

The Red Hawk Review

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Artistic Expressions from Gateway's Talented Visual Artists and Wordsmiths. This was made possible by a generous contribution from The Gateway Foundation





Art by AJ Thomas

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Trigger Warning

This publication includes content that touches on (1) rape, (2) sexual assault, (3) animal cruelty or animal death, (4) excessive or gratuitous violence, and (5) death or dying. Reader discretion is advised.



Art by Kayla Jaeger



Art by Natalie Murphy

Poetry



Art by Abbie Lang

SnowGlobe

Irene De La Rosa Causey

A perfect moment suspended in time
A magical love story to share with the world
A piece of egg-nog cake as you sip a cup of hot cocoa
Skating with your love, holding hands as you both listen to Christmas music.

Il Soffio Di Zefiro

Filomena Vulnera

Cielo grigio, nuvole nere che nascondono il sole, come i dubbi che offuscano le certezze e le speranze.

Gocce di pioggia bagnano la terra arsa dalla calura, come lacrime che scorrono su un volto che ha dimenticato il sorriso.

Dietro i nubi c'è il sereno: basterà un soffio di vento per fare ritornare l'azzurro, fare ritornare il sorriso e rinfocolare le speranze.

NUCCIA



Art by Destiny Hopkins

The Breath of Zephyr

Filomena Vulnera

Gray sky, black clouds that hide the sun, like doubts that cloud certainties and hopes.

Drops of rain wet the earth scorched by the heat, like tears flowing down a face that has forgotten its smile. Behind the clouds, there is the clear sky: a breath of wind will be enough to make the blue return, bring back the smile, and re-energize hopes.

NUCCIA

Al Di La Della Siepe

Filomena Vulnera

Al di la della siepe, al di la dei monti, al di la del mare, al di la della vita.

Al di la di tutto c'è qualcosa, o si spera che ci sia.

Mondi reali o immaginari, in cui la realtà si mescola con la fantasia e l'immaginazione in un caleidoscopio d'immagini che hanno i colori del momento e dello stato d'animo.

Mondi che ci danno la possibilità di crearci una nicchia, un rifugio, un angolo tutto nostro in cui le cose vanno come vorremmo che andassero.

Cancellata la realtà, ci si può organizzare un'esistenza parallela in cui tutto è bello, sincero, onesto.

Dove non esiste l'ansia, il dolore, la miseria, l'emarginazione.

NUCCIA

Beyond the Hedge

Filomena Vulnera

Beyond the hedge, beyond the mountains, beyond the sea, beyond life.

Beyond everything, there is something or one hopes there is.

Real or imaginary worlds, in which reality mixes with fantasy and imagination in a kaleidoscope of images that have the colors of the moment and the mood.

Worlds that give us the opportunity to create a niche, a refuge, a corner of our own where things go the way we would like them to go.

Once reality has been erased, one can organize a parallel existence in which everything is beautiful, sincere, honest.

Where anxiety, pain, misery, and marginalization do not exist.

NUCCIA

Alone*Irene De La Rosa Causey*

Being alone can cut like a knife
 Being alone is like a rose petal that fades
 Being alone is like a sad story
 Being alone can take your breath away

Turbinio*Filomena Vulnera*

Come una sorgente impetuosa, mille pensieri, mille emozioni sgorgano dalla mente e dal cuore e si fondono in un fiume fatto di lacrime.

Sgorgano, ma non riesco a dare forma e costrutto ad una gioia e a un tormento, ad un sogno e ad un'illusione, a descrivere con parole i turbini che mi travolgono innalzandomi e sprofondandomi.

Dal sole alle tenebre in un vorticare di immagini che si scompongono e compongono come un puzzle impazzito.

Mi aggrappo ai ricordi e nella notte accendo un fuoco di speranza che riscaldi il freddo della mia anima.

NUCCIA

Swirl*Filomena Vulnera*

Like an impetuous spring, a thousand thoughts a thousand emotions flow from the mind and heart and merge into a river made of tears.

They flow, but I am unable to give shape and construct to a joy and a torment, to a dream and an illusion, to describe in words the whirlwinds that overwhelm me, raising me up and sinking me.

From sun to darkness in a swirl of images that break down and put together like a crazy puzzle.

I hold on to memories, and in the night, I light a fire of hope that warms the cold of my soul.

NUCCIA



Art by Erin Groce

Eventi Tempestosi

Filomena Vulnera

Il cielo sembra non avere più lo stesso colore, così il mare e i suoi rossi tramonti.

La notte si popola di fantasmi: non puoi dormire... forse non vuoi dormire.

E aspetti l'alba del nuovo giorno.

E aspetti la luce che scacci le ombre.

E i cattivi pensieri si rintanano negli angoli più remoti: in agguato, pronti a balzarti incontro, a ferirti, a dilaniarti a distruggere ogni tua resistenza, la forza di lottare, la stessa voglia di vivere.

Raccogli il tuo fagotto di speranze sualcite e di sogni infranti e ti avvii per andare chissà dove.

Sulla spiaggia deserta l'onde cancellano i tuoi passi e le lacrime sembrano spruzzi di salsedine che nessuno potrà riconoscere... NUCCIA

Stormy Events

Filomena Vulnera

The sky no longer seems to have the same color, as does the sea and its red sunsets.

The night is filled with ghosts: you can't sleep... maybe you don't want to sleep.

And wait for the dawn of the new day.

And you wait for the light to chase away the shadows. And bad thoughts hide in the most remote corners: lurking, ready to pounce on you, to hurt you, to tear you apart and destroy all your resistance, the strength to fight, the very desire to live.

You pick up your bundle of crumpled hopes and broken dreams and set off to go who knows where.

On the deserted beach the waves erase your steps and the tears look like sprays of salt that no one will be able to recognize...NUCCIA



Art by Maddie Granahan

Untitled*Ethan Adams***I.**

Beyond me- all of it
 Walking down the street, green and unanswered
 The alignment of all things in the vastness of our continuous forthcoming?
 Don't know- shouldn't
 The sensual contours of the countryside,
 with hills unrolling into wildflower and stream
 Bubbling beneath tufts of grass
 where butterflies bathe
 Lying beneath the shimmering green hues of quiet moments
 Contemplating valleys, etched by water flowing
 Held in place and bound by pine
 Black mud smooth on freckled green face
 Capitulating water bubbles and bounces
 Through my ancient wrinkled earth

II.

The purple aster - fall in all its curiosities
 Bounding, binding away
 Filling every hole dug up in summer
 Burying its cold earth secrets
 thoughts aloud like barefoot oak and gray clouds shining
 All is well-
 The beauty behind constant running of minds
 Moving through twisted thought and begging
 Like hidden angels
 We forget to look inside-
 Turn away from light
 Flowing steady, the foliage of my heart,
 Cut back and regrowth
 For my desire surely lies quietly in heart
 That I should yearn to be a perfect reflection
 Of you on Earth

III.

Mother's blanket on lonesome wood
 forest blood argues with the scabbing of ice on woodland flow
 We are all conserving our spark in hopes that it will return
 With an abundance of learned lessons and stagnant contemplation
 of winters past always collecting miracles to piece together the face of god



Art by Tyler Wilson

Prose



Art by Jennifer Maldonado

The Terms? Terminal. by Matthew Torgerson

A sentence leaving the lips of a forked tongue. A sentence not composed of words or conjunctions but years; a prison sentence, trapped by cells, just the same. Degrading and eating at not only your corporeal flesh but the essence of your intangible spirit and liveliness along with it. The piercing grip of a familiar, conniving, and omnipresent threat that may be called the true Zodiac Killer: cancer. This, to some, is what lies behind the infrastructure of the place known as Hotel California, from roof to foundation. Much like the body composition the song constantly seems to allude to, the first two verses and the chorus will be thoroughly broken down and dismantled to decipher another meaning behind the Hotel California and its illustrious archetypes of terminal illness and looking into the face of death with uncertainty. The evocative theme and the soul-stirring melody bred together to form a narrative on terminal illness, the last fight to cling to life, and the beautiful and unearthly journey after. Although The Eagles have been dismissive of this and many other theories deciphered from the piece as not the true meaning, this is a tune with, I believe, purposely ambiguous lyricism in order for audience interaction and a plethora of relatable tales to be fostered from the vague phrasing. To many, this is not only an intriguing assertion but also a lachrymose and perilous journey for individuals or their families around the globe. This is not just a morbid subject but, one could say, frequently an almost macabre topic of sorts as well. This track has such a myriad of well-fitting meanings that it almost makes an individual wonder how this could have been inadvertent. Though this is likely a mere "happy," if one could use such an adjective for the subject matter, accident, it is exceedingly real in its effect and representation of this aching community, as well as just so happening to be what I would label the most compelling, lyrically form-fitting, and substantive meaning that arose from the philosophizing and alternative interpretations of fans. In the eyes of some of these pontificators populating a sort of purgatory, those around them, and even many third-party somewhat quasi-cryptographers, the Eagles' 1976 release of "Hotel California" can be seen as metaphorically portraying the hampering afflictions of a devastating diagnosis of cancer or other terminal illness. Still, although the patient may be broken along the way, seemingly defeated, it leaves not just a flicker but a whole firestorm of hope towards budding and blossoming again, following a lengthy clash from within.

First and foremost, the first verse begins to stroke the canvas and elucidate the pure calamity of the diagnosis, scrambling and laboring to give it your all. This verse chronicles the metaphorical narrative of a terminally ill patient in their final moments and the lights going out. In some of the first lines, it jumps right into the action by stating, "On a dark desert highway / Cool wind in my hair / Warm smell of colitas / Rising up through the air" (Eagles, par. 1). The song starts off dense, with a dry, desert-like landscape, symbolizing a desolate and hopeless end with no control over the direction of the highway. This group of artistic phrases figuratively displays riding upon the highway of death instantly within the opening and the lingering scents of inviting aromas and tempting sensations while traveling. This beginning symbolizes not only being led towards death in some way, but further symbolizing death beckoning someone through the imagery of luring fragrances. Following this, the song then states, "Up ahead in the

distance / I saw a shimmering light / My head grew heavy and my sight grew dim / I had to stop for the night” (Eagles, par. 1). This is where the narrative truly begins to puzzle itself together. These ending lines of the first verse poetically depict seeing a gleam of light, the patient’s head growing laden and his vision fading, and, after struggling exhaustively tooth and nail, eventually giving in and stopping for the night, which is the final moment in the physical realm. Moreover, this alludes to, more precisely, brain cancer, stemming from the imagery of a head being heavier from the tumor itself and sight growing faint, diminishing from the vision issues and symptoms associated with damage to the brain, typical of brain tumors.

Continuing this tale and marking it as far from over, depicting the voyage held after the flatline and lights tunneling and funneling into one guided layover before a full death, the starting lines of the second verse state, “There she stood in the doorway / I heard the mission bell / And I was thinking to myself / ‘This could be Heaven or this could be Hell’” (Eagles, par. 2). These lines display this patient, after breathing his last breath, being guided into a doorway and hearing a bell, figuratively referring to a ringing in the ears and being guided through a doorway upon death. Then, as their spirit begins to pass over, the patient mulls over whether where he is being led in heaven or hell, illustrating his regret and reflections on his life and earnestly wondering what direction that has brought him. Will it be heaven, or will it be hell? Following these doubts and ponderings, it is stated, “Then she lit up a candle / And she

showed me the way / There were voices down the corridor/ I thought I heard them say” (Eagles, par. 2). This set of lyrics unveils a sense of hope, symbolically exhibiting a spark of light shown to them by their guide towards their final destination. They then hear a subtle but cheery collection of voices—their loved ones and fellow attendees of this residence—calling to them, leading into the concluding chorus to the most relevant sections of this recording.

In the third and final section of this track dissection, there is the overarching chorus, which begins by stating in emblematic prose, “Welcome to the Hotel California / Such a lovely place / Such a lovely face” (Eagles, par. 3). This symbolic language is used to refer to the heavens by describing a lovely place and, even more profoundly, a lovely face, which refers to the divine face of God and the surreal conference with the original image and basis of human creation. Furthermore, it goes on to elaborate with, “Plenty of room at the Hotel California / Any time of year / You can find it here” (Eagles, par. 3). This finish to the chorus symbolically alludes to the heavens and makes an analogy to a literal hotel, saying this place has an influx of people coming in at all times; however, it is vast and will always have plenty of room, regardless. Overall, the title “Hotel California” is representative of the firmament. The phrase “Hotel California” is almost akin to a kenning in the way it purposely and metaphorically depicts this word in indirect wording rather than a more steady, single, and literal word. The hotel it speaks of is the heavens themselves and is symbolic of the term “checking out” as an idiom for death and departing from their stay on earth, then finding themselves checking into the 5-star paradise that is “Hotel California”.

The Eagles’ “Hotel California,” especially as detailed through the first two verses and subsequent chorus, can easily be thought of as emblematic of terminal illness, as supported by other various listed catalogs and in-depth threads of similar online,

widespread opinions regarding the song. Even if not entirely intentionally, this masterpiece eloquently painted the fervor and fire of a terminally ill patient facing all the reflections, regrets, wrongs, and straightforward hardships of their own body failing them in the last of their lives. Anticipation was left as an even more intrusive and controlling antagonist than the results themselves. A bleak look at being torn and worn by a fight never even held on the theater floor with an attentive audience but behind closed curtains instead. The backdrop and haunting takedown from a place hardly even locatable until the realization it has already begun lands center stage with an unforeseen plot twist, leaving oneself with an even more unsought and sudden meeting with the director himself. These eldritch lyrics and melody chronicle the qualia of the circumstance and encounter with terminal illness and fortuitously make the experience and feelings associated with it more understandable through the format of symbolic poetry, conveying the sentiment or soul of the piece in a touching and accessible composition showing the sensations an experience of terminal illness can truly elicit. But following this, the piece also manages to employ a roller-coaster of emotions by, although not deliberately, seeming to allude to the positive outcome of a pleasant afterlife awaiting, juxtaposing the fear and hesitance displayed till then with wrapping it all up in a loving bow of an optimistic message of assurance. Though perhaps not premeditated, this song developed and took on another meaning for those who needed meaning; now meaning it has, in a way, procured an even more special sort of significance to some. That, in itself, is superbly surreal and perhaps slightly melancholically momentous. Ultimately, the writer of the 1976 release "Hotel California," the Eagles, at least in the minds of numerous individuals beset or bedeviled by these burdens, writes this piece about capturing the feel of the seemingly desolate and aloof existence of the last days clawing up from the edge of the cliff of cancer, just for a rock to slip and life and hope to be lost briefly, but at apparent rock bottom, being caught and consoled by the touch of a presence that is inviting and warm when he finally relinquishes control: the heavens of "Hotel California".



Art by Aryanna Selle

13 Going on 29

by Scarlett R. Gibbs

When I was 13 years old, I experienced a very heinous, violent crime. It completely altered my world. Everything down to my soul was taken away from me. From that day forward I was never the same. I was gray and lifeless in a world full of color and life. While everyone else was living life, I was dead inside, wishing I wasn't alive. I was the victim of rape, but this would not be the last time I experienced sexual violence. In fact, this was just the beginning...

When I was 17 years old, I experienced it all over again. How do you tell anyone you've been sexually assaulted again? The walls just kept caving in. I felt as if nothing in my life was never going to change. I still hadn't recovered from when I was raped at 13. Now I'm going through it again. "Fake a smile and just pretend? What should I do? Do I report it? Nothing was done when I reported it when I was 13, so what will be different now? Screw it; I must report for myself, for my own sake." I was racing with these thoughts. "Just give her all different medication to numb her pain. She won't feel her emotions then, and therapy will work and lots of it, then maybe she will process what is going on." That's what people kept telling my family to do because they didn't know how to help me anymore. My family was starting to fall apart as I was falling apart even more... All the wrong medication and all the wrong therapy. All ended up making things worse and just wanting to end things. I would save myself the heartache. I would save myself the pain of it happening again. I would save my family the heartache of having to deal with me. "Take them you know you want to."

Seventeen years old, laying in a hospital bed, waking up to a nurse next to me typing on a computer. Not sure what's going on, but she's not really paying too much attention. "What day is it? Where am I even? Does she even know I'm awake?" I suppose I should probably actually say something."

Me: "Hello?"

Nurse: "Hi, I'm Nurse Jackie. I'm one of your 24-hour surveillance nurses."

Me: "Uh...Okay... What day is it? How long have I been asleep? Where am I? How long have I been here? How long will I be here? Why do I need you? Can I make a phone call?"

Nurse: "It's Wednesday; you've been asleep since you came in, and we had to pump your stomach on Sunday night,

but we had to constantly sedate you because you were getting aggressive and harmful to yourself and others. So you have been out for four days. You are at the Children's Hospital of Wisconsin. You will be here until a bed opens up at the psychiatric hospital your mother wants you to go to. You have me and other nurses like me because you attempted suicide. The only people you are allowed to call are your parents and your grandmother. We have a call list of people for you, and those are the only people you can contact.

Me: I was just silent. I didn't know what to say. I didn't know how to react. I was in utter shock and disbelief. "How did I survive?" I remember making a call to my mother and asking her how she found out. She said I was on the phone with a friend, and that friend started to notice a difference in my speech

and told her mother and her mother called my mother. My mother found me and called an ambulance. I have been forever grateful for that friend since my healing journey started. That was my third suicide attempt since I was 13 years old.

At 25 years old, I didn't think I would ever experience sexual assault again. I thought I finally put that chapter behind me. I thought maybe I could start healing, but that wasn't the case. It happened to me one last time. At the time, I blamed myself for what happened to me. Looking back, I wish I could have prevented it or even seen a warning sign. I felt like other people thought.

I was responsible for what happened to me. However, I did not control what happened. I was the victim of a crime, not the perpetrator. "Why is it me? What did I do to deserve this? What am I doing differently than everyone else?" I'm trying to fight, but can't even do that because I'm just too overpowered. Slowly shutting down fight or flight, they say well, my fight or flight isn't coming into play here... "Where is it? Hello? Why aren't you activating? You are supposed to activate?"

That's my hair you're ripping out... stop spitting on me. God, just kill me already. Make it all stop." This time, I did not report because after two reports going nowhere, how could I put myself through a third report and have it go nowhere?

For 14 years, I lived in a constant state of numbness and fear. I didn't care about myself or my life. I didn't care what was happening around me or to whom. I just wanted to numb the pain in any way I could. If I wasn't drinking, I was smoking weed, and if I wasn't doing either of those things, I was sleeping the day away. My mind was constantly dark and cloudy. I was more than sad; I was depressed. I didn't want to live anymore. I was so tired of trying to keep going. I was so tired of trying to keep up this act that I was okay. I was so tired of just trying. I don't think people realize how tiring it can really be. I was sick of seeing therapist after therapist who wasn't helping and who I didn't get along with. I was just tired.

When I was 26 years old, laying in bed thinking about life I had a choice to make. Do I keep living in a state of victim or do I make the choice to live in a state of survivor? After drinking myself half to death, multiple suicide attempts, and living in a gray while the rest of the world was living in color, I had to make a choice. I finally made the choice to go to a women's shelter and get some serious help. Up until this point, I never thought I would walk into a women's shelter. I always knew about them, but I always thought they were more for those who are victims of domestic violence. Come to find out, they do way more than that.

It's women's shelter day. I have never been more excited to walk into a building in my entire life, but I was also extremely nervous because the thought that my entire state of life would change scared me. I had grown so accustomed to the way I was living. The way that I had built walls up to survive the world. To break them down, to rebuild healthy boundaries, and really try to heal from my trauma scared me. It would be to anyone in my state at that time, but I knew I had to do it if I wanted to live a "normal" happy life. I remember my

grandmother offering to come with me, and I told her, "No, I need to do this by myself for myself." I walked into the shelter, and this very gentle, very tall African American security guard asked me who I was, what I was there for, and who I was seeing. I said, "I'm just a lost woman who is a victim of sexual violence,

I'm not sure who I'm supposed to see and what I'm here for. I just need help." He stood up and said, "Give me one second, ma'am." He turned around and got someone. Within minutes, I was speaking to a victim advocate. They got me the help I needed.

At 28 years old, I look back; it's been 7,337,513 minutes since I was 13 years old, it's been 5,759,274 minutes since I was 17 years old, and it's been 2,075,757 minutes since I was 25 years old. To think about that and read that time to me is outstanding. It's almost surreal. If you had asked 26-year-old me before I made my decision to go into the women's shelter if I'd still be here at 28 years old, I probably would have said "No," and that would have been the truth at the time. Now, at 28 years old, I am proud to say that I am here, and I'm here to stay! I am here to tell my story for every person who can't tell theirs. But most importantly, I'm here for myself, and I'm living life in color again. A piece of 13-year-old me is sitting beside me, cheering me on. I am no longer a victim; I am a survivor.



Art by Erin Dalton

3 Songs, 4 Women

by Matthew Rarie

Music resonates with everybody in different ways. Music evokes a wide range of emotions and can instantly transport an individual to a time or place in their lives. I have been asked what my favorite song is or who is my favorite artist or band, but these questions do not scratch the surface of how music affects my life. Favorite songs and bands change over time, but I have never been asked a question that really makes me contemplate the effect that artists or songs have had on my life. Four women in my life have had a profound influence on my life, and hearing any of these three songs will bring me right to a moment in time that reminds me of how lucky I am to have each of them in my life.

My mom was a major influence in my early life and has been a major support system for me. I was the surprise child in my family, and the result of that was me growing up as practically an only child as both of my older brothers were moving out as I began elementary school. My mom was born in 1954, and as a result, her musical tastes were heavily influenced by the '60s rock and roll era. When I think of my mom, my mind instantly goes to "Happy Together" by The Turtles from 1967. This was apparently my favorite song that my mom had on cassette that she played anywhere we went in our old green Pontiac. There is a line in the third verse, "Me and you, and you and me. No matter how they toss the dice, it had to be," that resonated with my five-year-old brain. Almost any time we were in the car for long enough, my mom would hear from the back seat, "Play the dice song, Momma." As I grew up, I realized how much those memories meant to her as she would bring them up time and time again in conversations with me and my children. This song will immediately bring a flood of memories of my mom back to me from all stages of my life. Unfortunately, this song has become nearly impossible to listen to since my mom's passing in November 2021. It has been a band-aid that I have not quite been willing to rip off yet. The one time that I have listened to "Happy Together" was when I was holding my newborn son, Jack, as the song began to play on a '60s mix that was set on shuffle. It was nice and therapeutic to share stories with my sleeping boy of how loved and adored he would have been by his Nana.

The next song that comes to mind brings even more mixed emotions. My first marriage began at the ripe old age of nineteen but did not last long after the vows. We decided to part ways very shortly after our wedding and did not have contact for years. However, due to a lack of maturity and no pressing desire to remarry, we did not officially divorce. Both of us had moved on, and she even had a daughter of her own. One day, I received a very unexpected message from her, and it reopened a dialogue between us that had not happened for years. Old feelings began to emerge, but I had my reservations, considering how the last attempt at a relationship had ended. While I was driving in my car, uncertain of how to move forward, I made a quick prayer for a sign. Immediately, the next song that began to play on the radio was "I Won't Give Up" by Jason Mraz, released in 2012. Listening to the song and really taking in the chorus, "I won't give up on us," was all I needed to jump headfirst into a questionable idea. Without much surprise, the marriage officially ended in a divorce a few years later as the problems we had the first time reared their ugly heads again, but this time, I had

become a dad to two wonderful little girls. This changed my life for the better in every single way. I may not be perfect, but being a good and present father is something that I strive for every day. I learned that the best things in my life were the product of some questionable decision-making. Now, every time I hear “I Won’t Give Up,” I go to the moment in time that started me on the path to becoming a father.

If we are keeping count, that leaves one song and one woman left to go. I could not leave out my beautiful and supportive wife, Nicole, and our song together. “In Case You Didn’t Know” by Brett Young, released in 2016, is a song that we both gravitated to. When Brett Young sings, “In case you didn’t know baby I’m crazy ‘bout ya, and I’d be lyin’ if I said I could live this life without ya.” it brings me right back to our getting to know each other phase, and how much peace I’ve found with her. The journey it took us to find each other was unlikely. We have both been previously married and had multiple states between us. We eventually found each other in the county jail, where we both worked. We have since built a life together that includes a wonderful, blended family of four children, two cats, and a recently purchased house.

Music, for me, can act as a time machine. While I can bop along to the latest Top 20 list like everyone else, certain songs bring me back to moments and periods of my life. I can picture environments, feel emotions, and relive these experiences through songs. While there are multiple other examples of this, I can’t ignore the impact that these three songs and four women have had on my life.

From Dairy and Meat to Buried in Grief by Matthew Torgerson

An assault, peppered in just like a salt, if the lid was not twisted on even slightly. A sort of self-vandalism, self-imposed, and soon succumbed to. Letting unwanted pariahs feed like piranhas and seep into every chamber of one's being, yearning for their leave but simultaneously giving them a polite and private escort through the defenses and handing them the launch codes palm-to-palm with no sign of acrimony, illustrating a sort of poorly enforced xenophobia.

Ignoring the cause and prognosis, wishing to pull the killswitch on these perpetrators, yet remaining the sole conductor on track to completing the circuit. All the while sustaining a suffocating wait and fluctuating weight as the numbers on the scale dive off and free-fall in a way no longer so exhilarating. Pried from pride, praying, and pleading. Palpable palpitations and extreme exhaustion and exertion of the extremities. Valves plug and shut down like the dial of a faucet, leaving an assuredly draining experience. A situation that should leave hair standing on end but instead devolving into follicles falling back in order to fight another day. Sapiens are no longer able to waste time splitting hairs but are forced into losing them. People who do not turn a hair yet wind up in the crosshairs. Civilians are going from thinking this could never harm a hair on their head to just hanging on by a hair. Everything, from a shortness of breath to a shortness of years left at all, no longer privy to punctuality. Soon, flatlines seem to be the only horizon

awaiting. All procured vigor is soon relinquished, painted, and propagated by propagandists who are far more interested in gluttony and profit than any prerequisite to a plebian or proletariat person's well-being. This is what it is to perpetuate a projection that possesses people to possess a sense of quasi-fitness with the current culturally accepted diet. It is a robbery and a false sense of security, taking with it the longevity of the only mortal vessel one can ever even potentially possess. There are no redos or checkpoints on the journey of the human experience.

The utmost transgressors of this sacred, sacrosanct, and nonrenewable resource called life force are meat and dairy intake, working symbiotically towards the destruction of the average layman's health. Society needs to make a vast reduction or put a total halt entirely on the embracing of the consumption of these culinary categories if, as a culture, they treasure the preservation of their individual lives. It must be the main character of the dietary guidelines,

the protagonist of Haleness. This must become a priority in all cultures with the applicable resources, no longer surpassing general society's ken, but now locally located in the commons of common knowledge. For the good of their limited lives, which they can never attain again, society must be striving for the upper echelons, a zealous zenith. Still, today society is barely scraping the bottom of the barrel of basic maintenance. For the sake of everything general culture deems cherishable, society must intervene while people still have years on the clock and terminate the irresponsible welcoming and promotion of current meat and dairy intake practices and market the idea of ideal dietary safety to future generations and those

with the ability to act now with the proper instruction, due to the unfathomable influence these dining behaviors have on heart disease, cancer, and antibiotic resistance.

Today, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, coronary heart disease still remains America's top killer. Due to the country's current culture and misinformed habitual dietary practices, society often pushes for culinary dishes that may sound "good," but this is unfortunately only in the sense of perceived taste rather than in the sense of influence on one's anatomy. If fed the incorrect fuel, the body begins to break down, and it is no longer the well-oiled machine it was designed to be. Blood flow turns to a blood "no," vascular efforts turn into construction zones, pathways jam, and soon arteries begin clogging worse than a New York rush hour. Suddenly, heartache becomes more than an emotional figure of speech. Luckily for the general population, coronary heart disease appears to be not only preventative but also reversible. Following an explanation that a study was run applying a plant-based diet to

advanced heart disease patients, as well as saying the authors merely wished this would stop the further development of the heart disease, Michael Greger, an M.D. and FACLM member, as well as founder of NutritionFacts.org, partnered with Gene Stone, both authors of *How Not to Die* said, "Their patients' heart disease started to reverse. These patients were getting better" (pg. 36). But how does one accomplish such prevention or recovery? Well, this is attained, quite fortunately, by primarily only one exceedingly practicable and achievable route. This is the removal of the consumption of external cholesterol from the diet. In fact, earlier in their book,

Greger and Stone also stated, "According to William C. Roberts, the editor-in-chief of the *American Journal Of Cardiology*, the only critical risk factor for atherosclerotic plaque buildup is cholesterol, specifically elevated LDL cholesterol in your blood" (pg. 33). Gregor and Stone then go on to elaborate with a more thorough explanation of cholesterol function and, furthermore, the food that these digestive foes reside in, saying:

Indeed, LDL is called "bad" cholesterol because it's the vehicle by which cholesterol is deposited into your arteries. Autopsies of thousands of young accident victims have shown that the level of cholesterol in the blood was closely correlated with the amount of atherosclerosis in their arteries. To drastically reduce LDL cholesterol levels, you need to drastically reduce your intake of three things: trans fat, which comes from processed foods and naturally from meat and dairy; saturated fat, found mainly in animal products and junk foods; and to a lesser extent dietary cholesterol, found exclusively in animal-derived foods,

especially eggs. Notice a pattern here? The three boosters of bad cholesterol—the number-one risk factor for our number-one killer—all stem from eating animal products and processed junk. (pg. 33)

This is an intriguing revelation for most. These foods are, as American culture knows all too well, immensely prominent staples in the diets of the vast majority of society. These same staples wreak havoc and absolute devastation upon the ideal operation of one's body, hence why there is such a drastic issue with the prevalence of coronary heart disease. This does bring to light the light at the end of the tunnel,

however. That light being, this is not an accident, this is not inevitable, this is something preventable, and not only this, this is something known precisely how to go about that prevention. This prevention, conveniently the recovery all the same, is, without a doubt, the avoidance and self-prohibiting of the habitual practices of meat and dairy intake. These findings prove the conduciveness of adhering to these opposing practices, cutting these culinary choices from the recommendations of any healthy diet, and show that the restriction and all-around elimination of these food groups are cardioprotective.

Now, to run down the list by the CDC yet again and move onto America's second-top cause of death, that brings the cross-hairs down upon the hearty concern that is cancer. A barrage on the build, as the decrepit body barely stays bearing the beefy burden of your brittle bones.

Motor skills with assisting pins firing no further—a system failure of the one system meant to erect a firewall and keep you immune. Now, immunity alchemizes instead into the deepest of vulnerabilities. Stages of life become stages of cancer, which become stages of grief. This darkness does again come with an upside, though. This fate does have an exit ramp before one is to reach the dystopian city of Cancer. Cancer risk is malleable. The fate is not sealed since birth, and one does have, at least, fairly significant control over the direction of the health outcomes. Most could come to expect that not smoking cigarettes at all versus smoking a pack a day may produce vastly different results as to an individual's longevity and lifespan. Thankfully, modern studies and finding the root causes of risk have made the risk of cancer variable in the same way. Cancer risk is alterable, supported by a demonstrable amount of evidence accessible in modern society, and if one is to take lessons from the teachings of what is known now, although affected by a host of factors, a large percentage of this prevention is roughly replicable and can be applied to any individual. Firstly, according to researchers Amy Joy Lanou and Barbara Svenson, "...a broad body of evidence links specific plant foods such as fruits and vegetables, plant constituents such as fiber, antioxidants and other phytochemicals, and achieving and maintaining a healthy weight to reduced risk of cancer diagnosis and recurrence" (Sec. 1). Now, this illustrates the utility and healthfulness, as well as the direct effect on cancer risk, of the other main food groups aside from meat and dairy products. Still, surely that doesn't imply that any part of animal products could have negative or harmful effects by any means, right? Well, this would unfortunately be a misplaced hope. These same researchers later note, "...research links the consumption of meat, especially red and processed meats, to increased risk of several types of cancer" (Lanou and Svenson, Sec. 1). The unfortunate reality is that, supported by a steep mountain containing a plethora of research, meat consumption does lead to an exacerbated risk of cancer. Moreover, for reference to specific figures of risk reduction resulting from the opposition, plant-based diets, or, in other words, the elimination of meat and dairy, the Cambridge University Press released within their Journals in Volume 81 Issue 2 the statement that "The risk for any type of cancer (all cancers combined) was 10 % lower in vegetarians than that in meat-eaters in EPIC-Oxford (Fig. 1), and 18 % lower in vegans (Fig. 2)" (Key et al., Sec. 19). All this evidence considered, the conclusion can be drawn that, provided the drop in risk of cancer is desirable and it is life and health society values, the eradication of meat and dairy

consumption is a largely definitional characteristic of optimal health, and the recommendation to avoid these in the confines of the general public must be something that is made readily available, so the consequences of the standard American diet are certainly known to the participants.

Thus far, this material has covered a multitude, although a drop in the pool overall, of dietary health concerns raised by the consumption of meat and dairy innately in the animal products themselves. But what influence do the factory farming practices by the hand of the human race have on the health effects of the consumption of these products? It may seem that that could not pose a significant threat to the future or the development of an individual, and especially not the human species as a whole. Still, again, this would be an exceedingly and unfortunately incorrect presumption. The risk introduced goes by the name of antimicrobial

resistance. Although it may not sound terribly intimidating, and although it is not overtly known in everyday common knowledge, the effects on the population can become astronomical. As defined by the World Health Organization, “Antimicrobials – including antibiotics, antivirals, antifungals, and antiparasitics – are medicines used to prevent and treat infectious diseases in humans, animals, and plants” (Sec. 1). Now, this can initially seem to be a helping hand, an artificial aid ushering us in the right direction; however, the immediate help comes with a price. One might wonder how the treatment and prevention of ailments such as these could possibly pose any downside. This does seem unintuitive, but only before you zoom out to reference the bigger picture. The answer is antimicrobial resistance. The World Health Organization later states, “Antimicrobial Resistance (AMR) occurs when bacteria, viruses, fungi, and parasites no longer respond to antimicrobial medicines”. Piggy-backing off of this statement, most notably a problem in the context of humans, the treatment received from antimicrobial medications, as well as antibiotics, can, in the words of this organization again, “...become ineffective and infections become difficult or impossible to treat, increasing the risk of disease spread, severe illness, disability, and death” (Sec. 2). This contention is a colossal issue that will inevitably compound over time. But that would require the ingestion of some sort of medication, one might think, so as long as these medications are only taken when needed, the effect can be limited and slowed. That thought would be, as thoughts mentioned prior, incorrect, however. Here lies the heart of the issue. These medications are exceedingly easy to have frequent and prolonged exposure to,

increasing the individual's and their offspring's resistance. This exposure comes in the form of, quite a surprise, food choice. Research published by the National Library of Medicine states, “...antimicrobials are often administered to promote animal growth. Each time antimicrobials are used, a selective pressure is applied to AMR bacteria. Moreover, AMR genes can be transmitted to humans through the consumption of meat-harboring-resistant bacteria” (Conceição et al., Sec. 1). By the same token, this horrendously unnerving reality of transmission and the consequences that arise also extend to dairy. Another publication from the National Library of Medicine notes that “...the extensive use of antibiotics in the livestock production systems to treat mastitis

and other bacterial diseases can lead to the presence of AMR genes in bacteria that contaminate or naturally occur in milk and dairy products, thereby introducing them into the food chain” (Rubiola et al., Sec. 1). All this is to mean, not only must human civilization be

worried for their own health, from escalated heart disease to cancer risk, as well as their own antimicrobial resistance, but also the hand-me-down health concerns they will pass down to their future lineage. If society as a cohesive unit values their own well-being and haleness in this lifetime, as well as their children, grandchildren, and onward generations, they must put a stop to the spread of these harmful diet recommendations as well as take a closer look at the dietary concerns and decisions they make for themselves when choosing their next meal.

Much of this information presented would serve as a source of distress and disturbance to society as a whole. However, sometimes, this rude awakening is a necessary precursor to amelioration, not only resulting in the betterment of civilization but also the saving of lives. Catching and paying keen attention to the consequential effects, as well as learning from others' mistakes before having to make them first-person, is one of the most eminently empowering privileges and self-governing abilities bestowed upon the population in an age of such an influx of information. Just one significant facet of information collection that the shared knowledge of accumulated society has brought to light is a system of fairly consistently concluding cause and effect. The result is that, just like the advances in modern forensics, the culprit is known. Some of the most devious offenders are those who grew up alongside the years of experiential learning gathered—something unexpected. This is what it is to be blindsided by the uncomfortable reality that the diet often recommended across the nation may have several shortcomings. But the one least questioned and most culpable? That is, without a doubt, deduced down to meat and dairy intake. This is permitted and even endorsed by a vast majority of the population, either blissfully unaware or purposefully ignoring the mass quantity and body of research concluding the risks picked up in every fork-full. The mass consumption and toleration of animal products should no longer so brazenly coexist with the sought-after diet of the public, and misconceptions can no longer guide the diet choices of citizens. For the sake of the immediate health and longevity of individuals in modern society, their loved ones, the well-being of future generations, and the corruption and contamination of the learned health practices spider-webbing and seeping further into all facets of life for society's innocent offspring, convenience must be sacrificed, and culinary commonalities must be redirected. To save all that general culture deems cherishable, a halt must be brought to the current momentum of animal consumption and casual advocacy of irresponsible, insufficient, and anti-self-sustaining current meat and dairy intake practices due to their unfathomable influence on heart disease, cancer, and antibiotic resistance.

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Ary by Jayde Van Den Berg

Aurora
by Kylie Crane

“Eye contact. Eye contact is essential,” Warren said.

“Why?” Lenny asked.

“It lets women know that you’re looking at them and not through them.”

“No shit,” Lenny pondered.

Lenny wore a cozy beige sweater, shoulder-length, dirty blonde hair, and round glasses. Warren had a strong jaw, slicked-back black hair, and a leather jacket to match. People called him “T-Bird” in high school. The two men took in their surroundings of the club until their drinks came. Warren looked at the women analyzing each in seconds, something he had picked up after years of practice. He finally fixed his gaze on one woman. She had long brown hair and dark eyes. Her dress was black and skin-tight. She drank alone in the corner. *She could work.*

“Hey man, you see that girl in the corner?” Warren faintly nodded his head in her direction. Lenny whipped his head around squinting his eyes to see through the disorientating lights. Warren smacked the back of Lenny’s head.

“No, idiot,” Warren hissed.

“What?” Lenny asked and readjusted his glasses.

“Don’t whip around like that. Don’t draw so much attention.”

“Oh, right. Sorry,” Lenny apologized, his face dropping like a child who was told he was getting no dessert. He slowly scanned and then focused on the woman.

“Yeah. What about her?” Lenny questioned, turning back around to Warren.

“How do you pick them?” Warren probed. He took a sip from his drink.

“Um,” Lenny started, “I make sure they’re alone and seem gullible,” Lenny revealed while running his finger on the edge of the table.

“Just women?” Warren asked.

“Yeah,” Lenny assured.

The waitress returned with their drinks. They paid and gave her a tip.

Warren gave Lenny a wave of the hand, telling him to continue; he found his gaze returning to the woman.

“It’s easier if they’re smaller in height and weight, but you have to be careful; they can be feisty sometimes...” Lenny trailed off.

The woman finally looked over to their booth, making eye contact with Warren. She didn’t budge. Neither did he.

“Oh yeah, and I usually go for blondes.”

This broke Warren’s concentration on the woman.

“Why’s that?”

“They’re easier.”

“Easier? You think a woman’s hair color defines that?”

“Well...when you put it like that...”

“It sounds stupid doesn’t it?”

“Yeah, it does.” Lenny dropped his head once again. He had so much to learn.

“And even if that was true, it’s the 90s,” Warren added, “Women dye their hair all the time.”

“Yeah, that’s true,” Lenny chuckled and started to loosen up. Warren returned his attention to the woman. She seemingly had two shots within the minute they had talked. She scanned the bar looking for anyone who would look back. The only person she could find was Warren, watching her every move like a predator stalking their prey. She maintained eye contact. Warren raised his left hand slightly and gestured for her to come to him.

The woman strutted to their booth. Warren could smell her sweet perfume against the stale air.

“What’s your name?” Warren asked.

“Aurora.”

“A beautiful name for a beautiful girl.”

“Thank you. What’s yours?” Aurora returned.

“Warren.”

“Warren. I like that.”

“Thanks. Come and sit.” Warren patted his left leg at the end of the booth. Aurora smirked. She sat on Warren’s firm leg and laid her purse on the table in front of them. Once she sat down, Warren held her waist with his left hand stabilizing her, never letting his right hand leave his drink.

“Aurora, this is my friend, Lenny.”

“Hi,” Aurora said.

“Hey,” Lenny returned with a smile.

Warren could tell that Lenny’s presence was failing his attempt by the second. He needed to get Aurora alone for this to work.

“Aurora, do you think my friend and I can go to the little boy’s room?”

“Oh yeah, sure.”

Aurora shimmied off Warren’s leg and stood up allowing him to move out of the booth. Lenny followed. Both men walked to the bathroom.

“So Lenny,” Warren started, “Do you think you can leave me and Aurora alone? I think I can bag this one, but you still need to watch. Which means you’re also gonna have to try and follow us when we leave without her knowing. She’ll be distracted, but not enough for you to be obvious.”

“Yeah, sure thing, man. I can do that.”

“Good. Just watch and take mental notes, okay?”

“Yes sir,” Lenny delivered with a salute and a chuckle.

Warren patted Lenny’s shoulder and headed out of the bathroom. Warren returned to the lights and the drunks and found Aurora sitting where he’d left her. She was ravishing. Her elbow was leaning on the table, her hand holding her face. She looked bored. The club lights gave the illusion that her skin was purple.

“Hey, beautiful,” Warren said.

Aurora’s expression quickly changed from bored to intrigued.

“Hey, handsome,” Aurora returned. She got up from the booth and gave his seat back.

“Where’s your friend?” Aurora scanned the room.

“Ah, he decided to call it a night.”

Without needing to invite her, Aurora sat once again on his leg, this time more sure, placing his left hand on her thigh.

“So, what’s a stunning woman like you doing here all alone?” Warren asked. “Men would be lining up out the door to be where I am.” He sipped on his drink.

Aurora chuckled at this like she too didn’t know the answer to his question.

“I don’t know. It seems like no one has looked at me once tonight...except you of course.” Aurora looked off into the distance as if remembering a time, or a person.

“Food for thought?” Warren asked. He touched her chin, and gently moved her head to face his.

Aurora sighed. “I’ve never been good at this.”

“Good at what?” Warren started to mindlessly rub her leg.

“Dating and guys...Jesus Christ. I can’t believe I’m here, doing this, wearing this!”

“What? You don’t like what you’re wearing?” Aurora shook her head no.

“I think you look great.”

“Really?” Aurora looked down, trying to examine herself in a different light.

“Yes really.” Warren’s hand moved higher on Aurora’s thigh.

Warren and Aurora’s faces were inches apart. Threatening a kiss, or a bite. Aurora looked at his lips, then back to his hazel eyes. Warren did the same. Aurora adjusted so the rest of her body was turned towards him. She ran her hands from the back of his neck to the inside of his leather jacket and over his black t-shirt. Warren’s hand reached up to the left side of her face, his thumb grazing her lips. God, he wanted this one. She would be so pretty to have. Warren’s hand returned to the side of Aurora’s face as he moved closer. She moved closer too. Their eyes closed and their lips met. He breathed her in; could taste her pain. He wanted to take that away. She deepened the kiss and returned her hands to his neck, keeping him there. Warren’s right hand left the side of Aurora’s face and trailed down to her waist, pulling her closer.

“Do you wanna get out of here?” Warren asked.

“Yes.”

“Do you have a car to worry about?”

“No. My friend dropped me off.”

“Okay. Let’s go.”

She got off his leg and grabbed her purse. Warren got out of the booth and returned his hand to her waist. They passed Lenny by the bar. *He’s hiding well.* Aurora and Warren made their way outside, pushing past the other clubgoers. The night air had a chill that made Aurora instantly hold her arms.

“You cold?” Warren asked.

“Yes,” Aurora said through chattering teeth.

Warren took off his jacket and draped it over Aurora’s shoulders.

“Is that better?”

“Yes, thank you.”

The pair made it to Warren’s truck where he led Aurora to the passenger side and opened the door for her.

“Wow, what a gentleman.”

“Do you need any help getting in?” Warren replied.

“No, I got it.”

Warren softly shut the door and smoothed his hair. He made his way around to the driver’s side and got in, starting the truck. The mumble of a local news station hummed between them. Once he pulled out of the parking lot he glanced in the rearview mirror and made sure Lenny was following them. Sure enough, there was Lenny in his truck, trailing, but not too close to draw attention.

After a minute, Aurora asked, “So, where are we going?”

“My motel room. I don’t want you to feel uncomfortable, though. If you don’t want to, we don’t have to. I’m just visiting for my job, so I don’t have anywhere else we can go.”

“No, that’s fine. So, what do you do for work?”

“Construction.”

“I see.”

A few minutes later they arrived at Warren’s motel room. Warren got out and went to the other side of the truck to open the door for Aurora.

“Thank you,” she blushed.

Warren walked to his room and fished the keys out of his pocket. He finally got the door open and Aurora inside. He threw his keys somewhere in the room and pushed Aurora against the door. He kissed her like his life depended on it. Aurora took his jacket off, along with her purse, and threw them on the bed quickly, then returned her hands to his hair and her lips to his. Warren’s hands ran down her arms and waist then to her hips where he wrapped her left leg around him. Warren had to stop. Now. He needed to make sure Lenny didn’t get lost.

“You know...what I’m...gonna do?” Warren said between kisses on her soft lips.

“What?” Aurora breathed.

“I’m gonna get us some ice, and then I’ll be back and we can have a drink from the mini-fridge, my treat.”

Aurora’s face showed disappointment, wanting to continue what Warren had just interrupted.

“Or whatever you want, beautiful,” Warren said with his rich voice, wanting to promise whatever he needed to ensure that Aurora would still be there when he returned.

“Mmm, okay,” Aurora returned with a chuckle. Just then, Warren saw headlights and prayed to God it was Lenny in his truck. Warren unhooked Aurora’s leg from around his torso, grabbed the ice bucket, and headed out the door. He was met with Lenny leaning against his truck, smoking a cigarette. The red embers were the only light in the parking lot.

“So what’s the plan?” Lenny asked as Warren approached him.

Warren looked around and made sure no one else was lingering outside for a smoke, or some fresh night air. It was clear.

"I'm gonna get some ice, and then I'm going back in there," Warren gestured to the room. "Then, I'll do it. It shouldn't take long. I'm gonna step out and have a smoke. Then you'll know."

Lenny nodded his head. "Okay. How are you gonna do it?"

"I have an idea."

Lenny nodded his head and took a drag on his cigarette. Warren filled the bucket with ice and made his way back to the room. Once inside, he sat the bucket on the counter and returned his attention to Aurora. The room was now bathed with soft, yellow light from the standing lamp in the corner of the room. She sat with her legs crossed and her shoes now discarded to the side of the bed. Her purse, along with Warren's jacket, was hanging on the small chair set by the curtained window. She leaned back with her arms supporting her.

"Hey, you," she said.

She made her way to Warren and asked, "Can I have a drink?"

"Sure. Pick your poison," he said while grabbing the small bottles of different liquor from the mini-fridge.

"This one," Aurora pointed to the rum.

"Great choice."

"Thank you," she smirked.

Warren grabbed one of the styrofoam cups and shoveled some ice into it, then poured the golden liquor on top.

"Sorry, I don't have my fine china here," Warren handed Aurora the cup, "but I hope this will do." She laughed and took a sip.

"This is good, thank you."

"Mhm," Warren poured himself a random liquor in his squeaky cup of ice. Once he sipped his, Aurora had already downed hers. She put her empty cup back on the counter and placed herself in front of Warren. She started rubbing his chest while he downed his drink. They kissed once more, and then more.

"You taste like Rum," said Warren.

Her hands trailed down his torso. He started kissing Aurora's neck as she reached for his hair. He wrapped his hand around her throat and reached his other hand to the top of her head, bringing the hand on her throat up, supporting Aurora's jaw.

"What are you doing?" she chuckled.

Warren stopped kissing her neck, "I'm sorry."

"What?"

Crack.

Aurora laid limp in Warren's arms. He laid her on the bed.

"I hope you can forgive me," he whispered against her temple.

Warren went into Aurora's purse grabbing the ID from her wallet. Aurora Marshall. 23 years old. Blonde. *She dyed her hair.* 5'5. He returned the card to its place and turned to her. He rested her hands on top of her stomach as one would in a coffin and closed her eyes with a gentle touch of his hand—a sleeping beauty.

Warren left the room with a cigarette between his lips and a lighter in his right hand. The hand that held Aurora's throat.

"How'd it go?" Lenny asked, just finishing the last of his smoke.

“Good,” Warren blew smoke through his lips.

Warren rested his fresh cigarette in between a crack in the sidewalk, he would smoke it later. Lenny went first, Warren followed, closed the door, and started cleaning up. Lenny sat at the end of the bed soaking in Aurora.

“She looks so peaceful. How did you do it?”

“I broke her neck.” Warren’s answer was muffled from under the bed. He found his keys.

“Really?” Lenny turned his head to the left. “Oh, I see now.”

“Are you ready to help me?” Warren asked.

“Yeah, man. Anything you need.”

Once Lenny checked the parking lot to make sure no one was around, both men carried Aurora to Lenny’s truck, draping her arms around their shoulders, making sure to return her heels and purse to her. With Aurora in the backseat and Lenny in the passenger’s, Warren drove them to his current job site. Twenty minutes later, after Lenny’s surprisingly decent carpool karaoke attempt, they arrived. It was barely 11:00, but the sky was dark enough to hide their chore.

“So, how are we doing this? Digging? Burning?” Lenny asked with excitement rising in his voice.

“Concrete.”

“Concrete?”

“You’ll see.”

Warren jumped out of the truck and turned on the light stands scattered around the dirt. Neither were worried about anyone suspecting strange activity since there was nothing but woods and bare land around for almost a mile in every direction. Warren brought Lenny to a big, removed tree, and behind it a woodchipper.

“I thought you said concrete. Why aren’t we over there, you know, by the concrete?” Lenny waved towards the opposite end of the site.

“We have to shred her first to get her in the concrete.”

“Oh shit,” Lenny started laughing and Warren joined.

Lenny carried Aurora to the woodchipper with Warren carrying her purse and heels. They would burn her belongings later. Warren laid out a tarp to put Aurora on. The men undressed Aurora and used saws so she was in more manageable pieces. The men put Aurora in. Warren made sure to have a clean, unused bin to catch her. The men then used shovels to incorporate Aurora into the concrete mix. Warren started up the concrete mixer and dumped the mix into the molds that would later be the outside patio. The mix was dispersed and Lenny helped Warren sift it with a 2’ x 4’ x 8’. Warren made sure the concrete was not discolored and had the right texture. They stoked a fire in the pit and threw Aurora’s belongings in.

“So are we all set here?” Lenny asked, wiping his forehead with the back of his hand. There was blood on it.

“Almost, we just need to clean up and make sure everything burns,” Warren said.

“I’ll take the mixer,” said Lenny.

“Okay, I’ll take the woodchipper and the bin. We can split the saws,” Warren offered. Half an hour into thorough cleaning two more trucks drove up to the site. Warren and Lenny stopped cleaning. Two men exited the first truck. One was fairly young and the other had copper hair. In the other truck, a large, muscular man with a dark beard leaped out.

“Is it done?” asked the man with copper hair.

“Just cleaning up,” Warren responded.

Copper hair approached Lenny and shook his hand.

“Welcome to the team,” he said.

“Thank you,” Lenny said.



Art by Johanna Burmiester

The Grief on Our Plates

by Bella Coxon

First Place Winner

Born to be used; born to die. This concept, as tragic as it sounds, is a reality for billions of beings worldwide. This is a life in animal agriculture, an industry that is usually overlooked but must be brought to light. The production and consumption of animal products exist across the globe. Techniques such as artificial semination, chick culling, and gas chambers are methods that these businesses could not thrive without. Despite their unethically, these procedures are still completely legal and recommended to be successful in this field. Many routine practices in animal agriculture are inhumane and should not be tolerated or supported.

To start, artificial semination is a process utilized in all areas of animal agriculture but is most notable in the dairy industry. Like all mammals, cows produce milk only when they are pregnant. So, to obtain their milk, they must be impregnated using artificial insemination. This starts with obtaining bull semen commonly using electroejaculation. This act includes performing a transrectal massage by inserting one's arm, up to the shoulder, in the anus of the bull to manually stimulate the bull's prostate. Then, an electrified probe is inserted into the bull's anus and rectum. Next, "While holding the probe, the handler slowly increases the electricity setting from lowest to highest until the animal either ejaculates or passes out and falls down." (Mercy For Animals, par. 4) Once they have forcefully taken the bull's semen, it can now be used to impregnate a female cow. The act of impregnation involves first restraining the cow so they can't fight back. The devices that hold the cows down are commonly called 'rape racks' in the industry. Then one must insert their arm into the cow's anus until about elbow-deep to hold the cervix in place from inside the animal's rectum. Then, the semen is forced inside the cow's vagina with a large rod-like device. All of this is done without any form of pain relief. These cows have absolutely no power to stop this treatment; they are forced to endure this horrific sexual violation. Once the cow gives birth, the calf is taken away so that consumers can have the milk that her body made for her child. The calf is either sent to slaughter for veal or has the same fate as its mother: life in the dairy industry. From the cow's perspective, this is a miserable life to be forced into. The act of artificial insemination is truly unspeakable, and those who pay for milk must be aware of the torture behind their glass.

Next up, chick culling is a required and standard protocol in the egg industry. In egg production, male chicks are not useful products because they are not able to lay eggs and are not a breed used for meat. Since the males are useless in this industry, they must be disposed of efficiently. The male chicks are sorted out from the females and sent to slaughter at just a few hours old. Killing the males is done in an array of ways, like drowning, crushing, electrocution, gassing, burning, and maceration. The most common strategy used worldwide is killing through maceration. This is where live chicks are put into large, high-speed grinders and turned to pulp while fully conscious. There is video proof of these animals, surrounded by the shells they had hatched just hours earlier, being sent to the macerator. This approach is most used because the mashed bodies of the chicks can be used as feed for the female chicks in the industry. Industries force these animals to be bred into existence only to deem them worthless

and send them to their execution just hours into their lives. Worldwide, as many as “6.5 billion male chicks each year are hatched, only to be quickly snuffed out.” (Vox, par. 2). No way of chick culling uses any form of pain relief, and these babies must feel every second of their annihilation. Consumers of eggs need to know the torture they are paying for, and producers need to be upfront about what people are paying them to do.

Lastly, gas chambers are one of the most commonly used ways to slaughter animals for meat. Gas chambers are usually thought to be a painless way to die, compared to electrocution, throat-slitting, or bolt guns, but that is far from the truth. In these chambers, the gas CO₂ is utilized. Inhaling such large quantities of this gas “acidifies eyes, nostrils, mouths, and lungs, meaning the animals feel like they are burning from the inside out for 15-60 seconds or more.” (Philip Lymbrey, par. 3). This agonizing pain is evident as animals in gas chambers throw their bodies around the cage, squealing frantically as they gasp for air, which only makes it worse. It is also important to note that animals may simply become unconscious from CO₂ gassing and often regain consciousness at any point during the butchering process. However, because of the convenience of this way of slaughtering, this is a very common custom in the meat industry, especially involving pigs. Pigs are found to be smarter than dogs and even toddlers, so it is undeniable that they have an intense experience in these chambers. Farms forcing this painful death on intelligent creatures must be known to the public for what it is.

Animal agriculture ensures the pain and misery of billions of sentient creatures every single day. Procedures such as artificial insemination, chick culling, and gas chambers, and practices that animal industries could not exist without. Buying goods containing animal products funds these farms to continue such atrocities. Providing a demand for these products ensures that farms will provide a supply through the monstrous acts previously stated. By no longer purchasing animal products such as meat, dairy, and eggs, farms will no longer be funded by society, and the torture will end. All citizens have the power to vote with their dollar and influence whether products will continue to be produced in the future. All individuals have the ability to end their support of these industries. That ability is going vegan.

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Art by Karen VanBenschoten

The Soft Whisper of An Assisted End

by Matthew Torgerson

A leaf cracks near the threshold of the entrance again. The crumble near the stoop was spine-tingling and browbeating; the constant stress was more than pestilential in itself. The scythe scrapes and scars the windowsill. The tyrannizing dragging of a cloak is heard on the dry grains of dirt outside the already dilapidated property. The anticipation is such a torture in itself that the opening of the door no longer disturbs, and the regret of the turn of the knob never comes. It has gone on too long. The decision has been contemplated to its natural end. But the door is slammed shut before the gentle fade of the unending hell on earth even has the chance to hit. Thoughts of the good times are slowly lost and fade further, only day by day being able to focus on the agony before you. This is what it is to be stricken by an unbearable disease. A suffering so insufferable, that the suffering can no longer be suffered. A situation where one experiences pain and decline so immense that it is not worth it to withstand but instead to withdraw. Harrowing anguish that goes beyond the scope of what would dictate a life even a life at all. Something a multitude would gag and sneer at the mere idea of taking with them in their last moments, knowing they crave more than this demoralizing and cheerless end. No, they decide what they take with them will be the momentous memories and light of their life towards the light ushering in their death. The law leaves them wanted while ignoring what they want. This is, of course, euthanasia. An assisted end that comes from the merciful, benevolent, pain-free, and keenly professional hand of a licensed physician. Euthanasia overlaps and falls congruent with the general moral framework of all who value self-autonomy and foundational rights within the United States, all who value mercy and recognize there are a percent of people with undeserving deep misery and physical suffering they wish to ameliorate, and those who value leaving this plane of existence with both presence of mind and on their own terms. In order to transpose and live in accordance with the general values marketed within the thoughts and general Western culture of the United States while simultaneously quelling torment, as well as giving those trudging through agonizing terminal illness and demeaning experience the dignity they deserve in their final days, society must amend the Suicide Act of 1961 and re-evaluate the role of bans and medical professionals in providing opportunity for the personal liberty of imploring euthanasia.

First and foremost, regarding euthanasia, there is the problem of running into a wall spray-painted with the word "consistency". Within the confines of United States law, it is not only permissible but encouraged and treasured to express the right to personal autonomy and self-control with whatever decisions are evaluated to be the best for the individual in their view, so long as they do not encroach upon other citizens equal rights. The citizen makes their considerations, and for better or worse and wrong or right, the freedom to make those decisions is what is celebrated so long as it is solely their consequence and direct harm to pay. Enlisting in war, parachuting, drinking alcohol, smoking, and potentially life-altering or devastating contracts are all tolerated under current law through the principle of personal choice, despite inherent risks. But, alongside all this, there are two primary shortcomings and exceptions to the rule with a lack of truly consistent reasoning: drug legality when not impinging on others' rights, and

the topic of contention addressed here, the Suicide Act of 1961. For the sake of not only consistency but also pure humanity and respect, an amendment to this act is imperative and tragically overdue. 72 years under the hand of falsely withheld freedom, crossed-examined against innate rights we hold as indelible and sacrosanct in all other forms of scenarios within the borders of the fifty states currently united. These are freedoms so nonnegotiable it is said even to this day these are the foundational principles of the country, tellingly named first in a short list of succinct summarizations in societal conversation. Personal liberties and self-autonomy are continually violated and inconsistently dispersed throughout society's values. Even valorous and sympathetic physicians' careers were decimated and, furthermore, thrown behind bars for a pronounced timespan for simply being the only ones to listen and display immense clemency. If the United States is to hold dear these idolized personal freedoms and sacred self-autotomy, they must hold this invariably and with no discrepancy, especially in the crosshairs of requested compassion. Following the mention of compassion, there is another intimately related facet of euthanasia that also involves this fundamental virtue. When dealing with a patient with an incurable and virulent disease, who is anyone to reduce their access to a painless end? Who is anyone to shackle them down and keep them tied to their excruciating existence till their legs finally give out from the weight of it all? Who benefits from this authoritarian rule? These are questions worth pondering and worth the time to reflect on and assess why this society has this regulation enforced in the first place, running through the thought process rather than accepting it blindly. Some may intuitively believe keeping someone alive is always the right course of action, but this is not always the case, especially for those who do not want the savings. Maintaining a life, if it could even be called that, is far from a blanket solution. Securing a promise of further suffering while ignoring the victim does nothing for anyone involved. Death is not, without exception, the worst outcome. When terminal illness latches onto a person, intolerable pain and a diminished quality of life are not always worth the hardship or the regression of the impression a patient wishes to leave this world with. Sometimes they wish to check out of this reality with what they want to remember and simultaneously ease their torment prematurely. Even if this is not a decision everyone would choose to make, it is one to be respected and honored. Euthanasia may not be the answer to all of life's problems, but it must be acknowledged that it is never the answer. Punishment to the victim is not only unfathomable but also to the family who is forced to observe them in a state of such anguish, as well as to the physicians courageous enough to relieve these people despite the towering threat of draconian law standing over them. Depending on the patient and situation alike, out of pure commiseration and alleviation of a fate worse than death, euthanasia should be on the table of medical availability.

To a person who's lost everything else, even the essentials and health, and is left in a total state of privation, why let everything slip away and lose track of dignity all the same? In a time where standing in itself can be so arduous, standing for something is what remains. For a plethora of patients gruelingly and unbearably dwindling, dignity is much of what they have left. For them, they pride themselves on clinging to this, at least, to not part with who they are before they part with this world. They may have lost their beloved, their motor skills, everything that gave life the same spark it once did, and an uncountable sum of individual battles, but they haven't lost their mind or lost the war;

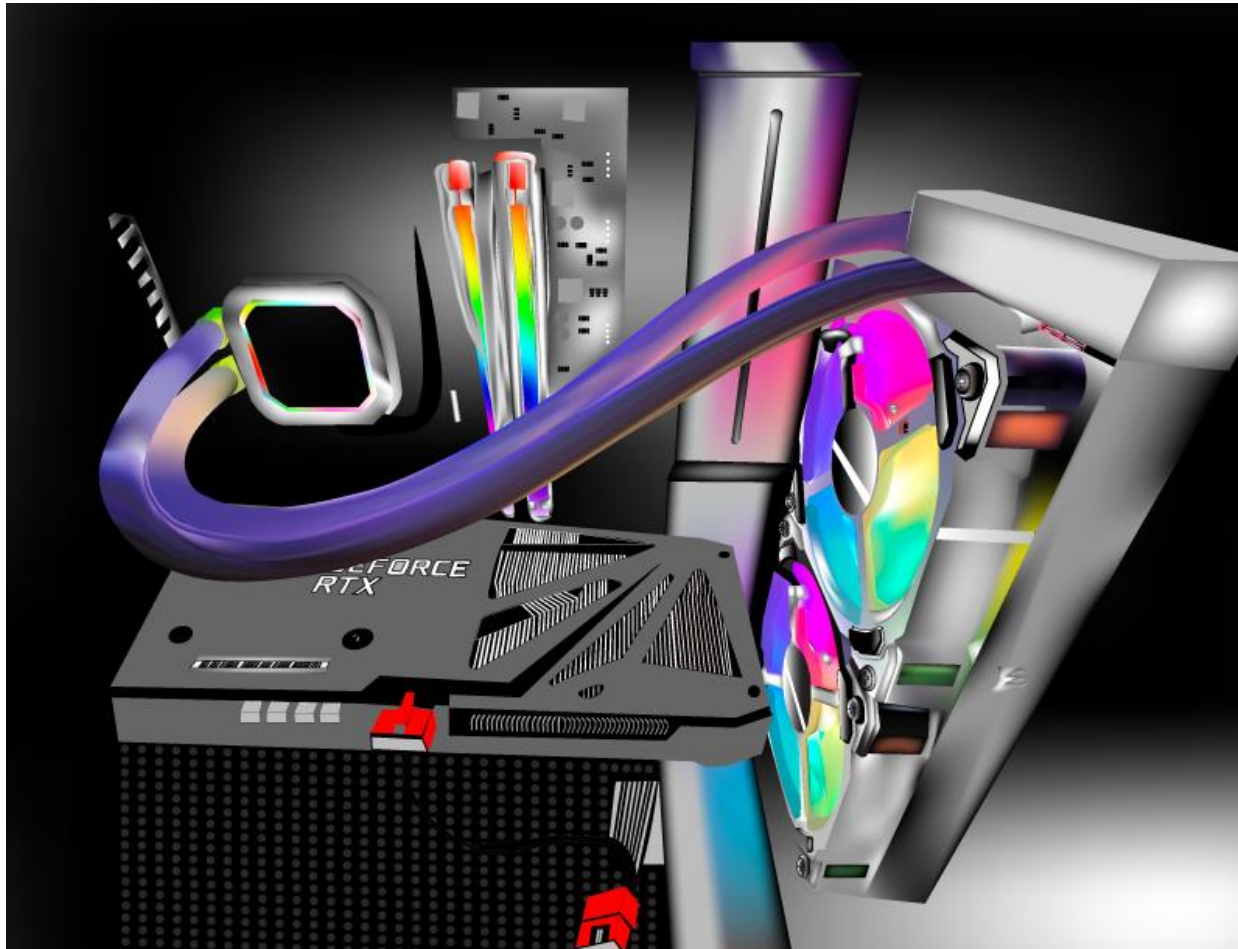
the only remains of who they are. They can excavate these remains from the trenches of their last standoff, exercise the last bit of control they have had in so long, and ensure they go in peace, comfort, and confidence that this is up to them and no other influence has a hand in the bread basket. For many, this is how they wish to wave goodbye to their corporeal form. Even if some might not understand or it does not seem to mean much in their situation, this is everything to this subsection of patients. To take that away from them and demean and degrade their lives even further should be the real crime. Euthanasia may seem like an extreme solution, but society may need to realize this is because these are extreme circumstances. Saving a life may make someone absent from the situation and context of consequence, but for these terminal patients, it is the antithesis. The situation and the afflicted opinions considered, euthanasia can be a true example of altruism.

When all is said and done, linens of death beds tucked and pulled tautly, intuition fails many as it is uncovered that the principles they espouse are not truly accomplished through the extension of life but, rather, the extinguishing. Not keeping someone standing just to stumble on hot coals for the rest of their walk, but the converse: letting them finally rest in the hushed tranquility they prayed for the whole time. Not projecting their own values and biases formed while being void of the ramifications, but instead trusting these patients and families to locate their own ease and solace and walk their own nuanced path, or lack thereof. For those with a death-dealing illness that makes them wish solely for relief, suffering sets upon a set of strikes till all they can do is hope for the lethal last after all they were forced through already, society owes them a ceasefire. The respected opinion to opt out and at least fulfill their wish to perform the final exercise of willpower and pure choice, on their own terms and no one else's, for once. Following the pangs and aches that feel eternal, they wish to dictate and retract their involvement. This choice is euthanasia. Being the United States, a Western society that preserves and prioritizes life, liberty, and the pursuit of happiness, it is time to let those who are excruciatingly vanishing from this world finally declare their own independence. It is time to let those with an irretrievably diminished quality of life leave on not only a satisfying note but one they wanted and solidified themselves. To align the established values and thoughts on personal liberty and possess consistency in all facets of society within the United States, extend an olive branch to the terminally ill undergoing unfathomable hardship, and endow these patients with the dignity and self-governing they've long begged for, society must abandon and revamp the Suicide Act of 1961, re-evaluate if laws should ever impose on self-autonomy in this way at all, and approach traditional ideas on the subject of euthanasia with a healthy amount of skepticism. This does not undermine the value of life; this celebrates life how they wish it to be remembered, by their own hand. No longer is this governed by the reality of the anguish in the end, but instead by the recipient of this immense pain, the only one who should have this say. No more prolongation of privation in purgatory while under protest, but instead pursuing the probation of a period of no perpetuated penalization or perturbation, only pacification through non-participation. Not held prisoner and forced into seppuku, indignation over withheld dignity, but slipping away with a compassionate escape hatch. It is the view of which we hold these practices that should truthfully be euthanized. Traditional does not necessitate being in the right, so taboo or not, it is time to assist the suicide of the Suicide Act of 1961.

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