vestiges

commonplaces
beauty, plus pity
a snail leaves its slime
globed fruit
commonplaces

paulette cedano
turner flynn
mason hilado
When a person is feeling blue, a bit of time and maybe several scoops of his/her favorite ice cream is enough to bring about a lighter mood. When a person suffers from depression, that person may resort to taking prescription or nonprescription drugs, special counseling, or even institutionalization in order to treat their condition. For the most part, the condition of these patients is curable if s/he realizes s/he has a problem. However, when a patient suffers from emotional repression and does not realize that s/he faces many emotional burdens, the patient may develop strange hobbies as a coping mechanism. The narrator in Jayne Anne Phillip’s “Bluegill” is one such patient who suffers from emotional repression of various situations in her past and copes with having many sexual relationships with men. This “eclectic” hobby, as Disheroon-Green says, comes from the desire to validate herself and feel a human connection (273). Brian Jarvis states that “‘Bluegill’ is “a lyrical address from a mother to her unborn child” (200). The narrator explains to the baby how she undergoes a transformation as she finally discovers a sense of self and an opportunity to break the chain of wrongdoings done to her throughout her life.
Prior to becoming pregnant, the narrator is an unhappy woman who was raised in an environment that bred insecurity and emotional death. The source of the narrator’s psychiatric dilemmas starts in early childhood with the way she was treated by her parents. Although not much insight is given about the actual circumstances of the narrator’s youth, she describes that when she was younger, she kept a “menagerie of treasures and dust” (Phillips 120), which included many ordinary objects, including pieces of jewelry, rhinestones, lipstick, slippers, and a “man’s blue silk tie” (Phillips 120). The narrator also describes her circumstance as “alone in [her] high bed, the dark, the dark” (Phillips 120). The clues she gives are enough to say that, as a child, she did not receive much attention from her parents, and the result of her desire for affection was the development of her collection. As the narrator talks to her unborn child, she experiences nostalgia brought upon by thinking about her past—but she does not experience it in the generally positive way that most people do. As described by D.S. Werman, “normal nostalgia” is generally associated with homesickness and the “memories of one’s past.” In some cases, pathological forms of nostalgia can develop in patients, commonly seen as “attempted mastery through idealization and displacement of a painful past” (Werman). The narrator tells her baby about her past so that she can displace her feelings about it onto the child—yet do so in a positive manner instead of taking out her frustrations on an undeserving, innocent little human unlike what her parents did to her.
The emotional death the narrator felt in her childhood manifested itself in her adulthood as an intense desire to have sexual relations with men. When she was with men, she did not recall names, but she remembers small details about their socioeconomic class or the setting in which they had sex. She tells her unborn baby, “there were many fathers” (Phillips 118) and describes some scenarios. The narrator recalls several rooms with sensory details like a “truck, a rattling of nuts and bolts,” “a long car with mechanical windows that zimmed as they moved smoothly up and down” (Phillips 118), and the varied economic statuses of her partners, including “men with offices, married men and their secretaries… sanitary weekend joggers, [and] movie reviewers” (Phillips 119). These are only a few of the many different details she recounts about her experiences with men. Sarah Robertson points out how the narrator “reduces men to a generic figure” (132), categorizing them as mere objects of use instead of regarding them as human. The descriptions that the narrator provides are only “fleeting moment[s]” (Disheroon-Green 273) in her quest to find meaning and connection in her life. The narrator is with all of the men because she wishes to feel alive, to feel a connection, to be awakened from her emotional death: all she wanted was to “escape the confines of the home, hence the vast array of places and people she recounts” (Robertson 133). Rather than fall in love with any man and seek a meaningful connection with him, argues Disheroon-Green, the narrator is “too enamored with life in the fast lane” (275); furthermore, Jarvis rightly notes that she does not “grasp [her] motivations or fully comprehend her
behavior” (197). The observation made about the narrator's perspective about the men further proves that she was dead inside and that she sought desperately to have meaning in her life.

When she becomes pregnant and is in the midst of telling her child the story of her life, the narrator realizes that she finally has someone with whom she can connect—she has formed the emotional connection she had always sought since her youth. She was already pregnant when she describes a scene with a young man who had followed her home in pursuit of a sexual encounter with her. Although she could have potentially had sex with him—even guaranteeing to the baby that it would be safe, “floating, interior and protected” (Phillips 118)—she eventually decides to reject the young man’s advances. She confesses that she is true to her child and states that she is “in [its] employ” and “very nearly married” (Phillips 118) to it. The scene with the young man “captures a complex of emotions” (Jarvis 200) and shows how the narrator has a relationship with her baby not only as a mother but as “employment, marriage, [and] a bargain” (Squier 20). Susan Squier explains that the “fetus is put in a position as the one in control” (20), which illustrates how the mother fully submits to it. In truth, she fears that the “rhythmic lapsing of [her] love for [the baby]” (Phillips 118) would wane. The mother is wholly dedicated to her baby as she tells it that she has left its father “purely” (Phillips 119) in an effort to have a more positive, bonding relationship with it. The father of the baby did not seem interested in the baby’s well-being, so rather than force him to stay in the child’s life and potentially subjugate it to the same cruel treatment
she received in her youth, the mother simply let the father go so that she could raise the child in an environment that would benefit it. The narrator has developed a love that is felt deeply within her and wishes nothing for the best for her child.

The mother relates her own experience as a child to the experiences of the children stolen by the Pied Piper, yet she tells the story with a happy ending like the one she wishes for her own child and herself. The folk tale starts with a man known as the Pied Piper who promised the town of Hamlin that he would rid it of all its mice and pests for a reasonable pay. When the citizens agreed to have him remove the rats, he took out a small fife and started playing it; the mice and rats all came out of the homes of the citizens and followed the Pied Piper out of the town and into a river, where they fell in and drowned. However, the Piper was promised more money than what the citizens could pay, so they made up every kind of excuse to avoid paying him. One day, the Pied Piper returned with a vengeance and played the fife again—however, the second time, the children all came out of the homes of the parents and followed the Piper, never to be seen again (Grimm). Although none of the citizens knew what had happened to the children who had followed the Piper, the narrator of “Bluegill” imagined her own outcome to the story to have a more positive ending. The children in the narrator’s ending “have grown no taller and experienced no disease” and “have no interest in talk or travel” (Phillips 117). The Piper is a sort of “father fit for animalistic angels” (Phillips 117) and could always care for them and play with them as they continue their
spectral existence forever. The reason why the mother fantasizes about this ending for the children of the Pied Piper is because they end up being happy and cared for—something that she had always wished for herself. The children never aged, so they would never have the chance to reflect about their own lives and feel the twisting pang of nostalgia as they think of the lost past. The existence that the children lead also “embodies the in-between nature of the fetus” (Squier 20) as an entity that is not quite alive yet obviously not dead: just a happy existence inside its mother’s womb like the Pied Piper’s children are simple, happy entities. At the end of the narrative, she tells her child about “lost fishermen” (Phillips 120) who are “pale and blue, glowing” (Phillips 120) approaching her in the shore of the beach she visits. The men, like ghosts, are visions that she is only able to see because of the influence of the child in her womb, this being indicative of the transformation the narrator has gone through. The influence of the baby allows her to see life through a different perspective, seeing things that she might have missed before because of potential blocks in her way of thinking. The men are the grown versions of the Pied Piper’s children, and the narrator is able to see them because she finally feels safe and satisfied like the Pied Piper’s children felt.

When a person is raised in an environment that causes him or her emotional damage, sometimes the damage is incurable or even goes completely unnoticed for his/her whole life. Jayne Anne Phillips explores the nature of identity and motherhood in the Postmodern Era and sheds insight into the psychology of an emotionally damaged person. The
narrator in “Bluegill” went from being a shell of a woman who sought attention from men for validation and dreaming of a better life for herself to a woman who has found satisfaction as she carries her unborn baby and plans to raise it in a completely different way from the way she was raised. Squier explains that “a complicated relationship exists between the gestating woman and the fetus, a relationship that has social...dimensions” (19), and that relationship is what brings meaning to the emotionally-empty narrator in “Bluegill.” After an unknown amount of time struggling to find human connection in her life, the narrator finally finds it, quite literally, within herself. The fateful day that her baby was conceived was the day that its mother found a new meaning in her life.
Works Cited


Before the Renaissance, art was nothing more than imagery for mystic symbolism and picture storybooks. Art up into the medieval ages was used for this purpose, relating to the poor and ignorant peasants who attended church the stories and events recorded in the Bible. However, as the Renaissance began, art took on a completely new look. Art was still used to decorate churches and to show stories from the Bible, but artists started using new techniques to make the art more naturalistic and appealing to viewers. They were abandoning the traditions of the past and creating whole new pieces of art never seen before. They were also incorporating the ideas of humanism into their art to as well as referencing the Greco-Roman period; moreover, they were being viewed with respect and appreciation because of the talent they possessed and the new styles of paintings they were creating. The first of these great artists to show such skill and genius was Tommaso di Ser Giovanni di Simone, famously known as Masaccio. Masaccio first demonstrated his talent and knowledge in his Holy Trinity, which he painted in the Church of Santa Maria Novella. Masaccio’s Holy Trinity is the first example to show the transition of medieval iconography into the masterpieces produced during the Renaissance.
The *Holy Trinity* displays the first known use of linear perspective in a painting. Masaccio’s incorporation of linear perspective creates the illusion that there is actually a recession into the wall when the viewer is kneeling and looking up at the painting. This happens because “The vanishing-point of the foreshortened barrel vault is at the top of the raised step behind the kneeling donors, roughly at the spectator’s eye-level” (Wohl). Masaccio accomplished this by “appling to humankind and earthbound works the mathematical truths of a purposeful nature believed they existed as they were presented to him by the ceaseless revolutions of the heaven” (Goffen 103). Masaccio recognized that the world is composed orderly and mathematically. He extracted this knowledge and made use of it in his painting. Rona Goffen writes that “Masaccio’s Trinity fresco has played a pivotal role in the history of art as both a definitive example of early Renaissance linear perspective and as a kind of prophetic forerunner of the perspective method discussed nearly a decade later by Leon Battista Alberti” (90). Masaccio set the new standard for art, and artists who saw this and Masaccio’s other works were inspired and wanted to learn and master linear perspective so that their paintings would also display the depth as Masaccio’s; as a result, they began to abandon their medieval roots of just painting imagery and copying their masters. Equipped with linear perspective and the new techniques of the Renaissance, artists were now able to bring forth their masterpieces.

As the art of the Renaissance was shifting and changing, art was no longer about iconography. Art was now being used for decoration
because it was beautiful and made one feel emotions when looked upon. The viewer could contemplate what ideas were being expressed in the painting. One might ask “What was the artist thinking when he painted this?” or “What skill and wonder is displayed. How gifted must he have been to have painted this?” Rich patrons were also given the opportunity to immortalize themselves into paintings so that they could show their support, too, by having their portrait included into the art as an on-looking bystander. Also, as people’s standard of living was increasing and they were being better educated, art was no longer needed as just religious, didactic imagery. Biblical scenes were still being painted, but they were no longer just important images on a wall. Rather, art was being transformed into a holy experience for those going to church. As one entered a cathedral, bright colors shone forth and cast a shimmering radiance to the heavenly scenes painted all around on the walls. “Visions from the most high,” someone exclaims as one takes in the aura that biblical scenes project. The power and influence that this imagery now has is much more highly evolved than images found in the old medieval churches. It helped a person better connect spiritually and more deeply to the teachings of the church. *Holy Trinity* shows that “in rendering the illusion of the presence of such a mystery, the painter’s naturalism brings to the worshiper’s mundane eyes an elevated, transcendent subject, which he thus sees as in a vision. Masaccio’s naturalism serves his visionary purpose of affording the viewer an initial stage in the vision of the mystery of the Trinity as if beheld in the church itself” (Barolsky). As one gazes upon the *Holy*
Trinity, the naturalism it displays “intensifies the function of the picture as a transmitter of religious experience while, on the other hand, it tends to depreciate this function by propelling the sacred image into the world of rational reality, which is alien to the realm of faith and, in a sense, profanes it” (Schlegel 30). All Masaccio really does in his art is enhance the image spiritually for the benefit of the viewer.

Masaccio’s Holy Trinity brought to the world of art a new aspect that would appear in later Renaissance paintings. Brunelleschi and other architects were bringing back the classical architecture of the past from the Greco-Roman period. Masaccio does this as well. Masaccio “demonstrates not only the Antique features which Brunelleschi was introducing to Florence, but also, in the dramatic foreshortening of the vault, his theories on perspective” (Smith). A coffered ceiling resembling that of the Pantheon in Rome is used as the painting’s ceiling. A painted barrel vault gives the illusion of the image receding back into the wall. Classical columns also stand to each side of the barrel vault further illustrating the painting’s aesthetic nod to the Greco-Roman time period. As people of the Renaissance started to uncover Greco-Roman writings and humanism was becoming popular as a way to live, artists wanted to capture and show these emotions and ideas in their art. They abandoned traditional backgrounds and landscapes and instead painted classical architecture to give tribute to Greco-Roman thinkers. Masaccio’s incorporation of classical architecture helped set forth the new, naturalistic art. It models that of
the Greco-Roman Period but to a higher degree. The classical architecture was “not necessarily concerned with new (pagan) subjects but represents ‘old,’ that is, traditional, Christian subjects in a new way” (Goffen 2). Greco-Roman architecture also helped bring a new look to Christianity. Cathedrals and chapels were decorated in classical architecture and looked beautiful. It inspired artists and served as a model for their own paintings.

Giorgio Vasari writes in his account on Masaccio that the artist “realized that painting is nothing other than the art of imitating all the living things of Nature with their simple colours and design just as Nature produced them, so that anyone who fully follows Nature should be considered a splendid artisan” (101). Masaccio was the first artist to bring about naturalism into Renaissance paintings. His mastery of perspective and technique brought forth breathtaking works of art that are still treasured to this day. His Holy Trinity was the first to abandon medieval traditions used by artists before him. He chose not to copy and repaint what had already been done but rather painted something new. The Holy Trinity is also not just imagery but something truly beautiful and inspiring to behold. It is tragic that such a genius of an artist died so young. One can imagine what Masaccio could have painted and left to us if he had lived a longer life. However, what he accomplished is still remarkable. He opened the door that allowed his artistic heirs to paint true reality. In a way, he was like a father who left an inheritance to his children. Masaccio provided the technique and inspiration needed for those after himself, and he lives on in the
great works of the high masters of the Renaissance and artists of today.

Works Cited


In the film *Silver Linings Playbook*, directed by David O. Russell, the term “excelsior” is a common reoccurrence. The word in itself is most commonly associated with the main character, Pat, in instances where he is reminded of his not-too-distant past. It is under Pat’s belief that although there exists rough situations in the present, brighter days exist in the future as long as one makes the proper adjustments. In saying this distinct expression, Pat hopes to remember his quest for self-betterment in an effort to overcome the shortcomings of his psyche. Pat recognizes excelsior as a unique coping method to deal with possible barriers to his much sought-after goal. One could argue that Pat’s father, Pat Senior, could potentially be a blockade due to conflict of personal interests. Although related by blood, like most immediate family, similarities and differences are apparent among both in terms of their mental states. Pat and Pat Senior are members of the Solitano family who share regrets due to their mental predicaments. Although they may be affiliated with one another, their relationship is dysfunctional, largely caused by differing views on the truth. *Silver Linings Playbook* exhibits the reality of conflicting human behavior commonly asso-
ciated with father-son relations.

Pat and his father have diverse beliefs on the concept of honesty. For instance, Pat is a firm believer in speaking the truth. When having dinner at his friend Ronnie’s house, Pat met Tiffany for the first time. An awkward encounter arises between Tiffany and her sister, the wife of Ronnie, and as a result, Tiffany announces that she wants to leave. Before leaving, Tiffany asks Pat if he is going to walk her home. In response, Pat says “You have poor social skills. You have a problem.” Having just met someone, most people on average would not speak their mind so freely about that person. One can claim Pat lacks social restraints when it boils down to his expression of what is factual or what he believes to be true. Basically, Pat can be a tad too honest depending on the circumstance. He admits to this while speaking with Tiffany about what she would like in return for delivering the letter he wrote to Nikki when he says “I don’t have a filter when I talk.” On the contrary, Pat Senior isn’t as believing in the truth as his son is. He is more inclined to hide the truth from others for the better of himself. When Pat is taken home by his mother for the first time after being released from the Karel Psychiatric Facility in Baltimore, Pat Senior is surprised to see his son. Pat asks his father what he has been doing with himself, and Pat Senior tells his son that he plans on starting a restaurant. Pat then asks his father about how he plans on paying for it and asks Pat Senior if it will be funded by his bookmaking. Pat Senior questions his son knew about his bookmaking, and Pat promptly tells his father that his mother had told him. Pat Senior isn’t quite fond of this and asks his wife “Why? Why Dolores? Why did you say
that to him?” Aside from hiding the truth, Pat Senior is more manipulative in the ways he handles scenarios. When a parlay is established between Pat Senior and his friend Randy, Pat leaves the house not wanting to have anything to do with it. Tiffany concludes that the only way to get Pat to take part is by telling him that his wife Nikki will be going to the dance competition. Pat Senior sides with this conclusion, compounding it by claiming “It’s a white lie. What’s that matter? That’s no big deal. So it’s a little lie.” Pat Senior is under the assumption that lying to his son will make things better in the long run. He expresses this by saying “You know. We gotta leave a trail of bread crumbs so that he can live his life without ruining it.”

Pat and Pat Senior, just like every person in existence, have psychological issues that help define their personalities. For example, Pat is bipolar and with this comes mood swings. Typically, the mood is shifted from calm to emotionally unstable within a blink of an eye. After Pat finished reading one of the books that Nikki teaches to her class (Hemingway’s *A Farewell to Arms*), he throws the book out of the upstairs window, breaking the glass in the process. Pat then goes on a rant to his parents on why he became so upset, but nothing he proposed was justifiable by any means. Another instance of Pat portraying signs of being bipolar is when he goes to therapy for the first time. When he signs in at the office, he hears his wedding song playing in the background. Being reminded of a part of his past that he would like to forget, he asks the receptionist in an assertive fashion if she could turn the song off. When the receptionist informs Pat that she cannot turn off the song, Pat freaks out and starts to frantically search for a
speaker. He walks over to a magazine rack to see if the speaker is behind it and throws the rack aside. Only when he has stirred up enough commotion and becomes the center of attention does Pat realize the error of how he had handled the situation and calms down. Similarly, Pat Senior has a psychological issue of his own, but it differs from Pat’s. Pat Senior has undiagnosed obsessive compulsive disorder, especially when the Philadelphia Eagles are in the picture. On a Sunday when the Eagles are playing, Pat has a disagreement with his mother regarding his medications. Pat refuses to take his medications, and in an effort to end the discussion, he leaves his mother to go for a run. Pat Senior stops Pat from leaving and encourages Pat to stay and watch the game with him. Pat agrees to stay for the first part of the game and proceeds to sit down on the sofa. When Pat seats himself, he asks his father what he has in his hand. Pat Senior shows his son a handkerchief that is folded in a fixed fashion. Afterwards, Pat Senior turns three remotes in a specific order towards a particular direction. Pat then says “That’s OCD. That’s crazy.” Pat Senior strongly believes that most everything has to be in a certain position or done in a determined way for a desired outcome to ensue. With his undiagnosed OCD comes a more critical mindset. When Pat is ready to give a letter he wrote to Nikki for Tiffany to deliver, he tells his father that he took one of his envelopes. Pat Senior is not too fond of this action and starts to criticize Pat. Pat’s mother reminds Pat Senior that it is game day and she is making food. Pat exacerbates this, acting out of character and more excited than normal. Pat Senior questions
Pat by saying “What are you- what are you so up about?”

Both Pat Senior and his son also have regrets they wish they could correct and make better but realize what has happened in the past cannot be undone. Instead, they are forced to look at the present and mend what they can in an effort to do right. As it goes for Pat, this is illustrated after a freak-out incident in regards to his misplaced wedding video. Pat accidently hits his mother and strikes back at Pat Senior who is only trying to defend his wife. Pat regrets doing what he did and decides that he should start taking the medication that he so strongly opposes. Besides deciding to take his prescribed drugs, Pat also makes time to fix the window he had broken. Throughout the movie, Pat looks to correct the situation between Nikki and himself. He works out faithfully to stay fit, befriends Tiffany and helps her with her issues, and goes to therapy in hopes of becoming a better person for Nikki. Nearly beating to death the history teacher with whom his wife had comitted adultery is not exactly what Pat regrets but, rather, losing Nikki as a result of his actions is what he wraps his mind around. Pat Senior, like his son, has regrets of his own as well. When Pat starts to faithfully practice dancing with Tiffany, Pat Senior starts to sense that he is losing his son. He very emotionally admits to Pat that he may not have spent enough time with Pat growing up and that he may have skewed the time with Pat’s brother. In doing so, Pat Senior feels that he may be at fault for Pat feeling worse about his behavior. Pat Senior opens up to his son and wants to do everything that he can to get Pat back on his feet. On a smaller, less obvious note, Pat Senior regrets getting banned from attending Eagles’ games.
Being the superstitious diehard fan that he is, he can never be allowed to watch his favorite football team from a true fan perspective ever again. All that Pat Senior can do now is give all the support he can from the comfort of his house in hopes for the home team to emerge victorious.

It is game day, and the Philadelphia Eagles are set to play the New York Giants in a highly important match that gives the Eagles’ fans an idea of whether or not they will make it to the playoffs. Pat Senior is driving Pat to the much-anticipated division game. Pat tells his father “It’s too bad you can’t come to the stadium, but I know you were kicked out, you know, for beating everybody up. Guess we’re not that different, huh, Dad?” Pat Senior responds with “Is that a bad thing?” This short exchange of words between Pat Senior and Pat signifies a “like father, like son” relationship yet at the same time exemplifies the differing views and opinions each has towards each other. David O. Russell suggests in Silver Linings Playbook that a near-parallel commonality is conveyed through father-son connections of conflicting perspectives when observing the characters of Pat and Pat Senior. Excelsior guides Pat in the right direction, making him decide on critical decisions that ultimately allow him to find happiness. At the end of the movie, Pat’s self-portrait is hung up beside that of his brother’s. This act signifies a positive fix in the relationship between Pat and his father, Pat Senior. Likewise, it symbolizes the result of the brighter days that can exist in the future. All one has to do is believe and stay dedicated to his or her cause. If there is hope that exists within, there lies excelsior.
Work Cited

Bill liked to talk about ghosts. We got millions of ghost stories in these swamps. The only thing we have more of than ghosts is lightning, carried by storms from the ocean. Indians and Confederate dissidents have been stalking these willows and this mud for generations. “We got more than the folks up north ‘cause our history is sadder.” Bill would always say this in a solemn voice as if he were one of the leaders of the ghost tours in Charleston or Savannah. He always coerced me into playing with the Ouija board he’d made out of an old pizza box. He swore he communicated once with the White Lady of Tiernay Plantation who told him to buy a scratch off. He won 20 bucks. We went to movies with it, hiding Cokes and Twizzlers in my purse. Even when we hit the supernatural jackpot, folks around here like to keep it cheap. Bill told me once that if no one sees you die, you get stuck here. An apparition made to wander humid nights scaring teenagers out on the marsh frog-giggin’ and getting drunk. He was on a first name basis with anyone who had ever died in Beaufort County without someone watching.
I wasn’t scared or nothing. Why, I could never believe in that stuff or any of that supernatural hoopla. The way I figure it, I’m not getting out of this swamp without getting a scholarship for good grades, and that comes from studying, not trying to contact my dead great-uncle Jim who was born and died in this Godforsaken place, this shit hole with Town Hall pot-lucks on Wednesdays, church on Sundays, and full immersions in a run-off of the Ashley. I’ll mind my business and my grades till summer, till I graduate valedictorian and head up to USC. I’ll get out of here the minute that diploma hits my hand.

This morning I got up and helped mom with the dishes and getting my younger siblings ready for school. Matt has the red backpack, Luke the blue one, and Deliah, the pink, each with matching color lunch boxes. All hell will break loose if you hand them the wrong color. My older sister Chris moved to Austin about five years ago. She pierced her septum and told everyone Chris was short for Chrysanthemum. It’s Christene Jolene. In her profile picture, she’s got a mess of auburn dreds. I’m betting none of her weirdo friends at the organic coffee place she works at knows she was homecoming queen two years running.

Mom needs all the help she can get since my dad never came back from Kuwait, and Christene isn’t the maternal type. She split the moment she had enough money saved.

“This place is too claustrophobic for my art”--Chris’s final words to the rest of us. I think she’s right, but it still doesn’t make her any less of a
bitch for leaving me with this mess.

It’s up to me to look after the kids while my mom is stuck behind the deli counter at the Piggly Wiggly. I don’t know what she’s going to do when I leave, but I can’t let that stop me. Even when she is home, she usually just sits in Dad’s faded red recliner mumbling to the air. My mom was never a beauty queen, but in pictures from when she was younger, she looked good: tall, skinny, blonde hair blown out like Farrah Fawcet. Now her hair is always in some stage of falling out of a bun and deep crow’s feet around faded blue eyes. Southern sun turns the skin to leather and whites of the eyes yellow. After a lifetime on the beach, you start looking like a bad taxidermy job.

The young kids don’t remember dad, and mom never says his name. Sometimes I wonder what it’d be like if he were here. I remember him being tall and happy, maybe drunk a lot but always clean-shaven with copper hair buzzed to the scalp. He would wear his army uniform to church, and everyone would comment on how proud they were of the town hero and how sad they were that he was leaving. He and my mom used to fight a lot. They got married senior year when one night of cheap beer-induced passion led to Christene. Both of them fell into the trap that small towns use to ensnare their populations. Babies. Once you get pregnant, there’s no chance of making it out of the swamp. They argued mostly at night; the more tall-boys piled up in the garbage can, the louder the fight. One time, I heard her say “Sometimes I wish you were dead.” I wonder if
she feels bad about that now. She never talks about him, but she hasn’t gone out dating, either.

I knew Bill all my life, but we didn’t start kissing till my sophomore year. He lived down the way, towards the school. This morning he made the Spanish moss into a wig and jumped out of a tall oak to spook me and the kids. I didn’t run away ‘cause I was scared, just ‘cause last time he gave me chiggers that way. I liked that Bill was tall with broad shoulders and lots of dark hair that swooped to the side like most of the boys in the county. He had a lopsided smile and crinkly brown eyes all set proportionally into a round face. His eyes were the best part about him. They were round and fierce with flecks of gold round the pupil if you looked close enough. In them, he carried a sense of daring, of rage, like the sea he made his living from, a part of Bill that could never be tamed. I just wish he was smarter. He was the type to watch the movies of the required reading and say that math shouldn’t have letters and squiggles in it.

After school today, I sent Matt, Luke, and Deliah home without me. Friday afternoons are mine, a nice reminder to mom that those kids aren’t mine. Bill and I headed out into the marsh. We ducked under hovering willow branches onto the burn trail named after that local Confederate soldier who died in the Battle of Boonville—Hanock’s Path, but the kids call it something more vulgar. I could hear the bullfrogs croaking a lament. They knew it was Friday, and soon enough kids would be coming after them with gigs or pocket knives tied to sticks. The trail ends at a tall cy-
press near the water. The inscription “C&J 4-eva” meticulously carved on its light bark. C & J were long gone; the tree belongs to me and Bill now. I was reading *Killers of the Dream* aloud at the base of it while he swung from the branches. He started whistling, so I stopped and said “You’re not even paying attention!”

“Oh Button, ‘course I am. I like the way your mouth moves when you say the long words,” he answered and tried to plant a kiss on me before I could flee.

He had sort of graduated a few years ago. Pierre G.T. Beauregard High School will let you graduate even if you don’t have a 2.0 GPA. They said “Bill is a good Christian boy, and it don’t matter if he doesn’t know algebra; he’s not going to be a brain surgeon or nothing.” He was planning on getting a football scholarship, but scouts don’t really like to come this far into the swamp. I don’t think he was that good anyways. So Bill stayed, and he liked it here, he said, as long as I was here. He worked on his daddy’s boat and always smelled like the sea: sun, salt, and shellfish. Add sand and you got the four S’s of Turtle Cove. I would like to add another “s,” but this town is so far up its own ass that I don’t think they can smell it anymore. The only good thing in Turtle Cove is Bill, and even he can’t see that there’s more to life than crab cages and family bibles.

The sulfur from the marsh was coming up something fierce, so we decided against staying to watch the sunset. Bill looked into the air, squinted his eyes, and sniffed. “Storm’s movin’ close. Betta’ start hustlin’,
babe.” At 20 years old, he was already a wise, old sailor. I suspected one of these days he’d start saying he could feel it in his joints. I stared at him with his back to the open water, his dark brown eyes turning a golden pine as the fat docile sun melted into the tree line behind him. I could see the storm rolling over the waves of the Atlantic, black and grey giants, tumbling toward Bill and me.

As we started walking back, single file like the Indians, I got fixated on how Bill’s hair came to a curl at the nape of his neck. That’s how come I wasn’t paying any attention and got my shoe stuck in the mud. They call it Mississippi Mud, but they have it all over the place, the quicksand of the south. My shoe was a goner.

“C’mere, Button. Climb aboard,” he directed as he lowered at his knees, and I jumped up on his back. With my arms around his neck, his arms under my knees, I once again got lost in that curl on his neck. I bent and kissed it. It left traces of sand and salt on my lips, just like everything else here.

“Whoo. This is some workout, Button,” Bill grunted as he repositioned me giving a light pinch to my rear.

“I’m not fat! Stop shifting me around. I’m getting sick,” I yelled against the wind.

“Of course you ain’t, darlin’. Don’t get mad. It’s a good thing. I gotta stay sexy if I’m going to be your trophy husband.” I could hear him say it
through that lopsided grin that makes everyone like him.

“Get Crackin’! The storm’s catching up.”

I hated when he talked to me about marriage. I like Bill, but it’s easy to like him. He’s nice and handsome, but I want to get out of this town and all the people here, including Bill. He makes me laugh, and he’s a good kisser, but goofball antics and soft lips only go so far. Sometimes you want to stop kissing and start talking about the outside world. He’d be happy staying here with me as a clammer’s wife popping out kids for the rest of my life. I started planning in my head; quietly because I’m still not sure that Bill can’t read thoughts. I’ll break up with him before I ship off for college, and this time it will stick. I’ll look right into those brown eyes, centered in that tanned, sea-worn face, and I’ll say we’re through. It won’t be like the last couple of times when I just sat there and got lost in them. Maybe that’s how mama felt about dad. Honestly, if Bill did die, then I wouldn’t have to break his heart. I wouldn’t be the bad guy. Sometimes I wish he were dead.

“It’s okay, Button. We’re almost there.” He hollered, but the wind turned it into a whisper.

I smiled. I felt safe with him holding me. I pushed the impending break-up from my mind. I’ll do it Sunday, one more weekend with those wild eyes, I told myself.

The rain hadn’t even started, but I could feel the storm. I could feel
the electricity prickle the hairs on my arm and neck. I could smell the heavy humidity mixing with the sulfur. It sticks in your throat and doesn’t give enough oxygen to your lungs. We passed a bush of Confederate Jasmine and I allowed myself a deeper breath, letting the soft, soapy scent block out the rotten egg fumes of sulfur. I’ll miss the smell of gardenias and jasmine when I leave but not the sulfur. I held on to Bill a little tighter. The sweat dripping off his earlobe splashed on my nose. He picked up his pace, careful over tree roots. He’s mine, I thought. I don’t want to let him go, ever. I heard the thunder first. I always thought it worked the other way around.

I guess that’s when it happened. They say when you get knocked out, there is nothingness, darkness. I couldn’t tell you ’cause there wasn’t even nothing. I was holding onto Bill, and now I’m here, sitting in this stupid hospital bed, in this stupid hospital gown. You, telling me that Bill is dead, struck down by lightning and that I hit a tree root. I need to talk to that gang of sophomores that found us. I need to ask them if Bill was already dead. Did they see him die? Instead, I’m just sitting here with a contusion and concussion telling y’all how this came about and my Bill lying there alone in the morgue. I want to see those smiling eyes again. Please. It’s my fault that he’s dead. If I hadn’t’ve wished it, that lightning would’ve never come for him. I can’t remember if I saw him die. If I saw him dead. Does it count if I was knocked out, or is he a ghost now? I can’t leave Turtle Cove till I know.
“Jeremy,” Ally said softly, from her place looking out of the telescope. “Come and see.”

I grinned, shoving my hands in my pockets and making my way toward Ally. It was a cold, clear morning, perfect for stargazing, as Ally said. Luckily, Mr. McManus had no problem with the local students using his field for, um, recreational activities. I didn’t think Ally would be into that kind of thing, though, so I didn’t bring anything like beer or smokes.

“What am I looking at?” I asked her as she backed away from the telescope.

“Venus. It’s the really bright one toward the edge of the telescope, along the right side of the horizon,” she explained, pushing my head down to the eyepiece and tilting it in the right position.

“Careful!” I scolded, catching myself from falling and knocking over her telescope. “I didn’t think someone like you would be very interested in this,” I said, after a moment’s pause.
“You mean astronomy?” she responded, and I could practically hear her smirking as she spoke. “The theater isn’t the center of my existence, you know.”

“I know that, smartass,” I shot back, and I heard her giggle, plopping down into the grass. “I just figured that someone who loves, you know, singing and dancing and acting and all that freedom of expression stuff wouldn’t be very interested in science with all its set rules and speculation.” As I was saying this, I truly started to look and saw this marbled curve in the sky.

I must’ve gasped because I heard Ally say, “It’s beautiful, huh?”

“That’s Venus?” I breathed, suddenly unable to take my eyes away. “There’s no way a rock can be that pretty.”

“And yet you stare at it in wonder,” she said. When I murmured in agreement, I heard her chuckle behind me. “Besides, science, astronomy especially, is all about discovery. Even before we had telescopes, we were marveling at the sky and wondering what was beyond our world,” she continued.

“Too the point where the Romans even wanted to name a planet after their goddess of beauty,” I replied, backing away from the telescope. As I backed away, I realized I couldn’t see Ally anymore, before tripping over what should’ve felt like a tree root but felt more like a leg.

“Ow!” Ally cried out as I fell flat on top of her.
“Shit!” I cried, rolling off her and blushing at my uncharacteristic clumsiness. “Sorry!”

“God, you’re heavy,” she said, sitting up. “And you totally just killed the moment, jerkwad.”

Surprised, I smirked to cover it. “Were we having a moment?” I quipped.

“Not the way you were thinking,” she shot back.

My smirk widened. “Liar,” I jabbed. As I said it, I could see her getting more and more frustrated.

“Just drop it, will you?” she said, biting off her words. I considered continuing, but I figured it wasn’t worth making her totally mad at me. I did agree to spend the whole night with her, after all. I hadn’t hung out with her this long to screw it up now.

I flopped on my back, gazing at the star-studded sky above us. “I wonder what they do on a daily basis on the International Space Station,” I said, trying to distract her.

“What?” she asked, obviously not falling for my plan.

“You were just sniping at me for killing our moment,” I stated. “I’m just trying to get it back.”

Her dark brows knit together; her green eyes irked. “I wasn’t sniping,” she snapped.
“Ally,” I said. “I’m sorry, okay? Can we please just move on?”

Her face faltered, and she sighed. “You’re right,” she said. “I’m sorry.”

We sat in silence for a moment, and I had the feeling that we had turned a corner. We couldn’t just treat each other with some distant cordiality now that we’d fought a little. Everything just seemed to get a little more real.

“So, Stargirl. You’ve got any answers for my question?” I said, folding my arms behind my head.

I could see her out of the corner of my eye as she grinned, closing her eyes and tilting her head to the sky. “Number one: it was more of a statement. And number two, I’m not sure,” she said, eyes still closed. “Maybe what goes on in supernovas or what could happen to a person in a black hole or maybe proof of life on other planets?”

In that moment watching her, I think I had seen the one thing in the universe more beautiful than Venus in the night sky. I swallowed against a lump in my throat, not wanting to think these thoughts about Ally of all people.

“What do you really believe in intelligent life beyond Earth?” I asked her, trying to distract myself.

She snorted. “I barely believe that life on Earth is intelligent sometimes, but yes, I do believe in aliens,” she said, finally opening her eyes to
look at me.

“And I thought we knew what went on in black holes,” I said.

She looked at me, her head tilted. “What? No opinion on intelligent life?” she mocked.

I quirked my mouth upward just slightly at her. “I’m not sure. It’s kind of like that one quote says: ‘Two possibilities exist; either we are alone in the Universe or we are not. Both are equally terrifying’,” I said by way of answering. Honestly, I wasn’t sure whether or not we were alone, and I definitely wasn’t certain that I wanted to know.

“Sir Arthur Clarke,” Ally said, finally looking back at me. “I’m impressed.”

“Thank you. And what about black holes, then, Stargirl? I asked.

“So you’re going to keep calling me that, huh?” she replied, amused. “As for black holes: we know how light moves in one and such, but as for how a body would fare in one, we have no idea. We simply don’t have the technology to find out what would happen if, say, a human were to be sucked into one. We don’t know if we would come out fine, or have our atoms all rearranged, or even find ourselves perfectly fine, just in another part of space. Hell, we might even be in another part of time. We just don’t have the resources or the know-how to make it work.”

I let that sink in for a moment. “I guess I can see why the government wouldn’t want to spend that kind of money,” I said.
“What do you mean?” Ally asked.

I couldn’t see what was unclear about that. “I mean, it just sounds like a lot of inventions for space need to be made. If it’s the only thing it’s going to be used for, I can kinda see why the government wouldn’t want to spend the money,” I explained.

“No, no. You’ve got it all wrong,” Ally replied, shaking her head. “You don’t have to use technology made for space just for space. We’re appropriating space technology to study our oceans all the time.”


“Okay, get this,” Ally said, turning to me and framing a space in front of her with her hands. “We know more about the universe outside of our planet than we do our own oceans.”

My eyebrows shot up in surprise. “Really?”

“Yeah. It’s so weird. We’re trying so hard to learn about the universe around us, and we only know a fraction of the species under the sea,” she said, enthused. It was kind of cute to see how excited she got over something like that. Then again, it was kind of a huge thing to think about.

I chortled, to Ally’s mystification. “Now you have that Little Mermaid song stuck in my head,” I told her and then began singing it in the goofiest accent I could.

“Be serious!” she bawled, shoving my shoulder, but she was laugh-
ing. After she had calmed down a bit, she said, “But think about it. There was this one species of fish, the Coelacanth, that people thought died out with the dinosaurs, until they found one in Africa back in the thirties’. And that was just by chance. Imagine what we could find if we deliberately looked. I bet we could find thousands of undiscovered species of fish and sea plants.”

Something occurred to me with that statement. “Don’t scientists say that we could find the cure for cancer at the bottom of the ocean?” I asked.

Ally nodded, her smile growing wider. “We could probably find cure to dozens of diseases under the ocean, and space tech is created to withstand the harshest of conditions in the universe,” she said, her voice rising in pitch. “I love theatre, don’t get me wrong, but I really want to be an astrophysicist. I just want it to be me and the wide open sky.” As she said this, her smile grew shy as though she felt silly saying this. I wouldn’t tell her without her prodding me, but I didn’t think it was.

I liked seeing this side of her. It dawned on me that I had known Ally my entire life, but I had never really known her. I didn’t know what made her truly happy, what made her passionate, what made her sad, what she wanted to do with her life. All my life I had known this girl, and I truly didn’t start getting to know her until now. I know that based on this night, I had only seen a small side of her, but what little bit I saw, I liked. Really
liked. I found myself wishing she felt the same about me, as stupid as that was.

As I was about to respond, my phone went off, signaling that it was time to leave unless Ally and I wanted to be caught sneaking out. I fought a sigh and told her, “Time to go home.”

“Already?” she whined as I stood and offered my hand, which she took.

As we secured her telescope in the back of my truck, ready for the half-hour drive home, she asked me, “So did I teach you anything tonight?”

“I don’t think I have to stay awake in astronomy ever again,” I said, making her laugh as I shut the tailgate. “What matters is that you had fun,” I said, smiling at her.

“Of course I did,” she said. Then, Ally grinned, crossing the few feet of space between us and kissing my cheek. If that action surprised me, which it did, then what she whispered in my ear shocked me a little bit more.

“Best first date ever.”

And then the world shrank down to the size of me, Ally, and above us, the star-studded expanse of undiscovered sky.
Pedrito was beyond counting down days. He warily pondered every moment as he paced from the living room through the indoor terrace to the back door where he would stare out the window into Abuela’s back yard, imagining what the next few weeks would be like. He heard Uncle Enzo’s phone call this morning, and he knew he wouldn’t be alone much longer. Rafi and Julio were coming, and it would not be soon enough.

Every kid on his street had abandoned him this summer break. Some were old enough now to help their mami and papi at the store; others went to their dad’s for the summer or were sent away to camp. Pedrito had no brothers or sisters. He had no one. Until today.

With his cousins in tow, Pedrito roamed the streets of the entire Ocean View neighborhood on his chrome-framed Redline BMX bike, chasing after those shadowy figures hiding just beyond the corner of their eyes near the woods and empty “for sale” homes on the outskirts. The terrible trio ran together again, and, more importantly, Pedrito was not alone.

“Let’s play hide ‘n’ seek.”
Both his cousins had reservations about Pedrito’s suggestion, considering what had happened the last time Rafi and Julio had visited. Uncle Enzo had joined them that night. “Anything to keep the boys entertained,” he told Abuela. “Idle hands…”

It was Pedrito’s turn to seek. Abuela’s house was no mansion, but it had many rooms, doors, and closets. The open kitchen and living room offered no good hiding spots, neither did the laundry room nor the garage. Pedrito knew the house better than any of them.

He did not think to look for the boys under a pile of dirty laundry, where their giggle almost gave them away. Pedrito headed for the bedrooms and became fixed on the half-open guest room door. “Too obvious,” he thought as he moved closer, hoping to surprise a potential victim and then so audaciously kicking the door in as hard as he could.

Uncle Enzo’s scream had a higher pitch than Pedrito’s, higher than anyone remembered ever hearing from him. He hopped on one leg from behind the door to the nearby bed, examining his dark purple toe nail.

“Why did you do that, you little jerk?”

“Oh my God. Why did I do that?” Pedrito thought to himself, but he couldn’t answer because he didn’t know. He only knew it felt right at the moment, but he couldn’t explain it. Maybe Pedrito was as weird as everyone thought. Maybe that’s why he was alone so much.

Uncle Enzo’s anger went away a lot quicker than it took for his dead
nail to fall off. Enzo was a good uncle, and he loved little, awkward Pedrito.

Today would be different. It was sunny, and they could play in the yard. No doors to kick, only a couple of thick mango trees, and a few others they could climb, a large dog house, and plenty of running room. Pedrito felt he was safe for others to be around him, safe to be himself, and, more importantly, he was not alone.

The game went on all afternoon without incident, except for the occasional snack break for one of Abuela’s made-to-order butter-mayo-ham-cheese sandwiches and chocolate milk. Abuela loved feeding the boys as much as she liked having them close where she could hear them, as long as no one cried, and even then she did not mind much.

Julio’s little sprout legs made him easy prey. The youngest and smallest of the three found the best cover but could not outrun the other two when they spotted him. It was Julio’s turn to seek again, and a familiar audacious sensation came over Pedrito.

“Let’s create a distraction.”

“What do you mean?” Rafi was fascinated by this new development.

“One of us can make noises on the other side of the yard, make him think we’re there.”

“Like, throwing something?”
“Yeah. Well, no. We can’t throw from here. I can throw over the roof, but I don’t know where it’ll land. I might break a window or something.”

“Go on the roof then”.

“Yeah!”

Pedrito wasn’t allowed to climb onto the roof, but that was his favorite place to go when no one was looking for him. Rafi knew how effortlessly Pedrito could climb up the window bars, especially for such a big kid as Pedrito, who was two years older than him, and four years bigger.

Julio began the count, shouting out every tenth number. Pedrito made it up and across the flat part of the roof to the far side of the yard just as the breeze carried Julio’s “one hundred.” The yard was shaped like a large, square-angled horseshoe with Julio on one end and Pedrito now overlooking the other. It took one try for Pedrito to hit the dog-house with a pebble and close to a full minute before he saw Julio’s face peeking from around the corner with his back against the wall, police-style.

Still crouching, Pedrito started the dash back to the other side of the roof where he “super-heroed” himself quickly over the edge and down onto the window bars. One final drop to the wooden bench below, and Pedrito would conquer the game. He saw Rafi coming out from the thick mango tree foliage a few feet away, and Pedrito let go, but his landing was off. Something shifted underneath him, causing him to bounce off the bench to the ground, and as he rolled on his back, Pedrito saw Rafi’s
grimace while rocking back and forth on the bench, gripping the leg that had broken Pedrito’s fall.

“Why did you jump on me like that?”

“You weren’t here! I looked around--”

“I can’t walk on my leg!” Rafi tried to limp before lying back down on the bench.

“Didn’t you see me climb down? I was right there!” Pedrito pleaded his case waving both arms, pointing to the window bars. They couldn’t pin this on him. No way.

“I saw you. I thought you saw me moving.”

“You saw me, and you kept going? This can’t be my fault. Please, God. C’mon!”

The commotion brought Abuela out to the yard, running to calm the boys down. Pedrito was in trouble for climbing on the roof, and thanks to Abuela’s intervention, no one really yelled at him, but they didn’t have to the way they all looked at him.

Poor Rafi went over what happened a dozen times that afternoon, disclaiming that “it was an accident” every time. A few phone calls later, Uncle Enzo came home and took Rafi to the clinic, and from there, with a full-leg cast, along with Julio back to their mother, who asked not to let that “brutish gorilla” near her children.
Pedrito stood by the back door, looking out the window into the back yard, thinking about what he could have done differently. Summer had just begun, and while his friends were somewhere having fun, he would be alone forever--because that is exactly what long summers felt like.
a snail leaves its slime

hillary dunkley
randy smith
melissa simon
hillary dunkley  first place

Out of Many, One People
randy smith  second place
Sweetgrass woven as tightly as my braids,
Those baskets carefully hung on your mama's kitchen walls.
I’m sure their salty fragrance holds still today.
We’d watch the ladies weaving them at the market.
Laughing and singing as they twisted straw into gold,
It was always our favorite place to go.
We were too young to know what--more who--
Used to be sold there before the jade Buddahs and Bene wafers.

We’d hide in the hydrangeas, our mighty fortress on the battery,
When tourists would take pictures of your home.
They’d spy us and make us talk in our molasses voices.
They’d laugh, say how funny.
Man, we must’ve been alligators,
The main attraction at the zoo.

I was worried about Cotillion.
You’d laugh at how I would fare as a debutante.
You said they don’t let you, if you got skinned knees,
And mine resembled the worn brick streets.

My mom would make us Sweet Tea.
We’d drink it faster than she could pour.
Sweet Tea, the Ambrosia of the South,
Kept us strong and hyper
At Ft. Sumter while reenacting that noble April night.

Then I moved away, the war lost.
My father took us farther south,
But the accents died, so mine did, too.
I miss when I wasn’t such a con,
Where I first kissed you on that 300-year-old lawn.
Ayuda me,  
ayuda me.

El oscuro me mantiene  
where you do not.

You left me to the darkness,  
the devil, and the deep blue sea.

Ayuda me,  
ayuda me.

El oscuro me mantiene  
where you cannot.

I showed you the fifth dimension.  
I held your hand as you shook.
El oscuro me mantiene
where you will not.

Ayuda me,
ayuda me.

I would drown if you
were not keeping me afloat.
As I lie here on this desert sand,
How much of my time has slipped through fate’s hand.
   Is there still a world beyond this battlefield,
Or is the only existence the one we breathe life to here?
   What wars could be fought if soldiers refused
To pick up weapons and be moved or used?
   I often worry about the status of my soul
Because I agreed to be put in this hole.
And when my orders come down that line,
   I lose all clarity on how much of me is mine.
I’m here because I was told there’s a job to be done.
   Duty…Responsibility requires that I leave it for none.
Hope gives me the strength to pull the trigger.
Despair keeps me from looking too closely at truth’s figure.
Right beside the presence of muzzle fire and hammer click,
   The dust takes form and chooses you to mimic.
And when it’s all too much, I close my eyes.
The sun shines over your smile and the earth sighs.
You are the reason I continue to wake even in this hell.
My heart keeps up its beat because that is where you dwell.
And every bullet that whines carries your voice,
But sometimes you fade to remind me of my choice.
It is in those quiet times when you’ve vanished
That my soul cries out in alarm, truly famished.
Although I carry you with me everywhere I’m here,
I know that I left you alone with fear.
To believe you wait for me is paramount to my survival
And to think you also long for our revival.
I close my eyes on the imprint of this gritty loam.
Every time I see you I am transported home.
The person that I am demands that here I stay,
And honor insists I must join in this fray.
I fight not for brass and all they would do.
I struggle on only to return to you.
What use have I for the world they would create
When my entire world with you awaits.
Sometimes you might not understand why I had to leave,
But that I will return for you is all you need believe.
And should I be stuck here in everlasting roam,
Remember that when my eyes are closed, I am home.
All night long and into the dawn she ran on her journey. Helios, leaving behind the lovely standing waters, rose up into the brazen sky to shine upon the immortals and also on mortal men across the grain-giving farmland . . . Now as these tasted the entrails, and burned, for the god, the thigh bones, these others put straight in, and on the balanced ship took off the sails, and stowed them, and moored her in, and themselves landed.