

Home

About Us

## East Fork: A Journal of the Arts

Issue 23-

Previous Issues

Join Our Team

## Taxi

walked along, nonchalantly, seeming to have gained a tolerance to the odorous atmosphere. And the sounds, which were abundant, forcefully rang throughout the air, exploding in his ears, in his mind. He heard the frantic beeping noises of traffic, the occasional scream of some drunk or wild man, and often casual conversations of passersby. Many discussed business, others considered visiting particular tourist attractions, while some planned out various crimes they would find buildings shine like radiant deities. He watched as the city around him grew to life in the darkness. The glow of the city expanded and brightened. The lights were like some liquid poison, spreading across the

He saw someone in the darkness. The driver wiped his eyes. Sniffed. Breathed. Established a sense of sobriety for himself so he could drive. The lights, the sounds, the smells, all simultaneously filled the taxi with greater force, further stimulating even more feelings of repugnance within him. A man, quite old and weathered by years of earthly suffering, had opened the door and bent his body somewhat awkwardly in an attempt to position himself correctly on the seat, in which he rested upon with an audible and lengthy sigh of relief. The driver relaxed, a little relieved himself that he hadn't picked up some young drunk moron who forgot his wallet. The old man exhaled again,

extremely grateful for a chance to rest. "The Faerwald Luxury Apartment building please," a croaky voice reverberated throughout the inside of the vehicle. The driver, being familiar with this location, immediately shifted the car and began to head in the requested direction, just as stars began to penetrate the dark surface of the sky. "Seems to get more and more crowded out there everyday, doesn't it?" the driver said jokingly, trying to spark conversation with the aged man.

"Oh yeah," the husky voice reappeared, "it seems the crowds are getting more violent too. I almost had to deck a few guys." He laughed raucously. "But lucky for them, those punks haven't tried me. Probably because they're too afraid of me." The driver chuckled along with the friendly comic, establishing a general liking to the man already. "Yeah, you do seem pretty intimidating," the driver remarked, in an attempt to match the humorous aura the man conveyed, who released another hoarse laugh. "You remind me of my son," the old man breathed, "what's your name?" "John. You?" "Lucas."

The driver accelerated the taxi rather ardently when the light turned green in slight agitation of the stupidity of dangerous drivers. He looked in the mirror to notice Lucas viewing the city lights through the window, seeming to have not noticed or just simply ignored John's sudden fit of feverish anger. "So do you live here or are you just a tourist, Lucas?"

"It was one of those smaller, quieter towns, you know like the ones with farms and such." John looked to the rearview mirror again, noticing a discernible change in the old man's "We were both born and raised there, lived there for most of our lives." "Why'd you move?" Lucas paused for a moment. "Someone close passed away, and it just...it devastated us."

"We moved here to get our minds off of it, you know. To just forget everything. To just pitch.

these things have to happen. Why they have to hurt so much." "I don't know." "Sometimes...I just don't know what to do." "I know how you feel." The cab filled with a dismal glow as the moon rose higher into the sky. John felt increasingly sympathetic for the elderly man as his whimpers subsided to a series of lengthy exhalations. "These things, Lucas," John spoke, "these things we go through...they hurt, I know. But that's life, you know. Life is painful. It's hard. I don't know why, either, but that's just the way it

"I don't know. Listen John, I'm sorry for getting all weepy in your cab," Lucas said apologetically after a moment. "Oh no it's fine. Don't worry about it." "I just...I don't know. I don't really talk about this often." "Yeah, I understand. You know, you're a very thoughtful man, Lucas," the driver tried to change the subject, "you seem like a songwriter or something."

cab, and let his shoes touch the pavement.

"Really? What do you write?" "I've written a few poems, short stories, things like that." "How long have you been a writer?"

"I wanted to be a superhero actually, you know," he looked at Lucas in the mirror with a smile, "so I could fly around and save people in trouble." The old man chuckled. "Sounds fun." Lucas looked at John in the mirror, his smile fading to a solemn complexion. "But seriously, what have you always dreamed of becoming?" "Honestly, I didn't know what I wanted to be. I didn't have a big passion for anything." "Yes vou did." "No I really didn't, I still don't." "Yes you do." John smiled at the man's seemingly comedic assertions and crinkled his eyebrows in

confusion as he arrived at the desired destination. "Really? What are they then?" he inquired sarcastically as Lucas noticed the familiar surroundings, paid his driver, opened the door of the

"You've already reached them," the old man said as he completely exited the cab and

John pulled away from the apartment building as the moon began to shine through his the celestial body in the night sky. The light flooded everything. His eyes. His mind. It was The moon, completely full and radiant, rose into the sky, drifting across the stars and the darkness. John smiled, accepting what surfaced, accepting the passage of the things that surfaced. It was beautiful. The stoplight turned green as rain began to pour. He accelerated through the intersection.

He looked at the moon again. It continued to rise, the stars illuminating existence behind it, the rain washing life ahead of it. So beautiful. He saw a couple standing in the rain. They stood under a light on the side of the road. He He stopped the taxi next to the strangers, prompting them to rush into the vehicle. A hurriedly shut the door behind them. Water dripped from their hair and clothes, soaking the seats. "Wow," he heard the man say vehemently, as he wiped the water from his face. "It's 'Yeah, looks like it," the driver replied, looking out his window. "I hate freak The couple chuckled a little as they let a few more exhales. "112 Barde Avenue, please,"

street. He could hear the drops of water continuously pound on the top of the car, as if to illustrate their desire for entry. John imagined the water raining down with such force so as to penetrate the taxi, so that it could fill up the cab and wash away all the things that tore at him. He felt a familiar pressure. Another feeling of loss. He breathed deeply. With a sudden rush of embarrassment, John looked in the mirror, thinking his exhalation was way too audible. The couple didn't seem to notice. Instead, they sat holding each other, as if they were formed a bond greater than themselves. Streetlights illuminated the pair. Brightened them. As if happened as the car passed under the numerous lights. Spheres of life that lit the road ahead of Another feeling surfaced in him. Joy. Yes, that's it. Joy. No. Glee. Yes, that's what it

He hoped they didn't notice. He wished they ignored everything, or that they were just temporarily unable to utilize their senses to distinguish what had transpired. He looked in the mirror once more. They didn't move. The woman watched the cars and the people as they passed by in the rain. The man held her. As if to keep her from floating away. Or to keep her from becoming a part of the lights and rain. He drove along through the harsh weather, watching the rain bounce off of the hood of the taxi, giving the entire vehicle an almost supernatural and even ethereal glow. The road became a glossy night sky. A mirror. A piece of art painted by some metaphysical being. Why did it pain him? What is the purpose? Of pain? Of suffering? Is there a purpose? Why is it painful? Why is it so difficult? John screamed in his mind. Flashes. Of anger. Of light. Another tear fell. Another one. Another. He didn't know what to do.

"Could you drop us off here?" "What do you mean?" "We want to walk the rest of the way." John looked in the mirror at the couple confusedly. "We're only a couple blocks away, "Yeah but the storm looks like it let up a little." "Yeah. Plus it'd be fun to enjoy the last bit of the rain anyway." "Okay." John pulled the car to the side of the road next to a fountain.

"Thanks," the woman responded as they paid and then entered the abating storm.

No. No. No. No. No. No. He struck the steering wheel. With both of his palms, he struck the steering wheel. Over and over again. He velled. He pleaded. Struck the steering wheel again. He punched the dashboard. Again. He rubbed his eyes with his palms. He screamed again. Struck the door beside him with his elbow. It hurt. His knuckles bled. He let his head fall on the steering wheel. Let the hard plastic and leather leave a mark on his forehead. He swore. Again. Tears fell from his face once more. He shouted. Struck the dashboard again. The wheel. The dashboard. The door. Wheel. Door. Dashboard. Dashboard. He held his face in his hands. He could feel the wetness. It seeped through his hands. It struck his legs. His skin was hot. Burning. Scorching. Charring. He adjusted the mirror. Watched himself as he continued to breathe violently and hastily. His face was red. Tears streamed down relentlessly.

Suddenly a door was flung open ahead of him. Light spilled out of a building ahead, lighting up the street. The door was opened so harshly that it hit the wall of the building. A young woman ran out into the darkness. Stumbling about slightly. A man, seeming to hold part of his face as if from an injury, began to pursue her. He stopped for a moment to balance himself on the wall, acknowledging the

The girl noticed John and began to run toward the taxi. He sat quietly in the driver's seat as tears still rolled down his face. He watched

as the girl came closer to the passenger door of the car. She had red marks all across her face. Dark bruises decorated her arm. A small black purse dangled on her forearm. John noticed these things as she reached for the handle. She sat down in the passenger seat of the

The rain continued to fall. However, as each drop struck the pavement, the storm softened. The darkness that had completely obscured the stars began to dissipate, revealing a decorative network of lights that had been placed meticulously across the expanse. Lights that

John pulled his taxi over on a dark road. No people were there. No cars passed. The road was lit by a single streetlight. He waited on the

surrounding all that is living. There existed a fire that never burned out. Multiple fires. No. Infinite fires. A never-ending amount of fires

car. The man, having noticed the taxi as well, began to run toward the door the girl slammed shut. John felt as his heart began to race. He wiped the tears off of his face. He could see the man now, who was quite rough-looking and was bleeding from a large, ugly gash in his cheek. Having left the taxi running, John accelerated the vehicle onto the street and sped away from the man who continued to pursue them. The girl watched as she sped away from the man. Breathing heavily, she watched the lighted room she had just ran out of as the taxi passed it. John turned the cab to the right to get back to a lighted street, ensuring the prevention of the seemingly violent incident. A scent began bleeding into the air. A nice perfume smell permeated the cab. He looked over a moment at the girl. She seemed to be in her early twenties. Her dark hair was messy and frazzled. She wore black shorts and her shirt was torn on the side. Her eyes were dark, not only from the crudely applied mascara, but seemingly from lack of sleep or from some injury as well. He could see

"Do you need to go to the hospital?" "No." "Are you hurt?" "I'll be okay." "Can I ask what's wrong? Or what happened?" "I don't ... I don't know." John turned the taxi again, allowing a bridge to appear ahead. "Could...could you stop up here?" The girl gasped a little, seeming to choke up on her tears. The hand she used to point with was shaking. "But this is the bridge."

She evaded his grasp. She reached in her pocket and threw a couple hundred dollar bills on the seat where her purse sat. "Wait." She stepped out of the car. "Wait." She slammed the door. "Wait." John watched the girl as she walked around the front of the taxi. The headlights lighting her. He felt it. His heart beat. He felt as it

raced faster and faster. His eyes flitted around. His hands began shaking. He breathed heavily.

"Please." He didn't know who he was saying it to. "Please. Don't let her."

John felt his heart as it began to slow and return to its normal pace. He exhaled once.

"No. I don't know. No. I'm not." Her voice was faint and increasingly choppy with every tear.

He felt death. He felt life. He stepped toward the girl. He felt the end. He felt the beginning. He began to run to her. He was burning. He was freezing. He got closer to her. He felt everything. He felt nothing.

"What are you doing?" The familiar sting in his eyes. "Please." He tried to grab at her arm as she opened the door.

He cried. He held her. "Please." She cried. She cried more.

"Lucas!" John exclaimed excitedly.

"No actually. The airport, please."

"It's going pretty good, John. How are you?"

"She, uh...she passed away a few years ago."

Lucas looked into John's eyes in the mirror. "Which is?"

humanity consistently overlooks. The only thing we should really hold onto...is each other."

"Yeah. How's it going?"

"Back to my old town."

"And your wife?"

we?"

"What?"

the important part."

"Huh?" The old man was suddenly startled. "John? Is that you?"

He pulled her down from the edge of the bridge.

passed him continued to strive for their destinations. Each person having his or her own story. Every one of them. The city lit up. A breathtaking conglomeration of lights bled into the sky. As one entity, the lights rose to such a point in the sky so as to join the infinitely brilliant fires that burned forever in an expanse not of nothingness, but of darkness. Not an oppressive or a terrifying darkness. But an eternal darkness that exists despite the creation of anything else. A darkness that exists as a union of everything in existence. A darkness that is shaped by the lights and the arrangement of lights. A darkness that exists as either something so transcendentally beautiful or something so severely destructive. But still one that is shaped by the lights and their arrangement.

"I'm feeling good. Real good. Same place as yesterday?" John asked him as he began to drive back onto the road.

With a sudden shock of confusion, John's eyes flicked to the reflection of the weathered man. "I thought—"

The driver noticed Lucas holding a single bag of luggage. "The airport? Where are you flying to?"

"My son died. Our son has been dead, for many years. Then we moved here. A couple years after that, my wife passed. I couldn't handle it. I couldn't handle it, so I refused to accept it. I couldn't accept it." "I'm sorry to hear that, Lucas." "I loved them. And I'm pretty sure they loved me. But I guess it's time for me to accept the fact that they're gone. I need to 'move on'. It's something they would've wanted, huh?" The old man had taken on a cynical tone. "Lucas, I know it's difficult," John responded with a sympathetic air, "but it's all a part of the life we live." "I still don't understand." "I don't think most do." Lucas let out that familiar sigh. "What are we searching for, John?" The driver of the taxi paused. The cab stopped at a red light. He turned around for a moment to look into Lucas's eyes. A frosty blue

The smell of the street bothered him. It always had. The crowds of people produced a

smell almost putrid to him. They reeked of outdated foods, unwashed bodies, alcohol. They all

pleasure in committing. There were so many people, each walking or driving or striving for some destination, for some reason. Lights bounced and danced on their heads, as the sky grew dark. Large screens that featured advertisements began lighting the air around themselves, making the once-blank expanse of the night. He rubbed his eyes in agitation. He hated it. All of it. The fact that something as repulsive as the city, as revolting as the drunks and the hobos, as noxious as the large screens—the fact that they could all attain the transformation they had—it bothered him. It confused him, too. Infused in him a sense of bewilderment. In so many bizarre ways, the lights affected him. They filled him with feelings of some sort of hope, some kind of strange uplifting atmosphere, as if he wished for something. Something he couldn't exactly identify. Something he wasn't even sure if he was conscious of. He breathed. A sudden rush of thoughts flashed in his mind. He hated them. Yet he loved them. He wished they would disappear. But he wished they would stay. They scared him,

relieved him. Tears welled up in his eyes just for moment, burning him, freeing him...

"It's nice to meet you, Lucas." John waited patiently for a red light to turn, as a car in the traffic perpendicular to him sped wildly through the road. "Likewise."

"My wife and I moved here—uh let's see—about seven years ago," the man said, visibly surprised by the remembrance of the amount of time he has resided in the city. "Where did you live before moving here?" countenance. "Yeah, I know what you mean."

allow the lights to blind us, rather than help us see." Lucas's voice fell into a deep, monotone John looked at him through the mirror again, a little surprised at the poetic accuracy of his statement. "I'm sorry for your loss." John noticed a small flash of light fall from Lucas's The old man took another breath, exhaling shakily. "I just wish we could've helped him." "I...I don't understand, John. In all of my years and experiences and tragedies and blessings, why can't I understand? That's all I want. I just want to be able to know why. Why

is. I mean, does anyone really know why? You know what I'm saying? Does any person really know why life is like this? I mean-" "I hate this," Lucas interrupted. "What?" "I hate this. I hate it." "You hate what? Cabs?" Lucas sniffed. "No. Of course not. I hate pain." "Who doesn't?" Lucas let out a long exhale.

The old man wiped his face with a trembling hand, adjusted his white hair. "I'm a writer, actually," Lucas responded after a few seconds, realizing the driver's intentions. He inhaled. Exhaled slowly. "For quite some time. Years and years. I don't write as much as I used to though. Gettin' too old." Lucas smiled, wiping his eyes once more. "What about you, John? What did you aspire

stood with a great deal of effort, "you're a taxi driver." John noticed the old man gave him almost double the amount on the meter. He smiled. He missed Lucas already. He cried. He wasn't entirely sure why. windshield, brightening the inside of the taxi. The driver pulled up to a stoplight. He looked up at

could see them waving frantically to get out of the weather. young man and woman crawled in, allowing a gust of brisk air to fill the cab. They sat and They exhaled gratefully as they acknowledged the new-found refuge. really pouring out there." the woman spoke as she began to relax in the warmth of her friend. John accelerated the vehicle again, directing it to the requested destination. The rain began to fall even harder as the taxi moved along. On the sidewalks umbrellas

danced around under the moonlight as people began rushing to find dry areas. Some of them continued in their caper alone while others traveled in groups of two or three. Rain drops filled up the windshield as John activated the wipers. He watched carefully as the water began to streak

down the glass, blurring everything outside of the taxi, just to be abruptly swept off onto the

protecting each other from something. They kissed. They loved each other. They, together, something intentionally emphasized them so as to torture John. Darkness fell on them. Then light. They dimmed. Then they irradiated. Concealed. Then embellished. These things all John. Spheres that stretched almost infinitely ahead. was. He was cheerful. He could feel it. He was happy. Tears rolled down his face. A creeping feeling grasped him. Clawed at him. But he was happy. He felt it. He felt as everything outside of his eye blurred. He felt as it tickled him. Tore a path for itself in his face. The stream continued to roll down, wetting what was dry. What was once dry. What will be dry again. The stream stopped at his jaw. Flowed into a ball. Became too heavy to maintain its adhesive properties. Fell. He could feel it strike his lap. It was warm. Hot. It burned through him. Through his leg. Through the taxi. Through the ground. It horrified him. But he was happy. Happy...happy...

He inhaled. Exhaled. He watched the road. Inhaled. Exhaled. Watched. Breathed. In. Out. Everything outside—the water, the painting, the paint itself—moved. The tears and the rain and the lights had created a place where all things in existence came together to form something unimaginably surreal. Everything, the essence of everything, fused into a state of infinity. An immeasurable transcendence. "Sir?" A deep voice rang out in the air, shattering the abstract fixation. "Yes?" John replied in an unbelievably clear voice.

John watched for a moment as the couple got out of the taxi. They walked for a moment in the rain, getting soaked once more. They began treading in the puddles that had formed, causing the small pools to explode into an array of water droplets that seemed to surround the couple, as if to join the humans in celebration. The day faded into complete darkness as they laughed and twirled in the harsh rain. Being only lighted by the streetlights, the couple continued to frolic in the direction of their destination. John pulled the cab away from the fountain, with newly surfaced feelings he didn't fully understand. The couple found even more joy in

the rain. The storm. Something that destroys. Yet provides life. Something that depresses, yet uplifts.

side of the street. Staring at the streetlight a few feet in front of the taxi. He breathed. Inhaled. Ex-

that are never extinguished.

Why?

pain he was evidently in.

"Are you okay?" he asked the girl softly.

Something horrible.

He felt afraid. He felt courage.

He opened the door.

He reached out to her. No. No. No. Please. No. He grabbed her hand.

Please. No.

She cried.

Why? What? How? He cried. Each tear continued along the paved and worn path. All the way to the end where it is liberated. No. Abandoned. Left to be evaporated into nothingness.

constantly burned, continuously scorching the night sky. Lights that branded the expanse, to keep it from growing to dark, from

tears running down her face. She wiped them. Again and again. Everytime she wiped them another tear filled the place of the previous one. Her face dropped into her hands. She began to cry uncontrollably. He felt pain again. That pang of sorrow. That desire. He continued to drive. Unsure what to do exactly. The lights of the city filled the cab once more. The rain, now completely gone, had left the painting to dry on the street. The lights continually bouncing off of it.

"I know. Could you stop here? Right here. Right here." John looked at her face as he pulled the taxi to the side of the bridge. Tears streamed down her face. A river seemed to flow from her Her eyes. They were wide. She stopped wiping them. Black eyeliner had been smeared down her face. There was a familiarity about her complexion. "What are you doing?" John questioned the girl, feeling his heart race again. He could feel something. Sense something.

He felt pain. He felt comfort. He stepped onto the wet pavement. He felt weakness. He felt strength. He got out of the taxi.

He cried. "Please. Don't." He cried. He sat against the wall of the side of the bridge, holding her. He cried. "Please." Everything that he had hated and loved. The city. The rain. The moon. The lights. The people. Everything that had pained him. Everything that he was afraid of. Everything he wished for. Everything he questioned. It was there. It was all clear to him. The purpose. The point. The fear. The pain. The suffering. She cried. He cried. He loved the tears. They elevated him. They were a release. They didn't burn him. They never did. They warmed him. The abstract quality of the tears and the night became clear to him. Everything mattered. The tears. The anguish. The rain. The taxi. The night and the day. The pain and the suffering. The past and the future. Her. Himself. He picked himself up. He held onto her. He picked her up. He started walking. Each step strengthening him. Helping her. Every step empowered both of them. They stepped off of the sidewalk. Onto the wet street. They stepped in front of the headlights of the taxi. Both of them lit up like radiant deities. Everything physical seemed to fade away. It all disintegrated into nothingness. Everything metaphysical appeared more illuminated than ever. A world where the pained are carried to rest and purpose. A world where everything existed together with one purpose. A world of light. Not a heaven. Not a hell. An earth. They transcended to this reality. They walked around the taxi. He opened the door. Allowed her to sit. He walked back around and sat in the driver's seat. He let the tears stay. Drying already on "Now," John felt his voice suffuse with ardor, potence, life, existence, even time itself as he looked at the girl, "where to?"

Epilogue

John drove his taxi into the city. The lights still so beautiful. The moon just beginning to rise over the horizon again. The people that

He saw someone in the darkness. He breathed. He pulled the taxi over to the side of the road. The door opened. A familiar grunt sounded as a man attempted to position himself correctly on the seat. An elderly man appeared in the mirror that John was watching

Everything was there. Existing in their hands. Everything. Everything that mattered. Everything that made sense. Everything that didn't.

color with a reflective red glow. "What do you mean?" "You know, like what purpose are we expecting to find? We're always trying to discover some kind of point. I mean, biologically, I guess we are wired to learn and adapt and progress until we reach some kind of cognitive or technological nirvana. But, on a deeper level, I feel like we were meant for something more. John, what is it we're truly trying to achieve? In the expanse of reality, in the tribulation of life, in the unshakable apprehension of death, in the inconspicuous beauty of existence, in the infinity of Truth...what is it that we're looking

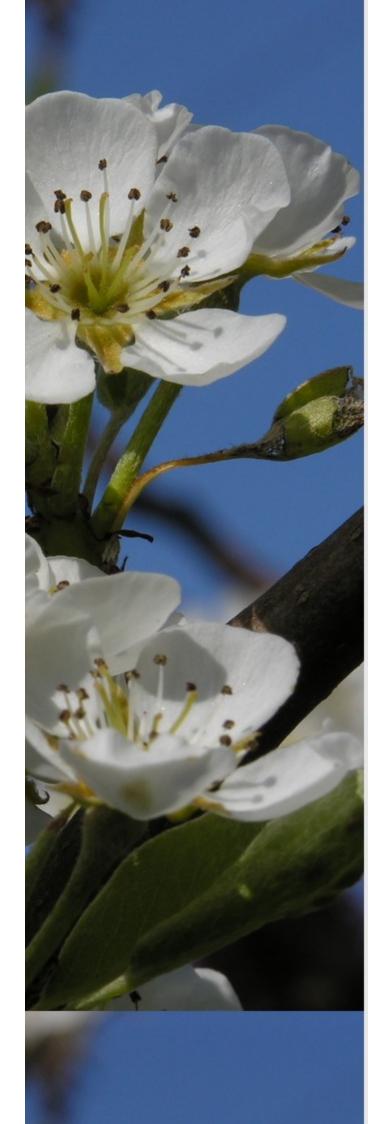
John hesitated for a moment. Allowing the old man's words to register in his mind. The point. Of living. Of being alive. Of existing. John turned back around, watching another taxi in front of his as the light turned green. He continued along the road. He watched as the cab turned down another street, to reach a separate destination for a separate passenger. "We're all just passengers in a taxi, aren't

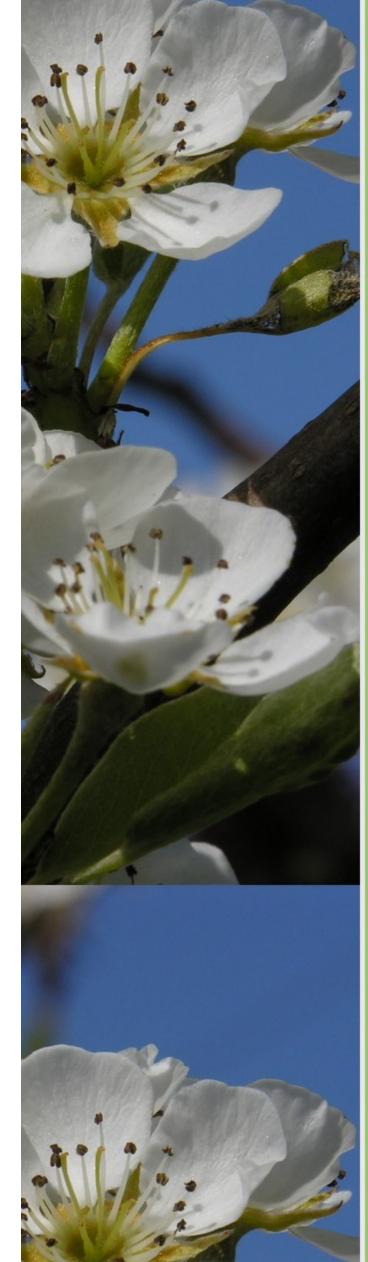
"We all only care about the destination. The end of it all. We all believe we are creators of our own destinies, but we are simply bystanders of the journey fate takes us on. We all care about the insignificant things. About being drivers or passengers. We always miss

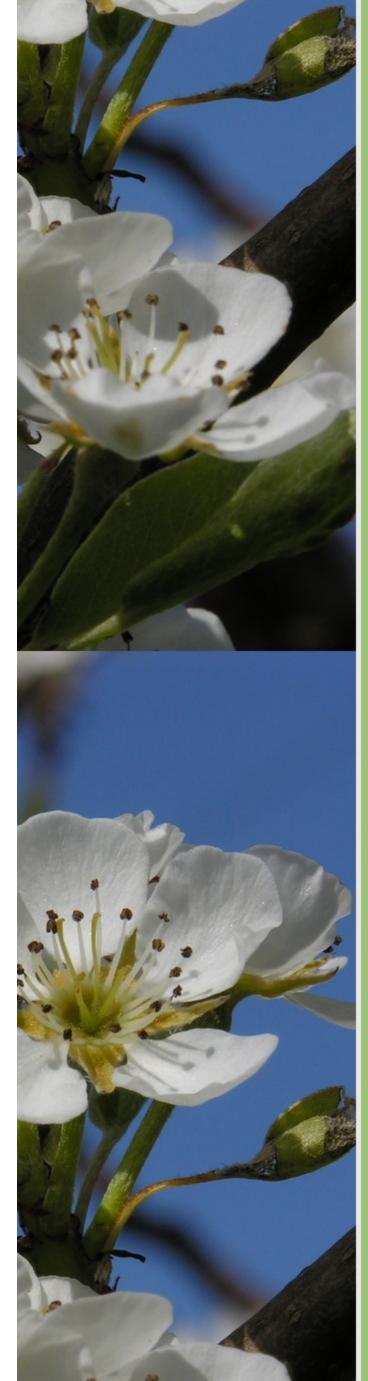
"The only thing we have ever truly found," the driver replied, "the only purpose we can really create for ourselves, and the very thing

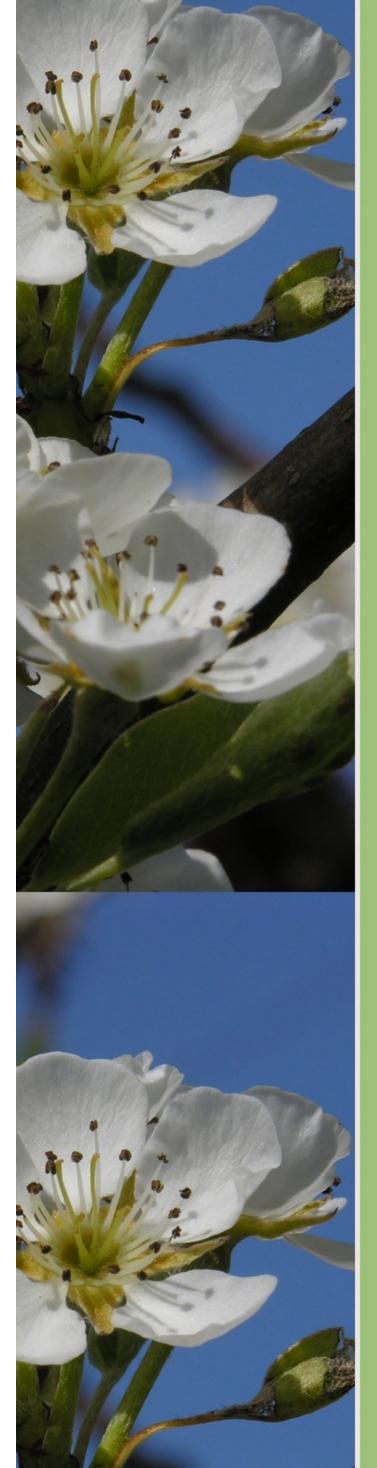














yright Eastfork Online Literary Journal, All Rights Re



