

MIDWESTERN STATE UNIVERSITY PRESENTS

VOICES

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Editors' Notes

The Editors are proud to introduce this year's issue of *Voices*, the thirty-eighth in its history. We would like to thank our advisor, John Schulze, for his expertise throughout the process of putting this journal together. The Editors would also like to thank the English Department, Student Allocations Fund, the Vinson Award, the Bryan L. Lawrence Endowment, and, most of all, the many contributors for providing *Voices* with the very best material. None of this would be possible without them.

Producing *Voices* has been a challenge, but an enjoyable one at that. Due to the journal having a break year between issues, we wanted the journal to be better than it has ever been. From slipping in to do a page or two between classes, to staying until seven and ordering twenty dollars worth of pizza, the editors have enjoyed every moment it has taken to bring the readers an incredible journal. We hope you can find joy in reading our contributors' works just as we have.

If you are interested in submitting to our journal for a future issue, please check out our website at www.mwsu.info/voices.

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2015-16 Vinson Award Winner

You're Not as Cool as You Think You Are

KALLI ROOT

It was a summer of firsts and a summer of lasts. Right after high school and before college; inherently a time of change. Over the years, I had grown accustomed to a procession of long and uneventful summers, the majority of which I had spent in a mildly melancholic state, so I didn't expect much of this one—until I met him. The true circumstance of our meeting was insignificant, and to simplify things for my parents, we decided that we had “met in a bookshop.” This explanation was simple, cute, and most importantly, plausible. From that first meeting, we threw ourselves into a fast-paced, cinematic, and doomed romance.

I'd only ever been there twice, truth be told. But when I think of that summer, no other place comes so quickly or vividly to mind. The roof of an abandoned meat packing plant isn't what most people envision when they think of a “romantic location,” but the view, overlooking the city lights of downtown Fort Worth, combined with the crisp and surprisingly cool July night air, and a mutual inclination toward teenage rebellion, added up to an escape that was better than champagne and candlelight any day.

In isolation from the rest of the world, inhibitions fell like leaves. He had an offbeat charm, and a contagious attitude of deliberate nonchalance that appealed to my own *liberosis*. I found myself sharing things that sounded foreign to say aloud: my deep-seated fear of the unknown future, the reason I fought with my mother, and things that I hadn't even known about myself until they came pouring out. His azure eyes absorbed each insecurity and every ugly truth. The only person who'd ever understood me, and he called me enigma.

He leaned against the low railing and lit a cigarette, an unattractive habit that at an earlier point in time might've been a deal breaker for me. Standing on that roof, overlooking a town full of people who didn't know or care that we existed, it seemed a natural thing to do. As I sat contemplating the metaphorical significance of each quickly disappearing wisp of smoke, the white graffiti words “You're not as cool as you think you are” glared at me through the darkness. Every inch of the abandoned factory was covered in a cacophony of street art that must have been accumulating since long before I was born, most of which faded to illegibility once the sun set. Yet those words remained, a solemn reminder that no matter how alive we felt up there on top of the world, it was only an illusion. The sense

of unparalleled youth and vitality I had found in that eternal bubble of summer would soon draw to an inevitable conclusion. I averted my gaze.

July was a bullet. Before I could even catch my breath, two weeks had passed since that final excursion to the roof, and that was it. He left for the east coast, and I was left with a journal of half-coherent poetry that I would never finish. The following weeks were rough. My appetite dwindled. Sleep became an evasive commodity. Then, to top it all off, the downstairs air conditioner in my house stopped working. My normal seasonal melancholia seemed to have increased tenfold, as though to compensate for the time it had lost.

Several months elapsed, and I began to fall back together. At least, I retreated into a sort of emotional numbness, in which I had sought solace many times in the past. I no longer fell asleep each night on a tear-soaked pillow. I stopped mixing bourbon with orange juice and watching the sun rise alone at six o'clock each morning. My sleep patterns returned to a semblance of normalcy. The transition to college in a town one hundred and sixteen miles from where we'd first met helped alleviate a degree of longing. I found distractions.

However, on the drive from school to home, there is a stretch of time during which I have a clear view of downtown Fort Worth. Each time I can't help but search intently for that obscure building that defined a dreamlike summer. The view of the skyline from the roof had been impeccable—it should be visible. Yet my search is always fruitless. Every time I find myself unable to locate the ruinous factory, I feel a revival of dull pain, accompanied by a wave of . . . relief. Relief, because my inability to recapture the beauty of the summer, no matter how desperately I long to do so, ensures that it will remain only in my memory, untarnished by time or reality.

I don't know if what I found that summer was "love." Even if it was, I'd be too afraid to allow myself to think of it as such. Rather, it was a transformative and learning experience, which taught me that the value of a thing is not intertwined with its longevity. It was brief, but by virtue of its brevity, it was . . . pure. I take solace in the awareness that the beauty and purity of my star-crossed romance will resonate long after autumn's leaves begin to fall.

2016-17 Vinson Award Winner

The Sorcerer of Summit Street

CHAD MARQUI

*We'll keep coming back to the things we love,
a typewriter banging away...*

—Hugh Ogden, “*We Never Tire, We Flourish*”

I remember your voice. Soft and mellow like a cup of chamomile, you would say, “Good morning, my cherubs,” as if you claimed dominion over our inexperienced souls and pens. Bouncing into the classroom, your flannel buttoned askew; hair like mercury pulled tightly back in a red bandana; faded jeans stretched down to bare threads, living out their last distinguished communion before splitting like atoms.

Heading into the workshop, I had been awake for two days. Besieged by anxiety and a blanketing despondency, I waged war against every line. I beat the keys like a deranged piano player only to erase, filling the blank space with more ineffable emotions. Sculpting and contouring the elegy for a departed friend, I hoped for high gravitas, a hit.

And I remember the class: presentation day. I sprinted into my seat and waited for the din to die down, as you nodded at me. I started, but choked. The second line, when I said Brad’s name, caught like spackling in my throat. Out of my periphery, I saw you move, a gentle traipse in my direction. As my saline deluge pounded the page, ink bleeding into a Rorschach, I felt your hands. Those fingers, lean, knobby, stained by smoke and pen, pressed into my shoulders. I smelled the hot intermingling of mint and cigarillos along with the faintly woody aftershave and icy musk of your deodorant.

Then I heard your voice. As your unkempt mustache grazed my ear, you said, “They will come, but they are not ready.”

When I heard the news, I hadn’t thought about my life and your connection to it for years. I had left Connecticut, and you had done what you always had, teach and pillage the wild for your next poem. An island was your retreat. Bought in the 70s off your piddling salary and published work, you hastily assembled the cabin’s edifice. The flower garden took time as you named each plant from petal to stem. Your hammock stretched between two Maine Maples. The house spoke to your frugality: one single

Crockpot seasoned by stews and bacon fat; a roll-top desk with an often-repaired typewriter overlooked the lake; a duct-taped recliner pushed near the stone fireplace. On every other available space —from hardbacks to newspapers down to poems — pages upon pages were strewn about in a literary avalanche.

So it was not surprising that your radio, a refurbished box set, had been off for days, the report from the weather authority patently ignored. Armed with your satchel, binoculars, and Nordic skis, you headed for the mainland. You wanted to call your daughter from a pay phone to wish her a Happy New Year and grab some Prosecco. Perhaps, you would make some copies or pick up a book at the library. A simple errand then back to the recliner by your blazing fire.

Three days passed. A local trapper found you, originally mistaken for driftwood hovering in a shimmering pool between cracked white ice. Your wiry silver hair buoyed in that small eddy, rising and falling with the tide.

And 11 years later, here I am. My hands, unlike yours, not grasping at ice as the shards break away, but dancing, again, on my new-age transcribing machine. Maybe, they have come, these words, but certainly too late: you saved me.

2016-17 Bryan L. Lawrence Award

On Staring

FAITH MUÑOZ

Two minutes and six seconds is the longest I've been able to stare without blinking. I know this because I timed it. Forty minutes and fifty-nine seconds is the world record. Hell to the no on trying to beat that. The staring game is my one and only party trick. It's the only physical game I can beat my athletically gifted cousins at. I have none other than my Mexican genes to thank for this not-so-super power. No, seriously; of all the countries I've been to in my lifetime – Mexico, Italy, Canada, France, and the United Arab Emirates – no one stares more than the Mexican.

As a kid in the United States, my mom constantly told me, “Don't stare. It's rude to stare.” Then, when I was eight years old, we moved to Mexico. Funny enough, it was a culture shock to me even though I looked just like everyone else. The rhythmic language, the relaxed approach to life, and the smells were very new to me. The one thing that surprised me the most, but took no time to get used to, was the staring. Wasn't it rude to stare? Not here.

In Mexico, everyone, the children, the elderly, even the dogs stare. I could be running an errand on foot just a few blocks from home, minding my own business, when all of the sudden, a car passes and everyone, including the driver, turns to stare at me or someone else on the street. At first, I thought it was because I spoke like a *gringa*. I learned Spanish, but it didn't stop. Then I thought it was because I looked like a *popis*¹ because I wore the uniform from the best school in town. But the staring persisted.

In elementary, my favorite thing to do when I arrived to school was to stand behind the gated entrance and watch the cars pass by while all the kids played in the playground behind me. The school guard stood at the door letting the children in, and I stood at the other end watching the kids exit their family's car through the gate bars. I don't know why I did it, but it was oddly comforting. Amidst all the action – cars maneuvering through the dusty potholes, children pulling their uniforms into place, parents waving goodbye through the windows – my stillness made me feel invisible. If no one was looking at me, I felt better about looking at everyone else.

As a teenager, I was no longer invisible and the stares towards me become of a different nature. They were often accompanied by a whistle or “tss tss” or “ey mamacita chula ven pa'ca.” Initially, I found this unsettling,

1 Stereotype for a stuck up, rich person

but I got used to it and have developed a defense mechanism against cat-callers. Twist your face into the most horrendous grimace you can muster. Works every time.

Since staring was never a problem in Mexico, eye contact was the most natural thing for me. However, when I went to the United Arab Emirates, I was surprised to find out that every single time I made eye contact with a man on the street for more than a few seconds, I was greeted with sexual gestures or exaggerated up and down looks. One night while leaving a Filipino restaurant in Dubai, I was standing near the entrance of a parking garage. A boy no older than myself at the time, 17, sat in the passenger's seat of a truck exiting the garage. I made eye contact with him for no more than a second as the truck drove passed, but it was enough time for him to smirk, open his mouth, and rapidly flick his tongue up and down at me.

“Mom! Did you see that? Did you see the face that boy just made?!” That’s when our friend, Pastor Rowell, informed me that, in Arab culture, eye contact between men and women was not appropriate. Staring at a man in the eyes meant I was attracted to them. I avoided eye contact with people on the street for the rest of my stay there. Despite that, there was much to look at. The magnificent dancing water shows in front of the sky scrapping Burj Khalifa, the fine sand dunes just outside of Al Ain, the winding, hot spring sprinkled Jebel Hafeet mountains, and the blinding blue waters surrounding the Palm Jumeirah.

A few years later, I had the opportunity to study abroad in France. There, most people simply avoided eye contact on the street. There’s not a lot of smiling, either. Still, people forever stare in France. They stare at the art. Stare at the architecture. Stare at clothing. Stare at perfectly manicured parks. People-watching contributes to the café culture as well. The gist is to see and be seen.

In Paris, my friend Maridi and I got to see *Le Corsaire* at the Opéra National. It was an eventful night, starting with getting pick-pocketed at Odéon station on our way to Palais Garnier to getting harassed on the way back from the opera. A creepy middle-aged man with a small cup in his hand got on the train and set his eyes on me and Maridi. He sauntered over to us with a Cheshire cat smile and began to leer at us. I could feel his eyes looking over my body. I know I’m a piece of work, but I’m no Venus de Milo. How must she feel standing in the Louvre all day, still, yet nowhere near invisible?

Before going to France, my mom told me to look everyone in the eyes because if they thought you could recognize them, they were less likely to try to rob you. I guess she wasn’t always right. Anger boiled up in me and

I stared back at him with fierce eyes. We had a stare down in the middle of a train. I wish I had timed it because it felt longer than two minutes and six seconds.

“What are you doing? Don’t stare at him,” Maridi told me multiple times.

The man only seemed to elicit further pleasure from it, but he was challenging me. I wasn’t going to look down and be an innocent lamb to his wolfish grin. I’m not sure who won.

He jabbed his cup in our faces, jingling the few coins inside.

“Je suis pauvre. Donne-moi de l’argent.”²

“Je n’ai pas d’argent.”³ And that was the truth. Just a few hours before, my two credit cards and 70€ were stolen from my hand without my knowing it.

Although Maridi didn’t stare at him, she was visibly frowning.

“Souris,”⁴ he cooed at her. Now she was pissed.

“Va te faire foutre!”⁵ He continued to leer at her and after a few minutes moved on down the train.

Needless to say, the next time I visit another country, I will be checking their policy on staring and eye contact.

2 “I’m poor. Give me money.”

3 “I don’t have money.”

4 “Smile”

5 “Go f—k yourself!”

What Goes Next

DAVID MAROLF

When they came to me
the price was set:
“A pound of flesh for your dreams.”
Just sign on the dotted line.
I thought it was a bargain,
a bit of pain for a lifetime of success:
the nicest car to drive, the best wine to drink,
and more awards than I can hang on my wall.
With the flick of my pen,
I signed my body away.
But I forgot about the interest.
They took a finger first,
and I decided nine
works just as well as ten.
Then went the ear;
music was no good anymore, anyway.
I protested when they came for the tongue,
but my protests fell silent shortly.
Sometime after the skin, eye, tooth, teeth,
foot, femur, tibia, fibula,
pharynx, larynx, testes, kidneys,
and gallbladder,
it became easier to count
what was left.
Now I’m a blind, one-armed,
two-fingered bloodied wreck
with a new sports car
that I can’t drive,
the finest French wine
that I can’t taste,
and a house cluttered
with plaques like gravestones
and medals like nooses.
And the worst part is,
even as I type this
with my remaining thumb and index,
I hear them at the door
and wonder what goes next.

Canterbury Road

The sound of rain
fades
into the background
where you don't
hear it
until
it's gone.
Our friendship
was like that.
Constant,
the muted
beat
of a heart.
But now
as I walk
down this soaked road,
the only
footsteps I hear
are my own.

God Pours Craft Beer on Weekends

I met God in a crowded brewery
with wooden walls and oak barstools.
He was tending the bar,
wearing a flannel shirt with rolled up sleeves,
showing off the tattoos on his forearms.
I almost didn't recognize him.
He had the bushy beard you hear about,
but he also wore a fleece beanie
and square-frame black glasses.
"Are you God?" I asked.
He just smiled and said,
"I work here on weekends."
I said I didn't expect to see him there.
He said no one does.
Then he told me about the beers on tap,
the pale ale from Palo Alto,
the pilsner from Pittsburgh,
the bock from Boston,
and he mentioned he would
find me a bottle of wine
if I was interested.
Then I did what anyone would do.
I pulled up a stool at the bar,
and asked God to pour me a glass,
ice cold with a head of white froth.

Wings

ALEXIS B. MENDEZ

When hope is low and the stars are high,
I lie beneath and look toward the sky.
Every once in a while
I find my mouth making a smile
because I notice a brilliant shooting star
imprinting a ghostly scar.
And now I stand, eyes closed, and wish, not for material things
but for something more close to wings
so that I may fly away from my troubles and fears,
so that I may get rid of all my tears.

Paper Tigers

KATELYN TEAGUE

*“The most difficult thing is the decision to act,
the rest is merely tenacity. The fears are paper tigers.”*

- Amelia Earhart

A blur of blue water hitting glass,
rushing in to fill the cockpit.

Coarse sand beneath my hands,
lodging itself in my pores.

Only the Pacific stretches before me,
pieces of plane decorating the waves.

I call for help, for the many
who anticipated this moment of failing,

and only silence answers. I turn to see
the island behind me, fruit-bearing

trees and singing birds. But in the hidden
places, I sense them lurking.

Evening Sky Dancing

The scissor-tails come every night.
They're never late.

When the sun begins to fall
and the sky tinges to pink, they come.
They line up along the power line,

weighing it down with hollow bones.
They flit back and forth from line to sky,

tails continuously snipping,
seemingly never quite satisfied
with the hand of twilight closing

around their hours of flight.
While watching through my window,

the glass between us ceases
to exist as my gaze follows their fluttering,
their flapping and their sky dancing.

All day long I anticipate their evening
return, their restless scissoring tails.

But then one night, I stand looking out.
They've moved on, leaving
only an empty wire.

Flower Girl

SYDNEY ELIZABETH CHANDLER

Texas Thistle

Our house became a home the day the flowers grew.

Trumpet Vine

It had started with a ten by ten plot of land beside the front porch. He fenced it off with winding, wooden posts which he sawed and shaved himself. Eggshell Blue, the posts were painted. I loved the color so much, I painted our front door to match.

Windflower

He seeded the soil when the soil was ripe;
the worms are coming to the surface –
It's going to rain – It's time to seed
and after he seeded the land, he shuffled in through Eggshell Blue, stepped out of his leather boots and green garden gloves, smiled lopsided with his eyes and cheeks, and seeded me as well.

Tahoka Daisy

She grew as the flowers grew.

Yellow Columbine

I worked the kitchen and he worked the garden. She played with the poppies and went to school. She was a smart girl. I worked and slept. He slept and gardened. I watched them grow from behind the glass of kitchen window.

Passion Flower

She began to sew petals onto all of her clothes. Petals she picked from her father's garden.

Foxglove

The seasons waxed and waned, and with them, the flowers. Yellow Daisies browned and curled, Mystic Spires grew in their places; the Bluebonnets stood and fastly fell,
they must have had a case of the blues,
he sometimes joked. It became a song I would hum in my head: every Spring when the rain would fall, he would seed the soil, for the soil was ripe.

Indian Blanket

But that one Spring, he found our Flower Girl in his gardening shed, a large bag of seed crumpled up in both hands. He asked

Why did you eat all of my wildflower seeds?

Her belly was grumbling – the secret sound of stretching bones. She said
I want you to help me grow, like you help your garden grow. I want you to hold me with your green garden gloves.

Diamond Petal

As she spoke, the seeds began to sprout. Spring green stalks rose from out of her navel and fanned their flat leaves up towards the light. Rose buds fell from her lips and her eyelids; from under her nails, round roots took form.

Butterfly Weed

He carried her in a bundle of arms, quietly, purposefully, out toward the garden. He planted her deep, alongside his wildflowers. He recoated the fencing an Eggshell Blue. An afternoon rain began to fall. It was very pretty, her flowers and all. I watched them grow from behind the glass of kitchen window.

When Winter Came

MALLORY EVANGELISTA

I used to see our stone-brick house
Spice and pumpkins, Fall year round
Two pairs of boots,
Your ABU's
All lined up right by your Blues.
Our little girl
With dark brown eyes
Your teakwood scent
I'd come to life
Fear was your darkness,
A darkness I'd fight,
Heart fires a-blazing would warm all cold nights
A poignant love story,
Ever-after to be
We were wild flowers set to bloom in the Spring
Grown up in Detroit and your PTSD
Winter was coming
Colorblind disbelief
For the darkness was greater than your love was to be
For I had loved you when you couldn't love me.

Smile, Sweetheart

FAITH MUÑOZ

Looks staring behind her
Sitting dead ripe in October
Her force of desire pulls
Lust laced slants to examine
Polished and clean
Wax wine-colored lips
Factory-fresh figure
Woman's body wholly at fault
Her screams split soundproof booths
The swell of her breathing
Morbidly inward
Barbwired diaphragm
"Give us a smile, sweetheart"
She would not succumb
Why not her?

Home

ANDREEA CALIN

The hollow house is quiet.
Silverware clatters against empty plates.
We go through the motions,
Whispering grace and praying to Hate.

It is lonely in the hollow house.
The silence is skull-shattering loud.
We tremble as we drift to sleep,
Counting our ghosts in the crowd.

The hollow house is dead.
(It creeps around corners)
We keep grudges hidden in stiff rooms,
A house full of hoarders.

After Thoughts

I think about how bells ring at the hour.
And maybe now I should be musing about
Impending doom and the irrelevance of
Time, but I just think of how I now cower
At misplaced harsh noises.

If I had a doubt

It was your fault that I can't stand to love
Anything since you, maybe I wouldn't sour
At the smell of your perfume, or choke out
Deep sobs when I discover your velvet glove
You lost a year ago, embroidered flower
Stitched into the ring finger—a sprout
Of the newly blossoming love you cut off
 With razor-edged and deafening screams;
 I'm sorry I'm bursting at the seams.

Socks

I have cold feet. Always have. Socks don't help much; I put them on and can still feel the cold of my skin, cold to the bone.

When I was a little girl, my mom would pull my tiny feet onto her lap and rub them until they were warm, never noticing that just minutes after she stopped, they turned back to ice.

After a visit with my mom, my grandma decided she would be the one to solve all my problems: she'd knit me socks until my feet weren't cold anymore. She knitted me so many pairs that when I moved out of my childhood home years later, I had to buy a new dresser to fit them all. Warm, cozy, yarn socks—peach, plum, olive, chocolate colored socks—tucked neatly into drawer after never-ending drawer.

Turns out, cozy socks don't do much to fix my freezing feet either.

When I turned 13, I became obsessed with love. I spent hours at a time locked in my room, jotting down every little idea I had for the pattern of the lace on my wedding dress, the texture of my groom's bow tie, and the flavor of the big white cake in the dining hall.

I'd curl up on my bed, feet tucked under me, ignoring the cold as I dreamt up my future.

All I wanted was to be home after another unsuccessful fourth date. It always ended there. Date four was my unlucky day, ending with a tub of Rocky Road and my fuzzy, chocolate colored socks. I liked their brown because it made me feel grounded, because it was warm and my whole body was cold to the core. I rubbed my shaky limbs and mended my achy spirit as the evening fell into night.

I drift away from the shoreline; the train of my white dress weighs me down like an anchor. Torn lace trails behind me, coated in sand and salt water. It's late and dark. The sun fell victim to the moon hours ago, meeting its end in the icy sea.

I dig my toe into the sand; I've got cold feet.

Night Aura

SARAH STUKALIN

The fiery landscape engulfs me and I am surrounded in the nothing. I realize I am no longer careless and I trod along the barren street way under the cover of the desolate sky. Affluent men with their top hats crowd me and I relish in the attention and the temptation of a love so sweet it's candy and all things bliss. I relish in all of my lasts.

But it isn't me they're looking at.

They flock to the street windows, ignoring the iridescent glow of the night aura and look at the glass turned to stone. The glow of a star faded into yellow. They see the string-like figure on the shop window and propose what it means. They do not know what lies ahead in the grim and gray future of their spring but they choose to ignore it and revel in the decadence of their current existence; using their canes as support to propel themselves along the hideousness of their sentiments. I cover my breast pocket in pure terror of angst...

But one man bowed his head. One man knew of the disgust and the anger and the salt gray tears which drove the hatred into hell. One man knew of the legacy and the fiery ambition and that one man knew.

The desolate cloud engulfs me and I'm completely unaware. I realize soon I can be careless and I lay myself down along the tear-stained ground and the cover of no light. Men and women with their grimy feet crowd the room and I weep in the sorrow and the temptation of a breath so sweet it's candy. I accept my last breaths.

It isn't us they care about.

They drop to the ground, ignoring the screams of their children and look at the air turned to stone; the glow of a star faded into yellow. I see the disgust in their eyes and the grave future of their winter and they do not chose to ignore it. I cover my face in pure terror.

But one man raised his head. One man recognized the disgust and the anger and the salt gray tears which drove his hatred into hell. One man knew of the legacy he hoped he would one day leave behind.

He knew.

But not for long

Inspired by Ernst Ludwig Kirchner's *Street Scene In Berlin*

Insomnia

A.F. FANDRICH

It's 1:28 AM. The lights are off, Rowan is asleep, and I should be too, but my mind is keeping me wide awake with a pit in my stomach that just won't go away. I have been tossing and turning for the last half hour, but no matter how comfortable I can physically get, I cannot ease my mind. We lie on the pull-out couch in my sister's living room, our usual. We never stay at his house because it's too far away from everyone, the parties, the booze. My house is off limits due to my dad's immense hatred of Rowan for reasons I understand but have not accepted. So, we settle for this old pull-out bed from this dog-piss stained couch because, "It's better than nothing, Vic."

I finally give up, settle on the bed, and stare at the ceiling fan, even though this means that a supporting bar will be jammed into the middle of my back. I just don't care at this point, because it is becoming apparent that nothing is going to shut my mind up this time.

"What do you want?" I ask.

Let us out. We need air, say the thoughts.

"But why now? Can't this wait till morning?"

The sun doesn't wait to rise because you want to remain in the night.

I watch the ceiling fan move at its extra fast pace. Neither Rowan nor I can sleep without the dull hum of the blades cutting through the air. The wind that cools our blanketed bodies is a necessity. I remember our first night that we spent together on this bed. Drunk and fast. Everyone was outside around the fire, unaware of the fire that was being lit just a few yards away. The bed didn't seem uncomfortable then as I stared into his coffee-colored eyes, but the mind doesn't focus on discomforts when you feed it pleasure.

I decide to make a cup of coffee. In times of jitteriness, anxiety, and insomnia, coffee calms me immensely, though I don't always have to do this to sleep next to Rowan. The beginning of our relationship was fun; rebelling against my parents and dating someone five years older than me filled me with an adrenaline rush equivalent to diving out of an airplane. At the end of those vigorous days, I welcomed sleep and it came quickly. However, this lasted only for a month; Rowan's tender moments would be replaced with random bouts of aggression, and my never-ending thoughts would keep me up at night, questioning the reason behind the behavior. I discovered that coffee dissolved these questions and allowed me to dream of happier days.

My legs swing over my side of the bed. I inch myself off to ensure Rowan will not wake up. He is not nice when he first wakes up; many of our fights take place in the morning. Our fights are never physical, and he's never left a mark on me, but mental bruises take just as long to heal. The linoleum floor is cold against my feet, cold enough to send a wave of goosebumps up my calf. I open the drawer where my sister keeps her Keurig K-cups and insert one into the machine. When it finishes brewing, I reach for my cup and breathe in the aroma of Starbucks House Blend. It's almost enough to make you feel like you're in an actual Starbucks, sitting at one of their tables, drinking a coffee with the morning paper. An experience I cannot call my own since Rowan hates coffee and would never step inside a Starbucks.

I come back to the living room, settling onto the foot of the bed with my cup. I question if this is the appropriate spot to sit, but realize it is too late to readjust. I fold my feet under me, sitting with my back to his body. A calming wave washes over me as I take my first sip, and an image of myself sitting in a French café comes to mind. I see myself, book in hand, enjoying the day like a sophisticated woman. Men smile and wave without bad intentions, only hoping to receive a moment of recognition from a woman of my degree. But Rowan's foot touches my thigh, and my daydream fades away faster than it was conjured. A dream of Paris seems to be just that, only a dream, at least when I consider Rowan's travel desires. He believes the French are just stuck up, that the country is not a worthy spot for tourism. His ideal European vacation would be to Germany or Ireland, somewhere where there is beer, and a lot of it.

I cannot remember a moment in which Rowan and I were together and he wasn't drinking. Whether we go out to restaurants, hang out at my sister's house, or are off at the mall, he always manages to slip something in. At first I didn't mind it. I found it attractive, almost, to be with someone who could hold their liquor so well. But after he'd had twelve drinks three nights in a row and had hardly made it to bed on his own, the attraction that once existed began to fade. I've tried to reason with him, ask him to have one night out with me in which we stayed sober, but he always says the same thing:

"I am a man who works three weeks on, and one week off. If I want to have a fucking beer with the guys, I'm gonna have a fucking beer with the guys. If you don't like that, you can either get over it, or take your happy ass back to your parent's house."

We both knew that wasn't going to happen.

"Okay, I think that's enough," I say to my thoughts.

No, not yet.

“I don’t want to think about this anymore.”

We cannot be stifled any longer.

My coffee is cooling; I’ve been sitting here too long without drinking it. I could go back into the kitchen, maybe heat it up in the microwave. But would the same authenticity still be there? Would Rowan wake from the sound of the tray rotating? I could just finish it as is and not waste the rest. But would the cold caffeine cause the opposite effect that hot coffee has on me? Will my insomnia only be made worse? Taking that chance, I tilt my head back and let the rest of the dark liquid slide down my throat, coating it with a sweet, smooth flavor. I close my eyes, allowing the coffee to find its place in my body, hoping it can find the pit in my stomach that is aching for fulfillment. I wait for what seems like forever, yet the pit only seems to have widened.

I feel the bed move, and a shot of fear runs down my arms. I’ve disturbed him. The last time I woke him up in the middle of the night, he yelled at me and called me selfish. He was to go back to work the next day and I had already ruined it for him, seeing as he wouldn’t have a full night’s sleep. For him, five minutes of alertness between dreams meant ten hours of yawning for the next day. All I’d wanted was to lay my head on his shoulder as I fell asleep. Though if the roles had been reversed, I would have been expected to accept it willingly. A double standard I was being trained to bear.

Thankfully for me, his movement appears to be an unconscious readjustment. No signs of awareness, nothing to be afraid of. I take this opportunity to return my cup to the kitchen. My departure from the room is again slow, especially with his new signs of movement. I must be careful. When I return, I opt for the floor so I don’t risk waking Rowan. I reach for the remote to turn the TV on, making sure the volume is very low before I explore the selection on Netflix. Ever since I was a child, the sound of the TV has always helped me sleep. I remember sharing a room with my sister, watching cartoons until my sight faded away with my consciousness. She would wait until my breathing regulated to change the channel to MTV or something that didn’t make her feel like a kid. She cared enough for me to let me find my dreams first.

Rowan cannot sleep that way. He despises when I turn it on, glaring and sighing angrily as if I were causing him deep inner pain with every minute I allowed the TV to stay on. I’ve learned to be like my sister and allow him to find his dreams before I start the process of finding mine. It’s hard to indulge in this compromise when he refuses to get into bed no earlier than midnight and I have to be at work at eight the next morning. I like to think that’s part of how my insomnia started, catering to him and

his sleeping preferences, though it may also be from the new stresses that college has placed on me. I've thought about sleeping in a different room, but Rowan says he's grown accustomed to my being next to him and he cannot imagine it any other way. I'm not sure if he's being honest or if this is just a different way for him to control what I do. He's taken me away from my parents and he's done his best to convince me to not go to college; I can only imagine what he thinks my sleeping in a different room would do to his control.

I look at my phone to see the time. 2:18.

"It's too late to be up like this."

We're almost there.

Ratatouille is the first movie to appear in the Netflix options, and so I choose it out of my sheer enjoyment for the movie. The end of the bed is soft against my head as I lean back, closing my eyes to try and find rest. However, in spite of my many efforts, the sound of Remy's kitchen crash scene is too loud, even for me. I feel Rowan lean toward the end of the bed. I have awakened the beast. The calming wave that my coffee had brought me flushes from my body instantly.

"Vic. Really? How immature can you get? *Ratatouille*?" Rowan says, glaring at me from above.

"I thought you were asleep. I'm sorry, I just wanted to have it on for a few minutes," I say.

"Yeah, well, you would've been better off just watching it off your phone."

"I'm sorry."

"For Christ's sake."

He leans back and flings the blanket off of him, the corner of it smacking me on the side of the face while the rest of it tumbles to the ground. His feet are on the floor, his legs moving hastily over to where he keeps his overnight bag. Rowan's grabbing his pants, pulling them on quicker than the fan's blades cut through the air.

"What are you doing, Ro?"

"I'm going home, where I know I'll be able to sleep."

I stare at him as he digs through his bag for a T-shirt. My legs are numb; my knees are filling with quicksand. I feel like my legs will disappear before I get the courage to stand. He looks around the room, seeming to give up on the search through his bag as he throws it on the bed.

"Where's my shirt?"

I grab the shirt from the floor next to me, throwing it at his feet. I should have kept it, tried to stop him from leaving, but these thoughts from tonight are keeping me set in my spot, cooperative.

He sits on the bed and starts putting on his boots, yanking his jeans over the leather tops. He reaches for his charger, stuffing it in the bag with the rest of the things that he will take from here, that he will take from me. I think about how I wish he could take my memories of us, and throw them in that bag as well. The few happy moments, the many drunken nights, and every breakdown he caused me. I wish he could take that instead of the life before him.

Rowan stands, grabbing his bag. He takes one last moment to glare at me. “Don’t expect me to call you tomorrow.”

He’s halfway out the door when I say, “That’s okay, I think I’ll let the sun rise.”

Rowan stops for just a split second, listening to my words, but closes the door behind him without another sound. I don’t get up to chase him this time, and I have no desire to watch his truck leave. Instead, I get off the floor and lock the door behind him. I grab the blanket he threw on the floor and settle into the middle of the bed, where there will not be any discomfort. My mind is silent, free of any sleepless thought. I close my eyes, and I let the sounds of the French music take me away to my European vacation.

Crazy

DOMINIQUE WAGONER

“I love you.”

He must.

“Could you not be so needy?”

I just wanted attention.

“It was your fault.”

I made the mistake.

“You were never here.”

He is right.

“She was just a friend.”

That’s not what the hickies say.

“You made me cheat.”

I’m sorry.

“I’ll give you another chance if you change.”

Of course, I love you.

“You need to lose weight.”

But I can see ribcage.

“Stop being so sad all the time.”

I am so tired.

“You have become ugly.”

I am trying to be better.

“I’m leaving you for her.”

What? I have worked so hard.

“PLEASE STAY!”

She must be crazy.

Road Kill

SYDNEY ELIZABETH CHANDLER

Swift's fidgety guitar strings heave themselves through His car radio. I'm on Highway 290. My eyes behind their contact lenses zoom in on a dead doe on the side of the road. Cut in thirds, her flank is pressed flat into the asphalt. *There I was again tonight ...* I fucking hate this song, He says to His car radio, nodding to His car radio, disturbing the doe's left entrails on the road. *Shifting eyes and vacancy ...* This seatbelt is cutting strips out of my heart, I think. Swift's fidgety guitar strings work themselves louder as He turns the volume dial the wrong way – it's left, not right, you – screaming at my memories and me and the red bladder of the doe which is now caught under the truck's left front wheel. *Across the room your silhouette ...* There is so much blood in my body. There is so much room for blood and water in my body. Leave it, I say and I say it Again. *It was enchanting to meet you ...* I am taken back to Phoenix, Arizona, with the dick-type cacti, the ones with two horned balls and one thick shaft of green and brown pricking, raping the sky from their place on the side of the road as we drive. *I'm wonderstruck ...* Have you been to Arizona before, she asks. I shake my head No three times and wonder what sex might feel like or what sex might feel like with a cactus. *All the way home ...* There are so many cacti on the side of the road. I wonder if anyone has run naked through them, on them, beside them. There is so much room for blood on cactus spikes.

Abby was brought in at ninety pounds, the twin was brought in at ninety-two. The Ginger Cutter was always big and scarred, the ten-year-old was too skinny to walk when her dad

carried her in to the center. *Don't you let it go ...*

Natalie had no nose.

I was brought in at one hundred and nine and I was proud, I think. I learned that your

body, after eating its body fat, will eat at the cartilage on your face.

Have you been to treatment before, the nurse

asks. No, I reply, this plastic arm band is itchy you spelled my name wrong it's a Y not

an I *was enchanted to meet you ...*

Nurse says OK I say (ok) back

Nurse says NO RUNNING I say (no running) back

NO TOILET WITHOUT NURSE

(no toilet without nurse)

NO LEAVING THE GROUNDS

(no leaving the grounds)

NO HIDING FOOD OR CUTTING
SANDWICHES INTO TENTHS OR
EATING PASTA WITH A KNIFE OR
BREAKING THE HEADS OFF THE
ANIMAL CRACKERS TO HIDE UNDER
THE RUG AFTER TEN AM SNACK TIME

I say (ok) and I get a new plastic arm band

which still itches. It plays with the hairs on my wrist, the skin underneath.

It feels dirty and cold like flesh that

isn't mine. Abby loves to listen to Taylor Swift

(T. Swift is the best is the BEST) and the twin likes to listen to her

too. The ten-year-old isn't with us in the Lounge Room

painted dark blue and tickled with

glow stars. A Code of another, darker color is called when

Ginger Cutter attempts to stab her wrist – the culprit,

a deformed paper clip – as

(T. Swift is the best is the BEST)

sings *don't you let it go...* from the Lounge

Room's

corner radio.

There is so much room that will never be touched

by blood, or me, in this world.

GOD, GIVE ME THE GRACE TO ACCEPT

(Please, give me the grace to accept)

THE THINGS THAT CAN'T BE CHANGED

(The things that can't be changed)

COURAGE TO CHANGE THE THINGS

(Courage to change the things)

WHICH SHOULD BE CHANGED

(which could possibly be changed)

AND THE WISDOM TO DISTINGUISH

(and the wisdom to distinguish)

ONE FROM THE OTHER

(one from all the rest)

It is time to say goodbye to the

ten

year

old

who can now walk on her own two

four

sized

feet

who can now eat

without the feeding tube thrust down her

year

ten

old

throat and secured to the inside

of her left nostril with white hospital tape. Don't

worry, she whispers to Abby to Twin to me, her new friend, I'll be back to
you

soon. I'll run a few laps around my

backyard and I'll

be back

to you soon.

Abby has eaten a scoop of vanilla ice cream. Natalie has hidden her last graham cracker away in the folds of its wrapper. The twin is gone, she left with her other self who came to pick her up with their parents. I wonder what it's like to share the same blood, the same face but not the same disease. *Who do you love?* ... I do not know how long I will be here I do not know how to miss the scabs on the knuckles of my right hand from my teeth I do not know how to think of my family without seeing blood, tainted. Stains on a white petal rose. Swift's CD is scratching on the tongue of the Lounge Room's corner radio *I'd open I'd open I'd open* – I'd open my wrists if I thought it would help A SLAP on the wrist, don't think that way, you deserve to Not Think That Way.

I'd open up and you would say ...

This song fucking sucks. He tries to turn the radio back down. Leave it, I say and I say it Again.

I know it sucks I think it

Fucking

Sucks

but leave it just leave it just let it play through. *It was enchanting*

to meet you ...

Swift's fidgety guitar strings fade like the bottoms of running shoes as the song finally comes to an end. He nods towards the car's radio – Silence – as He/Lover/Stranger turns onto Circle Drive. Are you

okay He asks my shell. (I think I am) my shell

asks back, Abby's short straw hair still clear in my memory, her body spinning clockwise in

the center of the Lounge Room, her bare feet, bubblegum toes, seeming to float just above the brown rug. Natalie's

cartilage threading itself back together

her pulse returning from that of a baby bird's. They

couldn't find a heartbeat when she first came in. When I

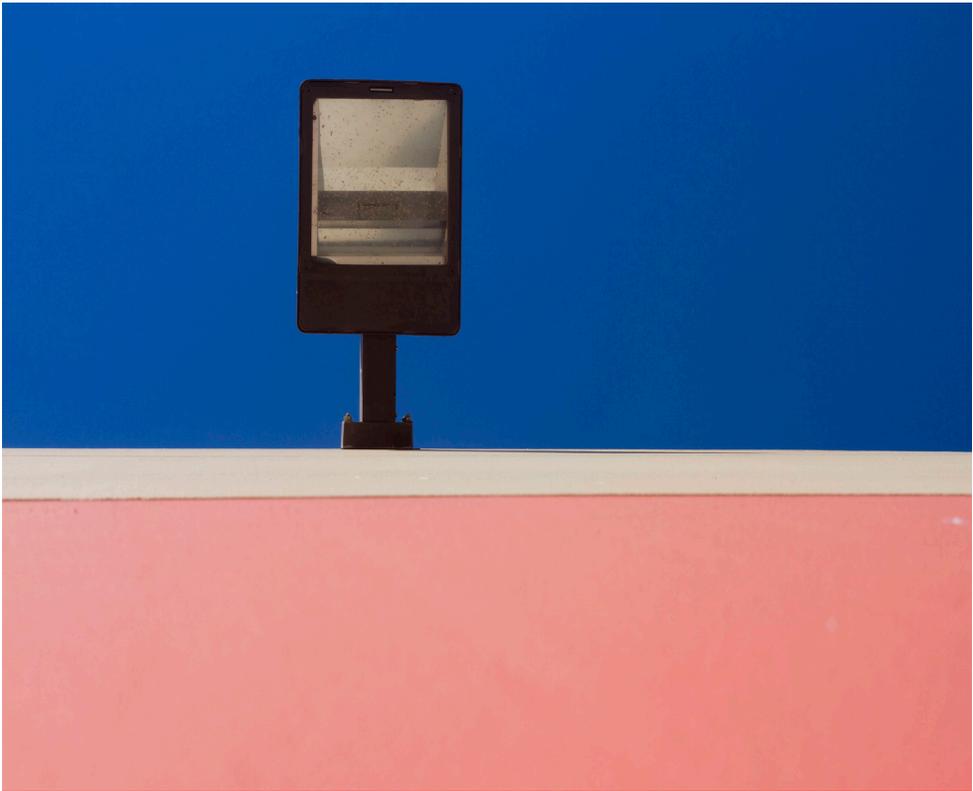
left Arizona, Abby asked me to send a new Swift CD I said (ok). I

bought the CD I

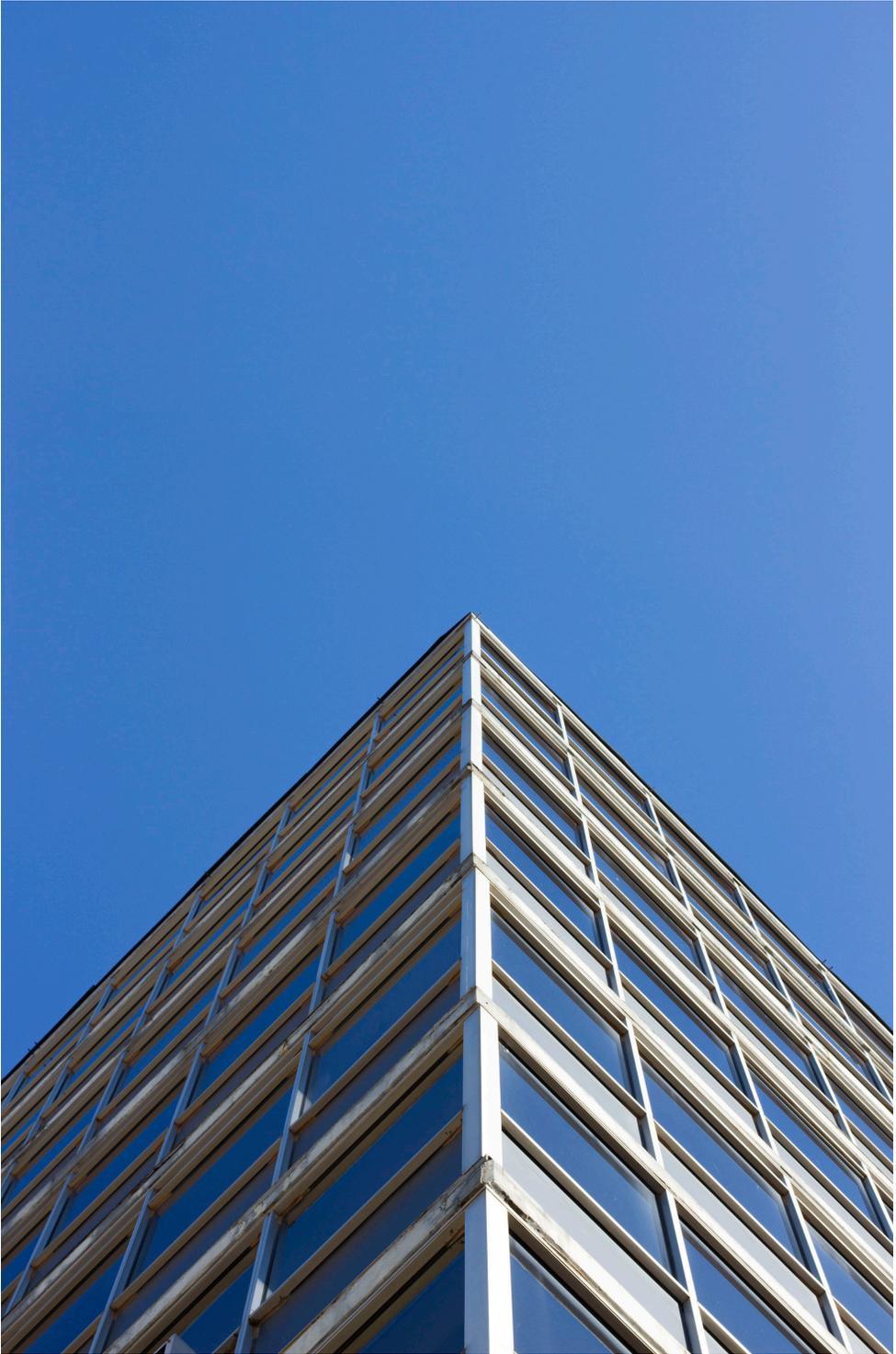
tucked the CD into an orange shoe box under my bed I never
mailed it I
never opened it I hoped it would be lost, eaten by
time and
fluffed spider's homes. It's sad, that deer, He
says to Open Road. I nod, and imagine The Scavengers, The Birds, The
Beasts,
licking at the doe's dead wounds, and making the
asphalt, wet and warm, beneath her,
clean.



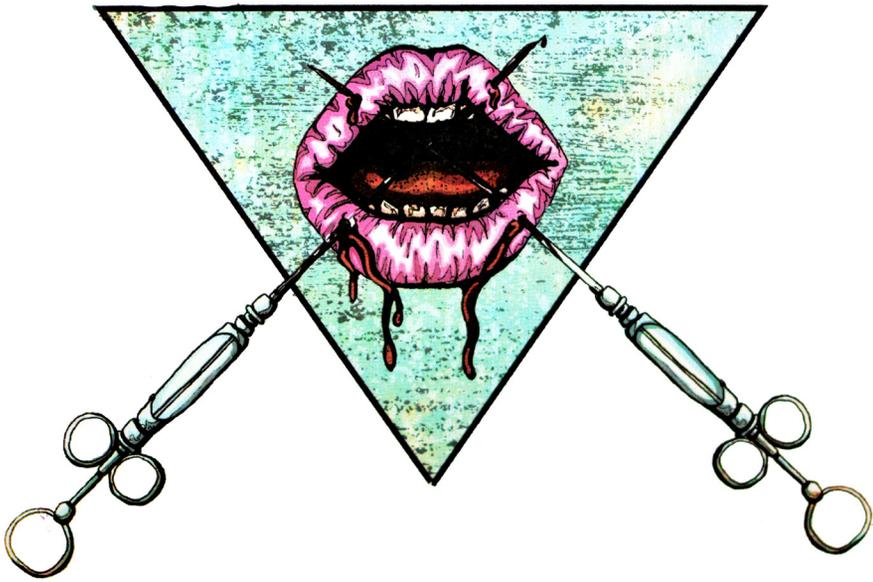
DIA DE LOS MUERTOS BY SHAYLYNN HARMON



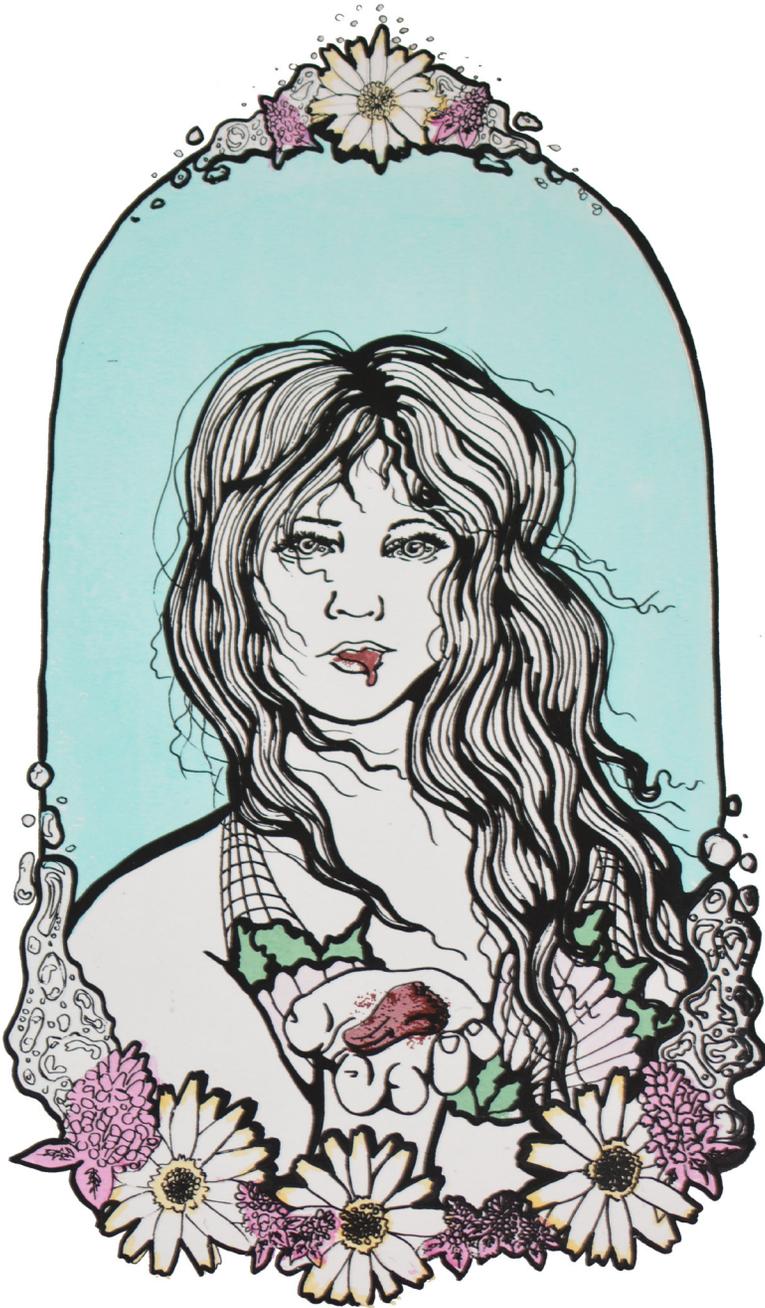
DYSTOPIA BY KEVIN APPIAH-KUBI



BLUE CORNER BY KEVIN APPIAH-KUBI



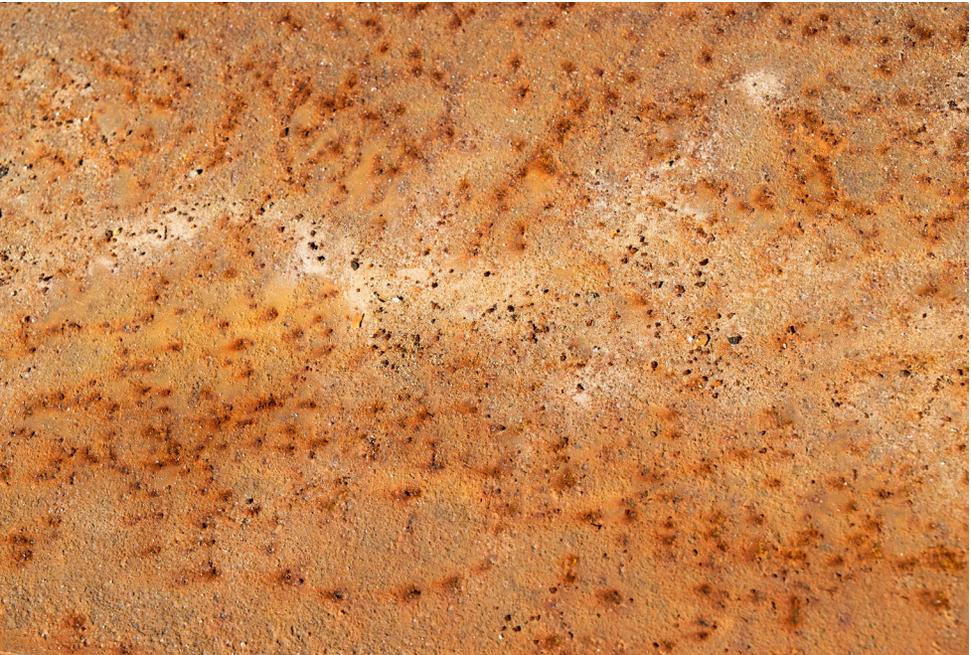
AICHOPHOBIA BY LAUREN HAMLIN



THE LITTLE MERMAID BY LAUREN HAMLIN



THE GREAT HARVEST BY TANNER SLAVENS



WHAT ROAD BY MICHELLE CASTRO



COKE BOTTLES BY KRISTEN FARRIER

For My Friend, the Oxycontin Addict,
and His Sister Who's No Longer Here

NATHAN JOWERS

I live in an okay neighborhood.
I don't lock my doors.

Today a siren waddles down South 14th
the way a toddler's feet can wander left and right
like *wee Woo wee Woo wee Woo wee...*

Some families must clean the pantry of all
the Kraft® they had stashed for little sister;
parents take turns crying to each other
before they eat their Easy Mac in silence.

The brother swallows, stomachs
the pain his friends can't medicate:
Cold sweats, wandering lips,
small pupils lifted to heaven.

Doctors try to make things wonderful.
Keys jingle for painkillers that make them
closer to okay.

Though docs live in Lexus neighborhoods,
they always lock their bathroom cabinets.

They are used to hearing the worst ooze
from alternate left/right sides of the ward
like *please God please God please God please...*

They learn to fear the absence of agony,
the orange bottle emptied too quickly,
the parent loose with prescription slips,
vomit of a child who can't be refilled.

An Echo of You

SANDERS GREEN

Cold tile on my bare feet,
The kitchen obscured under a shroud of darkness,
Teabags
Scattered
On the counter.
The window above the faulty faucet,
Stained and tinted blue,
Opening my eyes to the dismal world drenched in morning dew

The frigid
Sound of each stray drop
Pulled from the faucet
striking the sink
Like a shattering
Mirror sending fragments
in every direction.

Not until the aspirin
Secure in my hand
Makes its way past my teeth
Do I see
what you left
for me:
A narcissus.

Stunning.
Prideful.
Heartbreaking.

I wilt in its presence,
No words,
Not a sound
Save the poignant
Tap on the sink,
Fractures the air
Least of all,
my own voice

As I stare
At all
That I have
Left
of you.

Broken-in

CAITLIN OPP

The leather jacket,
hanging limply on the coat rack,
bears the sharp smell
of cigarettes and coffee
that lingers in the musty air
even after she cleaned.

The wailing of a fatherless infant
explodes against the walls
of the tired home
while the kettle screams
and sirens echo in the street
and her face falls, defeated,
her weary head in her hands,
and the leather jacket sagged.

It's amazing what can happen if you put off doing laundry long enough

There's nothing like finding money
in the pocket of a faded old pair of jeans
that I only wear when I need to do laundry
(you know, when I *really* need to do laundry...).

I slip those bad boys on,
slide my hand into the pocket
with a familiar hole in the bottom
and there it is:
a weathered twenty-dollar bill.
Jackson's face has been folded and bent
far too many times,
there's a tiny tear at the top,
and it smells faintly like Gain,
but the beat up old thing
puts a smile on my face,
even when I know
that the laundry has to be done.

The Sake of Luck

SARAH STUKALIN

Why do I look for trouble in the dark?
A constant stumble on the worst of heart
I stalk the lonely streets of night and day
And take what's given in complete dismay
I ruin myself for the sake of luck
I say, "Be careful," and always duck
I do lack my true self I must confess
Though I can't admit I'm truly a mess
The knives in their hearts replace their true form
I ignore all their constant fits of scorn
But despite foul glances I know what's true
I make what's given, what's given is due
I live on edge they try to give flatter
They do not know my heart will soon shatter

Unsolicited Advice to Girls with Red Hair and Hazel Eyes (after Jeanann Verlee)

NABILA MEGHJANI

When your father threatens you by swallowing a handful of pills, do not laugh.

When the prettiest girl in class smirks and whispers to her giggling friends at the sight of your tangled and unruly hair, smile at her. Surprise her.

When a boy you just met says you are beautiful, believe him. Do not doubt him, do not turn red.

When the girl who sits next to you in class says you smell different, making *different* sound like *bad*, say thank you. Do not regret the small bottle of perfume in the back of your mother's cupboard.

When you are no longer the student with straight A's, face the failure and try better next time.

When the old lady next door tells people that you are rude and stuck up all because she cannot hear your murmured greetings, do not slouch. Keep your head held high because you have done nothing wrong.

When your father threatens you by swallowing a handful of pills, do not laugh.

When the people at home do something wrong, take a deep breath, count back from 10.

When your therapist tells you to go outside for at least an hour a day, do not brush her words off. No one's out to get you.

When your closest friends stop talking to you, ask them why and then learn to forgive.

When your house crashes and burns in the metaphorical sense, take blame.

When you feel overwhelmed and lost, let it all out.

When your mother does not seem to notice your reactions anymore, do not feel hurt. Try to understand that she sees the man she hates in you.

When the boy you like has a girlfriend, laugh it off. You always fall for unreachable and complicated.

When the girl you like has a boyfriend and is probably straight, laugh.

Laugh because this is what you always do and then befriend her anyway.

When the old man tries to grab you in the poorly lit street, kick, scream and run.

When your father threatens you by swallowing a handful of pills, please, do not laugh.

Ruby Woo

FAITH MUÑOZ

I was thirteen when my mom bought me my first lipstick from the cosmetics department in Dillard's. It wasn't from the makeup aisle at Walgreen's like I expected. We scanned the dark tubes containing varying hues of pink, red, brown, orange, and purple sitting on the glass displays. The saleslady brought a color palette and matched pigments to my skin tone. She selected five tubes and made small marks on my hand with each lipstick. I wanted all of them but there was one particular color that stood out to me the most – Ruby Woo by MAC.

As if being inducted into womanhood, my mom took the lipstick and leaned down to gently dab it on my lips. “My mom bought me my first lipstick and I’ve been looking forward to the day I could buy you your first.”

The wrinkles around her eyes were starting to show, especially when she tried to avoid crying. She turned me around to face the mirrored counters so that I could see my reflection. For the first time since my accident, I didn't see the wheelchair carrying my paralyzed legs. My attention centered on the juicy red color bursting from my lips. For the first time, I felt beautiful.

Over the past couple of years, I've managed to add eight more shades of lipstick to my collection: cerise, auburn, scarlet, maroon, carnelian, Indian red, coral, and hot pink. I keep them all in a drawstring bag hanging from my closet doorknob next to the full body length mirror attached to the door. There's also a lot of empty space in my room. All unnecessary furniture was removed so that I could move around in my wheelchair and my mom could dress me and get me in and out of bed. A bed, a book shelf, and a night stand are the only furniture still there, but two years after the accident that rendered my legs useless, I can mostly dress myself and get in and out of bed without help.

Sometimes I sit and look at the empty reflection of the white wall behind me through the closet door mirror and just want to cut it off so I won't always have to look at it. There's nothing more useless than an empty reflection. I'd like to cut off the bottom half too, but at least it reflects something, the mousy-haired girl sitting in a wheelchair.

“Honey,” my mom says through the crack in my door. “I'm going down the street to a garage sale. I'll be back in a bit. Isa's here.”

Seconds later, my best friend bursts through the door and launches herself onto my freshly made bed.

“Could you not? I just made that bed.”

Ignoring me, she reaches for a pillow and hugs it. “Lorena, what am I going to do?” She whines.

“You could fix my bed.”

She fake-throws the pillow at me. “I’ll fix your stupid bed if you help me come up with ideas for my photography project. It’s due in two days and I haven’t even started.”

Without warning, my legs started spasming, the only time my legs move of their own volition. Isa doesn’t say anything but silently motions with her hand for me to join her on my bed. I wheel my chair closer to the bed and smoothly transfer my body to the edge of the mattress. Then, I grab my jerking legs and place each one on top of the comforter and lay flat on my back. Isa slips the pillow under my head, propping it to where I can see what she’s doing. She presses her hand to the right place about my knees that stops my legs from quivering and proceeds to expertly perform the range of motion exercises she’s seen my mom perform many times. Like my mom, Isa has stuck with me every step of the way after the accident. She helps me reach the books on the top shelf in the library, regularly comes over to paint my toenails in the summer, and even organized a petition for more wheelchair ramps at school. What I like is that she never treated our friendship any differently because I could no longer walk.

“How would you feel if I took pictures of you for my project?” Isa asks.

“Doing what, sitting in a chair?”

She gives me a serious look. “No, it’s nice out. What about taking some pictures of you swimming? You haven’t swum in the past two years and you actually have a pool.”

“That’s because I can’t.”

“Sure you can. Maybe you can’t move your legs but your arms have gotten pretty strong. You could just float. Even babies can do it. That’s it. I’ve decided you’re going to be my model. I’m going to get my camera and you can borrow my extra swimsuit. Be back in half an hour.”

I didn’t even have time to protest before she was out the door. In the past two years, I’ve tried to hold onto all the memories of running, squatting, feeling the heat and cold on my legs, but it’s getting harder and harder as time goes on. I look down at my legs and can see the dents they make in the comforter, but I can’t feel their dead weight. I’ve given up on the hope that my spinal cord will miraculously heal itself and I’ll be able to use my legs again. Now, I entertain myself with the hope that it’s more likely that I’ll be able to move them by developing telekinesis powers. Every once in a while, I practice staring intently at my legs with the hope that my brain, like my arms, will compensate for my inactive lower half.

“Lorena, I’m back!” calls my mom from the door to the house. I can hear other voices and think perhaps we have company. I move myself back to the edge of the bed to hop back into my wheelchair. Just then, two men come into my room carrying a vanity. They set the heavy piece of furniture catty corner to the side and leave. The vanity looks pretty much like a desk with storage space on each side of the empty middle where the chair goes, but it’s closer to the ground. Mom enters my room as I roll up to the vanity.

“I thought you might have gotten tired of using the mirror on your closet door so when I found this squat little vanity with a mirror I thought it would be perfect. I also got you this makeup organizer that you can put your lipsticks in.”

I wheel my chair into the gap. The mirror reflects only the upper half of my body. She sets the transparent rectangle caddy next to the mirror and hands me my pouch of lipsticks. I slide each lipstick into a slot of its own, organized from darkest to lightest shade. I look into the mirror to see my mom unhook the mirror from the closet door and stuff it in the closet.

“Thank you, Mom.”

She kisses the top of my head and reaches for a tube of lipstick – Ruby Woo red.

“I always liked this color on you. You should wear it for your photo shoot. I saw Isa outside and she told me she was going to photograph you swimming.”

She opens the tube of lipstick and tenderly runs it over my lips like she did the first day she bought it for me.

“Are you sure you want to do this?” Mom asks as she adjusts the straps to the swimsuit.

“It’s too late to go back now. Isa won’t stop whining if I don’t do this,” I say holding my hair away from my neck.

“You don’t have to do it if you don’t want to.”

“It’s fine, Mom.”

I wheel myself to the lip of the pool. *I wonder if the water’s cold or warm.*

“Ready?”

My mom tilts my wheelchair just enough at the edge of the brimming pool so that I can plunge into the water. Isa is already clicking away wanting to catch every detail of this moment. The water is freezing, but I manage to hold my breath and let gravity pull me, sinking to bottom until I can go no further. After a few seconds, I push myself towards the surface using my arms to shove the water down and my body up. I can’t remember feeling everything so intensely before. As I surface, I immediately

regret the past two years I could have been spent swimming.

“You good, baby?”

I hold a thumbs up and give my mom and ear-to-ear grin. Her smile, almost wider than mine, crinkles the corners of her eyes and tears flow down her cheeks. Isa tells me to float for a little bit and just swim around. I suck in a lungful of air and lay my head on the bed of water. The cool water droplets trickle along the sun-dried parts of my face. I glance down at my legs. They leave no dent in the water; rather, they are a part of the water. I spread my arms out and slowly fan them back in forth in wide strokes. I'm another molecule of H_2O bumping off one another, sending battalions of molecules across the pool.

The water effortlessly sustains my legs, bobbing them up and down. The weightlessness makes me believe I might as well be in zero gravity. I let the pool carry the burden I didn't realize weighed me down until the water bore it for me. I release the pent up resentment toward the accident that robbed me of my ability to chase after life with fully functioning legs and let it flow into the bacteria-killing chlorinated water. For the first time, I see myself the way the sky sees me: a girl with red lips as if kissed by the sun, floating in a pool of reflected sky.

Little Revolutions

CAITLIN MCNEELY

Revolution clicks against the back of ivory graves
Cracks against my flesh
Pumps through my chest
and sparks off my furrowed brow

I am not your maker
But I can undo you
I will tear down your words till they are just
l e t t e r s
to remake as I please

I am tired of your laughs in my silence
I can no longer bear to be implicated
in your cruelty
with only sewn together lips as my weapon
for my own destruction

Revolution sings through my anxious heart
And my stitches tear as my lips pop open
and I pour my brokenness out to you
and you laugh
and say “don’t be so sensitive”

Don’t be such an asshole

Early Voting

ALLISON BROWN

I ducked my head into the gray-hooded booth
tucked in the grocery aisle next to Halloween candy.
Sweet, scary, makes me sick.
Treat or trick?

Put on a costume, a skin not my own
and ask strangers to give me what I want,
like cheap gasoline or low taxes or a neighborhood
free from the suicide bombers or scary clowns
parading around like politicians.

My grandmother
will have some things to say
come Thanksgiving.
A hearty helping of Grand Ole Politics
piled up next to the turkey and cornbread stuffing.

God bless America, let freedom ring,
bury my head
in the grim shopping cart of my country's future,
and please let me buy some organic produce
on my way out.

Behind Locked Doors

CG MARINELLI

My mother asked that I not name the assailant in this piece.

Merritt was on her way back home from a fun night out with her date, a good friend from her statistics class, completely unaware of what was about to come. He walked her back to her door. It was late and the rest of her roommates were still out, enjoying their Friday night. She opened the door and invited him in for a quick drink and to watch a quick episode of a show, something they'd done many times before, but it seemed that he expected a bit more from her this time.

He came in slowly, shut the door quietly behind him, locked it, and approached her from behind.

While she was busy fiddling with the TV, he wrapped his arms around her and began to kiss her neck. Merritt pulled away, shocked that he would do that knowing she had a boyfriend.

"Why did you do that?" She asked him, slightly scared of this side of a friend she'd never seen before.

"Because, Merritt, Mike's not here, and why not? You've been giving me the 'fuck me' eyes all night long, and I thought it was about time I finally gave it to you." His eyes were frantic, his mind and body overcome with pure lust, while her eyes filled with tears and fear.

She started to scream, but he reached out and clasped her by the throat.

"There's no one to hear you scream," he whispered, and then he kissed her harshly—teeth knocking, noses clashing together.

She could taste blood on her tongue from where he bit her lip. Black spots began spotting her vision as he removed his hands from her throat and ripped open her blouse. She coughed a few times before letting out a single, ear-piercing scream. He slapped her.

It began to seem as if all hope was lost until she heard someone pounding on the door.

"Merritt! Grace! Are you in there?! Are you okay?! Please answer me!" It was Mike! All Merritt could think was *Thank God my dorm is co-ed*, but all her friend could think of was escape. He punched her in the temple, rendering her defenseless on the floor, almost knocking her out. He began looking for a way out, but the only exits were the door or the double-paned window in the bathroom. Thank God for the prison cell college dorm rooms. He was stuck. "Merritt or Grace, answer the door or else I'm

knocking it down!”

Twenty seconds and no answer later, Mike got to work. With one strong kick from the 240-pound linebacker, the hinges came loose; a second hard kick, and the door shook a little bit more; a third and final kick, and the door practically sprang open. He first saw Merritt, injured and on the floor, and went to her, but then he saw her assailant dart toward the door in attempt to escape. His speed was no match for Mike’s.

Mike landed punch after punch on him until he was bleeding out of both his mouth and his nose. Several teeth were on the floor, and Mike’s knuckles were bloody and raw. Another few hits and kicks knocked Merritt’s assailant out, but Mike’s rage made him carry on.

“Mike, stop!” Merritt yelled in a raspy voice, but it didn’t seem to catch his attention. “Mike, stop! You’ll kill him! Mike, you’ll lose your scholarship!” That seemed to catch his attention. He stopped, went to Merritt, and comforted her. Her assailant laid bloody and beaten on the floor only feet away.

Merritt’s roommate, Grace, returned to the dorm an hour later to find everyone in the same position. She called the campus police who sent an ambulance to tend to them all. The assailant was arrested and expelled. Neither Merritt nor Mike ever saw him again.

Merritt was lucky that Mike saved her being raped, but many others are not so lucky. She got out of a bad situation with a few bruises, scrapes, and a tale to tell. To this day, she warns my sister and I that if we ever see someone try to lock the door behind us, get out no matter who they are or where we are. It’s a piece of advice that has stuck with me over the years due to the severity of the anecdote that came along with it.

Rape is sadly not a rare occurrence in college. One in five women are sexually assaulted while in college, and only ten percent of those victims report it. The women are scared, ashamed, and worried of what others will think of them as “damaged goods.” These women weren’t lucky enough to have someone come to their aid, and that’s something my mother will never forget.

New Friend

GRETCHEN FELLE

I saw the blur of your bare breasts before you
 lifted your skirt to ask if your ass was normal, and I touched it
 to say yes, then showed you mine to be sure
I remember it all
 You, laughing as the party
 changed me
 because you were high, and because you were sad
You, crying for my brother as I drove us home for bed
 where you ate cold pepperoni, and where I slept in his place.
When you woke up, you were fine.



MACAW BY MICHELLE CASTRO



THE END BY KENNETH SHANKS



JUST DO ONE THING BY KENNETH SHANKS



INTO THE CLEARING BY MALLORY EVANGELISTA



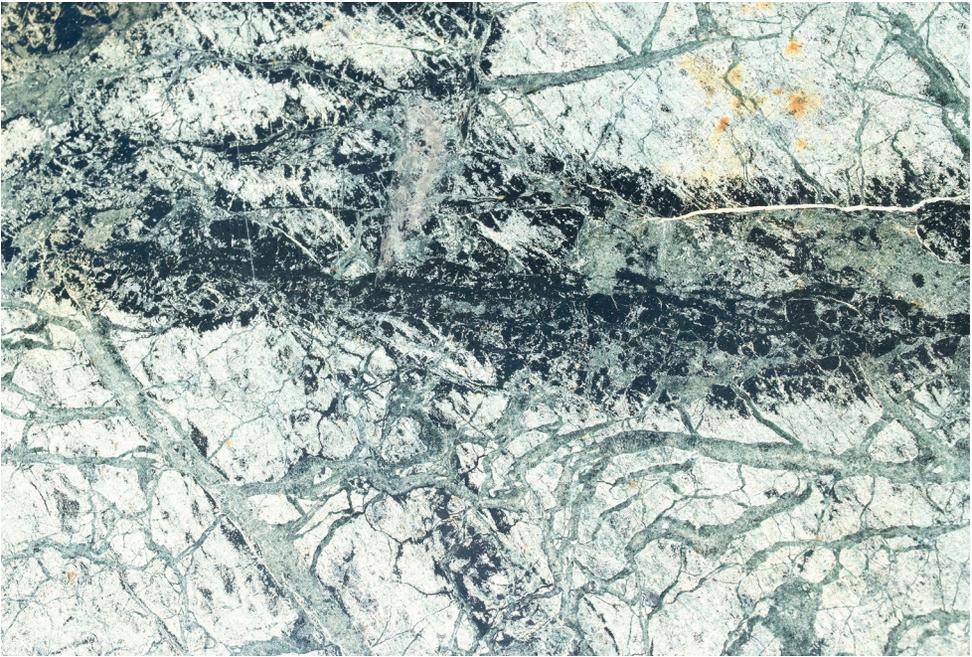
GREENTHUMB BY RACHEL ROSS



DEPTH OF AMY BY RACHEL ROSS



ANTI MONA BY EMMA GRIFFITHS



MAPS! BY MICHELLE CASTRO

Always at Your Heels

SANDERS GREEN

Nature is persistent. It will not allow you to ignore its presence. Even in this modern day and age, as you burrow into your phone, it won't be long until it wraps its vines around you again. The rustle of the trees will whisper, 'remember me?' Raindrops will slam into your windows like bullets, laying siege to your forgetfulness. Some of us purposefully try to escape our lineage, but others have been consumed by the responsibilities of day-to-day life and simply do not remember to breathe in the tangled perfumes of the earth. Whichever you may be, nature will not be forgotten.

There was a time when you would go outside and look under rocks and around deeply rooted oaks to see what you could find. Every insect, every bird absorbed your senses. Clouds were full of possibilities. The dandelions were awaiting your youthful breath. You ran with the wind.

There will be a time when you will return to the ground. Gnarled roots will cradle your corpse; it will once again hum in tune to the symphony of the earth. Until then, like a waterfall, reminders will cascade around you, some friendly, nudging you out the door with a summer breeze, others insistent, picking you up and hurling you into the forest through downpours and hurricanes.

Moths will lay silent on brick walls. Lizards will expand their scarlet throats as you walk by. The Sun's long fingers will claw at your back. A ladybug will alight on your shirt. As you wake, mourning doves will coo outside your window and as you fall onto your bed at night, toads will cry desperately into the darkness. It takes little more than a glance to realize that there is always a piece to nature, nipping at your heels.

Do not be alarmed; do not try to escape. Though nature is wild and dangerous, it is exquisite. Take the time to stare into the eyes of a creature of this world. Plunge yourself into nature. The water may be bitingly cold. It will leave you breathless and stunned. It will pound through your veins, reminding you that it was always there. It will overcome you, if you let it and you should. Let it be magnificent.

Beautiful Letdowns

CHAD MARQUI

Hovering past
like billowing sails,
with legs emerging
soft and pink
from sheer fabric.

Gesticulating theatrically
on minuscule phones,
they release conjecture
and chit chit.
Things avowed,
blabber spilled like martinis
from heavily painted lips.

And these delectable débutantes
are politely requested
at dinner parties
on the village green
or over coffee and afternoon tea.

And no one questions
for they are flawless,
with bodies chiseled
by gyms and water diets.
Pristine plastic faces done
by doctors who failed as artists.

But behind it all,
contrived façade
and college degree credentials,
they are vacuous.

But behold!
They offer up their hidden secrets,
their magical private places,
then pull it away
like a matador's red cape.

And we chase.
Men in pin-striped suits,
bashful boys drawn in by surfaces,
sucked in by bulges forming
below the belt.
And rarely do we listen
to the staccato beat
of the pumping heart.

This circuitous traipsing of thought that
registers a seismic nothing
except an aesthetic rumble.
And when that transitory moment,
fleeting passage of lust,
washes away from attrition,
they,
these beautiful letdowns,
put pumps back on over
painted toenails
and strut out front doors.
Leaving you to your books
and your cluttered apartment
and the sweet snap
of loneliness
that always pervades,
seeping into pores.

Honky-Tonks and Hookers

Again,
evening ends like this.
My father passed out,
sprawled across carpeting
like he is making a snow angel.
Wheezing and huffing
like Rip Van Parental Unit
in a comatose stupor.

Sometimes,
the dog nudges him,
presses his nose against
the small of his back.
Or drops a ball in the kitchen,
letting it roll
to arouse suspicion.
But hardly a movement,
just his patterned
imprecise intake and discharge
from smoke charred lungs.

I recognize his places—
the honky-tonks and bars
with names like Sully's,
Grizzly Saloon, or Crosslake Inn
(which falsely attracts lodgers
with weary highway eyes).
Where men clad in flannel
and whiskey bent grins,
fondle girls tinted in rouge
with speckle bruised thighs.

I've watched people grow old
under this distorted neon glow.
Daylight dwindling and
nights extending,
spanning out,
fist fighting against pure light.

Dreams encapsulated
in jukebox tunes and
disjointed barroom banter.

And I know the kind—
those predisposed,
cosmically drawn.
Auto-piloted cars
veering and steering
into another gravel lot.
Whose chapped, rugged hands
cannot forgo the intimacy of
cascading beer foam
and lecherous looks
from corner booth admirers.

I know my disposition.
I know my family name.
And in the end,
I cannot allow
pen and pad
to be rendered lame.

A Voice in the Dark

CAITLIN MCNEELY

“Do you ever get in a mood, where you can’t stand hearing another word from a heterosexual, middle class white man? And you just want to sweep them aside and look for a different voice, a woman, someone of color, someone who has had to deal with being silenced... I just want to shush them like I’ve been shushed. So they’ll *know*. So they’ll *get it*.”

“Do you really think they’d understand?”

“Maybe. Maybe if I got everyone else to do it with me, and taught it to my children, and my children’s children, so that they could experience a century of what it’s like to be always trying and failing to live up to someone else’s standard. Men would live for women, and be pressured into settling down and having kids, and have to choose between their family and their career. Men would be drilled in the art of pleasing women. Don’t be vulgar. Don’t be a prude, but don’t be a slut. Be sexy, but as if you didn’t know you were sexy. Never put yourself first. Remember to smile when you hear a sexist joke. Be passive and empty, a smiling face with no thoughts or desires of your own,” Grace hissed the words into the darkness, working herself up into a fury.

“Did something happen?” Sam asked, staring up at the stars from her reclining lawn chair.

“I just saw something that pissed me off. One of my guy friends posted this thing on Facebook, complaining about women’s privilege.”

“What?” Sam looked over at her dark-skinned friend, who was only a few feet away, but still difficult to see with only the light of stars and a sliver of moon to illuminate her. She glanced down at her own pale hand that seemed practically bio-luminescent, and smiled slightly.

“Yeah. The whole thing was about how hard it is for guys, how women get free drinks at bars, and can wear makeup to make themselves look nicer, and guys are expected to open doors for them... It was so fucking dumb and uneducated. Like, women get free drinks at bars because they are presented as objects of attraction to men, so they are encouraged to get drunk and sleep around. Women getting free drinks, which doesn’t happen at all bars, and, when it does, usually happens on ladies’ night, so only once a week, is all about men, and what men want from women. So, no, that does not make women privileged. And as far as makeup goes, well, I have some mixed feelings about that. Some girls I know use makeup to make them feel put-together and prepared for the day, or they think it’s fun, or like how it makes them look. Other girls I know resent the fact that for a

woman, dressing professionally means wearing makeup, which is a bullshit double standard if I ever saw one. And if guys are really so upset about makeup, they know where the drugstore's at. Why don't they go buy some and try it out? Ooh, because they're afraid of social stigma? They might be judged based on their appearance, just like every woman is judged every day? Boo-freaking-hoo.

"And I am so fucking tired of hearing about holding doors open. There are real feminist issues of inequality in pay, in law, and the never ending abyss of social inequality, yet somehow it always boils down to a man complaining about how if women want to be equal then they shouldn't have to open doors for them or show chivalry. So how about this? Instead of worrying about whether or not you should open the door for a woman, worry about a world where it's unsafe for a woman to go anywhere by herself for fear of being raped and murdered. And you know what the truth is, I don't fucking care if you hold the door for me. I'm a woman, and if I see that someone is behind me, or trying to get through the same door as me, I hold it open for them because that is common fucking courtesy and because I like to show respect and kindness to all the human beings I meet regardless of their race, gender, or sexual orientation."

Sam reached over in the darkness and squeezed her friend's hand.

"And do you know what the worst part is?" Grace whispered, her voice cracking as tears filled her eyes. "If I said this in front of a man, if I discussed my feelings and lived experience with this kind of passion, I'd be pushed aside as a crazy, overly emotional, overreacting feminazi. Like caring about women, about 50% of the population, is a crime equal to killing millions of Jews."

They sat in the aftermath of her words for a long time, letting them permeate their skin, taking the words into their hearts as truths.

"I know," said Sam, after a long time. "I feel like that, too."

Can You Blame Us?

MITALI SHARMA

Come quick, she's slipping.
Her virtue, her worth,
is vanishing before our eyes.
Soon she'll cease to exist.
Just a dress swaying
beneath the Hanging Tree.

What was her worth, anyway?
No more, no less than a
corpse all throughout.
Can you blame us?
Not even a silly, little head
on her fleshy, white shoulders.
What other choice was there?
We were teaching her a lesson.

She started it,
baring her arms for all to see.
She made us do it,
egging us on in that
itsy-bitsy dress.
She was asking for it,
practically dangling herself
before us, like a piece of meat.
She baited us, only harmless fools.
It was our human nature.

Her mother should've warned her,
raised her up to be a Lady.
A Lady is covered,
embalmed from head to toe,
yet has a carnal allure,
suited for *reeling* in a man.
The obedient one does
as we tell her and never *drops*
out of line.

Now, her reputation is shot,
at the bottom of the gallows,
decapitated and burned to a crisp.
She shouldn't have expected any better.
After all, *boys will be boys*.

Based on "El bretel" (Translated as "The Strap") by Roberto Fernández
Ibáñez, 1955

Brown

Stuck in transit, not
black nor white,
looking in from the out,
I observe: things are not all right.

I protest for:
 A livid rock,
 a tongue left twisted,
 how many lives
 will go unlisted?

I berate:
 So many folds
 upon our brains,
 what different features,
 but still the same.

I preach:
 What prejudices we
 disguise yet keep
 will only make
 blue mothers weep.

When short hands meet long,
I retreat home to sleep.
Some fight on.
For you, I weep.

What a privilege it is,
I strain to say,
to put out the lights,
let the day fade away.

How fortunate
we all must be
to choose what we will
or will not see.

My heart is cleft for
those today,
with no choice but
to ingest it all anyways.

For when your cause
is the life you keep,
the haunt never rests,
not even in sleep.

Thoughts in the Rain

C.J. SHALEESH

How befitting is this weather
Shattered sprinkles
Droplets on and off all day
Water glides, pressing against human skin
And when caught in crevasses
Are devices to rip and tear away

Tear him away from my soul
Puncture his side until one becomes two
Then slice his spine
Until he crumbles to rubble
And hopefully disintegrates

There is no more place for him
It is no longer safe
There is too much hate
Too much of a chance
To become broken
Bludgeoned on a sidewalk
To even let his spirit explore the night

But even suppressed
Hidden away
He is always next to her
Both equally me

...It would be so much easier
If I was a she
 instead of a they

Rip that girl away from my eyes
Or better yet blur my sight
And to be safe
My hearing too
So my attraction will melt away

Encompass my being
In the blue- gray
White- noise curtain
Desensitizing
Until I have nothing left to feel
For her or any other girl

I have no right to like her
It's too much of a risk
I don't want to see her lip torn
Bleeding tears
Just because someone caught a glimpse
Of our kiss

...It would be so much easier
If only that girl
 was that guy

But even with these thoughts
Gnawing away
Nothing will change
I am
And will remain
Just a person stuck in the rain
Afraid

Banlieue

LARA LIN

The house's windows are lined with flowers
The block is still, the air quiet and hush.
You are quick to walk past.

The green foliage is full and lush
The pouting petals are glistening and white
The house's windows are lined with flowers.

The hose is unreeled, strewn across the lawn-- water gushes.
The sidewalk's soaked so you sidestep to the right
Quick to walk past...

The front door slams. You hear a fuss.
You think to turn around, but you only glance far enough so you might
See the house's windows are lined with flowers.

There's a man's voice and his words are an ambush.
He screams some more before entering a white car. The engine's hum
brings respite.
You are quick to walk past.

Your feet take you over the sodden grass, now crushed.
You want to comfort the woman crying from the fight.
Instead, you notice the house's windows lined with flowers.
You are quick to walk past.

Trade A Smile for Your Eyes

ANNA THOMAS

You remember the first time she walked into your parlor. That's wrong. She didn't walk; she strode in like she owned the place. Given how inexperienced you were, she could have said she actually did own the place, and you would have believed her. There was an edge to her, an alertness that made her seem like she was on a whole other plane of existence, like she was privy to a secret you could only dream of knowing. She walked up to the counter and made a facial expression. You would call it a smile, but it resembled the gleaming edge of a knife too much to make the comparison. It reeked of danger. You swallowed harshly.

"I need eyes," she said, in a surprisingly deep voice. You gaped for a few seconds, looking directly into the thick lashed eyes on her face. They were terrifying, like staring into a black hole, so vast and so dark you could feel yourself slipping away.

"We don't sell eyes here, ma'am," you said, like the idiot you were. She rolled her eyes, breaking the spell.

"Obviously not. I meant, I need tattoos of these eyes," she said, slapping a piece of paper on the counter between the both of you. They were beautiful eyes, and they were perfectly suited to the style you had been cultivating, thin curved lines and intense detail work. You couldn't resist the challenge, and you certainly couldn't resist her intense gaze.

She wanted the eyes on the inside of her wrists, and you rose to the occasion. Wrist tattoos usually hurt like hell, but she didn't flinch the entire time, just stared at the wall ahead of her, stoic and terrifying.

It was far from the last time. As you got better, more honed, she would come with increasingly difficult designs. They were all eyes, but they varied in size, shape, even color, and the designs became more and more intricate. She wanted them all over her body, up her spine, on the small of her back, on her shoulder blades, on the backs of her hands, under her collarbones. Every time she came, she would offer that knife of a smile and a design, and you would eventually learn to smile back, and watch that knife soften into something slightly more fond, and infinitely sadder. She began to talk during her sessions, telling stories of her past, of a trickster who charmed her into letting her guard down, only to end up betraying her, of her best friend who she sacrificed everything for. You opened up as well, talking about your fear of snakes, and how when you were a child, you could always tell what the weather would be, or if people you knew would have good days or bad. You told her about how you used to have

small visions, only to see them happen seconds after you spoke. You laughed about them to her, putting them down as children's fantasy, but she would only stare at you, something approximating affection in her inkwell eyes. Near the end of her visits, her smiles became sadder, more reluctant, and she would draw out her visits as long as she possibly could. She started to wait longer between each visit, like she was trying to stave something off. You did your best not to take it personally.

On her last visit to your parlor, she came in slowly, coming closer to dragging her heels than she ever had. You were already smiling at her.

"It's your hundredth eye today." You said, in a celebratory voice. Her shoulders slumped, but you forged ahead anyways. "This one's on the house. My treat."

The final eye was far simpler than anything she had ever asked for, just two curved lines like sideways parentheses, and a single dot in the middle. She wanted it in the middle of her forehead. You complied without question like you always did. She didn't talk that last time, just stared at you with despairing eyes. You didn't speak either, just focused on your work, making sure it was perfect. Something felt different this time.

When you had finished, she grabbed you by the hand and pulled you towards her. You were face to face, and she was talking.

"You have to understand, I didn't choose this, it's just how it has to be." She was talking rapidly, words tripping and stumbling out of her mouth, and you were so confused. Her voice slowed, and she took a shuddering breath. "You gave me all these beautiful eyes, and I thank you for that. I owe you everything, but I need one more thing from you." She seemed to steel herself against something, and then she leaned forwards and kissed your forehead. "Your sight." Everything went hazy and blurry, and the last thing you ever saw was the sight of every single eye that you had lovingly pressed into her skin blinking at once.

She didn't take everything from you that day. She may have taken your sight, but she gave you clarity. Those visions you used to have came back with a vengeance. You stopped your tattoo work - nobody wants a blind person with needles near them. Instead, you branched into fortune telling, and you made a killing. Tiresias's Fortunes, on the intersection of Delphi and Olympus, is well known throughout the city, and you never want for work. As for your mystery patron, your masterpiece personified, she sometimes drops around. She finally told you her name, Argus, and whenever she drops by, you smile widely. People tell you your smile is terrifying. They say it looks like a knife.

Untitled

MACKENZIE COOK

If I were to compare you
to the passive rumpled sheets that make our ocean,
I would be that which is consumed,
Eaten and folded underneath so to be silenced.
Alongside other monstrosities like blood under skin.
I need not compare you
to rouge cheeks,
because I would be your wearer,
all choir-girl glow.
Bearing striking resemblance
To the inevitable after-show roses,
soon to rest on stained minivan carpet
and that would be real life.
If I were to compare you to a parent,
I would be the same child I am now
but with your signature memorized:
no longer a vague principle on the back of a prescription bottle.

Matches and milliseconds

I've been spending the last
30 thousand years
Or maybe seconds
Trying to light a match.
Though my fingers keep
Fumbling
And I'm thinking maybe
I should stop.

I've been spending the last
14 thousand milliseconds
Or maybe years
Writing books in my head
Like giving light undeserved permanence.
I pretend that maybe broken feet
Are my hurdle and not
Low ability to increase heartbeats.

But I'll keep eating up milliseconds
Until I cast a light—
Proving I am not my matches:
Broken,
Sometimes,
Letting dim flickers gnaw,
on the underneath of my fingernails.

The Death of False Colors

“You know an entity is beautiful
When scientists all
Try to make it permanent.
Make it into shapes.
A retina nebula,
Flashes of light rupturing
Its placid surface.
Bright veins at it’s core-
Stretch marks of a star.
At 360 degrees long distance we
See our Red Rectangle-
An anomaly all wrapped up in
False color ready to explode.
7 thousand years ago
went faint behind a thousand particles of dust.”
I once climbed inside the belly
Of a telescope room
The biggest piece of translucent glass
Bending the sky to my eyes.
I rubbed my arms cloaked in gooseflesh
Imagining the cold heat of lone stars
Reaching out to our gray building
A freckle against frozen Kansas ground.
I imagined some distant family
Of retinas-
Like the ones between
the world and your headspace-
Reaching out to make blood course
Though my spotted fingers.
I imagined the sky 7 thousand years ago
As they all started to implode
Spilling false colors my eyes will never see,
For I am the Kansas wannabe
To her Hubble telescope
Watching the year you burst from above.

The Sea

SYDNEY ELIZABETH CHANDLER

Waves break open the sand like splinters break open pink skin. She reaches down and her hands bulge, morph, swim to the left of their wrists as she dunks them underwater. Skin always looks different from under water, she knows this to be true.

*

Father once put a circular glass up to his left eye and lifted it horizontally, staring at her through it. His eye grew large, the green iris reminding the girl of whisked eggs with specks of basil peppered throughout. She had taken the glass from his one big hand into her two small hands, and held the glass up to her mouth. Her smile magnified, her teeth, rounded, like a suckling baby's.

*

A piece of cedar wood lies spongy under the glass surface of the tides pool. Two small hands reach under the water. Tiny bubbles of air become pocketed between the fingernails and the rubbery skin of these hands as they plunge deeper. One by one, the bubbles of air escape from either side of her half-moon fingernails; they lift off, swirling, surfacing, trailing white lines like bullets in the water.

*

It is just a piece of bark. Small, jagged, lifeless and bendy, like a newly sprouted stalk. How long has it been buried at sea?

*

She pulls at the edges of the ship's wooden hull, and the nose of the sea vessel breaches the water's surface. The ship is enormous. The mast's sails blanket the girl in billowing shadow. And as the ship rises from its grave in the sand, the sea line beyond it moves forward, to meet it.

*

Come, let me carry you away.

*

Father stands on the slippery sheet rocks. His toes, like her toes, short and rounded at the edges, curl into the crevices of the sheet rock for balance. He raises his binoculars to his eyes, and the world magnifies before him. He watches as a seagull hovers over the blue water, its white and yellow beak squalling for fish, its white and gray wings batting at the invisible wind currents which hold it afloat in the sky. He watches as the seagull rides higher and higher, until its rubber feet find a wooden ledge to stand upon. Father takes the binoculars from his eyes. His seagull has landed atop a mast of a sailing ship.

*

Sliced into the cedar wood are four letters, curved and capitalized. *FARA*, the wooden remains read. The rest of the word, or the name, for *FARA* could mean most anything if connected to the right letters, is broken off, lost, from the jagged edge of the wood. She traces the four letters with the tip of her thumb.

*

Three board the sailing ship: a girl, a man, and a squalling bird, off the Californian coast. *Where should we go?* Father asks. *Where should I be?* She asks herself.

*

The girl with her hands and the bird with its beak hold tight to the rope that is wrapped around Father's waist. He lowers himself over the edge of the ship and etches *FARAwAY* into the bow with his red Swiss army knife, blowing at the crisps of wood that flake from the bow while he does so.

*

Father teaches and the girl listens true. The loyal seagull squalls and dives for fish. The sailing vessel is a grand bank schooner, a ship of two masts, the fore and aft. Father shows the small girl how to rig the mast's canvases. She mirrors his movements under his shadow. *The deck must be scrubbed with sponge*

and salt water. Sweat and rain water will rot the cedar wood. Father teaches her how to compromise with the sea, by loosening her small legs to absorb the water's deep rocks and shakes.

*

The *FARAway* carries the girl comfortably in its girth; the girl has sea legs and can sleep soundly in a swayed hammock. Father is claustrophobic, he cannot enter the belly of the ship. Instead, he sleeps on the *FARAway*'s ribbed stern, and keeps conversation with the moon. The South Pacific churns idly underneath them, the belly of the *FARAway* tickled by sea monsters of kind intent.

*

Father pulls at the rig's frayed ropings. The girl chases the bird's winged shadow on the deck. *Please let her keep chasing the shadows. Don't let her catch them. Please, not yet. For I do not want to leave this vessel. I don't want to leave. Not yet.*

*

The bird knows it is time to leave. The bird of yellow and gray and white always knows; its brothers and sisters are ingrained with the gift of instinctual travel. Not one bird ever engages with the fear of moving, of leaving, of arriving. The bird simply knows when and where to fly, and prays that the winds will let it fly there. As the *FARAway* catches sight of the green Chilean coast, the seagull unravels its wings and let's go.

*

One day, Father finds one of the bird's wing feathers tucked pointedly in the side of his yellow sun hat. He takes the leaving of the feather as a present of good-bye. But the bird left the feather not as a present, but as a wish. *I wish for you to grow feathers like me, so you may fly away. It is time.*

*

The girl will learn the workings of the sailing ship, the sea, the currents, in time. She will grow up, flower, and decide that the sea is where she wants to live. She will race against other sea riders in her one-manned Sun Ship, leaving land for months at a time as she traverses currents across the Pacific.

Mother will say *you must ground yourself one day, child*. But the child who will no longer be a child will explain: *my feet and I feel grounded most when naked and standing on swaying cedar wood*.

*

The girl grows brown under the sun, her arms strong and roped with muscle. Father watches the little girl grow as the *FARAWAY* cuts lines through the South Atlantic, the Cape Horn current churning the cedar wood swiftly on the tip of one finger. Father misses the bird, and the beach, where the girl was young and her hands, small.

*

As Father and the girl travel farther and farther out to sea, the *FARAWAY* vessel begins to unravel. First, the crow's nest, and the foremast which it stands upon, breaks, splashing thickly into the sea. A wheel of rope goes missing from the deck, the belly of the ship rises to meet the hull. The cedar boards creak and bend and decay. By the third month at sea, third year? Third half-life? Our large vessel, with its large mast, and its large girth, and its sail's tremendous hold of breath, the sound like pinned sheets on a black wire clothesline flapping in a spring breeze, is no more.

*

At the sleepy end of one day, with the sky a petal purple, the *FARAWAY* bobs its head up and down, its being cut down to the size of a row boat. Father and I, taller I, older I, older Father, graying Father, look at one another, and then to the oars in the middle of the boat. We both reach for the oars, one in attempt to hold onto a past narrative, the other in an attempt to write one anew. But as we both reach out to grab hold of the wood, our hands slap each other's. The sound is thick and uneasy.

*

Where should we go? Father asks. *Where should I be?* the older me questions. *How did I become lost at sea?*

*

It is just a piece of bark. Small, jagged, lifeless and bendy, like a newly sprouted stalk. How long has it been buried at sea? The small girl reaches down and pulls at the sunken wood. The dead cedar crumbles coolly in her hands. *Put that down*, Father says, *for it smells of fish*. The girl steps away from the wood and the tide. She jumps with both feet to land in each of Father's foot falls as she follows him across the sand.

Absolute Magnitude

R. MADI SEAWRIGHT

What if the stars were the
freckles of God

The Northern Lights
the colors in his hair

The planets His
spinning thoughts

The Big Bang
the light bulb in his head

Constellations the
sketches for creation

Black-holes
trash cans
for ideas that didn't quite
make the cut

Space dust His crumbs
brushed off the breakfast table

Comets
the Almighty's
home runs

The sun
the window from which
He looks upon the world

They say we are His body
What if every man is a cell?

Each man's brain
a nucleus

Every person
Born for the Greater Purpose

College

The door creaks as I turn the knob
I thought I was over it
But walking into the permanently naked bedroom stings once more

There used to be clanking, grimy dishes piled next to an untucked sheet
Crayola lipsticks and false eyelashes collecting on the counter
Dirty laundry, including a forbidden black thong, trailing from a wicker
basket
and the voice like a bell telling me she needed more lunch money

There used to be an adolescent reminding me of who I once was,
singing along to her favorite songs
 she thought I couldn't hear

Dedicated to Ryland

SANDERS GREEN

On a dark and stormy night I saw a rainbow: on that inky, tempestuous night, I saw you in every color and you saw me.

“I have to tell you something,” I leaned into you, the rain drizzling from the rusty rain gutter onto my shirt, “back at the cabin.”

“Me too,” you whispered back, lacing your hand into mine.

The silent cabins formed a wall on our left, our path paved by gravel and the barren spots without, exposing burnt-orange clay to the soles of my white vans, to your combat boots.

We ambled back to the cabin with shoes stained orange and dusty wooden panels to plant our bare feet upon. Our bodies collapse onto a mattress, drenched and tired, but our souls burn. Speaking in low tones I declared softly what it was to know you — my compatriot, my confidant.

We are rainbows, you and I. Not the 99¢-a-piece postcard rainbows boasting showy and artificial tones. No, we thrive in our colors.

Ryland Schenk-Turner, I see you in taillights smudged by a rainy windshield, bright and strong and softened by the sheets of rain. A soft sherbet hovering in a sunset, glowing and soporific; a buttercup unfolding quietly to the world, simple and reminiscent. Thoughts of you dance through my mind as a shining emerald beetle skitters across the pavement, insistent on being alive. Memories rustle like saplings in the breeze as a blue jay curiously flits forward, then jumps into flight, soaring over the peaks of the sycamore. In a field of bramble and wildflowers, a thistle humbly dons the purple that glows in your soul.

We exist in that moment, on the bottom of an ancient cabin bunk. The signatures of past campers from past years envelop the metal skeleton of the bed. Hearing my words blending with the roar of raindrops, truth on every breath, I brimmed with gratitude; I overflow with the reality of my infatuation with this moment and with you. The feeling immerses my breath, my lungs and seeps from my palms, surrounding my words.

The moment drifts on sleepily. I feel the cheap mattress cover under my shoulder and your legs against mine. Your eyes squeeze shut and your mouth forms a smile, small and contemplative. Words weave into a thought inside your mind; gather on a breath to rush in the humid air.

A fierce red like the blood pumping through your heart; this color resides in your soul. The soft sherbet of a sunset humming on the horizon: just like me. The petals of a sunflower at midday. A deep forest: the color after it rains, every tree alive as stray rain droplets roll off leaves. A perfect blue sky on the day of a picnic; laughter and the smell of barbecue blending

with the breeze. A sea of lavender rolling, bowing, swaying under a soft breeze and the charged darkness of a stormy night the moment before lightning strikes.

Exhausted and radiant, we lie clasped in the moment, under a brooding sky.

Last Wishes of a Bibliophile

ALLISON BROWN

When I am dead, my dearest,
bury me in books.
You of all people know
I've never been one for dirt.

Press me in the pages like a daisy,
surrounded by ten thousand words
I've read before.
Sing no sad songs for me;
but speak in tongues of authors
I once loved.

And if you'd please remember,
my favorite ones write fiction.
And if you dare forget,
pick paperbacks about the boy who lived.
Send me on with talk of magic,
talk of love.

Plant no roses at my head,
instead build bookshelves
and read to me each night
that I am gone.

THANK YOU TO OUR CONTRIBUTORS:

Kevin Appiah-Kubi attends Midwestern State University and is part of the Juanita & Ralph Harvey School of Visual Arts. Currently in his senior year, Kevin is majoring in Photography and was awarded a scholarship by the Wichita Falls Municipal Airport during the Fall 2016 semester.

Allison Brown is a senior Convergence Journalism major at Abilene Christian University. She served as Editor in Chief of her university's student-run newspaper, *The Optimist*, for the 2016-17 school year. Allison loves traveling, writing, learning, reading, and telling people's stories. When she is not busy making the newspaper, Allison can be found cooking or attempting to perfect her latté art skills, which at this point are well below average. She is 100% an ENFP and sometimes, she is funny on Twitter. After college, she plans to pursue her masters in Publishing Media at Oxford Brookes University in Oxford, England.

Andreea Calin is an 11th grader at The Kinkaid School in Houston, TX, dog lover, and recovering picky eater. She writes about any and everything, not because she wants to, but because she *needs* to. She has previously received Silver and Gold keys from the Scholastic Writing Awards, and this is her first publication.

Michelle Castro is a Midwestern State University Senior working on her Bachelor of Fine Arts with a focus on Ceramics and a minor in Graphic Design. Her ceramics work was exhibited at the Beatrice M. Haggerty Gallery for the Regional Ceramics Juried Competition at the University of Dallas and exhibited at the Wichita Falls Museum of Art at Midwestern State University. She has also had work exhibited in the gallery at the University of Texas at Tyler, in Tyler, Texas. Her work is an attempt to encourage an open dialogue about social issues.

Sydney Elizabeth Chandler is currently in her junior year at the University of Saint Edwards in Austin, Texas. She is majoring in Creative Writing, with a strong pull toward poetry and fiction. Sydney would like to thank her family and her friends, along with both the good and ugly experiences in her life, for shaping her into who she is today. After college, Sydney plans to pursue her MFA in fiction writing.

Mackenzie Cook is a sophomore at Cy-Fair High School in Cypress,

Texas. This is her first publication not affiliated with her school newspaper, *The Reporter*. She is also currently on the Writers in the Schools Houston Youth Advisory Council, with which she works to provide opportunities for students to explore writing in the Houston area.

Mallory Evangelista is a pianist, fitness enthusiast, writer, photographer and world traveler from Aurora, Colorado. She has lived in five countries and four states and has visited eighteen states and over fifteen countries, from which she gets her writing inspiration. She has been featured in the Stars and Stripes, the U.S. Military's independent news source and has attended journalism conferences in Tokyo, Japan. She is studying English at Midwestern State University and lives by Jeremiah 29:11.

A.F. Fandrich writes to make connections and evoke deep emotions in her readers, ones they hadn't known they could feel. She grew up on a farm 60 miles west of Fort Worth, Texas, and is currently a junior studying English and Creative Writing at Midwestern State University. Her biggest inspirations include, but are not limited to, Jesus Christ, Edgar Allen Poe, Flannery O'Connor, Jenny Lawson, Gracie Power, and her parents.

Krysten Farrier is a junior at Midwestern State University where she currently majors in Graphic Design with a minor in Printmaking. In late February, her and eleven other students were hand-picked to be a part of an exhibition at the University of Texas at Tyler where four of Krysten's works are displayed in the Fine Arts Complex Gallery. She also has a piece of her work displayed on the first floor of the City National Building in Downtown Wichita Falls. In the fall semester of 2016, she was awarded President's Honor Roll for maintaining a GPA of 4.0 or higher.

Gretchen Felle is a postmodern poet of the American Midwest. She's known corn fields and symphonies, trailers and basement mansions, and dreads space all the time. Follow her work at www.gretchenfelle.com.

Jamie Gardner was born in Kingston, Jamaica, and raised on the island of Antigua. She began drawing and painting from a young age under the mentorship of her mother who was a full-time attorney and part-time artist. A major factor in her developing a passion for art making was the opportunity to compete; from 9 years old to 18 years, Jamie entered national and regional art competitions, gaining recognition and experience along the way. After completing high school and two years at the Antigua State College, she taught junior-high level mathematics before enrolling at

Midwestern State University in Fall 2012. Since then, Jamie has been active in the Art and Mathematics department, several honor societies on campus, and the Caribbean Students Organization.

Elizabeth Sanders Green (known as Sanders) is a sophomore at The Kinkaid High School in Houston, Texas. She has received an honorable mention in the regional Scholastic competition for a personal essay, as well as a silver key in the national Scholastic competition for poetry. She has been published in her school's literary magazine, *Falcon Wings*. Her favorite authors include Neil Gaiman and Charlotte Brontë.

Emma Griffiths is working to receive her BFA in Painting and Graphic Design. After graduation she plans to pursue her MFA. Follow her on Instagram @ecgriffiths42 for more.

Lauren Hamlin is a senior at Midwestern State University with a major emphasis in Printmaking and minor in Graphic Design. She is the typical, artsy girl with a bit of nerd in her. Her designs vary, but the art itself is a little on the darker side dealing primarily with phobias and fears. She started her photography business back in high school in order to provide great photos at a cheaper cost for those who can't normally afford them. Over her four years at MSU, she has created logos and branding for two local non-profit agencies. She has been able to show her work not only in the college galleries but at the new Wichita Falls Municipal Airport and at many art events in downtown Wichita Falls. She loves to design and print, so she wanted to combine the two of them and see where it would go. She would love to find the right opportunity in the printmaking or graphic design field to build her experience. Her ultimate goal is to one day open a studio/shop in Galveston.

Shaylynn Harmon is a junior attending Midwestern State University. She is currently pursuing a Bachelor of Fine Arts with an emphasis in Graphic Design and a minor in Printmaking. She received the Graphic Design Award for the 2015 – 2016 school year from Lamar D. Fain College of Fine Arts. Her work has been displayed in the Juanita Harvey Art Gallery for the annual Juried Student Shows in 2015 and 2016, the Re-Imagined Maps Exhibition at the Downtown Wichita Falls Farmer's Market, and currently has work being displayed at West Texas A&M as part of the Texas Borderlands Print Exchange.

Nathan Jowers is a sophomore Biblical Text major at Abilene Christian

University. His primary subjects of study are Koine Greek, Hebrew, and philosophy. Nathan has previously published a short story in Abilene Christian University's literature magazine, *The Shinnery Review*.

Andrea Lara Lin is a high school sophomore at The Kinkaid School in Houston, Texas. She has received a gold key in her region's Scholastic competition for novel writing and has been participating in her school's creative writing program for one year. This is her first time being published and she looks forward to future opportunities.

Caroline Grey Marinelli (or CG as she likes to be called) is a tenth grader at The Kinkaid School in Houston, Texas. She has won a golden key as well as two honorable mentions in the Scholastic Art and Writing Awards for her works of Sci-Fi/Fantasy, personal essays, and poetry. CG has previously been published in her school's literary magazine, *Falcon Wings*, and in an anthology of pieces written at the UVA Young Writer's Workshop 2016.

David Marolf is a senior Chemistry major at Abilene Christian University. These are his first published poems, but he has also been co-author of several synthetic inorganic chemistry papers, if anyone is interested. His interests include poetry, chemistry, and explaining to people that it is possible to be interested in both.

Chad Marqui grew up in Zion, Illinois, but spent most of his adult life in Chicago. He has studied English, Creative Writing, and Philosophy at Trinity and Lake Forest College before returning to school at Midwestern State University. Chad is now completing his degree in English with ELAR Certification. He hopes to teach prescriptive grammar to high school students while eventually completing an MFA in Creative Writing. His first play, *These Four Walls*, was a *Playwrights in Progress* selection and enjoyed an extremely brief run at Victory Gardens Theatre in Chicago.

Caitlin McNeely graduated from MSU in December 2016 with a B.A. in English with a minor in Business Administration. She plans to continue her education in the fields of Creative Writing, Women's and Gender Studies, and Composition and eventually become a professor. Currently working at Moffett Library, she enjoys long books, epic video games, and spending time with her friends and family.

Nabila Meghjani is a junior at Clements High School in Sugar Land,

Texas. When she's not busy with school, she likes reading poetry and various types of novels and scrolling through her Tumblr. She hopes to change the world one day. She is honored that her piece is being published in *Voices* and would like to thank the editorial team for their kind words and her many English teachers over the years who have only encouraged her love of writing.

Alexis Mendez is a junior at Midwestern State University and is studying Psychology. She first started writing in middle school and has since then loved it. She feels that writing runs in her blood, because her mother also started writing in middle school and was even published a couple times. She has always dreamed of writing her own book and will possibly soon write a poetry book or co-write one with her mother. This is her first time being published and she feels grateful for the opportunity.

Faith Muñoz is a senior English major at Midwestern State University. She is from Wichita Falls, Texas. She has been involved with the MSU Arts and Literature Society since 2014 and is the current president. She was the 2014-2015 Outstanding Freshman Woman of the Year. Aside from writing, she enjoys editing, teaching, reading, and learning languages. In the past year, she edited two books by Pastor Mark Graham. She is fluent in Spanish and French and is learning Korean. After graduating, she plans to teach English in South Korea before attending graduate school for a degree in English.

Caitlin Opp is a sophomore at Abilene Christian University. She is majoring in Nursing, has a minor in English, and is the co-captain as well as Vice President of the ACU Women's Rugby Team. Miss Opp was encouraged to start writing at a young age by her mother, who is an English teacher and a continuous source of support and inspiration in her life today. Although Caitlin currently plans to begin a career of nursing after college, she hopes to one day follow in her mother's footsteps and teach English and writing to a new generation of minds.

Rachel Lynette Ross is a sophomore at Midwestern State University working on a Bachelor of Fine Arts, majoring in Ceramics. Rachel enjoys working in the studio making cups and bowls. She works on the weekends at the local Farmer's market and a downtown craft shop that showcases her pottery.

R. Madi Seawright is from Colleyville, Texas, and is a junior Psychology

major at Abilene Christian University. Madi seeks poetic inspiration from Anne Sexton and Charles Simic. She is passionate about eliminating the mental health stigma, and hopes to one day become a successful Licensed Professional Counselor. She enjoys longboarding, making playlists, and going on road trips.

C.J. Shaleesh is currently attending St. Edward's University, where she is pursuing bachelor degrees in both Marketing and English Writing and Rhetoric with a concentration in Creative Writing. Her work has previously been published by *New Literati*, one of St. Edward's literary journals. Presently, she is working for *New Literati* as a staff writer and copy editor. After she graduates, C.J. hopes to work in publishing as an editor so that she can be constantly immersed in creativity, while also helping others art be seen and heard by the masses.

Kenneth Zackery Shanks was born on April 16th, 1989 in Wichita Falls, Texas. He is currently a senior at Midwestern State University studying Photography and Printmaking. Kenneth has two art shows that he will be presenting in late April and early May of 2017. The title of his show is *Seeing Depression with the Naked Eye*. The shows, one being EURECA and the other his senior show, will be based on the depression that he has struggled with through his life. Kenneth's plans for the future are to continue his depression project and to be happy.

Mitali Sharma is a high school senior at The Kinkaid School in Houston, Texas and has been a part of their creative writing program for three years. She has been published several times in her school's literary magazine, *Falcon Wings*, as well as in the *Teen Ink* online literary magazine. She has received Scholastic Honorable Mention awards for two of her personal essays, "Lessons in Sisterhood" and "Lumos," and for her poem, "Can you blame us?". This year she will serve as the Editor-in-Chief of *Falcon Wings* and her school's academic journal.

Tanner Slavens is a hardworking, focused artist studying at Midwestern State University. He is currently a freshman Art major who plans to graduate as a Graphic Designer. In third grade, he received an award for one of his pastel pieces from the Association of Christian Schools International. Tanner is currently working on getting published and hoping to be successful.

Sarah Elaina Stukalin is a Junior at The Kinkaid School in Houston,

Texas. She has been studying creative writing at Kinkaid for two years, and has contributed as a staff member and layout editor of the school literary magazine, *Falcon Wings*.

Katelyn Teague is from Fort Worth, Texas, and currently attends Abilene Christian University. She is a sophomore majoring in English-Teaching. She intends to teach high school after graduation and hopes to share her newfound love of poetry with her future students.

Anna Thomas is a junior at The Kinkaid School in Houston, Texas. This is her first work submitted for publication, but she hopes to expand her repertoire in the future.

Dominique Wagoner is a junior English major at Midwestern State University. Hailing from Cedar Hill, Texas, she came to Midwestern State University for its excellent English program and liberal arts curriculum. She is ecstatic to have her first poem published in *Voices'* Spring 2017 edition. When she is not writing poetry or finishing her copious amounts of homework, she enjoys sewing, crafting, and playing fetch with her dog, Speckles.