

THE LHSP ARTS & LITERARY JOURNAL

DEAR FRIENDS

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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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Paul Barron

LETTER FROM THE DIRECTOR

It's my privilege, at the end of my first year as interim director, to introduce the Lloyd Hall Scholar's Program Arts and Literary Journal. Though I have taught writing in LHSP since 2004, I've gotten to spend this year, from fall move-in to summer break, much like our students, immersed in the Program. I think back to our first ice-cream social, a dramatic red sky silhouetting the Life Sciences Building across Palmer Field. It's strange to remember the first time we encounter people who are now familiar, then recall our steps towards friendship.

The poem from which this year's journal draws its name, "Dear Friends" by Payton Luukkala, refers directly to the past year and its milestones. Yet it's more than reminiscence; her poem reveals moments by which one person might know others—moments remembered but also those shaped by language, each giving form to the intimate spaces friends might occupy in the imagination.

Dear Jenny:

I saw someone with your smile
earlier today. Hers was directed
at the cement or maybe the small
subsisting grass between the cracks.
Her golden retriever floated beside
her, tasted the survivors of summer
before wiping its tongue on yellow

faded paper leaves.
I want you to be the dog,
not tethered to red leather
but staining the world with its tongue,
striking the earth with the ungentle stroke
of its paws.

Read as third person, *Dear Friends* (the journal) serves as a collection of all sorts of friendship. It's the mark of a well edited journal that expands on its theme in ways we might not have predicted (hats off to Megan, Aaron, and the editors-at-large). Brenner Bernstein imbues Waldo with an inner life in "Who's Waldo?" Kate Bishop leaves me haunted at the end "Fifteen Months," as I try to assemble those "six letters." I have too many favorite lines to quote from this volume. There's this from Natalie Burr's "Making Room":

"I thought that I could shoo away the chemicals in his body that were dismantling his mind and pulling him apart like a spool of thread being unraveled, but I didn't know how quickly it was happening, the terrifying rate at which amino acids were combining to form proteins that would outweigh his endorphins and cause him to visibly cool his attitude toward me over the course of a single conversation."

And this from Rajal Patel's "You":

"If God could replace my bones with tungsten, I wouldn't mind the extra weight if it meant I could be strong like you."

In this year's journal, you'll find elegant tropes, as in the choice implied in Nicole Davtyan's "Used Cars" and in Hannah Rhodenhiser's "Packing is a strange expression of love" ("Prospect Ave. Is Closed").

The art work chosen for this year's journal is particularly arresting, often exploring those hidden seams of friendship we mine in ourselves: Ilma Bilic's "Empty," Cassidy Carpenter's "Few Doubts," and the dark currents of Katherine Qiao's apparently literal "At My Fingertips." What I find particularly impressive in this volume is the way the art, photography, poetry, and prose radiates confidence and vulnerability—at times batting the world at arms' length with irony and wit; at times drawing us close, confidential and sincere. Also collected here are the winners of the Caldwell Poetry Prizes in the original/written category so you can experience some of the excellent work we celebrated last March. As you read the bios of all the contributors you'll find a wide range academic, creative, and professional interests. I'm excited by what the future holds for them. Whatever our contributors study or work at, they have made a space in their lives to see closely, to experience deeply, and to show us the world through their eyes.

I was tempted to begin this letter "Dear Friends," in part addressing our actual friends of LHSP, alumni, students, staff, faculty, administrators, and parents. But addressing potential readers as "Dear Friends" is also presumptive, embodying a hope that an audience will be drawn to engage with and experience the work presented here.

Let me close with this wish instead, dear friends, and hope you'll find this journal as satisfying as I do.

Paul Barron, MFA
Interim Director

Megan Knittel

LETTER FROM THE EDITOR

When first-year LHSP students enter the University, friendship is a driving force in their hopes and fears. This year's journal is reflective of the ways our students' friendships have influenced their self definitions. The themes and ideas presented in this journal, *Dear Friends*, and Payton's title poem "Dear Friends," represent the voices of our students as they have grown, learned, created, and formed strong bonds of friendship in LHSP.

This year was transformative for both LHSP and myself. I bonded with sixteen other 2nd year Student Assistants, whose stories are featured in Payton's "Dear Friends," while crafting luminaries in our Creative Communities LHSP 230 class. The process of making art together, which required dedication and teamwork, allowed us to connect on a deeper level than completing just the basic LHSP participation requirements would have and allowed me to grow personally and as a leader. This experience is the core of LHSP's philosophy, that creative expression can connect us and teach us about ourselves. This year's journal is about discovering ourselves through others.

This journal would not be possible without the LHSP students who had the courage to share their struggles, ideas, and emotions with us through their creative work. It was a pleasure and a privilege to get to know you all personally and through your writing and artwork. As time passes, I hope that you can look back on this journal as a time capsule of your year in LHSP and all your dear friends.

CONTENTS

Paul Barron | <i>Letter from the Director</i>	iii
Megan Knittel | <i>Letter from the Editor</i>	vii

Poetry

Yardain Amron* <i>E Bar</i>	1
Yardain Amron* <i>Family Get Together</i>	2
Yardain Amron* <i>The S is Sundry</i>	5
Kate Bishop | <i>Fifteen Months</i>	7
Natalie Burr | <i>Rug Burn</i>	9
Lyndsey Covert | <i>Kite Strings</i>	29
Nikole Davtyan | <i>Used Cars</i>	31
Laura Dzubay | <i>Accordion Anatamy</i>	33
Laura Dzubay | <i>Betty Hill's Dream on the Fifth Night</i>	35
Laura Dzubay | <i>Four Attempts at Understanding Nature</i>	36
Laura Dzubay | <i>Seasonal Affective Disorder</i>	38
Alyssa Holt | <i>On the Eradication of Plagues</i>	40
Alyssa Holt | <i>Say Something</i>	42
Christina Khouri | <i>Untitled</i>	65
Payton Luokkala | <i>Dear Friends</i>	66
Emily Miu | <i>Haiku Silliness</i>	78
Dana Nathanson | <i>it's ok</i>	80
Rajal Patel | <i>You</i>	82

* LHSP alumni

Hannah Rhodenhiser	|	<i>Grapefruit Spoons</i>	.....	89
Hannah Rhodenhiser	|	<i>Ouija</i>	.....	90
Hannah Rhodenhiser	|	<i>Prospect Ave. Is Closed</i>	.....	91
Hannah Rhodenhiser	|	<i>Sam I Am</i>	.....	94
Sarah Schuen	|	<i>The Fall and Ebb</i>	.....	98
Sharon Shen ⁺		<i>A Toast</i>	.....	99
Sharon Shen ⁺		<i>an open letter...</i>	.....	101
Sharon Shen ⁺		<i>Commission</i>	.....	104
Sharon Shen ⁺		<i>Dua</i>	.....	108
Luke Stevenson	|	<i>Life Cycles</i>	.....	110
Sarah Uddin	|	<i>Ode to Cherise</i>	.....	111
Asritha Vinnakota	|	<i>Bullet Freedom</i>	.....	114
Haley Winkle	|	<i>Don't Tell Me</i>	.....	116
Haley Winkle	|	<i>Leaves</i>	.....	118
Haley Winkle	|	<i>Mother</i>	.....	119

Fiction

Brenner Bernstein	|	<i>Who Is Waldo?</i>	.....	5
Natalie Burr	|	<i>Making Room</i>	.....	9
Rhea Cheeti	|	<i>Auric</i>	.....	22
Rhea Cheeti	|	<i>Phase I</i>	.....	23
Sarah Costello	|	<i>The Key</i>	.....	24
Asritha Vinnakota	|	<i>Bells Chime</i>	.....	112

Nonfiction

Natalie Burr | <i>The Bewitching Hour</i>	11
Rebecca Polinsky | <i>Forehead Kisses</i>	84
Rebecca Polinsky | <i>Stinky Feet</i>	85

Art

Sarah Adams | <i>Weekend</i>	45
Jessica Ankley | <i>Fluidity</i>	46
Ilma Bilic | <i>Awkwardly Numb</i>	47
Ilma Bilic | <i>Empty</i>	48
Skylar Burkhardt | <i>Lives Left Behind</i>	49
Cassidy Carpenter | <i>Coexistence</i>	50
Cassidy Carpenter | <i>Few Doubts</i>	51
Cassidy Carpenter | <i>Self (Glitched) Portrait</i>	52
Claire Davenport | <i>Manhattan</i>	53
Carson Hart | <i>Dion Agius Strange Rumbings</i>	54
Madison Jaber | <i>Dreams & Visions</i>	55
Yulia Lomakina | <i>There are always flowers for those who want to see them</i>	56
Siena McKim | <i>Bugged Out</i>	57
Anna Minnebo | <i>Evolution</i>	58
Emily Post | <i>Penthesilea 2 & 3</i>	59
Katherine Qiao | <i>at my fingertips</i>	60
Katherine Qiao | <i>Overflow</i>	61
Katherine Qiao | <i>Silence</i>	62
Manuel Rodriguez | <i>Untitled</i>	63
Cindy Xuan | <i>Intuit Perspective Hallway</i>	64

Yardain Amron

E BAR

kneeding a pen into forehead. circling gloss over lips. ankle shakes only I make exist. the room writes the people and the cactus molds itself.

cold coffee now

the important things are put on hold for the moment while important things take hold of the moment. your work now my pleasure. my fissure now my work. beaded braid breasted, hand covered mouth suggested. soft cheeks, deeper in. Vollebekk's harmonica in my ears, accordioneering inside out time, through wine bottled bars, without room for doubt that far is more ours than mine.

but what do you mean?

Is that note you're writing for me? Clearly not, gone without a lash. No matter. The ponytail boy who made his friend leave his number is here now. He even eats banana chips like a scarecrow. I write mixed messages are not wrong messages. Conflict, sometimes, is as secret as the spoon a dog's tongue shapes itself into to drink: only visible in slow motion replay.

* *Caldwell Finalist*

Yardain Amron
FAMILY GET TOGETHER

set the alarm for pm by mistake
it was the first time they paged my name over the intercom
I ran shoeless down the terminal, proud I didn't care what they thought,
knowing now that means I care.
It was my second time in a prop-plane —
the first was vacation in Alaska while wholeness was still still,
all five of us and our pilot,
slicing clouds and rainbows over beautiful Denali,
cutting smiles to memory more real in descending age order —
(I once asked why they married each other. Mom said because he owned his own
toolbox.
I can't remember what Dad said ... if he said, which is a better answer than
hers)
— I slept this second time,
woke to "Welcome to Toronto" and the feeling of going without knowing why

* *Caldwell Finalist*

Yardain Amron

THE S IS SUNDRY

For the whole day, i sit over one sentence, drown it in, and in it, insecure narcissism, add clauses that only bastardize the words farther from their brained purity, shift the 'In 1932' from preposition to postposition back and forth and back and forth, like a broken yet still oscillating fan, trying to make something instead of letting it be made, and out the window, past the unmoving vibrating tree, before the white picket fence i watched the man cut and build and paint and coat and coat again and again steadily over many weeks in the fall, the light fades unforgiving in its steadiness, and i worry how many more days of this, this paralysis, i can endure, can afford, can process, before i give up, settle unsatisfied on the 'In 1932' in the postposition, but not because i've concluded the content can stand without the context, but because i'm tired and demoralized and sad, and blinded by my leaky goggles of faith that chlorinate my truths into artful atonalities, and so i just leave it at the end without sound reason, at which point the silent whistle sounds, and my brain flings my body from desk to bed, or is it the other way around, my body flinging my brain?, and i flick through the news on my phone only to escape into the space of real death in the name of faith, now guilty of my too-real drama, and i bury my eyes into the softness of a cold pillow, whose violence exists only in context, whose softness exists only in content, and the loneliness seeps in, and i call my mom and she mentions self-sabotage and i say i know, and she says to go swim, and i say i will, and she says she loves me

* *Caldwell Finalist*

and i feel horrible because i still feel shitty, which means my self-absorbed failure is drowning out her unconditional love, and afterwards, when i'm back alone, i start a new page in naive hope of erasing all context, and write nothing but this for the whole day.

Brenner Bernstein
WHO IS WALDO?

“Do you know what it is like to always be watched? To always have to look over your shoulder before you do or say anything? Why does everyone else get to have privacy except for me? I used to think it was fun to get all the attention, to have everybody’s eyes on me. Now all I yearn for is freedom, a chance to get away from everything and just be me.

When I was in high school I didn’t really have any friends. I was obsessed with the outdoors and adventure. Most of the guys in my school were into things like football and girls, and doing anything it took to be popular. I pretended like I didn’t care, but it hurt everyday knowing that I was just a fly on the wall and that nobody knew I even existed. I wanted to be somebody. I wanted to know what it felt like to have people notice me. Everyday after school I would make my way over to the coffee shop, pick up my apron, and grind out 6 hours at minimum wage. I knew that as soon as it was time for graduation I would compile all my money and get out of this town. I had a plan, and I was going to stick to it. I was going to travel the world and finally make a name for myself.

I took my very first flight across seas to Europe and just let my imagination take the way. I didn’t have much money so I would wear the same clothes everyday: jeans, a red and white striped shirt, my dorky reading glasses, and my red and white beanie to match my shirt. It was the only thing that stuck with me from high school, the only piece of me I was keeping on this journey. For a while I traveled around Europe feeling like the same fly on the wall, but then something magical happened.

I was in Paris making my way back to my hostel when I passed a newsstand. I

couldn't believe my own eyes. On the very front page was a picture of me! All of the writing was in French but at the bottom of the page was the face of the author who wrote the exposé. At first I didn't recognize him, but as I looked a little closer I noticed that I had seen this man before. He was the man I saw sitting in the booth in the Purple Moose in Sydney, the man I saw standing in line for the exhibit at the Anne Frank House, the very man I bumped into while on a tour in the Sistine Chapel. I guess my head must have been looking at the ground for a while now, because when I looked up there were multiple cameras pointed my way. Everywhere I looked people recognized the dorky man in red and white. I was finally famous, I finally I felt like I had a purpose in life. Every day, I would notice more people cheering for me. There were at least one more set of eyes gazing at my red and white attire. After being lonely for so many years, I had found company.

However, the joy didn't last. I soon realized that they didn't like me for me. People got amusement from my outrageous style and didn't even care to hear about my interests or the incredible adventure I had experienced. I felt like a walking Santa Clause, but not the good kind, the kind of Santa who is clearly wearing a fake beard and padded stomach. It became torture I just couldn't endure. I decided to disappear and end this insane charade once and for all, but it wasn't easy. I tried to mind my own business, but wherever I went I was being hunted as if I was some sort of prey. No matter where I went, I was never alone. It became some sort game, 'Where's Waldo.' It was a nightmare I couldn't escape. That is when I finally decided to take off my clothes, part of my identity, and disappear for good."

Kate Bishop
FIFTEEN MONTHS

What a beautiful thing
it was to have loved
the light in you.
It was a kaleidoscopic
tempest: crystalline fragments
of shattered glass
breaking against the hardwood floor
in a crescendo of
iridescence.
The remnants
of opals left to
glimmer unassumingly
on top of clovers in the
early morning are nothing more
than its distorted reflection
in a river during the rain.

If there was ever
an equivalent
to watching you wilt,
it is the incessant
torture

of your cold hands seizing
everything I want to say
and rearranging my words
into your name.

I'm only here because
you preferred oblivion.
My throat hasn't stopped hurting
for fifteen months,
six letters scratching it raw
whenever I even
think of them.

Natalie Burr

THE BEWITCHING HOUR

When the hour approaches and the crowd of post-pubescent teenagers has thinned, body heat still hanging in the kitchen, living room, in the hall, hovering over throw pillows and marble counter tops ordered straight from an upscale home improvement catalog, and the suburban house party one-part-symphony-three-parts-cacophony has turned down for what just enough for Ubers to be requested and en route, arriving in a matter of minutes—this is the post-witching hour, the bewitching hour, where I'm from. Red cups are left on the lawn or thrown in the trash, to the relief or dismay of that evening's unlucky adolescent host, and expensive hard wood floors are buried in a sticky coating of cheap beer.

Living this close to a major metropolis, the midnight complexion of the sky is only a starless bruised gray, even on the clearest night. It's doubtful that any of us will make it home before curfew, and when the car deposits me on the curb in front of my quietly disapproving house—by day, sunny sitcom suburbia—and pulls away, I'm left with the stereotypical summer sounds of cicadas, humming electrical street lamps, and the chattering box air conditioners that are solely responsible for masking the noise of my key in the lock and the creaky open and shut of the back door.

There are always leftovers in the fridge, and fruit in little bowls on the kitchen table and I don't need light to guide me to my room. The scratchy rug from the Turkish merchant in Watertown, the cold wood floor after it, slipping between the doorway and the kitchen cabinet with all of the good china, the softly twisting stairs, invisible until my eyes adjust and I confirm that, yes, the stairs are still there under my feet and they are still beige and carpeted, I breathe in and out and make no other noises until

I finally cross the threshold of my room and crumple like a frustrated origami attempt into the red-sheeted womb of my bed. The scent of the incense I burned just before I had gone out that night is still lingering so, so faintly in the air around me. In the morning, there is the promise of a sweet headache and a bagel from Rosenfeld's.

Natalie Burr
MAKING ROOM

“It’s disillusionment,” he said, “not depression. I resent that, you calling me depressed. It minimizes my problem, categorizes me, checks me off as a box on a form at the doctor’s office. I’m disillusioned, not depressed.”

Leo pulled the covers up to his chin and turned to face me. We were in bed, his bed, smoking weed out of a vaporizer. I put my lips on the small mouthpiece and took a light breath in, holding it; the burnt taste rang loudly in the back of my throat. I didn’t look at him until I exhaled, with such force that I startled Chaz, who had been curled up and purring on my bare stomach. I was conjugating verbs in my head, in French, because that was the class I was skipping. On mornings when he distracted me from my studies this way, I always made a point of not completely devoting my attention to Leo. This wasn’t easy—he had a way of concentrating on my words with such ferocity that it made me want to give up everything, to melt the parts that made me who I was and attach them to who he was, just to revel in his intensity. It was mid May and I was a junior in high school. I had several weeks left of hard work, specifically a thesis paper on the history of Boston’s urban development that I intended to do very well on, mostly because I loved the research. To chastise myself for the work I was missing, I conjugated verbs that I would be quizzed on later in the week. *Mettre. Je mets, tu mets, il met, nous mettons, vous mettez, ils mettent.*

Leo and I were trying to pick up where we had left off. He had returned from college something like three weeks ago, so I hadn’t noticed the cold space that would grow to separate us in the coming months. Still in search of a summer job, he had little to do, and his house was always empty. His mother taught algebra at my school, and

his father did something at an office park in Waltham. He had a younger brother who was also a junior, but he usually went to class. On mornings like these, I would drive over in my shitbox car with the windows down, breathing in the suburban spring, sometimes so early that I would wake Leo up. I would crawl into bed with him and let his wiry six-foot frame settle around me. Later, he would make eggs with toast and coffee, and we would eat in bed. Then he would tell me stories from the year that we hadn't seen each other, the four months that he had been in school at Bowdoin College in Maine and the other eight that he had been backpacking in South America, the year that I had spent home, stuck. We had both grown up in that lost year, but in opposite directions.

"I'm sorry, you know what I mean," I handed Leo the vaporizer and turned towards him, upsetting Chaz so that our bodies were parallel under the covers but there was about six inches of space between us.

"It's just—like, there was this time, in the lab I told you about—" he was referring to the neuroscience research lab where he had interned at Bowdoin—"the one with the mice? Where I had to perform all those spinal cord dissections?" He continued, and I was unsure where he was headed. He told me about one afternoon when the sunlight was skimming off of the Androscoggin River and streaming into the lab:

"I had performed a dorsal root ganglia dissection, a process in which the spinal cord of the mouse is severed through a cut in the abdomen—" no shit, this is what he talked like—"At point, I had done this procedure maybe a hundred times and I was confident, my hand no longer shook when I picked up the scalpel and held the euthanized rodent in my hand." *Vous prenez, ils prennent.*

"But this time, I don't know what happened. They aren't supposed to use pregnant mice in the lab and usually there's a way of screening the animals so as to ensure that they're all fit to be subjects in an experiment. I made the incision just as I was supposed to and slid the scalpel across the creature's soft belly; something was wrong, and I felt movement under my fingers. Five, unimaginably small, but moving, living, breathing, fetuses fell out of the euthanized mouse and onto my tray. They squirmed,

sickly pink and red and purple, covered in their own womb matter, crying, and I didn't know what to do, I was shocked and what could I do?" *Emmerde. J'emmerde, tu emmerdes, il emmerde, nous emmerdons.* "They were far too premature to survive being forced out of their mother's womb, and even if they had been able to live, I quickly realized that their delicate lives would have been sacrificed in the near future for the lab's research. I was alone at my workspace. I waited with them, imploring them to pull through with every cell in my body, I watched them as they succumbed to what was, truly, an inevitable fate, struggling for life in a pile of their mother's innards." *J'oublie, tu oublies.*

"My supervisor apologized when I reported the mistake to her. 'We really couldn't be one hundred percent certain that improper subjects wouldn't make it into the research supply,' she told me with sympathetic eyes and a cordial pat on the shoulder before sending me home early for the day. It was brutal, and I was destroyed. I avoided my friends for weeks, eating rarely, sleeping almost not at all. This tiny event could have ended my world, and I wanted it to for some time, before I realized that it was all so selfish. How could I care about some fucked up lab situation when there are, you know, *people* being brutally and systematically murdered every day?" *Je tiens.* "Isn't that selfish of me, to let this ruin my life for a month? But it *was* so fucked up, and I still think about it all the time, if it changes anything..."

He trailed off and waited for me to respond. I hadn't finished conjugating *Vomir: Je vomis, tu vomis, il vomit...* one of my favorites, because it means exactly what you think it means, and it's surprisingly useful. I didn't say anything, but turned to face the wall.

* * *

I felt compelled to call myself out or cut class to spend time with Leo—at the age of seventeen, there's nothing so shattering as seeing someone you love come undone the way he did. I thought that I could shoo away the chemicals in his body that were dismantling his mind and pulling him apart like a spool of thread being unraveled, but

I didn't know how quickly it was happening, the terrifying rate at which amino acids were combining to form proteins that would outweigh his endorphins and cause him to visibly cool his attitude toward me over the course of a single conversation. I couldn't have put him under a microscope to see the hydrocarbon chains that were bonding to create complex hormones that would pulse through his nerve synapses, rearing their ugly heads throughout the coming months: When he refused to leave the house for four days because he couldn't find a book that I'm not sure existed; one night that summer when I fell asleep in the car and instead of driving me home from his house, he drove eight hours to a mountain in Vermont that he had climbed as a child, and insisted we were home. I don't think anyone or anything could have stopped him from getting worse.

In the hot weeks that summer before he really stopped being himself, there were good days. It rained more than usual, the type of summer storms that propelled us off of the couch in front of the chattering box air conditioners and away from the city to drive towards quiet baseball fields. We would lie in the wet grass, flinching at the thunder and daring the lightning to strike us until our clothes were soaked and we were half deaf. When it got dark, we would come back and change our clothes, he would make dinner and we would eat.

Once when we ate cereal for dinner and the television was on, he fell asleep with his head resting on my thigh. Leo hadn't touched his bowl of corn flakes, and they had been sitting on the floor next to the green couch for several hours, saturated with milk. I forget what channel we were watching, but I remember the movie that was on. It was the one where Tupac plays a drug dealer trying to get a high-school basketball player to leave his small town stardom and pursue a career on the streets. Instead of focusing on the glow of the TV set, I watched the warped mirror images of the action onscreen that was reflected in the window on the opposite wall. Even my father was asleep which means it must have been so late that it was early. The house was dead quiet except for Leo's calm sleep sounds and the racket of the cicadas in the backyard. The sound on the television was all the way down, so I watched the characters as they

delivered silent dialogue.

In one scene, Tupac is speaking to the young basketball player when all of a sudden, and with the gaudy showmanship of a birthday party magician, he produces a razor blade that had presumably been tucked into his cheek for the larger part of the scene. He holds up the razor blade and it glints in the artificial moonlight of Hollywood's take on an urban basketball court. He smiles at the blade lovingly, sleepily, before he puts it back in his mouth, shaking his head with the wizened satisfaction of an old man.

I moved my tongue around the soft folds on the inside of my cheek, over my teeth and the creases on the roof of my mouth. I wondered where Tupac kept the razor, if he had trained himself to hold it there while he spoke his lines, like some type of hood ventriloquism. I began to draw a picture inside my mouth with my tongue. I traced Leo's figure as it was sprawled on the couch. His feet, each toe, his legs bent at a ninety degree angle, arms wrapped around himself, almost fetal, all of his strong features slackened in the tiny death that is being asleep, these were all reimagined on the roof of my mouth.

When I was done, I carefully reached in and extracted my picture, holding it up to see what I'd made. However, what I had drawn wasn't Leo, but instead it was a mouse, the pregnant mouse that he had cut open that afternoon at the lab. I don't know how I knew it was that specific mouse, but I knew that it was, in the way that you know things in dreams. She was soft and white and warm in my hands as I held her up in the moving blue light of the television set. I was startled to be holding something very different than what I had anticipated, so I let out a little gasp and dropped the mouse on the floor. She came to life when she hit the carpet and scurried out of the room and into the dark house.

* * *

The summer ended, and so did Leo's presence in my life. I killed our relationship be-

fore he went back to school and he told me he understood but I don't think he forgave me. With prospects of college looming ahead of me, I was wholly and happily overwhelmed with focusing on my own future. I was pursuing my idea of manifest destiny, looking to spend my next four years in some smoky western college town.

Leo dropped out of school for good later that semester. "Conventional learning isn't for me," he told me in a letter, written in a shaky hand that I didn't recognize. He wrote to me that he was taking his car and his clothes and moving to Quebec to work at his uncle's fishing lodge on the Saint Lawrence River. I wrote off a rambling response, not taking the time to collect the open-ended thoughts that I had about his situation. I was embarrassed with the result of my efforts to put my feelings on paper because they sounded grossly sentimental when I read them out loud.

Frustrated with how well Leo had expressed himself in writing, I decided to put off sending the letter. I folded the single sheet of paper first into quarters, and in half again and again until it was the size of a quarter. Then, I carved out a pocket in my cheek with my tongue and tucked into it the square of paper, just as I imagined I would fit a razor blade in my mouth. I held it there for days, growing accustomed to how it felt, learning how to talk without letting it disturb my speech, brushing my teeth with it there, soon forgetting that it was there at all, until weeks later when, on a whim, I pulled out the folded piece of paper and without giving it a second glance, put it in an envelope made out to the address that Leo had given me and threw it in the mail. I didn't expect a response and I figured it didn't matter what I had written, because it was unlikely that Leo and I would ever cross paths again.

* * *

And we didn't—until last week, when he reappeared as I waited in a painfully long line at the pharmacy down the street from my apartment in Madison. I was anxious and dehydrated even before my phone began buzzing against my leg, because I'd skipped lunch to call about a job opening that would allow me to be closer to my parents and

their simultaneously declining health. I didn't have the number saved, and the area code was one I didn't recognize, so I answered haltingly. A pleasant voice at the other end greeted me after I had confirmed who I was.

"I'm calling from the Forestville Police Department, investigating the disappearance of one Leo Holm. He's been missing for a couple of weeks now, and we don't have much to go on, but we did find an old drawing that was sent to him with your name listed as the return address. We traced it to this phone number," said the voice at the other end.

I didn't know what drawing the voice on the other end was referring to in her subtle French Canadian accent, and I expressed this to her. I explained that I hadn't been in contact with Leo for almost ten years. My insides were twisting nervously as she told me what little she could about his disappearance. His uncle had filed the report after he stopped showing up to the fishing lodge where he had been a tour guide and maintenance man for nearly a decade. Based on his apartment and the people who knew him, he didn't have many friends, but he read a lot. I told the woman on the phone that this didn't surprise me, knowing Leo, though I hardly believed the words once they slipped out of my mouth. She encouraged me to visit Forestville, to talk to Leo's uncle, whom she knew personally. She told me that he was taking Leo's disappearance pretty hard, and he could use someone to talk to.

There wasn't any good reason for me to go. It's true that I was starved for adventure in the post-college years that I lived in Madison. My boyfriend at the time seemed wholly displeased with the idea of me driving up north to look for my high school sweetheart, no matter how dysfunctional I'd promised him our relationship had been. I was overwhelmed by my job and strained financially, but something about Leo's sudden reentry into my life as he exited every other plane of existence made it absolutely necessary to drop what I was doing and drive to Canada for a long weekend. No one knew for sure that Leo wasn't ever coming back or if he was dead or alive, but I knew he was gone from this world. On top of all that it was February, and so fucking cold that I couldn't feel my face after the sixty second walk from my car to the police station

where I had requested to read Leo's missing persons case before meeting his uncle for dinner at the fishing lodge.

The receptionist at the police station smiled at me with his chapped lips as he handed me the file — held under public domain for me by the woman on the phone — but his eyes got it all wrong, expressing a lazy attempt at pity instead of what I assume was intended to be sympathy. A poster with an old French proverb printed across it in block letters was hanging above the front desk. It was an odd and seemingly irrelevant phrase for a police station:

“Surtout souris, n’oublie pas de sourire!”

I found a table in the lobby of the quiet police station and sifted through the missing persons forms and other papers relevant to Leo's case. I quickly located the envelope with my name in the upper left corner, my handwriting spelling out his name and address in the center. Inside the envelope was the folded piece of paper I had put in the mail so many years ago, except now it was torn at the edges and crumpled as if it had been read many times. I opened it, expecting to see my handwriting forming awkward sentences that did no justice to the emotional confusion that I had experienced at the time that I'd written the letter. But there were no words on the page; instead, there was a simple drawing. It was the outline of a mouse, drawn in black pen. I looked up to make sure that the cold-eyed man behind the desk wasn't watching me before I folded up the drawing and placed it, just so, in the space inside my mouth that I had carved out so many years ago. After running my tongue over the paper just a few times it settled into the shape of my cheek, fitting exactly as it once had.

* * *

I knew that Leo wouldn't be found, and he wasn't. Soon after my trip to Forestville, I sold the apartment in Madison and broke up with my boyfriend, taking the job back east. I don't keep the black pen drawing in the space in my mouth anymore because it got too heavy to carry around, and the ink started to stain my teeth. I took out the

drawing of the mouse a couple of years after my visit to Forestville, putting it in my wallet nested behind the kindergarten class picture of my first child, where it stayed for many seasons.

I rarely take out the drawing; unfolding the crumpled square of notebook paper and looking at it seems to be too much of a task. It might be the only trace of Leo that's left, because he's been forgotten from everywhere else. For some time, the pocket inside my cheek was empty, but it still found good use over the years. In it, I carry things that Leo never knew about me: the horrible secrets of my close friends, doubts about my marriage, the uncomfortable truth that my second child has always been my favorite. I carry the things that are never on the tip of my tongue, but are always nearby.

Natalie Burr
RUG BURN

My mother met the merchant in Istanbul:
a man with olive-oiled skin and sugar tones in his accent
black and blue — his jeans and a t-shirt, black, always,
so he paled beside his brilliant product.
He filled the house with two hundred square feet of history
of the East, trees of life, rugs for prayer, hidden
beneath the feet of the mosque masses for centuries,
tumbling from dust and rubble into my living room,
woven with purposeful mistakes because
to mimic perfection is to disrespect perfect creations; you are not God you
are not without fault from this I learned that even

When they are pinched corporate and artless,
in office parks wall to wall and a hopeless vomit hue —
Polyester, rayon, synthetic and aiming for function
— Mass-produced and meant for invisibility, they are still
rolled up heavy and historic and they are filled
with Elizabeth Taylor carried past Ptolemy and his guards
whispering inside to Caesar; even the electric blue mat
in the bathroom, soaked and soapy at the mercy
of the child in the tub, has this common ancestor.

I sit wide-eyed in the dark
and the patterns below me rise between my toes
not in technicolor, and not a quilt to keep a body warm
but the soft armor, like flesh for floors of stone and dark wood.
These lines of dyed wool have repeated the dukkha
since the invention of soldiers and boots: *all life is suffering,*
all life is suffering. It is the muffled thudd
of soldier's boots steeped in mud on the carpet

But there is revenge in upturned corners
tripped over in the night
and networks of stains from the dog,
before he was house trained.
These are trees of life, too.

Rhea Cheeti

AURIC

His mother scowled at him, wisps of her honey blonde hair falling into her eyes. She certainly looked the part of a normal mother. Maybe if Michael pretended hard enough, she actually would be. Squeezing his eyes shut, he thought of happiness

Homemade cookies and
Sunshine and the smell of
Freshly mown grass after rain
And bli

Crack

With a sharp jolt, his head swung to the side.
She'd slapped him.

With barely suppressed fury clouded behind her amber eyes, *the same as his own*, she looked him over, before they softened unexpectedly. Gripping his chin with her hand, she held his head in place as she crouched down to face him.

"Don't you see Michael?" She asked, silently pleading with him to understand. "Don't you see? You're *special*. You're pure and untouched; they didn't get a chance to corrupt you. Me and you, we'll rule the world together." She sighed, her minty breath fanning over his face.

He didn't understand.

At all.

He was only six.

Rhea Cheeti

PHASE I

“Eh, after a while, we realized that the concepts of hell and heaven were way too arbitrary to decide where someone should go after they die. I mean, the afterlife is forever, right?”

He glanced at Chloe, observing the way she nervously tucked a strand of honey-blond hair behind her ear. She really was a vision, even in death, with her baby-blue eyes and upturned pink lips. He snorted. Chloe looked like she could barely harm a fly.

“So we resorted to more... let’s say creative measures.” His eyes bore into Chloe’s, glimmering with a knowledge beyond her understanding. “There are seven phases that each person has to pass through to reach heaven. If you can handle it, you’re in. It’s more fair, y’know? People exist on a spectrum, and it’d only be right to reflect that in the afterlife.”

“We like to get all the major ones out of the way first. In phase I, you confront everything you’ve ever killed, pretty basic stuff, unless you’re a serial killer or something.” He watched Chloe out of the corner of his eye, noticing the way she visibly shuddered at the word ‘killed’.

“Phase I will start soon. See you in a while.” He smirked as she offered him a shaky smile, fear dancing in her eyes.

He retreated into the darkness, watching the hordes of insects attack Chloe, digging their pincers into her skin, swarming up her body and crawling into her eyes, her mouth, her ears.

“Those idiots never expect it.”

He chuckled softly as her screams filled the air.

Sarah Costello
THE KEY

When I was growing up, Mr. Reyland lived in the house across the street and two doors down. He was one of those people who looked to never age: he seemed to be infinitely about sixty years old. He kept his yard in pristine condition, his gray hair cut and combed back in the same standard style for as long as I knew him, and although he owned a car, he hardly ever used it, instead choosing to walk everywhere. He always used a cane but never gave any indication that he had a limp or a bad hip or anything that might suggest he actually needed one, and he marched down his driveway every day at precisely 3:30 pm to get his mail. Every Saturday the same thirty-something man, wearing a freshly-pressed suit and carrying a black briefcase, pulled a matte black SUV with blacked-out windows into Mr. Reyland's driveway at 10:00 am, got out, keyed in the code to open his garage, and went inside. He would reverse the ritual precisely at noon, only this time holding some sort of sandwich wrapped in paper, and occasionally carrying a water bottle. This was the routine for as long as I can remember, and I never thought anything of it. I like routine, and Mr. Reyland's was no exception—I always saw it, knew what was happening, but never took too much note. The routine never changed, so I had no reason to.

Occasionally my parents would have a conversation with him that I can describe in no way other than “neighborly”, making small talk as they stood alternately at the bottom of his driveway or ours if they happened to be outside at the same time, but I never actually spoke to him myself. I was an especially shy kid and I never had any reason to go that way down the street, so if our paths ever crossed, I might've smiled at him, and he might've given me the kind of wink that made me

feel like I was in on a secret, but I'm fairly certain I never actually said so much as a word to him.

This, of course, was why it was so perplexing when, a number of years later, I received an urgent letter from a high-class lawyer telling me that this same Mr. Reyland was dead.

* * *

It had been a long week of work, and after dragging myself up the three flights of stairs to my apartment, all I could think of were my ambitious plans for the evening: to ignore all of my obligations and responsibilities and to collapse on the couch, spending the entire night bingewatching Netflix alone with my Olive Garden leftovers and some cheap red wine. This grand plan, however, was quickly foiled. As I turned the key, my door sticking (*again, goddammit*), I gave it a particularly hard shove with my shoulder before it finally gave in and I stumbled across the threshold. Off-balance and not thinking, I threw my arm out to catch myself, causing the large stack of mail in my arms to go flying both in the apartment and out. Groaning, I leaned down to pick all the pieces off the ground when a particular white envelope caught my eye. *Bastian & Bastian Law?*

Befuddled, I stepped back out into the hallway and picked it up, thinking there must be something wrong here. Why on earth would Bastian & Bastian be contacting me, a barely out of college, hardly employed girl with no reason whatsoever to need (nor the funds to pay for) a lawyer? Ripping open the envelope, I scanned the letter. Then I did a double take and read it fully. Then I read it again. Mr. Reyland being dead, okay. It's not like he was young. But he put me in his will? *Why on earth would Mr. Reyland put me in his will?*

"Please visit our office at your earliest convenience," I read aloud to no one in particular. I looked at it for a moment, decided that that was probably lawyer talk for "we need to see you right this very second", begrudgingly picked my things back up, and headed towards the door. *There goes tonight's plans*, I thought, yanking a few times to get

the door open and looking longingly back at the wine on the counter before pulling the door shut behind me.

* * *

That, ladies and gentlemen, is how I ended up here, at not quite 6:00 pm on a Friday night, in the grayest office I've ever seen in my life, sitting in front of a strange man whose cuff links alone likely cost more than my monthly rent.

"Miss Lachman?" he asks, not taking his eyes off of the file in front of him.

"Yes."

"Short story: your neighbor's dead. He left this key and the contents of its accompanying storage unit to you, and he was insistent that you visit it immediately," he informs me curtly, seeming to look everywhere in the room but my face as he hands me an envelope. He looks back down to the papers on his desk as I open the envelope and pull out a single key.

I have seen this key before. Mr. Reyland kept it on his key ring—it's impossible to miss, bright orange at the base like the keys you get for the lockers at the gym, stamped in dark ink with the number *5401*. Mr. Reyland had kept it in his pocket, sometimes pulling it out and fiddling with it when he spoke to others, and it had caught my eye more than once.

"You'll go through several security checkpoints at the storage facility, but don't worry—the security team has already been warned that you will be there. Here's the address and key code you'll need to access the unit." He slides a piece of paper across the table to me, on it an address I don't recognize and a long and seemingly random combination of numbers and letters written in neat ink. "Don't lose it, don't duplicate it, and do not input it into any computer without at least three security checks, do you understand?"

"I..." I start to object, but the man finally tears his gaze from the paper before him and looks me in the eye. Gaze, I realize immediately, is not the right word to describe this man's look. His countenance is serious, sharp, and intimidating—your standard

snakelike lawyer face—but for some reason I make the snap decision to trust him. Something about his expression convinces me that this is something I must not question. “I understand.”

* * *

I open the door of the storage facility promptly as it opens at 8:00 am the next morning. Once I step inside, I need to take a moment to take it all in. If the facility is impressive from the outside, the inside is breathtaking (a word I’d never thought I’d use to describe a storage facility, if I’m honest); it sprawls, seeming to get only larger the longer I look. The building itself was hard to find, but that’s nothing compared to any sad attempts I might make at finding unit 5401, so I ask the woman at the desk. The lawyer was right: they were expecting me, and I breeze through the unnervingly thorough security. When I reach the door in question, the guards take a few steps and turn pointedly away; I am meant to be alone with this room, but not *too* alone.

Taking a deep breath, I enter the lengthy code and turn the key in the lock, and the first thing I’m hit with is a cool breeze and a musty smell. I don’t get much farther for a second, frozen, because if I’m honest, musty is not a smell I’d associate with the clean, pristine world of Mr. Reyland’s, and it takes me aback a bit. Once I get past that, though, I survey the space.

It’s a huge room—perfectly square with dust everywhere, except for on its contents, a pile of papers laying on the floor precisely in the middle which are entirely dust-free. This vault is clearly built to hold something much larger, but the dust implies it never has—or at least it hasn’t in a very long time. I tread lightly to the center of the room and pick the pile up. Underneath it is the same layer of dust that coats the entire square unit—the room’s contents were placed there recently, then. Crouching, I run my fingers over the floor, drawing parallel curves in the dust, and as I shift my feet a cloud of dust puffs up towards my face. It takes me a moment, but once I register this, I pause. This doesn’t add up. If the contents of the unit were placed on top of the dust, they would’ve had to have been put there recently, but the only footprints in the

room are my own. There is no way any person could get the stack so precisely centered without stepping into the room and creating tracks or otherwise disturbing the dust. There's just no way. Perplexed, I turn the stack over in my hands to examine it.

I'm not sure what I expected to find in this room, but this is sure not it. At closer look, the stack of papers is actually a well-worn hardcover book, a crisply sealed white envelope, and a stapled packet that appears to be... a photocopied duplicate of a classified federal government file? *What?* I feel a rush of adrenaline (or is it just pure fear?) take over, and I start to panic. This can't be legal. Is this legal? I'm wracking my mind and I realize that I'm not even sure what Mr. Reyland did—he must've been retired, but what was he retired from? The more I think, the more I realize how little I actually knew about the man. I'm not sure if this is legal or not, I realize, but it's mine now, and the hovering guards are making me nervous. Not wanting to spend any more time here, I make one last sweep of the room, and leave the unit with its contents in hand, reminding myself that I can always come back if I need to.

Lyndsey Covert
KITE STRINGS

Bare feet on shattered glass forgiven,
no blood spilled,
cold waves reaching to hold yesterday's landscape,
nothing looks the same
leaves of bronze and gold mimic
the dying glow of day's end.
We race against the wind,
cotton slapping skin
until we send our shirts to the skies,
pulled tight with spare bones and driftwood.
We floss our teeth with kite strings
and kiss into knots.
Tangled lines and miscommunication
face-down on the ground muttering
"I'm Not Good Enough."
All I can do is hold numb fingers
and tell you how much I love you
with the clenching of a fist,
the actual words are stuck in my throat
tongue-tied and I wish
it was tied up with yours.
We can blame the salt on our cheeks on the sea breeze.

Beneath our feet,
shifting with the whims of the wind
unrecognizable tomorrow
...you claim you've changed.

Kite strings like fish wire,
guttured and hung out to dry after we clash midair
you blame it on your father
and I ask to go home just because I want you
to ask me to stay.
Soles of our shoes worn through
slapping on pavement,
kisses like catfights.
Desperate to bring feeling
to cold fingers,
there's a fine line
between bruised and broken.
I asked for disaster,
little red string twisted around knuckles,
I don't ever remember tender flesh
taking me somewhere better before.

Kites crash
with knots leading you into a labyrinth
you have to fix it,
fix it.
Hair tangled like kite strings
you twist your fingers in.
Gums bleeding
Bare feet
The wind carries me.

Nikole Davtyan
USED CARS

I was in sixth grade
when my mom gave me
the talk.
To be honest,
I didn't know what
sex really was back then.
But this lecture wasn't about how;
it was about why I couldn't.
"No one wants a used car."
I didn't understand.

So she showed me.
We drove to two places that day.
The dealership,
full of nice, shiny cars
that smelled like peppermint.
And the other,
a junkyard
consisting of broken down
and rusted Volkswagens.

"Pick one."

I looked at her,
eyes glossy and full of confusion.
“Pick one,” she repeated.
I lowered my head
and uttered
exactly what she wanted to hear.

Laura Dzubay
ACCORDION ANATOMY

When first you sank into our couch,
I contracted into myself. Grasped hard
on both strappy handles and forced
inward, battling the breath
around my middle, compressing it.
You drove the TV up to twice the normal
volume, leaning back
so that the cushions formed a shape
around you, a cavity around the underside
of a black tooth. I pressed myself in on both sides
and made no sound. You entrenched
our family in Florida, dragged
my mother south, miles away from sun-
ridged mountains. The stripes of me flushed
in turn scarlet and pale – crimson and
cream, like my home – like flesh
against the bone. When you and my mother
traded high-octave notes across the living
room, agony swelled in my heart,
thin and tense like the bellows. My brother
called you a fat asshole, but not

* *Caldwell Finalist*

to your face. Mid-prayer, I try
to summon up some kind of love for you –
because if I don't it's unfair,
if I don't I don't care,
if I don't it's ungrateful. You sit
on the couch again, as the children's shrieks
explore treble clef and my mother
tackles dishes in the kitchen, and you slip
behind the screen of a laptop,
absorbed yet again in your own keys.

Laura Dzubay

BETTY HILL'S DREAM ON THE FIFTH NIGHT

When you asked me where I came from, I said
folded red tablecloths, dusty windowsills and jars
made of glass in the cellar. It sounded odd
when I tried to explain farmland, the NAACP,
how the interstates worked – as though
something meaningful was lost in translation
from my tongue to yours. Something taken.
All life is a distraction from what could have been
in missing time, tucked thinner than paper
between the moments when we glance over,
one hand on the steering wheel, Twin Mountain
slipping by out the passenger window, and think
we know one another. God sat in the mountain
that night, profiled in stone, witnessing.
As for you, a map of stars, no words needed.
I never asked for explanation, or worse,
compensation for my time and trouble, a mouse
to quench your curiosity. You melted away,
your lips like sunken skies and skin like
Athena's eyes, and I, planted deep in New
Hampshire and asphalt, watched you soar
years away, and went home.

* *Caldwell Finalist*

Laura Dzubay
FOUR ATTEMPTS
AT UNDERSTANDING NATURE

I.

my grandfather is cubism,
tortilla yellows and magic
mountain blues. his radio
shakes dylan free, hair
pricks like cactus needles.
zapata he wrote,
night fishing at moms'.
now there is a man
who soaks in sunsets.

II.

reach inward
for a poetry-book of dna,
sinewy guitar strings in the heart.
swallow everything when fingers close
and come up grasping black cords,

* *Caldwell Finalist*

screens glowing star-similar, slimy
and treacherous, lodged
in the throat.
we are our own thieves.

III.

show me the silence
of open air, spindled trees
in the hills
and thorny dust for ground.
the sounds of walking.
a gray woman
losing her way in the wild, a stallion
with a spanish name, moving
as if in a photograph, watching.

IV.

when the blood
moon rose i stared
and stared
at its slick back, speckled
with shade. but why
was it there?
and why did i care?
and why was it red?

Laura Dzubay
SEASONAL AFFECTIVE DISORDER

*April come she will
When streams are ripe and swelled with rain.
May she will stay,
Resting in my arms again.*
–Simon & Garfunkel

The winter weather is back,
dressing the mountains and skirting the
treetops. You wish you had gone south
for the season. Heads bow
against bracing winds, buildings hunch,
glaring crows cluster on the wires.
Many miles away from here
is a drive-in theatre, a summer's paradise
caked in white. You wish you had
followed the birds; I wish for a chariot,
gleaming and gold.
Soon it will be April.
You have spent these months taking note
of animals – deer standing frozen
in the woods, squirrels surfacing on

* *Caldwell Finalist*

occasion and then dipping back
beneath waves of snow. Me, I have
in my house a drawer full of bent spoons,
away from the knives and the other cutlery.
It reminds me of things apart. I have not
been able to be you, I couldn't
have taken it. Only Simon is gentle enough for me:
April come she will
April come she will
April come she will

Alyssa Holt

ON THE ERADICATION OF PLAGUES

On his porch, in the cold,
a green dress glittering along her sharp curves,
dripping in a cornhusk khaki coat —
“you give them an inch and they go bobbing their hair and
hemming their dresses,” she’d overheard in her memory —
her knuckles rasp and cough against crested pine wood,
woodpeckers.

First she couldn’t get her fingers all the way around the knob,
left hand knocking at her skull trying to
grasp the concept —
Like locusts they’d come,
after the summer spent harvesting corn,
the sharpening of her curves,
the pronunciation of the fields,
as if they may contain a feast.

Some hot summer drought they’d been through,
and like locusts, they’d swarmed.
There was nowhere she could not hear them clicking in her ears,
an undertone behind conversations,

* *Caldwell Finalist*

a steadily resurfacing thought.

What was the sudden interest in plains they'd never before considered?

There'd always been something she'd liked about the forest,
some draw to the periphery lining of trees.

She'd once climbed to the top of a steep hill overlooking a field and laid down,
considering the yellow net around the sky.

Here the drone ceased,

drowned out by wind seeping between a vertical sieve,
the pattering feet of the leaves against the dusty earth.

On his porch he meets her, looks at her dripping wet, watered.

His arm rasps against her waist, a branch keeping her up at night.

The locusts go no farther than the barrier of the forest.

She keeps to the shadows cast by the trees against the tall grasses.

She can feel their spindly legs brushing her ankles,

can't tell where the grass ends and the locusts begin.

His arm around her, a tree she might climb.

Looming,

fall sequoia, sturdy against her flank,

she wonders at the leaves descending, the locusts mating.

Alyssa Holt
SAY SOMETHING

Fist meets flesh.
Her cheek ripples
ellipses around knuckles
pebbles on pond water
marbles on hardwood
someone trips over them,
scatters down the stairs,
collects in a heap in the grout.
Little teeth ping across the floor,
clicking in morse code.

“There was once a woman who drowned her children,”
say the teeth,
“drove them out to the lake,
packed them brown paper sack lunches
and sand pails and shovels,
and asked them to dig.
Children and sand castles,
their imagined royalty, their mother a queen,
father tending his kingdom —
abhorrent of cliches,
her throat clutched around her barking,

* *Caldwell Finalist*

‘shut up! shut up!’

She fed them when they’d dug half the lengths of their bodies,
their sandwiches thick with sand and silence,
and once they’d dug so deep their little arms couldn’t brush the opening,
pail-full by pail-full she showered them,
lake water and sand,
shower before bed,
until only the tallest’s little finger
poked from his cement grave.”

The marbles roll,
their gritty curves a record turning,
a jazz singer crooning love songs,
an echo across the floor.

“There was once a woman who raised her children,”
the marbles reply,
“And the tallest grew up but never moved away,
and the shortest moved away but never grew up,
lost their jobs,
lost their minds,
lost money, lost freedom.
She visits one in prison,
the other keeps her prisoner.
The middle one was alright.
She would have liked to have seen him at Holidays,
but no one came around anymore.
Not even her parents, or siblings.
Their father?
Oh, she’d left him,

fled with the kids and her bruises.”

The man who’d slipped down the stairs like marbles,
or, metaphorically, had actually lost his marbles —
his ribs gasp for breath, punctuating their words with sharp coughs,
rattle against each other like wind chimes.

“There was once a man,”
the ribs say,
“Who saw a woman across a room and knew he’d marry her,
till death do them part,
in sickness and in health,
in short-temper and in violence,
do you take thee to be your lawfully wedded wife?
He did.
You may hit the bride.”
The ribs stop talking, because they are overtaken by a fit of coughing.

And the teeth were silent, and the marbles halted their motion,
and the woman’s tongue lolled from her mouth,
not saying anything.



Sarah Adams
WEEKEND
PHOTOGRAPHY



Jessica Ankley
FLUIDITY
WATERCOLOR



Ilma Bilic
AWKWARDLY NUMB
ACRYLIC PAINT

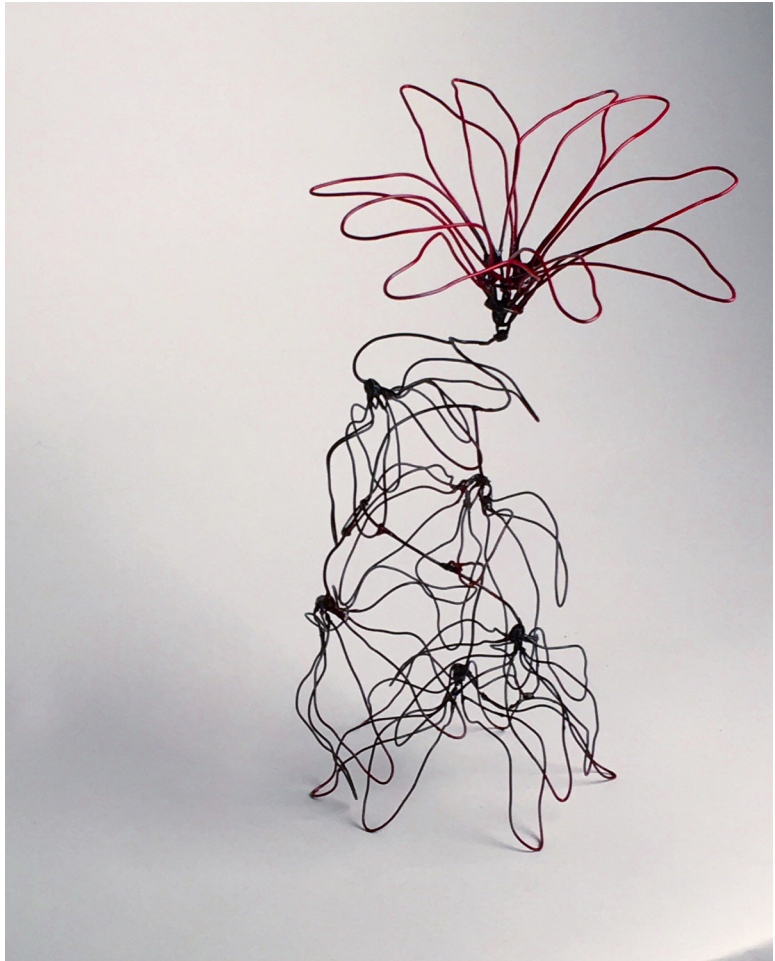


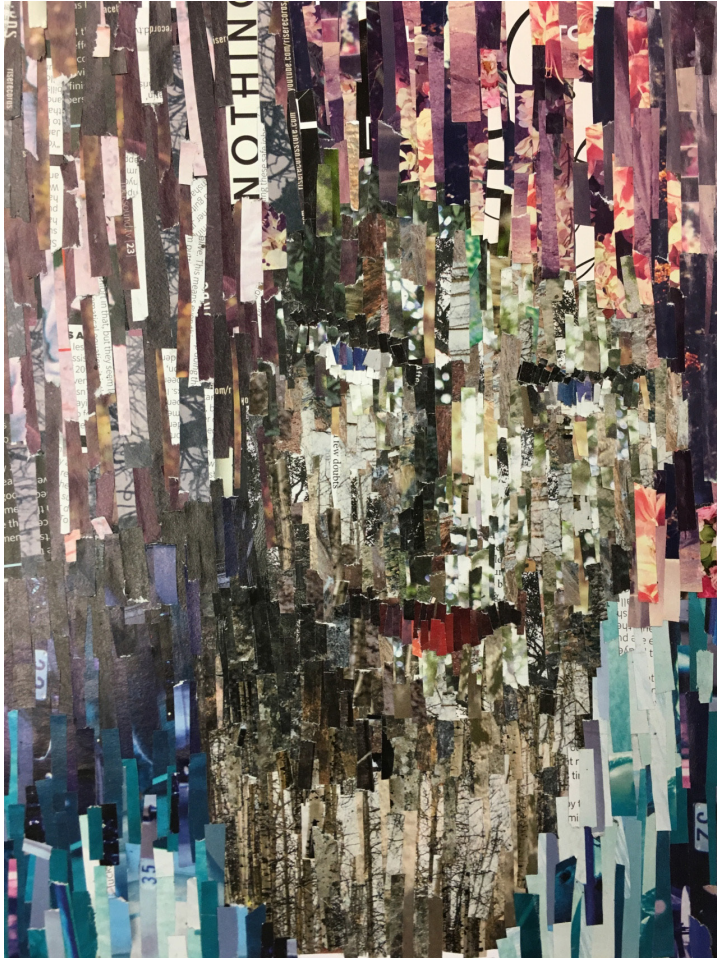
Ilma Bilic
EMPTY
PHOTOSHOP COLLAGE



Skylar Burkhardt
LIVES LEFT BEHIND
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

Cassidy Carpenter
COEXISTENCE
BRONZE WIRE





Cassidy Carpenter
FEW DOUBTS
COLLAGE



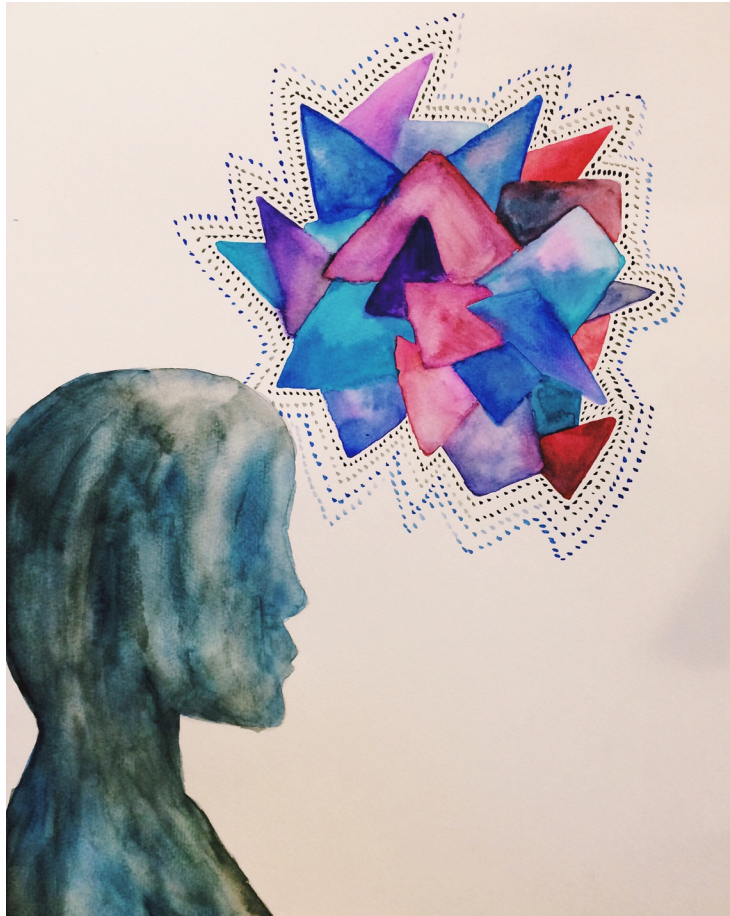
Cassidy Carpenter
SELF (GLITCHED) PORTRAIT
GRAPHITE



Claire Davenport
MANHATTAN
ACRYLIC COLLAGE



Carson Hart
DION AGIUS STRANGE RUMBLINGS
INK



Madison Jaber
DREAMS & VISIONS
WATERCOLOR

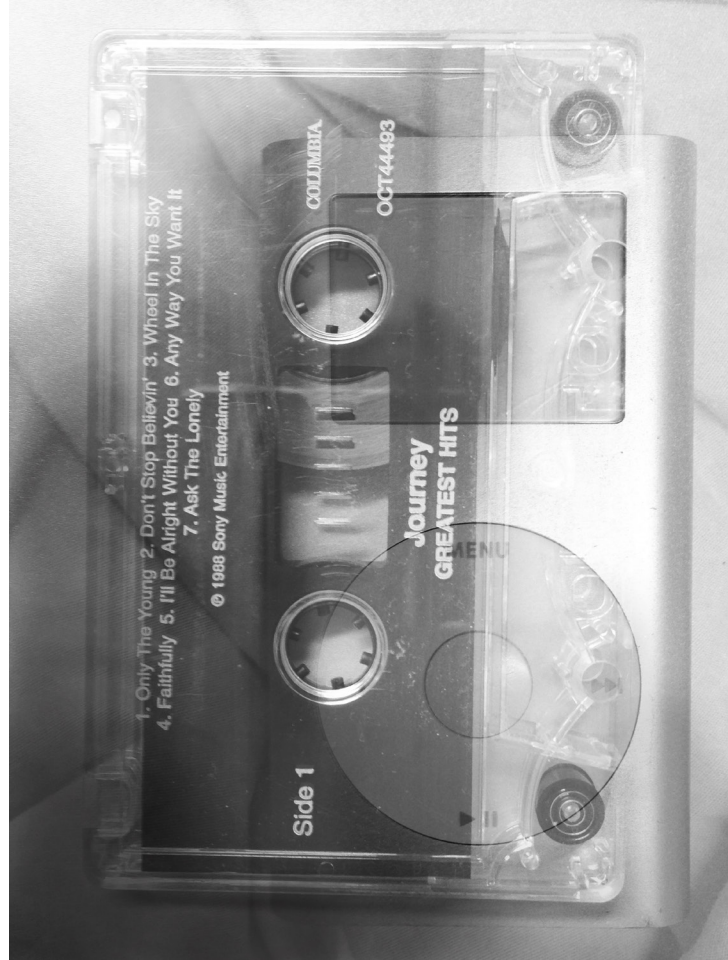
Yulia Lomakina
THERE ARE ALWAYS
FLOWERS FOR THOSE
WHO WANT TO SEE THEM
DIGITAL PHOTOGRAPHY

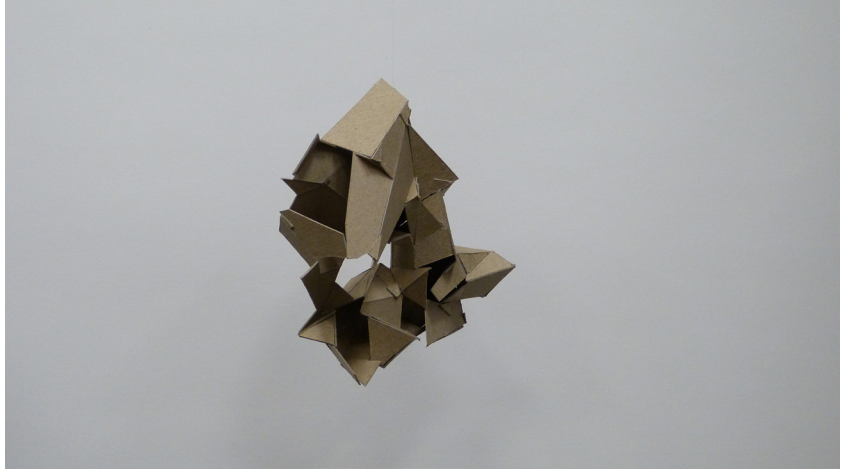




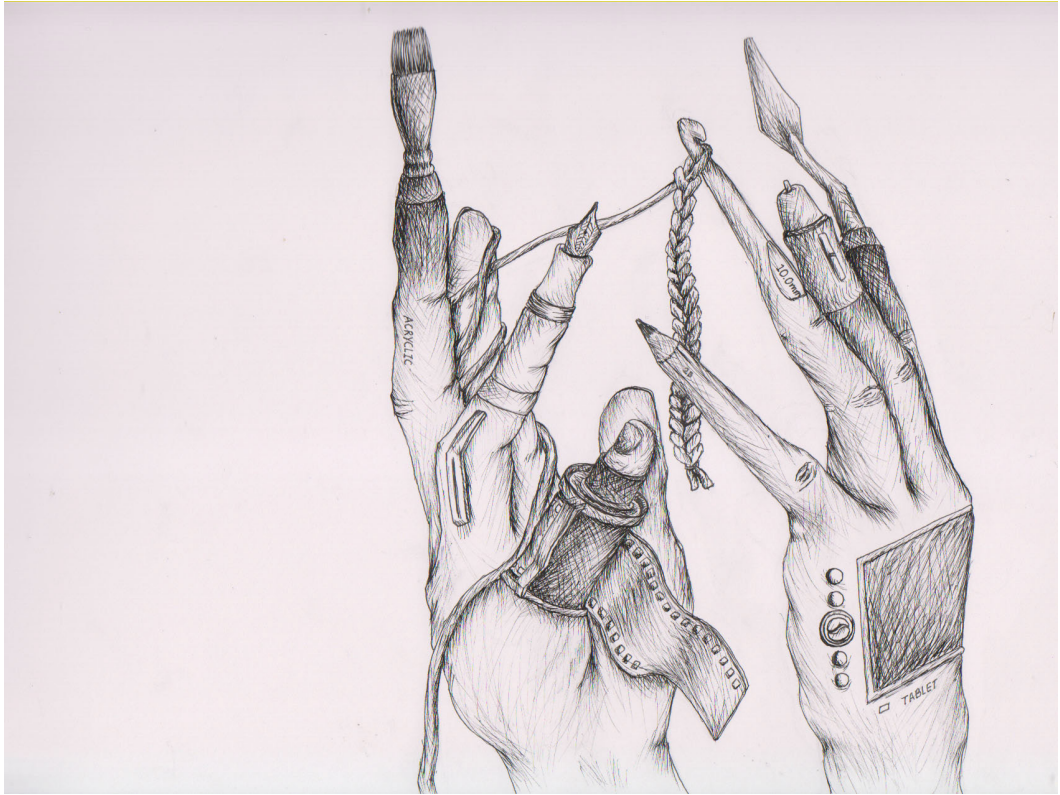
Siena McKim
BUGGED OUT
GRAPHITE, COLORED PENCIL, PAPER, AND MOSS

Anna Minnebo
EVOLUTION
PHOTOGRAPHY





Emily Post
PENTHESILEA 2 & 3
1-PLY CHIPBOARD



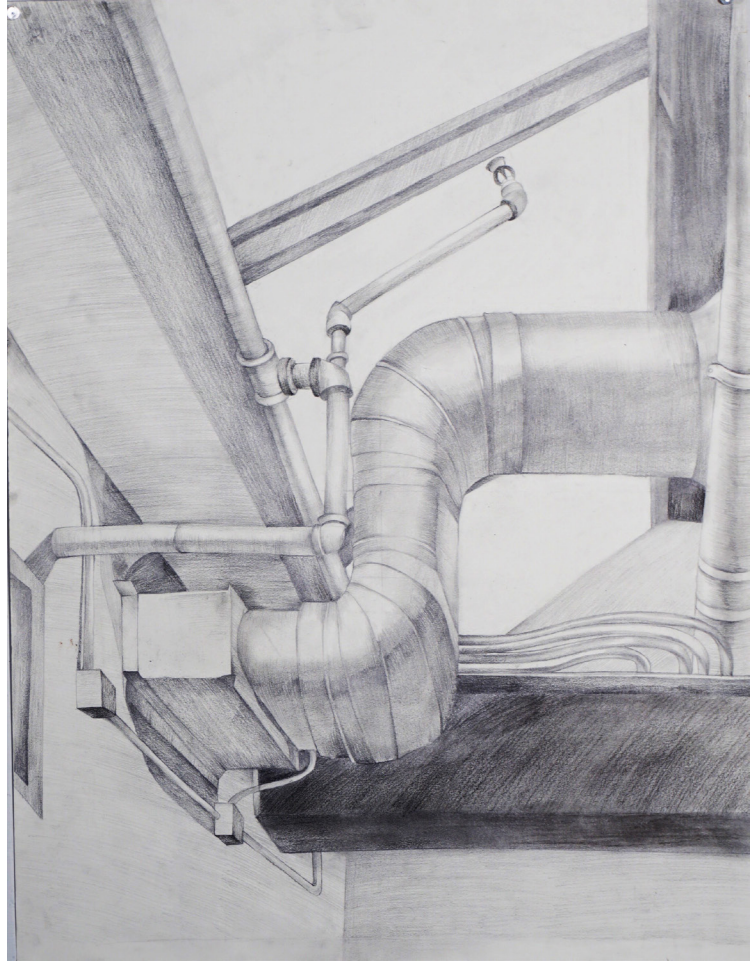
Katherine Qiao
AT MY FINGERTIPS
INK



Katherine Qiao
SILENCE
INK



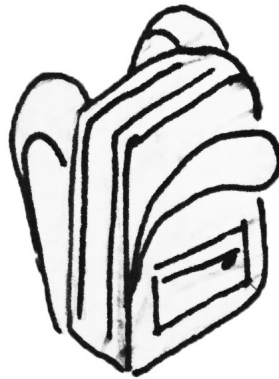
Manuel Rodriguez
UNTITLED
MARKER AND PEN



Cindy Xuan
INTUIT
PERSPECTIVE HALLWAY
GRAPHITE PENCIL

Christina Khouri
UNTITLED

In the morning
it was dense
of hollow hearts
and hollow brains
substance sucked out by sickness
instability standardized by struggle



Payton Luokkala
DEAR FRIENDS

Dear Jenny:

I saw someone with your smile
earlier today. Hers was directed
at the cement or maybe the small
subsisting grass between the cracks.
Her golden retriever floated beside
her, tasted the survivors of summer
before wiping its tongue on yellow
faded paper leaves.

I want you to be the dog,
not tethered to red leather
but staining the world with its tongue,
striking the earth with the ungentle stroke
of its paws.

Dear Haley:

You once told me
Time does not exist.

Friend, I must trust you
because
I threw the clock away.

Dear Caleb:

I wish my hand could
capture a moment like you.
My brain tried: at Mark's house
on your way to turn off
the car lights that were not on,
you stopped at the door, craned your neck,
maybe hearing your name,
face shiny like a melting candle,
teeth bright like the flame,
eyes that reflected a child
who would never grow up. Your hands gripped
the door frame,
each muscle pressed deep into the wood;
don't worry, this moment
waited patiently for your return.

Dear Megan:

You deserve every kindness;
this includes allowing you to

wrap your curls around your index finger,
keep your hands busy as your mind stirs —
Twirl your damn hair.
You might not get the job that doesn't hire
finicky applicants,
but will receive all of the loyalty
there is to be given because when you speak,
teacher, it is important,
but when you listen
crowds will follow.

Dear Alyssa:

The photograph of you, wings of lace
stretched twenty feet behind your back;
Did you feel like an angel?
I'm not sure I believe in such things,
but I remember last year when you read
poems that shook the ground, made
icicles fall from rooftops &
puddle on the ground below;
I was jealous of your ability
to articulate. This year, when we read,
you were afraid, insecurities dripped from your eyes &
I thought, "How? How could this girl who can make a
cold world warm
be afraid?"

Dear Hannah:

Remember when we fought
about the clock? I explained
the tics
kept me awake like
the tocs like
the tics
in my head & I knew I was the problem
but I could not watch my life
count down each night &
I was so relieved to tear down that clock,
down in the middle of the night,
twice. It was either it or me &
you chose me &
yelled at me
for me.

Dear Shavon:

Perfection —
you will never achieve it.
The day you are chained to
three syllables
is a day I do not hope to meet.

Dear Taylor:

When I think of you I think of your hands,
how they know
art & how to laugh
but I repeat myself
because
you are beautiful
you are water
you are laughter
you are paint
& I wanted to write that down.

Dear Michelle:

Lion tamers do not apologize at all;
people apologize too often.
You, dearest friend, are a person
(a static position) & so,

Short Advice in Taming Lions:
Soft palm feeds the lion's need
Through course hair.
Just like that
He is yours.

Dear Kaitlyn:

Flamingos eat pink
shrimp, stain their feathers
with the stuff; they flock
together, create coral lakes
of wings, long legs, curved beaks,
difficult to determine where one
organism ends,
begins.

Dear Jasmine:

Daughter of the star breather,
your laughter is fragmentary
luminescence, lustrous breath
slowly saturating that which is
not already light.

Dear Meghna:

Life looks better
through your camera lens—
sharper & colorful & bright,
optimistic...
more pleasant words.

Dear Matt:

Words feel so good. I know
you do not believe me because
they are unwilling to bungee jump
from your mouth or enter the war
at the end of your pencil lead but
believe me. Believe me.

I want you to get in a fight,
paint with your tongue;
roll down a snow-covered hill
wearing barely any clothes
under the night sky
that blows pain into the rubies
of your knees when you stand again.

That is right; you are bleeding.
Don't you feel alive?

Dear Coco:

The likelihood of buying
something with ten dollars
that will change your life
is low,
but it can happen.
That is all I know of economics;
I carry one bill in my wallet.

Dear Nathan:

yellowbluepink
confetti-covered marching bands
clamor down Main Street;
children slurp lollipops,
spit into kazoos,
clap their sticky hands
off one another;
hipster plays turquoise
ukulele, taps his toe
on the flower pot outside
the comic book store,
cigarette hanging from his mouth,
he cannot keep his feet still,
cannot keep them still;

crows flap their wings,
expertly moving the air behind them;
men scrape their leather shoes
against pavement, hiding their
little stumbles by digging toes
deeper into the ground;
sea green eyes peek under copper curls,
push their waves
through the coffee shop, attempt to crash
into the brown eyes across the ocean
that will never
never
notice;

you do not have to choose

Dear Maia:

Before I thought your
voice might overpower mine
from existence, use brute reason
to beat my sound back into the cave
it belonged. That never happened.
I am sorry I ever thought that
your eloquent speeches
impeded me from attempting
such things. Pasta mother,
hug mother, mother with
Italian tongue;
one who sustains,
grows, loves
—you do not
remind me of my mother—
You remind me of the sun.

Dear Payton:

Dad said,
It's all relative
which sounded a lot like

*Nothing means anything,
but it didn't. It meant
Choose how to see the world.*

—

Do you remember
digs in the sand
balancing the granules
in your palms
an attempt to determine
whether you were
worth
your weight
in salt?

—

Luminaries
out of wire, blood &
tape, tissue paper
eventually created
a hippo. A purple,
crooked jaw, cartoon eyes
two-legged hippo.
Because this child imagines
parades from where she sat
on the curb, feet among candy,
everyone else looking so tall.

—
If I saw art beneath a tree
I'd delay to leave the spot,
bide my time by praying for
the artist to appear. My wish
would be for him to be
like me.

—
Tyree Guyton
saw the Heidelberg Project
before he created it.
I see spots sometimes
too.

—
Tell the shiny kid
he is not so shiny,
or tell him those of
us that are a bit too raw
around
the edges treasure our
rust or at least pretend to, or
just tell him
you love him.

—

Lately I want to cut
my hair
all I have is child's scissors
I cannot cut
straight lines
I cannot decide
how much to cut;
if I desire to chop
off hair, any decision without
copper scars on the floor is
no decision at all.

—

Home light is
different than other
light because it
touches people you know &
that same light touches you
pushes a lost strand behind an ear
tells a joke to your eyes, like
welcome home
like your familiars will always be
across the candlelit,
bread-plentiful
table.

Emily Miu
HAIKU SILLINESS

I.
eaten by a cow
while eating a hamburger
cannibalism

II.
bun in the oven
bakes away for nine long months
pregnant metaphor

III.
cow pies are not pie
they are actually poop
mulch disappointment

IV.
gravy boats are neat
neater in the shaper of cows
like honey in bears

VI.

Jessica Rabbit
brains over boobs over brawn?
it begs the question

VIII.

cereal killer
watch for your neck, artichokes
grocery murder

IX.

brie-ster and swiss-mass
don't forget gouda friday
cheesy holidays

X.

I'm close to nature
even in the smallest way
TP's made from trees

Dana Nathanson
IT'S OK

A fresh start into your new life
But
I already feel behind
Because
I'm not defined
I feel obsolete
Rushed
Prodded and poked
Upside down when
Everyone else
Seems to be right-side up.
I'm floating in a huge cloud of
Oblivion
But,
I'll be okay,
Right?

I've lost my identity
But I think I'm ok with it
Because
Maybe it's never meant to be found
Independence has given me time

To realize
That being defined isn't
What life is about
Life isn't black and white
It's a lot of fucking gray
I don't think I'll ever
Identify my
Identity..
But,
That's ok.

Rajal Patel
YOU

If buildings were crumbling and the sea threatened to swallow cities whole while people around us collapsed into dust, then maybe, just maybe, I might tell you the truth. I know I'm a bit too sinister for your taste to be anticipating catastrophe, but hear me out.

I need something terrible to scare me into admitting it. Jumping to conclusions at this age; everyone is right—we really don't know anything.

Maybe we haven't seen enough of the world.
Maybe there isn't enough world to see.
But we gather what we can.

We're collectors.
I, of beautiful things, and you, of the unexpected. I'd always watch you care with such gentleness for that dull, rusty trash, that never in my life had I wished so much to be a rock.

But I could never be one of your little geode minerals.
You'd have to crack me open for that,
and even if you ever do, there's nothing beautiful about me inside.
You've always seen crystal palaces in the vast caves of the colorless mind.
All I could ever see was a cold, dark place I would not dare to step foot in.
You, on the other hand, loved to get lost.
If God could replace my bones with tungsten, I wouldn't mind the extra weight
if it meant I could be strong like you.
Sometimes, I just wish I were magic so you'd be at least a little bit in awe of me.
But instead I'm boring,
living for mediocre reasoning's,
seeking only for the greater aesthetics.

Maybe, in some other world,
if we could breathe underwater and I didn't have that tattoo,
I wouldn't have to pretend that the look you gave me was as if you loved me.

But I think, instead, if this were a zombie apocalypse,
you'd be the survivor and I probably would have tried to eat you alive.
I'd like to think that before I turned, I might salvage some of my sense to confess.

But I fear you'd be gone before I could turn to tell you
that it was always you.

And only you.

Rebecca Polinsky

FOREHEAD KISSES

I'm from my mom. I'm from the way she clutches her cell phone when telling a secret to her sister. I'm from the rhythm of her tears falling from her cheek when she closes her eyes to listen to me sing. I'm from the squeaking of the front door opening when my dad returns from work at hours too late. I'm from the way he kisses my forehead and smiles into my mother's eyes—the way he stabs a spoon into a gallon of chocolate ice cream. I'm from the echoes of my little sister's violin filling the empty spaces of my home and the vibration of my mom's phone when my older sister calls to share happy news. I'm from my sister's lingering perfume in her bedroom even when she's miles away. I'm from my parent's bedroom, a place where any emotion is welcomed and nurtured. I am from the smell of melted Shabbos candles on Friday nights, the way homemade chocolate chip cookies melt on my tongue. I'm from the clicking of my puppy's paws against wooden floors, the way he watches pedestrians pass by, his rough tongue swallowing my cheeks. I'm from a place where no secrets are kept, where ACT books are shoved down adolescent throats at an age where everyone is lost and afraid. I'm from the way the gateway arch glows behind the window of the backseat of a car, and I'm from the way it feels to come home.

Rebecca Polinsky
STINKY FEET

She sits on the edge of the bed and stares at her toes. They are narrow and when she looks at them she thinks about when she was 8, and how her father would nuzzle his face into her tiny, innocent, soft feet, toss her onto the couch and yell “Stinky feet!” She smiled. Now she is 9 years older and her toes are bony and sharp.

She strokes the edges of her skeletal and icy knees with her thin, weak fingers. Her knuckles are dry and as she moves her hands, she watches each bone glide beneath her skin. She raises her hands in the air and watches her pinky twitch the way it always has, and watches her thumbs tremble violently; she watches a small drop of blood slither down her middle finger, down the back of her palm, and onto the white carpet. Her nails are painted navy and each nail is surrounded by bloody cuticles and scars from the tips of her two front teeth. She rests her hands back onto her cold thighs and suddenly can taste a fat tear slide between her parched lips. She sits there in silence and is haunted by the piercing noise of her own 8-year old giggles and her father rejoicing, “Stinky feet.”

The girl is a universal archetype of a teenager who starves herself to feel beautiful. I am transforming into a lost, struggling, 17-year old character to shed light on all of the girls and women who look in the mirror and are displeased with the image that shines back. I was inspired to create this character after my recent exposure to the tragic effects of an eating disorder.

When my best friend told me that after she ate anything she considered “un-

healthy” for the past several weeks, she would go up to her bathroom, turn on the shower, and stick her toothbrush down her throat, I was blind to the permanence of her confession. She’d sit cross-legged on the chilled tile floor and wait for her regurgitated food to slide down the drain of her toilet and disappear forever.

My friend didn’t cry when she told me. She sat firmly in the passenger seat of my car on a fall day, cracking her knuckles, biting her skin, swallowing deeply. She stared out the front window—she couldn’t look at me. But I didn’t peel my eyes away from her. Her hands continued moving, her eyes were dark and empty, and her shoulders were slumped as if her body was older and weaker. We sat there together and listened to the hum of the car engine and the wind whistling through the cracks of my window. I watched her eyes close and then I closed mine too.

This was a transformative experience for both my friend and myself. I guided her toward seeking help from her parents, who responded with intense therapy. Eventually, she stopped purging, but in order to do so, she filtered her diet so that she consumed only what she identified as healthy. She saw bread and carbohydrates as poison, she refused any form of dessert, and she exercised compulsively. When I would eat lunch with her, she would stare at my food, chewing aggressively and immediately shoving a piece of gum into her mouth. Gum became her scape goat—I would watch her put a fresh piece in her mouth, chew for nearly 30 seconds, spit it out, and put a new piece back in her mouth. This cycle would occur every day, all day. I was in a difficult position, because the only people who knew about her therapy and her disorder were her family, my family, and me. Our other friends would approach me and say, “Have you noticed how much weight she’s lost?” And every time, I would shake my head, shrug my shoulders, and walk away. Her fixation on image had consumed her identity. She was constantly incorporating the topic of the appearance of other people into conversation. When I stood next to her to take a photograph, I wrapped my arm around her mid torso and felt her suck in tightly to appear even thinner. She was not the same.

This cycle was a constant source of stress for me. I dreaded any instance I had to be in her presence with food. I used to eat my lunch in the class I had with her every

day, but the way she gazed at my whole-wheat peanut butter sandwich and pretzels made me feel so insecure that I stopped bringing sandwiches; I could no longer eat in front of my best friend. Her excessive control led me to feel guilty or displeased when I ate something she wouldn't. I hated the positive attention she received; when she went to look at colleges in California, she posted a picture in a bikini on Instagram. Comments from distant family and friends read, "You are so hot" and "Omg your body." *Oh my God, your body.*

Her family has always been close to mine—we are next-door neighbors—and one evening, we all sat around our dining room table for Shabbos dinner, and I watched my mother observe my friend taking the nuts and dried fruit out of the salad. My friend took very few and extremely small bites of the chicken, and immediately after, she violently shoved a piece of gum into her mouth and chewed anxiously. The next morning, my parents sat me down and asked me to limit my time around her. They began to understand the inescapable effects from the exposure to her disorder. My mom reached for my hand and tenderly whispered, "You are confident. Never lose that." And at that moment, I realized I was beginning losing such a valued element of my being—security.

I don't blame her for the impact her disorder has had on me. I knew ever since our car ride that she had lost control over her actions, her emotions, and her anxiety. In many ways, my friend's eating disorder continues to affect me. I have a heightened awareness for the desire to be too skinny—for the thigh gap, the abs, and the thin arms. After first-handedly witnessing the decay of my beautiful, lively friend, I am devastated at the media's continuous imposition of an expectation of what is sexy—of what is beautiful.

Although my friend is healing and is gradually reshaping into her healthy body weight, I am still surrounded by girls who obsess over eating and image. I've come to better understand the universally skewed perception of image.

The character I am creating wears big sweaters to swallow her skeleton-like figure. She has dark circles under her eyes. Her eyes are swollen and red. Her lips are dry and her skin is pale, and her feet are not tiny or innocent or soft.

I stand facing the mirror in my dorm room and apply dark eye shadow beneath my eyelids. I wrap myself in my dad's XXL zip up jacket I brought to school. When I cross my legs on the hard wood floor to try and create the illusion of a girl struggling with anorexia, I am holding back tears. My friend's eating disorder has changed *me*. Perhaps this realization is the most arduous aspect of the transformation. I am overwhelmingly heavyhearted for my best friend and for all who struggle with perception of self-image.

My character is afraid, and I'm afraid too.

Hannah Rhodenbiser
GRAPEFRUIT SPOONS

The grapefruit spoons are in a broken drawer below
the drying rack that always overflows
with half dried dishes.

A firewood style stack of tired spoons
may conceal the serrated edge shaped like toes
of a lady who has worn pointed high heeled shoes too long.

My mother never wears high heeled shoes,
she still has her wedding Birkenstock sandals.
They are white.

My dad ate grapefruit two primary ways:
A peeled pink orange in the desert,
cut across the belly and carved with a spoon.

Hannah Rhodenbiser

OUIJA

In 9th grade I let my book club ask the ouija board,
in a candlelit second story bedroom, what
my boyfriend would look like. I was curious.
I predicted, with a high degree of confidence,
I would never know by looking at him.
I knew the dude they spelled out in the dark, with
normal human hair and eyes, was not someone I would ever feel
my heart go skipping 'round about,
unless he made a loud, unexpected, noise.
Those seem to make me jump more lately.
In my 19th year I met a girl who made my heart
want to build luminaries
out of the kind of laughter that makes your belly hurt
instead of wire, and comfortable silence in place of tape
so that she would never worry in the dark.
Just cover it all in tissue paper painted on with watered down glue
and let it dry out in the wind.

* *Caldwell Finalist*

Hannah Rhodenbiser

PROSPECT AVE. IS CLOSED

The dog smelled like death,
rotting tissue and old vegetables.
He wasn't dying, but no matter how many times I brushed him
or yelled "why do you stink?" or "don't come near me!"
he stunk.

I wasn't mad at the dog for smelling,
I was mad at the clouds for being too majestic and striking,
seriously resembling the CGI clouds constructed from the ideal of cloud
but not really clouds, these really clouds were too perfect,
and the trees had highlights in their leaves,
green halos that reached to the dancing vapor like jewelry,
bare dead branches just outstretched palms trying to touch their faces.

It was too beautiful for July,
I didn't trust the sunshine that caressed my skin.
the grass that was green rather than dull brown.
It was too much paradise for ordinary,
too many moments enjoying the view
while I waited at a red light.

* *Caldwell Finalist*

I was trying to morn like death, but I had already mourned the death
and it wasn't a death, just a normal. Just a brokenness.
Prospect Avenue was closed.

I didn't get lost coming home from Beth's House.
I could tell you I was crying because my skin was soaked in cleaning products,
409 multi-purpose spray or disintegrated magic erasers.
I was the magician that made lost shoes appear in book bags,
and lost book bags appear under couches and a layer of cat fur.

I could tell you about my history,
that the Swiffer cover had been soaked in fabreeze,
that I followed it across the wood floors anyway
because I actually wanted to cry, but I didn't,
I only cried while driving, when it could have killed me.

Packing is a strange expression of love.
an act of community when it marks the end of community.
Perhaps if we called this ending a commencement it would feel less dull.
Dull pain that won't leave, not something you can just ignore.

I packed her bathroom supplies
bottles of old Grand Hotel lotion with their ridiculous flowers,
pads, and dental floss, things humans use.
Fit folders of things that needed keeping flat into a Medium
UHaul box to be marked.

Scrubbed tarnation out of the rectangle behind the refrigerator,
rubbed a sponge into the wall until it was just little bits without form
on the floor to be swept and the grease was still on the walls.

I scrubbed that tarnation out of the floor and then stood up dizzy to remember that this was a poor love note, because she would never see the floor underneath a refrigerator in the house she didn't live in anymore.

I was sweeping up little bits of her fingernails, pistachio shells she had touched, dust that had settled in the years she had settled in.

Hannah Rhodenbiser
SAM I AM

Sam I Am

On the Youth Pilgrimage before my junior year of high school
my friend Sammy came out during her faith story
as trans
now we call him Sam

him is sometimes hard to remember mid-sentence
because Samantha was someone I loved
Love. I love Sam,

Sam said "I am Sam"
I just put my hand on his knee while he finished talking,
and wondered if knee touching was still okay
if he wasn't my gal friend anymore.

I say *him* and *Sam* because it isn't my choice,
This is Sam's choice,
and I choose to listen
Whatever makes Sam happy makes me happy.
I support being who you feel most truly is you

* *Caldwell Finalist*

Which is why I do math and write poetry
Maybe if I put it all out on paper it will start
to feel like I am someone I know.

The hardest thing about pronouns
is how much I loved Samantha

From my skin she was real and she taught me
how to feel like a woman when I wanted to stay a girl.
I remember one Sunday Sammy asked
“Are you a woman, I’m a woman.” By this Sam meant
“I got my period,” she taught me to talk about menstruation,
that it isn’t shameful.
But she wasn’t a woman or a girl.

The girl I sat beside on the bow of a small ferry
slowly chugging through a choppy bay in Maine
talking about Noah’s ark, and thoughts that felt deep to us
Maybe she didn’t ever exist.
That person beside me felt like the closest thing to truth knew.

This is not to say Sam is not who Sam is
This is just to say that loving a being who feels like a lie
made not-my-choice, not-really-my-business
feel like a challenge to history I rejoice in having lived.

The fact that I miss Samantha,
makes me feel guilty,
but poetry is supposed to be honest

I think
and as much as I want Sam to be the self that feels truest
the self that makes Sam feel happy
I sometimes find myself staring out at the rooftops
feeling sick, not because my friend wants to be a dad
not that.
sick because of how terrible it must feel to think your entire body is a lie.

When my faith kicks in I wonder
how could the body that grew in a mother
and carried you through even when it didn't want to
a body God gave you
be a huge error?

I would not choose many things that are true of my body
but it is my body.

I know it doesn't work this way because I listen when you told me it doesn't
but I wish it worked in a way that meant everyone could be their truest self without
having to surgically alter themselves.
I wish the body we got matched because I see it hurts when it doesn't.
I see that sometimes it doesn't.
I admit I don't really understand.

When Sam said "I am Sam
Sam I am"
I said "I love you
If Sam is you, I love Sam."

Things that are true:

When it comes to Bernoulli Variables
there are only two possible outcomes:
success or failure. 1 or 0

With gender there is no discrete random variable
because discrete means countable
how can we count something that means something different
to every single person who experiences it?

The probability density of any given continuous random variable is zero.

The probability density of your expression of gender is zero.

This true fact does not negate the truth of the fact that your gender identity is real.

Sam says, "Sam is what I would prefer...no, what I Need to be called"

I say, "cool, thanks for letting me know."

Sarah Schuen

THE FALL AND EBB

The buds burst backwards on the brittle bones
of branches, stripped of every leaf;
Their seeds sleep soundly in the heel of earth which,
bloodlet by the hand of autumn bleeds
white rime—a flake for every gust
of wind on its lonely westward march
through the slowly-balding shock of scrub.
Our tongues are stilled—we speak with sighs.
We see with fresh, chill-peeled gaze:
the tree-trunks shiver in their naked bark,
wait mutely for the engorged dark.
What is life now? It seems to be,
when each breath taken scorns the lungs,
when birds fly out on the low, gray sky,
and the empty nest is tinged with frost,
a succession of lonelinesses.

Sharon Shen
A TOAST

My clinical instructor warns me
to get rid of the marks on my skin

visible signs of my personal life are
not permitted at the hospital bedside
because it might offend my patients.
I let this settle in, let her assume she knows
why I relish the shearing of my skin
in the snare of a blade,
let her squash the aberrant daisy
petals I had labored to grow in my mind.

She says I need to get help;
I tell her I already am. She says,
you are one of my brightest students!

She says, don't let this ruin your chances.

How little she knows about the weeds
that threaten to overtake my garden
or the nettles that thrive on her every word;

* *Caldwell Finalist*

about the time I got so desperate
I planted tiny white pills on my tongue
and swallowed them to lay my body to rest.

I spend New Year's Eve with two legs dangled out
the twenty-third floor window, suspended above
a misty St. Louis night. I wonder how easy it is to
slip through life's fingers on a whim, how much power
courses through these fragile bones.

I roll up my sleeves and examine
these love letters written across my arms.
I want to tell my clinical instructor
that I've spent my whole life tethered to
a shovel and spade and these marks
are the evidence of my hard work, that this
is how I've grounded myself and claimed my right
to living.

Sharon Shen

an open letter to first generation

taiwanese/

american

women

or,

a commentary on growing up

(neither)

taiwanese -

(nor)

- american

or,

imaginary conversations with my sister

when they ask you where you're from, say michigan. and when they ask you, no, where are you *really* from, say *michigan* with a pinch of sass. you are more american than you are taiwanese but nobody believes you because of your honey-wheat skin and seashell eyes.

* *Caldwell Finalist*

you speak english better than you do chinese,
and yes, you do speak chinese, even though
no, taiwan is not a republic of china, and yes,
taiwan is its own country. but you live in
michigan and that is as home as it gets.

when they whisper *he has yellow fever*
between stifled giggles or try to copy last
night's homework from you, walk the other
way. embrace your birthright of sneers and
sidelong looks; you were composed by the
grating accents of your immigrant parents,
and you are a symphony. demand presence in
an unrelenting white-black dichotomy and
refuse to be tuned out because the model
minority is not a compliment. it will throttle
you until you can't breathe *you can't breathe*

breathe.

when they ask you where you're from, say
your mother's womb. tell them how you were
nurtured by her sorrow, how you suckled the
homesickness right from her breast only for
taiwan to think of you as american and for
america to label you as foreign. you will learn
to savor the bitter taste of iron filling your

mouth with unsatiated grief. you are not a
simple answer. keep walking. bedazzle white
sidewalks with your color and graffiti walls
saying *no* to what they think they own just

keep breathing.

Sharon Shen
RE: COMMISSION

I

how do you tell your own mother that you don't love her?

II

when i'm six & i hear the sputtering engine
in the garage as i cower beneath the fortress of my desk,
straining my ears to decipher the foreboding footfalls
of my father coming home

III

to my ex

i fucking hate you.

IV

why i never answer your texts

* *Caldwell Finalist*

my parents don't believe me when
i tell them that my brother hits me

don't care about how he drags me
out of bed when the neighborhood

is sleeping & he warns me to keep quiet,

V

they ask me why i don't believe in god anymore.

VI

for my sister

i wish i could save you from what is coming.
i try to persuade myself that you are braver
& bolder
than i, & that is why i don't answer
your questions about

why i never come home or
why i was in the hospital
or why white girls raffle off your asian tears
or why our mother thinks you're fat
or why we have to pretend so much

& i know you are asking for my love
but i don't have any to give

VII

he is like

the delicate tinkling of a harp
eyes you'd win staring contests for
a kite waltzing higher into the sky
a mountaintop view

& i am like

muffled notes
a languorous gaze
the broken spool of string
a miniscule curl of moss in the valley

VIII

hello, i'd like to return ½ cup of anxiety, 3 bottles of self-loathing & 6 ounces of guilt,
please,
& i'll purchase 1 pint of amnesia, thank you

IX

ma'am –

*did you want to take your complimentary
teaspoon of love?*

X

for me

darling,

you

side

will

other

make

the

it

to

through

canyons

these

Sharon Shen

DUA

I listen to the Arabic words cascading off my roommate's tongue. She is kneeling on the bright teal carpet, eyes fixated on a point half a foot in front of her, eyes downcast. She is showing me how to pray to Allah, five times a day facing towards the direction of the Kabba. She explains to me the significance of the hijab, the dispute behind male domination and female respect. Her hair fans around her face and her smile is bright as she describes arranged marriages and her mother's favoritism towards her brother. She has never been to Pakistan before, and she no longer practices Islam. I skim over the brown caverns of her eyes for signs of resentment, of pain, of injustice - but all I see is the knowing acceptance of a girl who has always grown up this way. I wonder if she wishes things were different. I wonder if she quivers in a white society

* *Caldwell Finalist*

the way I do, or if she feels like she is tightropeing
between two radically different cultures,
in constant danger of failing. These are the things
we do not speak of, a brown girl and a yellow girl,
weary from carrying oppression on our backs and it is
so much easier to pretend that it does not exist at all.

Luke Stevenson
LIFE CYCLES

Say something, they told the babe,
And the babe formed his first words.
Make something, they told the child,
And they child created a picture.
Learn something, they told the boy,
And the boy went to school.
Be something, they told the man,
And the man found a career.
Teach something, they told the elder,
And the elder passed on everything he knew.
Be at peace, they told the corpse,
And the spirit of the man, looking back on his life, quietly said:
“I don’t know how.”

Sarab Uddin
ODE TO CHERISE

It's a bug's life after all.
I've never seen you click the safety on your gun,
And I've been shot many times.

Build me up with smiles and eyebrows, defined and chiseled,
only to turn the magnifying glass in my direction,
I hope I did you justice,
kiss me goodnight before bed and tuck me in real tight,
Like Mother—like Father.
No, it'll never be the same.

Asritha Vinnakota
BELLS CHIME

The antique grandfather clock starts chiming its first of twelve bells. Neither of them acknowledges the blaring noise as they glare at each other across the narrow battlefield filled with broken glass and shattered hopes spread askew. He's slumping at the door with a ragged old suitcase. A suitcase that was probably stuck somewhere deep in their eerie basement, tucked behind the nostalgia and memories. He fumbles and sluggishly grasps for the door knob as he looks back at her with bloodshot eyes that she doesn't even recognize.

The second bell chimes.

She searches for an answer somewhere behind his guarded demeanor but all she sees is defeat. She could plead and beg all she wanted, convincing him that all he needed was right here. He insisted it was at the end of the local's glass bottle. In the end he would darken any other light.

"He's bad news"- friends, teachers, strangers, mother.

"Leave him like we all did. There's no hope."- every other voice in her head.

Yet she held on to that man she loved and trusted. The laughs. The cries. The times he held her when everything felt wrong. The times he held her when everything felt right. The joys. The fights. The hugs. The destructions of hearts. Light. Darkness. She flashes back through all of the ups and downs they came out of until she lands on the memory of him relapsing two days ago into the red eye. All she sees now is a shell.

The fifth bell chimes.

"Did you ever love me?" Audrey questions as she wipes the mascara-stained tears from her freshly bruised face, glaring him down with no mercy. He glances up at her

for a second. For a moment, a flash of familiarity and seeps through. She clings to that feeling- that deep down he is still in there buried underneath all the hatred and self-deprecating. Yet, it is only for a moment, as is everything for these two. He clumsily yanks the door, muttering something that will never see the light of day tomorrow or in the future. He stumbles away. He breaks away. Away from her. Away from love.

“Have fun in hell, bastard,” She cries as she watches the boy walk further into the distance into the dark abyss or solitude and deprecation

She strides upstairs to put her baby sister to bed as she searches for a way to explain to the little one that her superhero, Daddy, flew away.

The last bell chimes.

Asritha Vinnakota
BULLET FREEDOM

5

"NO Mother I will never be that!"

"Why? Because that's not me! I'm not your damn puppet and stop trying to make me"

"I cannot be this superficial hellish, perfect vision you h-"

Cold slap of winter ice cuts off any expression for years, freezing me

4

Feelings- yes

Thoughts-yes

Efforts- yes

Symptoms- 93%, yet no one knows or cares to be aware of the mess

3

Happiness is gone, joys turn to drunken solitude

Life gives you lemons in May

Take the fucking lemons and throw them at the wall

Because you're not even good enough to even make fucking lemonade

2

The hand recoils around the black sliver of truth

Always dictated by grey opinions and premeditated choices appearing as need

Believing one day change will bring about relief

Yet believing in something down the alley does not beckon for the weak

1

No

Yes

Done

Haley Winkle
DON'T TELL ME

Don't tell me about how much you love getting drunk at frat parties

until you are a young woman
taking what is offered
from the boy in his white t-shirt and loud
pride for getting what he wants.

Don't tell me how great it is
until he's getting you to forget
how to spell your own last name

or to forget how to see,
so he can turn your eyes into mirrors
making it easier to see himself
in you,

until in his own eyes you are a sun, something he
feels entitled to because
it shines for the whole world.

He'll reassure you "this is fun,"
swirling your drink then twirling

* *Caldwell Finalist*

you in your black skirt
within the haze of oblivious
classmates laughing in their own circles.

He will spin your senses into his own drunken gold
until you can only see as far as
the insides of your eyelids
and can't feel warm like a sun,
just cold as everything is dark and

that's all you can remember
before losing your ability to stay in your body.

Haley Winkle
LEAVES

and I wonder if I, too,
will blush when I am dying.

* *Caldwell Finalist*

Haley Winkle
MOTHER

I remember locating each freckle on my body,
sparse brown dots, nothing
in comparison to my mother's
pale skin covered in tiny overlapping clouds
glowing golden in sunlight,

just like her.
I kept inventory of my own;

four on my left forearm and three on my right
one on each of my calves,
wondering when more would sprout
from my already sun-stained skin
shades darker than hers.

My new freckles
crept up throughout the years
and at the same pace,
I have noticeably become
more and more like her.
Someday

* *Caldwell Finalist*

maybe I'll glow the way she does,
golden in sunlight
skin like watercolor wash
instead of dots mistaken
for constellations spread out.

CONTRIBUTORS

Sarah Adams is a BFA Theatre Design and Production student from Richmond, Virginia.

As a child, **Yardain Amron** failed to master yoyo, card magic, and oboe. As a grownup at university, he studied English literature and hopes to, ego depending, write more about others than himself.

Jessica Ankley is a sophomore at U of M and plans to study environmental science. This painting was influenced by the flows and contrasting colors of nature that harmoniously compliment one another.

Brenner Bernstein is from Washington D.C. He loves playing soccer and writing poetry and short stories in his down time. He plans on getting a BBA from Ross or majoring in economics next year.

Ilma Bilic was once a hired smurf, working in the chocolate industry, but is now more of an illustrator pursuing her own ideas. Her work can be found on instagram: @funkyduck9 Don't worry, be happy.

Kate Bishop is currently an International Studies major with a concentration in Comparative Culture & Identity. Her work has previously appeared in The Blue Marble Review. She is from Leland, MI.

Skylar Burkhardt plans to major in psychology with a minor in computer science and writing. In her spare time, Skylar enjoys playing the guitar, taking pictures, playing sports, and writing poetry.

Natalie Burr is a sophomore majoring in Program in the Environment and Philosophy from Newton, Massachusetts. In her spare time, she enjoys fancy cheeses, memes, and the great outdoors.

Cassidy Carpenter is an Art and Design Major with a focus in illustration. She is from Ann Arbor.

Rhea Cheeti is hoping to major in Organizational Studies and minor in Performing Arts Management, and is fascinated with the way record labels and the music industry works. She has a penchant for writing short horror stories, and you can usually find her appreciating movies about the zombie apocalypse, writing fiction in the hallways, or Facetiming her dog.

Sarah Costello is a rising sophomore planning (key word ‘planning’) to double major in Screen Arts and Cultures and German. She likes stories, sports, music, and Marvel. She would like to take this time to apologize for the fact that no, she has no idea how that story ends, either.

Lyndsey Covert is a civil engineering major. She was very involved in writing and the arts in high school and wanted to continue to create in college. She was inspired to write this poem by Lake Michigan in the summer.

Claire Davenport is a sophomore majoring in Industrial and Operations Engineering and plans to pursue a minor in Art and Design. This collage was created in response to an essay she wrote about the song “Manhattan” by Sara Bareilles.

Nikole Davtyan is a sophomore at the University of Michigan. She plans on double majoring in Screen Arts/Cultures and Communications and hopes to screenwrite and produce in the television industry one day.

Laura Dzubay is an English major planning to concentrate in Creative Writing. Her work has appeared previously in the Oleander Review, the 19th Annual Cafe Shapiro Anthology, and Elan Literary Magazine, and her recent awards for her writing include four national medals from the Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. She enjoys hiking and playing guitar.

Carson Hart is currently a freshman studying through the STAMPS School of Art and Design. He is from Hermosa Beach, California and enjoys surfing and skating. Other artistic endeavors include photography, drawing, building, fashion, and film.

Alyssa Holt is a southwestern desert transplant majoring English. She has the recipient of the Caldwell Poetry Prize in both spoken and written poetry for the past two years and received the Roy W Cowden memorial fellowship through the Hopwood program in 2015. When she isn't writing, she can be found exploring the arboretum or running laps around the Big House.

Maddy Jaber is a freshman in the Lloyd Hall Scholars Program and was drawn to LHSP from her strong interest in visual arts and dance. She hopes to major in Organizational Studies and pursue a business and the environment focus. She will continue her love for dance through her hip-hop team - EnCore and draw on her free time in the future!

Christina Khouri is a freshman studying Nursing. She enjoys filling her notes with doodles and drawing people that sit in front of her in lecture. So if you see the back of your head at an art exhibit, don't be frightened.

Yulia Lomakina is an international student from Russia, interested in studying Business as a major with a minor in Creative Writing. Yulia enjoys painting in free time and her favorite artists are Pablo Picasso and Gustav Klimt. Her favorite quote is: "Creativity takes courage" by Henry Matisse.

Payton Luokkala is majoring in English and Anthropology. She wrote this series of poems in order to get out of writing an essay for Mark Tucker's class.

Siena McKim is majoring in Art and Design and minoring in Environmental Science. She hopes to explore this idea throughout her work for the next three years at Michigan. "Bugged Out" explores the idea that the details of life, bugs, are important for maintaining a positive outlook on life.

Ann Minnebo is a double major in Anthropology and American Culture. She loves history and really old stuff. Photography is just one of her many favorite forms of art.

Emily Miu doesn't have a major, but that will probably, hopefully change at some point. She's pretty into musicals and stuff. Also, who needs college, surely not Emily, she's already got her Associate's of Art (she totally still needs college).

Dana Nathanson is a freshman from Portland Oregon. She is majoring in Communications and Spanish with a minor in Art and Design with Stamps.

Rebecca Polinsky is from St. Louis, Missouri and is an International Studies and Spanish major. She will graduate in 2019. Becca is a member of the Compulsive Lyres a cappella group and Alpha Phi sorority, and finds extraordinary peace in both singing and creative writing.

Emily Post is continuing her study of architecture and writing in the fall 2016 semester as a junior in Taubman (yes UM has an architecture school). In her free time, she'd like to play an rpg with friends or read a book. But she's not kidding anyone: who ever heard of an arch student having free time?

Katherine Qiao is a first-year from Troy, Michigan who loves doing many different kinds of creative expression including art and writing, especially traditional Chinese painting and creative writing. If she is not throwing around sarcastic comments and giving judgmental stares, she likes doing math and daydreaming.

Hannah Rhodenhiser is studying Economics, Mathematics, and Chinese language. She has won the Caldwell Poetry Prize two years running.

Brought up in Chicago, **Manuel Rodriguez** believes art is a struggle to capture moments we cannot explain or understand. He plans to dual major in Art and Psychology.

Sarah Schuen is a rising sophomore interested in Health Sciences and Anthropology. She also likes paracosm development.

Sharon Shen is a junior in the School of Nursing with a minor in creative writing. She discovered slam poetry in high school and has been reading and writing poetry since. Some of her favorite poets include Sharon Olds, Ocean Vuong, Paul Tran, Olivia Gatwood, and Blythe Baird.

Luke Stevenson is from Plymouth, Michigan. He plans to double major in Screen Arts and Culture and English. You can find him in one of the lounges on weekend mornings watching the Premier League (Go Spurs!). After he graduates he hopes to work in the movie business.

Sarah Uddin is an aspiring anthropologist and filmmaker. She wrote this poem after feeling nostalgic for her best friend and mentor, Cherise. Besides writing, she enjoys yoga and watching movies.

Asritha Vinnakota is a rising sophomore who is pursuing a major in political science with a minor in law, justice and social change. When she is procrastinating all of her academic work to the very last day, which is usually always, she is trying her hand at writing short stories and poetry, and attempting other creative art forms to truly express herself.

Haley Winkle is a junior studying Creative Writing & Literature with a focus on poetry and minoring in Art & Design while wondering what rules she can get away with breaking at any given point in time. At this point in her life, succulent plants, sunsets, and old marble sculptures give her emotions. Please do not ask her what she plans to do with her degree unless your desired response is a confused shrug.

Cindy Xuan is Shanghainese and is majoring in art and design. She wants to be a product designer in the future and enjoys practicing observational drawing.