

The Lighter

Volume 65
Issue 2 *The Lighter Spring 2019*

Article 1

May 2019

The Lighter Spring 2019

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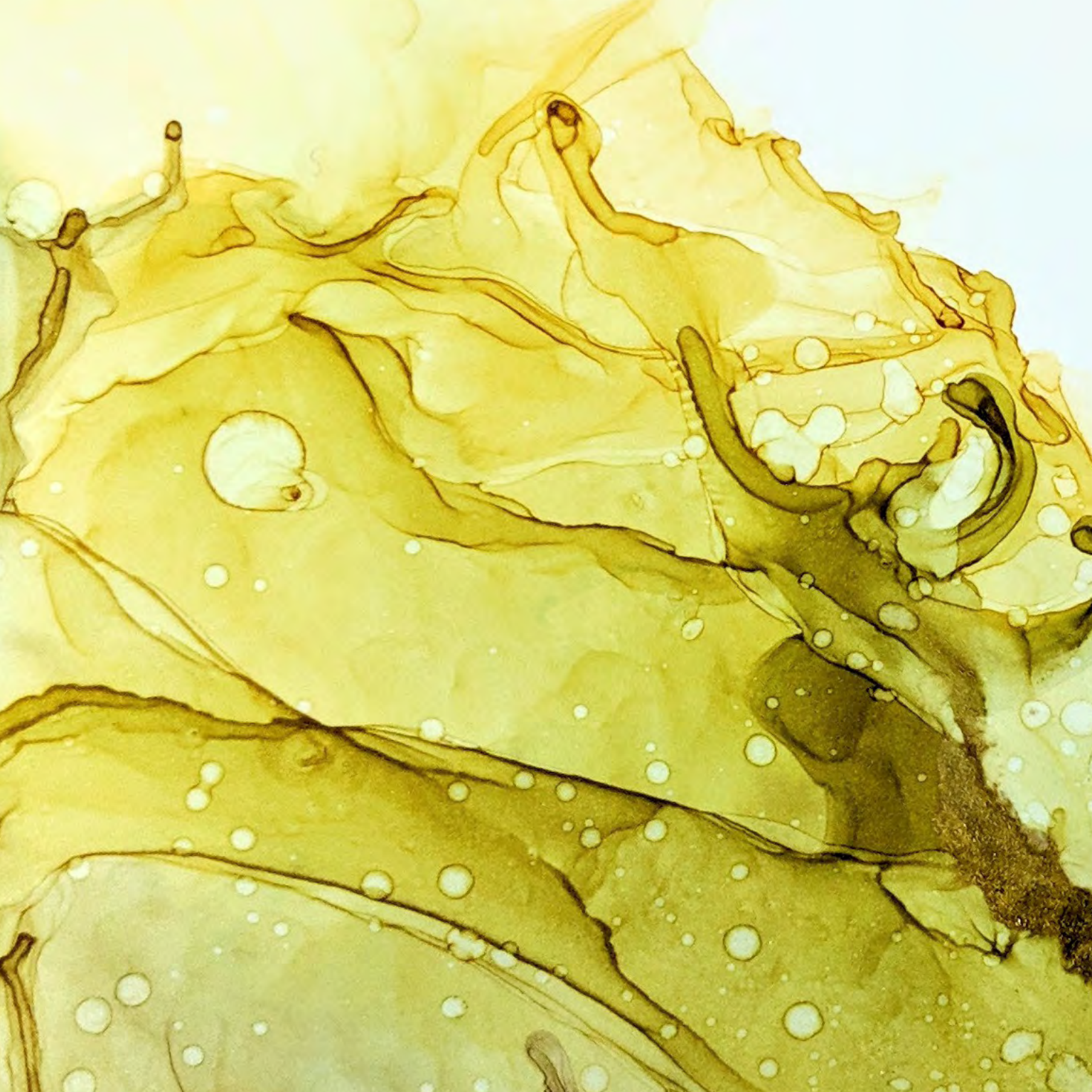
Recommended Citation

(2019) "The Lighter Spring 2019," *The Lighter*: Vol. 65 : Iss. 2 , Article 1.
Available at: <https://scholar.valpo.edu/lighter/vol65/iss2/1>

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the lighter.



volume 65
issue 2.

editors note.

Every semester, this publication has the privilege to see the amazing creative works that our community has made. We see everything from the joy of falling asleep next to a loved one to the dynamic between strangers stranded together after a plane crash to intricate pointillism that reveals more than what first meets the eye. In these specific pages, you will see the vast array of creative outlets and perspectives on things in our world and things connected to our humanity. In pulling together this issue, I found myself shocked at how many different topics and themes were reflected in the works. It honestly was difficult to create a layout that made sense, but this I think is also an enormous blessing and shows the depth that we have as a creative community.

Art is not an isolated matter however, nor is it something that is meant to be exclusive to one group of people. This semester, *The Lighter* has taken another step in our growth, expanding outside of the university. While we were successful in some endeavours and not as successful in others, we believe this is a step in the right direction for our publication. A close alumna, Kendall Kartaly, reached out to us and told us about how the adolescents at her school were creating amazing works. From this, we began to work together to create a new feature section so that not only her students could see their hard work come to life on the page, but so that we could see their perspectives all the way from Bydgoszcz, Poland.

For me, this issue is particularly important as it is the last that I will be on staff for. It has been a complete honor to be able to serve as Editor this semester and pour my love into this community and publication. In my three years here, I have had the incredible opportunities to learn from not one, but two phenomenal Editors before me, Michele Strachota and Emily Neuharth. My only hope is that in anything that I failed to do in being Editor this issue, it has been made up through the passion and heart I not only gave, but felt in all those around me on the road to this final print.

with love,

Sarah Law

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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sarah law | editor
anna bedalov | assistant editor
haley brewer | assistant editor
nicole jones | graphic designer
lexi gault | social media manager
mark wagnaar | faculty advisor

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Meet Mona Lisa.

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Published by Valparaiso University, Valparaiso, IN 46383.

For more information, email the.lighter@valpo.edu



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marcus boas



Metal Skies
photography

Somewhere, Anywhere

“So I think we should all introduce ourselves,” He clapped his hands together, standing in the loose circle. From their places crouched in the sand, everyone stared up at him with mixed emotion. “How about we go around and say our names, our reason for traveling, and maybe a fun fact about ourselves!”

There was a beat of silence.

“Is he being serious right now?” One woman muttered to another, her ripped button up falling over one shoulder. “He’s being serious, isn’t he.”

The man smiled widely, dusting sand off his hands. “Of course! I’ll go first. My name’s Justin, I’m an Aquarius, I’m traveling for work, and my fun fact is...” He trailed off, thinking. He lit up after a moment, holding up a finger. “I teach Zumba classes on the weekends!” He turned to the person at his side, “Your turn!”

The man he had gestured to seemed to be in shock, staring off into the distance. He had yet to acknowledge any of them or the openly bleeding gash at his side. From how it was still going, the injury was totally going to ruin his shirt. Justin waited for a moment, staring at the man, before sighing. Someone across the circle spoke up in his place.

“Fun fact: this is my first plane crash,” One of the women, dressed in a dirty, navy blue uniform, spoke up. Her legs were crossed delicately to the side and a small bag perched perfectly in her lap. She had kicked off her heels before sitting down, and they were placed carefully on the sand in order to keep them in good condition.

Justin frowned at her, “You didn’t follow the format.”

She sighed, “Fine. I’m Serena, I was your flight attendant, and this is my first plane crash.”

“Really?” One of the women gave her an impressed look, like that fact was Serena’s sole doing. “How long have you been flying?”

“Ten years,” Serena answered politely. “I love it. And plane crashes aren’t actually that common.”

“Common enough,” someone muttered, who they all swiftly ignored.

They looked to Serena’s right, the introductions apparently proceeding in a clockwise fashion. The woman sitting there seemed surprised by the attention.

“Oh, well, I’m Janet,” she started, looking off in thought. “I was visiting my daughter in Europe, and...” She bit her lip, “I have a pet bird?”

“I love birds!” A young woman gushed from across the circle, “I used to have a cockatiel!”

The teenage boy in the circle burst out laughing, “You used to have a what?”

“Oh my god --”

“Next person!” Justin clapped his hands together again, his grin looking strained. He turned to the teenage boy, “How about you?”

He looked surprised to have been picked but grinned nonetheless. “Name’s Arland, I’m fifteen, and one time, I met Shaquille O’Neil.”

“How was he?”

“Pretty chill,” Arland nodded smugly. “He signed my face.”

“Why are you traveling?” Janet asked if only to be courteous.

“My mom and I are visiting family.” He gestured behind him, “She’s around here somewhere.”

No one mentioned the fact that they were all who survived, but smiled and nodded instead.

“Well,” The woman at Arland’s side spoke up, “I’m Rebecca, I’m traveling for vacation, and my fun fact is that I can hold my breath for a minute and a half.”

“Bet that helped you out recently,” The man next to her -- Michael, he had mentioned on the plane -- muttered out, glancing towards the slowly sinking front half of the plane. Smoke was still drifting up from it.

Justin nodded happily, “What an interesting talent!” Rebecca’s cheeks turned a bright red, either from the words or her minor head trauma finally catching up with her. Justin looked to one of the older men there, who was scowling at the sand and fiddling with something on his hand.

He seemed to realize they were all looking at him

Somewhere, Anywhere (continued)

and frowned even deeper. When he spoke, he only spat out a single word, "George."

Justin gave him an encouraging nod, "And? Reason for traveling? Fun fact?"

George glared at him in the way only grumpy old men could, "None of your business, hippie. And there's nothing fun about me."

Serena frowned at him, as did nearly everyone in the circle, the exception being the man from earlier who was still staring off into the distance, his eyes now half-lidded.

George had been grumpy to her on the plane as well, but the older woman at his side had managed to draw a few looks of kindness from him when ordering their drinks. That woman was nowhere to be found, and George's hand continued to mess with his ring.

Before Justin could respond to that, as he was bound to do, there was a quick, sharp bang on metal that had all their attention snapping elsewhere.

They looked to the cause of the commotion. Michael had pushed himself up from the circle while they were talking and was now pacing up and down a small length of the beach. His foot must have hit the sheet metal as he walked back and forth, causing the loud sound.

"Should we check on him?" One of the women frowned in concern -- Andrea, who had loudly introduced herself on the plane.

"But we haven't finished introductions!" Justin's face fell, "This is the time for cultivating bonds!"

"We've got time, don't worry," Rebecca stood up and began making her way over to where Michael was pacing, a few others following.

"So Michael," Andrea started once they had all paused and looked at each other. The man didn't pause in his pacing, and she continued. "We were just wondering what you're doing."

He still hadn't looked to any of them, "I'm thinking."

She nodded like his words were something particularly wise. "Thinking about what, exactly?"

He let out a rough breath, "Listen, we've all seen LOST," He finally paused, but only to gesture frantically towards the tree line, "And according to that, we've got to stay out the forest as much as we can, establish a steady hierarchy, and be fully prepared to live out the rest of our lives on this island!"

"Weren't they all dead in the end?"

The man cried out, "That's even worse!"

Arland gave him a strange look, "What's LOST?"

Michael made a sound like the question had personally wounded him. George, who had surprisingly walked over with the others, scoffed at the teen.

"These millennials don't know anything," George frowned, crossing his arms. "Even with all their Googles and Twitters, they still don't know basic education."

"LOST is considered basic education?"

Rebecca gave him a considering look, "I thought millennials were like, twenty-five and up. He's too young to be a millennial."

"Even worse," George only muttered, turning his attention back to Michael, who was still shaking. The rest of the group's attention followed. Andrea took a step forward.

"This is totally not a LOST situation," She told him in a poor attempt at comfort, frowning. "Maybe Cast Away. LOST was too out there. None of it made any sense."

"It was ahead of its time," Michael clenched his jaw, "And it made sense if you paid attention!"

"Whatever," Andrea rolled her eyes, giving up and now visibly annoyed. "Go join Sydney if you're gonna freak out. We'll be busy being normal for when you're done."

A few paces away, a young woman was hunched over an oversized suitcase, baring her teeth at the sound of her name. "You're not getting my stuff," she hissed loudly, her hold on the large bag tightening. "Stay away!"

"No one wants your dirty rags, Sydney!"

Andrea yelled back, taking a moment to rub at her temples. "Shouldn't we be, like, looking for food and water while we're sitting around?"

“We just had our mid-flight snack, like, an hour ago.” Janet pointed out.

“I stress-snack!” Andrea snapped. “And I meant for later!”

“Hey guys,” Justin stepped forward, his hands held up in peace. “I feel like the vibe here is getting way negative, and it’s totally gonna affect our auras in a not-pretty way. How ‘bout we do some breathing exercises?”

“Justin, sweetheart, your face is rocking but I’m seriously gonna punch it if you keep talking.”

Justin looked nearly scandalized, his hand coming to his chest, while Andrea continued to huff in annoyance. At her side, Rebecca ran a hand through her hair in a mimicking nervous emotion. It was tangled and clumped around the right side of her head where her ear was still loudly ringing. Justin looked much too hurt, his eyes turning liquid, for it to be completely about Andrea’s words.

“We need to like, account for everything and everyone we have,” Rebecca said, taking a breath before Andrea could go further into an argument. “First, do we have any doctors or nurses?”

“I have a doctorate in poetry,” One of the older men added, standing like he was going to jump into action.

“You absolutely know that’s not what I’m talking about,” She told him through clenched teeth.

Hesitantly, Janet raised her hand. “I took a first-aid class in college?”

Serena nodded in agreement, “Flight attendants know the basics.”

Rebecca nodded, “Okay, just... go around and check people out, okay?” She pointed to the man from their original circle, now hunched over in the sand. “Maybe start with him.”

They did so, poking at him in experiment first, and the rest of them turned to Rebecca. For now, she seemed to be in charge.

“Okay, next we’ll...” She looked to the numerous littered bags of luggage crawling up the sealine. Despite the low number of people gathered around, it had been a fully packed flight. “Drag the bags up and we’ll start going through them. I’m sure someone packed something useful.” There was a sea of nods, and they each went to gather the nearest floating bags. Rebecca paused, her eye-catching on the numerous damaged trees, the blackened leaves.

The back half of their plane had disappeared into the forest and the soft gray smoke drifting up had turned dark and black within the last hour or so. They had sent some people to check it out in the immediate aftermath but, nothing good. That’s what they said. There was nothing good over there. Rebecca hadn’t even thought to question it when they announced that but what did that even mean? What did it even mean?

In the distance, there was horrible, guttural scream, of fear or pain. They stood as one, their eyes wide, and stared off into the direction. The black smoke continued its steady rise.

Finally, one of them found their voice. “What was that?”

“Probably just my mom,” Arland told them, the only one looking out towards the skyline. “She’s around here somewhere.”

grace biermann | poetry

Self Portrait with John Donne

“Begin,” he whispers, “by finding a metaphor—
A central idea you can play with,
That starts at the very beginning
And is intriguing enough
To last for several lines.”
I obey.
He doesn’t seem to notice.

“Okay,” he says, growing
More excited by the minute,
“Now that you have a metaphor,
Mess around with it.”
He keeps going, oblivious
To his mussed hair and wrinkled doublet.
“Turn it upside down!”
He’s hanging from the ceiling
Like a bat.
“Look at it backwards!”
His face is impossible to see.
“Stretch it and see what happens!”
He’s now a walking funhouse mirror.

“Now,” he exclaims,
Back to normal,
“Present your conclusion. It should be
Somewhat surprising,
But fit with the rest of the poem.”
“Done,” I say quietly
To the empty room.

lexi gault



HAVE YOU SEEN YOURSELF AT ALL HOURS
charcoal

anna bedalov | poetry

teal

i am no one without my ribs
protecting my fragile, flesh-worn center.
my tears are given to the tide,
my laughter to the rain – this offering
makes me bigger than i ever need to be,
as the deep blue-purple honey drips
down my throat, coating my sore heart.

i have been many people in my lifetime;
some of me more teal than tan,
projected above my frame and filling
my head with cloudy thoughts.
i am strongest colored olive,
after my skin has soaked its most needed
nutrients. i have been much weaker –
i've grown darker, overcrowded as i age –

and so, sweet prince,
who are you when your skin melts?
and are you who your brittle bones say?
what do your ribs think of your gentle soul?
what makes your insides move to the rhythm
your heart presents? the only jungle left
here is asphalt, and we dance
upon it, without care, love how feet vibrate
to our beats, protected in isolated cages.

rachel kennedy | prose

All Because of a Fire Alarm

Breathe... Once in. Once out, Now do it again. And again. There you go. You're alright.

The edges of my body feel like they're curling in. A space grows around the outer edge of me, making me feel like I'm wearing a body that's two sizes too big. Walking past everyone else having dinner with their friends, I feel the too-familiar insecurities coming back to swallow me whole. I can't help feeling almost overwhelmed on my way back to the dorm.

Just another minute or two... Wait until you're inside, out of the sun... Keep the walls up.

I know I'm counting to ten. I know I'm repeating it. I'm barely keeping my breath steady. Nudging me is a shadow I know too well; the dark thoughts are pushing at the walls I spent so long building up. If I were already in my room, they might have won out, but I'm still walking.

Nobody wants to be your friend.

Focus on your steps. Left and right. One, two, three, four... Keep going...

It's warm, at least. That makes it easier to carry the food back without a bag. The evening sunshine, a refreshing drink after such a cold, grey drought, makes everything look more alive. Somewhere in my gut, a glimmer of hope exists for another day.

Count with the steps. The door's not far now. Cross the circle and you're in the home stretch.

The bottle in my hand is sweating. A flash of worry about if the shirt I'm wearing has weird marks on it interrupts my focus for half a second, maybe less. I shift the drink into my other hand, balancing it on top of the sandwich and next to the chips. As I slide the card through the reader, I send a silent please and thank you to nowhere in particular, grateful that it worked this time. It beeps, and

I open the door, the routine of it bringing me closer to my room where I can relax my defenses a little.

Even in your dorm nobody wants you.

A deep breath in... Up the stairs, one, two, three, four... Why are there so many?

The platform gives slight reprieve, three more steps up and I'm heading down the hallway. I'm not coming back to friendly faces or anyone else; It's just me, myself, and some of my favorite characters from television. Not having a roommate isn't bad most of the time, but today I'm especially glad I don't have to answer any questions or pretend I'm perfectly fine. I enter my room and, as I close the door, I let out a small breath I'd been holding since I reached the door to my suite.

Your friend didn't want to room with you.

Grab a plate, the second drawer. Put the food on the bed, by the laptop. Take your shoes off.

A crack. It's small, but only one thought came through. Even though it's not true, it hurts and I choke back tears, letting only a few roll silently down my cheeks. I wipe my eyes and grab a plastic knife. Lord knows I don't need half of the mayo on my sandwich. I sit down in front of my laptop, taking a few more breaths to stop the crying for now. Two papers wait to be finished, two art projects are untouched, another paper isn't even started, and a group Wikipedia page needs editing, all before the weekend. I give myself a half hour before I need to focus on schoolwork.

You won't get any of it done on time.

You just need to take it one thing at a time. Eat first, or you'll be starving while you work on it.

The sandwich isn't the best I've ever had, but it does its job. I know I shouldn't eat on a bed because it will make it harder to fall asleep at night. My logic is that I sleep on the other bed and in that case, it doesn't matter. I watch the first episode of Freaks

rachel kennedy | prose

All Because of a Fire Alarm (continued)

and Geeks again, comparing the actors' different roles to these characters. There are very few Seth Rogan related things that I've liked, and even fewer with James Franco.

Once the credits roll, it's back to the paper. You'll get it done tonight.

The short break helped me reseal the wall. I put the plate and the empty chip bag in the trash. Focusing on something—anything—outside myself helps quiet the dark thoughts swimming in my head, for a little while at least. Making a mental note to take the two bags downstairs tomorrow, I exit out of Netflix and switch to Pandora. I should put on one of the classical music stations since it won't distract me, but I want to listen to musicals, so I pick the Broadway station. Not two sentences in, I click on the Pandora tab to skip the slower song. I do my best to refrain from skipping too much and return to the paper once more.

Page six. Only two more pages to go, and it's only six o'clock. You'll finish this one soon.

I stop short of eight pages. It's a first draft and I'm not sure what I'm missing. Besides, I'll be able to expand on it later for the final draft. Closing my research tabs, I upload the paper to the Blackboard journal and call it quits. I take a moment to relax, complacent with finishing the paper. I need a shower. It may even help me sort out my thoughts, so I grab my towel and go out into the suite's bathroom. One of my suitemates is in her room, but the door is closed. I turn the faucet and the water rushes out.

A quick shower and then you have five more pages to write and—

No ideas.

Just breathe.

The warm water helps me calm down. My shoulders relax, momentarily forgetting to worry about posture. I let my mind wander through a thousand things, trailing farther away from the moment and finding peace somewhere outside myself. The crack in my wall shrinks,

sealing the darker thoughts on the other side. I'm safe for now, protected from myself for a little while.

You've washed everything. One more rinse, for good measure, and then we have to get out.

The shower does me good. I feel revitalized, a small amount, sure, but some is better than none. When I step back in my room, I realize that the sun has set, meaning I showered for about an hour. I usually do my best work at night. Everything seems clearer. I'm a nocturnal being that constantly forces herself awake in the early hours of the day to pretend to be "normal". The mornings are always groggy and slow. Around eight or nine at night, that's when life starts to happen. The quiet dark lets smaller details come to life; the moon shows a secret side of the world that few care to look at. I've always loved the moon. It's white, reflected light makes everything calmer and subtly beautiful. It lets the world speak for itself in a way the sun can't do. I write my paper, the nighttime encouraging me and giving me more energy.

You're so close. It's almost done and then you can go to bed. And tomorrow you can relax.

There's no point in sleep if you're going to be a failure. Why don't you—

A beehive explodes in my head. I jump out of my bed and take three huge steps to the door, shoving my fingers in my ears. A damn fire alarm. I need my shoes, my ID, my phone. I stand shocked in place, debating whether I should stay inside and wait it out. I grab my wedge sandals, the easiest pair to slip on. I grab my phone and storm outside, frustrated at the unwanted study break and shaken by the buzz ricocheting around the room. The shorts barely cover any skin, made of just a little more fabric than my underwear. The tank top is thin and the wind makes it billow too much for my liking—no one needs to see the stretch marks. I try to keep a straight face, but the buzzing alarm is in my head, shaking my whole foundation like an earthquake in my mind.

**Everyone's looking at you. Why'd you wear heels
with that outfit?**

*Breathe. It'll take five minutes. Keep your arms crossed so
the shirt doesn't fly away. Breathe.*

**You don't even have friends to talk to, what a loser.
Everyone hates you.**

I want to go back and pick something different. I wish I had worn my rainbow leopard print pants. At least I'd be warm then. The wind is so much colder than earlier today. And I just showered, fantastic. I wish one of my friends was here, at least I could joke about this with them. I see Anna and Cameron, but we're not really close. I'm fairly sure Cameron doesn't even know we went to the same school.

**Anna wouldn't want to talk to you anyway. She's
better than you.**

*Count to ten. Your friends are probably at the library. You
know they're busy. Look, you can go in now.*

**You get to walk in front of more people. They'll all
hate you, too. You look stupid.**

Stay calm. It's not that bad.

I walk in, past the two cops in the lobby. I could go up the main stairwell, but the back one is more appealing. No one is on that side of the building yet. Everyone is waiting for the elevator. Anyway, I don't want to be in a crowd. My walls are falling fast, the fire alarm having destroyed the foundation. My throat aches. Tears threaten to fall while I take the stairs in twos.

**They're all talking about how dumb you are. You
know they are.**

Hold it in. Twenty steps more.

**You wish you were as good as them. You're nothing
to anyone. You're only friends are never there for
you. Everyone who doesn't hate you, pities you.**

I walk as fast as I can down the hallway to my room. My walls are only a few stones high now. The card slides through and the door opens easily. I walk in my door, letting it slam behind me; no one's ever here to ask if I'm alright. I let the barriers fall, feeling the dark thoughts ready to pounce. I slip the wedges off and sit on the bed. The real alarm isn't on anymore, but my brain doesn't register that. My head is still buzzing, and I'm shaking. My hands hold the sides of my head, intertwining with the roots of my hair.

Nobody cares about you. Cry, lonely little loser, cry.

The tears fall, my walls crumbled to nothing but rubble despite everything.

hailey hemmings-kadolph



Caffeine and nicotine
coffee and charcoal

leanna sanchez | poetry

it isn't personal

You

with your wide smile

with your future and your leaving (and
you're leaving)

you and your charisma Everyone

loves you

and

me.

lingering, small, stopped by a wall

(and you're leaving)

I

guess

this is

(and you don't stop for me)

goodbye

?

(and I say nothing to you.)

grace burkhart | poetry

I'm Afraid I'm a Dodo Bird

The cliff calls to us,
a siren song promising
happiness, a stable future.
So we shuffle forward.

Unwanted wind whips,
entrapping us in a rough
embrace and ensuring
descent to the stormy sea.

To calm the fear,
we spread our tiny
wings and fall,
hoping we can fly.

mark young



Gaelic Greenery
photography

anna stryczula | poetry

Self Portrait with Infinity

Habits on, nuns rise with the sun,
Pray for bread and break fast. I sleep alone
Until clocks stop, until dust unsticks from dust
and the last amen floats far off in space

Somewhere among the high-tossed stars —
Another answer to a blank page. In junior high
I dreamed to try the habit, string beads around my neck
And count them out, amen, amen, amen —

But I always lost track. These days rewind. The sun rises
For everyone, and everyone prays for bread,
And everyone breaks, even numbers
and the stars and stones that form heaven.

I rise with a sleeping sun, kneel naked, and pray
For a stranger's words to live unbroken by day.

emma hecht | poetry

Grapefruit Spoon

cocooned in a kitchen drawer
until the pale wildflowers
underneath backyard pines pick it

carve away at my throat, reaping
sore phlegm from my tonsils,
my amber habit of being quiet

humid prayers rise up
after a cough of dust that settles
in fresh, dusk-lit mud. I press

my forehead to the stems
along with the cicadas who groan
with summer continuum

grant katula



Morning Commute
watercolor

taylor bundren | poetry

Back to the Forest

When I met him
I was drawn in
by the feeling of
streets and bustle and twinkling lights.

Up and down his back
there was a city,
filled with buildings and people
and a massive skyline
sprawling across his skin
from the nape of his neck
to the last hill of his spine.

Down the expanse
of his chest and belly
were hundreds of highways
full of traffic and intersections
and places to be.

The bottoms of his feet
were green
from stepping on trees in forests
and valleys and meadows.

I was the moon,
watching over my city
and running my fingers
through the streets and buildings,
over the pavement.

But my lungs filled with smog
and his poisonous words.
I was tired of coughing up
thick, black clouds of pollution
and burning my eyes
with acidic smoke.
My hands were restless
and always came away covered
with grit and grime,
dust and dirt.

He said one time
that there were deep forests
and valleys and meadows
in my eyes,
and I think in that one instance
he was right.

Leaving *The Lighter* and Bringing It into the Future

Tracy Monson and Evan Bryson are previous Editors of The Lighter. This year's judges for the Artivism Contest, they kindly shared their wealth of knowledge and experience with us on life post-Lighter and how creativity still shapes their worlds today.

Sarah: What are you doing now and where do you want to go in the future?

Tracy: One of the things I'm doing right now is waiting for this baby to arrive, which is kind of like being a kid when Christmas is two weeks away and it's like--it feels like forever. I have that same sort of anticipation right now which is more maddening than I thought it would be. The other thing I'm doing, from a career standpoint, is I've been at a fintech company for the last eight and a half years. For my second job after Valpo, I took a job at a small 20 person company that I didn't think would be that interesting. I just thought it was a stepping stone. And I've been with that company as we've grown from 20 people up to about 110, for the last year or so as its Chief Marketing Officer. It's kind of a little community that we've built around trying to do interesting work and solve hard problems with a group of people that enjoy being around one another. My work is something I'm passionate about and not something I ever envisioned myself doing as an English major. But it's been a really cool path. [For the future] I think being aware of where this change of being a parent takes me. I'm sure it will shift my priorities, some of my interests. So next I'm just going to be curious about what that looks like.

Evan: I work as a "Content Specialist" for a fintech company just outside Chicago, and fun fact, Tracy Monson is actually my boss. Well, she's actually my boss's boss cause she's the Chief Marketing Officer, but it's Tracy's department. She was the Editor-in-chief of *The Lighter* in... 2006, 2007 and I was her Assistant Editor. And then I became Editor-in-chief the year after that. So maybe I'll become Chief Marketing Officer, but that's doubtful. And I guess what I do everyday is I write and design for our company. I don't know what I'll do in the future.

S: How does creativity and or the creative arts tie into that?

T: I feel like one of the things that surprised me the most was I had this idea that there was a right way to be creative. Because you're coming from what you know, which is this wonderful university setting where you can get so immersed in writing and literature and these wonderful discussions. I left school thinking this is how to be creative and when I didn't get a job right away that offered those things, I was disappointed. And then I ended up at the company I'm at now and so much of the trajectory that company has included building things and building teams and bringing people together to have hard conversations to solve problems. And what I learned is that that can be a very creative process. So for me, I go to work every day and I'm not writing poems any more, but I'm feeling intensely creative when I have a great conversation or when we solve something really tricky. I guess that's a big part of how I feel creative, and I can only imagine that building a little human will also feel very creative. I don't know if that counts as the creative arts, but it feels like creativity to me.

E: [Jokingly] Honestly, I myself wonder that quite a bit. No, I think that for professional writing and professional communication it's about approaching an understanding of your audience and imagining their needs and so it's like... this morning I drafted a thank you email on behalf of one our company's leaders. I had made a whole bunch of stuff for him. I had designed a booth and then I created a presentation and basically drafted a small play for him. And I feel like that's what I do everyday. I feel like I write the script for the pageant that is our company's communications. So it's pretty creative.

S: Do you still create in a more traditional sense of art, poetry, or prose? And if so, what?

T: Some people balance non-art jobs/work and continue to create in the traditional sense but I haven't lately. I get back to that through reading—usually whatever Evan recommends to me.

E: Yeah, I still write. In fact, I pursued an MFA in Creative Writing and so I'm still heavily invested in a lit community. I don't know if I actually belong to one, but for awhile I met with a writing group and wrote short stories and sort of worked on a novel and a play. The thing that I'm really interested in and engage with the most is criticism. I love reading criticism and I like writing criticism, and so I've published mostly in really tiny venues but it's been really fun to write that. And then I still paint as well. Paint is also a kind of regular practice for me. I like thinking through painting and I think that writing and painting sort of activate the same places in my head, which is very narrative-based.

S: What most appeals to you in a written work or an artistic piece?

T: Art is special because it can do a huge range of things. It can be for pure enjoyment or it can cause you to pause and think or it can ask you to do something. It can capture ideas that are not so concrete. There's all this complicated stuff in the world that everyone would have you believe is very black and white. And art kind of gets in all the spaces between black and white. I guess [it's] a way to go deeper. That's what's appealing to me about art.

E: I have kind of a selfish and narcissistic answer to that, and then one that will be less selfish and narcissistic. But I think the first is identification. I like a thing that tells me about myself, you know? And I don't know if that was always the case, but going through graduate school and going through the hustle of finding a career, I felt extraordinarily decentered and disassociated from my own life and my own convictions and my own work. And so finding novels or seeing paintings or going to a play that seemed to speak some sort of truth about the condition of living was really important to me. I mean, it makes it seem like art as therapy, which is fine. And this actually feels related, but it's my less narcissistic response, and that's voice. Coming across something that's so confoundingly new and entertaining and stimulating and perplexing... I like that about a work. I wish I read more diversely in a sense. Like, not only fiction or nonfiction, but read up on mathematics or biology or looked more into history, and maybe I'll get to a point in my life where that happens again, but I don't know.

S: What do you see the role of creative works as in the modern world?

T: So there's this great quote by James Baldwin and I think it gets into why we picked this piece [artivism]. But the quote is the purpose of art is to lay bare the questions that have been hidden by the answers. So I think in some ways the purpose of art is to reveal that the world is complex. I mentioned just purely enjoying or reacting to art, but I think this feels really true to me too—that the purpose of art is to show that the world is a pretty complicated place, which means that it's a pretty interesting place.

E: I think it's sort of what I just described: to give us intense feelings and to connect us to their consequences. Sure, art provides entertainment but what I think this it should do is cultivate empathy—though it feels really marmish to say people should be reading or people should be looking at things to feel more and to feel more intensely and to think correctly and to think righteously, which is a very fussy sort of Susan Sontag-ian kind of approach. But I think there is something true there. I think if people did encounter art more openly and more ardently they might be able to think through other situations in kind. Like, they might be able to think about issues of immigration and border walls, or native terrorism, or the weakening of our democracy, or economic disparity with the same kind of close scrutiny and intense feeling. They might be able to think through their own relationships better, romantic or otherwise! But mostly art's just there to make living not suck.

S: Why do you think it is that creative works can reach people in ways that other things cannot?

T: Maybe because it uses things that we don't normally rely on in daily conversations or interactions, which are full of a lot of quick soundbites and just getting to the point. Art can use tools like imagery or metaphor close attention to sound—ways that we don't normally interact with each other or express ourselves, and so it makes us pay attention and notice in a different way.

E: I wish I had brushed up on my John Gardner before sitting for these questions! I'm compelled to gloss on the scholar

Leaving *The Lighter* and Bringing It into the Future (continued)

Ellen Dissanayake, whose work I've, um, only actually encountered as a gloss on a blog, but she's argued that we're genetically wired for art—that our species has benefited from the ability to be still and listen and then be moved. So creative works speak to a lizard part of our brain that craves beauty and narrative and enchantment. And that's why creative works reach us when other methods fail. Yeah. I'm pretty sure it's just stimulating an evolutionary node in some reptilian part of our mind. I wish it was more than that. And I don't want to reduce it to anything less than that, but yeah. We're built to just listen to stories and react to them.

S: What first drew you into *The Lighter* when you were at Valpo?

T: I think I was a freshman when I first started doing the selection committee and there were so many juniors and seniors that I looked up to, and just the idea that people could sit around and have these conversations and challenge one another. You could have 10 people look at one piece of writing and all 10 people could have a different perspective on it. It was so cool to me and I wanted to be part of that and hang out with these people and go to the coffeehouses. It was the community aspect and the idea that there was this place where you could just have your own ideas about like a poem. It was wonderful.

E: I grew up in a really small town. I lived on a farm, and I was obsessed with idea of culture and fostering culture and being with people who produced culture. And it was from the mistaken idea that my county didn't have any culture or wasn't producing any. It was certainly a reaction to that and so I spent all of high school reading and writing and sort of making myself very pretentious and unapproachable. And then when I got to Valpo, it was like, "Where are they? Where are these people?" Who were like finger snapping in coffee shops. And it turned out actually that Valpo produces way too many kind people to sort of entertain that level of pretension. I mean, you can find it at Valpo, obviously, but it was just different and my illusions were stripped away and it was more just like people

who were friends who were hanging out who enjoyed writing and shared a passion for literature. So I got involved based on ideas I had cultivated since middle school about what that community would look like. *The Lighter* was the fulfillment of that sort of dream, I guess. That seems really sentimental, but I feel like it just is that sentimental. I feel like it must be like that for most people. Not like, "I'm coming from a farm and I want to see the bright lights of *The Lighter*," but kinda. People discover, "I have friends here and I enjoy this."

S: How has your experience with *The Lighter* or Valpo impacted your career and life?

T: In so many ways. I think Valpo planted the seeds for trying my best to be thoughtful. Before Valpo, I didn't grapple with hard questions, and that's what so many of my classes pushed me to do. That, plus the relationships that I formed there. So many Valpo people are still a huge part of my life. I get to see Evan every day! Something I didn't fully know when I was there, that I realized later, was how special the professors are—most of my professors were not only passionate about their subjects but the students and the greater campus life. The importance of community is definitely something I took with me from Valpo.

E: It illuminated my future with a tractor beam. I hazard to connect it too strongly to everything that came after—but it was really important being the Editor of *The Lighter*, fostering a community of visual artists and writers on campus, and it definitely informed all the career and life decisions I made afterwards. I got into graduate school based on the efforts I put into *The Lighter* and the writings I did there. The design work contributed to my double-whammy portfolio! Things like organizing selection committees, learning how to package InDesign files, working with presses, laying out a page—these are social-professionalizing, resumé-padding experiences! Also! I should point out something super obvious about how *The Lighter* has impacted my life... Tracy is my boss and is the reason why

I have this job. And it's a fantastic job for a great company. And Tracy's also been one of my guiding lights for my life and if I hadn't been at *The Lighter*, I would have never met this person and like, had her valuable, incredible friendship and mentorship.

S: What is your favorite Lighter memory?

T: Senior year was so fun because Melanie Schaap was the graphic designer and Evan was the Assistant Editor. I remember we spent hours and hours and hours on the layout and we thought we were never going to be done with it. I also remember, I think maybe it was the year before that, we decided it would make a really cool image to scan in the ends of our hair. I think Melanie suggested it. So we put our hair in a scanner, and there's the ends of our hair on the page. We were just having so much fun building this book. Ooo! That was also the year, it was either 2006 or 2007, when we wanted to switch to the square format. It had been the rectangle for so long and we had to go to student senate to get a little extra money for it and they were like "why do you want to do it?" and we hadn't really thought through it. I think in the moment we said "Uh, people will pick it up more if it's a square" and they were like Okay sounds fine. It wasn't even that much more money that we needed for printing, but it felt like this huge revolutionary thing. It definitely wasn't, but it was a lot of fun.

E: Give me a second to think about that... I think this might be tangentially related to a Lighter memory, but it was when I was in a studio painting class with our designer Melanie Schaap, when I was the Assistant Editor under Tracy, and me and Melanie were painting at the same time. And it was great, being able to produce *The Lighter* with this person and then also be able to also produce a painting alongside this person. That general everyday interaction of seeing Tracy and Melanie! It was great. Melanie made this large painting of a bowl of fruit, and I think it actually made it into *The Lighter*, I could be mistaken about that [editor's note: Evan was mistaken; it is a different painting, of a vegetable], but I think it is in there. I think it was called "Sweet 'n' Pretty" and then after she finished that I ended up titling a series of my own paintings "Sweet 'n' Pretty." I can still smell the Art/Psych building even as I recall this.



lauren welter | prose

It Came with Blood and Teeth

The wind hurried from the room the night the girl was born, with the thick cord wrapped around her strangled neck, silent as the sudden breeze, as the sudden and heart-stopping fear in the room, as death.

The father was not there and his wife, too, could not have been bothered to attend as she was, as of the time, unaware of the existence of the child. However, the father's mistress was in attendance, and her ragged breaths were the only sound in the previously noisy chamber. The wet nurse cut away the cord that choked the girl, praying under her breath for the heart to have stilled. The chief of the clan, she knew, would be very relieved to know the child had died at birth, and the mistress seemed not too far behind.

The wife it would seem, would never have to know the truth of his infidelity, and he could go about raising the red-faced and wrinkled boy that had been birthed mere moments before the girl. The wet nurse believed in her gods like any good woman of the clan and could not shake the feeling that the boy and girl, having been conceived so closely, were almost twin souls, a gift from Iluanka, the Goddess of Fertility and Family. That, however, was not the case and the thought of her chief lying with another woman so soon after lying with her chieftess sent a shock of disgust through the wet nurse's stomach like no bloody wound had yet. She had a strong stomach, they said, for a woman. She had stitched, sliced, and severed wounds for the chief's army for two years now. She had a strong stomach, she thought, for anybody.

Relief was now growing strongly in the room that had previously been filled with terror and grief. The mistress took her last breath, and the child choked suddenly on her first.

The wet nurse sighed in dissatisfaction as the small chest rose, and the wailing began. It is to be a long night, she sighed, wetting a cloth and scrubbing hard at the already angry-looking skin of the child. The babe wailed louder, longer, small fingers curling and fat legs pumping ever-so-slightly in discomfort. The wet nurse marveled at how new the child was. Raw.

The wet nurse had just delivered her first baby, at fifteen years old.

There was a knock on the hut's door and one of the several territory soldiers walked in, nose wrinkling at the smell and sight of blood. He had a gruff face, with dark hair pulled severely back in a thick braid, signaling his rank at the honor being permitted to grow it out so. His shoulders peaked under his animal-bone armor, a thick tusk protruding from the scalp of his helmet.

"Did you need any help with..." he stopped mid-sentence and gestured vaguely at the body of the mistress, as if unsure how to describe the suddenly vacant person. He'd probably taken hundreds of lives in combat, but those were clan-warranted deaths. This death had no purpose, had come suddenly and left quietly. The wet nurse thumbed at the holy beads wrapped around her throat, promising to make an offering to Leuia, the Goddess of Death, as soon as possible.

"Yes, if you wouldn't mind," the wet nurse replied, turning back to her task in the hopes of ending the conversation. She began to collect her instruments, gathering the wet and bloodied rags in her woven basket as the soldier passed her without another word.

The wet nurse didn't watch as he struggled with the dead weight of the mistress, only looked up from her task when the door had shut once again behind her, and the wind came rushing back in to stir up once again the sharp smell of blood and birth and death. The baby had ceased her tantrum and now lie quietly, almost contemplating the wet nurse above her. The nurse, wrapping the child in a woolen towel, looked away quickly.

The eyes. They unnerved her, seemed to be too aware for something that had just moments ago not been a real person, at least, not in the physical sense.

The wind howled outside, and the wet nurse shivered at its nearness.

There was another howl, somewhat lower than the first. It was not the wind.

*

And so the girl did not die, though one could argue the essence of her did.

The chief did not, it would seem, want to go beyond being unfaithful to being murderous, and so he granted the newborn child allowance to stay and be of his blood. His wife, the chieftess of the clan with nails and hair far too lank and brittle for her seventeen years, did not in her delirious haze of recently giving birth to her son, seem to notice that she had created only one child and not two. She accepted both children in her arms when she could find the strength to hold anything and kissed both of their bald heads with equal affection.

The sight had turned the chief's stomach in an odd way, seeing his wife deceived in her frail state, and so he snatched the children from her and demanded she was still unwell and needed further rest before she could handle her children once again. He had handed the pair over to the wet nurse, a young thing with dark eyebrows that looked disgruntled by her chief even when she nodded her head dutifully and whisked the children away.

"Take care of my sons," the chief had demanded after her hurrying form.

Yes, the chief had told the clan he had been given two sons by Iluanka. Twin boys: Wren and Atlas, both born of the same mother with the wet nurse and dozen tribesman guards there to attest to the case.

And so the two twin boys were treated as such, even though the wet nurse felt that twisting feeling in her gut. The wet nurse, Anaya, meaning sharp as a fox, cleaned the babes separately and never around the other nurses. She became the sole caretaker of the twins, under the chief's command, much to the dismay of the older wet nurses who had been vying for such a possession close to the chief and chieftess. Anaya clung to both children, easily becoming fond of both, though that twist in her gut soon became a fierce wave of protectiveness mere months after the two births. She felt that wave of protectiveness when the chief eyed Wren with mild disappointment, swaddled in earthy toned cotton of baby boys. She felt it when she walked back to her hut late at night, after leaving the two to be tended by the chief himself, and felt the wandering eyes of soldier's over her exposed skin like beetles skittering across the dirt floor.

Nothing good ever came from being a woman

alone in this world, Anaya thought.

Anaya, trusting that her name truly gave her wisdom, decided to trust her instinct: let Wren believe she was a boy for as long as possible, to give her the strength a childhood as a prince would bring her. Due to Anaya's decision, Wren grew up believing herself to be a twin, an equal, to Atlas in every way. They didn't splash in rivers like other boys of the tribe: they were princes. They had tutors, and did horseback riding, and trained for the army. The lack of physical boyhood never crossed Wren's mind at such a young age.

As they matured, the twins proved to share only slight resemblances from their nose to the color of their hair. What the two lacked in resemblance they made up in brotherly antics, and so the tribespeople found themselves charmed by the pair.

Wren, they would say, was small and gawky, with hair that grew wildly from the moment he was conceived and had a sharp, sometimes cruel laugh.

Atlas, they would say, was broader in shoulder but feminine, almost girl-like, in the length of his lashes and the slope of his cheekbones.

They never would have assumed that under Wren's layers of fur hid a secret the chief took many measures to keep hidden. He argued he did not want his sons to grow soft by being helped to bathe and dress, like princes of the tribe before. On the night of Wren's first bleeding, with the telltale sign of womanhood starkly staining the sheets of her bed, the light cotton of her trousers, it was her father she ran to in a flurry of tears and pronouncements of her sudden illness. The chief sat his daughter down on multiple occasions after that to discuss her predicament: she was different than the other boys around her, and she must be sure to guard herself against their taunts and potential violence. The chief did not say the word girl or woman to her, but as Wren grew and the bleedings continued, she knew. She stole strips of absorbent cloth from the nurses' station every month, feeling guilty for her thievery. One month, when the flow was heavier than usual, she found herself searching through the woven baskets of Anaya, her wet nurse, for more strips of cloth. Anaya had caught her, returning suddenly from an errand, and Wren froze, hand still shifting through vials and creams, hot with shame.

lauren welter | prose

It Came with Blood and Teeth (continued)

Anaya, now twenty nine, had pulled strips from one of the many pockets of her nurse's apron and handed Wren a wad. Her fingers had closed around Wren's, warm and calming. "I know," she had said, and Wren's heart began to jackrabbit against her ribcage. "You're fine, it's fine. I'll make you more and bring you some for next month, too."

Wren realized how tense her muscles had gone and felt silly. Of course Anaya knew, she had been her wet nurse since birth after all. Both for her and Atlas.

"Is Atlas—" Wren began, and Anaya cut her off with a curt shake of her head.

"Only you, Cenrosa." Only you, princess.

And so Wren had begun to understand, at least in part.

She did not understand her father's motives for keeping her birthhood a secret and try as she might to work up the courage to ask, she always found herself whisked away in his gentle voice or all-encompassing hugs to ruin the time they spent together. Around her fifteenth birthday, she finally promised herself one thing: to uphold her father's decision of keeping her birthright a secret and guarding it like a precious jewel. She would train to become as powerful as the other boys beside her, despite the monthly bleedings, and be as commanding and as the men that sat and counseled beside her father. She would bring him the head of any beast that threatened her tribe, any monster that sniffed too close to their gates.

Then, maybe then, she could be accepted as his fierce daughter and not his fierce son.

Despite the physical differences the two were comprised of, no one could deny that Wren and Atlas surely behaved like true brothers. They wrestled in the woods when they should have been studying, and performed small plays for their mother, who never truly recovered from Atlas's delivery and was always in her bed, her skin draining in color even as her eyes lit up at the sight of her two sons.

If Wren cut herself up trying arrow practice by shooting at half-dead trees in the wood near the west of the

tribe, Atlas was earning the same cuts beside her, even as his interest in shooting a bow and arrow only went so far as enjoying Wren practice. Wren found herself practicing more and more as she grew, the howl of the wind and other creatures beyond the tribe driving her to practice well before the dawn birthed the world in new light. If she could prove herself as useful as a warrior girl, and not just some lazy prince of the tribe, surely her father would explain why he still pretended she was a man. She had some desire, some incredible drive, to bring her father the head of wild forest creatures as proof of her worth, a valued soldier despite her birthhood. Sometimes, she hated herself for what she could not be. She would quickly grow angry with herself and take up her shooting with more urgency.

Self-pitying, she would think to herself, does not kill what lives beyond the Wood.

If Atlas stole away into the tribeswoman's tent in search of whatever books he could get his hands on, any sort of papers that held a new idea or interesting story, Wren was standing guard at the flap and shaking hands of the soldiers who walked past, already calculating how long she could grow her hair out once she was accepted into their ranks. Her hair grew like a weed, they said, and she would be grateful to stop cutting it every other moon and let it grow past her shoulders.

Ultimately, they were brothers, through and through.

Sneaking off into the dense wood beyond the tribe's land was a regular pastime for the two brothers who found themselves bored with chores and their tutors, both excelling in the likes of writing and making themselves comprehensible, although Wren found a far greater interest in how the insides of a frog may work while Atlas spent hours reading book after book on the history of every culture he could get his hands on. On this particular day, with the clouds bubbled around the sun like an infection, Wren and Atlas had that brotherly agreement to not meet their tutor in the clearing behind the gathering circles, and

instead stole away to the woods, trying to jump on each other's back and knock the other down all the way.

Wren found herself growing more and more anxious in the presence of Atlas as she grew older. They were now sixteen, a man's age, and soon Atlas would surely discover the affliction that ailed Wren. Would he accept her as his sister, or be disgusted with the idea she could ever deem herself worthy of becoming the tribe's chief commander in war? Would he be angry with her, for her years of deception?

It was these thoughts, tripping over themselves in her mind, that distracted her from the rustling of underbrush, the lack of bird-calls that blanketed the Wood in an eerie calm.

The snow had fallen hard and fast the night before, and their sturdy boots broke the snow-crusting grounds in reckless cracks from reckless boys. Atlas began to explain some sort of cultural tradition he'd been reading about, where women wear headdresses of silk and dance with bells on their ankles to honor the dead and lead them toward eternal resting, while Wren half-listened, marveling at the arrowhead in her hand etched with stick drawings of warriors. Her father had promised she would someday be etched on an arrowhead as he had pressed the gift into her hand, honoring her entrance into manhood. Wren had found it almost the perfect time to confront him on her secret, but with the arrowhead warm in her palm and her father's eyes full of pride at her growth, she choked on the words and instead wrapped her arms around his thick neck in gratitude.

Of course, it had also been Atlas's birthday, and the chief had promised Atlas a trip to a larger city come summer when the ground was softer and easier for travel, where Atlas could find a library and spend all day drowning in words and stories from lands all over. Atlas's eyes had shown with happy tears at the news, Wren vaguely registering that this would be the first time in their sixteen years that they would be apart. She thumbed the nasty point of the arrowhead, feeling skin break.

The two brothers, lost in two entirely different worlds, walked nearly hip to hip, their steps aligned until they found the edge of the forest and Wren bravely offered

to lead the way, stepping over giant tree roots and clearing the way of suspicious foliage with a kick of her boot.

They were nearly to the stream, the same stream where they had been learning how to fish and wash their own clothing, when a large crack somewhere deep in the woods sent Atlas roughly into the square of Wren back. Wren had abruptly stopped to listen and Atlas continued on, lost in thought.

"What is it?" Atlas asked, placing a hand on Wren's shoulder. Wren shrugged his hand off, but not maliciously. Her ears nearly perked up, her eyes searching through the foliage, the heaven-ward branches, the rushing stream. Her heart was like a roll of thunder in her ears and she breathed heavily through her nose. She recalled what Guamen, a soldier who trained her and Atlas in hand-to-hand combat had taught her about using your fear as a driving force. She willed the roaring to dull and for her senses to sharpen as she scanned the trees one last time.

"I thought I heard something," was all Wren replied, refusing to let her voice shake. Wren released her grip on the arrowhead, blood dripping unto the snow at her feet. Atlas began to say something, eyes wide at the sight of the red starkly against the crisp white, when a sudden howl pierced the air around them.

Wren felt the hair on the back of her neck rise, felt Atlas's fingers digging through her layers and into her shoulder. It could not be, not now, before she was fully prepared. Wren always imagined herself a shining hero facing whatever creature came slithering at the tribe through the Wood, her victorious smile as her spear found its otherworldly head.

She did not imagine her first encounter with a Wood Creature would be nearly unarmed, her brother beside her, trembling like a leaf.

Atlas began to tug on his brother, lips trembling into motion with no sound escaping them.

"It's just a wolf," Wren managed to tell him, the lie falling from barely movable lips. She ran her fingers over the curves in the arrowhead, the etches, reminding herself that his father had given her the gift with a promise: she would someday be a warrior. She could take care of herself and her brother now, so she could take care of the tribe's army later.

lauren welter | prose

It Came with Blood and Teeth (continued)

“I was afraid it was a wolf,” was Atlas’ shaky reply. Wren’s heart lurched at the fear in it. That was the voice that recited entire stories to her before bed, dramatized epic poems so she could imagine herself the dazzling hero. The voice of the brother whom had been with her since practically birth, her twin if not by birth then by right. She wrapped a hand around Atlas’s trembling fingers, a sharp ache in her chest, a need to protect what was hers.

The two brothers stood in silence a moment longer, and not so much as a bird trilled in the wood. Only the sound of the stream to their right, tumbling over rocks and breaking up ice, was louder than the twins’ heartbeat in their ears.

Atlas began, “We should go back-” but a sudden growl to their left rippled through the air, and suddenly Atlas’s hand was ripped from his brother’s shoulder and Wren finally found the cowardice in her to scream.

The thing was unlike anything Wren had seen, with curved legs covered with matted fur, knotted and darkened with dirt or maybe blood. The upper half of the beast was even more hideous in its complete absurdity: the upper body was that of a woman, completely bare despite the cold, and it was the first time Wren had ever seen a body that was not her own. Atlas was screaming, sounding far-away and clouded for the fear that thundered in Wren’s ears, and she went to leap for her brother. The beast let out one more final growl, eyes locked with Wren, and tore out the throat of screaming Atlas as he attempted to claw his way out from under its massive hulk, tears streaming down his face and his voice hoarse with his cries of, “Wren, Brother, Help me!”

Wren felt the breath punch from her chest, and she could not remember falling to her knees, dropping the arrowhead in the snow beside her, her hand a mass of blood. The sound of crunching bone and feverish slurping filled her ears, and she did not realize she was screaming once more until the only sound she could hear was her own echoed back at her in the clearing. The shock of it, the sound of

herself sounding so animalistic and desperate, brought her back to her senses. She lunged for the arrowhead, took aim at the figure now hunched over the lump of flesh and tissue that had once been her brother, her twin if not by birth then by soul, her Atlas, and hurled the arrow with as much strength as she was able.

The beast turned swiftly, snatching the arrowhead from the air and tossing it into the stream as easily as Wren may have dismissed a projectile of jerky from Atlas during dinner. The beast began to growl once more, its eyes red and feral and unholy, and it took Wren a moment to realize that the beast was laughing at her misery.

“Did he belong to you?” the beast asked, its voice deep and gruff for its soft and feminine features, distinctly unhuman.

“He was my brother,” Wren whispered, refusing to look anywhere but into the eyes of her brother’s murder, at his lifeless corpse. “He was my twin.”

The beast seemed to enjoy that, its cracked and gray lips spreading into what it seemed to deem a smile, jagged teeth riddled with connective tissue gleaming in the sunlight. Wren winced, finally looking away. She heard the beast moving, trembled at the sound of it prowling through the snow, cracking over ice, the smell of death clinging to Wren like a heavy cloak. Finally, Wren forced her eyes up and found the beast watching her, something akin to curiosity to be found in them.

“Well? Aren’t you going to eat me too?” she asked, her blood a steady roar in her ears.

The beast began to growl again, and this time it sounded more like the laughter it was attempting to imitate. “Oh, poor child,” it purred, words floating among the trees as she prowled, “We only eat little boys, not half-boy half-girl things. Promise to give your father a kiss for me, dear.” And then the creature was gone as quickly as it had come.

And Wren fainted beside the corpse of her brother.

mark young



Mountain Throne
photography

brendan miller



Through the Castle Walls
photography

samantha holland



Glacier
photography

The Pull

The lake was quiet today. It was usually like this at this point of the summer— in the aftermath of the Fourth and with a month until Labor Day, there was a pocket of time in August when my parents were two of the few occupants living in the beach houses along the shore.

“Come up to the cottage this weekend,” My mother had urged to me over the phone the day prior as I lay in bed, eyes watching the ceiling fan. “Don’t sit alone at home. Be with us. It’ll be a nice vacation after your busy summer in Ireland.” She offered it like it was an option, but I knew if I didn’t come, she would send my dad back on the three-hour drive between Rockford and Caseville to check on me. In order to save gas and her peace of mind, I went.

Most of the neighboring cottages along the shore sat vacant, their seasonal residents sending their absences in the form of empty boat hoists dotting the shallows. I spent so many summers as a child hating the serenity of Lake Huron, wishing instead to spend my time with kids my age. Now, though, the calm was welcome. With adulthood lapping at my ankles, I came to appreciate the quiet and began to understand why my mother loved it so much up here. I knew after the abrupt end following a month of constant uncertainty, I should have felt calm, too. Forgive me for my defiance.

I sat out on the porch overlooking the lake. The water was high this year, its edges lapping against the old and abused breakers meant to diverge the current from reaching the house. Mom sat in a recliner near me with clip-on sunglasses and a book at her nose, her manicured toes flexing to the beat of a song inside her head. Meanwhile Charity, my parents’ giant Newfoundland, trudded along the shoreline, her heavy and lowered gait reminiscent of a small bear’s more than that of a dog’s. In the distance, seagulls circled over the water, searching for an easy meal swimming under the calm surface.

This was a sight very familiar and comforting to me, and yet I felt a disconnect between my mind and body. I felt shrunken, like I put a pair of binoculars over my eyes

and looked in through the opposite side. While I wanted to enjoy the warmth of the late summer afternoon I couldn’t help but worry that I had only spread my bereavement to the people around me rather than leave some of it at the house.

Down the beach, I could see a man and a woman walking along the shore toward our cottage. They weaved among the breakers to avoid the water. With them was a terrier less than an eighth of the size of Charity. Seeing the approaching family, she looked up and watched intently, tail sticking straight back behind her. She stood rigid and still when they reached her; I could tell the dog’s owners were apprehensive of our behemoth of a canine, and they tried their best to skirt around her with what little space they had between her and the shore. The smaller dog strained against its leash to sniff up at Charity’s snout, and after a moment’s hesitation, she enthusiastically lowered herself into a playful crouch. The two of them pounced around each other happily before the couple managed to yank their dog away to continue their trek down the beach. As cliché as it felt, I found myself envying how easy it was for dogs to feel satisfied; the most important things they had to worry about were finding entertainment, spending time outside and getting fed two to three times a day. If I could achieve the same level of happiness from tasks that simple, I’d be heralded a saint.

My mind buzzed. I fought against the feeling of dread bubbling up my chest. My head was in a constant spin of questions and self-blame, playing back the events of the past month and pinpointing the moments where I could have handled things better. There was no end to the cycle; I wanted to shut the whole thing down. “Take a holiday,” I begged my brain. “You’ve earned it.” The repetition of the waves reaching the shore — the wash and the release of each impact with the sand— acted as a slight distraction from the feeling. I closed my eyes and took in a cleansing breath, focusing on the timeless ebb and flow of the water.

The waves didn’t make me forget anything that had happened. It certainly didn’t answer any of my unanswered

questions, but it helped with the ache. Perhaps self reflection was redundant at this point, but there was nothing else I could do. There was nothing else I wanted to do. I decided to take myself to the source of the calm.

Warm swells lulling toward the shore danced around my ankles. The only whitecaps came from the opposing force of my shins pushing against the natural current to wade deeper into the water. Upon seeing my descent from the porch, Charity followed closely behind me with ball in mouth, hopeful for a splash sent her way or a game of chase along the shore. I ignored her and stepped further into the lake. I heard her plunging footsteps stop behind me, clearly confused by my disinterest. This was followed by a muted splash — the ball, being dropped from her mouth — then an annoyed growl; then, when I still refused to acknowledge her, a sequence of loud and deep barks.

I turned and pointed at her sternly. “Charity, no. Go lay down.”

She paused to consider my words before another collection of barks. She was challenging me; she had always been this defiant.

“No,” I repeated. “Go bother Mom.”

She persisted, her barks becoming more irritated. I picked up the ball bobbing at her feet and threw it toward the shore. She followed after it, and with her back turned I retreated further into the water. By the time she retrieved it and began to follow me again, I had already passed the first sandbar. She stopped once the water reached her chest, deeming it too deep for her to continue. I heard her bark after me before I heard my mom call her back up to the porch.

The green water rose to my hips as I passed the second sandbar, then subsided as I reached the next one. My feet were swallowed up by the murk, the only sign of their presence betrayed by the kicking up of sand as they made impact with the lakebed. Ahead of me was an expanse of nothing, the horizon only preceded by islands and the distant gray rise of Saginaw Bay. I directed my body toward the uninterrupted swathe of water to the northeast, lake giving way to more lake.

Then, slowly, I lowered myself into a sitting

position. The cool embrace of the water swelled around my neck, dampening the hair around my nape. The surface nipped at my ears, rocking me gently back and forth. Reaching my hands out to either side of me, the current laced its way through my fingers. I buried my hand into the soft lakebed beneath me and pulled up a handful of wet sand, watching the minerals slide from between the cracks in my palm. I closed my eyes, willing the lake to swallow me up if she so chose. I had seen how cruel she could be in the past, and I knew she was capable of doing it. But I knew she wouldn't; it was why I was okay with the idea of disappearing.

You hated large bodies of water. I had hoped the thought of you wouldn't follow me here. Silly me.

Instead of succumbing to the lake, she cradled me. There was nothing hostile about her embrace today. I felt the gentle push and pull of the waves beckon me back to the shore. It was a gentle insistence, and as much as I wanted to abandon my thoughts on the sand, I knew I'd have to listen to her eventually.

With each wave, she whispered the words I wanted to shout.

Come back. Come back.

mark young



Before the Boatman Arrives
photography

lexi gault



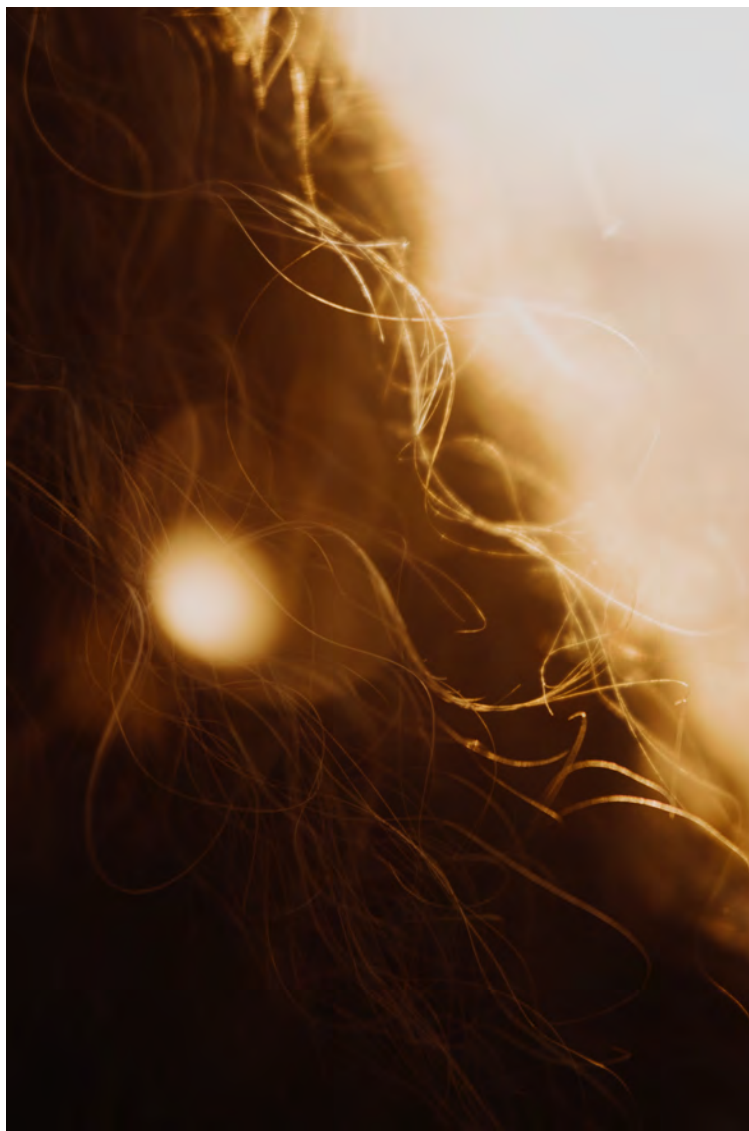
Humming
acrylic

grace burkhart



waiting on the world
photography

brendan miller



Beach Breeze Through Her Hair
photography

The Art of Language:

Works from Bydgoszcz, Poland





Sharing language is more than words, it is more than speaking the same words. There is language everywhere: in the slivers of sunlight, cobblestone streets, seeing the same people on the public transport, a man asking strangers for help putting on his coat, a woman recognizing that we have the same commute home with a smile, a wave from a child in the car while crossing the intersection.

Within these pages, like a beating heart, are poetry, lyrics, stories, and photography that give life to these everyday moments in Bydgoszcz, Poland, but also worlds that are near and far, imaginary and very real. From my third year students at Uniwersytet Kazimierza Wielkiego w Bydgoszczy, I am so excited to welcome you to these experiences and to see the slivers of life, the imagination, the moments, in both Polish and English. The famous Polish poet, Czesław Miłosz, once wrote, “The purpose of poetry is to remind us how difficult it is to remain just one person, for our house is open, there are no keys in the doors, and invisible guests come in and out at will.” I think that is true of sharing any language--from images to stories--and I hope these pages will be an invisible guest guiding you to new experiences and connections like a wave and a smile from a friendly face.

--Kendall Kartaly
Valpo Class of 2018



piotr oesterreich | poetry

Życie i Śmierć

Śmierć jak życie, życie jak śmierć,
Gdzie pod falami morza toną wartości,
Gdzie w palcach płomieni popielą się idee.
Śmierć jak życie, życie jak śmierć.
Wszystko zanika pośród niepamięci odmětów cienia,
Gdzie mrok ogarnia i życia strumień przebija.
Śmierć jak życie, życie jak śmierć,
I wszystko zanika, jak blask słońca,
Gdy zaślania je górujący nocą księżyc.

The Life and Death

The death as the life, the life as the death,
where the sea drowns values under its waves,
where tongues of flames incinerate ideas.
The death as the life, the life as the death.
Everything vanishes amongst the oblivion's shadows,
where the darkness grasps and pierces stream of life.
The death as the life, the life as the death,
and all the things disappear, like the sunshine,
when it's covered by the moon towering over the night sky.

Na granicy światów

Na wpół martwy i na granicy światów,
Chwieje się nie wiedząc, którą otchłań wybrać,
Między śmiercią, a życiem stąpa niepewnie,
Każdym krokiem, raz z jednej, a raz z drugiej strony,
Trzyma się krawędzi i na cienkiej jej linii,
Stara się utrzymać, by nie zgubić siebie.
Idzie i kroczy, lecz zdecydować nie umie,
Gdzie lepiej, a gdzie będzie mu gorzej.
Na wpół żywy, ku rozpaczy bramie sunie,
Nie mogąc podjąć wyboru, czy przejść,
Czy się cofnąć, czy też stanąć być może,
I idzie i drepcze pochłonięty myślami,
Gdzie błąd nastąpił, gdzie zło popełnił,
Że wędrować mu przyszło po takiej krainie.
Na wpół już martwy, a na wpół wciąż żywy,
Chwiejnym swym krokiem przebywa tę drogę,
Stojąc na rozdrożu, dokonując wyboru,
Sięgając raz po potępienie, a raz po przebaczenie.
Typuje, rzuca swe myśli światu na widok,
Pada na ziemię, na granicy pozostając,
Na granicy światów i w bezczasie leżąc,
Wygnyany w czasie i wygnany z życia,
Wygnyany ze śmierci i wygnany z pamięci...
Na wpół już martwy, na wpół jeszcze żywy,
Skonał w ciszy, odszedł jak wiatr bezszelestnie,
Na wieczność pozostając w ciemności uścisku.

At the worlds' boundary

Half dead and at the worlds' boundary,
He sways knowing not which abyss to choose,
Between life and death treading uncertainly,
with each of his steps, from one side to the other,
He sticks to the ledge and its thin line,
Trying not to fall, not to lose himself.
He goes and walks, yet he cannot decide,
Where better, or where worse he will feel.
Half alive to the despair's gate he slides,
Unable to make a choice, whether to go through,
or go back, or to stand still perhaps,
And so he walks and minces lost in his thoughts,
Where the error, where his wrongdoing was
that to travel through such a land he is bound.
Already half dead, and still half alive,
With swaying steps, he walks this road,
Standing at the crossroad, making a choice,
At one time reaching for damnation, for forgiveness at the other.
He guesses, throws his thoughts for the world to see,
Falls to the ground, staying at the edge,
At the worlds' boundary and in the timeless void lying,
Exiled from time, exiled from life,
Exiled from death, exiled from memo--
Already half dead, still half alive,
He agonized in silence, passed away without a sound,
for the eternity remaining in the darkness' embrace.

Skąły Niebieskie

Skąły niebieskie - łamię się

Księżyc - zanika

Światło - zawodzi

O nie.

Skąły Niebieskie - łamię się

Księżyc - zanika

Światło - zawodzi

Już zniknęły.

Pokój pełen ludzi,

Pusty jednak jest.

Słońce może świecić,

Nie zanurkujesz, nie.

Pytanie zadać możesz:

Co prawdziwe jest?

Widzieć możesz gwiazdy,

Są na całym niebie.

Jedną możesz stać się,

Gdy twój czas nadejdzie.

Kwestią czasu jest to,

Kwestią czasu jest

Nie widzieć mogą tego,

Ślepi bowiem są.

Nie poczuć mogą tego,

Serca z lodu mają.

Pokój pełen ludzi

A ty ciągle sam.

Bądź ostrożny więc czego życzysz sobie.

Sny spełniają się i ty się tego dowiesz.

Jednego dnia prawdę poznasz,

Na kamieniach niebieskich jak oczy kogoś tam.

Skąły Niebieskie - łamię się

Księżyc - zanika

Światło - zawodzi

O nie.

Skąły Niebieskie - łamię się

Księżyc - zanika

Światło - zawodzi

Już zniknęły.

Strach przed tym co nadejść ma,

Strach przed tym co było tam,

Strach przed tym co nam to da

I nieznanym czasem.

Wybór został dokonany,

A grunt niestabilny nasz.

Jedno już my wyjście mamy

Przez pokrzywy droga ma.

Skąły Niebieskie - łamię się

Księżyc - zanika

Światło - zawodzi

O nie.

Skąły Niebieskie - łamię się

Księżyc - zanika

Światło - zawodzi

Już zniknęły.

Blue Rocks

Blue rocks - breaking

Moon is - fading

Light is - failing

Oh no.

Blue rocks - breaking

Moon is - fading

Light is - failing

Now it's gone.

May be room full of people,

But it's empty still.

Sun may shine,

But you won't dive in.

You may ask the question:

What is real?

You may see the stars

All across the sky.

You may even be one

When it's time.

Just a matter of time

Just a matter of time

They may not see this,

They are blind.

They may not feel this,

Stone cold heart.

In the room full of people

You're the only one.

So be careful what you wish for,

Because dreams may come true.

One day you will learn the truth

On the rocks as blue as someone's eyes.

Blue rocks - breaking

Moon is - fading

Light is - failing

Oh no.

Blue rocks - breaking

Moon is - fading

Light is - failing

Now it's gone.

Afraid of what's to come,

Afraid of what is done,

Afraid of the outcome

And the time that seems unknown.

You've made that choice,

Your ground is unstable.

The only way out

Is the way through the nettle

Blue rocks - breaking

Moon is - fading

Light is - failing

Oh no.

Blue rocks - breaking

Moon is - fading

Light is - failing

Now it's gone.

Męskość

Niedzielnny poranek. Dźwięk śmiechu rozprzestrzenia się w domu Boba Ketchuma, 45-letniego męża i ojca z Iowa. Pierwszą rzeczą jaką robi, jest włożenie koszuli z podwinętymi rękawami i nałożenie ulubionego brązowego kowbojskiego kapelusza. Ze spokojem na twarzy schodzi po schodach i łapie swoją córeczkę w powietrzu, która ucieka od starszego brata goniącego ją z plastikowym rewolwerem w rękę. Czas na śniadanie. Kawa i jajecznica z boczkiem. Potem nadszedł czas na mszę. Mając pod ręką żonę i dzieci biegające gdzieś w oddali, w końcu wchodzi do kościoła i słuchają kazania księdza Patricka. Potem czas na odpoczynek z rodziną, następnie wypuszcza konie na pastwisko, a kiedy dzień powoli mija, nadszedł wreszcie czas na piwo, corn-doga stworzonego przez jego ukochaną żonę i mecz baseballowy. Kiedy nadszedł czas odpoczynku, daje swoim dzieciom całusa na dobranoc i kieruje się do sypialni. W chwili zadumy przed końcowym odpoczynkiem planuje jutrzejszy dzień roboczy. Najpierw zabierze Lucy i Bertie do szkoły, Audrey przygotuje śniadanie do pracy. Potem zabierze Audrey do szpitala na popołudniową zmianę. Uwolnij konie i daj psom jedzenie. Następnie do pracy na placu budowy. Pamiętaj o rachunkach. Zasypia z zapracowanym umysłem i spokojnym oddechem.

Piąta rano. Słońce jeszcze się nie obudziło. Boston, Massachusetts stoi w miejszc, a Billy Byrnes, ignorując dzień tygodnia, zapala samochód i jedzie do warsztatu samochodowego. Wkrótce pojawiają się jego kumple, którzy rozpoczną dzień od złożenia starego Rolls Royce'a. Chociaż Billy jest zawodowo kucharzem i właścicielem warsztatu, jest traktowany jak mentor. Nie boi się pracy, jest niezależny, ale wciąż lojalny i oddany swoim bliskim. Pieniądze nie dają szczęścia Billemu. Po prostu lubi swoją pracę. To pasja, z którą się identyfikuje. Bez warsztatu byłby niekompletny. Siedzi tam cały dzień, tworząc, odkrywając, rozwiązując. Kiedy dzień dobiega końca, wraca do swojego małego mieszkania, siada na dużej kanapie z piwem w dłoni. Jest wyczerpany, ale wciąż udaje mu się podnieść butelkę i wypić resztę swojego napoju. Zasypia na kanapie. Robi to bardzo często. Mimo wyczerpania jego myśli są prawdziwym bałaganem poświęconym jutrzejszym zamówieniom - wymianie klocków hamulcowych, sprzedaży samochodu, który niedawno odrestaurowali, zmianie skrzyni biegów. W końcu poddaje się i wpada w otchłań snów.

Dźwięk iPhone'a budzi umysł Christophera Brooksa. Wszystko idzie zgodnie z harmonogramem. 6:30 rano pobudka, 7:00 rano bieg w Central Parku, 7:30 przygotowanie do bardzo

pracowitego dnia. Wsiada do masywnego czarnego Chevroleta, gdzie czeka na niego jego sekretarka. Daje mu walizkę pełną kontraktów i zamówień. Cała wycieczka poświęcona jest nowej inwestycji i spotkaniu biznesowemu, które odbędzie się po południu. Wchodząc do biura, uderza go wściekły dźwięk jego telefonu, który szalenie przekierowuje numery na pocztę głosową. 5 nieodebranych połączeń. Rosjanie przesyłają nowy plan inwestycyjny, zmiany, umowy, spotkanie z biznesmenem z Estonii. Inni odpuścili by już dawno i uciekli od zgiełku i hałasu. Ale nie Christopher. Jest urodzonym biznesmenem. Agresywny, ambitny, uwielbia ten zastrzyk adrenaliny, ciągle zamieszanie i życie zgodnie z harmonogramem. Cały jego dzień mija tak szybko, że nie zauważa zachodu słońca. Doszedł do wszystkiego sam. Nauka, kariera, pieniądze. Odkrywa, że jego życie jest doskonałe. Cały dzień mija w pośpiechu. Wieczór spędza z kolegami na bankiecie. Trochę drogiego wina, szwedzki stół z ulubionymi potrawami. Wraca do swojego mieszkania w centrum Nowego Jorku późno w nocy. Zasypia z uśmiechem na twarzy. Wygląda na całkiem spokojnego jak na człowieka, który jest szaloną maszyną biznesową.

Tych trzech mężczyzn odpowiada trzem motywom męskim w kulturze amerykańskiej. Bob Ketchum to wspaniały przykład dystyngowanego patriarchy - pełnego obowiązku, uprzejmości, chrześcijańskiego dżentelmena związanego z rodziną. Billy Byrnes jest heroicznym rzemieślnikiem. Rzemieślnik, mentor, nie bojący się pracy i lojalny wobec swoich towarzyszy. Ostatni - Christopher Brooks to Self-Made Man-mobilny, konkurencyjny i agresywny w biznesie. Moim zdaniem motywy te są nadal obecne w naszym społeczeństwie. Miliardy ludzi żyją na całym świecie i, jak przedstawiłam w poprzednich akapitach, są w stanie podświadomie dopasować się do tych motywów. We współczesnej kulturze Self-Made Man jest najbardziej dominujący. Ludzie tacy jak Mark Zuckerberg i Steve Jobs są doskonałymi przykładami ludzi XXI wieku, którzy sami doszli do szczęścia i kariery. George Washington byłby najbardziej znanym dystyngowanym patriarchą, a heroicznym rzemieślnikiem dla mnie byłby mój tata, który sam jest mechanikiem samochodowym. Praca go identyfikuje i jest mentorem dla swoich kolegów. Lojalny, cnotliwy i nie bojący się pracy. Pomimo różnic czasowych, zmian i modernizacji świata, każdy z tych wzorów można znaleźć zarówno w mediach, jak i lokalnie wśród nas. Wszystko jest kwestią obserwacji i dedukcji.

American Manhood from Poland

Sunday morning. The sound of laughter spreads around the home of Bob Ketchum, a 45-year-old husband and father from Iowa. First thing he does is put on his shirt with rolled up sleeves and his favorite brown cowboy hat. With calmness on his face, he goes down the stairs and catches his little daughter in the air, who runs away from her older brother with a plastic revolver. Breakfast time. Coffee and scrambled eggs with bacon. Then it's time for church. With his wife in hand and children running somewhere in the distance, they finally enter the church and listen to Father Patrick's sermon. After that, some family time with the kids, then he releases the horses on the pasture and when the day slowly passes it's finally time for a beer, a corn-dog made by his beloved wife and a baseball game. When it's time to rest, he gives his children a goodnight kiss and heads towards the bedroom. At the moment of reverie before he falls asleep he plans the working day tomorrow. First, take Lucy and Bertie to school, Audrey will prepare breakfast for work. Then he'll take Audrey to the hospital for her afternoon shift. Release the horses and give the dogs food. Then to work on the construction site. Remember to pay the bills. He falls asleep with a busy mind and steady breathing.

Five in the morning. The sun has not yet woken up. Boston stands still, and Billy Byrnes, ignoring the day of the week, ignites the car and drives to his car workshop. His comrades will soon appear and they start the day with putting together an old Rolls Royce. Even though Billy is technically the chief and owner of the workshop, he is treated like a mentor, unafraid of work, independent but still loyal and dedicated to his close ones. For him, money is an additional thing. He likes his job. It is a passion, he identifies with it. Without the workshop, he would be incomplete. He sits the whole day there, creating, discovering, solving. When the day comes to an end he drives back to his little apartment, sits down on a big sofa with a beer in his hand. He's exhausted but still manages to pick up the bottle and drink the rest of his beverage. He falls asleep on the sofa. He does it very often. Despite the exhaustion, his thoughts are a real mess devoted to tomorrow's orders- replacement of brake pads, the sale of a car they repaired some time ago, change of gearbox. Finally he gives up and falls into an abyss of dreams.

The sound of an iPhone wakes Christopher Brooks's mind. Everything goes according to schedule. 6:30 am wake up, 7:00 morning jogging in Central Park, 7:30 getting ready for a very busy day. He gets into the massive black Chevrolet, where

his secretary is waiting for him. She gives him a suitcase full of contracts and orders. The whole trip is devoted to the new investment and the business meeting that will take place in the afternoon. Entering the office, he is hit by the furious sound of his phone, which rushes like crazy through his voicemail. 5 missed calls. The Russians send a new investment plan, changes, revisions of contracts, a meeting with a businessman from Estonia. Any other person would drop everything and run away from the bustle and noise. But not Christopher. He is a born businessman. Aggressive, ambitious, loves this kick of adrenaline, constant confusion and life according to a schedule. His whole day revolves around so quickly that he does not notice the sunset. He came to everything himself. Science, career, money. He finds his life perfects as it is. The whole day passes by in a rush. He spends the evening at a banquet with his colleagues. A bit of expensive wine, a Swedish table with his favorites dishes. He goes back to his apartment in central New York late at night. He falls asleep with a smile on his face. He seems pretty calm for a man that is a rushing business machine.

These three men correspond to three male motifs in American culture. Bob Ketchum is a great example of a Genteel Patriarch- full of duty, kindness, a Christian gentleman involved with his family. Billy Byrnes is a Heroic Artisan. A craftsman, mentor, unafraid of work and loyal to his comrades. The last one- Christopher Brooks is a Self-Made Man- mobile, competitive and aggressive in business. In my opinion, these motives are still present in our society. Billions of men are living around the globe and as I presented in the previous paragraphs they are able to subconsciously fit into these motives. In contemporary culture the Self-Made Man is the most dominant one. People such as Mark Zuckerberg and Steve Jobs are the perfect examples of a XXI century man that came to his fortune and career by himself. George Washington would be the most famous Genteel Patriarch, and a Heroic Artisan for me would be my dad, who is a car mechanic himself. It identifies him and he is a mentor for his colleagues. Loyal, virtuous and unafraid of work. Despite the time differences, changes and modernization of the world, each of these patterns can be found both in popular media and locally among us. It is all a matter of observation and deduction.

marcin "josh" | poetry

Insanity

Do you hear it sometimes?
The eerie aberrant music coming out of nowhere --
You hear it with your mind and you try to localise its source
But the radio is broken and your phone is off
And then you ponder why
Why is the radio broken?
Isn't that insanity token?
The music hypnotising, as it were
It hums, U hums, It sings, U sings --
Isn't that insanity token?
And then enlightenment comes --
It's a message from your subconsciousness
It's talking to you
But who is a man talking to himself?
Isn't that insanity token?
It tells you to listen and repeat
Repeat what? The lyrics -- the empty lyrics?! The melody?!
All the senses are awaken
Such deep breath you have just taken
You see a piano standing in the corner
Keys are rusty -- but will work
And you play --
Isn't that insanity token?
F B D C F
A B E C D
K F E B C
You're playing out of tune
Your fingers linger
Your groggy eyes slowly fall into sleep
But you have to finish this piece
E D C F A
Eyelids fall.
The piano has vanished.
Isn't that insanity token?
You play the same notes
When you sit in front of that piano
Sometimes -
Other people do the same
But never think --
Is that insanity token?

marcin "josh" | poem

A merry-go-round in a blue funk

I wish I could touch the dimples on your face
Smell the haze you spray...
And what if I could
Simply drink your blood?
I am a vampire after all!
The original preying on Earth --
Yet, when I look around
There are many of them
Thinning the herd -
But brittle as glass.
If only I could control your mind:
As you control mine.
Who is you?
Is it they?
Or are she it?
He wished a golden fish
A piranha to grant his wish
But first came there a monk
Who was just a prank
Then came lady white
But she was out of sight
And last came thick-ish rope
Successful but not dope
I wish I could touch the dimples of your face
Smell the haze you spray...
Raspberries I can't afford
But dream I can
Falling asleep
Will you count sheep with me?



Dubrovnik



Elen

Mrok opanował świat. Czarna Śmierć przykryła swą bezlitosną peleryną tętniącą ongiś życiem ziemię. Dżuma mknęła z Azji jedwabnym szlakiem kosząc ludzkie istnienie straszną zarazą. Rozprzestrzeniła się również w Europie gdzie zdzięsiatkowała wiele rodzin.

To był tragiczny czas w życiu młodziutkiej Elen. Zaraza zapukała również do jej rodzinnego domu na peryferiach Paryża. Bez skrupułów spowiła mrokiem jej najbliższych. Aby spotęgować swą bezwzględność pozostawiła przy życiu tą delikatną, niewinną istotę na której błękitnych oczach umierali w ogromnym cierpieniu rodzice. Jedynym pragnieniem dziewczyny w tym momencie była śmierć, ale niestety los miał inne plany.

Jedyną krewną, która mogła przygarnąć Elen była jej ciotka Madeleine mieszkająca w odległym Azay. Rodzina utrzymywała mizerny kontakt z ciotką, była uważana za wariatkę, ale ze względu na jej majątność nie przekreślono jej całkowicie. Podróż była długa, serce Elen rozszarpane tragedią dodatkowo wypełnił strach i niepewność. Na zewnątrz było strasznie ponuro, żaden promień słońca nie przedarł się przez grube chmury by chociaż koniuszkiem musnąć zatrwożone lico dziewczyny. Malowniczy krajobraz skrył się pod smutną, mglistą kołdrą, zdradzając tylko czasem nieregularne kształty.

Gdy dotarła na miejsce jej oczom ukazała się stara, metalowa, olbrzymia brama na której wiatr wygrywał smyczkiem przeraźliwą melodię. Dziewczyna z drżeniem w kolanach weszła na teren tej mrocznej posesji. W oddali widać było ogromny budynek. Mgła dotarła również tu spowijając okolicę w szarym uścisku i ciężko było rozejrzeć się po włościach. Dreszcze coraz częściej przeszywały Elen, gdy zbliżała się do ciężkich drzwi wejściowych, bała się, że zbraknie jej odwagi na zapukaniu. Ostatni krok dzielił ją już od tej chwili gdy nagle przeraźliwym skrzypem wrota otwarły się wchłaniając do środka ciekawski tuman mgły. Zachrypiały głos wezwał jej imię, serce dziewczyny zamarło. Wyjścia nie było, ostatkiem sił Elen weszła do środka a myśli szarpające się w głowie nie pomagały opanować strachu. Hol był spory, stłumione światło lamp olejnych torowało drogę do starych schodów załamując się na grubych ramach obrazów, które wypełniały niemal każdy wolny skrawek ścian. Po prawej stronie przed schodami ukazało się wejście do kolejnego pomieszczenia, które było bardziej rozświetlone. Nagle w drzwiach stanęła ciotka Madeleine. To była piękna kobieta. Jej szczerpłą sylwetkę okalała skromna ciemno zielona suknia jednak uszyta z drogiego materiału. Długie kruczoczarne włosy upięte były niedbale w zmysłny kok, z którego kosmki loków opadały na jej ramiona. Ciemne oczy wpatrywały się badawczo w Elen. Po chwili jej blade dłonie ujęły przemarnie ręce dziewczyny.

-Jesteś bardzo podobna do Kate- lekko stłumionym zachrypniętym głosem odparła ciotka

-Kolacja jest już podana. Rozbierz się i zjedz, pewnie jesteś głodna-to mówiąc wskazała stary, pięknie zdobiony stół rozświetlony pasującym do stołu świecznikiem.

Elen jadła w samotności obserwując kolejne obrazy ujawnione przez drgające światło świec. Chłodne przyjęcie przez ciotkę wcale jej nie zaskoczyło. Widziała ją ostatni raz będąc jeszcze małą dziewczynką.. To

była kuzynka jej matki. Odziedziczyła ten dworek po swych rodzicach, którzy zmarli nagle w niewyjaśnionych okolicznościach. Żyła tu całkiem sama odcinając się od rodziny, podobno obłęd zamknął ją w tych murach po śmierci rodziców. Krążyły jakieś dziwne plotki ale cała jej historia spowita była tajemnicą i wszyscy stronili od kontaktów z nią.

Wspólny byt obu poszarpanych przez życie istnień był o dziwo udany. Elen z czasem przyzwyczała się do mrocznego dworku, do tajemniczych komnat, w których meble poprzykrywane były niechlujnie białymi ongiś prześcieradłami, do monotonii życia ciotki i do zasad, które bardzo surowo kazano jej przestrzegać. Każdego dnia przychodziła stara kobieta, która nazywała siebie służącą. Była bardzo dziwna ale widać, że tylko dzięki niej to wszystko jakoś funkcjonuje. Przynosiła zakupy, szykowała posiłki i skrupulatnie sprzątała sypialnię Elen oraz salon. O dziwo nie sprzątała nigdy sypialni ciotki ani innych pomieszczeń, do których nie wolno było nikomu wchodzić. Wieczorem po dołożeniu do ognia w wielkim kominku wychodziła zamykając za sobą olbrzymie drzwi z głośnym brzękiem starych kluczy. Ciotka sypiała bardzo długo dopiero późnym popołudniem pojawiała się by przysiąść na atlasowej sofie w salonie i czytała Elen niesamowitą powieść nieznanego dziewczynie autora. Znikała gdy służąca Eve podawała kolację, nigdy nie jadły razem i przychodziła po wyjściu starej kobiety by grać na starym fortepianie piękne melodie. Muzyka ta niczym jedwabna mgielka otulała cały mroczny chłód tego domu i przez ten czas jak rozbrzmiewała cudowna lekkość wkradała się w serce Elen kojąc cierpienie zmarnowanego serca. Dźwięki te kołysały tak magicznie, że zwykle utulała dziewczynę do beztrojskiego snu. I tak było codziennie. Młodziutka dziewczyna o dziwo nabierała sił w tym melancholijnym domu.

Pewnego dnia w holu Elen odkryła pod stertą szmat stara maszynę do szycia i za pozwoleniem starej Eve zaczęła szyc i przerabiać znalezione w swojej sypialni suknie. To zajęcie pozwalało jej zaprzatnąć bezwzględne myśli twórczą radością. Gdy z czasem zaczęły wysychać ciemnie oplatające jej duszę i pierwsze wiosenne paczki wkładły się nieśmiało w serce dziewczyny postanowiła zająć się dworkiem i nadać mu dawnego piękna i szlachetności. W przypływie już dawno zapomnianych emocji nieopacznie młode dziewczę zaczęło naginać srogie zasady ciotki. Zapuściła się pewnego poranka długim korytarzem do jednego z ostatnich pokoi na piętze. Bezszelstnie wemknęła się do starej komnaty postanawiając zabrać się za porządkowanie domu. Pod starymi szmatami, grubą warstwą płątaniny kurzu i porzuconych pajęczyn jej oczom ukazały się piękne, niesamowicie zdobne meble oraz wielkie obrazy. Na środku stał spory sekretarzyk z mnóstwem szuflad. Natarczywa ciekawość namówiła dziewczynę by sprawdzić ich zawartość. Okazało się, że jest to gabinet ojca Madeleine, było tam sporo dokumentów i listów. Jedna z szuflad zamknięta była na klucz i mimo prób nie szło się do niej dostać. Elen usiadła zmożona na ogromnym krześle przy sekretarzyku, rozejrzała się po mrocznym pomieszczeniu i na jednej ze ścian ukazał się jej wielki portret srogiego mężczyzny, patrzącego gniewnie spod siwych, bujnych brwi na nią. Dreszcz przeszedł przez rozemocjonowaną dziewczynę niczym smągnięcie biczem. Nie przestraszyła się jednak i zaczęła wnikliwiej myskwować po pokoju. W ferworze emocji zdobny kałamarz spadł z łoskotem na ziemię, gdy dziewczyna sięgała po niego jej wzrok przykuł błyszczące coś przyczepione pod blatem biurka. To był kluczyczek wciśnięty starannie w wyżłobione drewno. Oczywiście pasował do tajemniczej szuflady, w której ku zdziwieniu Elen nie było wartościowych rzeczy tylko jakaś sterta zmarnowanych starością kart włożonych niechlujnie w skórzaną oprawę. Nagle dziewczyna usłyszała wołanie Eve.

Nie wiedząc czemu schowała zawartość szuflady w sukni i wybiegła z pokoju wpadając na stara służącą. Kobieta zrugła dziewczyną z dziwnym strachem w oczach. Elen obiecała, że już nigdy nie złamie zakazu i z ogromnym mętlikiem pytań w głowie zasiadła do szycia. Następnego poranka postanowiła zagłębić się w swe tajemnicze znalezisko, które okazało się dziennikiem ojca ciotki. Karta po karcie dziewczyna wczytywała się w życie tego surowego, zawziętego ale za razem kochającego niezmiernie swych najbliższych człowieka. Niestety stabilny, zamożny byt cenionego szlachcica opanował chaos w postaci obłubienia jego najukochańszej Madeleine. Ojciec miał zaplanowane życie swej córki a nawet miał już zaplanowanego męża dla niej a tu okazuje się, że jego najważniejsza na świecie istota kocha innego i chce zaburzyć lata jego planów i starań, to był szok. Zdesperowany ojciec w ferworze ferii zaczął więc knuć, z cichym przyzwoleniem matki Madeleine, jak tu wyeliminować tą zakałą, która pojawiła się na jego stabilnej życiowej drodze. Zawiodły wszystkie próby wyzwolenia córki z miłosegno upojenia, a wiele z nich było nikczemnych aż jeżył się włos na głowie Elen przedzierając się przez kolejne wersy dziennika. Postanowiła odłożyć go na miejsce, nie chciała dźwigać tej historii na swoich barkach. Akurat zbliżał się wieczór i ciotka pojawiła się na sofie z książką w dłoni. Dziewczyna schowała dziennik i zasiadła w salonie by słuchać dalszego ciągu powieści. Nagle jakieś cierpkie i smutne uczucie wkrađło się w myśli Elen... opowieść ciotki zaczęła dziwnie coś jej przypominać. To była historia cudownej miłości dwojga kochanków przepelniona magią, pięknymi podróżami oczywiście heroiczna wbrew światu ale piękna i niespodziewanie wkrađła się w tą beżmierną arkadę tragedii. Kochanek ginie w niewyjaśnionych okolicznościach. Przez kilka miesięcy nie ma od niego wieści, nikt go nie widział, przepada. Dziewczyna wyczekuje, płacze z tęsknoty popada w obłęd....Aż nagle ciało ukochanego zostaje znalezione na brzegu okolicznej rzeki i tragedia dopełnia się. Ciotka przerywa czytanie w tym momencie, zapada bezkresna cisza, wydaje się nawet jakby zamarł ogień w kominku. Madeleine odchodzi...nie pojawia się nawet po kolacji by zagrać piękną melodię. Elen desperacko postanawia wrócić do dziennika. Z drażniącym cierpkim zatrwożeniem wertowała wymi błękitnymi oczami po kolejnych wersach . Ojciec ciotki dociera do człowieka, który ma rozwiązać jego duszący problem. Systematycznie i monotonie powtarzają się na pomiętych coraz bardziej kartkach słowa „...Boże wybacź!”. Wcześniejsza przemyślana „uwieczniana sprawozdawczość w dzienniku przeradza się w chaotyczny zlepek skołatanych myśli a pismo z poukładanej kaligrafii zmieniło się w drżące wołanie o przebaczenie. Ciężko poukladać wszystko w logiczną całość. Pojawiają się zamiast faktów uczucia, które targają tym roslým szlachcicem sprowadzając go do skulonego, zamkniętego w sobie starca. Ostatni wpis zmroził krem w żyłach dziewczyny...”nie wiedziałem, że zlecając jego zabicie...zamorduje serce mojej córki...” Elen nie mogła zasnąć tej nocy... zaczęła łączyć wszystkie fakty w całość, przypomniały jej się jakieś zasłyszane plotki na rodzinnych przyjęciach ...nie mogła w to wszystko uwierzyć. Uczucie przerażającego bólu wymieszanego z goryczą stłamsiło jej myśli...w końcu zasnęła. Ze snu zerwał ją metaliczny brzęk kluczy Eve. Zerwała się na równe nogi i pobiegła do starej służącej. Opowiedziała jej wszystko, nie potrafiła sama dźwigać tego brzemienia. Eve pobladła i przysiadła na starym krześle w kuchni. Po chwili wyszeptwała drżącym głosem...”...tajemnica została odkryta...”Okazało się, że to wszystko prawd jednak nikt nie wiedział jak doszło do śmierci kochanka Madeleine. Ona po jego stracie obłąkana trafiła do pobliskiego klasztoru, gdzie próbowano wyrwać ją z marazmu. Po kolejnej „nieudanej próbie samobójczej

ograbionej przez życie z miłości dziewczyny, znalaziono jej ojca w gabinecie z ostrzem noża wbitym centralnie w bezlitosne, wymięte z człowieczeństwa serce. Matkę Madeleine po kilku dniach znaleziono w piwnicach dworku zwisającej bezwiednie na starym, żeglarskim sznurze. Eve zamilkła na chwilę....po czym odparła, że to ona znalazła rodziców ciotki...Wszystko wskazywało na to, że matka Madeleine zabiła męża po czym sama odebrała sobie życie i nikt nie wiedział co doprowadziło tych zamożnym, poważanych ludzi do takiego obłędu...roilo się od plotek ale z czasem odkryto tą tragedię zapomnieniem a może wyparciem... Stara służąca nie odsunęła się tylko od tej rodziny, zajmowała się Dworkiem do powrotu Madeleine z klasztoru. Kobieta wróciła ale nie mogła przardzić sobie z rzeczywistościąEve poprosiła Elen, żeby dała dziennik ciotce.... Dziewczyna była w ogromnym szoku, wszystko było jasne ale jak zniesie tą prawdę ciotka.... Ogień łamał drobne gałązki w kominku, a ciepło okalające zatrwożone ciało Elen starało się uspokoić szalejące węń myśli. Nagle pojawiła się ciotka na atlasowej sofie jak zwykle znikąd i zaczęła czytać powieść od początku. Elen podeszła do niej i położyła dziennik ojca na atlasową poduszkę sąsiadującą z czarną koronkową suknią ciotki. Madeleine zamilkła odłożyła swą książkę i sięgnęła po dziennik...każda przejrzana strona opadała bezwiednie na drewniana podłogę. Po opadnięciu ostatniej strony jej brązowe wielkie oczy spojrzwały na Elen. Dziewczyna nie mogła ogarnąć tego spojrzenia, beżmiar żalu i cierpienia lawirujący w nim był nieopisywalny. W milczeniu ciotka podeszła do fortepianu i zaczęła grać. Muzyka przenikała na wskroś , tak że aż Eve wyłoniła się z kuchni i zasiadła nieopodal kominka by wsłuchać się w tą magiczną melodię. Początek był im znany, to były piękne dźwięki miłości sunące gdzieś ponad rzeczywistością...z każdą kolejną chwilą zamieniały się w mocniejsze i szybsze odgłosy, które z ogromnym trudem fortepian wylańiał z siebie. Każda z nut przesywała na wskroś ciernistym dźwiękiem bólu i cierpienia...po chwili melodia złągodniała, mimo mocnego wydźwięku była opanowana jakby ból nie mógł już więcej ranić i ukoił się swym przeznaczeniu. Fortepian zamilkł, Madeleine wstała, spojrzwała na Elen i uśmiechnęła się ciepło. Ogromna jasność nastąpiła wokół niej i nagle z nicości wyłoniła się niewyraźna postać wysokiego ,smukłego młodzieńca, który wyciągnął rękę w stronę Madeleine. Kobieta podała mu swą dłoń i razem w tej niesamowicie ciepłej i niewiarygodnie jasnej łunie odeszli w dal znikając nagle. Elen zszokowana spojrzwała na Eve, po której uśmiechniętej twarzy spływały łzy...Dziewczyna przez chwilę myślała, że to sen, bo to nie mogło się przecież naprawdę zdarzyć. Eve chwyciła ją za rękę i zaprowadziła do niegdyś pięknego parku za domem, gdzie byli pochowani rodzice ciotki. Wskazała na jesczce jeden grób nieopodal na którym widniały inicjały Madeleine i odległa data jej śmierci...Dopełniła swego życia w samotności i zapomnieniu, tak jak chciała, ale jej dusza nie mogło się uwolnić skołatana tą tajemnicą. Eve złapała dłonie Elen i powiedziała tylko... „...uwolniłaś ją, są już razem, tak jak pragnęła...”.

Życie młodziutkiej choć niewiarygodnie doświadczonej przez los dziewczyny zmieniło się diametralnie. Dwie dusze zaznały wzajemnie ukojenia a Mrok odchodząc na mglistej łunie zerknął za siebie rzucając tajemniczo bezwzględne spojrzenie na los Elen.

Elen

Darkness has taken over the world. Black Death with her merciless cape has covered the world that was once vibrant with life. The Plague rushed from Asia through the silk trail, mowing down human existence with a terrible disease. It has also spread in Europe where many families were decimated with death.

It was a tragic time in the life of young Elen. The Plague has also knocked on her family home on the outskirts of Paris. It scolded her loved ones without scruples. In order to heighten its ruthlessness, it left this delicate, innocent being alive and made her experience the imperishable suffering of her parents' deaths. The girl's only desire at that moment was death, but unfortunately, fate had other plans.

The only relative who could take in Elen was her aunt Madeleine who lived in the distant Azay. The family maintained a miserable contact with her aunt as she was considered a madwoman, but due to her fortune she was not completely crossed out. The journey was long, the heart of Elen torn apart by tragedy, filled with fear and uncertainty. Outside it was terribly gloomy, no ray of sun broke through the thick clouds, to at least tip the face of the girl. The picturesque landscape hid under a sad, misty quilt, betraying only irregular shapes.

When she arrived, an giant gate appeared in the distance on which the wind played a terrifying melody. The girl with trembling hands in her lap entered the dark estate. In the distance you could see a huge building. The fog also reached there, enveloping the area in a gray embrace, and it was hard to look around. Chills more and more pierced Elen as she approached the heavy front door, afraid she would lack the courage to knock. The last step separated her from the moment when suddenly the entrance door was opened, absorbing the curious mist of clouds. A croaky voice called her name, the girl's heart sank. There was no exit, the last of Elen's strenght came inside and the thoughts that plucked in her head did not help to overcome fear. The lobby was large, with the muffled light of oil lamps paving the way to the old stairs, breaking down on thick frames of images that filled almost every free scrap of walls. On the right side, in front of the stairs, the entrance to the next room appeared, which was brighter. Suddenly Aunt Madeleine stood at the door. She was a beautiful woman. Her slim body was surrounded by a modest dark green dress, but made of expensive material. The long jet-black hair was slashed carelessly in a clever bun from which the wisps of curls fell on her shoulders. Dark eyes stared at Elen. After a moment her pale hands caught the frozen hands of the girl.

"You are very similar to Kate," said the aunt, slightly muffled in a hoarse voice. "The supper is ready. Undress and eat, you're probably hungry." This is when she pointed to an old, beautifully decorated table illuminated by a matching candlestick.

Elen ate alone, observing subsequent images revealed by the twinkling light of candles. The cool reception by her aunt did not surprise her at all. She saw her the last time when she was a little girl ... That was her mother's cousin. She inherited this house from her parents who died suddenly in unexplained circumstances. She lived here completely alone, cutting herself

off from the family --apparently insanity locked her in these walls after the death of her parents. There were some strange rumors, but all of her story was shrouded in mystery, and everyone avoided contact with her.

The common existence of both life-torn lives was surprisingly amazing. Elen with time became accustomed to the dark manor, to mysterious rooms, in which the furniture was covered with sloppy white sheets, to the monotony of her aunt's life and to the rules that she was strictly told to follow. Every day an old woman, who was calling herself a servant had been coming to the manor. She was very strange but it can't be unseen that only thanks to her everything was working. She was doing the groceries, she prepared meals and scrupulously cleaned Elen's bedrooms and living room. Surprisingly, she had never cleaned her aunt's bedroom or other rooms to which no one was allowed to enter. In the evening, after making the fire in the big fireplace, she was leaving the manor, closing the door with a loud clatter of old keys. Elen's aunt slept for a long time. Only late in the afternoon she appeared to sit on a satin sofa in the living room and read Elen an amazing novel by a unknown artist. She disappeared when the servant Eve brought the supper. They had never eaten together. Elen's aunt came after the old woman left to play beautiful melodies on the old piano. This music, like a silken mist, enveloped the dark chill of the house and during that time, as the wonderful lightness resounded, crept into Elen's heart, shedding the suffering of a wasted heart. These sounds swayed so magically that it usually comforted the girl for a carefree dream. And so it was every day. The young girl surprisingly gained strength in this melancholy home.

One day in the lobby, Elen discovered an old sewing machine under a pile of rags, and with the permission of old Eve she began sewing and remodeling the dresses she had found in her bedroom. This occupation allowed her to take ruthless thoughts with creative joy. When, over time, thorns began to dry up around her soul and the first spring parcels crept shyly into the girl's heart, she decided to take care of the manor and give it its former beauty and nobility. In the tide of long-forgotten emotions, the young girl vaguely began to bend the strict aunt's rules. She set off one morning in a long corridor to one of the last rooms on the first floor. She slipped into the old room noiselessly, deciding to get her house clean. Underneath the old rags, a thick layer of tangled dust and discarded spider webs, beautiful, incredibly ornate furniture and great paintings appeared to her eyes. There was a large secretary-like desk in the middle with a lot of drawers. Insistent curiosity convinced the girl to check their contents. It turned out that it was the office of Madeleine's father. There were a lot of documents and letters. One of the drawers was locked and, despite attempts, there was no way getting inside it.

Elen sat down in a huge chair next to the secretary's desk. She looked around the dark room, and on one of the walls there was a large portrait of a stern man, staring angrily with gray, lush eyebrows at her. A thrill passed through the emotional girl like a whip. She did not get scared, however, and began to search the room more carefully. In the excitement of emotion, the ornamented ink bottle fell to the ground with a clatter, and when the girl reached for it, her eyes were caught by a shiny something attached to the desk. It was a key pressed carefully into the carved wood. Of course, it matched the mysterious drawer, in which, to Elen's surprise, were no valuable things, just a pile of wasted old cards inserted in a messy leather cover. Suddenly the girl heard Eve's cry. Not knowing why she hid the contents of the drawer in her dress she ran out of the room bumping into the old maid. The woman scolded the girl with strange fear in her eyes. Elen promised that she would never break the ban and with a huge confusion

of questions in her head sat at the sewing machine. The next morning she decided to delve into her mysterious finding, which turned out to be the diary of her aunt's father. Page by page she discovered the life of a harsh, fierce, but at the same time immeasurably loving, father and husband.

Unfortunately, the stable, affluent existence of the esteemed nobleman mastered chaos in the form of his beloved Madeleine. The man had planned his daughter's life and even had a husband planned for her and it turned out that his most favorite person in the world loved another man and wanted to disturb the years of his plans and efforts... it was a shock. The desperate father in the throes of winter holidays began to plot, with the quiet consent of Madeleine's mother, how to eliminate this branch, which appeared on his stable life path. They failed all attempts to free their daughter from a passionate intoxication, and many of the plans were wicked until Elen's hair bristled when she was breaking through the verse lines of the diary. She decided to put him back in place, she did not want to carry this story on her shoulders. The evening was approaching, and her aunt appeared on the sofa with a book in her hand. The girl hid the diary and sat in the living room to listen to the novel. Suddenly, a sour and sad feeling crept into Elena's mind ... her aunt's story began to look strange to her. It was a story of the wonderful love of two lovers filled with magic, beautiful journeys, of course, heroic against the world but beautiful, and it unexpectedly creeps into this immense arcane tragedy. The lover dies in unexplained circumstances. For a few months she has no news from him, no one has seen him, he is lost. The girl is waiting, crying out of longing falls into madness ... Until suddenly the body of the beloved one is found on the bank of the surrounding river and the tragedy is completed. Madeline interrupts reading at this moment, there is an endless silence, it seems even as if the fire in the fireplace has died away. Madeleine leaves ... does not even appear after supper to play a beautiful melody. Elen desperately decides to go back to the diary. With irritating ache of fear she turned her blue eyes on the next verses. Aunt's father reaches a man who is to solve his suffocating problem. Systematically, monotones are repeated on the slips of paper, "God forgive me!". Earlier thought-out, immortalized reporting in the journal turns into a chaotic conglomeration of troubled thoughts and the letter from the sorted calligraphy has turned into a trembling cry for forgiveness. It's difficult to put everything into a logical whole. Instead of the facts, there appear feelings that strike the large nobleman, bringing him to a huddled, introverted old man. The last entry froze her veins ... "I did not know that ordering his killing ... would murder my daughter's heart ...". Elen could not fall asleep that night ... she began to combine all facts into a whole, reminded her of some rumors heard at family parties ... she could not believe it all. The feeling of terrifying pain mixed with bitterness stammered her thoughts ... she finally fell asleep. A metallic clank of Eve's keys broke her from her sleep. She jumped to her feet and ran to the old maid. She told her everything, she could not bear the burden herself. Eve paled and sat down in the old chair in the kitchen. After a while, she whispered in a trembling voice ... "... the mystery was discovered ..." It turned out that all this was true, but no one knew how Madeleine's lover had died. After her loss, she went to a nearby monastery, where she tried to rip herself out of apathy. After another unsuccessful suicide attempt plagued by a girl's life of love, her father was found in the office with a knife-blade driven centrally into a merciless, heart-crumpled humanity. Madeleine's mother was found in the cellars of a manor dangling unconsciously on an old, sailing rope after a few days. Eve fell silent for a moment then she replied that she found her aunt's parents Everything indicated that Madeleine's mother killed

her husband and then took her own life and no one knew what led those wealthy, serious people to such madness ... swarmed with gossip but over time this tragedy was covered with oblivion and perhaps repression ... The old maid did not just move away from this family, she took care of the manor to return Madeleine from the monastery.

The woman came back but she could not cope with the reality ... Eve asked Elen to give her aunt's journal The girl was in a huge shock, everything was clear but how can her aunt bear it The fire broke small twigs in the fireplace, the perplexed body of Elen tried to calm the raging thoughts. Suddenly, her aunt appeared on the satin sofa as usual from nowhere and began to read the novel from the beginning. Elen came up to her and put her father's diary on a satin pillow next to her black aunt's lace gown. Madeleine fell silent, put down her book and reached for the diary each page that had been inspected fell unknowingly onto the wooden floor. After dropping the last page, her brown big eyes looked at Elen. The girl could not grasp this gaze, the immense regret and suffering that she navigated in it was indescribable. In complete silence, Madeline went up to the piano and began to play. The music penetrated through, so that Eve emerged from the kitchen and sat near the fireplace to listen to this magical melody. The beginning was familiar to them, they were beautiful sounds of love that glided somewhere above reality ... with each passing moment they turned into stronger and faster noises, which with great difficulty the piano was emerging from itself. Each note pierced through the thorny sound of pain and suffering ... after a while, the melody softened, in spite of its strong overtone, it was overcome as if the pain could not hurt anymore and soothed its destiny. The piano fell silent, Madeleine rose, looked at Elen and smiled warmly. A great brightness came around her, and suddenly a vague figure of a tall, slender young man appeared out of nothingness and reached out to Madeleine. The woman gave him her hand and together in this incredibly warm and incredibly bright glow they went away, disappearing suddenly. Elen looked at shockedly at Eve, with tears running down her smiling face ... The girl thought for a moment that it was a dream, because it could not really happen. Eve grabbed her hand and led her to the once beautiful park behind the house, where her aunt's parents were buried. She pointed to another grave nearby where Madeleine's initials were visible and the distant date of her death ... She filled her life in loneliness and oblivion as she wished, but her soul could not be freed by this mystery. Eve grabbed Elen's hands and only said ... "... you released her, they are together, just as she wanted ...".

The life of a young but unbelievably experienced girl has changed dramatically. Two souls experienced each other's relief and the Darkness, as he stepped out of the misty glow, glanced behind him, casting a mysteriously ruthless look at the fate of Elen.



The Art of Language:

Works from Bydgoszcz, Poland



isabel coffey | poetry

A Poem for Today

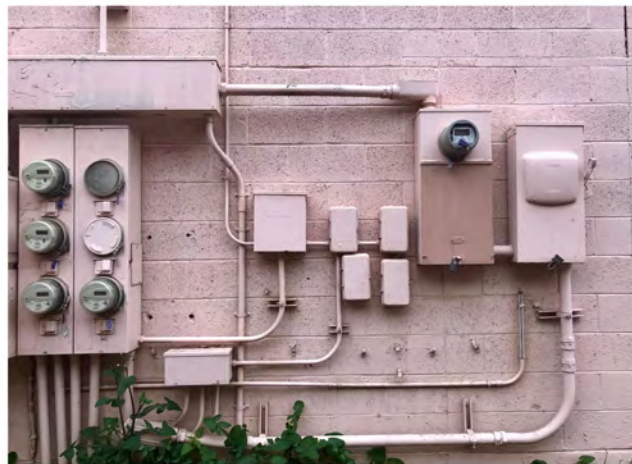
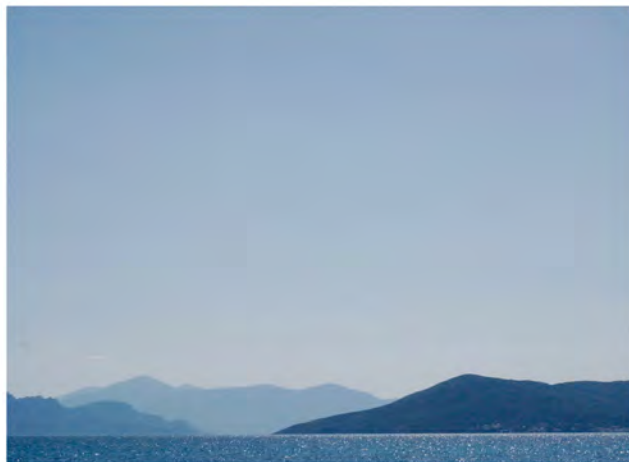
The theatre feels entirely unlike sunset evenings, until tonight. We begin as always, teary in the dark, in cushioned seats, and then we step out into summer sky, purple smoke scrawled across a canvas of seventies orange and blushing pink. Hand-in-hand, our sweat mingling in warm evening air, I realize--the film and here, it's all the same. Your skin glows alongside the sinking sun and together we lift off to ride the burning Chariot into darkness. Nothing could be more simple than a hymn to nature sung in plaintive cries by a poet raven locks framing a face as young as new dew and eyes as old as the world. Perhaps you were her in a different life, or in this same one. We approach the graying horizon and I wonder what it will be like to be old. Will we grocery-shop together, bags of crackers and Campbell's straining veined arms? Will we still see midnight showings of Indie films that warm our insides and hurt our hearts? Will we keep kissing through the credits 'til theatre workers come in with brooms and cans?

antoine hanchard



Villaboiss Lavalette
photography

isabel coffey



The Most Human Colors
photography

emily neuharth | prosepoem

Four Months in Cambridge, England

With pocketed-hands and glossy eyes, the wind moves me towards a half-hidden gazebo. I walk past the small *Private Fellows' Garden* sign, focusing on how the smell of slow-coming rain softens the throats of invisible birds. Cobwebs shiver at me as I tentatively sit, unsure if their tenuous dance is in defense or in welcome— me, their uninvited American guest. Brave and flimsy, wildflowers float in a green ocean of grass that fills the garden with pockets of undulating waves. The wind's dull roar is broken by a lone leaf, dead, as it pitter-pat-patters to the ground...perhaps its audible descent is a quiet epiphany, or perhaps it's a mournful sigh. Staring at the empty bench across from me, I wonder: *How many conversations have been born under this octagon-roof?* Only the wind howls back. With my head bent as if for prayer, I scrawl with numbing fingers into a too-small notebook: *How many idea-offerings have been orphaned in this private Eden?* Both winter's wry, dead victims and spring's naïve but bright recruits encircle me; I sense them reading over my shoulder. *Perhaps this garden's pure purpose was to grow old, to survive.* My gaze slips off the page and onto the moss sprawling and sleeping in the cracks of the floor's many-stoned design. *Did the Fellows think all of this was beautiful when it was still new?* I try in vain to imagine this garden's balance between necropolis and growing life (a characteristic singular to time-worn things) as it must have once been: bare and open, seedlings being planted with careful attention and then left alone to someday become this Private Fellows' Garden. Occasionally I hear a distant door squeak open; my heart rate quickens then slows when nobody comes to me. Rain's tap-dancing toes have begun their warm-ups and I reason with myself that no one, a Fellow or not, wants to sit outside in this weather. Goosebumps push up against my clothes as I release my mind's reins to the wind once again. Engraved into the wood I'm leaning against are elegant capital letters: "IN BELOVED MEMORY OF..." *Perhaps in attempts at either immortality or grieving, this gazebo was constructed so that it could stand still and lonely behind vine-covered buildings, gates, and trees.* The cold cobwebs and crackly vines speak to me forgotten, sad sounds, and yet, neither have broken under these violent winds— they disagree with my musings. And here I am now, ushered into this spot by some of the most alive forces I know— curiosity, inspiration, prideful rebelliousness and entitlement, and a desire for shelter from these oh-too-generous skies. *Perhaps this Private Garden's aura of disuse was intentional...maybe it was built not for the luxury of those prestigious Fellows, but for the rush of adrenaline it lends to the foolish few who give it a purpose of their own.*

marcus boas | poetry

Anak Bulan

Smiles sit on our faces
as we gaze upon the stars,

each a shining pinprick of silver
stretched across a deep, dark cloak.

The moon floats like a sterling spoon
balancing between the shadows, resting

on my fingertips, pouring white light
through the brittle branches of trees

standing along the road, breaking up
the pavement into a glinting tapestry.

Our faces are only sheltered by the glow
our white teeth hold in our mouths.

You tell me your father calls
you his moon child, his anak bulan.

I cherish everything you share, since after
years of friendship there is so much more to say.

We race through streets on our bikes
like children, avoiding every uneven brick.

Soon, we will have to return to our lives,
filled with deadlines and doubt.

But for one refreshing summer night,
We get to blow our worries away like smoke.

We fill the air with laughter and with cries,
as we find comfort in this reunion.

With one hand, you reach for your lighter—the other
still on the steering wheel—and skillfully add

a tiny red dot to the curtain of stars,
letting its light dance on your lips.

emily gustin



Starry Afternoon
photography

mark young



The Observable Universe
photography

anna bedalov | poetry

night & day

i will always be your child,
i whisper to the shining moon
as i drive, always to Orion's belt.
i'm ready to fly, to move forever
further from ghosts, but i'm waiting for the dead
of blackest night to surround me, heaviest blanket
comforting my insides and pulling me out
far from this small set, my second home.
in order to find my hero out,
the moon must be where it is day –
i will push into the light
and learn to be myself.

this is florida, i say –
sun slowly compressing my cheek
as i think of someplace else, larger –
or my grandmother's in the summertime.
the sky is millions of brilliant miles away;
lazy-thin clouds collect our old thoughts of relief,
of our home – not yet – that will someday exist.
sunlight on cheekbones as our eyes fall shut,
content for now to be where we are:
planes growling overhead as we sit
underneath the windowsill,
weary, endlessly worn.

jake pitts | poetry

Wood Spoon Wisdom

“Never let your guard down,”
my Oma once told me, between fond
sips from her mason-jar of white wine.
The sweet, intoxicating beverage
changing her, turning her bitter.

“Never forget a person’s worth,”
she would slur in broken English.
Oma taught me little worth minding:
only macabre advice, and the
woeful bite of a wooden spoon.

Oma watched from the window,
years later, on the day I met you.
We flirted and floated on the water,
If only I could’ve known
what would become of us.

Three times we got together.
Three times we parted again.
The first end struck me
in the heart; the second beginning
you struck me in the face.

Every time you push your way back
into my life, I seem to forget the last:
fleeting amnesia followed
by lasting sorrow. I ought to hate you,
like I do Oma, yet I don’t.

Achilles had his heel and I have you.
Maybe if I’d heeded Oma’s well-meant words,
I could have been spared your torments.
But I didn’t: her imparted wisdom faded
with the scars on my ass.

laura muther | poetry

Honor Code

I have neither given or received, nor have I tolerated or been aware of others' use of unauthorized bribery money to get accepted into university.



editor's intro.

This time last year, Editor Emily Neuharth had the vision to combine what she had seen in the archives of *The Lighter* and the current state of artistic affairs to create the first Artivism Contest. Previous issues are full of comedy in multiple mediums, the most provoking of which are the satirical ones. At some point, the satire started to slip away, giving room instead to other emotional foci. This is not to say this is a bad thing, but it is something that needed to be brought to attention. All art does work, and all of that work is equally important, but in a political climate where people may not feel encouraged to speak about their concerns-- be they environmental, political, social, or anything else-- we wanted to provide a platform for that activism.

We've decided to keep this idea of art as activism alive by continuing the contest that Emily created last year. In our submissions for the contest, it was heartwarming and reaffirming to see the wide range of topics that our community has been thinking about and were inspired by. As Wangechi Mutu said in the quote that inspired this contest, "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." It is our hope that our winners of this year's Artivism Contest will not just infiltrate your psyche, but inspire and encourage you to create your own activism.

judges' thoughts on the activism winner

Tracy Monson

We talked about a lot of things because at first Evan and I were chatting a little bit, like, "What's our criteria and should we establish criteria for this?" And one of the things that we said was that it should move people to action, which, I think broadly understood includes just thought and questioning without compromising aesthetically. It should be strong art and also have the ability to move. We ended up picking the atom bomb piece just because it, for me I think, promoted the most reflection after I read it. There's a lot of great questions that it prompted me to ask. I think it says a lot of things but in very few words, which is what poetry should do and I loved I guess the thought that these little ways that we're separated or are separating from one another. I mean, the piece focuses on this big horrific event, this horrific destruction, but it's also the way that these little daily destructions can occur between people, and really thinking about that and sitting with that, I was like, "Oh, this is pretty intense." And then I read it probably like 8 or 10 times and for a long time I was thinking about what does the speaker in the poem want? And then I was like, "I think the speaker wants to disclose something to us. There're these lines, "But let me blind you. Let me tell you / that black and white at war / is a command from the almighty, / that it's settled in your bones." At first I read that and was like, "Oh shit, this 'separate' is part of us. It's kind of inevitable that people are this way. And then I was thinking why are we this way and is it really appealing and is it actually human nature to view people as Other. And I realized I think the speaker is saying, "Let me tell you this lie, let me tell you that this is a command from the almighty that this is they way it has to be," and I was kind of like, maybe this is hopeful. It's not from the point of view of the bomb, it's from this moment before destruction

happens. And I guess in the moment leading up to something, there's a chance to make a choice and then I got really hopeful about it. The whole process of thinking through the poem and spending time with it it provokes a lot of thoughts and questions which is what I think activism should do.

Evan Bryson

This one just made a lasting impression. I read it and then I let it sit and then I wanted to reread it to see how it sort of opened up again. And I felt that the other entries were very closed and you go them very quickly and getting things very quickly to me is satisfying, but it doesn't mean that there's very much depth there. And I felt that this one had depth. We were thinking about what activism actually is and what the components could actually be. Because it's a combination of art and activism and we thought that it should still be an object that is artful, or aesthetic or grounded in aesthetics without compromising sort of what makes something aesthetically successful. But it should also be activism in a way that it isn't useless. It isn't just an object that sits there and demands nothing of you and so also recognizing that it's very difficult for things to be both. It's very special for things to be an object and not an object. So thinking through this poem, what moved more or struck me is that it did make me think. That seems to be very important in this political moment: that giving yourself space to think. And I think that it contained an intellectual use of irony, I guess beyond a black and white image which is a critical component in the poem.

anna styczula | poetry

From the Point of View of the Light from an Atomic Bomb

In a second I will show you
what is born from separation.
My life is but a prelude
to the rot that is to come;

But let me blind you. Let me tell you
that black and white at war
is a command from the almighty,
that it's settled in your bones,
in the soldier's skull on your desk.

Tomorrow you will see the truth
from your burnt-out sockets:
A sky of ash, falling
to an endless sea of dust.

But am I not as beautiful and bright
as the morning star?

the lighter's second annual

artivism contest winner

anna styrczula



This apocalyptic poem, written from the point of view of the light from an atom bomb, has both historical grounding in World War II with the bombing of Hiroshima and Nagasaki as well as contemporary meaning with continuing tensions of nuclear war and the aggressive, black-and-white political attitudes of today. I firmly believe that dehumanization is responsible for some of humanity's worst crimes, from racism (which allows for such disturbing phenomena such as the American collection of Japanese skulls as trophies that occurred in World War II) to the belief that nuclear devastation could ever be a good option. As such, I wished to personify not simply the (perhaps metaphorical) bomb but the light that signals the bomb as a sort of voice both tempting us and inadvertently warning us about the dangers of this path. These destructive attitudes exist as much today as they did in the past; in fact, I see many of them on the rise. Hopefully, looking back at history in this way can enlighten us as to how to approach the decisions we must make today: with empathy and awareness of how we are, in many ways, still blind.

nathaniel bouman



I'll Be There Next Time
creative coding

staff's honorable mention

nathaniel bouman

My submission was initially inspired by the recent video “Loneliness” by educational YouTube channel Kurzgesagt (link: https://youtu.be/n3Xv_g3g-mA). In present day, more and more adults are suffering from chronic loneliness. Despite our living in the most connected time in history, it’s all too easy to feel isolated. These feelings can quickly spiral, leading to behaviors that create the very isolation we fear.

It can be difficult to spot depression, even in a close friend. If there’s someone you haven’t seen in a while, who’s been ignoring your invitations to hang out for weeks, it’s tempting to think they just no longer want to be friends, and to stop reaching out to them. In my piece, “I’ll Be There Next Time,” I give a glimpse of what might cause a text containing those words, “I’ll be there next time,” to be sent. The message I want to send is simple: if you have a friend you haven’t seen in a while, don’t be afraid to do a wellness check. You never know what they might be going through, and the impact you could have.

monique ledonne



A Dreary Day in Chicago
mixed media

jesse hershberger | poetry

Resurrection

I do not understand this Jesus
with translucent skin

cryptic blue eyes
always dead (or dying).

Nor do I understand a God
aged and wrinkled
Santa Claus Beard
high on a throne in the clouds.

No, My Jesus is a Freedom Fighter,
with skin like hot chocolate
eyes of understanding
protesting alongside me.

And My God is a strong Queer Woman
the one to create
rainbows, sunsets,
and the clitoris?

When I close my eyes to pray at night
This is what I see--

Who else could have made this world?

Who else could have made me?

haley brewer | prose

Faith, Unquestioned

Desperation, the worn paper reminded her, was key.

She held the mangled prayer book carefully in her hands, the messy instructions written in pencil on the back inside cover hardly legible as her mouth stumbled over the unfamiliar Latin. She could almost feel her grandmother's bony fingers digging into her shoulders so many years ago as she passed the small book, a warning clear and unhidden in her smoke-gravel voice. Maria had been barely eighteen — off to university the day after — when the older woman had explained. Or tried to.

Maria took a deep breath and followed the vague instructions as close to the foreign letter as possible. Google translate wasn't proving itself as key to the process as she'd hoped.

She tossed her offering into the clear air, whispering out the last phrase, and watched it fall through the air. In one moment to the next — the amount of time it took her ice misted breath to dissolve into the night — the coin was caught easily in a palm, and something — someone? — stood in front of her.

He examined the silver coin carefully. She stuffed the paper deep into her jacket pocket and tried to keep her trembling to a minimum.

"A lost art," He remarked, still looking down at the coin. He held it up to the dark sky and the moon was only barely illuminated enough for it to catch the light. "I was certain no one remembered."

"Yeah, well," She probably should have had something better, more impressive to say, but, well. She shoved her freezing hands deep into her pockets and tried again. "Apparently someone does."

He made a small noise of interest and stared down at the simple offering. She shifted her weight nervously — weren't they supposed to get down to business as soon as possible? Set down the rules?

She tried for his attention once more. "You know how long it took me to find a scratched quarter?"

"It's not just a quarter. I really don't give a shit about mortal money." He flipped the coin in the air, caught

it, and flipped it onto his palm. It was heads up. "It can be anything with minor value. Quarters work."

She huffed out a breath and white mist slung to the brief, fleeting heat. She couldn't help her curiosity. "What's it about then?"

"You know how many residual emotions linger on these things?" He rubbed his thumb over the print and let his eyes flutter shut. "Some kid brought an ice cream cone with this, once. Another used it to buy a set of shaped erasers at school. It lingered in some guy's jacket for a few months and then it was used to buy some lunch." He took a deep breath. "It still smells like a high school cafeteria."

"And that's good?" She couldn't help but ask. All she remembered about her high school cafeteria was the constant smell of french fries, even though they were only served on Fridays.

"A scratched quarter's been places." He flipped the coin in the air again. "That's what's good. Anyway," He gave her a look over, slightly suspicious and incredibly judgemental. "The hell you want."

"I didn't think angels could curse," She muttered before straightening up and tightening her thin jacket around her waist. He wasn't dressed for the weather at all — strangely, a dirty jean jacket hung off his aged frame with a dark flannel hiding under it, and his baggy jeans were completely wrecked at the ends. His hair hung tangled and mostly silvered around his chin, looking like nothing especially special. Had she not literally watched him form into existence a few moments ago, she would never believe.

She cleared her throat and spoke carefully, her words picked long ago. "I need you to walk me home." She paused. "And keep me safe. That's the important part, I guess."

"A single quarter'll only get you twenty minutes," He told her like she wasn't already well-aware. "Not a second longer."

"Good thing the walk is only fifteen," She tilted her chin up and glanced towards the silver coin still in his grasp as a reminder. "Do we have a deal?"

He rubbed his fingers into the hard metal and

grimaced, clearly resistant but bending to the idea. “Lead the way, human.”

“It’s Maria,” She corrected him and very purposely didn’t share her last name.

He regarded her thoughtfully. “That’s fitting.”

She rolled her eyes, “And yours?”

“You wouldn’t be able to pronounce it,” he said, “but I guess you could call me Dave.”

She raised her eyebrow. “Surprisingly human.”

“Most things are,” He said, and then he fell quiet, clearly waiting for her to take the lead down the street. She didn’t move an inch.

“So you’ll do it?” She asked, having never gotten his agreement. “You’ll protect me?”

He scoffed. “Have you no faith?” He asked, looking almost interested in the answer. In his hands, the silver coin rolled back and forth over his fingers, the physics an impossible feat as it ran quick and brisk over his knuckles and the cracks in his palms without prompt.

Faith, the cousin to loyalty, felt like a collar hugging her throat. Any tighter, she’d choke. But without it would she be free, or lost?

“I have enough,” She answered, her voice somehow steady.

“Well, alright.” He eyed her for another moment before taking a step forward. “I’ll make sure none of the big-bads get you, then.”

“Thanks,” she replied, dryly. She started to lead the way, Dave only a few steps behind her. She felt exposed with her back to him — horribly so — but didn’t move to resolve it. Offending an angel was at least within the top two worst things one could do, or so her grandmother had claimed. She quietly walked on, stiff and anxious. The sound of Dave’s rough-looking sneakers crushing into the gravel was her only clue that he was still following at all.

“Not much of a talker?” He drawled on once they were a bit into their walk. She said nothing, and somehow, that only seemed to encourage him. “C’mon, if I have to do this, you can at least entertain me with some odd conversation.”

“I’m not making you do anything,” she muttered. “You agreed.”

He sped up slightly so they were talking together. “Promises do mean something, I suppose.” He shot her a

look. “Doesn’t mean this has to be boring, though. Or—” He cut himself off and examined her face. “Are you too scared?”

She forced her tense shoulders to drop and turned her head to face him head-on. “No,” she said, feeling more solid in the words than she had in the beginning. Her eyes flickered away before he could continue on. “But this is my stop.”

He took in her apartment building with the same feeling of underwhelm that she herself had felt when first faced with the building. He turned back to her, suddenly seeming unsure as he shifted his weight.

He looked down at his hands and appeared begrudgingly pleased as he stared down at the coin between them. His gaze flickered up to hers. “Need the same treatment tomorrow?”

She swallowed and wondered what the hell she was getting into. “Yes.”

...

A handful of summons later, their exchange was down to almost routine as he caught the coin without a word and nodded in casual acceptance. She tilted her head to the side.

“What’s on it?” She asked, admittedly curious about the topic.

His eyes were already closed as he rubbed the metal into his palm. “It’s got grocery store all over it. Rolled under the counter for a few years before someone pocketed it.” He opened his eyes, “Then, used it as part of a stiff tip.”

“It was a pretty crappy tip,” she agreed, an exhausted sigh in her voice. “A handful of coins after two hours of service.”

He hummed, maybe in agreement, and stepped forward to start down the short path. She followed a half-step behind, staring at him with hesitant curiosity.

She huddled down into her oversized coat and bit her lip, “Why is it always you? Don’t you have better things to do?”

“Not much use for angels these days.” He flipped the coin and let it linger, spinning impossibly in the air for a few long moments before snatching it back. It was an odd display of power that left her feeling uneasy. Was she supposed to be impressed? In awe?

Scared?

She forced a breath through her lungs and instead threw him one of the chalky diner mints she had shoved

Faith, Unquestioned (continued)

into her jacket pocket. He caught it easily and stared at it narrow-eyed for a minute before crushing the thin plastic and pulling it off, almost pleased. The action reminded her oddly of a child. She gave him a thoughtful look.

“How long have you been around?”

“Too long,” he said obnoxiously around the mint in his mouth, some spit flying out as he spoke. She wrinkled her nose in disgust.

“Very angelic,” She muttered, kicking up some of the snow as she walked.

He threw her a sideways glance as she went quiet. “Nothing else to ask?”

She shrugged and he had yet to look away from her.

“Most humans have a laundry list of questions,” he observed. “Nothing about the big man, how this all started, how it ends?”

She thought about it. “Would you answer them?”

“No,” He said, somewhat reluctantly. “But that doesn’t stop most of you from asking anyway.”

She offered him a curious click of her tongue. “Do you hang out with a lot of humans?”

“No,” He repeated, again reluctant. “Doesn’t mean I don’t know enough about your kind.”

“Like what?”

“You’re all terrified little children,” he said.

“Terrified of life, death, each other, and no one at all.” He thought for a moment. “That surprised me. How scared you all are of being alone.” He gave her an obvious look as if to allude to their very situation.

She clenched her jaw, a bit annoyed at his aloof tone. “It’s safer not to be alone.” At that, he let out a harsh bark of laughter.

“You humans would do practically anything not to die,” he scoffed, still amused. “It’s embarrassing.”

She swallowed around her dry throat. “Wouldn’t you?”

“No,” he said, and didn’t continue.

She smoothed her mouth out into a stern line.

“You’re the guardian angel selling out 20-minutes for a

quarter,” she rolled her eyes, suddenly bold. “Not very mighty to be done down by a ritual.”

“Careful now,” He said, his words flowing easy but the expression on his face anything but. She dipped her chin and said nothing else.

“See you next week,” she said as they arrived at her building, both lingering for a moment. She tipped her head to the side so her hair fell over her eyes. There was no response and when she glanced back, he was gone.

...

“What do you do with the quarters after I give them to you?” She asked, Dave’s eyes still closed as he took whatever he did from the small press of metal. This was a question she had been wondering for a while — did he keep them and return to them later? Did the emotions or memories wear off after so many uses? Did he just drop them into the grass when she wasn’t looking, after they’d been drained of whatever he found so compelling?

Why did she even care?

He opened his eyes after a few moments and dropped his hand to his side, apparently done.

“Whatever I please,” he answered, a small bit of snide in his voice. She rolled her eyes, rubbing her hands together against the cold.

“Everything you say doesn’t have to be all mysterious, you know,” She said as she carefully stepped over a broken piece of sidewalk concrete. “You can just talk like a normal person.”

“I’m not a person,” He replied, seemingly finding joy in that fact as a small smile curled at his chapped lips.

She blew out a breath. “Yes, you keep reminding me of that fact. I know.” She pursed her lips. “It’s not as bad as you think it is.”

He shot her a careful look. “You really believe that,” he observed.

She tilted her chin up, defiant. “Yes. I do.” She met his gaze and paused in her step. “Why don’t you?”

He watched her for a long minute as she refused to

waver. When he spoke, his voice was rough and aged like it was the oldest part of him.

“Your life will be worth nothing,” he said, his words slowed and slurred as through a mouthful of thick honey, “doesn’t that bother you? You’re one in so many, and not even your dust will matter. When everything is done and over and the credits are rolling, nothing — especially not you — will matter in the slightest.”

A lingering pause separated them before she spoke up.

“I used to be obsessed with leaving my mark on the world, a legacy,” she told him, her voice soft, stopping in her steps even as her limited time wound down. “I grew up needing to know I would be worth something, that the world would remember me fondly and cry on my birthday.” He turned doubtful. “And that changed?”

“Yes,” She said. “When I die, the grass I’m buried under will flourish, even if only for a moment in the longshot. Maybe a flower will grow from me, and maybe someone will appreciate it. Maybe they’ll pick it and bring it to someone they love. Or they won’t, and my grass will brown before winter. But that hope that perhaps I will — perhaps I’ll do something good and help just the slightest —” She swallowed. “That may be nothing to you, but it’s enough for me.”

“I don’t mind dying as nothing,” She continued before pausing. “I mean, how’s your existence as ‘something’ going?”

“What do you think?” He asked, his voice a sour gruff note.

“Being human isn’t horrible,” she felt the need to defend.

“Humanity is a godawful trait to have.” He puffed a breath of smoke. “All sadness and fear and panic until you’re finally dead too soon in a planet you left worse.”

She sighed, looking off into the distant darkness. They were almost home. “I’m sure it looks that way. But it’s worth it, I think.” I hope.

He seemed to hear her thought loud and clear, which she wouldn’t put past him. Finally, after a few seconds of silence, as they both sorted through their thoughts, he heaved out a sigh. “I suppose.”

At her surprise, he snorted. “I suppose it better be worth it for all the trouble you’ve caused,” he gestured around them, “For free will and such.”

She paused in her steps, suddenly shaken by a thought. She turned slowly. “...Do you not have free will?”

“What do you think?” He shoved his hands into his pockets and hunched over. “It’s overrated anyway.”

“You have no free will at all?” She blinked back at him, shocked straight into dumbfounded.

He leaned in, and for a single terrifying second, he looked gruesome with power. “I have enough to shut you up,” he challenged, enough threat in his voice for her to step back automatically. A beat later, he looked at her, annoyed.

“I’m done with this,” he said, waving his hand in a lazy gesture, and then he was gone.

She broke away from the haze of dusty power and, even though they were barely minutes from the diner front only seconds ago, she was home.

...

“Wasn’t sure if you’d come,” She remarked casually a few afternoons later, rubbing her thumb over the deep scratch in the coin. She tried to find one especially well-worn and this one — a 1973 issue with a gray line carved across the print — would hopefully fit the bill. This time, instead of tossing it into the air, she held it out and waited.

Dave eyed her with a heavily mistrustful air and said nothing. Eventually, a minute later at least, he took it without a word and stepped forward to begin their path. “What’s on this one?” She asked lightly as she followed. He sighed, gave her another look that could almost be called exasperated, and let his eyes flutter shut. His thumb continued its steady stroke across the print. “There’s a lot here. Recently, it was arcade money. Afterward, it was thrown in a coin converter. Then it went to some toy machine.” He opened his eyes. “That’s where you got this?”

She couldn’t help but be impressed. “It was my turn to clean out the claw drop.” The haul was also beneficial enough that she was able to scrounge up another small handful of well-worn coins, leaving room for other worries.

“It remembers you,” he said, like his words were nothing but casual. “Cheap peach perfume, mostly, but sweat and food as well. It liked you well enough.”

She usually doused herself in spray after a shift to cover up the grease covering her clothes and skin.

“Anything else?” She asked, slightly breathless, maybe awed.

haley brewer | prose

Faith, Unquestioned (continued)

He opened his eyes, “Fear,” he said, “just enough to risk yourself calling on a random spirit for protection.”

Her throat felt incredibly dry, so much so she didn’t even feel she could form words. Thankfully, Dave didn’t seem to be waiting for any. He turned away, walking forward from where she was frozen in step, flipped the coin in the air, caught it in his mouth, and swallowed it.

“Gross,” She automatically said, gagging.

“An acquired taste,” He allowed her. “Don’t knock it till you try it.” She wrinkled her nose.

“Next week,” she promised, “I’ll bring diner leftovers. So you’re not eating any more quarters.”

He almost smiled at that. “Better grab some more of those mints while you’re at it.”

She rolled her eyes, somehow more fond than annoyed at his brisk tone. “Whatever you say.”

...

When he was summoned, he was already frowning.

“Where the hell were you last night?” He scowled. “You kept me waiting all night.”

She cocked her head to the side and spoke softly through her still slightly sore throat. “Couldn’t you tell I was sick or something? Look down from your cloud and see me surrounded by a thousand wrinkled tissues?”

Somehow, his scowl got even deeper, “That’s not how angels work.”

He tried to hand over his denim jacket — a surprisingly considerate gesture — but she shook her head and pulled her thin jacket tighter around herself. Angels had very few rules, she remembered, but you were to never take an offering from an angel. It wouldn’t do well to be in their debt, or so her grandmother had claimed.

He sighed, maybe in annoyance, probably in frustration, but shoved his jacket back on and pulled it tight around his shoulders. It made sense that his clothes never changed, she supposed, but it only really added to an uncaring appearance.

“You shouldn’t be walking home in this cold,”

a disapproving look came over his face. “Can’t you have someone drive you home or pick you up?”

She swallowed around her tight throat, “And let you miss out on your quarter?” She said, forcing a purposely light note in her voice. She nodded to the coin he hadn’t bothered to check yet. “What’s on it?”

He watched her for another moment, suspicious in a way he hadn’t been since the beginning. Then, he closed his eyes.

“Someone picked this one up off the road,” A look of concentration came over his face. “Before that, it was used to buy some cat food and a bouquet of flowers for...” he trailed off and flipped the coin over in his hands, “for mother’s day. Daisies.”

Something small and warm tugged at her chest, “My mother loved daisies,” She said softly. “She grew them in her garden.”

They both went quiet, lost in separate memories. Dave forced out a harsh breath and pocketed the coin. “Flowers are a useless thing to give, I never understood why that caught on with you lot.”

She shrugged. “A lot of people like them. They’re pretty, and they smell good.”

He raised an eyebrow. “And they’re dead within the week. You’re just giving them colorful weeds that they’ll have to take care of and watch die. How is that appealing? How is that a gift?”

“That’s not the point,” she argued, “It’s mainly the thought that counts anyway. You enjoy them while they last.”

“Yeah, well, I don’t get it.” He glanced around, the dark street around them giving nothing away as to what his eye found so interesting. “Thought can only get you so far.”

“You don’t have to,” she said. “It’s a human thing.”

He snorted. “It sure is,” he said as they approached her building. She shot him a curious look, her mind wondering something distant that she didn’t quite manage to get a grasp on, but said nothing.

“Next week,” she started, half-turned back towards him as she climbed her steps, “I’m going to bring you flowers.”

He scoffed, he rolled his eyes, and he was gone before the air left her lungs in a sigh. But he didn't tell her no.

...

She was already walking but turned to stroll backward for a few steps so she could toss the coin to Dave's waiting hand. Of course, he caught it easily and walked with her, even as he took a deep breath and inhaled.

She didn't bother asking, only waited with an expectant look.

He opened his eyes and stared to the side, not really seeing. "This one's boring — sat in a piggy-bank forgotten for a few years — there's almost nothing on it but some teen's messy bedroom. Then, thrown in a wallet and used as part of a tip for a shitty meal." Still, he held onto it with the same tight, choking grip as the others.

"Find me a better one next time," he grunted out, like it was somehow her fault she was unable to locate one worth his attention and time. "Find me one with something exciting."

She cocked her head to the side, her eyes narrowed. "Why can't you go find your own quarters or such?"

"You ask too many questions," he recited as usual, but the warning in his voice was lacking. She tried again. "You're supposed to be this all-powerful angel." She raised her eyebrows. "Why do you need humans to do your fetching?"

He hummed. "And how sure are you that I'm an angel?" He flashed her a sharp grin. "I could be anything."

"I believe you," She said. "You could be. But you're an angel."

"And how do you know that?" He asked. "How do you know I'm not god?" He was watching her very, very carefully, "He's got to be somewhere, after all."

"God looks like my mother," she answered, sure. "So yeah, you're not her."

He gave her a long considering look. "You sure about that?"

"Yeah," she said, "I am. What about you?"

"What do you think?"

She frowned. "You can't use that as your answer to every question I have."

"Sure I can," he answered, cheerful.

That's not fair, she wanted to reply, but could already hear his smug and gruff answer — probably

something vaguely insulting about humanity. Instead, she huffed out a breath and continued walking.

"Well, if we're asking questions —" He shoved an unlit cigarette in the corner of his mouth and met her step. With a tap of his finger to the end, it began burning red hot, a low glow in the otherwise cold and still night air. "Why don't you have someone walk you home?"

She shot him a wary glance and ignored the question. "How did you get your hands on a pack of cigarettes? Do you accept something else other than old coins?"

"Traded with some of your earlier quarters. They're all worn out now anyway." Without prompt, he handed over one of the cigarettes, unlit. The moment it was placed between her fingers, the end flared up. She wasn't much of a smoker, but the smell reminded her of her grandma and she couldn't help but inhale the wispy gray air. Her throat burned, her chest warmed, her shoulders relaxed as the nicotine hit. She hadn't had a cigarette in years, probably, not since—

She froze and stared down at the cigarette, her limbs numb. "You're never supposed to accept anything but protection from an angel." She swallowed, her throat feeling suddenly so thick. "They always come back for their debts." "Smart girl," he said without much inflection in his voice. "Read that in your prayer book?"

She swallowed and her eyes were still lit up from the red glow of burning tobacco. "What now?"

He cocked his head to the side and stared her down for a long, long moment. "I don't know," his voice was deep in thought. "If you could have anything, what would you want?" He asked, his voice almost curious. Despite the faint terror climbing up her arms and setting in like frostbite, she couldn't help but answer.

"A good night's sleep," she said, her voice hardly trembling. "No nightmares ever again."

"Now that isn't entirely true," he said, a weird misplaced mix of pity and sternness on his face. "Lying to an angel is quite the sin, you know."

"I'm not lying," she snapped. "You said it yourself, you don't know everything about me."

Pity was still painted across his face. "You've been giving me quarters for weeks now. Trauma and grief have hung off them as much as everything else."

Faith, Unquestioned (continued)

Her throat was tight, her nose burning, but she refused to break. They were so close to her apartment — her empty apartment — and she sped up in her step, passing him thoroughly.

“Who was it?” He yelled out to her from his lazy stroll. “Someone close, I imagine. Perhaps a best friend, or a sibling—”

“Shut up,” She spun around, the effect of her words almost ruined as she nearly slipped on the ice. As it was, before she could hit the ground, Dave made a loose gesture and the air became solid and pushing until she was right and steady on her feet. She snarled and scrambled away from the air, now empty and normal. “You — you have no right.”

He sneered. “Such a sensitive little human, I should have known.”

Urgent, scrawled out warnings from the prayer book ran as rampant reminders through her head but she couldn’t help her tightened fists, the hard line of her shoulders.

“You’re just a burnt out empty spirit.” She clenched her jaw. “You call humanity a sin and all of us fools, but at least we try. We know how this whole thing is gonna end but we try. If anyone’s the embarrassment, it’s you. So smug and all-knowing yet so fucking scared,” she spat. “Real high and mighty, aren’t you? Definitely the picturesque guardian angel—”

Her words cut off instantly as her throat closed on her. Not enough to cut off her breath, but enough to stop her words. Dave dropped his lifted hand and the pressure eased off slowly. The skin held tight over his bones appeared to tremble away from his core, like his muscles and skin and mass were frantic to get away from him. He took a deep, audible breath, forcing calm onto himself, and then his body stilled.

Neither of them said anything as she rubbed at her throat, shocked but not completely surprised by the action. Her apartment was thankfully not too far, and they walked the rest of the way with silence and still air separating them. She paused at her door and turned just enough to lift her chin at him. “I’m not going to apologize for what I said.”

“Your apologies are as worthless to me as your life,” he answered, choosing instead to train his gaze on the far

distance. “Keep your humanity to yourself, I don’t need it.”

She dipped her head. “Are you sure about that?”

He said nothing. When she looked back, he was gone.

Yet, despite the empty space vast in front of her, the deserted street, she could almost hear his gruff and smoke-stained voice asking, what do you think?

...

She stood at the foot of her building steps, staring forward. The cold winter air should have felt clear and freezing but the numerous memories of their harsh, traded words and emotions far from faded lingered behind and stuffed the space between them like heavy cotton, going so far to even choke its way down her throat at any attempt at sound. Even her breath was trembling.

Dave, behind her, was smoking another cigarette. The light lit up his face not in a halo, but as if a dim spotlight was bringing him to attention.

Neither of them said anything, and they lingered like that in silence long enough that he was able to pull the last breath from the cigarette. He flicked the remaining ash at her feet and her twenty minutes were long since over.

When he spoke, it was their first words exchanged all night. He spoke carefully, like he was unfamiliar and unsure with the words, almost like a school-child reading verse out loud for the first time.

“Why don’t you have someone else walk you home?”

She looked over to him and didn’t drop her gaze.

“Because I don’t have anyone else anymore,” she finally answered, the words stronger and more sure than she’d ever felt. “Why do you keep coming?”

Dave threw his cigarette bud to the gravel, the crushed up filter just barely still burning smoke, and didn’t bother stomping it out. “What do you think?”

leah gatchel



guardian angel
photography

jake pitts



Jesus Cats
photography

antoine howard



La Main
photography

Idle hands

Whatever he had proposed the afterlife to be like, Peter was completely sure his imagination had come nothing close to this.

"I don't understand why angels even need their dry cleaning done," He muttered, bending down to separate the whites from the super-whites. They didn't get many colors other than the singular, although Kath had once theorized that maybe their eyes couldn't see the range of colors, which Peter automatically took as truth. "They're completely spotless." They always were and always have been, at least from as far back as Peter can remember, but he didn't add that. She probably knew better than him.

"I'm sure they're dirty," Kath commented sensibly as always. As she spoke, she laid out another robe from the drying rack. "We probably just can't see it. Like they're covered in sin or something."

"Still," He grumbled, "What's keeping them from cleaning their own outfits with magic or whatever?"

"I don't think it's called magic," she only said as she pressed down the heated iron. With her words, a burst of steam filled the air. The angels liked their robes pressed with a variety of different fabric softeners -- pure joy, the concept of hope, the moment after a baby is born. Kath had chosen one of his favorite scents for this load of clothes, a shimmering bottle of innocent first love. He wondered if she did that on purpose and then decided that she probably did.

She was the only reason he'd fully ruled out the possibility of this place being hell -- there was no way Kath would end up there. He'd call her meant for heaven, or whatever eternal reward there was, but this place -- a damp basement with laundry machines that wrapped around the concrete walls and scratched metal tables that separated the room -- was far from whatever white light was supposed to meet them. That, at least, Peter was sure of. Everything else -- both of their lives leading up to this, everything else but this godforsaken room -- was clouds.

She picked up another stark white bundle of fabric and laid it out. She wrinkled her nose as she turned out the

pockets: a handful of teeth, three long, sharpened fingernails, and a tangled tuff of dark, wispy hair that she set aside to package up later with the pick-up. Angels, they had long since learned, always came back for their left-behind collectibles.

Empty the pockets. Pre-wash. Wash. Dry. Iron. Fold. Repeat forever.

From the ceiling, several more baskets of robes fell from nothing and landed lined up perfectly neat on the cracked tile. A few moments later, a single robe followed almost like an afterthought and joined one of the baskets.

Peter sighed, resisted the urge to slam his head into the rumbling washing machine, and set aside his newly finished load.

Impossibly, Kath didn't seem to mind their constant-everyday-never-ending task. She almost seemed to enjoy it.

"I just like laundry," she had commented the only time Peter had asked. "It's nice."

Nice maybe for a Sunday afternoon with the cable on. Peter was now content to classify it as something no less than eternal, constant torture. Kath, with a small line in-between her eyebrows and her lips perched slightly to the side, quietly voiced her disagreement.

But he couldn't help but continue that thought. Maybe that's what this was. Maybe the angels -- God, maybe -- were waiting behind a few layers of existence like double-sided glass, just waiting and watching to see when they'd snap. Maybe it was something like their reality television, if that term even applied here. That felt as likely as anything else.

Kath sighed, bringing his attention back to her, and held up the robe in her hands to the light, "I think this one is stained."

Peter leaned in and squinted at the fabric. "How can you even tell?"

She gestured toward an unmarked space, "Can't you see it?" She frowned, her gaze still on the spot. "I've never seen anything like it."

Peter gave the robe another few moments of looking before shrugging. "I don't see anything. Maybe you're imagining it."

“I’m not imagining it,” She only said, her soft voice backed with sure steel. She ran the tip of her finger around an invisible shape, tracing the unseen stain. He turned away, feeling oddly shaken, and felt the incredible need to change the topic. He cleared his throat.

“I wonder what we did on Earth for this to be our eternal punishment,” He said as he stuffed an armful of freshly dried white robes in a basket before balancing it on his hip. “Something horrible, probably.” He thought for a moment, “It’s kind of torture in itself that we can’t remember.”

He dropped the basket off in the corner, now ready to be thrown in the washer, and Kath went quiet for a long moment. When he turned back, the so-called stained robe fell soundlessly from her hands and tumbled to the ground. She was staring straight ahead, blinking rapidly, like to keep tears back. He froze at the surprising display of emotion, unsure and unknowing what to do next. Kath’s hushed words stopped him from going any further.

“Maybe we didn’t do anything,” She said, her gaze far-off into the distance as her voice almost resisted trembling with emotion, her hands still frozen mid-fold. The smell of new life lingered on her hands from their earlier load, and she flexed her hands open and shut. Her voice was somehow filled with conflicting traces of wonder and dread. “Maybe we were just really good at laundry.”

thaige doran



Chicago Commuters
photography

caroline hyde | poetry

Fr(e)ight

Distant dissonance carries
along galvanized paths, the
empty streets a tuning fork.

After three years, the strain is
familiar; it hums, colors the quiet air
too thick to breathe.

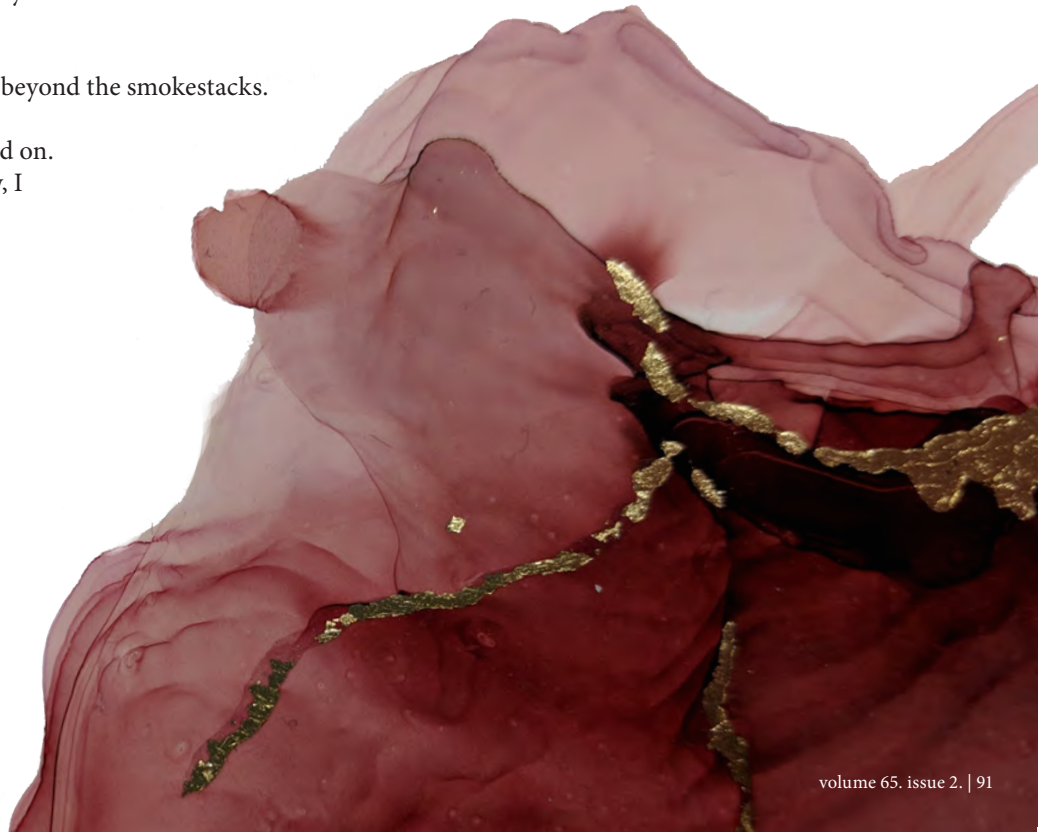
I settle into cold sheets and
press an ear to the dark.

Once more, insistent, the voice travels
sliding between slack of brick and mortar.

In a state of iron and rust, we find
music in the thrum of industry. The
smog weighs heavy.

I wonder how far heaven sits beyond the smokestacks.

The freighted band has moved on.
With the silence hanging low, I
am alone again.



Finding Your Writing

Melissa Fraterrigo is the author of more than forty short stories, nonfiction essays, and reviews. A lifelong teacher, Melissa has a deep love for all forms of story. She founded the Lafayette Writers' Studio in Lafayette, Indiana in 2014 to help local writers develop their voices while benefiting the community at large. <http://www.melissafaterrigo.com/> After visiting campus on February 19, Fraterrigo sat down with Assistant Editors Haley Brewer and Anna Bedalov.

Haley: What other writers do you think have influenced your work?

Melissa: You know, it's always changing according to what I'm working on. Maybe I'll just speak to *Glory Days* because that's the book that I read from last night [Feb. 19]. In *Glory Days*, I was reading a lot of poetry, a lot of Appalachian poetry in particular. Really voice-driven narrative type pieces, [like] Sharon Olds or Gabrielle Calvocoressi wrote a book with a series of prose poems called *The Last Time I Saw Amelia Earhart*. I read that book a lot. A lot of Sharon Olds... and then a lot of real place driven fiction writers: Bonnie Jo Campbell, I love Michelle Hoover... I was also looking, once I realized I was writing a novel in stories, I tried to immerse myself in that form, which means I was reading a lot of novels in stories. So Cathy Day, she teaches at Ball State, Elizabeth Strout and Olive Kitteridge, *Visit for the Goon Squad* by Jennifer Egan, *Winesburg Ohio*... I also love Dan Chaon; he does some really cool things with structure. Not necessarily a novel in stories per se, but he uses structure in an artful way to help tell a story. So my interests in what I read is pretty vast and it depends on what I'm working on. Right now, I'm pretty in time with this woman Rebecca McCay, she lives in Chicago.

Anna: You mentioned place, and we know you've moved around a little bit in your past. Is there a way that a change in setting has affected how you write or how does your physical place affect how you write place in your work?
M: I think the times that I have been away from my "people" have forced me to look more closely at where I'm currently

residing. So for instance, I moved to Indiana in 2010 after living a year in downtown Philly, where I didn't have a spot of grass to my name, a real urban environment. And then I'm living in West Lafayette, which really isn't that urban of an area at all. Within 3 miles, there are farms. And so definitely, where I've lived has forced me to look at place and how that affects characters within that residence. And I do think that sometimes it's not until we're away from a certain environment that we're able to sort of make sense of it and how it might influence our work.

H: You've written a lot of magical realism. Do you find that the genre makes it hard to pull from your own life experiences? Or is it more freeing?

M: I think it's more freeing. I've always been most interested in the "what if." Those are like my favorite two words right next to each other because I think no matter what kind of conundrum a character finds him or herself in, as a writer, I can always consider "what if." What if they did this or what if they did that? And it's the same kinds of questions we can ask ourselves in our own lives. What if I did this or what if I did that? Who would I become? How would this alter my path? So in terms of magical realism, I think that oftentimes we have to make sure that we're using that form of writing to best serve a story, whether you're writing magical realism or realistic fiction. You have to make sure that the type of writing that you selected best serves that particular story. So it's not like I sat down and was like, "Okay I'm going to write a magical story." Usually, it became kind of an outsource or a result of the story itself. And I find that those surprises, when a character does something that's really shocking or unusual or magical, I find that really fun and I really enjoy that aspect of the process of creativity-- just kind of discovering what is in this world that is unexplainable even to me.

H: Do you want to go into detail about your creative process?

M: Sure. Well, I discovered while writing *Glory Days* that I

write best really early in the morning usually. I don't know that I could have done it as an undergrad. But at this stage in my life, I feel most free when I can kind of just roll out of bed, pour myself a cup of coffee, and sit down at my desk. That's when it's easiest for me to access these deep parts of myself where these stories reside. I didn't come from a family that really embraced the creative arts. It isn't that they didn't believe in literature, but they didn't know how someone could maybe use that to jump-start a career or make a living. So in some ways I feel like by sitting down, and as a result personally, I still have a lot of doubts even when I sit down and work... I still have a lot of doubts about my work and whether or not a piece is going to fruition or gel in any way that I hope. So by writing in the dark before anybody else in my family is awake is the first step that allows me to not listen to those voices, those editorial voices or those doubting voices because it's just me waking up. I mean, as we go throughout our day, that's when other people's ideas and thoughts go through our mind. But when you first wake up you're pretty fresh and you're alone with yourself and there's something pretty freeing to me about working in the dark because I feel that mirrors the creative process itself. I also write longhand. I write with pencil on yellow legal pads. Something I talked to Professor Byrne's students about last night is how important it is to understand your specific process. And for me, it's been wonderful to understand that working alone in the morning works well. It's also been great for me to realize that by writing longhand I'm able to slow down the ideas in my head, where other writers might not enjoy that. But for me, it allows me to see more. I'm a pretty visual writer. I like to use images to really create a setting and place and so I need to even go through the process of making a "j." When you're using your hand it's different to use cursive and write words with a hand than it is to tap on these cold keys. So I write everything out initially and then kind of the first step in my revision process is when I type that work.

A: Do you have a question that you hate answering about your work in interviews?

M: It might have been the first one. Just like, influences,

because I feel like you peg somebody. Like, "Oh what is she reading? Does she read enough? You know, who are the types?" Because I mentioned primarily Caucasian women, I think I'm aware of that, and yet I read Latino authors and... it's that just when you ask me right off the bat, I'm going to rattle off whatever comes to mind. And I don't know that is always reflective of my whole reading history. Does that make sense? And I think some people are better [at that]. I bet Professor Ruff is awesome at remembering like everything he's ever read. He's got so many books. But I am not that person. In fact, I see a book on his desk that I just gave to GoodWill. There are too many books sometimes.

H: Do you listen to any music while you write?

M: I don't. I love podcasts, but I don't listen to them while I work. I'll be honest-- I like silence. I like libraries. I belong to a coworking studio. That's where I teach classes from my writing studio. And so the work that I do there, I tend not to do my most creative work. So I'm four years in a young adult novel right now and the primary work when I work on that novel-- I mean I can do edits when I'm at the coworking space-- but if I'm reading something out loud or working on something fresh, I'll go home where I know I'm not going to be interrupted.

A: You teach at the coworking space. How do you think teaching has affected your creative writing?

M: Teaching has made me a writer, to be honest. I started as a junior high and high school English teacher and it was during that time that I didn't want to just teach and started working toward my MFA and started focusing on fiction, taking classes on fiction, and after I got my MFA, I did work at a couple of universities. And at that point in time, I didn't have my book yet. And so when you're teaching for a university, in order for you to get a good job, a tenure track job, you need to have at least a book. Now it's probably at least two books. So I was changing jobs every year, at Southern Utah University, at Penn State... and I'd switch jobs every year which means finding a new apartment and you know, everything that comes along with moving and trying to write. And it was just overwhelming and I realized that it wasn't serving my

Finding Your Writing (continued)

writing. So in terms of the creative process, I always try to think about what is going to be most helpful for my creative process and how can I listen to that. So I actually switched to editing and I started working at St. Xavier's in Chicago. I was a senior editor there in their magazine and worked there for five years. And I would do some writing, but I would say in terms of my career, initially I thought leaving the classroom would offer me some more time because I wouldn't have to spend as much time preparing for classes. I could just read books that I wanted to read rather than think about how I would teach them and just focus on my writing. But I think it was the opposite. I think it was the work I was doing just didn't feed me in a way that teaching does when you're interacting with students, when you are considering how does an author use a particular element of craft to highlight tension. Or, how does the author invite the reader to discover insight in the scene or something like that. So it wasn't until I moved to West Lafayette in 2010 that I really missed that sense of community that a classroom provides, but also the community that comes with being with a group of writers. So that's why I opened the Lafayette Writers Studio: to create a center where those in my community could learn about the art and craft of writing, whether or not they were affiliated with the university. So to get back to your question, Glory Days without a doubt was writing because of the interaction that I have with students and the way that their diligence showed me that no matter what story you have to tell, it is a worthwhile one and that it's extremely hard work, but it so rewarding. And I truly believe that is due to my students.

H: Do you have any advice for aspiring undergrad writers, especially because you work with them?

M: Just to get to know yourself is the first one. I think in an undergraduate class it's easy for us to compare ourselves to other people. Like, "Oh, I work differently from this person." And you think they're doing it right and I'm doing it wrong, and I think the first thing to remember is that there is no one right way to create. The only proper way to create is the one

that speaks to your process. So you have to spend time honing your process. How do you work best? Do you like to work long handed? Would you rather work at a keyboard? Do you like to stand up? Do you like chatter around you? Do you like to share your work right off the bat or would you rather wait until your work is more polished? So all these questions that only you can answer will help you get to know yourself better and the better you know yourself, the better you're going to be able to bring to your craft. The other thing that I believe in is reading deeply and widely, certainly. And then things that you love, I believe in rereading them and figuring out how they work and really unpacking a book or short story and look at the turns that an author makes. Look at the strategies that they use to create this piece of literature. Look at the places where you feel the deepest, where you feel the greatest sense of intimacy with a character or a situation. Look at what strategies again the author is doing to provide that experience for you. Lastly, I also believe in schedules. So I do believe in having some kind of a schedule. Again, that's kind of... I can only speak to what works for me. And I have always benefited from having a writing schedule. Whether it be every morning... I mean, I don't have a certain time so much that I wake up about five and I expect myself to be at my desk. And so I think it's really helpful to have some kind of a schedule and I encourage all my students to make schedules for themselves, even if they're just over the time that we're together in a particular course. And I also have students set up accountability partners and have someone to check in with on a weekly basis and say, "This is what I did this week," or, "This is what I hope to do," or, "This is what I discovered." So having something of a community again is really important because no one is going to ask you when you're walking on the street, "Tell about that story you're working on. I read that last scene and it was really interesting to me." People have no idea about your creative work, so when you do have the opportunity to work with other writers and be in a workshop, set up those relationships. They are key and you want to cultivate them both inside the classroom and beyond, like after class ends. There's no reason why you can't continue to work with a particular

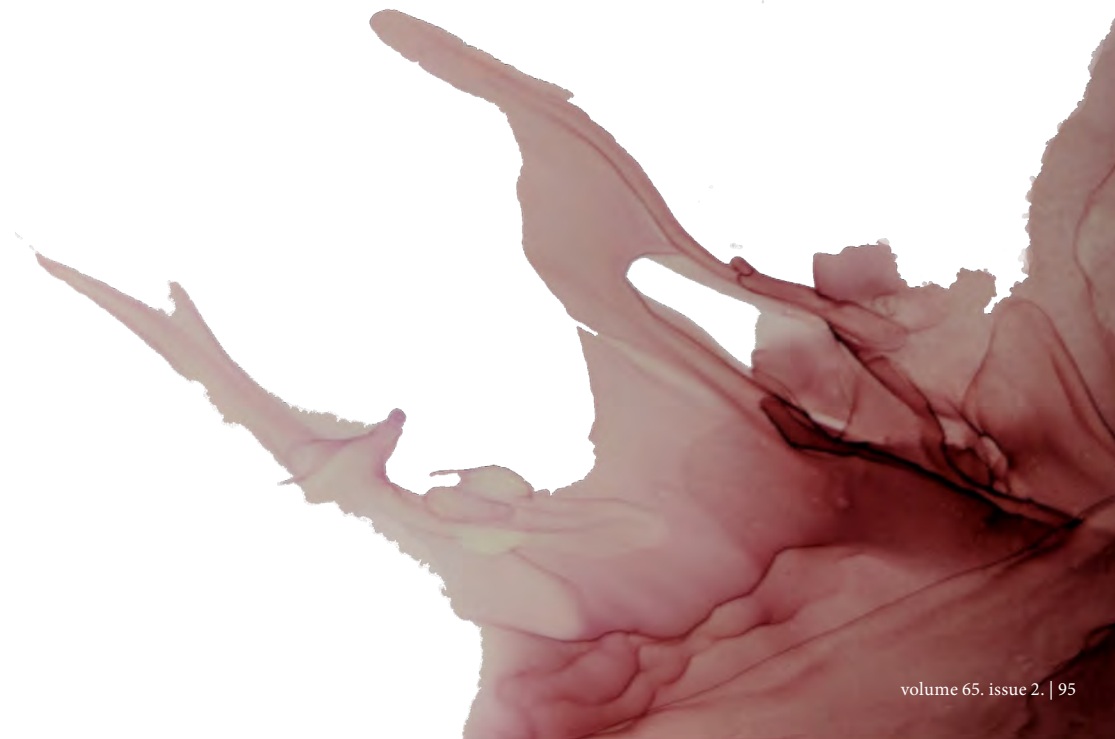
writer that you felt like you liked their work and they seemed supportive and they've got a good idea of what you're doing and vice versa. So that's really important too I think.

H: What was your childhood dream?

M: This is it. To be a writer.

A: Did you write a lot as a child?

M: I told this last night, but my first book was in first grade and it was called *The Little Punkun*. There was a little jack-o'-lantern and it was even dark then. And here's this kid in a little classroom in a Catholic school and it's a pumpkin with a knife coming down. You'd think my parents would put me in counseling right then and there or be a little concerned, but nobody really blinked an eye. But my mom still has it. Every once in a while she'll, "Hey, let me get that book out for you," and it's like, you know, in shreds. But I always wanted to be a writer. I just didn't, again, have the kind of family where I thought that was a possibility, but obviously, I was still thinking about that throughout time because here I am now.



lexi gault



Concealed Chaos
ink

emma hecht | prose

The June Crows' Oracle

I told him I thought I wanted my retirement job to be fortune cookie writing. He told me he thought I didn't understand the point of retirement. I asked him why he was spending his retirement babysitting me. He asked me why I wasn't quietly reading my magazine.

He hadn't taken his attention from his book, Galileo: Watcher of the Skies, carefully reading under a faded Red Sox baseball cap and brownish-gray furrowed eyebrows. I focused back on my magazine as I lounged upside down, opposite from him on the leather couch, shuffling through my mom's most recent copy of Cosmopolitan.

"What are you?" I asked.

He waited for me to clarify.

"Like," I said, flipping over and around so I could face him on my belly, "What's your sign?"

More silence. He was ignoring me.

"Like, I was born on November 27th, so I'm a Sagittarius. Everybody's birthday goes with a word that tells them things about themselves. So my word tells me—"

"July 2nd, Cancer. And it's pronounced 'Sagittarius.' The beginning sounds like 'badge,' not 'bag.'"

I tried each way out loud several times, "Sagittarius, sadge-itarrius, sag-ittarius, sadge-itarrius," until he shot me a look over Galileo.

Rolling my eyes, I stopped and began to scan the pages, mumbling, "Cancer, Cancer, Cancer... Okay, Cancer. 'It's the season for a summer fling, Cancer! With the Moon moving into retrograde and the Sun and Jupiter transitioning into fire signs—things are heating up! The sixth is National Garden Exercise Day, so get out in those plants, stop and smell the roses, and try out some lunges to increase that libido! Now, you, Cancer, can be insecure, moody, and pessimistic, but don't let that stop you from trying something new! Remember—you're also tenacious and highly imaginative! After that, it's only thirteen days until National Kissing Day, and you know what that means! It's time to grab your favorite Capricorn or Taurus and—"

"That's enough, Mae."

"But we were just getting to the good part."

"I'm sure we were."

"What's libido?"

He paused before replying, "Blood pressure."

"Oh. Isn't that why you take those pills at lunch? I thought you said that was to make it go lower, not higher. Why would Cosmo tell you to increase it?"

"I think—"

"Yeah, because when we were eating ants on a log last Tuesday, you took out those blue pills and I said, 'What are those for?' And you said, 'To decrease my blood pressure.' And I said, 'What's blood pressure?' And you—"

"I think I hear your mom," he said, quickly getting up from the couch with the customary "oof."

I looked out the window to the dark driveway and seeing her pull into the garage, jumped up off the couch and skipped in front of him through the dining room, the kitchen, and into the foyer where she was taking off her black high heels—the ones she wore to work and the ones I always used to play dress up.

"What are you?" I asked as I gave her a hug, feeling her waist-length brown hair.

"What's that?" she asked, pulling back, amused.

"What's your astrological sign? For your horoscope from Cosmo," he said from the corner he was leaning against.

"Hi, Dan," she said, smiling.

"Hi. How was Commerson, Garibaldi, & Bonneville today?" he replied, smiling back. It was a strange, sharp smile as if it was something he should have kept hidden inside.

I started tapping on her elbow. Horoscope conversation was more important and more interesting than law conversation.

She sighed and said, "Well, Garibaldi left for the Caribbean and Bonneville got about a month head-start on the July 4th weekend, so it's just—yes, Mae, sorry, I'm a Capricorn."

I ran for the magazine from the living room, which I'd left strewn on the couch. I sat down for a moment to search the pink pages for "Capricorn" while hushed voices

The June Crows' Oracle (continued)

continued in the foyer until I walked back in to Dan closing the door behind him. He waved through the glass pane at me and I waved back, Cosmo flopping in my hand, and watched him walk back across the street towards his house.

"Okay mom, Capricorn. Ready? 'Happy summer, Capricorn!'"

"Actually, how about dinner? Horoscope later, okay? I'm starving. I think there's still leftover lasagna in the fridge, right? Unless you and Dan ate that for lunch today..." she trailed off, heading into the kitchen to search for what I hadn't eaten all of.

"There's some Gushers left in the pantry," I yelled after her, hurt, and happy that Dan and I had indeed finished the lasagna for lunch. I stood there letting that sink in and then, realizing I was hungry, slapped Cosmo down on the foyer tile and moped into the kitchen. She was opening all of the cabinets, likely looking for something with more nutrition than Gushers.

She stopped and looked at me, one of her hands still clutching a metal cabinet handle. She outstretched the other for me to take and said, "Can you come sit in the living room with me for a sec?"

I shimmed past her and headed to the living room, sprawling out on the hardwood floor. She followed me and carefully sat down next to me in her pencil skirt, slinging her legs to the side.

"Mae, dad's been gone a long time," she said, glancing down at her hands, which were folded in her lap. We were both quiet and stared at each other.

"Dan's a very nice man," she said, breaking the silence with her lawyer voice. She was making an argument for him. "And he and I have talked about seeing more of each other and going on a grown up date, so he's asked me to go see a movie with him tonight and I said yes."

"He's really old. What movie?"

"Something with Leonardo DiCaprio I think. He's not that much older than—"

"Also, boys have cooties."

"You know, I think last time Dan went to the doctor, they checked for cooties and the test came back negative."

I looked at her and thought about Dan. Overall, he wore too much gray, like an unfashionable cloud. But he didn't make me eat carrots or broccoli and he let me play with the soccer ball inside the house and he taught me the names of the birds we saw in the front yard.

"Okay," I said.

"You're sure?" she asked, tilting her forehead towards me.

"Yeah, can I go read now?" I asked, getting up and heading towards my bedroom.

"Hey, hold on," she said, grabbing the back of my shirt, "We're leaving in an hour so I'll still be here until you go to bed, but I'm going to call Laura and make sure she can come over and watch you. And you need to eat dinner."

"Not hungry," I said, as I ran towards the bookshelf in my room.

I lounged on my bed for an hour, reading Mrs. Hyde's Superstitions for Girls. Drinking apple juice out of a green cup gives you hives, a group of crows standing in short grass is a sign of past onslaught, saying the alphabet two times through while riding in the car prevents accidents, microwaving someone's socks makes them tell the truth—

"Dan and Laura are here, so I hope you have your teeth brushed and PJs on!" she yelled from the kitchen. I scrambled out of bed and exchanged my shorts and butterfly tank top for silky monkey pajamas. I was in the bathroom, spitting out my toothpaste when she walked in.

"Ready for bed?"

"Yep."

"Okay, Laura's in the living room if you need anything. I'll see you in the morning okay?"

"Okay."

"Give me a hug," she said smiling widely at me, stretching out her arms. She looked pretty.

I hugged her tightly and said goodnight. She said goodnight back.

“I love you,” she said, turning to walk away.

“Love you too,” I said, heading into my bedroom.

I laid in bed for three hours, alert, waiting for her. Finally, I heard the door open, and threw my Hello Kitty covers off and skipped to the kitchen.

“How was it?” I asked, hopeful, not really knowing what I was hoping for.

But as she stood still in the center of the kitchen with a blank stare, I saw something black under her eyes and dirt on her jeans.

“Go back to bed, Mae.”

“Are you okay?”

“Go back to bed,” she said firmly, not looking at me.

~

Laura babysat me after that, up until we moved. But I saw him one more time. I was looking out the front window, watching some crows peck at another bird. I glanced across the street at his house. I saw him looking back at me through his bedroom window, smiling. He waved and that gave me goosebumps. I snapped the curtains shut. I don't watch the birds anymore.

courtney earl | poetry

The Thread

Dismember your father's kingdom with righteous hands; slender fingers, pale flesh cradling your unraveling fate as you offer your undoing to the man whom all will praise for slaying

the monstrosity of your cursed kin. Your sacrifice ignored as you exposed a life to this hero's blade, yanked across the throat of a beast whose blood you shared pooled on frigid stone floors, severing

you from a dynasty in the name of love. Salty seas lap at the blood but cannot wash away sins of a sister or pull you back to a shore your feet will never feel between your toes

again. His warm arms circle your slim waist, leading you aboard his ship that, sail as black as night, envelopes your escape. The end of the thread, tied to his frayed belt, dangles,

bloody, impure. He discards the string, overboard, just as he discards you, lying in the sand, watching the black sail become one with the sinking horizon, leaving you for dead,

breaking your curse. Your crown is thrown to the eternal stars by the love of a god; new life in the fallen heart of a golden woman, spun from dirt to glitter brighter than glory of the sword

brendan miller



The Train Ride to Auschwitz
photography

lexi gault



Sinking Clutter
graphite

alexis mentis | poetry

STAY

Touching the end of a stainless steel
razor, you feel a sharp sting prick
the end of a calloused finger.
Blood, the size of a pencil's eraser,

appears—a stark contrast to pale skin.
Breath sucks back into your lungs
as you stare longingly, transfixed
by the shard of shiny steel.

I wish I could have been there to cut
the connection between you and the blade
that promises nothing but pain.
But I was not there.

Luckily, you are still here. The next time
that promise of pain makes an entrance,
I will be there standing guard—
scissors in hand—making sure you stay.

I need you here, with me,
a pair of lungs able to breathe.

michelle fobert | poetry

To Reminisce

Dedicated to Samantha Hawsryz

As the muddled grass flattens beneath my black flats,
air compresses, leading to a weak squeak. The worn
soles lick the upheaval of caked clay that embraces
each shoe. They say you cannot pick the day.

I am not here to visit you, but red-eyed, face
stained, I make an unannounced hello.
You have not moved since last November
when your neighboring tree grasped dry berries.

It's called a permanent resting place, after all.
So there you stay—static—while the world
continues onward without your purposed pulse.
Your name, like glass, leaves blood on our tongues.

The difference between the two dates
stamped on your granite marker stays twenty
although that annual melody should have been sung
eight more times by now. And maybe it has...

Do you parents still include your name on Christmas
cards? Does an ageless daughter still have a place
within the frames of a stationary? Perhaps
the plasticity of this dirt is your yearly well-wishes.

The rumble of the distant train sounds your new salutation.
Tired tracks resembling large kidney beans that trace your
stonework recount your closing line, and plastic stakes crowned
with cheapened floral pieces replace the ink of a signature.

In those photos, *the last pieces I have of you*, I find myself
getting younger. Yet your face stays unscathed by time.
The half moon of your eyes never came from marriage
or children. Adolescence marks the end of your abridged story.

It's strange to think I knew you less time than you've
been gone. Our only chance to reminisce those short
seasons comes with a scheduled drive on a dreary Sunday
or a newly planted resident a few plots over from you.

Another's goodbye leads to your heavy-hearted hello.

brandon lechappelle



City Lights
photography

emily gustin



Deep in the Black Hills
photography

AISLE FOUR

God, I hated the night shift.

“Another one,” I muttered just loud enough for her to hear. At my voice, she looked up and grimaced. The tear-stricken woman was already dumping her few purchases at the check-out counter where I stood, her cheeks red and shiny with free-flowing tears.

“Plastic is fine,” she told me, sadness dragging her voice down an octave or two before I could ask. I shared a quick look with Leah, who only shook her head before going back to her magazine, and I started scanning.

I wished we’d just get self-checkouts already, like every other grocery store in the area, but I knew the owners would never want to risk messing up whatever energy laid here. Or, more importantly, risk angering anything.

“How was your visit?” I said lightly because from what the sticker on the screen reminded me, it was required to ask.

She sniffled, the sound thick and full, and I knew this wouldn’t be a silent transaction. I continued to drag her purchases across the laser -- a can of peaches this time joining her several other odd choices -- but this one seemed to be the one to catch her attention. Before I could drop it into the bag, she grabbed it and held it to her chest.

“These were his favorite,” She said, mostly to herself. “With sweet cream and raisins. I thought it was so gross.”

When Joyce, the manager, had asked about my empathy skills, I’d wrongly assumed the most I’d be doing was comforting crying toddlers, maybe the odd customer who couldn’t pay. That’s what I get for lying on my application, I guess.

“I suppose it makes sense that’s what did it,” She continued, no longer looking, or talking to me. She gazed off into the distance, straight at the employee corkboard on the back wall. Even from here, I could see the dark print on the neon flyers that advised our actions for when we had visitors.

“Where did you see him?” I asked, because it was another required question from the sticker. This time, I paused in my scanning to grab a pen.

“Aisle four,” She responded, still looking away.

“Canned fruit section.”

I hummed because there wasn’t much else I wanted to say and marked it down. That aisle was proving to be particularly popular this month from what the spreadsheet was saying.

“He...” The woman trailed off and finally forced her gaze back to me. I paused in scanning her coffee beans. “He looks good. Better than he did before.”

My eyes flickered to Leah, who watched on with a pitying look.

“Okay,” I only said, returning to her items. A handful of limes, a tin of candy, and a bottled tea later, I was showing her the total.

As I was reaching for her credit card dropped on the counter between us, her other hand came up to clasp around my wrist, tight and desperate as she searched my face for something, anything.

“You work here,” she stated obviously, her eyes wide. “You must know -- what does that mean? That has to be good, right? That he’s at peace or happy or something, right?”

“I...” I didn’t know what to say. I never really learned how to deal with the angry ones, or worse, the desperate ones. I’d usually call Joyce down from the offices and have her deal with them, but her tight grip was only letting me consider the idea and nothing more.

“I don’t know,” I finally said as I jerked my wrist out of her grip. My skin had gone pale and white at her hold, and the skin rushed back to color as I rubbed at it. “I don’t know,” I said again.

That, at least, seemed to have some effect on her. She dropped her hand so hard it fell against the counter with a thud and blinked once, twice.

She slowly walked away, leaving everything behind except the can of peaches, still clenched in her right hand. The automatic doors flew open to let her through, and I didn’t care nearly enough to chase after her for a sixty-cent can.

I sighed and began tucking away the leftover items behind the counter with me. It didn’t happen often, people just dropping their items to leave in a daze, but it happened

haley brewer | prose

AISLE FOUR (continued)

enough that I was already annoyed at the thought of returning them all before the end of my shift.

Leah turned back around from her own checkout booth and gave me an obvious look. “Can’t you be any nicer?” Her eyes flickered to the doorway where the lady had disappeared, almost worried.

I shrugged and exited out of the checkout program. We probably wouldn’t be getting many more customers that night and I could always try and direct them towards Leah if so. I hated dealing with the criers.

“Don’t you remember how you were?” Leah challenged, “The first time?”

I sighed, “I was a stupid kid,” I couldn’t help my eye roll, “I cried at everything back then.”

“It was last November,” She pointed out, “barely a year.”

“Barely a year,” I repeated, and wasn’t that hard to believe. It felt like a lot longer.

She went quiet like she always did. I waited for the question.

“How’s mom?” She asked, her voice curved with softness, almost like it was at the edge of some distant emotion. “Is she... okay?”

“She’s better,” I told her, even if she wasn’t. “Although she’s still not letting Liam and I out after five on school nights.”

“Good,” She agreed because she and Mom were hardly in disagreement over anything. “You guys have no business being out late.”

“Whatever,” I rolled my eyes, mostly because it drove her crazy. At her annoyed huff that followed the action, it worked. “It’s not like anything bad’s gonna happen.”

“That’s what I thought,” Leah told me, far-away, just as her hand came up to brush away the hair from my face. Her hand went straight through, of course, but the action comforted me nonetheless.

My braids were always messy nowadays, mostly because she used to be the one to do them every morning. I had to learn how to do them off a YouTube video in the months following but no matter what a few hairs always hung in my

face afterward. I kind of hated that.

The first time she did so, months and months ago, when she first tried to brush my hair back with such a horrible look of sadness and pity on her face, I curled up under the check-out lane and cried until Joyce pulled me out and calmed me down in her office. I still don’t know why she offered me a job after all that, and I still wasn’t fully sure why I even accepted it.

Leah went back to her seat just as another customer came up to the checkout lane, heading straight for me. They were crying, nearly sobbing, with a loaf of raisin bread clenched to their chest. I sighed and logged back into my computer. Probably just another aisle four.

anna stryczula | poetry

Teething

(In Memory of my Wisdom Teeth)

The bloodstorm raged and left
my mouth a tidepool, agape
for saltwater to swill and
spill onto split glass, clean cuts,
green moss on white rocks
the tongue licks and grinds.
Little pebble teeth clench what I once remembered.
Now dismembered in the watery mouth,
tidings come and go, pulses
of foam, of light metal,
melting into babymouthed nothings,
unable to feed thought –
the jaw sewn tight.
So this is why infants cry.

emily friedman | poetry

THIS or THAT

I had to make a choice
Between THIS or THAT
I chose THIS
Even though everybody else chose THAT
I would've chosen THAT
If I didn't have to choose THIS

You see with THIS
I've worked so hard to have the opportunity to go to THIS
And I made a promise to myself to go to THIS
Even before I knew when THIS was happening
And if I went to THIS and did well
I could've gone to the place I've dreamed of going
I could've gone THERE
But the chances of going THERE are slim
In fact I was aware going into THIS
If you don't think you have a shot at going THERE
Why even try at all
You should go to THAT with us instead



emma hecht | poetry

Pillow Thoughts

“I can’t sleep like this, bub. Sorry,” I say
as she lies with an arm, a leg, a sheet
blanketing me. So she uncovers me,
leaving the sheet, which we’ll turn to springtime
origami with our comatose kicks.
Only our backs touch. She’s asleep so soon,
her slow undulations lull me, and I
sleepily wonder why she puts empty
candy wrappers back in the bag, or if
she knows—I like this part of the day most.

contributer bios.

Marcus Boas | is a senior digital media major with creative writing and individual science minors. He is a Dutch international student and Resident Assistant, who also somehow manages to be the Vice President for both VISA and Karate Club. In the non-existent free time he has left, he enjoys making art, watching movies, and complaining to his friends about the U.S., which is his secret way of saying he loves it here. Yet, as graduation approaches, the complaints are slowly getting replaced with sentimental sobs.

Anna Bedalov | is a sophomore creative writing major. Her favorite color is sunshine yellow. She requests that you hug your pets and your parents.

Grace Biermann | is a sophomore English and humanities major who doesn't know what to say in this bio because she doesn't know which of the things she wrote, if anything, will be published. So it's fortunate that all the people who she wants to thank know who they are, and might even be annoyed if she named them. But she loves them, and thanks them anyway. Soli Deo Gloria.

Haley Brewer | is an English major junior who sometimes writes. She prefers peppermint mochas, paperback books, the color pink, and pretty much everything to do with cats. Every time she writes she feels like it's going to be her last good idea, but she's happy to report that hasn't been the case so far. Will keep you updated on that front. She dedicates her work to #1 fans-- aka her mom and grandparents. Heart emojis to you all.

Taylor Bundren | is a senior communication and history double major. If you're reading this, send coffee. I did this instead of my homework and am in need of caffeine.

Grace Burkhart | is a biochemistry major with a creative writing minor, and I love writing poems and practicing photography when the inspiration strikes!

Isabel Coffey | is a junior, studying creative writing, classics, and humanities. I have been making pictures as long as I can remember but have never had any formal training. My photography has previously been published in *The Lighter*.

Thaige Doran | is a 19 year old photographer from Michigan City, Ind. Embarking on this photo journey has led me to beautiful places and blessed me with the opportunity to capture timeless moments. I love to focus on portraits and landscapes the most, but capturing anything beautiful is my mission.

Courtney Earl | is a junior double majoring in creative writing and classical civilizations. When not reading about myths and the ancient world, she likes to write fiction and spend time with her dogs. She hopes to one day be an archaeologist and a young adult novelist.

Michelle Stiegart Fobert | is currently pursuing her M.A. in English Studies and Communication. She grew up in the western suburbs of Chicago. She now resides in Culver, Ind. where she teaches high school English. Her poems have been featured in previous issues of *The Lighter* and in the Blue River Review.

Emily Friedman | is a sophomore psychology major and education minor. She would like to thank teenage angst for being great inspiration for her poetry.

Leah Gatchel | is currently a freshman creative writing major at Valparaiso University. Her work is inspired by observations around campus, and by running to the rescue with peace.

Lexi Gault | is a sophomore astronomy and math double major made of stars and colored pencils.

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

Antoine Hanchard | is a senior civil engineering major. Currently, I am the project manager of my senior design project as well as the captain of AISC Steel Bridge and co-captain of the ASCE concrete canoe. Outside of the university, I am member of Sigma Pi and head the public relations and new member education portions of the fraternity. I decided to try photography so I diversity my hobbies.

Emma Hecht | Thank you to *The Lighter* for giving my writing the opportunity to be somewhere besides a folder on my desktop.

Hailey Hemmings-Kadolph | has an undying passion for creating all kinds of art, especially drawing and painting, dabbling in photography as well. I currently have no idea

what I'm doing with myself concerning my major. Because of my love for creating and capturing art, I will probably switch my major to studio arts, but am conflicted... Please help...

Jesse Hershberger | is an English, Spanish, and political science major at Valpo who likes to play frisbee and talk (a lot). She writes about God in the world and other light-hearted topics and is endlessly grateful to Meg for helping her to find her voice.

Samantha Holland | is an individualized major student set to graduate in August. In her free time, she likes to go hiking with friends and take her two dogs, Maggie and Glenda, for walks on campus!

Caroline Hyde | is a fiction writer at heart, but she is no stranger to broadening her horizons-- she has also written poetry, creative nonfiction, and a handful of plays. When she isn't writing, you can find her snuggling with her cat, Frankie, eating Little Caesars pizza (more likely) or napping (most likely). As a senior, she'd like to thank the wonderful people at *The Lighter* for giving her writing a place to live on the page forever, as well as providing a wonderful environment in the selection committee.

Nicole Jones | is a junior digital media art major who is slowly removing capitalization from her life to accentuate her laidback lifestyle (she tried to exclude them from the book but was forbidden by her editor). she never knows what to say in her contributor bio that won't make her dad laugh at her, so she hopes you enjoyed reading this, mike.

Grant Katula | This illustration ["Morning Commute"] we can all relate to. We often times find ourselves in route to a place we need to be going, but do not want to be going to. We would rather be going somewhere else, somewhere more fun where we feel our lives intended for pleasure, not money. The inspiration behind this piece was observing a student pass by with his backpack with a look of despair on his face. You could tell he was wishing he was somewhere else and I related enough to illustrate our feelings.

Sarah Law | is a senior English major with a double minor and apologizes to Nicole Jones for ruining her style, but still firmly believes in capitalization.

Brandon LeChappelle | is a junior public health major with a passion for capturing the magnificence of this earth and life through photo and video.

Monique LeDonne | is a sophomore biology and Chinese/Japanese studies double major.

Rachel Kennedy | is a senior creative writing major and has been published in *The Lighter* twice before. I've always loved to read, and that love turned into a passion for writing. I've written many different types of things, and I hope to share more pieces in the future for people to enjoy.

Alexis Mentis | is a junior English major and creative writing minor. My name is Alexis, but some people call me Lexi. I love to read, watch tv/movies, hang out with my family, and obsess over Friends.

Brendan Miller | is a photographer from Hillsdale, Mich. His focus is on portrait and athletic photography with a personal touch. This past semester, he was abroad in Germany and had many opportunities to travel across Europe unsupervised. More of his work can be found at 325photo.com

Laura Muther | is a sophomore history major and sociology minor. I enjoy the opportunity to take time for creative exploration and am motivated by the desire to understand the complexity of the changing world around me.

Emily Neuharth | is a junior creative writing major who is thrilled to be able to give a little piece of her heart to this semester's issue from all the way across the pond. *The Lighter* is her writing's home-base, but it's also found resting places in Tributaries, DASH, typishly, and Sink Hollow.

Jake Pitts | is a junior creative writing major from the small town of Hillsdale, Mich. He often tries his best to display the honor and integrity of the written word.

Leanna Sanchez | is a freshman meteorology student. In her free time she enjoys studying the blade and exploring wholesome memes. She would like to thank everyone for reading *The Lighter*, and urge you all to wear a seatbelt at all times, just in case!

Anna Stryczula | is a junior digital media art major and computer science minor with an inexplicable taste for poetry (well-done). You can find more of her work at sophiechoir.tumblr.com. Shout out to her friends and family for their continuous support!

Lauren Welter | is an English major, I have never written a cover letter, I am vastly uninteresting so... I write.

Mark Young | takes portraits of people, places, and all things. To see more of my work please visit markyoungphoto.com.

acknowledgements

The Editor's Note was hard to write, but this section is honestly the most nerve wracking because I'm terrified we'll forget someone. There were so many hands that helped bring this issue into publication and we are eternally grateful for all of the help and advise we received.

Brandon Aube | our contact and hero at our printer Gilson Graphics.

Kaitlyn Steinhiser | making communication crystal clear across this creative community to all things Senate related.

Kendall Kartaly | for being the spark of genius and reaching out to us to establish the amazing feature on foreign creative works.

Lexi Gault | for painting the backgrounds and covers for this issue and **Nicole Jones**, for compiling them onto the pages and arranging them with the texts. These ladies epically took (near) a thousand images from a psychotic Pinterest board and turned them into this beauty in your hands.

Mark Wagenaar | for advice and guidance as our new faculty advisor.

Melissa Fraterrigo | for sitting down with our staff and sharing her wealth of writing knowledge for this issue.

Our copy edit heroes on this issue | Emma Hecht, Hayley Kim, Isabel Coffey, and Leanna Sanchez.

Susan | who we are still terrified of from last spring's issue. Please watch over Bertha and our office and accept this offering of art and literature.

Tracy Monson and Evan Bryson | our Artivism Judges and Lighter alums. It was a joy to work with you both and hear about your own Lighter memories.

Thank YOU for picking up a copy! We hope you enjoyed it.



the lighter.

