

Crossroads



Art and literature by the students at
Hudson County Community College

Crossroads

Art and literature by students at Hudson
County Community College

Sponsored by Sigma Kappa Delta &
the Literary Club

Issue 11

Spring 2023

Faculty Advisor

Heather E. Connors

Editorial Board

Heather E. Connors

Kenny Fabara

Cover Art

Maria Melillo, *Untitled* (Front)

Maria Melillo, *Untitled* (Back)

Editorial Policy

The student editorial board considers submissions from all currently registered HCCC students and alumni. Submissions must conform to college guidelines regarding behavior and speech, and the editorial board will not accept material that aims to denigrate based on race, sexuality, or other aspects of identity. Decisions of the editorial board are final. *Crossroads* asks for first North American publishing rights. Authors and artists retain their copyrights, own their work, and have the rights to future use of this work. *Crossroads* accepts submissions on a rolling basis. Submit to crossroads@hecc.edu.



CONTENTS

PROSE & POETRY

SUMMER REIGN

A Tribute to David Kato

EVELYN LACROIX

Umbrellas

Dream of Me and You

JULIA ESTEVES

Planning an Escape

DAKOTA SMITH

Silas—Destroyer of Words

MATTHEW ROPEROS

No Exit

MARLENNE E. ANDALIA

The Twist of a Story

ART & PHOTOGRAPHY

MARLENNE E. ANDALIA

The Joy of Nature!

MARIA MELILLO

Untitled

Untitled

A Tribute to David Kato

Summer Reign

Just heard my brotha in Uganda got bludgeoned to death
Got a father from Nigeria who's supposed to love me to death
Living as a queer in fear got me thinking about death
Imagine if they came upstairs and I was found dead

Whether I pump myself with lead or stay confined to my bed
I'm dying, I'm tired of living, so depressed
To kill those who speak on behalf of the oppressed
Is like killing one of God's angels, a saint's been laid to rest

I'm nowhere near perfect, but my spirit lives inside
Same body, same flesh...we all bleed, we all die
But there are some among us, so conflicted inside
Homophobia eats away at you, then you want me to cry

To cry cuz I love her in spite of my mother
To lie about boyfriends--undercover coworker
To smile in the face of such an oppressive system
To talk to my mother about my lover, even though she won't
listen

A down low sista, too short to be a mister
In East Africa, I'd be killed as your mother or your sister

And all this because we can't accept our differences

There are kids who have to witness this
Priests who will not mention it;
Pride parades of people who will stand up
And not just sit with this

That international outcry has to start at home
It could be me, you, or someone you don't even know
This person may not have one good place to go
But if you lead them in the right direction, they just might find
their way home

To all the LGBTQ kids who found freedom by leaving
Whose parents and family call them nothing but "heathen"
Who go to bed sometimes without even eating
Keep your head up, you will not be defeated.

Umbrellas

Evelyn LaCroix

Under the heavy beating of rain on the cool pavement and the slow passing umbrellas was the fast and heavy thumping beat from Umi's boots. She raced past the calm pedestrians, twirling a frantic dance in a failed attempt to avoid bumping into people. All the people could hear was a yelp that held an 'excuse me!' or 'I'm sorry!'

When she finally managed to stop her frantic dance, she landed in front of Golden Leaf Café. It was a small building made of old, worn red brick as the base below a wide window and a soft yellow paint on the concrete walls. The curtains inside the window were a warm autumn red, tied back with a ribbon in that same soft yellow colour.

Umi walked towards the maple wood door; a wooden sign in the shape of a maple leaf painted in a crimson red hung on the door and read the café's name. As she entered, the soft jingle of a bell rang, a sound Umi had come to find much comfort in these last few months.

"Welcome! I'll be ready to help you in one moment," a soft, songbird-like voice called from the back of the café.

Umi cleared her throat, pushing her wet frizzy hair away from her face frantically. Her cheeks and ears were flushed as she made her way to the counter. "It's alright, please take your time."

Quick clicking footsteps were then heard from the back and the kitchen door opened just as quickly. A flurry of thick, ivory hair bounced into the main area of the café before the person was able to even step in. The woman quickly tamed her bangs back into place, embarrassed at how fast she had reacted. While she was fixing her image to be more presentable in her own eyes, Umi could only think about how perfect she looked from where she stood.

The young lady had a fair and clear complexion, her hair tied up behind her in a thick ponytail, yet she still had some of her snowy ivory hair out to frame her narrow face. When Umi looked into her eyes, it felt like it wasn't a cold rainy day, but a calm and sunny spring morning, as all the spring grass and trees laid right before her in her eyes.

"How," the barista cleared her throat. "Sorry, what can I get

started for you, Umi?”

When she smiled, it made Umi want to just pause time and life itself; that smile was all she needed in order to be happy. It was a selfish wish to only want that smile to be hers and hers alone.

Umi smiled back. “A medium dark mocha coffee and the house pastry, to go please.”

The ivory woman nodded and turned her back to Umi as she got started on the coffee. It gave Umi just a bit more time to admire her.

She was very tall, and her slender figure moved around in a much more graceful dance than Umi had on her way here. It was as if God herself blessed her to be the most perfect and elegant person to ever grace this earth.

“I realized something,” said the young woman. With a light chuckle, Umi rested her arms on the counter leaning in. “And what could that be, Maple?”

“Your order is the same colour as your eyes.” Maple laughed with a gentle shake to her shoulders and a slight bounce to her hair. Her laugh was Umi’s drug, but that was true about everything Maple did.

“Is that so?”

“Yeah, that’s why it has slowly become my favorite thing to make, even if it is bitter.” Maple turned around with two drinks made and two-house pastries placed neatly in a to-go box and bag.

“Well, you’ve never had good taste, have you?” Umi teased and handed over her payment.

“That isn’t true,” Maple replied, putting the money away before removing her apron and coming around the counter.

“Oh? What is one good thing that is better than what I’ve picked?” Umi asked as she put the bag over her shoulder. Both picked up their respected drinks, and when they got to the door, she handed Umi an umbrella that sat near the entrance. It was a bright, royal blue. She reached over to pick up another umbrella, lavender.

“Well for starters,” she opened the café door, “I picked up your umbrella when you forgot it again.”

“I was running late, you can’t fault me,” Umi defended. “And how was I supposed to know it was going to rain!”

When they stepped out and opened their umbrellas, the colours complemented each other well.

“Secondly,” she sang, “I picked out the pastry, a coconut chocolate brownie, something we both like. Something that I

introduced to you.”

Umi's face lit up even more than it already had, and her smile stretched farther than she thought it could. “Really, it's that time of year already?”

Maple smiled. “Yes, it is almost spring. Do you not read the calendar, or even the date on your phone?”

They stopped at a corner waiting for the light to turn. “Why should I, when I have you and the café menu to remind me?”

Maple shook her head in faux disappointment. “Oh, you would be hopeless without me.”

“I'm hopeless either way,” Umi countered.

Maple rolled her eyes before pouting. “True, but I also styled your hair this morning, which is now ruined.”

She moved her tea to the hand holding her umbrella before moving to Umi's hair. Golden auburn hair was pushed back as Maple moved her hand across Umi's cheek. Maple's hand was soft and warm in comparison to Umi's cold, rough skin.

Umi gently pushed her hand away before she could be distracted and lean into it. “I'm sorry. I promise I'll make it up to you.”

And that promise made Maple smile.

When she smiled, Umi knew that she would keep any promise in order to make her happy.

“You better, your hair is too nice to be left alone.”

When the light turned green, they crossed side by side in a comforting silence.

“There is one more thing I think I have better taste in,” Maple mused, her lips curved in a mischievous, charming grin.

Umi sighed, stopping when they reached the other side. Umi knew she had to indulge her, “And what could that be?”

Maple then grabbed her free hand; it was such a stark difference: Her soft, pale, slender hand holding onto Umi's tanned, scarred, rough hands.

“I chose you.”

With that, Maple leaned down towards her face. Both their umbrellas fell slightly, allowing the rain to shower them.

Umi knew she was right: Just like with the umbrellas—her choice—they fit perfectly.

Dream of Me and You

Evelyn LaCroix

When you woke, the first thing you noticed was a weight on you. It was a blanket. The next thing you noticed was the pain in your lower back as you sat up. In this small apartment, you had fallen asleep on the couch, waiting for Mina to come home. The final thing you noticed was the smell of warm, bitter coffee that filled the air. Getting off the couch, you walked towards the table that sat along the wall of the kitchen; it was like muscle memory, the layout of this apartment. You listened to the coffee pot dribble out the coffee and the sizzling of pancakes on the pan.

You heard the ceramic cup placed in front of you. You inched your hand towards it, gently grabbed it, and it felt warm and smooth. You rubbed the side of the cup with your thumb and rubbed the rim of the cup with your index finger. Taking in the sounds, smells, and feeling of your apartment always brought a strange, warming comfort.

You hear the gentle winds rattle the tree branches below the window while feeling the breeze from outside the window next to the table brush against your hand that grasped the cup. The birds sang outside, the low shuffle of feet from the people above you getting ready for work. You brought the coffee cup closer to you, feeling the steam flood up towards your nostrils.

You then focused on Mina, hearing her dance around the kitchen, her footsteps light—so light you had to put your full attention on her to even hear her feet move. Yet the only giveaway of her movements were the familiar lulling ring of her hair stick. At the end of the stick was a small bell. She bought it after your third date, and remembering her words still brought peace to your mind.

"Now you'll always hear me coming!"

Focusing in on her again, you could hear her humming. It was the loudest thing in the apartment. Mina was humming "Dream A Little Dream Of Me." A song that, over time, you had grown fond of. It was her grandmother's favorite song, apparently, and she used to sing it often to her. You remember when you first met the woman.

It was before you moved in together. Mina had wanted you to meet her since she was very close with her grandmother. Her grandmother was a small, older woman in her 60s. Entering her home, you heard the song, and immediately Mina she started to

hum along to it. The day was mostly uneventful while getting to know her. You stayed the night, and when you both got to her old bedroom you asked about the song.

"It was her and my Pop Pop's song. Though they only played it on their anniversaries. After Pop Pop passed, she started to play it again a lot. I hated it growing up, but once my family moved outta state, I started to miss it. So I started to listen to it in my free time. Then when I moved back here for college, I was glad to hear it. It made me feel close with Mami and even Pop Pop sometimes."

That night, you tried to make my way to the bathroom, yet it was hard to find it with many things scattered around. You stopped not too far away from the room you were in before you heard the sound of a bell.

"You know, I was nervous about meeting you."

You tilted your head in the direction of the voice beside you. You knew it was her grandmother.

"But you know, after meeting you, I know Mina loves you the way I loved my husband."

You nodded, turning your head.

"Ah, are you searching for the bathroom? Here, I'll show you."

She walked you down the hall towards the hall. When you entered, you could hear her talking to herself.

"They remind us of Derek. They are just as in love as we were. I think I have the perfect gift."

The next morning as we were getting ready to leave with Mina's boxes in the car, her grandmother approached, holding a small box.

"I think your grandfather would agree that this is a good gift for you both. Now please don't be shy to come and visit."

Mina hugged her grandmother. "We won't."

When she let go, you stuck out your hand and her grandmother pulled you slowly into a hug.

"We won't," you promised when you let go.

You remember when you got to your apartment, Mina opened the box and let out a gasp. She quickly went through her boxes and pulled something out. Only once you heard music playing did you realize she had taken out a cassette player. Through the old player was that old song.

Even now hearing her humming that sound, it reminded you of her grandmother and how that song was her blessing. You then heard two plates being put onto the table. You felt a

gentle kiss placed atop your head.

"Good morning, Love. Sorry you fell asleep waiting for me." She sat across from you but reached over and put her hand over yours. She brushed her thumb over your knuckles as you both ate.

"It's not an issue. I'd wait for as long as I can for you." She squeezed your hand. "Yeah, well I don't want you getting a bad back waiting for me. So next time wait for me in our room, alright?"

"Alright," you nodded.

You both continued to eat, listening to forks clink against the plates, the tapping of your foot against the floor, and the sweet humming of "Dream A Little Dream of Me" from Mina.



The Joy of Nature!

Marlenne E. Andalia

Planning an Escape

Julia Esteves

Jack had grown quite fond of his own company. The orphanage on the east side of London he currently resided in had never been the best place to make a friend. He was dropped off just a week after birth in a small basket wrapped in beige blankets or at least that is what the head nun once told him. It had been close to twelve years since that eventful night. Now Jack sat in the common room with Dickens *Great Expectations* in hand.

Almost every day was like the last. Jack would arise precisely at nine in the morning with all the other children. They would then make their way into the common room for breakfast, which usually consisted of the same disgusting oatmeal with a sad, lonely bit of bread. Then they were allowed almost a full hour after breakfast in the common room unsupervised. This is when Jack would sneak a book back into the room and under his pillow while the other kids would trade candies they have kept hidden or play card games such as poker which was forbidden in the orphanage.

Around eleven, all the nuns would come to collect the children and take them to their daily schooling or lectures, which were held in an annexation of the orphanage itself: A tall but small room with narrow windows and plenty of wooden chairs for pupils. Morning lectures consisted of the basic core subjects most children would learn in school: Classic literature, basic mathematics and some natural sciences.

Jack had never found either mathematics or natural science interesting. He supposed if he didn't completely understand it, it was not something to waste his time on. Literature, on the other hand, was his favorite. Since arriving, Jack has been proud to state he had read books far beyond his level. From Shakespeare to Dicken. Hardy to Tolkien. Jack had always volunteered to read aloud for the class or discuss his ideas. Most of the nuns welcomed his discussions but there was one who thought Jack's interest in writing was taking up his time.

Sister Agatha was an old, lonely woman. She had been working in the orphanage providing for children since the Second World War. Her long black hair was always neatly tucked in and her socks always matched perfectly. It had been rumored that she had escaped from the war and came here to England for

shelter against the Nazi; others said that she was the daughter of millionaire parents who had both died when the great Titanic sank all those years ago with their riches. No rumor had a true fact behind it.

After lectures, the sisters would take the children across the street to church where sermons would be given. That was the most boring part of Jack's day. He could never stay awake in church. After church, the children would return to the common room, have their dinner, and spend a couple hours until bedtime. Each day consisted of the same routine. It wasn't a pleasant one, thought Jack, and he would surely change the timing on certain things such as church sermons taking up so long.

It was Monday evening and the rain was pouring down from outside. The orphanage was an old building, so every time it rained the building would shutter in response. Jack was sitting on one of the many arm chairs, book in hand.

He was almost finished with his current read when two other small boys took the seats next to him. They also had books in hand. Jack found this to be odd because besides himself, no other child would bother to read during their free time. The two books read *Call of The Wild* and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. Jack had recognized both books immediately because he had read them in the past.

"Neat books you've got there," he spoke up only loud enough for the two kids to hear.

The small boys lifted their heads to meet his eyes.

"Same there," one responded.

"We were hoping you might add your thoughts on our...discussion," the other boy added.

The two boys looked at each other, somehow made an agreement using eye contact, and looked back over to Jack. They moved closer to where now only the three of them could hear the conversation about to take place.

"We're planning an escape," one boy said enthusiastically.

Jack's eyes widened. An escape from the orphanage was near impossible, and if caught trying to leave, you would be sent to the one across London in the southern district. The southern district orphanage was known for its terrible living conditions and abusive nuns.

"It's impossible," said Jack quietly to both boys.

The slimmer shook his head. "You see we've been planning this for some time now, yea. There is always a time when all the sisters take their rest and lunch between lectures and during evening break."

This was true. Jack had before noticed the fewer nuns during this time. “Even if we were able to get past the nuns, the front and back entrances are always blocked and so are the main staircases. What are we to do? Jump from the windows?” Jack exclaimed.

The taller boy smirked. He looked as though he was laughing to himself.

“Precisely so,” he said. “The walls can be scaled and we are small enough to get through the roofs undetected. We are to climb to the top and over buildings until we are at the end of the street...in front of the train station.”

The plan was near genius, thought Jack. If this were to truly work, they would simply pass by the top of buildings unnoticed under the cover of night. One minute they would be there, the next they'd be gone. The lanky boy introduced himself as Harry and the portly one as Joseph. Harry was taller with bright blond hair and hazel eyes. His skin was pale due to the lack of sun. He had these bushy, full eyebrows which added to his facial expressions. Joseph had darker brown hair and eyes. He was just a couple inches shorter than Jack. Together, the three boys began planning their perfect escape.

Nearly two whole days had passed. Jack and the boys he now referred to as his company had pondered escape strategies. They could take their chances during the day scurry like mice through the roofs undetected. That was too risky, thought Jack. Any bystander who looked up would be surprised to see three pre adolescent boys running on top of buildings and rush into the old orphanage to tell the nuns. Though Jack was sure no nun would begin to try to climb those walls themselves. Chasing after the boys would be futile. But the police would surely be called. Jack knew they must make their escape at night, precisely after the place was put to rest until the morning. Thus leaving nearly nine whole hours to get as far away as possible. It was Friday afternoon. The morning sermon had just concluded and the three boys were sitting together in the grand church.

“We could maybe steal some of the wine from the church, get the sisters drunk,” whispered Joseph.

“Have you ever seen a nun drunk?” responded Jack.

Both Harry and Joseph shook their heads no.

“Neither have I,” Jack stated.

“I don't think I've seen a nun do anything but walk around and bark orders as if Jesus himself had placed her on this Earth,” Harry chuckled.

Joseph indulged in laughter while Jack had simply rolled his eyes at Harry's remark. Sister Agatha called for the children. All thirty two of them. All the boys stood from their seats and collectively made a single file line.

"My Sister, how disciplined you have them," the good Father Uriel remarked.

"Thank you, Father," old Agatha blushed.

Jack swallowed back vomit. They began to make their way back into the orphanage just across the street. Jack felt the cold autumn air hit his youthful face. The wind was blowing against their direction. His old boots stomped against the stone road. Jack looked around to see ladies with their gentlemen holding onto each other to protect themselves from the cold.

He wondered if he would ever find someone like that.

"Yeah, right," he said to himself and diverted his gaze back to the line. The orphanage had been cleaned and cleared. The sisters usually cleaned and made their rounds while the boys were away. Right after arriving, Jack, Harry and Joseph sat together in the corner of the common room while all the other boys began behaving like animals and drunken fools looking for cards and board games. The three anxious boys looked around before spilling their secret schemes.

"The nuns don't lock the back door, the one that leads into the back terrace," Harry spat out.

Jack moved his head forward. "How do you know for sure?" he asked.

"I saw Sister Mary step out for a cigarette. She came back inside and left the door partly open," Harry explained.

Jack took a couple seconds to think. "The terrace is just a room away from the sleeping room besides the windows. It would lead us perfectly to the top," Jack explained. The two boys looked wide-eyed at him.

Joseph held a puzzled look on his face. "But the top, it's pretty high up," he exclaimed.

"That's the point, moron," Harry nudged him in the arm.

Harry rolled his eyes back to Jack, who was clearly in his head, thinking. Harry let out a quick sigh. "It's just. What if we fall?"

Joseph spoke again. "Make sure you land on your feet."

Harry smirked.

Fear rattled in and out of Joseph.

"We climb from the terrace through the top, scale right across the whole place and onto the neighboring building, there we make it to the other side of the street," Jack explained.

He carefully thought out this plan yesterday while looking out the window. He noticed the building beside the place lead right to the open street behind them. There they could walk the two blocks to the nearest train or bus station.

“Say this does work, then what?” Harry said.

“Well, we’d take the bus to Victoria Station in London then you two could go wherever else you desire,” Jack replied.

“With what money?” Joseph asked sarcastically. Between the three boys they had one penny to their names. Not nearly enough to secure a bus ticket or a hot meal.

“The nuns keep a stash of cash under the main desk,” Harry said. “Could be anywhere from fifty to a hundred pounds in there,” he added.

Jack was beyond shocked at what he was hearing. “Harry, you sneaky devil.”

Harry let out a small laugh. “It’s settled. First we get the cash, then we bolt.”

Both Jack and Harry smiled at each other like two geniuses solving an extensive mathematical problem. Joseph sat there nervously. He knew he was not cut out for the streets. He knew he couldn’t make it on his own. He was not like the other two boys. Jack and Harry were clever and smart, maybe too much for their own good. The boys could easily talk their way out of any situation or sway others with their words into getting what they so desire. Joseph could not act in that manner. He was a sensitive child. He felt his fill and even that of those around him.

Such a funny thought, how Joseph found himself in the company of two boys who were his polar opposite.

“All wonderful, yes. But how do you suppose we get a hold of that money?” Harry asked Jack.

“One of us, the sneakiest fellow, quietest on his feet, will simply take it,” Harry scoffed.

“I suppose that will be you.”

“Not sure,” Jack said. “Who’s the lightest?”

It clearly was not Joseph. Jack was short for his age, weighing nearly eighty pounds. Harry was taller, about five foot one but significantly skinny for his height and age.

“You,” Joseph said, pointing to Harry.

“You want me to be your thief, so be it, but you better guarantee our leaving this place, Jack,” Harry said irritably. His eyebrows scrunched up on his forehead while he crossed his arms defensively.

Jack was aware the plan was risky and involved tasks that would easily put them in a world of trouble if caught. The nuns

were spiteful.

Speaking of nuns, Sister Mary now walked into the common room. She held her chin exceedingly high as she ordered everyone to head into their beds and prepare for lights out. The nuns had a funny way of shouting commands and parading the children around as if they were Nazi soldiers, Jack thought. Someone better inform the good sisters the war had ended three years ago. The three boys split ways: As Harry made way to the bathrooms, Joseph to fetch his night time clothing and Jack headed to change.

Aside from when they were scheming, they were not to be seen with each other. As a precaution. If the three boys managed to form their own secret clique, someone was bound to notice and expose them. So, they swore to stay away from each other during breakfast, sermons, and night time routine. Jack had just gotten into bed as the nuns shut the wide wooden doors adorned with glass cutouts. He watched as Sister Mary made her way back into the corridor which led to both the nun's quarters and the main entrance.

Jack stayed awake that night. He stayed awake to note if any other boy was awake and could potentially spot him and his company as they made their escape. As expected, not a sound came from anywhere. All Jack heard was the little rattles and scurries the mice made as they waltzed across the floor in search of food. Sleep found Jack quickly and he did not resist.

The boys were greeted by the loud tapping of Sister Agatha's heels making their way through the room. As always, she would dreadfully open every curtain as wide as the curtain would go to allow the utmost sun to nearly blind the children. Another form of torture they so loved to use, Jack said internally.

"Rise at once, breakfast is to be served in exactly fifteen minutes," the sister barked.

All the boys hesitantly rose from their bunks. A few had managed to get walking into the bathrooms to change. Jack sat there, staring at the sister. He thought to himself just one more day of planning and he would never have to wake up to her irritating face ever again. Jack found her face to be the most unpleasant, especially in the morning. He brushed a hand through his dark blond curls. His natural curls held their form, no matter which crazy position he chose to sleep in the night before. It was almost his trademark. Wild blond curls and bright green eyes. Someone had once told Jack he looked like a famous movie actor from Hollywood but Jack couldn't remember the actor's name. Anywho, by now Sister Agatha was barking up a

storm so the boys had rushed into the dinning area. Soon enough, they were given bowls of the same cold, stale porridge and a glass of room temperature milk.

Harry had already picked up a spoonful and put it right back down. He would've rather starved than take a bite out of whatever unholy creation the sisters had made now. Joseph was halfway through the bowl. He had managed to gulp down the glass of milk in a short time as well. If anyone deserves an honorary prize for consuming food in limited time, it would be Joseph. Jack looked over at Harry sitting miserably aside other boys who were also discontent with their morning portion.

Lectures would commence shortly followed by a small break in the common room, where the three boys would hopefully finalize their plan for tonight. Jack sat in his usual wooden seat for morning lessons. He sat in the middle row, on the second row going back. He did not choose the seat of course. If it were up to him, he would've placed himself in a back corner where they could not see him read or daze off while looking out the window.

"Students," Sister Mary and Betty began. Were they even qualified to teach? Jack thought to himself.

Sister Betty began drawing what looked to be a triangle with calculations to the side of it. She had a heavy textbook in one hand and the other holding the chalk. Mathematics had never been Jack's strong suit though, Harry did not seem to mind math. He admired the determination mathematicians used everyday to solve problems nobody else wanted to solve. The nuns then placed three different problems on the chalkboard and called upon two students to answer them in front of the class. One of those students was Harry. He strutted to the front of the classroom, now standing in front of the board. He chose the harder problem on purpose and began to work. Jack watched expressionless but amused as his new complicit partner in crime scribbled equations and numbers onto the board. After a good two minutes up there, Harry drew a circle around his conclusive answer. The sisters applauded his quick and precise work.

After lessons had concluded for the day, the orphanage boys made their way back into the common room. As soon as the nuns had closed off the room and vanished, the three boys made their ways slowly into their designated corner.

"I didn't know you were some sort of mathematical genius," Joseph said, directing his comment to Harry.

"I'm not, it's quite basic once you've become familiarized with the material," Harry responded calmly.

"Nevermind the math, the skies are clear today, no rain, we

can leave tonight,” exclaimed Jack.

“Well thank God, I can’t stand one more day of this rubbish food,” Harry stated indifferently

Jack had noticed Harry despised the orphanage just as much as he did. They shared in their indifference towards this place and those who make a poor attempt to run it. Jack knew this would help their plan overall. The more Harry loathed the orphanage, the more effort he would put into getting far, far away.

“Today is just as good as any day,” Joseph added to the discussion.

Both Harry and Jack knew the plan was going to happen with or without Joseph, he just so happened to be in on it.

“Alright then, right after lights out, we’ll wait a good thirty minutes till everyone is fast asleep.”

“I’ll slither my way into the nun’s office, rob them of their cash. You two will wait for me in the common room” Harry said with a calm that suggested he had done this before.

Jack grinned ear to ear. He had known of Harry’s delinquent tendencies but did not know them to their full extent.

“Be sure to layer your outerwear underneath your night time clothing, it is winter after all,” Jack said to the group.

The sisters came into the room which meant it was time for bed. Pure adrenaline pumped through the boys’ veins. Joseph may have felt more nervous than the other two boys. He was not up for a life of crime. As the plan materialized, he doubted his decision to ever become involved. But it was too late now. The other two boys were undoubtedly prepared to execute this plan in a matter of hours.

The lights flickered off. Jack lay in the bed awake as ever. Underneath his bed time clothing was a pair of corduroy pants and a knit sweater. Just enough to maintain his warmth while facing the brutal south english winter. Harry and Joseph wore extra clothing strategically. Nearly forty five minutes had passed since the initial moment all went quiet. Jack heard a tap, then another tap.

He carefully and slowly picked his head up to see Harry already halfway across the room inches away from the door which was left partially open. Jack, without making a sound, pulled his covers off of himself. He began to tiptoe toward Harry. Joseph came next, he took longer, planned his steps more carefully.

Jack and Henry had made it to the common room. There, Jack placed himself in a hidden corner while Henry quietly made

his way to secure the cash. Jack ducked behind an armchair and waited in silence as Henry retrieved the money they needed to disappear. It took Joseph twice as long to reach the common room but he eventually made it and joined Jack hiding behind the piece of furniture. Both boys tighten their muscles to not make a sound. Harry came creeping from the corridor, smirking as if he just pulled off the ultimate heist. In his hand, a brown envelope was stuffed into his jacket pocket. Jack let out his first breath of victory.

The plan was nearly complete.

“You bloody genius,” Harry whispered.

Jack gave him a grin ensuring he too felt the victory. The three boys made a bolt for the back door. They dashed through the small back door and right onto the terrace. Jack felt the cool air of winter’s night quickly surround him. They began scaling the massive wall. Jack went first followed by Harry then Joseph. Their muscles ached as they used their strength to pull themselves upward and forward. Finally, reaching the roof.

“It cuts off,” Jack said angrily.

The three boys looked at the missing piece of wide wall which was the bridge to the neighboring building.

“We have to jump,” Harry said confidently.

He zipped his jacket pockets and pulled his hood over. Joseph began panicking. His breaths became shorter.

“I..I..can’t,” he let out. Harry and Jack gave themselves a questioning look before facing Joseph.

“It’s the only way,” Jack said.

Suddenly, lights rapidly turned on behind them. The nuns... They’ve awakened. They know something is wrong. Adrenaline pushed Jack to take a step closer to the edge.

“We have to go now!”

Harry nodded and took a couple steps back. He shook his legs before sprinting. He sprinted through the roof, feet hitting the shingles until he was in the air, flying or throwing himself across buildings.

There, he landed and stood up on two feet. Harry had made it across. Jack followed, not looking back and taking a deep breath before his two feet moved faster than they ever have. Pushing himself off that roof and onto the next. His hands grasped the shingles. Harry grabbed him by the arm and pulled him forward.

“JOSEPH!” Both boys called. Joseph stood paralyzed. He couldn’t jump. His mind would simply not let him. The voices of the nuns drew closer. They had caught on and Joseph watched as

he stayed behind and his two companions disappeared into the night.

Silas – Destroyer of Words

Dakota Smith

The candles dripped their wax onto the basement floor, the flames being the only thing illuminating our agape mouths and the furrowed brow of our new companion. His eyes glared at the three of us, like a cat that just had its' tail pulled. He was angry, and we couldn't believe what we were seeing.

His red skin and yellow eyes were the only thing cliché devil-like about him. He stood three feet tall and had the features of a newborn baby. His head was enormous compared to the rest of his body, and his hands were feeble. His knees shook under the weight of his body.

“What the fuck,” Melissa managed to get out. His eyes darted to her, and then he grinned. He snapped his fingers, and her eyes widened as she began speaking gibberish.

“Free chickens, manage detector, explicit displease...” the devil snapped his fingers again, and Melissa started coughing.

“What did you just do?!” I grabbed her by the shoulders and placed her on the nearby couch. She muttered that it felt like her tongue was on fire. Alan stood in the same place, with the summoning book still in his hands, his mouth still open. He had gotten it from a friend of his, who said the book would be able to summon the devil.

“My name is Silas, Destroyer of Words. You summoned me here, you should know what I just did.” He began looking Alan up and down, like a cat about to pounce on a mouse.

“Worlds,” Alan squeaked. “Destroyer of Worlds.”

Silas chuckled. “Trying to summon an entity of that caliber with that children’s book? You’re even lucky to have summoned something of my power. I twist people’s words, make them forget things, I am that thing on the tip of your tongue holding back words. I can make mortals say whatever I want them to. I am a linguistic creature.”

Alan and I looked at the book together. The symbols and candles were all correct, and the chanting. What could have gone wrong?

Silas rolled his yellow eyes. “It’s the candles, you dipshits, the candles! What does your book say about the candles? Read it to me.”

“Six candles, one unscented, one cinnamon, one lavender, and in between these three, three vanilla,” Alan read back the

words to him.

Silas walked to the edge of the summoning circle, to the supposed unscented candle. He licked the wax, smirking at us because he already knew the answer. “You have four vanilla.”

A silence fell in the room as we did not know what to do next. We were just three dumb kids on Halloween night, without even expecting anything to happen. Now, we were staring at a demon that controlled words.

“Why try and summon a Destroyer of Worlds anyway?” Silas asked. “Trying to rule the world? Only politicians and billionaires could ever summon them.”

The three of us shrugged, not knowing why we would ever think about dabbling into dark arts. None of us even liked horror movies.

“Ugh, teenagers,” Silas said as he vanished into a puff of smoke.

No Exit

Matthew Roperos

You wake up with a start, as if you've just come out of a never-ending nightmare. You wipe away the sweat on your forehead only for you to realize your hand is wet, in fact your whole body is. You're not even wearing clothes. The whole bed seems to have been soaked because of you as well. You look around for something to wear but notice that this room isn't familiar to you at all, you actually can't remember how you got here or even who you are.

Even your name eludes you... All you seem to remember is a... tube? Water? You remember... seeing yourself? A mirror perhaps? You sit there trying to remember. It's all blurry and it gives you a headache to continue.

After a moment to compose yourself, you take in the room. The bed you're on is in a corner of the room with a drawer at the foot of the bed. Across from the bed is a flight of stairs that seem to lead into another room which has a blurry glass window wall looking out to this room. You can only think that that's an odd design for a home, or at least you think this is a home. Looking around once more you see on the wall next to the stairs is a sink with a mirror, a rack with a towel on it and what seems to be a dryer next to it that is in use as it silently vibrates. The walls themselves are pure white, as is the ceiling. Looking directly up however you notice there's a hole. A circular hole that's too smooth to be made by accident. That's very strange and you can only think back on the tube from your mind. You shake the thought off to look around the room once more.

It seems to be a very minimalist room, you decide. There's nothing much here, not even a shower or a toilet. It may be less than minimalist if those kinds of necessities aren't here. Then again, it's not as if you know what makes a room minimalist.

You're unsure if you should wait in bed or if you should walk around. Considering that you don't remember anything, you're hesitant to even get up. Someone must have brought you here and could be back any moment. Now, you think, it would be embarrassing for someone to come in when you're naked. At least have the decency to get dressed. You get up from the bed and as you do so the dryer sets off its alarm. Must have finished its job. You walk over to it glancing at the towel rack next to it as you get closer. You decide it's better to wipe away what you presume is sweat off your body before doing anything else.

As you finish, you hear a muffled bang. You look around the

room only to notice a figure from the floor above behind the blurred glass window looking down at you. Or at least you think, it's just a blurred outline to you. You call out but the figure quickly darts out of view, picking something up as well. Maybe they're getting someone? Now that you know someone's around you definitely decide it's better to get dressed.

Before that of course you can't help but peek into the dryer. Looking into it you see it's a clean, white bed sheet. Identical to the bed you were on. Were you sweating so much whoever was here had to keep changing the sheets? How embarrassing. You make a mental note to apologize for that. You take out the sheets, uncover the ones from the bed and put the clean ones on. You decide to put the wet ones into the dryer as well, setting the dryer for 30 minutes.

After all that, you think it's finally time to put on some clothes. You look into the drawer that was at the foot of the bed to find that in all three containers are identical shirts and shorts of different colors. The first container seems to only contain three sets of blue clothes, while the second contains red sets missing only five. The third, all yellow, seems to just lack one, which gives you the impression that over time the clothes here were taken away one by one and not returned or filled back up. You decide to take a set from the first container, leaving only two left, you think you used to like the color blue before losing your memories. You definitely don't want to be seen walking around in an ugly color such as yellow.

You decide to wait around until that person from the second floor comes back, feeling that snooping around the upstairs with no one present would be pretty rude. You look around once more, your eyes settling on the sink with the mirror. You realize that you don't remember what you look like as well. Forgetting your name and your face all together hits home that who you are is lost. Only basic knowledge can be discerned. This hits you with a somber mood. You hope that whoever is here can help you remember.

You walk up to the mirror and take in how you look. You see... well, you see you. Unsure if you're considered particularly beautiful or handsome in society, looking at yourself some more you decide with a unsure finality that you are in fact attractive. Better to have some shred of confidence than no confidence along with no memories.

After waiting 18 minutes, which you're able to tell from the time of the dryer, you feel impatient. It shouldn't take that long to come back, should it? You think on it, deciding it might be best after all to advance forward. With some reluctance you head up

the stairs to the next room.

The new room is more of a rectangle compared to the square room from before. Close to you on the left wall is a couch, a mini fridge, with a coffee table in front of both. On the right is a desk with x-rays of a human body strewn about it. Further along the left wall are two chairs flanking a dining table. Across from that on the right is the window looking to the first floor, next to the window hugging the wall is a shelf with books in it. At the end of the room is a blue wooden door. The walls themselves are brown wooden walls while the ceiling is made up of grey rectangle shaped tiles.

It doesn't seem as if anything of interest is around here. You look through the mini fridge only to be disappointed with a sight of nothing in it. You cross over to the desk to look at the x-ray photos, but you can't make much of them. Just scans of someone's body. You move over to the window to look down at the floor, immediately noticing that it's not blurry from this point of view. It must be similar to a one-way mirror, except you can just vaguely see from one side. Looking back at the dryer, there should be a few minutes left to it.

Scooting over to the left, you stand in front of the bookshelf quickly scanning the titles of them. None of them sound interesting to you. There seems to be various books on the human body, as well as some on the mind and also soul. There are some books that seem to relate to asexual production, cell division and DNA splicing. At the bottom shelf you see there's a bible along with what you guess are other books of religion. What a strange collection.

You pick out the biggest, heaviest book on the shelf. The title reads *What Does It Mean to Be Human?*. Skimming through the pages, it seems to be a lot of talk you don't understand. Theories on souls, what makes us up, stuff about twins, even some stuff about religion and about some special sheep called Dolly. Kinda weird stuff. You don't think all of it pertains to being human. But what do you know, you can't remember much anyway.

Before looking more in depth into the book, you hear a faint alarm. It must be the dryer. You step over to the window only to be surprised. There's someone down there! How can that be? There's just one way to the room and that's through here. Then you remember the hole in the ceiling. Had they dropped down there?

You look closely at them, and they seem to be naked. The person grabs the towel to wipe themselves. You're getting a weird sense of *deja vu*. You try to make out the features of the person... only for you to see that you're looking at yourself. That's you down

there. That's you drying yourself. You feel weak at this thought, dropping the book with a loud smack onto the ground. This startles you back to reality, yet it also draws the you from the first floor to look in this direction. You--or rather they--call out to you. You quickly pick up the book and dart out of view. Your heart is pounding. That can't be you. If it isn't, then what is it? You want to peer back down but you're afraid, afraid to confirm your own fears.

You put the book back on the shelf and decide that it's time to leave the room. You need to find someone, anyone that's not whatever that is below, and ask them what's going on. You open the blue door to another stairway up to find that the stairwell is littered with pictures, all the way up to the ceiling. The stairs themselves lead up to the right and you glimpse someone entering a door at the top. You call out to them just as they've gone through the door. They do not come back out.

You march up the stairs; however, one of the pictures catches your eye, and upon closer inspection you find that it's a picture of you. In fact, after looking at the other pictures they all appear to be of you. You in bed, drying yourself, putting on clothes.

But some of the pictures are strange... they show things that didn't happen. Some pictures have you inspecting walls, looking under the bed, even wearing the other colored clothes such as red or the odd yellow. You notice some pictures even have you eating in the previous room. From eating a whole meal to just simple chips along with various drinks.

After looking at yourself in yellow you definitely think it's not your color, but you also start to doubt if this is you at all. They must just be look-a-likes. The person you saw from the first room couldn't have been you either. None of these can be you, you're you.

That just begs the question again... if they're not you, who are they? Or what are they? Do you have a twin, but like everything else you just forgot? That doesn't feel right. But you can't be totally sure. You're hesitant to go back there to find out. Fear grips you, preventing you from walking forward or back. You continue to stand in the middle of the stairway, blankly staring at all the pictures around. Looking at the actions you did take, wondering if that is you or just another look-a-like. You can barely stand to look at the different colored ones or the ones that do something different, looking at them makes you feel sick.

You don't know how long you stood there for, simply looking at what's around you. Feeling faint and weary from all this. You take a seat on one of the steps, covering your face in your hands as

if to hide yourself from what's around you.

After some time you hear a muffled sound from the room you came from. Another sense of *deja vu* flows through and you can't help but remember when you dropped the book. You quickly scamper up the stairs. Entering the solid black door you faintly hear someone call out but you ignore it. You get a feeling that you shouldn't meet whoever just arrived.

The new room is vastly different from the other two. It's noticeably smaller as well as dimmer with no light switch to up the brightness. The walls seem to be made of metal with what seem to be screws in the corners of the walls. The ceiling is no different just with a little more screws. The room itself has nothing but these two odd vertical, clear glass tubes, each reaching up to the ceiling and attached to a wall. The one on the right is sealed with clear liquid inside, the one on the left is open but has liquid on the ground around it.

You stand there just staring at the glass containers, at the walls, at the floor, whatever there is to stare at. There's nothing else here. You're sure a person stepped through the door into this room. You're sure of it. In spite of what you saw, there's no one here. Yet there's no exit. Just these glass cases... You walk around feeling the walls, the tubes, the ground. You're not sure what you're looking for but you're hoping you'll find something. Anything that'll indicate a way out of here.

Not finding anything you look back to the one open glass tube. Is that the way out? Should you stand in it? Is it similar to an elevator? You get the feeling that it isn't but the room isn't giving you much in the way of options right now. It's the only thing you got besides, the person from before is bound to show up soon. You ready yourself for whatever's to come. You can't help but feel scared regardless.

You step into the open tube, positioning yourself to face the tube across from you. After nothing happens you start to feel silly for being so amped up over nothing. Before you try to step out the tube closes, clear glass covers the way. You take a step back as it startles you, back against the wall. Water starts to rapidly fill the container from somewhere. You can't really tell from where, all you know is that it's filling up fast.

Panic ensues. You start to scream, you pound against the glass door, kicking it and slamming yourself into it. Before you know it the water is up to your stomach. You take a deep breath then you crouch down to look underwater to see where it's all coming from. There seem to be small gaps that run between the base of the tubes wall and the floor itself. You can't possibly plug the whole thing

up. You come back up, the water is already up to your chest. You don't have long until you're completely submerged then you're bound to drown, seconds until the inevitable. The water reaches your neck, then your chin. You take a deep breath as it covers your mouth, then eyes, then your head.

You hold your breath for as long as you could, which isn't very long, unintentionally gasping out for air to find that... you're breathing. You're somehow breathing in this liquid just fine. It's a very uncomfortable feeling, as if you're on the verge of drowning, but you're still taking in air somehow. Even if just barely. As you continue to breathe in this liquid, you find that you're slowly losing control over yourself, feeling very weak. Not to mention very sleepy as well. Before you give in to the fatigue, you can't help but notice something happening in the tube across from you... Something is bubbling in there... there seems to be faint movement, it looks as if... something is growing inside. Even in this tired state you feel alarmed. Something is actively being made in the opposite tube...

It's a fight to continue looking however, your eyelids feeling very, very heavy... You can't keep them up... whatever it is on the other side is almost done though... you... just need to stay awake... they kinda... look like...

You wake up with a start, as if you've just come out of a never-ending nightmare.

The Twist of a Story

Marlene A Andalia

In the middle of the night, there was a flash that I had never seen. It was pitch dark, the neighborhood felt cold and frightening. The majority of my neighbors were gone to their beach homes.

But that flash of light! I was scared and all alone. Not even my dog wanted to bark.

It was on some sort of clock: every 20 seconds. I thought I was in a horror movie.

It felt very cold, windy. My legs were shaking, and so was my dog.

Well, I stood still and I was hesitant to move. I found the courage to go to the ground floor and look out the window.

I thought I saw an alien, but how was that possible?

“Oh, no.”

It is coming straight at me and my dog!

Later on, I discovered that it was a small boat coming to the shoreline, the Coast Guard involved in a rescue.

Sometimes, your mind does play tricks on you.



2023