

Hold On

A hand is seen reaching upwards from a circular opening in a thick, light-colored rope. The rope is coiled on a lush green grassy field. The background within the circle is a bright blue sky with some white clouds. The overall scene is captured from a low angle, looking up through the hole in the rope.

The LHSP Arts & Literary Journal
2017 – 2018

Hold On

THE LHSP ARTS & LITERARY JOURNAL

HOLD ON

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THE LHSP ARTS & LITERARY JOURNAL

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Carol Tell

Letter from the Director

“Hold on!”

I heard this phrase a few mornings ago as I headed to campus, inadvertently eavesdropping (sorry, it happens!) on two students who were chatting casually as they walked in front of me. They were bantering back and forth, friendly and familiar, when some comment caused one of them to pause, then stop. “Hold on!” she said. “That’s not okay.” At that point I passed the pair, relieved to let them work out their grievances in private. But I thought about the tone—both insistent and patient—of the woman’s initial protest. It lingered as I read through this gorgeous LHSP literary journal. The phrase said to me: Wait. Listen. I have something to say about that.

What a wonderful title for our journal. There are so many meanings of the phrase, as Co-Editor-in-Chief Megan Knittel deftly addresses in her letter (page ix). It implies nostalgia, a refusal to “let go.” It implies hardship—you only need to “hold on” if there’s something threatening to sweep you away or topple you over. But it also implies strength—standing firm in one’s beliefs.

Most of all, I’m struck by this slightly different meaning: of speaking out, of talking back, of challenging and questioning the status quo. It’s a phrase of resistance. It’s the opposite of complacency. Such dissent resonates with so many of these pieces published in the 2017-18 LHSP Arts and Literary Journal. The art, poetry, fiction, and nonfiction here question and complicate issues of identity, sexuality, race, ethnicity, gender, even memory. For example, Chris Crowder’s poem “Everyday and Monday” begins with a question that is as wry

as it is succinct: “‘What are you doing for MLK Day?’ she asked to the only Black person in the room.” Dylan Gilbert’s poem “Metal Mouth” wistfully describes how the speaker’s braces may have straightened her teeth but also erased her family’s legacy (“my family got a gap in its teeth/ so wide it stretch back for centuries”). In questioning the sanitizing aesthetics of contemporary orthodontics, Dylan complicates our understanding of family, identity, and those superficial “flaws” that may mark deeper and more important connections to the past.

Her poem says: Hold on.

Some argue all good art does this, especially during divisive political times—it talks back to “legitimacy,” not to silence or scold, but to complicate and deepen. The writer Nadezdha Mandelstam, whose husband Osip was imprisoned for years in a Russian Gulag for his poetry, asked the question in this way: Is it better to keep your mouth shut, to be dignified and wary and safe? She found her answer: “I decided it is better to scream. Silence is the real crime against humanity.”

I’m so proud of the way the students in this journal refuse to be silent. Riya Gupta’s and Vedika Aigalika’s thoughtful pieces talk back to particular, stinging moments of racism and bias from their childhoods; Joel Danilewitz, in his essay “Straight-acting,” questions “the drive that pushes gay people to make their orientation more palatable to a heteronormative culture.”

Yet there is also plenty of humor, idealism, and poignant whimsy in the journal. Marjorie Gaber’s cartoonish “Dreamlands” captures the allure of escaping reality, a young person lounging in a tree-house of sorts with eccentric, chimerical creatures. Peggy Randon’s “Grown from Concrete” shows a young African-American girl surrounded by imaginative, potent images of childhood, including the Hungry Caterpillar and its transformed butterfly.

I want to thank those responsible for transforming this collection of individual pieces into a coherent, dynamic journal: the talented LHSP Journal Editorial Staff, and especially Alexis Aulepp and Megan Knittel, our Editors-in-Chief. Megan is off to graduate school after working on the journal for four years, and Alexis will be back to lead the journal in the fall.

In addition, I want to give a special thanks to our new journal advisor Marie Sweetman, who has taken over this year. She's a superbly professional editor, an editor's editor, with sensitivity, insight, and razor-sharp sensibility.

Mostly, though, I want to say thank you to LHSP students 2017-18. I learned a lot from you this year—about wisdom, about “necessary trouble” (to quote Rep. John Lewis, who visited campus this year), and about resilience. About the ways that art and writing can speak up, speak out, and speak against. And yes, about how to say: Hold on.

Alexis Aulepp & Megan Knittel
Letters from the Editors

For me, creative expression has always been an ebbing and flowing tide of holding on and letting go, a balancing act between remembering and moving forward. My poetry has been where I find solace and sanity, where I make sense of what I am experiencing, feeling, and thinking, and where I capture the things I don't want to forget or lose to ravenous time. I was pleased to find this same spirit of holding on echoed throughout many of the submissions for this year's journal. Whatever our medium, our work is where we can vent, cleanse, share, grieve, celebrate, capture, release, and, yes, hold on. Whether it's putting a thought or story down in words, translating an image from mind to page, or constructing a song, sculpture, film, dance, or other creative work in our chosen medium, creative expression is how we hold on to what matters—our creativity, our spirit, our sanity, our memory, and who and where we once have been.

In this journal, we tried to capture this year's creative spirit through the work of current and former LHSP students. In doing so, we ask you to hold on, too. Hold on to the memories. Hold on to the lessons learned. Hold on, in the famous words of Bon Jovi, to "what we've got," and give pause to each of these contributions from our many creative students. They've poured out their hearts, souls, imaginations, memories, and lives on these pages, and it's something worth pausing for. Something, if you'll allow me, worth holding on to. I suppose it goes without saying, then, but hold on for the ride.

—*Alexis Aulepp*

Entering college is, for most students, a delicate act of negotiating who you have been with who you want to become. Many students, myself included, viewed coming to college as a fresh start, a reinvention of the self. Despite leaving hometowns and families behind, the influence of the past is still sharply felt, either as a comforting foundation or a source of conflict as one changes and gains new perspectives. As I grew and gained new perspectives at U of M, new frictions and conflicts arose with the people and places of my own past, and how (if) I still fit into where I came from. To borrow the title of Thomas Wolfe's seminal novel, *You Can't Go Home Again*; meaning, you can't truly ever go back to the past, because it has changed just as much as you have. The creators featured in this journal grapple with these ideas of freedom and reconciliation, with hope for the future compounded by a profound sense of loss. These creators allow the complexity of their experiences and evolving beliefs to shine through an incredible diversity of artwork, poetry, and prose.

The title of the journal reflects these themes as well. "Hold On" captures not just an action, but a choice. Holding on can be considered an act of resolve against an outside force, and a conscious choice to not let go. This idea of resiliency has become increasingly ingrained in our global society and tumultuous political landscapes over this past year. Holding on or letting go, or existing somewhere in between, of past people, places, and ideologies lies at the heart of this year's journal. Consider the whimsical nostalgia of Peggy Randon's "Grown from Concrete," or the vibrant, hopeful energy displayed in Marjorie Gaber's "Dreamlands." Riya Gupta's "Geography Bee" explores how something as seemingly simple as a name can link the past and future of a person, and Benjamin Biber's "Right" reflects on the incredible persistence of memories. The work in this book, at its core, argues that our experiences of the past are a powerful part of our present and future; how we respond to and use the past creates the future. To quote Pily O'Hara's "Wombed" where our title was drawn from, "*Hold on. / Hold on to ignorance—to innocence / [...] Sucking on what-ifs and could-have-beens.*" Even as the past, ourselves, and the world

constantly shift around us, nothing is more important than holding on to what we value and believe in most.

I would like to give my deepest thanks to the LHSP staff and my fellow LHSP RA's; your support made LHSP my home during my four years at U of M, and I will forever be grateful. I also want to thank my brilliant co-editors Alexis and Marie, and the incredibly dedicated members of our lit journal club whose hard work and enthusiasm put this book together piece by piece. Most of all, I want to thank all of you who contributed to the book. Your courage and vulnerability made this book possible, and I was inspired and humbled by your work. I hope this journal serves as an enjoyable and poignant time capsule of your time in LHSP.

—*Megan Knittel*

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* *Caldwell Finalist*

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*** Please enjoy the audio / visual pieces on the LHSP website.*

Amen Al-Moamen
The Awakening

At the wake of dawn, I lay unsure

breathe in

At the wake of dawn, I lay unsure

breathe out

At the wake of dawn, I lay unsure

repeat

Our hands held by memory
We chase only desire
We're led astray
Away from the rhythm of past
Away from yesterday

With the leaves that float aimlessly
And the dandelions so close to me
We're blown towards the unknown
Into tomorrow's eternity

"are you feeling well?"

Mother,
The stars speak to me

"you'll need to be up at dawn, get your rest"

So elegant
So careless
Why am I deaf
to their humble whispers?
Why are we deaf
to their humble whispers?

"get your rest, you'll be okay"

I have walked memory away
And with a match I will strike light
Where the dark chooses to lay
Today, I will be okay
Today, we will be okay

Alexis Aulepp

Ashes, Ashes

the September sun beats down
bright as the molten filament
of a dying lightbulb, making rainbows
on the wings of the flies
that feast quickly
before their food gets cold

an old woman bats them away
shuffling down the street and grumbling
that the barber took too much off the top
of this dusty desert village
the last time the planes flew over

somewhere, a siren sounds
belatedly
wailing like the young mother
clutching a broken child to her chest
in a crinkled photograph

blink

and the wind wrestles the creased print
from the hand of the form on the floor
that doesn't move,
doesn't breathe

doesn't watch the wilted page drift
through flies and ash
up and away from this damaged earth

doesn't mourn the grieving ink of night
that seeps from the horizon
blotting out the sky until it is a full page of black
with no room for histories penned in blood

Alexis Aulepp
Band-Aids

When I say I need more Band-Aids, what I really mean is that I'm hemophilic and I think I'm going to bleed out if you don't stop cutting me.

And it's not that I don't appreciate the effort that you put in to memorizing my face, it's just that I really wish you'd stop treating me like a textbook or a greeting card or that one piece of mail that gets glanced at before heading straight to the trash.

You see, the difference between you and me is that I know when you say you need more space it doesn't mean you need more time to sit at Starbucks and play with your napkin and stare at the man across the street who is trying to open his umbrella.

You mean that your apartment isn't big enough for three people, and that I'm the one who lingers where I shouldn't.

So when you asked me to water your plants while you were away on vacation, I didn't plan to kill them. It's not like I overwatered them on purpose, or even because I don't know how to take care of plants, it's just that sometimes I'm absentminded and other times I don't know when to stop giving.

It's kind of like how I know that I can't give a dime to every person on the street with a cardboard sign and two left shoes, but that doesn't mean I can't offer them a smile and perhaps a hello and maybe, if it's been a while, some Band-Aids.

Alexis Aulepp

Falling

I was told that love is a rose,
a fragile flower the color of lips
and apples and blood

but my love is no rose

it is a collage of torn out pages,
a book with too many words and
too many characters with too few plot lines
and all the wrong dialogue

my love is aching knees and elbow grease,
and falling off your bike without training wheels
because *screw it!*
and getting up again because I can

my love is not kissing in the rain
or rubbing up against a pillow
or chocolates hiding underneath a fist
of flowers

my love is the music of a dying breed,
the old-time classics that make people stop
and listen, swaying and humming and forgetting
before the song's even over

my love is challenge

my love is not an hourglass
of slipping sand,
each grain tumbling
like a schoolgirl, head over heels
in mesmerizingly steady progress

my love is a snow globe,
a flurry of swirling bits, irregularly shaped and
chaotically sinking, settling
into uneven lumps of sparkle
that refuse to lie still

...

shake me once
and watch the little town tremble

Alexis Aulepp
Lemonade

loss is a lot like sitting on the floor
and staring at the moon
and holding a wish like a secret piece of paper
in your mouth, lips pressed tightly closed
and eyes turning the blurring world into ash
and bits of dying firefly

while thinking about grandmothers who wink out like fading stars
as memories slip and slide like inexperienced skaters,
dissolving faster than the Alka-Seltzer tablet
that became her last meal

then remembering Sean Coleman's brown eyes
that you hadn't thought about since tenth grade;
the ones that now stare at you in your sleep,
begging unanswered questions

and trying to answer them, in your haze of grief,
and getting angry at the moon,
and fantasizing about throwing rocks

before giving up hope in a huff
of recognized futility

much like crying yourself to sleep
in a huddle on your bedroom floor,
a stuffed leopard clutched as close to your chest
as the bear you used to sleep with

or awakening to snowflakes
suspended as if by string,
swaying slightly in the breath of wind
that shudders from the rooftops

it reminds you of Josh,
eyes wide and bright and
elsewhere,
saying the cold never bothers him
when he focuses on the snow

Josh makes you think of a song
about lemonade;
one that scatters the fireflies and brings the crumbling world
back into focus

...

with your wishing lips pressed closed,
you hum it to the moon

Vedika Aigalika

brown is the color of poop

“Brown is the color of poop.” My first day at Leonard Elementary School was unconventional by a measure of details significant to the life of a third grader. My family had just bought a house, and although I’d lived in the city of Troy my whole life, I was suddenly thrust into a completely new environment two miles away from the comfort of the apartment I’d previously lived in, presented with the challenge of making new friends. When a classmate recited the statement above to me on the playground at recess, I was stunned. It was the first time I ever had any indication that the color of my skin made the value of my character subordinate to hers.

Race as a category of divergence in character, as I experienced, is articulated in the essay about social construction written by Ian Lopéz. He argues that the plasticity of race is what allows people to combine socially significant elements into competing societal forces. For me, the color of my skin and the stereotype that Indians are nerds were fused to create the box I was categorized into. The notion that brown implied smart, which associated to nerd, made brown seem ugly because I couldn’t be smart *and* beautiful if I were a nerd. These characteristics didn’t make sense if I wasn’t at school on the playground surrounded by the other racial categories in the box of our school. I didn’t *feel* any different from who I’d been at my old school or who I was when I played with friends from outside of school; the color of my skin was irrelevant to the content of my character. Lopéz writes, affirming my experience, that categories of race are produced by a myriad of conflicting social forces; they overlap and inform other social categories; and only make sense in relationship to distinct racial categories, having no meaningful independent existence. Race is socially constructed. He addresses racial fabrication as four important facets of race that I saw directly translate to

my life. Human interactions, rather than being abstract forces, produce race differentiation, and this constitutes an integral part of a whole social fabric that includes gender and class relations, which are constructed relationally against one another, rather than in isolation. Lastly, the meaning of systems surrounding race changes quickly rather than slowly. Although I had spent three years developing an idea of who I was at my other elementary school, the girl on the new playground was able to craft her opinion of me within minutes of the first day based on a relation that changed the way I would think about race and myself for the rest of my life. She made assumptions that worked in her favor, because it was easy to categorize me with the group that consisted only of Indian kids and I was forced to be friends with them, after she outcasted me from her white friends. Thus, race was socially constructed.

As I grew older, my definition of race evolved with the friends I made and experiences I had that allowed me to reflect on how the color of my skin changed the way I integrated into society. It became something I was forced to confront in order to understand my identity. I struggled defining if I was an Indian American or an American Indian and what each of those terms exactly meant. Why was white American seen as the 'best' American, or rather, why wasn't Indian American just as *American*? What I hadn't understood at the time was the difference between race and ethnicity which answers the question that tormented my thoughts. My early identifications of race were intrinsic to who I felt I was. I felt American because of the ease with which the letters of the alphabet rolled off my tongue in English versus my mother tongue of Marathi. I wore jeans instead of *kurtas* to feel American and all of the times I insisted that my mom pack a lunch for me that wasn't Indian food, I was trying to *be* American. American was what felt comfortable and secure. Indian meant I had to suppress a part of who I was. As Lopéz defines, race is self-reinforcing; my adolescent ideas that jumbled race and ethnicity as one and the same were a constant I iterated in my head. Construction implies a mixture of chance, context, and choice, so racial construction is a series of these factors evolving to fit a definition in a specific circumstance as it did for me. In popular culture, there is little differentiation in a common man's understanding of what race and ethnicity are (*Race: The Power of an Illusion*). The most powerful argument stands that race be-

comes institutionalized in a way that has profound social consequences in society. It is socially imposed and hierarchical, essentially how you are perceived by others, whereas ethnicity ties to a feeling of belonging. I was born in India to Indian parents but raised in the United States, so I feel a connection with both American and Indian history and culture, yet the color of my skin is the first characteristic of me that is seen, emphasizing the label of *Indian* in Indian American.

A specific incident that highlights the way race is classified and fabricated jumps to mind from my sophomore year of high school. The city of Troy could be described as its own gated community for the glaring privilege of its upper middle class families. My swim team had a meet in Hazel Park, a neighborhood of Detroit, and I remember my coach told us to be careful before we boarded the bus, because “it wasn’t a good area.” His assurance came from a place of fear and absence of comprehension as to why he deemed it perilous: for its constituents, who were primarily African Americans. The rationale of his thinking can be analyzed by the process of redlining as directed by the Federal Housing Administration in 1939, which determined secure districts by their “possessive investment in whiteness” (Lipsitz). Hazel Park was mandated as a “fourth grade” zone, and the ramifications of this decision were still evident when we went to compete at their high school. The quality of education and accessibility of school-provided facilities like the pool were far inferior in comparison to Troy’s school district just twenty minutes away. Residential segregation inhibited accumulation of assets of individuals in the area, and equity that comes with homeownership, investments that I’d taken for granted. These areas like Hazel Park hallmark the notorious reputation of Detroit, and remain underprivileged today due to the difficulty of obtaining federal aid for a redlined area that is burdened with the stigma of poor. Racism is systematic, in that it originates because of government aid discrimination which readily creates stereotypes. African Americans as lazy or leaning on welfare is one of these clichés that expounds on systematic racism. Not permitting the aid and renovation that is necessary in communities such as Hazel Park diminishes equal opportunity for reducing intergenerational poverty with work, which, if provided, could show equal growth and wealth in the lives of its constituents with income and independence (Benjamin, 296). When race is inherently apparent as

privatized prejudice in the backbones of regulation in society, terms such as “not a good area” coin a complex problem constructed by systematic racism as equivalent to racial typecasts.

The incident which happened with the girl who called brown ugly was an unfortunate circumstance that carried connotation into my life. Much of my youth was spent with my group of family friends who I considered my closest companions. My ideas of relationships and race were contoured in shades of only brown, and this influenced my prejudiced ideas of who I chose to connect with; that is, until I met one of my best friends, Anna, in fifth grade, who happened to be white. I spent countless Thanksgivings with Anna’s family and met her extended family, absorbing the similarities between our families, unpolarized by race. She celebrated Indian holidays with me and our interpersonal relationship generated an awareness of intersectionality within our friend groups at school and family at home. This year, when we decided to be roommates, I had family in India who asked me if I’d feel more “comfortable” rooming with someone who understood my culture. I was surprised when my parents, who’ve spent the majority of their life surrounded by other Indians, answered that our relationship was enhanced by the divergence of race. We strive to create compassion and empathy in our discussions; it was a matter of who we identified ourselves as that merged our relationships, not the colors of our skin. Rich Benjamin discusses communities as segregated from one another in his book *Searching for Whitopia*, and I realized this concept was prevalent in my home and school life. Interpersonal communication is vital in improving synthetic communities that are racially melded as it did for me and Anna. Personal experience of race as a lived and intermixed narrative, constantly evolving, is key to voice in writing the future of race.

An alternative view of an understanding of race as fixed and stagnant rather than migratory with respect to interpersonal communication is best exemplified by the 2016 presidential election. The majority of the Trump voter base that identified with fear of refugees and immigrants stemmed from isolated communities that have little understanding of a holistic society due to avoidance of meaningful conversation. For them, race *is* stationary in their bubble and convoluted otherwise. Benjamin quotes Attorney General Eric Holder, who warns that instead of diversity being a powerful positive force, if progress of discussion is not

made, it could become a reason for polarization and this statement directly applies to Trump's base. Some of their bias and reluctance to articulate racial debate could be unconscious, due to a lack of experience, willingness to understand, and knowledge of divergent cultures, but could also be transformed with eloquent and meaningful conversation in the form of interpersonal relationships.

Race is in the workings of human hands as internalized experiences that shape the lens through which society operates. The definition is constructed by the conditions of systemically entrenched stereotypes that complicate general understanding of race in the United States. I write "brown is the color of poop" with no caps to symbolize the narrative of how significant the color of my skin should be to my character. The relevance of deeply rooted racial biases is underscored by my experiences of segregated youth, and this elevates the implication of race as a social hierarchy that is constantly evolving. Benjamin writes that we should flavor our conversation with substantial racial discussion and ask questions that channel race to a pragmatic focus. In this definition of transforming race, interpersonal relationships that create conversation between communities have the ability to alter the course of race as it is understood today. If I could respond to the girl from my third-grade class, I'd ask, *Why do Indians with comparable personalities to whites receive a disproportionate share of the playground at recess and of the tables in the cafeteria, leading to self-identity crises?*, and hope that it would be the start of an insightful conversation about race.

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Camryn Banks

Gaia Was a Black Woman

Generations of settlers cling to my breast. I have been feeding them from my own emergency reserve.

They take all I have, teeth clenched in my nipple, eyes wide and bulging, searching for a home. They want a place to grow their nature, a home for tonight. My voice imitates their mother's (soft, supple, deep, loving).

They want to hear it tremble in their ears in the midnight hour. Strokes of Adam, sins of Cain.

They power their seed into me, impregnating a daughter of false hope with a son.

He will take after his fathers and do exactly as they do: fight his way onto a teat for nourishment, exuberantly exclaiming his love, while watching my chest fall and rise and sigh and cry.

They never had their own names, somehow they all blended together. Unrecognizable, I call them daily. I call them daddy.

I never met my daughter. She was swiftly stolen away to raise her own generations.

Now, she a bearer of barren fruit, shall never enjoy the laurels of sisterhood. She can never know her own greatness.

Her role is pillar. But with no foundation, who can she truly support?

Lynne Bekdash

Off-Season

Come summer, the Richards and Susans come:
Range Rovers chatter with champagne trunks,
backseat chatter of little brother
and older sister and middle child. For them:
my red and yellow lights chase each other
around the arcade, and the carnival music
drunkard-stumbles through the air,
and the birds speak. The Ferris wheel turns.
The cotton candy spins the sunrise pink,
my sky pink as first kiss lips: a summer love
to draw filched-Jameson-happy into sand,
and to ride bikes shrieking through rain for
in piddle-pedal waltz steps, hands full the whole time
of mangoes, boardwalk pizza, purple chalk.

I giggle my water up the shore in glitters
because the sunglasses and flip-flops on land
just laugh oh-so-pretty. They laugh, oh—! So nice.
Traffic lights direct whole lines of metal ants
who sparkle in the sun—and carry crumbs

out of town and glint the whole trip long.
The red and green blink for no one now,
the red and yellow not at all.
Gray air holds the Ferris wheel still and mud
clumps beech leaves by the shoreline pebbles.
No one dances mangoes down the dashes in the road,
handlebars trembling happy the whole way home.
I miss the music playing; who the hell
dances with the music off? No Robert or Sandra
—no little or older or middle—

gums the dock up today with ice cream stain
or popsicle drip, you say. You can sit flat on the dock now
to spin my clouds blue as baby sneeze
and to blink lullabies to the lake
you want no one else to hear. My water
serenades in whispers only you hear.
You cradle green rocks I sandpapered down
to fit like silver dollars in your palm.
And they do. Neon ghosts over your skin,
but mute, it sells you nothing, so you buy
no corn dog, play no pinball, buy no beer.
The flip-flops wait for corn dog return beer
pinball returns fry dog corn back to beer, will
return here and scour their sand-toes of me, but you

love me barefoot as a winter beach.

Benjamin Biber
The Clock

John sat in the lobby of his office. He liked to greet patients as they came in, and now he examined the room that had been in the family for forty years with clinical precision. They didn't save much from the flood, but they did save the clock. The big, tacky, yin-and-yang printed clock that hung in the waiting room of the dentist's office, a faux sign of spirit and youth and spry decor. The fabric on the rickety chairs was stained by the water level, and they had to be tossed. Also irredeemable were the old books that served as reading material, shrunk and wavered by the onslaught of water to become even less readable than before. John always kept old, thick novels instead of magazines in the waiting room, just like his father had done. Maybe it pushed away the new, hip residents of the town, but the longtime locals, the geezers, the guys across the back forty didn't seem to mind, and they're the ones that really needed some goddamn dental work. Some old-timer would show up for an appointment and have precisely ten minutes to examine the weathered text of some old Dickens novel or something before being called by the receptionist, at which point they would abandon it. At the next visit the geezer would read the same chapter again, remembering nothing. John's dad had always liked it that way—"A stroll in heaven over a week in purgatory"—because he had always been big on 'important' things.

"You might not like this, but heaven knows it's important," he'd say, about some classic novel, a fishing trip with John's stoic uncle, pretty much anything, always gauging things not by their value or appearance but by the weight they held. Always the type to talk about a sunset to the point of sucking the beauty out of the moment. So he kept the books in his office, most of them volumes that he hadn't even read, and when John got older and took

over the practice and became his dad (at least it seemed like that someday) he begrudgingly kept the books. Who gave a damn if the families over the hill liked *Cosmopolitan* more than the three-part Lincoln biography that had never renounced its seat in forty years?

But now the books (and the chairs and the goddamn doorknob somehow)—the ones that hadn't been swept down the river that the office overlooked, so deceptively puny now when it's low—had to be tossed, and now to replace them there were *Cosmos* and *Redbooks* and *Highlights*, glossy and pretty and inviting.

The clock, however, was no longer pretty and inviting. The water had changed it. It still told the time but the tick-tock was syncopated now, pitch-stretched somehow. A minute was still a minute but now it was a lumbering minute, a funeral march. The weight of the tick seemed much heavier than that of the tock, with the tick slamming its foot down dominantly and the tock sheepishly sneaking in at the last second, trying to avoid notice.

The flood had gotten limited TV coverage, mostly regional. It made some amount of sense—it had been bad but not catastrophic, and anybody living in a valley had to expect floods once in awhile. Still, it stung John to hear the news anchors downplay it, and it stung even more to hear people chirp their offhand comments.

“That wasn't a flood, you shoulda been here in '86, now that was a flood.”

Only one person had died in the flood, and common consensus was that it was a freak accident that should have never happened. It was crazy to hear how thin the line was between no deaths and one death. The yuppies were the worst, mentioning it like an afterthought.

There was one comment in particular that stuck with John. It was made by Kurt Farmington, father of two from up on the hill, proud coach of the local youth football team. His family was one of the younger families in the neighborhood, certainly the youngest that came to John's office. He didn't know why they did—Kurt and his wife always complained about the decor and the reading material, the archaic scheduling system of notecards and filing cabinets.

John had seen Kurt at the grocery store, where he was buying kumquats. The store, like everything else, was still recovering from the flood. There were massive dumpsters of

soiled produce out back, and the tiling was in the process of being replaced, giving the whole store a post-rapture feel. The owner of the store would be on TV that night, lamenting the true cost of the flood—several thousands of dollars in lost inventory and revenue. The accountants had done the numbers and the total loss was some very impressive number, much larger than one. The store was still kicking, though, proudly leaving its doors open to serve the surviving denizens of the town.

Kurt was idly inspecting the fruit while chatting with the stock guy about the flood, every few seconds either bagging up the kumquat—or something like that—or tossing it back on the pile. Even though their house was up on the hill, water had gotten into the basement and the whole thing flooded. Their whole vinyl collection had to be scrapped, he lamented to the stock boy, an emaciated youth in his early teens with shaggy hair who was feigning interest while unloading apples from a cart.

“At least only one person died,” Kurt had said. “Everybody knows you stay inside, stay high, but some idiot wasn’t doing what he was supposed to do. Did you hear about that?”

The stock boy took a moment to realize a response was expected, then replied that no, he had not heard about that.

“He was outside on a balcony over the river for some reason, watching the water rise, when he slipped and went right down. It took them days to find the body. I guess that’s natural selection for you,” he scoffed, apparently proud that he had remembered something from science class. The stock boy fidgeted, probably from the casual dismissal of human life, then assented and moved on to the next aisle of fruit.

John could have given Kurt a piece of his mind then, or maybe even gotten physical. In his head he imagined himself grabbing him by the scruff of the neck and slamming his face into a pile of kiwis, which would probably scatter all over the floor (to the chagrin of the stock boy). “This isn’t your town,” he would scream. “It should have been you and your wife and your kids and your stupid ass vinyl to die because YOU DON’T BELONG HERE.”

But instead of doing this John walked past Kurt and the kumquats and kept shopping. As the town’s senior dentist he would bear this, just as he would bear the squat

grocery store owner blabbering on the TV and the glib news correspondents and all the people in his goddamn town.

Now, sitting in the waiting room waiting for his next appointment, John thought about the sense of ownership he had over the town. His father had drilled it into him from a young age, telling him that it was THEIR town and the heart of the country was in this very valley. In this very waiting room there had been a family photo album that his father had forced him to pore over as he watched over his shoulder, pointing out their modest lineage. John's grandfather and great-grandfathers had been coal miners, had been born and died in this very valley, had been baptized in the river that ran through the heart of town, had worked until there was no more coal, pushing John's father to become a dentist.

"But I'm not better than them," John's father had emphasized. "I was born in this valley and I'll die in this valley, and proudly, dammit. Being a dentist doesn't change that. You were born in this valley and you can leave this valley if you want but you'll always have come from this valley and nobody can change that. It's an important place, remember that. You have to cherish the important things."

Across from John, the big ugly clock ticked and tocked. TICK. tock. TICK. tock.

The door opened with a jangle and John's appointment walked in. Kurt Farmington, funnily enough—not dragging either one of his kids or dropping off his wife, coming in for a big procedure—a pulling. He smiled warmly, a big ugly grin.

"Hey John, how are you?"

John smiled, a tight-lipped fake little thing. "Just fine, thank you. You can check in with Tammy at the desk and then we can get started."

Kurt grunted in assent and shuffled over. John got up and walked through the door into his office, absentmindedly preparing his equipment. He looked out the window at the river below. It was hard to believe that such a meek little thing could be so ugly, so beautiful, so monstrous. He thought about what his father had told him—how this valley was so important, these people were so important. Years ago he would have rolled his eyes, maybe even argued.

But right now his dad had never seemed so right. Some places are more important than others. Some people are more important than others.

John walked over to the window. He looked again at the river. He looked at the balcony where his father had died a year ago.

He was interrupted by a rapping on the door. It was Kurt, of course. He walked in with the same shit-eating grin on his face.

“Time to get this show on the road,” he joked, plopping himself into the worn dentist’s chair.

John continued looking over the river for one long second. Dentistry was generally, safe, but accidents happened. Routine procedures resulted in tragedy from time to time. It usually wasn’t the dentist’s fault, and was usually blamed on an improperly sized dose of anesthetic—especially if the dentist covered his tracks. There was only one person in the chair behind him. Many losses was a tragedy, but just one? One was an afterthought.

John turned around from the window at his patient, no fake smile this time, now wielding a grin as wide and genuine as ever.

“Let’s get started.”

Benjamin Biber
Ghosts

One night during the summer I turned eight something blew up in the woods behind my house.

I heard something

Nothing that I remember now but enough to wake me up.

I had a loft bed so I was tucked up in the corner like a cobweb

Sat up, trying to see some sign of fallout or catastrophe
through the darkness

Saw nothing so climbed back into bed and let my head sink into the pillow and the
summer heat, mulling over the possible causes.

My mind spun like it did, could only do on hot summer nights, living vicariously
through all the heat and passion and debauchery of the season as I stewed at home,
the clock flaying itself and throwing its organs to every corner of the room like rice
at a wedding

Outside my room, a light clicked

My dad had gotten up to investigate, my mom too. I hovered a foot or two above
their heads, heard them whisper

like you do late at night

not to avoid waking anybody up but because your voice has yet to arise, when it's
still curled up and shrunken into your throat.

I heard their speculations but couldn't understand anything besides a few words here and there.

And then
wedged in between a few muffled syllables, I heard one word
'Transformer'
not lowercase-t-transformer
(which I had no knowledge of even being a thing)
but capital-T-Transformer, as in popular line of anthropomorphic robots from the
plastic figures and movies and chintzy riff-raff
I laid there and considered everything: the boom, the hour, the T-word
It became increasingly obvious
Self-evident
that the Transformers had come to Earth, that the reign of man over his domain
was over.

In the daylight or a year later or during the winter, this would have never occurred to me. But because it was the middle of the night and I was eight and it was summer, the season closer to paradise and closer to God than anything else,
and
the ghosts in the backyard had been busy lately,
trying to whisper but failing to conceal their chatter,
it made perfect sense that the Transformers had come at last.

If you asked a hundred people if the Rapture were scheduled to occur tomorrow, if they had penciled in their schedule a spot for the return of Jesus Christ and the evaporation of every willing soul, how many would say yes? But if you started pulling people off of the Earth, blowing past the warnings and shoving the flesh of redemption of their faces, how many more would agree that it was happening?

That is how I was able to believe that the Transformers had come. To an eight-year-old, God is more or less as tangible as a fictional robot. He is something you can cherish and put faith in and even love but so are robots, and here was not a Rapture but the second coming of Optimus Prime, and I was a pious and willing servant. I needed no more proof and I went back to sleep, ready to wake up to a new world.

Then an hour or two later

my parents called me downstairs so I could see the fire department come and fix the transformer, which was not a capital-T-transformer but a lowercase-t-transformer, some glorified electrical outlet in the woods that couldn't even do a simple job correctly. It was around five in the morning at that point and the sun was beginning to rise as I stood in the driveway by my parents as the truck pulled into the neighbor's driveway and the firemen drudged out slowly and into the woods, taking their time to inspect the damage. I don't remember what color the sunrise was but I remember that it was paler and less splendid than usual, and no matter how much my father oohed and aahed it was still the sunrise of a human world, without Transformers.

Benjamin Biber
Right

For the first few years I could remember you were always up before me (gone to work) and in bed after me (back from God knows what) and our lives only overlapped in the half-life of the night, respective worlds of son and father only converging when we were both unawares. You slept in an exaggerated sprawl, like you were posing for a cheesy commercial, not hunched over like you were during the day. While I would curl into a passive ball and Mom would lie flat as a plank as if freshly executed, you would attack sleep, relaxed but vigilant.

But I could only see this when I would wake up in the night, sometimes groggy, sometimes clearheaded, sometimes just to take a piss. Sometimes it seemed like my brain just had to make sure I was still alive and that there was a roof over my head and the world still made sense, and all I had to do was snag a sight of you and catch a whiff of the smoke in the curtains and then I could pass out peacefully. Even if your mind was already running further away by then our bodies were never closer, in the smoky room where the three of us slept during those years, that room where all our needs and wants blended together, where cigarettes and food and water and sleep were all the same, all melted into a hazy stew. Mom said that the cigarettes would kill your lungs but they seemed to blend with your soul, something that you seemed to transmit to me either genetically or through diffusion at night. In the end that was the only thing you left—a curve in the curtains, a crease in the pillow, your breath in the walls.

Benjamin Biber
The Weather

I make small talk about the weather with my dad. It's one of the three or four things I bring up with him, one box on a little spreadsheet xeroxed and tucked in a fold of my brain. There's no unspoken rule or anything like that, but our conversations go best when controlled so I stick to what I know.

This is not to say that we don't talk much. We talk frequently and even energetically sometimes, and it never feels like an obligation or a burden. It just so happens that the weather usually comes up first and last.

When I talk about the weather, I speak in psalms—it's all praises and lamentations, histories and prophecies. I'm an astronaut of triteness, bringing the medium to new frontiers.

"It's a beautiful day" gains new life when spoken with excessive conviction.

"It's cold" offers a surprising diversity of opportunity for conversation, especially when followed by "as" and a choice expletive. That can lead to a hackneyed explanation of humidity and even to a physics lecture, in rare cases culminating in the opening of one or more Wikipedia pages, a clear sign of a successful conversation.

More sticky things like pride and self-reflection are more difficult to elucidate or relate to the weather, and are usually avoided out of convenience's sake. Goals are good when specific and material and can be safely shared. A raindrop, a flood, a blizzard: these things are real as anything and punch you in the face when you walk outside. Other things are flimsier. An idea, when probed, can dive into a corner or even implode. A snowstorm can be compared to the five inches of last week, the three feet of a few years ago, or even the monster of '88. It has lived for many years and will live for many more—never disillusioned, never ignored, never pushed away.

Kailyn Bondoni

Honey

I'd only ever thought to put honey in my tea,

Never to put it behind a pair of glasses.

But I suppose that sense of surprise suits you.

A good kind of unexpected.

The kind that's like finding that you won \$3 back
for your \$2 scratch ticket.

The kind that's like hearing a song you haven't listened to in years
and still knowing all of the words

You're like that.

A home within four loose threads dangling off of an old sweater.

Hiding a smile Like Only you know that honey doesn't just go into tea.

Kailyn Bondoni

The Thing About Writing Poetry

The thing about writing poetry is that
Making everything so tragically beautiful
Will, in return, make you more beautifully tragic.
It's the price you pay for writing.
If you decide to write poetry
Your life becomes one big, awful poem.

And yes, you get to breathe in silver and exhale gold.
But you also must breathe in ash and dust and suffocating dirt
The air in your world becomes a clouded charcoal gray
And you only get to see magic if you look hard enough for it
The realism of life will present itself through your neutrality
Because real words don't show through tinted glasses

And then, you should know that if you decide to write poetry
You will both lose and gain all of the numbness that this world has to offer
Imagine—feeling entirely everything and yet absolutely nothing
All at once—
All of the spectrum between pain and joy you've ever realized
Mixed with a complete lack of remorse and feeling

Imagine being so lost

That's the secret that no one wants to tell you about writing—
It's the over romanticized puppet of society
It is in no way an easy way of life

You shouldn't want that for yourself.
You deserve so much more.
You deserve to be happy.

Don't write poetry.

Don't become a poem.

Don't willingly give it your air.

Because if you do
That vow of agreement
Will be the last real breath
You will ever take.

Kailyn Bondoni

Too Close to My Heart to Remove

I want you to know
That I can live with your bullets
Lodged in my chest my whole life
Too close to my heart to remove

And one day when I breathe
I'll no longer feel them
Rubbing up against my lungs
But I'll know they're there

How you lost control too many times
Borrowing excuses of inferiority
Used me for target practice
Why do we own so many tv remotes?

Eyes redder than the crimson ink
That you never let me draw
Bleeding something that's not blood
While claiming you loved me the most

Reaching under blankets to steal
Fingertip strokes that never belonged to you
Trust is forevermore something
I'll have trouble finding in green eyes

Just because I've forgiven you
Doesn't mean I'll forget you shot me
Here one moment and then gone
Early one Wednesday morning

Dylan Borgerding
Adolescence

August 20th, 2017. Flushing, Michigan. My car is running. Tonight the interior lights of my car are the only other source of light besides the headlights projecting stale white light against Tristan's garage door. It is few minutes longer battling the cold and humid summer night air with my shoddy-at-best car air conditioning until Tristan comes out of his front door with Maria in tow. This marks the beginning of a trip we have been collectively anticipating for months to see the total solar eclipse. Our destination was set for Hopkinsville, Kentucky. Approximately nine hours directly south. Our plan was for me solely to drive us straight through the night with minimal stops. This was my first time driving such a distance, let alone in the middle of the night when I habitually would have been in a deep sleep. Even with this in mind I was not apprehensive. Awaiting us in Kentucky was one of the most significant natural phenomenon to occur in the United States in the last fifty years. Outside of the car windows we were surrounded by an empty and silhouetted landscape for what in the end turned out to be eleven hours. Somewhere between hour seven and eight a delirium took hold. At this point, Maria had been asleep in the back seat for some time, leaving Tristan and I in the front to a road trip playlist, darkness on all sides, and our wits. Sleep-deprived and caffeine-charged, we had reached a point of mental degradation where it was difficult to come up with something we *wouldn't* find funny. At some unspecified point in time, the names of every city we passed through in Indiana became the most ridiculous thing we had ever read. All of our conversations invariably lead to gut-splitting laughter. Then, as if out of nowhere, at hour ten the sun poked above the horizon and the Indiana/Kentucky border came into sight. When I saw the border, in a way I felt like I was waking up from a trance and had a moment of self-reflection.

I was dead tired. I couldn't believe the risk we took, that I put us through, for me to drive all night like that. I realized for much of this trip I could have easily fallen asleep at the wheel, zipping at highway speeds completely out of control. Our situation could have turned catastrophic at the blink of an eye. One nod of my head and the car could, in an instant, have been rolling down the side of the highway. A tragedy was narrowly avoided.

October 25, 2017. I wake up, glance at the clock, 8:08 AM. A crisp fall breeze pours through my dorm room window before I fall back asleep. I wake again, 9:15 AM. I wake up once more; this time the digital clock face uncaringly displays 10:11 AM. I'm late for my calculus class. I remove my pillow from underneath my head, toss it to the side, and roll over flat onto my stomach, stretched out on the surface of my twin-sized bed. I hear muffled clicking outside my door. It swings open, revealing my roommate on the other side. He's already returning from walking about Ann Arbor before my feet have touched the floor. His energy this early in the morning is palpable and appreciated. I can feel myself shaking the grip of sleep; I won't be falling back asleep. Twenty minutes later I peel myself out of bed, shower, and get ready in a rush. Leaving my dorm without completing my routine of making and drinking a few cups of coffee from the pot before I leave for classes. To rectify this lapse in habit I head to a nearby coffee shop in the few minutes before my class at noon was to begin. I pay for an empty medium-sized cup, which I intend to fill with black, reliable drip coffee. There were three coffee selections before me that I had seen the last several times I had been in this coffee shop in all-too-similar situations. The house blend, a French brew, and an ambiguous "Fall Spice" coffee. A woman was currently attempting to fill her own empty cup with drip coffee. She beckoned for the attention of one of the employees of the coffee shop who was busy behind the counter, "Excuse me? Excuse me, miss? There's uh...there's no coffee in here." I wasn't entirely sure what that meant for me, seeing as now that the clock on my phone read 12:07 PM, I had only three minutes until I was officially late for the second time that day. Running out of time and still without coffee, I went to investigate the woman's claim myself. She was two-thirds right. There was no French or house brew, but when I pulled the valve on

the container labeled Fall Spice, out flowed the familiar brown liquid. As my cup began filling, I didn't notice the typical yet drastic rise in heat on the surface of my hand in contact with my cup. Attempting to withhold any bitter-black-coffee-loving prejudice I might have about this fall spice flavor, I took a sip to tell what was replacing my ritual. Still not entirely awake yet and caffeine-deprived, when the fall spice touched my tongue, all I tasted was my own disappointment. I've always enjoyed my coffee black and bitter, and the fall spice felt like it was infringing on something simple and timeless.

I sat in the back of the lecture hall with my despicable cup of coffee, which I was determined to finish in my physics class. Not particularly interested in what my professor was marking up the chalkboard about at the front of the room, I opened my usual tabs on my computer. The various social media and news sites I use to satiate my boredom and current events addiction. This day, a story from multiple national news sources about an incident that happened in Genesee County, Michigan, where I spent the first eighteen years of my life. It was extremely seldom that something in the national news cycle would occur anywhere near my little nook of the Midwest. So of course seeing this news story so close to home had piqued my interest. The story in the news was displayed in such a way that many assumptions could be made, while many questions still persisted.

October 18th, 2017. Five boys, or however you may choose to deem them, aged fifteen to seventeen, spent the night as many teenagers growing up in a small town do: trying to find whatever on God's silhouetted Earth they could do to entertain themselves on a Wednesday night. At some point the boys' night took a turn, and I cannot begin to understand what went through the minds of these five young men that led them to the repulsive decision to throw rocks over an interpass onto the busiest expressway in the state below. Between the five of them, over twenty rocks were thrown over the fence of the interpass towards cars racing at highway speeds. As anyone might have guessed but certainly not wished, the boys' lack in judgment led to the end of a life and destruction of the lives of the loved ones of the late Kenneth Alexander White. The police were without any information about who had thrown

the rocks until one day later. The oldest of the boys, for one reason or another, came to the police station and admitted to the police his and the other boys' involvement in the death the night prior. It was not long after that all five of those involved were charged with murder in the second degree. There was much talk about what the boys' fate should be; words such as "intent," "guilt," "innocence," "premeditated," "consequences" were fervently batted about in the comments section. Some blamed the boys, some blamed the parents, some blamed only the eldest of the pentad of adolescents. At that moment in time, that was as far as the story went; the outcome was still to be decided. Once I had completely digested this awful happening, the only true sense I could make of it all was best summed up by the Sheriff of Genesee County, Robert Pickell, the man who has five minors facing life in prison under his watch and on his conscience. "The young people are charged criminally, a young boy lost his father, and all of the families are left grieving; at the end of the day nobody wins."

After I was finished with my classes that day I had plans to quickly meet with my father so he could give me my social security card, which I probably should have taken with me to college in the first place. I walked out of the front of my dorm under a sunny, cloud-spotted sky and got into his car parked in a lot nearby. Our conversations as of late had what I perceived to be the slightest aura around them. This was a new situation for us. He had an empty nest to return to after raising children for nearly four decades, and here I was, his last, his baby, transitioning into the murky world of independence. Nonetheless, the love remained constant. With a freshly blossoming hint of respect of independence to pleasantly accompany it, like a latte with a pleasant autumn spice. A fleeting pleasantness that we try to seize, to cherish, as the crema on a hot espresso shot. And like crema, with pleasantness eventually comes a hole. As it typically would, the conversation with my father eventually turned to current events.

"Did you see the story of those kids who threw rocks onto I-75?"

"Yeah."

My father turned to face me. "Did you recognize any of them?"

At that, I immediately starting searching through my mind's database for any-

body and everybody I knew who lived in Clio, but I hadn't paid much attention to the countenances of the boys charged, so I came up with nothing.

I truly had no idea who it could have been that I was supposed to recognize. My assumption was that this was to be someone I knew only through my parents and that I had met once or twice, possibly when I was quite young, somebody at a comfortable distance, at least. My father handed me his smart phone with an article with a clear photo of the boys on screen. I looked again at the low-quality courtroom photo, but recognized no one. When I first had read about the story, the boys' names didn't stick because, frankly, I didn't care who they were. It didn't seem to matter *who* the boys were; what mattered was the situation at hand, that terrible misjudgment on behalf of five boys led to death, and five young men facing life in prison. It wasn't until I read the names again that the importance and relevance was impressed on me.

"Kyle Anger, 17; 16-year-olds Mark Sekelsky and Mikadyn Payne; and 15-year-olds Alexander Miller and Trevor Gray; were charged this week on charges of..."

There it was. There it was the whole time. A spark of recognition. Trevor Gray. I looked closer at the picture of the five to confirm my suspicion, and confirmed it was. I immediately thought of Thanksgiving. I thought of my family. I thought of awful spiced coffee. I thought of eleven weary hours in a car surrounded by night. I thought of Sheriff Pickell. I thought of Trevor. I thought of Trevor Gray.

Although you couldn't prove it with a DNA test, Trevor Gray, charged-with-second-degree-murder-for-taking-an-innocent-life-making-national-news Trevor Gray was my family. He was my uncle's spouse's child, my cousin. At that time, the semantics of my relation to Trevor felt unimportant. I thought of Thanksgiving, only a month away, one of the many holidays where I expect to see my cousin and his sister every year. Then Christmas, then Easter, and so on. The constant of seeing the same cast of loved ones every year we seemed to have taken for granted was ripped out from underneath my family in a series of events nobody could have foreseen. Juxtaposed with a jovial Thanksgiving around a table full of homemade dishes and family, was the horrid half-reality of my fifteen-year-old cousin, of

a kid, of Trevor Gray, spending the rest of his waking moments surrounded by the concrete walls of a prison, all because of an equally horrid tragedy. I thought of awful spiced coffee. I thought in retrospect that up until my realization how insignificant my day had been. How dare I get so bothered by something as trivial as spiced coffee? All that time, my family had been in turmoil, racing to deal with this tragedy and its innumerable stresses. My uncle and his spouse might be losing their son to the prison system, and I was bitching about coffee. I thought of tragedy, I thought of Kentucky and how by chance I avoided my own devastating experience caused by irresponsibility and teenage wanderlust. What if this was me? How was I supposed to react to all of this now? How would someone society calls an “adult” in my position deal with this? I thought of Sheriff Pickell. At the end of the day, nobody wins.

Delaney Cavanagh

Skin

I am starting to be aware of the space I take up.

The skin that stretches and hangs around my bones, my softness, my mystical buzz.

It always feels different.

When I'm ravished by those microscopic foreign invaders my skin feels like it's rejecting me, it is in battle.

So at these times I must love it most.

My proteins, my atoms, my glands.

My oils, my pheromones.

It feels soft when the sun or the glow from a fire sets upon it.

It feels dense in the dark months when there is little warmth or moisture in the air.

When I cease my vision, and go inside my maze, I feel it most.

My faint freckles, my little lines, my perfect pattern.

Constantly renewed, month to month, I am grown anew but stay the same.

I will never keep up with learning myself, but I am starting to be ok with that.

Grace Coudal

Aunt to the East / Making Up for Lost Time

In the morning, nan sits patiently on your wood counter next to the honey
and the bag of biscuits from the small store down the street.

The one with the fluorescent signs in the window and the grapefruit boxes
by the open door entrance.

This time Amy Winehouse is booming in your kitchen,

And upstairs Rag Pahadi is playing in your bedroom.

Your black tile floor is cold in the morning

I find crumbs under my toes before the dogs do.

I know you tried to salvage what was left of your home grown Humboldt Park kitchen
but old friends told you floor mosaics wouldn't ship well overseas and

I think this new floor complements your chile pepper fridge just fine.

I know your amber fragrance will embroider itself into my clothes

by sundown, (soon the windows will no longer bean of eager dragonflies)

And you may even start smelling like a mother for a week.

I find steaming scrambled eggs on a plate with chickpeas and spinach
and everything left over from last night.

The three placemats still sit on the rectangle table.

In your home, I add one more orange napkin at dinner and subtract all the bits of red meat.

I look out past the white wood door and see your two foxes chasing each other.
Their collars dance around their necks just like the bees do.
You're sitting in the backyard on a tree stump with two crooked arms next to the makeshift koi pond.

I know you're checking your email,
Or checking your Facebook,
You check on me.

I tell you the eggs are only spicy enough to make my taste buds tap dance around the salt,
and the weather seems duller than usual

You chuckle and tell me this is a beautiful day for London,
it's the best weather you've had all week, and I should be thankful.

I sit on the sparkled yarn blanket that's laid on the grass next to your twisted chair
and your purple yoga mat.

Freshly dug dirt maps out your garden, I can still smell the damp dew from last night

You tell me my Uncle Ash is at work and his parents are making us dinner later,

Tell me we may have to skip our afternoon dessert to save room for the samosas

And giggles.

When I ask you what our perfect day looks like

You tell me the first thing on our agenda is to give you a haircut in the ginger sunshine.

The scissors are in the kitchen drawer next to the spatula, but
not next to the knives.

I will only start chopping after we collect new poppies to plant
in the front woven window baskets.

I will only start chopping after you visit us back at home.

Grace Coudal
Crimson Era

Bush be blooming beneath cotton,
Shave be unshaven under lace.

It bleeds into last night's pajamas,
staining uneven on a bed of growth,
where a garden grew and hormones swam.

18 years and this bed is the only thing that
knows my body equal, coffee stains
mixed with woman youth, where I found
my years shortened by what ran between my thighs.

Where my mother told me to protect.

Where I found a friend for bloody Sundays.

Period stains permanent on polka dot sheets.

This is the red swamp.

This is the red sea.

These are the cramps

of adulthood.

Chris Crowder

Everyday and Monday

“What are you doing for MLK Day?” she asked
to the only Black person in the room

I mean, you could’ve just asked me if I had weekend plans
like you ask your look-alike neighbor

But I’m glad you asked
because I am reciting the whole “I Have A Dream” speech by heart
while I filter the sugar out of the bottom of the Kool-Aid pitcher
with my Black lips and the Black gap between my front teeth
and my molars perform PSI compression on a chicken’s epidermis
All while I steal second base
and get gunned down
as hip hop and police sirens rattle beyond the outfield fence

May I ask what you are doing for President’s Day?

I can celebrate now, too, within
the upcoming month just for me
But as I get older and blow out the candles
I am aware of mortality and different kinds of fire

and how putting on more weight is dangerous
so I don't fly
farther back from the recoil of deadly weapons
and so I won't become a martyr
like Saint Valentine
because all that would be left of me is a name
and a date
and a dash on a cemetery plot
that only the people we hold close remember

No legacy

No continued celebration

Just continued mourning

And a desire to have a day in our honor
without having to die

Every morning it seems I am moved to tears
out of fear
because I don't want to know the joy of being in Heaven
and not looking down

So that's what's on my mind at the moment
Probably will be the same on Monday too

Does that answer your question?

Chris Crowder

Half Life

My anger has a half-life
not a time span, but the fact that only half of it is allowed to be alive

The other half is left on the ground
and is gradually covered by
the times people told me I was dirt
and the times my name was mud
and when I stuck my head in the sand
and when I was anything but a gem
until the frustration succumbs to all of the pressure
to make a rock of conglomerate

It is rough around the edges; calcified
until it realized it was lactose intolerant
and puckered its lips from sucking on life's bitter lime
Stone-throws away are my other sedimentary rocks
gray and without emotion
stoic until you kick it around until it falls down a sewer
or is left behind
or is lost from the last strike

The anger is still in there, waiting to be released
like the evils in Pandora's Box
and just like those, they're radioactive—ready to destroy the world
or rather, my world
because if I said all what I was angry about,
I would have no one
And no one is more feared than the Black man in America
or at least, an angry one
We can start a riot
but it's more accurate that people just think we'll start one
Sometimes I want to, but know better
when I have my entire world to uphold
to a higher standard than the one that is assumed of me
Make an ass out of you and me by putting me in a box
Or rather a pen as I am the donkey
people who think they're Jesus ride to cities like they're Bethlehem

My stony soul built up a wall of these rocks
and with an atom bomb turned into pebbles
and under the stomping of my feet in tantrum
turned to ashes
Out of the contents of an urn rises a phoenix
that is my unwanted empathy
howling the hymn of my epitaph:
It's not you, it's you, it's me
Individuals aren't what makes my mentality mad per se
It's instead the sum of everyone
and how I'm outnumbered by everyone
It's not often we think of the definition of a Minority

and how being fewer can make you less than
and how less than symbols look like arrowheads in a side
piercing until a line is drawn
so we're equal to(o)
Looking like a sideways six because it's half past
as four chimes of Carillon de Westminster sound
more like impending doom

Grandfather clocks shut up my snoring
Grandfather clauses still keep us quiet
The new tactic to silence is not to prevent voting
but to not listen at all
without a preamble
siding, sympathizing, sleeping with the counterargument
While I worry, wallow, weep that the powerful can put me on mute
After, even if, I address them begrudgingly as excellency
The boilerplate bullshit is music to the ears
While concerns from the depths of the earth go
in one ear and out the other as excrement, wax

I'm battered by my own furious thoughts cuffing my insides
Even if I did open the bruise up
to let the bruise blood come out to show them,
how many would know the song?
Sirens wail in familiar choruses to complacency
I guess the same is the fate of Black anxiety
But someday the moment will come where it hits too close to home
and households come to common understanding
but not quite common sense

Because one hand is gripping fallacies
as someone that is fallible
And the other hand sees grudges die and disintegrate
Disintegrate
into whistles in the wind
that sounds like the voice of one passed away
or one of my screams that had to die
and transform into a voice more polite
and defeated and weathered
hoping that the half of me that is still alive
has a voice strong enough
so I can exist here
and There
respectfully

I'm having difficulty explaining
what's on the precipice of my tongue
It's like searching for the last Lego piece
blowing a gasket over not being able to finish
I've been constructing for the longest time
trying to build my foundation upon bricks
But sometimes it gets knocked down like straw and sticks
And sometimes I sway in the wind like straw
and snap like a stick
Snap, crackle, pop emotion
Snap, crackle, pop my spine
I need an erect backbone to stay on my two feet
when all other ground is sinking sand

Still under my feet and under the earth are the conglomerate rocks
misshapen and holy
and wholly abstract
prime to seep into magma
and erupt
But my innards and introspection will never flood
the streets of Pompeii
or the contiguous 48
and out of those, I only feel safe going to a few
and within those states, I must be careful where to go
But if I told this to everyone
I would get shocks of disbelief
tasering me from my extremities to my core
Nobody wants to hear my screams of pain from the voltage
So I'll jump over every electric fence
or smile through the pain
of the shock collar set off when I use words they don't want to hear
I bark
I bite
Or at least I could
I'll remain gentle, hoping that will invoke pity to listen
But deep down, when they ask how I am,
I want to say, "I'm anxious about being Black"
But I'm afraid understanding can only be surface level
and nobody will want to reach into my mouth
and take the stone out of my esophagus

Colin Cusimano

Fall Away Somehow

November rain fell softly. The sky was a soft misty grey. It was cold. Phillip carried his groceries and looked down at the cracked street below him. He took deep breaths, and exhaled the vapor like a train, stoic on the snowy rails. His sixty-year-old legs ached.

He unlocked the door to his house, creaked it open, and stomped his boots off inside. Immediately he could smell that dinner was on the stove: spaghetti and meatballs. All the lights were off in the house, and the dim evening was only warmed by the yellow light illuminating the hallway from the kitchen, where nobody was waiting to eat. He had put the stove on simmer when he went out to buy some bread. He sat down on his chair, and spun the spaghetti on his fork. He was tired.

Three hard knocks on his front door. He looked up from his dinner, then hoisted his old body up, leaning heavily on the table. Three more hard knocks. Phillip finally made it to the door, and when he opened it, he saw who was waiting there: the landlord.

“Hey Phil, can we sit down?”

“Yeah, I guess, come on in,” he barely mumbled.

“Sorry, Phil, I didn’t quite catch that.”

Phil waved him in as he turned away and started to the kitchen. They sat down across from each other at the small square table with only the bowl of spaghetti and a piece of bread on it. The lamp hung down from the ceiling almost to eye level in the middle of the table, so Phillip hunched his back and leaned in, while the landlord leaned back in his chair, hands resting behind his head.

“Phil, Phil, Phil. I’m not going to beat around the bush, as they say. You are a good man, Phil, and you do not deserve this, but this is what I need to do. I have people to answer to—I have bills, Phil, you know that. And, and you have been causing me some trouble. You haven’t paid rent in months, and on top of that you have no job to pay rent. So it’s this, conflict, between us that brings me here. Listen, I know I said you don’t deserve this, but you kind of do. Nothing is free, Phil, you know that. And, well shit, Phil you don’t do anything all day! Maybe if you at least tried to get a job, I could let you stay a little longer, but the fact is, your wife’s money, rest her soul, is gone! I don’t know how you even buy food!”

“Pension.”

“That’s neither here nor there, as they say. The point is, you have two weeks to make arrangements and move out.” He stood up, squeaking the chair on the linoleum, and left. Phillip looked down.

He left his house. His head hurt. He walked without thinking into the woods behind his house. The trees were turning yellow. Their limbs swayed. Orange leaves on the ground, crunched and decomposed, blew around swirling. Dark brown limbs behind the bright leaves, bones covering the sky, shifting back and forth, bending and rattling.

He stepped and stepped. His somewhat tall figure bending under branches, walking in a straight line, only wavering around trees and ponds.

His mind was in his childhood: his mother and father, now long gone. He remembered the quietness of his house, the tall edges of the corners of the walls, the way the light came through the windows. He remembered the first time he ran away, seven years old, the transgression by his mother now entirely forgotten, but not the tears, and not the slamming of the door, running out into the backyard, yelling, “I will never come home again!”

He went to a park that time. He sat on top of the play structure, confused and angry. He had no idea where to go. The burden on his friends’ families if he were to appear; somehow he believed they would take him in, no questions asked, and not tell his parents. His grandmother was in town from Ohio. She was not often.

His rage only lasted forty-five minutes. He then began to feel so lonely. He thought they would have found him by now, and begged him to stay. He walked the three minutes back to his house, embarrassed.

He was far from his house now. The sky was a dim pink at the horizon, a faint echo of the brilliant sunset that was evidently occurring behind the clouds' curtain. The trees grew thicker, and their branches reached up and over him, like he was walking in a tunnel. He was alone now too. He drove deeper into the forest, half closing his eyes through tears, stomach aching. His legs were cold beneath his thin pajama pants, and the sweater over his body did little for warmth. He shivered as he began to walk more recklessly: getting cut by branches and twigs, stepping through puddles and mud. He was crying now. His head was splitting, as his breaths began to heave. He vomited, then fell onto his knees, then onto his side, where he closed his eyes and fell asleep, overtaken by the sudden darkness of the forest, the damp dead leaves underneath—the realization of his isolation. A crow looked down from a branch.

Deep in the heart of the forest, right in the center, something rotted. It reeked. A dark gummy mass, like a pile of rotting logs or flesh. Around this monstrosity, a clearing where trees and animals did not dare to breach.

Phillip woke up, hungover almost. His head still ached, and his stomach now felt worse. He had no idea how long he had been sleeping, but it was dim, so it could either be morning or evening. He did a quick look around to orient himself, but he saw no landmarks. The sun was no help, because it could either be hanging west or east, depending on what time of day it really was. All of the trees seemed to watch him. They stood, almost. The forest was too silent. A crow cawed.

Phillip shivered. He decided he needed to go home, to lay in his bed, to eat some chicken noodle soup. His mother used to make him chicken noodle soup when he was sick. He remembered the best days of his childhood were when he was sick—when he got to stay home from school. His mother let him watch television all day, and she would make him chicken noodle soup. If he threw up she would clean it without protest or anger. The stuffy nose and sore throat and tired head were all welcome, if they meant he could be home.

He remembered when he first left home, for university. Untethered, he drifted his entire four years. Days passed mindlessly, and nights passed alone. At the beginning, he tried to join clubs, to go out and meet people, but his second year he cut himself off from other people almost completely. He dipped in and out of consciousness. His parents visited often. They took him out to dinner and bought him books. When he got back to his dorm and they left, he went to bed by himself. Nothing changed, despite his parents' efforts. He stumbled through classes, not speaking for weeks until his parents came back. Then he graduated.

He had been walking now for an hour or so. The sun sunk, so he knew it was evening. His legs were sore, and he felt like he was going in circles. He clenched his fists and spit on the ground.

The sun sank lower. It was dark now and Phillip was getting desperate. He was hungry. He was tired. He felt like his eyes were not working quite right. He saw a crow on a branch, looking straight into him, past his eyes. It cawed, then flew down to the forest floor. It turned around and began walking. He was drawn to follow it as it hopped and half flew into the trees.

The back of his wife, leading him to the shore of the lake where they owned a lake house. He thought back to the lake house, the boat clunking on the rubber tires roped onto the side of the dock. He thought of the window in the bedroom upstairs, hearing the waves lap on the shore as he went to sleep under the navy blue sheets, his wife next to him. He remembered the drive into the cottage, into the woods at night, the trees illuminating into existence just beyond the road, then disappearing again just as quick, the uncertainty of what

was veiled just behind the foliage—wolves, bears, hunters who could mistake you for a deer, lost civilizations, serial killers shut up in hunting blinds?

He went back even further, to when he was a child at his friend's lake house, on the bank of a winding river they called a lake. They told ghost stories of a woman in colonial America, on the frontier, alone in the woods in a cabin with her baby. One night she heard a rustling in the forest, then suddenly an unknown band of soldiers barricaded her door, and set the house ablaze. Now, according to legend, her ghost appears in the mist over lakes, calling out her baby's name, looking to take revenge on anyone who has heard her story. He looked out the window that night, and swore he could see a woman floating over the water.

He thought of this story every now and then in the cottage with his wife. He remembered pulling into the driveway of the cottage, afraid of being abducted by aliens (a dream his father once told him) on the way from the car to the house. Once inside, the first flickering on of the lights warmed him, even in the hot summer months. They lit fires in the backyard and put on their biggest sweatshirts. They had no kids to make s'mores with, so they drank wine until they fell asleep, right in the back yard, and woke up regretting the bumps of mosquito bites they were now covered with.

He met his wife after he graduated, at a local bar during the period in his life where he went to bars for a change of scenery in his drinking. They made eye contact, and she approached him, introducing herself as Summer. They hit it off before he got too far into his drink, and made plans for a formal date the following Saturday. She wrote her telephone number on his hand, and when he got home he wrote it out on a piece of paper, and clipped it under a fridge magnet in his tiny apartment.

Her favorite season was summer. She loved the sun and the warmth, going to the beach, and wearing shorts and sundresses. That's why they decided to buy a cottage. He had no job or money of his own, but she worked as a teacher in the local high school, so through careful savings they could afford the cottage. That's where they spent most of their time as her health declined when they were around forty. She died slowly, over years. He could see it in her when they were thirty or so. She developed a cough, slight at first, but by the end it was a

constant hacking, spitting up blood. He saw her body give up on her. He saw her frame thin, her bones become apparent, a skeleton. She refused to see a doctor. They yelled most nights about it when she became too sick to work. He remembered late at night, yelling for her life, her eyes tragically determined, enflamed against him, against herself. "If you want to die, you can go ahead," he said, slamming the door. He heard nothing as he walked out through the front door, to the local bar, drowning himself again.

He remembered before it all, how at home he felt in her arms. He had not felt like that since he left his parents. After eight months, however, that feeling slipped away, no matter how hard he tried to grasp it, no matter how he clawed. She filled their house with things, and she hugged and kissed him, but he never felt settled; he never felt quite home. He paced back and forth some nights. His stomach relentlessly felt like a rock. He was hollowed out.

He threw up again. The crow screeched, then flew off. His entire body was ready to shut down. His shoes were almost worn through, his pajamas were all ripped, his legs rattled. On top of it all, it was almost pitch black now. The trees seemed to creep closer to him, black pillars, twisted and gnarled branches void of leaves. The sky was an unholy purple at the horizon. He could smell something, something despicable. His face jerked back in protest. It smelled evil, somehow.

He heard drums come from somewhere in the woods, somewhere just beyond the thick wall of trees that seemed to surround him. He followed the rhythm, the constant beating of the bass drum. His footsteps syncopated; one two three four, one two three four, he counted in his head, lost in the thumps echoing on the trunks and canopy of the woods. He then heard shouting over the rhythm, chanting with the drum. His legs felt like rubber. He could not stop them from carrying him deeper towards the ritual. The smell began to intensify. He wanted to gag and turn back, but his face was placid, and his eyes were dull.

The thumping became louder, unreadably loud in his ears, pulsing the blood through his brain. His head shook with every pound of the drum. Through the trees he could see a dark mass on fire, blazing in the center of a clearing. Figures danced in circles around the fire, chanting and screeching, dressed in black robes with gold cords around their waists. They

wore masks that looked like the heads of crows. Some of them marched in the circle with huge drums strapped to their chests. They beat them with alternating arms. He stumbled into the clearing, his legs shaking more than ever now. The smell in his nose was so overpowering, and his head was pulsing so badly he could hardly comprehend what was happening.

He fell into the circle, and began to march around endlessly in the line. He gave up on comprehending what was happening. He closed his eyes, and tears streamed down his rosy cheeks. They came down faster and faster now, as the drums sped up. The fire raged higher and higher, and the drums beat fast and faster. He was crying as hard as he ever had. He fell to his knees and broke down. He clawed the dirt, and dry heaved. They chanted louder. He let out a screech. The crow flew down from the void sky, into the brilliant orange light, and dove into the fire. It was engulfed by the rotting burning sludge. The sludge morphed and contorted, bubbled and popped. The chants reached a fever pitch.

Suddenly the sludge retracted to the size of a gravestone, and the fire burned up and away into the heavens. The circle stopped dead. The chanting and drums stopped. Phillip gasped. The sludge shot up and grew into a giant devil. Its head beamed at the sky, and its jaw opened down to its chest. It let out a roar that made everything go white for a moment. Its bony arms grew from the filth, and its dead hand clasped Phillip. He was soaked in his own tears. He could feel the devil's finger bones on his skin, under its sludge flesh. He contorted in its hand. He twisted around, kicked his legs, bashed his arms, but he only sunk deeper. The devil lifted him above his gaping mouth.

He remembered his mother, her warm embrace, how she soothed him when he was a child, writhing against the world. He remembered his home, his childhood home. His bed. The counter where his mom served him grilled cheese.

He remembered when his mom slipped away in a hospital bed, soon after he graduated. He remembered their last conversation, then hugging her body, feeling at home for the last time in his life, then feeling her die in his arms. He held on until she was cold and covered in tears. He let go and retracted through the IV's and monitor wires. He backed out of the room, and wandered around the hospital. All around him he saw the same scene: families

torn, lives let go. His father stood in the doorway, then walked up to her body. He fell to his knees and buried his face in his hands. A man before an altar.

The devil dangled him and shook him around laughing.

“Eat me already, you fucking devil!”

“You only wish,” the devil said, shaking with rapturous laughter. Then he dropped Phillip into his jaws and crunched whatever life was left out of him.

The pyre collapsed, and the figures in robes left the site without any words. They left the ashes smoking on the ground in the center of the forest. They wandered back into the trees. Now everything was silent. There was nobody now. Nobody in the final moments. There never was anyone.

The sun came up the next morning, and the light found its way through the window of what used to be Phillip’s house. It fell as the same rectangle into the same corner between the hardwood floor and the golden wall. The house creaked in the familiar way. It smelled like autumn and linen. The sheets were ruffled and scattered. The landlord knocked three times on the front door. Nobody answered. He figured Phillip had moved on. Well, that was that then, as they say.

Colin Cusimano

Pictured Rocks

To get there you need to drive. Out of the grey concrete spider web of Metro-Detroit. Out of the strip malls, body shops, and puddled asphalt. Through the gradient of suburbs, the straight roads crumbling where they meet drainage ditches and front yards. Up the freeway past the farms—barren snowy vacancies in the winter, golden expanses in the summer. Past tilled earth, lone farm houses, and trees in the distance. Drive up, into the sky, and look down over the curve of the Zilwaukee Bridge, the land flat and expansive. Stretch your neck to see how the Saginaw river lies, boats idling towards Lake Huron. The buildings thin. The trees drift into pines.

You are now “Up North.” But you don’t stop here. You keep going north, over the mighty Mackinac Bridge. Across the Straits of Mackinac, where Lake Michigan and Lake Huron join, where the water is cold and brilliant blue.

Across the bridge is St. Ignace, a small town with hotels, a pharmacy, and a park along the north shore of the Straits. The highway turns west along the southern coast of the Upper Peninsula, and for a few miles it is lined with hotel cabins, broken-down restaurants with giant signs advertising “PASTIES,” and a zoo. Then the buildings stutter, and give way to a deep forest. The highway bends along the coast, passing through sand dunes at some points, touching the edge of the woods at others. The highway turns north, and the meandering curves of the coast are supplanted by miles of deadly straight road; the planners of the interstate system did not need to bend the highway around any landmarks in the heart of the Upper Peninsula, so they didn’t.

After around three hours of straight driving through flat forest, meadows, and logging roads, the highway makes a sharp left, and dips into a valley, and hills appear as abruptly as the turn. The hills continue on the drive all the way to Munising, on the north coast of the Upper Peninsula. From Munising, you drive northeast to Pictured Rocks National Campground.

Driving in, you get a sense of how isolated the campgrounds are. The road is two thin lanes, bending and curving along hills sometimes, and going straight through flat ground at others. In the hilly portions, the air seems to open up, and light pours through the birch trees. The vast birch forest has no ground foliage, just a red brown hue of dirt. The trees are still and quiet, and it feels like you are an invader in their home, like they are holding their breath, anxiously waiting for your car to drive by so the woods can be still and quiet again.

Soon, ferns start to appear on the ground, and pines begin to replace the birch trees. Daisies grow along the side of the road. The ground is a rusty red covering of pine needles, and dirt. The forest is dense. Moss grows up the tree trunks and over boulders. The tall pines seem to stand and shoot into the air, reaching for sunlight. The forest is alive: The trees and plants are not a backdrop, they live and breathe. They give you the same sense as when there is another person sleeping in the same room as you—you can feel their presence.

The campground is a round clearing, with sandy ground. There is a hill between the campground and the lake, so that you can climb up the tree-covered side facing the forest, then look down over the dunes, down to the rocky beach, and beyond that, the ghastly titan Lake Superior. It sits steel blue and monumental, an impossibly deep and frigid monolith. Its profundity pulls you in; it has a weight like the sphere that bends the checkerboard gravity diagram. Looking out into the lake, it's hard to comprehend just how far the water goes away from you. Imagining Canada on the other side, all those miles away, the same water rising and swelling on the shore as before your feet, is like looking at the distant stars: Stars you know exist out there. Stars that you know somewhere are burning bright, and if you just had the time you could go up and be next to them, and see them with your own eyes, and feel their heat in person. Their distance is real, but they still feel tangible.

The pervasive feeling is that nature is alive, that it has a presence. The woods, lake, and stars feel ancient and everlasting. Looking at Orion or Cassiopeia, you can feel them looking back at you. The trees stand on top of the dunes, and gather in the forest. *You* are secondary, a person passing through, catching a glimpse and leaving. The forest and lake and stars go on without you.

Without you, Superior sits, and the waves break on the rocky beach, day after day. Without you, the fog rolls in and the sun becomes a diluted spotlight for a minute, until the fog rolls out again. Without you the corpses of ships, and the men who died in them, rest quietly under clear water. Without you the stars look down on the earth, and a brown bear's chest rises and falls as it sleeps. All of this quietly. Even quieter when you're gone.

Colin Cusimano

“Shattered time drags along”

Shattered time drags along,
warmed by the Sunday sun,
pale blue sky living room light.
Newspaper folded, thrown away,
coffee cold and thick,
fingers like twigs, brain like mist,
eyes hungry for something that doesn't exist,
shifting weight on the chair,
cherished filth washed away,
someday.

regress

Tyler Davis-Kean

Confetti and Stars

A memory hangs from the ceiling
An old balloon with an old celebration
Decorated with confetti and stars
It swings back and forth

The picture we took is now aged and worn
Shown and paraded
They gave praise without choice
Hollow smiles and empty festivals
When we look we only see ourselves

The floor was stained and sticky
My lips puckered from my mug
The glitter was caught in the back of my throat
I choked and laughed

Old feelings never come back
So I return to where I feel nothing
My sheets turn me wooden

Now my memory dwindles
Sparse records on our shelves
The imprint has worn away

Hearts written on hands
Love thrown around lest we glare
I should have been streamed with tears
The photograph showed my dry eyes

We built a cage and lost our way out
We sprinkle it with stickers and glitter
We spray it with perfume and cologne
We paint on confetti and stars
It floats above my bed

Claire Denson

Cognitive Development

*Stay out of my nightmares, stay out of my dreams.
You're not even welcome in my memories.*

"Things Fall Apart" — Built To Spill

Room 1207 in Mason Hall is a haunted house
on a boat with hallways leading
to more hallways, with no Exit.

Everywhere I turn
he's at the corner.
Hiding claws behind his back,
he asks me for a hug.

I dive for an easy volley.
My hand slips against
the ball, and my face lands
in the sand at his feet.

In the studio he's above me:

Acrylic paint and charcoal thick in the air
like in memory but voice deeper, face caked
in stubble he coos and this time,
this time I want him.

I look over my shoulder in class
I look over my shoulder in class
I look over my shoulder in class
I look over my shoulder in class

I skip class

Claire Denson

Your Friend First

He says *You're beautiful*
then gets on top of you.

You close your eyes,
and remember last week.

*Even if we hook up sometimes,
I'll be your friend first.*

Your Friend First grinds
his boner against
your hip bone.

Your Friend First says
You always leave me hanging.

You roll over and apologize
for all the hearts you've broken.

Your Friend First rolls
his eyes and says

I was just kidding.

Laura Dzubay

Pause While Running

today I stood between the twin spruces,
in the rain, as in an art museum. the field
before me, in the rain. When you're driving
through Indiana and you see the cornfields there are
1. infinite colors rolling by, sure they're mostly shades
of gold and rust but that's the thing about
infinity: it's not like it gets any smaller.

I thought about the back doorway
of my neighbors' house, in the rain, about
time passing on the farm and in
all my friends' lives, I tried
to come up with something holy
to set down into words after. But these thoughts
were going nowhere, and when I dropped them
I landed myself inside a painting, the way
you always wish you could, standing on a clean
white floor in the air conditioning, hearing
others' murmurs and the clicking of the shoes. You look
between the framing and you can't start walking again
: you want to hear the thunder, you thirst

Laura Dzubay

The Proper Response

When darkness chases you down, don't
buckle and run like they do in movies—

panic room, the gun your father keeps
above the mantle. You knew this

the first time you watched a deer go
down in the forest because of you. She

was only sixteen, the subway man sings.
She was too young to fall in love, I was too

young to help her. You learned a while ago
that evil is like taffy: colorful & ridiculously

sweet, fun in small doses, a thing you
can pop like candy in the back of a car.

But too much and your stomach will curl
heavy, like a lead balloon. And it sticks

to your teeth for hours afterward, turns
your mouth black, makes its shelter

on your back between the shoulder
blades. If it catches up to you your throat

will go black too, dust will pile
under your tongue. Don't act scared. Smile

like they taught you, button your flannel
against the wind. When you find the exit,

don't pick up your feet or break down shaking
on the other side. Be polite, thank the evil

for the pleasure of its company, twirl
and shut the door.

Joel Danilewitz
Nightcap(p)

I scroll through a grid of faces and torsos, a layout that looks almost like the composites hanging on the walls in a sorority house. There's a little red dot above the chat icon, like an answering machine box blinking to tell me that someone's called for me.

Each square neatly contains an entire profile that refuses to let anything beyond someone's head or body spill out of the thin box. The sluggish pace of the app has an incredibly shoddy quality. The only two colors underlying the grid are black and the yellow that lights up the logo, like the sign of a diner at the end of an interstate, used as a last resort.

This app is familiar to me the way a doctor's office is familiar to those who remain in a constant state of ailment. I use it for a few minutes, exchange more face pictures with people, until either they don't respond or I get lazy. Actively seeking someone out in the middle of the day is an exhaustive mission. Besides, when they reply to my messages, the validation is probably better than whatever follows.

My obsession with using the app as a temporary self-esteem boost underscores my embarrassingly low amount of self-worth. I tap open every box, hoping someone's interest comes my way.

A little tri-toned ping startles me. I shift the vibrate button on quickly. I'm in the Ugli, sitting on the second floor across from some friends, computer screens masking their faces. Julia's earbud dangles loosely, hovering over her keyboard. The tri-tone alert lifts her eyes from her screen to my phone. I'm surprised she can hear it over the buzzing voices that cloud the library.

“Are you ever gonna start your work?” she asks in a self-aggrandizing *look how much I’m getting done* tone.

“I’m actually working,” I respond, “It’s a project.” I tap the new message notification. An alert from Jack. It’s nice that he puts his quaint little name as the header, rather than “looking for now” or the ostensibly harmless “fun?”

It’s 9:30 PM. I have work that’s been assigned for a future that’s current distance from the present permits my procrastination. The question isn’t whether or not I’ll do my work, but rather what I’ll choose in lieu of my responsibilities. I scroll through apps all day, rendering my retina display a fat, smudgy streak thanks to my unrelenting thumb. Sometimes I think if I tap my way through every post or every account, I’ll get closer to a notification electrifying my screen that says “WINNER!!!!!!”

We begin exchanging “face pics.” I choose ones with little sexual nuance, so as not to be presumptuous. A picture of me at the football game, my arm swinging loosely over my friend’s shoulder, exposing a lopsided grin thanks to a good pregame. I’m wearing round sunglasses. My friend is cropped out of the picture.

Everyone always really wants a picture of you exposing some toned portion of your torso, or exhibiting your gratuitous biceps. I have my face, one that Julia’s mom said she thinks is “very handsome,” and even though Jewish mothers aren’t necessarily my demographic, I’ll remind myself of this if he doesn’t respond.

But he does. “Cute,” he says. He sends forth his own: a selfie in some shrubbery. He wears glasses, has a thick clump of bleached hair with chunky roots that are slowly beginning to overtake the blonde on top. He wears round, wire-rimmed, circular glasses that ten years ago would’ve been nerdy, but the permutations of style, in all its transience, make them fitting for someone like him, a someone who exposes his wrist to have three triangular tattoos, all at lopsided, different angles.

It doesn’t take him long to ask why I’m online. The lack of pretense on the app in theory should repel me, especially being someone who says he likes to take things slow, but instead it draws me further into the opaqueness of each user’s blatant sexual needs.

He makes his intent clear, telling me he wants to meet up. It's 9:30 PM and I know I'm not going to get any work done. I know he doesn't want to go on a date. He lives in East Quad—in three minutes I can make my way into his single, which he advertises as one of the reasons to stop by.

I have to go to bed. It's Sunday. Another week of pledge tasks and tireless assignments confronts me, and the imbalance that four to five hours less of sleep will bring is hanging in the back of the mind.

Except there's something briefly illuminating about this prospect—something that says I'm good enough for an hour at least. It'll be that something that I can come back to, something that gives me worth. This is why I'm obsessed with using these apps—it's a temporary source of validation, something I can sink my teeth into for a second because it's what I innately lack.

"Yeah I'll be there soon," I type back, careful to not let the anxious cluster of nerves that hang on the tips of my fingers spill into the text box.

"I think I have to leave," I announce to a gaggle of people who can't hear. It takes a second for Julia to register that I said something. Her eyes flutter to life, managing to pull themselves from the desktop and make a brief registration of what I said.

"Where are you going?" she asks, her mind still not completely peeled off from whatever was on her computer.

"Probably gonna go get laid or something," I say, an on-brand enough joke so that she doesn't take it seriously. She just briefly laughs, then goes back to her computer. I shovel my books into my backpack, struggling to fit it all in because the wooden paddle that juts out of my bag pushes all my notebooks to the front, leaving a tiny slit open at the top of the zip. One more inconvenience pledge term instigates.

I walk to East Quad, jittery. I plug in my headphones and listen to the same song I always play when it feels like all my cells are jumping around inside me, floating past each other at five miles per second. The buttery voice of whoever sings "Everything's Alright" in the original *Jesus Christ Superstar* cast placates my restlessness. "Try not to get worried,

try not to turn on to problems that upset you now, don't you know everything's alright yes everything's fine...."

What looks like a thin shadow underneath a porch light is actually Jack, standing there. I know he's waiting but his presence is so passive that I would've guessed he was just glancing over the courtyard.

When I come up to the door, he barely smiles and says "I'm Jack," a mumble that is less a statement of fact and more so a thought he accidentally let slip out.

"I'm Joel," I say, forcing a giggle so he can at least acknowledge the contrived nature of our introduction. He barely registers it, turns to open the door, and leads me up three flights of stairs, into his room.

He jumps onto his bed. Looks at me through his thin glasses, squinting like he just took a hit. "You're cute."

"So what year are you?" I ask, trying to slow the inevitable, like I'm tapping the ground on the side of a bike.

"I'm a sophomore," he responds. He puts his hand on my arm. I'm not bubbly inside, but something rises to the surface of my face, a rush of heat which fades as quickly as it comes.

I stave it off. "What's your major?" as if his hand isn't gliding down the wrinkled skin of my shirt.

"I'm in CS," he replies. "You?"

"Still undecided. I'm in LSA but I'm thinking of applying to Ford when I'm a sophomore."

This line has rolled off so many times since the beginning of the semester. Throughout rush and during the interviews at my fraternity—in which I ask brothers a series of questions as part of my initiation—I would say it, a sense of righteousness underlying it, telling people *look how passionate I am about the issues*. Everything I say lately seeks recognition, the product of becoming one in 40,000. So insignificant that your greatest accomplishments are no longer that great, just pleas for corroboration from others that you're good enough.

So when I say this to him, the intent remains, though the confidence that usually holds my words up vanishes, my words barely hanging in the air. He takes the reins and shuts me up when he presses his lips to mine.

There's something ephemeral about hooking up with him. There's the way he holds the side of my head, then motions briefly towards the nape of my neck, then pushes his fingers through my hair. His hands are impatient with the still nature of my body. The tips of his fingers grasp the bottom of my shirt, almost as though he's getting ready to remove the white, airy pajama top I threw on with the same kind of haste that got me into his dorm.

It's as he decides, then decides not to, then finally decides to remove my shirt that I realize I barely had a chance to see his room. My eyes dart around a little bit, catching glimpses of the tapestry that floats on the wall. It's hard to pick out what muted color it is—there's just a whisper of illumination in the room. He has those little dangly, all-purpose Christmas lights entwined with the tassels of the tapestry, giving the room a soft glow that dusts every object with scant light.

His room is an overt display of the artisanal, hipsterish persona that emanates from the three tattoos on his forearm to the tumult of bleached, wavy blonde hair on his head. Purposefully unkempt. He has hanging wires with pictures clipped on by wooden clothing pins. A clean, ornate display of his various bowls and grinders is clustered neatly on his bedside table. A mason jar stuffed with condoms sits perched in the corner of his desk, gently squeezed into the corner of a wall. He keeps his incense in a clear vial.

He holds me with his hands on both my arms, like he's trying to contain me. All I want is someone who can hold me from below and lift me up, but I don't know if anyone can. Lodged inside my brain is the voice that tells me only I can hold my weight up. I am in control of my own self-worth. But that voice is too faint below the noise of everything else, a cacophony in my head that led me to his room. I think about my friends, all of whom I'm still getting to know. Each time I'm with them I question what it is they like about me and if they'll remain past first semester. For some reason I always feel like I need an explicit display of affection, someone telling me I'm good enough to keep around. I think about so many

things that I barely notice as his hands move down my arms.

It's as though he was trying to fit me into the neatly haphazard nature of the room. A potent cinnamon smell was flooding the room, undoubtedly an artificial cinnamon, the progenitor of which was lying on his bedside table. Soon, the little scented candle would extinguish, and I looked closely so that it may, knowing that as it flickered out my time would be up.

...

2:00 AM. Walking home, bracing the cold. My pants are a little saggy. I think I missed a loop on my belt. I fish my phone out of my pocket, my hands slowly numbing but my fingers still tapping away, opening the app. His little icon is still there. The last message: "come to the courtyard across from Zaragon." Everything is the same outside and it bothers me.

Everything flashes in bursts. Nothing just happened, so I feel nothing in response. You can't say you got intimate... I don't even know his hometown. He's in-state. There's something. But he said, "you're so cute" when coming up for air, and for a second I believed he meant it.

Nobody's on. I log in to Instagram. Twenty likes. Mikayla commented, "my favessss." Sarah replied, "lovee." Something percolates down into my underbelly, a brief blimp of warmth, like someone clicked on a lighter for two seconds underneath my ribcage. It's the same as when he said he wanted to hang out. The same as when he said I was cute. The same as each touch, each fleeting grasp.

I keep dipping my toe back into it—continually reaching in, feeling warm for a few seconds, taking whatever I can. I know it's inefficient. I've already realized how little I can realistically take from this false sense of fulfillment. Hooking up with someone random only reinforced this.

I hold onto the little square with my finger until it animatedly wiggles on my screen. I click the little x in the top left hand corner of the box, a first step to free myself from the transitory validation of others.

Joel Danilewitz
Straight-acting

In Frank Ocean's 2017 song "Chanel," the enigmatic hip hop star blurs the line between femininity and masculinity when describing his boyfriend, ruminating on the guise his lover puts on when he sings, "Got one that's straight-acting, turnt out like some dirty plastic (ride)," using a somewhat esoteric phrase to convey his boyfriend's desperation to conform, shielding away the aspects of his sexuality that may be considered "flamboyant" or "feminine."

This is the drive that pushes gay people to make their orientation more palatable to a heteronormative culture despite what we view as society's continued acceptance of all forms of human sexuality. It is constantly exhibited in several aspects of our culture, including the types of gay men and women whose stories are told in mass media and the suppression of LGBT actors and actresses from coming out, exemplifying how this kind of opinion is codified within the societal opinions on gay people. It is further shown by the phrase "straight-acting"—a phrase borne out of the enduring belief that conformity should trump freedom of expression. This term is the conception of decades-old stereotypes, misogynistic attitudes, and antiquated views about masculinity and femininity that is damaging for all.

Straight-acting is a self-explanatory phrase. It derives from the assumption that gay men all share the same stereotypes and are all expected to behave in mannerisms that one would define as "effeminate" or "girly," generalizations that entail the classic archetype of a gay man: feminine, with a lisp, emotional, sassy, and easily commodified. The "straight-acting" gay man eviscerates all conscious stereotypes by acting how society expects a straight man to act: emotionally disengaged, a deep voice, partakes in conventions typically

prescribed to straight men such as sports, and acts in ways that evokes surprise from people when they discover that he is not, in fact, attracted to the opposite sex.

These are the two central issues confronted by this pigeonhole. It begins with an implicit societal push for masculine figures. Since being gay is already seen as something that strips away one's masculinity, there is a concerted effort made at being as manly as possible, something that is seen as a contrast to what being gay entails. Furthermore, the concept of men acting in a "feminine" way, and having those mannerisms, is viewed negatively for any man to maintain. The term "straight-acting" is an exemplification of the roots of homophobia, exhibiting that this kind of bigotry is really just misogyny directed towards men, resembling how *Moonlight* (2016) writer Tyler McCraney described homophobia. In an interview, the acclaimed and Oscar-nominated writer opined how he views homophobia as sexism, saying "at the end of the day, if we look at all real homophobia, it's anti-feminism. It's really anti-feminism dressed up, or pointed at men" (HRC.org).

The film *Moonlight* is an acute depiction of barriers that this kind of debilitating ideal erects. The movie revolves around a black boy whose proclivities some view as reflective of his emerging sexuality. Within the black community, his sexuality is incongruent with the culture of masculinity that homophobia is predicated on. As he grows up, he learns to confront this homophobia by diminishing what people perceive to be as the revealing factors of his sexuality. As an adult, he peddles drugs and transforms his body, bulking his frame to appear as intimidatingly masculine as possible. He submerges his face in sinks filled with ice water, almost as though he is trying to become immune to some kind of piercing, cold pain, callusing his personality with each dunk in the water. Towards the end, he confronts the parts of him that he has avoided for all of his life in marginal ways, but we see the damaging impact these expectations have had on him.

It's these kind of stories that are emblematic of the notions that are imposed on boys from a young age, and foster a need for boys, especially gay boys, to mask aspects of themselves that run contrary to their cultures and become the all-too-destructive phrase, "straight-acting."

Straight-acting also persists within the professional lives of many gay people. In many jobs, men and women are encouraged to blot out even the most cosmetic aspects of their lives. This can be seen in the burgeoning careers of Hollywood actors, who must convince audiences and producers alike of their dubious sexuality. In this sense, they must take on roles both on screen and beyond the camera.

Within Hollywood, gay men and women have been forced to conceal their identities to achieve certain roles at the urging of agents and producers alike. The misconceptions about gay women also haunt many lesbian actresses. Prior to coming out as gay in 2014, Ellen Page described how she had agents who previously discouraged her from being open about her sexuality, lamenting how it would tie her to stereotypes that would ultimately hinder her career and prevent producers from wanting to work with her. In an interview, she recently stated that “there’s this narrative that people are attached to: you cannot come out because it’s going to hurt your career.” An article written for *Variety* by Brett Lang details how despite America’s growing acceptance of LGBT individuals, there is a reluctance to cast them in movies because people will have difficulty “suspending their disbelief” that the character is straight. This all stems from ideas that one’s sexual orientation is largely indicative of the kind of character they would be, a product of the delusions regarding gay men and women by a vast majority of people. Can a man who kisses another man still be an action star? For many in Hollywood, though progress is being made, these outdated questions still linger. Even so-called progressive film stars such as Matt Damon have made comments about how gay actors should stay closeted, saying that “I think you’re a better actor the less people know about you, period...and sexuality is a huge part of that. Whether you’re gay or straight, people shouldn’t know anything about your sexuality because that’s one of the mysteries you should be able to play,” as though one’s personal life and screen roles are completely inextricable. Considering acting is precluded by the idea that people can transform themselves to fit a new role, there are still those who would rather see gay and lesbian actors shut up their identity to neutralize their identity rather than be open per their own choice.

This is at the crux of the issue of “straight-acting;” it belittles the existence of gay lives by taking the ability of expression away from gay men.

Our culture emphasizes gender roles, and though inclusivity has ostensibly become mainstream, it seems clear with the advent of “straight-acting,” internalized and externalized homophobia with strains of sexism and misogyny still run rampant in parts of our culture.

Erin Farrugia
Days at Sea

Beneath the deck, my mind sways
The hull rocking back and forth with the lull of the sea
I spot you through the porthole of my fantasy
Starboard, dancing among the waves, a goddess of the sea
You leap into the misty air and seem to stand still
Your body
Strong and powerful like the mainsail in a storm
But you, my love, are the storm
Chaotic and free, you make me fear death
Yet I embrace your rigor
I climb to the crow's nest to be near you
To let your rain wash away the sin of the sea from my hot skin
Yet just like that, the cannons shift and the barrels roll
And with a swing of the sturdy wooden boom
You are gone
Your effervescent glow disappearing into the roaring foam of the sea
Breathless, leaning over the port side, I grasp the rope so tightly my hands hurt
God has cursed me
Oh my love if I could only hold my breath ever so long
I would swim after you

But alas my feet must stay grounded
Because tomorrow another storm will roll in
And you will be gone
And the rain will wash over my skin
But the sin of the sea will stay with me
Always

Erin Farrugia

Seasons

Brown crumbling leaves shower down from branches above
And the wind circles my head
leaving trails of dead debris
tangled in my hair
The raw chill stings my skin
Forcing tears to track slowly down my face
And as I walk
I think of how it used to be

Just weeks before
When golden orange honeys dripped down from the trees
Buildings wrapped in leafy vines
washed in waves
Of deep reds, oranges, and yellows
And the world looked as if it had burst into beautiful flames
My eyes did not squint from the cold
But they opened wide without request
Innately knowing they must indulge in this beauty

I think of how it used to be

Just weeks before
When golden orange honeys dripped down from the trees
adhering my hand to yours
Buildings wrapped in leafy vines just as
Your arms wrapped around me
Washed in the deep red waves of your embrace
And our passion felt as if it had burst into beautiful flames
My eyes opened wide upon your arrival
As if an instinct
I knew I could not miss a second of you

I think of how it used to be

Just months before
When my body
Was mapped in lines of sweat
As I walked below
Thick greens
That beams of sunlight broke through
to pour down on me
Enveloping me in their warmth
My skin darkened with the love of the sun
Hot to the touch

I think of how it used to be

Just months before
When my body
was mapped in lines of sweat
Nervous as you looked at me from across the room
When I walked below
Thick crowds
That your smile broke through
To find me
Enveloping me in happiness
My skin forever darkened by your affection
The blush in my cheeks hot to the touch.

As the sun has faded from my pale skin and
Coats wrap me in layers
To simulate that warmth I once knew
I think of how it used to be.

Charlotte Fater

I tried to do you justice

To you, for you, and about you, the one
who can water and fertilize and grow
Until you are completed, but not done;
A lovely flower in full bloom, although,
Flowers are recognizable and you
I can only see by what I outgrew.

Completion is not the word and flower
Is worse. Ignore my words which are untrue,
I meant to be poetic, not sour
Your understanding. Take these lines in lieu:
All the selves you've owned, despite contrary
Opinions, have been good enough for me.

Finally I decide my message: hold
Onto hope, more importantly, justice,
No matter how often the world seems cold,
Let cynicism leak out with a hiss.
What's needed is kindness, braveness, boldness—
You were born for just such a time as this.

Bellina Gaskey
At the Cage Door

After Maya Angelou's "Caged Bird"

I have since unlocked my black wire cage
But do I dare to try to claim the sky?
I spent so long forcing myself to fall
That I wonder how I'll be able to fly

From even here, on peaty ground
I feel the lightning and shake at the sound
Of thunder growling, mocking me
Saying "oh fragile bird, how dare you BE?"

It's sad to watch my heart have to persist
In insisting to myself I have the right to exist
Why do my tattered wings not spread wide yet
Still I pace in the cage and place my bets

For when I will finally burst free through that door
Let despondence and hatred shatter against the floor
I'd replace them with sunbeams I see right outside
Or am I scared to be happy, to sing and not cry?

Bellina Gaskey
Drawing Me

She has drawn all over me
the lines and contours
of the Perfect body,
squeezing my skin
to show me
how it ought to forever fold
so she won't have to trace
all over it again.

She has erased my blemishes
by rubbing just hard enough to leave
a scar.
The discord of those vicious words
is like an angry child's scribbling
to cross out all the parts of me
that filled out outside the lines.
They're straight lines, not curves.
Never curves.

Dylan Gilbert

Metal Mouth

my family got a gap in its teeth
so wide it stretch back for centuries

my grandma wore hers with red lips
blushed poinsettia pink to cover up
constellations on her cheeks

chalked her eyelids blue
even when everyone told
her she was too dark to

she cut her words so clean
scrubbed em in a sink and
served them up on porcelain
for me like she did coco puffs
and gumbo
and collard greens
told me to lick the
whole plate into mirror

my grandma didn't have to tell
people she had a college degree
she was brown skin
knew the backs of busses well
called MLK "Martin"
like we do a cousin

but when her words whistled
through that clearing sitting
between her front teeth
white men in suits
sat back and thought
"damn, she's smarter than me"

my grandma didn't give a fuck
in the most eloquent way there ever was
rumor has it she changed her name
in the second grade 'cause Halle May
was too country for her taste

she was a teacher
and everywhere
her heel clicked
was her classroom
nobody was
too grown
or too man
or too white
to be schooled

she wore wigs
and sculpted breasts
from the fat in her thighs
to ward off the look of cancer

like she was
Michelangelo

I watched my grandma
run the kitchen and every
other room in the house

I remember how real God is
when I think about how
she put pictures of
Obama on the walls
like she had a fourth son
how the Lord picked her up
before she had to endure
the heartbreak of Trump

I looked at my grandma
like the saint she was
like the angel she is
I pulled on her hands
dressed in pressed-on nails
all through the school
during grandparents' day

she never missed a
grandparents' day
until she did
until she got sick
again

I got metal in my mouth
the month before she died
and I'm still mourning
my gap, envying my dad's

I smile more now that she's
not here. it's less genuine
than the straightness of my teeth
you see, my lips reveal a dimple
when my mouth pulls open
like curtains, shows off a smile
that looks more commercial
than heritage

but then there's a dimple

the dimple's not deep but it's
still a pocket and it does its job
holds all the things I wanna hear

“you look so much like your grandmother”
“you know Bernadette had one just like that”

I can still feel her lipstick like wax
stamped heavy on my cheek

smell her Chanel No. 5
lingering in the stitching of my sweaters

hear her voice

Louisiana stirred in with Chicago
accent suppressed by a strict tongue
ordering “give me some sugar”

as she stood 5’1
same height as I was
showed off a smile with
a space in it that used to claim me
a mouth broken in the best way possible
pointed a snaggle tooth in my direction
and said “that’s my granddaughter”

I’m 18 now
she’s been gone for 6 years
I still look at invading
my mouth with braces as the
worst mistake there ever was

Dylan Gilbert

The Multiple Meanings of “Nigga”

The word “nigga” stems from the derogatory slur “nigger.” Although “nigga” derives from a word that has been used to offend and oppress black people throughout history. Today you’ll hear the word often in popular music and media, as “nigga” has made its way into casual settings and everyday speech. “Nigga” is a highly controversial word because it has two meanings that heavily differ. The definition of the word drastically changes not with the context, but with the speaker. The colloquial term that my friends and I use in laughter and love quickly resorts back to its harmful and hateful roots when it is uttered by a non-black person.

The African American community took a word that has been soaked in a long history of hate and reclaimed it. Now, the word “nigga” is used amongst black people to mean things such as brother and friend. This adopted term of endearment has been popularized and profited off of in the music industry. It is a part of Ebonics and it is representative of how black people have adapted in harsh situations. Showing not only how African Americans have turned their pain into culture and sentiment, but profit. “Nigga” is a term for black people, by black people. Despite any amount of popularity or casualness it now holds, I fully believe it should stay within the race.

It is truly an inspiring and beautiful thing that black people have flipped a racial slur into something positive. As an African American, it is simply offensive that non-black people think they have a right to reap any part of that positivity. This is where the second, discriminatory and offensive definition of “nigga” surfaces. When non-black people say the word “nigga” it not only sounds like a slur, but also like theft of culture. When white people, specifically, say “nigga,” no matter what the context, it is always hate speech. This is due to the racial power

dynamics in America coupled with this country's long history of enslavement and genocide of black people. The word "nigga" is always tainted with oppression and always has a degrading tone when it is said by a white person.

Some people, like my caucasian mother, argue that because the word "nigga" comes with rules and complications, no one of any race should be saying it. I do not believe that this logic is rooted in hate, but rather a lack of understanding and a feeling of discomfort. The "nobody should be saying it" argument is used by people who are either uncomfortable or envious; both, however, are problematic. The argument rooted in discomfort is due to the fact that people, especially caucasian people, do not like to be reminded of the violent and hate-filled history that the word "nigga" holds. This is in a way understandable; nobody enjoys feeling guilt, especially for something they themselves might not have done. The argument that stems from envy is the one in which non-black people believe that them not being able to say "nigga" is a form of oppression. Due to the large amount of privilege that the caucasian race holds, when some people are told that "nigga" becomes an offensive word when white people say it or sing it, they believe that "this must be what oppression feels like" and become outraged. This argument that oppression is not being able to use a racial slur was never a convincing one. However, it might be more compelling to listen to if white people fought for equality in the prison systems or school systems half as much as they fought for the equality of being able to say "nigga."

The caucasian race has stolen practically everything from black people, including black people themselves. They have taken and gentrified almost every piece of slang the African American community has ever produced, but "nigga" is not one of those words they can pull from our mouths or white-wash in theirs. It is not just any piece of slang. "Nigga" has already been baptized in white saliva and black blood. When I hear a white person saying "nigga," I do not hear "brother." I hear all the hatred in the voice of the man who called me a "nigger" and spat on me last summer. When I hear a white person saying "nigga" I do not hear "dude." I hear the breaking of Matthew's arm when he called me a "dirty nigger" in the first grade and my brother pushed him off the slide. When I hear a white person saying "nigga" it always sounds like "nigger," it always cuts, and I am always filled to the brim with anger and exhaustion.

However, when I hear a black person address me as “my nigga” with laughter and a light heart, I hear “family” and I feel less alone in such a racially isolating world.

As someone who is biracial I grew up with a moderate level of confusion as to where I fit in and what race I belonged to. When I entered freshman year at Pioneer High School I was finally in an educational environment where I was not one of four or five black people in the grade. I was nervous; I believed I would not be credited for my blackness due to being half white. However, when I got to Pioneer and began spending time with other African American students, the moment I felt fully accepted by my black community was when they started calling me their nigga. The word “nigga” is complex for me because as much as I associate it with acceptance from the black community, I do so with rejection from the white community. In my first few weeks of college someone, or someones, vandalized black students’ doors by writing “Nigga” on them. I was already feeling out of place and underrepresented in a public university that has an underwhelming four-percent black student population. After seeing this act of hate, I felt that my suspicions that the University of Michigan does not actually want black students here, had been confirmed. This word, which served as a welcome mat in my high school, now looked like a sign that read “DO NOT ENTER, TRESPASSERS WILL BE SHOT” at my college.

Whatever large amount of weight the common word holds, the word “nigga” carries double. “Nigga” has two definitions in my life and they conflict on every aspect but there is one piece of the definitions that agree, and that is how much power the word has. It holds as much love as it does hate, and it includes as much as it excludes. However much drenched in love, or filled with hate the word “nigga” is, it always unifies me with my black community.

Dylan Gilbert

Sugar on the Tongue

I wanna hear the
voices of black children
fill up every room to the brim
want the notes they hit to
be cotton candy light
melt into me like sugar
on the tongue

I wanna hear black boys'
"wassup nigga"s reach altitudes
so cool white eyes can't scorn them
black girls excite a scream in one another
so high they fly out their boxes

I wanna see us unzip ourselves
from neck to shackle
use that generational
muscle memory
and pick out those
bristles of self doubt

that catch tongues
and slow speech

I wanna hear black children
sing their greetings, joys and
grievances without a stutter or a glance over shoulder

I want their voices bass up,
static free
as clean or as
explicit as they care to be

I want their laughs to boom
so loud they pulsate like a good
speaker in the stomach

yes, I want my baby to be black
and unapologetically loud
yes, I want my baby to be black
and never yielding for any category
their skin may drive them into

and yes,
I am afraid
to raise a baby
who's got skin
that signals war

and stays packing
pores with melanin
so rich they might
as well be armed

yes, I am afraid
to birth an act of resistance
a child whose heart beats like
a time bomb and name prints
like an obituary

the sounds that come out
our mouths must be
something pretty special
to make white people
shake like this

so I'll sing my baby
the opposite of a lullaby
wake them up from womb:

“baby when the whole
world is trying to bury you
by bullet, gavel, or destitution
there are a lot of things to
be afraid of but your voice
is never one”

Bhoomika Gupta

Distance

9,853 miles

My high school, friends, teachers,
all so far
from me.
3 flights, 8 hours each.
Once a year, or maybe
never again.

7,938 miles

My grandmother. The brightest soul,
who makes me smile but
lives alone. Needs constant flights
to see her family.
Always far,
never close.

7,087 miles

My family, my new 'home.'
Only 2 months here,
unclear whether I
belong. I know no one,
nothing, just the
heat and the sand.

500 miles

My best friend, in the entire world.
Making a name
of himself,
making life of his own.
Adjusting to a new place,
just like me.
Missing each other,
endlessly.

0 miles

Me. Alone.
Away from all that
matters.
Constant missing.
Making a new place
home.

Riya Gupta
Anxiety

There!
See that cloud?
That big black cloud.

No.
It's far out there,
In the distance.
Smaller than the speck of
A car on the ground from
An airplane.

Huh?

There!
Don't you see?

It's growing bigger,
Ominously.

No, I don't see.

How can you not
See?
It's there, look.
It's bigger than an elephant.
Bigger than a mammoth.
Bigger than you,

Than me.
Bigger than love,
Than acceptance.

I don't see.

How can you not
See?
My vision is clogged,
Blurred
wisps of smoke
Against a backdrop of
Grey...it's coming for me

Why do you worry?
There's nothing there.

It's there!
It's there!
It's there, right here!
It's so big,
So black.
Like black ink in an
Ink well
And I've got not one quill
Near me.
Nothing to dip
Nothing to draw
Nothing to escape this
Terror.

This terror.
It's bubbling in me
Like the fires of Mount Doom
My heart slipping away from me
Through the cracks.

Falling, falling
Like a Gollum.
Melting.

My toes are curling in agony
My hair standing like scared soldiers
The lines on my skin turning red
Burning through my skin.
My stomach has left,
Dropped clear out the bottom.
My ears smoke
My fingers quiver

Hello?

Hello?

Can't you see it?
It's there.
See?

That big black cloud
There, in the distance.
That big, looming cloud.
It's coming.
Hello?

Hello?

hello

hell—

Riya Gupta

Geography Bee

It was a fancy day in 8th grade.
I walked through at-the-time-giant double doors
Into the library of our wonderful little dusty school.

It was the semi-finals of
The geography bee.
I was so cool.

My crush was by my side, we were so close.
So close.
I was trying to be extra cool, since I was already the normal, acceptable amount of cool at the geography bee.
I was sitting up on one of the wooden tables, my feet crossed up on the Red-cushioned chair.
Leaning back on my palms stretched behind me
Not really realizing how dumbly delinquent I looked at the Goddamn geography bee.
Classic Riya

The teacher was calling attendance, she called out a name
“Rebo?”
I laughed. Looked around, smirking.
“Is Rebo here?”

“Who the hell is Rebo?” my eighth-grade mouth turned to my crush, laughing, playing cool.

“You.”

That wiped the attitude out of my mouth. There goes my cool!

Bye!

See you at next year’s geography bee!

I guess I’m Rebo now. I guess that’s me.

I told my friends. They laughed.

I was not happy.

I wasn’t really very cool to begin with, and now

I reminded myself of a children’s

Dinosaur character in a low budget mascot

Costume.

Rebo, the Big Blue Dinosaur!

My friends taunted me, laughed at me.

They changed my name to

Rebo

In their phones.

Until one day, kind of all of a sudden,

Like in the fairy tales,

They ended up laughing with me.

Rebo was not an embarrassment,

It was a term of endearment.

My closest friends yell

REBOOOOOOOO

Down the hallways.

My Finsta is christened Rebo Guppy.

My mistakes are called Rebos

My wins are called classic Rebos.

My alter-ego is called Rebo

My truer self?

Also called Rebo.

A name as unique as I am,

As unique as my friendships,

As full of love as when my dad calls me

Pumpkin

Or my mom calls me

Sona

A name that links me to the people I left behind

A name I was falsely given

A name I hated

A name I now love

Because of everything it means and

everything it meant and

everything it holds.

As weird and

odd and

illogical and

sweet and

important as

Riya.

Riya Gupta

Sucker Punch

Life delivered quite a
Sucker Punch
today.
Straight to my jaw line.
No hooks.
No cheap shots.
A straight punch, square in the face
—I felt the back foot.
And I didn't even block. I didn't see it coming.
In this grand back and forth of ours,
Life got the best today.
Probably in revenge of the time
I tackled it and rested my foot proudly
on top
in a victor's pose.
Which was in revenge of the time that
Life poured ice cold ice cubes down
my back
And didn't even apologize.
Which was in revenge of the time...
Our grand back and forth.
And Life, you've got me bested, with this
Sucker Punch.
But not for long.



Suha Asadulla
Untitled I, II, III, IV



Sophie Barlow

Bear

Charcoal on paper



Delaney Cavanagh

A Piscean Dream

Acrylic paint and black ink on paper



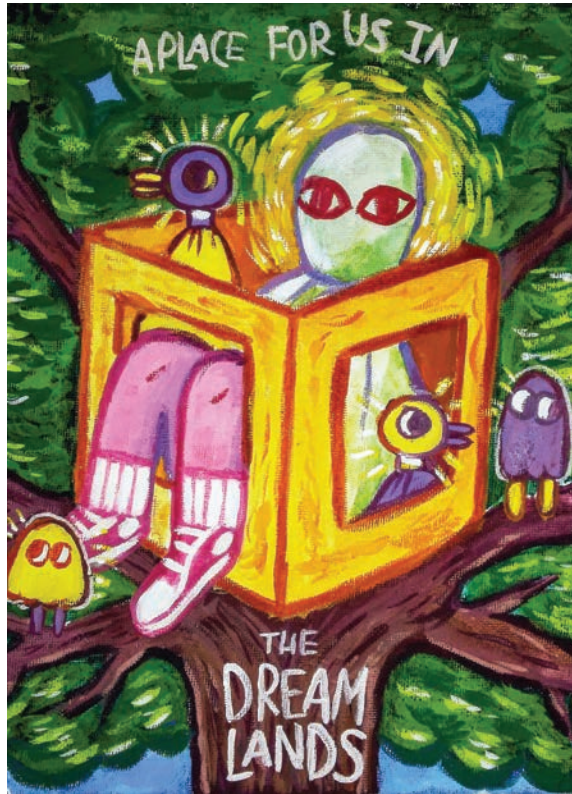
Grace Coudal
Eleanor
Photography



Marjorie Gaber

Burning Building

Digital illustration



Marjorie Gaber

Dreamlands

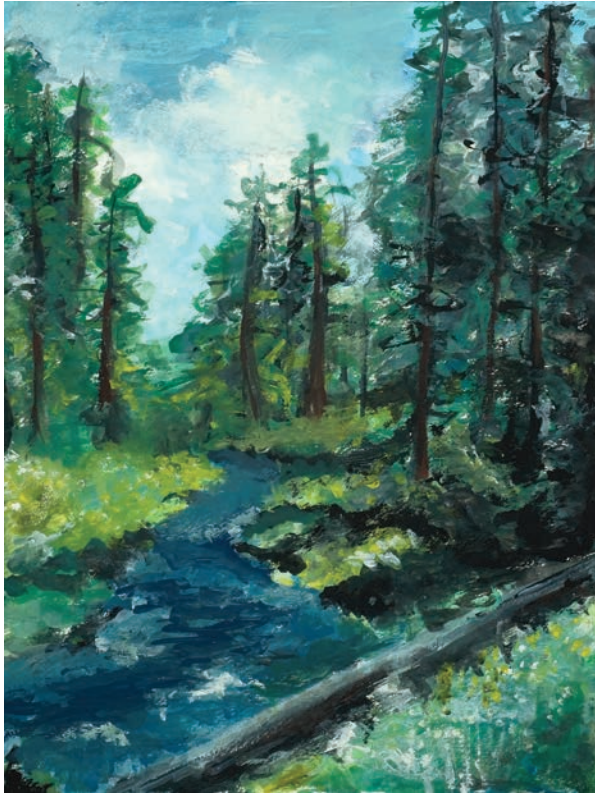
Gouache-acrylic paint on canvas



Chenlang Gao

Before

Acrylic paint



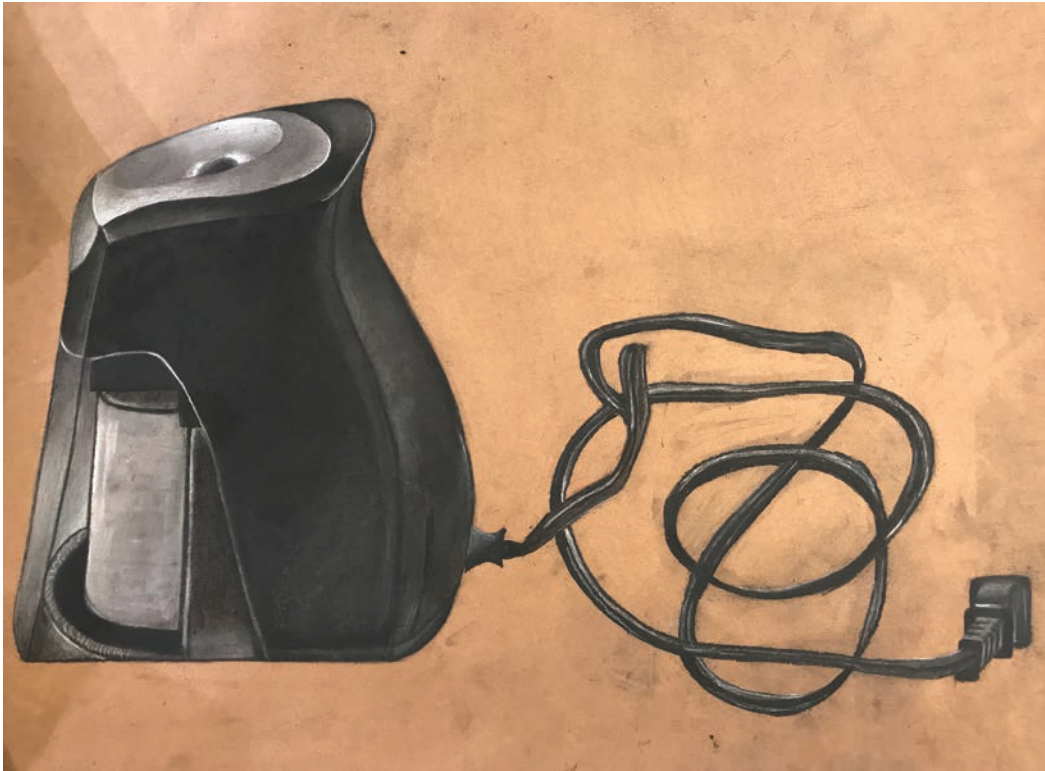
Natasha Gibbs

Forest

Watercolor



Talia Gothelf
Untitled
Photography



Taylor Grier

Cartooned Realistically

White and black charcoal and chalk



Kathryn Halverson

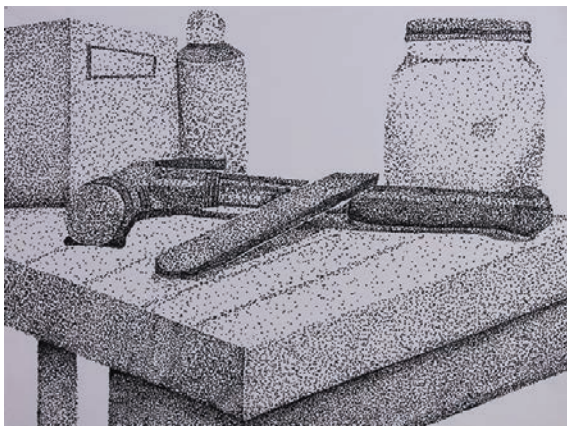
Abstract Buildings

Sharpie, marker, and water



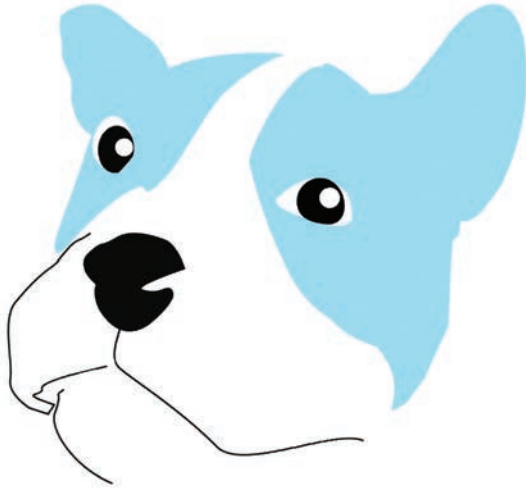
Kathryn Halverson

Lily
Sharpie



Kathryn Halverson

Tools
Sharpie



Brenda Harvey

Marley

Adobe Illustrator



Sara Jex
Cuyahoga Bloom
Photography



Valerie Le

Strange Fruits

Ink



Elia Levitin

A Stroll

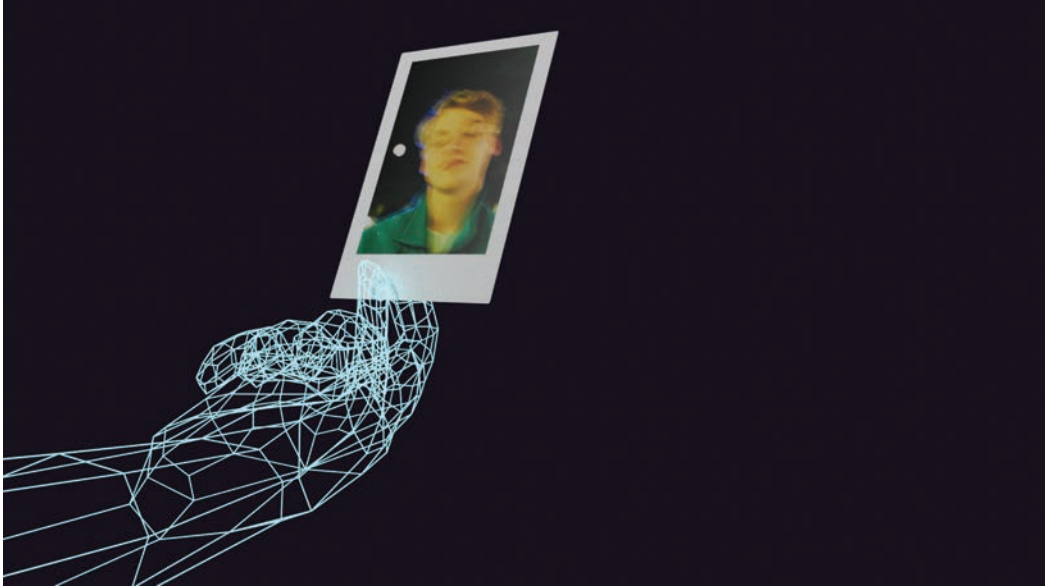
Film photography



Elia Levitin
Light Year
Film photography



Elia Levitin
Untitled IX
Film photography



Eli Lustig

Nostalgia

Photography and 3D animation



Louise Malmgren

Too Close

Marker



Jacob Mancinotti

Employee of the Month
Collage



Juan Marquez
Blue Light
Digital photography



Juan Marquez
Tied Up
Digital photography



Lydia Plescher

The Great Outdoors 1

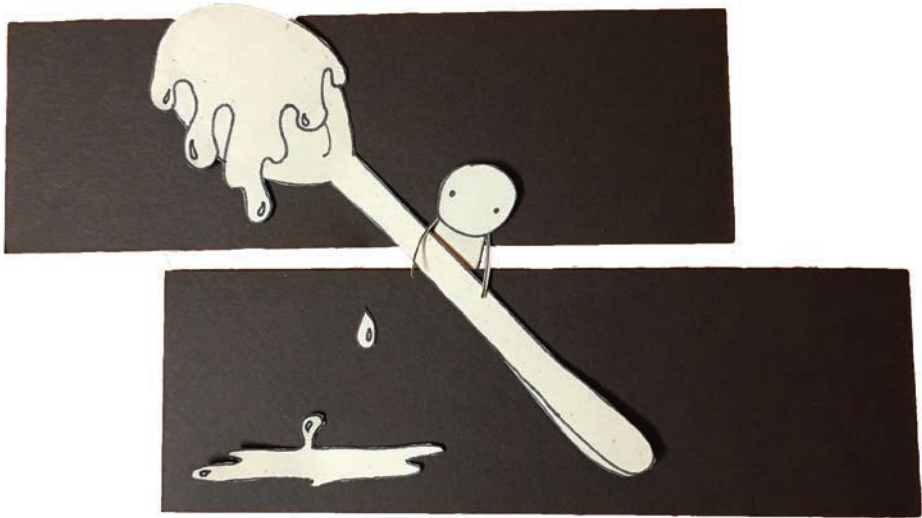
Felted wool



Lydia Plescher

The Great Outdoors 2

Felted wool



Lydia Plescher

Untitled

Cut paper



Rachael Price

Untitled
Photography

140



Peggy Randon
Grown From Concrete



Peggy Randon
Madonna



Tessa Rose
Satellite Sex
Collage



Matthieu Sarrola

Untitled
Photography



Joshua Snyder

Untitled

Photography



Mariah Stevens

Ailey

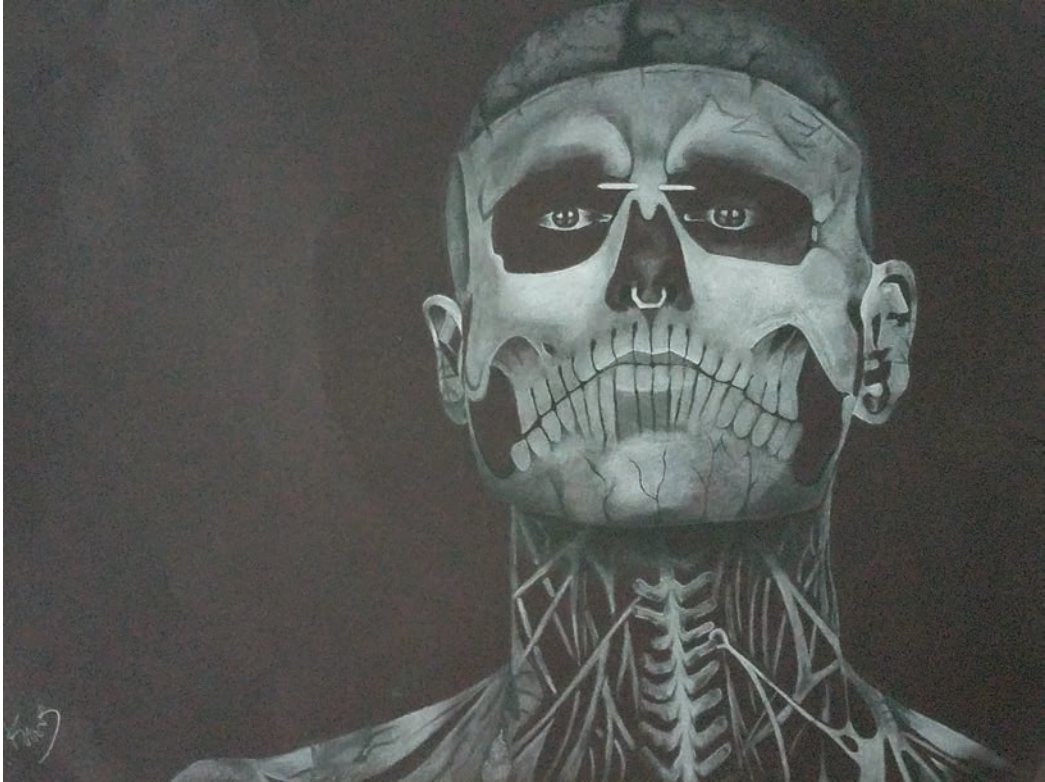
Photography



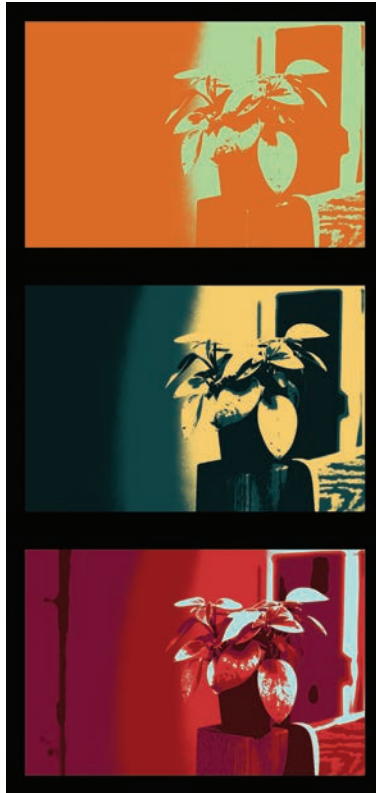
Kim Swineheart

Mia Wallace

Acrylic paint



Kim Swineheart
Zombie Boy
Charcoal



Marin Tarnowski

Progression of Colors

Digital media



Marin Tarnowski

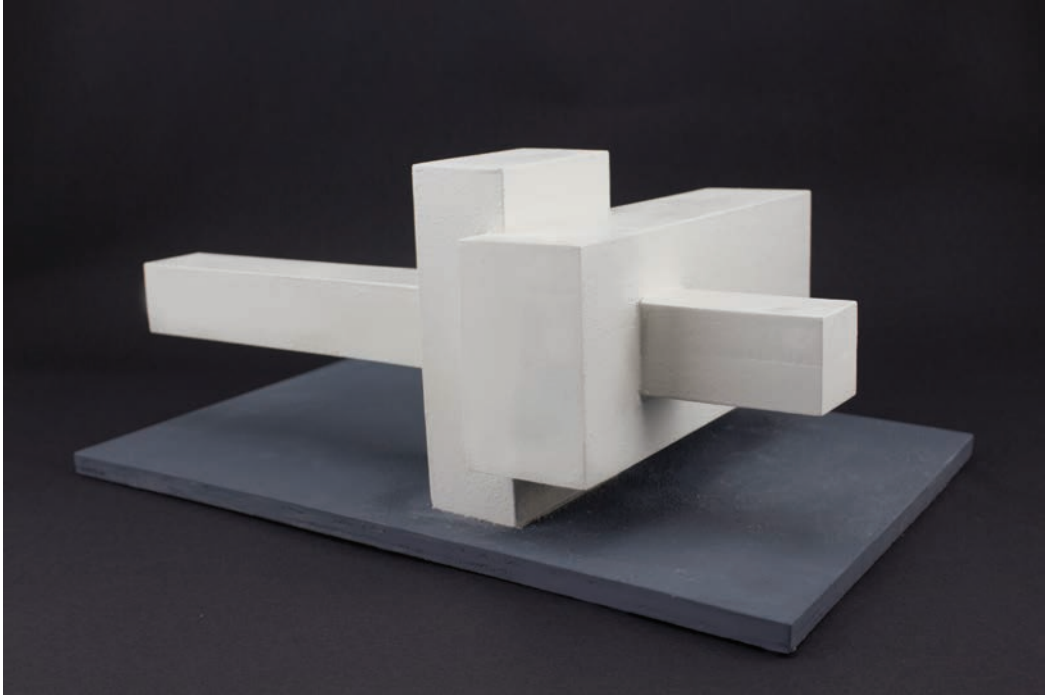
Paper
Paper

150



Marin Tarnowski

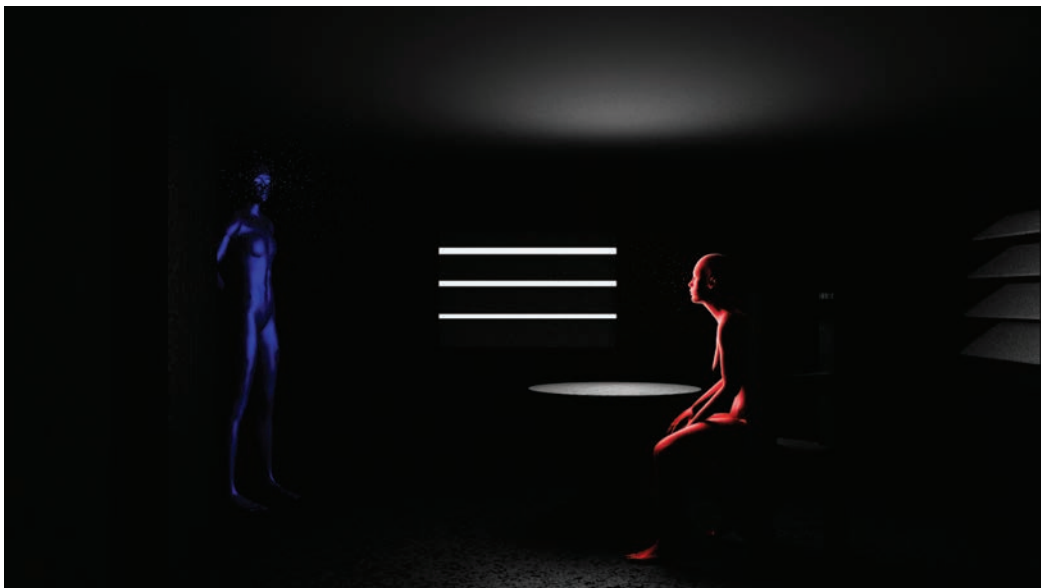
Paper
Paper



Marin Tarnowski

Volume

Wood and acrylic paint



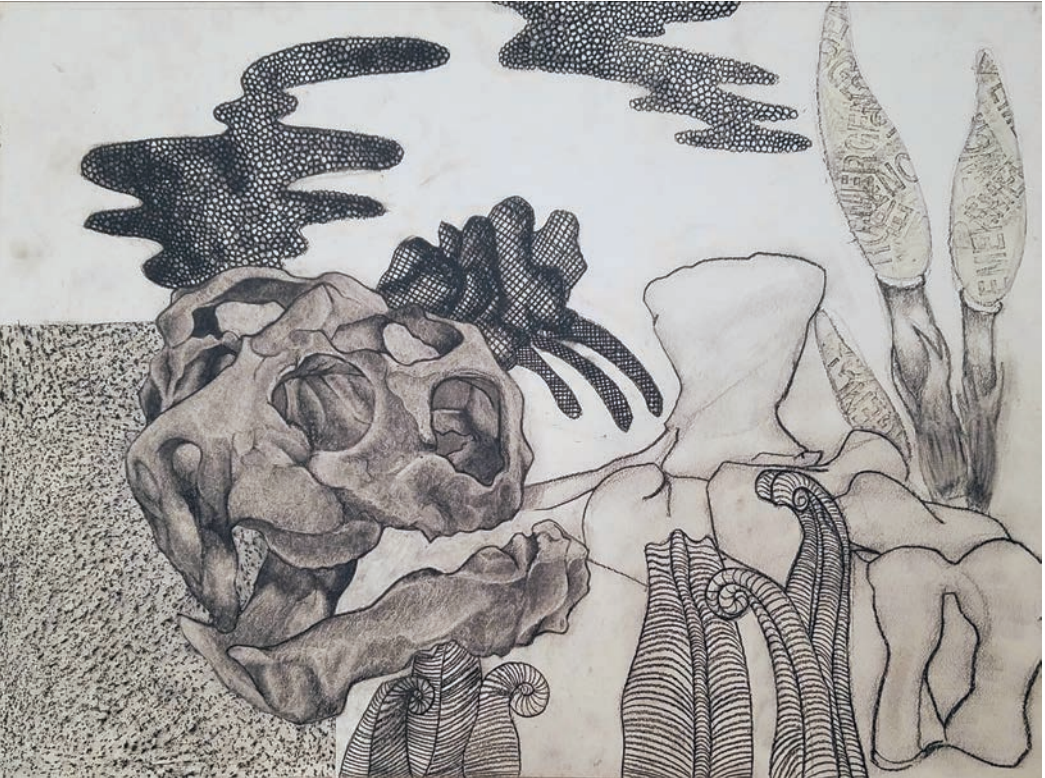
Alex Trombley

Love
Digital

153



Charles Wenaas
Untitled I



Charles Wenaas
Untitled II



Zilin Xia

Imagination Forest

Oil painting



Zilin Xia

Paradise City

Oil painting



Michaela Zewde

Monk

Photography

Jennifer Lange
May in the Valley

the blue jays conducted their spiral flight behind me
and I turned my head,
thinking the shimmer of my hair was a moth
perched on the side of my rocking bench.
I fought hard to convince myself
the sweat seeping through my shirt didn't bother me
and continued to caution-sip chamomile tea.
may doesn't let on just how hard she hits.
the willow trees (if they're even willows) rained yellow flower
or dying gnats,
it is hard to tell when it is all so small and all so much
(and all so dead)
my mother watched me (she always did when I came out here)
rinsing raw chicken behind the kitchen bay window
what must be reflecting into my eyes now (or refracting? I forget which)
my eyes, shaded by a hat that read, in bold letters, the name of a university
last year, a hat with the name of a film company
two years ago it was just green
this year I cut my bangs and stopped wearing hats altogether

the door next to my room is broken off
and I wondered if it was the man I thought I heard
on my rooftop earlier that week
my mother laid in my bed the morning after asking me if I was okay,
as if the man had been in my room and not 12 feet above me
I suppose something that small doesn't make a difference
when you are so big, so grown
as my mother is

I could see the bees chase and fight in the sunniest patch of grass on the lawn,
the part that has always looked neon to me once we replanted it
after I ran over it with my car
I was scared to walk back into the house, because that meant walking through
the bees and on top of the path where the dirt cuts like glass
two women walked past me in flip flops
I didn't need to turn my head to know they are the ladies who live three houses up,
the pink house with the rusted Persian gates that probably
won't be here in two years
one said "talking is nice, this is really helpful to me"
I listened closer but they walk too quickly and talk too slow
I missed it and look back to my front doors,
the owls coo twisting nostalgia in my stomach so badly
my soles took the blow and dragged me back inside

Jennifer Lange

The Need to Simply Exist

The drip drop of a kitchen sink could drive a man insane. Drip, drop, drip drop, drip drop drip—I get it, you're leaky, you rusty old carcass I'll fix you, I'll fix you, shut up. I don't have to get out of bed to dig around my bedside drawer for the wrench I found in that alleyway next to that marketplace that Korean family owns in Bed-Stuy. But dear god when my feet hit the floor it's ice cold, so cold I scrunch up my toes and walk on the sides of my soles. "You catch a cold fast as you can swat a fly, the weather actin' up like it is" the tenant next door to me chuckled yesterday through puffs of her Fortuna Blue cigarette and sips of the coffee she offers me every morning despite my unwavering refusal. Right now I believe she might be right. I place my rinsing glass under the faucet to collect whatever my sink is spitting out before I tinker with the pipes, twisting something that looks like it should be tightened and banging on the main pipe until I hear the drip drop cut out. It'll pick up again later, most likely as I'm falling asleep but right now all I feel is sweet, sweet relief. The water in the glass goes to the cactus I'm trying to keep alive for once, I don't do pets really, but apparently I don't do plants either. Or they don't do me. I named this one Roger, which was probably a mistake. Looks more like Judy to me now that it's browning and withered up at the tips. Whatever, as if this dumbass cactus has a chance in hell surviving January. I won't get another one once this one goes, put this water to better use anyway, it's still good for drinking.

The clock on my stovetop reads 7:33 AM when my toast pops up and I'm dumping my last scoop of Folgers into the red tin mug I've kept with me since I first moved in; served me well, never broke, never damaged. It's Sunday and I should be asleep still but now that I'm up, I might as well stay up. Plus waking up this early means I can read the paper that gets

delivered to the young couple in 3B through and through, fold it up back into its plastic and have it back on their doorstep before they even wake up and put on the only vinyl they have for the dusty turntable I helped them lug upstairs one afternoon when the guy had a sprained wrist. His name is Jeremy, I'm almost positive. Her name always slips my mind. She's pretty in the most average, boring way. Each time she tells me her name all I can do is stare at her hair and think "Wow, you are so completely, entirely *like* everybody else it's astonishing how incapable you were at establishing a single distinctly unique feature about yourself." She's nice though, and sometimes I get this image of her in my head when I shower or when I'm falling asleep and it makes me feel happy and numb all at the same time.

By the time I finish eating I have read all of the A section, which I did without even putting on my glasses or dropping a single crumb. No big news, nothing to keep track of, so I slip the paper in front of 3B before I step back into my studio apartment. My box is the same temperature as the hallway, which is the same temperature as outside. For some godforsaken reason our landlord has either A) forgotten to pay the gas bill for the entire building, B) got sick of the squatters in 5D and is trying to weed them out, or C) died. I put on my parka but I feel dumb in a parka in my own home, and I don't like to feel dumb in my own home. My bed quilt has just been shifted slightly to the left in my sleep so all I have to do is tuck it right before I switch off my lights and shuffle down to B&D Liquor, which sells the cheapest cigarettes you can buy within a mile radius. At least my lungs and fingertips will be warm today. Maybe my stomach too, if this damned cough doesn't give up.

The place always reeks of banana peels and Public Restroom Soap, the kind that gives you more germs than if you just skipped the whole process altogether. People are so concerned about germs. That's why I think the coin is going extinct. Mamas and papas found out how many germs their little Sally's and their little Bobby's were cradling in their tiny hands on the way to buy some pop and figured swapping a couple quarters for an Honest Abe was the cure for the common flu. This is New York City. Who are you fooling with your suds and scrubs, waste of your time, waste of your time.

Fahim guards the rows of menthols and spirits like a proud mother bear. I admire Fahim, always have. He's a straightforward man, the kind of man who cleans out the coffee maker in between uses to keep the machine running good and long like instructions tell you to do. The kind of man who opens his drug and liquor store at 6 AM on a Sunday morning, before the druggies and boozers have even woken up to realize it's the day the lord will wash everything away.

I'd consider Fahim a friend on the basis of our bi-weekly transactions; he offers me something and I offer him something in return and we are content with that. He's already punched in \$1.86 and dropped the red box on the countertop by the time I tell him good morning. "One pack Legends?" I shrink my hand in my pack pocket and just feel the cold of quarters, no cash. Jesus Christ, no cash. My eyes meet Fahim's in the most dreadful way and he knows immediately I've left my wallet at home like some kind of mooch. "How much do you have there?" but I can't place three quarters onto Fahim's counter and tell him this is all I got, it's not all I got, I got more at home. "Take it, pay the rest next time." I tell him no, I won't take advantage of our friendship like that. He tells me he doesn't know my name but he knows sure as hell I'm an honest man, a loyal man and will return with the money if I want the cigarettes now. "How many can I get for seventy-five cents?" I don't want to go back to my apartment until I have to later tonight, I don't want to risk running into someone who's gonna have me feed their cat for the weekend or offer me a cup of coffee. I don't want to look at that dying stupid cactus just sitting there in the shade but my hands are shaking so bad at this point and I can tell I look messed up and I'm not messed up, I sure as hell don't like looking like it. "Take the pack, I can't give you only some." So I stand there like some kind of dumb proud idiot until Fahim takes his own pack out of his pocket, hands over seven cigs and slips my coins out of sight.

The sky is already dark when I return at 4:32 PM that night. Tomorrow it will be Monday and I will go to work typing out someone's false confession. Stenography isn't anything to be ashamed of, not at all; honest job. It's still cold as hell, which makes me think the landlord has died. It's the plant or me next, I suppose.

Bethany Lehman

A History of Shirley

The story of Shirley starts in a car. He was speeding and the sky was raining and the prattling neighbors said it first, *Oh poor Shirley, that poor dear, did you hear she lost the baby?* Only I got it wrong and really he was drunk and you were fighting and maybe you went to grab the wheel or open the car door and the next thing you know you wake up 80 years later with a family that visits you but doesn't recognize you when you scream out for them. *It's ok, mom. I'm here. I'm here, it's me. You know who I am. Right?* Only you, only you know, that they are all spies sent from the Soviets to lure your secrets from you. Your speech plays like a concert hall pianist missing the minor f key. Hitting silent, slow notes and breaking. Brake. Slow. *Honey, please you're scaring me watch the road. Hail Mary, full of grace, don't take me to your sacred place.* The greatest betrayal of all is summarizing the lost receipts, the missed phone calls, the sitting in your car when you leave someone you love, the best steak you ever had, the first job you ever quit, into a few words on a tombstone. Even in the hospice, you were scared.

Bethany Lehman

On the Rationality of Birds

starlings can be fooled into making irrational choices
they grow numb dumb when they hear the honk
of a twenty-twelve honda
and the male hawk is only twenty minutes late
or, twenty minutes later than anticipated.

a blind eye turned on and off like
a lightbulb or
a toaster or
the answering machine when he calls
the night drunk and darkened.

not like or unlike the hundreds of Rwandan women
seeking asylum in the States
who could not—
after seeing so much
see again
for many years
or the rest of their lives.

Benjamin Ludtke

hard cement in Michigan's small town

The road is broken
like it has never
not been there.
Even the dirt roads
lead to far away places.
The trees here
are like a sea,
one with waves
and leaves
And the small cabin
is one ship
in this ocean.

This town refuses to move.
It only changes
its clothes occasionally.
Like Northland Grocery,
a fluorescent memory.
And Jack's Tackle Shop,
dark,

smells like a cave
full of worms
and fishing line.

The small beach
on the small lake
doesn't know how to handle
an overpopulation
of feet.

And you
who reminds the town
of where it could be
further cement Shirley's cafe
onto Route 22.

Payton Luukkala

this is a tentative apology

the opposite of mother is rock / the opposite of rock is toxic sludge / toxic sludge holds the alphabet together / like the little cursive loops between the letters on a happy birthday sign / oh yeah, happy birthday / to the ground / to my aching neck / from the crows that cackle down from the gnarled fists of trees / a punch below the eye leaving a bruise / like a fingerprint of blackberry / oh simon / oh garfunkel / oh tic chasing toc / oh the clock i threw away in the held breath of night

the opposite of dust is my sister's ACT score / the opposite of ACT is think / i'm sorry for that one / we called the milkman tinkerbelle / he played on my dad's softball team / that summer, i could've made so much money from returned cans / but forethought / once, i hid from my parents close enough to hear their worry / "what does she look like?" / a smudge of mud around the ankles

the opposite of Kierkegaard is martin, the mailman, because i know how he spends his time / the opposite of time is ants / the opposite of anthill is organic grocery store / the opposite of three bananas for a dollar is i'll tell you a joke for free / orange you glad i didn't say banana / i hardly ever say anything at all

the opposite of gun is fireworks, although neither can occur without at least some surprise
/ like i am the opposite of violence / but somehow unlike comfort / like “i’ll be back” is
different than “wait right here” / turn right three miles ago / for Krazy Kalpan’s firework
emporium / like a memory shack / B-52’s / this is the only song i know / this is a tentative
apology / i dance, lean close to tell you “shoulders are the hips of the upper body”

the opposite of “i love you” is “sure” / “sure,” “fine,” and “okay” are the same as garbage
/ you have my permission to love garbage all you want / orange peels, coffee grinds,
fathers, etc. / empty and overflowing / a glass of water / room temperature / waiting to be
on your lips / on the kitchen counter

the opposite of real is / i don’t / imagine you as i clomp home, intimate with cement, after
many hours of wastefulness / eyes of gasping river, mouth ungraceful, nags closed but
also, metaphorically, open / this has never happened / this has never happened everyday

Eric Margolin

A Collection of Comedic Haikus

As the world crumbles
We look to one person
The myth, Shia Labeouf

*

As leaves fall from trees
And the seasons quickly change
We must wear jackets

*

When we go to sleep
We dream of grand wonderlands
But then, John O’Korn

*

A conflict arises
How will the cake be cut?
We say “like pizza”

At a big airport
There is so much movement here
An escalator

*

A New York subway
Passengers crowd like sardines
A chicken roams free

*

A big intense chase
Running through the crazy maze
Chasing Bob, my dog

Margaret McKinney

“I want to be in love”

I want to be in love.
That listen to a song and day dream love.
That feel your heart skip a beat love.
That smile like a psychopath, can't feel your legs or your feet love.
I want to be in love.
Real love.
No, not that teen love.
That text left on read that I know you've seen love.
That scared of what they think love.
That say “I love you” but don't know what it means love.
No, I don't have time for that, Love.
I'm done with your light switch, on and off, yes and no, hot and cold love.
That affection when we're alone love.
But when you're with your friends, “What is love?”
I'm sick of that “thing” love.
Drag out for six months fling love.
Then you just leave, Love?
Because in another girl you found something that you love
More than my love.

Well, Love,
I'm done giving up my taken for granted love.
Because convincing myself that your love
Is my love
Is not love.
And I want to be in love.
Real love.

Pily O'Hara

Little Boy Laughter

I was six years old
the first time
a boy told me
I wasn't good enough.

Pretty enough,
That is
because the best
Thing a girl could ever be in this world
is Pretty
Gentle
Delicate
Small
Little flower.

The hair that sprouted
from my arms
agitated your stomachs
While mine
remained settled,
unaffected by your ignorance.

But your parched lips
could only say those words
for so long
Depleted laughter
Shriveled sneers
Your ivy thoughts
Inched into my brain
Replacing
My own.

Taking my mother's razor
Dragging its blades
across my prepubescent body
You owned me
You made me
A woman
before Mother Nature
decided to do so
Herself.

Red stained
Shower drains
Blades cut deep
but never as deep as
your words.

Pily O'Hara
Wombed

Bang.

Bang.

Bang.

Bullets ricocheted off the walls of her womb,
Perforating her—
in – side – out
with 2.34mm lesions

If her child screamed,
she would not hear the sirens in the distance
or the deep bellows projecting from down below;
She'd hold her stomach and whisper:

Hold on.

Hold on to ignorance—to innocence
to a belly so full your heart hurts
and your head spins
of the prospect of light on a Monday morning—

Light.

The candle barely flickered before it went out.

Perhaps she'll sing herself a lullaby someday
Cradled in the memory of her bellowing belly
Sucking on what-ifs and could-have-beens
The languid state of disarray for months on end—

Nine months on end.

The man in the alabaster jacket
suggests she try again
 wave that white flag into the wind.

She picked up the shrapnel from the ground
and swallowed her happiness whole.

Rattled.

Her body—

Unarmed.

Her heart—

shattered.

Jadah Parker

A Discussion of Race

A person's social identity is an integral part of their life as it often defines how they are perceived by others and their navigation through society. Three main ways someone is identified are through race, class, and gender. In terms of race, black and brown ethnic groups typically rank lower; in class, the unemployed or "working poor" are considered lower class; and, in gender, women are considered inferior to men. In each of these identities, the minorities (black/brown people, lower socio-economic class, women) are targets of discrimination, and, in worse cases, violence. So, what happens when these identities intersect? More specifically, what does it mean to be black and middle class? Observing how these identities tie into each other can help us better understand how social institutions like education, family, and the economy work together in an effort to value certain identities and minimize the identities of others.

The social construction of race, class, and gender

All three identities of race, class, and gender are social constructions. They were created to enforce hierarchy. Race was created by Anglo-Europeans "to make other groups seem something less than human" (Roy, 2001:80). Slavery was a big factor in the establishment of race and racism. European settlers viewed Africans as "savage," which qualified them as less or sub-human. White scientists went as far as using science to "prove" that African Americans were biologically inferior to white people by studying brain size and comparing black subjects to monkeys. The construction of class was more transitional than race.

Class was first a distinction between the bourgeoisie and the proletariats during the 17th and 18th centuries. The bourgeoisie controlled the means of production and the proletariats were the ones who worked. During the Industrialization period, the middle class emerged. This was because of the increase in department stores and large offices. These white-collar jobs were changing the social division. The middle-class citizens separated themselves from working-class with the neighborhoods they lived in and the wages they were earning. Now, the class distinctions we know today are the upper class, similar to the bourgeoisie; the middle class, the salary earners; and the lower class, or the working class.

While many make the mistake of referring to gender as biological differences, it is actually the social differences between a male and female. Gender norms and roles dictate the behaviors that are considered appropriate and acceptable based on one's sex. For instance, gender norms dictate that girls play with dolls while boys play with trucks. Or, women make better nurses; and men, doctors.

In all three of these cases, society has constructed a method of stratification which places rich, white men in the top, favorable majority; while minorities—i.e., black/brown ethnicities, the unemployed or poor, and women are placed on the bottom. The fact that these identities are socially constructed does not mean that they aren't real. In fact, these social identities make people the target of discrimination—racism, classism, and sexism; and, in many instances, minorities may be the victim of all three.

The establishment of the black middle class

The black middle class was established around the time slavery was ending and the Jim Crow era was beginning. After the Reconstruction period, many blacks began migrating from the blatant racism of the south to the north and its prospect for industrial jobs. Within the workforce, there were (and still are) occupational levels—skilled, unskilled, and professional. Blacks were moving into metropolitan areas where there was a high concentration of economic homogeneity. This meant that blacks that were making the same amount of income

and working similar jobs were populating the same areas. In addition to obtaining new/better employment, more blacks were becoming educated and finishing higher levels of schooling than previously available in the south. This interaction made people aware of their class status. The legislation of the Reconstruction period, the career opportunities created after WWI and II, and the Great Migration were the positive factors that shaped the development of the black middle class. However, negative factors including the Ku Klux Klan, the Great Depression, educational inequality, job discrimination, and racism presented obvious setbacks for this class. Also consider that, since the Depression had a profound negative impact on all classes—particularly the white affluent and working or middle class—its negative effect on black sharecroppers (who lost their land) and black industrial workers (who lost their jobs) was even deeper as their class status meant there was no family name or wealth to fall back on.

Historically, the lifestyle and “criteria” for being black middle class changed based off of social conditions. The expansion of the black middle class became very visible in the 1950s due to the increase in education levels, occupational variation, and other socioeconomic opportunities, as well as a decline in economic and racial barriers for social upward mobility, and an increase in motivation for blacks to integrate into American society and strengthen the economy.

What does it mean to be black and middle class?

Considering society’s influence on the construction of race, class, and gender identification and the history of the black middle class, what does it mean to be black and middle class today? According to Dr. Frank Yates, a black professor of psychology at the University of Michigan, being black and middle class had a role in his career, goals, and life. Dr. Yates was born in Memphis, Tennessee in 1945, the fifth of seven children. His father was a chef and farmer who owned a restaurant and an apartment building. Dr. Yates attended public schools until the sixth grade when he began attending Catholic schools. In order to pay for his Catholic schooling, Dr. Yates worked as a newspaper delivery boy. With encouragement from his

parents to pursue his dreams, Dr. Yates migrated north to Indiana where he attended Notre Dame University, majoring in psychology. He held jobs to support himself through college, and later received his master's and doctoral degrees from the University of Michigan.

He looks back to his childhood where, although he lived in the South, he was not around many whites. His school was a black Catholic school and the nuns were the only white people. His doctor was also white. So, while he knew white people, he never experienced racism. In college, he explained that the small percentage of black students at Notre Dame stuck together. For Dr. Yates, being black and middle class meant growing up in the South during a time when the black middle class was just being created. It meant attending a public school, then taking advantage of the opportunity to assist in the payment of a Catholic school education. It meant having a father who worked two jobs to support the family, growing up with both parents who understood the long-term impact of supporting the aspirations of their children, and attending college.

Although Dr. Yates and I are many years apart, the idea of what it means to be black and middle class for both of us is very similar. I grew up in Chicago, in a two-parent home with my older sister. My parents both attended college and had well-paying jobs and thriving professional careers. My sister and I attended select public schools since preschool. Today, with the encouragement and support of our parents, we are both in college—she attends a private historically black university in Washington, D.C., and I am a student at the University of Michigan.

My elementary and middle school experiences were ethnically diverse: I was surrounded by faces that looked like me and many others that did not. I attended a select high school that was predominantly black with a small percentage of Latinx students. I worked hard to excel in school, took advantage of summer employment opportunities, and relied on scholarships and grants to pay for my college tuition. For me, being black and middle class meant living in a two-parent home, the ability to participate in multiple extracurricular activities, attending schools outside of my neighborhood, and attending a top public university.

I deduce that many of the standards of being black and middle class could include but aren't limited to: attending a decent public school, growing up with two parents, having little to no financial limitations on participating in extracurricular opportunities, and parental/familial support and encouragement to attend college.

The impact of social institutions

Although the two examples of what it means to be black and middle class are from people who grew up in different geographic locations and time periods, there are some similarities between them: the impact of education, family structure and support, and the family's socio-economic lifestyle.

Both Dr. Yates and I attended public schools, although he ended up attending Catholic school and I attended public schools with selective enrollment status. While obtaining education is an important social factor, the type of education—i.e., public schools versus private/selective/Catholic—can further social discrimination in many ways. Public schools are typically extremely segregated and more likely to be attended by minority and lower class communities. Additionally, these schools are often severely underfunded and usually placed in communities that are inhabited predominantly by minorities and people with lower income levels. This results in limited resources for teachers, books, and facilities, and it affects the retention and graduation rates of the students.

In both my and Dr. Yates' lives family support was a common factor. Our families were involved in our lives and supported our educational choices whether financially or via emotional support. In middle-class families, concerted cultivation is a common way to raise children. In concerted cultivation, children are involved in extracurriculars and there is heavy parent involvement. This creates a reliance on the child's performance. Having parents that work in salary-earning jobs means that they have a higher income and not as demanding of a work schedule. This allows for more family time, more options for neighborhoods to live in, and ability to use money for leisure activities. In Dr. Yates' situation, his father worked two

jobs and owned a restaurant and both my mother and father worked. Here, both family and economic lifestyles did not negatively affect us because of our race or class. Instead, our class was a valued identity, so we don't experience social discrimination.

We can see that social institutions have a way of supporting identities; in this case, being middle class is a valued identity, so the social institutions of family and economy support this identity. The significance of social institutions in the perpetuation of the effects of intersectionality should help society to think of ways to reform these institutions so that certain identities aren't marginalized.

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Angel Phillips

Me+You

Me plus you

Is only an algebraic expression.

Simply because if I integrate the space between us right now it would be equivalent to the transfinite number \aleph_0

I can think up 1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8, and so on ways of how I could approach you right now

But my displacement equals zero.

Me plus you is like the proof for the Riemann hypothesis, it doesn't exist yet, but if it did the world would change.

How do I let you know that the acceleration of my heartbeat equates to the velocity of the light that illuminates the symmetry of your face?

How do I let you know that I want to spend as many days of my life with you as there are numbers in the exact value of π ?

Maybe if I said it with a story problem

I have had seven broken hearts. If I walked up to you and said, "Hello." How many broken hearts would I walk away with?

Angel Phillips

My Friend Dee

I love my imaginary friend Dee
I've known her since what feels like forever

Her arm intertwined in mine
When you try to pull us apart we just get closer together
My ears and her mouth are next door neighbors
Sharing secrets my family could never begin to understand

But who cares

My friend Dee and I have this special connection

When we were younger she used to come over on random days
But the older we get she spends the night more and more
We enjoyed playing hide and seek in the dark
Removing all glimpses of light until we are left with all we have
I drown in her somber blue eyes every night
I can't seem to look away

She's the cop to my robber, the spider to my fly,
We're always playing these little games and I always end up caught
Playing tic tac toe on my skin
She always knows how to make me feel better
Sometimes we have so much fun we miss breakfast, lunch...and dinner
But it's ok because she's always there for me

I often find myself just sitting in my bed with Dee for hours
No words being said just our thoughts embracing in the air

Dee is a...realist
She doesn't have much optimism
She can't quite laugh or smile at the little things
I find myself being more and more like her each day

One day my mom caught us playing with the shadows
Mine being under my eyes and in my ribs
I offer to let my mom in on our fun

When I tell my mom about her she says I need help
I thought she would say my imaginary friend is a problem

But the only problem with Dee
Is that she is very real

Peggy Randon
She/Her/Hers

Introduction

A compilation of recollections from my complicated past, the stories illustrate the inner conflict of grappling with one's identity throughout teen years and into early adulthood. As a girl who grew up in a predominantly conservative, Black, Christian household, openly expressing sexual or religious conflict is always taboo. My parents' divorce caused a lot of physical and mental displacement, and I found myself frequently having to be my own role model. It was hard for me, after their separation, to believe in the idea of long lasting-love or that a guy could find true happiness in a girl like me. It was even harder for me to participate in the confusion that increasingly pressed into the forefront of my mind about *girls*...

1. Home Sweet Home

Throughout my senior year, I spent equal time in every area of my home. In every room, I found a space to study, sleep, or enjoy leisure. Spontaneously, I would find that my room upstairs no longer entertained me; it was too cramped, too consumed by the unresolved messes I created. So, I migrated to the basement for the day, bringing just enough from my room to keep me warm and occupied. Of course, this lasted only until the basement started to bore me, at which time I would have to find a new area to station myself for the day or the week or the month. My disorganization alone was enough to incite frustration within my parents. My mom, Lisa, who was the only parent at home since the divorce, declared as a pediatrician would, that having a stable work environment is better conducive to good mental health. Besides, I was irresponsible, and now the messes I made were not mine but hers to fix.

It was most exciting when things were rearranged, something changed, or otherwise renewed, and I could experience a new area of the home. An immediate example of this surrounds my brother's departure from home. Mark was in his second year of college at the University of Michigan, Dearborn Campus. We found that this was a better choice for him, considering his own personal instabilities with mental health, and everyone was just relieved that he could be called upon at any moment. Despite this, he only seldom slept at home and, when his room was finally cleaned of his clothes, notes, books, and things, I saw it as a sign that it was now ready for me to acquire. I did.

I would like to say that I overcame this cycle of “space-conquering,” but it never happened. Consuming rooms became a practice that plagued me throughout high school and into the summer of my freshman year. On the surface, it never affected me. A lack of organization? Sure, but nothing going away for college could not fix. As I would come to find, this perpetuated an uncontrolled emotional instability. Now, when I arrived home after a regretful day, plopping myself horizontally on the living room couch or in some tiny corner of my room, there was an inescapable discomfort. **I left no room a safe haven.** Everywhere I went felt like the scene of a crime.

2. This is a Metaphor

It's 6 PM on a Friday night, and the fuzzy, curly ends of my hair are practically unraveling themselves. Blind to my proximities, I reach back and take hold of a single textured piece at the root, running my fingers through the conjoined strands in a single movement and taking delight in its spring-like release. It's a good time when only a handful of the twists tangle—one knot, a snap, a shameless dash to my mom for guidance—but bad days only worsen when what feels like half of my hair is swept up from the floor. For this, I remind myself to go slower and be patient. My muscles tense and my hands are numb—I shut my eyes and reassure myself that “This...is...a metaphor,” and admittedly laugh at my own grandiosity in doing so.

Don't get me wrong, the process of doing my hair is both familiar and beautiful; it is a meditative state. I recollect the period of my life when it was a privilege rather than an

assumed right to fashion my hair in a twisted style; oh the wonders of modern medicine to inhibit a disruptive (and, frankly, unflattering) case of Alopecia Areata on a plushy, brown-skinned, four-year-old girl. Well, despite my love of unconventional art, I cannot say that I like the challenges of it. Caring for my hair was becoming, again, a responsibility and a regiment. At 18, I was the autoimmune-disease-ridden little girl. I felt like an incomplete person, meticulously placing fine braids over inconsistent patches of missing hair. **I was a liar**, held together by a confidence as fragile as the hairs on my head, which, ironically, was a situation most improved by those around me, and only attacked by myself. **This had to be the ultimate consequence for my past life wrongdoings.** As one can imagine, twisting my hair takes quite a while, so I usually have time to further ponder the intricacies of the metaphor that is my hair. But today, I choose to be less optimistic. It is cold and dark outside, and I refuse to find comparisons in that.

3. Cherry Flavor

I have concluded that after approximately one shot or two beers or at any time after 4 o'clock in the morning, **I am the best version of myself.** Whether it's my disillusionment or my newfound liberation, I am no longer restricted by the conscious (straight) mind. I reached this conclusion by force after coming to terms with how I felt about kissing her.

Sam. Let me just say that she is a complicated woman. She's the fastest talking, most open-minded person I have ever encountered. She is guy-pleasing and girl-loving. She is sexual and vibrantly confident in her open discontent; she sees areas of improvement, in herself and others, and charges at them like a bull. I think I unconsciously recognized from the start that I needed a bit more of her in my life. Physically she is beautiful. Not to be too graphic, but she has round, dark eyes and long black hair that would drive someone crazy. As for her lips, I would usually never pay attention to them unless she released from them the most infectious airy laugh. Most evidently, she is Indian, and not to stereotype, but her parents were pretty protective of their only daughter. That meant the few trips to the mall we had together were adventures to be cherished.

When we met at Somerset, I was late per usual, but she was okay with that. And, when I brought my boyfriend along for an unplanned trio, she pretended to be okay with that. It was awkward to say the least, and in retrospect I am so ashamed of the lie. The truth is, I promised him a show. We had all talked about our sexual fluidity and telling her I loved her could now run off my lips effortlessly. I wanted to kiss Sam, and he wanted to see.

I remember walking briskly beside her as we all made our way to the men's restroom. "Sam... are you sure?" I said softly. Even with her reassurance, I could not shake the frustration that our first kiss would be staged. We arrived, but I was not going to make the first move; **I did not want to scare her.** She grabbed me, and touched me in private places. Her kisses were my favorite flavor. I wanted to keep going, but I urged myself to stop. "Are you happy now?" as I turned to the guy in the room. We made our dramatic sneak-out, and split at the mall's closing.

More and more, I find that the girl I am skin deep reflects an entirely different person. Besides pushing my body to its extremes, I find it is difficult to achieve this state of mind anymore. Truthfully, I think I am more scarred from kissing girls than the straight girl who kissed me.

Conclusion

The glimpses into my life are pieces of my ever evolving self-perception, and I have to believe that this is just a normal part of growing up. I am no one's perfect anything—I can admit that, but I choose to believe that my intentions are not to hurt people or confuse them, **they are simply the casualties of my own conflict with identity.** I find that I have to be most careful when the person I am endangering is myself. *Hub...* Who knew being fluid meant that She would be so stuck.

Jessica Tinor
Love Poem

No wonder we run away.
To pronounce,
To put oneself within reciprocity
Of an abstract ball of nothing
Is a struggle unto itself

It begins as a melody, the first syllable
(and it really is two syllables I think)
Doesn't just pop out of nowhere,
There's a gentle transition:
A tentative curl of the tongue,
A single flick
And you're instantly hooked
On the shy tickle
Left on the roof of your mouth

As the first syllable leaves
You expect more

Where'd it go?

And then out of nowhere,
It forces you to sink your own teeth
Onto the flaking skin of your lips,
As if it denies the right,
the need
To wrap your soul from the frigid outside
And stop it
From leaking out shame
In front of cold, unblinking eyes

Jessica Tinor

Running in the Arb

Sole against soil
the response is electric.
A single,
laser-focused beat
Is shot from the earth into the void,
a solitary, wandering echo.

But that's just the first step.
They come in twos,
couples of thump-thumps
scaling the beams of my body

Charmed by the drone
of their monotonous hymn,
my muscles quiver
with shy appreciation

Confidence peaks
and they come in 4s, 6s, 8s.
Mindless syllables

pushing against existing structures
drowning out
the screech of stifled muscles
the drag of bone against bone.

All guards down,
molten iron coats my sinews
as the cold still air I breathe
seeps into my pores
and burns away broken capillaries
with liquid fire.

Cursed tin man,
I am now but a mass
of moving noise.
I exist only because each step,
Each “thump-thump” I take
Testifies to the weight
Of my presence

So the beat must go on

The landline to the earth I crush
must ring true til the end.

Nicole Tsuno

The Black Hole Information Paradox

I once knew a girl who had a nebula in her soul
Pulsars tucked behind her hair,
Drew information in like the pull of a blackhole.

She knew the specific state of every particle—mass, position,
temperature; the quantum wave function that describes
how trees get lonely alone in rolling hills must be preserved

Information must live on, I cannot destroy only
transform it. But she wore the equator like a noose and
felt her inner stars grow cold.

When I tried to find the correct latitude of her heartbeat she
violently condensed. Her density of hurt so high the escape velocity
ran away from itself beyond the speed of light.

Imagine a clock falling towards her center, slowing
at the edge of the event horizon. Photons spread too thin,
making blood rise from pale cheeks, her memories
trapped on the flypaper of the surface.

Because she is heat, she ran into the birds and
watched them rise. For she too is a wild thing,
mass and energy evaporating into the universe

until she completely disappears. Time had dilated itself to
find the coordinates of her love, but does it
set her free?

I spent nine minutes watching everything I have ever known
evaporate into nothingness and wondered what it meant

Everything, I thought in the tenth minute.
Or nothing at all.

Nicole Tsuno

The Psychology of Hazards

your grief; that's my drive reduction
hair falling like smoke, like little snakes
wet clothes adhered to the walls of the room
trapped in a crowd, own silence too loud
to spend time alone
i need no refractory period after your "anxiety"
give thanks that I'm not with you for thanksgiving
hope this helps

you're apart or a part, it's a scientific fact
give thanks for the thieves that breathe from my lungs
my favorite feelings include "everything on my back is all I own"
and "waking up with nowhere to be"
but when I delay the day
fireworks remind me of babies born
budding rapists,
medication is my medium of metacognition
too many self-help pamphlets on the wall give me anxiety about anxiety.

i've got a mind of quicksand
dragging ideas into its depths
but the world thought I was a hazard
and filled me up with cement
tie my hair up little tendrils floating away
digital physics with the world as an output
of a deterministic computation device, hope this helps
simply, I've got no energy for things that do not
stir the center of me

but people are not poetry
so i've got yellow caution tape for skin
but even when covered, object permanence
i'll keep telling you that "it's okay"
this is not my home just where i sometimes sleep
that feels like informational structural realism
i live in the shadows and when you're not home,
i'll burglarize your creaky tongue
so sorry; it's a fundamental attribution error.

painkillers make me dizzy so I'm lying
back upon the bathroom floor
thinking of you shit talking me
i get exhilaration from casual exercise outside
you should try it too, hope this helps
wondering did i do what i need to do in the future?
i think it's okay to become a silhouette
i love the shade—sorry I can't help it
my words taste like concrete.

Vennela Vellanki

it's never as easy as a+b

a=the distance i'd go for you

b=what you'd do for me

a+b=what they define love to be

introduce c and we have a family

if only it were that simple

then you must factor in

d for the Distance you keep from me

e for the Energy you take from me

f for the Feelings you take for me

g for the Goosebumps you give to me

and don't forget the (H)itting and the (I) love yous and the (J)ust kiddings and the (K)ill yous

L represents the Love you don't show, i just have to Listen

m=the Minutes i long for your arms to envelop me and your eyes to consume me

n=No i can't see you, No i'm busy, i kNow you like it, i kNow you want it

O shit how did it get so bad

p is for all the Promises you made to me and all the Privileges you took away from me

it's so (Q)uiet outside. even the trees stopped hearing the wind.
r is for the roughness, the bruises, the pain, the broken
(S)creams I can no longer utter from my (T)hroat
but feel (U)nder my clothes, in the cuts on my skin
v=the Void i feel in my mind for my heart is too distracted by the words you speak and the
(W)ishes i place upon the stars to go back to the world where $a+b+c$ =simplicity, a gift,
but X marks the spot where the sun refuses to shine and the water ceases to lap so the sand dries
up and the rocks they stay sharp and they cut the soles of my feet as i try to run away from
y=You with your claws for hands and stones for eyes but
Z
Z stands for the dresses you sweetly unzip and the loving whispers you softly utter and the sleep
i crave every night, held tightly between your arms, lying close to the rhythms of your beating
heart and the warmth of your coffee breath, for without you i am as hollow as the number Zero
year with you I'll never be 1.

Sydney Wagner

A Tribute to Grandpa

I learned so much about you after you left us.

Up until the afternoon of your funeral and the days following, I didn't know you used to drive two hours to and from work every single day to keep your family afloat. The six of you lived in a tiny, run-down house the color of a robin egg. It was practically the size of one too, only one bathroom. We drove by it on one of our wild-goose chases before you got too sick to travel, in search of lost things you and my mother and your other daughters once knew, in search of coins buried in the dirt of old schoolhouse grounds that weren't even there to begin with. Looking back, I don't think it was about searching for old pennies with your metal detector for you. I think it was about you reminiscing one last time, eager to show us what your life once looked like, years before my cousins or siblings or I were born, before you didn't have that chance anymore.

I didn't know you ate baked beans on sandwiches. Even when they were cold. Whenever there's baked beans at a meal, I eat them now, even though I don't love them—because you did.

I didn't know you used to dye your hair when it began turning grey—the thought still makes me chuckle, because the you I knew couldn't have cared less about your appearance. Grandma was always the one to tuck in your shirt, untwist your suspenders, smooth down your hair that was sticking out in all different directions from a nap in your La-Z-Boy.

I wish I could sit down and ask you everything. Ask you questions I never thought of until it was too late. Ask you about your favorite color and your greatest fears and the most courageous thing you've ever done (if you can choose, because there's too many to count; you were a strong, intelligent fellow all your life met with struggles you did not deserve).

I want to sit down with you and just exchange sentences, hear your thoughts and opinions, although your opinions were never in short supply. You were the most honest, blunt person I knew and that's what I adored about you.

I want to sit down with you like that time we were under the glorious shade of the party tent, on the boiling-hot morning of my open house and just talked about words, the calm before the storm of too much food and too many people asking about my future, maybe even including a "Go Blue" with shining teeth as I plastered on a smile of my own, pretending to know what that future of mine would entail, although I was terrified and uncertain on the inside.

You always believed I was destined for greatness.

You always believed I would love it here, that it would be, as you repeated on the phone over and over again the day I called you after getting accepted, "a good deal," and you were right.

But on that morning of June 3rd, we sat circled around one of the tables, the slight breeze another relief from the weather, as you quizzed me along with my sister and cousins on our knowledge of old-timey language. Your first question was something about "salt of the earth," and we begged you to tell us what it meant after throwing out incorrect guesses, never before having heard the phrase, and you explained how it was a term used to describe the best kind of people. The most humble, most grounded.

We thought it'd be funny to turn it around on you, asking you what you thought "lit" meant, and "ship." To which you just responded, "a boat" in exasperation, like *of course* it means boat, what else could it possibly mean? And laughed and didn't believe us when we explained to you that it was a word for a couple you wished would get together.

I remember that exact moment, laughing, as if it were suspended in time and locked away in a box I can go back and visit in my mind, as if it happened just seconds ago. I remember watching you laugh, I remember the curves of your face and the dimples impaling your cheeks as you leaned forward and back, rocking in that way you did when you laughed, your teeth showing in that way they did only when you weren't having your picture taken.

I think maybe that is my favorite memory of you.

I think maybe you were the salt of the earth.

Aubrianna Wickings

Ellipses

I am a period that doesn't want to let go...
of the words she strung together...
amidst a whirlwind of thoughts...
she never thought...
would come out...
right...

Wrong.

I
am a justified paragraph.
An ocean full of ifs, ands,
and buts incessantly
pulling me backward and
pushing me forward and
guiding me well beyond
margins which only inch
toward land, while I rush
onto it—too fast for my
good—too confident in

where I'm heading along
an unpaved path; the
space between lines.

I am
nothing to study;
nothing to summarize.
And my life,
nothing anyone but myself
must plot.

Haley Winkle

ode to a magic lightbulb

room dressed in pink light, until it shifts to purple, and the white of the room is no longer. light wooden headboard smooth enough to be mistaken for velvet. the burgundy of my hair pretends to be black like yours. all texture in yours grows soft, which is not to say that it wasn't already comparable to the warmth of a midwinter coat, but now, it's a cloud in its most feathery form. there are no hues untouched by a layer of fuschia. we both become neon, skin glowing as plum shadows fall behind us.

Haley Winkle

what your stylist doesn't want you to know about cutting your own hair

the joy of three-inch wet
burgundy locks falling
to the white porcelain sink,
almost rusty, and
satisfactory gestures of
their curves. the way the
shorter trimmings still seem
to bounce even after becoming
grounded, how they look
celebratory, excited to be
free. excited for you, free
of them, giving yourself
exactly what you need.
the pleasure in sliding the
shears diagonally,
finally framing your cheeks
with new lines. making those
lines. knowing it isn't permanent,
knowing it isn't masterful, already
noticing those locks bounce
happy to be themselves
again, ends looking
up to the vanity lights.

CONTRIBUTORS

Vedika Aigalika is majoring in Business at the University of Michigan. She often writes and performs poetry exploring complex dynamics of society found in her personal experiences. Her work has been published previously and she has won several accolades for slam poetry. This piece in particular analyzes a specific childhood experience in a broader scope of examining identity and her inspiration comes from this process of claiming one's self-identity.

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Payton Luokkala appreciates being in these pages with you all, but is so anxious about life after graduation she probably won't even be able to finish th

Eli Lustig's work is focused around the digital persona and how that persona becomes an extension of one's identity, both figuratively and literally. His art utilizes techniques exclusive to 3D animation, thus giving a lens to the digital world we are increasingly living in.

From Commerce Township, MI, **Louise Malmgren** hopes to major in Industrial Operations Engineering or Architecture. “Too Close” was inspired by the mood on campus during finals week. When tensions and stress levels were skyrocketing, making this piece was a great way not only to destress, but also to display the bottled-up frustrations people experience.

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Michaela Zewde is a Communications and Political Science major at the University of Michigan. "Monk" captures an Ethiopian Orthodox priest in front of his home and church in the holy city of Lalibela, Ethiopia. Michaela's work is inspired by her Ethiopian heritage and love of history and culture.



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