



2015

TOBECO

LITERARY ARTS JOURNAL

CREDITS

The Tobeco Staff would like to thank the writers and artists who submitted their work to this year's journal. We would also like to thank PAGES, Student Senate, English Club, Sigma Tau Delta, Michelle's Café, designer Brenda Stahlman, and the university's students, faculty and staff for their support.

Faculty Advisors

Dr. Philip Terman and Dr. Chris McCarrick

Senior Editors

Derek Dietz and Rebecca Greenman

Editors

Christian Crankfield, Therese Holzapfel, Kaitlyn Sass, Mark Skalski

Tobeco Literary & Artistic Journal is a student organization that strives to enhance literary and artistic life at the university and within our local community by accepting submissions of poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, world translations, and artwork. Through this publication, we hope to raise cultural and artistic awareness and to advocate a comfortable and creative environment for writers and artists alike.

The name "Tobeco" is taken from the Native American word for the Clarion River. Through this connection, we are reminded that art is as timeless as the river itself.

We are currently reading for next year's issue. Please send poetry, fiction, nonfiction or art to: tobeco@clarion.edu

Cover Image by Bailey Chiotti

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Font

LIZZ MURR

Georgia feels at home to me, staring back through the shining glow of laptop screens.

Hemingway and I, we both drink down Courier upon our Royal Portables.

Times New and all their Romans attack me through mildly apologetic rejection letters.

They pile on my desk, an accumulation of letter after letter thicker than Franklin Gothic.

If I succeed less than that of Poor Richard, write my obituary in Comic Sans,
and pray -

I'll never be damned to Helvetica.

DEAD LANGUAGE

CAYLEIGH BONIGER

His hand blossoms across mine
in the early spring sunshine radiating from my fingertips.
His thumb tracing the roadmap of veins
like a lost car;
his eyes scrutinizing his own motion
as if he could fathom the route into coherence.

He dares not look up.
I dare not look away.

His brush paints me radiantly flush:
December moon worked to burnished sunset,
and I could painlessly pull out of our wordless orbit,
away from this animal gravity,
until his gated lips part
and mumble the traces of Byron –
reflexively –

the words trembling along the cells from palm to palm
like the shiver of a prayer along a spider's web.

Sighing *Sonnets of the Portuguese* as we roam
abandoned sidewalks,
his greenhouse voice trailing tendrils in his wake –
glancing along my jawbone,
drawing close to the pulse
before fluttering away
with the echoes of my breath.

Spilling Donne as we dance
to the light pouring out of our tongues,
and the shadows so thick
they curtain us in
as I strip down to nothing
but my constellation dotted skin –
child of stardust and tectonic shifts,
drawing on a wildfire to sustain me,
fuelling the death I didn't desire to deter.

He smudges the silhouette of verse into my skin with his lips,
inking Shakespeare onto my bones with his tongue,
and I can feel myself
turning into the pages of a poetic anthology
only the two of us can make out.

WHISKEY

CAYLEIGH BONIGER

I crave a lover like whiskey,

with days when he steals
under my skin,

stealthily

beckoning –
just one more glass...one glass more,

until my lips thrum,
my cheeks grow flush,

and every drop of me
crown to toe-top
fills with flashing fireflies.

Other days, he washes
my head in an amber flood,

encasing me in ether:

dance sparking in my limbs,
bliss bubbling in me,
a spitting fire log.

The first rush of him
igniting my chest,

supernova drifting in a wind.

THE OAK

CAYLEIGH BONIGER

He knew what it was to embrace the Sky -
to stretch
and spread his arms ever wider
in the hopes that he had all of her,
that he hadn't missed a single drop of her,
knowing all the while
there was more -
more he'd never touch, let alone understand.
But he held her anyway.

When she cried, he gathered up every tear he could reach
and wept with her.
He loved to brush against her belly as the sun crested -
to see the blush creep across her skin.
It was his fingers that swept away her nimbus hair
when the wind dusted it about her face.
When evening fell to expose her flaws,
he would kiss every freckled star
hoping she could forgive his rough lips and scarred skin.
He would sing her breeze-soft ballads
to soothe her troubled moods.

But days came when he could only curse
her name
and her distance,
when he would rake her flesh to make her sob,
to soak in her rain with pleasure.
Always to regret.

So he would stretch his arms a little wider,
kiss a little softer,
sing a little longer
to make amends.

She would kiss
ever so softly
back.

JOURNEYS END IN LOVERS' MEETING

CAYLEIGH BONNIGER

This neighborhood was a quiet one. He could appreciate quiet, had lived with it many years, but it was the kind of company that always looked to you for conversation. He offered it the last town he had passed through, one of many. That day had glowed with more than sunshine, not because of any particular happenstance, but because the air was alive and the trees danced and he reveled in that energy.

The street echoed with children, flashes of games and bikes and colorful t-shirts crackling around him in an ecstatic storm. He smiled at their pace, but kept with his steady amble. There was no rush when nothing waited for him at the end of the long tightrope he'd been traversing.

Under the shade of a sycamore in a wide expanse of yard, two women were stretched on a ragged navy-and-white plaid blanket, a picnic basket huddled off to the side. One lay with her head lolling against her companion's shoulder, her chin tipped up to gaze, her fingers tracing the line of the jaw and throat above her. Her lover looked into the arms of the tree stretching over them, a smile playing on her face like the sunlight playing on their figures, melting her skin. Everything else about her was still as earth, even her long hair, worked into dozens of dark braids.

His steps slowed as he spied them, and although he desired to leave them to their privacy, he was entranced by their enchantment. The thumb running along sharp angles under soft skin, lingering in the curls of hair at the neck's edge. He could feel the ghost of a rougher thumb and the whisper of stubble on stubble and made an effort to push the hand away before he could catch the whiff of his sweat. These thoughts would not do.

He left the couple to their world.

He shook his head. The rain had returned. The quiet did not offer a word in return for his small confession. No penance, but no judgment, either. That was more than any priest had managed for him. His lips murmured a quiet Hail Mary into the mist out of some remnant of faith. Then he hummed a snatch of an obscure song:

"O mistress mine, where are you roaming? O, stay and hear; your true love's coming."



KAYLA SHAFFER

MY ELDEST SIBLING

EMILY JONAS

Softly,
while staring down at the kitchen counter,
my mother spoke to me.

Her eyes watered,
struggling to find a place to rest their gaze -
first the floor, the sink, the blank wall,
then the lace-trimmed curtains, the decorative plates,
the golden center of a round, white knob on a kitchen cupboard.

Her words were half-spoken,
her sentences broken.
Only when she settled her sight
on the kitchen counter
could she find a way to say
I should have another sibling.

Silently,
we stared together.
The cheap, green laminate countertop
with tiny black specks stared back,
somehow comforting us both.

She was seventeen when she found out
she was going to be a mother, and
she was seventeen when she decided
she didn't want to be.

Her voice cracked -
each uneasy word, each unwanted pause.

I could finally understand that
for thirty years,
she was searching for comfort.

But the only comfort she found
in thirty years
was staring at that kitchen counter.

LIVE

LIZZ MURR

My Grandfather told me, between his yellowed teeth and cigar breath, that life isn't pretty.

My Mother never told me, between her job and piled dishes, clichés of comfort.

My Boyfriend told me, between my legs and rushed breaths, not to worry.

My Doctor never told me, between crinkly paper and hospital gowns, that I have a life.

I used to sell carpets down near a city in Washington. The town was grey in weather and in buildings. I no longer speak of the little carpet shop. I used to be pretty. So did the town.

I'm not really a person

LINDSEY NEISWONGER



THE DUBIOUS BOND

KAYLEEN MERICLE

“There’s another curve up ahead. You should slow down, Hales. You can turn the wheel now. Turn the wheel!”

The car leaned into the edge of the road hard as Haley jerked the steering wheel to the left.

“Are you trying to kill us, or do you just enjoy scaring the shit out of me?!”

Haley rolled her eyes. Her sister had a tendency for theatrics.

“Maybe both,” she sneered back.

“How considerate of you, thinking of me before you croak. Did you pick out my casket, too?”

“Of course I did. What kind of sister would I be if I didn’t look out for you?”

“Well, technically I should be the one looking out. Being more mature and all.”

Cheyenne posed with a look of distinguished nobility. Haley glanced over and broke out in mocking laughter.

“Older doesn’t mean more mature. Just means you’re older – more wrinkly and prone to breaking your feeble bones. I think my preparation skills actually make me more mature than you.”

“You know I hate white. It better not be white.”

“With those calves? Pfft. Trust me, it’s not white.”

Cheyenne glared menacingly.

“Jesus, I wasn’t going to turn too early and spiral out into the other lane okay?”

“No, you were just going to veer off the road completely.”

“Chey, I know what I’m doing.”

“No you don’t. That’s why you have a permit. You’re learning. The fact that you think you know just proves how much you don’t.”

“Well it’s not my fault you’re a terrible teacher.”

“I’ve been telling you to slow down. You’re the one that doesn’t listen.”

“And just exactly how am I supposed to concentrate when you’re always barking orders at me?!”

“You’re *supposed* to know how to use the brake!”

Haley’s frustration was reaching its peak. Her sister offers to let her drive, then spends the whole time yelling at her.

“I try to, but I got peg leg!”

“What?”

Cheyenne eyed her sister, one eyebrow slowly arching in confusion. Was this some new way of irritating her? Making up words on the fly?

“I can’t feel the car speeding up. You’re the one who told me to pay attention to the road, to not look at the speedometer.”

“I still have no idea what the hell ‘peg leg’ means.”

“You know, that I can’t slow down.”

In the brief expanse of their shared silence, Cheyenne’s face squinched up in disbelief.

“Do you mean lead foot?”

Haley groaned.

“Yeah whatever, you know what I meant.”

Cheyenne’s laughter bubbled out unexpectedly.

“Oh my god. Hahaha! Peg leg!”

Haley joined her sister's laughter, quickly forgetting her embarrassment. Her shoulders eased along with her built tension. She didn't want to admit her nervousness. In an attempt to escape the traffic and noise from the main road, she briskly turned down Jo Jo Road. Breathing in the warm air flowing in from the window, the peeking sunlight felt good on her face. Cheyenne smiled at her, appreciating the sudden change of scenery. The lustrous greenery loomed above and all around them. Haley quickly smiled back at her sister, her eyes darting back to the road, glad Cheyenne had talked her into the drive. A little fresh air was just what she needed to clear her head.

Cheyenne reached out her fingers tentatively and pushed on the volume knob, filling the car up with loud pop music. Haley glanced over to her, making a face like she just bit into a fresh lemon. Cheyenne giggled before switching the station. She skipped over three Country and two Christian Rock stations before arriving at their destination.

You're listening to Mega Rock.

The familiar voice, deep and alluring, announced their triumph. The piano keys that started playing next lit up both their eyes.

"You better pull over!" Cheyenne shouted over the music, smiling mischievously, the right corner of her mouth turning up ever so slightly.

Haley nodded and gradually pulled over to a nearby turnaround. She opened her door, bursting out of her restrictive enclosure. Her sister gladly followed suit, but not before cranking the ballad up and grabbing her hairbrush from her bag. She raced around the car to Haley, a grin dominating her face. She yanked her arm forward, putting the makeshift microphone under her sister's chin. Haley quickly grasped the upper region and flicked her body closer.

"Just a small town girl,"

"Livin' in a lonely world,"

"She took the midnight train,"

"Go-in' anywhereee!"

They belted out the lyrics their mother had engraved in their hearts in unison. Their singing was neither harmonic nor in tune. In fact, most people would associate it with the shrill screech of a squealing pig. Most of the high notes ended in squeaking or sounded much like the squawks of a mangled bird. But out here in the woods, nothing but the sound of the wind, moving branches, and surrounding critters – these sisters embraced their freedom. They convulsed and thrusted with the tempo. Swaying to the beat, they allowed themselves to become lost in their surroundings.

Their heads bobbed and weaved, hips moving to the rhythm. Who didn't love the feeling of getting lost, body and mind? To an outsider, it looked a lot like flailing around. They weren't particularly paying attention to anything, focusing purely on the feeling of being free. That's what the music felt like – freedom. Bodies almost weightless, they glided and slid over the compact dirt underneath them like figure skaters.

Finally, the song came to an end. Cheyenne went back into the car and switched off the radio. She twisted around and looked back at Haley through the rear window, wondering what was keeping her. Haley abruptly turned around to face her, eyes brimming with unspilled tears. Cheyenne rushed over to her and swiftly wrapped her arms around her as she unleashed her pent-up sorrow.

As her wrenching sobs slowly lessened, Haley lifted her head and looked up at her sister.

"Do you think she'd be proud of us?"

"I know she would. She is – wherever she is."

The sun suddenly shone down through the leaves, offering up its replenishment, everything transforming in the bright light.

THE HOSPITAL ROOM

RONNIE JAMES

Your death a foregone conclusion.
The doctor demonstrates your empty tube.
I laughed at your legs, skinny as a blue jay's,
But now I loathe that they are thick and blue.
Enough equipment-
To send a shuttle back to the moon.
Left alone where I'm told you'll die,
I trace the veins on your hands,
Like I did, as a small boy,
Three-dimensional rivers on a map,
Because nobody else is here,
It's okay to trace my intimacy.
I sit here despising this wretched room,
This is the place my hero dies.
But suddenly I have an epiphany
This room I detest has special memories
Here is where you last kissed my mom and
brothers,
Hugged your parents, your brothers and sister and
all your best friends.
This is the room you spoke your last words to me,
Your final words on earth; as it turned out.
I love you, Bud, you whispered,
A secret I'll cherish forever.

SNOW ASTRONAUT

EMILY JONAS

Hurling through time and space
on the interstate.
No astronauts joining him.
No gravity pulling him down.
Only 18 wheels pushing him forward.

The tempo of the snow
tapping on the windshield,
repeating its cold reminder that
the black hole of time continues-
catching lifetimes on the tip of its tongue,
letting them melt,
swallowing them whole.

Lights of dying stars disappear,
leaving him wondering
Where did they go?

His thumb strikes a beat on
the upside-down mountain range
encompassing the entire circumference
of his tiny world.

BEGIN AGAIN

CARLA CILVIK

A constrained smile with downcast eyes. She shuffles her feet on frozen pavement; tiny ice particles bounce carelessly off rubber soles that are destined for anything but amnesty. As words, like configurations of a dream, tumble through her cloudy mind, she fumbles to recognize herself. Then, rounding a corner, she collides with hopeless determination. Dim light of streetlamps like drained life hovers in the air and clings to those clouded thoughts. They become alive, and now, suddenly, her mind is freight trains and sirens speeding toward a sure destination. In the distance, a bridge- a symbol of connection, a symbol of what she's always desired. With narrowed eyes, sharp breaths and perfectly paced footsteps, she heads toward the stone structure. Once halted in the middle of her destiny, the threshold of her future, she slowly pulls tattered letters from her past out from her grey pea coat - ones she's written and ones that were written to her, and she branches out to hold them over the icy river- pausing briefly- then one by one lets them fly into darkness and melt away. A family without support, friends who never cared and ex-lovers who broke her down. With the streetlamps' light fading, all grows dark save for the footprints carved in snow just beyond that bridge- her new life beginning.

DECISIONS

KAITLYNN SASS

“Mama, I can’t find Oscar anywhere,” Cole whines. Cole is my little brother. He thinks the whole world revolves around him and his stupid cat. Dingy thing. The cat, I mean. We found it last fall hiding under our half-collapsed porch, missing part of a tail and smelling worse than the spaghetti sauce Mama forgot was in the back of the fridge. That cat climbed right into my brother’s arms and almost never left.

Dad didn’t want us to keep it. He said seven kids and two parents make for enough mouths to feed around here. Said if we could barely afford food for ourselves, we sure as hell weren’t buying any cat food. But Mama said Cole should be allowed to keep the poor thing. So the cat stayed, and Dad left.

That was almost three months ago. Now, Mama has to take care of all of us kids, and hold down her new janitor job. She cleans at the school. It’s real exciting for us kids, cause we see her all the time now. How many kids get to say ‘hey’ to their Mamas in the hallways? And anyway, Mama doesn’t mind doing the extra work. It’s like practice for cleaning up around our house. At least, that’s how I look at it.

“Cole, honey, I’m trying to get all of you kids fed breakfast and pack your lunches. I can’t be looking for Oscar right now. Sit down and eat, and I’m sure he’ll turn up.” Mama’s trying to be reassuring, but Cole still looks real worried. He sits down at the scratched up table and looks down into his hands like they hold some big secret of the universe.

“Tracy, run upstairs and make sure everyone’s dressed and ready to go. I don’t want any more repeats of what happened last week,” Mama says to me. I roll my eyes, but head for the stairs. Mama means that she doesn’t want anybody leaving the house in their underwear again. Lily, the baby of the family, left for kindergarten last week wearing a pink t-shirt and Cinderella underwear, and that was it. Mama was so busy yelling at the boys to stop pulling my hair that she didn’t even notice until we were standing at the bus stop and the whole neighborhood already saw her.

By the time I make sure everyone is presentable and herd them toward the kitchen, Cole is whining about that cat again, and Mama is standing at the stove telling him to quit his fussing. Even though Cole is the only one older than me, he has a real sensitive side that makes him seem way younger. That’s probably why so many of the boys pick on him in school.

We all come into the kitchen and make a big fuss about who’s gonna sit where, even though we always end up in the same spots as the day before. I don’t think anybody but me notices when Cole gets up and slips out the front door. I don’t say anything, cuz what harm can he do?

Mama serves us pancakes the size of the skillet she used to cook them in with warm butter and syrup. Everyone stops talking, and the contest begins to see who can finish in the fewest bites. Just when I’m about halfway done – in four bites, mind you – Mama asks where Cole is.

“He went outside,” I struggle to get out around the pancake taking up a lot of space in my mouth. I get to be the hero now, being the only one who knows where Cole went and all.

Mama tells everyone else to stay inside and finish up, while she grabs me by the arm and pulls me out the door right behind her. We head down the street, trying to see where Cole ran off to. Finally, Mama spots him sitting right on the side of the road and gives out a little involuntary croak. She sounds like the little frog I hid in my pocket once. No one woulda known about him if he had just kept quiet through dinner. That was back when Dad was still around.

Mama runs toward Cole as fast as she can and starts to yell at him to get away from the road. That’s when I see the cat. Cole is stroking the fur that is flatter than I remember it being before. Mama sees it too, pretty soon, and changes the tone of her voice to the soft and caring one. We get closer and see the tears falling down Cole’s cheeks faster than his wiper-blade fingers can catch them.

In some situations, I believe, there is a choice. A choice between crying, or laughing to keep from crying. The past few months, I've made this choice a lot of times. A lot of times, I chose wrong. This is one of those times.

I can't stop the cackle that escapes from deep inside my throat. It jumps high into the air and echoes across the whole neighborhood. I might as well have slapped Cole across the face. His eyes turn dark and his frown starts to look mean instead of sad. Next thing I know, he jumps on me and I tumble into the grass of the neighbor's yard. Mama is yelling again, and trying to pull Cole off of me. His fists jab into my stomach and arms. He tires fast and gets up. Now his eyes look dead. Him and Mama start to walk home, and Mama puts her arm around his shoulders.

"We'll get you another cat, sweetie."

I watch them from my spot on the wet ground, feeling cold water seep into my jeans. I realize how big small decisions can be.

KAYLA SHAFFER



AFTER QUESTIONING A PUBLISHED POET

SHANNON GEER

He said all his life he wanted to be a poet, and I shuddered like the newborn rabbits I found in my yard five summers ago. I never once had the thought, "I want to be a poet." No, instead, I just enjoyed how it felt to write poetry, the great exhale of champagne breath, and the tingle of a tongue dipped in Pop Rocks. I used it to hide, even in grade school, I'd strain and fight to crawl between the lines I wrote, pull my last dangling foot in before the attackers have the chance to bite it like hungry wolves, the print and hastily scratched graphite marks slipping into my ears, dulling the words of the teacher or the girls with toxic taunts and so little to live for; the girls so bored that they provoke just to watch what would happen – cruel matadors. The poems cradled and suspended me, like the extra glass of my father's homemade wine I always sneak after he's gone to sleep. I thought it my security blanket that I would grow to be independent of, thankful for its years of service, and cast aside. Years later, here I am and here I hide; a numb head and a rapid heart; my pencil in hand until I write myself my fortress, my nest, and take safety with my own rabbits to stop the quivering.

IN THE WOODS BEHIND THE DAM

SHANNON GEER

When I was a girl, I loved the smell
of moss.
Earthy and full, it smelled of life.
Purity in its truest form, there in the growth.
Stacked on the great boulder,
I made moss cakes, molded it like clay.
I loved the way it sung when pulled from the earth,
like the gasp a child makes between sobs,
like Velcro, but softer, like a sigh.
I carried it with me, sprawled on the boulder,
the grains press my scraped legs with gentle pricks,
wishing to attach myself to the rock like
I knew the moss would—
to its mother.
Sometimes, still,
I awake at night from the smell of earth,
back cold from the boulder beneath me.

EAST BRANCH

SHANNON GEER

I know you're still there.
In the chipping red paint of the Camp;
in the eternal view of the lake below;
in the broken sunlight laughing on its
crystal surface;
in the echoing winds that snake around
the branches of the many maple trees
you used to marvel at, you're there.

Listening, still listening to my incessant
little-girl giggles while I play in the pebbles
in the front yard;
while I dive off the dock and swim
underneath it to count the spiders,
even though I knew I wasn't supposed to;
while I watched my father skip stones across
that lake and failed every time he told me to
try.

I like to think that your smile is etched into
the bark of the birches that line the property
and that your eyes are the spots on the
backs of all the salamanders my brother and
I used to catch and to bring you, and that
your perfume is the Sassafras I'd gather
in bouquets for my mother to give to
you, from daughter to mother, and again.
I don't forget you or remember, I simply
enjoy what's still left of your voice, Here,
in the chamomile cricket chirps.

SAILING ON SENTIMENT

SAMUEL MARLATT

I imagine color so vivid
leaving those lips—
as if a doorway
to another dimension.

Each hue a photon fingerprint;
appearing in this moment
a manifestation—...
lovely, serene, glowing.

The visible spectrum
of your soul dancing
like willows in mid September.

Green goddess of dawn strolling throughout the
night sky;
forest hiding its identity; snow covered and silent—
horizon bursting into flames a million miles away;

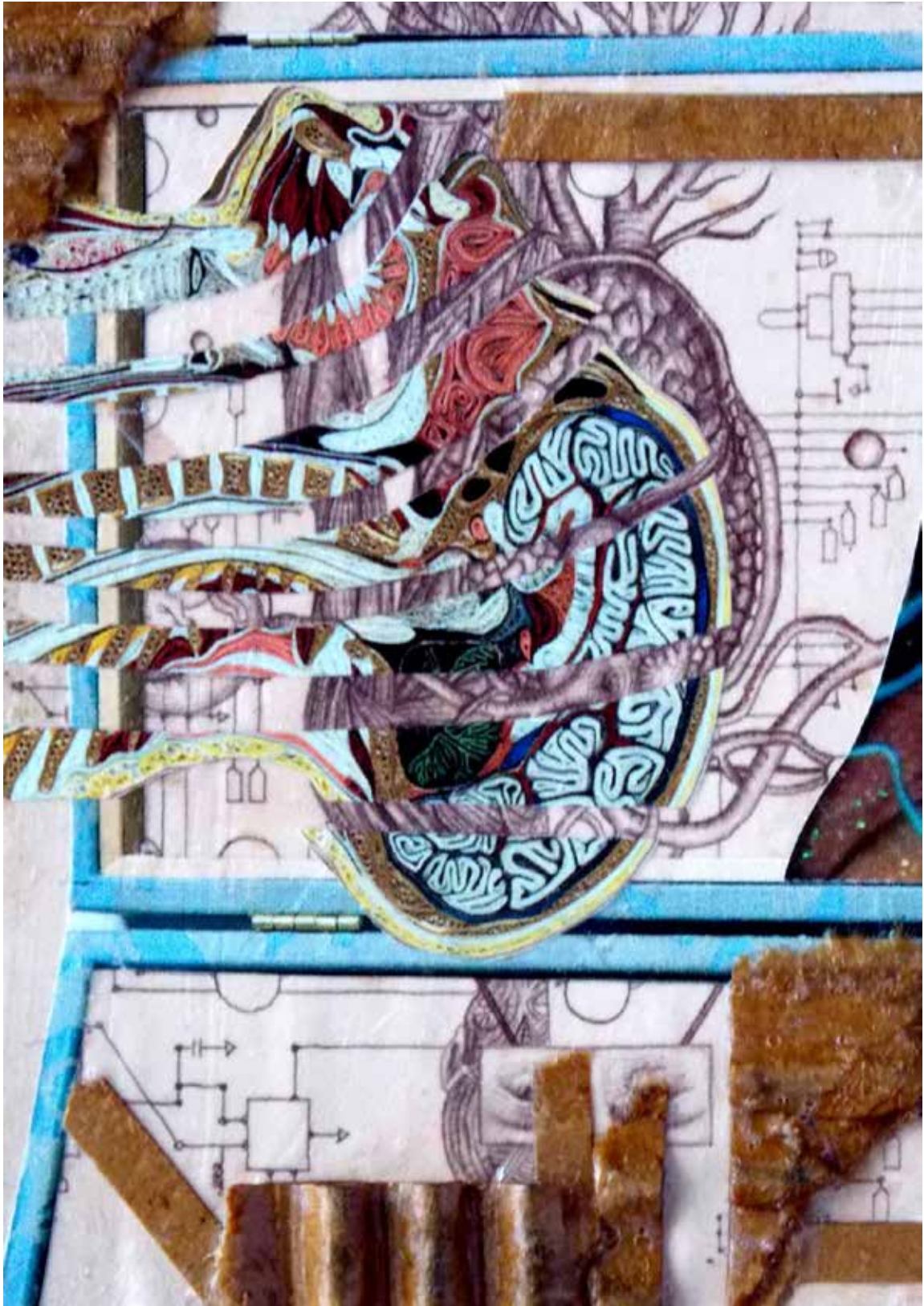
mere abbreviations of you.

Shimmering foam gliding
across the shoreline
before retreating back home—

I long for such dedication.

Where were you?

During the tens of thousands
of circles the clock hands ran
while I sat as a delphinium
missing the sun in December.



AUTUMN WERTZ

THOSE EYES

MONIQUE DICKENS

Those eyes.
Those...
Crooked,
flicked,
ugly eyes.
Those eyes that make people go,
"Are you looking at me?"
Those eyes that make people laugh,
and stare,
and look away cause...
well, those eyes aren't pleasant.

Those eyes have hurt and pain,
torrents of rain,
guilty, ashamed and confused,
tormented, bullied and abused.
Those eyes have been abandoned multiple times.
They've witnessed unspeakable things
even unspeakable crimes.
Those eyes belong to a family of dysfunction.
They yearn to escape a curse
that spans from generation to generation.

And there's some controversy
about how those eyes always seem to overcome adversity.
But, if you ever bother to take a gander
you'd see that those eyes are also full of wonder.

Buried beneath this pain and negativity
deep below the surface lays inner beauty.
'Cause see, these eyes also hold hope.
Joy.
Happiness.
They'll never forget
but will always strive for forgiveness.
Those eyes are unique.
Special.
Beautiful.

Those eyes are elated to know that someone loves them
and hopes that one day, that person will find them.
Those eyes jiggle
and dance.
They sparkle in the sight of romance.

Those eyes are brown
and grey
and blue.
They tell the truth.
They hold secrets you never knew.
You love those eyes because
they reflect,
never neglect
always respect...
you.

And for that,
I am proud of those eyes.
They may not be perfect
but to me, they're worth it
because they belong to me.

And I am free,
full of glee,
proud to be...
just look into my eyes.

BARBIE IS NOT MY MOTHER

AMBER MORGAN-OPITZ

I never wanted to look like a Barbie doll. I did not envy her. Her thick plastic skin, painted smile with those teeth glued shut. I didn't care about her bust to waist proportion.

I did, however, want to be strong like her. Children cut off her hair, gave her marker scars, and drowned her in bathtubs, popped off her head. But she would still have that smile plastered across her face, teeth shining and eyes wide.

Barbie has the ability to be anything and everything. She was a doctor, nurse, pilot, flight attendant, detective, vet, dancer, bride, mother, sister, and lawyer.

You see Barbie is often times torn to pieces by the women of my generation because they say she's the reason we hate our bodies.

They say that she fed us lies about how we look, that we can never look like her. But I see women everyday wearing those fake plastic smiles.

I see it in the mirror, in myself.

I see women keep their teeth glued shut when the cat calls come on the street - teeth stay clenched after we've already said no thank you.

Teeth clenched shut at the dinner table, shuffling food around our plates but never lifting the forks to our mouth.

Our eyes stay open. We don't have the luxury of closing our eyes.

But Barbie didn't teach me that.

She's not the one who taught us to disguise ourselves.



REBEKAH ALVIANI

FRIEND, I SEE YOUR VULTURES

NATALIE GODWIN

You,

Youthful soul enslaved to a bottomless crater of desperation, for love; an affection that you can only see on the other side of the cracked glass by mocking vultures. They devour the warmth from your body; but your immobilized self cannot care. Each vulture is a friend, that's tearing small holes to pile the pills and broken bottles. It keeps you believing, for a snowflake of a moment, you are loved. Soon it melts away, until you ingest more toxins, into the heavy set figure that cries to be an hour glass, untouched by the forceful hands of a beast embedded in the carcass of a young man.

JE SUIS CHARLIE/I AM CHARLIE

ELISABETH SAUVAGE-CALLAGHAN



*In Memory of Cabu and all of those killed
In the January 7, 2015 shooting attack on Charlie Hebdo*

Le jour où
Ils ont tué
Le Grand Duduche,
Une partie de mon être
S'est éteinte
Charlie

The day
They killed
Le Grand Duduche
A piece of my soul
Died
Charlie

FORGOTTEN SPOT

LIZZ MURR

Deep in the woods,
At the end of a dust road,
Lies a small graveyard
Made of 17 stones.
People from the Civil War,
Forgotten in this one small spot.

The stone dissolves
With the slightest touch,
The dates and names
Bleached forever by the sun.

TRESTLE

HANNAH GLOECKL

Trees pinned by "Private Property" postings
The river's resurrection attracts a chorus of Chevys and Fords,
The five miles pathway muddy on tires and sneakers
Of a christening crowd from the college, who trudge
A snowy track through a tunnel muddled
With teenage and twenty-something scripture.

A weather-beaten arch stained with canvases
Of dark ice wears thin against soles of steel-toed
Boots scraping across moldy timber and tarnished
Alloy raised amid Pennsylvanian mountains.
Among cross-beams cemented with bolts unbroken
And barren liquor bottles, the river rises.

STARTLED NIGHT

KAYLEEN MERICLE

Jostled awake—
alarm bombards the senses;
thick, pungent smoke
mixing with a stomachache,
more than a stomachache—
a stampede of trampling feet
syncing with stabbing cries
assault sensitive ears—
rushing through a crammed outlet
into the dark expanse
of a crowded passageway,
slamming shoulders,
squeezing, squealing,
swept away in a wave of
tear-streamed dark faces,
the stairs, ancient, rickety—
down into winter breezes biting
at soft exposed flesh.
Lights flash red—propel
like a beacon. Firemen
pump from stubborn, frozen
hydrants. Sparkling smoke licks
up the walls—snapping,
stretching outward, reaching
sinisterly over to its next
victim, flames spitting,
engulfing—consuming the block
home by unsuspecting home.

LA COMPLAINTE DU PONT DES ARTS

Ce matin, la brebis galeuse
Bêlé plus fort que les autres
Dans le troupeau des ponts
De Paris.
Eh oui,
Le Pont des Arts
Fait même plus que bêler, il rouspète –
Y'en a marre!

Pourquoi donc, dit-il,
Bergère, Oh ma Tour Eiffel,
Dois-je porter le poids
De ces amours
Cadenassés?

Et vous,
Amoureux
De tous les coins du Monde
Pourquoi
Cet assassinat?
Ne savez-vous donc pas
Que l'amour
C'est la liberté
Et non pas l'enchaînement
Mutuel?

Embrassez-vous
Enlacez et entrelacez-vous
Etreignez-vous
Appuyez-vous
Sur mes parapets
Mais, par pitié,
Laissez mes grilles
En paix!

THE PONTS DES ARTS' COMPLAINT

This morning, the black sheep
In the flock of Paris bridges
Bleats louder than his brothers.
Yes, not only is the Pont des Arts
Bleating,
He's downright bitching –
He's had it!

O, why,
Eiffel Tower, my shepherdess,
Must I carry the weight
Of this shackled
Love?

And you,
Lovers
From all over the World,
Why
Are you killing me?
Don't you know that
Love is
Freedom
Not mutual
Bonding?

Kiss,
Embrace, entwine,
Enfold each other.
Lean against
Me,
But – for God's sake –
Leave my railings
In peace!

A SON'S SONG

DEREK DIETZ

Last night, I dreamt I heard your song on the radio.

The guitar chords, as dainty as a fawn's first steps, tiptoed through my green pickup's stereo. The truck lurched forward as the melody began, the rattling engine as shocked as I was to hear it. Almost immediately, I realized I was dreaming.

There was no way that any radio station would broadcast that simple tune you composed at the foot of your bed. After all, you never even played it for your mother and me. The song remained silent, sealed up inside a stack of sheet music I found one cold May morning in your room. The somber minor chords were scrawled out on ragged pages ripped from a spiral-bound notebook.

In the rearview mirror of my truck, a shadowed reflection of a memory played out, like a miniature black and white movie. The two of us on a dark November evening years ago were huddled around your mother's parked car on the blacktop, our breath emerging as spirits from our mouths. The tire needed replacing, and as I worked, I asked you to keep a flashlight focused. You were still young then, with your chubby cherub face. You hummed some murmur of a tune under your breath, and as your voice grew louder, the light beam began to wander away from the tire. I heard my own voice snap you out of your trance,

"Keep the light steady, son."

In the weeks leading up to your death, you submerged yourself in solitude. Your mother and I read the daily news and watched Letterman on *Late Night* while ghosts of songs leaked out from underneath your closed bedroom door. In the hell of the day when we came home to your body bent over on your bloodied bed, my brain kept pounding out the question *Where did he get the gun?*

Since you left us, we've kept your bedroom door open.

As I drove on, I seemed to be the only vehicle on the unceasing stretch of highway. Along the roadside, I began to notice these lines of people. They were the students, friends, and classmates that came to your viewing in that funeral house that reeked like hot weeds. There were so many people. I remembered the way they shook my hand and said they were sorry and told me what a talented young man you were. What else could I do but nod my head and agree? I wondered if you ever played your song for any of them.

Now, those visitors held a procession on the dream road. As I passed the lines of mourners, great pines rose up tall, grievers that were far more composed, though they quaked in the wind. In their shadows, a picnic table sat, lit up bright by muddy streetlights. I saw you out there, your slouched posture and your weeping shoulders painting a somber shadow on the ground. Buddy Holly, with his horn-rimmed smile, sat with you at the table. Circled around you were Hendrix, Morrison, Joplin. A late lunch for late musicians. Even in death you were amongst friends. But I kept driving on.

The accelerator jammed on me, and I pumped the pedal to regain the lost speed. The speedometer needle swung like a metronome in perfect time with your music which continued on as constant as the speckled pavement beneath me. Somewhere between forty and sixty miles per hour, I saw the shining face of your little cousin, Anna, behind the swinging needle. Her eyes glowed dashboard green back at me. She surprised us all when she asked to speak at your service. She brought her guitar, and in that freezing cemetery, she provided warmth to the mourners through music you had composed. Apparently, in the days after your passing, she also found your sheet music, taught herself your secret melody. The song that was once lifeless and stiff was resurrected, and as the gentle guitar blessed us, I swear you were there too, appearing like the first flowers of the redbud you bought for your mother years ago.

The song echoed again inside of my dream, and as I drove across that dark path, my hands gripped the wheel, anticipating turns despite the unwavering road. I glanced over to the passenger seat and there you were, perched beside me. Your hands were water as you strummed the strings. You didn't say a word to me, nor I to you. We let the music fill up the empty space between us.

The road continued on, and I kept the gas steady.

TONIGHT I WANTED TO WALK HOME IN THE RAIN

CARLA CILVIK

Tonight I wanted to walk home in the rain
Although, the pursuing chill and wind
Prevented me from my compelling intuition.
Still, I imagined.
The droplets falling to their
Choreographed dance,
Patterns so intricate.
I wanted the beaded dancers to soak into
me—
I wanted to soak into the melded Earth,
To open my mouth and let salvation
Soothe my burning tongue,
My smoldering soul.

The tendrils of my hands
Would capture bliss
In a fraction of a second
Only to feel it slip away
One fraction later—
A confession never spoken.
If I could toss the exiled angels
Back into Heaven, I wonder if
My soul would catch flame again.

Who's the priest that convicts?
The one who decides whether
The flames stay lit
Or die?
Surely, I have tried
To thrust the water back to its source.
No purpose in trying.
Belief is what holds me here.
Let the water drown the priest.
I'm no slave to conviction.

BRIANNA NELLIS



ADDRESSING THE DIFFERENCE

ANDREA COBB

From the inside of a gold framed bakery
watching the hallowed others dredge by
this double plated window,
 for protection
 or prevention – of the violent acts –
 made out of fear – not hatred –

but a need to move away from oil stained streets
where tinned food trucks
sell rotting bananas and beef dogs
to privileged pregnant women with painted faces.

The service workers behind bakery counters,
That blind man screaming scripture to deaf ears
 – at the corner of Market & Broad St. –
Wounded veterans holding crumpled Starbucks stench cups
begging for “*change.*”

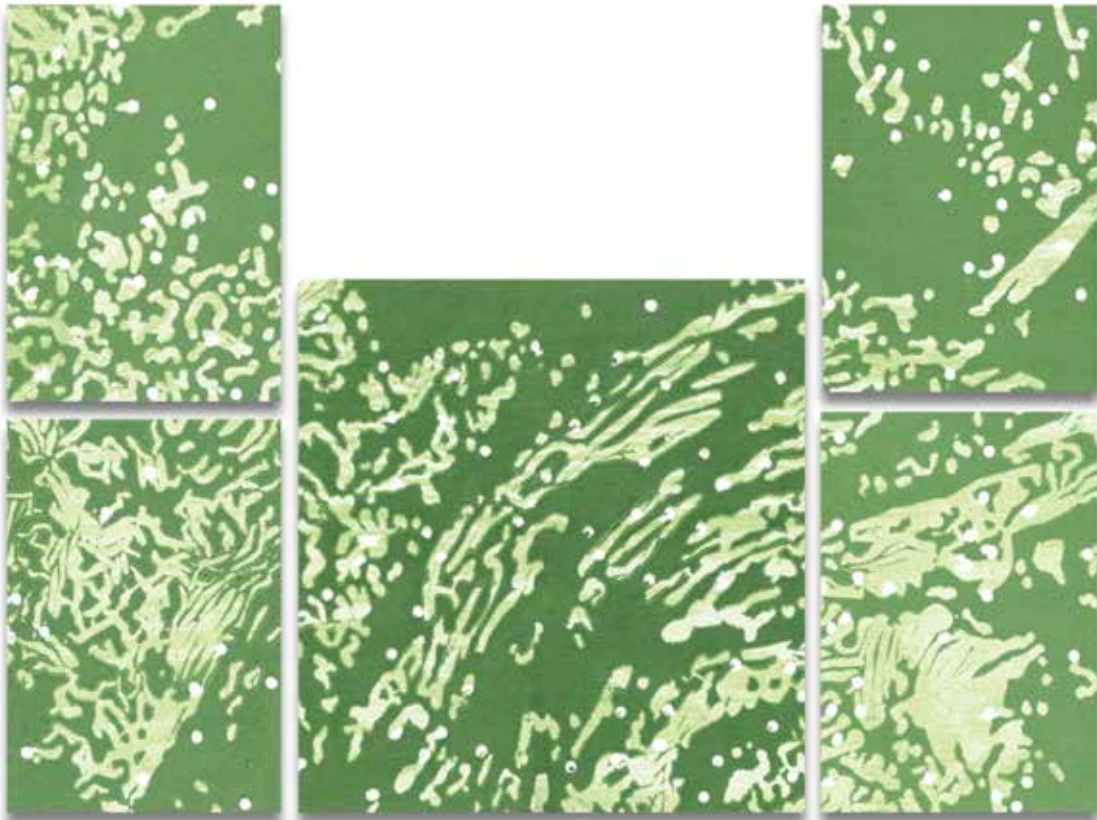
The clothed and scarfed people
with buds plugging their ears
march dutifully to their jobs
 or class
 or markets selling produce to those
 who can afford nutrition.

In this bumbling City of Brotherly Love,
siblings tightly clench their eyelids
and hide in coffee shops
 tapping away at expensive computers,

clutching their herbed teas trying to forget
 or ignore

That hunched figure,
across the street,
crouched
 between lumps of snow & garbage.

KAITLYN ELLINGER



THE SMITHS HAVE DONE IT AGAIN

ANDREA COBB

A legato chorus mixed with a haunting lullabye
pumps eagerly through the same ear buds
that whisper licks of Coltrane.

An endless orchestra of random artists
living in a small portable apple
that is always smushed at the bottom of my plaid sack -

caught between gum wrappers and lint.

Each voice fights for a chance
to sing to me.

OBSERVING A YOGA CLASS IN CENTER CITY, PHILADELPHIA

ANDREA COBB

My bare feet stand rooted shoulder length apart, heels pressing all of my weight into the shallow pad of my yoga mat. My toes extend into tangled green roots burrowing and nesting deep into the earth. I feel my toes spread and dig deeper as my breath flows cyclically through my wooden lungs. My arms extend parallel to the ground, shooting out branches so far my shoulders pop out of their sockets and extend to catch the sun on the horizon. I feel my torso stiff and solid carrying the weight of my heavy branches, but I feel balanced because my roots are deep and connected. I feel my breath exhale, shaking the leaves of my branches, and as I open my oak brown eyes, I reconnect with the physical world around me once again. I wiggle my toes and shake out my shoulders, feeling a connection with every pore draping my newly refreshed body.

What I have found is that yoga means something very different to every individual person. To Mary-ellen, my own instructor, it is a form of meditation; to Kathryn, the instructor I am observing today, it is a healing ritual; to my father, it is a waste of “Goddam’ time”; to me, yoga is mindfulness and exercising control of the body.

The large room where class will take place looks to be a repurposed dance studio. A wall-to-wall mirror reflects the floor-to-ceiling window opposite. On this sunny day, this room embodies the world. You could look in that vast mirror and touch the face of a biker on Market Street and race your fingers alongside his reflection until he disappears and your fingers pedal right into the brick wall adjacent to the mirror. A single African American mother walks with child on hip, holding desperately to the small hand of another young child around the age of four. He seems to be crying in the upper corner of the mirror, but the mother has a destination on the opposite side of the mirror where the wall molds intersect at the door, and she cannot listen to the resistant child’s wails. Bustles of women and men march past one another; poor passing wealthy, father passing child, privileged passing needy.

At the very center of the mirror, you can spot Love Park. The pool is empty, and a bed of granite backdrops the love statue. In pictures, I imagine the statue silhouetted with lovers and that sparkling fountain. The statue, void of sparkling water, appears as empty as the dance studio where I wait for class to start. This room is one world within a larger world. Micro within macro.

Kathryn walks in frantically, hoarse from a cold she is trying to heal. She shakes my hand while stripping off her street clothes. Underneath her oversized jeans are skin tight leggings.

“So glad you could be with us today,” she says through her Temple University sweatshirt as she pulls it over her frizzy, short-cut hair.

“Thank you so much for having me. I’m really looking forward to this.”

She notices my own robin egg yoga matt, and I spot awkwardness in her expression.

“Oh, um, actually...for liability reasons, I could lose my job if you join in. I thought this was just an observation. I feel bad, but I could lose my job, and it seemed like you just wanted to watch.”

Who just watches a yoga class?

Not wanting to make her uncomfortable and seeing her distress, I assure her it’s no big deal and I would just observe: “I’m just grateful to be here.”

The classroom of eight fills with girls draped in oversized neon armor; soft woolen socks and cozy sweaters cover their frames as they lazily slouch over their array of rainbow yoga mats. Kathryn begins to teach a lesson on spacing ribs and pushing palms between shoulder blades in order to enforce ‘the breath.’ The class inhales and exhales as the wind

reflected in the mirror breathes life into Philadelphia streets. Lumps of trash, thrown about through city's lungs, navigate through alleyways as blood courses through arteries. Students nod along, bobbing disheveled buns carefully placed on top of their crowns. Girls in colorful crop-tops over skin tight leggings stretch out their fingertips – popping joints – waking up their bodies.

Kathryn strolls the classroom touching each student, repeating, "Find your base, your skeleton, and feel how it moves." My morbid imagination begins to take hold, manifesting itself in every corner of this classroom. Suddenly, they are all sitting skeletons striking sharp poses – downward facing dog, warrior, and triangle. Their sliding shoulder blades slipping through scapulas entrance me. I stare at each skeleton, still adorned in colorful garments, breathing through their ivory bones. In the mirror, I catch a glance at myself. I meet my mirrored stare and can't shake my comparative gaze of solid meat and flesh aside these dancing, slender bones.

My right hand callused with Russell's sign wanders to my chest and I start pushing down on the soft skin searching for the bones beneath. I feel wiry muscle intertwined underneath my goose-bump skin. I dig and scratch at my skin searching for the structure I know lies below the armor of this solid body.

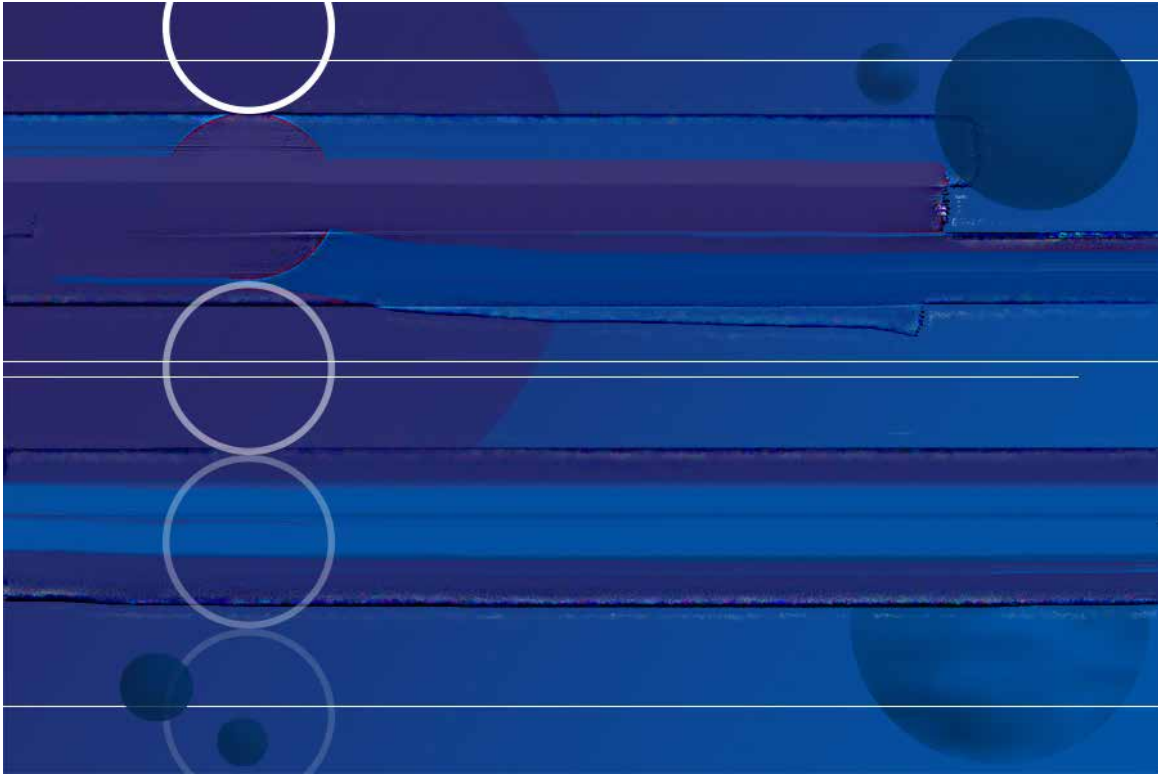
The warm sun drapes my back like a hand stitched afghan, but I shiver, huddled frozen to this hardwood floor, thinking, "How can I make these swaying skeletons disappear?" I don't know how to let go of these images and see meat filling out flesh once again. I cannot un-see the bones before me pressing heels-imprinting their mats with simple touches. The dangerous beauty of these bones makes me cry, but I've mastered the mask. I sit with my face still and unmoving, but tears roll down my cheeks and dribble past my chin. I try desperately to remember the strong tree that I had inhabited earlier. I remind myself that trees are sturdier than ivory bones and this strive for a skeletal frame is what has haunted my mind for 3 years now. I want the shadows of skeletons to stop appearing before my eyes every time I come close to not caring about the protrusion of my rib cage.

Yoga is supposed to be mindfulness, but my mind is wreaking havoc through this brick sanctuary. My mind is a distressed youth, out of control, screaming protest through cans of hissing spray paint, smashing mirrors begging for my attention. Like a disappointed mother, I don't want to listen. I just want it to shut up and go away. I shut down and ignore the skeletons and my mind's encrypted message meant for me and me alone. I don't know how to deal with this, so I won't.

I curl into a fetal ball against the hardwood floor and try to remember my breath. Through a clenched esophagus, I swallow the iron ball of air that has puckered itself within my cheeks. I force the breath down and allow myself to release the breath. It sputters out like toxic sludge, and I swear I can see shadows of my inky breath rejected on the hardwood panels. I take in another breath, and it comes in more smoothly, like a spoonful of raw honey. The breath leaves my throat expunged and clean.

I feel my feet become solid and stony. My eyelids shut from a heavy force, and my body sinks into the floor as every muscle both tightens and relaxes, allowing me to transform into a singular solid object. I am cool to the touch, and my pores open up to become solid masses of granite. I bring my arms and legs into my chest to make myself as compact as possible.

I am not mountain, strong and stable standing tall looking over the world with clarity and perspective. I am neither strong nor healthy enough to be mountain; however, I am stronger than these bones dancing around me. I am rock, but one day I will grow, developing strength from overcoming my comparative gaze. I will be mountain.



COLORS

KAITLYNN SASS

You unwrap yourself from around me, climb onto the edge of the boat, and dive into the dark water. Rocking motions control the path of the pontoon, and I lounge against the side, sipping beer – condensation on the bottle reminding me of cooler mornings to come – and watching you swim. You move like a mermaid, gracefully propelling your body back and forth, barely breaking the calm waters. Fireworks are mirrored on the surface, obstructing my clear view of you. I sit my beer on a bench and climb onto the railing, imagining being forced to walk the plank.

My entrance is more like the splash a car makes in Hollywood-staged accidents. The cool water soaks my clothes, caresses my skin. I no longer know which way is up. My hands pushing against an unmovable weight, I try to splash the water, try to call for help. I struggle to hold my breath. Flashes of color – desperate – cross my line of vision and I yearn for your hand to grasp mine.

YOU'RE IN EVERYTHING I SEE

Inspired by Hematite

MEKKA DUSCH

Snakes writhe
themselves in knots
to resist their own
temptations.

-stitches-

The moon dreams of
something fuller,
an Ocean never
filled. Only gapes
and craters.

-stitches-stitches-

And the lonely Crow soars
against the White.
Lands in a crooked tree...
to try to bear its life.

-stitches-stitches-stitches-

A water lily
fights the muck
of a dirty swamp
to bloom.

-stitches-

While the cactus puckers
from its own prick,
salty tears seep through
its green leather hide.
It's only nourishment, wasted.

-stitches-stitches-

You fade away
from my fractured heart.
Bleeding out in limbo.
Will I ever find the ground
to stand on?

-stitches-stitches-stitches-

My heart beats without rhythm,
slow, fast - stops.
Please don't slip through the cracks.
I'll stitch them together. Please.
Please don't go away.
You remind me of Everything.

THE GOLDEN GLIDER

KAITLYN PLUMMER

A new little creature
In a cramped container,
Clear as a freshly cleaned window,
Like a trophy on display.

It glides through the water
As easily as a dart,
Flying quickly, elegantly to its target.
The scales shine brightly orange,
My own personal sunset in a tank.

Bubbles form on the surface,
The array of colors below.
Pink, blue, green, purple pebbles;
It lures me in with its own spell.

Eyes glued to the tank;
Stuck fast to the performer inside,
Every disappearance of soggy flakes.
Every twitch of a fin.

DOORS

REBECCA GREENMAN

Relationships rely on tone.
The commonplace door,
A communicative medium,
Meditates on its atmosphere.

The careless crash emitted
From an ignored and chipped door
As she runs to his car for a final kiss
Is the telltale sign of a woman in lust.

When he wakes early for work,
And she rolls towards emptiness,
The whisper of a door knob
Accompanied by a secured lock's click,
Exposes a considerate love.

When the reliable door
Is thrown to its stop
With the strength
Of a shattering heart,
Reverberations echo
Through the linoleum floor,
Down the wood paneled walls,
To the ribcage of a peacefully
Slumbering man.

RICHELE BOTZER



MY STRANGE OBSESSION

REBECCA GREENMAN

“So why don’t you tell us about yourself. Tell us why you’re here.”

“Well, I always watched them shows you put on. I always thought to myself, what freaks, ya know? I guess the freaks were kinda like me – didn’t know they were freaks. That’s all. They just didn’t see it. You do something long enough, you don’t think it’s weird. You think it’s just one of them things people don’t talk about – like washing your belly button. Nobody ever mentions it, but you know everybody digs a finger in there to get out the lint.”

“Yes. Yes, of course, but why don’t you explain to us exactly what it is you have been doing all these years. Explain your... *Strange Obsession.*”

“Well, let me build up to it, okay? I want to explain myself before you go judgin’. I was born in a nice family. Sweet mother. Strong father. An older brother who didn’t let nobody mess with me at school. An older sister who taught me how to wear makeup. And it was all fine and normal, ‘cept I was the baby. Are you the baby of your fam?”

“Sort of. I’m an only child.”

“Well it isn’t the same. I’ll tell you that now. Don’t go around telling people you’re the baby of the family. It’s not the same. Anyways, I guess, everyone always thought I was cute and they didn’t never want to make me mad or sad, so they just let me do what I wanted. Well kids do weird things. They need someone to yell at them every once in a while. They need someone to make them embarrassed, so they understand. Nobody wanted to do that for me, I suppose. So I never knew to not do it.”

“Okay, ma’am. I think we all understand now. Will you please tell us what your obsession is?”

“See I always liked a crunch. I always enjoyed a good crispy chip. So I would chew on some random things sometimes. See if they were crunchy or not. Then I found the perfect snack. Just enough crunch, and, conveniently enough, it was free!”

“Now we’re rolling, go ahead and tell us what this special snack is.”

“I eat nails. Not the hammering kind. The kind that grows off of human appendages. That kind. I especially prefer the toe variety.”

“Ahhh. Very interesting. Would you mind explaining to us how this all began? Do you remember your first meal?”

“I was about five or so. I remember picking one up and eating it.”

“Ma’am, if you want us to dedicate an episode to you, we’ll need a bit more intrigue than that. Understand?”

“Yeah, sure. So, I think it might have been after school one day during kindergarten. I remember being upset that my mom wasn’t there to pick me up at the normal time.”

“Oh interesting. So your mother often forgot about you, then?”

“No. I already told you – my whole family was crazy about me.”

“Hmmm. Well, I think perhaps we have enough information, then. Thank you for your time, Ms. Clemmons.”

“No. No, I’m sorry. I forgot something. It’s all coming back now. My mother did have a tendency to forget me sometimes. I could be awfully quiet, and I think maybe that made her not always remember me. So it was the first day of kindergarten maybe, and I was sitting there – waiting for my mamma to come get me, and I was so terribly sad and nervous and... abandoned. That night, I went home and mindlessly sort of chewed my toes. I liked the crunch, you know.”

“Perfect. Wonderful. Sign this release, Ms. Clemmons, and we’ll pass your story on right away. Thank you. The door is back and to the left.”



AUTUMN WERTZ

INTUITION

REBECCA GREENMAN

I guess my ma musta been a child once. That's what they all say, right? "I was young once." Why would they even say that to us? I don't wanna think about them making out in their parents' fucking station wagon. Like too much information, you know? Anyways, that's not my point. My point is, my mom's never really acted like a young person. I think even when she was fifteen she musta been at least 45. She just sits around watchin' Murder She Wrote and eating prunes. Who the hell eats prunes? The woman's compulsive. Not a clue how to let loose. So she takes it out on me.

I never really minded much. I didn't tell her nothin' is all. Sometimes that's just easier. Even if there's a problem, so what? It isn't gonna help any to make a fuss. The toilet's leakin'. What the fuck is she gonna do about it? Sorry, back to the story – that's why you called me here, right?

Okay, so yesterday, she gets home from her shift at the Dollar Tree. She's sorta out of it. Dropped her purse on the landing of the complex. Doesn't even bother picking up the cherry blossom hand sanitizer. That Bath and Body shit ain't cheap. So I knew something was up. So the whole *she musta been young before but always blames me for like being a fuckin' kid* thing – well, she walks in on me smoking a bowl, and I'm only tellin' ya this cause I'm being truthful. So don't get all pissy about it. So she sees me smoking, and she just tosses her keys on the table and goes to her bedroom. Well, I mean I guess it's a pullout couch in the corner, but there's a curtain so it works. Anyway, she walks back there, and I'm like "Shit, she's so pissed, she can't even yell." And I figure, maybe she don't know what smokin' a bowl is. Maybe she don't realize.

So I decided to just finish it off. No need wasting the stuff. That's just irresponsible, ya know? So ma – she all the sudden screams. Not an angry scream but kinda like a banchee. Picture some crazy woman in a straight jacket cryin' over her fiancée who fell in love with someone else... Like those urban legends, I guess.

Then it gets real quiet, like I almost shit my pants, cause the quiet's scarier than the scream. If you ask me, I think it's instinct. Like all the animals sense something and leave and then you're in silence and you know shit is about to go down. Then, I hear a real tiny giggle. I think. Maybe it was the window opening. But it sounded like a giggle. Next thing I know, she's lyin' on the pavement four stories down.

It didn't even look funny. It looked natural. She always sleeps with her arm behind her back and her head off to the side. And this looked like that. Like if someone woulda just dropped her – mattress and all – right in front of the building. Our apartment isn't even that high. She shoulda just broke something. They haven't even really told me what happened to her or why she hasn't woken up. I don't think they know. She didn't break nothing but her arm. Her head wasn't bleeding inside or out. She just went to sleep. They aren't saying it's a coma. Shock is what the nurse lady kept saying. And I telled 'em if working at the Dollar Tree didn't shock her to sleep, then why should this? They didn't say nothing after that.

That's what happened. And I can't tell you nothin' about the hand mark. I didn't touch her, and even if I did, it wouldn't a'been like that. I mean on her arm like that. She has a bad shoulder, don't let nobody touch it.

If you don't need to know nothin' more, then I gotta get back to the hospital. She was making sounds last night. It could mean she'll wake up today. I don't need her flippin out about hospital bills right quick, so I should be there when she wakes.

A (PISSED OFF) LOVE POEM

REBECCA GREENMAN

As a pre-pubescent
With dreams of a love
That would traverse the ocean,
I listed the characteristics of a man.

Can talk for hours each day
And never get enough.
Say I'm beautiful.
He feels so lucky.
I'm his princess,
His love.

He'll make it known
That I am his.

As a post-pubescent
With dreams of a love
That will transcend college,
I list the characteristics of a man
That will deserve my love.

One without his brain
Slowly dripping down his spine
Or out of a slack nostril
With each puff of the blunt.
Perhaps he'll call me his love
But not when I'm blowing
His two-bit theories to smithereens -
Not when I'm demonstrating
The functionality of a developed prefrontal
lobe.

He can call me his love
When he grovels at my feet,
When he looks me in the eyes,
When he bares his soul -
Not when he draws up his sword
To ineffectually dismantle my opinion.

An ancient school-girl-me
Will not deter my feminist
Urge to undermine the presumed superiority -
To dislodge his misogynist vocabulary.

I'll be someone's love
Behind closed doors.



LEAH KETH



LOVE LETTER TO MY SAXOPHONE

DEREK DIETZ

Cracked and weather-worn pads
click and pop as a D Minor Harmonic scale
writhes its way out, like my charmed serpent,
through the bronze, shining bell of my sax.
My fingers respond like elephants' memories.
The scale is a bicycle
I never forgot how to ride.

Unsatisfied with my tinny tone,
I remove the reed
and allow the jazzy juice of my mouth to soak
through the bamboo fibers,
a sloppy bit of foreplay
before the real lovemaking begins.

My neck strap reeks
of sweat and summer sun -
four seasons of marching band
while my other friends scored goals
on freshly cut soccer fields.
The football field is no jazz hall.
We clean up good.

It's been months since we danced together.
I'm as rusty as her ancient, speckled finish,
but once that bass starts walking
And the piano twinkles in,
suddenly we're like old lovers once again,
and I wonder why it's been so long
since we waltzed through changes like these.

```

namespace poem in c#
{
    public partial class Form1 : Form
    {
        public Form1()
        {
            InitializeComponent();
        }

        private void Poem_Click(object sender, EventArgs e)
        {
            try
            {
                //poetry is the spontaneous overflow of powerful feeling -Wordsworth
                string spontaneousOverflow, powerfulFeeling, poem;

                spontaneousOverflow = imagery.Text;
                powerfulFeeling = metaphor.Text;
                poem = spontaneousOverflow + " " + powerfulFeeling;

                MessageBox.Show(poem);
            }
            catch (Exception ex)
            {
                MessageBox.Show("Error" + ex);
            }
        }
    }
}

```

KATE DIVITO

HAIKU

R. CRAIG BRUSH

November 2014

Dreams intrude on waking hours

When is a cigar not a cigar?

Side with Erikson on this

~

Words of red-hued flame

The old, poison-lipped cleric

Spreads hatred; deceit

~

Wetness harkens me

Marching through the foreign mud

A time out of mind

~

Swiftly falling flakes

The cardinal swoops eagerly

Ms. Cardinal unmoved

~

Peripherally:

Fleeting looks begin the dance

Where it ends, who knows?

~

She sits before

Beauty permeates all

My heart leaps

~

Stillness

Soliloquy

Hearth fire

RELATIVE REFRAIN

AUDRIANNA DELACOUR

Like an eclipse of moths

Fluttering toward a light bulb,

We flocked to them

When we heard

The melodious picking

Of Dad's guitar -

His eyes sneaking

a peak of his idol -

Synced with the horsehair

Bow on the fiddle strings

That Grandpa played.

Although his bones ached,

Each tune took him back

To his younger days.

His crippled, wrinkled

Hands cradled his

Beloved old friend.

Singing, clapping,

Laughing along to

The funny little tunes

They would play.

I can almost hear

Them belt out,

"A pretty little squirrel

with his tail in a curl

and they all got a girl

but me."



BREANNA ARBUCKLE

JANUARY

AMELIA EIGER

Gingerly, like the careful steps of a deer in the dead of winter, I stepped out of my mother's black Subaru. The world that greeted me was cold and white like 99.9% of the demographic of the town I had just moved to. My mother, eyes glistening, kissed me warmly on the cheek.

"Try to have a good day, baby," she said, pulling me into a final hug. I hugged her back tightly, willing her not to let go. But she did, and the wind rushing toward my face seemed chillier than it had before. My lungs felt frosty. I braced myself against the wind, and through the muddy slush, I trudged toward the hostile bricks of Hillview Elementary. I flicked a final wave back to my mother.

Our family had moved during an unreasonably cold and snowy January, which meant my presence would interrupt a half-finished school year. I'd had many friends in Massachusetts and, though I was anxious, I assumed I would successfully do the same here. Merely entering the third grade, I had not yet grasped how drastically a population could change with your location.

Terribly intrigued by their foreign addition, the established cast of third graders in Mrs. Cagno's class responded to my appearance with a caution hinting at xenophobia. They were fascinated by many things about me: where I had come from, my young age.

Their more probing inquiries came shortly after my first indiscretion:

"If you get a pink slip, you have to take it home for your parents to sign. You get gold slips for being good. If you get five she'll give you candy or you can pick a prize from the prize bucket,"

Addie said, explaining our penal system's perks.

"Oh my god. That's wicked awesome," I grinned. Addie gaped in horror.

"Y-you can't use the Lord's name in vain! That's a pink slip. I'm telling Mrs. Cagno." She marched away, indignant with righteousness.

This moment marked perhaps the first time I had even considered my *own* religious views. Though born of a Christian father and a Jewish mother, both were non-practicing nonbelievers; curiously, they only seemed to identify religiously around the holiday season. I had no beliefs. I believed that was okay. The population of Grove City, Pennsylvania felt otherwise.

I met Emma on the playground. We were both watching the herds plow through the fresh land, those afraid of the cold wetness placing their feet within the imprint of those who came before. Neither of us had been fond of the tundra Hillview's playground offered as amusement. She told me she knew of a spot where the two of us could keep warm. Obliging, I followed her as we ventured to the far side of the frozen playground. We plodded around to the other side of the building. She swung open the door to the lunchroom, which was always empty during recess. The inside warmth heaved toward us. We slouched against a brick wall within the closed foyer. The wind moaned outside. Numbly, I rubbed my pink cheeks.

"I'm sorry, what was your name?" I asked once my cheeks had thawed and my lips could properly form words.

"Emma," she responded. "It has to be from the Bible. It has to be."

“Oh...I don’t think I know that...” I responded feebly.

“Yeah I really only read the Bible,” she said, speaking over me. “Has your family found a church yet?”

“Oh, um...no,” I said, hoping to appear as if we had even been looking.

“Oh that’s good. Come to my youth group,” she demanded.

“Um I’ll have to ask my mom...”

“Okay. Well, I’ll write my phone number down, and you can give me yours once we get inside.”

The recess bell rang out across the playground. We rejoined the others dashing toward the school. Maybe I could go with her. I could always just pretend to be a Christian. That shouldn’t be too hard, right? But what if I didn’t know the words to any of the songs? Would she catch me? What if I told her I was converting? Would she be proud? Would it matter that I was Jewish now?

But what if I was honest? I was sure that only unpleasant consequences could accompany my honesty. I dreaded the imminent loss of my new and only friend.

This worry was new to me. I remembered my days on the playground at Wood School in Boston, where my only concern was avoiding the rough young boys on the soccer field. They’d liked to kick dodgeballs at any passing girl. While some other girls found it exhilarating and had happily assumed it was only a warped game of dodgeball, the field filled me with terror. I avoided it, preferring to jump rope with my friend Geralyn.

As time passed at Hillview, I managed to scrounge up a few friends, none that I was ever particularly close with. As the bell rang, Emma and I stampeded toward the playground. Our hiding place had since been discovered, and the teachers kept a watchful eye over our activities. I suggested jumping rope to keep warm, feeling as though any activity might stave off the cold.

“We don’t have jump ropes here,” she said, redirecting my attention toward the swing set. It was erected at the farthest reaches of the property. As we approached, I noticed our footprints were the first to intrude on this unblemished territory. We imprinted our presence on the land in clumsy strides. All ten swings remained unoccupied as they had throughout the majority of the winter season. I noticed ten fluffy piles of snow mounded upon each of the seats. Emma blew on one and laughed as it sparkled to the ground. I swiped at mine with a mittened hand. The pile silently thumped to the ground.

We sat together on these swings, side by side.

“You’re going to hell, you know,” she stated factually.

“What?” I inquired, suddenly and inexplicably nauseous. “How do you know?”

“You’re not *saved*. I talked to my dad. You can never know Jesus, and you can never go to heaven, and you have to die so you will go to Hell,” she explained sympathetically.

“What if I become a Christian?”

“You can’t. You’d still be Jewish.”

I skidded my feet on the frosted mulch and brought my swing to a halt. I stared back at my friend in disbelief. I had nothing to say; I said nothing. After a pause:

“I’m sorry,” I told her. I wasn’t. I trudged away. Snow collected in my shoes.

BRITTANY HAUSER



SAFETY IN THE STORM

R. CRAIG BRUSH (2012)

It isn't that I cannot love, but that I will not.
For in that care-free sea of bliss a tempest stirs
— a vast and inimitable danger for unwary travelers.

Hapless, I avoid such unlucky places,
Preferring rather the imagined safety of the coastal shoals
On whose beaten banks my toes take root in calm reassurance.

Alas, the true danger abides near the leeward shore
Where rocks and wreckage lie quietly in wait,
Resolute in their iniquitous intent to submerge and consume.

Incognizant, I flounder.
Uncomprehending, I slowly drown.
Wherein have I erred?

Disquietude.
Despair.
If only I had put to sea.



MEAGAN GROSS

AN INTRODUCTION

MEGAN STOUDT

The exchange is brief. Within it, I hardly hint at my woes. Yet, gliding out of my presence, she tosses words behind. No more to her than crumpled paper. No more to her, no more to me. At first. Confusion urges me to reconsider. These words were scrawled on the tongue of one whose existence is all but foreign to mine. The error is understandable. She is not to know that two such words have never made acquaintance. Not in my presence, anyway. Not even with me individually, either. *Strong. Woman.* No. Not I. Strong did not stand at my elbow and help me tug open the entrance to school. Kindergarten was Excalibur, the door its rock. Strong favored a fifth grader its Arthur. Strong would not crown me king. Nor queen. How could it, when Woman and I are unaffiliated? Woman wouldn't dare touch me, repelled by Girl clutching wantonly to my chest. During the night, she grips me extra tight. Trying to extract salty drops from my quaking form. Silent seas were produced the year Strong stealthily dragged every relative from my bones. Stable, Sufficient, and Surviving stumbled away. Fragile, Frail, and Fading filled in. Woman heard. She obviously assumed my new companions would consume me. Make sure I never attained her alliance. Who could blame her missing our meeting? Miraculously, though, I shook my restrictive jailors. Freed, I could finally pursue the ever-elusive pair I so desired. Still, I constantly checked over my shoulder. Perhaps this distracted me. Made me miss Girl's grip slip. Caused a failure to notice two companions stepping out to greet me. Only looking at what a stranger threw behind am I able to see that which is in front of me. Hello.

GOURMET CHEF

THERESE HOLZAPFEL

Steam veils the pallid
green symbols on the digital
clock at the back of the stove.
Standing on tiptoe I peer
down into my cauldron and
examine the brew I am
currently concocting.
Bubbles serrate the edges
of a rusty surface
pockmarked with
emeralds, rubies, and pearls,
the treasures of the garden.
Slowly I churn the soup
in idle circles,
watch peppers, tomatoes, onions
chase each other in a whirlpool.
Glance at the grease-flecked
recipe on the table.
My heart clenches into a fist.
I raise my eyes to my sister,
who is leaning on the other
edge of the table as if she
is the bad cop and I the
sweating suspect.
"Do you recall,"
I calmly ask,
"if I was supposed to put
one can of tomatoes in this
or four?"

THE CUSTOMER OUT BACK

THERESE HOLZAPFEL

It had been raining for most of the day, and by the time I jogged into work the cuffs of my pants were clinging to my ankles and my hair was a rat's nest of damp tangles. Inside the little burger joint it wasn't much brighter. Silence reigned over the two or three people eating and the gray pall of the afternoon outside seemed to have crept in after me. Sweeping past the bathrooms I thrust open a side door with my elbow and came around behind the front counter. Annie, the shift manager for that evening, sauntered up to me while I was retying my hair into some presentable shape and bitching about my wet socks under my breath.

"Pleasant day," she remarked dryly as I clocked in, and then eyed the rings of grimy water pooling around my shoes. "Considering that you're already wet..."

She pointed leadingly at the garbage cans behind her, which were overflowing from the previous shift. I felt my shoulders droop. My eyes rolled instinctively to the drive-thru window across the way. The rain looked like it was coming down even harder now, slashing at the smudged glass as if it knew that soon enough some poor slob would have to go trudging out into its hard embrace. I narrowed my eyes at the very slob reflected in the windowpane. She glared back at me from the glass, the rivulets of rain water tracing swiftly down her face like scars.

A few minutes later I was flicking the drenched strands of my hair out of my eyes as I made the trek to the junk pile behind the shop. The bags within the garbage cans were swollen to bursting, but it wasn't a matter of weight. Today it was a matter of speed and agility, neither of which the rolling trash pails carried in spades. Scraping and creaking on the pockmarked asphalt their wheels caught in every crevice and every pothole, splashing my already doused shins with clammy water after each bump. Cursing viciously I lugged them over the parking lot and to the fenced-in area that contained the dumpsters. I was so busy stringing together as many creative words as possible that I almost didn't see the man until we were less than twenty feet apart.

Sometime in the future I would wonder how old he really was, but at the moment it didn't occur to me. He looked about a thousand-and-one, with cracked brown leather for skin and a pair of dusty blue marbles for eyes. Some of the tangled gray yarn on his head escaped from under his ball cap and mingled with the frayed strings on his shoulders. His threadbare clothes clung to him as mine did, as if riveted to his flesh by the pouring rain. There were scars on his face.

We made eye contact for about five seconds, and he didn't seem to notice when I jumped. Silently he bent down in the refuse of the dumpster and fished around. A few seconds later the twisted claws of his hands came up clutching a few plastic bottles and one aluminum can. As I stood like an idiot in the rain he waded over to the edge of the trash heap and swung himself over the ragged lip. He landed heavily beside the shopping cart he had parked at the base of the fence. Putting his finds gently in the cart among the other treasures within it he covered the vehicle with a tarp and pushed onward. One of the wheels on his cart squeaked, but he didn't seem to mind it. The man himself never made a sound the whole time I watched him blaze a trail across the parking lot and vanish into the rain.

Back inside the restaurant I dumped the garbage cans just inside the back door and shook off like a dog. One of the new girls frowned in sympathy as she passed me. My favorite work buddy chuckled and tossed a solitary paper napkin my way. As I wrung out my ponytail Annie trudged past, clipboard in hand.

"Hey, there was a homeless guy rooting through the trash out there," I commented offhandedly.

"What a coincidence," she replied, her eyes barely flicking up from the paperwork on her board. "He was here yesterday. I thought of you when I saw him."

The rest of the night was rather uneventful, as most rainy evenings were. After a couple hours I stepped out the back door for some downtime while Annie continued her paperwork. Lighting a cigarette I huddled under the little awning above the rear exit, standing just inside the curtain of cold rain. My eyes wandered for a second toward the dumpsters. I thought about the food we had pitched in the trash cans throughout my shift. The homeless man had been up to his knees in it, the gnarled talons of his hands scraping up some bottles and a can.

My cigarette suddenly tasted bad. I ground it out with my heel and went back inside.

KAYLA SHAFFER



QUESTIONS, RAW AND UNEDITED

R. CRAIG BRUSH

May 23, 2014

I would like to cry, but I don't know if I can. Just watched *Lone Survivor* with J & E – first time I've seen a modern war movie since 2005, when I shipped off to OSUT. Avoidance: I'm very good at it. I've been avoiding emotions since I was a pre-pubescent boy. Tough stuff – very sad.

The story I was familiar with, but there's something about the sights and sounds of combat – the war I knew – those familiar old links to the past that draw me back, that welcome me with open arms, saying “come home to us; you're still in the fight.” But I'm not in the fight, not anymore – only in the deepest recesses of my heart. I cannot let go; I do not want to, not to forget, forever memorializing the fallen, on both sides, and the death which lives within me, always vigilant. It watches; it waits; it restrains, never allowing me to relax, always pulling me back – to the past, to my friends, to an awareness of who I was and what I have done. The comrades who've died, the people I've killed their screams – that piece of me I murdered with every life taken, every shot fired . . .

Was that me? Is that who I am? Or was it the circumstances living through me, some moment metaphysical, when the *Fates* come alive and *Atropos* does her dirty but necessary work on Earth. I'll never know. If there was a clear choice, it wasn't clear to me, then or now. Too many have died – too many innocents – too many lives cut short, potential unfulfilled, hopes for a better future unrealized. And thus echoes the cry of the Ancients, down through the ages: “Justice!” Will they ever get it? Can they?

I do not know. I cannot.

But this I do know: evil exists, and it lurks in places within us we can scarce imagine. One of the greatest is that voice which lives among us, within us, which comforts and reassures, saying “bear all things with the knowledge of certain Justice in the hereafter.” It breeds complacency like a dung heap disease, allowing good people with good intentions to do nothing in this one certain life, here and now. Untold multitudes suffer needlessly, and we, what do we do? What do we do?

Answer: we make this world a better place, for ourselves and for our children, one good and selfless deed at a time. We are still in the fight.

R.C.B., out.

LINDSEY NEISWONGER



FRINGE JOSH JONES

I'm trying to write the words you wouldn't want to run into in a back alley on the way to your car after the bar on a burned out Friday night.

Drunk.

Fucked.

If poems are like athletes, then this one's Bobby Farnham, all street and fringe and smarter than you'd think. Fast like a firework or the flames that took my neighbors' house when I was a child while my father read my report card. Fuck you like a silhouette of a woman in an auditorium with a cigarette between her teeth under a sign that says, "No Smoking." Bold and bitter like a black Columbian dark roast too late in the day. Sharp as a buck knife in the last week of November during rifle season. A rusted nail without a tetanus shot.

What?

"You don't think I'm a goal-scorer?"

IN THE PLACES OF THINGS, I DREAM

JOSH JONES

I dream in dim-lit parking lots
and snow-kissed pine-lined driveways
when I'm the only one who still seems glad
it's winter.
The old women play board games
in cafes
while businesses die along Main Street.
They talk about their
cleaning ladies
and big houses
and I think about living in the woods.
I dream in storage containers.
Lay prone on my grandma's old sectional
in my parents' basement.

I dream of girls with tattoos and dark
eyes
and how I think about again, oh, please.
I dream in the State of the Union,
or more like a nightmare.
Like a homeless graduate.
I dream in dirt and hopelessness
while my friends get jobs at factories.
And there's nothing but the quiet
that makes a sound and
I dream in dim-lit parking lots
and snow-kissed pine-lined driveways
in all hours of
the day.



KAYLA SHAFFER

AUTUMN WERTZ



PULPIT

LIZZ MURR

I like to hum hymns between Sundays
And pretend to lead sermons in alleyways of empty dumpsters
And broken bottles.
I like to imagine my worn down flannel jacket and jeans are fit for a clergyman.
I like to watch families holding hands between the open doors as they approach the pews.
I like to attend church where I'm welcome - among rats
And all the shattered glass.

HOLINESS ON THREE

MILEA REYNOLDS

Inspired by Frederic Chopin's "Waltz in B flat minor"

Holiness
comes
in threes.

Father
Son Spirit

Red, Blue, Yellow.

Rock,
Paper,
Scissors.

Ready,
Set,
Go.

3/4 time signature
blew my mind, and 4/4
became a thing of the past.

Ladies in lacy dresses curtsey
to men in trousers,
waltz around a ballroom.

The emphasis comes on ONE,
my teacher would say—
try clapping it.

On the third day,
God created the waters,
and the dry land.

The old ladies say that death
comes in threes, but I suppose death
is also holy.

The doctor worried
about my unborn brother,
the third child.

He suggested that we free him
from the cruel world before he had a chance
to suffer in it.

My mother refused,
and he was born perfect.
This is holy, too.

ELAINA FENSTERMACHER



IMAGES OF RAIN

MILEA REYNOLDS

Inspired by Frederic Chopin's Prelude Op. 28 No. 15 ("Raindrops")

It rained on our wedding day.
Inches of snow crept upward into billows of fog—
sublimation,
one of your favorite words.

All the women assured me
it's good luck.

But the rain of December is nothing like
the rain of July,
when lightning swims through rumbling clouds,
makes you wonder if tonight, the world is ending.

*

When it rains at camp,
it washes away the dust.
Last year, it flooded.
Geysers shot up
from grates in the pavement.
You and I spent hours in the Dining Hall,
sweeping the rising water into the drain.
Once the clouds were empty,
we could laugh again.

*

When lightning reached down
and zapped the transformer
on the telephone pole,
fireworks flew from all directions.
Colors rippled on black clouds
like a Pennsylvanian Aurora Borealis.

You called 9-1-1, and soon
red flashing lights joined the electric
rainbow.

*

You watched me at track meets
when the rain whipped
across all eight lanes.
I ran one lap after another,
rain pouring into my eyes and mixing
with sweat.
You could have found shelter
in your car, but
you were there, jacket in hand,
when I crossed the finish line.

*

And then there was that time
when we danced in the downpour.
I don't think we knew
that we would have the rest of our lives
to hold each other
when the thunder roars.
I had to wear one of your t-shirts
while my soaked clothes
hung up to dry.

*

You told me
that it's all part of our story.

THREE METHODS OF MOTION

MILEA REYNOLDS

Inspired by Ludwig van Beethoven's "Pathétique" Sonata

I.

A chord that puts every finger
to work—*fortissimo*—
like the bellow of a train
close enough to make the crossing lights wink.

Sometimes I run on the railroad tracks,
two wooden planks to every stride,
heart beating wildly as I tiptoe over trestles,
praying the ancient construction
will hold up for one more day.
The smell of melting tar on the hottest days of August.
The scraping of the ballast under my sneakers.
Occasionally I will mimic Maniac Magee
until my balance fails.

My father tells me this is a violation.
He would know. He has spent his entire life
obsessed with trains. When he was a little boy,
playing with his train set underneath the Christmas tree,
he knew this was his calling.

I would hike up the stairs to his office
as a little girl, *chugga chugga*,
to drop off his dinner. A Wal-Mart bag
with a bologna sandwich, rippled potato chips, and a cola.
"Mommy says 'I Love You,'" I relayed
as I handed him the bag.

Yes, I can tell you about the loneliness
of a child whose parent works nights.
He gave my sister and I a stuffed lamb,
dressed in full conductor garb. It sang a railroad song
when you pressed its hoof,
Choo Choo.
To remind us of him when he was away.

We decided not to move to New York, even though
we liked the house there with plush purple carpets and a fireplace.
The jobs began to change, and I didn't realize why
I was getting school lunches free.

But now life is stable.
He is gone before the sun
ever inches into the sky and he is back
when twilight has slunk over the earth.

Every time I run on the tracks, I challenge one of those
steel monsters
to sneak up behind me. I want to hear its thunder
as it chases me. I want to feel my heart beat faster,
until it reaches the tempo
of the thousand wheels,
clickity-clack.
I will tease it, daring it to catch me,
relishing the feeling of being in control,
and then,
I will jump.

II.
Someday I hope you take me for a boat ride.
One of those fancy gondolas,
with the Italian man in the striped shirt and
red-ribboned hat
rowing us past the Venetian storefronts,
balancing on the prow.

We'll watch the blue-green water
ripple slowly around us, smooth
glissandos swelling from our boat.
You'll point out how busy the city is
and I'll show you the peaceful sky.

We'll move with the flow of the river, lazily,
and thinking about the muffins we enjoyed for breakfast.
We'll watch tiny white birds swooping low,
skimming the water, their feathers
just barely getting wet.

III.
I loved the *accelerando* of my clicking chain
spinning faster and faster as my feet
shoved the pedals forward.
Wheels somersaulted over and over
as the bike floated down the pavement.

My dad showed me how to drip oil
onto the chain when the rain's rust
made it screech. He showed me how to unscrew
the tiny cap on the wheel, hook up the pump,
fix the flat.

We took a family walk almost every day
in the summertime, I on my bicycle
and my parents ambling behind, pushing a stroller
with my baby sister inside.
To Stoneburg Road and back—I had to tap
the stop sign before we could turn around.

Going home was always easier.
Downhill. I showed off by riding with no hands,
even fixing my ponytail while I soared
down the pavement, to demonstrate
my poise. Mom and Dad
had a different kind of balance,
one that surged
through their knitted fingers.

I knew my balance was at its peak
when I could ride to Sally's,
buy a gallon of milk for the brownies
my mom was baking,
and somehow manage to carry it home
while my knees dipped up and down
and one hand on the handlebar
steered left and right.

The sight of his car in the driveway—
a rare occurrence at lunchtime—
was enough to lure me
from the neighbor's basketball hoop.
No matter the score,
I would sprint home to see him.

Music swells with movement.
Quicker, quicker, moving up,
and then descending, *slurs* and *staccatos* dancing together.
Motion and balance keep each other alive,
one guiding the other,
two wheels on a bicycle, spinning in sync.

GODA

MILEA REYNOLDS

*Inspired by Robert Schumann's
"Reverie"*

Lullaby.

The melody
a mother whispers
to her child,
pianissimo,
as the stars begin to flicker.
Her voice
dissolves
into the fluttering curtains.

The soft hissing of flames,
licking the last bits
of glowing log,
the embers themselves
dozing off.

The swing set
after its last friends
have gone home,
chains
still squeaking.

The rustle
of paper-thin leaves,
swimming in the wind's
current, migrating
along the grass;
no destination,
remembering the look
of bare branches.

The last *fermata*,
vibrating
in the air.
Hold it tightly,
and
it might
never fade.

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