

nota bene 2017

Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society Literary Anthology



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HONOR SOCIETY

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Phi Theta Kappa Honor Society is proud to present the 23rd edition of *Nota Bene*, the nation's only literary anthology featuring excellence in writing among students at associate degree-granting institutions.

When we first published *Nota Bene* in 1994, we were overwhelmed with the response from members who flooded our mailboxes with submissions and from the audience who enthusiastically read the book. Today we continue to see a fervent response to the call for submissions, and selection for publication remains a great source of pride.

We are pleased to once again offer scholarships to outstanding *Nota Bene* authors. This year's Ewing Citation Scholarship has been awarded to the top overall entry, "Can They Tell?" by Steven E. Rauscher, a member from the Community College of Philadelphia in Pennsylvania who is now attending Temple University. The authors of four other standout entries have been recognized as 2017 Reynolds Scholars.

Nota Bene takes its name from the Latin expression for "note well." We hope you will take note and be inspired by the good work of these exceptional authors. We are grateful for the continued opportunity to showcase the talents of Phi Theta Kappa members and to affirm our commitment to the recognition and academic excellence of students seeking associate degrees and certificates.

Sincerely,

The *Nota Bene* Editorial Board

Sue Grove

Norma Kent

Joseph Spooner

The 2017 issue of *Nota Bene* is dedicated to Imelda Socorro Ruiz, who passed away in August 2017. Imelda received a Reynolds Award for her poem, "Grannie Dress."



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Advisors Emeriti are a select group of retired or retiring advisors who, after providing extraordinary leadership and achieving success, are invited to continue their engagement and support of the Society based on their interests and expertise in Phi Theta Kappa's programs.

AWARDS

The Ewing Citation Scholarship Award of \$1,000 is given to the author of the *Nota Bene* manuscript considered to be the most outstanding of all entries. It is named in honor of Nell Ewing, long-time Phi Theta Kappa staff member who was a driving force behind *Nota Bene*, beginning with its conceptual design and establishment. Ewing retired in 2012 after serving 26 years with Phi Theta Kappa.

The Reynolds Scholarship Awards of \$500 each are given to up to four authors whose manuscripts were deemed outstanding. These awards are endowed by the Donald W. Reynolds Foundation in Pine Bluff, Arkansas, and honor the memory of the late Donald W. Reynolds, founder of the Donrey Media Group.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

EWING CITATION AWARD

- 6 Can They Tell? The Un-Americanness of Our America
Steven E. Rauscher
Community College of Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

REYNOLDS AWARD

- 8 Grannie Dress
Imelda Socorro Ruiz
College of Southern Nevada
Nevada
- 10 Prologue: Aurelia by the Sea
Rebecca Watters
Seminole State College
Florida
- 12 Firewater
Joshua Gray
Metropolitan Community College
Missouri
- 16 Olvido
Maria Isabel Medina de Sklavenitis
Southwestern College
California

SELECTED AUTHORS

- 18 Transgender Lives Matter
Kaci Sullivan
Madison Area Technical College
Wisconsin
- 22 To Write
Olivia Wynn
Tyler Junior College
Texas
- 23 In Memoriam
Harris Armstrong
Front Range Community College
Colorado

- 25 Three Times a Lady
Sarah Ladd
West Kentucky Community and
Technical College
Kentucky
- 27 A Secondhand Ode
Jennifer Flanery
Minneapolis Community and
Technical College
Minnesota
- 28 Challenging Routine
Daniel Hurley
Mercer County Community College
New Jersey
- 32 The Thinker
Nicholas Moy
Seminole State College
Florida
- 33 Symbolized Interpretations:
A Reader-Response Criticism
Alissa Dickerson
Kalamazoo Valley Community College
Michigan
- 36 Wait Passionately
Nicholas Moy
Seminole State College
Florida
- 38 Of Barns and Fathers
Sarah Ladd
West Kentucky Community and
Technical College
Kentucky
- 40 Haiku Sequence
Maria Burns
Eastern Shore Community College
Virginia

- | | |
|--|--|
| <p>41 One Giant Leap for Mankind
Jasmine Coleman
Spokane Falls Community College
Washington</p> | <p>56 Flight to Oblivion
Mariana Orrego
Coastal Carolina Community College
North Carolina</p> |
| <p>45 Jacqueline
Aliyah Harris
Coastal Carolina Community College
North Carolina</p> | <p>58 Graphic Emotions
Rebecca Bennett
Delaware County Community College
Pennsylvania</p> |
| <p>48 Whether the Weather Likes It or Not
Arabella Chamberlain
Sauk Valley Community College
Illinois</p> | <p>61 Diary of a Dying Girl
Ashley Crunk
East Mississippi Community College
Mississippi</p> |
| <p>50 The Millennial Generation
Rebecca Noelle Summers
Georgia Highlands College
Georgia</p> | <p>66 Broken Heart Note
Christopher Ray
Raritan Valley Community College
New Jersey</p> |
| <p>54 The Ultimate Measure
Benjamin J. Law
Columbia Gorge Community College
Oregon</p> | <p>68 Cockroaches
Oyindamola Shoola
Bronx Community College
New York</p> |

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CAN THEY TELL?
THE UN-AMERICANNES OF OUR AMERICA



STEVEN E. RAUSCHER
Community College of Philadelphia
Pennsylvania

Standing in Statuary Hall in the Capitol, surrounded by the shades of great Americans immortalized in marble and bronze, I wondered if they could tell. My girlfriend and I were enjoying a week in Washington, D.C., and she was more than happy to stop our tour group so I could pose under the statue of New Jersey's own Richard Stockton. Our tour guide obliged the photo opportunity, and I smiled awkwardly under the beautifully carved chunk of marble, hoping beyond hope it wouldn't spring to life and smash me where I stood.

For generations, it's been a point of pride on my father's side of the family to loudly decree that we descend directly from a signer of the *Declaration of Independence*. I was steeped and raised in this narrative, to the point that my decision to go to any college other than the one named after our great forefather was met with serious questions.

As a clan, our claim to being great Americans rested inviolably within this direct descent. We rested just above actual poverty and lacked any kind of family treasures, but you'd better believe that the handwritten family tree was the most valuable artifact we possessed, passed down from generation to generation. It was our proof of great citizenship; no matter what mistakes we made as human organisms, we would be forgiven as Americans.

In Statuary Hall, though, standing under a representation of the best thing my father's side of the family has ever given the world, I couldn't help but wonder if they could tell. My girlfriend, the numerous tour groups scuttling around, the immortal souls of the Great Americans forever gazing upon me and only me: I wondered if they could tell that I was a fraud.

Fuad Khazi Taima was born to wealth in Iraq. He came to America to study business, graduating from the University of Pennsylvania's Wharton School before marrying an American girl who — in time — would become my grandmother. Together they had five children, the last of them my mother. But before that last little one was old enough to form memories, her father skipped town and headed for the suburbs of Washington, D.C.

Depending on which postmortem report you read, Fuad Taima was either a tragic globalist or a gilded businessman completely lacking in authenticity. He settled in McLean, Virginia,

and remarried. Together, he and his second wife had a son. Throughout the 1980s and 1990s, Fuad positioned himself as a successful businessman who happened to moonlight as the voice of Iraq in America.

While the motivations remain a mystery, the important fact is that my grandfather's story ended in 1999 when he, his wife, and their teenaged son were found murdered in their home.

Detectives considered the killing "execution-style," indicative of a premeditated offense. Rumors swirled of Saddam Hussein's involvement, and before long, the grandfather I never met was buried as an enemy of the state.

Back in the Capitol, crushed under the weight of all that marble and all that familial responsibility, I wondered if those around me — both alive and swirling in the eddies of history — could tell that I was simultaneously the most American and un-American person in the room.

The term "American" as an adjective rings dogmatic in 2017. Our elected leaders seem to go out of their way to assign definitive characteristics to their idealized version of the proper American citizen and punish those among us who don't quite fit the mold, evident in our current president's attempts at pushing a racially motivated travel ban and more recent establishment of a hotline intended only for the reporting of crimes committed by immigrants. But how does one define so damningly what an American is in order to punish and remove those who are not?

It's no secret that our nation was borne to maturity by the immediate descendants of immigrants. Or that it was then propelled to economic superiority by immigrants. Our wars have been fought by immigrants, our students have been taught by immigrants, and our scientific answers to problems have been sought by immigrants. Our America as we know it is as fundamentally un-American as it gets.

But today, our leaders seem to want to rewrite that narrative. Before our great, varied country can even celebrate its 300th birthday, its politicians wish to distance themselves from the ethnically ambiguous foundations of America and purport that it is now possible to assign a verifiable state of Americanness, that we've had enough generations between us and the Founding Fathers to establish ourselves as a unique people. Simply put, America is now old enough for government-sponsored nationalism. Has anyone making decisions to limit access to America run a full assessment on their own personal heritage?

Even if we allow the existence of a unique identity for each of the "older" nations of the world — those in Western Europe and Asia — we run into problems when tracing back the uniqueness of national lineage. A quick study of world history reveals that today's British citizens are yesterday's Romans, that today's Italians share a certain Germanic heritage, and that today's generalized Asians are surprisingly Mongolian. Past conquests negate the veracity of current nationalism. If even the storied nations of the Old World are blocked from enjoying a limitless, homogenous cultural identity, how can Americans in 2017 even pretend to have one?

The hard truth is that Americans — by historic definition — are problematic for quick categorizations. Every American citizen has an impossibly rich ethnic and cultural background; we're all descended from explorers and thinkers, as well as murderers and bigots. In the past, this cacophony of heritages was recognized as American greatness. There was no reason to fear a forebear's checkered past because the future held only positive potential for all of that discordant familial flotsam. Today, though, a shared national identity is being forced upon us, despite the differences that formerly made us great. As a product of discord, a walking American oxymoron, my sincere hope is that we find a way to collectively loose the veil of nationalism that is otherwise threatening to choke our actual, documented uniqueness out of existence. A selective American identity is no American identity worth pursuing, nor is it even possible to attain. By pushing toward that homogenous impossibility, we do anything but make America great again.

GRANNIE DRESS

IMELDA SOCORRO RUIZ
*College of Southern Nevada
Nevada*

She asks me for help with her bath.
The feigned helpless look in her eyes
masks the command in her quivering voice.
I scrub her back with a washcloth generously lathered
with a no-more-tears shampoo-body wash in one,
labeled for use on sensitive skin.

Looking at her, I cannot help thinking
of an old grannie dress that I wash by hand;
scrubbing off mildew stains formed by countless splatters
of creamed coffee and thick chicken broth.
Now, she wears it — indelible spots and lines and creases,
sagging on her bent frame defying fashion trends.

The steam from the hot shower mists
the well-lit movie star mirror as it does my eyes.
I long to store the dress away
in a sandalwood chest with a mothball or two
to keep foraging creatures at bay.
But she has no choices left.



Comfort is all that matters to her now,
not style nor her once-impeccable taste.

She will keep wearing this dress —
this lousy excuse for a birthday suit.

Oh, but it pains me to see her
growing old like this.

I cannot cleanse this pain out of my heart,
a pain so deep, unreachable
by the no-more-tears formulation;
compounded by a thought I truly hate —
tomorrow will come and like it or not,
I shall wear this grannie dress, too.

PROLOGUE: AURELIA BY THE SEA



REBECCA WATTERS
Seminole State College
Florida

Palazzo Belmonte
Southern Italy
November 1663

Seated before the mirror on my dresser, wearing a powder-blue dressing gown adorned with lace and ribbons, I felt nothing as I stared at my reflection. While my ladies arranged my hair, I was far away in a world that no longer seemed real to me. It was as a dream, bitter and sweet, only it seemed as though it never happened. Only a year had passed, yet it felt like an eternity. But I could still feel him with me, his breath on my face, his lips caressing me... I could still see the intensity and passion in his eyes. It was his eyes that drew me to him the first time we met — they were as blue as the sea, only twice as deep. In his eyes lived the soul of a man I felt I had known for an eternity, though our lives crossed only briefly. How many people spent their lifetimes searching for a love like ours, only never to find it?

So consumed was I by these thoughts, I did not hear one of my ladies talking to me. When I did not answer, she asked, "*Signora? Mia signora principessa?*"

It was jarring to be brought back so unexpectedly to the present — back to my seemingly perfect life in a palace by the sea, where I was the wife of a great and noble prince. Only my life was not as perfect as it outwardly seemed. Hidden beneath the gilded tapestries and whitewashed walls, beneath the courtesies and smiles and flattery, was so much emptiness. It was a life of luxury, but a life without meaning. In that way, it was death.

"Leave me," I said, raising my hand to silence her.

"*Si, principessa,*" my lady replied. Then she returned the hand mirror to the dressing table and curtsied, along with the other ladies. With questioning looks and concerning gazes, they hurried away, not daring to inquire. It was not their place to ask why I wanted to be left alone, nor to ask what was troubling me.

When they were gone and I was alone, I inhaled deeply, pulling the salty air into my lungs. Finally, I could breathe again.

My chamber was awash in early morning sunlight coming through the open balcony. The familiar sounds and smells of the ocean were carried in on the breeze. The songs of birds reminded me of my childhood, of the songbirds my mother always kept at our family villa in northern Italy. She would sing to them and talk to them as if they were her children. They might as well have been, for she adored them as much as she adored me, her only daughter.

She called me her little songbird and insisted I sing for her whenever she was unwell. It was the only thing that would make her well again, so she claimed. And so, I would sing, in my soft little voice, while she gazed at the little birds in their cage by her bed. As I grew older, I began to relate more and more to her pretty songbirds in their gilded cages. While my brothers went off to sea with our father, a Venetian naval captain and a doge of Crete, I remained at home with my mother, only reading about the exciting adventures of seafarers and heroes of old in the many books at my disposal. Still, I tried never to complain, never knowing that a woman could be free to go her own way. But now, everything was different. Now I had tasted freedom; and once a bird has known what it is to be free, can it ever find contentment in returning to its cage once again?

That was the sea to me, and to him: freedom, adventure... It was the raging torrent of our emotions, unbound from the conventions of our separate worlds and the expectations of our peers. It was real — more real to me than anything I had known before or since. It was life.

Walking out onto my balcony, I placed my hands on the stone balustrade. Gazing out across the sea, my heart called to him. Could he hear me from where he was? Could the cry of my soul traverse the distance between us and somehow guide him back to me?

"I cannot wait for you any longer, *il mio cuore*," I whispered through my tears. "I must come to you. I must find you."

I could hear the crash of waves upon the shore, beckoning me toward the sea...toward life...beckoning me to search for him. Would I find him there, waiting for me still — ever patient, ever loving? Would he be there to catch me if I jumped?

FIREWATER



JOSHUA GRAY

*Metropolitan Community College
Missouri*

My grandpappy used to tell me the folktale of the notorious outlaw Sam Haine at bedtime.

Haine was a mean vagabond and an even meaner drunk. Grandpa told me that he and his gang of bandits used to go from town to town when the yeomen had first started Manifest Destiny. When folks hit the Santa Fe Trail, Sam Haine was there. When folks hit the Oregon Trail, Sam Haine was there. Hell, when folks tried to make farms around the great crossroads town Independence, Sam Haine was there as well.

My grandpa told me that Haine met his match one day down in St. Louis. The tale went that Haine had decided the best way to spend his newly liberated bank notes was at his favorite spot in any town: the bar. The drunker Haine and his gang got, the louder and rowdier they got. Eventually, the barkeep told Haine that she wouldn't serve them any more hooch if they kept tearing up the place.

Whether the barkeep didn't know Haine's reputation, or simply didn't care, grandpa never told me. What grandpa did tell me, was that Haine gunned the barkeep down where she stood. Didn't take kindly to folks telling him when he had enough to drink. The barkeep, however, was one of those voodoo priestesses, mambos I think they're called. The thing about mambos is that they're revered in their towns, and it's common knowledge that the voodoo crowd doesn't take kindly to transgressions, let alone the outright murder of their clergy.

According to the tale, one of the old mambo's pupils decided to enact lex talionis: eye for an eye, blow for a blow, tooth for a tooth, body for a body. Grandpa told me later that night, when Haine and all of his gang were passed out in their camp outside of St. Louis, the young man came. He came quiet as a ghost but savage as a rabid coyote.

Moving from sleeping sack to sleeping sack, buck knife in hand, the lad cut their throats. By the time he had finally gotten to Haine, he was already covered head to toe in the blood of the entire gang.

Standing above Haine's sleeping sack, the young student decided that death was too good for Haine. Calling upon all of his mambo's teachings, and all of his vehemence, the young man cursed Haine. Haine would die that day, yet he wouldn't actually die at all. Haine would be forever cursed to walk the Earth as a ghoul, mobile but unfeeling.

For Haine, all food would taste like dirt, all water would go down like oil, and no woman would satisfy his needs. He would be constantly starving, dehydrated, and suffocating 'til the horns of judgement sound.

The only thing that he would be left with would be the hooch. All he would feel is the burning of liquor. All he would experience is the fuzziness of intoxication. All he would smell is the pungent aroma of alcohol.

The only way he could break the curse was to find a man who could beat him in drinking, and he would be bound by voodoo to commit entirely to any drinking challenge. If he were to feign defeat, he would stay bound by mortal tethers, forcing him to drink in earnest. In life, he lauded that he could outdrink any man, so in death he would be cursed to find the exception.

So, from town to town he would supposedly frequent taverns, challenging everyone to the bottle. If the poor sod he challenged couldn't best him, he would gun them where they stood. If they refused, he'd gun them down anyway.

Why am I telling you this story? Because it ain't no story. Now before you go off hollering that I'm just a dumb senile old man, let me finish. I didn't buy the story either when I was a young buck, always thought it was just something the older folks liked to tell around the bonfire at night. Until one night, at the old bar in Independence, Gilted Wench it was called, Haine himself came trudging through the door.

Haine kept a bandanna around his face and his hat pulled down so nobody would recognize his rotting visage. After he stepped into the bar, he pulled off the bandanna like a snake-oil peddler showing off his wares and bellowed with all the ferocity of Beelzebub himself.

"My name is Samuel Jackson Haine! I ain't gotta tell y'all who I am and what I'm capable of! So, sit down and listen! One of you sorry bastards is gonna drink with me! Then after that, either you'll die or I can finally rot in peace!"

Now nobody else in the bar said a thing. Dead silence, like a funeral procession. I didn't bother looking up. All I could think of was my grandpa's story and thought he was just some dumb outlaw trying to use a folktale to get easy drink and easy coin from a bunch of drunkards.

I laughed a barking hyena laugh. I went to take a drink from my mug when it exploded in my hand with the loud roar of a hand-cannon reverberating through the bar. The bullet didn't hit my hand, but I was still livid nonetheless. I didn't take too kindly to sudden and abrupt confrontation. I spent a good time fighting the Union in the Civil War, and I always believed gunfire calls for gunfire.

Quick as a fox and smooth as a wench's rump, I drew my iron and shot the man claiming to be Sam Haine dead in his chest. I knew it hit because I saw him buckle backwards as if he had been hit with an Irish punch, but he didn't drop. Instead, he composed himself, made a cough that sounded like he was choking around a week's worth of phlegm, and laughed. That's when I looked at his face and finally saw the rotting and corpulent visage.

His cheeks had rotted away showing dull brown teeth and rotted gums. His skin clung tight and hard like week-old jerky. His jaundice-yellow and bloodshot eyes rolled freely in a lidless skull. His nose was missing, with only two slits dripping mucus in the spot where it should have been.

I must have looked like a fool, because Haine laughed. His laugh started out with a dry rasp and ended with the gurgling of phlegm.

"Looks like I found my challenger. I hope you made peace with God, boy," he said to me before roughly sitting down in the chair on the other side of my table. Haine looked over at the bartender, his bones creaking loudly, and motioned toward the table. "Come get my new friend and I yer finest drink. Top shelf. Strongest ya got," he said with what was either a grimace or a smile — his mutilated face made it difficult to gauge any mood.

The bartender obediently moved to the cabinet and pulled down a large bottle of Mexican tequila, the kind with the worm at the bottom. Most folks around that town said that the worm was stronger than the entire bottle — the kind of stuff that would make a man hallucinate and talk to trees. Nobody was brave enough to try, so nobody knew whether or not that statement was true.

The bartender froze before the bottle, and Haine tapped his finger impatiently. What was he going to say? No? It wasn't wise to tell Haine no.

The bartender brought two small glasses and sat them on the table next to the liquor. My skin was clammy with sweat and cold with terror. I looked up at the bartender, who only kept my gaze for a brief second before he looked away. He — and probably everybody else in that bar — thought I was living on borrowed time at that moment. Hell, I thought the same thing.

I looked back over at Haine, who pulled his hat off his head and sat it on the table. Haine leaned backwards comfortably, his damnable blood and piss-colored eyes never leaving my face. He motioned to the liquor on the table.

"Well, pour," he said with obvious finality. I poured both glasses a sixth of the way up, passed Haine one, and stared morosely at mine, before Haine demanded, "Drink."

I sighed, thinking about all the sins of my past. Thinking about the big ones and the small ones. Thinking about every time I took something that was just lying about, and every time I broke some poor girl's heart. Would I pass judgement? Would St. Peter let me through those pearly gates? I didn't know. All I knew was that I didn't feel ready to die. Not yet.

I drank the glass in one gulp. I was young at the time and proud of my ability to drink. The irony of my mindset and what situation I found myself in didn't escape me. Haine drank his and sighed with satisfaction.

"Another," he stated with that grimace/grin. So, I poured.

After that second glass, my sense of time started to escape me. All I knew was that most folks in the bar started milling out once Haine locked those cold dead eyes on me. A few stayed out of macabre curiosity, but most left.

More than a couple of glasses later, I started to feel my limit approaching. I couldn't focus my eyes, I had trouble sitting upright in my chair, and I tasted the warm bile of vomit on the back of my throat.

I looked at the bottle and noticed that there was still about a quarter of its contents remaining. I knew that in one or two more glasses I would be out cold, only this time I wouldn't be waking back up. If the hooch claimed me, then so would Haine.

I distinctly remember looking at Haine and noticing that he was swaying a little, but nowhere near as much as me. I thought I could have tried shooting him again, but that didn't work so well the first time. I thought I could try running, but Haine already showed that he was a crack shot. Besides, legend held that Haine would hunt down whoever ran and kill him anyway. Every man's gotta sleep eventually, but Haine ain't no man, and it didn't take a genius to see that he'd be a relentless fiend.

I paused over the next glass, desperately trying to come up with a plan. Then, as I eyed the bottle, it came to me: the worm. It was a long shot, but at the time I felt a long shot was

better than no shot at all. I grabbed the bottle, thinking that even if it didn't work, at least I'd be too drunk to feel the bullet.

I slammed the opening to my lips, tilted it upwards, and started chugging. Chugging because my life literally rested on it. It burned something fierce, and I knew I would be done after this, one way or another.

I got half of what was left down, slammed the bottle on the table, and shoved it towards Haine. I felt the liquid in my stomach fighting to come back up, but I was just trying to stay conscious for a little longer.

"Match me," I demanded through slurred speech.

At this, Haine laughed. The scariest thing about this laugh was that it seemed genuine. He honestly found it funny that I had demanded him to match me, when I was obviously so close to going under. I forced my haggard vision on the bottle and stared at that little worm that I was hoping would be my savior.

"Very well," Haine said before taking the bottle and mimicking my performance.

He turned that sodding thing upside down and started chugging. He drank all that hooch with impressive gall. He wasn't choking, coughing, or anything. He just kept drinking until the last bit of liquid — and that little worm — were down his throat. Haine wiped his mouth arrogantly and set the bottle down in front of me before leaning back in his chair and staring my way.

At that point, I was having trouble keeping my liquid dinner down. I stumbled hard and had to force myself back up in the chair. My breath was like fire, every exhale bringing up tequila vapor. Haine didn't seem affected. He just motioned over to the bartender for another bottle. At that point, I was convinced that was it. My time was up. I tried, but it just wasn't meant to be.

"Ha, you look like you're about done there, boy. Barkeep, bring me another bottle. Somethin' casual. I want to sip on somethin' sweet when I shoot this boy in his..." Suddenly Haine's voice caught. My little savior worm was working. Haine turned to look at me, pure hatred in those dead bloodshot eyes, "You dirty cheat. You found a way to poison me? Was it them voodoo bastards! I swear on my momma's grave I'm-a..." Before he finished, he vomited.

The vomit was a black and viscous liquid. Like crude oil mixed with grits. Haine reached for his gun but fell out of his chair before he could unholster it. Once Haine hit the ground, his dead eyes rolled back up into his skull. Then...he just started coming undone.

It started with his fingers and the inside of his boots and traveled up his arms and legs. Pungent sulfuric steam started emanating off of him like smoke. Where the steam traveled, his body broke down into dust fine as talcum. It kept working its way up his arms and legs until it made its way to his torso and finally his head. Before long, he was just empty clothes with a pile of yellowish-brown powder that used to be the dread ghoul Haine.

At first, I didn't recognize that I won. I actually outdrank the dead. When it finally hit me, I jumped to my feet and raised my hands to cheer. Attempted to, at least. I forgot how much I drank to get him to down that little worm. Once I jumped to my feet I hurled every ounce of tequila I had drank that night, fell over, and passed out right next to Haine's remains.

Laugh all y'all want. Y'all don't have to believe me. If there's one accomplishment I'm taking to my grave though, it's the day I drank with a dead man.

OLVIDO

MARIA ISABEL MEDINA DE SKLAVENTIS

*Southwestern College
California*

Si por mirarte
Me apego al gran conflicto
No te miraría
Y nunca te pensara

No me presiona
El ver que tú te marchas
Yo sé que sabes
Que eres mi gran mirada

Los días pasan
Y yo al lado de ellos
Me siento sola
No sé, tal vez
Porque te tengo lejos

Más en los días
En que yo te miraría
Todo es hermoso
Aunque este el sol en su guarida

Todas las horas mías
Al lado de las tuyas
Parecieran unirse
Para nunca desviarse

Yo sé que estoy sintiendo
Más fuertes mis latidos
Y no sé qué es lo que haría
Si estuviera algún día
Al lado de tu olvido.

Translation:

OBLIVION

If by looking at you
I cling to a great struggle
I would not admire you
I would never conceive you

It does not trouble me
To see that you are leaving,
I realize you know
You are my dearest sight

The days pass
And me by their side,
Lonely
Not sure, perhaps
Because you are afar

However, in the days
That I would contemplate you
All was beautiful
Even if the sun lay in its lair

All my hours
To those of yours
Seem to unite
Never to deviate

I acknowledge what I feel
My heartbeat is erratic,
I am clueless as to what I would do
If one day
I reach your oblivion

Translated by Iliana Ruíz and Eleni Sklavenitis

TRANSGENDER LIVES MATTER



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At least 1 million people in the United States identify as transgender (Stroumsa e31), and a significant portion of that population doesn't have access to comprehensive medical care. Transgender individuals are living with a medical condition called dysphoria, wherein the brain and body are oppositely sexed. In other words, the inborn gender of the brain is different than the physical sex characteristics of the body. Dysphoria causes depression, anxiety, and sometimes suicidal ideation in those affected. The dysphoria and social rejection that transgender individuals experience leads to much higher rates of suicide, unemployment, homelessness, and illness than the general cisgender (non-transgender individuals who identify with their assigned birth gender) population.

Gender affirmation surgeries provide hope and increased quality of life for transgender patients because these procedures greatly reduce crippling dysphoria. Additionally, social rejection may be mitigated, as the more a transgender person "passes" (a commonly used phrase in the transgender community to describe successfully presenting as one's self-identified gender rather than one's birth-assigned gender), the more they are accepted and valued by society (a terrible thing indeed, but a topic for another paper).

Therefore "passing" holds immense weight in the quality of a transgender person's life. This idea of "passing," or projecting society's sexist gender role expectations, does not solely affect transgender individuals. For example, when North Carolina created legislation making it illegal for transwomen to use female restroom facilities, many cisgender women who did not look feminine or womanly enough found themselves receiving the same aggressive, scary treatment a transwoman would have as they were forcibly removed from the ladies' restroom (Tharrette). It's easy to understand the idea of "passing" in this context, as well as the direct impact "passing" has on a transgender patient's quality of life.

But who really cares? Who besides me and the small, growing population of transgender men and women has a stake in these claims? The answer is an emphatic: everyone. Everyone has a stake in the quality of care and compassion our society provides. The full spectrum

of surgeries available to treat gender dysphoria are life-saving and should be considered medically necessary, rather than elective, cosmetic procedures. This complex web of treatments must be affordable and accessible to a widely diverse population.

Each transgender individual experiences their own unique medical transition. Despite the belief commonly held by cisgender people that a single surgery transforms one sex into the other, as evidenced by the popular (and inappropriate) questions, “Did you get *the surgery*?” and “Are you going to get *the surgery*?” gender affirmation surgeries exist on a spectrum. This spectrum represents a complex web of choices and procedures available for treating the gender dysphoria experienced by transmen and transwomen. This web of choices includes everything from genital surgeries, or what’s commonly referred to as “bottom surgery,” as well as “top surgery” and facial reconstruction.

Additionally, multiple types of bottom surgery exist for both transmen and transwomen to choose from, depending on how completely they choose to augment themselves. For example, a transman may opt to have a hysterectomy, but not a phalloplasty (surgically constructed phallus), and a transwoman may choose to have an orchiectomy (removal of testicles) but not a phallus reduction. These are just two scenarios out of many, representing what a “bottom surgery” might look like. Transwomen who undergo top surgery receive breast augmentation or implantation; likewise, a trans-masculine top surgery entails a double mastectomy, usually including nipple modification. Facial reconstruction would include any feminizing or masculinizing procedures of the face and neck, such as shaving the larynx of a transwoman or re-shaping the jaw line of a transman. So, one can easily see how gender affirmation surgeries cannot simply be summarized as a single operation, or *the surgery*. Clearly, medical transition is a process unique to each transgender individual. Therefore, it is essential that this *entire web* of procedures be recognized as life-saving medicine.

Gender confirmation surgeries have been proven to save transgender lives; in fact, they have the power to completely change a transgender person’s life. Whether a transgender person passes as their self-identified gender dictates their acceptance by society. When transgender people do not pass, their employability, safety, acceptance, confidence, happiness, and quality of life suffer considerably, while the likelihood that they will commit suicide or be assaulted increases. Furthermore, the dysphoria brought on by this dissonance of the mind and body is a profound catalyst for depression, anxiety, self-hatred, general dysfunction, and suicide.

Transgender lives are irrefutably and measurably improved by access to gender affirmation surgeries. Recent studies have found that medically and socially transitioning brings transgender individuals greater personal safety, mental health, and purpose. For instance, in 1982, the *Journal of Consulting and Clinical Psychology* conducted a study on transmen who had undergone gender affirmation surgeries. Some participants had received more surgical treatment than others, and researchers found that the procedures were conclusively linked to decreased dysphoria. Furthermore, body satisfaction levels directly correlated to the extent to which participants had modified their bodies. Transmen with less modified bodies expressed a keen interest in further surgeries and a conviction that the procedure(s) would improve their quality of life. In fact, financial barriers were cited as the main reason some transmen hadn’t undergone more surgical treatment (Fleming 461-462).

Again, in 2007, the Leicester Gender Identity Clinic (located in the United Kingdom) conducted a study evaluating the quality of life in 112 transgender patients who had undergone gender confirmation surgeries, and a resounding 92 percent reported improved quality of life, personal relationships, and working relationships. The study participants who had gender confirmation surgery felt much safer in society and experienced a sharp reduction in threats, harassment, and violence targeted against them (Khoosal 72-83). Again, in 2010, surgeons Tiffany Ainsworth and Jeffery Spiegel conducted a study to evaluate how mental health and quality of life improve in transwomen who receive facial feminization surgery. Of the 247 participants, those who had received treatment (roughly half) had significantly higher mental health and quality of life scores. Furthermore, these women reported experiencing greater social acceptance and dramatically reduced dysphoria, noting a near absence of suicide ideation (Ainsworth 1019- 1024). So, we see again and

again that gender confirmation surgeries, and not therapy alone, yield the best outcomes for transgender lives.

In fact, it is precisely because the stakes are incredibly high that some transgender people (who can see no other way) even go so far as to perform gender affirmation surgeries on themselves. A medical study published in Ontario examined the prevalence of this issue and found that even in Canada, where gender confirmation surgeries are publicly funded, the approval process is rigorous and requires extensive medical documentation and specialist approval. Because access is limited and many transgender people are uninsured and poor, a handful operate on themselves every year. Several transwomen indicated performing orchiectomies on themselves, and one transman reported undergoing a self-mastectomy. Although it is horrifying to imagine someone performing such an operation on themselves, it's important to note that the study theorized that had the participants had access to insurance and services, they probably wouldn't have chosen a do-it-yourself home surgery (Rotondi 1830-1836).

Gender confirmation surgeries must be accessible and affordable to the widely diverse population of transgender patients seeking treatment. Some Americans will say "Obamacare already pays for this," but they would be wrong, as most states exclude transgender coverage. According to one 2014 study concerning the state of transgender healthcare, it was found that transgender patients experienced prejudice and discrimination from their medical providers and insurers, resulting in sub-par care. As we know, incomplete and incomprehensive transgender healthcare leads to increased suicide, illness, and violence against patients. This is even truer of poor transgender individuals and those of color (Stroumsa e31-e38). It's time for more politicians, doctors, parents, teachers, friends, neighbors, and allies to start acting on behalf of the 1 million-plus transgender Americans currently living in our country, many of whom are suffering from untreated dysphoria.

Some politicians are opening their eyes to this pressing reality; in 2014, the governor of New York, Andrew Cuomo, made the choice to increase access to gender affirmation surgery. He drafted legislation that prohibited providers of mental health insurance from refusing coverage of gender dysphoria. In an open letter, Cuomo decreed that both diagnosis and treatment must be covered (Duhaime-Ross). Furthermore, *The Torontoist*, a news syndicate out of Ontario, Canada, argues that accessibility of gender confirmation surgery matters because lack of access sometimes results in suicide. With a waitlist for gender affirmation surgery at 1,200 names and climbing, many transgender people sit on the back burner, waiting for treatment in hopelessness and angst. The Ontario government is working hard to legislate a solution, as nearly 75 percent of transgender Canadians have attempted suicide, a stark reality that could have been avoided with proper treatment. Canadian government officials understand these surgeries are not mere cosmetic procedures; in fact, they represent the very difference between life and death (Lenti).

Many tax payers, politicians, insurance companies, and medical professionals feel that transsexualism and medical transition are personal choices. These people argue strongly that they should be free to morally oppose and refuse to support such choices; in fact, they will insist that transgender patients need therapy, not surgery, or that the surgery is cosmetic anyway, and, "Hey! Doesn't Obamacare pay for that already?!" Such impassioned individuals don't believe that gender affirmation surgeries are a matter of life and death or, therefore, that they have the power to be life-saving.

However, we now conclusively know exactly the opposite of such sentiments to be true. Transsexual and gender-variant identities are inborn, and the full spectrum of gender confirmation surgeries available to transgender patients have the power to vastly and measurably improve their quality of life. In patients who haven't undergone such procedures, dysphoria and social rejection combine to create a compromised experience of life, fraught with challenges (such as high rates of employment and homelessness) that are quite avoidable with complete, comprehensive, and accessible treatment.

While it's true that the visibility and awareness the transgender population has experienced is a recent development, that does not mean our understanding and treatment of dysphoria is in its infancy, or that gender confirmation surgeries are elective, non-essential, cosmetic procedures. Those who would argue otherwise only do so out of ignorance. In fact, further research, support, and societal acknowledgement of transgender lives would vastly improve dysphoria treatment and our understanding of what causes individuals to be transgender, thereby yielding more sophisticated answers to common objections against increasing the accessibility and coverage of gender affirmation surgery.

Ultimately, when our society denies transmen and transwomen access to life-saving gender affirmation surgeries, these human beings are stripped of their equality and fair pursuit of happiness. As a result, transgender individuals suffer decreased quality of life as measured in rates of suicide, unemployment, and depression. Dysphoria diagnoses and treatment must be readily accessible to the incredibly diverse transgender population it serves. To refuse this population comprehensive medical treatment is a gross violation of their civil rights.

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TO WRITE

OLIVIA WYNN

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I spill my heart out onto the page,
Feeling my blood turn into ink as it flows through my pen,
Creating words I can't seem to say aloud;

I do my best to de-tangle the veins of emotions,
Trying to figure out which are supposed to lead out,
Which could be cut to end all the pain,
And which ones can be felt to remember your pulse again;

With each drop of blood that hits the paper,
I am reminded that I am still alive,
I feel the cuts turning into scars as time goes by;

Then I'm left to question if they really happened or if it was all just my imagination.

IN MEMORIAM

OR: TO A MAN I WILL NEVER MEET BUT REMAINS THE
WHOLE DAMN REASON I MOVED TO COLORADO



HARRIS ARMSTRONG
Front Range Community College
Colorado

You brought me here. A man who never left the house without two drinks, water and a two-liter of Dr. Pepper. Never. Back when it was possible to get you to leave at all. It's hard to believe your passing had the long reach of dragging a city boy to the mountains. Rose tells me that you had always liked me, even if we never met. "Give 'em hell, Harry!" you would tell Rose to say to me every time she called home.

I've seen one picture of you since I arrived. Penny doesn't like family photos. Instead of keeping your portrait in a place of honor, your wife keeps your ashes in a trunk that matches the rustic cabin aesthetic of the living room. Rose showed me an old hunting picture on her phone. Your head is tilted forward, your mouth wide open in a tableau of a laugh. Balding, what little hair left on your head was dark and didn't match your grey beard. Your moustache is auburn, patchwork colors across the body. You're in a hunting jacket and red plaid flannel. You hold a rifle in one hand, kneeling in front of a leafless tree. Penny liked to tell tall tales about your hunting, but I never saw a corpse, never heard of a kill. No corpse adorned your side in the photograph I saw. This lack made me wonder what you tracked when you grabbed a gun.

Guns were the first to go after you left. Eric came and took them before I could see them close. Rose told me I ought to be glad, because Eric is nothing like you. Penny says you treated Eric like your own, though he hardly acted like even a stepson. After you died, he stayed for five days and asked for money. When your wife told him she couldn't spare it, she lied.

The only tangible contact between son-in-law and the father of my bride was a gift I gave you. I knew we had the occult in common. I read cards, and dowsing was passed down from one Armstrong to the next. One small act of a poor boy trying to marry into your clan. The pendulum was citrine and amethyst, meant to enhance your water dowsing willow witching, and save you from yourself. Amethyst, I hope you didn't know, is a charm for addicts.

You tried meth once, I heard. Said it was, "Okay." You moved to this state because Oklahoma was crawling with pot dealers. The amount of money you were making caught the attention of the wrong people. Dealing heroin with the Hell's Angels was easier, but you were younger then. Diesel Dog was the string of the plant you grew and engineered yourself. I can smell it in the fabric of the furniture you left behind. It lingers in the cardboard and paper you hoarded. It sticks to the trash we had to clean out of the basement we sleep in. You used to smoke here, thinking the landlord wouldn't be able to smell the scent of a breach in the lease. Sometimes when it's my turn to do the laundry, I can smell something bitter lingering between the folds of the clothes.

Somehow you managed to act like a father through benders and growing pot. To this day, your wife tries to preach to me that you were a saint, but I know better. Rose likes to tell me the funny stories about your adventures. The tale when you were 20 and took a chance on some powder that looked like Comet still makes me laugh. Turns out it was mescaline all along. Past the humor, they tell me about the days your family would hide in the closet from the lows off the highs. Rose says you made an attempt to raise them — how you were more like a burnout older brother. Anecdotes and quality time, but no real structure. The framework came from Penny. She smacked your child across the face, yanked her hair, and made her believe she could be nothing without you and her. It took power that you could never lend when Rose grabbed her mother's hand and refused to be hit any more.

Rose told me about the day you died. You had come up from the basement, short of breath and sick to your stomach. Penny sent you to bed. An hour passed before she noticed you slipping away. I remember the call and the tears. I too cried that day and held Rose as close as she would let me. She kept repeating the dialogue you had before you left. You were proud of your one child. You were glad she got away. You were happy Rose found me. You were excited we were together. When the ambulance came, Penny said the house was quiet. That was the only time I ever heard her speak of it.

Hearing your proud speech secondhand, I wonder what you think of us getting pulled into your wife's sand trap need for her kid to come back home. I voiced this to Rose, but she didn't want to even think what you might say. You always knew Penny was most talented at making you both feel ungrateful. *Virgula Divina*, the divining rod with which your Ulster ancestors found their way across the South, is how you search now. The semi-precious pendulum gifted between diviners acts as a compass, a never-ending search for self, for Dutchman's Gold, for Bigfoot, for fortune in a world that granted you none. All the weed in the world didn't stop the paranoia. Refuge from shapes in the dark, that's what you sought in the needles, the cigarettes, the Heineken.

When I came to fill your shoes in a home that wanted a man of the house, I picked up the pendulum I gave you out of the effects Penny kept. Gifts, accidentally returned to the giver. I wonder if that is bad luck, but the weight feels right in my palm. Yellow glittered with purple, refracting light from the smooth surface of the stone. I sit in your old armchair and hold the pendulum by the chain. I hope you found what you were looking for. Every time I ask, the chain swings left.

THREE TIMES A LADY



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The head lifeguard at Panama City Beach drowned right off the coast in the spring of '08. When his body washed up on shore, his lean but fit frame was soggy and covered in seaweed. No one had reported him missing, but a skinny twig of a woman showed up at the morgue to ID the body. At first, it looked as though she had poor taste in makeup. On second look, you could tell she had layers and layers of blue eyes, hidden by concealer and wrinkles that her years had not earned. She tried to cover it all up with a hat. She wasn't a hat person.

The widow didn't cry when she saw the blob of fish-eaten flesh on a cold slab. She shivered, but more from anger and terrified relief than from grief. The only emotion she showed was sliding her own weak hand across the cuts along the back of his right fist.

Everybody blamed his death on Karma, which was fair. The storm that choked the life from his defenseless neck had come out of nowhere and left back out to sea. The cuts on his wrist matched the bruises on his widow's face. What was not fair was that they called Karma ugly names and said she was a loathsome mistress, which just wasn't true.

You see, I've met Karma. She's actually a very nice lady.

We had tea in her condo off a beach in Port-au-Prince. She spilled a little on the starch white tablecloth and giggled. She has a beautiful laugh. Intoxicating, even. She quickly wet a towel and cleaned the stain.

"Do you take sugar in your tea?" she asked me. I didn't. She took only half a teaspoon. "Not too sweet, not too bitter," she explained.

She kept a tidy home. She had modern art on the walls but rustic furniture. She had blue lace on her china and a deer antler chandelier. I never saw any home so mystically charming. I stared for hours into her African masks that hung on snowy white walls and looked deep into the soul of the severed buffalo head across the room. It was mystical, but also homey in the way that you wouldn't mind kicking off your shoes and taking a nap on her couch. I feel like if I had, she would have brought me warm milk and a sugar cookie.

She had lived alone since her husband was killed. A wannabe lover stabbed him 20 times in the midnight blackness that only a Haitian beach can know. Blood ran through the small, smooth rocks and into the Caribbean waters. Detectives said it was a suicide. The case was wrapped up in a half-baked effort and quickly forgotten.

But really — how can a man stab himself 20 times? Karma didn't know. When I asked, her whole demeanor changed. Her bright blue eyes clouded with a sadness too deep for words.

I spent months looking for clues. I would impress her when I brought the person who'd caused her so much misery to justice. When I found the murderer, she was just a Jane Doe on a slab at the local morgue. They had scrubbed Karma's husband's blood from beneath her fingernails. She lay, defeated in love as well as death. The mortician said it was "an act of God" that killed her.

Karma wasn't surprised about Jane Doe's mysterious death. "The justice system is a joke," she said when I told her. I think she smiled a little. "The justice system will only ever protect the rich. People like my husband need a superhero. They need someone to break laws."

The lifeguard was no surprise either. Her name was in the headlines when they found his swollen corpse, his nostrils filled with moss and fish eggs. The articles said he was a wife beater, but his obituary still spoke of his heroic life work. "Laws overlook crime for the sake of public relations," Karma told me as she slowly put the clippings on her fridge — right along with all the rest.



A SECONDHAND ODE

JENNIFER FLANERY

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O Goodwill, a reverse St. Anthony —
Patron saint to lost things, found
May your shelves always be filled
With dusty old tomes, two quarters apiece

A paradise of wool sweaters, with colors arranged
In bright, static-filled stacks
Like tropical flowers in a garden of discounts,
Surrounded by chipped cups. You, my thrift store
Smell of my sweet frugality, mothballs,
And the remains of perfume on a stranger's coat,

Lost to the world until I pluck it
From the racks, found.

CHALLENGING ROUTINE



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Apart from the Quran, *The Thousand and One Nights* (*Alf Layla wa-Layla* or *The Arabian Nights*) is argued to be the most influential work of Arab and Islamic culture. Serving as a melting pot for various Middle Eastern and Asian ideologies and customs, *The Thousand and One Nights* embraces several world cultures while maintaining Islam at the root of its creative assembly, similar to the construction of nested Russian dolls, one story building off the other forms the narrative with the eventual convergence of all stories to an organic whole.

Apart from the text's culturally unifying role, its stories challenge Muslim law and customs and present contradictions to established gender roles in ancient Islamic and Arab society. These contradictions are partly the result of women antagonizing men in order to propel them toward healing — showing the love and care infused in Islam. Central to Islamic and Arabic culture is a patriarchal order that enhances the position of men over women in almost every aspect of daily life.

Present in this narrative are multiple examples of women deviating from this established social order and turning the tables so now *they* have the upper hand — the enhanced position — over men. As a whole, the women presented in the multiple stories contained within *The Thousand and One Nights* challenge the established patriarchal order of the Golden Age era, and in turn showcase a noticeable control over the men they interact with that is contrary to the collective conscious of the time period.

At the beginning of the narrative, King Shahryar's wife's sexual activities with a slave constitute a violation of the Quran's teachings that proves to have a deflating effect on Shahryar's social prestige. After Shahryar, who is a Persian king, witnesses his wife cheating on him with a slave on the palace grounds, he is shaken to his core by the fact that his own wife had shown such pronounced disloyalty to him. He is so upset that he exclaims, "Perish the world and perish life!" (Haddawy 612).

In cases of adultery and fornication — whether it is a man or a woman who commits the act — the Quran imposes a severe punishment (Hijab 42). Despite the fact that Shahryar kills his wife for fornicating with someone other than himself, and death could be considered her punishment, her actions showcase a direct transgression of Muslim norms as she sexually

interacts with someone other than her husband. Her actions defy a central proposition of the Quran “that men are in charge of women and are a degree above them” (42). From the frazzling effect that her actions have on Shahryar, it appears that she has actually taken emotional control of her husband. Shahryar’s self-perception as a masculine, dominant figure reflected in both his city and his relationship with his wife is weakened.

Further depicting feminine gender superiority are the actions taken by a particularly vulnerable woman depicted in the middle of the story. Imprisoned in a glass chest by a horrible black demon, a woman — whose name is not made known — is forced to remain chaste and travel with the demon forever for no specific reason. However, after she encounters Shahryar and his brother, King Shazaman of Samarkand, on their journey out of the city of Samarkand, she also seems to deviate from Islamic and Arab customs by making Shahryar and Shazaman subordinate to her wishes and by committing an action contrary to one of the four prescribed models of perfect women in Islamic tradition.

As the two brothers try to hide from the young woman, who has just perched herself under the very tree that they were hiding from her in, she sees them and insists that they come down and have sexual intercourse with her. Refusing, the brothers plead for the woman to leave them alone — yet she threatens that unless they follow *her* orders, she will wake the demon and have it kill them. Scared and apprehensive, the two brothers “climbed down very slowly and stood before her” (Haddawy 613).

Contrary to the hegemonic masculinity present in ancient Islamic and Arab society during the time period that the story is based in, the men in this situation — Shahryar and Shazaman — are subject to the demands of the woman. Whereas Islamic and Arab women are usually subordinate to the commands of men in literature as well as real life, the young woman in this situation is proving to break that glass ceiling and instead force Shahryar and Shazaman to satisfy *her* need for sex or face death, rather than serve *their* need.

The young woman is also challenging one of four models for perfect women the Quran prescribes. One of those models is to be like “Mary, the mother of Jesus, who is a model of chastity, faith, and devotion” (Hewer 130). By now having sex with a total of 100 men, and being unmarried while doing so, the young woman is clearly not conforming to this model for women, as she is not chaste.

Unlike all of the other women described in the narrative, Shahrazad challenges the Quran’s insistence of deference to parental guidance and pursues her ambition to marry Shahryar by imposing a threat on her father if he continues to resist granting her wish, which he eventually does in the face of his daughter’s threat. Shahrazad is not only the most intelligent woman depicted in the story, but also the most culturally disruptive character, which is evident from her intense disagreement with her father.

Relating to her father her wish to marry Shahryar in an attempt to either save women from Shahryar’s rage or perish like the rest, Shahrazad is met with stark resistance from her father who thinks that his daughter’s plan is foolish, reminding her that, “ ‘He who misbehaves ends up in trouble’ ” (Haddawy 615). Despite her father’s recitation of two stories illustrating the demise of people who have misbehaved, Shahrazad continues to refuse his resistance to her plan and threatens that she will tell Shahryar about his refusal. Exhausted from arguing, Shahrazad’s father eventually backs down and complies with her wish.

In the Quran, filial piety is stressed in the Muslim community, even claiming that it is the second-most important commitment of Muslims (Siddiqi). In this scene of the text, Shahrazad is clearly being disloyal to this creed by refusing to comply with her father’s wish. By imposing a threat on her father, she further chips away at the patriarchal familial structure that is central to ancient Islamic and Arab society — female deference to male orders, specifically within the family. Nonetheless, her threat eventually makes her father conform to her wishes, which he is explicitly angry about. In this situation specifically, Shahrazad’s rebellious persona is uncovered — a persona that will influence the rest of the narrative.

Displaying rebelliousness to social norms even more, in the “Tale of the Porter and the Young Girls” story, the three young sisters’ household condition — imposed on all the people that enter their palace — produces a culturally contradictory matriarchal power

structure and significantly influences the actions of the men in their presence. In order to remain in the company of three young sisters, a porter, a few kalandars, a Khalifah, and the Khalifah's wazier — who are all men — have to pledge their allegiance to the sisters' household condition, "Speak not of what concerns you not or you will hear that which shall please you not" (Mathers 623). By complying with this condition, the patriarchal household structure, a cultural norm in ancient Islamic and Arab society, is instead replaced with a matriarchal structure where the women are the rule makers and have authority over the actions of the men in their presence.

According to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the noun "condition" means something that "must exist or be present if something else is to be or take place." In order to remain in the sisters' presence and enjoy the pleasure of their company, the men have to accept their household rule — the condition — which is contrary to the general consensus that men, during the time period this narrative was written in, determine the conditions of their social interactions.

In this story, the authority of the young sisters is so powerful that the men have to *whisper* to each other when they discuss how they should approach demanding an answer to the bizarre things they had witnessed during their time with the sisters. Even the fact that the men are limited in what they can say, as laid out in the household rule, is a testament to the power that the sisters have over the men in their presence. Specifically, this is an example of the reversal of freedom of speech limitations for men and women, where women are usually the ones who are limited in what concerns they can express.

Near the end of the story, in "The Tale of Sympathy the Learned," the slave girl Sympathy's repeated display of her intelligence to the members of the Khalifah's assembly demonstrates a contradiction to the assumption that women are less knowledgeable than men in ancient Islam, which in turn affects the perceptions of those men of her status as a slave. After Sympathy's master told the Khalifah that she wished to prove herself worthy of being sold to him, the Khalifah decided to test her self-proclaimed knowledge by making her face the questions of masters of various areas of study.

According to a passage in one of the hadiths, which is a series of reports describing the words, actions, or habits of the Islamic Prophet Muhammad, the Prophet tells a group of women that he has "not seen anyone more deficient in intelligence...than you [the women]" ("Translation"). Present in this story, and throughout ancient Islamic and Arab society, the idea that women are intellectually inferior to men is present.

However, after Sympathy answers every single question she is asked correctly, and actually stumps some of the masters with questions she asks them, the Khalifah eventually recognizes her intellectual greatness (Mathers 643). Not only did Sympathy's actions challenge the assumption of female intellectual inferiority to men, but they also caused the masters who challenged her, after acknowledging her high degree of intelligence, to respect her more than her status as a slave granted.

An additional fascinating point in the story is when Shahryar adopts the notion that Shahrazad had "won" him over. This idea runs contrary to the ancient Islamic and Arab conception of unequivocal superiority of men over women and further proves that a woman has the ability to have a significant psychological influence over the persona of a man.

After Shahrazad's younger sister, Dunyazad, asks Shahryar if he is going to kill Shahrazad like the rest of the women he had slept with, he emotionally quenches Dunyazad's fear and states that the Lord of Pity had given Shahrazad "gifts with which to win me" (Mathers 645). After praising Shahrazad for making him worthy of reflection and teaching him many lessons, Shahryar believes that he has been won over by her. To "win," according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, is to "conquer, subdue, overcome, defeat, vanquish, [or] 'beat' " ("Win"). For a woman to "win" over a man, specifically in ancient Islamic and Arab society, is contrary to the social norm of men actually winning over women — whether emotionally, physically, or mentally.

Prompted by the actions of Shahrazad, Shahryar's obvious personality change — and apparent ideological enlightening — serves as an example of women having the power to

alter the persona of not only a male, but specifically a male king — which was extremely rare throughout the Middle East during the Golden Age. Furthermore, after listening to Shahrazad recite stories for a thousand and one nights, Shahryar's life direction as a king was altered — he became a more gracious king overall. This point is particularly fascinating because it goes to show how much emotional and psychological influence Shahrazad had over a man who was previously a ruthless, enraged murderer who despised women.

Moreover, Shahryar's insistence that the tales of Shahrazad be documented, distributed, and learned throughout his empire further illustrates the extent to which Shahrazad's intellect unusually penetrated the minds of women and men alike in ancient Islamic and Arab society and proved to have a lasting effect on Shahryar's life. After Shahryar and Shahrazad were married, Shahryar called on the most renowned analysts and scribes to write out the tales of Shahrazad.

Because he very much admired the intellect, eloquence, and wisdom of his wife, Shahryar decided to use Shahrazad's tales as "an instruction to the people and their children's children" (Mathers 647). This decision is striking because there are very few women in ancient Islamic and/or Arab history that were respected enough to have their work designated as instructional articles for all members of a society to read. Additionally, this very action by Shahryar captures the high degree of respect that he held for his wife for the rest of his life.

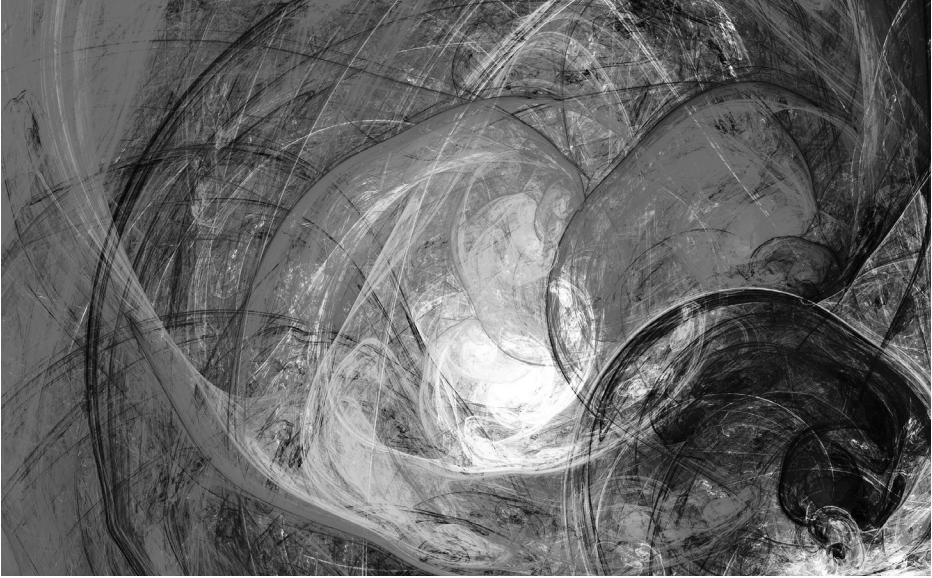
As a whole, *The Thousand and One Nights* is an exceptional narrative that has had a lasting impact on Islamic and Arab culture, society, and history for thousands of years. More specifically, however, the multiple stories contained within the narrative provide subtle and explicit examples of how women deviated and challenged the patriarchal order of Islamic and Arab society, and showcased their ability to influence, and exert control over, the men in their life.

From King Shahryar's wife's fornication to Sympathy's captivating intellectual superiority, women in this narrative seem to go against the perceived inferior gender and social norms present within their respective societies. As a result, women are seen not just altering the structure of their social interactions from patriarchal to matriarchal, but also controlling the men in their presence emotionally, physically, and/or psychologically. Women in this narrative are not only expressing a feminist critique of gender norms that are at the heart of ancient Islamic and Arab history, culture, and society, but also representing the qualities of love and mercy that inform Islam.

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THE THINKER



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Painting in infinite shades of infrared
Abstract the canvas, porcelain
An ivory expanse, formless and vast
Need I finish a thought? Perhaps tomorrow
Perhaps now, perhaps in the past
Perhaps in the "that" which came before
Its eternal gaze seeping over us all
Perhaps in the timeless tome of stone
Or papyrus rich and blooded
Perhaps in the visceral visage of leering oats
And their harsh masters
Perhaps in the ray of progress and
Sentimental tachyons
Beaming through to vocalize

Need I finish a thought? Or has it not already
Been said? Has it yet perished, withered, or

All will remain the same
In blinding light, I grope
For vines and cellulose to no avail
Rubber and shrieks characterize me
Bounce back to primordial ooze.

SYMBOLIZED INTERPRETATIONS:

A READER-RESPONSE CRITICISM



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Pick up a book, open to a random page, and tell me what you see. Words. No; that's black ink on white paper. Words only exist when we assign meaning onto them; our interpretations of every single word in our known language breathes them to life. Otherwise, they would simply exist as black ink on white paper forever; this theory belongs to reader-response literary criticism.

Jim Ray Daniels' "The Tall Tale of the Cowboy Mattress" is a story about the fear and apprehension a father feels when his son loses his innocence. The story takes readers back in time to glimpse the narrator's life as a young adult, using this perspective as a parallel for his son's coming of age. The poetic imagery and numerous metaphors weave the reader through the indeterminacy littering each sentence, eventually arriving at a conclusion determined by a subjective reader-response critical analysis; or at least, that is one interpretation.

Because there is much indeterminacy in Daniels' short story, the reader creates a symbolized meaning in an attempt of interpretation. The act of reading itself creates an act of interpretation that is subjective to the reader; therefore, what the reader determines to be the meaning of a text is actually "the meaning of the conceptual experience we create in response to the text" (Tyson 178). Each reader-response interpretation created by the reader produces the desire to explain a text, and, therefore, is subject to the reader's own "feelings, associations, and memories that occur as we react to [the text]" (178); what we perceive to be true about a text determines our interpretations. My subjective reader-response critical analysis of Jim Ray Daniels' "The Tall Tale of the Cowboy Mattress" is one such interpretation.

There are strong sexual undertones throughout Daniels' story that convey a deeper meaning than the immediate carnal behavior it is associated with; rather, these undertones are a metaphor for the complexities of life. The indeterminacy of the first sentence introduces such a meaning: "The single mattress decorated with laconic cowboys twirling graceful lassoes on gallant horses under puffy clouds lasted through a lot of stains" (Daniels 203). Indeterminacy lies with the unexplained word "stains," which the reader is left to discern for his/herself as both literally and metaphorically symbolic of the messiness of life. Contrasting the realization that life is messy with the childish imagery of puffy clouds, twirling lassoes, and happy-go-

lucky cowboys, we conclude that this is a coming-of-age story. If we take a closer look at the adjectives used to describe what is printed on the mattress, this realization becomes clearer.

The word “laconic,” which means concise, brief, or simple, describes the cowboys printed all over the mattress; we can take the definition of this word and interpret it to mean that the cowboys represent what is simple and concise. Because the cowboys are printed all over a child’s mattress, and because the cowboys are described as laconic — simple and concise — the reader automatically interprets the cowboys to symbolize an uncomplicated existence; therefore, innocence. The lassoes in the cowboy’s hands “twirling graceful[ly],” the “gallant horses,” and “puffy clouds” all symbolize the easygoing, uncomplicated, innocent existence that is naturally associated with childhood. Therefore, the easily recognizable imagery of the romanticized cowboy decorating a child’s mattress represents innocence.

In an effort to interpret the first sentence of Daniels’ short story, the reader analyzes the words, “laconic,” “graceful,” “gallant,” and “puffy,” which describe an innocent, playful, and childish scene, yet contrasts it with the word “stains” that connotes uncleanliness and/or the carnal actions of a young teenage boy. However, in my interpretation, I want the text to transcend beyond human carnal behaviors, so I create additional meaning onto the word contrasting with the imagery of innocence. Therefore, I mold “stains” into a metaphor conveying the complexities of life because the sexual undertones of Daniels’ story leave me with an uneasy feeling; in order to digest the literal meaning, I have to create a metaphorical meaning.

My effort to create additional meaning onto the text is called symbolization, which is “our perception and identification of our reading experience [that] creates a conceptual, or symbolic, world in our mind as we read [...]. Thus, the text we talk about isn’t really the text on the page; it’s the text in our mind” (178). According to subjective reader-response theory, “readers’ responses are the text” (178), so the meaning I create in my interpretation of Daniels’ “The Tall Tale of the Cowboy Mattress” is derived from my reaction to my own subjection of the text. What I perceive the text to mean is how I create my interpretation.

As my symbolization of the text continues as I read, I interpret the use of cowboy imagery to represent innocence as quite ironic, simply because the life of a cowboy was anything but innocent, let alone laconic, graceful, or gallant. Cowboys were ranchers who maintained thousands of livestock year-round in the remote wilderness of the western United States. They dealt with all types of weather; food and shelters were either scarce or had poor conditions; controlling substantial numbers of large livestock was quite dangerous; and predatory animals often threatened the livestock.

In the same way that we romanticize the life of a cowboy, a childhood can also be — and quite often is — romanticized. There are children worldwide who suffer from the same ailments that all of mankind suffer from; innocence cannot always protect them from the messiness of life. Nevertheless, romanticized interpretations of childhood claim that innocence is protection from the outside world; therefore, the cowboys with their lassoes and their horses and their puffy clouds last through the metaphorical “stains” that symbolize the complexities and messiness of life in the outside world. Because the narrator kept and continued to use his cowboy mattress well into adulthood, he was attempting to keep and to use his innocence, despite his numerous actions on that same mattress that were anything but innocent. Therefore, the narrator was trying to maintain his own romanticized perception of an innocent childhood despite his inevitable coming of age.

The irony behind the use of cowboys in Daniels’ short story is once again subject to my own symbolization of the text; I argue that the cowboy represents innocence in this story and that it naturally contradicts with the historical evidence of the life of a real cowboy. I use this ironic contradiction to support my claim that the innocence associated with the images printed on a child’s mattress conflicts with the inevitable loss of innocence of the narrator’s son, of which the narrator himself struggles to reconcile. Therefore, I used textual evidence, as well as some historical evidence, to support my re-symbolization, or what David Bleich calls the act of interpreting, which is, “interpreting the meaning of the conceptual experience we created in response to the text” (Tyson 178). Subjective reader-response criticism is about acknowledging that our own interpretations of texts stem from our own experience of the text; what we

perceive to be true, based on our “feelings, associations, and memories” that happen as we read determines our interpretations.

“The Tall Tale of the Cowboy Mattress” carries on to describe a father reminiscing about his young adulthood and his first taste of freedom. He sentimentally remembers his cowboy mattress — that stayed with him until he was 25 — and all the complexities of life it endured with him. The narrator says his parents “sent me on my way with the cowboy mattress, it meant I wasn’t coming home” (Daniels 203). In contrast, the narrator’s son “is a sullen cowboy these days, a loner out on the prairie. We keep calling him back to the campfire, but he prefers his cool, personal darkness” (203). As the narrator relates back to his reluctance to leave home for the first time and how he continued to cling onto the cowboy mattress — onto his childhood innocence — he is apprehensive of his son’s striking contrast. Therefore, because the narrator had to come to terms with own his coming of age, he has to come to terms with that of his son.

This interpretation of Jim Ray Daniels’ “The Tall Tale of the Cowboy Mattress” is subjective to my own “feelings, associations, and memories that occurred as [I] reacted [to the text]” (Tyson 178); it is the result of what I perceived the meaning of the short story to be. Based on subjective reader-response, I used symbolization, or the conceptual/symbolic world created in my mind as I read, and re-symbolization, the act of interpreting, to determine what the story meant to me and how I came to reach that meaning. Without the meaning we symbolize to words, they would simply be black ink on white paper.

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WAIT PASSIONATELY

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When life demands of you a span
Of time, of effort
Of some combination of the two
Let not the dread huddle up on you and
Let not the draw and drive of other greener fields or sandier shores
Send you home or afar

If you stay
Stay contently
Know that nowhere demands your presence more than the venerable soil or engineered
cement you stand on

If you move
Move evenly
Linger not on bland paths and sprint not across beautiful spaces — and never mistake the
two, for the former rarely comes and the latter may surprise you

Most importantly, though,

If you wait
Wait passionately
Let your planned gaze steady upon the ticking hands that one day will bring about your hour

Because so many
Amble meaninglessly along, waiting for their time to come in dull steps and ruts



They kiss the weekend as it comes, lick coffee from troughs and never drink deeply
They dance mildly in doubt, never truly drunken with love or with virtue
They pray halfheartedly and deny without conviction
They think without seeing, see without thinking

Such is not a true water
It cannot satisfy the thirst of life
And it evaporates upon splashing the tongue

And so few
Stride with purpose, patrolling their corridor in honorable patience
And greet each day with energy and fervor, alternately sipping as a sommelier or gulping as a
glutton from the well of passion
And dance wildly in faith or reason, blessed and intoxicated by the pleasure of existence
And choose whether to pray or deny, or perhaps both
And both think and see in equal measure

If you wait
Wait passionately
Let your goals resonate as bright lights in the distance but also let your steps slowly radiate as
you draw near

For if you do not
You may see
The darkness that lies beneath the ground
A cruel and deceptive shade of our reality
That has greeted and taken so many who walk gingerly on the path of this blissful,
Bacchanalian gnosis

Be ever mindful of your step
So as to never stray and fall into this haunted, depressive squalor
That hangs over our heads and dangles a scythe or noose

And always remember

If you wait
Wait passionately
For such is the way to drink the nectar of life



OF BARNS AND FATHERS



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Lady King's condemned barn is only a stone's throw across the street from my childhood, redbrick home. It is, I think, the flawless representative of a father. I can see it, standing there always: so close, but forbidden, the white-washed haunted walls making me burn to explore inside of it. I used to sit underneath the maple tree in the front lawn of our property and throw my rocks as hard as I could, trying to hit the big, broad walls. I could never reach it.

I was not allowed to go explore the inside. At least, that's what I was always told. But age 10 is the year of initiation at my school; you must break one grand family rule. I could have chosen a variety of things — most people in my class tried on condoms or stole wine out of their parent's fridge — but all I wanted was to see the inside of that cursed barn.

I remember that walking across that asphalt strip took a lot longer than it should have or than it ever had in my daydreams about this moment. The Johnson grass was tall and tangled, tripping my legs in a web of regret before I even reached the entrance. The grass and the path I was leaving through it would surely let my parents know what I had done, and if they could not, there were surely garden snakes teeming by the roots, waiting to slither up my thighs if I paused for one moment.

I had only ever seen the broad side of the barn, but I found out it wasn't as big as it looked from across the road. It was a very narrow rectangular shape. It was broad daylight outside, but all I could see through the cracks in the wood was charcoaled blackness.

I knew I would never live with myself if I didn't face my fears, so I lifted my skirt and began climbing over the rough wooden planks, which were locked in an infinite embrace and which, at one point in their lives, were actually barn doors. As I reached to brace myself on one, a chunk of the aged and rotten wood broke off into my hand, and I fell, headlong, into the darkness.

It took a while for my eyes to adjust, and while I waited, every sharp inhale of my own breath startled me into jumping in an attempt to get away from whatever might be crawling in the dirt around me. My nose hairs tingled from an odd but overwhelming odor.

I finally could see that there was one long hallway that stretched the length of the barn, empty save for the rusted remains of an old tiller. There were lofts on either side — tall lofts that reached the ceiling, and they were piled high with what seemed like hundreds of bales of rotten hay. I climbed up into the loft on the right. The hay was wet and sticky — moving, it seemed, with the bodies of a million roaches.

There were several old chicken nests nestled between hay bales. They had all been raided long ago, but there were the broken shells for proof that life had once existed here. I poked my finger at one of the eggshells. It rolled over against my touch, and I jumped. There was a tiny bird skeleton stuck to the inside of the shell, no doubt sucked out of its skin to its early grave.

By the time I climbed down the ladder, I couldn't make it to the door. I don't know if the sun had actually set outside or if dust had just risen from the barn floor and thickened the air. I couldn't see my hand in front of my face.

I must have cried for hours before I climbed back up the ladder that I had leaned against and fell into a pile of hay. It rolled with the multitude of tiny insect bodies, massaging me into a deep sleep.

I don't think I've ever slept better.



HAIKU SEQUENCE

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Your shadow kisses
Dance across my aching heart
I wish you the world.

My soul willing you
Like a frightened girl at night
To protect my heart.

My angel own, I
Loved in silence from afar
You are lost to me

All the things I'd say
If I had a thousand hours
I am too afraid

Yet you once loved me
You don't anymore. I wish
That I had known then

ONE GIANT LEAP FOR MANKIND

BIOTECHNOLOGY AND ITS EFFECTS ON HUMAN FUNCTIONING



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Two centuries ago the average lifespan of humans was almost half the lifespan of ours today. With the onset of technology like immunization, better sanitization, and antibiotics, we were able to double our life expectancy. There are still factors, however, that can destroy the functioning of the human body. From disease to disaster, our bodies cannot always maintain themselves, and this is where further technological advances are needed. Can biotechnology be used to sustain the functioning of our bodies and perhaps even double our lifespan again? We will challenge these possibilities as we investigate recent advances in organ repair, limb replacements, and nerve connections.

Organs are the miniature factories that keep our city of a body running. A failure in one of these carbon mechanisms, and our entire system can shut down. Now that we are able to transplant organs, it is possible to combat this problem, but is there a solution that doesn't involve waitlists and donors? Professor Juan Carlos Izpisua Belmonte says yes. "The idea is to take human cells and implant them... into specially prepared pig embryos so that the resulting organism, known as a chimera, develops into an animal with a human pancreas, kidney, or other organs" (34).

Using Clustered Regularly Interspaced Short Palindromic Repeats (CRISPR), a tool that can edit the genetics of an organism, Belmonte's team plans on deleting certain organs from the anatomy of a pig embryo. Then they will fill the altered embryo with human stem cells, all of which carry the genes that were deleted from the embryo's "blueprint." The result is a phenotypically normal pig that is utilizing a human organ to function.

Like trying to complete a puzzle with the pieces from another box, it seems improbable, but Belmonte's team has already had success. He says, "[r]esearchers in his lab and in other groups have taken the next step and injected human stem cells into porcine embryos. A few of these injections 'took,' and we confirmed that the human tissue had started to mature normally" (Belmonte 35). Now, if harvesting organs made from pig flesh isn't your cup of tea, perhaps you'd prefer organs manufactured by a 3D printer.

Unlike organs grown in a pig, using a 3D printer allows scientists to make organs from one's own stem cells. In the past scientists struggled with creating a framework on which the growth of such an organ could take place. They would strip an organ of its cells and, according to engineers Ibrahim Ozbolat and Howard Chen, would use the leftover blood vessels as a foundation for new cells to grow (31). However, the inconsistency of pores in the blood vessel framework became a factor in the functioning of the organ.

Scientists needed to create a uniform, porous surface onto the scaffolds but had no method of doing so until the invention of the 3D printer (Ozbolat, Chen 32). Using scaffolds like these, "the Wake Forest Institute of Regenerative Medicine has replaced the bladders of patients who suffer from end-stage bladder disease with 'artificial' bladders that were created using the patients' own cells" (31). Now scientists hope to combine 3D printers with "laser-assisted cell-writing technology" to print the organs themselves without having to create a scaffold (32).

Being able to manufacture organs without having to wait for a donor or pig embryo to grow would significantly reduce complications and fatalities due to organ failures. Humans would be able to address almost any organ-related problem, replace the organ if need be, and have a fully functional body again. The problem with these organs made from cells, via pig or printer, is that the cells themselves have a life span. Even if one was to replace an organ, that same organ would decay eventually. So, why not use inorganic materials to build one?

In the late 1900s, the first artificial heart was made. Consisting of polymer fibers and silicon rubber, the pneumatic device known as the "Liotta Heart" was placed into its first patient. Thirty-two hours later, the patient's body rejected the device and died of kidney failure (Cooley 201). Although the experiment failed, Denton Cooley's team "learned that human circulation could be successfully sustained by a mechanical pulsatile device" (201).

So far, we have not been able to make a completely functioning artificial heart, though the article "Bio Artificial Organs: Brief Chronology and Latest Updates. Case Study: Human Heart" claims we can make partially artificial hearts. "[I]n bio artificial organs, artificial devices are coupled with living cells capable of performing most or all of the biomechanical or metabolic function of a complex organ... The longest a patient has been supported with a [manufactured heart] is nearly four years before receiving a successful transplant" (Hinganu, Stan, Gandore, and Hinganu D. 58). Unfortunately, we have not advanced technology enough to replace complex organs with more durable inorganic replicas for long periods of time. We have instead made temporary replacements that "eliminate the need for pacemakers and defibrillators" and buys patients more time in their wait for a heart donor. The manufactured heart continues to sustain human bodies until another technological advance can aid their functioning better. Artificial organs aren't the only inorganic additions that can impact the way our bodies operate.

The Pentagon's Advance Research Projects Agency (DARPA) has already made a connection between the synthetic and the artificial. They have invented a robotic arm that attaches to the end of human nerves and moves based on the electrical signals of the user's brain. The communication between the two is accurate enough, as Sara Reardon observes, "to perform difficult tasks such as handling soft fruit and even rock climbing" (143). In fact, "[t]he device won approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration last year — the first nerve-controlled prosthetic to do so — and the company says that it is now working on commercialization" (Reardon 143). For those that have lost limbs or the communication among the brain and the limbs, this invention is crucial to their everyday bodily functions.

Another artificial mechanism, the exoskeleton, provides an alternate solution to those problems. An exoskeleton is a body suit that enables the user to move faster and utilize more strength. It is strapped on and, unlike the prosthetic from the last paragraph, can be taken on and off. The exoskeleton is meant to assist the bodies of those who are too feeble for industrial work, and yet it also carries therapeutic applications. William Knight, senior editor for artificial intelligence at *MIT Technology Review*, explains, "[e]xoskeletons have found commercial traction for rehabilitation and as walking aids. Earlier this week, a company...

announced the latest version of its device for people with spinal-cord injuries. The system enables people who normally require a wheelchair to walk with the aid of crutches" (1).

There are even versions, like the robotic arm, that connect to the nerves and allow the user to control it with their mind. This piece of technology, which is already commercialized in Japan, could potentially decrease the obstacles faced by the debilitated and increase the strength of the everyday human. With the inventions of exoskeletons and robotic prosthesis, we are learning to send data from our minds to machines, but what about the reverse?

The article "Prosthetic Hand Sensor Placement: Analysis of Touch Perception During the Grasp" addresses this issue. "Current prosthetic hands are based on sophisticated multi-fingered structures... The sensory information is used for control, but not sent to the user of the hand (amputee). Grasping without sensing is not good enough" (Mirkovic, Popovic 1). Engineers have already realized this and developed a "glove" covered in sensors. So far, the gloves can recreate a "grasp estimation" and stimulate a feeling of touch (2). They've successfully passed this information to the user, but the data isn't complex enough to describe texture and temperature. Using positive temperature coefficient (PTC) thermistors and force-sensing resistor (FSR) sensors, scientists are trying to do just that.

PTCs work like a series of thermometers expressing the different temperatures a prosthetic is experiencing. The FSRs record the force necessary to, say, grasp an object. The more slippery or flexible an object is, the more force required, thus quantifying the data in a way the user will understand. Together these two sensors recreate the sensation of touch and enable prosthetics to function more similarly to real limbs. If we can simulate the sense of touch, what does that mean for the other senses?

Advances in robotics pose a threat to disabilities like blindness and deafness. One such advancement is called the "eyeborg." The eyeborg converts wavelengths of light into sound, allowing humans to "hear color." Aaron Parkhurst from University College London tells us that science "is working on adapting [t]his relationship with technology to experience wavelengths of less than 400 nm, or ultraviolet light," which exceeds the data we normally perceive with our eyes (74).

Similarly, we can replace hearing with feeling. Using two magnets implanted in the fingers and ultrasonic sensors, it is possible to send out a signal, receive its reverberation, and feel the vibration of the magnets. People with this implant "can feel how close or how far away an object is from [their] body. [He or she] experiences sonar" (Parkhurst 75). With these same magnetic implants and an electromagnetic sensor, a person can receive infrared light, better known as heat. "Infrared is a type of heat signature, and so [we] can see how many people are in a room by looking at the room with [our] fingers" (Parkhurst 74). Not only has technology provided us with these loopholes around disability, it also brings us above and beyond our normal capacity for perception.

Whether it's organs, limbs, or nerves, we can utilize technology to greatly impact the functioning of the human body. This view of "enhanced" humans, however, is not always accepted. Integrating man and machine raises many ethical questions and dangerous possibilities; a power-assisted exoskeleton can be used to harm others, while modifying human stem cells seems unconscionable. Upgrading humans has its consequences, but the common misconception is that these consequences are new. Humans have been adapting and evolving since their beginning, so why stop now? Let's continue to grow and take that next step, the step toward biotechnology.

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JACQUELINE



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Although little time had passed, it felt so strange for Mr. Hayes to be back in that room again; the room where he spent his last moments with his love Jacqueline. He analyzed the room. Everything was just how they had left it: the bed half-made, curtains slightly drawn, and papers scattered on the desk by the window. Mr. Hayes' eyes shifted to the right side of the room where the bed was and noticed on the nightstand an empty cup with a faint lipstick stain on it. Mr. Hayes chuckled to himself.

"Jackie," he whispered under his breath. "It feels like you never left."

He walked straight toward the window and looked out at the garden with its blooming tulips and buttercups. Usually on nice spring days like this, he would look out that window and see Jacqueline working tirelessly in that garden, raking, planting... He would always tell Jacqueline that she needed to take it easy due to their aging bodies, and, of course, she would tell him to shove it. Boy, she loved that garden, and Mr. Hayes loved her. No matter how old they'd gotten, Jacqueline kept that fiery spirit of hers 'til the day she drew her last breath.

Mr. Hayes, still looking out the window, pictured Jacqueline out there in the garden smiling and waving at him. He felt a sudden urge to wave back, but then realized that there was no one there. Jacqueline wasn't there. His mood grew somber, and he turned his body away from the window. He continued to study the room.

He strolled over to the bathroom, adjacent to their bedroom on his right, and flipped the light switch on. The first thing Mr. Hayes saw in front of him was his reflection; his short salt and pepper hair was slicked back and contrasted heavily against his olive-toned complexion. His face had many worry lines, and under his hazel eyes were prominent dark circles; they were partly from his age but mostly from the endless nights he stayed up, comforting a fragile and sick Jacqueline who was unable to keep her food down.

Mr. Hayes moved closer to the mirror, looking at himself. He was wearing a black suit and a

lapis-colored tie with flamingos on it; that tie was Jacqueline's favorite. He stared at the tie and his eyes started to water.

Dammit, this isn't fair, he thought. *This isn't fair!* He angrily drove his left fist into the counter below him, again and again until specks of blood started to appear on his knuckles. Mr. Hayes then sank down to his feet sobbing. He felt like he had lost a part of himself, and he hated it. He absolutely hated it. Suddenly, he heard a small knock on the bedroom door.

"Hey, Dad," a familiar voice called to him. "Everyone is here, and the limos have arrived."

Mr. Hayes froze with tears still streaming down his face. He remained silent. Another knock followed.

"Dad, are you in there?" the voice asked.

He rose up from the ground and recollected himself, slicking his disheveled hair back into place.

He cleared his throat and answered, "Y-Yes. I'm in here."

The voice spoke again. "Do you mind if I come in?"

"No, I don't mind," said Mr. Hayes.

He then heard the sound of the door creaking open and heels walking across the wood floor. He soon spotted in the mirror another figure behind him. It was his daughter Julie, who was in her early-30s. She shared a striking resemblance to her father with her facial features and dark complexion. All were from her father except her blue eyes; those were her mother's. She wore a black peplum dress with diamond-studded earrings, and her hair was pulled back into a simple ponytail.

Julie's gaze wandered down to her father's bloodstained fist. She sighed. "Dad," she said sounding disappointed.

Mr. Hayes turned to face her. "Honey, I'm fine. It was just a little hiccup... That's all," he said trying to ease her concern.

Julie hastened towards the sink and turned the faucet on. "Come here," she said.

Her dad silently complied and walked over to her. Once he handed her his fist, Julie began to wash it and then dry it. After she was done, she looked at her father and saw that his eyes were red. Her heart broke and she hugged him. She began to cry.

"Dad, I'm sorry," she murmured.

Mr. Hayes hugged his daughter back and said, "It's okay, honey. I'll be all right... We'll all be all right."

They stood there for a moment quietly hugging each other. They weren't sure if they were truly going to be all right, but for a time like this, hope was all they had. Julie pulled away and caught a glimpse of her reflection; she looked like a mess.

"Ugh, look at me. I look horrible," Julie said with annoyance in her voice. She moved closer to the mirror and began wiping away her now-smeared eye makeup.

Her father let out a small snicker, which soon turned into a blustering laughter, throwing his head back.

Julie turned to glare at him but then softened her expression. This was the first time since her mother's passing that he wasn't feeling sad, and she was glad to see him with some joy. She began to laugh, too.

Ha, Mom sure had herself a couple of lunatics, she thought jokingly.

After a couple of minutes, their laughter started to die down, and they felt like a weight had been lifted from their shoulders. Both of them knew this feeling wasn't going last, especially

with what was going to happen within the next few hours; however, that didn't matter to them. For right now, they just wanted to bask in this elatedness, even if it was only for a while.

Without a warning, there was a thundering knock at the bedroom door that caused Mr. Hayes and Julie to jump.

"Hey, guys," a deep voice spoke. "It's time to leave. Are you coming?" This voice belonged to Mr. Hayes' son Ryan, who was five years younger than Julie.

Julie's smile fell as she remembered why she came upstairs to see him in the first place. She linked her arm around his father's and looked him in the eyes. "It's time," she said trying to sound calm.

Her father nodded but looked back at the mirror to check his appearance for the final time. He couldn't help but smile a little bit.

Well Jacqueline, at least I get to see you one last time babe, he silently said to himself, hoping that somewhere, wherever Jacqueline was, that she heard him.

He turned back to his daughter, took a deep breath, and said, "Okay... Let's go."

WHETHER THE WEATHER LIKES IT OR NOT

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We all remember that moment
when we abandon the safety of shore
and set sail on the seven seas
aboard our own unstoppable vessel;
her sails, majestic, her bow, exquisite.
Together at the helm, we sail to another realm.

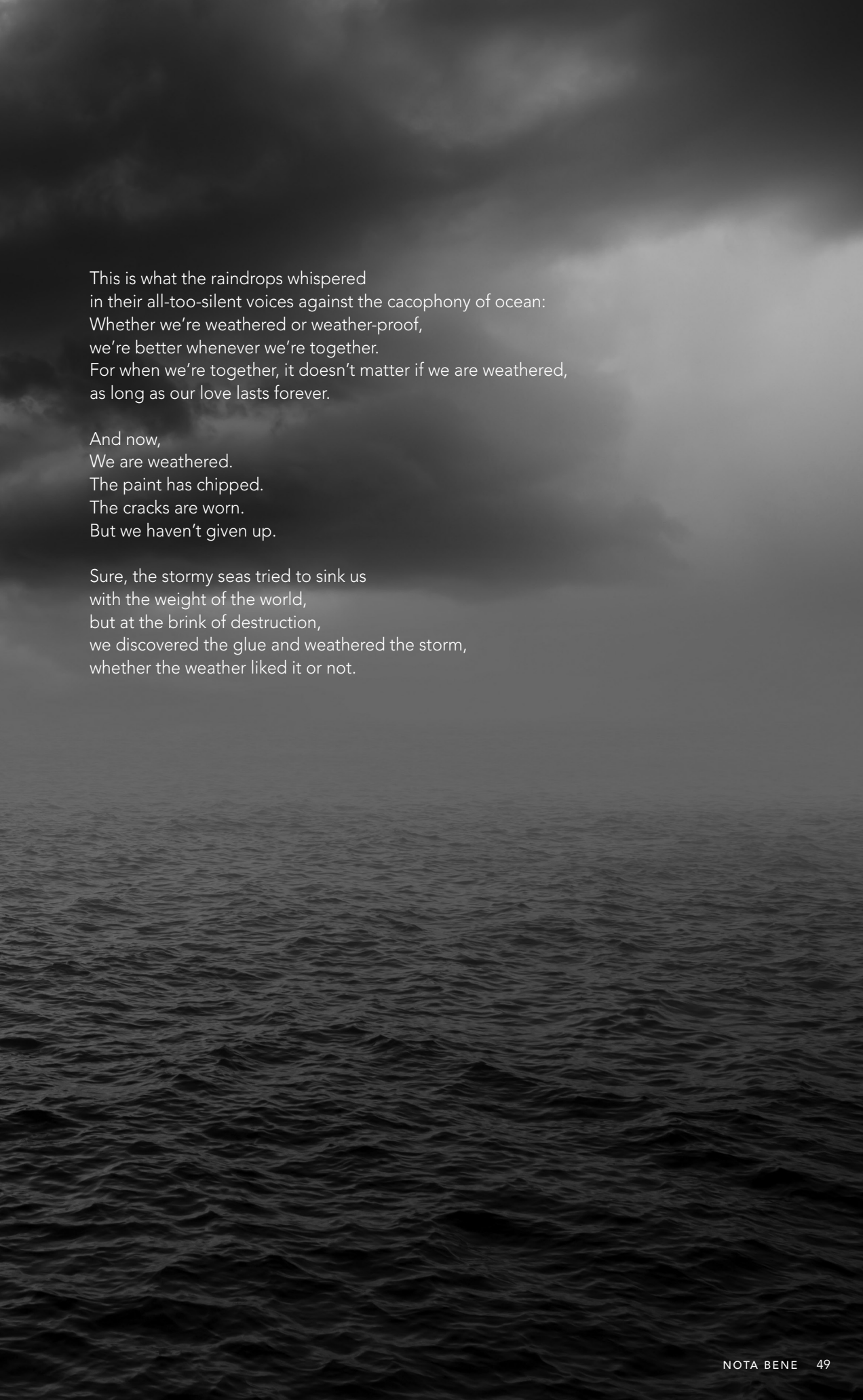
To start with, we're invincible and unsinkable.
Nothing can touch us.
Little leak? "Little duct tape."
Sudden creak? "Turn the other cheek."
We're weather-proof.

We float on a cloud, light as a feather,
'til the sudden "plink" of a raindrop.
Odd. It seems to want to tell me something,
but it's lost to the whispers of the sea.
It's raining, but it's okay;
we're weather-proof.

A little while later,
the cracks become greater.
The tape won't stick.
The facade doesn't hold.
The ice-cold raindrops break through our haze
like the cold barrel of a gun.
Lightning streaks the sky; the thunder rumbles.
We grasp for anything tangible
and hope we can swim.

Inch by inch, the waters rise.
The waves grow; the wind attacks,
and then, the seemingly endless barrage.
We fight to escape, we fight for freedom,
We fight to survive.
We're weathering, whether we like it or not.

Slowly, the cloud tears begin to dry
and all that remains is a soft trickle of raindrops
whispering their sweet nonsense.



This is what the raindrops whispered
in their all-too-silent voices against the cacophony of ocean:
Whether we're weathered or weather-proof,
we're better whenever we're together.
For when we're together, it doesn't matter if we are weathered,
as long as our love lasts forever.

And now,
We are weathered.
The paint has chipped.
The cracks are worn.
But we haven't given up.

Sure, the stormy seas tried to sink us
with the weight of the world,
but at the brink of destruction,
we discovered the glue and weathered the storm,
whether the weather liked it or not.

THE MILLENNIAL GENERATION



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The study of the Millennial Generation in adulthood has been of much interest in recent years. With many of its members finally reaching adulthood, the Millennials have officially installed themselves as the largest generation in America (Brownstein). They have outnumbered the Baby Boomers in order to attain this title, but what is particularly interesting is the behavior of the Millennials.

The Millennial Generation represents the first generation of digital natives, and many researchers are still trying to unravel what repercussions, good or bad, a dominant generation raised with technology may bring. Despite being the most technologically active and connected through hundreds of technological platforms, about 90 percent of Millennials agree that most people share too much information on the Internet (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 1).

This statistic from the Pew Research Center is helpful in identifying another key ideology rampant among people from the Millennial Generation: they are hugely distrusting of others ("Millennials in Adulthood" 1). In fact, social trust in Millennials is so low, that when asked if most people can generally be trusted, only about 19 percent of Millennials agreed, while other living generations are at 30 percent or more (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 1). The low trust of Millennials, as well as their more accepting nature, can potentially be linked to their upbringing in the digital age while being exposed to the crippling events of 9/11 and the Great Recession (Burststein).

The Great Recession is a larger sticking point for Millennials though, with the majority of them still facing massive unemployment and debt despite the economic upturn (Brownstein). Because they are the most educated generation, Millennials have the largest accumulation of student debt that any generation has ever faced (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 1), and the unemployment rate for adults in this particular generation has remained in the double digits for nearly six years (Brownstein). The Pew Research Center suggests that these financial burdens may be the real reason Millennials have been so slow to marry, which has in turn caused Millennials to carry the highest percentage of out-of-wedlock births ("Millennials in Adulthood" 1).

However, despite strong economic disadvantages, the Millennial Generation has made great strides in the political arena. They are widely acclaimed as the generation that is most accepting of others and have played a large role in the social restructuring of America. Being the most ethnically and racially diverse generation (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 1; Rainer and Rainer) and raised in an environment without the strains of segregation faced by the Baby Boomers and the Silent Generation, the Millennials believe strongly in equality and fairness for all and see no issue with interracial or interreligious marriages (Pew Research Center, "Interracial Marriages Are Increasingly Accepted in America"; Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3; Rainer and Rainer).

The 2015 legalization of same-sex marriage was a landmark victory for the Millennial Generation, who have been advocating for gay rights and same-sex marriage since at least 2007 (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 2). While support for same-sex marriage has been on the rise for all generations, the Millennial Generation saw a surge in support in 2010; and now, nearly 68 percent of adults in this age group support same-sex marriage (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 2). Though the trend for all generations has been increasing support for this issue, the Millennials have always been the most supportive and are still the most supportive by a 13-point gap (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 2).

The generational difference in level of support for same-sex marriage can be further analyzed with the Millennials' educational and religious backgrounds. To begin with, Robert Jones's article from *Same-Sex Marriage* suggests that "support for same-sex marriage is positively correlated with higher education levels," and the Millennials are known to be the most educated generation (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 1). The findings in this study suggest that the higher the level of education, the more likely it is that a person will support same-sex marriage, with minorities in support coming from high school graduates and majorities in support coming from undergraduate and post-graduate degree holders (Jones).

Millennials may also find themselves more likely to support gay marriage because of their steadily increasing dissociation with religion. Pew Research Center suggests that "not only are they less likely than older generations to be affiliated with any religion, they are also less likely to say they believe in God" ("Millennials in Adulthood" 1). The evidence supports this statement, with only 58 percent of Millennials expressing that they are absolutely certain of the existence of God (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 1). Several studies have correlated the relationship between religion and a person's support of same-sex marriage (Jones; Rainer and Rainer). Most notably, the study in *Has Child Behavior Worsened* suggests that someone who was raised religious but does not actively attend church is "in a group where 74 percent are supportive of same-sex marriages," and 85 percent of respondents with no religious background polled in support of same-sex marriages (Rainer and Rainer). The Millennials, because of their increasingly non-religious lifestyles, are naturally more inclined to support same-sex marriage.

Still, this is not the only major social reform Millennials find themselves in favor of. A large majority of Millennials are also in favor of marijuana legalization, with 69 percent polling in favor of legalizing the drug (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3). The Millennial Generation is actually the driving force behind the movement, with a 16-point gap between them and Generation X's 53 percent majority (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3). Already they have seen the legalization of marijuana in Colorado and Washington (Hunter); and with the largest voter population in such strong support of the movement, it would not be surprising if all states were to eventually allow pot as a consumer product (Brownstein; Hunter).

Another example of the liberalism and the accepting nature of Millennials is in their support of interracial marriage. Being raised in an environment void of racial segregation certainly helped in Millennials developing friendships across racial lines (Rainer and Rainer), but in adulthood this result appears to translate into an acceptance of interracial marriage as well (Pew Research Center, "Interracial Marriages Are Increasingly Accepted in America"; Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 4; Rainer and Rainer). The study from *Has Child*

Behavior worsened found that 93 percent of Millennials found no issue in marrying a person from a different racial or ethnic background (Rainer and Rainer). Eighty-seven percent of Millennial respondents claimed they would not be opposed to making their own marriage an interracial one, and one in four Millennials have actually gone through with an interracial marriage (Rainer and Rainer).

Even with immigration reform, Millennials have proven to be the most accepting generation. In Pew Research Center's analysis on the generations' views on immigration reform, they found that not only do Millennials have the highest percentage of respondents in favor of allowing illegal residents to stay and apply for citizenship, less than 17 percent of this population wish to have current illegal residents deported (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3). Compared to Generation X's 23 percent who would wish illegal residents not be allowed to stay and the 30 percent support for deportation in the Baby Boomer and Silent Generations (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3), the Millennial Generation can definitively prove the acceptance of others they have come to be known for.

Despite the clear liberalism of the Millennial Generation on most political issues, they are much more evenly split on debates of abortion and gun control (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3). In fact, Generation X leads in support of abortion rights, with the Millennial Generation polling at a close second; and the Silent Generation has the most advocates for gun control, with the Millennials and Generation X sitting in the middle (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3). This is not to say the Millennials' liberalism dies with these two issues; instead, it is merely a touch vaguer. A solid majority — 56 percent — of Millennials polled in favor of abortion rights in 2014, compared to a majority polling pro-life from 2008 to 2012 (Hunter; Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3). As for gun control, one could ascertain that the Pew Research Center's findings suggest that both Millennials and Generation X are closer to the Baby Boomers in the belief that Americans have a right to gun ownership (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3).

This assumption would correlate well with the idea that Millennials are overwhelmingly politically independent, rather than Democratic as their voting data may suggest (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 2). A solid half of the generation does not identify with either major party (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 1), while roughly one in five say they are Libertarian (Moore). Millennials have always had the highest percentage of politically independent voters (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 2), which could certainly be a result of their overall distrust for people, but it is more likely that the group only appears Democratic in the elections because of similar cultural views (Brownstein). The Democratic Party supports same-sex marriage, marijuana legalization, abortion rights, and immigration reform in the form of allowing illegal residents to apply for citizenship (Democratic National Committee). These similar viewpoints earn the Democratic Party the votes of the Millennials (Brownstein; Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 2), but earning the Millennial vote at election time does not necessarily mean that people of this generation agree with everything in the Democratic Party's platform.

Instead, Millennials remain independent because of the differences their ideology has with that of the Democratic Party. A good example of this would be the Democratic Party's agenda for gun control (Democratic National Committee), while the slight majority of Millennials prefer to support the American right to own a gun (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3). If one was to distinctly analyze the overall ideology of the Millennial Generation, he or she would most likely find their social views to be more Libertarian than Democratic (Libertarian National Committee). On the other hand, Millennials are the most supportive of any generation to the idea that the government should be larger and provide more services (Pew Research Center, "Millennials in Adulthood" 3), which sways them again to become Democratic constituents economically.

Perhaps it is because the Millennial Generation is seeing victories in social reform but still faces strong economic trouble that they continue to identify as independent, despite strong Democratic leanings. With their low social trust and ongoing economic battles, the Millennial Generation is less inclined to support any politician. Ronald Brownstein spoke in the *National*

Journal about how the economic trouble of the Millennial Generation spawns from the governmental programs' favor of older citizens to younger, going as far as to say that "the political system's response to the Millennials' economic distress must be something more than, as a modern Marie Antoinette might put it, to let them smoke pot."

Brownstein is absolutely correct in the sense that Millennials will never identify with either major party as long as they face such great financial burdens. However, with the political and financial optimism Millennials have for the future (Burstein; Rainer and Rainer), it is very likely that this generation of diverse and accepting individuals could change America for the better. Thom and Jess Rainer claimed in *Has Child Behavior Worsened* that "the Boomer generation became the generation of tolerance, but the Millennials do not simply 'tolerate' those of different skin colors or ethnic backgrounds." In the same article, Thom and Jess talk of how 70 percent of Millennials have a friend from a different religious background and 80 percent have a friend with a different lifestyle than their own. This level of acceptance for others in Millennial culture speaks volumes for how society can and will evolve to become a more accepting place. The Millennial Generation, through their social and political views, is on the edge of creating something magnificent. Their greatest adversary, however, will remain their economic troubles in the face of the digital age.

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THE ULTIMATE MEASURE



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Danny's finger traces the page, outlining every word. He blinks away the sleep in his eyes and bites his lip to dull the quivers, the dim bedside light glinting off his glasses. "I have a dream..." he whispers, slowly turning the page. Pursing his lips and pulling his blanket tighter, he leans into the book to peer at the illustration of Martin Luther King Jr. "*Memphis, Tennessee. April 4th, 1968.*" Two of Danny's fingers brush over the photo and slowly move down to a quote beneath. "*The ultimate measure of a man is not where he stands in moments of comfort and convenience, but where he stands at times of challenge and controversy.*"

"Boy, what you doin up at this hour?" Danny's mom surprises him from his doorway. He leaps at her voice, accidentally slamming the book closed in the process. "Hush now!" She whispers. "Baby girl's finally sleepin'."

"Sorry, mom, I - I...was just doing some homework."

"Yeah? And what were we studying?" She asks skeptically and glides to Danny's bedside. He holds up the cover of his textbook — *The African American's United States History*.

"It's for Black History Month. Mr. Humphreys is making everyone read through the chapters about Martin Luther King Jr. and Malcom X. They were both assassinated..."

"Mhm, I know it," his mom answers somberly, sitting on the edge of his bed. "Are you enjoying the read?"

"I guess," Danny shrugs. "I don't get why somebody could be so...angry."

"You mean Malcolm X?"

"No, no, the people who killed them. What could drive someone to do that? I see things at school that make me stop and wonder — like that Carter kid always getting to share his essays first in Mrs. Allen's class, or even Mr. Humphreys letting the other black kids talk a little more trash than...well, than Carter."

"I haven't heard you mention any of this before?" His mom sits up a little straighter, concern washing over her eyes.

"Well... I mean, I never thought anything of it until now. I knew it was wrong, I guess, but not worth taking up arms over. And definitely not worth *killing* for." He taps the book with his knuckles. "It's gotten worse this month, too, and Mr. Humphreys said the other day that he wouldn't even teach on Black History Month if the school didn't require it. He says it only causes discord, forces people to look at their differences instead of acknowledge that we're all just human beings."

"A lot of people feel that way, boy. I happen to think acknowledging we're all the same at heart is as important as acknowledging that African Americans have a powerful and important history. Has anything happened to you that you haven't told me 'bout?"

"No, not to me... Darrius got called the N-word one time by the Hernandez twins. And Chanelle had something duct taped to her windshield after school a month or so ago."

"This all happened at school? And I didn't hear about it?"

"Chanelle reported it and the school handled it pretty quietly, and the Hernandez twins were reprimanded and put in detention for a week. It's not a big deal—"

"It is, too," Danny's mom speaks over him. "Those things shouldn't happen! Sometimes folks of other colors—"

"Mom," Danny reclaims the conversation, putting his hand on her shoulder. "Mr. Humphreys says that people who make 'blanket statements' about other races are just as guilty." His mom stops and stares at him with a frustrated expression.

"Well..." She breathes. "I just wish that things were different, baby boy. I wish that high school wasn't harsher on certain peoples than it is on others."

"Carter gets just as much crap as the rest of us, mom... Before dad — I mean — before he died, he always told me that no matter what happened to me that I was to stand up for others who had it worse, to be the bandage for another even when I was being cut."

"A military man would tell you that..."

"I think...I think that if we really want change, it's going to take effort from both sides. Maybe there will always be those people that act out against us and us against them, but if we put in the effort and meet those that stand up for us halfway, we can really make a difference, like Martin Luther King Jr. did."

"It'll take time and work," his mom says quietly.

"All great things do," Danny responds with a smile before reopening his book and pouring himself into it again.

FLIGHT TO OBLIVION

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Leave me without pondering.

Walk, jog,
run, sprint,
better yet,
fly!

Soar through the open sky.

Do not halt to acknowledge what you left behind.

Leave me at flashing speed.

Make sure I will not be able to follow along this time.


I will not force you to leave traces and hints so I can find you.

Erase all the footprints you leave behind
in whichever path you chose to embark.

This time,

I will not beg for you to stray from your path.

I will not attempt to persuade you to stay in my loving arms,
with empty hope of preventing your departure.



I cannot chase you any longer.
It is due time I liberate you and our ties.

You had warned me about this,
about being a free spirit.
Nothing and no one is able to pin you down.

I, however, was
a quixotic dreamer.
My ideals interfered with your reality.
Irrational beliefs that I could save you.
Save you from the nomadic way of life you have chosen.

Go on if you must my dear,
but, take in this journey,
along with your adventurous spirit,
the chains of our love,
the jail of our monotony
and the prison of my warmth.

GRAPHIC EMOTIONS



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Art Spiegelman's classic graphic novel *Maus* follows the story of Vladek Spiegelman as he narrates how he survived the Holocaust. Within this historical yet psychological piece of graphic literature are various dark themes, such as the strained relationship between a father and son and the relationship between past and present.

The comic "Prisoner on Hell Planet" within the graphic novel reinforces the darker themes of the book by utilizing realistic and surrealistic artwork. These types of artwork are techniques to show the characters' emotions, especially sorrow and horror. It is through the expressionist style of Art and Vladek's characters and the concept of breaking the fourth wall that Spiegelman focuses on emotions through the contrast of realistic and surrealistic art that takes place in the novel, especially within "Prisoner on Hell Planet."

The concept of realism is introduced as a whole through Vladek's personal account of the Holocaust and the author's artwork. Vladek as a narrator embodies the realistic aspect, for his character displays complex emotions while staying true to his perspective on what happened to him during the Holocaust. An example of this occurs when Vladek witnesses for the first time a true hate crime against non-militia Jews. After witnessing the hangings of men he had known, Vladek was overcome with terror, stating, "I was frightened to go outside for a few days... I didn't want to pass where they were hanging. And maybe one of them could have talked of me to the Germans to try to save himself" (86).

Throughout the novel, there are moments such as this, where Vladek's emotions take over in the midst of his story, jarring him from continuing and resulting in him becoming self-aware by focusing on the present. However, while Vladek's and other characters' emotions are conveyed through the artwork, it is primarily through the narration that the reader is subjected to their feelings. The author takes an objective approach on the graphic novel as a whole by simply reporting what Vladek revealed about himself, yet it is within "Prisoner on Hell Planet" that the emotions are felt by the reader due to the abstract artwork.

There are moments throughout "Prisoner on Hell Planet" where Art and Vladek's characters are both realistic and surreal due to their emotions influencing the artwork. Art is introduced in panel two of the comic strip as a realistic man that was just released from the hospital, where the background gives his character height and his detailed face gives him an identity. His brows are furrowed and a spotlight is placed onto him, accentuating his eyes; this attention to detail conveys the sorrow and potential emptiness that Art feels at that moment.

There is further attention to detail in panels 10-11 and 13-14, where there is more focus on Art's facial features in order to convey his sorrow further. This set of four panels is a close up of half of his face, with a progression of tears falling down his cheek. The author's choice of focusing on only part of Art's face makes his character more relatable for the reader, for too much realism makes it more difficult to identify with the character. The author conveys a sense of realism through Art's character by focusing on his physical features in the midst of his sorrows.

Likewise, the author conveys a sense of surrealism through Art's character whenever he feels trapped and empty. While realism is evident when Art feels the first pang of grief in the comic, surrealism became evident at the moment of his mother's funeral and during the remembrance of Art's last moments with his mother. In panels 23-27, the artwork of Art's character slowly becomes more harsh and blocky, while his surroundings become more expressionistic. The detail in his face deteriorates due to the block shapes on his face, while his character overall becomes less realistic due to the thick, bold lines that envelop the prisoner's uniform. This results in Art's physical features and uniform losing their realistic texture, which may connote that he feels as if he is held down by guilt.

Likewise, it is after a family friend accused Art that the artwork becomes more expressionistic in panels 25-27, which also suggests that Art may feel detached. Art's facial features seem to droop while the background becomes more cluttered and distorted, suggesting that he was overwhelmed by the trauma of losing his mother. Similarly, as Art sat remembering his final moments with his mother in panel 33, Art's dream-sequence character again becomes harsh and blocky when the dreamt-up memory of his mother left him yet again. These two moments display Art's emotions by focusing on the expressionistic nature of the artwork through bold and twisted line-work.

Although Vladek only appears for half of the comic, his character displays both naturalistic and abstract aspects in order to reveal his own inner turmoil. Much like throughout the graphic novel, the relationship between realism and emotions is only evident in Vladek's narration and reaction to events, while surrealism occurs in terms of his character's creation. Vladek possesses realistic attributes in "Prisoner on Hell Planet" in terms of how he grieves and reacts to his wife's suicide. One prominent example of him dealing with his grief in a conventional manner is in panels 17 and 18, where he seeks out comfort from his son. This is a typical reaction to grief, where one seeks companionship in order to deal with one's own emotions.

Vladek displays his grief through his actions further when he recites a hymn in Hebrew at his wife's funeral. He sought to seek relief for himself and his deceased wife from a religious standpoint, uniting them in life and in death. The author is able to convey realism through Vladek's character by focusing on Vladek's behaviors and actions.

While Vladek's character tends to present grief through his realistic thoughts and actions, the author expresses surrealism by manipulating the physical features of Vladek, especially his face. In panel three, Vladek's character is introduced as a darkened man with long distorted features, and the door that he touches grows to an unrealistic size as well. This slightly warped view could be used to show how his world is changing, for everything except Vladek and the door was naturalistic. The room itself was not exaggerated; this means that it is not the physical objects around Vladek that were changing, but it was him and his own perceptions.

This change in Vladek and his emotions is displayed throughout the rest of the comic, yet it is introduced in panels 16-18 where he initially grieves over his wife's suicide. In panel 16, Vladek is colored entirely white, which may suggest that he felt drained and empty without his wife's presence. However, it is during panels 17 and 18 that Vladek regains a darkened shade, yet there is much detail in his hands and face. Vladek's face seems gaunt and sickly while his hands cling to Art's shoulders; by maintaining a grip on Art, Vladek attempts to remain grounded while filled with despair and loneliness. The author addresses the emotionally complex characters of Art and Vladek by focusing on their actions and how they were portrayed through art.

While the emphasis on emotions through the characters themselves show realism and surrealism, the concept of breaking the fourth wall reveals surrealism by examining the tortured psyche of Art. In "Prisoner on Hell Planet," Art tells the story of his mother's suicide through his perspective to the audience. This is introduced in panel two, where Art is in a prison uniform looking directly at the audience. The uniform is a symbol for Art feeling trapped by guilt over his mother's death, and he promotes that guilt further by forcing his own perspective onto those around him.

The most important instance of Art's forcing his perspective onto other people is in panel 12, where the reader experiences his view of the doctor. The artwork of the doctor has a nightmarish feel with inhuman hands, a monstrous grin, and a henchman in the background laughing. Both the doctor and the man behind him seem to be mocking Art, yet this is only his perception of how others view him. By including this image, Art accentuates his guilt by forcing others to mock and blame him for what happened. The author utilizes the concept of breaking the fourth wall in order to convey the raw emotions that Art feels by demonstrating how, when in the midst of depression, one tends to reflect negatively onto oneself.

The overall significance of "Prisoner on Hell Planet" is that it reveals the inner psychological workings of the two main characters without explicitly stating what they feel by focusing on realism and surrealism. The comic provides some background as to why the relationship between Art and Vladek is strained. Throughout the novel the reader only saw the version of Art and Vladek that Art wanted us to see, yet it is within the comic that we see the depth of both characters' emotions. The artistic elements of realism and surrealism come together perfectly to show how Art and Vladek struggle to cope with the loss and trauma that comes from losing someone so important.

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DIARY OF A DYING GIRL



ASHLEY CRUNK

*East Mississippi Community College
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Cancer sucks. Naomi was the girl that I had known since birth. Literally. Our fathers met at the hospital the day we were born and hit it off right away. Soon enough, family cookouts became a regular event. She was my best friend, and the girl that I had fallen madly in love with.

Memories of her scribbling on the paper flood my mind. Dragging my fingers across the brown leather-like cover, I grab the strap that keeps the book closed and unwind it. Immediately, I recognize her familiar handwriting. Her mother gave me the diary two days after the funeral — it was of the utmost importance to Naomi that this journal was placed in my possession. I hadn't had the heart to touch it again until now.

Oct. 14th, 2014

Hi Diary, I guess. I'm only writing in this stupid thing because Jason told me to. He said that he thought that this would be "good" for me to get my "feelings" out to myself. I've had cancer for two months now. I was diagnosed a week after school started. Radley came with us because there's no telling that guy "no." The doctor was nice and everything, but we knew the answer wasn't going to be good. When he told us it was cancer, I told Mom to go tell Radley right then. I really didn't want to see his face. I just wish this never happened. Thank God for Radley. He is the only thing keeping me sane right now. — N

"You know you shouldn't worry so much Radley," she assured me as she brushed a hair over her shoulder.

Naomi had been coughing up blood for weeks, but there was *nothing* to worry about?

Surely, she was mistaken. I looked at her again. And really *looked* at her. Fear was written in her features. I glanced around the waiting room to find something, *anything* that could take her mind off the current situation. Her mother had busied herself with a magazine.

Leaning toward her in her chair, I nudged her with my elbow and waggled my eyebrows. "Do you..." I paused, "wanna hear a joke?"

Naomi cut a sideways glare at me. "Yeah, go for it," she muttered with a roll of her eyes and a sigh.

"Did you hear about the guy who lost his whole left side?" Naomi made discreet cricket noises with her mouth.

As I gave her a scowl, she stuck her tongue out at me. "He's *alright* now," I beamed cheekily at her.

The girl clapped her pale hands together sarcastically before actually picking up a magazine on the small table to her right. "This should be more entertaining than you."

Scoffing, I crossed my arms and sat back against the chair in a huff. "Well, damn. Rude."

So many minutes passed by. Feeling far too anxious, I fiddled around: pulled at the fabric of my chair, ran a hand through my blonde locks, and tapped a beat on my thighs. Annoyed with my fidgeting, Naomi gave me a "stop that" look.

"Naomi Watkins. We have your test results."

I was then left alone to nervously contemplate the fate of my best friend. She was my entire world. We were about to be 16, and we were supposed to be getting ready to live our lives to the fullest. Our families took vacations together, I took her shopping and let her use my money, and we were always inseparable. But someone in excellent health does not just start coughing up blood and having shortness of breath. I had never been so afraid in my life.

"Radley."

Flinching at the sound of the voice above me, I gazed up at her mother. My hairs stood on edge.

Glancing around, I stuttered out, "W-Where's Naomi?" Swallowing hard, I tried my best not to overthink what the outcome of the test results were.

"Radley," she whimpered as she placed a quivering hand onto my shoulders, "the doctor won't let her leave the room yet. She wanted you to know what he said."

"M-Miss Susan? What is it? What's wrong with her?" my tone gradually increased with each passing question. "Is she going to be okay?"

Never in my 15 years had I seen anyone break down into tears as her mother did that day. She unraveled before me.

"Oh, Radley. She has cancer."

I felt my stomach churn as the news took a grip on my heart. I didn't even feel guilty for puking on the waiting room floor.

Nov. 2nd, 2014

Thank God for my family and Radley. Radley visits me almost every day. I finally convinced him to go back to baseball for next season. He has argued with me forever now, but I think he's finally got the message that I'm not gonna let it go. I'm not feeling much better, but Radley brought me some "happies" today, so that made things better. He's amazing. — N

The first months of chemotherapy didn't treat her well. Every day that I stepped into that hospital room was gut-wrenching. Naomi lay there with breathing tubes in her nose, a feeding tube in her stomach, IVs poked into her arms, and the worst part: the tufts of those

flaxen blonde locks that left her scalp with every swipe of her head across the pillow. She sat up with a delighted grin when she saw me step into the room.

"Hey loser, you're late. What took you so long to get here?"

Scoffing dramatically, I crossed my arms. "Unlike you, I had a lot of homework to do, thanks."

Naomi rolled her eyes so hard it should have given her a headache. I snorted at her attitude before she decided to reply. "Well excuse me for having an ailment."

"Speaking of which — how are you?"

With a fake smile that I could read all too well, she beckoned me to sit down on the seat next to her bed. "I'm great! There's a new hot nurse named Jason, and he's super nice. So, even though I'm stuck here at least I have something good to look at," she paused while gnawing on her bottom lip in thought. "And — oh! I get to watch TV whenever I want. How awesome is that?" she chimed in a sing-song tone.

Staring at her blankly, I frowned. "Don't," I groveled before sucking in a breath and mustering the sternest tone I could manage. "Don't do that with me."

"Do what?"

"Lie to me."

Watching her carefully, I witnessed her put-together plastic smile melt off her rosy face. The blonde glanced down at her bruised forearms before managing out a faint snuffle. Something within her changed in an instant. "I hate this. I want to go home. I want this all to stop. Radley — everything *hurts*."

She stared down at her carefully folded hands in her lap as tears began to drip and sprinkle onto her fingertips. "My cheeks and tongue are so covered in ulcers that anytime I put something in my mouth it feels like my mouth is full of broken glass. It hurts too much to eat. One of my nurses sucks with IVs, so my bruises have bruises! My hair is falling out. I can't breathe. I can't sleep. I just want to die already!" she screeched as she threw her hands in the air with frustration.

The whirlwind of emotions took hold. Pity. Rage. I felt my heart explode in my chest. What are you supposed to say when your best friend, the girl you love so dearly, tells you that she just wants to die?

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't have said that. But Radley, you have to realize the cancer is in stage four. The spots on my lungs won't decrease in mass. This is going to kill me," Naomi murmured with honesty thick in her words. Her eyes bored fiercely into mine.

"Stop it! Shut up! You're not going to die! You have to fight this."

"You act like this is something I can *actually* fight. This is up to fate. I am doing everything they are telling me to do," she ran a hand through her thin hair with aggravation. "I just want people to understand what this is like. Cancer isn't some forbidden word... it's just deadly and misunderstood."

The maturity in her voice wasn't new, but more profound. Naomi had always spoken with reason, although the outlook she saw at that time was entirely different than she had ever been before.

"You will *beat* the cancer."

"I wish I could."

Lying on my bed, I threw the baseball up and caught it repeatedly. I couldn't gather my thoughts. Naomi was the only thing on my mind. I wanted to tell her how I felt, but I couldn't find a way to do so. Why would I tell her that I loved her if we couldn't be together? That

would cause more pain for the both of us. Sitting straight in my bed with an exaggerated sigh, I hugged a pillow to my chest. She was dying. My best friend was going to disappear. There was nothing I could do to stop it. One day I would wake up, and I wouldn't have Naomi there for me. Curling into the fetal position, I allowed my emotions to take over. The dam broke, and I bawled into the pillow.

A moment later, my bedroom door flew open and my mother stood there with worry. Her eyes were wide with concern after she had heard my cries. There were no words to be said as Mom calmly strode over to my bed and wrapped a comforting pair of arms around me. My mother ran her hand through my messy mane before placing a kiss on my forehead.

"She's going to be okay," she stated in an attempt to reassure me.

I sniffled and shook my head. "No, Mom. She's going to die."

She didn't try to lie to me again.

Feb. 20th, 2015

I'm falling apart. I can't feel my fingers. I swear it's not cancer that kills people, chemotherapy does. This isn't going to save my life. I'm dying. There is nothing I can do to stop this. So, I'm just going to live things to the fullest. I'm going to admit this to myself now, even though I'm scared to die. — N

The worst part of cancer is watching a human being slowly fall apart and deteriorate before the eyes. Months passed at an agonizingly sluggish rate as Naomi began to grow weaker. Her hair was completely gone. Her plush cheeks sunk into her face, and she coughed blood violently into her hands. Her eyes had begun to lose vibrant color and age into a dull, painful storm. Naomi had become a walking zombie that occasionally flashed her teeth in a lying grin. The girl I loved so much was nothing but skin and bones.

I sat in a chair next to her hospital bed. She shifted her eyes toward me in a side glance as she paced her breathing behind her oxygen mask. Naomi flashed a weak smile in my direction, and held her hand out to me. Squeezing her tiny fingers with mine, I gave her a reassuring grin.

"You are so strong," I told her as my voice cracked.

"Thanks," she stated simply. She took in a sharp breath and stared at me. "How much longer do you think this will go on?"

"Until you give up."

She chuckled. "My body is going to kill me before my spirit does."

"Then you'll live forever."

She said nothing, but I could see the smile in her eyes.

"Mom! I'm home!" I called into the house, and kicked my cleats off at the door. A small "uh-huh" chimed from the kitchen before the phone blared loudly throughout the house.

My mother answered the phone that time. "Hello? Oh, hey Susan."

Hearing Miss Susan's name caused immediate panic in my system. I hadn't gotten to visit Naomi yet that day. Unfortunately, all of my fears were confirmed when my mother's hand flew to her mouth as she cut a glance at me. A feeling of dread enveloped me, and my entire body tingled until becoming numb.

"She's gone, isn't she?" I whimpered out.

My mother's glazed-over eyes were answer enough.

Her funeral was probably the most beautiful ceremony I had ever attended. There were pictures of the two of us in almost every corner.

I blinked the tears off my lashes as I gazed at the old photos. I had truly lost the love of my life. Glancing into the ceremonial room, I saw the casket. Her body lay peacefully with flowers covering it as if she were merely a sleeping angel. I approached Miss Susan and her husband.

"Could I have a moment alone?"

Miss Susan gave me a gentle yet watery smile as she nodded in response. No other words were needed as I, the mere child in this situation, approached death.

I appreciated her flower halo they had wrapped around the blonde wig lying on her head.

Reaching into the casket to touch her caused my own heart to stop. My breath caught in my throat. I cried. I sobbed. Cupping her cold cheek, I felt the contrast of my warm, living hand. I leaned into the casket and pressed my lips gently to her forehead.

"I'm going to miss you so much," I whispered. "I love you. I'm sorry I never actually told you."

A sudden chill crawled up my spine, taking away my breath. I gently picked one of the flowers out of her colorful crown and cradled it to my chest. I knew if Naomi saw me like this she would tell me to "suck it up." I laughed at my own thought. Squeezing the edge of the casket, I felt my own tears land onto the back of my hands.

"Goodbye."

Maybe it was because I was hysterical, but I could've sworn I heard a faint whisper of a voice in my ear return the farewell.

As I reach the end of the small journal, I realize these are the last of her words I will see. Whoever said that men don't cry was stupid and obviously never lost the one they loved. Sobbing hysterically has been my new-found hobby as of late, especially now that I'm flipping through Naomi's final words. But wait? This can't be right. The page is bare except for five words written on the back. I lift a brow with confusion as I squint to see the writing:

Radley, I always loved you. — Naomi Watkins

BROKEN HEART NOTE

CHRISTOPHER RAY

Raritan Valley Community College

New Jersey

December Eighth Two Thousand Fifteen

At Brew Ha Ha Café

Sitting

Like the hundreds of times before

But,

on this day

You turned your head to me

Our eyes meet,

Like a drop of water,

Running down the driver's window,

And blending into another

Come over, will you?

Yes

We study

Not an hour goes by —

We're both extremely shy,

Going to Chipotle

It sounds like a great idea

80 questions to you

20 to me

Unsure if I'm your drop,

But wait I do,

I wait

And wait

And wait

Until I figured,

It's too late,

— Much too late

But something great!

We're off on our second date!

I can't be late!

But I am

Not that it mattered

Because I lasted

Not one month,

But four

We kissed

We cuddled

We said, "I like you"

We went to that restaurant

Because we went to every single restaurant

until I told

that stupid lie

The one that I held onto

Only to show you that I

Am a great guy
Only then did the magic wear off,
The "I miss you" texts
To the
"Are we meeting up after class?" texts
Became no texts

Silence in May
Silence in June
Silence in July
Silence in August
Silence in September,
October
Nov.
Dec.
1
2
3

When will I know
The reason you left
Because I love you so

It hurts because
You lived in my heart
But after all of this
It is clear that
It was only a visit



COCKROACHES



OYINDAMOLA SHOOLA
*Bronx Community College
New York*

It is April again.
The thumping rhyme of the rain
Reminds me of the 94's sound of war drums.
The ones that beat up our existence.

I can still see the soldiers.
I couldn't tell if they were alive
But they stayed still, with clenched palms
On the sticks of death that hung on their necks.

The "bold nations" had run away.
Their holy bullets could not stand
The filth of bloody rage in the eyes
Of dark-toned skins with machetes.

Their eyes still hunt me.
Fixed glare of children stripped of life
Upon bodies that flooded the streets
As if in companion with the soil.

The air of the streets dried out to stinks.
Vultures had taken dominion over the lands,
The lakes and pools were colored red,
I have never seen nature so stiff.

If you look closer, a little bit deeper,
You too will see the souls of their carcasses,
As if to take a step away from the death
That had taken a step into them.

Those were the times of war
When we didn't run, we didn't hide,
We simply sat and laughed as hard
'til God decided it was our time.



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