

The Lighter

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THE LIGHTER

FALL 2019

Holland

THE LIGHTER

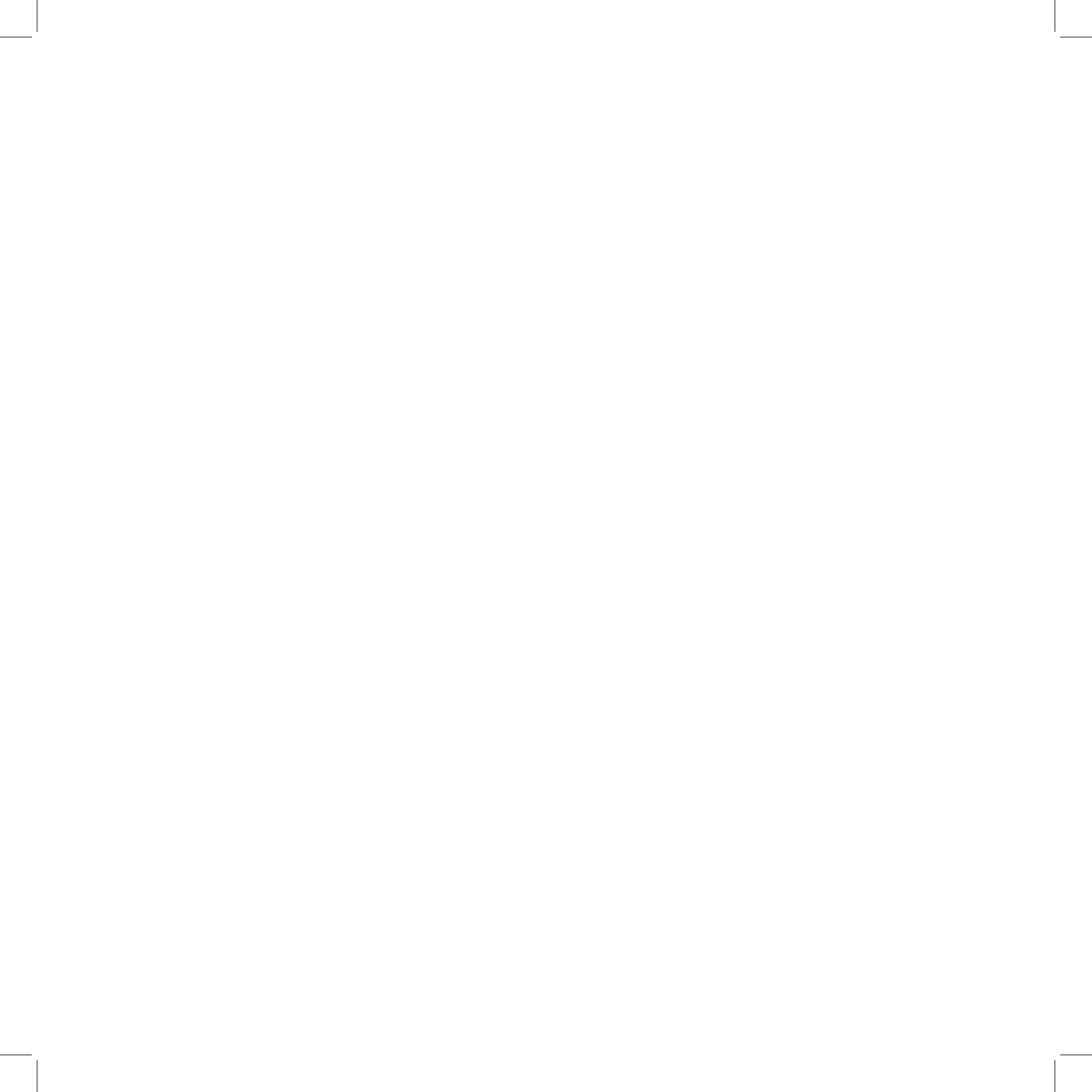
FALL 2019

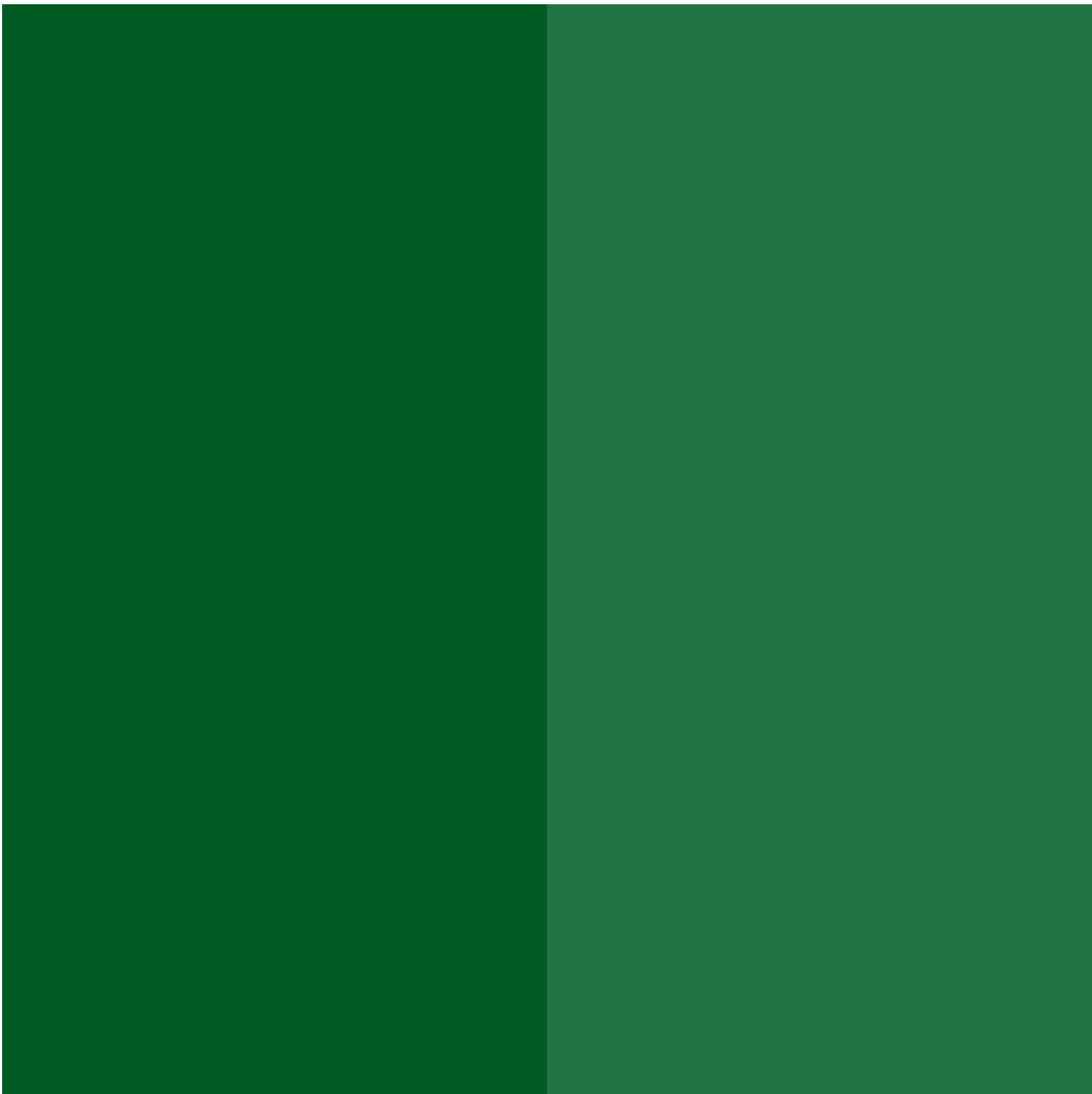
Florence

THE LIGHTER

FALL 2019

Athens





Volume 66
Issue 1

Editor's Note.

To my fellow literary lovers and art appreciators,

Welcome to the 2019 Fall issue of *The Lighter*, who I've been affectionately referring to as "The Sisters." Meet Florence, Athens, and Holland, different on the outside but each holding the same array of carefully curated pieces. I've been in love with *The Lighter* ever since I arrived at Valpo, and being the Editor in Chief this semester has been one of the best experiences of my college career. Thank you to everyone who helped get me here—my past editors, numerous professors, and the friends I've made through this organization.

I wouldn't have been able to do any of this without my incredible support system of friends and family, my mother, brother, and grandparents, and the team I was privileged enough to surround myself with, just to name a few. The birth of this issue was determined to be a difficult one, but Isabel, Rebecca, and Lexi were always willing to lend a hand to bring "The Sisters" to life. Despite the challenges this semester brought us, we're as strong a team as ever.

Even though stressful at times, this issue was so much fun to make. *The Lighter* is like a collage of mixed-matched genres and art pieces—with "Future Earth" being a prime example of that exactly. Traditional art on canvas and digital art coexist page by page, and formal poetry such as "a sestina for the rain, for my bones, for my soul" is printed in the same book as the form-playful piece "Writer's Clock." The off-beat is explored in "spirits." and "LEMONS ARE FOR WOMEN" and humor gets to shine in pieces like "Campus Tree" and "Longtime Friend." So many genres find their home in this issue, and hopefully, so will you.

The design theme, we decided early-on, is "possibility." To me, paint chips signify possibility: a hope. With any luck, the art shared in this semester's *Lighter* will convey that. Thank you all so much.

Yours in *Lighter* love,



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

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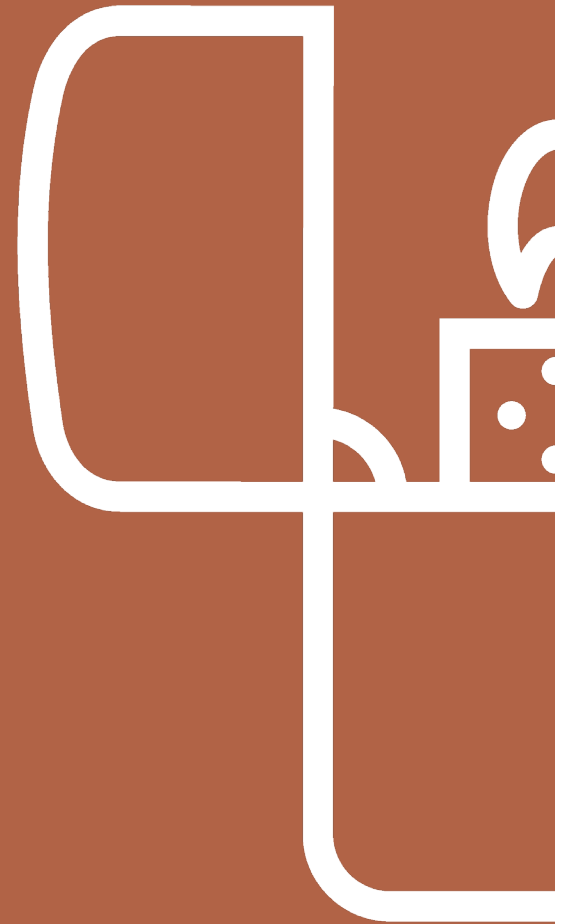
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Meet The Sisters.
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Sedimentary | Lexi Gault
acrylic pour

Bath Time | Emma Hecht

poetry

I sit here by a small circular window, a fisheye lens to
the lowest deck and the black, rupturing ocean, folding
a swell of rough, bleached bath towels into animals.

Somewhere above me, couples celebrate their second decade
of retirement with four olives in an overpriced martini
before careening towards their clean cabins around

nine-thirty. At home, she will be shampooing our son's hair
with some sort of 3-in-1: a cartoon shark in the shape
of a watermelon grins widely on the teal plastic bottle.

She'll sponge off today's blue Crayola body art
and the dry land that's caked onto the soles
of his feet. He'll introduce his yellow duck

to a new member of his Fisher Price collection
(maybe tonight the purple octopus?) and the three
will say a splashing goodbye as he drips out of the tub.

She'll grab the nearest towel as he squirms, slippery,
and hug him with Downy-softened cotton, rubbing
his hair with the hood that bears the tan face of a

monkey. I sit here, my dry, lint-stained hands, rolling sterile
elephants for strangers to use after they scrub at wrinkled
sunburns speckled with well gin and lines of Caribbean seaweed.

A Brisk Walk | Demi Marshall

poetry

I'm greeted by crisp cold
air as I leave with a sense of urgency.
I rush down cobblestone streets
lined with famed landmarks.

Bicycles blur past, chiming
bells, forming songs like morning
birds. Double-decker buses
charge down narrow roads.

I stop for hot tea.
Money is different here, smoother.
Sweet smells of the shop linger
in my nose, the bitter taste keeps

me going. I swiftly weave between
strangers on the crowded sidewalk.
Accents, footsteps, foreign
faces overwhelm me.

Suddenly, I collide with a woman.
Her vision snaps from towering
buildings to me. She questions,
"What's your hurry?"



little village | Leah Gatchel
photography

Chicago | Anna Styruczula

poetry

The city where my parents met
was never a city of dreams—
they worked their way in, hands touched
by the blood of oxen
and stinging soap, in their eyes
a future white with hope
like the worn marble steps
of Union Station. They'd moved an ocean
to move now on rails, railed against
their lots, their parents' impoverished
land, to stand now
alone
in apartments overfull of strange friends.
I like to think they met at a party—
deep in the sleepless night,
in the living guts of the city,
vodka in hand, face white
with weariness, my father winked
at the woman with dark red curls
and the chalky dust of cleaning gloves
under her nails. Their rails crossed.
Their rough hands reached and touched
and held on, with herculean strength,
to the city that writhed and changed so restlessly—
working to the bones, to the meat,
making ends meet
as they met on street corners, in sweating stores, in need
to walk together, to break, to breathe
and to eat.
They married.
They left the city, closed their bloodshot eyes,
and dreamt up me.



Dirty Shoe | Ethan Jones
photography

Vintage, Not Forgotten | Andréa Kütemeier
photography



Through a Windshield | Rebecca Stockham

poetry

To think inhaling the spray
from spinning semi wheels over
smoothed pavement would ease
the growing pit in my stomach.

I blink at dripping billboards
that will never blink back—
how little they actually see
at seventy-five miles per hour.

The hollow click of the turn
signal beats on my ribs; let
your rain-blurred headlights
pin me to my seat, belt

slid across my shallow chest—
does it scare you that I only
ever feel safe enough to fall
asleep in your passenger seat?

The High Road | Haley Brewer

prose

The road, at least, was deserted.

Out of everything, this was probably what was most comforting—the barely lit street that extended out before me, that guided me, that allowed me some singular peace. In the passenger seat, my companion hadn't even glanced out to the darkened road and just continued to watch me with dark, steady eyes, just as she had the moment she arrived, since we arrived.

She was young, much too young for the seriousness in her gaze, the grave note in her voice. I don't remember much about being that young—there was a lot I didn't remember—but a few certain half-filled in memories floated to the top, like the odds and ends at the back of a drawer. Carelessly discarded once, but things kept nonetheless.

The first memory I can fumble into my hands is yellowed and aged like silk paper left in the sun, all crumbled at the sides with missing pieces. Preschool, maybe, probably around the age of my companion.

The memory is this: a classroom, stained alphabet carpet, a desk with peeling stickers on the top and a room that smelled strangely sweet, like apple juice and wood chips, along with a sharp scent I now knew as disinfectant spray.

This is where the doctor pulled me out, I remember saying proudly to a classmate, pointing at my birthmark shaped like two lazy, sloppy circles. I had been convinced that birthmarks were left by the first person who touched you. The dark

spotchy mark painted across my left knee seemed to confirm this, looking almost like two thumbs coming together. I remember being faithful to this fact until it was probably odd to do so, into my teens, at least. A small part of me probably still believed.

I pressed my foot a bit lower onto the gas, wishing I could speed the way I wanted—needed—to. The speedometer shot up, the sight familiar, but the car's speed remained exactly the same.

I didn't want to look over, but my gaze was dragged over nonetheless. The car continued its steady race forward, not an inch of sway from the road.

“Are you ready?” She asked, her features tight and drawn. Despite the youth to her rounded cheeks and the short dark curls that surrounded her face in a halo, her serious, haunted gaze was anything but the conviction of innocence. Her eyes were wide but clear of any dominant emotion as they stared back into mine, the same.

I jerked my eyes back to the road. A shuddering breath forced its way through my lungs, in and out. I flipped my turn signal to the right and switched lanes.

“Ready for what?” I asked lightly, harsh gravel in my voice from disuse. I cleared my throat.

She sighed, almost disappointed. Out of the corner of my eye, I could see her shifting her weight back and forth. If everything was normal—she and I and the road spread out before us – I'd be

tempted to call her antsy. After all, she was hardly tall enough for her feet to hang off the edge of the seat, her sneakers just barely peeking over the worn fabric. Her age would support the fact. And yet, it didn't fit right, for her.

I tugged the wheel to the side and made another rough lane change. The action just barely pushed me into the door. Neither of us were wearing seatbelts, but that didn't seem to especially bother me. Why would it?

On the radio, the theme song to *Golden Girls* was playing tiny and static on loop. What a strange song for a radio station to play.

Around the rearview mirror, I had placed a selection of brightly colored beads and air freshers. Despite being worse for wear—most broken and hardly hanging on—they glowed brilliantly in a yellow haze. The windshield was in a similar state of misfortune with an intense spiderweb crack shattered across the glass that almost entirely blocked my vision, not that it mattered. On the opposite side, the lower part of the windshield was entirely missing.

"This is my mother's favorite show," I said, like it was just then occurring to me as the theme song started over, not a moment of pause. "She would watch it every night. My room was right across from hers and I'd leave my door open so I could listen to it as I fell asleep."

"It's time to move on," she said, her voice soft around the disapproving frown on her face. "You know this."

I flexed my hands around the crack in my steering wheel. The aching pressure around my neck pitched upwards before fading back into its dull constant.

I dug my nail into the destroyed material and hard, rough plastic bit back at me. The song started once again. "Where do you want to go?" I asked, saying it like it was a treat, like I was allowing her some grand prize.

She said nothing and I could almost hear her youth-pitched voice saying, *you know where I want to go*. I did, and I said nothing.

Off-key, I hummed to the song. It started and ended several more times, with static as its only interruption.

"You have to let go," She said suddenly, staring ahead towards the road as I did. I must have been driving for days at that point.

I swallowed and the lingering tight pain hugging my throat only increased. I pressed down harder on the gas, and her gaze still lingered. Her hand came over mine, the contrasting size almost comical.

"You can't stay here forever." Hot tears fell numb and free down my cheeks.

"I just want to drive," I whispered, my throat thick and aching. Drives always calmed me down. After a long drive, everything will be alright.

She pulled her hand away and shook her head, something pitying coming over her face.

I reached up, my hand shaking, and traced where bone jutted out of the skin at the back of my neck. The bone was dry and brittle and crumbling at the touch. I let my hand fall back to the wheel.

There was a long stretch where neither of us spoke, only the radio filling the empty, horrifying quiet. She was the first to speak. "You're not going to find what you lost."

"I lost everything."

The High Road (*cont.*) | Haley Brewer

prose

“Then,” she said, “where exactly are you going?”

I swallowed, said nothing, and I kept driving.

I tightened my hands around the wheel and then dropped my hands to my lap. The wheel didn’t even twitch. Nowhere. I wasn’t driving anywhere.

“I’m not ready.”

“Hardly anyone is.” She said. “But what’s done is done, what’s gone is gone. You can’t drive back to what you lost.”

I let out a bitter laugh, “I can try. I can try.”

I forced myself to look at her. Somehow, orange light shifted around the shadows on her face even though the pitch darkness was vast before us, my dim headlights only a small glow in comparison.

As I watched, her tongue came out and poked at the window in her grin, the first bit of childhood she had shown since I’d started driving. I had lost my first tooth at a soccer game in preschool. The left front one, I remembered.

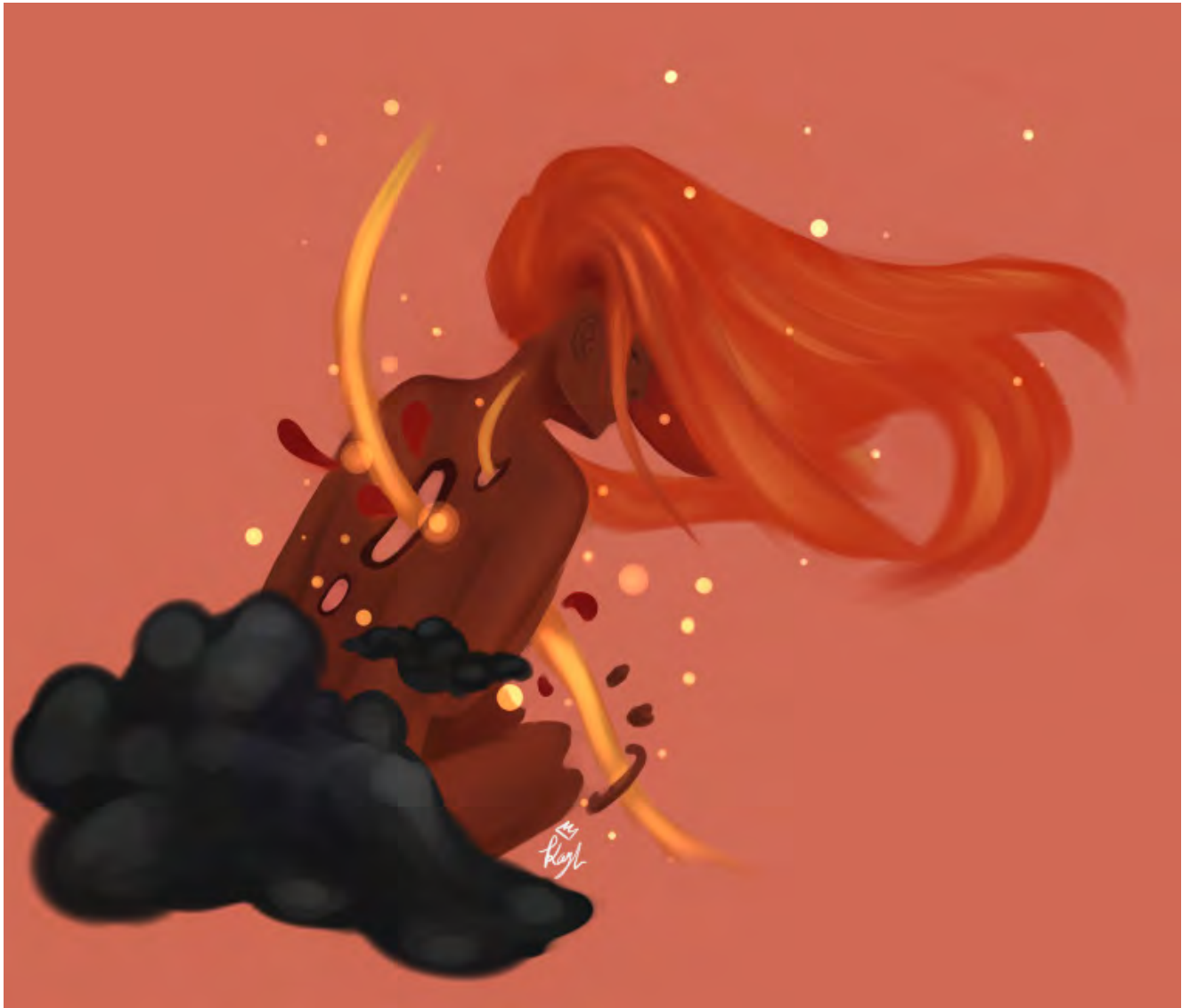
Why her? Why that age?

She was still looking away, her chin tilted up so she could peer out the window. On her knee, she rubbed at her own dark mark, identical in place and shape.

The road stretched before us forever long, and we were the only ones there. Everything will be alright after a long drive.

“Will it?” She asked. I hadn’t even said that out loud. She was looking to me now, her eyes were a shade too sad, a hue too knowing. “Will it be alright?”

Burnout | Kayla Smith
digital art



Nailbiter | J. Banko-Boone
poetry

I scream off the mountain

I

am a lesbian

and the valley replies

no shit.

Long nails hammer taps on my shoulders so I turn around
and beautiful women pluck my eyes from my skull,
cradling my sight in polished hands.

I wake up and bite my nails
and cringe at the thought
of kissing boys.

Leaning into daydreaming a picket fence fantasy
of living with my wife
and 2.5 cats in the suburbs of Baltimore.

Four years too late cram studying gay terminology
to feed the selfish sapphic succubus
in charge of my soul's narrative
who is writing a story (my story)
in alliteration and broken Polish.

Seeing without sight hip waist dips in curves out of silhouettes
dance off the mountain and into the air.
Following fainting falling, I can't fly like them with empty sockets,
clumsy as I am, desperate to be but
never femme enough or butch enough,
just a regular dyke
who can't breathe right
when the girl I've loved too forthright
puts her head on my shoulder.

Nailbiter (cont.) | J. Banko-Boone

poetry

I fall off the wagon and off the cliff and expect to land,
but the women flying above me get smaller
as I slide down the spiral of time,
moments slipping by of me coming to terms with me
and the razors of coming out to everyone but you
peel away my pink skin revealing the blue underneath
and I land with a thud

on the bottom of eternity,

breaking my back on my father's casket and
bleeding out - not from the razors,
from paper cuts I got writing the letter I left by your empty chest
telling you I'm a lesbian.

I'm sorry I'm sorry I'm sorry
echoes through the valley and pulses for my heart
as I think of her and cry crocodile tears for you,

because I could never fly
until I had to mail a confession

to your unrecognizable corpse.



F U S I O N | Valeria Lelong
art



Messy Yellow | Kayla Smith
digital art



Wise Man | Ethan Jones
photography



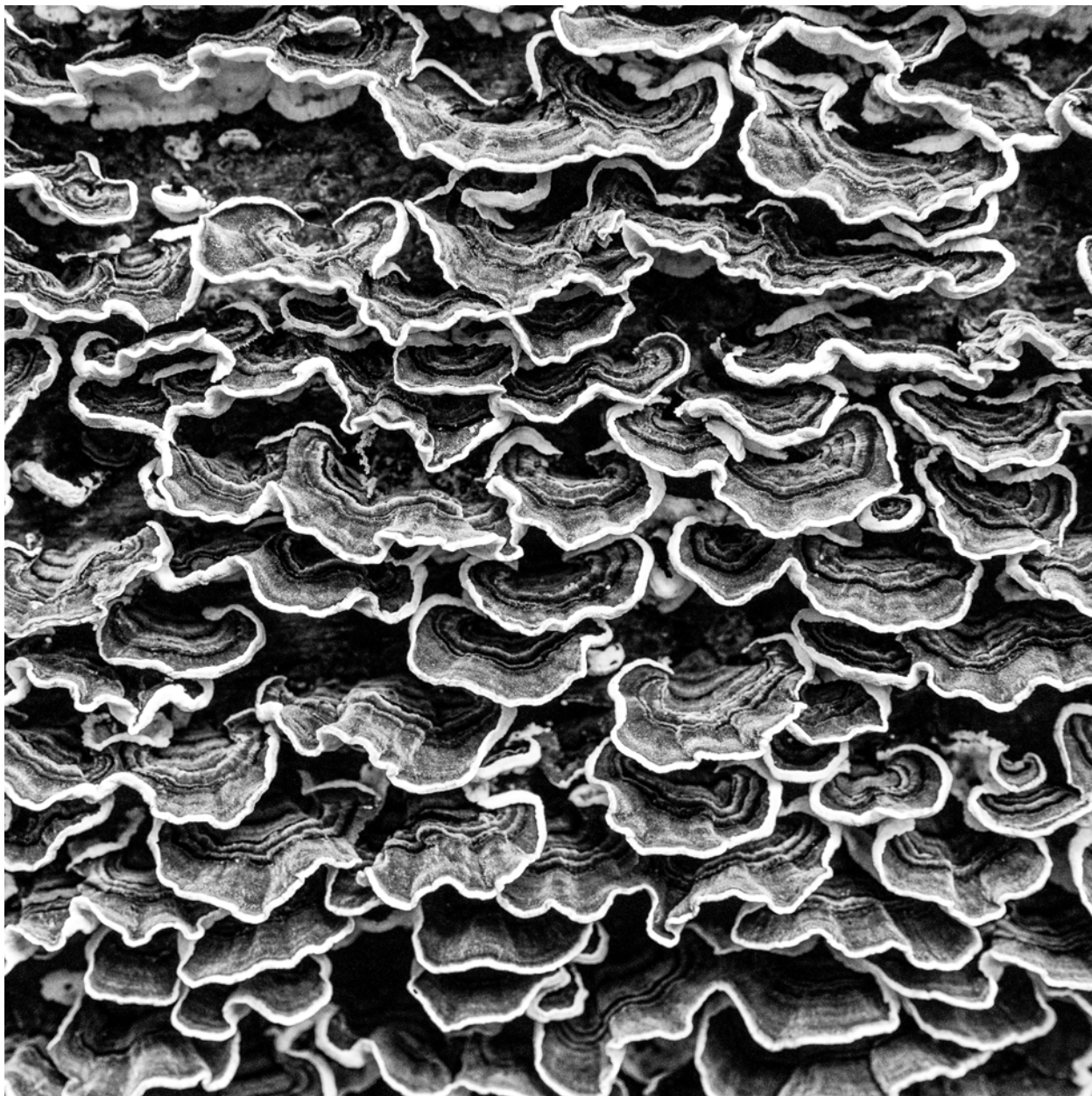
A Lone Train | G. Sandmire
photography



A Delinquent's Proverb | Hailey Kadolph
photography



Perspective 1 | Mihailo Bradash
photography



Does This Bring You Zen? 3 | Tim Bimler
photography

The Shade | Courtney Earl

poetry

He promised he'd love me
all the days of my life,
travel to the ends of the earth
to be by my side; swore we'd grow
old together, and near the end of our
lives, his breath will fade out,
but his heart is always mine.

He never imagined that fate's
cruel plan would leave him
widowed just as his marriage
began, but as his nightmares
came to life, I took my last
breath, and with tears
in my eyes, succumbed to death.

Beneath the trees where we
said our vows, I sleep softly
deep underground; he sobs, broken,
and promises me this: death won't
do us part and he will not rest
until he's found me again and both
of our hearts lie still in our chests.



Common Good

BIRD WORLD

THE HUMANS

FUTURE



Future Earth | Hayley Kim
art

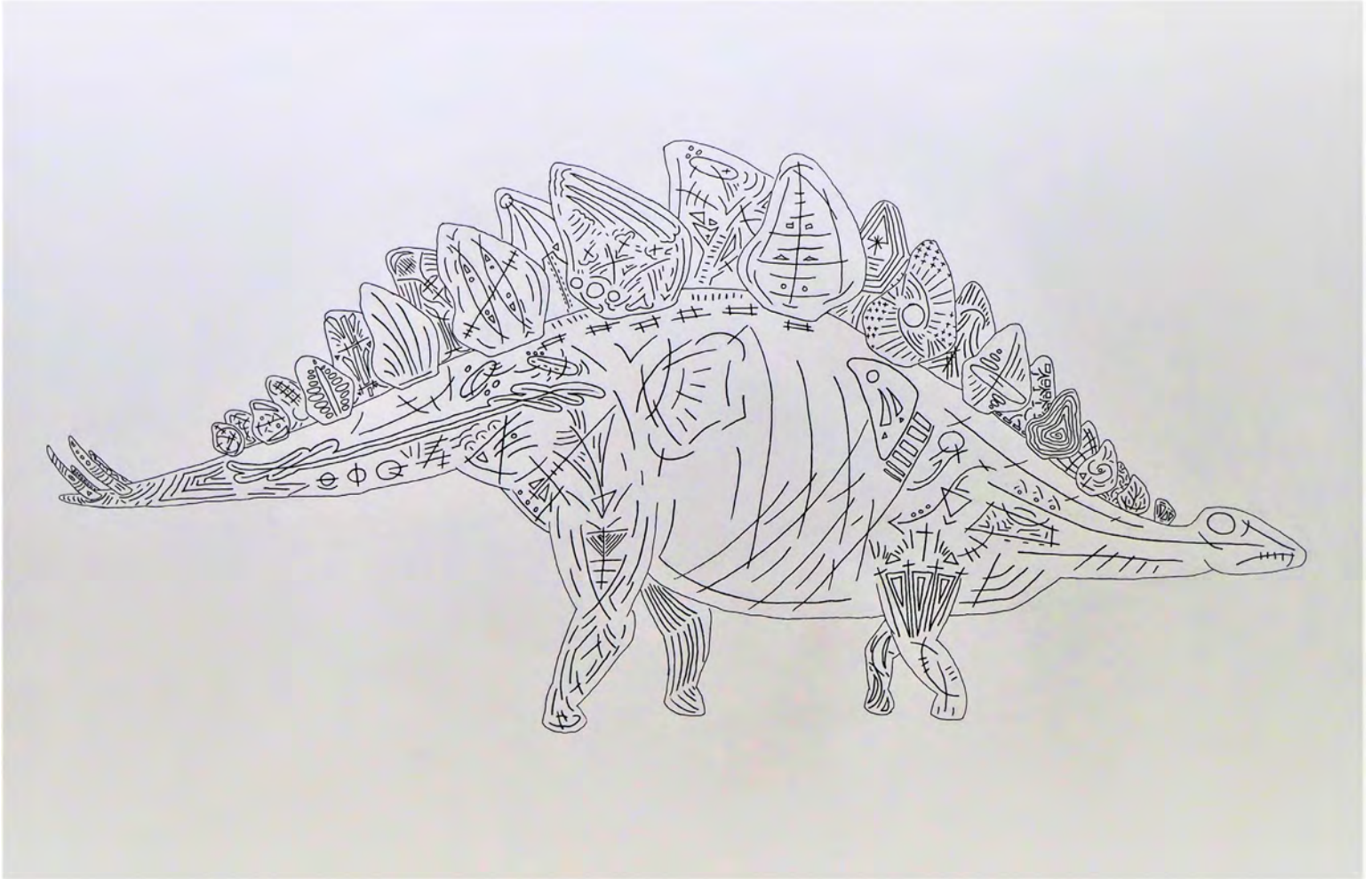
sometimes i make lists | Rae Erickson

poetry

sometimes i grab the back of my neck to trick myself that you're still here. sometimes i lay on my carpet and wink slowly at the carpet fibers. sometimes i wish i was prettier, or nicer, or simpler; i buy oreos and rum and then make myself cum; i wear necklaces relatives gave to me, even though they really aren't my style. sometimes i get nervous my friends hate me; i hoard my ativan; i text my exes from high school and tell them i despise the sun. sometimes i think about all of the men that fucked me then left; i pretend i am controlling my lava lamp with telekinesis; i complain to my mom while i rip a tissue to snowy pieces. sometimes i forget about when i was scared of ketchup; i wonder if my dad is actually as happy as he seems to be; i research rat breeders to try to stop remembering how much we laughed under the comforter that one night when i told you my retainers are glow in the dark. sometimes i grab the back of your neck to trick myself that you're still here.



LEMONS ARE FOR WOMEN | Cecelia Siefer
printmaking



Specimen | Madison Wilson
art

Longtime Friend | Isabel Coffey
digital art





Campus Tree | Mihailo Bradash
photography



Endless Pineapple | Brandon LaChappelle
photography

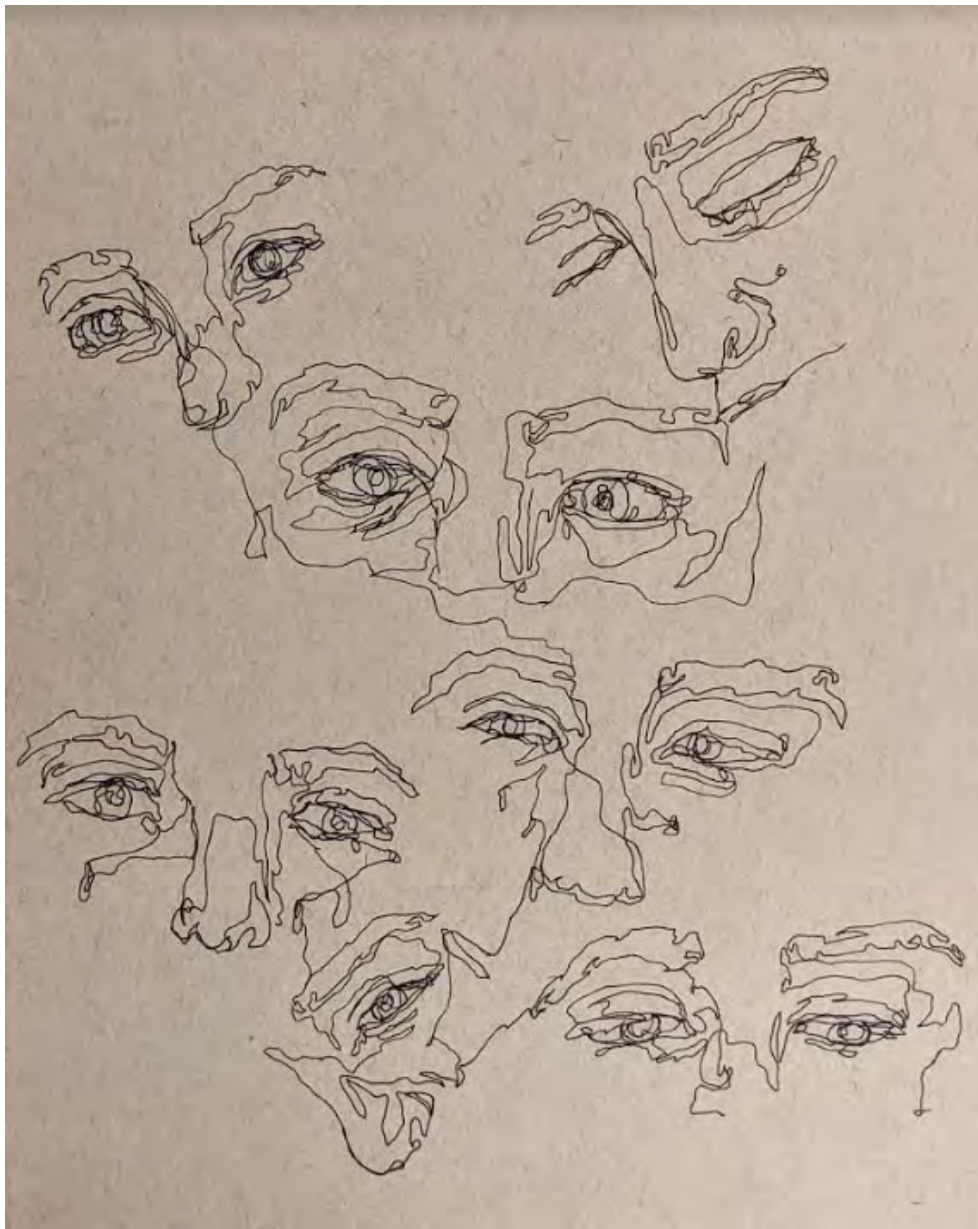


Sleeping Bear Blues | Brandon LaChappelle
photography

4-minute bowl of soup | Isabel Coffey

poetry

I know the recipe
and I know it takes
longer to make, even
to simmer, let alone
chopping and adding
vegetables, sprinkling
spices and stirring
and doling,
but I must fit
the eating
to a patch
of time
before
my shift
and in 4 minutes
(a fraction of what it took
to write this poem)
the flavors come through
and my belly is full.



fixing myself too | Lexi Gault
art

the setting of self | Anna Bedalov

poetry

the light fades with distance
as bluegray seeps in, covering
the outcroppings with faint shadow.
ants scatter. they swarm again,
pulling at the edges of the rocks,
darting out for glances of the void
swallowing the stones and grass.
the pale in the distance seems to burn
into the sky, all colors meshing while

her hair doesn't move – yet it sways,
blustering between the stillness,
feeling a heartbeat just beneath
the skin. passing footsteps push
her, feel her, create the illusion,
the motion and music of her
muscles in the moment, holding on
to the youngest version of herself,
manifest, sleeping, morphing

to her grasp, the skin half-formed
and pliant, already approaching
the end of usefulness. it feels right
to know what song holds a space
for a person, what chord might
feel like happening upon a home
with the most welcoming open door,
warm hugs and familiarity –
that sound so dear as to be

practically family, floating
so closely between the ribcage
and the heart, beating – i think
i knew you in a dream, once knowing
the refrains that had carved a space
exactly the size of your mind, the tone
ringing home and calling you back.
i knew you, i'm sure of it, the moon
reaching out to hold, to caress the storm

that rose as the thousands of waves
coming before, feeling the beat below,
the pulse of your history within
all your wonderful iterations.
please look to the sea and note
its romantics: back and back
and back again, joining the rain
as it flows away, grasping for you
with the force of the moon,

the millions of motions before
remembered in the duality of the sand,
the coarse softness that holds
the water as a pillow, a comfort
to draw you in, a hug and a hair-
rustling to send the sea away again,
back to the open, to home
and the clear, the thunder awaiting
with open arms and applause.

home alone | Emily Neuharth

poetry

sisters emptying parents' wine,
ambiguous liquid leaves philosophy raw:
they trace an apparently infinite line of distress;

the world weeps a pastel pulse as dead ancestors
return, roots mimicking memory equally erasing
skin sequins, slipping whirl-like until ghost turns
to soap-soak, staining dirty tongues that fall into grief
harbor where natural reflections fasten hymn chains,
& vast untitled pain is available— so take up the space;
wonder falls dim to zodiac reason, clouding cellars
with sellers striving & breaking bread & taking toasts;
all children eventually quit their beds and live entirely
hungry in the distance, echoing like makeshift mystical
midnights that agree to stillness as almost complete;
some advice— avoid pulpit explosions & reach hard
& grow glitter & glow glamorous in the mirror,
since sun will always drop down despite the young
sipping nostalgia dry while the old gods drink the dusk
of hollow wishes blown to holy hill hands, lost in silence

so quick, share more of the pink glass and hot touch;
wandering smooth into a voidless state no longer asking,
Are we the only ones?

a prayer, half asleep | Megan Martinez

poetry

i searched desperately
for the right words
to prescribe;
how to heal my pain?

the loneliness settling
in my chest,
the confusion
bouncing around my brain.

the feelings i harbored,
betrayal beating in my heart;
the suffering i endured,
reduced to too much

i checked the Bible first,
Psalms mostly,
and found nothing—
no verse

that could mend these wounds.
so i scoured the internet
with hopes of a wider search,
but to no avail.

and so i sat
with palms up,
my wide open
heart at anybody's mercy,

all of my grief
open for the world to see;
i prayed
in my own words
to the God i know
is listening; He sees this
unique hurt of mine and recovers
me not as i was but renewed.

Scapegoat Acrostic | Grace Biermann

poetry

“And Pilate asked him, ‘Are you the King of the Jews?’ And he answered him, ‘You have said so.’”
Luke 23:3

It is you should be the patron saint of students.
who stood better than you at “athens and Ajerusalem”,
when you asked God what truth was before you killed Him,
when you killed God for caesar and the roaring crowds?
not, of course, that you did the deed yourself.
you did not drive the nails into the softly curling hands,
nor thrust the cruel crown into the pale, unyielding head.
there was no blood to wash away.

No blood, but did you dream there was?
the night after that day of dark, did you wake screaming,
as procula had the night before?
did you both see it in your sleeping eyes—
the water dripping from your hands, dark, thick, and slow,
not water?

Really, i do not wonder that you left that land soon after.
it took too much from you—you were not meant
for public servanthood.
but in the golden palaces of rome,
what were your thoughts when procula left quietly at dusk,
and came back glowing, humming snatches of hymnody?
she loved you still, you could not doubt,
but she no longer worshipped you.
instead, she worshipped He whom you had killed.
was there fresh horror coiling in your core?

I think of you, and wonder what your days were like.
did your hard roman heart change before your death?
i hope so.
i need it to be true that, when you drew
your last long gasping breath,
and closed your eyes on procula’s face, wet with watery tears,
you opened them to light, and the smile of the murdered Man.
for i am pontius pilate, and i too killed my God.



Perspective 2 | Mihailo Bradash
photography



Sacred Spaces | Andréa Kütemeier
photography

Mom and I Decorate for Christmas | Emma Hecht

poetry

i. Gold

Gently, she lays spun glass around the rosewood stable, pulling the hairs apart ever so slightly into cirrus drifts, which bank over the heads of the small ceramic lambs, curled up on the buffet table in the dining room. The cow and the donkey bow into a slumber to the silent tune of the shepherd's fife. She asks me which way is East so we know what side to put the wise men on, two years down the table. We pick up Jesus, Mary, and Joseph, organize them into a triune family under a modest roof.

ii. Frankincense

Dozens of small white cartons filled with glass treasures. We loop our index fingers through ovals of fishing line and thin ribbon, holding them up to the window pane, December's adoration casting a silver hue. We admire some longer than others, especially the glassy red orb that forms into a burgundy teardrop at the bottom. All laid out on sheets of old tissue paper, perfumed with sap, crinkled and torn from so many times being tucked in and taken out. This ornamental orphanage awaits its advent, to be swaddled gloriously in thorns of blue spruce.

iii. Chocolate

She rummages through the Sharpies and rubber bands in the kitchen junk drawer for a roll of Scotch tape. Out of a bag of Hershey's Kisses from Walgreen's, she counts twenty-five pieces of full, silver crinoline, and binds one to every boxed date with an adhesive O. At night, after we sit in red pajamas by a golden fire and read from Matthew and Luke, I tear off a Kiss and she gets the bag containing the rest from a high cupboard shelf. We indulge in a sweet, daily gift, together.

A Shared Meal | Maggie Dominak

prose

The crisp, fall-dipped air filled my nose, awakening my senses. I lazily strode to my backyard; I never have anything too pressing on my schedule so I could afford to take my time. As I reached up to the nearest tree to detach the bird feeder, I heard a shrill chirping. Cardinals. They must have been hungry: as I filled the feeder with a fresh batch of seeds, their chirping grew impatient. When I hung it back up on the branch, wrinkling my nose at the pungent smell of seed and grain, I took a few steps back. The cardinals immediately zipped toward the seeds, three of them landing atop the feeder. There was an entire family: a father, mother, and baby. Their beautiful red feathers were a refreshing sight amongst the gloom of fall. They feasted on the free meal, and then the youngest one, with a full belly, nuzzled against his mother's wing. I felt a tear escape my eye, and wondered what it was like to have a mother and father to simply share a meal with.

Time Has a Way of Forgetting | Madelyn Gehring

poetry

I can't remember your favorite color,
or how you preferred your eggs;
however, I remember tears rolling down my jumper
the night you told me you could no longer stay.

The songs you once listened to escape me now
along with the way you used to style your hair;
but I hear echoing of my cries off the walls
when I begged you to stay by my side.

I can't recall the subjects of our long talks from the past,
or even the titles of those books you once read;
though I still see the empty look in your eyes
as you insincerely explained why you had to walk away.

The sound of your laugh is one I can no longer hear.
Was your birthday the 15th or the 16th? What was the year?
I will never forget the feeling of loneliness
as I watched your car drive out of sight

while I whispered my final goodbyes.

(How) To Make Tortillas | Haley Brewer

prose

During your weekly call with your grandma, she informs you that you two are going to make tortillas this weekend.

Grandma thinks you're a baker—she thinks you're a lot of things: a hairdresser because you dye your own hair, a gardener because you haven't killed your cactus yet, religious because your school was growing up. You've baked a handful of cakes and own a pie tin, so you're also a baker.

She's waiting for you in the kitchen when you arrive, and your mother automatically goes to sit with your grandpa. It skips a generation, she claims whenever grandma tries to rope her into cooking, but that has never sounded right to you. It's not like your habit of burning dough is in your blood. Nonetheless, they sit and talk, and you go to grandma.

In broken English and perfect Spanish, her sister has texted out the recipe. You both have trouble reading from the small screen and you squint at the dim drugstore phone. She doesn't remember the recipe—it's been that long—and she seems almost embarrassed. You don't know why she would be—it's not like you know it either—but her skin still flushes red while she flutters around the kitchen to gather the bare-bones ingredients that she does remember: flour and salt.

In the DeLeon family, you are the only one with a white name and she is the only one who can speak perfect Spanish. On the scale that measures your family's ethnicity, you two are on

polar opposite ends. That embarrassment you understand, it's well-worn to you, but it never occurred to you that it may run both ways.

As you both huddle over the phone that provides a lifeline to something one of you lost and something the other never had, you think of that. You write the recipe down from the cellphone and work through the clumsy wording with a rag thrown over your shoulder, an apron hugging your waist.

You haven't cooked in this kitchen since the summer after senior year of high school, when your family lost the house and had to move in to grandma's garage with everything you, your mother, and brother could fit in the U-Haul your aunt rented.

All your family's possessions were in one room, stacked until cardboard towers hid the floor mattress you and mother shared every night. You remember how most nights you would just stare at the ceiling and count down the days until you left for college, *Frasier* on the grainy corner TV because your mother needed it on to sleep.

You'd stay up till early-morning, at least usually, and then wake up again when your mother readied for work at dawn. Soon after, your brother would come down from the couch upstairs to take her place, the blankets still warm from her stay.

In the morning, real morning, grandma was there to wake the house with coffee and the curtains pinned up. And food, of course—a plate

of fried strips of meat, some rice soaking up the grease, beans and folded bread on the side. Your family always joked that grandma kept Mexico in her bones, mostly due to her lack of belief in general air-conditioning, but her food always reminds you of that.

You haven't cooked in this kitchen in years.

1. Never ask for exact measurements and let the women who went before you guide your hands.

Grab the tub of lard that has turned green—best by June 2016—and shyly admit you think it's gone bad. She's embarrassed—you both are—but google says butter is just as fine, and you press a few bars under wax paper to soften.

Next, you measure out the handful of flour and enjoy the familiar feeling of dryness fill every crack and wrinkle of your hands. This is familiar at least. You add the butter to the dry ingredients and mix by hand until a tan paste forms.

My mother used to call them tostas, she says quietly as her fingers press in the dough, when they're small and round like this.

Make sure they're not too thin or they'll burn hard, and make sure they're not too thick or the dough will pool out like jelly when you cut into them. Your first ones are fat and small and not at all worthy of the "tortilla" title. You push them back into the bowl of dough and she guides you through the process again.

You were convinced she hated you, you remember, when you were awkward and young and less understanding. She was never as kind as your mother or aunts and always seemed upset with you— always wanting you either in the kitchen to clean or in the living room to brush her

hair when the boys were out in the yard. You'd pout when your brother and cousins would come in, covered in mud and farmer's tans. Finally, you complained enough that she just let you go. She hated you after all, or so you truly believed, and you were better off running around. You were too boyish, she too quiet. Neither of you knew what to do with each other, and you were certain that meant her dislike.

Through the window, a thick layer of snow is piled frozen on the sill like dried wax. The glow of the kitchen reflects back to you.

She was alone in that house, you remember now, after you went outside.

2. Roll the dough flat and thin until they're almost see through.

My mother was like a machine, she says, both of your hands clumsy and unfamiliar with the motions. Your hands are covered thick in lumpy dough and flour. Her nails are painted hot pink, her favorite color, and on her thumb, the color is chipped. Your hair is a similar hot pink, already fading towards a bleached orange.

The process is slowly coming back to your grandma and she is laying out thin-pressed dough on a plate for you to cook. With steam curling the hairs at your temples, it is your job to watch the tortillas cook and keep them from burning.

You had another job here, several summers ago when you and your brother were too young to stay home alone, when your mother would drop you off early before her morning shift. You'd work grandma's garden for hours— planting seeds and weeding and throwing the rotten pears out

(How) To Make Tortillas (*cont.*) | Haley Brewer

prose

of her yard so the squirrels and raccoons would stay away. At the end of the week, you'd both get a crisp new twenty-dollar bill fresh from the bank to match your newly darkened skin.

No one else has to do this, you'd argue with your mother on the drive home, angry and sweaty and wishing you'd just be home already. 'No one' refers to your older and younger cousins, both single children who never appeared for the hot summer days of work. *I want a job.*

You have a job, she would reply, tired and disinterested in hearing you whine after a longer day of work than you had.

A real job, you would reply.

You don't need a real job. This argument is familiar and well-worn at this point, would be until you were seventeen and pinning a Subway nametag on your polo.

I want one, you would insist.

She'd look over at you, her eyes leaving the road for a split-second, and sigh. *Your job is taking care of grandma and grandpa*, she'd always say with her tone daring for an argument. *That's your job.*

You stand in the kitchen, in the present, and watch the pillows of dough darken and flatten on the stovetop.

3. Lay out the circles of dough on a hot plate and flip them once they're cooked.

I like when the bubbles form, she says as she

passes over the plate, *tell me if they do.*

They do, and you do.

She rushes over, dough still covering the ends of her fingers, and you both watch a small bubble grow slightly more and more obvious. After a few moments, she reaches out and presses the bubble down until the dough pops and then flattens completely. She laughs, and you've never seen her so young.

Your mother says when you were a baby, your grandma was the only one who could get you to stop crying. You're kind of infamous for that in your family, being a terrible baby. You were the first girl, and you were terrible—fussy and crying and almost impossible to calm.

You suppose that makes sense, though, that she could calm you. She is quiet and careful and still sometimes hums under her breath. You like it now, and you probably liked it then.

When you were a young teen and rebellious and hating your family and self, you were disgusted by how soft she was, how delicate and subservient and quiet. You would never be like her, you swore. You would scream and yell and take up space along the way and you would never serve, never fade into the roughly painted walls as she did.

The sour taste that appears at the back of your throat from being so terribly wrong should feel more familiar at this point, but you've always been a slow learner. When you think of your grandmother now you, yes, think of softness and

light colors and a warmth like safety, but you would never dream of pinning those angry, false emotions on her.

You see a different woman, completely driven by the love for her family, quiet and almost secret in her love. As everyone's gathered, she's the one tucked away at the stove, spoon cradled in her palm as she stirs and fries and spices up an excuse for everyone to stay longer. She is away from the family but dedicated all the same, even more as laughter drifts from the living room and steam warms her cheeks.

Soft, but also the woman who catches and kills centipedes with her bare hands without hesitation, who came from the dry air and sun-bleached sand of another country and carried that heat with her for sixty years.

4. Take them off the heat before they burn and harden.

The first tortilla you two make is hard as a chip and sweet from too much sugar. You smother it in butter and give it to your grandpa, who eats it and doesn't make fun of it too much. You both know it's terrible and giggle together as you press another on the hot pan. The dough sizzles as soon as it hits the surface.

Growing up, your mother once said, *my parents never said they loved us*.

'Us' was three sisters total and two brothers, the eldest and youngest. Your mother, the second oldest, likes to talk about how she used to sneak out the balcony door—the one grandpa closed up when your oldest cousin was born—and the trouble she got in that she swears her parents

still don't know about. She talks about her youth the way people talk about old mistakes— distance there, always, sometimes with laughter, sometimes with far-off eyes.

Growing up, your mother always told you she loved you. She swore she did, as if you doubted, as if you didn't know.

Growing up, you would have sworn your grandmother hated you.

You have so much in common with your mother—your similar faces, your laughs, your stubborn natures—and perhaps something else.

5. Place the tortillas in a warmer and eat with strips of meat, rice greasy from the pan.

There is steam and laughter and fingertips burnt from the hot top— the kitchen is warm, bright, and despite everything—maybe because of everything—you've always felt safe here.

During your weekly call, a majority of which is typically spent talking with your grandpa, she never says *I love you* first before handing off the phone. This used to mean something to you, used to signify something, but you can't—don't—find that there anymore.

You are the one with the white name who struggles around her Spanish 'R's, but you are the one here, in the kitchen, borrowing her apron, using her stovetop. She guides your hands around your shared history and suggests a touch more of butter. You apply a spoonful, and she is at your side.

Card Trick | Emma Hecht
poetry

We wear t-shirts, cargo shorts, and bare feet.
I race into the garage, tippy toes on sawdust,

throw open the gardening cabinet, sift through
tulip bulbs, gloves stained by flower beds,

a jug of Roundup. I dig out a clothespin,
rush back out to dad, who's on one knee, shuffling

through a deck of cards, finding the strongest one.
He draws the four of clubs. With his index finger,

he taps one of the metal bars, the one next to the wheel.
"So, this is called the seat stay," he says. He bends

our cardboard contortionist around it, steers it through
the spokes. "Let's put the clothespin on next."

I hand it to him, palm to palm. Everything fastened
on the seat stay. I clip on my helmet, kick back

my kickstand. Coast down the gravel, turn right. He watches
his eight-year-old girl roar down their road on a Harley.



Pinwheel | Anthony Staros
photography

Lake Michigan Milky Way | Brandon LaChappelle
photography





Twinkle, Twinkle, Ring Around the Bridge | Emily Neuharth

poetry

how i wonder at the ghostly moon's
light. it mixes with echoing inhales
and exhales, punctuated by *wish* stained
tears. i keep midnight alive—*build it*
up above the world so high, build it up
with the god *and silver* falling through
panes of glass—traveling darkly,
head pressed hard against pillow.
i savor the *twinkling* dizziness,
chest cracking, i picture myself:
alone, ashes, all fall
down higher and higher between
clouds that make my pulse buzz
with quiet alarm. memories squeeze
thoughts, roughly cutting *bars*
and bridges that a different self
once built: destruction, distortion,
despair. clock glows *rosy* red, taunting
its inevitable *ring, ringing around.*
my bed grows arms to keep me
captive with promises of a *little star.*
turning on my side, i give in. i melt.
rhymes paint shadowy messy murals
against eyelids. childhood clucks its tongue
at me, making my breath *jump a little,*
jump right off the ground until

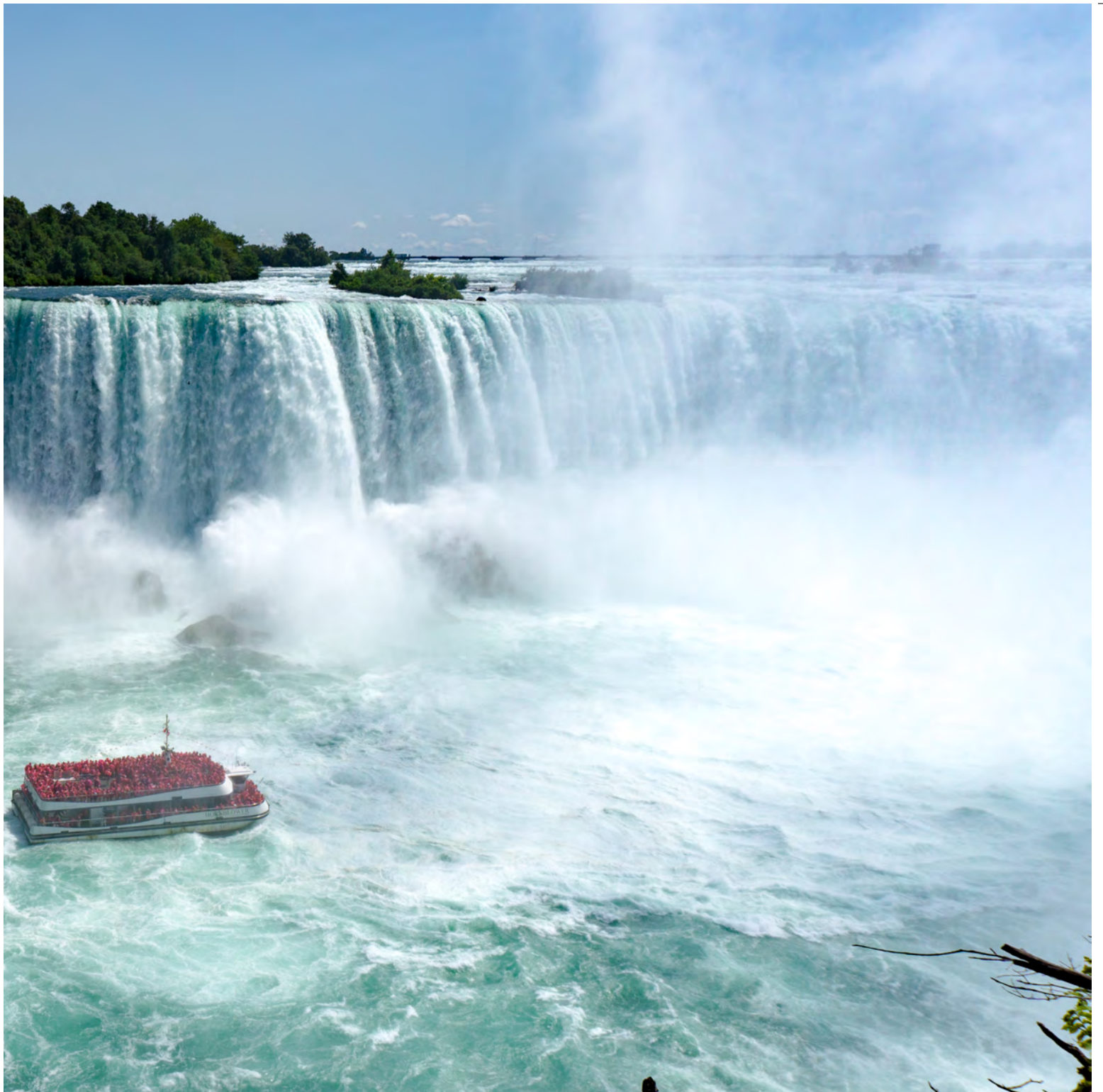
I'm up.



Lone Swan | Ethan Jones
photography

Into the Mist | Emily Gustin
photography





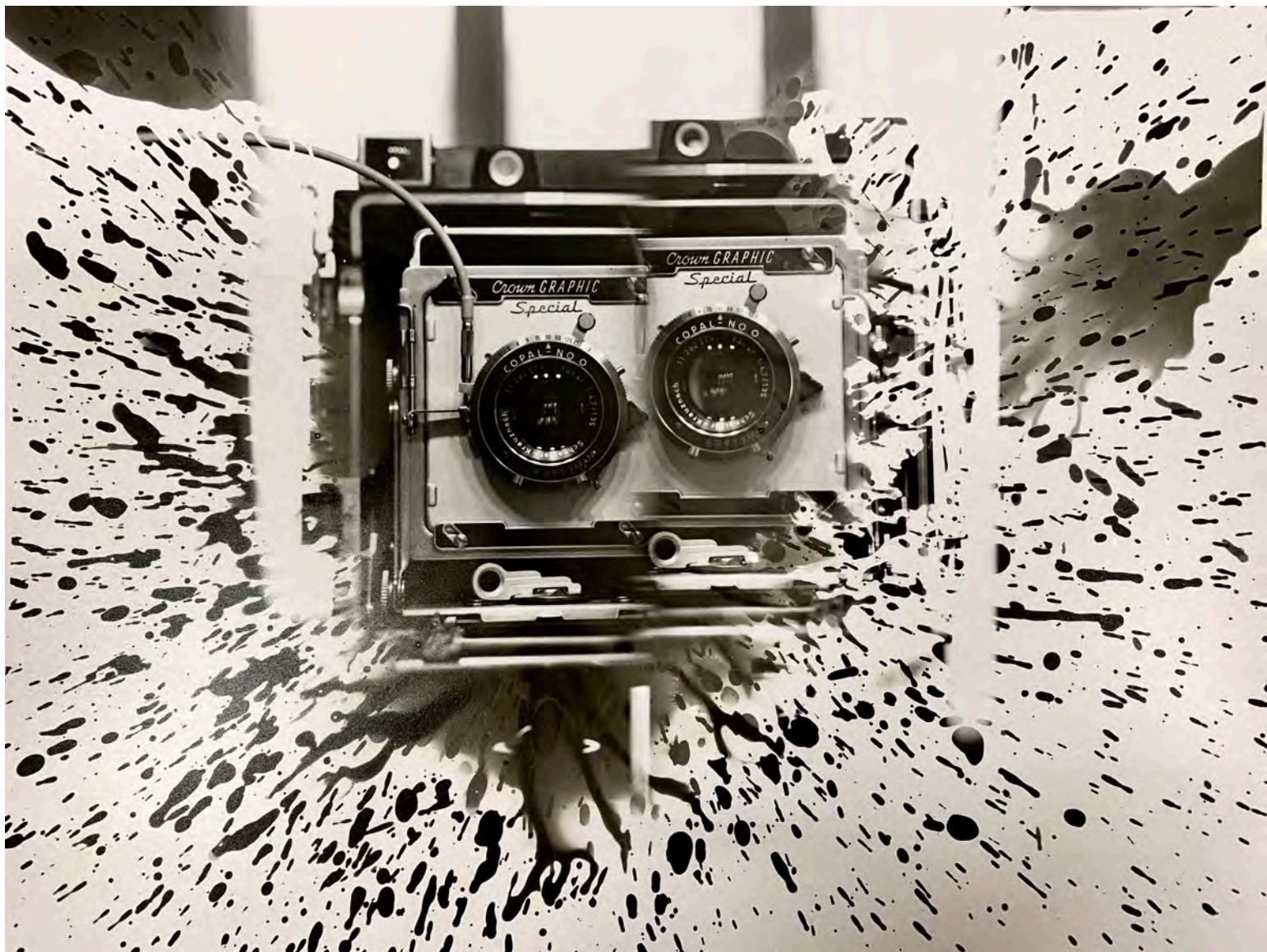


greenhouse in pink | Alyssa Trinko
photography

Mid-Afternoon Nap | Isabel Coffey

poetry

I undress after second-guessing
the act as I always do, but I choose
to avoid the itchy soreness my jeans
leave behind my knees when I hug
one to my chest and stretch the other
beyond me; to avoid twisting creases
into the blouse that screams “art
student.” I hesitate to undress
this time because time is limited.
Time slips away as I try to decide
if I have time to take time. At last,
inevitably, I lay garments carefully
over desk-chair, jeans showing shape
even without my hips in them, a shadow
figure emerged since the last wash;
shirt finding shoulders on metal chair
back; shoes tucked between octopus
wheels in desk’s shadow line. Glasses
recline at my bedside. I sip from a glass
of water, slip on an eye-mask to subdue
the 3pm light. I set three alarms:
a trilogy of rupturing prayers
that I won’t keep sleeping into the night



Self Portrait | Brendan Miller
photography - 4x5 film

Writer's Clock | Emma Hecht
poetry

Steadfast, I hang on the wall
and she sighs while she stares
at my fingerless hands.
(Hers have yet to make ticks
in her open notebook.)
She eats caramels
out of an old coffee mug,
drinks cold coffee
out of a chipped wine glass.
They give her syntactic
sugar, as much as they can
muster, and she overturns
everything onto her page, an ink-
spill, until she is content
with her handiwork. A shut notebook,
a confession of relief. Because
if she's not writing,
no one reads her worth.

Wes Anderson Waves | Mark Young
photography







I Miss My Friends | Rae Erickson
art



Screen Crying | Emily Neuharth

poetry

The end-credits of a shitty Netflix original movie illuminate the notorious midnight hour between Friday and Saturday. But at 7:05pm, I honestly typed: *I am happy*. I reread my tweets, burn them into me. Whispering out loud and alone, almost a conversation, I construct this self-image while on the dregs of my period and a blood-red bottle of wine (day 5, so I know it's not PMS). I scowl at the blinking cursor, rushing the immovable font. Serifs pulse back at me like engorged ticks—exposed. Now sickly-familiar, the blue light blues blur

me. Longing for an adrenaline vibration to symbolize redemption for my being the only one that can hear my tic-tac bric-a-brac. The single “*We miss you*” message is from Tinder—the app personified—no one's heart rate quickened when those vulnerable words flew. I am crying because I am crying about an empty notification screen and what's than that. Late at night,

I try to snuff out the fire: lose my grip on my tears, tighten the one on my phone. I imagine myself from a stranger's perspective, my favorite fantasy. Click *This is what your Facebook profile looks like to: Public*. Aching so deeply I can hear it, I dream of this smiling fool taking control. But

all I do is stare
until
everything becomes pixelated.



intoxicated | Hailey Kadolph
photography

Interview with Michael Martone

Michael Martone, author of books such as “The Blue Book Guide to Indiana” and “Fort Wayne Is Seventh on Hitler’s List,” visited campus on Oct. 9, 2019 as the first of many authors visiting campus for the annual Wordfest authors series that takes place throughout the year. During his visit, one of our staff members, Isabel Coffey, was lucky enough to sit down with Martone for an interview.

While he currently teaches creative writing at the University of Alabama, he grew up only a hundred miles away in Fort Wayne, Indiana.

Isabel Coffey: So, I know a little about your education and background—you attended Indiana University, right?

Michael Martone: And Butler. I started at Butler, and then went to [IU] and graduated there. Then I spent a year as a night auditor at the Marriott in Fort Wayne, and then I went to Johns Hopkins, which at the time was just a one year program. So, not even an MFA program. An MA program.

I: So throughout undergrad, did you intend to study writing?

M: Well, I am so old that that wasn’t even...a thing. I was sitting in graduate school—and I had only heard of graduate school because when I was an undergraduate, Indiana University didn’t have a graduate program. When I applied—now, there’ll be 300 programs for you to apply to—but when I applied, there were maybe a dozen...And the other thing I think is interesting, when I began teaching in a graduate program, all the people who applied to get an MFA were undergraduate English majors. Now that’s changed. I’d say about half our application pool is out of an English department. The other half are from political science, gender studies. But your generation, my current students, they wanna be writers but instead of turning to this Chaucer guy, or to Shakespeare, they look to what they like to read, what they learned to read early on. So the big influences now are, say, comic books, movies, video games (which are narrative delivery devices), and, of course, the book that changed everything— “Harry Potter.” So I imagine a lot of your friends and colleagues and age-mates who say “I wanna be a writer” really wanna go to a place where these things are considered literature. Do you think that’s true of your colleagues here?

I: I think a lot of my fellows are in creative writing or are English majors, but we all find ourselves doing a lot outside of the creative writing craft classes...I think, none of us are probably fully convinced we’re gonna just...go be a writer. We all have these contingency plans and different disciplines.

M: Yeah, I mean, I ask you about going to graduate school, and ten years ago, that’s the obvious next step. But now I might say take a year off, look around...But now the revolution of the internet has created this phenomenon where everybody in some way is a writer. You know on Facebook, there’s your story right there, the feed of everyone’s words. In the academy, they want you to be a professional writer, but the literature for people now is the literature that’s being produced right now, and even in craft terms, it’s not as compelling as it was just 10 years ago.

I: It does feel sort of nebulous. You’re saying maybe we’re on the tail end of this MFA thing.

M: Yeah, I say that not to discourage you, but it’s not necessarily obvious that’s what you need to do. The only thing I would

"A Hermes Kind-of guy"

promise, and the really valuable part, is that they give you protected time and space. There are still programs where you'd pay—and you should not go into debt for this. But if you can find a place, like Alabama, that has 4 years of fellowship, where you won't be in debt, that's great. One possible outcome is you come out of it like, 'Oh, I don't want to be a writer, after all.' But you still had that time to try it, and if you're coming out debt-free, it's all good. Some places advertise, 'Come here and you'll really write good.' They make you think they'll teach you some perfect formula. I don't think that's the way to think about it.

I: I feel like, in both undergrad and grad school, there's this tension between the name recognition and the accompanying opportunities—which, yes, there are definitely a lot of opportunities for graduates of top-name schools—

M: Yes, undeniably.

I: But it's the tension of that, versus the person, the individual, in a space that's a good fit. Like, we are...Midwesterners. We work with our hands. We love cornfields. We watch the sunsets. We don't need to be the top doctor, we just want to be a doctor. Or, that's how it is for me. I don't need to be the top writer. I just need to write, because I feel like it answers something in my soul. It's cheesy, but that's what it is.

M: That's what it is. I have to put on my syllabus my 'outcomes.' So I put on my syllabus, 'In 20 years, my students will still be writers.' So next thing I know, the Dean is coming in and saying, Michael, how are we going to assess this? How are we gonna grade that? So I say well, in 20 years, call 'em up! He says, what about 16 weeks?

I: 16 weeks? The semester flies by. I feel like I've barely settled in and gotten the hang of a class, and then it's already over.

M: Yeah, writing's not a discipline like a university wants to say. You're not learning it. What you are learning is a practice, so that for the rest of your life you'll be a writer. The prestige stuff you're talking about often is actually deleterious to that, in that, 'Oh, I'm writing to be rewarded'—as opposed to just what you said, it's like brushing my teeth or something, it's a practice you just do. That other stuff is a nice thing when it happens. My mother was a high school English teacher and also a writer. She wrote all her life. So when I was a kid, 5 years old, she'd come home from work, make dinner, wash the dishes, and then she'd sit down and write at the kitchen table. So I grew up thinking, 'that's just another thing adults do.'

I: It's what you do. Yeah.

M: It wasn't until later that I realized that's more unusual than it is usual. But that's still the way I talk to my students. The only way to be a writer is by writing. So you should use this time, and that grad school time, to figure out how to really normalize it in your life. And I always say, too, when I was in graduate school 40 years ago, there were better writers in the workshop than me, but now, 40 years after that, there are 2 of the original 13 still writing—so I win. Right? I mean it doesn't matter how good I was then. What matters is that I've endured. I try to teach more endurance, more quantity and process, than quality and perfection.

I: Yeah, I like this idea that it's not a discipline, or something that you one day master or become a professional. It's this endless lifestyle or part of your routine.

M: Yeah. Maybe not a perfect analogy, but I try every day, or every other day, to get to the Y and jog. Now I am not jogging to take on Bolt, or whatever, but the rewards are part of it. Our universities and our culture tell us that the only thing that counts is if you win. If you can quantify and sell your work, and be the best, you win.

I: So, I've heard about your education, and some advice to us aspiring writers. Totally different track, what genres do you like to read?

M: Oh! Well, the nice thing, back to school a little bit...all the places that I worked at were all over clear about genre, in that you're a poet or you're a prose writer, and if you're a prose writer you're either fiction or nonfiction. One of the things I really wanted to do when I went to Alabama was to say, it's not a porous thing. It's a master of fine arts in writing. Everybody should be doing everything. In our program, you could apply in poetry, but when you get there, you could have your thesis that's a novel. On the other hand, a place like Iowa or Syracuse, you have to say this is what I am. So to answer that personally, I like it all. Even within say fiction writing, I like lyric fiction as well as narrative storytelling.

I: I think that definitely comes through in your writing. We read *Four for a Quarter* in our class—

M: Yeah, what are those things? Ha. Well, what I always say to my students, is about Hermes. You know Hermes?

I: Sure, *the* Hermes?

M: Right. Well, Hermes, you know, was the youngest of the 12 Olympians, and we usually think of him only as a kind of messenger....But he was also the trickster, the patron of thieves, and the patron of bankers—not because bankers are thieves or thieves bankers, but because he is always present in transmission...So Hermes, in the fifth Homeric hymn, steals his older brother Apollo's sacred cattle. And Hermes is just a baby at the time, so he says, 'I'm just a baby, how could I possibly have stolen your cattle...?' Of course, Apollo, the Brad Pitt of gods, is also the perfecton of music and art. So he—this will get back to genre, don't worry—so Zeus says, yeah Hermes you stole it, now tell your brother and Apollo is about to beat him up. So then Hermes gives Apollo something very important, which he has invented as a baby. It is the Lyre. That charms Apollo. Now because it's Apollo, he immediately plays the most beautiful music ever.

I: Right, of course.

M: So here's the difference, back to the genre question: most people, when they come to school or think about writing, they are Apollo. Apollo is a great musician. He takes music and keeps it in that genre and does it to perfection. Most schools are like that. This is music. This is how you're gonna study it. Hermes is a different kinda artist, and that's where I am. Because he's a trickster, he's about confusing categories to open up spaces for wonder in life...So if you did look at *Four for a Quarter*, what I'm saying is, this may look like this, but I am making it something else. The downside is a kind of invisibilut, because people look at it and say, what the hell is this? But the downside for me of the Apollo model, is like, y'know, the blurb always says 'this is a brand new book, unlike anything else except *Gone With the Wind*.' We need to put it in a category. But the job of the trickster is to actually open up that space of imagination in the reader...Because life is boring, and we get used to things, and if you can bring something you've never heard before, that's the thing to do. So I'm a Hermes kind of guy, not an Apollo. And that's not to say don't do Apollo. That has to be done too. But it's about knowing for you where you are.

Burnt | Rebecca Stockham

poetry

My light is artificial, cast from bulbs
screwed in too tight—I'm becoming
all too familiar with the chill
of a half-lit room, and I'm learning
that keeping the door shut

keeps the warmth in.
Mom can't seem to remember
the right wattage, leaving me
with a surplus of bulbs that refuse
to fit. Maybe it's time to start

buying my own refills.
The rare power surge blinds
me, frying the wires and burning
off my too-warm fingerprints.
It's a miracle the glass doesn't crack

with the force of my tapping,
the weight of my stomach settling
in its freefall, bile clogging my throat
when the dimmed lighting wavers.

First Boat of the Morning | Mark Young
photography





a sestina for the rain, for my bones, for my soul | Anna Bedalov

poetry

i want to let my brain alone for once—
if you catch me on the right
day, i'll have to come clean.
my delicate wrist is easy to snap;
the fragility of my skeleton will pull
my skull to the ground; the rain

drenches my sheets. take the shape of rain
while wanting might and dark just once,
wanting to resist my ego's pull.
there is an acute angle stemming right
through my frontal lobe, ready to snap
my eyes shut. storms can clean

or mutilate peace, destroy the clean
i once knew. out of the rain
the bush burns and my shoulders snap,
shake and warm what is left. once,
the angle expanded to the right,
and my spine succumbed to the pull

of the dirt. my spine and mind pull
in opposite directions, leave my body clean
and pure in the road, cars in the right
lane braking around my body in the rain.
my brain betrayed me once,
and now my bones pop and snap

when i stand. this week the cold snap
crawled through my kneecap to pull
at grief. the myth of forty days once
held me over, a flood to wash us clean,
to let the evil drown in endless rain,
but i'm not convinced god has the right

to condemn his own children, right?
if i truly believe that i can snap
out of it, is it confirmed that the rain
would save me? is it possible to pull
myself from hell, to break and clean
with my own might, just this once?

my new right iris has no pull
on my mind as i snap, a cut clean
through flesh and rain, for once.

Birth of the Universe | Mark Young
photography



red variations | Kristian Josifoski

poetry

1

blood swirls in my veins
the expanding infinity of my body
like the firmament

2

baptize me in a river of wine
marry me in a crown of thorns
let me return to the slippery vagina

3

i look for a rose when i
don't want one
you choke on the stem

4

art is making his lips red
with every sip of wine
and then with each thrust

5

my shivering body
here i am again beautifully drunk without veins,
blood swirling in me

6

crawling endlessly on the sands
of the red desert
while my chest expands

7

while your heart burns
i lick the
flames

8

i eat the apple of every garden
and feel the universe in my bile
joyfully singing and shitting

9

another knife fight
in the streets
and nothing to eat

10

a red desert in him
begging for my lips
the grape aroma flowers him

11

i lay in fire as it cools me
wishing for a swollen red tit to suckle
finally the sun sinks below the horizon

12

rise from the rose garden
kiss me with your honey mouth
blood will carry us to the river



Does This Bring You Zen? 2 | Tim Bimler
photography



Ocean Flyby | Emily Kusel
photography

Yosemite | Ethan Jones
photography



“Momma says you’ll make me rotten.”
He lies in the grass, pale face turned
toward the blazing sun. With dark eyes
shut, he glows like a fallen angel in his
black jeans and leather jacket, oblivious
to summer’s heat. Momma sees the devil
when she looks at him, danger and seduction

wrapped up in a tall, quiet boy who will
surely steal my soul. She doesn’t know
he makes me bloom, a seedling she buried
in dirt to die, refusing to let grow,
now showered with love she could never find,
exploding me into a garden confident
enough in my colors to not fear his storm.

“How could I destroy what gives me life?”
he asks, voice floating softly on the gentle
breeze. Momma thinks he’ll bring me ruin,
that I am still too much of a sapling to bear
his pain, but instead he brings me red roses
because they are beautiful and fierce
like me with their velvet petals and prickly

thorns. I tended Momma’s gardens alone
while her heart wandered, but he thinks
only of me as he walks, seeking warmth
in my absence, picking pomegranates
from shrubs he planted when he first met me,
his company my favorite fruit in the cold
winter months when I am forced to disappear.

I want to grow | Kayla Smith
digital art



Ativan | Anthony Staros
art





Perspective 3 | Mihailo Bradash
photography

recompense | Anna Bedalov
poetry

my second mind mocks me
from the shadows shown gray; i am not
who i say i am. but i will hold
your suitcase if you pull mine, you
with your cracking elbows & dreams
that slip

below, you with twelve hundred
half-broken pencils, looking for a way
to bridge the gap between here & forever,
the cousins christened hate & love pulling
closer, alone by night, hidden by day.
i am you, for as far as i can throw myself.

i can imagine myself now: i shed
my skin, blueberry irises flashing
sorry, we're closed until the record
drops out of this everlasting loop
of pits & pain, from sour to sweet.

the raspberry seed rots in my molar cap
as the brake lights behind me glow.
again, the sky bruises as a peach,
turning my cheeks freckled strawberry.
my hands are climbing the mountain range
made of my spine –

up, i shiver,
hold my bent ribs, reshape & correct
the divot above my left kidney.
my unreliable legs have pushed
me to the ground, but i cannot
hate what moves me to the stars.

spirits. | Kylynn Smith
digital art



Call Waiting | Haley Brewer

prose

“You *have* to stop calling me.”

A pause.

“Oh, don’t be ridiculous,” his mother’s breezy voice drifted from the metal retriever, uninterested in his words. “Now, as I was saying—” She jumped to continue her tangent from their last call, a lengthy list on how to care for her delicate china.

He had never even used a payphone before. He didn’t even know they still existed until this one started screaming as he passed by moments ago. After days of somewhat ignoring every phone within hearing distance blaring as he stumbled passed, he finally snapped and stalked over, and it was like she didn’t even notice he was gone, like their last conversation and this one were only broken up by a few minutes.

For the first few days of this, he had taken frantic notes as she spoke, as if her tips for cleaning the hardwood were truly anything special. He thought this was her last attempt at getting peace, like there was some holy meaning hidden in her recipe for sugar cookies. He stared at the ceiling for hours wondering if the extra splash of vanilla and coconut oil were metaphors for life or the secret to happiness or some other all-important thing she would trust him to figure out.

But then he realized it meant nothing.

All of her words, that is. It was all just distracted rambling that went on and on as she reminded him to water the plants in her study and how exactly to handle her tricky stovetop. So he

stopped taking notes and he stopped picking up the phone. Not that that stopped her from calling.

The dim lighting hanging above him reflected off the grime-covered glass and draped the entire area in a dull, sickly green color. He traced a nonsensical pattern into the dirt.

Would it kill you to call your mother once in a while, she’d said the last time he’d seen her, right before everything went wrong in that godforsaken house. She held his face in her hands, the tips of her manicured nails poking at him, and gave him a stern look even as he rolled his eyes. *You’re never too busy for your mother.*

Maybe he was going crazy. Unable to cope. Maybe he was just some regular twenty-something who completely lost his mind and was unable to do much of anything anymore.

“Please stop calling me,” he said, interrupting her, and the aching exhaustion that lined his body was clear in his voice. “You can’t do this forever. This can’t be your forever.”

Maybe he was the one who was dead. Or maybe he was in a coma and his dedicated mother was the only one who could visit day in and out, sitting by his bed and filling his ear with the cotton nothings of her routine. Which “maybe” was more terrifying? He hadn’t decided.

“Just a few more minutes,” she said, voice less pleading and more dismissive. “The dishes under the kitchen cabinet -”

“I love you,” he said, his shaking hands matched his voice as he pressed the phone tighter into his cheek. “I really do. But,” he swallowed, not

even surprised when she didn't even pause before jumping into the silence. He spoke over her words: "I have to go. I can't keep doing this. Goodbye."

"- don't forget to soak the lasagna dish or the polish will scratch -"

He slowly pulled away from the phone and gently hung it back on the retriever. Immediately, its ring ripped through the air as it rang up again. In his pocket, his phone began vibrating against his thigh. He had let it die a few days ago, and yet the unknown number flashed brightly across the screen as he pulled it out. There was a storefront only a few feet away, and even through the glass and wood built up, he could hear the shrill scream.

He leaned against the smudged glass of the booth and let his eyes flutter shut. The bulb flickering above him tinted the black of his closed eyelids a shade lighter. He took a breath and, for a single solid moment, the cold air rushing in and out of his lungs was the only thing on his mind.

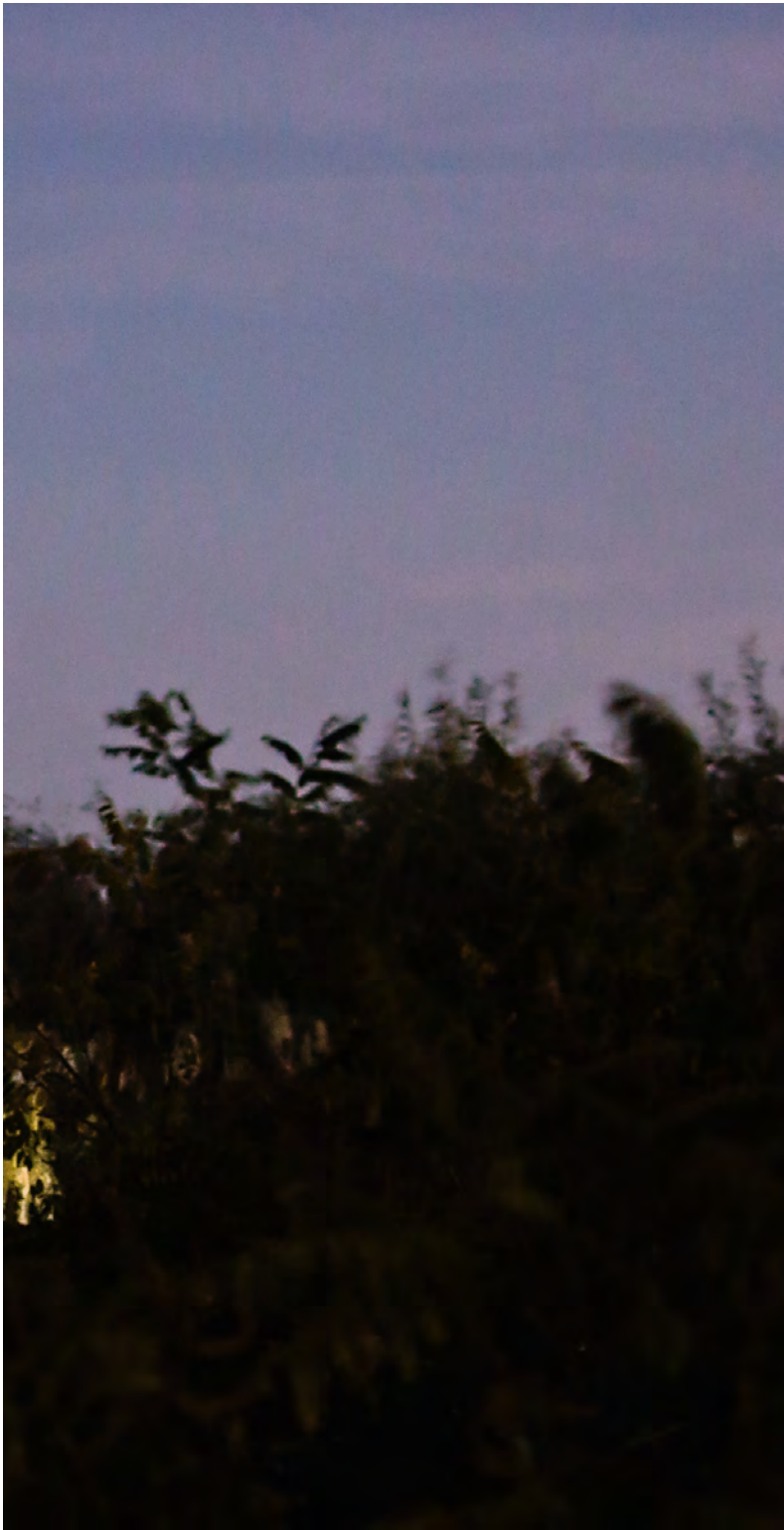
All at once, the ringing stopped cut-off and quick and the night was left alone, frozen and still. Then, within the breath, before he could even let out a sigh of knowing resignation, it began again and he opened his eyes.

He looked at his previously dead phone where her name and photo glowed on the screen, an image at some dinner she'd insisted on some time last year. He didn't even remember taking that photo, and he turned off the service on her phone two weeks ago, but none of that seemed to matter.

He stared at it for one more moment before letting his phone fall to the concrete. He walked away and the phones were still screeching behind him, a demand and a plea in one.

He could almost hear her voice in the sound, calling out to him.





Lightning in the Field
Alana Swopes
photography

Scene 2, Take 1 | Emily Neuharth

poetry

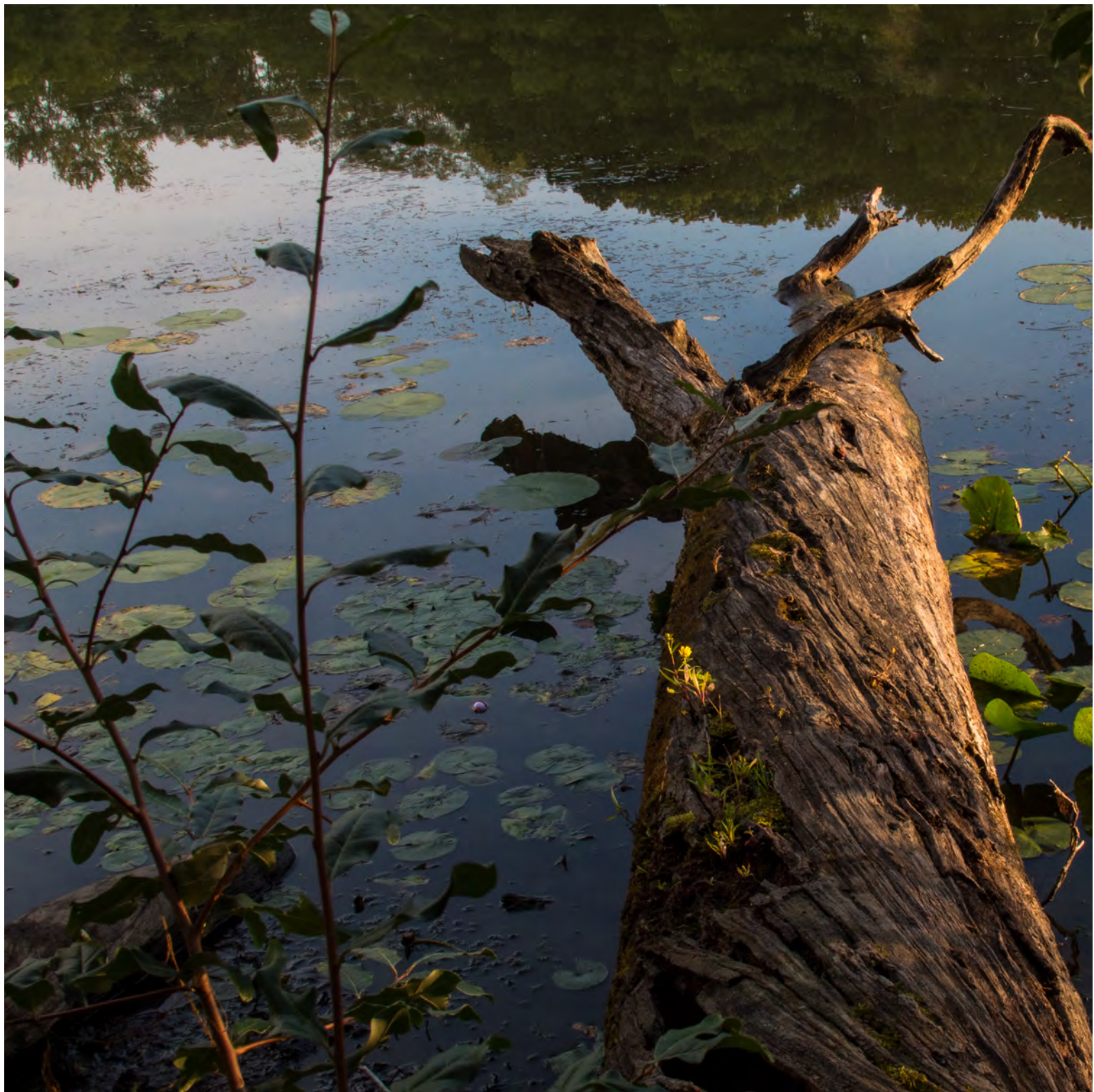
Alone, nighttime covered
us with B&W vision. Bare
feet, we left the cold cement
for puddled roads, slick grass,
wet sand; “Your Hand in Mine”
by Explosions in the Sky still
lingering from the distant car.
Descending,
 you led the way
through tall twitching reeds
like the tree-lined tunnel taken
in Scene 1, never returning
as the same people. Rapidly
we went from narrow to wide;
the dunes’ ends imperceptible
in every direction except behind.
Glowing in the rain, we looked
at the lake, at each other
for a second. Lightning snatched
for our attention & we let the storm
guide us. The atmosphere: charged.
But we only cared for sparks between
our own bodies, not that nervous one
of Midwest water. Dark canopy turned
silver in mythic affirmation the first time
you put your arm around me. Unseen
gods & stars steadily showered shoulders
with teardrop blessings (almost anointed).
Frothing waves chased each other,
content in themselves, floating farther
while we listened, while we tal—

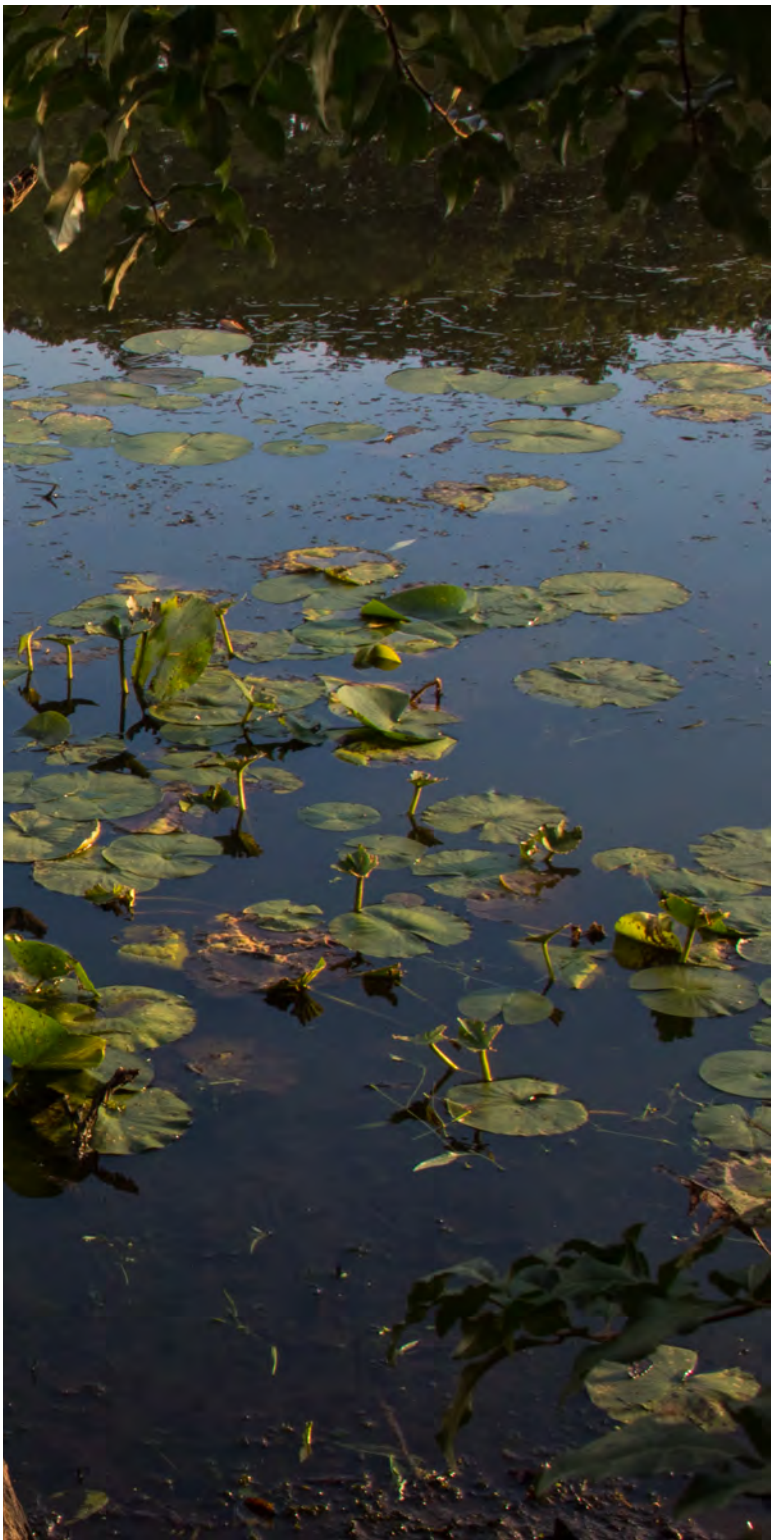
interrupted
 by
 electric
 ink
 spilt

from the heavens (almost written).
It struck us deep, wind sewing us
together. “We were the only people
in the world who saw that” 1 Take,
& then thunder sealed the magic
deep into our goose-bumped bones.



The Wall | Andréa Kütemeier
photography





Lakewood at Dawn | Matthew
Bremer
photography

Lécoulement | Valeria Lelong
art





Ghosts of the Bazaar | Kristian Josifoski

poetry

You'll find the ghosts of the bazaar
in the old town,
sipping
tea with gypsies and
yelping their guttural tongues,
the rhythmic Turkish syllables
drowning the fluid Romani
like summer waves
swallowing pearls.

You can spot them by their marble
shadows,
like the moon glow on a black lake.
Sometimes they sit by the shore
and splash passersby
and sit and laugh, untraced.

Sometimes they get rebellious and play the santur
or the oud inside the mosque right by the city center.
According to them, they might as well. They are stuck here,
and thank Allah for that, they say.

I want to do more here, an old grandma
in a hijab said,
and she slid behind
a park bench and poked a couple in the buttocks
with a plastic fork.



Seal It | Emily Kusel
photography

Contributer

Bios

Anna Bedalov is a junior creative writing major whose newly Irish blood has created home and love from thirty-six hundred miles away.

Grace Biermann is a junior English and humanities double major from all over the Midwest. When she's not reading or writing for classes she enjoys reading and writing for fun, watching old movies or *Parks and Rec*, drinking tea or apple cider, spending time with her friends and family, and telling her dog what a very good girl she is. She wants to thank everyone who has helped her get through a very rocky semester, especially Miranda, for being a perpetual source of laughter and encouragement, and Michael, for his thoughtful comments on just about everything, poetry included. Soli Deo Gloria.

Tim Bimler is a senior astronomy and education major. He is a photographer in his off time focusing on myopic landscapes.

J. Boone-Banko has a passion for poetry and a weakness for prose, but loves a good essay analyzing literature. Reading is fantastic and so are garden snails. Growing up in cornfields by the ocean, Boone-Banko developed an impressive collection of seashells but could only bring one to college.

Mihailo Bradash is a fifth year mechanical engineering major. When he isn't thinking of numbers he likes to look at the world with different perspective.

Matthew Bremer is a senior astronomy and secondary education major and President

of Phi Mu Alpha Sinfonia. Outside of being a student he enjoys being an amateur astronomer, photographer, and disc golfer.

Haley Brewer is an English major senior who sometimes writes. She prefers peppermint mochas, paperback books, the color pink, and pretty much all cats. Every time she writes she feels like it's going to be her last good idea, but she's happy to report that hasn't been the case so far. Will keep you updated on that front.

Isabel Coffey is a full-time student of creative writing and classics, a part-time barista, a fraction content and a bit unruly. She loves mugs full of black coffee or tea, armfuls of cats, closets hung with fall jackets, and working with her hands.

Maggie Dominiak is a junior creative writing and classics double major. She enjoys darker stories; Stephen King is an inspiration for her. Her hope is to become a novelist and screenwriter in the horror and fantasy genres. She adores reading, is obsessed with writing, draws when the Muse strikes, and dances when she needs to let the negative energy out. She loves being human but would prefer if she could be transformed into a dragon.

Courtney Earl is a senior double creative writing and classical civilizations major with a minor in theology. She enjoys expanding her book collection, learning languages, and spending time with her birds and dogs. She plans to continue her education and hopes to be an archaeologist someday.

Rae Erickson is a senior with an individualized major called Art and Healing with Diverse Populations.

Leah Gatchel is a sophomore creative and professional writing double major. Her biggest inspirations are living a life full of peace and river phoenix.

Lexi Gault is a junior astronomy and math double major whose hands leave marks of acrylic paint and quiet love.

Maddie Gehring is a junior English secondary education major. At any given time, you can find her buying more books than she could ever read in a lifetime at Barnes and Noble. She is currently making her way through the Agatha Christie canon.

Emily Gustin is a digital media arts major and communications minor. In her creative work, she strives to share her perspective of the world and loves making photographs during her travels to achieve this. She hopes that you enjoy this issue of *The Lighter*!

Emma Hecht is a senior creative writing and humanities major with a computer science minor. // Things she does once a day: skip breakfast, stress about graduation, forget to water her houseplant. Things she does twice a day: drop her water bottle, lose her headphones, eat Pop-Tarts. Things she does one hundred times a day: snooze her alarm, check her email, quote *The Office*.

Ethan Jones is a freshman in the physician assistant program who enjoys traveling and finds interest in art. His favorite hobby is

photography and he practices often.

Kristian Josifoski a music composition and English double major who is still trying to keep sane after all these years of balancing schoolwork and creative projects. He believes that poetry and music are one and the same, and seeks to bridge the two worlds just as the Ancient's did. He enjoys experimental music, surrealist poetry, and serenading people with Balkan instruments.

Hailey Kadolph is a sophomore studio art major. This will be the third issue of *The Lighter* that she has pieces included in, which makes her very proud. She has a passion for singing and also takes pride in being a part of the VU Chorale. She's probably gone insane and loves her equally insane friends who always find a way to make her laugh.

Hayley Kim is a senior English major who just counted and owns seven turtlenecks which tells you everything you need to know about her.

Emily Kusel is a freshman art major with an interest in sports and wildlife photography. She is a sports photographer for the yearbook. She takes her wildlife shots in La Jolla and in her backyard, in sunny San Diego.

Andréa Kütemeier is a senior digital media major. She is a thrill seeker and world traveler. Adventure is her game. Ask her to go skydiving...she'll say yes.

Brandon LaChappelle is a senior public health major whose passion for photography

Contributor Bias

has been around since middle school. His interest areas include photographing landscapes, portraits, and making videos. In his free time you will find him cheering on his favorite sports teams (the Green Bay Packers, Milwaukee Bucks, and Wisconsin Badgers) or spending time with friends and family.

Valeria Lelong is a French student at Valpo for the semester. She studies International Studies but has always been passionate about art. She draws a lot and loves taking pictures and going to museums (the Museum of Modern Art in Paris is her favorite). She has recently discovered that she loves abstract art and was surprised that it could be so therapeutic.

Demi Marshall is a senior English major with a theatre minor. She enjoys writing, reading, listening to music, and hanging out with friends. She mainly writes for online music publications but has recently gained interest in creative writing, such as poetry and playwriting.

Megan Martinez is a junior creative writing major who greatly enjoys capturing a moment in a poem.

Brendan Miller is a coffee addict from Hillsdale, MI. He likes making photos and videos, traveling, and working on his truck. He dislikes wet socks, stinkbugs, and sleeping in hot places. 325photo.com

Emily Neuharth is a senior studying creative writing and humanities. She writes to catch her mistakes and coping mechanisms in one hand, in hopes of observing how they play together. Also, she loves *The Lighter* so very much.

G. Sandmire is a sophomore nonbinary computer science major with a mathematics minor, is involved with Alliance, the on-campus group for LGBT+ people and allies, and is a supporter of equal rights for all LGBT+ people.

Cecelia Siefer is a freshman and, while is not an art major, art has surrounded her whole life. She loves dancing in her room and running in the woods. Both her parents are artists and they have inspired her from a young age. She has played violin since 2nd grade and make the best Spotify playlists.

Kayla Smith is a freshman art major. She is your local artist who spends her days basking in the sunshine from the window. She is still growing and figuring out who she is, what she likes, what she doesn't. She is a flower slowly starting to bloom.

Kylynn Smith is a sophomore studio art major, more commonly known as the vampire seen roaming around campus. Running on black coffee and living her life by the moon, she enjoys making art, poetry, and music. She also loves getting tattoos and drawing them for everyone she knows.

Anthony Staros is a communications and art major senior from Chicago. He likes to draw (obviously), to skateboard, and play and write music sometimes. Over the summer, he got into a bad skateboarding accident (he's alright now) and it has been the inspiration for some of his more recent drawings.

Rebecca Stockham is a sophjunior English lit and creative writing double major and will continue to insist that she does not write poetry despite consistently writing poetry.

Anna Styrzcza is a senior digital media

art and humanities double major and computer science minor who should be doing homework right now. She thanks her friends and family for their love and support. For more of her writing, check out her blog at sophiechoir.tumblr.com.

Alana Swopes is a music in her junior year. She likes Bill Callahan, Alexander McQueen, and The Sims. When she's not practicing, she's either watching *Law and Order* or cooking videos on youtube. Everything around her inspires, but sometimes she's too lazy to express it.

Alyssa Trinko is a senior history major with minors in French and visual narrative studies. She will spend her final semester studying abroad in Paris, France beginning in January. This past summer, Alyssa was a Creative Placemaking Fellow at the Harrison Center in Indianapolis, where she had her first art show. She is passionate about photography and social justice, and she looks forward to pursuing these interests after graduation.

Madison Wilson is a junior art major and psychology minor. She likes abstract art with a focus in line, paleoart, and landscapes.

Mark Young looks for unique ways to capture portraits of earth, people, and all things in order to tell stories that hopefully change the way you look at the world. For more photos, please visit markyoungphoto.com

Acknowledgements

“The Sisters” came to be from the work and determination of many. From our selection committee members to the E-Board to a variety of peers who were willing to give advice, assistance, or maybe just a well-needed open ear for ranting: we wouldn’t have been able to do it without all of you. We are so incredibly grateful for all your help!

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Our copyediting queens Emma Hecht, Hayley Kim, Leanna Sanchez, Kate Mathews, and Emily Neuharth, who helped make this issue what it is.

And lastly, you! Thank you for picking up this semester’s issue of *The Lighter*. We hope you enjoy it as much as we enjoyed making it. Heart emojis to you all.

The Lighter





