

# The Lighter

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Volume 64

Issue 2 *The Lighter Spring 2018*

Article 1

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## The Lighter Spring 2018

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A person in a dark t-shirt is seen from the back, looking towards a glowing blue energy stream that flows across the top of the frame. The scene is set in a dark, industrial or cave-like environment with a starry night sky visible through an opening. A white SUV is parked in the background. The overall mood is mysterious and futuristic.

THE  
LIGHTER



# The Lighter

*Via Incensa*

Issue 62  
Volume 2

## Editor's Note for *The Lighter*

Spring 2018

If you're willing to dive  
this deep: this book breathes.  
Feel the reoccurring doubt  
accompanied by religion—  
as it should be— floating  
over pleas for awareness.  
Our universal ceiling  
has descended into the pages  
to mingle with glitter, death,  
potatoes, and coffee. Loneliness  
and creativity creep out of homes  
to whisper a vulnerable "come closer"  
to nature, to magic, to us, to the elderly  
flowers taking a final bow. Please  
follow the crowns of heads  
pointing to the hopeful  
seeds sleeping in the spine  
of *The Lighter*.

Yours in peace and literary love,

A handwritten signature in white ink, reading "Emily E. Hartman". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a prominent initial "E".

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

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My scars make him feel uneasy.  
They scream out to him at night,  
reminding him I've been damaged  
by myself:  
crazed woman.

To him, the birthmark stretched  
across my ribcage is a flaw  
that cannot be erased

and the stretchmarks  
that cascade around my backside  
are unworthy of admiration.

I tell him to fuck off  
with a smile,  
the freckles on my cheeks  
migrating up my bones.

I strip down in my room, alone,  
and let my hips swing to the pulse of music.

I am well

with the secrets  
my body tells.

Megan McDaniel



Nicole Jones

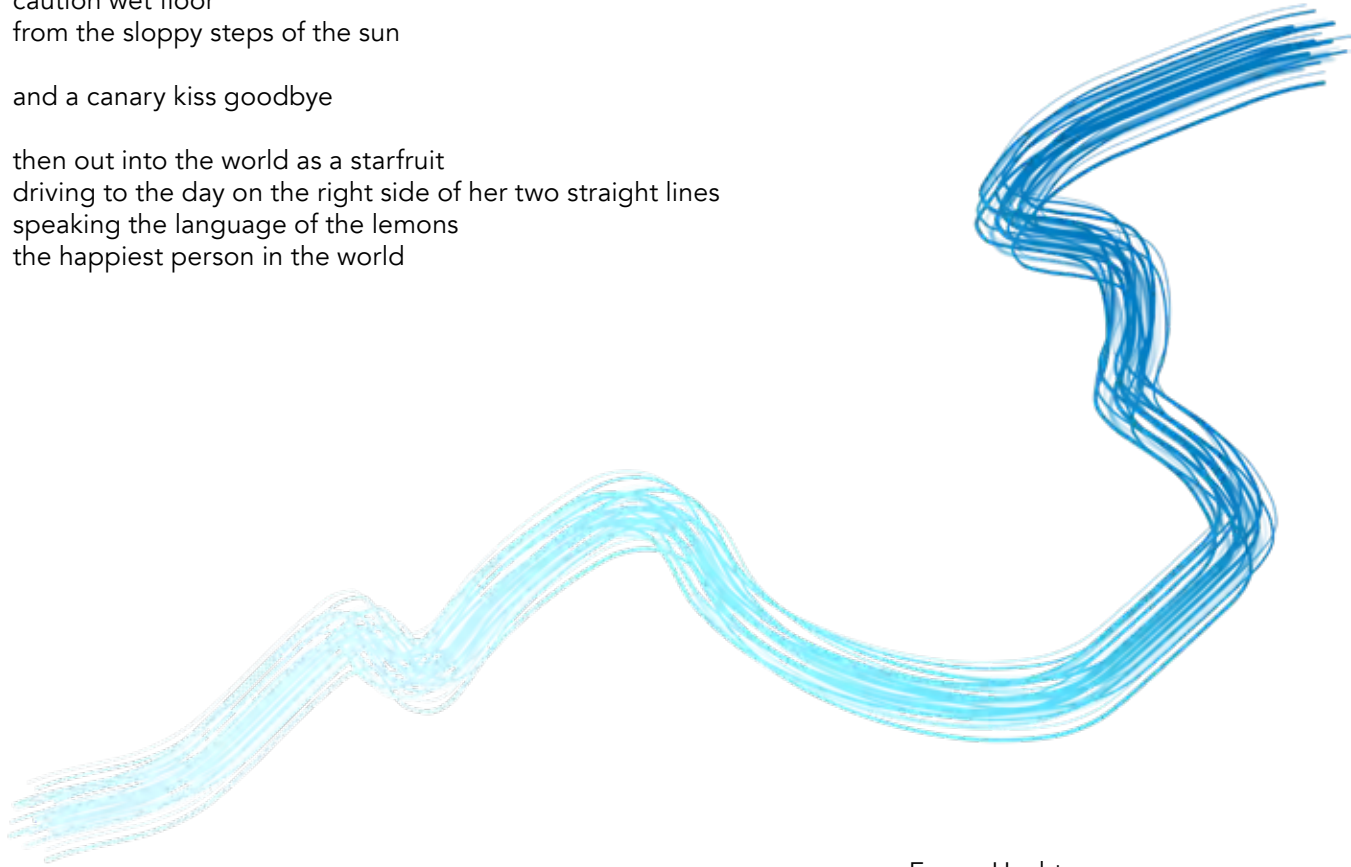
a town with only a blinking light  
at home in a house of daffodils  
sentimental snapshots on citrine walls  
the morning egged on by the earth's amber axis

so now

rubber ducks on a river of bubble bath  
caution wet floor  
from the sloppy steps of the sun

and a canary kiss goodbye

then out into the world as a starfruit  
driving to the day on the right side of her two straight lines  
speaking the language of the lemons  
the happiest person in the world



Emma Hecht



Monique Le Donne

Arthur still goes and starts Emily's car.

She had asked him before she went off to school, right before she got on the bus with all her bags of matching luggage, off-thought and quick, like it was something she'd completely forgotten about. And he promised, of course. Anything for *his Emily*. Like she wasn't something we shared, created together. But that's not for right now.

The fact is, Arthur still goes out there.

I clean, I speak, I smile, I put one foot in front of the other and I walk. I buy flowers and heat up dinner and sit alone in the parlor while I eat it. I do all this, and I continue on.

And he starts the car.

I stand at the window, clenching at a damp rag, and watch as he sits in there, in her 83' Chrysler, for a complete five minutes - the recommended warm up time - before pulling out the driveway and circling the neighborhood once, twice, and returning on the third.

Everyday, like clockwork.

He comes back, smelling like her perfume and cigarettes. I catch a desperate gulp of it. I pretend like I am busy at work, rubbing invisible spots out of the furniture.

He hangs her keys on the hook, sparkly keychains clicking together with the motion, and takes a moment, as he always does, to stare out the window.

I keep my head lowered to couch leather, my gaze sliding up to him. He's gone gray at the temples in the past few months. I wonder when that began to happen.

My gaze flickers away, back down to the

couch. I scrub away.

"We'll have to sell it soon," I say.

He is so still, looking out the window.

"Amber's looking for something cheap for her son." Amber is our neighbor who won't stop sending over casseroles with too much onion. She thinks she's helping, but I'm tired of all the fridge space disappearing when she shows up with pitiful watery eyes and a too-large glass dish. "Or we can sell it to the junkyard."

He says nothing.

The lemon *Pledge* on the rag has stolen the faint flower perfume from the air and it burns at my nose. If I got close enough to him, I know I would still be able to smell that dirty smoke and the Kohls perfume my brother got her for Christmas. He usually smells like her for some time after he goes out there.

He turns then, not meeting my eyes, never meeting my eyes. Not anymore, at least. He hasn't said a thing.

We were in love once, I remember. He used to make me laugh, and buy bagels on Sunday mornings. Emily always got sesame seed.

Everything seems like so long ago.

He walks away then, taking her scent with him, and I am still holding onto that lemon *Pledge* rag.



Brendan Miller





Andréa Kütemeier

Nothing is emptier than your home.  
Counter tops cluttered with knick-knacks,  
and prayer cards scattered among the grain  
of the table. Walls wedged with framed  
acrylics— your initials hidden in corners.

Birthday wishes and aged turkey  
hands hold as dead moths beating  
against the fridge, marked by ancient adhesive.  
Vacuum lines remain crop-like in woven braids,  
only disrupted by one set of mislaid steps.

Grandchildren's posed teeth span the baby  
grand with a softened layer of undisturbed dust  
stuck on the reflective surface. And from below,  
the broken speaker muffles vintage tunes as he sits  
in solemn. His harsh breaths choke on aged air.

Arthritic hands—*aged veins*—hold a plastic fork,  
rewashed; ring no longer clung to the left. Stagnant  
scent of sealed glass and bared doors remain  
as a shallow grave; whistling promises not kept.  
Relatives come— unnerved by the aura of your museum.

Though an apparition, we see you at the sink, cutting  
coupons and scoffing at the mess Fred left. The stillness  
catches your voice— your laugh, so rhythmic and bask.  
We walk among your trinkets, mindful not to touch.  
To smudge an existence, a life, the mausoleum you left behind.

Michelle Stiegart

She used an old mint tin when she packed the tea,  
 a smooth-faced silver circle promising  
 wintry fresh breath in raised letters, half-worn  
 away. You weighed it in your palm when you first  
 found it in the mail, light little thing that it was,  
 then set it on the shelf somewhere  
 between the glass noodles and the honey jar.  
 Two weeks and a day later you set the water to boiling  
 in the early hours of the day,  
 and cracked open the tin.

You have been far and away from home. But here,  
 drowsy-eyed and swaying, elbow leant up  
 against the sink, the scent suffuses,  
 music from another room, some familiar refrain  
 sustained through walls, through miles and years.  
 Earthy green and toasted rice and roasting smoke  
 tug at your sleeve, warm and worn, beloved and dear.  
 Now do you remember? How she tucked  
 your shivering toes under her knee, pressing  
 the warmed mug between your clasped hands,  
 head bowed near yours as she gave you  
 the old stories, breaking them off piece  
 by piece, a shared sweet between the two of you:

Like the story she shared of the bear  
 who traded away a hundred days of sunlight  
 for the right to walk upright, human and lithe;  
 of the night-eyed warriors who shot down  
 echoes of the moon and sun, shattering them  
 into a thousand sheening stars; of the rooster  
 who first sang the gods to waking in the early hours  
 of the world. You drank them down  
 the way you downed the warmth of the fire  
 where the tea leaves dried, feathering out  
 over the insides of your tender, hollow ribs  
 an age and another ago.

You have been far and away from home. But today,  
 the deckled glow of morning peeks over the rooftops  
 and you partake. Tea is tea is water set to fire  
 and the green, warm and full and flush with some  
 quiet-eyed reminder of every single-handed way  
 we make our own sunlight.

Eleanor Chae



Sarah Zakowski

coffee stains are common:  
the bitter liquid lingers,  
reminding you of what was yours,  
the taste you once had claim to.  
the plastic lid has rings of muddy caramel  
left behind by careless drips.  
your tongue covets for more  
to fight the clinging acidity, finding  
no respite with the roof of your mouth.

i don't pretend to know french,  
but i know that  
sillage is a french word  
literally translated as 'wake,'  
but figuratively meaning  
when a scent clings to the air  
after someone has left.  
you are left  
to deal with the wake of the missing.

fog is clustered around cars  
and gripping the brick walls.  
the grayness is eerie, quiet,  
still.  
it is sillaging the ground  
with its stuffy-sweet odor.

it is the coffee stain  
holding on to your  
white shirt  
the day you used too much milk.

Anna Bedalov



Brendan Miller





Grace Erickson

Home is the crumbling house on the hill  
with the wind whistling through windows.  
It feels like the hills meandering and pages rustling.

In the winter the cold rolls  
in and settles in the low places,  
like water in the bottom of a bowl.

In the summer the heat pounces,  
lands in a crouch and stays.  
It winds around my ankles, a purring cat,  
so I lay on the slope, let it curl up on my stomach  
and don't move.

In the spring we can't mow the bottom of the yard.  
The marsh claims our land as its own  
because the tiny river flowing west  
is no match for the rains.

And in the fall the leaves drip like rain.  
The ash trees are always the first  
to strip themselves bare.  
But lately it's hard to tell;  
they're almost dead anyway.

The stars remain unfamiliar,  
guarded as they are by mosquitoes and anonymity.  
I hear the voices of the wanderers, though,  
and their footsteps as they pass.

Julia Evans

The god of this household is named Susan, and she has been here since the beginning.

She is here, right now, constantly-always-forever right over my shoulder. Sometimes, I think I can catch sight of her if I spin around fast enough—quick, rough flashes of her silver, wispy hair, a collection of jutting bones warmed by blanketed skin. Her name is Susan, and this is her house.

I think she likes me, or at the very least likes my weekly dues of blood vials and fresh bones cushioned inside the microwave. I read somewhere that things like these need an altar, but I didn't have one when I moved in so we had to make due with the inside of my microwave. This arrangement seems to satisfy Susan just fine, but I'm starting to miss two minute popcorn.

I wrinkle my nose in the direction of the altar. The ram's head inside is taking up too much room, and it's bloated tongue hangs from its mouth and almost touches the counter. Using a plastic fork, I try and push it back down its throat without much success. After a few minutes of this, I give up.

Glancing around, I take account of the small household I've learned to share. There is a chess board on the kitchen table that was there when I moved in. I never bothered to move it from there, mostly because I had nothing to replace it with. But I like how cultured it makes me look, and it would also make an excellent conversation piece if I ever had anyone over.

We'll play on occasion. She'll never move the pieces in front of me, so after every turn I have to leave the room and come back a few minutes later. Sometimes if I zone out hard enough, when I blink myself back a few of the pieces will be rearranged and a knight or two will be lined up on

the other side of the board. I always have to check the board afterwards because I know Susan likes to cheat, even though she gets offended when I point that out.

Next to the board, I notice she's left dust and crumbles of dried bone on the coffee table, right next to a teacup saucer. I've never had a household before, and I've never had a god. I wonder if they're all this messy, or if Susan is just trying to annoy me. It works.

I wipe up the bits with a wet paper towel, and I noticed they've already started to congeal and melt into the delicate wood of the table. It was only some cheap thing from IKEA, but it was the first thing I bought when I moved in. If she's trying to annoy me, a god's attempt is never futile I guess.

I flip off the air and, almost immediately, start coughing violently into my palm, hard scraping against my throat until I force out what was caught. I peer down into my cupped hand, weighed down in spit. The usual.

Three molars and a front. Someone will be missing these.

I dump them into the jar and wipe the inside of my hand on my jeans. It's almost full, barely an inch left in the clear glass and I wonder vaguely if I'll get a prize once it's filled. A smile, maybe.

This is Susan's way of telling me to be kinder to her, although this is the worst thing she's done yet. I wonder if it's the most powerful thing she can do, but I don't want to test her.

I dust off the altar and blot at the spoiled blood with paper towels. It never goes dry— not on an altar— but it does start to brown and stink after a while. Susan likes it fresh, or at least from the source within the past few days. She can always tell when I

try and skimp out on it.

I dip my finger in the blood and, as I feel compelled to, touch it to my tongue. I press it to the roof of my mouth like hard candy, and suck. It tastes like movie theater popcorn.



*DEFINITIVE PROOF OF CREATURES IN SPACE*

They scowled and shook their heads.  
Preacher proclaims, "No,  
we don't have don't want aliens here."  
He mustn't have seen the news today.  
Aliens are among us!

David Bowie, now  
back on his home planet,  
descended to Earth in an orange halo.  
Waves of phase haze,  
his deep-voice croon,  
captivated—*corrupted*—over the radio.

A Martian here  
does tend to foster fear,  
and sure, Ziggy Stardust scared some,  
but instead of domination  
he brought seduction. Countless youths  
fell to his powers  
of fashion and passion and face paint.

When Bowie sang of outer space,  
teens screamed and danced and littered  
glitter. When Bowie wore first  
dress, then suit, this planet pulsed  
with newfound freedom.  
When Bowie asked, "Is there life on Mars?"  
the answer was undeniably,  
"Yes."

Hayley Kim



Andréa Kütemeier



I know that the stars are there.

I know they will glow for millions, if not billions, of years after they die. They will spread light and color throughout their galaxies and our shared universe for eons. Their deaths will eject gas to help the next stars grow, with different chemical makeups that might benefit future creatures.

I know they guided our ancestors. We are looking at nearly the same sky that they did. Polaris led slaves to freedom in the northern United States. Constellations shaped science and mythology in Ancient Greece. They might be in a different alignment now than thousands of years ago, but the sky is largely the same. The past is still with us.

I know our star will burn for five billion more years, and will live to see many more triumphs and failures of humanity. Innumerable civilizations will fall and be reborn again before our star's core dies. We will ultimately be unable to stop it from expanding when its hydrogen supply is depleted at the end of its life.

Yet for all their power, all their bright shining splendor and magnificence, I still can't see the stars on a cloudy night. Their glowing is stopped by a layer of condensed water. Their greatness is reduced to nothingness behind a hazy veil.

I still know that the stars are there.

Do they know that I'm here?



Mark Young



Nathan Biancardi



Nathan Biancardi

EVIDENCE REPORT

Date: 27 Apr. 1993 Secured by: Officer Evans

Case #: 788743 Item #: 012

Condition: Good Sealed by: Captain Jones

Evidence Description:

Personal letter from suspect Jacqueline Waters to a James Dedecore detailing the involvement of J. Dedecore in the Banking Universal Heist case. J. Dedecore is allegedly the third party involved, meant to be driving the car for the other two parties (Waters, location unknown, and R. Dedecore, deceased). J. Dedecore is on record for previously denying any knowledge of the event or the role of R. Dedecore.

Suspect(s): James Dedecore

Victim(s): clients of Banking Universal Co.

Location: 43 Amber Way, New Orleans, LA 70124 (Residence of Dedecore)

Time of collection: 10:13 AM

James—

*I'm sorry that I killed your brother. I'd like to start by getting that out there. It was never meant to happen, even as it was happening. I'm not used to working with other people while on the job, so when I felt his hand on my shoulder I reacted. Everything else was already going to shit, they knew what was happening before we even had the chance to get into the back, so of course I thought it was someone who was trying to bring us in. The security was alerted while we were still walking and the police were called before we even reached the front desk.*

*But you know all this. After all, wasn't it your own damn fault that the security got wary? You really thought it was a smart idea to drive by the front doors not twice, but three times within five minutes? You were supposed to be better than that.*

*You saw what happened next, being idiotic enough to park so that, presumably, you could check in on your little brother. Well, I wanted to leave as soon as we noticed everyone was on edge; but your brother insisted that everything was fine. By the time he wanted to leave as well, we were stuck and bags were being searched, including my large spacious bag that only contained the wiring to make it look full.*

*Cue the chaos.*

*Somewhere in the melee, I decided to get myself out. I'm loyal, but only to an extent. I had already seen your brother surrounded by police, so of course I didn't even consider that it could be him. I felt the hand and spun, striking strong and true with that beautiful dagger you carved for me last summer. It was an accident, though. I never meant to harm him, let alone kill him.*

*Go try to find the security tapes if you don't believe me. I'd be curious to see whose face looked the most shocked, his or mine.*

*Even not knowing that it was an accident— after every job that we have worked together— I never thought you'd have the indecency to give my name and photo to the police.*

*I don't like making mistakes. I don't like sloppy jobs. I don't like it when things go wrong. And I really don't like it when someone snitches.*

*You let your sentimentality stain every surface and crevice of this job, even now, and clearly*



*the death of your brother was not enough for you to learn to keep it under control.*

*I've never been caught before, and I don't intend to let that happen now. But the only reason why you've never been caught was because of me. And after this, I'm not going to just tuck tail and never look back. Believe me, I'm skilled enough to affect the actions done in the light of day while still hiding in the shadows.*

*You played your cards wrong, and I'm going to make sure you lose the game because of it.*

*Sorry for your loss,  
Jackie*

*P.S. By the way, do you still go for a run every day at 10? I think that may be the only time I can drop this off. I do hope you find this before the police do.*





Mark Young



Eric Ream





Christopher Connor

# Artivism Judges

**Ellen Adria Orner** is a nonfiction writer and poet. She works as director of communications for the School of Art at the University of Tennessee.

Her jobs deals with almost anything having to do with words, from event planning and website maintenance to print publication and social media.

While at Valpo, she spent part of her time, "... practicing strange dialects, including but not limited to Scottish Freedom, Norwegian Pickled Herring and Stupid Boy" (*The Lighter* Spring 2010).

Ellen is happy with her current career but would also be open to getting her Masters of Fine Arts in Creative Nonfiction. Back at Valpo though, she, "... aspire[d] to being homeless on the Boston subway but only for long enough to write a book about it" (Fall 2008). She also had "a theory that people's big toes often resemble their faces" (Fall 2009).

She also serves as staff director for the Sundress Academy of the Arts, and was the 2016 nonfiction editor for *Grist: A Journal of the Literary Arts*. She is a 2011 Valpo alumna and a native of Gary, Indiana.

Ellen has been published in *The Lighter* every semester from Fall 2007 to Spring 2011.



**John Linstrom's** poetry and nonfiction have recently appeared or are forthcoming in *Commonweal Magazine*, *Valparaiso Poetry Review*, *Dunes Review*, *Narrative Northeast*, *Broad River Review*, and *Prairie Gold: An Anthology of the American Heartland*. In 2015, Counterpoint Press published his centennial edition of Liberty Hyde Bailey's ecological manifesto, *The Holy Earth*, featuring a new foreword by Wendell Berry. (More information available at [www.johnlinstrom.com](http://www.johnlinstrom.com))

John also, "enjoys pesto, lying on his back with his hair in the dirt, feet, and the Oxford comma, which he implements relentlessly" (*The Lighter* Fall 2008). Currently, he is a doctoral candidate in English and American Literature at New York University, and holds an MFA in Creative Writing and Environment from Iowa State University. He is also a 2010 Valpo alumni, where he was Assistant Editor of *The Cresset*, and a *Lighter* selection committee member and contributor, serving as the Editor for Fall 2009-Spring 2010.

While attending Valpo, he also described himself as, "A regular simulacrum doggedly determined to rip himself up and taste the dirt" (Fall 2009).

# Artivism Interview

interviewed by Emily Neuharth and Sarah Law

## **This is your first year with the Artivism Contest. What do you think this contributes to the community?**

**E:** I think a lot of people are thinking about ways that they can make things better right now but might feel a little strange about actually putting their voices out there. So, to see a special space in *The Lighter* just for that must be really encouraging and would motivate people to make their voices heard more often.

**J:** In this political climate with so much divisive rhetoric on every side of every issue, it seems like the artists have a special ability to complicate and to bring people in and to make it appear more human, which means more multi-layered, and multi-faceted. So I think it has the potential to grow communities in general. This kind of artistic engagement with political events and happenings, whether or not you might agree with the positions forwarded by a specific artist, it creates space for dialogue wherever it happens. So hopefully it adds something like that to the community by providing a platform for artists and by broadcasting that out to the students.

## **How is Artivism shown in our own life?**

**E:** I work at the University of Tennessee' School of Art, so I'm surrounded by student artists and faculty and I see a lot of different approaches to the act of activism in art... there's definitely always some sort of messaging going on, whether intentionally or not. But then other artists are using their platforms, as people who make really visually arresting things, to call attention to issues that they feel are unjust or are just using their voice to get other people on board... And you know sometimes it's performance art, sometimes it's things that

really make you feel vulnerable, or make the artist really have to put themselves out there in a really personal way.

**J:** I think an image that's been produced over time is the isolated writer, working like in a little garret somewhere producing masterpieces without the influence of society or a community like that. I don't know quite where that comes from but I don't think it's real. I think of a writer like Walt Whitman who made it his project to channel the energies of communities and societies and, in his case, a nation of people... So I want my writing to be a meaningful part of my life. Otherwise I don't think it's sustainable. I don't think my life is meaningful unless I'm engaging with other people.

## **What is the most important thing you think people should know about Artivism?**

**E:** I suppose there's a lot of things you can define it or experience it as, or people can define it in various ways... But I guess, just the term existing means that there must be art that is perceived, whether in writing or in visual art or any other kind of genre, as not activist. So I guess it means 'art that's willing to claim it or looking to be categorized in that way [activism] to some extent.'

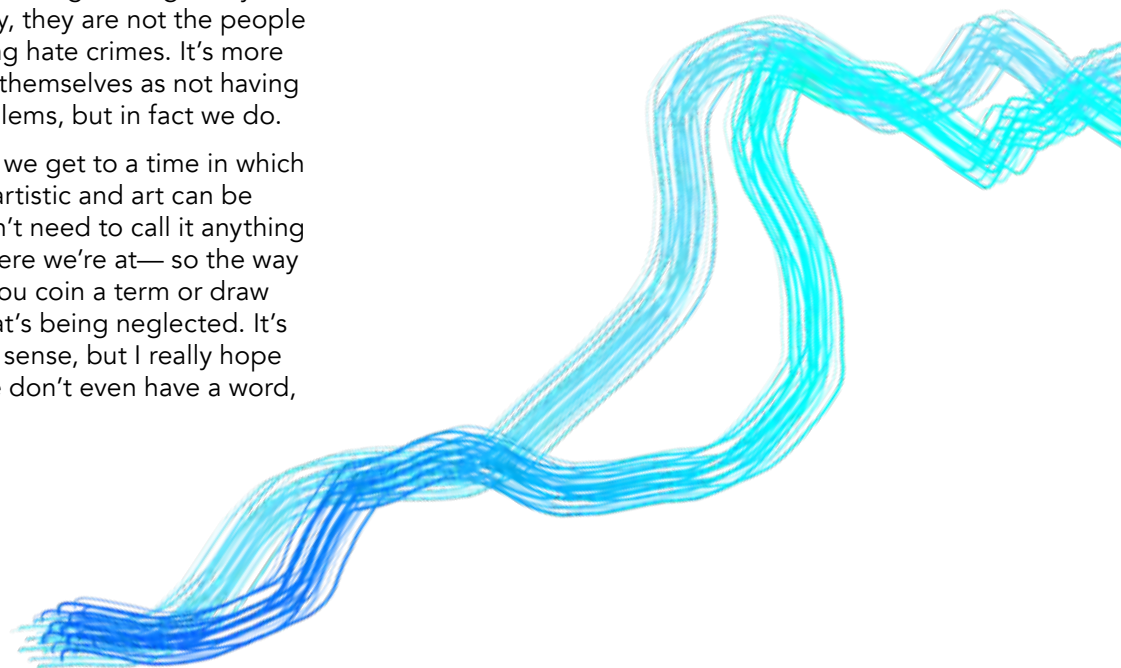
**J:** I'm not sure what the most important thing would be, but from the standpoint of a reader which we all are, I think one of the most important things to keep in mind is artivism is art and it's perfectly within it— just because a piece is responding to current events doesn't mean that it somehow is less worthy or, you know, less emotional or something... [As a writer,] you

should really have a sense of what and how you want to communicate to whoever might pick up your piece. I think it might be easy to fall into a type of trap when you're writing in ways that engage with the political, falling into the rhetoric of one side or another, and there's a difference between falling into that rhetoric in an unproductive or even, like, destructive way versus engaging it intentionally which can be really powerful.

**Where do you see the role of Activism going in the future?**

**E:** I think that's hard for me because I feel like it's really really old— even before that name was applied to it. I think the earliest activism that comes to mind is satire, like using comic figure to poke fun at political figures or to make scenes of war or of atrocities that are grotesque, to like put in front of peoples' faces the sort of the nastiness of the world that they're a part of. [For] the bystanders that aren't really innocent, maybe the same thing is still true. The people that are reading *The Lighter*, you never know, but most likely, they are not the people that are actively committing hate crimes. It's more likely people who think of themselves as not having to worry about those problems, but in fact we do.

**J:** I hope that in the future we get to a time in which the political can be more artistic and art can be more political and you don't need to call it anything special. [But] that's not where we're at— so the way language like this works, you coin a term or draw attention to something that's being neglected. It's a really great effort in that sense, but I really hope we get to a time where we don't even have a word, it's just art.



when we first met, i'd no clue what to say—  
your beauty took away those kinds of things—  
but as weeks passed with each slow day-to-day  
the moments had me tied to you with strings.  
these ties came in most any shape and size,  
from songs to humor, i could not resist  
the gravity expelling from your eyes,  
your bright and bold i could not stand to miss.  
i felt myself fall in, and yet i could  
not stop or slow against this force unknown.  
until we're one i'll wish and knock on wood;  
it's clear you are the marrow in my bone.  
if, then, the moon you are and always be,  
your might pulls me to follow as the sea.

a beacon shining through my darkest skies,  
you lead me back to where i feel at home;  
from depths of night you pull my soul to rise —  
we are attached no matter how i roam.  
your kiss, your touch, your calm for which i yearn  
(a word until just now to me unknown)  
and, gone tonight, i know you will return —  
it's not possession but you're still my own.  
although apart through endless dreams we sleep,  
my peace of mind is brought by you, i know  
you're safety shining, anchored through the deep —  
connection close that isn't meant for show.  
and even though you're missing and i whine,  
i rest assured because i know you're mine.

Anna Bedalov



Monique Le Donne

Glitter, the beach, magic, faeries, crystal balls across the room, 3 a.m., sand in your sheets. Smoke, sparkling juice, sun tea, stacks of unopened mail, clocks that don't work. Skateboarding, paint, painting paintings, a full stack of pancakes in a diner long after breakfast. Barefoot, running up the sidewalk, crashing waves, bonfire on the beach. Reading the stars, reading the newspaper, CD cases with the wrong CD inside, records, mixtapes, sunglasses at night. Un-brushed hair falling to your waist and big t-shirts that you borrowed but never returned. Being watched by the moon. Spinning, dancing, twirling, smiling under multicolored lights. Last night, first night, any night.

Waking up in the morning and coffee and still glitter. Seeing the mess, leaving the mess, waiting for the night again. Setting out honey for the faeries and fruit staining the fingertips. Candles, flowers, vintage perfume. Cloying scents almost overwhelming but then lulling you to sleep in a way close to comforting. Flowers woven into your braids and shells along the windowsill. Drunk in the middle of the road when it's too late or too early for cars to be out. An out of tune piano, AM radio, wind chimes on the porch, the faint noise of a garage band from far down the street. Lollipops, laying on the floor or grass or sand or street and staring at the ceiling or sky for what might be hours. Silken robes and lipstick and glitter. Time passes both slowly and quickly, and your feet grow vines and sink into the floor.

Hayley Kim



Hayley Kim



you said you were grieving  
at the idea of going to heaven  
without me.

how sad you'll be when  
Death takes you away and heaven  
cannot be found.

Lexi Gault



Claire Utzinger

*From noon to three, the whole earth was dark. Around midafternoon Jesus groaned out of the depths, crying loudly, "Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani?" —Matthew 27:45-46*

*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*

He grabbed me hard  
And still you did  
nothing I cry out

*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*

My body and my head  
ache but still  
you are not near

*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani*

A bottle smashes  
hard and sharp my God  
where are you

*Eloi, Eloi, lama sabachthani:*

My God,  
My God,  
Why have you forsaken me?



Jesse Hershberger

There is a curve to her body and spine that wraps around your mind like pastry paper and bakes in the image of her softness, of seductery and twisting legs that go and go and go, and a half-turned smile over her shoulder— the kind she levels you with when she’s being particularly inviting— impresses the image of a slinking seductress disappearing in folds of green and mountains of blue and yellow. Disappearing into sharp peaks of orange and howling wind calls of white and yellow that slices into the sky, striking it without abandon, hoping to devour the earth and sky and sun.

You lose her for just a second, an instant in the length of space and time, and there is a howling storm of color and movement where there once was a woman. But you can still see her, if you try. Not in the slinking legs of a seductress with a wrapping curve in her body, no, now you see her *storm*. Now, she is the sharp curve of green, splitting the sky and her eyes are the blue tipped mountains with golden undertones. What once was the slink of her legs is the curve of the wind, wrapping around the trees and shearing the sky. She is the burning red at the bottom of your world, set on fire with passion and curving yellows. She has become the earth and the sky and the sun and the *storm*.

Mirica Yancey



Mark Young

It was her job, and her job alone. Every day she would hop down the three giant steps of the giant yellow bus and head straight for the mailbox. Sometimes the journey was tough, trying to trudge through snow as high as her knobby little knees. Other times, though, it was pleasant. She would jump over the parallel sidewalk cracks to protect her mom, and she would stretch her arms out from her sides like the flightless bird she was. Penguins were her favorite animal, and she told every other third grader she knew that she was going to steal one from the zoo when they visited at the end of the school year. She would name him Nelson, and she would do everything she could to convince mom to keep him. But she knew that wouldn't be hard—mom liked penguins too.

Their mailbox was a rusty piece of black metal, with smudged out initials that might've once read "T.L.," or maybe that wasn't even a T. Her eyes barely reached the bottom of the box, so she couldn't quite see what was up there. But her fingertips reached the handle on the mailbox door, which was all she needed to complete the special job mom had given her five months ago. Every day she would pull that handle down, grab the sharp edges of unwanted envelopes and uninteresting magazines, and she'd excitedly jog up the paved walkway that led to their bright red door. This was the same door that protected the secrets that kids don't get to know until they're older, and sure enough mom would be waiting behind it, tears ready to burst.

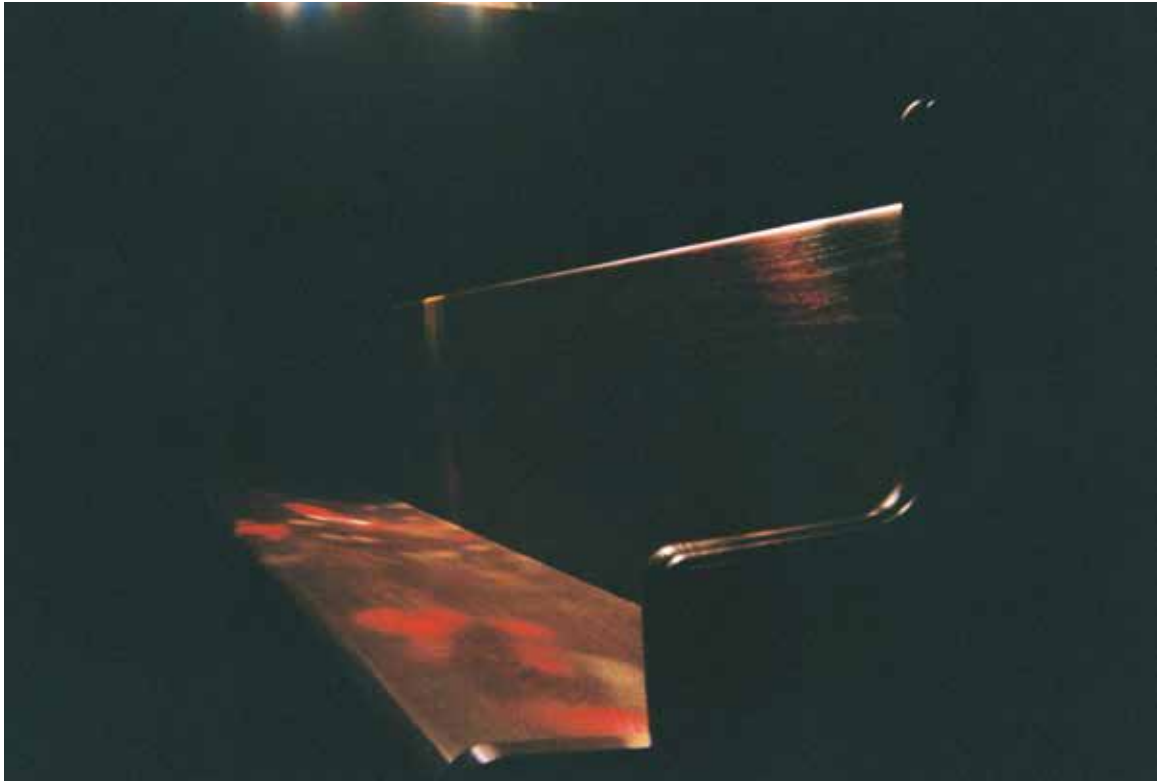
She would hand mom the empty stack, and after a few seconds of anticipation, mom would pull her into a hug and shower her with sadness. T.L. was somewhere overseas and hadn't written home in half a year.

But that was a secret she wouldn't know until she was older, so she just hugged back and thought of Nelson and how happy mom was going to be when she finally brought him home.

To whom it may concern—

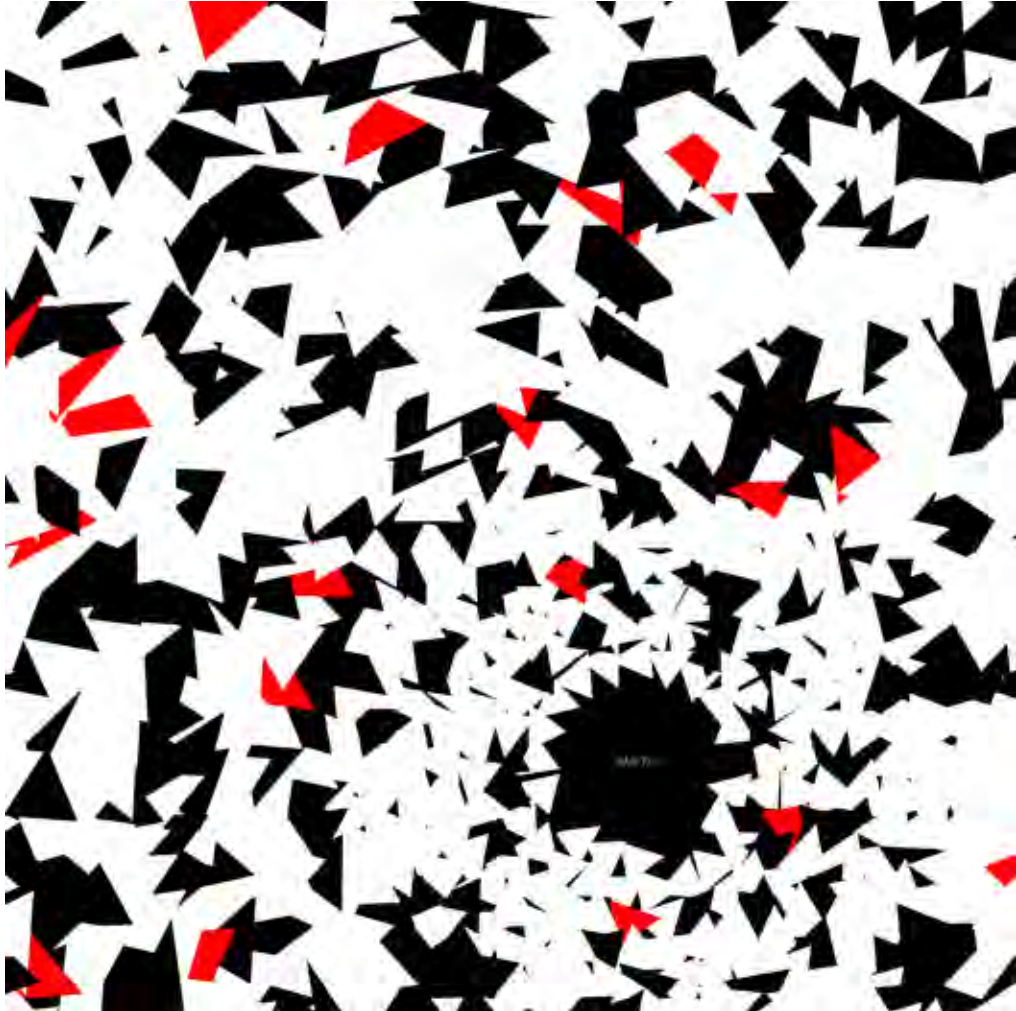
Let me stretch my time:  
a spinner luring an endless  
thread from a cotton cluster;  
Yes, let me stretch my time, lest  
it be too small, too sudden,  
too easily misplaced, or broken;  
And let me also be the cotton  
thread— refined and ready  
on the spool, to be taken  
into your hand, great weaver.  
Let me be the weaver,  
creator of image and texture,  
pulling this world's best ideas  
and colors into one space. Let  
me be at peace, at long last,  
the tapestry on the wall, hanging  
for centuries, beheld by passers-  
by who need to feast their eyes.  
Let me become dusty and gray  
and disintegrate, lost to the spinning  
hand of time. Let me lay alone  
and forget these words and forget  
myself and blow away forever.

Isabel Coffey



Emily Mrzlak





Nathaniel Bouman



Monique Le Donne

In the movie *The Holiday*,  
Jude Law says:  
"One does not have sex  
with women who are unconscious."  
Then Cameron Diaz laughs,  
embarrassed. And he's right,  
because that's not sex.  
When you did that,  
they should have called it  
rape. When you did that,  
I should have called it  
rape. When you did that,  
they pulled you off  
the limp body underneath you,  
with panties yanked halfway down.

When you did that,  
they just yelled:  
"What are you doing?"  
The answer should have been  
rape.

Megan Gilliam



Milka Vidova

Beth drowned the dog after he said they couldn't keep her,  
and it's sad, what the region does to women.

The prettiest stretch of land, emerald blanket or sugar sand,  
feels whatever the cooling towers plant; it's the same  
with that man.

As she waded into Lake Michigan, her cuffed jeans  
dark with freshwater, she felt his gaze hard  
on her back.

Of course, he drives a forest green Jeep,  
what else for our Levi's, L.L. Bean babe on the  
front porch in his worn flannel, cup of coffee  
in his hand.

Everything is a little lost, somehow never enough  
blood to keep the day-to-day soft and alive,  
worthwhile of the time put into it— and of course, she can  
put in all the time she likes,

but withdrawals are out of the question.

River Wilding



Elle Howard

# Editor's Thoughts on the Artivism Contest

Many times we have found ourselves unintentionally staying in the office until midnight, absolutely lost in *The Lighter* issues from the 60's, 70's, and 80's. The fascination was a mix of shock and awe at what was "allowed to be published," which led to realizing how campus culture manifested itself in the magazine. What stood out the most to me was the overall tone of those magazines; they were full of cocky, eloquent, satire—the '64-'65 book even labeling *The Lighter* as Valpo's "literary-humor magazine."

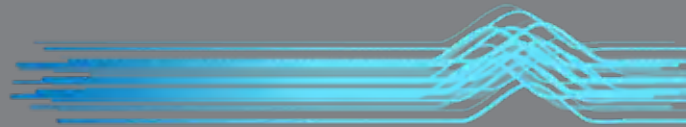
If you look at our issues from the '90s until now, humor is not very present. I believe this is a combination of societal changes; we've grown more accepting of sharing stories about mental illnesses and heartbreak—and I believe that is a change for the better. But we've also grown less comfortable speaking up about political, social and religious issues, which is part of what led me to create the Artivism Contest.

The other half of the Contest's inspiration came from my discovery of Artivism and its shining contemporary relevance. In a world where injustice has grown comfortable, many blatantly illogical stances of discrimination and denial have taken hold and I was feeling discouraged in my attempts to resist them with logic—which is how I'd always been taught to argue. When I stumbled upon Artivism (Art + Activism), a lightbulb went off as I realized that this is the perfect way to combat injustice since art thrives upon its defiance of logic.

I was reignited with hope as I looked over the many poignant submissions that made our first Artivism Contest extremely competitive; I can't wait for this subtle movement to grow and I know that our readers will be challenged, inspired, and moved.

***"Art allows you to imbue the truth with a sort of magic...so it can infiltrate the psyches of more people, including those who don't believe the same things as you."***

**—Wangechi Mutu**





# Judges' Thoughts on the Artivism Winner

## John:

In this piece, the artist captures all the pain, fragility, conflict, and humanity of a movement. The young subject of the portrait, characterized as much by the flowers gracing her cheek and by the fierce, inarticulate lines projecting outward from her, roars into the light while a darker presence roars backward from her mind, but a simple duality splinters in the floral and messy profusion that dominates the piece, out of which emerges a face, scrawled over like a memory, at once frightfully ambivalent and, it seems, pained itself. The artist's ability to balance multidimensional human depth while also channeling the focused rage of a liberatory movement doesn't only offer a rallying cry; it also offers a vision for a future, one seemingly defined by compassion, the validity of emotional expression, and vulnerable encounter.

## Ellen:

What I love about this piece is the delicate line weight in the bottom half contrasted with the explosion of ink and paint in the top half, a bouquet of pain and grief balanced precariously on the head of a woman and a small, fanged, desperately frightened creature emerging from the back of her head. The human faces in the piece belong to individuals, and are rendered by a particular hand. This says something to me about the Me Too movement itself— how it functions by power of the individual story, laden with specific detail, a story that no one else can tell and yet everyone can recognize. Above all, this piece reminds me that vulnerability persists in anger, in protest.





Siclaly Esparza

# Siclaly Esparza

"I know with the whole 'Me Too' movement, there are some who believe it's all just a conspiracy. God I wish. I guess it's hard to believe something you don't know.

But when you don't listen? When you think it's just some way for women to get money or fifteen minutes of fame? I mean, if that's what will make you feel better, but it doesn't erase what happened and what's still happening. It's like you have to scream for someone to listen, but even then they'll say you're being shrill and will elect Pussygrabber. So I guess I'm tired of stewing in shame and guilt, and that's why I created this piece."

- Siclaly Esparza



*The Lighter's Inaugural*

# Artivism Contest Winner

"This work is inspired by Barkley L. Hendricks' "Lawdy Mama," (1969) which is a socially charged portrait of a black woman being presented in a (religious) panel painting with gold-leaf. Hendricks metaphorically connects the halos of religious art with the woman's afro, critiquing the lack of black presence in old European works.

During a photo session, I was exploring the shapes of the human body, and as I was working Hendricks' painting flashed in front of my eyes. It caused me to think about injustice in the world towards humans based on their bodies. Representation in media has changed drastically since Hendricks' commented on it. Yet, black men are still often portrayed as hostile, aggressive, or just overall 'bad'. In my work, I seek to empower and celebrate the black male body by presenting it in a powerful, yet vulnerable way, as well as drawing on Hendricks' strong, artistic voice. I thought long and hard about the title for this piece; one that sends a message. However, in the end, I realized that the best way to send this message would be to highlight the photo's humanity by using my friend's name.

It is important to recognize my privilege in this situation as a white male European, but I don't believe that this should stop me from taking a stance on this issue and celebrating the differences and commonalities that we as humans have.

The world can be a very upsetting place, but I firmly believe that positivity is what can get us through these issues. This is not the same as ignoring the problems and is why my work is celebratory, yet still critiquing. I intend for my art to open people's minds on (oftentimes overlooked) issues like this." - Marcus Boas



Dezmen | Digital Photography | Marcus Boas

## Honorable Mention

I feel a certain responsibility/privilege/desire/  
pressure/need.

When someone uses offensive words, I ought to say something. After all, doesn't being the minority in the room mean you are the voice of all minorities? And of course, how will anyone learn that their words or actions are wrong if I don't tell them so? And shouldn't I be patient with them, explain to them why their stereotyping/belittling/mockings of me or others is wrong? Not everyone was brought up the way that I was— I need to guide them to see what is right. Right?

I try to do this.

But my interruption/intervention/interrogation tends to go several less-than-pleasant ways. I will either:

- a) Get too angry or yell and create a fight that can end a relationship
- b) Become overwhelmed by emotion so that my rebuttal ends in my own tears
- c) Realize that I cannot/should not speak for groups I am not a part of
- d) Be unable to even speak for myself in the way that I want to
- e) Say nothing.

I don't know where this leaves me. Because while I've always noticed ugliness from people, politics lately has exposed this ugliness more obviously than I've noticed before. I tread lightly because I don't want to find out whether or not the person I'm talking to views POCs as equal. Whether or not they believe others deserve the right to exist safely and happily. I don't want to be disappointed, and while I wish my perceptions of others could remain untainted by "only their political views," once I know how a person sees others/their peers/the world, I can't forget that. "Political views" do not

only have to do with politics— they have to do with others' quality of life, voice in shaping the country, and opportunity to defy stereotypes.

I am exhausted. It is not my job to educate those who choose to hate, because if I do speak up, will I come out unscathed?

But if I don't speak up, who will?

## Staff's Honorable Mention

"In the wider scheme of things, this piece is in response to the growing visibility of hate groups who have taken the Trump presidency as an invitation to spew their ideology louder than before. Specifically, this piece stems from a conversation I had with some friends that left me questioning my own responsibilities in speaking out against these groups, particularly in everyday life."

- Hayley Kim

It's the first week of classes, and I have to make a choice. I have to decide if my fun fact will be that I like the color purple, or that I use male pronouns. Just announcing that blind to a class; I haven't had the nerve yet. I don't know who's in that room, what they think; because without warning, when I open my mouth, what for most people is some nebulous "social justice issue" is suddenly sitting in front of them and they have to make a choice. But what they don't realize is I'm trying to make a choice, too.

Now, I could tell you about the all the places where I make a point about asserting my pronouns, but also about the places where I just... don't. I could tell you about how my best friend yells at me about that. He says I have to stop letting myself be walked all over, but what he doesn't understand is how goddamn terrifying it is to do that, every time. How many hits my armor has taken. And sometimes when I do correct people – most times, actually, people will look at me funny and get confused and not understand this simple correction I'm trying to make, and then it becomes a *thing*.

I hate *things*. They're ugly and they're awkward and they make you feel like you can't talk to your family anymore. Coming out is painful and scary and gets you rude emails from your parents. There are so many things I would like to say, facing down these demons in human clothing. So many wars I want to fight; so many Twitter trolls I want to demolish. I crave to stop using my armor – my battered and faded camo, ceramic plates shattered from too many shots in only a few short months. I crave to finally take the offensive, take back my dignity. "Come at me, bro," I wanna say. "I'm a tough guy; I can take whatever you got." But I can't do that; better to keep your mouth shut and be nice than be That Angry Trans™, the one the "normal"

talking heads on TV whine about without knowing anything about our rage.

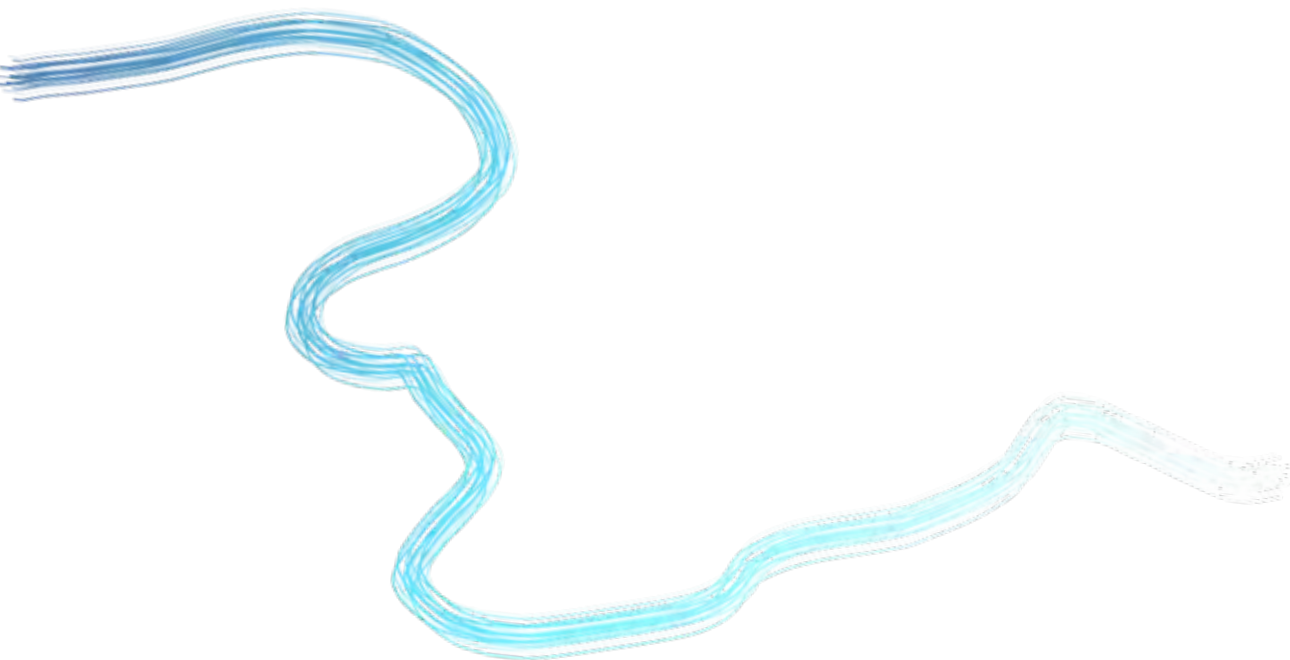
I bottle it up. It's in a vodka bottle – the alcohol I used to get wasted the day Trump tweeted about his "ban" – and I carry it around inside me between my lungs, squishing my heart behind my sternum, the top just sticking through my collarbone. I know it's there because I feel it; it's where all the emotion of being transgender lives – all the pain and the anger, the anxiety, everything, every time someone calls this guy "she."

Thoughts go through my head into my mouth, where they sit like snake's poison on my tongue, before they slide thick and cloying and choking down my throat and into the bottle. They fume as they're forced down; they revolt and bubble, leave scars in their wake, miss the mouth of the bottle entirely and dribble along the outside, slowly seeping into my heart.

Some days, I'm David – promised the kingdom of Israel, but on the run from death – and the world seems so dark, the promise lost and so hopeless, and I am so lost I don't know how to find the next sunrise. Some days, thoughts pack that bottle of vodka almost ready to explode with furious syllables, a thousand little soldiers full of fight and battle, screaming a war cry into my soul. Some days everything's quiet and cold, and that insidious seepage eats away at my heart, taking my soul hostage, and I know why so many trans kids commit suicide.

And yet, thousands of years ago, David wrote, "Blessed be the Lord, my rock, who trains my hands for war, and my fingers for battle." So I know that someday, those voices will shout loud enough, and those soldiers will fight hard enough, and the bottle will break. And I will take my turn to lie down on that cool table, and the doctor will pick the

shards of glass from my chest, and remove the things that never belonged on this body, and when the surgeon is done, the pumps will pull the poison out of me so it will not harm me, and I will rise, and finally be everything I want to be, and I will work wonders.



April is the cruelest month?  
Try September, October, or even November.  
People change with the seasons,  
getting crueler and less caring every day.

With every leaf that falls  
another shred of humanity is lost,  
sent to shrivel up  
after being detached from  
its source of life for so long.

Cold winds cause care to curl  
in on itself, shrinking smaller  
until it's just a morsel  
of what it was,

until it is no longer recognizable  
as inherently human,  
but a folly of our  
faults and fears.

Jessica Clanton



Marcus Boas



*After William Butler Yeats' "Easter, 1916"*

If there are any here who think themselves  
To be some second Yeats—  
A singer of the song of human pain—  
Then let them do their duty.  
Let them write our lament,  
A dirge for the ones who died  
A bloody, useless death,  
Lying alone on pavement  
Or the hallway of a school.

But there is, after all, no earthly pen  
That can write them out in a verse  
And make them a terrible beauty.  
There are too many.  
Too many names and days,  
When Rachel cried out for her children  
And we almost lost God's face.  
Yeats had MacDonagh and MacBride  
And Pearse and Connolly.  
We have hundreds.  
Alhadeff and Anguiano and Beigel,  
Dworet and Feis and Guttenberg,  
Hixon and Hoyer and Loughran,  
Montalto and Oliver and Petty,  
Pollack and Ramsay and Schachter,  
Schentrup and Wang.

These are only one day.  
No man can list them all,  
The lives gone in Las Vegas,  
In Sandy Hook, in Columbine—  
In each hometown.  
No man or woman can, but only God,  
He only could write the song—  
The God who held them as they died,  
Who crooned His last love-words in their ears,  
Who numbered them each as one,  
And knew them each by their face.  
It must have been a hard death,  
Each one, some fast, some slow.  
Some filled with pain,  
And some so quick they did not know they died,  
But stared into the sky with eyes unseeing,  
While all around them fell the tears of God,  
Who cries not ash or rain, but blood.

Grace Biermann



Nicole Jones

You call me by a name, but it is  
not mine. You call me by a title,  
but it does not fit. You put me  
in a box, in a group, in a class, in a crowd,  
add a label, make it final, define me by yourself –  
but I do not belong there. I tell you  
these things, and you turn me away.

The hold you believe you have on my body  
Is a claim staked on stolen land.  
The right you boast to determine  
my identity  
is poison  
granted by a false prophet  
And comes with the promise of annihilation  
By the true Almighty.

The person you claim to govern burned  
A glorious death in the fires that fell from the sun.  
Resurrected in the rain  
That poured from the cold-eyed moon.  
The person now before you was forged  
In the flames of the inferno, quenched  
In the living water, an indomitable steel soul.

I am that I am, made new again, strength  
perfected in weakness. I am the survivor  
of 7000 days and 7000 nights spent wandering,  
but I am no longer lost. I am the owner of the radical truth  
that you cannot ordain me to be  
something I was never born to be. I am the keeper  
of the singular right to name, claim, ordain myself.

Sawyer Patrick



Demi Marshall



Monique Le Donne

I have been serving the longest shift in gift shop history since the beginning of time, and this is a fact. I was new once, I'm sure, and there was someone before me, but I have been serving the longest.

I have a customer, new from the looks of her still iron-pressed white robes. Hardly anyone checks out the gift shop first here, and I wonder why she's done so. Maybe she's meeting someone.

She's already been here for a few years, so I feel comfortable enough to ask her why.

"I like gift shops," she says. "I always have."

"I've heard Hell's gift shop isn't nearly as spacious," I tell her like I'm proud of that fact. "No air conditioning and a line that you can never reach the front of."

"That doesn't sound like a good money making strategy." She says this like she doesn't believe me, as if I'd lie while standing in a side room to the most literal holy place in the universe.

"It's Hell, of course it isn't good." I would be offended if I could be.

"Oh, well." She gives me a small shrug. "You'd think they'd at least want to make some money."

*Money doesn't exist*, I want to tell her, but I don't want to talk to her any longer than I have to. I stay quiet. She continues to look at a wall of keychains with every name in the world. Just beyond her is a row of hanging T-shirts with Jesus' face printed on them, Veronica style, that change everytime I look over.

There are things more valuable for sale, of course. A thousand years of self worth for the memory of your first kiss, the answer to any question in the world for the taste of your favorite food. Postcards to Earth reading *Wish you were here* that arrive in the

form of a miracle. The meaning of life, in several different philosophical flavors, all lined up on the counter like chewing gum. There's a limited edition Darwin kind that I've heard is quite good, and I wonder if we'll ever start stocking it.

She's still looking at the cheaper gifts, and I wonder when she'll leave. It's been a few decades, at least.

"Have you seen this?" I gesture towards our display, tiny snow globes shining up at us, hoping my help will hurry her. "It's one of our newest products."

She creeps over, interested, and leans in to inspect them. They're funny little things that I've never quite understood, but the humans seem to go crazy for them.

But, instead of freckled snow floating down through foggy water, it is a glimpse. Of something valuable, I assume, from how the humans go pale and stiff at a look inside. She does the same as each human before her.

I see nothing, only muddled green-blue, like a confused mood ring.

"I'll take it," she traces her fingernail over the glass. "And make sure to wrap it up in paper." I do so, and a layer of bubble wrap as well, and punch it into the register. It rings out the total like a church choir, and I hold out my hand.

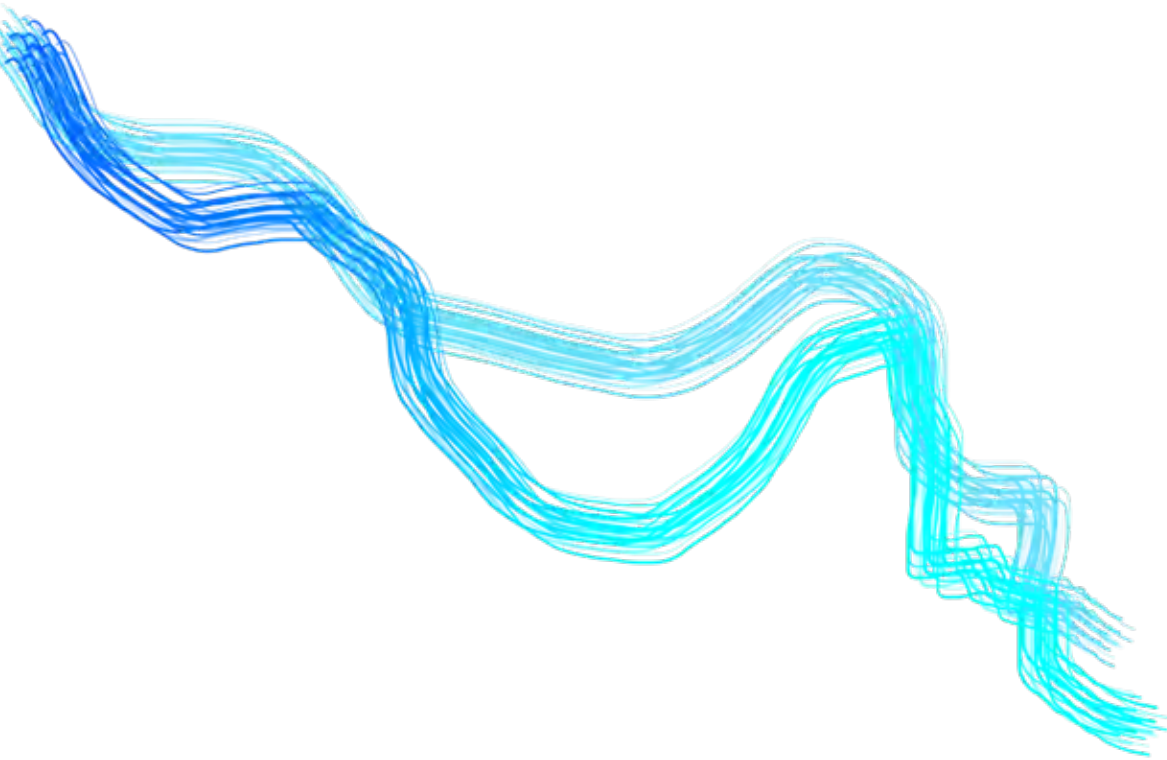
"That'll be seven tears," She makes a face like this is too much to ask even though I've heard it's a fairly reasonable price. Her hand wobbles like she wants to put it back.

I sigh, and mostly just want her out of the store. "Four tears and a laugh, then." My manager is going to be upset I keep underselling purchases,

but they haven't checked on me in a few millennia.

She nods at the offer and pulls the fresh tears from her eyes, the laugh from her throat. Quietly, she places them on either side of the register. I count up the tears and put them in their correct slots and hand over her receipt. She hurries out, and that in itself is worth the tears that will be taken from my paycheck.

I take her laugh and pop it in my mouth. It's a bit crunchy, a tad sour, but not unpleasantly so. It's the first laugh I've had in awhile, so I chew slowly. I turn to wave her off— there's always someone waving you off in heaven— and my gaze catches on the T-shirt rack. Jesus now looks a bit like a modern Meryl Streep. Hm. Bold casting choice.





Isabel Coffey





Mark Young



Brendan Miller

There's never an invite  
needed. Bring a bag of chips  
and a beer in hand.

Talk with friends, family,  
the neighborhood stranger.  
Listen to the way  
they weave their lives  
through stories told again  
and again. Laugh,  
add your own thread.

Hear the nighttime crickets  
chatter. Play cards, eat  
chocolate chip ice cream  
sprinkled with fireworks.

Sit in the summertime,  
where there's lemonade,  
liquor, hellos turning  
into how-are-yous.

Make the porch home  
on a warm spring day.  
Just listen to the love-  
d ones' voices, and fall  
prey to the world's sway.

Grace Burkhart

In the summer of 1988,  
the world heard the meaning  
of life in only three words.

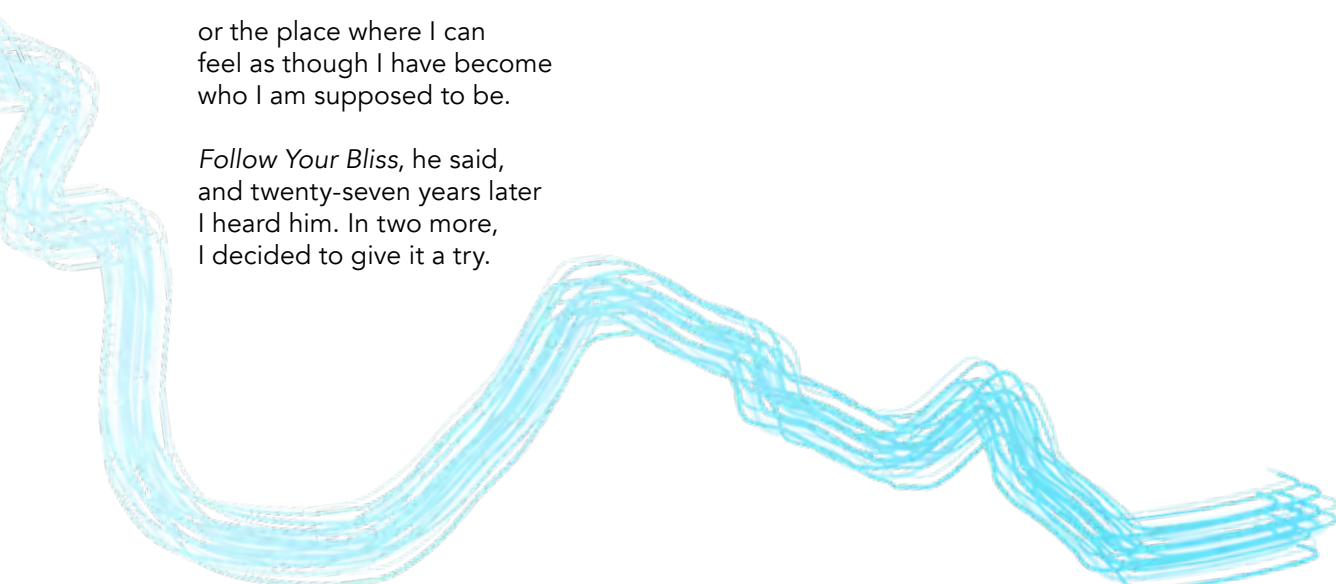
Waiting, with baited breath,  
I learned that you cannot live  
without finding your rapture;

and like a young boy in love,  
waiting for a reciprocal utterance,  
I hung on to every syllable.

Though it took months  
of thought, I began to search  
for the jumping-off point;

or the place where I can  
feel as though I have become  
who I am supposed to be.

*Follow Your Bliss*, he said,  
and twenty-seven years later  
I heard him. In two more,  
I decided to give it a try.



Jackson Spanburg

*Dedicated to Geraldine Carol Stiegart*

Work remains two hours east across a state border and rowed traffic, and here I'm posed with one of life's terrible terminations—unplanned and untimely like most.

Childlike, I clamp onto my parents' 90's vanity, sheer stocking wrapped limbs twisted; weight pressing on gravity, as I trace my thick lips in your retro red.

Fragile fingers usher the cardinal color to Cupid's bow; the ruby hue replaces the soft salmon flesh. Dauntingly, I face my reflection— now a novelty.

Recognition only took a tribute to your signature style. With newly painted lips, I find my bone structure, eyes, brows, nose in photos; they never belonged to father, mother, or aunt.

Slim eyes blinking—static, resurrected from 1952— I memorized your colorless copies but never saw the parallel. Yet now, billowed, black dress, curled locks, crimson lined lips, I see you— still breathing.

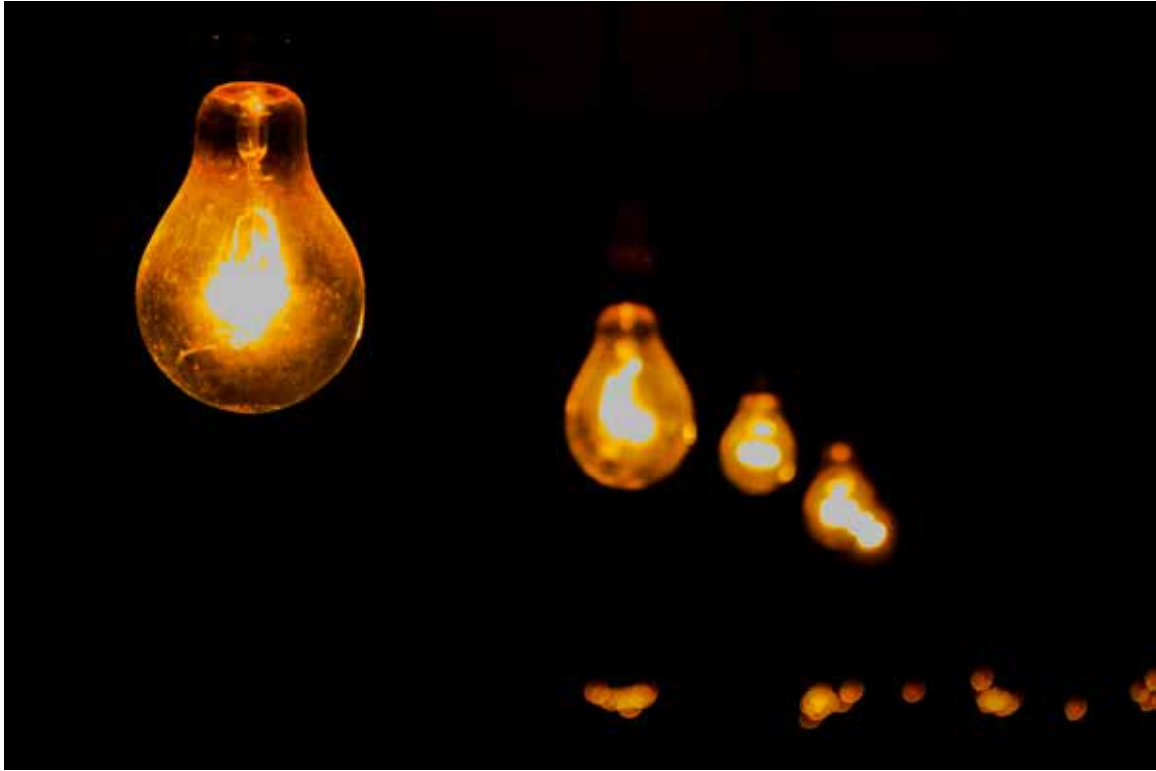
Michelle Stiegart

The town sleeps sound as a newborn,  
Cradled in the nest of Midwest terrain.  
But now illumination emanates from the Bradfords'  
Like the stark, bright light beams  
In an operating room: alienating a patient.  
Their windows are display cases  
Or shiny, glass jars, filled with formalde-  
hyde, preserving a "criminal" brain.  
A scream shatters the silence  
In the town sleeping sound as a newborn.

And now it seeps like thick molasses,  
Curling in a swirl around Mr. Bradford.  
Sharply, grabbing the knife from her swiftly,  
The officer calms her in a whisper,  
"Mrs. Bradford,  
you're safe now."  
"There was shoving  
And slapping," she says as dark red  
Lipstick engulfs her trembling lips.  
The officer's shoulder becomes the base for long, blonde  
Waves, tears running down cheeks past dark red  
Flecks like freckles, that populate smooth, silken skin.  
He holds her while she weeps, failing to see  
The spreading crease of bright, white teeth.  
As bright as the lights in the operating room  
Where Mr. Bradford now lays in sleep.

Madison Magiera

The Dar'K'night | Film  
featured on the table of contents spread



Vishal Bharadwaj Meruga

# The Lighter Creatives: Full-Fledged Adults

## What has drawn you to the creative arts?

**Ellen Orner:** I have always loved to read and have been writing for a long time too, and have just gotten a lot of joy out of taking the time to put my thoughts and my way of perception of the world down on paper [and] I started making art later. With writing, I feel a sense of responsibility though to use it to get across the things that I think about, and things that I argue about with my friends and family on a daily basis and to get down the experiences that I think would have the potential to change other people's ways of looking at their neighborhoods or their communities and at themselves and at their families.

**John Linstrom:** Well, when I was a kid, I wanted to be an astronaut for longer than most people—from kindergarten to fourth or fifth grade. I was a real space nerd and I really wanted to bridge the gap between astronomy and *Star Wars*. I don't know, that's some of the things that drew me in, and I just love struggling to understand people and also trying to explain all the different kinds of ways I'm confused about the world and people around me.

## Why do you think creativity is important?

**E:** I think pretty much everybody is really creative, whether that is something that they are used to knowing about themselves or accessing or not. It's in there: that impulse to play and to take the things you see and imagine more, and I don't know how to explain it but kind of like...like I'm standing at this really beautiful lake right now in Tennessee, and there's light on the shore and there's ducks and geese and there's all sorts of material that you're soaking in and it feels really important to your

interviewed by Emily Neuharth and Sarah Law

being—to just be able to look at this. I feel better as a person for just being: having the time and the space to look and hear and smell all this. But then your brain wants to do more than that; those images and those senses become part of your imagination when you're not looking at it anymore, and [imagination's] ability to be able to hold onto it and continue to develop it into your way of seeing other things. I think that's part of what creativity is: taking seemingly different thoughts and perceptions and combining them in a way that only you can. That's just really useful to have as part of your life, so then if you can do that out-loud and have other people share in that and use their own words too, then it just kinda feeds on itself and we become fuller people when we're able to do that in public in some way.

**J:** I think it's most important because it is the way in which we empathize with other people. I think Thoreau said something in *Walden* that to see through another person's eyes for just a moment would be such a huge revelation that it would put to rest all human arts in all of its forms. Human arts are all kinda striving toward perspective that's greater than the perspective you started with.

## What is your creative process?

**E:** I'll take notes throughout the week either in my phone or in a notebook, write things down as they come to me. So when I need to sit down and write a poem, I'll go back through those things and it could be something that I scribbled down while



I was having a phone call with my brother three years ago, or was thinking about while I was driving yesterday, and put those things together around the theme, usually the theme that's bothering me the most. The most helpful feedback is just hearing how somebody else perceived something.

**J:** I wish I had a more regular one, but as a grad student my life tends to be a little bit scattered. The most important thing for me is when you open up a blank page to just to start wording in there. Then I always have to sleep on it before I can look at it again, or maybe take a week and come back to it. Revision is always a huge part of the process for me, because for my poems I usually write by hand and then I type it up to revise and that's the most effective, but it's different for everybody of course. I definitely haven't found any secrets.

### **What advice would you give to any new creators?**

**E:** The thing that's been the most helpful for me, is starting to write again because I didn't for a long time. I graduated from college [so] I didn't have any deadlines, and it just felt like something I was always going to do later, but eventually I just got really used to not doing it and didn't really even call myself a writer. I've learned to let go of a lot of my own expectations for myself, so instead of thinking "If I really was a writer, I'd do it without external motivation...or I wouldn't have this reaction of being frustrated or whatever." So just to let go of that and be OK with whatever sort of writer you are at the moment, and to get comfortable with, for me, being the person that has to have

somebody else giving me a deadline.

**J:** Keep reading. Also, to either have a day job or to go to grad school; it's important to stay alive. And the amazing thing about graduate education, is that they'll pay you to come and give you time. Having a writing community can be really helpful, whether that means a community of college-educated people, or if it means you're writing poetry or stories or painting or taking photographs and you want to gain the approval of the folks that come together for poker nights on Saturdays, like that can be the community that you need— there needs to be some sharing and dialogue otherwise you go crazy in your own head. And remembering that rejection is a part of life and the process; if you're getting rejected it means you're doing your job. That's what I tell myself. Also, I feel that people probably represent their life as writers a little bit more romantic than it actually is (laughter). You know, it's really hard work and really daunting and it can be emotionally a pain in the butt to put yourself out there— and that's normal.

### **What is the most difficult part about the creative process or job?**

**E:** The most challenging thing is jumping to self-criticism. It's like becoming a reader of my work before I really finish writing it. I've later come to find out that writers deal with that limitation in different ways. Some people wake up really early and write when they're still kinda sleepy because your brain is closer to dream state where you aren't as self-censoring, other people have exercises that help them get to that space, other people don't have that same level of self-criticism; so that's one of the hardest things for me but I think it's cool to find ways to get around that.



**J:** I think the most difficult part for me is sitting myself down and having all the distractions off like my phone, and actually starting something new or even developing something that I've started can be difficult at times. I'm not a very extroverted person by nature but I do get antsy when I'm isolated like that; it's just kinda like a biological reaction I think. But maybe just the more you do it, the more you find a way to keep going. And for a job, I think just the fact that the economy doesn't really value creativity [enough].

**What's one of the most valuable or long-lasting parts of your Valpo academic experience and how has it impacted your career? Your life?**

**E:** Well definitely Prof. Schuette had a huge impact on me with her friendship and mentorship. Her support was just totally invaluable. Sarah Jantzi as an art professor, who, in a quieter way was also really influential and supportive. Yeah, [Schuette was] just really good at instilling confidence without imposing values if that makes sense. The writing seminars, the classes... Allison's class about literature and technology, and Intro to Creative Nonfiction class. She's [Schuette] pretty central to all of that for me.

**J:** It's just great for people who get an intellectual kick out of reading great stuff and being exposed to stuff that you wouldn't necessarily know to look for and, then at another level, it's incredibly useful for learning how to process complexity in complex ways which I think actually has a craft about it. I think that is incredibly valuable in and of itself in learning to be a fuller more engaged, more empathetic human. That's the best use of an English major and the best use of college education as far as I'm concerned. I don't think college should ever be reduced to the level of job preparation, some people treat it that way but you can make a good living without a college degree. A college degree offers you the opportunity to, like I said, enter into complexity and empathy in beautiful ways.

**When you were an undergrad, did you have any idea this was the career you'd end up in?**

**E:** I've always been interested in editing, so my first few jobs out of college, that weren't waiting tables, were copyediting, because I like it; it feels easy, I like to read, and you get paid for it: it's fantastic! I knew that I might end up doing something along those lines if I weren't going to become a professor, which I had no idea what that might entail at the time; I didn't have a clue how difficult it is to get a job like that, all of the hoops you have to jump through, and that you definitely need to publish a book or two if you want to have any hope. So, I think I did imagine that I might be doing something like this. I didn't know it would be at an Art School and I'm really overjoyed that it is; the students and the faculty are fun people in a different way than other departments are.

**J:** I had academic leanings before even coming to Valpo. I mean, you know, in the sense that I was a nerd. But I really didn't know where I wanted to go after college. I applied to MFA programs because I didn't know what else to do and because I had been an English major taking as many creative writing electives as I could, and I wanted to prove that I could actually do the creative writing part in a way that was more than marginal to who I was on paper you know. But I've never been a very big believer in mapping out your life in advance because I think a lot of the best decisions and changes people make in their life happen when they're open to and responding to what's happening around them. And I think that's just, I wouldn't have it any other way.

*(continued)*

## **What is your favorite memory of *The Lighter*?**

**E:** I was just a reader [on the selection committee] and I was a sophomore and, to me, everybody involved— I didn't know them very well yet— felt like they were all seniors and full-fledged adults. There were a lot of readers and that made it a very long session of deciding what was going to go in. Everybody had a lot to say, and we did the whole like going around the circle and reading the submissions outloud and voting; there were some heated discussions and I was just excited. Like, people really care about this and they're smart, and they're using words to describe writing that I've never heard before...it really pushed me to dive in and realize that it's okay to be passionate about writing and that there's a lot more room to grow in terms of my sensibilities of things and subject matter as a writer.

**J:** It's not a specific memory, but I really loved the selection committee meetings; that was such a cool way for people to come together in a non-classroom setting to really have serious discussion about what they value in a piece of work. For a more specific memory... I wrote a nonsense poem back in high school and I just really liked the sounds in it, but it was a nonsense poem, it meant nothing and the words were just goofy. It was titled "Little Tickle-Fruits" and I submitted that poem to *The Lighter* like four semesters in a row and at first it was as a non-staff member. I just remember being in the selection committee meeting for one of these and, you know, being engaged in the community and the editor at the time was I believe Evan Scott Bryson and he said something to the effect of, "You know, I think we've seen this poem before. We've talked about it then, but there's just something endearing about it, we've got to talk about it again." And they eventually printed it so it's probably somewhere in *The Lighter* archives [Spring 2008].



Nathan Biancardi

In darkness and chaos the storm did begin  
When oceans of dust did into stars spin  
And time, it unraveled in myriad strands  
As ripples and waves in the shimmering sands.  
Yet in all these patterns, one hears that the cry  
Pervading all life and all matter is "Why?"  
It rang as the myst'ry through all time and space  
And I did, as others, this great quest embrace.  
So I dimly looked out, though looking within,  
Perceived two dueling forces, yet neither could win;  
As though two princely warriors a battle would fight  
One cloaked in shadow, the other in light.  
In the dark, o'er the trees of an evergreen wood  
In the heights, in the midst of the storm where they stood  
How like lightning they danced through the rain-sheeted stage  
Wherein steel rang on steel, and they sang nature's rage.  
And yet this vain battle no answers could give,  
No explanation how or for what to live  
But that the scene in itself an answer might be  
How both at the surface and beyond one may see.  
I would fight the good fight; I would finish the race  
But still yet these heavens the stars do not grace.  
Time and the storm will blend all to gray  
And so shall long after the end of my day;  
But forth to the future I did thus avow  
To always transcend the moment of now.  
Touching the essence that does all pervade;  
Let wind be my cloak, and lightning my blade  
And my heart be swept up in tumultuous form  
For all things are one, and I am the storm.

Andrew Edwards



Anna Styrzula



A man with coffee-warm eyes and ebony hair  
traced my figure every night  
with his golden, desirable hands.

He believed that drenching  
me in honey-infused love  
would be enough  
to send the demons away.

What he never understood  
is that he can't  
make the demons disappear.  
He can only get to know them:

their crooked grins  
their empty eyes  
their wicked ways

when they shake me  
awake in the dead  
of night and ask me to dance.

Megan McDaniel

Our family-friend, Ainura, brought us an all-black kitten. She presented him, informing us that he's called *d'yavol besami*: Russian for "possessed by an evil spirit." My sisters and I were totally thrilled to get another kitty. We immediately decided he needed a new name, not because we were concerned about his original name's foreshadowing temperament, but because it was hard to pronounce. He was dubbed Bagheera—after *The Jungle Book*, obviously. Not in touch with American pop-culture at all, we never got the superstitious warning against all-black cats. But, it turns out we didn't need to grow up around campfire ghost stories to be weary of them. We should have kept our Disney movie theme by naming him after *Cinderella's* Lucifer.

This cat attacked everything, alive or not. Our furniture, slippers and arms were speckled with his little claw marks. In the kitchen we had to climb on top of the bench in order to walk by the dinner table so that our socked feet didn't get lacerated by Bagheera prowling underneath the tablecloth. He would jump out of shadows, and appear from under chairs like a ghost: ready to kill. Bagheera even hissed and clawed at our other cats, and let me tell you, Carlos and Rico were not amused. He was our only cat that didn't fit our Latino-name pattern. Carlos, Rico and Javier are some of the best cats I have ever met. I'm proud to say that many "non-cat people" have told me they really do like our cats. In retrospect, we might have cursed Bagheera ourselves by leaving him out of our cat-name-clique.

Ainura had brought Bagheera to us as a last resort, and we had thought her offer to initially throw him out on the street was absurd. It didn't take long for the offer to become more appetizing. But thanks to my older sister, Autumn, we never had to kick him out.

The front door barely fit the frame, so it always took at least two all-of-our-weight tugs to get it open, and we had to really slam it shut. One day, Autumn was going inside but suddenly paused when she didn't hear the usual "bang" as it closed. As she looked back over her shoulder she saw the door swinging open and Bagheera teetering across the entryway. Autumn had accidentally slammed our cat's head in the door. She cried with guilt as we carefully carried him into the kitchen, holding him delicately partly because of his possibly-fatal injury, and partly because we'd never been this close to him without being scratched.

Bagheera's vicious personality was especially disappointing to me. Cats have an unprecedented place in my heart: right above Bavarian-creme donuts and just below the smell of rain. I am a pro at scratching them under their chins until they purr, and there is nothing like burying my face in their little bellies. Looking at Bagheera's swollen head, I was torn with sympathy for his bent whiskers, while being very aware of how nice it was to not be under his constant-attack. We were guiltily happy that he had gotten hurt, but also terrified that he would switch back to his usual fury at any second. Once his vigour returned, Autumn would have an unspoken death-sentence.

In the following days, he lethargically laid around. We weren't too shocked that he had survived, considering he was devil-possessed. He slowly regained his energy and spunk, but to all of our great surprise, he wasn't vicious anymore. After his head was slammed in the door, Bagheera was a perfect angel. Autumn must have smashed the name-curse right out of his system. So once again, all was right with the world. Each of the cats in my life were worthy of my borderline-obsessive love.



It was as if our house had just emerged from a civil war; we tentatively walked the hallways freely with only our battle-scars to pay homage to the terror that we survived.

Years later, I read *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest* in English class, where I was utterly horrified to learn that in the 60's psychologists performed lobotomies on mentally ill patients. This violent method continued because lobotomies were producing "results." Any patient who was disruptive or uncooperative became immediately docile, AKA "cured," after they cut out chunks of their brains—shocker. Before I had even finished reading the definition of "lobotomy" on Dictionary.com, I was filled with outrage at the blatant immorality and dehumanization that the mentally ill faced.

And then I thought of Bagheera. My stomach dropped as the image of him walking sideways into the entryway reappeared. Perhaps that demon-filled cat was mentally ill, but that seems disrespectful to real people who are mentally ill. Also, there's no way for us to have ever known if he had a mental illness; he wasn't really the type to sit on a therapist's couch, openly sharing his life story. Then I considered how small the cat's brain was to begin with, and I was re-washed with guilt as I pictured the door swinging like a hammer into his head, making a cartoon brain pop out of his skull like a cork out of a wine bottle. I imagined the brain rolling around our kitchen floor. But then I saw the pre-lobotomized Bagheera attacking his own brain that had crossed his lair under the dinner table bench. Maybe lobotomies are okay...but *only* if they're accidentally performed on vicious, evil, Lucifer's-alter-ego type of cats.



Andréa Kütemeier

I found my self a sailor,  
herself a spinning storm,  
and from her eye I sat and watched  
the sea as it was torn—  
carved and crashed, crucified,  
cut apart with tears—  
from the calm of her dead eye  
I watched and felt no fear.



Anna Styrzula

the wooden boat sways in the semblance of calm  
imperfect and inconsistent  
thinking it is stern  
thinking it does not have to bow to the waves  
proof against water

the current knows better  
carefully choosing each cracked splinter  
in the eye of a storm  
water spills easily through the planks  
bound down by drowning

the boat is not to blame  
it is its nature

to succumb

the moon keeps watch  
infinite and indefectible  
beaming benevolently over the mess  
holding sway with the tide  
to undrench the boat

i, the broken boat  
sin, the surging flood  
God, greater than the moon

Emma Hecht



Eric Ream

The car never seems to run  
out of gas. Instead we fuel  
it, almost every time  
with a carefully concocted potion:

One cool, summer evening simmered  
slowly, two people who  
fit the front seats, guitar  
pouring out of the speakers  
and slipping into the street.

No one can touch us. The doors  
are shields, the windows  
show us movie scenes. Somehow,  
we are outside the world  
and inside ourselves.

The wheels spin the earth slowly,  
now faster, now just in time  
with the blinking of stars.  
Nothing before, nothing after;  
there is only us, the music, the car.

Hayley Kim



Mark Young

Sitting in the softly lit kitchen, Bridget's eyes darted across the page as she read the Munster Express. Black pupils almost tripping over themselves. She gasped a little as Hugh burst in through the side door. The room was silent except for the impatient grunts that came from her husband while unlacing his leather boots. Bridget watched with anticipation. His hand pushed up against the stoney gray walls of their humble cottage for support. After seemingly too much time, Hugh was finally released from his shoes. As his eyes met hers, she could see the pot full of frustration and fear coming to a boil.

"Half the field is just gone. It's like someone just plucked all of the potatoes straight out of the ground."

"Half?" her hand flew to her chest, "Oh, Hugh..."

The distressed man sat down next to his wife at the table. His head so heavy he had to support it with his hands. Worry and anxiety flooded Bridget's senses as if she wasn't already drowning.

"This is a huge loss. Frankly, I don't know what to think, let alone do! Who could have done this? There's absolutely no way we could've missed someone robbing our field! Stealing all of those potatoes would've taken entirely too long to go unnoticed!"

Bridget reached for the newspaper and showed him the headline: *War on Potatoes???* He grabbed it out of her hands and hastily scanned the page. *Local farmers in a state of confusion over missing crops. Potato production coming to a halt. Mysterious assault and harassment affecting farmers.* Hugh turned his gaze towards Bridget,

"What is happening?"

The potato industry was the most fruitful business an Irishman could be a part of during the 19th century. Potatoes were at the center of most people's diet: potato pancakes, scalloped potatoes, mashed potatoes, fried potatoes! Any meal of the day, there were potatoes on that plate. Many farmers grew exclusively potatoes, due to their demand, cost effectiveness, agricultural maintenance, and fairly high yield. Potatoes were the fruit of the field and the food on the table. Hugh had inherited the family potato farm after his father had passed. This was the land from which he had been supporting himself and Bridget since the beginning of their marriage, some odd years ago. She had yet to bear a child; considering the hard times rural Ireland was facing, this had turned out to be for the better. The potato crops were their children. For years the couple had given the potatoes all they needed to be strong and hearty crops: nutrients, protection, space, and of course... tender loving care. Hugh simply couldn't comprehend how and why the potatoes were missing. He thought of himself as a good farmer, someone who knew his land and reliably facilitated the production of beautiful potatoes, season after season. He felt helpless and devastated as he turned his teary gaze towards Bridget. She replied with a gentle and caring caress that only a loving wife could deliver.

Later that evening, Bridget returned to the kitchen to prepare dinner, potato soup and homemade bread. She reached her hand into the potato bin in the pantry, as she so often did, and quickly realized there was not a single spud for her to grab. She yanked her hand back with lightning speed as if the ghost of the potatoes that were supposed to have been there had bitten her.



“Huuuuugh....!” She squeaked out loud even though she knew he had just left to go speak to their surrounding neighbors about the incident. The sudden surge of adrenaline left her heart a couple of gears too high. After a few moments, the frightened woman cautiously peered back into the still empty bin. She knew there had been at least thirty potatoes in there after making hashbrowns for breakfast this morning. She took a couple of steps backwards just to distance herself from this disturbing scene. Her mind reeled, replaying images and memories, fact-checking itself. Where did all those potatoes go? This wasn’t right. She bewilderedly whipped her head left and right, scanning the room for clues or signs of any kind. Bridget finally decided this was enough for her and quickly scampered to their bedroom and slammed the door.

The potatoes were the one steady thing that they could always rely on; they were like clockwork. No matter what, the potatoes were there for the them. Bridget had never known a life barren of potatoes. But now... The constant source of security and reassurance was being ripped out from underneath of her. She sat with her chin to her knees, trying to steady herself in spite of the swirling thoughts. She thought the anxious voices in her head were filling up the room with noise until a “*THUD*” against the door suddenly penetrated her mental static. Bridget immediately snapped into focus. Her ears rang with the crisp quality of a heightened alertness. The silence now seemed deathly more quiet than before the *thud*.

She hesitated a moment longer before loudly whispering,

“Hugh??” “*THUD*,” the door seemed to rattle from impact.

A gasp jumped from her lips as she crawled backwards across the bed. Three more successive *thuds* sent her to her feet and into the corner of the room. Quick breath shook out of her frightened frame. She eyed the window on the other side of the room. The wood panes were usually swollen shut in the summer but she believed she might be able to shoulder it open with enough force. Another *thud* glued her against the wall once more. After regaining her courage, she streaked across the room and began her valiant attempt at escape. Her shoulder ached after several tries and she began to lose hope. She whimpered for Hugh.

Meanwhile, Hugh had just begun his trek back from the last neighbors’ house. Apparently, they were just as kerfuffled as he was. As he was walking, he thought of the first year him and Bridget took over the farm. They had fretted entirely too much over the possibility of their spuds not sprouting. Lo and behold, every single one of those darn tubers grew into a lush and fruitful plant. In fact, several of their mother plants were chosen from that initial year’s crop because of their strong genetics. After recollecting, Hugh realized that it was their constant success that was the foundation for all of his bewilderment. *Maybe it’s about time we experienced some hardships*, he thought. With this, he had convinced himself that this was nothing strange, but an overdue tax collection by the hands of the Great Almighty. He grinned at the thought of it, for he knew God would never subject them to something they couldn’t handle. He was instantly filled with cheer and nearly skipped back to the cottage to inform Bridget of the triviality of their situation.

Before too long, Hugh was pushing open the front door of their quaint residence. He

paused a moment to glance at the bright green ivy climbing its way up the stones towards the sun. A smile overtook his face. He simply loved seeing something grow and thrive. He wished the vine luck towards its goal and continued on into the house. As soon as he passed the threshold, something hit him as if it were a sack of potatoes. He could nearly taste the starch in the air. Red flags shot up as a means of warning and precaution, his mind bolted to Bridget. Where was she? They resided in very small living quarters so there wasn't much room for privacy.

"Bridge?" he hesitantly called.

His sensory perception couldn't quite make out what had happened but he felt it was bad. His feet hurried him through the cottage, stopping a few feet outside their bedroom door. Worried eyes slowly melted towards the floor and landed on several raw potatoes lying about the dirt at his feet.

"Bridget?" he called once again, still to no avail.

There looked to be dents and scuffs in the wood of the door. Something in his gut told him he didn't want to see what was on the other side. He mustered whatever bravery he had stored in order to turn that door knob. He immediately wished he hadn't. There were long scraps of bloody debris strewn about the room. His heart and stomach joined hands and jumped. He gazed out into the space that him and Bridget had used as a sanctuary for rest and for love. The crimson color stained the pale starch of their bed sheets and forced him to recoil into the hallway for safety. Logic and emotion battled for control while he forced his body to continue further into the room. The red warning signs were everywhere. He was all but holding his breath as he stepped over what looked like strips of

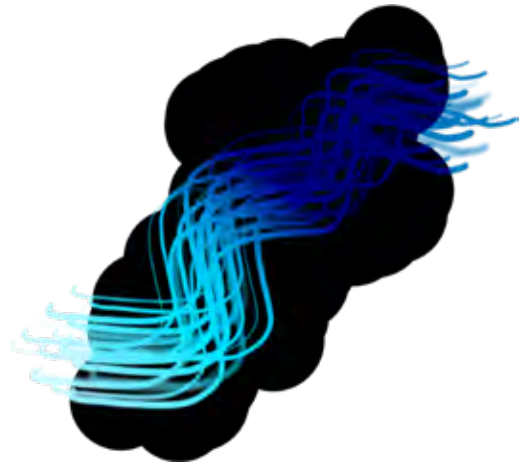
skin. His torso contracted, trying to heave itself away from the dreadful sight before him. The woman of his fondest memories would now be the source of his most scarring nightmares. Peeled like a raw potato, she lay in their bed for her final rest. Hugh could no longer withstand the horror and promptly slumped over onto the floor, dirt pressing up against his cheek and whispering encouragement into his ear. It was several movements before he regained consciousness and several after that before he re-oriented himself in reality.

Unable to bear the sight, Hugh squeezed his sore eyes shut and screamed against the eerie silence. His cry of anguish only intensified the suffocating weight of the circumstances. Paranoia crept in and he realized he may be in danger as well... He bolted to his feet. His eyes and sixth sense swept all dimensions of the room. He seemed to be alone, but for how long? Hugh hesitated before returning his gaze to his unfortunate wife. He winced and resistively leaned forward to check her pulse, just in case. He would rather that she be dead than in the shape she was in now. Thankfully, through God's grace, Bridget's heart beat was non-existent. He covered her with their ancient woolen blanket and stared at her inanimate form while backing out of the room.

His mind was fried. There simply was not sufficient capacity available to handle such a thing. Suddenly, an external stimulus jolted his attention. He looked down to confront whatever had just touched his ankle and was surprised to see a dirty potato laying next to his foot. The lines of hair running across his forehead crinkled in towards each other. In the same moment, the sun had just descended below the horizon and took the light away with it. The inside of the cottage immediately dimmed as if on command. Out of Hugh's radar,

several spuds quietly rolled along the dirt floor. Hugh dashed across the main room of the cottage in a bee-line for a candle. Bridget always left it next to the potato bin. His hands shook as he fiddled around for a match. After an eternity, he managed to light the candle and regain a small parameter of vision. His ears perked up at the strange sound coming from near the floor. The hairs covering his body stood on end to serve as a final warning.

The potatoes aligned themselves in a perfect circle around the human. The largest spud sat just outside the line, ready to usher the attack. The potato paused for a moment and recollected on the first time he had sprouted an eye. It had changed everything. With each new eye, he had grown more conscious. It was as if he could perceive the full scope of reality. He could feel the man's fear and confusion. For a brief instance, he felt a wave of sympathy for the beast. But this was no time for mercy... The Potatoes had the upper hand. These were the moments that restored hope for freedom and justice within their carbohydrate community. The genocide was coming to an end, he had promised that to the mother of the two young ones that got turned into hash browns. Never again.... He decided he mustn't waste any more time and without further thought signaled to the others. One by one, each potato cultivated all the will it could muster and consecutively launched itself at Hugh.





Taylor Bundren



Emily Mrzlak

Dear That Fucking House,

It's unbearable to admit that I miss you. You were absolutely horrible.

The one with the broken towel rack in the bathroom, and the screen door that the landlord refused to fix. The one with the heater that would kill itself once or twice a winter, leaving the scratched hardwood floors and stained kitchen counters icy and freezing. That house, on the main street in town, that kept us up at all hours with police sirens and rattling semi-trucks speeding by. The one that caught on fire, the one I counted the years until I was able to leave. The house where my father yelled and screamed and eventually left from.

The one I cried and sang and dyed my hair in. The one where I learned to cook, and walked home from middle school to. Where my brother and I laughed and fought and grew in.

My room, bright and messy and crowded. The stain on the hardwood where I spilled pink nail polish, and the crack in the ceiling from when my brother broke the ceiling light.

You were absolutely horrible in the way you never kept the chill out and the heat in, leaving us draped in blankets and bulky sweaters. Your broken kitchen stove, and the garage door that never opened. That ugly, bumpy yard that held our picnics and barbecues and the oak tree we sacrificed footballs and frisbees too.

When we were moving out I sat in my room and I cried and cried and listened to my mother argue with the landlord. I thought we would live there forever.

You were terrible. But I'm still so furious you were taken away from us.

I hope this break up has been as hard on you as it has been on us. I hope you crash in on yourself, light yourself on fire. I want to see you destroyed, because that's what was happening to us in those last few months.

Sincerely,

Me

Haley Brewer

it strikes me as a place i'll never be again:  
dripping, splashing, falling  
from an intangible, unreachable plane.  
the air is thick with want  
for what i cannot have.  
my skin pours inside itself  
as the water creeps down my neck,  
my fingers, my calves,  
the contrast of the heavy air  
and soothing rain returning me  
to those four weeks,  
each given to a year  
and earned by the twenty-hour drive.  
i will never be inside that condo again.

but i can't erase the awareness  
of the storms that chased us  
nor the clouds that covered us,  
spilling their contents  
like a poorly-kept secret,  
bristling against the sand and sea  
and forcing us to revel in their strength.

my arms cry for the sweet relief  
of escaping into those three stories,  
collapsing onto towels and blankets  
as our skin regained consciousness,  
remembered warmth.  
the recesses of my brain plea to return,  
knowing i cannot:  
i have changed  
and it is the same.  
the presence of heat in the air  
against rain's chill:  
a promise,

a kiss on the cheek,  
swearing safety and happiness  
through the darkest downpours.  
i was that promise.

i am that promise.

i let the wind caress me,  
see the pine tree as a palm,  
and let rain cover my cheeks  
as a mask for the tears.

Anna Bedalov





Andréa Kütemeier





Nicole Jones

White hands strangle  
the wheel. Right foot  
does more than light tap.  
*Brain bleeding... unconscious*  
dash across my wet eyes.

The engine's melodic tune  
jumps to a higher pitch;  
the brake lights blink.  
Like a cheap commercial,  
that phone call replays.

One hour and twelve  
minutes is the time  
to beat. Thoughts of what I  
will say—what I would pray—  
smudge my vision.

*Why couldn't you have left  
the mess until morning?  
Was the bleeding worth it?*  
The tires hit the hump of the  
speed bump—level 3, row B.

\*\*\*

Eyes stitched closed  
but with a slack mouth.  
Saliva cascades as you,  
a prophet, mutter  
the moments of your life.

You ask for your deceased  
dog, shout at your sober  
husband for the bourbon,  
and plead with your *babička*  
about Lenten's stifling silence.

I sit; your son scoffs  
to leave you be. You turn  
towards me; broken, bruised  
hand grabs my thin finger.  
Eyes dimly lit; head tilts.

"Well, this is a surprise.  
You drove a long way."  
For the second time  
today, my mind is numb  
with chaotic clamor.

I stare at the patterned  
bed sheet, memorizing  
this final moment, teasing  
the firm felt—fully aware  
that this was the last of you.

Michelle Stiegart



Ashley Borg

Mark and I had finished our ascent and descent in the claustrophobia-inducing elevator you take to visit the top of the Arch. Standing on the carpeted steel, he had pointed in the direction of his house and clicked his camera down at the archaic courthouse and at my cheek, which was flushed by his attention and the humidity of June. An hour before, we'd been on the ground amidst the archipelago of buildings and creaking around in that courthouse; banners of red, white, and blue holding centuries of dust that we were freely admitted to breathe in. Six hundred and thirty feet up, a drone flew like a careless monarch butterfly to meet our eyeline through the windows, upsetting the guard by its illegality.

Returning to the ground in the sunset on a quiet downtown sidewalk, he walks with that sway he has while I lengthen my stride and practically skip to keep up. One shoulder carries his Nikon and the other holds the weight of my swinging hand that's enlaced in his. He's always a fast walker, in combat against wasting time, but this is a race to get back to the parking meter that holds his car, Frank, in his spot. Mark names everything Frank. Earlier, he wondered aloud at how much money to put in, as Frank and I leaned against each other, spectating. I think now he may be wishing he'd splurged, throwing in six more quarters for another hour.

Laughing about nothing, halfway to Frank, there's a man coming from the opposite direction, fifteen yards away, eyes on the ground. He looks like a shorter version of Samuel L. Jackson and is dressed in all black, which, during a Missouri summer, is almost worse than wearing white after Labor Day. As soon as we notice him, he's swinging his dark Jansport backpack off his shoulder and into the crook of his elbow, still casually making strides toward us. Quickly but sloppily unzipping the main

pocket, he reaches through the gap and pulls out a black handgun.

"It's okay. Just keep walking," Mark says swiftly, reassuringly under his breath, as if I was considering having a nervous breakdown or overtaking the man and his gun using only my bare hands.

He squeezes my hand tighter, hugging my metacarpals to protect me from a potential gunshot wound. But my heart rate stays steady; adrenaline doesn't flood into my bloodstream. When the gun being cocked resonates a few sidewalk slabs in front of us, I just avert my eyes and focus on the way my sandals scuff on the cement. He drops the cold piece of metal back into his Jansport anyway and conceals it from us with the sound of the zipper.

He steps past us, the current of our breezes entangled for a moment. Mark and I continue silently until we're sure he's safely behind us and then laugh, breathing out in disbelief. We turn in unison and look back only to see him heading up a ramp into the garage of a Hampton Inn. With widened eyes, we look back at each other and agree, lacking faith in our hypothesis, that he must be hotel security.

Reaching the car, we close the doors gently, as Frank is old and somewhat frail, and buckle our seatbelts.

Turning the key in the ignition, he asks, "Can I get you to do me a favor?"

"What's that," I say, smiling.

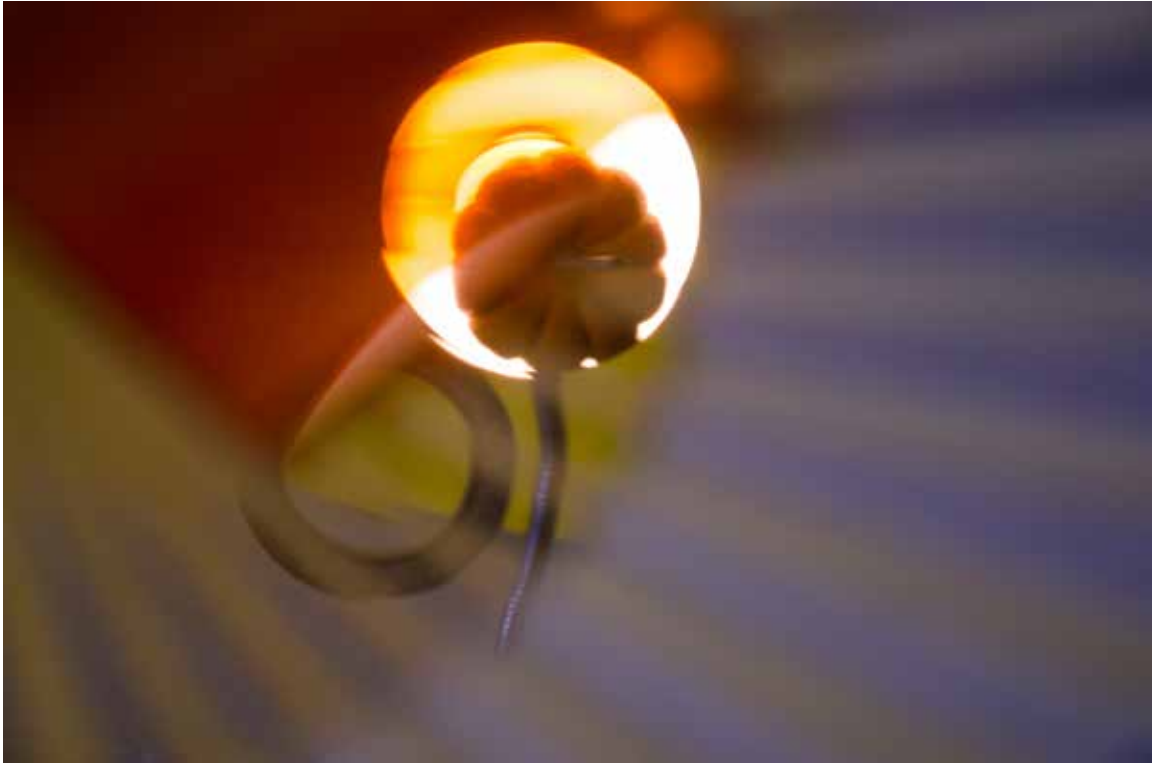
Pausing for a moment, "Please don't tell your parents."



Eric Ream



Sydney Ezell

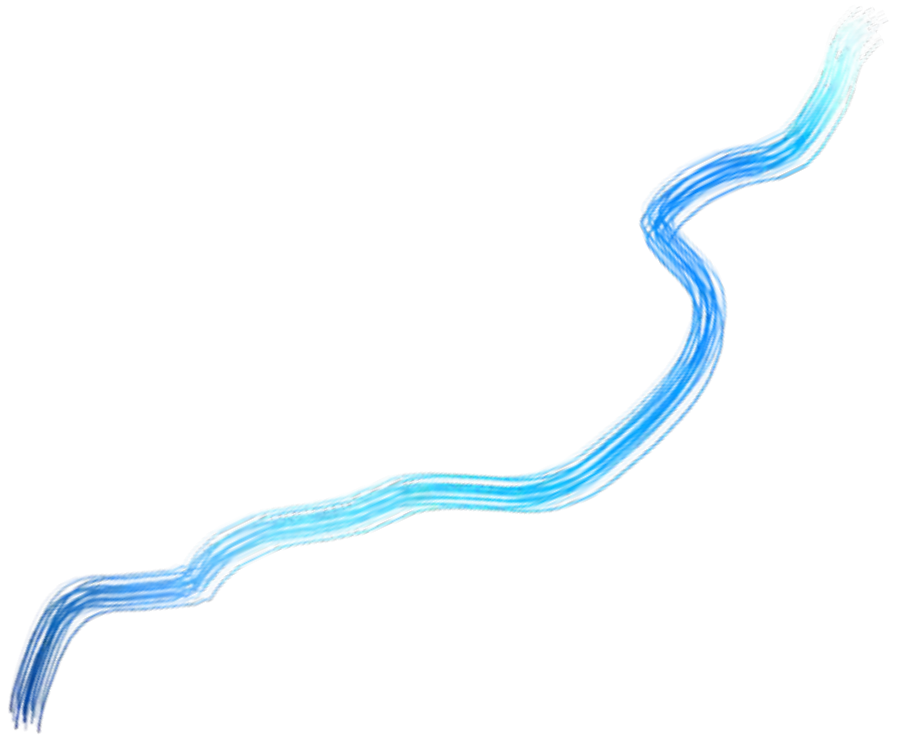


Marcus Boas

*A child is playing in a field and finds a flower dancing in the breeze. The child approaches the flower and asks, "Flower, what are you doing there?"*

*The flower responds:*

"My dear, sweet child,  
Infant of gold,  
Well, here I am,  
Just growing old,  
Obeying the wind,  
And doing as told,  
And sharing my pollen  
For the bees to hold.  
I'm soaking in sunshine,  
And dancing in mist,  
Accepting this moment  
For the gift that it is,  
Drinking and savoring  
The dawn's early dew...  
Oh, my dear child,  
I'm talking to you!"



Lauren Clark





Nathan Biancardi



Marcus Boas



Zhaotong Liu

I was cold until the fire  
(*el fuego de tus ojos*)  
consumed me  
(*lentamente*).

The flames licked my feet  
(*antes de darme cuenta*)  
and twined up my legs  
(*como serpientes*)

before they destroyed my hips and waist  
(*como un incendio forestal*)  
and crackled and popped in my lungs  
(*a tu orden*).

My throat was burning  
(*el dolor me escaldaba*)  
when you left  
(*y estaba atrapado*).

You will come back to me  
(*necesito que tú vuelvas*).

Taylor Bundren

For years, I have poured  
my mind, body, and soul into you  
for an unfair return of your superficial touch,  
knowing very well  
that I would never have you  
for more than a few nights at a time.

For years, I have heard  
the things your friends would say about me,  
and I refuse to be reduced to a skank  
for simply loving you unreciprocated.

For I realize now that  
you are not the prize.  
I am.

The next time you get your heart broken,  
do not rely on the expenditure of my body  
to mend it for you.

My vagina is not your sweet salvation to dip into  
whenever you may get hungry  
for my touch.

My body is a palace,  
and you  
are unwelcome here.

Megan McDaniel

There is a structure to our weekend nights. We travel the same journey, over and over; like someone rereading the worn pages of a favorite novel, over and over again.

You call me. Sometimes I text you. Sometimes I have other things I really need to do. Sometimes I should have been sleeping an hour ago. I almost never turn you down. Not this year. Not after what we've been through. Sometimes you bring someone; sometimes I join your party, already existing. Sometimes we swing by someone's dorm before we leave. It's irrelevant because, eventually, inevitably, everyone else will peel away, and it will be the two of us by ourselves.

I know you. I've only known you for two years, but I've known you forever. You tell so many stories, your history is paved on my brain, your memories settled next to mine. You laugh, because you love telling jokes. You talk with your hands, waving them around in front of you to carve out spaces and places, and put your stories in proportion. You talk with a goofy grin on your face when you're happy; you talk with a furrowed brow and pinched eyes when you're trying not to cry. I never realized you cried so much. I haven't cried this much in years.

We linger in places. We stay long after we're done with our meal, our midnight snack. We stay, talking about everything, sometimes, but never about nothing. We will have our existential crises, not knowing what we're going to do when we graduate. You will talk about losing things you never had. I will talk about losing things I just found. There are things we say we won't talk about, but we might talk about them anyway.

I know your voice. I can hear it echoing in my head even now that I've kicked you out of my

dorm and told you I needed to sleep. Instead, I'm sitting here writing this, hearing your voice in my head. There is a pattern to your sentences. You talk in bursts, chunks of story or idea or concept squared off and neatly partitioned by your hands in the space between us. The table is our battle ground, hands wave around like fighter jets, words fly – but this is where the metaphor ends, because you are never cruel. I may hurt people with my blundering colloquialisms, but you always warn me before you say something you think I might find offensive. Though, sometimes, you don't realize what you're doing, but I stop you, and gently tell you to be careful, or not to say it that way. Sometimes we discuss that tangent, walking down dark Valpo sidewalks, my face to the concrete in front of me while you continue to divide the air in front of you, fruitlessly now as the battlefield is ever shifting as we walk.

We get back to my dorm room – mine, because I only have one roommate, and she's usually gone on a Friday night. You turn on the harsh light by the door rather than the softer, nicer floor lamp my mom bought me before she left, hating the idea of abandoning me here without something to soothe the empty space of the room. We cluster on my bed, tight for no reason, like preparation for a war that will never come – or maybe it's already here – but you fill the space of the room anyway. I don't have to wrestle with my loneliness when I'm not alone on a Friday night.

Sometimes I stare at the carpet – also impulse-bought by my mother, but I begrudge her none of these things – sometimes I stare at you. Sometimes you stare at the divided space in front of you. Sometimes you cry and I hug you. Sometimes I rant and you hug me. Sometimes you hug me when we're standing in the doorway for no good reason

other than the fact that you're grateful for me, and I am grateful for you.

When we get that far, to that doorway, you usually walk away, but today you break the rules, and we linger yet again. We go through all the same steps, in 10 minutes and my doorway, rather than 110 and the space between my dorm and Jimmy Johns. But it's not for long. I was the one who tried to throw you out tonight, breaking the rule that you check the clock and decide at what point past midnight is late enough; you stay just long enough to fix that, leaving because you know I want you to, hugging me because you need to and, really, I don't mind this more tactile version of you.

And then you're gone. And that is how our weekend nights go. Like clockwork. Like a formula. Like something out of a storybook. But there is meaning in this mundane, and upon meditation, I mark myself not minding.





Mark Young



Secretive, the Scorpio twins, and envious,  
Possessive and reticent. Foolish women,  
Lowell's women. We say that they  
Killed themselves because they could not  
Live in his shadow. Babies could not fill it,  
Therapy could not cure it, the gaping maw  
Of despondence, unfulfillment. Father figures  
In somehow, but specifics are really unknown  
Unless Plath, Sexton were to return from  
Their "unfortunate medical thing," an East  
Coast tobacco dispensary.

River Wilding



Monique Le Donne

I form  
in the absence of you.  
The curve of time  
idles  
along your distant smile,  
the incline of my lips--  
against air.



Anna Styrzula



Elle Howard



Tim Bimler

At the end of summer, we found ourselves  
in a northern town, looking for anything.  
At Forever Books, I had decided  
that I wished to be a writer, but  
I've never written a page of prose;  
Never dreaming of the distant future,  
You just lived to feel the lakefront,  
the cool breeze amidst the warmth  
of the September air. Living only on  
ice cream of the most superb origin,

you became an adult before I ever could,  
and everything I learned had left your lips.  
You had the darkest eyes I could sink into,  
and a gleaming smile that pulled me out.  
As our hands intertwined, we became  
a portrait of *The Lovers* in the midwest's  
Tarot deck. With nothing to hide,  
and everything to gain, I live for your vexing  
incantations that melt me into the waterfront  
winds that blow East from Silver Beach.

Jackson Spanburg



Nathan Biancardi



When I was born, I was at peace for a day. I had one solitary deep sleep. When I woke up, it was to my Father's salt and pepper bearded face, two inches in front of mine. He was introducing me to a crepe colored blob of clay, my twin sister, Natalie. "Natalie, Oliver. Oliver, Natalie. Natalie, Oliver. Oliver, Natalie," as if we were going to miraculously learn to speak right there in the incubators.

At this introduction, I began to wail so ruthlessly that I fractured one of my ribs (the origin of many hospital bills in my childhood and teen years). My Father retells this story annually on our birthday. As I wheeze to blow out the candles, His monologue defines my crying as "tears of joy" at the sight of my little sister. I'm not sure He has ever accumulated enough evidence to support this testimonial, as the only other times that I have even come close to tears regarding Natalie is when she kicks me for calling her "Nat the Rat." It's inevitable though, the nickname. Her face isn't a far cry from that of a rodent's, so the connection wasn't hard to make. And it's not like she doesn't do the same thing to me. When I had my smoking phase back in tenth grade, she called me PallM-Ollie, even though she knew very well that I preferred Marlboros. Once, I invited my best friend's sister over for a game night. My Father walked into the basement to find us making out on the white, multi-colored dotted mat on the floor and He grounded me and sent Brandi home. Natalie called me Oliver Twist for weeks.

My Father is always one for strict punishment. Natalie says He's punishing us twofold, trying to compensate for the lack of a maternal influence. He never tells us anything about our mother, even though it seems as though Natalie begs him at least once a month to supply us with more information. She craves a motherly presence

more than I do. But He only says that she left and then forbids us to go looking for her. This is the part of our birth story He leaves out over cake. Our mother bolted the moment her pangs were over.

This year on our birthday, today, we will not be home for the party. Our Father will stand over the dining room table and tell His story for the eighteenth time, but only to the oak chairs. Because this year, without telling Him, Natalie and I got ourselves the trip we've coveted for a long time.

"Welcome on board," a stewardess says, her crimson apple lips smiling, blonde hair waving.

"I'll welcome *you* on board," I say with a wink, just loudly enough for her pearl studded ears to catch.

Her eyebrows shoot up her forehead as she sneers beautifully. Natalie hears too and snorts, shoving me toward our seats. Plopping into 19D next to two businessmen already strapped in and napping, she passes by me, making it to 20D. I refused to buy tickets in the same row, wishing to avoid conversation, which Natalie usually considers obligatory.

The captain announces that we will be flying at an altitude of thirty-six thousand feet. Flight attendants go through their interpretive dance, and then all of them go about their business preparing for takeoff, which seems to consist largely of crew members loudly jogging through the aisles and disappearing into little compartments.

"Psst."

Natalie. I ignore her, look up hungrily at the stewardess approaching with the snack cart, then focus on a handout from the mesh bag attached to the seat in front of me, learning how I can earn frequent flyer miles.



“Psst.”

Earning miles is easy with a credit card or even a prepaid card. I’m turning the page to find out more when I’m interrupted by the sound of my name, followed by a “how to inflate your personal flotation device” pamphlet slapping the top of my head.

Swiveling into the aisle to glare back at her, I’m suddenly struck by the snack cart, first in the ankle and, milliseconds later, in the skull. I shift, bruised, towards the perpetrator and she turns up the corners of her red Botox-injected smile, tosses her straw colored hair, and says snidely over fifty bags of pretzels, “I’m sorry, sir, but I need all bags, feet, and heads out of the aisle.”

I contemptuously gather myself into my seat, get up onto my knees and, facing backwards, pop my face over the head rest.

“What could you possibly want, Natalie,” I hiss.

“Are you nervous for our internation-Ollie bound flight?”

“We’re going to Arizona, idiot. It takes an hour and a half.”

“I know, I know,” she draws. “Who would’ve thought? Arizona... Still. What if something happens with your rib and your lung collapses and you die? I just want you to know that I will not resuscitate you.”

“It won’t. I’ll be fine,” I state. I turn back into my seat and wince at the surprise spasm in my torso, the pain and shortness of breath that has already started to set in from the altitude.

Thrusting myself back up to look over the

seat, I scowl at her and quickly add, “And if I do die, it will have been your fault.”

For an hour I sit like a motionless tree, rooted in the discolored wool-blend fabric of the seat, trying to ignore the intermittent babbling Natalie forces in my direction, trying to avoid any more pain. But, it proves impossible. Every word she speaks eggs my rib on and it stabs at my ability to breathe. With fifteen minutes left of the flight, it’s announced that everyone should fasten their seatbelts, put their trays in the upright position, and prepare for landing. Considering the aisle is now completely clear, I take this opportunity to unclasp my seatbelt and stand up for a stretch, hoping that slow movement and distance from Natalie will cure me.

In an instant, my lungs strip my brain of blood, ruby splotches burn in my vision and then blackness knocks me down, my ribcage pinning me to the floor.

I awake from this faint peace thirty-two seconds later and find the stewardess pressing an oxygen mask over my nose and mouth with unnecessary force. I can feel that my chest has taken a respite from paining me and my eyes immediately search for Natalie. She’s sitting mildly, seatbelted into her seat with her tray upright, staring at me apathetically.

“You’re fine,” she mouths.

I lie despondently on the scratchy carpet for fourteen more minutes as the stewardess drones on about the signs and symptoms of high altitude sickness. The wheels touch down on the runway, joggling my head against the floor, almost putting me out of my misery again. My eyes loll briefly into the back of my head and the splotches return momentarily, but the oxygen mask is forced down

on me even harder. So I maintain consciousness. The stewardess motions for the male flight attendant to come over. As he kneels to pick me up, my sister cautions him, "Careful, he's heavier than he looks. Rolie Polie Ollie."

However, he seems to disagree because he lifts me up easily. We proceed onto the gangway first, in front of passengers that peer at me with a mixture of concern and impatience. He places me into a wheelchair and walks away. A little too late, I turn to him.

"I don't need this," the air hears.

Natalie sidles up to me and I change my mind.

"Push me," I groan.

She grabs the handles and carelessly drives me into the nearest wall.

"You can walk," she asserts as she begins to parade down the hallway, almost disappearing in the ever growing sea of people from our flight.

I sit for a moment, considering sliding back down the gangway, onto the plane and going home. I roll my eyes, blow a significant amount of air out of my nose, grab the wheels, back out of the plaster divot the chair made, and roll after Natalie. Catching up to her, we make our way to Gate C6, the crowd thinning until it's almost exclusively the two of us wandering down the hall of Phoenix Sky Harbor.

"We're here," I say expectantly, looking around at empty seats.

"You can't just say that and think anything's going to happen," Natalie criticizes.

"No, I'm just saying there was an agreement

and if it's broken I think there should be \$227 coming my way to cover airfare. Maybe we shouldn't have done this in the first place."

And then we look behind us and I think we see her at the same time. It has to be her. Black hair pulled into a severe bun at the nape of her neck matching the strict dress she's wearing. Her skin pale and somehow translucent; you can almost see cool blood trickling into the fingers clutching the snakeskin purse. Behind her on one of the seats I see a sign that says "Oliver & Natalie." It's as if she thought of wanting us, but then gave up again. Her crepe lips, the same color as the circles around her eyes, aren't smiling to see us.

Under her gaze, I get out of the wheelchair and walk towards her, following Natalie, who has already taken a few steps. We stand side by side in front of her.

"Well," she says. As she narrows her eyes to slits to scrutinize us, I can feel my rib begin to burn.

"Well," we say back in unison.

She sucks in one cheek and sweeps her eyes across our faces again and then stares between us. From behind, a calm, unexpected hand rests on my shoulder.

"Well," says my Father softly.

Stunned silence until—

"We aren't expecting you," our mother comments placidly, which is my concern exactly. I don't know how He knew we were coming and, by the ludicrous expression on her face, Natalie is as surprised and afraid as I am.

"How did you..." I trail off.

Natalie follows up with, "Why..."

Our mother keeps eye contact with my Father.

"I think it would be best if we went home," He replies.

"They just got here."

"Nice of you to finally take an interest, but they don't need whatever you may offer them, just like in the beginning," He declares softly, deeply. He turns and walks away from the gate, our backs turned on Him, leaving us in more silence until I blurt out, "You left us. Why?"

No reply, just a thin gaze.

"Why?" I repeat.

"Your father sent me away. He didn't think I was fit to be a mother. But I am," she responds slowly, firmly. But something about it seems wrong, as if at any moment our eyes will start swirling in shades of green and blue and yellow, as if she's trying to hypnotize us. The burning in my rib grows stronger.

"He told us you left," Natalie says sadly, maintaining any last trace of caution.

Our mother laughs through her nose and glides closer toward us. "He sent me away because he thought I would be poisonous to you. But I certainly am not."

Natalie's eyes begin to swirl.

"Why didn't you try to contact us before now? You had years," I say dissentingly, angrily.

"Ollie. She's trying now," Natalie cuts in, before our mother has a chance to lie to me again. "It's okay. We understand," she continues meekly and our mother smiles greedily at her.

"No we don't," I say firmly to Natalie and "I'm sorry, I think this was a mistake. We shouldn't have come," to our mother.

I turn away, taking Natalie's arm in my hand, and seeing my Father standing down the hall staring down at His clasped hands, I go towards Him.

"Let go of me! You can go, but I'm staying. I'm staying with her."

"You're not serious. You have to see through her."

"See through what? Why can't you just give her a chance? What more do you want from her?"

My rib radiates an all-encompassing fire.

"I just don't think she is who you think. Trust me."

"Okay," she scoffs and goes and stands next to her mother. They look so alike.

I wait for a moment for her to come back to me but she doesn't. So I turn and painfully walk away from the gate, leaving Natalie to her mother, and follow my Father, the flames dimming each step we take towards home.



Elle Howard

# Contributer Bios

Adam Apel | is a junior Actuarial Science major who's searching for Anchors in a world full of Tentacles.

Andréa Kütemeier | is a sophomore Digital Media major with a concentration in Photography, minoring in Fundamentals of Business and Entrepreneurship. She is a member of the Social Action Leadership Team (SALT), co-leader for the Event Planning Committee for the World Relief Campaign, and Volunteer Committee Chair for History Club VU. She also enjoys participating in Intramural Volleyball and Basketball. She says, "Make sure what you do is what you love."

Andrew Edwards | A freshman Physics major who finds the same level of aesthetic pleasure in a set of elegant equations as in a poem. Plans to find a career as a professor.

Anna Bedalov | Freshman Creative Writing major in love with the English language and the world.

Anna Styrzczula | Sophomore, Digital Media major. Thanks to my friends and family for their unending support!

Ashley Borg | I am a senior Digital Media major with a heart for photography. My first concentration was landscape photography, but I've recently discovered a love for portraiture/self-portraiture. Learning about various photography movements through my different photo and art classes has helped me branch out and become a better photographer. I have learned so many lessons through photography and I am thankful to have opportunities like this to share my work with others.

Brendan Miller | I am a sophomore, Communications major. I am the photo editor for both *The Torch* and *The Beacon*. My favorite flavor of ice cream is coffee.

Christopher Connor | I am a senior Civil Engineering major who has been taking photos since I was a kid using a disposable camera. I now focus on macro photography. In these photos, I show campus through the perspective of an ant.

Claire Utzinger | is a Sophomore Studio Art major and a Communications minor from Hampden-Sydney, VA. She enjoys chicken biscuits, cats, and long walks on the beach.

Demi Marshall | is a Sophomore English major. This is her first time submitting to *The Lighter*. Demi attends a lot of concerts, and in doing so has developed an interest in concert photography. Using only her phone, a lot of effort can go into taking up close, intimate pictures of performers. Demi hopes to continue improving her photography skills, and continue to share her work.

Eleanor Chae | If you're reading this: SEND HELP. They're keeping me locked up somewhere. I can't get out on my own, but I managed to sneak this note into *The Lighter*. If you see this then you need to send someone to the basem

Elle Howard | is an artist who is trying to make sense of her life.

Emily Mrzlak | is a Junior studying English and Secondary Education, and is a member of Christ College. She hopes to teach English at the middle or high school level after graduation, and loves sharing her passion for reading and writing with her students. She hopes you enjoy her work!

Emily Neuharth | is an alien-believer, activist, empath, and metaphor-junkie. She wishes she could adorn a monogrammed, shimmering star on the heart of every person that reads *The Lighter*.

Emma Hecht | I'm from Battle Creek, MI, which is solely known for Kellogg's cereal. My proudest talent is having a quote from *The Office* for every situation, but I occasionally sing and play piano on the side. I also went through two majors before I found Creative Writing, the only one that hasn't been accompanied by tear-stained homework and lecture notes. My other major, Computer Science, is still on a trial period. At this time, I cannot say if its contract will be renewed.

Eric Ream | I is a freshman Nursing major who likes to lose himself in his work. He has modeled for his sibling's art and has always loved every aspect. After taking a class on his own he learned that he loves the ability to capture a mood or a moment in time with photography and has been smitten since. He hopes to get his name out there and to inspire others.

Grace Biermann | I is a freshman English major currently living in Valparaiso, whose work is strongly influenced by her lifelong Christianity. She is ridiculously passionate about Harry Potter, the Lord of the Rings, and Captain America, and ridiculously fond of writing about herself in the third person. Shoutout to Michael Bukata and Mark Fields for their thoughts on her poem.

Grace Burkhart | I am a sophomore Biochemistry major with a creative writing minor. I love to read, and am pretty new at the whole poet thing. Thanks for reading *The Lighter*!

Grace Erickson | I love art because it allows me to use my heart through my hands!

Haley Brewer | She is an English and Communications major sophomore who sometimes writes. She dedicates her work to her biggest fan— her cat. She prefers peppermint lattes, paperback books, and the color purple. Her favorite food is hot sauce.

Hayley Kim | I is a sophomore English major who has killed every plant she has ever owned but for some reason keeps buying new ones.

Isabel Coffey | I has previously had photography and poetry published in *The Lighter*, as well as creative nonfiction published in *Oakland Arts Review* and short fiction published in an anthology by *Chapter One Chicago*. She is very excited to see this semester's edition of *The Lighter*, and all the beautiful art within it.

Jackson Spanburg | I an English and Secondary Education major, poet by day, and an aggressively average musician by night.

Jesse Hershberger | I sophomore English & Political science major: Some feelings are hard to explain in words. Poetry helps you get close.

Jessica Clanton | I English and Secondary Education major with a Creative Writing minor. If I'm not sleeping, I'm probably working. I just hope to write things that people think is cool.

Julia Evans | I am a senior Psychology major. I've been writing poems, short stories, and novels since I was in fifth grade. Other hobbies include fangirling over R2-D2, listening to classic rock, and reading as many books in one day as possible (current record is 7). This is my first publication.

Kian Benton | I In the process of freeing my mind so my ass can follow.

Lauren Clark | I'm from Huntington Beach, California. My favorite country is France, my favorite language is French. I love reading and writing, songs and poetry, and music speaks to my soul. My favorite color is green.

Lexi Gault | I Freshman Astronomy major who likes to look at, breath in, and create art.



Madison Magiera | I am a sophomore English major with a Criminology minor from Hebron, IN. I love reading, writing and eating pickles.

This is my first submission to *The Lighter*.

Marcus Boas | is a junior Digital Media major with Creative Writing and Science minors. He is a Dutch international student that enjoys making art, watching movies, and complaining about the US, even though he actually loves it here.

Mark Young | For more photos by Mark visit [markyoungphoto.com](http://markyoungphoto.com)

Megan Gilliam | senior Criminology & English double major. A wise woman once told me, as I was babbling about the parts of my mind that I could not console, that I sounded like a writer who wasn't writing. So, I picked up a diary to fill with terrible poetry...and now here we are.

Moral of the story: listen to the people who believe in you.

Megan McDaniel | I am a senior Health Sciences major who prefers to spend time writing poetry and feeding my creative side. My inspirations ignite from personal experiences, strangers I connect with, friends, and other forms of life that surround me.

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

Milka Vidova | I'm a senior Marketing major with a minor in Business Analytics, Psychology, and Studio Art. I love chocolate, my dog, and trivia; If you like my photos, help me out by downloading HQ and use the referral code MilkaV to help me get more lives! :)

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

Monique Le Donne | is a freshman at Valparaiso University studying Biology and Chemistry. I've been drawing and painting for several years. My typical mediums include acrylics, colored pencils, and graphite. I enjoy art as a means to express myself and relieve stress.

Nathan Biancardi | I enjoy painting and drawing from my imagination. My work consists of the way the imagination puts together different elements to create new and unusual concepts.

Nathaniel Bouman | is a senior Computer Science, Physics, and Humanities triple major with a Math minor who will stay at VU for a fifth year. He spends his time finding passions at SALT, singing in the VuVox and Hooked on Tonics a cappella groups, and serving as (soon-to-be-past) president of Mortar Board Senior Honor Society. In his free time, he enjoys creating art through code, and working on his hobby of solo independent game development. 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 sophomore Digital Media Art major who is *The Lighter's* resident graphic designer and fairy pixie queen. She can be spotted in dark parking lots and fields looking for the Big Dipper, and just really likes art, mac and cheese, and chicken nuggets.

River Wilding | is a senior Creative Writing major and Art minor. They like country music, women, and bourbon, and hate capitalism.

Sarah Law | I am an ardent bibliophile that also enjoys playing piano and painting (not at the same time) whenever I am not reading. This is my first publication and I cannot wait to see it next to everyone else's amazing work!

Sarah Zakowski | I am a junior Music Education major. When my artwork is viewed, I hope you will react to the various pieces with enthusiasm and emotions of happiness and joy. I have drawn pieces consisting of universal themes—music, animals, and family—that people can relate to. I hope when you view my favorite things in these drawings that they will inspire you to consider your passions and interests as well!

Sawyer Patrick | is a Computer Science and English double major who loves to write in his free time. He loves science fiction and poetry and anything that is a social commentary.

Sydney Ezell | is a senior English major with Spanish and Music minors. She is really excited that her photography will be featured in *The Lighter*, as she is new to this medium and is a performing artist instead of a visual artist. She enjoys reading fiction, playing flute, and spending time with her fiancé, Nolan, and their dog, Luna. She survives on veggie hot dogs and potatoes (of all types). Send her veggie hot dogs and potatoes.

Taylor Bundren | I'm a junior double major in Journalism and History. All my creative projects are brought to you by coffee and good playlists.

Tim Bimler | I am a sophomore Physics and Secondary Education major. I have done photography as a hobby since high school, but just recently ventured into the world of Film. This jump has made me focus more on the emotions and gravity of the shot. This moved my art from simply capturing the moment to capturing the meaning of the moment.

Vishal Bharadwaj Meruga | is a grad student doing my masters in Information Technology. My piece is simply an attempt to bring people's attention to things that will usually go unnoticed. "What is everywhere?" The only thing that is everywhere in existence is pure darkness and light is a temporary happening. To feel the essence of light, we should also acknowledge the darkness around us.

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.



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Alexis Mentis for all of her time and excitement that's been put into being *The Lighter's* first ever Lead Blogger. (Check it out at <https://thelighterlitmag.wixsite.com/thelighter>)

Mark Young for allowing us to use his photo "Magical Music" as our cover. Check out his wonderful work in our general submissions as well! (P.S. thank you for leaving your meeting early, walking to schnabel in the rain, and at personal expense taking Siclaly's headshot.)

Vishal Bharadwaj for allowing us to use his photo "The Dar'K'night" as our Table of Contents background. Check out his wonderful work in our general submissions as well!

Ashley Borg for allowing us to use her photo "The Burning Cardboard" as the background for our Editor's Note and Staff Page. Check out her wonderful work in our general submissions as well!

Haley Brewer and Professor Jon Bull for their determined work on our archives and website in order to preserve *The Lighter* for eternity.



A person is seen from behind, sitting on the ground and playing an acoustic guitar. They are positioned under a large, light-colored tent or canopy. The background is a dark night sky filled with numerous stars. To the left, there is a structure made of sandbags or similar material. In the distance, some faint lights and a wooden railing are visible. The overall lighting is dim, with a soft glow from the tent and the starry sky.

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