



*genesis*  
*literary & art magazine*



# genesis

*literary & art magazine*

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# Letter from the Editors

Our magazine has represented the lives and perspectives of our students since it originated in 1972. This issue especially delves into the wide range of identities that are present here at IUPUI. Alongside pieces of personal reflection are other works that center on feelings of nostalgia for what once was, and hope for what is possible in the future. Art decorates the magazine and amplifies these present messages to incorporate existence itself. All the contributions in this issue help define what it means to be human and in doing so an impression finds its way into each reader's heart.

We are honored to present the 2024 issue of *genesis*.

Thank you to all of our wonderful staff members who spent countless hours reviewing submissions and sharing their thoughts in order to create this magazine. Thank you to Sarah Layden, our faculty advisor, for all of her guidance and support as we learned how to step into the role of Managing Editors. Thank you to all of our talented and brave contributors who willingly shared their art and writing with us. We would be nothing without your creativity. Finally, thank you to the friends of *genesis* and to our readers. We hope you enjoy this year's issue!

Bailey Evans & Eli Witham  
*Managing Editors*

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## Do you still go down to Cicero Creek?

*Maggie Hoppel*

Do you still roll up your skinny jeans  
into wobbly capris and trundle down the hill  
on the rickety stairs your dad built in the 90s?  
Do you still cling to the tree trunks as you go?  
And when you get down there,  
crouching on the rocks by the cloudy water  
do you press your palm to the gravel beneath the stream?  
Do you still wade in to your knees and back out  
to the U-shaped shore? Do you leave footprints?  
Do you dig up garter snakes? Do you get leeches  
and laugh secrets into discarded Diet Coke cans?  
Is anyone beside you to hear them?  
Do you stuff your pockets with sparkly rocks  
your mom won't begrudge past the porch?  
And if we went back—I'll be home  
this summer—do you think we could strap on our crocs  
and whittle away the afternoon pretending  
to be something more than ourselves?  
I'll call you as I ring the doorbell, like always,  
just to hear your sock feet thump to the threshold  
on the other side.



## **Opossum Lake**

Cara David

*11" x 14" Digital Illustration*

# Cicadas

*Anna Turgeon*

Background noise takes center stage  
When it's least desired.

I think I'm hard of hearing  
*(is it hereditary?)*  
Because I can't hear myself think tonight.  
This cicada crowd is drowning out my words  
And silencing my memories.  
The din of dusk drones on and crescendos with my empathy.  
A swell of understanding, a glimpse of her world.

I think I'm hard of hearing  
Because I can barely hear you tonight.  
Recollections of you in this house conflate into  
An amalgam of hushed tones just out of earshot.  
Even my grief: it merely whispers here somehow.  
The cicadas are out tonight, grandma...  
Please, come closer, speak louder.

# Miles Per Minute

*Ruthie Barakat*

She told everyone – whether they were listening or not – about how she couldn't wait to get out of there. She had decided a while back that she would do more than dream about her new life that awaited her in the city. She would train, and she would escape.

Along her quiet country road, she'd kick up dust with the turning wheels of her more-rusty-than-red bicycle. Everyday she would trek down the bumpy gravel driveway to become one with the long yellow dashes on the road. She would shoot at lightspeed towards the city, the dashes blending into one continuous line. Her blue and yellow striped shirt whipped in the wind, clinging to her sweaty shoulders. She was sure she was moving so quickly, biking so fiercely, that her shirt must have looked green to the onlookers lounging on their porches. Old Mrs. Thomas who brought her dinners, Dr. Greene who had explained what a period was, Sheriff Bill who brought Daddy home sometimes and other times took him away.

Sometimes she could hear someone's yell getting lost in the wind behind her. Asking where the hell she was going in all that rush, or asking about Daddy. She didn't have time to answer any of them. She knew she would need to reach Indianapolis before anyone could realize she was gone. Breathing more deeply the more rapidly she turned the disintegrating pedals, focusing harder to ensure she would make it. A mere 32 miles stood between her hometown and the city where her aunt lived.

Every day she saw the same sights, timing the seconds between each one. She always held her breath biking past the cemetery and the peeling blue barn. It wasn't quite haunted but she'd spent enough time disappearing there that it may as well have been. She went to that barn, climbed up to the loft where the windows were permanently open and would watch the sun finish setting. But that was only when Daddy had a bad day, and he didn't always have those.

There were some nights when he plodded through the doorway merrily, leaning against the dark floral wallpaper, with rosy cheeks. He would grumble at her to make him a G&T while he made his way over to the record player Mama had left behind. Thumbing through a stack of vinyls, he shouted that it was time for her to rack up the goddamn pool table. And those were the good nights at home. She did worry though. About what Daddy would do when he eventually smashed his last highball glass – Daddy had an affinity for crushing objects against the basement's peeling wood paneling, especially when he sunk the 8 ball in a pocket too soon. When that finally happened, she worried about the suddenly-shortened lifespan of the beautiful green-tinted juice glasses that were also left behind by Mama.

School was almost out and the pool would soon open up, transitioning the small town into another summer. It was almost June, and the Summer Solstice was to be the day. The longest day of the year. She would need every second of that day to get to the rest of her life. To her Aunt in the city. She hadn't seen her in a while – a long time it felt like – but she knew her Aunt would be okay with her showing up. She had told her so the last time she came to visit.

“You been doin’ okay, sweetie?” Aunt Emmy had asked, eyeballing Daddy from across the room. He had been stumbling more than usual but cursing more quietly. She'd processed the question as she'd rushed over to pick up the newspaper that had fluttered to the ground, and responded habitually.

“We're all okay, he's always like this.”

Her Aunt had nodded her head with hesitation, as if she could really understand.

“Mmm,” she'd continued, “alright, honey. If you ever need anything you just call now. I can be here in no time. I know things have been different lately – hell, I'm not even sure what things were like before. But you're not alone, hear me?”

She had responded by giving her aunt a hug, thankful to have been so close to a warm, perfumed body. She'd wanted to say so, she wanted to thank her, but all she could do was cry into the hem of her aunt's faux fur jacket which smelled a little bit like Mama. She had figured her Aunt just felt bad for her. Aunt Emmy's sister was the one who left her daughter behind, dooming her to a life of loneliness in a loudness that always surrounded her.

“Reckon you oughta be headed back to all those lights now, huh Emmy?” Her father had spat the words out like venom. The slurring of his words had seemed to scatter their meaning.

“Why don't you sit down, Stu?”

The way her Aunt had challenged Daddy made her tense up. Did she not realize she couldn't talk to Daddy like that? Mama had known. She had been reminded lotsa times. She had watched Mama beg Daddy to stop repeatedly, to put down the bottle, but he never would.

She knew Aunt Emmy wasn't prepared for his wrath, how could she be? Aunt Emmy didn't know what she knew, what she'd seen. She'd pleaded with her aunt, for both of their sakes.

“Please, it's fine. He don't mean it, Aunt Emmy. He just gets this way sometimes.”

She had glared at Daddy with daggers while she'd spoke.

“Nobody should get this way, ever.”

Then Daddy had gone ahead and proceeded to get that way. His voice had carried over the endless cornfields. The last surviving plates from the green-tinted set had met their untimely demise. Mama’d only been gone a couple weeks and Daddy had already finished off the salad bowls, too.

She had always swept up the gleaming shards, watched Daddy leave or pass out, then she would take off on two wheels that shook as she picked up speed. But that time Daddy hadn’t passed out and instead of him leaving, Sheriff Bill had shown up.

At the height of Daddy’s hollering, Aunt Emmy had calmly walked to the kitchen and dialed the police. By the time he’d known she had done this, Sheriff Bill had already been knocking on the front door, interrupting Daddy’s rage. They’d then stood and watched Daddy do what he always did best: lie. Aunt Emmy had watched as Daddy had assured the Sheriff that, like she had told her aunt, everything was fine.

As she biked down roads that only she knew about, she contemplated the idea that she was a liar just like her Daddy. She should have said everything wasn’t okay, that Aunt Emmy could save her – had to save her – that Sheriff Bill should take her away from Daddy.

But she hadn’t. She was afraid. She was afraid of Daddy and she was also afraid of leaving Daddy. Daddy, who Mama had already left, who was still there for her. She remembered how Mama had looked at her the night she crept past her bedroom to the front door. She had looked in at her wide-eyed child and shook her head with impending repentance. She had said goodbye, Babygirl and told her to take care of herself and then added Daddy, too. She wished every day she had asked to go with Mama. But she hadn’t. So after Sheriff Bill’s cop car and Aunt Emmy’s Buick had galumphed out of the gravel driveway, Daddy had cut the phone line so nobody could call 911 anymore.

Eventually the days got warmer and she got stronger, angrier, fueled by the idea of burying her face into one of Aunt Emmy’s soft, flowy sundresses and inhaling deeply. She prepared herself for salvation every day, smelling the sweet country air mixed with the scent of diesel as she got closer and closer to the city. But each time the skyline was about to appear, she turned around, and headed back to Daddy with lead legs.

But not for much longer. This time she wouldn’t look back.

She picked up her aluminum chariot from the overgrown grass in the front yard, hearing its pieces squeaking and rotating into place. Gears, chains, handlebars. Everything was set, her long awaited liberation finally underway. She gathered dust flying down the driveway, it followed her as she turned onto the infinitely stretching state road. The dust swirled around her as she blew past

forgotten stop signs, it provided her with a sooty cloak as she whizzed past the Sheriff station. Through the dust, she pictured the Indianapolis skyline opening up for her. She imagined the magnificent cluster of skyscrapers welcoming her home. She could hear the gentleness of Aunt Emmy's voice cradled between the hum of cars stuck in traffic and the ambience of the nightly talk radio.

The sun was setting at her back, soft pinks and purples painting the sky overhead. For the past few hours there had been no noise. No sounds other than her steady breath and the soothing clank of her bike chains. Slicing through her soundless bubble of triumph, on and immediately off, was the quick flip of a siren. Sweating and breathing heavily, she pedaled faster. She pedaled faster than she ever had, fast enough to get clear across the country if she wanted. She was almost there. The car pulled up slowly next to her – not even breaking a sweat to match her fervid pace.

“Hey kiddo,” Sheriff Bill said, “I figured you’d be heading this way.”

# The Dahlia That Withered Away

*Tomislav Kraljic*

the sable ragged curtains hang  
onto the stained metal grommets  
obscuring the clear windowpane  
that breathes life  
into this somber room.

slouched over  
on the crooked oak table  
like a dahlia shriveling  
as it weeps for water.  
his chin meets his breast  
as his cold eyes stare  
into the dark glass of liquor.

with his callous hands  
tightly wrapped around,  
he taps the glass with his  
chewed and chipped fingernails.  
he straightens his bowed back  
and takes another swig and gulp  
until there is no more left  
of him.

just like the dahlia  
that withered away  
as it wept for help  
so did he.





## **Dripping Flowers**

MyKenzi Wells

*Digital Photography*

# The Fan

*Emily Hostettler*

The summers blend together now. The years slip from memory. My mother hated bug spray. I remember that much. I'll never forget the fan in my bedroom window. It didn't help on humid nights. The breeze always failed to find the bottom bunk. But its hum held my secrets. And if I listened closely, I could hear the giggles of ghost stories and apologies from long, water-logged days. I told my cousin, Sarah, there were eels in the lake that day. It was a harmless prank. But that fan huffed a pattern all night. A constant drone. Sleep dodged me.

The next night was cooler. Or maybe it was the next summer. The fan masked the sound of my grandmother stumbling into my bedroom. Sarah and I woke to the beacon of a flashlight. I was hit with a burst of chilly air as soon as I stood. She spoke of an intruder, a large spider on the center of her sofa bed in the living room.

“Have any clean sheets?” she asked.

We quietly followed her and stood in horror at the sight of a doused sheet and a freshly used can of bug spray. It smelled as if someone mistook a can of deet for a can of room freshener.

“I hope it won't wake your mother.” Grandma stated what we were all thinking.

I glanced toward the sound of heavy snoring down the hall.

I whispered, “Stay here. I'll get everything we need.” I meant it, too.

The cabin had a soul of its own after dusk. And I knew every corner. I had extensive experience in undetected galivanting. I took the mission seriously. I returned with a fresh sheet and detergent.

Terror stole our breaths when the sounds of my snoring mother stopped for a moment, yielding to the faint sounds of the fan. We stood, frozen, until the snoring gradually continued. We laughed, small at first, but it spread like the water on the bedsheet as we washed it in the sink. We kept quiet as we snuck out to drape the sheet on the line to dry. We were hushed enough to hear that familiar hum from my window, barely audible under the cacophony of katydids. I came back into my room and stood in front of the fan, warm with stifled laughter. And then the blades lulled me to sleep.

# Hurricane St. Agatha through the Eyes of a Coastal Florida Timeshare Purchased through a Costco Membership circa 2017

*Eliza Surdzial*

Like the Mother Mary mourning the loss  
of her flesh, waves crashed onto  
the mainland. A flood of holy water  
yanking palm trees by their ponytails,  
slamming through the front doors,  
clawing at its walls.

A house once the top prize  
on the top pedestal, abandoned  
at the tingle of hair standing up  
on the back of one's neck.

Family photos with scribbled-out smiles,  
blurry faces. The salt  
as sweet as sugar  
washing away all traces of debris.

Deteriorated paint and damaged wallpaper  
drooping half-way down the  
wall, scattered lilies blooming,  
breathing in the water.

A table on two legs balancing rose-colored glassware  
surrendering to its knees. Water  
trickling out to return to  
its ocean womb. Damp  
wooden floorboards erasing  
scratches and scuffs from shoes.

Underneath  
the chipped pink paint  
and the smoke-brown wallpaper  
and fist-sized holes,  
a blank canvas of drywall awoke  
like Aphrodite from the sea—  
clean. No more traces of tears,  
cracks, or fingerprints to see.

The home's skin shed like a snake's  
with every scratch and blue bruise  
carried away.

A shredded self-portrait sewed together  
with heartstrings and saltwater  
paper mâché paste revealed itself.

Torn but familiar,

    wrinkled but in-focus—

a puzzle not with

missing pieces but with a revised

reflection overlaid

that's clean

    and free

        and new.

# Homecoming

Kate Weber

There is no prison sentence harder to stomach than having to move back in with your parents at twenty-nine. But isn't that the point of prison? To punish, to be quarantined from the rest of decent society while you learn your lesson? Maybe it's what she deserves – after all, she chose to try and outrun this place, it would make sense that her punishment for fucking up her fresh start would be to return to square one.

Still, it's unfair to call her homecoming a prison sentence, even if that's how it feels. There are reasons she's back – filing for divorce and your father's cancer becoming terminal in the same week would be enough to drive anyone back home. And so she's come back, with her head hung low over the steering wheel and tail between her legs.

The tiny main street almost looks like the backwater hick town Kit remembers – bright storefronts that have been molding since the 60s, vandalism on the stop signs, unattended kids walking down the middle of the street. She doesn't recognize any of the kids though, and doesn't know who's driving which car, and the snow lands a little differently on the curb now. Still, it's the same kind of cold judgment in the air as when she left, the same harsh Indiana winter, the same chill deep in her bones.

She goes to the new grocery store in town – a big chain with giant block lettering, cluttered aisles, and a proper produce section. She weaves up and down the aisles, grabbing canned food and packaged dinners to cover up the appalling amount of liquor in her cart. A raincloud follows her around the store as she shops – disapproving glares from strangers burn holes in the back of her head as she moves, winter hat pulled down low. The kid at the counter rings her up with huge eyes, almost like he's seeing a ghost, and he may as well have.

The phantom glares follow her through the parking lot, bolstered by whispers as she weaves through the cars. Something is intoxicating about the anonymity of a new city where no one knows who she really is, where it doesn't matter, where the name *Kit Graves* fades into the background and ceases to exist to everyone around her. But here, it feels like quitting that freedom cold turkey. The older people remember her, the ones her age look right through her. They all know why she's back, all taken part in flinging rumors of her personal failure around behind her back. She can practically picture the church luncheons, the late Fridays down at the Thirsty Cow, the snickers and endless choruses of *bless her heart* from her former classmates. If he was here, Jack would shake his head and insist she was just hyper-aware, that sometimes a marriage just *fails*, that none of them judge her for putting off the visits to her dying father, and the most infuriating part of that is that he'd be *right* and it wouldn't change a damn thing about how she feels.

The parking lot goes eerily silent as freezing rain starts falling and she hurriedly loads her trunk. Cars zoom past on the street, pushing muddy slush into the dead grass just beyond the curb. She slams the trunk closed, flakes of rust falling to her feet, and is turning around to push the cart back to the corral when she sees him.

He's old now, which is the first thing she notices. Old might be a harsh word for it – maybe he isn't old, maybe he's just thirty. He's got faint crow's feet, traces of a life spent smiling without her. His hair, now salt-and-pepper, falls into his eyes the way it always has. He's wearing a blue button-up with a dark red tie. She's sure that if she gets close enough, she'll find his hands covered in papercuts and ink stains – no doubt with a wedding ring around his finger.

Even from across the lot, he looks happy.

“Ben!” She calls, her mouth faster than her mind. She's glued to the cement as he whips around and squints at her. His face is a mask of confusion for long enough for her mind to realize what she just did, and then his eyes open wide with realization.

“Kit?”

He says her name like a slur, his squint sharp as a knife. She internally groans, cursing her mouth for betraying her. They start the awkward walk toward each other, shuffling feet and heads bent against the rain. They meet in the middle, both of them all awkward hugs and forced laughs as they take in the effect the years have had on their faces. She wonders vaguely how she looks to him now, with her college hoodie and already graying hair. Proof of a life lived without him.

“You're old!” She giggles like a teenager, overwhelmed with the sight of him, the smell of him, the way his chest is still so broad, the way seeing him feels like going home and being locked in a cell all at once.

“You are too!” He laughs, absentmindedly brushing her hair from her face. “Miss Big Scientist, why on earth are you back here?”

“Just back for the holidays, I only got in last night, I wasn't expecting to see you so soon,” she lies, intoxicated with the friendly ignorance of old friends. It almost feels like they've spoken at some point since she skipped town – they haven't.

Oh *Jesus*, they're just old friends now, aren't they? But then, is it possible to still be friends? Perhaps it would be more appropriate to call him a partner in crime after all is said and done, but then, usually, you *like* your partner in crime.

“How long are you in town? Christ, it's been *ages*. You still at the old house on 17?” He's still shocked, face as pale as the kid at the register. She realizes she

hasn't touched him since the night of the accident, and hasn't heard his voice in a decade.

"Yeah, you know how my folks are, too stubborn to admit they need help looking after the house and yard – the basement flooded last Spring and dad's been too sick to clean and fix it properly, so, you know, I have my work cut out for me –"

She can't stop herself from rambling, but Ben looks like he's clinging to every word. His eyes are hungry, pushing and pulling her away all at once. She wonders if he's also looking at her through rose-colored glasses right now, wonders how long until they come off and he looks at her with the hatred she deserves.

"And how's he doing, by the way? Warren, I mean, he hasn't been coming to church or anything lately."

She feels her face flicker at that and curses the way her body starts chewing on the inside of her cheek, completely ignorant of her brain's instructions. Grant, her brother, called her with the first diagnosis about six months ago. *Stage three, staying hopeful*. And then the fatigue and treatments started and now...well, the man's a shell. A ghost, waiting to die.

"He's fine. Doing freelance repairs in the meantime."

She cringes as she says it. *In the meantime* is such a crude way to say *while he's waiting to die of brain cancer*. Ben nods sympathetically, though, and they fall silent, standing a few feet apart. For a second her heart leaps into her throat with nostalgia. Her mind floods with memories of him driving too fast down country roads, awkward silence drowning them both in the car as they stumble through conversations that feel way too grown-up for them to be having.

"What have you been up to?" She asks quickly before he can turn away. He closes the trunk of the car and lets his hands rest on his hips as he leans against it, looking at his feet. He runs a hand through his hair as he talks.

"Just busy ending up like my parents, you know how it is for us townies."

She nods, eyes still fixed on the ring on his finger. Her runaway mouth starts moving before she can stop it.

"You're married?" She manages to ask without her voice breaking, a feat she'd deemed impossible years ago. When Grant called her with the news, she spent hours crying over it, sick to her stomach with disappointment and fighting the urge to drive back to Hythe and apologize to him, sobbing on the moldy couch in her apartment while Jack fussed over her, absolutely clueless and unable to understand why it hurt.

"What are you so upset about?" Grant had asked over the phone, voice gentle.

“You weren’t going to come back for him. You know that.”

But in the parking lot, the stupid, entitled teenage part of her mind starts nagging at her. *You came back, see? You came back. Why is he still married? You came back!*

Ben looks at his hand as if he’d forgotten he has a ring on, a faint smile tugging at the corners of his lips. “Yeah, back in ‘91. God, that sounds like forever ago, doesn’t it?”

She shrugs, doing her best to smile at him. Some of it’s genuine, most of it is, *she swears*, and logically she knows she has absolutely no claim to him, but she can’t help the small sinking feeling in her chest.

“That’s good, I’m really happy for you. You deserve to be happy.”

She doesn’t realize she’s quoting herself until his face flickers slightly, but only for a fraction of a second. He brushes it off, though, so quickly she wonders if she made it up.

“What about you?” His eyes narrow. “Anyone managed to tame you, yet?”

She shivers slightly, either from the January wind or from his implication that she is and always was some kind of wild animal.

“Briefly,” she breathes. “Didn’t work out. You know me.”

It’s not the rehearsed statement they’d agreed on when Jack told her he was done. It’s not even close, it leaves out the endless fighting, lying for no reason, and silent treatments. Nobody wants to hear about all of that, though, and Ben would probably just hate her more for her handling of it, anyway. She can practically hear his voice, somewhere between sad and cruel, *he was too good for you anyway*.

They stand for a few more minutes, parking lot slush seeping into her tennis shoes. She fiddles with the pack of cigarettes in her pocket and wonders if Ben still smokes. He used to, fat clouds pouring from his lips and calloused fingers twirling joints and cigarettes as if they were drumsticks in Tommy Lee’s hands. A voice in the back of her brain pipes up, *Jack hates it when you smoke, you know you should quit*. She brushes it off and desperately searches for something to talk about. Ben fiddles with his ring, looking absentminded. A small, spiteful part of Kit hopes he’s just as lost as she is.

They stand in uncomfortable silence until a woman gets into the car next to Ben’s – she stares at them, blinking confusedly. Kit doesn’t recognize her, but Ben gives her a small smile. It feels a bit like being stabbed to see him be polite, like the butterflies she used to feel suddenly grew razor blades for wings.



Ben looks away from her as the mystery woman backs out of her spot. Kit can't breathe.

"I should go," he's saying, digging his keys from his pocket. The metallic jingle echoes around the parking lot, the loudest sound in her ears. "It was nice to see you, though. I missed you."

"Missed you too, Ben." She sighs, turning away. She can picture him in her head, opening and closing his mouth as though he has something else to say. She wants him to have no choice but to leave without a word to anyone, without her forgiveness. She wants to haunt him exactly as he's haunted her all these years. Wants him to jump at strangers in gas stations, dial her number and hang up, and drive past her house on the way home from work.

Before she can even register what she's doing, she's in her car again. David Bowie plays over the broken radio, static buzzing with his voice and speakers shuttering with the bass. Again, she finds herself driving away from him, confused and stupid.

She turns left out of the lot and starts the familiar route back to the blue house on 17, finally returning home with just as much hurt and regret as she had when she left.

# pondering a black girl's\* suicide

*Saloni Dixon*

~~don't tell nobody~~ she's dancing on beer cans  
and shingles and bones ~~don't tell a soul~~  
~~have we gone crazy? are we even whole?~~  
she's been dead ~~so long~~ closed in silence  
sky laid on her like a million men go on in  
wind let her be born she hasn't seen stars  
~~only branded a whore.~~

\* today, my mouth is a tomb of the things  
white people forget. Beneath the sky a garden blue  
stalks my name I forget this kind of fire strikes  
black bodies into shit Oh friends wild  
until we are free set us afire again.

# Windsor and Newtown Galeria Acrylic

*Elizabeth Terhorst*

When I look in the mirror, I see myself covered in paint.

Red

Around my neck  
From when I was thirteen.

Pink

Caressing my cheek  
From age sixteen.

Purple

Blossoming in the crook  
Of my eighteen-year-old elbow.

Blue

Slapped across my back  
From times I was too young to remember.

It sticks to my clothes.

It gets matted in my hair.

Green clumps

Hang off my split ends,  
Going on six years old.

Orange peels off my ankle

In the shape of  
My middle school cast.

It stains my bed,

My walls,  
The trunk of my car.

Yellow and gold cover every inch of that polyester interior.

I see the paint in

Every. Single. Photo.

The rainbow flashes  
Through my camera roll  
Every time I open the damn app.

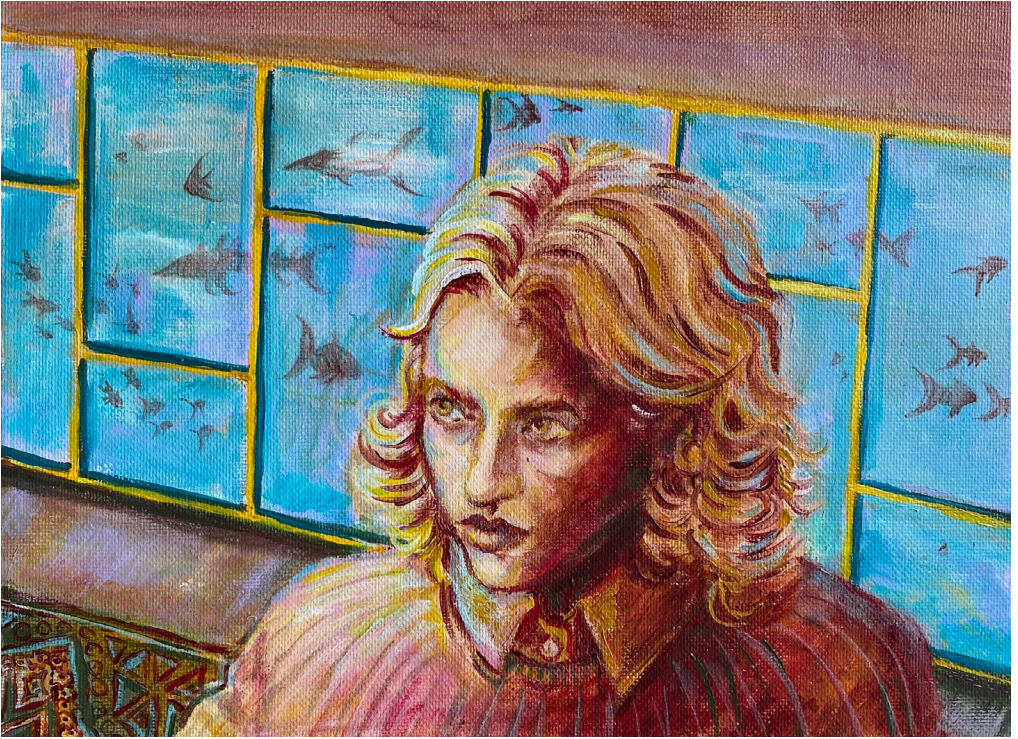
I scrub.  
And scrub.  
And scrub.  
And scrub.

I can never see past the paint.

When I look in the mirror, I see myself covered in paint.

But, I'm starting to think  
That's how other people see themselves, too.

That's why no one comments on the palettes I leave behind, the ones on every  
seat.



## **The Mystery**

Jordan Winslow

*9" x 12" Acrylic Painting*

*Your Word burned the rope from my throat,  
so, too, the cloaks of shadows past.  
Your Word held lips to my wrists where my teeth used to be,  
and held in my arms divinity. Your hands  
placed on my feet her little feet,  
her hands clasped with mine – A flower  
divine – mornings of bouquets of kisses,*

*Amor*

you loved to breathe in my every exhale,  
and your hands on my back, tracing with nails  
soothing me coupled with rapture.  
“Me gusta complacerte” – me encantó escucharte  
cantar, acariciarte y

“Por favor”

despertarme bajo tus miles de besos  
sobre mi rostro – Lagrimas compartidas,  
más que una, que dos... más que tres veces...  
Calmaste mis penas y me partiste en dos.

Dios

sabe lo que hizo, a escondidos exquisito  
tapándome los ojos a lo que tan claro sentí...  
Si no jamás te hubiese dejado así – Sin letra, sin voz  
estaría muriendo, cargando tormentas  
clavados en mi pecho con cada palabra no dicha –  
Te lo diré... pues te digo que sí, que sí te mentí  
una y sólo una vez más por el miedo...  
La verdad es que sí... que sí... que sí fue

por ti que me

rasgué

in two

in two

arrancando de mi

corazón

la rosa que entre lágrimas leíste ...

Y que sí

que sí

que sí lo pensé...

en un futuro los dos,

el comenzar de un cuento,

el cuento sin fin

# Ode to my Pilot G-2 07 pen

*Ashley Wilson*

My lovesick knuckles creak  
as they clutch you,  
for fear I may lose you, my voice.  
You bring soul to my symphony.

Your flowing ink a river,  
bringing life to the words  
that sprout into sycamore groves.

I wear the muddied remains of my words  
down my hand like battle scars.  
You, my sword and my shield,  
the warrior cry I will croak  
until the end.

I imagine if they cut me open  
your gel would be pumping  
through my bruised, black heart.

# Lady in Thread

Ava Russell

The dress rack stood reliably jam-packed at the very back of the store, past the rows and rows of all other kinds of clothing racks also stuffed to the point of bursting. Their contents spilled out onto the white vinyl floor in puddles of cheap polyester and cotton that piqued my curiosity. The best pieces always came from the floor: vintage Tripp NYC skirts, handmade velvet tops with dramatic trumpet sleeves any vampire would die again to own—things I encountered in my dreams, but rarely in my waking life.

Despite the temptation to stop and help the unhappy blue-shirted employees return the items to their respective racks, I headed straight to the dresses. Any pit-stops would throw my well-established Goodwill routine off, and before I knew it the store would be closing, and I would have to drive home in the dark. I'd only stopped in to reawaken my creativity after a particularly mind-numbing day of shuffling around columns outlining the latest celebrity gossip in disturbing detail at work, and it wouldn't be long before Goodwill's unique old-lady-mothball-perfume odor made my nose itch. That smell bothered me no matter how much time I spent in the store.

Thankfully, only a few other customers lingered around the store, which meant that I wouldn't have to put up with people choosing to stand right next to me in an otherwise empty aisle. I stood in front of the disorganized dress display mindlessly *flick, flick, flicking* through florals and stripes and animal prints, until I came across the inevitable snagged hanger. Its clear plastic arm poked out from between some disillusioned college girl's old neon pink prom dress and a buttercup-yellow skirt suit Jackie Kennedy would have adored. The hook had caught on the prom dress's sweetheart neckline before whatever garment the attached hanger held could tumble completely to the floor. Snagged hangers had enraged me many times before, so rather than swiping right past it, I parted the prom dress and Jackie's suit to stick it back on the rack. The overworked, underpaid employees already put up with too much to deal with minor annoyances.

I jumped back so quickly that my boots gave a high-pitched squeak.

"Oh my god!" I said.

"Help, help!" the small, brown-haired woman hanging in the snagged dress said. She was so short that her feet dangled above the ground even suspended from the prom dress rather than the rack, so the hanger crammed in between her shoulders and the dress pressed her chin flat against her chest. She flailed her arms and kicked her feet to no avail—somehow her frantic movements didn't affect the dress she hung in or the ones around it. That woman did *not* belong with the dresses.



“Oh my god,” I said again. “Hang on—I mean, wait a second, I’ll find someone to help get you down gently.” I turned to yell for one of the employees scurrying around the store, but the woman hissed at me.

“No! Do you think I would be hanging here if those assholes could see me? You’re the only person who’s acknowledged me in the week I’ve been hanging here.” Her voice sounded strained and strangled from the pressure of the hanger forcing her head down, like hands slightly compressed her throat.

“What do you mean? Of course I can see you—”

“I’m dead, you idiot! And I’m stuck in this dress that smells like piss and clam chowder, so get me down *quietly* before someone sees you acting crazy,” the woman said.

Now, I believed in ghosts. I absolutely believed in ghosts, but I could not believe I’d found one at Goodwill. Maybe all those hours of watching cheesy ghost hunting shows and horror movies had finally gone to my head, and the woman would disappear if I closed my eyes for a moment.

“Hey, hippie girl, what the hell are you doing?” the woman said. Well, she hadn’t disappeared. Too bad. I assumed her calling me a hippie came from my waist length, blonde hair, or possibly the tiered dress I’d made myself from gray floral curtains. Either way, it didn’t matter. I reached out to touch the woman’s arm, expecting my fingers to go right through her pale skin despite the fact that she appeared just as tangible as a living person. Instead, she felt like an ice cube: cold, solid, and almost slimy with moisture. I shuddered and pulled back.

What would happen if I just walked away? I could push the prom dress and skirt suit back together and leave, and the ghost woman would be someone else’s problem. But what kind of pathetic, weak person would ignore the pleas of someone who’d somehow ended up in Goodwill purgatory? That woman didn’t seem very pleasant, but she’d been a living, breathing person before, and helping her would mean I’d taken initiative for once.

“Alright,” I said. “I’ll help, but beyond getting you down from that rack, I have no idea what I can do for you.”

“Hallelujah, I get to go home with a hippie,” she said. I’d been reaching out to grab her hanger, but stopped when her words landed. I could accept the presence of ghosts at Goodwill, both in the form of otherworldly smells and of human souls. I could even accept that she’d called me a hippie, but bringing a ghost into my home would be an entirely different crisis.

“Go home with me?”

“What, you’re just gonna leave me on the filthy floor? Haven’t I suffered enough?”

“So, you want me to—”

A disinterested employee wandered by; some greasy teenager fed up with his life. He didn't look at me, but I shut up regardless. It seemed he really couldn't see the woman dangling there, since he kept on his not-so-merry way with his head down and his feet shuffling.

I continued, keeping my voice barely above a whisper: “You want me to take you home, and then what? Hang you up in my closet?”

“Very funny. No, there's got to be a way to get me out of this thing and into the Great Beyond, or down to Hell, or wherever I'm going. Let's be honest, I'm probably going to Hell, but it has to be better than this,” the woman said. She flailed around again, and I sighed. If a dead person could be so optimistic, then surely I could set my own cynicism aside.

“Okay. I'll have to buy your dress to get you out of here. Please don't make me look any crazier than I already do,” I said. “By the way, do you have a name?”

“Unfortunately.”

“Well, what is it?”

“Linda. Now, if you're done flirting with me, I'd like to get out of here,” Linda said. How asking for her name counted as flirting, I didn't know. Her attitude was starting to get on my nerves, so I didn't argue.

I grabbed the hanger with both hands to hoist Linda down, which turned out to be unnecessary. Much to my surprise, her presence in the dress didn't add any weight to it, though her body moved and folded with it. The layers of pale blue and purple chiffon that made up its skirt swished delicately in my hands, and the diamond applique in the middle of its square neckline sparkled even under Goodwill's gray, fluorescent lighting. Its rectangular straps were thick, but not in a clunky way, as was the pastel purple ribbon cinching in the waist. Too bad I wouldn't be able to squeeze that tiny thing on even if I sold my soul. It smelled absolutely rancid, anyway. Clam chowder, just like Linda had said.

Linda choked and wheezed all the way to the long, white counter full of registers at the front of the store, where I met the same drowsy-eyed teenager who'd trudged past me earlier.

“Hi, how's it going?” I said, laying Linda down on the counter as gently as I could. The kid's shiny, plastic nametag proudly announced him as ‘Rebel’ in between Sharpied-on bats and spiderwebs. The red streaks dyed in his black hair clashed with the cobalt blue of his Goodwill t-shirt. He reminded me of my teenage self—and my adult self, to be honest.

“Is this all for you, ma’am?” Rebel asked quietly. He wasn’t disinterested, after all, just shy and timid. Like I used to be, before I grew into my uncommon personality and style. My dark clothes and platform boots made me a target for snide comments all through school, but as an adult they drew people to me—outside of my stuffy, over-professional coworkers in graphic design, that was. My team handled the layout of a barely known tabloid magazine, so I didn’t understand why any of them believed they were so prestigious. Oddly enough, teenagers seemed to compliment me the most. I prided myself on being a little bit of a fairy goth-mother to the kids who were too afraid to wear their souls on the outside like I did. I’d even taken on a mentor role for a bubbly girl who fawned over my handmade velvet capelet one frigid winter day. We’d become like sisters, the two of us.

“Sure is,” I said. The way Linda’s being interacted with the dress continued to baffle me. If Rebel laid the dress down flat, Linda appeared to flatten out with it, except for her head and arms. If he folded the dress in half, Linda folded in half. It was like crumpling and straightening an invincible piece of paper over and over again. If Zak Bagans could see that, he’d scream and run for real.

Rebel scanned Linda’s tag, removed the hanger from her dress, and shook open a plastic bag to stuff her in. She grunted and whined while he folded her right in half across the waist and tucked her into the bag on her back. I couldn’t see her all squished up in there, but she probably didn’t look very happy. I handed Rebel my Goodwill Rewards card—if I had to take Linda home with me, I would certainly get my rewards points for it—but the machine made a loud, angry *beep* when he scanned it.

“Sorry, it’s only my second day,” Rebel said. His voice trembled ever so slightly.

“It’s okay, kiddo. Take your time,” I said.

“Hurry up, hurry up!” Linda hissed from inside the bag. I ignored her. “Tell that little freak to move his ass!”

“Shut up, asshole!” I said. No way in hell would I let her talk about a harmless, insecure teenager like that, even if he couldn’t hear her. Rebel froze with his hand hovering over the register screen, glancing up at me with black-rimmed owl eyes now screened by a wall of tears. Poor kid probably thought I was about to make his life miserable. “Sorry, that wasn’t about you. Sometimes I think out loud.”

Rebel didn’t say another word to me. I left the store with Linda in my hand and a heart full of guilt in my throat. I’d avoided doing so many things throughout my life for no reason other than fear and insecurity, and I hated that I might have driven that shy kid back into some reclusive pattern he’d just managed to break out of. I took Linda out of the bag to place her in my car so she would be more comfortable—if she could even feel anything—but made no attempt to be

gentle when throwing her down across the backseat.

She bounced and threw her arms up dramatically. “Jesus Christ on a cruise ship!”

“Sorry,” I said. Not really.

The atmosphere inside my little silver car felt heavy and awkward. Thankfully, my house wasn’t far. Should I talk to Linda, or just let her stew in her own misery? My first impression of her as rude, pushy, and a bit of a bitch had turned out to be correct, and I usually tried to avoid people like her for my own sanity. Silence it would be, at least if I could help it.

It turned out the choice wouldn’t be mine. Linda opened her big mouth to yap, yap, yap as soon as we came to a red light. “Christ, your car is filthy,” she said. “Maybe even worse than that dump store. I just don’t understand why anyone would ever choose to go in there—”

“Some people don’t have a choice. Some people can only afford to shop secondhand, which you’ve clearly never had to do, *Linda*. And some people just like helping the environment, or saving money, or whatever else.”

“Jesus, who put that stick up your ass?”

“Check your attitude, or I’ll turn this car around and donate you back to Goodwill,” I said. That shut Linda right up, and I thanked my lucky stars for it. Elitist snobs had been the bane of my existence for as long as I could remember. From the prissy little rich kids of elementary school to the stuck-up sorority sisters of college, all the way to the professional women in their pencil skirts and ankle-breaking heels, there had always been someone snickering at my outdated, secondhand clothes. I never went hungry as a kid, but my family certainly wasn’t well-off. Everything we owned came from garage sales and thrift stores, which I never minded. It taught me how to be resourceful and care for the few things I did own, but it didn’t stop the sting of side glances and cupped whispers from my peers. *She’s a trashy hillbilly*, they used to say. *A freak, a weirdo*. Those whispers carried with them a hidden meaning: She’s not one of us.

Now that I had adult money of my own, I continued to shop secondhand partially as a silent middle-finger to everyone who’d ever looked down on me for it. Apparently, going to thrift stores would only ever be trendy or cool if you had millions of followers to share your million-dollar hauls with. Well, I didn’t have that. I never would have that, and I didn’t need that to enjoy paying a quarter of the original price for clothing that had only been worn a few times before finding its way to me. Fast fashion would destroy us all.

“My name is Juliette, if you care,” I said as we approached the entrance to the small subdivision I lived in.

“Juliette. That’s the name I would have picked if I ever had a girl,” Linda said.

“Really?”

“No.”

I rolled my eyes. Why had I expected anything different from her? “You’re such a ray of sunshine, Linda. I hope you stick around forever,” I said.

“Gee, thanks. I’d love to spend eternity with a lazy hippie like you.”

I whipped my car into the driveway of my orange townhouse a little quicker than I usually did, nearly smashing into the bushes next to the path to my front door. Linda slid from the backseat and hit the floor with a shout.

“The hell is your problem, you little—”

Before she could hurl another insult at me, I slammed my door. Apparently, she got the message, since she merely glared at me as I pinched the straps of her dress and pulled her off the floor. I dreaded bringing that awful woman into my home, but I could always throw her right back out if we couldn’t set her free. Maybe she deserved a lifetime in Goodwill purgatory, anyway.

I brought Linda into my cozily cramped sewing room and arranged her in my desk chair as close to a sitting position as I could manage, then took the chair at my sewing table against the other wall. The two chairs were the only surfaces not covered in unfinished projects, or heaps of scrap fabric that I could never bring myself to get rid of. Linda couldn’t move beyond the confines of the dress, so her head and shoulders ended up hanging over the back of the chair. Even stretched to her full height, she didn’t appear to be any taller than tiny icon Danny DeVito, whose height I could reference thanks to the cardboard cutout of him standing in the corner of the room. The weirdest yet most touching birthday gift I’d ever gotten. It was no surprise that it had come from my mentee, who understood my appreciation for Danny DeVito’s sense of humor and genuine kindness better than anyone else. We might have truly been sisters in another life.

Linda craned her neck to look around, her eyes glancing over my disorganized fabric stash, cluttered bookshelves, and sewing table. She landed on the shelf of trinkets next to said sewing table, all of it thrifted: little porcelain ladies trailing parasols and coy glances over their shoulders, rubber bats and plastic jack-o-lanterns, and plenty of books. Anne Rice would always be my favorite.

“Wow, you’re some collector. Where’d you get all those neat little things?” Linda said.

“I can’t tell if you’re being sarcastic again or not.”

“No, no, I mean it.”

“Oh. Well, I got most of it secondhand. Just like I got the fabric this dress is made from secondhand, which you seem to hate,” I said, gesturing to the tiered, tank-style, calf-length dress I’d made myself, under which I wore a ribbed mock-neck shirt. The idea for the dress’s design had occurred to me as soon as I saw the sheer gray floral curtains it was made from hanging with the rest of the Goodwill linens.

“I don’t hate it, it’s just not my style. As you can see, I prefer classy over trashy, but there’s nothing wrong with being the other way around. For you.” *Trashy*. That word seemed to follow me everywhere, and hearing it from Linda’s snobby ass gave it even more bite. At that point, I just wanted her out of my sanctuary.

“To think I wasted ten dollars on you,” I said. That amount of money could have gotten me an entire stack of books, or sheets and curtains for upcycling. Instead, it had gotten me a pig-nosed, obnoxious woman in a dress that smelled so offensively rotten I had to open the one window in the room, which my desk sat against. Linda let her head fall back, and she stared at me while I looked out at the street. All those normal people going about their normal days.

“Are you photosynthesizing?” Linda said.

“No. Why?”

“Because you’re a hippie. Isn’t that how hippies eat?”

“I don’t think so. Either way, I’m not a hippie, so stop calling me that.”

“With all that blonde hair? Of course you are. Maybe that’s why you can see me and no one else can.”

“Again, I’m not a hippie, but you might be onto something. I’ve seen ghosts before—at least, I think I have. Nothing as solid as you, but maybe being open to the paranormal makes me more likely to experience it,” I said. “What do you think?”

“I’m all out of sarcasm, Scooby-Doo. Go ask Shaggy.”

Rather than take Linda’s bait, I walked over to my bookshelf to see if I happened to have any guides on banishing nasty jackasses from our realm laying around. No such luck. The closest thing I had was a rather tongue-in-cheek book on the paranormal for children, which, having laughed through it once or twice before, I knew did not contain any information even remotely relevant to my situation.

“So. Any ideas on how to get you out of that thing?” I said, turning back to Linda. She still lay with her head over the back of the chair and her hands limp at her sides.

“Not a one. I’m pretty new to the whole being dead thing,” Linda said. I hadn’t considered how she might have died yet. Rescuing a ghost from Goodwill apparently required my full attention, which I noted in case it ever happened again. If it did, though, I would probably just walk away like I should have done to Linda. But how *did* she die? There might be clues as to how we could free her in that answer.

“If you don’t mind me asking, how did you die? You can’t be any older than forty-five, and I don’t see any wounds on you,” I said.

“Wow, great eye. Is it my turn to ask you personal questions now?”

“No.”

“Fine. My idiot husband murdered me. He threw a big, romantic dinner for our twenty-fifth anniversary this year, and he put rat poison in my clam chowder. Why would he want to kill someone as stunningly beautiful and intelligent as me? So he could go be with his hot, twenty-something mistress. I knew about her, because I know everything, and he knew I knew, so he killed me before I could kill him.”

“Were you really going to kill him?”

“No. But I sure as hell would have taken everything he owned in the divorce.”

“That’s really awful, Linda. I’m sorry,” I said. Despite my growing dislike for Linda, I really did feel sorry. To think that she had slept next to the man who would eventually murder her for twenty-five years! Still, my sympathy didn’t mean I was willing to put up with Linda’s attitude any longer than I had to. She likely felt the same about me, since she’d called me *trashy*.

With nowhere else to start, we tried several things I’d seen in movies or read in books: burying the dress, chanting bullshit incantations from the internet, lighting candles, even throwing salt at Linda while yelling about God and the Devil. Linda screamed and cried through the last attempt, mostly for the sake of performance, but unfortunately remained bound to the dress. She and I both grew frustrated, and as we stewed in the growing heat of my shrinking sewing room, I had one last idea.

“When I was a kid, I read a story about someone putting on a dead person’s necklace and somehow freeing their spirit. Or getting possessed. I can’t really remember now, but it’s worth a shot,” I said.

Linda threw her arms straight up into the air from where she lay on the wood floor. “Oh, wow! Yes, what a great idea. Squish yourself into this dress with me—if you can even fit—and carry me around like a little, pathetic baby—”

“Listen, you ungrateful bitch, I’m doing everything I can! You think I know

any more about this than you do? I hope you do go straight to Hell,” I said.

A heaviness shrouded the room, like humidity hanging in the air after rain. Linda stared up at me with wide, unblinking blue eyes while I felt as though a crater had opened up in my stomach and sucked all my organs into it. What kind of miserable person would say such things, especially when a trip to Hell could really be in the cards?

“I’m sorry,” I said. “I shouldn’t have said that.”

Linda sighed. “But you should have. Maybe I would have been a better person in my life if more people talked to me like you just did.” She rolled her head to the side and stared out the window. “Truth be told, I was always one mean son-of-a-bitch, and I guess that made people afraid to put me in my place. If I could do it all over again—hell, listen to me. I’m being pathetic, but you know what I mean.”

“I guess so.”

“Let’s try your idea,” Linda said. “It really isn’t a bad one, I’m just an asshole.”

I slipped my dress off, leaving on my mock-neck and the bicycle shorts I always wore underneath, and carefully grabbed Linda by the straps of her dress. Undoing the zipper in the back of the dress with one hand was quite the battle, but squeezing that teeny tiny thing on would be a full-on war. I stepped in, tightened my grip on the dress, and prepared myself to pull like Linda’s afterlife depended on it.

The dress didn’t budge with my first pull. It stuck around my lower thighs and choked Linda hard, but she seemed to be pushed tighter up against the fabric than she had been before. My dumb idea might actually work. I squeezed my thighs together and pulled again. The dress gave a couple of inches, then a couple more, and finally I worked it up to the tops of my thighs. As I squeezed in, Linda squeezed out, her facial features contorting and flattening as if being shoved up against a pane of glass. Seams busted, my skin chafed against the dress, and no way in hell would this work—

All at once, our images peeled apart, and Linda tumbled forward onto the floor. She still wore a version of the same long, blue and purple dress stuck around my thighs, but now the skirt showed a ghostly green hue and floated slightly above the floor. Her loose brown curls shone and swished with every movement she made.

“Holy shit, I’m a mermaid!” Linda said. I nearly cried.

“You really are the same height as Danny DeVito,” was all I could think to say.



Linda tucked her knees up to her chest and pulled the world's slowest backflip, floating through the air like water while I kicked off the physical version of her dress. "Oh, I am gonna raise so much hell," she said. "Hey, I wonder if I can touch things now." Linda floated over to my bookshelf and swiped at my favorite porcelain lady; one hunched over a sewing machine, guiding a sheet of fabric under the needle like nothing else in the world mattered. Linda's hand went right through her.

"Try moving it with your mind," I said. "Sometimes movie ghosts can do that."

"Even better." Linda aimed a determined glare at the little seamstress and pursed her lips while we waited in anticipatory silence. Had there been any blood left in her, she would have burst a vessel from the intensity of her efforts. I watched the statue as intently as Linda, and it began to shudder. The sound of porcelain rapidly *clink, clink, clinking* joined us in the room as the statue wobbled on its base.

"Don't break her!" I said. The shuddering halted abruptly.

Linda whooped. "I'm a god! You know, Juliette, I couldn't have picked a better hippie to come home with."

"And I couldn't have picked a better mean bitch to bring home."

"You flatter me. Now, if you'll excuse me, I'm gonna go haunt the shit out of my ex-husband."

You go girl, I thought. In spite of her many, many, *many* bad qualities, Linda's determination inspired me. She struck a Superman pose and floated straight up through the ceiling.

I sat down and started work on what would be the first original piece of clothing I ever attempted to sell the very next day. It turned out that freeing a ghost from eternity in a rotting dress could be quite motivating, and the success had been the push I needed to confront my own confinement. I worked a soulless desk job that barely allowed me to contribute anything of value to a dying magazine, surrounded by people who constantly let me know I didn't belong with them, to avoid struggling the way my family had when I was a kid. For the time being, I needed to keep that miserable job to survive, but that didn't mean I couldn't get started on what I really lived for. I didn't have a storefront to display my one-of-a-kind, handmade clothing in, but the internet could be one hell of a resource for attracting attention.

I'd already finished the design sketch, and needed to draft a pattern to execute it. Linda's dress greeted me from the corner of my sewing room, and every discouraging, intrusive thought that had managed to regenerate during work that day melted away once again. A quick dry cleaning had fixed the rotten smell of

the dress, and a few stitches had fixed the busted seams. The dress now adorned an old sewing form standing proudly next to Danny DeVito in the corner where I could constantly see them both. I would always remember the determined glint in Linda's eye as she floated through my ceiling to go wreak havoc, and I hoped to mirror it.

Something shiny and metallic glittered in the evening sunlight streaming onto the closed lid of my laptop—a beautiful silver necklace with a purple diamond winking in the center of its heart shaped charm. A handwritten note lay beside it:

*Here you go, kid. This used to be mine, back when I had a body. Figured I'd better bring you something nice to wear, since that old dress won't fit you. It's my way of thanking you for putting up with me, even for a short while, and for giving me the chance to keep ruining my bastard husband's life from beyond the grave. Boo, you old bitch! That's what I would say to him if he could see me. I've already managed to scare his little mistress away, and I'm working on driving him totally bonkers. It's the little things that count—slamming doors, dumping all of his tighty-not-so-whities out on the floor, turning the cold water on while he's showering. I wish I could find a way to let him know it's me. Thanks, Juliette. I mean it.*

The necklace would pair perfectly with my new design: a lace-up, off the shoulder gown with a bodice covered in jewels and a skirt drowning in layers and layers of pale blue and purple chiffon, lovingly called The Linda.

## **vibrator? hardly know her.**

*Ruthie Barakat*

i like raspberries on my fingertips,  
stained red and sweet  
my lips tingle from off-brand seltzer

shoes shuffle across the floor,  
wood laminate underneath worn-out reeboks  
steps leading upstairs

fingertips looking for a drawer  
to pull out  
too soon to tell

it smells like purple and perfume  
luminescent, flickering  
like tongues and candlelight

on top of it all,  
three is my lucky number,  
writing my name on your teeth

a cat's cradle in the bedroom,  
hot breath on a pillow  
not everything fast is battery-powered



## **Fool for Love**

Elise Dobson

*48" x 36" Acrylic Paint on Canvas*

# butterflies

*Selma Adie*

the butterflies  
in my chest have been dormant  
and sleeping for ages  
but when you brushed up against me  
and knocked on my heart  
they awoke in a frenzy and threw themselves  
against my ribcage, fervent,  
aching to be set free  
and land gently on your face and  
adorn your gorgeous eyes  
and decorate your cheeks like freckles

## DJ Khalid could never

*Ruthie Barakat*

we hold hands,  
never able to agree on a flavor,  
happy to not share.  
i want it sweet, so cold  
i can feel the nerves  
in my teeth,  
screaming through enamel

you bite down,  
i tell you to go slowly –  
you'll give yourself a bellyache.  
but you want more.

i make requests.  
we ask for the whole pint,  
but i'd settle for a half.  
if they don't have what we want  
we'll take it to go,  
spoonfuls in the backseat.

you open your mouth and  
i make that airplane sound,  
lovingly churned cream and  
sugar destined for your tongue

we lay back,  
stomachs full,  
mouths sticky,  
sweet tooth still not satiated



## **Intimates**

Abby Franke

*Stained Glass, Steel Rod*

## Dear Lance

*Maggie Hoppel*

Candles: check. Wine: check. Flowers: check, and I know they're his favorite because his grandma gave him a piece of her lilac bush before she died, and from what I could see from my binoculars it's the best-kept thing in his front yard.

"Please, I have a family," whimpers Mr. Galton. His gag must've slipped off. "Please just untie me. I'm begging you."

"Hush! You're ruining the mood," I say back.

Tonight, I confess the first degree murder of 26 people over the last 3 years.

Everything has to be perfect.

After all, I hear Lance coming now, recording equipment jangling on his backpack.

I hope he thinks I'm pretty. Did I remember lip gloss? What color, again? I thought I brought the pink but ... wait. Knife in hand, I approach Mr. Galton. I reach in his pocket and rummage for a second. There it is.

"Thanks for holding that for me," I say. Tears and snot are streaming down his face as I reapply the gloss and smack my lips.

"Step away from Stephen Galton," says a calm, rumbling voice from behind me.

I swoon as I turn around. I've admired those green eyes from his TV interviews forever, but this is the first time they've landed on me.

Google the love of my life. He's on Spotify, Apple Podcasts, Audible, you name it. His show is called *UNMASKED: The Lady Killer of Evergreen City*—and that, of course, is me. He's an independent investigative journalist, and he's been on my trail since the beginning. Some people think he's crazy, but I think he's a visionary. And not bad on the eyes, either.

"Hi, Lance," I say. "Sorry I set your grandma on fire."

He doesn't bat an eye, but I know he remembers the picture of her I sent on Valentine's Day, with the flesh melting off her bones like maple syrup on the side of a pancake. And the box of cherry truffles.

He reaches in his pocket for his phone, but doesn't pull it out. He's started recording, then.



“You need to untie Stephen, and...” Lance trails off. He wrinkles his nose. “Is that wine?”

“Have some. I brought two glasses for a reason,” I say.

Lance opens his mouth to say no. He scans my display on the bridge: a little table with a red checkered tablecloth, the candles and flowers, the hysterical, middle aged father of 2 tied up on the railing. He’s computing. I see it written on his face. I want to kiss the tip of his nose and maybe stab him with a letter opener.

“Will you answer my questions if I drink with you?” he asks.

I consider this. He knows my face now, of course, but the mystery of me is part of the reason he’s here right now. Answers kill the magic. And I was rather hoping he’d visit me in jail.

Still, with the light of the candles reflecting off his eyes, and the stars and the river blurring the distant horizon, I find the ambiance of the night has an effect on me, too.

I pour us each a glass. “You get three questions,” I say.

“Five,” he replies.

“Three.”

“Fine, but this better not be poisoned.” Lance takes a drink.

I gesture for him to sit at the table, but instead he leans over the railing and stares out into the water. Thinking. Breathing in the scent of the lilacs, his grandma’s favorite flower, and the scent of me.

Question one: “Tell me about Phillip Bethany,” he says.

Technically not a question, but I’ll roll with it.

Phillip Bethany was the first person I ever killed. He worked at the bank I used at the time, and had this basket of Dum-Dums he gave to little kids when they came in. Why did I kill him? I don’t know. He was there, and I needed to cash a check, and suddenly it was like all the voices in the world were going to break my brain in two if I didn’t silence one. I had a Dum-Dum afterwards. A purple one.

Lance chews the inside of his cheek as I recount the story, interjecting with the occasional “mhhh.”

“How does no one know anything about you?” he asks next.

Oh, this one's easy. "Like anything, covering up a murder is just a skill that you build over time," I say. "I studied past killers and I know our police department like the back of my hand. I couldn't afford to get caught, that would mean the end of your podcast. And I know how much you love your career."

"This is about me?"

"Was that your third question?"

Lance mulls it over. Then he nods.

This is it. In the whirlpool night, with the music of Stephen Galton's soft sobs in the background and a bottle of wine in my hand, this is when I tell Lance our love story for the very first time. We'll have a scrapbook of this moment in twenty years. I have to think of how I want to phrase it.

I'll start with Arlene, maybe. I set her on fire before I knew Lance. She was the quintessential murder victim: old, rich, and lonely, with a grandson who lived out of state and funneled the family's money into his lackluster podcasting career. I wish they bottled the smell of burning flesh like floral perfumes. I wouldn't rub it on my wrists, but maybe it would be alright as one of those plug-in air fresheners.

That murder set a grief-stricken Lance about investigating me for the first time. I'd heard loads of other podcasts about myself. Some suspected I was on the inside of the Evergreen PD, others swore I was from out of town. But *UNMASKED* was the first to confirm I'm a woman. Lance talked about me with such obsession in his tone. It was electric and safe and messy and obvious. He wanted me more than anyone ever had in my whole life.

If I could do it over, I'd kill his grandma again and again to keep him here, next to me, just like this.

Lance didn't do as well with this story. He kept drinking his wine. I liked the way it drew my eyes to his mouth, but he wasn't listening so much.

"Don't you understand, Lance?" I say finally. "I love you. This is the end of the podcast. I can't keep killing to help you with it anymore, because I want to be with you. Galton got ordained for his best friend's second wedding last year. After he marries us, he'll be my final victim."

Lance blinks.

"So this is the end," he says.

He glances between Galton and me. Me, in the LBD I stole from my roommate. Me, the who to his dunnit. Me, who loves him more than anyone ever has in his whole life.

I wait.

A pair of handcuffs bite my wrists, and an officer pulls me away from him. I hadn't even heard his shoes on the metal walkway behind me. Not like Lance. When Lance was next to me, he eclipsed the whole world. And he knew it. He knew all along.

"I warned you," Lance mouths silently. His smile is intoxicating as they wrestle me into the squad car.

He'll publish this recording to the podcast later, and I'll probably still listen to it. He'll brag about how he kept me talking, wine in hand, as the police prowled the bridge all along. Maybe he'll be a witness in my trial.

I was outfoxed.

How dare he. How dare he throw away everything I have to offer like it's nothing. I've killed three years' worth of innocent people for him! What other woman would do that for the one she loves? Spotify says I'm in the top 1% of listeners for his podcast!

But, as soon as the anger wells up within me, it's gone, and there's something else in its place. Heat in my cheeks. Butterflies in my stomach.

*I was outfoxed. He beat me.*

It was almost better than being married by Galton. He took my script and wadded it up and set it on fire just like I did his grandma.

Am I crazy, or is this kinda hot?

I don't listen to my Miranda rights as the officer rattles them off. As the cop car pulls away, I lean my head against the window, smiling dreamily into the night. I'm already thinking of what kind of chocolates I'll send him next Valentine's day, and what I'll put in my love letter since he doesn't have any more living family members.

Dear Lance, I'll say. Maybe that's it. Maybe I'll scrawl it all over the paper until it's just a puddle of black pen ink. I hope they let me have a pen where I'm going.

Dear Lance, I'll write, love, the Lady Killer of Evergreen City.

# Milk-White Bones

*Eliza Surdzial*

I might not be your one, but I promise  
I'm not rotten. Could you stomach a foreign flavor?  
Would it taste better watered-down? Perhaps dried-up  
like the apple chips your mother would buy from Whole Foods

for your Little League games. My bones could be putty  
for you, the hidden pearls beneath the surface. I can tear  
and rip and dig them out for you  
to be molded into nana's cookies,

bleached in icing, dressed in sugar glitter  
like your prom date's dress— the cherry-blonde  
cheerleader still framed atop your parents' fireplace,  
my own fruit the ash below, an unfortunate side

effect to keep yourself warm. You color and  
sketch your stars in white constellations  
on my skin, and maybe one day the paint will seep  
underneath and knead me inside out. I need me outside in

to save your hands the strain from finger food staining  
to be easier to consume. I'd even pray to your god to not make  
you sick, to taste enough, to be anything  
to you.

# Hoarder of Memories

*Ayva Edwards*

## Rings

I had worn the same two rings since 2018: one will be my wedding ring and the other I will likely never see again. One, my Granny's wedding ring; the other, a cheap ring that my best friend in high school, Myah, gifted me. My Granny's ring fits perfectly on my right ring finger; over the years creating a small bump on the inside of it, mutating over time to support the constant wear. A slight tan line can be seen upon the removal of the ring, but I only do so to shower or swim. It's both silver and gold (14 karat, according to the inside of the band) with three small diamonds embedded into the two eye shapes, and one star shape in the middle. It is a simple band that my Granny hated; her father-in-law purchased the cheapest rings he could find at a pawn shop (it was what one might call a shotgun wedding), and she had little to no say in it. Today, she wears my grandpa's version of the ring, and my grandpa doesn't wear one. I've always told her that I love the ring, and her response is always the same; "Well, I'm glad somebody does." If I get married, I will use this ring.

My other ring was a Christmas gift from Myah. Christmas is her favorite holiday, and she never missed an opportunity to give thoughtful gifts to her friends. Among a large basket filled with various yellow items (my favorite color) was a thin-wired, double-stoned ring from Pura Vida. The price tag on the back read \$10. Upon further research, I realized that the ring used to have a rose gold band. Towards the end of its life, it turned silver with wear and morphed into some oblong shape.

This ring used to sit on my right thumb. It served as a fidget toy of sorts for many years; I often would place the ring right at the knuckle, then bend my thumb hard until it eventually created two large grotesque calluses on this knuckle. They started small, but now when I show people the calluses, their reaction is always somewhere along the lines of, "Ew, what happened?"

I was raking leaves recently and the ring was lost among the damp clumps of warm-colored leaves; maybe on the ground, or maybe in a trash bag? I didn't look for it; it could have been anywhere, and it was starting to rain. I replaced it with a similar ring for fidgeting, but it turns my thumb green and means nothing to me.

## Kitchen Table

My kitchen table has been in my family for almost eight decades. My great-grandparents built a wooden kitchen table for their three-person family somewhere around the late 1940s/early 1950s. The table is small, only about four feet long and two feet wide with the leaf out. It's a warm tan-ish color made of

cherry wood. They used the table until my Granny eventually moved out to live with my grandpa when she then acquired the table. In the heat of the late 70s, my grandpa covered the tabletop in a deep maroon color, keeping the legs the original wood.

They used the table for many years, but after having three kids, they outgrew the table and had to replace it with a newer, larger version. Knowing my grandma, I'm sure she wasn't jumping at the idea of having to get something "new." The now-old table sat in a corner and was used as a place to store junk for decades. She is a real hoarder (the kind that finds six dead cats in her house upon an attempt to clean the mountains of junk), so it would have easily been a victim of the house had it not meant so much to her. It was later passed down to my dad when he moved out of their home, and it became the table I used in my childhood, too.

Once the table came into my dad's possession, he stripped the maroon paint from it, returning it to its original state. He painted the legs of the table an awful off-white cream color; almost restoring it to its former glory. When I was no more than 10, we painted little treasure chests for my American Girl Doll-themed birthday party. I chose hot pink and electric orange paint and my parents didn't protect the table. Now, I see it as a bit of a mistake on my parents' part. The stains from the acrylic paint never came off. You don't have to look close to see it, even today. It does bring back fond memories when I do see the stains, however stark they are against the original wood.

When I grew up a bit, in middle school, my parents traded the small shaky table for a much more sturdy, darker wooden table that towered over the old one. I have always been quite sentimental with objects, so I made it clear that I did not support this choice. I said this until I realized how nice the new table was, and begrudgingly allowed the old one to be put in the crawlspace for the next foreseeable future. My dad dismantled the old table, wrapped it in thick heavy plastic, and hid it away. Out of sight, out of mind. When I moved out after high school into my first apartment and was frantically searching for furniture, I inherited the table. In my entire 20 years of living at that house, I never even knew we had a crawl space until the table had to be excavated from under all of the dust.

It still has the awful cream-colored legs on it, but I figure it's my turn to make it the way I want it to be. Once I figure out how to strip it, we'll be in good shape until whoever I pass it down to makes a mess of it again. Stains of pink and orange paint still scatter across it from the birthday party painting disaster. If you look close enough, you can even see the maroon still lingering in some of the wood grain, my dad likes to point out. I like the imperfectness of it, though. It holds the history in its grain, and I much prefer that to a shiny new table.

## **Cork Board**

Larger items I've collected over the years landed on my corkboard. At my high school graduation open house, I asked everyone to write a piece of advice or

memory on a slip of paper for me to read throughout college. Some examples of the wisdom provided were, “Don’t be TO stupid” (grammar was certainly not a strength for him), or “I will forever remember our blue slushie dates. Also don’t overdose on something” or simply, “I am not one who should be giving advice”. Although not very helpful, I love to look at them when I’m feeling down, for a good laugh and a rush of forgotten memories.

Along with those are various Christmas cards from work, a few mini *Thinking of You* cards mailed to me by my grandma in South Carolina, Valentine’s Day cards, a ginkgo leaf (my favorite tree), a few fortunes from Panda Express, and the top of a donut box from when my current best friend, Karina, revealed to me that she was pregnant; *Do-nut be mad, You’ll be a great auntie! (Please don’t be mad)*. I wasn’t mad. There’s also a top of a box from when said best friend asked me to be her maid of honor, which my brother’s dog partially destroyed. Accompanying these is an old license plate that says *Spread a Little Sunshine!* with a smiling sun on one side, as well as a wonderful crochet piece that reads *I <3 BOOBS* purchased from the Indy Gay Market. Alongside these are 6 bumper stickers with various phrases like “Propagate Peace” and “Well-behaved Women Seldom Make History” and “Don’t Judge Me Because I Sin Differently Than You.”

Looking at the board every day allows the nostalgia to flood back in, and excites me for the future and the new memories that will come with it. All of these things certainly make moving to a different living situation a major pain every time, but the memories are priceless, so I do it with happiness.

## **Card Box**

I also collect cards from family and friends. They primarily consist of birthday, graduation, and Christmas cards. For the most part, they are all generic cards that one could purchase at a CVS or Walmart, but there are quite a few handmade ones as well. These are mostly created by my grandma, Mommom, who is now enjoying her retirement in South Carolina. Some are simply printed onto a sheet of paper, others are drawn on, and others are so well-made that they appear to be purchased cards, but they have my name printed on them.

Going back to read the cards again has made me realize how many people that have gifted me the cards are now gone, passed away or otherwise out of my life. I can recognize the age of some of the givers of the cards because of the shaky, uneven way they write my name, then the cursive of their name below is perfect. Every card has something special that shows the reason in which they are writing to me, or a signature unique to them. One from my step-grandpa writes, “In Loving Memory of Grandma Nelson.” My dad always writes something about him being “so proud” of me, while his brother and husband always sign, “Love, your favorite uncles.” The ones from Mommom are usually my favorite. If they aren’t made directly from her, she always writes a sweet inspirational note, or a corny joke like, “What did the green grape say to the purple one? *BREATHE! BREATHE!*” then follows it up with “I’m tellin’ ya – I’m funny city!” She always

signs the same way; xoxo with smiley faces in the o's.

Ones from Karina usually have some horrible stick figure drawing of us or my favorite band at the time within a cheesy card, with something like a frog in skydiving goggles with the phrase "Dream it. Do it. Ribbit." written on the outside. Behind Mommom, my work birthday cards are another solid favorite. The one I received for my 21st birthday has big and small cartoon mushrooms that originally said, "Dad, you're such a fungi!" but "Dad" has been crossed out and replaced with my name. I can't repeat a majority of the notes from my coworkers, but because this card was for my 21st birthday that I celebrated at the restaurant, most of them have something to do with "shots on me tonight!" (I got wasted off of three drinks and was home in bed by 9:00, so no shots were taken or purchased). When I see those cards, I can't stop the memories from flooding back in; both from the event that the card was for, or the person who gifted it to me. Thankfully, a majority of the people who have written to me are still here, but when they're gone, I'll always have something to remember them by.

## Memory Book

I am a hoarder of memories. Since I was 12, I have held on to every movie and concert ticket, polaroid, and park map from any point in my life that I felt was worth remembering. In middle school, my friend, Maria, gifted me a 5x7 photo album to hold pictures. The outside cover is black with cheesy emboldened words like *moments* and *laughter* and *family* written in gaudy white script. She added in a few old photos of us at the beginning; the first being a photo of us holding hands and walking at the Indianapolis Zoo on the bouncy bridge while we were on a field trip for a biology class. The rest are random selfies of us from about 8th-9th grade. I have filled the rest over the years, only never with more 5x7 pictures. Almost 10 years later, I finally filled it to its full capacity. My first one is full to the brim and it will not get even close to closing, so it usually lays flat on its back, pages fanning out unevenly.

Taller items such as playbills, park maps, and love letters from past relationships spill out of the top; bound by the plastic pages. They are accompanied by molded dried flowers, vending machine fortune cards, the clock out sheet from the first day of my first job, a tattoo stencil my artist drew after I told him I wanted "junkless angels" on my thighs and he drew a massive penis on it, old ID's, gum wrappers with little notes from my high school friends scribbled on them, my first (and only) lottery ticket, the teal Good Dye Young box from the first time I dyed my hair, my cat's umbilical cord (don't ask), a signed sticker from a music artist that I don't remember meeting, Disney fast passes, balloons from the Grateful Dead Shakedown Street (need I say more?), photo booth strips, a broken reed from winning the state marching band champions, pamphlets of hateful propaganda dealt by Christian protestors at pride, endless parking passes, and my first "I Voted" sticker. Most of the items are out of order and I don't remember their significance, or when I came across them. I know that they were important to me at some point, so in the album they stay. I think I started the collection to remember the good and the bad times in my growing-up years, knowing that my



memory is shit from an early age.

I greatly underestimated how difficult it would be to find a similar book that also serves the purpose that I require it to. I eventually found something similar on Amazon, but it doesn't quite feel like the last one. It's a fake light wood cut into 5x7 squares and it flips open up and down, instead of like a book. It was the best I could do. The book itself holds no sentimental value, and it just doesn't quite feel like the old one. One day, all of it will be considered "vintage." Maybe I could sell it. I could never. Those memories are priceless.



## **The Silent Beast**

Lexia Holmes

*Digital Photography*

# Keeping Our Practices: A Walk Through Crown Hill

Kayla McVeigh

How am I to walk through the plots of those who will never break their silence?  
Without kissing my knees to the grass  
Without joining my hands—palms pressed and fingers laced

How am I not to chip away at pieces of limestone?  
Pocketing fragments of the infamous  
Dillinger fame

How am I not to pause at the strange exchanges of closed eyes and bowed heads?  
Mouths bound and veiled in black fabric  
Softly spoken metaphors—*where you'll find them now*. The fluttering of monarch wings

Am I not to feed the dead?  
Recipes etched into their gravestones  
*Ginger snap, crumble, and Annie's strudel*

How am I to add to the legacy of the Children's Poet?  
Place a coin among the small stacks of pennies, quarters, and giftings of ever-green wreaths  
A stone slab encircled by columns atop the highest hill

How then am I to keep you?  
Am I to strike a match and add a burning incense stick to the amber-colored jar?  
Watch it trail off and hold the silence—smoke slips away

Am I not to help in keeping these practices, whatever they may be?  
Until another match flickers and the next stick burns  
Nag Champa floating up into the air and over the graves

# My Father Grew Wings

*Trent Platt*

The land of faeries is not what you think.  
When you look through the outline of trees  
and see the sky blue, you two are there.  
When you pick and blow dandelions  
on the back porch with him, you two are there.  
You two are there when you blow whistles  
with crabgrass and hay and he writes songs.  
When you sway on swings with  
mulch chips in your nails, you two are there.  
You are there when your fingers bleed  
from short chalk ends on the sidewalk.  
You are there putting dirt and leaves  
in each other's mouths and  
they were there the day he grew wings.  
And when it is dark outside and he is gone,  
don't fret, they are still here, but  
until you grow your wings too,  
you are not welcome.



## **Cat in a Tree**

Cara David

*10.5" x 15" Lithograph*

# Lavender

*Christopher Cassetty*

I just now vacuumed up the lavender  
that fell from the bouquet of flowers  
I arranged for you so long ago.  
Those tiny purple flakes sat and dried  
on my carpet for so long that—I think  
that spot may stay forever mauve, like  
aberrations in a moving, gloaming sky.  
I stare, cross-legged on the floor in front of  
my bed, at this sky, where light beiges  
mix so beautifully with the dappled  
singes of the dried lavender leaves,  
almost like birds amidst clouds between  
me and the foreboding and soon night.  
Then these images take shape to me,  
and I see the birds fly away into seas  
of oranges and blues, and far away  
the palette blends into thunderous  
and dark blacks—and whites, and rains then  
pour from above me, and I look down to see  
suddenly sand beneath my legs, slowly turning  
piebald from the worsening summer rains, and  
I take the sand within my hands and watch  
it spill from between my webbed and pure  
fingers, and the clumps where the rain  
had touched fall out so—displeasingly—  
but I gaze back up to find the sun dip  
beneath tumultuous and restless seas,  
and I go to take my breath and stand  
before I'm confronted by death and gasp—  
I see the bouquet before me wherefrom  
those lavender petals had fallen to the floor,  
flowers hanging withered from a vase  
just filled with freshly reclaimed rainwater.

# The Lynching

*Saloni Dixon*

I should have slept, would have  
but had to fight the darkness, had  
to build a fire and bathe a man in  
flames. I will not shoot myself  
in the head, hang myself  
with a trash bag. Black since  
birth, burnt by birth. Yes, I may be at risk,  
but I promise you, I trust the maggots  
who live beneath the floorboards of my house  
to do what they must. Charred,  
his flesh is bark. No sign of roots.  
I can't leave him. This is limbo, life  
after death coming in hungry.

## Two Boars

Kayla McVeigh

Slowly. Running from my scalp down through the long strands falling over my shoulders. The bristles wiggle through tangles and snags. Making my hair soft and weightless. Weightless as fog over a boreal forest, over pine-mapped backcountry trails or plots marked with crosses and stones.

My father combed his beard with a boar bristle brush. I wonder if he sensed him. Who would think to look in pie crust, glue, fertilizer, or in the bristles attached to a square backboard with a wooden handle?

*Ordinary everyday things.*

I have a pouty lower lip, I think while watching myself in the mirror. Again, raising my hand to the top of my head, I brush all the way down to the tough coarser ends. I keep reworking the same sections of long dark hair. I spent my lifetime watching. A lifetime watching his beard turn from brown to grey.

I wouldn't have known just from looking that I could find you here. Unsnagging knots in my hair or resting, resting behind the medicine cabinet. Here. Among my toiletries.

*I thought I'd find you in the forest.*

Lumbering across the backcountry trails. A path carved out by cloven hooves beneath you and those that came before you. Before me. Blackberry brambles, nettles, and ferns. A lineage trampling out a ritual of migration across lifespans. Predestined and passed. Passed to me. Dad, you didn't have much, but you did have what you knew of the woods. You had all the time we spent on those trails. I know you would have wanted to leave something behind.

I squeeze my eyes shut as I tease out a difficult strand that won't unknot. I picture you resting in the ferns. Belly pressed and laid into the soft earth. Grey-blotted eyes, a spotted snout, and soft brown stripes. Stripes that run laterally, stretching with the expansion of your lungs. Slowing.

*Flesh, blood, tusks.*

Bristles scratch softly. How did they scap your body? What words did they use when they deconstructed you? Body to carcass. Creature to material. Bones, hair, and nails to minerals, bristles, and upholstery.

*I can't go back. I still see you there.*



In the forest. Charging. Through tangles and twists of brambles. Squealing out as metal rings in the air. Wings flushed from the coverage of low-hanging branches. Tree sparrows part, weaving like needles through the fabric of the sky. The ground meets you cold and hard. Thorned vines of blackberry-spotted thickets snag and knot around you. Tightening, they tangle. Your hands swinging at your sides, underneath the cream-colored mittens I crocheted you—mistaken for the flag-raised tail of a white-tailed deer. It's hard to see through the dense tangle of branches and vines. It's easy to shoot a boar.

*I hope they cried when they took that shot, but I doubt it.*

Done. Throwing softened strands of long dark hair behind my shoulders, I can now place such an everyday thing back on the shelf. Behind a bathroom mirror—clouded. Framed edges peeling with layers of slapped-on paint. In the medicine cabinet—so unsuspecting. Above the sink. Your bristles hold oils. Glistening, they could almost be mistaken for black waxy plastic.

*How do they cut and gather you to make such fine everyday things?*

Somewhere I imagine smokestacks and plumes spit poison in the shape of clouds. Like a crematorium spitting out the ash of those we loved. Distant factories and you on their fractured lines, just another order. Behind the scenes, worker's hands remove me from your full processing. Removing me from the full ritual of your death.

*I can only guess what the steps look like between death and consumption.*

I thought it would be hard to find you. I pictured having to search for you in our well-scavenged woods, our backcountry trails. You had an eye for spotting wild mushrooms, puffballs, and morels.

*It's hard to imagine you anywhere other than in the forest and yet here you are in such everyday things.*

Why am I so surprised when it's you? Wasn't there life in all our commodities—at some point? So everyday and ordinary that we are abstracted from what they contain.

*Dad, I kept your boar bristle brush.*

Tangled in nettles, lips purple—blackberry stained. Resting. Belly pressed into the earth. Bleeding out red, you mixed into the soil of our backcountry trails.

I feel guilty for wanting to ask,

*at what point did you stop being a boar and become a brush?*

# Identity

Nya A. Gaines

My given name is Haruki Fujihara. For the convenience of others, I go by Alex.

To be completely honest, I don't even remember when I started going by Alex or why I chose that name specifically. Don't get me wrong, I don't dislike my given name. My mother carefully picked out the kanji characters, as do many Japanese parents, comprising Haruki so that it would best embody me, as she once put it. Haru translates to spring, since I was born on the first of spring according to the Japanese calendar. Ki can be spelled a variety of ways, but my mother chose the character meaning joy, because according to her, the day I was born was the most joyous one of her life. That's why, she always disliked when others called me Alex, probably even felt a little bit disrespected.

We had a falling out over my name when I graduated high school, and my small high school in suburban Valparaiso, Indiana wrote Alex Fujihara on my diploma. Someone in the office messed up the documentation. My mother was furious I didn't push harder (really at all) for it to be changed. We mostly stopped talking, with the exception of birthdays or holidays, after I moved out to work as a tattoo artist in Los Angeles at nineteen. That was six years ago. She's a stubborn woman, and I inherited that trait, so neither of us wanted to yield and apologize to the other.

However, I think my resolve is weaker than hers, and I felt compelled to call my mother after the appointment with my most recent client. As the line rings in my ear, I find my chest growing tight, as if I have a real bad heartburn. It dings twice. Then thrice.

"*Moshi Moshi?*" My mother's voice sounds tired, like she just woke up. I forgot about the time difference. It would be close to nine in the evening in Indiana. As I swallow back the nerves lodged in my throat, I force my hands to stop their trembling.

"Nee, Okaasan, I didn't call at a bad time, did I?"

"No. No." There is some shuffling in the background, followed by metal clambering on the counter. "I was in the middle of preparing dinner. Is something wrong? You rarely call."

"Not really..." I say, losing my train of thought. "I just-uh..." My gaze lands on one of the many figurines I had decorating my tattoo station. It's of a small child wearing black and red samurai armor, which makes it stand out amongst the anime figures who wear bold colors while holding dramatic poses.

“Haruki?” My mother calls. “Are you okay?”

“My client saw your doll, Okaasan.”

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Today was the day before a large convention was set to start at the Los Angeles Convention Center, so the Little Tokyo district had drawn in a greater influx of patrons than usual. It was already a rather condensed area with several small shops that honestly all sold the same overpriced anime figurines and botched looking keychains that looked nothing like the character. And now that the infamous “June Gloom” had passed, the California heat was a merciless sauna that amplified any B.O. Given this, I didn’t have many appointments lined up, because I wanted to make sure I could leave before drunken idiots began fighting to get inside the fifteen different sushi restaurants near my shop.

She was my first client of the day, entering my shop at eleven-thirty.

“Welcome-” I started, stopping short upon seeing the beauty standing by the doorway, timidly twiddling her fingers. She had a heart-shaped face and iridescent hair that almost took on a purple hue depending on the direction of the artificial lighting of the tattoo shop. She strangely donned a baseball cap underneath a black hoodie, and her gaze scoured the shop quickly, almost as if she were searching for something. Or someone.

“I have an appointment...” she said, rocking awkwardly on the balls of her feet. I noticed her shoes looked quite expensive for a pair of sneakers. Crisp and white with a black midsole. “It’s with Alex?”

Her name was Yuka Chobe, according to the foreign driver’s license she gave me. Her name contained the characters for summer and evening, and she was born in the same year as me, but in July. The picture looked a few years old. Yuka had more of a baby face, and her hair was cut into a bob.

“Oh, my name spelled in English is Y-U-K-”

“It’s okay,” I cut her off, passing her back her license and paperwork to sign. “I speak Japanese.”

“Really?” She switched to her native language as her eyes lit up. “You’re Japanese?”

“Technically, yes. I was born in Saitama,” I answered in Japanese. “I’ve lived here though, since I was nine.”

“Ehhh? How old are you? Your Japanese is still so good!”

“We’re both twenty-five. My birthday is in March.”

“Ehh! You’re older? I’ve been speaking so informally this whole time!” Yuka exclaimed. She pulled the bill of her hat down, trying to cover her face that was blossoming a bright red. I found it amusing. I wasn’t even that much of a senior to her, so I didn’t see the need for formalities and honorifics.

I printed off the design I drew up based on the image that had been emailed to me. It was a small piece, so I didn’t anticipate it taking too long to complete. Yuka sent me a wind chime and asked that I add a butterfly. As I continued to set up my station, sanitizing the table and getting my gloves on, my client continued to rapidly fire more questions. Sometimes, it was difficult to understand her excited kansai dialect.

“What’s your name in Japanese?” Yuka sat on the tattoo chair.

“It’s Haruki Fujihara.”

“What characters?”

“Spring and joy,” I said. “I was born on the first day of spring, and according to my mom, that was the most joyous day of her life.” I then let out an airy laugh.

“She probably regrets that now, because I drove her crazy as a child.”

“Where did the name Alex come from?” Yuka asked, an innocent question that I avoided answering by shrugging and focusing my attention on the bottles of ink I needed for the piece. “Do you not like the name Haruki?”

“No. I like my name. Alex is just easier.”

“How so?” Yuka persisted.

“Well, when you live in a country where employers are quick to judge a resume based on the name you have, it’s quite convenient to put an American sounding name.” I tried to sound lighthearted so it would be perceived as a joke. Though it hadn’t been a complete lie, Yuka didn’t seem too convinced.

“But you’re a tattoo artist. You work for yourself.”

“That is true.”

“Then why don’t you use your Japanese name?”

“Does it really matter whether I do or not?”

“I suppose not, but...” Yuka pouted, her eyebrows furrowing in a look of disapproval.

“I haven’t gone by Haruki since I was a kid,” I huffed, growing annoyed from

how her pestering started to resemble my mother's. "That's all there is to it."

I started going by Alex in the third grade. That timeline was about right. When I started school, I was the new foreign kid from Japan who spoke at most thirty words in English. My classmates kept forgetting my name or mispronouncing it, calling me "hair-ru-ki" instead of "ha-ru-ki", which was extremely frustrating. Repeating myself over and over grew annoying, so the next time someone asked, I blurted out the first American name I could think of. It unfortunately stuck.

On the first day of school I always mentally prepared myself for the blank stare of confusion from the teacher looking at the roster, trying to figure out how not to screw up my name. They would go through the Andersons, Davidsons, and Johnsons with ease, pause, then tentatively sound out "Fu-Fu-Fu" of Fujihara without the same previous confidence. I'd awkwardly chime in, "I go by Alex," and the teacher would nod and never use my given name again.

The bad part is, my name was a relatively easy one to pronounce in Japanese. It looked how it sounded, but little attempt was ever made to say it correctly. Except by the one Korean girl in my sixth science grade class who was kind of in the same boat as me. Her name was Minyeong, but people called her Minnie.

"Why do you keep calling my son by a name that is not his?" My mother would angrily say during PTA meetings. "Do not call him anything but what is on his birth certificate." Combined with her thick accent and broken English, the teachers often could hardly understand her, let alone grasp why she was upset.

"Mrs. Fujihara," my teacher tried to calm her down. "Alex here-"

"Haruki! His name is Haruki!"

"Okaasan, please," I muttered, sinking into my seat, wishing the cushion would swallow me whole and save me from the embarrassment that was my mother. "I asked them to-"

"No!" My mother interrupted, switching to Japanese out of habit when she was angry. "That is not the name I gave you. Do you care nothing about what your name means?"

I bit my tongue, and we stopped arguing after that. Over the years she sent my dad to parent teacher meetings instead. He understood the situation a little more from my perspective. At work, they called him strictly professor (his name is Ryusuke). My mother would still make it known she disliked the name Alex, taking extra effort to address me as Haruki when my friends came over or if she did decide to come to a school function.

To be honest, at that age, I didn't quite understand why my mother vehemently opposed me using what was the equivalent in my book to a nickname. I knew my legal name was Haruki. I knew it meant "Spring Joy." That wouldn't change

despite my desire to go by a different name so people would stop butchering Haruki. Alex didn't mean anything to me other than serving as a means of convenience for others, and honestly, myself.

"Have you never used a nickname or anything of the sort?" I asked Yuka. "It's basically the same."

Yuka frowned. "A nickname should be something you want. Not something people call you, because they don't want to learn your actual name."

"Whatever you say."

After that, Yuka dropped the topic, a prominent scowl still on her face. I resumed setting up.

The tattoo stencil stuck to Yuka's fair skin well. It fit nicely on the back of her tricep, and became completely hidden underneath the sleeve of her T-shirt once it was pulled down. I positioned myself behind Yuka, with the tattoo gun in hand. She straightened her posture as I dipped the end of the needle into the first color, black.

"If you begin feeling lightheaded, let me know," I said, turning on the machine. The gun whirled to life, resonating throughout the shop. "If you get uncomfortable then we can reposition to lay down."

Yuka wordlessly nodded. The instant the needle poked at her virgin skin, she jumped. I pulled away before I could make a mistake.

"Sorry!" She panicked. "You can continue. It just caught me off guard."

After the initial jump, Yuka sat relatively still for a first timer. Every now and then, she twitched. It was an involuntary reaction, because the nerves in the arm don't really like being aggravated. However, I was mostly concerned with how tense she was.

"Ne, Yuka, what brings you to California?" I asked.

Yuka grit her teeth, exhaling sharply through her nose as I finished the outline of the butterfly. "I'm...here for a concert."

"Oh really?" I cleaned the needle to dip into the purple next. I gently wiped her skin with solution to get rid of the excess black ink. Her arm was slowly turning an angry red. "Who are you here to see?"

"I'm actually the one performing," Yuka let out a shaky breath. "My group is called HARMONY. We're performing at LA Expo tomorrow night."

"Are you sure getting a tattoo the day before was the best idea then?" I joked.

“Your arm will be sore.”

“Today was the only day I could get in with you.” Yuka hissed as I wiped her arm again, and I muttered a soft apology. “We leave the day after tomorrow for San Francisco and then we head east.”

The name HARMONY sounded familiar. I had classmates who were fans of those various J-Pop and K-Pop groups, but I never really paid all that much to celebrities. If there was a song I liked, I added it to my playlist without looking too deep into the famous’ personal lives.

“If I may ask, is there a meaning behind this tattoo? There doesn’t have to be one, but I was just curious.”

Yuka’s body slumped a bit, the previous tension disappearing in an instant. I quickly tried to change the subject to the concert, but instead, she answered.

“My older brother passed away suddenly in a car accident,” Yuka explained. I sat back, turning the machine off. “He was my best friend, and I miss him every day. We always played with the windchimes as kids. The day after he passed, I was sitting in the yard crying when a butterfly landed on the nearby chime. I figured that it was him coming back to tell me that everything would be okay.”

One would assume that opening up about this deep of a wound to a stranger would result in waterworks. I had tissues on standby. Yuka instead had a fond smile on her face. While her eyes looked glossy, tears had yet to fall. She took a sharp breath before letting out a shaky exhale, straightened her posture and looked over to me, who quite honestly, sat dumbfounded by her strange behavior.

“On your shop’s Instagram,” Yuka continued, “there was a picture of your station with a Gogatsu Ningyo as the focus. The base of the doll had the characters of Haruki etched into the wood. I wanted to be tattooed by the one who was supposed to be the joy of spring. I figured their work would bring me happiness and help me honor my brother.”

I went quiet. My throat felt tight after the heartfelt confession. I knew what doll she was referencing. My mother had it made for me when I was a kid for Children’s Day, a holiday in Japan to celebrate youth and pray for their health and success. A Gogatsu Ningyo was the male counterpart to a traditional Hina doll, which was often given to little girls for the same event. This particular doll of mine was a miniature boy wearing red and black samurai armor to symbolize strength and power. My mother had my name etched into it. I casually started to display it in the shop for aesthetic purposes. Before then, I had it stashed away in my closet, because after a show-and-tell went wrong in the fifth grade, I really started to hate my name.

My family was one of three Asian families in the suburban town. My father got a job at a university in Chicago, and would make the hour commute twice a

week to teach his class. I disliked living in the rural city of Valparaiso, because I quickly learned that many of my peers were close-minded, a trait they inherited from their equally close-minded parents.

There was a kid in my class I particularly despised named Tyler. Tyler came from an affluent White, upper-class family who owned lake houses and took lavish vacations every month. When he first targeted me, his family had just come back from a trip to Kyoto during spring break, and he went around bragging about how much he knew about Japan, proclaiming himself some sort of expert on the culture now. I think he just wanted to show off his knowledge and that he thought he knew more than the actual Japanese student.

I often kept to myself, drawing comics alone instead of playing with the other kids at recess. When our teacher requested that each student bring in an item to showcase from their vacation, I brought in my Gogatsu Ningyo to explain about Children's Day.

"So Children's Day is the last day of Golden Week and is to celebrate children and their happiness," I explained to the best of my ability in front of the class. "My parents pray for my future and wish that I grow up big and strong."

"Thank you for sharing, Alex," my teacher said. She then turned to the class. "Did anyone have any questions?"

"Alex, what's your Japanese name?" A girl had asked.

"It's Haruki. That's what these characters here say. Together it means spring joy."

I received many awes and more questions after, including my peers asking me to write the kanji characters on the white board, which I obliged without protest.

"You know, that's such a girly meaning," Tyler scoffed. "There's no way you'll grow big and strong with a name like that. I guess that's why you go by Alex."

I wish I had said something to retaliate, but at the time, I didn't have the confidence to do so. Instead I erased my name off the board and quickly took my seat in the back of the classroom.

Fifteen years later, I received the reaction I had long desired from Yuka.

"Thank you, Yuka," I said. She tilted her head sideways in confusion. I picked back up my tattoo gun. I dipped it into the next color, pink, so that I can finish the butterfly. "Thank you for allowing me the honor to commemorate your brother with my artwork."

I finished the piece in silence, hyper focusing to make sure each shaded area, each line, was perfect. Only when she looked at the finished product in the



mirror, an hour and a half later, did Yuka finally cry.

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“I had never seen someone so happy after getting a tattoo done,” I laugh to myself as I recount the earlier interaction to my mother over the phone. “She thanked me over and over and over. It started to become awkward, because I really didn’t know what to say from praise.”

The more I think about it, the interaction is almost funny to me. Yuka came to me because of a Gogatsu Ningyo I got when I was ten. All the doll does is sit on my desk and look pretty, yet it ended up being the reason why a client desperately wanted me to tattoo her.

“Nee, Okaasan, I guess I have to thank you for getting me that doll all those years ago-”

On the other side of the line, my mother is sniffing.

“Eh! Okaasan, are you-”

“I’m so happy,” my mother says. As she’s crying, I sit silently holding the phone to my ear, listening to her wails. “You bring me so much joy, Haruki, and I’m happy someone saw my child in the way I always wanted.”

I’ve never heard my mother cry before. She is one to always save face and hide any negative emotions. Even during the times we’ve had disputes regarding my name, she never raised her voice nor lashed out, perhaps bottling up her feelings for years. After hearing her cry, I realize just how much I have been hurting her.

“I’m really sorry, Okaasan.”

“For what?” My mother asks, still sniffing.

“For disrespecting you in the way I did. I didn’t know that you saw my name in that regard.”

“Haruki, it’s not me that you think you’re disrespecting. It’s yourself. A child’s name is their first sense of identity and they will carry it with them all their life, which is why I cared so much about what it meant. You actively denied yourself that for years. You having a nickname was never the problem. It was the fact that you changed for the convenience of others.”

As painful as the realization is, she’s right.

Growing up I made excuses for others who couldn’t take the extra two seconds to learn the proper pronunciation of my name, and let bullies dwindle my

self-esteem with their petty taunting. I then let people, like Tyler, rob me of the sense of joy I felt when someone finally did take interest in my name. As a result, I shrugged off a crucial part of me.

I never really understood the significance of my name. Actually, it is more like I never comprehended how it was significant to me. The meaning of Haruki was always just the definition of the characters, and it never registered to me how my name interconnected with my identity. However, my name does not simply mean “spring joy.” It represents me and the joy that I bring, the joy I bring to my mother, and the joy I’ve brought to Yuka.

My given name is Haruki Fujihara. For the sake of myself, I should have always embraced that.

# I Miss the Homs Shopping Malls

*Selma Adie*

The first time I learned what death was  
I saw body bags lined up roughly in the hallway of a mall  
There was nowhere else to put them  
Soon enough, the bags ran out, and then it was just bodies  
Bloodied and bruised and charred in weird ways  
There wasn't enough press to cover every death  
So survivors wandered down the line, looking for someone they recognized  
A mother, a son, a brother  
For some, their face would turn suddenly  
And they'd throw themselves on a body, sobbing  
Others just looked solemn and sat by their friends' remains

A week later, I went to an American funeral for the first time  
I was eight and just starting to understand what it meant to die  
I was scared because I didn't want to see a family friend's dad  
Splayed and bloodied on the floor of our local shopping mall  
And when we walked into an empty church, I was shocked  
That all the windows were intact and only a shag carpet covered the floors  
There was only one body, adorned with flowers and candles  
In a large, ornate mahogany casket at the front of the hall

And at my first funeral, I learned that things aren't fair for people like me  
And I wondered where I'd go when I died  
With my people, blue and swollen, on a bloody linoleum floor  
Or in an empty room, in an elaborate casket, alone

# Fragmentation

*Christopher Cassetty*

She looked me in the eyes  
and all of a sudden, I forgot who I was,  
and I was sticking my barren feet  
under the sheets, still cold  
from not having been used all day,  
to let the warmth build up around me  
under the covers.  
I felt her words cover my head and neck,  
bathing me, cleansing me,  
running cool from the tap  
until the water heater croaks to life  
and you hear whining in the pipes  
like the ringing of your ears,  
and of course, I didn't hear what she said.  
Then I dropped into the bed  
and saw the light around me grow dim,  
and instantly from day,  
it was—to night  
and the sheets were warm,  
and the water just right,  
and I closed my eyes;  
I hoped then, if I didn't open them again,  
I wouldn't see her leave.  
I tried to keep them closed, I tried,  
but my blood ran cold,  
and I awoke to a misplaced blanket  
that let all of the warm air out,  
and found her missing, gone,  
vanished, and thus another day  
I would collect all the fragments of my skull  
to piece them together after they had all  
fallen apart,  
my memories spilled against asphalt  
and who I was before her on a stretcher  
being carried away with each glance  
of where she used to sleep on my bed.  
I hate the way people stare into my eyes  
knowing the same person  
doesn't don them anymore,  
but I hope at least  
I remind them less and less of her.



## **The Silent Beast**

Lexia Holmes

*Digital Photography*

# Shackles to Spectacles

*Zion O. Adedipe*

Outcries from the oppressive realms, where shadows weep,  
A realm where serpents are slain but villains are made,  
In our dystopian misery, Black warriors arise asserting the essence of our defiance,  
Bound by shackles, bound by chains, bound by faith, imprisoned by the bloody  
waxen pagans,  
Bound in blood, the repercussion of an attack.

Voices echoing and roaring vengeance, but the bloody waxen pagans believed us  
to be Black swans,  
These same Black swans hunted their heads, murdered thousands of their  
crowned waxen pagans,  
Turning their houses to coffins and taking their recompenses into ashes,  
Bound by shackles, bound by chains, bound by faith, imprisoned by the bloody  
waxen pagans,  
Terror prowling at their spirits, but their Gods conquered,  
Amidst this darkened hour, a tale unfolds.  
From pagan shackles to a Black fortress, where all invaders were annihilated,  
Our audacity seemed to have reeled in a scene,  
Again and again the spectacle of defiance cast it spells,  
As we navigate this dystopian hell.

Grand marronage whispers echo loud,  
For we are the African diasporas, the descendants of wrathful warriors,  
Boldly being themselves, hunting for the blood, flesh, and death of this waxen  
pagan.  
African culture continues in the footprints of their brave bloody soles.

# Accentity (Accent Identity)

*Daniel Awosika*

I belong to an ever-growing community of West Africans in diaspora, more specifically Nigerians in America. Immigrating to another country is never an easy task. To leave centuries of history and connection behind is an ask that can only be justified by the issue that merits such displacement, of which there are many. Be it escaping from traditional customs that endanger the lives of your family or winning the visa lottery, a golden-ticket opportunity to rewrite the sins of the past and start life anew. Or for the plain desire to create a better life for your children in an environment away from your birthplace which slowly seems to be collapsing in on itself. It was rough enough when they were children, but they never imagined that it would become much worse. Regardless of any given reason, we make the journey to a new continent, a new world.

We are everywhere. We go to the same grocery stores, get excited for the latest movie releases, and eat the same burgers found in the seemingly endless rows of restaurants. We vote in the same elections, actively advocate for change in American society and face the same universal struggles. Despite these shared similarities, we couldn't be more different from American culture if we tried. We shop at the only few African markets around, dress up in our traditional clothing every Sunday for an inarguably African church service, pray for change in our dishonest Nigerian government, and hope our families in the motherland stay safe from random acts of violence. We attend the same schools, have similar teachers and learn the same subjects. But wherever we go, our accents follow us as a reminder of what we left behind.

Middle school, as bad as it was already, only got worse if you spoke with a different accent. As if the hundreds of consciously and unconsciously anxious and self-negligent tweens did not have enough ammunition to fuel their bursts of mockery and displays of insecurity, now they had another tool, one that could be launched anytime you so much as opened your mouth to express why you did not deserve to be treated this horribly. Even worse are your attempts to defend another classmate getting bullied only for the focus of ridicule to be shifted to you, them mouthing your words, stretching their faces to accentuate its hilariousness, and puckering their lips in that strange way they did when mimicking African accents. Afraid of it happening again, from now on you would look the other way anytime you saw a peer suffering the same fate you try so hard to shield yourself from.

Perhaps you develop a second accent, one for home and another for everywhere else, in hopes of better successfully assimilating with the people who have caused you great torment. You pray that they do not recognize your African heritage and instead ignorantly embrace you as "one of their own." You wonder if they smell the jollof rice you had for lunch or the amala you ate for dinner yesterday in your breath. You even begin to look down on your other African

classmates who were not as quick to jump ship, who, unlike you despite all the bullying and harsh critics, they'd still rather stay true to their roots than to be indoctrinated to the shallow depths of a half-baked life. Although this strategy may work for a time, you begin to feel ever more alienated because (a.) everyone knows you're African, and (b.) everyone notices how hard you try to hide it. You never feel at home with any group because you're never sure when to let your guard down.

It's a balancing act, being an immigrant. You get the best and worst of both worlds. The desire to be so firmly planted in one group lingers still, and you seek out any avenue of connection and understanding. Over time though you begin to accept your accent, love it even. Every slip of the accent into a more traditional one outside of home now represents a reconnection to a shared heritage. Sundays are the days you feel most comfortable; the medley of tradition combined with youthful empathy, for a moment, drowns out the pain from the past week and beyond. Then you wake up the next day at six o'clock in the morning to replay the reality of being a foreigner in another country.



# Incantation for the end of pain

*Ashley Wilson*

Better a lobotomy  
than one more minute  
of this migraine.  
Take an ice pick to my skull,  
hit every pressure point.

Better yet, twist off my head  
like a lightbulb, grind the socket  
of my spine to ash.

Pop my Barbie doll joints apart  
pop them like fireworks  
and shove them back into place.

Suck this ache from my marrow,  
take it into your bones.  
and know what I feel.

Take this, all sinew and stretch;  
tie the strands of my muscles  
to wicked steeds.  
Tear me limb from limb.

Please.

The ice pick  
didn't work last time.

# How Still We See

Kim Kile

## KATE

As she walked to Room 810 at the end of the hospital hallway, Kate noticed the quiet first. She heard no nurses with clanging medical carts, no noisy families pushing the limits of visitation hours, and no encouraging words like “Just one more push!” coming from behind closed doors. On a floor that should be full of first gasps for air, she heard no newborn baby cries. The hallway was hushed like the quietness surrounding every grief she had ever known, imitating those few moments before loss becomes palpable and aching. Kate slowed her steps to delay the inevitable, thinking to herself that if she turned around now, she would never have to face the horrifying truth that waited for her when she entered the room.

Taking a deep, cleansing breath, Kate pushed the door open. She noticed the picture of a long-stemmed, white rose that hung in the center of it, and she winced. The room was like every maternity room she’d ever been in with a delivery bed, two uncomfortable-looking conversion recliners upholstered in a mauvy shade of plastic, and an empty newborn bassinet in the corner. It had everything Kate was used to seeing in this type of room except for the feeling of nervous anticipation and the rhythmic whooshes of a baby’s heartbeat coming through the fetal heart rate monitor. Only the heartbeat of Kate’s daughter, Tully, beeped through the heaviness of Kate’s sorrow.

Kate hesitated at the door, praying to herself as she had since she’d answered the phone earlier in the day, please give me strength and the right words to say. Kate stressed the pleases in her head so they sounded more like *please* hoping the politeness and urgency in her silent petitions would encourage God to answer them more quickly. Peeking around the curtain pulled across the entrance to the room, she whispered, “Hey, sweet girl. I’m here.”

Tully opened her eyes and grimaced as she struggled to sit up. Kate missed seeing Tully’s eyes shine and the corners of her mouth turn up in her familiar Tully smile, the smile that pulled up the tops of her cheeks to the bottom of her blue eyes until they squinted. Instead, Kate could see her fear masquerading as tiny, iridescent tears, squeezing from the corners of those blue eyes when she finally reached the side of Tully’s bed. She leaned in to give Tully a long, warm hug, hoping it would give Tully a feeling of warmth and the sense of comfort hugs sometimes did—safe and familiar like a favorite quilt or a worn teddy bear.

“Hey, Mom,” Tully said in a groggy, hoarse voice. “Thanks for coming. You guys got here fast. You just missed Dr. Hanson.”

“I’m so sorry, Tully,” Kate said, not knowing if she was apologizing for miss-

ing the doctor or for the loss of Tully's baby, only six weeks from his due date. "What did Dr. Hanson say?"

"She gave me some anti-anxiety medication for tonight and said they're going to induce me tomorrow morning. They don't know what happened to him, Mom. They can't tell us why."

The "why" questions would keep Kate, Tully, and Tully's husband, John, up that night. Why had Tully felt their baby in the morning only to discover there wasn't a heartbeat at her appointment that afternoon? Why did this happen at 34 weeks? Why couldn't Tully protect him? Why couldn't Kate shield Tully and John from this unthinkable sequence of events?

Kate reached back into her first-time mother memories and thought about the contrast between today and the day Tully was born. She remembered thinking how beautiful a sapphire birthstone would be in a mother's ring someday, but then Tully showed her independence and determination by coming in the last week of August. Now she and Tully could both wear peridot stones in honor of their oldest children. It was a comparison Kate wish she didn't have to make.

## TULLY

"Hey, Mom," Ollie said. "Why do turtles remind you of Teddy?"

Ollie's question came as he was sitting at the kitchen island eating a PB and J for lunch, slowly chewing each bite and then licking the thick glob of peanut butter stuck to the roof of his mouth. Tully looked up from the sink where she was rinsing off the breakfast dishes before loading them into the dishwasher.

"Well, Ollie," she said, "when Teddy was still inside of me, he would always hide from the ultrasound technician, and we could never get a good look at his face. He liked to tuck it into his chin and curl up tight in a ball like a turtle going into his shell, so your dad and I nicknamed him, 'Teddy the Turtle.'"

"Do you think he still looks like a turtle?" Ollie asked as he spread a dropped lump of jelly around in circles on his paper plate with his index finger.

Tully didn't know how to answer Ollie's question. How could she explain to a 5-year-old that her memories of his older brother were beginning to fade, just like Teddy's images on the ultrasound paper hanging on the refrigerator, smudgy and out-of-focus?

"I think, Ollie," Tully said, "that Teddy probably still looks like a turtle because whenever I see a turtle, I think of him and, I think he still wants us to remember him."

"Yeah, I think so, too, Mom," Ollie replied. "I think he's still acting like a turtle so that when we see him someday, he can surprise us with what he really

looks like.”

Tully paused just a moment before responding to Ollie. “I think you’re absolutely right, Ollie. I can’t wait for the day when we finally get to see Teddy for real.”

After lunch, Tully set Ollie up with an eight-pack of finger paints, butcher paper, and a full roll of paper towels—just in case—then sat down in the adjoining family room and thought about her Teddy conversation with Ollie. Even though she’d told Ollie that Teddy probably still looked like a turtle, she knew differently. Teddy, in fact, had been born looking very much like a baby, fully formed with ten fingers, ten toes, and his father’s Irish, upturned nose and dimpled chin. Although his eyes never opened, Tully liked to imagine that Teddy had her blue eyes, a recessive trait that somehow ran strong on her side of the family passed down from her grandmother to her father and then to her.

Even after six years, Tully still felt Teddy’s loss in the deepest nooks of her heart and mind, the sadness tugging at her whenever she thought about the day they “lost” him. Tully hated the phrase “lost a baby” because it sounded so irresponsible, like she and John had somehow misplaced him and then had forgotten to go to Lost and Found to retrieve him. She also never knew how to answer the question, “How many children do you have?” Did she answer truthfully and then explain that her oldest was stillborn? Or did she lie and leave Teddy out of her count? Ignoring Theo’s being felt disrespectful to Tully, and she silently apologized to her firstborn when she took the easy way out and answered, “We have one little boy named Ollie.”

Tully looked away from their family picture on the opposite side of room and glanced into the kitchen to make sure Ollie was still painting on at least the marble countertop and not the walls. He was, gratefully, and he noticed her watching him.

“Look, Mom,” he said, holding up a picture filled with splotches of green, blue, and brown paint. “I painted a turtle sitting on a log in a river. Do you think it looks like Teddy?”

“I see your turtle on the log, and I do think it resembles Teddy a bit,” Tully answered. “Let me get a closer look.”

Tully walked back into the kitchen and stood behind Ollie and his painting, leaning down so her right cheek touched the top of Ollie’s head. She breathed in his little boy scent of peanut butter, vegetable-based finger paints, and a touch of baby shampoo before speaking.

“Why, yes, I really see it now,” Tully spoke into Ollie’s left ear. “The turtle’s head is tucked into its shell, isn’t it? And it’s sitting quietly and still on the log, hoping we can’t see it, right?”

Ollie nodded his head up and down and turned in his stool to face Tully. Holding up his still-wet picture, he asked her, “Can you please hang it up next to Teddy’s picture on the refrigerator when it dries, Mommy? Just like you have my preschool and kindergarten pictures next to each other?”

“Of course, Ollie,” Tully replied. “I’ll even make sure Daddy sees it when he gets home tonight, if that’s OK with you.”

“Yep,” said Ollie as he jumped from the stool and left the kitchen headed to the mudroom and the door to the backyard. “I’m going outside to swing now, Mommy. I’ll stay in our yard. Don’t worry.”

## KATE

The next morning Kate woke up stiffly from a restless and uncomfortable night sleeping in one of the recliner-sleepers. For the one moment she existed in that dreamy state somewhere between sleep and awareness, she wondered why her husband wasn’t snoring beside her and where their cat, Izzy, was since she wasn’t curled up on the curve of Kate’s tucked-in knees. She then remembered her current reality. Taking a quick peek behind the gray plastic curtain pulled to keep out the early morning light, Kate saw a sun-filled, blue-skied August morning. The lingering orange, purple, and pink bands from the Indiana sunrise outside promised a perfect summer day, a feeling not echoed in the little room on the eighth floor. Kate knew today would be the hardest day she had ever faced, and she questioned how she could find peace and purpose in the upcoming tragic moments. Having been induced herself, she knew the process Tully would go through as part of her induction: the Pitocin drip, the cervix checks, and, finally, the call to push. But today, instead of a steady sound of whooshes and beeps, the three of them had just one heartbeat to listen to, a single human to watch electronically. A small cadre of nurses came into the room throughout the morning, checking-in with Tully, monitoring her vital signs and emotional state, but never staying long enough to make small talk or prepare the room for a standard delivery. They didn’t need to turn on the bassinette warmer or put the pediatrician on notice when it came time for Tully to push.

For 30 weeks, Kate had imagined the scene of helping Tully and John bring their baby boy into the world. She visualized how she would hold one of Tully’s hands while John held the other, and, as Tully’s support team, they would tell her to push, push, push. How they would watch for the baby’s head to crown and tell her he was almost there; just one more push Tully, and you’ll see your baby boy. Today, though, Kate whispered to Tully how brave she thought she was, how Tully was the strongest woman Kate had ever known, and how Tully was the best mama in the world to Teddy. Together, Kate, Tully, John, and Dr. Hanson brought baby Teddy into the world and into Tully’s waiting arms. From his head covered in wispy, black hair to his tiny, curled toes, Teddy was perfect in every way but one.

In the solemnness of the “after,” Kate thought she would find a sense of closure

that only comes with knowing the why. Instead, she found emotional support and physical strength in the people who endured the day with them. The compassionate doctor who carefully laid their precious Teddy on Tully's chest, hiding the true knot in his umbilical cord, gave Kate relief to know that Tully was supported. The discreet nurse who wiped away her own tears while swaddling Teddy and who took care not to touch his fragile skin any more than necessary, preserved more than just Teddy's complexion. She gave their family permission to hold him for as long as they needed to whisper, "I love you," and say their goodbyes. And it was the willingness of a hospital pastor to baptize a stillborn baby when another minister refused that showed Kate how faith is more than church doctrine; it is the act of honoring Christ's intent in horrific situations. In the aftermath of Teddy's birth, Kate sat in the near silence and absorbed the comfort that surrounded her family through these simple acts of human kindness.

## TULLY

After Ollie left the kitchen to swing in the clearing of their wooded backyard, Tully picked up her cell phone from the counter where it had been charging, unlocked it, and tapped the phone icon. Near the top of her recent calls, she saw the name she was looking for and touched "Mom ICE 2." She made sure she still had a view from the large kitchen window of Ollie swinging on his playset as she waited for her mom to answer.

"Hey, Tully," her mom said after a few rings. "What's up?"

"Hi, Mom," she answered. "Not much really. Ollie just finished lunch and some finger painting, and now he's outside swinging. Guess what he painted?"

"Oh, that's a hard one, Tully," Kate said. She was trying to go down the current list of Ollie's favorite things in her mind before answering. "I'm going to guess either a car or a cat."

"Not even close, Mom," Tully said. "He told me he painted a turtle sitting on a log in a river because it reminded him of Teddy."

"Teddy," Kate said, lifting the end of his name with her voice so it became a question.

"Yes," said Tully. "Ollie asked about Teddy during lunch today. Just out of the blue, he asked me why turtles reminded me of Teddy, so I told him about Teddy hiding during his ultrasounds and how we gave him the nickname 'Teddy the Turtle.'"

"Oh, Tully! I wish I could be there to give you a hug right now, sweetie," said Kate. "I know that had to have hurt a little-maybe even a lot. How are you doing right now?"

"It did, but I'm fine. I just wasn't expecting that deep of a conversation with

a 5-year today,” said Tully. She hoped the small laugh at the end of her sentence didn’t give away that she wasn’t as fine as she said she was. She walked over to lean against the kitchen island to steady her shaking legs.

“I can come over if you need to talk, Tully,” Kate offered. “It won’t take me but a minute to put away what I’ve been working on and head your way. I’d love to see both of you anyway. It’s been a few days.”

“It has been a few days, and you’re more than welcome to come over, but please don’t think you have to take care of me, Mom,” said Tully. “I’m really OK. I’m just reminiscing about Teddy and all we went through those couple of days. I still don’t know how I survived.”

Tully heard Kate take a deep breath before she spoke again.

“Tully, you are the bravest woman I know,” Kate finally said. “I’ll be there in just a few minutes. Tell Ollie I’m on my way, and I can’t wait for him to show me his picture.”

#### KATE

She led Tully into the bathroom and helped her undress while the hot water in the shower created a fine mist around them. Tully’s long, blonde hair was matted from staying in bed for two days, so Kate gently brushed it to remove the largest knots before she washed Tully’s hair.

“OK, baby,” Kate said. Can you step into the shower without too much pain? You can sit on the shower stool we bought for you to use while you heal.”

“Yeah, I can get in there,” Tully replied, wincing as she lifted each foot and leg into the tub.

“I’ll do this as quickly as I can so you can get back to bed, OK? I just know that a warm shower always makes me feel better,” said Kate. “There’s just something about having clean hair and a clean body that relaxes me.”

“I don’t think I’ll feel relaxed for a long time, Mom, but the water feels good, and I really do appreciate you helping me get settled at home,” Tully replied, as she leaned her head back into the stream of warm water, letting it mix with the shampoo and tears running down her face.

After Kate got Tully dried off, dressed, and back in bed, she left her to nap alongside her husband, John. Kate closed the door to their bedroom as quietly as she could and glanced across the hall to the room where the nursery was ready for a new baby just two days ago.

During Tully’s stay in the hospital, Kate’s husband, and John’s parents had removed any trace of the baby that was supposed to arrive in a few weeks. They

had packed his unused clothes, books, and newborn diapers into tubs, and had taken them, along with the crib, rocker, and dresser, to a newly rented storage unit. Just the weekend before, family and friends had gathered to shower Tully, John, and Teddy with gifts at a turtle-themed baby shower, and they were still receiving gifts at their garage door multiple times a day. Kate looked outside every few hours for new boxes so she could then hide them under moving blankets in the garage until someone could be persuaded to take them to the storage unit.

Needing a few quiet minutes to herself, Kate headed to her room, which was next to the former nursery. Sitting on the bed, she melted into the mattress, feeling the enormity of Teddy's death settling like the weight of an immense boulder on her shoulders, back, and neck. Her emotional trauma turned into a physical pain that seized her body and wouldn't let go. All five feet, five inches of her ached as if her emotions had taken on life and were squeezing her until she couldn't breathe without gasping. She fell back with her arms over her head hoping that if she lengthened her core, she could get the air she needed. Deep breaths in through the nose and out through the mouth, Kate, she reminded herself. Feeling the tension starting to loosen in her shoulders, Kate sat up again and thought about what else needed to be done: notification phone calls to make and texts to send, plus Teddy's obituary to write for their hometown newspaper, and autopsy and burial details to manage. It all felt overwhelming in the moment, but Kate was not going to let those responsibilities fall to Tully or John. Let them sleep while they can, she thought, as she started down the stairs to her waiting to-do list on the kitchen table.

#### TULLY and KATE

"Hey, Ollie," said Tully as she walked out the back door. "Guess who's coming over in a few minutes? Gigi!"

"Gigi's coming over during the day! "Why is she coming?" asked Ollie. He stopped kicking his feet in the air, so he could slow down and talk to Tully.

"Well, I called and told her about your turtle painting, and she wants to see it," Tully responded. "I'm guessing that's OK with you, right, buddy?" She tried to stop Ollie's swing by putting her hand on the rope closest to her and holding on tightly. She didn't want him to be tempted to jump out and roll in the grass while they were talking. Ollie dragged the tips of his tennis shoes along the dirt path under the swing making a "shh-shu" sound every time they touched the ground until he came to a complete stop. He then spread the two lengths of rope apart with his hands before jumping and rolling in the grass anyway.

"Mom, I'm going to go sit on the front porch and wait for Gigi to get here," said Ollie as he ran past her on his way to the front yard. "Come with me, OK?"

Tully followed her son around the side of their house that bordered a small creek, taking care not to step on the scattering of purple and white violets blooming up-and-down the banks. She loved how the Midwestern springs came



in bursts of color in her yard—white crocuses, red tulips, yellow daffodils, blue muscari, and purple hyacinths. Pink blossoms dotted the red bud trees that grew along the creek bank, the entire scene creating a floral rainbow every March and April for Tully to enjoy.

“Are you coming, Mom?” asked Ollie, as he raced toward Tully from around the front of the house. “Gigi will be here any second.”

“Almost there,” said Tully. She ran toward Ollie, grabbing him around the waist and swinging him up in the air. His giggles filled the space between them, warm and bubbly like the best bubble bath Tully had ever taken. Tully gave Ollie a squeeze before setting him down feet first on the newly sprouted grass coming up in the yard.

“There’s Gigi!” Ollie cried when he noticed a car coming up the long drive to their house. He started running to where the driveway met the sidewalk in front of the garage doors.

“Careful, buddy,” Kate said. “Gigi will be here in just a second. Wait right here.” Tully came up behind Ollie and crossed her arms around him from behind to keep him from hopping into the driveway. She could feel Ollie’s excitement in his fast-beating heart and the near misses his feet made on hers while dancing up and down. When Tully heard her mother turn the car off, she released Ollie from her protective hug.

“Gigi!” exclaimed Ollie. “You’re here.”

Kate’s greeting mimicked her grandson’s enthusiasm as she met him in front of her car. “Ollie! Yes, I am. Give me a hug!” She picked him up and gave him a hug while swinging him from side-to-side.

“I’ve missed you, sweet boy,” she said as she gave him a kiss and put him down. “I hear you painted a picture that I have to see.”

“I did! It’s a turtle on a log. I’m going to go get it now. Be right back,” Ollie said as he turned his energy into a run up the porch steps and through the front door.

“I don’t know how you keep up with him, Tully,” Kate laughed as she and Tully sat down on the wide front porch steps. “That boy has more energy in him than a can of Red Bull!”

“Yes, he does,” Tully laughed along with her mom. “I swear if we could harness it, we might have the answer for our fossil fuel crisis.” Tully’s tone became quieter, though, when she said, “I sometimes wonder what it would be like if I had two little boys running around all day.”

Kate leaned into her daughter, giving her hug. “Two little boys would be a

blessing, Tully.”

At that moment, Ollie burst back onto the porch, his turtle picture waving in his right hand. Both women turned around and scooted over to make room for Ollie between them.

“Here you go, Gigi,” Ollie said as he handed her his picture. “The turtle is right there,” he said, leaning over and pointing to a green splash of paint near the bottom of the page. “And see, he’s sitting on the log I painted right here.” Ollie touched a piece of brown paint under the green blob. Kate turned the picture toward her so she could get a better look at Ollie’s piece of art.

“Ollie, I love your picture. Your mom told me that you painted it after talking about Teddy,” said Kate. “Is this him?”

“Gigi, you’re so silly! It’s just a picture of Teddy,” replied Ollie. “Teddy lives in heaven.”

“Of course, he does, Ols. You’re right,” said Kate. “You’ve done a good job painting a picture of him though. It makes me happy to see that he’s sitting on a log soaking in the sun.”

“Ollie, why don’t you put that back in the kitchen,” said Tully, joining their conversation. “I’ll hang it on the refrigerator after Gigi leaves. You can play outside until it’s time for dinner if you want.”

“OK, Mom. I’ll be out back,” said Ollie already halfway through the front door.

“I love that he thinks about Teddy,” Kate said to Tully. “It’s hard to believe it’s been six years since Teddy died.”

“On the day he was born, I promised Teddy that I would never forget him,” said Tully, “but sometimes a day or two goes by, and I realize I haven’t thought about him at all. Then I feel guilty. It’s this awful cycle I go through.”

“But you’ve passed your love for Teddy to Ollie. That’s obvious,” said Kate. “Even on the days he doesn’t come to your mind, I’m sure he comes to someone else’s. Between us all, he’s not forgotten. He just decides who he’s going to visit each day.”

“That’s a nice thought, Mom,” said Tully. “But you can’t imagine what it’s like to be the one in a million in the worst way possible. Now that John and I have been on that side of the percentages, I always think the worst.”

“I didn’t realize you still feel that way, Tull,” said Kate. “I guess I thought that after you had Ollie, that feeling went away. I’m really sorry I didn’t know or

didn't even think to ask." Kate slid over to Tully's side and put her arm around her.

"Ollie is such a blessing, but there's a reason we haven't had more children," Tully spoke quietly. "The anxiety I felt during Ollie's pregnancy was just too much to do more than once."

Tully and Kate sat in silence for a few minutes while Kate considered Tully's admission. She knew Tully and John had gone in for multiple ultrasounds while they were pregnant with Ollie, but she had no idea how much the stress of having a baby still affected Tully. She ached for her daughter and John who, at one time, wanted a house full of babies. For once, Kate had no positive words for Tully. She was at a loss on how to comfort her without sounding insensitive. Although she knew there would be no Ollie without Teddy, Ollie wasn't a tradeoff for the heartache they all endured when Teddy died. He wasn't a consolation prize. The grief lingered over their family like wisps of smoke swirling from person to person, sometimes leaving them alone, sometimes encircling them all with their tendrils. Like a campfire, the embers of their grief glowed and smoldered, waiting to be ignited at a moment's notice.

"No words feel right, Tully," Kate said after a few quiet moments. "I'm here for you in any way you need me. Please reach out when those days hit too hard, and I'll just sit with you."

"Mom! Gigi! Come here!" Ollie's shouts interrupted their conversation as he rounded the front of the house at a dead run. Stopping in front of them, Ollie kept up his excited chatter while reaching out a hand to Tully. "It's Teddy! Teddy's by the creek!"

"Ollie, honey, you know Teddy can't be here, right?" said Tully as she stood up, took Ollie's outreached hand, and followed him to the side yard.

"I know, Mom, but he's here. I promise! Gigi, are you coming, too?" asked Ollie, looking backward to where Kate was scrambling up from the steps.

"I'm right behind you guys," said Kate. She, like Tully, was curious about what Ollie could have seen in the yard that made him think he'd seen Teddy.

Ollie stopped by the creek bank bending down and pointing to a tree limb that had fallen across the running water. "Look, right there! Right there on the log," said Ollie. "Do you see Teddy? He's sitting on that log right by the bank. Just like my painting."

Tully and Kate looked down to where Ollie was pointing, the afternoon sun streaming through the spring foliage blooming in the trees above them leaving sparkles in the water and spots of sun on the limb Ollie was pointing to. Right where he pointed, a small painted turtle sat in a circular patch of sun nestled between a stand of cattails and a knot on the limb.

“See! I told you Teddy was here,” said Ollie. “He’s just taking an afternoon nap.”

Tully kneeled beside the bank and leaned over until she was just above the sunning turtle. “Hey, Teddy,” she said. “I’m so happy you decided to visit us today. She added quietly, “I’ve missed you.”

Kate stood behind her daughter and grandson and took in the surrounding scene-spring in glorious, full bloom along the creek, Tully talking to “Teddy,” and Ollie chattering to no one in particular about how awesome it was that Teddy was on the log “just like his painting.” Almost as if it had heard them, the small turtle stretched its long head out of its shell and looked around, its gaze resting upon the trio on the bank for moment before slipping into the creek and swimming away.



## Unbridled Rage

Abby Franke

11" x 17" Digitally Illustrated Posters

# The Righteous

Ashley Wilson

**The Lord is far from the wicked, but he hears the prayers of the righteous.**

– *Proverbs 15:29*

God forbid my little thighs be exposed  
in the presence of all those devout Lutheran men.  
I would pick the dried dribbles of candle wax  
from the pew till my fingers turned raw,  
anything to distract from the drone  
of a sermon not meant for me.  
We perched there, perfect rows  
of deep blue polos and pressed khakis.  
I would have worn a skirt, but my legs  
were too long and skirts too short.

Quiet down, like a lady,  
don't waste your breath.  
You know your voice isn't wanted here.  
Press your tense little shoulders  
against these too-straight pews.  
Get down on your wobbly knees,  
fold your trembling hands  
and close your eyes.  
Thou shalt pray into the blackness to be saved  
by a God who doesn't care to answer.

Come, little children—  
stand in uniform columns.  
File through the chapel.  
Come, dip your fingers  
into the trickling baptismal font.  
Drag the cross on your forehead,  
feel it sink into your skin  
as the holy water makes contact.

If you are good, you will  
take the weight of righteousness.  
on your naked shoulders.

I know the weight of *your* righteousness  
is one I will never bear.

# The Worship of Woman

*Elise Dobson*

I am from the bend in the river,  
where the Willow Tree roots writhe with sin in the embankment,  
and the Cottonwood snowflakes atop your Sunday best.  
I am from the wooden pews in the Catholic Church where the scripture is shoveled down the raw throats of non-believers like the Eucharist,  
and no amount of church wine could wash the taste out of my mouth.  
I am from the body and blood of my mother, a truer religion than any father could sermon.  
I am from the font of sickly sweet honey and rose petal thorns,  
for I am baptized in the generational rage of Eve.  
I take communion from her breast,  
and pray at her feet.  
I am of woman, from woman, to woman.  
I am not religious but I'll be damned if I miss a Sunday.

## How to Sell Your Body (and Survive It)

Eliza Surdzial

Leave home as soon as you graduate high school. Underestimate how much money you'll need to live in the city while attending college. Meet an older man who tells you you're too pretty to be a waitress or dishwasher. ~~Don't trust him.~~ Follow him.

This is how you become a 7th Avenue Girl. Your name is not your own.

Work the graveyard shift— 9 p.m. to 5 a.m. Schedule your classes for the afternoon. Lie when classmates ask what you do for work. Learn that you can function on four hours of sleep with the help of coffee ~~and cocaine~~. Be nice and listen to the veterans' advice. These women will not only be your friends— your *family*— but also your mentors. They'll be the ones that offer you a cigarette (*It'll help you calm down and get it over with*). They'll be the ones you go to when you don't know how much to charge. They'll be the ones who teach you to scream "*Fire!*" not "*Help!*" if someone tries to take advantage of you. Run whenever you hear another girl shouting that. ~~It will always be too late.~~

After your first time, puke in an alleyway and sob. One of the older veterans— a woman called Lola with fake Chanel perfume and fiery, bright red hair— will hold your hair from your face and tell you it gets easier. She's lying. Hold onto its falsity for comfort. It will take months before you start to become numb to the nerves and nausea. The speech you recite as you walk up to a car, the positions and sounds, shoving crumpled bills into a black pouch— make it all blur into a robotic routine. By the end of your first year, have regulars.

Do your makeup to look even younger. Pigtails are a hit on Sundays. Equate your worth to your body and how many men want a slice of it. Dress enough to keep you warm in the midnight wind but not enough that it repels customers. Buy fishnets in packs of five from the corner store. Always carry a taser. A knife. Pepper spray. An alarm. A pack of condoms. Birth control. Buy thick hangers from the corner store, too, while you're at it. Lola will instruct you over the phone how to use them. ~~They will hurt.~~ They will work. Don't talk to cops. A rookie made that mistake. Find her body discarded behind a dumpster with her panties torn and a bullet in her throat. There will be no funeral, but you and some of the other girls will hold a moment of silence for her. Pretend to not see one of the girls hop into the car of your professor's husband. Act surprised when she stops wearing her wedding ring to lectures. Turn down the guy sitting next to you in biology. Turn down your classmates' offer to hang out after class. Don't turn down the cigarettes and needles. They will ~~destroy you~~ keep you going.

Accept the number Lola gives you (*My cousin is a therapist. Promise me you'll see her*). Go every Thursday to the cozy little office with the yellow, plush couch. Open your mouth— but not as a service. Let the words flow out— even if



just a few. Cut your working hours. Create a resume. Apply to four different unpaid internships. Get rejected by the first three. Get accepted by the fourth. Break down and throw a stiletto at your mirror. Realize that nothing will ever get rid of the years of invisible handprints and marks of repulsive lust.

Wash. Scrub. Scratch. Tear. *Scream.*

Repeat to yourself that virginity and body count are just concepts meant to belittle women's sexuality. Repeat to yourself that you are more than just your body. Repeat to yourself that you are a *person*— not an object to be traded and bought and sold. Whisper this over and over and over again until you finally start to believe it.

Set your last day of work on 7th Avenue. You won't walk those midnight streets again. It will have been five years. Lola will hold you tight and with tears in her eyes tell you how proud she is of you. Promise to visit her even when she tells you to move far, far away. Use your internship to get a better job. Use your better job to earn more money than you ever did on the street. Use that money to buy clean needles, toiletries, and other basic care items for the remaining 7th Avenue Girls. Do not leave *this* family behind.

When you introduce yourself at your first AA meeting (*It's not just for alcoholics*), take a deep breath and use your real name.



## **The Silent Beast**

Lexia Holmes

*Digital Photography*

# Refurbished Doll

*Raeya Wilhelm*

I lie in a field of ivy, weary,  
thoughts drifting with the circling crows.  
Things are easier this way.  
Not like the shovel  
removing the snake's head,  
or my broken wrists in autumn.  
More metal in the ear could fix me,  
or perhaps a river of ink.  
Most efforts are in vain.  
Screws jammed through my bones  
or thread pulling flesh  
like a refurbished doll could  
not stop my corrosion.  
Do we glue the dead leaves  
to the winter tree and  
pretend they never died?

# Grey Hair

*Kayla McVeigh*

The first strands of grey were rooted just above my right temple.  
A gentleness that comes from the aging of dark hair to a softened grey.  
For the first time in three generations, fingertips traced lovingly from the scalp all the way down to the frayed split ends. Taking notice without reaching for scissors or dye.  
Daily surprises are offered within a lifetime.  
These strands are threaded through a lineage before me. A twist of silver now twirled through my own fingers.  
We don't have to do anything more than observe.  
Each life presents us with something familiar, but new. Returned knowledge and deepened connections. It's not just in our blood and our birth. It's in our change and our marks of age.  
Touch it if you can. Feel it and be kind. Your body is never static and still always exactly as it is meant to be.  
Pain and all. The beauty of softening from dark to grey.



## **The Eyes**

Raeya Wilhelm

*16" x 24" Acrylic Painting*

## How to Dragon, for any curious fire-breathing, winged serpents out there

*Christian Sickmeier*

First, you need to get off your lazy tail – yes, that one wrapped around the golden statue of some king you either ate or scared off. You need to stretch, make noises that will make any creature near your cove fly away, and maybe blow out a couple of puffs of smoke for good measure. Look around at the pile of gold you have been sleeping on and realize it is far too small for a dragon such as yourself. Once you are full of greed and the need to expand your gold pile, slither out of your cove. Make it nice and slow so the ground shakes with each step and throw in an angry snort here and there. Exit your cave, which we all know is just a castle you knocked over who knows how many years ago, and extend your wings. Hold them out longer than what is needed, but you have to look big if any eyes are on you. Speaking of which, take a big sniff. Smell that? That’s a deer. And that? That’s a hog. Smell the difference? No? That’s okay. You didn’t come here to eat wild animals; you came for something else.

Once you focus back on why you stepped out into the sun, get ready to fly. Flap your wings around. You don’t really need to do this; it’s just fun to see everything fly away under your wings. Lower yourself to the ground; that’s why you stretched earlier, and spring up as fast and as high as possible. Pound your wings as hard as you can. It’s essential to flap as fast as you can; otherwise, you’ll... and what self-respecting flying dragon can’t get off the ground on the first try? Once you are in the air, do some pointless spins and twirls. Not because you enjoy it, of course, it’s just how dragons get off the ground. Then a roar, not your main roar, but the roar you make when you’re on your way. Fly south. Dragons are always north of people. Don’t get distracted by any animals, even if you’re tempted. Remember, you’re filled with greed.

The lands below you should change from forested wildlands to tamer forests, then to groves, fields, and finally, farmlands. If it doesn’t go in that exact order, you’re going the wrong way. Trust me; I should know. If you see a farmer, make sure to fly right over them, not too low of course, high enough so they see the shadow pass over them, and then they hear you. They tend to scream and scatter like ants but are more enjoyable. Do not, and I repeat, do not, remember that one man who just started to cry in a horrible voice the last time you went out. It’s upsetting to one’s health.

Once you locate the castle, make sure to roar – your “I’m going to eat you” roar. Do it a couple of times to make sure they hear you. Swoop in at the walls a couple of times. Don’t touch anything, just get them really scared. Let them shoot arrows or boulders at you. The arrows don’t do anything, and the big rocks are easy enough to avoid. Once they all stink of fear – that salty, dungy smell – that’s when you know they are ripe enough and ready to be seared. Open your mouth and bring up the greed that filled you; let it out. It will burn up the arrows, armor, the flesh inside, and even the stone walls. Make a couple of passes; don’t make

any art, just go back and forth. Fly up really high and look at the castle. It should look like a child's drawing. Now dive. Hold the dive to the last second then fling your wings out. All the debris and anyone around should fly back. Walk into the throne room, eat anyone there, then find the treasure room. Ahhh, there it is. You can hear it, smell it, feel the gold inside. Once you break down the wall, look. Just look. Make sure it is bigger than your other pile, and if not, I'll let you figure out how to move the gold.

## a zombie

*Clayton Hunsader*

IS a Zombie. a grotesque  
corpse, brainless and feeding  
on what it lacks. Its movements  
are rigid as rigor-mortis  
is battled by whatever bacteria,  
virus, parasite, poison, or personality  
that forces their inhuman form.

little larvae are always  
attracted to them, the stench  
of decay follows dilapidated  
bone structures and liquified  
internal organs. a wiggling mass  
flocking like a cloud of crows  
coming to consume, reproducing  
solely sustained on rot.

what goes first: the zombies head,  
heart, or humanness? the change  
is irreversible so it's irresponsible  
to let them take any more of your precious air.  
it's neither yours nor their fault  
they're this way; why the sword ended  
with you on the hilt and them on the silver, shrieking.

discarded and destitute, the undead  
wander without aim  
clawing each other for whatever  
scraps are found. the barricaded  
built starting with balsam, then brick.  
as more became infected, the protected  
passively grew from natural progression.  
now basalt separates the beasts from  
the boasts of normalcy. yes, a zombie  
is just a Zombie; a grotesque corpse,  
brainless and feeding on what it lacks.





**Nostalgia Is a Sweet and Suffocating Aroma**

Clayton Keehn

*11" x 14" Ink on Synthetic Yupo Paper*

# Mania, and her Beautiful Countenance

*Christopher Cassetty*

You were even more beautiful  
with those manic eyes, so bright  
and refulgent, I never dared  
think a more beautiful grey,  
and even when you stared  
at me with such distaste and—  
hate, I couldn't help, in frustration,  
but love you, and I still do,  
though I haven't met with your soul  
in quite some time; it makes me wonder—  
was it ever just your eyes,  
or the damaged soul I saw inside,  
that made me love you more  
than I ever thought to love myself.

# Your Dying

*Kim Kile*

The last time I saw you alive,  
death was creeping up your throat,  
taking you from the inside out.  
It didn't steal you quietly in the night,  
but suffocated you slowly, taunting you,  
offering you peace for the briefest of seconds  
before tightening its grip around your throat,  
causing you to sit up and cry in pain.  
I saw the blackness in your mouth,  
death's residue, inky as tar  
and engulfing your gasping breaths,  
leaving nothing for you,  
but your dying.

You're dying, and now, like a good daughter,  
I sit beside your bed and hold your bony hand  
still full of parental strength and power,  
and I give you permission to leave the  
torture, to surrender yourself,  
and melt into the dark, viscous pool,  
an offering to end your suffering by  
crossing the River Styx.  
But you fight me, and you fight your dying  
like you have a choice,  
like the odds are in your favor, but  
death's laugh lingers,  
rattling from your chest,  
contorting your face,  
so that the last time I saw you,  
your dying was your last victory.

# Apology for a Dissociative State of Mind

*Eliza Surdzial*

It's wide-eyed sleepwalking. Cotton ball  
brain. A drunk walk home stone-cold  
sober. Dust collecting on a spinning  
ceiling fan. You're a robot wearing  
human skin, clouded eyes and  
automated dances. A puppeteer pulling  
their own strings. Pressing the big  
red button.

*(Where did it even come from?)*

You're hammering at a blacked-out  
window, hearing voices on  
the other side. A one-way  
mirror. High-pitched ringing singing  
a lullaby. Elevator music looping from the phone  
hanging unanswered  
by its cord.

*(Who's even calling?)*

It's floating suspended  
under water. I Know The End's guttural  
scream fallen silent on silly straw ears. The clicks  
of a clock still ticking without batteries.

*(How is time still moving?)*

You're a house fire— the home,  
the lit match, and  
the witness watching it.  
Inhale the ash— your own exhale—  
and blow out clouds,  
covering the sky in a foggy blanket.

## Not Your Kind of Faggot

Tegan Blackburn

I'm crouched by my locker to retrieve a fallen pencil when the boy who hisses and meows and breaks open pens in pre-algebra slips by and coughs out the word: faggot. He's disappeared by the time I look up, the slur trailing behind, the ooze of a slug. I look from one end of the hallway to the other, searching for anyone else who fits that word. But there are only the red, faded lockers, lined up straight like boys in bootcamp, and the paper ghosts and spiders and skeletons, posed on the closed doors for Halloween. No one else but me. The faggot.

Our middle school uniforms consist of polo shirts and khaki pants, our own orange jumpsuits before high school permits us our civilian clothes. I dress the same as my classmates, varied only by the color of the polos and whether the khakis are black or tan. Yet I'm the only girl in my grade with hair this short. Half a pixie cut, half a buzz, a cornfield only partially tilled. Anyone who looks at my backpack can see the buttons peppering the sides, with their rainbow stripes and hearts, bought from dollar baskets at anime conventions.

I speed through my essays and science worksheets, enough to maintain an A-B average, all so I can open a book where two girls during World War II hold hands longer than they probably should, or pour over my sketchbook as two men with limbs too long and eyes too big press their lips together, born from my mechanical pencils. I catch their eyes around me, stuck on my hair, my buttons, my art, and hope they recognize what I've made obvious. *I'm the gay kid and you can't ignore it.*

But now someone has said it in their own words. The faggot.

It's something I never would have been called in earlier years. Not even by the kids at summer camp who snorted at a 10 year old with a My Little Pony lunchbox, or classmates who would get up and find another seat when I sat by them at lunch. Not me, the Barbie Princess on Halloween with her purple tulle dress and long golden hair. The kid who woke up early to watch Winx Club, with its fashion and fairies and a boyfriend for every main character. Who collected Littlest Pet Shop toys, whose room was painted bubblegum pink, who once tried to wear light-up Cinderella shoes to school.

I won't chop off that ass-length hair until age 12 (though not before getting a bob-cut that looks like Johnny Depp-Willy Wonka's.) The same time I began to realize I watched Winx Club to look at the characters, boyfriends be damned, in their short skirts and gogo boots, their painted lips and flowing hair. The same reason I wanted to dress as every princess from every Barbie movie, to capture the image of their beauty if only for a night. The same age when I tape a letter to the milk carton where my dad can't miss it, telling him I think I might be gay. He says that he'll accept me no matter what, until the next day, where he accuses me

of being brainwashed by porn.

He can deny it all he wants, but I know it to be true. I know that I'm gay. But this is the first time I've thought of it through this word. The faggot.

I find myself in that moment, still crouched over my pencil and staring down the vacant hallway, thinking that if this kid knew his slurs, he might have called me a dyke. That word spat at short haired girls, girls in flannels, girls with set jaws and chiseled faces, whether they have held another girl in their eyes or not. If he weren't already gone, I might have yelled to correct him. Not for the sake of a correctly gendered slur but because until that point, I figure it must be what I am. I'm a girl. I'm gay, and I want everyone to know it. If I make it known that I'm a dyke, any insult toward my sexuality is declawed. No word can be used to hurt me.

But I sit with that word. I run it through my hands like I'm testing fabric. The faggot.

I like how the word feels in my mouth. Its two syllables, the way both of them have a bite when you speak. Not toward anyone else. Never toward anyone else, because if any one queer person squeezed the word like clay, their handprints would all come away different, if they were comfortable holding it at all. Bigots clutch it all the same, I think. A blunt force weapon, a baseball bat, a crowbar to strike across the skull of anyone who ever dared to walk a way they didn't like, who had a haircut they deemed weird, who dressed too colorful or too mismatched or too different from their own clothes, who found joy in their gender and what that gender meant to them, who assign traits to loving another or loving oneself, the kind of love they don't comprehend, what they decree must be bludgeoned.

They can't comprehend the way I hold that word. The faggot.

I'm a baby gay. I've yet to watch *The Rocky Horror Picture Show*. I've been to one Pride Festival, and I caught heatstroke and forgot most of it. I won't kiss a girl until freshman year, when Ryann Murray kisses me on the lips unprompted during a field trip, and I spend the next three days convinced her boyfriend will find out and kick my ass.

I don't know if the heart of that word is whole just yet, but I've felt it beating.

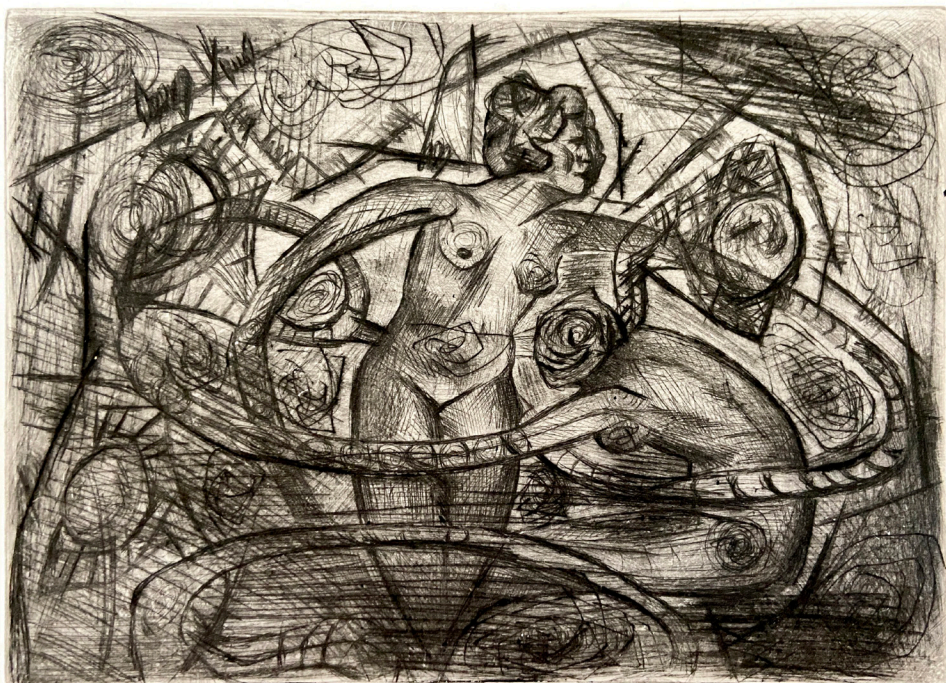
In clips I've seen of John Waters films, where Divine turns a red dress fished from the trash into the red carpet, a hand on her hip and a gun in the other, face as much makeup as it is skin. In the penultimate scene of my latest book, in the cold of night, the brush of near death, when one girl screams to another *kiss me, Hardy, kiss me quick!* In the swirling neon tunnel of a haunted carnival at Halloween, when a girl in killer clown makeup and a poofy skirt jumped out in front of me and ran a finger down my cheek. In the furrowed brows and tilted heads of confused kids asking teachers or parents if I'm a boy or a girl. When my fingers

first ran along the fresh shave of my hair. When I booted up my brother's fighting games just to turn the camera around all the pretty girls. When I looked at a list of gender-neutral baby names and christened myself new, because looking at it felt like coming home.

I don't say anything. I let it roll off my back when I get to my feet, pencil in hand, to walk back to class.

People like that would never understand they weren't even saying the same word anyway. Not to me.

Not to the faggot.



ST III 2/2

Kira Taylor

## **Twisted**

Kira Taylor

*7" x 9" Intaglio Hardground Etching*



## Send to Postal Code: 184209

*Alexandra Kluger*

I am from naked birch trees,  
that blend in with the gray skies seamlessly.

I am from the snow that blankets the ground  
and chills the air with each breath,

from a small town that lives within the  
Arctic Circle, hidden, not known of.

I am from borscht that simmers the back  
of your throat as you sip, sip, sip on it—

hoping to not burn the roof of  
your mouth or tip of your tongue.

I am from strange looking letters; mainly  
symbols because “letters” are unrecognizable.

I am from pointe shoes that leave scarring,  
bright red blisters and pink tutus that cinch

the tiniest waists and float effortlessly  
as the twirls make us dizzy.

I am from the vodka that burns your throat,  
tingles your tastebuds, causing them to dance

freely yet ever so painfully...  
too much of me and you won't remember.

I am from Matryoshka's,  
they unstack, stack, unstack, stack...

I am from Orthodoxy, beautiful, elegant,  
modest, white baptismal robes.

I am from the brown bears that prowl  
and hunt; resilient and preserving.

I am from Tchaikovsky, Swan Lake.  
Layers of traditionalism.

I am from the red, blue, white  
horizontal striped flag in Apatity, Russia.

# Fair Winds and Following Seas

*Kayla McVeigh*

*A maritime phrase for wishing farewell and a safe voyage*

If goodbyes bleed, so be it  
Let them chum the waters calling wide-mouthed bullhead sharks  
Circling blackened seas  
Fins like sails cutting through the push and pull of tides  
Let them feed  
Tooth by tooth, scissoring through flesh

Let ships be called to the edge of the world  
Sinking through deeper shades of navy they are returned  
Within the depths that keep creatures with little use for eyes

If goodbyes cry, have them sing out with shorebirds  
Let them sound over waves crashing along coastal cliffs that hold speckled eggs  
Glaucous-winged gulls  
Flapping above choppy waters, flight caught in stirring winds and skies  
Let us cry  
Wing by wing, rising above currents

Let tides tumble along the stretches of shoreline  
Crushing dark green glass, smoothing discarded Heineken bottles  
In waves, all things exist somewhere between flotsam and found

And goodbyes are just tradition for all that lives at sea

# Spring

*Haley Merida*

The thrum of my father's old truck always had the knack for putting me to sleep. It was welcomed now. My dad has finally stopped going on about how proud of me he was. It was sweet when I first got my acceptance letter, but now that we were on the 16 hour drive up to my school, it was unneeded. As we pulled up to the table labeled according to our last name, I showed my new school ID to the girl wearing the polo with our school's name and khaki shorts. She smiled, asked for my name, and tried to ease any nerves that I might have. But I could only focus on her name tag. It said Callie.

I wish I could go back that spring. To my mother's steady breathing lulling me into a deep sleep while I stayed attached to her back like a koala, feeling her warmth. The scent of her perfume and tide detergent lingered around me for the few days I went to school that year. I would struggle to rub off her Revlon 535 stains on my forehead. My father would come home from work with some form of takeout and bags under his eyes. It was clear that he was hiding his pain within himself. Even then, at the age of 11, I knew. No one could understand those quiet days. Nothing and everything seemed to be happening around us all at once. All I can ever remember of my father of that time is the way his eyes could never quite reach any of us, just coasting through the house while Mom and I made conversation about what show we were watching that day. I still remember how deafening the silence was when the nurse would leave for the day.

My father eventually had to put his foot down and make me attend some school. I knew just from how everyone stared at me that the teacher talked to everyone. Their gazes, full of unwanted pity, ran through my spine and made the hairs on my neck stand. I dropped my head to avoid any unwanted eye contact as I made my way to my desk.

That day at recess a girl from my class came up to me. Her name was Callie. She told me that she was sorry that my mom was dying. I just said that I was too. Still to this day, I think about Callie and how most people would consider what she did rude, but to me, it was freeing. Callie offered me a sort of liberation from the quiet whispers behind my back. She let me know that she knew what I was going through. I found myself gravitating towards Callie after that.

When I crawled into my mother's bed after school that day, my mother brushed my hair from my face as I told her all about how Callie and I played at recess. I told her that I hoped we would be great friends. I also told her how I was really going to miss her when she left. I told her how scared I was. She wiped my tears away from my cheek as she whispered that everything would be okay. That she would always be with me and in my heart. She told me that her love for me was so strong that it would not be possible for it to leave with her.

Now instead of mourning the days that my father would force me to go to school, I would have a silent celebration within my spirit. I felt horrible about being excited to spend time with Callie over my mother. With Callie, death wasn't hanging over us like the Spanish moss in the willows of our backyard. I knew that I would always miss my mother dearly, but I couldn't help but miss Callie too. I would find myself wanting to talk about her to my parents constantly. This was something Callie said today, Callie would love that. Callie has pretty blonde hair just like that character. I tried to hold myself back for my mother's sake. Even at eleven years old I still had the forethought to put my mother first. It drove her absolutely insane.

One Friday night my mother wanted me to invite Callie over for a sleepover. My father was worried that all the medical equipment and the nurse would freak her out, but I assured my father that Callie already knew that my mother was sick. "That doesn't mean she really knows what that means, dear," he told me. I couldn't comprehend what he meant then. Even though I should have.

When Callie came over with her father behind, I felt nothing like the butterflies I had felt then. I knew that this would be a memorable. I still remember the way that my mother's candles reflected off of Callie's blonde braids. It felt so exhilarating to see her occupy the same space that I had been in my entire life. It was also a little unsettling to see her next to my mother's plethora of pills. I could tell that Callie's father was off put by my mother's headscarf. Callie clearly did not tell him about her, probably because she didn't see why she would have to. She was only there to play. My parents told me that I should show her to my game room, ushering us away while the adults got to talk. I didn't mind, however, since I really wanted to show her my toys and games.

While me and Callie were in the midst of making ourselves in the Sims, I heard my father scream my mom's name. The image I saw as I ran down the stairs will forever be ingrained in my memory. There will never be a moment in my life where I wouldn't have my father on the ground clutching my mother's limp body at the back of my mind. It will always be on in a loop.

I don't really remember the car ride to the hospital that night. I just knew that it was silent. There must have been a vacuum that sucked the air out of the car at some point. I swore that I could hear my mother's slowing heartbeat in the ambulance in front of us. I can faintly remember the way that Callie clutched my hand, begging me not to follow my mother wherever she was going.

After we got to the hospital, and saw my mother being ushered into intensive care, with a swarm of doctors, nurses, and CNAs trying to protect their queen bee. My father called Callie's dad to come get her. "I'm so sorry for this, Tim." Callie's father told mine. I had to watch her disappear into the darkness past the sliding doors. For a split second, I no longer was thinking of my mother and whether or not she was going to be okay. I was thinking of myself and Callie.

After around 6 hours of endless waiting my father was told that my mother

was, for now, in a stable condition. The cancer was now in almost every single part of her body. Her time was shortened in half overnight. This was the moment that I had my first panic attack. The spring was almost over and now I would have to face the summer without my mother. Without our shows. Without her voice shushing my cries away. I would never be able to see the way that my father tried to hide how much he loved her while she told him about her day at dinner. I would never wake up for school in the morning with her showing me what she painted for me the night prior. Everything that I had known about the world was collapsing in on me, filling my lungs to where I could not possibly breathe. I came back to the hospital waiting room in my father's arms. He was trying his best to comfort me the way he knew my mother would. I guess it's hard to do while you're sobbing just as hard.

I don't remember much from the weeks after that hospital visit. Just a sense of quiet mourning that was rolling through the house in waves. My father had stopped making me go to school. There was no borrowed time anymore. My mother was put on hospice care, her only drugs now just consisted of easing her pain for the remainder of her time on earth. I cried more in the weeks before her death than I actually did when she died. Even though she was still in the house living and breathing she was as good as dead. She had become what she dreaded the most. A walking corpse. My father and I tried to respect her wishes and to treat her as normally as we could. It was impossible to ignore the reality of the situation.

Everyone told me to remember her before she got sick and to try and see her as that. But I've only ever seen her bright eyes and flowing, thick hair in photos. I could never remember my mother before she was sick, she was sick for what felt like my entire life. My father knew this, he just told me to know that her suffering would end soon. In whatever afterlife was waiting for her, cancer would not follow, it was too deeply rooted within her body.

The funeral is what I remember the most. My mom already took me to Khol's to get a dress for it. She wanted to make sure that I looked good and still felt pretty. It was her last act of being a mother. From the moment I got out of my father's truck and entered the funeral home I told myself I wouldn't cry. My whole family was expecting me to cry. I still have trouble crying about it. I always knew my mother was going to die sooner than other's. A part of me that I tried to ignore and tried to throw away was happy that I didn't have to worry about it happening anymore. I could finally rest at night not thinking about when she would die.

Me and my dad sat in the front row, right by the casket and the preacher. I tried not to react to the way the preacher's false teeth flopped out of his mouth when he sang old mountain hymns based on some weird abstract Bible verse my mother cared nothing about. It had to be my grandpa's doing. No way dad would ask for that. My grandmother grabbed my right hand and rubbed what she must have thought to be comforting circles on the back of my hand. However, they didn't seem so comforting with how she was shaking terribly while ice cold. I had the thought that my mom's hands had to be warmer than grandma's. I wanted

nothing more than to go up to my mother and crawl in the casket with her and drift away into our dreams together. She would always be protecting me then.

After the songs and verses were finally finished, me, my father, and my grandparents stood in a line in front of my mom's casket.

I tried to stay glued to my dad for the remainder of the funeral. He was now my only anchor to the world. The only proof that I had that someone loved me. I listened to what everyone told us. How this would pass. How they were praying for us. My father would just do his best to nod along and not ignore them completely. He later told me that the whole time he was wondering how ridiculous my mother would find the whole thing. She knew that her and my father's families would make it weird.

The world got dark after. There were always remnants of my mother in our house. The plates we ate dinner on were hers from her first apartment. Their bedroom still smelled like her perfume. Her Revlon 535 was still sitting on her dresser, waiting for her. Just as me and my father were. I asked him to let me go to online school after. He had no choice but to let me.

My dad was forever different after the death of my mom. If someone who barely knew him, like his coworker or something saw him, they wouldn't see it. I knew that he didn't laugh as much anymore. I knew that he stopped playing the guitar. I heard his muffled sobs come from their bedroom while he thought I was sleeping. I knew that the reason he didn't clear her out of the house was because he didn't want it to feel real. I didn't either.

It felt impossible to live with just my dad after my mom died. She was always the one to take care of me, to talk to me. Living with a grieving parent who you never felt close to was excruciating at first. Until I saw him one evening slumped on the kitchen table, with a bottle of whisky in hand. Even at 12, I knew that this was his coping. Knew it was the wrong way to cope. Knew that my mother would hate it. That's what I told him when I shook him awake. Though I was afraid he would be angry, he wasn't. He just laughed and said, "Part of what hurts the most about losing her is that you are *just* like her. I hate that I hate it. I hate that just looking at you do your schoolwork sometimes makes me cry because I'm reminded of how your mom looked while painting. You both furrow your brows in the same exact way." After the initial sting of what my father, my last parent, had just said to me, I sat down next to him.

"Sometimes I hate how when I'm looking for something that I lost I think to ask her if she saw it. I also hate how when you come home from work you sometimes call her name from instinct." I said. This made him smile. He started laughing, and me with him. I really felt like my father's daughter in that instant. We were both doing a terrible job at what my mom told us to do.

I stopped laughing when I noticed that his laugh had turned into a sob. He hadn't openly cried since the funeral 6 months prior. I barely heard him whisper,

“I’m sorry Sam. I should have saved her. I could’ve noticed the symptoms sooner.” I immediately hugged him before he could say any more. I knew my mom was spinning in her grave. I knew that this had to stop immediately. I knew I had to save my father from himself.

“Dad, you know you have to stop this before mom starts haunting you. This is what she said not to do. You know she hates when people don’t listen.” My own voice sounded foreign to me as it was wet with tears. My father just nodded his head and hugged me back. I don’t remember how long we sat there like that. I just know that he started going to therapy after that.

We moved away from my mother’s dream house a year after she died. Both me and my dad decided that there was no point as it was always *her* house and there was nothing but ghosts there for us.

I still think about that spring as the best of my life. Sometimes if I think about it hard enough, I can go back there. Those memories will forever be ingrained in my soul. I think that my mother gave me that spring to stay with her, that was what she meant when she said that her love for me was so strong that she would never leave. She would be in every spring.

For Holy and Chloe.



## How to be a Mexican American in Indiana

*Xavier Neier*

Be born in Tijuana; have a Mexican background, but be adopted by two Hoosiers; don't worry, you'll know what a Hoosier is later; don't memorize your mother's face, you'll have a picture of her later; don't remember all the details of the process, you'll have the adoption explained to you by your new parents. They aren't new, they have always been your parents. Go to Indiana, settle down in a quiet town like New Pal, a sleepy town, frozen in time. On the high shelf, your only form of contact to the other world sits high above your head: rough, itchy blankets, a pair of miniature dolls with their black suit and white and red dress, a baby's straw sombrero—aren't they nice mantel pieces? Don't open the navy-blue tote yet, let it sit in the closet under the folded Lego boxes. Pay attention to the two beanie babies on the dresser, one red with the Mexican flag on its chest and the other splashed with red, white, and blue, undoubtedly the American one. Get a younger sister; be mistaken as the younger brother because you're less responsible. Be seen at church; get mistaken as her boyfriend by the other kids. Her blue eyes and your brown eyes don't match. It's okay, they didn't know you were adopted. Take a look in the tote, even if you're not bothered by the adoption yet.

Go to the county fairgrounds, be approached by fellow Hispanics—after all, you're one of them, right? *¿Dónde están los baños?* Listen as they speak too fast; say you don't speak Spanish but in English of course; let their daughter translate the message, she understands two languages. Why not you? Get exposed as a fraud; take Spanish classes throughout high school; then take more classes at college; great, now you can read at a second-grade level; join the school's Latino club, you'll fit right in, right? Go watch their dramatic movies, see their tarot cards, and taste inoffensive flavors of catered Qdoba. Realize something is off, you're not connecting, like an observer but not part of the whole. You're not picking up their de's or los's or keeping up with their language, or your language? It's becoming a whole cultural class, and you're already taking too many classes.

Get overwhelmed with school and stop going to the club. Great, you didn't plan for this extended spring-break; leave the school, just for a minute, online work is better anyways; pause, open your blue tote now, just once more; some other blankets, dried palm leaves; look, her photo; that's your mom, or your real mom, or your birth parent? She could not have been taller than 5' 4", given how the kitchen cabinets towered over her. Read her face, her tiny, brown eyes, the thin strands of hair framing her face. Nothing, there is nothing to read from her distant face. Imagine her voice, what she must have said to you before handing you off; be careful putting the photo back in the box, or you'll ruin the memory; you are a Hoosier, an American. Go ahead, take more classes, do more tutoring sessions, connect to other Hispanic clubs; do these things, even when you don't fit in; you may never become fully Mexican, but you are still Mexican, and hey, being bilingual is a worthy skill. You could travel back to Tijuana, talk to your

second mother, hear her voice again for the first time. *Have you thought about what you want to say to her?* You'll figure it out as the years go by.



## **HDYKAM?**

Clayton Keehn

*11" x 14" Ink on Synthetic Yupo Paper*

# Before We Forget

*Kayla McVeigh*

Gravel crunched and popped as he rolled from the cul-de-sac onto Cedar Bend Court. Peter made this trip daily now. His “a little bit each day” attitude kept him optimistic about moving his dad out as that time grew closer. His dad wasn’t the typical hoarder though. Peter’s childhood home was housing his dad’s great archive. It wasn’t as straightforward as medicine, but Peter understood his dad’s work helped people. Growing up his dad always talked about the responsibility of collecting ethnographies. There was always his dad’s anxiety that if the archive disappeared, those voices might disappear. The curation of such an archive was just as sensitive.

“Don’t let those bastards pick apart-” It had been over six months since his dad had last talked with him like that. Since then, Norman’s worsening health had progressed. Their lives moved more quickly. In that disorienting movement, things that were once focused were now blurred. Many things were forgotten.

Climbing the porch steps, Peter kept his arms tucked against his sides. He knew better than to grab onto the shaky railing. It had always been more of a hazard than a help. He still had a scar etched lightly on his chin to prove it. Work from earlier that morning was still cutting away at him. Replaying the morning wasn’t helping much to smooth out those edges. He needed a distraction to get his mind off it. His keys rattled. This gently called for his attention as he snaked them out of his pocket.

When he stepped into the mudroom the house overtook him. Visually the clutter was always overwhelming, but it also smelled intensely of patchouli. Smoke pooled in the mudroom from incense burning somewhere deeper in the home. Peter went to sit down, but the entryway bench was no longer visible under the immense piles. He stepped off his shoes, scuffing the backs in the process. Small shavings of faux leather fell to the floor. Then he carefully moved around the stacks of papers. The piles were stacked so high they leaned like Jenga blocks. Pages hung down sweeping the floor—the newest addition to Norm’s creeping archive.

He followed the spread back to its source in the sitting room. Peter could see his dad had been pulling box after box of his old research from the attic. Calling out to him, Peter said, “Damn it, Dad. What did I say about the stairs?” Despite Peter’s voice, the lap-sided house with green walls and a forgotten carpet held great silence. The patchouli seemed to fill the space when sound didn’t. It made Peter’s eyes water. Norman was resting in the well-lit sitting room in one of the two burnt orange armchairs just below the skylight. Everything was incredibly still. This made the rhythmic rising and sinking of their chests seem pronounced and unnatural. Only the soft hissing of air sneaking in and out of their lungs could be heard.

Across the sitting room and up the wall stood the mounds of clip-bound manuscripts. They ascended in a multi-tiered formation from several years of stacking and useless sorting. Peter thought if he could only take a few days off work, he could get the house under control. He looked at the deep lines that ran vertically from the corners of Norman's mouth. Time was only ever going to work against them. He put this thought down to focus on sorting. The forever creeping archive was a beast that pulled and crawled its spiral-bound body across the floor.

Heading for the light switch, Peter hopped around the wandering branches of root-bound pathos plants. They exploded out of their ceramic planters and their vines wandered over old piles of once-sorted papers. Peter's face scrunched up at the sight of his lost progress. He had hours of work at his feet, at least half that work would be redoing everything he had accomplished yesterday. Norman wheezed from across the room while trying to shift his weight onto his left side in the cushioned chair. Peter continued to sift through the piles of papers until a strange article fixed his attention. "Crows?" he mumbled. The article was titled, *The Curious Crow Funerals: A Murder in Mourning*.

Peter's mom had loved birds. He thought about how his dad would annoy him by talking about the significance of birds in other cultures. His mom always held a warm smile to remind Peter to listen.

"Dad just doesn't understand what I want to do. He thinks all doctors are unethical or something." Peter had said over the phone once. He had been in his twenties and was still in school. His mom called to invite him over for dinner. Even while in college, all his life he had never lived more than fifteen minutes from them. "Besides I don't know about culture and religion. What am I supposed to say when he talks about that?"

"Just listen to him, Peanut. That's all you have to do."

It wasn't that Peter and Norman fought, but from the time he moved out for college and went into medicine, he and his dad had grown apart. His mom was always good at bridging that.

Earlier that morning, before arriving at his dad's, Peter had scheduled a few hours to work in the lab. He could then head over to the house for a few hours and make it back to the hospital for a one-on-one with one of his patients. He worked these shifts more often given his dad's needs. Peter had arrived at the lab at 8:15. His thoughts were ahead of him. He was already planning out what he could get done at the house. He was still unaware of the disaster at work. The sharp point he would soon find himself stuck on all day.

His desk had always been near the tanks of rats in the control group so he could tune out the soft clicking from their glass water bottles. The rodents guzzled down droplets of water for hours on end. A very distinctive clatter. This and the humming of fluorescent lights were so constant they were practically inaudible to him. Inaudible most days, but not this morning.

His colleagues were quiet. The research assistant seemed nervous. Their eyes dropped to the floor. The flick of a tongue nervously wetting a tensed lower lip, queued him in on the news. For the first time in years, he could hear the chatter of the lab again. It was practically deafening. It seemed cruel that his longest and most promising trial was ruined, but the lab could be unchanged. His desk was just as he had left it. A mug with an assortment of pens and his notebook sat in the right-hand corner. Above them clung a few pink post-it notes with the contact information for assisted living facilities. These were peeling off the wall. In the middle of his desk sat two sample designs for the experimental drug's potential packaging. A game changer for families battling alongside a loved one with an aggressive and often terminal form of leukemia.

When he finally approached the tank, he lowered his hand into the cage as though needing to touch what his sight struggled to make sense of. "What happened, Star?" Peter said as his fingers met with the stiff body. Last week the whole team celebrated this rodent with hard nips of respectably aged scotch. Like the other lab rats, Star had white fur with standard ears and amber eyes. Some of the rats had their tails marked with a black sharpie to make identifying them easier, but Star could be easily recognized by his one bad eye. It was an old injury, but a miraculous recovery.

An overlooked wire from the mesh covering on the tank had stabbed into his left eye socket. For a while, the blackened eye oozed an unpromising amount of puss. It was surprising when the eye crusted over, and the swelling went down. That was Star though, a fighter. He showed all the signs of a medical breakthrough. Peter even decided that after this trial he would retire the rat into the care of his youngest. She was a senior in high school with a 17-year-old grudge built up from never having had a pet. Peter thought about what this meant for his patients, and he thought about what this meant for their families. He'd watched mothers throw themselves to the floor and patients fade away. Don't forget them, he thought.

Running the water and the bathroom fan, Peter tried to hide for a moment before going back out to face the team. His face was red, and his eyes were puffy. He had never cried over any of the rats before, but he had never named any of them before. Nichole, one of the research assistants removed Star from the other rats who had been grooming the body. She popped the small corpse into the freezer and said something about an article she had seen. Something about how the pack will bury their dead within 48 hours. The team knew from experience that the other rats would produce unreliable data for the next few days. Their behavior already masking any meaningful response to the drug in development. The experimental group would likely refuse food, move slower, and sleep for much longer than usual. None of this behavior would be useable.

"What do you want for dinner, Dad?" Peter called out from the kitchen. Norman's face abruptly twisted up in distress and his eyes searched around the room as if looking for something familiar he could ground himself in. Peter kept his distance waiting under the arched doorway so he wouldn't add to this stress. Nor-

man looked at Peter occasionally, but it was clear he wasn't finding the security that he needed. Peter lightly tapped his thumb against his thigh five times before responding. "What's wrong, Dad?" he asked gently.

Norman gasped as he tried to speak. Even his words thrashed about wildly like something feral backed into a corner. "I just don't know why you keep calling me that. Who are you to call me that?" His speech was rapid, and his wheezing grew louder.

Peter tensed. He cleared his throat as it had choked up slightly. Taking his time, he carefully said, "That's all right, Norman. You're okay. You're safe with me. You're safe, you know that. I'll call you Norm. Is that better?" It was something Peter had read and now it was something he practiced. There was a chickadee whistling near the window by the armchairs. This must have been enough because Norman trailed off repeating to himself softly,

"That would be better, that would be better, that would be better."

A sufficient mantra for a slipping mind. Norman repeated things to himself more often over the past few months. Sometimes verbally, it started with dates, then names which he told himself not to forget, and eventually just an utterance

don't forget,

don't forget,

don't forget

He repeated these reminders until the syllables seemed to come loose and the entire string of words ultimately lost meaning. Eventually, they became hand-printed on notepads only to fade from him as soon as the words hit the paper. Norman would ask Peter to decipher his notes, but Peter noticed they had become less legible. Norman reached to his left side for some photographs that were stacked on the round side table. This calmed him. He began flipping through the stack. Norman looked up at Peter and their eyes met for a moment as Norman flashed Peter a lighthearted smile. Following this small grin, he said, "This was me."

Peter caught himself searching for his dad in those brief seconds of eye contact and thought to himself that he should know better by now. The two armchairs were angled toward each other. Norman always sat in his chair and Peter found himself sitting in the one that had been his mom's. She would spend hours watching the cardinals and chickadees that flitted around the feeder that hung in the window. Peter sunk into her neighboring armchair and tilted his head over to quickly reference which of the washed-out pictures Norman was talking about today.

"What's that M?" Norman asked.

“University of Michigan,” Peter said.

“I went there?”

“No, you taught there. Anthropology.”

Looking at the mess of papers and books Peter was already prepared for what Norman would say next. “We can’t let the knowledge be forgotten. We can’t.” Norman cried out with a weakness in his voice that reflected the helplessness in his situation.

Peter thought about the comfort his dad had given him at his mom’s funeral. Norman’s words still echoed. Peter had tried to study his mom’s many details—the things he could collect her in. Things like a few of her illustrations or her guide to the Birds of the North. He looked for her in some of his own features. The small things like her widow’s peak. It dipped down from her dark hair and framed her forehead. It reflected the one shaping Peter’s own hairline. He hadn’t always noticed this. Peter collected these details and his dad burned incense. He thought about this when he had stood over his mom a few years back. She was several feet under, somewhere closer to the bedrock than the topsoil. He remembered how Norman had taken him by the shoulder, softly reassured him, and in a steady voice said,

“It’s okay to feel hopeless. This is hopeless. Just don’t confuse it for being pointless.”

“I know, Dad. No, Norman, I’m sorry. I’m sorry. I know.” Peter said pulling himself to his feet. He needed to head home but would try to come back earlier tomorrow for a better start on the archive.

When Peter got to work, he was at least fifteen minutes late. It wasn’t like Peter, he was almost always on time, but he was finding it harder to go through the motions of his day. His body felt heavier, and his thoughts moved slower. Dr. Khan had been waiting for him at his desk. He wasn’t exactly a supervisor, but he was someone Peter reported to and someone he owed an explanation to. “Look, Dr. Weber,” Dr. Khan said meeting Peter’s eyes with concern. “We were all thrown off by yesterday, but you dipped out of here and missed an appointment with one of your patients.”

“I know.” The space between Peter’s eyebrows matted up and the tensing of his jaw was straining his neck.

Dr. Khan looked at the post-it notes and the pamphlets on Peter’s desk titled, Pivot Test, Preventing the Next Fall Ages 80 and Older, and a flyer titled Memory Care: Three Ways to Help When They Forget.

“Does he know who you are still?”



Peter looked up and said, “Not exactly. Some days yes, but more like, familiar.”

“So, what are you going to do?” It came off as abrupt, but Peter knew Khan was just trying to help. People were always trying to help.

“What I can, I guess. What more can I do?” He said more out of habit like a call-and-response sort of exchange. Peter had gotten used to these conversations but as his own words reached his ears he paused for a moment. With a deep breath, he held that thought, Then, following his exhale he said, “I’ve got to put that rat in the ground.”

At the end of his shift, he packed up Star in a brown paper lunch sack. He had a quiet drive over to the house on Cedar Bend Court. Norman stopped him at the front door refusing to let him. He wouldn’t budge until Peter felt familiar again. Peter was someone safe. Peter always helped with the archive. Regaining Norman’s trust, he was able to help him into the backyard one unsteady step at a time. Peter got Norman settled in. Sitting in a metal folding chair, Norman was calm in the warm sun. Spring had worked hard to melt away the lingering chills of winter. Peter shoveled heaps of earth from the unkept flower bed making a hole. He placed Star about two feet into the ground just below the thickets of thorn-laced stems and full bunches of pink petals. Newly bloomed petals with deep red creases in their folds.

“Your mom loved those roses,” Norman said looking right at Peter.

Peter’s eyes met his dad’s. They held that silence for a lingering minute or two. The drifting clouds exposed beams of light shifting warm rays onto Peter’s face. It felt good. The warmth of the sun pressed his skin as the glow accentuated the amber tones in his dark brown hair. Norman was smiling and Peter noticed that his dad looked radiant. With folded skin and an inward collapsing frame, his lungs held air and his skin caught sunlight. He was radiant.

# No Dinner

*Saloni Dixon*

my father, regal as an Obeah man sculpted out of wood from a scared tree of no name, no place, or origin stands before me.

he says “*uchi*, bones of my bones, Eat. your ebony cup half full. open wide—golden child of the sun. remember, you are the tongue of your ancestors. way back in Africa, sap running dry. your belly ready to sail icy seas like a torn page from a book. *Eat.*”

our dutch oven clicks, sending a mountain to stir a pot of cane sugar, water, molasses, and snow peas.

thick branches shake, falling into Cherokee land and someplace else lost. all legends in night light. my father sweats in a world of corpses and the undertaker says no truth follows the negro. clogging up rivers, muffling jambalaya rhythms riding sweet bass strings, and I hear centuries carcasses of the dancing drums.

# Identity Crisis

*Alexandra Kluger*

Although I am Russian, I am not *really Russian*.  
I am not the essence of beauty wrapped in a kokoshnik

that's dazzled and draped by the porcelain rose  
tinted cheeks. I am not the luxuriant judder of

incomprehensible language that flatters  
the most eager and soft of ears. Nor am I the

purity of stainless snow baptist robes be to Law,  
rather by the Crimson Blood that cleaned me clear.

I also am not the vodka that stings and burns,  
but am the Pelmeni of hospitality and heart that

pours so smoothly into bowls of art and wooden  
splinters. I am not the composition of art—

encased and displayed, framed in golden petals  
that are only seen in my strands of blonde.

I am not the embellishment of a sarafan,  
but am the masquerader drowned beneath.

Although I am Russian, I am not *really Russian*  
because the American aroma has dissolved me.

# Being Black

*Tyler Butler*

## Television

Spring Break was always one of the best parts of any school year. I mean who wouldn't love a week where they can kick it and sit back and be free of the annoyance of school and the crap that comes with it? Seventh grade was a bit different in that regard. Not only was I getting some time off from those dreaded high school applications, but I was going to spend a few days at my cousin's house! Coming from my dad's side of the family, my cousins Bill and Kennedy were always around my grandmother's house during the weekend. If I had time I would hang out with them and we'd have fun for hours on end. Whether it was playing some board games or playing Super Mario Bros on our Nintendo DS's, it was always a blast going hanging out and messing around with them.

The one activity I always found us participating in the most above all else was watching Television. TV was a great way to pass the time, especially when that TV belonged to my grandparents. With what felt like an infinite amount of channels available to us, we would always flip around and take a look at what we would watch. It could be the sports channel, Cartoon Network, or ABC's random game shows. We always would find something to watch and something to explore within the endless sea of content.

Naturally, the first big thing I did when I showed up to my cousins' house on a glorious Friday night was ask what they had on TV. In Bill's words, they had "everything you can think of." If I'm being honest, I couldn't think of any statement that would be any better than that. We spent hours in the basement just watching random stuff that came on the TV. In that time, we managed to find some absurd shows and channels that I still find myself looking at now. Whether it was the three different versions of ESPN, or watching the absurdity that was Ridiculousness, we laughed so much that day you would think we were at a circus.

During our infinite surf the two of them had to take care of some chores assigned by my uncle. It had taken a while so I figured I would spend some time clicking through some channels while I waited for them to come back. While I kept flipping through I saw something that caught my eye on Adult Swim. I couldn't tell what the deal was at first. Perhaps it was the way the characters talked. Maybe it was the presentation of animation. Hell it could have just been the fact that this was the most amount of black characters I saw on an animated show. No matter what it was, I found myself glued to the screen.

"Oh shit that's the Boondocks!" Bill said, seemingly hearing the TV as the two of them ran back down to the basement. "I can't believe the show is on right now!"

“You know this show?” I asked.

“Oh yeah we both watch it all the time” Kennedy told me. “It’s one of my favorite shows!”

I knew the two were brothers but I didn’t think both of them knew a show like this. Kennedy is about my age whereas Bill was in high school, so I was always thinking there were some things he knew more than us. This show was on Adult Swim after all, and most of the time I wouldn’t be awake to watch it. So to know about a show that Kennedy AND Bill knew was a bit of a weird moment to process. I needed to know more so I asked the obvious question of “what’s the show about?”

“Oh it’s the most black show ever dude!” Kennedy said quickly. “It’s really funny and talks a lot about black stuff!”

“Oh yeah it’s funny as hell,” Bill replied. “We should check the schedule right quick. I bet it’s gonna be on for a while.”

His guess was right. The show was gonna be on until about 3 AM. I don’t know if it was a marathon or something of the sorts, but I wasn’t gonna turn this down. I wanted to be a part of the group and understand what was going on. So we watched some episodes, with some being simple while some being crazy. One minute I was seeing a chicken flu incident, and then the next the old man was coming back from the dead and possessing someone. It was a crazy show that I had so much fun experiencing for the first time, especially with all the nods to black culture.

One episode that stuck out to me was an episode that focused on the nature of Barack Obama’s election. The episode was meant to be a commentary on the way black people approached the election. Some of the cast found it as a means to promote products and become extremely popular. Others assumed Barack would be the end all solution to all the black issues. While it was funny there was a sense of reality that hit me during this time. Being 2014, this was around the time Barack was running for his second term, and I was forced to become a lot more aware of the politics around him. For every one moment that I laughed, another moment I had to really consider the circumstances of my status as a black man in the current society.

“What did you think?” Bill asked me, clearly excited to see my response. We had been watching hours of the show, so I needed to say something.

“It’s unique.” I said while laughing. “I don’t think I’m supposed to watch this show right now.”

“Every black kid gotta watch Boondocks at some point!” Kennedy said. “It’s a show made for every black kid.”

I thought about it for a second. Then a few seconds. Then almost a minute. I've seen many shows, but Boondocks was a show that spoke to me and me alone. It wasn't something I thought anyone could fully understand if they weren't the same skin color as I. Thankfully, I had two cousins right there who looked just like me.

"Is it airing tommo-I mean later tonight?" I asked.

Bill looked at the schedule for the night time program. "Yep. A good few hours."

As I began to head upstairs to the sleeping couch I made sure to leave one last message: "Let's make sure to watch it again." The two of them nodded in agreement, leaving me with only one thought in my mind after that.

"I gotta see more."

## **Winter 2008**

Another year, another time to set up the Christmas tree. At least that's what it should've been. I was young and silly and didn't exactly have the most object permanence going on. What I did appreciate even back then was the beauty of music. If there was a song on the radio I loved, you bet your ass I was dancing and prancing around the room. It got so notable that my mom even went as far as to set up little dance parties before I went to school. From the classics like Mozart, to the modern hits like Maroon 5, I was always jumping and hopping around like a spring.

However, something changed this year as we were waiting on the Christmas tree to be delivered. As my mom was preparing the radio, she just simply asked if I had "ever heard of Louis Armstrong?" I had shaken my head no at the time cause well...I didn't know. Her eyebrows perked up a little, but she shook her head and said "You got a lot to learn about your history." At this point I was still lost but intrigued by this unknown figure, and waited for my mother to put on a song.

The song she put on was "What a Wonderful World." At first I couldn't fully get what mom wanted me to see in it. Then I listened for longer and longer. I wasn't dancing or moving or jumping around the room like I normally would. I was silent and completely mesmerized by the sounds I was hearing. It felt like stepping into a different world for the first time. This was SOUL music, something which I didn't realize I would love until now.

"This music is so cool!" I told mom, my face brightening up like a lightbulb. "I wanna hear more!"

My mom smiled and simply said, "Now that's what I wanted to hear." She went through her phone and prepared to open up a new piece of music, this time

with Michael Jackson at the helm. This time she played the song “Beat It,” which unlike the last song had me back to my old bouncing self. It was a different tone and structure, but still full of that life and soul that the past song had. I was still invigorated by the sounds and the way my body snaked around the room. I had danced before, but not to this degree, and it felt less wild than I did before.

But would you believe that STILL wasn’t the end? My mom and I spent the 40 minutes playing all sorts of music from black history. One minute she was playing songs from Tupac, then the next it was NWA. I was being exposed to not just music, but black music. But something that stuck out just as much as the music, was my mom. It had been the most amount of time me and my mom spent together, and the most I had ever seen her smile at that point in my life. She was never an unhappy person, but this moment was different. We weren’t thinking about the tree or any issues in life. All we were thinking about was how cool the music was at the moment. It was above all else pure bliss. Me and mom always spent time together, and yet this time around it felt like we became closer than we ever were.

Eventually I needed to rest after all of that hopping and jumping around. While I laid there, relaxing and thinking about what I heard, my mom plopped right next to me with a wide grin on her face. “This music is your history, son,” she told me in a light tone. “I know you’ve listened to tons of music in the past, but this is a bit different from that. This music is YOU. And you have no idea how happy I am to see you appreciate it.”

“Thanks mom.” I said. Simple response sure, but it’s one that I think was enough to get my love across. It seemed to work, as she hugged me shortly after the exchange. Just in time for the tree to finally arrive.

## **Hair**

Waking up from a long car ride is a relaxing if odd experience. My mom had just shaken me up to display to me the area she had been excited to show me the entire day. Once my eyes adjusted to the concept of light I witnessed a glowing neon sign that simply read “HAIR SALON.” Just before I could answer even a simple question, my mom dropped me off and told me she’d be back in an hour. To say I was lost would be the understatement of the year.

I walked in and noticed the smell of the room. The air had the scent of roses outside of a garden. It was shockingly clean to boot. For how wide and big the area was, there was practically no speck of hair or broken materials anywhere. It almost felt like I was being pranked. To drive about 20 minutes to get here could only mean that whatever this place was, Mom must have loved to come here, at least I assume.

“Heyo, you must be Tyler!” a voice said. Breaking me out of my trance, I saw a man who looked like he had a Malboros every day. His face looked like it would break if I hit him too hard. I didn’t want to be rude however, so I simply

responded.

“Hey uh, who are you?” I asked.

“Oh, I’m yo barber Pete. Yo mom said you needed a fresh cut for Picture Day tomorrow!”

I hadn’t really thought about it, but it was picture day tomorrow. I usually don’t really think about it too much and I just kinda get it over with. I guess since it was my freshman year of high school mom wanted me to actually have a proper picture.

“So what are ya getting little man?” Pete asked.

“Just do whatever. I’m not picky,” I told him.

Clearly that struck a chord, because right after that Pete asked “You want a lining? How bout a solid fade? I could give you a shape up if that’s all you need.”

I was lost. I’ll admit. The only term I fully knew was “lining,” as that’s what I would get if I wasn’t getting a cut. All I could say was “uuuuuhhhh” when he asked me those questions.

Pete simply laughed. “You gotta know your hairstyles, maaaaan. It’s what makes the black man whole!”

I gave a weird crooked smile and gave an honestly shit response. “Well, I mean, it can’t be that important, it’s just some hair.”

“Aight, just hold on for a second.” Pete told me. “I think I know what you need.”

I found myself in the chair getting a cut, but something was different. It felt more natural, slow, and collected. In the past my haircuts tended to be fairly straightforward. About 20 minutes or so. This one took about 45 minutes, but each minute felt impactful. There was a purpose to the cuts. I almost fell asleep and let him take the wheel. Despite his looks, he damn for sure knew what he was doing.

“I’m done, little man. Check it out,” Pete told me.

I grabbed the mirror and I gotta say, I damn for sure wasn’t ready for this. My afro, which was once unshaped and all over the place like a hedgehog’s spikes, felt contained proper. It had a real circular shape, big enough to be an afro but small enough to pick. I was so focused on the first real cut I received that I didn’t even notice Mom walk into the shop.

“He must like it,” she told Pete, giving off a smile that almost seemed smug.



“Yeah, I gave it some of the magic touch,” Pete replied. “Bet you he’ll take his hair seriously now.”

“You like it?” my mom asked me.

“It’s awesome,” I told her. “How do I keep this?”

“It’s about effort, man,” Pete told me. “Black man’s hair ain’t like nothing else. You can’t just brush it and it looks good. You gotta put that soul into it.”

I looked at myself in the mirror one more time before looking at Pete. My eyes were as wide as the room itself, and before I could speak he simply asked, “You need my number? I can help you out, lil bro.”

Of course I said yes to that request. I had to learn more! As I left the shop, Pete simply told me one more thing: “Black Hair is real hair!”



## **New York Blue Botanical Garden #1**

Yuko Kyutoku

*23" x 23" Mixed Media on Stonehenge Paper*

# The Cradle

*Selma Adie*

I remember my baby cradle  
It had white netting and white sheets  
And a white blanket to envelop me  
Colorless and drab

Sometimes I would ask for color  
In the only way I knew how  
I would scream, and the world  
Would only scream back

When I grew older, they gave me  
Two colors, as a reward  
I got blue, for being good  
And green, for staying quiet

I got hungry, I got tired  
And I screamed at the world again  
It gave me colors to shut me up  
Paints in purple and pink

I couldn't eat the colors  
Couldn't sleep on them, either  
And when I cried again,  
They took my green away

I tried to hush myself  
And ask for food instead  
But they took the blue away, too  
To teach me not to complain

As I became an adult  
Learned to feed myself, clean myself  
Paint my own way  
I learned all the different colors and their names

And I knew when I saw pink again  
That it would hurt. That it would scream.  
I plastered my walls with it anyway

Can't say I was surprised when the walls began to bleed.

## to have and to hold

*Bee Fee*

*Slice through the skin like a sharpened knife against paper*

*Clutch the dampened couch cushions as pain grinds teeth*

*Suck air through a clenched jaw*

The pain sears and sizzles at the edge of my vision

Fragmented glimpses of you

*Blink*

*Tears drip from eyes*

I search for your eyes

You have none

*Stab at the body blindly as if you are simply a piece of flesh*

*An empty vessel tossed aside for the buzzards and vultures alike*

*Search for Humanity*

In this moment of despair, I plead for mercy

*Call their name*

*Please*

*Do not answer*

*Claw with nails, tear through tissue and muscle right down to the bone*

*Crack ribs*

*Pluck out their still-beating heart with talons*

A claw machine, your hand dangles and sways

Mocking

What you came for has been found – my heart was only ever yours: to have and  
to hold.

## If...then

*Kim Kile*

If the biopsy reports had been different, this is what I would have wanted you to know. You may not have been the first love of my life, which is why I know you are *the* love of my life. If you ever want to relive those first strong emotions we felt for one another, our letters from when you were in law school, and I was still an undergrad are in the green, blue, and white striped box on the top shelf of our closet. Don't worry, I've already destroyed letters from anyone other than you, so the kids can't ask you uncomfortable questions about my love life before you. You'll also find some high school and sorority mementos that have survived 40 years of moving and spring cleanings, so please handle them with care, and remember that they meant something to me. My phone passcode is my birthday. If you ever want to see the starts to poems and stories I wanted to write one day, go to the Notes app. You'll see some of my most raw moments in short bursts of one or two lines, maybe just a title, but it's a part of me that you don't normally see until it's polished and perfect. Speaking of my phone, don't be surprised if I get a call from the folks who run my Harry Potter game. I'm one of their VIPs, apparently, which probably means I spend way too much money on coins and power-ups which you'll see if you check my bank account. You'll also find way too much jewelry in the drawer in the closet. Please make sure that everyone in the family, including Anna and Ethan's future wife, take the pieces that remind them of me. I don't want anyone to have hurt feelings about whether they were considered family or not. Emily can have my Kappa key, and I pray that you find your TKE pin in there somewhere. It should go to Erik one day. I'm looking forward to spending days in the sunroom with you, so if you read this someday, think of me while you watch our Indiana sky turn every shade of pink, orange, and red in the mornings and the evenings. I designed it so you could watch a full day of the sun traveling from east to west without ever leaving your rocker. And make sure Erin gets all my books. She's a bibliophile like her mother and will respect them the way I do. I imagine her telling her children, "We never throw away books." Maybe you'll trip over my "to read" stack one day and think of me kindly instead of swearing about more stuff on the floor. Please continue decorating the house for the holidays-go big, celebrate like each one is the last one, and welcome all into our home without being worried about pet fluff and dust. I've spent too much time caring about the way the house looked instead of living in the moment with the people who share the house with me. Make spinach dip and have friends over for Butler basketball games, watch "It's a Wonderful Life" every Christmas Eve, and think of me when you see a mourning dove out the window or pick up a penny from the sidewalk. I'll be in the moments that you least expect to find me.

# The Process of Healing

*Sarah Seigel*

She brushes through the knots in her hair,  
she opens the curtains and lets in the light,  
giving away all she has to spare,  
she bites her tongue in spite.

The wolves rip and tear her apart,  
but she still finds herself going into the woods,  
holding onto everything in her pretty little heart,  
hoping to find something good.

The monsters that once seemed so cruel  
now bring her to her knees.  
She feels like such a fool,  
hating herself for how much she pleas.

Another day, another month, another year,  
afraid that every great thing will disappear.

She closes the curtains  
and turns off the light.  
She feels so uncertain,  
is this all worth the fight?

The fires she lights start to burn,  
will she ever change,  
will she ever learn?

She offers herself on a silver platter,  
will they even notice,  
will it even matter?

She finds pieces of herself to carve,  
*will I look prettier if I starve?*

She tells herself that this life is so sweet,  
feeling the faint way her heart beats,  
pretending that she does not lie down in defeat,  
her mother asks her when she will eat.

She tells her mother she is fine.  
*She will always deny.*  
Her mother tries not to cry.  
The cycle repeats.



## **This Is Home**

Corrin Larson

*Film Photography*

# Rebuilding Home

*Alicia Rump*

As I slow to a stop and the car behind me switches quickly to the other lane, I am reminded of the first time I made this turn. The car behind me almost hit me then, for the weeds and the woods were so overgrown, it was easy to miss the mailbox and the gravel road beneath it. This entire home, at the time, seemed like a forgotten property. Abandoned, neglected, the greenery growing whichever direction fed it most, a home for no one who cared to take care. This Indiana intersection off Allisonville Road is relentless, but this home was quiet, and forlorn.

Now, though it's dark, the space between the thicket of trees is cut back well behind the mailbox, and the gravel driveway inches out to the road welcoming me in. The gravel crunches under my tires, spewing as my Honda climbs across because I still turn too fast, but I slow as I come up on my family's vehicles. All four of my siblings drove separately, each of their cars lined up on the left, and I spy my mom's BMW tucked between them as if hiding. I'm excited at this development, but nervous, the past begging me to be cautious of disappointment.

Pulling up to my dad's Chevy pickup and his Prius (ever the most practical, this man), my Honda Fit squeezes comfortably between them. I switch off my volume and flick off my headlights. The bright white of the projector's light shines through the screen into the front of my car, the images on the screen backwards. I'm late to our movie night.

As this yard stood prior to my dad moving in, these nights wouldn't exist because the brush was too wild, the lawn unmowed, the weeds encroaching over any available space. Snake holes and hollowed mole hills made the ground unfit for chairs and dangling legs, and the biting bugs were nuisances none of us wanted to bother with.

There used to be tall switchgrass that dipped over the front walkway. It was one of the first things my dad cut away, opening a path to his always unlocked front door and up to the rest of the yard. He then mulched the path and placed circular cobblestone disks as walking steps up the middle. As I step from my car and approach my family, my dad's rust-colored dog comes sprinting from the darkness and I curse, almost tripping over the wire staking the projector's screen in place as he runs circles around my feet. I heard my brother, Nick, snort and I'd flip him off if my hands weren't occupied with my bag and my sweatshirt. He whistles, and the dog darts to him instead.

In front of where my family sits, on a pole that extends from the front porch by the porch swing, where one would normally hang a flag, hangs the screen. From the little table on the porch sits his janky laptop, bowed away to keep the light distant, playing some streaming service to which the projector is connected. In front of all of us is a fire pit, a small one compared to the massive pit he has



further down in the backyard. The trees surrounding the three-acre property form a perfect circle, fortifying the house and its inhabitants against the rest of the city and its occupants. Tonight, we are watching *Ready or Not*, followed by the fifth Predator movie, *Prey*.

“There she is! Finally.” My mom calls over the lone JBL speaker. Something loosens in my chest. She sounds like she’s enjoying herself.

“Yeah, yeah, I’m only a bit late.” I reply.

My dad has pulled out one long sofa resting just behind the path, and my twin sister, Addie, and my sister, Maddie, sit buried beneath the best blankets alongside my mom. Where my dad is all about practicality, my mom and Maddie are all about quality. Two bottles of Sauvignon Blanc peek out beside the legs of the sofa next to my mom, and as I watch she leans over and wrenches something from Maddie’s grasp.

“Mom, that Juul is mine!” Maddie says, and leans over, slapping my mom’s arm, trying to retrieve her stolen vape.

“Then where is mine?”

“I don’t know! Wherever you put it last, but that one-” Maddie snags it and yanks, “is mine!”

My mom leans in to fight her for it.

“Guys!” Gabby, our younger sister, is looking at them in annoyance from her spot on a folding chair beside them.

“She started it.” Maddie mumbles.

“I don’t care.” She says. She’s annoyed, but no one takes her seriously, as seen when my mom and Maddie keep fighting, only quieter.

Addie waves and lifts up her arm, showing another blanket she has hidden away, my favorite one, and I smile, winking.

Gabby sits with her legs kicked over my brother, the youngest, who’s 6 ‘4 frame sits in the folding chair beside her, the both of them swamped beneath a knitted blanket my grandma made. There’s an empty folding chair beside them, and I place my bag on it and pull my sweatshirt on, before kicking Nick in the shin as I ruffle Gabby’s hair. She swats me away with a grin and smacks me on the leg.

Nick smiles around what looks to be Oreos, and says, “Sup.”

“Save some of those for me,” I warn him.

He grins again, about to speak, but Gabby beats him to it. “He bought four bags, plus Cheez-its, and three bags of fruit snacks. Trust me, there’s plenty.”

My dad stands from the loveseat by the porch and hobbles up to the computer and pauses the movie.

“Bathroom break,” he calls to all, and then to me, “you hungry?”

I grabbed my bag and follow him, leaning over to give my mom a quick hug.

“Glad you came,” I say.

“I’m glad I did too.”

Maddie chimes in, “Can you plug this in for me?”

I grab her Juul, ignoring her and my mom as they return to arguing about whose Juul I am now in charge of charging.

“Grab me a water!” Nick calls out behind me as I follow my dad through the screen door into his dimly lit house. There’s a flickering warm glow from twinkling lights wrapped around a fake fern in the corner of the kitchen.

My dad’s hip buckles, still adjusting to standing, and I’m struck yet again by how things have changed.

He reaches an arm around my shoulders and pulls me into a hug, kissing my forehead.

“There’s lasagna and blueberry tarte on the counter and drinks in the fridge. I’m going to use the restroom, grab me a Mountain Dew?”

I chuckle, nodding. It wouldn’t be this house, his house, without something warm and sweet on the stove and mountain dew in the fridge, his addictions sans vodka. At the end of the day, was it this man’s sobriety that brought us to this moment? It’s more than that, though. It’s been every choice since.

I look around, the past pulling at my vision, at this moment, begging to be recognized.

2007

*We’d lived in a three-story brick house behind a gate, with a barn out back, and 22 acres of property. At this time, my twin sister and I were eleven, and there were eight years between us and the youngest, our brother Nick.*

*This was 2007, and our dad must’ve known far before any of us the effects of the recession because he’d started drinking again. We didn’t know until our mom*

*knew, and she only found out once he wrecked his four-wheeler into a tree and almost died. He broke his skull, lost his ear, broke his neck, and survived, but his secret was out.*

*The water went first, and then the heat. We'd shower at my mom's friend's house, and cuddle together in Addie's and my room. Their dream house, a failed dream. A foreclosure soon followed, as did their divorce.*

*From 2008 to 2018, throughout 10 years, we moved between our mom and dads, between 14 houses total. From riches to poverty, from whole to pieces, from stability to chaos. We carried our clothes from one house to the next in Kroger trash bags, hoping to God our dad wasn't drunk when he picked us up and hoping our mom wouldn't be there because if she knew, then the fight would be worse than the risk.*

*We broke the structure. Our uncles and aunts, all happily married, all in the same house for as long as we'd known them...we were outliers. Unstable. Like the houses we lived in.*

*The Tamarisk House. The worst because it followed the big house. A mess, smelling of cat piss, all of us full of lice...we fended for ourselves. Our dad tried to help, but once every other weekend didn't cut it. Our mom worked, and worked some more, and hated him for our circumstances.*

*There was dad's house off River Road, too small and cramped, two people couldn't fit in the kitchen unless it was one of us and our brother Nick, who was maybe three at the time. We had a pet snake. It died in this house due to neglect. Our mom would drop us off, never sticking around to talk to him. They fought a lot around this time, and neither the house nor them had space for us.*

*There was his house off Spring Mill Road. It was a huge house, but it was empty. There was a speaker system that worked and ran throughout the house, but there was no heat. We'd cuddle up on an air mattress in the living room, falling asleep to Scooby-Doo movies, surrounded by space heaters. It was cold, and it echoed. It was hollow. My mom never visited this house.*

*There was his apartment off Eagle Creek, even smaller than River Road. It didn't matter so much that three of us slept in one bed, my brother sleeping in my dad's, and one of us was assigned to the couch. It had heat, water, and electricity. Addie and I had our learner's permits, and our mom trusted us to transport our siblings in favor of interacting with him.*

*There was the house off Wooster Ct. It reeked of animal feces and cigarette smoke, past caretakers forgoing taking care. I slept in the best bedroom because it had hardwood floors, and, since I have asthma, I got it. It didn't matter. I couldn't breathe, regardless.*

*This house, like all the rest since the divorce, since the recession, since he*

*started drinking again, felt as helpless to its circumstances as we were.*

Beginning 2018

*“Hello?” I ask, groggy with a sinking pit in my stomach. My aunt had no reason to call me. There was only one reason she would.*

*“Your dad is in the hospital. He was in an accident. You need to get your siblings and get to the hospital off Post Road. I’m sending you the address.” Succinct. Matter of fact.*

*“Was he drinking?” I asked, already sitting up and pulling on pants, knowing as I asked that this question was pointless.*

*“We don’t know anything yet. All we know is that they said to collect family.”*

*“We’ll be there in an hour and a half.” I hung up, feeling nothing.*

*I pulled on jeans, my shoes, and grabbed my keys and drove to the breakfast restaurant my twin and I worked at. The restaurant hadn’t opened yet, and she was smiling when I walked in. Her face fell as I walked behind the counter and grabbed her wrist, stabilizing myself more than assisting her. I was numb until I tried to say Dad was in an accident. I only succeeded in saying, “Dad-” before the emotions hit and my throat tightened and I couldn’t speak and all I could think was she’s going to think he’s dead, and we don’t know that yet, get it together!*

*I remember everyone who had been there, laughing and talking, disappeared. She waited, her face falling, until I could choke it out. Our manager came up, Addie excused us, and we met at her car to drive from Bloomington back to Indy, up to the hospital.*

*There’s nothing quite like the phone call you’ve been dreading. There’s nothing you appreciate more than a lack of a definite; there’s nothing as dreadful and as hopeful as a lack of answers.*

*Along the way, we collected our siblings, informing them one by one, and collectively coming together, bracing ourselves yet again against a new pain from our parents.*

*I remember my mom asking if she should inform our brother. We denied her, saying we were on our way to pick him up from our aunts, and that we’d explain. In hindsight, this may have been something within her responsibility, but we were far too used to taking on that responsibility that we couldn’t allow her to have it. Not when it came to our father, who she despised with passion. Addie and I met Gabby at our Aunt’s, picking up our brother, and merging in the same car. Maddie was on her way back from Ball State. All our destinations converged at the hospital.*

Ending 2018

*He looks old, but in a different way than how he looked while drunk. While drunk, he seemed 20 years his age, and it wasn't uncommon for people to ask if we needed help to get away from him. He looked like a creepy, old drunk bothering teen girls. The bags under his eyes, unkempt appearance, watery stare, it aged him. Now, he's lost weight. His hair is gray, and he limps, his hip replacement a permanent pain. The lines in his face are deep set. His smile, though, is bright. His blue eyes are clear, and he gets hyper, an unusual youthful energy not common in 58 year old men.*

*He'd barely survived his accident, which we now call a blessing. With a BAC of .48, had he made it home, the next day we would've found him dead. More accurately, my little brother would've found him dead. The apartment dad lived in at the time was within walking distance of my mom's, and he was the only one who still visited my dad.*

*Instead, he went to the hospital where he stayed in the ICU for a month. He survived delirium tremens, hallucinating and shaking, completely unaware people were in the room with him while he talked about forks walking on the ceiling. He ripped out his catheter during one of these moments. It was brutal.*

*He became sober. The first thing he remembers is the priest who visited three weeks into his stay. The last thing he remembered was two days prior to his accident. He'd been drunk since the week of Christmas.*

*Through CT-scans and X-Rays, the doctors found an abdominal aneurysm. Had they not, he wouldn't have made it to the following Christmas. They opened up his stomach and added another scar to his repertoire.*

*He recovered. He went to jail. He got out. He reapplied for the real-estate license he'd let lapse over the years and started working.*

*Desperate to avoid idle hands, he found a steal within the AA community. Someone wanted to stop taking care of a property, but it wouldn't sell because it's set to be taken by the government under eminent domain. They let my dad move in as a gesture of good faith and community. He rebuilt, starting with this house. It's still set to be torn down, but the date keeps getting pushed back, and instead of one year, it's now been five.*

I hear the toilet flush and shake my head.

The differences between 2018 and now are stark, obvious in the ways that this house is different from all the rest. This isn't fragile, or smoke.

The kitchen, which had been small and cramped because of its design, has an entirely different layout and is now long with tiled flooring and a stainless-steel fridge in place of the stained white broken one that'd been here before.

This new fridge has character and life. On one side hangs a personalized calendar with family photos that he checks off daily. Birthday cards stick in all directions and on the other side is a photo of his father who passed away a year ago. A folded card sticks to the fridge right in front, the cover of which is a drawing of this property I sketched out in pen instead of signing my name, while inside is a gratitude letter I wrote to him the first Christmas we spent here. This sits next to another drawing, another letter, where I sketched his face, his smile, on the cover, for his birthday the following year.

No longer smelling of stale air and dust, smoke from the firepit drifts through the screen door, along with the toasted scent of sugar emanating from the blueberry tarte. Pictures of us and his family, his friends, and his dog line the walls. A wooden plaque hangs in the hallway that reads ‘best dad’ with all of our names carved out below it. He already has his Christmas tree up, along with pumpkins and leftover decorations from my Maddie’s birthday on October 10th.

My mom, unable to be in the same room as him for 15 years, now sits outside laughing with my siblings, her voice loud even while trying to be quiet.

I drop off my bag, grab a Mountain Dew and water, plug in Maddie’s vape, and meet my dad again at the front door. I hand him the Mountain Dew and he holds open the door as I slide past.

I duck once more beneath the projector screen and grab my spot on the last available chair, passing Nick his water.

Addie throws me the blanket she’d tucked away, and I settle in and get comfy. When I breathe out, I’m hit with a feeling I can’t identify. It’s not nostalgia. Our family hasn’t been together like this, as a whole and at peace, in almost fifteen years. I reckon it’s probably gratitude, or awe. Whatever it is makes my chest simultaneously tight, while also making me feel like I’ve inhaled a much richer oxygen than I’m used to, like I’ve given up smoking and my body is trying to readjust to clean air.

It’s been five years since my dad’s sobriety, since his accident. Every day since has been an effort in rebuilding, and now, for the past three weeks, within the cool and crisp month of October, we’ve been having outdoor movie nights on Sunday nights. My mom, after three invites and many, many assurances from both us and our dad, has finally agreed to join us.

My dad returns to his seat, and it grows quiet while we watch. Every ten minutes it seems my mom or my sister Maddie, both talking to each other in whispers and not paying attention, asks a question along the lines of ‘what’s happening’ or ‘why is he/she/they doing that’ and all of us groan, answer, or beg them to shut up. Gabby goes as far as threatening to dump her water over them if they don’t and asking Addie to pinch them since she’s closer. Addie obliges not five minutes later.

My dad cracks jokes making fun of our mom over this, and she laughs; the hints of a friendship reinstated. This experience is as soothing as it is bewildering, but slowly I grow more comfortable, my heart thawing with each positive interaction.

The firepit crackles before us sending out little incandescent particles in concordance with the wind. The screen pushes back into the bushes separating the driveway from the house as the wind picks up. We can easily hear the JBL speaker below the screen, but it is not loud enough to drown out the sound of my dad's dog wandering his yard behind us. It is easy to accept the random noises as his dog's doing, but when the movie goes silent and the wind stops howling, the odd branch breaking creates its own jump-scares.

The serenity of the night envelopes us as we all sit mindful of this moment. The movies, though scary, can't breach the sense of safety and security we've crafted these last few years. The jump scares can't overcome the laughter that follows. The unease can't trump the beauty of the night sky, and the comforting breeze of a perfect fall night with all of us buried under blankets and at peace. The past was a broken foundation that we've now flipped and fixed; this home lively and cared for, no longer forlorn.

# How to Open a Can of Nothing.

*Clayton Hunsader*

Is nothing something?  
Can nothing be when something is?  
Does the absence of a thing  
tell us anything?

It doesn't exist. What doesn't?  
Consciousness has no physical form  
yet it recognizes all feeling.  
It takes up no matter  
so does it matter  
if it knows the difference  
between Something and Nothing

The only guarantee for life  
is Death.

Is Darkness just the lack  
of Light?

Emptiness does not prove  
that something was There,  
But something being There  
proves that There was empty  
Before. Every Action  
has an Equal and Opposite  
Reaction.

The existence of mountains  
implies the depths of oceans.

Absolute Zero  
allows no light,  
no life,

no movement,  
no temperature,  
nothing—

but can never be perceived.

So is nothing something?

The monolithic accomplishment of consciousness exists,  
Therefore an equally formidable absence of it does as well.  
Is everything nothing?

I think. I am. What am I not?

Everything exists strictly within observation,  
but that begs the question  
What's observing it?



## Sign Crushes Motorist

*Jared Miller*

I had a dream about you  
the night before my birthday

we were in my bed  
our legs were where our heads should've been  
I was on top of you  
your shirt was off  
I held you like a vice around your chest  
so tight I feared cracking your ribs  
we weren't having sex  
that was never the intention  
we were talking  
whispering  
giggling  
I gave you kisses on your naked shoulder

you were not something won or conquered  
you were camaraderie personified  
a person who I both saw myself in  
and admired with my whole being

our hearts beat against one another  
each desperately hoping to break out of their respective cages  
to become a singular atom  
at once  
it was like what being in love is like  
it felt like being home

it was over quick  
even for a dream, it was a quick and blurry flash  
still the brief vignette stuck in my head  
I told you about it the next morning  
the morning of my birthday  
I can't remember what you said



## **Fortune of a Hypochondriac**

Kira Taylor

*12" x 16" Lithograph*

# Oración

Mario Stone

Por favor,  
que cada lagrima sea  
una petición a Tu bendito querer,  
que cada vez que digo su nombre sea  
un pedido de mi alma – *Flor del cielo*,  
    mátame *anhelo morir*  
    por resucitar *recordando el primer beso*  
                    tan natural *de cada amanecer-*  
    En convulsiones estoy, *las lagrimas*  
quemando, sudando  
                    espinas en mis mejillas-  
*sobre mi rostro un asfixio divino.*  
*aún quedan conmigo*  
    cada recuerdo *mil tesoros*  
    mil latidos implacables- *en mi cofre*  
    *suma una cosecha de flores,*  
    cada flor compartida *es tuya –*  
                    las bañe con *gotas de sol*  
                    el recuerdo de *tus ojos*  
                    tu sonrisa,  
                            tu linda  
                                amor

## Gives life

*Kayla McVeigh*

Glimmering scales of lapis lazuli  
He spits at me from under the moaning ice  
“And if I hooked your lip next?” he mocks  
His lustrous shine illuminates the depths of the lake  
Or is it the northern lights?  
“I want to live,” I cry, yanking the rod  
Swiftly circling the hole in the ice  
He is a blinding flash of light  
“And if I made you bleed?” he taunts  
Ribbons of blood coil around him  
I pull him closer to the surface  
His light crackles  
Static sparks sting my hands  
My hair fades  
My eyes cloud over  
My joints and bones resist me  
The line snaps  
The fish says:

*“Would sleep be so bad after a time of unrest?”*

## **Kiln Kind of Love**

*Alexandra Kluger*

Perhaps he saw me as dry clay.  
He knew his hands were wet.  
He knew he could mold me into  
anything he desired.  
He grabbed me and unwrapped me.  
He saw my ugly and my beautiful,  
But still, what he had  
in mind was better.  
He threw me on his pottery wheel—  
and it spun, and spun, and spun.  
I never had a chance to get off  
...unless he took me off.  
Everything spinning around me  
and I had no grasp to stop.  
Once he got me molded into  
his desired idea of me,  
he threw me in the kiln  
and watched me burn...  
forgetting to ever take me out.



## **Rainy Day**

Abby Franke

*12.5" x 6" Silk Screen Print*

**back when the world was within walking  
distance,**

*Ruthie Barakat*

i spent summer days floating,  
hidden in the neighbor's in-ground pool,  
where i paddled with no noodle,  
my digits pruney with chlorine.

dirt angels formed beside a baseball dugout,  
splayed arms and legs moved in unison,  
blue skies above the neighborhood.  
my nails bitten and full of earth.

the library was five minutes by bike.  
sometimes i dozed in the periodical room  
among air-conditioned bookshelves  
or flipped through pages with chapped thumbs

on command i was a: dolphin, pink power ranger,  
silent wallflower with a soccer ball  
pacing around the backyard.  
with tiny fists unafraid to meet rusted wire fence.

must have gone through thousands of boxes  
of blueberry toaster strudel. i'd go out,  
with sticky hands, to knock on houses.  
and i'd wave with my innocent frosting fingers.





# Artists' Statements

**Zion Adedipe** is a sophomore majoring in Computer Information Technology and Africana Studies. His hobbies include writing poems, dancing, running, ping-pong, and tennis. In his free time, he loves researching and playing video games. His future career goals include going to law school and working in the Information Technology industry as a Cybersecurity engineer.

On “Shackles to Spectacles,” Zion says: [This piece] is an epic poem that discusses the assertions of blackness, freedom, and resistance from oppression. This poem is not for the timid, not for those who do not have a calling for social justice, and not for those whose intellectualism is clouded by darkness.

**Selma Adie** is a biology student at IUI with a wide range of passions, ranging from insect and environmental research to painting fish in places they shouldn't be. They are the co-founder and vice president of the Disability Advocacy Organization and a member of and volunteer with the Domestic Abuse Prevention Student Organization. They can frequently be found at the Herron library, writing poetry, designing stickers for events, or crying over chemistry homework.

**Daniel Awosika** is a freshman at IUPUI. In his free time, he enjoys reading stories; they inspire him to share his.

**Ruthie Barakat** is a nonbinary human majoring in creative writing. They love their dogs, their hot girlfriend, and Kurt Vonnegut.

**Tegan Blackburn** is a senior at IUPUI majoring in Art Education. She writes both fiction and creative nonfiction with the intent of portraying various queer and autistic experiences. When not writing, she can be found drawing, baking, cuddling with her cats, and reading books about weird and queer people.

On “Not Your Kind of Faggot,” Tegan says: [This piece] illustrates the personal experience of reclaiming slurs as queer person and how the pieces that make up the identity of any gay and/or trans person encapsulate the queer experience in a far broader spectrum than ignorance can ever understand.

**Tyler Butler** is an African American senior student majoring in Creative Writing with a minor in Africana Studies. He plans on heading to graduate school to expand his ventures in writing and plans on becoming a great author in the near future.

**Christopher Cassetty** is a third-year student studying creative writing at IUPUI. He often writes about his trials with bipolar disorder, struggles with love and despair, and his love for the natural world. In his free time, he makes music, writes, reads, and spends time with his closest friends.

On “Lavender,” Christopher says: [This piece] is a telling story about lost love. In the piece, lavender stains on carpet are symbolically represented as artifacts of a relationship long-passed and the figurative death of said relationship through the use of illusion, imagination, and hallucination. The speaker conjures vivid and lysergic scenes in the mind, symbolizing this relationship as they lose themselves in mesmerizing nature of the lavender stains on the carpet.

On “Fragmentation,” Christopher says: [This poem] is a free-verse piece about codependency, borderline personality disorder, and ego dissolution. Christopher Cassetty wrote this piece to convey the feeling of losing one’s identity after being forced to leave the arms of a lover, as one with BPD often struggles with maintaining a consistent sense of identity and the consistent casualty of the ego.

On “Mania, and her Beautiful Countenance,” Christopher says: [This poem] is a piece about the circular insanity of bipolar depression. On one hand, the speaker loves and admires this manic side of the subject. Whilst on the other, the speaker laments that they love this person more than they love themselves. The speaker is, in this sense, fragmented between the two sides of bipolar depression, lamenting the throes of depression whilst shamefully embracing the warmth of mania. The speaker and the subject being separate also furthers this divide between the two sides of bipolarity.

**Cara David** is a multimedia artist originally from South Central Pennsylvania. Her art is strongly influenced by her love of wildlife and nature and her interest in current environmental issues such as endangered and invasive species, pollution, and climate change.

On “Cat in a Tree,” Cara says: One of the goals in my art is to show the outdoors and its inhabitants. This piece is a lithography of Princess Lucy as she peaks down from a tree.

On “Opossum Lake,” Cara says: Wildlife and nature have always been extremely important to her, and she hope to use art to celebrate the outdoors space where she feel most at home. This piece shows Opossum Lake, a community park she grew up visiting.

**Saloni Dixon** is an IUI student based in Indianapolis who studies biomedical informatics and creative writing. With passion for bioinformatics, poetry, and art, they directed and wrote the theatrical play *Kababayan*. It’s Saloni’s commitment to create impactful art that advocates for silenced voices and embodies a new wave of social change.

On “pondering a black girl’s\* suicide,” Saloni says: In [this piece] they confront silence. We question our sanity in a world where her existence is disregarded. She deserves liberation; Reborn under the stars, no longer labeled a victim of oppression. We must ignite the flames of resistance until freedom reigns once more.

**Elise Dobson** was born and raised in a quaint town nestled in rural Indiana. They discovered their passion for the vibrant and expressive world of art. Three years ago, they moved to Indianapolis, where the bustling cityscape and its myriad of urban elements captivated their artistic spirit. Driven by a deep-seated desire to impart the values of creativity and self-expression, they embarked on a journey into art education. Their aspiration is to enrich the lives of future generations by instilling a profound appreciation for art while nurturing young minds with the power of creative expression.

**Ayva Edwards** is a senior at IUI pursuing a degree in Creative Writing. In her free time, she enjoys playing in her band, Maeberry, where she is the lead singer and guitarist.

**Bee Fee** is absolutely thrilled to have their work published in *genesis*. They are a sophomore at IUI, studying English with a concentration in Creative Writing. They would like to thank their family and friends for their continued support!

**Abby Franke** is an Integrative Studio Practice major at Herron, graduating in the spring of 2024 with a focus in Illustration and Sculpture. Her artistic practice revolves around her view of girlhood and femininity, utilizing personal writing, narrative illustration, and glass work.

On “Unbridled Rage,” Abby says: These posters accompany an entire body of work which confronts female rage, utilizing overly feminine visuals in contrast with a traditionally masculine embodiment of what it means to be angry.

**Nya Gaines** is a double major in Creative Writing and Japanese studies. She enjoys studying other languages and cultures so that she can incorporate what she learns into her writing. She aspires to be a director to create and share her stories in the form of anime and movies.

**Lexia Holmes** is a student studying Sports Management at IUPUI. She has always really enjoyed using her photography to capture the deep and flowing emotions of life. She hopes in the future to keep creating emotional stories with her photography.

On “The Silent Beast,” Lexia says: These pieces were created to really show the physical and deep emotions of anxiety. How it controls every inch of your life. That this silent beast is suffocating and powerful.

**Maggie Hoppel** is a first-year student majoring in journalism and creative writing, with a minor in graphic design. Her writing is brought to you by dining hall coffee and sad cowboy songs.

**Emily Hostettler** is a continuing studies student at IUPUI. She lives in Indianapolis with her husband, two kids, and cat. She enjoys cooking, traveling, learning languages, long walks among Indiana’s enthralling landscapes, and playing casual and easy-going games of Mario Kart with her children.

**Clayton Hunsader** is a poet and musician from Fishers, IN.

**Clayton Keehn** is an artist originally from Northwest Indiana. His appreciation of various media, including music, films, video games, and comics, inspires his artwork. His inky visuals establish a chaotic language and sense of spontaneity. Typography is often included in his pieces to further his aesthetic and aid in compositions.

**Kim Kile** is a second-year PhD student in the American Studies program with a minor in English. The focus of her work is biblio- and poetry therapy which is a counseling technique used to help children and young adults overcome traumatic events in their lives by writing poetry or reading books. Her poetic inspiration usually comes while she's driving, washing her hair, or doing other mundane life tasks. Thanks to her Notes app, she has a stockpile of first lines, titles, and story ideas waiting for the someday she has free to bring them to life.

On "Your Dying," Kim says: In September of 2014, Kim watched her father in his last few days of life struggling against all odds and his own dying. What she remembers most—the blackness of his mouth as death crept up from the inside and his intense strength to stay alive—were the inspirations for this poem.

On "If...Then," Kim says: Following a routine colonoscopy (which she waited much too long to have!), Kim learned she had several polyps removed and a growth on her colon that needed surgery. While all of the biopsy reports were negative, this experience was the inspiration for "If...then."

On "How Still We See," Kim says: Kim's grandson is a rainbow baby, a baby born following the death of a stillbirth or miscarriage. After the loss of her first grandson, Kim turned to writing to process the grief she was experiencing. "How Still We See" takes a look back at her family's loss while also looking forward to what the future holds for their rainbow baby.

**Alexandra Kluger** is a Russian writer who enjoys expressing herself through the art of poetry. Alexandra tends to write in-depth, emotion provoking poetry about Russia, Faith, and inner thoughts/ feelings.

On "Send to Postal Code: 184209," Alexandra says: [This piece] is a poem about Apitity, Russia, where Alexandra is from. Alexandra elaborates on the most known parts of Russia's culture all the while personalizing it to her life. Alexandra elaborates and cultivates the finest details of Russia that emphasize the beauty of her hometown.

On "Identity Crisis," Alexandra says: [This piece] is a poem that encases the feelings of losing the sense of one's self as they no longer live in their home country. This poem elaborates on the identity that should be there but no longer lives. Filled with twists and turns mentally and emotionally, "Identity Crisis" leans into the should-be's, want-to-be's and challenging staple pieces of losing a

sense of self.

On “Kiln Kind of Love,” Alexandra says: [This piece] is a poem based off a love story that was set ablaze. This poem encases the feelings of what it feels like to give yourself vulnerably and be shaped into something else—someone else’s idea of you. “Kiln Kind of Love” also elaborates on the burning and downfall of a heart that, after being used, was left to be forgotten about. A poem filled with intensity, neglect, and heartbreak.

**Tomislav Kraljic** is a sophomore student and army veteran studying Mathematics with a concentration in Actuarial Science. In his free time, he enjoys writing and reading poetry that illustrates the raw human experience and condition that everyone can relate to.

**Yuko Kyutoku** was born in Aichi in Japan. Having grown up both next to the mountain and rivers, her love of nature and the outdoors grew tremendously. Throughout her life, Yuko has always been fascinated by images and how the world is represented through the eyes of others. Naturally, she was drawn to drawings and paintings. The interest was cultivated during her childhood period and further developed when she opted to take her bachelor’s degree in fine art, painting, drawing, and printmaking at SUNY Purchase College in New York.

**Corrin Larson** is a senior at IUPUI studying Integrative Studio Practices at Herron School of Art + Design, specializing in painting and photography. Through her time at Herron, she has studied the integration of radiology biomedical engineering technology into her work, which led her to give a speech and have her work on display in Chicago, IL, at the Radiology Science of North America (RSNA) conference in 2022. She made digital photos by using an ultrasound probe. Continuing that study, she created silver gelatin prints analog style using x-ray negatives instead of photo negatives. She has also experimented with expired film, disposable cameras, and more. She is interested in having her work published in IUPUI’s *genesis* Magazine 2024 edition. Though I have had several art exhibitions, she has never been published! She feels it would be an honor and a privilege to have her work in her school’s magazine before she graduates. Her time at Herron has been a great one, and she is in disbelief that it is almost over. In having her work published in *genesis*, she hopes to leave a mark on Herron before she goes.

On “This is Home,” Corrin says: Through growing up without much money, she learned tricks to live frugally early on. Most of the clothes she wore were gifted to her from family friends, and she had free lunch at school. Going to Herron School of Art + Design has grown harder each year due to rent and prices in general going up, leading to her working more and more each year. She is grateful for the privilege and opportunity to pursue higher education, and hopefully a degree will allow her to have a more sustainable living situation one day. With this project she wants to ask viewers, “Where are you going to sleep tonight? Where did you wake up this morning?” For some, having a house and a bed is not a worry. For others, there is fear of losing their home, or those already

homeless, worry of finding shelter day-by-day. Every year she tries to donate old clothes and buy toiletries and non-perishable foods to donate to homeless shelters. She understands the struggle and the worrying of these “simple things,” so whenever she has enough financial security to help, she does. With this opportunity to showcase her art, she wanted to bring up housing issues in our society, to use this as a platform to advocate for privilege awareness, and to inspire the Indianapolis community to give back.

See this whole series of work at CorrinLarsonArt on Instagram. Corrin intends to donate a portion of the sale of prints to local homeless shelters. Please donate to 91 Place Indy and/or Community Alliance of the Far Eastside Inc. (CAFE). 91 Place is a shelter for homeless youth, and CAFE is a food pantry.

**Kayla McVeigh** was born and raised on Alaska’s Kenai Peninsula. She is a senior majoring in English with a concentration in linguistics. Kayla would like to continue her study of linguistics at a graduate level and plans on working in community collaborative indigenous language revitalization.

On “Keeping Our Practices: A Walk Through Crown Hill,” Kayla says: This piece was sparked after taking part in a student-led tour of Crown Hill along with a few Religious Studies faculty and Medical Humanities students.

**Haley Merida** is currently a fourth-year student studying creative writing. She has an innate love for language and storytelling and loves learning more about her passion at IUPUI.

**Jared Miller** is a sophomore student at IUPUI studying journalism. In his free time, Jared can be found staring out the window analyzing the flight patterns of birds.

**Xavier Neier** is a senior undergraduate student at IUPUI. He is majoring in English with a concentration in Professional and Public Writing. He would like to thank his supportive family and friends for their encouragement throughout his college and career journey. He hopes to return to Tijuana someday and visit.

On “How to be a Mexican American in Indiana,” Xavier says: The piece comes from a place of mixed cultural identities as a Mexican American living in Indiana. He was a Mexican baby adopted by two loving white Americans from the Hoosier state. The work is dedicated to the memories of growing up adopted and wanting some answers to his life.

**Trent Platt** writes: The days spent with a father are overlooked and the culmination of those tender moments slowly receding back into the mind is something all deal with. This piece perhaps provides a means of reconnection to one’s family and to relive a moment with childlike brightness.

**Alicia Rump** is a returning student who is a junior and a creative writing major. She enjoys all forms of storytelling, loves to read and draw, and loves to meet new people.

On “Rebuilding Home,” Alicia says: The inspiration for [this piece] centers around a moment that would’ve been impossible in the past and looks through this lens to explore how this moment came to be.

**Ava Russell** is a senior studying creative writing with the hopes of becoming a published author, as well as working in editing or publishing. She loves to write about all things spooky, creepy, and weird, but also enjoys using writing as a means of self-exploration.

**Sarah Seigel** has always been an advocate for mental health and hopes that her writing can help others in the same way that it has helped her.

**Christian Sickmeier**, a Junior at the Kelley School of Business, is passionate about storytelling across various mediums. Whether it’s data, literature, film, or beyond, he delights in sharing stories. Fantasy writing holds a special place in his heart, and he finds joy in serving at Redeemer Bible Church, his local church.

On “How to Dragon, for any curious fire-breathing, winged serpents out there,” Christian says: Inspired by C.S. Lewis’s and J.R.R. Tolkien’s writings, Christian has attempted to emulate them. He has always loved dragons, the embodiment of fantasy, and thought it humorous to juxtapose a scary creature with a childlike narrative highlighting some tropes. Or he wrote it to actually help any dragons out there.

**Mario Stone** walked through fire to find these words for you, Juli. He hasn’t stopped and loves you still in ways only your hearts can know.

**Eliza Surdzial** is a Sophomore at IUPUI majoring in Marketing and minoring in Creative Writing, and she is of Filipino, Puerto Rican, and Polish descent. She is currently a DEI digital marketing intern with hopes of continuing to work in non-profit marketing post-graduation.

**Kira Taylor** is a Junior at IUPUI, and they major in printmaking and drawing/illustration. In their free time, they lead the Disability Advocacy Organization of IUPUI.

On “Fortune of a Hypochondriac,” Kira says: After being called a hypochondriac their whole life, it turns out it was warranted, but the anxiety surrounding their health is never-ending. It’s dizzying, and they wanted to create a piece that captured that anxiety with conflicting color choices and a magic 8-ball.

**Elizabeth Terhorst** is majoring Secondary English Education and English Literature at IUPUI. They work with domestic violence shelters in the area via the club they are co-president of here on campus (DAPSO). Elizabeth has been pas-

sionate about writing since grade school and hopes to get their poetry and novels published someday.

On “Windsor and Newtown Galeria Acrylic,” Elizabeth says: The idea of using paint as a metaphor for trauma is something that they have been thinking about how to phrase for a few years, but it was only when the paint their uncle got them finally ran out, Windsor and Newtown Galeria Acrylic, that they were able to put to pen out how they wanted to word it.

**Anna Turgeon** is a Senior Communication Studies major at IUPUI who enjoys writing poetry, watercolor painting, calligraphy, cooking, reading, and working out. She loves spending time with her family, enjoying good food, and getting her competitive side on by playing her dad in ping pong!

**Kate Weber** is a junior studying psychology. She has been writing since middle school and avoiding her problems since birth.

**MyKenzi Wells** is a Junior Creative Writing Major. In her free time, she reads an insane amount of romcoms, photographs way too many flowers, consumes too much caffeine, and writes novels that will never be completed. One day she hopes to publish books that will help people say what they couldn’t say and be the person they never dreamed of being.

**Lord Raeya Wilhelm** of Glencoe is a writer who thinks deeply about thoughts.

On “The Eyes,” Raeya says: [This piece] illustrates the feeling of being watched when no one is around.

**Ashley Wilson** is a current junior double majoring in Creative Writing and Journalism with a minor in Classical Studies. When she’s not writing or taking photos, she spends her time advocating for LGBTQ+/human rights, crocheting, and reading.

**Jordan Winslow** has used art as a way to express and understand herself. She does not like to limit herself to one style, subject matter, or material, but prefers to explore something new with every piece. Her earliest works were rooted in fantasy tales of dragons and wizards, but these concepts have slowly incorporated philosophical concepts as well as both abstract patterns and realism.

On “The Mystery,” Jordan says: This painting has changed its meaning for her over time. At first, it represented her skeptical nature and the feeling that something dangerous was always lurking behind her. Now, this painting seems to her like a woman who has just heard a noise and is turning around to face whatever it is—hesitant, but ready to meet it.



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