

create | encounter

**BABIES
ARE
MURDERED
HERE**

LIFE MATTERS JOURNAL | SPECIAL EDITION
2ND ANNUAL CREATIVE ISSUE | OCTOBER 2018

Î. Clipperton
(Fr.)

Table of

Art

1st Place Winner: Abort-Deport	Cover, 10
2nd Place Winner: Married to PTSD	3
Gone Too Soon	18
And I Still Hope	20
Worth	9

Mixed Media Art Installation

1st Place Winner: Dilation and Evacuation	13
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Music

1st Place Winner: I'll Love You	13
2nd Place Winner: Ezra	20

This journal is dedicated to the aborted, the bombed, the executed, the euthanized, the abused, the raped, and all other victims of violence, whether legal or illegal. We have been told by our society and our culture wars that those of us who oppose these acts of violence must be divided. We have been told to embrace some with love while endorsing the killing of others. We reject that conventional attitude, whether it's called Left or Right, and instead embrace a consistent ethic of life toward all victims of violence. We are Life Matters Journal, and we are here because politics kills.

Disclaimer: The views presented in this journal do not necessarily represent the views of all members, contributors, or donors. This publication exists to present a forum for discussion within the consistent life ethic, to promote discourse, peer review, and dialogue.

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Contents

Poetry

- 2 1st Place Winner: Inside the Beast
- 12 2nd Place Winner: The Procedure
- 21 In Living Color
- 19 The Average Age of Homelessness

Fiction

- 4 1st Place Winner: Crossing Over
- 14 2nd Place Winner: Following the Bends

Letter From the Editor

Dear Readers,

In the last year, I learned more about what it means to be an artist than I have ever before. This past summer was a hard one for activists and humans alike. I lived in Manhattan, New York where I was surrounded by homelessness, addiction and protests for abortion on demand. Every time I went on social media, I saw something that would bring me tears from Ireland repealing the 8th Amendment to the heartless separation of families at the boarder to Antwon Rose Jr. being shot in my hometown of Pittsburgh, PA. I am a writer, and writing is the only way I was and am able to cope with the anxieties and heartbreak of the dehumanization I witness in the world around me.

In my writing classes, my peers and I always discuss, “why do so many people want to be writers?” Across the nation, in the last 20/30/40 years, there has been an upward enrollment for the creative arts and lower for academic programs like literature or history. Our parents definitely question us and believe me, I am not in writing for the money and fame (mainly because it exists so rarely).

“Writing,” my peers and I always answer with vigor, “is something we have to do.” Like other artists, we create for ourselves. We want so desperately try to understand the world around us and what it means to be human. We want to know that we matter and have a voice in the things we see and care about. In turn, when sharing this work with others, we try our hardest to share these thoughts and reflections, so that they touch others in the same way our inspirations touch us.

This issue, the 2nd Annual Edition of *Create | Encounter*, merges life and art with honest and emotional tributes to the many issues surrounding human life and dignity. Once again thank you to everyone who submitted to this publication, the brilliant winners published here, and the review board that helped make the tough decisions. This issue touches my heart with the relevance and wide range of consistent life issues covered. Now let’s share and rehumanize.

With peace and love,

Maria Pane



Inside the Beast

by Sarah Terzo

When others drove with their headlights on
and tied yellow ribbons onto trees
we wore black and walked to school.
When torches lit, and oil fields burned
when flames rose into Iraqi skies
we came together, voices shouting
“No bombs, no blood for oil!”
In 1990 war was easy to oppose.

We knew they burned cities into skeletons.
left human bodies black and charred
Broken-backed buildings, seared hot as the sun
Hurricane winds stole breath.
When the bombs thundered down
louder than all reason,
they left streets like tombs, covered in ash.
What monsters they, we said.

The day was warm,
the grass was innocent green.
Clear skies turned black and white with smoke
Planes became guided missiles, bringing death.
The news showed tumbling bodies
Blood on the pavement in our shining city.
Darkness spread across the earth as the towers fell.

A nation cried out for revenge
A million throats screamed raw
Blood for blood, death for death
Good people threw down banners and enlisted
Kings and princes stoked the flames of war.
And the smoke got in our eyes, we could not see.
A carnivorous beast had swallowed us whole
We were consumed.

A long time later
The shame of our hate would haunt us.
War left us bereft, we saw too late.
There was blood on our hands.
We came to know this, to understand
after the hundred thousandth drop of rain
soaked the soil of our victims' graves.

Married to PTSD

by Aryn Coyle



Crossing Over

by Lauren Pope

Anie's Friday shift was going well. It was 7 AM and her patrons had consisted mostly of old men who sat in the corner drinking coffee and spreading local gossip. They were content with fresh coffee every 20 minutes and a smile. So, when Mauricio walked in the door, she had to stop herself from audibly groaning. He was accompanied by several of his crew, and they were all obviously either hung over or still drunk. Some local girls hung off one of the cronies, but Anie couldn't tell if they were enjoying themselves or just resigned to being there and doing an admirable job hiding their fear.

Mauricio grabbed Anie's butt as she came to take the order. Not even a quick pat or squeeze. He put his hand on her like he owned her. She cringed but continued writing. She hoped he wouldn't take her lack of open revulsion as permission and slipped away as quickly as she could. When she came back with the food she was greeted with spilled coffee and a pile of crumpled napkins. A few of the gang had dispersed and only Mauricio and someone, whose name she could never quite remember, were still at the table.

"Bathroom," Mauricio grunted, in explanation.

Anie thought it was a bit early in the day for drugs, even for this bunch, but shrugged and arranged the table. Mauricio placed his hand on her arm as she worked. She flinched without thought, causing him to let out a booming laugh and exchange some crude gestures with his friend. Anie blushed and pulled

away. She gathered her composure and refilled the old men's coffee. Thankfully, none of them were grabby.

The rest of the service was pretty uneventful. Mauricio's crew actually paid their bill and left a few coins on the table for her trouble. She'd gotten things prepped for lunch without much problem, and only needed to take out the trash before she could start her two mile journey home. The dumpster wasn't located directly behind the restaurant. It was down a weird curving alleyway that seemed intentionally designed to allow for ambush by some seedy coke-fiend. The staff usually had a buddy system for going back there, but the dishwasher was still up to his elbows, so Anie risked going out herself.

She turned the first corner and heard a voice.

"Anie."

Before she could process it, his arms were around her waist. She recognized them immediately. Mauricio. He stunk of alcohol and something else.

"Mauricio..." She stumbled for words. "I need to take this to the dumpster."

He knocked the bag out of her hands while pulling her closer to his body.

"I'm Catholic."

He laughed. She knew what was coming but tried her best to push him away, repeatedly telling him no and hoping that someone would hear and come.

No one did.

He laughed again when he was finished. Then he just left. He left like it was nothing. Like he'd gone out for a

smoke and needed to go catch the rest of a game.

Anie looked at the ground. The bag had torn when he'd thrown it. She ignored the pain inside of her and bent down to gather the discarded cups and bits of leftover meat. Then she stood up, and took the bag to the dumpster. She vomited.

—

Her father accompanied her to the police station. He was in a blind rage and was swearing to kill Mauricio, but her mother had pleaded mercy. Justice, she had said. Anie and her father sat in the sterile room together. Him with his face and arms stern and bulging, her trying her best to sink into the painted walls. At last they called her name.

Detective Caliez was a stout man. Maybe 40. He didn't look particularly kind, but seemed competent. He diligently took notes and nodded when it was appropriate. He promised that there would be a full investigation and that he just needed to interview the accused assailant. Anie tried to ignore the disgusted look he gave her father as they walked out.

A week later they received a notice. They did not have evidence to pursue an indictment. Her father saw one of Mauricio's men at the station. There'd never been a chance. A week after that, a friendly nurse told Anie that the pregnancy test was positive. She cried the entire drive home.

Her mother and sisters talked in

hushed voices about the situation. There were ways. There were people. God would understand. Anie overheard one particularly well constructed plan and burst into the room.

"It is not the rapist's baby. It is...mine. Mine, Mama," she sobbed.

"Shhh, Anietta, shh," her mother comforted her, shooting warning glances at her daughters. "I know, I know, but what about Mauricio? If he knows, what will he do?"

Anie had been turning that over in her mind for days. There was no reason for him to see her. She hadn't been back to work, and he hadn't come to see her. He seemed content to maintain an uneasy truce in which she was forever broken and he got away without so much as a harsh word.

Perhaps she could just avoid him. She knew that it was wishful thinking. He would find out. Someone would tell him. It was better that she be the one to do it.

"We'll tell him here. With Papa here, he won't dare do anything. I will tell him that I want nothing from him and that will be that."

Anie's mother and sisters exchanged incredulous glances. They knew there was no use trying to change her mind about it. The joke had always been that Anie was the goat. Stubborn didn't begin to describe her when she dug in her heels. She'd once literally tackled an escaping rooster just to prove he wouldn't get away. He was a pretty tasty bird.

"I'll tell Papa to make the arrangements," Anie's mother said.

Three days later Mauricio was sitting in Mama's chair. He slumped so far into it that his head was barely above the backrest. His leg was crossed with his ankle resting on his



Anie overheard one particularly well constructed plan and burst into the room.

knee, and light from the window was shining off of his slicked-back hair. He looked thoroughly inconvenienced.

Anie took a deep breath. "I need you to know," she stumbled over her breath for a few seconds, but continued, "I need you to know that I'm pregnant."

His inconvenience turned to rage.

"Get rid of it! You have to fucking get rid of it!" He rose from the chair and started towards her. Anie's father took a step forward, but she waved him off.

Mauricio stopped, looming above her.

"I'm not going to do that, Mauricio. It's a human being, and I can't...I could never kill it."

His eyes narrowed with contempt.

"You don't have to do anything. I won't ask for any money. I won't even tell the baby that you are her father or how..." her voice trailed.

Before Anie could regain her composure he was lunging for her. He had his hands around her neck. "You WILL get rid of it!" he screamed, threading his fingers.

In another second her father was on top of him, pulling Mauricio to the ground. Anie let out a gasp of air and her sisters rushed to her side. Her father and Mauricio were rolling on the ground. Her father had a distinctive weight advantage on Mauricio, but the younger man's blows came faster than he could block. With a scream, he slammed a fist into her father's head, slamming it back onto the tiled floor. Anie heard a sickening crunch, and blood pooled in a sickening swirl. Her father stopped moving.

"Papa! Papa!" Anie screamed. Her mother and sisters screams soon joined. Mauricio stumbled to his feet. He looked dazed and sickened, but still deathly dangerous. For a moment Anie thought that he would kill them all, right then and there, but instead he ran out the door. Anie and her mother sat sobbing

at her father's feet. Malta, Anie's older sister, was the first to speak.

"We have to call an ambulance!"

Anie shook her head. "He's not breathing. He's... gone."

Her mother rose to her feet and wiped her hands, wet with blood, on her apron.

"He's gone to get his men. We have to get out before they come back."

—

Two weeks later, Anie found herself in a cramped produce truck, driving towards Reynosa. Directly beside her sat Sayra and her two year old daughter, Flor. Sayra had been mostly silent during the trip, but as they got closer to the border, she began to open up. Her husband, Anibal, was a police officer in Guatemala City until someone came to their house one evening and shot him before burning the house to the ground. Once news of his death had reached her, Sayra knew that she was also in danger, and fled with Flor. They'd been on the road for 3 weeks. Flor cried constantly for her Papa.

"He was a good man."

Sayra repeated that mantra all the time. "A good, decent man."

Anie's nausea made her condition obvious, and she soon shared her story with Sayra. Days passed with little food or water. People were pulled off the truck and beaten and abandoned if they couldn't continue to pay the "fees" the men asked for. Anie was thankful that she could pay and prayed for everyone she saw tossed aside. Flor ceased crying and simply whimpered in her mother's arms.

The plan for both women was to arrive at Piedad de Jesus Mejia and prepare their cases. This transport would get them into the city, and from there they'd take a bus. When they actually arrived at the station, it was the dead of night and none of the buses were

running. Anie and Sayra slept in shifts. Just before dawn, a man came up with a gun demanding money. They gave all that they had. Sayra said nothing.

Anie and Sayra poured over the bus map. The best option would put them about 5 miles out. When the bus arrived, Anie paid their fare with her mother's ring she had sewn into her skirt. Something about losing it, the heat, and the pregnancy made her nearly faint, but she managed to smile and wink at Flor as they sat down. Sayra mouthed a thank you that didn't seem enough. Anie replied with a wave more lighthearted than she felt, "De nada."

The driver smirked and tapped the ring as they got off. Anie powered on her phone for the first time in 3 weeks. She saw a rush of messages from her family. Her father's body had been found. Mauricio had been arrested but immediately released. They were safe at Tio Jorge's. Then nothing else. She decided not to risk a response until she was safely across the border. Instead, she punched in the address to the shelter and mapped a path.

Flor, in her colorful sandals, only lasted an hour before Anie and Sayra needed to alternate carrying her. While they walked, Tia Anie told her stories about the adventures they would have when they finally arrived in America. That made her giggle, a sound that Sayra had almost forgotten on their journey. Finally, they arrived at the shelter. There were showers and real food. Simple cots were set up in

cozy rooms. Anie and Sayra could finally relax.

The next day, someone came to help them prepare their case. Sayra had a decent level of documentation. Flor's birth certificate, as well as her own, Anibal's service records, and a newspaper clipping announcing his death. Anie had only her ID and her pregnancy as proof of her situation. The advocate told her that her case would be harder, but that she would fight for her and try to gather any additional information on her father's murder.

A week later, they approached the border. There was a crowd of people at the port of entry. More than the advocate had seen before.

"Maria! They're turning everyone away!" shouted a stout priest. "They say it's full. America is full."

Maria turned to her clients, "We'll try."

For 6 days they spent their days camped at the border. Every so often a few people would be shuffled through, and at last, it was finally their turn. Maria gave the women the contact information for her liaison across the border, hugged them, and gave Flor a kiss on the head. "Be well," she said.

—

Maria had explained that they would spend two or so nights in the "icebox" for processing. Afterwards, they'd be given a return date for their credible fear interview. Sayra's cousin would drive down from San Antonio to pick them up to stay with her family while their cases worked their way through the court.

So, when the American agent took them into a dark van, they had little worry about what was about to happen. Flor gave her mother a frightened look, and Sayra smoothed her hair.

"Shh, little bird. Shh. It's all going to be ok. We just have to be brave for a little while longer."

"Maria! They're turning everyone away!" shouted a stout priest. "They say it's full. America is full."

They arrived at the processing center. A rough man threw the door open and grabbed Flor by the arm. She screamed.

"We're taking her for a shower and delousing. She'll be returned after processing."

"No!" shouted Sayra, "She's clean! She's had showers every day. She needs to stay with me. I'm still nursing her!"

The man said nothing and slammed the door.

"You're going to the women's building," the driver grunted.

Sayra was hysterical, but Anie held her hand. "It's ok. She'll be right back with you. It's ok." Anie couldn't make herself believe the words she said.

The van stopped and they were marched into a building. Inside, there was a huge open area enclosed by a fence. There were women everywhere. Some were crying. Others stared blankly into space. The driver pushed Anie and Sayra through the gate.

A woman, mad with grief, sat sobbing several yards away.

"They took them! They took them!"

Anie walked over to her. "Who? Who did they take?"

"My babies! They took my babies! Three days ago they took my babies and no one will tell me where."

—

Sayra and Anie sat in a small cell with two other women. It had been months since the man had taken Flor away. Anie was round in belly, but sunken everywhere else. Her once vibrant red hair was brittle and falling out. They'd asked for vitamins, but were given none. Her only check up had been a single doctor's visit two months earlier. She'd heard her baby's heartbeat and smiled at its strength. Now, she felt its kicks and had secretly decided that it was a girl. She'd name her Eva.

Sayra doted over Anie. She made sure

she always ate the larger share and had enough water. Anie, in turn, kept Sayra's spirits up about being reunited with Flor. Sayra had spoken to Flor once, a month after the separation. Flor had only cried Mama. The women's rosaries had been taken by the agents as a strangulation hazard, but they'd scratched some semblance of one into the floor and prayed it constantly.

This day, Anie woke up in a pool of blood. She screamed and Sayra ran to her side. "Can you feel her kick?"

Anie laid still. A flutter came from her belly and she almost cried in relief. "Yes. But something's wrong Sayra. Something is horribly wrong."

Sayra screamed for a guard. After ten agonizing minutes, a tall, thin man came to their cell.

"She's bleeding out!" shouted Sayra, "She needs a doctor. Now!"

The man shrugged and turned around. He didn't say anything.

Sayra turned back towards Anie who was clutching her belly. "He's going to get someone. I'm sure of it."

Anie moaned. The contractions were starting. The other women jumped into action. One of them was gathering blankets and the other was examining Anie's face.

"She's too pale. I think it's the placenta. They need to take the baby now."

"Help! Please Help!" shouted Sayra.

No one came. Anie moaned in agony for 5 hours and no one came.

The woman who had gathered the sheets had designated herself the honorary midwife. She had five children of her own.

"It's almost time," she said.

No one had asked Anie about feeling movement in hours. They were afraid of the answer. Blood was everywhere.

At last, Eva was born. She had a full head of black hair and Anie's nose. She

was completely still.

Anie was barely conscious. “Why isn’t she crying?” she sobbed.

No one spoke.

“Why isn’t she crying?”

The “midwife” looked down sadly at Anie, as she placed little Eva’s body in her arms. “I’m so sorry sweetie.”

Anie held her silently and brushed her hair away from her eyes.

“She’s beautiful.”

Then Anie laid her head back on the pillow and said nothing else.

“We have to stop the bleeding,” the woman said, working furiously to press on Anie’s belly, “We have to get the

placenta out.”

They worked for over thirty minutes, and were finally successful. The bleeding didn’t stop. Anie’s pulse had become undetectable.

Sayra sat with her back against the bars and sobbed into her hands.

An hour later, a guard came to serve dinner. Seeing the blood, he ran for a doctor.

Hours too late, a young man, not even 30, entered their cell. It looked like a murder scene. It was.

He pronounced Anie and baby Eva dead then turned and walked away.



Abort, Deport

by Maria Oswalt



One woman said she was left to bleed for about eight days after she was told there was no one available at the facility to tend to her.

**I REALIZED I
WAS LOSING MY
SON, IT WAS
HIS LIFE THAT
I WAS BLEEDING
OUT... I STARTED
CRYING AND
CRYING AND
CRYING...**

The woman was reportedly deported back to El Salvador.

**&
STILL
LOVE
JUSTICE**

The Procedure.

by Herb Geraghty

In a Chemical Abortion the doctor prescribes RU-486, a chemical that causes the hormones needed to maintain the uterine lining to deplete. It is used in conjunction with a drug that causes strong contractions and the eventual expulsion and fatal starvation of the child-fetus.

In Vacuum Aspiration abortions the doctor inserts a hollow suction tube into the mother's dilated cervix. Using a vacuum with 27 times the power of a typical household vacuum, the baby-child, fetus is torn into pieces pulled through a hose into a bottle. In later term abortions, referred to as Dilatation & Curettage or D&C abortions, the doctor then uses a small loop-shaped steel knife called a curette to make sure there isn't any remaining baby-body parts fetal tissue left in the uterus.

In D&E — Dilation & Evacuation — abortions the doctor inserts narrow forceps-like pliers into the uterus to snap the baby's spine and crush her skull, grasp an arm or leg tissue, and, with a twisting motion, tear the limbs from the child's body remove the contents of the uterus. At the end of the procedure, body parts are counted tissue is examined to ensure none of the child's limbs products of conception have been left in the uterus.

In an Induction Abortion the doctor will poison inject digoxin or potassium chloride into the child's heart to cause a heart attack induce fetal demise. Labor is induced to deliver an already dead child remove the contents of the uterus.

Dilation & Evacuation

by Kelsey Hazzard

Sopher forceps are used in dilation & evacuation abortions to dismember second-trimester children in the womb. For this piece, they have been used to tear apart photo negatives. “Dilation & Evacuation” invites viewers to reflect upon how abortion destroys entire lifetimes, and all the Kodak moments that would have been; look closely and you will see a wedding, birthday, first day of school, skydiving, and more. Inspirations include the future-like-ours argument and the Polaroid analogy. The Sopher forceps are firmly glued to the lightbox so they can never harm a child; once intended as an instrument of death, they now communicate how devastating abortion is for the victim and all of society.



Medium: Mixed media sculpture
(lightbox, photo negatives, and Sopher forceps)

I'll Love You

Written and performed
by Krista Corbello



Following The Bends

by John Whitehead

*“Negotiate a river by following its bends;
enter a country by following its customs.”*

-Cambodian proverb

Chanlina waited until nighttime to take the files. She had worked late, staying behind after the others had left the office. This would not attract attention — she frequently worked into the evening, as Mr. Yi’s bad health meant she had to do more for him. (Also, working late allowed her to avoid her husband for a few more hours.) When the office seemed empty, she went to Mr. Yi’s office and logged on to his computer. This was not noteworthy, either: she frequently used his computer. Someone viewing security camera footage would not find her presence suspicious. Although she felt light-headed — fear? excitement? — Chanlina tried to maintain a tired, bored expression for the camera as she clicked through the folders.

A meeting two weeks earlier had brought her to this moment. She had left the house before sunrise, shivering and thinking how much warmer it must be back home. She drove into work through one of Shanghai’s winter rains, listening on the radio to the latest news of fighting on the central Viet Nam front, and started work at her usual early hour. Mr. Yi had met her on the way to the senior staff meeting, hobbling and grimacing. Chanlina wondered how much longer he could get by on just a cane.

The staff room slowly filled with white- and gray-haired men and their assistants. Mr. Zhou, the director, arrived last, being wheeled in by one of his assistants. His eyes were bright amid his lined face. They went through the meeting’s agenda quickly, and Chanlina thought the gathering was about to end when Mr. Zhou made the announcement.

“We have not been able to reach an

agreement with the Americans about the undersea drilling. They, backed up by their government, are simply not compromising. So, I have decided to send senior staff to New York to talk to them directly. Perhaps that will make an impression.” The bright eyes settled on Mr. Yi. “I have chosen Yi to go, later this month.”

Chanlina glanced at Mr. Yi, whose expression had not changed. He had not told her this was coming. He could not be happy about this, as traveling was difficult for him.

After the meeting adjourned, Mr. Yi took her aside. His eyebrows — still dark despite his white hair — were furrowed. This meant something important was coming. “I’ll need more assistance on this trip to New York than I have before. Reaching an agreement on the drilling is very important,” he added, as if that were the reason he wanted assistance. “And talking to Americans is much harder now that it used to be. So, I would like you to come with me.”

Chanlina smiled and thanked him while she considered what to make of this. A business trip meant time away from the house, which was good. Also, she had never been to the United States — although the visit would naturally be a tense one. It would be cold in New York, as well. She thought again of home. She remembered how the sunrise would light up the mist on the Tonle Sap River. Chanlina wondered what her mother was doing right now.

Then, there in the hallway with Mr. Yi, the idea had come to her. Without meaning to, she had smiled more broadly.

She was so close now to making it all happen. She couldn’t succeed, though, if she just presented herself without having anything to offer. This was why she was in Mr. Yi’s office now. He received technical reports — describing maintenance

problems, procurement needs, other details — about all the undersea drilling equipment, including the submersibles the workers rode underwater. And Chanlina knew the company worked with the People's Liberation Army Navy. She occasionally saw naval officers meeting with Mr. Zhou or Mr. Yi — although she was never invited to those meetings. The equipment probably had military uses.

She had opened up documents Mr. Yi would need for the negotiations. She had waited until now to print copies so she would have a reason, if anyone walked in, for why she was on Mr. Yi's computer. Also, having these documents open was useful if the security camera behind her could pick up the computer screen. Shifting in the chair so that her body temporarily blocked the screen, she found the folder with the technical reports. Then she switched back to the negotiation-related documents and returned to her natural position in the chair.

Chanlina pretended to study the documents for a moment longer. Then, she shifted again and, acting as if she were just leaning forward and resting her hand on the computer, plugged in the thumb drive. Some more pretend study of the screen. Another shift, and she copied the files. Some more pretend study until the transfer completed. The transfer complete, she lingered a little longer; leaving quickly would be suspicious. Chanlina printed the negotiation documents and left the office with them and the thumb drive. Driving back to the house through the rain, she rehearsed what to say to the Americans.

Sleeping on the flight from Shanghai to New York, Chanlina dreamed of her mother. She often did. She usually dreamed of Mother amid a flock of birds: chickens, or ducks, or sometimes Pittas. Mother might just sit among them as they clucked or chirped; or she might bat at them with her arms. Chanlina sometimes wondered if the birds were meant to be her sisters. Certainly they made the same amount of noise. And Mother would occasionally give the

birds the thin smile she would always give Chanlina and her sisters when her patience was at an end.

Mother had many different smiles, for different moods and occasions. The best was the one she would give when genuinely pleased: a broad smile that made her whole face crinkle up like someone crumpling up a piece of cloth. That was what Chanlina dreamed of on the flight: just Mother's face crinkling up in the best smile of them all.

Chanlina had not seen that smile while waking for a long time. Even when she was still at home such smiles had become rare after her father's death and all that followed. Smiles after that she recognized as not reflecting happiness. And when Mother had brought news of the offer from a man in China — an offer of marriage to her eldest daughter; an offer that could help their family — she had not smiled at all.

They had to change planes in Vancouver. Mr. Yi and Chanlina disembarked along with the man from the security department nicknamed "Big Lin," who was there to help Mr. Yi get around. For travel, Mr. Yi had exchanged his cane for a wheelchair and Big Lin wheeled him to the next gate with Chanlina following.

At the gate, Chanlina waited to take her next step. Sitting there, she saw a group of women with a man at their center walk down the concourse. The man, silver-haired and in a dark suit, leaned on a cane with one hand and on one of the women's arms with the other. The other two women carried bags.

The women were well-dressed but looked odd: their skin was so smooth and even, without marks or changes in tone; their heads twitched slightly. And they looked so similar — were they related? Then Chanlina realized they were all androids. She watched as the man uttered a command in Japanese,

Driving back to the house through the rain, she rehearsed what to say to the Americans.

and he and the android women turned into one of the airport shops.

She sat there as a TV screen blared about naval maneuvers in the South China Sea. The western news made it sound as if China were the one at fault, with no mention of everything the Americans were doing wrong. Chanlina felt irritated — an odd reaction, she supposed, under the circumstances.

Finally, she got up and told Mr. Yi and Big Lin that she had to use the ladies' room. Chanlina had earlier noted the signs for a cybercafé in the terminal. She followed the signs quickly, not wanting to be away too long. Perhaps she was being too cautious by not using her own phone, but she wanted to leave as little of a trail as possible.

The cybercafé door was shut and had a sign: "Temporarily Closed for Maintenance." She paused. Was there another one? She had to get back to her gate soon.

Turning around, she noticed that the Japanese man and his androids were sitting at the gate across from the closed cybercafé. The man was looking at his phone.

Chanlina walked over to him, bowed slightly and put on what she hoped was her most winning smile. "Excuse me, sir." The man looked up. "My phone." Chanlina held it up. "It's not working. May I have yours? Just a moment?" Her Japanese was poor, so she hoped he understood.

With a slight nod, the man handed over the phone. Searching online in Japanese was not easy and not helped by how her hand trembled slightly. This was taking too long; she had to get back to the gate. She found what she wanted, though: the address of the American Office of Foreign Missions in New York. Chanlina memorized the address.

With another smile and a thank you, she handed the Japanese man his phone. This

had worked out better than she had hoped. Using a stranger's phone left even less of a trail than using a cybercafé.

As Chanlina handed back the phone, her movement triggered the nearest android, whose head swiveled to look at her. Chanlina looked at the symmetrical plastic face free of birth marks, moles, or pimples. The sunlight shining through the gate's window hit the android's eyes, making them shiny and opaque. Chanlina turned and hurried back to her own gate.

New York was familiar in some ways. It had the same crowds of graying people and was cold, as expected. They received more stares and suspicious looks, though, which became even more intent when people heard them speaking Chinese.

When they arrived at the American company's office, they were met by a man who at first Chanlina thought might also be an android. He had the same taut, fixed face and glossy hair. When he spoke, though, he was clearly human.

"Hi there, good to meet all of you. Thanks so much for coming all this way so we could work this out.

I'm just sorry we couldn't offer you better weather while you were here! Oh well, what can you expect for February? I feel jealous of my old man. He lives down in the islands. He's probably at the beach right now! The guy's pushing 90 and he's still body surfing!"

Chanlina found it hard to keep up with what the man was saying but felt sure she was not missing anything important. He had that American habit of talking without really saying anything. Would that get tiresome after too long here?

With introductions out of the way, the negotiations began and the man who greeted them, along with other American businessmen, now spoke more slowly and seriously. Mr. Yi handled the talks well,

New York was familiar in some ways. It had the same crowds of graying people and was cold, as expected.

as he always did. He could seem friendly and reasonable while giving little away. As in past talks with Americans, he claimed Chanlina's English was better than his and occasionally asked her to translate something, so he had more time to think about his response. Watching him work, she considered how what she was going to do would be hard for him.

That night at the hotel Chanlina read a message on her phone from Mother. The message talked about the problems of managing the family shop and her sisters' time in school. Chanlina wanted to call her but doubted she could prevent herself from telling Mother what she was about to do. She lay on the bed, holding her phone, and wondering how quickly she could get a new job and keep sending money home.

Chanlina acted on the last day of the trip. Despite Mr. Yi's skill, the negotiations had not succeeded and they were returning to China without an agreement. She waited until the last day because looking for her would be harder if Mr. Yi and Big Lin had to catch a flight. They were to have breakfast before checking out of the hotel; Chanlina called Mr. Yi to say she was not feeling well and would have to come down later.

She waited in her room for fifteen minutes, her heart feeling like it was trying to break out of her chest. Then she grabbed her bags, went to the stairwell, and ran down the stairs onto the street. Chanlina didn't feel the cold; she was sweating.

Calling a car beforehand would have been risky, so she had to find one now. She scanned the sea of cars and hailed an old-fashioned taxi. The cab, its paint peeling and rust showing beneath, pulled over.

Chanlina settled inside the cab, which smelled of body odor and perfume. As they drove along, she found herself again rehearsing her words. There was no need to practice now — they were not hard English words to say — but she kept repeating them to herself.

"I am from China. I wish to defect. I have information."

She reached inside her purse to

grasp the thumb drive. She squeezed it, as if that could get the cab there faster.

"So, where you from?" the cab driver asked.

"China," she said, only half listening. Then she paused and spoke again. "No, Cambodia. I am from Cambodia." She could say that now. That was home.

"Are you just visiting? Here on business?"

"Yes, business."

"How long are in town for?"

"I don't know." That was the truth.

The driver asked her more questions, about how she liked the city and what she was going to do during her stay.

She answered vaguely, still rehearsing in her mind the words she planned to say at the Foreign Missions Office.

"You have kids back home?"

"No." The cab was stalled in traffic. When would they get there? Her heart was still trying to break through her ribs.

"I have three kids!" He gestured at photos on the dashboard. "They make a lot of trouble," he laughed. He chattered away, telling stories about his children. Then he asked, "So you have any family back home?"

"My mother. And two sisters."

He nodded. "I have a sister and a brother." He paused. "My mom died last year."

"Oh. I'm sorry."

"Yeah, it was real tough. She was sick for a long time, you know? She was strong, but she just couldn't take care of herself anymore. She needed help — to take a shower, go to the bathroom, eat. It was real hard. It ended up that me and my brother and sister had to go to the doctor and ask him to help her so she wouldn't go through it anymore."

Chanlina did not understand. "You asked the doctor to help her? Why wasn't the doctor helping her? You said she was sick."

"She was sick for a long time, you know? She was strong, but she just couldn't take care of herself anymore."

The driver glanced at her in the rearview mirror. “No, what I mean is...He was helping her before, but she wasn’t getting better. And she wasn’t happy, either. So, it ended up that we asked the doctor to give her pills.”

“Pills?”

“Yeah. You know, so she could die.”

Chanlina was not sure she understood the driver’s English. “The doctor gave your mother pills so she could die?”

“Yeah, that’s right. It wasn’t easy, but I mean she just wasn’t happy anymore. She shouldn’t have to live like that.”

“And you can do that? A doctor can do that?”

“Yeah.” He looked at her again in the mirror. “It’s a free country!”

Chanlina leaned back in her seat and thought about this. She stared out the cab’s window at the street, at the snow and the graying people shuffling past. She felt her

heartbeat slow down. The sweat on her scalp and face and back cooled. The sunrise on the Tonle Sap again flashed through her mind. Then she spoke.

“I am sorry. Can you take me back to the hotel?”

The driver turned around. “What?”

“No, it’s fine. It’s fine. I will pay you. Just take me back to where you picked me up.”

He shrugged. “OK.” He moved the cab over so they could make the next turn.

While the cab idled at a red light, Chanlina rolled down the window. Now she felt the cold; it scraped against her wet face as she leaned out the window. She saw a sewer grate by the curb. She took the thumb drive out of her purse and dropped it down the grate. It clattered away.

Chanlina rolled up the window, sat back, and tried to think of the excuses she would give Mr. Yi.



Gone Too Soon by Aryn Coyle

The Average Age of Homelessness

by Zachary Neal Wierschem

Sitting on the side of the street
I feel all the important people pass me by:
Moms, Bisnessmen, Toys R Us workers.
My shirt looks like it came from
old Goodwill from the Bronx,
one where all the clothes are sprayed
with yurine smelling perfum before they are sold.
I present my small cup to the people hoping to hear the sweet sound of spare
change hitting the bottom.

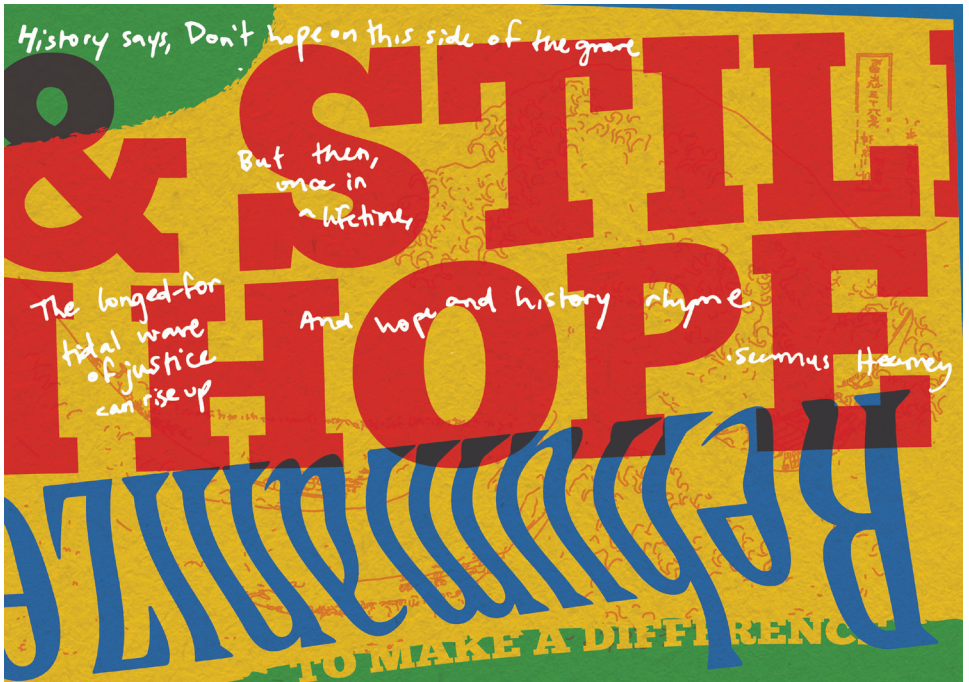
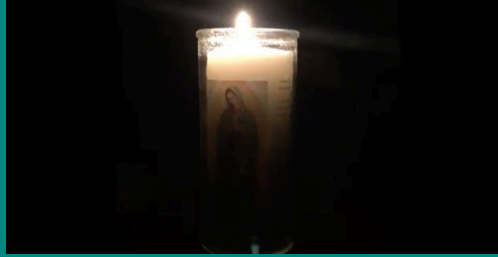
Some of these passing people carry sharp nives with them,
the kind my dad frequently used on my mom:
a nife of words
If he works he won't have to be on the street?
and my hart bleeds becuse I wish it that easy.

Some of the passing people carry lies with them
and those hurt more than the nife
I'm sorry, I don't have any money on me
but the jingle in their poket never lies to me

One older man stopt in his walking
and nelt down to my face.
Hello young man, I'd love to help you. How old are you?
I wuz surprised he didn't back away from my smell
and I answerd:
Sir, nine years old.

Ezra

Written and performed by Rey Guevara



And I Still Hope by Maria Oswalt

In Living Color

by Sarah Terzo

When my eyes are closed
I see a laughing child in a field.
Flowers in her hands.
Her smile wide as summer.
She would have been born in June, they said.
She was so small.
Her body could have fit
in the palm of my hand.
I could not read my future.
It gaped like an open maw, eager to swallow me whole.
I sent the pill like a guided missile to my womb.
My body became a place of execution.
I was the blood-soaked earth, a battlefield
where the living dragged away the corpses of the dead.
I was a poisoned flower
blooming beneath a red and swollen sun.
Afterwards, I gathered up the pieces of myself,
glued them back together, until I seemed intact.
But the cracks became fault lines.
My life rocked on its foundations.
My child still lives
in my mind, not where she belonged.
In the gaps between
what I say and cannot say.
I do not know, I have not learned
how to forget.

