

The Awakenings Review

The Awakenings Review

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Front Cover Art: Richard Wu’s photograph “Windmill’s Silhouette” graces the cover of *The Awakenings Review* this fall. Richard’s extraordinary talent captures bold landscapes and uncommon architectural forms. Richard writes, “This photograph was taken of a historic windmill in the city of Bruges, Belgium. At the time I visited this windmill, the sun was about to set, so I climbed a mound to find a camera angle where the fading light would accentuate the windmill’s architecture against its silhouetted surroundings.”

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Submission Guidelines

The Awakenings Review is an annual literary journal published by The Awakenings Project, located near Chicago. *The Awakenings Review* publishes original poetry, short stories, dramatic scenes, essays, photographs, excerpts from larger works, and black-and-white cover art—all created by persons who have had a personal experience with mental illness.

Editorial Policy

A writer for *The Awakenings Review* (*The AR*) need not have a mental illness—we open submissions to family members and friends of people with mental illness. We do prefer that a writer have a mental illness of some type, and be willing to write about it, but that does not have to be the focus of their writings. *The AR* occasionally publishes special issues dedicated to specific topics, or features authors who live with a particular illness.

In most cases, at least two members of *The AR* editorial board review each submission. We strive to give a preliminary response as soon as possible.

Contributors selected for publication are not paid for their work. However, they will receive a complimentary copy of the journal in which their work is published when it becomes available, and additional copies at a discount.

Submissions

Submissions are accepted on an ongoing basis. Email submissions should be in a .doc or .docx format attached to an email sent to AR@AwakeningsProject.org. Include the word “submission” in the subject line.

If you are submitting more than one poem by email, they should all be grouped together into one Word file, e.g., not sent as individual files.

All manuscripts sent to us should be accompanied by a cover letter, which in part describes the writer’s relationship to mental illness, either self, family member, or friend.

Manuscripts can be mailed to:

The Awakenings Review
P.O. Box 177
Wheaton, IL 60187

If mailed to us, you will be notified when we receive your submission.

Submission Guidelines

Material must be offered for *first publication*. We do not accept previously published work. Simultaneous submissions are allowed. However, if a submission is accepted by another publisher as well as by *The AR*, the author

must notify *The AR* as soon as possible of their preferred publisher.

Individuals are encouraged to submit a body of work for review. With poetry, that means no less than three poems, **or** up to five pieces of poetry, or one short story (no more than 5000 words) per issue. If this limit is exceeded, the entire submission may be returned unreviewed.

Do not send *The AR* the original or sole copy of a submission. *The AR* does not accept responsibility for lost or damaged submissions.

Mailed submissions will not be returned to the creator unless accompanied by a self-addressed stamped envelope with the correct postage.

Format for Submissions

Please adhere to the following guidelines:

- *PROSE and POETRY*: The maximum length for all work submitted for a given issue is 5,000 words.
- Pages should be numbered, and the writer's name, address, phone, and email address should appear at the top of the first page of each piece submitted.
- Authors should be aware that an individual line of poetry that exceeds 60 characters in length cannot be printed as a single line when published.
- Upon acceptance for publication, authors who reach us through the mail will be asked to email a copy of their works to AR@AwakeningsProject.org.
- *ARTWORK*: *The AR* accepts B/W photographs, ink drawings, etchings, charcoal drawings, paintings, and graphics to be considered for cover art. *Send your work to AR@AwakeningsProject.org in a .jpeg format.* Include "submission" in the email subject line.
- *The AR* accepts photographs up to 8" x 10" in size. Do not send the original negative.
- Only submissions mailed to us with a self-addressed, stamped envelope with correct postage will be returned to the sender.

Mental Health History

Authors should include a cover letter describing their experience with mental illness, either self, family member, or friend of someone who struggles with mental illness. While this information is voluntary and its absence will not preclude your work from being considered, if your work is accepted for publication you will be asked to submit a short biography where we would like you to supply this information.

Copyright

Writers and artists retain the copyright to their material. By submitting work, they agree to assign to *The AR* one-time rights for publication.

Privacy

By agreeing to allow their work published in *The AR*, writers whose work is accepted agree to allow *The AR* to publish a brief biography of them in the print copy of *The AR*, and to permit *The AR* to publish their names and titles of their works on The Awakenings Project web site. With the author's permission, the work itself may also be published on The Awakenings Project web site. The Awakenings Project will take measures to protect writers' names from access by Internet "web crawlers" to ensure, to the best of its ability, the writer's privacy. Access to information published on The Awakenings Project site cannot, however, be guaranteed to be inaccessible to all web crawlers.

Foreword

The Awakenings Review has dedicated itself with zeal, professionalism, and compassion to fostering and promoting the work of imaginative, remarkable artists who live daily with mental illness. Our mission, which is to not only encourage, but to advance the work of writers with these types of challenges, spoke to me directly. Four years ago, when just by chance, I became aware of *The Awakenings Review*. I knew on a visceral level that I wanted to be involved and to have an impact.

Under the steadfast, genuinely warm guidance of Robert Lundin, Editor-in-Chief extraordinaire, I first volunteered in the capacity of assistant editor, offering critiques to those writers who didn't quite make the cut. This was a task that required great tact and sensitivity. No one wants to be rejected! However, scores of submitters, even ones who had been gently turned down, wrote to thank me for my input. Oftentimes, my constructive criticism resulted in these authors editing their work and subsequently resubmitting. Repeatedly, I was told how validating it was to be read, listened to, and cared about.

Currently, I serve as the associate editor, reading nearly every submission that reaches us, presenting my opinion about which ones should move on to the next level. In both of these roles, I have been genuinely appreciated by those at the helm. What a courageous, talented, visionary group I have been lucky to be an integral part of. Wanting to further deepen my level of commitment, two years ago I joined Bob, and the wonderfully dedicated, forward-thinking Irene O'Neill, and other resolute members, to serve on the Board of Directors of The Awakenings Project, the overarching nonprofit whose goal is to provide acceptance and appreciation of art by people living with mental illness in all creative endeavors, particularly fine arts, music, literature, and drama.

I sincerely wish I had been at the fore of our literary magazine since its inception. How wonderfully rewarding it would be to see the nascent map of our goals and dreams twist and turn, finally reaching fruition. Nevertheless, I take great pride in the production of this, our 20th Anniversary Edition. We are the preeminent literary journal to showcase poetry and prose by people who experience mental illness. We strive to give a voice to this population. We offer support and encouragement to our writers, but also, as readers, we are fortunate to have exposure to their raw, insightful, authentic body of work. Sometimes a poem resonates with our own situation, or a story sends us delving deeper, or

perhaps a prose submission extends to us a glimmer of hope. We are enriched by their words.

For the first time since our debut, we are including photography and art peppered throughout our literary magazine. Yet again, we are true to our goal of moving artists with mental health issues forward in a positive, constructive, rewarding way, providing yet another avenue to showcase their talents.

As in past issues, we feature writers from all over the globe who, due to their respective situations, tackle many facets of shame, struggle, desperation, triumph, hope, acceptance, and humor in their literary trajectories.

It's quite the challenge to highlight just a few of the poets represented in our 20th Anniversary Edition, but here is a taste of what you'll find: Poet Bibhu Padhi hails from India. His eloquent use of language spills onto the page and the reader is transported. Enjoy his pieces which are based on a major character in the Indian epic, *Mahabharata*. Hope Andersen is releasing her memoir titled *How to Remodel a Life: one woman's guide to surviving alcoholism and bipolar disorder* (Warren Publishing 2020). Multi-talented, she writes in various genres which include poetry. Six of her engaging poems are showcased in this *Awakenings Review*. The quandary of writing honestly about not being truthful is captured in the essence of what it feels like to lie by Fred Yannantuono. Follow Zan Bocke's authentic gripping experiences with her troubled mom as Zan navigates the foster care system in her story, "Meadowlark." From across the pond in England, Stephen C. Middleton sweeps us up with his crisp concise poetry. Turn the pages of this salient literary journal and find yourself with a better understanding and appreciation for the gifts these writers bestow upon us. Soak up their imagery. Lounge in their world. Relate to their disruptions and conquests. Allow yourself to be moved, touched, motivated, and transformed. Enjoy and read on.....

Audrey Sher-Walton
Associate Editor



Preface

With this issue we observe exactly two decades of publishing *The Awakenings Review*. That may well make us the oldest running literary magazine in the nation committed to publishing poetry, fiction, and nonfiction by poets and writers with mental illness and those close to them.

It's cliché to say 'how the years have flown by so quickly,' or 'look at what we've accomplished in that time,' or 'I remember our first issue when...' What I'd like to write about instead is the impact that *The Awakenings Review* has had on peoples' lives, how it's made them resilient and stronger, moreover how it's ushered my journey in life to becoming a person immersed in a struggle of epic proportions, the struggle between mental health and stigma.

Under the umbrella of the Awakenings Project, the group that spawned the AR, many of us were able to find a point of reference in our lives. We no longer were a nebulous group of people with psychiatric illnesses loosely aligned by way of our mutual suffering. We now had a broader, more valuable and positive identity, that of artist and creator, of writer and poet, of show manager and artistic director, of innovator and leader. With the Awakenings art shows our small band became more than friends, we became colleagues and comrades. Twenty-four years ago, four years before the AR arrived, The Awakenings Art Show stirred hearts with a warmth of feeling and inspiration that has seen us flourish through these many years.

Remarkably, this identity came abruptly; it was not fermented. The first art show in 1997 was so exhilarating that we basked in its glow for months. Not long afterwards we found opportunities to exhibit our art at other galleries throughout the Chicago area which cemented our nascent identity as artists and creators, as show managers and producers. From this platform leapt *The Awakenings Review*.

The AR is different from art shows we undertake in one important capacity: we obtain submissions from virtually anywhere in the world, while the art shows are restricted by way of logistics to a regional area. At the start, at the University of Chicago, beginning with a call for submissions in *Poets & Writers* magazine, a steady flow of submissions started to come our way and the editorial facet of the AR was in gear. After 20 years, the flow continues.

We are people with mental illnesses; we are compelled to publish and disseminate a journal that speaks to who we are. We have a tool in our hands. A tool by which we are able to reach out to a segment of the literary community

that deeply understands and identifies with our motives and mission. We are a tool by which we create ripples in the great ocean of words to which many people will be attracted, people who might otherwise not be in a position to reveal their most familiar selves to the literary public.

As someone who has lived with a mental illness for over forty years, I'm aware of how a person with these disorders adopts an identity as mentally ill which can eclipse other remarkable and resilient personal characteristics. As the AR has grown and matured over two decades, I too have become more at ease with my own mental illness to the point that I don't distinguish it as an embarrassing malady as much as an irksome fact. I feel I have grown beyond doubts and fears generated by stigma, beyond its crippling ways, into a productive and meaningful role in the community. The AR has taught me to be an editor and not an apologist.

I believe this is an important role to rise to. There is nothing less than a great struggle in our culture between mental health and stigma. At times stigma fades into the background, but at times it explodes with deadly shrapnel. The Awakenings Review has given my life a response to stigma. It gives every poet, writer, reader, and editor a flak jacket to repel the cutting shards of stigma. It has given us pride in our accomplishments and pride in who we are. Like the Awakenings Art Show propelling our little band of mentally ill people into the roles of colleagues, artists and managers, I believe the AR can legitimize a creative person by letting them reveal just who they are.

In sum, many of us are people who cope with a litany of mental illnesses and find the courage through this journal for familiar expression. We are a journal that, as David Lynn, the editor emeritus of *The Kenyon Review*, eloquently said, "In a time when so many other journals have failed to survive, The AR has continued to thrive with riveting and important new work. It plays a truly important role in the life of American letters and the life of the American mind. We are all better off for its presence."

Robert Lundin
Editor



Bibhu Padhi



MISSING HISTORY

By the time you know,
everything is hidden
in time's wandering eye.

Places and persons
unvisited for lack of time,

now borrowed from
a lost mouth for the first time.

The waiting is all there is,
to be measured by
an inappropriate loss—
a question to time.

Suffering and loss place you
in possession of small things
long forgotten and now remembered.

An evening's conversation
offering a missing link—

a tremor on the lips, a story
untold for lack of a listener.

And then, all at once
everything falls into place—

a recognition of a lost word
or face, a return to the calendar years,
and a feeling of trust in this moment's

Bibhu Padhi

announcement, of its very own
truth of things, emerging now at
a blurred distance of insanity.



BODY

This is where everything
is, lives and breathes
or just ceases to be.
Everything else—all that
promises to be true—is vague
and nameless, like someone
you have never spent time with.

This alone is branches and leaves,
fingers, toes and lips, the fruit's
and the breast's haughty,
self-contained accuracy,
the statue's slow,
incredible formation through
time, each moment's limitlessness.

How can I forget what has grown
through a careful, evolving
history, or can bring in tomorrow
long before its chosen time?
Spirit of it all, it has its needs too—
the dark smell of the cave's depth,
the very special intimacies.



THIS DISEMBODIED VISITOR

for Milmun

A nameless something keeps returning to a tender throat, periodically, despite all our concerned efforts to keep it off the lean innocence and helplessness of the sinless but inflamed voice, the body's cryptic heat, our fears. Why does it choose to be so? As if it would feel lonely without being where it was, as if it was slowly making this throat its home, safe from the world's curious eye, as if it was its last shelter? Our guesses move from word to word, very human help to help, while the throat darkly awaits the visitor's arrival after a period of its inexplicable absence, its possible flight to other, unsuspecting, but less habitable throats. We wonder about the much-required end, about how to stop its next arrival before it has arrived. We go through our rich vocabularies, tell each other, "No, now that we have chosen a very different word of warning—the most illegible, the least administered, almost a mantra—it wouldn't dare arrive again, for it would hear and feel it for the first time from so near." We wait. The first sensation of its coming is in the mind and in the air. My hopes stay close to me though, as if they were prayers too. I ask my child, "How do you feel this morning, now?" A timid voice answers, "I don't know." And I think I tell him, "You've nothing to fear now, and this you should know." The insistent visitor

Bibhu Padhi

is nowhere near, but I can still see how,
on my child's small eyes and elsewhere;
the fear is going to stay.



STORY OF A NIGHT

My feet walked the corridor
endlessly, moving toward the room
in which she was, moving away.

The night shifted, hour by hour,
the rains increased, the nearby houses
standing like witnesses to a distant fear.

A long time later, I stepped inside the room,
where she sat in my bed. Blue, transparent,
her body flowing inside the room like sea water.

I walked nearer, quietly sat beside her.
She was looking into me as if
I couldn't be anyone but herself.

Quietly I curled my arms around her,
throughout imagining the many ways
to hold an absence. Fear was so near!

And suddenly, the words, "I feel so afraid!"
I had hardly heard them before something
twisted around me like a lover.

I carried her to the adjoining room where we lay
in a safer bed, each folded around the other like
leaf and bud. The night and the rains were there.



WITNESS

The great war has ended.
No one lost, no one won.
What do win and loss mean
to so close a picture
that held the world together?
And you, Belalsen, have seen it all—
your bodiless head watching
the pilgrimage of events
from the earth's topmost place?
You were born to be here, with
immortality in your eyes;
you are here with all of us,
with me now, and will
continue to be here
to an endless time.

Belalsen, what did you see,
what did you hear, when, on
Kurukshetra's land of truth,
the great war was on? I know
what your answer would be:
"I did not hear anything,
only saw a serrated,
razor-sharp wheel flying
from end to end, bloody with
human death, the sacrificial
animals, remaining unseen."

I am told you had witnessed it all
from the beginning
to the tentative end. And
the question, "What did you
see, Belalsen," was answered
so simply. "I saw nothing
except the wheel flying
to and fro, separating

Bibhu Padhi

the head from the body,
just as it had been in my case.”

Death was everywhere
and, at the end of it all,
when some dead warriors
floated toward heaven, some
had to look into the immensities
of hell for a minute or so.
Belalsen, where are you now?

I can neither see you nor
hear you, nor do I know
what you will tell me
when my time comes to leave.
Will you witness that too?
Please do, for you shall
tell the world that here
was a man who enjoyed
everything, including
death and immortality
of the soul, who dreamt
it all, witnessed it all.

Based on a major character in the Indian epic, *Mahabharata*.

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***Bibhu Padhi** has been suffering from bipolar disorder for the last twenty-nine years. Pushcart nominee, he has published fourteen books of poetry. His poems have appeared in distinguished magazines throughout the English-speaking world, such as Acumen, Contemporary Review, The Poetry Review, Poetry Wales, The Rialto, Stand, America, The American Scholar, Commonwealth, The New Criterion, Poetry, Southwest Review, TriQuarterly, New Contrast, The Antigonish Review, Queen's Quarterly and The Toronto Review. They have been included in numerous anthologies and textbooks. Five of the most recent are The Bloodaxe Book of Contemporary Indian Poets, Language for a New Century (Norton) Journeys (HarperCollins), 60 Indian Poets (Penguin) and The HarperCollins Book of English Poetry.*

Roddy Williams



HEREDITY

My family passes on insanity
like earlobes
guilt frames
and hair looms
the grim sets of jaws

They cleave to the mad gene
add it to the heraldry
Sable
Two crossed swords with
barking rampant
Crest
psychoses saddled
on the young with bitter abandon

Motto
Pass The Grudge

I was with them today
all in their handmedowns
casting me the twitching
glitter of an eye
that's never seen the better days
or the other side of
the hill the story's written on



AUGUST

Maybe it's the weather drives us crazy,
tempering our heads like a beaten sword.
Sun and rain take it in turns to test me;
bake and soak my head until I confess.

What is the crime of which I am accused?
I should not have to tell you, says the voice
of Pavlov's bell, ringing through the thick heat,
waking the neighbours, who complain to me.

You should know, whispers through the white noise of
the rain, doing impressions of my mum.
Indeed I should. I always wished I did.
Today the blue is clear across the sky,

empty of everything. No love. No hate.
No words. No explanation for it all.



UNKNOWN MEN

I walk among these men, unknown, absorb
their faces like a newly trodden way
and some days I may stay awhile until
I'm so familiar they will greet me
with a smile of happy recognition,
worrying itself beneath my trainers.

In time they get so close they singe their beards.
Smoking ringlets seesaw down to gravel
and grime the teeth so welcoming, so free.
I am the candle in a world of moths.

Roddy Williams

Then I must wander on, to fresh strangers
free of obligation and of foot guilt
measuring the distance held between us
with a ruler fashioned from acquaintance.



HOW'S THE FAMILY?

Ask me how I am
that pointless exercise
a question oozed to tongue from the mire
of smooth smalltalk
I have problems
mouthing the banal chitchat
the garble tennis the banter

Fine thanks. How are you?
From there I am care-deaf
My mind conjures an algorithm
of frequently
made ball returns
Oh I am sorry to hear that.
I know how you are feeling.



TRAINING PURPOSES

You don't mind if I record this do you?
It's for training purposes

This NHS biro becomes wand
To my head I conjure
bored young people
suited proper shoes
doodling or checking Facebook
while my voice from

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a face they'll never see
hisses into heads
providing vital insight
on the mad

They won't need wands they've
got styluses
will fashion an avatar
based on preconceptions about my voice
They'll base it on John Peel
I am thinking

if they know who John Peel is
and what he looks like

That's not a safe bet
They'll likely be millenials
for whom only the present moment exists

They will hate me for sucking that moment
from them
into my vents

I will teach them either hate
or the dangers of paranoia

Maybe I should say
Hello trainees
to put them at their ease

No
That's fine

Roddy Williams



Roddy Williams writes, “I am a Welsh gay man, currently living and working in London, and recently celebrated my sixtieth birthday. I have suffered from bouts of severe depression all my life, although never sought help until around eighteen months ago. My family was majorly dysfunctional and it took me years to realise that my father was clinically depressed until his death at 59 from a heart attack brought on by alcoholism. My mother survived into her nineties but developed Alzheimers and passed away two years ago. The rest of my family suffer from mental health issues from a lesser to greater degree, ranging from the delusional to schizophrenia and cannabis psychosis. Writing and creativity have always helped me manage to cope.”

Nnadi Samuel



QUEEN PREMIERS FOR GIRLS SHEDDING THEIR FIVES

We are postgraduate students in every world except this one uniformed in blue..
the stars here do not recognize us..
& every harmattan, the wind vandalises the pipelines in our skin..
looking for a country's hubris to loot..

each day mistakes the girl child for it's queen premiere..
& suggests her into tired pages thumbed to coma by life's signature..
into hardbacks orphaned to the grip of another expired spine.

I met a little girl of five in a motel & shared her abandoned skin..
apparently, her father died also in a beer parlour..
& the way she said this, without a flinch..
without traces of sadness in those eyes that brew a different sea of strange..
bereft of grief, regret or those remorseful crutches that aids the flight of an egret..
it was as if something she never had but hoped for, died even before she could
mould it..
it was as if her feelings were the thread..
& life was the seamstress behind her garment of distress..
it was as if a drunk century memorized her into states & pre matured capitals..

into multiplication tables reeking of empty bare bottles..
because, to say we haven't printed another soul on a measled doormat..
is to leave my readers dormant..
it is to paint the helm of her emotions white..
& beg her not to soil it with her own wars



Nnadi Samuel

BODY OF AN ESSAY

The earth sometimes is a chapel ..
where the dead confesses their indebted essays..
a grieving alphabet strolls past a man..
& assesses him with intimate contempt, like the margins we omit in our
informal letters..
randomly distributed into the night, his body seeks coherence in a
paragraphed mist..
in the quietness of crickets..
& things whose grudges cannot withstand a summer gaze..
in this essay, he is indebted to just the syntax of his own breath..
compound lungs that sentences him into ignorant concords..
he is indebted to the navel of a page..
the only thing that can boldly starch his manhood to a tattered hearth..
in this essay, there are no flowers to make up for overused phrases as
your sincerely..
no hibiscus to purple our vacant smiles ..
only a crop of extinguished regrets mooned into a garden of sentence..
begging for pruning ..



DEATH IN AUTUMN'S CRIB

Spring heralded a curtain of trees & ambushed a man on his bed ..
the sun sets at his back & rises in his blood pressure..
winter tried his invalidity on ..
& every other season wore a disabled look around him..
we met summer licking a lady ripe in a nocturnal cesspit ..
a closer look told us, her life wasn't worth the next day's purchase..
a burden of snow was lifted from the wet corpse of a little boy..
& the loud pitch of autumn's silhouette was modulated in the bloated dirge his
mother inks..
a man forgot a morsel of his footprint on a desert sand..
the deranged sun scampered to decay it, not minding it's busy schedule..
a recruit of winter's breeze once flagged a teenager down..

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& pulverized him into a sub standard breathalyzer, checking for the ethanol he hid in his breast pocket..
just yesterday..
a woman died, pale as a vapour exhaled into the earth..
we forged her shivering sarcophagus in crimsons of a blindfolded yuletide..
& autumn came snowed in well sharpened bayonet, to play the truth or dare game in her crib..



MOTHER'S MARRIAGE
VOWS TO ME

Samii, reminds me of my pet name ploughing the ridgetides of my mother's lips, like dry harmattan..
-- she finds me scampering to her call with all my concern tugging at the dreadlocks of her eyelashes..
something she couldn't boldly fix as an unbeliever..

i do not forget how our laughter melts half way through each other..
how she reconciles the whole sky in her eyes..
& makes sunlight lie for a very cheap fare..
she was always thick & violent..
like a pregnant tide & i can feel her last wave now above my collar bones even as i write this..
she tries the patient of this world on like every other housemaid she employs..
& made each unripe pods behind our garden form an opinion of her in their tipsy bulbs..
she picks a candle with a dragon head & makes it spew fire in our dark room bereaved of shiny objects..
she was an electrifying garden..
& the flowers she beared sent shock waves down our roof..
my bow prostrates to her every morning like the rug she spreads over her head & call it wig; something trimly unkempt as a carpet grass..
I mortgage every skin of advice she rinses on her tongue, including those she couldn't bathe properly..
on the day of her last wedding anniversary,
she uncovered the dregs of her emotions in a husk of soar palm wine, before

Nnadi Samuel

urging me to drink..

In her eyes were these words: you would outlive my sorrow ..

though she didn't seem convincing, her tears tarred the street of my heart.

& now, each time the sun lights & a tear drops, my face becomes a figurine of wishes..

a patient result of photosynthesis; a medal in a place of rust.

I now parade our balcony of flower vases without any doubt, that the petals left unshed is her tiny absence..

& the way her silhouette fumigates every fragrance of my ex-girlfriends..

just so i could find true love once again..



Nnadi Samuel writes, "I am a 20-year-old graduate of English & literature from the University of Benin (Nigeria). I've had works previously published in LIBRETTO Magazine, Ace World Publishers & Artifact Magazine. Although I have not fully been a victim of mental illness, I grew up resonating with quite a handful of loved ones who have had it & I find the courage with which they deal with it very inspiring. I also have a piece titled "My girlfriend says she would die in a street lamp" forthcoming in Jams & Sand Magazine which borders on this topic."

Mari-Carmen Marin



THE FIRST TIME IT HAPPENED

I remember the tingling in my fingers—
an ant trail down to the tips.
I remember my thumbs bending
and locking in place
in rigor mortis,
only I was alive,
a twelve-year-old girl
standing outside
my math classroom
in Madre de la Luz Middle School,
“Mother of Light,”
and yet
I felt motherless,
trapped in a dark place
I did not recognize.

I remember my lungs
shrinking—
I wanted to breathe
long deep breaths,
as if getting ready
to dive in the sea
we went to swim
on San Miguel beach
every summer.
I remember inhaling,
the air caught
in my throat.

I remember my heart
jumping in my chest,

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trying to warn me
I needed to breathe.

I remember shaking
like a fish out of water,
and then,
sobbing
deep racking sobs,

all happening
in an eternal minute
before a test,

all happening
in front of a crowd
of students I was
always careful to impress . . .

. . . until my teacher,
Don Miguel Pelayo,
came out and hugged me,
his arms like a blanket
covering a survivor
of a shipwreck,
his soothing voice
whispering, "it's okay;
you are okay."



IT'S ALL IN YOUR HEAD

The first night, I think I'd had a bad dream:
me stranded in the ocean,
no ship, no land, no people.
Giant waves drag me down.
I sink; then rise; I sink again; this time I can't
move my legs. I'm drowning . . . blackout . . .

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Then, I'm sitting up on my bed coughing,
gasping for air—my sister's steady breathing
brings me to reality. It's 4 a.m.; it's calm;
I'm home; I'm dry; I'm alive.

The second night I fall asleep fast
only to wake up five hours later
panting, crying, sweating.
I go to the bathroom to grab a tissue.
The girl in the mirror looks pale;
strands of her long hair stick to her cheeks and neck.
I look at her, wash and dry her face until some color
returns to her skin and she looks calmer.
Back in bed, I pray for the morning to arrive fast.

The third night I don't want to fall asleep.
What if I don't wake up to remember to breathe?
What if I die? I'm too young, three days before I turn sixteen.
Fear kidnaps my nerves,
ties them with an electric wire
that keeps me alert.

Daylight is my lifesaver, but not today,
Sunday, a sunny and breezy winter day.
I step out and the house door closes
behind me, sucking up the air I need to breathe.
I bend over to get my breath back,
and that's it.
I got enough.

Sitting in a cold room of the Torrecárdenas Hospital—
my dad's arm around my shoulder, my mom's legs
crossing and uncrossing, crossing and uncrossing—
I remember the time I asked mom whether families
reencountered in heaven. "Don't know," she answered.

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When Dr. Pardo enters the room—my X-rays in his right hand—
he examines my chest, smiles and says,
“You are fine.
Take Valium for three nights.
It’s all in your head.”



IN ANSWER TO THOSE WHO
SAY THE VOICES IN MY HEAD
ARE NOT REAL

I hear voices in my head,
a mob of angry people yelling
at me and each other, the deafening
noise of a demolition tool
in a construction site. I don’t know
why or what they want—the voices.
I just know I want silence,
no more jackhammers
cracking up the pavement of my brain.

I see them in the woman in the mirror:
in her hazel irises when they turn
greener inside and darker around their edge,
floating in bloodshot eyes—lids
too heavy and waterlogged to remain open;
in her body—her protruding shoulder blades, clavicles,
her sternum, spine, twenty-four ribs, and hip bones;
in her skin, the color of bleached bones,
thin as the peel of a yellow plum.

The voices taste like milk gone bad,
the kind of sourness no mouthwash can kill.
It spreads fast, like the flu during fall,
and soon enough it’s in my stomach. Sweet
treats are never sweet; I regurgitate

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the voices' bile
morning, evening, night,
awake and asleep.

I can smell the voices in the greasy strands
of hair whirl-pooling on the floor of my bathroom,
in the dirty clothes piling up and falling
out of the hamper in my closet,
in the weeks-old food in the refrigerator –
the moldy broccoli, the spoilt apples,
the rotten beef.

The voices have sharp edges.
They hurt my hands when I try to write down
the pain they cause—the brick block in my chest,
rubbing up and down against my sternum, obstructing
the air from going to my lungs,
the cold sweat bringing shivers of unease
down my spine,
the cramps in my legs, the tightness in my neck,
the weight on my back that bends me down
until I only want to lie down
and sleep forever so that I stop
hearing the voices in my head.



THE SOUL KILLER

I have a demon in my mind.
He never seems to sleep and likes
creeping through my head to my eyes
where he sits, obstructing my view,

and he becomes the only sight
I have. A demon in my mind
glares down at me with blood-red eyes,
freezing up my veins till my legs

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refuse to walk; my hands can't feel
the touch of warmth. Beware! Inside
I have a demon. In my mind,
no room is left for dreams or hope

just him, trampling on my senses.
I've become a walking shadow
reflecting his crippling power.
I have a demon in my mind.



THE FALL

To my right
the blazing sun
on the bare shoulders
of little kids,
whooping at play
with delta kites,
painting the sky
with downward strokes,
whipped by the strength
of howling winds.

To my left
a shallow pit,
dark and cold
as a tomb
made of stone,
with jagged edges
and mossy walls
humming the tunes
of those who lost
the sight of the sun,
of playful kids,
of dancing kites

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propelled by the wind
whipping the sky.

I look down
the pit,
stumble,
and fall,
hitting
the planks
of no__thing__ness.



***Mari-Carmen Marin** was born in Málaga, Spain, but moved to Houston, TX, in 2003, where she has found her second home. She is a professor of English at Lone Star College—Tomball, and enjoys dancing, drawing, reading, and writing poetry in her spare time. During her teenage years, she experienced restlessness, anxiety, and episodes of sadness she or even her doctors couldn't explain. It was not until she was 23 that she was diagnosed with depression and prescribed anti-depressants for the first time. After years writing poetry to help her deal with anxiety that leads to depression, and after realizing how important it is for those suffering from mental disorders to be understood and supported, she has decided to write a poetry book that aims to raise awareness of the seriousness of mental illness as well as to reach out to those who suffer in silence or whose condition is dismissed.*

Zan Bockes



MEADOWLARK

I. Athena

“DO NOT PICK UP HITCHHIKERS,” read the highway sign. In the midst of Nebraska’s flat expanse huddled a group of old brick buildings with dark windows. Mom and I had passed the Regional Psychiatric Facility once when we traveled from Omaha to the Grand Canyon, just before her commitment in the summer of ’72, when I turned ten. She drove wildly, one hand holding a beer, a cigarette gripped in the other, guiding the car with her thumb and pinky as she belted out Janis Joplin on the radio.

She had begun calling herself Athena, which fit far better than her real name, Eunice. She was petite and wiry, with sinews in her arms and legs like ropes beneath the skin. She gesticulated flamboyantly when talking, movements sharp and angular, tossing long bronze hair from chestnut eyes. She worked sporadically as a waitress and dancer but rarely kept a job for more than a couple of months.

My father divorced her when I was only two, disappearing to the West Coast in a rented black Cadillac, never to be seen again. The only thing I knew for sure about Mom’s childhood was that she was an only child. Anything else proved questionable, whether the information got lost over time or never happened to begin with. She presented alternate scenarios: Someone left her on a doorstep, wolves raised her, she wasn’t born until age 18, and sprang, fully armed with thunderbolts, from Zeus’ forehead.

Her biggest ambition was to marry into wealth and “find a fertile niche.” “Geoffrey,” she told me, “we’ll live in a huge white house with pillars, like the Parthenon, with expensive art on the walls and a telephone in the bathroom. There will be marble floors and a statue of Zeus and a fully stocked bar in the foyer. We’ll have a maid and a cook and a gardener. And your bedroom will be painted blue, with puffy white clouds around the ceiling.” Despite these promises, I knew it would never happen, that the man she hoped for lived only in the shadow world of her dreams.

Nevertheless, a parade of shady men marched through our

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household. One of them, Willis, stayed longer than the others and seemed nice, until Mom took out a cash advance on his credit card and threw \$3000 in fives off the roof of the Daily News building. Some people below thought she was going to leap, but most scrambled around collecting what they could and paid no attention to her. Willis and I watched from the street. He yelled, “Go ahead and jump, you crazy bitch!”

Like all the other men, he vanished.

II. Gone

On a steamy July night in my tenth year, I returned from a baseball game to find the apartment dark. I felt my way past the couch and coffee table to the light switch in the kitchen, stumbling over Mom’s purse, which overflowed with receipts and unopened bills.

Mom being gone was not unusual, but she never left her purse behind. She went everywhere with the tiger skin monstrosity, its chains jingling like a jailor’s keys.

I fixed a bowl of Frosted Mini-Wheats and turned on the TV, twisting the dial through several channels. The blue light illuminated cigarette butts and liquor bottles strewn across the floor, along with empty wrappers for celery and carrots. I figured she was on a diet again, though she didn’t need to lose any more weight from her spindly frame. A loose stalk of celery sprouted from a crack between the couch cushions. I suspected she’d lost her cocktail waitress job, and I thought she’d come home soon and do her usual routine—throw things against the wall and knock back several shots of Old Crow, then go to bed.

At ten p.m., I went to bed and tried to sleep, but all I could do was stare at the shadow my nightlight made—a long bar of darkness that narrowed towards the door, cast by the edge of my dresser. I dozed off briefly but was awakened by loud, rapid pounding. When I opened the door, a cop stood there.

“I’m here about Eunice Copeland. Is she your mother?”

I said she was.

He told me she had been “detained.” I wasn’t sure what that meant. He said she was safe, but that she needed help and was taken to a hospital to get better. “You need to gather some things. I’ll take you to a safe place where you won’t have to be alone.”

“I don’t want to go anywhere,” I said, but the cop said that was not an option.

Soon after, I moved in with the Flinks.

III. The Flinks

Owen and Marla Flink were foster parents to seven of us children. Rumor had it that they profited nicely from benefits allotted for taking care of us. We all hated them. The other kids kept Owen and Marla busy with their arrests and detentions and drug addiction and truancy and assaults and shoplifting and court dates and vandalism and bail outs...In the midst of all the tumult, I was always “The Quiet One” who never caused trouble.

The Flinks told me shortly after I arrived that “that awful mother of yours” had been committed to the state hospital for dancing naked on a bar while throwing handfuls of carrots and celery at the patrons. Then they said Mom had hanged herself in the hospital and abandoned me, her only child, because I’d become a burden and showed signs of going crazy myself.

Countless times I wanted to run away from the Flinks, but I had no place to go. I had no money of my own and no one to stay with.

“Your mother was a raving schizophrenic,” Mr. Flink said. “You’re lucky to be free of her.”

Mrs. Flink warned, “If you don’t watch it, you’ll end up just like her.”

Occasionally I wondered if this were true—some days my body felt like a block of ice. My insides froze and I couldn’t move. I could only peer outside at a dark gray world. Then light glinted off things, everything sharp and angular as though under fluorescent bulbs. My thoughts rocketed, my emotions raw. I heard disembodied voices coming out of the electrical outlets—a low buzz of conversation that never seemed to get closer or farther away. Huge, powerful monsters peered at me from the dark, always on the verge of pouncing.

Many times I saw Mom in my dreams. We danced in a meadow with bright birds all around, laughing and trying to pin each other down in the long grass. But, as the Flinks so vehemently advised, I tried to go on with my life.

My last couple of years with the Flinks, I was tormented by a 17-year-old named Colin. He was the oldest and this was his eighth foster family. He had long bones and bad teeth and sallow skin from smoking cigarettes. He teased me endlessly about my “schizo mom,” said it was my inheritance to be a “maniac” too.

One summer morning, just before Colin ran away for good, we all looked out the back window at Mr. Flink’s prize rose garden. Each bloom had been cut off just below the bud and laid carefully at its roots.

Mr. Flink shook his beefy jowls and demanded the perpetrator identify

himself. Colin appeared with a pair of scissors he'd supposedly found in my underwear drawer.

"Who else but a whacko would do something like that?" Colin declared.

Mr. Flink ordered me to stay in my room for a week, coming out only for school. I missed several dinners. I sat in my room, hating. I hated Colin and Mr. Flink, the desolate rose garden with its thorny stems. To my relief, Colin finally left.

The roses grew new buds.

IV. Hundreds of Letters

At 18, I was set free from the foster home. Not much later I read an article in the Daily News—the Flinks' house had burned down, Owen and Marla dead from smoke inhalation. All the kids survived. The Fire Marshall deemed the fire "suspicious."

I went into training in welding at the Job Corps in Lincoln and got a job on a highway crew, constructing guard rails along lonely stretches of rural roads. The sun burned holes in the silver bowl of the sky, tanning my skin to a rich brown.

I stayed in a wayside motel near Crete with six other coworkers, taking cold showers in the evening when the hot water ran out. We ate canned chili and sandwiches in the crowded kitchenette. A few of us slept on the floor.

Occasionally someone got a letter from a girlfriend or wife, finding its way through various channels to the hands of the recipients. On a humid summer day, my boss gave me a letter dated six months before, with the return address as the Regional Psychiatric Facility near North Platte. "It must be one of your crazy lady friends," my boss scoffed. "Did you meet each other in the Loony Bin?"

My hands shook as I tore open the wrinkled envelope. Ten pages of scrawled notes in pencil were jammed inside, and I could barely decipher the handwriting or content. "My sweet little Geoff," the letter began. I made out a few legible words: "...hope you are still with us...after all this time sending you hundreds of letters...I can't bear this place any longer...end my life...I'm so sorry...your loving mother, Athena."

My heart pounded. Was this some kind of joke? I thought of Colin. He would do something cruel like this, haunt me from whatever corner of the world he'd found himself in. "Hundreds of letters," Athena had written. Did the Flinks lie to me all along? Perhaps she really was still alive and they'd destroyed her letters for some unknown reason. My hands clenched, my breaths shallow.

I immediately tried to call the hospital, asking if they had a patient named Eunice Copeland, but the receptionist couldn't say, due to "confidentiality issues." I called again a little later and asked for her directly. The operator transferred me to C Ward but the nurse told me, "I'm sorry, she doesn't have phone privileges right now. Is there a message?" I gave my name and found out I could visit the next day after five p.m.

I left work early and began the 200-mile trip to North Platte in a pounding rain, my wipers slapping back and forth, back and forth, as I drove.

V. A Lifetime of Lifetimes

Mom and I met in a tiny room crowded with a long table and plastic chairs. The textured walls were pale green, and heavy screens blocked out most of the daylight. I waited for almost 20 minutes, gazing around the room to pass the time. I noticed the uneven bead on the carelessly welded table legs. My boss would not have approved. Even I, a relative novice, could do a better job than that.

Finally a staff person led Mom in. She wore threadbare jeans and a sweatshirt that hung to her knees, her bones still lanky underneath. But her face had acquired a rounded, pudgy look, hair returned to its original mousey brown, fingernails bitten to blunt, red nubs. She smelled of cigarettes and bleachy soap.

The staff lady instructed "Eunice" to sit at the far end of the table to discourage physical contact and surreptitious exchange of contraband.

"It's Athena," Mom said quickly. When her eyes met mine, they danced and shone, full of the light I remembered as a child.

"Oh, Geoff. You're here!"

There was so much to say, we were speechless. I took in her face, trying to remember the audacious young woman she used to be, but I couldn't recall her as I thought I should, no matter how hard I focused on her birdlike body in the shroud of clothes. Had we met on the street, I would not recognize her.

"Where to start?" Athena said. "I can't believe it's been eight years!"

"A lot can happen," I said.

"I've been right here waiting for you, Geoff. I never thought you'd abandon me for good. Though you had every right to."

I told her about the Flinks, how they claimed she had committed suicide and left me to fend for myself at such a young age.

"But I wrote you! So many times! Those monsters didn't tell you?"

I shook my head. "They kept telling me to forget you, to move on. I'm sorry. I just didn't know..."

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“Actually,” she said, “I died a bunch of times, over and over. The last time was about six months ago. I wrote you a letter just before. I drowned myself in the toilet—just stuck my head in, flushed, and inhaled the water. I passed out and woke up in this new life. Everything is the same, except for little things. Like the morning sun—it looks pixilated. Or my dinner tray—everything seems like it’s made of cement. Or the water—it smells like brimstone, so you can’t drink it.”

“That’s awful, Mom,” I said, wondering if this was a delusion.

“No one believes I died and woke up in this new world. They all know it, staff especially is in on it, but they won’t give me the satisfaction of having figured it out. You believe me, Geoff, right?”

I didn’t know what to say. Maybe she was right. Who could judge?

“I don’t know how many new worlds I have to wake up in. It could be hundreds. If they never acknowledge what I know is true, that this is the next life, I don’t think I can bear it. It’s the ultimate test of a lifetime. A lifetime of lifetimes.”

“That must be so hard for you,” I said. Maybe she belonged here after all, I thought, then immediately felt guilty. I wanted to believe she was capable of living outside these walls and needed only to be liberated.

“I hate this place.” Her voice became rough, edgy. “They won’t let me do my experiments. I’ve got a chemical process to turn rabbit dung into gold. I’m working on a little chain for Dr. Overland. I could make millions! All I need is more materials and a lab and a patent. We could be rich, Geoff! We could live in a huge white house with pillars...”

She broke off and peered at a spot on the table. “They’re always listening,” she whispered. “They hide microphones everywhere. You can see their faces in the woodwork.”

“It’s ok, Mom.”

“Then they talk—talk, talk, talk. Just behind my left ear, a little above it. And staff gets angry when I talk back.”

“They can’t hurt you,” I said.

Suddenly she rose from her chair and came down to my end of the table, putting her arms around me.

“I love you, Geoff. You’ll always be my baby.”

A nurse came in. “No public displays of affection, Eunice. Time’s up.”

VI. Beyond the Door

I went back a month later. Mom met me at the door of C Ward, dancing

in the long hallway. “I’m getting SO MUCH BETTER, Geoff! Now I’ve got grounds privileges! That means I can go outside—all afternoon if I want!”

Once I’d signed her out at the nurses’ station, she linked arms with me as she strolled through the locked door, which closed with a deep clang. “I’ve heard that door for years and always wanted to hear it slam with me outside. It sounds different now. Not so final,” she said.

We walked along a row of brick buildings, past the towering Admin Building with its white portico and the long, low recreation hall. The clack of pool balls drifted from the open door.

The relentless sun drove us to a shady spot at the edge of campus. In a small clearing, concrete posts rose haphazardly, some more worn than others.

“This is the hospital cemetery,” Mom said. “Do you believe it? Everybody gets a number. Then you have to go to the Admin Building to look up the name.”

We settled under a tree. A nearby bush sheltered a pile of rabbit droppings. “Look!” Mom said. “We’re rich!”

The scratchy weeds crackled in the heat. A chain link fence cut us off from the field near the highway. Convection currents wrinkled the asphalt. A bird perched on one of the grave posts, trilling musically. Mom told me it was a Western Meadowlark, the state bird, with its black and yellow striped head and the black “V” on its chest. Another one perched on a stalk of goldenrod, which Mom also identified as the state flower.

After awhile, she said, “It would be so easy to escape. I’ve been planning it out.”

I tried to tell if she was joking, but she lowered her voice. “I need your help, Geoff. I need somebody to meet me on the highway, give me a ride into town, at least.”

“Well, I don’t know...” I said. “If you’re better and getting close to discharge, I don’t see why—“

“Oh, Geoff. I don’t expect you to understand. I’ve been here for eight years! I need to be free—with you—to go out and live my life like a real person!”

“Aren’t you afraid you’ll get caught? And have to stay even longer?”

“That’s where you come in. I could sneak out—just climb over that fence...Please, Geoff...”

“I’m not sure I could do that,” I said, turning a blade of grass in my fingers. “Don’t you need medication?”

“Oh, no. I quit taking that stuff years ago. It was making me paranoid. And my legs kept jerking.”

“Well...”

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“Please, please, please,” she begged, gripping my arms with her stunted nails until it hurt. “We could just drive away! Once I’m over the state line, they can’t come after me. I’m only committed in Nebraska.”

Her plans tumbled from dry, chapped lips. She kept wiping at the mustache of sweat above her mouth. “With grounds privileges, I don’t have to be back till eight p.m. I could hide somewhere till after dark. Things are always such chaos in there. They won’t even know I’m missing until the next morning. Oh, Geoff! We could go to Colorado. It would be like our trip to the Grand Canyon—remember?”

“Of course.”

“We could see the Garden of the Gods. I’ve never been there...I’ve always wanted to go...”

Although I was still dubious, we settled on a plan. I’d park on the highway at ten p.m. on August 8, her 43rd birthday, and she’d climb the fence to join me.

VII. Rendezvous

I quit work a week later. My ’72 Cordoba (which Mom called the “showboat” last time I’d visited) was in good shape, with plenty of room for my meager belongings and my passenger. I’d brought a bouquet of red roses tied with a frilly red ribbon.

When I came to the sign, “DO NOT PICK UP HITCHHIKERS,” the soft summer dark had almost covered the landscape. Across the field, the lights of the hospital looked like pinpricks in black paper. I sat in the car for awhile, listening to the ticking of the cooling engine. Occasionally a passing vehicle buffeted by.

After awhile I got out, peering across the field. Crickets cheetered in the grass. It was well after ten and no sign of Mom. I lay on the roof of the car, my arms behind my head. Eleven p.m. came. Midnight, one a.m. There was no moon, but the stars glittered with a hard light as though embossed on the sky.

Time dragged on. I dozed in the back seat for awhile, my cheek pressed to the sticky vinyl. A chain of semis thundered by, beating the air as they passed.

When the sun began to spill over the horizon, the flat land extended in every direction. My eyes felt gritty from lack of sleep. I took one last look around. The low buildings of the hospital hung in nacreous light.

Finally I drove into North Platte and got a room at the Hideaway Inn. I lay on the lumpy mattress for hours, listening to the drone of the air conditioner in the window, trying to figure out what had happened to Mom.

Had she been caught hiding somewhere?

Did she have an episode and end up in the Seclusion Room?

Had she decided against it after all and been unable to contact me?

I was surprised to find relief in these possibilities. I wasn't really sure how I could take care of her if she got out. What would I do if her illness overtook her again?

I succumbed to a dense, paralyzing sleep.

VIII. The Garden of the Gods

When I awoke, the bedside clock said 6:15, but at first I didn't know if it was a.m. or p.m. The room was dim and smelled stale. I looked out the window at a nondescript vacant lot bristling with dry weeds and grasses. Newspapers and fast food wrappers rolled across the parking lot in the steady wind. It took me awhile to come to—not even bad coffee from the motel office could dispel my fatigue. I groggily replayed last night's events, more and more alarmed.

I called the hospital switchboard and asked for Eunice, but the woman put me on hold for about five minutes.

Then she came back on. "I'm sorry sir. There's been a problem. May I ask who is calling?"

I told her. She put me on hold again. When she returned, I could hear some sort of commotion in the background. "He should know," someone said.

The switchboard woman took a deep breath. "I'm sorry to report this... Ms. Copeland apparently eloped last night."

"Eloped!" I cried. "With who?"

"I mean she escaped. It's called eloping."

"Where did she go?"

"One of our groundskeepers discovered her body this morning. We think she was the victim of a hit and run accident while trying to elope."

"No, no. This isn't right," I stammered.

"She was evidently thrown off the road quite a ways into the field. From what we could tell, she was killed instantly. The police have been notified."

"I need to see her!"

"We wouldn't recommend it."

"What's going to happen to her?"

"Her remains will be buried in our patients' cemetery..."

A buzzing began in my ears. I looked around the motel room from where

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I sat on the bed, the phone frozen to my hand. The flimsy curtain batted in the breeze. Voices groaned from the electrical outlets—“Nooooo, noooo...”

“I’m sorry for your loss,” the woman added tonelessly.

I let the phone drop. When I shuffled into the bathroom for a glass of water, I caught sight of my image in the mirror. A stranger stared back, its expression shifting back and forth from one expression to another. Then I could see suggestions of the features Mom had given me: The wide lips, the soft, feathered hair, the chestnut eyes.

An electric jolt shot through me. My fist lashed out. The mirror shattered, silver shards skittering across the floor. Around a little cut on my finger, a single drop of blood formed.

For a moment I stood shocked and numb, unable to comprehend my sudden rage. But just as quickly, the anger vanished and left a bland apathy. My mind muddled, I considered my options.

I had no job, no home and no companion. Some people may have envied my freedom, but this didn’t seem like freedom. It felt like a lead apron pressing my chest, an accumulation of the years I’d lived with the Flinks, of the years Mom had been locked up. Only by gritting our teeth could we endure it. We held out hope for release in order to get by.

I’d always been soothed by driving. I figured I might as well keep going, maybe to Colorado Springs and the Garden of the Gods. Athena would have liked that.

I turned out of the motel parking lot and onto the highway. I could drive all night, if I wanted. Beside me on the seat, Mom’s roses lay wilting in their limp ribbon. A meadowlark flew just ahead, gold streaming from its feathers, until I pulled down the visor against the setting sun.

THE END