



# The Blotter

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# The Blotter

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## “Juxtaposition”

When I was twelve, I lost my funeral virginity.

It was for a distant aunt I think, whom I intrinsically loved and mourned of course, though I had no need for tears or morose thoughts at such an age for a woman I’d probably met less than a handful of times.

Like most people you meet, I also once had a grandfather. He was the perfect image of a typical grandpa; rigid, gruff exterior with a gentle, solicitous interior. He was always clean, well-dressed, shirt tucked into his pants, with thick pilot-style reading glasses and smelling of Irish Spring. The only thing that was ever even slightly untidy about him was his eyebrows. His eyebrow hairs would grow like weeds in a freshly *herbicide*d garden, like dandelions, resilient and to be damned if they ever be stopped or slowed.

He liked IHOP, watching the ducks outside his home, trips to Piggly Wiggly for peaches, replaying old baseball highlights, and listening to my grandmother work on the New York Times crossword as she read and solved it aloud each Sunday. When I would visit and we would walk the halls of his retirement village, not a single person we passed went without a good morning or a hello.

He had been a teacher all his life, and a firm believer in a force bigger than us. Whatever that force may have been, I’m not sure, and based on my father’s stories, I don’t think he was too sure either. But he cared most about being an altruistic man, and I sensed he also believed that the act of him being himself would simply inspire reciprocity of his own ways.

As his grandchild, that steadfastness brought me comfort. Even with his furrowed brows and somewhat gravelly register. So in his years at the village, he was a Sunday school teacher. He brought comfort to other people at the village who needed solace, brought friendship to any [all] newcomers to the village, he would lend an ear to those that needed it, and was known for his ‘right on the nose’ movie recommendations. He liked dozing off to classical music radio, eating Italian food, taking photographs, singing, and listening to his big family of singers serenade him at every family reunion.

In the spring of my junior year of high school, he died.

In the midst of midterm cramming, SAT prep, prom organizing, spring vocals concert rehearsals, with college applications on the horizon, I found myself sitting in a stuffy retirement home living room while I listened to my two aunts sing “This is my Father’s World” in the next room, stifling tears. Instead of having study groups or shopping for dresses or reviewing sheet music with my friends, I was “saying goodbye”.

I don’t think at that age I was really aware of the permanence one’s death had on someone— not in the way that death is permanent but in the way that death changes one’s perception of the length of that permanence. Time is just time and will always be time, I knew that, but how we perceive it is always fluctuating.

A short couple days after we had said goodbye, he had passed, and another short couple of weeks after that, we all met back down in South Carolina for a celebration of life.

And then it finally hit me. As I sat on a rickety pew and looked up at my aunt standing at the pulpit, looking down at her notes with a neatly folded wad of tissues in her hand, I didn’t understand how her knees weren’t buckling. How was she speaking affluently, not choking on her own words, not throwing the pastor’s lectionary across the sanctuary and crumbling onto the floor? I couldn’t imagine the amount of grief she was feeling; how she kept on going.

And in that moment, as she continued on with her eulogy, I did try to imagine. I imagined it was me up at that pulpit, talking about what my father meant to me and all the things I loved to do with him, and how earth shatteringly immensely I was going to miss it all. And then I stopped because I simply couldn’t imagine it anymore.

I loved my grandpa, and still love him even in his death, but I knew that the sadness I’ll feel for my own parents will be leagues above what I felt for him. Even then, in the quiet corners of your mind you ask yourself, “What will I do then? What kind of toll will this take on me?”

When I finally returned back to school, after my mother had covertly informed all my teachers of his passing and how it might affect me in my classes, I did notice a change. I caught myself thinking about him and my grandmother, stealing my attention away from my studies. I found myself questioning over and over, *how do people do this? Get up and continue despite whatever life-altering events happened previously?*

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## CAUTION

people try and put us

## "Sacred to Secular"

by Charles Hill

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The meaning of life has stepped away from the sacred aspect of god's will and into the will of man's, who has empowered the secular notion of humans as acting agents. This transition was notably seen in the Renaissance by Pico della Mirandola, who wrote a book titled *Oration on the Dignity of Man*. This book caused great troubles for Mirandola but planted a seed for future philosophers. One of the future philosophers was Albert Camus, who published an essay titled *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* (*The Myth of Sisyphus*) over 450 years later, answering much of the enigma for Mirandola's dilemma.

In 1486, Mirandola published a controversial book that backfired on him, getting him locked up for seven years (Juntz•pp.180-101). He was a student at the Neo-Platonic Academy; during this time he studied many religions and compiled his book of 900 theses which came to a sacred sharing conclusion. One of Mirandola's conclusions was that humans have defined the nature of all creatures by laws they have created (Juntz.p.181). Mirandola was hinting that humans have created all the religions of the world and the moral codes that create their rigid boundaries. This was an insinuation that the sacred texts of religions were not di-

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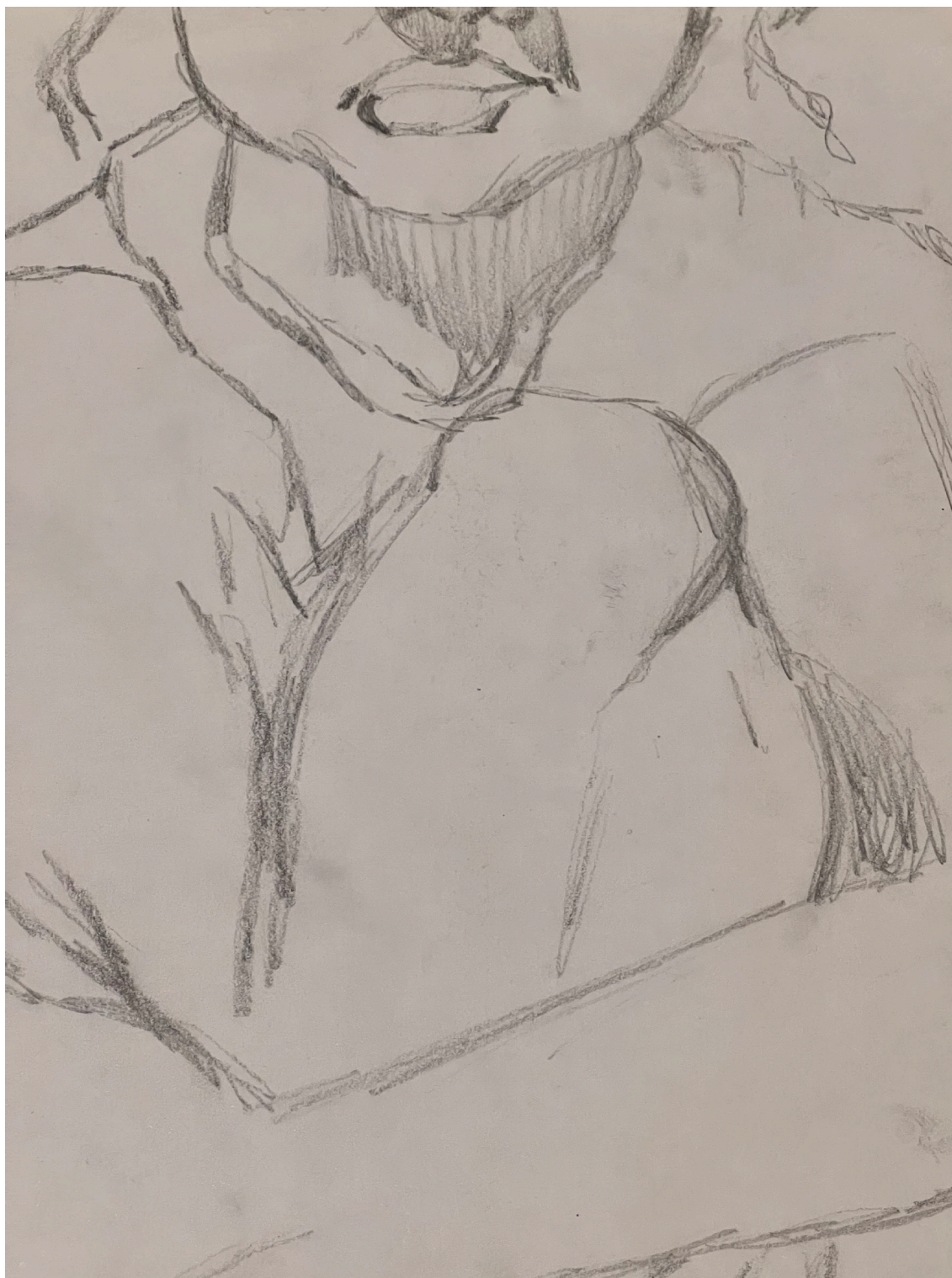
vine but the men that created them were. The notion that man could have the free will to create rules and moral concepts was seen as an act of heresy (Juntz.p.181).

Another conclusion Mirandola perceived was that man has the free will to choose their own moral codes. This concept placed the human at the divine level of God (Juntz•p. 180). By placing one in the position to control his destiny subsequently placed God in the back seat. Mirandola's seed of empowering book took many years to grow into concepts now seen as normal. The transition from the sacred to the secular has had many progressions and digressions but in the twentieth century philosophers had arrived to a fine-tuned axiom.

Existentialism complements Mirandola in such a way that it seems to be what he was hinting at in his book. Existentialism can be summed up to mean "to exist is simply to be there, what exist appears, lets itself be encountered but you can never deduce it" (Bragg•2008). The essence of existentialism directly correlates Mirandola by indicating man must analyze nature to understand the meaning of his existence. Camus questions the life, nature and happiness denying beliefs from most religions for the promise of an after-life by indicat-



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ing humans are mortals (Bragg• 2008). Camus was an essayist, novelist and playwright who wrote many influential works in the first half of the twentieth century.

Camus' vision of life was to find the meaning of it while alive not to think that the meaning for life was based off of events that would happen after death. In this aspect Camus was taking control of his future, he was empowering the free will to think rather than allowing others to tell him what to think. Camus echoes Mirandola by placing the human in the driver's seat rather than a divine entity. Mirandola writes "We have assigned you, trace for yourself the lineaments of your own nature" (Juntz•p. 180).

The existential thoughts drove Camus into a nihilistic approach. Nihilism rejects all religious moral principles and alludes that everything is meaningless (Juntz•p. 329). He used the Greek myth of Sisyphus to illustrate his view on life (Juntz•p.329). In his essay, Camus averred that Sisyphus was much like humans - in his time of punishment he chose to make light and fun of the task of rolling the boulder up the hill as a way to get back at the gods who had sentenced him to pain. Camus believed that humans, in the light of pain, and death being the only end in life, accept the struggles of life with happiness and contentment. Their actions are much like Sisyphus which in the end amount to nothing.

The total transition from Mirandola's free  
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will to decide what is right as humans in what god to follow changed to Camus' nihilistic concept of no god at all. The leap over 455 years has moved the human mind from the back seat to the driver's seat and in the controlling position of what is virtue. The sacred texts seem to have less weight in humanity as humanity progressed to the ability to think for themselves. The meaning of life has stepped away from the sacred aspect of god's will and into the man's, who has empowered the secular notion that humans are acting agents.

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## "Chocolate Conquest"

by César Bolívar Higuain Lopez (Bolivito) | Corey J. L. Gabriel\*

---

"A stranger to myself and the world,  
armed solely with a thought that negates  
itself as soon as it asserts, what is  
this condition in which I can have peace  
only by refusing to know and to live, in  
which the appetite for conquest bumps  
into walls that defy its assaults?"

-Albert Camus

The sun had long fallen beyond French  
horizon, and with it went propriety, integ-  
rity, compassion, in this economic metrop-  
olis of global engine - Frankfurt am Main.  
Without the oils and lubricants of morali-  
ty, the city would grind.

In a dimly lit cafe, two strangers,  
sharing a round table, sat across from each  
other. Its marble top was crowded with  
empty coffee cups and scattered sections  
of the Frankfurter Rundschau - the city's  
major paper.

The strangers were apprehensive to  
dialogue, and, after silently assenting to  
a safe sharing of company sans vulnerable  
communication, without violating the  
illusion of trust and security, they quietly  
agreed to merely read and recommend the  
week's articles of highest intrigue. Reti-  
cently, one would softly suggest an article  
laying it face up tapping the page, 'And  
this one.'

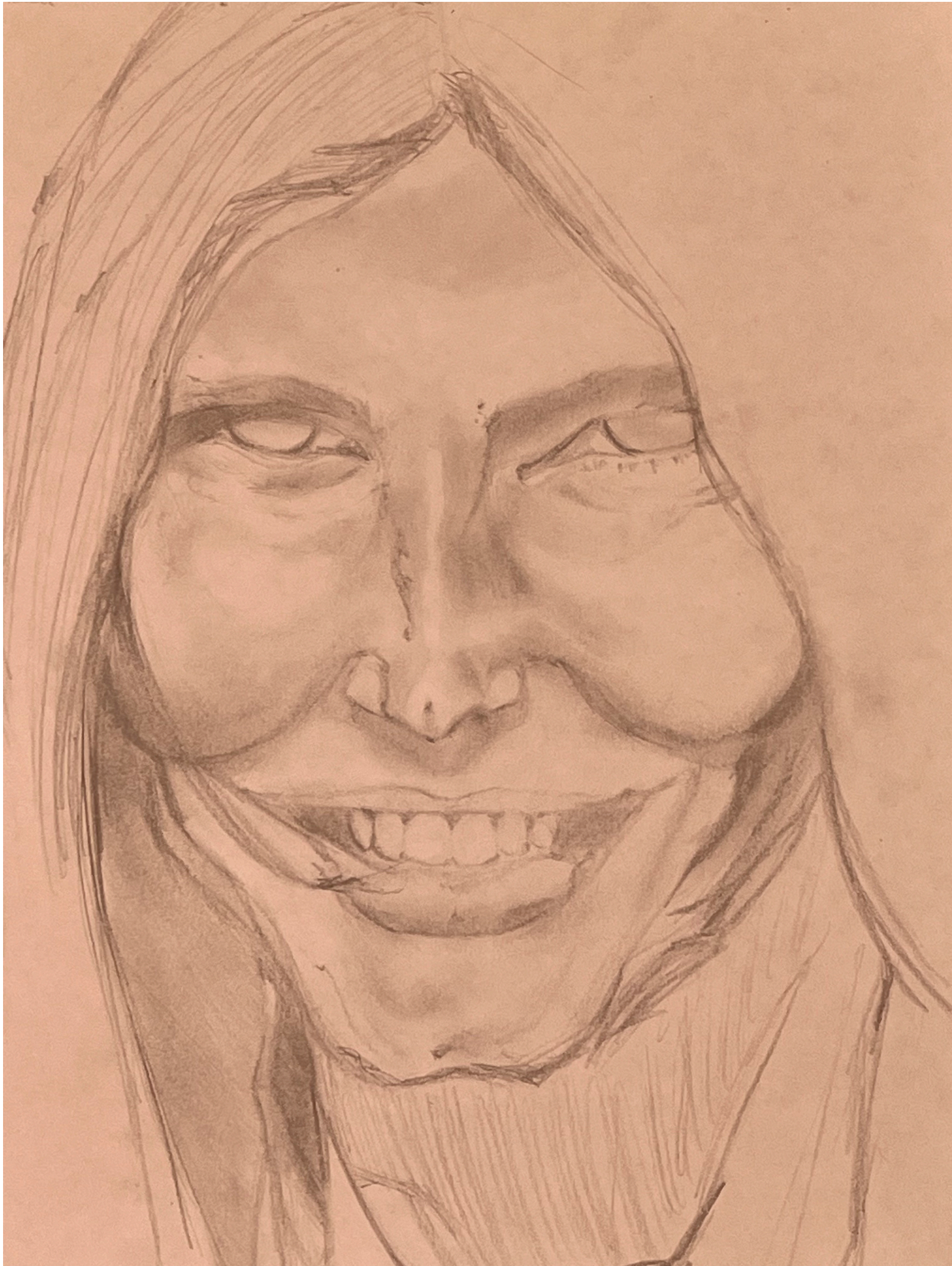
The first man wore reading glasses  
that rested on the bridge of a nefarious-  
ly-hooked nose and a slack coat, its collar  
limp and exposing his double-chin. The  
second man read without aid, but with a  
nervous idiosyncrasy exhibited in how he  
incessantly twisted a limb of his scarf, let  
it unravel, tugged at his moustache a bit,  
then would repeat.

At some arbitrary moment, the scarved  
man recommended an essay in Tuesday's  
Health section that discussed the potential  
harms of self-psychoanalyzing, and how  
it is important to confide in trained and  
objective professionals. The collared man  
eventually read it.

Deeper in the night, without obvious  
motive, that collared man folded all the  
papers before him, some with and some  
against the folds, breast-pocketed his read-  
ing glasses, and rent the silence of their  
quiet fellowship.

"I test myself regularly in trying to  
chart a discipline quotient, measuring over  
time whether my efforts prove I'm capable  
of being an effective monarch of me... or  
not. How? Well, by placing one square  
of chocolate on my tongue. The goal... to  
restrain myself from chewing it... to let  
it melt. Problem is, I can't. I chew every  
square."







"Hmm... I find it strange how words can come out of our mouths, but not our beings. Many preach wholesome theory, but are found wanting in practice. One can say 'Discipline' but can't exhibit 'Discipline'

"That may be true, but I believe we're only hard on ourselves. For example, we have enough discipline to order and deliver our communication... Discipline enough to live by habit... enough to sit here and read the paper."

"But habits don't require discipline. And communication, that's a process that has been delegated to the less demanding parts of the brain... somewhere in the subconscious. To change your language, diction, tone, et cetera, okay, that might require your conscious effort, your attention. But to simply speak, no. it actually takes more discipline to speak unnaturally than it does when casually dialoguing."

"So, if you propose that changing requires a discipline I - I believe - am in want of, how would you suggest I acquire discipline enough to melt the chocolate?"

"I would suggest rather that you counter your efforts... See, you must want to melt the chocolate more than you want to chew it. Diminish the desire to chew the chocolate, then you will melt it."

"I can't- I won't deny myself pleasure! I will satisfy my desires! I love chocolate... That I can't help."

"Is there anything you can help?"

"Myself to more."

"Thus, your discipline. See, discipline

is essentially self-ruling the self consistently, according to some principle or law. In your case, self-rules according to the law of satisfaction. With satisfaction as a standard, your cravings to consumptively indulge in chocolate compels your obedience to it. In other words, your cravings, in order to fulfill the devouring - the chocolate imperative. Therefore, you aren't in need of more discipline. If melting the chocolate or exhibiting the apparent discipline to do so is the end-result you desire, you need a new law by which to judge, to rule yourself; a revolution to self-jurisdiction. But you only wish to melt the chocolate to determine whether or not you have discipline, to convince yourself of it. Now, it's only a matter of perspective. You have discipline. We all do. You, in particular, are a faithfully disciplined hedonist - the sensualist. So, your assessment is complete. Now you may eat your chocolate to your heart's content... with a clear conscience."

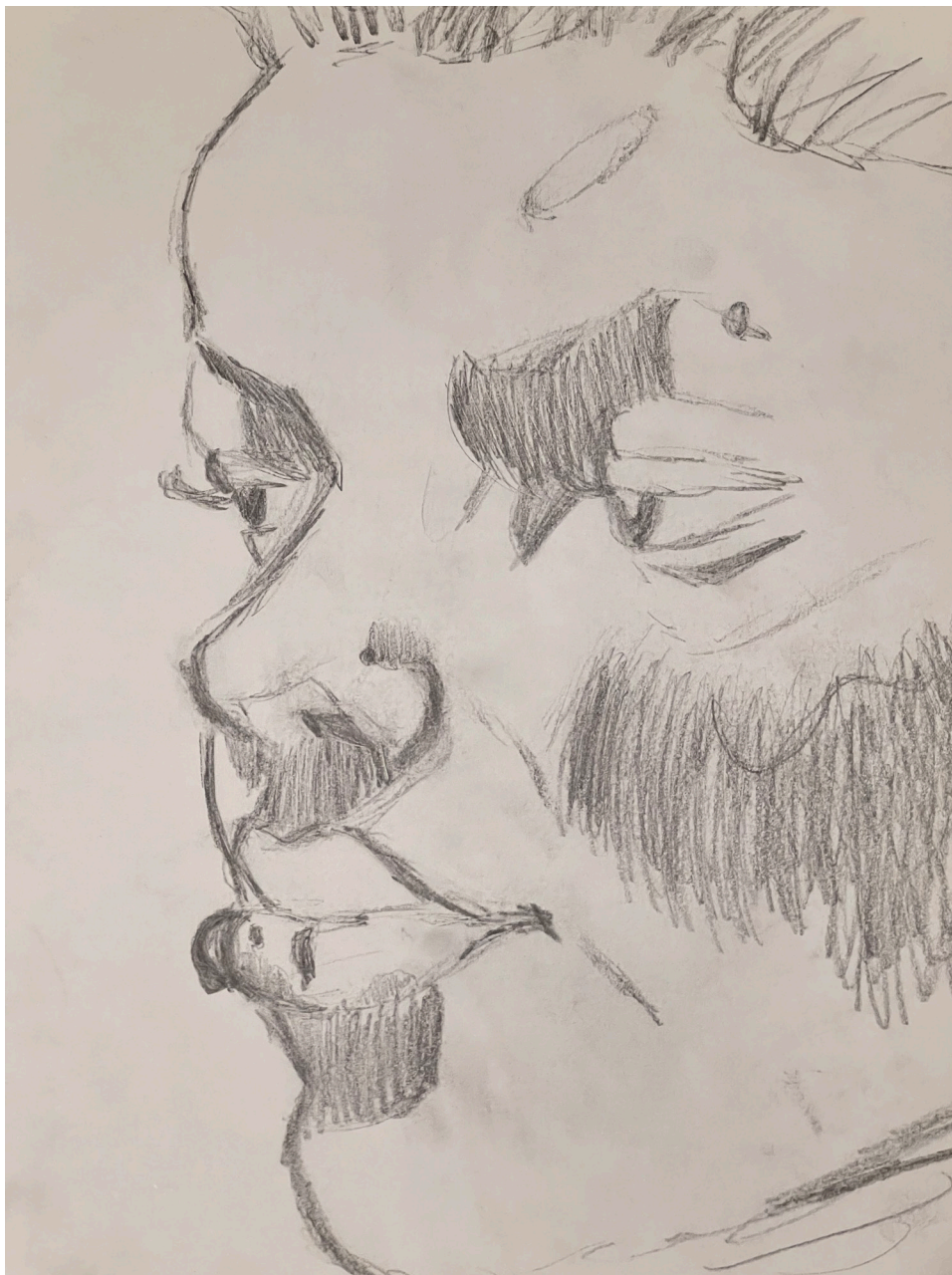
"To declare my assessment complete is illusory. It'll never end. Since you insist on preaching - agh! - discipline, in your practical fashion, I now must explore why theorists - such as yourself - fail to practically uphold, via discipline, their social contracts. We had an agreement here and you've violated it, mind you. See, beneath your ideas, you smuggled hostile reasoning into a place of safe contemplation. We humans can never enjoy a good thing. When a treasure presents itself, we hastily admire it only to skip all adoration and arrive at a place where we try to dimin-

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ish it into a quaint explanation, then try either to profit by it or destroy it. Why not let goodness be and be adored? You... you are like me. Yes... Tonight, you, sir, have chewed the chocolate.”

The collared man rose from the table, laid a five Euro bill by his empty coffee cup, and departed without a nod. He en-

tered the brisk night, and flipping his coat collar up, followed the sound of rakish traffic into the dense new of downtown Frankfurt. ❖





# “What Bugs Taught Me While I Lay Dying”

by Kadaron Sledge

What Bugs Taught Me While I Lay Dying  
Kadaron Sledge, Dallas, TX

They say I'll not live two week—buried before “B” in Bucket List.

Hospice.

My soul shatters, whispers: Make sense of this for me.

Exhale, let myself experience what's left of the world outside of my bedroom window.

Moths face paint tonight's harvest moon. They Rorschach-blot my window screen; squirming for entrance, to touch my pumpernickel candle's flame death, a beckoning orange/yellow/red belly dancer.

Make sense of this for me.

“With What? Moths fighting for what will kill them as if human?”

As if human?

“Like...” (inhale; sharp, painful, eviscerating).

...me and smoking.

## "Live Again"

by Artem Vaskanyan

Part of me believes that I did not survive  
That I had died a long time ago.  
But when I died I began to live again,  
In a different way and in the different mind.

And when I resisted to live a life  
That I did not want,  
I began surviving, and living became dreadful.

Once I accepted life for the way it was,  
Living life did not only become easier  
But enjoyable as well.

I believe that once a man dies  
He is no longer the same,  
Because you cannot kill a dead man twice.  
You cannot kill what has already died.







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# The Dream Journal

real dreams, real weird

Please send excerpts from your own dream journals.

If nothing else, we'd love to read them.

We won't publish your whole name.

Two dreams, concurrent nights. First had me back in school – an old plot with few twists – but no one was there who I was ever friends with. Not disappointing, just odd that it was so. All of the forgotten mistakes of being a teenaged boy: bad taste in clothing, poor hair care, needing to shave but imagining myself to have proper mustache and beard whiskers rather than the desert scruff of dry weeds scattered on my cheeks. Milling about waiting for something. Has there been another bit of relief from afternoon boredom? A pulled fire-alarm? How luxurious it is to be outside in the spring or autumn sunshine, rather than inside where the window do not dissipate teen-stench of failed deodorant, or gymnasium feet or just rampant hormones with nowhere to go. We talk, or rather those I am with talk one to another, but without meaning. Words that don't reach my back-in-time ears.

The second is sometime later; only a handful of years, really, but proportionally so much more to my now-just-post-teen self. I am at my university, trying to get back to my dorm, trying to navigate the campus. It is dusk, and the classrooms are empty, but there is something going on, something that I am not privy to. A fraternal exercise, or some mathematics or science organization doing the voodoo they do. I reach the gym, and begin walking a treadmill, only it is an ancient thing, one that does not have electric rollers but flywheels that must be pushed along with brute force. A professor is waiting for me to finish so that they can do their after-class working out. I move on, down hallways past trophy cases with no meaning to me, until I reach a student union. One of my classmates is there, visiting, and has an infant in swaddling, and they hand the child to me to hold and admire. The face of the child is distant, distorted, and yet it gives me a strange dream-smile, and I am happy that I can make a baby smile.

HSM. - Cyberspace



continued from page 3

Now I find myself in a parallel situation. Getting caught up in my work and the routines of day-to-day, feeling that same persistent sorrow. When you're fighting against the clock-of-the-unavoidable like age or illness, the only thing you can do is find a way to spend that time wisely. But what are you to do when that ticking clock is preventable? Not a sickness or a cancer or simple senescence, but a time-bomb specifically armed for you. When you're in the back of the crowd watching clock after clock tick to zero and feeling only a fraction of the melancholy you're watching others experience.

I think about the juxtaposition between those griefs, when that grief is triggered by two astronomically different suppliers. Something inescapable versus something tailored to be given to you. Given to you, given to your family, friends, children, coworkers, neighbors, teammates, acquaintances, and everyone else you know.

So you ask yourself, "What am I to do? What am I supposed to do?" Because what else are you possibly to do? The juxtaposition reveals not only the weight of the losses but the profound need for empathy.

Grandpa would be disappointed.

Olivia Somers - [editor@blotterrag.com](mailto:editor@blotterrag.com)

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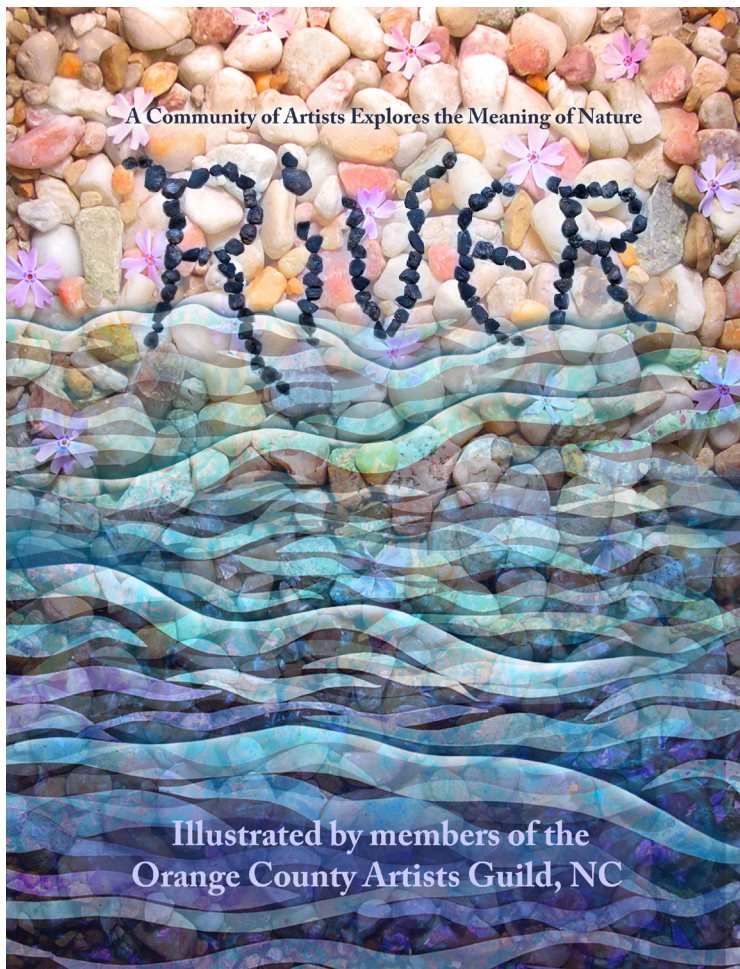
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