Artist Statement

I begin by imagining the protagonist’s hands. I know my method might sound a bit odd, but I’ve always been fascinated by hands because they’re very telling of a person’s more visceral story to those who choose to pay close enough attention. Hands let me discover what it is the character may do for work, where they’ve traveled or live, their age, possible interests, how they might smell and sound. After cultivating these threads of viable character traits I then consider if a close or wide psychic distance would best serve to strengthen the overall character development of the protagonist and secondary characters as they are presented to the reader. Once I feel as though I have a good idea of who the story’s key characters are and where their motivations lie, I follow their hands to then build the world around them. By focusing on each character’s hands I’m able to identify how each character interacts with one another and how they physically engage with their surroundings.

My intention of bringing the perspectives and voices of the seldom read to the forefront of applicable literary thought and conversations is to urge readers and the exclusive publishing world to make the sincere effort to seek out and promote narratives experimenting and pushing against perpetually normalized literary conventions. As an observer I notice the frequency of people who tend to avoid or shy away from conversations or instances requiring them to step outside of their zone of comfort in order to experience life through the eyes, skin, and bones of someone else. Keeping this in mind, I don’t provide much, if any exposition before revealing the occasion for story to the reader. I prefer to introduce my stories with characters engaged in short passages of dialogue or at the onset of a rising action in order to imitate a relatable concept of time that will exist with each reader well beyond the page. Once I’ve done the work of providing the reader(s) with glimpses of the story’s underlying tensions, I then make space for each protagonist to bring the reader(s) inward. I often use internal dialogue right away as a way to establish credibility between the narrator and the reader(s). This then allows me to slow the pacing down enough for the narrator to describe the setting, and how characters are then interacting both with and within the world I’m creating.

After countless writing workshops and constructive feedback from my peers, I’m aware that my writing doesn’t always elicit the sense of trust in the reader from the author. As noted in early drafts of *It’s Time* and *The Storm*, I sometimes saturate narratives with redundant details and descriptions instead of letting the reader formulate their own views and motivations about varying characters and the world present on the page. Reflecting on past drafts and the final versions present in this portfolio, I now understand this process to be my method of figuring out each character’s misfit details and how they will function on the page and work within the fictitious realm. Just as I’ve learned to distinguish and cut out the abundance of unnecessary adjectives in early drafts, I am now working to improve on recognizing and letting go of the hindering descriptions that only distract the reader(s) from the story.

During a productive workshop of *It’s Time*, I’d received feedback about reader’s confusion regarding Eric’s relationship to Nilo and whether they were friends, roommates, or lovers. At the time I’d decided they were roommates and chose to show Eric as the more physically masculine of the two characters. Though I was still uncertain of their relationship myself, I did know that my aim was to juxtapose Nilo’s own struggles with his internalized mental and cultural masculinity. Following my readings of Shaila Abdullah’s novel *Saffron Dreams* and essays by James Baldwin, I discerned that the scenes where Eric attempts to convince Nilo to call Yussef back and connect with his sisters after moving them to the United States from their home in Morocco manifested as intimate synergy. I changed my mind and chose to engage Nilo and Eric as lovers instead of heteronormative roommates because I was better able to justify Eric’s motives for repeatedly answering the phone and taking messages for Nilo though he is annoyed. When I began editing their dialogue to sound as though they’ve been in a committed relationship for a substantial amount of time I no longer felt like the story was resisting me. This then made it easy and enjoyable to write in the organic moments where Eric lays his arm across Nilo’s shoulders or kisses his forehead. My ambition for future drafts of *It’s Time* is to expand on Eric’s expressed insecurity when he asks Nilo if he’s avoiding his sisters as a ploy to keep them from learning of their relationship and their older brother’s homosexuality. My thought is to further complicate the stakes for Nilo when considering how his family’s faith views homosexuality. The current draft in this portfolio maintains the focus on Nilo and his inner turmoil around being reunited with his sisters and provides no response to Eric’s question from Nilo. I think I created a missed opportunity for myself by allowing Eric’s easy acceptance of Nilo’s blatant shift from the avoidance of his sisters to Nilo then choosing to overlook what Eric is requesting of Nilo.

My original conception of *The Storm* was influenced by Haruki Murakami’s novel *The Wind-Up Bird Chronicle*. I aspire to manifest a similar sense of eerie authenticity for the reader with my use of setting descriptions, time as shown through the paralleled Southern Florida storm, and the conspicuous tension of active betrayal unfolding between two longtime friends. I appreciate Murakami’s usual cat trope in his narratives and included the cat, Isham, as a way to show homage for Murakami's respected craft. The early drafts of *The Storm* were riddled with excessive adverbs and rushed through the falling out of Robin and Linnet’s eighteen-year friendship. I had made the mistake of dropping the reader into the eye of the storm without providing a clear sense of the characters’ background and the significance of their friendship prior to their demise. I chose to maintain the first-person narration in Robin’s voice then applied my classmates’ suggestions of giving Linnet more room on the page in the interest of allowing the reader to judge who her character is and the stakes she has in their friendship. This story has and continues to challenge me because it’s the first prose I’ve produced with characters I honestly do not like. I plan to turn *The Storm* into a longer story, beginning earlier on in Robin and Linnet’s friendship then carrying the reader along through their destructive end.

When initially sitting down to write what is now titled *No Onions*, I only knew I wanted to try to craft a suspenseful narrative. Inspired by the popularity of commuter bicycling and the widespread use of rideshare services in Portland, I decided to create a story with a crass bicycle repair shop owner named Thom. Aside from Thom’s declared motivation of murdering unsuspecting Uber drivers as his only foreseeable option to maintain his livelihood—however completely disregarding his poor customer service—I didn’t have much of a sense for his characterization. I don’t typically read suspense novels or thrillers, and instead relied on influences from Toni Morrison’s *Beloved* and *a mercy*. I was most intrigued with Morrison’s use of young protagonists’ perspectives and voice to defamiliarize the reader’s own notions of children’s innate innocence albeit shaped by the grueling, unavoidable societal constructs. Thom didn’t strike me as the fatherly type, so I decided it would be interesting if Thom had a child he didn’t know about but who sought him out as a teenager.

I concentrated on Morrison’s use of syntax and diction to manifest a feeling of uneasiness throughout her storylines and did my best to emulate the same techniques. *No Onions* was one of the more difficult stories I’ve written in quite some time because it includes flashbacks alluding to rape. I struggled in identifying who would be revealed as the perpetrator of the past actions, which led to the spawning of Cora. After a few drafts I recognized how I could use ambiguity as a mode to show my trust with the reader. In future drafts of *No Onions* I think it would be fun and interesting to refine Cora’s storyline into a series of vignettes. I would include Cora’s relationship with her mom, Bera, and how she’s perceived to those she interacts with at school.