

The English Department presents  
the 2017 Annual

## *Seven Gill Shark Review Anthology*

A collection of original composition by students, staff, faculty, and community members at College of the Redwoods. We are pleased to present these original compositions for your enjoyment.

All of this would have been impossible without the hard work and dedication of the following people:

### **Spring 2017 Student Editors**

Donel Arrington  
Dena Holper  
Katelyn Jones  
Clare Magneson

### **Faculty Advisor:**

David Holper, English Faculty

### **Graphic Artist:**

Erin Jones

## Spring 2017

Talia Anderson	Thank You (Fiction Awardee)
Donel Arrington	I Can't Breathe
	I Am (Hobson Awardee)
Matt Baker	Gregarious Chants
Simona Carini	Erasure
Daryl Ngee Chinn	Gas (Poetry Awardee)
	Wide Gray Delta of the Morning
Rene Diedrich	The Heart of the Beast
Ana Contessa Carmona Gambina	The Bliss of Eucalyptus
Johanna Gross	Not a Real Poet
Dena Holper	While Troy Was Conquered
Katelyn Jones	Underneath
Suzanne Langford	Jacaranda Cake
Cory Morrow-Simmons	Just Another Denzil
Rick Park	Lost God
Jen DeParma	The Last to Know

Poetry prize is generously sponsored by Northtown Books  
Prose prize is generously sponsored by Booklegger Books

**Honorable Mentions:**

Rene Diedrich

A Letter from Purgatory

Nova Love

Ocean

Storm Child

Vinnie Peloso

My Favorite Senior Citizen

Angela Powell

Human Story

Benjamin Green

Providence

Linda Kuckuk

Looking Back

Nancy Wheeler

Call in the Dogs

Amy Peterson

Maybe

Katie Uber

The Pilgrimage

*Talia Anderson*  
THANK YOU

Two words. Two words punctuated by a smiley face of all things. “Thank You.” Those two words were it. I almost started crying, but I held back. Not in front of them; not in front of my parents, not in front of Josh's parents. My heart was pounding, hard. I could feel my face growing hot and red. My lungs felt starved for oxygen.

“What does it say?” Maisie Hodge – Josh's mom – stared at me like I was some sort of miracle. I was Josh's best friend. In the end, I was his only friend. My parents saw him as something strange and tragic, and his parents viewed him as something frail and priceless and something to be protected at all costs because there was no telling how long he would last. He hated that, but he never told them. He told me, though.

I dropped the note and bolted. I had to leave. I had to be alone with my thoughts and with what I had left of Josh and my pounding heart and pressurized lungs.

I sprinted down the street. My mind was racing, turning over things, remembering his outbursts, his tears, his apologies, and I took them all in stride because I always told myself that he would be okay. That the relapses were just flukes. That I would have my best friend again some day.

I remembered joking with him a week before when he'd told me: “Hey, man, the eighth time's the charm, right?” He had laughed, but it had sounded hollow and that scared me.

Two and a half years previously, a week before his fifteenth birthday, Josh had been diagnosed with leukemia. I had felt helpless; I wanted to do anything and everything to help my best friend get better, and I tried. I tried so hard; I learned everything there was to know about leukemia and how it worked and eventually Josh started joking and saying that I knew more than his doctors and why don't I treat him from now on.

Leukemia cells have a habit of hiding in spinal fluid and sperm cells. That's what kept happening to Josh. It hit him hard every time. I think my parents, his parents, and I got numb to it after a few times, but he would go into a rage every single time.

I would sit cross legged on his bed as he paced and shouted and screamed and made dents in his walls with his fists, until about the fourth time it happened. He was too weak to make holes, but he pounded the walls anyway. The medication took its toll and the time before last he had been pounded his fists on his mattress and tore through pillows while I sat at his feet, waiting, being with him in his anger, feeling helpless with him.

This time, last week, he had done nothing. He had nodded. He had cried a little. I had given him a hug, and he had been stiff as a board. He felt so thin; I could feel his bones through his skin. I saw his veins, some broken and purple, though his hands. His eyes were red. He insisted it was because of some of the medication.

The air burned through my lungs as I still sprinted, farther away from my neighborhood, from my parents, from his parents, from everything. I considered running forever. That would be better. It would be an outlet for pain. I could pretend that the pain of grief was the pain in my legs, and I could just pound it out in the asphalt and pavement.

I had seen Josh just a few hours before, just before I had gone to school. His mom had to leave early for work, and his dad had to catch a plane, so I had gone to check on him before the nurse came to help him out.

He had seemed dull. He was trying to smile and joke and laugh, but everything was hollow.

“We'll be okay,” I had said to him, clumsily patting his hand.

“I don't know. Sometimes it feels like it will never end.”

“It's... it's like that race, remember, two years ago? Against Ridge High?”

“How could I forget?” A small smile. “It was a million degrees. The course was too

long. I had a bum knee for the first half.”

“And you thought it would go on forever.”

“Yeah,” Josh conceded.

I felt lame giving a sports-related pep talk, but I pushed forward. “Someone... someone's just measured this course too long, okay? It's hard; it's painful but you'll make it. You'll win just like you did that race, okay?”

“Yeah.” Josh tried to smile again. He tried harder, and it actually made it up to his eyes. He paused. “Can... can you do me a favor, Jen?”

“What's up?” I tried to glance discretely at my phone to see what time it was. I'd been late for class a few times, and the administration wasn't as understanding as I thought they should have been.

“It's okay; it's just...” He winced. “My mom forgot to give me my pain medication this morning, and my joints just hurt so bad right now...”

“Oh...uh...” I had never handled Josh's medication before.

“The nurse won't be here for a couple hours.” He pleaded. “I know where it's at but I can't get it. It's in my parents' room.”

“I don't know...”

“Jen, I'm at a ten out of ten okay? Please help...” His eyes welled up. I felt like there was something I was missing, some subtext, but I ignored it.

“Okay, where is it?”

“It's in her jewelry box... for safety. She's worried someone might break in for the pain meds or something.” He casually rolled his eyes. I got a glimpse of the Old Josh.

“Yeah, sure.” I hesitated just a second longer and then left the room.

I'd never been in his parents' room before, but it was easy to find the rosewood jewelry box on the vanity. I jumped when I opened it; it started playing Fur Elise. I fumbled

with the narrow pill bottle, the only bottle in there, and snapped the lid closed, half terrified that the music would continue. It didn't.

I put the bottle on Josh's table beside his bed, alongside his bottles of eye drops, the basins for throwing up in, and bandages for the medication port in his chest.

“Thanks.” He smiled. He was really trying. Maybe the sports talk did something.

The ground felt hard and unforgiving as I started slowing down. I forced myself to keep running—to keep going; to force the pain out through my legs.

I left Josh.

Then after school his mother had gone back to the house to get things she had forgotten and found him.

He was dead. He had overdosed on some of his medication.

“I called Jim right back, of course. Luckily the plane was delayed,” she had babbled. She didn't seem to know how to stop talking.

She handed me the note.

He had written just one note with my name on it. Me, the only friend who had stayed with him through his tantrums and absences from school and eventual absence from the track team.

He had written just those two words and with those two words my whole being felt like it was being torn apart.

He wrote: Thank you.

*Donel Arrington*  
I CAN'T BREATHE

1.

*Eric Garner*

I feel the weight  
of this moment,  
like a shackle, on my leg  
like a noose around my neck  
as I try to tell you  
I can't catch  
my last breath,

2.

Ramsey Orta

I feel the weight  
of this moment  
like the weight of  
fire bombs in Philly  
Emmitt Till in Mississippi  
Fred Hampton as he slept  
me here recording  
                    your last breath  
                    officers, around your neck—

Now *I* sit  
            behind bars  
and wonder why  
*I'm* the one that's caged  
while the *Daniel Pantileo*  
            just got  
                    a raise.



*Donel Arrington*

I AM

the beauty  
    and the light  
I'm the darkness  
    and the plight  
I'm the things  
    you think at night, I am—

I'm the prison  
    I'm the cell  
I'm the mental  
    anguish hell  
I'm the curse  
    and I'm the spell, I am—

I'm the criminal  
    the crook  
I'm that last life  
    they took  
injecting lethal  
    heart stop shook, I am—

I'm the fulfillment  
    of the dream  
I'm that friend  
    you couldn't keep  
I'm the charmer  
    and the creep, I am—

I'm Jericho  
    and its walls  
the revolution  
    and its balls  
school shooters  
    inside malls, I am—

I'm the order  
    of this world  
misogynistic  
    men and girls  
I'm the straightener  
    to your curls, I am—

I'm your wedding  
    and your dress  
I'm that drunken

mid-day sex  
all that, anguish  
and the stress  
that feeling deep  
within your chest, I am—

I'm the soil  
and the trees  
I am money  
I am greed  
I'm the plant  
and I'm the seed, I am—

I am that,  
that isn't seen  
I'm the Pope  
and I'm the Queen  
presidential nominees, I am—

I'm the war  
and I'm the peace  
Islamophobia beneath  
austerity in Greece, I am—

I'm Sandra Bland  
I'm Michael Brown  
I'm Freddy Gray  
inside the ground  
I'm Sam Debose  
I'm Tamir Rice  
I'm Walter Scott  
I lost my life  
I'm Eric Garner  
*"I can't Breathe"*  
I'm mass rebellion  
in the streets  
my hands are up  
I'm on my knees  
the status quo  
is what police  
enforce—

we all beneath  
the dream is not  
within your reach,  
Amerika ain't free  
she just  
took off her sheets—

I'm occupy  
the fucking streets  
I'm that mace  
that they release  
the Brooklyn Bridge  
arrest police  
the not yet born  
and the deceased  
the climate change  
the mass concrete  
the car you drive  
the pig you eat  
the cow that's there  
that you call beef  
the barricades, yeah  
the news cheats  
the media  
is just a cheap  
tool used  
by the elite,  
I am—

I'm say her name  
I'm Yazmin Payne  
I'm national pride  
I'm so profane  
I'm this culture  
gone insane  
for all the bad  
we all to blame  
solutions not  
within this game  
that we call politics  
today,

I am black,  
white, and grey

I'm all the music  
ever made

the revolution  
and the way,

I am.

*Matt Baker*

GREGARIOUS CHANTS

Let me think now  
Of a time after  
Dirt and metal  
And the machine  
Stomachs that clutter  
The floor.  
Of anything but  
The four giant and lonesome  
Sheet metal walls  
Surrounding this  
Industrial empty vessel.  
Let me witness, instead,  
The red sand of an ancient desert.  
The unending blue sky  
atop grained fields.  
Let me engulf the chariots  
Called thunder  
and the blessing of rain.  
Behind guarded eyes  
I observe this place  
Pleading its decay.  
Howling at the futility  
That it ungracefully persists.  
Let the world breathe in unison,  
the sigh of a late morning.  
Let cold metallic pipes  
Be replaced with friend's hands.  
Let the desire for money  
Become a hunger for love.

This is never today.  
And not tomorrow.

But when nothing exists  
Beyond rust and death,  
Shall what has been forgotten in the forty hours,  
Become only memory.

As for tonight, I will drink  
An expensive beer  
And surrender to the  
Walking stars before the  
Tax payer's slumber.

*Simona Carini*  
ERASURE

Two sculls slide into  
The dwindling water of a minus tide  
We row as the early sun peeks  
Over coastal fog capping inland hills  
Unmuted light gilds Humboldt Bay  
Four oars' rhythmic dips nick the silence.

At the south end of Woodley Island Marina  
Fog flows in fast and low  
No land is visible beyond  
The channel marker planted in vapor:  
Is this how ancient sailors imagined the Unknown  
Awaiting who dared push past the Pillars of Hercules?

We turn around  
Row again on calm water  
In the clear.

A mile north  
A fog wall closes in.  
By the time we reach our dock  
The eraser has blurred the lines  
Recently drawn by sunlight.

The water flows under Samoa Bridge  
Docks dotting the channel vanish  
Boats dissolve into ghosts  
Trees turn into light traces.

A familiar place  
Now a landscape of losses  
Is this what being bereft feels like?

As the world sublimates from solid to vapor  
I grasp the oars, a bucket, the hose  
Resist losing hold.

A harbor seal, round-headed and round-eyed,  
Surfaces near the dock  
Our gazes lock:  
It's just us, dear friend,  
Just us.

*Daryl Ngee Chinn*  
GAS

Chevron station, dusk.  
“Do you have any money for gas?”  
“Sorry.”                      Am I?

Back to his truck.  
a pick-up,  
beige, dusty.  
Looks at his phone,  
stares off.  
Is he from the hills,  
camping out,  
driving through,  
doing something  
illegal?

He’s red-headed.  
like the Colorado man  
accused of killing  
twelve, wounding seventy.  
Didn’t really look at him,  
just said no, turned my back.

New York subway:  
“Ladies and gentlemen,  
I’m sorry to bother you.  
I’m a veteran and hungry.  
I haven’t eaten.  
I need money for food.  
Anything will help.  
God bless you all.”

In the car’s racket  
almost everyone  
is silent and still.

Who deserves help,  
the car with emergency  
flashers on at night,  
the tan woman with the dog  
on the corner,  
a silent wide-eyed man  
with a sign and paper cup,  
or this man sitting still  
in his truck?

If I asked for his story,

would I believe him  
and give him something?

From my Scout years,  
“...to help  
other people  
at all times...”

At Passover,  
we leave the door open  
for Elijah.

From my church,  
“...faith, love,  
and charity...”

Who is the supplicant,  
the one asking for help  
or the one questioning  
whether to give?

Am I  
or am I not  
my brother's keeper?

When I say  
“Sorry” it means No,  
a question, a twinge.

*Daryl Ngee Chinn*

WIDE GRAY DELTA OF THE MORNING

Nightskin

Light rises

Your right shoulder a pear silhouette  
melon tomato nectarine peach

Rose fuchsia fragrant  
the deep orchid ovary  
the caress of the nearday hour

Only light breaths  
like ripples a calm shore  
while the night exhales exhales  
before any bird's first flight  
or leaf shivers

The moment moves eyelids flutter  
dreams begin to drowse

I can barely touch you  
though we're cupped curled  
this hunger broods an unsaid confession  
to cleave yet cleave  
to give be given to have  
to hold

to begin and receive yet again  
This  
then and now

sparrow heralds the air turns hard squawks  
poppies and dandelions  
holler their orange and yellow logic  
to the wide-eyed gray sky  
foxglove brood in the shadows  
and the Big Leaf maple sways dips  
languorous stretches  
in soft-loved air



*Rene Diedrich*

THE HEART OF THE BEAST

Is infantile beyond the common reach  
It sentimentalizes objectifies  
It won't go to sleep

It wants something  
Almost nothing gnaws  
Away at its thorny feet  
Let me remind you to  
Put it behind you  
Because there is no pleasing  
This thing

It wants what it wants  
And it wants everything  
Listen to its hypnotic thumping  
Mesmerized by the beat

You can't soothe it  
You can't remove it  
With anything less  
Than a dagger  
Cut it out like cancer

Rip it out of your chest  
Behold its purple thumping  
Crimson pumping  
Marinate it in  
Feral hatred  
And eat it in tiny bites  
The next day.

*Ana Contessa Carmona Gambina*  
THE BLISS OF EUCALYPTUS

In Monterey and Santa Cruz Counties, there is a majestic eucalyptus forest that rambles on over the hills towards nearby San Juan Bautista in San Benito County. If you're traveling along Highway 101 in Monterey County, you get to flirt with the eucalyptus trees a bit, here and there; but it's not until you're approaching Rocks Road, near the San Benito County Line, that you actually escape into the forest. The experience is over in about the same amount of time as passage through a drive-through redwood tree, but for a moment or two you're in a sweet eucalyptus wave as you breeze through the trees. And if you're lucky enough to pass through the area after a rain when the wonderful eucalyptus aroma is especially pungent, then you know dead on that God lives there.

I lived on a small farm on Anzar Road, outside of tiny Aromas near Santa Cruz. Our quirky little farm stood on an edge of the eucalyptus forest, and it was bliss and otherworldly to be in the thick of it, especially during rainy months. But those were not the only storms leaving pungent vapors behind. There was extreme violence in our home; growing up with angry, resentful fathers, I often escaped into the trees for solace when I was able to get away from the war and booze zones at home. We had horses, and sometimes I'd escape on horseback and ride through the trees up and down the rolling hills, either on my own or with my sister or my best friend, Misty James, who also had horses and lived on a small farm nearby. Sometimes I rode off on my sister's old bicycle through the trees, down the windy country roads. I liked the gentle rustling of those tall, lean branches. The scent was like mom putting Vick's Vaporub on my chest and a bit on my upper lip, when I was little and suffering through bronchial asthma or a frequent cold. That sharp, fine smell steamed love and healing into me.

We lived on Anzar Road until the summer of 1985, and about a year earlier when I was in 7th grade, I took an especially brutal beatdown from my step-dad, Wayne. It was the kind of shit that used to make me nauseous because of blows to the head, but this one was especially harsh because it was attached to toxic shame. Wayne thought I had stolen some money from Misty's dad. It was a misunderstanding, but I couldn't explain that to Wayne; he assumed the worst and let me have it.

I had been over at Misty's that day after it stopped raining, and Mr. James said we could go get ourselves some candy and stuff from the River Oaks Store down by Chittenden Pass, now that it looked like the rain had finished up. He told Misty to go into his bedroom and get a few dollars off his dresser, and for us go get our stuff and please bring him a Mr. Pibb – but don't shake it. Ok, sounds good; so, we did. Chittenden was too far to take the horses, and it was a busy, dangerous stretch of highway anyway, so we rode bikes. When we got back, we dropped off the mildly shaken Mr. Pibb (Misty couldn't resist; such a daddy's girl), and then we started making our way down to my house. Wayne spotted us walking with a few treats and asked how we had paid for them. Misty looked up from her new magazine, smiled, and said we got some money off of her dad's dresser. As soon as the words left her mouth, I knew I was dead. I knew Wayne would misunderstand what she had said, but I was not afforded the luxury of dignity with my step-father; I was not allowed to speak up for myself and clarify that situation, or any situation. It was bad enough that I existed – Wayne wanted a wife, yeah, but not three damn daughters that weren't his and weren't sons; and a good chance to beat that resentment into us girls, he'd ripely take.

*Now I have to make him look bad in front of the neighbors? Make it look like he's raising some damn problem child?* Wayne said it all with a glance and a shake of the head, and that

stupid click of the tongue he used to do; but I got that shit loud and clear. Misty looked at both of us like she knew she'd missed something, but didn't know what. Her life was simple. In Misty's world, you have one father, and he adores you, and, of course, you can help yourself to the few dollars on his dresser and go buy yourself whatever you want – that's what it's for. All that he has to offer is yours, child.

With orange sticky fingers, I handed my bag of cheese puffs to Misty and said she could have my soda, too. I hated to part with them – cheese puffs, soda pop, normal life shit – they were rare treats in my house growing up. We didn't have money for 'that kind of crap.' Booze was never crap, though. Always had money for that. But I didn't argue, I was in enough trouble. In handing my treats to Misty, I surrendered the illusion of ease, which I'd never possessed to begin with, back over to her – a girl who wore the ease of life like the thick, curly hair that bounced and flowed around her. And I jolted myself back to my thin, flat world. Wayne's world. The old man fixed his glare on me a bit, and then he turned towards our open driveway gate and started up our long driveway. I looked away from Misty, so she wouldn't see my soul break, and I followed the tempest home.

The eucalyptus trees lined up on the left as you went up our steep driveway. They swayed and rustled a bit in the breeze after the early morning's storm that day, but I didn't look over as I headed up towards the house. The air of eucalyptus after the rain was probably strong, sharp, and wonderful, but I doubt I noticed. I knew what was coming up was bad. It was doubly bad to Wayne, though. To him, I had stolen money and made him look like a bad father. A poor father. The poor substitute that he was. He had the length of our driveway to decide all the reasons why I deserved what I was about to get and how he would deliver. I guess he decided on an old-fashioned ass kicking after all, because that's what he brought. When any day ending in 'y' is

good enough for some ass whoopin', you really have to step up your brute game, to hammer home the points that you'd want some poor sap to make sure that they remember. Kids at school would sometimes confide details of their own run-ins with their father's belts or maybe a switch off a tree. Wayne never hit my sisters or me with anything. As a blue-collar iron worker, also raising livestock on five acres, he certainly didn't need any backup to beat on young girls. His raging fists pounded down on me that day, while he shouted whatever it was that he wanted to make sure I remembered. His words, thankfully, are long forgotten; still, I got that shit loud and clear.

It wasn't enough to leave me an emotional mess in crumbled defeat on our garage floor that rainy day, after Wayne had shown me, yet again, who was boss. He grabbed my thin hair and yanked me up, and demanded I go apologize to Mr. James. I was in heaving, wobbly hysterics and, oddly, in no shape to speak with anyone just then, but you can bet I sure did not hesitate. It was a bit of a walk over to Misty's house, with the tall, swaying trees off to the far left; still, I was a trembling, throbbing mess by the time I knocked on the window of their pale green Dutch door, with bits of cheese puff dust on my fingertips. Misty swung the door open with a bouncy smile and was so freaked out by my appearance and hysterics that our friendship never survived. I didn't fit in with many kids to begin with, and it wasn't long before this sweet friend faded from my life as well.

Coincidentally, I 'caught a cold' the next morning after my run-in with Wayne that day, and my mom had me take a few days off from school. That's what she called it when fathers and step-fathers would get a little crazy and come down too hard and crash the party. And also by coincidence, or maybe it was paradox, but after that day I never rode through the eucalyptus trees again.

*Johanna Gross*  
NOT A REAL POET

I am going insane with this structure  
With minding iambic pentameter  
Forcing a rhyme like an unset fracture  
I am an ant; this is my anteater

I mean, why can I not write as I please?  
What would really happen if I wrote here.

Or over here.

Or maybe I could start a long run on sentence that just keeps going and going over here until I have no more space like overpopulation and can you imagine what the poetry equivalent of that would be – words spurring more and more words until there are a hundred thousand libraries of Alexandria, like word bunny sex that just multiplies exponentially until they become the invasive species of people's minds and hearts.

Maybe that is how I should write my poetry.

I like to think of it as a story, where there are two ancient forces fighting a battle as old as the universe. Maybe these forces are personified, one representing all that is good with angelic features while the other is untainted evil older than the universe, older than time. Evil would have created the universe, for it was his uncontrolled hands that caused it to explode in a big bang! Since then, I think, good has been trying to piece back the universe. That's why we see constellations.

Or I could write freely  
Only paying attention  
To where to break my  
Lines  
Ignoring punctuation

Where is the fun in writing poetry?  
If I cannot write poems as I please?

*Dena Holper*

WHILE TROY WAS CONQUERED

Moonlight bathed that Stygian night,  
cloaking your smooth bronze skin  
reflecting off the sea—  
a million foggy mirrors  
tumbling in, sliding out  
hello, goodbye, hello, goodbye.

You brush my ear, breathing goodbye,  
on this final, onyx-cold night  
before you sail the warships south,  
leaving the musk of your salt-toned skin  
clinging to my sweaty breasts, a mirror  
to rival the wine-red sea.

Had I forseen  
how the vineyards would bloom and die,  
how the goats would birth and mirror  
the vineyards, how at night  
Telemachus would cuddle in my arms, my skin  
the closest thing to the father he lived without,

how my fingers would shuttle in and out  
threads forming a tapestry  
too familiar to my roughened skin,  
how I would live off one goodbye  
for twenty years, pulling out the rows at night,  
I would not have let you leave me here.

I pace the beach in the meager  
hours when the servants are not yet out,  
and my suitors spoil the night.  
I am sick of seeing  
my son's frown, telling him "be good,"  
while I weave excuses to hide within.

The cold settles on my skin—  
I find no faces that mirror  
your gentle strength, you to whom I said goodbye  
too many memories ago, when time was out  
of question, when I didn't long to leave this sea  
with new hands to warm and hold at night.

Can you hear my skin calling out  
to you? Do you mirror my longing across this sea  
that breathes countless goodbyes this Stygian night?



*Katelyn Jones*  
UNDERNEATH

I have a really nice pair of underwear.  
The way they lie against the curves  
of my hips to create the epitome of comfort.  
The trim holds the perfect amount of lace  
so there is no chafe, and they shield  
my eyes from the stretch marks and excess fat.

They stretch, so even when my fat  
expands, this garment, my beautiful underwear,  
will move with me, constantly willing to shield  
me from the gazes of others as my curves  
unwittingly draw their attention. The lace  
gently caressing my skin reminds me of this comfort.

I am not the only person with such comfort.  
There are some who suffer the impression that their natural fat  
is a curse; who believe something as simple as lace  
will lure the attention of another even though the underwear  
hides; who believe they are loved for their curves.  
We conclude that this piece of fabric is a shield

made of iron. That the decorated nonsense is a shield  
that provides us some semblance of comfort  
in a world where *people* become no more than curves.  
We don't get it. Can't get it through our fat  
heads that something as simple as flashy underwear  
will not give us our freedoms. But we still love the lace

that's just the right width; love the way the lace  
makes us feel pretty. We don't want to see it as a shield,  
we just love to see, to feel, to wear our underwear  
that cost way too much but was worth it for the comfort.  
We love the way that they make things like fat  
look good, transform the lumps into bodacious curves,

not to mention decorating those beautiful curves  
with polka dots and slinky satins and lace.  
Freedom lies in understanding that our fat  
is not the problem, that this garment is not a shield,  
that this shouldn't be something we rely on for comfort—

that it is merely a pair of underwear.

I will wear my underwear. I will allow my curves  
to look amazing in that lace, and to embrace the fat.  
Above all, I will remember my shield is not true comfort.

*Suzanne Langford*  
JACARANDA CAKE

*Homage to Emmy Bridgwater*

One

One day in the backyard a young girl sang a cake from the soil and purple petals under the jacaranda tree. While the cake baked on the raggedy, red bricks in the southern California sun, the Donkey, paying absolutely no attention to the child, or where he was going – because he carried about impressive things on which to think – stepped on the cake and thought, "Goddamn mud."

Two

While the Donkey fetched the hose to clean the bricks, the child retrieved the cake remnants and cradled the bits in the cool shade of the avocado tree. With the help of the Cat, who retied her gypsy-bells apron, she lullabyed a bit more soil-flower mixture and re-patty caked the confection. Before adding six juniper berries, she bathed them awhile in a flowerpot with a few yellow nasturtiums and the sunny, sour juice of fallen grapefruit.

Three

The child considered the Donkey who readied himself for a nap in his pint-size beach chair. He fussed about in Speedo bathing trunks near the guava bush on the patio right outside the laundry room door. She wanted lunch, but remembered only Lawry's Seasoned Salt, gin on the counter, and Spencer steaks in the freezer. Hungry for a gently grilled cheese sandwich, she ate handfuls of pink guavas instead.

Four

The Donkey woke up around six o'clock, dreaming red wine and steak. Unfortunately, the lady inside the house who loved the Donkey was drinking up the gin and not cooking dinner just yet. The Cat announced the good news to anyone who was listening that the child's jacaranda cake was baked and ready to eat. The girl had decorated it with a happy crumble of wild lupine, and with an antique saucer for a cake plate, she placed it on the dining room table. The child felt the cool room glow and transmute with her creation at the center. Content, she hugged the Cat and sought out her stack of library books – endless stories of little, blond, ambushed wagon train girls living peacefully with Indian families in the woods – until dinnertime. The lady preferred eating at the kitchen table. She served Dennison's chili con carne and corn tortillas, and the Donkey pouted because he said that's not a real dinner. Maybe tomorrow the lady would cook pork chops. But the child didn't listen to the pork chop discussion. Not anymore. She planned to pack a bag that night, or one night soon, and follow the lavender jacaranda blossoms to somewhere else.

*Cory Morrow-Simmons*  
JUST ANOTHER DENZIL

The other day someone asked me if I was Muslim  
I guess I fit the part said I'm

The great debater (just another denzil)  
Nah, I'm more of the devil's advocate  
Like i wanna see impeachment  
Not a dude shot or assassinated  
But I mean I'm sitting here dealing  
Like I'm not complacent  
Nah, I'm just lookin cause  
I sadly gotta face it

Been woke  
But not sleeping is ignorant  
Unless you heard alternative facts  
Though this month suppose alter the fact that  
Slavery and the raping of natives  
Is the past  
and we should be highlighted and moving pass

Sorry, not sorry, you appropriated my culture  
Shocked the labeled savages and monkeys  
Got stronger postures  
And quite frankly I'm lil anxy  
Holding back cause  
I ain't got martyr complex in me

But like I know  
I Shouldn't doubt them  
They'll probably come  
Be Taken out like Fred or Malcolm

I wish I was from Wakanda  
So I can be the Black Panther  
Get a lil sploitation  
Flip the script on the mass incarceration  
Throw some black dynamite  
And blow the scene

Mortified that mortal men claiming  
That the children of the sun aren't blessings  
To the earth  
and that they should be sold whipped chained and  
casted as serfs...  
Shit, I wish....  
my people were treated like dirty  
and so was his  
Her's  
your's

Kinda harder standing in crowd  
when you're stickin out  
It was kinda hard to find the light  
When the damp cave might  
take it out  
But hope illuminates  
I mean the underground  
Railroad and negro spirituals  
Instilled that we could be separated  
from the depraved  
King's dream been storming  
But will freedom rain?

*Rick Park*  
LOST GOD

(Flyer on a Phone Pole)

he goes by many names,  
Yahweh, Adonai—but  
never responds when called.

Last seen (if ever)  
in a burning bush. Fond  
of fire and flood.

Warning—known to be  
jealous, vengeful,  
abandons offspring.

If found, do not return.  
Send instead, directly to the infinite—  
he'll be more at home there.

*Jen DeParma*

THE LAST TO KNOW

With my dad it was slowly realizing he wasn't ever leaving  
waiting all that time for us to take him home  
while with the cat it was her meowing at me still  
as if I could help could take away the pain in her  
but the dog she knew before anyone and off she went  
into the woods to die by herself buried in the ferns.

Was she only at the road so you didn't know  
couldn't be sure she was coming here for you  
or was she standing in the doorway patiently waiting  
while you wobbled and wasted away wondering  
why so much pain or was she out gathering flowers  
unaware that you were so close to finishing up your business?

Were you ready to go or did I rush you or are all  
of us ready when the pain gets that powerful encompassing  
consuming our last days so it's hard to remember  
smiling faces how laughter feels the moments of joining  
when everything in your life seems perfect and  
connected to something so much bigger and you  
forgive everyone and feel so grateful for everything  
it's there I want to die it's there I want to live.



## HONORABLE MENTIONS

*Rene Diedrich*  
A LETTER FROM PURGATORY

I have never been so good with words, but death had made me more articulate. It is nothing like we think it is. Death that is. But then again neither is life unless you're like us. We are called cockroach people. Remember from that crazy book you showed me by some Mexicali lawyer who liked to party? You sat there on the step with me, that tour turned accordion frantically rising inside as our father and sisters and brothers and cousins and everyone we ever knew ate meat and corn, then pink cake because it was someone's sweet 16 party. You kept telling me: "She is not sweet! She is 16! She's six months pregnant. Hypocrisy!"

I liked the way you wore skinny jeans on your long, thick legs, a pair of chucks and your torn and faded Iron Maiden T-shirt instead of some gaudy dress made of glittery fabric in bright, shiny colors.

But that was not the first time I knew. I knew way before then. You were five and tugging at the dress your mother made you wear, cussing at those damned buckle shoes. You caught me staring at you and your scraped knees and put me on blast.

"Why you looking at my road rash?"

"It's so cool..."

And that was when I knew.

We were all poor, illegals, wet backs who didn't give a shit what the gringos said, but baby girl, you were worse off than any homie in Wilmas, and the other girls said you were weird because you had no dresses and never wore ribbings in your thick, black hair.

The boys would tease you, too. But you didn't cry or tattle. You stood up and said, "Come on!" and every puta that made a move ended up in a ball on the ground holding his balls

as you laughed like some evil witch.

I would catch your eye and feel the flame in mine as the sun sunk into the great black mystery of your eyes.

You proved yourself, and Bangers were always trying to recruit you. But my breezy was not part of no gang. She is an army of one.

*Nova Love*  
OCEAN

I need the ocean, to cry my tears  
To wash me, unclean and salty  
To take me in, like a lover  
Embrace me, like a mother  
Punish me, like a father  
Tease me, like a brother  
Miss me, like a sister  
Forget me, like a child  
To know me, to not know me  
To listen  
But not hear me

I need

The ocean

To cry

My tears

Storm Child

She looked up from where she sat on the swept dirt floor and noticed how the shadows cast by the two lamp flames competed with one another across the Grandmother's face. Litra craned her neck. It seemed to her that she always had to look up, looking up into faces lit from above, the black nostrils and pink roofs of people's mouths. She looked up the legs of her family, the brown columns of flesh wrinkled at the knees, up at the dark earth-toned tattoos of those who had luckily grown old enough to pass the Simbaru-Tuksoru. One of the lamp flames swayed, and the shadows sparred again as the first words of Grandmother Latula's story began.

The spoken language of the people of Karr is a roiling thing, a distant, purring thunderstorm, captured like a flying beetle on a tether. Litra liked the stories that were like those storms. They started low and slow, then walked peak to peak over the Winafro Mountains until booming battles stood overhead. Litra thought that during those storms she was just like everyone else in the village, who then had to look up to hear the words of their elder's elders.

This night's story began so. Some always present shepherdess in Litra's mind began leading each word into the part of her memory that held each story like the cave corral held the winter flock. She wondered why not everyone could recall and retell the stories of their elders. In a brief reverie she smiled with gleaming small teeth, eyes closed and head lolled back because she knew that she could just open the fence and a story would prance out for her.

In a moment of youthful forgetfulness, Litra spoke out the question that had formed deep within. “Why can I remember all our stories and no one else can, Grandma?” No sooner was it spoken than she felt her insides clench at the realization that she had spoken over the elder storyteller, which no one had ever done in Litra’s short lifetime. Her eyes opened, and looking up she expected to see lightning in the eyes of all those who loved her, but Grandmother Latula’s tender aging lips turned up into a brief smile. “Ah, the Wisdom-Keeper begins to awaken,” she said. “Listen storm-child, and soon you will learn the answer you seek, our people have a story about that.”

While Litra looked up, the lamp flames danced, and she saw that the Grandmother’s face was lit, but somehow un-shadowed. Litra replied unthinking, “Of course we do, how would we know about it if there wasn’t”? Grandmother Latula’s eyes did spark like lightning then, and as she laughed out, the pink roof of her mouth looked as beautiful as a fresh caught fish held up in new moonlight.

*Vinnie Peloso*

MY FAVORITE SENIOR CITIZEN

For Ruth Mountaingrove (1923 -2016)

My favorite senior citizen has bad breath.  
Her teeth are bad, number less than ten.  
But her smile rocks my world.

My favorite senior citizen does not like men.  
A radical lesbian feminist,  
she always laughs at my jokes.

My favorite senior citizen looks  
like a misshapen lump of secondhand clothes.  
Her breasts hang to her waist.

Her hair is clean but thin.  
She wears no makeup, scent or polish.  
Yet her fingers are long and expressive.

And she sings like an angel in heat.  
Eyes bright behind cataracts,  
her mind is sharp as her wit.

I don't know why we are friends.  
Maybe I remind her of her youngest,  
a suicide twenty years dead.

Maybe she is the woman I am  
when lusting for other women,  
hating men's stupid ways,

not giving a fuck how we look,  
act, sound or smell.  
She looks like heaven to me.

Always laughing, curious, honest and sharp  
as the warm, wet, sour sweetness  
of our first soul kiss.

She in her usual sweats,  
me in my mini, fishnets and heels.

*Angela Powell*

HUMAN STORY

Sometimes I see my life like unfinished verses and words on book pages scattered on the earth... I strain trying to make sense and see the meaning of this language...sadness comes like rain and blurs out some of the unfinished scattered prose...sometimes the winds pick up the pieces and take them somewhere new.... If books had thoughts I wonder what they would think about the person reading it. Does it read the reader's face? Every line, freckle and sharp curve telling a story of its own? Does it stare in wonder at the eyes gazing into its body, peering between the covers? Does it love the hands that hold it open, the hands that turn its pages, the finger that follows its words, the lips that tremble, murmur, whisper, speak aloud its truth? Does it wonder about the other books around it and what truths they have inside? If books were human would words be the bone or the body? Does its spine hurt from being opened and closed time after time? Does it feel neglected on its shelf, in its drawer, bag, or under the bed. Does it long to be read or feel alone if no one has ever read it? Is it happy with its genera, its chapters? Is it happy the way it ends?



*Benjamin Green*  
PROVIDENCE

A small act  
That needs doing--

Or is it  
Something else?

Every spring,  
The heron arrives

An embodiment of grace,  
An ornamentation,  
Stalking gophers  
In an un-mowed field.

Graceful  
Gracious  
Is there a difference?

For me, more than beauty now,  
The heron symbolizes *patience*:  
The willingness to wait  
Longer than I can watch.  
The willingness to kill,  
To swallow whole,  
Probably still alive,  
To appease hunger, appetite.

There was no promise  
of *satiation*.

Once swallowed, the heron  
Begins to listen  
To the ground  
With its feet again. Once more.  
*Waiting....*

I have seen them kill  
What is too large to swallow.

*Linda Kuckuk*  
LOOKING BACK

She holds it out to me.

She didn't know at the time just how important it really is. She made me laugh when she squatted down near the line—a baby's squat—her little legs already so close to the ground that the bend of her chunky knees was just a formality. But she squatted next to the long, long white line so big to her; so tiny.

Gently, methodically, she brushed backward and forward, backward and forward, her dancing fingers all it took to erase the sparkles of white from the sand, to fly them on the breeze and collect them in her hand, her jacket, her hair; the dust of the line becoming part of her, the threshold to some magic place only seen by her imagination as though her little body were become part of the line.

She was closer to the heat of the diamond and smell of the turf than most two-year olds would dream even during baseball nights of summer slumber. On this pre-game field, she was surrounded by white dust that draws a line from Home to First, closer to the magic of a real baseball game than most children will ever be.

The stadium seats are empty in the photo I hold. Soon they would be full of hot dogs and peanuts, baseball mitts, and excited fans. Aaryn would eat a Dodger Dog slathered in mustard and freshly chopped onion, the piquant smell will come home in her jacket and tee-shirt. She'll fall asleep before we get there, and I'll pick bits of onion off her pillow the next morning.

“Take me out to the ballgame!” my daughter will sing. Would sing. Did sing.

The first-baseline went on as far as her baby eyes could see, starting one side of her, going

on the length of the field when she gathered that Dodger Dust from the stadium floor. Before Dad could scoop her up, a groundskeeper was already on the scene, and I let my laughing camera swing down on its strap to look at her through my real eyes, but she had turned away and back over Dad's shoulder toward the man, the man who was fixing her line, her long, long line of sparkly white, putting back the dust, where she had taken it up in her fingers, her hand now glittered with baseline.

The man mended the line. Never looking her way, he didn't smile, he didn't frown. His eyes kept to the ground, to his domain, to the line that will now be a just a little crooked until the players take over what Aaryn began and shatter her line abruptly with their balls and cleats and spit, their line from Home to First just a little bit out-of-place. A little jaunty. A little disobedient. A tiny bit to the left of right just like her.

For reasons not entirely clear, Dodger Stadium was our community baseline. Season tickets, friends, family. A sort of central gathering place of Oooh's and Aah's and blasts from the organ and one or two sing-a-longs. When she was older, Disneyland took the place of Dodger Stadium. But when my daughter was small, the sights and smells of Saturday ball games were magic.

My hand feels old as I hold the photo thick with memory. There are no ball players there. The stadium seats are empty. Unknown faces blur the background and do not see the magic dust in my daughter's hand. The Dad is laughing, the Groundskeeper is fixing, Mom is saying, "Thank you, Baby for the Magic Dust."

I look back, searching the photo for her, as though she is here now, reaching the memory out to me. Tears wash my face as she holds it forever in her hand: the magic dust.

*Nancy Wheeler*  
CALL IN THE DOGS

My father sits there, his mouth open, breathing so imperceptibly that I wonder whether he is dead or alive. His hair pokes around in unruly patches. I am reminded that I should give him a haircut. His cheeks are sunken, his lips purple. The lifeline of oxygen tubing marks the sides of his face because he cranks it up too tight under his nose most of the time. Ninety-nine years of action, slowed to a slender pulse between life and death. "The Lord don't want me, and the devil won't take me," he tells us routinely, "but you can't bury a man that's walking."

This Saturday we will have a limited edition celebration of his birthday with only twenty-five friends from the Arcata Senior Center for a rib dinner. Until this year, it was a hundred or more on his birthday at his house in Janesville, California, where he lived for thirty years.

I hated his birthday. He expected me to come to his house and feed an unknown number of show-uppers that he'd invited, folks who worked in the post office, and grocery clerks at Safeway. All of the neighbors came. Until the past few years, family members flew into Reno, rented cars, and drove the seventy-five miles for the occasion.

The annual dinner was the least of the problems. I arrived days early to clean up the mess that was his life after my mother died: papers, magazines, and junk mail piled on all surfaces and the grit that accumulated under them. I ran a Cloroxing marathon before I dared to cook in that kitchen.

Next came mucking out the garage where the food would be dished up before folks gathered on the lawns to eat at tables borrowed from the Jolly Elders' Hall. "Oh, the garage is all right," he advised, not seeming to notice, or care about, the huge blotches of oil that had drained from his 1976 Chevy onto the cement, the plastic Pennzoil containers that had been

thrown helter-skelter on the floor, or paper wrappers of fast food that had finally fallen out of his pick-up due to crowded conditions. One time, when I cleaned out his truck, there was a colony of maggots ensconced and thriving behind the seats. A zillion spiders found safe housing in Dad's garage. Dirt and leaves collected under the ramp, around the freezer, and stuck to the oil patches on the floor.

"The garage is NOT all right," I countered, scolding him as if he were a child and then immediately feeling guilty for handling it that way. "All we need is for our guests to get sick, retch their guts out, and sue us."

My father sat and watched as I attempted to do housework that had piled up over the months since I last visited. He then proceeded to call various folks with, "Are you coming to my party?" and the members of the band that he had goaded into playing, "Don't forget to come and play at my party next Saturday." Then, as a reminder, he called Norman, who had been nagged and had agreed to cook the chickens, and Mike, who would barbecue the lamb. I found this shameless coercion despicable.

This afternoon, at two-thirty, twenty-five seniors will show up, and we will celebrate his ninety-ninth birthday, at our house. "Late," he reminds me. We are late because I spent the month of his real birthday packing up, cleaning up and repairing his house, in Janesville, to become a rental. In the process, there were seven trips to the dump, countless donation trips to charitable organizations, dozens of phone calls to chimney sweeps, pump repair shops, painters, carpet layers, handymen, appliance stores, and my husband to see if he was surviving in his job as my father's caretaker at home.

The last of my father's belongings is now crammed into our shop or his bedroom: his saxophone, violin, his black tap dancing shoes, guitar, music and photos of his lost home and

location. A displaced person, he is. The precious things of his life are difficult for him to locate as they are pushed into a space that is not easily accessed by a man barely able to walk, even with his walker.

"You can't bury a man that's walking," he tells us so often that it has become a joke between my husband and me, a mocking refrain that we pass between ourselves as we roll our eyes.

Judy, a generous lady, will be at the party today. Judy, who my father has pressured into helping him become a millionaire, in his fading moments, by selling these treasures of his life on e-Bay. She sits at his table at lunch in the Senior Center.

*I think, "I must warn Judy that she has to set the boundaries with my father. He thinks his Navajo blanket is worth \$800, his 40's Boy Scout knife worth \$250, and his painting, on a piece of Masonite, by Clyde Farlin, of a Wells Fargo stagecoach, a \$5,000 out-of-perspective classic. He will drive poor Judy crazy with his demands."*

I remember cowboys' advice when leaving a campsite, "Call in the dogs and piss on the fire." I think of how this applies to my father's state, his "dogs," the possessions he treasures, and the "fire," his eroding life.

I have purchased all of the food for his party, but he insists on buying the booze.

"Take me to Safeway to buy the wine and beer," the old codger says, the minute I walk in the door from my morning walk.

"Give me a minute to catch my breath, and I'll get your oxygen bottle into the car."

"Get my jacket from the bedroom."

"Okay." I check out the front of one of his jackets that he has thrown onto the floor, check it out for spots of food. It is a constant war to keep my father's things off the floor and clean. The same things that drove me out of his nest as a teenager have invaded my nest today.

His reality and mine have shifted so far out of alignment, communication between us has diminished to his orders and my replies. He attempts to engage me in topics such as, "You can cure cancer with baking soda and maple syrup, but doctors don't want to admit it because they get kick-backs from pharmaceuticals' companies who make all of these crazy medications."

"Oh yeah?" I respond, unenthusiastic. *Where do you go from here?* I think.

When I return from his bedroom, he is bent horizontally over his walker, mincing his way down the ramp into the garage. I open the car door. He backs the walker to the seat and falls in, straining to pull his feet in after him. I give him the tubing that is keeping him alive. He presses it over his ears and under his nose while I manipulate his walker and its basket into the trunk of the car. I go back and close his car door. *This trip to buy the booze will take over an hour of my day.* I vacillate between feeling pity for him and pity for myself. Though I do the lion's share, my devoted husband, Joe, has also sacrificed while my father's life takes its time slipping away. "You can't bury a man that's walking."

We do the bath. He wants to wear a white starched shirt and a string tie. I rifle through Joe's closet and find a shirt that will fit Dad.

The guests arrive. They are my age and younger.

"I don't have an enemy in the world," he tells us. "I've outlived them all."

A generous trio sets up in the clean garage, a bass, keyboard and sax. My father invited five musicians, but two had other engagements, *like doing the laundry*, I think.

The music begins with my father calling out the favorites, "Good Night Irene," "If Ever I Would Leave You," "Kansas City." Some sing. He is disappointed no one will dance with him and his walker.

Joe and I finish setting up the buffet. The weather is balmy. Folks dish up and sit at the tables on the deck with a view of the bay and sea beyond. This old, old man from another era hobbles out to take his place at the end of one of the tables. I push his oxygenator out onto the deck, plug it in, and hand him the plastic tether to his life. I pull the chair away from the table, wait for him to sit down, and then pull one side close and then the other. The party lasts for hours with "his" friends conversing more with Joe and me than with my father. They are our contemporaries. His have pissed on their fires long ago.

My destiny is to experience a close-up view of the end of life, my father's. When will he piss on the fire? He wants to live to be a hundred.

Will he make it? Will I? You can't bury a man that's walking.



*Amy Peterson*

MAYBE

Our Milky Way is about 13 billion years old.  
It's average-sized.  
There may be as many as  
100 billion solar systems.  
400 billion stars.

There may be as many as 200 billion galaxies  
In our universe.

How many universes are there?  
I think it's safe to say  
That I will never know.

Yet here I stand, on the coast of a continent,  
By the ocean of a planet  
That is a speck among specks.

Yes, we're important.  
In our own tiny way.  
But I feel different about things  
When I can step back from myself  
And realize that my life is not a blip.

Sometimes I stand  
Under a clear, starry sky  
And stare at the lights  
That shine on me from past lives,  
Past futures, because they are so far away.

And knowing at least some of those stars  
Have planets orbiting around them,  
I imagine that some of those planets  
Are just the right distance from their star.  
That they have oceans, and they harbor life.  
And that maybe, just maybe, those lives  
Are just as unimportant as mine.  
But maybe together, our lives are more than blips.

I wonder if their worlds  
Have countries and states,

If their people have friendships,  
As fragile as our own.  
If they can love,  
As well as hate.  
If they have struggled with war,  
As our planet has.

And I imagine, if they would not  
Give us some advice. Probably not, but still.  
I like to imagine that they would tell us  
How to be OK.

Right now, in my tiny little world,  
In my tiny little less-than-a-blip,  
There are people who are so angry  
Amongst themselves  
That friendships are ending.  
Relationships are coming to a halt.  
People are dying inside, because our tiny little country  
Is split in two, inside of every person.  
Friends and families are turning against each other  
And it's coursing through the population like a riptide.

I have come to the realization that I am less than a blip.  
But that does not mean that I am in any way indifferent  
From the friction between the people of a country  
that is supposed to be united. All the people I love are also less than blips  
In the space-time continuum. And I want so badly for us to realize that no matter what's going  
on  
In our government, each individual can agree to disagree.

Yes, I know I'm a dreamer.  
But when I stare a clear lit sky, drifting between reality and imagination,  
Knowing that our galaxy is 13 billion years old, that many of the stars I am staring at right now  
are long gone, and that the very "rough estimate" of stars in the universe is a 1 with twenty-four  
zeros after it, I am convinced that maybe, maybe, maybe, that's the only way to be.

“Why?”

The small child sat in the corner, watching the teacher nervously as he repeated his question.

“Why did the pilgrims come to Avalon?”

A murmur ran through the classroom as the other children considered the question.

“You’re stupid,” one told him.

“Nobody cares about *why*, doofus!” said another, larger, student. The little one just waited quietly in his corner as the teacher shushed her class and approached his seat.

“I will speak to you after instruction, student sixty-seven,” she said, and he nodded mutely. The teacher returned to the viewing board and resumed her lesson, occasionally tapping the lines of writing for added emphasis.

“The pilgrims came four-hundred cycles ago, in their vessels made of strange Terran metals,” she said.

“They raped Avalon, stealing her water, her ore, and her very earth, but even that was not enough.”

The one-hundred children in the teacher’s unit shifted in boredom, and only one stayed still: the bright eyes of student sixty-seven stared out at her from the shadowy corner. They were the only part of him that moved.

“The pilgrims tried to be our friends, but they could not understand our traditions, or our lifestyle, or our rights. They cared only for our science, our technology. They tried to be our friends, but all they wanted were our secrets.”

Not a single child shifted now, because every one of them could tell that this was far more than just a lesson.

“We killed the pilgrims, every last one. We had no other choice.”

The teacher’s long, delicate fingers brushed the viewing board, and the room blackened. Two-hundred bright and curious eyes gleamed back at her through the darkness.

“They wanted what was ours, what we could not afford to share... but they lacked the skill to take it from us. And so they paid the price. Remember, children: secrets should seldom be shared, and a world can only bear one master.”

She surveyed her first grade class, deciding that they had reached their processing limit for the day.

“Class is dismissed.”

Ninety-nine children scrambled out of the chamber, off to entertain themselves in one of the far more interesting areas of the ship. Number sixty-seven approached her, solemn and shy as always.

The teacher looked down at him curiously.

“You wondered why?” she asked. His tiny head motioned his assent.

*One hundred students*, the teacher mused. *A hundred children and only one thought to ask*. Her expression was gentle but sad as she answered his question.

“The pilgrims came to Avalon because they had no other choice.”

The boy looked up at her, waiting. She laid a hand on his downy purple crest and knelt down to look into his eyes.

“Their planet was dying, Sixty-seven. Their sun had gone cold, and their planet, third from the sun, was unable to survive.”

“They needed our technology, child, but so did we, and we could not afford to offer up our precious secrets. But they had no other choice.”

She stroked his scales gently as he climbed into her lap. The teacher smiled at her student, the only one in the entire class that had thought to ask the necessary question. Sighing slightly, she finished her story.

“Their planet was dying, student sixty-seven.”

“Like ours?”

“Like ours.”