



# genesis

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# Letter from the Editors

We are honored to present the fall 2022 issue of *genesis*. We recently celebrated 50 years of our magazine, reflecting on the years past—these magazine issues represent themes that we all grapple with as we begin to understand ourselves and the ups and downs of our lives. Our magazine has been publishing these conversations since 1972, with the editorial process completed by our very own dedicated IUPUI student editors. We are grateful to read the work submitted to *genesis*, and we take great care in the work that we do.

Our fall 2022 selected works feature important, needed conversations about the need for change in our world and in our country's societal structure. These conversations raise awareness of the importance of mental health. They navigate love, loss, questioning, frustration, and hope. They work to define our individual places in the world. This body of work prompts reflection and leaves powerful impressions.

We would like to thank our editors for their thoughtful contributions and hard work. Thank you to Sarah Layden, our faculty advisor, for her support and her unwavering confidence and faith in us. Thank you to our amazing contributors—you all breathe life into these pages, and we are so grateful for your explorations. Finally, thank you to the friends of *genesis* and to our readers—your involvement helps us flourish.

Shannon Kucaj & Monica Simmons  
*Managing Editors*

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# A COVID Supermarket in Indiana

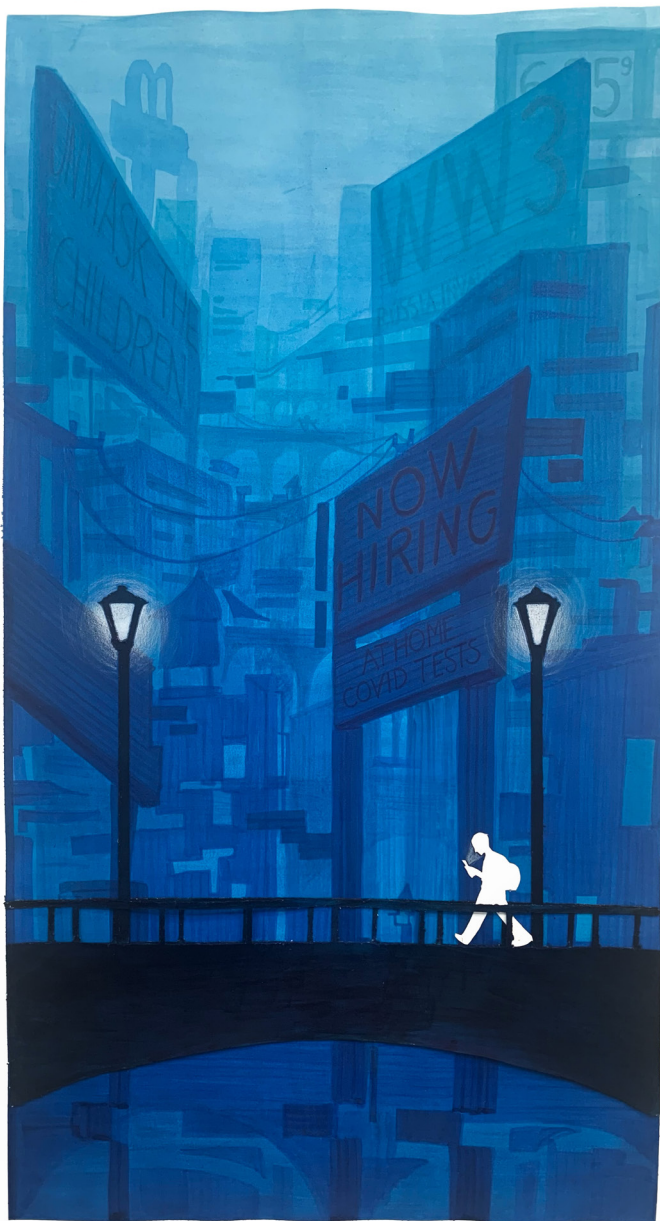
Nathan Marquam

Ginsberg! I have some bad news about the grocery store.  
It is bigger now and I don't think anything of it. I wander  
the gleaming aisles steered by no one but myself, looking for chocolate  
hearts to gobble. I could say I bought it for a lover, but the lover is me.  
I'm not ashamed of being alone, nor of not being alone.  
Ginsberg, I dated the grocery boy. He smelled like onions  
and rotten milk. I unbuckled his belt in the parking lot  
behind a flashing billboard and tried to feel nothing. I think of it now

and shiver in the electronics aisle as I paw through a bargain bin  
of movies in search of an angry fix, a five-dollar distraction to pair  
with a six-dollar wine. But you're not invited, Ginsberg. Not tonight.  
You'd want to probe and question, turn the shrink-wrapped cases  
in your large hands like you're examining a steak.  
There's nothing to do but fill myself with images—slick-muscled boys,  
girls of slender curves, some glorious in-between. I consume it all  
as I wobble across this endless off-white, a rotund and sexless creature  
fading to the edges of myself. Ginsberg, the whole world is screen

except me. I'm flesh and more flesh, rolls of it. Every city  
I might have escaped to covers its windows and coughs as I pass.  
All day I sit around wishing I did not exist, or that I wasn't scared to die,  
or that this landscape of screened faces would smile back at me.  
We mustn't linger too long here. Everything could kill you. Hurry through  
this tundra of refrigeration and don't stop to examine the cardboard pizzas  
in cardboard boxes, the pre-cut, pre-cooked frozen vegetables I have eaten  
hundreds of times without tasting. Hurry through the checkout (you scan  
the vegetables twice, the pizza not at all, and don't even wink). Follow me  
out to the parking lot that refuses to darken and try not to breathe in  
the fluorescence that hangs in the air like mist, shrinks you down  
until I can carry you in my pocket, play you through earbuds.

As sidewalk crumbles to road, I walk the concrete line between grass  
and traffic, between your world and mine. I almost go over the edge,  
but you are holding me steady—your voice at my command,  
our lips moving together, no difference between space and time.  
When I am home, I'll let you speak the way you want to be heard,  
through the jumping static crackle of a five-dollar forty-five.  
I'll set aside the movies, the pizza, the wine. Tonight, I'll watch  
you spin, Allen Ginsberg, and try to untangle my mind.



## **Dissociation**

Danielle Harrell

Acrylic paint, watercolor, colored pencil, marker, collage; 17"x30"

# Evening Hunger

Alex T. Spurling

In traffic, thrown into the thralls of hunger.

In my purview, a livestock trailer  
ocular slits for ventilation, a dozen waving snouts,  
sun rays on bead-like eyes  
the stench of the farm  
it permeates  
grass fed, free-roam  
makes no difference

Billboards, pictorial images,  
of perspiring patties and salivating mouths  
unshakable adverts

Hindus venerate the cow, the Jains as well  
a divine symbol

dung, urine, and milk,  
ghee and curd,  
an all-purpose remedy  
panchagavya  
the heifer is generous

Discomfort,  
and the eyes of privilege  
break contact,  
for their own sake  
meditation is disbanded  
by impatient horns  
and coarse expletives

And,  
sympathetic hands,  
raise a perspiring patty  
to my salivating mouth,  
and nothing is sacred



# Damn Junkies

Nicholas Gross

There was a different feeling to the air in Seattle in the autumn of 1985. The feeling in the air wasn't coming in from the ports, or the forests, or the waves on the Puget Sound. It was coming in on cramped middle seats in smoky coach sections of passenger planes. It was coming in on worn bench seats in beat up hand-me-down pickups. The air was the cool breeze of life that rolled off of sherpa wool collars on denim jackets of young people from the north, south, east, and west corners of the United States and every square mile in between. They had come for the mountains and the evergreen trees, but they stayed for the taste of a cold dollar beer, the sound of a distorted guitar, and the warm embrace of a stranger who was just as happy to be found and validated as you were. It was the best feeling, with the best people, in the best place that I've ever been in my life. At least, that's how it was then.

Now it was 1995 and the record needle was no longer the only needle that spun the people of Seattle around. I stepped out of the rotted wooden lobby door of my apartment and stepped on a flier. "There is no WIN in Heroin! Get help now! King County Health Services." I chuckled at the corny Boy Scout rhetoric on the flier. I lifted the hood of my rain jacket over my head, and I lit the first cigarette of the day. Rain in Seattle was like wind in Chicago or traffic in New York City. It wasn't anything abnormal. It just *was*.

There was a young man and a young woman on the wet sidewalk to my left. The window ledge of a Chinese dumpling spot that was attached to my apartment building supported their visibly soaking heads. I began to approach them to check for a pulse. *Please don't be dead. The phone booth here smells like dog piss, and I need the rest of my quarters for smokes anyway.* I noticed two used needle syringes that ended a stream of dried blood. The stream began at the inside of their swollen elbow joints and led down toward a crevice in the sidewalk. The arms had been constricted with what I assumed were the leashes of the bony Labrador Retriever that laid upon the wet cement at their feet. The dog shivered and looked up at me with hungry dark eyes. I crouched and stepped slowly toward the dog. The dog loaded its weight onto its hind legs and snarled and growled as I approached. I sighed and exhaled slowly. *Well, my bad for trying to help them, Boy.*

I backed away and looked over toward the man and woman that huddled under the window and on the cold wet cement. The woman was short and thin. She had a blonde pixie cut. Her face was sunken and gaunt and her complexion was pale. Her right cheek filled with rain water as she rested her head on the shoulder of the man. His chin rested firmly upon his sternum and a rain jacket hood obscured all but his stubbled chin. I didn't know *who* they were, but I knew *what* they were. They were addicts. Junkies. Dopeheads. Burnouts. Maybe they were those kids like me, in those passenger planes and pickup trucks. Maybe they

went left when I went right. Maybe they zigged where I zagged. But here they were, cold and wet, on a dirty Seattle sidewalk. And here I was staring at them like animals at a zoo.

I looked through the window of the restaurant and stared at an elderly East Asian man who I knew only as “Mister Li.” He nodded at the couple and threw up his hands like Pontius Pilot had before Christ. I couldn’t hear him through the glass. I pointed to my ear, prompting him to repeat what he had said. He nodded to the two people in front of his restaurant. He shook his head and mouthed the words “damn junkies.” He shrugged his shoulders as if to say “*not my problem.*” *Next customer.* I turned away from the soaking addicts and from Mister Li. *They’re probably just knocked out from the smack. I’m sure the old man will wake them up once he closes shop for the night. Or at least some cops or someone will come by.* I slouched under the hood of my rain jacket and hid myself from the rain and the sullen eyes of the thin woman. I watched the rain flow into the drains, and I pretended that I hadn’t seen anything.

I walked to meet the other members of my band at our makeshift recording studio. It was above the coffee shop that our lead guitarist, Mark worked at during the day. The Pacific Bean Coffee Shop was only two blocks away from my apartment and so it was a short walk.

I pressed the foam earpieces of my Walkman cassette recorder firmly against my ears. I thought that perhaps the music would calm my nerves, but my cigarette had come to its butt and I still saw the shivering dog and the bloody needle syringe on each square of sidewalk. I saw the man and woman in the heads and faces of shoppers, blue-collar tradesmen, and white-collar professionals. I should have done something. But I couldn’t. There was the dog. The *dog*. Who was I anyway? I was a record store clerk and not a paramedic. After all, I’m sure that the old man was right with what he said. Right? *Damn junkies.*

I approached the coffee shop. The sign on the door read CLOSED, but I knocked on the door and nodded through the murky glass to Carlo, the closer. He put down his mop and opened the door. “Drummer Danny! What’s up, man? Thank God, we are closed. I need a damn joint, like yesterday.” He lifted a chair that he had set down between the door and its frame. He pulled a tightly-wrapped joint out from his crumpled pack of cigarettes. “Want to smoke this with me, man?”

I patted his shoulder as I stepped over the chair and into the coffee shop. “No thanks, man. Someone other than Mark has to be on time in this band.”

The Pacific Bean was a small and intimate corner shop. It was not unlike the other several small coffee shops that had opened up in Seattle in the last ten years. There was a dirty coffee bar and dozens of framed photographs of third-world coffee exporters. They were the kind of photographs you’d see in National Geographic magazines. The tables and chairs were all second-hand pieces of furniture that had been acquired from restaurants and bars that had gone out of business for one reason or another. There was a door next to the coffee bar that

was painted black with the exception of a small rectangle that had once been covered with a restroom sign. There was now a paper sign just below it. The words “Employees Only. PERIOD!” were scribbled in blue ink on a tattered scroll of receipt paper. The restroom had once been open to the people of Seattle until a third person was found dead in the restroom from an apparent drug overdose. *Damn junkies.*

Mark was upstairs in the studio tuning his guitar. He sighed and looked around the studio and then back to me. “Johnny is... wherever in the hell Johnny is these days. You know how it is, man. To Hell with it, Carlo knows most of our shit. I’ll ask if he can cover for Johnny. It wouldn’t be the *first* time anyway.” He was right, and where “Johnny was” was probably on someone’s floor, asleep next to some woman that he had met the night before surrounded by empty bottles and a spilled ashtray. That was Johnny.

Johnny used to be my best friend. He had been like me. He had been one of those young kids in those passenger planes and in those pickup trucks looking for a place to find himself. I don’t know if Johnny found himself. But he found barrooms, liquor stores, and people who might feel sorry for him. There were no words more romantic to Johnny than “this one’s on me John Boy.” I used to feel sorry for Johnny too. I used to say those words too. I used to say it before Johnny murdered our friendship. He had murdered it with the lies, the pity party, and all of the other bullshit. His choice, not mine.

The band was what real musicians would refer to as a “quintet.” Mark, Johnny, Johnny’s brother Matt, Tommy, and me. “Willie Pete” was the name of the band. I came up with the name after my old man’s stories about the old white chemical bombs from ‘Nam. We toured the country and opened up for big-label bands every week.

Then in 1988, Tommy got paralyzed in a drunken car accident.

Four years later Matt hung himself in the kitchen that he and Johnny shared in their apartment. Johnny cut him down and held him in his arms on the linoleum floor until the paramedics arrived. The Johnny that I knew died that day. He lost his smile somewhere in the liquor stores and in the dive bars and sadly, he never found it.

Johnny was always coming in late to rehearsals, late to gigs, late to anything with an agreed-upon time. We had started telling Johnny that we were meeting an hour before the actual time so that he would arrive on time. He still arrived at the shop one, two, or even three hours late. Mark referred to the beginning of rehearsal as “Johnny Time,” because it was whatever time that Johnny decided that he would come to rehearsal. “I’ll see you tomorrow for rehearsal at Johnny O’ Clock. Pacific Standard Time. Same as always.” That was the joke that Mark and I made to somehow get a chuckle or a smile out of the reality that our friend was slowly flowing down a drain like rainy sludge.

The band was a three-piece band now, and we sure as hell were not traveling the country and we sure as hell were not playing big shows anymore.

Now, in 1995, a headlining show in Spokane or Olympia was a big deal. Hell, we jumped at the opportunity to play shows in local ballrooms and barrooms, places that we would have laughed at as recently as five years ago.

I lit another cigarette and began tuning my drums and rearranging my cymbal stands. Anything to pass the time and kill the silence. I didn't think that I would still be rehearsing in a converted apartment above a coffee shop at twenty-eight years old. The other bands that we had played with in the early days had all gone on to sign record deals and play shows in countries that I couldn't even point out on a map. But those bands didn't have Johnny, at least that's what I told myself each time that I heard one of those bands on the radio or on T.V. I didn't know if that was the reason, but it helped.

Our best shows and our best days as a band were behind us. It wouldn't be long before we were playing dive bars and musty basements, playing covers and accepting cases of shit lager beer for payment. Mark sat down on an old velvet Ottoman and thumbed the chorus to a post-punk song with his amp turned down low.

Mark was now to me who Johnny used to be. He was my best friend. He was with me when my old man died of an accidental overdose from all the pills that the veteran's hospital loaded him up with. Johnny had sat there with me in that funeral home with my old man's casket. The funeral home was not crowded. The room in the funeral home had been vacant other than for a few distant relatives and some of the veterans that had been with my old man in Vietnam. Man. I hated pills, powders, and booze. I hated that shit and what it did to people.

I watched Mark shift anxiously on the Ottoman and tap his fingers on the back of his guitar. "Screw it," he said. "I'm getting Carlo. I don't care. I'm not Johnny's damn babysitter." He laid down his guitar against the nearby coiled furnace and stood up. He descended down the creaky stairs. The creaks provided a melody on top of the rhythmic thud of the floor tom that provided the only sound amongst the loud silence in the dirty apartment. I struggled to find the tune of the large floor tom. The drum was like Johnny. It struggled to find its sound. It struggled to find its identity amongst the other drums. It was either way too high or way too low, and like Johnny, it was always on the floor.

Mark and I had agreed to take a few weeks to ourselves and get away from the music and away from the bullshit, Johnny's bullshit, that is. Mark and I had thought that maybe time away from the music would help Johnny find himself, find his smile, and find the old Johnny, our Johnny. *Oh, Johnny. What the hell happened to you pal? Where did my best friend go? Where is he?*

Sirens wailed in the distance. There were three distinct sets of horns that wailed louder and louder. I stood up from my drum seat and looked through the set of broken blinds. I looked through the window and down onto the street below. Police cars, fire engines, and ambulances sped past the window and down the street. I waited a few moments for the wail of the sirens to wane as the vehicles drove further away down the street and on to whatever shithole they were headed

to.

The sirens didn't wane though. They rang in place like an unanswered telephone or like a knock from an expecting landlord or bill collector. I looked out the window again and saw the faint red pulsing flash of the siren lights around the corner. The vehicles had stopped. *Shit! Did Mister Li set that damn kitchen on fire again?* In all the years that Mister Li had been making dumplings, he had not mastered the unappreciated art of not turning your kitchen into a pyrotechnic show. I saw no smoke billow into the sky. I heard no sound of hydrant water cascade against the brick exterior of a burning building. It wasn't a fire.

"Matt?! Carlos?! What the hell is going on down there?" I yelled down the stairs, but there was no response. We all had somewhat impaired hearing from all the years of roaring amplifiers, crashing cymbals, and from the once screaming crowds of people.

I sighed. "Jesus Christ. I swear you two need hearing aids. Hey! Assholes!" I shouted down the stairs. Again. No response.

I walked down the stairs and leaned into the right-side railing. The coffee shop was empty. The chair that had kept the door open was now inside the shop. I opened the door and the sirens were now almost deafening. I walked back toward my apartment building that had now become the feature attraction of Seattle.

A crowd of people circled the perimeter of the emergency vehicles that parked in the street. People stood on their toes with crossed arms and phony frowns of concern. They leaned from left to right, jockeying for position for the best view. Man, people are so full of shit. They don't give a damn about what happened or who it happened to. They just want something to gossip about tomorrow in the breakroom at the office with "Jen in Accounting."

I stepped through the crowd of people. I shifted through the crowd of denim and flannel shoulders and past the dirty looks and the mumbled scoffs. *Hey asshole. I live here.* I reached the inside perimeter of the crowd. It had been secured with yellow caution tape and a series of orange traffic cones. Seattle's finest stood with their arms extended as they motioned to the crowd of mostly assholes to step back.

I bumped the shoulder of someone on my right. "Hey asshole. Learn to walk." I turned to my right. I looked into Mark's red eyes that flooded with tears. "Mark. What happened man?"

"Johnny," Mark cried. "It's fucking Johnny. He's dead," he sniffled.

I shook my head. "No. No. No. No way! What happened?" I shouted. *How could Johnny have died?* He had started seeing a shrink during his time away from the band and he had told me that he had cut back on his drinking when I had talked to him on the phone two weeks ago. I didn't understand for the life of me how Johnny could have died at twenty-seven.

Mark closed his eyes and winced as he took a deep breath. "I still can't really believe it. They found a used heroin needle next to him and a dog leash

around his arm. He OD'ed man. He overdosed. He's dead! Heroin. It was *heroin*. Who even knew Johnny was doing that shit?"

My breath began to shake and my eyes grew even wider. I stared back into Mark's glossy eyes. I knew that Johnny used to hang around some shady characters, but he had told me that he had told them all to get lost when they started using needles and smack. I opened my mouth to speak but no words came out.

Mark grabbed my shoulder as if to comfort me or maybe to comfort himself. "The worst part is," Mark paused, "The old man from the dumpling place watched him all day. He said that dozens of people walked past him and that girl for hours. He did nothing! *They* did nothing! How much of a piece of shit does someone have to be to let someone die before their eyes and do *nothing*? What is wrong with people? Johnny had problems. Sure man. We know that. He had issues. But he was a *person*! A human being! He was our friend! He wasn't just some, some *damn junkie*!"

# Rest and Fire, Black Child

Mariah Ivey

may you dance as if the fire is beneath you  
chassé your fears into plied position

scorching pavements with radical affirmation  
promising to always be kind to yourself

may you burn down broken systems tethered to Black tears  
Emmett Tills and ticking timebombs, only to ring-shout

your way into safe spaces of emotional release  
may you awaken without apology on your tongue but joy beneath your wings

laughing as if healing and resistance share one body  
may you remember your body—not as America's sacrificial lamb

but as a harmonious vessel of ancestral hymns  
singing songs of sweetness and soul

*liberation will come from a Black thing*

may your palms, as they are, blessed with golden warmth and  
grandmama's prayers, hold vinyl record memories worth replaying on Sundays

may your days feel a lot warmer there  
not as an escape of your reality but an extension of the reimagined

ease belongs to you  
ease has always belonged to you

rest and fire. rest *in* fire.  
rest and fire, Black child.

# **Autopsy**

Nathan Marquam

I've searched for something good in you,  
like apple carved down to the bone.  
Found tire swings and skipping stones.  
I've searched for something good in you,  
found worm-gut nails and walls punched through,  
the strongest hands I've ever known—  
I've searched for something good in you,  
like apple carved down to the bone.



# Demeter's Nectarine

Christopher Cassetty

O', budding Nectarine,

who kiss'd so high upon the sprig for thee,  
Demeter, ere she wept the Winter dearth  
o' wisps o' pollen borne by honey-bee  
to Thee: the Portent o' the blessèd Spring.

O', fallen Nectarine,

whose Fleurs and Lure hath fallen on the Earth,  
reposed on the verdant mead all furl'd,  
and pure, so she could not resist thy worth,  
and ope'd the Earth exhuming misery.

O', blooming Nectarine,

who hast fleurie a darling Orchid rose,  
beget thou such a rich and merry mirth  
for past, and too, too long has Spring reposed  
in fetters o' Eleusis' mysteries—

O', dreary Nectarine,

who will not bare her fruit this solemn year,  
and weeps beneath the barren skies forlorn—  
as will'd away the Sun Demeter's tears  
from thee, for loss o' bless'd Persephone.

O', flower'd Nectarine,

who hath so much allur'd the minds o' wise,  
becom'st thou love-betrothed to nether-worlds,  
the path o' lies that led to her demise,  
and comes to thee the Queen: Persephone.

Demeter's Nectarine,

who whilom bloom'd upon the kiss of she,  
Demeter, ere the Goddess' heart she tore,  
and why must die her lovely Nectarine:  
deceitful fleurs who lur'd Persephone.

## Unnamed Poem 6

Christopher Cassetty

This poem was written firsthand during the events described in a notebook later found with my belongings being checked into the hospital; it is transcribed digitally here.

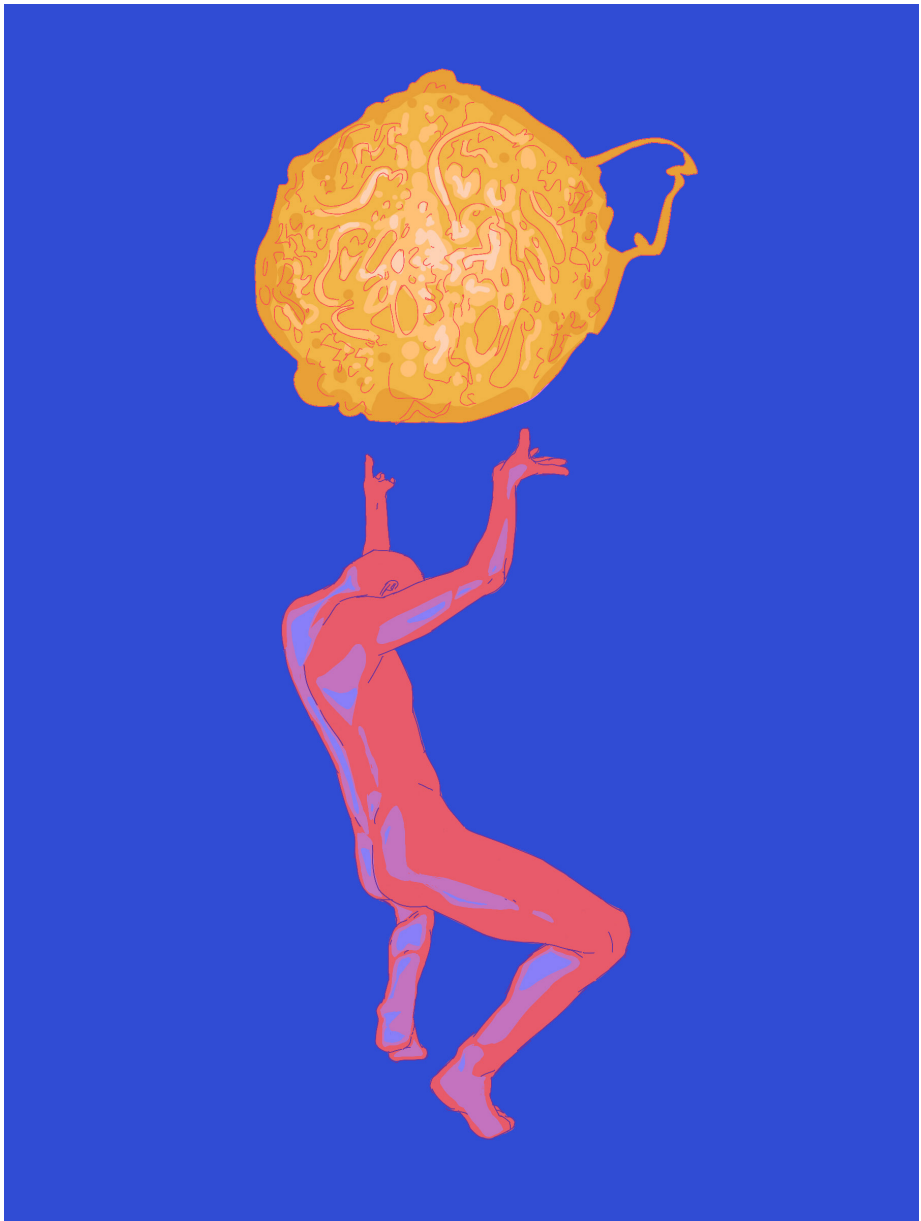
I lay atop my bed with clouds for eyes;  
these wretched liquid tears beseem me well,  
for nightly days and daily nights have come  
to be ubiquitous so with these storms.

A crying-crying so well taught from birth.  
How comical 'tis, to cry like this from then,  
to now, and neither is there sight of end-  
of end; I beg the stars to make it end.

The moon aflame the night wants too to die,  
a flutter 'twixt the clouds o' dreary hell;  
she weeps, and tears besmirch the whilom 'drum  
arras o' sky; her flames ignite the swarm

of thoughts-of thoughts of which there was a dearth-  
to die, to take the hand o' moon and then—  
ignite, the round o' chamber, make my end,  
to call my days forgone, by means of scend,

and was it well, decided I, the perfect Night to ... [sic, page torn]



**there's something they're not telling me**

Nicole Hay

Digital art; 6"x8"

## **coruscations**

Christopher Cassetty

dreamt i one july of—coruscations  
who, when asked, would dance upon the walls and  
glimmer in the blood that dripped from the ceilings.

dreamt i one december of—july,  
who, without having been asked, would play over  
and over until my ears rang and bled into my pillow.

dreamt i one april of—showers,  
who, by chance, would wash my face and  
wake me from the floor after i had taken my pills.

dreamt i one late june of the rancid entrails  
of the driver of a car—spilt—across stained asphalt  
and wondered, “what is this to do with me?”

dreamt i last night of my dreams,  
a coruscation, a nightmare, an overdose and an accident,  
and wondered if there was anything at all

to be learnt from a dream.

# Munkhi

Mario Stone

Sometimes I feed him daily  
though I try to not at all,  
and despite the bite, his empty eyes,  
I heed his monkey call.

I (**Clutch the stick**) crawl on my fists  
in search of flesh to beat—

(**Blind it**)

(**Claw it**)

(**Maul it**

**raw**) the pulp I eat

I eat

I eat.

There's a monkey lives inside  
my brain, twisting  
grabbing me  
he bites— what bliss  
to lick his tongue (**Your lips**  
**desire**) what a fright.

He's crawling through my mouth (**Again**)  
he's fingering my eyes,  
I've let him come alive (**AGAIN**)  
his howl no surprise

*fore twilight throes, the victim moans*

unto **My jungle groans**

*her wet oasis, her featherdove hair,*

**Her skin** *the moon*

*so fair* **So rare**

**so soft her lips We're crawling through  
the bliss Her mourning seeks**

**red tongues Her eyes so wet  
to lies— We come**

**for sin Death welcoming**

**The pleasure  
Your demise**

## **A Midnight Heartbreak**

Christopher Cassetty

Upon the Sun's faint dying breath, as Twilight lies in sombre death,  
do I descry the pallid Moon, so doleful, whole, so dismal, too;  
and up above the clouds so high, she weeps agleam her tears of white,  
a crying sight so full of woe, wherein her sins the Night bestows.  
A dream beseems this dreary Night, for all it crawls with things of fright:  
the gothic moth in search of gore; the mystic witch who reads of lore;  
as well, her spell, the peccant bane; and last, the ghastr, of vile disdain.  
And I, thereby, am last to go, to cry whereby the Moon doth glow.

To cry, and die, am I so tempt', as dreams appease the Night's contempt,  
and wherefore werewolves turn to howl, whereby the nightly Moon befouls  
the midnight grid of blazing stars, our twain, ill-fated, broken hearts,  
as werewolves share parts man and wolf, and rarely dares feel woe the wolf.  
When only grown to don my fur, enthrall'd by all the Moon's allure,  
with teeth agleam from moonlit dreams—the ichor crying from my teeth—  
as well, the knell before the sheep, my droning groan for more to eat,  
beware the air so moon-kiss'd cold, ... as werewolf dare I favour wolf.



**Raven Mocker**

Raeya Wilhelm

Acrylic paint; 12"x16"

# A Stalker's Mercy

Anthony Gonzalez

Louisiana, 1895. The small fishing village of Longue Rivière was in shambles. Located just south of Breaux Bridge, the once peaceful and quiet village was disheveled and bloodied. Bodies littered the muddied ground, some with tools and makeshift weapons in their hands, most face down in a failed attempt to flee. A carriage, with its shredded cover listing lazily in the breeze, sat crushed on the side of the single road through the town. The small rows of raised houses that lined the road stood hollowed and gaping, looking almost as bloodied and broken as their former tenants. Shutters were hanging skewed, doors were torn free of their hinges, and there was nothing but a mournful wind carrying the stench of death through them. Only two other things moved through the remains of this broken community, eyes scanning the death and destruction around them.

Kalista slowly made her way down the narrow road, rifle at the low ready, watching for any sign of life. Her hard leather boots sunk slightly into the soft earth soundlessly. She didn't want to alert anyone to her presence. The long duster she wore looked out of place this time of year with how hot and humid it had been. However, if what she had suspected happened to this village turned out to be true, she wouldn't dare take it off. She moved around the broken bodies, being careful not to get too close to any of them. They were scattered haphazardly, so it was slow going.

Walking closely in front of her, eyes and ears constantly alert for any signs of danger, was her faithful hound, Remy. The Dogo Argentino was 120 pounds of pure muscle and power. His white fur stood in stark contrast to the muck and mire around them, a sign of purity in this god forsaken place. He would occasionally put his nose to the ground, searching for any scent that might offer any clues as to what had happened here.

Suddenly, he stopped and turned his head to one of the houses closer to the river that ran parallel to the road. Kalista stopped and raised her rifle towards the door. She listened intently to try and pick up what he may have heard, but all she could hear was the gentle lapping of the river against the bank. The door was open, and the steps leading up to it were spattered with blood. Cautiously, she began to make her way up the steps, eyes and rifle barrel never leaving the entryway.

The inside of the small house was divided into 3 rooms, with the dining room/common room being the largest. There was a small wood stove in the corner, which provided heat and a place to cook meals, along with a dining table that was covered in the half-eaten remains of what Kalista assumed was the former tenants' breakfast. Various types of wooden furniture lay splintered and smashed around the room, and an oil lantern hung broken next to the back window. The first room had its door open and led into a small bedroom. A quick scan of the room revealed nothing other than an unmade bed and dresser. The last room had



its door shut, and Kalista approached it with slow wary steps. She could just make out the muffled rapid breathing on the other side. Since the door opened out, she positioned herself on the latch side of the door and placed her hand on the handle. After making sure Remy was on the opposite side, she wordlessly counted to three and threw open the door.

The room was a pantry, and huddled in the corner covered in blood was a boy barely old enough to be called a man. He was as pale as a ghost and covered in sweat with eyes so wide they looked like they would pop right out of his head. He was shaking uncontrollably as his hands clutched the wound on the side of his stomach.

“Please...” the boy gasped, staring at the rifle barrel pointed at him. “Please don’t hurt me!”

After a brief pause, Kalista lowered her rifle and looked at Remy.

“Remy, post,” She ordered. Remy padded over to the front door and assumed sentry duty while Kalista entered the pantry. “It’s OK. I’m here to help. Let’s get you out of there, so I can look at your wound.”

The boy looked as if his heart was about to leap out of his chest when she spoke, but he allowed himself to be pulled to his feet. She walked him out to the main room and had him lay down on the table. His shirt was torn, soaked with blood, and a long gash had been made across his abdomen.

“What happened here?” she asked, setting her rifle against the table so she could help ease the boy onto the table.

“The monsters... they came out of nowhere,” he said, still shaking. “It was horrible. They... they just... attacked everyone. I had to hide. God, the screams.”

“How many were there? What did they look like?” she asked, lifting the boy’s tattered shirt to inspect the wound. Black veins were surrounding the wound, and small sores had already begun to appear on his chest. *‘Damn...’*

“I don’t know,” he replied, sweat pouring from his clammy skin. “Three, I think. Two of them looked like regular people but with gray skin and these boils around their face and arms. One of them looked like something out of a nightmare. It stood taller than any man, and its arms were long and twisted. Its head looked like a giant hairless rat with a big gaping mouth that could swallow a child whole.”

The boy looked up at Kalista as she continued to inspect him. She was being careful to keep her face neutral. He stared at the three long scars that ran down the right side of her face.

“Hey, you’re one of them, aren’t you?” he asked. “You’re a Stalker.” She nodded.

The boy suddenly reached up and grabbed her arm. “Please! Please, you have to help her!” he pleaded. “That thing, the big one, it had her necklace caught on one of its claws! Please, you have to find her!”

“Slow down. Who are you talking about?”

“Lucie! She’s been home sick ever since she got bit by a possum a few nights ago.”

Kalista raised an eyebrow. “A possum? Are you sure?”

“Well, she thought it was. It happened at night. What does it matter?!” he asked in frustration. “She lives with her folks a little way outside the village. Please, you have to get to her!”

Kalista nodded. “Don’t worry. I’ll find her.” She gently removed the boy’s hand and eased him back on the table. “Now, close your eyes. This is going to hurt a little bit.”

The boy looked up at her emotionless face as she reached behind herself.

“You promise you’ll find her, right?” he asked, eyes pleading.

“I give you my word that I’ll find her,” she said as she reached up with her other hand to place it on the boy’s head. “Now, close your eyes and try to relax.”

The boy did as he was told, and before he could utter another word, Kalista retrieved the Bowie knife from behind her and plunged it into the boy’s heart. He let out a surprised gasp and then went limp. She looked down at the poor boy who had died by her hand. The blessed forged blade would ensure that the corruption that was growing within him wouldn’t spread. It was the only thing she could do for him, a hollow mercy that tasted like ash in her mouth. If her uncle were here, he would have said a prayer for him, asking God to welcome him into His kingdom. But he wasn’t here, and she would never waste her breath on a God she felt either didn’t care or wanted His creations to suffer. Her thoughts turned back to her own past, and she began to feel a sense of something approaching envy for the boy. She didn’t know if he’d had any family that died in the attack, but she knew he wouldn’t have to know what life was like without them if he had.

Remy let out a low growl, breaking her from a train of thought that she could ill afford to follow. She still had more to do, more monsters to banish from a world they wished to devour. She removed the knife from the boy’s chest and put it back in its sheath. She picked up her rifle and moved towards the doorway. Raspy voices were growing louder with every step. The once deathly silent village was now about to become unnaturally busy. She had a job to do and a promise to keep.

Outside, the broken and battered remains of the villagers were lifting themselves out of the mud and blood. Their skin had turned a sickening shade of gray with black veins spidering around boils and sores. Blackened eyes searched their surroundings, looking for prey, and darkened teeth bit the air in anticipation. After spotting the pair at the top of the stairs, the walking corpses shambled towards them with arms outstretched. Kalista raised her rifle, took aim at the closest one as it began to ascend the steps towards her, and fired a round through its head. It dropped like a marionette that had just had its strings cut as she chambered another round and fired at the next walker that was trying to climb over its fallen neighbor. More and more plague-walkers began to shamble towards the

noise, and Kalista knew she had to hurry and get rid of them before the big one showed up.

After she fired her last rifle round, Kalista moved down the narrow porch and jumped over the railing. Remy followed close behind, jumping through the posts on the railing. Kalista slung her rifle over her shoulder and drew her revolvers. Even though it was a small village, there were a lot of walkers with a newfound hunger that would never be sated. She fired round after round with quick precision, dropping them one after another.

“Remy, roundup!” she ordered once she had fired her last round. Remy began barking and darting around the horde trying to get their attention. The walkers began to give chase to the loud and nimble creature that they were far too slow to catch. They began to bunch together as Remy quickly circled them, their focus completely on him. Kalista used this time to reload, as well as check her surroundings. It looked like almost all the reanimated villagers were now together in one group, being herded by her dog. She began to fire into the crowd, which caused some of the plague walkers to break away from the main group and advance towards her. However, they were slow, and Kalista was able to finish off most of the horde before a loud, guttural roar pierced the sound of raspy moans and snarls from the few stragglers that remained.

From the far end of the road, a towering abomination was charging towards her with frightening speed. It stood over nine feet tall and waved its long misshapen claws as if it couldn't wait to tear her limb from limb. Its mouth was stretched impossibly wide, and its large black eyes were filled with hate and hunger. Tattered rags and dried blood covered the thing's gray, stretched flesh, and its limbs were far too long and had far too many joints to be considered human anymore.

“Shit!” Kalista swore as she holstered her revolvers and began to reload her rifle. She'd hoped she would have had a little more time before the plague-morph showed up. As it was, there were still two or three walkers around. Once she put the last round into her rifle and chambered it, Kalista had just enough time to fire off a few quick shots before she had to roll out of the way of the thing charging at her. It dug its claws into the soft earth, trying to stop its momentum, and charged at her again. Kalista fired another series of rounds into the thing, with one hitting it in the hip, causing it to stumble. Unfortunately, the massive monster was able to reach her with a swipe of its elongated arms. Despite how lithe and sickly it looked, the creature was powerful enough to send Kalista flying across the road. She landed on her back with her rifle tumbling from her grasp.

Before she could even get to her feet, the creature was on top of her. It opened its maw wide, and Kalista had to block its bite with her forearm. It was like her arm was in a vice, and she howled out in pain as its teeth tried to puncture the hard leather of her duster. With her free hand, she tried to reach her knife, but it was difficult with her pinned on her back. Her hands kept slipping on the muddied handle, and the creature's thrashing was causing her to shift around

too much.

Finally, she managed to get it free and plunged the blade deep into the abomination's side. It let out a demonic howl of pain and fury as the blessed forged steel burned its corrupted flesh. Kalista pulled the knife out and plunged it upwards into the creature's heart. It rolled off of her and started to claw at its chest as faint wisps of smoke rose from its wound. Kalista pressed the advantage and continued to stab the creature repeatedly until, with one last gurgle, the thing lay still on the ground.

Kalista sat on the ground panting from the struggle, watching the corpse to make sure it was dead. The last two plague-walkers began to shamble closer to her, no longer interested in the prey that was too quick for them to catch. With barely a glance, Kalista drew one of her revolvers and shot both in the head. Getting to her feet, she picked up her hat and rifle before moving to stand over the body of the plague-morph. She noticed the shine of a small, silver necklace caught in one of the thing's claws.

"Rest in peace, Lucie," she said, once again saddened that this was the only mercy that she could offer.



**All I See is Red**

Anna Corso

Oil paint, acrylic, and joint compound on wood; 22.5"x2.5"x24"

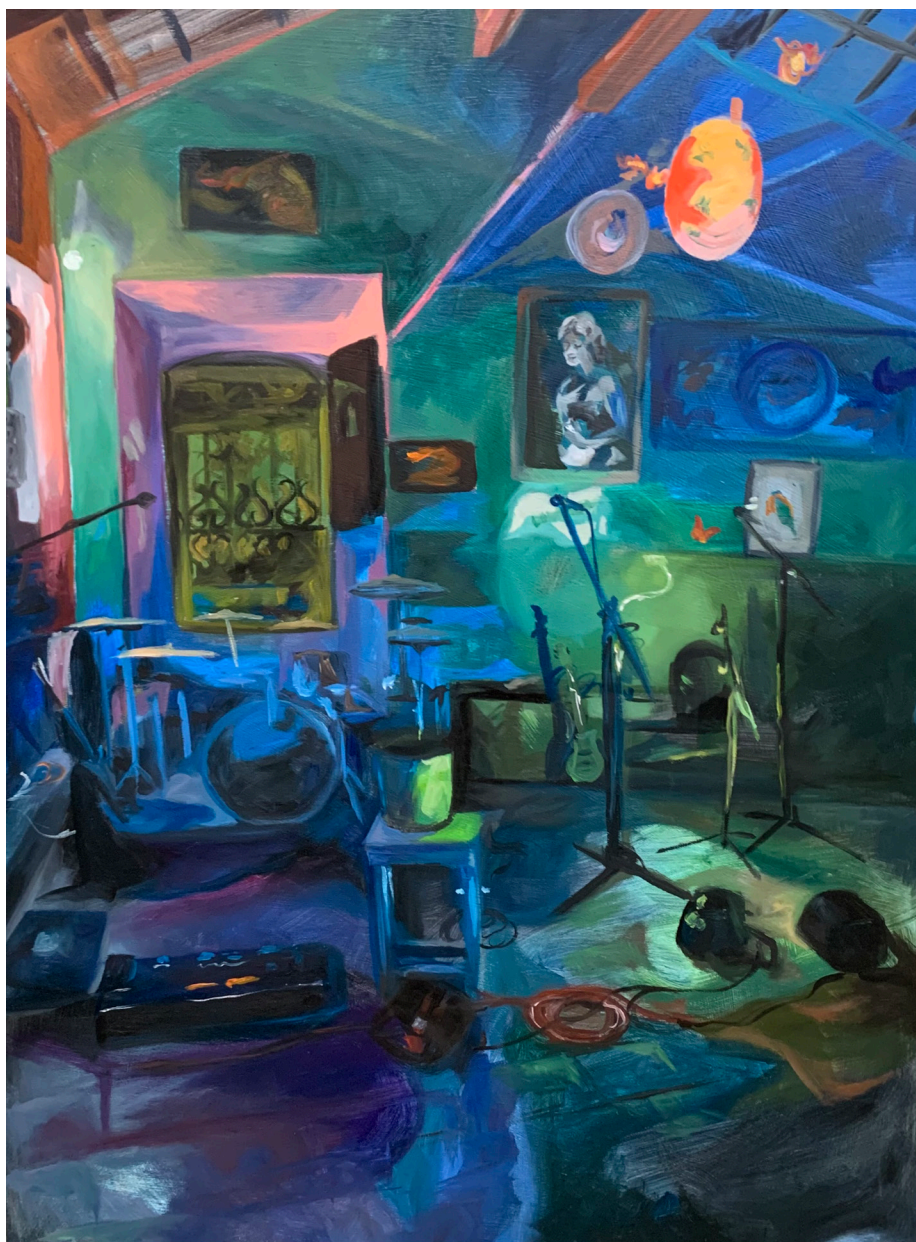
# Modern Medicine

Kayla McVeigh

The room looks different this time. Old frumpy furniture with threadbare cushions has been replaced with sleek modern benches that are resistant to wearing down. Likewise, the staff seems to have been upgraded to young doctors and nurses with plastic skin. The room is still framed by three walls and a sliding glass door peeking from behind a curtain the doctor left pulled back slightly from earlier during his mandatory pop-in. The curtain is new and a different color from the one that was here when I first arrived. This medical curtain is so fresh it hangs with folded creases still visible from its days pressed and packaged tightly in a warehouse facility, waiting to be ordered. The tubes and equipment they inserted and hooked up to me smell sterile and of saline.

A needle from my IV is pinching with a cold sensation where it is taped to the flesh of my arm and tethers me to the room through a bruised vein. The needle's plastic wrapping still lingers on the speckled countertop, torn open but not yet discarded. A beeping monitor is watching my vitals. It rhythmically fills the room with an auditory reminder of my decline. The room not only looks new, but it also feels new, much like the crisp atmosphere of a model home. Despite the efforts of baking sheets, the prospective homeowners see through the deceptively warm gooey cookies that are trying to feed them the lie of a home. Convincing as chocolate chips might be, the buyers always know better. They see the space around them—it is lifeless, an artificial prop of the real thing.

The screen facing me clicks black after a long period of inactivity. Its shiny and metallic construction is fitting with the hospital's emphasis on innovation. Examining my reflection in the blackness of the screen, I can see one thing out of place in this room. He told me my kidneys are failing with the stench of coffee wafting off his breath. His story is that of 5:00 A.M. yoga and nonfat cappuccinos. My body, however, tells the story of illness and death. My ailment is the last archaic feature of this state-of-the-art room, nonresponsive to groundbreaking treatments in plastic packaging. When I finally give way, I will be a fossil that my doctor will raise his hands over, joined with his fellow Johns Hopkins graduates. They will celebrate one more step into the modern age as my body is wheeled away. The room will be prepared for a body more receptive and willing. They will praise the miracles of modern medicine.



**Bar in Mexico**

Caroline Kridle

Oil painting; 24"x30"

# Prayer of the Unrequited Lover

Corlan McCollum

For all I gain  
to be in the same space as you  
to breathe in the same air  
to share in the same memories,  
a part of me becomes... inaccessible.  
A part of me that consists mostly of hope.  
It is a warm part of my heart that  
cannot burn if I am too close to you.  
A fire that suffocates in  
the reality of who and what  
we are.  
God help our souls. Are we who we're  
meant to be? Is this what  
was intended for us?  
How could we be anything other  
than the idols, the totems we  
construct of ourselves to display to others and say  
"See this image, and know me by my work."  
We are under so much pressure,  
if not to be somebody then  
to be anybody, and we have  
so little time to grow slowly and naturally as people,  
without the knowing gaze of others.  
When you are alone,  
in the quiet,  
in the empty space  
where the only thing to fill the room  
is the volume of your soul,  
who are you?  
And how do you love me then, I wonder?  
It is not a love I could ever know,  
by virtue of it being so private,  
but it is a love that shy chamber of my heart bleeds for,  
a love that can't be shared when we're together.  
God help us to save us from ourselves, and the awful things we do and think. May he deliver  
us from temptation and impulse, and into the arms of a righteous and destined future.  
Somewhere warm with sunshine. I don't care if the rivers flow with milk and honey. I don't  
care if it's Nirvana or Eden or the Kingdom of Heaven. I know that we go together, and  
the world may pull us apart or say otherwise, but Lord, there is nothing more pure or divine  
than love, and I love you, and the best laid plans of men could not keep this love down. If  
this isn't holy then there is nothing sacred worth keeping. His will is done, on earth as it is in  
heaven, and we are a part of it. This is my prayer, and my promise in God's name, amen.

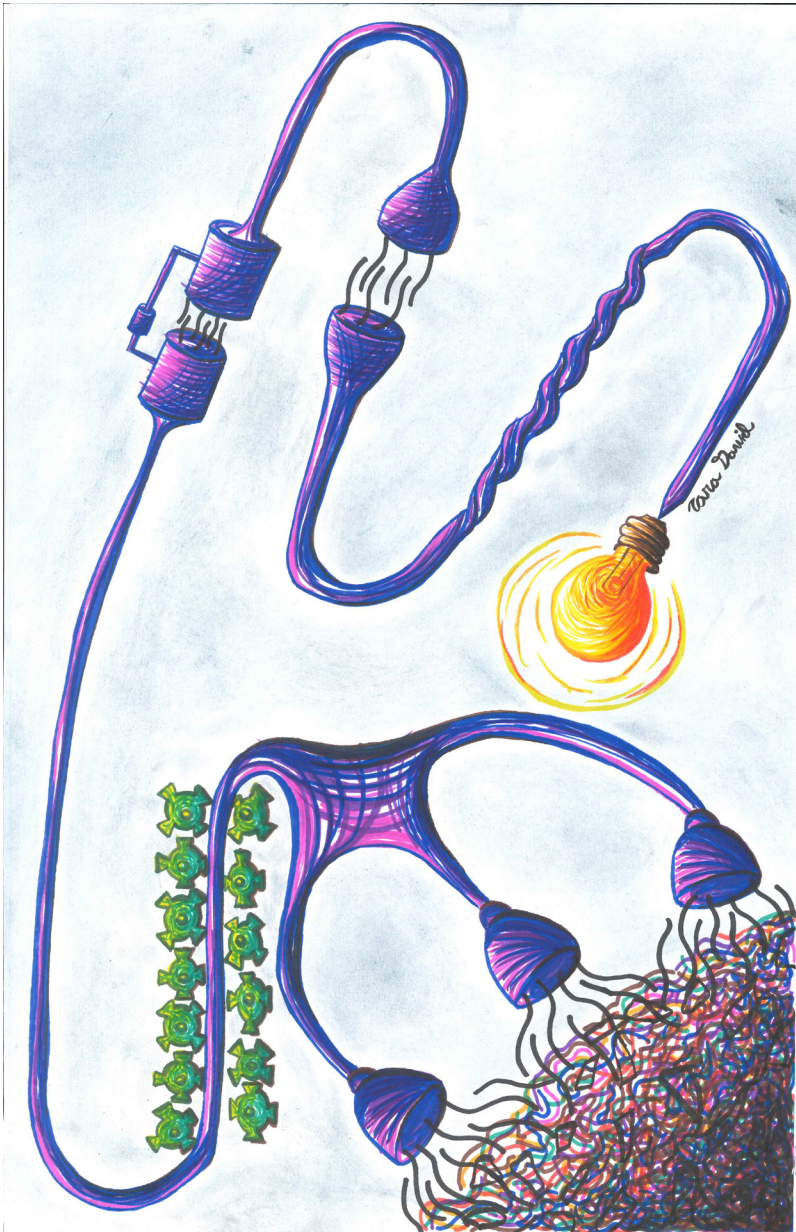




## **The Orchard Floor**

Louisa Coello

Gouache and white ink on paper; 3"x5"



## **Technology**

Cara David

Alcohol marker drawing; 11"x17"

# The Way the Money Goes

Sarah Wulf

Ian's basement had smelled like weed and alcohol since we were about six, but Ian had only ever drunk or smoked at swim team parties. Which means he had no excuse for spouting off philosophical hypotheses while I was trying to read the Navy's recruitment website.

"Sandy, would you sell your soul?"

"Nah."

"What if I offered you all the money in the world?"

"That's a big responsibility," I replied.

"Is it, though?"

"If I had all the money in the world, I'd have to redistribute it. I'd have to make sure everyone was on an equal playing field. Of course that would mean giving more to some than others, and the others wouldn't like that."

"You don't *have* to redistribute it."

"I'm not evil."

"Just because you're a pacifist doesn't mean you're not evil."

Ian threw his legs up over the couch with the pink, blue, and purple swirls. When we were eleven, he claimed his older brothers stole it from a dentist office that was abandoned in the eighties. It wasn't an unbelievable story.

I looked at the website but didn't really read it. It was hard to focus with the commercial blaring in the background.

"Does your body look like this?" The commercial showed a woman with an inch or so of fat sticking out over her low jeans. She looked a little like me. "Stop by New Life Cosmetic for a consultation! At New Life, we'll do our best to transform you into a completely new person! Get rid of all that unsightly fat, and start your New Life!"

"You have to be able to swim to join the Navy," Ian said from across the couch. His legs were kicked over the arm of the couch, and his curly dark hair was laid back against the cushion.

"I'm not seeing that anywhere," I told him, "and I thought I was the best swimmer you knew."

"What about Eric?"

"The best living swimmer, then."

"You want Chinese?" he asked. My brain flashed a blue screen as I processed the change in topic.

"We had Chinese last week."

Ian's eyes rolled under his eyelids. When we were nine, he'd tried to show me how to roll my eyes as dramatically as he did. I never got the hang of it.

"It's the only thing around here that's cheap and actually worth eating."

"What about Holloway's?"

"Last time I went there, there was blood on my pancakes."

“I know,” I said, “you’ve mentioned that every time anyone mentions Holloway’s.”

“Then why do you keep bringing it up?”

He punctuated that with a scoff that sounded more like he was trying to force his vocal chords out of his mouth. I slammed my laptop shut, hit the power button for the TV, and followed him up the stairs.

“Turn the TV off, man, you’re burning money.”

A set of keys flew at my face from across the kitchen.

“You drive,” Ian demanded. Last time he drove at night, I had to help get him out of a ditch.

An outdated jingle for a car commercial greeted us when the old truck roared to life. It played the same chorus six times and the drum line buzzed Ian’s speakers.

“Girls don’t like boys  
who drive old jalopies.

Trade in your car.

Come on to Poppy’s!”

I lowered the volume.

The drive to Summer Garden took us past our old school. A cheap banner hung over the outside gym wall. The late October wind was blowing it around slightly, and you could see the mural that it was covering.

A girl in my sister’s class had commissioned the mural as a memorial for the people whose houses had been torn down to build up the school and the area around it. They had been forced out of their homes, and most of them had never been compensated.

“Litening Boltz.” Ian read the banner. “Energy all day, every day.”

“Was that the stuff that gave you a panic attack?”

“It didn’t *give* me a panic attack. It just made my mind move fast.”

“It didn’t help.”

“I’ll bet they make you drink that in the Navy.”

“I think cocaine would go easier on the body.”

He snorted. He hadn’t seen himself in an energy drink-induced-spiral on the floor of the chemistry classroom. He barely remembered the whole thing. The company said that he’d drunk too much, and it was his fault he’d had a panic attack. I looked up a proper serving. It was a quarter of a can.

Ian glared at the glowing green and white sign for Holloway’s.

“Don’t even think about it.”

Inside Summer Garden sat some bright red plastic booths and clay colored tiles. The yellowed drywall was decorated with some old pictures of the neighborhood alongside some generic shots of Chinese landmarks and a signed photo of a Chinese film star.

Ian always got the curry chicken, and he slid in front of me so he could order while I read the menu. It was faded and yellow like the wall. An ad for Zoeng Lawn Service hung above it, covering the name of a dish that sounded like Hunan Beef. The description seemed good.

“What if we had a picnic?” Ian asked. The cashier had told us it was about a fifteen minute wait, and we’d settled in one of the booths. This was after explaining to the cashier that Ian wasn’t paying, and that it was okay that he wasn’t paying because we weren’t dating.

“It’s dark out.”

“It wouldn’t be so bad. The weather is so nice, and I know a great spot.”

“Whatever you say, man.”

In the car, Ian switched the station to my heavy metal preset. On Saturday nights they apparently had an anarcho-punk segment.

“Shop at Ader for 20% off your holiday essentials,” the radio shouted. “Holiday dresses, ties, snow boots, and all the gifts you can imagine! 15% of all proceeds go to Home for the Holidays. Help our soldiers see their families this Christmas. Visit Ader today!”

“It’s October,” I muttered.

Ian rummaged through the brown paper bags.

“They got us some of those noodle chips.”

“Ooh.”

“And an exorbitant amount of duck sauce. Turn right up here.”

“Into the woods?”

“Yeah.”

I turned. The car heaved and bumped along the dirt path.

“There should be a clearing up just a little ways. There. There! *There!*”

“I got it, jeez.”

I swung into the white gravel parking area. Three stone benches faced the creek. Ian and I grabbed our bags and sat on the center bench.

About a year ago, this clearing had been empty save for a couple of stray plastic bags and water bottles. After the neighborhood got rich and the property values went up, the older, poorer residents tried out less legal ways of making money so they could keep living here. They usually met in the clearing, easy to find but often abandoned. That night, it had rained heavily. The creek had been high and fast. The night had been cold.

Conrad—the news never gave his last name—had met up with someone to sell something that night. A product or a service, the news never said that either. Whoever he’d been selling to had become irritated, and shoved him in the water before running off.

The kid had grabbed a weak root and screamed like a mourning mother until Eric had come running out of his nearby house. Eric Graza, who broke records on the swim team, had jumped into the creek without even taking off his shoes. He’d hauled him onto his back and swum with him to a bank that Conrad could climb onto. Conrad had managed to crawl his way to safety. Swimming in cold water with a 180-pound high schooler on your back is exhausting however. Eric had lost strength and was swept from the bank. He drowned.

The county had set a memorial for his heroism and fenced in the area around the benches. A bunch of us from the swim team had been drafted to build it. We hadn’t even been invited to the memorial dedication. Ian had ranted about

it for a literal week. Various signs, like the sort you see in people's yards, were nailed to the fence we'd built.

"Is that a goddamn Holloway's sign?"

Ian was squinting in the darkness to try and read a green and white sign. You'd think that they'd made the fence out of signs with the number that there were. They surrounded us.

"This is your spot?"

"Yeah." Ian sighed. "The signs weren't here last time, though. Still, it's got these nice benches, and you can see the creek real well. And hear it."

We stopped talking for a moment to listen to the creek babble. It was low now.

"What'd you get?" Ian asked me.

"Beef egg foo young. You?"

"Curry chicken, you know that."

The creek and the wind filled the silence again as we ate and read the ads. I saw one for glasses and another for a surgery that would make you not need glasses. One for an injection that would get rid of wrinkles. There were a ton of realtor signs. It was like they were trying to sell Eric's memorial.

"There's one for the Navy," I pointed out.

Ian didn't look up from his little, white rice box.

"Are you really gonna join?" he asked.

"Maybe."

"Why? You were a hardcore pacifist until, like, this year. You smoked Skylar Gadzinski in that war debate. Do you really want to leave town?"

"College money." I held up a second finger. "And not really."

"Sellout."

Ian threw a fortune cookie in my lap.

I opened it. The side facing me was an ugly, energy-drink green.

"Crypto Mortgage: Make your fortune!" I read aloud.

"Man, I have never wanted to scan a QR code less."

I flipped it over and read the message.

"What's it say?" Ian demanded.

"A life choice will soon bring you financial security. What does yours say?"

"You will soon discover easy ways to make money," he sighed. "I never put much faith in fortune cookies anyway."

"Must be a tough year for the fortune cookie companies, if they need to sell ad space."

"They just want to make more money. Everywhere you go, you're just a product. Nothing is sacred."

Ian's sigh came out high and forced. I wondered if Eric knew how many campaigns he wound up in. Or if my sister's classmate knew her mural was used in every school ad, even though it painted the town in a bad light. I wonder if she knew they did that, then covered it up again. I wondered if Sandy from two years ago could have been paid any amount of money to pick up a gun.

“You know that community college?” I asked Ian.

“Arthur St. John’s?”

“Yeah, that one,” I nodded. “I’ll bet they have a good swimming scholarship.”

Ian’s shoulder shook next to mine. So light, I wasn’t even sure it was moving.

“They have a great pool,” he said eventually.

“Yeah.”

“Please don’t leave.”

“I’ll do my best.”

## **Surrogate father sestina**

Nathan Marquam

Losing a tooth is like losing a father—  
another soon grows in its place, though not  
immediately. First comes the blood-black absence,  
the small cavern hidden inside. Then one day,  
it fills with jagged rock, something small and alive  
within you, that's of you, but haunted. I grew

so fast I could hear my bones crack, outgrew  
skirts and sweaters, friends, my name, the father  
I was born with. He was an exoskeleton, not alive  
the moment I left him, just the cells to die. Not  
my fault, people said, but with each passing day  
I was a different shape— bigger in his absence

and brave, no walls of him to contain me, and absence  
became me, something exponential in the way I grew,  
formless and large, more myself each passing day—  
but like a poem, I wanted to be restrained. No father,  
no curfew, no shotgun warning for the boys. Not  
alone, but reaching always for something alive

until I reached and found something alive.  
He tasted of salt, morning breath, the absence  
of death, of fathers, the word no. Before, I had not  
known something worse than death. I grew  
fond of my own decay, eyes like my father's  
blue and terribly still, counting days

spent watching the sun pass me by, days  
spent afraid to let the world see me alive,  
and the fathers lined up to save me. Fathers  
with blackened lungs, charred in the absence  
of children and wives, fathers who grew  
fond of me, of what I could fill in them. Not



out of obligation, they said, but love— not  
worth it when my chatter filled their days  
with incessant noise. I watched as they grew  
bored of my damage, but they were alive,  
a line between me and the absence  
of me, chain wallet fathers, bar stool fathers,

fathers I killed while they were still alive.  
I spent my days collecting each absence,  
grew into the shape of a man, a not-father.

# Combat Sport

Corlan McCollum

Conductors at the ready, baton twirlers  
armed and poised, the band is en garde,  
ready, fence, and the symphony begins  
with the first chair lunging, the brass section  
coming alive as sabers clash, parry, riposte,  
the touch goes to your opponent.

Go back to your en garde position,  
twist your back foot perpendicular to your front,  
squeak the rubber of your sole on the floor.  
Shoulder width apart, find your balance, bend your knees,  
hear *fence!* and summon the drums,  
stomp your foot and stop your opponent.  
Time stops, the orchestra lulls.

You have the right of way! Move!  
As fast as the strings of a violin warble,  
aim to cut across the chest,  
the blade whistling as you swing.  
Then the horns resound again,  
they parry, you beat, and the light chimes -  
the touch goes to your dueler.  
The opera approaches its climax,  
the diva is belting her final notes.  
Find a strategy, bend your knees, *fence!*  
Arm up, blade straight out, foot forward,  
classic, obvious prise de fer,  
so they stop advancing and cut  
across your vest. Your guts would spill  
on the battlefield, centuries ago.  
You sigh with the woodwinds,  
the bout goes to the enemy.



**Point Five**

Anna Corso

Ink on paper; 18"x24"

## **Sweaty Hands and Red Balls**

Kyle Jennings

Before I was seventeen, I never considered myself a winner. The word loser always followed me like a shadow. In the sports I participated in, like baseball, all I ever received were “thanks for trying” trophies. I never had one that said CHAMPION. For one night, I was a champion on a carpet court in front of screaming teenagers.

I remember sitting in my friend’s red Oldsmobile. We were parked on a country road in Delaware County, northeast of Indy. I held a flyer calling out the best dodgeball players the county’s high schools had to offer. Delaware County is home to seven high schools. While I only attended one, yearly county tournaments for school events were a big deal, always bringing the biggest crowd and selling out the gymnasium. Muncie South, Muncie Central, Burriss, Wes-Del, Wapahani, Delta, Yorktown, Daleville. The school I belonged to was Wapahani. I asked my friend, Selvey, if he wanted to do it. I’m not sure what compelled me to want to do this. Selvey and I were seventeen and not the most in shape or most limber of people. Also, we are at the bottom of the clique chain; would we even know enough people to join us?

Our first stop was at a kid named Evan’s house. I only knew Evan through the grapevine of others, like Selvey. I attempted to persuade him to join our team and our cause. What I didn’t realize was he was a hippie. Or what I imagined a hippie to be. He replied, “I don’t do sporting events for men to watch,” or whatever the hell that meant. Selvey and I accepted our loss and proceeded to leave when his sister stopped us. I don’t remember how old she was. She gave us a long speech on how she was listening and wanted to join, a speech that I missed because my teenage self just couldn’t stop thinking about how attractive she was. Sarah was her name.

I’ve never considered myself a lucky kid. But on this day, my luck changed. As we were leaving, Evan’s cousin was pulling up. Another kid from my school was just a grade below me. His name was Austin, and this kid couldn’t stop smiling at the excitement of joining our team.

We arrived at the venue, a church surrounded by cornfields with a gymnasium attached to the side of it. The gym court was carpeted, with a running oval overlooking the court. There were bleachers set up on the backside of the court. We checked in with the lady wearing a lanyard. We told her of our lack of two players, for which she found volunteers—Matt and Julie. Eight teams represented four schools. We were the second team formed from Wapahani, and the other group was the jocks of our school, the baseball and basketball players joining forces for one purpose, to win.

The rules were simple, hit another player or catch a ball to eliminate the opposing team. For added intensity, there was a backboard rule; any time a team hit the backboard, the eliminated players could come back in. The bracket was

set on a giant dry-erase board, the national anthem was sung, and game time.

We were up first. Matt and Julie assured us they had our backs and wanted to win. The silver bleachers filled as our teams stood across from each other. The balls being used were small red foam with a plastic covering. They flew accurately for about ten feet but were unreliable after that. The ref blew the whistle, and we rushed forward to the balls sitting on the centerline. Within seconds, balls were flying, and team members were dropping but at a slower rate than the other team. Behind all that grinning, Austin was a talented player, followed by the blonde stranger, Matt, who joined our team. With their prowess, we won the first game. Our teamwork in the first game wasn't bad. Callouts on what other players should do were floating around us. Sometimes it got hard to hear with crowd noise.

Our sister team won easily, followed by an all-senior team and another team full of guys with cut-off sleeves. The sleeveless team was going to be our next opponent after a small intermission. The intermission consisted of a pastor; it was a church event, sharing some stories about Jesus, then a snack break of juice and cookies. Not sure why us being teenagers, there were juice boxes.

The next game was on—us versus the sleeveless kids. These kids were more vocal than the previous team. There was no strategy amongst themselves, and they were all shit talk. On wild throws, they retorted with, “You suck, you sissy.” A whistle blew, and it was go time. This team was better than the previous team, as their accuracy was on point. Selvey and Evan's sister, the less agile of our squad, were eliminated first. I managed to get an accurate throw to take out one of their players but was taken out by a two-on-one. Again it was down to Austin and Matt. The two of them against the remaining four. Even if the backboard got hit, my team was looking tired. Selvey breathed deeply, and Sarah had sweat rolling down her exhausted red face. And Julie, who volunteered to join, looked at her as if she was somewhere else.

Matt was hit in the shoulder, leaving just Austin, still grinning. I don't know how he did it. Four guys were throwing what seemed like twenty balls at him. He hurled that red dot into the backboard on the other side, allowing us to come back in. The sleeveless team drilled the backboard behind us out of fear or just plain dumb. It was back to six on six. Matt wiped out three with a second wind, with Sarah getting one and myself clearing out the remaining two.

Our sister team was up. This all-senior team was larger than them. Their teamwork was centered on great callouts and who should have a ball. Our sister team's game plan was to just throw the ball. There was no teamwork in throwing together. It was whoever got a ball that threw it. With this strategy, they were quickly defeated before they could hit the backboard.

Watching the match, the adrenaline crept in. I remember just thinking about playing in a dodgeball championship match, which made my hands shake, and I was sweating. This was the first time I would be in a sporting championship battle. I felt like, at this point, I was tired of participation. The senior team trotted

to the bench we were sitting at and wished us good luck. I could see on their faces how defeated they were.

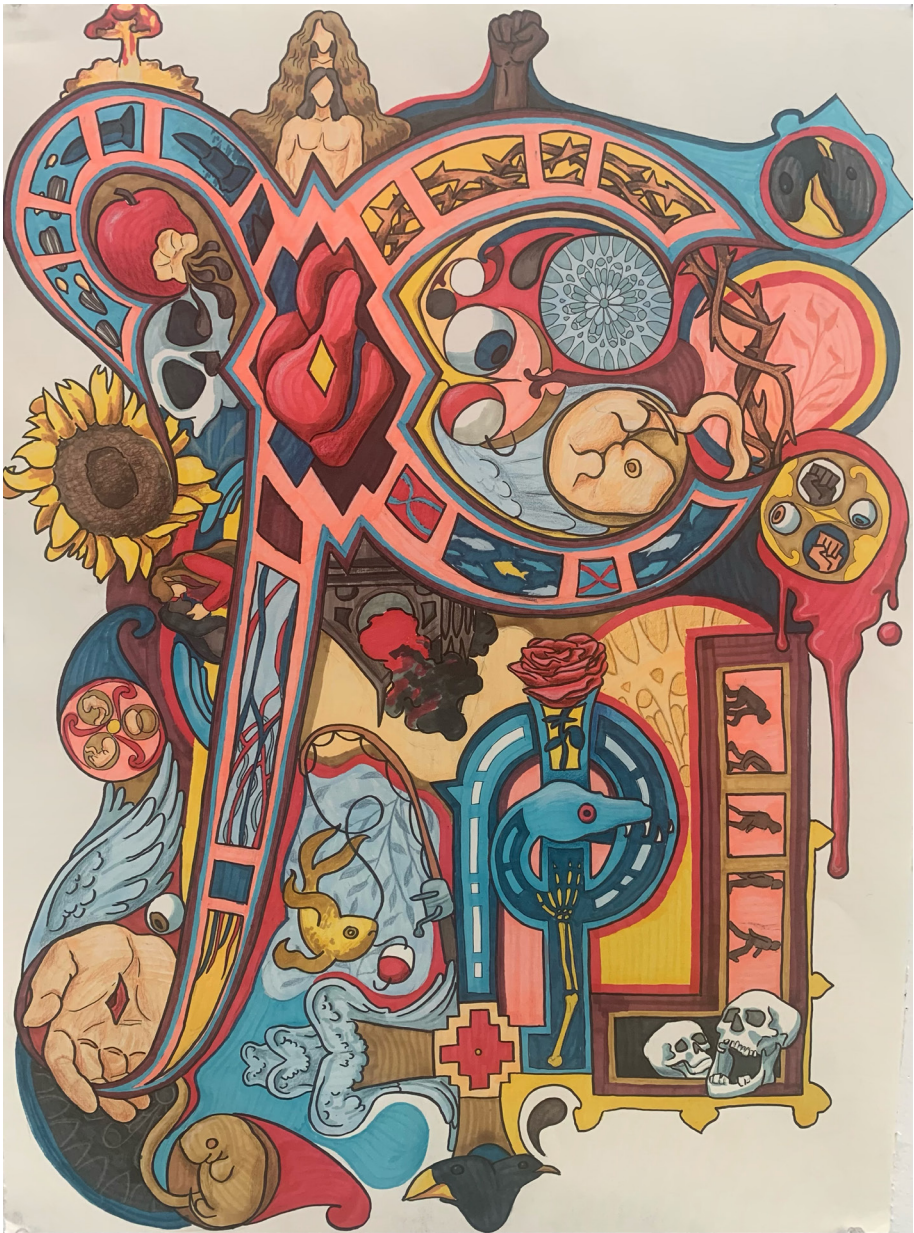
Either the gym became hot, or the adrenaline pulsed, and sweat soaked my clothes. I was becoming worried if I could throw a ball. The two teams lined up; the full senior team, I gathered, was from a school just north of our school. To this day, I wonder if those seniors were as nervous as I was. Were my other teammates' hands sweating? The whistle blew, and we charged. They charged. I imagined this is what a medieval fight would have looked like, with two lines opposing catapults hurling rocks.

It was even at first, if we lost one, obviously Selvey, we got one of theirs to counter. This jab-for-jab went on until there were two left on both teams, with the grinning Austin and Julie on ours. I was hit trying to catch a ball, something that's hard to do when they are that small. The seniors hit the backboard first, Austin drilling the backboard seconds later. I can remember the crowd roaring as both sides were filled to full.

The seniors must have learned of our secret weapon; they aimed for the grin and got it—their pitch-perfect callouts pointing who needed balls to get the job done. Luckily the blonde took out two before he was gone, followed by Selvey. The sister traded with one, followed by the brunette. That left a two-versus-one situation for me. I by no means was a flexible kid, with a six-foot build and two left feet. It felt like a puppeteer was pulling my limbs by strings when I dodged two shots and threw an accurate shot to eliminate one.

I remember freaking out. Time was almost like it was still. The last remaining player was wearing a multi-shade green shirt with the word TIGERS across the chest. Was it respect or luck? He didn't throw it when I was reaching for a ball. We stared at each other, and I didn't want to make the first move; I was as good as gone if I missed. He made the first move and threw. I remember that ball being accurate and fast, but somehow I dodged it. I sucked my gut in and curved my back, the ball whizzing by. He had no choice but to step forward to grab another ball. I threw mine. Taking no time to aim, I threw it. The ball flew, descending quickly until it hit him on his exposed shin and bounced off.

The gym erupted in cheers, and the court was filled with bodies. I was high-fiving kids I didn't even know. The moderator of the tournament gathered my team in the middle of the crowd. We were awarded a hundred-dollar check for winning, which didn't split six ways evenly, so I don't know why it was a hundred. Also, there was no trophy or plaque. Why have a tournament if you are not going to hand out a trophy?



- Best of Art -

## Where Was Jesus?

Danielle Harrell

Marker and colored pencil; 22"x30"

*Modernized illustration from the original Chi Rho page from the Book of Kells.*

## **Gardeners**

Lio Patrick

He sits with the storm—his only company. Around him, the humid air warms his bare arms and legs, although a gust of cold bursts through and ruffles his grimy T-shirt every few minutes. His long-gone ma’s clock strums inside the house, nailed just above the front door. The sun is invisible. Wind blows as if the whole world is sighing into his face. His fingernails scrape the wooden arms of his chair as he holds them tight, and he leans back as it rocks beneath him, nice and slow. Under the shifting weight, the floorboards cry. Rain comes down hard, unabashed, and endless.

The old man closes his eyes to hear the storm better. It’s not too far now. He knows it by the aches in his limbs and the thrumming of thunder in time with his heartbeat. Storms like this come through every June. They always have, at least for the seventy-six years he’s been around to witness them. But they’ve been getting worse for a couple years. Everyone that once was here is gone now. Bucky and Alma, Jodie, Muriel, his ma and pa, and Christopher—they all gave up on the creaky, broken house, and found better places to die. The house, and everything with it, is his sole responsibility. And it might just blow away someday in a storm like this. Maybe he’ll be inside when it happens. With the raging thunder getting closer, faster than his heart now, he wonders if today will be the day. He opens his eyes to see lightning tear the sky down the middle.

The wind rushes toward him, spewing cold droplets and ruffling his T-shirt again. This time it’s longer and more violent, as if it wants more than the shirt to move. He can picture the flood rolling right up to where he’s waiting, planted on his porch like one of the dead leafy things in the clay pots in the corner. Over the roof and gutters, torrents pour in thick curtains. He can’t see more than a few feet of his front yard even when the curtains are parted, but he knows that the grass is drowning. He would get up and do something, if there were something to do. All that planting and caring he did, wasted. He even bought a fertilizer in hopes that the green could be made greener. Instead the sky wants to make everything blue.

His earliest memory of thunder and rain like this is from when he was nine years old, in this same house. It is the farthest back he can go in his mind, and the image is like an old, water-warped photograph. He remembers the noise the clearest—thunder like God’s very own drums, lightning like the splitting of the universe into halves. The holy instruments of unforgiving hail and rain—weather like bullets, bearing judgment. He’d been convinced the world was ending. His ma and pa had taught him about Armageddon, so that even as a boy, he should have been able to recognize it.

He thought it was bad then. Now he just feels foolish. Foolish that he believed he could keep up a garden, foolish that he thought the house was really his, foolish that he imagined anything in the world was there to stay. There is nothing else to do; he sits in Jodie’s old chair, waiting for the storm to come take everything. Waiting for God to pull out the weeds.



# Screen Door Blues

Jessamine Coover

It's that time of year again,  
When I sleep with the door wide open.  
Sheets tossed to the foot of the bed, hoping  
for release from the fist of humidity.  
Clothing clings to me,  
    a second skin.  
Thick air fills my lungs to the brim and  
swamps all thoughts.  
    No work to be done,  
I ought to rejoice.  
Sneak down to the old pond,  
cut off my hair and change my name.  
Dance under those stars as  
    naked as I came into this world.  
It's summertime and I sleep with the  
screen door wide open.  
Left with nothing but time for hoping.

## Croissants

Mario Stone

I close my eyes and lick  
your sweetness from my lips,  
thinking of your powdered skin  
beneath my fingertips.

I wet my lips to taste you  
once more—and once again  
the yearning grasps my aching heart—  
once more would be a sin.

And so instead I write these words  
for you to always know...  
I savored every second twice  
to never let you go.

# **I fucked to love, but never made it**

Mario Stone

Her crying pulse heralds the chaotic  
Bellows of deeper thrash. I tear into  
Her heart and lick its length until my tongue blooms

Lush, bloodrose— our parting lips.  
Lust the crave, the crutch  
I grab, I clutch and push. To carry on

Is vanity— such endeavors in the name of love  
Are feats of self-deception,  
A felony of lips

Giving way to squandered breath, pleasure past—  
A thorn to pierce the supple mass  
And burn the skin I hold close.

## **On Plato and Humanity**

Payton Foster

I get caught in the throes of you so often  
That I forget what is me and what is you.  
Blurring occurs beneath layers of linen  
And under the dense cover that is night  
That makes us indistinguishable.  
I long to stay with you forever this way,  
Us two melding and becoming seamlessly one.  
Like what the ancient greeks thought to be the first humans.  
I think the gods would be jealous enough  
To want to split us in the end too.  
Which is maybe why even though we want to be one  
We will stay two.  
To respect the divinity that made us separate.  
Always longing to be whole again.

# December

Christopher Cassetty

Splendour off' is rare upon the Winter morn—  
    where hangs on low our Eve's deceitful fruit,  
and tears away the pall o' gloaming skies the moonly breast  
o' ensorcelled Selene, and thus am I remember'd  
well the dreary night so long ago; July warmth  
burn'd the midnight air, and wherefore blazed the Moon  
    to mock the dousèd Sun by sea repressèd,  
doth she wither embers unto Nyx's bleak December.

Whispers 'pon the parchment-glass the quill to horror:  
    the soft and gelid touch o' Winter's sooth;  
or e'er the comet-dust fell, Hypnos' nepenthe bless'd,  
beseem'd the starless morn the night I well remember.  
For were it without Selene's Endymion torture,  
'pon her Zeus's blessing to have undying youth,  
    would sleep be not the unfortunate egress  
from the moonlit nights o' Nyx's bleak December.

Philtres form'd from whisper'd words and winter's lore  
    are too the mind's sweet lullabies of youth;  
beware this tincture, brewed o' weeping skies' depression,  
melts the icy carapace with fierce inferno embers.  
'Fore, her ash, the lachryma-dust of flames, scorching  
Earth from the gelid burns o' melancholy gaze o' Moon,  
    was once the steam o' River Lethe's breath,  
borne to Earth to warm our Nyx's bleak December.

Tender is the Sun in waking from his torpor  
    when he descries the fiery lands bedewed,  
and wherefrom wept the winter skies, the morning crest o'  
Moon, and 'pon this sight, Selene doth scream in ghastly tremor.  
For were it without Selene's Endymion torture,  
'pon her Zeus's blessing to have undying youth,  
    would I need not the morning sultry death o'  
Moon, to sleep at ease in Nyx's bleak December.

# The Tilt of Me

Kat Scott

Have I wakened the grass  
these early mornings, before the dawn  
voices each bird's place in their canopies?  
It seems to bend louder underfoot now,  
a groaning that I've pulled back its covers,  
exposed each blade to cooler air  
than it took to bed.

Or do you think it's always awake?  
That it revels in its nudity  
regardless of light or air or fashion.  
No, in winter the grass sports its brown and tweed  
while ceasing to reach up, to climb  
steadily, to outgrow last year's shoes.

Sometimes the grass will join me, between my toes  
then my sheets. I won't be able to stay, to keep it  
warm and verdant. Instead, I'll slip away  
begin my day anew, as if it and I had never touched  
never slicked the dew upon our skin  
and while it was green sang together.  
But as the day grows tall and the grass goes cool,  
it shrugs on its winter coat, in the hopes that spring  
will come searching and find it there.



## Artists' Statements

**Christopher Cassetty** is a poet and technical writer from Plainfield, Indiana. He strives to revive traditional English poetry through a contemporary American looking glass. Often in his poems, he writes about his struggles with mental health in encrypted and enigmatic ways, often through the use of dichotomy, encryption, and allusion. His poetic muses are Edgar Allan Poe, Stephen Crane, and William Shakespeare.

On "A Midnight Heartbreak": A fictional poem about the tribulations of a werewolf speaker, this is actually based on a true event, wherein the author felt divided by his internal and external selves and projected his woes onto a speaker with a metaphorically broken heart.

On "coruscations": This poem recounts the speaker's recollection of several memorable dreams, all which seemingly have significance in the speaker's life but in enigmatic and mystical ways. The weight of a single dream is examined in this poem by cross-analyzing dreams and their connections to reality.

On "December": This poem, a pair to his earlier poem "July," pontificates upon the speaker's ardent emotions about the moon, lamenting that the Moon's melancholic beauty prevents him from adequate sleep. The speaker compares himself in this case to Endymion, the forced lover of Greek Goddess Selene.

On "Demeter's Nectarine": This poem recounts the myth of the abduction of Persephone in a manner that serves as an extended metaphor for the author's own depression, highlighting how quickly his mood could shift because of his disorder.

On "Unnamed Poem 6": One of the author's many unnamed poems, specifically number 6, this was written during a depressive episode shortly before the author's trip to a behavioral hospital. The speaker pleads with reality to make his sadness end, all while feeling encouraged by the morose air of the moon to die.

**Louisa Coello** is a senior at the Herron School of Art and Design, earning her Bachelor's in Drawing and Illustration. She hopes to work in children's book illustration, as well as freelance, once she graduates in May.

On "The Orchard Floor": Made with gouache and white ink on paper, this is a 3"x5", this is a drawing of a character named Martin in the simple beauty of a warm fall afternoon in an apple orchard.

**Jessamine Coovert** is a sophomore studying anthropology. They began writing in high school and were published in *The Polk Street Review* in Noblesville. Their plan is to write part-time while attending graduate school. As an Indiana native, they enjoy visiting local coffee shops and antique stores.



**Anna Corso** is a multi-media artist studying Art Education at the Herron School of Art and Design. Between fourteen years of classical ballet training and a knack for picking up almost every art medium at some point, it's safe to say that their life revolves around art. Recently, they have thoroughly enjoyed exploring unconventional perspectives of their subjects.

On "All I See is Red": This piece was the artist's first oil painting, painted in response to the pain the artist felt while learning about the wrongs of the US Military.

On "Point Five": This piece is a self-portrait taken in 0.5 lens, with the goal of it being a very unattractive picture of Anna. Point Five showcases that even if you have big glasses, chapped lips, and crooked teeth, you can still be cool.

**Cara David** is an artist from South-Central Pennsylvania. She is pursuing her BFA in Integrative Studio Practice- Drawing/Illustration and Printmaking at Herron School of Art and Design (IUPUI) and working at the Indianapolis Zoo. David's art is influenced by wildlife and nature and her interest in current environmental issues.

On "Technology": Wildlife and nature have always been extremely important to her, so environmental issues carry the extra weight of deciding the future of the places and animals that she values so much. This piece in particular is a creative illustration of a new piece of technology that improves the efficiency of pumps that pull methane out of landfills and turn it into electricity instead of allowing it to go directly into our atmosphere, where it would add to the effects of climate change. It is an 11"x17" alcohol marker drawing.

**Payton Foster** is a queer literature student and bibliophile. When she's not reading at home with her cat, she is working in her bookstore job or spending time with her siblings. Her biggest inspiration is all the women in her life that inspire her to be more creative every day.

**Anthony Gonzalez** is an Electrical Engineering student at IUPUI. He enjoys cooking, reading, and listening to music while he writes. He is also currently working on a fantasy novel in his limited free time.

**Nicholas "Nick" Gross** is a junior undergraduate student at IUPUI. He is pursuing two BA degrees, one in English (concentration in Literature) and one in History, respectively, as well as a minor in Creative Writing. He may pursue a graduate MFA in Creative Writing in the future but is undecided at the time of writing this. He plans to begin a career in secondary education upon graduating from IUPUI, as well as traveling and writing during summers. He enjoys dogs, cold-brew coffee, and the outdoors.

**Danielle Harrell** is a junior at Herron studying Drawing and Illustration.

On “Dissociation”: She reflected on her recent experiences with the pandemic, expressing the loneliness of the digital age versus the backdrop of a world falling apart.

On “Where Was Jesus?”: Her piece modernizes the Chi Rho page from the *Book of Kells*, asking the question, “Where was Jesus?” in the midst of issues like war, pro-life versus pro-choice, evolution versus creation, and other such controversies.

**Nicole Hay** is a second year at Herron School of Art and Design, pursuing a major in VCD, but she enjoys illustration in their spare time.

**Mariah Ivey** is a poet, musician, and scholar living and working in Indianapolis, Indiana. She also is a current graduate student at IUPUI, completing an English MA program. Inspired by language and its transformative power, Mariah continues to use her work as a catalyst for reimagining Black futurity, joy, and togetherness through the preservation of Black thought and stories.

**Kyle Jennings** is a sophomore. He plans on getting a creative writing major. He started writing in middle school, and what started off as fan fiction turned into fiction. He enjoys writing stories for Dungeons and Dragons campaigns.

**Caroline Kridle** is a senior at Herron School of Art and Design. She’s a painter and illustrator, and she combines the two disciplines to make narrative illustrative paintings about psychology and personal experiences, often using bright expressive colors and strange proportions to emphasize certain feelings. She likes cats, philosophizing, mismatched socks, and lemons.

On “Bar in Mexico”: This is a painting of a bar/venue she visited in Ajijic, Mexico. She was going for realism; she wanted to capture how bright, loud, and unique the experience of being there was. The reference photo was taken during a quick pause while the musicians took a break from playing, but the room was still buzzing with energy.

**Nathan Marquam** is an English master’s student in his last semester at IUPUI. Having also done his bachelor’s in English at IUPUI, Nathan has been a proud member of the IUPUI community for six years. After graduation, Nathan hopes to continue working on his current passion project, a series of sonnets written in conversation with various Marxian scholars.

**Corlan McCollum** is a real human being from Pittsboro, Indiana.

**Kayla McVeigh** was born and raised on the Kenai Peninsula in Alaska. She is studying linguistics with the goal of working in language conservation.

**Lio Patrick** is a fiction writer and all-around word enthusiast. He's a senior majoring in literature, and he still knows very little about anything. Most of the time, he's either thinking about sad things, laughing at funny things, or collecting recipes. He hopes you're taking care.

**Kat Scott** is a current English MA graduate student from Indianapolis, Indiana with an undergraduate BFA in Illustration from Savannah College of Art and Design. Her work is influenced by the natural world around her and questions what it means to both female and 'human' in the world today. She is influenced by writers who focus on post-modernism and feminism mixed with the intimately confessional.

**Alex T. Spurling** is in his senior year at IUPUI, and he is double-majoring in English and Philosophy. Alex enjoys the outdoors and traveling, and he anticipates visiting Europe after graduating in the spring.

**Mario Stone** loves you even when you don't love yourself.

**Raeya Wilhelm** is a seventeen-year-old writer and artist. She enjoys writing books and poetry in her free time, as well as watching horror movies, studying mythology, and spending time with those she loves.

On "Raven Mocker": This painting is a rendition of a Raven Mocker—a type of witch from Native American mythology.

**Sarah Wulf** is a junior at IUPUI. She majors in both English and History. She likes reading, writing, and trying new foods. Sarah lives in Greenwood, IN with her parents, sister, and an old dog.

On "The Way the Money Goes": She got the idea for her story after seeing mortgage, crypto, and banking ads on the backs of her fortunes and noticing that, more often than not, her fortune would be about getting money. To her, it highlighted how much of her life she spent being sold something.

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