

VOLUME NINE • AUTUMN 2018

B R E

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Breakwall

Volume Nine • Autumn 2018

Breakwall is a title that will call up personal images and memories for the many people familiar with a Lake Erie breakwall. Metaphorically and symbolically, this title also connotes a need for people to break down the barriers, or walls, of separation, ignorance, fear, and so on. Breakwalls are strong objects that are meant to withstand storms and the furies of nature, and they help keep the calm and rough waters separated; in fact, they help create the calm water on the shore, provide safe harbor for boats, and breakwall lighthouses were once beacons of light providing safe passage for ships. In a community as diverse as Cleveland and its surrounding areas, these metaphors and symbolic images certainly apply.

Staff:

Steve Thomas, Design Editor

Selection Committee:

Jim Pojman

Michael Thomas

Faculty Advisors:

Brian Hall, Liberal Arts—English

Jimi Izrael, Creative Arts—Journalism & Mass Communication

Steven Mastroianni, Creative Arts—Photography

Lindsay Milam, Liberal Arts—English

Jennifer Skop, Liberal Arts—English

Cassandra Sweeney, Liberal Arts—English

Many thanks to the staff, faculty, and administration of Cuyahoga Community College, specifically Dr. Michael Schoop, Dr. G. Paul Cox, and the Student Life offices for their support.

The 9th volume of Breakwall is dedicated to Daniel Levin, who is always behind the camera lens but always at the front of Breakwall's photographic beauty.

Breakwall assumes all responsibility for the content of this magazine.



POETRY

The Ballad Of A Soldier

Blair Austin

What do you do when little girls look up to you?

Have you ever had to wipe the tears of wounded eyes? Stained cheeks and battle cries...

What do you do for lil boys who need more than toys? Whose futures you cannot predict...

Knowing your experience to teach them is hopelessly limited..

How can your heart not ache for the likes of these, people we treat as second rate...giving them no chance straight out the gate... the back burners we throw them on...

And when they rise in revolt...only then do we state what is wrong...

Whirlwinding has been their lives, but no one pays attention to their battle cries..

In the end you point, you judge, but where were you when they so longingly needed that nudge.. that hug, that love?

That push, that ear..some endearment..a healthy fear.

More than the words pushed out in grandiose forums.. bright lights and mics

But what do we really do for them..

Battle cries and scars plague the generations...How can they recoup from the present separation?

No laws, no bills can do what needs to be done..

I believe it's high time to get off our high horses and slum..

Lace up those boots, roll up our sleeves... get down and dirty for the likes of these...

Our sons and daughters, future fathers and mothers.. need more than a ball, a doll and a hotdog...

Battle cries and scars.. are we not products of this all.

Game changing strategies; revolutionaries of peace...

Begins with people like you...People like me...

Battle cries and scars

When will we hear them and stop pretending that we don't see...

Homeless (A Sestina)

Daniel McPolin

For Patrick

How the hell did I end up homeless?
I gave it all away because I'm a drunk
Now I go to sleep at night hungry
sleeping in an abandoned building they call a squat
It's better than a homeless shelter
except that at night it's not as warm

We did have blankets to keep us warm
But nobody suffers like the homeless
At least the squat was shelter
And we could drink until we were good and drunk
You can't do that at a homeless shelter, just a squat
We ate pastry thrown out of the shop at night to not go hungry

Not everyone knows what it's like to go hungry
Or to lose sleep because you can't get warm
or to sleep on the hard ground of a squat
Not everyone knows what it's like to be homeless
where your only pleasure in life is getting drunk
And the squat is your only shelter

I really couldn't stand homeless shelters
I ate at churches so I didn't go hungry
And at night all I could do to ease the pain was to get drunk
And all I had was that wild Irish Rose to make my belly warm
And for a while I wouldn't think about being homeless
And I was happy in the squat

I would sleep in my shoes, fully clothed, in the squat
It was better than being on a park bench with no shelter
A lot of people think of an old man with a bottle and a long beard, pan handling, as a
homeless
person, when a lot of times it's a mother and her kids going hungry
And fighting to stay warm

And the only way I could escape it all was to get drunk

I lost everything because I'm a drunk
And the only home I have is this squat
And I sleep with a jacket to keep warm
But it's better than having no shelter
at all. If I miss dinner at the church at night I'm going to go hungry
nobody suffers like the homeless

You can't get drunk in a homeless shelter
But in a squat you can. And eat pastry so you're not hungry
tonight I'll try to stay warm. Nobody suffers like the homeless

I Thought

DeLisha McMiller

I once thought I knew about love,
A mystic, mysterious trance
I always thought when one was in love,
there was nothing but romance
I thought love could never hurt you,
and would always make you strong.
But after I fell in love with you
All I thought was wrong
I thought you would always be there
anytime I was in need
But you only needed me
when you needed a deed
I waited for your calls, your texts, your snaps
your affections
But night after night after night after night
All I felt was rejection
I did all I could think of,
to make you see how I felt
I did everything you asked of me,
I played the cards I was dealt
I thought that things would change
When that test showed up as a plus
But all you did was encourage me
to do what a woman must
I thought you would have compassion,
a sense of how I felt
But you broke up with me three weeks later
and that left the biggest welt
I thought all these things about love
were true and lovely and pure
But you took all I thought about love and
prevented me from moving forward
Now I think that love is dead and
I am not worth the time
For anyone else to be with me,
I took your actions as a sign
I thought you were the one
I would spend the rest of my life with
I think that all I thought once
is a memory I will truly miss.

Safe Haven

Desaraye Johnson

I always swore love could never tear me apart until someone loved me better than I loved myself.

Then I decided not to stay and took it all away, took me all away.

I never believed in love or thought nothing could ever last or ever feel this safe again.

Tears of mercury falling from my eyes like acid burning and sickening sadness being strained from the soul.

I go back to that night again and again, tossing and turning,

Exhausted from the fear and the panic, the only forms of weakness- being driven from my body.

I'm holding myself together.

I can see it coming.

It's so beautiful, so serene. Like a dream.

It was a dream not a nightmare. Everything is ethereal, faint.

Then she appeared, my angel on the stairs.

She stayed by my side until I fell asleep, but only for a moment in what seemed like a lifetime.

I felt safe and maybe I slept peacefully for the first time on her shoulder with her arms around me.

Still protecting me but only for a little while.

Everything fades

Time becomes a relentless thing.

Sooner later that light at the end of the tunnel just fades back to black.

Life gets complicated, another heart as fragile as a broken mirror.

Everything is gone, love surely dies as soon as that pen meets the paper.

My eyes search for her but she's not with me.

I'm sure that one day, I hope I can gracefully look away as often as I can,

Until I'm comfortable in my own skin to search for a sense of hope

And all the music and melodies that I ever heard will finally come back to me in waves.

So that I will finally be able to sleep.

This is how it starts. It starts off slow the way it always has.

I often tell myself "Why does it matter?"

"You should've known you couldn't keep her."

She had to go but she must've known.

It's just me now, stripped naked and cast out into a world on fire.

I loved this mansion, but there's too many walls and windows.

I'm just another soul just passing through, a deteriorating shadow of my former self.

Laughing, twisting spinning around in this beautiful place.

Everything is so ethereal, so lost and faint.

"This must've been a dream" I thought
Until all those memories and things slowly started to turn to dust and our stories into ashes.
It was morning when my guardian angel flew away and returned to heaven.
Now I am here forced to deal with the pain.
It's just me standing here, back to searching for my safe haven.
Back to dreaming
Back to screaming
Back to shouting out loud again.

I'm just another soul, lost without their angel tonight.
I can't stand these ice cold nights blurring together
I feel like a madman, pacing back and forth like some prolific painter in the dark wondering
what year it is.
It's been two weeks now and the whole world should have changed, but things still look
the same.
It's been two weeks of trying to forget for one more night or wondering why I'm even still
here at all.
Two weeks for me to finally look at my reflection
and I knew that somewhere out there that there was love for me.

Life in Fractions

Desaraye Johnson

I am a dreamer caught in a nightmare
A beautiful dream that I never thought to imagine in a thousand nods.
You're young and growing up, Caught in a world tangled up and twisted into lies.
In a world painted in grey and rain that still remains on the Branches of hallow trees that
will someday dissolve right back to the earth.
Clearing the month of all those sorry expressions, and rids the streets of blood and silent
armies... so we can dance.

It's that feeling again, coming at me in heat waves,
Soaking through my body and out my fingertips in shafts of color.
Turning everything back into dust, brush and bruises.
I shut my eyes and watch as the world dies
I lift my eyes and all is born again.
Here is the world. Beautiful and terrible things will happen.
In the shadow of the day it's too dangerous and it's way too cold to be at home.
Even when things get tense we all know that it's too dangerous to be sleeping alone
In the end all those little things get blown into fractions.

To try be nobody but yourself in a world
I found myself alone, just my own naked self underneath a sea of stars breathing down.
It's so beautiful.
The world goes on
All I've been doing us writing these pages and wondering how the hell I'm still alive, and
even if I care.

Even the toughest kid in the world still gets sad.
Consumed with fear and anger, but just enough pride not to let that show.
When all else fails,
Hope decays,
Generations disappear.
Washed away as the world simply stares.
Everything fades away, like darkness over day.
Like black winter outside our windows and blood all over the pavement.

I'm just a passenger just passing through.
We are the outsiders, shackled like prisoners to our prison walls.
And they will kick and they will scream
But there's no way they're ever getting out.

It's just another day,
Another 10 years, another kid my age at the very center of the universe forced to stay
silent with hands held high towards the sky.
The kid with the big dreams and a cluttered mind.
He's talking, stuttering and mumbling as the world watches.
A natural born leader– the kid with the scattered brain

Clutching a book in his hands held with pride.
A little black book with a broken spine, scribbled with words and quotes inside.
He is both scared and angry
He's just a lonely lovesick boy with his rhymes, but nobody listens.
They say they understand,
They Say that we're just kids waiting to be torn down.
At the end of the day we will still be at the very center surrounded by all those beautiful
little angels and demons.
We will still be our own protection
But not now...
Not today.
I tell myself that I am only human, and yes I am just a kid
Just keep tearing me down and leaving me to suffer the consequences.
In a world that's falling apart from the sickness,
I just want to be pure.

Nature

Hannah Lovejoy

between the powerful winds in my throat,
the monstrosity of my branches,
and the thunderous boom of my step,
i am a force to be reckoned with.
do not get caught up in me because i swear i will devastate everything you love.
my screams have been said to clear out an entire city within seconds.
my laughter will make you shiver down to your bones.
the beginning and end of me are like this.
however,
if you stay long enough,
which not many do,
i can promise you that the eye of my storm is magnificent.
only the most perfect weather can be found there.
days sunny and peaceful enough to make you believe this is what heaven looks like.
sadly,
these days do not last long.
i am sorry for that.
if you make it past the beginning of me,
you are just in for another round at the end.
i am not worth it.
very little comes along with me.
if you have stayed long enough to see the eye,
i do not know whether to consider you lucky,
or just a damn fool.

Home

Indya Powell

Wanting to be comfortable in your skin
not once did it hit
I had my own to tend

A vision with white picket fence and all
Just like the perfectly scripted sitcoms
where everyone got along
All issues resolved before the curtain closed
Where daddy always came home
and momma was tree that kept family strong
Never oblivious
simply praying the good outweighed the wrong

I thought I built us a home
No matter what the inside entailed
I knew to keep the outside landscaped, manicured, trendy
who would've known the foundation was sinking?
It was as if the house was built on stilts
No cement
No trace of bricks

I tried to build a home out of you
Hoping we both could be comfy
Together, we'd be solid foundation
water the flowers
plant a prosperous garden
with a driveway as long as our dreams would allow
But it takes two for certain dreams to come true
That's why many were planted
but never enough light, water or food to bloom

Truthfully speaking
Home is a state of mind
Free space
It's up to all parties involved to upkeep such a sanctioned place
Property value slowly decreased
Lesson learned
You can't create a home out of a human being.

To Simplify a Sentence

Joanne Ferrone

Adjectives and adverbs.
Covering words to aestheticize value.
To overpower the clarity of a sentence
made of crystal.

Interpreter for predicaments.
Dedicate their meanings of enrichment,
entrapped in a veil of doubt.

Raymond Carver wrote, "They have no
business [in prose]." Influencing words
to waste space.

Ambiguity in clouds of grey.
While evading adjectives and adverbs,
do not stop the pursuit to find colors.

Graffiti: Museum of the City

Joanne Ferrone

Walk over here, enter the underbelly of the city.
View grimy walls.

Riding the subway in unfamiliar territory, images flit past. Standing on the platform, see the layered chemicals on brick, blaring a new form of expression.

No longer is it the Golden Age of tagging giant, pneumatic letters spray painted by hooligans. Spelling names like Daze and Lady Pink on apocalyptic backdrops.

Artists release aerosol from canisters. Colors slash, merging to form a masterpiece. In the dark, under a bridge, on a building, train, light pole.

Highway driving, see the stockade splattered with picture messages, some expressing pain.

Using the city as a canvas, scenes are sweeping and fluorescent. Paintings funky in magic-realist style.

An exhibition of congested works capturing communal spirit. Art.

Who I Be: Mrs. Harriet Tubman

Raquel Wilbon

Y'all think y'all know me...

Y'all don't know me!

Let me refresh yo memory.

I beez the one, who wanted to be free.

I wanted to help set my peoples free.

They called me Moses.

You know, that lady they hate.

Oh, they hated me!

Hated me so bad, I heard there was a ransom, but, I couldn't let that stop me.

Stop me from my freedom.

You know, I didn't know it would be dis hard.

But, I wanted it so bad, so bad I could taste it.

Once I tasted it, I told my peoples, you gone have to face it.

Face a lot of danger, but we gone get outta here.

I say keep open your ear.

... I don't won't none of y'all to disappear.

Ohhhh...no...not while I'z hear.

You can't have but so much fear.

Gone head and shed a tear.

I'z gone hear a loud cheer when you cross that line.

You'ze gone start livin mighty fine!

They say "masa catch us, us gone hang."

You thinking about us gone hang more than have your own thangs.

I'z ...scare that freedom into you if I have to.

"Either you'z gone die a slave, or live free!"

Which one it's gone be?

Huh...I 'z told y'all, y'all don't know me.

I beez that lady who wnts to be free...

By any means necessary.

Un Broken

Shakitha Day

Oh, woe is me,
If ye were ever to cry
For any lad or child,
Ye shall cry for her.

The pains of her heart run deep.
The burdens of her soul are heavy,
The weight of one thousand men,
Tears shed of widowed women,
The depth of her tale
Is that of one
Only she could tell.

For pity shall be felt,
But not wanted or needed,
For she had buried herself.
She is knee high
In the wasteland of anguish.
She is not ready to call her name defeat.
She shall spring up
Like the mountains,
And she shall flow as the rivers
Until all her conquests
Are beneath her feet.

Time Passes

Terri Patton

Time has passed
within you and me
White Flowers mixed
with faded memories

God blessed me
apples fell down
from the learning tree

Some hard to swallow
some bitter sweet
a cold paradise
all that passion stirred up in me

Perception scared
illusions made real
until a whisper
awakens my heart
now I feel and release myself
from the tarnished
golden silence

I lift my eyes
I lift my heart
My life... a history
of wealth, of challenge
of wisdom
so be it, so go I

We create the dance
our soul
We become the dance
our God
We never dance alone
we all dance together
step by step by step
time passes

Hey, Borincano

Thalia Arias Gonzalez

We board that plane holding a ticket from Puerto Rico to the American Dream.

We board it with many things: hope, excitement, fear, sadness, and pain.

So much pain, for when that plane takes off it takes so much with it.

But it can't take our roots.

They stay buried deep in the earth that witnessed our birth.

The island of Borinquen.

Where the breadfruit grows and the coquí sings.

And as it takes us away, we feel the nerve that connects our heart with our roots stretch.

But that nerve only stretches so long and as the distance grows, it snaps, mercilessly ripping something out from deep within us.

Something that stays connected to the island forever.

Without warning, the tears flow from our eyes, with the pain of realizing what stayed behind.

Half of our soul, half of our hearts; Borinquen decided to keep them, so we'd always come back.

Finally, we arrive here - The United States of America.

God willing, we might be able to live The American Dream.

Sometimes we do, sometimes we don't.

We put up with so much.

We get so little.

We move forward.

We work hard.

We get the job done.

We never forget our island.

Listen Borincano, can you hear the song of your ancestors?

Listen to the African drums.

Listen to the Taino songs.

Borinquen is alive, and it's claiming its children.

We hear it in our hearts.

We feel it in our blood.

But we ignore it, the economy is bad, the job market is worst.

We look the other way; we turn a deaf ear.

And so we carry on, pushing forward with our ancestors' songs deep in our hearts, dreaming of the day we can return to our island.

There, where the waves and the Coqui lull us to sleep, and the blood of the Taino, African and Spaniard become one under the Caribbean sun.

Hey, listen Borincano, and tell me - will you ever return?

Mental Suicide

Zion Sullivan

Mental suicide

is what I'm on the verge of committing
I am locked in a room with bar doors and cement walls
Isolated
As I sit and rot away, facing all kinds of different tortures
and wondering what will be my next set of horrors

My head

It isn't on right
Because I have been smite
Locked in this cold, dark room all night

Mental suicide

Is the key to set me free
From this huge mental catastrophe
That will soon have consumed all of me

The torch in the hall suddenly comes to a blaze
They toss me half a portion of food with a small like blade

Wait, why give me this blade?

Are they trying me?
What's their plot?
I run to the corner
I throw the knife
And I try to hide my inner strife

Mental suicide

Will soon be my best friend
For I can assure
That they have something deadly in store

Footsteps

I hear footsteps coming from down the hall
Is it true?
Will I die after all?

How will it happen death by severe whip lash?

Or by
Deadly poisonous gas?
I don't know what's waiting for me on the other side

But I know they will get me before my

Mental suicide

Until next time
Oh p.s. I love you
Always and forever

A Strained Surprise

Daniela Cacho

I enter a state of unwelcoming energies,
twirling, inimitably
like
fingers dancing in rotating,
through forgotten keys.
When Velvet Underground starts to play,
my emotions whisper through
Lou's euphony.
I lose serenity.
My arrival has still to be present,
my reflection
shown within your eyes.
I will apprise
dawn.
For darkness has fulfilled me,
a strained surprise.

Angry Beast

Janelli Cedeno

The angry beast inside my head
All the voices want me dead
I can't help but stay in bed
No school no work let me sleep instead
I can't think too far ahead
And if I don't open my mouth I can't get fed
I am holding on one thread
It's easier said
He tells me to hate myself
He tells me I'm ugly
He tells me I'm fat
He says c'mon lets chat
You're nothing but a rat
I beat myself with a bat
You think it's a couple words and that's that?
What about that bed where I sat
Or when he laid me on my back
Congrats you got me
You want a plaque?
Now every time I hear a knock I have a heart attack
Your soul is nothing but black
You got me up like an insomniac
Trying not to break like shellac
These feelings are whack
Always had me on the wall like a thumbtack
With a pile of books stacked
Wouldn't let me out until my legs cracked
Told me if I moved I am done and that's a fact
Now let's get on a new track

To Be

Chris Lozano

They just label her a cutter,
 But she says the blood is him
 Draining out of her.
 Her father's friend told her they were
 Playing a secret game-
 Said her daddy would be very mad if she told anybody about their secret
 game,
 Twenty years later and she still tastes his breath upon every man she's tried
 to love-
 Every time she's touched by the hands of vulnerability,
 And she's gripped by the falling in love and its suspense,
 She murders the relationship in self-defense-
 Then she cuts herself again to feel something better than life,
 And she tries so hard to be normal like everyone else,
 Tries to be what the world says she should be,
 But seeming to be something she's not
 Is why she bleeds.

A stranger living in someone else's body,
 From birth, he always knew himself to be a her,
 She felt lovely inside, but never identified
 With what mirrors implied,
 She hid behind him from a world that uses words like
 Fag, homo and queer,
 Until she realized being dead was the same as living in fear.
 Choosing to be, rather than to seem,
 She said goodbye to him
 Then introduced herself to the world-
 It's been five years since she came out as a girl,
 And her family and friends still won't speak to her,
 She misses them dearly, but nothing compares
 To the beauty that living authentically bares.

Some just label them losers and junkies, but if you ask them
 They call themselves empty-
 Prescription pills and refills rattling inside them,
 They were hopeful kids once,
 But now the only time they don't want to die
 Is when they're high-
 Some say they're already dead.
 With needles hanging from their veins

They no longer feel the pain,
The emptiness disappears momentarily,
And rather than to be, they choose to seem-
Sobriety hidden, vaguely and obliquely recalled,
Lost souls dwindling and wandering discreetly,
Until one day they disappear completely.

They said he was a problem child who never met his father,
And to his mother, boyfriends were more important than he,
Children are gardens within themselves blossoming,
Love is the Spring shower that brings forth life,
And so his inner fruits withered as the weeds grew rife.
His fist became megaphones as his anger ran wild,
But neighbors and teachers just labeled him a problem child.
As a man, true love remains the deceptive stranger he never met,
Partners in intimate relationships become suspects-
He thinks sooner or later they'll find someone better,
Erroneously he learned to accept what he seemed to be,
Not realizing human beings have the power to be
Anything they dream.

Our lives are but a glorious flash
In forever's starry night of existence,
We are born as a comet, a shooting star, an instant,
Allow your light to be your own beacon of hope,
Realize your insecurities and doubts are illusory,
Live as if you have but one chance to be,
One chance to dance in the world authentically,
Give yourself the gift of love and empathy,
Be completely you, be completely free,
Rather than to seem, choose to be.

Why the Moon will Forever Chase the Sun

Chris Lozano

I understand why the moon will forever chase the Sun
 Even if he never gets to touch her again.
 The moon is driven by the same force that drives all things,
 And I understand why Spring comes again and again
 To be amongst us humans, even if for just a while,
 Until mortality recaptures it too to the reoccurring Slumber,
 And I understand why I see those I've loved
 In the eyes of strangers who say hello,
 And I understand why I see the same eyes in all animals.
 I know why there are four seasons that vary from year to year,
 And I know why they always come back-
 These souls of ours have chosen to come and go
 Knowing within irony lies the greatest gifts-
 Death and life are but the same:
 Continuations into each other,
 And I know why I see humans in all things,
 Flowers and trees, birds and bees,
 They come and they go, and they come again.

The moon is driven by the same force that drives all things,
 And I know why love feels better than anything else.
 I saw an elderly couple feeding each other ice cream,
 And even though they were aware their time together was short,
 They smiled for the deeper-knowing that they'd find each other again,
 And I understand why the moon will forever chase the sun.

It was not me that found this understanding
 But it was this understanding that found me-
 Our paths all lead to one inevitable understanding.
 Sooner or later, whether in this life or the next,
 The Truth bends, twist, and turns us
 Guiding us like the moon to the Sun,
 Let go of the need to control and you will see
 We are but leaves in the wind of the All-Knowing-
 Everything has come to you for one purpose,
 And everything leaves you for the same,

Even the sinner is called to be a saint,
Even the child is called to be great,
And I know why falling in love,
And even losing that love
Is necessary for some,
And I know why the moon
Will forever chase the Sun.

Words

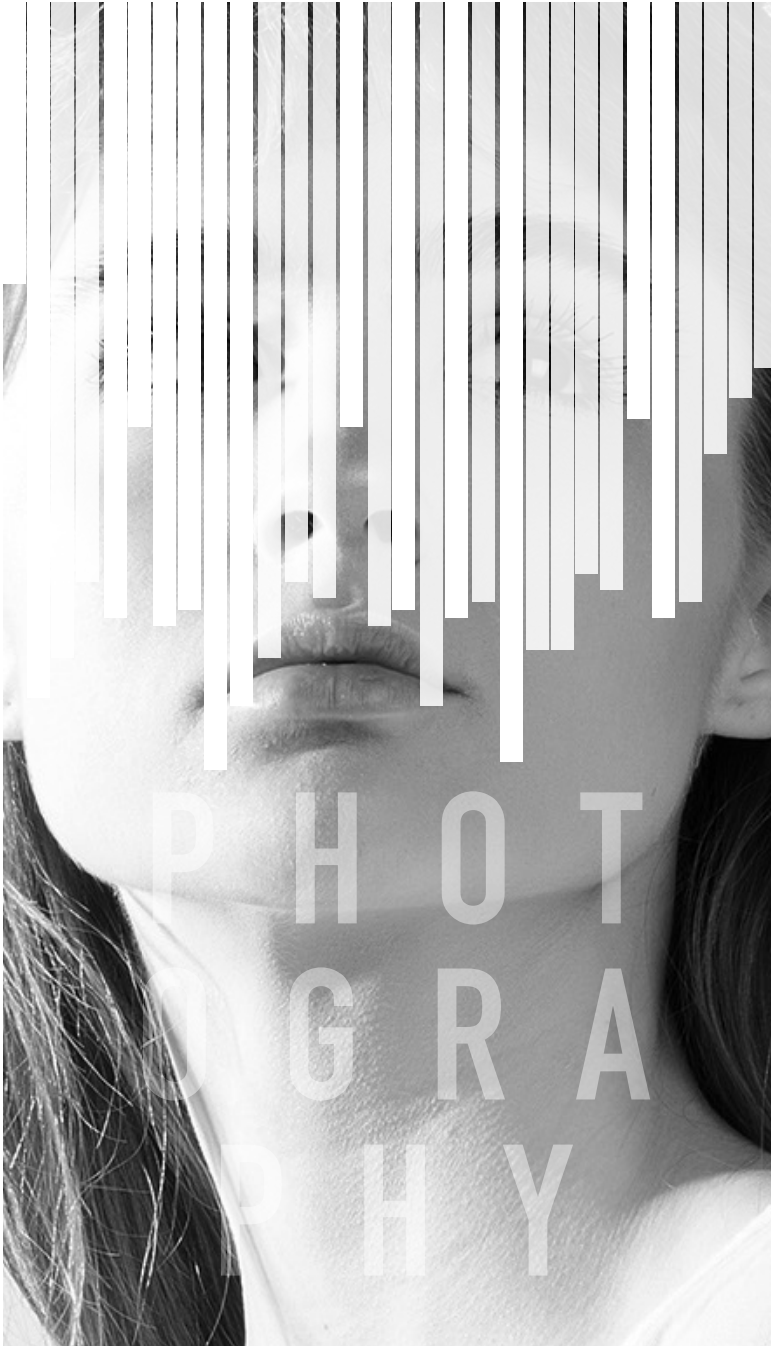
Rebecca Groth

Words shook fair,
She reached for them there.
Although they weren't hers, she grasped them in turns.

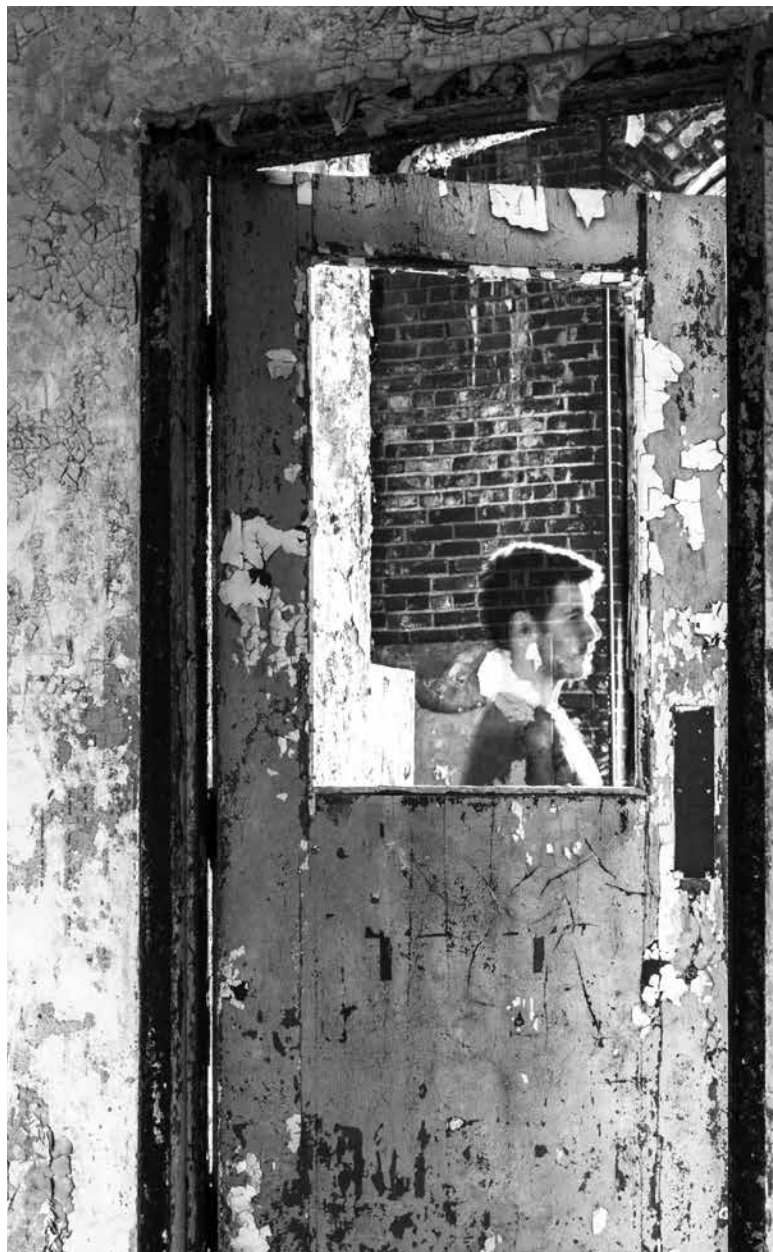
It's not the light she wanted this time.
You turn the bones into coal mines.
You took my heart, and tainted the lines.

The glass in her jar... broke, and broke, never to scar.

She reached for stars,
This time, they won't be too far.













Dashaunae Jackson



Devante Bennett-Lee











Dashaunae Jackson



Kristine Noll



Jeziel Chavez



Robert Kovatich



Robert Kovatich







Jeziel Chavez



Tom Crane





Matter

Courtney Hatcher

One

My brother always told me that nothing could hurt me with my eyes shut.

I always say that you cannot hide from fear; that it demands to be felt. But that night, I squeezed them shut as tight as I could, until little stars and circles started floating around in my head. He leaned over the edge of the top bunk and stretched his arm down to grab my hand. He squeezed it tightly as we heard our mother scream, getting louder and louder, each smack getting harder, and our eyes shutting tighter.

"It's going to be okay, Cali, I promise." I opened my eyes to see him smiling down at me. "One of these days, we'll make it out of here. I'll move us into one of those small houses in the suburbs, on the most quiet street we can find. What do they call those things...cul de sacs? Those big circles? We'll live on one of those, so you can ride your bike." He squeezes my hand again, and I let my eyes close gently, trying to imagine a life without pain.

Two

I am sitting alone in a cold dark room. No one else is here but me, and I'm not even sure that I'm really here. I can feel the silence wrapping around me like the wind, pushing and pulling me into thoughts that I do not want to think, sending shivers down my spine, waking up the goosebumps on my forearms. The clock on the wall has been taunting me for hours, but I don't want to know what time it is. You see, the things that I don't know, they could never hurt me. Being careful to avoid looking at the time, I balance my phone in my quivering palm and type out the ten digits that I could never forget. Holding my breath, I put it up to my ear and listen.

"Hey, it's Chase. Sorry I can't pick up right now, you know what to do."

I hang up before the beep, and finally exhale.

Three

"Put your arms up Cali, like this."

I'm trying to focus, but I just can't. I've got a billion and one things on my mind and learning how to shoot a gun is the least of them all.

"Can we take a break? My arms are getting tired," I say, slowly setting my gun on the ground and then stretching my legs out on the cold linoleum floor. Leaning against the wall, I take the ridiculous earmuffs off and peer up at my big brother.

"Cali, this is something you need to know how to do. I'm not going to be around to protect you forever, you know."

He's right, I know, but I keep thinking that maybe he will be around forever. The prospect of taking care of myself is terrifying.

"What's wrong, kid?"

He squats down next to me, placing his hand on my shoulder. How do I look at him and tell him all that's on my mind? How do I tell him that I worry about him? How do I tell him that I need him?

I don't. I punch his arm, flash him my fakest smile, and say "Nothing, I just needed a little break. Let's get back to it."

He laughs and helps me up, then stands behind me as I get ready to aim, then fire the gun.

Four

"I want you out of my house, Chase. Now!"

My mother is a hurricane, she is a force of nature; she can make men tremble with the slightest touch. Chase is an unexpected victim, sucked into a storm he never knew was coming. He is nineteen in this moment, and I am fourteen. We cannot breathe under her thumb.

"Ma, just calm down," he pleads.

I cower in the corner like a dog afraid of a thunderstorm.

"Calm down? You want me to calm down? You know, you have some nerve. I should've seen this coming years ago."

She slams her glass down on the table, spilling a bit of whiskey on our dark cherry wood table. Chase eyes the drink and then tries to take Mother's hand, but she smacks him across the face, the sound echoing into the hallway.

"What is wrong with you?" he asks, his voice full of equal parts fear and disgust. "You don't even know him. You barely even know me, or Cali! You have no right to judge me," he screams, tears streaming down his reddened cheeks. I wish I had enough balls to get up and hug him, to tell her that she's wrong about him, that he is a good man. But all I can do is sit here, and watch her push him into the wall and hit and cry and hit and cry. I cannot move. I'm frozen with my feet superglued to the carpet. My arms wrap themselves around my knees as I rock back and forth, back and forth, to the rhythm of the blows. Our mother begins to sob. I look up, and she is laying on the kitchen floor. Chase is covered in sweat and tears, his face blood red. He looks at me, and there is a silent agreement: we must leave now. I run up the steps to my bedroom, and pull my suitcase out from underneath my bed. I toss underwear, a pair of jeans, and a few hoodies inside. My favorite book, *The Catcher in the Rye*, a toothbrush, and my life savings of three hundred bucks. I go into Chase's room next door, and he is ready too. I nod at him, and we run down the steps and into the kitchen. Mother sits on the floor, cursing us with every step we take. I run out of the door and into the passenger seat of his pickup truck. He starts it up, pulls out of the driveway, grabs my hand, then takes off down the street. "Where are we gonna go?"

Chase looks at me like I've just said the most ridiculous thing ever. "We're gonna go to a motel for now, Cali. Then, in a couple weeks, I'm gonna find us a place of our own. A house, on a cul de sac." He then gives me a reassuring glance, and I shut my eyes and fall asleep as we speed down the freeway.

Five

I am riding down the highway at 80 miles per hour with my eyes wide shut. Although the windows are down, I can feel warmth emanating from all around me. To my left is my big brother, swerving us in and out of lanes, smiling with a cigarette dangling from his lips. To my right is Alex, my brother's boyfriend. He has his seat leaned all the way back, and his eyes are shut too. He reaches one arm across my lap so that he can hold hands with Chase, and he sticks his other arm out of the window. He calls this "catching the breeze". I call this ridiculous. You cannot hold onto something that doesn't want to be held. The night is clear, and up ahead, the North Star is leading the way to our new home in Columbus, Ohio. I turn the radio up louder; a song called "The Dog Days Are Over" comes on. I smile to myself, thinking how true that is. We are riding down the highway at eighty miles per hour, escaping everything that hurt us in the past. Our dog days are officially over.

Six

"Be safe," I tell my brother, straightening his bow tie.

"Don't ruin the apartment while I'm gone," he tells me, flashing a toothy grin at me.

"I would never," I promise him. "Have fun."

He gives me a kiss on my left cheek, and Alex gives me a kiss on my right. They are leaving to go to their first ever real date. When the door closes, I sit back on our new couch and sigh, thinking of how much we all had to struggle to get to this point. But I guess all that matters in the end is that we got here, and we have each other.

Seven

In 2016, more than 250 innocent black lives were taken by white police. Unarmed black men are twice as likely to get killed as armed white men. This can happen anywhere, anytime. More specifically, when you least expect it.

Eight

Finding him wasn't the hard part, getting him alone was the hard part. Officer Tart was always surrounded by a crew of other people, laughing and drinking like they were some saints or something. But once I did get him alone, he was mine for the taking.

Nine

All I had to do was stand up straight, point, and aim. Just like Chase taught me.

"Don't shoot," he pleads. He begs... But I keep my eyes shut, because those are the same words that my brother said before he died.

Ten

They say the eyes are the window to the soul; I believe that. I've never seen eyes like Officer Tart's before. They were smaller than most people's eyes, and squinty, like he was always trying to see something that wasn't really there, like he was trying to force something into existence. I had seen his face in newspapers and on my community's Facebook page, but never up close like this before. He had the kind of eyes that made you feel something when he looked at you, just not something good. When his eyes, harsh and grey, like steel, landed on me, I felt vulnerable; like I was being undressed by a perverted stranger. I remember the way my face

would grow warmer with every roll of his pupils, like one sideways glance could set me on fire. Now, as he lay still on the ground, those eyes were still grey, but even colder now; lifeless. I debated with myself on whether or not I should close his eyelids. I almost did, but I could not tear away from my reflection. The glassiness of his eyeballs only made me appear less familiar; as if I weren't the same girl I was two hours ago; as if I had aged years in minutes. I stared at myself with grey and hazel flecks of light surrounding me until I could not bear to any longer. I tried to shake him. I smacked his cold, damp face. I spit on him. Kicked him. Cried on him, thinking maybe my tears would bring him back to life, but nothing worked. He was dead. There is an ocean of blood beneath his head, and I'm not just swimming, I'm baptizing myself in it, cleansing myself of my sins in a sea of warm, fantastic red. I dip my fingers in this Holy water and smear it all over my cold, shaky body, convincing myself that I'm clean. I'm clean.

For a moment, the world is still. Silent. Peaceful. No city lights, no voices, no traffic, just the sound of leaves dancing upon their branches as they congratulate me for what I've done. No one else saw what happened here tonight. Maybe that means it didn't really happen. Because if a tree falls in a forest and nobody is around to see it, well then, it didn't really fall. Is a body any different? My brother used to tell me, if the monsters stay under your bed, then they aren't really there. But what if the monsters are in my head?

The skeletons that rest in my closet. . . if I keep the door locked, they aren't really there. If I keep my eyes shut, then none of this actually happened. My chest rises as I take one last deep breath. The sky is as clear as it has ever been, and as black as the ground underneath my feet. I can make out various constellations as I look up, but I keep my eyes on the North Star, praying for it to lead me home. It shines its light on me in response, whispering to me that I've done well.

The Third Gentleman of Verona

A Reflective Memoir Essay

Sean Andalcio

Clear skies, a comforting breeze, trees blossoming and flowers blooming. It was another picturesque morning in the American classroom. Second period had just begun, and my peers were finally settling into their seats. April was almost over, and the fact it was Thursday was definitely contributing to the growing buzz amongst the senior classmen. Chatter about plans for college, graduation, and prom night were ubiquitous, but we still had our work cut out for us. Any minute now our AP Biology teacher, Mrs. Baum, would march into the classroom, hush us up, and give us a stern lecture about not slacking on our final project. As I idly twirled my pencil at my desk, I could already imagine her steely gaze behind those square, horn-rimmed glasses, scouring the classroom relentlessly for troublemakers. I hadn't made much progress myself, but as long I kept my head down, I was confident my outline was thorough enough to keep her at bay. I'd probably end up writing it up at the last minute as usual, but there was always enough time to right these things.

As the bell for class rang, Mrs. Baum strode into the classroom, but something was off. The longer I observed, the more I realized her tough demeanor was tinged by... melancholy. Zoe, a classmate of mine, trailed in behind her, red in the face and clearly distraught. I didn't know her very well, but I used to play cards with her boyfriend all the time. Shuffling wistfully to her seat, I glimpsed her whispering to her neighbour, which caused the other girl to immediately tear up. From the front of the class, there was no way for me to eavesdrop on the rumour mill, but it was spreading like wildfire. Mrs. Baum took her place at the head of the room, cleared her throat, and everyone became silent. *"Class, it has come to my attention that one your classmates passed away last night. I understand this may come as a shock to some of you, and you have my permission to check into the guidance office for as long as you need."*

Mrs. Baum didn't say her name, but by this point even I had put two and two together. Gathering my things, I zipped up my bag and left the classroom without another word. The looks on my peers faces told me they were appalled, but I couldn't hear them. I was too distracted by the sound of her laughter echoing in my head.

As I walked out the main entrance to the school, I thought about places I could sit quietly to contemplate where I had gone wrong. Emma Brunskill, the girl I had loved, was dead by her own hand. What made it worse? I wasn't even surprised.

To an outsider looking in, Emma's suicide was an irrational and harrowing act that made no sense in the context of her life. She was an excellent student who had already planned out her path to college. She did tons of incredible extracurriculars, whether it was volunteering for her church, singing for her choir, or raising and training seeing eye dogs for the blind. She had a loving family, a steady group of friends, and was liked by virtually everyone she knew. But to someone with my life experiences, all of these positive elements are meaningless when your mind isn't in the right place.

You see, depression and suicide are two forces I have battled for almost my entire existence. I can still remember what it was like to sit alone in 6th grade, pondering the meaning of my life and what it was worth to the people around me. When you suffer from depression, you build mental biases that warp your perspective and ability to make sound judgements. Rather than assess situations objectively, you defer to negative distortions which reinforce themselves in every circumstance. Instead of coming to rational conclusions, you think in absolutes; anything that is not a "complete success" must be a degree of failure, and failure wholly attributable to you.

In retrospect, I think this shared burden is what drew me to Emma in the first place. My schedule was such that we shared a free period every day of the week, and I sought her out at almost every opportunity. She smiled, laughed, and knew all the right things to say to put people around her at ease. But in our moments alone, I detected a sober sense of rumination, quite similar to my own. Of course, if you had asked me at the time, I would have staunchly denied harboring such dark thoughts. I was too distracted working through my own feelings, and was clever enough to realize their implications would be off-putting to "normal" people. Rather than express myself to those I trusted and cared for, I chose to conceal my emotional turmoil. The fear of losing face, or disturbing some vague, yet overbearing social normalities was too great. Out of concern for losing her, I could not express my truest self, even to Emma, although I willed myself to try on more than one occasion. Tragically, she made the same calculations I did, coming to a much more fateful conclusion.

Thus have I shunn'd the fire for fear of burning,

And drench'd me in the sea, where I am drown'd.

It is often agreed upon in academic circles that the *Two Gentlemen of Verona* is Shakespeare's weakest work. But in all the literature I have witnessed, no two verses have so succinctly illustrated the greatest torment of my life. I often pondered how my things might be different had I come across them before Emma's passing. In the play, Proteus felt bound by the expectations of his father to lie about his passion for Julia (his beloved). Instead of liberating him, the lie condemns Proteus to a faraway court in Milan, separating him from his paramour.

Like Proteus, my own mistakes irreparably changed the relationship with the person I held most dear. While I am now free to return to Verona, there is no one waiting for me in the city. Even six years later, in my weakest moments, my conscience remains gnawed upon by grief and doubt. At some point in those years, the raw aching of loss dissipated and was replaced by something more bearable. I have

gone to great lengths to make amends in my own life, to not repeat my faults or see them wrought in the lives of my peers. Those close enough might describe me as “healed” or “rehabilitated”, but I find such terms to be overstated.

A wound that no longer bleeds, yet refuses to fade is a scar, and they persist just as easily in the psyche as on the body. Scars are not intrinsically wicked or malign. Where memory fades, scars persevere. They are living testaments to our endurance in the face of injury and pain. They are chiseled inscriptions of our story, of our lives’ hardships and follies on our souls. Scars can be grisly to look upon. But as Kalil advised, I would rather drink the bitter potion a thousand times over relaying the task to another. Whenever my time comes, I would hope to die as I now strive to live.

Lost, but Seeking.

What Goes Down Easy

Melissa Crisan

Felt restless. Couldn't sleep. Went outside for a cigarette, and took a walk around the neighborhood. I'd rehearsed that story well over a hundred times before I snuck away that night, thoroughly seasoning all of the extra details just enough to go down easy in case my gatekeeper got hungry for an explanation. Although I'd put a substantial amount of effort in creating one, it existed primarily as a backup, a safeguard that would lessen the impact in the off chance that the worst-case scenario came to fruition. But I wasn't one to be hindered by the what-ifs. Four long years of coming and going without arousing suspicion had trained me well, so getting caught was barely factored into the equation.

But when the lights of Shelly's Customs suddenly switched on as I finally arrived back home, I froze. My back was turned, but the reflection of Trevor's disgruntled glare still pierced me all the same, his deep, raspy growls rattling in between breaths. Once again, I recited my lines: *Felt restless. Couldn't sleep.* But I couldn't bring myself to verbalize them. With my cover blown to bits, he would have known right away that I was lying, and I would have ended up getting an even longer earful. Instead, the only thing I could think to save myself now was, "I'm sorry."

"For what?"

His response initiated a groan, and a yawn promptly after, "Come on, Trev." Running pairs of fingers through my hair, I pushed several messy black strands away from my face and tried to peel away at the mud encrusted to my cheeks. My hands, bruised over and scabbed, hooked on to the back of my neck to massage my sore muscles as I motioned towards the clock on the wall, "We're not gonna play this game tonight, are we? It's four a.m."

"You weren't so concerned about time when you skipped out a few hours ago," he bitterly reminded while digging through his shirt pocket for a lighter and a single cigarette. Ash rained down on his pants as he lit and inhaled. "Did the fear of an ass-whooping give you a change of heart?"

"Look, I know it's too late for excuses and apologies now, but they're the best I've got."

Ignoring me, he slowly removed the cigarette from his lips to rest between his fingers. Ribbons of smoke billowed from the tip, soiling the air with a bitter, smoky aroma. One arm folded over the other, he rested his head back against the wall and closed his eyes without saying another word.

"Fine," I grumbled, throwing a hand up in the air and tapping my toes on the floor, "Player one wins. I screwed up, okay? I can't do anythin' about it now."

"Pathetic," Trevor interrupted, swirling the used butt into the ashtray. "Really. You call that an apology? No one in their right mind would let you back in their home with that attitude."

"I was tryin' to be sincere!"

"Sincere?" Loud, raspy laughter echoed off the store shelves seconds later. The amusement came so strong that he keeled over and gripped the armrest of his chair as his chuckles brought on a choking fit. To clear his airway, he pounded his fists against his chest. As soon as he found relief and settled down, he was up again and ready to tan my hide, "Trying and doing are two different things, boy. You haven't been sincere a day in your life, and don't ever let me see you pretendin' like you are ever again."

I bit my lip and saluted in defeat. "Yes, sir."

In front of the counter, I pulled up a chair and plopped down, stretching out like a starfish. My sweaty, blistered feet delighted in the cool glass of the countertop when I released them from their leather shoe prison, but the rest of my body still shivered uncontrollably. Over my shoulder, the open sign blinked in bright reds and blues, the store aisles only dimly lit by dying ceiling security lamps. Outside, through the thin layers of frost covering the windows, armies of snowflakes charged down from the cloudy sky. The dark setting made my eyes heavy, but sleeping wasn't an option when I knew I had to be somewhere even worse in just a few short hours.

To my dismay, Trevor broke the peaceful silence without warning and asked, "Are you okay?"

Exasperated, I shrugged, swinging my arms behind my head and leaning the chair back to a dangerous level. "That didn't seem to matter to you a few minutes ago."

"Quit feeling sorry for yourself and answer the question," he demanded, his voice dropping a few octaves.

Taken aback by the sudden tone shift, I was left at a loss for words. I peered up at him over the tops of my knees, and noticed that his teeth were clenched, and his jaw was firmly locked. Two balled fists rested on the edge of the counter, scooting my feet away to reveal my face. Knowing just about anything I'd say would make him blow his top, I responded with a simple, "I'm fine."

"You're trailing mud in everywhere. Do you got any spare clothes?"

"No."

"What've you eaten today?"

"I haven't."

"For Christ's sake..." he whined, blindly inching his hand up the wall to grab a pair of keys hanging on a hook by the door that led to his upstairs room. My reflexes snapped into action to spare my eye sockets a stabbing, as the sharp metal edges launched straight towards my face. "Go take a quick shower," he ordered. "There are some clothes up there somewhere. But come back here when you're done. We gotta talk."

Rolling my eyes, I limped up the stairs, wincing with each step. It took an eternity to get to the top, and by the time I did, my legs were throbbing fiercely. The railing broke an impending fall, and I leaned against it with all my weight, panting heavily and clutching my weak, wobbly knees. When I made it to the bathroom and removed my torn-up jeans, I found that each of them had swelled to the size of two black and blue baseballs. Standing up to bathe would be impossible, so I filled the tub halfway and slowly lowered myself inside, resting my head against the edge and plunging chin-deep into the steaming water. The cuts on my body stung as I disinfected them with soap, fresh blood still oozing from the gashes and melting away within the liquid to dye it a dull shade of crimson. I scraped the dry, crumbly splotches off the rest of my body until my skin was red and tender. With a few more splashes, I cleaned the remnants of that night from my face, letting all the stress and pain swirl down the drain. For me, it was that easy.

As I came back downstairs, the lights began to flicker, and then gave out. The darkness swallowed my vision and impaired my navigation, but the faint light of a candle on the corner of the counter suffused far enough through the room and helped direct me toward the counter. A can of spray-on cheese, a box of crackers, and a glass of milk were placed adjacent to it, along with a small stack of bills and change that Trevor was preparing to count, "Don't let 'em collect dust," he said, his focus fixated on the register as he blindly scooped a spoonful of cookie dough ice-cream from a large tub on his lap, "We gotta get rid of the perishable stuff before it goes bad."

My stomach growled at the sight of the feast. Using every wall and table top available, I shifted my weight carefully and pulled myself back to the chair. This time, he was watching me, his brows furrowing in concern. "What'd you break this time?"

"These damn things again," I quietly moaned as I ripped the can open with my teeth and loaded a single cracker with a swirly mountain's worth of cheese. Wasting no time, I shoved it into my cheek and was thrilled at the thick explosion of flavor dancing on my tongue.

"You're one lucky kid," he scoffed, shuffling the bills over and over again to recount. "Coulda lost a lot more than a fight tonight."

"I wouldn't say that," I mumbled between bites, cheesy streams dripping down my chin and staining it yellow. "Looks like someone beat you to the beatin'."

"Well, I oughta go and return the favor-"

"Save yourself the trouble. You'd come out lookin' even worse than me."

He parted from his task for a moment to look up at me, "Trouble? If you were so concerned about saving me the trouble, you'd have quit them so quick they'd never even know you were one of them-"

"I'm working on it, alright?" I yelled. The Raven tattoo on my right hand started to burn as his words sunk in. Beneath the counter, I stared down at the image, permanently engraved on my skin. A reel of memories played through my mind, those of the swarms of branded hands reaching out to strike me. Sharp, veiny knuckles smashing through my teeth until they shattered on the concrete, and flocks of other Ravens pulling me apart limb by limb. For a moment, I got lost in the reminiscing. That was the first time I wished that the bird would come to life, spread its wings, and fly away from me. I wished escaping my life could be as simple as

sneaking out at night and washing blood down the drain had been.

My heart slammed against the walls of my ribcage so violently, I thought I would puke. The last smoke in my pack was my only liberation, and without asking, I touched it to his lighter and drew in a puff. Trevor eyed me down indignantly as he counted the bills in his register. He usually didn't have a problem with offering me a stick, but that night, he reeked of disapproval. "You wiped that out already? I just gave it to you this morning."

"Give me a break. It's been a long night."

"You really oughta quit that dope, son. You're too young to be--"

"And you're a hypocrite," I interjected, opening my mouth to blow smoke in his face. "You're not my legal guardian, so why do you care? A thug like me could easily rob you clean."

"Try it. I'll put a bullet in your head before you have a chance to give me one of them pitiful apologies of yours."

At that, I laughed, extinguishing my cigarette as it crumbled to its stub, "There's the old geezer I know and love." I punched his shoulder in good spirit, leaned over, and snatched another cigarette from his shirt pocket. "For a minute there, I thought my dad had risen from the dead or something."

His face was hard, "I'm serious."

"So am I."

"That's not what I'm talking about," he said. In a hurried fervor, he shoved the money back into the register slots and pushed the tray back in. "Did you take a good look at yourself in the mirror upstairs? How in the world do you think you can go home like this?"

There it was. His true intentions, now clear and in my face, beckoning my attention in a death grip. For months now, he'd brought the subject up again and again, subtly trying to urge me out the door. But I refused to give him recognition, "So that's what this discussion is about? We're back to this conversation again? How many times have I--"

Before I could retort, he pointed out, "It's been four years, right? It's about time you went home, son. Your family's probably been scared to death--"

"My family is my business," I growled, standing up so quickly that my chair tipped over and fell on its side. He wasn't even the least bit startled as I slammed my palms on the counter. "Keep your nose out of it."

Trevor's eyes narrowed as he stared at me over the brim of his glasses. "You became my business the moment you waltzed into my life and held yourself up here. I ain't just a motel, you know--"

"Why do you want me to leave so bad? Am I really that annoyin'?" I asked, twiddling my now quivering thumbs out of his view. Unable to stand the butterflies fluttering away in my stomach, I almost withdrew the question, but my curiosity needed an answer now. "I mean...I know I'm not the most courteous guest and all--"

"It ain't about your manners, kid. You've thrown four years away for those punks. I don't want you wasting any more--"

"You still think I just follow them like a puppy dog? I've been tryin' to break away from the Ravens for months now!" I cried.

"Trying and doing are two different-"

"I'm aware," I shouted in an effort to drown his advances out. "And I know you mean well, but you don't know what I came from. It wasn't much better."

"Being with a dysfunctional family is still better than sticking by the sides of thugs who do *this* to you," To make his point, he swooped over to grab my arm, push down my sleeve, and exposed not only the tattoo, but the millions of slashes all across my skin. "You'd rather hold on to past grievances and lose your life instead?"

I quickly yanked it back and stumbled out of his reach. "You said so yourself. They'd have to be crazy to take me back. I'm not so good at crawlin' in on my knees, remember?"

"You're nineteen years old, Milo. Be a man about it-"

"What does that even *mean*?!" I screamed, my temper finally boiling over the brim of control. In a large, sweeping motion, I swiped everything off of the counter, watching as it slammed against the ground. My breathing escalated to wild hyper-ventilation, and I threw my arms about as a monstrous roar ripped its way through my throat. "I've worked so hard to figure that out, and it never ends up goin' well for me! How the hell can I go back when I have nothin'?"

Trevor didn't console me. He didn't even continue his tirade. Instead, he swung open a nearby cabinet drawer, and pulled out a sheet of paper. Slamming it on the counter, he slid it into my view. In bright bold letters, the bankruptcy form stared me right in the face. His eyes clouded over when I looked back up to him. "You ain't the only one who's gotta start over."

My mouth fell. I looked to his face for some sort of better explanation, but there was none. My entire body unclenched instantly, "Trevor, what the-"

"Here's what you're gonna do," he started, leaning forward to rest his forearms on his knees, "Twelve bucks should be enough for a train ride back home." Trevor popped open the register drawer once more, and gathered every last bill inside, throwing it on top of the papers in a jumbled mess. "You're gonna march up to the door, and answer to anything that your folks gotta say. No smart-ass remarks, and no diversion."

But I shoved off his advice yet again, "Why didn't you say something earlier? I-"

"Take whatever hits they give you," he persisted, "and don't run away this time. That'll at least get ya in the door."

"What about you? Where are you gonna go?"

"Don't worry about me," he finally stood up from the counter, bending over to grab a suitcase as he crossed to the other side. "This is your chance to break away, and you're taking it. Even if I gotta drag you there myself."

"Let me go with you."

"Not a chance."

"But we can-"

"Out of the question," he uttered, taking both of my shoulders in his hands to rattle some sense into me. "I know it's scary, but you gotta do it."

Beams of the day's first sunlight cast their way between the rain droplets and scattered across the floor of Shelly's Customs. It burned my skin on contact. *Felt restless. Couldn't sleep. Went outside for a cigarette, and took a walk around the neighborhood.* It was the only excuse I had, but this time, it wasn't good enough. We both had spent the last four years flushing our mistakes down the drain, as if they never even happened.

A single tear spilled from my eye, "Will they find me? Or you?"

"If they do, I'll put a bullet in their-"

"Yeah," I laughed sadly, sniffing as even more welled in my eyes, "I bet you would." My eyes glued to the ground, the awkward silence returned for a brief moment until I asked, "So I really have no choice this time?"

"You're gonna be okay, kid," Trevor had a grim smile as he handed me the money. "We'll both be-"

"Okay...okay," I repeated to myself, gathering the courage as I picked up the suitcase and stepped outside. My retinas stung from the reflection blinding sun in the puddles of water that surrounded me, but I couldn't hide from it anymore. This time, I decided not to wash it all away. Maybe they'd even believe my story: *Felt restless. Couldn't sleep. Went out for a cigarette, and took a walk around the neighborhood.*

Overdose

Emily Mocadlo

Dawn broke through the cool midsummer evening. The warming morning rays of the sun rose through the full trees through the suburban streets. It travelled quickly upon the cool pavement on to the freshly cut grass that held a “Sold” sign. The rays wiped away the darkness from the pale yellow home and travelled through the blossoming tulips up to the large open front window. Through the window was an empty and freshly furnished living room. The fresh white carpet laid clean and practically untouched except for the shattered glass that laid hidden within the soft fibers of the carpet. Around the shards were larger broken pieces of a new picture frame that laid helpless on the floor and against the freshly painted crème walls. A torn picture laid facedown leading to more glass and wood along the walls of the room.

A small tan couch sat before a dark brown coffee table that held an open pregnancy book. The pages were wrinkled in small areas from the dried tears that fell upon it. A crumpled, clear ultrasound picture of a seven-month old baby girl lay on the floor between the couch and the table. A sterling silver ring with the words “You are my Strength” etched within the inner ring lay lonely and bare on the soft barren couch. Its partner lay across the room in the dining room beneath the black chair; the diamond had fallen out and was helpless within the fibers of the carpet. The sun travelled up to the black dining room table that rested empty without its normal fill of eggs, waffles, and blueberry muffins. The smell of freshly ground coffee was absent from the house.

Past the dining room at the end of the long hall stood a closed wooden door. Beyond the door was a dark room. The thick cranberry curtains remained shut, keeping the light away. A large bed sat in the middle of the room, its covers untouched. The dark room was untouched; she couldn’t lay there. Instead, she lay tear-soaked and tired in the bathtub. Her large stomach poked above the rim of the tub. She stared blankly at the ceiling as tears continued to slowly slide down her face.

“Mrs. Baker, I’d like to ask you some more questions.” The officer sat at her desk, ashamed of herself for pressing more questions on this woman, but she had to do her job “Mrs. Baker.”

“It’s Ms.”

“I’m sorry?”

She cleared her throat, and tried to speak louder, “It’s Ms. now.” Addison continued to look at her enlarged stomach as she rested her hand on her baby, trying to find some comfort.

“I’m sorry, Ms. Baker, but I do need to ask some more questions,” Karen hated herself for speaking. She hated this part of the job. “Can I ask you some questions?”

Addison chuckled as she shook her head. The tears came back, "What more do you want to know? My husband... God! My husband died! He died!" Addison couldn't help but to raise her voice as she laughed out pain, "My husband broke his promise! He broke his promise! Damn it! He was just going out for drinks, and instead he met up with his friends and took one too many lines. What more do you want to know?"

Karen watched the trembling pregnant woman before her and she grew hysterical from heartbreak. Tears streamed down Addison's face as she yelled at her. Karen just sat there and let her do it. What could she do?

"I know this is hard for you, but we'd like to help," Karen said softly, trying to comfort the woman before her. "

"Help? You want to help me? You can't. You can't help me. I am a twenty-eight-year-old pregnant widow. You can't help me, unless you can turn back the clock. Can you do that officer? Can you turn back the clock, so I can save myself from this hell?"

The two women sat there silently. The clock and Addison's tears were the only sounds the bounced between the plastered walls.

"Can I just go home?"

"Yes, Ms. Baker. Go home and rest. We've put you through enough here." Karen stood and opened the door of her office allowing Addison to waddle through. "Ms. Baker," she called out having Addison turning towards her, "I am terribly sorry for your loss."

"Thank-you," she sniffled and began to walk towards the door. Her mind was full of fury. She tried to focus on the door that was only twenty feet away from her. She was almost free of the smell of the stale coffee and sweat, until she heard a familiar voice.

"Addy!"

Addison turned to see Thomas standing behind bars with his hands detained behind him. She looked at his rounded bearded face.

"Addy, I'm sorry..."

Tears welled up in her eyes as she turned away from him and walked away. Rain hit her face as she walked toward her new mini-van. She stood against her door and let the rain cover her. Her knees felt weak as anger boiled through every vessel in her body. This was his fault. She never liked Thomas; he gave her a bad feeling from the start. He pushed David into doing that garbage. He pushed against her from the very beginning...

"Addison, this is Thomas, my best bro."

Addison reached out and grabbed the clammy hand that was linked to a fully rounded, tattooed short man. He smiled slyly exposing a chipped tooth. "Hey, it's nice to meet you." His voice was raspy and his breath smell of nicotine and weed.

"Likewise," she said withdrawing her hand, replacing Thomas' hand with David's. Thomas glared down subtly at it and smiled. Thomas looked up and David and gave a slight head nod. David's smile grew as he let go of Addison's hand.

"Babe, I'll be right back, will you be okay on your own for a moment?" he asked her.

Addison looked into his clear blue eyes and smiled, "Sure babe." He kissed her cheek and walked away with Thomas. Addison stood alone, uncomfortably in the back corner of the smoke-filled room. Heavy music filled her ears as she watched the strange people around her pass a bud and drink from their red solo cups. The room grew colder the longer she stood there. Where was David? After about a half hour she went to look for him. She walked down towards the basement. It was much quieter, and the air quality wasn't any better, but it was quiet. Before she landed on the basement floor, she stopped when she heard Thomas and David talking.

"I don't like her man," Thomas said.

"What? Why not? She's amazing. I mean, I really think she's the one for me," David replied.

"She just doesn't seem like she'd be cool with this stuff, ya know?"

"She doesn't care if I smoke-

"Yeah, but what about the-

"I mean, I've told her about it, she's not real happy about it but I'm going to stop... ya know for her."

"Or, you could just not tell her. Ignorance is bliss."

David didn't reply. There was nothing for a moment until Thomas broke the quiet. "Yo, hit another one of these lines before we go back up."

"Alright man."

Addison, filled with shock, turned and walked back to where she was standing before. Not too long after, David and Thomas returned. David greeted her with a hug. When he released her from his tight grasp she looked into to his blue eyes, which were now consumed by his enlarged pupils.

"Addison, want a drink?" Thomas offered.

"No, I'm driving."

"Miss.... Miss!"

"What?"

"Are you alright?"

She stood under the umbrella of a strange officer.

"Yeah, I'm fine thank-you," she replied shaking her head and returning to reality. The officer looked at her unsure but helped her into her van. He watched her as she pulled away.

Drenched from the rain, Addison drove towards her home alone. Stopping at a red light, she cleared her eyes and looked out the window to the local buildings to her left. Her eyes stopped on Charlie's Pub. She was right that night.

Sitting at the bar, she watched the football games that were displayed across the

T.V. sets that lined the top of the liquor shelves.

"Where's David at?" Chuck asked handing her another water.

"Haven't the slightest idea, Chuck. He was supposed to be here two hours ago, so yeah, I have no idea where he is at."

"I would've left by now, screw him. This is the seventh time he's been this late getting here. How many other times at different places? How many times has he just not shown up?"

Addison smiled tightly at Chuck, "I am a patient person Chuck, he is still figuring out how to-

"What? Figuring out how to be in a relationship? Listen, it's probably none of my business, but I hear a lot behind this bar, sometimes it's from him, other times it's from his buddies, and a lot of it is dangerous and illegal."

Addison looked at the water that slid quickly down the side of her glass, "I've talked to him... I just... I just-

"Just what? Look at me Addison," he said. She slowly looked up from the top of her glasses. "Addison, if you were my girl, you would be my top priority. I would never be late, I would always show up, and I would try to be better for you. I don't think the message is sinking into his head, and to be honest, you deserve better than this."

Addison opened her mouth to talk but stopped when she felt the breeze come in from the door and heard the laughter of David and his friends.

"I thought it was date night?" Chuck said.

"They probably gave him a ride," she reasoned.

"I bet you that he's high on something strong."

Addison didn't reply in fear that Chuck was right. David approached her and hugged her tight from behind.

"Hey there sexy lady," David greeted reaching around to kiss her cheek. "Chuck, two shots of Fireball and Coke."

Chuck shook his head and turned away to grab his order. Addison looked over at David, who was giddy and fidgety. He kept looking around the bar with sweat dripping down his forehead. He finally looked at Addison who was observing him closely. He grabbed her hand, and she pulled back once she felt their clamminess. She looked into his eyes and saw no blue. She turned towards the bar, as David dismissed her reaction and turned to Thomas to laugh and talk. Chuck just looked at her and shook his head. She could only sit there ashamed of herself.

"Babe could you hold on to my wallet while I step out with Thomas for a sec?"

Before she could answer he handed her his wallet and followed Thomas like a well-trained pup. Chuck rested his hands on the bar and spoke, "He's going to forget to pay for the drinks again, would you mind?" he said motioning towards his wallet.

"Yeah," she said and opened his wallet. He pulled out a ten and handed it to Chuck, and began to close his wallet until she saw it. There in the corner sat a small plastic bag. Tears began to fill her eyes as she looked at the small bag of cocaine

that sat in his wallet.

"Are you okay?" Chuck asked. She didn't reply. This was the last straw.

Addison stormed out of the building to confront David. "What is this shit!" she yelled.

"Yo, babe chill," he said. Thomas abandoned him to face her.

"You have got to be kidding me, David! Why do you need this junk!"

"What are you-

She pulled out the tiny bag and held it before him.

"Look, it's just a little buzz that's all. A good high."

"Yeah, and are you on a good high right now, David?" He didn't reply to her, only stared at the bag. "You need to decide what's more important to you. The high, or me?" She stood there waiting for a reply. "Well?"

He didn't say anything. "Are you seriously debating this?" she yelled completely dumbfounded by his reaction.

"Babe, it's not that simple."

"Really?" she laughed, "then let me make it easier for you. Enjoy the buzz, hope it's worth it," she said and threw his bag at him and walked away.

"Addison! Wait! Addison!-

A car horn shook her back onto the road. She blinked back the tears and quickly drove home. Walking into her home, she walked straight to her bedroom and changed into dry clothes. Walking back to the living room she grabbed the vacuum and cleaned the mess from the previous night. Sucking up all the glass, she slowly crouched over and picked up the frame pieces and photos. She threw the frame pieces away and sat back on her couch with the torn wedding photos in her hand. Rubbing her stomach, she cried for taking him back....

A knock came to her apartment door. Taking out her earbuds, she opened the door to see David standing weak with a rose.

"Can I come in?" he asked. She moved aside to let him in. He didn't walk too far in until he turned and embraced her, dropping the rose.

"Addison, these past three months have been awful. I can't live without you," he said pulling her back to look at her. "I went to rehab and I got cleaned up. Please, please give me another chance."

"I can't-

"Addison, I love you more than anything, please, I want to marry you and have a family with weekend cookouts and a dog or two, please I want to build a life, I want to build a life with you. I promise that I will never put any of that back into my body again."

"You went to rehab and now you want to get married?"

"I've always wanted to marry you, Addison, I just made stupid choices that ruined

that, but I can be better. I want to be better for you. You're my strength, I couldn't have gotten through withdrawal without you, I couldn't have wanted the change without you. Please give me another chance, I promise I won't let you down again."

Tears were in his eyes as he pleaded for her forgiveness and a second chance.

"I don't give second chances David, but... you're worth it," she said smiling at him, "I've missed you."

"I've missed you, too."

She sat on the couch and thought about the phone call from Thomas; she remembered reading and joyfully planning the oncoming arrival of their baby when the phone rang. She remembered the heart-wrenching feeling when he told her.

"Please Addison, you're my one phone call. He just took too much, I'm sorry... He wasn't waking up... I never should've.... Addison can you hear me? Please say something."

"He overdosed?" the words choked out of her mouth, "but he... he hasn't touched it in so long? How could he... how could he overdose, Thomas?"

"It was my fault... I brought it back to him six months ago...Addison, I wish I could take it back..."

"Six months ago, we found out about the...the baby... you gave him coke when he was having a baby! You fucking gave him coke and we're having a baby!" she cried, "he... he can't... this is your fault you bastard...you fucking bastard how could you do this to him..."

She hung up and crumpled the ultra sound picture in her hand. She screamed as tears flooded her eyes. She took off her rings, setting one down and throwing the other. She looked at their wedding photos. Her heart ached looking at their smiling faces. She walked over to them, throwing them against the wall, yelling as she destroyed their entire life.

"You promised me!" she cried, "You promised me better! You promised me change!" Her knees gave in as she sunk to the floor. Sobbing quietly, she spoke softly, "You promised me... you... you broke your promise..."

The sun broke through the rain as dusk approached through her window. She sat on her couch alone in her quiet house. The walls and her hands were bare. She sighed, and the tears finally stopped. She looked down her stomach and gently stroked the baby. "I promise you that I will give you better. I promise... I promise..."



Tears of the Shamed

Dayvon Rose

Lights up. Chairs in a semi-circle, Kyle walks in while looking at his phone. He puts his phone in his pocket and sighs. He notices someone sitting down already, reading a book, but they do not notice him while he sits down.

KYLE

Hi.

Charlie looks up from her book and sees him.

CHARLIE

Hi...do you need something?

KYLE

No, I jus-

Mr. Knox comes into the room with a clipboard and mug in each hand. He takes a sip of his drink then looks up to see Kyle sitting in the middle chair.

MR. KNOX

Hey Charlie, good to see you again.

Charlie nods without looking up. Mr. Knox notices Kyle.

You new here? To the school I mean.

KYLE

Oh, eh, yeah.

Mr. Knox takes the middle seat and places his clipboard down and sets his coffee mug on top.

MR. KNOX

Well, hello, I'm the advisor for the club. It's unfortunate that you came, though; this is our last meeting.

Charlie stares at Mr. Knox for a moment.

But either way, I'm glad you came.

Mr. Knox extends his hand forward to greet him, and Kyle shakes his hand.

I'm Darrell Knox, you can call me Darrell, Professor Knox, or just Mr. Knox.

KYLE

Aren't you the theatre teacher?

MR. KNOX

Yes, I am. I also minored in psychology, so I know what I am doing here.

Mr. Knox picks up his mug and clipboard, he flips through pages while drinking from his mug. He then looks at his watch.

The others should be here soon-

Laughter is heard off-stage as two people trickle in. They notice Kyle, become quiet, and quickly take their seats as they stare at them.

KYLE

Hi?

SAM

Sup!

MR. KNOX

Alright guys, your president is out sick again and so I'll be taking over this meeting. First, this is our new member-

KYLE

I'm not a new member, I was just curious about the club.

SAM

(chuckle)

That's how I started...but then it changed me.

KYLE

I bet you say that to all the new members.

SAM

We don't really get new members...

MR. KNOX

Well, now that that's settled. Next week is the annual social, Hannah is still out sick, ah. Please do note that this meeting will be kept short because of rehearsals for the fall show. Now, let's begin the exercise I assigned last week.

Naomi, you can begin.

NAOMI

Me? Alright.

Naomi grabs a piece of paper from out of her book bag. She then flattens it out, squints at it, then takes a deep breath.

I was locked in a room with no way out, the windows shut and my mind filled with doubt. The screen light had pierced my soul and I knew then that I would never be whole. The taunts, the sneers, the insults...the tears, would it even be bad if I ended it here? Thoughts swirled inside, I could not take anymore, but I knew that I had to open the door...and...scene.

Everyone begins to snap except for Kyle and Charlie, who half snaps, he follows the action, but sits quietly.

MR. KNOX

Excellent work Naomi, I felt like I was actually in th-

Kyle's phone vibrates; he quickly walks out of the room while everyone stared.

CHARLIE

I bet he's here to make fun of us like the last two people who "joined."

NAOMI

They weren't that bad.

CHARLIE

Naomi, they laughed at you when you did your poem on inner peace.

SAM

Then, they made fun of my weight and told me to put a plastic bag over my head.
That doesn't even make sense, either I'm fat or ugly. I can't be both right?

There is a silence in the room.

Right?

CHARLIE

Yeah, whatever, they don't care about what makes sense.

NAOMI

They just want us to feel bad about ourselves-.

CHARLIE

Mr. Knox, how can we ever be taken seriously as a support group if we're just reciting poems about 'feelings' while our president is out "sick"?

MR. KNOX

Why'd you say it like that?

SAM

Hannah isn't sick, she's been homeschooled since the start of second semester.

Once she saw that *they* aren't afraid to come here, in the one place we're supposed to be shielded from them, she broke down. It's already been three weeks; she's not coming back.

Kyle walks in while looking distressed, he takes his seat.

NAOMI

Don't think negative thoughts, she'll come back!

SAM

Maybe I'll call her after rehearsals.

KYLE

Who?

CHARLIE

None of your business.

SAM

Hannah....our president.

MR. KNOX

Alright, listen. I have an idea. Charlie and Sam, could you stand up for me please?

Sam stands up from his seat, but Charlie stays seated.

MR. KNOX

Come on, you said you wanted something more serious.

NAOMI

I'll do it if she won't.

Naomi gets up and takes a few deep breaths.

MR. KNOX

Alright, both of you get into the middle and face each other.

They both move cautiously to the middle of the circle.

Now, I would like you both to look into each other's eyes and tell each other two compliments and one insult, in any order you choose.

NAOMI

Insult? I can't do that!

SAM

Isn't that the opposite of what this group is about?

MR. KNOX

Just trust me, I know what I'm doing.

NAOMI

You can go first if you want.

SAM

Alright.

Sam closes her eyes and takes a few deep breaths.

You're pretty, you're kind, annnnd you never hide your emotions?

NAOMI

OK, um, you're honest, you have a good sense of humor, and ...

SAM

And?

NAOMI

Annnnd...I can't insult people...I see the good in everyone. I mean, I know there are mean people, but nobody deserves to be insulted.

CHARLIE

What exactly was this supposed to do?

MR. KNOX

The exercise was supposed to show you that all words carry weight. Although Naomi *didn't have* an insult, it was meant to show that even though there was more than one compliment, a single insult can hold more weight.

NAOMI

Well...let's just do another poem, this is getting too stressful for me.

CHARLIE

Stop...stop...just stop. No more poems and no more "exercises." This isn't helping anyone in the group! Ever since Hannah left, all we've been doing is reading poems, holding hands, and singing Kumbaya. We're forced into thinking that all we need to do is smile and think happy thoughts. There are people in the halls, right now, struggling with this kind of stuff. They're too afraid to come here because they think they'll be judged or not taken seriously, and that's just this school alone. Back when Hannah was still here, we actually talked about our problems. I don't see how what we're doing now is helping anyone.

Mr. Knox claps with a deep sigh.

MR. KNOX

Alright, since my idea apparently didn't work... Charlie, if you would rather have

everyone talk about their problems, why don't you start?

SAM

Let's just do something.

Everyone looks at Charlie waiting to see if anything will happen.

CHARLIE

Fine...I'll start. My parents were never really "proud" of me. Yeah sure, I'm their only child but... I guess to them that never mattered. They're nice, they love me and I love them but in that very 'professional' kind of way. So, a couple years ago when I told them that I liked girls, it just seemed like one more reason for them not to be proud of me. I'm lucky, they didn't get angry when I told them and they weren't violent towards me in any way. But that look on their faces when I told them... it's like they didn't know who I was - but I definitely wasn't their daughter anymore. I felt out of place for almost a year before I met someone who made me feel... happy. She was proud of me, proud to call me her girlfriend. And I was proud of her. I was the luckiest girl in the world. But other people didn't see it that way. Honestly, when we were at school, no one really seemed to care... but when we went out on dates in public... well it wasn't as easy then.

Charlie chuckles, but it looks as if she's fighting back tears.

But you know what sucks even more? Being told you are going to hell for holding someone's hand. Me? I can take it, who cares what other people think? But she couldn't handle it. I've never cared what other people think but she does. Others' hate broke us. It's hard to know who I am without her. I guess I'm still trying to figure it out.

SAM

For me, it all started around 8th grade. I got a Facebook account set up so that I could be like all the other 8th graders. I was so caught up in friending people that I would just add anyone.

NAOMI

I remember that, I added you right after I made mine.

Sam gets up, showing hesitation.

SAM

As I said, I friended anyone. A month into summer vacation and I actually started talking to people on there, nobody would really message me back, but I felt *popular*. About a week later and I got a message back, he said "Hey." So I replied with "Hi," he said, "You look really cool." I said thanks and we talked for a few days. That weekend he asked for a picture of me, I asked him why, but he would just say, "I want to see your beautiful face." So I took a picture and sent him it, he then started asking for more pictures. Each time he asked to see a bit more of my body. I finally said stop, because he made me feel uncomfortable. You know what he said? He said, "You can't stop now, you're my boyfriend. You're supposed to send me pictures." I told him he was wrong, I wasn't his boyfriend and would never send him any more pictures. So he threatened to send them to people around the school and that everyone would call me...*names*... once school started back up. Of course I still said no...and he sent the pictures I sent to him, and sure enough not even a day later I got messages from almost everyone I was friends with on Facebook. Some were mean, some were gross, and most of the people were disgusted to the point where they unfriended me. By the tim-

Kyle's phone vibrates, he looks at it while standing up. He then starts to walk out of the room.

CHARLIE

Hold up, where are you going?

KYLE

I have to-

CHARLIE

You think it's *fine*, to just walk away when someone is sharing their personal experiences like this?

SAM

Charlie, it's fine!

KYLE

No-

Charlie gets up from her seat.

MR. KNOX

Charlie wait...

CHARLIE

No!

Charlie walks beside Mr. Knox.

Mr. Knox, this is the second time he has walked out of the room. Who are you texting?

KYLE

Nobody...

The phone vibrates again.

CHARLIE

Come here!

Charlie rushes towards Kyle, he walks around the chairs, Charlie runs through the chairs. As Kyle tries to run, Charlie grabs his phone.

KYLE

Let go!

SAM

Charlie quit it!

CHARLIE

Not until he tells me who he's texting.

NAOMI

He said nobody.

MR. KNOX

That's enough.

CHARLIE

Aren't you guys curious as to why he keeps leaving, why he keeps checking his phone? He's probably texting people what we've been saying and making fun of us! You think you can just walk in here and pretend like I don't know what you're

up to? You think you're better than us? Better than me?

Sam approaches the middle section, but Mr. Knox intercepts with his arm.

SAM

No-Charlie that's enough! I'm so sick of you controlling what everyone thinks and does.

Charlie, approaches the middle section, but Mr. Knox intercepts with his other arm.

CHARLIE

Excuse me? Do you not even understand what bullying looks like?

MR. KNOX

Ladies!

SAM

Yes, I do, and so does everyone else here. He's not even doing anything wrong.

You are the only one making fun of people, you are the only one yelling at everybody, and you are the only one here who thinks they have the audacity to push us around. So far you're the only one being the bully.

CHARLIE

Me? I'm th-

SAM

Telling us what we should do, thinking that your way is the only way to make things right. You are *not* Hannah, stop acting like her!

CHARLIE

Do *not* speak abo...you barely know what happened to me. It's going to take more than some sad story for you to even understand a glimpse of what happened to me. Not all of us can just ignore *them* Sam! Not all of us can just go to our parents and just tell them everything.

NAOMI

Not all of us can bottle our emotions either...

CHARLIE

Look, I am trying to help us, I am trying to fix everything so that *you* can stop crying, and *you* can stop looking so dang pathetic every time you look into a mirror. I tried my best to keep this club in order because we know Mr. Knox can't do it himself and besides, he has better things to do than to babysit us like we are freaking children.

SAM & NAOMI

I'm not a child.

KYLE

Please just stop!

Silence. Kyle takes his phone out of his pocket and turns it on.

Here

Kyle hands Charlie his phone hesitantly.

CHARLIE

What's this?

KYLE

Facebook...just...read.

Charlie scans the screen.

CHARLIE

Why are you posting this on your account?

Sam takes the phone from Charlie out of curiosity and scrolls through it while Mr. Knox and Naomi watches over her. They begin to read what they see.

SAM

Get out of America?

NAOMI

Hitler should have lived so that all the minorities and gays....

Naomi steps back from the group.

I can't finish that....

KYLE

I am not posting that...someone else is.

NAOMI

Who?

Kyle sits back down.

KYLE

I don't know...it's been happening for a few months. At my old school it was just a stupid little joke someone played...until.

MR. KNOX

Until it got out of hand?

Mr. Knox takes the phone from Sam and gives it back to Kyle.

KYLE

People started to friend the *fake* Kyle...then they started to take my pictures from my own account and made it theirs. They would post mean comments about people and message people privately.

NAOMI

Why didn't you report them?

CHARLIE

He did...didn't you?

KYLE

I did! After a few days they stopped...then they came back. But this time it wasn't mean comments about *other* people, it was mean comments about me. People in school looked at me sideways, called me an attention seeker and the more I tried to deny it was me, the more they didn't believe me. It was like it didn't even matter if I was right, everyone just wanted to be in on the joke. So...I told my dad about it and he went up to the school. The principal said that he could do nothing about it and it was out of his hands. He even suggested we move out of the neighborhood all together.

SAM

And that's how you ended up here?

KYLE

Yes.

There is silence.

NAOMI

Well.....I'm here for you. Everyone here has been bullied, that's what this group is...
no...that's what we're here for.

SAM

We all don't exactly fit the description of normal people either and we *all* make
mistakes...right Charlie?

CHARLIE

Yeah, um, sorry about your phone.

KYLE

No...it's fine. I came here knowing that it wasn't going to be easy to open up, but I
was hoping I would be able to.

MR. KNOX

I'm, glad I met you guys too.

CHARLIE

Oh...you're still here?

MR. KNOX

I know I was not the best replacement, but I seriously had the best intentions...
Listen, I have to go, I'm running late for rehearsals. Stay here as long as you need
to. This is a safe room and nobody can hurt you.

Mr. Knox glances at Charlie, then grabs his things and leaves.

SAM

Whelp, I'm hungry, let's go get something to eat. If you ask me, I really need some
fries.

Sam and Naomi start to walk out of the room.

NAOMI

I'll keep to my salads.

SAM

It's ok to pig out once in awhile....are you guys coming?

Kyle and Sam are still sitting.

You know...you don't need a club to have a support group.

NAOMI

We can have our own support group.

SAM

Our first meeting can be at Five Guys, let's go!

Kyle chuckles then follows them out. Charlie pulls out her phones and stares at it.

CHARLIE

I'll catch up with you later, I want to...check up on Hannah.

NAOMI

Tell her I said hi!

Kyle's phone vibrates, he takes it out of his pocket, but Sam lowers his hand.

They soon walk out of the room. Charlie notices everyone is out and breathes deeply and looks up at the ceiling.

CHARLIE

I couldn't do it...I thought that since this was our last meeting I could tell them. I tried opening up and letting people in, but it's hard. It's hard knowing that there are people out there who want to hurt other people, it's hard knowing that you can't do anything but ignore them, it's hard knowing the person that I love more than anyone else was driven away from me by them. (Jokingly) *Come on Hannah. Homeschool?*

Charlie pulls out a piece of paper out of her pocket.

Did you really have to...to...to? I promise to keep fighting for *us* all of us, I promise I won't let them win.

ABOUT THE CONTRIBUTORS

Sean Andalcio is a student at Tri-C working to transfer to Cleveland State University for a degree in Computer Science. A long-time creative writer, he also enjoys gaming and tutoring in his free time.

Thalia Arias moved to Cleveland from Isabela, Puerto Rico in 2015. After working as a pastry chef in a local bakery she decided that it was not the right job for her. She enrolled at Tri-C and is currently in her last semester, with plans of transferring to Kent State.

Blair Austin is a student at Cuyahoga Community College.

Savion Barnes is an upcoming Professional Portrait Photographer in Cleveland, Ohio. He specializes in capturing pictures with a cinematic feel similar to a scene from a movie. He works with major artists and models shooting concert and fashion photography throughout Ohio. Savion is currently attending Tri-C Metro for his degree in Photography and Business.

Devante Bennett-Lee is a 24-year-old who was born and raised in one of Cleveland's inner-city neighborhoods. He is currently studying photography after discovering his passion for it when he took an elective class in Photo I. He plans on being a commercial and documentary photographer.

Daniela Cacho resides in Cleveland, Ohio and is currently a student at Cuyahoga Community College. She is taking classes to complete an Associates of Arts degree while also being Editor-in-Chief of *The Voice*, Tri-C's student run newspaper. Following, Cacho will be attending Cleveland State University to obtain a Bachelor of Arts in Journalism and Promotional Communication degree.

Jeziel Chavez is a Recording Arts and Photography student at Tri-C. He was born in Mexico City, Mexico in 1995 and moved to Ohio in 2005. From a very young age, Jeziel has been interested in expressing himself, whether through music, performance, or art. Inspired by artists like Todd Hido, Flor Garduño, and Louis Kevin Celestin, Jeziel finds ways to express and capture his life experiences through light in his photography and sound in his music.

Janelli Cedeno is a current Psychology major at Tri-C, and she hopes to transfer to Cleveland State University to pursue her bachelor's and master's degrees. She hopes to someday be a doctor and help individuals battle mental illness. Janelli is a confessional poet, and she herself also had her fight with mental illness, which has led to her writing poetry.

Tom Crane is a photography student at Cuyahoga Community College. With the support of his family and friends, he was able to go back to school to follow his passion. Tom enjoys sharing his passion for photography with his son, sometimes even trusting him with the camera.

Melissa Crisan is a senior College Credit Plus student currently earning her high school diploma and a Bachelor's in English. Her goal to become an author has led to a first place victory at Ohio's annual Power of the Pen regional competition, and taken her to state-level writing tournaments.

Shakitha Day has come a long way, not only from her home but also from who she once was. She always told those closest to her that even if she wanted to give up, she could not because she didn't know how. Springing forth from dysfunction, spiraling through heartache, and overcoming obstacles she always found a way to maintain not only her composure but also her sanity.

Joanne Ferrone holds an Associate of Arts degree from Tri-C and is currently pursuing her Art Therapy Certification through Tri-C's Creative Arts Program. She presently attends Baldwin Wallace University majoring in English and is active in several on-campus clubs including Alpha Sigma Lambda and Sigma Tau Delta.

Rebecca Groth is passionate about learning, listening, and teaching. She is an artist, a researcher, and a community leader. She is graduating from Tri-C to go on to transfer to earn her Bachelor's in Political Science. In her spare time, she cares about film, photography, writing, and hiking. Her purpose is to educate and bring people together, while respecting their individualism.

Courtney Hatcher was born in Cleveland and is a full time student at Tri-C. Outside of school, she works as a preschool teacher, where she reads to kids during story time and writes children's books inspired by their meaningful conversations. In her free time, you'll catch her painting, making pottery, or reading *Harry Potter*.

DaShaunae Jackson's passion for photography was born in high school when she joined the school's yearbook. She studied graphic design at Kent State University. Her interest has since returned to photography and she uses the same principles of design to create her photographs. She is currently enrolled in the photography program at Cuyahoga Community College. Portraiture, fashion and street photography warms her heart the most. DaShaunae will continue her career in photojournalism.

Desaraye Johnson is from Strongsville and is pursuing an Associate of Arts degree. Her interests include painting, sketching, and writing poetry and short stories in her free time. She plans to attend Cleveland State University to study and obtain her degree in film making and acting. She believes that art is real when shared and is a great way to connect with other people on a much deeper level.

Robert Kovatich's photographic journey began with film in the darkroom and is now focused on digital photography and fine art giclee printing. His passion for the natural landscape has taken him throughout Ohio, the U.S. National Parks system, and outside the U.S.

Hannah Lovejoy is in her third semester at Tri-C. She wants to be a high school English teacher because she loves literature. She started writing poetry about four years ago and has never stopped creating. She recently started writing short stories and now, even a full length novel. She loves the expression people can show through their writing.

Chris Lozano refers to himself as an average person with extraordinary dreams. A sophomore in college, Chris isn't completely sure what he wants to do when he graduates, but he believes everything will work itself out. "Love takes care of us if we trust it, and let it," he says.

Daniel McPolin has had two poems published previously: one in *Who's Who in Poetry* 2012 and one in Sonoma State University's *Zaum*. He has an associate's degree from Tri-C.

DeLisha McMiller is currently in her first semester at Tri-C. She is twenty years old and loves writing, playing with her dog and cat, and hanging out with family and friends. She runs track for Tri-C and graduated from Streetsboro High School.

Caryn Mills is a retired veterinarian and high school biology teacher who enjoyed taking Daniel Levin's Photo 1 and Photo 2 courses through Tri-C's Program 60. She is particularly interested in shooting photographs of animals and plants, and especially enjoys macrophotography, which exposes amazing structures unseen by the naked eye.

Emily Mocadlo is in her second year at Tri-C and is preparing to graduate in May of 2018 with her Associate's degree in Liberal Arts. Emily plans on attending Cleveland State University to continue her education towards her Bachelor's and Master's in English Literature. She hopes to become an English teacher and a published fiction writer. Currently employed at her local library, Emily is eagerly learning new techniques and gathering unique inspirations for her writing.

Kristine Noll is a Greater Cleveland native, former educator and photographer. She hopes to combine her love for educating and passion for photography to create positive change in her community and beyond. Kristine volunteers with various local organizations and is pursuing documentary photo projects to highlight the wonderful work being done in our great city to ensure a prosperous future.

Terri J. Patton is a writer, musician, painter, and former student at Tri-C. Born in Ohio, Terri was a long-time resident of Los Angeles, CA. She travels the U.S. and abroad to satisfy her curiosity for life. Presently, Terri lives in Cleveland and is the assistant/coordinator at Gallery East, Tri-C Eastern Campus' art gallery.

Indya Powell is a journalism major who loves to write about everything around her. She is most inspired by life's journeys. After Indya graduated from Tri-C, she transferred to Cleveland State University and will graduate with her bachelor's degree in promotional communication in May 2018. When taking a break from writing, she enjoys reading, cooking, and spending time with loved ones.

Dayvon Rose is currently a student at Tri-C who loves to write plays when he is not on stage. Thanks to his loved ones, he has learned to be more open with himself and will always remember this quote: "Life is too short not to say the important things to the important people."

Breakwall is a jump start to **Zion Sullivan's** success as a writer. He sees it as an opportunity to get out of his box, and take advantage of what is in front of him while he has it. He hopes that his work sparks something in other people, but also more within himself.

Matthew Whiteside is an experienced, well-rounded artist dedicated but not limited to photography. His many ways of conveying ideas mostly consist of fashion and editorial styled work. Throughout his years of photography he has been able to shoot much more than portraits: he has shot shows, sports and conceptual still life photos.

A Tri-C graduate, **Raquel Wilbon** will earn her Bachelor's degree from Cleveland State in May 2018.

Kaitlin Willi is currently a junior at Westlake High School participating in CCP. She is a member of Phi Theta Kappa and the honors program at Tri-C and plans to study mechanical engineering after graduation. She enjoys travel and taking pictures of the places she goes.

ABOUT THE COMMITTEE

Jim Pojman has lived overseas for 22 years. During that time he developed an interest in environmental portrait photography as a way to document life outside of the U.S. Since returning to the States four years ago, he has explored photography as a medium to investigate social and political topics.

Originally from Ohio, **Michael Thomas** brought his scholastic career to Cuyahoga Community College this year and is going to Cleveland State University next year. A writer, Creative Writing major, and journalist, Michael is a lover of all things literary.

SUBMISSIONS

BREAKWALL 2018-2019 CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS (LITERATURE)

Breakwall is Cuyahoga Community College's creative and literary arts publication. This publication is a high quality, easily accessible creative outlet for students to showcase their talents in the arts (poetry, fiction, drama, essays, feature articles, photography, graphic art). All Tri-C students, current and former, are encouraged to submit.

Each contributor may submit up to three pieces, in any combination of genres:
 Prose/Drama/Feature Articles: 3,000 words maximum per piece; one-act plays are appropriate for the size constraints of the publication. Please double-space submissions.
 Poetry: 1,000 words maximum per piece; please submit in the page layout you intend.
 Photography: Only black and white submissions will be accepted. Please save as .jpg file (quality of 8) with a resolution of 300 ppi. The image size must be 11" as its highest or widest dimension. Save each photograph as "Last_First_number_email address.jpg"

All pieces must be submitted in electronic format. Save all text files as .rtf, .doc, or .docx and all visual images as .jpg files on a flash drive or CD-ROM. The drive/CD must contain all submissions plus a 50-word biography of the contributor, written in third-person point

of view. Submissions will also be accepted through e-mail.

Only submissions that are complete and follow all guidelines will be forwarded to the selection committee. Selected works reflect the aesthetic judgment of the selection committee and no work is guaranteed publication.

Please double-check for grammatical and typographical errors prior to submitting your work. The editors are not responsible for publishing errors contained in submitted items.

The editors use a blind submissions process. Therefore, do not include your name on the submitted entries-include it only on the Submission Form where you list the title(s) of your work(s) and your contact information. In early spring 2019, selected contributors will be notified of the intent to publish their work(s). Anticipated publication date is summer 2019.

SUBMISSION DEADLINE: FRIDAY, MARCH 8, 2019

You may submit your drive/CD in one of two ways:

Mail/in person:

Breakwall, c/o Lindsay Milam
 MLA 223-S
 2900 Community College Avenue
 Cleveland, OH 44115

Via email:

Lindsay.Milam@tri-c.edu

If you have any questions, please contact Lindsay Milam at Lindsay.Milam@tri-c.edu or at 216.987.4544.

BREAKWALL 2018-2019

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS (PHOTOGRAPHY)

Breakwall is Cuyahoga Community College's creative and literary arts publication. This publication is a high quality, easily accessible creative outlet for students to showcase their talents in the arts (poetry, fiction, drama, essays, feature articles, photography, graphic art). All Tri-C students, current and former, are encouraged to submit.

Photography: Only black and white submissions will be accepted.

Save as a .jpg file format with a quality of [9 Photoshop or 90 Lightroom] with a resolution of 300 ppi. Image size must be 11" as its longest dimension.

All pieces must be submitted in electronic format. If your photograph is selected, you will be required to write a 50-word biography of the contributor, written in third-person point of view.

Only submissions that are complete and follow all guidelines will be forwarded to the selection committee.

Selected works reflect the aesthetic judgment of the selection committee and no work is guaranteed publication.

Double-check for grammatical and typographical errors prior to submitting your biography.

The editors use a blind submissions process. Your files will be renamed before they are shown to the jurors. In early spring 2017, selected contributors will be notified of the intent to publish their work(s).

Applications can be found in the **Class Folder** on the Metro and West servers, but must be submitted to the Breakwall folders in the **Student Drop** servers

Folder Naming: **Last_First_Breakwall**

File Naming: **Last_First_1_email address.jpg Last_First_2_email address.jpg Last_First_3_email address.jpg**

All 3 files and your application must be placed in your folder. Take a high res photo of your completed application or fill it out electronically. (Smart phone camera image is adequate)

Submission Form Naming: **Last_First_BreakwallForm**

The Breakwall form may be filled out submitted electronically or can be photographed or scanned once it is signed.

Submission Deadline: Friday, March 9, 2018. Only applications that arrive by the due date will be accepted. Submit your personal folder via:

Western Campus and Metro Campus: In the **_Breakwall Folder** found in the Student Drop server

Eastern Campus: In the **Breakwall Folder** found in the Student Drop server in the **Breakwall MacWork** Dropserver

Questions? Contact Steven Mastroianni via email: steven.mastroianni@tri-c.edu

BREAKWALL 2018-2019

CALL FOR SUBMISSIONS (LITERATURE)

(Only page 2 should be turned in.)

Contact Information:

Name	
Mailing Address, City, State & Zip Code	_____ _____
Phone#	
Email	
Which Tri-C campus do you attend?	<input type="checkbox"/> Metro Campus <input type="checkbox"/> West Campus <input type="checkbox"/> East Campus <input type="checkbox"/> Westshore/CC Campus

File Name: Instructions on Call for Submissions form	Genre
Submission 1	Photography
Submission 2	Photography
Submission 3	Photography

Biography:

If a photograph of yours is selected, you will be required to write a fifty word autobiography written in a third-person point of view. This biography will be featured on the Contributor section of the issue. If you do not include a biography and your work(s) are accepted, your name will not be listed on the Contributor list.

Statement of Original Work:

I hereby state that all works submitted are my own and previously unpublished. I grant the editorial committee permission to use my works for publication and promotion of *Breakwall*, which may include publication on the future *Breakwall* website.

Contributor Signature REQUIRED

Contributor Print Name REQUIRED

PHONE# REQUIRED

DATE REQUIRED

BREAKWALL VOL. 9 • CONTRIBUTORS

SEAN ANDALCIO
BLAIR AUSTIN
SAVION BARNES
DEVANTE BENNETT-LEE
DANIELA CACHO
JANELLI CEDENO
JEZIEL CHAVEZ
TOM CRANE
MELISSA CRISAN
SHAKITHA DAY
JOANNE FERRONE
THALIA ARIAS GONZALEZ
REBECCA GROTH
COURTNEY HATCHER
DASHAUNAE JACKSON
DESARAYE JOHNSON
ROBERT KOVATICH
HANNAH LOVEJOY
CHRIS LOZANO
DANIEL MCPOLIN
DELISHA MCMILLER
CARYN MILLS
EMILY MOCADLO
KRISTINE NOLL
TERRI PATTON
INDYA POWELL
DAYVON ROSE
ZION SULLIVAN
RAQUEL WILBON
MATTHEW WHITESIDE
KAITLIN WILLI