

THE OWL



2020

Contents

Brothers and Arms by Logan Kovach - 3

The Little Crow by Cat Giacalone

Marmalade Sundays: A Food Memory by Adrian Burr

From Bombay to Mumbai: An Analysis of Cultural Hegemony Through Name Changes in India
by Carl DeScott - 14

Progeny by Emily Shpiece - 16

The Ghost of Home by Isabela Bernstein - 20

Bottom of the Shower by Anthony E. Padget-Gettys - 24

Quest for Convivencia by Adrian Burr - 25

With My Whole Heart by Alexis Dolph - 31

The Case for Tuition Free College in America by Carl DeScott - 35

Fuck /fək/ vulgar slang by Anthony E. Padget-Gettys - 39

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Greetings from the OWL

Hello all,

We hope everyone is getting along well in this new situation. Though we may all be stuck inside our homes, we all seem to have adapted to what the world has thrown at us. And the OWL has decided to continue despite not having access to any of our resources. We are presenting this year's literary magazine online, as you may have guessed by now. This has presented its own challenges, such as figuring out the best way to get this to everyone, as well as finding the software to assemble the whole thing—something we perhaps got lucky with. We all have my fellow editors to thank for getting this whole thing together despite the hurdles we've had to jump through.

Prior to being sent home for the rest of the semester, we had done quite a few things thanks to the English department at this school. Our advisor and teacher, Dr. Caplan has guided us through every step of this project to help ensure that we would have this out to you in the form that it is now. We also have met with each writer who has come to our campus to talk about their experiences as both a writer in the world, and as a student here (for those who were alumni). These opportunities have helped us on our journey in creating this edition of the OWL, as well as shaping our experiences as students. In addition to alumni (such as Marwa Helal, Amy Lemon, and Martha Park) we also were able to meet with other members of the literary community. William Logan, Molly McCully Brown, and Ben Lerner gave us a personal insight into the literary community, which helped us better shape the OWL and our future career goals. All of these authors took the time from their busy schedules to guide us and give us a better understanding of the importance of all literature, from this small publication, to the big name books out there. And we hope that similar opportunities arise for all of you.

Recently, with all of this behind us and in our minds, we have been speedily assembling this final product. We have been working hard this past month to get this out on time for all of you to read. Even though it's online, and maybe not as fun to flip through as a print copy, we all hope you find this edition of the OWL just as enjoyable as all of the previous, printed, ones. Speaking of this edition, aside from the obvious, we have made some changes from the last edition. There is no similar theme amongst these works, which we decided would be best given the varied submissions we received. This edition is also a little smaller than previous years, due to some last-minute changes that had to be made, and the loss of access to the rest of the works submitted. We

hope that you all still find it to be satisfying to read through.

All of the submissions that we read through were great, there were so many wonderful ideas and pieces of writing from all of you, and it was hard to decide which ones would be included. The submissions published in this edition were the ones that we all thought would be the best reads for everyone. They stuck out the most to us, either due to their tone, their storyline, or their message, and we hope that you find these to be as thought-provoking or emotional as we have.

My congratulations to all of the writers who find their works in this. To those who don't, we hope you all keep writing, as all of you had good ideas. we hope everyone's semester finishes smoothly, and that everyone continues to stay safe and healthy in these uncertain times.

Sincerely,

the OWL team

Brothers in Arms

Script by Logan Kovach

FADE IN:

INT. DINING ROOM - NIGHT

A small soviet-style apartment. Furnished and well lived in. ANDREI, 19, sits at the table, in a wheelchair. MARYA, 57, his mother, sits opposite.

MARYA

Eat your soup, before it gets cold.

ANDREI doesn't move.

MARYA (CONT'D)

Andrei, I said eat your soup.

MARYA makes a face and goes to turn on the radio. The radio voice talks about uprisings across the country. MARYA goes over to a framed photo of a man on the wall.

MARYA (CONT'D)

They're misguided, great shepherd. Misguided, black sheep.

ANDREI looks at her and then out the window. It is beginning to snow. There is a knock at the door. MARYA goes to check. The sound of a door opening. MARYA gasps. Silence.

ANDREI

Mother, who is it?

Beat.

ANDREI (CONT'D)

Mother?

A moment of tension. Then, MARYA returns with CASIMIR, 23. CASIMIR is dressed in military regalia. The tension is broken with smiles.

MARYA

Look who decides a bloody uprising is the best time to visit his family.

CASIMIR

I don't think you give me enough credit. I've been on the frontlines since April.

MARYA

I know! I listen to the radio every day, trying to keep up with all the nonsense.

CASIMIR

Oh, turn that thing off. Propaganda is all that's good for.

CASIMIR turns the radio off. Awkward silence.

MARYA

God, look at you! You're skin and bones! Let me go fix you a bowl of soup.

MARYA goes.

CASIMIR

It's good to see you, Andrei.

CASIMIR hugs ANDREI.

ANDREI

What's it like?

CASIMIR

It's late. I wouldn't want to give you nightmares.

ANDREI

Nightmares?

CASIMIR unplugs the radio.

CASIMIR

Propaganda.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - NIGHT, EVEN LATER

CASIMIR sits at the open window, smoking. The gunfire sounds are less seldom. Unbeknownst to him, ANDREI enters. CASIMIR looks at his military jacket and tears off a patch. He looks at it before throwing it to the wind.

ANDREI

Why are you back?

CASIMIR jumps.

CASIMIR

Jesus. Don't sneak up on me like that.

ANDREI

Answer the question.

CASIMIR

You won't like the answer.

Beat.

CASIMIR (CONT'D)

Fine, but you can't tell mother.

CASIMIR flicks his cigarette out the window.

CASIMIR (CONT'D)

I deserted.

ANDREI goes to make a fuss. CASIMIR shushes him.

CASIMIR (CONT'D)

The things they're saying on the radio? None of it's true. Half the country has fallen to the rebels. The revolution is winning. It's coming here soon. I wanted to get both of you out, but Mother seems. . .

ANDREI

Patriotic.

CASIMIR

Patriotic, yes. Let's go with that.

ANDREI

When will the rebel army be here?

CASIMIR

Soon.

CUT TO:

INT. LIVING ROOM - DAY, A FEW DAYS LATER

ANDREI sits in his wheelchair, alone. The sound of panic and gunfire is heard outside. A moment later, the door slams open. It is CASIMIR.

ANDREI

Casimir, what was that explosion? What's going on?

CASIMIR

I told you, they're here. Bomb went off in the market. We gotta go, now.

CASIMIR rushes past ANDREI into a bedroom, leaving ANDREI by himself.

ANDREI

Where's Mother, Casimir?

Beat.

ANDREI (CONT'D)

Casimir, where is she, she went to town with you.

Beat. Andrei begins crying.

ANDREI (CONT'D)

Casimir. . . where. . . where is. . .

CASIMIR enters with a backpack on and machine gun over his shoulder. He throws a pair of Lofstrand crutches at ANDREI.

CASIMIR

Put those on.

CASIMIR begins collecting a few things from around the apartment.

ANDREI

Brother, I. . . I can't. . . I haven't tried to move without this for. . . for months. . .

CASIMIR grabs ANDREI by the collar.

CASIMIR

I just watched mother and countless others turn into bloody heaps because of one suicide bomber. I've been watching this revolution happen since April. You are either going to strap those on and walk, or you can stay here and wait for the bullet to be put in your brain. What's it going to be, brother?

ANDREI

What happened to you?

CASIMIR

I woke up.

CASIMIR begins strapping the Lofstrand crutches onto ANDREI.

CASIMIR (CONT'D)

Let me help you.

CASIMIR helps ANDREI get up. As soon as he lets go of him, ANDREI crashes to the ground.

CASIMIR

C'mon, c'mon. What did father always used to say?

ANDREI

I don't know.

CASIMIR

Yes you do, say it.

ANDREI

If you don't use your head, use your feet.

CASIMIR

That's right, Andrei! Stop thinking about it. Just do it!

CASIMIR brings ANDREI back to his feet. He slowly lets go, and ANDREI stands upright.

ANDREI

I'm doing it, Casimir, I'm doing it!

They embrace. As they do, a bullet shatters their window.

CASIMIR

Let's go, now!

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - DAY

A tank with civilians firing machine guns into the air drives by. After a moment, CASIMIR exits one of the buildings and looks around. ANDREI follows closely.

ANDREI

Casimir, where are we going?

CASIMIR

Sh!

Beat. CASIMIR eases up.

CASIMIR (CONT'D)

You remember that mineshaft we used to play in as kids?

ANDREI

The one that caved in and killed Ivan's older brother?

CASIMIR

If we can make it there, we can follow it out of the city to the quarry.

ANDREI

That's still on the other side of the city, you know?

CASIMIR

I know a path. Just follow me and do as I say, got it?

ANDREI nods. The two walk in the opposite direction of the tank, off camera. Gunfire in the not-so-distance.

CUT TO:

INT. ART MUSEUM - DAY

ANDREI is sitting on a bench in a war torn art museum. He looks at a large, slightly damaged painting that looks similar to Picaosso's La Guernica. As ANDREI is lost in thought, CASIMIR enters.

CASIMIR

The alleyway ahead is clear. If we can make it through the rest of the city just as smooth, we'll be in the clear.

ANDREI

Come look at this, Casimir.

CASIMIR eyes the painting.

CASIMIR

It's destroyed.

ANDREI

This place was built because we wanted to take care of art, of things like this. Yet when people show their true colors, they destroy it. We're like animals, Casimir.

CASIMIR

Alright, c'mon Mr. Philosopher, we've still got a lot of city left.

CASIMIR helps ANDREI up and they exit the room.

CUT TO:

EXT. CITY STREET - SUNSET

ANDREI and CASIMIR sit behind an overturned car. They are dirtier than before. Gunfire hits the car. CASIMIR hands ANDREI a pistol.

CASIMIR

Take this. If they hit me, you know what to do.

ANDREI

No, I-

CASIMIR gets up and begins taking potshots, ducking back to reload. No one but ANDREI

and CASIMIR are seen during this.
ANDREI inspects the pistol. He cocks it.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - NIGHT

A soviet-style apartment not dissimilar to the first shot. Then, a gunshot. The door's lock is broken. The door slams in. ANDREI is very awkwardly letting CASIMIR lean on him while using crutches. CASIMIR crashes into a chair, holding his thigh.

ANDREI

Stay right there, lemme look for bandages or something.

CASIMIR

Yeah, 'cause I was planning on going for an evening fucking stroll.

ANDREI begins going through drawers.

CASIMIR (CONT'D)

Forget the drawers, I'm pretty sure I got a first aid kit in the backpack.

ANDREI rummages through the bag until he produces some gauze. He begins wrapping it around CASIMIR's wound.

CASIMIR (CONT'D)

Ouch! Be careful, Andrei.

ANDREI

Sorry, sorry.

Beat.

ANDREI (CONT'D)

Why did they shoot at us? We're civilians, too.

CASIMIR

Do you wear their symbol? Do I? No, so they kill us.

ANDREI finishes bandaging him.

ANDREI

What do we do?

CASIMIR

What are you talking about? We make our way to the mine. It's time to go.

CASIMIR stands up, winces, and slumps back down.

CASIMIR (CONT'D)

It's nearly dark. It's probably not safe out right now. We'll wait until morning.

Beat.

ANDREI

Looks like we're both crippled now, huh?

CASIMIR hits him.

CASIMIR

Don't fucking say that about me. I'm not like you. I'm going to bed.

CASIMIR stands up, in pain, and walks somewhere else in the apartment. ANDREI is left alone.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - MORNING

ANDREI is sleeping on the couch. His crutches are on the floor. The sound of footsteps off camera.

CASIMIR

(off-camera)

Andrei, quit stomping so loud, you're gonna-

A gunshot. ANDREI wakes up. Footsteps. ANDREI quietly grabs the pistol CASIMIR gave him from off the coffee table and slides it in his jacket. He feigns being asleep. A man in civilian clothing walks up next to ANDREI, holding a machine gun. Before he can react. ANDREI pulls the gun out and shoots the man. He falls over dead. ANDREI sits up and fires another two shots into his corpse. He drops the gun. Silence.

ANDREI

Casimir? Casimir?!

He straps on his crutches and goes to the room CASIMIR was in. CASIMIR is never shown.

CUT TO:

INT. APARTMENT - MORNING

ANDREI is standing before the door. He has CASIMIR's backpack machine gun, and jacket on him. There is blood on the jacket.

He takes a deep breath and opens the door.

CUT TO:

EXT. FOREST - AFTERNOON

A serene, untouched forest. Snow on the ground. There is rusted equipment that is covered in dead foliage. A bird sits on a branch. There is a rustling noise and it flies off. ANDREI enters from a tunnel hidden by vines. Once he gets out in the open, he looks back. The sounds of gunfire are distant. He breathes a sigh of relief, and walks off, away from the city.

FADE TO:

BLACK

The Little Crow

By Cat Giacalone

One day, a little crow
Was flying low through the woods, looking for something
to calm the growling beast of his stomach. Food was scarce,
and he hadn't eaten all day.
In the distance, the ground glistened
among the trees and the tall grass. Curious, the young bird swooped down
and saw another crow just beneath
the rippling surface. It looked small
and hungry. The little crow thought it was so beautiful,
with feathers of obsidian and a pointed, black beak.
The small fowl was mesmerized, so he rushed off
to find something for the beautiful bird to eat.
After almost an hour of hunting,
he found a small beetle. It wasn't a meal
and hardly a snack, but he brought it back
to the other crow anyway. When he returned,
it was still there, but it also had a tiny bug
in its beak. The little crow leaned forward
to offer it his beetle, and when it wouldn't take the food,
the he opened his beak
and dropped it into the other crow's open mouth
and watched the insect disappear
beneath the surface. The little crow was genuinely happy
to see the delight on its face,
and he wanted to please it again,
So he flew off to find some more food.
The next day, he brought three berries and five seeds.
The day after, he came across an animal carcass
that had already been scavenged. He took the little bit of meat
left on the bones. But after a week, the other crow looked smaller,
until he was almost wasted away to nothing.

The little crow was confused. He gave all of his food
to it, but it was more starved
than when they first met. The little crow rushed off again
to find some more food, and returned with a tiny shrew.
He was dying and didn't care. All he wanted
was for the other crow to live. He leaned forward
to give it the rodent,
but as he got close to the surface,
his legs gave out.
He fell forward into the water
and thrashed about, trying to crawl out to safety,
but he was too weak.
He gave up
and let the water drown him.

Marmalade Sundays: A Food Memory

By Adrian Burr

Shreeeinnngg! My alarm goes off. It's 7:30, Sunday morning, and the sky is already turning from pink to light blue. My apron waits for me on the closet door, a cream canvas with blue, green, and yellow floral prints. I pull out two glass bowls, a measuring cup, plastic ladles, teaspoon and tablespoon, and my grandmother's copy of *The Joy of Cooking*, a 1964 edition with a stained teal face. I run my fingers over its sandwiched pages till I find the crimson ribbon that bookmarks our most beloved recipe: crepes.

Sift the flour, salt and sugar. Separate whites from yolks, add water, milk, and a dash of vanilla. My father ambles into the kitchen.

"Need help, honey?" He kisses my head.

"You can start the bacon and espresso."

The espresso! That steaming elixir, poured into two orange ceramic cups and mixed with a spoonful of sugar. We sip, we sigh, we share a grin.

I pull out an old cast iron pan with a bonafide wooden handle that has seven circular indents. From the back, the pan looks like six black planets orbiting a black sun. This is our ebelskiver pan, smuggled from Denmark sometime in the 1950s. On special Sundays we use this pan to make delightfully round, jelly-filled, better-than-pancakes ebelskivers, or "ploppers" as we call them. They are the only dish we inherited from my Danish great-grandmother, who came to America in 1910. When my mother was little, she would wake to the smell of ebelskivers and come down to find her grandmother working magic on the stovetop in only her bra (they didn't have good air-conditioning in the 70s, and Florida is hot). My family doesn't make ebelskivers like the Danes; we don't have my great-grandmother's original recipe so we use a crepe batter, and we eat ploppers dozens of times a year while the Danes only partake on Christmas. I was actually scolded by one of my Danish Friends when she discovered our breach in Christmas tradition. But as my great-grandmother was the one who first broke that tradition, I don't feel too bad. And as for it being a Christmas tradition, our Sunday mornings do have a touch of the sacred.

My parents have never been very happy together. I often marvel at how two individuals who I understand so well can so easily upset each other. They are triggered by subtle things, sore spots I have learned to dance around. My father might micromanage dinner preparation or the details for a road trip, little exasperations about the way my mother does things stacking up like stones between them. My mother will say nothing except "Do what you want Todd," letting layers of unchallenged criticisms collect until it's decades deep. This resigned response dampens my father's spirit. He's

always just trying to make things better. Their unhappiness rolls off them in suffocating waves, transforming them into the Martyr and the Silenced One.

Sometime around age twelve I realized I could temporarily infuse our home with the contentment it lacked by baking for my parents. No one can be completely unhappy when there is fresh bread or cookies to be eaten. Sundays were the main event, too early for the regrets of my father or the bitterness of my mother to begin percolating in the air. The set table and offerings of food practically glowing in the soft morning light seemed to whisper reassurances about the state of our family dynamics. It was the time we were most at peace.

Slip a sliver of butter into each ebelskiver bowl, add two tablespoons of batter and a small dollop of marmalade (my father's favorite). Wait two minutes. Then, using two slim wooden tongs expertly (or inexpertly) flip the half-baked balls so the uncooked side rests on the bottom. If you put in too much marmalade, it will run to the bottom to crystalize and smoke. This always adds an extra delicious crunch, but your next batch will stick and burn. If done right the ploppers just plop right out of the pan, perfectly round and golden, light and crispy on the outside with a marmalade surprise.

We still eat ebelskiver the proper way, drizzled in maple syrup and dusted with powdered sugar. Ten neighbors might pass through the house to grab a plover over the course of the morning, all invited by my father when he was out walking our rottweiler. He'll call to them as they water their gardens or grab their mail,

"Adrian has made ploppers Sandra! Why don't you come over?" "Would you like an espresso Alex?" "Breakfast is ready!" Two or three neighbors will actually sit down to eat with us. There are never enough chairs, and we end up pulling the piano bench into the dining room for me and my little sister to share. My father is in his element, telling stories, teasing, inquiring, flirting with everyone, offering more, more, more, orchestrating the conversation.

"What are you up to?" "How is your son?" "More espresso?" Laughter. More ploppers. More laughter. "Do you want an egg too? I can make you one." "Damn, these ploppers are delicious!" My mother sits by, determinedly chiming in now and then, or carrying on a side conversation with someone else at the table. The haze of food and friends acts like a cushy insulation between her and him. I relax, feeling successful in my role as parent whisperer extraordinaire.

Soon all the ploppers have been eaten, the film of egg yolk left behind on the plate scraped up and nibbled on, too golden and precious to waste. There's not a bit of bacon left, and only dregs in the bialletti. Now we might go for a walk, then visit the movie theater, or pile on the couch to watch a rental. The contentment of Sunday mornings will hold us through the day, waning slightly as the sun goes down.

My parents are separated now. I am relieved. Filling their bitter silence was an exhausting and

fruitless occupation that I never learned to resist. We still have Sunday breakfast, but less often. Now they must fuel me through weeks, months, a collection of perfect little memories to stir in my espresso. They're still just as sacred, but now bittersweet, like the lingering taste of marmalade.

From Bombay to Mumbai- An Analysis of Cultural Hegemony Through Name Changes in India

By Carl DeScott

Western imperialism resulted in the anglicization of the names of many places throughout the world, India being one of them. In the years between 1858 and 1947, the Indian subcontinent was ruled by the British, in what was known as the British Raj. In this period, many city and state names within the country were anglicized to fit in with the new ownership. One such city that was forced to change its name was the city of Mumbai. Its name was changed multiple times, but the first important change to note was because of the Portuguese writer Gaspar Correia. In his book *Lendas da India*, he dubbed the city Bombaim, equivalent to the phrase “good little bay” in Old Portuguese. When the British took control of the subcontinent, they once again changed the name, but to something more in line with keeping English speakers in mind, to the city of Bombay.

After World War 2 and with large nationalistic sentiment growing within the country, in no small part thanks to Mahatma Gandhi and the Indian National Congress, India was released from British rule in 1947. When India acquired its independence, a few cities within the country immediately changed their names to reflect this newfound freedom, an example being the city of Jubbulpore becoming Jabalpur, to reflect the Hindi natives of the area. The city of Bombay however, would not receive its name change till the year 1995. This was at the behest of the Marathi far right nationalist party Shiv Sena, who had just won the Maharashtra state elections. They argued that the current name of the city was a corrupted English version of Mumbai, and a reminder of the old British colonial rule that gripped the country. The name change was also a push to strengthen the Marathi identity in the Maharashtra region of India, as the name is derived from the Koli goddess Mumbaiadevi, who is considered the patron god of the city, and important to the Marathi people.

Socially speaking, the name carries a large amount of weight to a certain contingent of people in the area. The city of Mumbai is sometimes referred to by its old name of Bombay by people living in the city and in other regions in the area. However, it has been observed that calling the city by its old name in the presence of certain ‘patriotic’ individuals sparks outbursts of emotion, in some cases it being in a violently political nature. This in it of itself shows the importance of cultural integrity to this group of people. The name of Mumbai is meant to harken back to the traditions of the Marathi people; their identity as a people is within the name itself. The change itself was the people’s way to counter an old hegemonic force over their way of life.

However, this sentiment throughout Mumbai is not cohesive. There is a group of people within the city itself who didn’t appreciate the sudden change. Not only did the name of the city itself

change, but the government also ordered federal agencies, local businesses, and newspapers to change their names to reflect the change. The sudden transition was not appreciated by some. Even if it was 'liberating' them from the colonial name, Bombay was the only name they've known. This is one of the reasons why people within Mumbai continue to call the city by the name Bombay, as a form of resistance to the sudden change. This name change did not affect some residents of the city at all. Those who speak the languages of Marathi and Gujarati have always called the city Mumbai, so the transition was rather moot to them.

The name changes of cities within India are deeply rooted in certain political agendas. Shown in both transitions of power, whoever was leading the country got to name the cities within it. When the British took power, they anglicanized the name of the city to Bombay, cementing the British Raj hegemony present at the time. When this power was lost and time went on, another group of people who were in charge, in this case nationalist Shiv Sena party of the Maharashtra State, decided to instill a counter culture and replace the name with Mumbai, and by forcing the name on businesses and other such entities, they created a hegemony of their own. Shiv Sena had the intent of renaming other anglicanized institutions, such as Bollywood, a cross between Bombay and Hollywood. This in a way mirrors the past of the British Raj; the party wished to change the name of a place for the sake of tying it in to their cultural identity. The discussion of the name change has not stopped today. People within and outside Mumbai still believe that the name of the city should still be Bombay. Mainly people who oppose the Shiv Sena party, and regard the change as arbitrary and a waste of political capital. Not to mention the national government of India also objected to the name change, as they felt the city would lose its international identity.

It is interesting to note that the name change to Mumbai is reflective of both dominance and resistance in relatively equal parts. We can see resistance in the fact that the switch from Bombay to Mumbai was done in opposition to the old hegemonic influences of the British Raj. It was meant to restore the identity of the Marathi people by using the name inspired by their local deity. But this does not mean that dominance did not play a part in the change. As the change was brought on by nationalist influences. It's not as if there was necessarily a consensus when it came to changing the name; it was meant to empower the Marathi identity in the region. It's a geographical irony: an old name is forced on a city where a new name was forced on them centuries ago.

Progeny

By Emily Shpiece

I wash the dishes. I wash the food and stains off, and if I can't wash them off, then I scrub them off, and if I can't scrub them off, I leave water on them to soak until they lose their grip on the surface of the mug, bowl, plate, and then I rinse it off and put it in the dishwasher. I used to only unload then load the dishwasher, then I didn't have a dishwasher, so when I moved back home I would unload it, hand wash the dishes in the sink, and reload it.

Before I moved to college I told my little brother he should start unloading and loading the dishwasher. I told him it would make our mom less angry with him if he did. He scoffed at me and rolled his eyes. I've since realized it's not that it would make her less angry, but that it would deter her anger away from him, and that was important because after I left there would only be two people she could be angry at, and she was rarely angry with my dad to his face. Her frustration would usually be taken out on any one of us three.

When my brother and I were kids, we'd play in the backyard as my mother moved rocks from the creek around a tree. She dropped mulch there and decided that's what was needed to make a flowerbed. My dad and I have tried summer after summer to make it habitable, but amidst the tree roots and pebbles, the only plants that embedded themselves in the soil were eaten by the surrounding deer and rabbits. Now it's only onion grass and moss. They eat up the nutrients in the soil, coat the surface of the ground, and they sag beneath the weight of our feet.

One May, it rained every day. Her joints were constantly aching. Feeling a sense of obligation and pity, I rubbed her hands, the skin rolling around like slime between my fingers. She moaned from the pain, and it drove her to tears. She cried to me about her son, his arrogance, all that she's done for him. I was uncomfortable, but refrained from saying anything. It was the obligation. I, her daughter, felt like the pupil, dutifully carrying the torch of motherhood burden. *This is what it will be like, her tears advised me, in the world of men and mothers.*

I used to spend all my time in the shower. When I was overwhelmed or needed to get away from my parents I'd stay in the shower for extended periods of time. I'd shave, scratch, scrub away at the dirt piling onto my skin as I turned pink. My fingers, oversaturated, would prune up so I could still use my hands and have a grip on the shower handles and my towel as I'd dry myself off. As I got older, I'd drive to my friend's houses. I'd stay for hours on end, in the company of adults who were nothing like my parents, people who

I'd call "Mom" and "Dad." To accommodate my taking up space, I'd complete odd jobs: Washing the dishes, taking out the trash, weeding the flowerbeds.

My mom isn't a green thumb. She doesn't know much about maintaining care and she thinks the plants I have are ugly, but she tries, which is more than I can say about most people. Ironically, she can get plants to root better than anyone else I've seen. Regardless of what the plant needs, she sticks it in the ground and it takes hold.

Nothing else in her life is like that. She loses friends left and right and can't fathom why. She discloses her anxieties and fears to me tearfully in private, but will have a bitter, hard attitude in public. She makes side comments and criticizes, employing a harsh self-deprecating demeanor that I don't know how to respond to. The silence on my lips is often too much to bear, and we can both feel rifts, roots losing grip and ties to each other.

Maybe the only thing she can root is her spite. Grudge is deep seated, the Miracle Grow that keeps her going. She's living life in a cloud of constant disappointment, but as long as there's a cloud it'll keep her roots nourished.

She's being watered down. Her roots can't hold onto relationships, they can't hold onto her bones, and they can't hold her together in one piece for more than a month. She has to have constant breakdowns to realign herself so she can keep going. One month at a time. One lost friend, one drained knee, one snap at her daughter, one soured meal at a time.

I don't even know who she is. When she became a mother, she gave up the parts of herself. She's a husk, giving all of herself to her family. She's allowed to feel anger, sadness, self-pity. She's allowed to leave for hours on end. I need to stop feeling bad for myself when she's being human.

When I become a mother, am I going to give up the parts of myself? Am I going to be a husk, giving all to my family? Will I be allowed to feel anger, sadness, self-pity? How much of my life is going to be dedicated to my blossoming children over allowing myself to thrive?

My anxiety tends to point out stains and blemishes, which is why come exam time you'll find me scrubbing away at walls with a Lysol wipe. I realized about the same time I started washing dishes all the time that I picked up cleaning as a response to my mom's temper. To cope with anxiety from my mom, I'd clean to prevent her from being angry at me, and it all became so intertwined that cleaning became its own independent coping mechanism. Now I enjoy cleaning but I'm not sure if it stemmed from the right place; if I grew to love it out of habit or if I grew to love it in a Stockholm-Pavlovian condition.

When my little brother turned 3, I broke my arm and she busted her knee. Routine cartilage built up in her leg, and she needed to get it drained. At the same time, I broke my arm, but there was only one slot open at the doctor's office the following Monday.

Over the summer, we were boating and she fractured her vertebrae because the speed boat was too speedy and the wind was wrong and the waves were rough and we landed wrong and she was in the front of the boat and it snapped her spine. She could've been paralyzed but we were lucky. We rode back to the dock slowly, water splashing and soaking us. The guy driving the boat said it was her weight. She doesn't like boating anymore. In the following months of recovery, I functioned as her back, bending over to pick things up or down for her.

She had to get two knees drained within a month of each other and was sentenced to a wheelchair for three weeks but no pain. That was lucky. We went to Disney and skipped all the lines and took turns pushing her in the wheelchair but she only wanted me to do it. I knew how to do it correctly: Slowly, carefully, mindful of the fact there was a person sitting there.

Dutifully?

My little brother's currently under a mystery diagnosis waiting game. Multiple things have been ruled out but when my mom told me in November it might be lupus, I couldn't help but panic a little. The other day they ruled out Ehlers. "How did you get tested for that," I asked angrily. "There's a waiting list of two years."

He shrugged. "I dunno," he said, picking up a video game. "I just know I got tested and I don't have it."

My mother, the youngest of five. My father, the youngest of three. I was their youngest for seven years before their last one, born to a life of medical maladies. The burden of the youngest. Did inheritance wash over me?

Water oversaturates my hands and I still have grip. She grasps and misses, slips and slides. I maintain a balance; she tumbles down.

But I can feel my knees and ankles pop and bones accidentally move out of place when I take a step. I can feel my frustrations build into destructive anger, rooted deep inside me.

Others are not so lucky. Their Ehlers is extreme; vascular, classic-hypermobility painful strains. My friend's basilic vein popped out of place once and was nearly ruptured. We're lucky. We don't have it that bad. I don't even have it at all.

My mom lays on the living room couch in agony. Her eyes are barely closed and she tries to nap to keep from feeling the deep-seated pain, but she can never sleep at night. When we renovated my brother's room to a guest room, she stopped leaving my dad in the middle of the night for the couch and went to the room next door instead. When she's sad, she'll hide in there, curled up on the bed. When she's sad, I run away. I feel bad for her, and for myself at the same time. A mixture of bitterness and hard attitude.

She storms around the house, slamming doors and laundry baskets. She flings the front door, screen door, car door out behind her, and rushes away. She's angry at my dad, but there's a storm outside, too. We both look at each other with the same face. The storm outside is supposed to last a week, but we don't know when the inside storm is going to break into sunlight. I wonder when she'll leave my dad. I wonder when she'll leave for good. The door slam heard 'round the world, 'round the house.

When she gets like this, each step is like a thunder clap. Like thunderstorms, her footsteps shake the entire house. I'm not afraid of thunder, but I am afraid of my house falling apart. I wonder how long it'll take before lightning strikes one of us dead.

But I love my mom. She works so hard. She loves so much. Her eyes well up and shower when she thinks about her children. She's either nourishing or eroding us, and at any given moment it could shift rapidly.

Every time I say I'm going out, reject an invitation to play a game, see a movie with her, be part of the family, I can feel her energy waver, some sadness creep into her behavior. Before leaving I'll try to make amends by quickly putting shoes away because she can't bend over, or doing the dishes. Helping by scrubbing the frying pan that's been sitting out on the stove for a day. Am I scrubbing for her? Or am I trying to scrub her off of me?

Plants can reproduce by making copies of themselves, perfect genetic matches, or they can receive an input of genetics from other plants of a similar species to create a genetically different plant. Like people, the survivalist goal for reproduction with plants is to continuously strive for genetic perfection, to the point where the DNA aligns just right and death by age is a wives tale. My friends call me sprout because of my love for plants. I've yet to figure out if I'm a copy or slightly bettered a chance for survival.

The Ghost of Home

by Isabela Bernstein

At first he is hesitant, as if a visitor waiting to be invited in. He reaches for his pocket, takes one small sip of the metal flask, an even smaller step inside and lets his eyes wander around the silent, empty house, looking for nothing in particular. It smells like dust and forgotten memories, and doesn't quite feel like home.

The house seems as if seen in an old picture, wrinkled and stained by coffee and time, but still is what remembers. The big stairs right as you come in, that one broken step that always squeaks, the white walls that have turned beige, the drawings on them, unavoidable when in a house full of kids, the height markers by the door drawn over the years, the red couch Mom saved for months to buy, the bookshelf with all her favorites, probably untouched since someone other than dad was here, the brown Barcalounger by the window, the ugliest chair anyone has ever seen, where dad would sit quiet for hours and hours until all the kids were deep into sleep.

He takes another step. He is home. Or at least it should feel like he is. But the silence makes it unrecognizable, and every tiny detail that is different makes it feel as if this house was never really a home.

The old rug with the pretty flowers Mom sewed is no longer on the floor; the box television is replaced by a flat screen one he has no idea how dad could afford, and most of the pictures that used to fill the shelves are laying flat across them – he doesn't know if it was dad that didn't want to have to stare at the ghosts of his once family or if the wind just caused them to fall and he simply didn't care enough to fix it. He reaches for his pocket.

What surprises him the most is how it feels so much bigger. When he was a child, half or maybe less of the size he is now, there was so much life, so many colors, noises, smells, hugs; now there is nothing but him and the moments that feel like someone else's memories.

He walks to the couch and for a second thinks about sitting, but something within stops him. It feels like this is the crime scene of his childhood's murder, and it doesn't feel right to move anything.

So he just stands there, reaches for his pocket, pretends he is a few many inches shorter and tries to remember. Carol and Joe, still freshmen in high school, yelling over the remote; Nicole, around twelve, by the coffee table drawing like she used to before she grew up and had to *get a real job*; Tom, just turned ten, running around the house with that football that broke at least four lamps in three months; by the window, dad, asleep or silently drinking a beer back when he could stop at just one.

He pretends he can see the colors of a big loving family, hear the sound of happiness and Sunday afternoon, smell Mom's sweet potato and bean casserole almost ready in the kitchen. He pretends he's still

eight, sitting on the rug with the pretty flower print, watching whatever the twins would eventually agree to disagree on, their old brown mutt alive, breathing heavily on his lap. He pretends life didn't happen and he never grew up to be someone that boy wouldn't quite be proud of.

Doing his best not to touch anything, he finds his way to the dining room, which looks almost the same with a few extra layers of dust. Once, when this house was safe of sadness and Mom's absence, they would sit here every birthday, Christmas, Thanksgiving or that one time Mom got her big raise – but as the years went by, as Mom got tired and sicker and dad got angry and drunker, happy days became less happy, and that dining room an empty, dusty reminder of the happy family they once were and would never be again.

As he steps into the kitchen, he no longer must close his eyes to remember – it's unavoidable. Mom's standing there, hair in a messy bun, yellow pencil attempting to keep it together, that terrible country album she loved playing on the background – not loud enough to wake dad up, of course –, that apron they gave her for Mother's Day, each of the kids' hands stained on it with paint with a different color, and, most importantly, the lovely smile that always emerged on her face every time one of them came in to ask about lunch.

He reaches for his pocket and takes another sip. It breaks him to do it in front of her memory, but still he does. It hurts every part of him to think about her, but he is glad the memory of his mother that lives within him is this one. He's glad the colors that remind him of her are those of the apron instead of the greyness of her face during those last days, the sound is that of her terrible taste in music instead of her quiet sobs on those late nights when no one even knew if dad was coming back, and the touch is her warm hug by the kitchen door instead of the coldness of her hand when she barely had the strength to hold his anymore.

He wants to stay here, picturing her cooking and smiling, pretending she's alive until a tiny part of him believes it, but his siblings will be here soon to start packing, and he wants to finish looking around while still alone.

He feels just as he did the last time he was here, over fifteen years ago. It was Mom's memorial service, and though the house was packed with neighbors and friends who also loved her smile, for the first time in very long it was in silence. The music that once lived within these walls had been fading for years, but there was always a spark of hope and music that came from the simple fact that she was still here.

Even on those last days, when all the kids but him were moved out and visited only when they could, she would turn the radio on maximum volume, and anytime she had visitors tell the best and worst jokes she could think of in an attempt that more often than not was successful to fill the house with laughter.

Then the inevitable happened, and the silence was crisp and cold, making all the kids that were no longer kids feel the sharp pain of her absence every time they would breathe and be reminded that, unlike her, they were still alive.

None of them planned for that to be the last time they would be here. As much as they were too hurt

by all the years of dad's drinking and all the silence before that, as much as they felt the right to hate him for it, they were all trying very hard to still love him. But he didn't answer their calls, send back Christmas cards, go to Nicole's wedding or visit when his first grandson was born. They didn't have the energy to keep fighting for love, so they let him slowly fade into memories just like Mom did.

The truth is it felt like Dad had been dead for way longer than just two days.

As he goes up to the second floor, his eyes land on the framed picture that hangs by the stairs. All of them with dad, outside by that old picnic table that broke so many years ago. Dad seemed happy. There were no bags under his eyes or bruises on his knuckles, and no hate in his look. And then he sees himself, curled up in his arm, and that is precisely what breaks his heart.

It scares him to know the little boy in the picture would grow up to see his mother work herself to a point of such exhaustion that her body didn't have the strength to fight when sickness came; to see his father dive so deep into anger or guilt or whatever it was that not even five kids desperate for love could save him from drowning. It scares him that so many nights alone in his room listening to his father's rage and his mother's pain would slowly make him forget the child he once was. That he would grow up and find a girl with kind eyes like his mother's, and start a family that seemed like a dream, but at night he would still be haunted by ghosts of nightmares that only that flask could make him forget.

What scares him the most, however, is how much the image of himself as a child reminds him of his son. He reaches for his pocket, feeling the cold steel, but this time he does not take a sip.

He walks by his parents' room. He can almost hear the fight that would repeat itself at least three times a week, the punches on the wall, the words too sharp and cruel to be repeated, the painful screams of Mom begging him to please, please stop. His heart sinks, not only because of the weight of the memories, but maybe because of a bit of guilt too. He catches himself once again reaching for his pocket, but stops before he can feel the cold steel.

He isn't sure if the neighbor found dad downstairs or in there, but the part of him that is still only a boy afraid of ghosts is not ready to come in and see the image of his faded father and of mom's greying face terrified of what her little boy has become.

Then he passes by the mirror hanged on his sisters' old door. For a fraction of a second, he believes he is seeing a ghost. The uneven stubble of a beard, the rough hands so characteristic of angry men, the deep dark circles under his eyes, the blueness of which clearly craving, begging him to please, please reach for his pocket. It breaks his heart to take a second look and realize that the man in the mirror is not a ghost, and the mirror is only a mirror.

It is then when he finally decides to forgive his father. For so many years, he thought of dad as the villain. The angry man who could never stop drinking, the one to be blamed for Mom's death and all of his nightmares. And perhaps that was in fact true, but now he realized it didn't matter. Because there could be a

million reasons he could never be sure of for dad doing what he did. Maybe his father was the same way or he felt too guilty about how much Mom worked – the truth is, it didn't matter. He needed to forgive dad to forgive himself.

Next is his room. Once, shared with his two brothers, but since he is the youngest and the last one to move out, for a few years it was only his. It's empty just as he left it; a naked mattress, dirty white blank walls, empty closets. The only thing in here is a book - his mom's favorite, and though he hadn't thought about it in years, when his eyes land on the dark green paper cover he can almost hear her reading it to him, every night for so long; he also remembers those last few weeks, when she no longer had the energy to make as many jokes, and in the silence of her fading asked him to read it to her.

He hears two cars parking outside. His siblings are here, and he should go downstairs to meet them. But before, he gives himself a minute. He takes a deep breath, and as the house fills with the familiar voices of the people he loves and with a little bit of life, finally, he reaches for his pocket.

He grabs the old dusty book and on its lonely spot on the shelf places the metal flask he has taken everywhere for longer than he would like to admit. Tonight, he tells himself, when he gets home, he will tell his wife the truth that has been choking him for so long, and he will ask for help. He will say the words his father never had the strength to, and that will be the beginning of what his story must become rather than the end of it.

I am an alcoholic.

And before he goes to sleep, he will read his son Grandma's favorite story and make certain he never needs a dusty wrinkled picture to remember his Dad loves him.

Bottom of the Shower

By Anthony E. Padget-Gettys

When you're a child, a pre-teen,
You don't know what depression is.

When I was young I would take long showers.
I liked to sit at the bottom with the warm waters
And just think for a while.
Sometimes it would be nice little fantasies,
Imagination running wild with adventure.
Other times it was pondering the big questions the best a child can.
One day I sat at the bottom of the shower,
Not fantasizing, not imagining.
I was pondering the point of life.
Why do we go on living?
What is the reason to avoid death?
Sat there showered with warm waters,
I concluded: History.
The ability to watch history pass was my one answer.
Of course I thought of my family, my friends,
But I was not thinking of my own reasons,
I was pondering in generality, detaching from myself.
I made an impersonal reason for living
To argue away suicide.

When you're a child you don't know what depression is
But you can know the bottom of the shower.

Quest for Convivencia

By Adrian Burr

It was 10:58 am. The southern Spanish sun was already so strong it bleached the sandstone blocks of the Roman bridge. I was supposed to meet my guide Javier at 11 am. While I waited, I studied the map I had snagged from the tourism desk a few blocks away. It showed the layout of the old city, with little symbols indicating museums, places to eat, and important historical sites. At a few minutes' past, a tall, salt and pepper man of about forty-five strolled up to me. He was holding a sign which read, "Tours of Old Cordoba!" He took off his sunglasses to shake my hand, then began to show me our tour path on the map,

"Well, I will start by telling you about the Roman bridge. This is where we are standing, see? And there is the guard tower. We will follow this path through the city and end our tour at the Mezquita, the mosque as you say in English. Now, this city was famous in the medieval period for its peaceful living together of Muslims, Christians, and Jews. We call it 'Convivencia.'"

I nodded eagerly. Convivencia was what I was here for. I first heard the term in my medieval history course. My textbook, *A Short History of the Middle Ages*, portrayed medieval Muslim Spain, or Al-Andalus, as a beacon of science, learning, and cultural interaction that far outshone the rest of Europe. Cordoba was its capital. It housed hundreds of libraries, hospitals, and public schools where even women could study. Its streets were clean and lit at night by oil lamps. And though it was ruled by a Muslim elite, Christians and Jews were active participants in society. It sounded breathtaking, utopian. I had never been taught the extent of the achievements of Medieval Islamic culture, and more importantly, about any peaceful interactions and cultural exchanges between Christians and Muslims. And any time modern Muslims were mentioned in my childhood, it was in reference to bloody conflict.

The first time I truly grasped the concept of war was in second grade. It was spring. I was on the playground when I heard a cacophony of angry buzzing, and looked up to see seven fighter jets shooting across the sky. My friend Anthony explained, in that self-important way of children repeating what their parents said,

"Those planes are going to bomb Iraq. Bush is sending them."

That evening I made my parents explain why our President had sent planes to bomb another country. They said it was because a war on terror had been declared. It had something to do with Muslims. The details of the conversation have faded over the years, but the image of planes against a grey, spring sky stuck with me. I knew even then there would be people on the ground in Iraq, people who would feel just as small as I felt looking up at those sharp, black triangles. And they would be afraid. They would try to run and hide, but they wouldn't be able to run fast enough. In my own seven-year old way, I grasped the danger the Iraqis

were in long before I knew about 9/11, that date that has been mythologized in the American consciousness.

Ever since, I have felt ashamed of my country's propensity towards violence and anti-Muslim sentiments. Our medieval history class even read contemporary political articles that cited the crusades as proof that Muslims had always been in conflict with Christians. I saw in this period of Spanish history a kind of redemption, a possible model for how Christians and Muslims in modern times might live more peacefully. When I decided to study abroad in Spain, I wrote a grant to visit Cordoba for a few days. I wanted to see the city for myself, and learn as much as I could about how the Muslims, Jews, and Christians of Cordoba had interacted. I wondered; what parts of the other's religion did each group emphasize to find common ground? What spiritual figures might they have celebrated together? How did Cordoban officials deal with religious conflict?

Javier led me through the "artisan quarter," a collection of narrow, cobblestone streets filled with quaint white-washed buildings with red tile roofs. Instead of the usual combination of sleepy cafes, dimly lit gelaterias, and mom and pop shops that one finds in Spain, there was a bounty of tourist stops. These ranged in target customer from the very wealthy, boutiques filled with leather purses and expensive ceramics, to kitschy, five-euro fans, ten-euro scarves, and refrigerator magnets showing illustrated versions of the Mezquita or the Roman bridge.

We stopped by the official museum of Cordoba. This was the place I was most excited to see, apart from the Mezquita. I was sure that here I would find detailed accounts of daily life under Muslim rule for Christians and Jews, household objects, descriptions of the libraries, maybe scrolls!

There was an entire floor related to objects found from the roman period with plaques detailing festivals celebrated, letters from generals, explanations of mythic figures from fragments of pottery. In the medieval Muslim section, nothing. Well, some things, a few musical instruments, whose plaques said only that the instruments couldn't be played in public spaces because it was un-Islamic. There was a chair taken from a house, and a drawing of the layout of the home of a middle-class family. The entire collection of artifacts took up half a small room. The other half was devoted to the pre-Roman settlement.

"Why is there so little information about daily life under Muslim rule?" I asked Javier.

"Not a lot of things survive after hundreds of years."

Before I left to study abroad, I paid a visit to the Professor of Islamic art, Dr. Bailey, to ask which books she recommended on the art and architecture of Medieval Muslim Spain. After listing a few titles, she admitted she'd been on the committee that read my proposal.

"Oh really? What did you think of it?" She didn't answer, instead asking her own question.

“How did you come up with this idea?”

I explained my vision of using Convivencia to combat modern prejudices. Dr. Bailey pursed her lips.

“I should warn you, a lot of scholars, western, American scholars in particular, romanticize this period. There’s not as much evidence for Convivencia as they say. It’s a hotly debated topic. I think you can imagine why. I would hesitate to assert that the period was ‘progressive’ in any sense.”

I got the distinct feeling that Professor Baran voted “no” on my grant proposal. I also had the sudden sinking feeling that if she was right, then I too had fallen into a trap, using inaccurate history to further my own modern agenda. I left her office feeling much less sure of myself.

After the museum, we took a trip out to the ruins of the palace built by Abd al-Rahman III. The half-standing walls, unearthed from beneath hundreds of years of sedimentation, were fascinating, but yielded little in the way of daily life or interactions between Muslims, Christians, and Jews. They also had the haunting side-effect of reminding me of the solitary columns and chunks of debris left by a bombing in Syria.

I got very excited when we entered a small museum housed in one of the city guard-towers that was specifically about cross-cultural interaction between Muslims, Jews, and Christians. This too proved insubstantial. There were only inspiring quotes from famous men of the period who believed in the value of the other two religions, rather than any primary evidence of the peaceful interaction of these groups.

I started to panic. Every site praised the Convivencia, even advertised it as the central identifying feature of Cordoba, but none went into detail about how we know they lived peacefully, what “peaceful” interaction even looked like, or what the Christian and Jews thought of the Muslim elite. *This is it? This is all the information available?* I thought desperately. I worried Dr. Bailey was right.

Of course, I had tried to do research ahead of time to form my own opinion. I read books arguing for the existence of Convivencia, like *The Ornament of the World: How Muslims, Jews and Christians Created a Culture of Tolerance in Medieval Spain*, and books arguing the complete opposite using the exact same events in history, like *The Myth of the Andalusian Paradise*. All I had been able to discover was that no one could really say for certain how peaceful this period was. I had hoped visiting Cordoba in person would throw some additional light on the subject, but every passing second was proving me wrong.

And I also wondered, *Even if Convivencia was a myth, does it really matter as long as that myth helps form a positive view of Muslims that might decrease public support for conflict with Muslim-majority countries? Historical narratives are manipulated for political agendas all the time. Does it matter in the grand scheme of things?*

Javier and I finally reached the Mezquita, one of Spain's greatest attractions. The walls of the surrounding courtyard were four times my height, a patchwork of roman brick, weather-worn sandstone, and plaster ornamentation. The courtyard was filled with rows of manicured orange trees. The entrance to Mezquita yawned dark and cool. We stepped inside.

We were greeted by a hall that seemed to stretch endlessly into the shadows, held up by myriad checkered white and red horse-shoe columns. Taken from the aqueducts in Merida, I thought excitedly, my mind rattling off facts collected from hours spent reading art history textbooks.

"This is the Mezquita," Javier began, "the most important site in Cordoba. It was built by Abd al-Rahman I to be a symbol of his power when he first conquered Cordoba. Many later emirs added sections to the mosque, so it is many times bigger now than in the seven-hundreds."

Abd al-Rahman had in fact appropriated by force the old Visigoth church, torn it down, and used the materials, plus roman ruins, to build the mosque. The Visigoths for their part had built their church on a Roman temple, the Romans on an even older "pagan" temple. You could see the layers of ruins stacked beneath the floor through a glass-covered cut-out, ending with this layer, an amalgamation of Catholic and Muslim, a Mezquita, a mosque, with a baroque cathedral jutting from its center.

Javier continued in his narration as we made our way to back of the Mezquita where the mihrab, the sign showing the direction of Mecca, lay in all its dimly lit glory. It was a fabulous mosaic of Qur'an verses and curling vines framed by aging plaster carved into intricate, geometric designs. The ceiling over the mihrab glowed, a hexagon of blue and gold tiles. It was breathtaking. And yet...I looked around at the milling tourists, all of us lugging state of the art cameras, trying to capture this wonder frozen in time. The area around the mihrab felt sterile, like the viewing space for a museum, separated as we were by a tall, iron gate.

I had read online that Muslims still worshipped here, and last night, when I was settling into my hotel room, I hear the call to prayer. It had been so clear, so vibrant, as if it were right outside my window. I thought it must be coming from the Mezquita. I threw on my shoes and raced downstairs, but by the time I flung open the doors onto the street, the call had stopped. The huge gates of the Mezquita were locked. No light glinted from over the wall. The only thing to see was the silhouette of the minaret turned bell tower, lit up by display beams, in electric contrast to the deep blue of the sky.

"So, I know Catholics still have mass here, are Muslims allowed to have their service?" I asked Javier.

He seemed caught off guard, "Oh no, no, they have their own mosque a few blocks away, and they are very happy."

I made Javier point out the narrow, clean alleyway down which the mosque of these "very happy" Muslims apparently lay before he left me to give another tour. I did find the entrance, a small white-washed arch and warm, red doors, now closed. The only indication of the nature of the building was a brass plaque on the adjacent wall with some Arabic script on it. I wished for the umpteenth time that I could read the

language. In truth, the door hardly looked like the entrance to any sort of religious dwelling, more like the driveway to a moderately wealthy home.

This then, was why the call had been so clear. It really was just outside my window, hidden deep in the block.

I tried the door, hoping I could poke my head inside and ask permission to enter, but it was locked. I'm not sure I would have been brave enough to enter, or to ask anyone I found inside the questions that were clamoring to come out, like,

“Why are you worshipping in this tiny alley when one of the oldest mosques in the world is two blocks away? Is this city a place of Convivencia, or do they just sell it to tourists? Do you think Europeans refuse to admit refugees because their skin is brown or because many are Muslim? Do you feel welcome here?” There was only silence in the alley.

Spanish Muslims want to pray in the Mezquita. Many Muslim visitors are so moved by its beauty, that they spontaneously begin to pray. Muhammad Iqbal, a national poet of Pakistan from the 20th century, said in his famous poem about the mosque:

*Sacred for lovers of art, you are the glory of faith,
You have made Andalusia pure as a holy land!*

But any time a Muslim prays, they are asked to leave by security guards.

Since the early 2000s, the Islamic Council of Spain has petitioned the Catholic Church multiple times to allow Muslims to pray alongside Christians. One of their council members, Isabel Romero, said their petition was born, not of a desire to “recover a nostalgic Al-Andalus” but to “give our support to the universal character of the building.” To have a true, modern, Convivencia. Their requests have been denied every single time.

There was an incident in 2010 where six Austrian Muslims began to pray simultaneously. When security guards tried to forcibly remove them, two of the young men put up a struggle and seriously injured the security guards. The police said one of the men had a knife on them. According to The Guardian, the bishop's official response was, “The shared use of the cathedral by Catholics and Muslims would not contribute to the peaceful coexistence of the two beliefs.”

What had I been expecting to find in Cordoba? Obviously, an interpersonal connection, if my unexpected anxiety to talk to real Muslims was anything to go by. But that can't be found in history. History is in the realm of the imagination, reconstructed in all its grandeur and poetic significance. All I found in the end

was exploitation of history.

If I had to hazard a guess, all three Abrahamic religions probably did live relatively peacefully in some moments throughout the seven hundred years that Muslims ruled Spain. It couldn't have been idyllic. One of the Muslim elite's most important sources of income were special taxes extracted from Jews and Christians that ensured their "protected" status within Muslim society. That kind of hierarchical power structure could never be forgotten, no matter how beautiful the examples of the three religions' artistic collaboration.

But I found in the end I didn't care if Muslims, Christians, and Jews coexisted peacefully in the past. I wanted tangible evidence that it could happen in the present. I realized how inconsequential the history of Muslim Spain was if modern Muslims were not treated with equal respect. In this case, praising a seven-hundred year gone Convivencia became a cop-out, a romantic, grit-free alternative to battling contemporary, anti-Muslim prejudices. And I was just as guilty of this as the droves of American scholars that wanted to write ecstasies about the glories of centuries past, as if this somehow made an impact on the present. Wouldn't I have been better off going to the coast to learn about the immigrants risking their lives to cross the Mediterranean on rafts, or volunteering to help Syrian refugees, or just having more thoughtful, in depth conversations with American Muslims? What is the line between using history to combat current oppression and using it to escape?

I walked back to the Mezquita and sat on one of the low walls surrounding the bed of orange trees. I tried to journal, but came up with nothing. I felt no academic fervor or artistic inspiration. I had anticipated the presence of the Mezquita would inspire some sort of spiritual awakening in me, a feeling of oneness with all humanity, and ease my deeply imbedded shame at my country's behavior. I had dreamed the Mezquita would embody the possibilities of a brighter future. Instead, it seemed to symbolize my misguided fixation on simple, romantic solutions, and my subliminal desire to bury myself in history and forget.

I picked up an orange from the ground and peeled it, hoping to taste the splendor of the old city. It was green on the inside, and incredibly bitter. Obviously meant only for decoration. I ate it all anyway.

With My Whole Heart

By Alexis Dolph

His hands, with his lightly calloused palms and torn fingernails, curled around mine. He cracked a smile, eyes half shut, glimmering with mischief and a hint of what I thought- or, more accurately, what I hoped- was affection. We stood for what seemed like an hour, though realistically was only about two seconds, staring into each other's eyes. It had been a long time since I had memorized his face. A sea of emerald shone through curtains of blonde waves, while a red hue dusted the galaxy of freckles littered on his cheeks. Hints of scars, faded in the sun, were scattered across his visage, the most prominent one laying diagonally on the bridge of his nose. He never told me how he got them, always falling quiet whenever I asked. My eyes flickered down to his mouth, where I could see his crooked smile and the fake tooth that was a shade whiter than the rest.

I snapped out of my trance as he pulled me to the edge of the lake, wrapped his arms around my torso, and threw me into the murky water.

"ADAM!" I yelled as I came up from underneath the surface, pulling up my swim trunks which had slipped during the fall. I whipped my head around to find him doubled over on the shore, pounding his thighs, a booming laugh escaping his throat. I furrowed my eyebrows in playful anger, finding myself unable to feel any actual malice towards him, and swam over, macroalgae and mud brushing my feet.

"Hey, asshole," I said, as he glanced to me, stifling another chuckle, "what the hell did you do that for?"

"I dunno, Den. Wanted to get you outta your trance I guess."

"Trance?"

"Uh, yeah. You were looking at me for a long time." He crossed his legs and took a seat while speaking. "I mean, I know I'm pretty, but come on dude."

"Oh shut up.." I began to panic, trying to come up with any plausible explanation other than I was thinking about grabbing your face and kissing you until you couldn't breathe. "You, you just had something on your face."

He smirked. "Oh, I did?"

"Uh, yeah, yeah you did." A silence fell over us. I tried my hardest to not stare at him, to not fall into the same trap as before, but the effort proved futile, so I decided to study him once more.

Adam was hunched over, tall legs crossed underneath his body, toes furling into the coarse sand of the beach. His eyes surveyed the sky and the wind blew his curls away from his forehead, showing the sporadic blond hairs of his eyebrows creased in concentration, looking as if he were deep in thought. *Jesus Christ, he's so beautiful. What I wouldn't give to have his arms wrapped around my torso, legs entwined with*

mine...

But that would never happen, could never happen. Sure my parents were fine with whatever I turned out to be, but his parents, the school, our friends. . . we'd be ridiculed, ostracized, forced to live out our love in secret, hiding our true selves from the rest of society. So instead, I would stay hidden, spending my time yearning for the small touches we would exchange or waiting for the next time he teased me, wishing it were in a flirtatious manner.

My mind trailed back to a day freshman year when I fell ill and he decided to skip school, saying that if my parents weren't going to take care of me, he would instead.

We ended up sitting on the couch, inches separating our thighs, his elbow resting on my shoulder and head heavy in his hands. Adam was staring at his phone, tongue sticking out and eyebrows laced together in determination. If I remember correctly, he was scouring the web for home remedies, specifically for a severe headache, sore throat, and cough. After he figured out that the remedies were too complicated for him to recreate, he resorted to turning on one of our favorite sitcoms and practically force-feeding me cherry throat lozenges every time I coughed.

That day I realized how much Adam cared for me. How much I cared for him.

And that day, I thought I saw a sliver of love and affection in everything he did. It gave me hope that maybe he loved me too, in a way that best friends or siblings don't, in the way that I love him.

I was pulled back to reality as water poured over my head. Apparently, I hadn't noticed Adam swimming towards me, with the intent to push me under the surface, an act he did each time we came to the lake. I closed my eyes, not wanting the grimy lake water to invade them. I felt the pressure of Adam's hands on my shoulders, trying their hardest to hold me under for as long as he could. Eventually, his weak arms grew tired and he let me up for a few seconds, before smirking and pushing my head underwater once more. I honestly didn't mind this happening. He was just having fun, he wasn't trying to drown me. And, it gave me an excuse to have his hands on me.

Each time I emerged from the water, we were closer than we were before, and each time, my face grew redder and I became more and more nervous.

This time, when he softened his grip, finally letting me up, we were close. Closer than we had been before. Our faces were a little more than an inch apart. His eyes softened from the somewhat maniacal, joyous state they were in into one I knew all too well. The inner corners of his eyebrows were raised just slightly, his lips pressed into a ghost of a smile. I mimicked his expression and let my lips drift apart.

I could just make out the movement of his eyes drifting down, landing on my mouth. My mouth. I followed, noticing how he bit his bottom lip and let out an unsteady breath. I gulped and inched closer to him, which seemed impossible given how close we already were.

The tips of our noses brushed against each other and I could feel his heavy, staggered breath land on

my face. My breath hitched as his hands, his wet, rugged hands and lanky fingers, burrowed into my hair. He paused, body tensed, and did not move a muscle, almost as if he were rethinking what he was about to do.

Fuck it. I thought, and at that moment, decided to risk everything. Risk our friendship, risk our social status, risk our safety, risk literally everything.

I leaned into him and pressed our lips together, my heart lovingly deciding to stop as soon as I did.

It was all perfectly cliché. If the heavens could have opened up and if angels could have sung, they would have. It felt as if, somehow, every second Adam and I had spent together, every memory, every touch was for this moment. It was, quite literally, destiny. Or, it felt like it.

Until Adam pulled away.

Until he looked me in the eyes.

Until he wiped off his mouth, fear clouding over him, saying over and over “I’m so sorry Dennis, I can’t do this.”

Until he swam to shore and ran away, looking over his shoulder only once, as if to make sure I didn’t follow.

I screwed everything up, don’t I? I thought one day, laying in bed, comforter pulled up to the edges of my eyes, It had been about five days since that horrendous, life-ruining day at the lake. Adam hadn’t spoken to me since that day, choosing to ignore me in the hallways of school and sit on the complete opposite side of every class. It made sense why he did so. He couldn’t risk being seen with me. I would be too obvious, of course.

I obviously scared him. He didn’t want to kiss me. I should’ve known it.

If only he didn’t look like he wanted to so goddamn badly.

I grabbed my phone off the nightstand, deciding to open Instagram and scroll through his profile. Almost every picture had me in it with him, either standing next to each other, hugging, or doing something idiotic. I clicked on a random photo to get a closer look. It was one of us right before prom. Neither of us had dates, though we never did, so Adam suggested we should go together, as friends of course. In this specific photo, I had the genius idea of posing as if we were a couple, with me standing in front, with his arms wrapped around me. He agreed, for some odd reason, and his parents took the photo, not caring to hide the disgusted looks on their faces.

“Goddamnit,” I muttered, closing the app, “We were so happy, why did I have to kiss him?”

I found myself opening the messenger app, clicking on his name. The last message was from him: *hey bitch im coming over rn. unlock ur door*

It would be impossible to ruin our friendship even more than kissing him without warning, so I decided to text him.

Hey. Can you come over? We really need to talk.

A minute later, the read receipt showed up. He usually texted me back right away, said he hated it when he left people on read, especially me.

“Okay, guess I won’t be getting a response then. . .”

About five minutes later, there was a loud, slow knock on the front door. Nobody ever comes to our door. Only the mailman and Adam, and the mailman came two hours prior. *Must be Adam then.*

I rushed to the door, opening it in a panic. There Adam was, standing before me, looking at me in the eyes for the first time in these painful five days. He looked. . . terrible. His eyes were sunken in and his clothes were disheveled, with a large stain of what looked like chocolate smeared across the front of his sweatshirt. Even his hair, which he prided himself on, was flat, weighed down with grease, curls limp and color dull. *He didn’t look like this at school two days ago, damn.*

“Hey, Dennis.”

“Hey. Uh, you look awful.”

“Can I come in?”

“Oh, yeah.” I opened the door a little further and moved to the side, giving at least three feet for him to squeeze by without coming into contact with me.

An uncomfortable silence fell over the room when he entered. We just stared at each other, neither of us moving or even attempting to speak.

After a while, I took a breath and began. “So, Adam. I really wanted to apologize for. . . the. . .”

“No,” he interrupted, “Don’t- don’t apologize for that. I should be the one telling you sorry. I shouldn’t have left you and I shouldn’t have ignored you.”

“I-it’s okay, Adam. . . I just really need to tell you that. . .” My arms curl around me, fingers finding the side of my shirt, beginning to play with the fabric to calm my nerves. “I like you. Like, really like you.” I saw his feet shift underneath him, saw his arms cross in a sort of defense, noticed how he cleared his throat and shifted his eyes towards the door. “These five days have been unbearable without you in them, they’ve destroyed me, and they look like they’ve destroyed you too. . . I am really sorry for all of this, I understand if we can’t be fri-”

“Oh, just shut up, Dennis. I like you too. I like you a fuck ton. I figured that out these past few days. It’s so fucking obvious, I’ve just been too oblivious, or homophobic, or scared. Anyways, I like you. And I want to. . . I want you to know that. . . oh fuck it.” He licked his lips and crashed his lips into mine.

He pulled away a few seconds later, wiping his mouth, a gigantic grin consuming his face.

“Holy shit.”

I stood there, dazed. “Wait, what about your parents? Won’t they-”

“You know what, fuck my parents. You’re too important to me. I love you way too much.” He grabbed

The Case for Tuition Free College in America

By Carl DeScott

“Knowledge is power. Information is liberating. Education is the premise of progress, in every society, in every family.” This quote from Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, made in an address to the World Bank Conference in 1997, remains true to this day. Without education, advancements in culture, sciences, mathematics, and many other fields would be few and far between. Keeping this in mind, one might believe that providing higher education to the general public would be a cut and dry issue. However, with the issue of high tuition costs for attending colleges and universities still being hotly debated within America today, it is clear that this is not the case.

Expenses for higher education are extremely steep in the United States. In the 1920s, college admission soared to unbelievable heights, and it has only gotten higher with population growth. The government has helped people with funding for college in the past, by passing legislation such as the G.I. Bill, which helped veterans of World War Two get an education, and the Higher Education Act, which put in place financial aid that is still in use today. However, around 1975, tuition costs for attending college started to snowball, at about 5-6% above inflation. The costs and effects of said costs only get worse from that point. The raise in prices has caused people to delay marriage, having children, buying homes, among other major life decisions. Default rates on student loans rise, as students are usually unable to pay the hefty cost. It's at 2007 where the height of tuition costs reaches a milestone; George Washington University becomes the first college to raise their tuition to over \$50,000 a year. To add to the burden, state funding no longer was the main source of funding for public colleges due to budget cuts, leaving students to pick up the tab. As of the 2017-2018 school year, tuition costs for a state resident going to a four year public institution averages out to \$9,970, and jumps up to \$34,740 to attend a four year private university. With costs being at tremendous heights for potential students, debate has been raging on as to whether or not college should or should not be tuition free. Opponents of such a measure cite the claim that there is no possible way to fund such an endeavor, as a raise in taxes would not be widely accepted and a diversion of money from other areas would not be worth it. On the supporter's side of the issue, they claim that there are alternate ways to pay for tuition free college that would either require a very small rise in taxes, or even none at all. In addition to this, they also see that diversion of money from other areas of government would be beneficial to society as a whole.

Employers today are more and more frequently looking for job applicants who are in possession of a college degree. With the rising costs of tuition, however, less people are able to acquire such degrees. This decreases the number of potential applicants for any given position that requires a degree down significantly.

In some cases, this need for well educated employees is valid. With the rise of technology, the nature of some jobs has changed, requiring individuals to have more technical knowledge and critical thinking skills

then needed in the past. However, this is not nearly the case all the time. More often than not, employers put the threshold requirement of a degree on jobs that in the past didn't need one just due to the fact that more people have them, essentially making having a college diploma a standard. What is not taken into account is that while more people have degrees, the majority of people in the United States do not have one mainly due to cost. The argument of the diploma being devalued if more people were able to access higher education is nullified because of this very problem; employers expect employees to by and large have some sort of a degree, making having one be the normative for society.

In addition to the benefit of having a large pool of employees, there are multiple other benefits for states having a well educated workforce. States with an educated labor pool tend to have higher median wages, can avoid cutting taxes to seize private investments which perpetuates a race to the bottom economic strategy, allow them to attract high wage employers, and workers with higher income due to having higher paying jobs contribute more to the economy in taxes.

Research done by the Economic Policy Institute has shown that state productivity increases the more individuals have a college degree between the years 1979 and 2013. This same research also found that states with higher productivity also had higher wages. "Figure B shows that between 1979 and 2007, states with larger increases in productivity experienced larger increases in median worker compensation"(Berger). However, more likely than not, lawmakers will opt for quick solutions to economic problems, usually in the form of subsidies or tax breaks for businesses, and in doing that states kneecap a source of sustainable growth.

With the notions that employers are looking for workers with degrees and states with a well educated workforce are more productive and generate new revenue, it's imperative to know why we as a country have not addressed this issue more seriously. A proportional tax increase would help the government fund programs meant to help potential college students, but an argument commonly made by the other side is that such taxes would not openly benefit middle to lower class students, there reasoning being that the largest contingent of college bound students are upper-middle class individuals who do not need as much financial aid. However, there are solid points against this line of thinking. If expenses for college go down, more likely than not lower income students would attend colleges. In addition to this, financial burden on non-graduates would be substantially less, as tuition is one of the largest single costs of attending college. This allows low income individuals to enter schools with less risk of going into debt if they don't end up graduating. On top of this, research from Demos, an American public policy organization, has shown that the burden of cost has shifted to predominantly low income students and students of color, as need based grants such as the Pell Grant have not had an extensive increase in decades. "Low-income students are required to pay a far greater portion of their family's income in unmet college costs"(Huelsman).

Aside from that, there is also the reality that Americans have to pay taxes to send children to primary and secondary school, regardless if one sends their kids to a private school or if they have

children at all. This was in a large part due to the fact that a high school diploma was what was considered to be the necessary qualification to most jobs, as I alluded to previously. It is not an illogical leap in logic to put aside a part of taxes to help pay for college education, the new threshold for employment. Keith Ellison, a U.S. Representative in Minnesota, wrote in a piece for *The American Prospect* in support of funding for tuition free college, regardless of what class it helps most. “But certain things should be guaranteed to all Americans, poor or rich. It’s not a coincidence that some of the most important social programs in our government’s history have applied to all citizens, and not just to those struggling to make ends meet.”

The loudest argument heard in opposition to tuition free college is how would such an endeavor be affordable. However, it’s not a matter of adding more taxes to fund it; it’s a matter of shifting excessive expenditures from other areas to education. The largest portion of America’s tax dollars goes into defense spending. Consistently, discretion spending on defense averages to around 50%-55%, with other areas in discretionary spending paling in comparison. Education spending itself only hovers around 5% on average. The United States military is unnecessarily bloated compared to other countries. Our 2015 expenditures for defense spending averaged out to about \$596 U.S. billion dollars. The next biggest defense spenders, China, Saudi Arabia, Russia, the UK, India, France, and Japan spent around \$566 billion dollars combined. Even if our spending was cut in half, the United States would still have the biggest military budget in the world.

Most of this spending is wasted on unnecessary outlays. In a commissioned cost study by the military in 2016, they found that they could have accrued potential savings of \$125 billion dollars. They then preceded to bury the record so that no one would know how much money they wasted. Part of the problem is spending on new unreliable vehicles. In 2016, the US taxpayers paid \$11 billion on F-35, a jet that was behind schedule and riddled with problems. This is just one example of equipment that tax dollars paid for, but had numerous setbacks and problems.

Another drain on taxpayer dollars and one of the largest contributors to the bloated military budget is the excess number bases maintained in the U.S. This is not the military’s fault however; the Department of Defense needs permission from Congress to shut down military installations, and they have denied requests from the military to do so repeatedly. If 2%-5% of excess bases were decommissioned, it would save up to \$2 billion dollars per year. This number only accounts for bases in the U.S. Our country has unnecessary military bases across the globe, a good portion of which are in disuse but are still being funded. If we could decommission a large swathe of these bases, as well as the aforementioned 2%-5%, we would have a tremendous amount of money available to dedicate to help society by providing access to higher education tuition free.

There is another route that can be taken in order to fund tuition free college. In the United States, there are multiple tax loopholes taken advantage of by wealthy families and corporations in order to further

fill their pockets, which are worth trillions of dollars. Many of these loopholes can save affluent interests billions. In an interview with CNN, Joe Biden, former Vice-President of the United States, explained the effects of closing just one of these loops. “If you eliminated one single loophole called Stepped-Up Basis. . . I could put every single qualified kid in America, who qualifies, into community college, for free!” By this very logic, closing several of these loopholes would provide even more money for the economy, which could be put into education. In turn, this would increase productivity and increase median wages, essentially narrowing the gap between social classes, no increase in taxes for low or middle income families necessary.

More likely than not, until more progressive leadership comes into power, this issue is in permanent gridlock, and only made worse by the current administration. President Trump has repeatedly proposed to slash education spending in budget plans he’s put forward, and his choice of Secretary of Education in the form of Betsy DeVos shows that he does not care much for the funding of financial aid programs to help low to middle income students to get into college. However, with the general backlash towards the administration and it’s conservative politics, a vocal liberal majority has come out to challenge the government’s current mindset. Come election time, if there is enough progressive support, the issue of making tuition free college a reality might be closer than we think.

Fuck /fək/ vulgar slang

By Anthony E. Padget-Gettys

“Fuck fucking fucked fucker fucking fuckups fuck fucking fucked fucking fuckup fucking fucker’s fucking fuckup.” -Lewis Black

That bunch of fucks above is a grammatically correct
Concoction of fuckery.
And of fucking course it is,
“Fuck” is the most versatile of the vulgarities,
It is, simply said, fucking incredible.
It is almost impossible to fuckup grammatically
When tossing a fuck into a sentence.
Like a parachuting fucker throwing themselves at earth,
They can land any-fucking-where and be just fucking dandy.
It’s un-fucking-believable, I mean
Fuck! It amazes the fuck out of me,
Which is interesting, since placing something in me
Can also be called a fucking!
“Fuck” has so much power that
We say “Pardon my French” when it’s actually a Germanic fucking word,
That’s how fucking versatile it is!
We fuckheads can’t even get the origin correct,
It’s just too fucking multifaceted.
Or maybe multifucketed.

“Fuck me, fuck you, fuck everything, fuck the world.”
If we only had one definition for Fuck, then that sentence would seem to be from
An ambitious motherfucker trying to eventually fuck mother earth,
But that’s a hard fuck to get on your own.
Not that we aren’t fucking her up already.
I mean fucking hell, if you think censoring “Fuck” is our biggest concern
Then you’ve got another fucking thing coming,
Because we’re fucked.

But hey, fuck it.

What the fuck are we gonna do,

Get riled up and shout fuck The Man?

Likely. We do fucking love to tell Him to fuck off.

I mean, oh my fucking god it can be like fucking therapy!

So toss those middle fingers up to say it in fucking sign language.

Maybe toss a few extra fingers up to to give The Man a good fucking

So maybe when he's feeling real fucking sore tomorrow

He can reflect on some the issues bigger than our favourite word,

“Fuck.”

