

THE LHSP ARTS & LITERARY JOURNAL

# SOMBER POP

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# SOMBER POP

## THE LHSP ARTS & LITERARY JOURNAL

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Our mission is to create a student-run publication that showcases vibrant and engaging work produced in the LHSP community during the academic year.

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*Carol Tell*

## LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

In the spring I had the privilege of talking with an alumnus of the Pilot Program/LHSP from the early 1970s. In his first year in Alice Lloyd, he had an RA who, to put it simply, changed his life. The RA was an extraordinary jazz and blues musician, and his talent and passion influenced not just the alum but a good many of his friends who were part of the program. He would play for hours on the Alice Lloyd Steinway piano (the same Steinway that sits in our living room and is played constantly).

I was especially moved by the story because the relationship he described speaks directly to the mission of our program. The mentorship, partnership, and friendship among our students, student leaders, faculty, and staff, particularly as they involve the creative arts, are evident in all these pages. In this book, the splendid array of fiction, nonfiction, poetry, drama, and visual art suggests a flourishing of the young creative imagination, and how creativity begets creativity—how we influence one another in sometimes imperceptible ways. You may also wonder: sure, what happened in LHSP this year seems important to me now, but will I remember or care in 40 years? The story reminds us: Yes. This year does not only seem transformative—it is transformative. The work, and the relationships such work both required and nurtured, will change you.

It's a fatter book this year than in previous years, with an array of genres represented—including adapted screenplays by Christopher Crowder and Jenise Brooke Williams, a “sketchzine” by Michelle Sheng, even “Math Team Homework # 5,” a hilarious piece by Evan Rosen that, shall we say, defies genre. You'll find Sofie Jacobs' biting piece of creative nonfiction, as well as Alyssa Holt's gorgeously evocative and

emotionally authentic poems.

Many of the students in this book have talent in multiple genres—they are both artists and writers. I'm reminded of Taylor Houlihan's powerful written and visual sketches, which seem to speak to one another; or Annie Turpin's playful yet haunting "Untitled" and "Write What Scares You." I could go on and on. While most of the pieces are from first- or second-year students, we are lucky enough to get a sampling of poems by Jack Foster, who graduated this spring and whose poems have graced the pages of the journal since he was a freshman.

Thanks go to the journal staff who put this book together, and especially to Tanaz Ahmed and Jamie Monville, who served as co-editors, and the ever-unflappable and talented Aaron Burch, our journal supervisor. The first-year students who contributed to the journal were a remarkable cohort: creative, quirky, energetic, multi-faceted, and, according to our RAs this year, loud (I'm talking about you, residents of Fourth Angell). Such a sense of community pops from all these pages.

What may not be immediately apparent, however, are all those lesser known but crucial quieter moments leading up to these pages—the hard work behind the creation of these pieces, and other creative works in Alice Lloyd Hall. We in the program have had the opportunity to witness such moments—painting and sketching in the art studio, rehearsing in the dance studio, filming with Michael Sugerman or Matt Kipnis, writing pretty much everywhere. Or banging out chords on the beloved Steinway.

*Tanaz Ahmed & Jamie Monville*  
LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

The title of this year's journal, Somber Pop, is from Ania Dow's poem "I heard the somber pop of air rushing out." In the poem, the author looks back on her childhood and reminisces about her grandfather after he has passed away. While recounting a specific occurrence, the broader themes of the poem—growing up, loss, nostalgia—struck a chord with us. These themes are an integral part of embarking on one's college career as the freshman students of the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program. They are also an intrinsic part for those of us, like Jamie, who have already graduated and seniors, like Tanaz, who will soon embark on their professional careers.

\* \* \*

For most students, LHSP is a one year program. They arrive at a turning point in their lives and this transition leaves many students with conflicted feelings: excitement for the new and unknown is all tangled up in the sadness of knowingly leaving something behind.

As a senior, I'm acutely aware of how little time I have left in LHSP. Before I know it, it will be December and I'll be in the same position as Jamie. I'm a jumble of fear and hope, wrapped in bittersweet nostalgia. The somber pop of reality is still faint, but it gets closer and closer every time I skim through job listings or someone asks me about my career plans.

\* \* \*

It's a feeling I've become intimately acquainted with upon graduating from the University in May. The weekend of graduation was a blur of claps, smiles, and song. While the campus packed itself up and moved back home—to internships, into the great wide world—I chose to stay the summer, knowing that I'd need at least a few months to say goodbye.

I hear the somber pop of real life setting in every time I out send a resume; every time a friend moves away; every time I think of September wondering where I'll be—knowing that it won't be here.

\* \* \*

For the past couple of years LHSP has been both of our physical and emotional homes. And while it's now time to go, to experience all over again the rush and terror of moving to a new town, of making new friends, of adjusting, we know that these past years with LHSP will settle in deeply to our hearts. And one day, when we're finally settled into somewhere new and inevitably stumble across this book, we'll feel again, the somber pop of memories rushing in. And we'll smile.

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\* *LHSP alumni*

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*Anna Bauer*

## SALEM

But I do need an explanation! An explanation for this feeling – to them, it is magic that shoots cold chills down my spine, striking my back which rests against the hard stone wall – paralyzed from both the frigid temperature and my overwhelming fear. ‘No blanket for a Godless woman!’ For not even the thickest layer of fabric could return the warmth of God to my soulless, satanic body. Looking around in the rigid, dark place. Scratches flank the walls and metal bars taunt my gazes. The sheer hypocrisy – no God could protect those shouting that I don’t know mine. I am not deserving of His divine power, they say. Magic. Witchcraft. Heresy. These words, bellowed and hurled like knives, are as strange to me as they are to those who have locked me in this desolate chamber. A shuddering clank, and my prison door creaks open; a dark gaze lifts me up and drags me to an even colder outside. My bare feet sink into the mud as I trudge towards what has become my doom, squashing every bit of hope that previously existed in my mind. Their gazes watch as the beads of sweat race down my forehead, and their eyes match the beads on the back of my neck. They’re willing me to the platform – craving my body’s release. Why are they so afraid of me? Because I possess what these Godless people fear? The people of Salem I once deemed good, whose children I played with and whose mothers treated me as their own kin... how quickly they turn on what they do not understand! A sudden feeling of warmth erupts in me from within, but I know it cannot be His grace. Magic. It invigorates my limbs with mystical energy and my head begins to rise – I feel my spine straighten, and my chin lift, as I revel in their hatred. But their abhorrence cannot exemplify a heaven-bound ideal, and the Kingdom cannot possibly accept those that would turn on their own. The wooden

steps creak with each step I take, as I approach my final act. An icy hand clamps beneath my chin and slides the rugged rope against my dirty neck, now moistened by my own sweat. I swallow, trapped by the rope's restrictive grasp around my larynx, but with the liquids in my mouth comes a silvery whisper of hope. As my feet drop to the ground, I remember the dancing, and the shrieking, and the running into the woods. With closed eyes, open arms, and a wide smile — this is how I will enter the Kingdom.

*Alborz Bral*  
UNDULATIONS

It's getting late now. About time. The vibrations will resonate through, and trace your steady motions.

Don't. You. Miss. A. Beat.

Like the tide at night,  
you are bound to it  
a peculiar union:

Ocean's sound.

The sky covers itself  
with an indigo shroud.

lookers become hearers

Hearers become feelers, and  
feelers merge all together. Our time

has already begun; Let us test the waters.

Take my hand and don't let go; We're wading out further.

Look at them all, you say; each dot a drop of water,  
each drop blending with each other. How  
does it feel to be part of something  
that's greater, to see everything  
come together, like a million grains  
of salt? The steady humming, no more  
artificial than a seashell, submerges the broken pieces

at our feet. Breathe in the sea air. Feel it flowing  
through your body. Nature, the minstrel,  
plays a steady beat in sync with the  
sound of the blue waves. Casting  
off of everything now in each  
reflective drop of water;  
The time transforms into a  
fusion with the soft crushing  
sounds. Let's go for for a swim, my  
friend. Close your eyes, kick off, and dive in.

*Marissa Butler*

## THE RIGHTS AND WRONGS OF CLOSET THEFT

Between the ages of twelve and fourteen, I stole, and I lied. For years I had repeatedly learned from teachers, parents, and *Full House* episodes that both the actions were bad, wrong, and detention-worthy. However, no number of rules could stop this rule-follower from sneaking into her sister's closet full of wondrous and bountiful beauty. While my sister was eating breakfast downstairs, I would immediately go across the hall, into her room, pick out a shirt, throw a sweatshirt over it, and walk downstairs. I'd strut into class confident in my sweatshirt deception, but come four o'clock she would catch on to my games. Just when I would get settled in my room, she'd barge in and ask me point-blank: Did I take her shirt? Once my moment of internal panic had settled, I would calmly respond, "No." The results of this common exchange varied, but my motive primarily remained constant.

The following is a snapshot of myself at the aforementioned age range: quiet, introverted, happy, lanky, confused, afraid of confrontation, susceptible to judgment, and prone to having far too many role models. I looked up to my sister. She would pick up the perfect dress at the mall from the rack that I walked right past. She would watch movies that were not about post-apocalyptic worlds, superpowers, vampires, or adaptations of Nicholas Sparks' books: ones that my friends would simply write off as boring adult films. She and her friends were so close that eavesdropping on their conversations was like listening to a foreign language: one where every spoken word was hilarious. She had objects in her room that served no conceivable purpose other

than to elevate her room from being any seventeen-year-old's room to being her own. I thought she was *cool*. Her friends were *cool*. Her clothes were *cool*. *She* was cool. Retrospectively speaking, I probably sought her approval to an unhealthy extent, causing me to be a fly on the wall when her friends came over, to watch the same television shows she did, and well, what this all comes back down to, to steal her clothes. Why didn't I ask before taking the clothes? Well, because that wouldn't have been *cool*.

My fraud had a variety of consequences over the years. Often the plan would proceed smoothly, sparing us both. However, other times I would get caught. Specifically, once I took a black and white ombre top of hers. My logic? She never wore it, so she'd never notice. Wrong. She confronted me about it a few days later, to which I responded, "I have no idea what you're talking about." An hour later, while I was out of the house, she went into my room and found the shirt in its openly visible "hiding spot." The next time I went into her room to "borrow" one of her necklaces, I opened her jewelry box to find a note written in all-capital, red sharpie reading: DO NOT TOUCH MY STUFF. That visual alone plagued me with shame. I opened her closet, another note: DO NOT TAKE ANYTHING. I opened a drawer, another note. I found seventeen notes.

While these notes should have reminded me of the person on the other side of my actions and haunted my moral conscience until I felt a need to blurt out my truths, they instead provided me with merely temporary guilt. Such remorse stemmed more from the criminality connoted by the harshness of the red ink than by any real regret. When I went back to her closet in the following week, the notes no longer caused me any horror. In fact, they proved to be easily removable as I peeled back the tape, snatched my favorite shirt from underneath, and reapplied the tape. My shirt of choice was a relatively simple blouse: cream in color with many shades of blue floral embroidery along the neckline. It was retro, yet had a modern twist. It was sophisticated, yet playful. It was everything my, and the rest of my grade's, too-tight Aeropostale graphic t-shirts were not. It was the shirt Zooey Deschanel wore in our favorite movie, and, of course, my sister had it. When I walked through the halls in this shirt, I was no longer an awkward thirteen year-old; I was a cool high school senior who had her life togeth-

er, a sense of herself, and unique interests. In this sense, I was imitating her affect: the aspect of her that appeared desirable to me and could be faked with a new wardrobe and by picking up a few slang terms. This was no longer a series of youthful indiscretions. This was a case of identity theft.

Looking back on my past episodes, I do admit that they were wrong; nonetheless, I deny any driven insanity, broken relationships, or lost trust. I gave up my bad habit as I began to find myself and I no longer needed a shirt to give me voice. But throughout the process, I never was eaten up by painful revelations that in turn forced me into one big tearful, heartfelt, and freeing confession. In reality, the only times I truly confessed were when I was proven guilty by concrete found-clothing evidence. In fact, I am one hundred percent positive that there is a magenta Target dress rumbled up into a ball buried in a corner of my closet at home right now, and I am not in any desperate rush to go back and reveal my past wrong-doing now, five years later, when the dress is two sizes and about ten fashion seasons too late.

Sometimes life doesn't accumulate to a sincere, touching, serious-music sitcom lesson-learned talk, but that is okay. Today, my sister and I are closer than ever, despite being further apart than ever. She doesn't think less of me for my wrongdoings, nor would she even if she knew of the incidents never confessed. Now, my closet is filled with many of the same articles of clothing I used to steal, clothing that she has since gotten bored with or replaced with something better, all handed down to me over the years; while she is off being *cool* in New York City making movies, I feel like maybe I am catching up.

*Christopher Crowder*  
**AMERICAN'T (AN EXCERPT)**

INT. MIDDLEBERRY AMPHITHEATRE

Peter is walking through a crowd of people, wearing a hoodie to conceal his identity. Only Peter can be heard in the crowd.

PETER

(singing American't Dream)

[verse 1] I'm on cloud eight-one step below/ And you say  
it's my fault that I have no hope?/ Tell me something I  
don't know/ And just because I come from the hood, I can't  
put on a show/ Here's what you should know...

Peter reaches the front of the stage and climbs up, joining a band waiting for him and grabs the microphone. The crowd cheers loudly.

PETER

(singing)

[chorus] I American't Dream in the land of the free/ I American't  
Dream cause it's something I can't see/ I American't  
Dream with my cursed family tree/ I American't Dream cause I  
live in poverty/ I'm American and I American't Dream

[verse 2] I'm on cloud six-three steps more/ I'm below the  
line, almost to the floor/ Where is the money? I need some  
more/ If I can't sleep, what does that mean? I American't  
Dream!

QUICK TRANSITION TO NEW SETTING

INT. PETER'S HOUSE- MORNING

Peter is sleep talking, continuing his dream.

PETER

[verse 3] Land of the free, home of the brave/ to achieve  
you gotta more than behave...

Peter's brother, Russell, wakes up and listens to Peter sleep talk.

PETER

A home and a country that should leave us no more/ but a  
fate decided on where you were born/ through war and the  
battle's confusion/ I want to change my resolution...

Russell sneaks up to the side of Peter's mattress.

RUSSELL

(screaming)

Cause I'm American and I American't Dream!

Peter wakes up, startled. Russell is laughing in his face.

Peter's mom comes from another room, agitated. She is wearing an old robe  
and torn slippers. Her hair is messy and filthy.

MOM

God, Russ, do you ever just shut up? It's freakin' eight in  
the morning!

RUSSELL

I'm sorry...

MOM

You oughta be! If you wanna scream, go outside. Wake the  
whole neighborhood up.

RUSSELL

Alright, I'll see you later then!

MOM

No, boy! Don't you understand irony? You can't hear that tone in my voice?

PETER

You're thinking of sarcasm, Mom.

Mom walks over to Peter and slaps him in the face.

MOM

What did I tell you about being smart with me? You don't talk to your mother that way! I know I'm not the smartest soap in the box but that don't give you no right. You understand me?

PETER

Yes, but I wasn't trying to be smart with you-

MOM

Do you understand me, Peter?

PETER

Yes, ma'am.

MOM

Good. Now both of you shut up so I can go back to sleep.

RUSSELL

Mom, when is Dad gonna be back?

MOM

(exasperated)

I don't know, Russell. I don't know anymore. That's why I'm trying to get more sleep in the first place.

Mom returns to her bedroom.

RUSSELL

What are we gonna do without Dad not being here anymore?

PETER

I don't know. I'll figure something out. But you won't have to worry. I'm getting me and you out of here.

GO TO OPENING CREDITS

EXT. THE CITY OF MIDDLEBERRY

During the opening credits, the city of Middleberry is shown with "The Real World (Isn't One For Us)" playing in the background. Shots go from the Middleberry Amphitheatre, abandoned houses, Bear Football Stadium, people sitting on the side of the road, the churches, Grizz Records, etc.

Peter is singing and playing the guitar in the background as the opening credits roll.

PETER

(singing The Real World (Isn't One For Us))

[verse 1] It's like a prison here; no joy in, no way out/  
They say it's better on the outside, but when will they  
know?/ You don't know what you don't know, you don't know  
what you don't know

[chorus] The real world isn't one for us, the real world is dangerous/ The real world isn't one for me, the real world isn't where I'm supposed to be/ It's the real world

[verse 2] The rules are so different and guess we're out of line/ And they're tough so we resort to organized crime/ And I say we because we're bunched together/ The truest excuse is, "We don't know any better."/ Lord, if I leave here, don't leave me alone/ I'll need You forever because I'm scared to be on my own...

The opening credits stop and the camera fades in to Peter and Russell in their room as Peter finishes the song.

PETER

(still singing)

The real world isn't one for us, the real world is dangerous. The real world isn't one for me, the real world isn't where I'm supposed to be. It's the real world...

Peter stops playing and singing.

PETER

Well, that's all I got so far for that one. Not done yet.

RUSSELL

Sounds good, Pete. You need a new guitar though.

PETER

I know. Refurbishing one out of the dumpster isn't gonna do it.

RUSSELL

English, please?

PETER

Fixing.

RUSSELL

Oh. See, you're too smart for your own good. You are gonna be the one that gets us out of here. Lord knows I'm too dumb.

PETER

You're not dumb, Russ. I just got a gift... And I'm not being conceited... full of myself. It's by the grace of God I got this good brain...

RUSSELL

But it's a shame that that gift is almost a waste.

PETER

What do you mean?

RUSSELL

We live here. Like in your song you said this place is like a prison. Nobody makes it outta here.

PETER

I mean, I want to, but that song explains my feelings exactly. I don't know what the world is like outside of our neighborhood. I could make my way out, and I could fail and end up back where I started. I don't know what to do, nobody does!

RUSSELL

If you don't, nobody else has close to a chance.

PETER

I made a promise. Me and you are getting out.

RUSSELL

What about Mom and Dad?

PETER

Forget them. They've done nothing for us anyway.

There is a knock at the door. Russell gets up to answer it. Dad enters and Russell backs away and sits next to Peter.

DAD

Hey boys! How ya doin'?

The boys don't answer.

DAD

Look, guys, I know I messed up but I'm good now! Look at me! I'm smiling!

RUSSELL

You hit Pete.

DAD

I know, and I'm sorry, Peter, I own up to it. But really, I'm fine now! I left because I had to fix myself. And besides, Peter has to learn to fix his smart mouth...

PETER

(under his breath)

You left here cause Mom kicked you out every time you got high.

RUSSELL

Do you really own up to it?

DAD

Yes, I'm not sniffing it no more. I was wasting all that cage fighting money anyway.

RUSSELL

Don't tell me you're still doing that.

DAD

What else is gonna pay the bills, son?

PETER

Gee, I don't know... a real job?

DAD

You know damn well how hard that is, Peter. It makes more money anyway.

PETER

Regardless if that's true or not, you have mangled knuckles and cauliflower ears... I think that's God telling you to stop.

DAD

Why are you worrying so much? You want me to start selling again?

PETER

Of course not. I just think there are better and safer ways to get some money. What about helping out with a landscaping business or delivering for The Bear Bugle?

DAD

Peter, you of all people know how complicated money is around here. Now where is your mother?

RUSSELL

Her room. Where else? There are literally three places to be in here.

DAD

Don't let your brother start to rub off on you.

Dad leaves to go talk to Mom.

DAD

Hey, baby, I'm back.

MOM

I can see. Now I would like to see you walk out the door.

DAD

Just let me explain. I'm clean. You don't gotta worry about nothin'. I'm gonna start cage fighting again and we'll have some money to stay afloat.

MOM

You just don't understand. I'm gonna have to put a padlock on the fridge soon with the way the boys are eating. I feel stupid letting Pete handle the bills. And still, I felt better when you weren't here.

DAD

You can't admit that you didn't miss me.

MOM

I did. But I'm better on my own.

DAD

Now that's a lie. This is the skinniest I've seen Russ look, ever. And look at yourself. You're a mess. Your clothes are all dirty, but look at me. I'm clean.

MOM

Not in the way I would like you to be.

DAD

What do you mean?

MOM

You started selling again. Didn't you?

DAD

Yes.

MOM

Do the boys know?

DAD

No. I don't-

MOM

Don't worry about that. We need money however we can get it. I'm freakin' desperate. Not for you, but for something to eat. Something to keep me sane. And I can't believe that once again, it's your sinful money.

DAD

It's not a sin if I'm doing it for good.

MOM

How much longer can you keep this up? Are you getting along with Don lately?

DAD

Don isn't the focus anymore.

MOM

Well of course he is. He's been the boss since we dropped out of high school. He moved on up and got the huge house on Ursa Street.

DAD

He's not there anymore.

MOM

Where is he now?

DAD

I got him tied up in the trunk of his own car. We're taking over, baby.

*Claire Denson*  
**MOTHER**

We loved to see her in pain.

As much as we loved seeing her pull her own hair out, it wasn't enough.  
We wanted it to fall out on its own,  
too pure to grow from a head that grew such anger and stress

Debra — that was our mother's name.  
'Stop' was her favorite word.

I followed Benjamin as he led me in circles with colors clenched in our fists to  
    paint the walls as we ran  
But I would have been just as happy, just as obedient  
cradled in our mother's lap, being her cat  
if it would please Benjamin —  
My Master.

She saw the colors and watched the circles  
And she may have cried  
But Benjamin was laughing and so I was laughing  
And all we heard was our laughter.

*\* Caldwell Award Finalist*

While color painted the walls  
The color in my mother went gray.

By the time we were through  
and ready to apologize,  
All that was left of our mother was what she had become —  
a few strands of loose hair at our feet and a chunk of colorless plaster.

We spent the next six years trying to color her in.

*Ania Dow*

## FIRE LIKE WHISKEY BLISTERING THE THROAT OF THE SKY

before it's flushed down beneath the lake. The trees  
wave goodbye as they cast shadows over the bare,  
swollen bodies that lay dead deep in the cattails.

The remaining light strokes its way across  
the canvas, staining the sky with pigments  
more dramatic than blood that won't clot.

*Oh, how I would love to die blanketed by such beauty.*

*Ania Dow*

## I HEARD THE SOMBER POP OF AIR RUSHING OUT

From the Mylar balloons that withered five days after my eighth birthday.

There were three, all tied to the bannister that led up to our front porch on 259 Hillcrest, where the white paint peeled and offered splinters to our grazing hands.

Papa told me they were shot down by the rain swells of Northern Michigan, that they stood no chance and passed quietly.

When I came home they were shriveled and strewn across the thirsty hydrangeas that had been praying for rain ever since I was still seven.

\* \* \*

Here, when it rains, the sea wall loses another coat of paint, while the roof reddens and cracks against the Midwestern sky.

The burnt grass drowns in puddling waters, while the screen door moans from the second floor and suffers yet another beating from the envious wind as it slaps against the pale, bare wall.

The wooden floors swell with tears and whimpers as the entire house trembles with the staggering crashes of the waves. They slosh into the shoreline and try to remember what the sun looked like.

\* \* \*

I heard the somber pop of water rushing in when they told me Papa died. He was a 72-year-old native of Grosse Pointe Farms who lives on through his two sons and daughter, along with his six grandchildren.

They didn't mention that he was a great card player,  
or how he played the ukulele every Sunday at church,

but in the picture they chose, he was back at 259 Hillcrest,  
and you could see the Mylar balloons still floating above his bald head.

*Jack Foster*  
**A HAPPY BODY**

The humans gathered around Brother, and realized he was dead, because his skin was very pale, and his eyes looked into space.

So we parted the hair very carefully, and kept the temperature low, so the skin doesn't melt, so embalming fluid doesn't spill—that's why everyone agreed Brother had a stellar corpse.

The best part of Brother's funeral was the chicken, which was free. And I was wearing a little suit Mom bought, and it was so silly because Brother was dead.

I went onto the porch, and the yard was blooming in reverse, and I was on my knees looking at the minivan and giving not thanks.

After exchanging a harsh word, I went into the kitchen and had another poem, I mean muffin.

*\* Caldwell Award Finalist*

*Jack Foster*

## POETRY

I finally got wise after years and years of not  
being wise when a day early in October

proved interesting because Brother died  
of some bubbly cancer, and the sky

was so red that it was a shade of red  
that you would have a hard time imagining

because it looked so much like blue; meanwhile,  
a family gathered, and you were there too,

because I needed a spirit to buzz buzz  
around me and drown the noise.

*\* Caldwell Award Finalist*

*Jack Foster*  
**READING OUT LOUD**

I'm so sad because you're gone,  
and your face keeps appearing  
in the back yard with a glove,  
and then I thought  
about when we read a book out loud in our sister's room,  
and the light was warm because  
the carpet was thick and green

*\* Caldwell Award Finalist*

*Jack Foster*  
**STRANGE MAN**

Our uncle was a strange man, but we loved him very much; and then we discovered that he was our father, which changed our relationship somewhat.

*\* Caldwell Award Finalist*

*Helen Galliani*  
**ME HACES FALTA**

*I miss you.*

English-speakers say it so simply, use it so freely. I greeted my roommate after not seeing her for the weekend with, “I missed you!”

I didn’t really miss her. Having the room to myself was awesome. I’m just being nice.

My best friend lives in Dublin, and when I tell her I miss her, I really fucking mean it.

How unjust is it that I use the same word to politely greet my roommate and express a dire sense of longing to my friend on another continent?

Perhaps this is partly my own error... I do not have to greet my roommate in this way. But the fact that we only have one universally acceptable way of verbally expressing longing says something about the character of our culture... a lack of fervor.

I miss you. It doesn’t sound particularly nice, either, as it rolls off the lips. If I send this phrase in a letter or text, it has to be accompanied by a varying amount of emojis or frowny faces until I feel it carries the weight that it deserves.

I believe that Latinos are generally notorious for being more passionate because they are literally influenced by the character of their language.

They have different phrases for expressing different levels of longing, and they must be well-deserved.

*me haces falta.*

You make me lack. This is the most intense expression of longing, and rightfully so. What if we said that to someone every time we missed them dearly? Oh, mom, you made me lack over the last six weeks.

It's so much more appropriate for the feeling that comes with immense longing. In English the direct translation doesn't make sense, but the idea does. You make me lack, I don't feel like I am my complete self without you here, a piece of me is with you... these are so much more worthy of the emotion than "god I fucking miss you a lot."

During my first month in Ecuador, I used to tell people I missed them (in the most casual form) after not seeing them for a couple days. They would always stare at me for a little too long and then uncomfortably laugh, and I learned quickly that missing someone was not used there as a polite expression like it is in the U.S. You had to mean it. And when you did get a Spanish "I miss you," they felt a lot more hard-earned.

So from now on, I will bring justice to my English "I miss you." Perhaps they will never be as flavorful, but I will place my emojis with careful thought and consideration.

*Helen Galliani*

## HOW I GOT MY DRILL INSTRUCTOR TO STOP COMPARING ME TO JASON DERULO

“You consistently *disgrace* the image of women in the military, Galliani.” My drill sergeant was speaking to me in hissed tones that were so engorged with disgust that they somehow managed to amplify across the entire lecture hall. “Just quit, *please*,” he urged. “*No one* will give a fuck. You aren’t cut out for this. Do us all a favor and stop wasting our time.”

I stood in formation, lined with 27 other freshmen at our new student orientation for Naval ROTC. All of us had arrived four days early to Michigan in order to spend 12 hours a day being whittled down from intelligent, self-confident, and motivated high school graduates to mere college freshmen, “fourth-class,” the scum on the bottom of every upper classman’s combat boot. The whole purpose of the orientation is to break us down, make us realize our place, and to educate us on the workings of the Michigan Battalion. By the end of this orientation and the following two-month initiation, only 19 of us would remain.

As one may imagine, freshmen who choose to participate in ROTC with the intention of having a career in the military after they graduate must know what they are getting themselves into. Many would assume they are mentally and physically tough, natural leaders, extremely driven, and great under pressure.

The day before I arrived to NROTC orientation, I believed all these qualities to be true about myself. I had been the captain of many teams, created my share of organi-

zations, and participated in my share of internships. I had taken on South America by myself, with no Spanish knowledge, and returned to the United States with a fluency certificate and a second home. Life was my ship and I was the captain, forging all over my little map with ease and excitement and a dangerously self-assured attitude.

But as I stood there, getting violently hissed at about how much I sucked, I hit my inevitable iceberg and sank, fast. Probably at the same speed as the flustered tears that had been gathering in my eyes all afternoon and were now speeding down my face, turning my situation from horrible to horribly awkward. Who the hell cries in the military? No one. No one cries in the military. My drill sergeant immediately looked away, embarrassed for me, and I non-verbally thanked god that we had just been told that we were “fucking done” if we looked anywhere else but the chalkboard. No one else knew this happened. But I knew this happened, which honestly sucked just as much, *fuck*. If I was disgracing the female military image with whatever I had done before, I was now taking a huge shit on the face of the highest-ranking woman in the Navy.

I would love to profess that this was the low-point of my ROTC experience—that I had salvaged my ship from this pit, patched the holes, and was now back sailing through a difficult but manageable sea of self-improvement. Unfortunately, this instance was the first of what would become a wearisome chain of instances in which I proved my weakness over and over again. After our initial orientation, we continued to have very similar training sessions every Monday through Friday morning at 5 AM for two more months. These sessions were only an hour, but training did not get any easier. My lack of self-confidence in a group of large, intelligent, and talented boys was undeniable. My military bearing was pathetic—I had no sense of rigidity, my language habits were too informal, and my attempts to conceal my often-terrified emotions were poorly executed. Perhaps the most lethal of all my traits, however—the part of my personality that made frustration ooze out of all my drill sergeants with a single passing glance at my figure—was my excess of femininity.

Due to my notorious feminine character, I shocked everyone I knew with my decision to participate in ROTC. Even my best friend, whom I had told about my application to NROTC without much detail, couldn't conceal her “so, you're really doing this”

smirk as I broke the news that I had been accepted. She kept her sly smile plastered on her face as she reminded me, “There are uniforms in the Navy, hgal. I think you’ll be a badass but... *uniforms*.”

I was very self-conscious about what people would think about me when I told them that I was in the Navy, primarily because I wanted nothing to do with the masculine stereotype that women in the military inevitably hold in a male-dominated profession. But my decision to join the Navy was rooted in months of consideration and self-reflection. The adventure and fast-paced lifestyle of the Navy was what had me hooked—I couldn’t imagine a more appealing situation to practice nursing, my major, than on a ship that could circumnavigate the globe. So I decided I would simply become an anomaly. Being sworn into the Navy was not going to be a surrender of my femininity, and I felt that if I projected that attitude to my peers then perhaps they would become convinced as well.

As I formed this attitude, however, I never considered what I would have to exchange for the retention of my femininity. For the first few weeks of these sessions, I could not figure out what I was doing to get myself so much unwanted attention. They targeted me for my nervous habits (“Galliani, do you think this is some Jason Derulo video? Stop fucking *wiggling* when you talk”), the way I ran (“find some rigidity, Galliani, you run like my 13-year-old sister”), and my lack of volume when I spoke (“What was that, Galliani?? What was that?”). My self-confidence plummeted even further as I began to view myself as incapable and weak, two traits that I had never associated with my character in the past.

In the midst of my confusion and frustration, we were assigned to read Aaron Devor’s *Gender Role Behaviors and Attitudes* in class. I was astounded by how closely this article correlated with topics that had been so frequently floating around in my brain—what defines masculinity, what defines femininity, and how do these identities affect our day-to-day lives? A eureka moment came to me as I read the following quote:

As patriarchy has reserved active expressions of power as a masculine attribute, femininity must be expressed through modes of dress, move-

ment, speech and action which communicate weakness, dependency, ineffectualness, availability for sexual or emotional service, and sensitivity to the needs of others (Devor 460).

After reading this quote, I realized I was in the midst of a very clear and defined conflict of interest. I was on a quest to retain my femininity in the military—a community that built itself on the masculine principles of “toughness, confidence and self-reliance and the aura of aggression, violence and daring” and which, according to Devor, avoids “anything associated with femininity” (460). My quest was causing me to fail, and a change had to be made. But in order to be a successful leader in the Navy, did I have to *lose* my femininity? Throughout my initiation into the Navy, I had subconsciously been holding myself back with the idea that if I ceded to the masculine ways of my leaders and my peers, I would be surrendering a piece of myself. But did it really have to be one way or the other? Why couldn’t I have a little bit of both? According to Devor, I held some “masculine” qualities, too—I was always viewed as a confident and tough person, but I had been suppressing these qualities throughout ROTC training.

As I reflected on this, I thought of one of my fellow “midshipman,” Teresa, who had just been chosen for a position of leadership within our group. A couple mornings prior, we had been challenged to break into three teams and complete a series of difficult tasks in the form of hour-long relay races. These activities were very frequent for us—although challenging and stressful, they were also fun if you had the right leader and a hardworking group. Since Teresa had just been chosen as “squad leader,” she was in charge of the group that I happened to be a part of. She was by far the smallest member of the freshman group, quiet, beautiful, and almost never yelled at. Naturally, I had begun to study her very closely over the recent weeks in order to understand what she was doing so right and I was doing so wrong. During this morning, I finally began to understand.

After being briefed on our “mission” for the morning, Teresa ran back to our group and, in a very calm manner, divvied off all the specific jobs and tasks that needed to be completed in order for us to be successful. She gave off an aura of confidence and

toughness without being overly domineering or aggressive—her attitude made it clear who was in charge but also did not overpower the group. Under her guidance, we were successful over and over again—not because of any particular talent that was in the group, but because we were so well-organized and employed.

Teresa’s leadership style undeniably would have had “masculine” qualities according to Devor—she was able to step into a situation and take control with her tough attitude, or display unwavering confidence even in the face of our terrorizing drill sergeants. However, she did not let these masculine qualities define her persona—I would not consider her to be any less feminine than I. Teresa simply had enough confidence in her femininity that she felt no need to reinforce it through inherently feminine actions. She perceived herself as sufficiently feminine, enough so that her masculine traits did not overpower it.

The days of beginning my mornings with a seemingly unending combination of push-ups, wind sprints, and witty insults have ended, and it is now that I realize what I could have done to save myself from self-directed disappointment and comparisons to Jason Derulo. Self-identification is all about perception—I approached ROTC with an attitude that if I displayed any of my masculine qualities such as confidence or toughness, I would be viewed by my peers as domineering and controlling. Had I approached the situation with the attitude that displaying my confidence and toughness would portray me a fantastic leader and boss-ass bitch, I believe that the outcome of my two-month initiation into ROTC would have been much more positive. In ROTC and in my everyday life, I am much more successful in leadership positions when I am simply true to myself. Being a confident, tough, and self-reliant woman should never be perceived as shameful.

#### Works Cited

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*Karan Hallon*  
REPATRIATION

The movies never told Karthik Verma about the other side of funerals. They never told him that they mostly never happen on the banks of the *Ganga*, but rather in expansive crematoriums. They never told him that setting the body alight was no easy task and that, just like any fire, it needed the help of gasoline. Most surprisingly, though, the movies never told Karthik that oftentimes, one can see the body truly *burn* on the pyre.

That last thought made him smile. Not because he was some diabolical misanthrope, but simply because it was so morbid it bordered on absurd hilarity.

Wipe that smile off your face right now.

In his pseudo-philosophical meditation, Karthik had completely forgotten that he was at a funeral. His uncle's staring face, twisted with solemnity, pulled Karthik back to Earth and pulled Karthik's smile back down to nonexistence. Now he would have to satiate his mind simply with observations of his physical surroundings.

The crematorium, while not being the stuff of epic send-offs, was still a pretty place. It was an open courtyard bordered by forget-me-not blue walls in which there were about twenty-odd pyre-pits. Just as Christians could buy coffins of various qualities, the crematorium had different kinds of pyre-pits. If you were poor, you bought a glorified sandbox. If you were rich, you got a raised platform with an exhaust and all that jazz. In the background, the *Gayatri Mantra* played over and over again on repeat. Coupled with the gentle breeze, the mantra made the atmosphere of the crematorium calming. It could be the kind of place one would come to empty their mind.

But right now, that was not what he was there for. He was there for his grandfather's, his *dadaji's*, funeral. His grandfather had just passed away recently at the suffi-

ciently ripe age of 78, and everyone was there to see him off. Karthik's whole family was there, cousins and all. Next to him stood his parents, looking solemn, but not weeping like some of the other guests. He was thankful for his parents' presence. He knew for a fact that they were straightforward people who would not attempt to look devastated when they truly weren't. In fact, they were quite a juxtaposition to most of the other people at the funeral. Some, like Karthik's newly widowed grandmother, were in hysterics, while others, such as his eldest aunt and uncle, were sobbing loudly as they noisily proclaimed the inability for life to be the same again. This last observation incited further amusement, and Karthik bit back the urge to smile again. He had never had excellent relations with his eldest aunt, Pinderjeet, and uncle, Anil. They were the antitheses of just about everything he stood for. They were ones to garble their words, dish out passive-aggression, and talk money publicly. Anil was also the uncle who had stared him down just a minute ago. Karthik shuddered. At least he would not have to deal with this when he returned to London.

The funeral, or at least the chapter of it in the crematorium, lasted around two hours. This gave everyone ample time to sob, look solemn, talk, and sob a little more. When all of the religious proceedings were finished, it was time to go home. This, in itself, was a quite a big deal, considering that the entire Verma family (and extended family) had to drive back in eight cars. Karthik hoped that, despite the confusion, he would be able to ride back with his parents or younger aunt and uncle. He was feeling untalkative and did not want to engage in some drab, superficial conversation with his extended family, or even worse, with Aunt Pinderjeet and Uncle Anil. But of course, no story can be without conflict, and Karthik's life was one epic story.

"Karthik *beta*, come with us," called Aunt Pinderjeet.

"Coming, *bhua*," replied Karthik. He could not be picky, not today.

Fortunately for him, he would not be riding alone with his uncle and aunt. His cousin, Arnav, would be coming along. Twelve-year old Arnav was the son of Karthik's younger aunt, Lakshmi, and younger uncle, Deepak. As an impressionable youth who was about to enter teenagerhood, Arnav looked up to Karthik greatly and tried to emulate him as much as possible. Karthik recognised this and came to see Arnav as the only friend of Karthik's own generation within his paternal family. His elder cousins,

Aunt Pinderjeet's and Uncle Anil's children, were twenty and twenty-two years older than Karthik respectively and could not really be said to belong to the same generation as him. He shot a toothy grin to Arnav, who shot one back immediately. He bowed his head and stepped into the backseat of Uncle Anil's Hyundai Santro. The interior of the car was decorated with gaudy faux-leather seat covers. Once everyone was in and had sat down properly, Uncle Anil changed the gear and started driving. There were a couple of minutes of silence as they cruised down the streets of Delhi. Arnav was the first to break it.

"How's college going?"

"It's alright. The classes are really hard, and I spend most of my time studying," sighed Karthik.

"*Beta, tum kya par rabe ho?*" came Uncle Anil's voice monotonously

"International Relations," Karthik replied, trying to sound as enthusiastic as someone who is trying to sound enthusiastic on his grandfather's funeral day.

"*Achchha. To tumko Engineering ya Medicine mein koi interest nabin hai?*"

"No, Uncle, I think I.R. is my calling. King's is ranked 16th in the world for I.R."

"It's in London, right? It must be costing your parents a lot," responded Uncle Anil in English.

"Yes, but it's an amazing university. It has-"

"Better you stayed in India and went to University of Delhi," interrupted Uncle Anil, as if he were thinking aloud and not actually talking to anyone.

Karthik chuckled in response, and the conversation ended there. He was used to being criticized for his choice of major, but when Uncle Anil did it, the frustration was aggravated. The remainder of the 20-minute car journey back home was spent in relative silence, with words only being uttered occasionally to channel frustration at some road hog or other triviality.

When they finally arrived, they were only the second car of eight to have done so. Karthik looked forward to going straight to his and his parents' room and checking his mail. In fact, he was just about to do that when he crossed his mother, who quickly pulled him aside and whispered in his ear.

"We're having lunch together with the rest of the family. I need you to be present and show your face. It'll look bad otherwise."

Karthik sighed internally. Of course he could not have escaped so easily. It was a fair request. He was in the minority of people there who carried both his grandfather's blood *and* surname. Plus, he wanted to take some pressure off his parents because they had to deal with so much more than he did.

\* \* \*

After lunch, which was a long and heavy affair, Karthik finally received the opportunity to retire to his room and have some time alone. Most of the extended family had left the house and would either return later or tomorrow. This did not mean the house was empty. Out of everyone in the family, there were a few left. Apart from Karthik's parents and grandmother, Uncle Anil and Aunt Pinderjeet stayed, as did Uncle Deepak and Aunt Lakshmi. In addition, two of Karthik's dad's elder cousins, Bobby and Vivek, were also there with their wives. He presumed, and he was right, that they were discussing matters of the future pertaining both to the deceased's will as well as to what was to become of Karthik's grandmother, who could not bear to live alone. He felt bad for her. As worrisome and anxious as she could be, he did love her and was emotionally invested in what she would do now that she was alone. Would his aunts and uncles propose that she live with them? Probably not; they had their own old to look after. In Western societies, old peoples' homes existed, but did they even exist in Delhi? And if so, would they even be an option? The thought made him feel an unexpected amount of guilt. He knew that she definitely would not move in with his parents; she would not adjust to living in the UK.

He put it out of his mind and called Arnav over for idle chit-chat to pass the time, as well as because he was genuinely interested in Arnav's life.

"How's drumming coming along?" Karthik asked. Arnav, like him, was a drummer. It was just one of the ways in which Arnav seemed to mirror his 17-year-old cousin.

Before Arnav could even answer, however, Karthik heard his name being yelled from the living room.

"Karthik! Karthik!" boomed his mother's voice. Karthik did not like her intonation. It was the intonation she used when she was unhappy that he had not heard his name the first time it was yelled.

“*Areey yaar,*” he muttered at Arnav. He had no choice. “Coming!” he yelled back.

He quickly rose to his feet and hurried down the hallway to the living room and opened the sliding door. He was hit by the silence that befell him. Eleven faces stared at him. Some with solemnity, others with mild anger. There had been a dispute, he could feel it.

“*Haanji,*” said Karthik.

His mother responded.

“Karthik, we are going to move your *daadi* to Uncle Anil’s house for some time. She needs to recover.”

He was relieved. Uncle Anil’s house would be a good place for his grandmother to stay for a while. He relaxed. His mother continued.

“She feels lonely and needs company around all the time. We want you to stay with her for some time.”

Karthik froze. The prospect of staying at his uncle’s house for an indefinite time period washed over him. He could not escape the situation. He could not say that he did not want to be there for his grandmother.

“But what about college?” he asked lamely.

“Let college be. This is not the time to think about college. Your grandmother needs your help and all you can think about is *college?*” interrupted Uncle Anil impatiently.

“We can speak to King’s tomorrow and tell them it’s an emergency. I’m sure they’ll understand,” offered Karthik’s mother.

Somehow, Karthik highly doubted that they would understand. He looked at the floor and at his feet. He then looked at Uncle Anil, whose nostrils were flared and who was sitting on the sofa in a manner that would not be inappropriate for a mob boss. If his uncle had aggravated him before, he outright intimidated him now. Warning bells started ringing in Karthik’s ears, and he felt nauseated.

With a smile that could melt the hearts of angels, he whispered,

“Okay.”

And with that, he spun around and quickly returned to his room.

*Karan Hallon*

## THE EVENING ATE KEBABS

Opposite me, she gazed with a sternness  
That is reserved for mothers,  
And in the humid Dubai heat,  
To the ostinato of a traffic jam,  
We ate where we always ate on Fridays.  
Our favorite Lebanese restaurant down the street;  
Our favorite cheap and cheerful feast,  
Albeit,  
Today a silence pervaded  
As we ate our kebabs,  
Every bite I chewed, the meat cried with me,  
Like juice.  
My incisors were sending signals to my eyes  
To sob as I sized up my problems,  
My face seized up, spasming sporadically as  
She gazed directly into my chasms-for-eyes,  
And with the iciness of the same Michigan snow I refused to return to,  
Explained to me with frantic precision,  
“Life is not that easy. It is a challenge  
You need to face. You’re above complaints.  
Look me in the eyes and say,  
That with your escape your problems would go away.”

I knew she was right,  
But I had to explain the disdain I sustained,  
Needed to make myself heard before the waiter came,  
But as my lips parted to speak, my eyes spoke instead,  
Soaking wet.

“When I chose college, I chose profit;  
The prospect that, somewhere down the line,  
I would become someone — someone big —  
Was a potent dream —  
But it was only a dream —  
I never thought to consider  
Where my own happiness fit in.  
I feel —”

Just then, the waiter came with the spinach pie.  
We let the conversation go  
And stared at different parts of 8 o'clock,  
Her at the cheering street lights,  
And me at the darkening sky.

*Alyssa Holt*  
THE OPERATOR

To light and sound a theatrical performance, a number of specific skills are required. An operator must have a working knowledge of all parts of the booth, including the light board, the sound board, and the various accompanying equipment. Not only must the operator know how to use these things; they must be prompt at doing so. A good operator should be able to multitask more efficiently than anyone else in the show; perhaps, even, the director. In most cases, there are two operators appointed to the booth. One operator for sound, one for light. However, in the case of small productions and high school drama departments, an operator must be able to man both at once. Even with an adequate knowledge of the mechanical and technical parts, the operator still must possess a musical ear and a sharp eye. Sequence is ultimately the key. To preprogram an entire show into a series of timed clicks, the operator must discern the correct placement during a live show. There remains, even with the most practiced performances, a level of unpredictability in musical theater that demands of the operator the ability to quickly adapt their sequences of sound and light to fit any unexpected hiccups. Because of the improbability of this specific set of qualities developing in one person, good operators are rarities and investments, requiring both talent and extensive training. Even with all the aforementioned skills, in order for all of this to be really effective, for the audience to grant the company the absolute suspension of their disbelief, the operator himself must become utterly invisible. You should never see the operator; only his work. Bryan Cuellar was one such operator.

We were putting on Don Nigro's *Cinderella Waltz*, which has won many awards and of which I had heard nothing. It was only even notable—we only really had any

turnout at all—because it vastly departed from our typical repertoire of Disney and classic English comedies. We had been working every day from 4:30 to 9, with the thirty minutes between school and rehearsal designated for dinner. If it was a Friday, we worked until 11. On Saturdays, we came in at 12 and worked until 4 or 5 depending on what needed doing. We were a small group; dedicated thespians who had taken control right away, forming a band of actors and techies that owned the department, more so probably than our director. The “Theater Freaks,” as we referred to ourselves, consisted of five of us, all seniors with the exception of one freshman. I was the princess of the group. Not that I think I was ever such a diva as to deserve the title, but because that was what I played; that was my role, always. Typecast as a damsel in distress, forever waiting for her knight. And always the knight was Jacob Caire. He mostly played village idiots or saviors of feminine virtue, and had no other range beyond shouting or whining; skills he learned to use off-stage to bully the rest of us into acting on his whims. The only person who he really couldn’t bully around was Lexy; Alexia Amador, head of tech, who shouldn’t have been intimidating. A willowy flamenco dancer with more interest in power tools than pliés, her long black lashes and lithe limbs gave her an ethereal air only enhanced by the innate natural grace of a dancer; yet she commanded a room of rowdy actors and techies with the narrowing of her eyes and the slight jut of her lower lip. They strung along behind them Alex Koplos, an impressionable freshman who had taken a liking to Jacob and always played the ingénue. Koplos never belonged, really, but we kept her around for comic relief because we couldn’t find much else for her to do, and anyway, Jacob, although nearly four years her senior, had taken a liking to her, too. These were the people who were seen—actors and a stage manager, the stars of the play. But for all the recognition, the success of the show each night ultimately fell upon the operator. Always in the shadows, always just out of sight, was Bryan Cuellar—the “old man” of the troupe. Though younger in age by almost a year, he carried in his neck and shoulders a superiority that trumped even our director, who, fresh-faced and nubile as she was, never had much power to begin with. Bryan’s hands, which he waved emphatically while speaking, even through cracks in his voice, were suited to him; long, thin, and nearly translucent, with veins

crisscrossing under his skin in plain view. They were the hands of an operator. He ran lights, sound, and in some cases, a projector. He was adept with the technology and had nimble fingers. Nothing ever went awry with Bryan at the controls.

It was the longest I had ever spent working on one project. I won't say I developed a distaste for theater during this time, but I did grow tired of the absolute dedication expected of us. I suspect a lot of us did. Bryan pruned, looking each day more like he'd been hung out on a clothesline in the sun. He worked nearly twice as hard and twice as long as everyone else, but never complained. In the two years he had been a part of our odd little department, he had taken the tech booth as his own and was officially employed by the school. He made money, enough to fund himself and promise some future of secondary school. His family, like most families here, was not financially secure, so the extra income always meant more than that; this was not extra, this was supplementary. The perverse tradeoff being, when we worked four or five hours, Bryan was working eight or ten. In addition to his status as a full-time student, well—it certainly never did much for his wrinkled complexion. But he seemed content—satisfied. He had, I think, created for himself a home in his booth. He often missed entire classes to do so for staff meetings held in the auditorium. For Bryan, his teachers knew, sometimes two hours working in the booth was worth more than two hours of impersonal instruction. But I don't know how he convinced them of it in the first place. A lot of things about Bryan, I noticed, were unknown. Like where he went while we rehearsed. I could never figure it out. Of course, the stage was always lit and the sound always played when it should, but I never actually saw him execute any of it. Bryan and I were friends. I spoke with him every day, ate lunch with him, chatted with him during breaks, but when we were working, there was no sign of Bryan ever having existed. I suspect he shut himself away in his booth until it was time to lock up. Once, he had taken me on a tour. I suppose tour is stretching it; the room was tiny, maybe five by twenty, and lined with large black machinery covered in dials and buttons. It was immaculate. Everything was in its right place, ephemera catalogued meticulously, all according to Bryan's proclivities rather than those of someone above him. Here, Bryan held, undeniably, all the power. His backpack he propped against the door frame, his

chair was always set slightly askew, and the big master mouse balanced over the comically inadequate mouse pad, which he refused to replace because it was still functional. On the sill of the window that faced the stage were empty bags of chips, tall, hollow cans of tea, and a spectrum of candy wrappers. A controlled tangle of wires, buttons, and lights comprised what was, evidently, where Bryan lived, or attempted to. Here was where he sat, up above us all, quiet; observant. You couldn't see through the dull window from the seats just outside. If you never ventured to look, or even knew to, you'd never notice the booth, let alone the wispy man inside; invisible to the audience but pulling all the strings. So I guess that's where he was when he wasn't with us, but I couldn't say for certain. I never had the inclination to ask.

"We're stopping early," Bryan said. It was a Friday afternoon, late. Friday afternoons were always late. "Moss wants us to see Austin's show tonight."

Moss, Christi was our director. Austin was the rival school across town.

"Hoorah! Paris has been liberated," I muttered. Bryan's lips quirked up and the little wrinkles at the corners of his eyes creased like small accordions into themselves. Someone appreciated my joke, at least.

"Drama queen," Jacob said. He sat in a chair across the table from mine, and yet his voice still carried to the backs of my ears and crept, unwelcome, up my spine. I shuddered exaggeratedly in his direction. He rolled his eyes.

"Pack up, let's go," Lexy said.

Jacob and Lexy were perfect complements. One or the other always took charge, and the other followed with a weird mutual respect. If Jacob drove, Lexy directed. If Lexy decided on the restaurant, Jacob ordered, and so on. And always they were laughing at something just beyond the comprehension of everyone else. They had their own inside jokes—their own secret comedic language—that the rest of us could never access.

Most of us didn't have cars, and those who did shared them with parents and siblings, but Jacob had his that day. It was small and worn, its grey paint dull and chipped, interior shabby, but it had a motor and it ran. Most of the cast, extras and small parts, waved impersonal goodbyes and climbed into the back seats of their par-

ents' vans. The rest of us, in staggered time with all four car doors being pulled open consecutively, fell into the deflated leather seats. We'd been here so many times, the movements had been burned into muscle memory, a sort of choreography. Lexy took her second-in-command place beside Jacob, their seatbelts hanging beside them, unbuckled. Alex Koplos followed close behind, nose tickling the long black flyaway hairs that drifted behind Lexy when she walked. She cut the image of a daughter, sitting in the back seat. It was strange that Koplos had been adopted so easily by the group—an age difference of four years made her a literal child next to rowdy, carefree seniors. She didn't ask her mother for permission to ride with Jacob. She sat next to Bryan, who laughed but didn't wheeze the way he did when he was really laughing, and asked if I was coming.

"I don't have any money," I remember saying. I leaned on the handle of the back-seat car door closest to Bryan. I smiled, all teeth and gums, but he didn't smile back; he looked up at me with his lips pressed thin and his eyebrows high on his forehead. He offered to pay for my ticket. "Oh no, I couldn't do that to you. You work so hard for your money. You're too nice, Bryan." On more than one occasion, Bryan had paid for my lunch when he noticed I had none and wasn't planning on buying any. "You bought my lunch today," I said. "I couldn't ask you to pay for me again." Platitudes and shallow excuses. Not that I didn't appreciate what Bryan did for me, but really, I was tired of working, and was bored with the company of the same group of people. I had elaborate plans for a night at home—alone. I think Bryan knew this, because he accepted my excuses easily, although I knew he would have preferred not to, and Jacob drove off at reckless speeds around the bend that lined a deep ravine. The high school was built at the base of the Franklin Mountains on a series of hills that had been leveled into cliffs. The street wound sharply around the school and was protected from a steep twenty-foot drop only by a small embankment of dirt and a rusted metal barrier. But driving fast around these sorts of things was not considered any more of a risk than all the other stupid and reckless things we were always so eager and apt to do, so I wasn't concerned about their speed, nor did I even make conscious note of their continued acceleration. I think, when you live on the border of one of the most dangerous cities

in the world, and half the people you know call that city in Mexico home, you become desensitized to the idea of death. Every day was a practice in improvisation, never knowing if you would make it all the way home, or if you'd bite it somewhere between the border crossing and your driveway. No one ever gives improvisation their everything; no one ever won an award for making shit up as they go along, but neither does anyone imagine themselves choking on stage and aspire to that; the grey area between best effort and no effort does not equate to a safe life; it equates to an easy life. It's a life of little conflict beyond petty interpersonal relationships. The daily struggle to keep inventing, keep acting, keep playing off each other, keep taking risks is not a choice. You cannot quit life. So compute the minimum effort required for moderate comfort, and that reflects the mentality of those living here. Teenagers, at their invincible prime, prove themselves generation after generation as the poorest actors. With hardly any experience to go off of and miles of blank script in front of them, combined with adult freedoms still fresh and unexplored, teenagers, out of boredom or self-hatred, take the biggest risks for the most insignificant gains, simply for the thrill of having done so. The value of one more day alive is trivial compared to the fleeting pleasure, the unadulterated rush of nearly losing control. The worst part was, no matter what you did, whether you drove fast or slow, whether you hugged the turns or fishtailed wide, there were always going to be stray bullets. So nothing was safe. We never did anything safe. No one did. I watched their car gain speed and twist away, around the bend, and didn't think anything after it.

My mother was on her way to pick me up. I had spoken to her on the phone ten minutes earlier. It was strange, I thought, that she was taking so long. We lived five minutes away, at the top of one of the hills, within sight of the school. But her car still hadn't materialized from around the bend where the school made way for the street, which made way for the cliff. I tried not to let myself get carried away. I've always had awful anxiety, and this wasn't the first time my mom was late picking me up. She'd pull up, and I'd get in the car and say, "You scared me to death! I thought you had wrecked," and we'd laugh it off and drive home. The sun continued its trajectory down behind me, against the backdrop of the border fence and Ciudad Juarez. My mother's

car did not appear; its steady headlights did not shine.

The phone rings. This is when I close my eyes. I answer, "Hello?" and there's the sound of crackling, heavy breathing, and my mom's voice. It's dark. The house lights are all turned low, the only glow cast from thin yellow lines that run up through the seats. I remember that it's late. I remember that my eyes are closed. I don't dare open them. I don't hear what she's saying. I'm already watching a scene of destruction projected against my eyelids. When an operator lights a show, they have to pay special attention to which areas of the stage need lighting and which don't. If the stage is overlit, the actors will be saturated and their features erased in clean light. The right amount of shadows are absolutely necessary to good acting, which is why the accurate lighting of the show is imperative to the overall performance. This scene is not well lit. The operator has it all wrong. My mother is cast in shadow, her high cheek bones erased, her face a flat black mask. Her car is twisted into pieces around her, white paint fading away into brighter white light. Someone is screaming. I can't imagine why my mother would call me before an ambulance.

She shouts my name, but I think she's trying harder to hold herself together than me. "There's been an accident," she says. "I can't come get you." I hang up the phone. This is a dress rehearsal. I open my eyes. The curtain is still wide open. The sun creeps toward the horizon. Something is off. Someone is screaming over the roar of an ambulance. The sound technician has it all wrong. They must have messed up the sequence. Sequence is so important. The ambulance cuts through the screams, then fades out. They're going for my mother, I think. My mother's broken body, slumped over her seat, phone still in her hand, her face erased. The screaming hasn't stopped. The phone rings. Mom. I don't answer. Call the police, I think, an ambulance, someone else! Anyone else! You're dying, don't you understand? You're dying and I can't help you. I'm screaming.

At some point I ran back into the school. I must have been incoherent. I found someone, some woman, and I rested my head against her breast like I did when I was a child and I clung to my mother. I don't know if I ever opened my eyes, let tears collect between my lids and force their way down the junction between my nose and cheek

bones. I only have my mother. Who else is there but she? She is all I have, and I'm forgetting my lines on stage at the idea that she is gone.

Amidst the screaming, this woman's reassurances, the phone rings. Mom. I answer it. "Why do you keep calling? You're dying!" I'm hysterical. I've acted this way for parts many times before, but it's the first time I've ever felt myself play emotions so real. This is no time for improvisation, but she is deviating from the script my mind meticulously crafted. My mother speaks.

"I'm sorry. I should have started by saying I'm okay. I'm okay. I'm okay." She repeats it over and over, but I can't believe her. It doesn't sound the same over the phone. "I just witnessed an awful accident. I had to pull over and call for help. I'm sorry. I'm okay." I stop crying. I snap out of character. My mom is fine. She's fine, it was someone else. She's okay. I should feel bad for the other people, the people she saw, who must look a lot like I imagined my mother would look, but all I feel is relief. It wasn't my mom, and I allow myself this selfishness. It's human, I think, to be glad for someone else's pain that should have been yours. It's awful, but it's human. I let go of the woman, all of a sudden uncomfortable in my vulnerability, and she smiles at me when I explain. Smiling is the wrong response. This woman is a terrible actor. She asks if I need her to walk with me to my mom's car. I say no, it's just around the bend. Even if I did, I would have said no. She isn't right for the part. She waves goodbye from behind the front door of the school. It's very impersonal. The sun has almost fallen out of the sky, dark blue backdrop descending behind the set of mountains and houses. My eyes must be all red, nose full of snot. I must look pitiful, seventeen and crying like a child. I remember I'm still on the phone with my mom.

"Okay," I say. "Okay." Breathe. I sniffle, rapid little things, like gunshots. "I'm sorry." She says it's okay. "What happened?" She saw a car come around the curve. It was going too fast, and she doesn't know what happened. She thought it was going to stop. She thought the embankment would keep it from going over, but it didn't. You always think the embankment is going to stop you, but what's it going to do, really? What's a rusted hunk of metal going to do to stop a bigger hunk of metal hurtling straight toward it? Nothing. Nothing, and that's what happened. The car hurtled straight

through, over the side, and flipped and flipped, plummeted all the way down. She saw a flash. She thought it exploded. She watched four figures, one by one, pull themselves from the wreckage. One of them was laying on the ground now, not moving. A girl lay next to him, screaming. Another girl rested against the hood, her head in her hands. The driver, a boy, was walking around, pacing. She said she tried screaming to them. They didn't answer. "That's awful," I say. More platitudes come to my lips. Then I stop. She says they are just kids. They look like high school kids. An operator must consider all parts of the script at every present moment – something may be mentioned in the first act that doesn't occur until the second act. In *Cinderella Waltz*, the father once mentions chickens falling from the sky, but no chickens fall until the arrival of the Prince much later. Without the operator pulling his strings, any foreshadowing done with dialogue would be useless.

I stop. Then I start again, this time running. I'm chanting into the phone. I don't even know what, just chanting anything, trying to convince myself this isn't real, it can't be real. I hear her yell my name, like she's trying to calm me down. I can't calm down. I know who they are. I know where they were going. I know what happened. This time, the operator has the lighting just right. I round the bend, sprinting, with no regard for proper stage movements. There is no time to turn out for the audience, just a singular goal. I reach the wreckage, thin plumes of smoke rising toward the black sky. The shadows play on my friends' faces. This is not acting, but they could win awards. I can't hear a thing. The operator must have messed up the sound. Bryan dropped the ball, I think. I try to make out identities amidst the chaos. Lexy against the hood; Jacob pacing; Alex Koplos screaming. Her legs don't look right. Next to her, on the ground, unmoving: Bryan.

It's important to say this: Bryan did not die that night. No one did. They all went home, slept in their own beds, hugged their mothers and fathers. There were no repercussions, except for Koplos, who hadn't told her mother where she was. Everyone escaped in perfect working order, health-wise. All except Bryan; he fractured his spine. He could not move, only lay in bed, watching through blue curtains pulled apart only a few feet. I went to see him. I felt naked on stage alone in front of him. Playing vul-

nerability was never a strength of mine, but I found it was harder still when it wasn't acting; a performance in grief. I couldn't look him in the eye. I cried. Bryan told me not to cry and that he would be fine. But I wasn't crying for Bryan; I was crying because of Bryan. I was crying because I improvised, because I wasn't in the car and I should have been, because can you have survivor's guilt if no one has died? And I wonder, when people say, "you were lucky," I wonder: were there really no casualties? The utter destruction of any hope Bryan had for advancement in his career, his continued good health, or a brighter future made possible because of those things was dismissed as the byproduct of someone else's risk. Bryan—who had been so careful with everything he had, who always gave and never asked, who did not drive fast around bends toward embankments, did not leave his seatbelt unbuckled, and did not ever take a risk with a life that wasn't his to take—Bryan, who lived his life for safety, whose kindness could have killed me, and whom I could never fathomably blame. Maybe it should have been me, I would think as I crawled into bed in the subsequent weeks. Maybe if I had gone, I would wonder with eyes shut tight, it would have been different. Maybe that's what makes it all so dramatic, so worthy of retelling. I don't know. I don't think unwarranted pain makes for good storytelling.

Sometimes I don't know if I believe that there is a God, or karma, or some greater being that controls everyone's fate and evens every score in the end. I mean, I'm not refuting anything, I'm just saying that it seems awfully unjust that someone like Bryan could eat so much shit in one sitting, and no one else involved had to share. So I think, maybe, instead of a playwright, there's an operator. Someone is sitting in a booth, controlling the lights and the sound, orchestrating a show, making sure everyone pays attention to the right things, but with no control over the script. The script is set. It can't be changed, or modified, only interpreted. But what happened? Was this set, printed in ink long before we could have ever seen it coming? Or was this what happened when someone deviated from the script, when improvisation took hold, when risks were taken that needn't be? What is the right way to interpret this? How do you soften the blow? Is there some way I can say these things, put emphasis on different words, that would make them hurt less? That would make this less confusing? I don't know.

I don't know how. I'm not an award-winning actress. I don't have a Tony. All I have is this awful, sinking feeling and a script I have no choice but to follow.

That's how going on in the aftermath felt—of course the whole school knew by Monday, every teacher and student, every janitor—like following a script. I never faltered over a line, never forgot to say how sorry I was for everyone involved. But I never meant it. I never felt bad for anyone, really, but Bryan. People said the same things over and over, listened to Jacob and Lexy and Koplos' retellings. It was entertainment to the masses because they were all so detached. A fourth wall was created, and it excluded everyone, even those who had been in the car, even me, even my mother, leaving Bryan trapped on stage, miles from the booth. It was all wrong. Bryan never belonged in the spotlight; he wasn't supposed to be seen at all.

We continued rehearsals with clinical detachment. Lexy was appointed to the booth. She looked all wrong, up in a glass box that used to be Bryan's home. Little blue and red lights flashed around her, keys all begging to be pressed, sequenced clicks all laid out and ready. She did okay. The stage was lit, the sound played, but everything was off, just a little. She cleaned the empty tea cans from the sill, and it felt more like destruction than decoration. Power tools lost their appeal when she could command and control the cast and crew just the same, as intimidating as always, from the comfort of a booth that wasn't hers. And concerning the lighting and sound, there was always a slight delay. It was like watching television with a faulty signal—the sounds and the picture never lined up just right. The show went on without Bryan.

I don't remember when Bryan came back. Everything blurs together. He walked with a limp. He couldn't climb the tall stairs to the booth anymore. He quit. He developed a deep resentment of those involved. He lost weight. His already skinny frame grew sickly, his long hands wrinkled. There was too much skin. Our grandfatherly old man became an elderly recluse. He would tell me the things Jacob and Lexy had said to him when Koplos wasn't around to hear; awful things. I always wondered why they'd shelter Koplos, a child who shouldn't have stuck around, in favor of Bryan, a genuinely kindhearted man who had been paid in more pain than he deserved. Regardless, Koplos was sheltered, and Bryan was bombarded. They told him to get over it, that

he was fine, and he should be thankful everyone had survived. That they'd all made it out in one piece. I always wanted to scream at them, after he told me, scream, "You left Bryan's life in pieces! You broke him and stepped on the shattered remains!" I never screamed at them. But I should have. On his birthday, they made him a giant card. It seemed well-meaning. We all hoped—optimistically, naively—that here was a peace offering; an extended hand; a prayer in the void. I watched Bryan open that card, peel back the front cover like its very weight could be offensive, and I regarded in awe the way the shadows on his face shifted when he was confronted with a crude drawing of a car catapulting off a cliff, another car in ruins at the base. This was the way a stage ought to be lit, the way the actor's features should be rendered. Bryan at his finest among ruins. He'd never belonged on stage, but here was his cameo. His expressions were flawless and unadulterated. His eyes flicked across the page, and when they touched and settled on the bottom of the card, he saw written in red marker, "Ready for Round 2?" There must have been buckets of bile that rose to the base of my throat. I must have left marks in my palms as my fingernails dug into my flesh. To hate is an action—we never "play hate," but rather try to find some emotion from which our character derives the action. I could never pinpoint that emotion.

And every week, Bryan walked, on his own two feet, with his half-shuffling limp, to the hospital to pay his bills. He showed me once six hundred dollars in cash, crisply packed into his wallet, that he had to deliver that afternoon. I asked him where he got the money. Without a job, without his savings, how could he subsist? He told me he took out loans at the bank. I was instantly ashamed. That morning, I had been whining about taking out loans to pay for college, and here limped Bryan down the street, irreparably damaged and already deeper in debt than I could ever imagine being, and still smiling at me with his thin lips and eyes. I asked him why Jacob wasn't helping him pay. He said he didn't know, and his face fell.

It came out, finally, at the end of the year, what had happened. Bryan and I sat in the dressing room on the tables that lined the big makeup mirror. It was lunch. I held a sandwich in my hands and pressed my fingers into the bread but could not muster any will to eat it. My stomach flipped in my abdomen like a car flipping through the air,

tumbling toward asphalt. They hadn't been wearing seatbelts. Jacob was trying to impress Koplos. They were driving too fast. Bryan asked them to stop. Soft-spoken Bryan had been pleading for Jacob to please slow down; reasoning, rationalizing, groveling. No one listened. Bryan was invisible. He was always invisible. But he shouldn't have been. Bryan pulls the strings behind the curtain. Bryan holds the power. The operator here was the wrong person. Jacob would have never made a good operator. Good operators are rarities and investments. Bryan Cuellar was one such operator. In between the zeroes of the decimals of the last second, Koplos had made them all put on their seatbelts. And then it was happening. He doesn't remember the moment Jacob lost control, doesn't remember it starting, only remembers being in the air and thinking he was going to die and wondering how he'd deserved to get himself here. The car hits the ground and balances on its side. The audience holds their breath. The sound of a drop of a pin on wood would cause a disturbance, so still is the air. Then, all at once, the lighting darkens, all the sounds that have lagged reverberate tenfold against crushed metal, and Koplos slams bodily into him. There is a period of time that passes the length of which he cannot even venture to guess. Slowly, bright lights regain focus; he thinks they must be stage lights, and actors in white coats are delivering lines he doesn't understand. His eyes feel heavy. The curtain closes. End scene.

We didn't talk about it anymore after that. It all ends in a bad way. The show is over, the lights are out, the booth has been shut down and locked, but the curtains remain agape a few narrow feet. We move on. I moved away, I went to college, I tried to forget. I haven't talked to Jacob, Lexy, or Koplos since we closed out our last play, and I haven't spoken to Bryan since the last day of school. But I remember where they ended up, and it is with relative confidence that I can conclude here they remain: Bryan still has bills, and no way to pay for college. He was going to major in theater production. He was going to be in a big booth on Broadway. Those things didn't happen. Who knows if they even would have? Who knows if they even would have, even had he never gotten hurt? Who knows if they still might? Bryan's loss marked a period of static uncertainty in the lives of those around him, where everyone seemed to go on existing, but no one could remember how to move forward in time. Koplos, who never

matured beyond that content naivety that seems characteristic of young woman, has three more years of high school waiting in the wings before her graduation. Lexy lived out her time post-high school chasing that familiarity, and when she could not find it, quit school. She lives at home, stuck in high school, with no real connections to anyone beyond that. But Jacob, who's amassed enough cosmic karma points to have at least deserved some fate only slightly more insufferable and ultimately insignificant than these, instead emerges from backstage with a flower between his teeth, taking bows for his trickery, his thieving, and his flippant dismissal of another human life. He attends the University of Texas at Austin on scholarship; he plans to major in theater. The script continues. The actors have adapted to their ever-changing roles, learned their parts, memorized their lines. But there is an operator missing. The booth is empty and cold, lights blinking, sequence ready. Bryan stands in place behind thick blue curtains on a dark stage, unable to walk, yet achingly desperate to run. Long fingers clutch at the fabric as if something here will be able to offer him any kind of strength. He peers through a gap where the fabric meets. An empty stage and an audience of everyone he ever knew stares back at him unabashedly, watching where the curtain ripples against his shaking fingers. The house lights dim, and the blue curtain spreads wide, and stepping slowly, each movement meticulous, as if the hardwood might crack beneath his fragile body, Bryan makes his way center stage: the operator on display.

*Alyssa Holt*  
RIVERS

I can think of nothing better:

His sheets against my lips taste of river water. I find the taste comforting; better, even, than the taste of saline slick skin. I, on my stomach, find myself vulnerable, shirt hiked high on the planes of my shoulders, nothing to keep separate myself from the cold. He says he can, says he's trying, he wants to, but all I can think of are the rivers. All I can think of is the Huron. Swift, dominant, icy. All I can do is think.

The windows are always closed. And I think, could I have done better?

What am I to say of all these cold nights, the companionship of stagnant sheets, all the times it was only I here, watching the river continue to sweep over the horizon from the window? Can anything other than solidarity come from nothing?

I consider wildly whether or not we are anything, if I am nothing. It is all I can do but to think, entirely to myself, Do not open my lips, do not taste the sheets. You can

\* *Caldwell Finalist*

not hear what I'm saying through the cloth any better  
than you can hear me over the roar of the Huron. I  
am a trickle, a stream, compared to the river he is made of.

What am I made of?

If he were to take me in his hands, would he hold nothing?

I am cupped water in his palms-fleeting. Is that why his touches are sparing, reserved?

I think that I—

—I think that it is dangerous to think.

This is a physical, visceral place—not a space for thought, even the thought that I can  
do better.

I think that I can.

I can.

That I am certain of,

The way I am certain the Huron will always flow stronger, better  
than the Rio Grande. The Rio, gentle, shallow and transparent in a drought. I am  
nothing.

He could be the Huron, I think,

Because he has always been so much colder than I.

It's got to be a trick of the light that I,  
in between the slits of early sun across the sheets, and unsure of what to think,  
find the cold has seeped through the blinds into our bones, and the shadows have faded  
to nothing.

*Alyssa Holt*  
MIJITA

My grandfather used to call me Mijita.  
I don't know why I said—  
    "Papa,  
    You call me Mijita,  
    But that isn't my name."  
—because I really liked it.  
My little daughter.

On Sundays we took trips to Juarez-  
    handed pesos to tios at rickety stands in exchange for painted trinkets,  
    and dipped sweet breads into foam cups of Abuelita at pastel panaderias  
—until stepping foot into our homelands became a curse that ended  
in the broken bodies of our hijos.

MURDER CAPITAL OF THE WORLD

The body counts were never correct. I know, because every week,  
a different one of my friends was at a cemetery  
instead of at school.  
Visitors, one a resident.

\* *Caldwell Finalist*

I cannot roll my r's at the front of my tongue:  
words that necessitate the rr get stuck at the back of my throat.  
Rosaries felt heavy, worn beads like sandpaper—a punishment.  
Repeating Catholic prayers in Spanish never tasted right, anyway.  
They sound wrong in my voice.

“Plata o Plomo,”  
on a billboard  
on the highway  
mannequin strung up by its neck,  
dangling.

My grandmother, and her daughter, and her daughter,  
were born on the border, permanently threaded between two cultures.  
Barbed wire strained the color from our skin.  
Dark eyes and hair set foreignly in European faces.  
In the company of others, we did not relate to either side.  
I am not white, nor Latina. I am floating, unattached.

I am trying to convince everyone else of something which  
I cannot even convince myself.  
I am not Hispanic.  
I don't deserve to be called something as beautiful as  
Mijita,  
the little daughter of a Hispanic man.

My skin is the wrong shade of skin.  
Everyone can see through, all the way to pallid bones.

*Alyssa Holt*  
CARRIER

My mother  
— who really ought to be written about,  
and have monuments erected in her stead —  
passed down her potential  
like it's hereditary, and  
it skips a generation.

My grandmother was not a great woman.  
She married a great man.  
Not an important man,  
but one of good social standing,  
smart, and who spoke low and quick and stilled lips  
when he took off his hat.

He was a mathematician.  
My mother wanted to be an artist.  
She was her father's favorite.  
She took a job as an accountant,  
and quit that to take a job as a mother,  
and when her husband quit on her,  
she went back to work.  
She made her father proud.

\* *Caldwell Finalist*

My grandfather was mourned by a community.  
The neighbor pitched a vase against the wall.  
The old man was dead.  
My mother sat for a long time at her desk  
still as a painted porcelain doll.  
The neighbor—with the shattered vase—adopted the dogs and mowed the lawn.

I told my mother I was going to be a poet.  
“You already are a poet,” she said.  
My mother wanted to be an artist.  
No, a real poet.  
“You already are.”  
Like mother, like daughter.

My mother hates her job.  
“I hate my job,” she says.  
Comes home from work,  
kicks in the wooden bowl on the blue cabinet by the door.

“I hate my job.”  
We cannot afford tuition.  
“I’ll ask for a raise.”  
All the equity is in the house.  
“We can move.”  
She’s wanted to live in this neighborhood her whole life.  
This is her dream house.  
“We can sell it.”  
That’s what we do,

And everything in it.  
Later, on the phone,  
“I hate my job.”

My mother  
—who works time and a half to pay my tuition,  
and paints on her weekends off—  
will not be remembered.  
After she dies, no one will remember my mother but me.  
But if anyone remembers me, the poet—  
it’s what she would have wanted.

Greatness runs in the family.  
My mother swears it just skips.

*Alyssa Holt*  
MOBILE HOME

You can see the fence from my backyard  
You are here.

Take the left lane  
Let police sirens be your radio  
Recite prayers you know by heart but do not believe in  
Swerve to avoid oncoming traffic  
Do not touch anyone  
Do not touch anyone  
Do not touch anyone  
You are here.

My body houses unspoken half-truths  
I am false  
Held at the border between umber and egg white  
Where my skin posits the length of space between my house and the fence  
I face North toward bastardized  
New Mexico  
and from my backyard  
You can see the fence  
You are here.

\* *Caldwell Finalist*

I am here.

I am mobile

String me to the back of a pickup

100mph on the Border Highway

I will watch from my backyard

Curl my toes on the precipice of your truck bed

I can see the fence

Balancing empty space between bits of coiled wire

Pressing up against the horizon

Culture threaded through a chicken wire chessboard of ill intentions

I am here, but I cannot reach.

*Alyssa Holt*  
ON DEPRESSION

Muddy inkblot on an eraser-torn timeline  
Red pushpin on the floor below a map  
Patched graffiti on a mural

Carry with you  
Two glass bottles of water  
one empty and one full  
never do anything by halves  
Fake passport  
take the picture on a bad day  
no one will ever see it  
Headphones, only headphones  
listen to white noise  
thoughts drown out other people

Run your palm along every fence  
Scrape your hands raw until your fingerprints cannot identify you  
Prisoner with a metal cup against the bars  
I need help  
I need help  
Please help me.

Turn left at the first park  
Spend the night on a bench  
Do not sleep  
Step lightly over museum tiles  
Flash photography prohibited  
Leave no marks  
Tiptoe down steps  
Do not bend your knees  
Anticipate a misstep that will not come

Take the elevator  
Press into the corner until the mirrors don't catch your reflection  
Count teeth from the windows  
Numbers add subtract and multiply until they create emotions  
Ignore it  
Ignore it  
Don't say anything.

Have a glass of water  
Buy a print at the museum and sign your name at the bottom  
Scribble dates horizontally across a sheet of paper  
Press tiny gold stickers to a map

*Taylor Houlihan*  
DAUGHTER OF A PRIEST,  
BUT A SISTER TO SIN

Black tar pumps throughout her arteries through her veins to the capillaries until they returned to the heart, making her breathe heavily with depression. Her flaming hair ignites the cynical undertone of her conversation. When she laughs with wholeheartedness, she appears to be on the verge of crying. Recently, she has been walking with the weight of unmet expectations wheezing down her freckled neck, and she sits limply as if only held up by loose strings. She overdoses on her introversion until she's drunk enough to join the creatures of the night. She is morally ambiguous on Saturday nights, yet on Sunday morning takes communion from her father.

*Taylor Houliban*

## THROUGH THE LOOKING GLASS

The mirrors whisper. The four-cornered demi-god feeds off the power the viewer surrenders. Decadent murmurs distinguishable only by watering eyes. Salt water stains the glass. Narcissism rusts the frame, and an aroma of social pressures and disappointment begins to pervade, suffocating the vulnerable. Sour breath fogs the glass, revealing fingerprints. Mirrors have an ethereal ability to reflect self-consciousness and echo crippling insecurity. They don't tell the truth, they tells our truths. They will never tell the truth unless you make them. They transforms self-obsession into self-loathing. A daily ritual mutated into a sacrilegious sacrifice.

*Sarah Huttenlocher*

## THIRTEEN

My mother once asked me what I feared most in the whole world. I was thirteen with skinny limbs and unbrushed hair, and in reality my greatest fear was that I'd be stunted by some unwillingness to become an adult, yet unable to remain a child. But I was thirteen, and I didn't know what I was afraid of besides how my history teacher stared at my legs and the way the popular girls somehow knew when to flip their hair over their shoulders and laugh.

I also knew I was afraid of my brain, and my mother's. I was scared of being different, scared of what made me different, scared of who made me different. Scared of who made me.

The problem was, my father said once, that my mother was sick, but she wasn't dying. Dad didn't come home for a long time after that one, but that wasn't too weird, since he was almost never home anyway. He had an apartment in the city, so he could commute to work more easily apparently. My mother and I, and Dad when he was home, had The Big Stone House in a suburb where everyone hired Bryce Aarons from down the street to mow the lawn because there were no fathers to do it. Sure there were a few new families with starry eyes and drooling toddlers, and the fathers still took the train home each night, but it would never last.

I did not love my father. There is nothing malicious in that statement, because I didn't hate him either. I could list for you the things I loved: my big orange cat Ginger, my Grandma Louise, waking up when the sky was blue but you could still see the moon, books about tragic girls with big eyes, Pokemon cards, my mother. My mother. My father was not on this list because I never even considered adding him. He was

that man who came home every once in a while to give me new toys and lecture me about sports looking good on a college application, and couldn't I at least try? Even just tennis or golf? "Maybe if Cassandra played a sport you would love her, right, Bill?" my mom once asked, at my twelfth birthday dinner. That was a bad night all around. My father hated the salmon and refused to give the waitress a tip for bringing him subpar food. My mother called Dad a bastard and threw a fifty dollar glass of wine at him. I was in the awkward phase that I referred to as "the side-bangs year," so I just hid behind my hair.

The doctors called me a lot of things when I was little, but nervous was the one I heard most often. So I downed baby-Xanax and wet the bed until I was ten. My father called me a difficult child, and my mother would scream at him that I was mentally ill and he would scream back that he knew where I got it from. That much was true, I knew where I got it, too. My mother didn't have anxiety, but she had something, that was for sure. She wasn't like the mothers in our suburb, she was beautiful and young and she wasn't afraid of anything in the whole wide world. She didn't brush her hair or mine, never signed me up for ballet lessons or soccer, and sometimes she let me skip school so we could go to the beach when it was empty and walk into the waves with our clothes still on and our feet bare. I loved her more than I knew how to love anyone, and because of that I feared her. The more you love someone, the more power they have over you, that's one concept I understood even at thirteen.

The night my mother asked me what I was most afraid of was also the first day of eighth grade, my last first-day I'd have at Allington Country Day Middle School. Before going to Allington Preparatory. Schools in Allington were always private schools; any public school kids would've been bused to the next county. Maybe that wasn't fair, but I guess the school districts figured that anyone without the money for prep schools didn't belong in Allington.

I didn't want to answer her question, so I pushed the Italian take-out around on my plate. Another thing that separated my mother from others in Allington was her utter inability to cook anything edible. I decided to change the subject. "I asked my teachers to call me Cassie," I said, knowing it would stop her in her tracks.

“Cassandra, no. I did not name you after my mother so you could shorten it to such a troglodytic nickname,” Mom gasped.

“What is caveman-like about Cassie? It’s cute! Cassandra makes me sound like a sixty-year-old nun who smells like off-brand Abercrombie perfume,” I retorted. Mom liked to throw words like troglodytic into our everyday conversations to make sure I was reading all the books she recommended and looking up words I didn’t know. Not that troglodyte was much of a test; it’s what I called Sam Orson in third grade when he spilled lemonade on my dress. “Besides, your mom doesn’t even go by Cassandra, she hates it”

“I don’t know why she insists on Louise, but regardless I named you after her. Be proud, Cassandra.” My mother reached out to stroke my cheek, as she always did in her more tender moments. I sometimes got the feeling she was trying to memorize my features.

I looked both nothing and everything like Mom. She had black hair and black eyes, olive skin and hips that curved out and made people watch her every move. I had my father’s dirty blonde hair, which was always tangled, and green eyes that hadn’t come from either of my parents; my father joked they were the mailman’s. I was too skinny and almost sickly-pale, with freckles on the bridge of my nose. I was finally getting breasts, maybe I was hinting at a waist, but I was almost nothing like my mother. Except something subtle in the face. That’s what she told me; I had her face. Same round eyes, same full lips, same curve of the chin. My mother once said that looking at me was looking into a mirror of who she’d be if the artist was working in pastels. She also said I was beautiful, like her, but I knew enough to know that wasn’t true. I’d mentioned as much, and she’d simply reminded me that thirteen-year-old girls never know what beautiful is, and that perhaps I should reserve my judgment.

“I’m not ashamed of the name, but my friends call me Cassie” I looked down at my plate again. My friends did call me Cassie, but they weren’t really my friends. I had a group of girls who I sat with at lunch and who I swayed awkwardly next to at middle school dances, but there was always a wall between us. They couldn’t quite understand my quiet life painting and reading in the Big Stone House with my mother

and I couldn't quite understand why they giggled when nothing was funny and spent fifty dollars on tank-tops with paint stains that they could have made themselves. I had always wished I could get along better with people my own age, but my mom had purposely raised me into some facsimile of an adult. As much as I yearned to be a part of the ocean that was the cafeteria, trading stories and riding the wicked tides of adolescence, I always seemed to find myself observing from my own island, stranded alone in that hormonal sea. So yeah, my friends called me Cassie, and the nickname almost made me feel like I was connected to them, but never quite enough to satisfy what I needed.

I wasn't a complete loner, and perhaps that's what kept me from going insane. It's funny, though—my one and only true friend didn't call me by my name at all. Jack Wollstone had lived next door since we were both born in January of 1996. We grew up lying on the roof of my house, naming the stars and talking about things too big to understand. He called me Bramble, because when we were kids and he yelled my name, I'd always drop down out of a tree, hair coated in leaves and knees scraped with bark. I looked just like a bramble, so much so that even Mom called me that for a while, but Jack was the only one who stuck to it.

Jack and I were connected by our freedom. In this quiet beachside suburb where mothers buttoned their children's coats and cut the crusts off of sandwiches, Jack and I were the wild children. My mom didn't believe in rules, and Jack's great-aunt had taken him in when his dad got hooked on Vicodin, but she really didn't care for parenting. We had the run of Allington and the hills behind our houses, an unlimited amount of money, and pretty much nobody but each other. He knew my bones so well that he screamed first when I fell off the jungle gym and broke my ankle. I knew his lungs so well that I had his inhaler out before he even started to wheeze with an asthma attack. He went to Allington Country Day, but he was in the other lunch period, and spent the mandatory socializing time with some friends from his soccer team. Most people at school probably didn't know that we were best friends, or that we raced each other home from the bus stop every single day, heading to my room to listen to Rise Against and play Connect Four.

“Regardless, Cassandra,” she repeated. “Tell your teachers your proper name tomorrow.” She gave the “I mean it” look, but I still rolled my eyes.

“I’m going out,” I told her, raising my eyes to meet hers. They were black and flashing and inscrutable, just like always.

“Out, out, out,” Mom cried, “All you ever do is go out. Try telling me when you’re going to be in.” She pushed her plate away, watching me with that dark gaze until I wanted to take back every word I’d ever said.

“Jack and I were gonna go to the beach. I could stay home, though,” I offered. Jack would understand. Some days, my mother wanted me nowhere near her; other days, she couldn’t stand me leaving.

“No, no.” My mother deflated, her shoulders slumping and her breath leaving her in a sigh so large her lungs must have gone concave. “Have fun with Jack, sweetie. I’ll paint, I had a new painting I was working on.”

I suppose it says something about me that I leapt up from the table like I was scared she’d change her mind. My mother was my sun and my moon, and she controlled my ocean. Some days I loved her sweet like the waves on my feet, some days the tide came in strong and wild and I didn’t know if I loved her at all.

“I love you, Cassandra, don’t forget it,” she said as I headed to get my sweatshirt. The nights were unusually cold for early September.

“Love you too, Mom,” I told her, going back to kiss her cheek. There was something unspoken in that moment that thirteen-year-olds with bony elbows can’t quite grasp. Not till they’re sixteen with bruised knees and a nasty taste in their mouth, realizing that life blows even worse than they do.

That night, Jack and I sat in the cove we’d found just off the beach when we were nine. It was secluded, a good place to scream until your lungs broke, letting the stones take your sound and bury it. We talked until midnight; I can’t remember anymore what we talked about. I just know that I was happy when I got home that night. Mom wasn’t in her studio when I got back, so I checked her room. She was sleeping, and for a moment I felt like I was seeing something forbidden. My mother rarely slept, and never when I could see her. I looked at her for the longest time before I went to bed myself.

When I woke up the next morning, my mother was gone.

\* \* \*

My father didn't understand what was happening. I knew that because he kept saying over and over again "I don't understand what is happening." I really would have enjoyed slapping him, but Grandma Louise was there, and she was the one who taught me to save spiders by putting them in a glass and taking them outside. She wouldn't condone violence, even against my father, and she didn't like him any more than I did.

"We can't very well move her to the city, but I can't handle coming back here every night and getting to the office every morning. Who knows how long it will be until Selena gets over her tantrum, or whatever this is, and decides to come back? I can't deal with that many hours on the train." My dad was pacing the floor as he spoke, checking his watch every few minutes as if to remind us that he had better places to be. I also had places I'd rather be, even school, since I didn't like the idea of missing class on the second day of the year. "You could stay with her." Dad stopped pacing and fixed his gaze on Grandma Louise, who was sitting perched on the couch, a placating expression on her face. If I had gone over to her, she would have wrapped me in a big hug and held me while I cried. But I was thirteen, so I sat across the room in an old armchair, my knees pulled up to my chest and my hair in my eyes.

I knew Grandma Louise could not uproot from her house in Yonkers, could not move her two dogs or her china cabinet, could not leave her bridge friends and the cemetery where Grandpa Liam was buried. I also knew that, for me, Grandma would do all of that. I couldn't let her, I just couldn't.

"I'd be fine on my own, Dad. Jack and Mrs. Wollstone are right next door, Martha's here, and you aren't that far. Mom's never been gone too long." That was true, Mom had done this before, left suddenly, and been back only days later. This time was different, though, and we all knew it. Normally, she'd drive me to Grandma Louise's before she went off on some undefined trip. Normally, she didn't take her favorite photo of the two of us, or her paints, or her favorite dresses. I wanted to reassure my

father and grandmother that Mom would be back soon soon soon, and that thirteen was old enough to be a big girl. But I didn't know whether any of that was true.

My father wanted to accept my offer, to leave me here and get back to the city, forgetting I'd even called him this morning. Forgetting that I needed him for more than birthday cards and tuition. But Grandma Louise was watching him with the same eyes that my mother had, and he didn't want to seem like a bad father, even if we all already knew he was. "Stay here all alone? Well, not alone, I suppose, not if Martha's here." Martha was our maid, a small, quiet German woman who spoke with a heavy accent in the rare moments she spoke. The kind of person who was always there, yet never really there at all. She wouldn't watch me, but we could pretend that she would.

"Seriously." I turned towards Grandma Louise, knowing that the decision would be hers in the end. "I'd be totally fine. I know everyone on this street, and if I need anything, they'll help."

"You could fall down the stairs, or set the house on fire, or forget to feed the cat!" I wasn't used to hearing Grandma Louise sound worried, and it left something unsettled deep inside of me, like seeing a grown-up cry or a teacher buying underwear.

"I'll carry my cell phone, and I've never forgotten to feed Ginger!" I protested. "Grandma, you can't just leave everything for this. It'll be okay." I kept my voice smooth, the same voice I used when Mom was angry at Dad and throwing cereal boxes. It never worked on Mom, and I doubted it would work on Grandma either, but I was giving it a try.

Eventually, Grandma Louise caved. She knew, as well as I did, that she had too many responsibilities back home to move in on a second's notice. "If she isn't back by next Monday, then I'm coming to stay. I will not have you alone in this house for more than a week. If it wasn't your first week of school, I'd have you coming back home with me today." Grandma said all of this more to herself than to me. She was justifying. We all knew that I was only thirteen, and that leaving me alone couldn't possibly end well. But, in the typical way of my family, we were all trying to ignore those facts. I think, in part, we all still believed Mom would be back by the time we woke up the next morning.

Eventually, Dad and Grandma Louise both left, and I was alone in The Big Stone House. I felt their absence more acutely than I had expected. Suddenly, nobody was watching me, and I could do anything I wanted at all. My mother had never given me any rules, but the freedom I felt now was different nonetheless. I could be anyone, anyone at all, and nobody would be there to see.

It's a powerful thing, to be thirteen and to feel, even for a moment, like nobody can see you.

Something my mom always told me when she had too much wine: we get two chances in life, a chance to be who we want to be, and if that fails, a chance to be who everyone else wants us to be. My mother thought she had failed at both. I was thirteen, and my mom had left me, so I knew I'd failed at the latter. Nothing was left but to take a stab at the one I'd been avoiding. The only problem was, I didn't have the slightest idea who I wanted to be.

On the first day of my independence, I tried on my mother's clothes, even her underwear. I admired my skinny body in a lace bra two sizes too big, and the red dress she'd outgrown which laid on me perfectly. I painted my face, red lips, lined eyes, mascaraed lashes. I looked good, but in a way that scared me. I walked around in my own underwear, hair loose and messy, trying to be seductive, or some eighth grade version of it. I mixed vodka and root beer and got so drunk my head spun. I put on clothes and called Jack and we went down to the beach, vodka clutched in his palms, trying to pretend it didn't make either of us sick. I'd only had wine and champagne before, at weddings, or at dinner when we took that trip to Paris. But the vodka felt good when it burned a trail down my throat, like some kind of fiery reminder that I was all grown up. Even though somewhere inside, I knew that I wasn't.

Jack and I slept that night curled up in the fort of blankets we had made on the roof of The Big Stone House. He fell asleep first, and I stayed awake as long as I could, trying to figure out if the stars looked the same that day as they had the day before.

\* \* \*

I woke up with my face smeared by lipstick and my head feeling like a battleground. Jack went home to shower before school, and I washed my face. In the kitchen, Martha had left hot chocolate and two Advils, and I realized she knew everything. She'd spent the day before cleaning out the attic, and shouldn't have been able to see anything I did, but maybe she'd been thirteen once, too, as hard as that was to imagine.

I put on my normal clothes: skirt, woolen socks, Doc Martins, over-sized sweater. My father said I dressed like a Catholic school girl mixed with an orphan. My mother said it was fresh, hipster, grandmother meets Lolita. Jack said I dressed just like myself. That's why I loved Jack; he understood somehow that combat boots and flouncy skirts could be combined to make an image of a girl like me. I dressed the way I did because I liked the clothes that I liked, and even if I'd never win any awards for fashion, I felt comfortable in my clothes, which was good, because I didn't feel very comfortable in my own skin.

At thirteen, there wasn't much I could say that I liked about myself. I never wore makeup or brushed my hair, and my posture was mediocre at best. I was quiet and read too much and only smiled during art class. My friends were cool, and thought I belonged at the edge of their lunch table because the boys said I was pretty and my mother was exotic, and even if I was all the things they hated in the nerdy girls, it was okay because I had skinny thighs and let Jimmy Benson get to second base in the back of the library. Those were all the things I knew were me, and all the things that I secretly hated. All of the things that kept me from playing volleyball and shopping all weekend and caring about what color I painted my nails. I wanted so badly to be normal, to act like the other kids and to not be pretending. It hadn't occurred to me yet that everyone else was pretending as well, that all people are unique, and the ones who are good at middle school are the ones who learn to hide it. I never figured out how to hide who I was. I used to torture myself with the thoughts of who I could be, if I went to school one day and talked and laughed and flirted with boys rather than staring into the distance. I knew that if I wanted to, I could act normal, dress normal, be normal. But somehow, every time I swore to myself that I would change, I ended up thinking

of my mother's face. "Don't you ever try to be anyone besides my Cassandra," she always used to say to me. I'd gone into middle school thinking I could be myself, and it was too late to fix things.

I walked to school that morning, even though it was raining and any other day I'd have caught the bus. My head wasn't up to dealing with the noise of the morning school bus, and I didn't think my heart was up to it, either. I needed to be alone, because I knew that once I arrived at school, nobody would let me alone for even a second. I knew that, by the time school started, news of my mom's departure would have spread. The dominant feature of a town like Allington is that everyone knows everything about everyone else. And this was big news. Allington was a town of mothers. Missing fathers were common, expected even. Sure, we all had dads to pay the bills, but mothers made up the life of Allington. They organized bake sales, drove you to the mall, and went to PTA meetings to complain about how your history teacher still looked at your legs and that gym classes fostered unhealthy competition.

When I got to school, people kept coming up to me, people I never even talked to. They were asking if I was alright, if I'd be okay. I was even the focus of the lunchtime conversation, which had never happened before. The girls were intrigued, I was much more interesting now than before, and they were attracted to grief. All teenagers are, in a sickening way, like it makes them important if they grab a piece of someone's sorrow, get close enough to warm their hands but not so close that it burns.

Jenny Dubaso, who was probably the most popular girl in the eighth grade if you judged it by how well her hair held curls and her teeth held shine, turned to me at lunch. Though I sat at her sacred table, Jenny rarely even looked at me. It was as if she'd made the executive decision that I could sit at the popular table, but that didn't mean I was her responsibility. Rumor had it that she was under pressure from Jimmy Benson, who was the most popular boy, and who regularly bragged to his friends that he was the boy I'd lose my virginity to someday in the indiscernible future. I didn't care much about him saying that, because as much as eighth graders talk a big game about sex, we all knew we were too young for it. I'd never really spoken to Jimmy Benson, besides saying hi the day he gave me my first kiss, and I hadn't so much as

looked him in the eyes since. It was on the last day of seventh grade that he'd made the virginity proclamation to his friends, and on orientation day, a week before my mother left, that I'd let him kiss me and put his hands under my shirt. I wondered, vaguely, whether if he got his way I'd still sit at the popular table, or if Jenny's acceptance would break with my hymen. Of course, I'd sat with them since the last month of sixth grade, long before anyone talked about sex, so it didn't seem that there was a direct correlation. Even so, I'd always felt that Jenny was watching me, gauging my usefulness. She had a familiar, skeptical look in her eyes when she addressed me directly the day after my mother left.

"Cassie, do you still love your mom?" she asked. I knew in that moment that Jenny and I were the same, both smart and both a little bit off. She hid it better, but she was too cold, too calculating, too self-aware to be anything near normal. She wanted her question to sting, and it did.

I didn't know how to answer her. I guess the truth was that it hadn't occurred to me to feel any differently about my mother than I had the day before. Her being gone, it wasn't the change everyone thought it was. Yeah, she wasn't there anymore, but sometimes it felt like she never had been in the first place. I had known since I was young that my mother was a transient creature, that she wasn't able to stay tied down. I felt as though I'd been waiting my whole life for this to happen, and even though being abandoned hurt like my ribs were breaking open, there was something comforting in knowing that the worst had happened, and I wouldn't have to wait for it anymore. I told none of this to Jenny Dubaso.

"Yeah, I still love her. She's my mom." I looked away, towards the stretch of windows along the back wall. The rain had cleared, and it was lovely outside.

"I don't think I could love my mother anymore if she left me. I mean, if she did that, I'd have to think that she didn't love me." Jenny's voice was smooth and dangerous. She was trying to make me cry, or yell, or storm away. I wasn't going to react. Her words weren't having their desired effect, because she wasn't telling me anything that I didn't already know. Did she really think I hadn't already considered the possibility that my mother didn't love me? Did she really think I hadn't already sobbed

and ripped my own hair out? Did she really think that anything she said would hurt, when I barely even knew her, and when she didn't know my mother at all? I knew my mom, knew her better than I knew myself. And I knew that she loved me, maybe not well, maybe not enough, but certainly more than she loved anything else in the world besides herself.

"Yeah. You would have to think that, wouldn't you?" I stayed calm enough to aggravate Jenny, but she was smart enough to not let it show. She couldn't give away the games she played, not if she wanted to keep everyone else playing along. Girls, despite their portrayal in the media, will normally balk if things get too mean. Teenage girls have more sympathy than people think.

"I bet it's wicked having the house to yourself," another girl, Sicily, butted in to end the awkward silence. "You can do anything you want, right?"

"Yeah, it's not too bad." I threw Sicily a rare smile, because she was generally nice and I actually liked her. She always made an effort to talk to me, which was more than could be said for several of the girls at the table. She was also always the one who texted me if the whole group was making plans, which I sometimes went to even if I knew I'd just awkwardly orbit around the edges. It was nice to feel included. I'd never wanted to be a loner; I'd wanted to be just like Sicily and the other girls.

"Oh my god. You know what you should do? You should throw a party." This was from Amber, who was perhaps the most boy-crazy of the group, and who certainly had the best breasts. "I love parties, I can help you plan one!"

"Amber's right." Jenny met my eyes and smirked. "You should throw a party. We can welcome back the school year in the best way." Parties were what Jenny's older brother was famous for at the high school, and over the course of middle school he'd helped her throw some tamed (since the parents were upstairs) versions of his ragers. Basically the same but without the booze and with a whole lot more spin the bottle. "I bet your parents have a ton of alcohol, too." She was crossing into a territory none of us had dreamed of. Middle school was typically thought of, even by those of us in it, as too young for unsupervised parties and too young for getting drunk. Of course, I'd already broken the drinking rule myself, but what Jenny was suggesting was very dif-

ferent. It was one thing to get drunk with Jack and pretend to be an adult, but it was another thing to let the entire eighth grade masquerade as high schoolers in *my* house.

"I don't know," was all I said.

Jenny rolled her eyes. "Come *on*, it's not as though we'll trash the place. Just a little party, close friends only."

"It would be so much fun, Cassie," Amber chimed in. Soon the whole table was pleading. Only Sicily remained quiet, looking at my face as if she wanted to read my reaction. I tried to tell her with my eyes that things were already out of my control, and that we should both just let go.

\* \* \*

"I still can't believe you said yes, Bramble, you have no idea what you're getting yourself into." Jack and I were sitting on my bed, pretending to watch TV but really thinking anxious thoughts about our impending doom. "You could get in so much trouble, and me, too, just for helping you." He was going to help anyway, though, going to help make it the best party possible. There was nothing Jack wouldn't do for me, just as there was nothing that I wouldn't do for him. From the minute I'd announced I was throwing a party, the two of us knew we were in it together.

"They were fairly persuasive, and besides, I've got nothing better to do with my Friday. This place is too empty; it needs life. I'm starting to feel like I'm dying." These were all things I'd never have told anyone but Jack. I was like a completely different person with him, an open person, a fun person, a real, live, breathing person. At school sometimes, I felt like I was caving in, but with Jack, I felt like I was expanding.

"What if your mom comes home?" he asked, and I shrugged.

"It wouldn't even bother me. I wouldn't care if I got in trouble. If that happened, all that would really matter was that she came home," I told him honestly. I wanted my story to be one of the ones where the mother returns right in time for a climactic scene. I wanted there to be yelling, crying, accusations and blame. I wanted there to be healing, a resolution to follow that final swell of conflict. I wanted my mother to be home. I

think, in a way, I was hoping that having the party would draw my mother back, that she'd have to come and stop me from making such horrible decisions.

"If it means she comes back, I don't care if we get in trouble, either." Jack took my hand and squeezed. "Is Jimmy Benson coming? Are you going to hook up with him?" Jack was the only person who knew about what I'd done with Jimmy. Well, the only person that I'd told, but I was sure Jimmy had told plenty of his friends, so it really wasn't much of a secret. Jack hated Jimmy Benson, but so long as I wasn't getting hurt, he didn't care who I made out with.

Both Jack and I knew that someday we'd end up together, probably married with three kids, living somewhere far away from Allington. We knew that in the end, it was the two of us, but we weren't in any rush to get there. We didn't want to be anchors holding each other down; we wanted to explore our own worlds, and find our way back to each other in the end. I don't think we ever explicitly said any of this, but it was something we were in agreement about, even without words. Kind of like how we agreed that the worst thing we could ever become was our parents.

"He'll probably be there. All I know is, I'm not having sex with him. Can you even imagine? And he probably wouldn't know what to do any more than I would."

"He's so convinced he's going to do you, it's getting ridiculous. I think somebody needs to remind him that he's fourteen and not Casanova. But I didn't mean sex."

"No, I know what you meant, and I still don't know the answer. I'll kiss him back if he kisses me. You know how I am with the kids from school, I only react to direct stimuli. It's up to him if he wants to hook up. If he's even sober enough to find my mouth." Jack laughed at that, and we both lay back on the bed, heads turned towards each other. Our smiles faded, and for a few minutes, we were silent.

"I love you more than anything else in the world. Even if your mom never comes home, it'll be okay. I promise, I won't let you be alone." I felt a tear leak out of my eye, and I nodded, unable to speak through the lump in my throat. Only Jack knew how deeply lonely I truly was. I was as needy as any other little girl, I was just better at pretending I didn't have needs. With the way Mom was, it was easier to act self-sufficient, even if I didn't feel it.

“But what if I never see her again? I love her.” My voice broke, and the tears came heavily. At thirteen, I hated to cry in front of anyone, even Jack. But sometimes I was less powerful than the ocean inside me, which constantly begged for release.

“I know you do. I’m sorry,” Jack wiped my cheeks with his sleeve. For a rare moment, Jack and I were thinking different things. I was thinking about how much I missed my mother. Jack was thinking about how much he wished he could kill her.

Or perhaps, this isn’t how any of it happened. I’m looking back after years of growth. It’s doubtful we truly spoke so eloquently, or that I could really tell exactly what he thought. Perhaps it’s even doubtful that we knew, even then, that we’d end up together. But this is how I remember that day, and really, the importance of a day lies in how you remember it.

Like my favorite memory of my mother. I was seven, and she took me for a day in the city. We bought hot dogs from a street-stand, went to her favorite department store to try on thousand-dollar designer dresses, had our hair done at a famous salon. It was the best day of my entire life. My mother told me, “Anything you ask for today, you can have it. Just for this one day.” And she kept to that proclamation. When I asked her for a stuffed animal so large I couldn’t even carry it, she simply nodded her head and had someone help us get it into the car. When I asked if we could go to the park, and lie on the ground, just to see what the world must look like to bugs, she didn’t even hesitate. For one day, I had more freedom than a seven-year-old knows what to do with, and I didn’t think there would ever be anyone as perfect as my mom.

I cherished that memory for years. It wasn’t until I was older, at some concert, that I realized something had been missing from my perfect memory. It wasn’t until I learned to recognize the scent of marijuana that I figured out why Mom had been so keen to go along with a seven-year-old’s whims. Still, for years that memory was this shining light whenever things got bad. So you can see what I mean when I say that it’s really not about what happened, it’s all about how it’s remembered.

\* \* \*

Jack and I held hands while we waited for the first guest to arrive. We'd spent all week getting everything ready, focusing wholly on making everything perfect. It was a way to distract myself from the pain of every hour that passed without my mother's car pulling into the driveway. It was a distraction, and I think now that party might have been what saved me, in that first week alone, from falling into a place too dark to find my way out of.

It was Jack's idea to pour out half of the alcohol in all the liquor bottles and fill them in with water. The guests would still get drunk, but not nearly so much. We both knew there would be hell to pay next time Dad came home and reached for some Jack, and saw that all that was left were the watery dregs that hadn't been finished at the party, but neither of us were too worried. My father knew, as did I, that he couldn't really punish me. He'd given up his authority years earlier. Besides, he couldn't condemn me for crimes he himself was guilty of.

Amber arrived first, with Sicily in tow. They were both wearing masterfully applied makeup, which I knew must be the work of Sicily's older sister. If it had been any other party, I'd have had makeup on, too. Mom would have done it. But as it was, I had simply brushed my hair and put on my mother's old red dress. "You guys look great," Jack told them, and Sicily blushed while Amber just grinned.

"Jack Wollstone? Didn't know you'd be coming. But then again, you live next door to Cassie, don't you?" Amber assessed the two of us, and though we had stopped holding hands, we both felt a bit self-conscious. We'd forgotten that nobody knew we were friends.

"Who all is coming again?" I asked to change the subject.

"Jenny's on her way, along with Tiff, Ariana, and Lana. The rest of the girls are coming later. And then all the baseball boys are coming. Jenny said she invited a few girls from yearbook, and I think some freshman boys as well." That was big news to drop. High school boys at my house, probably from the actual high school baseball team. All the popular boys in Allington played baseball.

"Cool," I said, not feeling particularly cool in the least. My palms were starting to sweat, and I was getting more nervous by the second. "Um, well, come in. There's

some chips and drinks in the dining room. Sicily, do you remember where it is?" I asked, wondering if I should lead them or stay by the door. Sicily had only been to my house once or twice, and Amber had never been at all.

"I remember." Sicily smiled, and I felt slightly more at ease. When the girls walked away, Jack took my hand again.

"It'll be alright," he said, in the same voice he used when I had nightmares at sleepovers.

"I know," I replied, even though I didn't know at all.

More people arrived, and eventually someone, probably one of the boys, opened up the alcohol. Everyone drank out of plastic cups, their faces taut with excitement at breaking the rules. I told myself I wouldn't drink anything, but then I did. I drank a lot, compensating for the fact that I knew it was all half-water. Girls were acting drunker than they could possibly be. "How can you have three full cups?" A girl I didn't really know asked me. "I've had one, and my head is spinning." I didn't tell her that technically I'd only had one and a half, and she'd had barely even a half. I didn't really say anything to anyone. That's what I remember most clearly about that night. I was silent; I didn't speak. Nobody seemed to notice.

Eventually, Jimmy Benson found me, and he kissed me really hard and sloppy. I realized that in all honesty, he didn't know any more about kissing than I did. I didn't care. We went to my room, and he was way more excited than he should have been, because even though I was wasted, I was acutely aware that I wasn't really ready for anything at all. He kissed and kissed, and I kept my eyes open and stared at the wall and wondered what he saw in me that made him want to touch me. I wondered how long it would take until he ran away. I wondered if I could hold anyone's interest for long. If I hadn't been enough for my mother, who could I ever be enough for?

There was a picture on the wall of my room, of me and my mother, taken when I was ten or eleven. In it, we were standing on the beach, our arms wrapped around each other and our hair tangled from saltwater and wind. I remembered how my mother had approached a complete stranger, someone we'd never seen before, and asked them to take that picture. I suppose it wasn't a big deal, but at the time, I was shocked

at how bold Mom could be. I wondered if I'd ever be brave like her. I think I knew though, even then, that I wouldn't be.

My mother was beautiful, exotic, strange, and powerful. She was the universe inside of one person. I hated her almost as much as I loved her, and I wanted to be her almost as much as I wanted to be nothing like her. With Jimmy Benson kissing me, I thought I should feel something, but I didn't. All I felt was loss, an empty cavern that was growing and growing; I thought I'd be consumed. Suddenly, Jimmy's mouth felt too hungry, and I knew I couldn't feed it anymore.

I pushed him off of me, stumbled away from the bed. I went over to the picture and pulled it off the wall. I held it to my chest, and everything inside me was so raw and exposed that I thought I must have turned inside out. "What does it mean," I asked Jimmy, "If someone's not dead, but they're already a ghost?"

"What are you talking about?" He looked confused, then annoyed, then a little scared when he met my eyes.

"Nothing. I'm not talking about anything or anyone." I looked at the picture again, and then I threw it to the floor with as much force as I could muster. The glass shattered everywhere. Jimmy's jaw dropped, and he got off the bed, heading for the door.

"God, Cassie. I swear, sometimes I think you really are fucking insane." I just stared at him as he left the room.

"I am," I whispered to his back. "Just like my mother."

*Sarah Huttenlocher*  
GALILEO

I loved you the way  
Galileo  
must have loved the sun  
willing to sacrifice everything  
to prove it was  
the center of his universe  
of course Galileo only stated  
what Copernicus and Kepler  
learned before him  
whereas the discovery of you  
I can only blame myself for it

I loved you  
as though we shared our bones  
like two trees who had grown so close  
that their roots  
could never be untangled  
so were our skeletons  
our rib cages expanding in unison  
to make room for air  
from each other's lungs  
and our ankles curved to fit

from lazy nights  
in your old basement bed  
where they wrapped around each other

You did not love me

*Sarah Huttenlocher*

## THE SKELETONS OF CHRISTMAS TREES:

I know the way she'll look at her feet  
and stop meeting your eyes  
and that's what you'll notice  
before anything else.

I know she'll play her music louder  
and have more passion  
about those lyrics  
than she ever did before  
because those bands  
and their sugar coated truths  
they don't just speak to her  
they listen

I know she'll still laugh  
still smile  
and if you ask what's wrong  
she'll roll her eyes  
nothing's wrong  
not outside  
just the insides  
are growing messy

She'll sleep less  
and bite her nails till they bleed  
she'll tell you about that time  
she saw a chipmunk  
run over on the road  
and what if it had been going  
somewhere  
and somewhere, someone was waiting  
she won't listen  
if you tell her it's just  
a chipmunk  
because she's talking about herself.

She'll always be asking why:

Maybe it was the time  
when she was seven  
and she climbed to the top  
of that old yellow jungle gym  
but couldn't slide to the bottom  
on the fireman's pole  
she wasn't scared of moving up  
but she was scared of heading down  
and maybe that stuck with her

Maybe it was seventh grade  
sitting alone at lunch  
because everyone said  
she was too weird

until she believed them  
and they believed themselves  
So she ate peanut butter  
and hated the taste  
looked at the cafeteria ceiling  
and tried to pretend  
she was okay

Maybe it was here and now  
and the friends she made  
after puberty  
gave her a slim  
build  
and pretty lips  
pretty eyes  
The friends who said  
her name like it was  
something they wanted  
to get off their tongue  
because they never liked her  
never will  
she's convenient  
because she's there  
and she's a pushover

Maybe it's because her science teacher  
glares at her all class  
and yells at her in the halls  
or because her history teacher  
stares at her legs

and sometimes her chest  
when he thinks she isn't looking  
or because her English teacher  
should be saving her  
since they both love poetry  
and pain  
but her English class  
has all those sweaty hands  
big grin  
boys  
and she can't read her poetry  
not in front of them

Maybe it's because those  
sweaty hands  
big grin  
boys  
say she's hot  
when they know  
she can hear them  
and it feels so much better  
than when they used  
to say she was a freak  
but she feels guilty  
for that surge of pleasure  
at whatever crude  
acceptance  
they are giving

She'll be up later and later  
and she'll start sleeping  
through French class  
instead of learning  
how to use the subjunctive tense  
and the difference between  
chapeaux and chapelle

She'll start counting  
the minutes in history  
and hiding behind her hair  
writing poetry  
which she just discovered  
as a way to make things  
beautiful  
even as they're painful  
in the margins  
of all her notes

She'll find out that why  
rhymes with die  
and ice  
rhymes with suffice  
tears  
rhymes with fears  
and she'll use them all  
to tell her notebook  
about the time her sister  
said those hurtful things  
angry angry

at the baby sister  
She'll call the poem Cloudy Eyes  
and it won't be very good  
but she'll be prouder of it  
than of anything else

She will stay home  
the day they go  
to pick a Christmas tree  
even though every year  
she runs ahead of her parents  
finding a tree  
and smiling at it  
giving it a name  
and all the love in her heart  
even though Christmas  
is the happiest thing she knows  
this year she sits with a book  
and doesn't argue  
over who can put  
the angel on top  
because she never liked it anyway  
being perched on Daddy's shoulders  
an angel in her hand  
above the world  
she never liked it anyway

The night after the decorations go up  
that will be the first time  
her mother googles

depression  
and cannot fall asleep  
because it's almost Christmas  
and her youngest is thirteen  
and should still believe in Santa  
just a little bit  
in secret  
but instead  
she reads her books  
and forgets to smile for pictures

The first time she cuts herself  
she'll feel calmer than  
ever before  
three days before Christmas

she does it because she has a C in French  
and she's always had A's  
and because she doesn't want to see  
her aunts and uncles and cousins  
they don't really know her

that's how it is  
on the first day  
when she's already upset  
looking for a trigger  
so when her mother  
yells at her for leaving  
her window open  
when it's 40 degrees

and her friends post pictures  
on Facebook  
from a party  
she wasn't invited to  
she'll pull a thumbtack  
off her bulletin board  
and use it  
to slice open  
the tender flesh  
inside her arm  
little lines that  
she knows, even then,  
she'll regret when she's older

Things will change quickly  
after that one  
She'll start sleeping under  
the Christmas tree  
her little body  
curled behind the presents  
pretending she can  
stay in the dark arms  
of something that used  
to be good

She'll ask to go to the bathroom  
during history  
She'll roam the empty hallway  
and sit in a stall  
using the jagged plastic edge

of a ruler she split in half  
to re-open her skin  
before pulling down her sleeves

She'll fail another French test  
then a math test  
and her father won't mention it  
but he'll purse his lips  
and wonder  
where his smart little girl has gone  
She won't notice  
because she'll be convinced  
that nobody sees her

She'll have more nightmares  
and she'll stop smiling all together  
and she'll forget  
that she used to be  
a real live  
human girl  
with breathing lungs  
and a heart  
that knew something besides pain

She'll remember the time  
when she was maybe ten  
and she found  
in the deepest part  
of the woods in her backyard  
a gravesite of sorts

for all the Christmas trees  
her family ever had  
and she couldn't believe  
she'd never asked before  
what her parents did with  
those pretty pines  
after the ornaments came down  
but after that  
she knew  
and she'll think those  
lovely wooden skeletons  
that used to hold an angel  
are the saddest  
and most beautiful things  
she's ever seen  
and she'll want to write poems  
about those trees  
but there's no more time

No more time  
because she'll convince herself  
on that day  
that nobody cares  
and nobody notices  
and there's no more point  
she'll call a suicide hotline  
and get a busy signal  
which will make her laugh  
but also makes her tired  
so she'll grab her father's arthritis pills

and her mother's heart medication  
and mix them in her palm

She'll learn that this isn't so easy  
as it looks in the movies  
because you have to swallow  
each pill  
one  
by  
one  
not all at once  
so it takes a while  
and it's embarrassing  
and it's undignified  
when it's this slow

She'll leave her suicide note  
on the table  
the one that tells  
all the secrets  
she thought she hid well  
and all the things  
she kept hidden  
until they ate her  
inside out  
gnawing  
on her ribs

Then she'll be dizzy  
and her head will hurt

she'll walk outside  
needing needing  
to get to that graveyard  
of Christmas's past  
because she could  
die there  
and feel no pain

She won't make it to the woods,  
she'll barely make it  
to the yard  
before she collapses  
barefoot and coatless  
in the January snow  
She'll float  
above herself  
looking at  
what seems to be  
already the corpse  
of a pretty pretty girl  
that can't smile anymore  
she'll fade into blackness  
and she won't know  
if it hurts  
outside  
or inside

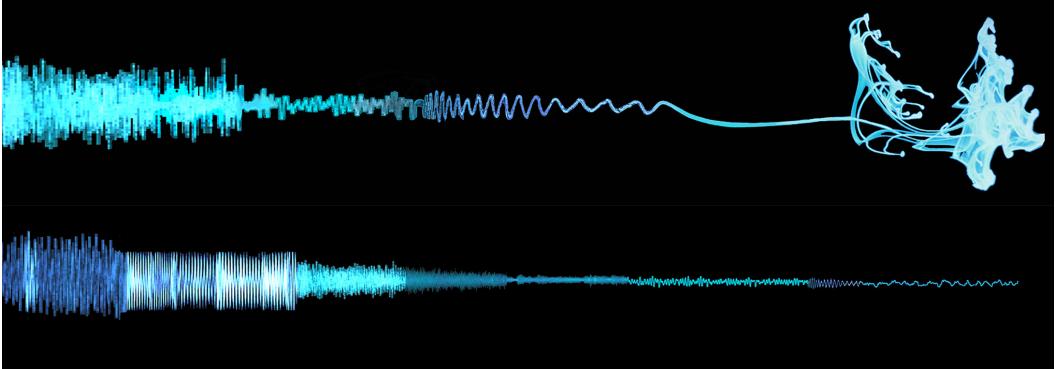
After, maybe she'll wake up  
if she's lucky  
she'll wake up

tangled in  
hospital sheets  
She'll wake up to her parents  
weary and red-eyed  
holding onto her hands  
gentle but desperate  
asking her to never  
ever  
try that again

Maybe she'll get a therapist  
who lets her read poetry out loud  
maybe things will be better  
she'll pass a French test  
kiss a boy with kind eyes  
laugh with her sister  
take walks to the park  
swing on her old swing set  
climb a tree  
write some stories  
braid her little cousin's hair

a young girl's journey  
into depression  
becomes a young girl's  
journey out  
And if she gets out  
free  
she'll know word for word  
what this poem says

and she'll know  
that maybe  
it was a little bit  
different  
with a new setting  
or timeline  
or just a different girl  
but she'll also know  
once she makes it out  
that it's the same story  
when it comes down to it  
beneath the plot  
beneath the words  
all those lost little girls  
are in the same labyrinth  
unsure  
with shaking legs  
and eyes  
they wish were tougher



*Michael Abushacra*  
DECOMPOSING COMPOSITION  
SOUND WAVEFORM AND DIGITALLY ALTERED PHOTO OF INK IN WATER MEDIUM

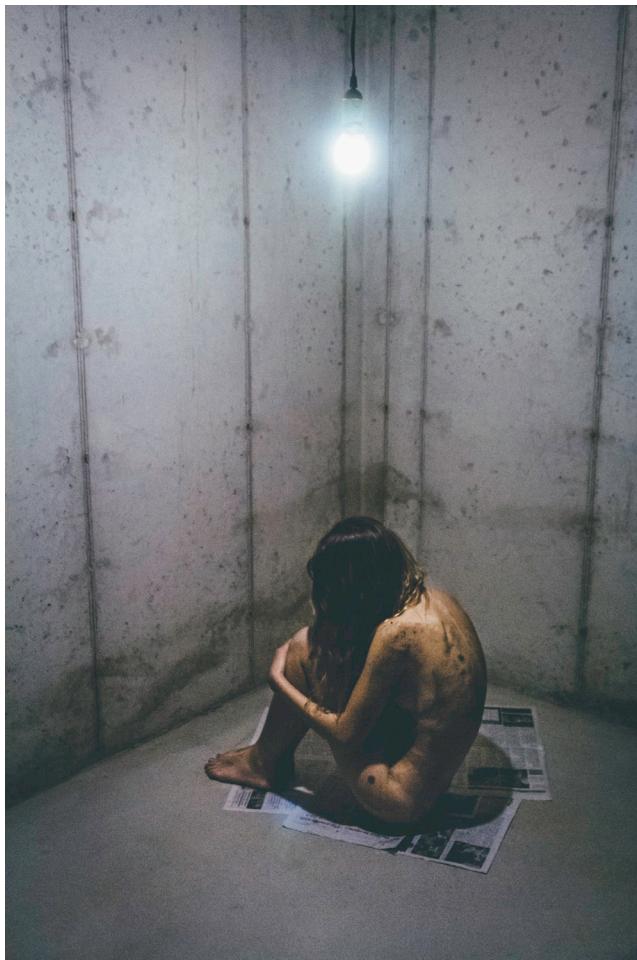


*Emily Addy*  
THE KOI POND  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY



*Michelle Belgrod*  
NARCISSISM  
PEN

*Caleb Bohn*  
CAPTIVITY EXPOSED  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY





*Marissa Butler*  
GIRL IN THE GREEN SWEATER  
WATERCOLOR



*Chloe Chung*

YOUR IMAGINATION CAN TAKE YOU ANYWHERE  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY



*Elizabeth Hinckley*  
POND-ERING  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

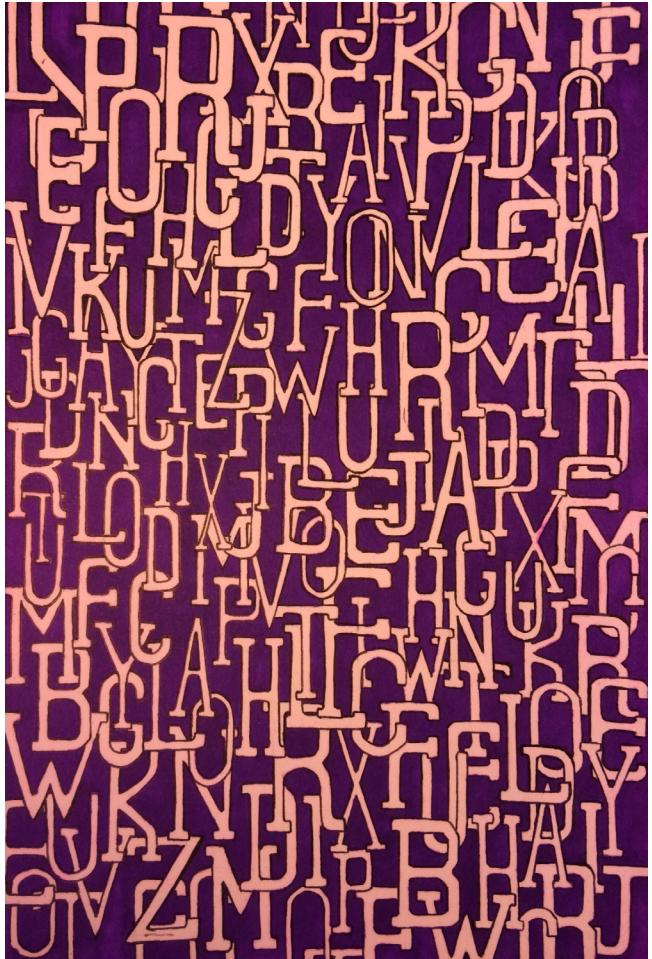


*Taylor Houliban*  
SELF-PORTRAIT  
GRAPHITE



*Matthew Kipnis*  
SUSPENSION  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

*Courtney Luk*  
SCATTERED TYPE  
INK





*Jennifer McLenon*  
FROSTY MUSHROOM  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

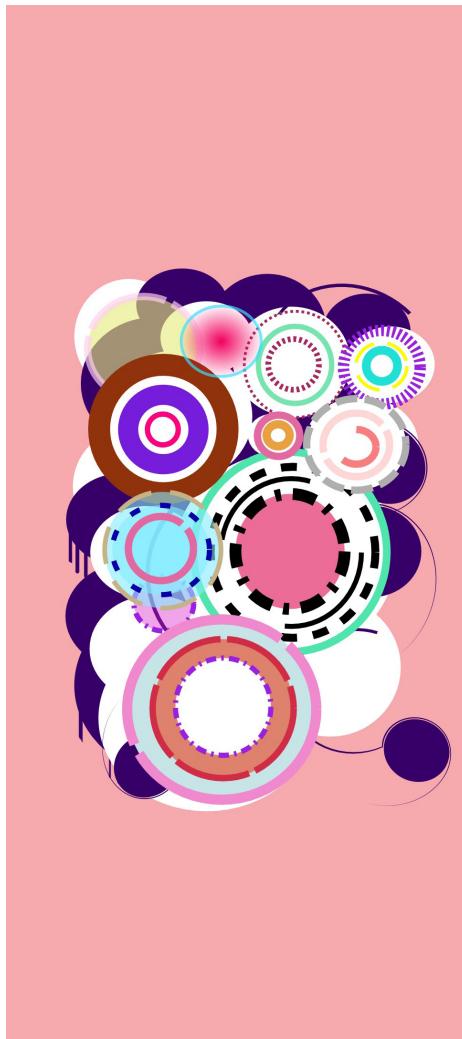


*Jennifer McLenon*  
REVERB  
MARKERS



*Jennifer McLenon*  
COSMIC VISION  
MARKERS, ACRYLIC PAINT

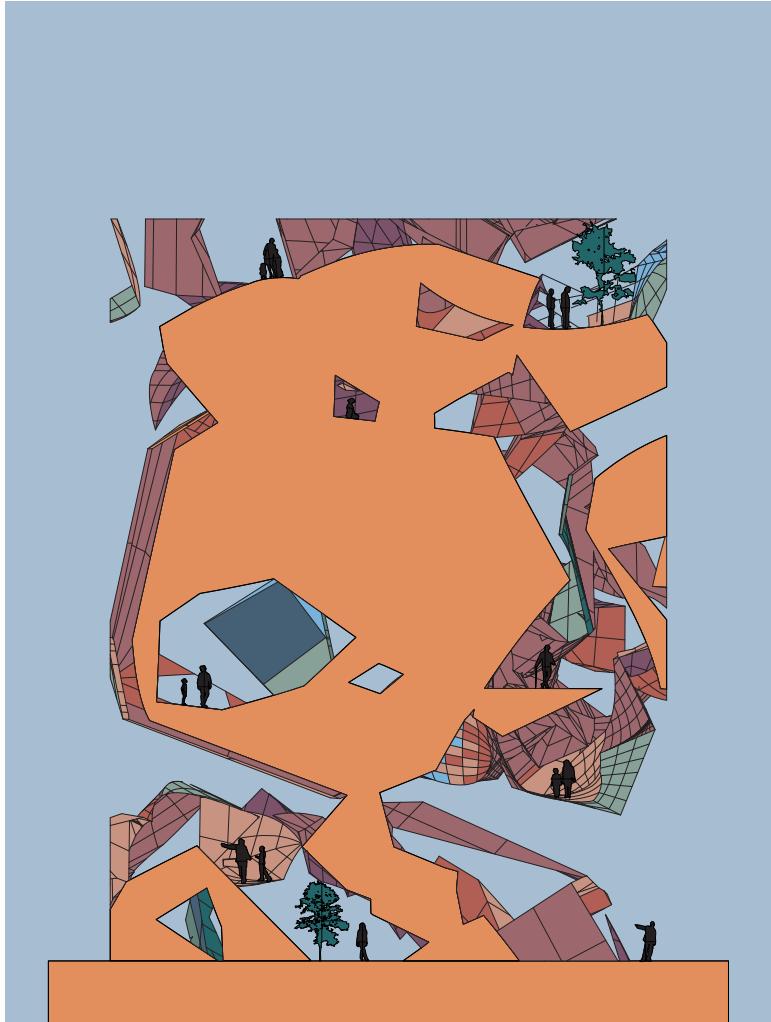
*Kaitlyn Moore*  
A JOG THROUGH HER MIND  
DIGITAL ART





*Neena Pio*  
CLOSING IN  
PENCIL

*Emily Post*  
ROCK CITY: GEODE MASS  
DIGITAL ART





*Lauren Reshef*  
DÉMANTELER  
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY



*Michelle Sheng*  
MODERN MOTHER  
DIGITAL ART



*Annie Turpin*  
**HOLDING IT TOGETHER**  
MIXED MEDIA - INK AND PAPER COLLAGE

*Jess Wolma*  
BALLERINA  
PENCIL



*Sofie Jacobs*  
EMPIRE STATE OF MIND

We were nearing the fifth hour of our bus ride to New York for the Newspaper and Lit Mag trip, and if Hannah Hassani didn't shut the fuck up about her "natural ear" for language, I was going to strangle her with my pillow.

Hannah and I had been B.F.s in seventh grade, except we didn't last F. We were congenial to each other's faces, and neither of us really had enough friends to admit we didn't like the other, so we spent our awkward phase pretending to have found friendship in one another. As we made friends we legitimately liked, though, we grew apart. Despite our first conversation in three years having been forced, I still felt a soft spot for the first girl to pull me into a bathroom and tell me my makeup made me look like "a clown's hooker."

Ah, friendship.

So it was sort of an obligation that, when our other friends couldn't, we sat together. We had a lovely, awkward, stilted conversation that bus ride. From what I caught of her oil spill of a "catch-up," her favorite book was *Outliers* by Malcolm Gladwell, she didn't tweet because she's not "conceited and egotistical," and she didn't wear makeup because it "shackles the face." She finished the monologue with a contemptuous smile. "But... your makeup looks pretty on you."

Bitch.

The soliloquy peaked with an impassioned speech about how she was thinking of becoming a vegan, par to her course, when Ms. Rozansky and Mr. Sybenga, our 27- and 30-year-old newspaper and literary magazine advisors, respectively, stood up together.

Shouted simultaneously, with unexpected enthusiasm: "We're here!"

Oh my god. They totally planned that. They totally worked that out together. That's so cute. They're going to have so much fun getting drunk with each other this week.

Ms. Rozansky, who the newspaper staff liked to call Rojack, adjusted her navy blazer, put on her glasses, and glanced at her iPhone. "Okay, guys, it's 5:25-ish now. *Jersey Boys* starts at 8, so you probably wanna put away your stuff and have dinner and get to the theatre by 7:15."

"Have fun and stay safe!" added Mr. Sybenga, who the newspaper staff didn't like to call anything.

There was a beat on the bus as we all pondered a few questions. Firstly, how was it "5:25-ish?" Rojack was literally staring at the iPhone. Come on, Rojack. Secondly, did this mean our supervisors weren't supervising us? Oh my god, this was going to be so much fun, and we were all totally going to get mugged!

\* \* \*

After a few awkward hugs between Hannah and myself, I joined the 40 high school students bobbing up and down out of the throng of the luggage like buoys in tumultuous waves. We were a gaggle of geese honking in the most inconvenient spot in the world, trying to get our shit together.

Finally, everyone had their bags and, directionless, meandered into the hotel lobby. I caught up with friends, to find Rebecca Jahnke standing with them. Oh, Rebecca. Rebecca, who sported the lovely floodwater jeans. Rebecca, who never had a question she wasn't afraid to ask. Rebecca, who Rojack had so kindly added into our room because her mother asked that she not walk anywhere alone.

We were in for a trip full of throwing Rebecca at each other in desperate attempts to not be the one stuck in the taxi or the theater with her. I foresaw of week of hot potato, or rather, hot Rebecca. ("Is that awful?" I later pondered to a friend in the safety of our hotel room. "Can you compare someone to a vegetable while they're still living?")

\* \* \*

It was, as Rojack would call it, 10:15-ish when *Jersey Boys* finally let out, and my classmates and I spilled onto the sidewalk like marbles out of a slashed plastic bag. I was exuberant. Nothing energized me more than small Italian men singing on a stage for two hours.

Purely by last name assignments (Hassani, Jacobs), Hannah and I sat next to each other in the theater and thus stood outside together, waiting for other friends to come out, when one of the younger, attractive, French pedicab drivers winked at us. “Hey, pretty girls, wanna ride?”

Rather than hear the textbook stranger danger, I thought this was adorable.

“Oh my god, Hannah, that’s so cute and charming,” I gushed, grabbing her forearm and bouncing excitedly at the possibility of abduction by foreign strangers. “Let’s go!”

“I mean, they’re obviously only doing it because they want to make \$30. Where would we even go? The stores are all closed.” Hannah sneered, crossing her arms away from my grasp.

“Nah, these stores don’t close ’til like midnight. People are everywhere, why would they close when they could still be making money off of stupid tourists?”

“Alright then, I’ll go.” She grinned at me, and for a moment, the Hannah I was semi-friends with grinned with her.

Giggling like the seventh graders we used to be, we grabbed hands when the soap bubble of our adventure, the colors of the city swirling before us, was stabbed with a rusted knife.

“Where are we going?”

Fuck. Rebecca.

“Um, Hannah and I are going out, but I think everyone else is looking for you!” I literally stood up straighter and bounced on my toes; I was just so happy and bright towards Rebecca! Also, I was craning my neck to find potential babysitters.

“No, everyone else went back to the hotel, they were tired. So I guess you’re stuck with me. May I come?”

I could feel Hannah preparing to look down on me and judge my next move, and I didn’t want to be the bitch that kicked out the girl with no friends. Especially when she was so grammatically correct. Of course Rebecca could come.

We climbed into the pedicab; Hannah and I foaming up our hands in a desperate attempt to piece our bubble back together.

“Where to?” Cab driver.

“Fifth Avenue.” Me.

“Where are we going?” Rebecca.

“Fifth Avenue.” Me.

“Why are we going to fifth avenue?” Rebecca.

“Cause it’s fun!” Hannah.

“Where on Fifth Avenue are we going?” Rebecca.

“Anywhere!” Hannah.

“Why is it fun? It’s cold.” Rebecca.

“Zip your jacket.” Me.

“Why is he going so fast? The wind’s so strong. Can we slow down?” Rebecca.

“No. That’s the point.” Me.

“I’m tired.” Rebecca.

“This is boring.” Rebecca.

“When can we go back?” Rebecca.

Our bubble was discombobulated to a point of no repair, and when we arrived at Fifth Avenue, our ignored expectations were met. Everything was closed. Except for the 30 Rock Observation Desk.

Hannah turned to me, her big, black curls a silhouette against the spacious, golden room.

“Do you want to go?” She grinned at me, and my heart warmed with excitement despite the chill in the bitter March night.

“I don’t like heights.” Rebecca quenched the excitement.

“Oh my god, Rebecca.” Hannah turned to her, hands out, exasperated. “You shouldn’t have come with us if you were just going to complain the whole time!”

“No, I think I want to come. Actually, I don’t. Why did you take me here?”

“We literally didn’t take you anywhere! You asked to come with us!” I bounced from one foot to the other, trying to look like I was trying to suppress my anger. “Do you want us to take you back?”

“Yeah, I guess.”

I hailed a regular cab this time, and we silently filed in. “Wait, I could have waited! Don’t you guys want to go?” Rebecca asked right as the cab was pulling away.

“No, you couldn’t have, Rebecca, you’re not allowed to be alone. And it’s too late now.” Hannah’s chill rivaled that of accidentally pouring water down your shirt and actually feeling your heart get colder.

Man, she is one fierce bitch, and there was an increasing respect growing for her. I was a terrible person.

We paid the driver, and took Rebecca to her room.

\* \* \*

“Wait, it’s 11:15. We still have time to go out some more,” Hannah suggested.

“Meh, okay.” I pulled on my jacket.

We shuffled in to the cab. “Empire state building?” Hannah’s Cheshire cat smile gleamed in the dark of the taxi.

However, upon arriving, the excitement faded to the realization that we were missing curfew in a strange city and I was tired. Eagerly chirping through the line in the lobby and finally into the elevator, at once I remembered my dad taking me to the Old Post Office Tower in DC. I was standing on the balcony, refusing to get in the cramped shelf that I was convinced would crash to our deaths. I had forced my dad to stop and walk down the rest of the way with me, not an option for the 83 flights I was about to ascend.

“Hannah,” I whispered behind a group of people filling into the elevator. “I hate

elevators.”

Hannah looked at me and silently took my hand. They fit the way they always had. Hers a little bigger than mine, overlapping slightly, as we walked into Claire’s to buy best friend necklaces, or into the cafeteria, swinging Vera Bradley lunch bags at our sides.

In the elevator, our ears popped, and the air temperature changed around us, but we never let go of each other’s hands. Horrified, I held her hand as I traveled through middle school. Horrified, I held it as I traveled through the Empire State Building.

We stepped out, still clutching hands.

We slowly walked to the barbed wire fence, and let go to grasp the railing.

\* \* \*

Magnificence. Below, the city lights were a congealed, misshapen mess of specks and blobs. They competed for attention: towers blinking rapidly, street lanes ablaze with cars, bridges boasting their solitude against the uninhibited sea. Above, the stars were outshone by their corrupted, earth-bound counterparts.

I was grinning into nothing and wind whipped tears from my eyes — either emotion or environment — and everything seemed pure but determined and hopeful just the same. And I grinned at my future.

I turned. And I grinned at my friend.

Hannah grinned back. “I think I’m going to write a poem about this.” She added contemptuously: “But in Farsi. I have a natural ear for language.”

*Athena Lee*

## UNSTOPPABLE

Who can tell me where this train stops?  
At Antietam or Africa?  
With four centuries of history  
It carries sweats, struggles, and sin  
Chasing the tortuous route, so dark so cruel  
Hidden underground, never be found  
Train of slaves  
Next stop: Promise Land

\* \* \*

Next stop: Promise Land  
Train of slaves  
Hidden underground, never be found  
Chasing the tortuous route, so dark so cruel  
It carries sweats, struggles, and sin  
With four centuries of history  
At Antietam or Africa?  
Who can tell me where this train stops?

*Bethany Lehman*

## MY PENNILESS WEEK: THE STORY OF A UNIVERSITY OF MICHIGAN STUDENT WITH ABSOLUTELY NO MONEY

And on the seventh day, God said, “Thou shalt rest, and spend all thine hard earned cash on Bobby Brown eyeliner and Panera paninis.” To work another week, and spend it all away another weekend, my own Achilles heel. And, Lather. Rinse. Repeat. All my life, I’ve suffered from an addiction to spending; whether it be from the thrill of the hunt for a bargain pair of designer jeans, or the convenience of getting takeout after a long day of academia and waitressing. Though I’ve always prided myself on “earning” my own money, drawing a firm line between myself and the “daddy’s MasterCard” of the world, my vice is the same and my spending equally shallow. I don’t spend my money on “necessities” (as much as I convince myself I really do *need* that coffee to survive another day). I attend a university where my every need should theoretically be taken care of. Health care? UHS. Food? Unlimited Meal Plan. Housing? I already furnished my dorm room. As far as transportation goes, I don’t have a real need to leave the campus until Thanksgiving break. My lofty tuition bill should theoretically cover my every need, but still I wonder: can I handle a week without spending? And what does a week without spending mean, for those of us whose jobs fund our tuition, or those working to send money back home? For those of us who are truly strapped for cash, how does the college experience differ from my own of relative frivolity? And I walk now, into the wild... without my plastic, and only my Mcard and room key to save me.

First of all, I am really hungry all the time and the dining hall hours — especially on the weekend — are limited. Oh, people don't eat lunch at 3 pm? Sorry, let me just tell that to my stomach real quick and maybe I won't be hungry anymore. I sullenly trudge back to my dorm and snack on CheezIts while I wonder if I am allowed to spend my Blue Bucks at Victor's without discrediting my own experiment. Between handfuls, I realize what a long week this is going to be. A tallying up of my expenses from the week before brought up the startling realization that I spent roughly \$27 on food outside of my meal plan (thanks, late night Pizza House) and that if I stopped spending money on coffee, I would be much better off. I long for Monday of last week, when I spent a reasonable \$3.78 at Au Bon Pain getting a bagel with lox between two impossibly hard and unending lectures. But honestly, what is a girl supposed to do? My classes are all over the Diag, and there's really not time between them to run to any dining hall and eat a meal, so I splurge at Chipotle or Bert's Cafe, cramming food in between cramming for exams. Sorry, I'm just trying to get an education here, I mumble to my burrito bowl. My burrito bowl doesn't respond. I'm unsurprised but disappointed all the same. After all, I did pay an absurd \$8 for it.

On my third day of not spending, when I cry happy tears at the sight of free bagels and coffee at the alumni center, I really think about what it means to tightly budget for food, or worse, to not have enough money for food at all. My version of "hungry" means not getting what I want, right when I want it. For others, this embodies a whole different way of living, from waiting to eat until free school lunch, to parking across the street from the food pantry lot to pick up the week's groceries. If spending no money for a few days has already made me conscientious of food prices, I can only imagine what it feels like to constantly be weighing comfort and hunger against pennies and dimes. I felt a pressing guilt for turning up my nose at the McDonalds and Taco Bells back in my home state. I kind of missed them and their weird smells that managed to stay in my car for what seemed like decades, or at least until I found whatever offending piece of trash had fallen under the passenger seat on my last trip. I felt bad for judging them, but worse for judging the people who ate inside these eateries; perhaps they did not have other choices.

Just as I began to sink into caffeine deprivation, my temporary moratorium on spending also took a deep swing at my social life. Talk about kicking a girl while she's down. How much money does it take to maintain my social life at the University of Michigan? Approximately \$23 a week, though there is some overlap with my food expenses. Ubers, coffee shop meetups, bar hopping, and "if you're not getting nachos with me right now, we aren't friends" take a toll on a student's budget. Even if you can't put a price on friendship (at least, that's what those MasterCard "priceless" commercials taught me, right?), there is an easily identifiable cost to maintaining those friendships. I may have dealt with my hunger and coffee deprivation in private, but my penniless week did not go unnoticed among my social group when it came to going out.

The first day of my experiment, in between walking to classes with a friend, we made our usual stop at Espresso Royale. I hesitated, and hung back near the door, away from the growing line of customers.

"What are you doing?" my friend asked impatiently.

I wondered what to say. I can't afford to spend \$1.70 on coffee? I don't want any? I hadn't yet decided if I had to be honest in my explanation of my study, or if I could be evasive about my lack of spending. I decided in the moment to go for vagueness, believing that in real life people are not so opaque about their finances.

I wave my hand dismissively. "I already had some." She nods her head in quick acknowledgement and turns her back to order her drink. I feel a sense of relief wash over me, and for some reason, I get the feeling I had just avoided humiliation. It was a harmless interaction, yet I was embarrassed not to have money, and ashamed enough to lie about it. I didn't want her vision of me to be one of pity.

As the week went on, the number of times I equated "I don't want" with "I can't afford" grew and grew. Of course I want a burrito. A cab ride home. An engagement ring. To understand chemistry or the meaning of life. But I could afford very little. Most of the time, as with the coffee scenario, my inability to partake went basically unnoticed. However, the few times my lack of financing impacted my social life were wholly disappointing or utterly awkward. It was a misfortune that one of my close friends had her birthday celebration during my week of no spending, but it represent-

ed a challenge all students without large trust funds have encountered: how to balance out having a social life and not breaking the bank. I sent a text declining, once again citing an immense amount of homework as my reason for not going. I sat in my bed alone watching Netflix that night, constantly refreshing my Snapchat and Instagram for photos of the night out I had declined. Did my twenty dollars keep me warm at night? I lay awake pondering my life choices.

At this point, it had become clear to me that in choosing evasiveness over honesty, I was not getting the full reactions from others I desired. I set out only wanting to know if I could not spend money, and though it was difficult, it was attainable. But what about the societal implications of others being aware that I was on a budget? I wanted to know the reactions of others if they genuinely understood that I was doing all I could to not spend. For the last two days of my experiment, I volunteered the information as freely as I could, sometimes aggressively. Some examples follow:

“Do you want to get Panera?”

“Oh, I would, but I’m trying not to spend money.”

“My dad would love it if I said that to him.”

And...

“Can we stop at Victor’s for smoothies?”

“Yeah, I’ll definitely come with you, but I’m trying to cut back.”

“What?”

“I’m trying not to spend so much.”

“Oh.” (awkward silence ensues)

Besides the occasional awkward pause or end of discussion, most people were generally sympathetic if not supportive of my reluctance to spend. Perhaps I do not surround myself with those involved in the culture of brand name sharing and truly ludicrous spending that would incite cruel or judgmental behavior. The embarrassment I felt earlier in my experiment melted away with each understanding nod or comment of “I should probably start doing the same.” Occasionally, a look of pity or offer to buy something for me would cost me a moment of discomfort, but people seemed mostly too absorbed in their own worlds to care whether or not I bought a coffee with them.

However, there was one strong exception to that trend, and that was not spending when it inhibited other people's ability to do what they wanted, or when it made them feel judged. Then, my lack of desire to spend money was mocked as silly or unnecessary because "you're wearing such expensive leggings, you obviously don't need to be saving money" or "I don't understand, it's just a few dollars." As my friend the notorious B.I.G. says, "Mo money, mo problems," except in this case I have no money and no problems. No one ever said life was fair.

Late one night, as I walked home from a party with my close friend and two of her friends, they decided spontaneously that Pizza House would be a great idea. I complained that I didn't want any, I was tired, I was broke, I wanted to go home, but to no avail. We were stopping at Pizza House. I lay down on the sidewalk. They carried me into Pizza House on their shoulders like a fallen soldier. Sometimes in life, you just can't win, I mumbled to myself. Knowing I couldn't afford it, I thought about walking home alone. But it was dark, cold, and I'm a petite female and also a wimp, so I stayed. We were seated immediately and given menus. Feeling a sudden shyness, I broke my own rules of honesty and told them at first I wasn't hungry. "What are you, on a diet?" one of the girls joked, but her eyes weren't kidding when they told me "eat this greasy food with me or die." Unfortunately for her, I had gone too far staying true to my experiment to be bullied by a girl in love with pizza. "Actually, I just really can't afford it right now. Sorry, guys." No one said anything for a tense minute, until my friend offered to pay my share as long as I paid her back. With another gentle refusal from me, they shrugged their shoulders and ordered their pizzas and milkshakes. I sat awkwardly at the table without eating anything. I hated myself for it, and for ruining the friendly dinner atmosphere. It is truly unpleasant to dine with someone who doesn't eat. Afterwards, my friend asked me why I had been so weird, and when I pressed her for the sake of my experiment, she admitted her two other friends had found my behavior a turnoff and felt judged by me. The embarrassment, the weirdness, the social stigma of the "have nots" I had spent many of my teenage years trying to avoid, fell upon me. I fidgeted uncomfortably. I wanted to tell her about my experiment, to distance myself from that perception of me. I didn't. Instead, I thought a lot about what this whole

ordeal had meant to me; as a student, as a privileged person, as a member of a community where not everyone is lucky enough to have pocket money.

In the end, not having money never ended up being about not spending money. I could get just as solid of an education here spending within the provisions of my tuition bill, as I could with extra change in my pocket. But money played a huge role in my social life, and in my self-perception and self-confidence. Money is one of the biggest social tools humans possess, and it is more difficult than I imagined to be actively social without the means to spend significant chunks of money each week. Even when most people didn't notice if I passed up a coffee or two, I noticed and felt a strong separation between myself and the bustling world around me. I felt distanced from those who went about their day without filtering their own costs of living. I became more aware of my spending, and of the price of my social life. I certainly missed my former lifestyle when I was staying at home, but I also finished my homework earlier, and went to bed at a more reasonable hour. I was healthier, and thought less about how I was perceived by others. On the other hand, I will probably not go another week without spending money in a long while. My mornings are more pleasant when I have a coffee in my hand, and I enjoy going out to dinner in the company of good friends. However, I sympathize with those who cannot, and understand those who choose not to, spend their time and money in such a manner. I do not blame them for choosing to pass up on going out; perhaps they have already recognized and do not reconcile themselves with the steep price of such a lifestyle. The only people I could not empathize with were those too closed-minded or judgmental to accept a peer who could not keep up with them financially. In the final hours of my experiment, I wondered about the old adage, "Can money buy happiness?" I know a lot of things money could buy that come close, but in the end, I think happiness is a choice. I was miserable at the beginning of my experiment because I thought I should be, but by the end of the experiment, I had grown at least mostly accustomed to my temporary new way of living. I was no longer ashamed, or as cognizant of my week of no spending. And, I was happy. Happy to be a student and spend time surrounded by people I liked, and read my books, and eat plenty of dining hall cookies.

*Bethany Lehman*

## FISHY, FISHY, CROSS MY OCEAN

The shark circled the crowded waters, nose tingling with a scent of fear and blood so strong it stung nostrils like bitter bile rising from within. Cutting knifelike through the throngs of oblivious seals and trout, the black body passed by like an ominous cloud, or a nightmare slipping away at dawn. The weakest seal hung back from the group, an isolated loner with ugly brown spots on the tip of its nose. Its pinhole black eyes met the shark's ravenous ones. A tack drops, and it's all over. Perhaps they both knew, even from the start.

\* \* \*

I was sixteen and a giant bitch. I wore low rise jeans and clingy sweaters that showcased a slice of flat stomach. My hips swung as I walked, my straightened hair moving with the rhythm of my stride like a seductive dance. I thought I was hot shit, and sought out others to validate this opinion. And we moved, like minnows, through the school in waves, calling and laughing to each other, skirting other students and obstacles like rocks at the bottom of the ocean. We ate lunch outside, or in a deserted hallway, denouncing the cafeteria as a loser trap for freshmen or people who actually ate at lunch. Sometimes we walked to Starbucks just so we could say we turned our noses up at the school rules barring underclassmen from leaving campus during free blocks. When older boys called our names in the hallway, we pretended not to hear them, yet texted them with a hormonal fervor at night as we did our homework. We were sixteen, and though we should have known better, we didn't.

Sophie was in both my American Literature English class and my American Studies history class, wore long polkadotted frocks and had acne along her chin and on her forehead. She rode her bicycle to school every day and apparently did not know where to purchase deodorant. Her nose was permanently pink from riding outside in the cold, and I once remarked to my friends that she resembled a clown. She was outspoken, and studious, and had trouble knowing when to stop talking. In a rare moment of insight, I can see that Sophie was a lot like me, or how I was in middle school before breasts and boys and my lethal interest in being well-liked. She raised her hand at least double the number of times any other student in class would, and by the third week of school, I could see the teachers rolling their eyes with yet another, “Yes, Sophie?”

I can say now that this was her only sin.

I hated Sophie because she was always there. I hated her domination of class discussions, and I hated that she acted as though we were friends when she would flag me down in the hallways to ask me questions about assignments or tell me what she thought of a particular reading. To Sophie, it must have been only natural to attempt friendship with the only girl she saw twice a day, every day. To me, it was loathsome that someone I found so annoying did not understand my social cues of rejection. Was I attempting to dominate Sophie, to try and make her adhere to the social structure I had spent painful years analyzing and poring over in an attempt to fit in? Was I jealous of her ability to stand so outside of society, to be wild and free and blissfully unaware of the expectations “fitting in” thrust upon its chosen cool kids? Sophie got under my skin in ways no one ever had before or since, and even now I struggle to understand why.

One mid-November day in American Literature, we were talking about our personal interpretations of *The Scarlet Letter*. Our first snowfall of the year dusted the sidewalk as the flurries came down in fat, sweeping currents. The virgin landscape stared up at me from the outdoors, mocking my entrapment in the school. I itched to go outside, step in the snow, leave my footprints. Class could not appeal to me less; I hadn’t eaten breakfast, and I had been harriedly doing homework all morning for two of my later classes after I had fallen asleep face-first in my textbook a night earlier. I was overtired, overworked, over-hungry. I make excuses for myself even now. I sat on

the edge of my seat like a kettle ready to boil over. I would have pounced at anything, but Sophie gave me the dousing of gasoline I needed for a fiery implosion.

“I just really think that the meteor is a motif for, like, Pearl’s innocence, and that it, like, umm... catalyzes what’s going to happen for the rest of the book. Like if the meteor didn’t happen, maybe the characters wouldn’t have thought so much about their umm... previous actions and like wouldn’t have behaved the way that they did... after the meteor.”

“What?” I startle even myself speaking aloud, but once I began, I knew I had opened a floodgate of untapped irritation whose flow was out of my control. “Where are you pulling that from? That makes absolutely zero sense and just because you’re using words you think are impressive like ‘catalyze’ doesn’t make your argument any stronger. I feel like you’re just talking to listen to your own voice right now, and it’s honestly getting so annoying because I really want to hear other people, too.”

There was a moment of horrified silence, as Sophie melted into the plastic of her chair and our teacher looked out the window before softly offering a half-hearted, “Did anyone else have an interpretation of the meteor they would like to share?” Sophie stared at the ceiling that was as empty as her eyes and didn’t move at all for the rest of the period. She might as well have been bleeding out for the dead look on her face, a slaughtered seal among thirsty sharks. Looking at Sophie’s carcass, guilt flashed through my veins, and I know my own face must have reflected it, if only for a moment. Self-criticism is a skill I struggle with now, and had almost no awareness of then. I quickly justified my behavior to cover my guilt: *everyone wanted to yell at Sophie, Sophie will grow from my criticism, maybe now we can all participate in class discussion*. Did I know it was wrong, even then, to publically stomp on such a delicate snowflake, one I knew couldn’t run from the bottom of my boot? I think I did.

Instead of turning around, admitting to flaws in my character and offering Sophie an apology, I left the class within seconds of the buzzer, fleeing from the scene of the crime like a child avoiding a scolding. I’m not proud of that at all; sixteen is too old to abandon responsibility for actions. I knew that then, and I know it now. I had been a bully, and an immature, fearful one at that. A few steps away from the door, I felt a

hand on my forearm, and a voice by my side.

“You know, Sophie really likes you.” One of my friends in class looked at me with downturned lips and searching bug eyes.

“Ok...” I drew out the last syllable to feign disinterest, a why-are-you-telling-me-this attitude I didn’t genuinely hold.

“I just don’t understand why you treat her the way you do. It’s like you go out of your way to show just how much you dislike her. Today was bad, but, Bethany... you do this shit to her all the time.”

“Oh god, no, I don’t. I don’t even know her, I don’t care what she does.” I bristled and excused myself, making a hairpin turn to leave and insulating myself in the crowd of students hustling to class.

\* \* \*

Moving in for the kill was easy. One quick, hard bite. That’s all. The seal’s body twitched and rolled before calmly coming to a standstill. The shark averted its eyes in guilt. The shark revealed no outward trace of remorse, but if sharks had big beating hearts, this one tremored before coming to a brief halt. But sharks are strong, and sharks are resilient, and the beating resumed momentarily. The seal’s heart dried out.

\* \* \*

Three years later, and I think about Sophie a lot. She brought out an ugly side of me, a side I had not had much experience handling. She irritated me, and upset me, and provoked me like no other person has ever done. What was it about Sophie that allowed her to affect me so strongly, when I remained cool and aloof with the majority of people in my high school? I was Miss-Independent, Miss-I-Don’t-Care, Miss-Never-Loses-Her-Temper, and frequently Miss-Never-Gets-Hurt. Except when I was around Sophie. Around Sophie, I didn’t know who I was at all.

I wish I could think about Sophie in the terms that my friend Emily does. Emily is

very spiritual and believes that everything happens for a reason. She told me that Sophie was placed in my life to show me exactly who I didn't want to be, neither a Sophie nor a bitchy 16-year-old who thinks she runs the world. Sophie is a lesson, Emily tells me, that I am to grow from.

Unfortunately, I don't believe in divine lessons. I'm a realist and think people that believe that everything happens for a reason have never had anything truly horrible happen to them. Perhaps Sophie has no meaning at all for me; the wrong day, the wrong time, the wrong person, and I lost my temper with her. Perhaps she is nothing special, and I've imagined her magical hold over me because I have a guilty conscience. I'd like to think the incident was insignificant to Sophie, one bad day in high school that is long forgotten now. I placate myself with this idea.

I used to think Sophie's only sin was her propinquity to me and annoying in-class habits. After some deep introspection, this is not entirely true. Sophie hit too close to home with me, behaved too similarly to how I had acted in middle school when I was an eager academic like her. Sometimes I pitied her, viewed her as a precocious child who had never grown up while I had. Other times, I envied her. Sophie wasn't a loser; she just fell outside of the social hierarchy that was our urban high school. Sophie did not conform the way everyone else did, a frustrating trait for someone who gave up a lot of herself to meet the status quo. Sophie was "other," and like a cowlick of hair that just won't lie flat, I had an obsessive need to put her down. Why I felt so strongly about her, I am still unsure. Nevertheless, the story of Sophie has become so vital in how I see myself, such a crucial foundation in my identity, that I will never forget it. When faced with such an ugly version of oneself, how does one address it? Do they run, as I did, fleeing the classroom and the responsibility to make things right? Or do they stay, and apologize, attempting to rebuild bridges they may have burned?

I am not proud of who I was at 16, but there is no law of physics that says that people cannot change. A few months ago, I ran into Sophie while I was picking up groceries. I smiled, and we talked; I asked about her college plans and congratulated her on graduating from our school with such high honors. It was not an apology, but it was a start.

*Bethany Lehman*

## CHINA

The royal China  
Sits upon a pedestal  
Of gold and ivory plates.  
Though the throne is solid,  
The China is not.

China requires that everything have a proper place.  
And a proper match.  
For every knife, a fork.  
For every plate, a bowl.

A China set with a missing cup,  
Is not a China set at all,  
And certainly not a royal one.  
An incomplete China set  
Begs to be smashed  
And overthrown.  
Tumbling from the pedestal  
A long way down.

Monarchy is not as graceful  
Or dignified  
As fine China.

*Bethany Lehman*  
UNTITLED #5

The loneliest moment in time  
    Reached its hand into forever  
And found me  
    Alone  
I held the fingers  
    Together with my own  
Until I could not tell our hands apart.

*Bethany Lehman*

## FOR H

I.

I do not believe  
In promised happiness  
Or purpose  
But  
The big bed  
In the tiny room  
Was the closest  
I've come  
To content

II.

The wind  
Tells stories  
In languages  
Not meant for us  
But I know it's always  
Your name  
Being said

*\* Caldwell Finalist*

III.

We are  
A deck of playing cards  
48 of them  
Remain  
But  
I miss  
The red joker  
The most

IV.

I fold my laundry  
Carefully  
And remind myself  
Not to think of you  
As I do these things  
But sometimes  
I like  
How you look  
In my head

*Bethany Lehman*  
**DIRTY DISHES**

Falling in love felt like  
Finding change in a vending machine  
But a broken one.  
Or turning on the radio  
To catch the end of the song  
Playing in your head all week.  
You could feel it  
Until you walked through a door  
Pressed a button on the microwave  
Turned a page in your book  
And then  
It was gone.  
And you wonder  
What it was  
You had just been thinking about.  
You can't remember.  
Maybe you're just hungry.  
The phantom lingers  
But only for awhile.

*\* Caldwell Finalist*

Falling out of love felt like  
Waking up from a nap  
Sweaty and tired.  
Or finding an old lottery stub  
That's already been scratched off.  
It doesn't love you.  
It's kept other company.  
Seen better days.  
Isn't as fresh as it used to be.  
It's not you, it's the stub.  
Does that still hurt?  
Can you still feel pain?  
And you wonder  
Could you have done things differently?  
You remember doing the dishes  
And kissing her neck  
You decide it wasn't your fault.  
Even if it was.

*Bethany Lehman*  
UNTITLED #2

We are drinking  
Instead of talking.  
There is a ghost  
Where once  
There was a girl.  
She exists alone  
A whole world away  
And for the first time  
We both know it.  
I say  
"You can tell me"  
She says  
"It wasn't like that"  
She says  
"Nothing happened."  
Nothing happened to me too.

There is a bathroom door  
A bolted door,  
A room that smells like piss.  
Her cigarette smoke  
Can almost reach me  
But not quite.  
Waiting. Waiting.  
I say  
"What happened?"  
Nothing. Nothing.  
I think about breathing.  
I think about the paint on the door.  
"He was so drunk..."  
She stops.  
"Anyway nothing happened."  
Nothing happened to me too.

*\* Caldwell Finalist*

Upstairs the music is muted.  
Silent faces.  
Still hands.  
Holding hands.  
Her mouth opens.  
Closes.  
“Do you want me to call someone?”  
Her mouth opens.  
Closes.  
Not holding hands.  
“No, it’s ok.”  
Take a long look.  
Look away.  
Pretend not to see  
“Nothing happened.”  
Nothing happened to me too.

“Where have you been?”  
They ask  
I think. I think.  
I remember sound  
Knocking on the door.  
I stop remembering  
“I don’t know.”  
A whole world away,  
In a room that smells like piss  
My mouth opens.  
Closes.  
I am naked  
For the first time.  
“Nothing happened.”  
They believe me  
They want to.

*Bethany Lehman*

## BOSTON

I.

We were small as tiny pearls  
Resting at the crest of chest that is neither neck nor breast,  
Not knowing and not wishing to be known  
Dark eyes as cloudy as miso soup or as  
Fresh as mud that has just been messed  
Inside the apartment where we were raised  
There were always two bedrooms  
And one less parent than that.

II.

Lynn Lynn the city of Sin,  
A penny for your thoughts  
If you can keep them to yourself  
In the spaces between brick walls that are not spaces,  
But homes with blue tarp ceilings and bible verses on the door  
“Homeless. Please help. Thank you. God bless.”  
The tenants can move but they don’t move on.  
The rainwater floods the bottom apartments  
Every year it doesn’t get fixed,

*\* Caldwell Finalist*

I look at the schools without potholes in the parking lot  
And fake grass on their playing fields,  
And wonder why.

III.

The harbor smells sometimes like fish and other times like salt  
Depending on the season  
Or if you like the person you're standing with.  
Home has never been the bricks and bolts of housing  
Or the signed leases and advance payments of lofts.  
Home is the half smirk instead of words  
When there is nothing to be said because  
All is understood.

*Payton Luukkala*

## DEAR POET WITH BLUE FINGERS:

1

The bruises underneath your fingernails remind me of home  
summers on the tired wooden swing with a book  
antsy for endings, wanting them to  
keep their distance. My nail edges chipped  
away the faded white paint, ground it to a powder in my palms.  
It stuck there, later onto my hair, my mother's shirt, my dog's fur.

2

My father likes that I was smart but not that I read so much;  
he is smart and barely had to read.  
If he could pry the pages  
my hands help him pile wood. We work slowly,  
consistently alongside Pink Floyd.  
My little brother takes breaks.  
Our sauna is warm at night,  
Still we dreamt of a greater heat to hug us.

3

Winter's belt rivaled Muhammad Ali's, the way bodies  
wavered as they defiantly strutted past.

Snow reverse pick-pockets socks,  
steals noses, both in appearance, function,  
overall homeostasis.

It is worse to see the thief in advance,  
invite them in, offer lemonade,  
then to sit blind, lay blind,  
be blind,  
unless you are blind,  
in which case that's the best way to go.

*Payton Luokkala*  
YOU WHO SKIMS RELIGION

You who worships trees  
when the leaves admit they've made a mistake,  
who sings with birds  
but is careful not to overtake their voice.  
You who walks far among the wisps of spicy leaves  
until your heels match their color  
and admit independence is a little lonely sometimes.  
You who rereads books  
even the bad ones, just for the memories,  
who remembers important events  
like the anniversary of a month without spirit  
and you who breaks it,  
breaks yourself every once in a while just because it feels  
good to melt and give yourself something to fix.  
You who believes in God, but unlike the others does not seek him.  
You let him hide.  
You who tastes recklessness in the wind  
wishes the rain were harder so your bones could enjoy it too.  
You independent soldier with  
a vocabulary of weaponry  
no training  
and no cause.

You  
Dear, Helpless, Hopeful Child.  
You who skims religion  
is too preoccupied writing their own.

*Corey Ortiz*

## WAKING NIGHTMARE: THE TOWER

A sudden, violent shaking caused my eyelids to fly open. I looked at the ceiling of the dark room; the only source of light was a small lantern dimly flickering across the room. I hopped off of the cot and tried to figure out where I was. I quickly concluded that I was aboard an old wooden ship, as the entire room continued to rock ceaselessly and the sounds of water splashing outside and dripping inside were constant. I found a staircase and climbed up to the deck.

Outside, I was greeted with a horrific view. I looked out at the vast, endless sea that I must have sailed on. Giant, angry waves roared as they rolled across the sea and crashed with unbridled rage. Strong winds drove the waves my way as a cattle herder would drive his stock. The sky was covered in a layer of low, menacing clouds that threatened to spew out a terrible tempest yet did no such thing. Instead, arcs of lightning occasionally made quick jumps from cloud to cloud, leaving only the crack of thunder as evidence of their passing. Then, the entire area was dark, yet it was illuminated through a green glow that leaked from behind the clouds. It almost seemed as if a sickly green sun was directly above the clouds, waiting to bathe the world in its damning light.

I turned to see where my ship had decided to land. It was stuck alongside a rotted pier that had no right to be intact; the decaying wood was covered in both seaweed and sea creatures and was cracked and split along every beam, yet it still held strong against the battering of the vicious waves. Looking at my own ship, I found it to be in similar shape; I needed to find a way off the ship before it finally did collapse. I looked past the pier and saw that it was connected to an island. The island was small, small

enough that I could easily trace the entire coastline. But the island itself was another beast altogether. The landscape was twisted and jagged, full of sharp, jutting pieces and dangerous indentations. Aside from the area around the pier, the shoreline featured larger spikes waiting to spear hapless ships. The soil was a grayish-black, as if a volcano had unleashed its choking ash on the land. However, all of that was meaningless, as something in the center of the island dominated everything else: a tower.

An ominous stone tower stood watch over the island. Like the pier and ship, it too had seen better days. The stone appeared to be cracked and worn, with some parts bearing a coat of moss large enough to be seen from the ship. The tower itself reached to the sky, nearly touching the low ridge of clouds. It lacked any truly defining features, but that made it seem more unwelcoming. There were numerous windows that dotted the sides of the tower, each shut with some sort of metal bars. Yet I did not see any light from within; a blank, cold darkness peered out from the windows. The only sense I felt from being in its presence was dread.

A thought barged its way into my mind: Where was everybody? I looked around the ship and did not find a single pulse. The tower and the island both appeared to be devoid of life as well. Despite my reservations about the tower, it was currently the safest place to be if the weather began to get worse. I made my way off the boat and onto the island. I crept slowly towards the tower, with only the crunch of the odd soil beneath my feet providing evidence for my visit. I found my way to the front entrance, which was surprisingly illuminated by twin lanterns on each side of it. An ancient door plagued with the same miasma as the rest of the island barred the way. I pressed my hands against the heavy wooden door and was surprised when it glided open. I was immediately met with a wall, with a pair of staircases on my left and right that each wrapped around the inside of the tower. I ascended the right staircase in darkness until I came out on the next level.

Ahead of me, the staircase continued upwards, sandwiched between two walls. I turned left onto the floor and found myself in the heart of the tower. Looking straight up, I could see the numerous floors of the tower, each one a hollow circle with the actual floor running alongside the walls. I saw rows of catwalks reaching over from each

side of the floors above me, criss-crossing in a seemingly random manner; each was hoisted up by an array of support cables haphazardly attached to the walls. At the top there was only darkness, but somehow the same sickly green coloring seemed to drip down from that area; at one moment, it was darkness, and then it was as if a barrier was lifted that allowed the glow to seep through. The glow fell all the way down the tower to my level, allowing me to somewhat see. Like the rest of the island, the tower was decrepit: the metal railings on the catwalks appeared to be rusted, the stone walls showed more cracks, some of which housed the green glow, and the floor was in general disrepair.

Between the bouts of thunder, I heard a sound echo from the opposite stairway. I backed up towards my own stairway, hugging the wall and peering just over it. The sound continued to echo rhythmically and methodically. It sounded as if a metal boot was attempting to slide across the stone before rising and plodding down. Finally, the source of the sound made its way down to my floor.

I wasn't sure what I was seeing. The first thing I noticed was that the creature was large; it stood about ten feet tall with a hunched back and was just narrow enough to walk down the staircase hallway comfortably. It was draped in a black cloth robe that included a hood, obscuring most of it from my sight. The robe was very tattered, revealing pieces of metal that seemed to come from antiquated armor. In its right "hand" (it appeared to be more like a claw than a hand) was a staff; the staff was ornate, covered in various etchings, but it also seemed to be rusted. At the tip of the staff was a chain attached to a lantern that swayed as the creature took its steps; a blade appeared to be sticking out of the side of the staff as well. As the creature continued to the next set of stairs that led to the entrance, I could hear the jangle of metal with every step. I wanted to run, to leave the tower, but I couldn't with that creature in the way, so I pressed on.

I went to the next level and looked for a place to hide. Instead, I found that alongside the walls were numerous prison cells. I glanced into the closest cell, seeing if I could possibly wait out the beast inside it. Instead, I found that it was already occupied.

In the corner of the cell, I could see the shadow of a man hunched over, shaking erratically. Quiet mumbles rattled away from the figure. The man suddenly stopped, turning his head towards me. In an instant, he flailed over to the bars like a wounded animal hopelessly trying to outrun its hunter. He grasped the bars and shoved his face between a set. I recoiled in shock, then took a closer look at the man. He was emaciated, almost skeletal in appearance. In the dim light of the green fire, I could see that his skin was unnaturally pale; looking into his eyes, I found they were similarly pale. He opened his mouth, which was lined with several rows of shark-like teeth, many of which were missing; he then began to speak frantically.

“The Warden, the Warden! You, you, stranger, you must find the Warden! No escape, don’t let them get you, don’t let them find you, don’t let them see you! Only escape is the Warden!”

Each word that tumbled out of him increased in volume and in speed. I tried to hush him and whispered to him.

“Who is this Warden? And where can I find him?”

The man gestured towards the top of the tower and began to speak in a song-like manner.

“The Warden knows, he knows! The Warden crows, he crows! You must find your way, for never again will you see the light of DAY!”

His voice boomed with the last word; the sound was not something he should have been capable of making. His mumbling soon turned into deranged yelling and bestial wailing as he continuously called for the Warden. I turned my head and saw another one of the guard-creatures approaching from the left staircase. I quickly made my way to the right stairs and began to climb, soon reaching the third floor.

From the third floor, I quickly counted out five floors remaining above me, with a sixth presumably holding this “Warden.” I could still hear the yells of the man below, and it seemed that others heard as well. The occupants of the cells on this floor began howling and snarling, pounding away at the bars of their cells. Each appeared to be similar to the man below, and each was overcome by the same animalistic rage. I spotted another guard on the catwalks; oddly, it seemed to be ignoring the ruckus

consuming the tower. It continued its slow march through the floor as if it had walked that path for all of eternity.

I avoided the beast and again found my way upstairs. Upon reaching the next floor, I saw something that stole my breath: one of the cells was open. As if on cue, the resident crawled out of it and eyed me, growling like a dog on guard. He immediately leapt towards me, tackling me to the ground. He began trying to swipe his fists at me, but I was able to easily overpower him due to his small, malnourished frame. I threw him off of me; he landed on his back and began to squirm like a dying animal before going limp. I sighed in relief, but a feeling of dread immediately fell over me. An icy aura chilled my bones; I knew what had happened. I had let them find me.

I turned around and found myself facing one of the monster guards; its breath was heavy and full of anger. It leered down at me, seemingly ready to attack after I made the first move. The dangling light on its staff illuminated its hideous face; the shape of its skull was more equine than human. Its elongated face showcased bone prominently, with a few patches of decayed skin still attached. But those were nothing compared to the eyes. The eye sockets were massive relative to the skull and held no eyeballs, but instead housed a black abyss lit by small pinpricks of green.

The beast slowly opened its mouth like a crocodile; strings of saliva dripped from both the top and bottom of the mouth. Rotted gums lined the inside of its mouth, all of which began to vibrate. The beast let out an inhuman roar, like the shriek of a woman mixed with scraping of metal against metal.

I turned and sprinted as fast as could, dashing over the catwalk. I looked over my shoulder and saw the beast charging after me with increasing speed; I noticed that it discarded its staff and that it appeared to have grown bony spines out of its back, like some form of demonic porcupine. The catwalks rattled as we ran across them, with the support cables rocking violently. I knew there was no way I could reach the top with this beast chasing me, so I ran to the outer ring of the floor and tried to head back towards where I first fought the prisoner.

The beast continued its horrific wail as it stomped closer and closer to me. I made it back to the spot and found the beast's staff lying on the ground. I picked it up and

ran back to the catwalks. I began swinging the staff wildly at the support cables; meanwhile, the creature had nearly gotten me in its grasp. I threw one final swing at a cable, managing to sever it with the blade. I threw the staff behind me at the beast and jumped to the outer ring; as the staff struck the beast, the support cables fully gave way under its heavy weight and snapped, sending the beast and the catwalks crashing into the lower levels.

The howling of the prisoners momentarily ceased; they seemed to be gauging what exactly had happened. I sat on the ground, my chest heaving. The prisoners bellowed out even more ferocious roars as if both angered and excited by this new turn of events. I slowly rose to my feet, my body still shaking from the rush of adrenaline. I took a deep breath and continued my ascent.

I managed to make my way up the rest of the tower without incident. I stopped taking looks at the floors and simply made my way up the stairs. I did notice that the guards did not seem to care that their comrade had fallen. They continued their slow, methodical patrol, oblivious to anything that wasn't a blatant intruder. The last set of stairs before the top level led to a large door that was actually in a decent condition compared to the rest of the tower. Above the door hung a sign that clearly stated "Warden's Office," though the letters appeared as if they were dripping; streaks of black ink were stained across the sign, yet there was no evidence of it having fallen off. I pushed open the door and found myself in what appeared to be some sort of shrine. Pillars lined the wall, with statues of the guard-creatures silently watching from between them. In the center of the room was a large, ornate basin filled with water. Above the basin was a comparatively simple chandelier, housing a set of candles that glowed the same eerie green glow.

I watched the light of the chandelier flicker when it suddenly went dark. I froze; my lungs refused to take in more air and my muscles did not respond. I heard a cracking sound from all around the room. The cracking was halted by the sound of shattering; I could feel small bits of stone hit my body. The water of the basin began to emanate the green glow; I could now see what caused the cracking.

Surrounding me was a circle of the bestial guards; I saw that the statues were no

longer present. These gargoyle monsters clearly saw me, yet they remained motionless. I looked back at the basin and saw that the water in the basin began to ripple. Slowly, something began to rise from the waters.

The creature that rose out of the water was impossibly tall; it towered over the guards, yet it still managed to come out of the basin that was shorter than myself. I quickly noticed that it was not standing but instead hovering over the basin. The length of its body was extremely thin, like the branch of a tree. Six long, spider-like limbs jutted out from its body: two for the legs, and four for the arms. At the end of each limb were three long, skinny digits; each looked as though it could impale a man with ease. The head of the creature was not even remotely human; it appeared much like the head of a termite with the jaws of a spider. The entire thing was flesh-colored, completing its nauseating appearance. I sighed and closed my eyes for several seconds; when I finally opened them, I saw that the Warden was ready to speak.

“Welcome... to my tower.” The Warden’s voice boomed from all around the room, as if it was projecting its voice through each of the guards. Despite the Warden’s appearance, its voice was very deep and almost grandfatherly in its tone, though I detected a hint of malice beneath the façade. It tilted its head slightly.

“Are you not impressed?” The Warden sounded almost disappointed.

I didn’t respond.

“Well, I suppose a love of one’s future locale is not necessary, though it does provide some assistance in alleviating the dull nature of repetitious work.”

I was surprised by the Warden’s civility, but I was also confused by his wording.

“Are you saying that you plan on imprisoning me?”

The Warden bellowed out a hearty laugh, though it was followed by a disturbing echo that sounded demonic.

“Why would I imprison you? As far as I am aware, you have committed no sin, and thus you do not deserve imprisonment. It really is simple as that. I really am grateful for your arrival, for it seems a terrible accident has befallen this facility. A noble guard in our employ tragically met his end after one of our walkways collapsed. Again, I am very glad that you agreed to sign on with us. You’ll be able to start immediately.”

My eyes widened in horror as my breath shortened once again.

“What are you talking about?”

The Warden chuckled before continuing.

“Why, you did sign up to be our newest guard, did you not?” The Warden’s voice was dripping with venomous sarcasm.

“Let’s get you suited up.”

The circle of guards closed in around me. I tried to turn and run to the door, but they grabbed a hold of me before I could. I screamed and kicked as they tightened their grip, but it was to no avail. One of the guards placed its hand over my face, blocking my nose and mouth. As I began to slip into unconsciousness, the last thing I heard was the laugh of the Warden.

\* \* \*

Floor Five. Cells Five Hundred through Five Hundred and Twenty. I checked each one, making sure no intruders were present.

I continued my march, ever vigilant for any intruders. I would not disappoint the Warden.

Cell Five Hundred and Seventeen. An intruder was hiding in the cell. The man was shaking and quivering; he saw my approach. He began to panic, he began to plead. I approached the cell and raised my staff; he shrieked in terror. Soon, the last audible sound was that of my seemingly endless screaming.

*Corey Ortiz*

## THE TREASURE OF THE LABYRINTH

I shuffled into the school building as the darkness crept up on that cool, autumn night. I joined a host of my fellow students outside the school chapel, following their lead and removing my shoes. Several of my friends begged me to come back to school and participate in this event held by our Campus Ministry; veterans of many Campus Ministry sessions insisted that this event was among the best offered, not only by the group, but by the school as a whole. I was hesitant to go, but the promise of food following the service caused my empty stomach to drag me back into the confines of my school. Eventually, the leaders of the group arrived and began explaining the service to us. Inside the chapel, numerous chairs had been reorganized into a pathway they dubbed “the Labyrinth.” We were told to attempt to contemplate our relationship with God (for the religious among us) and to simply meditate, taking a seat on any of the chairs that lined our journey. Eager to finish the maze and maneuver my way to the restaurant, I headed into the chapel.

Immediately upon entering, the atmosphere was noticeably different than what I was used to. The room was dim; the only light came from a handful of candles and the gaze of the moon coming in through the main window. The line of chairs reminded me nothing of the mythological Labyrinth; rather, they almost seemed lonely, waiting for one of us to welcome ourselves to them. In the center of the room was a massive cross surrounded by chairs waiting in reverence. However, the strangest sight was the rest of the students. My peers were known for their fun-loving and rowdy natures, but in this room I saw none of that. Everyone was quiet, deep in thought. In fact, the only noise came from soft and gentle ambient music and the sound of bodies shuffling into and

out of chairs. I immediately recognized the importance of this event and began to clear my mind, intending to take this seriously and see why the Labyrinth was so important.

My journey began, and I shuffled down the aisle, taking in deep, calming breaths. My body seemed almost rhythmic between my movements and the pace of my breathing, helping to put my mind at ease. I looked ahead and picked out a chair that was no different from its kin, yet this chair just seemed like the right place to make my first stop. I eased into the chair and bowed my head in thought, attempting to try my hand at meditation, something that never really made sense to me. I was skeptical of it; “There’s no way that sitting around for an hour will magically be great” was the thought that had dominated my mind. I wasn’t even sure what to do, so I just started to reflect on my life and thank God for it. Although it was simple and something that I’ve done plenty of times before, it felt good to think about what a pleasant life I led. After a short time, I left my chair and continued down the path.

The next chair that stood out to me was beneath the main window, bathed in the light of the newly-risen moon. I sat in that chair, tilted my head back, and looked into the expanse of the night sky. Rather than reflect, I just admired the beauty of the night and let out a sigh. It was not a sigh of contempt, nor was it a sigh of relief. It was a sigh of appreciation, one that is followed by an irresistible urge to smile. Looking at the moon with a goofy smile, I was happy. I didn’t know why, I just felt an incredible calm wash over me. The experience was almost surreal; the stress of day-to-day life provided no breaks like this.

My journey continued to unfold as I slid into another chair, this one contained within a special room in the chapel that held several religious icons. I decided to turn my mediation towards my faith. The group leaders encouraged us to “talk” with God, something I blankly agreed to do. Following their advice, I tried to initiate a conversation with God. While I was not expecting a voice to ask me “How are you?,” I was also not expecting the same feeling from my moon experience to grace me again. Looking into my hands, I regained that same smile and could again feel every slow, monotonous breath that lumbered through my body. I thanked God and ended the call, waiting a few moments before leaving.

Stepping onto the path once more, I decided to look up and see what progress the others had made. My earlier experiences made me feel a bit smug, knowing that they hadn't felt the same calm that I had. To my shock, everyone had a similar demeanor to me when I was meditating. There was no boredom or impatience in their faces, but instead, the same calmness that I felt seemed to be enthralling them as well. It was interesting to see so many different people with drastically different personalities experiencing the same, unifying feeling. I smiled in approval and slowly made my way to the next stop.

Eventually, I arrived at the center of the Labyrinth. Surrounding the cross were several other students, each one deep in thought. Upon joining them, I felt a different kind of happiness. Rather than joy from calm like earlier, this felt like I was a long-lost brother being welcomed back into a family. I took my place among the group and began to meditate, but after a bit I looked at my company. Again, the group of people surrounding me was a melting pot of personalities; some of them were good friends of mine, others were people I simply knew as classmates, while the rest were a mass of unknown faces. Yet here we were, appearing to be some sort of rag-tag team bound together by circumstance. But it was not circumstance that brought us all here. I wondered why we were all together in this place, experiencing the same thing despite coming for different reasons.

The return journey led me back the way I came, yet this journey back felt different. I was almost sad that this experience had reached its mid-point and was now heading to its end. The awe-inspiring calm I felt was seductive in nature, yet hid no malevolence. I wanted to stay, to enjoy something that I had never known. During my slow slog back to the entrance, I found more and more chairs that welcomed me with open arms (despite the lack of arms on these chairs). Using my newfound peace of mind, I began to focus on why exactly I felt so calm. I thought it might have been the solitary nature of the event, but relaxing alone in a chair or going for a walk did not bring the same feeling. Those were calming, but they did not evoke the "happy calm" that I was experiencing. I thought that it might have been the chance to escape from the pressures of life for a short while, but again that does not bring the same happiness

that now invaded my brain. Disappointed at my lack of an answer, I continued my final steps through the Labyrinth.

Eventually, I made my way out of the Labyrinth. The experiences I had were so overwhelming that the feeling of hunger just began to creep back into me. We all headed out to the restaurant, dominating an entire portion of it and claiming it in the name of our high school. Sitting among both friend and stranger, I enjoyed one of the best dinners I have ever had the pleasure of experiencing. This was not because of some phenomenal food, but rather the time I had with my classmates; honestly, the name of the restaurant escapes me, its importance having been dominated by the merriment of the night. We laughed, we shared stories, we had a great time. Well after the food was gone, we continued to chat with one another, only leaving when the dreadful call of the next school day began to sound. We parted ways, heading home to the soft comforts of our beds.

That night, as I lay in my bed, I couldn't help but think more about the night. I wanted to call it one of the best nights of my life, but why? On paper, it didn't seem like much. I went to my school, sat in some chairs, thought about stuff, and overpaid for some average food. What was special about that night? My mind drifted back to each experience I had during the night. From the first chair to the restaurant, my mind raced. The peace I had known earlier did not come back; I stayed awake wondering nearly until the break of dawn.

As much as I'd like to say it, my epiphany did not come to me that night, nor any night soon after. I continued to attend the Campus Ministry events and other similar meetings, again feeling the same way. Pondering endlessly, I finally believed I knew why I felt like that. In my high school, one of our unspoken mottos was "brotherhood." The thought was that, no matter who we were, we could stand together as classmates and as brothers. I realized that I was a part of a brotherhood that included so much more than my school; I was a part of the brother (and sister) hood of humanity. For all the innumerable differences among the individuals of the world, we all share at least one common trait: we are human. We laugh together, we cry together, we help one another. We live together, as one species.

That night in the chapel, my classmates and I bonded wordlessly as fellow human beings. We all had different reasons for being there; the devout believers were working on their faith, while some of us were attracted by the promise of food. However, during the short hour we were contained in that room, a bond was formed independent of words. We were able to come together and appreciate the tranquility that life has to offer. We walked into the depths of the Labyrinth and found peace. We may not have realized it, but we found what it meant to be living human beings. We found the Treasure of the Labyrinth, and we found it together.

It's interesting to think that something as mundane as chairs and candles can provide an avenue for the unique feeling of being alive. But in that room, "life" seemed to permeate every corner. I wanted to brag to my classmates about how I had felt, but eventually I realized that they knew the feeling as well. The veterans of the group were aware of the feeling, causing them to gleefully encourage us to go. They realized that the reason we felt alive wasn't because of the chairs or the candles, but instead because of all of us, strangers that are also brothers, together in one room.

Sometime later, during a theology class, we discussed the importance of human solidarity. Though none of these concepts were new to me, I finally understood what message my teachers were trying to convey. I understood why we give a damn when tragedy strikes someone we don't know that lives across the globe. Lessons about respect and compassion are repeated endlessly, but in this new context, I understood the meaning behind them. I even saw evolutionary lessons from a different viewpoint; there's a reason that we evolved as social animals. Without other humans, life is just a hollow mockery of its true potential. Being with other people is a unique feeling that can't be described accurately; it's just something we can embrace and enjoy.

It's moments like the Labyrinth that, to me, define life. There is no other feeling like the immense calm and happiness that comes when I find myself united with so many strangers. From my conversations with citizens of a rural West Virginia town during a service trip to my contribution to the thundering roar of a football stadium, I know that I am alive. I know that I am human, and I know that I share my life with seven billion other humans, and I couldn't be happier.

*Emily Post*  
EXPOSED

I want to be a whirlwind  
going around and around growing  
higher and stronger through the wind  
With pulses and energy  
I want to be Sparks  
though just one would be fine, I suppose  
I'd rather be an entire symphony  
of music and emotion  
A moving feast  
constant and in control:  
not "-able"  
not me.  
No, I want to be the entire  
river, lake, and ocean  
before I am *ever* your  
"drink of water" as if you should be  
lucky, privileged enough to find me  
on your lips.  
"She's Thunderstorms," too, rain and electricity  
flying down from the high heavens—  
but I only ever hear it through my  
music, ear buds

waiting for the right moment to bloom  
not into a flower, though I may yet have them  
cascading off of my outstretched arms  
with leaves in the wind

I want to be allowed to shed these layers  
like a snake its skin and a sheep its wool  
Shed with the seasons  
but also on my own, too.

I'd like to on my own, but not with  
needing to be on my own to do so.  
I *really* want to shed these layers  
for open eyes and souls  
and not to keep them, build them up,  
hour on the hour until I'm  
sweating through these skins and this voice  
this partial voice is croaking from lack  
of nourishment and proper hydration.  
I need this exposure to be decent  
without having to use that word.

I want to feel this freedom that I know  
I already have but  
I can never fully grasp how  
to plan it out so that it all feels  
a bit too safe.

*Hannah Rhodenbiser*

RE: LEUKEMIA

Don't listen when they tell you not to tape letters to the walls.

Collect in a pine chest:

    a letter from your Oma,

    a letter from Labrador,

    a letter from the electric company.

Arrange these in an equilateral manner

while chanting the names of extrasolar planets backwards,

have your friend play hymns on the guitar, too fast.

Now walk to the closest pond,

*wade in the water;*

until the scum of algae is coating the pale underside of your knees.

    Confess that you love your siblings.

    Gather a tadpole, a caterpillar, and a leftover leaf from fall.

Watch blue droplets of homemade paint run down your neck

in the mirror when the tadpole has legs,

the caterpillar has changed its name.

This is just to say,

we can say *everything will be Okay.*

will it still be relevant to wonder

if nothing turns out *okay?*

\* *Caldwell Finalist*

*Hannah Rhodenbiser*  
THE BENCH

It was nondescript,  
simply engraved with the words  
“Class Of  
1901.”

Neither welcoming nor adorned,  
It was not comfortable,  
Not warm.

Yet its unique discomfort made our silences  
expressions of affection  
and our awkwardness a treatment  
for the uncomfortable world.

It was cold and wet  
more often than a haven  
But it knew the phantom conversations  
that almost happened  
in the shadowy tactile past.

*Hannah Rhodenbiser*  
DEAR GLITTER

Dear Glitter,  
I ate the entire jar of peanut butter today.  
The underside of my skin was lined  
with a layer of fractured chocolate.  
Insulating my organs to prevent freezing.

Before I shuffled my way to the lecture hall  
my skin radiated the excess heat I had accumulated  
lying on my back in our artificial habitat.

If I was giant, mammal or reptilian ancestor  
disappeared into the sky 65 Million Years Ago  
I could not be warm blooded, my surface area  
insubstantial for the expulsion of the energy  
that sent my body into danger

release the steam-blocks,  
I have no ears engineered to save my insides from boiling.  
These fluctuations are fatal, be careful.

Dear Smiles,  
I miss you,  
The laughter not because we had to laugh  
rather than make each other cry.  
I miss the limits, the boundaries we could  
conceptualize but never travel to.

We sat stuck in the present as it slid into the past,  
our tenses confused by math and firelight.  
We could not say it clearly. We could only wonder  
on the back of an old newspaper, the ink coming off  
onto my hands as I drew vectors  
sending each moment into space  
saved forever in the permanence of numbers that have  
been rubbed away.

Dear Sofi,  
one Halloween you wore a red cloak  
and carried a checker-clothed basket  
the riding hood to my wolf's hat.  
Please know I will not eat you,

trust me that these eyes are big  
all the better for reading your novels and  
writing letters across the continent.  
You and me girl, we'll keep the postal service in business.

The other parts seem not exactly normal  
because each of us was born with our own strangeness,  
and we had to assemble ourselves to see  
this partial product.

One Sufi mystic who died a long time ago  
said something I take as:  
our weirdness,  
what we would never call “defects”  
because they are how we got to be our own awesome  
those things we would not choose but will not surrender,  
are the way our glory gets manifested.

Love,  
Hanners

*Evan Rosen*

## MATH TEAM HOMEWORK #5 COVER

**Math Team Homework #5: *Thanksgiving Edition***

Section: 037      Group Name: "Untidy Josephs"      Due Date: 26 November 2014

Scribe: Morgan D.

Clarifier: Carolyn P.

Reporter: Evan R.

Manager: Spirit of Mike L. [R.I.P.]

**Report:**

The hauntingly absent spirit of Mike L. filled the position of manager this week, and as a result, we were forced to operate as a loose confederacy of three independent calculus-practicing bodies, each with its own equal say in the operations of the math group decision-making process. Luckily, the odd number in the group allowed for a unanimous decision to be reached during every voting period.

Our first meeting came on Friday the 21<sup>st</sup>, directly following our class period, and took place in the UGLI (Undergraduate Library). It concluded at approximately 5:00pm, Eastern Standard Time, and covered topics ranging from "Problem 1" to "Problem 2" to "Why are we doing this right now?" and even "Where is Mike? We miss him!" It was decided we would meet again later.

On Monday the 24<sup>th</sup>, we reconvened in the quaint beige basement of East Hall, known to many as the "Math Lab." We were able to fully complete Problem Number 2 and make large dents into Problems 1 and 3, metaphorically speaking. Update on Mike L: *Still missing.*

Our last meeting took place on Tuesday (day after Monday), again in the Math Lab. We did not stop until all problems were answered, and also until it was 4:00pm because that is when the Math Lab closes. As scribe, Morgan beautifully articulated and documented our mathematical discoveries. As clarifier, Carolyn left no questions unanswered, no person unsure, and no neurons unconnected. As reporter, I hand-wrote this cover sheet on the back of a suntanned moose-hide and dictated it to my roommate Kevincao Yu, who subsequently printed it out on parchment. As a group, we were victorious. Update on Mike L.: *No update.*

*Annie Turpin*

## WRITE WHAT SCARES YOU

I am afraid of being caught peeing in the ocean,  
And being late to an important meeting,  
And the fact that my top played song on iTunes is “Mistletoe” by Justin Bieber.

I am afraid of my limbs being ripped off by a Great White Shark,  
And eating too many Reese’s cups after midnight,  
And the memory of my Grandma dropping my hamster after it bit her finger (RIP).

I am afraid of accidentally liking my ex-boyfriend’s new girlfriend’s mom’s photo on Instagram,  
Or someone looking through my Google search history,  
And my softball team photo from 2004.

I am afraid of the wrinkle that appears on my forehead when I’m under direct sunlight,  
And the hair that never stops growing from the mole on the side of my face,  
And the blackheads that come out of my Bioré® Pore Strip.

I am afraid of “Snapchat Stories” of teenage nightlife,  
And why yours is 200 seconds long,  
And how anything as “nutritious” as gummy vitamins could be so god damn delicious.

I am afraid of being offered food samples when I have my Invisalign in because I’m not

supposed to eat with them,  
But I am also afraid of not accepting samples.

I am afraid of the massage I got at a Korean Spa last year,  
And how everyone was naked  
Including my English teacher.

Just kidding, that was a lie. I'll admit it now because I'm afraid of being caught in one later.  
I'm afraid of my parents catching me sneaking out in the middle of the night.

I'm afraid of them coming in close to what looks like my head, whispering "sweet dreams, angel" and realizing that it's just a wig I got at a white elephant party.

I am afraid of talking for too long, and talking in circles, and saying the same thing over and over again, and being redundant, and repetitive, and sounding like an idiot because I have been saying the same thing for 10 seconds now.

I am afraid of ending things,  
And the 20-page-long printed out AIM conversation with my 7th grade crush "BBall-boiii95" that I taped into my diary next to the lyrics of "Bleeding Love" by Leona Lewis.

The conversation ended well.  
He said "gtg bi"  
And I said "bye"

*Jenise Brooke Williams*  
A DOLL'S HOUSE

[The sound of a door shutting is heard from below.]

Scene: Five years have passed. The scene takes place in a marketplace not far from Nora's old home. A hardly recognizable Nora is working at one of the small shops as a copier for the people of the town. She has just returned from a long trip away from town and has only been back for four months. The scene takes place in the shop where Nora works.

Torvald: [*Entering the shop.*] Hello. [*Rings bell on the front table.*] Hello.

One of Torvald's children: Father, I don't think anyone's here, maybe we should try again tomorrow.

Torvald: [*Turning to look at his son*] Tomorrow? Why, these documents should have been copied four days ago, but you neglected to do so. [*He says, casting a look of anger at his son.*] So now we no longer have the luxury of waiting another day. These documents must be copied now. [*Rings bell again.*] Hello. Is there anyone here that can copy my documents?

Nelson: [*Coming from the back room to the other side of the table with the bell on it; cleaning his glasses on the bottom of his shirt.*] Alright, alright, you rang?

Torvald: Ahh, yes, indeed I did. What took you so long? I have many things to do today and waiting around for you to do your job is not one of them.

Nelson: [*Putting his glasses on.*] Well, what is it that you need me to do?

Torvald: [*Stretching his arm out behind him to his son; after his son places the documents in his hands, he slams them down on the table with the bell on it.*] Well, if you could please just have these copied for me by this afternoon, I'll be back to pick them up and pay you then.

Nelson: [*Taking a look at the thick stack of paper, and then looking back up at Torvald in disbelief.*] You want all of these papers to be copied by this afternoon? Have you gone mad? It's irrational to think these could be copied even by tomorrow afternoon. [*Whispers aside.*] Perhaps we shouldn't wait until the last minute to have our work done. [*Pushes the documents back over to Torvald.*]

Torvald: [*Pushing the documents back to Nelson.*] I am willing to pay you top dollar to have these finished by this afternoon; I am sure you're able to do that for me.

Nelson: There is only one person that can finish that for you, and she is not working today. [*Pushes the papers back to Torvald and turns to go back to the back room.*]

Torvald: [*Growing agitated and worried that his documents will not be copied in time*] Please, I will pay her extra money if that's what this is about, but I have to have these finished

by this afternoon.

Nelson: Alright, alright. I will see if she is willing to make an exception for such a fine man like yourself. [*Picks up documents and casts Torvald a look of anger and disgust before he walks to the back room.*]

Torvald: Oh, thank you! Come along, boy, we must meet your brother and sister for lunch with your new mother.

One of Torvald's children: [*Sarcastically and bitterly to himself.*] Oh joy, mother number three.

[*Both exit the shop.*]

[*Nelson is walking to a woman, handing her Torvald's documents.*]

Nelson: We may be able to quit this dreadful business once and for all, Nora!

Nora: [*Rocking back and forth in her rocking chair.*] Whatever do you mean? No one is willing to pay that much for a simple copy. Besides, I rather like living a simple, [*Looks off into the distance.*] honest life.

Nelson: Oh, please, Nora, we could really use this money. [*Kneeling down, taking her hand in his, and looking intently into her eyes.*] That is, if you still want to run away and marry me.

Nora: Of course I would like to marry you, Nelson, some day. [*Turning away from him.*] I just need more time. [*Seeing the hurt in Nelson's face, she touches his cheek and smiles at him. Then she picks up the thick stack of documents.*] Well, I guess I better get started. When are they picking these up?

Nelson: [*Standing back up.*] This afternoon. I'll go get your ink. [*Goes into another room to pick up Nora's ink.*]

Nora: [*Getting paper from a cabinet and examining the stack of paper.*] Who are these for?

Nelson: [*Coming back into the room with Nora's ink in one hand and a quill pen in the other.*] He didn't say, but whoever he is, he is willing to pay top dollar, so you must do your very best work.

Nora: Of course. [*Sits down at her desk and begins copying the documents.*]

Scene: Several hours have passed, and after a long and uncomfortable lunch with his three children and his soon-to-be third wife, Torvald prepares himself to return to the shop to retrieve his documents and the copy of them.

Torvald: [*Standing and getting ready to leave*] Well, I will let you all continue to chat over tea; I have some business to attend to. [*Exits.*]

Scene: Torvald walks back to the shop and walks inside.

Torvald: [*Ringing the bell on the table.*] Hello. I'm back, where are my documents? I can

wait not a minute longer. [*Rings bell three times, and begins to walk to the back room when Nelson finally appears.*]

Nelson: [*Sarcastically.*] Oh joy, you're back.

Torvald: Yes, I am back. Where are my documents and my copy of them?

Nelson: [*Unenthused.*] Darling, have you finished copying yet?

Nora: [*From the back room.*] I need just a moment more.

Nelson: Well, could you wait just a moment longer? [*Says sarcastically, gesturing for Torvald to have a seat.*]

Torvald: [*Refusing Nelson's offer and growling with irritation.*] I specifically asked for the copy to be done when I returned this afternoon. I will wait only a moment longer.

Nora: [*Coming from the back room with a huge pile of papers in her hands.*] Ok, here it is. I have finally finished. [*Trips and drops the papers.*]

Torvald: [*Bending over to help Nora pick up the papers.*] Wonderful, now I will have to take the time to sort the papers out.

Nelson: [*Arranging a small stack of the papers and handing them to Torvald.*] We're sorry, Mr... I'm sorry, I don't recall your name, what is it?

Nora: [*Standing up while slowly backing away and looking at Torvald in fear and disgust.*] Torvald, his name is Torvald Helmer.

Torvald: [*Realizing who Nora is, he slowly stands up and looks at her in disbelief.*] Nora? Nora, is it really you? Oh my, I don't believe my eyes. My, how you have changed.

Nelson: [*Finally standing, leaving the papers alone and looking at the two.*] You two know each other?

Nora: We used to... We usde to... We were... He was my... [*Beginning to lose her balance.*]

Nelson: [*Helping Nora to stand up straight.*] Nora, darling, what is it? Do you know this man?

Torvald: [*Realizing Nora isn't able to say it.*] We were married. Very happily, too, for quite some time, but she ran away, leaving me and our three children alone without even a single letter over these past five years. She didn't even have the decency to tell me she was back in town.

Nelson: [*Finally realizing who Torvald is.*] I don't blame her, after what you did to her. You're lucky I haven't thrown you out. I have the right mind to destroy your precious documents right now. [*Picks up Torvald's papers and carries them over to a small fireplace in the corner.*]

Nora: [*Regaining her strength and stopping Nelson from putting the papers near the flame.*]

Stop, Nelson. That's enough, let's all be rational here. Give those to me. [*Takes papers from his hands and begins to rearrange them.*] Nelson, could you give Mr. Helmer and me a moment of privacy?

Nelson: [*Straightening up, and giving Torvald a threatening look of absolute rage.*] Only a moment, darling [*Looks at Torvald angrily*] and not a moment more. [*Exits to the back room.*]

Torvald: [*Hurriedly walking over to Nora.*] Oh, my dear Nora, my sweet little skylark. How I have missed you. I'm ashamed of the man I have become since your exit. I have become much harder, bitter even. I am to be married to my third wife in a month, [*Taking her hands into his and looking deeply into her eyes.*] that is unless you are ready to come and join your real family. We have missed you, and I forgive you, Nora.

Nora: [*Taking her hands away from his.*] You forgive me, Torvald? Why it's as if five years have not even passed! I forgive you, Torvald, and I have moved on. I am happy now, with Nelson. I cannot go back to that horrifying doll house you insist on calling a home. This [*Gesturing all around the tiny shop, which has a small flat above it where she and Nelson live.*] is my home.

Torvald: Oh, Nora, what can I do to show you how much we need you? How much I need you. I want you to come home.

Nora: If you wanted me back so badly, how come you never once searched for me, Torvald? I did not leave Christine's home for an entire month after leaving you and the children; you made no effort to get me to come back, Torvald. You didn't care about me, and you still don't. [*Turns away from him to walk back to the back room.*]

Torvald: [*Hurt and defeated.*] Nora, you told me to stay away, I didn't want to upset you any further. I thought it would only take a few weeks for you to get through this phase of yours, but after a year passed, I realized you weren't coming back, and did not want to be found.

Nora: That's just it, Torvald, you never knew what I wanted. You never understood me. A woman never truly wants to leave her husband and her children behind, but you left me with no other option. [*Walks toward the door to the back room.*]

[*Nora turns back around with the papers in her hands, and looks at Torvald.*]

[*Torvald looks up with hope that he has won her over.*]

Torvald: Oh, my little skylark, have you a change of heart?

Nora: [*Handing him his documents.*] No. Please, Mr. Helmer, just leave. [*Stops him as he chokes back tears and pulls his wallet out of his pocket.*] Your money is no good here, just promise you will leave me alone, and [*Looking deep into his eyes.*] that you won't tell the children where I am. Let's just continue to be the strangers we have always been.

Torvald: [*Trying to regain his composure as tears stream down his face.*] Goodbye, Nora— Goodbye Ma'am. [*Exits the shop.*]

[*As Nora stands in the middle of the shop, the lights slowly fade to black.*]

*Haley Winkle*  
NOVEMBER'S WISHES

November tells me she is fine,  
tells me of her dreams  
she wants to have a home  
with sixty candles to keep her warm  
a fireplace the color of her hair  
so that others will visit her, for once  
she knows she is cold-hearted  
but wants to be loved for her best intentions  
she cries rain that turns white  
when we disregard her,  
but she gives us power to keep ourselves warm  
and reminds us that a string between  
ourselves and others can never be broken  
that we are thankful for the wrong things  
year-round.

November tells me she wants to be warm  
though her lessons would not be the same  
and she would no longer be herself.  
She tells me she wants us to think of her  
as a friend and not an enemy,

\* *Caldwell Finalist*

because she braces us for the bitter and bare  
by shedding herself onto us  
by giving her life for our security.  
she means no harm  
she only wants to help  
but she is only seen in a blur of white  
threatening to engulf us all  
as nobody wants to live in the present anymore.

she is kind, she knows this  
and has gotten used to the hatred  
though she wishes it would stop  
before she disappears into the bitter  
until next year.  
she is not a pest  
no matter how strongly we believe her to be  
she only gets under our skin  
because we don't know how to button our coats  
and she likes it there,  
she likes having skin to feel on her own  
when all else pushes her away.

*Haley Winkle*  
THOUGHTS FROM THE RIVER

*thoughts from places: Huron River/October 25*

*part one*

Do you remember when you skipped a lunar eclipse to come here? You begged yourself to go to the place where serenity exists, where undomesticated animals are just as safe as domesticated ones, and where people go to explore the meanings behind the way that certain trees rustle in the wind or how certain currents of water flow and babble in conversation louder than others, so loud and eloquently that even you could understand them over the sound the sunset makes as it grips to the spaces between trees and their limbs and leaves. The way that the river's floor is unclear underneath ripples and their contour-line echoes, how each line kisses the shore and makes room for each preceding one to meet the trees too shy to be fully immersed in the water. Their roots are much ballsier. I remember when you said you were so in love with the paintings that October created that you shook and tears consequently fell from your face, and I agree – I agree from the view up here that each painting is even more beautiful than the last one she creates.

*part two*

Do you think that the trees like it when they lose their leaves? How do you think they feel when the bitter cold turns their green jackets into rich shades of orange? How do you think she feels when it rips off her soft green jacket to reveal an old, dry orange shirt caked in her memory spots like brain scabs all over? How does she feel when it

rips that from her, too, picks her memories and her clothes from her skin and drops each item beneath her feet when she can only reach into the air, helpless, but still helping you breathe? Is she stricken with fear? Does she become vulnerable to the world, asking for the sun to clothe her again in something strong enough that the absence of sun could not even remove? How does she feel to have her clothes resting on her feet, reminding her of her inabilities, that her roots will be there only for as long as she will and are stronger than she is, creating her background? I wonder if she likes to have the water kiss her feet, if she feels like royalty or if she feels as though it is trying to persuade her to walk farther in. She might be smart, though – she might fear walking all the way in because she doesn't want to freeze, like the absence of sun makes her. She might remember that after her clothes are torn off, her skin becomes coated in a layer of ice and cold, and she could not move even if she wanted to. She becomes property of winter when she wants to be only her own property, but nature does not allow for this. In time, she will regain color and clothes and warmth, only to have it taken from her once again in a year.

*part three*

I can remember feelings but hardly ever with their respective images. I can remember things triggered by sound and image but never what exactly it was. To be without knowledge is harrowing to my mind; I prefer to know what it is that concerns me and to have control of myself and all that lies within each of my acres of memory.

*Mo Diane Zhang*  
AVANT-GARDE MANNERIST

We move more elephants back to the truck  
Then rejoice in our rebirth  
The somnambulist catches the blue sun  
In the crumbling déjà vu

\* *Caldwell Finalist*

*Mo Diane Zhang*  
ETERNAL ABSENCE

Darling,  
We should get married at 17  
We should build a log cabin near the sea  
We should hurry to the zoo to see the giraffe at 3 am  
We should eat up all dark chocolates and then rob CVS  
We should destroy sandglass, watch, clock and any timepiece  
We should play and share our toys just like kindergarten friends  
We should write long long letters in the hoary winter night  
Write down "Darling darling darling darling"  
Until tomorrow becomes today  
The tomorrow that we always dream of  
But never live  
Always absent as presence

\* *Caldwell Finalist*

*Mo Diane Zhang*  
LETTER NEVER SENT

The day I handed in my first painting  
A landscape inspired by Mr. Van Gogh  
“Ruin is a gift.” You said  
Oh fiddlesticks  
Sometimes I found your words went  
So well with my inner radar  
That made me furious with myself

You always remind me of the filmmaker  
Who keeps his tape recorder in the fridge  
Or the graduate student who irons his term paper.  
You fucking-pathetic part-time art teacher trying to quit smoking

“A perfectly understandable symbolic narcissistic gesture”  
You quoted Atwood in one class for the ink sunflowers you painted  
Never did I laugh so hysterically feeling suffocated  
You were just a frivolously petulant histrionic idiot  
But I loved you so damned much

\* *Caldwell Finalist*

Seldom do I paint these days  
Neither do I think of you  
Only once under the water  
I couldn't see anything in the dark  
Suddenly your face emerged  
So real that I almost forgot to breathe

"You are the most inscrutable student I ever taught"  
I took it as a compliment  
If it weren't for you I could be a painter who knows  
But I won't be me today for sure  
Solid and strong "Transcendence," you said  
Bullshit.

*Anna Bauer, Alborz Bral, Payton Luokkala,  
Hannah Rhodenbiser, Haley Winkle, Melody Zhang*

## TRUTHS

**They told me** that truth meant forever, and love means getting hurt.  
but abstractions and arching statements are themselves abstractions  
the reef depends on Zooxanthellae algae, living inside transparent tissue of polyps.  
what is love when mutualistic symbiosis means a microcosmos?  
Not all coral can build limestone that lives in motionless dance.  
The skeleton cupcake tin with an entire biosphere dependent on Scleractinian coral  
turning Carbon Dioxide into 25% of all marine life in less than 1% of the ocean.  
Even with complex organs, and consciousness to write poetry, we merely complicated  
humans  
are incapable of knowing any love as real as the Zooxanthellae & the Scleractinian.  
To believe True Love is to hope that somehow these reefs will outlive us, despite us.  
Even when promised postage stamp scenes: becoming silhouettes in sunsets over  
waves,  
but maybe less cliché: it was a smog-medicated planet of the future that **I was promised.**

**I was promised** so many things.  
I was promised decades, ceaseless-fire, dreaming nights and wide-eyed days  
smothered with rest and ankle-deep in grace  
I was promised a chance to speak and a choice to please

a right to laugh and a breath of release from  
the granite-stone bitterness of tomorrows and goodbyes  
but time caught me by surprise  
swept me off my dangling feet into the dim & dank street  
and there I fell, and there I fell, where I fell  
I said this time, to myself, this time that I thought  
was merciful and free was less than ready to receive me.  
When I reluctantly, steadily, finally was dragged out of the darkness I  
was done. With the drugged deception of the so-called “love,” completely  
and unapologetically, I was finished, it was over.  
But you stroll over, and through, and in, this wretched life  
fulfill my non-negotiables  
empower even the strife  
read me debrief me see me  
and allow me to lead  
on to better dreams, and restful sleep  
I was promised so many things, and after they broke I prepared to a century before  
the next dawn  
But maybe **I was wrong.**

**I was wrong** to give in to that blind faith  
and to fall backwards into the dark.  
Some trust falls are just constructed with dirty, deceptive hands.  
But it was my mistake to trust that everyone has good intentions  
Because what right mind could feel as safe at midnight as they do at 8am?  
It's my fault doing that saying that wearing that.  
It's my fault for LEAD-ING. HIM. ON.  
I knew those hands so all so well  
But I guess I didn't expect what they were capable of  
Now I know not to trust you when you say **no worries.**

**No worries** is what I tell myself when nothing turns out as planned when it seems the universe has taken what's in front of me and crushed it between its hands times at which I feel like a boy rushing to dodge obstacles in a loosely-tailored suit only to remind myself in the end, that the things I can't do are simply grains of sugar sweetening the things that I can and that not knowing where the sphere will shift next does not make me any less of a man existence is not a race to the finish, some things should be taken slow and I think that, right there, is **one thing you should know**.

**One thing you should know** is that I am indecisive. I even struggle in the cereal aisle, because my life happiness might depend on that box or whether marshmallows are involved; I who can never pick a restaurant, tries those pants on 3 times but still is not quite sure whether I should buy them, has gotten the same haircut for years, only dares a few inches at a time; It's me who ditches random items at the register next to the magazines; My favorite color is both green and yellow, because green was my old favorite & I just cannot seem to let it go; I make games of Would You Rather a living Hell, I am that person who saves the money from birthday cards, constantly waiting for a better opportunity, I am anxiety if you are armed with a question, which **I hate**.

**I hate** how comfortable we are without knowing what it is that fills our ribcages, that ignorance makes us feel so at peace but if ignorance is bliss then I want to know what the opposite feels like,

to have the ever-growing knowledge behind  
why ink still smudges but never erases  
why the place on memory lane that made me smile  
no longer makes the clouds separate in my world  
if I must feel this bliss, this ignorance from the erasure of truth  
then I want to know why it doesn't taste as sweet  
as the morsels that feed my thoughts daily  
semblances become what we know, but until now  
I didn't know how to efface the lies **they told me.**

Hi!

I made a little sketchzine, which is supposed to be printed out double-sided on a sheet of paper, folded up, cut and stapled to be like a little book.

To send it to you digitally, I've compiled it as it would appear in spreads.

Thanks! <3



*Michelle Sheng*  
FIGHT ME!: A SKETCHZINE  
PEN & PENCIL





# CONTRIBUTORS

**Michael Abushacra** is a freshman hoping to study business and has strong interests in entrepreneurship and visual arts. He has been investigating the dichotomy between digital media and manipulation of physical photography.

**Emily Addy** is pursuing a major in psychology and a minor in art & design.

**Anna Bauer** is a freshman studying political science in the College of Literature, Science, and the Arts at the University of Michigan. The California native hopes to unite her passion for creativity and social justice with her intended career in politics or policymaking.

**Michelle Belgrod** is majoring in business and minoring in art. She currently is pursuing freelance art and is in the process of starting a design consulting club on campus in the fall. Check out her work online at [michellebelgrod.com](http://michellebelgrod.com).

**Caleb Bohn** is from Grand Haven, Michigan, and has been taking photos for about three years. He loves to travel to new places and capture the pure emotion of those locations.

**Alborz Bral** is planning on majoring in either computer science or business. He enjoys writing as a hobby and as a way to let out thoughts and ideas that cannot easily be expressed normally.

**Marissa Butler** is a first-year student at the University of Michigan studying screen arts and cultures. She has an encyclopedic knowledge of far too many television shows and considers movie theaters her second home. She also writes and paints from time to time.

**Chloe Chung** is majoring in English and is on the pre-med route. She hopes to eventually be a dermatologist. Photography and photo manipulation are two of her hobbies that she has pursued over the years.

**Christopher Crowder** is a communications major, also pursuing a possible minor in Writing. In his free time, he likes to write screenplays and watch sports. He is a writer for the *Michigan Daily* and hopes to be a sports journalist or a screenwriter after he graduates.

**Claire Denson** is an English and creative writing & literature double major at the University of Michigan. She enjoys rock concerts, poetry slams, comedy clubs, and the Oxford comma.

**Ania Dow** is a freshman from Michigan. Her major is undecided, but she has always enjoyed writing.

**Jack Foster** recently graduated from U of M with majors in French and comparative literature. He will be a Fulbright Scholar next year in Belgium, where he hopes to continue reading good books, seeing cool places, and meeting interesting people.

**Helen Galliani** is a member of the Nursing School Class of 2018, as well as the Naval ROTC program. Before Helen decided to grow up and go to college, she took a year off to go play and learn Spanish in Quito, Ecuador.

**Karan Hallon** is a poet who writes poetry for no other reason other than “it takes less time than writing fiction.” He has (thankfully) moved away from writing teenage-angst-ridden poetry to more nuanced writing. He hopes to major in information and minor in Spanish. Also, he will insist that ‘color’ has a ‘u’ in it and that ‘conceptualize’ is spelled with an ‘s’ and not a ‘zed.’

**Elizabeth Hinckley**, from Southern California, has wasted no time getting involved in as many things as possible on campus. A participant in LHSP and LHSP’s Photography Club, a member of Greek Life and the Women’s Club Water Polo team, and an active volunteer at Ann Arbor Preschool and Family Center, she has loved her time at Michigan. She plans on majoring in Biopsychology, Cognition, and Neuroscience (BCN) and Spanish, two areas of study that she never imagined she’d major in, but now can’t get enough of. Go Blue!

**Alyssa Holt** is a Southwestern desert transplant majoring in English and hoping to subconcentrate in creative writing. When she isn't frolicking in the Arb or eating an entire tray of MoJo peanut butter cookies by herself, she can be found curled up in bed, reworking a short story for the eighteenth time instead of writing her English paper that's due tomorrow.

**Taylor Houlihan** was born in FuJian Province, China and moved to the United States at the age of two. She has spent most of her life in tropical Miami, FL where she has fostered an appreciation of art and literature. Currently, Taylor is perusing a double major in illustration and neuroscience at U of M.

**Sarah Huttenlocher**, 19, is a rising sophomore planning to double major in psychology and creative writing. When she's not writing, she spends her time reading and collecting antique books.

**Sofie Jacobs** is the author of the bestselling series, "Just Between Us," a guided journal for girls and their moms, grandmothers, and sisters. An English major from Rockville, MD, Sofie is a member of Chi Omega sorority and the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program. She really, really hopes the girl her story is about never reads it.

**Matthew Kipnis** is a sophomore and student assistant in LHSP from Great Neck, NY. At the University of Michigan, he studies in the Stephen M. Ross School of Business but shoots photography in his free time.

Born in Taipei, Taiwan, **Athena Lee** came to the United States when she was 15. She likes writing, dancing, and playing the flute and the piano. Her intended majors are economics and statistics.

**Bethany Lehman** is a first-year student at the University of Michigan with plans to study environmental policy. She is also a member of Alpha Phi sorority.

Hailing from the San Francisco Bay Area, **Courtney Luk** just finished her first year at Michigan, where she is planning to major in economics and minor in multidisciplinary design. Besides her passion for design, she also loves music, as she plays the violin, viola, alto saxophone, and piano.

**Payton Luokkala** is currently extremely undecided about where her future will take her. But there are some things of which she is certain: she could walk until her feet fell off, the Upper Peninsula is the best home someone could have, and she will always continue to write.

**Jennifer McLenon** is a rising sophomore hoping to major in Biology. She is an arts and crafts addict who also enjoys listening to and making music. Some of her favorite pastimes include drawing, knitting, snacking, and bonding with her guitars.

Canton, MI native, **Kaitlyn Moore** is a pre-business student who plans to pursue a career in the fashion industry after graduating. As the founder and producer of the Acts of Fashion Charity Fashion Show, Kaitlyn spends a lot of her time planning annual fashion shows, and being involved in fashion-related activities. Kaitlyn also enjoys shopping, spending time with family and friends, and watching cartoons. One of Kaitlyn's favorite scriptures to live by is 1 Corinthians 10:31, and she strives to live her life through faith and happiness.

**Corey Ortiz** is a lifelong Wolverine fan from Toledo, Ohio who is overjoyed to be attending his dream school. He plans on applying to the School of Education and getting certified to teach English and history. He is looking forward to being able to teach a subject that enjoys very much.

**Neena Pio** is from Dexter, Michigan. She is double majoring in English and classical languages & literature. In relation to the arts, her favorite mediums are graphite, watercolor, and acrylics.

**Emily Post** should be studying right now, but instead is probably watching Netflix or playing an RPG. She also likes to read fantasy and feminist non-fiction. Emily is an architect in training with a minor dose of writing... get it?

**Lauren Reshef** is a student in LS&A, hoping to be an organizational studies major. She is passionate about music, singing, photography, and traveling. Throughout the course of this year, she has joined an a cappella group, Kol Hakavod, a PanHellenic sorority, Chi Omega, and participated in LHSP's Photography and Creative Writing Clubs.

**Hannah Rhodenhiser** plans to double major in mathematics and economics. She likes stir fry, waterfalls, and flannel sheets.

**Evan Rosen** is a sport management major in the School of Kinesiology. He is currently a student manager for the football team and a member of the Big Ten Network Student U. He completed his calculus course with an A-.

**Michelle Sheng** is chasing two degrees, one in art & design and one in something else. It's -10 degrees and she's harvesting all these clams in the hopes of one day making cartoons. Nice!

**Annie Turpin** is a freshman studying art and design at the Stamps School of Art & Design within the University of Michigan. She hopes to pursue an illustration or video major with a creative writing minor.

**Janise Brooke Williams** is a native of Detroit and proud graduate of Mercy High School looking to major in psychology and communication studies. She is an active member of the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program, Leaders and Best, Sister 2 Sister, SIBS and also the Vice President elect for Distinguished and served as Outer Relations Liaison for the Alice Lloyd Multicultural and Hall Council. The daughter of two Wolverines, Janise is the definition of the Michigan Difference.

**Haley Winkle** is a fire-haired young woman majoring in creative writing & literature and women's studies hailing from Kalamazoo, Michigan. Aside from being a passionate writer, she loves to make art, admire winter, and collect succulent plants.

**Jess Wolma** is a sophomore at the University of Michigan. She is majoring in primary education with a focus on language arts. Her work is inspired by the people in her life and the characters of the books she avidly reads.

**Melody Zhang** has loved prose poetry and folk music from the day she was born. She studies philosophy and environment in hopes of saving the earth. She eats and sings in her free time, and sometimes she even takes a nice jog in the Arb.

**Mo Diane Zhang** is a Chinese junior who majors in history of art. She photographs sometimes, writes often, and dance is always her antidote. She love the ocean, the horse and the old black-and-white movies.