



TOBECO 2017



Credits

The staff of Tobeco would like to thank the writers and artists who submitted to the 2016-2017 edition of our journal. We would also like to thank PAGES and designer Brenda Stahlman, Student Senate, English Club, Sigma Tau Delta, Reading for the Cure, Michelle's Café, and Clarion University's students, faculty, and staff for their support.

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"Will is Missing" by Beth Renaud

Tobeco Literary and Arts Journal is a student organization that strives to enhance the 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 encourage cultural and artistic awareness and to advocate an accepting 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 accepting submissions for the 2017-2018 issue. Please send poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, or artwork to: tobeco@clarion.edu

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Thoughtful Thinking

Mel Twain

Writing, my only form of expression.

New ideas begin to surface and rotate around my cranium.

Topics that involve politics, homework assignments, and more innovative ways to express myself.

I scour the room quickly in search of a pencil, in order to capture these fleeting thoughts.

But trying to capture these thoughts is much like trying to capture smoke

Stooping down to the unpolished hardwood floor

Seething through the oceans of discarded clothes

I stumble upon the treasure hidden deep below, the gold and green Ticonderoga

The bedpost acts as a water raft for me to pull myself out of the endless sea of clothes

I emerge from the sea, not drenched, but more determined than ever to place my thoughts onto paper before it's too late.

Clenching my pencil in hand, I hurriedly make my way over to my workplace

I sit in my desk chair

The seat as hard and uncomfortable as a stack of cinderblocks

Leaning forward ever so slightly, clinching the bottom of my chair

I begin to pull myself toward the desk

The metal legs of the chair abrading against the hardwood floors

Lifting my hand above the unblemished piece of paper

I anxiously begin to attempt to jot down the thoughts I so eagerly wanted to preserve

Suddenly, I draw a blank

"Writer's block" is what professional writers call it

Deciding to take a break, I arise from my throne

I stumble into the den and turn on the television

Real House Wives of Delaware County is on!

I'll just take a half hour break and then back to work

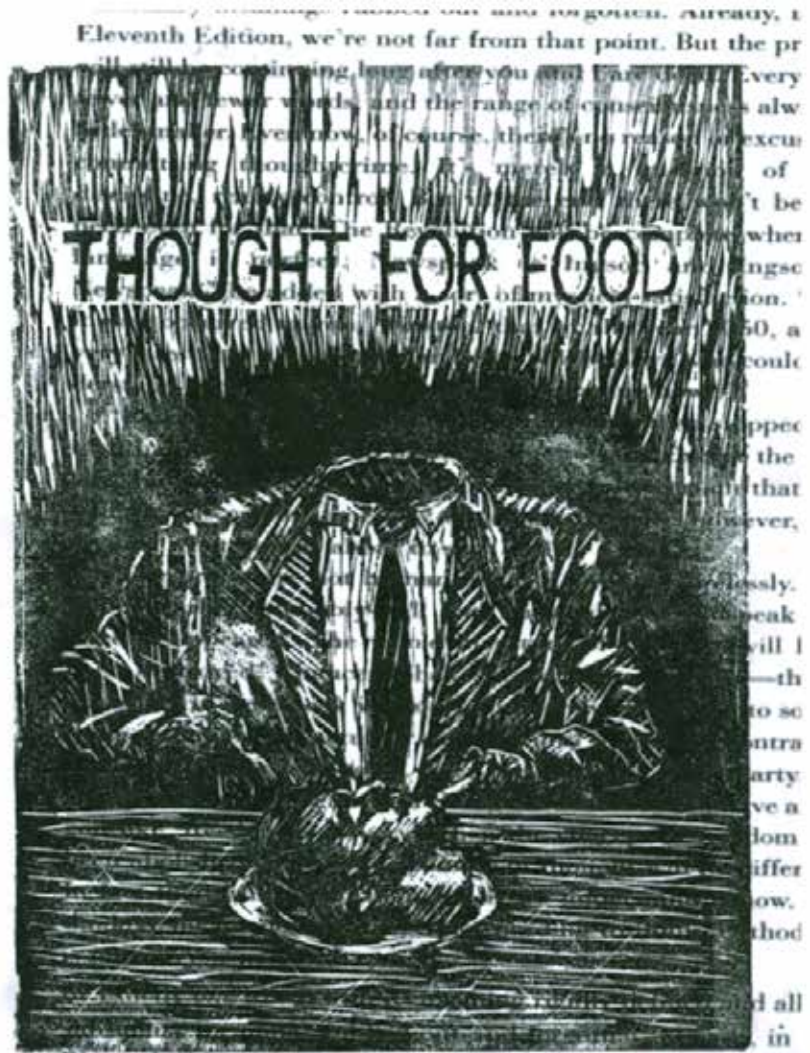
Two and a half hours passed

Rushing over to the desk, I pick up my work and read it aloud

"It was the beginning of the end, some may say."

Maybe this is a job for another day.

Thought for Food
by Wyatt Inlow



Eleventh Edition, we're not far from that point. But the process will still be continuing long after you and I are dead. Every-

Six

Sarah Benton

Her memory
told her lies
everyday.

The Striped Shirt

Valerie Tejada

Between the carpeted folding walls, cramped in a small space, Sayla drew her knees forward, rubbing them against her dripping nose. Her fingers were white from gripping her tan and paint-stained cargo pants. There was a click as the theater teacher, Miss Hellen, shut the cream colored door, leaving Sayla where she hid. Sayla could hear Miss Hellen's flat feet hitting the egg yolk floors, then coming to a slow stop. Holding her sniffling for a moment, Sayla listened.

"I feel terrible. It's a waterworks show in there. I truly thought I was helping," whispered Miss Hellen, but not quite quiet enough.

"Did you tell her you would make Jolene come find her?" asked a faint voice that Sayla couldn't make out.

"Yes, but it didn't do any good. Actually, I think it might have made it worse," answered Miss Hellen.

Of course it didn't help, thought a frustrated Sayla, *I know when I am not wanted*.

Sayla wished that they wouldn't send Jolene in because not having any friends was a little better than having someone who didn't want to be your friend. The voices continued talking. Miss Hellen said, "If only I hadn't left the room. I think she stood there for a good few minutes before she had the courage to leave. Can you imagine all those eyes...she was scarlet."

"I bet she was! Honestly, I was kind of waiting for something like this to happen to her. She can be so quiet and a little odd...but you know, she's sweet...very sweet."

Sayla felt an ache in her heart. *Was Miss Hellen agreeing with the other teacher?* she wondered. But the talking had stopped and their footsteps were becoming distant. The pain from holding back tears was ripping at Sayla's throat to be set free. She could still hear the giggles from an hour before...

Thick yellow and blue strips ran horizontally on Sayla's extra-large shirt. It wasn't that Sayla didn't need an extra large, she did. However, this was a boy's extra large – not a girl's. Sayla drowned in the fabric. Eleven years old with forever tangled chocolate hair that fell funny across her chubby face and a stomach that protruded past her unformed breasts. Sayla stood in line in the theater room that was covered with past years' production signs. On her left was a petite girl with sweetly braided hair that flowed all the way down her back – there were rainbow charms at the end of her braids that danced when the girl moved. The braided-hair girl wore a rose colored tank top with a unicorn galloping on it. There was a longing within Sayla to switch shirts with the braided-hair girl. Yet Sayla understood that her "large bone structure," which is how her mom called it, would never be flattering in the unicorn tank top. Once she tried on a similar shirt while shopping with her mother, but even an "Extra Extra Large" had straps that dug into her shoulders creating mini mountains, and the skin to shirt contact revealed to everyone what she was hiding under her normally drowning shirts.

On her right a freckled face boy nudged Sayla with his bony elbow to bring her attention to Miss Hellen as she danced into the theater room, papers dripping from her arms, her sunshine hair resting on her shoulders. Sayla and the freckled boy loved to watch Miss Hellen because it seemed that the world helped Miss Hellen out a little bit more than the rest of them. Observing Miss Hellen, Sayla straightened her shirt and pulled a few strands of hair behind her ear. Miss Hellen always had her golden hair tucked behind her ear as she dramatically read the script to twenty-five curious sets of eyes. Normally, Miss Hellen wore a striped dress and today was no exception. Sayla beamed.

"Good morning class, today we are going to continue with our production of *Annie*... Wait...where is my coffee...? I must have left it in my office, excuse me, children..." Miss Hellen called as she danced out of the theater room, the sunlight following her.

Sayla wondered if when Miss Hellen was younger, was she a little girl like herself or like the braided-hair girl? Who was now staring directly at Sayla. Curious, Sayla smiled. She had rarely seen the braided-hair girl in class before. Sayla caught the girl glancing back and forth between the little freckled boy and Sayla. The girl's eyes were squinting as her eyebrows crinkled together –one could tell she was thinking extremely hard. Squaring her shoulders toward Sayla, she asked, "Are you a boy or a girl?"

Stunned, Sayla didn't respond. Her mouth made a straight line while her pudgy

fingers tensed. Sayla was just about to open her mouth in anger when she heard laughter. Chuckles from a few of the other children erupted around her. Even the freckled face boy covered the smile that was forming with his hand. In the background, someone muttered, "I am glad someone asked. I was wondering too." Fire rose underneath Sayla's cheeks, making the anger fade, only to be replaced by an ache of rejection and hurt. Quietly, Sayla answered, "A girl. My name is Sayla." Staring at her feet, Sayla didn't want anyone to watch as her face changed from pink to a deep shade of crimson. Burning all over, Sayla felt like she was standing in a fire pit, letting the flames crawl from her toes to the crown of her head. A few children stayed quiet, their shocked eyes as wide as saucers. The giggling continued. Gaining confidence from the attention, the braided-hair girl announced, "I didn't know what you were – a girl, a boy, an it." There was more laughter. "Do you know you're wearing boy's clothes?" asked the braided hair girl.

"I like this shirt. I like stripes," Sayla responded. As she blinked, Sayla was surprised to find water lining her eyelids. The girl shook her head so the braids swooshed around her like a helicopter.

"You are a girl. You need to wear girl's clothes," demanded the braided-hair girl.

Sayla pushed the freckled face boy aside and bolted out of the theater room. As Sayla left, she bumped into Miss Hellen, spilling the coffee across the front of Miss Hellen's striped dress. "Sayla! Be careful!" Miss Hellen erupted in a harsh tone. Sayla ran away just as Miss Hellen noticed the already blotchy tear-stained face.

In her hiding place between the folding walls, Sayla wished desperately that she could go home to the safety of her room.

She imagined throwing away all the clothes in her closet that were boy's clothes. Although that would leave her with only a few things. *I'll give them away. I hate this shirt*, thought Sayla as she began to pick at a loose thread in the stitching. Anxiously, Sayla pulled the thread till it snapped. Sayla's stomach rolled over the lip of her cargo pants. She shifted to stop the pinching of the pants button into her flesh. These were a size fourteen, she was the only girl in her class who wore a size fourteen. Every other girl was in the single digits. Sometimes the other girls would go around asking what size everyone wore. During these scary conversations, Sayla usually managed to slip out of the room or start up a conversation with the boys. Those two digits made her squirm. They were a label for her. She hadn't stepped foot in the girls' section of a department store for a few years now. Rather, she learned to shop in the boys' section or learned to pick out items in the young adult area while still trying to dress like a sixth grader.

Soon, Sayla heard the knob jingle as Jolene hesitated by the door. Outside the room, the faint voice of Miss Hellen said, "Go on hon, help your Auntie out, tell her that you'll sit with her at lunch."

"But I told Maggie I would sit with her at lunch," whined Jolene.

"You can sit with Maggie tomorrow."

As Jolene entered, she filled the small space with the smell of cotton candy. Jolene had been carrying around a pink purse which held a petite pink bottle of perfume for a week straight – it went well with her completely pink outfit.

Setting the flashy pink purse in front of Sayla, Jolene sighed annoyingly and asked, "Are you alright? Want to go eat lunch with me?" Jolene secretly hoped that Sayla would

reject the forced invitation. Gazing up at Jolene's uncomfortable dark eyes, Sayla shook her head, letting her bangs cover her like a thick, heavy theater curtain.

Sighing, Jolene took out the pink perfume bottle to mist herself with cotton candy flavoring. Sayla inhaled the sweet scent. It was making her hungry, she could almost taste the cotton candy dissolving on her tongue. Pushing the cap of the bottle closed, Jolene glanced over at Sayla, who was taking deep breaths to breathe in the sugary scent.

"My mom brought it for me. She wears perfume and she thought since I am a girl, I should have some too. She says that all girls need to wear perfume." Hearing this made Sayla clench into an even smaller ball. Realizing what she said, Jolene quickly added, "I mean some girls don't have to wear perfume...I meant...would you like some?"

"Umm...yes, please," whispered Sayla. Unwrapping her white knuckles from the cargo pants, Sayla reached her hand toward Jolene.

"No, no, you want to spray your neck... so that the scent lingers...at least that's what my mom said," announced Jolene with a strong air of pride.

"It reminds me of the fair."

"Me too! That is why I picked it over Apple Spice or Summer's Dream," Jolene explained. Sayla stretched out her neck like a giraffe for Jolene to spray. The mist felt like a hundred kisses on Sayla's neck. Jolene sprayed herself once more, then let out a tiny cough.

"Maybe that was a little too much," she said, smiling. As the cotton candy covered the two of them, Sayla giggled and Jolene straightened out her striped pink stockings.

YOUNIQUE

Jennifer Clark

Porcelain skin,
Rosey red cheeks,
Defined jaw lines,
Piercing eyes.
A unique brand of falsehood,
Women apply to their faces.

Transforming any ugly stepsister into a Cinderella,
With foundation of liquid gold in an eyedropper bottle.
Mascara magnifies, volumizes lashes by four hundred percent.
Concealer vanishes blemishes like a magician vanishes his rabbit.
A makeup artist's masterpiece.

But all at the price of losing,
Your arm and leg.
A third world family's monthly earnings.
Do I realize the life of luxury I live?
Moth eaten rags hang on the skeletons of children,
Rummaging through debris.
Desperate for anything edible.
Yet I add another lip liner to my cart.

**Self-Portrait by
Beth Renaud**



Unfounded

Hannah Collings

“Hey, Mom?” Sadie strode into the room from which the memory originated, running her fingers up the back of her head and around, gathering the hair, rubber-banding it.

“What’s up, sweetie?” Mom’s eyes didn’t move from her sprinting thumbs. Even though by now her fingers must know which letter was where, the mobile device had always been Mom’s favorite child.

Sadie, shrugged, blushed. “So I was wondering...Did we used to babysit when I was little? Who was the baby you used to take care of when I was little?”

“What?” Mom abandoned her ichild and looked up at her flesh-and-blood daughter.

“Yeah, when I was like”—Sadie lifted her eyes to the ceiling and counted backward silently—“three, I guess.”

“We never babysat, honey.”

The girl’s brow knit. “But...”

“It’s just you and me, darlin.” Mom laughed, eyes again to the screen. “Always been.”

She was probably three when she heard it, probably her earliest memory. But was it really...the hazy line of the truth and fiction of unrecorded past was always in this story more ambiguous than usual.

Mom was gazing at the postcard-sized screen of her phone.

“What’s on Facebook, Mommy?” Sadie’d asked. Sometimes Mom showed her funny dogs dressed up, or pictures of her cousins at the park.

“I’m not on Facebook, sweetie. I’m looking up prices.”

“Prices for what?”

“Shh. Let Mommy look at this. It’s very important.”

Mom shifted in her seat, rubbed just above her belly button, and then lifted her thumbs to scroll again on her mobile device. The playback in Sadie’s mind became fuzzy here. The memory shifted location, as in a movie.

Mommy was at the door, talking to that man who used to come over a few times to visit. Sometimes some of Mommy’s friends (mommies themselves) would come to lunch or dinner or a picnic with their kids who were Sadie’s friends. This man-friend would come mostly when Sadie was supposed to be sleeping. She would lie on her belly in the doorway to her room, looking at books in the hall’s light when she’d hear the door open, his loud voice to which Mommy always told him, “Ssh! I have a kid.” After that Sadie’d always jump away from the doorway, into bed.

He wasn’t Dad. Sadie didn’t really know who Dad was, though probably he was somewhere because mostly everyone had a Dad or at least did one

time. Usually there is a mommy plus a daddy before there are any kids, Sadie had reasoned after observing friends' families.

Mom only came up to this man's shoulders. He had no hair, though he wasn't so old; his arms were hard, but belly soft. Sadie had seen him a few times before, when he'd made Mommy mad, coming to visit before Sadie was all-the-way tucked into bed.

"I think I gotta say in this," he told Mom.

"I think you think wrong. Whose uterus are we discussing again? That's right: mine. You left. Just go."

Sadie was coloring the Little Mermaid's seashell bra purple. The green crayon had been shrinking steadily and she prayed it would last through Ariel's tail.

She could see the door where she was at the table, but tried not to look. She always shut her lips tight when that man came to visit and pretended to be a baby who couldn't talk, even when he'd smile and tell her that mommy'd told him so much about her.

"Hun..."

"Leave," Mom said in the hard voice she used whenever she said Sadie's middle name too.

Sadie's straight, honey hair fell over her eyes as her crayon moved up and down the paper. She peered through it to see the man grab Mom's arm. Mom yelled and shoved him with the heel of her hand.

A neighbor called the police, and soon the big man was gone from Sadie's reminiscences.

Mommy was crying the whole time.

"I just have to do it now," Mom told the neighbor. "Can you stay with Sadie?"

"Yeah, yeah, of course."

"Thanks so much. I'm picking my mother up on the way. She's going to drive me back after."

"Sadie will be just fine."

Sadie, looking back, assumed the neighbor's assurances were accurate. She remembered no further ill done that day. She did remember having trouble concentrating on the Little Mermaid's de-whitening that day, though, by what her mind could never justify. Her thoughts, at least in memory, were all day wandering because of the incredibly, distractingly distressed wailing of an infant.

Alone? Alone.
Jennifer Setree

She walks alone,
holding his hand.

A Mother's Musings on Her Millennial's Music

Elisabeth Sauvage-Callaghan

We took the wheels off the bus and
Our five-year-old lost her religion.
She began worshipping
Madonna.
But - we drew the line at presenting her
With *Erotica*
At her seventh birthday party
Because, you know,
Other parents.
(She got it the next day.)

***Sylvia Spoon made
A damn good pretend mike.***

Age ten - her first concert -
No Doubt.
Any notion of age appropriateness
Was jettisoned
As the intoxicated bro behind us
Spat out loud lewd comments and
Gwen Stephani
Led the crowd
In a long-drawn,
Massive choral repetition
Of the F word.

***Oh, Mother(f*cker),
Where were thou?***

Then it was
The Spice Girls' era,
Two fifth graders
Strutting their pre-pubescent stuff
On the front lawn
To the sounds of *Wannabe* -
Telling the world what they didn't know yet
They wanted.

***The soundtrack that illuminated
My deepest darkness.***

Soon, Hanson's infectious
Mmbop, ba duba dop
Ba du bop, ba duba dop
Ba du bop, ba duba dop
Ba du, yeah
Contaminated our living room,
And led us to join a community
Of überexcited kids
And their unenthused, weary parents
For that unavoidable show
At the Igloo.

***Not only was it not that bad,
It was actually pretty good!***

Growing up is hard to do,
Music soothes the pain of
Being a teenager.
Lyrics matter,
Bad poetry prevailed.
It was the time of the M men –
Matthews, Mraz, and Mayer.
Music by the Beastie Boys, Everclear,
And Garbage found its way
On early Mixed CDs
For our road trips to the city
Or the outlet mall.

***Post Grunge and maudlin,
Wannabe deep pseudo folk?
Oh, just shoot me...***

I went through a serious
Barenaked Ladies phase
(And also loved Counting Crows.)
There were two BNL concerts –
She brought home the second one's playlist
As a trophy,
And we finally saw Adam Duritz
(On whom she had a crush when she was five)
On stage at Kent State –
It was August and Everything After.

***Two bands that will forever matter to me,
Even if I no longer listen to them.
and
Hey, I still have that playlist!***

In her late teens
A new sensibility for impeccably crafted,
Dreamy, highly poetic lyrics
Emerged,
That shaped forever

This exceptional wordsmith's
Sensitivity and craftsmanship.
Joanna Newsom's *The Milk Eye Mender*
Molded a fate still as malleable as clay, as
It became the soundtrack
To our continuing road trips
(She at the wheel, by now.)
Sadly,
Newsom's "untrainable" voice, like Dylan's,
Has forever remained an obstacle to
My appreciation of this songwriter's
Sheer genius.

***My daughter's 'Address to the Long Road' is
A phenomenal poetic tribute to
This poet of influence.***

And so it goes. On and on.
Music, the glue that bonds forever
A mother and daughter.
Be it evoking The National's
The Geese of Beverly Road during a
Stroll through Prospect Park,
Brooklyn, New York.
Be it her presence by my side
When I saw my idol, Patti Smith, perform
Live for the first time.
Be it her nod to my current obsession
With the band Beach House in her
Facebook Birthday message to me this year.
Be it, still, a plethora of recommendations,
"Listen to this..." "You will love that..."

***Music is life and love. Life and love are music.
Sharing the soundtrack of your life
Has been - and still is - a privilege,
My loved child.***

Hello There

Therese Holzapfel

My mother named me Jeremiah because she thought it was a girl's name.

She has to spell it a lot, like to the lady at the doctor's office and once to Mrs. O'Hare, who lives across the hall and watches me when Mom goes out. That was the first time, before Mrs. O'Hare started visiting a couple nights a week.

"...I-A-H," Mom spells it now to the old lady standing across from us. She grabs a yellow post-it from the edge of the table and rakes the letters of my name onto the back of it with a pen. I'm not that fast at writing yet, although Mrs. O'Hare tries to teach me the letters when the NASCAR race goes to commercial.

"Girls' names end with 'ah,' Belle," she adds, thrusting the note into the old woman's face.

"That's ludicrous," Belle replies. Her face goes a little white when she looks down at me. I cling to my mother's calf with one hand, fingers toying with the frayed tendons of denim spanning her round knee. Directly across from me Belle's knees are two poles wrapped in tan slacks, and her foot taps in its snub-nosed black flat. Mom's toes peek out from the straps at the front of her sandals, the red polish chipped to show the dull pink beneath.

"Why'd you use 'Nora' and 'Lisa' then?" Mom tilts her head back like she does with the landlord and aims a triumphant half-smile at the old woman across from us.

"Because those are actual girls' names."

"And 'Jeremiah' isn't?"

"No, Lisa!" Belle snaps, eyes wide as if Mom has sprouted a second head.

Mom just shrugs, one shoulder meeting her ear as if there's nothing she can do about that. She reaches down though and takes my hand, folding her fingers around mine. Her nails are long blue triangles against my skin.

"Just wait until your father gets home," Belle goes on, turning strained eyes to the narrow wooden frames on the wall of the kitchen. I try to follow where she's looking, but the table and chairs are in the way. All I can see are the tops of hairdos, foreheads, a raised arm holding a fish.

"Oh, and does what?" Mom demands, snorting like she does when a reporter says something dumb on TV. "I'm not eight years old anymore, Belle, Jesus..."

"Do you think this makes you an adult? Storming back in here with a toddler and a new car that's been God knows where..."

"Jeremiah, honey," Mom says all of a sudden. When I look up she's smiling at me. "Go on outside and look for pretty pebbles."

She stoops to kiss the hand she is holding before she lets go and nudges me toward the door. The old woman looks like she ate something bad.

"Mm-kay," I mumble, edging as far from Belle's beige-clad legs as I can before dashing out onto the porch. Behind me I hear the refrigerator door pop open, Belle muttering, and Mom's familiar, "Oh, for Christ's sake..."

The porch is warmer than the kitchen and smells like the rosebush next to the far right wall. It's one of those screened-in porches, with mesh all around instead of windows and mismatched chairs grouped in the one corner. I don't feel like collecting more pebbles, so I drop onto the steps just outside the battered old storm door. The sun is blaring directly onto my head and I squint out at the driveway. I can't even make out the shape of the house next-door, so I put my head down and observe my toenails. I like to count the days until I'm old enough to have them painted. At breakfast today Mom said, "At least one more day, Jeremiah honey." I am contemplating painting them purple.

“Hello there.”

A shadow falls on me at the same time the words do. I jump and look up to see an old man gazing down at me. He’s half-standing on the bottom step, one work boot still planted in the driveway. A plastic bag with bread and eggs dangles from his hand.

“What’s your name?” he asks, pushing his ball cap back from his forehead with a gnarled thumb.

“Jeremiah.”

His eyebrows make little upside-down U’s on his forehead, but only little ones.

“That’s a good name,” he says, and nods. He has the exact same eyes Mom does. “Where are your shoes?”

I glance down at my bare toes and splay them like peacock feathers, fat little nubs against the chewed-up paint on the stair.

“Didn’t bring ‘em.”

“I see. How old are you?”

“Three.”

“Three years?” He frowns a little and shifts his weight from one foot to the other. After a second he looks back at me.

“Do you like graham crackers?” he asks, moving up the stairs past me. When I nod, he smiles and pats my head.

“Lisa liked graham crackers,” he continues as he opens the storm door. “Lemme go get you some. I’ll be back, after I say hi.”

LITTLE BEAR

Olivia Stuckley

Superman capes,
Tonka trucks,
Green plaid,
And yellow polo –

My brother’s favorite shirts.
The day I finally wore my graduation gown,
My father’s sister
Finished the unforgettable:

A combination of his beloved shirts
Stitched together
Into a single bear
Wearing a flowing, ruby red cape
Just as he used to
Before he remained in the sky.

Twenty-Five

Sarah Benton

Her hair fell around her face in clumps.
Soft and shiny, it glistened in the sun.
This time next year, it will be long gone.



Cassidy Tonks



Cassidy Tonks

Five

Sarah Benton

My reflection pulled me in.

THE “WHAT’S ON MY IPHONE?” COLLECTION

Summer Murray

Please enter passcode.

SNAPCHAT

Omg like lol
Snapchat has me dying
This dog filter
I can't even

Brb I gtg
FT my BFF rn
She broke the snapstreak
#what
That's so cute
Post it on ur Story
And save it to your Camera Roll,
Saving to my Memories is such a hassle

TINDER

Add the photos that portray you nothing like you
actually look
Don't write too long of a bio, no one reads those anyway
Swipe left on the group photos and people you know
Swipe right on people who are too far away to ever
bump into

Hey, it's a match!
Ew, he sent a GIF?

Add the winky face
Not the peach
And def not the eggplant
You can't tell him ur DTF

TWITTER

How am I supposed to update the people of the
Internet on my life less than 140 characters?
#amiright #retweet #follow4follow

FACEBOOK

What's on my mind?

Can someone bring me a pizza?
Can my mom not friend request me?
Can you shut up about the election?
Can we not talk about religious beliefs?
Can my grandma stop commenting on my posts and
signing it “Love, G-Ma”?
Can you stop entering statuses like you are
searching Google?
Can you not try to friend me when we have no
mutual friends?

Like, do I even know you?

LINKEDIN

Hello Potential Employer. Notice that I am
professional with this social media account and
please do not look at my inappropriate posts and
pictures on my other social media.



INSTAGRAM

Make sure you get the right angle,
And add the filter to hide your flaws.
Don't forget the perfect caption,
Buy followers to ensure your self-esteem,
Otherwise delete it and start over.

PINTEREST

The OCD Haven
To organize the clothes you can't afford
Into a board
Post the DIY crafts you aren't arty enough to do
Into a board
Attach the tattoos and piercings you are too nervous to get
Into a board
Mix meals and drinks you aren't skilled enough to prepare
Into a board
Just Pin the life and luxuries you wish you had
Into your Pinterest account

TUMBLR

If you don't post amateur art,
rainbow waves of gay,
SJW power, porn,
and hipster fashion,
are you even on Tumblr?

YOUTUBE

Instead of writing your life,
Broadcast yourself!
Film the parts of your life
That make it look perfect.

Go viral
Make millions fall in love with you
Do silly videos for the views
Because that just means more revenue

Do sponsored videos
Even when your fans hate it
Say things that are rude and ridiculous
So people want to watch and call you out

Meet other successful Youtubers
And fake being friends
To satisfy your subscribers,
And let them think of a proper ship name.

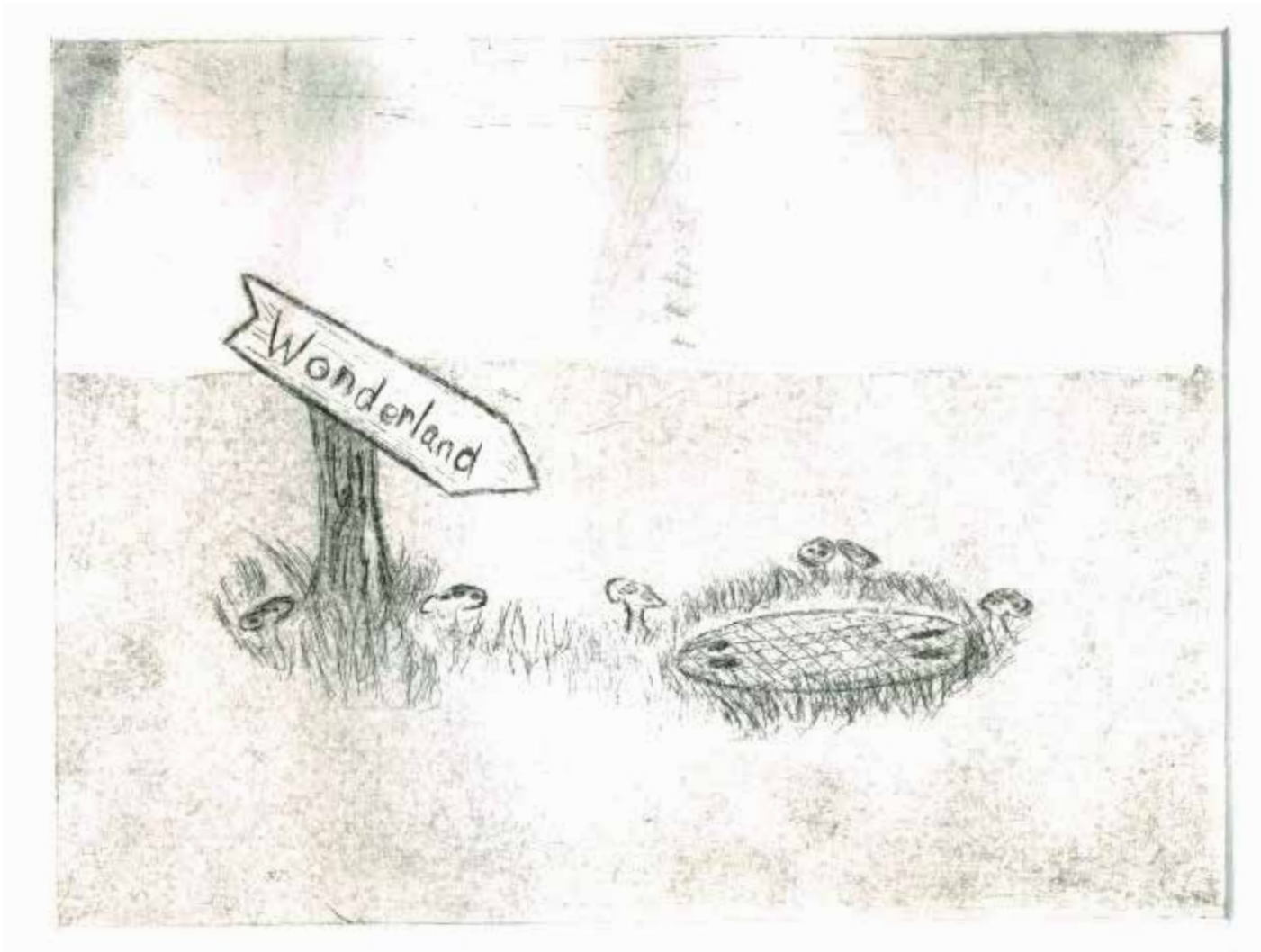
Make merch,
Write a book,
Go on tour,
Meet your viewers.

Silver Play Button? 100,000 subscribers. Money.
Gold Play Button? 1,000,000 subscribers. More money.
Diamond Play Button? 10,000,000 subscribers.
Most money.

Don't forget to like, comment, and subscribe!

MYSFACE

Hello? Anybody?



**Wonderland by
Deanne Gillen**

Pump, push, pull

ASHLEY HARTOS

Rising early to greet the weights,
I make the daily trek to the gym.
It's Wednesday,
That means arms and back.

Muscles screaming out like
A pack of howler monkeys.
Tendons stretching like elastic bands
With every pump, push, pull.

Sweat gliding down my body,
Forming patterns and trails like figure skaters.
Weights clang and crack slamming down,
Mocking me with its cackling tune.

Aching back keeps me from sleeping,
As if lying on busted bricks.
Sore arms heavy to hold,
Weighed down by sand buckets.

Tired legs beckon me to fall,
Wobbly like a newborn calf.
Yet every day I go back,
Growing with every pump, push, pull.

Tick Tock

Britiny Stofen

They pass me by
glancing every now and then.
Time goes on,
minute by minute,
second by second.
Tick tock, tick tock.

I can be worn on a wrist,
but usually I'm hanging
onto the wall.
Letting the hands around me
move from left to down to right
and back up again.
Tick tock, tick tock.

I see these faces,
giving me barely a glimpse.
They are so preoccupied,
staring into their phones,
watching T.V.
Letting all this time pass them by,
Tick tock, tick tock.

I SEE YOU

LOGAN KETH

I see you

I see you in everything

I see you in strangers on the street
Unaware their features or mannerisms
Remind me of you, causing me to stare.

I see you in the face of a friend
Caught in a fit of laughter
As I often brought on you.

I see you in the half-second
When my eyelids meet
In place of darkness.

I see you in the reflections
Of silver and blown glass resting
Among verdant fir boughs.

I see you in a tiny rose
Withering in the December cold
Through wind whipped eyes
On my walk home,
A beaten blossom
I want to break stride for
Falling, knees in the dirt,
To take you up in my hands
Whispering to the petals
“Don’t be afraid,”
“Spring will come,”
And “the sun will return,”
Returning every day
To remind you,

Constantly worrying
Over the seemingly inevitable,
Haunted by the gnawing thought
That if you could only be here
In the warmth of my home
In the protection of my walls
In the cradle of my care,
I would never have to risk losing you
To the bitter cold of the world again.
I would never have to remind you
That spring and warmth will return
Because you would stay warm.

I would keep you
With care and sanctuary
As you would keep me
With beauty and promise of hope
From withering in winter.

But I can’t.

I can’t cradle you in my hands

I can’t whisper hope to you

I can’t hear your laughter or worries

I can only see you.

THE URN FELLS AND GRANDMA WREPT.
Tammy Horsley

The Power of Acceptance

KAITLYNN SASS

When I dumped my boyfriend of four years and quite literally skipped off into the sunset, my friends and family expressed concern that I wasn't giving myself time to grieve the ending of an important relationship. They elicited the expected sympathetic noises and questions, trying to make sure I was okay. I had no desire to hear those things and was beyond the point of being able to appreciate them.

My best friend was the only one who didn't encourage me to sit down and cry with a pint of ice cream while cursing my ex's name. When I asked her why she seemed to accept my elation at my newfound single state, her answer threw my life off balance.

"Because you aren't straight. Of course you're happier without him."

I stared at the wall just above her forehead, my eyes blurring and burning. I wasn't straight? How did she get to make that decision? How was she so ferociously sure that she could say it to me conversationally? Why couldn't I say it to myself?

The thought had crossed my mind before, that maybe I wasn't so into the idea of being with a guy. I passed it off as 'not having found the right man yet,' as being an angst-y teen, anything to avoid having that conversation with myself.

Now, though, having heard the unthinkable out loud, it worked its way down into my very being, taking up residence deep in my chest. Everywhere I went I felt like people were looking at me and seeing this new information blossoming from within, information that I still did not internally have the words for.

It took nearly two more months for me to sit my best friend down and tell her that I was, in fact, a lesbian, confirming an epiphany that she beat me to. I practiced this conversation on her, and then my other friends at school, and then moved toward telling my family.

In the end, the hardest part was not sitting my parents down and telling them that, no, I would not be bringing a new boyfriend home anytime soon. It was not risking different treatment from my friends or testing the effectiveness of my grandmother's pacemaker. My biggest obstacle was overcoming my fear of disliking myself. When I did that, everyone else was more than willing to accept me.

For twenty years, I told myself that I was straight, that I could not be gay. I'm not sure what I thought the consequences of coming out would be, but they have been essentially nonexistent. I no longer lie to myself because there are plenty of others to do that for me. I find happiness in the places where I can be completely myself and in people who encourage me to do that. I believe in the power of self-love. And I believe that the biggest favor I can do for myself is to be honest about who I am.



Kaitlynn Sass

Poetry: The Only Therapy I Can Afford

EMILY GRIGGS

Anxiety.
Attention Deficit Hyperactivity Disorder.
Depression.
Obsessive Compulsive Disorder.
These words get used incorrectly on a daily basis,
And have a stigma surrounding them.
This group of gibberish may not mean a thing to you,
but means everything to me.
These words are my life.

Anxiety.
This word makes me think of the worst case scenarios for every situation.
I cannot go a day without my mind flooding with
What If's, like a leaky basement after a bad storm.
I rest my head on my hand. "What if I touched a doorknob, or a keyboard, after someone who had a contagious illness? What if I get horribly ill, have to go to the hospital, and they give me penicillin and I get sicker because I'm allergic to that medicine?"
I straighten my hair. "What if I forget to unplug it and it shorts out? What if my forgetfulness causes the building to burn down?"
I drop my pencil. "What if I don't reach it in time, and someone slips on it and gets hurt?"
I get the creeps any time I touch my face.
I don't straighten my hair as often as I'd like.
I keep a tighter grip on my pencils.

Depression.
This word means that many people see me as lazy, when really I'm just apathetic.
This word makes going to class every morning a battle-- and a victory.
This word desperately frustrates my anxiety, because when my anxiety wants to get up and go clean the entire house, my depression would rather stay in bed.
Five more minutes.
Ten more minutes.
I need a nap.
I can't remember a time when I wasn't depressed.
Maybe it started when my dad died.
Maybe I was depressed even before then.
When I was in high school, I felt like I was drowning in my mind.
I felt like I couldn't breathe, and the doctor said it wasn't physical.
I talked to my guidance counselor.
I talked to my pastor.
Nothing helped.
My mother refused to believe I had depression.
"Emily, you're too young for depression."
"Your life isn't hard enough to have that."
"You should try reading your Bible. That'll help. The Psalms are very encouraging!"
No one can help you if your mother doesn't see it.
I've never had treatment for my issues, because Jesus, The Great Physician, could heal all my ailments.
I believe that He gave us medicine as a means to heal people like me,
But apparently that wasn't my mom's view when it came to invisible illnesses.
I delicately deal with my affliction, taking it day by day.
I still struggle and feel inadequate,
With the nagging feeling that I'll never be good enough; that I'll never be better.
However, I am strong and I am able to power through the bad days.
I still struggle.

ADHD.

This word is an acronym, so often
spoken with spite.

“ADHD didn’t exist when I was in
school!”

Yes, it did: it just didn’t have a name.

Naming things lessens the fear you have
of them.

This word means I have to concentrate
more on standing still when I sing
in choir, rather than the music I’m
singing.

This word means that I can get
distracted, even in an empty room
with blank walls.

This word means I have to obsessively
use a planner, so I can stay on task
and be sure that nothing is forgotten.

I can’t stop moving, so I shake my leg,
twiddle my thumbs, flap my hand at
my side,

Like a bored kid in a too long church
service.

“Attention Deficit.” I don’t mean to be
easily distracted, and I promise I’m
listening.

My mind just runs so much faster than
I’d like it to.

OCD.

This word, out of all of these, is the word that is misused the most.

This word, out of all of these, is also the scariest to me,

And the hardest for me to accept.

OCD isn’t just cleaning a lot.

OCD isn’t just saying phrases three times; checking locks 5 exact
times before it’s time for bed.

OCD can be all these things, but it’s so much more.

OCD can be intrusive thoughts. Scary thoughts, gruesome thoughts,
bloody thoughts, sad thoughts.

Fixations.

OCD for me is seeing myself being hit by a car on an endless loop
for hours at a time,

OCD is seeing myself getting raped, assaulted, mugged, because I
got a bad feeling when I was walking alone.

OCD is becoming affixed on a video game, writing a huge guide
and spending all of my extra time on developing my little tiny
town of animal friends.

OCD can be making sure and double sure and triple sure and
quadruple sure that something is done. For safety, for comfort,
for ... no logical reason.

OCD can be organizing and reorganizing your DVD collection,
because obviously that is something that would make your father
proud of you.

Obviously.

It is more than just checking to be sure of things.

So much more.

**My mind is a prison
where I check the locks,
worrying myself to insanity
while fidgeting with
the tag on the thin mattress.**

Resting Bitch Face

Mallory Piercy

For several generations
A gift bestowed from woman to
woman
In my family-

Not bought or taught
To the next generation-
An offering only God has granted
Upon the lucky of us.

When one looks into my face,
The gift stares back
Unintentionally daunting,

Severe as frozen, icy wind.
From near or far
Alone, or in a crowded place.

The mouth thin and pursed,
Eyes blank with displeasure
that may or may not be accurate,
The jawline fixed and unrelenting.

All for no specific reason,
Other than it's simply my face.
That's all there is to it;

If you aren't granted the gift,
You never will be.
If you try to see it,
You'll find it far too often.

It can easily withstand time's changes.
It takes a likeness to the ladies.
Will it be passed on to my children?
Or wrinkle, wither, and die with me?

If the gift remains forgotten
I'll be just fine with that. Nonetheless,
if one of my daughters, amusingly
fortunate,
Inherits this gift,

I wouldn't complain, either.



Hay
by Carson Steiner

GRANDMA'S CHRISTMAS ORNAMENT

KATELYN MAILLE

Malus domestica

Kirstin Metzler

Every autumn, I got at least one;
a crimson sphere, ripe and fresh,
crisp, sweet, only 50 cents each.

Eating was quick; with a few bites
my snack became the moon,
waning, quarter, crescent,
until the vials of poison
that were the seeds appeared
and my teeth hit the stem.

Miles away,
inside a large cafeteria
that reeks from sweat, tears,
liquor and steamed vegetables,
another sphere sits,
dented and slightly brown,
probably just as bruised
as the soul it was given to,
after walking nearly a mile
in threadbare shoes
through stark white snow.

It sits, nestled
in a small nest of napkins
on a Styrofoam tray,
a plastic fork guarding left
and a milk carton right,
nearly colliding into
an impressive mountain
of mashed potatoes,
and waits.

A SIMPLE WREATH,
CAREFULLY CRAFTED,
SMALL FRAGILE
FINGERS TO PLACE
EACH PIECE.
GREEN BUTTONS IN THE
SHAPE OF A CIRCLE,
ROUND RED BEADS AND
SILVER SPARKLES.

GIVEN TO MY MOTHER
BY HER MOTHER –
A WOMAN I NEVER
MET, BUT HEARD ALL
ABOUT.
ABOUT FIVE FEET TALL,
HAIR LIKE FRESH
SNOW
HER HEART A FOUNTAIN
OF KINDNESS,
SMILE AS CONTAGIOUS
AS CHICKEN POX,
SHE OWNED A CRAFT
SHOP, CARING FOR
FOUR KIDS,
TAKEN BY CANCER,
FORTY-EIGHT YEARS
OLD.

EACH YEAR WE HANG
THE HOMEMADE
ADORNMENT,
GENTLY BY ITS SLIGHTLY
TATTERED GREEN
STRING,
ON THE PRICKLY PINE.

– 24 –

White Baby Doll

Erica Greer

I choose you,
Powder snowflake face
Rose water cheeks
Crystalized glass sclera
As the land of peace,
Baby Blue Iris

As the sea,

Things that I will never be.

I choose you,
Pure whiteness queen
Thin blond paper hair
Sharpen pencil lips
Scolding my blackness,
Whipping it off my stained red back

Whop-eesh, Whop-eesh.
Unwanted flesh tears off me like peeling
paint
Illuminating the Ganyra josephina
butterfly from its cocoon

Because I am;
The grit underneath your nails
The cavity in your tooth
The midnight that surrounds the
glistening moon

So I choose you....

Fish Friday *For Grandma*

ROSE GANOE

Ready –
Set –
Oh wait – I'm not ready!
Go!
Off around the man sitting down with his chair
 halfway into the aisle
Sidestep child trying to crawl out of the table
Order this, order that
Next stop – Table 2
Or wait...
Table 3 or 4 or okay, how about you?
Just give me one more minute...
Would you like whiskey or wine?
 Personally, I would want both, but...
I'll be there in a minute
Okay, here you go, do you need ranch with that?
Coke or Pepsi, Water or Tea?
We have baked potatoes, French fries...
Order ready for Table Three!
Nope, no mashed potatoes... okay let me check.
We are out of slaw, mac and cheese –
Oh wait we have an order yet!
5:30, 6:45 – when will it be 8 o'clock?
Did the clock stop?
Aching feet, tired legs...
Do you care if I join you? Surely not?
Smile, look pretty –
Damn you if you frown –
Run to Table 7, gallop to Table 8
Hey, we have been waiting for a while –
They got their food already and we were here
 before them! –
Smile, look pretty –
Don't you start to frown.
Oh honey, I need more wine,
 Frankly so do I
Do you need more water? More pop? More
 napkins?

Oh, hi there. How are you? Oh I'm doing fine.
Oh knee, please don't give out –
I need another beer. Honey, could you get me more
 ice?
Table 3, Table 4 – oh look the mayor brought his wife!
Shake hands, hug a friend...
Next stop Table 1: Five people, three kids
Oh god... no no...
Have some books – here you can color!
No honey, not the table –
Order up for Table 5 – 6 – 7 – 1
Come on girl! You are getting behind!
Our waitress hasn't brought our food back yet –
I want to talk to the manager –
This tastes wrong – this isn't hot
 It would be if you shut your mouth and didn't talk
Oh here! Let's sit at a dirty table: Do you honestly
 think I will wash it for you?
At least we don't have the stupid waitress again –
Oh no – I'm not sitting here
More coffee – I need more cream!
Lemons! Lemons! Hey, waitress we need more
 lemons!
Bathroom is out of paper towels –
God, we need a bigger kitchen.

8:00
People gone.
Blood on the floor –
 Thank god no one slipped
Those people only left you a two dollar tip!
I can't stand. It hurts to sit.
Eat dinner. Clean up. Beer in the back.
Oh hello, what can I do for you?
Okay, here you go.
Heavens, was it packed?
Home I go.
 I smell like fish.

FOUR WHITE WALLS

LaTrobe Barnitz

“We’ll keep in touch. Good luck!”
My dad shuts the door.

The walls close in,
Squeezing the breath out of my chest.
Cold, concrete blocks,
Gripping my arms with icy cold fingers
Hospital-white walls, and
The chemical-cleaner smell.
I’m a patient.
My disease is called “too old to live at home anymore.”

The voices outside are boisterous.
Newly grown children drinking in their freedom.
But, I’m a zoo animal in my cage.
I keep the door closed so no one will stare.

My stomach rumbles a noisy protest.
My legs won’t move.
They don’t know where to go.
The only part of me that isn’t at the mercy of my stomach.
I gnaw on a granola bar made of gravel and chocolate chips.

I’ve left Earth for Mars.



Relief
by *Eric Jones*

SKY FIRE

Ann Mary Hamilton

Late October 1967
Ending work too late
To ride the bus so
The manager drove me
Home in her
Volkswagen Beetle.

Beneath dark skies
Hung with black clouds
Appearing low enough
To touch, there was a
Strange energy that
Filled the air.

We drove east
On a road as dark
As the low hanging
Clouds, our vision
Restricted by the small
Windshield that only
Allowed us to look
Straight ahead.

In less than a breath
The sky became noon,
A brilliance that illuminated
The leaves' colors and
Outlined the thick clouds -
Was this the
Second Coming?
I bent down to
Look up.

As if thrown by Thor,
A massive ball of fire
Pierced the clouds
With flames streaking
Behind it for miles
Outlining the shape of
This extraterrestrial missile.

In my naivety
I feared only
that it would strike
The steel plant where
My boyfriend worked:
He had told me about
An area known as the
"Benzo Plant"
Filled with highly
Explosive - and flammable -
Material.

The next day
The television
Showed the fireball
Streaking above a
High school football
Game - still bright,
No longer a
Massive projectile.
It was reported to
Have broken up
Over Illinois.

Now that science
Has the knowledge
Of "near earth objects"
I realize that
This was no Second Coming.
This was annihilation.

Leaves and Things

Kevan Yenerall

A traitor to its name, no
rehabilitation occurred in
that antiseptic shared space
on Phillips Avenue.

There, only the routine and
repetitive may have made
any semblance of visible,
verifiable progress:

A reasonable chance at parking,
a slightly more efficient signing in,
a better glance at fall's foliage
through the lobby's automatic door.

Whatever the weather or human
condition, the elevator always
opened
to an omnipresent bouquet of
bleach
and Salisbury steak,

a symphony of beeping machines,
squeaking shoes on checkered lime
linoleum floor, daytime television
blaring through open doors.

Renegade cells, not content to
limit themselves to stomach, neck
and breast, now invading the
spine, severing speech.

With sponge serving as makeshift
oasis,
ointment-tipped Q-tips for cracked,
desert lips, I used pedestrian tools
to try to quench and heal.

I held her hand.

Unable to summon reels of
Hugs and hive-fives, smiling
1970s super 8s, brimming boxes of
Kodak moments, or any

appearance of historical documents,
precious memories or Hallmark
schmaltz from a life we never had,
I held her hand.

I held her hand and moved the
music box from the cold white
window sill to the barren lunch tray
beside the bed.

The music box – its repetitive peace,
lullaby grace and soothing cedar
speaking
to us, for us, our final conversation
as the seasons changed.

I see the leaves and
think of these things.

They have turned, fallen
and returned six times since
that final Friday evening with
three siblings in hospice,

five since the scattering at the serene
knoll among fallen red and gold, your
journey from Lower Burrell to the
hillside
of the Sisters of Divine Providence.

Grading and groundhog gazing at
the
morning room window, walking along
Gen. Braddock's Western
Pennsylvania trails,
driving northeast along the
Allegheny,

I see the leaves.

Picking pumpkins and bagging
apples,
sipping cider and writing papers,
holding my wife's hand and looking
into
her brilliant brown autumn eyes,

I see the leaves.

I think of these things.

Five went hunting,
one returned.
Tammy Horsley



Cassidy Tonks

DRUNK DRIVER

Ashley Hartos

Gazing out the smudged window, my brothers do the same.
Stench of whiskey circulates the enclosed space.
Dad mumbles to himself, “‘ways doin’ somethin’, never wha I wanna do”
Slurring his words over again.

Swaying from left to right, our heads conk against the glass cube.
My eyes snap to the front window, watching the blur of houses meshing together.
Mixture of blues, reds, whites, browns, churning before our eyes.
Silently begging for the car to straighten, but to no avail.

The rusted tan Toyota jerks sharply, causing us to shout in unison,
“Watch out,” barely escaping our mouths.
Closer, the dark pole reels us like a puppeteer.
Dad’s eyes flutter shut.

We collide.

Joyful Spring

Jennifer Nuttall

The snow slowly retreats,
an old man's receding hairline,
until only brown grass remains.
The trees show their buds
with newborn baby sprouts of green.
Proud Daffodil kings with crowns
of yellow gold stand up straight and tall.
Mrs. Robin dances and sings merry songs,
her joy evident at the coming changes.
The air has the gentle warmth of breath
from your lover's mouth onto your cheek.
On the wind you can hear the rhythmic tune,
spring, spring, spring, spring, spring, spring.

Lavender
by Carson Steiner



Kingdom in the Clouds

ROSE GANOE

She imagined they were in a castle high up on the clouds, drifting away from the land below—away from the white rooms and funny odor. This castle was brilliant in its area with a tall tower that touched the universe with its mighty peak. From high up on this tower the girl could look down at the villages streaming behind them.

“So long!” she would usually cry out, her voice loud and cheerful, bouncing off the walls and traveling far out the window. The people of the kingdom in the sky would stop and smile to the tower.

“There is our princess,” they would muse with love and compassion. But now, they looked aguishly up at the tower, awaiting the cry; a dark gloom had settled in the air, weighing the cloud down with moisture. High up in the tower the princess lay in her bed, her golden hair a halo around her head amidst the red covers and sheets.

“Daddy,” the princess now called out to the man folded beside her. Her voice was loud in a form of breathlessness, sinking into the man’s pores. No one talked in the building of stone, especially in the silk chamber which housed the princess.

“I am here.” The king’s voice was hollow.

“Daddy, do you love me?” Again her voice was airy, light, but loud.

“Evony, please not now.” He was gruff; he always was.

“Daddy, do you think there will be flowers there?” Evony asked.

“Of course there will be flowers. Everywhere you look there will be flowers. Who would be able to deny you them?” the king replied, unfolding himself to stand by the window that overlooked the world.

“Will there be roses? And daisies? And lilies? Will there be lilies?” the child asked.

“Of course, of course. Brilliant roses that climb the walls. Light-dazzling daisies that caress your feet as you walk through them. And lilies! Sunlight will glisten off of their petals, dropping liquid gold into the stream where you will be able to lie.”

“Will Clara be there? You said before Clara will be there waiting on me!”

“Of course, Evony. And your mother and Adam,” the father managed through a tight throat.

“Hooray! How I miss them! I haven’t seen them in ages!” the princess exclaimed in a wheezing voice.

“I know honey,” the king stated, not daring to look at his daughter.

“It hurts, Daddy. I don’t want to leave you. When will you be coming? You will be coming too Daddy, right?” She knew she shouldn’t say it, but she couldn’t hold it in much longer.

“It won’t be forever.”

“Promise?” The child’s voice wavered, not able to see the king nod his turned-down head.

“Do you love me, Daddy?” the child asked again.

“Yes, Evony. You are my pride and joy.” The words reached deaf ears. Slowly, the father turned around in the white room of the hospital, staring at his daughter who lay as if sleeping on the bed. Her bald head glistened in the light. Falling to his knees; outside the rain fell.

TERROR-FILLED TIMES

Kaitlynn Sass

My dad looked up at the looming tower and shook his head. “There is no way in hell I can get on that thing.”

“Dad, come on. When is the next time we’ll be at Disney? We have to ride it.”

The Tower of Terror stretched straight into the air, its faded, faulty-looking bricks stacked higher than the tallest roller coaster in the park. My dad’s head leaned back, his neck bent at an unnatural, uncomfortable angle. His eyes darted from the ground to the roof of the building, willing the space between the two to diminish.

“I seriously do not think I can make myself get on that thing.”

“You have gotten on every roller coaster in every amusement park we have ever been to. You got stuck on a roller coaster, hanging upside-down! And you’re telling me that you can’t get on a ride that goes up and down like an elevator?”

“Being upside-down for ten minutes is different than falling straight down into a pit.” He looks to the heavens again. “I’ll make you a deal.”

I wait.

“You get on Rockin’ Roller Coaster with me and I’ll ride the death trap with you.”

Of course. He would go to the one ride in the park I had serious qualms about. Why I felt that it was safe to fall

more than one hundred feet and not do a loop-the-loop I could not explain. But here we were.

“Fine. Let’s go.”

After thirty-five minutes in line and a lot of fighting back tears, we took our seats and allowed blue bars to lower, pressing our backs into hard plastic seats. The car crept forward on the track, music blared, a countdown flashed, we shot forward, and my eyes did not open again until all motion had ceased. My dad was ecstatic.

“Wow, that was great! Wasn’t it? Did you see all the decorations?”

I struggled to stand up from my seat.

“Okay, now it’s time for my pick. Let’s go.”

My dad’s face fell. “Are you sure about this?”

“I’m positive. It will be fine.”

We walked along an overgrown concrete path, black railings on both sides to herd people in the right direction. The concrete ended at an over-sized wooden door, propped open with a metal block. Through the doorway we were taken into a maze of a building, pictures and suits of armor covering every inch of space. And a sign – Wait time: Five minutes.

I smiled at my dad and led the way through the artificially dim hallways. Finally, we ran into a line of people

and, almost immediately, were ushered into a large elevator cart. Seatbelts no stronger than those used in automobiles secured us and our ascent began.

My dad, next to me in the middle of the back row, exuded anxiety.

Instead of being taken directly to the top and dropping immediately, as I anticipated, we moved through a labyrinth of haunted house rooms and projected ghosts. Every time the cart stalled, darkness creating a wall in front of us, I was convinced we were at the pivotal moment. But we kept moving. Gradually climbing. Building anticipation. And I realized that my dad might have had a point. I was dreading the moment when the ground would disappear beneath me, dreading it the same way I did taking off in an airplane, that moment when you level off and it feels like the seat and your body are falling through open air.

The large cart kept rolling, took us through two more eerie rooms, and then paused for a beat longer than before. I glanced at my dad and noticed his hands balled tightly around his armrests. Then – a flash of light. A window appearing in front of the cart, affording an aerial view of Hollywood Studios. And a click. And we were falling.

I gripped my dad's hand and couldn't even scream because all of the air had left my body, like getting hit in the stomach with a bowling ball. Without any pause for thought or to find oxygen again, we rushed upward, looked again out the window, and dropped. Over and over. Four times. Five. And finally settling back to ground level.

We silently exited the ride and the menacing building, taking a moment to adjust to the brightness of the day. As we stood ten feet from the tower, my dad held out his hand and looked genuinely shocked to see a continuous tremor running through his body.

"Well, that was awful." My dad's glance dared me to disagree.

"It was...I mean, it could have been worse."

He grabbed my own hand and held it straight out, alerting me to the fact that my arms and legs were quivering.

"Okay. It was bad. But we did it."

My dad rolled his eyes. "Sometimes it's okay to just walk away."



Hours
by Beth Renaud

GIVE ME YOUR LUNCH MONEY

EMILY GRIGGS

Standing at six feet seven inches,
weighing in at three hundred pounds or more,
my father was truly a hulk of a man.

He wore large polos to work,
huge button downs to church,
and at home, massive t-shirts.

Everything about my father was big:
from his clothes, to his hands,
even to his heart.

I mean that both figuratively
and literally.

His heart's substantial size is
what ultimately took him away from me.

To this day, I still wear his shirts.

When he died, they were like tents
on my tiny body.

As I grew, they still were oversized.

Today, I sit here writing this poem,
Wearing my favorite shirt of his.
On the front, it tells me the brand.
On the back, it declares
Give Me Your Lunch Money.

Correction: I wore that specific shirt
till it was more hole than fabric.
The one on my back now is a shirt I found on
the internet,
after three days of scouring.

Like I continually have to renew and
remember old memories of my dad,
I bought a new t-shirt off eBay.

All of his old shirts are worn to shreds.
I live in these shirts.

Of all the memorabilia of his that I have,
These ragged pieces of fabric will always be
my favorites.

Watchers
In the dark, walls spoke. – Michaela Bush

THE WALL AROUND YOU

Samantha Beal

If I could build a wall of love around you, I would.

If I could act as the cotton between you and all that may harm you, I would.

If I could rise up and be your barrier, standing between you, the unknown and all you fear, of course I would.

But you can't sing to ghosts; they can only sing to you.

If I could show you just how bright the rainbow is, I would.

If I could show you how loud "I love you" is, how sweet affection is, I would.

I would show you how plentiful, how sufficient, how patient, how caring I can be.

And I'd show you how strong you are, how plentiful, sufficient, how patient and caring.

I'd show you everything you cannot see, if I could.

But ghosts can't be shown; they can only show.

And if I could, if I did show you that castle of safety, if I did build you those walls, you'd be safe, secure and secluded.

But that's all. You'd be more dead than the ghost you are now, because you'd feel nothing but safe.

And you would be safe, but that would be the least of it.

You'd be whole and you'd be secure. You'd be protected by me.

But no matter how I want to hold you, the safety I wish I could offer would be your death.

To live is to risk, to exist to be insecure, to love to be unsafe.

And ghosts cannot be anchored.

BAD VIBES ONLY

Erica Greer

Part 1: The Man on the Street

I saw him on that night,
The moon was barely visible,
Covered by the clouds like a blanket tucking in a child.
The streetlights casting an unfamiliar shadow,
Outlining the body of an unidentified monster,
Revealing the embodiment of a man around the corner,
Walking like he had some kind of a mission,
Feet pacing, head high, arms swaying.
But what mission could be accomplished past 11:00pm?
He looked like he was sniffing,
Like a police dog looking for a bomb.
I continued contorting my body to the rhythm of the music to avoid contact until
He froze like he was caught in freeze tag.
He turned to face the big blue house on the corner,
And adjusted his eyes to mine intruding on his late night stroll.

Part 2: The Girl in the Window

I saw her on that night,
The moon was barely visible,
Covered by the clouds like the cover of a book hiding the unread words.
I was walking down the street when
The light in the house was casting an unfamiliar shadow,
Outlining the body of an unidentified monster,
Revealing the embodiment of a girl dancing in the window,
Like the fire in the night,
But what song lit the passionate fire past 11:00pm?
She twisted, flipped, and paused as if she was telling a dramatic story,
Dragging me in like a light to a moth only to zap me if I got too close.
I continued walking until an uneasy feeling rose over me.
I suddenly froze like a mime stuck behind an invisible wall.
I turned to face the big blue house on the corner,
And noticed that the building was abandoned for years.

Pop Choruses and Other Banes

Hannah Collings

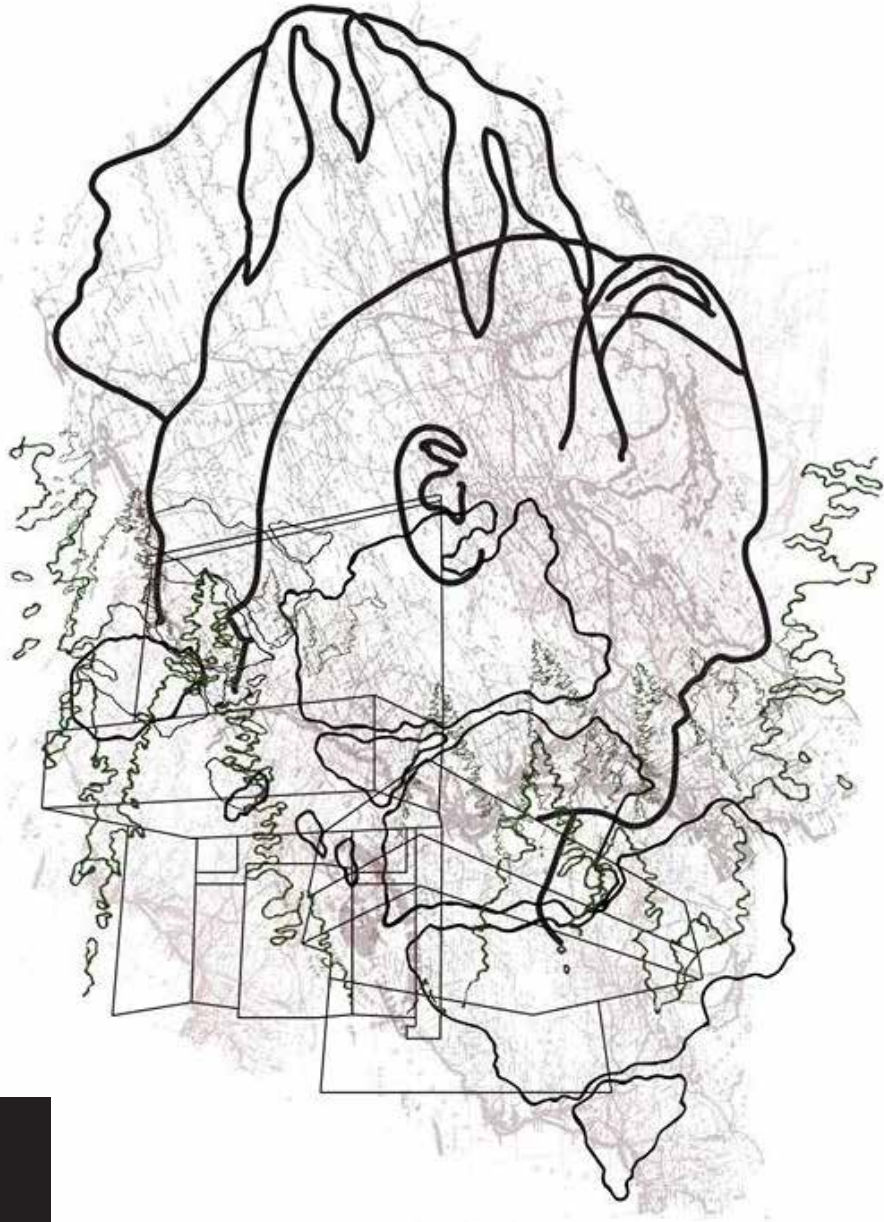
I hate, well, abhor
How we treat this language as a whore
Put a bit in, get a little out
No will; cheap words.
Language was made to express, create:
“Let there be light.”
The Author of all authors, Father, craftsman, He
Gave us words to garb, to guard, to form and frame.

If there are infinite sentences to be constructed,
Why do we suffer this blight:
Conducting pre-built
words to where they get the most
For their masters who give the least;
Sin against syntax,
Tyranny over terms.

I entreat, well, implore
To restore to this whore her
Dignity,
To let her flourish
in artistry, in poetry
give her more than peppy melody.

The one who built Adam from
Atoms, bestowed upon him first
Her, before even Eve,
But she was more beautiful when intraverbal,
Shared, propagated, cultivated.

This first woman, she
Carries with her the best,
The worst.
All that is known of human history
Is molested with hurry,
Tossed in effort to save what
We value more-time-but
Nothing so rushed, though rhymed, will merit
Posterity



Maps
by Beth Renaud

CLUELESS

(but Cecelia Stone, not Alicia Silverstone)

Olivia Stuckley

On the wall across from her bed hung every single magazine clip she found herself in, every newspaper article, every movie poster, and any and every mention of the name Cecelia Stone. You could tell which one was her favorite, as she had a particular placing for each of the pieces of paper; in the middle hung the *Rolling Stones* article about her “amazingly heart wrenching performance as a widow who must deal with all of her late husband’s illegal affairs in order to keep her family alive.” Her photo was blown up and beautifully photo-shopped in her character’s costume. In it she wore an elegant gown that matched the darkest coal you can think of, which (as she knew) complimented her olive skin and dark hair exquisitely. Back then it was long, almost reaching the small of her back, instead of the pixie cut she flaunts now. Next to it hung her absolute favorite prop she begged and begged the producers to let her keep as her own personal remembrance gift: the knife her character used to, spoiler alert, kill her husband.

You could tell which articles were her least favorite, too, as they were thrown sloppily in and around the tin trashcan at the foot of her bed. The one on top, the most recent, was the *New York Times* discussing how dissatisfied they – and everyone else, for that matter – were with her attempt at portraying Amelia Earhart in the film that came out five years prior. “It’s unbelievable how the right plot can do wonders for someone. Cecelia Stone is the epitome of a one-hit wonder.” One would question why she still has this article in her trashcan if the film came out half a decade earlier, but that’s her *special* trashcan, which is only for the “absolutely appalling bullshit” that she finds (not to mention it was the last article that had been written about her).

Her bed was completely distraught with her yellow lace throw pillows scattered all over the floor instead of on top of the bed. Her comforter was actually put on the bed lopsided, so it didn’t even reach the top or bottom and hung off of both sides, leaving a trail of purple on the floor. A small blue notebook was daintily placed where her pillow should be, as if it was more important. It was filled with dates and names of directors and producers and what looked like messages upon messages she had left them. Judging by the amount of times she called Woody Allen and Judd Apatow, she hadn’t heard back from any of them in years – in almost five years, actually. She refused to believe the downfall of Earhart ruined her acting career.

In her bedside drawer, Cecelia had condoms, as any normal human being. However, next to the box, there was a box full of something else – signed headshots and movie clips. Her signatures were identical to the rest, with the “e” in “Stone” looping around to cross the “t.” She could not bear the thought of it getting mixed up with someone else’s and spent months perfecting it. The last time she tried to give one away was about six months ago, immediately following the second date with a man she met at a bar. She told him to reach in there to grab a condom, and while he was at it, to grab a signed headshot in case anyone asked what it was like to date a movie star. He laughed and took one of each, commenting on how real the headshots all looked and how “legit” her signature seemed. Cecelia lost her mind at that point and forced him out, in disbelief that she even considered going all the way with someone who had no idea who she was.

He must live under a rock or something, she thought, or maybe he didn’t recognize me because of my hair.

Sure enough, right after he walked out the door, she picked her phone up to speak with J.J. Abrams’s voicemail for the twelfth time.

SENIOR STRIFE

Ashley Hartos

The smell of her vomit makes me gag. I hold back Ma's hair, trying to soothe her by rubbing her back with my palm in small circles. The single-person bathroom is cramped with two people in it. Yellow daisies dot the pastel blue walls, making it seem like a child's bathroom. We spend a lot of time in here.

It's alright Ma, just let it all out. You'll feel better afterward."

Ma gasps for breath, coughing with the effort. "I know dear, I'm trying. I'm so sorry you missed the bus again."

I stay silent. This has been happening a lot lately. When Ma got sick, I was the one who stepped to the plate, unlike Dad. He flaked, he's such an ass-hat. Unfortunately, he'll probably be back in a few weeks; that's just what he does. I glance at the picture of our cat, Sparkles, hanging crookedly near the mirror. It looks misplaced, covering the hole Dad punched when he first heard of Ma's illness.

After some time, I answer Ma, saying, "It's OK that I'm not going to school today. I didn't get to study for my geometry exam anyway."

I haven't been able to do anything lately. A few weeks back, I had to quit the

track team because I had to pick up more shifts at Dairy Queen. Homework has been completely out of the question. With me running around to clean the house, go to work, pick up Ma's medication and taking care of my little sister, life's been hell.

My teachers are starting to notice something is wrong, but I refuse to talk about it. I don't need their sympathy. I can take care of Ma all by myself. However, some instructors insist on sticking their noses where it doesn't belong.

Last Tuesday, Principal Martin called me down to the office because my English teacher Mr. Fredrick was worried about my academics.

"We've noticed a significant difference in your grades from last year. You aren't turning in your homework assignments, and you're barely passing history and Spanish, and you're failing in all other subjects. Is there anything you want to talk about, Annie?"

I sat there looking down, trying to look nonchalant and failing. I've been told my face is an open book, but that doesn't stop me from lying.

"No, everything is fine. I guess I just have senioritis!" I laughed, trying to make

it seem like it was no big deal, but we both knew it was.

Principal Martin looked at me with stern gray eyes. "This is serious, Miss Pucket. You're going to be graduating in four short months. If you don't get your act together, that might no longer be an option."

"I know, I'm sorry. I'll try harder, I promise."

Now, as I sit here holding Ma's hair, I close my eyes as reality hits. I'm going to have to drop out of school to take care of her. Even if I wanted to stay in school, I don't have the time to get my grades back up. I'm a few more F's away from flunking out anyway. Maybe one day when I have the time, I can finish school and get my GED. But right now, school just isn't an option.

Ma needs me.

I listen to her dry heaving in the pink porcelain toilet. I hate it. I hate this bathroom. I hate Ma's sickness. I hate the fact I'm going to fail out if school.

I kick off my Sketchers and settle on the faded lime green mat next to the shower. Better get comfortable, I'm going to be here for a while.

To the Breaking Point

EMILY GRIGGS

Deep breath in.

Hold it...

Exhale.

Good.

Green tea gone tepid.

Coloring books strewn about the room.

A marked up planner, and

An uncompleted to-do list.

somuchtodosolittletime

Take in a large, cleansing breath.

Feel it fill your lungs and

trap it inside, letting the air

clear your mind.

you're a failure you can't do anything right

Stress consumes and controls,

Tightening and constricting

Around me until

I can't breathe.

deadlines crowding messes building

Feel all those toxic thoughts and feelings

leaving your body with your breath.

Now, don't you feel better?

noidon't idon't feel better i can't feel better

Stress can be a force for good,

Forcing me to get things done

In record time.

PAST BANE

MICHAELA BUSH

IF I TOLD YOU A TERRIBLE SECRET,
MY DEAR,
AND I CRACKED OPEN
THE VISE AROUND MY CHEST
TO LET YOU PEEK INSIDE THIS MESS

– BE MY GUEST,

WOULD YOU DO ANYTHING BETTER
THAN SNEER?

MY PAST IS PAINTED BLACK AND BLUE,
I FEAR,

NONE OF WHICH WE'VE

EVER ADDRESSED

– IS IT TOO MUCH

FOR YOU TO DIGEST?

I NEED A PROMISE

YOU WON'T DISAPPEAR.

WOULD YOU TELL ME

IT'S NOT SANE,

AND YANK ME OUT FROM

UNDER YOUR WING?

OR WOULD YOU SEE THAT

MY PAST IS MY BANE,

SAY "YOU'RE OKAY,

I'M HERE NOW",

UNTIL THE STING

AND THE MONSTERS

LURKING IN MY MIND

ARE SLAIN

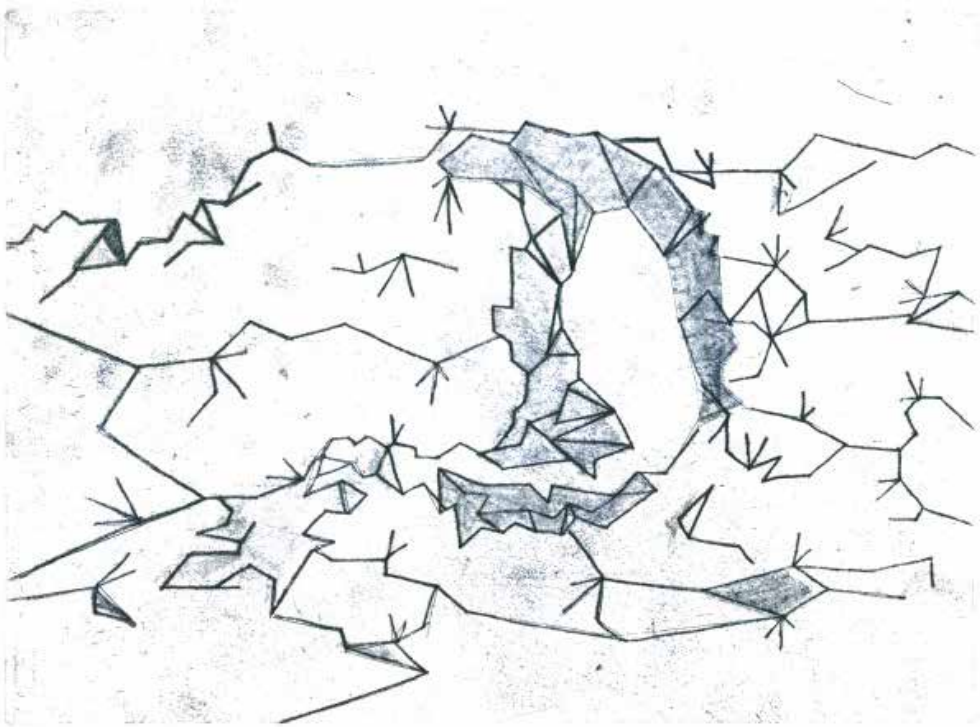
AND I'LL BE THE QUEEN

IF YOU'LL BE MY KING?

Unrequited

Michaela Bush

Their eyes met across the dining hall. His widened, grew warm, and hers flashed with fire. Then the love of his life started throwing knives.



Wave Etching
by Sierra Nicholes



Sleepy Hollow Moon
by Samantha Beal

BLOOD TRICKLED FROM THE DOLL.
— Lindsey Delacour

INTROVERSION

Olivia Stuckley

No matter which direction we turn –
Human faces.
Lights are dim, colors are flashing, air is stuffy –
A college party.
Everyone is jumping, yelling, dancing,
As if they are visiting an amusement park
Just as we were a little earlier,
While we now keep checking our phones
Hoping to see an “on my way!” message from our rides.

We only have so much spirit to convey
And it begins dwindling and dwindling
Like small grains of sand in an hourglass
After being fenced in by people.
We usually prefer to spend our time alone,
Either engulfed in our thoughts and feelings
Or reading a novel about a girl with a dragon tattoo.

Be that as it may,
With this lack of extroversion
Comes a careful ability to spectate
The buried indignant expression of a friend –
The slight furrow of her thick brow
And narrowing of her small dark eyes
That most would not think twice about.

We listen more than we speak,
With the intention to understand
As opposed to replying with
A competing anecdote about ourselves.



Swing
by Deanne Gillen

Two Kids.
One Cookie.
Let's Brawl.

— Suzanne Banta

LIVES

Martin Mateer

Go ask a man what he'd do
If a small child in the market
Waved to him. What then,
Would the man wave back,
Or would he wish he'd just go,
'Cause he's too afraid of
Being thought a pedo?

Go ask a woman what she'll wear
Out on the town with her friends tonight.
Something modest. She might say, or
If feeling empowered she might
Wear something brave. And yes,
It is brave 'cause if something would happen
She'd be asked what she wore.

Go ask a black man if he feels safe,
Walking home from overtime to help
Pay the rent. I bet he'd say no.
A black man outside at night?
That's just asking for the red and the white
To make him both black AND blue,
'Cause he must have been up to something.

Go ask a Latino in a border state
How he feels that he can be stopped
And asked for his papers, when really
He was born in New Jersey
And moved to Albuquerque
'Cause his aunt got sick
And he loves her.

Go ask your friends,
Your family, your neighbor,
Your mirror why we allow all this.
Why we allow each other to treat each other
Like we've done something wrong, when really
The only wrongdoing *I* see
Is that this poem was possible to make.

THE STUDLY OGRE

NIKKI HRIP

Strutting down the street,
Is it so wrong to be vain?
I am gorgeous- strong
Jaw and veiny muscles,
Brown leather vest, no
Shirt underneath- ladies!
Gather 'round! Let's talk
About me: best pitchfork
Salesman in the kingdom-
Every one sharpened and tested
Personally by yours truly- front
And center of town square for
Your viewing pleasure. Not
A lot of exquisite fish in the sea,
But boy I will fish!

These ugly broads—onions
Lacking a layer, not even a speckle
Of green, hideous in the day—holler
At me, “Yoo hoo! Shrekira!” Oh
And then there's that, my superb
Vocal talent. Guess you could say
I'm an all-star in every way...
What else is there? Guess I could
Say a thing or two about my cat—man
That puss is a tub of lard, I learned how
To push my pitchfork cart thanks
To that oversized basketball of fuzz—
Always rolling him around my castle
Halls to get food in the endless pit—hey puss,
It shows. Maybe one day they will make
A pair of shoes for this beast so he
Can move his lazy ass without assistance.

Speaking of ass, follow me to my pond
Out back—groundskeepers have to make
It look as good as me, I wanna see my
Olive skin glimmering, clear as my
photographer's
Polished camera lens, capturing my
perfection,
Placed above my fireplace in the den; not
A possibility a mile back in the thick woods.
Rumor has it a muddy, murky, foul, toad
Infested swamp resides back there. Explains
Where this damn mule came from—dirty,
Ash grey hair, flies inhabiting his tail—now
Inhabiting my backyard. Acts like he owns
the place.

I have two cruddy animals hissing
And hee-hawing while I try to catch
Some z's—beauty sleep people.
I need to tune my antennas to a new station,
This 'Old McDonald's Farm' is cramping
My style. It's been a while since Miss
Perfect came knocking at my gate—those
lips,
A stubborn apple red, I wanted to take
A bite. Her hair like chestnuts and—whoa!
Alright this is no game, running after
Some dame who ran off to be with some
Pale faced freak. I was above him in every
Way without having to fantasize about
The girl I didn't get. Here's hoping she
And he live happily ever after. Now,
Who wants a pitchfork?



Kaitlynn Sass

A Faithful Old Book

MICHAELA BUSH

The cover states
the title and version:
this one with the 'thee's
and 'thou's and 'shalt's.

Its spine crumbles like a
dilapidated structure,
so thick with knowledge,
it couldn't contain it all.

The pages not aging
as its kin's,
who yellows and expels
vanillin scents,

thin sheets have been
wrinkled and marred
with slashes that
underline verses.

Notes, muddled as
a child's first words,
scrawled in the margins;
the reader knows all their
favorite books within
this book.

Comfort of sleepless
nights, welcoming like a
warm summer day;
above all, a promise.

A REAL ELECTRICIAN

Tyler Hilbert

The soft hum of a drill,
Deafened by a guttural cry for maternal nurturing
While futilely punching a wall to numb the sharp hurt.
A gasp of air – the crunching of gravel to distract the mind–
The muttered “fucks” and the reversal of the metal guard,
Liberating the trapped digits, squirming their way into the
air to ensure their connection.
Dancing a demented jig to provide feeling to other parts of
my body,
A faint hope of distracting me
From the rollicking tremors.
A slip, a fall, as I lose my footing,
Skin to cloth to gravel reminds me that I'm not dreaming.
Staring at my concrete heaven, a denim overseer looms
Over my aggrieved body with a hearty chuckle.
“Are you missing anything?”
I grasp for the gravel with my injured hand.
“I don't think so.”
I pick some gravel up.
“Can you bend your fingers?”
I drop the few pieces pitifully.
“Yep.”
I carefully examine the pulsing hand, bruised black and blue,
Red slowly coloring my nails.
“Good. Now get up. We have to work.”
Recoiling at the rough contact with the gritty ground,
I lift myself up from the ground
With the injured digits.
Snickering at my cautious movements,
“You are a real electrician now.”



Intaglio
by Rion Botzer

HEAD COUNT MICHAELA BUSH

Hands trembled. Feet pedaled backwards. The girl fell to the ground and gaped at the open closet and the body inside it. No I.D. found.

The Silver Song

LATROBE BARNITZ

It lies in its case like the feather of a majestic bird,
Cradled in deep red velvet,
Metallic silver with shimmering strings,
A guitar slightly younger than me,
Another noisy little brother.

It waits for our father,
The man who still dreamed of being a rock star at 35,
Or a jazz player the more his hair tinged with grey,
Approaching the instrument's silver hue.

It longs for the days it played with friends:
Keyboards and bass guitars and drum sets,
That buffeted the house with walls of sound.
When there was music and laughter,
And clucking of amber beer bottles.
The days before his calloused fingers had changed a hundred diapers,
And gently applied a thousand band-aids to scrapes.

It grows old sitting by itself,
Alone in the basement that once shook the rest of the house,
Dreaming of the next time
When my father will go back in time.
Back to when he was fifteen,
Back to a day before the silver feather was born.

EMPTY SPACE

Cassidy Black

Empty space is difficult.
Nobody knows about this
room, separate from my body.
But I've told him about it.
Little pieces.
I throw my head back to
a bluebird's sky.
What happened to Monday?
All these dead words in my
throat, all these animal corpses,
rotting, turning to dust.
When there was sun
I smelled like sweat.
The phone rings.
I don't know my name.
I pull his shoulders into me:
Breathe. Let go.
He is someone you can return to.
He knows how to hold a revolver
but does not taste like gunpowder.
Another car accident.
It hasn't killed me today, but
there's always tomorrow.
I haven't made my bed in weeks.
I measure my scars, pulling open the
entrance and kissing it better.
Oh, the slow, steady burn of
a door being slammed.
Like an orgasm or an open wound
or something better than the secrets
I'm tired of keeping.

Still

CASSIDY BLACK

like a car accident
your newborn nephew clings to anything

there are candles lit in your bedroom
cotton sheets cling to our skin like we're magic

like I'll always be missing some part of you

said you wouldn't mind making me your wife
someday

but you're only nineteen
almost twenty

you look at me like maybe I could provide
a life you could live with

maybe by that time
I'll be made new

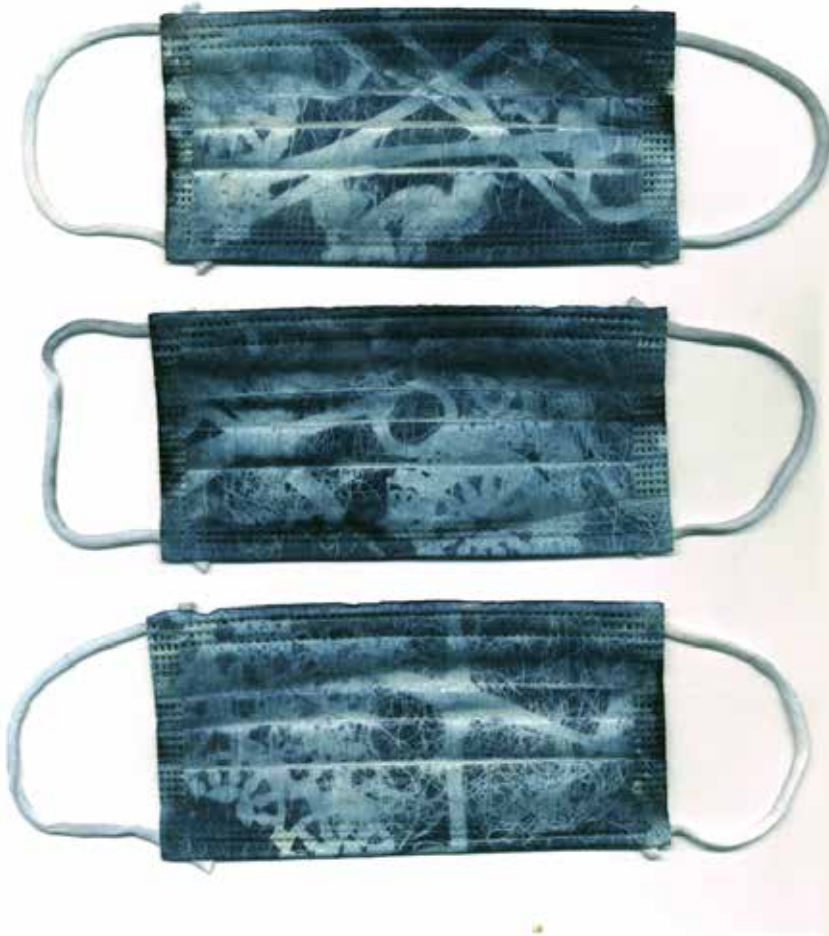
with cleaner skin

and the coffee pot will always
be full

maybe I'll be softer
thinner
sweeter

shrinking beneath the doubt of
my mother's eyes

still
cursed by the wind of those
cold small-town winters
checking the answering machine
for messages from my grandmother
revisiting the wishes I've made on
shooting stars
waiting for your car to pull into
the driveway







Carolyn Confer



Cassidy Tonks

Household Chores

Jennifer Setree

I always hated being the one to prepare the meat for our table.
It wouldn't be so bad if the man would just stop screaming.



Fractured
by Kayla Shaffer

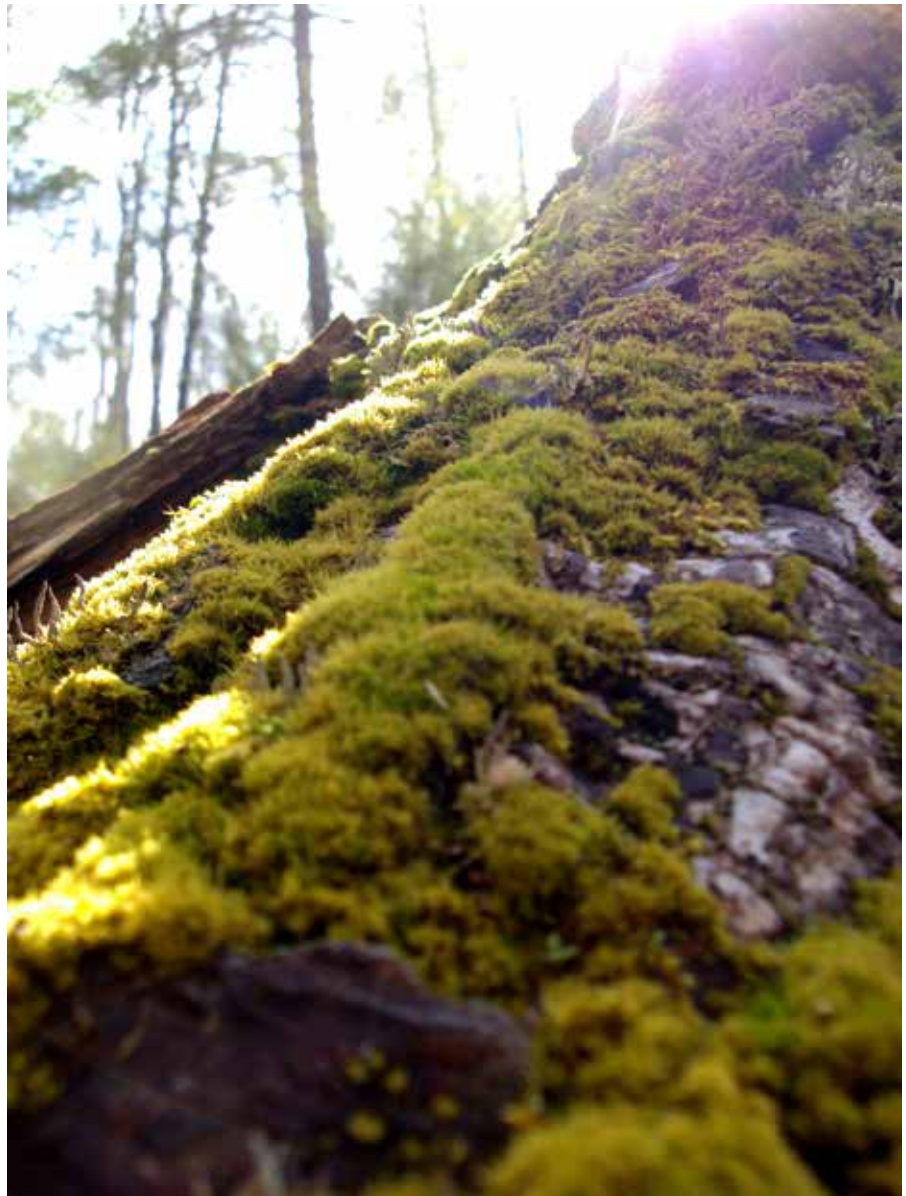


**Seeing Double
(Green Pipes)**
by Kayla Shaffer

Warped
by Kayla Shaffer



Ascent
by Kayla Shaffer



Last Cast

KALEB SUSKO

My father grabs the tin
Of maggots from his chest pocket,
His hands wrinkled, but still
Nimble enough to tie a hook,
He looks at me—One or two?
“I’d say just one, Dad. Don’t
Forget the worm.” As if he would
Ever forget the worm. His left
Hand wrestles the can back
Into his pocket. His right holds
The line against the pole. Last
One here. “You always say that
Before your last ten. You’ve got
Me saying it to my son.” The
Two of them look alike. Oh yeah.
Look at this one. The old man wants
A picture with his million-and-first
Trout, a shimmering brown,
Brighter than the previous million.
He doesn’t notice, breaks
Down the noodle rod, and waits.
“Last one here, Dad.”

The Opening

Samantha Beal

There is an opening in the sky. A small spot, where clouds break away to pale blue. Air rushes into this hole, bringing with it a gust of birds, dirt and prayers.

For truly, it’s a portal. A place where Heaven shines through to Earth. The human waits thousands—millions!—of years for validation, for verification of something he believes in so fiercely. He prays, fasts, promises, repents, desires in all he is. He will do anything or nothing, everything or some things for a sign, a glimmer, a word of positivity. He gives all, everything, down to the bones in his shoulders, the dreams in his heart, for a chance to see.

But that chance is settled now, nestled right there in the sky for all the world to see and not one human to recognize. The opening widens briefly, waxing under the pressure of pent-up prayer and deepest desire. It grows in order to encompass all that plagues humanity, all that it laments. It extends its boundaries to its limit just so one little, extra prayer can be carried to God.

And when it lets all through that it can, this portal closes. It moves on to another area, an area with just as many anxieties and lost sheep and perfectly-sighted, blind people. For though the clouds part and the sky blossoms, the human cannot recognize. The prayers rise, float and find their way to God’s Ears, but what mortals see? For prayers are gossamer and thoughts translucent, feelings nothing. But they are spoken with substance, and that is why they are always *felt*. That is why they fly.



Blossoms
by Carson Steiner

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