

2016

## Expressions 2016

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# *Expressions 2016*

DMACC Literary Magazine

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# **Expressions 2016**

## **Winners**

**1st Place (\$1,000 Scholarship) John Kirchner**

“Putrefaction”

“Dissonance”

“The Fitfully Awakened”

**2nd Place (\$500 Scholarship) Micah Anderson**

“Blinkers”

“A Year”

“The Prisoner”

### **Poetry**

**1st Place - Kay Timmins**

“Fragments of Loveletters Sent Too Late”

**2nd Place - Jacey Gutknecht**

“Invisible Lines”

**3rd Place - Hunter Amos**

“The Gospel According To Cheddar Jack  
(Words of Crust in Bold)”

### **Prose**

**1st Place - Brett Shelton**

“Disaster Insurance”

**2nd Place - Emily Berch**

“Not Your (Neuro)Typical Romance”

**3rd Place - Kasey Dunifer**

“Call Now”



# Fragments of Loveletters Sent Too Late

## Kay Timmins

To the boy who sang duets with me:  
I want to keep your voice inside the scars you gave me.  
You often made me bleed, I know,  
but through your abuse, I found my bravery.

To the man whose tome I read before I could pronounce  
its title:  
Though my love for you is one-sided and fraternal,  
I owe so much of my voice and heart to you.  
You taught me my affections were not abnormal,  
and gave me strength to fight anew.

To the gentleman whose soul outlives his physical form:  
Your words are still quite dangerous  
to those whose treachery endangers us.  
And though your life met end through tragedy,  
your martyrdom will forever scream for our liberty.

To the painter who had to die to be loved:  
How can I feel so much, so deeply,  
for a man I never met?  
You died so long before I was born,  
and still I feel I am in your debt.

To the girl who never told me her real name:  
I still hear your voice when I'm afraid;  
you'll always narrate my darkest hours.  
I'm sorry I only realised my love for you  
when I came to your grave with flowers.

To the woman who gave me my first kiss:  
Death came to you so quickly,  
and we never said good-bye.  
I thought we would grow old together,  
but only I grew old that night.

To the lady who always asked me to dance:  
At times I wonder if dancing  
was invented with you in mind.  
But other times I wonder if  
our lives were ever meant to intertwine.

To the lass who seemed an embodiment of art:  
You performed operas in filthy alleyways  
to bring the struggles of the homeless to light.  
You told me art alone is infallible,  
as you marked the streets with your fight.





# The Fitfully Awakened

## John Kirchner

I am going to be a revolutionary with unkempt flowing beard,  
Long frayed locks tucked tight into black beret with star atop  
Olive green fatigues. Combat boots, steel toed with laces taut,  
Well-thumbed works from Guevara to Zedong, with fist held high  
A hero's death awaits those brave enough as I, revolutionary.

I am going to be a guitar-god with greasy mop-top hair swaying,  
Sleek black guitar with thick gaged strings down-tuned low,  
Beat-up Converse high-tops, Hendrix shirt with holes ripped wide,  
Unmatched tolerance for vodka and moshing, with septum pierced,  
A fast life but forever remembered for those as metal as I, guitar-god.

But when I awaken,

I'm going to be a senior sales rep., with starched stiff collared shirt,  
Leased mid-sized Sedan, business card with off-centered impact font,  
Tough leather dress shoes, with pulsing ingrown toenail stubbed, on  
Faux oak grain desk, with coffee mug rings and stacked sales reports,  
A painful droll existence for those as financially secure as I, salesman.

Cartoon planet dotted pajamas, with boot textured footie bottoms,  
A large plastic toy spaceship, with laser guns to shoot the bad guys,  
Light up rear thrusters, with accompanying whooshing noises,  
Running through the living room with break-neck speed, my nephew  
Came to me, only to proclaim, "Uncle, I'm gonna be a astronaut."

But when he awakens,

A layering of dust will ground his spaceship, with  
chipped wings and warped fuselage.  
Planet dotted pajamas will be stowed away, with mothballs,  
in plastic bins forgotten.  
Realizing there are no bad guys, nor spaceships with laser-guns  
and flame decals,  
He will resign to become as we kids with dreams must. A black ink  
résumé in hand,  
My nephew also will proclaim, "I am going to be a sales rep."



# Not Your (Neuro)Typical Romance

## Emily Berch

**T**he Smiths are a mutual interest? Swipe right. Picture of him posing with his truck? Swipe left. Everyone has to have standards. When I downloaded Tinder, I thought it would be a joke. No one is meeting their soulmate on here, right? But honestly, it's kind of addicting. The more I swipe, the more matches I get. It is incredibly satisfying to find out a stranger thinks you're attractive as you sit at home in your sweats eating ice cream. Occasionally I'll come across people I know. I always swipe right on them. Usually we just end up laughing about dumb things people say on Tinder. That didn't happen with Thomas, though.

When I saw my old high school debate rival on Tinder, I had to swipe right. I'll be honest with you, I just wanted to mess with him. He was a weird guy. I mean, I was in debate as well, so how cool can I be? But I thought it could at least be entertaining. I took a screenshot of his profile and sent to some old debate friends. I swiped right. We matched. I wondered if he would message me. He didn't. We couldn't just ignore each other, though. He had to be as amused as I was that we matched.

My first message to him was sheepish, a little awkward. "Oh, hey. Haha."

"Haha, hi there."

"How's life after high school debate treating you?"

"It's been tolerable. Et tu?" I laughed. I had always known he was pretentious, but that was even worse than I had expected.

"It's been alright. I heard you judge debate sometimes." He didn't respond to that one. That's how our conversations went for a few days. We would spend a few minutes catching up, then he would stop responding to my messages. It irked me, but at the same time, I found myself wanting to talk to him more and more. Finally, it seemed that I would just have to be direct. "You know what I just thought, Thomas?" I messaged him one day.

"What's that?"

"I don't really know anything about you."

"Do you want to?"

"That would be neat." I always wonder what he was thinking that night. He responded with his phone number. I texted him shortly after, and later that evening, he used my phone number to find my snapchat account. His first snapchat to me was just a black screen. No words. I figured it was a mistake.

We texted throughout the evening, and it was surprisingly fun for me to talk to him. I was judging a debate tournament that weekend, and he was

competing in one several states away. We were both intellectually drained the next night, and we had both decided to relax with a little alcohol. Our snapchats grew increasingly promiscuous. Finally, he sent another totally black screen. This time with the message, "We should kiss and talk politics," written on it. I stared at my phone for a second. Even in my inebriated state, I recognized the oddity. I digested the information. Another message came through shortly. Another black screen. The message this time, "I apologize for my forwardness." I was intrigued. Boys seldom asked only for kisses. They never included a genuine desire for conversation when they asked for such things.

"Okay. Let's." He didn't open that one for a while. I soon forgot about it and went back to my friends. We didn't speak as much the next day. He was focused on debate. I was exhausted and hungover. Later in the afternoon, he sent me another snapchat with no words. It wasn't a black screen this time, though.

It was a blurry picture of him not looking at the camera. I didn't respond. He did this one or two more times. That evening, I finally responded with a confused face. We exchanged pictures of ourselves without words for twenty minutes. I didn't understand. "What are you up to?" I finally asked.

"Debate," he responded. The conversation flowed naturally from there. That's how it went for the next

week. He would send me wordless snapchats, and, despite my irritation at not knowing his motives, I would respond. We talked about music, debate, people we both knew from high school.

**"Boys seldom asked only for kisses."**

He told me that we would both be judging at the same high school tournament one weekend. I asked him to help me learn the type of debate he did in college. He smiled.

We didn't see each other at that tournament, though. We were in different buildings all weekend. However, I did get a chance to talk with his old high school partner. She had always been friendly, and we spent a few minutes catching up. I finally approached the topic of Thomas. "I've been talking to him a little lately," I told her.

"Oh?" She raised an eyebrow at me and giggled. Michelle had always been sweet. It was part of the reason she and Thomas had been successful as a team. He was aggressive and cunning in his argumentation; she was sweet and agreeable, while still proving her point.

**"We snapchatted again that night."**

They balanced each other out.

"Sometimes he just sends me random pictures with no words," I told her. "Do you know what that's about?"

"He's done that to me a couple times," she said. "He gets lonely, and he doesn't really know how to tell people that. He just wants people to talk to." It made sense. Thomas had always been odd. "I mean, he has social problems."

"Clearly," I laughed.

"No, he actually does," she told me. My

face must have shown my confusion because she lowered her voice, and her expression softened. "Thomas has Asperger's."

I was so embarrassed. I had been so incredibly insensitive. I was ashamed of every time I had sat around with my teammates in high school and joked about how awkward he was. I internally scolded myself for every thought I had had about his social irregularities. I told myself that I had to monitor my behavior more closely from then on. Of course, he never found out that I knew.

We snapchatted again that night. I told him I wished I had been able to see him at the tournament. The conversation went normally for us. Finally, at two in the morning, for the first time since the first evening he snapchatted me, he clearly expressed his desire for me, though it was marginally less eloquent this time around. "Nudes for nudes?"

"Certainly not while I'm driving."

"So when you get home?"

"We'll see." He fell asleep before I arrived back at my house. Our relationship only escalated from there, though. The more we got to know each other, the more I found myself having genuine interest in him. I did research. I checked out a library book titled **Loving Someone With Asperger's**. I learned that it was best for him to operate in terms of logic. He didn't like grey areas. When he became

uncomfortable with how we were communicating, he would just walk away. That was the hardest part for me.

We had spoken every day for a month, but things didn't seem to be going anywhere. This thing that had started out as a joke to me had turned into something I cared about. I cared about Thomas. He didn't want to talk about

**"He clearly expressed his desire for me, though it was marginally less eloquent this time around. 'Nudes for nudes?' 'Certainly not while I'm driving.'"**

it, though. It was endlessly frustrating for me. I had to know. One night, I decided the best course of action would simply to address it head on. "Hey, I like you. I want to actually get to know you better. We should hang out or actually talk or

something." He didn't respond to that. The next day he acted like everything was normal. I couldn't handle it. The next day, I decided I needed answers. "What's your deal?"

"Just left the gym. What's up?"

"I don't understand anything about you. Explain." He didn't respond to that one. My impatience got the better of me, and I followed up an hour later. "I've put myself out there by telling you I like you, and you don't respond. But you'll ask for pictures of me and occasionally ask about my personal life. But there's never any personal discussion about you. What's your deal? What are you about?"

"I'm very confused. Your questions are kind of vague. I don't know how to answer 'what's my deal' or 'what am I about.' When you say you like me and

**“I would read my messages sent with desperation to know what he thought of me while I unscrewed my bottle of antidepressants.”**

I don't respond, it's probably because you're too vague in what like means.”

“Okay, but you're confusing. When we just talk, I really enjoy it, but I don't have any idea what you think of me.” He didn't respond to that one. If I had to pick a tipping point in my relationship with Thomas, it would be this night.

We had a few similar conversations throughout the week. I would review the previous night's text messages as I took my medicine each morning. It was a routine akin to holding a cigarette between your teeth while applying a nicotine patch. I would read my messages sent with desperation to know what he thought of me while I unscrewed my bottle of antidepressants. I would question his motives for talking to me in the first place as I swallowed an anxiety pill. Boys had always taken advantage of me. I was used to that. Growing up in a household where my father controlled my every move had made me vulnerable to abusive partners. Abusive partners had taught me that I was only good for one thing. Lately, I've realized that I have often tried to use that one thing to trick boys into actually caring for me. Thomas didn't pick up on that message, though.

As time went on, it became abundantly clear that we could never have a real relationship. He was often apathetic and outwardly cold. I was

needy. His discomfort with my craving for affection overpowered his own longing for companionship, and our conversations grew shorter and became less and less frequent. Our original routine of him sending me a blank message was reversed. I message him first now. My snapchats and text messages are often opened and unanswered. I'll never know what he was thinking the night he gave me his phone number. I'll never know why he swiped right. I just know that I'm still here, dying to matter to someone, and I'll have to get my fix elsewhere.





# Putrefaction

## John Kirchner

Decay? No, former colony of spores, branching  
green rot, bread mold.

Stocks sink, our lips loose watching ships, a  
homestead of mold.

Crisp buck, hard to come by, still stained, but  
ironed straight.

Hungry man, dollar menu makes it quick, yet  
we're fed mold.

Foreign enough, far enough, fitting for our  
greatest disregard.

Crumpled map, we'll just Google that, our fatal  
fungus, head mold.

We all want a younger wife, kids and a dog, too,  
TV 50-inch LED display,

Suburban scape, four-car garage, pool in the  
backyard. We're bred to mold.

I don't like it but can't get out; box me, ship me,  
faster with Amazon Prime.

"Hanoi John, you ought' be red, how dare you?"  
Our forefathers bled for mold.



# Disaster Insurance

Brett Shelton

It's nights like these that worry me, the nights when I'm so close to finishing up my paperwork. Once I sign the last of these forms I will be all caught up. I will be able to relax for a day or two before it piles on again, but I just feel that as soon as I set my pen down I'll have to listen to that god forsaken noise again. I sign my name on the last sheet. Robert Parks. I immediately stare in the direction of my cellphone, glaring at the screen in anticipation. Nothing. Only the reflection of the ceiling fan struggling to complete each rotation. Ten seconds pass and still nothing. I sharply exhale as I head towards my bed. I fall face first on top of the covers in a slump, my feet hanging off the end. The room is nearly silent except for the sluggish hum of the fan.

It was no more than one minute before a distant thundering sound ever so slightly shook the bedframe. I lie to myself and pretend I didn't feel it. The far off rumbling sound gently rattles my room again. The pens and pencils on my desk roll and a small framed picture of a woman and young girl falls onto its side. "No, no, no, no, no, no..." I whisper

into the covers. I brace myself waiting for that infernal sound to pierce my ear drums. A dingy glow illuminates the room as I am forced to experience that dreaded noise. The melody to 'La Cucaracha' begins playing from the speakers of my cellphone. I don't even bother getting up to answer it, I just

**"The night secretary on the other end knows I won't answer it. They just call as a formality at this point. I know the drill."**

lie there as the notes march into my ear canal and barge into my skull. The night secretary on the other end knows I won't answer it. They just call as a formality at this point. I know the drill. The tune comes to a halt and the drone of the fan takes over again. The song is still ringing in my ears and so I clench my eyes tighter in a desperate attempt to try and make it go away. "I should take a sick day," I mumble as my consciousness fades into a restless sleep.

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The sky has been painted a rich burgundy glow as the sun peaks over the horizon, its light level with my sightline. I put on some chintzy sunglasses while I step out of my car. Fresh concrete dust blows up from the ground and on to my pant legs when I shut the door to my 2001 Mercury. Some policemen stand in a

hodgepodge while a few firefighters meander around in front of the mass of rubble and twisted steel. Large gashes mark the side of the row of buildings. Sparking, bent lamp posts line the streets as pedestrians stroll past on the one clear side walk. They don't even offer a glance over at what had transpired the previous night. Next to one of the officers stands a woman with a light brown hair situated in a ponytail with bangs. 'It's Formal Yet Trendy' I imagine the magazine she knows she's too old to read says. She turns towards me when she hears my footsteps crunch the broken glass behind her. She is

wearing a grey suit almost identical to mine aside from her personal addition of a non-regulatory baby blue tie. She's holding two hardhats in her hands.

"I know I'm late. I stopped for coffee." I might as well say it before she berates me herself.

"That's fine," she says.

My answer seemed to satisfy her.

"Four city blocks were destroyed by a giant lizard fighting a moth and you had time to get coffee."

I guess not. "It's not like we're rescue workers, Graves."

I turn to the officer next to her. His attention's on the rubble. "You."

"Hm?"

"What can you tell me about the incident?"

**"The sun has risen  
some since I arrived  
and now everything is  
coated in an amber glow.  
There's not a single  
flashing red and blue  
light anymore. It seems  
the police had left after  
taping off the street."**

"It seems those two kept their fighting confined to just this road. The damage is certainly not the worst we've seen this year. This office complex got the worst of it though; let's hope no one felt like getting a little Xeroxing done at two in the morning," he says proudly, fond of his joke. He looks at me, then looks at her. Graves and I both stare at him with the same expression.

"Jeez, you insurance guys don't know how to take a joke do you?"

"Well, let's start surveying the area," she says with a sigh. She turns to me and hands me the helmet. We start heading towards

the rubble.

"You take the lobby, I'll take the next floor. I think I can climb up from that spot over there," I say to her, pointing. She steps in front of me and gives me the look. I've only worked with her for two cases and I already hate that look. With hardened eyes like those I'd swear she served two tours in Vietnam or something. "Fine, I'll help you with the lobby."

"The safety videos explicitly said not to split up when going into collapsed buildings."

"I said I'd come with you. I just thought it would go faster if we..."

"You might gash your leg on some steel or get struck by falling debris. And if you're partner isn't with you..."

"I know."

Elizabeth Graves: my new partner. She's about fifteen years younger than I am, not that anyone could tell. No one would be blamed for thinking she'd been doing this job for ages. Fresh out of college she came to this city to work about a year ago; I'd seen her around the office for a while but never really said anything to her. I think she came to this city expecting that she'd be doing CPR on school children or assisting in on-site emergency surgery, but this city already has enough paramedics. Up until recently she just was the nurse working the mail room. She was promoted after my last partner retired and two other agents were stomped on at the last company picnic.

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Anything made of ceramic or glass has been shattered and the wall of metal mailboxes has become a twisted mass of steel. The whole front of the complex had been crushed, but overall the building remained intact. The elevators in the far back are mostly unscathed by the damage but the door to the stairwell is jammed. I finish writing down assessment details on my yellow notepad. I look at my watch. 6:15. It only took forty minutes to get a rough estimate on the lobby but it felt like we've been here for twice as long. I wave to her, silently telling her that we're done on this floor. Office lobbies tend to be pretty easy, not much

in them aside from some lamps and leather chairs. Graves and I begin to head back outside; the drastic change in light levels stings my eyes, it makes me feel like I'm waking up again. The sun has risen some since I arrived and now everything is coated in an amber glow. There's not a single flashing red and blue light anymore. It seems the police had left after taping off the street. It is just Graves and I behind all the yellow tape.

"All of the policemen and ambulances are gone already? It's only been twenty minutes!"

"Forty, actually." She doesn't hear me, though; she's too busy looking down the street to see if at least one policeman or rescue worker had stayed behind. I take off my hardhat and wipe my forehead. "Well, no one got hurt. There's no reason for them to stick around anymore. Plus they've been at the scene longer than we have anyway."

"I suppose." She crosses her arms starts making the face again, but not at me this time. Not really at anyone in particular either. She's just glaring indiscriminately at nothing. I lightly tap

the hardhat she's wearing with the one in my hand to get her attention.

"If we hurry we can get the next two floors done before lunchtime," she sighs as I put

my hardhat back on.

"Fine, boss."

"Earlier I saw a place we could climb to get to the next floor. Maybe the

**" 'What the hell? They turned it into a plaything?' she says, not even trying to hide the disgust in her voice."**

stairwell won't be blocked and we won't have to use firetruck ladders to get to the upper floors."

When we reach the peak of the tallest heap of cement, I brush the glass from a relatively flat area with my foot. I get down on a knee and lock my gloved fingers together for her to put her foot in.

"I'll boost you up." I help her clear the five-foot distance between the heap and the second story floor. Graves might be almost as tall as me, but she's definitely not as heavy. She helps pull me up the best she can, and after a bit of a struggle I'm up there with her.

I realize something and let out a breathy chuckle. "It looks like I've switched roles."

Graves raises an eyebrow. "Switched?"

I realize this was the most emotion I had let on in our time working together. I quickly straighten out my face before I speak again. "My last partner was in his mid-sixties, but he was built like an ox. Usually I was the one getting boosted up."

She lets out a yawn while she says, "Oh, that's funny."

We head further into the building. We walk past swivel chairs, pens, and waves of paper that are strewn about. Cubicle decorations, like family photos and fuzzy dice, haphazardly litter the ground. Taking a careful look around it seems this floor is, or was rather, a regional office for a chain of toy stores. Some broken display cases rest along the main hallway with some the business's latest products scattered in the dust. A certain scaly figurine catches my eye and it seems Graves

must have noticed it as soon as I did. She picks it up and shakes off the dirt.

"What the hell? They turned it into a plaything?" she says, not even trying to hide the disgust in her voice.

"I'll bet it's good business. Kids love re-enacting wanton destruction."

Graves reaches down and picks up another plastic toy with three heads and some wings. "These things kill people, Parks. It's not fun, it's terrible."

"I guess they got what was coming to them, then," I say, casually kicking one of the figurines a few feet down the hall. She's right, though. It is screwed up but I can't really blame them for doing it. If trying profit off something like this didn't work they wouldn't do it. Graves drops the two in her hands on the floor and we venture further into the office.

I'm about to pull out my notepad when Graves quickly sticks her arm out in front of me, accidentally slamming it into my chest. I let out an "oof" before she whispers, "Did you hear that?"

"No—"

"SHH!" We stand in silence for a few moments. There's nothing but the soft wisp of the cool draft. I'm about to give up on listening before I hear a faint voice come from across the room.

"Mommy."

Graves takes off towards the noise before I have a chance to ask why a kid would have been here in the first place.

"Mommy." The muffled voice chokes out again. It sounds like a little girl. I briskly walk over to where Graves is desperately pushing at a heap of ceiling tile and circuitry. "Mommy." We can hear the voice but we can't see girl herself.

"I'll call an ambulance."

"Would you help me?!" Her voice cracks when she says it. I get down, too, and start trying to move the bulk of twisted wires.

"We're going to help you. Don't worry. You're going to be ok." Graves is trying her best to be reassuring but her voice is shaky. "We're going to get you out of there."

Both of us feel the heap begin to shift, it's finally going to budge. Using the weight of our whole bodies' we heave and topple a chunk of the mass. We begin flipping over the loose debris, but both of us immediately stop when we uncover the victim, taking in what we're seeing.

"Mommy," she whimpers again. Her alabaster face has been smashed in and the dress she's wearing is in shreds. I can't help but smile. I reach down and pick up the doll by its neck and pull the string on her back.

"Change me," it whines.

"Today, you and I are heroes, Graves."

She sits down on the floor with a thud. "I'm sorry. I swear I thought it was . . ." her voice trails off. She looks at the doll in my hand again. "I'm just glad it's no one's hurt."

I run my thumb over the indent on my bare ringer finger. "Yeah, me too."

---

The stagnant, chilled air in the breakroom practically freezes the sweat on the back of my neck. Over the last

two days Graves and I have finished our initial inspection and spent the whole morning filling out the first of many claims reports. I finish off my coffee from the cup I had left in the car all morning. A man who looks as if he had not combed his hair since it grew onto his head sits down next to me at the plastic folding table.

"Hello, Robert Parks."

"Martin." I nod. Of course we're having lunch at the same time.

"You look like hell. I heard you got saddled with a rough one today."

I rest my cheek on my fist. "Nothing a little overtime can't handle." I try to manage another drop out of the cup.

"Don't I know it." He leans in a little closer. "I heard the boss talking;

another job is heading your way."

"Another? But the one I'm on . . ."

"That thing took the scenic route home and then made a wide turn,

skimmed the top floor off an apartment building." He notices the dejected look on my face. "Oh, cheer up, Robert, it'll only take one afternoon. The apartment manager already filed for a specific amount, we just need you to go over and see if they're asking for too much." He grins a toothy grin. "Play around with some loopholes if you have too. It's kids' stuff." My stomach lurches when he says that. I know exactly what he means.

"Why didn't they tell me this the day of?"

**"A few layers of massive blue tarps whip in the wind at the top of the low income apartment building. Graves looks to me as if to ask what next."**



"Apparently, we didn't even know there was a notice until a few hours ago. Ever since what's-her-face moved the corporate ladder, the mailroom has been run by chimps. Speaking of which, how's the new partner working out?"

The smells of hot coffee and fresh food flow into the breakroom. Graves had arrived with her lunch putting my dollar twenty meal to shame. "I'm working out just fine."

"You heard her, Martin." I switch my attention to her as I stand up from the folding chair. "We've got a change of plans after lunch. I'll tell you on the way."

---

Both Graves and I step out of our respective cars. The debris that would have resulted from the damage has been removed from the streets, just leaving the cracks it made in the concrete. A few layers of massive blue tarps whip in the wind at the top of the low-income apartment building. Graves looks to me as if to ask What Next? I start walking towards the entrance and

she quickly is at my heels. A school bus hisses to a halt at the corner of the street. Several elementary age kids burst out of the doors. All of the children are immersed in the conversations they didn't finish on their ride home.

"Why do I have to be 'it' again? Moths are for girls!" One boy yells to another as they whiz past Graves and me.

A young girl walking into the apartment building right behind us is talking to her slightly older friend. "Mom said Greg isn't coming back to school for a while since he hurt his feet."

We let them go past us into the stairwell. Graves whispers to me, "People still live here after what happened?"

"As long as the building is structurally sound there's no need to move everybody out." Graves just lets out a sigh. We begin the climb up the stairwell. Natural light shines in from six stories up from where the stairs reached the top floor.

"You and I haven't worked a residential case yet together yet, have we?"

She shakes her head. "I don't think so. We've only worked industrial or corporate cases up until now."

"Right. These ones tend to be a bit easier. Not as much paperwork." I pull out a folded sheet of paper out of breast pocket. It contains a variety of technical information about the claim filed by the residents and the landlord.

**"I understand you need some time to take this all in. Our company is more than willing to work with you on creating a plan that works for both of us."**

Amidst the cluttered data sheet is written "Moore's Relocated to Apartment 4C."

Tucked in the folded data sheet was another piece of paper torn from a notebook. On it reads a handwritten note from one of the higher-ups. "Budget is

getting thin, cut any costs you can on each of your cases."

I've been doing this for over a decade

yet they always seem to remind me how the business works. I quickly glance at Graves and stuff the torn notebook piece back into my suit pocket. "Since the landlord already filed the claim we just need to do a quick inspection to see if they're asking for too much."

Graves reaches over and takes the data sheet from my hand and starts scanning it over.

"There's something in here I don't quite get." She begins to read a specific portion of the document out loud. "In addition to making repairs to damaged property the owner of the complex is responsible for the medical coverage of any occupants harmed in the unforeseen event of collateral damage."

She hands the sheet back to me and I refold it into a neat square before placing back in my suit pocket with the scrap note. "So the family won't have to pay out of their own pocket?"

"Not if they live somewhere that handles collateral damage for them. Not everyone is so lucky to live in a place like that."

"Yeah, lucky."

We arrive at apartment 4C and Graves and I accidentally synchronize our knocks on the door. No response. I knock again. After a beat the door opens up a crack and the tarnished steel chain stops the door from opening up any further.

"Who are you?" says a monotonous voice.

"We're with Collateral Damage

Insurance. Are you Mr. Moore?"

"Yes." He unhooks the door and lets us in.

"First and foremost, I'm sorry about what has happened, Mr. Moore."

Graves chimes in, "I'm sorry as well, Mr. Moore. Is there anything we can do for you?"

Mr. Moore wobbles and limps across the room and dejectedly sits down onto a mattress. There's nothing in the room except for three mattresses and the regular utilities like a stove and refrigerator. He tries covering his thumb which is twisted back beyond what's normal. It's practically mangled.

"I understand that you and your wife are unharmed." I take another look at his hand.

"Yes."

"At the present moment is she perhaps at the hospital?"

"Yes, she's visiting with my boy," he chokes out.

"Now your landlord has filed a claim for \$80,000 for the medical costs of your son's surgery, in addition to the cost of any lost property," I explain. I continue, "Have you been in contact with the hospital about how much the procedure would cost?"

"They said it would cost \$28,000 to perform the amputation. Around another \$25,000 for the prosthetics and \$10,000 for therapy." Mr. Moore still will not make eye contact with us. Graves has not said anything. I glance over at her. She has the same look plastered on her face she had when she heard the doll cry out. Damn it. I wish I could be like you.

**"Get out. Get the hell out of here! Get the hell out of here!"**

"Well, our company only covers costs up to \$40,000 per person." Graves and the man jerk their heads to look at me. Graves tries to say something but I cut her off. "Is it at all possible if you could check again to see if there's another medical option you could pursue for your son?"

"You're saying you won't do your job?!" He begins to try and lift himself from the mattress.

"I'm doing my job, sir. It's in our policy. We are not allowed to allocate any more funds than it states in the contract. If you want to get the rest of the medical coverage you'll need to reapply for extra coverage." My voice cracks a little. His face begins to flush. I glance at Graves from the corner of my eye. Her fists are clenched and her brow is furrowed.

"I understand you need some time to take this all in. Our company is more than willing to work with you on creating a plan that works for both of us."

"Get out. Get the hell out of here! Get the hell out of here!"

"Come on, Graves. We'll go assess the damage on the roof."

I close the door behind us. When I turn around Graves takes me by surprise as she lunges into my coat pocket and snatches the data sheet out. She intensely skims over what's been printed. After a few moments she lets loose.

"Bullcrap. Bullcrap! What the hell are you doing?"

"Listen," I say, as we both notice the scrap of notebook paper float to the

ground. She snatches it up before I have the chance to myself.

"What the hell are you doing? Extortion!?"

"I've been doing this job for years. It's the only way we can keep up with the amount of money we have to shell out every month," I say, trying to justify my career in a few words. Graves just stands there expressionlessly staring at me. She drops both the data sheet and scrap of paper onto the floor. Her voice is quiet now.

"I thought you, of all people, actually cared. Day in and day out, I thought you did your best trying to help rebuild what those monsters keep taking away. Instead you don't give a damn like everyone else."

I feel a migraine pierce my temple and my forehead begins to burn up. "I didn't

**"I thought you, of all people, actually cared. Day in and day out, I thought you did your best trying to help rebuild what those monsters keep taking away. Instead you don't give a damn like everyone else."**

pick this job to become a saint." I run my thumb over the empty space on my ring finger. "I chose this job because it pays well enough. Enough to take care of myself and enough to take care of..." I pause. We both just stare at each other. Her breathing is heavy and her fists are still clenched.

"Anyone who can't cut costs gets fired. But it's not like I need the money anymore anyway. This job is all I know how to do. It's the only thing I could ever do right." I reach down and pick up the claim report off the ground and hold it out to her.

"You're my boss, now, Elizabeth."



# Dissonance

## John Kirchner

An unforeseen crack, how it contrasts on white-washed wall  
Peeking antennae, scuffling legs, slender bodied squatter  
'Trenched in drywall, what opportune home you've made  
Blackened, repulsive, those flailing limbs, pincers upfront

Peeking antennae, scuffling legs, slender bodied squatter  
Why my wall? It was so clean or at least it seemed before  
Blackened, repulsive, those flailing limbs, pincers upfront  
Writhing, wriggling, segmented sojourner, you're unwelcome

Why my wall? It was so clean or at least it seemed before  
So ceaseless you long-legged dancer, corkscrewing contortionist  
Writhing, wriggling, segmented sojourner, you're unwelcome  
Scurry as you will, slip out of bed I, for there's no sleep anymore

So ceaseless you long-legged dancer, corkscrewing contortionist  
Careening again, look what you've done, deep-gashed drywall  
Scurry as you will, slip into bed I, for there's sleep evermore  
Unforeseen crack, no longer contrasts on the white-washed wall



# The Gospel According to Cheddar Jack

## (Words of Crust in Bold)

### Hunter Amos

#### CHAPTER 1

1. An angel of the LORD appeared to the Extra Virgin Mary and said "Surely ye shall be with child of the Holy Spirit, and ye shalt call him Cheesus."

2. Mary answered "Aye."

3. It was to come to pass that king Jerod wished a survey of his people, so each man was to return to the place of his birth to have his census taken.

4. Joe possessed too much census, so he didn't mind if they took some. Because of this, he and Mary went to Bethleham.

5. Though Mary was great with child and cheese curds in her womb, they could not find anywhere to sleep the night.

6. Finally, they did find an inn, but it was so full it looked unstable, so the innkeeper told them they could find somewhere much more stable in the stable.

7. Mary gave birth to Cheesus and sat him in the mangy manager manger.

8. A bright new star shone over the stable, and it guided the Three Blind Mice to worship the savor.

9. They arrived bearing gifts of cheese, cheese, and cheese, respectively.

10. It just so happened that word got around to king Jerod that Cheesus would be a problem, so he had all the sucklings in the land executed.

11. Cheesus escaped this fate because

Joe and Mary fled to Egypt or some such place.

#### CHAPTER 2.

In time, Cheesus grew into a man.

2. He went to His brother Jon the Baptiser to be baptised.

3. Jon took Cheesus to the great fondue pot and baptised Him.

3. Dipping Him down, down, down into the gooey cheese of redemption, Jon baptised Him.

4. When Cheesus came up, the Holey Spirit alighted upon Cheesus in the form of a chicken.

5. Cheesus said "**GOUDA has blessed this day.**" And it was so.

6. Afterwards, Cheesus went up to the Italian restaurant called the Mountain of Olives to preach, teach, reach, and beseech.

#### CHAPTER 3

1. It was at this time that Cheesus spoke to his disciples, telling them in parables of the things to come.

2. When talking with his followers, a wealthy cheese monger approached Him and asked "O LORD, how may I follow thee?"

3. To this Cheesus replied, "**Give all of thy cheese away to the poor, take up the simple garment of a cheesecloth, and follow me in my ministry.**"

4. To this the cheese monger replied "O LORD, I can not do this thing. I so love my business and mine cheeses, I can not bear to part with them.

5. And he left Cheesus and his disciples.

6. So Cheesus said unto his followers **"It is easier for a dairy cow to fit through the holes in a cheese shredder than for a rich cheese monger to enter the Kingdom of Wisconsin."**

7. And so it came to pass that Cheesus and his disciples were much tired of their wanderings and sought to stay and rest a time.

8. They passed by a ship of fishermen casting their nets over the left side of the ship, but catching nothing.

9. Calling out to them, Cheesus said **"Cast thy nest over the right side of your vessel, and see the bounty ye shall reap."**

10. Doing so, the fishermen brought up nets so full they were almost burst with the fishes caught.

11. So full were the nets with anchovies and sardines, the fishermen filled the entire ship.

12. Cheesus called to them again and said **"Put down your nets, no longer be fishers of pizza toppings, but fishers of men."**

#### CHAPTER 4

The apostles came into the holy city of Milwaukee, and all of the people greeted Cheesus as he came riding on his ass.

2. The people in Milwaukee were so surprised at this, they laid down palm leaves before him, for they hadst never seen a man riding his ass in such a way.

3. And so it was that Cheesus, holier than Swiss cheese, did dwell in Milwaukee for a time.

4. While there he performed many miracles to the people, that they might know him and be made knowing of his divinity.

5. While preaching in the local pizzeria, the Pharicheeses approached him, and so said "If thou were in truth the LORD, couldst you not make sweet and carbonated this bitter water? Couldst thou not take this water which floweth from the bathroom tap and make it suitable for the Holy Offering?"

6. To them Cheesus replied, **"Yea, better still shall I improve it."**

7. So doing, He took up their pitcher of water, and through the Holy Power converted it to cherry cola.

8. All the people saw this and were amazed, but the hearts of the Pharicheeses were made harder than cheese rind against Cheesus.

9. Cheesus taught the people that he was the One prophesied, the Prince of Pizza, LORD of LARDS.

10. Then the Pharicheeses were much distressed, and asked if a man shouldst not pay his taxes on the Sabbath.

11. Cheesus answered **"Give unto little Caesar what is little Caesar's, and give unto GOUDA what is GOUDA's."**

12. At this the Pharicheeses were much outraged and began to plot against Him.

#### CHAPTER 5

Cheesus made his way to the pizza parlor, where he was to worship that day.

2. Coming there, he beheld many

money changers in the pizza parlor changing money and game tokens.

3. Cheesus was cheesed off about this.

4. Cheesus drove the money changers out of the temple, and flipped their tables and arcade machines over.

5. In a great shout He exclaimed **"Ye backslidden serpents of Saytan, getteth out of the house of my Father!"**

5. And so the tables were turned on the money changers.

## CHAPTER 6

So it was that evening the LORD sat down with his twelve disciples, Papa Murphy, Papa John, Colby, Colby Jack, Cheddar Jack, Chuck E. Cheese, Monterey Jack, Ol' Bleu, Jarlsburg Hamburger, Pepper Jack, Petey, Tom, and Joodas.

2. He brought them around him, and taking a piece of grilled cheese he divided it among His disciples.

3. So doing He said **"This is my body, broken for you. Eat this in remembrance of me."**

4. He then took some cherry cola and served it to his disciples.

5. So doing He said **"This is my blood, shed for you. Drink this in remembrance of me."**

6. His disciples did not know quite what to think of this.

7. Joodas had taken just about all he was about to take of Cheesus.

8. Then Cheesus said unto them **"One of ye shall betray me."**

9. Petey replied, "O! Surely not I my LORD!"

10. Cheesus responded **"Verily do I say to ye Petey, ye shalt deny me**

**thrice before the cock's crow on the morrow."**

11. The disciples were much afrightened, except for Joodas who was much annoyed.

12. Joodas left the congregation, and sought out some Romano soldiers.

13. They gave him twenty game tokens for telling them where Cheesus was, that they might go and capture the Messyiah.

## CHAPTER 7

The next morning the Romanos captured Cheesus.

2. On their way to Pile-it, the ruler of Milwaukee, they passed by Petey's apartment.

3. Calling out to them, Petey cried "What art thou doing with the Savory Savior?"

4. The Romanos turned and called back "This man is a criminal, dost thou know him?"

5. Petey cried "Nay!"

6. They said "Art thou sure about that? If thee beist a friend of a criminal, thou art a criminal as well! Do ye know him?"

7. Petey cried again "Nay!"

8. The Romanos shouted "Art thou positively certain thou dost not know this man?!"

9. Petey cried "Yea, forsooth, I know him not!"

10. A cock crowed loudly after Petey said this, and Petey was saddened.

11. The Romanos led Cheesus away.

12. Cheesus wept.

13. Taken before Pile-it, Cheesus was made to stand trial.

14. Pile-it said to the multitude

gathered before the balcony where Cheesus and he were "Is it the wish of you all that this man be skewered? Indeed, I do not wish to do so."

15. But a thunderous roar came from the multitude yelling in a great voice "Yes! This man sayeth he is GOUDA, but is only a man!"

16. So, Pile-it turned Cheesus over to the soldiers.

## CHAPTER 8

The Romanos forced him to carry a large skewer to a place called Pro-Val-Own, which meaneth "place of the skull" in that tongue.

2. They placed upon His head a crown of spicy cheese puffs, and placed Him upon the skewer.

3. Taunting Him, they tore out his beard, and pieced His side with a spear.

4. After they had done this, they proceeded to distill a drink peculiar to Milwaukee, called beer. They took some of the herb called hops that grew in that place, and some of the grain, and some yeast for this purpose.

5. Then a soldier said, let us add to this beer some of the unleavened bread of the Chews, and see what flavor resulteth thereof.

6. There Cheesus hung on the skewer, and prayed most reverently to GOUDA; **"Forgive them Father, for they know not what they brew."**

7. Thus did Cheesus perish for the salivation of the world.

8. His mother Mary and His girlfriend Mary took down his body and prepared it in the manner of the Chews.

9. Nary a Mary was merry, on the contrary, very wary of a scary place to

bury.

10. Mary<sup>2</sup> placed the body in a cave and sealed it up with a boulder.

11. Three days did pass, and then they opened the tomb again.

12. Cheesus was not there, but a beautiful milk maid from Wisconsin was in there. She shone light, and was wearing pure white overalls.

13. She told them, "Cheesus has risen from the dead, and shall yet return to you.\*"

14. The women were much astonished at this, but the milk maid disappeared, and only the empty tomb was left.

\*See first Parmesanians chapter four verse twenty

## CHAPTER 9

When the Maries told Cheesus' friend Tom about all this, he was skeptical.

2. Then Cheesus appeared to them, and showed Tom his wholly holy holey hands.

4. Mary said "I told you so."

3. Then Tom became a believer. Not a doubt in his mind. Not a trace. He felt the love and he was a believer he couldn't leave her if he tried.

4. Cheesus then took a walk on the sea of Gallicheese to a boat full of his old buddies.

5. After speaking with them for a while and a time, he ascended into Wisconsin, awaiting a time when he shall return to judge the world.

6. Amen.





# Invisible Lines

Jacey Gutknecht

Constellations of imperfect light,  
Connected with invisible lines to tell  
A story,  
A myth,  
A meaning.  
Perhaps I'll write our story in the lines of the sky  
High above for lonesome eyes to  
See,  
Connect,  
Read.  
Interpreted to their own liking  
Evolving with each stranger.  
A new story,  
A new feeling,  
A new meaning.  
On the brink of new beginnings,  
These cursive lines meant,  
Just for them in that moment.  
Illuminated in the night,  
Moments marked.  
For we are the stars in the night sky  
Our hearts connected with invisible lines.



# Blinkers

## Micah Anderson

She was brought broken and bleeding  
into my emergency room.  
Shattered like glass.

Her parents, through red-rimmed eyes,  
blinking away the tears,  
told me the story.

It was a peaceful Sunday drive.  
When the car changed lanes,  
Without using the blinkers.

The vehicle collided with another.  
The little girl was flung from her seat  
As the automobile collapsed like the final  
note from an accordion.

The tiny body skipped  
across the pavement  
Like a smooth stone tossed  
across the water; Sending ripples.

Her father couldn't call for help  
His phone had been damaged;  
An unfinished text frozen on the screen.  
With mask and gloves on,  
I look down at the angel  
no longer perfect.  
I think of my own child  
And how she always complains  
that the seatbelt scratches her neck.  
I think of the countless hours I've spent  
away from my daughter,  
while I fixed other people.

I think about how much she's grown, and  
the pencil marks on the wall.  
Each one reminding me that  
she's growing up without me.

I shake the fog from my head and  
blink my vision clear.  
The bright lights shudder.

They remind me of the blinkers on a car  
Then everything returns to normal, and  
I get to work.



# Call Now!

## Kacey Dunifer

**D**o you hate your life? Tired of wondering what the hell is wrong with you?! Well, wonder no longer. What I'm about to show you is the FUTURE of self-discovery and mental illness! And all you have to do is follow a few short steps.

First: Simply type your symptoms into the web browser of your choice and let the fun begin!

Don't believe me? Let's listen to the story of a young girl.

The following testimonials are the accounts of real people, not hired actors.

"Oh, yeah, so it all started when I was lying in bed one night. It was, like, 3 A.M. and I was scrolling through Facebook. I saw one of my friend's new cover photos and it was a Venn diagram, where one circle was labeled 'absolute narcissism' and the other 'crippling self-doubt' and where they met in the middle, it said 'art.'

And the caption was like, 'omg me sameeee.'

And I was, like, shit. I totally have crippling self-doubt... No doubt. But, wait, am I a narcissist?

I never really thought of myself as a narcissist because I hate myself so much. Aren't narcissists, like, in love with themselves?

So, I googled, 'How do I know if I'm

a narcissist?' Oh, um, oh yeah. \*ahem\* 'There were over a million results in less than a second!'

So I took a quiz and it told me I was a 'covert narcissist,' which is a narcissist who, deep down, thinks that they can achieve a lot, has grandiose dreams of what they will become... like an actress, writer or filmmaker. But, in reality, they can't live up to their expectations, like in everyday situations. And I'm like 'omg me sameeee.' So that fucking sucks.

Oh, shit, am I allowed to curse?

Anyway, then, at the bottom of the website, I saw a link to an article that said 'the difference between covert narcissism and inverted narcissism.' So, I clicked it as I finished off the bag of Cheetos.

It said inverted narcissists attach themselves to the overt narcissist (which is the classic narcissist). 'They compulsively and obsessively seek security via dependence upon a classic narcissist.' Then it hit me. Like a big fucking rock straight to my face.

I depended on my ex-boyfriend for everything. I didn't care if he abused me. I needed that attention. That's when I came across the term 'co-dependency' and now I'm, like, actually reading credible information on it and teaching myself how to overcome it. I talk to my mom about how she dealt with it when she felt trapped while she

was married to my dad, an alcoholic. I am actually out in the world, dealing with it on my own terms.

I mean, uh... 'I feel so happy. Self-diagnosing via web search results changed my life. And it can change yours. Buy now.'"

Wow! Thanks! Super-duper inspiring stuff! So, what do you do after step one? Step two!

You're going to click on the desired link to which your questions will be answered and your troubled mind relieved!

Now, let's look at someone else, who had a different experience with our Step-by-step Self Discovery Program:

"Oh, hey there! So you want to know a little bit about self-diagnosing? Oh, it's the best! See how I'm cleaning, right now? I never would have been doing this if I hadn't stumbled upon that subreddit about OCD and hoarding!

At first, I was a little skeptical—

Oh fuck this. I know I'm not supposed to curse but I am not advocating for this shit. Mental illness is more than just adopting a diagnosis because it sounds appealing.

Like, no you're not bipolar; you're just mad. No, you're not having a panic attack; you just freaked out for a second. No, you're not OCD; you just want your dishes to be clean. And, side note, you wouldn't be OCD; you would have OCD.

Forget about those blogs, subreddits, and yahoo answers. I'll tell you what OCD is.

It's checking your phone seven times just to get the time. It's checking your

ex-boyfriend's twitter every two hours. It's coughing until you almost pass out because that last cough wasn't just right. It's eating at Panda Express or McDonald's whenever you drive by. It's picking your scalp until it bleeds. And bleeds. And bleeds. And it's raw. And your hairdresser asks what's wrong with you. And your boyfriend asks why he can't play with your hair. And everyone asks, 'Why don't you just chew some gum?'

And my mom says it will go away after I find my 'inner peace.' And my doctors say it will go away after I try Citalopram, and my doctors say it will go away after I try Effexor, and my doctors say it will go away after I try Zoloft, and my doctors say it will go away after I try Effexor again, and my doctors say it will go away after I try Abilify, and my doctors say it will go away after I try Desipramine, and my doctors say it will go away after I try Risperidone, and my doctors say it will go away after I try Prozac, and my doctors say it will go away after I try Wellbutrin. But I'm still on Wellbutrin.

It's your dad checking every room before you go out of town. It's your brother cleaning his bong after every hit. It's when your dad, your brother, and you are all on the same anti-anxiety medication. And you only know that because you have to check the medicine cabinet of every bathroom you enter. Don't invite me over.

It's insidious. It's multiplying. It's mutating.

And now it's having flashbacks. It's having nightmares. It's jumping at the sound of your name. It's feeling

worthless. It's knowing that you'll never be able to get married, have kids, or live a normal life. It's unable to remember what exactly happened that night. And it's avoiding anything that reminds you of him.

But he says it's not PTSD because you 'weren't in a war.'

Well, buddy, after following step one, my successful Bing search of 'leading cause of PTSD,' I accomplished step two by clicking on the Anxiety and Depression Association of America's dot org website. Upon discovering the facts and statistics page, I found out that rape is the most likely trigger of PTSD and 50% of women who are raped develop the disorder.

Oh, the cue card guy is telling me to knock it off. Ha. Whatever. I swear to god if I didn't need the money for all those medical bills...

'I owe it all to the step-by-step Self Discovery Program. Order while supplies last.'"

See, folks! If you play your cards right, you can discover, not one, but TWO self-diagnoses! Wow! What are you waiting for?! This double offer won't last long so call now! But hold on! We have one last testimonial— Wait, where did she go? Rick, go get that woman or she's not getting her check!—Ha-ha! Sorry, guys! Currently experiencing some technical difficulties—Rick!!!



# The Prisoner

## Micah Anderson

The sound of static coming from the television drowned out all the other noises. The blizzard on the screen illuminated the small coffee table on which a dozen beer bottles were strewn about. One of the bottles was half empty, and the amber liquid began to pour out onto the glass tabletop. It found its way to the edge and fell over.

That's where Warren found him. He was slumped over on the couch, a beer bottle tipped over in his lap. Warren sighed as he gently shook his father. He groaned in his sleep but didn't wake. Warren grumbled to himself as he shook harder. He was getting tired of this. It had been going on for the last fifteen years.

"Dad . . . wake up." Warren picked up the remote from a puddle on the coffee table. He shook the beer off and turned off the TV. He dropped the remote and kicked his father lightly.

It was of no use. Warren shook him again anyway. He mumbled, and then turned over.

"Come on, Dad . . . this is what? The third night in a row?"

Warren's father stirred and groggily opened his eyes. He stared at his son through slits. His voice sounded hoarse and drool collected on his chin as he spoke. "What'd you turn the TV off for?"

"It's late; or rather early. You've been

drinking again."

Warren's father picked up the bottle from his lap and turned it upside down. A few drops fell out. "It's the only comfort I can get knowing that I have a screw-up for a son."

"You need to start taking better care of yourself."

Warren's father tried to get to his feet but fell back onto the couch. Warren tried to help him, but his hand got batted away. His father finally managed to get to his feet. He swayed back and forth, showing his drunkenness.

"You need help, Dad." The rough, once-hard working hand made contact with Warren's face and sent him backward. The force of the slap broke the skin on his cheek.

"Stay down there until you know your place," his father said. "That's where you belong."

Warren's father tossed the beer bottle and it shattered upon impact with the floor. "Twenty-five years old and you still can't learn."

Warren sighed and picked himself up off the floor. "I'm sorry. I love you, Dad."

Warren's father grunted, "I know, son, I know."

"Warren, are you even listening to me?"

Warren shook his head and blinked away his thoughts. He looked across the table at his wife, Marcy. She was holding a pan of scrambled eggs, a scowl on her face. "Yes, I heard every word."

"Then what was I saying?"

Warren smiled sheepishly and shrugged. "So I wasn't listening."

"I said, since I'm going to be out of town this weekend, and because of your long hours, I asked Liv if she would be able to watch Cathy."

"Oh. What did she say?"

"She said she would do it, but now you owe her."

Warren grinned, "I'll just add it to the long list of things I owe my sister."

Warren's smile began to fade. Marcy put down the pan of eggs and put her hand on Warren's shoulder. "Are you alright? You seem distracted lately."

Warren shook his head. "I've just been thinking about my dad."

"I'm sorry. It must be hard for you."

"I miss him."

"He must have been a good father. You love him so much."

"He was the best."

Marcy put her arms around Warren's neck and pressed her head against his neck. "Maybe I need to do something to cheer you up when I get back. I could do that thing you like so much . . ."

"Shit."

Marcy pulled away and looked at her husband. "What? You don't want that?"

Warren shook his head. "No, not that," he pointed to the TV that was muted on

the counter, "that."

Warren unmuted the TV. The reporter was in mid-sentence. "...he's been charged with two counts of first degree murder and is being transferred to the state penitentiary."

"I have to deal with that today."

Warren put his head down onto the table.

"Warren Michaels, are you going to

fall apart like this every time a criminal is transferred to your prison?"

Warren sat up straight. "You're right. It's just the timing . . ."

Marcy kissed Warren. "I know.

You'll make it through this."

"There's no one quite like you, Mrs. Michaels."

Marcy laughed and pulled Warren closer, "I know."

"Ew! You're kissing!" Cathy had entered the room unheard, like a mouse skittering across the floor.

Warren turned to face his daughter. She smiled up at him with her chubby cheeks.

"You'd better get out of here or I might just SWAT you."

Cathy screeched and ran out of the room giggling. Warren turned his attention back to Marcy. "The little insect . . ." Marcy plopped a paper bag in front of Warren.

"You should get going. You don't want to be late welcoming the new inmate."

Warren picked up the lunch bag and kissed his wife. "Have a good day," she said.

**"A woman stood next to his father, but her face had been ripped off from the picture, leaving her identity a mystery."**

"I'll try."

Warren adjusted the radio on his shoulder. His bagged lunch was in his mouth and Warren removed it to place it in his locker. He noticed that the book he was currently reading had fallen over, and he put it in its proper place before putting his lunch in the locker beside it.

Now that his locker was perfect, Warren began to close the door, but he stopped as he noticed the picture taped to the inside of the door was crooked. Warren immediately straightened it.

He stared intently at the photo. It was yellowing around the edges, showing its age. The photo showed his father, serious as ever. Warren sat at his feet, his smile frozen forever. A woman stood next to his father, but her face had been ripped off from the picture, leaving her identity a mystery.

"You nervous?"

Warren shut his locker door revealing Gerald, leaning against the wall. "About what?" Warren asked.

"The new inmate. You know I heard that while being transferred over here he tried to escape. And that during the attempt, he put four guards in the hospital, two in intensive care."

"Is that so?"

Gerald nodded.

"No, I'm not nervous."

But Gerald's story had sent a shiver down Warren's spine and he tried to keep his composure as he walked away.

"Don't walk away from me."

Warren stopped, afraid to turn around.

"Get back over here."

Warren turned and stared at the ground as he walked toward his father.

"Look at me when I'm talking to you!"

Warren glanced at his father, but then turned to look at his mother. She was sitting on the couch, brushing his sister's hair. His mother seemed oblivious to the whole scenario laid before her, but Liv took it all in with wide eyes.

"Don't look to your mother for help. I told you to do something and I expect you to do it!"

Warren shuffled toward his father and timidly stood before him, afraid that his life would end before his tenth birthday.

"Turn around."

Warren obeyed and began to cry, awaiting his punishment.

Warren escorted the new inmate, along with three other guards. Even though there were four of them, he felt that they were greatly outnumbered. He glanced over at the other three guards and he could sit it in their faces; the fear.

They turned a corner and the inmate raised his hand to scratch his nose. One of the guards stopped short and his elbow hit the inmate in the ribs. The inmate grunted and glared at the guard. "Sorry. Accident," the guard said.

"Accident my ass," the inmate mumbled.

"What did you say?" Warren asked.

"Nothing," the inmate replied.

**"He was fit  
and ripped."**

The inmate stared directly into Warren's eyes. It felt as if he was looking into his soul and in that moment Warren felt exposed, naked.

Those prying eyes were tearing away his outer shell and finding the defenseless meat underneath.

The inmate's appearance screamed criminal. He was a tall man, over six feet, nearer to six and a half. He was fit and ripped. His muscles seemed to have muscles. The largest clothing they had looked way too small for him. The clothes stretched across his tight chest and helped to show off his muscle. His veins were visible all over his body and throbbed as his blood took the express train from his heart to the rest of his body. Tattoos covered his body, most of them obscene. A large scar ran across his face and over one eye. It was the one dead eye that made Warren shudder and turn away. This inmate was the spitting image of a prisoner. He was the posterchild of the inmates. The devil himself would have been scared to be near him.

Warren nudged the inmate firmly. "Get moving."

A few hours later after the new inmate had been settled in, Warren found himself in the cafeteria. He was standing at the back of the room, his back against the wall. He glanced at the entrance as the new inmate entered with another inmate. Warren moved from his position at the back and made

his way toward the two inmates.

The other inmate was a heavy man, much too fat to even think of making an escape. Warren was positive that he would get winded just looking at a pair of running shoes.

They talked in hushed tones as they got their food and Warren was barely able to make out what they were saying.

"So, Si, what do you think of the place?"

The inmate's voice wasn't what Warren was expecting. From his size, Warren had guessed that he would have a deep and heavy voice to accompany his weight. But it was in fact the exact opposite. His voice was too high for a man his size, even if he had been the proper weight.

"The last place was nicer." The new inmate, Silas, replied.

Warren kept his distance, but made sure he was close enough to hear the conversation. Si and his friend found a place to sit. The friend motioned to an inmate sitting all by himself. "You know who that is?"

Si nodded. "I heard talk. Rapist?"

The friend nodded. "Specializing in children."

Si spoke with his mouth full of food. "Someone ought to teach him a lesson."

"I've got just the thing for the job."

Warren had heard enough and made his way to the back of the room. He would make sure to keep an eye on those two. Nobody was going to misbehave in his prison.

**"Tattoos covered his body, most of them obscene. A large scar ran across his face and over one eye."**

“Nobody misbehaves in my house!”

Warren’s father was beyond upset. Anger crept into his face, turning it a deep red. Warren cowered by his mother’s feet.

Warren’s father slapped at his ears. Warren’s head knocked against his mother’s knee. “Dear . . .” she said.

“What?” Warren’s father snapped.

“Can’t you do that in another room? Take him out of here.”

“Why don’t you leave the room if you’re so uncomfortable?”

“You’re frightening Livy.”

“I don’t give a damn.”

Warren’s mother gave his father a look and walked out of the room with Liv holding on to her shoulder. Warren watched his mother leave and realized he was now alone with his father.

Warren took his break about an hour after Si and his fat friend had eaten.

He put his lunch bag onto the table and checked his phone. He noticed a text from his sister. Cathy wants 2 stay over 2nite.

Warren replied with his approval and took a bite from his apple. He quickly spat it out as if the apple had gone bad.

Warren looked at the shiny red apple and tossed it into the trash. But it wasn’t the apple that had left a bad taste in his mouth.

Warren finished his lunch and crumpled up the paper bag.

The paper bag sat on the countertop. Warren reached up for it, but his father

swatted his hand away. “You’ll get your food when your grades improve.”

Warren rubbed his hand tenderly as his father continued, “I won’t have a failure for a son. Maybe hunger will help you concentrate and you’ll realize what’s important around here.”

Warren hung his head sadly. “I’m sorry. I’ll do better.”

“Yes. You will.”

“But why does Liv get to eat...”

“What did I just say?” Warren’s father’s voice thundered and Warren flinched as if a storm had appeared suddenly out of nowhere and a bolt of lightning had just missed singeing him.

“Your mother is responsible for Liv. And besides, she actually deserves to eat. Now get your ass out of here or you’ll miss the bus. And I won’t be driving you if you do.”

Warren turned his face away from his father to hide his tears. His stomach growled and he slowly walked away. “Get!” his father yelled, and Warren scurried off.

Warren’s father reached into the bag and took out an apple. He took a bite out of it and the juice ran down his beard.

**“Warren broke through the crowd and saw the scene set in front of him. The inmate turned and the shank was plunged repeatedly into his body.”**

It was sunny outside and was still warm enough to be considered nice. Warren surveyed the sea of orange as he made his way around the perimeter. He searched the crowd, trying to find

where Si and the fat inmate had gotten to.

Warren finally spotted him. He was moving fast, shoving prisoners aside as he made his way toward an inmate all by himself; the same inmate from the cafeteria.

“Shit!” Warren spoke into the radio on his shoulder and raced after Si. “We may have a situation in the courtyard.”

Warren made his way through the mass of bodies. “Get out of the way!”

“Hey! Asshole!”

That was Si’s voice. Warren broke through the crowd and saw the scene set in front of him. The inmate turned and the shank was plunged repeatedly into his body.

Warren reached Si and kicked him behind the kneecap. Si fell and Warren kicked him in the ribs. “You piece of shit!” Warren continued to kick him until Gerald arrived and pulled him back.

Warren faced away and tried to regain his composure. “Take him to solitary.”

It was dark and it was damp. Warren hated every inch of that room. The worst part was the isolation. He didn’t like being alone much, especially in the dark. The basement was the creepiest place in the house.

Warren hated it when his father got angry. If he wasn’t getting beaten, then he was getting locked down here with the rats.

Warren tried his hardest to see in

the dark, he wanted to make sure there were no monsters hiding down here, even though none compared with the one that was upstairs. What Warren needed was a flashlight. He was sure there was one down here somewhere.

He felt on the shelves, careful not to break anything on them. He grasped what he was sure was a flashlight and turned it on. The soft yellow glow was like heaven. In that moment, Warren felt like he had won the lottery. The light was his salvation.

Warren turned and the light shined on his father, who had somehow gotten in the basement without a sound.

His father shook his finger at him. “No flashlights. You have to stay down here, alone in the dark.”

Warren’s father took the light from him and pushed him to the ground. “You’ll thank me for all this someday.” Warren’s father laughed as he took Warren’s one solace upstairs and locked the door.

Warren was beat. He opened the door to his house and flipped on the light. He expected to see Cathy

standing there, waiting for him. But then he remembered that she was staying over at Liv’s.

Warren made his way into the kitchen and took a beer from the fridge. He opened it and took a long drink.

Warren rubbed his eyes with one hand

and yawned. He went upstairs and plopped down onto his bed. He took

**“I can’t take care of them both. Besides, Warren is broken. I don’t want anything to do with him. Every day I can see him turning into you.”**

another swig of his beer and set it down on the nightstand. He let out a sigh and opened his eyes. He stared into darkness.

Warren reached out and put his hand on Marcy's side of the bed. The covers felt cold to his touch and Warren wished that she didn't have to be out of town. Warren picked up her pillow and put it against his face. He inhaled deeply, taking in her scent.

Warren cried himself to sleep.

Warren was woken from his slumber by the sound of his phone ringing. "Hello?"

"Warren, I was wondering if you could get out of work today." Liv always knew just how to annoy Warren.

"Probably not. Why?"

Liv sighed on the other end. "They need me at work today. It's an emergency." There was a pause. "I guess I'll ask Mom."

"I'll see what I can do. I might be able to find a replacement."

"God, Warren. What's wrong with Mom watching Cathy? She loves her."

"I'm not having this conversation again."

"At least she cares. That's more than can be said about Dad."

Warren clenched the phone tight in his hand. "How dare you?"

"He was a horrible person, Warren."

"You wouldn't know! You and Mom ran off and left me to deal with him. And he did the best he could to raise me into the man I am today."

"I was just a baby when Mom left Dad. She thought it better that I was with her."

"But she abandoned me! Who really abused me the most?"

"Look Warren, I don't have the time. I'm dropping Cathy off at Mom's. Okay?"

Warren hung up. He picked up the half empty beer bottle from the nightstand and tossed it against the wall. The amber liquid slowly rolled down the wall.

A single tear slowly rolled down Warren's face as he secretly watched his parents argue. His mother was putting on her coat and Liv looked like a marshmallow in hers.

"Fine, leave. I don't give a shit." Warren could hear the sadness seeping through his father's anger.

"I know, that's why I'm leaving. You never give a shit."

"Why don't you take Warren with you too? Rid me of both burdens."

"I can't take care of them both. Besides, Warren is broken. I don't want anything to do with him. Every day I can see him turning into you."

Warren's mother turned to go.

"Did it ever occur to you that I treat him the way I do so he doesn't turn into me? Who could ever love someone like me?"

"Who indeed?"

Warren's mother left the house for the last time. She slammed the door and Warren's father broke into tears.

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A month had passed since Si had killed the other inmate. He was released back into Gen Pop and that's where

Warren found him. "You've got a visitor."

Warren led Si into the visitation room. There were a couple other prisoners meeting with their loved ones and the fat inmate that Si had befriended was one of them

Si walked over to an empty stall and picked up the phone. A woman held the phone on the other side of the glass. "There's someone who wants to talk to you."

The woman set the phone down and a little girl picked it up. "Hi, Daddy!"

"Hey, baby girl." Si smiled at his daughter through the glass.

"I miss you, Daddy. When are you coming home?"

Si's lip trembled and he struggled to hold back a tear.

Warren could see the whole thing from where he was standing and he felt a tear of his own roll down his cheek. Warren wiped it away and looked around to see if anyone else had seen him.

The sound of angry shouts brought Warren's attention back to the inmates. The fat inmate was yelling at the woman he was talking to. "Why do you keep coming back here? I don't care about you! I don't care about our son!"

"But he misses you," the woman said.

"I don't miss him! That retarded bastard drove me insane. I'll beat him harder the next time I see him!"

The woman began to cry.

"Hey!"

The fat inmate turned to see Si coming towards him. "Stay out of this, Si, it don't concern you."

Si grabbed the fat inmate by the

head and slammed him against the table. Warren acted faster this time. He was on Si before he could make another move.

"You don't deserve that boy!" Si said.

Warren shoved Si against the wall.

"I would never yell at a child, let alone hurt one." Si struggled as two more guards came to Warren's aid.

"I may be a criminal, but I'm not a bad man!"

Si continued to yell as the two guards led him out of the room.

Warren glanced out through the glass and saw Si's wife, clinging to her child. She comforted her as the little girl cried. She reminded Warren of Cathy and he thought of the last time he had embraced his daughter. The thought made him weep.

Warren wept with what he knew was his last embrace. His father lay in a hospital bed, dying. Warren knew that the outcome was inevitable, but now that the time had come Warren wasn't sure he could handle it.

"I don't want you to leave. I need you, Dad."

Warren's father coughed. The cough was a deep hard cough from the chest. A little blood came out into his hand. His voice was weak and barely audible. "Warren."

"I'm here, Dad."

"Warren, I just want you to know..." he coughed again and Warren wasn't sure that he would be able to finish. "I'm not a bad man. I just wanted to let you know that. I'm not a bad man."

Warren took hold of his father's hand. It was cold and weak, his father

was barely able to hold on. Tears welled up in Warren's eyes.

As his father passed, Warren spoke to him for the last time. "I know, Dad, I know."



# A Year

## Micah Anderson

The year begins anew.  
Winter turns to spring; to summer; to fall;  
and then back into winter, giving the year a  
repeating timeline.  
The year begins in darkness;  
empty until snow covers the earth and erases  
the color;  
like an artist erasing his masterpiece, only to start  
again with marks so light.

The snow falls lightly  
during the first months of the year. Brand new  
flakes, in all shapes and sizes. They're without color  
and softly they are falling.  
The cold wind bites, leaving the  
skin a dark  
shade of blue, like when an animal bites the hand,  
leaving bruise lines.

Spring breaks through winter's hold. And lining  
the pathways are trees in bloom. They soak up  
the sunlight  
and bud turns to leaf, until darkening  
shadows are cast below. Spring renews;  
not just foliage, but the soul as well. Life lives again  
and the downfall  
of death is imminent. The snow melts away and  
flowers bloom in many varieties of colors.

Bodies drown in sweat while the red and  
yellow colored  
rays of sunlight pour out their wrath. Lines of busy  
bees get to work. Gushing waterfalls  
release their melted snow like an open wound.

Lightning cracks its whip across the sky. Swarms of mosquitoes newly arrived, appear to take from their victims their blood, rich and dark.

Summer ends. And what once was green is now darkened. The leaves change from their green robes to those more colorful. The animals knew this was coming. They lined up to collect their food until the light left and darkness had fallen.

The snow again falls. And with it brings the darkest evening of the year. Firelight helps to warm cold bones; the flames coloring the skyline with scarlet and orange. Now the year is old that once was new.

The year now ends; and with it, chaos falls like a child coloring in a book. Bright and dark hues alike go outside the lines. But finally the light breaks through the turmoil and ushers in a year; brand new.

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