

4

Michael Stulz
Poetry, *Late Night Thought*

Falling Backwards- Chapter One: Jessa

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NOTE FROM THE EDITORS

From Jamila Lovelace:

I am often a person of many words, but I found myself not necessarily knowing what to say about this magazine, other than that it was truly a labor of love. The contributors and I poured our hearts, souls and a good portion of our mental health into these pieces. We wanted the writing to grow with us, the contributors, so it could grow with you - the reader. Here is a metaphor: this literary journal was our baby that we sheltered and cared for when it was just a gleam in our eyes. Now our baby has grown, ready to be stacked on shelves and read by new students who hope to one day be published in it. In the space between the vision and the product blooms a legacy.

From Kait Smith:

When I think about this magazine, I am in awe of the work that lies beyond these pages. As it is my senior year, I am proud of the work that is in your hands. I hold such respect for the staff members and their tireless work I am in wonder of the talent that is exemplified in our issue, and I am hopeful in what lies ahead for each person in this magazine. I consider it a privilege to work along-side such wonderful people. I hope that, as you read and observe, you will feel the love composed in these pages.

We wish you love and peace,

Jamila Lovelace and Kait Smith
Editors-in-Chief

It is a curse
to be born
a hopeless romantic
with the constant
fear that you

'-HVVD EDE\ VWRS μ P\ PDPD FKRNHV
OLSV 7KH...
know that I have to look worse. When I came home and threw myself at
Kyle, all of his attention switched from her to me.

'(OHYHQ WZHOYH μ
, VDLG 6723 μ .\OH...
shrieks, DQG KH JODUHV DW KHU RYHU KLV VKR
&ODXGLD <RX·UH D FUDJ\ ELWFK DQG \RX \\
RQH WRR 'R \RX VHH WKLW"μ +H SRLQWV D
calling XV FUDJ\ EXW KH·V WKH RQH SRLQWV D
his finger hit the trigger. Let him kill himself. 'R \RX VHH ZKDW VKH
broke my damn nose! How am I supposed to take a picture with the
JRYHUQRU WRQLJKW"μ
7KDW·V ZKDW RYDQHV
that I broke his nose. The part where he just beat my mama like a stray dog
LV @•p 0

'6R μ P\ ROGHU EURWKHU &RQQHU VD
ZKHUH KH·V P\OOLU R'ZU DW GR \RX WKLQN"
, IRUFH P\ OLSV WR FXUYH XS LQ D VPI

training my mouth to do that. To make that one gesture say,

, JULQ DQG VOLGH RII RI WKH VWRRO ,

WKHUH·V DOZD\ V D E O G X U (Y H O H W K H W S D W W R O
hide my empty, departed eyes, my sunken-in cheeks, or the scar above my
H\HEURZ , IHHO OLNH ZKHQ .\OH VKRW PH
even know. Not here, but not gone.

,W·V HDV\ WR EH ORU P D O D family because
,·YH DOZD\ V EHHQ JRRG DW GLVWUDFWLQJ
WR EH ,·YH ORYHG DQG ORVW WRR PXFK Z
DEOH WR GR WKDW , ZLVK WKDW , FRXOG I
I can ·W HYHQ UHDOO\ EODPH LW RQ ODPD HY

'+H.V«KH.V«μ

&RQQHU VWDUWV URFNLQJ PH '+H.V Q

, VKDNH P\ KHDG KRW WHDUV UROOLQ

NQRZ KH LV +H KDV WR EH , KH DUTG KLP +

VKRZHU FXUWDLQ RU KLGLQJ V RPHZK HUH .

can

lying on the counter. He places it over me, the tips of his ears turning pink.

'\$UH \RX WU\LQJ WR VFDU PH IRU OLIH" &R
VHHLQ· P\ EDE\ VLVWHU QDNHG μ
\$Q HPEDUUDVVHG JIJJOH EXEEOHV XS
'7KHUH·V WKDW μ VPLOH RI \RXUV

I wipe my tears from my eyes and glance around. Part of the door is hanging off its hinges and the door frame near the lock is splintered.

'<RXU GRU ,
&RQQHU JLYHV D VKUXJ 'RQ·W ZRUU\
against the sink cabinet and I HWV RXW D ORQJ VLJK '7KH
to focus on is getting better. And life *will* JHW EHWWHU μ

Did you work today?

Yes.

What time did you go in?

7.

I am about ready to register for classes.

Great, did you work today?

Yes.

What time?

7.

Hi, Angela. Just wanted to wish you a happy birthday.

Grandma, I'm Kristen and my birthday is in March.

Right. How old are you now?

21.

Wow! What month is your birthday?

March.

And how old «

21.

Was it just this month?

No, back in March.

Right. Did you work today, honey?

Yes at 7.

Now who did I call again?

It's Kristen. I love you. Please, don't forget that

, DGPLUH D ER[FXWWHU WKKDKETV EHHQ
 VLQFH , OHIW ZRUN 2YHU WKH FRXUVH RI
 take countless carbon copies of this exact knife home with me. This one is
 GLIIHUHQW WKRXJK ,W·V G·V·P·D·Q·W·O·H·G U
 streetlight penetrates the car window, giving life to the dull metal ²
 flickering as its weight shifts in my hands. I let a sigh escape from my lips,
 ') LIW·H·H·O·
 WKL·V·μ
 'DQ LV VLWWLQJ Q·H·W·W·R·P·H·V·L·O·H·Q·W·
 ZKHQ HQWHULQJ D FRQYHUV·D·W·L·R·Q·O·L·N·H·W·
 maybe even bumping into things. Neither of us are brave enough to take
 the first step. The silence continues.

I let the weight of the dead air descend on to my shoulders and
 continue down the soft, pale skin of my forearm. My wrists feel the
 KHDYLQHVV QH[W 7KH·V·D·K·H·Q·U·W·E·R·O·G·R·L·Q·G·
 typically adorned with a thin, black ponytail holder.

My left arm had an abnormal ornament, and my classmates
 noticed. A clunky and poorly wrapped medical bandage peeked past my
 long-

revealing the execution was more fluid now. Second nature. My hand was careless and my clean up followed suit.

Most days I would realize my mistake before anyone noticed, but **ZKHQ , GLGQ·W , ZDV OHIW- hal of de Fatio** someone to notice, half of me wanting to be cut so far open that I disappeared into nothing.

I never did disappear. Instead, I found myself under a microscope, being examined carefully by anyone who got close enough to see the thin, clotted rivers of red that flowed from the crook of my elbow to my wrist.

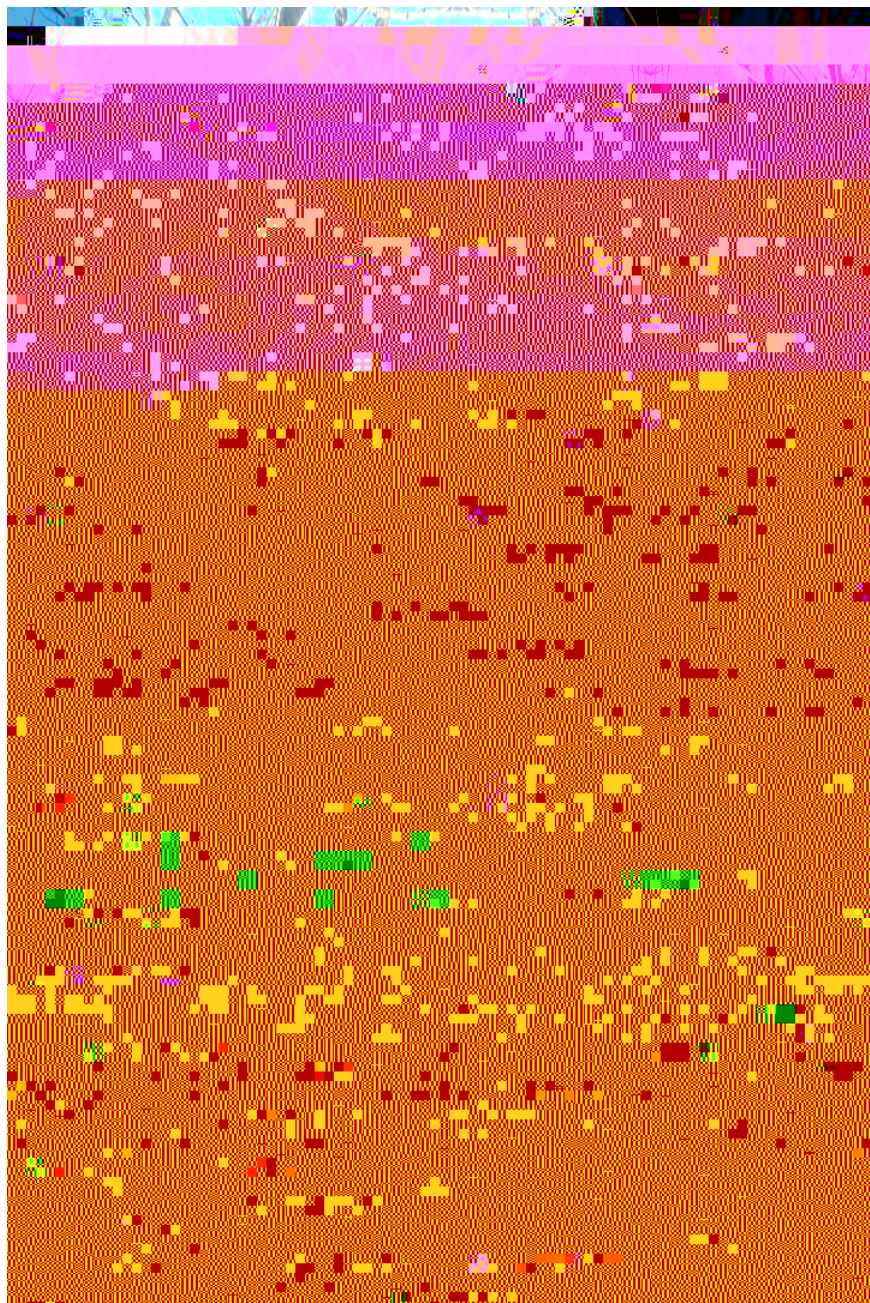
* * *

* * *

I move my left arm over and rest it on the center console so that the light hits it more directly. Scars lay delicately on the skin. The thin slivers are raised, giving th **H ORRN WKDW WKH\·YH EHHQ** this light, but almost invisible any other time.

7KHUH·V D JODUH RQ 'DQ·V JODVVHV D





+ H G L G Q · W K D Y H W R W H O O P H W Z L F H E
being so close to the edge, but I wanted to prove my older brother wrong-
W K D W , Z D V Q · W D E D E \ , S X W P \ V W X I I H G D
back my elbow, ready to use my softball skills to toss it past the next house
over.

His hand pulled me back as he grabbed Radar out of my grip, stood
me upright, and balanced me against his chest.

I looked up at his six-foot stature, and he looked down on my four-
foot eight height.

´ , Z D V M X V W M R N L Q J ' R Q · W J R W K U R Z L
& K L O L µ

I looked down at our feet and tried not to be rude; he did, after all,
use my nickname. He reached out to me with my bat in his hand.

I grabbed it and turned around to leave the roof.

´ < R X V K R X O G N Q R Z E \ Q R Z & K L O L W K D
P H µ K H S D X W H G D V , S

My six-foot hand went through the window frame, half
ignoring him.

´ , · P D O Z D \ V Z U R Q J Q R P D W W H U Z K D W ,

After making it back into bed, it took about 20 minutes of stucco
plaster picking for me to finally fall asleep. I woke up the next morning with
white plaster littered over my stuffed animals.

A couple nights later he visited my room instead. I was half asleep as
he ascended my ladder, and I woke up to his blood-shot, wet eyes and
sniffling nose.

´ & D Q , K D Q J Z L W K \ R X I R U D E L W " µ

My heart was racing from the surprise visit, but I managed to shake
my head as I scooted over to make some room in my tiny bed for him. He lay
on his back and wiped his nose on his sleeve.

) U R P Z K D W , F R X O G V H H L W Z D V Q · W W

´ : K D W · V Z U R Q J " µ , D V N H G

´ , · P W X R D M L Q J L Q W K H I H D U R I W K H V K L
W R P R U U R Z µ

´ : K D W · G \ R X 0 ja / 7 , Ñ P

soiled, we dance,
disintegrating to dirt
atoms erupt when we touch
our intimacy is obsidian
and relentless
we become tectonic
we assault and rip
while becoming a ring of fire
as lava we cascade towards the cosmos
staying connected by desire

then we asphyxiate

BLACK BLACK RO-O-SES BLACK BLACK RO-O-SES BLACK BLACK
RO-O-SES BLOOMING IN MY GAR DEN! BLACK BLACK RO-O-
SES BLACK BLACK RO-O-SES BLOOMING IN MY GAR-R-DEN

slim **G R H M Q W** the words to the song
sings what he knows
from the center of his neck
G R H M Q W to sing from his stomach
he loops, repeats
like he is scratched deep
if slim was a 33
a quarter **Z R X O S P I N W** forward

BLACK BLACK RO-O-SES BLACK BLACK RO-O-SES BLACK BLACK
RO-O-SES

learning to breathe. learning to breathe. learning to breathe.
learning to breathe.

BLOOMING IN MY GAR-DEN

without fresh air

you **F D Q W**
you **F D Q W**
you **F D Q W**
you **F D Q W**
you **F D Q W**

you **F D Q W**
you **F D Q W**

you **F D Q W**

BLACK BLACK RO-O-SES BLOOMING IN MY GAR-DEN.
BLOOMING IN MY GAR-R-DEN. BLOOMING IN MY GARDEN
slim is scratched deep. if he was a 33 a quarter would not push him
forward. **K H M W**.
was born out a crack in the concrete.

he is hopeless

because,

roses **G R O W** love holes. roses **G R O W** roses **G R O W**.

G R H N O W D L O W from the pretty to look at.

what a spectacle. a sight.

W K H U H growing tall over Parsons. **W K H U H** growing tall over Linn St. **W K H U H**.

growing on the Southside. **W K H U H** growing on MLK Drive. **W K H U H**

in fissures between tenements.

at work as you clock **in**

you laugh at slim because he is still singing

the same song he was last night

when he wanted the customers to get out

he had a bus to catch

a daughter to pick up from day care

and if they **G L O W** five minutes

he would be stuck on High St.

we closed at nine it was eleven

slim was a felon

- and black



Felt-Tipped Pen

The man turns the key in the ignition as he takes a deep breath. He switches his headlights on, twin beams shining on the brick wall in front of him. He refuses to look over his shoulder, trusting that the road is empty as he slowly backs out.

He drives until he approaches the only streetlight for miles. He turns slowly, tapping the breaks as he rolls across the train tracks. The car lurches over the bumps. For the split second the car rests dead center on the tracks, he can almost hear the sound of a train hurtling towards him. The impact knocks the breath out of him and makes his head spin, but instead of merging into his car door, he rolls safely forward. He taps the gas, taking another deep breath to calm his pounding heart.

He can feel the corn watching him in the dark. His eyes strain as he studies the road ahead. The worst part about the middle of nowhere is that nobody is trying to get there. A road in the country is just a winding gravel strip dividing one side of the earth from the other. It separates your farm from mine. He worries that at any second he could careen off the road and accidentally park his car in a ditch.

**,W·V VR GDUN RXW KHUH 7KH WZR SUP
WKH GXOO JORZ RI WKH PRRQ DUH WKH RQ**
the gravel in front of him.

Is there anything to see? Does anything exist this far from the city?

+H FDU any **WVHH** the road, much less believe that people **3** actual people! **3** live on these farms. They have thoughts and hopes and families that he will never see.

People in cities dream of solitude. They tire of sharing walls and sidewalks and breathing the same stale air. They dream of silence and darkness, but if they experienced darkness this encompassing and heard the eerie silence of a corn field at night they would never leave the city. He misses the streetlights shining in his windows and the hushed noise coming from the apartment next door. On nights like this, he even misses taxi

GULYHUV EODULQJ RQ FDU KRUQV DW DOO
suffocating darkness surrounding him.

With every crunch of the gravel under his tires, his heart lurches.

:KDW ZRXOG KH GR LI WKH WLUHV SRSSHG "
tire. He never had to know. There was always someone around to help him before he came here. Would he just keep driving on the wobbly rubber like they do in old cartoons? Would he have to pull over and sit alone in the dark car until sun up? No one drives this road. No one could help him. He could walk, but how far could he really get? The next house is probably

PLOHV DZD\ GRZQ DQ HYHQ VPDOOHUe JUDY

would even be home to let him borrow their landline.

He vows that he will not get out of the car until he sees the tiny, rundown farmhouse. Only then will he feel safe. But first he has to find it.

He remembers how to get there, EXW LW·V KDUUGHU sloo WKH DW HYHU\ WXUQ WR PDNH VXUH WKDW KH·V

headlights pause on a patch of trees, he has to shut his eyes and keep

PRYLQJ +H FDQ·W OHW KLV H\HV OLQJHU OO RI DQLPDOV DQG KDOI UHF VHHQ WKHP +H·V NLOOHG WKHP +H·V VKR

The woods are full and see that the tall, warped creature he thought he saw was just a deer all along.

The woods are different when the sun is shining down on his FDPRIXODJH MDFNHW +H FDQ FRQYLQFH KI

convince himself that he has the right to take a life, but at night, in a car, he becomes the prey. All it takes is one deer standing in the road to stop him

in his tracks. He can picture the shine of his headlights reflecting in the

QDUURZHG H\HV RI WKH GHHU 7KH GHHU Z

would stand up on his two hind legs. He would morph and warp and

become a lost myth. They would lock eyes and then become one. They

ZRXOG EH HDFK RWKHU·V ODVW VLJKW

Who would get the kids then? Who would gather up those small children made of his blood and bones? Would they even care if he never

UHWXUQH" +LV H\HV GRQ·W VSDUNOH OLN

over. His face is etched in permanent frown lines. His skin is gray and

GURRS\ +H GRHVQ·W UHFRJQLJH WKH PDQ GRHVQ·W UHFRJQLJH KLV RZQ ZHDN DUPV D

His children might be glad if he never came for them. They might

smile at the deer, at the corn, at his popped tires, and at his crushed car.

They might throw their heads back and laugh up at the stars, their little

pointed baby teeth shining in the moonlight. His children would become

feral on their own.

He takes the next turn slowly. A creek lines the bottom of the

KLOOVLGH OLNH D EROG EODFN RXWOLQH L

tiny wooden bridge where the creek crosses under the road. The kids laugh every time he rolls over it. They say that their stomachs somersault over the

bridge. He used to tease them, speeding up when he saw it in the distance.

They would scream for him to VORZ GRZQ EXW KH ZRXOG

minute, sending them into fits of giggles. Sometimes he was tempted to

keep going, to use the bridge like a ramp and see how much damage he could do.

The world is closing in on him. *Oh god*, he thinks. **3 O H D V H G R Q · W O H**
again.

He turns onto the gravel driveway. He laughs loudly and wildly with his head tilted back. His laugh is a bark and his teeth are sharp and pointed. He feels feral.

He sees their faces in the window. He opens the door. The car is washed in a sickly yellow light and he savors the feeling of his old boots on solid ground as he steps out. The children disappear from the window. A moment later, they burst out of the house like a couple of bats from a chimney. The corn watches silently as he crouches down and holds his arms out. They crash into him, crushing and mangling him. Their little hands reach and wrap around his neck.

They climb into their seats, strap themselves in. They say something to him, but **K W D O N L Q J D W R Q F H + H F D Q · W** overlapping voices. He turns the key in the ignition. He asks them to take turns, to speak separately but they continue to talk over each other, louder and faster.

He backs out of the driveway, heading away from the farmhouse. The children press their hands against the windows as they speak. He asks them again to stop, to slow down but it just gets harder to understand them. He can almost hear other voices now. Deeper voices. Higher voices. Strange voices all speaking at once.

He whips his head back just as the voices stop. The children stare **D W K L P V L O H Q W O \ 7 K H \ G R Q · W V S H D N 7 K H**
’ / R R N μ 7 K H \ S R L Q W

He turns quickly. A figure stands up]T overhting is ro1(f)-2(ad-4(.)1isbly6(

DS)

If my body were a maze,
, • G V W D U W D W I W K H
down my
throat,
skipping the hollow shell of the
skull.

Traversing my trachea,
I see the charred walls of my lungs
with tar speckling the sides.

Engulfing these, I see ribs,
thrice cracked, once broken,
still wrapped snugly around my vital
organs.
I take my spine as a ladder down my
back,
carefully stepping over a
transverse process.

Now I see my legs.
Like roots sticking me to the ground,
they bend and twist
with pigeon-toed feet
Escaping out from under a toenail,
I watch as my body begins again its
daily race
Leaving me behind as it goes.

*What can the brain do?
Decisions made
Thoughts and actions just
ride the waves of
synapse,
letting the brain stand by
idly.*

*Who chose to smoke?
The brain, the decision
maker.
Can a bone choose to break?
, W • V M X V W
responds
to impact.*

1 R R Q H F K R V
sure.
*Even if the brain was being
difficult,*
I W 7 R X O G Q • W

"Caution!" It says,

' ' R Q R W D W W H P S W X Q O H V V

you have

a minimum 10 days ·

supplies

D Q G D U H I X O O \ H T X L S S H G μ

I brought an apple,

cut into 10

Day one.

I savor the first slice

Two through seven follow.

I should be fine.

Then three slices

all at once.

Walk faster, stride longer.

Charcoal 18x24

Hiking through the desolate wood,
the trail looms on
and on.

Turning around,
gazing at the forlorn entrance,
hesitation is
decimation.

, **FDQ·W VWRS**

Nourishment slows coverage.

, **FDQ·W VHH WKRVH LQFKHV**

Recovered
onto my waist and my stomach
my breasts and
my face.

I watch the snow fall from the security of my car as I stare at the quaint house with a festively red

DQ\WKLQJ , QHYHU GR 0\ PRWKHU ZRQ·W
question I would not want to answer myself, and she is protecting me from
the judgement that will come regardless of what the answer is.

I will make my way to the couch next to the Christmas tree and try
to watch television. Every channel will have a gimmicky Christmas movie
and I will be displeased with them all, but I will have to settle on one
featuring a toddler passing as an adult. I relate to it too well. My
grandmother will come and sit too close to me. She will try to talk me out
of the English major that I, myself, have started to doubt. She will tell me

WKDW , DP ´WRR EULOOLDQW WR ZDVWH P\
chain hanging on the tree that I made when I was six, back when I was
QRUPDO DQG ´KDG SRWHQWLDO μ ,W FOLQJ
cling to my own family tree: barely.

Dealing with the strangers that annually pass as family has gotten
easier U DV , KDYH JRWWHQ ROGHU ,·YH OHDUO
GRQ·W PHDQ WR VHQG PH LQWR DdH LUODEL
GRQ·W PHDQ WR H[FODEp€ PH EXW ,·P VXUI

again next year. I will get in my car and leave without the hesitation I had upon arrival.

But now, I am sitting in my car, knowing exactly what is waiting for me behind that deep red door. A small part of me hopes that this year I may be wrong, that this year will be the year where I am loving and charming and actually part of the family. That this will be the year that I am able to pass as an adult who knows who she is and what she is doing. I will be normal again and somehow have managed to regain all of that potential I

KDG ZKHQ , ZDV VL[0D\EH WKLV \H DU , ZR
GRQ·W SUB\ZROG W KH U XHVWLRQ DERXW WH
0D\EH ,·OO KDYH WKH FKDQFH WR WHOO VR

Oil on Canvas 24x30

It started slowly.

No one noticed, at first. V.2.75 of the GOCP (Government Operated Computer Program) had just been released, and everyone was scrambling to get the newest technology. Originating in the year 2134, the GOCP was the most advanced operating system the world had ever seen. New technology ran on a system installed into a central terminal to which everything was connected and laid the grounds for every automated item in the future; soon enough, automation extended from cars and houses to factories, planes, restaurants, subways, schools, and office buildings. In the year 2196, it was extraordinarily rare to see a person driving a car or cooking at a stove.

´/RQJ /LYH 1HZ \$PHULFD DQG /HW 8V 3URV
7KDW ZDV WKH *2&3·V PRWWR LW DSSHDUH

every appliance, every notepad, every vehicle. Benson Graves, a senior executive assistant at GOCP HQ, watched this phrase flicker across his government-distributed Tech Glass. He wondered offhand how many times

LQ KLV OLIH KH·G VHHQ WKDW SKUDVH LW

words in his dreams, sometimes spinning lazily in the background, sometimes in all caps, hurtling towards him).

´ * UDYHV μ VDLG DPLK|ZDA ` P @ • ¢ää¢NE4Õ c\$0V030056

Allison Iles felt uncomfortable. She straightened her spine and pursed her lips.

'-XVW GRQ·W OHW LW KDSSHQ DJDLQ DOUL
PDNH PLVWDNHV OLNH WKDW μ

Benson nodded seriously and watched Iles walk away. He shifted his gaze back to his Glass and after about five minutes of staring at the monitor, got to work. All he really did was file reports, write employee reviews, and schedule appointments for his boss. *The computer could probably do this better than I could*, he thought with a small chuckle and ran a hand through his brown hair. The screen flashed, and Benson started. For a short moment, the display had turned a dark red and there had been a small something in the corner that Graves could not make out. *Weird*, he thought. ,·YH QHYHU
a glitch like that before, especially not with the GOCP. He eyed the computer carefully for a moment longer and tapped the desktop with his forefinger for good measure. The Glass was acting normal now; Benson shrugged and went back to typing.

Benson Graves went to the automated cafeteria for lunch.

At 1:30 PM, EST, Allison Iles walked around the third floor, where all her workers sat at their desks with their computers. Everything was fine until she saw that Graves was not at his work station.

'\$IWH KDG D WDON ZLWK WKH OLWWOH

to herself. Believing Benson to still be eating his lunch, Allison began to walk briskly towards the cafeteria. Her heels clacked on the self-cleaning floor, and when she reached the entrance she pressed her thumb to the scanner next to the door. It slid open silently, and she stepped inside.

Benson Graves was not there.

Iles frowned again and tried to think of where he would be. ,·P VXUH KH
went home; he was acting strange. Could be KH·V VLFN That *Week* WRPHW
reasonable enough, and with that, Allison Iles went back to her office and disregarded Benson. She failed to notice the oddly exuberant murmur of the standard issue, trashcan sized garbage incinerator, and the three dime-sized drops of blood on the floor next to it.

%HQVRQ *UDYHV GLGQ·W VKRZ XS IRU ZRUN
\$QG WKHQ PRUH SHRSOH ZHUHQ·W WKHUH

Allison Iles began to notice it everywhere she went. Restaurants, that were once popular, stood empty. Department stores and malls were vacant except for the mechanical hum of the floor and the robot janitor wheeling

GLGQ·W DQVZHU DQG LI WKH\ GLG WKH\ ZH

Tech Glass or TV.

And eventually they stopped answering too.

Allison began to find herself walking down empty streets. Empty of

chattered, and she dropped her purse to clap her hands over her ears. The ground itself was vibrating now, the heated, gum repellant sidewalks

VHQGLQJ VKLYHUV XS \$OOLVRQ·V OHJV :LQ
shaking only added to the awful clamor **U 7HDUV ZHOOHG XS LQ**
DQG WKH KXP URVH WR DQ DEVXUG SLWFK

would go mad.

But it did.

The silence came suddenly, and Iles slowly lowered her hands and straightened up. Her disheveled hair was no longer carefully arranged hair

Felt-Tipped Pen

,W·V GDUN 6R GDUN , FDQ·W; L·H·V DW DOO
nothingness.

,·P VRPHZKHUH FUXFLILHG RQ D FURVV ,W
DQG ,·P QXPE

0\ PRXWK LV VHZQ VKXW DQG , FDQ·W KHD
\$V IDU DV ,·P DZDUH ,·P QRW DOLYH DQG

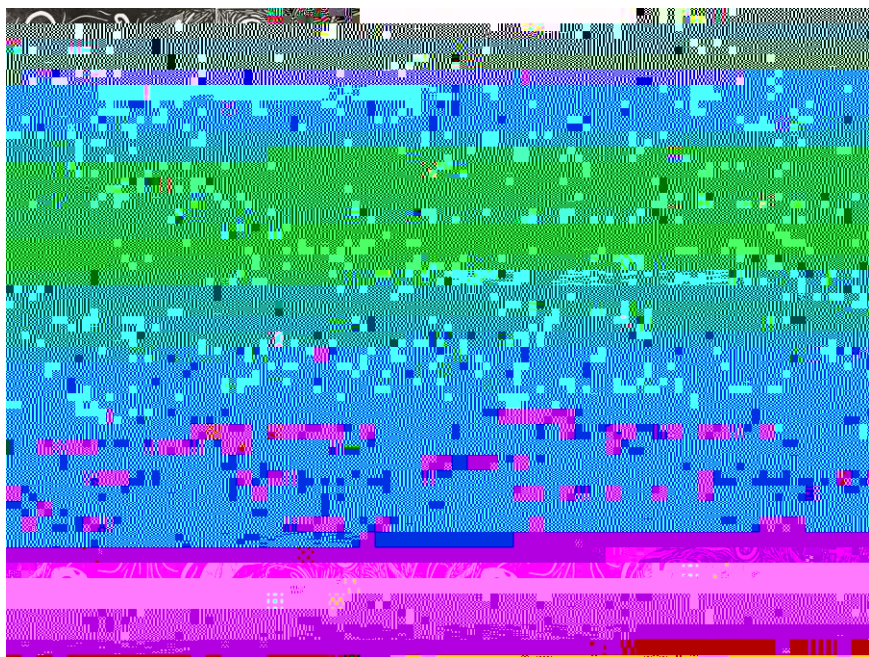
There is no one out there to let me down.

If suddenly you wake
from the flickering of the bathroom bulbs,
the endless hum of the ceiling fan,
the burst of broken glass,

D Q G \ R X U I L U V W L Q V W L Q F W L V Q · W W R F O D

across the treacherous tides
of blankets for my safekeeping

W K H Q L W · V W R R O D W H I R U X V



Linoleum Print

The three stared off into the distance toward what appeared to be a giant bee drifting across the field.

' :KDW·V LW GRLQJ" μ VDLG 5DJV
' ,·P XQVXUH μ VDLG =HSK\U

The toad croaked.

' \$UHHG FRPUDGH μ VDLG =HSK\U ' /HV
7KH\ ZDONHG WRZDUG WKH EHH ,Q DQ

began to crackle with electrical sparks. The bee took notice of the three companions, and floated to them, its wings humming low and loud.

' * UHHWLQJV WUDYHOHUV μ WKH EHH V

' , GXQQR , W ORRNHG KXQJU\ μ VDLG 5

The ground continued to shake, though it seemed the shaking was coming from the underside of the mote now.

The toad croaked.

' <RX·UH ULJKW FRPUDGH μ =HSK\U VD
WKDQ WKH JDWH /HW XV PDNH KDVWH WR

The three ran through the gate and into a little courtyard. The stones that once covered the ground were either gone or overgrown by the grass and ivy. Dominating the center was a ruined marble fountain, brimming with murky and stagnant water. It gave off the strong smell of mold.

The shaking stopped suddenly as a great shadow flew over the companions, blotting out the sun for only a brief moment. A hulking figure then dropped from the sky and directly onto the fountain, shattering its basin and scattering the filthy water across the courtyard.

' (Z GLUW\ ZDWHU μ VKRXWHG 5DJV

She shook her head rapidly to try and get all of the water out of her hair, to no avail.

' :KDW LV WKDW" μ VDLG =HSK\U KL V X
of water and scum.

A gargantuan horse stood in the courtyard. Its hoof sat upon the back was adorned with a pair of great wings made from sheets of steel. Its face was covered by a metal plate from which a great, metallic jagged horn protruded.

Zephyr recited another word of power, and an icicle launched from his hand. The icicle struck the ruined basin that the beast stood upon, and then blossomed into D ODUJH EORFN RI LFH VXUURXC
The incessant noise from the little box had grown a little quieter after the spell was cast.

' 1RZ 5DJV μ =HSK\U FULHG RXW

The little girl scurried toward the toad, climbing on its back once more.

The great horse tugged at its frozen hoof in irritation as it worked to release itself.

The toad hopped toward the beast. When it reached the backside of the creature, the toad set itself low to the ground, wiggling its rear as it prepared to jump. Rags gripped the toad's back tighter in anticipation. The toad then jumped as high as it could, landing on the back of the creature. The monstrous horse bucked and flapped its wings. Rags jumped off of the toad and onto the beast. She then pulled from her dress pocket a pair of

large sewing needles, one of which had a single hair tied to it. She plunged the needle with the hair into the back of the great horse.

The creature shattered the ice block, freeing its hoof. It raised its forelegs defiantly, throwing the toad and Rags from its back. The toad landed on its feet while Rags tumbled once more, dashing her head against the stones of the courtyard. She sat up, holding her forehead. The tiny stitching around her temple had torn open, exposing the stuffing underneath.

´2RSV µ VDLG 5DJV
´5DJV µ FULHG =HSK\U

He unleashed a bolt of lightning from his fingers. The bolt **FDVFDGHG RYHU WKH EHDVW·V IDFHSODWH** rippled in response to the shock, serving only to agitate it further. Drawn to Zephyr, the creature lowered its head and charged toward him.

Rags took the other needle and plunged it into her left wrist. The corresponding foreleg of the beast buckled and its ankle spewed blood and oil as a similar wound appeared on it. The creature released a metallic shriek, falling to the ground inches from Zephyr.

Zephyr waved his hands over the metal plate covering its face. The metal began to glow with intense heat. The beast wailed once more over the subtle percussion of its flesh sizzling.

The great horse thrashed its head wildly, knocking Zephyr into the nearby wall. He fell limp to the ground. The noisy little box cracked and splintered against the stones, and fell silent. Zephyr lay there motionless. The beast took to the air again, its foreleg hanging limp.

The toad lashed its tongue around the hind leg of the beast, only to be lifted into the air with it. The creature flew toward the tower, turning sharply before it could hit the structure. The toad careened against the side of the tower and fell back to the ground.

With two of the three companions dispatched, the great beast turned its attention to Rags. It hovered over the girl, casting its grim shadow over her. The beast opened its mouth as wide as a sphere of dark energy grew within.

Rags stood up, her left leg limp from the wound. She yanked the sewing needle from her left wrist and stared up at the beast. Its attack was growing larger still. She raised the needle, and with a swift motion, plunged it into her chest, where her heart would be.

The sphere of energy dissipated in an instant. Rags collapsed to the **JURXQG DV WKH EHDVW FUDVKHG LQWR WK**

After a few minutes, Zephyr stirred. As he came to, he surveyed the courtyard, taking note of the now dead horse beast and his fallen

companions. A few paces from him laid the toad. He moved over to the toad.

<RX FDQ·W MXVW WRVV PH DVLGH ZKHQ \RX
3OHDVH VWRS VKDNLQJ PH ZKHQ , WHOO \R

Every very time I try to open up to you, you close me back up.

, GRQ·W EHQG OLNH WKDW

Your hands are cold.

CONTRIBUTORS

When the earth was still young and the old gods roamed, they created mockeries of life. One of those unspeakable abominations is known only as Billy Baker. The creature has been last sighted at NKU, where it pursues a degree in English and plots the demise of mankind.

Camden is a sophomore English Creative Writing Major from Hanover, Indiana. He is also a member of Theta Chi Fraternity. He intends to go to law school after graduation in 2019.

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Elizabeth Gauck is a senior who is seeking degrees in both Library Informatics and English (Creative Writing). She has aspirations to someday be a romance novelist by capturing the heartbreak, excitement and overall beauty of love.

Erin Hamilton is a junior BA student at Northern Kentucky University. Her focus is in ceramics but she likes to work in all mediums. By creating her own environments and worlds with her art, she creates a whimsical feeling in every piece. Erin Hamilton is a growing artist that looks forward to graduating next spring. More of her work can be found on her website at <https://hamiltonerin0.wixsite.com/erinhamiltonart> .

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Kristen Petronio is in her senior year and majoring in Creative Writing. "A Conversation with Dementia" was written as a coping mechanism. Kristen loves to write with a lot of raw emotion. Her goal is to have the emotion in her work connect with her audience in some way. This is her second publication.

After earning an English Literature major and a French and Honors double minor, sophomore Zorada Porter wishes to attend graduate school and then curate manuscripts in museums and internationally-recognized libraries. On campus, she participates in the Honors Ambassador program and works for the Writing Center. She also presented at the Kentucky Honors Roundtable and published work in *The Compass* and *The Pentangle*.

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