

The Lighter

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Editor's Note

Although *The Lighter* received fewer submissions this semester, I've mentioned to my staff numerous times that I believe the quality was consistently better. We accepted almost 30% more pieces than usual. Simply put, the art produced by Valpo's students this semester is beautiful.

We accepted a staggering amount of pieces that center on light. "The Path to Light Contains Obstacles" and "Staying Up to Shoot the Sunrise," to name a few. Is this a coincidence? Irony? If it's not too much, maybe we at *The (Light)er* can call it fate. And yet, *The Lighter* seems to always attract dark pieces like "So Unhappy" and "Never Go to Bed On a Full Stomach." In these, we see students struggling to answer questions of pain. Why does this hurt? And why does it hurt like this? There is a kind of bravery, a vulnerability in writing so honestly that I am thankful to be witness to. Still, we have pieces like "76 Lamps" and "Rebirth," which show us a coexistence of light and darkness. It's tempting to ask, how can this be? How can such monumental concepts live together, not overtaking each other? To which I can only think, it takes a precarious balance. A balance, I hope we've achieved in this book. Despite all of the cliches, I think it's safe to say we have to exist on both terms. The interaction of pieces within the book only highlight their strengths. Together, they make each other so much darker, and still, so much lighter.



All submissions remain anonymous throughout the selection process. The Lighter welcomes submissions from all undergraduate, graduate, and law students of Valparaiso University, regardless of race, gender, religious creed, or sexual orientation. The Editor assumes responsibility for the contents of this publication. The views expressed in these works do not represent any official stance of Valparaiso University



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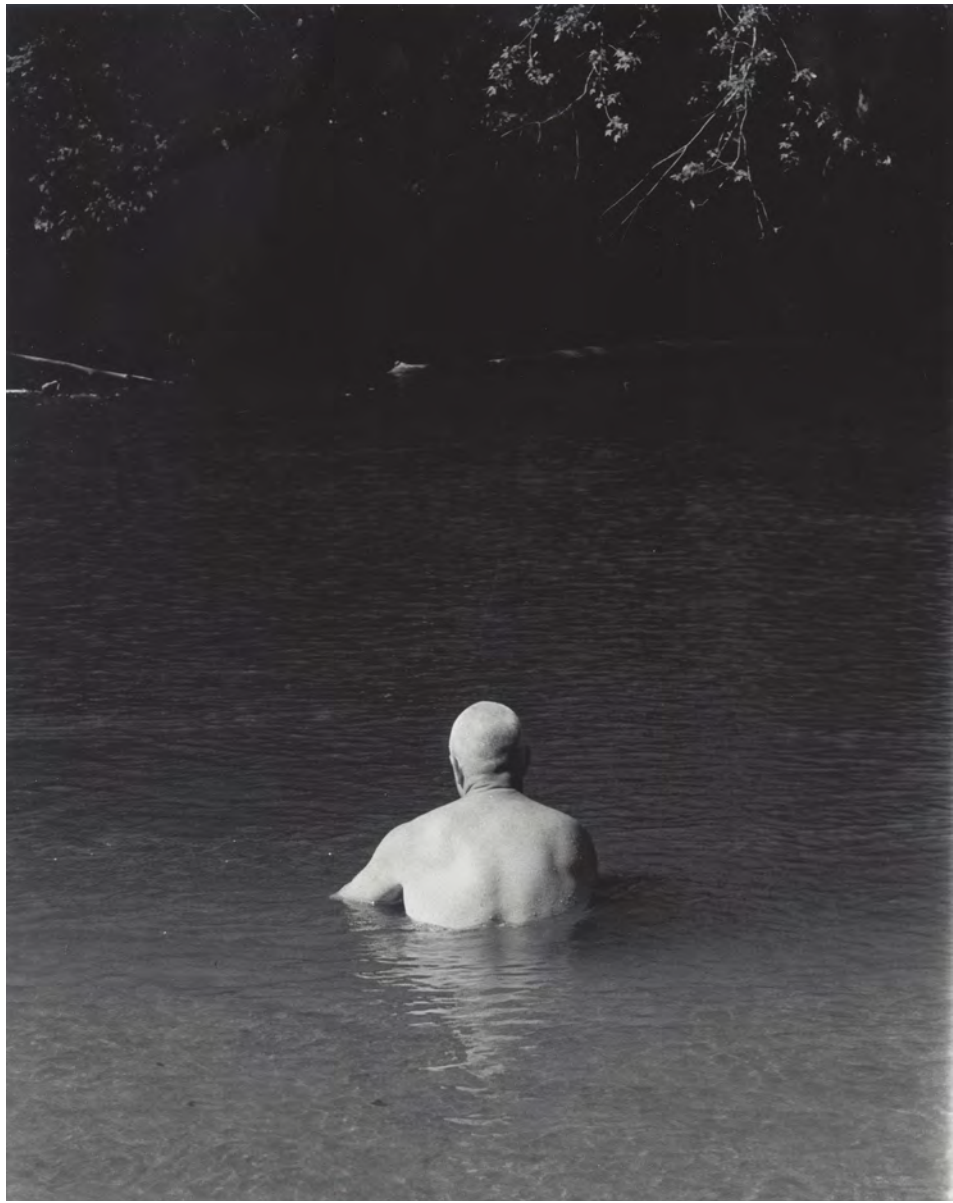
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Ophelia Complex (Father)

Elle Howard / Film Photography (Gelatin Silver Print)

generic pizza place, 6.34 pm

It's over too greasy pizza,
and soda with crushed ice,
I say,
it's been a year.
Almost two, she corrects me.
It's almost been two years.
We start laughing about her chemo,
the pains it caused her,
the sickness,
and how I used to force her to eat.
At one point,
heaving for breath through laughter,
she mentions a time we went grocery shopping,
and she couldn't remember where she was,
right there in the middle of Meijers.
We laugh about dad leaving,
my brother dropping out of school,
and us crying in parking lots.
I bring up the time we lost the car,
and that makes us both go quiet.
Too soon,
I guess.

Driving Lessons

I was fourteen and driving ninety miles per hour with my dad in the passenger seat. He had been teaching me to drive, and now that I was feeling much more comfortable behind the wheel, he decided it was time for me to join the one hundred-mile-an-hour club.

We were on a familiar road, Highway 39, which ran in front of his house. I can only imagine what the deep metallic-blue exterior of his car must have looked like as we drove down the road that day—a mere flash of color sprayed across a background of cornfields, like a painting of all shades of green and golden brown and yellow with an out-of-place stroke of blue mistakenly brushed right through the middle. But the color would have appeared and then vanished just as quickly as we drove faster and faster. The speedometer crept to the ninety mark, then ninety-five, and I quickly loosened the muscles in my ankle, releasing the gas pedal.

“No, no, no,” my dad urged, his low voice somewhat lighter, slightly amused. “You didn’t get to one hundred. You’ve got to get all the way to one hundred to be in the hundred-mile-an-hour club.” He was smiling and leaning forward slightly, like a parent coaching his child at a sport, but my dad was never interested in coaching my tee-ball team. This was more his style.

I was nervous the first time he announced he was going to teach me to drive. He took me to one of the country roads near his house, put the car in park, and told me to switch seats with him. I had never been in the driver’s seat of a running car before. He, on the other hand, had driven across the country without a license when he was just twelve years old, he informed me. I was an amateur.

I was stiff—hands at ten and two, my back tall and flat, my eyes pinned to the road. He told me where the gas and brake pedals were and how to put the car in drive. As soon as we started moving, I slammed hard on the brake, our bodies jerking forward, and he laughed.

He told me to put my hands at the bottom of the wheel, cradling it gently. He made me relax my back to fit the curve of my seat. I needed to be comfortable, he told me. If I was afraid, I could easily wreck by overcorrecting or being too jumpy. I needed to be alert, to be a “defensive driver,” but not a nervous one.

He taught me to be careful about staying in my lane, especially when going over hills. He told me to pay attention to whether streets had two or four-way stops. He shared his method of determining whether a car was a cop, and he advised me to never follow the exact speed limit in order to avoid suspicion. All very practical advice, he thought.

I loved my dad teaching me, passing down his knowledge. Driving with him, tracing the backroads of our small northwest Indiana town, the road filled with potholes and lined by cornfields sprouting like bumpers alongside a bowling lane, I was content. Few cars passed, and we were much more likely to spot a tractor than a police officer. Despite my lack of a driver’s license, or even a learner’s permit, I was safe on those roads with my dad.

This was perhaps the time when I felt safest with him, possibly the first time since I was

a little kid that I truly felt him taking his place as my parent, my guardian, rather than feeling as though I were the one who needed to take care of him. I loved the way that felt. I was absolutely hooked on that feeling, and I found myself calling him much more frequently, just to ask if he wanted to take me for a lesson. I wonder now if he realized that it wasn't the learning to drive that I craved.

But now I was being initiated. My dad was fulfilling his desire for adrenaline and also his desire to share that thrill with me, his daughter. Before the car could slow down too much, I crushed the pedal back to the floor, mostly wanting to get it over with.

I hardly blinked, afraid to miss seeing something—a deer, another car—that might cross our path. I suppressed the thought of wrecking or being pulled over as I sped forward. As quickly as my eyes could move, I glanced at the speedometer and back at the road, back at the speedometer, back at the road, until finally, the little orange spoke climbed just past the one hundred mark.

I released the pedal again and exhaled as my dad leaned back in his seat, still smiling. “So,” he said, “how did that feel?”

In relief, I laughed and glanced at him. He looked proud.

I was still smiling as I turned back to the road, shaking my head.

“Don't tell your mom,” he said.



Self Portrait (The Artist Becoming Herself)

Elle Howard / 35mm Film

Seed

I swallowed my mother's wedding ring
a few months after she made me.
It burrowed into my belly
as she searched the house and wept:
"Where did it go? Where did it go?"
A few months later she reached into my gaping mouth
and plucked out a diamond flower.
Smiling, she tucked it behind my ear
as I took my first shuddering breath.



Identify as Beautiful

Andréa Kütemeier / Digital Photography



The Monarch's Shadow

Andréa Kütemeier / Digital Photography

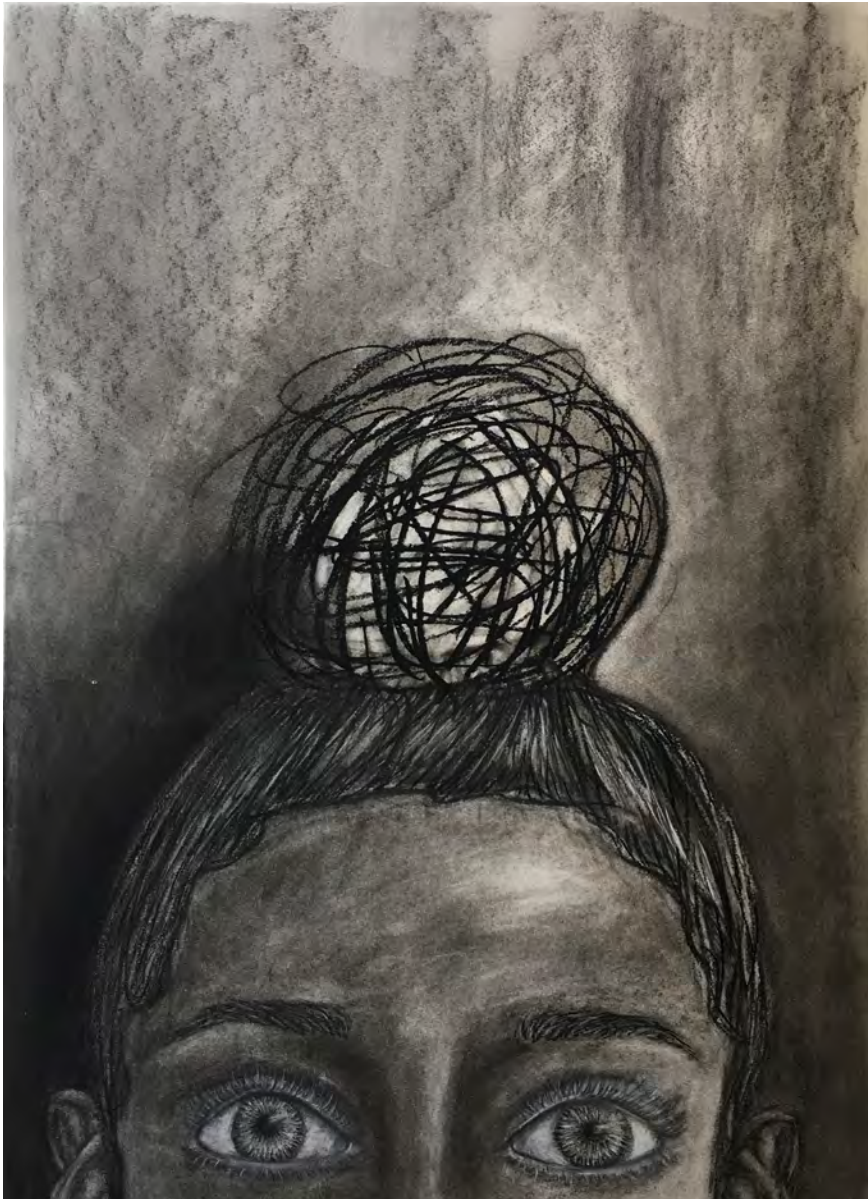


Yin and Yang

Kian Benton / Digital Photography

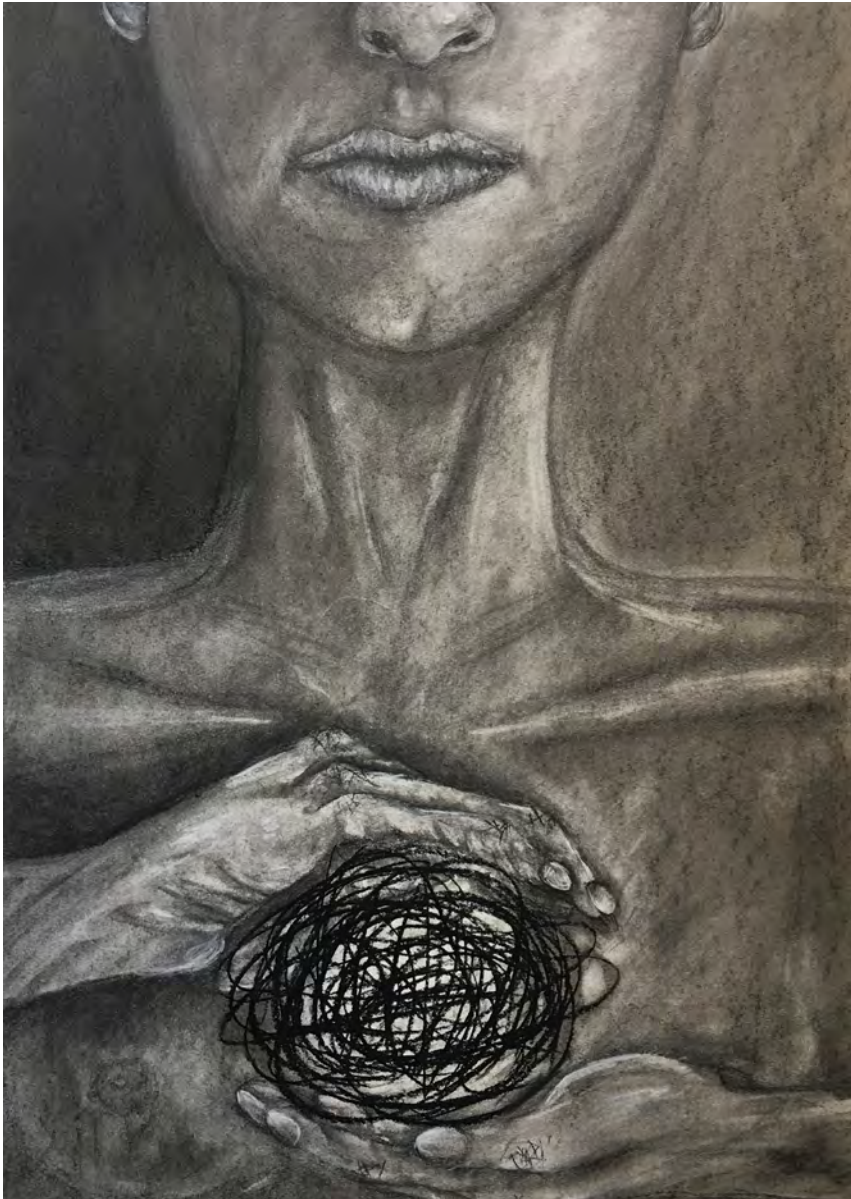
Dear Sister

I know it's scary inside your head now, and you feel horribly alone, but I was once in your shoes. I know you feel hopeless; your demons claw at the inside of your skull, the way waves batter a sailor's boat in a storm. I know you can't see the sun, so you think it has chosen to abandon you, that you are destined to live a life in darkness, where demons can find you. I know you lack the ability to love yourself now; you swear nobody ever will. It kills me to see you suffer, huddled under blankets, struggling to breathe as your fears press on your chest; the clock ticks out 2:08 AM in a silent house. Though your mind is heavy, your heart aches, I need you to know it will all be okay one day; you are so beautiful and strong, such as the ocean you feel you are drowning beneath. You are loved more than anything. I swear, until you learn to love yourself, I will love you enough for both of us. One day, clouds will fade, waves will calm, the demons will still. You will see the sun; you will see beauty in the rainbow again.



Insight

Milka Vidova / Charcoal



Oversight

Milka Vidova / Charcoal



Unfound

Grace Erickson / String, Color Pencil, Watercolor Pencil

A Closed Church is not a Church

I hadn't planned to go in, anyway;
it caught my eye from some feet away—
the light amidst the shadow-filled night,
like a shadow in the heat of midday.

I didn't plan it, but still my feet bore
my hesitant hands to the glass outer door—
peering inside I found no one in sight,
and so I pulled, eager to further explore—

The door was locked shut for the night.
I let my hand drop back to my side.
While I could not say that I was dismayed,
I wondered why they had left on the light.



New Orleans

Emily Gustin / Digital Photography

Good Thing They Didn't Have a Dog

CHARACTER

MEATBALL, M. 20

Smart robber

NOODLE, M. 22

Stupid robber

MR. HANDLER, M. 40

Father to Lily and Rose

ROSE, F. 16

Mr. Handler's daughter

LILY, F. 1

Mr. Handler's daughter

**we never actually have to see the baby

SETTING

The Handler's middle-class home.

AT RISE: it is night time. The Handler's house is two stories with the front side cut off so the audience can see inside all the rooms. Upstairs there are three bedrooms. MR. HANDLER is sound asleep in the master bedroom. LILY is asleep in her crib in the next room. ROSE is awake in the room next to that with headphones on and her laptop open. There is also a bathroom upstairs.

Downstairs there is another bathroom, a living room and a kitchen. MEATBALL and NOODLE enter dressed in all black and creep to the side door attached to the kitchen. NOODLE reaches for the doorknob. MEATBALL slaps his hand away. NOODLE looks confused. MEATBALL slaps him upside the head, taking a pair of gloves out of his pocket and putting them on. Realization dawns on NOODLE's face and he takes out his own gloves.

NOODLE moves for the door again, turning the handle and finding it's open. He puts his hand up for a high-five but MEATBALL does not acknowledge it as he walks into the house. MEATBALL walks through the kitchen and into the living room, looking for valuable things.

NOODLE wanders around the kitchen, opening and closing cupboards with a fair amount of noise and then moving to the fridge. He pulls out a box of leftover pizza and starts eating it. In the living room, MEATBALL carefully and quietly inspects everything, being selective with what he puts in his bag.

NOODLE drops the pizza box and MEATBALL swivels his head in that direction with annoyance. NOODLE picks up the now empty pizza box and puts it back in the fridge, slamming the door loudly. MEATBALL stalks back into the kitchen and hits NOODLE upside the head. NOODLE looks surprised and MEATBALL puts his finger to his mouth in the "hush" symbol. After a warning glance, MEATBALL goes back to the living room. NOODLE rubs his head and walks upstairs. He enters the bathroom, looks halfheartedly through the medicine cabinet and

Good Thing They Didn't Have a Dog / Continued

shoves a bottle of pills in his backpack.

MEATBALL moves from the living room to the kitchen, picking out a few valuable things to take.

In the bathroom, NOODLE takes off his gloves so he can relieve himself. He does not flush or wash his hands. He inspects himself in the mirror, fixing his hair. In the master bedroom, MR HANDLER stirs.

MEATBALL moves into the downstairs bathroom.

ROSE takes her headphones out and puts her laptop aside, getting out of bed. She exits her room and goes downstairs to the kitchen.

NOODLE exits the upstairs bathroom and forgets his gloves on the counter. He enters LILY's room and stands over her crib. MR. HANDLER gets out of bed, slowly stretching and rubbing his eyes. He goes into the bathroom.

NOODLE exits LILY's room and goes to the downstairs living room to look for MEATBALL.

ROSE takes the pizza box out of the fridge and frowns when she finds it's empty. She throws it on the counter behind her but it falls to the floor. She crouches down to pick it up. She is out of NOODLE's view when he glances in the kitchen for MEATBALL. NOODLE moves past the kitchen and finds MEATBALL in the bathroom. ROSE stands up and puts the box on the counter. She opens the freezer, grabs a pint of ice cream and heads back to her room.

MR. HANDLER washes his hands but does not notice the gloves. He exits the bathroom just as ROSE closes her bedroom door.

MEATBALL follows NOODLE out of the downstairs bathroom and toward the stairs.

MR. HANDLER walks back to his room. NOODLE and MEATBALL head up the stairs just as MR. HANDLER shuts his bedroom door. They enter LILY's room and NOODLE points to the baby. MEATBALL looks unimpressed.

ROSE gets back into her bed, taking a while to situate herself. MR. HANDLER climbs back in bed.

NOODLE reaches for the baby but MEATBALL slaps his hand then the back of his head. NOODLE makes a pained noise. MR. HANDLER hears this from the bedroom and sits back up.

MEATBALL and NOODLE head back downstairs but MEATBALL stops NOODLE, lifting his

hand angrily and showing him that he doesn't have gloves on.

MR. HANDLER walks into LILY's room to check the noise out.

NOODLE runs back up the stairs and grabs the gloves off the bathroom counter.

ROSE opens her ice cream and realizes she has no spoon. She sighs and takes her blankets off again.

NOODLE runs back down stairs and MEATBALL slaps him on the head again.

MR. HANDLER smiles at LILY who is still sound asleep. ROSE exits her room to get a spoon.

MEATBALL and NOODLE go into the kitchen. NOODLE pauses with a confused look at the pizza box on the counter. He quickly puts it back in the fridge and they exit the house. ROSE enters the kitchen and grabs a spoon. She slams the drawer and winces at the noise.

MR. HANDLER hears this from upstairs and looks warily out into the hallway.

ROSE notices the kitchen door is not locked so she locks it. She heads upstairs as MR. HANDLER comes into the hallway. MR. HANDLER sees her and gives a relieved smile. He kisses ROSE on the forehead and they both go back to their rooms and get in bed.

END.



Small-Scale Perspectives

Kian Benton / Digital Photography



We are Small

Lexi Gault / Acrylic

To Those Who Are Different

Dear Night Wanderer,

Cursed with endless wanderlust and a thirst for knowledge unquenchable

Devour the world whole in your quest for answers undiscovered

Let libraries of Alexandrias rest in your stomach,

The prickly spines of books in your teeth and

Swallow down wells of knowledge and truth and immortality.

Dear Star Gazer,

Who lays outside in the crisp night,

Dreaming of galaxies beyond your reach

Build stairways into the hearts of nebulas and disappear into the void of space,

Grasp burning stars and stream their heat through your veins and become one with the universe.

Dear Day Dreamer,

Who tilts their head up to the clouds and dreams of things yet to come

Who thinks in terms of cosmic wonder and not earthly practicality

To you, Day Dreamer, reach for dreams unseen but not impossible and cradle

their burning star bellies in your soft hands and know that you always

could, you did, and you still can.



The Galaxy We Reside In

Mark Young / Digital Photography

Desolation

i wish there was a word for
the need to be somewhere miles away
seeing who my soul aches for most
moving fast to happiness
as in,
if i am not immediately
in her hometown,
surely i will melt into the lithosphere
and be part of the lava underneath.
burning, and burning, and burning,
my heart so hot it heaves.

i wish there was a word for
the need to be tethered to right now
tied to this moment exactly
forced to be stationary
as in,
if i do not have an anchor to
this place on earth,
surely i will rocket through the stratosphere
and be lost to the icy depths of space.
freezing, and freezing, and freezing,
my brain so bare it breaks.

i wish there was a word for
the need to be surrounded by friends
suffocated by their presence
enclosed by their warm circle
as in,
if i am not crowded in
by my closest,
surely i will evaporate into air
and be gone from all human memory.
flying, and flying, and flying,
my core so cold it cries.



Full Orbit

Nathan Biancardi / Oil

Over You

I run my nails along my ribs;
burrowing in the warm, soft folds.
I pull my hands out from behind my back,
survey their reapings: little eraser shavings
cling to the gutter between finger and nail.
I hold them up, breaking the spouting
water's path. A peace offering:

Take them, please leave.

I scratch whatever will give, off
my shoulders, my arms, my legs,
my stomach, my chest. I scrape
and I let go, until my body
is corduroy.

I get out of the shower:
tiger-striped, exposed, burning,

new.



Spatial Awareness

Kian Benton / Digital Photography



Beyond the Surface

Andréa Kütemeier / Digital Photography

Whiskey, Wisdom, and Writing: An Interview With the Wagenaars

Michéle Strachota: When did you start writing, and specifically when did you start poetry?

Chelsea Wagenaar: I wanted to write since I was eight or nine. I didn't have a very concrete sense of what I wanted to write just that I liked writing. I thought I would like fiction since that's what I read like most kids. Though I did have a book of children's poems when I was young and I loved them. So I can sort of see how it led me to becoming a poet. I don't think I did a lot of writing in high school. I didn't really have any opportunities to do it and I didn't do much on my own. And then I went to college with the plan to major in English and my plan on the other side of college was to be a writer, though I didn't really know what that looked like. It was my second year of college when I took an intro to poetry writing class and it was like a conversion experience. My instructor... I don't know what she talked about. She talked about poetry: Why study it, why write it, what she loved about it. I just felt like I had never been excited and invigorated in any other class in my entire life. And that feeling didn't die off once we got going. I felt like the way poetry used language was all the things I was really interested in about how to use language.

Mark Wagenaar: I had been a reader of novels my whole life, but as a boy I was more interested in fantasy novels. As I got older I gravitated toward detective novels. But my first writing really was poetry. I had been taking a Twentieth Century literature course—my undergrad, I was just there to play soccer really. Sort of a business major by default. So I took this class, reading Eliot and Stevens and just didn't know you could do these sorts of things in poetry. So I started my own feeble attempts in response of... I think in response to having my heart broken, who knows, love and loss and all that. I had this moment where I didn't know what to do with myself after college. I played soccer for money, and I ended up going to New Jersey to study international diplomacy. I was still reading and writing poetry and I was like, seems like something to think about, you know. Anyway, so I decided to just take a crack at a couple of different things, and I had taken one [poetry] workshop. But we only workshoped my poem if there was time. I remember when I worked for the North American Review I was able to read poetry and fiction submissions and I realized that I had come a little ways and mine weren't necessarily as bad as some of this stuff. I kind of felt like I could maybe get into this. Like I could make it.

MS: Are there any questions about being a writer that you get all the time but that annoy you?

MW: One that I get quite often is, "Where do your ideas come from?" That's a tough one to answer.

CW: Another one that I get is, "What kind of poetry do you write?"

MW: What kind of poetry do you write, yeah.

CW: I never know what anybody means when they ask what kind of poetry do I write.

MW: It's tough to describe.

CW: Do you want to know if it rhymes or do you want to know if they're all about the same thing? What do you mean "kind?" So my book came out—the press is in Florida—and I went on a tour of some colleges in Florida. Some of them were off the beaten path and the people at the readings weren't necessarily writers and didn't know anything about writing. Every single reading, somebody asked me if I liked Edgar Allan Poe, cause that was the only other poet they had heard of—not even Robert Frost—but Poe, "Was he a big influence on your work?" I don't think there's any questions that annoy me though.

MW: I'm just happy to have them:

Emily Neuharth: What are both of your poetry dreams? Like, do you want to someday have this number of books published or do you hope to be a professor at this university?

Whiskey, Wisdom, and Writing: An Interview With the Wagenaars / Continued

CW: Well, I think as far as teaching goes, we'd love to teach creative writing in the same department.

MW: Yeah, that's the dream. I think we'd love to team-teach a course at some point.

CW: I want to be a finalist for a major poetry award. I don't even need to win it, just a finalist...

MW: Just to be in the national conversation would be. Getting the phone call about the first book is something that is almost indescribable. I broke down in tears when I got the call. I actually missed the call, I was like son of a bitch! But that really was one dream. Currently I have similar fiction ambitions. I would love to publish my short story collection, a novel.

CW: I was in a grocery store when I got the call about my book, in the cereal aisle. And my student was down the aisle, stocking cereal and it was kind of awkward. It wasn't a student I knew very well and I was trying to keep my voice down, my enthusiasm down. And what are the odds of the person near me actually knowing me so if I was freaking out on the phone, he'd be like, "Professor Wagenaar?"

MS: What advice do you have for young writers? Or, writers that have just begun?

CW: If you're young and you want to pursue a graduate degree in it, to not take out loans for it, then find programs that will fund you. It's a really fulfilling, wonderful thing to pursue but it's not worth racking up debt for.

MW: For me, it's to read or write something everyday. Just keep your feet wet, even if it's for ten minutes, you've done something, right? I think, something along rejection too. If you decide on this for a lifetime apprenticeship, which is what writing is, you're going to rack up hundreds of thousands of rejections, and collect those like they're bags of gold, because they really are. It means you've had the guts to send your work to the world and not everyone displays that kind of courage.

CW: And the patience to wait so long for the "no."

MS: What are the ideal conditions for you to write in?

CW: Morning. It needs to be A.M. for me to write well. I like to write in silence, but if there's music on it's fine [if it's] without words. I like to have a pencil and paper and a laptop. So I usually start with pencil and paper but then I hit a point where I need to know what it will look like on a page. I like it to be raining—no, just kidding. But it is great when it's raining. And I always have a book or two that I love that I can—at dull points where I'm hitting a wall—pick up and read something, a poem or two, to give me fresh direction.

MW: Yeah, a book as a spirit guide to lead us through the underworld of writing, our own personal hell. For me, it's a night flight to anywhere with a big glass of whisky.

CW: Yeah, Mark likes to write on planes. I don't write very well on planes.

MW: I don't know what it is, but window seats at night with a glass of bourbon and, like you know, don't talk to me. Headphones on some kind of music that makes me a little teary.

MS: What is the reality of being a published author? Versus what people expect?

CW: It depends a lot on what you publish, what genre it is. Reality is, if you're a poet, nobody cares. There can be so much anticipation and eagerness that goes into waiting for a first book to come out. And there can be a really crushing sense of disappointment when it comes out, and with what doesn't happen. I [had] kind of heard enough to know that you're book being out is momentous for you and a few people, but it can take a long time to feel like it has much effect. So I wasn't expecting to be in the New York Times or anything. It got reviewed, I think two or three times and I was happy with that. A lot of books come out and don't get any reviews because there's so many.

MS: Especially now with self publishing.

CW: Yeah and with all these tiny, little presses that publish a handful of books every year. Some of which are good. It's just really hard to pay attention to everything out there that there is to pay attention to.

EN: So with all that considered, what about publishing a book motivates you?

CW: It still feels to me like a personal accomplishment. And I'm happy with the people who read it and feel directed or inspired in their own work, or even not in their own work but they read it to read it and aren't writers themselves. I don't want to write poems that only other writers are interested in. I want to write poems that my aunt can read and take some pleasure from. But practically, to[for] the job, you have to publish books. So that kind of spurs you on if you want to get a job, get tenure, those kinds of things.

MW: It also seems like if you've got a couple years worth of poems you often look back and think, am I making any progress? What are the themes that are really driving me forward? One thing poetry allows you to do is to reinvent yourself if you care to do so. Or if you come across an aesthetic that's wildly different than your own you can pursue that. What might this other one look like? It sharpens the pleasures of reading other collections.

MS: What do you find to be the most difficult thing about writing?

CW: Writing...Actually doing it. I don't know how to say it other than that. Actually turning out some language into something that seems more than the sum of its parts. I think writing stresses me out. As much as I love it, I heard someone say once, they don't love writing, they love having written. It's coming against all the ways you fall short. Your imagination falls short. Your vocabulary falls short. I don't have the tools I need to write the thing I want to write. So there's this constant battle between having to do it and feeling like you can't do it. That to me is harder than rejection.

MW: That's about right, yeah, marrying your focus and your discipline to a poem's conceptual possibility. Because quite often if you don't have the right focus or are not spending enough time on a poem, it's going to fall short somewhere in one of its movements; the possibilities for figurative language will go unrealized and I think that's what haunts me the most, that I won't necessarily be able to elucidate and draw out the mystery that I feel when I'm approaching the poem.

CW: You're a lot more eloquent than me.

MW: That's why I always let you go first so I can like mull over the possibilities of the answer. Words!

CW: That's why I write things, because I can't say them.

EN: Has teaching affected or influenced your poetry writing?

MW: For me, one way that it's affected my own writing is the level of attention that I've brought to texts of other poets. If you're teaching a book you better know the hell out of six or ten of their poems.

CW: You never know something as well as when you teach it. I think it's the preparation. To be accountable for something, you have to see not just what something is but all the way through it. I feel that anytime you teach something you have to be able to defend it in some way, even if you don't love whatever it is, you still have to bring yourself to where that [author] is. What's important is that the work of your imagination when you read something to teach it, that work is much more taxing than if you were reading for pleasure or for your own edification because you have to imagine responses to it that are not yours at all—which is a lot of work. This could be teaching or it could be a lot of other things—but I always write better when I have something else to do or feel like there are a lot of claims on my time. I don't

Whiskey, Wisdom, and Writing: An Interview With the Wagenaars / Continued

write very well if I just have endless free time. Maybe writing for me feels like there's much more urgency if I'm having to chisel it out of a life that I otherwise would not allow it to happen.

EN: How do you think being married to a fellow poet influences your poetry?

CW: We get asked different version of this question. Do we read each other's poems? Yes.

MW: Yeah, Chels is my first reader. I'll know that a poem is half-decent if all Chels says is, "Oh, yeah I liked it." but if she says something like "Well, I wasn't sure about this part..." then I know I need to go back to the drawing board. Helps me to sharpen my own inner critic in terms of not letting myself get carried away.

CW: For me, I have somebody built into my life who can tell me, "Read this poem, it was awesome!" Mark reads all my work and gives me good feedback. I'm also around someone who writes all the time so I always feel like I should be writing more than I am. Mark doesn't feel like that because I don't out-write him but he out-writes me.

MS: Do you ever feel like you're competing?

CW: Well, we're competing all the time—we enter all of the same contests and submit to the same places. It doesn't usually turn into an issue, but there have been a few times where I was really pouty that I wasn't a finalist in something that Mark won or was a finalist in. I mean, it sort of comes with the territory. We dated for two years before we got married, so if this was going to be a serious issue I don't think we would have been able to move forward. But 99% of the time, it's enriching for us both to write poetry.

MW: I think one of our best things is that we don't take it too seriously. Like we take the craft and each other very seriously, but in terms of who gets published we don't really let it get to us too much.

EN: At the beginning, did you have support from your loved ones to take this poetic path for your life?

CW: I always did. My mom was really supportive of me I think she was probably a little bit skeptical of the specialized nature of my major [Poetry], that it was even more specialized than an English major, but I didn't have anybody making me feel like this was a terrible life choice or anything like that.

MS: Do you think things would be different if people hadn't supported you in that way?

CW: I don't know. It matters to me what other people think, so I could see it affecting me. From my parents, it was support alone. It was really just them saying "I recognize this thing that you love to do and I support it." I don't know, the first year of grad school was so tough, and I've told Mark this several times, that I don't think I would have stayed, I'd have dropped out, if I hadn't had Mark built in as my friend and husband.

MW: I don't think my parents still know what I do.

CW: Yes they do! They know more than my mom—she didn't even read my book!

MW: My friends, if they went to school it was like law school or med school so they've been buying houses and nice cars and things like that so I accepted early on that writing might entail a vow of poverty and that was okay with me. At its very richest, it's living a life where you're thinking about the interior emotional landscape of yourself and starting to navigate that and offer up some measure of that in

response to the world and the things you can't make sense of. But for me, I didn't really get a lot of, "Okay that's really cool" type of thing along the way, it was more like, "So, this degree... you can do what with it exactly? Like go teach high school?"

MS: This is not writing related, but how did you guys meet?

CW: When I was at [the University of Virginia] we were in a Christian fellowship called Chi Alpha and it was a really big undergraduate group, big enough that some graduate students would come to it too like Mark. We actually met at Chi Alpha's St. Patrick's Day party. We didn't meet in a writing context, just in a basement of somebody's house. We talked about books, it was one of the first things we talked about.

MW: Yeah, Chels told me she loved this book and this book and this book and I was like, "Those are all my favorites too!"

CW: So many lies...

MW: I hadn't read any of them.

CW: That's how we initially met. And then when I took Intro to Poetry he was teaching it, but I didn't take his class. *laughs* Because he was my friend! We weren't dating at that point, we'd just talk when we'd run into each other sometimes. I thought it'd be weird to be in his class, I just wanted to be his friend. Some people ask us, "Was Mark your teacher?" and think that something really sketchy happened [MW: Ohhh yeahhh] but no—it wasn't like. *laughs*

MW: But she did take that poetry class taught by my roommate, and they'd turn in their poems for workshop and I would go through them like, "Oh, where's Chelsea's?" and I'd flip through until I could read Chelsea's and then I'd write her like, "Hey I really liked this one" so we just kept talking and we were both working on poems-

CW: Mine were awful-

MW: Not true! We had a lot of great conversations and then we started hanging out, watching *The Office* quite often [CW: It's really nerdy haha] and we ate a lot of Thai food...

MS: Anything else either of you want to add for the interview?

MW: Maybe, that sometimes we compartmentalize literature too much. Like maybe they took a literature class and get one anthology that sits on their bookshelf. But I think that wherever you end up, it's worthwhile to try to keep reading, touching base with creative people in your community, going to readings. I don't know, I think that can be a richly rewarding pursuit that you don't have to be a teacher or anything like that to enjoy it and have it affect and change you.

Mark arrived for the interview before Chelsea did; once he realized this, he got really excited, hid by the door, and motioned to us to stay quiet. As soon as Chelsea opened the door Mark jumped out at her and she screamed, hit him, and then looked at Michelé and Emily: betrayed. We want to formally apologize for breaking the girl code and proclaim our deep appreciation for their Jim and Pam moments.



Staying Up to Shoot the Sunrise

Brendan Miller / Digital Photography

National Geographic III (August 1965)

"There was a white glow,"

Her lips formed a stiff, half-frozen smile.

her hands guide old prayers—all the evidence
the litanies of half a dozen sects,

between his ribs, the blood
sucking to right and left,
purely for pleasure.

SOUND SPINS OUT

with
eyes downcast

he stood poised on the brink of a *crescendo*

She spread crooked
fingers against a rain- and mist-
soaked sky

Suddenly his eyes flashed like headlights
in a dark tunnel.

This is only the first
sip, the first foretaste of a bitter cup which
will be proffered to us year by year
wilted by the flash of sun

(sleep well . . . the dawn will come)



Ebb and Flow

Kian Benton / Digital Photography

National Geographic IV (February 1976)

Humanity in bathing suits
the flood, the stillness of disbelief

dark lava cliffs
brown medicine bottles
sugar, beer, and champagne
wind and rain and
stars and silence—
Don't we excite the unruined side of you?

fourth-year students eyeing each other
through mesh fencing.
16 chairs upholstered in velvet
a strange
wilderness.
near riots, rapacious in white
a caged magpie, beer cans,
ROCKETS—
BIRDS—FLOWERS—ANIMALS—
lava itself,

phosphorous penitents
swig from the bottle.
glacier-carved
seeing unseen sights for the
very first time.
close enough to be devoured.

What was in that vast expanse?
more waves, more waves, more
Serpentine deaths

"The time is coming," His teeth are bared,
his claws extended, "when we will bottle this
oxygen and sell it."



The Path to Light Contains Obstacles

Marc Young / Digital Photography



Redirecting the Light

Brendan Miller / Digital Photography

That Would be a Good Name for a Band^[1]: Various Phrases I've Heard Over the Last Four Years^[2]

Tiny Tank Rock Box

Elbow Factory

John Adams' Jack Asses

Six Ho Ho™ Breakfast

The Space Martinis

Virtual Freedom Training

Dead Metaphors

Vegetable Love

Everyone's Favorite Nut Job

Tongue Blood

The Cherry on Top of the Sundae of Discontent

Leftover Death Sandwich

Bob Cratchit and the Bookkeepers

The Real Frat Bros String Quartet

Straight Up Bagpipe Rave

Liberty Cabbage

Lap Dance in the Atheist Rock Bar

The Merchants of Death

Reverse Factor

Soul Acne

Zucchini Fatality

Extraordinary Stupidity and The Bad Tempers

Minivan Fleet

Smite Stab Slay

From Carpet to Hardwood

Ticket Debacle

Your Grandma's Potatoes

Voluntary Buzzcut

The Secondhand Tortillas

One Hot Sec

Sucked Out the Moon-Hole

Pet Danger

Mosquito Fleet

Goldfish, We Have a Situation

[1] I have copyrighted all of these, and if you name your band any of them I will sue you. Also, that is an Honor Code violation and generally lame.

[2] Alternatively, you may use any of these names if you can ensure I get a cut of the profits and/or fame.



Soulful Street Guitar

Brendan Miller / Digital Photography

One-Man Band

His fingers ached. He'd been strumming an A minor chord on his beat up Fender guitar over and over for the past hour and a half and he didn't have any intentions of stopping. Sometimes his forefinger would bleed from the pressure of holding his pick too tightly, but he always considered that a good sign. Blood reminded him that he was human, and that his heart was still beating. He was the same Michael as he was the day before, though, and that was never an easy pill to swallow.

School was out for summer, which sucked. He was 17 and unemployed, which wasn't the biggest deal but still sort of a big deal, since the majority of his high school classmates were working at the movie theater or the swimming pool or babysitting tiny nuisances. Naturally, his parents were disappointed. But it wasn't his fault, he insisted. The problem was that there weren't enough places for punky teens to work in Newark, Delaware. To which his mom would always respond: "You aren't a real punk like those other kids Michael. It's just a phase that plenty of kids your age go through." That one made him laugh, even just thinking about it.

Newark was one of those places that was so bland on the outside that you got a bad taste in your mouth just from looking at it. You could count the number of unique looking houses in his neighborhood on one hand, and every other street corner had a park sitting on it waiting for kids who never came. That was a lie, actually. Kids came. Michael was just never one of them.

Michael didn't remember falling asleep the night before, but he woke up to the Jensen's dog barking up a storm across the street. He quickly slid open his window and opened fire with his airsoft gun, nailing little Fluffy in the head twice before she shut up and ran into the backyard.

Just kidding. Instead he shoved his pillow over his head and tried, unsuccessfully, to drown out the noise. By the time he gave up on sleep it was about 8:30, which was way too early to be a functioning human being. He threw his body to the right and rolled over onto the floor and started his daily routine: Play on his phone for about an hour, make breakfast, play video games for a few hours, and then do the one chore his mom put on the refrigerator for him. Since both of his parents worked they couldn't check on him, so a chore was the best they could do. He really wouldn't have minded doing more than one thing, but he wasn't one to overachieve. Today, he was on lawn-mowing duty.

His pale skin began to fry the second he stepped into the sunlight. It was actually a pretty mild day, but Michael was fairly deficient in Vitamin D so he really felt it. He made sure to take off his shirt in case any of the neighborhood girls happened to ride by and wanted to take a peek at his slender body.

As he pushed the mower around his yard he had to continuously brush his long brown hair out of his face, which (in his mind) only added to his emo allure. But after a thirty-minute show, he only managed to talk to middle-aged women walking dogs who only stopped to ask where his shirt was. Another journey outside the house, and another failure to come back with a girlfriend.

Before sliding the lawnmower back into its designated spot in the garage, Michael stopped to watch the pool party that was starting a few houses down. He recognized all of them—they were the neighborhood kids he never quite fit in with. And at the end of the street he could hear the sporty guys playing basketball, another group that didn't have room for an introverted guitar player in their ranks. It seemed like there was a niche for everyone except him. He figured we weren't all born to fit in, though, so he could live with being the outcast.

Michael started to turn his back on them all and put back the mower, but he caught a glimpse

of his next door neighbor struggling to hold up a dented mailbox. He ran over and helped steady the mailbox so it could be nailed back into position.

“Hey thanks. Would’ve never got this thing up on my own, but I got too much pride to tell my mom that.” Patty stuck out his hand and Michael shook it. Patty Callahan had just graduated from their high school, but Michael’s interactions with him came solely through these chance moments. Michael always thought he was a cool guy, even though he hardly showed up to his classes. Michael often heard from his own mom “what a tough time Mrs. Callahan is having with Pat, he just isn’t as motivated as you are honey.” Otherwise, he knew practically nothing else about him. And their conversations usually stopped right there, but not that day:

“Michael, you wanna jam with my band sometime? My mom told me you play.” The question caught him so off guard he thought Patty must’ve been on the phone with some other, cooler, Michael.

“You kidding me? That’d be wicked.” He scolded himself immediately for using the word “wicked,” but Patty didn’t seem to mind.

“Come by later, we’re looking for a new guitarist.” They shook hands again, this time ending it with a fist bump. Michael was utterly psyched for the first time since, well, ever.

Michael figured eight o’clock classified as “later,” so that’s when he grabbed his guitar and walked over. He felt like he was walking into his first audition. He had on his ripped black jeans and his Pierce the Veil shirt for the occasion, and he was feeling pretty confident with that. Mrs. Callahan answered the door, and boy was she thrilled to see Michael.

“Michael! It’s SO good to see you. I don’t know why we didn’t arrange this earlier. Do me a favor and tell Pat to keep the music down, though. He might listen to you.” She hugged him for good measure and sent him down the stairs into the basement.

Michael had been wondering all day how good the band was going to be. Would he be a shoe in? I mean, he’d been playing for years and felt great about his abilities. Or would they be super hardcore and insist on face melting tunes that he couldn’t keep up with? By the time he reached the bottom step he was sweating. He turned the corner to find Patty sitting behind a dingy drum set, alone. There was no other equipment, nor was there any room for any. A tiny TV was on in the corner playing the local news, which was the only thing preventing an eerie silence from enveloping them.

“Do you know any Pearl Jam?” Patty asked after a second or two had passed. Michael immediately ripped into the chorus of “Even Flow” on his guitar, and Patty promptly joined him for the rest of the song. After they finished, Patty laughed and looked Michael directly in the eye.

“You’re in.”



Eyes Wild Eyes Wide

Hayley Kim / Digital Photography



Chicago

Ivana Mileusnic / Digital Photography

76 Lamps

I used to lie in bed next to him in the mornings and trace the constellations of freckles that extended across his chest. It seemed so unreal that those strange, little specks which I loved so much, were only a diminutive part of a vast soul that I would never be able to fully comprehend. Sometimes, he would roll over and wrap his arms around me before even waking up. His galaxy eyes would slowly open and his lips would curve into the brightest, most adoring smile a person has ever seen. If I didn't know any better, I would've sworn that this boy had caught the sun in his hands and gave a little piece of it to every person he smiled at.

I woke up and admired the novae within him every single morning, right up until the day that his light burnt out. He skidded into a busy interstate where a semi-truck crashed straight into his driver's side door. They announced his time of death at 4:39 p.m. At 4:39 p.m., I had just stepped onto our front porch to admire the first day of spring. From that moment on, no morning has been the same, no coffee as sweet, and no constellation as beautiful.

Several years passed before I found myself sitting in a therapist's office, explaining why I own 76 lamps and why every light switch in my house has been taped up to remain perpetually "on." When I'd pull into my driveway, the brightness gleaming through the curtains occasionally tricked me into believing that his smile was behind the door, waiting for me to come back too.

I used to begin my mornings tracing his chest and making a list of every reason I loved him. Now, I find myself beginning each morning by making a list of things I would miss out on if I just fucking killed myself already.

- kisses from my neighbor's puppy
- gusts of wind on a warm day
- that new tea sold at the market
- a clear night sky full of stars



Apollo's Farewell to Manarola

Jessica Baxter / Digital Photography

Fifth Date

The salmon that night was exquisite.
The way it melted in my mouth, leaned
into my tastebuds—and so easily
they gave way—buttery and smooth,
it warmed my mouth with fiery subtlety,
smooth on my tongue, and silk inside
my cheek, catching on my teeth—
just so.

The wasabi touched down gently
then quickly skittered into my nose, up
into my eyes and exploded from my
forehead. A cough, the smallest gasping
cough, escaped between my
burning lips.

And the rice, seasoned perfectly—
a feat I understand from trying
to make it—and sticky, neatly contained
by that strip of seaweed girding its richness.
At my lips, it begins to fall apart; tongue
delves in and ravages the grains,
each making its way inside
my throat.

Disjointed flavors jumbling together
in my mouth, flailing to come together,
layering one on top of the other
and building to a perfect, harmonious
blend—Our waiter asks if we need
anything else, but we are satisfied—
“just the check.”

She Said

(AT RISE: BROOKLYN stands in front of a dark HOUSE. In her left hand is a photo, in her right a suitcase.)

BROOKLYN

She said that she loved me, you know? She looked me right in the eye and said, “God, Brooke, you’re the most beautiful thing I’ve ever seen” and then she’d laughed that laugh of hers and grabbed my hand and I loved her too. I thought we were forever. I thought we were -

(BROOKLYN gestures to the house.)

I thought we were a little house on the prairie with three kids and a dog kind of forever. But I was wrong. Maybe, when I looked at her and saw forever, she looked at me and saw something fun and adventurous and temporary. I mean, why else right? Why else would I be here without her? God, we’d spend days dreaming about the future. Thinking about going to college, and getting dumb little jobs and being happy. And I thought it was going to happen. I really did! We bought this stupid house, on this stupid block, with its stupid little fence - and we never kissed or anything but that was okay, I just thought we both knew but, God, I was wrong, okay? I thought I knew. But I didn’t. I never do. She did. I mean, of course she did. Because she left. She found some stupid boy, this stupid, perfect boy who was a pediatric nurse and knew how to make her laugh and how to make her smile and loved her so goddamn much and suddenly it was all “Brooke, he’s so perfect for me! Brooke you’re the best friend a girl could have. Oh Brooke!”

(BROOKLYN wipes her face.)

Well, you know what? Fuck you Natalia! And fuck this house! And fuck the love you made me believe we had! Do you hear me, Natalia? In that cute little house we bought together! DO YOU HEAR ME? FUCK YOU!

(BROOKLYN falls to the ground, sobbing. The lights in the house turn on. END SCENE.)



Moon Flower

Amoreena Roll / Digital Photography



Morning in the Mountains

Mark Young / Digital Photography

First Frost

Moonbeams brighten
desolate fields before dawn,
stretched before the man and the boy.
Frost has fallen, air frigid,
but the child's excitement
contradicts the cold.

The scene is still, silent,
except the crisp crunch
of steps on cut cornstalks
leading to the line of woods.
They climb the steel ladder
to the bench, perched
in the oak tree,
rest the guns between their legs,
and wait.

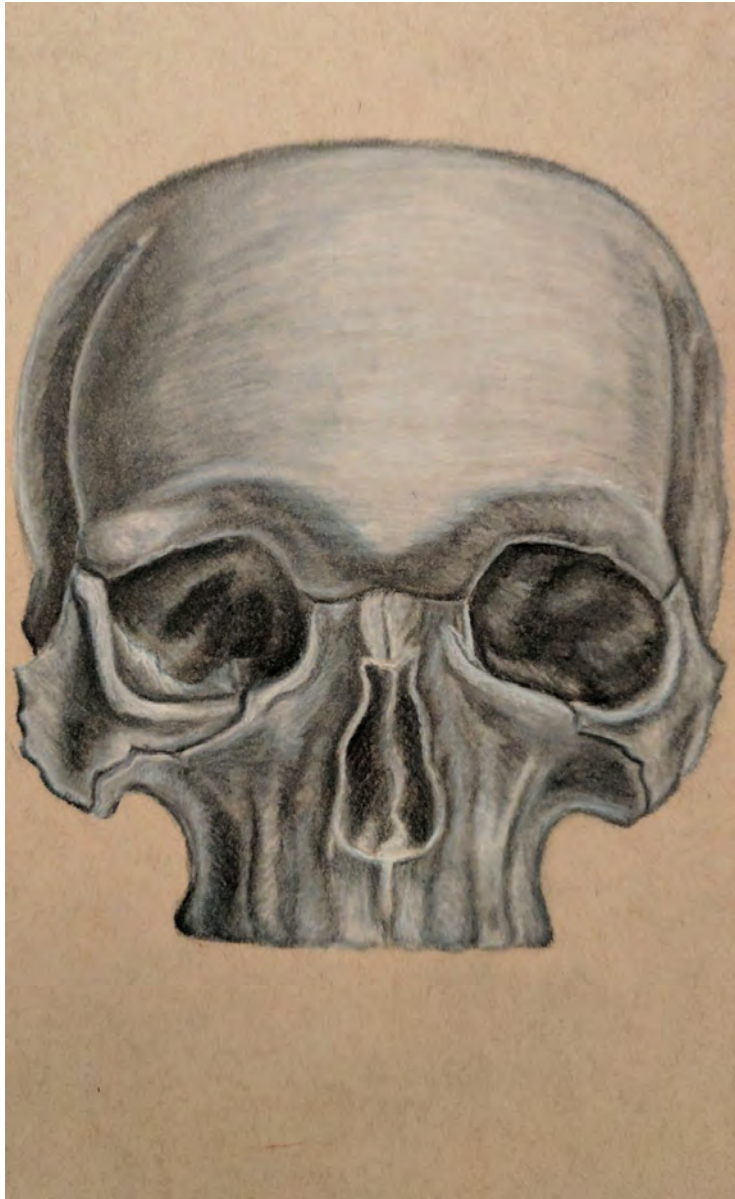
In chilled air, breaths cloud,
the man's strenuous,
more shallow than before.
The boy says,
"Can I blow the call?"
Rather than warn about whispering,
the man smiles and nods.

Time passes, the navy sky
disrupted by light,
the grandfather desperate
to slow it down.
He tells the boy tales,
passes stories, lessons,
to another generation
as the sun peeks over the field.

Despite their whispers,
the child's giggles,
a buck, oblivious,
its antlers expansive,
wanders across the field,
stopping, searching for food.

They freeze,
momentarily admiring
its magnificence.
The child lifts the weapon,
aiming with skill
learned from his grandpa.

Finger caressing the trigger,
the boy feels a feeble hand
gently lower his shoulder.
He stops, searches
his grandpa's glassy gaze,
affectionate, fixed on the deer.
The man says, swallowing tears,
"Let's let this one live
A little longer."



Me In 100 Years

Lexi Gault / Charcoal

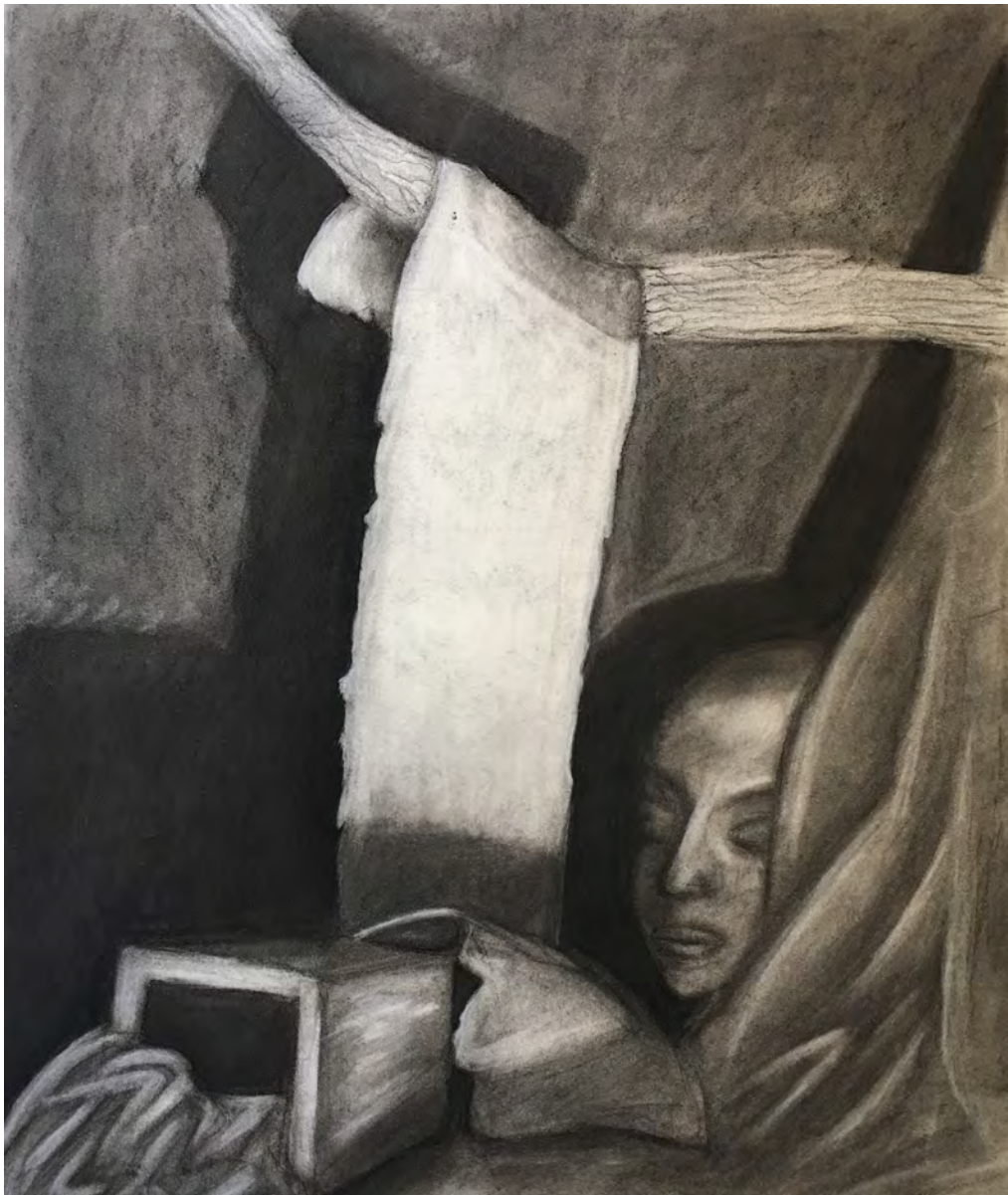
Caged Captor

I remember a grenade that I threw
which bounced off a wall, rolled back
and blew me in two.
My legs remember, too.

They work better, they say, as independents,
leaving my hips behind,
Hopping—free of stride.
Now that's freedom.

I was enslaving myself.

Staring out of my cage,
creating grenades
to annihilate my captor.
I was not too delighted
with success,
though, my legs
have never been better.



Suppress

Milka Vidova / Charcoal

The Rain Check

Somber strokes send lightning bolts.
Terrible lies haunt the unsurprised.
All in all, just hide it with a plaster smile.
Pick up the phone and make it a liar.
“Sorry Betty but Fred’s terribly sick.”

Hold back the heavens, mute, click.
Assuage the babe after his drunken rage.
Rewind to days of vows and vanilla cake.
Snatch each scream; blot the spill.
Intercede from above—pray to patron saints.

Tell him that he’s a good man.
Repeat it—allow the testament to echo
off floral walls until it becomes believable truth.
Yet tears flood; he promises to change.
So nod needlessly, rehearse for tomorrow.

Survivor

His knuckles find a place
against her brittle bones for the last time
on a frigid, September night.
With shaky hands and a freshly purpled cheek,
she drives south on the expressway
with sixty two dollars tucked into her bra.
It's all she had time to save
since the night she began to suspect
he was capable of homicide.

Melancholy memories from a decade
of survival have found their home,
sitting heavily within the bags that lie
under her monochrome, worn-out eyes.

She finds herself stumbling barefoot
into a Louisiana Speedway at 11 am
with the smell of whiskey
still dissipating from her throat;

soft jazz and a gas station coffee
to cheer her up.

from the top of the parking garage

*Dedicated to Corey Walgren,
who passed away at 16 years old
on January 11th, 2017.*

did god hold him for a few seconds
in mid-air, when that first step took him
off the ledge?

the proximity, the finality, the reality
of his descent from life
burrows into the caves of my eyes,

and sticks to my thoughts like the gum
under the typical classroom desks
that he will never sit at again.

it makes me wish; wish that the world
would rewind its orbits in order
to change how the pieces of that day

fell into place. if that is impossible,
then i wish that the world would
stop turning all together, because he did

and he was just like everyone else:
a human fallen from eden.
he sparked the wick in my left chest

that kept burning till tears fell like sad suns
dropping from above, brushing the bottom
of sky and spelling out this stranger's name.

is this how god makes shooting stars?



Historic District

Isabel Coffey / Digital Photography



Bellion, the Performer

Brendan Miller / Digital Photography

An Interview with Mark Irwin

Mich el : When did you start writing poetry?

Irwin: I started writing poetry when I was about 10 years old and they were not good poems. They were, you know, poems with visual images, kind of hieroglyphics and so it was crude. But I was always obsessed with words as a kid. And then when I was about I think 13 or 14 my mother was giving me French lessons and she bought, just by chance, a book of the selected poems of the French poet Arthur Rimbaud, the great 19th century poet. I'm actually working on a book of translations of Rimbaud. So that was what got me seriously thinking about poetry. I still wasn't writing very good poems. I don't think I wrote any acceptable poems maybe till I was 19 or 20 years old. But I was always a big reader.

M: Do you feel it's normal for people to have to write a lot of things they don't think are good?

I: I think it's important to write. I think every poet writes a lot of mediocre poems. And I think it's important to keep all those poems and to see how they fail. When I write, I write probably three or four poems a week and I think from every 50 poems that I write there's maybe three or four good ones. But often I'll go back to the broken poems and take pieces of those poems that might become part of other poems. I don't look at them for at least a month. I like having an objective view. If you look at something too quickly everything looks good. So after a month or two I can look and say, "Oh that's horrible. Can't believe I wrote that." But you know a writer needs objectivity with his work. For me it's time. You could be too emotionally close to something. My mother recently went in and out of assisted living and I was writing quite a bit about memories when we were young. But I didn't want to read any of what I had written for at least a month because I knew it was very emotional. There's a wonderful line by Thoreau, he says, "Why is it that a glass of water remains fresh for three or four hours and then grows stale but when frozen tastes sweet forever?" It is often said to be the difference between emotion and intellect. Poetry that's just written out of emotions won't last. It has to have some form or intellect and that's the frozen water Thoreau is talking about. I think that's an important distinction in poetry. There's a lot of writing today that's just emotion. We see that with pop songs. It's important in poetry that there's some sort of intellectual form to preserve the voice.

M: Are there questions that you get that you feel are either unwarranted or based on an assumption about what it means to be a writer that you think is false?

I: People often ask, "When did you start writing?" I'm sure there's a lot of writers that probably started writing at an early age. But I think you can start writing at a later age and become an equally talented writer. Like everything else it's about the amount of time you put in. Every day I write. I think it's a question of perseverance. I see a lot of students that I think are geniuses but maybe they don't put the amount of time into refining their craft that's necessary. Compare writing poetry to playing the piano. You have to develop a sense of form before you can really say something that's going to endure in any way. So going back to Arthur Rimbaud. He started writing poetry when he was six years old but he quit writing poetry when he was 21 years old. Quit completely. I think the best advice for any writer is to work every day at what you do. That's important. And it's difficult in the world we live in today because there's so many interruptions, you know, cell phones. As a writer today, you might miss some incredible event out the window because you're looking at your phone. So perception. We're talking about perception. It's important for a writer to watch what's going on. If you're constantly looking at your phone, you can dull your perception. Perception is important for all artists.

M: Do you feel like that's true because that's where you would get an idea for a poem? Or do you think it's more about understanding?

An Interview with Mark Iriwn / Continued

I: Perception is how you process emotional events that you're watching. So it's your response to the event. Perception can be a dull response or an original response, a sensory filter of how we filter the world. Different artists filter the world in different ways. Andy Warhol for instance, was filtering pop icons constantly. He was seeing a can of tomato soup as an icon of a mechanized industrial world. Well most people just saw it as a quick way to eat their lunch.

M: Do you have advice for writers, say they've written a long time, and are wanting to get into publishing?

I: Yeah, let me go back. I think it's important to write every day, but also to read the best writers that are writing. If you're a poet, you need to read the best poets. Even if you don't like those poets it's important to study them. You could write every day and if you're not reading, if you don't have models, or poems to emulate, it might not do any good. A balance between classic poetry and contemporary poetry.

M: I've read a lot of things that debate whether or not writing is a skill that can be taught-

I: Yeah, I'm not so sure writing can be taught. It can certainly be stylistically improved and honed but I don't think emotion—writing, all art is about emotion. How you process emotion through perception. If I walk into a class and say that my dog was hit by a car, each of those ten people in that class will process that information differently. Those students who have dogs will each respond more strongly. Someone who has lost a dog will respond the strongest. Writing is like that. How you process that emotion depends on what type of an artist you are and what sort of form you give that emotion. I don't think art can be taught. Art can be coached. Intuition. What to leave out. That's where art gets really complicated. It's a more advanced form of art. All artists, writers, go through editing. And you'd be surprised. For example, the original version of the Sun Also Rises begins with Jake boxing at Princeton. Fitzgerald told him to start it in Paris, with the second chapter. Hemingway said, "No, no, no." But the classic book we all know begins in Paris with Jake and Brett in Paris. It begins more in the middle than in the beginning. It begins in medias res. A lot of great art begins in the middle, not at the beginning. There's just so many factors that go into art. It's still a mystery to me. I haven't figured it all out.

M: You've mentioned a lot of great novels. Do you feel like studying other genres-?

I: Absolutely everything. I mean a writer has to know about everything. Has to know about anthropology. Has to know about science. I think the broader your field of perception is the greater the possibility for your own art will be.

M: Do you have ideal writing conditions?

I: I really admire people that can work anywhere. But I like writing in a quiet place. I think that part of art is silence. There's the silence between words, between lines. I get up in the morning, early, usually about six o'clock, and I'll write or read for a couple hours.

M: What do you think is the most difficult thing about writing?

I: Getting started. Beginnings and endings are very difficult. They're the most important parts of the poem. Beginnings are so important because you have to get the reader to want to read the poem. Endings are very important because they're usually not good enough. That's true with anything, isn't it? Beginning a relationship, ending a relationship. It's best in surprise. Beginning in surprise, ending in surprise.

M: Do you have a moment or a poem that you're proudest of in your writing career?

I: There's a poem of mine that I just wrote. It's called "In Autumn." I'm not singling that out. It's just because it just came

out a week ago. I'm 64 years old. I've had a lot of people very close to me die. Two artists very close to me who committed suicide. For me the poem is not just about autumn, it's about mortality. I like poems that are human. I don't like poems that are just selfishly indulgent and say, "Hey I'm artsy-schmartsy." I like poems that talk about the beauty of being a human being. And the joys and sadness. To have so much time on the earth, and only so much time, and never to know, when it'll begin or end.

M: What are some other writers that have influenced your work?

I: Well I love the poet, W.S. Merwin. I like Jorie Graham. A wonderful poet who teaches at Harvard. Mary Ruefle. John Ashbery who just died. He was great original poet. And I love Sylvia Plath. I like the black poet Yusef Komunyakaa very much. There's an Asian American poet Arthur Sze, I like his poetry very much. I feel fortunate that Emily Dickinson is an American poet. Her poems are really something.

M: You're a professor, correct?

I: I am professor. I haven't always been a professor. I've taught in 10 different creative writing programs, but now I'm a tenured professor at the University of Southern California But I think it's important that artists don't teach too much. It's important that you're not always talking about what you're doing. Like I am now, I shouldn't be doing this. *laughs* It's a joke. It's like a chef who comes to your table and you say, "Wow that soup was really good. What was in it?" And if he spent an hour telling you all the secrets he would not be a good chef. There's some mysterious thing.

M: Do you think that's because-?

I: It's a mystery, and you don't want to destroy the mystery.

M: So young writers need to discover that for themselves?

I: Well I mean, it's not so important when you're young, but when you get older, just to keep talking, I mean you shouldn't. It's natural when you're teaching to say well I remember when I was doing this and I did this wrong. And that's fine for a while. But you never wanna start talking about projects that are going on. The reason you write about something is that you don't quite understand it, usually. It's a mystery to you. So by talking about writing too much I think you can destroy the internal mystery of writing itself. Which is not good. So there's a healthy balance between the two is all I'm saying.

M: Well, that's all I had.

I: Well, good. That was great.



Momentum

Andréa Kütemeier / Digital Photography

Flood

The flood came
while I was away, but
a second one spilled
from the mouths of my mother
and siblings and neighbors and strangers. They sang out how
it began with drums. It rose to their hips.
It danced across backyards
and simple streets,
leaving behind leaves like confetti
on every roof
and in every river.



Under the Bridge

Isabel Coffey / Digital Photography

Driving East on 109th While Passing Under I-65

It's strange to me, how everything comes
back to you. I am nothing but whispers,
echoes of sentiments you gave me,
that go on brooding. The darkness of
night, as I drive on through concrete veins
to the country, is a ghost of your breath.
Searching for an exit, I live to flee,
but there are no off-ramps, only a pit
stop. I wished to travel the world with you,
but the windows are locked, I cannot breathe.

When I look into the dark country night,
I see failures. Missed opportunities-
the shortcomings of my life – that play out
like images upon the silver screen;
and maybe I'll laugh or cry. Yet I grow
worried. There's only thirty minutes left,
but there's so much to see and to love.
We have not spoken in years, but I know
that each and every week you attempt to
cross my mind. I hope that I may cross yours.

What Was He Like?

His hands were like Midas

Gilded gold and weathered

With the burn of the sun revealed in dark spots

On wrinkled skin

But he was strong.

For on his shoulders was the burden Atlas refused
to carry

And he was wise,

Mouth prickled in thoughts even Aristotle refused
to ponder

But it was his kindness.

It was his kindness.

It was his laugh, too booming and wide for his
frail frame

It was the slant of his smile, and the soft touch of
his weathered hands

It was his eyes, it was his hands, it was *everything*.

Yes it was everything.

By God, he was everything.

2.14

I'm so fucking tired of missing you.
It hits me in line at Walgreens,
looking at your favorite candy bar lined up at the register,
and on Sunday evenings,
when you were always off.
But it always hits the worst now,
when it's 2.14 AM,
and I'm the only one awake,
and I miss you for some god-knows-why reason.
You weren't even that great of a dad,
not even that okay of one.
I don't know why I'm doing this to myself,
torturing myself like this,
when you weren't that great.
The mantra of my past year has been all he did was yell.
I've said that to my mother,
as she cried once again.
My brother,
with a bitter grin.
To myself,
countless times.
But that's only half-true.
You yelled —
Christ, did you yell —
but you were there.
You were there for a lot of it,
for most of it.
I remember the time I got strep throat as a kid,
and you stayed up with me until morning and told me about timezones.
I remember how you used to let me fill in your tattoos with marker ink as you slept off a double-shift,
and how you woke up to rainbows and stars on your legs but didn't complain.
I remember how you used to shake a towel around our heads after bedtime baths,
and how you'd yell turbo-dry while we'd laugh and laugh.
I don't remember you tucking us in,
or telling us bedtime stories.
But I remember feeling safe, at night.
Maybe that's why I miss you at 2:14 AM.
Because nights were always quiet and safe and calm,
and you never yelled at night.
I guess I loved you more at night.
I guess I still do.



The Last Picture I Made on Dauphin Island

Elle Howard / Film Photography (Gelatin Silver Print)

The Neighbor Boy

CHARACTERS

JAKE, M. 7
BILLY, M. 7
DAD
BILLY'S DAD

**Note: does not have to be played by an actor, possess a single O.S. dialogue line.

SETTING

Adjacent front yards separated by a fence.

TIME

Any time after 1920.

(AT RISE: There is a red door and a blue door, each with porch steps, a picket fence between them. JAKE and DAD play catch in front of the red door. BILLY sits in front of the blue door digging a hole. JAKE looks over at BILLY)

JAKE: Can he play?

(DAD looks at BILLY and the blue door with disgust)

DAD: Not today, son.

JAKE: But, Dad-

DAD: Not today.

(Behind the red door a phone rings. DAD goes inside. JAKE throws the ball in frustration and it goes over the fence. He hesitates for a moment, looking back at the red door and then runs to the fence)

JAKE: Can I have my ball back?

(BILLY looks up at JAKE who points to the ball. BILLY gets the ball, walks over to the fence and places it in JAKE'S glove)

The Neighbor Boy / Coninued

JAKE: Thanks.

(JAKE runs through the red door)

JAKE: Dad!

(BILLY stands at the fence and stares at the red door)

(DAD comes out of the red door in a nice shirt, carrying a briefcase. JAKE follows him out)

JAKE: Dad!

DAD: Jake. We'll play later.

(DAD walks quickly across the yard, exits. Jake sulks on the porch steps. BILLY stares at him from the fence)

JAKE: What are you staring at?

(BILLY goes back to digging his hole. After a moment JAKE gets up and lobs the ball across the fence. BILLY walks the ball back over to the fence, holding it out)

JAKE: No, you're supposed to throw it.

(BILLY throws the ball weakly)

JAKE: That wasn't bad. Do you have a glove?

(BILLY shakes his head)

JAKE: Okay, well how about I throw it into your yard and then you get it and throw it back. Kind of like fetch.

(BILLY smiles and nods)

BILLY'S DAD (O.S): BILLY!

(BILLY runs through the blue door in a panic. JAKE looks at the blue door. Unintelligible yelling and crashing come from inside)
(JAKE goes through the red door. Silence)
(DAD comes out of the red door carrying a briefcase. JAKE follows carrying a backpack)

JAKE: Can I invite him to my party?

DAD: No.

JAKE: But dad-

DAD: End of discussion.

(They exit. BILLY comes out of the blue door carrying a worn backpack and slowly, sadly exits)

(JAKE enters wearing a birthday hat and carrying a baseball bat with a ribbon on it. He runs through the yard and into the red door)

JAKE: Mom! We're back! Are the cupcakes done?

(DAD enters carrying full bags of groceries and a bouquet of balloons. He goes through the red door. Upbeat music plays inside)

(BILLY exits from the blue door and sits on his front steps watching the red door for a time)

(The red door opens and JAKE sprints out holding a cupcake and baseball glove. He holds them over the fence for BILLY)

JAKE: Quick!

(BILLY runs to the fence and takes them. JAKE smiles and runs back inside, red door slamming. BILLY beams and takes a bite of the cupcake)

END

“So Unhappy”

She says as she drags her index fingers beneath her eyes, banishing the black that is always there for her. Reminders of breathless heaving, of a chest that cannot expand, of a soul that is suffocating.

Why? She imagines them asking, gesturing to still-frames of performances and costumes. Masks.

You can do anything, they say. Wide open, they urge from behind bars and beneath nails.

I am split she utters. I am everything before you and nothing you can see. I am what you expect and an arsenal of unknown. I breathe, but I am smothered. I must leave, but I am bound.



Happy Place

Tony Staros / Film Photography (Gelatin Silver Print)

Across the Scream

Ping.

Another note from you.
Each one makes me smile.
You shouldn't have
such a hold on my heart,
and yet—

Ping.

Message after message,
witty, dorky, fun.
conversations of puns and cats.
It's like we've been friends
for a lifetime, but—

Ping.

You're a stranger,
a man I've never met,
yet somehow,
with only letters on a screen
you've become my safe space.

Texting, or, Building Up The Courage to Ask For Help

Hey

Hi

Can we talk

Sure, what's up?

Just feeling kind of down

Why's that?

Depression

Ah I'm sorry, I've been feeling kind of down lately too.

How come?

I have this huge test coming up and I've been studying hardcore but I still don't feel ready

You've got this

I know, still nervous though

You study and work harder than anyone I know, you got it in the bag

Haha thanks, I have to go study more

Talk later

Okay, see ya then



Cracked Self Portrait

Nathan Biancardi / Oil



Self Portrait in Blue

Nathan Biancardi / Oil

Never Go to Bed On a Full Stomach

I'm topless, bending lower to kiss
his neck, my hands glide down his back.
I feel each breaking wave of his spine,
his ribs locked under muscles. But
he's pushing me away.

"When was the last time you went to the gym?"

I let go
of his bony arm. I look down at my rolls
of belly that remind me of the pile of comforters
kicked to the end of my bed. I slide off of his lap
like sandbags released from the hot air
balloon that flies away with my self-
confidence and lust.

Every morning, I see the folds of my stomach
crumpled in the covers.

When was the last time you went to the gym?

Those words begin to slice the Fat off
of my arms, legs, and belly. I collect the Fat
like seashells or fireflies, storing each piece in a jar.

Then, instead of eating, I dip my fingers
in poison and line my lips, the shade: night.
I kiss him.

"You taste so sweet," he says.
"You're my dessert," I say

as his head drops into my waiting palms.
I begin to cut open his tight skin.

Opening my jar, I scoop out the treasure
and bury it deep in him. I sew what I sowed,
savoring the rise and fall of every bulging lump.

Before walking out the door, I leave him
a note stamped with my lips' cracked print:

Gone to the gym
—*your ex-girlfriend*

Rebirth

Headlights peer out, prodding in the dark,
breeding uncertainty as the car rolls on.
Gasoline burns, and she leaves her mark.

In the breath of silence, no angels hark.
He screams to the wind, "Where have you gone?"
Headlights peer out, prodding in the dark.

No voice heard but his, no dog to bark,
just the wailing fervor of man withdrawn.
Gasoline burns, and she leaves her mark.

A flash came before him, ever so stark,
that left him paralyzed like a young fawn.
Headlights peer out, prodding in the dark;

Crash! and Bang! before she can stop or park,
to see that the night has taken her pawn.
Gasoline burns, and she leaves her mark.

He howls out in pain, wishing to embark
on a brand-new day, by the breath of dawn.
Headlights peer out, prodding in the dark;
gasoline burns, and she leaves her mark.

Staff Bios

Which answer is false?

Michelé Strachota:

- A / Trying to add the accent mark to her own name, she almost deleted the entire submissions key.
- B / “I didn’t find this piece particularly bad” is a compliment from Michelé.
- C / Used to think she couldn’t remember anything from before she was 13 years old.
- D / Took her 3 days to come up with the cover’s pun/meme.

Emily Neuharth:

- A / Michelé is to watermelon as Emily is to cats.
- B / Not allowed to vote on submissions that have cats in them because BIASED.
- C / Decorated the Lighter office with 3 really creepy metallic animal masks.
- D / Is really going to miss Michelé next semester. :’(

Nicole Jones:

- A / Has been called “an artistic genius” and “a rockstar” by Michelé Strachota.
- B / LOVEZ CHICKEN NUGGETsSZ AND BEEZ.
- C / Can’t keep secrets.
- D / Is nerdier than she looks.

Sarah Law:

- A / Played as seeker in the International Quidditch Association last summer.
- B / Is allergic to gluten but never complains when the rest of the staff eats a LOT of gluten (a lot).
- C / Is the Lighter’s first-ever social media manager.
- D / Is a Slytherin.

Mark Melvin:

- A / Is an angel.
- B / Takes years to respond to emails.
- C / Can be located in the basement of the Union.
- D / Printed this AMAZING AF book that’s in your hands right now!

Answers:

Michelé: D it took her 30 seconds.

Emily: C they are not creepy, they protect the office creativity and guard the door from negative energy.

Nicole: C she’s a mysterious fairy-queen.

Sarah: A she was the social media contributor for the International Quidditch Association last summer.

Mark: B he responds to every email at lightning-speed!!!! Every time! We appreciate it so much!

Contributor Bios

Adam Apel / I'm a Junior Actuarial Science major, and I spend most of my time telling long jokes and quoting the Bee Movie. I'd like to think that all of my writing is just pent up angst spilling onto the page, but I'll let you be the judge of that.

Amoreena Roll / I am not sure what route I will be taking in the art department but I do know that whatever I choose will be phenomenal. This is the first photograph I have taken since Middle School. I had somehow managed to get so caught up in life without art, but now I get to enjoy the bliss of falling in love with photography all over again.

Anna Bedalov / is a freshman Creative Writing major who doesn't quite know what the heck to do with her life, but is learning to be okay with that. Her favorite color is blue. She likes the English language a lot. She wants everyone to know that we only exist because old stars died and created carbon.

Anna Styrzcula / is a sophomore Digital Media Arts major with a Computer Science minor. When she's not making art or procrastinating on homework, she enjoys running her lame poetry blog at sophiechoir.tumblr.com. She would like to thank her friends and family for their wonderful support and the Lighter staff for working tirelessly to make this publication possible. Alec says hi!

Andréa Kütemeier / is a sophomore Digital Media major with minors in Fundamentals of Business and Entrepreneurship. While her main focus is in photography, she also has interests in drawing and experimenting with other mediums of art. Besides art, she spends a great amount of time working multiple jobs, participating in clubs and intramurals, and spending time with family and friends. Andréa is thrilled to be back at Valpo for her second year and excited for what is yet to come. She thanks her family and friends for all of their support throughout the years. She would not be the person she is today without each and everyone one of them.

Anthony Horn / My name is Anthony and I'm the next best thing to have ever walked this Earth immediately following Prince, our lord and savior. I enjoy boolin' with my daughter and wife, intoxication, reading, contemplating my role as a human in the endless cycle of entropy, and of course, writing. Check out some of my other pieces @ hornpoetry.tumblr.com
Love and shalom, readers.

Brendan Miller / is a sophomore Communications major. He recently switched from engineering and is happy to have more time to produce better work. Look for more of that work in The Torch or The Beacon.

Courtney Earl / is a sophomore creative writing and art double major with a minor in classical civilizations. In her free time, she's usually spending time with her two dogs, reading books from her endless to-be-read pile, or writing stories she hopes will be best-sellers one day. Being an author has been her dream since she was little, and while she works towards becoming a successful author she would love to work in a museum. Along with writing stories, she also writes poems occasionally, as seen published here. When on campus, she can typically be found in the library.

Elle Howard / is mainly interested in making art and surviving. Through her work, she is trying to come to terms with her past and present, with places and conversations and memory. She is inspired by bodies of water, buildings in decay, and the language of symbols.

Emily Gustin / is a freshman art major with a focus in digital media. She draws creative inspiration from the world and loves traveling to explore it. You can probably find her having a sweet chai latte at Uptown Cafe, looking at cat pictures on Instagram, or watching Netflix (or all three).

Grace Erickson / Ever since I was a little girl, I have had a deep love for darkness. It feels like there is something so safe yet mysterious about everything that is hidden. My hope is that my art may speak to those who are waiting for the secret parts of them to be discovered, because that is how my own challenges have begun to be resolved...

Haley Brewer / is an English major sophomore who sometimes writes. She dedicates her work to her mother, her grandparents, and that one stranger who once paid for her ice cream in a drive thru. She prefers peppermint lattes, paperback books, and the color purple. Her favorite food is hot sauce.

Hayley Kim / is a sophomore English major who thought that *The Lighter* needed more humor (and concert photography apparently). Her interests include music, art, David Bowie, buying more books than she has room for, sleeping, girl power, and noodle soup. She is proud of her friends who make this cool-ass magazine full of cool-ass art and hopes it will always stay Lit.

Isabel Coffey / is a sophomore creative writing and classics double major who is uncomfortable with writing about herself in third person. // I love writing and have been submitting to *The Lighter* since my first semester at Valpo. I also dabble in photography but pretty much just use my iPhone camera—nothing too fancy. To anyone reading this, thanks for picking up the book and supporting Valpo's artists.

Ivana Mileusnic / I am a senior political science major with a creative writing minor from Crown Point, Indiana. I started playing tennis when I was three and I have been playing ever since. I am in the midst of writing a fantasy novel that I hope to get published one day. I love to write in a variety of genres fantasy and fiction are my favorite. I love to draw, paint, and take photographs when I can.

Jackson Spanburg / is an English and secondary education major, poet by day, and lyricist by night. If you've read his work, just know that he still wants to rewrite it and spend six more months on a single stanza. Please stop him before all his hair falls out. Don't worry, it will take a while.

Jessica Baxter / Currently a junior Creative Writing major (previously Soc/Crim) with Psychology and Sociology minors. Photography is one of my favorite hobbies and genres and expressions of art; landscapes and travel photography, especially. I'm also an avid lover of puns, dad jokes, and clichés; one of my favorites is a photo “speaks a thousand words.” I find this the simplest and most appropriate for my submission (my first submission, wow, I am honored and grateful to even have one of my photos get accepted). There are not enough words to describe the beauty of the sun setting over the Mediterranean Sea; from my perch on one of the many seaside rocks, snapping one of many, many shots of Manarola at sunset, I'm very proud of the beauty captured in that moment, and so happy that I get to share it with you. Also: Cinque Terre, Italy. Please go whenever you get the chance. Add it to your Bucket List. Cross it off. Be inspired. Above all: Keep on being fantabulous.

Jessica Clanton / Pet Salamander aficionado. Dihydrogen monoxide consumer, carbon dioxide expender. English Education extraordinaire. Ezra #. Professional salt shaker. Ongoing aubergine enthusiast. Frowning loudly since 1997.

Jessica Martinovic / is a graduate student in the English Studies and Communication program. She loves writing, reading, decorating, being outside, listening to audiobooks, traveling, and spending time with her husband and their families.

Kian Benton / Just an earthling trying to express herself and spread the word of love.

Lexi Gault / is a freshman Astronomy major that likes to draw some and paint some. Sometimes it works out and other times it doesn't; this was one of the times that it worked out.

Mark Young / For more work by Mark Young please visit markyoungphoto.com .

Megan Gilliam / A wise woman once told me, as I was babbling about the parts of my mind that I could not console, that I sounded like a writer who wasn't writing. After I wrote my first piece—the one you may find in this book—I realized this was true. I think that's what makes writing so cool; you can write something for yourself with no intention of sharing it, and the next thing you know you're writing this note for your university's literary magazine. Moral of the story: listen to the people who believe in you.

Megan McDaniel / is a senior Health Sciences major who is devoted to studying medicine but has a madly passionate love affair with creative writing. She enjoys writing poetry and drinking rosé, not necessarily in that order.

Michelle Stiegart / is a current graduate student seeking her M.A. in English Studies and Communication. The committed commuter hails from Culver, Indiana after teaching at Culver Community High School. Although raised in suburbia, Michelle now enjoys the rural life with her husband and their menagerie. When she is not grading papers, Michelle enjoys writing—especially poetry. She would like to thank her patient husband Nick Fobert and sister Nicole Stiegart for being willing audience members to her often bleak poems.

Milka Vidova / I'm a pretty basic person who just loves chocolate, McNuggets, and art.

Mirica Yancey / is a freshman Computer Science major who is throwing around the idea of a Creative Writing minor and hoping it sticks. She is a scatterbrained mess of a person and has a tendency to stop in the middle of the street, in the middle of a sentence and write. Her friends do not appreciate this because they keep losing her. She loves cats and being weird.

Nathan Biancardi / I'm a Senior Art Major at VU. I have always drawn and painted throughout my life. I was able to create my own caricature business which has helped me payed through college. I love creating themes that have a narration and human elements to them.

Rachel Kennedy / My name is Rachel Kennedy and as of this year I am a Junior Creative writing major with an art minor. I've been seriously interested in writing since I was in middle school and I've been an avid reader even longer. Most of what I read and write is fantasy, although I have also written science fiction, nonfiction, and poetry. I'm grateful for the opportunity to have my work published in *The Lighter*, which will now be the third time I have published a poem, the first being in middle school and the second in high school. Besides writing and reading, I also love drawing (meaning I don't own a notebook without at least one doodle page), painting my nails, and having my blue hair stain every ear cuff I own. I love being able to express myself and I am happy to share my work here amongst many other wonderful pieces.

Tony Staros / I've been drawing and painting for over 6 years, but the first time I took photography was in high school, because the art class was full. When I started taking photography, I loved it so much, so I decided to take film photography and I thought it was magic.



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