



Pecan Grove Review

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Poetry

What the thieves left behind

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Four days later, Dad's stolen truck is found in Burnet
wrecked beyond against a cell phone tower, smashed and beaten.
The insurance man gave Dad a white trash bag with its *recovered*
contents.

Well, we recognized cheap black sunglasses,
blue jumper cables, HEB receipts, yellow Mardi Gras beads;
a nylon spider web, the silk rosary Mom bought in Mexico,
our wrinkled Texas map, two batteries (but no flashlight),
a torn blue envelope with scribbled directions to Tío Ito's farm.

But who owned the trash from Taco Bell,
those Mario Brothers' boxer shorts,
the kid's Pokeman t-shirt,
the new package of red toothbrushes or the Cowboys towel?
Who was reading the book called *Vampire Diaries*?
Or wearing only one red sock?
Or forgets a bag of birdseed?
Or the clown mask?

What the thieves left behind
Dad shoved deep into our backyard trash can.

We snuck out later, and claimed one thing back.

Brainwashed in the Helmand

Christopher Rodriguez

I am walking through sandy gritty streets of torment
Smelling burnt trash, smelling burnt flesh,
Hearing the crackling of mortars, hearing the blast of explosions.
I understand the large hearts of heroes, the courage of present times
How does one stay alive in such a gruesome battlefield where we are
soon to be engaged?
Halting, kneeling on one knee

Looking down on my rifle
My rifle is what keeps me alive
She will always keep me alive

I must hold her, clean her, fire her
My breath is my rifle's barrel
My freedom is my bullets
Target in range
The cries and curses and roar...the plaudits for well-aimed shots,
2 actual, 2 actual.... this is whiskey bravo, over
Whiskey bravo, go ahead

Sir, my rifle is human, just as I, because it is what gives me life in all my
battle rattle.

-Under the grey Weather-

Carmen Ruby Morales

Tiny drops
Sweep through the morning glaze
And a coolness shudders down my spine.
The breeze slaps my exposed cheeks
Then, a burning sensation lingers.
A masculine wail constructs the foundation
Of a sequence of lightning bolts
Groggily gazing through the morning grey
Exploring and Exposing
The movement of clouds.
Puddles on the ground
Testify to the chaos in the sky.

Final Mass

Katia Reguero-Inserni

Heaving

Trembling.

My violin shook under my chin,
the notes of Ave María blurring before my eyes.

But muscle memory remained intact
due to all of the times I had played it for her.

Once more, the bow crossed the strings, but this time
Abuela was not there to hear me.

In Your Art We Trust

Marla Yañez

Like a thick and humid mist,
you swept through your father's nerves,
and built a storm inside his veins.

Your headaches turned into art,
and your art became religion.

Words don't falter your imagination,
words don't downgrade your beliefs,
words don't stand in the way of your story.

Devoted and in love you brought yourself up from the dark.
You knew who you were before anyone else did.
Long hours with no sleep
you hardly had any time to eat.

Your art never faded with the envy of others
because God held your hand through the storm.
He kept your hands safe,
and just like the stained glass windows you painted,
your work and faith stood strong for years to come.
A foundation of your belief in God.
In your art we trust.

The Nowhere Where We Are Found

Stephen Calogero

*Beyond this silence
we shall not be here to find [heaven].
And that, my friend
is a great joy.*

— *David Whyte*

but then where shall we be?

to say that we will be nowhere

is of course equally true

although this does not mean

we will not be

since being nowhere

is the suffering of being

and why shall we not find it?

is this because

there is nothing to be found, or

perhaps it is not our place to find it?

and what is it but

the nowhere where we are found

saved from waiting here for it?

If You Ask Me

Mishell Toledo

If you ask me about my family,
I will start by telling you about my mother
Chestnut brown eyes that radiate when she laughs
The chaos her hair carries when it dances in the wind.
Her gentle hands that mended my shattered thirteen-year-old heart.
I can tell you the sun envies her, because the love she emanates
lights every room she enters.
My lioness mother, protector of her cubs.

If you ask me about my siblings,
I will tell you about my free-spirited older sister
who, upon high school graduation,
road tripped to Mexico without notifying our mom.
My adamant little sister
who selflessly gives her love to injured creatures.
My benevolent little brother
who never lets me leave home without a hug goodbye.

But if you ask me about my father,
I wish I could tell you he is a drunk or an addict
who is figuring himself out
Because then I could tell you, “He is doing his best to get clean or sober”
and explain that he is genuinely a good-hearted man.
Unfortunately, that is not my dad.
I wish I could tell you he walked out when I was only three
and that he’s never been a part of my life.
Unfortunately, that is not my dad.
My dad has lived in our house my entire life
yet has never once remembered my birthday.
Eighteen heinous years
living behind his prideful shadow.
A “man” who didn’t pause to think twice
about extruding his “family” from their house.

If you ask me about my family,
I will tell you, they are more than I could hope for.
But if you ask me about my father,
I will tell you,
He no longer occupies my thoughts
But once to simply say,
I hope when he is lonesome at the age of 92,
he doesn't sit in desolation
pondering about all the things he didn't do.

She Gathers Colors

Diane Gonzales Bertrand

Metal hangers scrape across
the plastic bar of her mother's closet,

a lonely scavenger hunt
for pants
the blue of ocean waves,

the favorite blouse
reminiscent of sunrise
in a distant morning sky,

the "pink like cotton candy" scarf

bought *last* Mother's Day.

The day after her mother dies,
she gathers colors,
for the final trip in black enamel.

Sign Language

Luke Neftali Villafranca

I see signs everywhere
I see signs in the wonders
Of your hands
The rivers of your veins
The mountains of your knuckles
The peaks and valleys of your fingers
Speak to me
Lead me back to God
Tell me all the words I need to know
Without a sound

Smarter Than Eve

Marissa Ceballos

Boys will be boys,

is what I was made to believe.

He was just being a “boy,”

when he slithered underneath my desk and in between my knees

He was just being a “boy,”

when he put his scaly hand on my calf slowly inching its way north

He was just being a “boy,”

when he extended his slimy head underneath my khaki skirt

In a school room where we learned of Adam and Eve,

he tried to steal my fruit.

I was just being a girl,

when I extended my foot, and squashed him to keep him from slithering farther.

Though he called me the serpent,

I was just being a girl who knew how to use an apple as a weapon

Springtime

Megan Grace Escalante

I hope the thought of me
is like springtime in your mind,
where you look around
and see flowers blooming
where they haven't
in a long,
long time.

I'll warm right up when you
aren't looking
until suddenly you're
bathed in sunshine.
Like Spring,
I want to grow on you in the subtlest
of ways.

Joe Pau

Stephen Calogero

he was eighty
when i met him

he had been an orphan

he lived in the senior
high-rise three blocks north

he loved company
his eyes sparkled
his generous laugh
toothless and soft

he asked if i could
get him a job
he liked to go out for a beer
we found him a lady-friend
visited him in the hospital
endured the nursing home that he hated
(but how he beamed on Saturdays,
showing us off to everyone
who had no one coming
to take them to breakfast.)

i saw him return to his high-rise
where everything came into focus
when we called for the paramedics
and i ran the three blocks to find him
laughing...

laughing even then,
with the fire fighters
with those rubber boots, helmets,
and useless axes,

laughing naturally, easily
what else?

it was his heart

When a year later
I wept at his grave
I knew it was Joe
teaching me to let go,
teaching me to delight.

Ode on a Coffee Pot

Robert Boyd Skipper

Alarms when snoozed are sweet, but those unsnoozed
 Are sweeter: therefore, ye soft harp, strum on.
That robin at my window: so enthused—
 So damned enthused two hours before the dawn!
I cotton up my ears. With hope forlorn
 I press the snooze. Again. And then again:
 Come back, fugacious nymphs in sylvan glade!
But birdie chirps his paean at the morn,
 Soon joined by distant barks and bangy din:
 The fanfare of a garbage truck parade.

Could I but drowse, adrift and insensate,
 Oblivious to cold (and skunk) and keep
My itchy nose subdued and sublimate
 The urge to pee and—oh to hell with sleep.
Turn off the gentle, musical alarm,
 ”Just not the light! Not yet the light,” I mumble
 As I survey my graying domicile.
Unfurl me from my blankets, soft and warm;
 From pillows, warm and soft, I sleepy-stumble
 To carpet, creaking wood, and icy tile.

I stare into the dark abysmal shelf
 And ask the deepest question man can ask:
“Why am I here? Where do I find my self?
 Oh what my purpose? What my slumbrous task?”
Aha! A simple tin, severe and old.
 By twisting off the lid of polished wood,
 I loose the luscious scent of coffee, ground
And fragrant. Sweet arabica, sweet prelude!
 One scoop, no more the filter mesh can hold.
 I close the latch and click it firmly down.

Thou still unravish'd bride of wakefulness!
 How black thou art, how small thy sacral pot.
Thy cord is scarce two feet, but nonetheless
 The nectar thou dispensest hits the spot.
For full two minutes keep my soul in thrall,
 Brew on, ye Procter Silex Single Serve,
 Decoct that java, slowly oh so slow.
And while I wait I once again observe,
"Coffee is life, life coffee,—that is all
 I know right now, and all I need to know."

The Departure

Mia Diaz

Her little black tap shoes scurried across the tiled floor.
The door began to open, she hurled her weight towards the door.
But this time, Daddy didn't catch her, or twirl her around.
He barely even looked at her, he barely made a sound.

"Daddy! Daddy! What about my hug? What about my kiss?"
No acknowledgement, no regard, she was dismissed.
Daddy walked towards Mommy and Mommy gave Daddy a glare.
Daddy froze, Baby Girl grabbed his leg, they headed up the stairs.

Daddy walked into his room, he pulled out his suitcase.
Clinging to his hip, Baby Girl begged, "Daddy! Let's play! Let's race!"
"Not now Baby Girl," Daddy said. "Maybe in a while."
Daddy usually did anything to make his girl smile.

Daddy swung his suitcase up, onto the bed.
Her giggles filled the room, his shirt landed on her head.
"Where are you going daddy? Are mommy and me coming with you?"
"Can we go to the lake or the beach? I know! You can take me to the zoo!"

It didn't take long before his suitcase was full.
"Let's rodeo, Daddy! I'm the cowgirl, you be the bull!"
Baby Girl continued jumping, "Daddy let's play."
"I can't." he said to her, "Daddy can't stay."

Daddy headed down the stairs, holdin onto Baby girl with all his might.
When they reached the door, Daddy said, "It's time to say goodnight."
"When are you coming home Daddy?" she asked, following him outside.

Daddy put his suitcase in the truck then turned, "I don't know," he sighed.

Mommy kept yelling about money to Daddy. It was a noisy, ugly fight.
Baby Girl had a good idea to make everything alright.
She ran back inside, to grab something from her room.
As she returned, Mommy yelled "I'll see you in the courtroom!"

Baby Girl ran up to daddy and lifted her pink piggy bank.
They stopped yelling, looked at each other, then their hearts sank.
"Here Daddy, take Piggy," she begged. "Daddy, you can stay!"
She looked at Mommy. She looked at Daddy. Neither knew what to say.

"Take Piggy back inside," said Mommy. "Save it for another day."
Baby girl saw tears in Daddy's eyes as he got in his truck and drove
away.

Jogging with the Fairies

Stephen Calogero

Thump, thump, thump...
my jostling bounce of long slackened muscles
laboring to hold my ground, slipping.
I'm 40 now.

Then the butterflies come,
hundreds of them fluttering on the breeze,
aloft on buttery wings,
their presence reminding me,
a determined rationalist,
that I don't know what butterflies really are.
They could be fairies out to say hello.

Every morning when I carry my Sarah
from her crib to her changing table,
she reaches out for her wooden fairy,
suspended from the light string,
her bright golden wings and impish smile
beckoning us to play, forgetting our routine.

We pause just long enough for
Sarah to touch her hello and feel
her wonder at fairies, their impish
goodness, the same goodness I want for her,
the kind of love that plays
and has enough sense to break the routine.

Yes, my impish daughter,
still safe for the fairies, watchful fairies,
playfully loving her as I do.

These fairy borne thoughts bring a smile,
as I jog my wooden jostle, my thump, thump,

still aloft, suspended from a string,
laboring to slow my schedule long enough
to help my daughter fly her fairy flight.

Masterpiece

Mishell Toledo

Your knuckles cast in shades of black and blue
as you painted your anger across my face

Marking my body with violent strokes of violet
Your final touches of victim and shame
I, your masterpiece.

Fiction

Killer Leanings

Alex Z. Salinas

I'm driven to Death in strange ways.

Oh, I limit my drinks; I count calories; I exercise daily; I smoke only on the Fourth of July; I believe in Heaven; I help a brother when he's down. But I also walk against traffic; I don't wear my seatbelt; I've stood outside in thunderstorms; I hold packages close to my chest, cut the tape in the direction of my heart; I press my weight against upper-story railings.

It's a statistical anomaly, a miracle, that I'm here. That any of us are. We fight against it daily, wanting—always—to be somewhere else.

Las Cochinas Christmas

First Act

Irene Chavez

The Characters:

Frankie

Francesca “Frankie” Garcia is a self-proclaimed nerd and is still getting over her break up with Ozzie, her high school sweetheart. She is returning home to San Antonio from college in Dallas.

Gina

Outspoken and flirtatious, she is attending University of Texas at Austin. She’s an only child, raised by her grandmother who considers Frankie and Mari sisters.

Mari

Mari is the main caretaker of her mother, Dona Carmen. She has an older brother, Memo. While she loves Frankie and Mari, she feels a little resentful that she stayed behind to care for her mom. She’s also been conflicted about telling the girls that she is a lesbian.

Memo

Mari’s elder brother attends college in Chicago. He works and sends money back home. He’s just broken up with a long-time girlfriend “La Gloria”. He’s a little arrogant and boastful. He has known Frankie and Gina since they were little girls and serves as a big brother for them.

Ozzie

Frankie’s Ex-boyfriend who grew up with the girls. He’s a soft spoken guy with little backbone.

Scene I: Reunion

A living room with adjoining kitchen in a small house in the barrio.

Time

It is Christmas Break 1994 in San Antonio, Texas. It is evening. Frankie and Gina are coming home from their first semester in college to

celebrate the holiday and meet up with their best friend, Mari.

Opening Scene

Selena's "Amor Prohibido" starts to play. Mari comes into the living room with pan dulce, places it in a bowl and begins to dance around a bit, doing her best Selena impression. She starts straightening up the living room. An immediate knock at the door comes. Frankie and Gina appear in the doorway.

Mari: Hola, cochinas!

The girls walk through the door and hug Mari. Gina recognizes the music and dances in. Frankie is carrying a bag of groceries.

Mari turns off the stereo as Frankie places the groceries on the table. Gina walks over to the dining room table.

Mari: What's with the groceries?

Frankie: Mom asked me to bring you all something for Noche Buena. She'll be coming out late from the hospital but wanted to help.

Mari: How is Sylvia?

Frankie: Mom's good. She's still working in the ICU. Y Dona Carmen?

Mari: Some days are better than others. She's been stable. Since the stroke, she just needs a lot more care. Memo sends money when they can. Memo is on his way from Chicago.

Gina: Is he still with La Gloria? (gestures "big boobs")

Mari: No, he told Mami that they broke up. She's dating some pendejo from St. Mary's.

Gina: Really? So you're saying there's a chance? Hook a sister up!

Mari: I wouldn't curse my worst enemy with Memo! Some people are more trouble than they are worth. Speaking of which, (glancing at Frankie) I ran into Luz at the store. She told me that Ozzie is getting

married.

Silence – Frankie looks like she got punched in the gut and sits down.

Frankie: Oh...wow. (pauses) Is Maggie pregnant?

Gina: Why else does anyone get married?

Frankie crosses her arms, still trying to process the news.

Mari: Luz didn't say. She did ask about you and I said you were coming back home and that you were good. (Pauses) Has Ozzie reached out to you?

Frankie: Not since the summer.

Mari: I'm sorry, manita. (Reaches for her hand and holds it)

Frankie looks up and smiles at them both.

Frankie: It's ok... I'm fine. It's not like I didn't know. (pauses) I just didn't expect him to get married so fast. You know once, we were watching the Pretty in Pink and he compared Maggie to Molly Ringwald. That's when I knew he was in love with her. The porcelain skin and red hair. That's always been his ideal. I just thought maybe, since we'd grown up together and lost our virginity to each other, well...that it meant something.

Mari: Fuck Molly Ringwald and that pendejo! He didn't deserve you. If you need a guy, just come to Austin and I'll show you around.

Mari: So you're having a good time up there huh, Gina?

Gina: Girl, you know I don't waste time. I see what I want and I go right after it. And you know what I found out? The uglier the guy, the bigger the dick.

Frankie: (laughs, covering her mouth) Damn, Gina!

Gina: What? It's true. I was talking to this handsome pre-law guy and he has this ugly best friend, right? They are both from the Valley. Turns out

the handsome one likes to talk a big game. He's a great kisser but in the end (makes a gesture with her hand)...a roll of quarters. All he's only good at eating...

Frankie: Wait...you had sex with both of them?

Gina: No, but I always check out the merchandise (raising an eyebrow).

Mari: Ok, so the second guy?

Gina: Kinda boring but he sweet. He comes back to my dorm, and we start making out. Then he gets all nervous and says he's never done it. (pauses) Ever.

Mari: No shit! A virgin from the Valley? No lo creo!

Gina: And you know how much I like virgins. So, I tell him that's ok, we'll take it slow, we don't have to do anything you don't want to do... blah blah. And then boom! (Gestures with her hand which thumps on the table) he pulls it out.

Frankie: I don't know how you do it. I just can't jump into sex like that. I'm not going to the party tomorrow night (moans and put her head down on the table).

Mari: Pinche Ozzie.

Gina grabs the bowl of pan dulce.

Gina: Who knows? He may not even show up. Besides, you are supposed to be with us.

Mari: Actually, I may be bringing someone. (Smirks bashfully).

Gina: What??? Ahhh...you've done something!

Frankie raises her head.

Frankie: Holy shit? Who is it?

Mari: I've been meaning to tell someone for like a month but (pauses) it's complicated.

Gina: Complicated que nada. Spill it, woman!

Mari: (sighs) I was taking mami to the clinic and we literally ran into each other in the elevator every Wednesday for like a month.

Gina: Hump day...nice!

Frankie hits her on the side.

Mari: Anyways, we met up for lunch, then the movies and then it started getting serious. I've never felt this way about anyone.

Gina: And so.... what happened?

Mari: Well, then I got up the nerve to kiss her.

Silence with mouths opened

Gina: What? (shocked laughter) A girl? You kissed a girl?

Frankie: Holy shit! This makes so much sense.

Mari blushes and smiles.

Mari: Yes, I kissed her and it was great! Her name is Jennifer and she's amazing. I can't wait for you all to meet her tomorrow night.

Gina: Wait, wait. So you are saying you don't like churros? (Holding up a churro from the pan dulce bag) Because churros are delicious!

Mari: Actually, no. I realized that I'd rather have an empanada.

Frankie: Wow. You know what? That's great. I'm really happy for you.
Gina: Cool, I have a lesbian friend now. My circle is complete. (hand gesture mimicking a circle)

Mari: I haven't told Mami yet but Memo knows. I think I've just been scared.

Frankie: We kinda knew, but we didn't. Love is love. And we love you...

The girls join together.

Gina: That's right, we love you...but not like that! Cochina! (hits her on the shoulder)

Mari: Cabronas!

Group hugs.

Gina: Oh my God, it's good to be back with you bitches! If I have to hear one more Tia ask a stupid question, I'll go nuts. (In a condescending tone) "Ay Mija, who are dating? You know, the good ones go fast."

Frankie grabs a veil from the couch.

Frankie: Ay, mija..did you know Janie's daughter just got engaged?

Gina: Yes, but did you know that Janie's daughter is also 3 months pregnant?

Frankie to Gina: I just want you to be happy and fat like me!

Girls laugh.

Mari: Mijita, I'd hate for you to be alone like me.

Frankie to Mari: Oye! Men don't like it if you are smarter than them. Don't use so many big words.

Mari to Gina: Remember, don't be too independent or strong!

Gina to Frankie: And please, for God's sake, don't eat too much in front of them! Unless it's churros. (takes a bite)

Memo opens the door and walks in with a suitcase.

Memo: Well, well...the gang's all here.

Mari: (Rushing to the door) Memo!

Memo drops his luggage and hugs his sister.

Gina pulls a compact from her purses and quickly applies lipstick.

Memo: Is Mami awake?

Mari: No, she's out but she wanted me to wake her when you got here.

Memo: No, no...let her rest. I'll sleep in the chair in her room. (Pauses)

Gina: Chicago looks good on you, Memo.

Memo: (smiling) Hello, Gina. Frankie. (Sees the pan dulce and with relief) Oh, thank God. (Takes the empanada from the bowl.) I've been dreaming of these damn things for days.

Memo begins to eat the empanada.

Frankie and Mari begin snickering.

Gina watches on adoringly.

Memo: What? (mouthful of food).

Mari: Welcome home.

End of Scene I

How to Deal with the Cold, Blue Monster

Amanda Bustos

With a touch, he makes salty water appear in your eyes. He hides under your bed, and enchants you, making you want to stay in bed for a day maybe two, a whole month perhaps two. He bites, tears and cuts your legs and wrists if your feet touch the ground; if you are ready to leave your bed. He is a motionless shadow who supports you every second of the day. He kisses your forehead before lunch, in class, and every other waking moment. He holds you, caresses you, comforts you when you play *The Smiths*. He loves you most when you blow fifteen candles, and a volcanic zit decorates your chin. He makes appearances when you least expect him; He has made appearances all your life. He was there when your grandma's skin finished wrinkling and perished. He was there when your fish swirled in the toilet, and the dog stopped barking. He is your loyal servant, holds your hand day and night.

When your pits begin to stink and your body learns to bleed, he touches your face softly with his cold, blue palm and says, "I know you're really tired, just sleep," and suddenly, your eyelids are stronger than your will to stay awake. On the sunniest of days, look to your left and you will find him putting sunscreen on, as you are ashamed to take off your blouse before you dive in the pool. On rainy days, he wears no cloak; He runs naked around your ceiling, races back and forth from the corridor. He will brush your hair and braid your throat, for no reason at all. His pot boils, head spins like an owl, and his nose shouts in fumes when you arrange a sleepover and try to make new friends. "You don't need any more friends! You have me," he will say.

Sometimes, you tiptoe around the house and whisper because you do not want him near. There are days you will think he vanished and found another friend, but he hears it all. Then days later, while you shower or before you sleep, he creeps under your bed and kicks the bottom of the mattress, "You shouldn't have left me, now you will really know I'm still here." He is under the bed, in the closet, the shower, the gym, left, right, in the dirt and the sky and the clouds. "Woah, did you do something to your hair? You look taller, stronger," you say when you see him next. Then one day, you will learn to love him and he will learn to loosen his grip around your neck. Like a tick, leach, and flea, he will feed from your

blood with his octopus arms. He will drag you underwater, and all sounds will be muffled. He will keep hugging you, eating your favorite cereal, swimming in the salty waters of your eyes, but then alas, you will feel no pain. You will taste no ice cream, or feel any rain.

And on the day you're craving sunshine, or the bright reds of flowers, you will remember you're growing very tired. Very, very tired. You will be so tired of feeling tired that perhaps you'll write it down, just in case you get so tired you forget why you were tired. And as the ink pours on the paper, as your hand glides quicker than your pulse, he will lose an arm, his nose, a leg then two. And when he shrinks in your hand, you will learn to see around you, for the first time since fifteen. And you will see the monsters crawling on the backs of everyone around you; some so tiny they keep them in their pockets, and others so big they have to be dragged. And if you keep writing, find someone to tell. And you will not be ashamed, because whoever you are telling, has a little monster as well. Keep him well-groomed and don't feed him too much. He can fit in a small cage beside you, never inside you. His tricks, dust, and spells will not shatter you like a porcelain doll at the slightest wind. Then one day you will know when he is not around, because flowers will smell nice again, and you will not feel underwater. And maybe, just maybe, leaving bed and smiling won't feel too much trouble.

Trip

Luke Neftali Villafranca

I remember the night I went crazy. Or had a nervous breakdown. Experienced psychosis. Whatever. I swear something was outside my apartment door. I made the sign of the cross and took a deep breath before I rushed out the door to my car. I swear something followed me as I drove. The radio told me what to do with a country song about airplanes.

I turned on my emergency lights and honked the horn. Other vehicles on the highway switched lanes. I swear each driver had no face. I had to piss, so I pissed my pants. I took the exit for the airport. I left my car in the drop-off lane.

I took my backpack out of the trunk. I took my driver's license, debit card, and cash out of my wallet. Then I threw the wallet in the airport trash. I wandered into the United States Office for help with buying a ticket somewhere, anywhere - maybe New York City or Peru. When the guards on duty questioned me, I must have given the wrong answers. A guard told me to stand against the wall, not to move. Another guard led me to the bathroom, told me to use it. I closed my eyes while I stood, pissed into a toilet this time, and thought my life could end at any second. I imagined a bullet from the guard's gun going clean through the back of my skull and exiting out of the center of my forehead. Somewhere along the way, I must have missed a sign or two, taken the wrong turn. I waited for the bang, for bullet to meet bone.

But all that happened was a ride home with my brother.

"Why didn't you call me, dude? You should have just called me," he said.

"I'm sorry, man."

You know the cops almost didn't let me take you? They said I had old warrants for speeding. Ain't that crazy," he said. "You're going to stay with me and Lauren, tonight. Everything's going to be all right."

Everything wasn't all right. I had lost my job. Actually, I had quit. Everyone was always telling me to wait, give decisions time. I wanted to leave their home that night to find a new job - bartending, waiting tables, anything. But my brother and his girlfriend asked me to wait. I asked how long. I looked at the clocks. The clocks weren't moving. I lost it. I

picked up the wooden chair I'd been using, slammed it to pieces against the floor. I grabbed the coffee pot on the stove. I shattered glass with it. Lauren screamed at me. Dogs began to bark. My brother followed me out the door, begged me to calm down. Someone had called the police.

I'd never been handcuffed before, felt cold metal clamped tight around my wrists. "If you refuse to be taken to the hospital, we'll have to take you to jail," said the policeman. What would you do?

At the hospital, nurses gave me a gown, drew blood, made me wait in a bed with curtains drawn around me. I kept asking the nurse on duty if I could use the bathroom. The nurse said I didn't have to keep asking for permission, said I could just go. So I went. Pissed in the bed. Another brilliant move.

"I'm sorry," I said to the nurse.

"What happened? Did you have a nightmare?"

I was strapped in a stretcher, wheeled inside an ambulance, and taken to the psych ward of another hospital. I was kept there for twelve days. In the beginning, I misbehaved. I refused to sleep in a room with an acid-addicted roommate. When the staffers said patients could stay in the dining room as long as we wanted, I ate and drank everything I could. When I looked up and saw the security camera in the corner of the ceiling, I pissed in a glass, and I drank that, too. "I'm a soldier," I told myself. "I'm a soldier."

I wrote a list of demands on a napkin stained with orange Cheeto dust. I awoke with a new roommate, a man who didn't speak. The place was full of characters - looney tunes in a looney bin. There was the lady who heard voices and wouldn't anyone change the television in the lounge. There was the guy in the Wonder Woman t-shirt who sang karaoke. There was the Crip who walked up and down the hallway in his blue boxers. He sang a song about cracking somebody's skull while he looked at me. I took off the blue socks I'd been issued. I had to let him know we were enemies. I'm a genius.

I got used to the wrist-cutters and failed suicides, alcoholics and depressed addicts. Together, we played dice games and watched CNN. There was a mass shooting in Las Vegas. Fifty-eight people were killed. A photograph flashed of the shooter. His eyes were closed, and there was no expression, like he didn't have a face.

"You see that? We're all fine! The real crazy people are outside," said the lady with bandages around her wrists.

When I was released, I did the therapy. I swallowed the uppers and gulped down the downers for a few months. But I decided it was all unnecessary. How do I live a sane life without the pills? It's simple.

When I hear something slam against my door at night, I don't leave until morning. I don't turn on the radio. And when I drive to God knows where, I keep my eyes on the road. If you ask me, it was all just one big misunderstanding after another - the night I tried to fly away, my twelve days in the psych ward, all the messages people gave. I'm not schizophrenic. And I refuse to say I'm bi-polar. But I have to go, now. I hear someone at my door.

The Candle

Marissa Ceballos

The sun had fallen on the humid summer night. Aaliyah stood outside her childhood home in the darkness trying to make out shadows of the forest she would soon enter. The distant sounds of the tribal owl could be heard, calling all women to join the ceremony. Aaliyah shifted her weight between her legs, hoping she would have the balance to withstand the ritual. She held out her hand waiting for her mother to place the white ritual candle in her hand.

Aliyah knew very little of what happened at the Women's Ceremony, only that it happened when the Red Mother of Womanhood visited the girls in the tribe. A week after the Red Mother's first visit, the girl was forced into a special ceremony. In this ceremony the women of the tribe stood around the girl while her mother lifted their daughter's sleeve and burned her left breast with a ritual candle. The mark of womanhood, the mark of marriage and childbearing. Both of Aaliyah's sisters had experienced it. Each one she watched leave and have a child, becoming slaves to their families.

Aaliyah never wished to become a woman. She didn't want to have a child, she wanted an opportunity to leave the tribe. This was not the life she had wanted. She dreamed of leaving the tribe to get an education. All her teachers had laughed at her when she told them of her dream, they said she was destined to stay within the tribe. Aaliyah wished to roam the world where people fell in love and chose each other. She didn't want a marriage where she had to learn to fall in love with her husband. She had plan to break away from the world of ceremonies, far from the tribe. However, she knew that as soon as she was marked by her mother, all her dreams would flood away. She knew she was minutes from losing all her dreams. The thought of not having this choice brought tears to the brim of her eyes. She didn't want to cry because the women were going into the forest and she wasn't sure if they could see her, even if she couldn't see them.

As she tried to make out the running shape jumping through the trees, she felt a heavy hand on her shoulder.

"Aliyah, welcome to womanhood. The Red Mother has blessed you with a gift, a gift that you will be reminded of every month until you are

old and ready to be taken by the Earth,” her mother stated.

“Mother I am not ready,” Aaliyah replied trying to see her mother’s comforting face.

“Hush Aaliyah, this is your destiny. The Red Mother makes no mistakes, it is time. All my daughters are to be married and bear children. It’s what your father and I expect of you.”

“But what if I want something else?” she asked lowering her hand, knowing that the moment her mother places the candle in her hand that her dreams will be over.

“Aaliyah, you are becoming a woman of the tribe. please stop whining. What else could you want? This is our land. The land of our ancestors and our future generations. You grandmother, sisters and I have worked to show you a good example of what it is to be a woman of the land.”

“Maybe I don’t want this land. I don’t want to be burned and I don’t want to be a woman of the tribe. Maybe I want to leave and create a life outside the forest.”

“Hush, Aaliyah! I will hear no more of this nonsense. You don’t appreciate the backs that have been broken so you could have these things. You should be more grateful of the things we give you. I believe you will be after tonight,” Her mother replied

“Mother I said don’t want to,” The girl begged

“That’s enough this is your past, present, and future. This is your culture.”

There was a small crack, like the sound of two branches rubbing against another. The sound was replaced with a small fire on match stick. With her free hand, her mother pulled out the ritual candle. The candle was white like a delicate rose that was beginning to wilt. Her mother reached out and grabbed Aaliyah’s hand, placing the candle inside.

“Please,” she begged between small tears.

“No,” the lines of her mother’s forehead scrunched together in determination

Aaliyah looked down at the candle and accepted the fate she was trying to escape. She walked down the path her mother was paving for her towards the forest. The flame before her burned at the aspirations she had beyond the tribe. She could barely remember any of them as she looked at the flame. The distant songs were becoming louder with every step they took. These are the songs of her past. These are the songs of the present. These are the songs of her future.

Aaliyah and her mother walked through the dark forest. She could faintly see the brown decaying bark on the tree from the faint light the candle put out. Her hand felt heavy and her fingers shook around the

wax. With every tree she passed, she felt another dream die. She knew she would be married in the coming months and in a year, she would more than likely become a mother.

As she looked at the flame, she saw it blowing in different directions. This flame was not like her. The flame could go wherever it wished, she was stuck in her tribe. She said goodbye to the corner office in a skyscraper. A place she believed nothing could touch her. She would be so far up in the building; the tribe could not find her.

There was a glowing light become brighter and brighter. Until it revealed to her the women of the tribe surrounding a large bonfire. Each one had their back to her as her mother walked in. Their songs now over, overtaken by silence and the rustle of the leaves. She looked around the circle of long braids and white smocks, looking for an escape but she knew there was none. Her mother blew out her candle and walked her closer to flames.

“Aaliyah, my child, you have been visited by the Red Mother,” Her mother said, “She brings you womanhood, marriage and fertility. Years, our tribe has made her happy and completed all she asks of us. Today we bring you into our circle. I will now ask you to blow out your candle of childhood.”

Aaliyah’s mother sent her a glare and Aaliyah pursed her lips together and blew out her candle, her dreams leaving with her childhood.

“The Red Mother blesses you with a husband, one you are to make happy and care for,” one woman stated as she turned around.

“The Red Mother blesses you with a home, one you should care for as long as you shall live,” another woman stated as she faced Aaliyah

“The Red Mother blesses you with fertility, you shall cultivate our land with children,” Her sister turned and said

“Finally, my daughter the Red Mother blesses you with our culture, you are responsible for living it out in all you do. You are to instruct your children in the ways of our tribe and be responsible for its continued growth. Now that you know what our Mother expects of you, you will now be marked into womanhood,” her mother explained as she walked to the bonfire, relighting the ritual candle.

Aaliyah knees felt weak as her mother walked to her, the fire consuming the wick of the candle. Her mother stood before her and exposed her left breast.

“Aaliyah, you are instructed to keep the words of our culture and the love of the Red Mother forever in your heart. From her breast she fed our families many years ago. Now we continue to feed our young from ours, therefore, I burn you with the responsibility to continue the tradition of

our tribe.”

With this, Aaliyah’s mother held the candle to the top of her daughter’s left breast. A hushed scream left Aaliyah’s mouth as the pain ran through her nerves, pulsing in the spot. The spot of womanhood, the spot of broken dreams.

Djarum Blacks

Amanda Bustos

You brush your cavity-plagued teeth with a brand new bottle of Colgate, but the stains of tar are like oil on a parking lot pavement. The smell of old car tire is your skunk spray, though you use the detergent that owns half of the ads on TV. You stand outside your single-roomed apartment, thinking about the same analogy all of your exes ridiculed: God gave you life through this cigarette. You light the last one of the pack, watching the neighbors from the floor below. They talk about tomorrow being the thirty-first of the month. How will you pay the bills this month, Jerry? Jerry and his not-so-happy wife vanish into apartment forty-five. “This five-dollar investment is taking the best of you,” says Mother every obligatory Christmas you see her. You stink stronger than cat piss, and it transpires to your itchy thrift shop blouse.

You have always believed and recited that we are all born Djarum Blacks. All clove-filled cigarettes with different flavors. Vanilla, cherry, maybe menthol. Behind the gas-station counter, next to the e-cigs, hies your five-dollar weekly investment. You have theorized that we begin as a whole cigarette in God’s hand, and with the shaking of the gold and black cardboard box, He chooses our fate. He lights our first breath and lets us fill his glorious air with the impurity of our contents. When we become “of age,” He hands us our own Djarum Black and says, “Here lies the rest of your days.”

You take the rest of your Djarum Black and inhale this new freedom. Every time your lungs burn and you see the tar leave your mouth, you exhale the pain of the day, the ache of today. The smoke reaches your head:

Dear God, Allah, or whoever, will you forgive me if I toss this cigarette from the second floor onto the parking lot cement? The priest says you never would, but please know this shit causes cancer. I’m petrified of cancer. If the butt is still burning but I need a break and my head is spinning from this fine, foreign tobacco, God will you think ill of me? Will you?

You run inside, shut the door, and run to your bedroom, hoping to leave God outside.

“Vanilla, cherry, or menthol?”

“Tonight I had vanilla, sweetie,” You say as you lay down on your old squeaky bed. Your boyfriend lies face down on the flower patterned mattress. You wish you could shake him and ask if God will forgive you... would you forgive me?

You make your way silently to the bathroom, reach into the cabinet and stare deeply at your chipped red toenails before you defy God. Forty-two sour capsules touch your tongue, and cling to your throat, hanging on to life. They melt and stir your stomach, and mix with the pizza and milk you had for dinner. You lay on the bathroom floor, staring at the mustard color tile that surrounds every inch of the wall. You cannot bear the weight of sin and your cigarette losing flame, so you reach the ceramic rim of the toilet, and touch your tonsils with your finger. You remember you cannot miss tomorrow; it's the thirty first, and you have bills to pay.

Cast and Casket

Glory Turnbull

It was a feverish summer. I was younger then, and it seemed to me that the swell of cicada song would never cease. Each dizzying day was a daze, and each week seemed to pass languidly, the river of time flowing gently in my favor. It was under this illusion of youth that I had ventured to travel with a good friend of mine. I wouldn't dare disgrace the dead, so for his sake, I'll call him 'Floyd' in this recounting.

Floyd was a quiet man, and the son of a preacher, though I never did see a prayer pass his lips until he was certain to be a dead man. That was his deceptive quality, I suppose, and what made him so fiercely enticing. The quietness, that is. In all truth, he was quite reckless despite his demeanor. Violent too, with volatility that leaked out of him from time to time. I dare say I was in love with him, for what it's worth. I don't think he could have ever been in love with me.

Though he never regarded me romantically, we were inseparable as 'friends', and the grotesque intertwining of our lives was as close to fateful as I've seen in all my years. I think of the two of us like two plants potted together, grown of the same soil. I suppose I would be like a vine, then. Wrapping around him, choking him out. My leaves would surely block the sun, and my roots would surely soak up any nutrients before he'd had the chance. Perhaps all I ever did was hurt him, but his insistence that we stay together assured me that he was pure, and worthy of my loving. Only the best people can have unrequited lovers.

It was his brashness that led us out, far, into the desert one early morning. It was my infatuation that facilitated it. He insisted that we go out into the desert, melodramatically, to get away from everyone else. Tell no one. Bring a picnic. Beer. Liquor. Our parents didn't seem to care one way or another. He thought he'd bring a gun, and we'd shoot targets till we couldn't see ten feet in front of us. My cheeks feel cold even now, as I think of what would follow our innocent propositions.

We loaded everything up in his ruby-red, muscular truck, and we sat up in the front seat for a while before leaving. I always felt honored to be his co-pilot. It was strangely cool for a summer morning. He remarked that the sky looked like it was ready to burst, it was so heavy with unborn raindrops. I liked to think of the clouds in that way. His way. I suggested

that we try again another day, perhaps when the weather favored us. He'd said to just let it rain on us if it did. He didn't think that any water would leave the sky. He was right. It didn't rain a drop for over a week.

We drove for a few hours, deeper and deeper into nothingness and nowhere. It was easier than it should have been to get lost on winding roads and dirt paths. We went further, further, and further still, until the soft tan of the sand contrasted the dim sky, becoming two oceans of pure color as they streaked past us. When we were sure to be truly alone, we drove off the road and parked someplace rocky and barren. It was him, and I, and nothing.

We unfolded our dingy lawn chairs, and started day drinking. As we finished our beers, we lined up the vacant cans along the opening of the bed of his truck. He brought out his gun, and told me not to miss, unless I wanted to get him a new truck for his birthday. It reminded me that he'd be turning nineteen in just a month. In less than that, his boyish body would be sent to an early grave. The sound of gunshots echoed into indifference. He may have owned the gun, but I was the better shot by far, and I could tell he was becoming frustrated with my success. His malice was delicious.

The sun had begun to set by the time we'd decided to call it a day, or rather, a night. We took care to gather up our belongings, and pack them all back just as they'd been. He told me to leave all the mutilated cans in a pile. They clanked together as I tossed them into a bag instead, and I hung the bag off the back of his truck. Just like newlyweds, I'd thought. I teased him for his negligence. And just as well as we'd come, we left. Or so it should have been.

Foolish kids that we were, we had forgotten something that should have been at the top of the list.

I lament even now the mind of my younger self. We got a few miles before Floyd noticed the predicament. I remember distinctly the panic that overtook him. He drove faster and faster, not that it helped us any. We ended up off the road, it was so dark. Or was it that he was drunk? I can't recall. There was no fuel left in the tank anyhow.

I convinced him that we would be found the next day. Then within the next couple of days. Then within the week. I think of it fondly, really. How cold it gets, out there in the bipolar desert. The two of us pressed together to conserve heat, and it brought to my mind the image of a couple.

It seemed so unfair. God waved him tantalizingly close, and giving me just a taste of what could have been. If we had gotten out, we would have been even closer. No one else could ever have been that close to

him, not by a mile. Does that make me sick in the head? I don't care.

The real problem was water. The first morning, we were both hungover something awful, and so we drank our water and waited inside his boiling hot truck. No one came for us. He had the idea that we should build a fire with all the dried out plants. So we did, and it the smoke seemed to wrap its hands around our throats, choking us.

He had the thought that we should start walking, so at least we could get closer to town. I hate to say that I convinced him that we ought to stay put where we were. Was it at that moment that I had killed him? I only wanted to stay so euphorically alone with him. I wonder if we would have survived if I wasn't so selfish. Altruism wasn't one of my qualities in youth.

Or can I say that it was? See, we did have some drinks left in our cooler. We had already drank the dirty melted ice, but aside from that, there were some beers left over. I gave them all to him. Call it an act of love. He drank each one down, and he told me they left him more parched than before he'd been in the first place. I put each can with the other disfigured ones, and they made the same clinking sound each time. Perhaps then, I killed him?

He looked so dry and hollow. His lips were so chapped, but I recall wanting to kiss them regardless, and biding my time, thinking that he'd pass out before I did. That way, I'd be able to make my move without his knowledge, or his distaste for people like me. He was so much further gone, and he lain there sweating in the driver's seat at night. It was cold, and he perspired like it was a Sunday afternoon. Usually one would shiver at the cold, but Floyd was was still. The wind shifted around and clinked the cans together.

I don't know exactly when he had died, but it dawned on me that I was alone, then. I kissed his dry, motionless lips. I disgust myself. I sat back in the passenger seat, and within twenty-four hours, authorities discovered his tomb, with me alive, in it. Spiteful God.

Sometimes I'll awaken at night to the sound of the clanging and scraping of cans. That week in the summer so many years ago left some foul, smoky residue in my mind, and a question still sweltering and burning deep within me. Did I know that I was killing him all the while, as I slipped the poison down his throat? Or rather, was I delirious, or had I forgotten that alcohol saps one's strength, and makes one lust for water all the more intensely?

Weep as I may, and consider what I will, I still don't know the truth. Memories are but a distorted looking glass for the regretful, I guess. I'm a very old man now, so I suppose I'll be joining Floyd soon. I wonder if

he'll appear young as he was then? Maybe not. Maybe there's nothing of the sort.

Or perhaps murderers like me go someplace else.

Non-
Fiction

The Projects on Baker Road

Amanda Bustos

If you ever leave the mountains of the all-glowing city, follow the high and mighty wall by the border. Follow it until the backyards no longer have pools and the houses become apartments and you repeatedly see McDonald's, Ross, and Dollar Tree instead of the hipster coffee shops of the upper east valley. Follow the highway like my grandmother followed the river north. Once you take Exit 42 on the corner of Midway, turn right onto my home on Baker Road. The pavement cooks the feet of the barefoot children chasing each other playing tag. Besides the iPod with the broken screen that Elena left before she ran away after college, they only have sticks to play with. Drive slow or the broken glass on the pavement will rejoice at your misfortune. The ancient lady of the street sits on her rocking chair from the sixties, watching a novella she can no longer hear, wondering if her daughter will visit this week like she did last month. On the corner stand the fearful Bull Dogs, I am embarrassed to say a few of my ex-boyfriends, selling Marijuana to the kid who ditched 8th period. The gang wears their pants sagging to the knees, while their mothers live on their knees, praying by their Virgin Mary and lit candles, "Please, dear Virgensita, take (Mario, Pablo, or Pedro) on a better path." Behind the Marijuana-scented clouds, the vapor rises from the kitchen. Apartment 59 is having enchiladas for dinner. Through the paper walls you hear my mother, yelling about money. Money, money, money. I do not understand why she fights so much about something we don't even have. Out the door runs her new boyfriend, crushing beer cans under the scorching sun. He tosses the cans to the small patch of grass, which we all know isn't really grass, just weeds that grew too much, hoping to be noticed, oblivious to the reality that my mother's preoccupations lie beyond gardening. As the sun gives us a break, you can hear the air conditioners one by one get turned off. We'd rather turn on the fans after 6:30 to keep the bill at an unreasonable, yet not impossible-to-pay price. When the street lights turn on, my mother sends me outside to water the two dead stems outside. I know it is an excuse to make me leave, so she can continue her ritualistic arguing in the comfort of this roach-filled home. I close the door behind me and water my feet instead. Maybe they will grow, and my sister's shoes will fit, and I won't

see the empty space, of about two inches, between my foot and the shoe, and my mother won't have to buy me new ones. It will save me from hearing "money" for a day or two. Across from me lives the woman with the rag around her head, staring out the window every now and then, with hopelessness in her cancer-plagued eyes. On the other side lives a woman with four children who run around as if they chugged three bottles of the two-liter Coca Colas each. You'll see her leave tonight, as she does each night, her sparkling stilettos lighting the street. Besides her five-inch cherry colored heels, the only light keeping us from pitch black is a dim, orange street light. The orange that radiates from that magnificent light bulb creates a revolting, nightmarish atmosphere that reminds us all of the money we lack in our pockets. I hear my mother. Money, money, money. I take out the cigarette that I delicately wrapped in toilet paper and carefully stole from Mother's new boyfriend, (his name might be Aaron, Steve, or Joe) and I light it with a Bic lighter I found on the bus ride home. I hide in front of my front door, next to the big, dirty window, hoping my mother won't walk out but knowing she never will. I keep thinking about college, wondering whether the sun will hit as hard as it does in this neighborhood. Will I have air conditioning? Will the street light be dim and my future bright? Anyway, hurry and drive back to the upper east valley; there is nothing to see.

The Disappearance of Walter Collins: A Mother's Undying Hope & the Wineville Chicken Coop Case

Gabriela Serrato

The disappearance of nine year old Walter Collins in 1928 in Los Angeles set in motion one of the most incredible series of events of the decade. The disappearance not only included child endangerment, but also brought to light female disempowerment, corruption, and flagrant mistreatment of those involved in the case.

On March 10, 1928, Christine Collins discovered every parent's worst fear: her son Walter was nowhere to be found. While the police suspected that Walter had simply run away, Christine feared the worst. She refused to believe that her young boy would run off, so she came to the dreaded conclusion that he had been kidnapped. Now with the suspicion that Walter had been taken, the police began to scan the Collins' street and the neighborhood of Lincoln Heights in Los Angeles. Local thugs were targeted, questioned, and interrogated on the whereabouts of Walter, but the search turned up nothing. It was not until witnesses were sought out that a neighbor, Mrs. A. Baker, claimed that she saw Walter in an automobile, begging to be released, in the company of two foreign-looking people.

Other neighbors gave information as well. They said that days prior to Walter's abduction, an Italian-looking man, along with a woman, were asking for Walter's address. All information and all leads led to nothing. There was simply no trace of Walter that led the police to finding him or finding out who had taken him. After searching the Lincoln Park Lake for Walter's body, and after a massive search of the northeastern part of the city, neither Walter nor any trace of him was found. Walter had now been missing without a trace for over a month.

Christine Collins was devastated, but she remained hopeful that each day she would hear news of her young son. Months passed, and she had to work daily with the racing thoughts of Walter's fate constantly

in her head. Losing sleep and having little motivation to continue her normal life, she did not surrender to the thought that Walter was gone forever. Five months after Walter's disappearance, a miracle happened. Walter had been found. It was now August, and Christine received the confirming news that Walter was alive in De Kalb, Illinois. It is hard to imagine how much joy, love, and excitement Christine experienced when she heard this news. Her persistent hoping seemed to have worked.

Walter was immediately put on a train to Los Angeles to be returned to Christine. The reuniting of mother and son was to be celebrated as a massive success of the police force. But as the approaching train came to a stop, with the anticipation of a happy reunion after five agonizing months, Christine immediately exclaimed that the boy who descended from the train was not her son. What Christine thought was the answer to her prayers, the miracle of a lifetime, proved not to be the case. The boy standing in front of her was not her son. Captain J. J. Jones of the LAPD could not believe what Christine was insisting. Jones explained to Christine that Walter simply seemed to change because of the duration of the months and the traumatic experiences that he had encountered. Christine rejected Jones' explanation. Christine insisted that she would know her own son, no matter the circumstances. Captain Jones would not take Christine's word for it, and would under no circumstances let it be known that the Los Angeles Police Department had made a mistake. Trying to avoid humiliation, Jones told Christine to take "Walter" home and try him out for a while, to see if her memory would clear to see that this was indeed her boy.

Christine, feeling the pressure from both the public and the police about the reunion, agreed to take the boy home. Subsequently, the police began to question "Walter" in hopes of finding his abductor. He was questioned on how he had escaped the kidnapper, and the police wanted to know how he had ended up in Illinois. Police and doctors were unable to get straight answers from the boy. He said little to nothing. It was as if he was keeping a secret, and no one could get the boy to say anything that he knew. Christine knew that the boy was not Walter, but she agreed to house and care for him. But she still sought to prove that she was right. She did not want the police to stop looking for the true Walter because she knew that he was still out there. Christine used Walter's dental records to prove the difference in Walter and the boy who now lived with her. Those records did indeed demonstrate marked differences in the two boys' teeth. Christine then took the dental records to Captain J. J. Jones. But the dental records proved to be no help. Not only did Jones not

believe Christine even with the records, he concluded that Christine was only trying to humiliate the Los Angeles Police Department. Captain Jones would not stand for this slander, especially by a woman. So Jones took immediate action. Jones had Christine Collins committed to the psychopathic ward of the General Hospital to be placed under observation under Code 12 internment, which was intended to jail anyone who was proving to be difficult.

Christine Collins remained in the hospital under harsh circumstances. She was treated inhumanely and fell victim to different forms of medicine to try and bring her to her senses, and for her to admit to this boy being the true Walter. Ten days passed, and then good news came that released Christine. The believed “Walter” had confessed to not being the real Walter. The boy was really Arthur Hutchins, Jr. His true name was discovered even after he provided another fake name of Billy Fields. When questioned as to why Arthur would pose as Walter, Arthur admitted that when he saw a picture of Walter and saw their resemblance, he saw an opportunity. He knew that if he pretended to be Walter, he would have a one way ticket to Los Angeles and an increased chance of making it in the movies, and even meet some of his favorite stars. The disappearance of Walter Collins would now resume, and would now resume from the very beginning. With no leads. Christine returned to her job, and was back to where she had been for nearly half of a year. Her daily routine remained: she would work, go home, and hope to hear about Walter.

Meanwhile, in Wineville, California, unthinkable events were occurring. It all began to unravel when Jessie Clark was eager to check up on her younger brother, Sanford Clark, who had moved to California two years prior with their uncle Gordon Stewart Northcott and his mother Sarah Louise. Jessie had become increasingly concerned for Sanford’s safety and his situation with their uncle Gordon. She decided to travel down to find out what exactly was taking place. Jessie’s fears of abuse and torment coming to Sanford from Gordon became clear during her visit. And not only was terror being brought upon Sanford, but Gordon even became violent towards Jessie herself. Jessie quickly took action. She returned home to Canada and told everything to her mother who had no hesitation in informing the police of the abuse.

When U.S. authorities got the information of Gordon Northcott’s actions, they made an immediate visit to his residence in Wineville, to a ranch out in the middle of nowhere. When Northcott saw the authorities driving up, he demanded that Sanford stall them for as long as he possibly could. Sanford did as he was told due to his own fear of Gordon. Gordon and his mother Sarah Louis fled, and were not captured until

they were found in British Columbia. Their capture was crucial thanks to what Sanford had told the police about Gordon and Sarah Louise. Sanford Clark informed the police that Gordon Stewart Northcott and Sarah Louise had murdered the missing boy, Walter Collins. Sanford also admitted that Walter was not the only boy who fell victim to the Northcott's hand, but other boys remained at the farm as well. Sanford Clark told everything to the police about what took place. He said that the boys were killed by an ax, and that quicklime was poured over their bodies before disposing them. In shock and disbelief, the police, with Sanford by their side, returned to Wineville to dig up the remains that Sanford claimed were there.

Physical remains were found on the farm proving that boys had been there, including the Winslow brothers who had gone missing only 30 miles away from where Walter had been taken. Library books belonging to the boys and clothes had been found in the chicken coop, where the Northcotts kept the boys locked in. A note written by the Winslow brothers was even discovered, simply saying, "Don't worry, we are fine." When Sanford took the authorities to the graves, the bodies no longer remained; only pieces of bodies were found. Gordon Northcott and his mother had emptied them and burned the bodies and remains in the desert before Jessie Clark informed the authorities about the negative conditions Sanford faced. Some human bones and a blood-soaked mattress did turn up, and it proved that Nelson and Lewis Winslow, Walter, and a ranch hand, Alvin Gothea, had all been tragically murdered.

It was December 3 when Gordon Stewart Northcott confessed to the murders of the Winslow brothers and Alvin Gothea. Sarah Louise Northcott confessed to the murder of Walter Collins. Gordon Northcott hinted that there were more than four boys that fell victim to his murderous activities. It is believed that the Northcotts may have been guilty of killing at least twenty. Gordon Stewart Northcott was found guilty of having committed three murders, and was sentenced to hang. His mother, Sarah Louise, was also found guilty of the murder of Walter Collins and sentenced to life in prison.

This did not please Christine Collins. Walter's entire body had not been found, so she still held out hope that her son might still be alive. She decided to go meet the man who was said to have taken Walter, Gordon Stewart Northcott. Collins met with Northcott to discuss whether or not he and his mother had truly killed her son. Although Northcott had previously admitted to the killings being done by them, he told Christine that they did not kill Walter. Christine believed Northcott. She chose to believe that this man did not take part in killing her son so that she could

hold out hope that he may one day return.

These slayings have become known as The Wineville Chicken Coop Case Murders, and Gordon Stewart Northcott was hanged on October 2, 1930 at San Quentin, California. Christine Collins was granted \$10,800 against Captain J. J. Jones for his sending her to a psychiatric ward, and for his denial at believing her claims that the boy returned to her was not Walter. But Jones never paid her, and was only given a four month suspension for what he had done against her. Christine never gave up hope that Walter remained alive, but he remained unfound for the remainder of her life.

Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough of What: Ideological Excess in Michael Jackson

Rick Saldaña

In his book, *Disparities*, Slavoj Žižek recalls the following joke: “‘Waiter! Get me a coffee without cream!’ ‘I’m sorry sir, we have no cream, only milk, so can it be coffee without milk?’” (291). This joke poignantly illustrates the way ideology in late stage capitalism operates, that is, ideology is never simply ideology, it is everything that is explicitly and, more importantly, implicitly explained. Coffee without milk may appear to be the same as coffee without cream, but the difference lies in the negative dialectical space between the two; the solution lies in the implication. This implication operates in a two-fold method: the first being an openness to the injection of other foreign ideological strata and the second being the possibility for excess. What is meant by ideological excess? For the purposes of this study, ideological excess can be thought of as the phenomena in which hegemony manifests and replicates itself within the material reality. Much like a dense fog, ideology blankets over one’s vision and gives the illusion that one is moving forward when in reality one is walking around in circles. The modern American people like to believe it lives within a so-called post-ideological society, in which there is no longer any need for the people to do their duty and sacrifice themselves for the society, however, this is simply not true. Ideology has become the lens itself; one is already sacrificed. Naturally, this insidious conditioning manifests within one of the most accurate barometers for society’s ideological standing: pop culture. Michael Jackson’s hit single “Don’t Stop ‘til You Get Enough” brilliantly illustrates this desire for excess in late capitalism, which points to the Marxist concept of the Negation of the Negation. It is not so much that the song analyzes the theory, but rather, it naturally and organically enacts the theoretical concepts in an accessible and imitable manner.

Thus the question arises: How does the song illustrate the desire of excess and to embody the Law of the Negation of the Negation?

In Marxist thought, the Negation of the Negation describes a phenomenon in which the dialectic acts cyclically within a materialist reality. In which there is a thesis that is negated to create its own natural opposite, but in time, the first negation is negated again to revert to a much more refined version of the original. As Marx explains:

It is the Negation of the Negation. It does not re-establish private property, but it does indeed establish individual property on the basis of the achievements of the capitalist era: namely co-operation and the possession in common of the land and the means of production by labour itself.

The transformation of the scattered private property resting on the personal labor of the individuals themselves into capitalist private property is naturally an incomparably more protracted, violent, and difficult process than the transformation of capitalist private property, which in fact already rests on the carrying on of production of society, into social property (Capital 929-30).

In other words, ancient accumulation of capital was communal and equally owned and used by the majority in a community, but with the rise of capitalism and private property, the small means of production that serfs owned during feudalism became privately owned; capital became owned and used by the few. This will, in turn, be negated and social ownership of capital will inevitably take control. This phenomenon is not restricted to pure economics as, for example, when a barley seed is planted and germinates, a stalk grows and negates the seed; the seed no longer exists. Eventually the stalk dies and gives off more barley seeds, the stalk is negated, and one finds themselves with the original thesis, only now there is a multitude of seeds. It is the Negation of the Negation. As such, this phenomenon illustrates how ideological excess can perpetuate itself, by pushing its own limits; it allows the person to push their own limits and gain new levels of excess.

Almost as a precursor to the excess of Reaganomics, Michael Jackson's "Don't Stop 'til You Get Enough" acts out the Law of the Negation of the Negation in spades wrapped in a funky pop melody. From the very beginning of the song, Jackson attempts to describe this insurmountable feeling that can only exist as an exhilarating shout. He then goes on to describe a series of metaphors for rising energy and heat accumulation, building up inside someone until it inevitably explodes. Jackson goes into the chorus, the ideological core of the song, by pointing to this excess by name, which he states being "love power."

What is this love power? It is the force which compels one to dance, to follow along with the song, to follow the status quo unquestioningly. It is incredibly telling when the chorus repeats, “Keep on with the force don’t stop/ Don’t stop ‘til you get enough,” as if to coax the listener to be consumed by the same love power that was mentioned towards the beginning of the song (Jackson). What is achieved in this exchange? Jackson sets up the idea of ideological excess by his yell, being so inexpressible that the shout is the only way to properly convey the message, and then he tests the limits of the listener. First the hesitation of reaching towards one’s limits, exemplified by keeping on with the force, is negated by Jackson himself; he tells the listener to not stop. Yet, this unadulterated consumption is negated again, to stop only when one is satisfied. However, when one is satisfied by this force, their limits have been reached and pushed, allowing for more excess to be appropriated when one reaches for their limits. The listener is compelled to repeat the process at the behest of some unknown force. Once one’s desires have been satisfied, whether by love power or the force itself, they are compelled to return to normality, but that normality is no longer available, it has been changed slightly. Žižek discusses this excess at the world wide level, by positing, “What if today’s global capitalism. . . no longer follow the pattern of an eventual explosion followed by a return to normality, but will instead assume the task of a new ‘ordering’ against the global capitalist disorder?” (*First as Tragedy, Then as Farce* 130). That is to say, how can one’s return to normality function as a reaction to a future reach towards hedonism while still attempting to grasp at normality. The reality is that it becomes impossible to shed ideology’s conditioning of one’s mind, the person has become too far ingrained in the status quo and cannot never truly exist separately from hegemony.

This is not to imply that there is a major global conspiracy and that the “Illuminati” is recruiting hordes of people to do their evil bidding. Rather, Michael Jackson, and everyone who resonated with his song, fully practiced and consumed the ideology without noticing. This unknowing behavior is littered throughout the song as well. At the beginning of the song, there is a small simple bass line that plays under Jackson’s muttering, rhythmic and repetitive, it underlines his somewhat bashful description of love power. Only when he gives into the excess and yells out does the bass line explode into a full swing, accompanied by violins, horns, and clapping; the excess has been reached. However, this full swing of energy cannot last forever, so it is negated when Jackson begins singing, however it does not revert back to its original bass line, and it is then accompanied by clapping and drums. This

This refinement of the new base of the song's melody is illustrative of how once someone reaches their ideological limits, the excess changes them. The energy rises again once the force is called by name in the chorus and the excess is reached again. The Negation of the Negation thus acts like something of a truthful lie, in the case of Jackson, it does not explicitly tell the listener of their excess, but nonetheless does it. As Žižek explains, "it is not only that one can deduce a true statement from a false premise. . . it is only if we take as our starting point a false premise that we can clearly see the true in its proper contours" (*Disparities* 298-9). This underhanded bribe may appear to be contradictory at first glance, but like anyone telling their side of the story, the narrative is functionally stretched to serve the purposes of the speaker, even if the original meanings of the narrative is incorrect.

One may read arguments similar to the ones presented and ask themselves of the applicability and validity. Surely it is fallacious to assume that Michael Jackson read all three volumes of *Capital* and applied them to his pop music. However, this pop song is indicative of the dialectical materialist superstructures in which hegemony operates. Much like state propaganda or fake news, it is critical to become aware of the ideological mechanisms which sustain everyday behaviors. It is telling that Michael Jackson tapped into something provocative and universal, especially in his own time, since his single shot up and stayed at the number one spot for six weeks and continues to be a model for pop songs to this day. Everyone is susceptible to ideological influence and they are even more prone to excess, especially now during a post-war conservative government with an emphasis on excess. It's no surprise that the current president speaks almost exclusively in hyperbole. During times like these, one is reminded of Marx's 11th thesis on Feuerbach, "Philosophers have merely interpreted the world in different ways; but the point is to change it" (181).

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Opening Heaven's Gate: How Thirty-Nine Believers "Ascended to Heaven" in UFOs

Evelin Joseph

The revelation that followed a mysterious Fed-Ex package sent to Rio DiAngelo definitely left the world in shock. On March 26, 1997, Rio DiAngelo, an ex-member of the Heaven's Gate cult, after receiving a package that contained a letter that read "by the time you read this, we will have exited our vehicles," a few video tapes, and some floppy disks, led the police to discover thirty-nine deceased bodies in a mansion in Rancho Santa Fe, California.¹ The twenty-one women and eighteen men were uniformly dressed in black, wearing Nike Decades, and covered with purple shrouds. The thirty-nine, with this *opening of their Heaven's Gate* and what seemed to be their official graduation ceremony, introduced the world to the largest mass suicide to occur on American soil.²

Found among the dead, was one of the leaders and founders of Heaven's Gate, Marshall Herff Applewhite. Even though Applewhite, son of a Presbyterian minister, seemed like a happy man with a wife and two children, he was constantly haunted by confusion over his sexual identity and homosexual desires.³ While suffering from depression and feelings of being alienated, he met Bonnie Lu Nettles, an unhappy nurse, who would end up becoming his partner in creating and leading Heaven's Gate. They quickly entered into a platonic relationship that psychiatrists call the "insanity of two," which develops when two delusional people live together and reinforce each other's ideas.⁴ Nettles convinced Applewhite that God had brought them together because they were aliens who had been sent to Earth to warn people of the end as foretold in the Bible. They believed that they were the "two witnesses" described in chapter 11 of the book of Revelations, who were resurrected and taken "up to heaven in a cloud," or what they believed to be an unidentified flying object (UFO).⁵ They believed that following their

resurrection, the UFO would collect them and anyone else that accepted them, and take them up to the “Next Level,” or a heavenly utopia where they would live as extraterrestrial beings. The pair, leaving their families and taking up names like “The Two,” “Bo and Peep,” and eventually “Do and Ti,” traveled the world to proclaim their message and recruit people to join them and their mission.⁶

“The Two” were extremely persuasive and influential on those who were also as lost, confused, and seeking as they were. The members ranged from people who had fascinations with UFOs to people who truly felt like they did not belong to this world. Heaven’s Gate offered answers to people who were continually questioning their spirituality and meaning of life. A member who took on the name Tddody credits his reason for joining the movement to the hellish world outside the cult. He had had a negative experience in the world, as he was “beat up, lied to, cheated, threatened, robbed, and abused in almost every way thinkable.”⁷ But Heaven’s Gate offered him an escape from this. Another member, who went under the name Yrsody, mentions that she had experimented with many New Age religious practices before finally accepting Heaven’s Gate and its mission.⁸

In order to become members, recruits would have to give up all human attachments, including names, families, and even their sexualities. Contact with the outside world was discouraged and the “students,” as they were called, were expected to follow strict schedules and routines to erase all humanness and begin their transformations into immortal, androgynous aliens.⁹ In the beginning, Ti (Nettles) and Do (Applewhite) taught the students that they would be going to the “Next Level” through a process similar to metamorphosis. Their human bodies would gradually turn into alien bodies, reaching completion at the “Next Level.” There was no indication that the members would have to give up their lives in order to reach this “Next Level,” but rather would require their physical bodies to gain access to the Kingdom of God.¹⁰ However, when Nettles died of cancer in 1985, Applewhite began teaching followers that since Ti had completed her mission, she had simply exited her “vehicle,” or body on Earth, and had ascended to the “Next Level,” where she would receive her new body.¹¹ The *students* eventually passionately believed in this separation of body and soul. Their strong belief in this teaching is exemplified through their website, where the members stated that they exited the “bodies that [they] borrowed” after they spread “information about [the] Evolutionary Kingdom Level Above Human” and opened the doorway to this heaven.¹² Applewhite and seven of his followers even went as far as surgically castrating themselves in order to fully extinguish

all sexual, and therefore human and physical, desires.

Applewhite knew that the time to shed their human containers was near when he heard about the “comet of the century,” the Hale-Bopp Comet. This brilliant comet was large and drew massive attention, but what attracted Heaven’s Gate to this comet was the mysterious “companion” following it. The media was bombarded with rumors that the tail following this comet was actually an alien spacecraft, and Heaven’s Gate certainly took the story to be true. Applewhite convinced the members that their co-founder Ti was coming back for them in the spacecraft trailing Hale-Bopp. As the members were completely devoted to their leader and were currently in a bond with him that was inexplicable, they believed him, and started getting ready for their exits.¹³ Preparing for their deaths, a week before their exits, they recorded Exit Videos depicting why they were going to such lengths and what Heaven’s Gate meant to them. Through these videos they stressed the fact that they made these decisions out of their own free will and even begged people to understand their actions. Through various internet articles and messages, they emphasized the fact that they were not committing suicide, as their bodies were never truly theirs in the first place.

On March 23, 1997, a day after the Hale-Bopp comet had its closest approach to Earth, Heaven’s Gate was officially opened, and the first wave of suicides took place. About fifteen people ingested applesauce or pudding laced with phenobarbital and downed it with Vodka. They covered their heads with plastic bags and eventually suffocated to death. The remaining members cleaned up the scene and neatly arranged and covered the bodies with purple shrouds. On March 24, 1997, fifteen more killed themselves in a similar fashion and were covered with purple shrouds. The remaining members went on to take their lives on March 25, 1997.

As expected, the media and American people were struck with complete surprise and shock and thrown into a chaotic frenzy after this event. Suicide itself is a topic of great regret and sadness, so to encounter a group of willing and able people who would take their own lives was flabbergasting. Through greater analysis and exploration we can also see the influences that outside forces played on their final decision. Applewhite and Nettles, through their social skills and persuasive techniques, gave their flock answers about their confusing lives and eventually made them so sure of this extraterrestrial afterlife that they were fully cognizant of and willing to make this physical sacrifice. Even DiAngelo, after leaving the cult, asserts that followers did not want to

live in a world without Applewhite and that what they had done could not be classified as suicide as their souls still reside in the “Next Level.”¹⁴ Applewhite, Nettles, and Heaven’s Gate gave these confused followers purpose and meaning. This event gives us insight about much more than simply another mass suicide that occurred in the world. This specific event shows us that there are many subtle, or even prominent, messages around the world, which can be articulated through media that can lead people to very self-destructive thoughts and actions. We are left with this realization: the thirty-nine have officially departed from the world, forever closing Heaven’s Gate after them.

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