

The Lighter

Volume 65

Issue 1 *The Lighter Fall 2018*

Article 1

The Lighter Fall 2018

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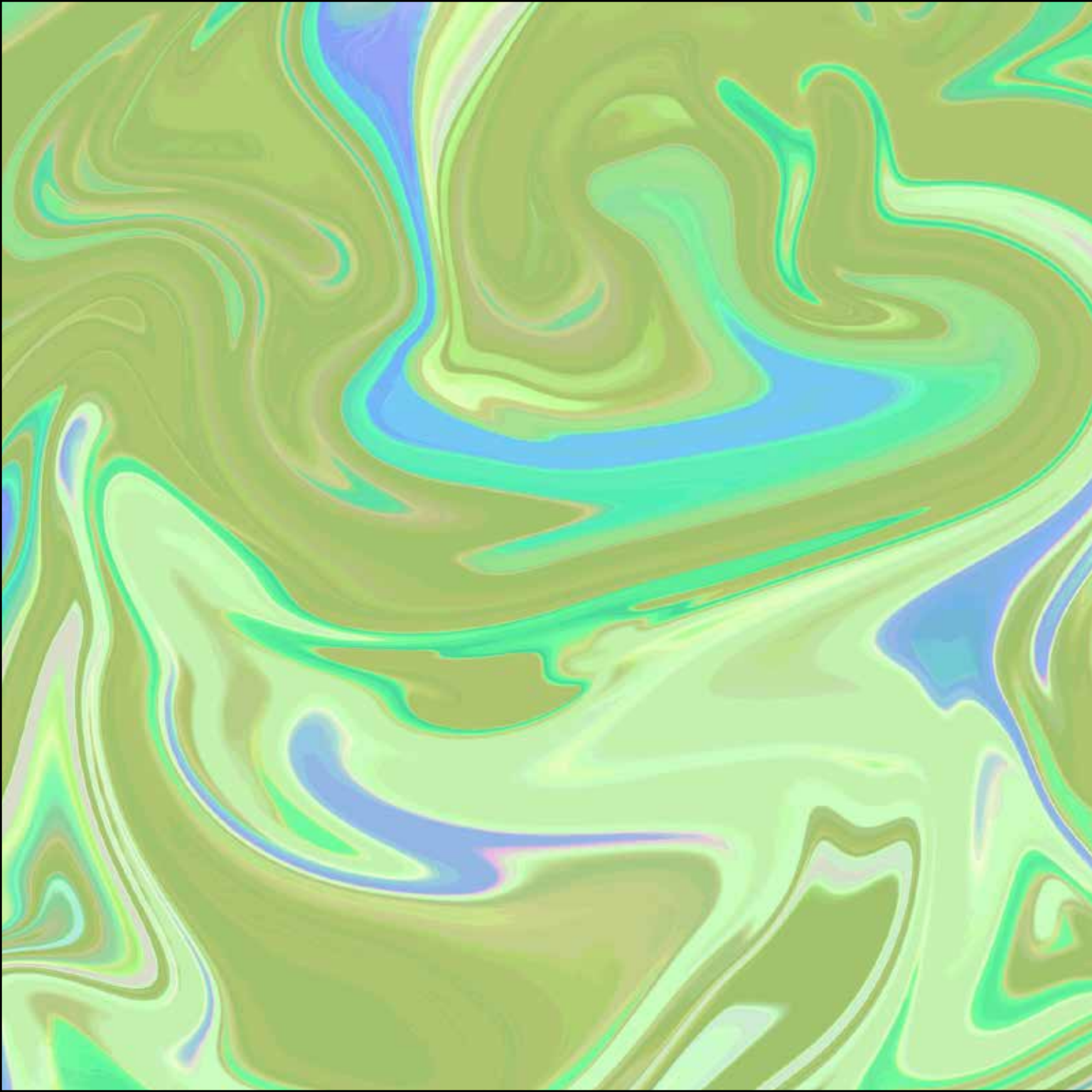
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the lighter





The **Lighter**
Via Incensa

issue 65
volume 1

editor's note

The creations that have found a resting place in our Fall 2018 issue are a testament to the evolutions, epiphanies and mistakes that so often chronicle our young adult years. Unearthing moments of self-discovery in places where we didn't expect it. Dipping our toes in and out of pools while trying to find political, religious, and social waters that suit us. Questioning if something is still cliché if it truly resonates with our experience. Finding affirmation of our identity when its absence is felt. Realizing that our kernels of self can be seen in others. Realizing that our kernels of self are still-forming. Realizing that our kernels of self will always be forming.

This journal has also been a testament to my personal evolutions, epiphanies and mistakes. To use Professor Schuette's metaphor, my second semester as Editor in Chief has been like my "sophomore year" of leading *The Lighter*. Whether you know from personal experience or you've witnessed others struggle from afar, sophomore year can be tough. The high that comes with all of the new-new-new has faded. The grace period for not knowing important information has passed. The external motivation of proving yourself as competent has been used up (every drop). But, sophomore year has its perks too. Everything feels more like home and there's a peace that comes with familiarity. You actually know the answers sometimes! You're forced to dig up those internal motivators that should have been sufficient enough to begin with.

All that being said, *The Lighter's* 2018 year has been packed to the brim with change and I couldn't be proud of us as an organization, as artists, and simply as humans. I've had the goosebump-giving experience of watching my staff grow from a single strand of Christmas lights to a disco ball glittering with strobe lights and potential. I'm thrilled to be "passing the lighter" to Sarah; she's so ready. Our Fall 2018 issue has been more of a team-effort than ever before and despite a slough of unforeseen obstacles, we're still lit.

Yours in peace and literary love,

A handwritten signature in white ink that reads "Emily E. Neubauer". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a large initial "E".

P.S. This note's abounding fragments were purposeful, and I have invoked my editorial wild card.

the lighter staff

Emily Neuharth	Editor in Chief
Sarah Law	Assistant Editor
Nicole Jones	Graphic Designer
Elizabeth Palmer	Social Media Manager
Allison Schuette	Faculty Advisor

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Faith Smith	Rachel Jones	Lera Good
Leanna Sanchez	Skyler Sherwood	Michael Kelley

We know that you're going to want more of The Lighter after you read our masterpiece but fear not! We have a solution: follow us on social media which can be found through our website (and while you're there, check out our archives)! <https://scholar.valpo.edu/lighter/>

I have neither given or received, nor have I tolerated others' use of unauthorized aid.

-Liza Frank.

Via Incensa is our Latin slogan meaning "The Way is Lit"

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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For more information and to become involved with us email the.lighter@valpo.edu

table of contents.

- 6 **Painting Her Nails** | Emma Hecht
- 7 **Lipstick** | Claire Utzinger
- 8 **Blood of the Innocent, Slaughter the Lamb** | Rachel Kennedy
- 9 **To the Bosnians** | Kristian Josifoski
- 10 **she changed the game** | Isis Zaki
- 11 **Satisfaction** | Anna Styrzczula
- 12 **Corrupt** | Milka Vidova
- 13 **Audiences** | Emily Mrzlak
- 14 **Craving** | Haley Brewer
- 16 **Glass Shattering** | Jessica Clanton
- 17 **Burned Out** | Hailey Kadolph
- 18 **Second Degree** | Caroline Hyde
- 20 **Hangnail** | Emma Hecht
- 21 **Napolean and the Soft Lights** | Brendan Miller
- 22 **Midwest Ballerina** | Kayle Lathrop
- 23 **Self-Care** | Megan McDaniel
- 24 **Life and Death** | Megan McDaniel
- 26 **Integration by Parts** | Lexi Gault
- 27 **Drinking Digits** | Megan McDaniel
- 28 **RIGHT** | Anna Bedalov
- 29 **Meditation Medication** | Madison Wilson
- 30 **“How are you?”** | Megan McDaniel
- 31 **headlights.** | Klylynn Smith
- 32 **The Waiting Game** | Mark Young
- 33 **godly Places** | Haley Brewer
- 34 **The Temple** | Anna Styrzczula
- 35 **Bridging the Sky** | Andréa Kütemeier
- 36 **An Interview with Poet Nate Marshal**
- 40 **5/2/18** | Caroline Hyde
- 41 **Chasing the Sun** | Emily Gustin
- 42 **DEAD-HEADERS** | Caroline Hyde
- 47 **Aging** | Monique LeDonne

- 48 **A morte da floresta é o fim da nossa vida** | Jesse Hershberger
- 49 **Rest** | Zhaoting Liu
- 50 **A Billion Star Hotel** | Mark Young
- 51 **Through the Night** | Rachel Jones
- 52 **claws that glitter** | Leanna Sanchez
- 53 **Sticky Fingers** | Taylor Bundren
- 54 **The Fisherman** | Emily Gustin
- 55 **The Absent-Minded Lifeguard's Guide to Swimming Lessons** | Daniel Funderburg
- 59 **My Diary** | Faith Smith
- 60 **Shared Space** | Zhaoting Liu
- 61 **Love is Patient** | Emily Mrzlak
- 62 **A sestina for You, for falling** | Emma Hecht
- 63 **we all fall down** | Leah Gatchel
- 64 **We Become Shadows** | Leanna Sanchez
- 65 **dragon's breath** | Leah Gatchel
- 66 **everything is blue** | Kylynn Smith
- 67 **dreaming of royal blue** | Anna Bedalov
- 68 **Ice Cold** | Lexi Gault
- 69 **Fine Tuning** | Gina Dalrymple
- 70 **A Lighter Celebrity: A Final Interview with Advisor Professor Schuette**
- 72 **Ghost Story** | Grace Biermann
- 73 **Faceless Portrait** | Amoreena Roll
- 74 **Who I Am On the Inside** | Matthew Bremer
- 75 **Between She and He** | Rebecca Stockham
- 76 **The Shaping Power of Memory** | Willow Walsh
- 78 **Self Portrait** | Nathaniel Bouman
- 79 **wet rice and beans, tortilla folded over** | Haley Brewer
- 83 **Taalbarrièr** | Marcus Boas
- 84 **Momentum** | Nicole Jones
- 85 **ribs** | Leanna Sanchez
- 86 **Self Reflect** | Self Reflect
- 87 **The Lumberyard** | Jake Pitts
- 88 **On the Twelfth of the Twelfth** | Sarah Law
- 88 **The Forgotten Muse** | Jake Pitts
- 89 **No Parking** | Kristen Haling
- 90 **Contributer Bios**

Painting Her Nails

Emma Hecht | Poetry

stagnant and submerged
in sparkling resin syrup

now suddenly shaken from slumber, off the shelf
by a blank, pressing thumb and forefinger tempest

twirled around as a generous whirlpool
and extracted to expose my dripping offering

gently stroking keratin shores
in layered waves

then forced down, sloshing back into sleep
as my flood dries into something beautiful

I bristle to know that my gift will be slowly
chipped away, and doused in alcohol

a brief, taken
for granted blessing



Lipstick | Photography

Claire Utzinger

Blood of the Innocent, Slaughter the Lamb

Rachel Kennedy | Poetry

Thick and red and dripping
through cracks and slits,
sticking
to skin and clothes and hair,
darkly oozing
out of freshly mutilated flesh,
torn, ripped, mangled
beyond recognition,
each faceless
freezing heap
just beginning to rot.
Rich earth gives way
to holes
ready for filling,
the stacks slowly moving
towards an eternal home.
No warriors on guard,
no armies protecting
poor souls lost,
sacrificed without sentiment
and without volunteering
for such violent endings.
Still, a battle rages on,
painting the earth red
as roses dotting the American Dream;
bodies—adults' and children's—
fall almost every day.
We are no closer to salvation.

To the Bosnians

Kristian Josifoski | Poetry

Nations slaughtered are one blood.
We flow in the same stream.
We sing sevdalinkas together.
No one can find us on a map.
When they do, they mischaracterize us.
Simplify us.
In history we are lost
until we raise a voice,
and when we raise a voice
we are propagandists
to the powers that still
live in the age of empires.
We are one blood that flows
continually against rough banks
with pebbles sinking into us.
But sands get to the stones,
eventually they do.

she changed the game

Isis Zaki | Poetry

abandoned
helpless
used
cheated
silenced
afraid

me too

she thought, watching a brave woman sit tall as she stared into the eyes of disbelief
“I am here today not because I want to be.

I am terrified.

I am here because I believe it is my civic duty to tell you what happened to me.”

me too

Enraged
Empowered
Liberated

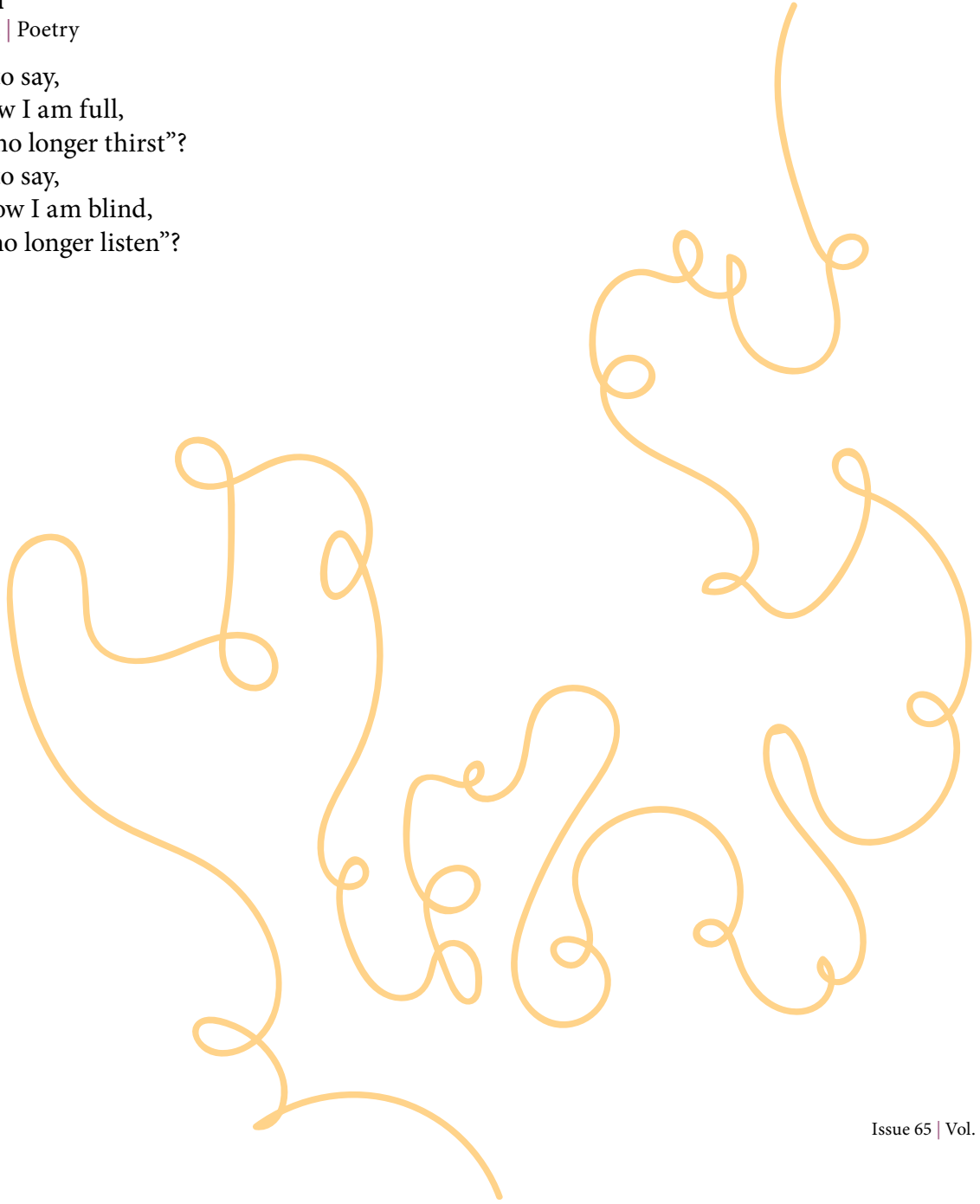
me too

finally, me too

Satisfaction

Anna Styruczula | Poetry

Is it enough to say,
“I ate and now I am full,
I drank and no longer thirst”?
Is it enough to say,
“I saw and now I am blind,
I heard and no longer listen”?





Corrupt | Film Photography

Milka Vidova

Audiences

Emily Mrzlak | Poetry

To be bare-faced is to say, “I trust you.”
I trust you
to see a glimpse of what I might have looked like
as a child,
running through the woods
unkempt
every summer at my family’s old cabin
before superfluous toiletries
cluttered my vanity.

Secluded, the matriarchs
reveal their authentic selves at the lake’s edge.
I asked my mother
why she exposed her legs,
unshaven,
as we shift the weight of the boat,
two-pieces flaunting blemished skin

“It’s just me and you here, so it doesn’t matter.”

When my mother asked me to meet her at the Denny's on West 23rd, I was driving before the phone call was over.

It was already a few digits past midnight when I arrived, but nonetheless the diner glowed with a warmth that was almost like coming home. I didn't know how she was getting here but the only other cars were lined up along the back — probably employees — and she always tended to run late. She'd expect me to get a table.

The bell over the door was broken, and instead of the usual high pitch ring it only let out a single hollow *thud* like a deflated basketball hitting concrete. I waited by the door, maybe forever, until finally an annoyed waitress rounded the corner, a steaming coffee pot in one hand, plastic menus tucked under the other.

The waitress led me to a table and poured a cup of coffee without asking, completely to the brim, and wordlessly dropped the menus onto the sticky surface. There was no way I could drink the coffee without risking a spill. I turned to look for the waitress, maybe to ask for another cup to pour it into it, but she had already disappeared around the corner.

When I looked back, my mother was sitting in the booth across from me as if she had always been. She was already smiling.

"Sweetheart," her voice held that same steady warmth, "how have you been?"

"I'm fine," I told her, barely lying, my voice hardly shaking. "I'm doing fine."

"And your brother?" Her mouth smoothed out in a tense line, "You're taking care of each other, right?"

I hadn't seen my brother since everything happened. "Of course."

"Good," she nodded, a small teasing curve of her mouth replacing the prior, "that's why I made two of you. Keep each other company."

I swallowed, "I know, Mom."

She had joked that same line so many times, repeated it during petty arguments between the two of them even more. *When I'm gone*, she'd say, that same line on her face, *all you'll have is each other. That's why I made two of you.*

Sometimes, I think my brother wishes it was just the one of him. Everything would have been so much easier. Everything would be so much better.

"How's work?" She kept messing with the paper wrapper of her straw, folding it back and forth as she spoke. "Did you get that promotion?"

I had quit my job four months ago. "Yes," I told her instead, "my boss is always saying how impressed he is with me." She beamed, and I forgot how her eyes used to shine like that when she was proud. I almost felt bad.

But that's what you do, when your mother calls or visits and wants updates on your life— you lie to her. That's what everyone jokes about. Does everyone else always feel this bad?

I couldn't take it any longer. Around the tightness in my throat, the burn in my nose, I finally managed to choke out the words that had been resting on the back of my tongue.

"What's it like?"

"Boring," she told me, a look on her face that flickered between dread and soft. "I never thought it would be so boring."

I took a breath, and waited another moment. "Did it hurt?"

"Yes," her voice was soft this time, an echo of a whisper almost. "It was the most painful thing I had ever felt. I always thought my last thought would be of you and your brother but," she swallowed, her gaze so distant she began to fade slightly into the shiny plastic of the booth. She was nearly see-through. "I just thought of the pain."

I was crying, I realized. Past tense, actually, with the streaks of salt already drying and itchy down my cheeks. I had been crying this entire time.

"I'm so sorry," I choked out, "I'm so sorry, Mom."

"Why?" She cocked her head to the side. She was wearing those same gold earrings, small half hoops that

cuffed around the earlobe, the ones that used to catch the light. They looked a few shakes too dull to do so now.

I didn't know what to say except -- "I was driving, Mom." I blinked at her, "Don't you remember? I was playing with the radio."

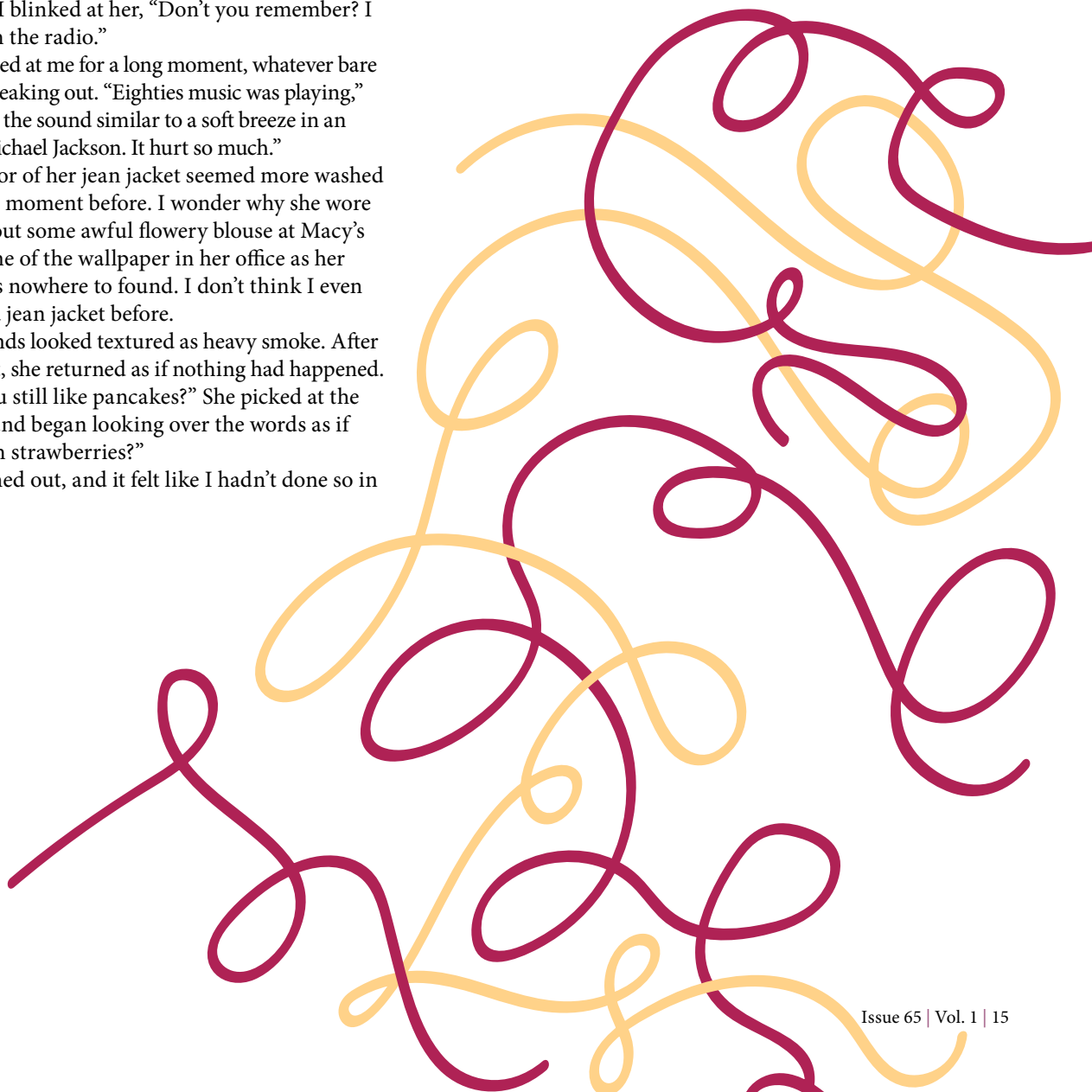
She stared at me for a long moment, whatever bare color in her face leaking out. "Eighties music was playing," she breathed out, the sound similar to a soft breeze in an empty room. "Michael Jackson. It hurt so much."

The color of her jean jacket seemed more washed out than it had a moment before. I wonder why she wore that -- I picked out some awful flowery blouse at Macy's that reminded me of the wallpaper in her office as her last, but that was nowhere to found. I don't think I even ever saw her in a jean jacket before.

Her hands looked textured as heavy smoke. After another moment, she returned as if nothing had happened.

"Do you still like pancakes?" She picked at the stack of menus and began looking over the words as if searching, "With strawberries?"

I breathed out, and it felt like I hadn't done so in years, "Yes."



Glass Shattering

Jessica Clanton | Poetry

The buzzing light above the mirror
casts long lined shadows
across the silhouette
of a 39-year-old washed-up
waitress dying for a last chance
at life.

She stares into the mirror,
eyes sunken, skin pale yellow
in a way that surpassed
undertone or shadow
and hinted more at jaundice.

The light is going out soon;
she knew by the flickering heat
that radiated out like a star
swelling, expanding until the inevitable
explosion from the pressure
of staying intact.

Later she would tell herself,
a delusion she stopped calling
herself on, the one carrying her
through lonely nights of staring
in a mirror at what she could only

come to conclude as being
a jaded version of a dream:
white picket fences, suburban bliss,
and nuclear explosions
on the Fourth of July.

The light inside the bulb sparked,
rapid pulses of light forming little
fireworks erupting haphazardly
from the small glass sphere containing
her only line of sight in the dim room.

The glass shatters into a thousand
tiny fragments of light, falling
with little *clink-clinks*, covering
the thick layer of grime
that could never be washed out
of the bathroom floor.

The dazzling light caught her eyes
before the explosion; small surges
of bliss before the grand finale:
a silent blackness covering the room.



Burned Out | Photography

Hailey Kadolph

The sun was muted by low clouds and canopies of trees, their leaves silent as the air hung heavy and warm on this August afternoon. There were no birds flitting about the boughs today; the feeders in the garden were empty and the songbirds were preparing for their journey south. In the distance, I could hear the buzz of a lone cicada, relentless in its search for company. I sidestepped through the slider door onto the porch, closing the screen behind me with my free hand, bowl of water in the other. Placing the ceramic onto the woven iron green table, I seated myself in the matching chair and reached into my pocket, retrieving a polaroid. I averted my eyes from the image and placed it onto the table, face-down.

Then, taking a deep breath, I flipped the picture over.

This was my favorite image of you. Eyes downward, you were strumming your guitar, face calm with relaxed concentration and your body facing toward me as the two of us sat on my bed. Your legs were criss-crossed, the sleeves of your maroon sweatshirt rolled up to gain better access to the strings. You looked so beautiful, and, despite your slightly disheveled appearance and the unbalanced saturation of light in the amateur shot, you seemed to glow. I could remember the song you were playing as I took this photo—

No. Stop. I shut my eyes again to try and block the memory. I couldn't.

I pulled out the plastic BIC lighter from my pocket and struck the gauge. The disc remained motionless under my thumb, jammed from lack of use. Again I tried and gathered similar results. I've never been good at working lighters; having no real reason to carry one, I didn't think rolling a metal disc with my thumb to strike a flint was a challenging task— and I didn't expect myself wishing for the dexterity to execute it properly. It took at least four more attempts until it finally sparked. The small fingernail of fire shot up from its plastic body, concentrated heat rippling the air above the tip of the flame. A tiny

hiss emitted from the gauge as the fluid gave life to this little flickering light, a hungry burning ribbon begging to devour. I hesitated, looking between the lighter and the polaroid. Then, gingerly, I held a corner of the photo up to the heat.

The edge sizzled at its touch, throwing up black smoke as I leaned away from the fume. I released the gauge on the lighter to shut it off and let the little trail of fire slowly make its way up the frame. The burn skirted around the photo almost as if it, too, was unsure if this was what I wanted. Licks of flame reached toward my fingertips, and out of fear for my hands I dropped the photo into the prepared bowl of water. It released a hiss as the fire was smothered; you landed facing upward and floated at the surface, unbothered.

I fished out the polaroid and rubbed the front of the photo against my shirt to collect the water, not minding the streaks of ash left behind on the fabric. The burn hadn't reached the film yet, but the weakened edge would make progress easier. I picked up the lighter and fumbled once again. The metal was hot to the touch, and the skin on my thumb protested in pain as I scratched it against the latch. After I switched hands and tried igniting it with my other thumb, I sparked it on the third try. I went to work once more, this time trying the harder-edged side of the polaroid. The heat blackened the frame again, but the fire still wasn't strong enough. As it made its way into the film, devouring a fraction of the room behind you, the bubbling orange laminate sputtered and slowly died.

My thumbs were red and irritated, my fingers stained by the crumbling ashen corners of the photo. Your face and body were still intact. If I wanted— and I did— I could stop now and save what I had left. But why? You made the decision to leave, and, while you were still here in this memory, you weren't here now. I knew that burning the picture wouldn't make me forget you; destroying the polaroid wouldn't destroy you. That wasn't what I wanted. The frayed image in my hand portrayed a version of you I once knew, a depiction of hope

and a future that would never come to pass. Whoever you were now, you hadn't spared a word for me.

You and I were both writers in our own respects. We both had a penchant for preserving beauty and painting scenes with our words. I was a storyteller: it was my duty to give life and voice to the parts of our lives that were no longer true. You were a poet: how ironic was it for your silence to speak volumes more than your words ever had.

Maybe I never knew you. Maybe it had never mattered.
But I knew that it did.

I picked up the lighter and ignited. Starting again from the softer corner, I kept the flame alive, my thumb pressed on the latch. The heat curled around my fingers as the black smoke stained the photo— your face shrouded in gray, your hands cuffed in fog. Soon after came the bubbling of the laminate, the delicate film curling and melting into the growing light. Fire licked at my knuckles. I tilted the lighter horizontally, the head of the flame blistering my thumb. For once, I ignored the pain. All of it.

It took your edges first. Your cheeks were cupped in flame as the black took hold, bucking the laminate forward. The smoke stroked your hair, its fingers making its way into your tousled roots. You were crowned with ash, the melting layers of the polaroid seeping into your scalp. I watched the light eat away at your diligent hands, devouring the body of your guitar, then creeping its way into your chest, heat gripping at your collar. You played for me one last time.

I was learning to let go.

For a moment I imagined you looking up at me as the fire danced at the corners of your eyes, a question bubbling on your smoldered lips. It was then that I realized I had no answer to give.

I watched you succumb to the hungry flame. I dropped the shriveled leaf of film into the bowl of water and watched the smoke climb into the air. And, with blackened hands and blistered thumbs, I rose.

Hangnail

Emma Hecht | Poetry

nails bitten down tenfold
towards the creamy lunula

slivered branches of skin
clutch to their root
sharply struck away by
reckless ribbons of incisor lightning

blood surfaces as
burgundy speckles of sap—
the only secret from inside
granted permission
to escape
and disclose itself



Napolean and Soft Lights | Photography

Brendan Miller

Midwest Ballerina

Kayle Lathrop | Poetry

They say it comes with the territory: sixteen years of dancing,
countless rolled ankles, two broken bones, an achilles with chronic tendonitis.

A small price to pay for a principal role in *Don Quixote*, I thought
at the time. Being able to achieve the perfect *sissonne*

to feel like Svetlana Zakharova in that very moment. Ruining your back,
pinching nerves and over-extending muscles, during the Arabian variation
from *The Nutcracker*, but continuing on nevertheless, never batting an eye.
Every time the rain falls, and the storms roll across the corn fields

my bones, all nineteen years of them, ache with arthritis.
But they ache, too, with a longing for a stage to stretch them on,
to yet again feel alive in front of an audience. And part of the territory
is the end of the territory, the day you hang up your pointe shoes,
your body too bruised & battered to continue, though some
do not decline the hip replacement, the ankle surgery.

Each morning you wake to do the chores, you'll see those old,
torn up pointe shoes hanging effortlessly above a shelf of photos,
when you graced the stage in those satin traps.
You'll throw on a flannel, jeans, and work boots, and trade the lessons

taught by the stage for those taught by the Midwest:
Learning to glide like the red-tailed hawk I see daily, how to *glissade*
almost effortlessly. Like that hawk, I am unsure where this life will take me,
but somehow I always end up in the same place, like clockwork.

I learned from the river to never give up, to hold my ground,
to be strong and independent, from the hog, its teeth seized
on my steel toed boots, to reach for what I want, because that's all it takes.
And the endless fields, the endless roads, the ever-present stars,
gleaming down above on any given summer night, to never give up,
even after giving up, to reach for a faith that's just beyond my belief.

Self-Care

Megan McDaniel | Poetry

My mother always told me that taking care
of myself was important. I remember
this as I stare up at the ceiling
from the bed I have been laying in
for five days straight.

I don't want to get up.
I'm hurt, tired, ugly –
but my mother's words
echo through my brain:
“Take time every day
to love yourself.”

I sigh into my hands
and run them through my tangled hair.
I roll myself out of bed,
one leg at a time.

I shower, shampoo, condition,
lotion my legs,
brush my hair,
paint my face.

I make my bruised body
golden again,

and I go get a coffee.

The feeling of wanting to die

It doesn't hit you all at once. The feeling creeps up on you like the cold winds of the fall creep in after a warm summer. One day you feel absolutely fine and the next you feel a little less fine but then you think, "Well, maybe I just didn't really sleep well," or "It's just because the weather is bringing me down." Then a couple days (maybe weeks if you're lucky) later, you feel awful. You just can't feel the joy in what you're doing. It doesn't matter where you are or what you're doing, you just won't feel anything. It's like an emptiness that fills your mind and body. You want to be happy, and you try, you really do try. But even when you're with your friends, sitting and laughing, you feel alone. You can't help it. The emptiness consumes you and surrounds you and takes everything you love and turns it into something that you were never good enough for. And you never could be. The thought alone makes you want to die. But for now, you hold on because there is still that glimmer of hope that everything will turn out okay and there was no reason to feel so alone in the first place. I felt that once- that feeling of hope. But it has long since disappeared and now all I can do is survive. I can't call what I do living because it doesn't feel like it is. I don't feel alive yet, still I know I am. My heart still beats, and the blood still flows through my veins and oxygen still inflates my lungs, but I don't feel things the way any human should anymore. I'm not saying that I don't feel remorse or guilt or happiness or sadness. I haven't gone crazy nor am I a sociopath. I can still feel happiness and sadness, but I no longer feel it as strongly as I used to. I once let them flow through me like one's blood flows through their veins: fast and free. I used to wear my heart on my sleeve and gave my trust away to anyone with a smiling face. I used to believe in the goodness of man and womankind. Because if there was no good left in this world, then it is not a world worth living in. And even in this empty state that I am living in,

I can still see the good in the world, I just no longer feel it in my life. For if I could I would know that my life is meaningful and is worth something. But I cannot seem to grasp that thought. I am too far gone into the abyss of emptiness to find my way back out.

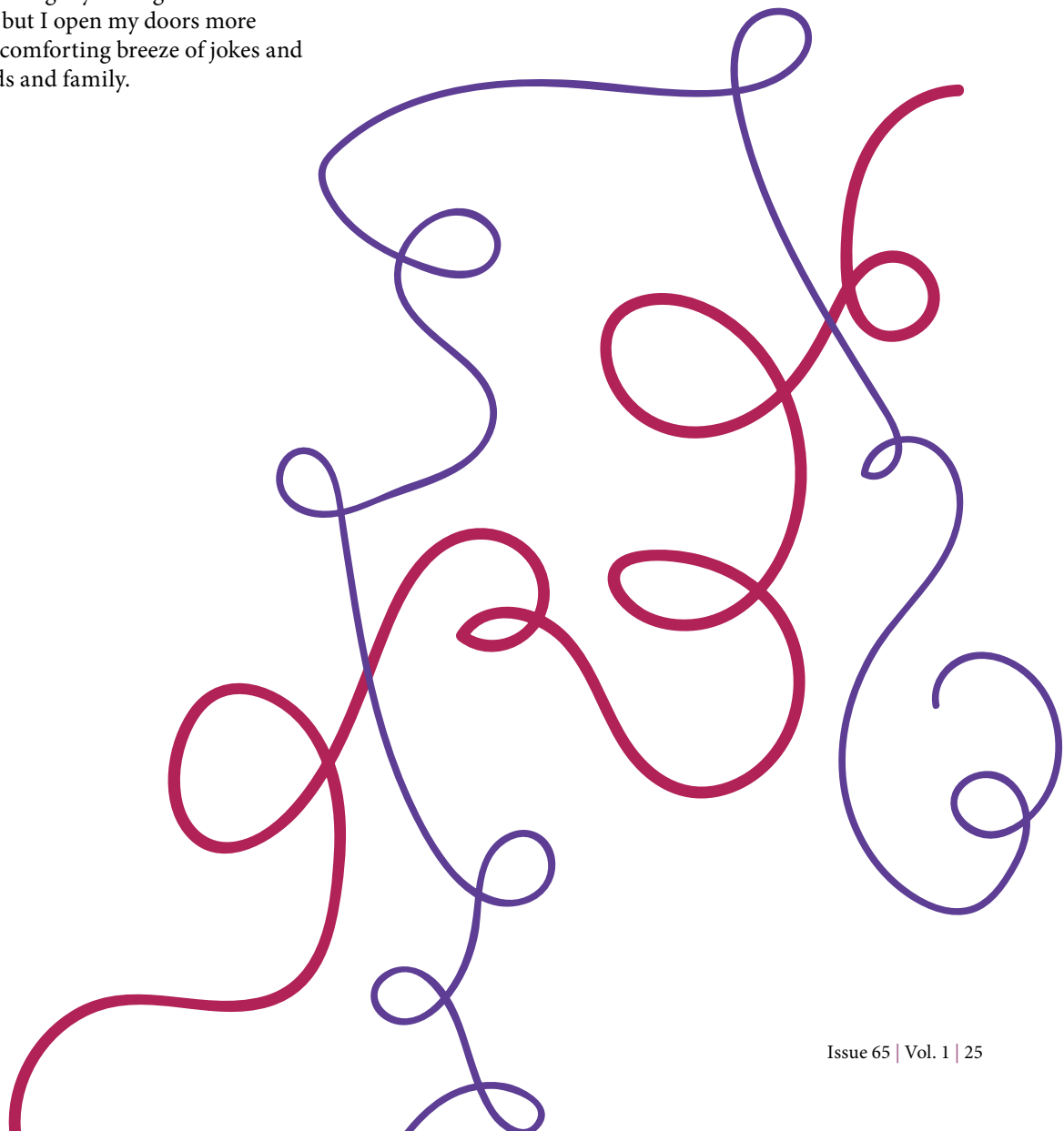
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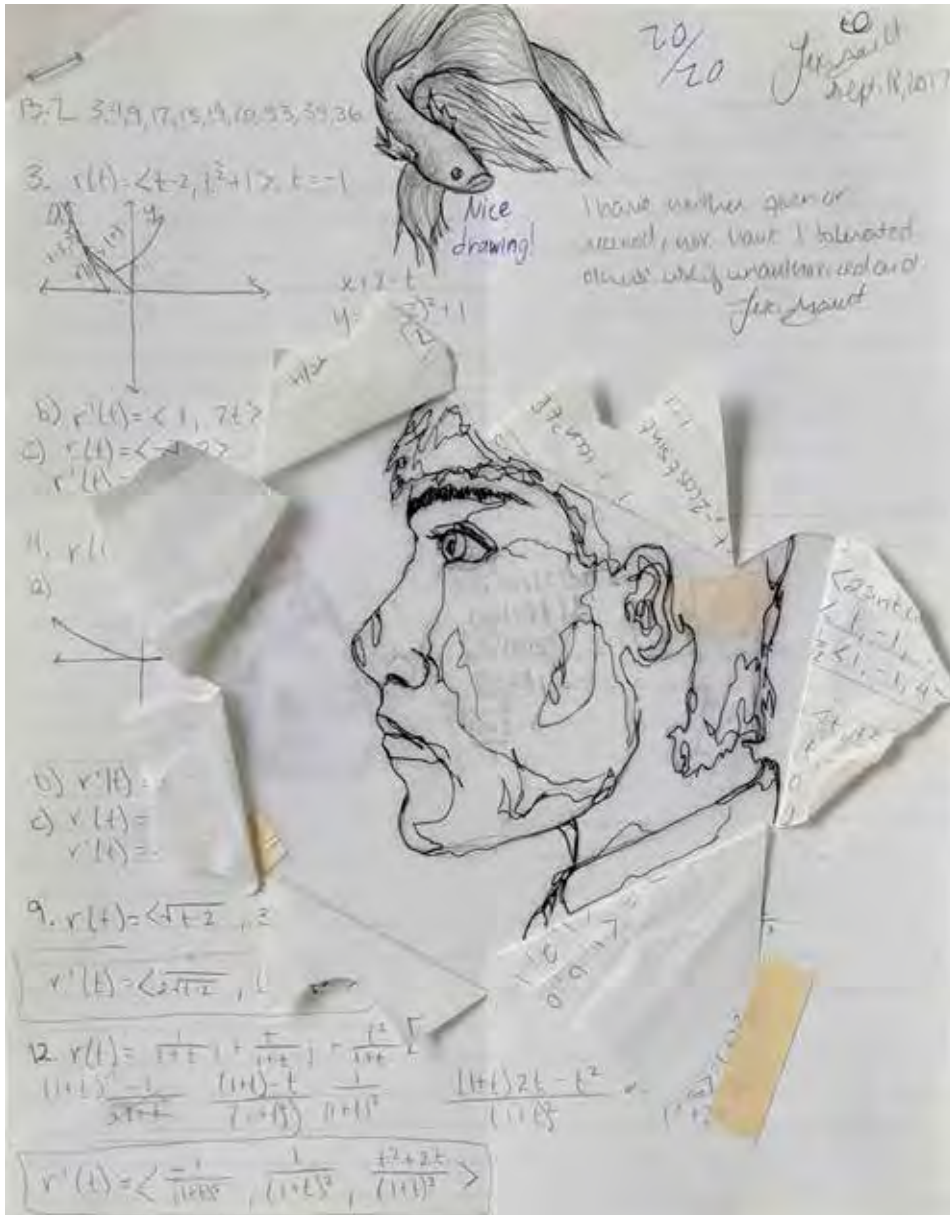
The feeling of wanting to live

This feeling comes unexpectedly. You don't notice the change happen but suddenly you're happy and enjoying things you had given up on. Not wanting to question your sudden happiness, you brush it off as an anomaly. But then you notice it more and more, to the point that you don't think it's an anomaly anymore. Instead of wondering why you feel better now and actually want to experience life, you jump right into the feeling. You hold tightly because you don't want to lose it again and you do as many things you enjoy as you can. This makes you even happier, pushing the feeling of emptiness further and further away. You feel the energy you now have rushing through your body. It keeps you moving even though your body isn't used to this much activity yet. Feeling like this, rather than let the physical exhaustion overwhelm me, I move to an activity that allows for rest: drawing. Something I haven't done for ages. The weight that was constantly on my chest, never allowing me to catch my breath has lifted and I can breathe deeply again. The intense pressure that lived with me, as though a roommate, has almost left. It's now more of an annoying visitor, only popping up when life gets too much. Its visits vary in length, but I never have to worry about it staying forever for I can still breathe when it comes around. Some breaths are shorter than they should be, but I am no longer choking on air, drowning on dry land. The hot sun that used to burn me now kisses my skin, leaving me engulfed in warmth that mimics the embrace of a loved one. Rainy days are no longer my favorite because they reflect my constant mood, but because I can curl up and read books that have been sitting neglected for far too long. The constant rain

soothes me, relaxing the tension I hold in my shoulders and neck, lulling me into a state of comfort.

I still shut myself away, hiding my feelings from others so as not to be a burden, but I open my doors more often now, letting in the comforting breeze of jokes and conversation from friends and family.





Integration By Parts | Pen and Graphite

Lexi Gault

Ana wasn't sure when people began to notice she was sick. Perhaps it was when they could see her ribcage prodding against the inside of her chest like an animal that desperately wanted out of its crate. Maybe it was that one time in gym class when she fainted in front of everybody because her head became too heavy for her bones to hold up. That was the first time anyone had ever asked her, "Are you okay?"

She didn't look at food like the rest of them. Most of the kids at school would drink orange juice at lunch and eat whatever government-regulated crap the cafeteria served up that day. She never drank the orange juice or ate in bites like everyone else. Ana spent her lunches drinking digits and eating in numbers. 25 calories for a carrot, 87 for the ranch. Together they added up to a single cup of orange juice. Her teachers always told her how good she was at math.

All of the numbers she ate throughout the day would return to taunt her late into the night as she stood over the scale on her cold bathroom floor and evaluated the damage she had done to the animal that lived inside of her chest.

"94 pounds heavy," Ana thought to herself. She remembered the calories in the carrot and ranch cup she ate at lunch. She let out a sigh that could shake a person to their knees. "25 plus 87 equals 94," she thought. "Tomorrow I'll stick with 50 calories," and she vomited into the sink.

She woke up to a lunch bag packed with worry by her sister. Adhered to the side of the bag was a little pink post-it note that read, "Please eat," and Ana cried her whole way through lunch.

Her friends never understood how, or especially why, somebody like her could starve themselves. "She's already so pretty," they would say. If ever they were to look just a little bit past her baby blue eyes and ample lips, they might have been able to comprehend the travesty.

"She's just doing it to get attention," a classmate occasionally proclaimed amongst locker room whispers to another, but Ana knew very well that the boys were out chasing hips, not lines. She didn't want the attention. She wanted the control. The number on the scale dropped lower and lower the less she ate. It was action and reaction, and it happened every time. It was dependable.

Ana was embarrassed by her life at home, utterly ashamed. Her dad was an angry alcoholic and her mother suffered from bipolar depression. She never knew what would happen after she crossed that line in the Earth that buried her home away from the rest of the world. Yet, she knew exactly what would happen if she didn't eat. The number that glared back at her empty eyes every night would eventually go down just like the liquor on her father's lips, and that gave her something to focus on.

Throughout the months, she became thinner and thinner until one of her classmates became so scared of the bones below Ana's neck that she sought out the school guidance counselor for help. They sent Ana away to a hospital in Michigan where she screamed and kicked and cried until a long, narrow tube was placed down her nose on Christmas day.

Ana was eventually forced into group therapy sessions at the hospital. She had to speak out loud to others about the circumstances that had led her there. Most of the time, when it became Ana's turn to talk, she could never get her mouth to open. Her therapists labeled her as difficult and non-compliant, but a nurse saw something in Ana that she recognized in herself and Ana's room became stocked with notebooks, colored pencils, and pens.

It took a few weeks until the hospital deemed her stable enough for release and let her out with extensive therapy lined up. Throughout the next year, Ana wrote poetry in her room and filled her walls with the absence of color. She splashed her walls with thick lines of the darkest blacks and haunting greys that filled her life. Her mind whirled with thoughts as she stared at these four walls for many months straight.

One day, Ana rose from her bed and impulsively ran to the store to buy more paint. She sped back to her room where she hastily dipped her dark-stained brush into the new can. With two careful strokes of her hand, a vibrant yellow bird came to life within the darkness of her walls. Ana fell to her knees and wept.

She realized that during all those months of avoiding food, the only thing she was eating was herself.



Meditation Medication | Ink

Madison Wilson

“How are you?”

Megan McDaniel | Poetry

The three simple words never fail
to inject bullets into my chest.
They are always countered with “good,”
and a smile that I hope isn’t too obviously forced.

But, the bullets whirl inside of me,
pounding away at the top of my throat,
begging me to be released.
I swallow them back down into my stomach,
allowing only my insides to scream.

I suppose that I could let them out,
but I fear keeping the bullets locked inside of me
causes less harm
than the repercussions of speaking.

The bullets orbit my intestines
until persistent nausea sets in,
my hands tremor with desolation,
and my forehead beads with sweat.

These symptoms act as their warning.
If I don’t let them out soon,
certainly they’ll kill me.

I swallow them down one last time,
refusing to open my mouth
around those I love,
saving them from the wrath
being harbored inside.

I find myself on a train
moving 100 miles per hour,
vomiting gunpowder
onto strangers.



headlights.

Kylynn Smith | Poetry

sometimes i worried that
you wouldn't notice me.
i threw myself in front of

the headlights

every time,
hoping you would crash
right into me.
to die in your light and breathe such sweet release.
but you crashed into me
when i wasn't even looking.
just one moment
&
i was in
your ruin.

my heart of the sea

i will take your heart of the stars
within

&
protect it
beneath the waves
of
my very soul.



The Waiting Game | Photography

Mark Young

When I met god for the third time that month, it was in an airport.

It was different than the first time, and at least this time I found him easily. It was right when I got off the arrivals walkway, with my carry-on rolling behind me, that I saw him and I had to pause in my steps.

He didn't have any bags, but instead stood with his back to me and faced the long glass window that stretched for as long as I could see. He was easily ignored, if he wanted. But I saw him the moment I stepped into the room, and that couldn't be a coincidence. I wondered if it would be too unforgivably self-centered to consider whether he was here for me. He was god after all, and that probably meant something.

Around him, people went along their business as they spoke quietly, scrolled through their phones, or simply sat silently. An older man two rows over had his head bowed in a prayer, a string of beads hanging from his clasped hands. This detail felt almost ironic... maybe even hopeful. Maybe it was sad. I haven't decided yet.

He still hadn't turned away from the window, and I dared to step forward until I was only a few feet — maybe an arm's length — away. If I could, I was close enough to reach forward and brush his robes. I was close enough to see how his shoulders trembled, quick and tight like an exhausted muscle. He was crying.

An airport, I thought, was a fitting place for his presence. His tears, at least. Maybe once I would have considered it a place of hope, but not anymore. I haven't for a long time.

A few paces away a woman was frantically trying to soothe her screaming baby, both of their cheeks flushed a matching harsh red, and I wondered why he didn't do anything, if he even could. I would think he could at least offer a few peaceful words to the mother, but he only continued to stare. He didn't even turn.

He must see something, something I had no hope of understanding, something so incredibly important. For him to not even turn, for him not to even look, he must.

He just continued to watch the planes come and go like they held some secret he was desperate to grasp. His mouth was slightly ajar and tears ran numerous and free down his long, wrinkled cheeks. I stood with him, only for a few moments, and watched. The planes sped down the concrete ways, small ant-like people in brightly colored vests were barely visible in the distance, and we both simply stared. Outside the airport, the world went on.

I stood with him, and I watched with him. In the distance, the baby was still screaming, the mother still soothing, and the man still praying. He was still crying, and I think I've almost got it.

The Temple

Anna Styrzcula | Poetry

The temple's roof had fallen in
during the long night's storm;
the glass front doors were broken,
the heavy curtains
torn.

I wander among silent pews,
my heart a watery void.
The waiting cross is cracked and skewed.
Lord, raise this temple I've destroyed.



Bridging the Sky | Photography

Andréa Kütemeier

An Interview with Nate Marshall

Interviewed by Sarah Law

Nate Marshall is the Director of National Programs for the Louder Than a Bomb Youth Poetry Festival. He is also an MC, award-winning poet, author of *Wild Hundreds* and an editor of *The BreakBeat Poets: New American Poetry in the Age of Hip-Hop*. Nate Marshall visited the university campus on September 19, 2018 to speak about his experiences growing up on the South Side of Chicago and share some of his work.

When and why did you start writing?

I started writing when I was pretty young. I was probably—man how old was I—probably like twelve or thirteen. It was a combination of a few things I think. It was just a thing that I happened to find that helped me process things emotionally. That's, I think, a turbulent and confusing time for any young person. So it helped me process and then I kinda got interested... I saw the T.V. show Def Poetry and also started becoming more interested in hip-hop and those two things really led me to try to write, to use writing as like I guess as a way to navigate the world. And my life would be so different if I didn't. Like, writing first off is just a big part of my professional life, but even beyond that: a lot of my friends, my partner, a lot of my social world is built from people who I've encountered because of writing. Because we met at poetry slams when we were young, or just because we were sort of fans of each other's work later on, or whatever.

Has it always been poetry? Or have you tried other forms?

It's primarily been poetry. When I first started writing [it was] like poetry and rap. And I've done both a lot and have continued to do both, but yeah, I've written a bunch of different stuff other than poems. I've written essays, journalistic type pieces, I just finished writing a play.

How do you see poetry serving writers and readers differently from other forms of creative expression?

It's a little hard to say because I think there are so many different kinds of poetry. But I'd say broadly that poetry teaches you the importance of being very careful with language. So often when people talk about, say, the novels that they love, or even like essays or news stories or something that they admire, often what they're talking



Photo Credit: Mercedes Zapata

about is the quality of the ideas or the quality of the narrative. Like, I love Harry Potter for example. And when I talk about what I love about Harry Potter, mostly it's that I'm really involved in the story and really invested in the characters. And then like some of the conflicts that come up and how they're resolving those things.

It's not that poetry doesn't or can't also have great stories or great characters in it but I think that what it means to assign something the title or label of poetry is to say, "I want you to take this seriously and pay very close attention to it at the level of the language." Beyond if you just like the story or not, or if you're compelled by the story or not, is how this thing is being said deeply moving to you. So I think poetry just makes everyone— it makes writers better writers and readers better readers.

What are your inspirations?

I mean a lot of things. I read a lot but I also watch a lot of TV and movies, listen to a lot of music, I take in a lot of art. But I think even beyond that, the positive energy around me is just really fascinating and inspiring. So the relationships I have with my family or my friends or sometimes I'll be at a restaurant and people-watch, taking the train downtown watching folks, or interacting with my students...those are all sources of inspiration to me.

I don't really believe in inspiration I guess I should say. I think the idea of being inspired in the way that people tend to use it is an excuse for people to not write. So what I mean when I say that is like if you purport, "I want to do this thing and I want to be good at this thing," then you do it, right? If you're like, "I want to be a basketball player, or I want to be a football player," you go to practice every day. You just shoot, even if you miss a shot, you shoot. But sometimes they fall easier, sometimes that calls harder and you have to figure out other ways to impact a game. And so I feel similarly about writing. I think like in art we sometimes use this concept of inspiration as, I don't want to say an excuse, but as like a rationalization to be less disciplined in our work than other people do in their work.

Do you believe creative expression is necessary? Why?

I don't know if I can really imagine a world without creative expression. I think that for me, across human history you see three things to be true. Number one, humans look to build communities with each other. Two, humans are often governed by fear, which is one of the things that make way for hate and distrust [towards] folks that are outside of our constructed group, so like...racism, xenophobia, anti-immigrant sentiment, all that shit is in that way very old, even if the actors or the groups that we're thinking about are not as old. The idea that humans are distrustful of outsiders has sort of always been true. And third, is that humans make things creatively. So whether that's thinking a of a way to solve a problem like, "Oh, I have this heavy rock that I'm going to move from there to there but it's too heavy for me to

carry so I build a wheel," that unlocks all this possibility. Or it's like, "Oh, I'm in a cave" and I'm like telling a story to my friends or my children or whatever, and so we draw a painting on the cave to illustrate the story. But I don't think that it's a the question of "if creative expression is important" because I think that the fact is that it's always happened. There's not an example of a culture in all of human history that we're aware of that doesn't practice creative expression.

How would you recommend artists remain positive in both the creation and sharing of their work?

I think you just have to be willing to suck. I think a lot of times what people mean when they say, "I'm inspired," is "I have an idea that doesn't suck. It's like, it's real—I feel that." But if you want to be really good at something, like really good, if you *really* want to move the needle, then you have to be willing to do it and not be good. For me, understanding that if you want to remain positive about your work then you have to understand that when you're getting critical feedback even if it's really harsh, that that feedback is not an indictment on your personhood or on whether or not you should continue to write.



Do you have any advice for people who may be afraid of pursuing a career with writing?

I think the thing about having a writing career is that if you want to be a successful sort of professional writer then I think you have to be broad about what that means. There's a million different ways to be a "professional writer." Like, there's some that are professors of writing, some are professors of other things, some are reporters, some write a lot of freelance, some work at community-based organizations, some are lawyers, some have jobs that really aren't directly related to their creative output. So it just means that you have to be flexible in your vision as to how you're going to make a living. I think if you have a really narrow vision of what a "professional writer" is then it's really easy to fail at achieving that vision. But if your vision is expansive and evolving and able to move and change as you move and change and as your needs move and change then it's a much more doable prospect.

The other thing too is this idea of being inflexible. When people think about being a "professional writer," what they really mean is like "I want to sit in my office or at my crib or whatever and write all day and then I guess send those things off to like some unknown publisher and they will then pay me enough that I can like make a life." But the thing is, pretty much no job works that way. No kind of job is doing a single thing all the time right. So when you think about even just what it takes to make a book, right, you write the book, you edit, you revise... but then there's all this other stuff that people don't really think about. Like, you pick the cover and you work with the artists and your publisher to procure the cover and then you do design. You have to work with a copy editor. There's a thing called a marketing questionnaire, where you're filling out all this stuff and you're producing all this language that's going to define the sales pitch for your book. You think about how you're going to put it out into the world and then maybe you tour with the book.

So you maybe go around and do readings, or workshops, you might do media around the book. You might have other sort of side projects that contribute to a robust conversation about the book. You might have to build a website or at least get someone to build one and manage that project. Maybe social media is a part of it. And a lot of times writers will fail or decide to get out of the game, not because they're not talented but because they didn't have enough imagination or patience for all the other parts of what it takes.

And so I would advise any young person to always think about what's the grunt work, the unsexy work, attached to that career and what part of that is the most doable to you— either because you don't mind it or because the payoff is worth it to you.

What do you hope to achieve in the future?

I want to keep writing, for sure. I'm trying to finish this next book, I'm trying to get this play produced. And I think beyond that really it's... I think what I most want is just to continue to figure out ways to make space for for young people that are interested in writing. And also to kind of make space for young men and for men more broadly to be more emotionally in tune with themselves and the people around them and the world because I think so much suffering happens in the world because like men are trained and incentivized to not feel.

What has been the greatest achievement for you so far?

It's honestly the fact that young people where I'm from will read my work and engage with it in whatever ways they engage with it. That it sometimes gets taught in schools, that for me is the thing. Like, yesterday I happened to be at a high school, working at a college fair, and a kid walked up to me and he was like, "Are you Nate Marshall?" And I was like, "Yes," and he said, "I appreciate your poetry." And so that's my greatest achievement. Like, there's been some really cool awards and nominations and all those things and I'm appreciative of all that. I'm grateful for anyone who engages with the work, but the fact that, you know, a black kid on the South Side is like "I fuck with your poems," *that* means the world to me

We were clasped gently inside spring's loving palms, her promises of rebirth and growth chirped and affirmed by messengers in the form of timid, hidden frogs. Her fingers tousled through our hair as shadows from the canopy above softened its edges with buds. Chiding winds bickered with indecision regarding the arrival of firm, yet forgiving rains.

She arrived just after you did, your glow a welcomed change that softened the harsh incandescent street lamps of the forgotten Midwest. I'm sure she watched us through that peephole, the moon, but I suppose she realized that her coveted warmth had been replicated by you. So, she stepped back; she took her time. I only wonder who I had been waiting for longer.

Yet, while I knew of nature's kindness, I could not forget her scorn.

I am constantly in fear and awe of how she takes just as much as she gives; she is not selective in the business of death but tends to vary in patience.

I can only pray that she takes her time with us.



Chasing the Sun | Photography

Emily Gustin

The television screen emitted a pale and distant hum into the darkened living room, bright light from the screen contrasting harshly against the corners of the furniture. My mother's sleeping shadow was curled inside the La-Z-Boy with a half-finished glass cupped against her chest, her knees drawn into her like a child cradled in the arms of a loving parent. Her other hand hung heavy along the armrest, an empty bottle of Lambrusco dangling from her fingers. She was still dressed from earlier; I couldn't remember if I saw her move from that spot since we came home that afternoon.

"Jesus, Kathy," My grandmother glared down at her daughter-in-law as she ascended the stairs in her nightgown. "At least take your tights off."

She had at least complied to slip off her shoes in the preceding twelve hours, as they sat discarded at the foot of the recliner— but her hair, still done up with wilted curls and matted with hairspray, clung to the upholstery of the chair. Makeup had migrated from her eyelids and found a home above her cheeks. I wondered how someone could look so old yet so childlike at the same time.

At only thirteen, I had not yet come to understand that being numb could sometimes be a welcome thing; I only knew that my mother embraced it, and for that I resented her. It felt disrespectful. She sat there and sank into herself while I was left alone to feel everything, ferociously and vivid, senses not yet dulled by the downward pressure of age, time and grief. That would change someday.

The light at the top of the staircase went out as Oma entered her room, leaving me in complete darkness. Once I heard the door close, I willed myself to turn away from my mother to engage my mission for the night. I snuck past and reached the fireplace my small stature proving inconvenient as I reached toward the back of the mantel. I knew what I was searching for, but I was having trouble locating it with just my hand in the dark.

Here?

No, not here.

Here.

My fingers wrapped around the box, and I stashed it away inside my tote bag, taking extra care to not disturb its contents. As long as I brought the box back before morning, no one would know it had moved.

A muted clatter sounded behind me; I jumped, swinging around and bracing myself for questioning, but the La-Z-Boy was still. The only movement came from the empty bottle that had fallen from my mother's hand onto the carpeted floor. I saw her hand recede back into the center of the recliner and curl up next to the glass at her heart. Her breath remained even, steady. This was my cue to exit quickly.

I made sure to close the screen door quietly behind me, pausing at the threshold to look up against the house and check for any lit windows that looked into the darkened woods. Finding none, I started my way down the trail toward the river, bare feet sliding pleasantly along the smooth stone pathway.

"June, you're overwatering the lilacs. I'm going to have you do something else."

Oma's voice cut clearly through the spray of water. I looked up at her in surprise; she pointed her spade in my direction as she crouched near the peonies.

"But you've only ever had me water the plants, Oma." At ten years old, my hands were deemed too clumsy and rough to handle the delicate pansies and marigolds my grandmother liked to pepper her garden with. She cited my rambunctious attitude around the backyard as a complaint, remarking every so often that girls my age shouldn't be digging for worms or bringing frogs home from the woods in plastic critter cages. Despite her protests to Mom to put me in line, nothing was ever done to keep me inside. Eventually, she learned to embrace it— but only on terms that benefit her green thumb.

She walked up to me with a pair of garden clippers in her other hand, holding them by the sharp end as she held out the handle to me. "I need you to dead-head the rhododendrons that Danny's repotting."

She wore her blue checkered blouse with a pair of worn-out jeans, knees stained brown and green and yet still somehow appearing tasteful. Her face was shielded by the sun with a large straw hat; she looked like she could have been pulled straight from a *Better Homes and Gardens* catalogue— and I'm sure if someone told her so, she'd be flattered. But rather than be the type of gardener that welcomed her guests in for lemonade and conversation, she employed the use of unpaid child labor in the form of my brother and I. Well, "child" was a subjective term; being ten years older than me, Danny didn't really share a generational overlap, and we were never really children at the same time. But the sentiment was still implied, and I knew that Danny wouldn't say no to helping Oma— especially while he was home from school. The garden was her pride and joy, and it kept her mind busy in her old age. Without it, she'd be out every afternoon gossiping with the townies over coffee.

I took the clippers from her hand and held it up to my face. I snapped it open, shut, open, shut. "What's dead-heading?"

"It's when you cut away the heads of flowers that have already gone through their bloom."

"But doesn't that hurt the flower?"

"No," Oma replied. "It's just getting rid of the extra. When you cut away the dead part of the flower, you're actually helping it grow. It's the part of the plant that isn't wanted."

I didn't understand why she looked at me the way she did as she said this.

Taking the clippers, I threw down the still-running hose and shrugged past her, joining Danny on the other side of the garden. His hand was buried deep inside a terracotta pot, and in one movement he scooped the molded mass of soil out of its container and placed it neatly into a larger vessel, patting it down with a pair of gloved hands.

"How'd you do that without spilling any dirt?" I asked.

"Oma's been making me do this long before you were around," he said with a smirk. "This ain't my first rodeo. You've been lucky that she's had you on hose duty all these years."

I rolled my eyes. He nudged a flower in need of re-potting in my direction and nodded toward the clippers. "Go ahead, Junie. Do your stuff. Dead-heading is easy; just clip off the brown parts."

The stone path devolved into dirt, the change in texture telling me I had entered the woods and passed the border of Oma's property. Sounds of early summer frogs ushered me further down the path as I neared the riverbank, their sweet chirps and croaks a welcomed and inviting reminder after a winter of silence and change. For a moment, I considered pulling out my flashlight to catch a frog and bring it back home before reminding myself why I came out here in the first place. I adjusted the tote bag on my shoulder, peering into the sack to make sure my descent into the ravine hadn't disturbed its contents. I knew it didn't matter much if I did, but I still wanted to be careful. Something about showing respect.

I took a moment to find my footing among the darkened forest floor and sat against the decline of the earth, taking in the sounds of the night. Through the charming chorus of ribbits, I could hear the distant ramble of the creek further down in the dark.

"Danny, what's a hussy?"

My brother, who was reclined against the ravine, bolted upright at the question. "What?"

"A hussy."

"I heard you the first time. You don't have to say it again. Where'd you hear that word?" Beat. "Did someone at school call you that?" Another beat. "Christ, what are they teaching in second grade nowadays?"

"No, it wasn't about me. But they said it about Mom. About how we don't have the same dads."

Danny was silent for a moment. I knew by the way he was ripping the grass from the ground that he was looking for a way to answer. After a moment, he discarded the pulled stalks and turned to me, eyes still downcast in thought.

“A hussy... is someone who... who doesn’t have great morals. Who doesn’t follow rules. And it’s a very bad thing to call someone’s mom.”

“But I thought you said it was cool to break the rules,” I said. Then, I gasped. “Are we hussies?”

Danny’s attempts at backpedaling were desperate. “No, Junie! No, no, we’re not hussies. And it’s only cool to break the rules sometimes, like when Oma tells you you can’t go swimming in the creek. That’s not what a hussy is.”

“Then what is it?”

Another period of silence. More shredded grass.

“They said it about Mom?”

I nodded.

He reached out and grasped one of my shoulders. I turned, surprised.

“June,” he began, “I want you to understand something right now. Just because we have different dads does not make me your brother any less.”

“I know.” Why was he telling me this? I just wanted to know what a hussy was.

“There are a lot of mean people in the world who might try and tell you differently. But their opinions don’t matter. Just know that Mom loves you, Oma loves you, and I do too, ya li’l squirt.” He accented the end of this by picking up a handful of the picked grass and tousling it into my hair.

“Hey!” I laughed. I picked up more of the grass and flung a handful at him; we began exchanging fire. I still hadn’t learned what a hussy was.

I suddenly felt cold. Memories from the past week began filling my head; I had been told to ignore the stares from my classmates as I walked down the hallway once the news had broken, but middle schoolers were relentless. It didn’t take long for everyone to find out, either; during lunch period a few days afterward, I sat with my usual group of acquaintances, picking absently at the bologna sandwich I had prepared for myself that

morning. Tommy Green, a boy in my grade who was anything but an empath, came up to me from behind and nudged me with the side of his shoe.

“So like, does this mean your grandma’s gonna kick you and your mom out now?”

The next thing I knew, I found myself seated in the principal’s office with Tommy beside me, his nose plugged with a stained tissue and head tilted back.

Using the decline of the ravine to my advantage, I pushed myself back onto my feet and continued my descent toward the water. Once I reached the riverside, I began looking for my destination that skirted alongside the shore. I was close now.

“No, no. You have to use your wrist when you throw it. Watch me.”

I stared keenly at Danny as he fished out another stone from the soaked pockets of his cargo shorts, stepping further out into the current. The water was at about mid-calf length for him, while it was nearly up to my waist. This was the designated “No Junes Allowed” zone, the point in the river where I wasn’t allowed past— also disguised as a tactic for him to put some space between us for the windup. He surveyed the stone for a moment, turning it over in his palm before comically leaning his shoulder back and effortlessly flicking it from his hand. It almost seemed to fly on its own accord as it skimmed, once, twice, three times, ripping seams into the surface of the water until it lost momentum and sank to join its countless comrades. My brother turned and bowed dramatically as I laughed and clapped.

“Again! Do it again!” I jumped enthusiastically and came down splashing, hanging off his arm once he came back closer to the shore. He reached into his pockets again and, to my dismay, his hand came up empty.

“Sorry, Junie,” he shrugged. “Guess I’m all out of stones for today.”

I felt a slight pout form on my face. Then, I made my own ripples in the current as my hands plunged toward the riverbed, bringing up handfuls of stones for Danny to inspect. He laughed and leaned forward to allow me to dump them into his own hand— two fistfuls of rocks from my six-year-old palms translated to about one heavy handful for him— and he crouched to my level, pointing to the stones with his free hand.

“The important thing about stone skipping is finding the right rock,” he said. “You can’t just skip any old stone and call it a day; you gotta look for the ones that are the right shape.”

I nodded intently, scanning his hand with an intensity that only children can harbor. After a moment I picked one from his palm and held it up. “Like this?”

“Almost,” Danny replied, taking it from my fingers and looking at it more closely. “Stones that like to skip are the ones that are flat and smooth. That way the water doesn’t catch on them and they can slide on the top much easier. This one is very nice, but look. See how it’s heavy on one side?”

I nodded.

“This stone was made for other things, but not skipping.” He placed it in my hand for me to look at. I rolled it around in my palm, mimicking what I saw him do earlier.

“So, it’s a... it’s a ploppin’ stone!” I concluded. Danny laughed.

“Yeah, Junie. It’s a ploppin’ stone.”

I raised the rock over my head and threw it upper-handedly, watching its high arc and descent into the water with a satisfying splash.

“Nice one!” Danny praised. I grinned wide.

“See, that’s what so cool about looking for rocks. They might be the same kind of rock, but you’ll never find two that look exactly the same. Even if they’re itty bitty pebbles.”

On the day he died, my mother went out into Oma’s garden and clipped the blooms off every bush and stalk. She spared nothing; not even the dandelions kept their heads. I heard Oma’s screams from my bedroom

where I had confined myself all day; my grandmother was an outspoken woman, but I had never heard her truly scream like she did that afternoon. It was enough to rouse me from my bed, and I inched along the upstairs hallway to listen to the tempest brewing downstairs in the kitchen.

“Daniel loved that garden. Why would you do something so reckless? So selfish?” Oma: raucous, furious.

“Oh, you be quiet. They’ll grow back. You only thought he loved it because you forced him to help you in the heat every summer.” Mom: quiet, defeated.

“What about my marigolds, Kathy? What about them? Will those grow back? Or do need to give you a lesson in gardening?”

Silence. Then, Oma again:

“Maybe that’s what I should have done to keep you busy all those years ago. Maybe that would have kept you from running off and getting knocked up by that deadbeat while my Ryan was on his deathbed.”

More silence, followed by the sound of hurried footsteps and a slamming door. I heard the car pull out of the garage and speed down the long driveway. Muffled sobbing that migrated to the deflowered backyard told me it was Oma that stayed behind.

I waited until I heard the rattle of the screen door to make my move downstairs. I peered my head into the room before entering. The smell of clipped flowers was thick and unyielding. On the kitchen table sat an overturned garbage bag, emptied of hundreds of blooms snipped at their prime. Peonies, roses, marigolds, foxgloves— flora of seemingly every shape and size littered the surface of the table. Their severed heads sagged against their stalks, some of them already beginning to wilt. Others lay full and open, happily unaware of their early demise. I had never seen a bouquet so vibrant and tragic, and I haven’t seen one like it since.

“Why do you think the sky can get so pink at dusk?”

Danny and I sat among the gnarled roots of an ancient willow at the riverside. While the river itself was our prime spot for swimming and “mucking around” as Oma used to call it, the willow had become our main squatting spot after I entered sixth grade. The pressure of growing up had begun to lay its burdens on my shoulders, and with the arrival of my first period, I was suddenly not as keen on swimming as I used to be. Danny had slowed down a bit, too; his recent graduation from college left him in a reflective state, with no promising job offers or concrete plans for his future. The past few months he had spent living at home, and, while he was our grandmother’s favorite, we could both sense that she was getting tired of housing all of us. The stress was getting to his spirits.

And so, between the death of childhood and the upwards march into the working world, we sat.

We watched the sun disappear behind the canopies through the tree’s low hanging branches, leaving us to revel in the afterglow. I pointed out rosy oranges and purples that lit up the underbellies of the clouds.

“I honestly can’t answer that one, June.”

“But I thought you knew everything,” I joked. He smirked and rolled his eyes in response.

“I got my diploma in business, not clouds.”

“Sounds pretty boring.”

Another resigned smile. “Yeah.”

Silence.

“Hey, June?”

“Yeah?”

“Do me a favor and try not to grow up.”

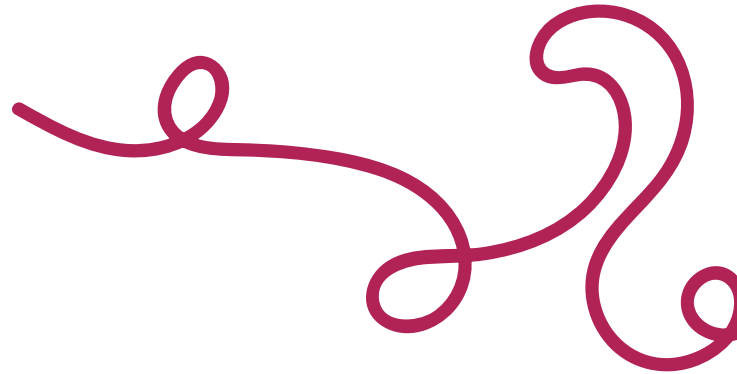
I parted the curtain of leaves to reach the trunk of the willow. Setting down my tote bag, I reached in and first retrieved a picture. It had been taken a few hours after I was born; there Danny was, a ten-year-old boy who recently lost his father, holding his bastard sister like she was the moon. I could never understand how he didn’t hate me like Oma did; I was a human rift, an anomaly that blotted the perfection that our family used to feign.

He beamed in the picture nonetheless; he was happy and proud to be my older brother, and he would never know how thankful I am that he was. I settled the picture gently among the roots, leaning it against the trunk.

Next was the box. Prying off the sealed lid, I was surprised at the fact that, instead of loosely sifting around inside the vessel, my brother’s ashes had been contained inside a plastic bag in the box all along. There was no need to be so careful. Tearing open the bag, I stepped out from under the willow and walked to the bank of the river. I took in a handful and remembered Danny’s technique.

Winding up and throwing my shoulder back, I cast my hand out and released underhandedly.

He seemed to fly on his own accord.





Aging | Acrylic

Monique Le Donne

A morte da floresta é o fim da nossa vida

Jesse Hershberger | Poetry

Inspired by the life and death of Dorothy Stang

Monkeys cry
and the poor
die and we keep
buying and buying
stuffing our bodies with the
propaganda
that one day it might fill the
God shaped
hole inside us.
So the monkeys keep
crying and the nuns keep
dying so that one fifth of us will
never have to stop
buying.

Have you ever heard a monkey, wailing, as its home is burned away?
Just wait—
we're next.



Rest | Photography

Zhaotong Liu



A Billion Star Hotel | Photography

Mark Young

through the night

Rachel Jones | Poetry

it's two a.m. and the world is quiet.
are you dreaming of me?
this silence isn't comforting like it once was.
enveloped in a sea of murky blue,
the color i once used to be so enamored with,
now drowning me little by little.

three comes fast and so does the realization that you never cared. and when i think
about how my naturally vibrant energy became melancholic around you,
i realize that i shouldn't care either.
but do i love too hard? or too fast?
did i do something wrong?
was it something i said? ...or didn't say?
how could you?
how could you?
how could you?
how do i go from here in the state that you left me in?

i tried sleeping it off until four.
vague memories flow through my mind, like a cloudy and distant dream that feels
a lifetime away.
art pouring from my fingertips, but it's ugly and it's raw,
and it's all about you.
it's *always* about you,
only you

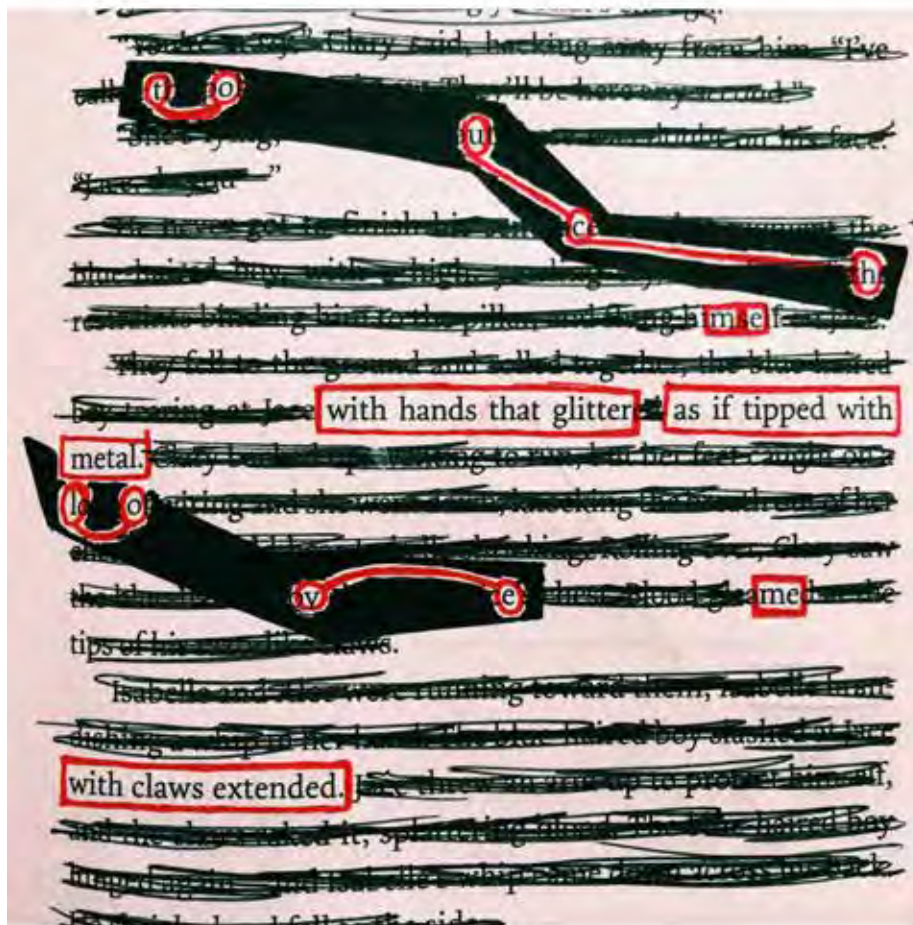
...but who even are you anymore?

suddenly it's five a.m. and i'm finally deleting your pictures from my phone. what was once
my lockscreen is now gone forever. a harsh, intense pain slowly becomes a dim, numbing sensation. will the sun be rising soon?

it's six a.m. and i want to thank you.
because of you, i realized that heartbreak can come from friends, too.

claws that glitter

Leanna Sanchez | Blackout Poetry



sticky fingers

Taylor Bundren | Poetry

The first brief touch
on my lower back,
there for only a moment,
leaves me spinning,
reeling—
a wink and then gone.

I bring a hand to my throat
because my breath is stolen too.
I feel around and realize
part of me is missing—
a sleight of hand,
a glimmer and then gone.

So I dream of the day
when I catch the edge of his sleeve
to pull him back into my world,
to shake his coat loose
and see pieces of myself
fall to the floor.

But I stay here, guarding the rest
of me while your echo lingers,
leaving my head still spinning
and my pockets empty.



The Fishermen | Photography

Emily Gustin

The Absent-Minded Lifeguard's Guide to Swimming Lessons

Daniel Funderburg | Prose

When you're a lifeguard, shit happens. Insofar as I've been able to figure out, shit inevitably happens to anyone who has to watch things for a living: lifeguards, police officers, nurses, and especially forest rangers. There are, for instance, pages upon pages and hours upon hours on the internet devoted to the shit that happens to forest rangers, which might run something like: "The Forestry Service fired me after I accidentally blew up a small mountain," or perhaps, "Hello, I'm an ex-forest ranger and let me tell you about the time the Chupacabra chased my jeep up a tree." As a rule, it's only the most realistic stuff in the whole internet. There are not, however, quite so many pages dedicated to the shit that happens to lifeguards. Not *quite*.

It was one Saturday morning during the summer of my senior year of high school. I was on duty at the Y.M.C.A. There were two pools. The newer, larger, and colder one was on one side of the building and was where the swim team practiced. I was on guard at the smaller, warmer, and- to be blunt- sketchier pool. We called it "the family pool," and given the sheer volume of small children and old people who wallowed in it, and the various and sundry stinks which proceeded from them, you can see how the sketchiness came about naturally.

I admit it, my mind wandered when I was on duty. Now before you start complaining, let me say that no accidents ever happened "on my watch." Writers' minds just tend to wander. Well, on this particular day, the large number of screaming kids in the shallow end made my mind start to wander. And as my mind wandered, I admit it, my eye wandered too. I didn't see them get in.

My mental anabasis went on for a minute or two, during which I only scanned the pool without taking in detail. I was too busy pondering the finer points of life, such as Pre-Calculus, or how to win the video-game level I was stuck on. I was brought back from the hinterlands by the sound of splashing, accompanied by a high-pitched moan. This moan came from the mouth of a female. To an eighteen-year-old boy, this was newsworthy. I looked for the source.

The source was below and two feet to the left of my chair. There were three girls, just my age, at the wall. One was clinging to it for dear life and emitting more sounds of distress; the other two were speaking to her in soothing tones. Now, I might be "The Absent-Minded Lifeguard," but I know that clinging to the wall and wailing are never good things for a swimmer to do. I got down from the chair to see if I could help.

I learned, in short order that:

1. No, she wasn't drowning.
2. Her name was Elizabeth.
3. These were her friends.
4. She couldn't swim a stroke, and was terrified of water, but yet...
5. They had talked her into trying to learn to swim.

Elizabeth got out of the pool to calm down, and for the first time, I really had a chance to look at her. She was a brunette, with her hair bobbed. She had a sweet face, even sweeter, I imagined, when she was calm and confident and her makeup wasn't wet. She wore a red bathing suit, and as I watched the water drip from the curves of her body and puddle around her feet, I couldn't help but feel attracted. This wasn't just the age-old teenaged tendency to make a bathing beauty out of any girl who climbed out of a swimming pool: I honestly felt drawn to Elizabeth. My mind raced. I spoke. "Look, Elizabeth... I'm a trained lifeguard, and... I get off work in fifteen minutes so... If you'll wait till then, I'll come in and help you."

Wouldn't you know it, Elizabeth accepted.

The next half hour was composed of:

1. Elizabeth being convinced to try swimming again in the eight-foot deep water.
2. Elizabeth losing her nerve two yards out.
3. Elizabeth crying.
4. Elizabeth's friends trying to convince her into a life-jacket.
5. Elizabeth refusing.

The Absent-Minded Lifeguard's Guide to Swimming Lessons (Continued)

Daniel Funderburg | Prose

6. Elizabeth's friends compromising by tying a pair of pool noodles around each of her arms like water wings.
7. Me clocking out with super-human speed.
8. Me swimming back out to find Elizabeth psyching herself up.
9. Me towing the now-buoyant Elizabeth out into the pool.
10. Elizabeth realizing this wasn't worth crying over (for the moment).
11. Me realizing Elizabeth was so scared of water she couldn't put her face underwater, even with goggles.
12. Elizabeth realizing she'd had enough of this for the day.
13. Elizabeth realizing she wouldn't mind having a swim lesson another day.
14. Elizabeth giving me her number to schedule it.

Now, at this point, I should probably tell you I had never given anyone a swimming lesson in my life. There were lifeguards who had trained for that—I hadn't. Sure I had a general idea, and *I* certainly knew how to swim, so how hard could it be to impart that knowledge? So I waited expectantly.

Elizabeth decided she wanted her next swim lesson at 6:00 A.M. on a Wednesday. So, by golly, I showed up at 6:00 A.M. on a Wednesday.

If I were to write the story of that swim lesson according to popular depictions of lifeguards, Elizabeths, and swim lessons, it would run something like this:

The Lifeguard would have a perfect tan, a perfect six-pack, and piercing eyes. His hair would be cropped short, bleached by the sun, and he would have an air of incredible calm and self-command, and no body hair.

The Elizabeth would be a very dark brunette, with skin lighter than his, yet not pale, and would be slender, with big eyes, and hair and makeup that would stay perfect

no matter how long she was in the pool, because she'd be going into beauty school, and know these things. She would have butterflies in her stomach, yet would still be perky.

The Swim Lesson would run as follows -- They would both come out of their respective locker rooms at the exact same time and set their bags right next to each other on the bench. He'd have on perfectly-fitting uniform board-shorts, she'd have on her perfectly-fitting one-piece. It'd be a white one-piece: be they movie stars or video-game characters, pop culture Elizabeths always find a way to wear white. They'd wade into the shallow end together, but then she'd realize she'd forgotten something, get out, and come back in with a swim ring she'd dug out of a box in the garage around her waist. She'd say something like "for luck." She wouldn't need luck. The Lifeguard would know exactly what to do, and by the end of the lesson, she'd slip casually out of her ring and do a lap of breaststroke. What would they talk about? Oh, anything and everything, but the rest of us would sure get some good life lessons out of it.

All that said, life is *not* a popular depiction. That swim lesson actually ran something like this:

I was pale as only a Midwesterner can be, had no readily-discernible muscles anywhere on my torso, no piercing eyes, and a mess of unkempt brown hair. Not only that, but I was flying by the seat of my pants. Oh, and had absolutely too much body hair.

Elizabeth was a very light brunette who wore her hair in a bob that, strangely for bobs, always managed to be falling apart, was pale to a truly Victorian degree, had the figure to match her pallor, and makeup that ran like a river. Can you guess what she wanted to do for a living? On the off chance you guessed "mortician" then you'd be right. Oh, and those butterflies that Pop-Culture-Elizabeth got? Well, this Elizabeth's butterflies were Japanese dive bombers, and her stomach was Pearl Harbor.

That Swim Lesson. Oh, let me tell you.

To begin with, I was not then, am not now, and,

barring the unforeseeable, will never be a morning person. In order to be at the Y by 6:00 A.M., I had to get up at 5:00. Now, one cup of coffee can only do so much, so I was already out of it when I got there.

A word about Y.M.C.A. locker rooms. There were, at one time, and probably still are in far-off lands, Y.M.C.A. locker rooms which smelled perfectly sweet and antiseptic. Our locker rooms were not among them. The Men's locker room had developed a stink which I can only describe thus: imagine if you will a spaceship of the far, far future. On a mission to some distant star system, this ship was overrun by some bizarre, parasitic alien entity, which proceeded to turn the entire vessel into one great big nest. As you run through the corridors, the walls move, the floors squeak and pulsate, rivers of God-knows-what ooze out of places they shouldn't, and while we're at it, the ship is carrying a cargo of Limburger cheese, which has gone bad. And that is how our locker room smelled.

Elizabeth and I escaped our locker rooms at about the same time, and there was no one else in the pool, so we proceeded to—Wait! I almost forgot our bathing suits. My shorts had reckoned on there being significantly more me than there was; Elizabeth's red two-piece had reckoned on there being significantly less Elizabeth than there was. I assume every teenager has one of those two bathing suits somewhere in their closet.

We held hands from the moment we entered the water. Notwithstanding, Elizabeth was still shivering from the moment the water passed her waist. Now I was flying by the seat of my pants but *did* at least have a general idea of the route to the target. And there was one problem I knew I had to address right off the bat. When they're giving you *real* swim lessons, the first thing they teach you is to stick your face under water and blow bubbles. But Elizabeth couldn't even manage that. So there was our start point. She agreed to try.

We went out until the water was halfway up Elizabeth's torso. Then she turned to me, grabbed both of my hands, took a deep breath, and plunged her face

underwater... Only to rip it out again a moment later, tears coming down her cheeks and shaking harder than ever. No, she couldn't bring herself to it. But you know what? For once in my brief career as a swim teacher, I was prepared. Elizabeth waded back to a safer depth, and I exited the pool to return with the wonder of modern technology.

As Elizabeth struggled into her mask and snorkel, I explained that now she had nothing to dread. Tmask would keep the water out of her eyes and nose, she could breathe all the air she could ever desire from the surface, and, with the little plastic plugs she had just slid into her ears, she couldn't be more watertight without a diving suit. Now, was this cheating? Neither of us cared. We waded out, Elizabeth took my hands, screwed up her courage, took the plunge, and... stayed under. The shaking ceased, and I could hear her breathing more calmly through her plastic lifeline. When she finally did surface and jerked the snorkel out of her mouth, Elizabeth yelled, "I did it!" so you would have thought we were just taking off our helmets from a dive to the sea floor. Then she went right down and did it again. Jubilation.

So now Elizabeth could go under water. With help. But she still couldn't swim. We set our sights on the deep end, and Elizabeth went over to the side of the pool to prepare for the arduous crossing. She tied the requisite noodles around her arms—a swim ring, no matter how garish, would simply have been too elegant for that swim lesson—and I worked her through the motions of breaststroke in the shallow end. Would the foam around her arms keep her from sinking? Did I actually teach her breaststroke? We were about to find out.

A wise man once said that any landing you survive is a good one. Something similar probably applies to swimming. Sure, Elizabeth flailed and splashed and stopped and started and gasped more than once. But her makeshift water wings kept her afloat. And whatever excuse for breaststroke I taught her kept her moving something like forward. And when her hands touched the side of the pool where the water was eight feet deep, there was once again rejoicing throughout the land. Even so, she decided she was going to stay there in the corner for a while and practice her kick.

The Absent-Minded Lifeguard's Guide to Swimming Lessons (Continued)

Daniel Funderburg | Prose

As Elizabeth kicked and started to decompress, we finally had the chance to talk. Was our talk an Earth-shattering moral message like the one our pop-culture forebears had? No. We talked about video games. What else did you expect when you put two nerds alone together with nothing better to do? We probably would have kept on building cities in the sky and comparing the merits of laser pistols for all eternity if we hadn't had a visitor.

This man looked like Andrew Jackson retired to Florida and let himself go. Sounded like it too. From what I could tell, he had just been swimming in the other pool and was coming in here to warm up. He sidled up to the edge of the pool, plunked himself down with his legs in the water, and stared at us in silence for a minute or so before he finally spoke.

"So. How're you two getting on?"

Elizabeth and I looked at each other. So this man thought that we were...? But of course it made sense to him. If, in *his* day, he had seen us there at the side of the pool, in our matching red bathing costumes that started a little over our knees and ended at our collar bones, with Elizabeth wearing the life preserver I had made her from the latest edition of *Popular Mechanics* out of three bicycle inner tubes, two spools of bailing twine and a half-pound of lard, he could have come to no other conclusion *but* that we were boyfriend and girlfriend.

We said something, in a beating-around-the-bush sort of way. Whatever it was, he still went to the hot tub believing I was teaching my girlfriend to swim.

Elizabeth completed the return journey to the shallow end with flying colors, and we both decided that was enough for one day. We went to the hot tub (praise the Lord, the old guy was gone), and then headed to towel off. We agreed that, given the circumstances, we both had a great time.

I admit it, forest rangers have the right to claim that more shit happens to them than anybody else: it's only natural when your job is to stand around in the most God-

forsaken parts of God's green earth and intentionally look for shit to happen. I'll give them that. That said, being a lifeguard isn't quite as sedate as the forest rangers would like you to believe. Shit happens to us too, although sometimes that shit is of our own making. At this point in the narrative, popular culture will have led you to expect me to start beating you over the head with a moral, just as it led you to expect lifeguards to have six-packs and Elizabeths to wear white. Well, just like I don't have a six-pack and Elizabeth wasn't wearing white, I'm not going to force a moral down your throat here. Even if I *could* find a moral, I don't figure it'd be worth your trouble. Now, it may interest you to know whether Elizabeth ever learned to swim or not. And I say it with pride: kind of.



My Diary

Faith Smith | Poetry

Inspired by Alicia Keys' song "My Diary"

Try to keep my secrets,
And I'll keep yours.
We could even trade thoughts and offer ourselves just that much more.
Normally I wouldn't suggest this, but I've been cut wide open.
My soul has been exposed, my clothes have been torn,
my mind has been picked apart, and this is almost another form of art.
I try to keep my promises,
Now you need to keep yours.
Share this with no one,
Because you are my diary.
You created the lines to the pages my pen sweeps over ever so gently.
You're the lock to the key I always carry with me.
Don't tell anyone,
Not even my soul.
Keep my secrets, even the ones I haven't told.



Shared Space | Photography

Zhaotong Liu

Love is Patient

Emily Mrzłak | Poetry

When I drink ginger tea it reminds me of you—
miso soup, savory fish,
and all the sushi places we've been to.

There is only one in my family
who shares the same affinity for the dish.
My brother is adventurous,
an aficionado of risks.

You have the same lust for fun,
but for me, you hesitate.
When we're sitting on the pier,
basking in the sun,

I recall all the times my kin pushed me in.
While you wait,
until I want to take the plunge.

A sestina for You, for falling

Emma Hecht | Poetry

The rope of the tire swing started to fray
when we still had to toddle, needed help
to walk to the tree that held it. I'd lie
underneath with my cheeks sanguine
with laughter at your upside-down face,
my every smile a snapshot in an album.

In a wheat sunset, the rope cracked like an old album,
when I was old enough to snap a slight fray.
I fell. You ran to me, worry on your face,
chivalrous, to offer your help.
In your boyish presence I was sanguine
and boasted, "I don't need you." A lie.

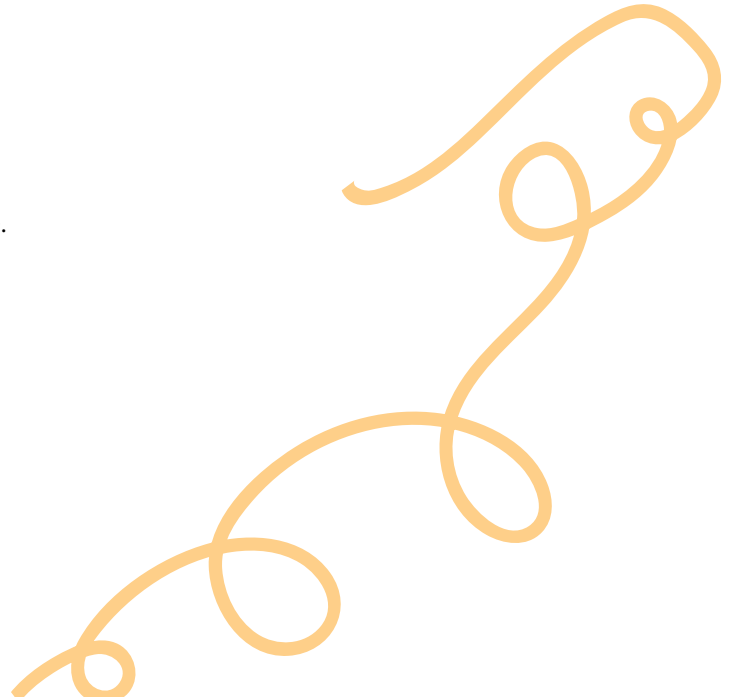
As our season aged, I would always lie
beside you. One night you enlaced my neck in a golden album—
inside was us, our foreheads together, sanguine.
You locked it to my skin with your lips; lips to fray
away my fear of falling; lips to help
me fall. In love with you, I shifted to face

the window. Just so I could see our welded image in its face,
counting your eyes, seeing two. Looking to undress any lie,
finding none. Purity I couldn't help
but hallucinate. Later you settled a Neil Young album
on the record player. We spun with it. My internal fray
forgotten under the slow ceiling fan that turned us sanguine.

When you told me, my ears scorched as sanguine
as the patient leaves on our tree, which waited to face
their fall, a foreseen autumnal fray.
I couldn't decide whether to suffocate in a lie
or to tear your chain, our album
off my throat, making room for air to gasp for help.

If you could sit here opaque and loving me, it would help.
Instead of that same reverie I have, painfully sanguine
and as vivid, as heavy on my chest as your photo in my album.
The timeless one where our simplicity lit your face.
Because now I'm here without you, and I lie
in sheets tormented by my body's lonely fray.

Tomorrow I'll face daylight with my own help
and lie under that tree: yellow, ochre; sanguine.
Without album, content to be unphotographed; to fray





we all fall down | Photography

We Become Shadows

Leanna Sanchez | Poetry

We got lost in the dark forest mazes
surrounded by spirits, ghosts in the night
black shadows leaked from heartbroken hazes
and so we lived in an absence of light.

In the desperate dusk, where dreams go to die
live nightmares howling, they murder all hope
we try to escape, in anguish we cry
run away dear, it's a dangerous slope.

Do you remember how summer would feel?
Thoughts of warm sunlight now only seem cruel
the longer I think, was it even real?
I'm falling apart, love, you were my jewel.

Wake up now darling, we'll never be free
our life is just you, the shadows, and me.



dragon's breath | Photography

Leah Gatchel



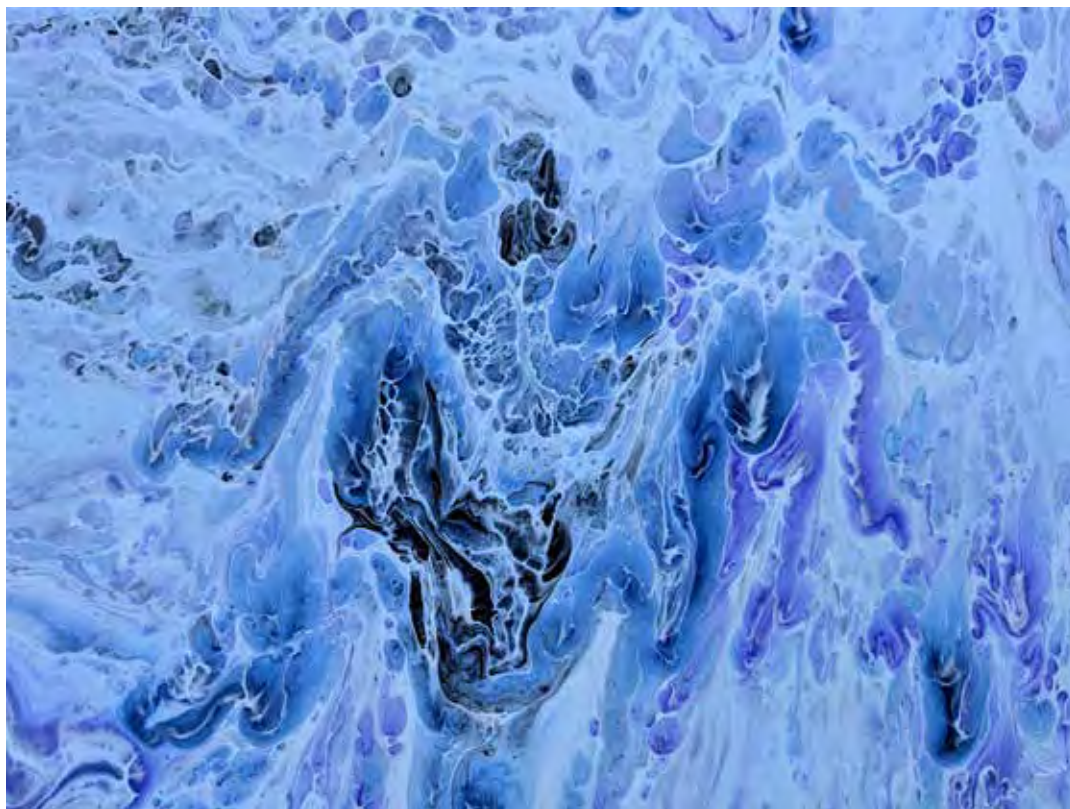
everything is blue. | Ink and Colored Pencil

Kylynn Smith

dreaming of royal blue

Anna Bedalov | Prose-Poem

a swallow flies up your left nostril and you taste strawberries as it dissolves. the sunset behind you is royal blue. each tree in the infinite forest surrounding you begins to melt. each tree becomes a dripping evergreen popsicle. they smell like cherries. the sun has set; the sky is royal blue. you open your mouth to taste the frozen pine tree growing out of your right kneecap. a sparrow escapes from your mouth, rolling off of your tongue and landing on the branch you were about to lick. the sparrow's eyes are royal blue. it opens its beak to sing, but it, too, cannot use its mouth properly and out flows a melody of robotic tones. musical notes appear in the air on a floating treble clef; the notes are royal blue. the bird sings louder. companions join in, flying out of the puddled evergreens to shout in front of you. the digested swallow warbles within your stomach. your skin turns royal blue. the first sparrow lunges forward to bite into your nose, which has turned into a beak. the tinny melody is louder than ever. you open your beak to join in the song. the sky turns black. the birds turn black. the notes turn black. you open your eyes to shut off your royal blue alarm clock.



Ice Cold | Acrylic Pouring

Lexi Gault



Fine Tuning | Watercolor

Gina Dalrymple

A Lighter Celebrity: A Final Interview with Advisor Professor Schuette

Everytime I walk into Professor Schuette's office, a sense of peace washes over me. Maybe it's the sunlight that falls from the mysteriously hidden skylight or maybe it's her leaf stickers that lounge across the walls. Maybe it's her mini-collection of The Lighter issues and old posters that she proudly displays. But it's probably just who Professor Schuette is and the confidence she has in me and in the world.

Why are you “passing the lighter” on to Professor Wagenaar next semester?

It's a good time to hand over the helm. I've been at the wheel for 13 years, and we have a new fiction writing hire, something the department worked toward for a long time. Plus my work on the Welcome Project always longs for more attention, like my cat, Monkey, who insists on love and affection when I get home from work.

In your own words, what would you say has been your vision for The Lighter and its role on campus?

Certainly for me, I think just given who I am as a person, community has kinda always been my framework— that's how I would think about it first. When I first started here I came out of an MFA program where I was really interested in like creating energy around writing culture and doing Coffeehouses and performance kind of stuff which is why I brought The Cabaret here. I wanted students to be excited about the idea of not “just writing for the page” but thinking about it as a way to connect with people and audiences.

Also, because I am a professor here and I know we're supposed to be professionalizing students, it should be an actual hands-on experience where you [the students] can make this happen and learn about budgeting and leadership and design and thinking about audience and vision and how you can manifest that in a concrete way. So the book itself and everything—that whole process of what goes into it—has immense value for the people working on it and I would include the selection committee in that too.

But my vision for the people that just come to a Coffeehouse or might just pick up a copy or just submit something... I think in the past, there's been less access to publicity and so the journal played that role as being a place for expressing. There's still something cool about having this print copy that you can show your family, that you can hold. Like Tumblr brings together voices, but it brings together a gazillion voices and the book still has this very space-ness about it, you know, that like really means, “I get to see my voice among my peers,” but it's not a gazillion peers— it's the people in this particular volume. There's something about it just being a Valpo publication which has the intimacy of a campus-oriented nature that I always thought was a valuable piece of what the journal does.

When you were a student at Valpo, were you involved at all with The Lighter?

I was not on the Selection Committee as an undergraduate. I don't know why. Perhaps because I was a Theo major and I didn't consider myself a Writer. That said, I wanted nothing more than to be published in The Lighter, so I must have needed some external confirmation. Remembering that makes me a better teacher.

If you think back on your time with The Lighter, do you have any favorite memories?

Okay so the first thing that comes to mind is... Was this Cabaret? I think it was Cabaret. So Evan, [a past Lighter Editor] in addition to being a writer and artist is also pretty performative, and I had collaboratively written this piece. He was really into the Wright brothers and so it had to do with flight. And because he's an artist he's so damn crafty too so we'd decided to make wings that we were going to wear as part of the performance. I was super excited about that and then I broke my damn elbow!

And it was maybe a week before or even that weekend of the performance so there was this whole like, “Am I even going to be able to get my wings on??” But, I did! I had this cast on as well as these wings...it was pretty funny. But we had also collaborated on like a short film for Cabaret? We had made some of the scenes to be projected and some of the scenes to be acted out.

I think what comes to mind really was the collaboration with Evan. And it would be interesting to see what he would say...But I feel like we do not think alike necessarily, but we give and take with each other’s ideas so what ends up coming out of it, gets to be its own thing that neither one of us could have done on our own and that’s just like... when you get to have that as an artist with somebody else it’s really...I’ve always found that to be amazing.

Professor Schuette’s natural inclination to reach outside of herself has been one of the most valuable lessons she’s taught me— and there have been many. Whether this outstretched hand (wing?) was in an effort to build community, to lift me up, or to conquer an obstacle together, she always did so as an equal.

The Lighter is forever indebted to her humility, non-judgemental wisdom, and passion for creative collaboration. We have grown in ways that do not have immediate, visible results which are a testament to her wisdom and patience. Professor Schuette, we hope that you are very proud of yourself. You should be.



You ought to know that it's not all that hard to die. I managed it quite easily. All it took was a drunk driver across the center line and— WHAM! Curtains. You ought to know that, though it hurt, it was only for a second. Just one second of blinding pain, and then they make you choose. You ought to know what the choice is, but I'm not allowed to tell you. All I can say is that that choice is part of why I'm here. You ought to know that I want desperately to talk to you, to touch your face. You ought to know that I can't. And, if you make the same choices, neither will you.

You ought to know that I have some regrets. I'm not allowed to tell you what they are, either. But I wish I could. You ought to know that I don't feel the world anymore. I'm never cold, never hot. It was nice for the first few years. Now it's just gray. It feels gray. It looks gray. It's not gray, really. I can still see the colors, sort of. You ought to know that they're nothing like your eyes or lips or that shirt that makes you look like summer.

You ought to know that I can't read anymore, either, at least, not in the proper sense. I can't interact with solid matter, so I can't turn pages. Nor can I watch movies, unless I manage to sneak into a theater right as one is starting. You ought to know, on a related topic, that I can't walk through walls. The rules still apply to me, sort of. But I can't touch anything or move anything. I spend a lot of time in art museums these days. You ought to know that if I squint hard enough, I can almost see the colors.

You ought to know that my memory is going. I remember you—how could I not?—but I've forgotten everything else useful. Places, dates, the characters from that book series. What was it? About the boy who had a stick that did magic? And there was a girl who read a lot? Is that right? You ought to know that I have no idea.

You ought to know that I can't, of course, be killed. I'm not allowed to walk through walls, but if a car goes through me it can't do anything. You ought to know that I tried. There was one particularly gray day, when I thought

I was forgetting you, that I wandered down to the highway and took a walk. I couldn't have killed a gnat, but I couldn't be killed by the tanker truck that ran me over. You ought to know that I almost felt sad when I realized I was still dead this way.

You ought to know that I can't really feel anything. I think I love you, but I'm not honestly sure what that word means anymore. I remember that I used to feel happy, especially on sunny days in the fall, and snowy days around that holiday with the lights and greenery. I remember that I used to feel sad, especially when you did. You ought to know that now that doesn't really happen.

You ought to know that death is easy. And, God knows, I'm not in favor of suicide. Anything but that. No, death is so easy that I hate it. I think that's the only thing I really feel anymore— that hatred for death. You ought to know that it consumes me, that fiery hatred. You ought to know that life is hard, so beautifully hard. You ought to know that life is the bravest thing you can do. You ought to know that you're the bravest person I've ever met. You ought to know that I won't be coming back, ever. You ought to know that this is hell.



Faceless Portrait | Photography

Amoreena Roll



Who I Am On the Inside | Film Photography

Matthew Bremer

Between SHE and HE

Rebecca Stockham | Poetry

She is miles away,
He is minutes away,
and they have never met.

you cannot remember if you loved She,
you convince yourself you don't love He.

if they were in a room,
sitting across from one another,
could they—would they—figure out
what they have in common?

it's not as if they're the same.

He is taller than She is and
She has lighter hair than He does and
He likes this and
She hates that and
He is still learning and
She knows far too much.

they're different
but they have broken you
in the same way.

a smile from She feels like flying,
silence from He feels like falling.
does She even think of you, now?
sometimes it feels as if He doesn't.

She is in your past,
He is in your present
and you're sure one day,
He will join her in the moments
you think of, late at night,
when you're all alone.

and others will join them, someday, too.

they are your first She and He
but they aren't your last.

It's weird to think about how our memories shape us. I have a concept of memory that may be entirely untrue, but that's how I envision the lives of my memories. I know there are probably hundreds, even thousands, of memories that are lost forever, but there are a few key scenes from my childhood I recall in great detail. My earliest memory is my third birthday, of me standing in the middle of our living room in LaPorte, Indiana. Under my toes, beige carpet my mom put in a few years back extends beneath espresso-brown couches, situated in an L shape, separating the living room from the kitchen doorway. Sunshine bleeds in through sheer, white curtains, saturating the whole room. I'm standing as tall as I can and feeling the height that turning three has blessed me with. In my mind, I'm four or five feet tall, but maybe it's because I feel so grown-up.

I can't imagine why this particular moment is so vivid for me because it doesn't appear to have any deeper meaning. I didn't discover anything, talk to anyone, or do anything, but it's the only clear picture I have of what I was like at three years old. Now, I can't say for sure whether this memory was the exact chain of events. I can't tell you definitively whether or not anyone else was in the room or whether or not I was standing or if I was doing something, but I can tell you that it's the image I carry with me. It's how I imagine myself at that age even if it didn't happen that way.

Honestly, it seems to me that the 'actual' truth, the kind of truth someone gets from a video-camera or recording, is almost irrelevant. Life is full of video-camera moments that we'll never get to see again because no one ever gets to look through reality's camera lens. The true chain of events as they actually happened couldn't be more arbitrary, because no one can say for sure what happened that day. All I have is this snapshot of myself, and it has become the lens in which I understand who I was back then. Yes, the lens may not be perfectly clear of all incongruities, but it is not reality's crystal-clear, video-camera lens in which I see myself anyway. My lens, the

way I see myself and the world around me, is a little fuzzy at times and may even distort what the crystal-clear lens would show me. But it doesn't matter. My earliest memory is the image I have of my three year old self.

I used to think that my memory footage, from my own incongruous lens, is stored in a sort of mental shoebox I can pull out from under the bed anytime I'd like to view them. My memories seem like a collection of photographs from different times in my life, and most of the photographs have faded but there are a few preserved in ziplock bags, a seal my mind has kept on these stories. I can look at the pictures exactly how they are, getting blurry with age but still as true to the memory as a home video of your childhood Fourth of July barbeque. But that isn't the case at all.

One photograph I have sealed in the shoebox is of my childhood home on Institute Street in Valparaiso, Indiana on September 11, 2001. The house was a definite fixer-upper, considering the previous owners had converted the hundred-some-year-old house into a duplex. At the time, my dad and I lived on the bottom floor, bachelor-pad style. The carpet was likely the cheapest Menard's offered and ours had a very noticeable clothes-iron burn in the middle of the living room. Our green and white striped, corduroy couch was situated opposite the TV which stood on a refurbished table my dad found on the curb down the street. He sat on the couch while I played on the floor near the burn mark. The news was on T.V., which is no surprise knowing my dad, and he watched intently, taking slurping sips of his black coffee on the fold-out table beside the couch. Suddenly, he jumps to his feet, screaming "No! No! NO! Oh my God!!!" at the T.V. Now this, for me, was not an entirely unfamiliar occurrence, given my dad's dedication to the Bears and the Cubs teams. I had witnessed my fair share of emotional outbursts aimed at the T.V. But this time was different. This time I felt scared.

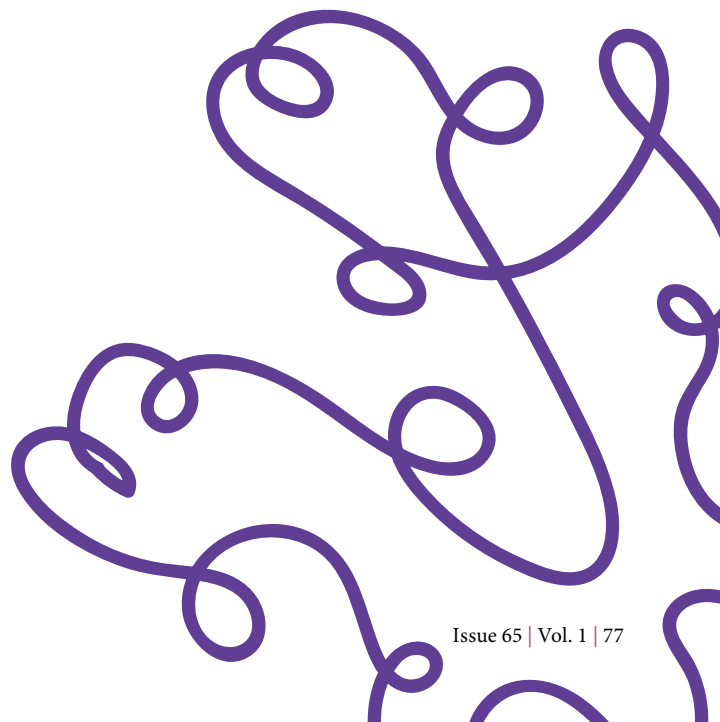
The look on my dad's face when he yelled at the T.V. is the image that burns in my mind when I try, from time to time, to make sense of that experience. I was scared; the thing that was happening was bad... really bad. But that's not all the memory makes me think about. In that image, I can see my dad's humanity, what it's like for him to see horrible things happening to people just a few hundred miles away. I think, too, of the times he traveled thousands of miles across the globe to cover the Iraq war for the *Post Tribune*. He had seen terrible things happen to people there too, and the anger and fear that bubbled in his eyes as he stood over the television connected me with those feelings. I feel like I know my dad more, and I can understand more fully how horrendous that day was.

On the fifteenth anniversary, my dad and I shared our memories of 9/11. I went first, telling him the whole story. He patiently waited for me to finish then informed me that he was, in fact, at work and I was at pre-school when it happened. I was shocked, at first, to be confronted with such an altered reality, and it felt invalidating to relinquish my own memory for his. But instead of pinning it as a he-said-she-said, I decided to take him at his word, being only four years old when it happened. But I can't seem to change or erase that memory.

I carry this false story around with me, and I've even told it to a number of people over the years, but I can't seem to force my brain to raise its hand and stamp INVALID over the image. It is obviously not an image cut from the crystal-clear, video-camera lens of reality, but a misshapen heap of details and emotions snapped right from my own foggy, distorted lens. Thus I'm forced to confront the truthfulness of the shoebox of memories I've stored. The ziplock seal I've kept on these moments hasn't preserved the memories in the way I previously imagined. That's not to mention how unrealistic it is to think that all these memories can be accessed whenever I choose as if they're sitting in an accessible shoebox compartment in my brain, ready to be unearthed whenever I choose. In reality,

I'm preserving the essence of the memory which, apparently, cannot be equated with the video-camera lens of reality. In order to fully understand the shaping effect these memories had on me, it's important for me to reflect on the moments where I'm drawn to distort reality's lens and create my own. The incongruities of these memories are not only surprising, but they lend a hand in understanding my lens, and how the 'essence' of the experience surfaces differently as a memory.

While my original memory is, for all intents and purposes, untrue, it's the version of events that has influenced the way I think about that day and the way I understand my dad. What truly happened to me that day in preschool has virtually no effect on me in the grand scheme of things. I'll never get to replay that moment in my brain and, even if I could, I doubt it would matter. The memory I have, true or false, makes up me, and the farther away the video-camera reality is from my own memory, the character I play in my own narrative surfaces.





Self Portrait | Creative Code

Nathaniel Bouman

For as long as I can remember, I've been asking where Papa was.

"He's working," Frankie would tell me, even as he looked over his shoulder to make sure Mama couldn't hear, "Eat your food."

"You ask too many questions," Veronica would say, and she was always mad at me. "Be quiet and do your chores before you wake Mama."

Veronica and Miguel were the only ones allowed to mention Mama out loud. Even Frankie couldn't without them getting mad, and he was only three years younger. That meant Ana and I especially couldn't, unless we were crying.

Miguel wouldn't say anything if I was brave enough to ask him. Ana would just shake her head because she was always sad about it. At least Veronica and Frankie would answer me, even if they didn't really.

I know it's because I'm the youngest. Ana was only two and a half years older, but that didn't seem to matter much. I was the baby, but at least I wasn't treated like one. It was Mama's turn to be one.

I wonder if they'd ever answer my question, if they'd ever stop going quiet and pressing their lips together and looking down. Miguel was the worst because Ana says he and Papa were like best friends from a movie, that they did everything together, so he'd hardly even let me get my question out before he'd stand up and walk away.

Back when everything was okay, when Papa wasn't at work and Mama wasn't in bed and when I was barely walking, everything must have been so much easier. I almost missed back then, if only from how soft Veronica's voice went at a memory of it, or how Frankie would tell Ana and I stuff we'd never know ourselves, like how Papa wore blue on holidays and brought home discount fruit on Fridays and always kissed our heads before he left. He must have done so before he went to work, and I like to think about that sometimes.

I asked Frankie again, but he didn't say anything. His silence was answer enough, occasionally.

Tia Irene always brought a smile and happy meals when she came, and not even Veronica would roll her eyes at the little toy at the bottom because it was all so good. Anything that wasn't beans and rice was so good, we all knew.

But this time Tia didn't bring happy meals, and this time she wasn't smiling. It made me less happy to see her, even if she still stopped to hug me and pressed her colored lips against my temple. When I wiped it off, little specks of dark red clung to my skin.

Tia was here to see Mama, which meant a lot because no one ever came by just to see Mama. Even the cousins, who weren't really our cousins but had been around since forever, just drunk their bottles on the front step and walked to the back of the house to use the bathroom although the one inside was closer. No one had come to see Mama since Papa went to work, which was forever ago.

But Tia was here, and she came prepared. She had an old wicker basket, weighed down heavy in her thin arms, and she carefully unpacked it on the coffee table.

A bowl, stone. Greens, dry and tied with string. A single egg. A cup, filled with water by Veronica without question. A candle.

She came over and lit small bundles of dried green in a bowl until hazy smoke hung from the ceiling like curtains. She went into Mama's room with her basket and locked the door and not even Veronica was allowed in. Mama was sick, but Tia was here to take care of it. She couldn't bring Papa back from work, but she could do this.

After a forever of quiet waiting, I went to turn on the TV but Miguel slapped my hand away and pushed me back to my seat. We continued to wait, and only Tia's low quiet muttering behind the door broke the silence.

When Mama's door finally clicked open, giant pillows of smoke burst from the open door and clung to the air. She had the bowl, but all the green and water and egg were gone. She said nothing, but she kissed me and Ana on the heads and she left without another word.

With the smoke thick in the air, Veronica inhaled a heavy breath like she was desperate for it, like it was her first ever. Maybe Mama would do the same.

For the day, Ana was fourteen and I wasn't allowed to leave the living room. Veronica's coworker was sick, so that meant Ana could go in her place even though she couldn't sew nearly as well and they'd only pay her half and she was really a bit older than me.

Frankie put a tortilla and some wet rice on a plate and told me it was my lunch, so don't eat it until Rugsrats comes on at noon. They all filed out the front door like little ducks and only Frankie turned to wave me goodbye. Ana was trying to be like Veronica, who hated me, and Miguel didn't seem to care either way. Veronica and Ana would ride with Ms. Gonzalez but Miguel and Frankie would have to walk. I wondered how long it would be until I was fourteen for a day.

I didn't like thinking about that, so I tried to make myself stop, but then I started crying. I'm glad the rest of them were gone at least because they always call me a cry-baby when I tear up at everything. Mama used to say I just had too many feelings, but she said it with a smile and brush of her lips on my forehead so it was okay, but she hadn't said that in a while.

I was thinking about Mama so much, I almost thought I made it up when I heard her voice calling out from her room. But I sat up straighter on the couch and, sure enough, she called out again. She was probably hungry or thirsty. She usually got so, but Ana always took care of it.

Usually, Ana made dinner for everyone during the day, but she was fourteen today and I wasn't allowed to leave the couch even though I ate the whole plate of food right after Frankie had slammed the door after himself. I wish I knew how to fry up eggs like Miguel, with cut-up meat and tomatoes and thick buttered bread. That would be my dream meal, and I'd never eat rice-and-beans ever again. When I'm rich, I'll buy beans just to throw them away, like spoiled kids in cartoons, and I'd only ever have rice if it was done up nice

in sweet cream and cinnamon. Mama called out once more, just as I started thinking about other things.

Mama was the baby we had to bring water and mushy corn to so she didn't cry. Ana always did, because Veronica hated doing it and it was a girl's job, but Ana was gone and now there was no one was here to give Mama her water.

Frankie told me not to leave the living room, but Veronica said to always listen to Mama and Mama was calling for someone. Despite that, I might have just ignored her but then I remembered Tia's visit with the smoke and the greens and the basket she brought special from home. I wanted to see it, even if Ana said it was bad.

I cracked her door open further from its tiny open inch, already feeling like dangerous, and walked quietly until I was at the side of her bed. She was awake, but she didn't look surprised to see me. I hadn't been in her room in weeks, and never alone, but she wasn't surprised.

"*Mija,*" Mama's eyes were dark and clouded as she stared straight at me. "*Donde estas todo el mundo?*"

I blinked at her.

I remember her curls looking softer, I think, and her laughing. If she started laughing now, I'd probably be scared. I was a little scared anyway.

"*Mija,*" she said again, just when I remembered why I came. She repeated her question as I dropped to my knees to peek under the bed. A tall glass of water, just where Tia left it, with a single egg floating at the bottom. I wasn't allowed to touch it — no one was — until Tia came back at the end of the week. But I didn't want to touch it, I just wanted to get my look in at it. I sat back up, and Mama hadn't rolled to the other side like she usually did after we walked in.

I stared at her, and she did so too. Somehow, half-buried under the musty blankets and with smashed curls and paler skin, she still looked like my Mama. I thought of her question, of Papa, and how many times I had asked the same question myself.

"They're working," I said, and then I left.

On Saturdays, at night, when Miguel sat on the front steps and Veronica went to the park and even Frankie went out into the street in thin shorts and no shirt to throw around balls and sticks, Ana and I would go in the backyard. We'd play games, even if Ana was still mad Veronica wouldn't let her go to the park as well, and the neighborhood kids too young for the steps and the park and even the street would come over.

Jules and his cousins and brothers would make up games with a thousand rules, and no one could ever keep track of what they were and who was in charge. It always ended in someone yelling, then crying, until someone's Mama came and broke it up and we all went to our separate patches of concrete and pouted. This happened nearly every time, yet each weekend had hoards of brown faces and excited grins that would pack behind our house.

It was the like the whole street was alive on Saturday nights. Ms. Gonzalez would fry up meat, Jules's mama would bake containers of tortillas, someone would bring tamales, another would make up a big tray of elote, and we'd set out the beans. Others would bring fruit or wet cake or creme cookies and it was my favorite day of the week. I didn't mind rice-and-beans as much on Saturdays, I think.

Veronica wore Mama's old clothes, and then they went to Ana, and Frankie shared Miguel's clothes because he shot up like a beanpole and didn't fit anything else.

No one was allowed to touch Papa's old stuff, not even his toolbox that took up half the living room from where he had unloaded it, so Miguel was the only one who got new clothes. But then, they were usually bought by the box from whatever vieja was selling them out on the block for a few dollars.

My shirts were so washed out that you couldn't tell what cartoon characters used to be on them, and I don't even know whose they used to be. Once every few months Frankie would go up to the attic and bring down a pair of dusty boxes, and that meant it was time for me

to get new old clothes. At least I didn't have to share with anyone after, not like Jules down the street. He had to share with every single one of his cousins before the clothes got to him, and they were hardly anything more than holes and thread at that point, and then they still went to his younger brothers. This was probably because we didn't have much family other than us, but I was still happy about it anyway, that I never got yelled at for ripping my jeans like Ana did. I didn't even mind having no more family, despite what Tia Irene would say.

Papa's whole family was home, and Mama only had her sister and us. Tia said there were a whole lot more of us, and that we all had the same dark curls and small eyes and feet, but they were all home or dead or both.

Tia was also the other only who would talk about Papa, although just in passing words and stories. Once in a while, she even talked about what we weren't allowed to, but only if Ana and I were the only ones in the room. She said we deserved to know, but Veronica and Miguel and sometimes Frankie would get mad and they'd fight and she'd leave. So now she only told us, just me mostly now since Ana never left Veronica's side, when we were alone.

It's not like it's contagious, Tia Irene would remark, and I think I liked her best because she talked to me like I was no different than Veronica, no younger or stupider. *It was just horrible luck.*

Miguel doesn't believe in luck, or fate, anything of that supernatural devil shit. Or at least that's what he says on the front step as he rubs at the cross around his neck. That was the only thing of Papa's anyone has touched since he went to work, and no one's said anything to him about it. Sometimes I imagine taking it off while he sleeps and wearing it myself. Or maybe I'd hide it somewhere since he'd take it away right after he saw me, and if I hide it I could go visit it and talk to it and rub my hands all over the metal as much as I wanted. Sometimes I think about doing that, but I think if I did that would be one of the only things in the world that would make Miguel cry. I usually stop thinking about it after that.

wet rice and beans, tortilla folded over (Continued)

Haley Brewer | Prose

Tia always thought Papa would come back, and that was the only time we'd ever heard Miguel yell. He was so much angrier in Spanish that I almost didn't know his voice. I was in the kitchen getting some juice, and I heard his deep anger that never translated as burning hot in English, and I almost thought a stranger was in the house.

Now, he usually left when she came over, mostly because she insisted on his name. Miguel was named after Papa, but we can't say his name anymore. He's the only one with a second name, and it's not real. But Tia always insisted, because it was his God-given name and no horrible event is going to change that.

Daniel? Do you understand me? Nothing is going to change that.

Nobody will tell me what 'that' is, not even Frankie who usually answers my questions but not really. If I asked around Tia, Veronica would just shush me and tell me to go play, like I really was a baby.

Tia was the only one who talked to me like I was a whole person and everything, and that's why she was my favorite. So when Veronica told me and Ana that Tia went home, that she won't be coming by anymore, that it was just us now, I almost cried for a week.

"Where's home?" I asked first because Tia wasn't simply hiding in our bedsheets and no one was saying anything. I didn't understand and Tia wasn't here to tell me what it meant because she was home.

"It's dry hot," Veronica, surprisingly, spoke up, "With color and sand everywhere you look."

Veronica and Miguel remembered home, and maybe Frankie. Ana was just a baby then, but I had never seen it, not even when I was in Mama's stomach. Ana says that's part of why Veronica hates me, but I don't get that and I was never brave enough to ask Tia and now I couldn't.

I wonder who was going to tell Mama. I wonder who was going to get the egg.

"At least she's home," someone said out on the steps, just like Tia used to, later that evening. I wasn't

supposed to listen in, but I'd been crying all day and Veronica hadn't yelled me off the window yet. I listened in, and hoped they wouldn't notice. "Everything else was just horrible luck."

This time, Miguel didn't fight them on luck. Maybe he was happy Tia was gone. If he was, I think that would make me hate him.

She went home, where the sky was everywhere and the grass is clay-colored. Home, my family's home, but not mine. My home was in the city, with music playing out from the street and Saturday night tamales and happy meals. If my family ever went home, I could never go with them. That's why Veronica hates me, Ana says.

Papa went to work. Tia went home. And now Mama was all alone.

I turned to Frankie, who was on the couch, and stared at him. He was watching the TV, playing the news with no words, but he wasn't really seeing. Tia went home, where I could never follow, just like Papa.

"Where's Papa?" I asked, and I told myself this was the last time.

"He's working," Frankie said, and then he started crying.

Taalbarrière

Marcus Boas | Poetry

I stuff my mouth
full with foreign foods.

I taste them daily.
Sometimes delicious,
sometimes disgusting.

Some days the spices burn
until my lips go numb, as I long
for the bland cooking of my mother—
My tongue slips on an icy sentence.

My flailing hands fly in all directions,
attempting to aid my throat.
Tying balloons on strings to each sound,
as if that would keep the gravity given
by my mouth from driving my words into the ground.

My throat is crammed and clogged
with bites that tie my tongue.
In need of speech, I suddenly forgot.
In search of words, I cannot find.

I start spewing sounds.
Spilling over my frozen lips,
they gush as I gurgle.

I can vaguely distinguish
the wild words I had for dinner.



Momentum | Photography

Nicole Jones

ribs

Leanna Sanchez | Blackout-Poetry

~~noticed: the color of antifreeze, spring grass. Colored contact lenses, probably. The bouncer shrugged, abruptly bored.~~

~~"Whatever. Go on in."~~

The boy slid past him, quick as an eel. Clary liked the lilt to his shoulder, the way he tossed his hair as he went. There was a word for him that her mother would have called insouciant.

~~"You thought he was cute," said Simon, sounding resigned.~~
~~"Didn't you?"~~

Clary dug her elbow into his ribs but didn't answer.

Inside, the club was full of dry-ice smoke, colored lights played over the dance floor, turning it into a multicolored fairland of blues and acid greens, hot pinks and golds.

The boy in the red jacket stroked the long razor sharp blade in his hands, an idle smile playing over his lips. It had been so easy a little bit of a glamour on the blade, to make it look harmless. Another glamour on his eyes, and the moment the bouncer had looked straight at him, he was in. Of course, he could not have done that if it were not for that terrible but it



Self Reflect | Acrylic on Wood

Claire Kovarik

The Lumberyard

Jake Pitts | Poetry

1. Daniel —

The tall, lanky fellow in charge
struts the long warehouse's length,
a joyous tune flowing from his pursed lips.
Daniel's warm, pleasant smile seems to
drive off the frigid Michigan weather,
as he carries a canary yellow sheet of paper.
His smile never once fades as he criticizes
the new worker, Bob, who failed to fill
the order to his high standards.

2. Bob —

The bald, bearded man stands still and silent
as the "Boss-Man" berates him. Bob's pulse spikes,
the stress threatening to break him; he feels the
same urge he's felt every day for nearly six years:
the soothing burn of Tennessee mash running down his throat.
Jesus is the only intoxicant he has now,
the weight of the compact book in his breast pocket
reminds him.

3. Jim —

The hairy, sasquatch-like, truck driver
approaches the wide doors to the warehouse,
a large bottle of Sprite in his massive paw.
Jim looks on as his superior chastises the greenhorn,
he knows the bible-thumper won't last long, few do.
He watches the scene whilst cracking the seal
to his bottle of citrus pop,
using it to wash down his heart medication.
Jim mutters, if only to himself, "Life goes on."

The boy of our story had lost his shoes. They were too big and floppy at the top, with frayed strings that no longer stayed tied. With every step he took they slipped and slid over his heels, making him slip and slide as well. As his luck would have it, he figured they must have slipped off his feet one night as he slept— just whisked away by the wind, nature covering its tracks with large plumes of snow that sprung up in the dark of the night.

So now our boy walked with no shoes, and had been for a couple days. But he didn't complain. He saw that it kind of fit perfectly because, he supposed, he was as lost as his shoes. And as our lost boy roamed he let this little thought amuse his little mind for quite some time.

But this could not entertain our lost boy's mind for long. He began to notice how cold and wet he was from the snow landing on his head to the ice crunching beneath his soaked socks. Still, he did not complain to himself because he had a lot to be happy for and he knew Papa would find him soon.

A part of our lost boy's mind couldn't help but wish for some warmth though. But not the kind he felt the other day at school when one of the girls in his class teased him at recess. Were your mother around she would have never let you walk out the door like that. Our lost boy felt his face warm that day despite the crisp wind blowing around them all. That was not the warmth he wanted to feel. No, he wanted the warmth of a cup of boiling water or of getting wrapped up in blankets with Papa, falling asleep by the fire.

It was scary, yes, being on his own with so many tall trees and long dark shadows, but he ignored the fear and mostly just felt so sorry. The first thing he would do when he saw Papa was tell him how sorry he was. All he had wanted to do was look at the lights and toys in the window. He still had to write his letter to Santa and absolutely had to find the right thing to ask for. He had asked Papa if he could ask Santa for Momma to come back, but that only made Papa sad and our little boy sad too when Papa had to explain, again, that it was impossible for her to come back.

He hadn't meant to walk so far away. But Papa would forgive him, because they were a team, him and Papa. Papa said so. Before, it was him and Momma and Papa, but Momma got sick last year although our little lost boy would have never been able to guess that based on the smile she gave him every day. Now though, it was just him and Papa, but they had each other, and they were happy.

Our lost boy didn't like thinking about Momma because it made him want to cry every time, but this is also why he knew Papa would find him. They were the only ones left and they would always have each other. No cold and no shadows were going to let him forget that. And so our lost boy continued his journey, trying to find home. He was used to the cold, he thought to himself. He could handle this. Papa will find him soon. And then he and Papa would huddle together by the fire like they did every night and he would be warm again.

Our little lost boy only believed in the good: that Papa would come to find him and Santa would bring him a present and that Momma was happier now. But what he didn't know was that he was walking in the wrong direction. For all that he knows about thinking good thoughts- how to be kind when faced with meanness, how to smile when he felt like crying, and how to help when he was the one that needed help- our lost boy knew nothing about direction.

He didn't know that he should have stayed where he was. He didn't know that Papa was only a store away, asking for food about to be thrown out so they could eat that night. He didn't know that with every step he took he traveled farther into the woods at the edge of town.

He thought he was headed home, but inch by inch, foot by foot, he moved away from home until he finally looked up and knew he was lost. He hadn't even cried yet, our brave lost boy, because as he and Papa always said, "Things could be much worse."

And our brave, lost, shoeless boy wrapped his too-big coat tighter around himself and marched on, believing with all his heart that Papa would find him.

But the night grew colder and darker on this day than the other days, and he could not stop the shivering that overtook his small frame. He finally could no longer stop the fear from coming in and while the desire to cry hit him, he found his eyes were unable to do so.

The trees grew before his eyes, every noise attacked his senses, and his arms and legs wobbled every time he shuffled along or took a breath. He tried to cry out, but only a small whimper was able to pass his shivering lips.

Nearly all thoughts fled his mind, save for how he was cold on the inside and increasingly more numb on the outside. The only mercy of the pitch black night was that he could not see his fingers and toes, now bitten and blue. The cold surrounded and climbed inside him. The wet fell around and beneath him, covering every possible surface it could find. Our lost boy couldn't remember what it felt like to be warm anymore. He had no more thought of Papa coming to find him or of how sorry he was for walking toward the window.

Instead, his mind could only think of one thing as his eyes glazed over. Maybe it was because of all the pine trees around him. Or maybe it was simply because he was a child and it is in a child's nature to dream of the magic of Santa and sleighs. But our little lost boy knew what he wanted for Christmas now. He began to think over and over again, *Please Santa, all I want is to be warm.*

Nothing else existed for our boy. Not the toys he looked at in the street, not the smells that made his stomach roar, not even the thought of Papa. Nothing but the cold and the hope that Santa would bring him warmth.

In his mind he cried while his body began to slow down, his eyes beginning to droop. What was the point of trying to walk when a step couldn't even carry him an inch anymore?

He felt so tired, so exhausted from battling the wind and the dark falling snow, his mind so dizzy and foggy, that all he wanted to do was close his eyes and take a nap.

Just as he was about to lower himself to the ground though, he saw a glimmer beneath one of the trees. Something about it drew him closer and with a burst of his old familiar joy he realized whatever it was was underneath a Christmas tree! Well, to him it looked like a Christmas tree although it had no lights or decorations. But he and Papa never had anything on their little tree either, which made this tree all the more endearing and welcoming to the boy.

He fought the cold and the wind against his face and the swirling snow curling around his face and ankles that tried to hold him back. Finally, he made it to the tree and ducked under its large branches heavy with mounds of snow. Falling to his knees to fit, he barely was able to register the relief from the wind as he beheld the brilliant pink rose in full bloom before him.

It was frosted over, yes, but all the petals were perfectly shaped and luminous from whatever secret health lied within. It stood like a solitary soldier out of the patched snow near the base of the tree. Our lost boy didn't know any better to look for thorns, but he didn't feel them pierce his fingers anyway as he plucked the rose from the ground. He has stopped feeling things there long ago.

Clutching the blossom of the flower in the cup of his hands, he once again found himself being lulled to sleep. But this time, he felt no fear or cold, only a warm blanket being draped over him and a tinge of sadness that Papa couldn't see the beautiful rose as well.

As he curled up on his side with the rose pressed near his chest, our lost boy smiled, for Santa had granted his Christmas wish. And as he closed his eyes, now able to peacefully rest away from the cold, he heard a mother's voice tell him with soft tears, "Welcome home," and he knew in his little heart he would never be cold again.

The Forgotten Muse

Jake Pitts | Poetry

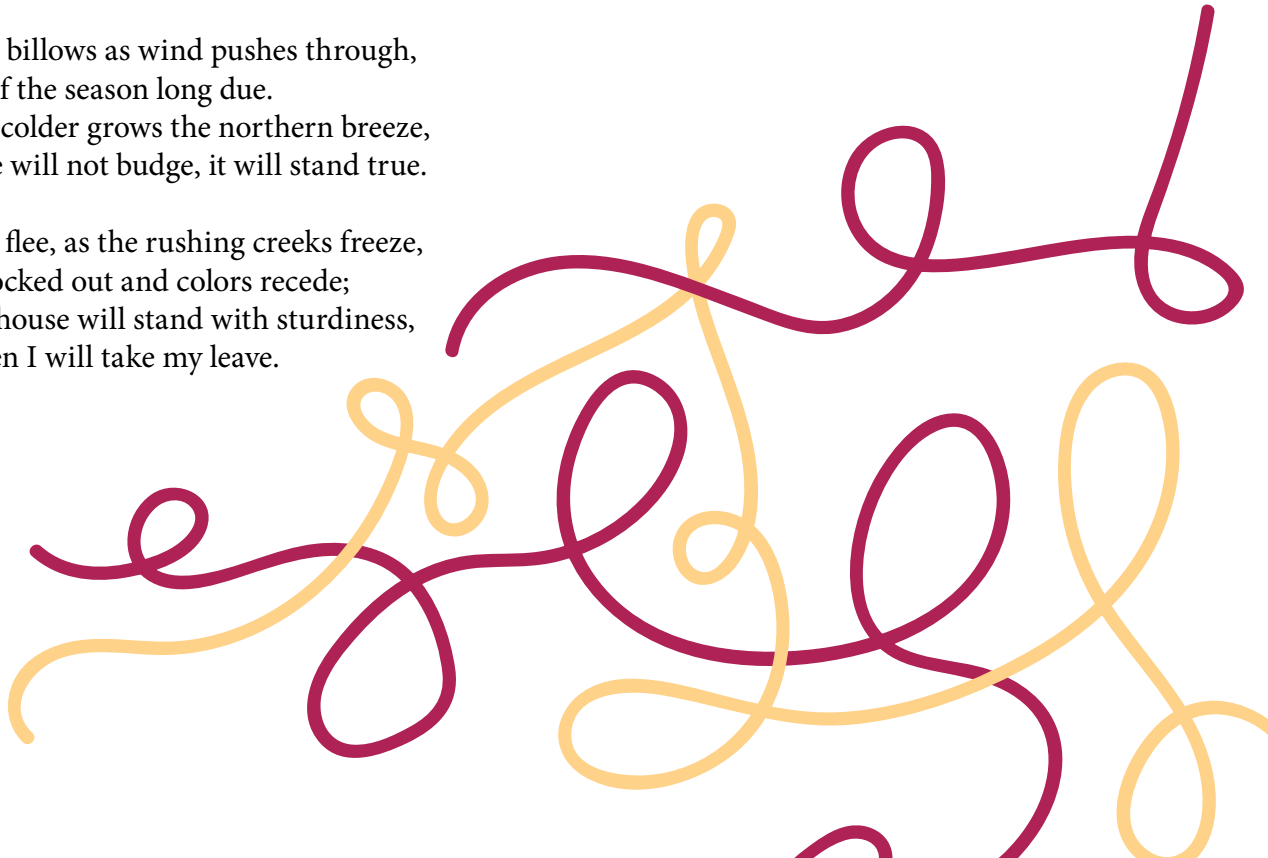
Draws inspiration from “Stopping by Woods on a Snowy Evening” by Robert Frost and references “Over the Hill to the Poorhouse” by Will McKendree Carleton

The dead woods recede with uneasiness,
An open void unfolds to lifelessness.
There lies the poorhouse, a piece of the past,
Standing alone against time’s cold caress.

Once the muse of that old poet since passed
Symbol of days since forgotten, downcast.
Days only remembered by those pious few.
They too resist time’s harsh hand to the last.

Tall tan grass billows as wind pushes through,
A reminder of the season long due.
Stronger and colder grows the northern breeze,
But the house will not budge, it will stand true.

Singing birds flee, as the rushing creeks freeze,
The sun is blocked out and colors recede;
Still the poorhouse will stand with sturdiness,
And soon even I will take my leave.





No Parking | Photography

Kristen Haling

contributer bios

Alyssa Maras | I am a senior Professional Writing major with a Journalism minor. I've been writing for a long time but rarely share anything. I love reading, listening to music, rainy weather, and autumn. I'm a part of Sigma Tau Delta which is an English Honors Society and Athena Society which is a feminist organization.

Amoreena Roll | as a sophomore at Valparaiso I am double majoring in Art and Psychology.

Andréa Kütemeier | is a junior Digital Media major. The Fall of 2018 was my favorite year yet at Valpo, even though I wasn't there. Exploring Europe for a semester was the best decision I have ever made. I have grown so much as an artist and a person through this opportunity and I encourage anyone to take the leap. Be creative. Be adventurous. Be you.

Anna Bedalov | is a sophomore creative writing major full of love and longing.

Anna Styruczala | is a junior Digital Media major. As always, I'd like to thank my friends and family for their support. You can find more of my work at sophiechoir.tumblr.com. Alec says hi!

Caroline Hyde | is a senior Creative Writing major from Rockford, MI. Writing has always been her greatest passion and best form of expression, and she is honored to be published in *The Lighter*. She considers herself to be a flexible writer, as she has written a plethora of short stories as well as creative nonfiction, plays and prose poetry.

Claire Kovarik | is a freshman Chemistry and Physics double major. Her art focuses around the depiction of stories; whether it's a story that already exists or one that the viewer creates.

Claire Utzinger | is a junior art major from Hampden Sydney Virginia. Being an art major at

Valparaiso university has pushed her out of her comfort zone to create pieces with mediums that she has never explored before. Each piece Claire creates is exploratory and helps her gain a greater understanding of herself as an artist and what she's looking to continue creating in the future.

Daniel Funderburg | Senior Double Major in Theatre and Creative Writing

Emily Gustin | is sophomore Digital Media Arts major. She draws inspiration from the world around her and loves traveling to explore it. She is so thankful for this opportunity to share her work with others and hopes that you enjoy this edition of *The Lighter*!

Emily Mrzлак | is an English and Secondary Education Major completing her senior year at Valpo. She loves spending time outdoors and daydreaming about being at her family's cabin in Northern Wisconsin. She hopes you enjoy her work and is honored to be featured!

Emma Hecht | I'm a junior Computer Science & Creative Writing major. I eat an alarming number of Reese's every day and I'm pretty good at sports. Unless you ask anyone that knows me—then I'm "athletically challenged."

Faith Smith | I am a freshman Creative Writing major. I wasn't comfortable letting others read my work because I wasn't the best at accepting criticism, however I think now I'm ready to put myself out there, especially since I aspire to be a self-published author. People will have to read my work all the time, and I think *The Lighter* is the first step to setting up my career.

Gina Dalrymple | I'm a senior English major. When I'm not busy writing essays, I can be found

making art, playing the piano, or stargazing. I tend to incorporate my interests into my artwork, which is why my bedroom wall is covered with paintings of galaxies.

Grace Biermann | is a sophomore English major who wants you to know that she appreciates you reading her work and then actually caring enough to check out the bio, too. She is still ridiculously passionate about Harry Potter, the Lord of the Rings, and Captain America. Thanks, as always, to Michael Bukata, her trusty beta reader and general sensible sounding board. Soli Deo Gloria.

Hailey Rose | Hemmings-Kadolph , Freshman, Biochemistry

Haley Brewer | is an English major junior who sometimes writes. She likes writing comedic horror, romance, and the occasional poem. She prefers peppermint mochas, paperback books, and the color pink. She hopes her mom likes her stuff even if it's too sad, and can't wait to go home and watch Parks and Rec.

Isis Zaki | is a Political Science and Humanities double major from the burbs of Chicago. She is not unlike many of her peers in that she enjoys staying up past her bedtime, drinking excessive amounts of coffee, and fervently believing that an empowered woman can do anything.

Jake Pitts | is a Junior Creative Writing major from Hillsdale, Michigan. Jake's primary focus as a writer is screenwriting but he possesses a great passion for poetry.

Jesse Hershberger | is a junior English, Political Science, and Spanish major who writes to make sense of faith, identity, and chronic pain. She is endlessly grateful to her friends who push her to step out of her comfort zone and share her work.

Jessica Clanton | If I look back on my work and say "dang, I didn't even know I knew those words," then I like to think it was a decent poem. If you didn't like it, just remember that I didn't ask.
- Jessica Clanton, 16th grade, English Ed.

Kayle Lathrop | is a 4th year Public Health major out of Monmouth, IL. In addition to writing, she enjoys dancing with the Valparaiso University Dance Ensemble and adventuring.

Kristen Haling | Sophomore, Digital Media Art Major

Kristian Josifoski | is a super senior studying Music Composition and English.

Kylynn Smith | is a freshman Studio Art major and the vampire commonly seen roaming campus. Running on no sleep, black coffee, and living her life by the moon, she enjoys spending her free time making art, listening to and writing songs, and writing poetry and novels. She also enjoys getting and drawing new tattoos. She would like to dedicate these pieces to the other half of her soul, Josh.

Leah Gatchel | I am a freshman at VU studying communications. Trying to find the balance of realization and optimization.

Leanna Sanchez | is a freshman meteorology and psychology major. She aspires to become either a storm chaser or solar eclipse chaser. Some of her favorite things include musical devices in poetry, neon lights, and goth fashion.

Lexi Gault | sophomore Astronomy and Math double major. Creating art in spite of what I'm told.

Madison Wilson | Sophomore, Art Therapy

Marcus Boas | is a senior Digital Media major with Creative Writing and Science minors. He

is a Dutch international student and Resident Assistant, who also manages to be the Vice President for both VISA and Karate Club. In the non-existent free time he has left, he enjoys making art, watching movies, and complaining about the US to his friends, which is his secret way of saying he loves it here.

Mark Young | For more work by Mark, please visit markyoungphoto.com

Matthew T. Bremer | is a Physics and Astronomy Major. As an avid musician, photography has become another extension of the artistic expression he finds in singing.

Megan McDaniel | is a graduate student studying to become a Physician Assistant. She has a passion for helping others that is best enabled through both medicine and creative writing. She writes in hopes to relate, inspire, and heal.

Milka Vidova | I'm a senior Marketing major with minors in Business Analytics, Psychology, and Studio Art. I took a photography class last semester and fell in love with film photography! Besides that I'm just your average McNugget, dog, and art lover :)

Monique Le Donne | I am a sophomore Biology major and chemistry minor student on the premedical track.

Nathaniel Bouman | is a senior Computer Science, Physics, and Humanities triple major with a Math minor. He is PR chair of SALT, sings in Hooked on Tonics, and former president of Mortar Board Senior Honor Society. He enjoys creating art through code. One day, he hopes to attend graduate school in media arts and science. He thanks his parents for their encouragement, and The Lighter staff for the opportunity.

Nicole Jones | is a Junior Digital Media Art major with a passion for fashion and an undying love for chicken nuggets, and mac and cheese. She is The Lighter's resident pixie fairy queen of graphic design and wants you to know she loves creating this book every semester. If you ever need to find her, look in a dark field as she's probably stargazing.

Rachel Jones | is a Social Work major and Women's Studies minor. She wants to use her outgoing nature to advocate inclusiveness and human rights.

Rachel Kennedy | I am a Creative Writing major with an Art minor. I've always been an avid reader, which led me to becoming a writer. I write all manner of genres, and one of my poems was published in a previous edition of The Lighter. I've very recently gotten into photography and I am always exploring new types of expression.

Rebecca Stockham | is a freshman English major and has always loved both reading and writing. She is also involved in APO and is a part of The Lighter selection committee.

Sarah Law | is a senior English major that thrives off her love of everything to do with Christmas. The only love that rivals this is her love of books, reading, and stories of any kind. She is beyond honored and thrilled to be a part of this publication in any capacity and every capacity she has been blessed with.

Taylor Bundren | a senior Communication and History major. My works are fueled by coffee and inspired by words or phrases that stick out in my mind.

Willow Walsh | is an English major with minors in Creative Writing and German. Born in the Vale of Paradise, she enjoys capturing her experiences of growing up in the Hoosier state, surrounded by cornfields on the cusp of the Chicagoland area.

Zhaotong Liu is a graduate student majoring in Digital Media. She loves painting and photography. She feels that photography is another form of painting that can record and present beauty. It also represents what she sees and feels.

acknowledgments

Allison Schuette we will flood our office with tears missing you. But we're so relieved that you are not leaving campus!!!!!!

IMC for the Nate Marshall bio that we essentially poached from Valpo News.

Kaitlyn Steinheiser for your energy and hard work as our liaison and CoM president—thank you for being a catalyst for change and always advocating for us!

Kate Mathews for being the BEST editor in the entire world. Seriously. (It just felt right to not be 110% grammatically correct for your shoutout. We're sorry. But were also not.)

Mark Wagenaar for being willing to dive head-first into the craziness that is The Lighter.

Nate Marshall for sharing his authentic wisdom with us and for his contributions to the creative world.

Student Senate, Committee on Media, and IT for helping us update our office computer whom we have named Bertha by the way!

TEAM LIT YO for actually wanting to put even MORE time and effort into The Lighter: Anna Bedalov, Haley Brewer, Hayley Kim, Kate Mathews, Laura Muther, Leanna Sanchez, Lexi Gault, and Megan Martinez

To Our Doodles Eugene, Yosif, Georgiana, N8, Gloria, Tom Boy, Phillipa, Phyllis, Sebastien: our precious children running amuck throughout the pages (we trust you to know who is who).

The background of the entire page is a complex, abstract pattern. It consists of numerous irregular, organic shapes in various colors including shades of purple, blue, red, orange, yellow, and green. These shapes are layered and overlapping, creating a sense of depth and movement. The overall effect is reminiscent of a microscopic view of a textured surface or a digital art piece.

issue 65
volume 1