

The Metropolitan



Homeland Watercolor Mikayla Keogh

A Magazine of Writing
by Students
at Metropolitan Community College

2019

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“...and then, I have nature and art and poetry, and if
that is not enough, what is enough?”

Vincent Van Gogh



METROPOLITAN
Community College

The Metropolitan 2019

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The Metropolitan publishes all types of academic and literary writing, including descriptive, narrative, expository, and persuasive works, as well as creative prose and poetry. We encourage writings from across the disciplines and also welcome visual art. Our goal is to showcase the best of the many voices, styles, and subjects MCC writers and readers find meaningful and to support critical thinking, creativity, and expression at Metropolitan Community College.

The Metropolitan is published once a year. The print edition includes the best selections from the full web edition which can be read at <https://themetropolitan.mccneb.edu>

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Contents

2019 Writing Awards 4

Brianna Wright

Sunstruck

Sonata in C# Minor

Alexa Rayne Anderson

This is What it Looks Like to Wake
Up to a Mess

Qiang Cao

Mother Dandelion
Flowers

Ryan Keith Marco

Fatherhood

Bonnie Jean DeWilde

Captain Texas: A Poem of Western
Bravery

Dillon Adkisson

The Entertainment

Moriah Roberts

Silence Doesn't Exist

Brittany Duncan

Disability Poem

Claire Furjanic

Blue Bird

2019 Writing Awards

For her poem “Sunstruck,” Stephanie Barelman is the winner of The Metropolitan 2019 Prize for Student Writing, a 13.5-credit-hour tuition remission. The first runner-up, Alexa Rayne Anderson, is awarded 9 credit hours tuition remission for her poem “This is What it Looks Like to Wake Up to a Mess.” The second runner-up, Qiang Cao, receives 4.5 credit hours tuition remission for her poem “Mother Dandelion.”

Sunstruck
Stephanie Barelman

It's three quarters of a mile from love
to oblivion.
I would know;
I've walked the path back and forth
a thousand times.
Counted the stones off the sidewalk.
Committed each tree to memory.
Some days I arrive at my own ruin
weary from the violent sun,
short of breath,
my entire being like a camera out of focus.
I think, I will go in and not come out.
If only you knew,
how I lay down, sweaty and ill,
how I force myself to be silent and want for nothing,
the skin of my arms spread across
the cold hard tile of the kitchen floor.
So much more in contrast then
to know me on those days my heart leaves me behind,
runs outside of these rooms
and out of the house, forgetting the heat.
How swiftly it goes over that hill,
desperate to be down it,
the lens opening wider, wider.
Infatuation, a heavy bag of literature books I borrowed from life
and can never return.
Sadness is knowing I cannot stay here forever,
no house to be found inside of love.
It is nothing but open space, endless sky,
shards of sun like rain.

Sonata in C# Minor

Stephanie Barelman

Give me the sweet smell of struggle.
Give me the stark red cry of love.
Every day, life victories over death in your smile,
memories of old flames become
first coats in the bitter winter.
But you see, I have learned to love the cold.
Especially when I wear your affection,
a heavy cloth, thick as wool.
Every day, your kindness wraps me more securely inside my
world.
The wintry scene becomes welcome—
because there is a warmth in the midst of it
and a warmth to be had at the end of the long walk—
the hands hastened by the fire,
the heart by your eyes.
Oh yes, life should give me a good fight
because I know my prize is you,
tottering sweetly at the end of the road, like a child.
You are my happiness.
Now that I possess your love, there is color in the world,
streaks of red on the white canvas,
the scent of roses in the otherwise sterile winter air.
Life exists where it didn't before.
I live when before I had died painful deaths,
awful deaths,
by my own hand, by indifference, by abuse.
Every sentence to you is a poem I never bothered to write down,
because the most important poems are the ones in memory.
The first coats we loved, but they were not practical.
The collars beautiful, the buttons neat.
It is warmth I want.
It is you, because you keep the wind out.
Because you were expensive and therefore of good quality.

What I mean to say is:
I want to stay inside your love forever
and not come out of it,
as if you were a welcome fever,
as if your love, and not my sadness
is the real death, a happy one.
But I forget my love;
after death, life follows.

This is What it Looks Like to Wake Up to a Mess

Alexa Rayne Anderson

This is what it looks like to wake up a mess
When the cat scratches at the door
Hair flattened from laying on my back
Eyes still fluttering from remnants of dreams
Arms above my head, grasping for nothing

Scattered around the bed are failed poems
Scattered across the desk are dull stories
Scattered around the floor are wrinkled up papers, and
Scattered is my brain from working all night long

Tears dried and caked to my face like scars
And on my lips, a smeared mix of lipstick and drool
Right leg hanging off the bed, blood rushing

And I feel like curling up
I feel like giving up

This is what it looks like to wake up a mess,

Light filtering through broken blinds
The cat scratches at the door again, and

I smile.

For today is like every other day, when I wake up a mess
My failures surrounding me, taunting me

I sit at my desk, looking at these writings
I sit, and I start anew
I sit, and decide I'll get it right someday
I sit with a pencil in my hand, and suppose I'll see

For when the sun hits at just the right angle

And when warmth fills the room
The breeze lightly flowing through my window
I cannot be sad forever, I can only hope that maybe
I can make something of the mess.

Mother Dandelion

Qiang Cao

In my lawn
I saw a dandelion
Which stood straight and proud
On this wide grass
With a poor chopstick-shaped body
It made me evoke my mother
They looked alike
never falling down
No matter how hard our life was ever

Whisper whisper...
After the wind blew
Her children with white feathers
flight in dance
to some unknown places
Then started another lifecycle
She stood there alone but still straight
Looking forward with a smile
Gradually disappearing into the earth

Flowers

Qiang Cao

Beauty
people seldom dislike it.
One day
Wanting to know
“What will be
the most beautiful flower”
I searched online
Lots of colorful pictures appeared
Showing different varieties of flowers
Red. Yellow. Pink. Blue. Purple

...
Also, they have such nice names
Rose. Lily. Lotus. Iris. Tulip

...
Writers write for them
Singers sing for them
Painters paint for them

Look up
Moon is bright
and quiet
Stars are moving around it
shining slightly
Our sight focuses on them
Except anything

However
Who
Notices that the darkness of night

I can't imagine
What these beauties will look like
Without the darkness's existence

Meanwhile
Unknown flowers are growing
In the fields
Alone
They have no name
No gorgeous looking
No pleasant smell
Nobody cares
Even like this
Still taking root
Under deep earth
Absorbing nutrients
To grow stronger
At the same time
Smiling
Toward the sun

Fatherhood

Ryan Keith Marco

My father's name is Vance. He is six feet tall with wavy brown hair. Vance and I share a lot of our looks in common, but not much else. Most people that know Vance would say he's a nice guy. To the people outside of my immediate family, Vance was jovial and easy going. Most people didn't know him like I knew him.

My older brother, Brad, my mother, and I were the only ones that saw Vance when he was scary. When Vance got angry with us, he would become abusive. It was always worse if he had been drinking. My mom once told me of a time Vance choked her into unconsciousness while she was pregnant with me, and holding my older, infant brother in her arms. Brad and I would often have to go to Vance's room and choose which of his belts he would beat us with.

I grew up in constant fear of Vance. Even when there were good memories, there was usually an underlying feeling of terror. Good times were almost always ruined with the thought of, "how long will this really last?" I never felt close to Vance. I only felt like I was a bother to him. I can only remember one time that Vance ever expressed that he was proud of me.

Brad and I would go over to Kimmy's house in the mornings and watch cartoons until it was time to walk to school together. Kimmy's mom and my mom were friends from work. My dad and Kimmy's dad were both in the military, but they never met until our moms introduced them. Kimmy and I were in first grade.

Kimmy was my friend, and possibly, the first girl I had a crush on. She was about my size, though not as rail thin as I was. She was slightly taller than me even though I was a month and a half older. Kimmy's hair was chin length, curly, and a brown that glowed red when the sun kissed it. She had the greenest eyes that I had ever seen. They were the color of mint ice cream that darkened toward the edge like the underside of a living spring leaf just after the sun goes down, but before the streetlights come on, when the sky is more purple than black. One Monday

morning, I asked Kimmy's brother what was wrong because Kimmy was quietly crying before school.

"Her dog got ran over yesterday," he answered.

"Oh no, that's horrible." And inevitably morbid curiosity forced me to follow up with, "How did it happen?"

"She was playing with her in the front yard, and some guy hit her with his truck, and didn't even stop to say sorry or nothing."

Aghast I asked, "She watched it happen?"

"Yea . . ."

I really liked Kimmy, and it broke my heart to see how sad she was. I kept imagining my new puppy, Peanut, getting run over and watching him die. Smashed by uncaring rubber and tossed to the side of the road like a bag of garbage flung by a sullen child on trash day. I didn't cry as much as Kimmy that day, but I was definitely the runner up.

During school I decided that, after my mom came and walked us home, I was going to do something to cheer Kimmy up so she wouldn't be sad. I racked my brain all day trying to come up with an idea. Only one idea came to me, though I tried and tried to come up with another. It was no good, nothing else would be certain to work. After I got home, while my mom was busy cooking, so that supper would be ready when my dad walked in from work, I grabbed my skateboard and snuck Peanut out of the house.

I couldn't carry Peanut and the skateboard because I was too small. So, I cradled Peanut in my arms and bent over a little at the waist to see the skateboard. I would give it a mighty shove with my foot then chase after it, so that when it slowed down, I could give it another push before it started rolling back down the hill. When I got to the corner, I made sure to look both ways about four times before crossing. After all, someone had just died on this part of the road.

Kimmy's house was the third one from the corner. At the end of Kimmy's yard, where the sidewalk was straight out from the front door, I kicked my skateboard upside down in the grass, so it wouldn't roll away. I walked up, through the yard, to Kimmy's porch and sat down next to the twisted wrought iron

balustrade. I clutched Peanut close softly crying and whispered, "Kimmy is a good person and you're going to be very happy."

Once I was able to dry my tears, I got up and quietly knocked on the door. There wasn't much I could do about the golf ball sized lump that was lodged in my throat. Luckily, it was Kimmy that answered the door. I just managed to croak out that I wanted her to have Peanut since her dog got ran over. She stood there silent, slack jawed, and blank faced as I thrust Peanut into her arms and fled.

I couldn't balance on the skateboard, so I sat on it, put my feet on the front and pushed myself diagonally from the end of her driveway to the corner, totally forgetting to check for traffic. At the corner, I had to dismount and put the skateboard up on the sidewalk before I resumed my trek home. My chest was tight and that damn lump in my throat still wouldn't go away, but I had a smile on my face. Once I made it home, I stashed my skateboard in the bushes on the side of the house and quietly let myself in the back door. I crept up the stairs and sidled up next to the kitchen doorway to listen to the sounds of my mom cooking. I dashed past the kitchen heading for my room. My mom must have seen me because she said, "Ryan, wash up. Dinner is going to be ready as soon as your dad gets home." "Okay," I called back in as cheery a voice as I could manage. I ran into the bathroom and quickly washed my hands. That done, I was finally able to go to my room and sit on my bed.

I just sat there taking long, deep breaths. The enormity of what I had just done began to dawn on me. I had just given my new puppy away without permission. My parents had given me Peanut just two weeks ago. My dad paid money, good, hard-earned money, for Peanut. This was so much worse than just breaking a toy. Worse, even, than breaking a new toy. Was there a way I could hide what I had done? I could say that Peanut ran away. But, no, I closed the gate when I came into the backyard. And besides, my mom saw Kimmy's mom all the time. Would my mom keep it a secret from my dad? Maybe. But only if I talked to her before my dad got home. Just then, I heard a car door and peeked out of my window. Too late, my dad was already home.

I went and sat back down on my bed. I wondered if it was going to be the belt. Dread began to build in the pit of my stomach. All during supper I could barely eat I felt so sick with anxiety. I tried my best to force the spaghetti down. Wasting food, after all, could lead to a beating. It wasn't long after supper that our doorbell rang.

There was little in our lives that was more exciting than evening company, so my brother raced to be the one to open the door. I usually was the quickest, but that night my heart just wasn't into it. I made it to the top of the stairs when Brad opened the door for Kimmy, clutching Peanut, followed closely by both of her parents. My dad passed me to greet our guests as the blood drained from my face. This was it. There was no avoiding the consequences now.

Kimmy's family was all crying as they told my dad what I had done. There were no more tears left in me. At least not right now. I couldn't believe my ears when I heard my dad brusquely say, "Well, it's his dog, he can do whatever he wants with it." Kimmy's dad gave my dad a firm handshake. As my dad came up the stairs, I searched his face for that look. The one that promised punishment as soon as our company left. I think my dad must have gotten something in his eye when he was by the front door because he had a tear on his cheek.

Kimmy's mom came up the stairs and gave me a hug. Kimmy and I ran off to play with Peanut in my room while the adults sat in the living room to visit about whatever adults talk about. By the time they left, my dad must have forgotten about the dog because I didn't get into trouble for giving away my new puppy without asking. It wasn't until much later that the tear on Vance's cheek would mean anything to me.

I harbored a lot of anger toward Vance. If I did something good Vance didn't notice me, but if I did something wrong, he was swift to administer punishment. My parents divorced when I was eight. I was forced to visit Vance for a year or two after the divorce, every other weekend. The abuse my brother and I experienced at Vance's hands stopped after the divorce, but my fear of him didn't go away for a very long time. Finally, I was told I didn't have to go visit him anymore if I didn't want to. I

didn't visit him many more times after that. That's when I started calling him Vance instead of Dad. I've only seen him two times since.

After my high school graduation, he took me out for lunch to congratulate me. It was awkward for both of us, I think. I never did tell Vance how he made me feel or what his actions cost me. Even though I despised Vance, I just didn't want to hurt his feelings. It was twelve years until I saw him again.

I got married, fathered three children of my own, and adopted two more kids. I know I make my own mistakes as a parent, but I make sure my kids know when I am proud of them. At one point I decided to try to reconnect with Vance. I thought he should be able to meet his grandchildren.

My wife, our five children, and I piled into the car and drove to Georgia so he could meet the six of them. While we were there visiting Vance told my wife about the time that I gave the neighbor girl my new puppy because her dog got run over by a car. He told her that I was such a caring and selfless person even when I was only six years old. It wasn't until that day my father said for the first time in my life that he was proud of me, twenty-three years too late. Even though I don't have much interest in a relationship with Vance, I have often thought about this story since then.

Captain Texas: A Poem of Western Bravery

Bonnie Jean DeWilde

If somebody steals your cattle, no need to start a battle.
He'll drive up in his Lexus, we're talkin' 'bout Cap'n Texas!

If you're woke up when you're restin', don't pull out Smith n' Wesson.
He's quick but isn't reckless, we're talkin' 'bout Cap'n Texas.

Your fence dun got run over, don't go shootin' up your Drover.
He's smart and ambidextrous, we're talkin' 'bout Cap'n Texas.

If a train car comes a loose, who'll catch that stray caboose?
He's got lightin' fast reflexes, we're talkin' 'bout Cap'n Texas.

If you're Chevy is a breakin', well there ain't no mistakin'.
Don't go looking up your ex's, just call up Cap'n Texas!

He saves us all from harm, he really is a charm.
There're lots of things that vex us, but we just call up Cap'n Texas!

A hero is a must, he leaves Batman in the dust.
He'll be home in time for dinner, our Cap'n is a winner!

The Entertainment

Dillon Adkisson

People were rolling in like water
flooding into our peripheral vision,
their stomachs brushing against
the tips of our elbows
as we walked in wide-eyed.
The music started to play
and everyone crowded in to listen.
But long before a sound diffused
into an indefinite amount of empty spaces,
between bodies, floating debris,
and calcified sludge,
a man near the bar
using his straightened hand like a visor
—saluting,
squinting his eyes,
stared into the gaze
of a man in the mirror,
struggling to recognize
who he was looking at.

The ball started to turn
and the lights began to sway,
undulating like illuminated lily pads
across the rough surface of the battered wood floor.
The lights continued to perpetually augment
what seemed like eternity.
After the serenade,
back to when the past was present,
we digressed into amber liquids,
rosy cheeks, poison wells,
and paper receipts.
Behind the tap handles looking conflicted,
that same guy stood,
hands pocketed,
trying to mimic that stranger's reflection.

Silence Doesn't Exist

Moriah Roberts

You will never get to see what makes me,
You will never get to see what breaks me,
You will only get to see what I present to you,

When you look at me,
You will remember me by my smile,
And if the clothes I had on were in style,

Remembering if I smelled like apple cinnamon,
The kind from Bath and Body Works,
Or if I smelled like the cheap version from the dollar store on
24th,

You'll remember the sound of my stomach,
The sound I tried to hide,
I'll tell you I'm okay,
But I can feel my stomach touching my back,
It's been three days since the last time I've eaten,
I missed this week's pantry,
I had to work a double to get my water cut back on,

Judging me silently,
For the simple fact that I cannot hear you,
But again,
You are wrong,
I can hear you loud and clear,
Your facial expression is louder than you think,
That penetrating stare,
I can feel your eyes,
Trying to figure me out,

Eyebrows scrunched together making a unibrow,
Your top lip lifted,

Your eyes so small they look like a paper cut,
You look like a marionette,
Let me stop,
You may be able to hear me too,

But only if you knew me,
If only you knew this is the best outfit in my closet,
If only you knew my water was shut off and that's why I could
not shower,
If only you knew in order to cover up the smell,
I used that \$1 perfume from the dollar store on 24th,
If only you knew the only way I eat is if I make it to the pantry
in time,
If only you knew that the expression you are wearing isn't your
best look,
I'm sorry I'm judging again,
Let me stop,
You may be able to hear me too.

Disability Poem

Brittany Duncan

Dear Hearing,
I have cried so many tears for you.
Since you left, I learned a whole new language.
Anger came and made me bitter,
But I became part of a wonderful culture, a new way of listening.
I have learned to live without you.
Losing you was a dark time, a silent time.
I do miss you Hearing,
Though, I know now I do not need
You, Hearing.

Blue Bird

Claire Furjanic

Lillian's eyes remained glued to the blank wall, her thoughts clouded. She was thinking about that bird, the bird she saw. Was it two days ago? No, that was today. It was a bright blue bird, its eye small and curious. It was on a tree, and then it was flying. Lillian laughed, remembering how the bird soared so close to her head. "Bird, blue bird, bird." She muttered to herself anxiously. This bird reminded her of something. She wished to tell someone about it. She heard the door to her room open, but she didn't bother to look. Bird, she thought to herself.

Josephine rushed to meet the car awaiting her across the street, raindrops falling down onto her. She quickly opened the passenger seat door and ducked inside the small car. Sighing in exhaustion, she shook the rain out of her hair.

"Thanks for the ride; my car is in the shop." Josephine glanced toward her older brother, Mason. He shrugged with a smile, "Anything for my sister."

Josephine fumbled with her keys as she looked out the window, watching the rain fall against the glass. The sky was full of gray clouds, and she listened closely for the thunder. Mason reached over and rested a hand on her shoulder. "It's good to see you. How have you been?"

"I'm okay, thanks." Josephine answered quickly.

When she was a little girl, she had big dreams. Not only that, but she believed they were achievable. Now, she lived in a tiny apartment that she could barely afford, all opportunities had passed her by, and she had no one to talk to about it.

Mason tapped his fingers nervously on the steering wheel, "What have you been up to? Are you still pursuing—"

"No." Josephine knew the question before it was even asked. She wished the answer were different.

"Oh, why not?" Mason's curiosity arose in his voice.

Josephine gazed out the window, avoiding eye contact with her brother. After a long moment of uncomfortable silence, she

finally spoke up and diverted the conversation.

Disappointment lingering in her voice, she said, “I, uh, applied for another job.”

“Oh yeah? Is that your third job now?” He sounded genuinely interested, but she could hear the concern in his voice. She didn’t reply. He wouldn’t understand.

Four years ago, a cold day in March, their parents invited family and friends over. The house was flooded with cousins, parents with newborn babies, and grandparents. Josephine distinctly remembered everything about this day. She remembered the taste of the lukewarm Pepsi she drank after letting it sit out for too long, she remembered the way her mom asked for her assistance in the kitchen, and the worried faces of her aunt and uncle when they said their goodbyes. Josephine recalled how she blamed her mother’s forgetfulness on the alcohol, the alcohol her mother hadn’t taken one sip of. She remembered overhearing a conversation between her mother and father in their bedroom.

Her father’s voice was full of uncertainty, “How could you forget your cousin’s name, Lily?”

Flustered, her mother responded in a hurry. “I’m sorry; I—I don’t know.”

“And the food, you forgot to... Should I be concerned?” The conversation ended quickly when Josephine heard her mother, the woman who was always full of laughter and kindness, begin to cry and scream.

Five months later, her mother’s memory had taken a large decline. She was constantly getting confused by small things. Josephine hated watching it. She stood by as the very things she loved about her mother fell apart, piece by piece. After Lillian was diagnosed with Alzheimer’s, Mason disappeared for a month. He left a note behind saying that it was a work trip, which didn’t fool Josephine for a second.

Her father tried his best to act like it was okay. He was there for the next year, caring for his wife and helping with the money. He was even there when she was moved into a nursing home. But the day came when he walked into the room and his

wife didn't look at him with her usual bright eyes and smile but instead furrowed her eyebrows in confusion, unfamiliar with who he was. After that, he must've just accepted that his wife was gone. He never again joined Josephine when she would drive down to the nursing home twice a week.

"Joey?"

The sound of her brother's concerned voice snapped her out of the trance. She forced herself to look at him now, his green eyes full of worry and sadness.

He sighed, "I'm worried about you. You can't put your entire life on hold just because—"

Josephine interrupted him, "Please stop. I'm doing exactly what I need to be doing. My mom needs me. She needs her family." Josephine's voice broke. She violently turned her head away from him so that he couldn't see the tears welling up in her eyes.

Mason sighed exhaustedly, "She would want you to pursue your dream. She would want you to be the pilot you've always dreamed of being, Joey. What was it that she would always say?"

Um, wouldn't she always say you were meant to fly?" Born to fly. She would say "You were born to fly."

Josephine shook her head, silently correcting him. She stopped herself from speaking all the unsaid frustrations and bitter words she had against her brother. He was right about that; her mother would want her to pursue her dream regardless of anything. Josephine missed the drive and determination of always having her future planned out. But this was never part of the plan. She ached for her mom to once again look at her with pride and delight shining in her eyes, instead of the distant gaze she now received.

They arrived to the nursing home and Mason pulled up to the front door. The brakes squealed and the car halted to a stop. Josephine awkwardly thanked him, "Would you like to come with me?"

Even though she asked, she already knew his answer. She couldn't recall the last time Mason had visited their mother. He

bit the inside of his lip, "Sorry, Joey. It's just... too hard."

Josephine opened her mouth, but thinking better, she shut it. She muttered another thank you before stepping out into the rain.

"Josephine Harvey, here to see Lillian Harvey." Josephine scribbled her name onto the sign-in sheet, avoiding eye contact with the lady behind the desk. She didn't wish to see the sad and sympathetic faces of those who worked here. She watched her dirty sneakers as they took small, quick steps down the hallway. Josephine observed the carpet, a disgusting maroon color. The unusual strong scent of sweat and elderly people filled her nose. Finally, she approached Room 112. She took a deep breath before turning the knob of the door.

Josephine immediately looked toward the chair in the corner of the room, where her mother always sat. A woman at the age of forty-nine, who used to jump up at the sight of company, remained still, her eyes glued to the wall. She was clothed in jeans too big for her waist and an overworn, stained light blue sweater.

Josephine took a step closer to her mother. "Hey mom, it's Josephine... or Joey."

Lillian turned her head slightly and gave her daughter a small smile. Her big blue eyes appeared to be lost, somewhere else. Josephine gently took her mother's hand. "I just saw Mason. I think he's doing good."

Lillian slowly nodded in return. Josephine couldn't help but smile as she searched the pocket of her bag, retrieving a plastic bag full of cookies. She passed one toward her mother. "I made chocolate chip cookies last night, your favorite. I brought you a few."

Lillian smiled as her fingers softly enclosed the cookie. Josephine leaned against the wall and took a bite of her creation. Instantly, the taste took her back to the hours spent on the back porch with her mother. They would sit on old, wooden rocking chairs, eating cookies and watching the sky. Waiting patiently for planes to fly by, they would play board games and enjoy each other's company. Since they lived near an airfield, spotting a vast

plane was a fascinating occurrence.

Josephine stopped reminiscing and glanced out the window, noticing that the rain had ceased. She couldn't help but think about the many flights that were delayed because of the storm. She shook the thought away, looking toward her mother. The cookie had been consumed, and Lillian looked pleased. Pieces and crumbs of the cookie were scattered throughout her sweater.

"Did you like it?" Josephine asked.

Lillian nodded enthusiastically, "Yes, yes," her voice faded into a murmur, "I did." Josephine smiled toward her mother.

"Okay Mom, let's get some air."

She helped her mom stand to her feet, the leftover crumbs of the cookie falling to the floor. Lillian's thin fingers wrapped tightly around Josephine's. They walked outside, the cold brisk air greeting them.

"How have you been?" Josephine held tightly onto her mother's hand like she used to do when she was a little girl.

Lillian smiled, "Good, good."

Josephine watched as her mother looked around at the trees, leaves hanging loosely from each branch, destined to fall. Josephine thought about the weeks she spent reading library books that featured anything to do with flying. She remembered how she would talk forever to her mother about the information she had gathered about airplanes and the required skills of a pilot. But now, they walked side by side in silence, listening to the wind howl and the leaves brush against one another.

Lillian suddenly began to laugh. "There was a bird."

"A bird?" Josephine questioned, startled by her mother's initiation of conversation.

Her mother nodded, pointing to a tall oak tree. "Yes, it was over there. Not moving."

Curious, Josephine continued the conversation. There weren't many things that her mother remembered. "Oh, and what did this bird look like?"

Lillian thought about the bright color of its feathers. "It was blue, a blue bird."

"Really?"

“Yeah, it wasn’t moving... and then it took off, and it was flying. Flying! It was so close to me.” Lillian giggled, her eyes darting from tree to tree.

Josephine smiled, “That’s funny.” She scanned the sky for more birds, wishing to provide more of this joy to her mother. She imagined the blue bird now, its eye small and curious.

They went back inside when the dark clouds began to reappear. Josephine walked her mother back to Room 112 and held the door open for her.

“Are you leaving?” Lillian inquired as she made her way back to her chair. Josephine took a glance around at the tan, boring walls of the room. She sighed, wishing they could go somewhere more lively. As far as Josephine was concerned, the confinement to this small room was unhelpful to her mother’s condition.

“No, Mom,” Josephine searched her backpack, “I want to hang out with you.”

Josephine pulled out a 4x6 photo of their family. She had planned to tape this to the wall her mother consistently stared at. It was taken on an unforgettable day in the summer ten years ago. They were in the backyard of their old home, playing ‘airplane,’ a game Lillian had created in order to serve the dreams that her daughter had harbored. She couldn’t wait for her daughter to fulfill her passion of becoming a pilot of an airline one day.

In the photo, Lillian, her husband Samuel, and Mason were all lined up, sitting in lawn chairs. Josephine stood in front of them, holding a plastic steering wheel. Mason was pretending to fall out of his chair from turbulence while Samuel was eating peanuts. It was one of Josephine’s most cherished memories with her family.

Josephine outstretched the photo toward her mother, desperately hoping it would resurrect memories. “Remember this, Mom? We were playing airplane.”

For a silent moment, Lillian searched the photo with diligence. As if she was memorizing every single detail, she ran her finger across it, pointing at each of the faces. Finally, she

spoke, “Yes.”

She let her finger linger over the ten-year-old Josephine in the photo, smiling softly. “You were born to fly.” Lillian whispered.

Josephine’s heart ached as the breath left her lungs. She stood there in disbelief, thinking about all the times her mother used to tell her that. She hadn’t heard those words in a few years. The words that used to always be spoken over her.

Josephine felt hopeful; her mother still believed in her, even after all these years when she refused to believe in herself. Suddenly, she remembered how she dropped out of college and ignored every opportunity she ever had of becoming a pilot. She shook her head solemnly. “I don’t think so.”

Lillian, with a look of displeasure, set the photo down in her lap. “No, no, no.” She muttered to herself. Josephine watched her mother space off and become clouded with distant thoughts.

After a moment of silence, Lillian raised her voice once more. “You will fly,” she said, more confident this time.

Josephine opened her mouth to deny it, but stopped herself. Her mom, at least for the moment, hadn’t forgotten. She took her mother’s hand in her own. “Mom, I wish—”

Lillian interrupted, “The other day, there was a bird. A blue bird... and it began to fly.”

In this Issue

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Qiang Cao

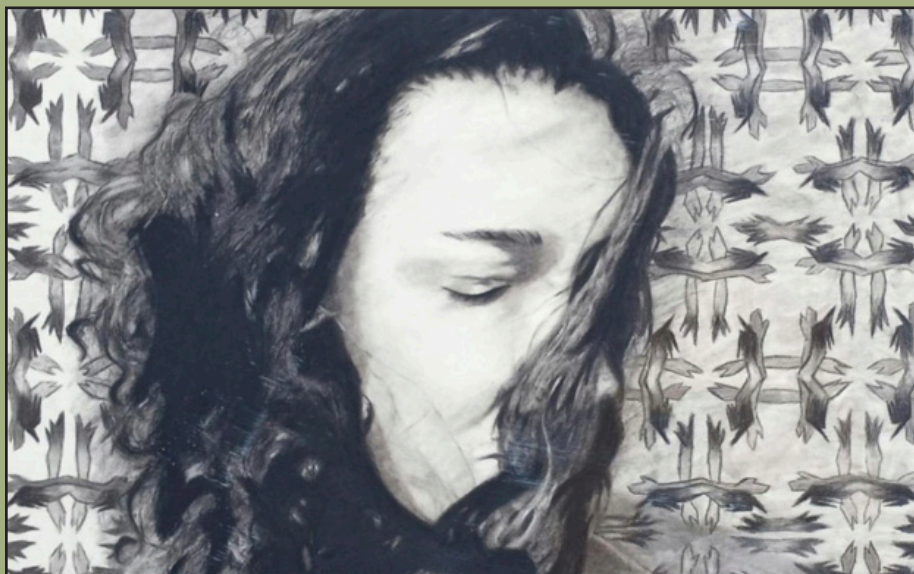
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