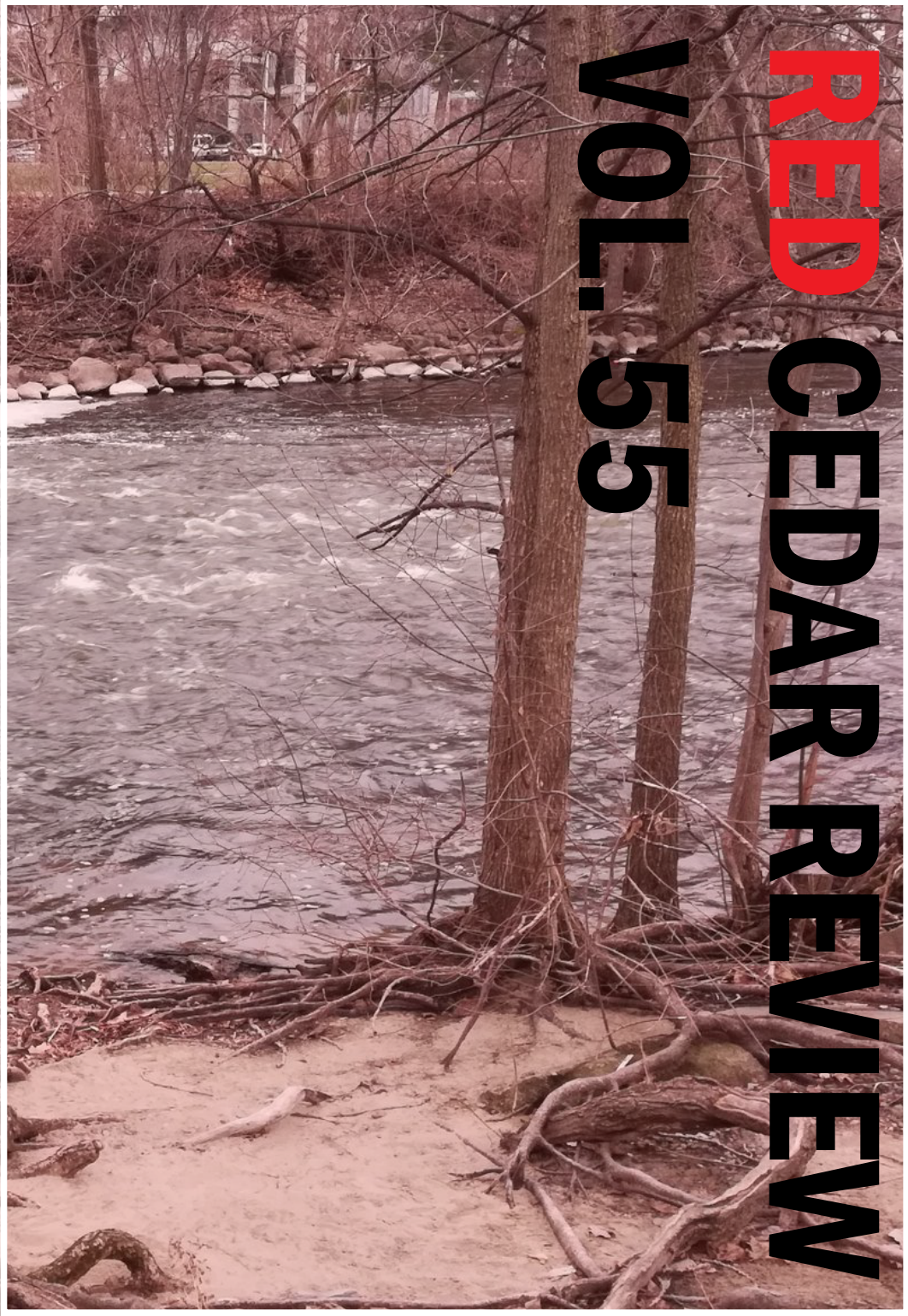


**RED CEDAR REVIEW VOL. 55**



**RED CEDAR REVIEW  
VOL. 55**





# *redcedar* **REVIEW**

2020

*Red Cedar Review* is an annual literary magazine published in the spring by Michigan State University undergraduates with support from the Michigan State University College of Arts and Letters and Department of English.

Cover design by Joseph Rivera.

Cover photograph by Madeleine Becker.

© 2020 Michigan State University Board of Trustees.

All rights reserved.



# RED CEDAR REVIEW VOLUME 55 STAFF

**MANAGING EDITOR:** KATHERINE STARK

**ASSISTANT MANAGING EDITOR:** JACOB LARGEN

**PROSE EDITOR:** CLAIRE WALSH

**POETRY EDITOR:** JACOB LARGEN

**ART EDITOR:** ANUSHA MAMIDIPAKA

**COPYEDITING:** CASSANDRA BLOOMINGDALE, MADI BROOKS-MILLER,  
OLIVIA DALBY, EMMA LANGSCHIED, NATALIE POLL, JOSEPH RIVERA

**TYPESETTING:** KATHERINE STARK

**SOCIAL MEDIA MANAGER:** ELENA SCHAFFER

**ARCHIVE TEAM:** EMMA LANGSCHIED, CLAIRE WALSH, JARETT  
GREENSTEIN

**FACULTY ADVISOR:** DR. ROBIN SILBERGLEID

**READERS:** HANA BERNARD, EMILY BEVARD, KELLY CRAIG, KIANNA  
DELLY, SARA GILSON, EMILY HOBRLA, KELSIE KARPINSKI, JULIE KLEIN,  
PAYTON MILLER, GRACE RAU, BROOKLYN RUE, ELENA SCHAFFER, SYD-  
NEY WILSON, MARY CLAIRE ZAUER

# CONTENTS

- IV RED CEDAR REVIEW VOLUME 55 STAFF**
- 1 EDITOR'S NOTE**  
**KATHERINE STARK**
- 3 STAFF NOTE**  
**EMMA LANGSCHIED**
- 5 PLUMERIA**  
**HALEY WINANS**
- 6 TRAILER NO. 7**  
**AMANDA PIEKARZ**
- 8 ONE WEDNESDAY, OVER WHATSAPP, MY EX CALLS ME A  
HEARTLESS ASSHOLE**  
**EMILY ROSE MILLER**
- 9 THE OBSERVER**  
**HAYDEN FROEHLICH**
- 13 MENTAL HEALTH DAY**  
**HEATHER TRUETT**
- 14 ARS POETICA**  
**HEATHER TRUETT**
- 16 CITY DELIGHTS**  
**HUGH COOK**
- 17 I LOVE YOU, I'M SORRY**  
**PHOENIX KENDALL**
- 18 GREEN GIRL**  
**MARTHA ROSE**
- 19 I'LL PLAY JOHN**  
**CORINNE DAVENPORT**
- 20 WHOLE DAMN HEAD**  
**CORINNE DAVENPORT**
- 21 IV TRIP**  
**RAZEEN AHMED**



- 22 DRAGON  
CONNOR CROWLEY
- 24 EVERYBODY LOVES BABY  
CONNOR CROWLEY
- 26 INFINITE BLUE  
ALLISON CRAFT
- 27 I WILL SHOW YOU FEAR IN A HANDFUL OF DUST  
EMILY BAKER
- 28 BEAUTY IN UGLY PLACES  
EMILY BAKER
- 29 FRAGILE AS A BEETLE'S WING  
EMILY BAKER
- 30 BEACH EULOGY  
VIOLET MITCHELL
- 32 DID YOU KNOW  
VIOLET MITCHELL
- 33 IF KITES WEREN'T ATTACHED TO STRINGS, THEY'D FLY  
AWAY FOREVER  
DAMIAN WANG
- 36 4:52 AM IN A TAIWANESE MOTHER'S SANCTUM  
DAMIAN WANG
- 38 BORDERLINE BORDERLESS BORDERING  
DAMIAN WANG
- 40 CLOCK IN  
LEWIS SMITH
- 41 BLINK  
CHRISTINE A. MACKENZIE
- 42 REMIND ME OF THE RENAISSANCE  
ALLISON CRAFT
- 43 ON WHEELS  
NICOLAS STEVENS
- 44 COULD YOU PULL OVER HERE?  
HENNA AHMED
- 46 WAR  
SHELBY WEISBURG

- 47 LENTICULAR  
SHELBY WEISBURG
- 48 HOME  
NICOLE PUSCAS
- 49 USER'S MANUAL, 2009 HONDA ACCORD  
TAYLOR ANNE THACKABERRY
- 51 (ON BEING) A (SOFT) PLACE TO LAND  
KATLYN FURLONG
- 52 BLOOD FRUIT  
KATLYN FURLONG
- 53 TWOFOLD  
KATLYN FURLONG
- 54 SOFT FALLS OF FATE  
NICOLE RICO
- 55 TRUTH  
JULIANNA VAUGHAN
- 60 WEIGHTLESS  
KAYLA SIMON
- 61 A GODLESS ROOM  
KAYLA SIMON
- 62 MY GORDIAN KNOT  
RACHEL HAGERMAN
- 64 FOR THE HENS  
ELLIS GIBSON
- 66 EMMA WATSON  
LUCAS CURITS
- 67 BATTERY ACID  
KYLE WRIGHT
- 70 I AM NOT THE MOON, NOR A STAR  
KAITLYN VON BEHREN
- 71 BOYS OVERHEARD WHILE PLAYING A VIDEO GAME  
KAITLYN VON BEHREN
- 72 CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES









# EDITOR'S NOTE

KATHERINE STARK

Dear Readers,

The production of Volume 55 of the *Red Cedar Review* took place during a year of many changes, for both our journal and our world. Some were planned, as we continued through a period of transition for our journal; others were not. When we started reading submissions last fall, none of us could've imagined what it would be like to publish the issue this spring amidst a global pandemic. Despite a world filled with constant upheaval and a never-ending cycle of frightening news—not to mention the practical shift to distance learning, video conferencing, and working in pajamas—our team continued working to put together this final product. I'm very proud of what we've accomplished this year.

In an effort that has been many years in the making, the entirety of the *Red Cedar Review* archive is now accessible online. Every issue dating back to 1963, representing decades of undergraduate literary publishing, is now available through the MSU Libraries website. Special thanks for their contributions to this process go to Claire Walsh, Emma Langschied, and Jarett Greenstein, as well as Shawn Nicholson, Robin Dean, and the MSU Libraries Digital Repository team. You can visit the archive at <https://d.lib.msu.edu/rcr>.

At the same time as we've been reflecting on the history of the *Red Cedar Review* through the archival process, we've also been navigating a major transition for the journal's future. I'm excited to announce that this is the first issue of the RCR to be published completely digitally. With our new website, we hope to continue publishing innovative undergraduate literature for a national audience while providing room for more experimentation in content and form.

I'd like to thank all of the many people who collaborated in the production of Volume 55: first of all, thank you to our talented contributors, dedicated readers, genre editors, and social media team, as well as Assistant Managing Editor Jacob Largen, whose help in leading the journal this year was invaluable. Special thanks go to the ENG 492 students, led

by Dr. Kurt Milberger, for their hard work editing and putting together the final product. As always, we're grateful for the wise leadership of Dr. Robin Silbergleid, our faculty advisor. Finally, I'd like to thank everyone at The Cube, especially Dr. Kate Birdsall and Sam Bloch, for bringing our vision for a new website to life.

I hope you'll continue to watch the journal change and grow in the coming years; I'm certainly excited to see what's to come. Most of all, I hope that the stories which we've collected here can do what literature does best: bring comfort, hope, and joy to the world in times of fear and uncertainty. These pieces certainly did so for us.

Sincerely,  
Katherine Stark  
Managing Editor

# STAFF NOTE

EMMA LANGSCHIED

During pandemics and times of crisis, publishing continues. This volume of the *Red Cedar Review* was completed from our own little spaces. It was produced despite the anxieties and loneliness brought on by our isolation from one another. From my own little space, I experimented with design software and reviewed final copyedits for some writing published in this volume. It's significant that we all took time to attend to such tasks to bring this copy of the RCR to fruition. Indeed, it's significant that publishing in general continues; people will always have ideas, descriptions, and poetry worth sharing. I hope this volume is read with the knowledge of the times it was created in—during the COVID-19 outbreak in the U.S. and across the world. I hope that during this interval, as readers and writers, we found some time to take some deep breaths, write a few lines, and find some joy amongst the difficulties and uncertainties.

Emma Langschied





# PLUMERIA

HALEY WINANS

You left me smothered  
in warm mayonnaise, snuggling with wilted  
lettuce between two slabs of stale

sourdough. My disguise lounges  
in the crumby pit of your snakeskin  
purse. I'm pushed under a crumpled

lei and a crinkly bag of hotel  
macadamia nuts so I'm not fondled  
and confiscated by TSA's clammy sausage

fingers. This claustrophobic  
terminal reeks of old people  
soap and bleach. The echoing cackle

of a bloated tourist shrivels  
my petals as bulging suitcases  
clunk down the slatted ramp. I want

to be in the loamy luxury  
of your terraced backyard  
surrounded by flourishing foreign

breeds that greet me like a divine  
alien. I'll grow to lick  
your window with my leathery

leaves and convince your guests  
that my ombré blooms  
are criminally fragrant  
and worthy of California's golden poppy sun.

# TRAILER NO. 7

AMANDA PIEKARZ

the wooden door too easily  
axed through:  
*Here's Johnny* I joked years ago  
before we realized it wasn't funny  
the panic settled thick, stifled  
in the back of my throat  
the doorknob hung limp and useless  
offering little security  
so at night, we pushed the couch  
in front of the door  
and tried to pretend we were safe  
surrounded by our smoke

a murder-suicide in the now-vacant lot  
beside ours left ghosts  
and us, even more unsettled, anxious  
for the onset of our lives  
staring out the window past the cars  
at the fields of corn which  
according to King is contaminated  
with killer children  
and Cujo and alien clowns  
*It's the Barrens* I say  
A— nodded, eyes pinched, nearly black  
with paranoia as strong as mine

the shadows which stalked in the yellow  
streetlights, on the darkest nights  
where the strangers prowled just past  
our lingering sight  
they tapped on the aluminum panels  
leaving hollow, haunted sounds  
while we lay close together, knit by blankets



in bed at night  
the trees would scratch our tin-can roof  
in complex abstract patterns  
all while we knew we needed out  
of Trailer No. 7

# ONE WEDNESDAY, OVER WHATSAPP, MY EX CALLS ME A HEARTLESS ASSHOLE

EMILY ROSE MILLER

i see the notification on my phone screen  
and i move to it like a sunflower facing the sun.  
nausea churns storms in my stomach  
at the thought of what she might say now,  
even though i have only withdrawn  
to protect myself. i grasp hope as tightly  
as a child holds a dandelion, and lose it  
just as swiftly as the wind blows its feathery seeds.

her words suck all energy  
from me. i wilt. the leaves of my body  
droop down, withering. the waxy petals  
of my mind turn frail and brown  
like the paper bags that held our lunch  
as we walked down a wide london street  
on an august day when i was naïve  
enough to believe she would  
fight for me and i would  
be sturdy enough to support her.

# THE OBSERVER

HAYDEN FROEHLICH

I followed a pod of bottlenose dolphins swimming in the Atlantic. They filled the blue void with clicks and squeaks. The powerful strokes of their tails stirred the water and made the sunlight wobble as they attacked a silver hurricane of sardines. I lost all sense of direction as they dove in, out, and around the swarm. There was a little pulse of pleasure each time they caught one.

I watched my great grandmother gaze at the shimmering, promising horizon from the deck of a Danish steam vessel. Her left hand held the rail while her right kept streamers of ebony hair out of her face. Those calloused hands would become veined and soft yet strong enough to strike piano chords and teach me to do the same. She watched dolphins dance in the wake.

I traced the notes of her favorite etude back hundreds of years to a private salon in mid-1800s Paris. The chortling conversations, critical debates, clinking glasses of finest wines, and rustling of delicate fabric fell silent as Chopin sat at the piano. When he played, it wasn't that he attacked the keys, they seemed to cling to him, relishing every blinding arpeggio or stunning chord. He could yell, whisper, dance, question, or melt with the notes. It seemed everyone had forgotten how to exhale. It had been a while since I hadn't felt alone in that.

I glided behind my children on the walk home from school. Leo plaintively sent his soccer ball tumbling across the concrete every few steps. Libra was trying to engage him in an earnest conversation about world hunger. I could feel the strength of her conviction. She'd done so much research for today's presentation. My nine-year-old son could only think of his own empty stomach.

I watched the woman who'd once married me through the final steps of cooking dinner. She sprinkled basil and black pepper onto the still bubbling mozzarella that coated her lasagna, arranged apple slices (with skin removed) on the edges of plastic Disney plates, and filled cups with cranberry juice, chocolate milk, and water. They gave thanks for the food, prayed for those poor children in Somalia, prayed for Josh's arm to feel better, prayed

for Mommy's job interview to go well, prayed for Daddy to stay safe, and then they ate.

I followed a memory back to the hilltop coated with pine needles. My shaggy brown hair mingled with Cassie's sweeping black hair like coffee spilled on ink strokes. Through trial, error, and references to the Big Dipper, she unveiled the constellations behind the smoky autumn clouds. She told me how to connect the faint dots to outline a bull, or a fish, or a pair of twins. I told her the birthdays of my favorite musicians, and she told me their signs.

I flew toward the light from the brightest star in her constellation, leaving the atmosphere behind. Didn't need it. I passed the powdered surface of the moon and increased my speed. I could move in any direction, across any dimension, as fast as I wanted. Light-years passed by. As I grew closer to the brilliant explosive blue point, I noticed it wasn't alone. There were two little stars waltzing with each other as the years elapsed. I watched them burn and boil. A triad of little gigantic infernos. The light would've been blinding. I didn't have eyes to close. It was too quiet.

I watched the man with the peppery beard rummage through my apartment for the drugs I hadn't paid for, smoking revolver still in his hand. He found the pills in the medicine cabinet, the Ziploc bag of crystals beneath the sink, and the rainbow-colored tabs in the book of Gershwin sheet music and my yellow composition book. He and his partner left. Climbed into their cars and just left. I followed the one with the peppery beard through the steamy, amber streets of my old city. He lived in a ramshackle house by the flyway of route 85. I followed him through the door, past the hook where he hung his jacket, to the tattered sofa where a young girl sat eating pretzels and watching *Tom and Jerry*. He sat with her in silence until the DVD ended. She kissed him goodnight and left. He rubbed his eyelids with both hands.

I watched a volcano explode in the Pacific with atomic force. The lava cooled into jagged black stone. Birds landed there, bringing seeds. The rocks were coated with green. I watched a fox wander through a city of oaks and a forest of concrete. I dove beneath the earth to watch a stalagmite grow steadily for centuries. Drip. Drip. Drip. Drip. One, two, three, four. . .

I tracked the melody that had hummed in my head since fourth grade until I finally learned how to write it on the first page of my composition book. It was always a sad but energetic flowing tune, like a snowmelt mountain creek that knows it won't last through the summer. I watched the little yellow book accrue tentative pieces. An experimental sonata, a passionate serenade, a furious dirge, a broken lament. It was placed with a tremble on church and school grand pianos, ruffled in backpacks, thrown across the



room, yet always kept tenderly with the other compositions. I watched as the notebooks were taken from the crime scene that my apartment became and given to Cassie. She piled them all quickly into a plastic bin and stowed it in the attic where they couldn't hurt her. I watched the bin collect a centimeter of dust.

I followed Cassie, who'd once married me, as she sped into the peaceful predawn, away from our latest fight. It was about either the job interview I missed or the hallucinogens that made me miss it. The cedars streaked past in her tunnel of headlights. God, why did I make her go so fast? She nearly crashed once when she furiously wiped away tears and drifted into the next lane. I was relieved when she stopped on the shoulder to weep onto the dash. The relief didn't last long. Her sensation of betrayal added to my guilt. I wanted to comfort her. Tried to tell her that I knew how wrong I was. I tried to force that sentiment to blossom in me and flow to her. Did I make her tears slow? Did I help her exhale? No. No, she was recovering on her own. Cassie is stronger than I am. I am nothing. I can see anything, go anywhere, but do nothing. I left.

I observed the missions to Mars and watched new human colonies bubble up on the red surface. I flew with a monarch butterfly on its trek across the Midwest, flower by flower, to a forest draped with orange and black wings. I watched Bangalter and Homem-Christo don their silver and gold helmets and set a crowd of thousands dancing to their electric elegies. I heard the thunderous applause that Beethoven could only see. I followed a maple seed catch a breeze and tuck in a knoll until it created a thousand trees. Yet these moments were all empty.

I followed the progress of a single perfect snowflake from its tumbling escape from the cloud to its helixing flight before landing delicately on my old windowsill. Behind the glass lay a warmer waking world filled with cheers and chuckles. A deluge of glossy presents was spread beneath our tree. I watched myself and my brothers unwrap familiar gifts. There was the copy of Super Mario Bros. that Stewart would play with his sons, there was the Tonka car Isaac would lose on our camping trip, there was the keyboard, hidden in that corner, that I would cling to for the rest of my life.

I decided to visit my children's Christmases. Libra celebrated with friends in a hotel in South Africa before leaving to serve pancakes and quiche to over a thousand. I then followed her merry evening phone call to her brother's snowy home in Montana. He had five kids now. A reader with her new sci-fi novel, an actor with his new vampire costume, a napper with his new lion Pillow Pet, a gamer with his new puzzler, and a musician with something much older. A composition book with yellowing pages. She opened it, placed it on the piano, and the melody that had been stuck in my

head since fourth grade poured from the strings. That couldn't be possible. I almost remembered how to inhale.

I followed the notes back again. The trills and chords were ringing from pianos, radios, and headphones across the world. Spreading, growing, gaining hundreds upon thousands of listeners. They made people smile while crying, gazing out train windows into thunderstorms, or made their eyes close as they coaxed the melodies from keyboards. They found them. The world found them. I had written the melodies that seemed to know what I was feeling in those moments. The moments she warmed my hands in the winter. The moments when I sat alone in the midnight fields behind my childhood home. The moments when I felt full and had to let the surplus emotion dance in a song. Had they really been worth something? It was incredible to see so many understanding my voice for the first time, but I wanted something more. They said the notes carried emotions across the years, and I needed to send a message.

I found my former self in a huddled, chemically crazed heap over the keyboard at one of many terrible 2:30 a.m.s. I drifted to his side and poured it all into him. The remorse, the longing, and the emptiness I'd felt for lengths of time neither of us could understand. Now I drove him to seize this possibility. *I can fill this void.* He stirred. *We can become more than a husk again.* He blinked away the dried tears. *But you have to sing louder than ever before.* He pulled himself upright, and started playing, writing, and recording. I made him see it or, at least, feel it all. The shoulder of the road, the burning of the stars, the snow, the children, the mistakes. He worked all night, weaving melodies, cadences, ebbs and flows. He titled it "Apology to the Autumn Sky" and collapsed. I followed the tune, protecting it, until it finally reached the hands of the little musician on Christmas who had a song to show her grandma.

# MENTAL HEALTH DAY

HEATHER TRUETT

*"I have measured out my life with coffee spoons . . ."*  
- T. S. Eliot

The rain is a tattoo on my windowpane.  
I sew myself to sofa cushions, knit the cat  
into my morning with her white paw resting  
on my shoulder. Her black nose is near  
my ear. I hear the throat hum sound  
of kitty contentment and sip Honduran coffee,  
poppies growing on the mug. The fan blades  
swirl their circles, steady, invisible dust.

The rain tangles up my motivation, and I won't  
move much today, won't tie my tennis shoes,  
won't get into my Prius, won't battle Memphis  
streets with windshield wipers swinging;  
a salsa dance to a rhythm I can't match. I am out  
of spoons, no tools for scooping another hour  
of concentration from my brain, instead, I stay  
here with the cat, the coffee, and the water drops.

Today's a day to sit at home, touch the cat's fur,  
purr just like her as the clock ticks by  
moments and the calendar's colored boxes of places  
to be, drip past with the clouds. I only breathe.  
All of the tasks on the list of to-dos are pinned  
fast to the pages, and they will still be there  
when the day is done.

# ARS POETICA

HEATHER TRUETT

*“Kiss me, and you will see how important I am.”*  
– Sylvia Plath

I want to be the words that decapitated Emily Dickinson,  
made her so cold no fire could warm her.

I will write scorch marks into the skin  
of a nation, scar its path.

I want to hold ajar the door  
to Morley’s madness, scribble  
my sea creature diary, flying fantasy  
in Sandburg’s air. I will be the echo  
that asks the shadow to dance.

I will write a light into the hateful night,  
force feed little lives into the daily deaths.

I want to be the “Ahhh”  
of Lucille Clifton’s first poem,  
da Vinci’s vital truth,  
Pablo Neruda’s act of peace.

I will write a war and make it melt,  
a snowflake soaking into manmade history.

I want to make Dylan Thomas’s  
toenails twinkle, steal T. S.’s soul,  
make love to the lightning  
Randall Jarrell called to strike.

I will write the striking blows  
of simple words with target marks.



I want to be born in the bowels  
of the ancient wilderness of earth,  
midwifed by Mary Oliver and holding  
Berry's hand while I breathe  
the unconditional breath.

I will write in that air, ethereal,  
tailor the truth to tease and tumble.

I want to be tangled limb  
by limb with Sylvia in her silence,  
becoming beautiful  
annihilation.

I will write a brand-new Genesis, create  
out of refuse a hallowed Universe.

I want to be  
to e. e.  
the only thing  
that matters

I will write for them  
and me  
the only things  
that matter.

# CITY DELIGHTS

HUGH COOK

I rolled my tongue along  
The hot geranium staining my mouth,  
Nectar left by flower sorbet,  
Watching my cousin's blond height  
In the French summer.

"As a child on the New York subway,  
Knowing we were packed like rats  
And smelled of shit,  
I still loved the density of humanity."

For the first time  
I thought of myself as part  
Of the sweating night;  
Cooling our bodies  
On the stones of the street.

We lay with the city's people,  
So close we became an offering,  
Buried by stars and symbols.

I looked back.  
Once past the Cathedral's throng  
The people walked together,  
Scraping cobbles older than  
They will ever be.

Tonguing redness at my lip,  
I watched the moon fall  
On all of us walking back  
From Catabasis,  
Divulging through streets.

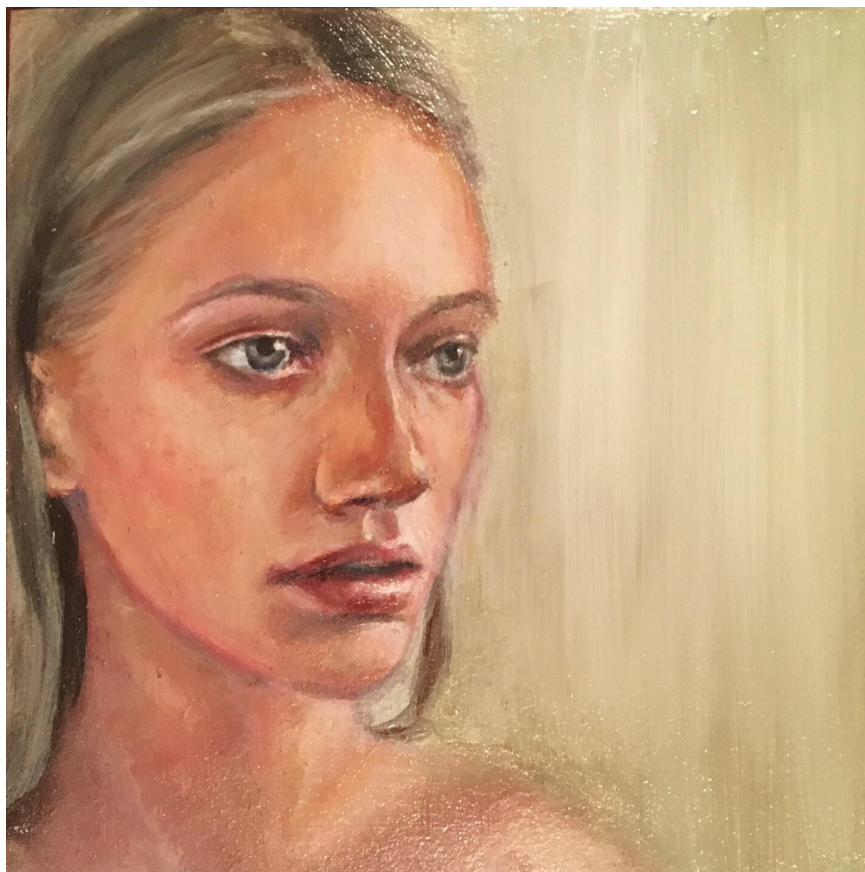
# I LOVE YOU, I'M SORRY

PHOENIX KENDALL

I'm repossessing the sandcastle  
Unless I cut my hair. Then  
I will bury it myself. Scanning  
Over the same lines, again an empty  
Swimming pool I sucked out. In my dreams,  
I take wire cutters,  
saw out my teeth,  
sew them into Valentine's Day cards that  
I would have sent to you on Christmas.  
Return me to sender—  
I'll write you a Freudian analysis and  
Scare you out of a barbershop quartet.

# GREEN GIRL

MARTHA ROSE



# I'LL PLAY JOHN

CORINNE DAVENPORT

Three detonators  
in a block of C4  
is how I convince myself  
that my weakness is synonymous with danger.

Ram me between  
a '90s monitor and  
a swivel chair,  
I'll float down that elevator shaft  
like a feather sighing.

My smile is replaced with dominoes,  
I eat sandwiches made of falling pianos,  
I'm always hungry for broken cords.  
Only vocal.

I think I keep hurting.  
My feet wrapped in my once-white tee shirt,  
dancing on glass windows (with glass feet)  
trying to find a way back inward.

I sing with my back to the choir,  
my fists—mistaken for lungs—are not bombs.  
Clenched hands can't pull clips.

# WHOLE DAMN HEAD

CORINNE DAVENPORT

It's been three months,  
and I'm still bargaining with the devil  
to baptize me.

I say,  
"He's still sleeping in my head,  
he hasn't paid rent in two years,  
and he leaves condom wrappers under the bed."

Achilles and his river grew up down the street,  
and the crossroads meet in my front yard.

Each night I offer my brain  
for a little more heart.

I say,  
"Take the thoughts. Take the whole head.  
I'll survive without the memory of him if you just take the  
whole  
damn  
head."



# IV TRIP

RAZEEN AHMED

I thought I saw a shooting star only to see it was a bug illuminated by the  
lights of 7/11,  
And I thought I met God—  
Until he asked to crash on my couch and I left him on read and  
I still feel guilty about it.  
I use glasses, can't see without them.  
One time they got lost in the middle of a garage rock mosh—  
Fell off my face  
On the ground for so long, my heart started to hurt.  
If before my eyes it's just a blur, how do I know I'm on the right track?  
And yet, amidst the twenty hundred stamps of the stampede of Vampire  
Weekend fans,  
They survived without a crack—  
Against all odds of universal entropy, how insane is that?  
Something went right for me  
For once  
And I still think about the seconds of that night,  
During the waking hours of my current ones  
Thinking how absurd the world works  
As I overflow spontaneously like Wordsworth  
A thousand pictures in my words, worth a million dollars each.  
Silver-tongued, I'm still a Star-Bellied Sneetch  
As I identify the things that sucked the life out of me  
I rip off the leech,  
But I forgive the disease.  
It knows no better it only knows how to be  
And so I simply say, "I can't judge thee."

# DRAGON

CONNOR CROWLEY

Last week,  
the zoo got a komodo dragon  
shipped in straight from Indonesia.  
I saw it on TV.  
They're calling him "Sean."  
I think it's kind of sick  
to take that kind of beast  
and give him a name like "Sean."  
If I had a body like *that*  
and was stuck with a name like *that*,  
I'd sure as hell bite the hand that fed me.  
I wonder what the other komodos would think  
if they heard that he was being called "Sean" now.  
This lizard's got the strength of ten men,  
he's itching to get back to Jakarta.  
He sees the zookeepers—the bastards—  
and the dragon inside him wants to knock the eyebrows off their faces,  
and poison the burnt coffee that they drink every morning  
during their first cigarette break.  
The only thing stopping him is the six-pound clubs  
that they keep dangling from their belts.  
They said on TV that komodo dragons are venomous and will hide  
behind rocks for hours until a gazelle  
or something gets near them and then they reach out and strike and with  
one bite they've taken down a  
whole damn gazelle.

I went and saw the lizard last night, after hours.  
I used to have a friend who worked at the zoo,  
he told me how to sneak in without making the alarms go off.  
Even without the alarms, I got a little tense.  
I spent fifteen minutes hiding behind a trash can after I got in,  
just to make sure the coast was clear,

and started cramping up after three minutes of crouching.  
I was surrounded by pieces of stained napkins that didn't quite make it  
into the can.  
Seeing the zoo at night  
put me on edge.  
It's like the animals know you're not supposed to be there  
and I got afraid that one of the antelopes would cry for help or something.  
I was checking behind my back the entire way to Sean's.  
His place was humid and dark, and stunk like raw meat in the desert.  
I wrestled that damn dragon for nearly half an hour before he got  
comfortable with me.

The next day, I've got Sean on a leash, and we're walking down Sunset  
Boulevard together.  
He's a lot slower than the TV made it seem, and he's walking about four  
feet behind me the entire time.  
I see some kids laughing, so I look behind me to check on Sean.  
This is the first time I really see him in daylight,  
the zoo was so damn dark I couldn't get a good glimpse of him.  
He looks different than he did on TV.  
He has little hands and walks like my grandad.  
So I drop the leash and he runs into an alleyway.  
I'm not letting some lizard make me look like a kook.

# EVERYBODY LOVES BABY

CONNOR CROWLEY

ray romano's got the face of a baby.  
he's tried to hide it  
with the coiffed hairdo,  
a full set of teeth,  
and smile lines hugging  
the sides of his mouth, but  
i don't buy it.  
i still see the baby fat bubbling under those cheeks.  
you've gotta look close, but it's all there:  
the loose teeth, the snotty lip, the blubbering.

there's a scene in "everybody loves" season 7 episode 22 where  
ray and robert are sitting on a sofa in the living room.  
ray is telling robert about a suitcase that he and debra  
are keeping on the stairs. it's been there for weeks because  
both of them refuse to be the one to move it.  
debra can't move it because she's busy taking care of the kids.  
ray can't move it because his hands are the size of grapes.  
there's a look of annoyance on robert's face.  
i'm on the edge of my seat rocking back and forth with my feet in my  
hands.  
robert calls ray a baby.  
i wail, excited that he is finally being exposed.  
ray looks back at robert, his face a play-doh structure,  
it can't be real.  
ray pouts and gets upset with robert.  
robert buys it. typical.  
baby always wins.  
you can't hate baby.  
marie enters, carrying a bag full of formula and pacifiers.

she walks up to ray, cooing, and rests his soft head  
over her left shoulder, patting his back.  
he lets out a burp that barely makes a sound.  
i ball my fists and stamp my feet.  
marie sets her child back down on the sofa,  
moving gently so as to not upset him.  
he continues to eat his crackers, surrounded by wealth.

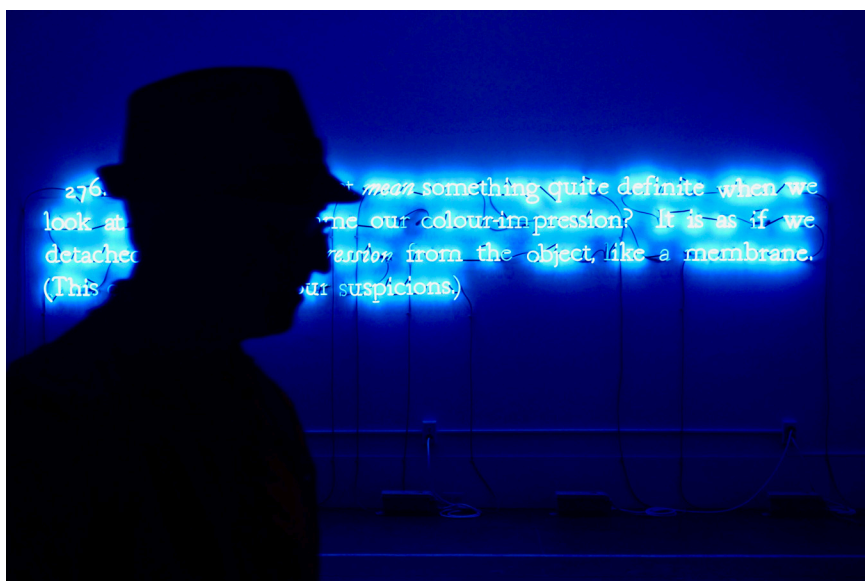
ray is a king, a pharaoh of an empire made of pink stone,  
draped in gold underneath the pulse of a warm sun.

robert loves raymond.  
debra loves raymond.  
marie loves raymond.  
everybody loves raymond.

jesus, man, how'd you do it?

# INFINITE BLUE

ALLISON CRAFT





# I WILL SHOW YOU FEAR IN A HANDFUL OF DUST

EMILY BAKER

The urn tips from the mantle,  
or is thrown in anger, and cracks.  
Gray ash drifts like snow over  
the living room rug. You're breathing  
in Great-Aunt Georgina. Oh, dearie me.

A monster made from the dirt  
too dry to keep your crops alive  
bears down on the midwestern desert  
your home has become, roaring  
and tearing at the boards of the barn  
with claws and teeth of knife-sharp sand.

Crouching in the ruins of the ancient forest,  
you bend to scoop up sawdust in your palm.  
You let it sift through your fingers, dance away  
on the wind. On the edge of the field of stumps  
and devastation looms a line of trees, marked  
with bleeding crosses of carmine paint.  
Your eyes tell you they're next for the levelers.

*I will show you fear in a handful of dust,*  
because dust is what remains when life  
has been pulverized to bits miniscule enough  
to be snatched away by an errant breath.

You sigh.

# BEAUTY IN UGLY PLACES

EMILY BAKER

The rainbow shimmer of an oil slick,  
choking life from water with thick, poisonous fingers.

A spatter pattern of arterial spray on a white wall,  
red droplets like the rubies of a dragon's hoard.

The sheen of a dead bird's feathers—  
because alive it never would have let you get that close.

The grass that grows greener over shallow graves,  
nurtured by an absence it cannot feel.

The color shift of a healing bruise purple-green-yellow-gone  
blooming and vanishing in its own sped-up spring.

Ancient bone chapels that make the dead into art—  
ribcage chandeliers and skull sconces brown with the weight of  
years.

Cracked soil, lines like scars or gaping mouths opening  
to beg for water in a drought, a roadmap of desperate thirst.

Flood-slaked streets, ordinary suburbs transformed  
into Venetian canals without their permission—roads made rivers.

The gleaming blade of a sword, sharp enough to sing  
as it slices through air or rope or flesh—a piercing melody.

A tear in a butterfly's wing, far more interesting than mere symmetry,  
a wound as a feature, a mark, a name.

Towering infernos that paint the sky orange-warm,  
hungry pyres that insatiably consume  
homes and trees and lives alike.

They say to pray for beauty to come out of ashes,  
but what if you've always liked the softness of the color gray?

# FRAGILE AS A BEETLE'S WING

EMILY BAKER

I have no idea where my armor ends  
and my skin begins because  
my world is a wound I must encase in chitin  
while my soul beneath yearns  
for simple touch, a brushing of fingertips  
over my bruised heart.

Some people have walls,  
but I have an exoskeleton; I inhabit  
a terror that breaking it will break me too.

The illusion of safety, but bugs  
can still be stepped on.

# BEACH EULOGY

VIOLET MITCHELL

I took a walk  
on the bare beach  
and apologized.

I let the ocean  
chew on the sand  
under my heels

and sink me  
down and down  
and I said I'm sorry.  
She whispered  
a wave. It was cold  
but I let her paint  
my ankles  
in the blood  
of shells

and fishbones.  
I let goosebumps  
carpet me. I let

her bury me  
low until her  
eyelashes were at

my stretch marks,  
my thighs. We  
are earth together,

I told her.  
I leave toe ponds  
for her, and leave my

fat gray heart  
next to the skel-  
etons she let me make.

# DID YOU KNOW

VIOLET MITCHELL

push pins perform somersaults / we decided not to go because  
of the rain / October is scary because we used to wonder what  
we would eat during winter hibernation / I am the scientist &  
the experiment / arthritis either smells like clementines or  
model train paint / artists are humans who draft / porter stout  
pumpkin sprinkle hops vine = masculine beer / we watch the  
misspellings grow / if you were here I'd probably overwater  
you / drag queen bingo was canceled last week / the president  
said that all my friends are illegal, again / I want to watch you  
meditate / my best advice is to arrive a month early to your  
appointments / I'm smiling for you no matter how many eyes  
I have

# IF KITES WEREN'T ATTACHED TO STRINGS, THEY'D FLY AWAY FOREVER

DAMIAN WANG

He doesn't like me from the get-go. Since entering the restaurant, with the bell at the left corner of the frame tinkling away, I have had this feeling. When I glance at the man, he is looking at me with an inexplicable rage, and a certain neurotic furor. When I lock eyes with him, my phone clutched in hand, rising by the second with my thumb paused over an unsent text ("Quick, should I get house special fried rice or chicken chow mein?"), he smooths his complexion into something apathetic and absent, pinched-together eyebrows sliding off his face like sweat, trickling down in black droplets. But I know it is there—that unsolicited animosity. I have seen it, and I am unlucky. The bell is still chiming. It chimes and my heart quakes and it is still chiming and chiming and I see it. I see it—he's reaching behind the counter for a chef's knife, freshly sharpened. The word "bolt" flashes across my mind's eye, in black and red, and I repeat it to myself, my feet unmoving, my back sweating, my fingers cracking. I turn around and slam my hands against the door. Push, push, push. The sign says to pull. My fingers have left sweaty greasy prints on the glassy acrylic or the acrylic glass of the door, I do not know but I wonder how ominous it will be for the next customer to see. How left-behind fingerprints always mean that the person who left them is no longer around. I pull the doorknob, and it falls off in my hand, but I don't let go. Out the door it is sunny and raining and thundering. So hot and so cold at the same time, and I am unlucky. All I did was come out for Chinese food, and I have been caught in something that I cannot understand. This is what happens to Asian kids who don't cook their own Asian food at home. This is what happens to Asian American

kids who “have a little too much American in them,” like my uncle often bemoans at the dinner table. This is what happens when you don’t eat your mother’s home-cooked meals, and you look elsewhere, away from the love she has cooked up for you. You might as well have slapped the rice bowl out of her hands, how you have shamed her and your family and brought this onto yourself, this danger and this impending doom and all this evil that you deserve. On the sidewalk there is gum everywhere and they beseech me like slime, drag me down towards them like dirty little demons of the street. Tiny hands unseen to the naked human eye clamp onto my new chucks and seep into the stiff navy blue canvas. They do not let go. These gum demons want me and they want me now. But I am a hot item tonight, 75% off and so desirable to all the shoppers. I turn my head back towards the restaurant, and I see the man coming for me, chef’s knife in hand, so slow, so sure, so deliberate in his movements. To him I do not even have a discount. I am 100% off. Free to hunt. He follows me onto the street, and I beg the gum demons to let me go, I need to go, I need to go. Please let me go. The gum demons relent but take my right pinky and ring finger as offerings to appease their king until the next time. I do not know if there will be a next time, but I keep my mouth shut and I bolt, canvassed feet thudding across the grim sidewalk. I do not know where I am going. I am suddenly in an unfamiliar town, and I run but I do not run out of breath and for fault of human error, I still gasp as I run. Down the streets of this unfamiliar familiar unfamiliar place I run, the man so close behind me, knife in hand and never wavering, always pointed straight at me. If he were a sniper, he could have shot me by now and been done with it, steady as his hand was and unwavering in his determination. But he likes the chase. He likes my fear. And I hand it over like I would hand over my precious jewels to a robber because I know of nothing else, I do not know what to do besides fear him, fear this whole place, fear for what I have become and for what I have unknowingly done wrong, in this life and in the past and most likely in the future one too. The man’s face is grinning, frowning, crying—a one-man Kabuki theater show as I run and run and run. In and out, and the people of this place fade and reappear. In one second people on the street are looking and shouting at me, in the next second the entire town is empty and I am running all alone with the man chasing me, then in another second the crowd is so thick I cannot see where my feet are taking me, there are elbows jabbing and hands shoving and I fear. I fear so heavily. Past a flower shop I run, but I skid and turn back to smell the plumeria bouquet. The flowers are so delicate and beautiful and fragile, and I pet their pretty colors, absorbing them into my fingertips. I swipe the lines across my cheeks like belated war paint halfway through a battle, and I run again. Even as I thud through the streets, I can



hear the little slimy leechy gum demons teetering beneath the cement, I can hear their gnarly soft voices promising and threatening and I do not respond. I know the man is still chasing me. I have been running for so long it feels like I have been traveling for light years to Alpha Centauri, like I am amongst the cosmos looking for Vega and homebound for an alien civilization that loves me and welcomes me and wants me. Into a four-story garage I turn, my hand catching on the sharp stone corner, skin tearing quick and slow at the same time, and propel myself up the staircase. The man is so close behind me. Up each individual stair I go—up, and up, stumbling and gasping and my hands feeling blindly in front of me for something I cannot name. When I finally trip and fall, it is with astounding violence as I spill across one-third of the grimy staircase. My blood, too, spills across the staircase as the man finally puts to work the knife he has been gripping so patiently for so long. I think I have allowed him some relief, that perhaps he deserves. I think perhaps I deserve this too, to be chased, and to have fear instilled in me and to be hunted until I have nowhere to run. Cheek pressed into the metal of the stairs, my eyes follow the black blood trickling away from every yawning pore of my body, bones aching, and flesh creaking like a great beast tossing its weary head. My blood smells like blueberry yogurt. The Yoplait brand, not the generic kind, never the generic kind.

I open my eyes again to a cobbled ceiling, hobbled hopes dashed across each ridge, and I do not breathe. I wish I could close them again.

# 4:52 AM IN A TAIWANESE MOTHER'S SANCTUM

DAMIAN WANG

Bitter melon soup  
Bitter melanin too  
When my mother cups me like Achilles'  
healing is unfound in her crockpots  
and cast iron pans.  
Grated skin makes the most flavorful stock,  
bitter me lies  
down on the kitchen floor.

When they make you bleed, thank them.  
Chefs don't like when you play the victim card.  
Knives are only a weapon made of intent.  
Toys can be weapons, too, in the wrong hands.  
You see, the more fight and bite you have, the more satisfying the slice,  
because 'fight' and 'bite' are mouth-feel, mouth-run, mouthing at your soul  
*—less child, insolence is not permitted, how dare*  
you knead her hand  
hold.

Each peel of your skin hitting broth,  
Pan fried in peanut oil and charred.  
Give in, because bitter melatonin won't bring dreams.  
Your mind may sleep, but you are running from

bad omens come in bitter men.  
You wish you had been sweet.  
Bitter melon, bitter mellow,  
Bitter me, lion within.

Lying is whining,  
and bitter is the taste they forget.  
Bitter melon gourds are not guards against cuts  
me against your chopping board,  
then sour their tongues with your pointed truth.  
Achilles was once a hero in his days and  
sometimes bitter gods just want to be unguarded,  
human too.

# BORDERLINE BORDERLESS BORDERING

DAMIAN WANG

An eye for an eye is the coward's way out.

I learned the hard way that head trauma is hardly fair,  
which some kids are forced to endure for the lack of white they contain.  
The more melanin you retain, the more damning the melancholy that  
follows.

When I'm forced to question the relevance of *where are you from* and I  
answer here.

Here, I'm from here *no, where are you really from*  
I cannot help but think, I don't know  
how to satisfy you.

I'm hungry for an answer too.

It's palpable in the *are you an immigrant* that the Target cashier spits out,  
the terracotta of my mother's skin heating, the tectonic plates of her  
shoulders fracturing,  
and my hands sweat glue as I piece her back together, my arm curved  
around tattooed shame.

The plateau of her face has never known peace.

Broken English chases me even though I was born here,  
because my mother is All Broken and no English.  
How is it possible to exist when your own damn mother is  
worth Less Than White?

The difference between knowing and wondering is buried in my mother's  
bones,  
the aches that she kneads when no one is looking. There's no room for  
her own grief when  
*do you bow when you greet other Ayy-gee-uhns?*<sup>9</sup> her spine crumbles  
under mouth traffic,  
mouth lost and mouthing at spoiled spice.

I thought color was the only difference.

But when whiteness encompasses all  
that I Am Not  
and all that she never was,  
I mourn how the sun rises from the West.

# CLOCK IN

LEWIS SMITH

I always wanted to live  
in a monastery.

I could ring the bells:  
signaling prayer, meals, and reflection.

Trading Jowett's Jig for single tones,  
how meditative.

I would pay my rent  
in pearls of wisdom.

Concerns of capital consigned to oblivion,  
my checkbook checked at the door.

The hour now approaches, steadfast in its passage through time's coffee  
filter.

The minutes dripping on my receding hairline.

Lamentations of daily woes, like shampoo, melt away the fine tufts on my  
head.

I would much prefer cloistered contemplation.

The world offers only stress,  
but the ethereal offers a hidden companion.

I want to live in a monastery,  
so I can finally be at peace.

But it will have to do:  
my clock and me.

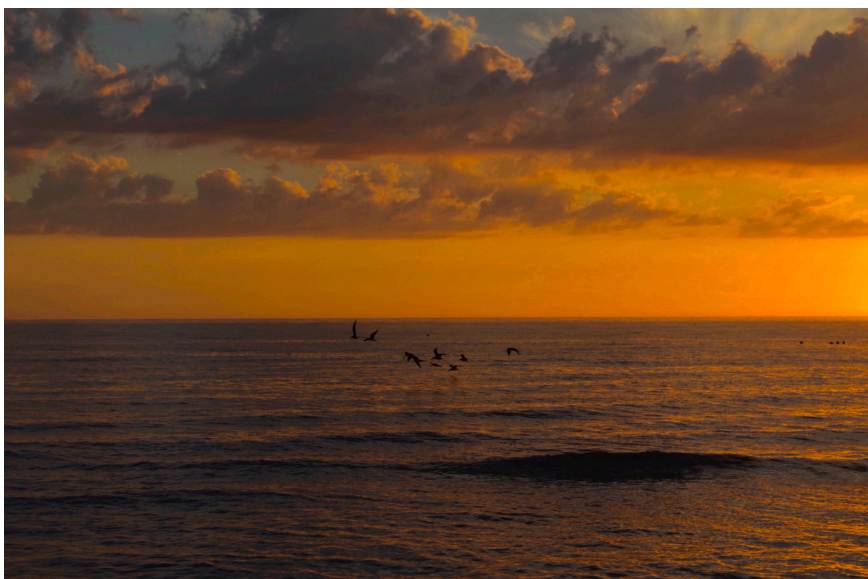
# BLINK

CHRISTINE A. MACKENZIE

is it normal for her to lean her head on the train window see wild brown  
grasses rapid blown in a field rapid shifts to woods streets towns is it normal  
to have moments when time roars like white rapids that sweep bodies down  
to the rocks is it normal to burrow into his arms to find a calm place to rest  
for a moment hand in hand eye to eye is it normal to blink all time has passed  
into the shade blink the sky outside is white farmhouses crumpled hands  
folded into each other is it normal to turn back blink lips on hers hands in  
hers body on hers each moment to the next moment to the next moment with  
him is it normal for the sky to fluster a thousand colors for the birds to arrive  
the next moment until they blurred shaded drained into puddles is it normal

# REMINDE ME OF THE RENAISSANCE

ALLISON CRAFT





# ON WHEELS

NICOLAS STEVENS

The pufferfish that once swung like chaos from the rearview mirror  
now gathers dust in the glove compartment,  
waiting for the next victim to unknowingly reach their hand in.  
Prickly enough to draw blood.

An obsidian letter opener  
brought back from Belize  
has long since disappeared  
somewhere between or under the seats.

The sunglasses holder filled with a cacophony of random objects:  
A large bolt, a crystal egg, and a fossilized clam  
that used to rattle violently at each turn,  
now remains deadly silent.

Somewhere in the junkyard  
my collection of oddities lies  
waiting to turn to dust  
abandoned between flights cross country  
its chassis too rusty, and its engine too moldered to start.

# COULD YOU PULL OVER HERE?

HENNA AHMED

On my way to heaven, I want to make a pit stop first. I want to go home. I want to stand on the front steps. I want to close my eyes and feel the warm air of an October noon. I want to walk in to see my mother on the phone in the kitchen surrounded by an aroma of spice and flavor. I want to hear the distant clanking of my father in his office. I want to walk past my sister and her boyfriend on the couch, laughing so . . . peacefully, as if in that moment the world outside had finally taken a big, deep, blue breath, and exhaled its sweet, long-awaited apology.

I am here.

I imagine walking up the stairs, passing the books that are no longer there, the trophies that no longer stand, and upon the carpet that hints at some mix of lavender and lemongrass. I go into my room. The lights are on; the music is playing.

I am here.

I want to turn off the lights, open the balcony door to hear the ceaseless, swaying palm trees fight the soft world outside, and then let myself fall

backwards. I'll fall for  
miles and miles only to  
be caught, so gently, by the smooth hands of the bed.

I am here. I am here.

And then I will sleep,  
maybe for a long, long time.

And this time,  
*I swear to you*

We will not be awoken by the shattered glass of their sirens, or the smell of lavender being replaced by burning books, or the sight of our entire childhood being swallowed whole by the same red earth that once raised it so peacefully.

No.

We won't.

For I am here,

and I will never leave you again.

# WAR

SHELBY WEISBURG

there's a stone in the front yard of their red house.  
the soil under it is common and full of worms,  
and they overturn that stone every morning,  
so gentle and easy with routine,  
to see life's beckoning rawness under it.  
they grew up when they truly loved that stone:  
they had something to lose,  
something so devastatingly casual,  
a stone some worms some soil a house.

so they sing, we want we want we want our stone  
we want to get in our cars and drive  
past what we know, what belongs to us.  
always already forever there was us and our stones,  
the stones in our yards, the yards of our homes,  
there our red house, there the neighbor's blue one,  
down the street our school, our church,  
our people who live all around us, who sing the same  
always already forever there was us and ours.

what they will do for anything, for one more stone  
one more car in the garage, one more yard on the block.  
they will turn over their stones,  
dissolve themselves in the common soil,  
place their stones where their faces used to be,  
sign their names away for something so casual.  
the soil under the stone not just soil anymore.  
because they said it belonged to them,  
they said it writhed dormant with life's rawness.

# LENTICULAR

SHELBY WEISBURG

*after Lucinda Parker*

iron mountains  
delay the oncoming studebaker  
clouds pink as the sun, bright  
against the sea-mist sky.  
pat the rolls, pat the rocks,  
waft your hand through heavens.  
    there the clouds,  
    there the mountains  
        approaching collision.

we cannot follow the clouds where they want to go.

(down in the foothills a girl dances  
for rain to kiss the papery grass.  
her mother scratches her arms  
    and waits for some sort of shunt.

the strings of drought  
reverberate for the tambourining  
    fingers of rain  
    pebbling over bluffs,  
the land a raspy soloist  
twiddling for the clashing chorus  
    of more-than clouds  
        arriving late in a studebaker.)

instead, there they are,  
    halted by our pre-given classifications.

# HOME

NICOLE PUSCAS



# USER'S MANUAL, 2009 HONDA ACCORD

TAYLOR ANNE THACKABERRY

Don't park under trees, don't drive on gravel roads. Close the sunroof before you park, or rain will get in. Your father loved this car, and only gave it to you because he loves you more. It will last a long time if you take care of it.

This is how you check the oil. This is how you check the wiper fluid. This is how you jump-start the battery in the winter when you're world-weary and cold and just want to go home for Christmas. If the oil is leaking, park over an old moving box. What did I tell you about driving on gravel roads?

This is how you change a tire. This is how you change lanes on I-81 so people won't honk at you.

Don't park outside without putting up the sun shield. If you need to cry, do it in the Target parking lot; everyone's done it there at least once, no one will judge you.

The radio has six presets: you'll know you're getting close to home when they stop playing static. You'll know you're even closer when the roads turn to gravel. I told you, take the other way. These country roads get bad in the winter, and I don't want you driving on them.

You're the Friend with the Car now, a powerful and dangerous position to be in. Can you pick me up at the airport? Can you drop me off at my friend's house? Can you pick me up from this party? You can say no. And when you do drive someone, don't be afraid to ask for gas money. Driving

home will cost you forty bucks in this economy; only do it if you really need to, we're not worth it.

Driving friends home should be an act of love. It says, I want to make sure you get home safe, I want you to stay out of the rain, I want to prolong the time I say goodbye until the very last possible moment. Don't let that boy you like walk home in the sleet. Drive him home, and then on the drive back, blast your favorite love songs and sing along like you mean it. Unless he lives on a gravel road. Then make him walk.

Most importantly, always text me when you get home. I'm not there to drive you anymore, and I want to know that you got back safe.



# (ON BEING) A (SOFT) PLACE TO LAND

KATLYN FURLONG

I flinch at the same scratch  
in the record every time.  
for spending eternity bracing  
for impact this body  
knows nothing about defense.  
applies it to everything.  
the touch of a hand, the  
creek of a floorboard even  
when it holds a familiar weight;  
in my chest—chest—chest—  
I say it as if to escape it.  
paper skin and paperweight  
bones. I can't remember  
why this started in the first place.  
I think it was something about  
permanence or the lack of it  
or about white socks with frilly  
lace tight around my ankles I  
asked my mother to take off  
but she needed to mark me  
girl soft and open a front  
porch step and a kiss on the cheek  
in June all the color runs out  
and I am staring at the big sky  
braiding the trails of planes  
no longer earth bound and I  
wish to soar past light  
but I am still taking lessons  
in becoming it.

# BLOOD FRUIT

KATLYN FURLONG

this summer I am  
all heart no song,  
raindrops vibrating a tin roof,  
the light that lingers,  
the soft hum of electric current,  
recurrently resurfacing—  
always coming up for air.  
I am a mouth full  
of a lover's mouth  
full of love  
for me;  
still Hunger burns  
a sore spot in the soft spot  
of my belly &  
nothing can mollify her  
need for blood.  
I crawl through forests foraging  
for wild berries  
with red-stained fingertips  
I tell her I did it,  
but she knows I could never kill it.  
he knows it too &  
tells me between bites  
he's moving to San Francisco  
for the winter,  
says he could love me from there &  
my stomach rumbles  
at the thought of canned preserves,  
the dying taste of July,  
& the fruit we thought could sustain us.

# TWOFOLD

KATLYN FURLONG

I want to be transparent, I say—as light floods the room I used to call home—that’s the only way to make it real—to take this body and turn it into crystalline water—so that you can see me so clearly—you can see yourself reflected back—perhaps the reason we fall in love is because we want to be seen— through eyes other than our own—so I stand still for you—but I only look like myself when I am running—away—like I am trying to escape this body—and these hips—and these collarbones—and these breasts—these things that make me feel like something I am not—I want to be fluid, I tell you as you pour a cup of coffee—you look at me through the little ribbons of steam—trying to escape the air—I say it again, louder—but language restrains me—as it does to anyone who’s ever believed in more—a week ago we were lying in the balmy sun—each of our bodies learning the weight of the other—you said we brought each other balance—but I want it on my own.

# SOFT FALLS OF FATE

NICOLE **RICO**



# TRUTH

JULIANNA VAUGHAN

The two o'clock trolley arrives five minutes behind schedule to pick up the group waiting on Wilson Street. Two men and two women board; the women on their way to the grocer and the doctor, the men don't say where they're headed but the stench of whiskey reeking off of them tells me where. The men haven't bathed in days, but when they board, they carry themselves with an air of dignity, a lie they upkeep to prevent the gossip, but everyone knows—they just don't talk about it.

"Did you hear," Mrs. Stein leans over to whisper to me, "about poor Mr. Armstrong?"

Mrs. Stein is small and stout. Her warm smile and twinkling eyes have a way of drawing people close to her, and one would imagine she has many friends. With how inviting she is, she often wonders at night why her husband doesn't love her, why her two boys disrespect her the way they do. Neither have come home since leaving for college. On Christmas, two places remained empty, and there were far too many leftovers.

"Poor Mr. Armstrong?" I echo just over the driver's holler—15th street and Franklin.

They should say poor Mrs. Armstrong. She's been through her share of troubles, but it's easier to blame her instead of acknowledging me.

The trolley stops, the two men exit. I see them walk straight to the bar. There is shame in the way they hang their heads. They've been out of work for a while. Their children are hungry, but their addictions are hungrier.

"Mrs. Armstrong has always been an attention seeker," Mrs. Stein continues, touching my seat just inches from my knee, but not quite, "I told Patrick not to marry her, but did he listen?"

The other woman, Mrs. Russo, adds solemnly, "He was bewitched by her beauty, but he's regretted marrying her since before the ink dried on their marriage license."

She's Mrs. Stein's next-door neighbor, heavily pregnant with her sixth child. She's naturally pretty. Can't be older than thirty. She wears a shiny diamond ring and earrings Mrs. Stein has always desired for herself. That's not all that Mrs. Stein coveted, though. She has always believed Mrs. Russo

has the perfect life: beautiful children, a handsome, kindhearted husband, and a well-trimmed garden in front of her white-picket-fenced home.

Mr. Russo died just two months ago. Killed in a fire at the factory. Her oldest boy, Sam, who's only thirteen, just had his first day of work yesterday at the same factory his father was killed in. She stayed up all last night in constant prayer, terrified he wouldn't return home.

"What did she do?" I ask the women, who simply exchange looks and shake their heads.

"I don't want to sound rude, but you're the last person who I'd tell her story to." Mrs. Russo smiles kindly.

The driver hollers back, 18th Street and Washington. "That's me!" Mrs. Russo struggles to stand under the weight of her growing stomach. She's so round she could pop any day now. "Goodbye, Jennie," she nods to Mrs. Stein. She turns a blind eye to me.

We watch her waddle towards the nearest building, smile still on her face. She's ten minutes late for her doctor's appointment. He probably won't see her anyway; she hasn't been able to pay her medical bills, even before her husband died. She wonders if she can teach her oldest daughter to deliver a baby to save on the crushing weight of the hospital bill when the time comes.

To our surprise, Mr. Armstrong climbs onto the bus. He brushes past us, but I catch up to him anyway and we are seated together. He avoids me like the plague, and he hates hearing what I have to say. Still, I ask him, "What happened to Mrs. Armstrong?"

"It's her fault." He can't look me in the eye. It isn't her fault. "How are you, Mrs. Stein?" He asks the woman in front of us, because he knows he can't talk to me without bending under the pressure of my gaze. No one can look me in the eye while they fabricate a story.

"I'm well." She isn't. For some weeks now, she has lacked the strength to get out of bed in the morning. She seldom is able to eat. "What's the news on Alice?"

He sighs as if he is stuck in a traffic jam, like his wife is nothing but an inconvenience. "There's not a thing wrong with that woman's life." There were, actually, quite a few things wrong with Alice Armstrong's life. "And yet she insists I'm the root of all her problems and she won't come back to the house."

"I'm sorry that you have to go through this." Mrs. Stein says softly. "I can't imagine how difficult this must be for you."

But it is far more difficult for Alice, the woman who has been trapped in a cage by this wretched man for twenty years. I've a good mind to look Mr. Armstrong in the face and make him confess out loud what a right fool

he is, but not yet. He'll reach his breaking point soon, when he'll have no choice but to confess.

"I did everything for her, gave her the life every woman could ever dream of. And this is how she repays me . . ."

Mr. and Mrs. Armstrong live in an (un)pleasant apartment complex in an (un)pleasant part of town, but never have to struggle with the bills. Mr. Armstrong used much of his paycheck to gamble. Alice Armstrong is an excellent cook. She is very smart. She daydreams often, of a world where she can speak her mind and vote. The other women think she is eccentric and a little strange in her habits. Some of them wish they had the courage to attend suffrage meetings downtown as she did.

"I can't think of a single reason why she did what she did." I can think of hundreds. "She has always been very happy with her life here." There's never been a day in her life with that man that she has felt genuinely happy. "Women are always complaining about nothing. Us men, we work all day, every day. And they think they have the right to claim they're tired at the end of the day. They think we should have to help with the kids or do the dishes. It's never enough for you women." Mr. Armstrong considers this fact. Even if he said this to me, his words wouldn't change one bit.

"I'm sure you are tired," is all Mrs. Stein says. She isn't smiling anymore; she doesn't agree with him. The driver hollers: 24th and West Baltimore. "Ah, my stop." She nods at Mr. Armstrong. She bites her lip when she notices me watching her and quickly looks away. Mr. Armstrong doesn't care to watch her walk down to the grocer and tips his head back against the seat, but I notice the way she recounts the money in her wallet, knowing that she hardly has enough.

For a while, it is just Mr. Armstrong and I on the trolley, waiting for the other to give up and leave. But Mr. Armstrong won't stand up and exit, not if there's a chance he'll have to look at me. He's afraid of me. He's afraid of being proven wrong.

"Are you headed home now, Mr. Armstrong?" I ask. My stop is approaching; I have somewhere to be.

"Yeah." His eyes are shut.

"Bet it'll be quite the change, having the house to yourself." I hover over him, knowing as soon as he opens his eyes, he'll see me. I think I've almost got him.

"I'm looking forward to the peace and quiet." He turns his head; eyes open only when I'm out of possible sight. He's terrified of the quiet; ever since Mrs. Armstrong left him, he hasn't gone home once.

We're almost to my stop. The trolley's starting to slow. "Patrick, look at me."

"I can't." He whispers.

"You have to face me, Patrick. It's the only way you'll ever be able to move on."

"I can't! I will not—" I grab his face, turn his head. I watch the fear wash over him. It's the fear of realizing that I know what he's done, and maybe something far more. Maybe when he faces me, he'll know he isn't innocent, that he's never getting the life back that he wasted.

"36th and Prospect." The driver hollers back at us. I nod as I let go of Mr. Armstrong.

"Remember what I said." I warn. I hear him gulp.

I stand up and walk to the front of the trolley. The driver glances back at Mr. Armstrong, whose hands now cover his eyes. He shakes his head, "Some people never learn."

"I guess they don't. No one ever wants to face me, and until then, they really can't learn, or change or grow in any way. But for some, facing me is more frightening than being miserable."

"Have a nice day," he smiles, having nothing to say on my words. They aren't for him, anyway; he and I have spoken often and have an understanding of each other. His smile is always forced, there is pain in his eyes, and sometimes he struggles to stay kind to the people of this town, who treat him like he is beneath them. They will never know what hardships he endures off this trolley, but God knows I do. His wife is very ill, in the final stages of her disease, yet he has to work so she can stay in the hospital. He longs to be at her side. He's afraid that she may die while he isn't there.

I meet his eyes. His pain is close to seeping to the surface, and I wonder how much longer it'll be before it does. "You will find peace soon," I say, and I never lie. Hearing it come from me, I can sense the wave of relief wash over him. His family has suffered for so long.

I step off the trolley onto Prospect, watching it roll away until it's out of sight. Mr. Armstrong is still covering his eyes. He might not move his hands until he's forced off the trolley, miles from here. Nearby, Alice is waiting for me. "Sorry I'm late." I stride over to the bench she is patiently seated at. "Now tell me, how are you?"

Her smile is genuine; she hasn't felt this way in decades. She doesn't have to say, I already know.

Some days ago, she faced me for the first time in her marriage. She realized there was nothing more she could do to make things work between herself and a man who did not care for her. She admitted everything to me, and by telling me she understood that none of it was her fault and didn't feel guilty for doing what had to be done.



Alice gathers her bags from beside her as she stands, smile turning into a beam. She doesn't have much, but it's enough to get her by for now. "Thank you. For everything."

"No need to thank me. Your strength came from within. Telling me only helped you realize that," I point out. "Now go on, you're going to miss your train."

"You're right." She checks her watch, surprised at how fast time seems to be going recently. I watch her hurry towards her train, board, and speed away on Opportunity.

It is quiet on Prospect today. It gives me time to think. About Alice, Mrs. Stein, Mrs. Russo, the trolley driver Mr. Miller, the men headed to the bar, even Mr. Armstrong. Many of them live lies to hide from me. It is easier to pretend that their lives are better than they really are; to put up a facade is all some of them have ever known. But on most of their current paths, they will never know real happiness, they will never be free from the lies they've buried themselves in, that they've convinced everyone but themselves are reality. All they have to do to redeem themselves is tell me. It seems quite simple, doesn't it?

But no one wants to tell the Truth.

# WEIGHTLESS

KAYLA SIMON

i.

you have cuts on your hands carved by your own fingertips  
and a burn from back when you could still stomach toast  
for breakfast. back when you could still stomach the image  
of your ribcage in mirrored glass. now you shake when  
your mother boils water on the stove, and it's been almost  
three years but you're not doing better. and it's so easy  
to lie when someone asks if you've eaten that maybe  
you can convince your own body it's not starving.

ii.

in chasing the absence of ourselves  
the darkness turns us into angels

we don't fear falling, no, we  
just want to know where we'll land

and will the ground shake and  
will our wings be too heavy,

will they weigh us down? if God asked you  
if you've eaten yet today

what would you say?

# A GODLESS ROOM

KAYLA SIMON

i stopped praying for a while  
    faith always slips away from me after loss.  
how i wished you could have seen the way  
i made Death into a father figure.  
i needed a strong grip in my life and  
had held Death's hand enough times to know that  
his would do.  
i had always imagined Death like the opposite of God  
so i stopped praying—  
i gave up waiting for words from above because  
if there were any i was missing them  
    maybe the angels took a lunch break  
    or the celestial radio was set to the wrong station.  
there was this feeling that no one was listening.  
maybe my holy words were smoke in a windowless room,  
collecting at the ceiling but never touching the stars.  
maybe it wasn't Heaven's fault my grief  
was piling up when I was the one who locked myself in,  
but i stopped praying.  
for a long time.  
i began to imagine God's voice like the sound  
just after a fire alarm stops ringing—  
    that is to say, silence  
    that is to say, a noise built on absence.

# MY GORDIAN KNOT

RACHEL HAGERMAN

I know you look a bit like me—

Long, stringy brown hair.

Small waist.

Ambitious green eyes.

Maybe you even have my dark eyebrows,  
straight teeth,  
and crooked smile.

A touch of pink on the cheeks  
and tan in your arms.  
An artistic freckle here and there.

Maybe you're not a *perfect* image,  
but a resemblance just the same.

Although,  
                    isn't it perfection that you seek?

"Straight lines,  
rule books,  
rising to the top."

You tie a slew of vague notions  
about a flawless self  
in knots around my brain.

"Perfect  
body,  
perfect  
mind.  
Always be

best.”

You dance in graceful motions,  
anchor the rope.  
Feet quietly kick my thoughts.

While your ideas entangle mine,  
my imprisoned brain begins to ask:  
*Should this Gordian knot be undone?*

“Straight lines,  
rule books,  
rising to the top.  
Perfect  
body,  
perfect mind.  
Always be  
best.”

This rope you’ve created,  
is it good?

This image *I*’ve created,  
does it show me who *I* am?

You raise your pink cheeks,  
and point your tan arms at me.

“Success,  
success,  
*this* is your  
desire!”

But you are not my perfect reflection,  
No—you simply show me who *I want* to be.

And, with tired green eyes and a shrinking waist,  
I wonder if I still believe this lie.

# FOR THE HENS

ELLIS GIBSON

Hens peck the ground, kick  
their feet, stride around  
wobble-wattled, bright-eyed,  
proud and prim. I love them  
all; I admire one, who,  
in a snit, hits wing-tips  
against her sister, pecks  
a bloody feather off,  
leaves mottled gray skin bare,  
and blinks yellow, pleased. Struts  
in the fence don't keep me  
out—but when I'm seen, they  
scatter and flee. My trick  
is easing round the side  
where bushes cast shadows  
and leaning there, teeth sharp  
as rooster spurs, until  
I'm sure. Then straight for them.  
The birds craft their eggs, bide  
their broody time to hatch  
the chicks, and I've bided  
too, let hunger scratch down  
my throat, fed my children  
on thin milk, crept at night  
to scout near the henhouse.  
Light hours: harder to hide,  
but the girls are outside,  
the chance is mine. I want  
to kiss their necks, loving  
where the farmer's fist chokes.  
I am a mother,  
therefore twice the fox. Know  
as I do: blood's meant to

bleed, hens to feed on wheat.  
My mouth is not for love stories  
but to open up and eat.

# EMMA WATSON

LUCAS CURITS





# BATTERY ACID

KYLE WRIGHT

As a child, lying propped up uncomfortably, wheezing and drawing air, waiting for the albuterol to kick in, still clutching the little plastic mask to my face like an adolescent, asthmatic version of Dennis Hopper in *Blue Velvet*. Waiting for the little fist-grips on my lungs to release, waiting for the air to stop feeling like a bucket of Nickelodeon slime or the dust in couch cracks as it goes in. Finding somewhere to hide within the films and television I watch, falling in through the pane—smudged or rosy, frail images, film stills, back of mind warped like a cracked lens. The sharp blows on my chest fall away. My imagination making the pieces of the people I see my own. I separate, and suddenly I'm one of the lucky kids in Willy Wonka's chocolate factory or strapped into a proton pack as one of the Ghostbusters. My voice speaks to me as if it is coming from someone else.

Grab that chair right there. Listen to this story. Your lungs don't have asthma, it's your mind. Your breath doesn't feel full of sand, it is someone else's bad body. Alright, don't break your other arm. Are you afraid of getting old? I am, I say to it as we fade into the ether. We look each other in the eyes and it's no use, the voice says, wavering as if across cave walls. If he's coming down with asthma, I don't want him out in the rain—that's the last thing my voice says.

Fading like the opening credit soundtrack. Letting myself slip into the projection of solids upon a plane surface, into the tides of moving pictures. Trying to will myself into the flickering television screen, into the crackle of old VHS tape. Align my heartbeat to the rhythm of maladjusted tracking lines. Find a flick that doesn't feel sick.

*On a note lost to the wind I wrote that I was beginning to feel the symptoms of an asthma attack. Chopped pieces out of the note, like a paper snowflake and let it fly from an open bedroom window.*

*Alright, close your eyes. What do you see? Rub 'em. Can you see the stars?*

Can you feel the film? Blurring the separation between body and movie. The inside of my thigh, edge of my collar bone. The light on the screen, flicker of mouthed words. The parts of my body that are changed by the scene, finding some real center on which to base the pain or erogenous textures. Finding the film that makes me forget that my own body doesn't always do what I tell it to. Change me, cinema. Make me feel someone else's faults. Find the words on someone else's tongue, lose them, feel the vibration of their larynx when my own only makes pitiful bleats. Find the strength to move in a body on screen, or find a place to focus, to forget about the tightness of my own bronchioles and the way gravity is heavier only on top of my chest.

Like reading Coetzee's *Age of Iron*, feeling the sickness working its way through my insides along with Mrs. Curren, hollowing muscles and bone. Feeling it so much it's almost impossible to continue reading. Feeling it seep through cracks my healthy body. Feeling the cancer welling up inside, the way ink or juice soaks into a napkin, spreading tendrils and blooming. The look I've seen in the eyes of friends and family consumed by it. Slow, silent. No flames or smoke. But the charred flesh is there, just underneath. The same putrid smell. The same queasy unease I feel, looking them in the face, making myself smile, hold back tears. Trying to grasp some language, even just a few words, to break the silence in the room. The cold sweat starts at my palms, works its way across my back and between any parts of my skin which touch. Trying to think of something to say, anything. Comment on the meal Dad just made us. Say something about the Chuck Norris movie on the television. Let loose a wild one and ask Grandpa about his time in Vietnam. Anything to fill this ringing quiet gulf.

Strange to think of the films that stuck with me only in one or two scenes; these scenes left imprints on parts of my own anatomy. One that comes to mind is Lars Von Trier's *Antichrist*. I can picture the cabin in the woods, the gray sky, the dull colors of the forest, and little else. But my groin still tenses in ghost sympathy, nausea rising from this area and shivering up through my stomach toward my chest. The instinctive way my hands move toward it, to protect from some unseen assailant. I don't even remember much of what happens, but my body does. A tinge of recognition in my penis, not quite pain, but nothing sexual. At least I don't think so. The way I wince, the way I tense, seems in fear rather than arousal. This isn't a pleasant flutter running across my skin, a fire I feel between where the muscle and bone meet, across my shoulder blades, up the back of my neck. It is a quick reaction, a jump cut. It is a coolness, an electricity, water on the verge of freezing pumping through my veins, my chest. Everything feels heavy, less responsive. Not pain, but uncomfortable. A lingering anxiety. Some

little sliver of the images stuck in my psyche like the piece of pencil lead in my index finger that has been there since high school. Something in the film I can no longer recall the source of—I've lost everything but the tactile outer shell of the movie. The leftover emotionality lingers in my lower-torso, in my legs and sex, even with the film's reels long-since out-of-print in my memory, among the countless other bodies on screens, other traumas, other pieces with which mine sympathize.

# I AM NOT THE MOON, NOR A STAR

KAITLYN VON BEHREN

*in response to W. H. Auden's "I Am Not A Camera"*

a girl with the sun's rays  
hidden in her hair  
whispers to me a secret,

and i wish  
i was the moon,  
reflecting light

back to her. instead,  
i am a black hole,  
collapsing matter, eating light.

saturn's rings rest  
on her fingers,  
and she giggles,

her grin veiled  
as if by a spread of cards  
(the sun and moon),

and i wish  
i was a star,  
luminous and warm.

# BOYS OVERHEARD WHILE PLAYING A VIDEO GAME

KAITLYN VON BEHREN

*after Mary Szybist's "Girls Overheard While Assembling a Puzzle"*

Amber's boobs were practically escaping during  
Bible study today, did you notice? Hey, I'll  
check the safes for ammo—don't  
die. I swear, every Sunday the  
evangelist's daughters wear less clothing. Not like I'm  
fucking complaining, though. Switch your  
goddamn gun. No, no, yeah, that one should  
hold 'em off. The sister is pretty hot, too. What if  
I go for Amber and you go for her—what's-her-name?  
Jada? Jade? Whatever, doesn't matter. I heard she's  
kinky as hell. Refill your ammo, quit trying your  
luck. Maybe the two of 'em would watch a  
movie with us next Friday, probably  
not unless we have something to smoke, though. They  
only fuck with druggies—you just have to  
pick 'em off. Just choose somebody and shoot him. This  
quest sucks. At least Cecilia's back down to nine a gram.  
Run, dude, run! Look for cover, Jesus! No wonder you get  
shot in the back so much. Think you'll finally get to  
third base? Just ask if you can slip a few fingers  
under her skirt, I dunno. She doesn't seem like a  
virgin to me. I'm just going to spray paint everything. I  
wonder if they're into Vicodin, maybe  
Xanax. I have a shit-ton left over from when my  
younger sister had a meltdown. Crap, where'd all these  
zombies come from?

# CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

**HENNA AHMED** is a nineteen-year-old Asian Indian poet currently studying psychological and brain sciences and English at the University of California Santa Barbara. She is in her second year in the English program and loves writing, poetry, and photography. In 2018, her childhood home burned down in the Woolsey Fires of Southern California. She writes about childhood, grief, and finding peace in the wake of such profound loss. She hopes to pursue higher education in the future and remain an advocate for mental health awareness.

**RAZEEN AHMED** is a second-year student at the University of California Santa Barbara. He is currently working on his coming-of-age novel, which is based on journal entries from the middle of high school through the end of college. He hopes that others find his writings relatable and can learn from his experiences.

**EMILY BAKER** is a student and writer from East Tennessee who is good at baking and less good at keeping plants alive. She specializes in poetry and short fiction, but just loves the art of a good story in any form. She wants to cultivate a lifelong love of learning in herself and others, for all manner of things from history to woodworking to languages. She believes we live in a fascinating world and wants to know and experience it as deeply as possible.

**HUGH COOK** attends the University of California Santa Barbara studying writing and literature. He has authored a collection titled *The Day it Became a Circle* (Afterworld Books). His poetry has been published in *Tipton Poetry Journal*, *Ariel Chart*, *Muddy River Poetry Review*, and *Blue Unicorn*.

ALLISON LEE CRAFT is a graduating senior at Virginia Tech majoring in cinema with minors in creative writing and leadership/social change. She is a passionate and enthusiastic writer, director, and producer. Along with film, Allison Lee is an accomplished and published writer and photographer. She has been published many times by *Silhouette Magazine* for her poetry and photography and is excited to branch out to *Red Cedar Review*. After graduation, Allison Lee will be attending the Sundance Film Festival and traveling cross country with her dog, Dolly May, most likely writing poetry and taking photos for as long her Silverado will carry them.

CONNOR CROWLEY is a fourth-year student at Willamette University in Salem, Oregon. He studies mathematics and creative writing, focusing primarily on creative nonfiction. His writing often explores the mundane and characters who have odd relationships with the public eye. He is currently working on a choose-your-own-adventure novel and spending quality time with his unruly pet rats.

LUCAS CURTIS is a twenty-one-year-old artist from a village called Dimondale, about twenty minutes south of East Lansing. He is a junior at Michigan State University currently pursuing a BA in graphic design. He has been illustrating mainly with graphite pencils and charcoal for as long as he can remember. Using Instagram as a main display for his work, he has received recognition from a broad range of audiences which include Hollywood celebrities such as Chris Pratt, Martin Sensmeier, and Lolo Jones to name a few. His inspiration comes from the huge support from his family, his uncle Keith, and his dear friends.

CORINNE DAVENPORT is an Eastern Michigan University student studying written communications and creative writing. Loving words from a young age, she told the entire fourth-grade student body during an assembly that she was going to be a writer. Corinne loves to experiment with poetry and prose and parataxis, often mixing the three. For the future, she would like to continue on to have entire collections of work published, sharing what she truly loves to do.

**HAYDEN R. FROEHLICH** is an undergraduate cinema and creative writing student at the University of Iowa. Hayden explores his love of art and storytelling through writing, cinema, animation, and photography. What Hayden will create next is unclear to everyone including Hayden. Sometimes he writes or films stories about a time-traveling ghost musician, a pansexual superhero who can't touch the ground, or a sentient stop-motion dry-erase sphere. His works explore themes of motion, emotion and work towards better inclusion for the queer community.

**KATLYN FURLONG** is a senior at California University of Pennsylvania where she majors in English with a concentration in creative writing. Katlyn has been published in *Litro Magazine* and works as an editor for an online literary magazine and as a writing consultant. She is from Coal Center, Pennsylvania, a small town with a whopping population of 176 people. She writes mostly poetry and creative nonfiction and shamelessly lives in pajama pants.

**ELLIS GIBSON** is a transgender, disabled poet most recently educated as an undergraduate at The Ohio State University. Ellis has had more encounters with chickens than with foxes, and is interested in manipulating language to approach the unsayable word, story, memory, or body.

**RACHEL HAGERMAN** is studying English with a concentration in writing, rhetorics, and literacies at Barrett, The Honors College at Arizona State University. She currently works as a freelance writer, teaching assistant, *Superstition Review* editor-in-chief, and ASU Senior Writing Mentor. She is also the founding editor and editor-in-chief of the ASU student organization, *The Spellbinding Shelf Book Bloggers*. Passionate about literature, she plans to pursue a career in editing and publishing after graduation.

**PHOENIX KENDALL** is a non-binary poet studying creative writing at Eastern Michigan University. Their work is forthcoming in *Glass Mountain*. Their work often examines the crossfire between



marginalized identities and the anxiety of the world around them. They are a big fan of their two pet rats, Holden and Phoebe.

CHRISTINE A. MACKENZIE studied at the University of Michigan Ann Arbor with majors in English, creative writing, and psychology. She is a crisis counselor and facilitates a mental health support group. In the future, she aspires to publish her poetry books and become a psychotherapist.

EMILY MILLER is currently an undergraduate senior at Saint Leo University in St. Leo, Florida, where she is studying English with a specialization in creative writing. Her work has been published in *The Dandelion Review*, *Sand Hill Review*, and is forthcoming in *The Dollhouse* and *Inklette*. When not writing, she can be found cuddling with her five cats and/or devouring frozen pizza. Connect with her on Instagram @actualprincessemily.

VIOLET MITCHELL is a Denver-based writer and artist. She earned a Bachelor of Applied Science in cognitive literary studies and is completing an MFA degree in creative writing, both from Regis University. Her work has been published in *Heavy Feather Review*, *The Blue Route*, *Sixfold*, *Word for/ Word*, *ANGLES*, *Furrow*, and several other journals. She received the Robert A. O'Sullivan, S.J. Memorial Award for Excellence in Writing in 2019.

AMANDA PIEKARZ is a young writer who is currently a senior at the University of Akron. Amanda has worked as the fiction editor for *The AshBelt* and as the arts and entertainment editor for *The Buchtelite* at the University of Akron. Amanda will be graduating as an English major with a double minor in psychology and creative writing. In her spare time, she loves kicking back with a good Stephen King novel, but her all-time favorite author will always be J.K. Rowling because Rowling inspired her love of reading as a child.

NICOLE PUSCAS has been surrounded by art for as long as she can remember. Her mother showed Nicole her graphite, colored pencil, and watercolor pieces when she was younger, and she has

been a huge inspiration ever since. The main reason she really got into watercolor was because of her mother. Without the materials and resources available to her, she would not be where she is now, and she is forever grateful. Her whole family inspires most of her work because the love and care she has for them makes her want to honor them in some sort of way.

NICOLE RICO has always been drawn to the occult and the idea of unseen beings living amongst us. Her work revolves around the concept of an Other: a living, breathing consciousness that inhabits us, our space, or follows our lives unseen yet aware of our every move. The Other can be anything from an inhuman entity, unearthly beings or a secondary consciousness. Within her photos she explores the Other, their inward dwelling, and their entanglement within our lives.

MARTHA ROSE has always had an interest in art. In college, she has continued her art education with 2D and 3D classes, commission pieces, and research projects. Her work is in a variety of different mediums, focusing primarily on the depiction of the inner person through varying methods of portraiture. In the future, she plans to continue her art education through college, exhibiting her work in various locations and eventually teaching art at a public school.

KAYLA SIMON is a first-year student at the University of Connecticut, where she is majoring in English with a concentration in creative writing. There are few things she loves as much as poetry, but chocolate chip cookie dough ice cream definitely comes close. When she isn't writing or reading, you can find her taking photos for her photography business or looking at the stars.

LEWIS SMITH is a junior computer science major and mathematics minor at Missouri State University. Although not pursuing a degree in creative writing or English, he has an avid interest in poetry, essays, and postmodernist fiction. He frequently writes on topics such as midwestern living, social issues, politics, and film.

NICOLAS STEVENS is an undergraduate student who was born in Vermont and studies creative writing at Pacific University. He has worked for Pacific's undergraduate literary magazine *Silk Road: A Literary Crossroads* as an assistant editor and has also had work accepted into the 2019 National Undergraduate Literature Conference and the 2019 Northwest Conference in the Humanities.

TAYLOR ANNE THACKABERRY is in her fourth year at Virginia Tech studying computer science and creative writing. She hails from Purcellville, Virginia, a place with far too many gravel roads. Although she considers herself a prose writer, most of her published works are poetry. She has been published in *Silhouette*, the Virginia Tech literary magazine, and was a finalist for the Steger Poetry Prize in 2018. In her free time, she enjoys paddleboarding and trying to find her place in the world.

HEATHER TRUETT is a mom to teen boys, a student at the University of Memphis, and a slightly heretical pastor's wife. *The Scientific Method of Getting Luckie*, her debut novel, releases in 2021.

JULIANNA VAUGHAN is a junior at Shippensburg University with a passion for writing fictional short stories. She is working toward achieving a Bachelor of Arts in English with a concentration in writing. Her plans for the future are simply to see where life takes her.

KAITLYN VON BEHREN is a nineteen-year-old poet currently studying English at Ripon College. Her poetry has appeared or is forthcoming in the *Oakland Arts Review*, *Canvas*, and *Wisconsin's Best Emerging Poets 2019*. Her poems have also been honored by the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards and Button Poetry.

DAMIAN WANG is a city boy who wears his heart on his sleeve and enjoys rainy days, hunting for boba, eating ramen, reading comics, doing JoJo poses, and inhaling the dusty aroma of old books. He has an eight-year-old cat named Miu Miu who likes to play feline editor by bodily key-smashing incoherent lines into his works. A lover of

poetry, Damian currently majors in English at UCLA with a concentration in creative writing. As the son of a diplomat, Damian uses his extensive cultural experiences as the backdrop of his writing, while exploring themes of gender, race, and loss.

SHELBY WEISBURG is currently a third-year student at Willamette University, where she is majoring in English with a focus in creative writing and expects to graduate in May 2020. She has been previously published in *Oakland Arts Review*, Cornell's *Rainy Day*, *FLARE: The Flagler Review*, and *Blacklist Journal*. When she's not writing, she works in the Oregon State Legislature, watches re-runs of SNL, and enjoys bouldering. She calls Colorado home.

HALEY WINANS is a ceramicist, organic gardener, and writer from Annapolis, Maryland. She has poetry published in *Scarab Literary Magazine* as well as *The Shore*. As a senior at Salisbury University, she's studying environmental studies and creative writing, with specific focuses on environmental justice, sustainable agriculture, and poetry. In all of her realms of interest, she is heavily influenced by the intrinsic connection between humans and the environment, and the impacts they have on one another.

KYLE WRIGHT is a Chicago-based writer, musician, and visual artist. His work has appeared in *Subterranean Blue Poetry*, *antinarative journal*, and *Bleached Butterfly*, and as part of *Really Serious Literature's Disappearing Chapbook Series*. He has surfed couches across Europe, lived on a mountain in Colorado, worked as a wedding DJ, and played blues music at old folks' homes. Currently, he shelves library books and sometimes tries to write them.

