

Anoka Ramsey Community College



# THE RAPIDS REVIEW

**ARCC**

**Creative Writing Club**

# **THE RAPIDS REVIEW 2020**

# WELCOME!

---

When going through the many submissions to this journal, I was stunned by the talent of Anoka Ramsey students. Many of the submissions were thoughtful, artful, and showed that the artist or writer had put a great deal of their time into their pieces. I was also stunned by how many pieces were sent in by professors on behalf of their students. It showed how proud Anoka Ramsey faculty are of their students and what their students create.

The Rapids Review works to showcase the creativity and artistic talents of Anoka Ramsey students. Throughout my time as a student at Anoka Ramsey, I have gotten to know many of the kindest most hardworking people I have never met. People of all ages and backgrounds come together at ARCC to create a healthy and effective environment for personal growth and creation. I am proud to share this journal because it shows the hard work ARCC students put into everything they do. While students are busy with school, jobs, and their families, they still take the time to share their art with the world.

The Rapids Review is especially important in the face of COVID-19. Many students are struggling, and uncertainty is

everywhere. The editors of the Rapids Review want to make sure students get the recognition they deserve despite these circumstances. We have included a wide variety of poetry, prose, and art. We chose pieces we believed showed signs of the artist's and writer's effort and passion for their respective crafts. We hope that you will come away feeling hopeful for your futures and your peers' futures. Thank you! And Enjoy.

-Olivia Lee (Editor)

## **ARCC Rapids Review Mission**

*The Rapids Review*, the Coon Rapids Campus student literary magazine, is dedicated to publishing a wide range of excellently crafted work by student writers of any experience and all ethnicities, genders, religions, sexual orientations, marital statuses, ages, and abilities.

## **Acknowledgements**

We would like to thank our readers for giving us a reason to create this journal.

Thanks to all the artists and writers, who were willing to share their wonderful works with the world.

Thank you to our editing team, who worked with great enthusiasm to do justice to each and every piece in this journal.

A huge thank you to the amazing Anoka Ramsey faculty, who promoted the journal and their students' work.

# **Table of Contents**

<b>No Title by Morgan Doerr</b>	<b>1</b>
<b>Welcome!</b>	<b>3</b>
<b>Northern Minnesota Rain</b>	<b>8</b>
<b>West Coast by Elizabeth Tischler</b>	<b>9</b>
<b>Conundrum.</b>	<b>10</b>
<b>No Title by Morgan Doerr</b>	<b>13</b>
<b>Band aids</b>	<b>14</b>
<b>Hope by Catherine McCarthy</b>	<b>15</b>
<b>Mimikry</b>	<b>16</b>
<b>My Lady by Catherine McCarthy</b>	<b>17</b>
<b>Alternate Dreaming</b>	<b>18</b>
<b>Solar Sunflower by Esther Stoy</b>	<b>20</b>
<b>Blood Quantum</b>	<b>21</b>
<b>Bagboy by Abigail Weller</b>	<b>27</b>
<b>Bathwater of Ghosts</b>	<b>28</b>
<b>Barbed Wire</b>	<b>30</b>
<b>Circular by Catherine McCarthy</b>	<b>32</b>
<b>Mile Marker 121</b>	<b>33</b>
<b>Mountains by Elizabeth Tischler</b>	<b>41</b>

<b>First Snow</b>	<b>52</b>
<b>Crazy Alice</b>	<b>53</b>
<b>Coffeehouse Dreams</b>	<b>54</b>
<b>Listen by Esther Stoy</b>	<b>55</b>
<b>Ana</b>	<b>56</b>
<b>Abstract by Catherine McCarthy</b>	<b>61</b>
<b>Comfort by Esther Stoy</b>	<b>65</b>

# NORTHERN MINNESOTA RAIN

---

by Riley Willman

Northern Minnesota rain, or so they called it.

To me it was peace.

Watching the rain pour from the sky  
delivering its message through the booming thunder  
and lightning streaks that lit up the night.

With storm clouds as dark as the factory air, we put into them.

Stretching out for all to see what we had done.

Killing earth slowly with all our modernization.

Was it worth it,

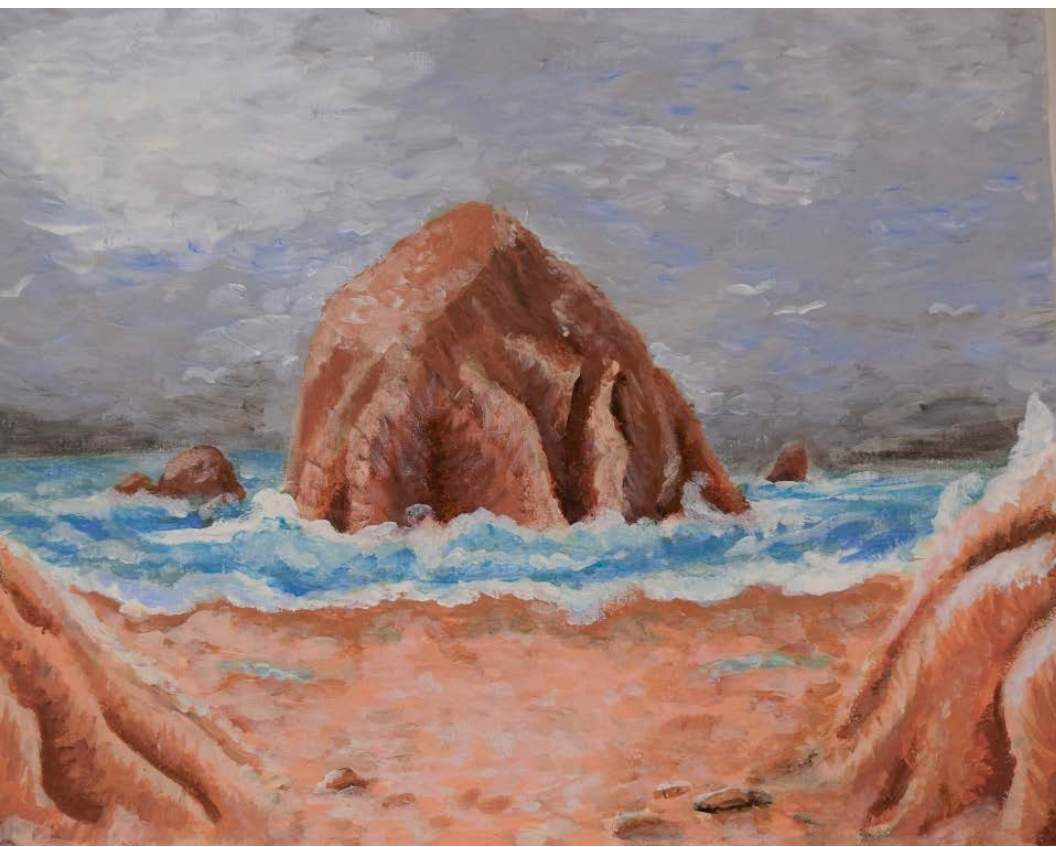
To know our species will go extinct because of our own  
creations?

To know that it is our fault when one day the sky deteriorates  
and we are left to burn under the sun with our mistakes?

To know it could have been prevented if people cared?

I cried with the sky hoping she'd see that I cared too.





# CONUNDRUM.

---

by Misty Fear

I have a dragon in my stomach  
he aches like a raw bone  
bruised with thunder.  
He has already  
eaten my soft pulsating heart.  
Bloody dark inferno  
spilling black blood inside my internals

I fight  
to hold doves inside my head,  
yet they rattle  
like a buzz of snakes and make  
my teeth ache.

I yearn  
to keep still beside this hot molten lava  
that spills and leave my body pale,  
panting  
for the moisture  
of dew on the side of a slick glass full of ice.

You have set me ablaze!  
And placed this dragon called lusting hopes inside my  
chest.

You are the dark face  
that emits false light  
like a worn street lamp in  
a dank alley.

You look like a friend,  
yet you lead me down diverging path  
with no true end.  
A prostitute in the dark with her pointy tooth smile,  
beguiles  
with rotting flesh that fractures in sunlight.

What shall I do? Shall I  
feed this dragon with in –  
fear of a dangerous dog that won't leave.  
Shall I  
allow it to eat my wormed up  
brains, my pink lungs,  
my toxic liver,  
my gruesome guts, my purple muscles  
and stretched out hide?

No,  
it is not that easy  
to feed a dragon. It has fed  
on more than  
my body, ravenous creature.

I've fed it my nightmares,  
my dark dream.  
The I,  
that is forever forlorn,  
the trust that never quite forms,  
my perceptions, my intuitions

I've fed them all to the  
dragon in my stomach  
and taken on his false form.  
Fattened  
on my imaginations,  
bloated like a corpse full of flies.

I will starve you away,  
until you wither  
and die with your hidden deceptions.  
At least I'll try,  
because someday,  
yes, someday, I like my dragon  
that lies inside.



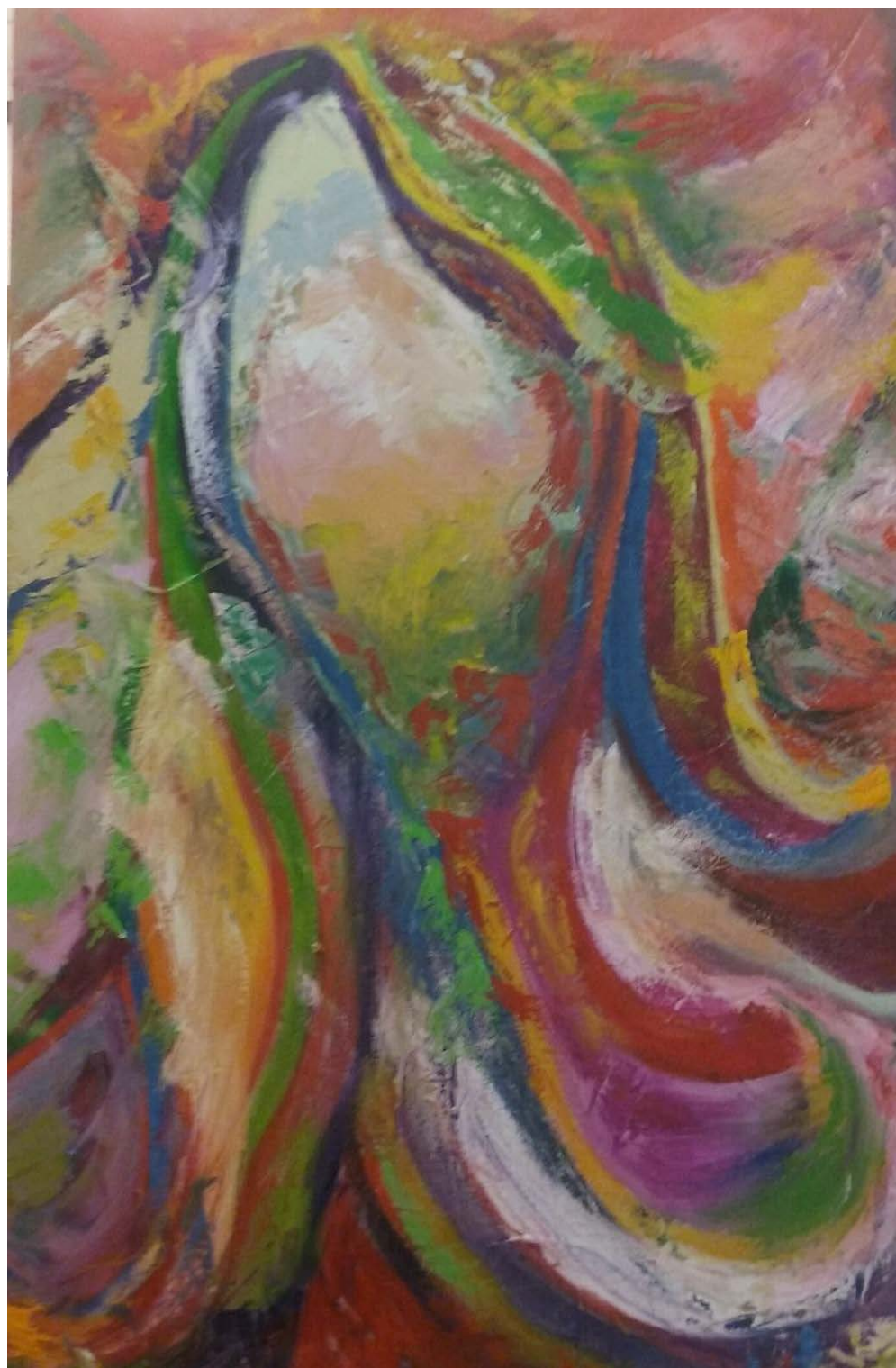
# BANDAIDS

---

by Riley Erickson

When a gash has overflown,  
don't cover it with bandages,  
don't keep it fresh, gooey.  
Let platelets form.  
Let red become brown.  
Let pain scab over  
until all pain has numbed,  
until it peels off into the wind,  
leaving your soft apricot  
skin untouched.  
If one tries to pick,  
misery will creep from the edges  
and they will feel it.  
They will be reminded of  
the initial gutting.  
One should not submit to permanence.





# MIMIKRY

---

by Joseph Wold

Where is our model?

Wo ist das Modell?

Our star citizen is now perverted.

However, the people worship  
them.

Doch die Leute haben sie  
verehrt.

Who is our model?

Wer ist das Modell?

Are they actually a demon  
wearing the skin of man?

Wären sie einen Teufel im  
Menschenpelz?

Tonight, we will see.

Heute nacht, werden wir sehen.

our paradigm is fluctuating

Who is the model and who is the  
mimic?

It's hard to tell when we all start  
to look the same.

Aber jeder sieht gleich aus.

Who is to blame?

Not I.

Nicht ich.

I'm just an onlooker.

Ich bin nur ein Zuschauer.

Isn't that right?	Ist das richtig?
-------------------	------------------





# ALTERNATE DREAMING

---

by Cicily Steinle

(inspired by Changeling: the Lost Second Edition)

What would you think, O child,  
if loss had never even been dreamed?  
If there was no chance whatsoever  
to recall this? But time regifts it, always:  
soon we remember the muffled fear  
of the shadow children. Yes, we'll see  
the trimmed pain of the crowned,  
and wish iron's fire did not set us alight  
with new desperation and scars...

My own dear, there are dreams where  
nightmares  
never tread, where every adult could become a  
child  
if he wishes, and where wishes are not the  
inhabitants  
of "What Was," but rather the uncertain, chilly  
"Now."

But if we could bend any pledge to our  
designs, would there be peace?  
What if emotion was always at a peak, and we  
never feared our hearts?  
Suppose we always knew where we were  
headed, and we always arrived.  
“Where am I going?” would not be connected  
to the tatters of our innocence.  
What if we did not have to count each free day  
as miracles in their own right?

What if that which you shape in your dream  
now  
could be reality in another's? What then, youth?  
Would you have us forget our private crucibles,  
the stolen time that gave us promises each  
day?  
To spin fate until we would forget  
what made us full of impossible?

Would we then truly be Lost?





# BLOOD QUANTUM

---

by Alyssa Overtoom

Most kindergarteners only need to worry about learning their shapes and numbers while also learning how to behave like proper human beings. You, however, get to be pulled out of class once a week to learn about your native heritage. You don't mind, though, because the woman who sits with you smells strongly of fresh tobacco and tanned deer skin. Sometimes she has a handmade board game, a simple snakes and ladders knock-off with little fact cards about your native people, and the two of you play together for twenty minutes before you're ushered back into class.

Once you're in first grade these sessions get longer, and you're joined by other kids just like you. The woman who brings you together, Mrs. Buffalohead, reminds you that if a teacher ever tries to deny you from coming to meet with her, you can tell that teacher it is against the law to do so. You nod but don't really understand the weight behind the message until much later. The kids around you are so similar but different too: they're Lakota, Dakota, Cherokee, but none of them are Ojibwe. You all sit around a table in an empty classroom, listening to Mrs. Buffalohead talk while you carefully stitch a bead pattern on a medicine bag. It's the size of a necklace, made from soft deer hide and sinew. You've carefully and painstakingly stitched the thunderbird onto the front, and you think about stuffing it full of cool rocks. Week by week, Mrs. Buffalohead comes to you with facts and stories about your heritage and the history of

those around you. You learn about wigwams and sugar treats, and you make horse-hair dolls and decorate rabbit skins with story drawings. By this time, you've been to a few pow-wows and have dreams of becoming a jingle dress dancer. You excitedly tell everyone you meet that you're Indian and attend a few night classes for learning to dance when your parents have a night off from work.

Your mother is ancestrally half Ojibwe and half French-Canadian and your father, Dutch and German. The other kids show their ancestry in their faces and you find yourself envious of their high cheekbones and chestnut skin. Your mother granted you her thick, almost black hair and earthy eyes, but your father gave you his milky, white man pallor and features. As you creep further and further into adulthood, you become more self-conscious about attending pow-wows and dance practice, and you breathe

relief as your parents have less time to take you to such outings.

In high school, you find that there aren't enough Native students for the district to be legally mandated to have an American Indian Education Program. The Buffalo-Hanover-Montrose area is a stark white contrast compared to your Brooklyn Park hometown, and your school days go uninterrupted. The only time your native heritage is brought up in class is either learning about colonization and Columbus or musing over how everyone on the rez is homeless, a druggie, or an alcoholic. You feel a hot, sick pool of dread building in your gut whenever these white kids around you start talking about your people. Your people who you have familial ties to, your people who you know are struggling, your people who work with what they have and deal with racism like this daily, but you don't have



to face it directly. You want to tell them to shut up, that they don't know what they're talking about, but you bite your tongue and let your ears feel hot. At times like these you thank your father for what he's given you.

It continues to haunt you after you graduate, even now it bites from time to time. You feel inadequate, incomplete, ashamed. You know you're native, but you wonder how much of you is native. A part of you argues that you would've worked harder to study dance and learn your people's language if you really wanted to be Ojibwe. It's layered, these internalized feelings of not being right. How much of you is native, how clear is the line between your ancestry? You perform a self-instilled version of blood quantum, of measuring native against white, and come out on the other side clean. Those needling little voices that tell you that you're wrong never go away, but they grow quiet.

You're Ojibwe, you're Chippewa, you're Anishinaabe. You love fry bread tacos and watching the fancy shawl dancers at the pow-wow, and still dream of getting to dance jingle dress someday. There is no "winning" the pot when it comes to your heritage, you play the hand you're dealt and make it work for you. You smile, and proudly tell everyone who will hear that you're Native American.



# BATHWATER OF GHOSTS

---

by Riley Erickson

I subdued myself in the water,  
accepting it as a warm hug,  
letting it fill every crevice  
of my nude body.  
Water filled my eardrums  
and the white noise of the world  
was replaced by shallow breathing  
that echoed like choppy wind.  
I heaved in a breath  
and watched the mounds of flesh  
on my chest peek out from the water  
and sink back down as I exhaled.  
I held up my hand with spread,  
child-like fingers,  
and watched mesmerized  
as steam curled and rose  
to the ceiling from my fingertips,  
as if commanded by my own magic.  
Each strand swirled and danced

like curious ghosts  
until collapsing onto glass.  
Perhaps I am the steam:  
flying with hope,  
knowing my destiny is inevitable.

# BARBED WIRE

---

by Amanda Finnestad

Looking at you, facing  
the once fear-maddening  
eyes that placidly gazed my direction.  
Forcefully inheriting what wasn't yours.  
I prepared my words, sharpening my  
tongue like a scythe waiting  
to eradicate the dry fodder that  
you sent my direction. I waited  
  
til your head was gleaming, shorn from  
guilt. With one movement,  
your heart was mine. Intertwined

with barbs of glee sent forth from my hand.

Piercing your heart and causing beads of sweat

to form on your brow. Then, Grace again

slowly warmed my heart,

speaking softly, questioning,

whispering in my ear, with

pleading eyes and soft, delicate touch.

Grace that erased my small

moment of pride, quickly

fading the triumphant yells

to soft words around my shoulders

and woe that filled my heart.





# MILE MARKER 121

---

by Madelynne Rootes

## CAST OF CHARACTERS

HIM, the main character in his mid-30s

GHOST, a companion of HIM, ageless

## SETTING

Cemetery

Railroad tracks

## STAGE DIRECTIONS

For each new day in the cemetery, Ghost and Him are in a different part of the cemetery, represented by their placement on the stage. When Him leaves each day, the stage darkens. The lighting is dim and ochre.

## SCENE 1

*It is autumn in a large cemetery. The headstones are tall and old. HIM walks down to where GHOST is sitting on one of the headstones.*

*The frequent sounds of trains going over nearby tracks are heard in the distance.*

GHOST: I knew we'd meet again.

HIM: You can't exactly call this a coincidence when I know where to find you all the time.

GHOST: Isn't that peculiar? Now come sit, you! And unburden yourself.

HIM: *(Climbs atop the headstone.)* Well, I suppose today wasn't too bad. I...

GHOST: You smell.

HIM: What?

GHOST: You smell again. And you say today wasn't too bad.

HIM: I've had worse days.

GHOST: Yes, that much is true. You have smelled worse before.

HIM: You know what? *(Takes out a cigarette and lights it.)* You're supposed to be helping me, not bringing me down.

GHOST: I'm not bringing you anywhere, except closer to the truth. Maybe one day you'll recognize it.

HIM: *(Blows out smoke. Crosses his arms.)* Whatever.

GHOST: Why are you here?

HIM: I don't know. It's quiet. It's peaceful. Offers a place to wind down. *(Turns toward Ghost with a derisive look on his face.)* Actually, I'm attempting to "return to my baseline, or decompress," as Angie calls it. Whatever the fuck that means.

GHOST: *(Tries to suppress laughter).*

HIM: I already do half the shit she talks about! I mean, I've survived this long. It's like listening to my own farts, just hot air, except it's running me dry. I should probably stop our sessions. Yeah, I'm better off on my own. Save myself some cash along the way too. *(Throws cigarette on the ground.)*

GHOST: *(Laughs aloud.)*

HIM: *(Smiles, believing Ghost is laughing at his comments.)* What? Yeah, she's like a asshole. Her mouth opens, and shit falls out.

GHOST: Of course, she is. Of course, she is. *(Waggles finger at Him).* You're a funny host, my friend. Funny, funny, funny.

HIM: *(Shrugs.)* It's one of my better attributes.

GHOST: You shouldn't have to worry about managing on your own.

HIM: That's what I was thinking! I'm doing just fine, you know. You don't think there is anything wrong with me, do you?

GHOST: Being what I am, I cannot say.

HIM: Being what you are? What's that supposed to mean?

GHOST: If I were to agree with you, I'd undermine my very existence.

HIM: Oh-ho-ho. I get it. If I admit that I talk to a dead person, that makes me a crazy person. Which means something is wrong with me.

GHOST: You're as crazy as you believe you are.

HIM: Right. And I don't believe I'm crazy, so why do I need a therapist?

GHOST: I mean, I can't help you anymore.

HIM: What are you talking about? I come and talk with you every day.

GHOST: You said that I should be helping you. I'm going to do the best I can by saying that I can't help you. That's why you need a therapist.

HIM: (*Becoming agitated.*) What? I *don't* need a therapist.

GHOST: But you need someone to talk to.

HIM: I am talking to someone. *You*.

GHOST: No, I can't help you anymore. You've come here too many times.

HIM: What in the *flying fuck* are you talking about?

GHOST: Do you know where you are?

HIM: Yeah. Jesus. I'm at the town cemetery. Is this because I shouldn't be talking to dead people or something? What

happened to “we are only as crazy as we believe?” I mean, this is *my* reality, *my* “coping mechanism.” Why can’t we leave it at that?

GHOST: What do I keep hearing?

HIM: (*Sighs.*) This is getting nowhere. I’ll see you later, pal.  
(*Turns to go.*)

GHOST: The old railroad tracks run across the backside of the cemetery.

HIM: So?

GHOST: Perhaps we should visit them.

HIM: Now why in fuck’s sake would I want to do that?

GHOST: I know that you like to watch the trains pass. You imagine yourself stealing away in one of the boxcars, having an unforeseen adventure. You imagine a different life, one filled with excitement, relieved of the grind...

HIM: Are you fucking serious? Are you suggesting that I run away from my problems?

GHOST: No, I am not suggesting anything like that. I am only suggesting that we go and watch the railroad tracks.

HIM: And I suppose if I go with you, that means I can talk with you for a while longer.

GHOST: (*Smiles.*) Absolutely.

HIM: Fine.

*HIM and GHOST are standing by the railroad tracks. There is a white sign near the tracks that says Mile Marker 121.*

GHOST: I haven't heard a train for a while. That could mean one is coming soon.

HIM: How long are we going to stand here staring at nothing?

GHOST: (*Sighs.*) Being here makes me want to be carried away. Do you get that feeling? No obligations. No expectations. Just the open sky and endless ground.

HIM: Yeah. Sure.

GHOST: When you look down the tracks into the distance, it feels like the sky bowls over them. As if the ground and the sky have changed places. The Earth is infinite, while the sky is finite. Makes life feel more... reachable, achievable. Worth living.

HIM: Maybe *you* should see a therapist.

GHOST: Oh, I'm only generating thoughts for you to ponder.

HIM: I'll consider them. Can we go now?

## SCENE II

*Another day.*

GHOST: Look who has come again. Tell me, did the tracks incite any inspirational thoughts?

HIM: Please don't let this be a segue for going to the railroad tracks again. I don't see how that was helpful.

GHOST: Apparently not. How was talking down by the railroad tracks any different from talking amidst the graves?

HIM: Because we weren't having a conversation. You went off on your own.

GHOST: So, you felt ignored, even though my words were meant for you?

HIM: Oh, for fuck's sake. Yes, fine. I felt like I wasn't part of our interaction. It felt one-sided.

GHOST: *(Appears to think about this.)* I'm not trying to persuade you to go down to the railroad tracks. But I do have something to show you, something that may prompt some much needed... conversation.

HIM: *(Sighs. Rubs his forehead.)* Do I have a choice in going?

GHOST: *(Vehemently.)* You always have a choice. Until you don't. I hope you're making the right one while you have the chance.

HIM: *(Pauses.)* Fine. Show me.

*Ghost leads Him through the graveyard. They wind amongst the tombstones, until they reach a giant oak tree. Hanging from a low limb of the tree is a hangman's noose.*

HIM: *(Startled.)* Jesus Christ!

GHOST: *(Monotone.)* The groundskeeper found a young girl hanging from this tree this morning. She was visiting her mother's grave late last night.

HIM: Why didn't they take down the rope? That's fucking tasteless.

GHOST: How do you feel about that?

HIM: Why did you show me this?

GHOST: It frightens you, doesn't it? Why?

HIM: It doesn't *frighten* me. It makes me angry. It's disrespectful to that poor child to keep that fucking rope hanging there.

*Him walks forward and unties the rope from the tree. He stands with the noose in his hand.*

GHOST: How do you feel while holding that rope in your hands?

HIM: *(Growls.)* Like you're an asshole.

GHOST: You haven't let it go.

HIM: Why did you show me this?

GHOST: Why are you still holding onto the rope?

HIM: Perhaps I'll strangle you with it.

GHOST: *(Laughs, tipping its head back.)* To do that, you'd have to put that rope around your own neck.

HIM: *(Throws the rope to the ground, snarling.)*

GHOST: I would suggest to you that you make the right choice and do not come back again.

HIM: I know what you're doing, you goddamn... *(Pauses.)* I don't know what you are! But I know that you're trying to scare me, threaten me! *(Starts to become hysterical. Pacing back and forth, hands in his hair.)* Well, too bad, buddy. Because I don't have anywhere else to go! I don't have





anyone to turn to! It's just me and you in this goddamn graveyard. Me and you and the rotting dead.

GHOST: Oh, stop it. You're lying to yourself, and you know it.

HIM: What? You think I'm *lying to myself*? Shouldn't I know how I feel inside? Fuck! You're such a fucking prick. How did I end up here, alone with a prick in a cemetery?

GHOST: I'm not anything that you think I am. Not anymore.

HIM: I don't care! I can't stand any more of your riddles. I'm leaving.

GHOST: (*Calling to Him's retreating back.*) Make sure to not come back!

### SCENE III

*Another day.*

GHOST: You shouldn't have come back.

HIM: What is with you trying to get me to leave you? I'm, like, the only person you can talk to.

GHOST: I have lots of friends with whom I can talk.

HIM: (*Scoffs.*) Please, you don't have friends.

GHOST: Believe what you will.

HIM: I believe that you're the liar. But I can indulge you. Do your friends haunt this cemetery too?

GHOST: I don't haunt this cemetery. This cemetery is where you choose to meet me.

HIM: But you're a motherfucking ghost!

GHOST: I prefer the term "spirit," and not all spirits are the reflection of something that's dead.

HIM: (*Waves his hand dismissively.*) Semantics. So, your friends are ghosts as well. Why can't I meet them?

GHOST: You don't want to meet them.

HIM: Why not?

GHOST: They don't like you.

HIM: What?

GHOST: You're a liar. You keep lying to me and to yourself.

HIM: Oh, not this again. Is there going to be another field trip as well?

GHOST: Look around the headstone you're leaning against.

*(Him leans over the top of the headstone to find an open grave. The cement block that holds the casket is present, but the groundskeepers have yet to cover up the hole.)*

HIM: *(Sighs.)* An open grave. What meaning am I to derive from this, I wonder?

GHOST: Are you not curious? Do you not want to lay down inside it?

HIM: *(Gives Ghost a look.)* No.

GHOST: *(Hops down from its perch, and lays down in the open grave. Closes its eyes.)* Now I know what it feels like to be you.

HIM: Fuck no, you don't.

GHOST: Come, friend. Lay next to me. Enclose yourself in the wet darkness, the black dirt.

HIM: I don't think so.

GHOST: *(Sits up in the grave.)* Does it scare you?

HIM: No. But it is disrespectful... and weird.

GHOST: Disrespectful, yes. Like the noose in the tree.

HIM: Yeah. Disrespectful to the deceased. We should honor their memories rather than defile them.

GHOST: And what of the living dead? What should we do with them?

HIM: The living dead do not exist, my friend.

GHOST: Yes, they do. I talk to some of them every day.

HIM: Well, if they did exist, we would have to get rid of them.

GHOST: Why? Aren't they dead too? Wouldn't it be more respectful of their state of being to help them?

HIM: Because they're inherently bad. They want to take over the world.

GHOST: I think they've already taken over the world.

HIM: Whatever you say, dude.

GHOST: Before we went to the railroad tracks, you admitted that you had problems.

HIM: Everyone has problems. It's part of living.

GHOST: Why are yours so special?

HIM: I don't think mine are special. That's why I stopped my sessions with Angie.

GHOST: Why'd you start seeing her in the first place?

HIM: I told you. Maisie convinced me.

GHOST: Ah. What does Maisie think of your problems?

HIM: *(Sighs. Takes out a cigarette and lights it. Exhales.)* I don't bloody know. Probably that they need to be fixed. She thinks they're getting in the way of our relationship.

GHOST: What do you think?

HIM: I think she's overly sensitive. She needs to toughen up and understand that problems are part of life, you know.

GHOST: Yes, you said that.

HIM: Well, I don't know what you want me to say.

GHOST: I wonder what it would feel like to be buried alive.

HIM: It'd probably suck shit. *(Stubs out cigarette.)*

GHOST: You would know.

#### SCENE IV

*Another day. Him stumbles around the cemetery, falling over headstones. Ghost watches Him struggle impassively.*

GHOST: You've returned again.

HIM: *(Settles on a headstone. Places his head in his hands.)* I told you. I have nowhere else to go.

GHOST: And I told you that was a lie.

HIM: Fuck you! This is the only place where I feel safe, okay?

GHOST: Well, now that's different. What are you so afraid of, friend?

HIM: Who said I'm afraid? It's more a feeling of... being uncomfortable. Like, something is hanging over my head, or crawling underneath my skin.

GHOST: Like a noose.

HIM: What?

GHOST: Or grave worms.

HIM: Are you being serious? This isn't fucking funny.

GHOST: I'm only trying to understand this feeling of foreboding.

HIM: Jesus. You know what? I don't care. I don't fucking care anymore.

GHOST: (*After a moment.*) Would you like to go down to the railroad tracks?

HIM: No! I wouldn't like to go down to the railroad tracks! I wouldn't like to go anywhere you suggest. Coming here is becoming as stressful as my real life.

GHOST: This isn't real to you?

HIM: No... It's separate, somehow. I don't know. I don't want to think about it right now.

GHOST: (*Fervently.*) What about me? What do you believe I am?

HIM: Leave me alone.

GHOST: Please, friend. You must answer me. What am I to you?

HIM: I said. Leave. Me. Alone.

GHOST: I'm afraid that I cannot.

HIM: Why the fuck not?

GHOST: If you knew that answer, we wouldn't be here right now.

HIM: Of course, I would! I'd be in the same shit regardless of where you are! Ugh! Why do I come here?

GHOST: I wonder that myself. This is a cemetery after all.

## SCENE V

*Another day. Him has slurred speech, red eyes, relatively incoherent.*

GHOST: *(Sighs.)* You are utterly hopeless, friend.

HIM: Shut up. I don't need your bullshit today. *(Explodes.)* It's *killing* me. It's fucking *killing* me. All of it. She's a bloody carnivore. And so are the executives. And you. Apparently, I can't speak with you anymore. What am I supposed to do with all *this*?

GHOST: Maybe we should go down to the railroad tracks.

HIM: Argh! *(Starts kicking headstones.)*

GHOST: Now, isn't that *disrespectful* to the dead?

HIM: Who cares what they think! They're the lucky ones! They're fucking dead! They don't have to worry about living a life they hate!

GHOST: It's still disrespectful.

HIM: Bugger you to Hell!

GHOST: Perhaps you should learn to respect yourself before you go about trying to respect others.

HIM: *(Panting. Mocking.)* And how would I do that, oh wise one?

GHOST: (*Eyes glinting, whispering.*) I've already shown you several ways...

HIM: Don't you *dare* say I don't respect myself! I respect the misery and work I put myself through each day! I respect the fact that I wake up every day against my wishes!

GHOST: You don't have to do that anymore.

HIM: If only. If only.

GHOST: (*Hands him a gravedigger's shovel.*)

HIM: What in the Hell is this for?

GHOST: To bury your sorrows.

HIM: That's fucking stupid. I'm not doing some metaphorical bullshit to make myself feel better!

GHOST: Trust me when I say you've already done most of the work. There's just one final step.

HIM: I don't understand. And I really don't care.

GHOST: Of course, you don't. You never have. You'll just continue to die away without the decency of calling it rot. So be it, my friend. So be it.

## SCENE VI

*Another day back at the cemetery. Him staggers into the cemetery, bruised and beaten.*

GHOST: (*Deadpans.*) It's getting worse.

HIM: No, it's not. Just a little tumble down the stairs.

GHOST: You should stop.



HIM: I can't. It's the only way I know.

GHOST: Shall we go down to the railroad tracks?

HIM: No. I don't like the railroad tracks. Aren't you going to ask me what happened?

GHOST: You said that you tumbled down the stairs. I believe you. My friends are at the railroad tracks. They want to meet you.

HIM: You believe me? That's a first. Your friends are there? Alrighty, then. Lead the way.

*Him and Ghost go down to the railroad tracks. It is empty, except for the tracks and the mile marker sign.*

HIM: So, where are these friends of yours?

GHOST: They'll be here soon. In the meantime, I think we need to have a conversation.

HIM: Why couldn't we have this conversation in the cemetery and come back later to meet your friends? I don't like the tracks.

GHOST: Because they'll be here soon. Now, here is what needs to be said. I told you not to come back, and yet you returned again and again...

HIM: And I told you that I didn't feel safe anywhere else! Am I not entitled to a safe place?

GHOST: ...I told you to make the right choice while you had the chance. And I told you to stop lying to yourself and to start recognizing the truth.

HIM: I'm not a goddamn liar!

*Both turn their heads at the sound of an oncoming train.  
They start to shout to be heard over the train.*

GHOST: (*Gleefully, watching the train.*) Here they come! My friends!

HIM: They're on the train?

GHOST: (*Turns back toward Him.*) You should've listened to all that I told you. Because now they're too strong.

HIM: What? Who?

GHOST: They call me to their side, and I can no longer resist their cries.

HIM: I don't understand...

GHOST: I tried to save you, but I can't do it anymore!

HIM: (*Frightened.*) Please, friend. Please. Everything is okay. You're okay. You can keep fighting.

GHOST: I cannot! Because you stopped fighting a long time ago. Instead, you drowned yourself in self-pity and spirits. Look inward, and you'll recognize me! Perhaps you can save the both of us.

HIM: Please! I don't understand! I don't want you to go away.

GHOST: See, friends! You were right! He's too afraid. You've always been afraid, running from ghosts! (*Laughs sorrowfully.*)

HIM: I'm not afraid! I just... I'm confused. I thought you were my friend.

GHOST: I was. Since your inner eye opened, I've been by your side. But the time has come to think of different things! You've spent too many years suffocating us. And I'm through with it. My friends are right. It's time to let you go.

HIM: Wait, goddammit! Wait! At least tell me who you are if you're not my friend.

GHOST: *(Laughs humorlessly.)* I'm you! I'm the voice inside your head. Now, for once, listen to me! And let me let you go.

*(The audience only sees Ghost pushing Him onto the tracks. The stage goes immediately dark following the push. There is only the sound of a train passing and the last echo of a horn.)*

# FIRST SNOW

---

by Riley Willman

Drifting slowly from the sky  
to meet with the ground below.

Covering the earth's mistakes  
as if it were easy, to forget all of its history.

As if it could be blown away like a dandelion's fluff in the  
spring.

Covered up with a fresh layer of paint; the snow.

As if death hadn't plagued the earth with his hate.

People blinded by their own problems

Forgetting about those less fortunate than them.

We hide in our houses cursing the snow.

We hate that it disrupts our lives in mild ways,

but we aren't the ones frozen on the streets at night like fish  
trapped in a river of ice.

# CRAZY ALICE

---

by Misty Fear

She whispered a charm in my ear  
we are going on an adventure my dear.  
We slipped away through the keyhole  
into the smoke and out of the loophole.

Watch out in this place called middles-worth  
it is certainly not your place of birth.  
She cheerfully evoked a cloak to hide in wit  
and I was then chagrin with the mirth of it.

Watch out in middles-worth for the Kingpin  
he will retain your grin and deadly sin.  
She will remind you, it is a spellbound joke  
within a resounding dream and then I awoke.

# COFFEEHOUSE DREAMS

---

by Maysoon Wazwaz

Cream colored tiles streaked with tea stains.  
The door chimes whimsically,  
hidden greetings.

The caramel spice and cinnamon breeze.  
Grandma's kitchen shrunken  
Curious seating

A hug of warm steam caresses my cheeks.  
Hypnotic violins tire me,  
playful attention.

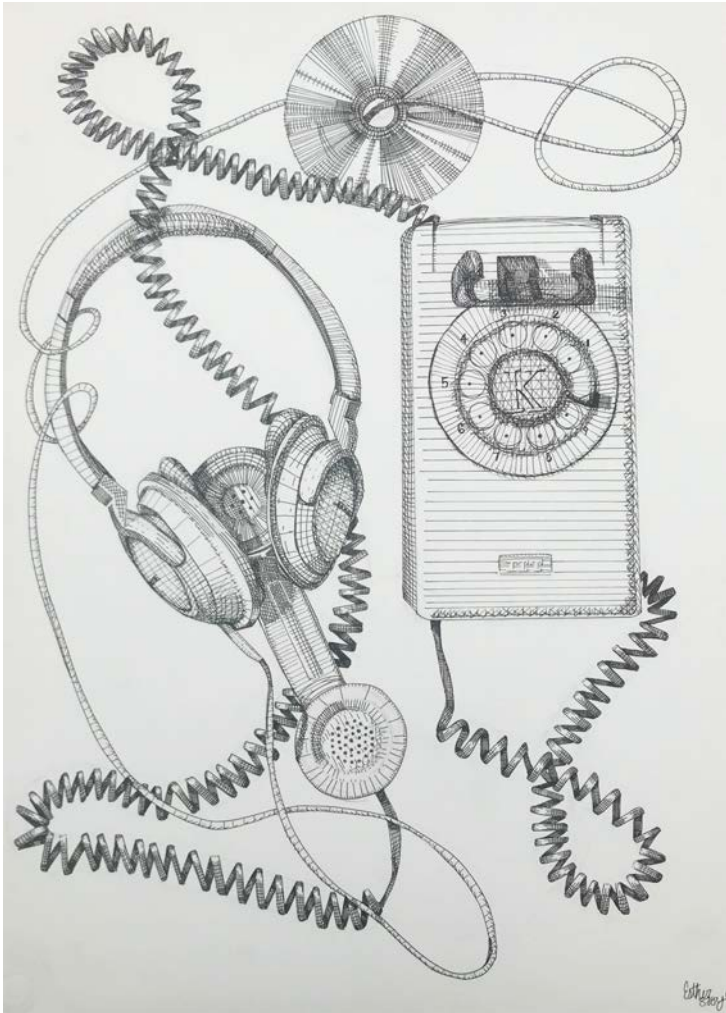
Sunlight pours through aged windowsills.  
Ebony chairs noisily clatter,  
Distant glances.

Whipped cream foams on coarse cheeks  
forming beards fit for Santa.  
Fluid chuckling.

Flat coffee drained to the bottom  
Curiosity flows within me,

*Care to grab a drink?*

Nutmeg hair conceals excitement,  
his eyes flitter like marbles,  
*tomorrow it is.*



# ANA

---

by Riley Willman

“If you don’t eat then I won’t either,” a promise. In 7th grade, I met her, Kimberly. She would quickly become my best friend, however, she introduced me to someone else that year too. This someone would quickly become practically inseparable from me for years to come. Her name is Ana, better known as Anorexia.

Shuffling through the cafeteria doors, Kimberly and I walked hand in hand. The sun across the cafeteria poured in through the big wall of windows, blinding us as we entered. We let go of our hands to shield our eyes from the sun to avoid running into someone else in the sea of hundreds of 7th graders pushing to get through the three small cafeteria



doors. All of us in a rush to get into the lengthening line to get our lunches, as if they would run out and we would be unfed if we weren't there fast enough. I reached my spot in line and looked to see Kimberly was gone, so I went to look for her.

I found her sitting at our usual table in the middle of the cafeteria, with no lunch. I sat down across from her confused and concerned. I questioned why she didn't come with me to the line, I questioned why she sat down before getting food, I questioned why she was avoiding my eyes and looked as if she was ashamed, I questioned why she wouldn't answer me, and I questioned if she was okay. After my questioning had come to an end, she finally squeaked out an answer for me. She responded with an answer along the lines of she was fat and didn't want to eat anymore. I didn't see what she saw. I didn't understand what she meant

and why she thought like that. What I did know is that food is a necessity and so I knew I needed to help. In my 12-year-old mind I proposed an ultimatum I thought would solve the whole issue, "If you don't eat then I won't either". Success could only last for so long until the disorder came creeping back into our lunch table. This time more than just me being the one to notice that she was no longer eating, but me being 12 I didn't understand what was right for me to do, so I kept my promise and stopped eating too.

It started with lunch, but then binging at home. Then my body got used to the missing meal and I no longer was hungry when I would get home from school. Then, when the pounds dropped off and I saw a difference in my size, I liked it. I liked it so much that I started to skip breakfast, since I ate it at school anyway. The last meal of the day was the hardest to avoid, since it was family time. However,

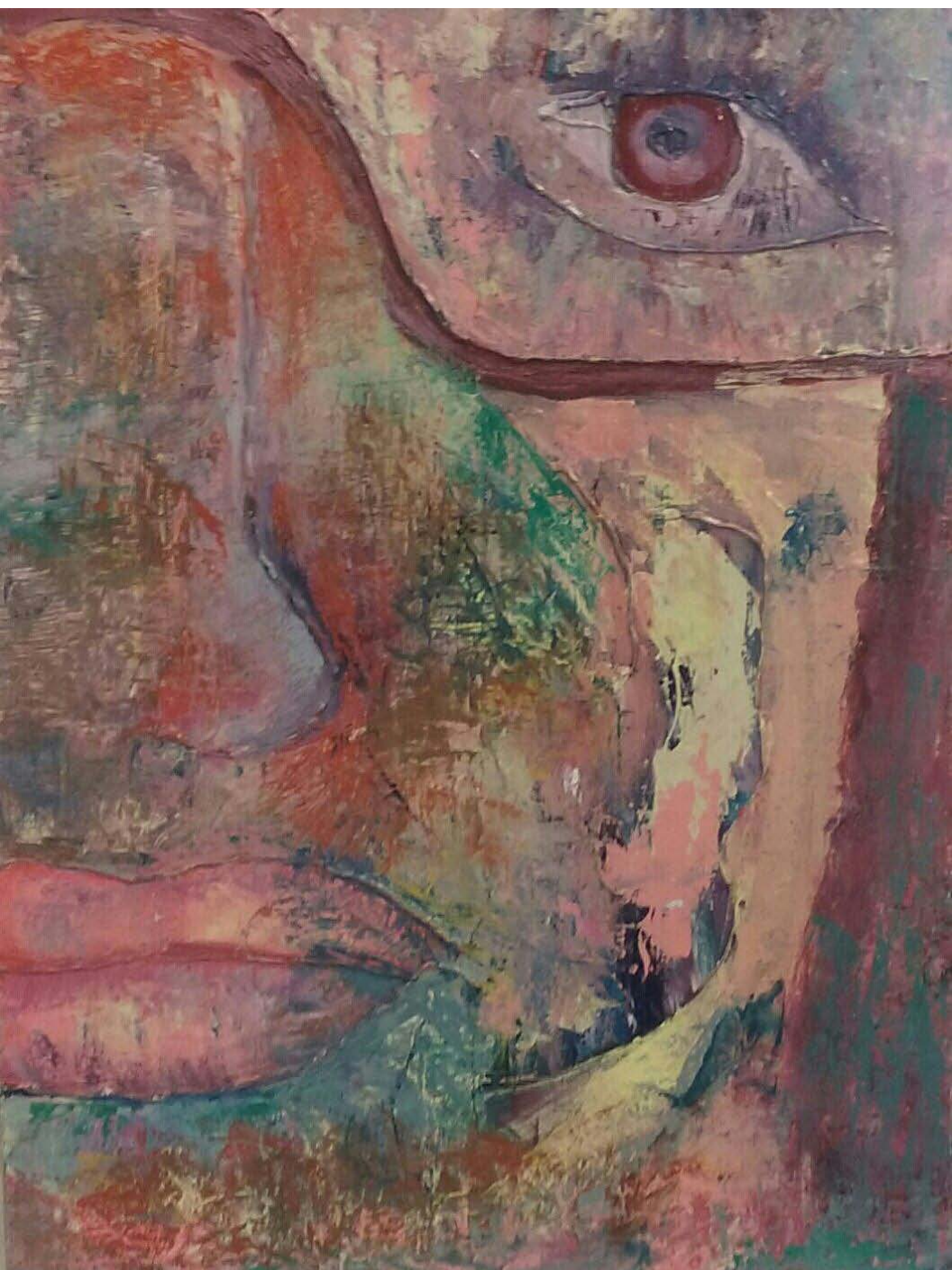
when your mind is overtaken by a disorder that doesn't let you consume, you find ways to avoid dinner too. *You're fine without lunch, so maybe you should skip the other meals too.*

My head was filled with tips and tricks to get out of eating thanks to the online community of anorexics and bulimics supporting each other in a shared destruction. I knew how many calories you could burn off by sitting in a cold bath for X amount of time, or how many calories fidgeting all day would burn *around 300*. I found lists of excuses to use to avoid food, tips to make it look like you had eaten, and motivation. Thinspiration, thinspo, bonespo, meanspo, sweetspo, anything that could motivate me not to eat, not to consume, not to gain, not to fail. *You're going to be so thin and beautiful and perfect, all you have to do is not eat-don't eat, don't eat, don't eat, don't eat, don't eat-you*

*don't deserve it.* Quickly, the thoughts began to consume my life and everything I did. The more I lost and listened, the louder they became.

*Don't you dare eat that. Don't even think about eating that. You don't deserve it. You need to be skinny; you need to be thin. What the fuck is wrong with you? You can't even not eat for a few hours. Stupid. Fat. Bitch.*

Hunger plagued my malnourished body and mind making me unable to think about anything except food, more specifically avoiding it. Meal plans, fasting trackers, rubber band snaps, ribbon tied around my wrist that fit around my waist, *motivation*. I became obsessed with not eating and longed to be as *perfect* and *thin* as the girls I idolized online. I kept better track of how many hours it had been since I last ate than how I was doing in school.



*You're only at 20 hours, you can't be hungry yet-You can do so much better than this-It hasn't even been a whole day yet-40 hours or you're a failure-You can't even do this right.*

Down and down I spiraled until I had lost around 15 pounds. I don't remember the exact weight I started at, but I had reached officially being underweight. The sick feeling of excitement, joy, and pride motivated me further into the darkness. Goals about my weight and size started to be achieved. ~~140, 135, 130, 125, 120, 110, 100, 0~~ dead. Smaller and smaller I became, never able to fully reach my body goals. *Concave stomach, bones that show, skeletal hands that held death's, legs so skinny they could barely support the rest of me.* There is a sick humor to how glorified death can be to an anorexic and how we long to be thin enough to taunt it.

The pride in being able to starve yourself is a twisted sense of accomplishment. Being able to control and have a will power strong enough not to eat has turned out to be quite as impressive as it is shocking to people who don't live a life with Ana. A false sense of control that motivated me further into the darkness also lead to me harming myself in more ways than I knew was possible. *Snap the rubber band when you get hungry, wrists bruised black and blue-If it hurts, hit yourself-focus on a pain other than your empty stomach, stomach and legs red from fists pounding at my body-If you fail hurt yourself-you deserve the pain and to suffer, bleed, body covered in scars that will never fully fade.*

Years of on and off suffering at the hands of my eating disorder, worry had piled up among friends and family, but I never got help. I spiraled down and down into

this darkness of self-hatred and obsession. The pride of an empty stomach and desire to be thin became my daily motivation. I can't tell you how or why it stopped, for I don't have the answer. The end wasn't sudden, nor was it slow. I am the best I have been since it has begun, but even now I still feel Ana's breath on the back of my ear whispering softly, ready to whisk me away back into her darkness. I wonder if Kimberly still hears her too.



