

# Tools of Humanity

Leah Franklin-Silva

15 May 2014



Table of Contents

*Prose*.....3

*Interview*.....4

*Short Story*.....5

*Occasional Paper*.....14

*Great Endings*.....16

*"Photo" Story*.....21

*The Photo*.....27

*The Play*.....28

*Poetry*.....31

*Favorite Poem*.....31

*Imitation Poem*.....32

*Spoken Word Poem*.....34

*Ransom Note Poem*.....36

*Reflection*.....37

*The Reflection*.....38

*Prose*



"The painter has the *Universe* in his mind and hands." — Leonardo da Vinci

## Bailey

4 February 2014

Seeing her walk through the doors from the bus, I'm always greeted by a Castiel-esque coat, an enthusiastic smile, and a cheery greeting in an obscure language I know nothing about. Unable to respond on the same level of coolness that Bailey has achieved simply by saying hello, I smile, salute, and greet her in English. Out of the arsenal of words that can be used to describe Bailey, the first ones coming to mind are "kind" and "spunky". The latter of the two words is credited to both her tendency to get hysterical if she's up after three o'clock in the morning and her love of cosplay. She specifically recalls a rather traumatizing incident with a lead pipe, and another with a whipped cream bottle. Her other antics are usually played out online in fictional role-playing chat rooms and on twitter.

Her friends online would certainly also use the word, "kind" to describe Bailey. She's so kind—and protective, in fact—that they've taken to calling her "Mama Russia". Often going completely out of her way to talk to someone, Bailey insists that she would stay up all night just to help a person who needs it. Not many people would actively choose to lose sleep over a complete stranger for nothing in return. Her friends would agree, in terms of character, that Bailey is truly extraordinary, and "adorable," despite her indignant protests.

Bailey's relationships with her friends are very special ones. In return, they'll stay up late for is she needs help, and they're always there for her when she needs them. She

knows for certain that her friends are always happy to listen to their "Mama Russia" vent if she's had a bad day, and they always know exactly how to make her feel better again.

No matter what happens, Bailey's kindness will surely carry her far in life.

## Play Ball

25 February 2014

September twenty-fifth, nineteen seventy-eight, was the first time Sean had ever seen somebody die. It was a shame really. That road had been a fantastic ballpark.

In nineteen seventy-eight, there was a road leading into the park where the boys of the middle school would collect to play baseball. The park itself had been claimed by snooty adults who glared at them over their glasses when they shouted, disturbed by the children's playful shouts as they tried to read. In the street, however, they were only ever bothered by their angry shouts and honking horns as they tried to leave. The only other slightly decent place to play ball in town would have been the graveyard, but the high school gangs had established their territory long ago. They sat around the mausoleum, drinking and kicking at the headstones. Sometimes, the other boys would try to have a look after they'd left, but Sean had never seen the point. Can't chase a fly ball while tripping over gravestones, and who's to say those spirits didn't finally get tired of boys kicking their graves? No; even if Sean ever made it to high school, there's no way he'd ever set foot in *that* place.

He'd loved everything about that road. The trees bent over on either side, serving as their marker for foul balls. In the winter, their foliage formed a tunnel of glistening snow, and one of flame in the autumn. As the sun moved across the sky, their shadows danced over the park, giving the boys a decent idea of the time of day. They'd decided, as a rule, they'd pack up once the shadows had touched the nearest golf course bunker. Of course, that meant they couldn't play for long during the winter.

Sean didn't mind that they couldn't play ball in the park. He couldn't have asked for a better place to get into trouble if he'd tried.

On the twenty-fifth, the light drizzle of warm, late-summer rain hadn't allowed the boys the occasional pleasure of the whole park to use. The grown-ups rarely stayed home with their books and their dogs unless it was pouring out, and even then, the boys slipped and slid around in the mud. They'd decided not to meet on particularly rainy days after Conner Greene sprained his ankle once trying to slide to home.

As Sean turned onto the street, someone called, "Sean's here!" Sean suspected it might have been Joey, and he was right. The voice suddenly appeared at his side, enthusiastically exclaiming, "You made it!

Sean's head snapped upwards sharply. "I always make it."

"Didn't last Thursday, and we lost. You're our best hitter. The score was seven to—what's that?" Joey grabbed at the obscured object in Sean's hand, accidentally pulling off his glove in the process. "Sorry," he mumbled, not sounding sorry at all as he turned the frisbee over in his hands, "What's this for?"

"You said it was my turn to bring second base."

Joey's face fell. "I forgot."

Sean huffed a bit and rolled his eyes. "So who's brought it?" He frustratingly snatched the navy disk out of his friend's hands, instinctively wiping his own on his pants after touching Joey's fog-dampened skin, though his was no dryer.

Joey ran his fingers through his messy, mouse-brown hair and shrugged. "I don't know, but we got one. See that tile over there?" He pointed to a gray, hexagon-shaped tile

with a mosaic butterfly, the color of which reminded Sean of the disgusting lavender dress that Lily Kinsey had worn every first day of school since the second grade. Sean thought her parents must have seen it in the store when she was a baby and thought, ‘*Yep, that’s the one,*’ and then bought every size to last her from then until the rest of her life.

“Where the hell did someone get *that* thing?” Sean couldn’t imagine any of the boys owning something as aged as the mud-smearred tile.

“I thought maybe Mikey stole it from his grandma’s garden.” Mikey stopped playing catch with his brother, Louis, at the mention of his name, and he waved enthusiastically at them, tucking a strand of blonde hair behind his ear as he did. “There you go. Mikey.” He pointed at him, grinning. He turned back to Sean, purposely raising his voice so Mikey could hear. “Figures. You know how Mikey is about butterflies!” Mikey released an arsenal of various obscenities at Joey, some of which were quite obscure, leaving his face plastered with a satisfied smirk. He turned back to his brother as Joey laughed.

Sean, now distressed over his useless frisbee, snapped, “Well, what am I supposed to do with this now?” He waved the disk in the air, hoping to catch his detached friend’s attention.

“I don’t know. Give it to someone in the park. They can throw it to their dog.” He smirked at Sean’s mortified expression, “Come on, Sean. Just put it down. Play ball with us.”

Sean made sure to give his friend a pointed look to let him know he wasn’t happy. Joey often took advantage of Sean’s forgiving nature, and they both knew it. Despite this, Sean obliged, dropped his frisbee on the ground, and kicked it off the side of the road so a

car wouldn't crush it, after which he perched on the fence lining the woods, serving as their dugout, with his team.

Sean's team was having a bad day. It was only their second time up to bat, and they were losing by four points. Paired with the fact that Mikey, on the opposing team, was having a particularly good hitting day, and Sean could barely keep up, on the flip side, Joey was getting increasingly frustrated as the game progressed, snapping at players as they struck out. Seeing this, Mikey called out playful taunts whenever he missed a ball.

Feeling someone kick at his leg, Sean sighed deeply. He'd rather have skipped his turn at bat and gone home. It was never fun losing to Taylor Hanson. Casting a worried glance at Joey, who was still sulking after he'd hit a pop-fly, he picked the bat off the ground and stood at home trying a few practice swings.

Sean locked eyes scornfully with his opponent. Taylor Hanson was the best pitcher that had ever come to play ball with them, and he knew it. He smirked as Sean came up to bat, tossing the ball around in his hands. He turned around to share his victor's glee with the rest of his teammates as Sean tried a few more practice swings. As he settled into position Taylor called, "You ready for this one, Joey?" He turned back to his team, "It's comin' fast. Thought I'd give you a warning."

"Just throw the ball, Taylor."

He turned back. "Right. *Excuse* me for trying to be polite."

Perhaps the outfielders were unprepared because they were still snickering at Taylor's comments, but even Sean was shocked as a loud crack sounded. Sean threw the

bat on the ground to watch his ball, waiting for it to be caught by Conner Greene in the midfield, but it instead sailed over his head and into the woods.

“Home run!” Joey called, grinning. Sean was too, as he ran back to Joey and the dugouts to celebrate. “Looks like your bad night’s ended. Just in time, too. That’ll be a grand slam. That means to catch up, we only need...” Sean let Joey’s voice fade into the background as he turned back to Taylor Hanson, who was glumly yelling at the outfielders to retrieve the ball.

“Conner, get the ball. *You’re* the one who missed it.”

“It was too high over my head. I’m only five-foot—.”

“You’re closest anyway. Just get it.” He spun away from Conner, ending the argument, and Conner dejectedly wandered into the woods to find the ball. He moved at a brisk pace, shuffling his feet, eager to resume the game.

“It’s been awhile. You think he’s alright?” Sean turned to Joey, who was poking at crawling insects on the fence. Joey shrugged absentmindedly. “Joey.”

“I don’t know, Sean. But if he doesn’t hurry up, we’ll have to forfeit the game and go home. We’ve lost nearly half an hour already.” He gave up on the bugs, finally glaring intently in the direction Conner had wandered.

Sean turned to stare at the trees lining the woods for movement. He spotted a rabbit, but not much else. Not Conner, at least. He suddenly wondered if there were any animals with long claws in the woods. Or a set of sharp teeth. “You think something could have happened to him?”

“He probably just can’t find the ball. Not that I care. I didn’t bring it today anyways.” Joey cracked his knuckles, “I wanted to finish the game. Mikey’s already heading home.”

“I’ll go help him.” Sean finally decided, hopping off the fence. Jogging to the outskirts of the road, he declared, “I’m going to find Conner.” A few of the other boys shrugged, and turned back to playing catch with stones.

“Sean!” Joey huffed for breath, “Don’t go into there by yourself. You ever seen the movies?” As he finally caught up to him, he said, “I’ll come with you.”

It was getting dark, and they still hadn’t found Conner.

Sean didn’t know him much. He’d talked with Conner a few times. Sean owed him chewing gum. Being the only one who’d lend it out, a lot of people owed him chewing gum. Nice kid, but a terrible ball player. He was a klutz, and often hurt himself on the field by accident. Still, he didn’t know him like he did Joey, Mikey, or even Taylor, as unpleasant as it was knowing *him*. He was just another face in the outfield, and Sean wasn’t certain why he cared about finding him so much.

Perhaps he at least wanted to pay back his debt.

They’d tried calling out to no avail. Sean decided that if they hadn’t found him soon, they’d have to go home. He could barely see anything in front of him, and he thought maybe Joey couldn’t either, by the way he kept stumbling into trees. After his

latest collision, he'd rubbed his sore nose indignantly, mumbling insults under his breath, and decided to walk behind Sean.

Sean wasn't sure if he was insulting Conner, or the tree.

It was difficult to navigate in the dark. More than once he'd felt a tree in front of him and had to stop. Of course, he hit the tree anyways when Joey slammed into him. The same went for roots on the ground; Joey usually took them both down. Sean would have to beat him up over his scraped knees later.

Sean heard a sharp intake of breath and the crunching of leaves behind him as Joey leaped back, startled. "What *is* that?"

"What?"

"You just stepped in something warm. It splashed on my leg." Sean wiggled his feet onto a dry surface, hearing the crunch of a few of the early-fallen Autumn leaves. The warm, thick substance on the backs of his legs trickled onto his socks.

Giving up his unsuccessful attempts at squinting through the dark, Sean breathed in a hauntingly familiar metallic scent. "Do you smell blood, Joey?"

"My nose is bleeding from that stupid tree. I've been smelling blood for the past ten minutes. Can we get out of here? Conner probably already went home."

Ignoring Joey's complaints, Sean lowered his hand, running it over the ground. A strong burning sensation formed in his stomach as the hot, sticky grass tainted his skin. He pulled his hand up sharply, finding an unmistakable object that was undoubtedly foreign to the woods.

A baseball, coated in blood.

He'd stepped in *blood*. *Conner's* blood. Sean backed up, temporarily forgetting Joey was there. Sean couldn't focus on whatever complaints Joey had about his feet being tread on as he tried to fight the overwhelming urge to vomit. He grabbed Joey's arm and ran, stumbling over tree roots, out of the woods, no longer safe.

No matter how hard he tried, his hands always smelled bloodily metallic. It was a scent that, when he noticed it, never failed to make his stomach turn. In the following years, he took to wearing gloves.

He'd been the one that hit the ball in the woods. Joey said it wasn't his fault. He wasn't the one who'd stuck the knife in Conner. Sean always responded he might as well have. They'd never found who did it. The police seemed to connect it with a robbery that had happened in a nearby neighborhood, the wounds on the body found in the house and on Conner being nearly identical. "Just a robber passing through," the police had quipped, "Nothing to worry about." Open and as good as shut again, for their town, at least. For Sean, the murder became an open wound, bleeding eternally. Sometimes it would scab over, but it would always break again.

He'd been so happy to hit a home run.

Conner became a ghost story. Junior High students would dare each other to go into the woods where he died. Very few did. Many baseballs hit into the woods were never retrieved. They often insisted to anyone who would listen that his angry spirit could

still be heard roaming about. Sean knew better than that. There was no unholy aura in the air the day they'd found Conner. Just emptiness. The cool autumn air had been so empty, it *hurt*.

It was that very reason that the pair never went back to the park. Sean and Joey often still played ball by themselves in the latter's backyard, Sean's Frisbee nearly always serving as second base. They preferred each other's understanding company to that of their old friends, even if that meant missing out on the graveyard.

They didn't want to see the headstone kicked.

## Batata Frita

9 February 2014

The first time I ever played bass live was with my dad. I was in the seventh grade, and I'd been playing for two weeks, at his instruction. He insisted that some public playing would be good for my "musical development". Naturally, I protested, but he made me come anyways. So we gathered up our thing, in hard black cases (except for the wires, which were in a red one), and we packed up the car and drove.

At this point in my life, I'd never been to Phillip Street Hall before. It's a very shady-looking Portuguese restaurant in East Providence, with bars on the windows and a busted up "We're Open!" sign. I was put off a little, but figured it wouldn't be so bad, because if the smiley face on the sign could still carry a goofy grin with both of his eyes scratched out, I could carry myself in there. We entered the building from an old-school brick alleyway, and the first thing I noticed walking inside was that it was very dim. The second thing I noticed was that we weren't even playing on the ground floor; the restaurant was in the basement.

After giving the whole place an up-down, I asked my dad, "Is this really it?"

"The food's good." He offered. That was enough compensation for me, and down we went with our black cases (and the one red one).

The restaurant was small enough so everyone could see us come in, though they had to crane their necks if they were sitting at the bar in the back. My dad seemed to know everyone down there in one way or another. He went to high school with this guy, coached soccer with this guy, or played music with this guy. Not to mention many of them seemed to share a name with him, "Joao". However, it wasn't much of a surprise, as in my experience, at least, most Portuguese men were named "Joao", and most women were named "Manuela". So, the tiny

restaurant turned into a chorus of, “Obrigado, Manuela!” and a ping-pong match of, “Ola, Joao!” The group, hardly divided by tables and chairs, began open discussion with each other, grinning and patting each other on the back. Meanwhile, I stood there narrowing my eyes at everyone, partly because I was still adjusting to the dark lighting, but mostly because the only phrase I’d ever learned to speak in Portuguese was “potato chip”, and I didn’t think it was relevant to anything anyone was saying. However, I made a mental note that if I needed anything, all I had to do was call, “Joao,” and at least a third of the staff would come running to ask what I needed.

As we ate and set up, my dad conversed with nearly everyone in the restaurant. If I was lucky, I got a friendly look and a heavily accented, “Hi, how are you?” along with a few inquiries of my bass playing ability. I answered with short responses, typical of me, and usually received an overenthusiastic grin in return, after which they turned back to my dad.

As for the actual playing, I can’t say I remember much, and there are two reasons for that. The first one was the whole “potato chip” thing; all the music was in Portuguese. The second was the hard-to-believe reality that Azorean folk music didn’t have many challenging bass lines. Playing close to three different notes in each song, I was grateful for the increasingly bigger cups of coffee my dad was ordering in an attempt to keep me awake.

Despite my first experience, that wasn’t the last time I went to Phillip Street Hall. I never played bass there again—Azorean folk music wasn’t my forte—but, like my dad had told me, the food was good.

I can proudly say that, since I’ve been back, I’ve ordered potato chips many times all by myself, and I think I’ve worked out everyone’s names. All the men are named “Joao” and all the women are named “Manuela.”

## I Can See the Stars

7 April 2014

Kitty was blind. Yet her eyes, gray as the New York City sidewalk she was striding, could observe the way the city lights blanked the canvas-sky of glittering starlight. She missed the way the universe was mapped above her head, an infinite and forever-changing and mysterious *thing* she was a part of, back home. Despite the larger-than-life aura of the city, she couldn't help but feel the universe was smaller than it had been in her small Virginian home-town.

Yet, perhaps, she overthought.

A familiar mechanical “ding-dong” sounded as Kitty pulled the door open. The building had a surprisingly clean-looking exterior for the city, as it was spared the graffiti and scratches that riddled the walls in more dangerous neighborhoods. She squeezed her eyes tightly, drawing deep breaths. The office needed a new bell. Perhaps she would suggest wind-chimes on the door to the redhead behind the window. She only realized she was standing, immobilized, in the doorway when the window woman, Lily, called out to her with, “Kitty?”

Kitty opened her eyes to see Lily several feet in front of her, hand outstretched, eyebrows furrowed, and her beige-painted lips slightly parted. With one last deep breath, Kitty shook her head, and plastered a smile on her face. “I’m here to see Doctor Wyndell.” Lily’s hand retracted and her mouth closed, though she still had the strange expression of concern in her eyes.

She knew why Kitty was here. Kitty knew she knew, and Lily knew she knew she knew. The announcement may have been a way of assuring Lily, “I’m okay,” but Kitty wouldn’t be here if she was, so she couldn’t be sure. *People who are okay don’t have therapists*, Kitty reminded herself, *I’m a liar*.

Doctor Wyndell asked her to talk about the car accident, about her friend, Sam. She didn't. They spoke about how to keep her anxiety levels low at work while he peered at her over his hands, folded under his chin, frustratingly wondering how on earth he could make a blind girl see.

Kitty missed Virginia snow, she decided, as she quickly closed the door to avoid the delayed, "ding dong" of the bell. At home, pristine fields of the frozen fluff fell from the sky to roll in and to eat. Urban snow turned to large piles of brown slush, piled on the sides of the roads, slimy to the touch, undoubtedly toxic to the taste.

Kitty was blind. She couldn't see why headphones weren't allowed at the office, or why her blonde locks always insisted on curling in the hot weather, and she most definitely didn't see how anyone could cure her infirmity, especially someone so insignificant.

A pastor stood proudly on the steps of a local chapel. She lowered her head, using her natural small stature to her advantage in order to avoid his late-night preaching. He saw her anyways, asked her if she had prayed lately. His face was kind and young, though his dark hair was streaked with gray. Kitty shook her head, biting her lip. "No one to hear my prayers."

"God hears all prayers." He insisted, reaching towards her hands. She pulled them out of his reach, behind her back, and looked away.

"How do you know there really is a God?" Kitty snapped.

Unoffended, the pastor shrugged, "How could a world so beautiful be created by accident? It must have been God's design, destined to happen."

Thinking of Sam, Kitty could still feel the sharp blade of guilt, the sweet pain of sorrow. "The world isn't beautiful. People make mistakes, they get hurt, they die. Why would anyone destine that?"

Kitty felt a strange feeling of satisfaction when his face fell. Looking pensive, he ran a hand through his hair. Kitty noticed his fingernails were dirty. “To truly see the light, must you not first experience life in the dark? I believe God will forgive all sin if you learn from your mistakes. Nobody can ask anything more.” Confidence regained, he dropped his hand and grinned. Kitty shook her head and turned to walk away, ignoring his continuation of preaching. She didn’t even turn around when he called out, “I’ll pray for you!”

Kitty couldn’t see the use in that.

A sparrow, hunting for scraps given out by friendly passer-bys, twitched its head longingly towards a cluster of trees on the opposite side of the road. Kitty watched it, preoccupied, on the steps to her apartment complex, smoking a cigarette. She inhaled the scratchy smoke deep into her lungs, which wheezed painfully in protest, despite the light buzz from the nicotine. The sparrow fluttered its wings, flying low against the ground across the street, barely dodging the city’s relentless and numerous drivers, darting forwards and backwards in its panicked state. As Kitty watched the bird reach its destination, she smiled for the first time in a week.

*What are the odds?* Kitty stared at the lit cigarette in her hand, pensive, smile fading. When it returned, she dropped the bud to the ground, smothering it with her boot. *Maybe it was destined to cross.*

Kitty ran up the stairs to her apartment, fingers already dialing the number, already composing millions of questions. As she pressed the glowing buttons, tears fell from her eyes. She cried for Sam, for herself, and for sparrows crushed in the street, for those who were blind. And the worst part was it hurt. *God, it hurt.* But maybe, the being in pain was the only way to feel good again later. And after she had run over a thousand different turns of events in her head, and after the months of feeling like a car-dodging sparrow in the street, and after the tears had washed the

clouds from her eyes, Kitty could finally see. And her gray eyes could see the starry night more clearly than she ever had.

Her grandmother picked up the phone. She had been sleeping, evident from her grumpy mumbles. Kitty didn't care. She was so close to the end, and Kitty needed to know what her grandmother had been thinking lately. "What do you think happens when you die, Grandma?"

In the silence that followed, Kitty could almost see her grandmother's cataract eyes, squinting in the dark at her question. After several moments she answered, "Why, Kitty?"

"Well—I thought—Grandma, we can't just be *gone*. Isn't life worth a little more than that? Isn't everything we *are* worth a little more? Don't you think anyone *knows* that?"

"Kitty? What's this about?" She sounded awake now. She heard her struggling to sit up as she said, "Are you alright?"

"Yes, Grandma. But I was thinking..." Kitty shook her head. Even she wasn't sure what she was thinking. Weakly, she finished, "...I don't know. I was thinking, maybe—well, wondering actually, if it's all worth-while after all."

"What is, dear?"

Breathless, Kitty simply burst out, "Life."

*"Why, my love, you talk as though you were fifty. You've got all your life before you. You mustn't be down-hearted."*

*Kitty shook her head and slowly smiled.*

*"I'm not. I have hope and courage. The past is finished; let the dead bury their dead. It's all uncertain, life and whatever is to come to me, but I enter upon it with a light and buoyant heart. There's so much I want to know; I want to read and I want to learn. I see in front of me the glorious fun of the world, people and music and dancing, and I see its beauty, the sea and the palm-trees, the sunrise and the sunset and the starry night. It's all confused, but vaguely I discern*

*a pattern, and I see before me an inexhaustible richness, the mystery and the strangeness of everything, compassion and charity, the Way and the Wayfarer, and perhaps in the end—God.”*

*--W. Somerset Maugham, *The Painted Veil**

Drama Queen

17 April 2014

There had been many nights in the past when Lucien had wished to simply stop *thinking*. Just for a moment or two. Of course, the wishing only caused more thinking, which only made it harder to sleep. *Not just sleep*, he thought, *No. Eating. Talking. Work. Thinking? Yes, thinking about things that matter. Thinking makes thinking hard, too. Think about that!* Lucien grinned at his own joke, and then frowned. Blinking dumbly at himself in the darkness, he rolled over to bury his face in his pillows, sighing. *Is that a paradox?* Lucien wasn't sure, and at this hour, he didn't think he cared. On his nightstand, his clock displayed a bright green "1:27 am". Hiking his fluffy comforter past his shoulders, he felt the cool air tickle his feet. He retreated them back into the warm cave of blankets by curling his legs. *I need a longer blanket. If my shoulders are warm, then my feet are cold, and if my feet are warm, my shoulders are cold.* Lucien closed his eyes and sighed, *I need to be up in four hours to finish my statistics essay. No thinking. Sleeping. Right.* Of course, after that moment, he spent another hour thinking about how to *not* to think.

On the way to class the following morning, many of the students looked to have spent their night in a similar fashion. Accessories trending amongst them were dark circles, slumped shoulders, and half-empty coffee cups, drained in desperation. Lucien had never liked the taste of coffee, but unfortunately was forced to subject himself to its unpleasant aftertaste to stay awake in his early classes. Even loaded with creamer and sugar, he couldn't help but wrinkle his nose after each tentative sip. It was while he was

pulling one of these faces that Tanya approached him, her own empty cup in hand. “Don’t be a drama queen.” She laughed as she ran a hand through her stringy, red hair.

Lucien turned his head towards her and rolled his eyes. In the chilled autumn air, a puff of his breath dissipated into the air, perfectly illustrating his frustrated sigh. “We can’t all have such profound love for disgusting things, can we?” His scowl shattered into a smile, as he offered his cup to her. Grinning back, she tossed her own empty cup into a nearby trashcan and accepted the hot drink. “It really is *awful*. I’m not just saying that.”

“I love it. Did I ever tell you my dad ran a café back in Boston? Great coffee.” She turned on her heels to face him, raising her eyebrows. “You should visit sometime.”

“Not a chance. So what you’re saying is...you were *bred* to have a thing for coffee?” Tanya punched his arm in response, to which Lucien laughed and rubbed the forming bruise, “Ow!”

Lucien thought he definitely heard Tanya mumble, “*Drama queen*,” as she started to class. A faint smile lingering on his lips, he followed suit of the tiny girl, still rubbing his arm.

The fiery foliage of the trees scattered around campus flickered like candlelight in the breeze. Lucien, for several years, had been fascinated by autumn leaves and how they could look like a hundred different things at once. A painter’s sunset or a phoenix nest or thousands of monarch butterflies. *Why do the leaves change color?* Running a hand through his already messy dark hair, he cast a quick glance at Tanya, who was waving to a few friends out for a run, before returning to his thoughts. *I’m sure someone has told me before. Just as sure as I am that I’ve forgotten why. Tanya might know. Should I ask*

*Tanya? No, she might've been the one that told me before. She might punch my arm again.* He couldn't help but smirk as he thought, *Tanya's hair looks like the leaves.*

As if she had been reading his thoughts, Tanya turned towards him, raising her eyebrows. Lucien thought he heard her grumble something about his being an airhead. Grinning in his own self-acceptance, he hurried after his friend, who had picked up her walking pace, it seemed, to recapture his attention.

Lucien's life, for his own taste, was far too ordinary. After experiencing other worlds through books, movies, and art, he decided that sitting in a statistics class doodling in the notebook he was supposed to be jotting notes in was hardly comparable to adventuring into dragon's lairs or saving the world from aliens. With a gradient effect, enthusiasm ranged from the few students actively learning and participating at the front of the room to those napping in the back, several of which were still wearing pajama bottoms. Lucien, in the middle of class, remained too desperate to receive a degree to sleep, but too bored to bother talking. Instead he resolved himself to freckle his olive skin with dark ink by poking his pen at his thumb,.

Vibrations rang through Lucien as he received a text message. Several people were snapped out of their sleep-induced drooling at the faint noise. *Nobody ever texts me.* Tanya, who was an exception to the enthusiastic-front correlation in order to sit next to her friend, elbowed him to make sure he'd heard it. *Except for Tanya.* Safely shielded by the students in front of him, he flipped through the messages on his phone. From his mother, read, "Hi, honey. Frankie in a bad accident while driving. Come visit at hospital after classes. Everything will be ok. Love you."

*Elaborate.* Despite the conclusive end to his mother's message, he stared daggers at his phone. He hoped that his little brother's accident wasn't severe, but in a city like Chicago, pileups and danger was common. He couldn't be sure. *What if this turns out to be like one of those movies and he's in a coma or loses his memory? What if he dies? New driver on the road, car accidents the leading cause of death in teenagers, it wouldn't take much else. If Frankie dies, I'll have to say something at the funeral. I might cry. What am I going to—?*

"You okay?" As he ripped his gaze away from his phone to meet Tanya's blue eyes, he felt his heart shatter. "You've been looking at that text for fifteen minutes." Unable to compose a response, Lucien shrugged in response, pocketing the phone, determined to remain hypersensitive to any new messages coming through. *Frankie isn't dead. He's not dead.* The lack of new messages coming through contributed to a growing lump in his throat, *He's not going to die.*

After class, had Lucien raced back to his room with his head down, not wanting to be stopped by any concerned passerbys. Tanya had shouted a farewell sentiment, but he hadn't felt willing to respond. Laying on his back and burning holes into the ceiling with his eyes, he decided, reflecting on it, that he wished he had. Turning his head to stare at his clock, the numbers displayed were 2:52pm. Phone resting on his chest in case of any more incoming vibrations, Lucien waited.

*What am I going to do without Frankie?* At the thought, he buried his gaze in the ceiling again. *Never thought about it I guess, He's always been around, my little brother. Never thought this would happen, What am I going to do without Frankie?* Lucien blinked a few times as his eyes focused on a few ants crawling on the ceiling, and rived

away again. *Nothing. I can't do anything. Hurts more to admit than I thought it would,* Today, Lucien clicked his tongue at the thought, *is full of surprises.*

Coincidentally, the vibration of his phone took him by surprise at that very moment. As the buzzing sensation echoed through his body, Lucien, who had been absorbed within himself, jumped and knocked his phone onto the floor. Swearing, he plucked it from the ground with a hopeful expression.

It was Tanya. A sigh composed of equal parts frustration and relief escaped his lips. He almost replaced the mobile back on his chest without opening it before he thought, *Tanya.* He considered her name before casually concluding, *I like Tanya.* In honor of the new discovery, he opened his inbox, reading, "Are you okay? You looked kind of sick after class." *I was.*

"My brother was in a car accident."

It was several minutes before she responded, "Shit, really? Is he okay?" *I don't know! Nobody's told me!*

"I haven't been to the hospital yet. I was supposed to go after class."

"Why haven't you?" *Why haven't I?* Lucien was unsure. He resolved to answer as truthfully as possible.

"Not sure if I could handle anything happening to Frankie." *Quite sure, on the contrary.*

"Not sure he could either. You should go. He needs his brother."

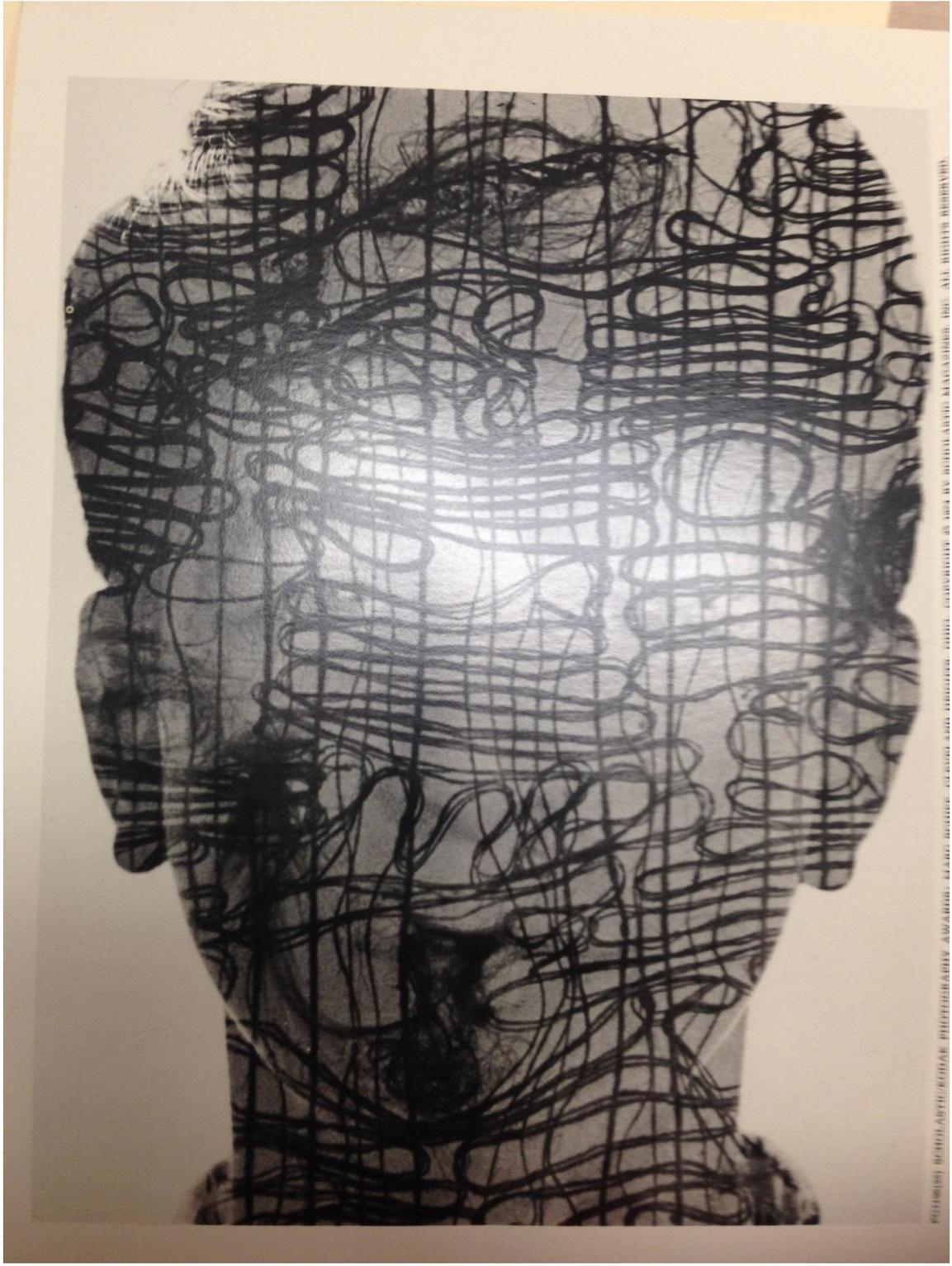
Lucien rolled onto his stomach, propping his head on a pillow, unsure whether or not he would be willing to abandon the emotional safety net that was his bed. "What if he doesn't make it?"

“Don’t be paranoid. You don’t even know what’s happened yet.” Lucien, of course, hadn’t thought of that. As he was thinking about his response, Tanya sent him another message, reading, “Just go. I’m here for you.” *I’ve never had anyone here for me before.* Thinking of the petite redhead, he decided, *It’s kind of nice.*

He would go, he decided, but not without Tanya and her autumn leaves. “Will you come?” When she didn’t respond, he added, “We can go for coffee.”

He smiled at her response, “I’m here for you even more if coffee is involved.”

Of course, every day after, she was.



PHOTOBY SCHOLASTIK/CONAR PHOTOGRAPHY AMADOR. MANO BEIDE. GREGORIO E JOA BY ROBERTO MANGABE. 1995. ALL RIGHTS RESERVED.

A Simple Solution

23 May 2014

CHARACTERS

DAVE, a frustrated high-school student.

MOM, an overenthusiastic mom with too much free time.

Scene 1

Scene opens. The sound of running water is heard. Somewhere, a clock ticks.

DAVE sits at a table, downstage-center, doing his math homework. He is visibly becoming more and more frustrated, scratching his head with his pencil and making quiet, yet dramatic sounds of indignation. A backpack filled with books hangs on the back of his chair. Giving into his frustration, he knocks the papers to the floor and begins to search through his backpack for something. MOM enters stage right.

MOM Hi, Dave, I'm home! [As she sees his homework, a look of confusion passes over her face.] Honey, why is your homework all over the floor?

DAVE Uh, I'm not really a math person. [MOM becomes frustrated and drops to gather the fallen papers.] Mom, it's fine. They're just props anyways.

MOM I don't care if they're just props, Dave. [She slaps the papers in a neat pile in front of him.] We can't just go around making messes everywhere. [DAVE stares at her with a blank expression, puzzled. She sighs and prepares to explain.] Where is your sister? She should hear this. We're going to be making some serious changes in this house.

DAVE She's taking a shower. [Beat.] What kind of changes are we talking about here, Mom?

MOM Well, there was a man who came into my night class today who was talking about Feng Shui, and I thought—

DAVE Feng Shui?

MOM It'll help us have a more grounded, energized, and balanced home. All we have to do is get rid of clutter, paint our front door red—

DAVE —Mom—

MOM —fill in dead zones, and we'll be able to tap into our home's energy, and—

DAVE [shouts] Mom! [She stops rambling and smiles innocently, waiting for his input.] Are you serious? [Her face falls]

MOM It'll be good for our family, Dave.

DAVE Mom, this is crazy. You can't keep doing this.

MOM Doing what?

DAVE Going off the deep end! [He interjects as she starts to protest.] This is just like that time you got into that "God for every man" bread religion. Remember? And all was fine and it was so inspiring until you found out we had to donate twenty percent of our salary, and became unreligious super fast.

MOM Feng Shui is—

DAVE A mystic way to enlightenment through decorating, yeah. [MOM crosses her arms.] I'm just saying Mom, there's no simple solution, and it's kind of weird that you go a little nuts with these religions, and diets, and causes, and stuff. Can't we just try to be, you know, a regular family?

MOM [Emotional] We are not a regular family. We are a Feng Shui family!

DAVE [Losing his patience.] You're crazy.

MOM [Angry] Young man, you go to your room!

Frustrated, DAVE obliges and walks off left stage. MOM follows, still looking angry.

[Black]

## Scene 2

Scene opens. On the stage is solely DAVE center stage, retelling the outcome of the Feng Shui incident in his house to the audience. He appears to be amused, yet still slightly frustrated, as if his mother's obsessive habits have continued.

DAVE So, believe it or not, the whole "Feng Shui" thing didn't really work out. It might be partly my fault, but I just had it, you know? I'm telling you, Feng Shui is kind of nuts. So I come home from school the next day and the place looks like the city morgue. I'm talking plain white walls, furniture all rearranged, no pictures on the walls, the whole deal. I'm half expecting a real estate agent to be walking around with a way-too-happy, affluent couple with their first and only newborn child. And I'm thinkin', you know, "Okay. It's not as bad as some of Mom's other flings. I can live with this until she gets over it." [Sighs] And then I saw my room. Posters ripped down from the walls, my bed backwards, books off the shelves, all my stuff gone. All of it! So I ask my mom where it is, and she said she threw it away. Why did she throw it away? [In imitation] Because Feng Shui said it interfered with the natural balance of our home. [His face falls back into one of frustrated humor.] So what do I do? I take the most reasonable course of action I can. The thing that I know will get this all sorted out fast and easy. A simple solution. [Shrugs] I threw all her stuff away. Of course it was still there because she couldn't live without

her Cosmopolitan magazines. Guess she would just have to die that month because I threw everything away. [Shrugs] Told her it was interfering with my Feng Shui magic. Well, after that, she decided it was more enlightening living with Cosmo-Tips than it was with natural balance, and that's just fine with me, though I'm a fan of Sports Illustrated myself.

## Poetry



One man in a thousand, Solomon says,  
Will stick more close than a brother.  
And it's worthwhile seeking him half your days  
If you find him before the other.

Nine hundred and ninety-nine depend  
On what the world sees in you,  
But the Thousandth Man will stand your friend  
With the whole world round agin you.

'Tis neither promise nor prayer nor show  
Will settle the finding for 'ee  
Nine hundred and ninety-nine of 'em go  
By your looks, or your acts, or your glory.

But if he finds you and you find him,  
The rest of the world don't matter;  
For the Thousandth Man will sink or swim  
With you in any water.

You can use his purse with no more talk  
Than he uses yours for his spendings,  
And laugh and meet in your daily walk  
As though there had been no lendings.

Nine hundred and ninety-nine of 'em all  
For silver and gold in their dealings;  
But the Thousandth Man, he's worth 'em all  
Because you can show him your feelings.

His wrong's your wrong, and his right's your right  
In season or out of season.  
Stand up and back it in all men's right  
With that for your only reason!

Nine hundred and ninety-nine can't bide  
The shame or mocking or laughter,  
But the Thousandth Man will stand by your side  
To the gallows-foot-and after!

—Rudyard Kipling; *The Thousandth Man*

## No Time

26 March 2014

I am fifteen.

Everything I do is for attention,

Part of a phase.

I have a pile of books

Heavier than I am,

And a pile of homework

I can feel in my temples.

My friends are drama free

Yet indulge themselves at every opportunity.

I don't have time to care.

I have deadlines.

I have to learn to speak

In front of others

Without crying or weak knees.

It's part of my grade.

What if I fail my classes?

Not sure what I really want,

So I'm told to try everything.

But there is no time.

I have deadlines.

I wake up at six, get home at seven.

They said I need extra-curriculars.

No time for poetry,

No time for dances,

No time to stretch my legs,

No time to speak.

I have deadlines.

## Surprising Myself

26 March 2014

I surprise myself.

It comes in quite a few different variations.

Making an adequate class presentation even though my knees are shaking,

Jumping off the high diving board when I was eight.

They aren't always good surprises, either.

Sometimes the surprise comes when I think I'm going to surprise myself and I don't,

or I say something that isn't exactly what I meant.

Sometimes it comes when I'm writing a poem, and I go back to read it

Only to find I don't really understand my own words.

Usually though, they snowball,

They form a line of toppling dominos, triggering new surprises and experiences.

I never expected to sing in front of anyone,

but when I did, I joined the theatre program.

I never expected, in preschool, that I could ever talk to anyone,

but the same day, I met my best friend.

I never expected to not be totally paralyzed

by the possibility that I could say or do something wrong,

and for that surprise, I'm still waiting,

but I know it's one in progress.

It draws closer always.

Surprises happen every day, and miracles too,

but they take a little time.

Miracles and surprises are exactly the same: life changing,

but in baby steps that you never saw coming.

Sometimes, they're so small, we forget that they're there.

We expect to be hit by a bus,

when it's more like a passing stranger bumping into you on the sidewalk,

or a dog bounding up to you and leaping onto your knees

while its owner scurries up to you, fussing over their dog and apologizing,

when really, thinking about the overexcited creature later on

is the only thing that makes you smile when you've had a bad day.

The miracles that matter are not always appreciated.

They move through the shadows backstage,

hand off a prop, or pat a lighting attendant on the back.

But I can see people changing every day, for better or for worse,

even if they say insist don't like surprises.

Anxiety

15 May 2014



## Reflection



"I found that I am now able to think creatively in new ways..."—Leah F. Silva

## Creative Writing Class

23 May 2014

Over the course of the past semester, I've learned a great deal about myself as a writer through creative writing class. Before enrolling in this class, I enjoyed writing and was very enthusiastic about learning new things about the creative process, so it was natural that I chose to take this class as an elective. I am also considering pursuing a career in writing, and I can definitely say, being near the end of this course, that I thoroughly enjoyed both the class and its assignments. Not only has my writing improved overall, which was my goal, but I found that I am now able to think creatively in new ways, and can come up with ideas using the different techniques I learned in class. I also found myself being able to become inspired more quickly and by a wider range of instigators than I was before. Throughout this class, the use of photos and other writing as inspiration has helped me widen my range of inspiration initiators.

My favorite assignment was definitely the "Photo" story. Usually, I write first, creating a mental picture as I go or after the story is complete, so it was very interesting to write with somewhat of a visual already provided to me. I was surprised when an idea came to me so quickly. However, I found that the story I wrote as a result of looking at the photo was amongst the best pieces I've written over the duration of this class, in my own opinion. My least favorite assignment was most likely the imitation poem, because I felt very limited with what I could and couldn't write about, and it was strange to "imitate" another poem line by line. With the first line being decided for us, I felt that the subject matter of the poem was more or less decided as well. However, overall, I enjoyed

all of the assignments, and improved my own writing as a result. I also noticed a common theme developing over the course of my assignments. Many of them seemed to deal with the characters' feelings towards other people or situations, and the stories often ended with some kind of epiphany. The realistic focus of thoughts, feelings, relationships, and emotions in my writing was a surprise to me, as I had never written with that specific focus in mind before.

This class certainly changed my perception of my own writing, specifically, my own style. Before taking this class, my style was very undeveloped. I often felt awkward linking words together to say what I wanted. However, after taking this, I feel a strong sense of self in my own writing, and I feel confident in myself. As a writer, I plan to continue developing my style and my own personal technique, and I plan to continue to explore writing as a possible career path. If I could add something to this class, I might add in some more time to write freely without any restriction.