Feast or Famine: A Collection of Flash Lit and Art
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ISBN

William Madison Randall Library supports the mission of the University by providing information resources and learner-centered services and by cultivating a rich physical and virtual environment dedicated to the open exchange of ideas and an information-literate community.

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INTRODUCTION
Lucy Holman

FlashLIT is Randall Library’s reimagined Flash Fiction competition and continues a tradition that has lasted over fifteen years. The initial Flash Fiction competition was limited to short fiction; however, the FlashLIT writing contest encourages student writing in multiple genres—poetry, non-fiction, and fiction.

In 2019, Randall hosted Thirsty Tome (another annual event!) with readings by local authors alongside students and faculty in the UNCW Department of Creative Writing. The theme was “Food Writing” and the event brought into focus the creativity and richness of culinary themes.

Inspired by that event, this year’s theme of “Feast or Famine” speaks to a writer’s exploration of the memories, experiences, and senses associated with food. This theme also addresses critical social issues surrounding hunger and food inequality in the U.S. and abroad and explores related psychological issues including food addictions and eating disorders.
In this year’s *FlashLIT*, characters hunger and thirst for more than literal food and water—they crave the nourishment of knowledge and success. The writers of the included pieces describe diets and disciplined eating, as well as the discipline applied to their academics. In these stories, essays, and poems, all of which were required to mention Randall Library, students explore the contrasts between the consumption of ideas and concepts and the literal consumption of food and drink!

All of this year’s entries have been judged, and these sixteen pieces of literature are the culmination of an epic writing competition, one that is inspired by UNCW’s culture of applied learning. Each piece is accompanied by an illustration created by students in ART 260: Introduction to Graphic Design, and the cover art, layout, and publication are the products of graduate students in UNCW’s Department of Creative Writing’s Publishing Laboratory.

*FlashLIT* highlights and recognizes the creativity and skill of students across our campus in a variety of disciplines. We hope you enjoy this collection of writers, artists, and publishers!
acknowledgments

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YOU’RE TWO when your parents nickname you Melon—for that watermelon belly, the bulging one they blow raspberries on, your skin smooth as lint. The kisses bloat your middle and it makes you giggle. It also makes you cry, but that’s because you’re two. When you’re two, you cry about everything.

***

YOU’RE SEVEN when you lose your two front teeth, one on its own, the other yanked out by a string attached to your doorknob. Your best friends, Lucy and Jenna, are collecting teeth from everyone in the class, piling them into a mason jar. Second grade molars click clack against first grade incisors. The girls say they are trying to summon the Tooth Fairy. She’s worth a lot more than the money she gives out, says Jenna.

***

YOU’RE TWELVE the day Jenna pokes the pudgy skin at the top of your
waistband, the slice of watermelon you’ve never gotten rid of. She suggests a diet, a cleanse, something her Au Pair says in passing. You’ve never heard your parents mention it—not unless cleanse is the same thing as cleansing, which your mother asks you to do everyday with your braces.

You spend that night googling: How to Feel Full Without Eating.

***

YOU’RE FIFTEEN when you ask your parents to stop calling you Melon.

Your stomach rumbles all the time, but you don’t listen to it. Food isn’t a language you speak anymore.

At dinner, you slip your meals to the dog or into your socks—anywhere but your mouth.

Lips shimmering in soda-flavored gloss, your friends at school tell you, You’ve never looked this good.

***

YOU’RE EIGHTEEN and it’s your birthday. Everyone is gathered around, watching you take a slice of lemon meringue pie. They want to see you eat. Since you fainted a few months ago, everyone is always eyeing your plate, especially your mother, with her wide doe eyes.

She takes your hand. She says, You’ve grown so fast. How did you get to be so big?

Maybe it’s your face that gives something away, because she says, Not big-big, I just mean, old.

You don’t eat the cake that night and you don’t care who sees. Your wish was futile anyway—no one can be two again.

***

YOU’RE TWENTY-ONE now. You sit in Randall Library with the company of books, of words from brilliant women who challenge your concept of what a ’good body’ means. But it is so hard to see your pear bottom, your tangerine breasts, as pretty. Impossible not to compare the passing bodies to fruit at a farmers’ market. Who is bruised? Who is shiny? Which one looks the sweetest?

When you return home for the holidays, you hug your parents, your dog, your few friends left from high school. Your father calls you Melon by mistake, says, Force of habit. Your mother squeezes one of your dwindling hips.

The next time your stomach howls, you hear it. This time you do your best to listen.
LYING ON THE DEFLATING FLOAT in my mother’s pool in Jacksonville, Florida, watching the willows shimmy in the warm autumn breeze, my stomach turned. My mother leaned out the back door, “Margarita?” she asked. The sound of The Weather Channel looping through the same fatalistic forecasts escaped from the living room and settled over me like a shadow.

“No thanks, Mom,” I said. “I’m good.”

I couldn’t eat the buttered crab legs she’d insisted on making the night before or the double-chocolate brownies crumbling on the counter. The mulled wine and pumpkin bread went cold. The twice-stuffed baked potatoes sunk in on themselves. Still, she kept cooking, and I couldn’t eat any of it. All I could think about was the tomato.

Four-hundred miles away, hurricane Florence crawled across Wilmington, North Carolina, pressing down on the town my partner and I had relocated to and purchased our first home the year before.
The 1935 bungalow needed work, and we wasted no time knocking down walls, pulling out windows, gutting the bathroom, stripping the plumbing and wiring. We toiled over caulking guns for months, lived without a toilet or running water for weeks at a time while resulting in bathroom breaks at Randall Library, showers at the Rec. Center, and digging six-inch deep cat holes in the backyard when nature called in the middle of the night. June marked a year since we’d been in the house. It also marked the start of hurricane season.

I was watching paint dry on the last picket fence post when I got an email from a professor saying our graduate classes were cancelled because of an impending storm. Within 24-hours, my partner and I screwed plywood over the windows, dragged the potted plants off the porch, and loaded our ’03 Subaru and ’92 Chevy with whatever sentimental objects we could cram in. We took to the highway, joining a rush of folks scrambling to get out, and headed to our home state of Florida, laughing with gas station clerks along the way at the irony of trying to escape a storm by heading to the capital of hurricane country.

When we arrived, the smell of spaghetti and meatballs from my mother’s kitchen met me in the driveway, and that’s when I remembered the tomato—a fat beefsteak purchased for bruschetta was sitting on the acacia butcher block countertop we’d installed the month before. I could see it softening, growing slush against the September heat that would settle in minutes once the power went out, a puddle of pink juice pooling on the counter and into the wood grain. I could see the fruit flies swarming to feast. I could smell the rot. For the next several days the news anchors measured rising flood waters, braced themselves against lamp posts while street signs flapped like broken wings, counted off the death toll, and shouted into the storm. The wind raged and the rain kept coming, but all I could think about was the tomato.
That’s my mindset as I make my way into Randall Library to finally, finally get something to eat.

I reach into my backpack, searching for my wallet. My hand grasps inside the small hidden compartment where I always keep it, only to come back empty. No wallet.

No wallet means no chocolate chip muffin melting in my mouth and no cream cheese on the corner of my lip. Not even the smooth glide of an iced tea or the energizing kick I so desperately need from a coffee.

My stomach rumbles unhappily, as if consciously aware that it will not be getting the sustenance it wants at this moment.
Sighing in defeat I trudge upstairs. If I can’t eat, then at the very least I’ll get my homework done. I find an empty seat easily, only a few people are scattered nearby. Pulling out my laptop and books I set up my workspace before going to dig out my headphones. Some gentle tunes will definitely help me get over the hollowness in my core, right?

Wrong.

No headphones.

I close my eyes. This is fine. It’s fine.

A sudden crinkle behind me has my eyes snapping open. When I turn to investigate I am met with a boy sitting a few tables away. His laptop is out and he’s scribbling in a notebook, but next to the notebook? A chip bag. Freshly opened.

The boy, oblivious to my horror, lifts a chip to his mouth and the resounding crunch is deafening in the silence of the library. Quickly, I look around, only to find everybody else blissfully unaware, headphones in and studying away.

Crunch.

I turn away from the scene, focusing on my own notes. This is fine.

Crunch, crunch.

My stomach rumbles again, loudly, but nobody hears because nobody is listening. Flipping to today’s notes, I uncap my pen and a highlighter. I ignore the way my nerves flare in annoyance at the constant sound.

Crunch, crunch, crunch.

I resist the urge to look again, staring holes into the noise-maker’s back will not stop the horrendous chewing. It’s not his fault he chose the loudest possible food to eat in the quietest space on campus. It isn’t his fault that his munching and snapping is like grinding bones in my ears.

Crunch, crunch. Crinkle, crunch, crunch.

Ok, maybe it is entirely his fault. What inhumane monster of a person eats chips at the library? Why does every click of teeth reverberate in my skull as though I myself am being eaten from the inside out?

Crunch, crunch, crinkle, crunch.

No, nope, no, I can’t do this. I quit. Packing up my things, I quickly make my way to another portion of tables, far away from chip-boy and any other potential distraction.

I have just finished setting my books out again when a girl wanders to sit at a table nearby. That’s fine. She’s pulling out her headphones and—wait—are those carrots?

Snap.
COME UP AND GET ME
Darby Freeman

THE BLACK INK IN FRONT OF ME looked as if it had been flooded with water. I blinked my eyes until my notes became clear again. I glanced at my laptop, bright to my drowsy eyes, and squinted for the time. 3:43 a.m. Looking around the second floor of Randall Library, I saw I was completely alone. My body was heavy except for the vague buzz of caffeine that had kept me going all night. My head felt blurry, a saturated sponge that was at capacity. I packed my bag and threw it over my shoulder.

My study spot was in the back of the library, so I headed to the staircase across from the auditorium. The only sounds were the quiet squeak of my shoes and the gentle jingling of zippers on my backpack. I was about to head downstairs when I noticed the door to Special Collections, ordinarily locked and only accessible to archivists, was standing wide open.

I walked over, curious, and peeked in. There were no lights on, but...
the room was half-lit with hallway light that flooded through the windows and open door. I listened and heard only the gentle hum of the heating system, but the archives spilled frigid air from the doorway that rushed around me into the otherwise warm library.

“Hello?” I asked tentatively as I stepped into the room. The air continued to whir, conspicuous among the silence. I wandered in and checked the door to the back offices but saw nothing. I couldn’t make out what was on the other side of the open doorframe, despite the dim light from outside. I was staring, trying to make out the office hallway, when the air shut off.

In the resulting silence, I heard sluggish breathing coming from the back offices. I held my breath and froze, eyes locked on the entryway. With each breath, the center of the doorway moved. Fear exploded in my chest as I finally discerned an immense, black creature staring at me. I trembled as it began to gurgle, working its way to incomprehensible whispers in a muted, gravelly voice. I was petrified, unable to comprehend what I was seeing. It continued to rumble until, finally, I was able to make out a few words.

“I deserve…to feast.”

Two reflective beads of black stood out among the darkness, watching me. A chill creeping up my spine finally shook me out of my trance and I turned to run. It screeched, piercingly shrill, as I twisted away. The creature lunged forward, so dark that it eclipsed all light merely by entering the room. Shadows stemming from the back hallway spread impossibly fast, reaching the front door just before I could. I slammed into it and collapsed while its tendrils stained the windows an inky obsidian. The last thing I saw was a thin arm, dripping with pitch-black velvety shadows, extending toward me.

Then nothing but silence.
IT IS LATE, the moon is full, and she is starving. Her belly is empty and growling as her mind screams out for something, anything to fill it. Tormented by what she does not understand, she has become a beast, lost to empty thoughts and one goal: to feed.

She is wrapped in blankets, on a bed like so many other beds, in a dorm like so many other dorms on campus. She contemplates staying shut away, but only for a moment, until her stomach growls again and the pain forces her up and out of bed. She ventures out into the cold darkness, shadows cleaved in two by streetlamps along the way. She knows where she needs to be, and the path before her is a straight line. All that she has to do is walk.

Motivated by hunger, she moves as quickly as she is able. She knows exactly what she needs. And it’s right in front of her.

She nears the end of the long walk, past the man-made lake with its fountain turned off for the night, and the silent clock tower. Her
prize is so close now—she howls at the night sky and the far-away moon as she arrives at the foot of the steps of Randall Library. She ascends, and is welcomed in by an automatic door and a rush of cool, AC-controlled air.

Finally. She smells the air, scenting coffee and pastries and paper. The library is mostly silent at this hour, save for the clicking computer mouse of another as hungry as she. The security guard at the door tips his hat to her and smiles.

There is a desk, just inside and to the left. Behind it sits a person whom she knows will help her. She lumbers over to him, trying her best to communicate. He nods, and points her in the right direction. She forgets to thank him in her haste to go where he has directed her.

She finds them—the books. Sitting beautiful and straight on dozens of shelves, all that she could ask for. All that she needs, and more.

Ravenously, she sets to work, ripping tome after tome from the neat shelves and tearing into them. She gobbles them up, devouring page after page until finally she is sated, her feast complete. She will pass her history test in the morning.
My feet pad through the aisles of Randall Library,
Blue green carpet a blur beneath dirty shoes
I am tired, I need to rest
Just a minute and then I
remember
I had a dream once
There were golden fields with stalks reaching heaven’s gates
Azure skies like endless oceans above, where
A fat calf laughed at the sickly lamb limping beside him
Belly empty, lonely like a whispering wind in the trees
The shepherd boy watched over them
While they grazed and the women gleaned wheat beside
The men, under a gleaming apricot sun
The calf boasted of his wealth, of the rubies he had found
And the beautiful coat he’d been sewn
He would be king among his kind, he
Told the lamb, patted the brown stomach as
He gobbled grapes and cheese and bread
Spit out the seeds to the mice below
The lamb was crippled, hind leg twisted in the dirt, coat
Dirty like crushed snow and the calf laughed at the
Lamb, who believed his barn to be a castle, who thought himself
richer than any king, grander than any
star blazing beyond the moon, belly full of the harvest
Milk and honey
The fattened calf cursed him as the dusk enveloped the land
And his crown dripped gold on the ground
As the shepherd boy came near,
Picked up the little king and took him away
As velvet black swallowed the world and the
Lamb cried, I had a dream
once
WE FOUND A BRICK BUILDING covered in vegetation. The inside full of desks, computers that hadn’t been turned on or used in years, books gone old and musty. It was a library, there was still a sign on the front dictating its name, Randall Library. We had stumbled across what used to be a college campus, left relatively pristine. It took up a lot of space, and had that eerie feeling of a ghost town; buildings left abandoned for decades. How most cities we stumbled upon felt. But here, there was a treasure: a relatively intact storage of food. The most food any of us had seen in months. We were excited at first, grabbing for the cans and containers, searching for the stuff that hadn’t spoilt. We all reconverged back to the little courtyard in front of the library, our arms full with the loot. It was a feast made of mismatched, expired, and stale things: crackers, cereal bars, cookies, chips, cans of beans, corn, salsa. A myriad of foods that we were glad to hold, to touch, to see. A moment of celebration amongst the general hunger and hurt.
of the days before, and the days that would come later. We started up a fire to warm us in the night air that got chilly as the sun went down. We all made a pile of our favorites, held them closely in our laps, almost scared to eat them. When we did, they would be gone. Hours later, we would be hungry again, the supplies would dwindle, we would have to leave, continue to search. But for that night, we were victorious. We sat together that night, knees and arms touching, a little too close to the fire that burned the edges of our skin. And we feasted.
I wake up wishing that dragonfly wings tasted like blueberries, but I have to tell you, they taste more like algae. And algae tastes like frog backs, and frog backs taste like dragonfly wings, but wet. If you insist on cooking them, they all taste like smoke. Here’s something: garlic chives look like regular chives—wild as toothbrush bristles—until the spring when POP they chuckle out tiny white flowers. You can eat the flowers too. I cut the chive stalks into segments between my fingernails and then sprinkle them over my bread like sweet ash. I take my bread into my mouth and walk outside. Light glints off the hard edge of Randall Library; it looks like a buttered gravestone. The world is molting: Last night’s clouds shed water until roofs shed shingles which will give birth to more shingles, to men on roofs talking to other men, men securing their ropes to chimneys, which will belch smoke come winter and then hold new logs deep in their bellies when the old ones crumble. These men on roofs will go home to their wives...
and make new men, and shingles will keep reeling from the mouths of machines in endless coarse black sheets, and somewhere the algae will thicken into a meadow, and a frog eating a dragonfly will die in the heart of it. Their bodies will bubble under the sun, sinking into the grass where roots slurp at innards in a marinara frenzy. And the chalk-happy blue of an afterstorm sky will press me up, up until my skull punches a hole in its teeming flatness and a shrapnel of blue gashes my gums and the words rise warm and crumbling from the belly of me: good morning, good morning.
TROUGH OF KNOWLEDGE
Mikaela Kesinger

WHEN YOU ENTER RANDALL LIBRARY, you are thousands of dust jackets from flooding the room with knowledge. And yet, look around and you will find glazed eyes glued to iridescent screens, shaded from the true feast that lay beneath muted covers just beyond machines. No longer are students lined aimlessly along bookcases, like antique bobble heads, nodding along slightly as eyes dart from shelf-to-shelf. Nor are we shoving our noses into the lignin permeated paper, breathing in the sweet smell of vanilla and almonds, as if our noses could capture the essence of the story without ever turning the page.

Instead, we all consume from the same source, and when the bigger pigs are hungry, the runts don’t eat. Without the protection of cloth binding, knowledge is consumed and regurgitated back into the trough, then fed to us as false-truths. Us runts are starved in a place abundant with feast, scared to venture into a new world only
paper-thin, and be reduced to a label—as if you, too, were just a book on the shelf.
Some of my coworkers throw Nerf darts at each other when they get bored, but not at me. I established that my first day. I’m not a child; I go to my job to work. NewGuy apparently hadn’t gotten the memo.

Someone introduces NewGuy to me, but I don’t pay much attention. He’s one of those typical nerds: white, unkempt hair, glasses, built like a stick bug. Most of my coworkers here, at Randall Library’s Technology Assistance Center, look like that. I settle into my chair and hope he’ll find someone else to bother if he makes a mistake.

If I was cooler, I’d have caught the Nerf dart he throws at me two hours later, like people in movies who snatch flies out of the air, pin the little fuckers between their forefinger and thumb. Instead, I don’t even notice the dart until it zings my cheekbone.

I won’t remember later exactly what I say when I tell him off, but he doesn’t speak to me for the rest of our shift.
After we clock out, he stays ahead of me the whole way down Chancellor's Walk. We enter the same dorm building; he must've swapped rooms recently. I expect us now to part ways, since the only boy's pod in our dorm is upstairs, but he heads toward the back.

"I'm starving," he complains.

Ah. Doesn't look like anyone has told him about the vending machine problem yet.

NewGuy slides quarters into the machine and presses the bright keys. My ears catch the low hum of the machine working and then a soft thud. He keeps his eyes on his phone as he fumbles around for his treat. I watch his hands absentmindedly peel back the plastic, the top of the Honey Bun deceptively perfect and iced—and there, there it is.

NewGuy drops the Honey Bun with a yelp. It lands belly-up, showing off the writhing black mass of ants clinging to the rings of dough on the underside.

I don't know how they wriggle in there and coat the inside of the packaging. It's been weeks since the ants invaded. They squirm over their sugary treat, already crumbing their way through the surface of the bun. A few venture out onto the floor but find nothing to feast on.

NewGuy swears and leaves.

I wonder how long it would take the ants to dissemble the whole thing. Would they eat it right there or carry it off in tiny puffs back to whichever hole they crawled from? They're meant to file back in a straight line, feed the other ants instead of gorging themselves now, but I imagine their little ant-bellies swelling, imagine them dying for their sweet tooth.

I don't get the chance to find out what they'll do. Another resident comes by, gets grossed out, and returns with a paper towel. I leave while she's in the middle of it. I'm a problem-solver when I'm at work; off the clock, I don't clean up other people's messes.
Fairley Lloyd

MY MOM’S GUIDE TO
ALTERNATIVE EATING

MY MOM IS A HEALTH NUT. Everything we eat must be one hundred percent Good for You. If she hears something that’s bad, it’s immediately thrown out and replaced with the Healthy Alternative.

At eight years old, I broke my arm on the school playground. Mom freaked out and rushed me to the urgent care. The doctor assured her that I wouldn’t die, but, somehow, Mom thought there had to be some magical food properties that could have prevented this. She was convinced that my arm broke so easily because I hadn’t had enough calcium that day. That, in addition to reading about dairy on the food pyramid, led her to stocking up on dairy in our house. I had to drink four glasses of milk a day. She made me eat yogurt at least once for breakfast. She put cheese in my sandwiches. She even bought ice cream, despite insisting that sugar was Bad For You, because it was dairy.

When I was twelve, Mom read a story on SELF Magazine about
dairy being Bad For You. Cow’s milk was meant to feed baby calves, she said. She also said that we were all lactose-intolerant and making ourselves sick by eating dairy products like milk and cheese and yogurt. After that, the dairy was gone. Our fridge was stocked with soy milk, vegan cheese, and every other alternative to dairy.

When I was sixteen, Mom decided that soy was Bad For Us as well. She heard about it from a friend’s best friend’s ex-husband who was a nutritionist. We drank almond milk instead of soy milk, until Mom read a study two weeks later about almond milk being Bad For You, too. We drank rice milk until she read another study and there was no milk in the house at all.

When I turned eighteen, gluten went out the window as well. I found out when I went to make a sandwich.

“Darla warned me about it,” Mom said.
“Mom,” I said, “Darla’s allergic to gluten.”
But Mom shook her head.
“No more gluten in the house,” she declared.

This cycle continued on and on, with every food I had in the house being replaced, until I no longer recognized what I was eating. I was so used to it by this point that when I got to college, I’d figure I’d better get used to whatever new Super Food Mom decided we must eat At All Times.

At twenty-one, during my senior year in college, I sat in the Port City Java in Randall Library, sipping on my coffee when Mom called me.

“What is it?” I asked.
“Did you see that Facebook post I tagged you in?” Mom asked me.
Apparently, potato is a starch!”
“I know,” I said.
“It converts to sugar in your body,” Mom said.
I sighed.
“So, no more potatoes?” I asked.
“No more potatoes,” Mom agreed. “But don’t worry! I found this great replacement on The Onion...”
in the short days of winter, when you aren’t getting laid as much, if at all, you may feel like spring will never come. When it does, all the chicks go into overdrive and there are more of you than they know what to do with. You are a representative—your constituency creates change—so there is no way you won’t be included. You constitute a staple base in one of life’s most important, and subsequently difficult, food classes: a principle understanding in the scientific aspects of cooking dictate change in the molecular make-up of food through heat, acid or cohesion. You represent the latter in many recipes—as a catalyst—causing cohesion for ingredients such as milk, flour and grains. For further reference, go to Randall Library and research.

Your involvement in the recipe for ice cream, for example, cannot be duplicated, nor should it be altered. Anyone who has ever tasted real ice cream as opposed to what is normally sold in shops and stores—knows the difference—and it is palatably unmeasurable. Respect for
one’s recipe derives from a respect for the one who wrote said recipe. A recipe’s destiny is, in fact, change. Contrary to popular belief, recipes are to be modified, changed and altered—as any theoretical concept would be to a pragmatist—questioning the amount or the inclusion of any ingredient is a fine cause. Beliefs on health or religion or culture—all apply.

You do not share these beliefs as our culture is human, and let’s face it: you are only an egg. You, or the chicken that passed you into this world, are not affected by religious bias or socio-restraints. Conversely, if it were you that brought the chick first, these things simply would not fit in the space given just for you within their hands and within their hearts. While you acknowledge that you collectively increase cholesterol, one should be reminded that you also have natural protein and biotin within your arsenal: both healthy elements that balance one’s metabolism. Despite these facts, true vegans abhor you, and for reasons more linked to a moral high ground than by the taste of you or by the vein-wrapped, velvet texture presented within the shell of a balut in Manila, or by the way someone’s fingers smell after eating such an intricate and fragile aphrodisiac.

For example, a crêpe made with flour alone is probably edible, but, that flour will only sit in their stomachs, indigestible for hours. Instead, we opt to whip you mercilessly—while simultaneously emulsifying within you—granting permission for the flour to separate and expand, its molecular structure allowed to change, due only to your introduction. The crêpe is wonderful—a delicacy of simple and yet excessive, moist wonders—all trying to live up to your alleged involvement in the fight for nourishment versus hunger. In a world strife with famine, you need only wait to get laid—and harvest this otherwise ubiquitous energy within your shell.
THE GREEN WIND
Ricki Nelson

THE AIR WAS THICK, green. Moving through it was like swimming in molasses with your arms tied to your sides. Impossible. Without a face mask the breath in your lungs would be stolen and your lungs crumpled like a used juice box. No goggles and your eyes would swell to the size of pomegranates.

“We lost another one today,” Chip said. Monica stormed through the library doors, unwrapping her bundles of scarves and snatching off her goggles.

“Did they go outside?” she asked.

“Yes.”

“Then whose fault is that?”

He nodded. “People are hungry.” “I’m working on that,” she said, climbing the stairs Chip hot on her heels. The door of the old Archive office closed behind them. “They’re getting restless, Monica.”

MONTGOMERY LILLA
Most students, the ones that survived the attack, wandered campus in old teal, Seahawk paraphernalia looted from the bookstore. Teal scarves, hoodies, sweatshirts, raincoats, socks, and onesies adorned with Seahawk logo.

Wednesday, January 13, 2067. That’s the day everything changed. The last day Wilmington was known as the Port City. That night an abundance of tubes were placed throughout the city. Market, Castle, Racine, South College, all lined with tubes. No one knew where they came from.

There was a halt in the normal morning hustle bustle. The nine-to-fivers were first to encounter the gas. Clouds of green smoke dried out their throats as they walked to their cars, many not making it to the door.

Soon a state of emergency was declared. Chaos ensued. It was anarchy. The Green Wind. That’s what they called it, polluted the water and killed the soil. Importers refused to bring goods to the city out of fear of death and infection. Students and locals were labeled infectants and forced to remain in the city and fend for themselves as stated by the US Government.

For the first few weeks, people tried to find normalcy in their new mummified states. But then, bodies began to drop and people grew hungry.

The rich infectants hoarded whatever supplies and imports they could buy, and walled themselves out from the rest of the city. They made a utopia in the leftover hell of commoners, and filled shipping crates with canned goods and clean water.

On campus, most students stayed inside with their ramen stockpiles and hoped for the best. Except one…Monica.

After the outbreak, she went out in search of those in need. She converted Randall into a sanctuary, and the second floor she made into a hospital. Monica welcomed the unhomed and lost. A savior they called her. A thief others might say.

“They’re hungry, and I’m going to feed them,” she said.

Monica had a plan, she just needed time. She peeked through the door. People writhed in pain between the walls of books.

“I have a plan. I’ll just need an army.”
WE FIND OUR HEROES—*heroes* being a loose term—Ryleigh and Olivia seated on blue couches outside Randall Library’s first floor bathroom, but mentally, they’re somewhere above the stratosphere having recently smoked a joint while going halves on a toilet seat.

“Dude, I’m fried,” says Ryleigh.

“Won’t be needing that back up joint,” says Olivia.

Their conversation, if that’s what we’ll call it, is interrupted by the horn screeches of Michael Jackson’s *Thriller* coming from humongous speakers in the entryway. Cheers bounce throughout the library as Hannah and her flashmob cronies demand spotlight. Our heroes cup hands over ears as their eyes spin in a maze of red tributaries.

“Whoa.”

“Warning would’ve been nice.”

Hannah dons the electric red leather jacket, matching pants, muted black shoes. Her posse, zombified: drab clothing, faces made-up
with a frightening sense of protrusion and sunken craters. Their limbs
swaying like tire swings, facial expressions foaming as the synthesizer
ddictates dance. Hannah’s crew sends the library staff into panic. Li-
rary noise level overload. Random students hop in to dance the cho-
rus with spines moving like pistons and shuffling in sync. As for our
heroes, they hold their breath in hopes of blending into the couch.
“I know she’s not pointing at us,” says Olivia.
Truth, Hannah is pointing at them.
“No, dude. Behind.”
Also truth, there’s someone behind them. A sickly-looking woman
with a nametag labeled “Aly” stumps by our heroes, completely off
tempo, sneezing bubbly gunk as she passes by.
“Say it, don’t spray it,” says Ryleigh.
It’s a lie to call it dancing, but Aly lumbers towards Hannah and
promptly bites her shoulder. Hannah roars like a foghorn until her
demeanor becomes decayed and hungry.
“Oh. Interpretative dance.” Our heroes say together.
“They ARE good.”
“She really sells it.”
“The special effects.”
Witnessing Hannah’s transformation, students scramble for exits
only to find more zombies with name tags: Derrick, Katherine, Greg.
Blood spurts like fire hydrants. It gets to the point where one won-
der s if teal is still a school color. Clearly crimson has its appeal. The
more necks gnawed, the more fingers munched, the more the music
morphs into yelling.
“Not sure I remember this part.”
“Same.”
That’s when it hit them. The giveaway being a zombie horde cir-
cling them like hyenas, but our heroes figured it out, as they tend to
do, stoned or not.
Feet up on the couch, backs pressed together, Ryleigh and Olivia
say their final words.
“I wish the zombie apocalypse came with less irony.”
“I wish I had Taco Bell.”
The rotting mass snarls in unison, sniffling their noses, some even
cough.
“Hold on.” Olivia gets up, walks over to Michael Jackson Zombie,
TUESDAYS AT RANDALL
Hayley Swinson

RANDALL LIBRARY WAS THE LAST PLACE  I’d expected to be. It was 9 a.m. on a Tuesday, and the semester was in full swing: puny undergrads marching like ants to the coffee shop, looking for all the world like they’d crawled from the depths of my junk drawer across slick counters to the cake crumbs I left on my unwashed plate—yes I had cake for breakfast, don’t judge me! There was a birthday—no, not mine—and drinks—definitely not mine—and the cake and the ants and now Randall Library. Really, it’s forever since I was twenty-one and the students called me friend, not teacher, and I spent Monday nights making the kinds of mistakes you regret later in life—regret not making, I mean—backseats of cars and parties you can barely remember—or did I read that in a book somewhere, slide it off a shelf in the library? What I’m saying is—what I’m trying to say—look, don’t eye me that way, I just want to check out this book on love and I’ve been waiting forever. Never mind the ants on the counter.
marching towards my crumby plate—feast or famine they’re always there, coming out of a hole in the wall somewhere—that drawer maybe, or my bedroom. But if you want to get rid of ants you’ve really only got two options: squish ’em or spray ’em. Or, I guess, just pretend they’re not there.
DURING THE DAY, I STUFF MYSELF with sound. My breakfast is the ring of my alarm, the sharp hissing of my broken shower head, the soft creaking of doors opening and closing though the small apartment building. I can’t eat too much in the morning, my stomach is sensitive after waking up.

By the time I get to school, nibbling on the rumble of passing cars and the stuttering pulse from my brake pedal, I often find myself starving. I’ll often take bites from passing conversation so I can distract myself enough from my hunger to put on a pair of headphones, walking into Randall Library while chewing on death metal and dance music, the silence between songs filled with thumping against keyboards and blenders running in the Port City Java.

I’m a menace during quiet time. Classes are a challenge. The worst is the rhetorical question: the ones that are followed by seconds of absolute silence as they stare the class down, waiting patiently for
an answer. I can only handle three seconds before I blurt something out, hoping that it’s correct so the professor can continue with their droning, and I can relax again.

There’s no peace to be found in silence, or even the soft hum of white noise. I’ll never understand how someone can relax, bathing in the evidence of the apathy of sound, because that’s all it is. Proof that if you don’t make an active effort, you will be surrounded by nothing, and will let yourself be lulled into it.

I say that, but for all the noise I can cram myself with during the day, I can’t handle it when I’m trying to sleep. The walls of my room are thin: I can hear the slam of a car door in the parking lot, my roommates whispering to each other in the living room, and the bathroom fan left running on the other side of my wall. It’s enough to make me want to gag.

Tonight, I’m being woken up over and over again by the neighbor’s baby. Maybe it’s upset from the cold weather, or maybe it’s sick, or maybe it just has a lot to process. Either way I lay under layers of blankets, my heart pounding as its cries shutter through the air vents, demanding to be heard.

I hear it, and then I’ll hear it again, and in the time between its cries I have two options: let myself exist in half-sleep, being aware of the nothing between each cry, frustrated to tears because I only want to sleep. Or I give up and grab my headphones, and tomorrow night I’ll be so scared of counting the seconds between screams like they’re claps of thunder that I might not sleep then either, and maybe I never will again.