

George Street
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(untitled) by Holly King

“What are you doing?” a little girl stared up at a man with wide eyes. He looked down at her, holding the railing behind him tighter as he was startled by the voice. “Nothing,” he answered, hoping the girl would leave. She mouthed ohh and smiled, taking a step to the railing herself and looking over the side of the bridge. “My mom doesn’t like it when I play here.” she said. The man didn’t answer the girl. He looked down again as the breeze shifted to blow at his chest. It took the girl’s hair with it, blowing it over her shoulders and letting it fall down her back. The water far below beat against the concrete columns that held up the bridge. “She says someone could fall from all the way up here.” The girl said. The man looked at her again. “Yeah it’s pretty dangerous. Where is your mom?” The girl looked at him now, her eyes seemed smaller. “She’s at home. Her and Dad are fighting again. So I left for a while.” The man’s heart sank. He looked back down at the water, remembering why exactly he had come there, but his hands that are wrapped around the railing wouldn’t let him now. He sighed and swung his legs to step back over, standing next to where the girl had sat, letting her legs dangle over the side of the bridge. “Do they fight a lot?” he asked, sitting next to her and dangling his legs as well. She shrugged, “I guess.” He nodded. “So why did you come out here?” She looked up at him. “Looking for my brother.” The man looked at her confused. “Mom said he flew away off the bridge. I come back sometimes to see if he flew back.” “Flew away?” “Yeah. He grew angel wings and flew away.” “Oh.” the man said, realizing what this girl was telling him and he felt a pit form in his stomach. “Why don’t we get you home?” “Yeah.” she nodded and stood with him. He held her hand as they walked back down the bridge. The water beat against the concrete below them and the breeze pushed at their backs.

Fools for Playing With Fire by Julia Park

I remember it like it was yesterday.
Lies and rumors, spreading like wildfire.
And me. Right in the middle of it all.
Seeing flames in every direction.
Nowhere to go. Absolutely trapped.
I'm such a fool. It's all about me.
I guess I started this. Do I deserve this?
The pain of the flames is excruciating.
How do I fix this? I shouldn't ask for help.
I don't want others to burn with me.
Even with those in my corner,
I feel like it is all up to me to survive.
With time, the fires slowly subsided.
There wasn't much I could do but wait.
Wait for the whispers of the flames
To stop haunting my every move.
As the smoke cleared, so did my mind.
I finally started to see the truth.
I poured the gasoline by trusting you.
You lit the match to hurt me.
I guess we were all fools in the end.



Breakthrough by
Christopher Hamilton

The Green Man by Jacob Dickens

The Green Man shuffles along the dark road at night with only a flashlight in his left hand to guide him along the path. People outside of town knew about the Green Man, had their own stories about him. He fell into a vat of acid as a child and lives in a cave. He was struck by lightning while climbing a tree and now can glow in the dark. His face can contort and stretch beyond human limits. He roams the countryside, looking for his next victim or looking for a friend or looking for a way back home. One of my friends in middle school insisted that he saw The Green Man outside his bedroom window one night, looking for him and calling his name. I told him that was bullshit but I'd be lying if I didn't start checking out my bedroom window after that. We heard that he would chase away children who got too close to his home in the woods. These stories got passed around like currency over fire pits or over lunch tables. A ghost story about a boogeyman a few miles over.

It was Harry who suggested we go out and find him one night. We were all drinking at his house when someone brought up The Green Man as a point of nostalgia. At first, everyone seemed hesitant at the idea. We didn't even know if there was a Green Man in the first place and it was getting late. Harry said that he had heard someone actually found the Green Man walking along a dirt road, calling out the name of some presumably dead lover and that he knew exactly where to take us. He promised that if nothing came out of it that he'd take us all out for dinner that week. That promise seemed good enough as any to convince us to get into his truck and drive over to Ellwood. Ellwood was not a terribly exciting town, more a location to stop on your way to other places. Most people who lived there worked in the local coal mine and would spend their evenings either at home or in the town's pub. In short, it wasn't the town you'd expect to house such a haunting figure. As we drove into Ellwood, Harry rolled down his window and asked a couple of men sitting outside the pub about The Green Man. They both looked at each other and smiled.

“Course we've seen him. Everyone in town knows him.”

“So, he's real then?”

“As real as the nose on your face.”

“Well, where can we find him?”

One of the men grimaced slightly. “I don’t know if he’s too open to having strangers come to gawk at him.”

“We’re not here to gawk at him or anything. I just want to meet him. Talk to him. Honestly.”

There was a pause, then a sigh.

“Take the road straight and turn at Beaver River. If you keep driving down that dirt road, you’ll see him.”

We thanked them and drove off. There was a quiet electricity humming around the car, a quiet anticipation that we were on our way to meet The Green Man, like we were meeting one of our biggest heroes or something. Harry finally turned near Beaver River and started down a narrow road surrounded by trees. Some of us thought we saw eyes watching us in the forest, others thought they could hear the faint moans of The Green Man in the distance. Eventually, we made it into a long clearing, more dirt than road, that ended in a tunnel. From the distance, we saw a faint glowing light, almost green in hue. None of us dared step out of the car until Harry finally gathered the courage to be the first. His steps were cautious, as if there were traps hidden around him to avoid, and he called out to the man in the distance. We all slowly began piling out, hiding behind Harry as the figure shuffled closer. Suddenly, the man stopped halfway down the tunnel and stood there.

He called out in a raspy voice, “Why are you here?”

Harry stammered for a second. “Are you The Green Man?”

The man sighed and kicked the ground, “That depends. What do you want from me?”

“I-I don’t know. I guess we just want to meet you is all.”

The man began approaching again, slowly. As he got closer, we began to make out more of his appearance. He wore a green flannel jacket over a white shirt and a pair of slacks. He seemed tall, an intimidating figure. He had a flashlight in one hand that he turned off by the time he was near us. As he stepped out into the car’s light, however, we saw his face. His eyes were swollen and misshapen and there didn’t seem to be anything recognizable on them. There wasn’t even an indentation where his eyes were supposed to be, just skin. His nose was nothing more than a hole in the middle of his face. His lips were gigantic, threatening to take over his whole face. His upper lip even seemed to swell up underneath where his nose should have been. His face seemed like a melted candle but his hair and outfit seemed to show he was an ordinary man. His brown hair was combed back though it puffed up around the back of his head. He was breathing pretty heavily. He stopped at the entrance of the tunnel, seemingly unwilling to move any further.

The man paused and broke the silence, asking, “Any of you got a cigarette?”

Aidan, who had been trembling slightly ever since we got out of the car, nodded. He took the pack out of his jacket and began walking over to the man, still afraid that getting too close would end in his demise. The man took his own hand out of his jacket, it too misshapen and swollen, and he reached out for the offered cigarette. Aidan handed it over, then quickly snapped his hand back. The man sighed.

“And a light?”

“Oh, right.”

Aidan struck a match and held it out for the man who hovered over the light for his cigarette. He stepped back and nodded.

“Well, is there anything you wanted to ask me? Or did you just wanna gawk?”

I called out, “What’s your name?”

“It’s Ray.”

“What happened to you?”

“Awfully upfront, aren’t ya? I tried to look at a bird’s nest as a kid on top of some old train tracks. I ended up touching the damn wire that powered them tracks and nearly died because of it. Doctors said I wouldn’t make it. Last kid who did something like it spent two weeks in agony before he died. But mamma said I was strong enough to make it and I did.”

“Do you hear the stories about yourself?”

“Hard not to. I get people like you coming down my way at least twice a week, you know? Folks from all over Pennsylvania trying to get a good look at me.” He moved his jacket out of the way to show a pistol hanging from his belt. “Started carrying this on me once some people started asking for trouble. But most folks just want to meet their childhood boogeyman.”

“What about people in town?”

“I’ve lived here for forty-five years. Some of those people in town drove me to school, some visited me in hospital. Everybody already knows me here, y’know? It’s just outside of Ellwood that the legends start spreading. Something about me being a phantom roaming the woods for lost souls or some horseshit.” He chuckled to himself.

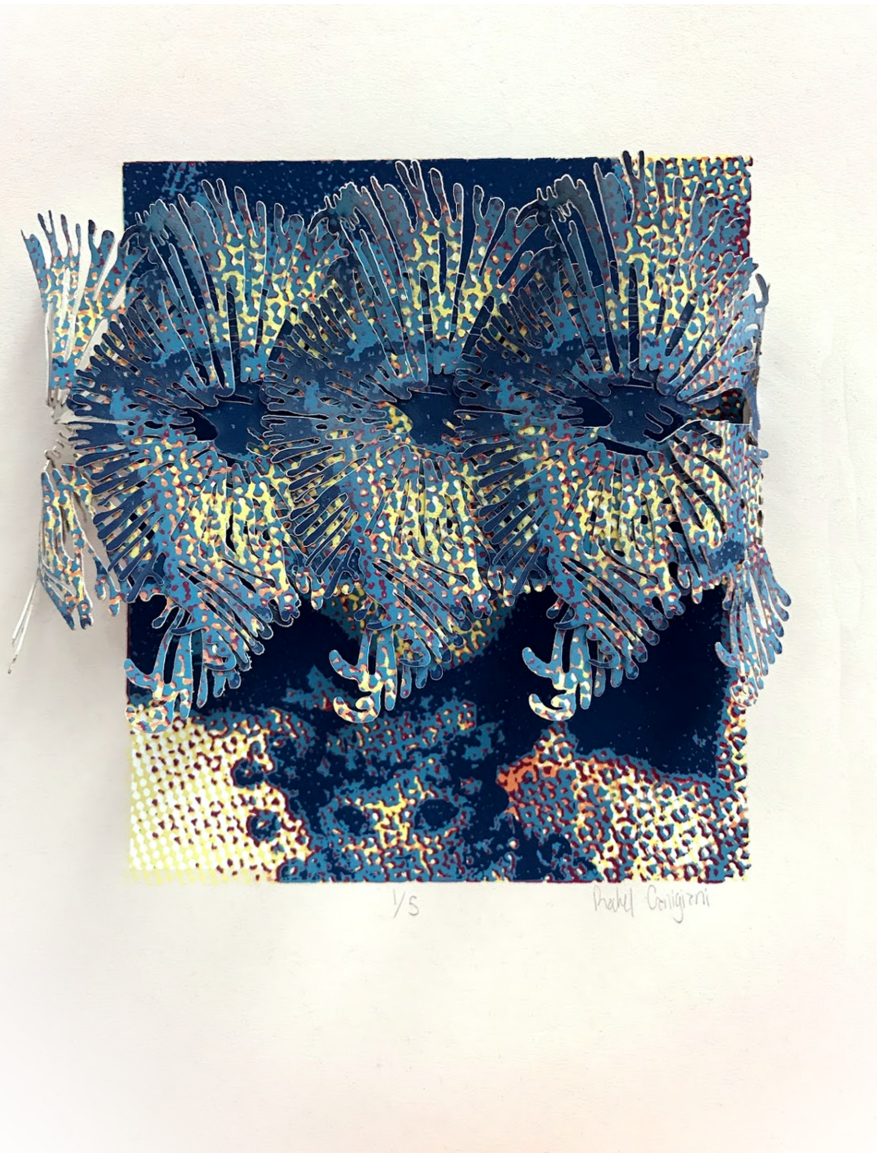
“Don’t you get lonely out here?”

“Lonely? I only live out here because that’s where my mamma raised me. I got for walks out here at night to avoid bringing this trouble in town. Otherwise, I get people coming to my house pretty damn often just to chat or to eat dinner. They don’t seem to mind anymore.”

We talked for a few more minutes before someone in the group suggested we should start heading back. We thanked Ray and said goodbye as we piled back into Harry's truck. That electricity, that anticipation that consumed us on the drive over to Ray's had washed away into a quiet surprise and a bittersweet aftertaste. The man we had spent our whole childhoods fearing was not only real but seemed unfazed by his reputation. It was almost unfathomable for everyone in the car. Harry told us on the way back that if he ever looked the way Ray did, he would just end it then and there. But for Ray, he didn't seem to mind much at this point. The folks we spoke to in town didn't seem fazed by him either, recounting memories of having a drink with him or going fishing. We told our classmates about our trip, but they didn't believe us. How could they? It was like claiming to have met Bigfoot and finding out he was a neat fella. That myth still kept spreading and kept churning even after we graduated. Folks still talk about The Green Man, that shuffling spirit forever doomed to haunt the backwoods of a town near you. It seemed like every few weeks someone back home would report a green light in the woods and start a frenzy at their school about it. Underneath that tragedy, though, was just a simple man trying to live his life just like us all. Isn't that story more interesting?

Remembrance by Leah Freeman

The curtains were welcoming and long, caressing the detective as he sped through the empty mansion halls. Signs of a struggle; whether of physical doings or of heart. The detective stops. Down at his feet, a little, grey stuffed cat whose fur was matted in the shape of a small hand. He bends down to it, making eye contact with his own reflection in the toy's glistening glass eyes. He sees fire in those eyes. Was it his? Or hers? He grabs the cat at first ferociously, and then with hesitation. He stands up slowly as he realizes there had been a trace of recognition tugging him into the eyes of the toy. He turns around to see himself. A mirror.



Memory Masked by Rachel Canigiani

Leon's Hatterene by Elias Peluso

It is a beautiful day here in the wonderful world of Pokémon. Residents of the Galar region are eagerly awaiting the day the beloved battle champion, Leon, returns for his tournament match. Let's check in with the heroes of our journey as they prepare to see an exciting broadcast.

Ash: Brock, are you sure you know the way to your own home? Leon's interview is on in five minutes!

Brock: I sure do! I know it like I know Diglett's feet.

Misty: Maybe that's why we're walking through some bushes now.

Brock: Wait - thar she blows! I told you I wasn't incompetent.

Ash: Just please turn on the TV quickly; I don't want to miss this!

Pikachu: Pika pika!

Togepi: (Sigh)

Misty: What's the matter, Togepi? This will be exciting, especially for Pokémon like you.

Our heroes have made it to Brock's house in the nick of time. Everyone in the Galar region is tuning in to this television special in anticipation of learning Leon's strategy for the upcoming tournament.

Ash: It's starting!

Cam the Interviewer: Hello, and thank you for tuning in to this special event here on the Meditonight Show. I'm Cam the Interviewer, and up here with me today is none other than the famous Galar Champion Leon! Please give him a big welcome.

Brock: Wait - I forgot the popcorn.

Misty: Quiet, you nuisance!

Leon: Thank you for having me. I always appreciate sharing my otherworldly knowledge of Pokémon.

Cam: It is otherworldly indeed! Now, I'm going to start off by breaking the anticipation and asking the question that everyone is wondering: which Pokémon will be on your team alongside your famous Charizard? An electric type? Another fire type?

Leon: (deep breath) Well, you see, the thing is...Charizard will not be on my team.

Ash, Misty and Brock: What?!

Pikachu: Pika?!

Cam: I'm sorry, did I hear you correctly? Did you say your staple Pokémon will not be joining you this tournament?

Leon: That is correct; my Hatterene will take his place.

Ash: What? A fairy type Pokémon?

Togepi: Hmm?

Brock: He must have rocks for brains!

Cam: I'm sure many of the viewers will agree with me that this is certainly shocking news. What is your reasoning behind this decision?

Leon: Well, Charizard has been on my team for quite a while. He has been one of my best Pokémon partners since I first started my journey. We have both come to an understanding that he just needs a little downtime from the shock and awe of performing in battle. Nothing serious.

Cam: And what was your inspiration for replacing his spot with a Hatterene? With all due respect, don't you want to win this tournament?

Misty: I'm with her.

Brock: Agreed!

Ash: Hold on, guys, I think there's more to this. Let's listen.

Leon: I thought long and hard about what Pokémon would fill Charizard's place. I could have used my Seismitoad, Aegislash, or even my Dragapult, but my fans already know them and expect these types of Pokémon to win. I wanted my decision to mean something more, so I chose the uncommon Pokémon, Hatterene.

Cam: Hatterene is a fairy-type Pokémon, correct? No champion has ever used a fairy-type on their team.

Leon: That's just the problem. Although fairy-types are valid Pokémon just like every other type, none have ever appeared on a champion's team. So for this match, I purposely recruited a fairy-type: Hatterene.

Brock: I guess that kind of makes sense.

Pikachu: Pika...

Misty: No it doesn't! You shouldn't choose a Pokémon to feature based only on its type; that's not fair to the other Pokémon.

Cam: I understand your intentions, but again, this is a big tournament. I think your fans will agree with me when I say that jeopardizing your team for this cause will not be worth it.

Leon: Why do you assume that Hatterene can't perform well?

Cam: I...

Ash: Hmm...

Leon: (Sigh) You see, it's a terrible cycle. Fairy is the most uncommon Pokémon type, so no champion trainers have even thought of putting one on their team. Because people never see fairy types on a strong trainer's team, they unconsciously assume that fairy types can't be strong Pokémon and never give them the chance to achieve greatness. But I know this is not true: fairy types can be the very best like no one ever was.

Ash: The very best...

Pikachu: Pika.

Ash: Hey, you're right, Pikachu. Togepi is a fairy type.

Togepi: Togepi...

Misty: Oh, yeah, I suppose he is. Is that why you've been sad all day, Togepi? Because you thought you wouldn't see Leon choose a Pokémon like you?

Togepi: Togepi.

Leon: Fairy types might be different from your typical Pokémon, but that's not a bad thing. Trainers should appreciate these differences. After all, that's what makes the world of Pokémon so spectacular. But most importantly, we need to think about how the fairy types feel.

Leon: These Pokémon will have the confidence to try to be the very best if they see other fairy types like them succeed. Otherwise, most won't believe in themselves. That's where I come in: with my fame and publicly, I have the power to make these Pokémon visible and make their voices heard. If we all work together to show the true power of fairy types, the Galar region, no, the whole Pokémon world will be a place where anyone can become champion!

Ash: Wow, I had no idea this was so important.

Pikachu: Pika Pika.

Brock: Yeah, maybe Leon made the right decision after all.

Ash and his friends were silent as they walked home that night, thinking about what Leon had said. They hadn't realized that they themselves had been overlooking these Pokémon all along. Perhaps all they needed was a change in mind - and heart - about fairy types.

Misty: Hey, Togepi, how would you like to start training tomorrow to join my gym leader team?

Togepi: Togepi!

THE END

Fragments of the Siege by John Dehaven

Whereas he may incise the most bewitching
Combinations of symbols, divulging an
acute utterance of up-most revelation;
Thus bequeathing only a sliver of his talent,
yet
Enough to satisfy a profusion of the hungry,
the divvy.

Understood, as the sun on a weather-less
morn;
Completely lucid in its entirety.
No one of righteous value could disembark
The natural rotation of the globe—its ways.
My own offering stunting my grasp.

But, when movements feel as innate as this,
Without ventured slate, I wonder if
A mistake it may not have been, and
If it were alright to undertake the spell
Bounding my wrists and fingertips?

The siege upon our home,
The house of the people.
We knew not that it was coming,
Nor why they came,
Nor who they were,
Only that it was before us.

Their gallows raised,
Their rallies rang
In our ears, our rattled minds.
Out for blood
Of the rivals
To their god of falsehoods and hate.

Pounding on doors
On walls of shields
Held up to keep the madmen away
The walls, doors
Soon gave way
And the world watched in silence...

The names of those
Who came our way
Were soon known the world over.
Some were thieves,
Most were crazed,
And all have blood on their hands.

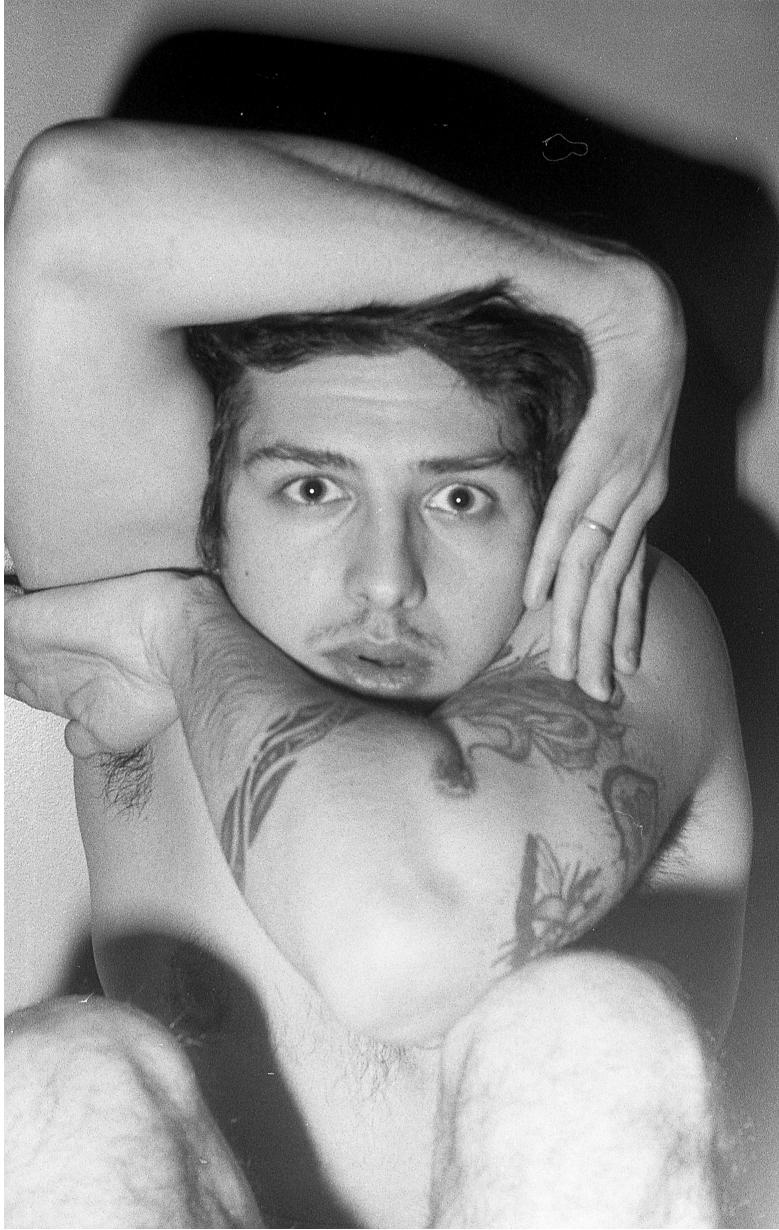
Empty words of outrage
On all our screens,
Condemning of the sudden siege.
Echoes of warnings
From experts
Ignored and shouted down.

In days to come
The damage done
Was greater than we'd seen.
One would succumb
To his wounds in duty
He was the martyr, the true patriot.

We watched and heard
Of countless souls
Drink deeply of the madness
Spewed into forums
And chambers deep,
Where the madmen simmer and breed.

In days long past
We knew of this,
Of the cesspits of rabid rage.
We joked, we laughed,
Words, just that,
That's all they'll ever be.

The wound festered
As we'd watched,
Yet we merely jeered and forgot.
"They are mad
We'll give you that
But nothing'll come of this."



Confined by Jon
Leicht

Frogs by Holly King

A frog croaked from its plexi-glass container. The young doctor was preoccupied, a grin splitting their face as the cells they observed under the microscope died. They could have kissed that frog if they didn't know better because it was the answer. They were all the answers. Frogs. Frogs.

The answer to dozens of diseases. Cancer, MS, countless blood diseases, even the common cold. The science seemed fishy, but it worked! The young doctor wasn't quite sure how, but it worked!

They rushed from the room, carrying the data, forgetting the samples in the hustle to show what they found but the data was the important part. Enzymes, found in the muscle tissue of a frog, could cure almost any formally non-curable disease that they knew about. This was huge.

They sped down the hallway, rushing towards Dr. Lander's laboratory. Dr. Lander would be the only one still here this late at night. They would know what to do with this data, with the discovery.

As they rushed, thoughts rushed just as fast through their mind. More research, human trials, medications and vaccines being produced, a healthier and happier life for humanity. A longer life for their mother even, a stage IV cancer patient. She could be cured with this. It might take a little while, but she could be cured.

However, one thought dawned on them. How had this not been discovered before? Surely other scientists before them would have found this. Countless doctorates focused on amphibians and medicine and virology. Even Dr. Lander, who had two doctorates, one in amphibian biology and one in medicine. Why hadn't he found it? The young doctor had even taken over his lab. The discovery was right there. Almost like it was set up for them to find it.

An older man stepped into the hall, the young doctor collided into his chest. “Oh, I’m so sorry Dr. Lander, but I found it.” the young doctor apologized while holding their papers in the air. “The cure to everything.”

Dr. Lander’s face seemed to age. “So you did,” he mumbled, flipping through the papers. A frown forming the wrinkles in his face and carving them deeper.

The young doctor’s face dropped, “Isn’t this good?”

The old doctor looked back at the young doctor. “It is good, yes. It’s a remarkable find...in theory.”

“Theory?”

He cleared his throat, motioning for the young doctor to follow him back into the lab. “I guess you need to know now that you’ve found it.” He paused as they sat. “This discovery isn’t yours, I’m afraid to say.”

“It’s not? How?”

“Well,” Dr. Lander explained, “Before you, the discovery was Dr. Lin’s, down the hall. Before her it was Dr. Alda’s, and before him it was mine. The original discovery belongs to Dr. Theodore Bushard back in the early 1960’s.” He thought for a moment, “So I guess it is your discovery now.”

The young doctor felt a new rush, “Why did no one report their findings? Why are we still sitting on this?”

Aubade by Jacob Dickens

I don't work much during the days anymore
because I stay up at night
By five in the morning, I stare at the sky as it
fades into life
Soon the light of a new day will pour past the
blinds of my room
Reminding me what I stayed up so long to
forget about:
Another day is gone, another night spent
alone in these four walls
Each night the same making me ultimately
wonder
When or if I can set myself right and finally
grow up.
Not much comes of my inner scolding, my
thoughts that tell me
"Why do you banish yourself to the darkness
Where no one can see you and no one will
hear you?
Is this the life you imagined you'd be living at
20?"

My mind is blank as I stare at the pale,
deathly blue light
It's not like I did nothing, I tell myself. It's not
like the night was wasted

Sure, these things I fill my nights with
removes my time from the morning
From the embrace of other people, conscious,
living with you through it
I can change my sleep schedule with ease. I
can keep this going.
But my mind is still blank in the mornings as
I sink into my gray and black comforter
The knowledge that these nights I spend
working, these nights I spend sneaking and
tiptoeing
Will blend together in my mind's eye, will
become one mono-memory
Of sleepless nights and groggy afternoons.
This is how my youth is spent, huh?

I come back to these thoughts, this fear of
mine that I
Will sit down years from now and remember
my halcyon days as one
Continuous block of dark, empty skies. But
where I am now
It's like falling deeper into a hole of your own
creation.
The light's pouring into the windows as I'm
typing this

Just at the edge of my vision through the
blinds, chopping into the room
I should get some rest. I should go to bed. I
peek outside.
The sky is broken, shattered like a
checkerboard, orange and blue rising slowly
past the horizon
Tomorrow, I'm going to get better at this and
then I'll get back on track
I think I said that yesterday



Motherhood by Hannah Lindsay

House for Sale by Jacob Dickens

House for sale. 3 bedroom, 2 and a half bath. 1401 Birch Street. 2,000 sq. ft. Comes with a fireplace. Fruit tree in the backyard planted by my grandmother when she and her husband bought the house. The two of them had met at an orchard where she was hired to pick apples. There's a very particular way you need to pick an apple on an orchard. First, you cup the apple in your hand, making sure you cover the entire bottom. Then you lift and twist to upwards against the tree until it snaps off and you're left with that classic stem adorning the top of the apple. My grandmother used to tell me that picking with your fingertips bruises the apple. She could fill up an entire basket in about six minutes before she got arthritis. She would take her basket of red delicious apples into the kitchen (which is stocked with a microwave, gas-powered oven and stove, and a Frigidaire vintage refrigerator) and cut them up all afternoon to bake them into apple crisps. Whenever I was at her house, she would let me help and my hands would be sticky from the nectary residue afterwards. She used to add a pinch of nutmeg to give the crisps more flavor and serve them with a scoop of vanilla ice cream. That tree weathered over forty years of sun and rain and is still standing in our backyard next to a twelve-foot shed my grandfather would spend his time in. When he retired, he got into woodworking as it seems all men his age feel obligated to. There's something about building something from scratch that appealed to him after years of selling other people's products. He would fix odds and ends around the house and even offer his help to his neighbors who bought his decorative cutting boards and birdhouses. He was a whiz at making a birdhouse and once a month, he would take about a dozen of them down to the farmer's market and sell them for forty bucks. He'd sell out by noon. There are three bedrooms in the house, a master bedroom, my mother's old room, and the guest room where I would normally stay on trips over to their house. The closet door used to get stuck until my grandfather fixed it so at a young age, I was terrified of sleeping in that room since the closet door would be open and exposed a black void of darkness behind it. It didn't help that my bed faced the closet head-on. When I was really little, I used to take crayons and scribble on the walls and play tic-tac-toe with myself. I always won. My mother was upset but grandma thought it was cute and kept it around for a few months until grandpa painted over it without telling her. For a while after, grandma used to give me art supplies and paper to make drawings she would collect in her dresser, bottom drawer. For the longest

time, my mother's bedroom was like a time capsule to the late 70s complete with Elvis Costello posters, a record collection that included two copies of Fleetwood Mac's Rumours, and a wooden bed frame adorned with an oversized quilt. Since then, my mother and I have cleaned up the room and put those items in storage, so now you can see the pale blue walls hidden away for years. There's a dining room that was used every other Sunday when grandma would have friends from church over to play a game of rummy which she would always come closer to winning but never could. The basement's unfinished, but there's a washer and dryer down there, though how willing you are to brave the basement's cold, liminal atmosphere is up to you. I don't know much about the attic and I don't think my grandparents knew much about it either. Call my cell at 873-555-9010 to discuss buying the house. We only ask that you remember not to bruise the apples when you pick them.

Bass Beat by Samantha Berdel

Bass. Beat. Left. Right. You. Me. Her. Us. Bass. Beat. Left. Right. Introspection.
Bass. Beat. Left. Right. Euphoria. Solace. Exhaustion. Bass. Beat. Left. Right. Sorry.
Bass. Beat. Left. Right. Summoning. Giggles. Perpetual. Bass. Beat. Left. Right. Destiny.
Bass. Beat. Left. Right. Disconsolation. Clutching. Sorry. Bass. Beat. Left. Right. Soulmate.
Bass. Beat. Left. Right. Me. Alone. Abandonment. Bass. Beat. Left. Right. Godspeed.



Night Walk by Leah Freeman

Coyotes by Holly King

Some nights I would be kept awake by howling outside. Living alone out in the forest that is to be expected. It's winter, the coyotes are hungry. It's just the coyotes. It's just the coyotes. It's always the coyotes. The dark figures that move through the trees are merely shadows. Tricks of the light. Or the coyotes.

Tonight I am still awake, and out of bed. Because of the coyotes. It's the coyotes. The stars shine bright above me and the trees sway. Leafless branches clack against each other just a little closer than the dark sky above. The clouds cover the moon and make the bright stars look red. They're just stars. It's just the coyotes. It's cold tonight as the weather turns to winter and my legs seem strangely numb, almost wet. Only it's a sticky sort of wet, like when warmed syrup is spilled in a restaurant. There's crunching in the fallen leaves around me. Jerky movements as the coyotes move in the brush, between the trees. It's the coyotes.

I get the sense they are hunting me, but I don't move. My legs are too numb. I should have brought a flashlight. I should have brought a gun. I could have shot the coyotes, then I would be home. But the coyotes don't scare me.

The howling started again, next to my ear. Loud guttural sounds that vibrated the ground and shook the trees. It made the pit in my stomach grow. I would normally hide from the noise, retreat under a blanket until the sound passed. But there's no blankets out here. But it's fine, it's just the coyotes.

It's the coyotes that tracked me through the trees earlier as I hiked home from the river. My dog growled at the brush when he heard them. He took off into the trees and I followed. I heard him yelp when I followed. I still haven't found him. "Hunter," I called him. My voice came out as a strangled grunt. I coughed and the wet stickiness filled my mouth, muffled my voice. The howling turned to growls and the wet stickiness grew thorns that pierced into my leg. And my chest. More filled my mouth.

The coyotes were always in the forest. I had seen them before, thinking nothing of it. They

would watch me and I would leave them alone, but they always watched me. My friend had visited before. She saw the coyotes too and screamed. She claimed they weren't coyotes and refused to come back. I don't mind the coyotes. I didn't at least.

The red stars moved around a bit. Always keeping a gaze on my eyes. Many glistening half moons hung below each pair of stars, growing steadily darker as they dropped the dark stickiness.

I feel bad for the coyotes, with their skin pulled back from their heads. Some of them are missing limbs or tails. A few of them seem to be so deformed it has become more comfortable for them to walk on two legs. They seem like walking clumps of raw meat and muscle, missing any sign of skin or fur. I wonder what happened to them.

The half moons draw closer to my face as the time goes on. I watch them as they dip into my chest and clamp around my arms and legs. It hurts but only a little. Everything is numb. I don't think I will be hiding under the blankets tonight. Who's going to feed my dog in the morning?

Anxiety by Julia Park

Some days I feel like I can't breathe.

It almost feels like the weight of the world is on top of me.

This pressure causes me pain in my back, head, neck, and chest.

These feelings drive me insane and all I want to do is rest.

I tell myself that I am fine, even though I know it is not true.

Hopefully, my anxiety will soon decline so I can breathe again like I used to.



(Untitled) by Hollace Kimmet

A Thought by Leah Freeman

Truly lucky that my pen may plant marks
Of any frank implication, further,
Of any meaning in sincere weight,
On a paper belonged to a lowly;
An undeserving miracle bestowed upon my hand.

Mind encompassed with absurdity
As I am grateful for the condemnation.
Accidental as it must have been, never
Have I depreciated the noble ability;
Affinity of man.



Laundry Day by Jon
Leicht