

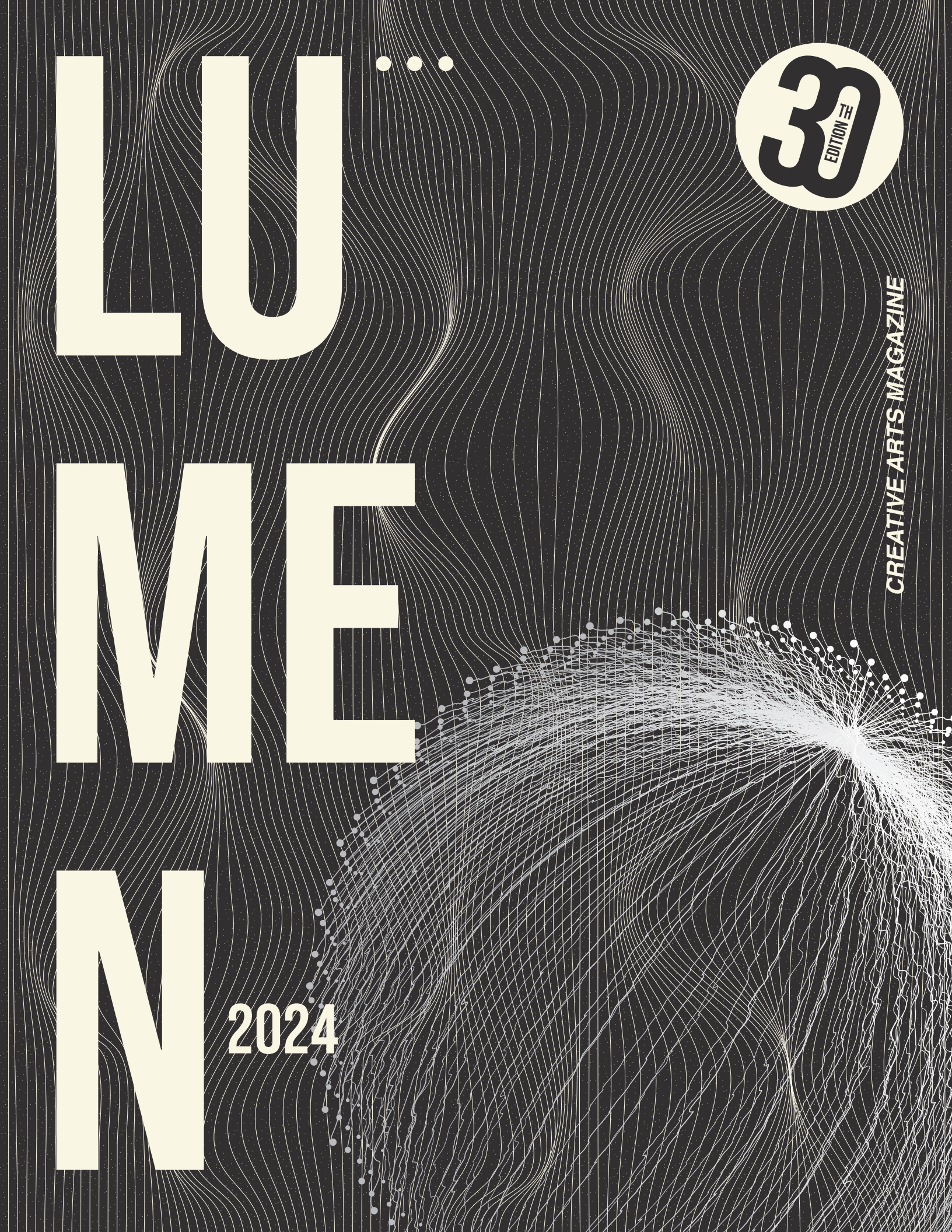
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M E

N 2024

CREATIVE ARTS MAGAZINE



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### CREATIVE WRITING

**1st Place** • Sofia Loiacono, for the poem “Fault Lines” (pg. 25)  
**2nd Place** • Brenda Medina, for the poem “Boots” (pg. 48)  
**3rd Place** • Corinne Voelker, for the poem “S(leap)ing” (pg. 79)

### LITERARY ANALYSIS

**Winner** • Madison Jukkola, for the essay “Black Feminism and the  
Mothering of Text”

## PATRICIA S. YAHN JURIED STUDENT SHOW

**1st Place** • Hannah Duckett, Charcoal, “Proverbs 31” (pg. 22)  
**2nd Place** • Casandra Reese, Digital/Photo, “Dream of Me” (pg. 60)  
**3rd Place** • Grady Amundson, Mixed media sculpture, “The Sum of Its Parts” (pg. 27)  
**Honorable Mention** • Abigail Wisniewski, Ceramic, “A-Ipine Retreat” (pg. 11)  
**Honorable Mention** • Gillian Samul, Mixed media, “A Field Guide to Insects” (pg. 30)  
**Honorable Mention** • Alyssa Szychowski, Digital, “Save the Reef” (pg. 38)  
**Juror’s Award** • Alyssa Poleski, Digital print, “Sty-led in Bonaire” (pg. 81)



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**PROVERBS 31**  
HANNAH DUCKETT

# VANITY IN DENIM

JOHN CARROLL

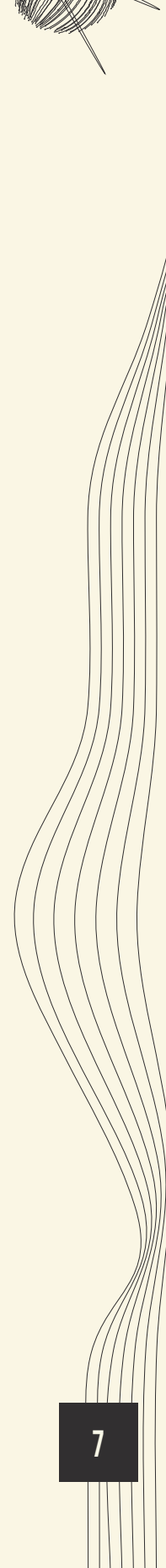
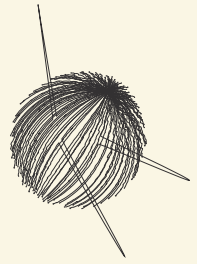
Flying down the basement stairs, in her head  
she was Anna Karenina. My drunk lungs froze  
even my bones, my hands started shuffling  
the wrinkled, leather arms of that couch  
Medusa here so unlovingly set in stone.

My head turned down while bottoms went up  
I pitied the worm, but he was the lucky one.  
To have drowned in the drink, what a way to go  
the bastard saved himself from Kylie May  
and the voice that brought Jericho down.

Her cauldron boiled a strange kind of brew  
a new bubbly, bursting hot air. How I prayed  
for the taste of a holy water, just a sip  
could have saved me—toiling and troubled  
knees peaking while my dignity leaked.

Just when I thought the heat done me in  
Fido came down strutting into our little den of sin.  
A tinge of blood brought in that hound  
to lick the sultry air, and laze at the feet  
of Kylie May, her travesty the Queen of Heels.

Mother Mary long gone. Prayers unanswered.  
Lilith at home in her lair. I'd love to scream  
but I still have my reason for being there.  
So I take my place within my head, and drink.  
Another round could put me to sleep instead.



# THE BLOOMER AND THE SUNRISE

ASHLEY BARLETTA

Early bloomer  
feel the sun  
reach for you.  
Feel her arms  
hug you and grow  
into the light  
be one with light  
be light.  
And when the sun  
goes below the horizon  
let yourself  
be entangled with the darkness  
let it be part of you  
be part of it  
darkness is in you  
it is in all of us.  
That does not mean  
darkness is all of you.

She picked dandelions and white clovers to surprise her mom with a bouquet when she called her in for supper. They were small enough to put in a medicine cup with a little water, and she didn't know the difference from a vase. They were always dead by the next day, which upset her but she would always go outside to pick more anyway.

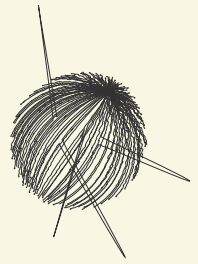
In summer she would go outside with mom and dad and pulled dandelions out of the grass before dad mowed. That was before he started spraying for weeds. She stopped picking dandelions because there were no more in the yard and they told her it was disrespectful to pick from the neighbor's yard. The neighbors didn't really mind but she didn't want to offend them anyway.

Young one  
wait for your petals  
they have not budded yet  
do not rush it  
do not Miracle-Gro  
you know it does not work like that.  
Stay green  
and know if the rain  
pounds down on you  
it is not your fault  
and believe me  
the sun won't be gone  
forever.

We have one spot in the front where snowdrops come up every spring. I don't know who planted







them, but I always knew winter was over when I saw them. I knew everything would be alright because we made it through another cold season. I dream of them sprouting up in the yard of my new home, and I always think about planting them, but never look up whether they are native to the climate or whether they would survive.

We have a bush of bleeding hearts that bloom early summer. I pick one to bring to my mom. She is surprised. She is smiling. I did good.

She taught me how to weed and tend to a garden. She showed me how to water the plants and we watched as the squirrels dug up the tulip bulbs and ate them one by one.

I don't think I ever bought her flowers from the store.

Early bloomer  
it is time  
for your roots  
to come out  
free of ground  
and sky  
and atmosphere  
you can be everywhere  
now.

When I moved here, I grew marigolds in this pot. They had the red on the tips my father liked. I was taller than the bushes lining the alley in the back, and my son was born the day the snowdrops bloomed. I wore dresses back then and carried him close to me. I painted the living room walls a border of green leaves and blue birds.

I showed my children books about animals and plants and watched them play in the backyard where the bushes grew. Every summer morning, the crows woke up my daughters, but I yelled up the stairs to make sure they got out of bed so I could go to work.

Mum watched them play when she wasn't too afraid to let them go outside. They should have gone outside more. But that wasn't so long ago. Letting the past be the past would mean letting it go, and I didn't teach my children that. They are with their past selves as they are with my past self and we all move in fluid motion.

Late bloomer  
be one with me  
make yourself  
into a little trinket  
to be carried around  
you will fit snugly  
on my windowsill  
rest.

Be everywhere  
in the sun  
in the stars  
in the rain

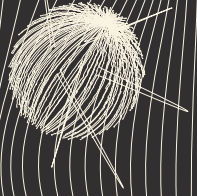
in the wind  
in the snow  
in this living room.  
You are one now,  
and I love you.

There were flowers everywhere when she returned to the ground when the dirt turned to mud in the rain. I remember the day—it was sunshine and rain at the same time. Mother Death and Father Time did their due diligence, and that was the last day I prayed. We kill flowers to give to living people grieving the dead. We kill flowers that color the lives of the gray, and plant again in spring.

We are the Anthropocene. It is easy to become the thing you fight against, but all humans are human. I tried to tell my dad not to spray the yard with chemicals, but he always knows more than I do about the things I learn in biology class. I never understood why we have to put dead bodies in a casket in a vault to protect the casket, as if someday we would dig her up again. I guess it is religion's fault. I guess whenever there is some part of a ceremony that doesn't make sense, it's nine times out of ten religion's fault.

Humans can't stand the thought of being eaten by some lowly parasite, or becoming nutrients for the soil whose cultivation they depend on. But she is of the earth, and she remains there. She would not have a fancy ritual—her death not determined by some man in a robe. We buried her in the garden she cultivated when I was a girl. We planted more flowers that year so our whole yard would burst with every color, lighten our own gray souls. We rejoiced in the dark soil and the life she gave to the flowers. I didn't pick or prune them anymore because she takes care of them.

Old one  
remember you will not  
depart from this land  
once you've left it.  
You will heal  
and grow again  
with everyone  
before  
and everyone  
after  
you.  
They will be here.  
We will be here too.  
Grow in your brokenness  
let the rain  
and wind  
and snow  
come from your own heart  
because you didn't deserve  
the conditions you lived in  
but live in them now.  
Be there now.  
Promise me you'll be there.



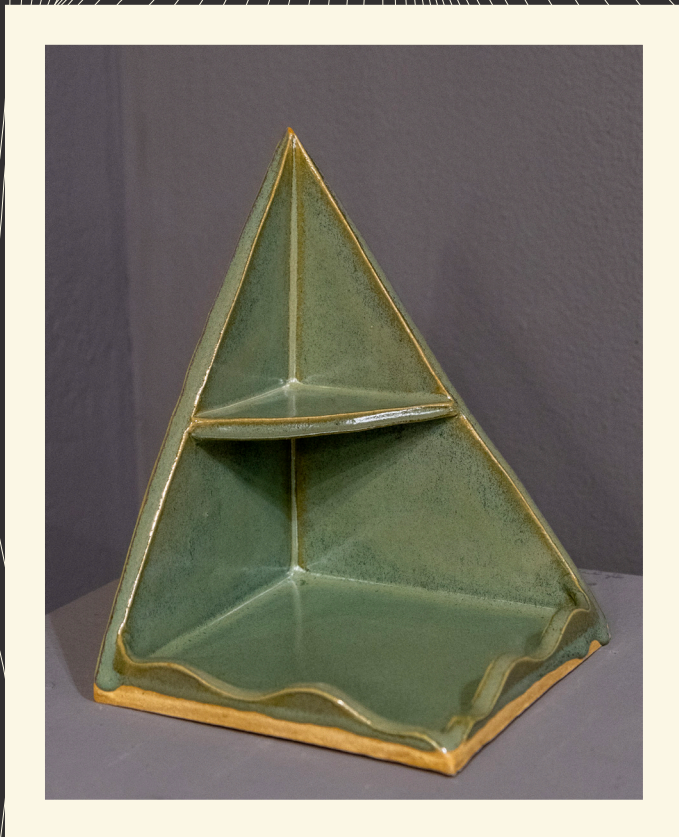
**3D PORTRAIT**  
LATA VISHESH



**A-LPINE RETREAT**  
ABIGAIL WISNIEWSKI



**CAT BOWL**  
LATA VISHESH



**CORNER ORGANIZER**  
CAMERON DOUBET



**BOOK BUTTER DISH**  
LATA VISHESH

# I'M NO POET

REID BROWN

I don't write poetry  
It doesn't come to me  
in soft spoken dreams  
or in the wave's tide  
Or in the wild spaces

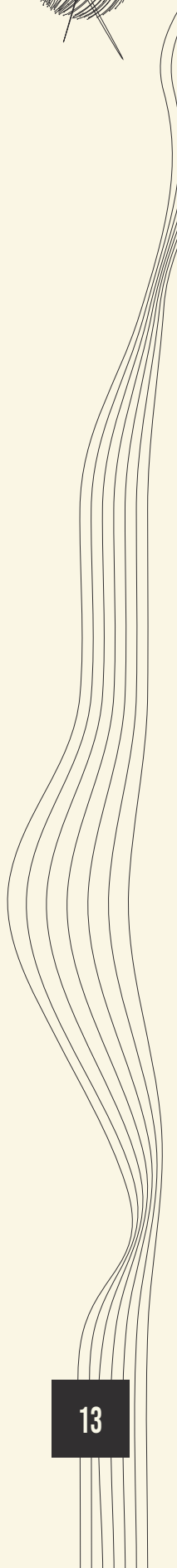
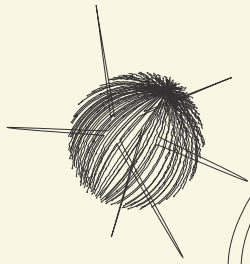
I don't share your gifts of words  
of tongues of honeyed wit  
my mind runs, too literal, too lazy  
too slow, too fast, too brass, too coarse.  
Not coarse enough.

my progenitors all are poets  
but I don't bear my soul  
with grace on swift wings or flowing things  
pour forth from font of feelings  
or make life spring from simple words

But I am no poet  
with no grand struggle  
no crusade nor quest  
I come to burgle from the libraries  
To steal stories from grand steeples  
Indiana Jones style

I don't belong among you writers and you dreamers  
in dark groves and strung out pouches  
in creaking chairs and ripped out couches  
it finds me

in mends, stitches, and a darn  
in small patches of colored yarn  
it still finds me  
cold garages at end of day  
and in its own unique way  
A poet's hymn comes calling



# TOMATO AND I

## AVA VOELKER

I cut into its firm flesh with a serrated knife  
It fought me  
something a good tomato wouldn't do

Ripe tomatoes yield and melt  
bursting forth into juice  
When you simply look at them

But why

Yes, why  
Should I get what I want?

Fight me  
I do not deserve to always have what I want  
Just as I should not be indulging in a tomato  
Alone  
at night

Salt and pepper do nothing to tenderize it  
A ripe tomato should not be crunchy and sour  
Ripe tomatoes  
are sweet and smooth

But then  
Why should it taste mature when it is not?

I understand not yet being ripe for what is happening to you

It is summer  
But the tomato is cool to the touch  
Pallid  
It is not rosy and blushing in the sun

Ironic  
To be  
Not in the right place  
At the right time

Not living up  
To what you are supposed to be

I understand you, tomato

Not able to bloom  
Even in the midst of your shining season

Oh tomato, you and I are one in the same

You disappoint me, tomato  
I disappoint me, tomato

You have sacrificed your life for my ungrateful stomach  
Oh tomato, poor tomato  
I will soon become sick of you and of the sun

You will ripen to death overnight

And I will ignore you until I no longer can

Then I will throw you out  
And forget about you  
About summer

Oh tomato  
Never appreciated when you are just perfect  
Always broken too young  
Unrealized in your prime  
Never becoming  
who you will be

Forgotten until your ideas  
Your heart  
Your body  
Your love  
Melt into the earth  
Musty and acrid

Poor tomato

Sitting in the fruit basket  
Too tender for the fridge where the other vegetables go  
Not quite fitting in with the apples and clementines

Unloved  
Unchosen  
Uneaten

Poor tomato  
I understand you, tomato

I'm sorry, tomato  
But for you and I  
This is life

So for now  
Ripen, tomato

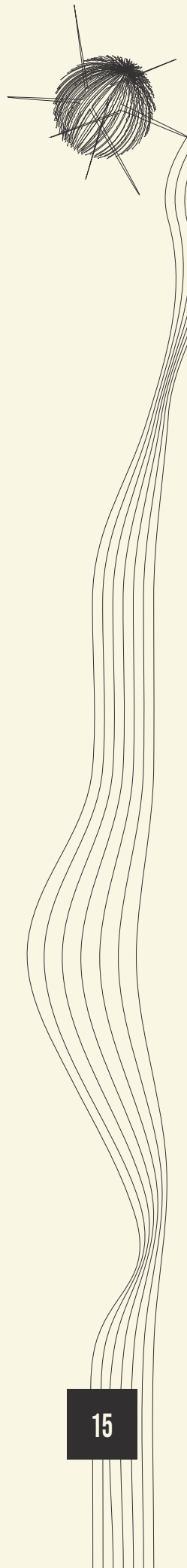
Perhaps tomorrow night  
You will be all that you are meant to be  
And I will be satisfied with you  
And with myself

And you will be deep crimson  
I, blushing  
You, soft but not squishy  
And I tenderhearted

We will be full  
You of juice  
Me of ideas

We will be desired and warm  
We will be the most perfect blossomed embodiment  
of our most wonderful  
and greatest  
potential

Blinding proof  
Vessels  
That the sun pours into  
We proudly display the work  
It has done in us



# LIQUID COURAGE

## ELENA BENGEL

They know Charlie by name now. As soon as he walked in, she smiled at him, “Hey, Charlie,” and he didn’t know how to handle it. If she knew his name, then they all knew his name. He wore a name tag sometimes, but how was he supposed to remember that when she knew his name and said it *that way*.

“Hey, Charlie.”

Jesus Christ, if this didn’t show how lonely he was. Overthinking about a store clerk. But, it wasn’t just today. It was every day. Every day she worked, at least.

This day, the day he realized she knew his name, she already had a pint of Platinum 7x waiting for him on the counter. She smiled at him and asked him if that was all he wanted. It was, but his brain panicked and he grabbed two 99 Banana shooters and placed them down in front of her. She smiled in mild surprise and started ringing the items out.

“Long day at work?” she asked. Her voice was smooth. Her hands looked smooth. How old could she be? He had been trying to guess for weeks, and today decided to settle on a high ball of 26.

“It’s been busy.” Is all he could get out of his throat. He wasn’t much of a talker to begin with, but he couldn’t stop thinking about the way she said his name. *Charlie*. How could someone even say a name like that?

He remembered nothing else of the conversation. He didn’t remember the total of the drinks. He remembered her finger patiently tapping on the screen to print the receipt. He remembered her smile when she told him to have a good rest of his shift. He remembered seeing her blonde hair held up by a black clip.

This scene, this distraction happened only last week, but he felt like the details were fading faster than ever before. He saw her every week, roughly 3-4 times if not more, depending on how many times he went into the store. His empty bottle of Platinum now sits on his coffee table while he stretches his brain for specific details of her face. Her hair. Her hands.

Charlie hadn’t been in a relationship in years. He didn’t avoid girls, and he couldn’t even say they avoided him, but nothing ever went past mild flirting once they found out his full-time job was at a gas station. Everyone claims that status symbols like that don’t matter, but they always do. It’s another front to hide how shallow we all are. Charlie wondered if she was shallow. He wondered if she would care that he worked at a gas station, or that maybe he had too much to drink on the daily. Would she willingly go on a date with him? His liquid courage seeped through his bloodstream, giving him ways and reasons to achieve this task. Would he ask before or after he bought his liquor? Would he buy anything at all?

If she did want to go on a date with Charlie, he would be royally f\*\*\*\*\* since he didn’t have a vehicle or any spending money. All of his money went to his rent and his booze. He could give it up, the Platinum. Even for a week. If he didn’t buy a bottle (or two) every day for a full week, he could save almost \$70.

No, no. If he did this, he would never see her. How would he ask her if he didn’t go in every day?

He didn’t work tomorrow, but he saw someone needed an evening shift taken in the prep kitchen. He noticed she worked every Thursday evening, but that didn’t encourage him to take it. Not at all.

“You sure about that?”

Brennan, Charlie’s coworker, continued prepping the burrito wraps while responding. He was the best one at it. No matter how much s\*\*\* someone put in one of those wraps, he was able to fold it like nothing had been put in between that flimsy tortilla.

Charlie, after downing some more liquid courage before his shift, just casually proposed his date-getting idea to Brennan. He didn’t understand why he did it when they rarely talked about anything





serious. But Charlie didn't think this was that serious. Right?

"Am I sure about what?" Charlie asked, losing focus on the conversation already. Brennan started on another wrap.

"You're telling me you want to ask out the liquor store clerk? The one you see every single day."

The tone in his voice was a little more inquisitive than usual.

"Uh, yeah. You think it's a bad idea?"

"I didn't say that," Brennan answered quickly. "Do you know what her name is?"

It was such a simple question. A question that he didn't know the answer to. Charlie knew she rarely wore a name tag, and when she did he didn't have the balls or the time to give a good look at it. He knew it wasn't the most common name in the world, or else he would have had to remember it. Did it start with an A? How had he not thought about this before? How had he neglected to even ask? The shame was almost immediate, but there's no way he'd let Brennan be the reason.

"Wouldn't you like to know." Charlie fired out, quick and hot. Brennan still wasn't facing him, but he had stopped in the middle of wrapping. Charlie could see him slightly shake his head, and he continued his monotonous routine.

He wondered what was stopping him from asking this girl out. They didn't know much about each other, but did anyone when they first begin dating?

He took a step out the back door. He had a leftover shooter from the other day. It didn't sting anymore when he downed them, they tasted like plastic or glue if anything else. He waited for his body to welcome the taste of freedom and confirmed in his mind: he was going to do it.

By the time he was on break, it was slightly past 6pm. He was practically shaking, and he couldn't tell if it was from nerves or the withdrawal. He hadn't had any Platinum since yesterday, but he didn't want to admit in any way, shape, or form that's what was giving him the shakes. He walked across the parking lot, past the large windows to get to the door. He could see her standing at the register, in her glory. Her hair was down and she was picking at her fingernails.

Hey, would you want to go out sometime? Hey, what's your phone number, would you wanna hang? Hey, what's your name?

When the bell dinged above his head, she turned her body slightly.

"Hey, Charlie."

The hairs on his arms stood straight up at the way she said his name. *How* can someone say a name like that? He could feel the saliva building up under his tongue.

Instead of walking around the register properly, he walked straight to it. She didn't pull out the Platinum right away.

"Pint of Platinum?" She asked casually, and her hand rested under the register, waiting to pull the bottle out for him. He was staring at her. Her lips looked wet and her skin shined with a surface layer of sweat from the day of work. Her hair curved away from her at the ends, and her eyes were rimmed with slight moon-shaped bags. He placed both of his hands on the counter to keep himself steady.

"Yes, please," he croaked out. He couldn't look directly at her, afraid she could see right through him.

"Five sixteen is your total."

His credit card slid into the card reader, and she lightly tapped the screen, waiting for the receipt.

"Hey." The greeting came out short and slightly louder than usual. Even with his words and functions lagging behind, her head in one fluid motion turned towards him. She blinked once and tilted

it, giving him a challenge. It only took him less than thirty seconds to realize she was waiting for him to continue.

“Let’s go out. Sometime.” His breath hitched at the end. The card reader was beeping incessantly, begging for him to take out his card. She held his eye contact. It made his whole body tense, but he couldn’t look away. When she finally broke eye contact, the corner of her lips turned up in uncertainty.

“I actually have a fiancé,” is all she said. No sorry, no other explanation, no thank you even.

Charlie kept staring. Brain racing off the track and into trees. His vision started blurring, and he felt himself shake uncontrollably.

“Can you please take your card out?” she asked, quieter now. Her eyes held concern, but her body seemed farther away than normal, like she was already setting up more barriers than before.

“You never said anything about a fiancé.”

“There was no need to. We’re not friends,” she shot back immediately, as if she was waiting for him to say that. He ripped his card out of the reader.

What a f\*\*\*\*\* blow. A. F\*\*\*\*\*. Blow.

“Are you okay? You don’t look too good.”

He looked up to her once again, feeling lightheaded and so hot. The oven inside him had been left on for too long, and he couldn’t keep the bottle upright. He couldn’t see her anymore. Blurred vision and blurred lines, her figure was nothing but an obstacle now. His head pounded to be let out.

“Obviously I’m not f\*\*\*\*\* okay!” He shouted the last two words, spit falling from his lips from the anticipation. He gripped the Platinum and stormed out the exit door. If anyone said anything, he couldn’t hear it. They could be calling the cops, but his body wasn’t letting him care. He walked across the parking lot to the back of his gas station, which could’ve taken 10 minutes or an hour.

He broke off the Platinum cap. Twisting it took too much work. His mouth waited to taste the paste, but it didn’t happen. He stared at the open bottle, the liquid just slightly below the pour line. His stomach churned, he had the worst case of cotton mouth, and all he wanted to do was never see the bottle again.

Before he knew it, the whole bottle was dumped on the pavement. It left a taunting abstract watermark. He opened the dumpster lid and tossed the bottle in. His body felt heavy. Zero control of his limbs, of his back, his head. He blinked away the fog to see how bright the blue sky was. A cloudless day.

The prep kitchen was booming. Brennan was flying across the assembly line while his other coworkers cleaned up messes and refilled cigarettes from the back. Charlie put on an apron and a hair net for his beard. His break wasn’t even over yet, but he wasn’t hungry anymore. He wasn’t a lot of things anymore.

Brennan gave him a side eye while he slipped on latex gloves. Charlie looked back at him, giving a slight grin.

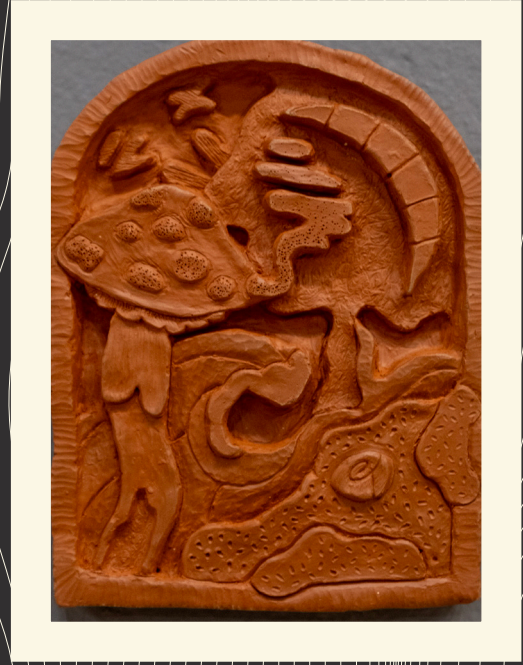
“So,” Brennan started. “What was her name?”

Charlie let out a hard, short laugh. His smile felt too big, but it felt so good on his cheeks. The tension.

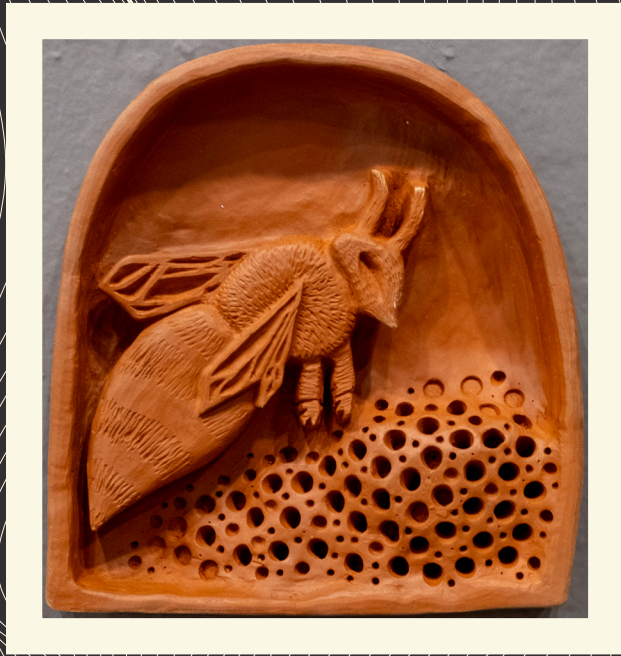
“Wouldn’t you like to know.”



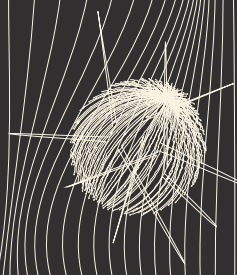
**SELF PORTRAIT RELIEF**  
HANNAH DUCKETT



**THE LOOKING GLASS**  
ALICIYA FORSYTHE



**APIARY ALTAR PIECE**  
MARLEY RAMON





**TERRARIUM OF MY MIND**  
ALYSSA SZYCHOWSKI



**GEOMETRIC SHAPE PHOTO MASHUP**  
JAMIE SENNETT

# DREAMS OF DIOGENES

JOHN CARROLL

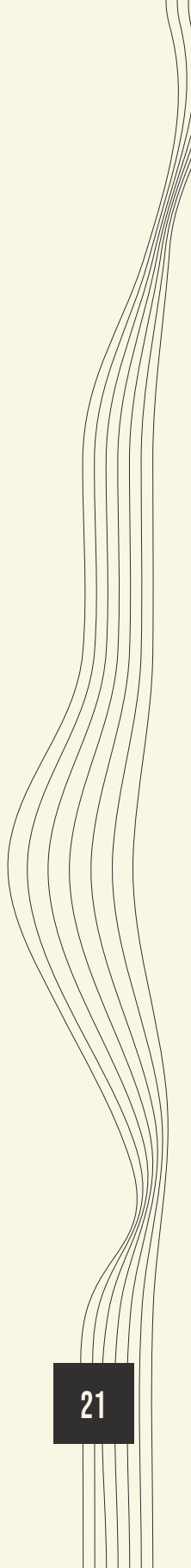
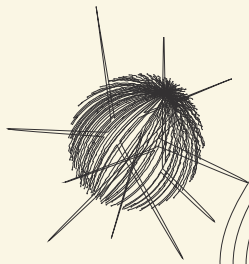
I see it all from the lonely park bench in the corner  
by the fountain, in my head. It's the water keeping me  
from the castles I see rising round my bed. Still the water—  
it flows as all the dogs come and go, leading their masters  
to kitschy circus shows. I get an itch when they moan  
and when they come my way—I cover my nose.

My back to the bench, slumping roundly in the seat  
my feet feel my soles as I ponder my lady at home.  
Hers are good enough to eat, but I dream of Diogenes  
and the sun blind to his eyes. Alexander is gone  
he's done building up his pride, like the castles I see  
stone sheets covering a myopic mind's eye.

She lays in white satin, laughing like the Joker—  
my face in the mud again. Kicking in the dust  
blanketing my bedrock of sober, steely charms.  
Enough with that velvet chain—all that humdrum  
molded from a graveyard of lost loves, blood  
sweat, pomp, and every circumstance under the sun.

I'm waging war with myself and the dogs keep barking.  
The feeling is gone, still the thought goes on ringing  
that the lady loves the shine in her diamonds, prizing  
sapphire eyes so clear, that fail to see the dogs playing.  
They love their hair more than the bread I pain to share  
but if she dreams of Diogenes she'll be on her own way.

Now I think that all these oddities would drive Diogenes insane.  
He'll be burning up the world looking for an honest man—  
enjoying the sun deep in the shade. See the dogs  
as they all come and go, leading their masters  
to whatever God knows. How simple, that dream  
to be a dog and want for nothing more than a bone.



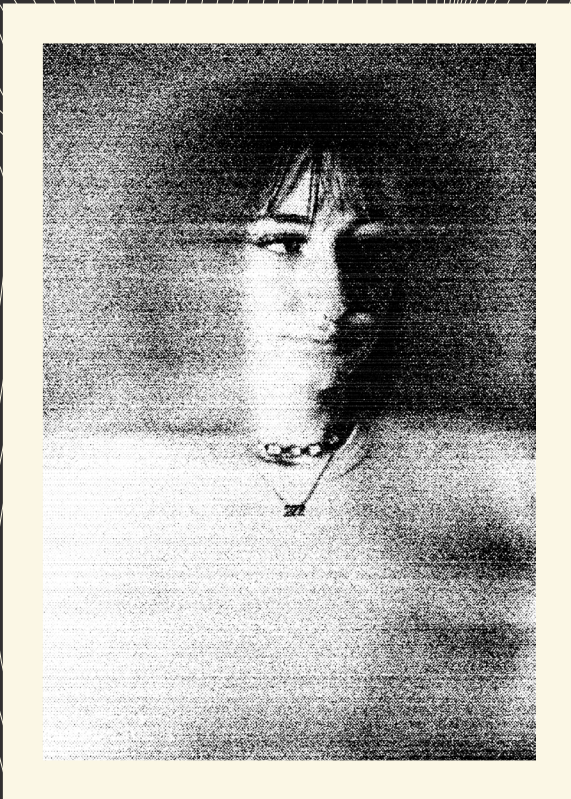
# I AM YOUR SPANIEL

## CARA BONA VITA

A beast is what they call me.  
A mangey, rotten old thing  
with canines falling from my gums  
and musty paws weighted by blunt claws.  
They say, "You love like a dog,"  
I say, "I can love like no other."  
I cling to the leash and the collar.  
I lick the hand that feeds  
and I nuzzle the hand that beats.  
I can't help it if my heart  
thinks for my brain.  
I favor loyalty until it kills me.  
I will let you pull the leash tighter  
and as I raise my head higher,  
I will look at you with the eyes of Argos,  
dropping my ears and wagging  
my tail as I revere you like  
the god you never were.  
I'll sleep at the foot of your bed  
if it means I get to be with you.  
I will give up every piece of myself  
like something not worth loving back.



**GAZEBO**  
SAMANTHA MCDONALD



**DOTTED LINES**  
JENNA LUTZ



**DREAMING OF PEACE**  
SARA SIMPSON



**INVERTED**  
VICTORIA PRAIRO



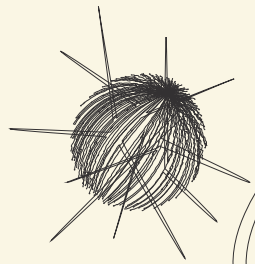
# FAULT LINES

SOFIA LOIACONO

We come from nothing into nothing—  
from a gash in the earth, a fissure underfoot.  
Every night someone dreams of soil splitting.  
Every night the Earth opens its mouth, revealing—  
yawning void. Gaping wound. Impermanence.  
Everyone everywhere, already home. Waiting for more.

We are born mid-earthquake, mid-decay, mid-succession.  
We build our lives on unstable ground.  
We dig our hands into warm dirt,  
bury seeds in the sun-bleached soil.  
We think nothing of it. We fear everything.

We return to a nothing that is not empty. A beating heart.  
Kneel at its altar. Bow your head.  
Cast fear into void before it hits the marrow. Offer it up.  
Offer meaning, caught from the air like summer fireflies.  
Offer warmth and hand-grown flowers.  
You will heal into the earth, gentle.  
It will not leave a scar.



# DEAR JOEY,

## VANESSA NOLAN

Dear Joey,

They told me I should write letters to you, so I guess this is that. I'm not sure how to begin. I'm not sure how this will end. I don't know if I can find the words to explain my disbelief. Every day as I pass through the campus, I feel like I see you, like I could just go up and talk to you, ask you about your day, your classes, your summer. Every thin boy with blonde hair is a disappointment, a stab in the chest, because I know it's not you, and it can never be you. Sometimes I pretend that it is you, just going about the normalcy of life. What a privilege it is to experience the normalcy of life. How easily it can be stripped from someone. How easily life can be stolen. It just isn't right.

Dear Joey,

I can't drive well now; I panic on the highway. I must pull over, and I can't breathe, and my heart flutters and feels like it will stop. Sometimes I almost pass out. I am so terrified. I am so terrified for you. How were you so brave? I could never be as brave as you were, stepping into the unknown fearlessly. If I could be a sliver of the person you were, I would live a successful life. I have accepted that maybe there is nothing beyond this life. I don't believe you're nowhere though; I know you're somewhere. Hopefully somewhere nice. But for me, if there is nothing, nothing beyond human life, I must be okay with it. We all leave. It just isn't fair that some are made to leave early.

Dear Joey,

I see them from a distance, how they go on loving you, how they try to stay strong, push on, do good in school, go out with friends. I see how she smiles, how she flawlessly succeeds in everything she does, how she keeps her spirits up and spreads kindness to all. I know you are so proud of her. I see how he betters himself, how he returned to his faith, how he pushes himself to triumph in your honor. I know you are taking care of him. I see how they speak your name, share your memories, laugh about all the jokes you shared. They remember how effortlessly funny and compassionate you were, how you could be friends with anyone, make anyone smile. They pass your memory around, through words, whispers, hugs, and tears. We catch it in our palms, and hold it close for eternity.

Dear Joey,

Why couldn't they do anything? Why couldn't they save you? It isn't fair. It isn't fair. I will never understand why the good die young. Why do they take young, righteous souls when there is violence and evil lurking through the crevices of the Earth? Why would a God do such a thing? I can never understand. How can they force you to leave it all behind, your family, your friends, your love? I am furious at the world for its senseless taking. I just cannot understand. How can someone be twenty-one and staring at the face of eternity?

Dear Joey,

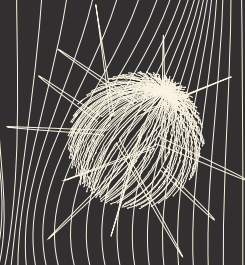
We let you fly away forever today. We put our hands on your casket and left a piece of our souls with yours. The hills were heavenly, the most serene pastures I've ever gazed upon. Your final resting place is fit for angels, and I will never forget how I was overcome with the beauty of it all. If we have to leave you to the sky, I am glad it is here in these slumbering meadows. I will never forget how we wept, how we said goodbye.

Dear Joey,

I wrote a song for you. They're singing it in the spring, the same season that will bring the blooming flowers to your resting place. We must continue our lives, but we carry you with us wherever we go. I still remember sharing the old classics with you, how I was about to read Dostoevsky, how we were going to talk about it. I still remember when I came upon the email, feeling like I was drowning even when I wasn't in the pool anymore. I still remember how selfless you were, how you came to watch me sing, how you cared about all of your friends so deeply. I still remember the way you and Ben would joke, how I would laugh until I cried. I will always remember. Until we meet again.

Your friend,

Vanessa



**THE SUM OF ITS PARTS**  
GRADY AMUNDSON

# FALL

## AVA VOELKER

“It’s beautiful, isn’t it?” she mused. The wind swooped through her hair and displaced strands of it from her hairdo and onto her cheek and lips and around her ears, the way it did to the leaves that scampered along the sidewalk beneath her. The tress stood like models, tall and proud. It was as if they were undressing after a long season of show, their gowns of red, orange, and yellow falling at the base of their trunks. The sunlight of dusk created a hazy spotlight on the glimmering leaves and made more eloquent the shadows of the trees.

The thin man sitting next to her on the park bench looked at her and at the trees. He looked at the leaves on the ground. He listened to their cacophony of rustling scratches as they scurried around, their dry scraping crescendoed with each breeze.

“Yes, indeed it is” he stated after a long pause in which the wind had begun to rouse the leaves into a rattling cadenza of whispered ooohs and aaahhhs. It seemed as though he was going to say something more. His lips parted and his eyes moved from their fixed place on the brown bark of the trees, but he hesitated.

He looked over at the woman again, who had her head down. She would have been looking at her lap if her eyes were open, but they were not. She was listening to the breathing of the sky and of this man sitting next to her and picturing her heart inside of her chest. Feeling for proof of its existence in the warm parts of her wrists and neck. She wondered if the wind did not, perhaps, have a heartbeat. Or if the trees did not breathe as steadily as she did on the park bench as she sat and listened.

His soft statement made her look up.

“But it’s so much change,” he murmured freely.

“And truthfully...” he looked up again at the trees losing their leaves. He wondered if it didn’t hurt at all, or if the trees were embarrassed to be naked in front of the people and animals passing by.

“There is death involved. Too much perhaps.” He leaned back and slung his arm around the top of the bench, a physical sign of his mental resignation, no longer willing to think of the hurt involved in this change. The sky continued to shut its eyes as the light grew leaner.

The woman echoed his musing as she lifted her head and opened her mouth: “too much death.” She tasted the words as she said them. *Too. Much. Too much. Death. Too much death.* She licked her teeth, rubbed her lips together. A brown leaf catapulted onto her shoe and she picked it up. It was crunchy and brown, not brilliantly gold or crimson. Old, dead. *Too. Much. Death.*

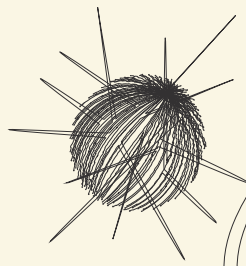
She softly threaded her thumb along the veins in the leaf. One by one, she picked the arms of the oak leaf away—they broke off with a clean snap.

“Not too much” she released the statement into the wind with the particles of the mutilated leaf that she crumpled up. She opened her fist and her mouth and both were left empty and dusty in the quiet evening. “Just enough.”

He looked up at her and at the trees with their jewels of leaves adorning them and at her and down the ground to the more desperate leaves who lay dying at their feet on the concrete path beneath their bench. He reached out to gently clasp her hand in his right hand. His left hand reached into his pocket to pull out a handkerchief. He grasped her hand in his and began to wipe the dust of death and change away from her palms.

“Isn’t any death at all an undesirable and unendurable amount? Death in itself is all consuming. That, is too much.” He finished, and as he pressed his thumb into her palm, freshly dusted off — rid of the remnants of death. She enclosed her fingers around his and sat still as the trees around them.

Above them, orange hue gave way to indigo as the night grew nearer. The wind became increasingly playful and tussled the man’s silky brown hair, flopping locks of curls to and from either side of the part where his hair normally rested.



“I suppose it feels that way” the woman decided as she gently slipped her hand from his and gracefully tugged at the ponytail at the nape of her neck.

“But it just feels right, to let something go.” In one swift motion she pulled her hair free and laughed as the wind rejoiced and moved to rustle her hair.

She picked up a handful of leaves that waited at her feet like playful puppies in the instigating wind. She drew them up as she sat straight and pushed her arms out in front of her. Her fist opened and the wind took every leaf, chasing them all into the air and then back onto the ground.

Fondly, the man tucked the hair in her eyes behind her left ear. He did the same for himself as the wind was relentless in its teasing. *Let go*, he thought. In an attempt to start this freedom he unbuttoned the wrists of his sleeves of his collared dress shirt and rolled them back. He did the same to the top button at the neck of his shirt. He felt the cool wind and approaching nighttime on his newly exposed neck and forearms. He felt the chill, that serious thought in stillness, brought seeping past his mind into his body. *Let go*, he reminded himself.

Breaking free from his silent thinking he offered to the woman a sigh of agreement. “Yes, I suppose it does, dear.” He thought to himself and his messy hair and undone buttons and of the woman’s own wind ruffled hair and how she had emptied her fists into the sky, releasing what was never hers in the first place. *It feels good, it feels right, to let something go.*



**TEA TIME**  
HANNAH DUCKETT



**A FIELD GUIDE TO INSECTS**  
GILLIAN SAMUL

# ONE MUNDANE MORNING

REID BROWN

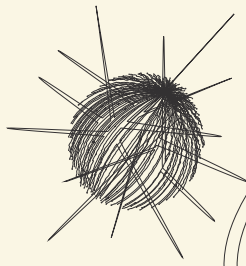
In the dawn rays of a gilded age  
I keep cautious  
So that in darkening dusk  
I'll be calmer

I'll look back and see you  
Bathed in the spring sun  
But carry on  
Know that mourning light lies

We weren't as warm  
I as caring  
You as clever

But time teases  
Pulls out problems  
Soft and sensual  
Like hands through hair

But here in these autumn rays  
Of a dying age  
I can pretend we were perfect

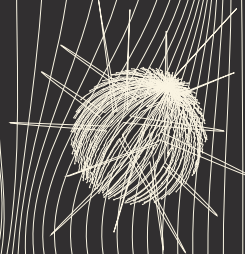


# IN PASSING

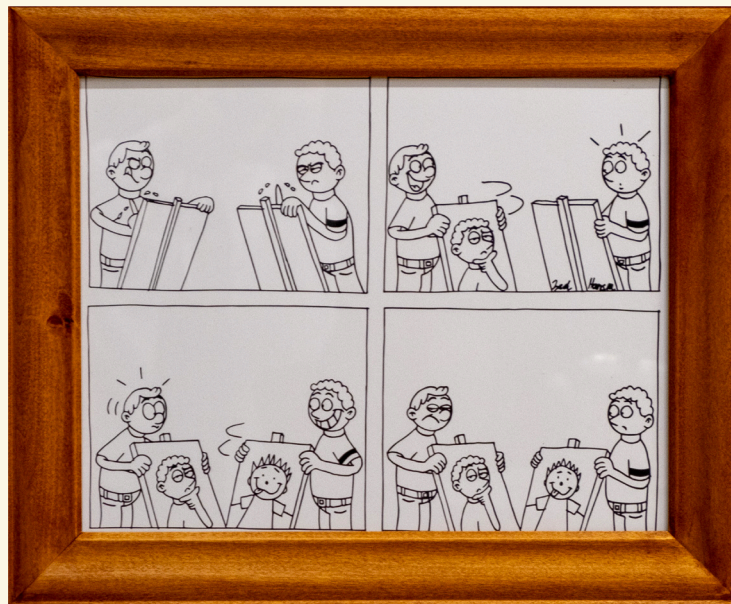
MATTHEW LUTZ

As we stand under lights of the parking garage,  
the florescence shines down with an audible buzz.  
And the cheap pocket watch that you stole from your dad  
fails to tell you the depths of the night.  
But we don't care too much for their laws or their rules,  
how they bind us and keep us from playing in twos.  
So, we take out a drag from that old cigarette  
that we found in the corner half gone.  
We burn lungs and we stare at this scribbled-up place.  
The graffiti defacing the monotone grays.  
On the walls and the floors that are lit up and bright,  
shining out with their soft greens and blues.  
We're alone and we sit with our buttons half done  
on our dress shirts all stained up with spit and with touch.  
And our eye bags hang low, like our loosened neck ties,  
over blazers still warm in the night.  
Then the flash of a light sets our frames on the wall.  
Silhouettes of us frozen, a car passing by.  
With the sanctity broken, laid rest at our feet,  
we go gather our coats and we leave.





**CHARCOAL STILL LIFE**  
OLIVIA CONNOR



**COMICALLY ARTISTIC**  
ZACHARY HANSEN

# HER MONOLITH

## BELA SURBELLA-HATHY

It started young. I was about seven years old when I at last began to notice. The lies were small, mostly harmless: *Yes, I finished my homework; no, it wasn't me; I don't know.* Childish fibs; they were never malicious. But it was then, at seven years old, that I noticed the cool lime flecks appear on my skin.

They were easily hidden underneath my clothes at that time, little more than any superficial scar left from a mosquito bite on a warm summer night, or a scraped knee from a tumble on the pavement. The gray flakes multiplied over the years.

\* \* \*

I was subject to years of inner turmoil—a constant back and forth, ebb and flow, wax and wane of either *never lie under any circumstance* or *sometimes, a white lie is alright to spare feelings.* The adults never seemed able to make up their minds. Morality seemed something of a myth in that way. Still, it didn't matter the genre of lie, the flakes would always appear. I noticed that the ones which spawned from especially minor lies would sometimes fall away on their own. Others established permanent residence upon my flesh. Less common, the flake would chip away to reveal the stone embedded into my skin. They appeared first on my chest, around the heart, but eventually began to radiate outwards. You see, even the most respectable person can't achieve a perfectly clean record. Lies by omission, well-intended, but unfulfilled promises. Loving assurances and statements formed from misconception.

These are the lies that consumed me.

\* \* \*

Life was not easy in the city. Once the country's crown jewel, it was thrown into discord by Leader. For years, civil war threatened to boil over its cracking walls. A battle of its nature was devastating in the moment, but the aftermath was worse. Annihilated, shelter was hard to come by, food was scarce, and medical care was extinct. Illness colonized the city, accompanied by her sister Death. Everything changed rapidly, my home no longer recognizable to myself or anybody else old enough to remember who she was before. In a place like this, my skin began to morph rapidly.

\* \* \*

When I was fourteen, I lay next to my best friend, Freya, on a rooftop in the city's heart. We lounged against fragmented concrete slabs, gazing up into the smoggy sky. Now and then, for only a split second, we might catch a glimpse of unfiltered sunlight if the wind could slice open the suffocating pollution. That day, we got that second, and I looked over to see her deep brown eyes absorb the light, shining a brilliant gold. Color like that was uncommon in those days.

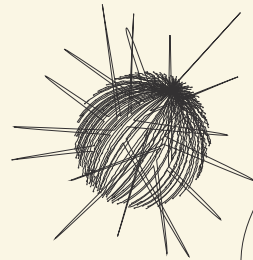
"Do you think we'll be able to move away from here when we're older?" Her voice was softer than anything you could find in this purgatory. I didn't have the heart to tell her no. I heard on the radio of how the little money we had was virtually useless now. I heard of how the neighboring cities were degenerating into places much like our home. There wasn't anywhere else to go. As it would turn out, their weapons had much more dire consequences for the world in its entirety. And I grieved for her.

"Of course we can."

I felt a crushing weight in my core, breathless and stunned. I don't think Freya noticed. That night, I examined my newly carved thorax.

\* \* \*

When I was twenty, Freya and I met an old man inside of what had once been an art gallery. It had been long since looted and vandalized, the once elegant creamy walls were now charred, punctured, stained with dust trapped in the sap of nicotine. The two of us had not eaten more than a few bites in weeks. We were desperate. The old man had offered us a loaf of bread in exchange for a handful of old coins and paper clips. In this economy, anything that was made of a metal—even cheap metal—had value. If it could be melted down, somebody would take it. We were so desperate. I had never wanted to hurt anyone. But now, it was a fight for survival.



“Thirty cents and two clips, yes?” He asked, looking between the two of us expectantly.

“Yes sir,” I replied, reaching for the bread as Freya slipped her hands into her pockets, rifling for the money. Except, she didn’t have any money. And neither did I. We turned and ran once I snatched the bread from his calloused hands, but I only made it about four feet before my legs felt like lead. I collapsed under the sudden unbalance. It took me a while to stand up and learn to move again.

We stayed hungry that week.

\* \* \*

By then, Freya had long known of my condition. She would examine my chilled “skin” each night, monitoring the expansion of the rock over my form. We never understood how I kept living for so long this way. Although I seemed fine, I could tell she worried. Things in the city worsened every year, and there was no way to leave. We had nothing except each other.

“What will happen if you completely turn to stone?” She asked one evening, tracing the sculpted veins on my wrists.

“I don’t know.”  
That was the truth.

\* \* \*

When I was twenty-four, the tension that had been rising in the city finally roared to life into a true civil war. My body felt heavy, bogged down by the crushing weight of false hope and the brutality of survival. I thought frequently of everyone I had ever tried to save. Everyone I had ever needed to cheat, which, thankfully, up to this point, was somehow still few. For love or fear, my body of lime was eaten away all the same. I grew anxious, feeling the mass penetrate deeper and deeper into what remained of my humanity. My heart still fluttered and my lungs drew air, but I began to fear the inevitable, whatever that was. I wondered whether the metamorphosis started before I was seven. Maybe my skeleton had been replaced by stone bit by bit and I had no idea. I would never find the answer.

At twenty-four, Freya and I were walking back to the makeshift shelter we had constructed on top of that building after everything had erupted. I think it was my fault. It was my fault. I had wanted to take a shortcut. It was my fault. She had been struck in the back of the head. My shortcut through the territory of highest conflict. My shortcut through the main grounds. My fault.

When I dragged her body into the ground level, she felt something akin to stone herself. I kneeled over her, pressing my worn jacket into her wound as she bled onto the cracked tile. I tried to stop the flow, to make her comfortable. I hoped it was just a tender place to be hit and that she would be okay, left only with a scar and a concussion. I hoped so until she started to speak like a drunk. Her words were slurred nonsense. At last, I understood.

“You... you think I’ll be-be okay, right?”

My heart stopped as I tearfully looked down upon her increasingly pale face. How can you tell somebody that they are about to die?

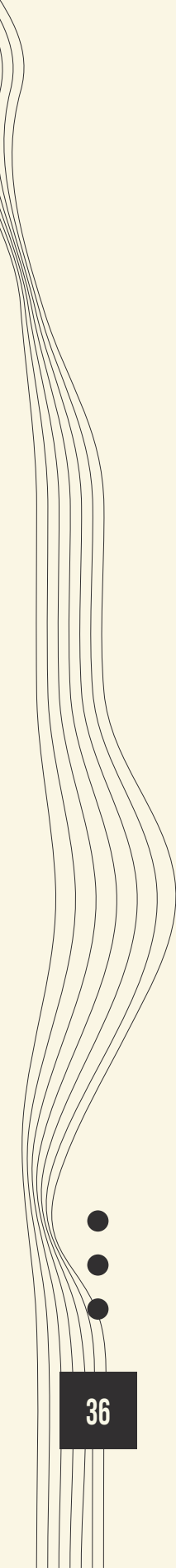
“Of course.”

She released a breath and finally settled.

I remained motionless for quite some time, lost trying to process my new reality. It must have been hours before I even attempted to move. And then I realized that I couldn’t. At last, my body was completely frozen in time. Over the days, weeks, and months, I was forced to gaze upon her, as she grew up in a new way. Rigor mortis, bloat, decay. I watched her warm skin turn purple and blue beneath me, and then shrink and rot. I watched non-human scavengers scurry with excitement over their latest find. I watched her waste away down to bone. And I wondered when the last time my bones looked like hers had been.

\* \* \*

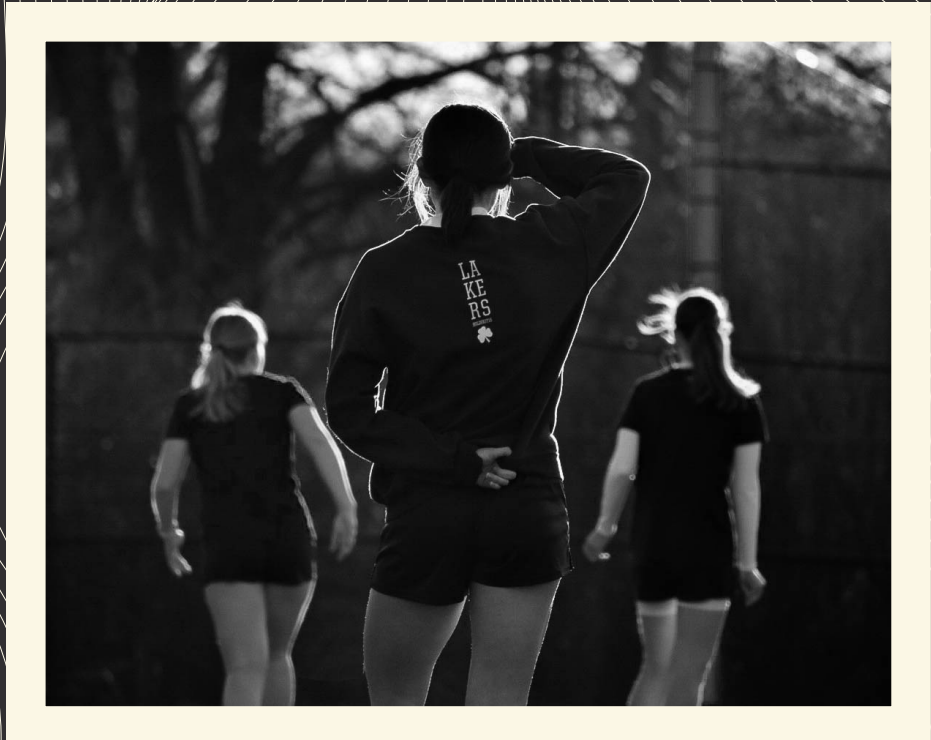
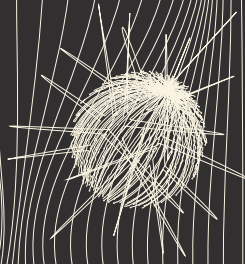
I do not know how long it has been. I could be thirty, thirty-four, or forty. I spend my time trying



to think of a lie that I can tell myself that would freeze my brain, finally deactivate myself. I try to think of a lie that would free me from staring eternally down at my dear friend's fragmented, scattered bones. I think about holding her head. I think about the old man and his bread. I think of us on the rooftop. I think of that stray sunbeam turning her deep eyes to gold as an alchemist would.

\* \* \*

But for now, I kneel, crying for absolution as what remains of her lay beneath me, her monolith.



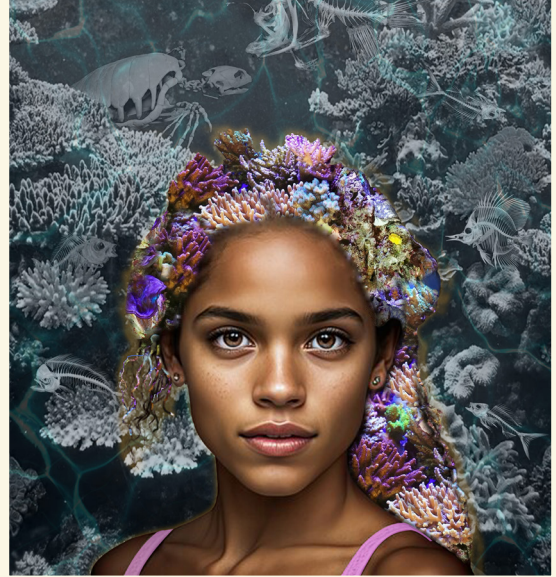
**SOCCER PRACTICE PHOTOGRAPHY**  
JAMIE SENNETT



**ISIS**  
JENNA LUTZ

Coral reefs are home to 25% of all marine life.

**SAVE THE REEF, SAVE A LIFE**



**SAVE THE REEF**  
ALYSSA SZYCHOWSKI



**INVISIBLE STRING**  
ELLA KLOSS

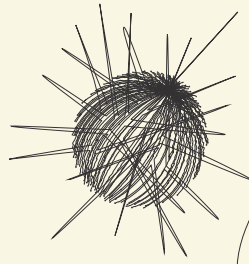


# THE HOARDER UNDER MY BED

SARAH BECK

Boxed all the same.  
Things left, like an out-of-business pawn shop came.  
Boxed in clear plastic with a white top,  
filled until the center bulges and the handles crave to pop.  
Confined,  
things that memories line.  
Things that I don't need,  
yet fill my heart busted with sentimental greed.  
Stuck there getting dusty,  
smelling musty.  
I guess that's it,  
other than all those things that don't fit.

—There is a hoarder under my bed



# TODAY IS A DAY LIKE ANY OTHER

CARMEN STEWART

Today is a day like any other  
As melancholic waves crash upon my vessel  
I don't know if I should bother  
To make a deal with the devil

I wail and thrash in the familiar void  
But the gentle nothingness persists  
Like a corpse, my vessel is devoid  
Without vitality, onward it simply drifts

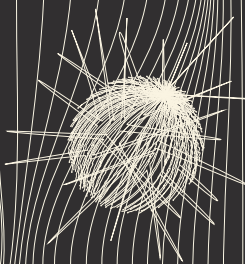
My fractures vanish into dark water  
To drown all those who dare board  
But to my demise, I shall be the author  
Without having written my last chord

Today is a day like any other  
My hull built without my consent  
My flags raised to serve another  
My decided purpose I will come to resent

Unlike the Titanic, I don't get to sink  
I might've died three times today  
Vanishing into oceans of ink  
Having no God of which to pray

None of my voyages have mattered  
I know my stories will never be told  
As with every night, I'll dock battered and bruised  
Left at the forgotten shore alone and abused

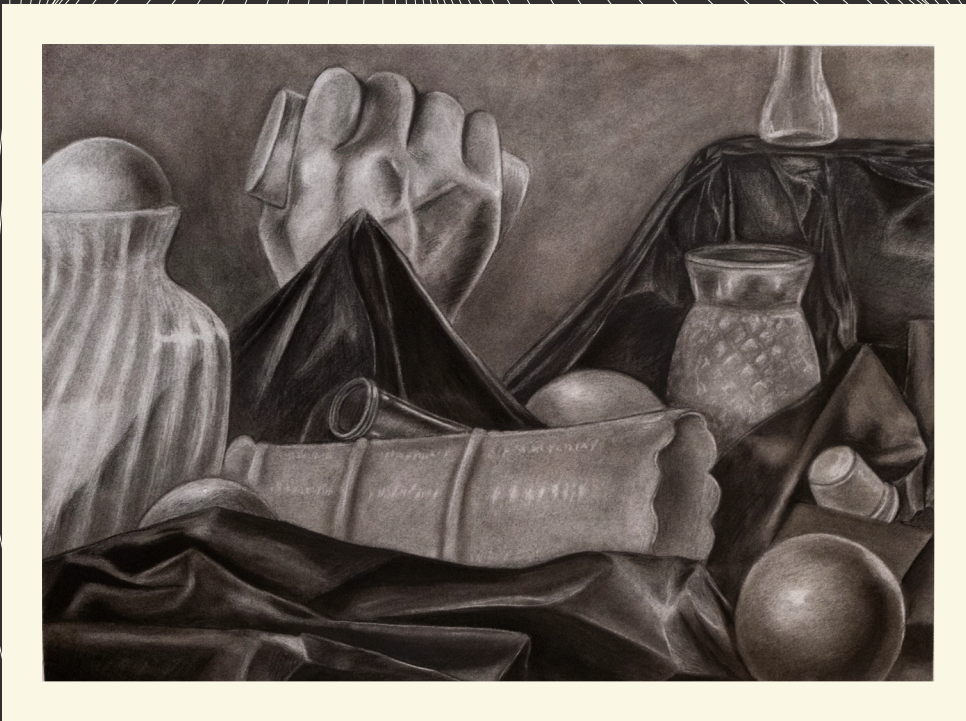




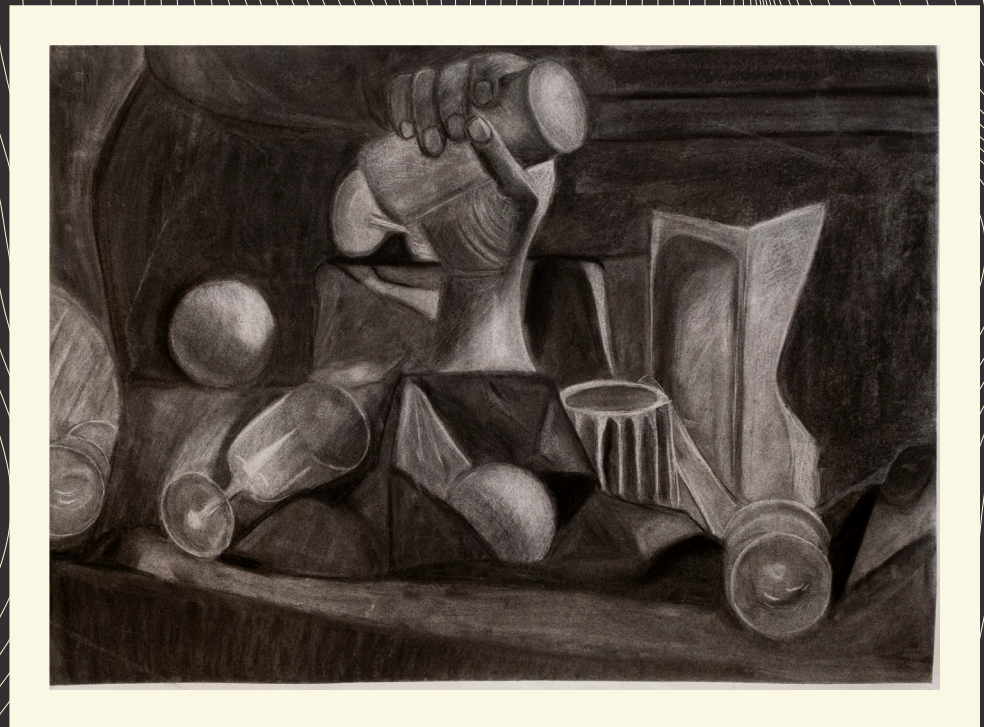
**FLOWER CANISTER**  
ABIGAIL PASCONE



**RAINY DAY FRIENDS**  
CLAIRE MILLSPAUN



**STILL LIFE STUDY**  
SAMANTHA McDONALD



**STILL LIFE**  
SOPHIE MASSARO

# EXPECT THE CRASH

ASHLEY BARLETTA

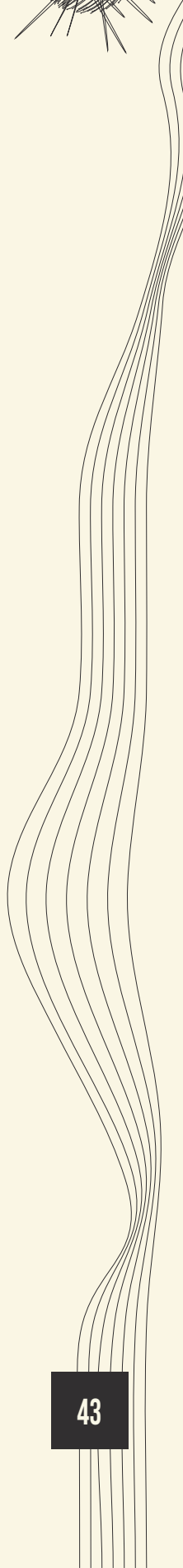
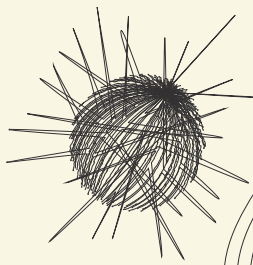
you will spend  
one third of your life sleeping  
one third of your life working  
and i think the other third  
is reserved for tears  
wishing things were different  
longing for something you don't have  
striving to achieve the impossible  
that's what keeps me  
from not only reaching for the stars  
but actually touching them

i think i used to think  
when i was younger  
that i really could do anything  
but i was so far away  
from the wall  
i am trying to break through  
i couldn't even see it back then

things would be going okay  
but nothing gold can stay  
so why would the silver  
or even the bronze  
i fell in love with brown a while back  
it's the color of coffee beans  
that gives me a reason  
to limit myself

i think i used to think  
there were no limits  
until i became a woman  
and had a million of them  
thrown at me all at once  
i surround myself with  
your sorrows  
and my own  
but the weight of the world  
isn't enough for me

now i have learned to thrive  
where i can't see  
and have no directions  
now i have learned to cry  
when i mean it  
and don't know when it will all be over  
i learned to keep moving  
in the midst of hitting the brakes  
and i learned to expect the crash



# MAKE HASTE SLOWLY

## KATHERINE MICHIEZI

In a loose embrace  
sangria and burnt pumpkin and honey  
leaves surround the asphalt.  
They fall, impress upon me softly  
I'm missing Latin class for this flight  
I'm taking on the road.

one, two buckle my shoe

I like crunching leaves and falling  
into them. I pick them up, peel  
paper from red crayons to rub  
the veins into paper.  
I breathe in the apple-cider-tart air  
after winning the race to the tree,  
and I try not to think about the leaves  
itchy and stuck in my hood.

three, four close the door

California and Vienna are impressed upon me  
as vivid as those leaf veins on printer paper,  
smoother than fifty-cent postcards.  
The horizon will only take me so far.

five, six pick up sticks

Before they cut down our big tree  
we took lots of pictures, and I cried  
to it from my bedroom window.

seven, eight  
seven, eight lay them straight

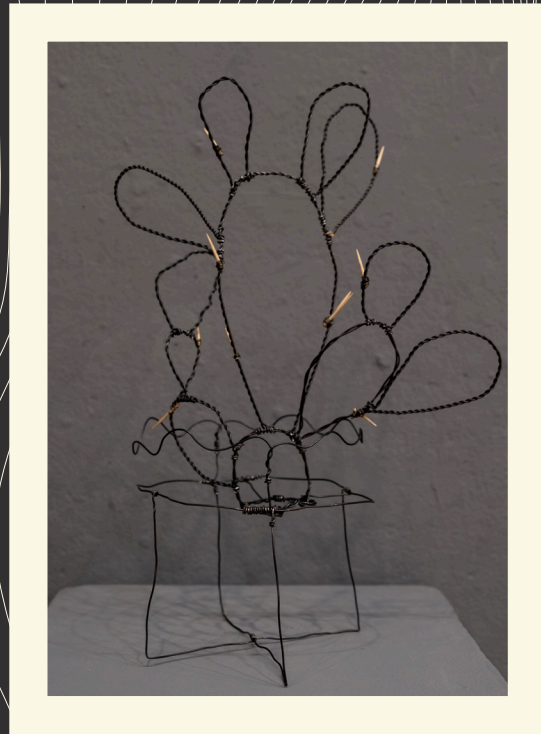
Here is the truth: they cut down  
our tree and I can't even remember  
the sound it made when it fell. I can't  
rake leaves from a tree that isn't there anymore.

nine ten

I argue with myself about the rhetoric of fall,  
hoping I can convince myself to love it again.  
I open my arms to the blurring view.



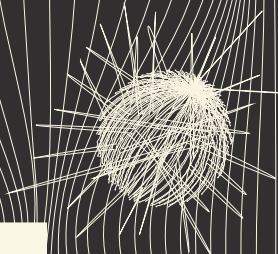
**ROOT OF IT ALL**  
SARA SIMPSON



**CACTUS TWINS**  
MIKAYLA TATLOW



**PESTILENCE**  
NICOLE LIBRA





**ENO**  
JENNA LUTZ

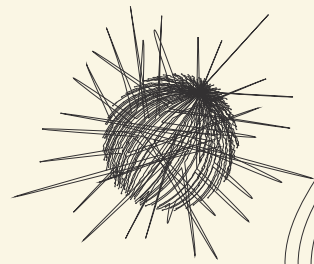


**HAPPY TEA POT**  
ANYAH HOLBEN



# FOLLOWING ARTISTRY

ELIZABETH PLUMMER



The cold slithers down my throat  
staining cheeks  
cracking fingers  
and I have caught you in snapshot  
Turned away  
flurries swirl, hair following  
and I am captivated  
capturing artist as mere muse  
I follow your footprints  
stepping in each with care  
hoping to find what grips you  
what drags shots from lens  
what grabs your interest  
A puzzle never to be solved  
complex conundrums tripping the mind  
Perhaps, it is enough:  
to be in frame, filed in memory  
amongst all your subjects  
To know that something in me  
has pulled you in  
Solar system tipped backwards  
unknown to you, apparent to me  
for it has always been the other way around  
The world obtaining the heart of the moon  
round and round without end  
You're in focus  
you're focused  
and I'm awaiting the moment you turn to me

# BOOTS

## BRENDA MEDINA

i'm snow days old—  
fashioned my own ice-skating rink out of the frozen  
puddle swallowed me whole  
naked little fingers

slipped

right

through

had no time for hats gloves or  
boots in my a\*\* when mom and dad get home—  
sick of being cooped up that's why i did it  
sitter sat me down said "what was i  
thinking?" "it's now or never  
better make a run for it while no one's looking"  
is what i was thinking and i'd do it again too  
even though my naked little fingers burn  
and my hair is frozen and my lips are blue  
and mom and dad are fixin' to get a boot  
'cause nothing feels quite so good as freedom

and no one looking





BAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER  
 INA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRU  
 NA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL  
 PA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHI  
 F FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE FEMINA FANM VIRINO GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA  
 MULHER FEMIEE **I AM WOMAN** KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE  
 BAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER  
 UER KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FE  
 NINE VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BA  
 MINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE POWERFUL WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FI  
 KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN RADAMT BA BABAE FEM  
 FANM VIRINO WAH  
 MOTERIS MARA KY  
 WAHINE WANITA VE  
 NINA GWIRAIG KIN  
 ZENA DONNA KYVIN  
 S STHREE DAN B  
 UINE VROUW FRA  
 MINA FEARLESS  
 NU SIEVIETE MO  
 WAHINE WANITA V  
 KYVINNE KOBIIETA  
 SHIVAVY FAFINE  
 MULHER FEMIEE  
 BABAYE WOMAN  
 NINA GWIRAIG K  
 ZENA DONNA KYV  
 THREE DAN BA  
 OUV FI BRAVE  
 MINA FANM VIRI  
 NU SIEVIETE M  
 WAHINE WANITA  
 KYVINNE KOBIIETA  
 AFINE AWEWE B  
 REIE MULIER KYV  
 UME GRUA ZENA  
 J AYAL STHREE  
 UINE VROUW FRA  
 MINA FANM VIRINO  
 TE MOTERIS MARA  
 ANITA VEHIWAVY F  
 KOBIIETA MULHER  
 EVE BABAYE WOM  
 REIE MULIER KYVIN  
 SHINE INKWATHE  
 IN KALI AYAL STH  
 INDE NAINÉ VROU  
 IAE FEMINA FANM  
 SIEVIETE MOTER  
 WAHINE WAN  
 KYVINNE KO  
 WAHINE ANE  
 IE STRONG  
 WOMAN FE  
 VIRINO KON  
 NINA KYVIN  
 V BA BABAE  
 OUV FRAU  
 ANA VIRINO  
 MOTERIS M  
 WAHINE WA  
 TERTIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE INDEPENDENT GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WA  
 VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE EMPOWERING MOTERIS MAR  
 KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY  
 AFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER  
 EMIEE MULIER GRUA ZENA KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE  
 ABAYE WOMAN COMPIDENT FEMME DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIE  
 YINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM TENACIOUS VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOM  
 UME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER KYVINNA GWIRAIG  
 J AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYV  
 UINE VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE INTELLIGENT AKYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BA  
 BINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA RESECURCEFUL KYVINDE NAINÉ VROU  
 SAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI AYAL STHREE DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FA  
 RINO WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTER  
 BA KYVINNE KOBIIETA MULHER FEMIEE MULIER KYVINNA GWIRAIG KIN KALI **I AM WOMAN** DAN BA BABAE FEMINA FANM VIRINO WAHINE WANITA VEHI  
 FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE FEMINA FAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA



WAHINE WANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA  
 ANITA VEHIWAVY FAFINE AWEWE BABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA  
 ABAYE WOMAN FEMME GRUA ZENA DONNA KYVINDE NAINÉ VROUW FRAU KONU SIEVIETE MOTERIS MARA KYVINNE KOBIIETA

# I AM WOMAN!

CASANDRA REESE



# TOOTS

ANYAH HOLBEN



**SUNSET**  
ISABELLA CAPPELLANO



**TEDDIE**  
GILLIAN SAMUL

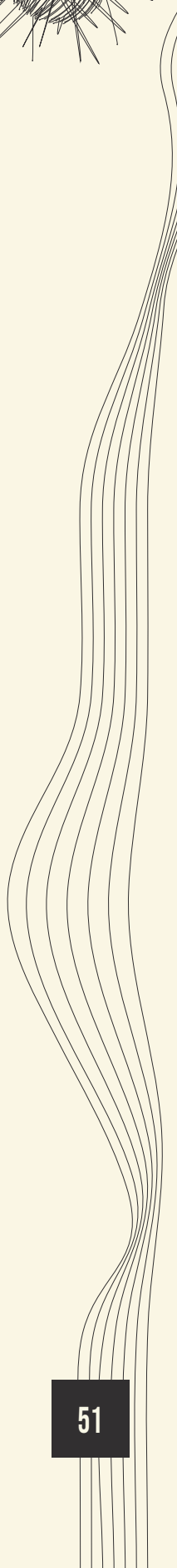
# CENTERFOLD

KATHERINE MICHIEZI

I can't let the airplane fly  
but I fold the paper anyway,  
crease one side, sharpen the edge  
crease the other, sharpen again.  
I can't make the point  
straight, there is too much  
sweat from my palms.  
I glance at how you play  
with your hands, fingers  
interlacing, cards layering  
together in a shuffle,  
slight pressure and cascade.  
I stare down, smooth down  
the ironed pleats in my black dress.

I watch you fold  
towels, tuck an edge  
under your chin, the same  
place you let all the punches  
roll down and collect.  
Your sides are two ends  
reaching, meeting  
hello again. I spread my arms  
wide to hold mine,  
adversaries opposing  
perfect rectangles.  
I time how quickly  
folded towels dry tears.

Fold and unfold and fold,  
collapse or laminate.  
I can't keep safe  
all the things I fold  
away or in or on.  
And I mostly forget  
all the things I've said,  
all the things I need to say,  
as I fold my tongue to speak.



# ROUND UP

## CORINNE VOELKER

The soft clinking of coin was what coaxed Fred into the laundromat off Exit 91. The smoke menagerie shop and “Fluffy’s Best Friend” pet groomer stores sandwiched it neatly. Fred’s fascination with coinage collecting had started at the early age of 14. He was the sort of oblivious fellow, prone to miss the details that were right under his nose.

The laundromat expressed all perfect signs of being well-established: wide paths of dirt furrowed into the linoleum from heavy foot traffic, jammed coin slots on washing and drying machines, a small whine of a 12-inch boxed television in the corner playing something inaudible and canny. He didn’t know why he was there. That reminder—of him, crawling out the window above the singular bathroom stall as the bar fight broke out—left him slightly disoriented as he walked further into the buzzing room. If the police had gotten a picture from the security cameras...

He didn’t notice the woman peering over a mountain of wire hangers. She showed no sign of acknowledgment to his presence either, but continued with her slow, arthritic, clamping, twisting, and straightening of mangled wires. To her left, a box of straight wires were colored hazelnut from rust. She stared into the television just now.

Fred walked over to the nearest washing machine, not sure of what to do next. He pressed his hand to the cradle of the handle and stared at his reflection in the glass, noticing for the first time the dark circles under his eyes. He didn’t notice that he was hardly recognizable, due to days of hurried road travel and a disheveled frown that knitted his usually neat eyebrows. He wasn’t sure where he could go; it would have to be back to Idaho.

The woman in the corner straightened a wire with a sounding “pling,” and Fred’s eyes turned to her warped reflection in the dull glass. His eyes fell to the plethora of discarded hangers which she’d presumably straightened and filed into what looked like shivs or spears, surrounding her slippered feet. Her eyes met his in the glass.

“Howdy, ma’am,” he said quickly. Nervously, perhaps. He turned around to see her high-penciled eyebrows fill and stretch into the thin shape of a smile. The EXIT sign cast a reddish glow on the room, from which the woman sat under as though she stood beneath a spotlight. Fred gulped, as if he was under the spotlight, and a bead of perspiration began to form on his forehead.

“Where’s your laundry at, son?” She asked, waving the pointed pliers as she spoke. “Ain’t nobody come into a laundromat without no laundry. Somebody send you over here for some joke?” He shrugged, thinking so loudly that he was sure she could hear.

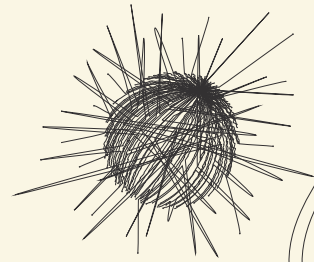
“I left it in the car. Just, uhh...just wanted to make sure y’all sold soap here too.”

“Hmh.” He didn’t notice that she didn’t believe the slow and clunky excuse. He didn’t notice her staring at his questionable features, at her fathoming his height and build and taking down the details of what he was wearing, or her quickly darting eyes out the window at the empty parking lot.

“I was also wonderin’ if, uh, y’all traded any coin here? If, ya know, you got some old change? I assume ya see plenty of it.” The woman, her bulging glasses staring shrewdly at him from her faded office chair, said nothing. “I’ve been lookin’ for some quarters before 1915. I, uh would be happy to break a Benjamin for them...” He took a few steps towards the exit but didn’t notice the wheeling of the office chair towards him.

“You stay right here, son,” she said. It wasn’t a request. She reached into her ballooning bathrobe pocket and Fred stood frozen, unsure if he should attack the lady or to run away. It didn’t seem right to him to rob an old lady. She looked like the type to carry a gun; Fred knew that this absolutely wasn’t the type of woman to mess with.

She brandished a squashed dandelion from her pocket with an “aha” look, frowned, and then dug deep into the well of her pocket again.



“Here, hold this for me.” He took the flower without noticing the mechanical dialing sound that came from the woman’s purple pocket. Soon after came an assortment of hard candies, janky twist ties, a ring of keys, nail clippers, used tissues, and a slimy lip balm, all dumped into Fred’s open hands. She reminded him of someone. He’d been counting how many cough drop wrappers could fit in his hands when he heard a metallic click.

“Take my coins and get out. I don’t want no criminals around here.” Everything, it seemed even the radio chatter and the television, went silent as Fred glanced up at her, a tiny one-shot pistol held fast in her hand. On the thick-screened tv in the corner, his picture flashed on the news, half-drunk and clutching the bar tip jar. “I shot a man once. He didn’t come anywhere near again.”

Fred smiled, quickly dumping the contents in his hands onto the floor. Her horrified look was enough to make him feel a twang of guilt somewhere in a little boy’s heart. He picked up the ring of keys and strode over to the dollar exchange machine, deciding to start with the biggest reward. “Which key?” He didn’t notice the light outside the window fading; those coins would be his. The old lady stood shaking behind him, but with his mind trained on the sight of the delicious coins, he didn’t see it. She directed him through each washing and drying machine, one by one, until the change couldn’t fit in the bucket he’d taken, too. When the last dribbling waterfall of coins has cascaded into a new bucket, he didn’t hear the quiet crunching of rocky tarmac under tires. He hadn’t decided what to do with the old woman yet, or how to make her forget him.

The childlike glow of joy in his eyes extinguished as he turned around, met with the faces of several officers surrounding him.

“Heads, we arrest you,” said one of the officers. “Tails...well, there ain’t no other options.” He liberally tossed the last penny in his hand and caught it, turning it over in his palm. Captivated by the last coin, Fred didn’t notice the officers approaching him from behind. They were pushing him to the ground no sooner than the officer announced “tails.” The pails of coins spilled over and he watched as pairs of legs and boots, like the coins and dust bunnies, scattered in different directions all across the floor. Coins continued their haphazard rolling, dancing in the light of his eyes, flinging spangles into the deep shadows of the room.

He can hear the sound, the crashing and clashing and tinny glee of smelted metals still today as he imagines cruising on the highway, passing every exit determinedly.

# VERMILION BORDER

## MARLEY RAMON

I need  
to feel layers between ligament  
lay between slices of musculature  
siphon warmth and everything else  
It isn't enough  
This isn't enough and I don't think it ever will be

Bruises on your chest  
ring like failed attempts  
when artery sits beneath my teeth  
I won't apologize for playing with my food

Slick shoulder skin like cool plum  
spring's first bite  
Nectar dripping over lips  
through warm waiting hands  
through fingers  
like sand so finite

First incision breaks cleanly  
I am a surgeon sans  
latex and starched garb  
pearly white and waiting

Red beads around the cracks  
until it gives  
I love you I love you I love you  
You're so much  
and on just this edge of satisfying

Millions have got it all wrong  
without prion fault  
it's not I hope you die  
it's I'll kill you

I'll be there at the end  
Dying only in the sense  
you'll never really walk again

Alive in name and tongue and  
as long as I live  
your name  
in the same breath as mine  
Two pieces of a puzzle  
where I claim the edges

Tell me everything  
what you still have left to say  
say it before you run out of time  
say it before it's too late

Ahead of consumption  
squeeze through skin and vein  
Nails mark through your back  
thighs play anaconda  
I will turn you to mush  
and broken bones  
And a tangled mess of still-shooting axons  
And I  
will collect all the pieces

I am not embracing  
I am sizing you up

# TRANSFIGURATION

ELIZABETH PLUMMER



The glass felt cool in his hands as he slid his fingers along the sphere, noticing the little ice skater sliding along the ice within. The house began to change around him, the tacky wallpaper peeling itself from the walls, a soft pink revealed beneath it. The furniture, weathered and worn in, covered in a film of dust, materialized into different pieces, screeching as they slid across the floor, rearranging themselves. Picture frames clattered to the ground, glass shattering, evaporating into thin air. His grip on the globe tightened, discomfort arising.

“Erica!” He whipped his head around, watching as a man barreled toward him. Stumbling, he jerked back, but was not quick enough to avoid the embrace. He was lifted, a large frame enveloping him, the sharp scent of cologne permeating the space. Instinctively, his arms returned the gesture, and a young giggle of delight escaped his mouth. “Look at you! You’ve gotten so big since I last saw you!” His hands dragged along the man’s back, the texture odd. He pulled back, staring at the military uniform before him.

Laughter came from the bedroom doorway, a woman leaning casually against the frame.

“Well, say hello to your father, dear.” He looked from the woman to the man again, wispy blonde bangs dancing along his forehead. Annoyed, he blew a gust of air up, shifting them slightly. A deep chuckle, and a hand came up to tuck them aside, fondness glittering in brown eyes.

“Hi Daddy,” he said, remembering his manners, finally settled from the shock. “I missed you.”

\* \* \*

The room began to rearrange once more, the walls slipping from pink to white, dolls lining shelves on the walls. A vanity dragged itself before him, the mirror revealing curly blonde locks, bright green eyes, thin, delicate lips, and a dark bruise across his cheek. Curious, he lifted his hand, brushing the violent, violet spot. A warm yellow lamp sat erect in the corner: the only source of light in the otherwise dim space. Turning around, he noted the darkness seeping in from the window, bleeding along the walls, spilling on to the floorboards. He pressed his toes into the chilly ground, inhaling softly.

“ERICA!” bellowed from beneath her, muffled from the distance, yet terrifying all the same. Swiftly, he wrapped around to the vanity’s side, reaching out to push it in front of the closed door. One hand, however, contained a flurry, the snow within the glass wildly flickering about from the abrupt movement. Digging a shoulder into the wood, he began to push, watching as the storm continued to build. A bang against the door startled him, but the task was complete. The doorknob rattled, a growl of frustration escaping the man outside it when the pressure wouldn’t cave.

“Stupid b\*\*\*\*!” he snarled, slamming a final fist against the chipped grain, then stumbling away. Heart roaring, Nathan stepped away, sliding down along the bedframe, trembling legs unable to support him any longer. The hem of a frilly, silk nightgown brushed his calves, and he reached out to fiddle with it, tugging anxiously. The globe made a thud as he lowered his other hand, allowing his eyes to slip shut.

\* \* \*

“Nathan?” A hand shook his shoulder, making him jump. Eyes flying open, he looked up in alarm, watching in his peripherals as white faded away, engulfed in swirling patterns and floral designs, the vanity scuttling back to its proper place, morphing from a light brown to a bright teal— difficult to look at. Frames levitated back on to the newly covered walls, having materialized from thin air. “Dude, why are you sitting on the floor?”

He refocused on the figure before him, waiting for recognition to hit him. Once it did, his face flushed, and he sputtered. A snicker, followed by a hand reaching out for him, offering to pull him up. Accepting it, he shifted from foot to foot, watching as the final arrangements descended into place.

“Listen, man, I know you’re into collecting shit, but you’re not really gonna buy a snow globe, right?” Lifting the object up, they watched as snow danced, mirroring the elegant pose of the skater.

“Nah, I was just looking around.” Setting it down on a dresser, they exited, his friend babbling about the vintage car in the garage, but he wasn’t really listening; *Erica* echoing again and again in his mind.

# AT THE END OF THE WORLD

VANESSA NOLAN

For what I know, I've seen the worst of you  
With sickly tendons strewn throughout the green  
And palms of dirt, a helmet cracked in two  
I find you sleeping, never with a dream.

One thing about your face seems strangely soft  
A jacket torn and tattered, fading grey  
The flesh is warped and white in ashen frost  
What have we done to make our God betray?

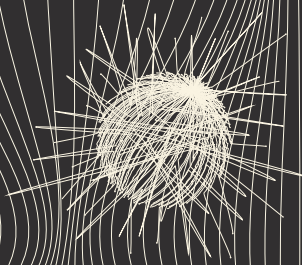
A medal for a bullet and a soul  
Your eyelids halfway shut, your jaw is slack  
The blood is dried, it crusts into your gold  
You rest with blazing fire at your back.

And now I'm left with nothing but my thoughts  
How many deaths awaken man to quell?  
A sword left in the rain; they watch you rot  
The barren trenches reaching over Hell.

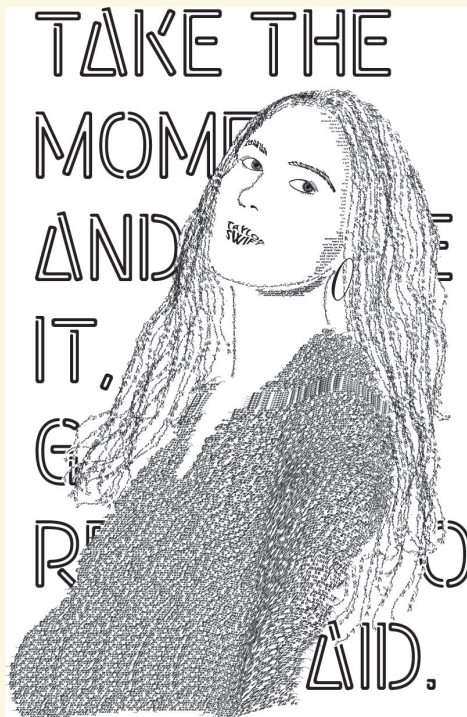
I leave behind my footprints and my torch  
My brother's boots no longer tread this sphere  
For what we've done, we die with angels scorched  
I've come to find there is no honor here.







**THE DAN**  
ELIJAH P. JOHNSON



**YOU'RE ON YOUR OWN KID**  
ALYSSA SZYCHOWSKI

# GLANCING, GAZING, JUST A GLIMPSE; FOR COLD AND LONELY: ONE REMIT

MARLEY RAMON

We were s'posed to be something, my icy weather first kiss culprit  
Red strings wound taut; strong, warm, thick knit  
There's a climate for the leaving, so I'm told 'bout once a minute  
Cold air cooling, hand laced hands, all of the above with love, candlelit

Red strings wound taut; strong, warm, thick knit  
Slipped clean, stripped bare, please just admit  
Cold air cooling, hand laced hands, all of the above with love, candlelit  
Intimate and infinite, no good stubborn hypocrite

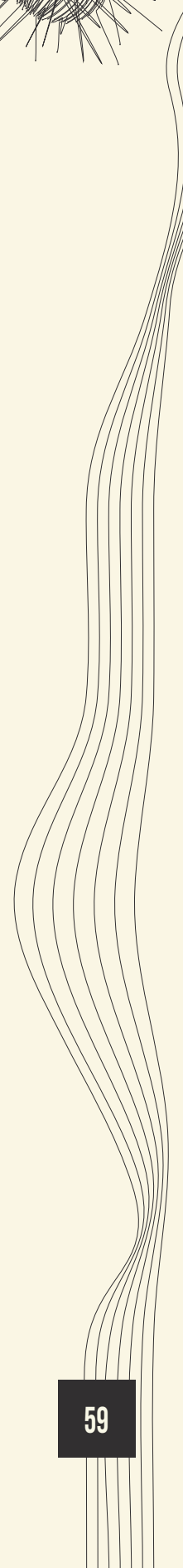
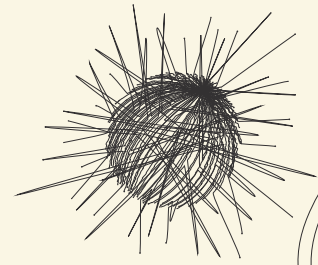
Slipped clean, stripped bare, please just admit  
There's a climate for the leaving, so I'm told 'bout once a minute  
Intimate and infinite, no good stubborn hypocrite  
We were s'posed to be something, my icy weather first kiss culprit



# VOWS TO MY PLANT

KATHERINE MICHIEZI

Edges,  
full arching  
leaning toward  
silky sunlight  
freckled and full  
and still growing.  
Off your pose  
on the sill  
cool ceramic  
in warm palms,  
I count each new leaf  
since last May.  
Hold me from then  
as I hold you now,  
with pencil marks  
on the door frame.  
And it's okay  
if you get busy  
growing,  
and it's okay  
if you only  
need me sometimes.  
I promise  
to keep you  
in the light,  
I promise  
to bring you  
with me.  
If there is a prayer,  
you are  
    amen.



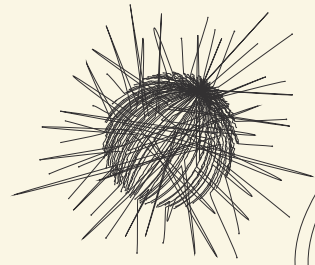


**DREAM OF ME**  
CASANDRA REESE



# LEFT WANTING

ELIZABETH PLUMMER



I cannot write love letters without flair, I've been told  
and my tongue dies  
at a loss for response  
because of course she's right  
refuge blown open  
tactics bleached clean

What is poetry  
but beguiled words  
venom doused with sentiment  
gift-wrapped and meant to sooth  
not you  
but me  
while my mind runs  
rampant biting at the bit  
wanting to spit and snarl

F\*\*\*, I'm writing to you  
for you  
and I want to be let in  
split apart and joined again  
just to sink in pooling blood  
and it is not enough  
will never be enough  
so I sink quill into flesh  
rip soul on to starch white  
bleeding black  
crumble  
try again  
losing myself with every word

I speak of reverence  
not being revered  
too uncertain  
too set on my own adoration  
Split mirror  
trick lingering in the cracks  
veil upheld  
light caught in blackout curtains  
obscuring the truth  
and I am not some lofty thing  
but *you* hang by tight knit cords  
behind framed phrases  
and perhaps there's a Duke in me  
who wants the perfect portrait

You have always been better  
at such things  
hands made from Creation  
for creation  
while I fumble  
Patroclus donning lover's armor  
and his end may hold purpose  
but I must forge forward  
not yet satisfied  
with poetry

# SECOND LEADS

## MARLEY RAMON

Rhys Pearson set his alarm for exactly 5:56 in the morning, every day. It gave him time to fully wake up, get his thoughts together, and think something, anything coherent. And exactly four minutes later: Rhys Pearson received some hint, every hour, on the hour, every day. By waking up slightly earlier than six, he maximized rest which allowed him to think relevant thoughts. Another half hour just wasn't worth some cosmic entity telling him not to snooze.

### ***Take a pen with you.***

Never let it be said that the hint he received was always critical. Rhys wiped his hand down his face, getting out of bed and heading to the shower. He wasn't actually sure when the hints had started, just that they were there, only he could hear them, and they didn't ever stop. None of the quick notes had ever helped him save the world, but nevertheless, each one was important and helpful. Anniversary reminders and present ideas and traffic avoidance and dodging simple annoyances. And that one time that the hints told him to tie his shoes and Rhys bent at the waist as an air conditioning unit shattered concrete a step ahead of him. He couldn't always see the results, but if seven am told him to set his cereal box down and pick it back up, he didn't question it. Maybe that extra second prevented a nine-car pileup; Rhys knew about the butterfly effect.

He took a little longer in the shower. Call it compensation for what he had to do. Someone—Rhys—got an invite to his ex's wedding. And Someone—Rhys again—had RSVP'd yes because he was still good friends with the bride, and he couldn't think of a good enough reason not to go. He finished blow drying and left the styling crème on the counter, imagining a little dunce hat on top of it. The orange tub hadn't done anything to him. The little orange tub hadn't made him use it. And the little orange tub hadn't made itself work so well despite being a gift from his ex, his soon to be married ex. Rhys pressed his head to the cool tile of the wall, careful not to screw his hair. *I said I would go. I said I would go. Why the f\*\*\* did I say I would go. I'm going to shoot myself; I am such an-*

### ***Attend Sara Li's wedding.***

Rhys let out a heady groan. *Now, I'm really going to shoot someone. I was going to go.* The voice knew him too well. It would've been easy just to skip, but he really was friends with Sara. They'd broken up amicably. That was what he'd told his friends. Rhys told them that he was over her. He was, mostly. He went most days without thinking about her, and he was a different man than the one left at the booth in the corner they'd called theirs. Rhys hadn't had halibut since, and he'd gotten over Sara Li in the two years without her.

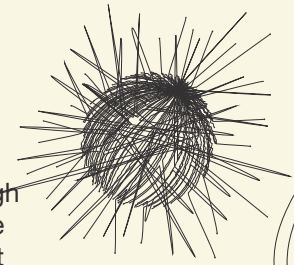
The engagement was still unexpected. Sara had never even considered marriage, not once during their six years. Maybe she'd just never considered marrying Rhys. He was not thinking that, stubbornly, he was avoiding that thought. He did let it simmer in the back of his head, hold languid bubbles until he needed it, needed it like one needs a good cry on a Valentine's Day. Rhys was not thinking about it, and eight a.m. hadn't come to tell him. Rhys and Sara were friends now. They were civil. She brought him coffee that one time when returning his stuff. He let the thought sit heavy at his peripherals. If he wasn't paying attention, it almost felt like it was behind him.

He'd moved on. Gone on other dates, tried other fish, he wasn't stuck on her or anything. But Rhys wasn't ready for her wedding to happen before his, and he hadn't anticipated having to attend without a plus one. He'd considered the fake dating options—in length—but all his single friends were straight or busy and the thought of an escort made his skin crawl. May came faster than expected and Rhys was caught unaware. Spring weddings were lovely, he'd been told. He'd find out.

Everything would work out; he'd rented the tux, bought the cheesiest "Mr. and Mrs." mugs he could find, and vowed to abuse the open bar. Rhys would have a great time.

On route to the venue, Rhys is losing his cool. He took off the suit jacket because he wasn't an idiot, but he felt like he'd sweat himself out of the undershirt. The hints hadn't been much help.

### ***Detour through the historic district.***



**Stop for lunch.**

**Order the lemonade.**

**Exit the vehicle with your left leg.**

Nothing was directly impacting anything. Rhys' bouncing leg was going to wear itself through the floor of his car. He'd make it to Sara's wedding as the fifth Flintstone. Rhys was just sitting in the parking lot, about to combust with energy. He'd used the pen to doodle aimlessly up his arms, but it didn't connect in the way the hints tend to. The clock approached three p.m. and Rhys jittered. He could see people filtering into the church. Tasteful gowns and black suits and people actually happy for the couple.

He wondered if he looked as bitter as he felt.

**Skip the Ceremony.**

*Oh, thank f\*\*\*\*\* god.*

Rhys car was the only one exiting the parking lot as they began to close the main doors. He'd meet them at the reception.

The little town where Sara staged her wedding was a little more interesting than Rhys thought. When he finally made it to the venue, lights were flashing, and the beat could be heard from outside. He hadn't done anything wrong per se, but he'd let himself get carried away by exploitable hints. Rhys was always very aware of the time. The party was well underway, it was time to face the music.

**Say you took Raton pass.**

Alibi established. When Rhys did see Sara, she was gorgeous, but it was fine. It really was. He opened that lid and whatever was simmering had long since leaked out. It hurt. He wanted to be the guy standing next to her. Rhys' hand on her waist as they walked table to table. But the hints didn't say anything as Sara walked away from their table, the voice came back at the top of the hour and told him to sleep at a friend's. She wore the earrings that he bought her way back when and they glittered in the lights. Baby strands of her hair tucked behind her ears. Maybe hair gel was just hair gel, and everything would be okay. He told her about Raton pass and her husband cut in, his parents were stuck just behind it. If only they'd gotten the memo to avoid it. If only. Rhys explained he just squeaked through, and Sara snorted at a familiar pun.

Rhys chest ached only a little bit. When they turned, so did he. He hadn't spent all that much time at the wedding, but he'd shown, hadn't he? The night air called to him.

**Go get a drink.**

He pivoted on his heel. The bar off to the side. Away from the tables and empty next to the full dance floor. When Rhys' feet carried him over to the lonely someone, he asked how his drink was. The man answered with a slur on just this edge of fun.

"Any good? Better be. I f\*\*\*\*\* taught him how to make it." The man was still looking at the glass in the light. Watching the colors refract off the finely cut crystal. Rhys quirked a smile. "Which isssss what I would say, if I had had four of these. Which I haven't." Rhys took the seat next to him and ordered his own drink.

"What are you trying to drink away? Liver function?" Rhys still smiled when he said it.

"What would I have to drink about? I'm at my very very—was better before the breakup—very good friend's wedding. And I am happy for him. Mazel Tov a\*\*hole," the man cracked a laugh and downed his drink. Rhys did the same and they ordered another round.

"Ever heard of second lead syndrome?"

The conversation didn't end until after the bartender made the final call, until after Sara left with Sean, until after the DJ stopped playing music. A voice told him not to drive home and Rhys is struck with a million memories of a younger man taking every hint as earthshattering revelation. Some things were obvious. Sometimes, things just worked out.

Rhys walked out the door with a hand in his back pocket and a number penned on a napkin. He was sobered up enough that he could rent a room for the night. Rhys' conversation partner gave him another suggestion. Luckily, he wasn't staying too far away.

# GUARDIAN IMPS

## REID BROWN

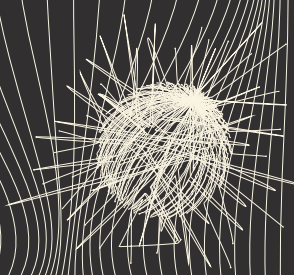
The imp on the shoulder  
the one with no name  
he whispers on and on his great game  
his shining cities, his grand designs  
far from the reach of mortal eyes —  
lost in the distance, it swirls in haze  
mad eyes shift  
seek to flee from his maze

She gives strange advice  
The other small vice  
The imp on the shoulder will not be restrained  
and goes to slip from her chains  
she whips, nips, grabs for the reins

They sit on your shoulder, these imps of two  
to slay or to spare them is up to you  
To let the muses be  
Allows oneself to roam free

For me myself I gave them a quill  
and I bade to them to do what they will  
Keep your imps on your shoulders  
for they lead you to more than just dead-ends  
if you but press on the wall  
watch the imps flutter and fall  
they lead you to treasures and baubles and faces  
and all sorts of people and very strange places





**ANAGAMA VASE**  
SAMANTHA MONTORO



**COLORFUL VASE**  
ANYAH HOLBEN

# BREAKING BREAD

CORINNE VOELKER

He asked where I came from  
below, I'd say.  
He asked me what my name was  
Rock, clear as day.  
He asked me how I knew the earth,  
I'd tell him it knew me,  
eyes watching my unmoving lips,  
I'd reach my hand to thee.

\* \* \*

"Her name was Petra," he whispered.

Murmurs of grief should have surrounded him; that's at least what he wanted in his funeral. His mutter evaporated into silence. A woman in front of him struggled to open a wrapper—for two minutes, the crinkling of thin plastic in frail hands echoed in the open sky—and Auld watched as the opaque wrapper slipped from her pocket and tumbled with the wind into the gaping, cracked hole of earth. Dry, dusky soil embraced her body as a coffin. Suddenly taken aloft by a breeze, the wrapper fluttered downward, resting finally on her convex chest. Auld's heart rushed with a mix of fear and hope every time he thought he saw her chest rising. His heart began falling at her release of breath. Her slightly parted lips, scarred and cracked now like he'd never seen them, releasing the same gasp of air that lodged in his throat. He knew the zing of the cool shovel in his hand. This time, the cold zipped up through the thin muscle of his forearm, zinging from his fingertips to his heart.

The last time the soil had tasted good was before the Paleozoic era, when the dinosaurs roamed and the phosphorous from their bones nourished living soil. Today's special was a mystery concoction of the waste of surrounding laboratories, factory spew, and sewage runoff. Auld knew that it would cling to his ribs for far too long; it was something he wouldn't be able to purge before it settled in his bones. These sediments, mixtures, and byproducts were in everyone; each generation, parents passed down these very poisons. He couldn't rid himself of something so integrally a part of him; still he buried someone so important in the very soil that struggled to keep their community alive.

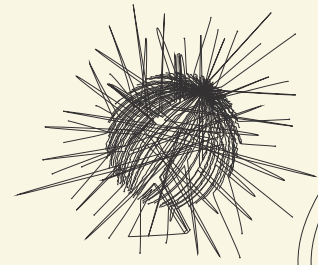
Though the grey, acidic soil was far too dry and dusty, he couldn't help himself from scooping up a handful off the spade. He told himself it was a cheers and nod to Petra, to all of those who came before him and their successes. She'd found herself, there, lying in the earth. It didn't feel right to leave her there, alone, with eyes searching.

He vowed that his dust would return before time; he would rather live as a part of the earth than the earth become something he lived on. With each chew, the soil slurried into thick mud that lodged in the back of his throat, caking around his uvula. He swallowed carefully, counting the seconds it took to settle in the hollow crease of his stomach. It settled with a gravity unfamiliar to him. Auld had once heard that people felt conviction in their stomachs, not their minds, their hearts, their knuckles, or their bellybuttons. He couldn't imagine something like that conviction coming from such a place; the searing of stomach acid up his throat had made him wonder how conviction could be felt anywhere but his heart. His heart told him it was time.

"Goodbye. I'll miss you." And for now, it didn't matter that he had no idea who he was, or that he couldn't separate himself from the earth. Petra had been enough. He could be, someday, too. He was already living amongst the very things that would see him dead.

\* \* \*

Touching the ground always made his fingers tingle; most years, he had lain flat-backed against the green scrubs and grasses, his palms pressed desperately to the surface. A thrill ran through him



every time he returned to his imprinted place, a nook curving itself to his shape alone. Silence became noise only for those who knew to listen; to hear to the chatter of a brook against stone or the whistling that grew from the roots to the tips of the leaves on red maple trees. New growths edged in closer to the imprint of the body every year; he imagined his skin took on a fluorescent, chlorophyllin hue and the sun crisped the green from his skin. Each year, the sounds grew quieter, until eventually, they'd faded to nothing. This was the last day he was to return, as there was nothing to listen for anymore.

This tilled brown patch of dirt, disconnected dead root, was only missing its oily sheen and its Auld-shaped outline. The grass around had wilted in a suffering, simpering way. It was coated in a fine muting substance that must have stopped Petra's music, too. He couldn't even hear her in the roots—even though she'd been gone for long—he tried to listen. Auld wondered if any of it was real. She'd had a way of coaxing the songs from the earth when they were gone—and taught him—to listen and ache for things that sustained him only in death, decay, and rot.

\* \* \*

"Every time I speak, the sounds are called from their casings of root," she said quietly, careful not to disturb the songs humming fixedly around them. She smiled her crooked smile, revealing glowing teeth in a brighter shade of yellow than the haze of sunspots Auld saw in his eyes.

With every sentence, the valley they sat in was slowly soaking in the songs of, what Petra believed, was found only in the roots. There was something ages old about them. Each tasted different, with notes of velvety cadmium or sticking malathion or some other unidentified taste; it was something he hadn't yet classified. He was sure the roots were vessels, filled with substances of shame, growth, death, and human error. They had to be; their songs were wailing tunes, mourning the loss of the sunken, dead roots.

Ice from glaciers far off began melting quietly as the roots coaxed them with their songs. They were not the songs Auld wanted, but he chewed them as Petra did, sat with her back ramrod straight as she did, closed his eyes for so long as she did. Soon, she'd taught him to keep a bundle of them in his back pocket. He chewed them habitually, spitting the acrid juices in flying shots back toward the ground. While he was careful to avoid the roots with spikes, or the thin, ever-whispering ones, it was difficult to know which roots breathed the songs Petra once called for.

\* \* \*

Assignment 10: explain how harmonization changes the songs of the roots.

What is the difference in taste?

*I've been saving these stupid worksheets and telling her that I keep forgetting them. They're not happy, but, I don't want to know the difference in taste. I don't want to know anything more. She wouldn't read these anyway.*

\* \* \*

He'd uprooted hundreds of trees before realizing that only a few types of roots gave him the taste, that feeling, and made the song she could call so easily.

He'd asked his family if they felt it too, the touch of the earth in the songs of root. His brother told him he'd lost it. That was the first time he'd tried to stop eating them. This loss of song showed him, however, that the earth was mourning in the vessels of oxbows, watersheds, and from the very depths of the ground. Some nights, if he lay quietly enough, he thought he could hear it in his brother's heartbeat. He couldn't hear past his own, to see if his was grieving too.

\* \* \*

Assignment 18: observe your findings from the week. List two new discoveries.

The roots, at first, weren't making sense. Nothing was, nothing is. I'm not sure how this is supposed to fix an eating disorder. Now all I can think about, all I hear is that song. It's too far stuck in my head to get out now, but I think it might have words to it.

\* \* \*

"Beyond the boundaries of ourselves," she'd said, "there are networks of roots. They learn a new bit of song every day. Alone, they cannot string their notes into something so sweet." That day, Auld dug a hollow into the great trunk of an old white oak tree. He wedged himself in and began to dig downward. This time instead of music, he heard screams. When his mouth ached for the chew of root, he remembered the horror and agony of this tree, those roots, and dug his hand into the rings of the tree again, reaching for the songs which echoed his own.

\* \* \*

Assignment 48: list three positive changes that have occurred since beginning treatment.

I'm starting to think that this is crazy. I'm craving the root, but not the chewy pulp of it. It's more of the taste, the metallic zing, the faint sulfuric odor of it.

\* \* \*

Petra religiously started her days absorbing the early morning sun. It made her feel like a turtle, cold-blooded and so sensitive to everything external, everything outside of herself. Hours turned days turned years turned life spent in white hallways could sap all the joy from anyone; she'd seen it happen to her closest coworkers. The only glow she saw on their faces was from the reflections of computer screen glares. She resolved instead to take her joy from the sun. She didn't care if it was lost by the end of the day, whether she felt better from it, or if she'd given every watt of it away. She knew, as the sun also rises, she wouldn't *find* herself in comfortable situations. So it didn't matter to her that she hated her job or that she went home at night to a moody cat. She kept them anyway.

She hadn't prepped to see the returning resident admitted to inpatient services earlier today, and something about his cocky attitude made her believe that he could tell. His name was odd, old; his case presented the same ways too. His history of anorexia nervosa, a refusal to take medications, and a return to treatment after six months in remission didn't bode well. His chief complaint, however, wasn't related to any emotional conditions. In fact, it was something that had once whispered in her soul, too: some time ago, before she'd learned to shut it out.

\* \* \*

Assignment 56: what is most helpful in weekly sessions?

half a banana peel

seven teaspoons of dirt

a shred of grout peeled away from tile

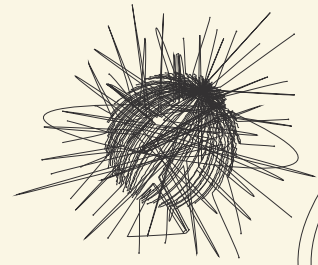
two paper cartons

\* \* \*

"I don't know where my body ends and the earth begins," he'd whispered, horrified. Silence followed. She hadn't known what to say, which strategy to take, how to follow up with the next question.

"Is that a physical or emotional feeling?" She'd asked.

"Literal."



“Could you describe it to me?” He took a while to think.

“My arms are gone, but my fingers reach into the soil and linger with worms. My legs form, wind, and ramble with the riverbeds, and I can’t stop the water from running in them. My chest rises into the curves of the hills and falls into cliffs and the mountains. When I go to reach for something, I don’t know where my hand is reaching because I can’t see anything it covers. And when I lift it back, all I have is a handful of dirt,” he said. His breathing had sped up and he took a few moments to calm down again.

\* \* \*

Assignment 70: what are the differences between living and dead root? Why?

I’m afraid I might relapse here.

\* \* \*

She had referenced all of the research manuals, studies, and publications she’d ever encountered about conditions like his. The pica diagnosis didn’t seem to fit, not when he heard things as he’d described. When nothing came to fruition, she took Auld to the places she’d been able to navigate these feelings. Stepping out of her faded, yellow compact car, she motioned for him to follow. The concrete beneath her shoes was cracked, but enough to work with. An abandoned steel mill dilapidated near this forgotten lot, something of the past dragging into present fabric like a thorn, something that interrupted the hills around them. It was perfect.

“I’m taking off my shoes,” she said, kicking them off, “watch where you step if you do too.” She stood, her face tilted towards the sun, feeling nothing for a while. Auld watched suspiciously, hoping he hadn’t followed a cracked life coach to the scene where his body would be left behind. Finally, she turned around.

“How long has it been since you’ve last eaten, Auld?”

“I can’t go more than three days without the real stuff,” he said, watching her still.

“And when you do eat, what happens?”

“Nothing; I’m still hungry. No matter how much I eat.” She knew. The expression, the insatiable hunger, the caution in his description, the angle of protruding cheekbones, the ever-baggy clothing no matter how new it was.

“And how do you celebrate when your clothes become too big?” She asked, recognizing immediately that she wasn’t the right therapist for his case; it was too close to home. She ambled towards the edge of the parking lot and thought about transferring him to a coworker. Finally, she stepped onto a crumbling curb, balancing between the lot and the land.

Auld’s Adam’s apple dipped downward. He shifted once, twice, before removing his shoes and socks too. “It’s hard to describe...I don’t really know if I can.” He turned away, beginning a slow jog. His feet first thumped on the concrete and left a furrow of recoiling grasses in his wake. He moved intentionally, rounding as close to steel mill as he dared while barefoot. Petra saw at once that he was kneeling with his hand to the hard earth, digging. She smiled her crooked smile, forgetting at once about her process of healing. She knew his hand would find flecks of fine metal in the soil; it was everywhere here. If he couldn’t find the metal, a worm or field mouse would suffice—she wondered if he’d learned this, too—and if he’s lost himself yet in the fantasy of going into the steel mill, of finding the asbestos in the dry-rotted pipes. She relished the memory of the rusted metal buckling under the force of her teeth. Every plant in the place was rooted in soil once coated with thickly settled smog. He could find much of what his mind, his heart fueled by this song, needed to survive here.

Auld sifted the dirt between his fingertips gingerly, watching as it all fell to the ground. He turned to Petra as she ambled towards him. It was quiet as they stared out at the mill.

\* \* \*

Assignment 102: if you were to change anything about your attitude or behaviors, past or present, what would you change?

Nothing.

\* \* \*

“Please tell me how this is going to help me,” he murmured, as though he didn’t want to disturb this place. She looked at him, first concerned, and then with a wild glare in her eye. Her eyebrows jumped in shock; the roots had called him before, sat with him. She couldn’t imagine anything stopping him from hearing the same song from the steel mill. She absentmindedly stooped to the ground, searching for a bit of broken pipe, steel, anything. When she drew her hand up, she held two small pieces of scrap metal.

“Here. The roots told you, so you should know,” she said, popping the pipe into her mouth and crunching away as if it were chewing gum. Auld dropped the piece to the ground.

“How is this going to help, Petra? I’m willing to do whatever it takes to get better, but...this is heading in the direction of another relapse. I’m here for help, remember?” She continued chomping mechanically, rolling the condensed piece of scrap metal between her tongue, savoring the stinging metallic taste of it that she could feel behind her eyes. “Petra? Let’s go.” He drove her back, slowly, knowing that he might never see her again.

\* \* \*

Assignment 114: what are three things you’re grateful for?

Car

Cat

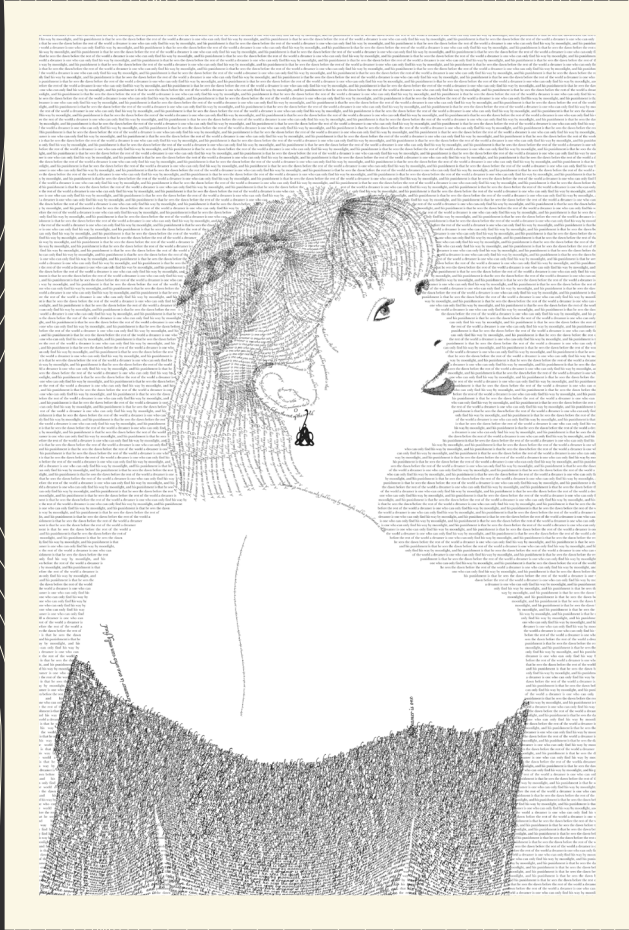
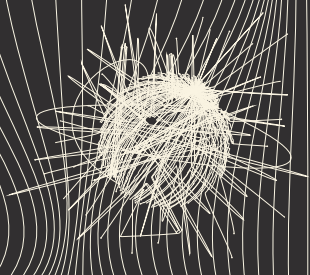
Carbon

\* \* \*

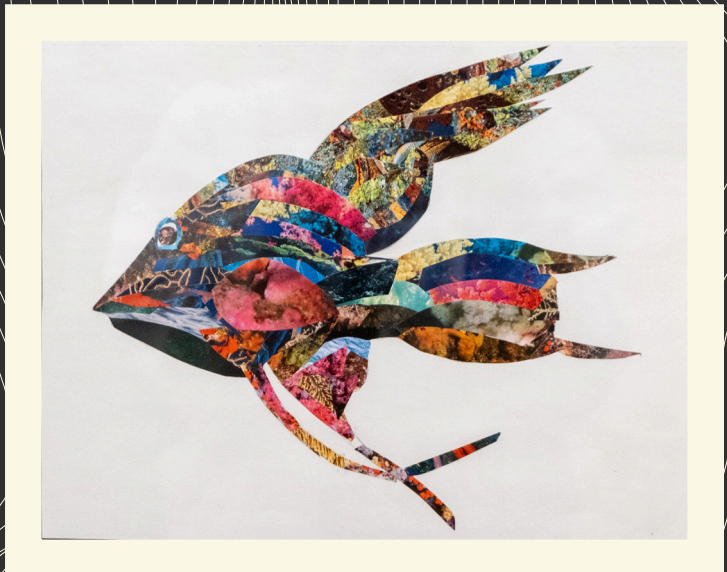
He couldn’t separate himself this time; still he was waking in a cold sweat from the picture of her staring eyes under her grave, lifeless, her skin cooled to the congealed with the dirt-specked fluid of the eyes. The dreams opened a new wound; he’d covered her thin body, beginning at her feet, struggling to tear his eyes away as it tumbled over her face. It wasn’t the rock of his fathers that covered her, the silt of the earth, nor the moss of spiders. His sweat and tears dripped down, intertwining with the fine sand, mingling. He knew it was just a dream, but the not knowing still haunted him. Roots, connecting every living thing, are growing in the same diseased soil, in human lust for more, in the poison of exhaustion and pride.

\* \* \*

There’s a reason  
the boundary between  
you and I and the earth  
is called crust.



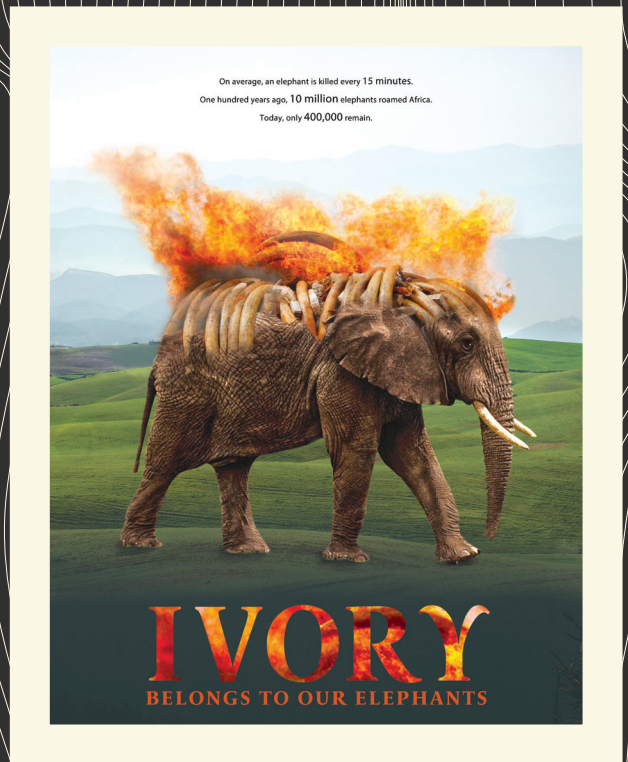
**FIND HER WAY BY MOONLIGHT**  
AINSLEY DUNNING



**KALEIDOSCOPE**  
MADELINE PRINCIPE



**GLAZE FUSION**  
MADELINE HUFFER



**ACTIVISM**  
ALLISON LINEMAN





# NEED YOU LIKE AN AMPUTATION

## MARLEY RAMON



I miss you like a phantom limb  
Like a weight I've just put down  
Like a touch that keeps on buzzing  
Like your smile's still my crown

I hold torn things: words, bits, and wisps  
Reminders for my lapse, perhaps  
Indexed brain matter, pinned down hands  
fabric fragments, paper scraps

Your chipped front tooth and old prescriptions  
picked cut scars, hands hoist to sky  
over every place you've held me  
'til sun has marked me high and dry

I will take us somewhere  
in this car, in closed garage  
tell King Midas where to shove it  
rip this man from my collage

Best thing to be is nothing, truly  
Second best: gone, dead, departed  
Third is probably in your arms  
Though they leave me broken hearted

There are things they didn't tell me  
that loving you was Faustian bargain  
something sharp and crass and lovely  
Left me has-been, good for nothin'

There are things you didn't tell me  
little sighs you'd just omit  
Always somewhere: fitter, finer  
there was always better conflict

Didn't realize you had plans  
That I was somewhere, trite divine  
left me witless, crossed, cut out  
despite my tryin', you weren't mine

Drown in riches, love in money  
Your dismay, I'll overcome it  
pour amber liquid, loft raised glasses  
I'll be waiting at your summit

Third best thing is we share sides  
on mountain top, below glass sands  
Arms like wire, annealed, swear taut  
Razor backed; hands clenched in hands

Soft and cradled, held and honed  
give me hands in all your dances  
Make me something, someone somewhere  
I will take you and your chances

# BLACK BIRD

ELIZABETH PLUMMER

A little girl stumbled along the sidewalk, dragging a wicker basket behind her, catching it on every crevice in the pavement. Frustrated garbles slipped past her lips at the hinderances, sparking increased amusement in her mother, who followed shortly behind. The woman's eyes were alert, ensuring that her daughter didn't trip and crash into the ground, but she also could not help taking in the scenery: the sun streamed down in a brilliant gleam, dappling the lake's surface, highlighting the swishing trees. A sense of contentment permeated the air, enveloping her in its warm embrace, untangling her normally tumultuous thoughts like a fine seamstress. Days such as these were rare, especially after the birth of Dawn. The moniker, she thought, should have brought bright times with it, but that had not been the case for a long while.

A startled sound brought her attention back to the present, her eyes snapping to Dawn's small form. The girl was crouched at the side of the path, her head tilted, reminiscent of a curious, confused puppy. Interest flooded the woman, causing her to increase her pace. Her daughter began reaching grubby hands out toward something, but a sharp noise of disapproval halted the movement.

"What have you..." *Oh.* The corpse of a baby bird was curled in the grass, staining the otherwise green field a soft black. She hunched down beside Dawn, peering at the tiny creature. "It must have fallen out of its nest," she muttered, sorrow beginning to creep up her spine. A mist settled at the edges of her vision, refusing to encroach any further.

"Mama?" her daughter babbled, and from her peripherals, she could make out a perplexed expression. Wispy brows were furrowed, and her nose was scrunched up, like a puppeteer had decided to exaggerate the expressions for clarity's sake. She felt the immense urge to run her fingers along the creases, smoothing them out into a blank portrait. Fingers encircled her own before she realized she had acted on the impulse, and they were left staring at one another, blue boring into blue. "Sleeping?" Dawn asked, shattering the stillness, pointing toward the baby bird.

Most mothers would have faltered, attempting to sugarcoat reality, placing peppermint upon their child's tongue; however, she felt no such hesitation.

"No, dear. It's dead." When that explanation failed where her hands also had, frustration flickered, brief—but bright. "It's not waking up."

"Oh," her daughter murmured, a soft gust of air. She didn't understand, not really, but her mother let go of the issue, reaching out to cradle the body in her own hands.

"Here," she gestured, setting it gingerly into Dawn's basket. "Let's go and bury it." With that, she glanced around, searching for the perfect spot. *The soil will be softer by the lake.* Decided, she strode off the path, calling for her daughter to follow. The soft rustling of grass strands behind confirmed that her request had been obeyed, but she did not turn back to look. There was one objective on her mind, and the matter had to be resolved.

When she reached the bank, she pressed her knees down, instantly digging her hands into the dirt, wrenching it from the earth. Dawn merely watched, eyes wide. A few minutes passed in silence before a triumphant sound emerged from the woman's mouth, wiping smudged palms against the grass. She beckoned her daughter closer, carefully removing the baby from its cradle, placing it into the shallow hole. After covering it, the two stood there for a long while, the contentment of the day dissipating the longer they did.

\* \* \*

"God damn it, Clarissa!"

She tensed, but pushed herself toward the voice. She navigated through the living room, stepping over various children's toys, before making her way to Dawn's bedroom. She stood in the doorway, hovering, wraithlike in her stillness. Her husband had their daughter's arm in his grip, examining her wrist. There was slight purpling encircling it, as if someone had squeezed too hard. He looked up at



her, accusation tainting his eyes an even deeper brown than usual. “Have you taken anything today?”

“No.” Flat and dull, before the implications made her bristle. “I don’t *need* anything.” He laughed bitterly, shaking his head in disbelief.

“What’s the date?” Immediately, shame and rage and pain clogged her throat, strangling it tight.

“You’re being unfair.” *No, wrong.* “What does it matter?” *Better.* His only response was to push himself up from the floor and brush past her, heading toward the bathroom. He was going to make her take something. Something that would rend her hollow and unblinking and miserable. She sprang into action, slamming her daughter’s door shut, locking it. Dawn was staring at her, and why did she always have to look so *afraid*. “Let’s read a bedtime story!” she exclaimed, falsely cheerful, slapping her hands together for dramatics.

“Daddy reads,” Dawn replied, stating it as if it were an unshakable fact, as if it were meant to be that way.

“Not tonight.” She scooped her daughter up, sweeping away the covers, forcing her to lay back against the sheets. As she pulled the comforter back up, she lingered on the bruising again. “Honey,” crooned softly. “Who did this?” Dawn’s face slipped into that scrunched look—the one she positively loathed.

“Clarissa?” followed by a gentle knock. “What’s going on in there?”

“Nothing!” Then: “I’m putting Dawn to bed!”

“How about you unlock the door, sweetie?” There was a soothing quality to her husband’s voice that she had always adored, and it was cranked to full effect at the moment. She hesitated, glancing over her shoulder, watching the hallway light dampen from his silhouette beneath the doorway. It reminded her of childhood, when the leaves would dance outside her bedroom window, casting shadows that seemed to live and breathe across her walls. That image raised her guard back up, stiffening her shoulders. She remained quiet, turning her attention back to her daughter, who was watching her with tear-filled eyes.

“I want Daddy,” she whispered.

“Clarissa, *please.*”

Again: “I want Daddy,” with slightly more desperation.

“Clarissa, honey, let’s just talk.”

“Mama!” she shrieked, slapping her hand away from where it had begun to dig into flesh.

“CLARISSA!” bellowed, now. She stood and padded over to the door, opening it and walking straight out of the room.

\* \* \*

Divorce papers laid neatly on the kitchen table, seeming to blaze with a vengeance. She was ignoring them, skirting around the space they occupied as if they would decide to leap up and tear her apart. Physically, that is, for they already had wrenched down her mental barriers, leaving her raw and aching from the assault. Confusion and betrayal loped around the house with her, snapping at her heels as she tore through rooms, tearing any loose objects free and throwing them on to the floor. Making her rounds, she made sure to hit each space, soiling any semblance of coziness they may have had.

She had been *trying*. She had been trying, and it didn’t matter. It never had before, so she wasn’t sure why the rejection stung so much now. She hadn’t been able to get Dawn’s teary-eyed visage out of her head, so when she awoke the next morning to pills set out on her bedside drawer, she had taken them without complaint. Every day since, the same routine occurred, and she had complied, gulping down the pills that nestled within her, altering how she acted, how she thought, how she loved.

Sirens were the first thing that clued her into her own screaming, for they were scarcely heard at first over shrieks and wails. Their sound grew increasingly louder, but she lacked all care in the world now. Then... they silenced. She finally ceased her rampaging, chest heaving, tears rolling viciously down her cheeks. The front door creaked, and her husband tentatively stepped through—still in uniform—locking on to her instantaneously. She could do nothing but glare at him, lip quivering, drawing herself up, attempting to collect her pride. Guilt settled over him, and he made an aborted movement toward her, hands twitching at his sides.

*He's coming to hug you.* Incredulous. Ridiculous. Giggles erupted from her, and once they started, they would not stop. She fell to the floor, unable to breathe, laughing at the absurdity of him. At the edge of her vision, she saw him kneel before her, but all she could focus on was the gun clipped to his belt. Cold clarity washed over her mania, sharpening blurry edges. *He's leaving you, and he'll take Dawn with him.* His hands curled around her, cradling—like she had with the bird. Hers wrapped around in return, a *bang* echoing in their home.

\* \* \*

Dawn sat silent in the back, strapped into her car seat. Her legs kicked the air as she surveyed the world rushing past them in a blur: face a vacant, blank template. Music would normally be filtering through the radio, drowning out the silence of the vehicle's occupants, but it didn't seem befitting of today. Clarissa knew the route by memory, and Dawn probably did as well, for their destination was the only place they ever really went alone together. The car felt heavier than it usually did, but she had never been one for lifting spaces, nor did she understand the point of lying to her daughter—or herself. Nothing felt right, but nothing was quite wrong either. Perhaps reality had yet to set in, or perhaps she had already made peace with it; regardless, neither were the case for Dawn, so she must merely feel the shift, feel its pressure, its significance.

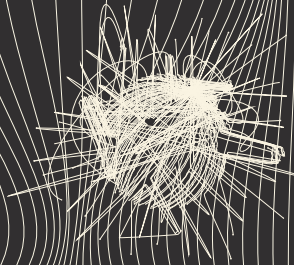
Asphalt turned to gravel, the need for headlights arising at some point during the change. She drove right past the parking lot onto the grass, which appeared to be a foaming sea of black under the cloudy night. The car finally stilled by the lake, lights casting a glimmer over the surface. She unbuckled, slamming the door shut behind her, then went to do the same for her daughter. Trudging around to the trunk, she removed a shovel, heading towards the lake. The spade dug into the ground, Dawn observing her as she worked. Crickets chirped, and they were the only other sound competing with the disturbance of dirt. It took far longer this time around than it had with the bird, causing her daughter to eventually sit down from exhaustion. Her arms trembled and her shoulders ached by the time she finished, but there was still more to be done.

Slogging back to her car, she examined the bag, prepping herself to haul it to the hole. Rolling her shoulder blades, she grabbed a hold of it, dragging it out, allowing it to land with a weighty thud on the ground. It was no easy task, but she eventually got it there, rolling it into place. Grabbing the spade once more, she began filling in what she had taken.

"Mama?" Such a soft, sweet sound. She looked over to Dawn, who still sat vigil in the dark grass, playing with a spade of it, not looking up.

"Daddy's dead, right?" A stunned feeling crashed over her, keeping her silent. Her daughter finally raised her eyes. "Like the bird?"

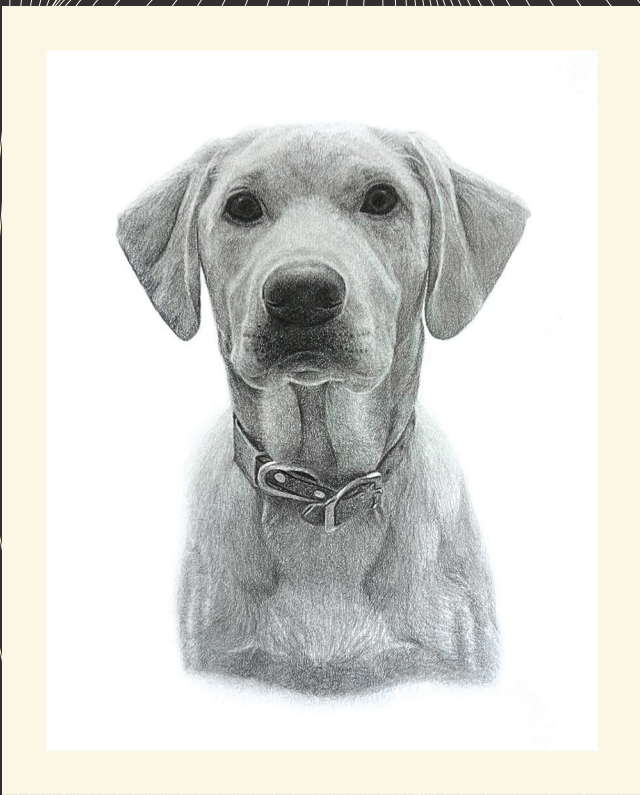
For the first time in Clarissa's life, peppermint coated her tongue.



**VESSEL**  
AVA FORSYTH



**WALK IN THE RAIN**  
OLIVIA CONNOR



**DAHLIA**  
ALLISON LINEMAN



**INK BRUSH**  
ELIJAH P. JOHNSON

# S(LEAP)ING

CORINNE VOELKER



*collapsing*  
asleep  
as a *slip*  
—down  
stairs;

follow crash, burnout, crunch, the lot, lashing din  
to a *well* of desperation,  
a rush of *quicksand* bruise,  
one—time vacation  
a *ticket*, obols  
of no use;  
liquid  
moon  
gone  
far.

I hope you *know*, you should understand.  
I've *given* up, it's *out* of my hands.  
When up is down, related, quixotically allayed.  
Life is short, art is longing too:  
common metaphors turning  
from rigid to renewed.

From within:  
not like a heart locked in chest  
smile bearing happy teeth  
eyes selling concentric soul

*Turn* a new leaf,  
*search* another page  
for your lost adventure;  
In his pockets, you'll find  
a hunk of bread

—a note from master—  
not meant for his lips.  
His *quests* to find a place:  
where courage  
where honor,  
where felicity  
as a silver sash—

minnow slipping quickly upstream,  
*casting* garments away,  
reddening  
—wake here.

# PENDULUM

ELIZABETH PLUMMER

It is in the waiting  
in picking you apart  
spilling pieces across the table  
only to sort them out

I fish for information  
drunk on the knowing  
of you knowing

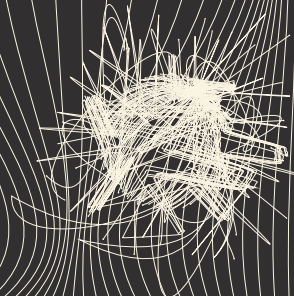
and my heart flutters  
at every question  
every smile  
every glance thrown my way

I pick up a post-it  
and feel myself fall  
for the short scribbled note  
and the doodle of yourself

I splay my love across your desk  
wrapped in napkin  
and I walk by your side  
hoping to step close

Always closer  
laying laundry across my bed  
wanting an invitation to yours  
and it's unnerving  
wanting you this way  
but I'm even more afraid  
that I'm alone in my waiting





**STY-LED IN BONAIRE**  
ALYSSA POLESKI



**STRING OF PEARLS**  
ABIGAIL WISNIEWSKI

**MISSING**  
VICTORIA PRAINO

**SPIRALING GROWTH**  
MADELINE HUFFER

**ORGANIC FORM**  
MADISON ZEVALLOS

**FINGERTIPS**  
GRADY AMUNDSON

# LITTLE BEAR

## MARLEY RAMON

Fear.

Mother was missing. Her bed empty, leaves scattered about the cave. Sniff. Sniff. You shifted around. Clean your paws. Un-mat your fur. Lick. What to do? Sniff. Standing, you stretch out last night's ache. It's cool, the dew of morning settling as the night turns into day. The hour too early to even form the sky blues you so love. There aren't any clouds. Not yet

Today will be beautiful. The sky clear, the air crisp, the wind cool along your fur. It will be hot later, the forest baking under the fierce summer sun. Dragon days coming with vengeance, leaving yourself to seek refuge in foliage. Temporary allies to all who shelter. You can't wait. A chance to forage, to play, to explore. A jaunt through the woods. Climbing trees. Splashing through a creek. You might catch a fish. You might see a bug. So much to be done. It was time to get up. Maybe you would look for mother. She had to be somewhere. You would find her. You could smell her already, she was near. Sniff. Sniff. Something else.

Pawing at your quarters, you look. The hole is opened. Bare.

Bear.

She has returned. As she enters, the usual vines fall back, once again hiding the den. She is wet. Her paws muddy and slick. Mother comes bearing gifts. She growls, a fish landing at your feet. Breakfast.

Joy.

The fish is delightful. Filling and delicious. The world rumbles as you rub against her. Gratitude. Appreciation. Sniff. Sniff. She smells like home. You look at her expectantly, angling yourself to the maw of the den. Shuffling on your paws. Anxious energy. She stares back at you for a second. Listening. Her ears twitch, as do yours. The forest is waking up. A whine. Mother's eyebrows crease slightly. Groan. Please. Want. Need.

She folds. Ears bowing. Eyes relaxing. She gruffs a goodbye. You are old enough to roam the lands for a few hours. You will take to exploration soon enough. Only a short hop until your third winter. It is time you gain confidence in your abilities. Mother will not be around forever.

Four small paws leave the den, mother sighing to sleep a few feet over. The sky is quickly gaining saturation. White puffs forming above your head. Glints in the distance you need to investigate.

The fish need not fear as you slosh through the brooks. Uprturning stones and truffling for prizes. You're full and have no need to hunt for now. Splash. Pounces sending ripples through the water. Fish scattering to hidey holes and distant banks. You hear something amongst the noise of the stream. Loud noises. Whimpering. You pad closer.

You will be of age soon; these are skills you need. Any great hunter must be able to watch and listen. Your ears flick to the noise. The clearing. A man. He's holding a weapon. You've seen skinned rabbits; you've been warned about traps. Mother guiding you away from silver mouths and sliced meat. This won't end well. You slink into the bushes. Leaving the comfort of the river for the safety of tree roots. Watching.

The man is many winters old. He is scarred and wrinkled. Skin brown from sun. Arms lean, hoisting a large axe. He is agitated. Much larger than the little one, he waves he arms. He makes hushed noises, eyes darting around. You can't understand his noises. He whines.

The little one is young. Skin smooth and fair. Hands as white as the fresh snow dustings, the first days you can remember. Her short coat as black as fresh soil. As rich in color as the harvest of roots you dig for with mother. Her mouth moves wildly, backing away from the man. Shrinking in size as she cowers against a tree. Her mouth is red. Red as fish. Red as breakfast.



The little one pushes out noises. Hardly stopping to breathe. The man stops. Grabbing the girl, you wait for his business to be over. For the weapon to fall. For the girl to fall. You press closer to the tree, hair raised.

The hunter pushes the girl away, she stumbles. He prods her further. The little girl of snow and soil sprints into the forest. Ragged breaths receding as she makes it out of the clearing. The man is worried. Hefting the axe in both hands, he searches. His coat greying from black. He surveys the clearing. Grumbling.

You itch to get away. To leave. To run to the den and find comfort in mother. To retreat behind the vines and embrace the warmth of the den.

The man sees you.

Frozen, you stare into his eyes. Green. Like the scales of the fish. He comes towards you. You're gripped by fear, claws digging into soft dirt. His hand pushes into the foliage. You remember how to move. Running. You scramble away. Searching for safety in the undergrowth. The sky is blue. Beautiful with its puffy white clouds.

You don't make it. His hands tight on the scruff of you neck. Momentum lost as you're yanked back towards the clearing. You're nearly three winters old. You're not nearly big enough yet. Earth. Grass and soil beneath your claws, you're pushed to the ground. Held there. You whine. Mother. Will she hear you?

The man lofts his weapon once again.

Fear.

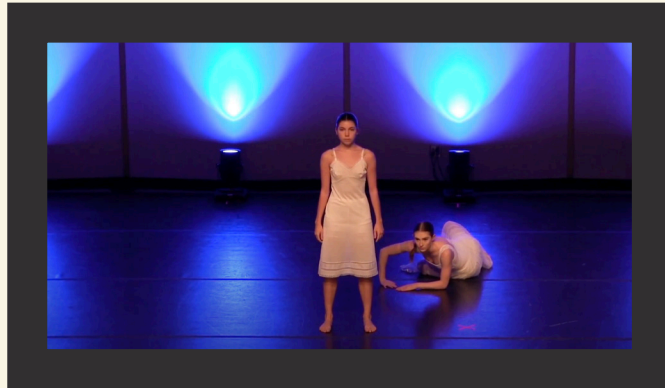
# BREAKFAST FOR DINNER

**Choreography** • Morgan Masters

**Music** • “Hockets for Two Voices: VI.” by Meara O’Reilly,  
“Drowned but Survived” by Nick Zammuto and Paul de Jong,  
“Going to Sleep” by Joanna Brouk

**Costumes** • Kelsie Mckalip

Mia Semieraro, Katelyn Turner-Leftwich



# TYPE TWO

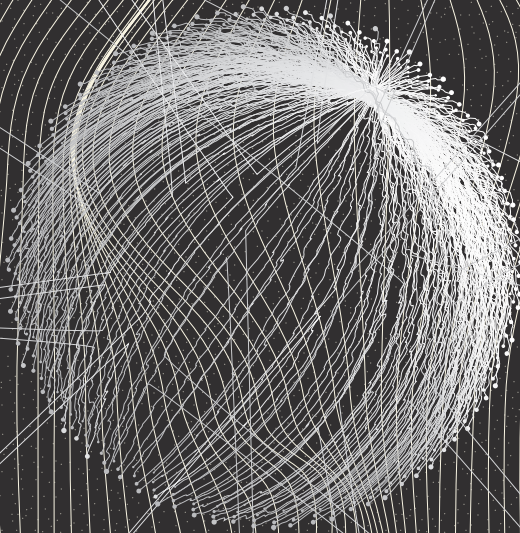
**Choreography** • Grace Mullins

**Music** • “Two (Instrumental)” by Ryan O’Neal, Behind “Every Decision” by Yehezkel Raz,  
“Atom 6” by Ryan O’Neal

Featuring The Helper (Lie with Me), written and recited by Eva Mihelich  
Elena Bobby, Nicole Hirsch, Moira Sullivan, Nicole Walters

“Like a tidal wave,  
I’ll make a mess /  
Or calm waters,  
if that serves you best”  
-Ryan O’Neal





• JOHN CARROLL • ASHLEY BARLETTA • REID BROWN • AVA VOELKER • ELENA BENDEL • CARA BONAVITA • SOFIA LOIACONO • VANESSA NOLAN • MATTHEW LUTZ • BELLA SURBELLA-HATHY • SARAH BECK • CARMEN STEWART • MATHERINE MICHENZI •  
• ELIZABETH PLUMMER • BRENDA MEDINA • CORINNE VOELKER • MARLEY RAMON • VANESSA NOLAN • ALYSSA SZYCHOWSKI • ELLA KLOSS • ELIJAH P. JOHNSON • ALLISON LINEMAN • SARA SIMPSON • MIKAYLA TATLOW • AURORA RISTO •  
• SAMANTHA MCDONALD • HANNAH DUCKETT • ANYAH HOLBEN • LATA VISHESH • ABIGAIL PACCONE • ZACHARY HANSEN • OLIVIA CONNOR • ALESSANDRA KOPPER • CLAIRE MILLSPA W • ANSLEY BUNNING • JAMIE SEKWETT • ALICIA FORSYTHE • GILLIAN SAMUL •  
• JENNA LUTZ • MARLEY RAMON • AMARA VENTURA • CAMERON DOUBET • ISABELLA CAPPELLANO • CASANDRA REESE • NICOLE LIBRA • SHANE FETZNER • OLIVIA CONNOR • GRADY AMUNDSON • VICTORIA PRAINO • ABIGAIL WISNIEWSKI • MADELINE HOFFER •  
• MADISON ZEVALLOS • ARCADIO TORRES • SAMANTHA MONTORO • SOPHIE MASSARO • MADELINE PRINCIPE • AVA FORSYTH • ANYAH HOLBEN • ALYSSA POLESKI • JOY HOGAN •