



OPULSE
LITERARY MAGAZINE



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THE RANTINGS OF A TIME TRAVELER

Alex Boggs

I've encountered a lot of people who seem to have ridiculously stupid ideas on how time travel works, and I figured I'd write this just to set the record straight. The typical layperson will often assume that if you get ahold of a time machine, you should never create any sort of paradoxes with it. It's like they're afraid the universe will implode if even the slightest little contradiction gets thrown into the mix. Let me tell you why that's bogus. I've created loads of paradoxes in my time, and the universe and I are completely fine. Hell, the moment I got my time

machine, I already introduced a paradox. See, I got it from my future self who came back to give it to me. I asked him where he got it from, and he said he got it from his future self when he was in my position. Right there was a classic case of a bootstrap paradox. Nobody created the time machine, it just somehow came into existence on its own, and for some reason (or maybe for no reason) I have it. It's this little thing that looks like a ballpoint pen, but without the writing tip; it still has the clicky button on the end, though. I just think about where and when I

want to go, then I click the button, and I go there.

Just out of spite for causality, I don't think I ever will give this time machine back to my past self. I'm sure you determinists are probably out there thinking, But you must! It's the only way to close the time loop! If you are one of the people who think that, I bet you're also the sort of person who brings a level into an art gallery just to make sure that none of the paintings are hanging crooked. Think about it this way: why would I ever want to give up something as fun as a time machine just to satisfy your backwards notion of causality? I'm going to take this thing to my grave; causality be damned. I used to think that way, that everything in the universe was bound by the rules of cause and effect, and that I should do my best to keep everything orderly, but once I figured out there weren't any real consequences for making paradoxes, I stopped giving a shit about untangling that Gordian knot. I just do whatever I like with my time machine now. I see the sights, uncover the mysteries, change things in interesting ways, and create the occasional paradox just for fun.

There's a question that tends to get asked when people talk about time travel, and that is, If you could go back in time and kill Hitler as a baby,

would you? For me, the answer to that question is yes, lots of yes. I killed baby Hitler so many times you could fill a landfill with baby Hitler corpses. You could feed a village for weeks on nothing more than all the baby Hitlers I've killed. I just go back and do it over and over again in different ways just to see what happens. Some mouth-breathers object to killing baby Hitler with the thought, If you do that, won't it change history? First of all, the whole point of killing Hitler as a baby is to change history. Second, to answer the question directly, yes and no. Sometimes when I do it, World War Two still happens, sometimes it doesn't. This one time, it got particularly weird. It was like everyone acted as though Hitler was alive and present, even though he wasn't. People would cheer for him at rallies when there was just an empty podium. Sometimes altering history creates little glitches like that.

A good utilitarian might try to go back and alter history so that everyone is happy all the time, and all the awful things like war and slavery and genocide never happen, and I figure I might do that someday, but I've got to admit that would be pretty boring. Honestly, I think human history is much better told as a series of tragedies. Have you ever read a story without any conflict? If

you have, then you'd know that it's a boring piece of shit. If you haven't, then that's probably because most people realize a good story needs conflict, so almost nobody writes stories without conflict. And besides, if I ever change my mind about that, I can always go back and change things later.

Another thing people tend to wonder when dealing with time travel is what happens when you meet a past or future self. I've met with past selves and future selves loads of times, and nothing special happens. I've killed my past selves and that hasn't stopped me from existing. I've asked my future selves what sorts of things I would eventually do, and I've deliberately done things differently. A lot of people have this weird idea that if you meet your future self, you cannot die until you become that later future self. Based on the fact that I've killed my past selves and that I often go out of my way to avoid doing what my future selves do, I'm pretty confident that idea's bullshit.

Speaking of interacting with copies of myself, I think the most fun I've had with them is when several thousands of my selves got together, conquered New Zealand, and established our own government. Unfortunately, it didn't last very long, since none of us got along. A bloody civil war broke out between those

who wanted us to have a hierarchy based on seniority and those who wanted more of a parliamentary system. The fact that most of us got bored with the tedium of running a government certainly didn't help with keeping the peace. In the end, a lot of my selves died, but most took their time machines and went to do other things. Thus, the people of New Zealand were liberated from my regime.

The paradox where I become my own father or grandfather seems like an interesting one to try to do, but I can't think of a way to do that without any sort of incest. I may have done some excessively fucked up things, but having sex with my mom or grandma is beyond my limit for depravity. There's a reason Oedipus gouged out his own eyes after he figured out he did that, and I feel like I'd do the same thing if I was in his position. While it would be cool to actually become a bootstrap paradox, I think that's a little beyond what I'd be willing to do.

That's most of what I wanted to say. Now I'm having trouble deciding what to do next. I'm not sure if I'd rather try to figure out all the details of the Kennedy assassination, or give hand grenades to Neanderthals. I think I'll just ask a future version of myself what he did, and then I'll do the opposite.



Fisherman's Boat

Levito Wulur

On the coast of Maine
Exists a beauty so fine.

This she is carved from pine,
and meant for relaxing, sitting
just like the Sun briefly resting
on its throne atop the water.

For years
She endured the saltwater
that corrodes her smooth
sleek skin,
now exposing the raw coarse-
ness hidden
beneath her glossy finish.

She endured the fishermen
that suffocate her with their
boots,
walking on her face with
sediments of mud and grime.

She endured the fishermen
that force feed her freshly-gut-
ted

fish intestines,
the accumulation of
blood and bile
rotting away each strand
of her timbered flesh.

Forever
appreciated not for beauty
but for utility.
This newfound purpose
embracing not beauty marks
but battle scars.



Where it Rains

E.L. Chan

I took a taxi home after I broke up with my boyfriend during our date.

The rain pitter-pattered on the roof of the car as I watched the cars go by through the window. The water drops trailed down the glass. My closed umbrella lay on the seat next to me. Its color matched the bright red of my raincoat.

In the City Where it Rained Every Day, the sun never shined and it rained every day. The city had a different name depending upon where visitors hailed from, but for those of us that called the city our home, it was always the City Where it Rained Every Day. My now ex-boyfriend had stated that as his main reason for wanting to leave the city. He wanted to see the sun again. He had not originally come from the city, and I guess it was an easy thing for him to want, an obvious thing for him to miss.

I did not break up with him because he wanted to try his luck in some other city where the sun shined and rain was considered a gloomy day, but because he wanted me to move with him or break up with him.

So, I broke up with him.

What exactly had he been expecting? My job was here, my gallery. My parents' resting places were here, and my family all lived here.

The taxi stopped and I paid the driver. My umbrella popped open as I stepped out of the car and into the street in front of my apartment. The heels of my boots clicked on the wet concrete. I jumped back as the taxi sped away, avoiding getting splashed.

Though my apartment building stood behind me, I stayed in the middle of the sidewalk. Each hollow ka-plunk on my umbrella was a whisper of reassurance. There were others walking leisurely on the sidewalk in their raincoats and matching umbrellas in groups of two or more. I heard children shrieking with laughter and I could see them across the street playing in the puddles in neon orange raincoats and boots. Their mother stood on the steps of their house as she watched them under a green umbrella that matched her boots.

I let my umbrella fall to my side and tilted my head back. The drops came softly,

wetting my eyes and my face. The rain wound its fingers through my long hair, which I had so painstakingly curled for my date. I breathed in the clean air as the water slid down my neck and past the collar of my raincoat.

If I opened my eyes I would be able to see the steeped roofs of the buildings around me, not flat like in cities where it only rained sometimes. Maybe I would see the streetlamps turning on or the people in the buildings, backlit by their lights. I heard raised voices and raucous laughter from an apartment building to my right as someone carried on some kind of a celebration. Or not. It may just be a party.

But all I felt was the rain.

How could anyone tire of this? The cleanness that I felt on my skin from water that came from the heavens, or the sounds of a city alive with the rain taking its dutiful place as music in the background of life.

Eventually, I left the rain outside to enter my apartment building. I was soaked to the bone and shivering a little, but I felt alive. With a picture in my mind, I changed and pulled out a fresh canvas and paints.

When I put the brush to the white canvas, it was to the singing of the rain outside. My other works watched on as I painted, depicting other scenes of the City Where it Rained Every Day. Reflections in puddles that glowed yellow. A firework show that man had yet to replicate in which lightning arced across the sky,

backlighting the clouds and the rain in a freeze frame of life. Windshield wipers danced in a frenzy across the window on a particularly rainy day, showing a clear picture of the traffic ahead that grew blurry with every second.

Rain was my livelihood. What would I do without the rain?

Let him find a girl that liked the sun and leave me to my little rainy city. Most people who did not grow up here often failed to see the city for what it was. They only saw the dreariness of ever present clouds hanging over their head and the occasional ominous thunder ringing in their ears. They didn't see the flashes of color as people walked about in their raincoats and matching umbrellas, trying to outdo each other in style and brightness. They didn't hear the orchestra of sound, perfectly coordinated in thunder and lightning, paired in rhythm to the lullaby of heaven's tears.

When I finished the painting, it was still raining outside. The canvas showed a couple dancing as the rain fell upon them and a single strike of lightning that illuminated the buildings around them, yellow light showing from the windows. The woman wore a red dress and the man wore a black suit. Their hands were clasped, held up to the sky.

The rain had been here when he came to the city and the rain will be here when he leaves it. Rain was a beginning, my beginning. The rain would be here for me in the morning when he would not be. Rain was life and rain was love.

it's the way things are (it's the way they have to be)

Jasmine Lamp

It's the way her chest rattles, lungs heaving as she curls in on herself. Her arms are shaking as she wraps them around her knees, hiding her face behind her hair as she cries.

It's the way the light dances around the room, casting shadows across her walls as she tries to muffle the sobs wracking her body as she swallows them down.

It's the way her face hangs gaunt, eyes bloodshot with bags under them. She can't sleep anymore, frightened by the dreams that plague her at night and the horrors that torment her during the day.

It's the way she can't face the day, eyes downturned and feet shuffling as people push past her. She can feel the looks they give her, a mix of pity and disinterest, and each one breaks her down and rubs her bare.

It's the way it's always been. It's the way it's always going to be.

"Are you getting sick?" a concerned look.

"No, I'm just tired." a small smile.

"Are you not wearing any makeup today?" a frown upon a pretty face.

"No, I was in a rush this morning." a frown pulling on cracked lips.

"Are you okay?" a worried voice, complete with fluttering hands and pure intentions.

"I'm just tired." a lie, spun in practiced words that flow too easily.

It's the way her name drips from his lips like gold, his voice smooth and deep, wrapping around her heart like a vice. She wants to hear it every second of every minute of every hour of every day, even when the words are less than pretty.

It's the way his eyes tell a story that doesn't match his mouth, her words going in one ear and out the other.

It's the way his fingers dig into her skin, telling her she's worthless one moment and all he can think about the next.

It's the way his words weigh on her, burrow under her skin and nest until they're all she's made of, until they're all she can see when she looks in the mirror.

It's the way he's always been. It's the way he's always going to be.

"Are you guys still together?" it's the tone, incredulous and pitying.

"Of course; I love him."

"He's no good for you; you could do so much better." it's the look, confused and ignorant.

"I don't want to do better; I want him."

"Where did these bruises come from?" it's the face, worry etched in wrinkles and in eyes.

"I tripped."

It's the way her eyes well up when she sees herself in the mirror, skin hanging from her bones. She can't help but glance at the magazine on the counter, beautiful eyes staring mockingly back into her own dull ones.

It's the way her fingers tremble when she goes to shake someone's hand, the smile sliding off their face when she hides her eyes.

It's the way she avoids leaving the house, clothes crusty from sleep and hair unkempt. Her milk has expired and she hasn't done laundry in a week, but she can't muster up the strength to get off the couch.

It's the way she hasn't smiled in years, hiding behind masks that sometimes crack and slip and show the mess she tries to hide.

It's the way she's always been. It's the way she's always going to be.

Her head is in her hands, elbows on her knees as she watches the flame on

the candle sway, flickering slightly and threatening to go out. Her eyes follow its movements, watching the shadows shift and morph into something ugly, something only she can dream of.

It's the way she feels, the constant pressure to be good enough, to be smart enough, to be enough, to be enough.

It's the way she can't breathe, breaths shallow as she tries to keep it together, tries to keep herself together.

It's the way the exhaustion makes her bones feel heavy. She sleeps and sleeps and sleeps but she never gets enough rest, head lolling in class as she tries and fails to focus.

It's the way she doesn't want to deal with this anymore, this life, whatever she's made of it.

She lets out the breath she's holding and the candle goes out. The dark consumes her, presses into her until it's all she can taste, until it's all she can feel.

The candle goes out and a little part of her goes out with it.

Naomi

Drew Antill

Cinderella was a Beatnik.
She slept with many princes.
Don't let the storybooks fool you,
She died of hepatitis.

Ariane Kitenge

TO THE DEAD

TO MY GHOST,
You made the day tougher,
The hours an eternity,
My mind suicidal.
TO MY GHOST,
I hate writing to you,
Or talking to you,

Because I know the fairy tales
were never true.
Thinking of you kills me.
TO MY GHOST,
I would like for once to be alone
In daylight, please vanish.
Give back my smile.

TO MY GHOST,
I don't want them to pity me,
So, please, let go of my hands.
Stop smiling at me.
Take back everything that's yours.
TO MY GHOST,
You turned my world into a ball,
Life became a dance floor,
Where I dance with death.
As I am wearing a mask
Just to play with life,
While listening to the tune of the dead.

TO MY GHOST,
The dance got boring,
Or should I say painful.
A laugh out of death
Doesn't sound pleasing anymore
When life is crying out to me
I can only feel pain

TO MY GHOST,
You gave me love once.
Now I can only remember
The pain out of loving you
Life made you an angel
While death made you a demon.
TO MY GHOST,
I won't come to your ball anymore,
So please stop sending the invitation
For the masquerade,
Cause I am tired of pretending,

Dancing with death,
Or playing with life
While listening to the dead.
TO MY GHOST,
Everyone has their masks,
But, please, take off yours.
Pain can be worn as a smile,
But my eyes can't contain the water
anymore.
My smile can't hold on for another day,
a month, or a year..
My hands can't stop my heart from
bleeding.

TO MY GHOST,
I need someone else hands.
I need a hospital, a doctor..
I need help.
So I am taking off my mask,
And I am calling 911.

TO MY GHOST,
You will always be my shadow,
Following me everywhere,
But I made darkness my home
For none to see you
TO MY GHOST,
Darkness is already upon me,
No need of you anymore.
TO MY GHOST,
Goodbye.

Transcendental

Amber D. Pellett

Sunlight waltzes in, across the window,
Collides with every teardrop on my face.
Although, I've thought of youthful things
And kept my heart afloat with wings
Of faith and dreams that never seem to come.

Am I the bleakest soul you have encountered?
The prayers I cry can never stop the rain.
If you can look past emptiness,
The darkness and the wide abyss,
You'll find the light I'm longing to obtain.

You can catch a glimpse of heaven
When you're trying to escape.
All the truth I've known has now become
extinct.

But, beneath us lies a compromise
I'm trying to erase.
We will keep the fire burning from inside.

Magic has been lost and aspirations dwindle.
The life I've yearned for hasn't come to pass.
Despite my faults and fallacies,
My virtues never do exceed
The expectations others have of me.
Now, the sun is setting in the evening.
The future rises higher than the past.

I know I've crossed this sea before.
I'll let the waves crash on the shore,
And be a steadfast keeper of the light.
You can catch a glimpse of heaven
When you're trying to escape.
All the truth I've known has now become
extinct.

But, beneath us lies a compromise
I'm trying to erase.
We will keep the fire burning from inside.

Oh! I can't imagine life without the darkness.
A night sky glimmers with the light of peace.
Tear away the web
That tangles my depression.
Setting me free from my grief!

You can catch a glimpse of heaven
When you're trying to escape.
All the truth I've known has now become
extinct.

But, beneath us lies a compromise
I'm trying to erase.
We will keep the fire burning from inside.

I will keep the fire burning
from inside.

White Windows

Levito Wulur

Beyond these snow-painted windows
Is a holy world
In which men never sin,
In which the serpent averts our thirst for lust,
And The Garden is forever lush.

This is what she believed until now
we all make mistakes she said
we can work through this she said
Telling her was the hardest thing I've ever done in my life.

But within these white windows—
A peaceful home suddenly
Embroidered with shards of glass
And splotches of coffee dripping on the wall—
Is a home now bleeding
internally
of chaos and dysfunction.

The passion evident
In the now jagged ceramic plates
and the coffee mugs with no handles
Never to be pieced back together.

But still she refuses to let me go.
Her tears
glue our cheekbones together—
Our ribs
fossilize into one.

Miners' Descent

Nathaniel Maciag

Stars of luminous light clutter the night sky.
Men shuffle from their houses without even saying goodbye.

Each grabs his numbered token, staggering them row-to-row,
and equipping metal hats, holding pickaxes in tow.

Down men go with lunch pails into the dark abyss,
remembering extra change in case they cross the River Styx.

Arms rise and fall mechanically, chipping at tenebrous earth
as the earth whispers slowly, causing black pneumo birth.

Soot covers working bodies, obscuring their expressions,
hiding discontent, and leaving solemn impressions

Wearing dutiful faces, each listens for the canaries' call,
like a mother listens to her womb after taking a nasty fall.

Onwardly working, each waiting for his whistle to blow,
as opposed to the siren that only the dead come to know.

With ending shifts comes solace, another day to behold.
Men stagger off the freight lift and on to their households.

As the sun begins to creep over the tired hills,
men shuffle from their houses, performing their normal drills.

Each clutching his numbered token, standing all in line,
Praying the sisters of fate don't sever their mortal twine.

Chasing Day

E.L. Chan

I was breaking the rules and my parents would never forgive me if I got arrested tonight. But then again, they had been lying to me for my whole life, so fair's fair.

I pulled on the fingerless gloves to cover the tattoo on the back of my right hand then shrugged into my hoodie. I glanced at the clock on my nightstand. Ten-thirty. It would be well and truly dark outside by now. I pulled the hood over my head and climbed out the window, closing and locking it behind me.

My room was on the second floor of the house, but it wasn't hard to climb down, especially after months of practice. Once my feet touched the ground, I headed down the street. I kept my head down and my hands in my pockets as I walked to the center of the city, my sneakers scuffing against the sidewalk.

As I got closer to the inner city, I saw a white police car and ducked into a nearby alleyway. I waited with my heart in my throat as it slowly cruised past the alley and kept going. I blew out a breath and continued on my way.

She had said to meet her at the park tonight. It was a full moon, and the Nighters were having a party. I had never been to one, and she thought it was time that I met some of her friends, and because it would mostly be teenagers it would be easier to blend in.

I had almost told her no. When society split up into a Day society and a Night society it became illegal for the two factions to intermingle outside of official gatherings, and none of those meetings consisted of teenagers.

I saw her the instant the park came into view. She was standing outside the park gates on the sidewalk with a group of other teenagers. She was wearing her long black hair loose around her shoulders tonight, dressed in a black skirt and white shirt with long sleeves.

She saw me coming and ran to meet me, leaving the group. We hugged and she grasped my hands.

"Good, you're wearing the gloves," she said. She wasn't, and the hollow crescent moon tattoo on the back of her right hand was

clear as day, marking her as a cadet in the Night Academy for the military, just as mine did for the Day Academy.

“Are you sure about this?” I asked. Her teeth raked her bottom lip but she nodded.

“Just them, though,” she said and dragged me to join the group she had been talking to.

There were only three of them, two boys and one girl, and when they looked at us holding hands, their expressions ranged from apprehensive to suspicious to excited.

“It’s about time, Yin,” the girl said to her.

“So, who’s your secret boyfriend?” one of the boys asked, crossing his beefy arms across his chest.

I fought the urge to hide behind Yin.

“This is Yang, and he’s not my boyfriend,” Yin said. “He’s my brother.”

“Twins, actually,” I added, pushing my hood back to reveal my black hair and mismatched eyes. The three teenagers gasped and took an unconscious step back.

I shared a look with Yin, the color of our eyes mirroring each other. My left eye was silver and my right eye was gold where her left was gold and her right was silver. It was impossible to deny our relation to each other when we were standing side-by-side.

“How is that possible?” the girl asked, staring at me. “You’re a Dayer, aren’t you?”

I peeled the glove off my right hand and showed them the sun tattoo on the back of it as an answer.

“We’re not sure ourselves,” Yin told her as I pulled my glove back on. True. I had hacked

into my birth records when I had found out that my parents weren’t my birth parents and found Yin by accident. It had been a year since then and we still didn’t know why we had been split between the two factions.

Cheers erupted from beyond the park gates, interrupting our minor epiphany, and we all jumped.

“The party’s starting!”

Yin’s friends seemed to come to a silent agreement. They helped smuggle me into the park by simply putting me in the middle of the group and walking past the two policemen who stood at the gates. They only gave our little group a cursory glance, taking in the obvious Nighter attire they were wearing, and dismissing them.

The park was alive with people dancing and singing. There was a band on a temporary stage that was playing and the lead singer’s hair had been dyed a neon pink.

Yin led me to the center of the crowd and we spent the next few hours dancing with her friends, who never left us. I had been afraid that other adults or just other people would see me and automatically know that I didn’t belong. But nobody gave me a second glance.

There was a loud screech and the music cut off. Everybody stopped and the park was filled with silence. I looked up at the stage and felt my blood turn to ice. Two police officers were standing on the stage.

Yin grabbed my arm and I pulled the hood over my head again. I was breaking the law with my mere presence and Yin and her friends were, too, by collaboration. We were all under eighteen and I was a Dayer.

“Shit,” Yin muttered beside me. One of her

friends, the taller one, stepped in front of me and blocked my view of the stage but also the view the police officers would have of me.

“You better go before they start searching the crowd,” Yin’s friend whispered into my ear. I looked to Yin. Without a word, she started leading the way out of the crowd, our hands held together.

Someone yelled for us to stop. Yin did, letting go of my hand, but not before whispering, “The Twilight District.”

I kept going. When I heard shouts, I started running. I had to use my elbows to knock aside the people who stood in my way, but I was already near the edge and it didn’t take long to break free of the crowd.

I sprang through the park gates and immediately turned left, further from the way I had come. I heard yelling behind me and glanced back to see only two police officers chasing me. And they were gaining.

I muttered a curse under my breath then the first building came into view. The Twilight District. I vaulted over the low gate and sprinted across the yard. I shimmed up the building’s walls in a flash and hauled myself onto the roof.

The police were shouting as I practically flew over the rooftops, leaping across the narrow gaps between the buildings, but their voices started to fade as I got further away. In the city district where the Day and Night societies were the closest in proximity, the buildings practically leaned against each other and running from building to building wasn’t hard for someone who was experienced in the endeavor. Or desperate enough. I had both on my side that night.

I eventually slowed down when I could no longer hear the shouting. I hunkered down and rested for a few minutes then started doubling back. My house was on the other side of town. By the time I made it back around, the cops were gone.

I sat on the roof and took out my phone. I sent Yin a coded message. A few minutes later she texted her response back, also coded. Apparently, I wasn’t the only one breaking the rules tonight as a group of Dayer teenagers had been found breaking curfew a few blocks away. The police had left and they had resumed the party. They had stopped her, but she had said that I had just been someone she was dancing with.

I stuck my phone back in my pocket and began the long journey back home.

It took almost two hours of dodging the police and taking all the shortcuts that I could think of and staying in the shadows. By the time I scaled the wall outside my bedroom and jimmied the window open, I was exhausted and had probably aged five years.

I collapsed on my bed and stared at the ceiling. That had been way too close.

My phone buzzed. Yin again. She said we shouldn’t meet again for the next few weeks. I agreed and sent her the text. She sent me a picture and I smiled. It was one she had snapped of us while we had been dancing. We had the same blood and the same heart, they couldn’t keep us apart forever. I had to content myself with that.

TO A SUICIDE

Ariane Kitenge

Please think of me
When comes the day
You have nothing left, please think of me
If your hands are tired of holding on,
If your legs can't stand anymore,
If your broken heart can't be put together,
If you are tired of goodbyes.
Please think of me,
And I promise
I will be the plaster cast for your hands,
The crutch for your legs,
The glue for your broken heart,
And the one, you will never say goodbye to.
Please think of me
If your life flashes before you.
Look for my face in each of those scenes
If you are giving up the fight.
Please remember me.
Remember this face in the middle of despair,
Remember that you always have something
to fight for,
Remember my kisses when death is sucking
your breath,
Remember that you have someone to live for
when life is drowning you,
Remember that you have someone to love
when death hugs you,
My hands will keep you warm
When death's cold hands call for you,
Remember my eyes when death glances back
at you,
Remember I love you when you wish you
could make a mistress out of death,
While looking at those pills.
Please remember me,

But if you choose death over me,
I promise I will try to understand.
I will understand if I wasn't enough,
If I was too weak against death,
If your pain was stronger than your love,
I will understand.
When I wish death on myself,
I will call on love for a trial
While I make life my judge
And death my one and only jury.
Being with you meant letting go,
And I know one day I will be able to.
I will be careless enough to let you fly alone,
Weak enough to let go of your memories,
Mended enough to look into your eyes once
again.
I will be, I promise.
But today, my broken heart cursed at your
memories,
My pain laughs at my love,
My anger smiles at your face,
My hatred loves your memories.
I should have known better than to fall for
you.
I was blinded by the representation of love
in your eyes
That I didn't see the pain they hid.
Now that I look at you laying in this casket,
I want to believe that:
Being strong doesn't mean holding on,
Strength isn't found in not crying,
But sometimes can be found in crying your
pain out,
Being strong means letting go,
But I am still learning to...

I am still looking for the strength to let you go
As you are standing before God.
Please speak of me,
Speak of this face which couldn't remind you
of hope in a middle of despair,
Of the one you should have fought for,
Of this lips which couldn't give you a proper
kiss of life,
Speak of the one who couldn't save you when
life drowned you,
Of the love that couldn't beat a hug from
death,
Of the hands that failed in keeping you warm
When death's cold hands called for you,
Speak of these eyes that couldn't make you
forget a glance from death,
Speak of the one who wished to be your
spouse when you made death your mistress
While looking at God's eyes.
Please remember me, speak of me,
And maybe God will be merciless enough
To call me to His side,

To suck my breath out of my body.
Maybe God will be heartless enough
To take your memories out of my mind,
To suck my love for you out of my heart,
Then I will be smart enough to let you go,
Wise enough to hate you,
But God is merciful and compassionate.
So I am letting go of you
While holding on to your memories
And grasping at your spirit
As I dream of a future where I was strong
enough against pain and death
Of a world where you hold back my hands
Where my love was enough for you to heal.
As for now, I couldn't make a solid case
against love.
The jury has deliberated.
Go in peace, love.

Appalachian Observation

Sue Weese Wilcox, MC '62

I often hear our Appalachian experience described as "soulful" or "poignant," and, indeed, it has been. When, at sundown, I look out my window upon Fork Mountain and watch the shadow of an opposite ridge crawling across its face, I am reminded that the same shadow has been cast there for sundowns beyond number. And all of the struggle that has taken place beneath that shadow is echoed in the sound of the water running through it or of the breeze stirring around it. I believe that it is the mountains who have the "soul."



Slipping on Crystal, or, How My Feet Became the Focus of My Marriage

Emily Stainbrook

I'm a princess because I lost my shoe.

Just let that sink in.

After hours spent talking, dancing, flirting,
drinking, smoking at a party,

I'm a princess because I was too drunk to
grab both of my shoes.

And it should tell you something about
my husband that he recognized my feet
and not my face—quite a surprise on the
honeymoon, let me tell you. You, fiendish
feline, you.

“Prince Charming” has a thing for feet.

“Happily ever after” has been, so far,

my husband staring at my feet and on rare
occasions, my quivering, feathery breasts.

We don't talk, the prince and I,

Now that we're both sober.

The “magic” is gone.

My fairy godmother, you ask?

She vanished – poof!

We both almost got what we wanted:

I escaped my step-family and it filled me
with glee to watch them mutilate each other
to fit in my shoe.

My husband finally appeased his parents
by getting married and thought he had
outsmarted them by choosing a bride too
desperate to care about his fetish.

I don't know what to do now that I have
what I thought I wanted, Lucifer.

I'm stuck with that foot-fetishist, but being
called by my real name and being spoken
to respectfully and not having to do chores
or cleaning and not having to worry about
finances—It's pretty alright.

What is my real name?

Well, Lucifer, silly kitty, it's certainly not
Cinderella.

And if you ever call me anything other than
Ashputtel again,

I'll turn you into a pair of house slippers.

* "Ashputtel" is the name of the girl in the story
on which Disney based their animated movie,
Cinderella. "Ashputtel" is recorded by the Brothers
Grimm in Grimm's Fairy Tales.

See You Again

Ariane Kitenge

Never say goodbye.

Goodbye, the only word left

As you are slipping away

Slipping away without me noticing

Noticing that the everlasting time has

betrayed me

The promises made are now broken

The unbroken relationship has become a
memory

A memory of joy in a day of pain

Your absence made paradise hell

And time cruel

Cruel for letting me think it was

everlasting

Everlasting time, powerful time

Digger of my pain, weaker in my healing

Stealer of my love, breaker of the

unbroken love

With you by my side, I loved

Without you, love has disappeared

But it can't fade away

A color of passion has become a color of
pain

Once you painted my heart in red with
cupid's arrow

As of today, the arrow has crushed my
heart

My heart has become a red sea of blood

I made the everlasting time a healer

The healer of my wounded heart

The wiper of this bath of blood

But he betrayed me again

Everlasting time, powerful time

Digger of my pain, weaker in my healing

Stealer of my love, breaker of the

unbroken love

You made a wound even time can't heal

You caused a hemorrhage that time can't
stop

Time made this wound even deeper

As time flew, the nearer I am to you.

Makes me wonder

As I feel your hands on my shoulder

As I picture your smile

But there is a price to pay: Memories

A flash that can't be pictured

A smile that can't be caressed

Everlasting time, powerful time

Digger of my pain, weaker in my healing

Stealer of my love, breaker of the

unbroken love

Never say goodbye

“I will see you soon”

The everlasting time has promised

A promise that can't be broken

A promise that can't be changed

With it comes no escape

The everlasting time took my goodbye
time

For a promise of eternity

You failed in keeping the vow taken

Endless time has ended our time

Everlasting time, powerful time

Digger of my pain, weaker in my healing
Stealer of my love, breaker of the unbroken
love
Everlasting time has broken the everlasting
love
Love has been replaced by pain
Healer time still can't heal
Time flows and the distance disappears
I can feel your hands on my back
I can see the life in a ceased smile
I still hope for a hug from the ghost hands
I can feel the wait from the other side
I can feel the eyes of time on me
Everlasting time, powerful time

Digger of my pain, weaker in my healing
Stealer of my love, breaker of the unbroken
love
Never say goodbye
The everlasting time has promised to end my
time
I hear the call from the other side,
I can feel death's cold hands closing on me
I am dancing on the music of death with life
Therefore, until next time
Never say goodbye.

In the Gray

E.L. Chan

He heard them before he saw them.

He was a lone figure as he plodded along on his horse. With a gray woolen cloak wrapped around his shoulders and the cowl pulled low over his head, he was just an indistinct individual heading to a destination only important to him and those he worked with. Gray cloak and gray dust clinging to his clothes, brown mud splattered on his legs and squelching every time his horse lifted its hooves. The past few days had been nothing but gray skies and brown mud.

Rounding the cluster of dead trees, his eyes confirmed what he had heard. Three men and a woman. As he was passing them, one of the men called for him to stop and he did.

"Wheh' ya' headin'?"

The older of the three men posed the question to him. The unnamed man in the gray cloak took precious seconds deliberating as he looked at the scene before him. The men wore military uniforms, but the clothes were old and showed signs of several repairs and patch jobs. He guessed them to be men from the outposts along nomansland.

"Beuknaw," he finally replied, naming a town just within the ring of outposts.

His eyes passed to the woman who was being held by one of the men. She was around his own age, in her twenties. Her skin was copper and her long hair black. If her coloring didn't give her away, he could see by her robes that she was Ruemi. A racial minority in the country, Ruemi could be split into two ethnic groups between agricultural workers and artisans or performers, but their modest dress distinguished both groups from the larger population.

She had already been roughed up.

"Help me!" she cried, as if sensing his gaze even though his eyes were hidden by his cowl.

One of the men backhanded her and she fell silent again. The unnamed man did not react. He looked back to the older man. Though he was the older of the three, he couldn't be much older than the unnamed man himself. Where the unnamed man was clean shaven, the older man had grown a scraggly blonde beard that made him look older. The two other men were younger still, one was also a blonde while the other was brunette.

The unnamed man pulled his cowl slightly back to show his blue eyes and his blonde hair. It made him uncomfortable to give the three men a view of his face, but the men wanted to be sure that he was allowed to be traveling out of the camp lands. There was no reason for them to suspect that he was a member of the resistance nor that his presence in the camp lands was anything to be anxious about. He had been tasked with the mission to Beuknaw to assist another resistance agent in distress because of the way he looked.

"Be on yer way," the older man finally said.

The unnamed man nodded to him and pulled his cowl down low again.

As he set his horse walking again, he heard the beating resume behind him. His hands tightened on the reins. Save this life and risk

the life of the one in Beuknaw or stand by while one life is killed and save the life of his ally in Beuknaw. He closed his eyes and saw the noose that had been hanging from the tree branch.

Don't get distracted.

A muscled twitched in his jaw and he dismounted. He grasped the hilt of the sword hanging from his saddle then decided against it. He threw his cloak onto the saddle, turning back to the men.

The brunette man reared back to punch the woman again and the unnamed man grabbed him by the shoulders and tossed him back. The young blonde man who had been holding the woman threw her aside and she promptly fell to the ground.

The older man grabbed the unnamed man from behind. The unnamed man used the weight of the older man to kick at the incoming blonde man with both feet, sending him flying back. He then jammed his elbow back. There was a grunt and the older man let go, staggering back.

"Close your eyes," he said, looking to the woman briefly, his voice gentle.

Then all three men converged on him.

The unnamed man pulled a knife from his belt, the metal flashing in the winter sun. He drove the blade into the side of the neck of the brunette man then ducked a swing from the older man. He grabbed the arm that the older man had swung at him and stabbed him under his arm. The unnamed man's leg snapped out and he kicked the knee of the younger blonde man. He felt the bone give way and the man cried out as he fell, his knee shattered.

The unnamed man twisted under the arm he was still holding and dragged the serrated edge of his knife across the older man's throat, the blood arcing through the air as if in slow motion.

The very air seemed to hold its breath as the unnamed man stood amid the bodies. Where before there had been five lives, now there were three, two of them snuffed out so quickly and so brutally that time itself seemed to be in shock.

If you must kill, then do so thoroughly. If you kill someone and get caught, then you are dead, and with you dead our friend in Beuknaw will be just as dead.

The unnamed man flicked his wrist, flinging most of the blood off the blade, and stalked to where the younger blonde man lay. The woman watched from where she sat on the ground, her brown eyes wide but saying nothing.

“Wha’re you doing?” the man asked, scrambling back, his broken knee useless to him.

The unnamed man grabbed him by the shirt and dragged him up so that their faces were inches apart.

“This one goes to the Castaways,” he told him.

Confusion clouded the man’s face then his eyes widened in realization at the battle cry of the most prominent resistance group in the country. But it was too late.

When he was done, the unnamed man wiped his knife on the dead man’s clothes and replaced it at his belt. He went over to where the woman remained on the ground. He stepped on something soft and looked down then grimaced. The color of the cloth matched the woman’s robes. It was the veils that the men had ripped from her head at some point. They were torn and stained beyond practicality by now.

The unnamed man knelt by the woman.

“Where are you from?” he asked her.

She just looked at him, her body shaking.

“Are you from the camp lands or a farm?”

he asked instead. The forced migration to the camp lands hadn’t included Ruemi that owned farms. Yet.

“F-farm,” she whispered.

“How far?” he asked, already worrying over the logistics. He needed to be in Beuknaw no later than two days from now. That gave him one day of leeway.

She pointed to the left, the way he had been heading, and said, “Ten miles.”

The unnamed man nodded and stood. He rifled through the dead men’s pockets, hoping to find something he could give the resistance for the trouble, but the men met his first impressions. They hadn’t been high enough to even warrant written instructions.

By the time he was done, the woman had stood and was waiting uncertainly.

The unnamed man went to his horse and led it back to her. Her teeth had begun to chatter and he wrapped his discarded cloak around her shoulders, pulling the hood over her head. When he indicated that she was to get on the horse and ride, she hesitated. He just waited and she eventually mounted up with his help.

He dug the extra cloak from one of his saddlebags and put it on, pulling the hood low over his eyes.

“Who are you?” she asked him quietly.

He remained silent as he led the horse away, leaving the bodies of the men where they had fallen. He glanced at her and then away.

“Stone,” he said. “Michael Stone.”

She didn’t ask why he would help her and he didn’t offer any answers.

We speak for those who have been silenced, we stand for those who have been beaten down, and we fight for those who cannot. We hold the line.

She's Human

Landon Santini

A glittery pink pencil
With a fluffy pink feathers,
Shining subtle flashes of different colored light;
Robin egg blue,
Lavender purple,
And silvery steel;
All covered with teeth marks
Being nibbled upon out of nervousness
Or as a self-compulsive habit,
Making me feel warm, fuzzy, ecstatic, and reassured

Before I found this pencil she dropped
Right here on the ground,
I knew she was something
Much great than me,
And that I was nothing.
But these teeth marks made me realize
That she’s not all that different from you or me.
She gets nervous sometimes, too.
She nibbles her pencil!
She’s human!

Better For The Pain

Amber D. Pellett

Fear.
It grows inside of me.
I can't keep running from the past.
I know that anguish never lasts.

Now.
Let go of yesterday.
Before tomorrow ever comes,
Your future's already begun.

Cast a shadow on the water.
Dive into the deepest sea.
When you find what you sought,
You'll know there's nothing else to gain.
But, you'll be better for—
Stronger for the pain.

Faith.
It dwells within my soul.
I can believe what I can't see.
Knowing that strength abounds in me.

Rise.
From persecution's scorn.
Words can't define any outcast
Who may build castles from the ash.

Soar upon the lies they swallow.
Run until you cannot breathe.
Resurrect their best kept secrets,
Knowing they can't be held to blame.
But, you'll be better for—
Stronger for...

Cast a shadow on the water.
Dive into the deepest sea.
When you find what you sought,
You'll know there's nothing else to gain.
But, you'll be better for—
Stronger for the pain.

ASEXUALITY

Emily Stainbrook

It's memorable
because it's not
memorable: The day I
thought it through. One
throwaway comment in a
throwaway conversation
intended to be
funny, but
striking
true.

Is it weird that
I'm not looking
for someone who
completes
me
or to have
sex
with me?

I thought it
was feminism: strong,
independent woman
who don't need
no man;
That's
me.

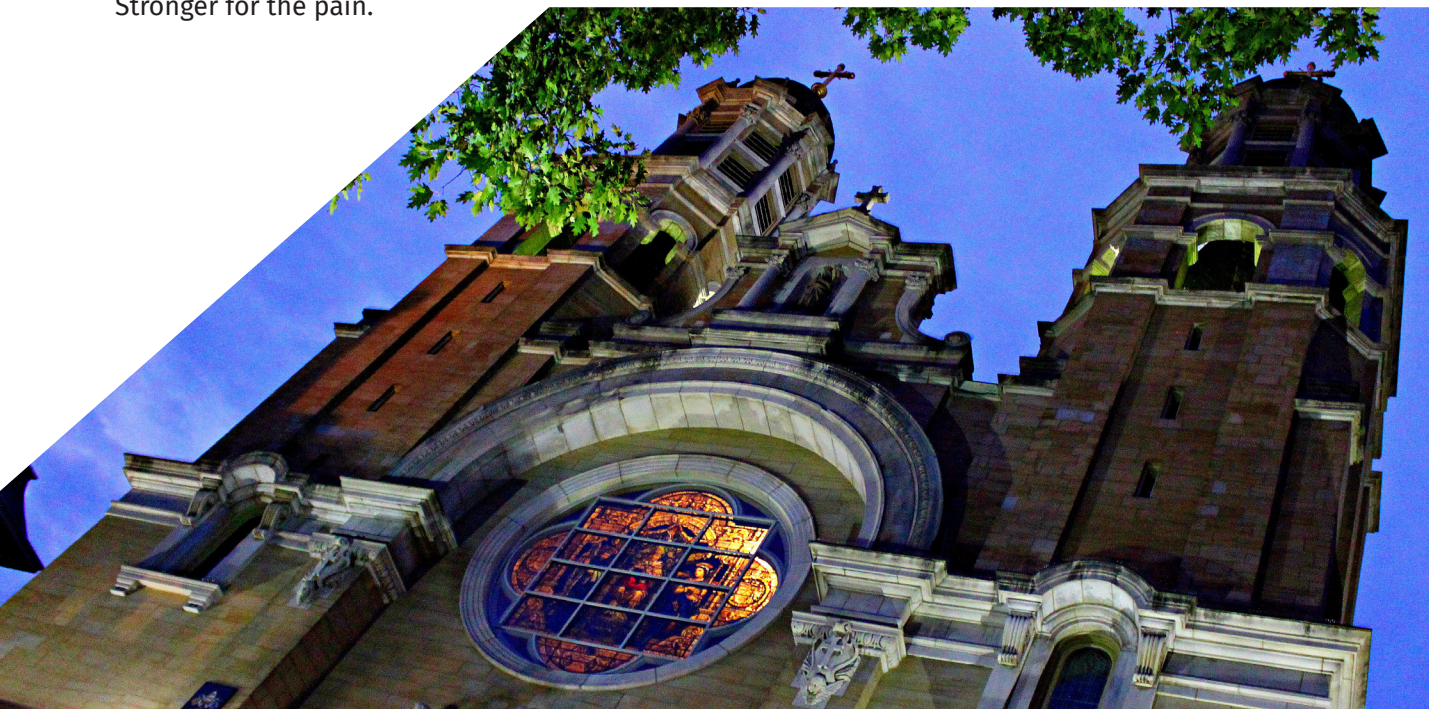
I don't need to be rescued,
I don't need to be save,
I don't need a soulmate
to find the value in
myself.

I am priceless,
a pearl of great worth.
I have all four arms
and all four legs.
When Zeus cut
Humans in half,
he forgot
about
me.

But maybe it's more
than that. Maybe I
don't look
because t o u c h i n g
doesn't
interest
me.

I don't want to be lonely,
but I would be okay.
I want my relationships
to grow deep and rich,
but you can keep
your hands
to yourself.

If I were a virgin
for the rest
of my life, I'd
still
be
okay.



And That's Okay

Matthew Daughtery

Knight to d4. Jason was beginning to take control of the game. After establishing a strong defense, Jason had begun mounting an equally potent offense. He looked up to the figure seated opposite him and again stared at the pale hairless skin of the figure. You wouldn't be able to tell by looking at him, but the silent figure was quickly falling behind and in danger of losing. The figure showed no signs of worry. Jason grew rather anxious. He was going to get something most people never got the chance to experience, a second chance at life. The events of the day replayed in his head...

Jason Brown was driving to the soccer fields. His son, Michael, had a game, and he wasn't going to miss this one. Michael was still upset that he had missed the last one. Jason wished he could have gone, but his boss needed someone to clock in overtime and he couldn't afford to say no. They needed the money. As Jason was thinking about the family's financial situation, he passed through a green-lit intersection. It all happened so fast. In a split second, Jason found himself

collapsed over his steering wheel. His head had split open and was spewing blood at an alarming rate. Jason tried to find his way out of his car and towards anyone that may be of help, but his vision was quickly beginning to fade. He struggled and finally opened the door before falling unconscious on the hard pavement next to his wreck of a car.

Jason snapped back to reality as his opponent moved. Bishop to f7. A good move, but Jason knew it was too late for his opponent. He began to tremble with excitement as he saw victory within his reach, and Jason did something he hadn't done since they started playing. He spoke.

"I'm going to see my wife again." Jason's eyes began to well up as he envisioned himself embracing his wife once more.

"Your wife is having an affair," the figure replied, not showing any semblance of emotion for his opponent.

Jason couldn't believe what he had heard. "What? What

do you mean?" he stammered as he made a move he hadn't fully thought through.

"She's been sleeping with her coworker Jonathan for the last 3 months. You two have had a lot of fights about the time they were spending together, haven't you?" the figure's gaze still hadn't moved from the table before him as he made another defensive move in an attempt to delay the inevitable.

Jason leaned back and let out a disappointed sigh. So his worst fears had been right all along? Of course they were. Jason had always known what was going on, even if he had never wanted to admit it to himself. Even without the affair, he and his wife had grown distant, and Jason was starting to think about going to couple's therapy, but there was no fixing things now. Jason regained his composure as he remembered he had a lot to live for. He still had to win.

"Well, I still need to be there for Michael. If I'm gone no one will be able to provide for his future. Sure I don't have the best job, but my

wife can't support him on just her salary, and we don't have any life insurance. If I die Michael might never be able to go to college, or worse, he might not make it out of high school. I need to be there for my son."

"Jason, the man that hit you today was a business owner. He was driving drunk when he flew through that intersection. If you died that man would have paid for Michael's college because of the overwhelming guilt."

"But, Michael would be traumatized without me. He would lose his father," his eyes began to well with tears and his hands began shaking.

"If you lived, your wife would get Michael in the divorce. He'd see you on the weekends and the occasional holiday. Michael would eventually come to see Jonathan as more of a father figure than you could ever be for him."

Jason began hyperventilating; he couldn't believe the words he was hearing. He was being shaken to his very core by the reality of the situation. He was now sobbing as he searched for a reason to continue playing.

"M-m-my mom. Surely having me around keeps her spirits high and gives her a reason

to keep fighting?" By this point, Jason had stopped making moves. He remained in a dominant position, but couldn't bring himself to move another piece.

"Yes. Your presence does keep your mother fighting against her cancer, and without you she would pass away within a few weeks, but-"

"Exactly! I need to win this for her." Jason interrupted the figure in a desperate attempt to cling to a sense of purpose for himself.

"Jason, even if you survived, your mother would only last about a year."

"That's a lot of time!" Jason was once again sobbing at the reality of his life he would be returning to.

"Yes, it is, Jason; it's a lot of time for your mother to be in pain. It's a lot of time for your mother to be weak and sick. It's a lot of time for her to suffer."

Jason leaned back in his chair as he wiped the tears from his face with the sleeve of his shirt. He dejectedly looked at the ground beneath him as though he might find the answers there. There was a long, long silence before he spoke again.

"The world would be better off without me."

"No," the figure replied, again not showing any emotion towards Jason. "The world is no different without you. There are 7 billion other people in this world, and your existence is by no means of any importance to a fraction of a fraction of a percent of them. In the very hospital you will be pronounced dead in, there will be 13 babies born. One of them will grow up to work on the first manned mission to Mars, while another will grow up to be a serial killer that will eventually claim 7 lives. The world will move on without you as it did with you. Your existence means nothing."

By this time, Jason had stopped crying. He sat in silence as he contemplated what the figure had said to him. After a few moments, his breathing came down to a normal level, his hands were no longer shaking, and his eyes had dried completely. For the first time since the beginning of the game, he felt completely at ease.

"And that's okay," Jason said to himself as he toppled his own king in resignation.

HOW HE LOVES ME

Josh Thomas

He tells me that he loves me
And he tells me that he cares,
I hear him say it everyday
And I know no one compares.

He tells me that he loves me
That I'm the apple of his eye,
I could never leave a man so great
He's more than money can buy.

His enchanting voice becomes my drug
And his kisses are so sweet!
I know we'll be forever
He's the greatest man I'll ever meet.

There are times when I get scared,
But I know that's just in my mind
He would never try to hurt me,
Of course he wouldn't; he's way too kind

He's there to forever embrace me
With hugs so large I can't breathe.
I sit and examine the artwork
From the love marks that he'll leave

For some reason he tends to hurt me
Sometimes I desire to run.
I know that I can't lose him
Without him, life would be no fun

I love it when he yells at me
And I just play along
I pretend I'm hurt by all his words
And I pretend that he is wrong

I love him when he drinks a lot
And when his speech is slurred,
And his beautiful name-callings
Oh, the most alluring thing I've ever heard

A hunger burning deep inside
For every rough and gentle touch,
His fingers dance along my skin
My body tingles; I love it so much.

His words are lyrically magical
And his spell entraps my thought.
I lose my mind just thinking of him,
In his perfection I am caught

His fingers lace my throat
And my breathing starts to slow
And when I pry his fingers away,
Adrenaline, heart rate, watch them go!

I tried to run away one time
All for just fun play,
The marks he left, they stung like hell
But I knew the pain wouldn't stay.

The beating? That's love.
And his harsh words? No, silly,
That's just how he loves me
Trust me, he loves me, really

The Will To Fly

Morgan Scritchfield

It must be quite convenient
To see planes from the ground,
To gather your artillery,
And shoot the beauties down.

You pull the trigger, give the call
To fire through the haze
Missiles, bullets, burning shots
To set airplanes ablaze.

A burning hunger has been quenched
If only temporary
To watch it spiral downward,
A wounded, dying faery.

You see the wings, once built to soar
dissolve to crumbling ash,
and savor every grinding crack
as dreams die in a flash.

Such beauty must be snuffed out quick,
So's not to let them see
What a soul's potential is,
And what can later be.

So take your hatred, shallow one,
Put flame to soaring dreams;
You shall not burn the will to fly,
But push it to higher extremes.

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