

THE MESSENGER
SPRING 2018



THE MESSENGER

The object of The Messenger is to encourage the appreciation and exploration of the creative arts. Since 1989, The Messenger has been celebrating student work by publishing submissions in a yearly student literary and visual arts magazine. For more information, please visit messengerur.wordpress.com

This year, The Messenger encouraged students to submit work related to a theme:

Frisson: /frē'sôn/ A sudden, strong feeling of excitement or fear; a thrill

Logo designed by Jay Do

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Genesis // Jack DeAngelis

I. In the Beginning.

Luminous wonder lay at Eve's fingertips and the children gazed in excitement as the expanding ball filled her palms and, while holding the end of the red rubber in one hand, she extended the other to the edge of her cart where she picked up a spool of string and tossed it over her shoulder, winking at the nearest child while catching the spool with her chin, cutting the perfect length with her teeth, and tying off the rubber in one splendidly fluid motion before kneeling down, and presenting aballoon to an enthralled young boy.

II. Fruit from the Tree of Knowledge.

The door clicked shut behind Eve, and she knew she was finally alone with only the supple hum of the dim lights that stretched vertically down the low ceiling of the hallway, illuminating the four shelves bolted to the floor before her with evenly spaced cardboard boxes on the rows which she now walked through before finding what she was looking for and, seeing the yellow card inscribed with her name, reached up to a shoulder height row of bins and grabbed abox that had a scaly cardboard bottom which easily slithered across the metal shelf and fell into her hands with a hiss.

Moving Still // Nene Diallo



III. The Fall from Grace.

The desk's silver handle slipped into the empty niche between Eve's left ring finger and palm as she reached into the shallow drawer and rummaged through its contents with her right hand, knocking over a cup of rusty paper clips, eventually finding a piece of red rubber which she began to blow into calmly because she had grown tired of staring at her diploma boxed away in the corner of the office opposite the desk that had an old spool of string upon it which she flipped over her shoulder, caught with her chin before cutting the perfect length of string with her teeth and tying off the rubber in one splendidly fluid motion, all while walking towards the window which she opened, feeling the long-forgotten embrace of the wind as she stepped up to the waist-level marble platform and then held out her hand so the balloon drifted out the window, floating playfully above the concrete far below and began pulling Eve towards the brilliant blue sky, tugging at all her elapsed artistry, yearning to drift off into the guileless clouds, heaving with increased animation and jerking her closer to the open window while her feet slid across the marble platform to the ledge until she finally succumbed, and her feet effortlessly left the rim of the office window high above the city street.



Flood // Peyton McGovern

Soft syllables drip from your lips
And as each one enters our atmosphere
my heart sinks deeper into the stone cold tile
Like a raindrop straight from the sullen sky
slides down a city skyscraper
and disperses into a million different directions
upon reaching Manhattan's unforgiving cement.
The same ground that shaped me into my current state
but also stole me from my small town Ohio roots.
Each translucent tear shifts to black
as it descends from my eyes
and picks up the remnants of my morning makeup routine,
before it crests to freedom off the edge of my chin.
And the cotton that covers my skin catches
each drop effortlessly
like my mom's welcome home after Paige
had her first slumber party down the block.
The blur of our modern Brooklyn loft suffocates me
and the cold floor has never felt more like
an iceberg in the middle of a desert.
Your too long in the shower,
"One more minute won't hurt anyone"
scent lingers towards me
And startles every inch of my sacred skin
and hits even the smallest cavity
of my holy body,
that you claim to worship faithfully.
And how dare you muster any form of the L word,
after telling me I may be too broken
for you to stay with much longer.
The only thing that's broken
is my trust in the man you claimed to be
In the dim light of our back corner booth
at Hourglass Tavern,
on the corner of West and 46th street.



Koi // Alexis Anderson

Cara and Dylan were happy to have found the listing so quickly.

She was in her leather pants, he was on his fifth beer. There was a chill on the patio that swept up their spines. This was how they sat now, he atop the stone wall looking at her, she in one of the hard wrought iron chairs with her eyes on the woods behind them. The spindly tall trees and their shivering leaves could be frightening in the dark, but after a few drinks and a little of whatever Dylan was smoking Cara found her mind beautifully numb to fear. Dylan was showing her the burn on his thumb and the soft webbing between his fingers from grabbing the sauté pan too quickly at work, its handle still hot from the oven. Maybe if his boss wasn't such a dick he wouldn't have felt so flustered. He always kept him too long on prep work, too, which Dylan suspected was to justify not giving him a raise. Cara nodded as needed while she smoked. She was twenty-three and good at listening. He was twenty-five and good at talking.

"Should we go, then?" she asked him.

"In a minute maybe. I'm just enjoying this."

"Katie'll be pissed at me if we're late again."

"Katie needs to learn to chill the fuck out. Remember when they were broken up?"

"Yeah, and Ben was fucking Ellen?"

"They didn't fuck."

"They did. Ellen told me. Before she quit. Before I left, too." She exhaled into the air.

"They were fucking for a while, actually."

"Nice. Well, I miss those days, man. When Ben was single and we got a fucking break."

"Be nice. He loves her. And I happen to like her too." She paused. "You know what's weird, though? You hear all these crazy things about someone's ex when they're apart, right? All the terrible things they've said and the awful things they've done. And then they get back together and you have to pretend you don't know about any of it. Like how Katie told me that for her birthday, she told Ben that all she wanted was to go to Marquee. He didn't have to get her anything, she just wanted to go there for dinner on her birthday. And that restaurant's not even that expensive. So on her birthday she's all dressed up, she's sitting at home waiting for Ben, and he comes home two hours after they were supposed to go, just reeking of alcohol and holding a McDonald's bag. He had gotten drinks with the guys after shift — which Katie hates, by the way — and he said he thought she would've liked the idea of staying in together for the night. God, she was pissed. So she tells me all this and then they get back together and he's the best boyfriend in the world again. And now every time I see Ben, I have to look in his eyes and smile like I don't know that he got Katie a bag of fucking McDonald's for her birthday." She burst out laughing. It reverberated into the night.

"Well," Dylan said, "At least he lowered the bar for me for your birthday."

“I don’t want anything from you anyways. Thank you again, by the way. I’ve been meaning to say it.”

“Seriously, you don’t have to. The rent is so cheap it doesn’t even make a difference. For a little bit, anyhow.” He raised his beer in her direction. “Here’s to finished basements in the middle of Durham County.”

“Yeah, here’s to the McGregor’s.”

Dylan laughed. “Here’s to the motherfucking McGregor’s!”

“Keep your voice down,” she murmured.

“Oh come on Car, they can’t hear me. Are they even home?”

“They’re always home. You just don’t know because you’re gone all day. But they’re always home. She’s always home.”

“It’s their house.”

“I know it’s their house, I’m just saying. I mean, it’s fine. They’re nice.” She paused. They looked at each other.

“So last night—”

“You heard it too?”

“I thought you were asleep.”

“I didn’t want to wake you. You’ve been working so hard.”

“Do you think it was —” Dylan whispered.

“Stop.”

“Car, they can’t hear us.”

“No, just stop. I don’t want to say it.” She folded her arms over her stomach, pulling her jacket in tighter as she looked past him into the darkness. “God, when I think of the sound of him—”

“How do you know it was him?”

“I just know.” She bit her thumbnail. “I meant to tell you, yesterday, I’m coming in from the car — I had gone to Target, just to get out. I didn’t even need anything, I could just feel their reproach for being home so often, and I was sick of staring at canvases, so I went to Target and shopped and shopped and wandered up and down the aisles and got a coffee and came home — and so I’m walking in and she stops me. ‘Care to give me a hand with the dishes, Cara?’ she asks me. Sure, I say. I mean, I don’t want to do her fucking dishes, but what am I going to do, tell her no? She leads me to the kitchen and gives me the towel to dry and there are bowls and bowls of sea glass lined up on her counter. She starts to wash it. The sea glass. Piece by piece. Neither of us say anything. I mean, I must have dried two hundred pieces of sea glass. And she turns to me, and goes —”

“Cara, what the fuck?”

“So she turns to me and looks me wide in the eyes and goes, ‘Do you ever just need to go to the beach, Cara? Sometimes I just need to go to the beach.’”

“What did you say?”

“I said I hadn’t been to the beach since I was a little girl.”

“What did she say?”

“She said she hadn’t either.”

Above them, the lights from the house were bright, shining out from the windows into the woods. The crisp air around them stirred. Dylan grabbed his empty beer and hopped off the stone wall. Cara stood to join him. Her chair screeched against the stone beneath it while the trees whispered.

“We should go.”

“We should go,” Cara agreed. “They’re waiting.”



The Fog // Yuwei Lin

to the vet
on a tepid day in spring.
The bluebells had begun
to flounder & burst
below the sun &
the birds began to sing
more subdued songs
to which the bugs would surely
overrun our houses.
My stutter was as well-behaved
and calm as she could be, but
she'd shrunk gnarled & sickly
amid age & lethargy. "A stay in the
hyperbaric oxygen chamber'd save her,"
the doctor said, "but it'd prolong her suffering."
I wouldn't deny life was better
with my stutter sleepy & snug at home.
My syllables came strong & steadily
in an earthy, meaty baritone.
Now I could order takeout on the phone
and say my surname, stoppage-free.
I could ask people on dates whenever I wished.
(Limited success, naturally.)
But she'd stalked me since I was four
and had been my constant companion,
ready & willing to make me strive
against my self-pity.
And I looked at her lying there,
distorted & pale, where
the foam of her gasping lay white on the mat
as thick and as heavy
as the air in our flat, where we'd spent
our years as best friends.
And I realized it'd not only be selfish, but self-cruelty,
to hang onto a pet
indefinitely.

Slip // Peyton McGovern

Slick rock,

one step, then two step and slip on down to earth.

Bone on stone.

World looks anew from the surface. But earth keeps crying. Down her face the tears simply slip.
One drop, two drop,

drip.

Coffee drips into my mug each morning and I beg the heavens for one last sip.

Let the brown liquid slip into my sleepy soul and ignite the fire where the rain once covered
earth's dry flesh.

My flesh slips into the ivory silk slip hidden beneath my velvet dress.

Covering my delicate heart as it slips into a frenzy when I see you at my bottom

Step.

One step, then two steps now closer to you.

I stare at the steps so I don't slip but just one glance won't hurt so I let my so my gaze
shift.

With one peek, I see your stone face slip into a subtle smile. Alas, our bodies are
side by side

so we slip out the door and into the damp night.

One drop, two drops down my bare arm as we make the last leg of our journey.

Four ships on the slip illuminated by the silver moon. The stars drip sweet residue over the
shore as your glowing eyes meet mine.

One heartbeat but then where's two?

I guess it couldn't help but skip when your hand slipped into mine.



Blackbird // Graiden Berger



Slow Journalism Assignment // Nidhi Sharma

There is a paper crane that sits on my desk. Just a small, simple one – made of frayed notebook paper, creased with calloused fingers in a hurry. Its wings just touch the smudged glass of the window hanging heavily on my wall. On overcast days, I rest my head on my arms, eye the bird’s light blue lined body, and picture it lifting fragile arms to fly away, far from my ordinary desk on an ordinary day. On days when the sun shines bright white against the hard surface of the table, the paper wings reflect like burnished bronze and burn brilliant in my eyes – like the pages of a book at high noon. What was brittle and breakable is now gleaming and enduring. My paper crane isn’t alive, that’s a kid’s fancy, a daydream, but it’s nice to think so. My little eggshell bird can be moody all it wants if it’s alive.

I remember the day my roommate gave me the paper crane, a couple years ago. I remember another day, a decade earlier, when my sister convinced me that all birds were made of paper, and the feathers which tufted from their bodies hid bones made of flimsy folded sheets. Bluebirds, flamingos, canaries and sparrows. They had all been creased into being once, grew feathers and become real life birds. My paper crane never grew its own plumage, but over the years I think I did, we probably all did. Now every morning I don my own feathers as I leave my room, and on my desk, I leave behind my fragile paper core.

They didn't speak since it happened. Every morning they would eat at the same times as before, but the father would always sit at the back-left corner of the kitchen table; his ten-year old boy would sit at the head of the right. This way neither of them had to see accidentally see the picture of her, perched on the counter behind the boy. The father would eat his Rice Krispies from a white bowl, slowly and meticulously. When he left, he didn't leave a single speck. He took his bowl to the sink, washed it, and put it away. He'd then walk back to his room.

The boy would follow him. The boy would look at his father sitting at the desk, facing a computer. Orange and blue lights would flash over the profile of his father's face. A face that didn't look back. The first few times the boy would huff and stomp away, the next several he would yell. Now he just sighed. He'd turn back into the kitchen and climb on a chair to reach for the cereal. (He was short for his age.)

He'd get the box of Frosted Flakes and pour his bowl and sit at the head of the left side of the table. He'd eat staring down until the cereal was gone and he could see his reflection in the bowl. His blonde hair and round face and big nose, all like his father's. After he drank the milk he would hastily rinse the bowl and run into the TV room. He liked watching the old school cartoons, like *Tom and Jerry* and *Looney Toons* and *Road Runner*. Sometimes he would fall asleep in front of the TV and sometimes he wouldn't.

One day he found himself going through the same motions. His father ate from a blue bowl and went into his room shortly thereafter. The boy followed, stared for the requisite bit, and dragged his feet as he shuffled back to the kitchen. Chair screech. Grab Frosted Flakes. Chair screech. Grab black bowl. Drawer screech. Grab spoon. Refrigerator suction noise. Grab milk. Chair screech. Sit. Pour. Feast on Frosted Flakes.

Halfway through the bowl, a shadow passed over the boy's face. The boy looked up, slight excitement in his eyes and mouth almost in a smile. They immediately fell down, squinted in confusion. Sitting across from him was a man he'd never seen before. Blonde hair, round face, big nose. Skinny body. He wore a white t-shirt. Once they met eyes the man put a finger to his mouth. *Shoosh*.

The man lowered his hands to the table. The boy washed the bowl in its entirety, looking at the man after every step. He put the bowl and spoon away, then the cereal and milk. The man never tried to look at the boy, just straight ahead. The boy goes back to his chair and sits down. The two look at each other again.

"Do I know you? Does Dad know you?" the boy asked. The man, as if in answer, coughed into his arms. Profusely. Loud, so fucking loud.

The boy remembered when he was sick, lying in bed, thirsty and hot, wanting everything to leave his body.

He screeched the chair over to the medicine cabinet and jumped onto it. He grabbed the purple cough medicine and filled up one of the small cups and gave it to the man. Looking at the boy and nodding in thanks, the man took the cup and downed it like it was liquor. The man let out a loud, pleased sigh.

The boy went to take the medicine back but the man was too fast for him. He took the bottle and poured another shot. And another. And another. And so on. The boy stepped backwards, but kept his eyes on the man. He knew where the knives were, just behind him, on the left of the sink. Then the man stopped taking shots. He turned and looked at the boy. Staring at the boy, he vomited all over the floor.

Dad will kill me. The boy ran around the table and down the hallway. The sounds of vomiting still went on as the boy slammed into the bathroom, grabbed a towel, and ran back into the kitchen. But when he got there, there was no vomit. There was no man. The medicine was back where it was supposed to be. For a moment a potential scream hung in the boy's mouth: *Dad? Dad?*

The boy shook his head. He walked into the living room, grabbed a soccer ball, and walked back across the house. He stood in his father's doorway, clutching the ball. It was an instinct to want to play ball with his father when he was scared. The boy opened his mouth to ask, but closed it once more and hung his head low. Eyes on his feet, he turned them and walked back into the kitchen.

A shadow fell over his face and he looked up. The man was there, on the other side of the kitchen. He held a soccer ball close to his chest. His eyes were big, shiny, mouth slightly down with wrinkles creeping out over his face. The boy was about to scream, but, like before, the man acted first: he held the ball an arm's length in front of him and dropped it.

It didn't bounce.

It lodged itself halfway into the floor.

It was like a bass being smashed, a synth firing every chord—a violin with seventy bows pulled over it, sliding up and down with every shift in direction marked by another wave of synth.

Loud, so fucking loud.

The boy could not scream. He just dropped his ball and watched it bounce across the kitchen. It came to a stop where the man was standing, but no longer was. The sounds did not stop. Just wavered, up and down, like the vibrations could pull you and stretch you out until you're a single vein, waved around as a single stroke in an oil painting.

"Jeremy! Jeremy!"

Jeremy's father pulled him up into his arms. He ran and struggled to keep Jeremy from falling. The kitchen lights strobed, rhythmic but asynchronous to the sirens. They darted through the living room and out the back door. Light purple and black clouds layered the sky. Below was a red sky. Pulses of white, like shooting stars, flared through the horizon. The boy screamed. The man screamed. Both of their words incomprehensible.

In the middle of their yard stood a short silo with a round door on the top. The man struggled to open the door with one arm and Jeremy in the other. Once open, the father forced Jeremy into the opening. As he started to climb down, Jeremy saw a tall orange cloud, blooming like a mushroom. He stopped moving. Jeremy and his father stared at each other for a moment.

His father slammed the door down. Jeremy beat at the door. His small fists cracking into concrete. He could feel his screams come back at him in that round hole, could feel something warm flow over his face and through the cracks between his fingers. A singular, monotonous screech dug into his ears. He recoiled he fell to the bottom of the hole.

Jeremy sat on the couch watching the TV. On the screen was a black and white turtle walking down a road. A monkey held a stick of dynamite over the turtle's head. Before it went off, the turtle retreated into his shell. A man's voice said:

This is an official civil defense film produced in co-operation with the Federal Civil Defense Administration and in consultation with the Safety Commission of the National Education Association.

He turned the TV off and walked into the kitchen. His father sat and ate cereal where he always had for the past year. Jeremy gave his father a small hug from the side and sat in the chair next to him. Jeremy couldn't see it, but his father was smiling.



For Andy // Michael Wyatt

Transplant // Dan Thigpen

In the River City

We don't have to climb into the attics

to find our confederates,

they line our streets, along with all the bums;

at least in my part of town:

"hey man can you spare some change?" —circa 2008

"hello sir, care to change your opinion on slavery?" —circa 1861

The heat brings on futility

—sweating out a tick—

tock!, and the humidity in lockstep.

The kind of argument our bodies,

chitin and bone,

hair and heart,

can't win.

Richmond summer brings the fish stink as always.

But the pockets of putrid air,

like scars and tattoos (so many here!) are important

because they remind us that the past was real.

As real as the ever-changing present,

and these days are ever changing.

So I moved to a city boiling in history,

where everything used to be better

—just ask the locals—

to start to rewrite my history.

And maybe one day I'll look back on these Capitol City days

and I too will think:

"everything used to be better."



Yellow //

Alexander Balsalmo

Yellow outlines your ghost
Fading in and out of life, untouched,
Unscathed, leaving me terrified
As you pass through natural laws

Blinking yellow lights
Remind me of your aura
Warm my chest, hands, laugh
Until the yellow flame dies out

Until you return
Synonymous with sun
Sunflowers yearning for yellow rays
But nights are growing stronger

To be shaken by yellow
Harmonics that heal and hurt
Hues from imperfect smiles, and long day shirts
And sundresses which blind the stars

To be illuminated by yellow
Streetlamps, headlights, watching your figure
Mesmerized by misdirection
As your living flesh walks beside me unnoticed

IX // Alexander Balsalmo

The world was ending. That was at least the sentiment of the crazy girl. She preached outside of the town hall and urged administration, the law, the squirrels, and the trees to listen to her tales of countless abductions by the green porous extraterrestrials known as the “Nodnarbs.” Her knees were bloodied from perfecting the X on the asphalt she had so cleverly scribed with old tossed away chalk, which had been replaced by the newer, more lavish expo marker. She was comfortable with her shoes—one next to her dorm window upside-down, the other kicked under the bed frame. Passersby avoided eye contact, which was easy with a smartphone. Expo markers had not been the only invention brought by extraterrestrials, according to the crazy girl. Expo’s by nature were easier to erase.

Though Nodnarbs may be a harmless tale, mathematicians were scrambling to disprove her assertions of derivatives, and psychologists were studying her ability to falsify memories, memories that had the crispness of a name brand camera followed by an array of letters and numbers that no one bothers to read. She was just another UFO seer, another alien believing fanatic, and if dealt with correctly, she would eventually be another member of society to fade into memory.

I watched from afar and saw that her spirit was broken. Not only would people ignore her warnings, but she was the only one who had come face to face with and lived after encountering a Nodnarb. I myself could not imagine the feeling of someone invading my mind, taking control of my own feet, and forcing me aboard a spacecraft with my eyes being the only things I could trust, let alone the feeling of fear as a Nodnarb pins you down, dissects you, and probes you, as the crazy girl tells it. It must have been difficult for her. No one believed her, and regardless of the content, that must have been a lonely reality to live in.

I remember meeting her before she was the crazy girl. We met inside a book store; I was looking for a gift for my sister, she was looking for a gift for herself. I was caught off guard when she told me not to buy the book I had chosen, pointing to all the well-written romance novels on the shelf. We started talking after that. She was athletic and had a proud spirit to her step that was shocking and admirable. Her taste in music was interesting; she hated the Beatles, but admired classical with a hint of grunge pop. She would come to my apartment building with doggy bags of “shmurg” and other takeout no one had ever heard of. She loved films that questioned reality and purpose, but was once caught watching *10 Things I Hate About You* as a guilty pleasure.

I was getting to know her, and then she began disappearing. At first it was nothing to be concerned about. People leave for short periods of time. People read, go to work, have sex, make salads and then justifiably order pizza alone later. But even when she visited, her mind would wander. Her hazel eyes would dart through me as if I no longer existed—as if we never existed.

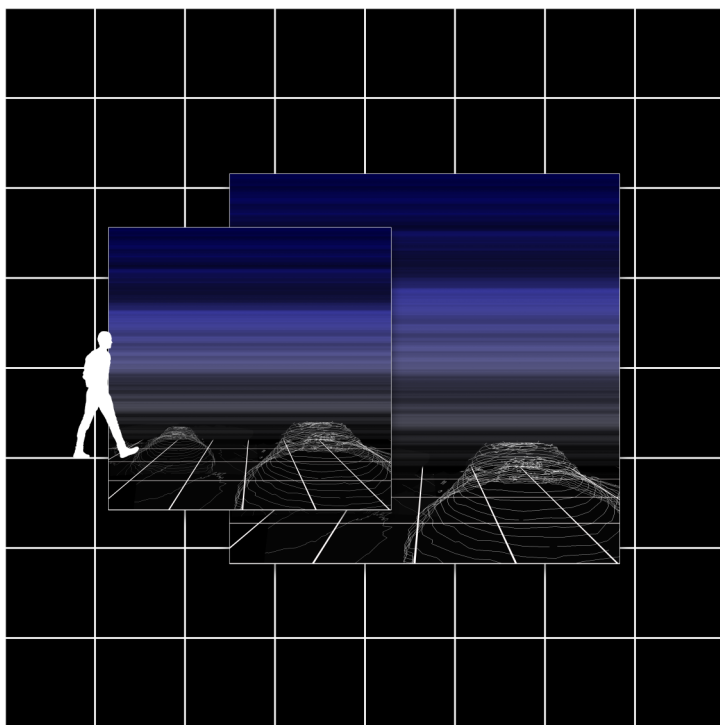
She’d found herself alone in a room that was built accidentally for no one.

I took note of small changes. She no longer wanted to go out at night to rent movies from the local library. She lowered her music so no one could hear it but herself. But every once in a while, her eyes would light up when talking about her temperament in relation to dog breeds or the art of Georges Seurat (an artist I needed to look up). The summer rolled around, and I decided I would take her to the Museum of Modern Art and show her how good I was at looking things up for her. A twenty-minute subway ride later and I watched that spark strike again, flooding fire into her empty room, and we made love in a shady motel a few blocks over for \$84. We talked about poetry, and I admitted to not having read much. Reaching towards the floor for her jacket, she pulled out a tattered, pocket-sized black leather-bound book of Emily Dickinson poems. You could still smell the leather under the wear and tear. We read them aloud, taking turns, until we fell asleep.

I was awoken in the night by a subtle tremor above the ceiling. It was what I deserved for getting a cheap motel in New York, and I silently congratulated the couple above us for whatever activities prompted such vibrations. The girl adorably mumbled in her sleep beside me. I rolled over, and as I stroked my hand through the girl's blond hair, it glistened in the aura of green light shining through the window. Her mumbles became louder, but still incomprehensible. I wondered if anyone else would be falsely congratulating me at this hour. I tried to calm her by touching her shoulder, and my hand shot back. Her body was frozen. The green light shone brighter, pulling the warmth and color from her skin. I sat up in disbelief, she followed with robotic movement. The green now emerged from the windows of her own eyes, the mumbles became cries and her body convulsed uncontrollably. My eyes burned from the intensity of green, as if no pair of sunglasses, or even brick wall, could shield the light. She began to dress, every movement coded and precise—save the tears—and walked towards the window. I ran, naked, towards her, and, with my vision impaired, tripped on the bed sheets that had been tossed to the floor. I fell, and, not seeing, I grabbed forward, ripping off one of her shoes. As her body went limp, darkness surrounded us once more. She sat up, shaking, crying, looking around, unsure of why she was on the floor. The only light came from her eyes, still radiating green, and the tears that had soaked the sheets, causing them to glow beneath us like a radioactive pool.

I awoke the next morning questioning whether my memories were trustworthy or just dreams. The girl seemed unphased, but held tighter to me than she did at the art museum. I had hoped this was a good sign. She looked up at me and her eyes shone green. It had been the first time I had ever looked at her so fondly and closely in the light.

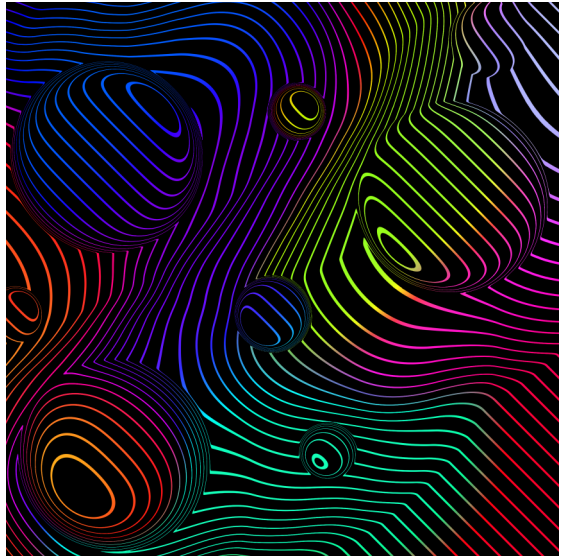
It's been years since we've spoken. My job forced me to relocate south, she chose to stay to pursue her message, and time did the rest. But on a recent business trip back, I saw her preaching from across the park. And though I cannot be certain she knows I can hear her, I am certain that her eyes are fading back to brown.



Another Grid // Jay Do

The Honeymooners // Peyton McGovern

Honey grab my hand, the moment is ours, let's dance under these stars. *I'm just not convinced Patrick, what if I burn my toes?* Sweetheart, I bought you the upgraded shoes exactly for this purpose, they can withstand 1032 degrees and right now we are at a comfortable 867. *I mean I guess you're right but...* Darling listen, I didn't spend the extra \$19.95 on those boots at Walmart just to sit here and babble, let's dance, we've never been closer to the stars. *I mean I guess you're right, I just don't understand why we couldn't have taken our honeymoon somewhere more traditional like the actual moon.* Dollface, the moon hasn't been an exotic destination since Taylor Swift visited there with her kids in July of 2032. We've never been the boring type, we are adventurers, we are the Tarzan and Jane of our generation. *Yeah, but Venus doesn't even have any good restaurants, at least the moon has the galaxy renowned Crater Diner.* Baby, even that isn't a hidden gem anymore since Guy Fieri visited there on the season finale of "Diners, Drive-Ins and Dives." I know you like a good dining experience, that's why I chose Venus over Jupiter. We can simply grill the steak in 4 seconds or less by placing it on the surface. *Yeah okay, I guess you're right but what about a spa? My sister said her face has never felt smoother than after her lava flow facial on the moon.* Lovey, you know we can never trust Tammy anyways, for God's sake she said Chuck E. Cheese Pizza was authentic Italian cuisine. *Well yes, I wouldn't exactly call that five star but she usually has good taste and I mean aside from that, what about the isolation here? It's romantic and all but don't you think it could get a bit boring here after a while.*



Universe 2.0 // Jay Do

Shit, so now it's not just the planet itself, it's me, I'm not good enough. *No babe, I was not saying that at all I was simply just...* Fine maybe the moon is a good fit for you after all, I heard it was Tinder's 3rd rated spot to meet singles last year. Anyways, why don't you go find yourself an average fucking moon man, maybe he'll join you for a fucking lava flow facial and then maybe he'll treat you to greasy fucking french fries at the Crater diner, like every other wannabe hipster couple who thinks they're fucking trendy traveling to the moon. *You know what Pat, those greasy ass french fries actually sound pretty damn good right now and a hell of a lot better than the freaking slabs of meat you packed to grill on this oven of a planet. And you know what, maybe I'd enjoy a freaking Tinder match who would take silly selfies with me on the Rocket Ship ride at Craters and Coasters.* Fine I guess I'll just sizzle these two damn tender, fine cuts of meat for myself while I book you a fucking ticket to the moon as soon as possible. *Sounds like a damn good plan to me, I'll see you back on Earth in a week.* Fine, I'll make us a Tuesday night dinner reservation at Olive Garden so we can fill each other in on our honeymoons.

Portrait of Us // Kayla Solbak

New Cross was a small borough technically within the London city limits but just removed enough to warrant two tube transfers to get anywhere significant. It was grimy, my suitcase rolling over cigarette butts the night I arrived. Nobody smokes in California. The borough was largely populated by students at the university I attended and recent immigrants. Sometimes I would see schoolchildren, mostly black, scuffing their dress shoes along the cobble streets. I watched them jump out of the double-decker bus at the stop outside the tattoo parlor and laugh past the oddly formal Indian place with the mouth-watering Korma, the open air grocery stand selling putrid fish, the myriad liquor stores with giant Lotto ads in the windows. The best pub was The Marquis of Granby, and it was there that I very publically decided their awful fruit syrup and cider concoction would be my go-to. I had never had a go-to drink before. At least one that didn't come in a shot glass. The Marquis was always roaring, always packed with students who'd been drinking since they were thirteen. Too poor to get drunk, I went home sober every time. Wafts of urine and epileptic street lights guided me home.

I slept in my £10 duvet from a biting January to a gloomy June. The tube tracks ran directly under my window, and the frantic knocking sound the trains made influenced my dreams. I would wake up in a panic and open my door, sure that someone had been pounding on it. While on a Skype call, an interviewer asked me if I needed to answer the door. "No, it's just the tube."

The moment I boarded that London-bound 787 at LAX, Sean became a phantom limb -- an invisible appendage I still exercised every day. On the Chunnel to Paris. On the vaporetto in Venice. Before he left my room for the last time he studied my postcard collection from art museums around Europe. Ten countries. A dozen art museums. He saw them arranged on the wall as a shrine to my life without him. We were ending, and he could only stare pained at the art, thinking of all the ways Degas had wronged him.

There's evidence to suggest we are more susceptible to weeping while on an airplane. The higher altitudes weaken our tear ducts, and our powerlessness if anything goes wrong contributes to an increased feeling of vulnerability. But I've only cried before a flight. Never after or during. Leaving is hard but landing isn't. Landing is a beginning.

My studies in London had finished but my lease hadn't, so I traveled. I sobbed twice in Paris. Silent sobs, but open floodgates nonetheless. The first was in the Notre-Dame, where I almost wished I had a god to pray to. The second was in a smaller art museum in the Tuileries Garden I didn't visit until my second trip. The Musée de l'Orangerie was designed for Monet's water lilies. The elongated canvases stretched almost entirely across the curved walls of the oval rooms, and benches in the center encourage viewers to sit and bask. Or ponder. Or lose their way in brilliant blues and greens. Monet has water lilies in New York, Italy, London, Japan. But his less-traveled lilies seem to know they are home. Standing before the canvases, I found connection without expectation. Individuality without lonesomeness. My eyes welled with water, asking the lilies to come home with them. I had more luck in the gift shop.

Loving Monet is cliché. The work is obvious, conventionally beautiful, pleasing above all else. But Impressionism caters to a desire no other style has captured. I can wade into the lily pond. Surrender myself to color and light.

A list of plans Sean and I made for our future:

- A trip to northern and western Norway to see the fjords (my idea)
- A trip to Memphis and Nashville to “see where it all began” (his idea)
- A crappy apartment always stocked with wine so we could learn to like it together
- A dishwasher, before the purchase of a dog
- A dog named Shakespeare
- Another dog named Donut. Or Doughnut. We never discussed that.
- Visit the phallogical museum in Reykjavik, Iceland
- Take two classes together next semester
- A California King-sized bed
- Mandatory pajama Saturdays in our California King-sized bed
- Fly to San Diego together to see my brother graduate high school (my idea)
- Never see each other again, except for those two goddamn classes (his idea)

Dublin was magic. Sean met me in London and we visited together. The music permeating not only the pubs but the streets, the restaurants, the mountains, all bringing me home to California where my grandparents played Irish folk songs for dessert. I drank Orchard Thieves and Sean drank Guinness while he pointed out every sign that said his name. We fought outside a pub in Temple Bar (I didn't care if anyone saw). We had sex inside a hostel near Busaras station (I didn't care if anyone heard). Dublin was a place of passion for me. I'd never seen grass so green.

I recognized a song a violinist played in a pub on our second night in town. He had the same name as my grandfather, and it was from him that I had first heard the song. It was a ballad, and the violinist played with more grace than my grandfather, but the same passion. When he looked up after the song, he saw me, holding Sean's hand, tears falling down my face. He smiled sheepishly and looked down at his fiddle then back at me. I couldn't feel Sean's hand because he was so far away. So far from that connection. So far from understanding. The musician brought the fiddle to his shoulder and broke out in a drinking song.

I collected pins and buttons from every country I visited while abroad, but I didn't get one in Ireland. I can't remember if I couldn't find one, or didn't look, but the pins adorning my jacket are a scrapbook of my travels, and I'm missing Ireland.

I'm always missing Ireland.

Two weeks ago half of Sean's wardrobe was here, strewn about my room. Nine of his socks, three pairs of boxers, two flannels, three sweaters, four shirts (all of them red) and one

pair of shoes. There was a bag of empty Mike's Hard bottles we drank a month prior I hadn't thrown out. Twice he left half-eaten mini Hershey's bars by his pillow. We were not a clean pair. We took the mattresses off the bed frames in my double room and pushed them together on the floor. The room was atrocious. But it was evidence of an us. Evidence I threw in trash bags and watched him carry out the door. Absence makes the heart grow fungus.

Prague was my first trip on my own. I met a med student named Laila at a classical music concert in Lobkowitz Palace. We were the youngest in the room by 30 years. We took a funicular to the best view of the fairytale city on the castle side of Charles Bridge, and later in the evening I met her and her Serbian man at the Reduta jazz club Bill Clinton jammed at on one of his state visits. We came on Frank Sinatra tribute night, and I tried to send Sean videos but I didn't have the data. I drank a White Russian and learned I could enjoy his favorite things without him.

After three days, I pulled my suitcase awkwardly across cobblestone streets to the bus station in the modern part of Prague. Before I departed for Berlin he asked me not to tell him about Germany because it hurt him too much that I would go without him. He knew that was wrong but he still asked, in earnest, expecting a sympathetic reply. So I saw Berlin without a copresence. I left my hostel across from museum island four mornings in a row and I never told him about the beers with the Australians and the views from Reichstag and the complicated joys of solitude.

Travel changed me in all the predictable, wonderful ways. There's a hunger, an independence, a confidence I hadn't had before. And they're almost entirely attributable to the time I spent alone, gaping at art. I promised Sean I wouldn't change and I'll never promise that again.

In the two years we were together, we rarely strayed from the modern art wings of museums. Partly because it was fun, partly because I didn't know anything about modern art. I knew something about Romanticism, Pointillism and the Renaissance, and Sean could never bear to feel like someone's world was bigger than his. Alone, I had Delacroix. Together, we had Duchamp. And upside-down urinals felt enough for me because I was smiling. I want to think it was a pained smile, a lying smile, but it wasn't. As if I were sleepwalking, I didn't know I was compromising.

I have loved art. Renoir as a child. Pop art in my teens. I assumed I had found someone who wanted to know me through the art on my walls, but insecurity overruled any interest Sean may have had. He feared there would always be a me without him. A me standing alone, feeling unabashedly whole at the marble feet of David. A me yearning for memories he wasn't there to make. When he left, there was still color, still beauty I had hung around the room.

Sometimes loss is relief.

Monet has water lilies in New York, Italy, Japan and my bedroom. I put up the poster the morning after Sean took his stuff. Connection without expectation. Individuality without lonesomeness. Sometimes I'm there, when a cashier asks me for the stories behind my pins. When Sean is Humphrey Bogart and I choose that plane every time. As I drift asleep I fall into Monet's brilliant blues and greens and wait for a knocking sound I know doesn't come anymore.

A Letter to Good Hair // Hunter Moyler

Dearest Despised "Good Hair,"

In a fashion uncharacteristic of me

and my head,

I'll be straight with you:

You're not my cup of tea.

If you were a human being

With the unctuous skin,

And sallow stink,

And sodden clothes

That one surely gets from

Slithering coolly from frowns and wrinkled lips

Into the waxy ears of children,

I'd fancy knocking out your two front teeth

With the butt end of a Negro comb

And see if you can still whistle "Dixie."

Because like that ditty,

You were born on a plantation

And ought've been left there to rot

Like pigs' feet and other atrocities.

If you were a product available

In bulk at Sam's Club, I'd buy

You out and burn you in the parking lot

Using a spray bottle of Sta-Sof-Fro to feed the fire

Of your demise and my discontent.

And I would hope that the supposed sons

And daughters of Ham would behold each other

By the light of that fire and see that it is not they

Whose skin has been burned and hair scorched

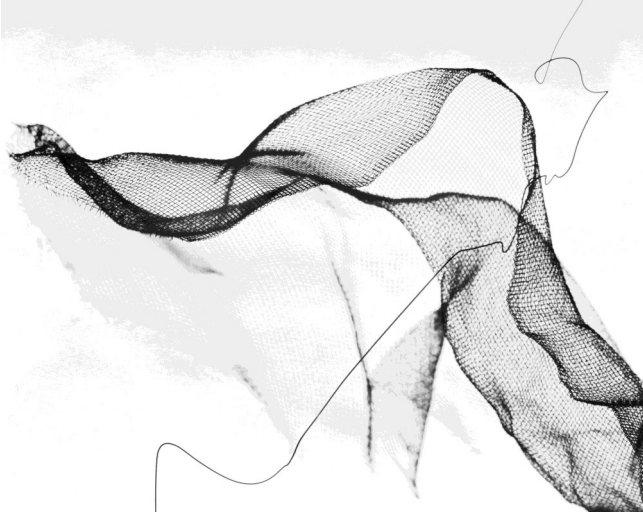
And mangled by the sun

But that the sun saw them
and kissed them
With as much love
as the good lord saw fit.
Sincerely,

the slave's dream & hope



Afar // Donte Lowman



Our Journey // Hannah Fulop

There is an anticipation in the new beginning. A certain hope springs into the soul of the youth. I know

not who I am yet. I know not who I will become. Here I am and here you are.

The people dance and laugh and they smile. We do too, but sometimes we feel and misunderstand and

we cry. Do you ever feel the loneliness of life? I feel it too sometimes. But here we are

for now. I don't understand why the people crave the difficult. The true beauty lies in the simple.

I turn around as we walk, confused. We've traveled so far, how is it that we've gone nowhere at all? As I said

I know not who I am. And you – you don't know who I am either. There I am and here you are.

Yes or no? Yes and no. The people will say that's how it is supposed to be. And I fear there is no way out for us.

So I let you go and you let me go. I know where I am now because I see that without you I know who I am.

We realize this journey, now old, is one we must walk alone. Here I am and there you are.

Poured Sin // Isabella Thomas

I poured sin in my cup

I'd thought pride would cut me off when I'd had enough

And I saw as wrath got stuck on the rim of my glass

Waiting for its turn to turn my tongue in anger

Lust made the drink go down quicker, smoother

and I wondered why it was easy to let my humanity rot

Festering from the marrow in my bones to my flesh

Greed begged me on his knees to keep going

And I figured that my worth had already been lacerated

cut too thinly to be pieced back together that I obliged him

I was made and unmade by Sloth,

numb like there were pennies dropped on my eyes

lids too weighted to be keep open

swallowing felt like fear tunneling down my throat

I felt gluttony as he dripped off my mouth

and I didn't want to lick the corners of my lips to soak up the drops

my pit of mistakes yawned wide in my belly

I felt congealed, as if I were separate from my body

Drinking.. humanity

Made unmade

Cocooned metamorphosis

Lacerated worth

Are we trapped into the lives we're born into

Cocooned by everything we can't control

The eye of the sun shone against the curve of the bull's horn so that it looked gilt with gold. He clove tufts of dried grass with his thundering hooves. Bits of ground flew in a spray behind his tail. He surged against the barbed wire fence, eyes rolling back in his skull. Metal looked to bite flesh and came up empty, catching a few coarse hairs instead of the blood-beat skin of the charger. Nostrils flaring, he faced the wind.

Kjar stood in his doorway. His hand pushed against the screen so it bowled away from him, the mesh straining against the orange rust of a line of nail-heads. He witnessed the running bull as he arced across the field. The wind caught the screen door and swung it open wildly so that it cracked against the side of his little shingled house at the end of the cul-de-sac. The round gravel drive reached past several more houses until it hit the patchwork paved road and the haphazard tilt of telephone wires that separated the field from the cluster of houses. The bull surged against the fence and, standing there in his doorway, the goldenrod sunlight streaming passed him, it felt to Kjar as if he, the bull, and the gravel road that stretched between them like a vast cathedral aisle were the only things touched by the sun under the bloody dome of heaven.

As the bull took on the wind, the boy ran. He fled halfway down the gravel road before diving between two houses. Leaving the familiar backyards of his neighbors, he set off into a thicket of brambles and clinging creepers that spilled out onto the well-worn track he followed. It was a path forged by the kids of the neighborhood, an expedition into the wild woods of Mahomet. An assorted mess of scraped up skin, gapping teeth, and crooked smiles, the little gang derived their pleasure from tracking mazes through the corn crops, swiping colas from the local general store, killing or keeping as secret pets the water snakes that left slaloms of mud on the banks of their little creek. And, most importantly, when the summer sun coaxed the gang away from the open doors of their Westinghouse refrigerators, their days were filled with flight. They would soar from ratty rope briefly heavenward and then into the cool embrace of the lake.

When Kjar took his turn, he would crash into the water and hold still, the lake reforming around this new inclusion, this limbed being that had plummeted down and down to its silt underbelly. Thin tendrils of freshwater seaweed reared up in the disturbed water and clung to his heels, touches of sunlight filtering in through their ochre tongues. Kjar froze, suspended like a stringless marionette in the water, letting the world move around his still body, feeling like he was the axis rod to its entire rotation. His reverie would eventually be ruined as currents of water lifted the stillness out of his crookedly shorn mop of hair and the unrestrained sway of the sun-bleached dock floating above its sunk anchor would inevitably catch his eye. Eventually, the red hot burning in his lungs was better than a neon life preserver in propelling him upward to break the surface and gasp for humid air. He would reemerge from the lake with dragging feet, feeling wooden. He would leave ochre and silt in his wake.

The trees through which the boy ran were thin and lithe, yet they towered toward the sky. His path followed a damp dimple in the land, a shallow basin hidden from the summer sun by the sheltering trees. At its center was a roving stream, strewn across the earth like a discarded ribbon. Where the world outside was large and flat and baked golden-brown and Kjar felt like an ant under a magnifying glass melting into the pavement, it was here amidst the singular trees swaying in the wind and with the scent of greenness clinging to his nostrils that the thundering in his skull finally quieted. He slowed to the pace of the silver trickling stream, gazing at the heavy bark of the trees and a string of aphids suckling its fresh leaves. He imagined the aphids sinking their tiny jaws into him, sapping up his essence until he was a shriveled shell filled with cracking bones and a feebly ticking red heart. He thought briefly on his decaying body piled beneath the trees, gypsy moth caterpillars building cocoons in his orbital cavities, brushing a wing tip to his zygomatic arch.

He had just reached the stony face of rocks near a bending arm of the stream when he saw the glimmer of smoke in the sky. Darting forward, he leapt from the packed earth onto a jutting ledge. One more jump brought him to the yawning mouth of a cave. It was little more than a shallow crevice in the low rock wall, but it was enough to house six children beneath its narrow height. Milo and Arlo were hunched around the fire waving any vestige of cool air toward them while fanning a great cloud of grey smoke toward the edge of the cave. The fire went out between them and they permitted it. Edison held a large green leaf and was systematically tearing it apart. Bette was humming to herself, gently prodding a snake she had caught gently with a stick, but the rat-tail thin creature merely began to curl itself into a rotating halo of disapproval. Mac was the eldest of them all, a beanpole of a thirteen-year-old who only promised to grow taller. He was their leader in all his unabashed, ruddy glory. He lounged against the back wall of the cave, his tawny yellow mane of hair puffing out in the June air. He twirled a zippo lighter across the gaps of his fingers.

There were several moments where the five cave-dwellers stared at Kjar and he at them. He was aware of their bare, dirt flecked feet and the air of unruliness that followed the little gang wherever they roamed. They were an itinerant band, departing from their homes every morning to leap fences and tramp through mud together. They spun like a force of nature, a tornado loosed upon the cornfields, sidestepping adulthood with artful ease and leaving slipshod monuments of childhood in their wake. Hellions blessed by the sun, their freckled skin browned in its rays, their faces turning like a flock of sunflowers stretching their yellow-petaled arms towards the god from which they received their name. But just as their days were iron hard sparks of fleeting fire, their nights were made velvet smooth and slow, eye-crooks gummed over with sticky sleep and bodies deflated from their sunsoaked days. An unrefined childhood.

“Well?” Mac finally asked. “What did they say?”

Kjar opened his mouth and worked his throat to form the words that he needed to speak. He sat down.

“Are they selling or not?” demanded Mac.

Kjar could feel tears unbidden begin to pool. “Yes.” He bit his tongue to keep from crying.

Bette abandoned the curling snake to its stick. Edison continued to tear his stack of leaves. “When are you leaving?” he asked, examining a tick that has just burrowed into the crevice of his elbow. He picked it out carefully.

“August. Two months. Well, less then,” Kjar said, splaying out his fingers. “It’s the 23rd now. We’ll probably leave the 21st.”

Bette nudged the stick and the snake now curled about it with her toe. It squirmed, flickering its tongue. “Are you sad?” Kjar nodded mutely. “Is it that you’ll miss us?” she pressed. He nodded again. “We’ll make it fun, then. These last two months. We’ll make them fun. Just for you.” She glanced around at the huddle of them. “I promise.”

That day, they departed the cave as the sun was setting to visit the general store. It reeked of gasoline and sugar. Bette bought a cola, dropping an extra nickel into the palm of the clerk’s hand for the handful of tootsie rolls Mac would undoubtedly sneak from the candy aisle. Arlo received his lollipop for being the storeowner’s nephew and then they left for Farmer Litney’s field to part the stalks of maize as they passed through.

Though Bette promised fun, Kjar only became more and more aware of the June days quickly slipping by. Proud as pie, his father would strut through the house, speaking of his new surveying job at Stapleton International. It was a big leap, he said, going from train tracks to landing strips. His mother talked about nothing but the move, scribbling list upon list onto

every available surface, her usually spindly, uniform letters diminishing to fit between the lines of Jewel-Osco receipts, the title of her list penciled in beneath the promise of You're in for something fresh! She made her children memorize their new address before they could even remember that they were leaving their old one.

They repeated 28 Mountain View Road until they murmured it in their sleep. Kjar felt the days falling away from him as the close of July came nearer and nearer, looking ever more frequently towards the creek and the lake for shared moments with his friends. The 4th of the month had given the gang the chance to build a resplendent bonfire and witness Farmer Litney set off thirty fireworks that joined the stars in the sky, blooming briefly before parachuting downward in banners of perishing light. There was a rush of joy hearing the sizzle and accompanying explosion. It filled Kjar with undiluted eagerness, that blast of gunpowder. He felt compelled to leap over the bonfire he had assembled and that Milo had covered in kerosene. Mac set it alight with his silver zippo lighter. The fire had burned for three days.

On August 19th, the neighborhood threw a going-away party for the Mortensen family. His mother had saddled Willa with watching Bobby as she and her husband ventured towards the punch. Willa promptly turned over the responsibility to Kjar before disappearing into the house of her friend. Kjar glanced at Bobby, who bared a large toothy grin and galloped off to the pie table. Kjar immediately sprinted the opposite direction. The gang assembled at the cave before trudging the perimeter of the neighborhood until they reached the bull's field opposite of Kjar's doorway. The patchwork pavement of the two-lane street was baking from the sun and it burned their bare feet so that they hopped west across the road as if it were a game.

...

28 Mountain View Road had a view of the mountains, which was as unexpected to Kjar as it was expected. The flatline of the corn and wheat fields, the carefully bisected and striated earth tilled by ox and machine, ended in a great undoing. The mountains speared through the earth, a disruption unforgivable. With the smooth, familiar ground on one side and the earth-shattering rocky range on the other, Kjar felt as though he lived at the end of the world, about to teeter off the edge of the voyager's map into the jaws of the waiting sea monster below.

It was a Saturday in April when he saw five tornadoes in a line on the horizon to the east, where Mahomet sat in the saffron fanfare of fond memory. The Mortensen family had gained a new life. A new house, new school, new jobs, and new friends. In a matter of months, his mother had gained a kindred spirit in the form of Sally Maple and his father had gained something more with the same woman. It was an affair that would last two more years in darkness, but secrets have a way of unfolding in the most ridiculous and awkward manner if given time, especially when one son knows the secret. Kjar had resisted the temptation to tell. He felt nothing but terror at the thought and would avoid his parents at all costs for fear that the secret might tumble out of him.

All his parents knew was that their son was nearing the climes of adulthood as he reached his teenaged years, becoming more and more reclusive. It was not until their front door swung closed at 4:33 A.M. on a retreating new leather backpack they had purchased for his thirteenth birthday when they realized that they hardly knew their son since leaving Mahomet, Illinois. Kjar was trudging along the highway while watching the arced descent of an airplane. It was extending its yearning wheels toward the runway of Stapleton International, when he stuck his thumb into the air and hailed a hulking 1949 red Chevy to pull over.

The window rolled down and Kjar was greeted by a grizzled, bloodshot man sporting a navy frayed hat with yellow and red stitching that proclaimed him a supporter of Denny's. "Where yuh offer, son?" the man hollered.

Approaching the open window, Kjar responded. A semi-truck blared past them, carrying his words away on the wind.

"Yuh gonna have to speak up, boy," the man said, shifting in his seat to get a closer look at Kjar.

"Mahomet. Mahomet, Illinois!"

"Hmm, I never heard of no Mohammed, Illinois. But I'm goin to Chicago, so yuh might as well hop on in here." He took a long inhale of his cigarette then threw it out the driver's side window. Kjar popped open the door and scrambled in. "I'm Lowell." The man offered his hand. It was oddly sticky as Kjar shook it and offered his own name. "Well that's a funny soundin name. How you spell it?"

"K-J-A-R. The 'j' is silent," Kjar responded, cheeks adopting a pink tinge.

"Yuh darn right the 'j' is silent, K Jar. Can I call you K Jar?" Lowell worked the truck into gear and merged back onto the highway. His driving style seemed to be very serpentine, Kjar noticed.

"Sure."

"Well K Jar, you wanna cig?" Lowell fished in his front pocket for a cigarette, bit it between his teeth, produced a match, and struck it against his thumbnail. It flared up immediately and, after lighting the cigarette, he tossed the still-puttering match out the window as he had with his previous cigarette just a moment prior.

"I don't smoke," Kjar responded, keeping a cough down as the cab filled with a soft blue haze.

"Well there ain't a better time to start than right now, sonny." Lowell handed over the cigarette he had already mawed with his teeth to Kjar and began fishing around his front pocket for another.

"Yuh know they banned cigarette ads from the T.V. last year? Whatta waste. Nixon seems to think a good smoke is bad for yuh health. I'll tell yuh right now, sonny. It calms the mind, relaxes the lungs, makes yuh think straight." Lowell flicked his new cigarette up and down with his lips. He pounded the volume button on the radio so that Take Me Home, Country Roads blared. Never had Kjar heard such a god-awful voice as Lowell joined in on every word. Once the radio had moved on to Aretha Franklin's rendition of Bridge Over Troubled Waters, Lowell was explaining to Kjar his avid devotion to John Denver and the particular love he held for Leaving On A Jet Plane.

"My dad works at the airport," Kjar offered at this remark.

"Oh, really? He a pilot?" asked Lowell, eyes narrowing as he stared at the road ahead.

"Nah. He just lays out the landing strips."

Lowell heaved a sigh of relief. "Ah that's good. S'probably better to keep both feet on the ground. Damned good song though."

A tinny version of Big Rock Candy Mountain played next and Kjar felt his head beginning to pound, especially as Lowell sang the lines "the birds and the bees and the cigarette trees" with particular gusto.

He had slept most of the day, despite Lowell's incandescent singing. Lowell shook him awake as the sun was setting. "Hey sonny. We in Davenport. Which way do I go to get to yor Muhammed?" Kjar began to protest, but Lowell was persistent so Kjar guided him the remaining three hours until they coasted into the town Kjar knew so well. "You come so far for this, sonny?" Lowell asked, barely making it into the gas station.

"Yes. All this way."

"Why?" Lowell parked by the nearest pump.

"It's home," Kjar murmured, eyes roving over the familiarities.

A smile flickered across Lowell's face. "Am I taking yuh anywheres in particular, sonny?"

Kjar shook his head. "I think I've got it from here. Thank you."

"You take care of yuhself, K Jar." He left Lowell pumping gas.



Sous Tour Eiffel // Michael Wyatt



Handed It // Jinny Kang

Perpetuity //

Caroline Fernandez

The gun went off when she was 3 and she hasn't stopped running since: to piano and flute and choir and orchestra and soccer and basketball and track and now yoga and that failed attempt at ballet and Model UN and all As and that one B that ruined it oops and the classes that she loved and the teachers that she hated and the drawing where they told her to slow down and the Spanish and the Chinese and graduation at 16 and the German and the gap year and college at 17 although she doesn't tell anyone that and sometimes she wonders if she is living off



Unmasked // Zachary Cain

inertia.

Crowd // Nazir Aziz

I've met many people.

Those who muffle enormous thoughts behind cold, silent lips.

Others who pick the locks in between teeth, forcing everyone to smile as they rob hearts. I've
met the devout worshipper,

the hopeless romantic, the marooned addict.

But deep down, I know that everyone is the same. Like me, a high rise laden with insecurities,
always swaying beneath the uncertainty of "why now?" to "what's next?" Here, a king on his
own without a commanding say,

there, the musician stringing chords to a deaf audience.

I used to be that boy

who kept placing his hand on his chest,

not believing that a universe throbbed beneath his gentle skin. So sacred was his heart,
which he thought belonged to no one else but him. Now, it's years later and he's still here,

but no longer in awe of himself.

He sees the world as it's been all along,

filled to the brim with tons and tons of people.

He tries to reinvent himself every day, he tries to unveil his ideals.

The Ignorant Omniscient // Carlos Chiroy

(An old folktale in Guatemala says that if you find an *esperanza* (Spanish word for hope), you will be blessed with prosperity and happiness. The reasons of this belief are unknown, but the greenness of this bug (*Caulopsis cuspidatus*) might explain this association, and why it's called "esperanza".)

My story starts with a woman grinding maize with a metate, as she prepares to open her small tortilleria, located in a dusty village in Guatemala. While she does this, one of her two kids, the youngest one, enters the room, showing excitement on his face full of dust and youth. His name is Miguelito. She asks him the motives of his euphoria, and he shows his two hands to her, letting a small *esperanza* jump freely, and tells her that he has found it while playing outside. She reminds him of the beatitude of finding an *esperanza*, and tells him that he must put it back where he had found it. While Miguelito tries to catch the bug again, his older brother, Antonio, enters and tells his mother that he is the one who had found the little *esperanza*. Both brothers start arguing and fighting, but the mother steps up and scolds them. After a moment of silence, the older brother accepts his lie, but expresses anger because Miguelito has always been a spoiled child, who gets all the good things. The mother doesn't say anything, but orders Miguelito to free the bug outside, and tells Antonio that he must protect his small brother regardless of their encounters.

As both brothers leave the room, they walk together for a couple of meters, and Miguelito kneels in front of a bush to put the *esperanza* on a leaf. But right before freeing the bug, Antonio pushes him abruptly, and he hits the ground violently. Miguelito stands up immediately and both start fighting again. He doesn't realize but, amid the combat, Miguelito ends up killing the *esperanza*. Once their legs and arms are exhausted, they stop fighting, and just then does Miguelito see the dead *esperanza*. He starts crying, but his brother tells him not to be weak. Antonio then leaves his brother alone, and goes to play with a plastic soccer ball. Miguelito observes the *esperanza*, and feels like a piece of felicity has been stolen from him. He also observes his brother and his indifference toward the death of the *esperanza*, and a sentiment of rage and hate raises in his heart. He feels misguided. Her mother had told him what happens when an *esperanza* is found, but she never told him what happens when one kills an *esperanza*; or when a brother hits you, and makes you hurt a small bug; or when someone snatches one's happiness of finding an *esperanza*. The mother just simply didn't explain what to do when life shows all its disarrays.

Miguelito takes the dead green bug with him, and goes to find a piece of paper and a gnawed pencil. He, unlike his mother, pretends to complete the folktale. He sits on the ground and reflects quietly. His determination resembles that of petite god planning the fate of humanity. He finally writes one single word, at the top of the paper. It's difficult to read, given his age and lack of dexterity, but a close approximation reveals the word "*matar*", or to kill in English. The weed of hatred has grown deep inside his heart, and has expanded its roots reaching his fingers, and forcing them to write that single word. Unexpectedly, the folktale has turned into an obscure guide of behavior in the hands of a child, and an *esperanza* has become an apple of discord by which death and dispute would spread among humans, caused by the desire of possessing the blessings that entail its saintly apparition.

After rewriting the essence of the folktale with a single word, the child folds the piece of paper and hides it in his pocket. Her mother calls him and requests his help as the clients, mostly indigenous housewives, arrive to the tortilleria. While he attends the women and collects the payments, he watches his mother carefully. She is a strong woman with powerful hands. He admires how she takes the tortillas directly from the ardent comal, and handles to the clients with no sign of pain. Her legs are like a tree's bole, and they have remained intact despite her exhausting single mother life. Before his eyes, her disheveled hair and

slovenly appearance are eclipsed by the perseverance in her gaze. Miguelito is young, but he has already learned to understand the sacrifice of his mother. Slowly but inevitably, the epiphany of his mother's devotion gives him no reason to continue despising his brother. So, he decides to leave the room, giving no explanation, and runs to find a corner of the world for himself. He then grasps the paper and unfolds it, and gets the pencil out of his other pocket. He first tries to erase the word *matar*, but his pencil doesn't have an eraser, and he chooses to cross out the word. After doing so, more words emerge unstoppably on the paper. I approach him to try to read his writing, but I ignore the meaning of most of his words, so I decide to transcribe his sentences, translating the words that are familiar to me.

Once he has finished editing his sentences, Miguelito digs a hole on the ground and hides the paper and the pencil. The gloom of the sunset warns him, and he takes his way back home. The seed of hate has now abandoned him. I stay in the same place, reading what I've written and trying to get something out of those words. But I can't, and I regret not knowing the meaning of a child's words. The folktale is incomplete, and I hold the missing part in my hands. Amidst the solitude, I keep repeating the words, hearing the wind echoing my voice, as the child's words run away from oblivion:

*"Si algún day someone intenta despojarte de una esperanza, then lucha with todas tus fuerzas, e impide que le hagan daño. However, si a pesar de tus efforts and sacrifices, you no puedes evitar que te la arrebaten, y tus tears corren libres por tus mejillas, remember que tu camino será bendecido en la medida en que puedas perdonar los errors of aquellos cuya avaricia ha corroído la amplitud de sus hearts, y la bondad de sus actos. Porque no hay mayor esperanza para el mundo, que saberte la excepción de la ambición humana, y el sueño de un futuro mejor. You eres el pequeño bug que la humanidad anhela encontrar, la serendipia relatada por un breve folktale de pueblo pequeño." **

*Spanish to English translation: " If some day someone tries to divest you of an *esperanza*, then fight with all your strength, and prevent them from hurting it. However, if in spite of your efforts and sacrifices, the *esperanza* is taken away from you, and your tears run free through your cheeks, remember that your path will be blessed to the extent that you can forgive the mistakes of those whose greed has corroded the breadth of their hearts, and the goodness of their acts. Because there is no greater *esperanza* for the world, than recognizing yourself as the exception of human ambition, and the dream of a better future. You are the little bug that humanity longs to find, the serendipity related by a small folktale of a small town."



Directions // Casey Murano

A Korean American Dream // Sharon Lee

One day, I make up my mind,

“I want to be more American”

I want to be like those confident, independent American women. I want to know who I am.

“So what stops you from becoming that?”

“Well...” I realize,

“That’s not who I am.”

I am a dual-citizen of two worlds, East and West

I am a Korean who wants to be American

I am an Asian who wants to be white

I say I am sick of my culture

My family and my friends

We are marginalized, outcasts, from the American society

Because I am ashamed of myself

I am angry at the world

The voice in my head shouts: “listen to me” and “look at me”

But I never cared to listen to the voices of others

I thought I didn’t need to

Because I am still invisible

So I care to see the Latin Ams, African Ams, Native Ams

And White Ams, too

Though we are all “I Ams”

I want to become more American

Because when I erase my culture, I can erase my color

And if I erase my color, I could become white

What if I could whiten my identity?

But would I be able to get rid of my Korean-ness?

If I get rid of it, would I still be me without it?

Can I become what I want to be

Or should I be who I am?

Identity is not always clear or solid

It is fluid, messy, and stained with trauma and pain

But like wabi-sabi*

Broken pieces can be mended with gold

I am me, whatever that may be

Broken and ever-changing

Never finished, never complete

I decide to be me, Korean and American

With my stinky kimchi and cheese

With my parents back at home

And my future here, another home

I allow me to be myself

So that they can be themselves, too

We are different, being one and only

But similar, wanting to love and be loved

That's how we break down the walls

And start building up tolerance

That's how I take the American Dream.

Smash it down, and rebuild it with my hands

*wabi-sabi: The Japanese art of discovering beauty in imperfection and in the natural cycle of growth and decay



Tamamonomae // Yuwei Lin

What Goes On Inside My Head // Claire Powell

This world is simultaneously the most beautiful place I know and also the ugliest demon I have ever met—a simple yet puzzling dichotomy that consumes me slowly, eating away at my identity. My soul, fleshy and wretched, is touched by a million rays of light and then drowned suddenly by

a tidal wave that

falls from my

crazed cerulean eyes.

I travel at a million miles per hour, searching for someone or something I'll never find, and then collapse, exhausted and near death.

I often look out over the lake and fall in love with the most incredible sky, the only sky I will ever know. There is no place I feel more at home than standing above the murky-blue waves, especially at night, when it is dark, when no one can see me. I am strong, invisible, finite. In this miniscule slice of the world, my life somehow appears understandable. No one can find me here, I can't find anyone else.

I live in the waves, so much so that sometimes I believe I have become one.

What would happen if

my bones and cartilage and skin

turned to driftwood and kelp and zebra shells?

One foot on the gnarled metal, one dangling above the abyss, I dare to let myself fall. Become a wave again. Looking down at my feet, standing on the very edge of the jetty, I realize how quickly it could all swallow me whole. This lover, this monster, my keeper, is also my killer. Or at least it could be.

One night I just want to jump. I want to free fall into the water, savor the fraction of a second I'll spend suspended above the oscillations, below the moon.

It should be a full moon,

a blazing white inferno in the sky,

Staring down at me,

holding all my secrets,

and all the words I'll never utter

to another human being.

And when I hit the frigid water, I want the tiny molecules to freeze my bones, preserving this moment for eternity. I never want to come back up for air, just become another wave, one that will wash over the shore, carrying coarse sand and seashells and colored glass away from the rest of the world.

Single Use // Olivia Tennyson

I think if you and I were still together
we'd go to Walmart and melt all their plastic.

To the one in Arkansas
in middle summer, red July
when the road before us
would radiate up, reaching for high light.

Liquified, plastic might become opacity
not like crayons melt to the color of passing
not like ice melts to the color of memory
but like a rear car window
flecked with dirt and grass and animal blood
after driving through Arkansas red July

brought back grassy fantasies
from burning with my back towards the sun

So while we're at it
we melt all the plastic, okay?

Save my sister's otter toy
because she loved that thing

and slept with it in her bed
despite it being rigid in form and love

and we shape it all into a sphere
which we dropkick into space

A new moon for now and for you and I and
not forever, single use and remembered opaquely.



Scraps // Zachary Cain

SELF PORTRAIT, 5'6" usually with a springy step, average build, fantastic head of hair, boxer briefs, usually colorful socks, clean pants (cuffed), mostly solid color shirts with the occasional pattern, a single pair of shoes worn until the end of its lifespan then replaced, glasses, plain eyes, dad's strong facial hair genes that I can never stand for more than 3 weeks at a time, INGREDIENTS, a mom, a dad, honestly the best folks around, mom gives long warm hugs and never has bad days, dad is a wise rock, tough as nails and very well spoken, they've given me a lot of choices, probably because they taught me to make the right ones, THE CRIB, San Antonio, steak house supreme, to the south is Mexico, where tons of cultural aromas have wafted toward the giant melting pot of diversity that is Texas, fiestas, murals, the River Walk, Sea World, Interstate 35 in all its 6-laned glory, road rage is at an all-time low the past years, pedestrians are mindful, have noticed a strange abundance of Ford Expeditions, LEMONADE, my best bud Kenny, a perfectionist with an identical dislike for the theatricalities of high school, we'd usually sit in the back of the room and criticize the entire curriculum in subdued whispers, our combined comedic and sarcastic force enough to topple even the most stoic teachers, if not with Kenny I'd be around Ty, 6'something, lady killer (his words, not mine), if our heights were averaged, I'd grow a couple of inches and quite frankly, I wouldn't mind that, Ty sings pretty well and reacts to everything as if he were in slow motion, laughs at old jokes, clumsy, great temper, Kenny, Ty, and I, ooo just listen to the assonance, Kenny, Ty, and I, has a nice ring to it, anyways we had a ritual of walking to the 7/11 afterschool to converse about trending news and music and Josiah's fourth encounter with the school security guard, over cheap hot dogs and warm lemonade, has-been-sitting-in-the-sun warm, but those days, man, those days, they were the best, BALL, is life, has been life, I played all of high school, never missed a shot that I didn't take, me: flashy point guard, you: in the dust, my fame to claim – excuse me – claim to fame was a buzzer beater in home court, down by 2, drained the 3, iconic moment, highlight of my entire sports career, scratch that, highlight of my life, basketball is my yoga and meditation, it prods me to think philosophically, in a fluid motion I shoot the ball, in the fleeting moments it hangs in the air I contemplate the infinitesimal occurrences across the globe and spanning the universe, hundreds of births and deaths, millions of leaves settling to the ground, billions of eyes blinking, trillions of stars bursting into supernovas of heat and light, all in the span of the two seconds it takes for that orange rock to fly towards the rim, swish, HEAT DEATH OF THE UNIVERSE, all things in existence are transferring heat to each other, if you grab a cold lemonade the lemonade heats up and your hand cools down, heat death theorizes that eventually every object in the universe will be in a state of thermodynamic equilibrium, maximum entropy, if so the transfer of heat becomes absent, thus energy becomes absent, so, all form of matter will just sit in time, no heat, no light, nothing, the ultimate abode of the universe to gradually fade into nothingness like a wet sneeze with saliva and bacteria glistening in the air before suddenly vanishing into the atmosphere, heat death is akin to relationships, I have observed its presence in my limited experience with the ladies, the chase enflames you, the first date your heart pounds out of your chest, the first kiss your lips burn with desire, a premature heart is bursting with heat, yet as time passes the heat is gently dispersed, the passion released, slowly trickling down, like hot lava hardening into cold igneous rock, and the relationship becomes unmoving, left

only to dissipate into the still air, this theory explains why amazing girls match with douchebag guys with not a shit to give, or why stereotypes of being cold and brooding to a girl will somehow make her more attracted to you, strange, so strange, but ask yourself, if into nothing we will fade why not be with someone with whom the embers never go dark and the hearth always stays ablaze, HOURGLASS, when reality slaps me across the face I think of an hourglass, granules of sand trickling from one space of life to an opposing place of death, nothing to do with time, only with the passage of insignificant moments of infinite opportunities, they pass through the needle narrow tunnel called age, if you try to flip the hourglass to find a long missed opportunity, one side goes empty and your time is done, unquenched, fruitless, I always catch the sand in my hands, and even though I can hold most of it, some slips through my fingers, things I can never hold, people I can never meet, places I can never see, and at times this terrifies me, but with a poker face and a nervous giggle, I brush away that feeling of inadequacy and pray that perhaps it's really not as bad as it seems, THE IN BETWEEN, I've never claimed to be good at this rated E-for-everyone video game called life, I take wrong turns all the time, I use pen to force myself to accept my mistakes rather than try to erase them, I see the wrong place at the wrong time as the right place at the right time, something must be wrong with me, but every day and every moment passes in a swirling typhoon of learning, adapting, inventing, admitting, accepting, allowing, I have this encyclopedia of everything in my world catalogued, my friends, my family, my experiences, but no fucking idea how they all fit together, no higher meaning to be achieved, no nirvana taking my breath away, it's a bit amusing really, how I quest for that clichéd and ultimate answer that will grant significance to my life, I have no aspirations to die a legend, to redefine the era I live in, or to make colossal tributes to the magnificence of humanity, I just want that simple truth that will checkmark my box with a flourish, but until I find it, I am but a collection of immeasurable moments of time, each one passing just as quick as the one before it.



Three in the Afternoon // Nene Diallo

Transgender, Transgressor // Canvas Brieva

(adjective, noun)

1. If you're a boy, you cut your hair short, but People still call you "ma'am" and "she."
2. If you're a girl, you strut your pride, but People ridicule your high heels.
3. If you're neither, you speak up to share your insight, but People shout to silence your voice.
4. If you're both, you navigate the day-by-day as usual, but People use every tool—new or old—to negate who you are.
5. If your gender changes often, you greet the world with your authentic self, but People legislate ways to exclude, impoverish, and eventually kill you.

(origin)

- too deviant to be understood, too marginalized to qualify for Life
- too ignorant to understand, too privileged to live any other way



Watch // Nene Diallo

The Only Resounding Plea // Canvas Brievas

That desolate prairie couldn't match how lonely—how abandoned—I felt. In my darkest hour, I couldn't see a glimmer, a spark, anything from life to offer a comforting reassurance that this wasn't the worst thing to happen before dying. Maybe I couldn't see it because of the obscuring shadows from nightfall.

Or maybe I couldn't see anything through the blood and tears blinding my eyes, in the same way his blinding hate overpowered him. It was a hopeful promise turned into a bad situation that ended in tragedy. That rhythm of a connection I felt between us turned out to be muffled static on the wrong radio frequency. He wasn't gay, but I was. And he hated me for it. He hated me so much for who I am, without even knowing who I was.

All the riches in the world wouldn't be enough to satiate his anger. He didn't get his fill from the wallet I handed him, but from the staggering force his pistol made against my skull before I gave him the wallet. He found fuel from my resistance, and maybe I bruised his ego as badly as he bruised my arms when he dragged me out of the truck at last.

Blow after blow landed perfectly on my face. I couldn't do anything between being pinned, tied, and beaten. My tears somehow made their mark across my blood-soaked face. I never stopped crying that dark night. The biting cold against my wounded flesh couldn't compare to the pain of his precision and the damage made with each swing of that pistol. My pleas drowned in his swirling fury. Maybe when I realized that it was pointless shouting at deaf men, I stopped grasping for a future of my life and just...settled.

Settled at the cusp of my life, in my birthplace that I never would've guessed would also hold my gravestone.

It's all gone now. My smile. My life. The fence I was tied to. As an outside observer on the world I used to be part of, I watch time go on and I witness how everything gets fuzzier for people, blanking in their memories, more tip-of-the-tongue-can't-think-of-his-name conversations happening. And they're unable to realize, "Oh, it was Matthew Shepard..."

Everything gets blurrier except for the hate that manifested against me that October 6th. Hate that has the right frequency to be the only resounding plea reaching the ears of deaf men. Hate that directs blind men about who to swing at next.

Hate that never ends, despite the damage it causes to everyone involved.

It ends with me trying to be flowers // Sam Craig

It starts with me trying to draw flowers
but the petals don't look right and
the stems don't look right and
I don't have an eraser
so I crumple the paper into trash
and I try again
I draw hearts and eyes and spaceships
and nothing at all
But the petals don't look right and
the stems look even worse
so I crumple them into trash
and I try again
I crumple forests into trash
and hands into fists
and stomachs into fists
and faces into fists
and lungs into fists
and hearts into fists
I try
and I try again
and again
When I grow weary of it
I plant my feet in the ground
and allow my legs to sink into the dirt
then my stomach my chest my head
except for my hands
those tight little fists
like flowers poking through the dirt

Edgeway Road // Maria Psarakis

A certain kind of blindness put its hooks in my head one evening
so I couldn't see how empty my hours were.
Their strict contours seemed suddenly diffuse,
the edges wet and ragged like a chewed pear.
I looked up to the incandescent face of a clock in its tower
and mistook it for the late spring moon.

That evening all I could do was walk.
First, in the park,
searching for a bench that I had once
lain alongside
when the gravitational pull between
my ribcage and Earth's core became overwhelming.
A pointless hunt – I could never see it again,
for the same reason that it is impossible to find the trees
grown from peach pits you once spat to the ground.
Then,
to the fields, as attractive and unbearable
as arrogance,
tangled acres of yellow flowers and Saxon bones
and lacewing flies churning overhead.
Hidden there are hollow things,
a ring of pebbles I stepped inside because I didn't fear
the sensation of pouring hydrochloric acid on my palm – the cold
watery burn of dissolution.

There is no more becoming lost, there is only becoming
and losing and losing what you become.

I must walk until I understand this, until I am able to
break open my jaw and devour it fully,
and for that I still cannot rest.
So I continued, that evening,
past the park and fields and motorway,
drifting forward to one day meet the radiant grey ocean and
make my peace with the periphery.



Peephole // Graiden Berger

*There's a swallow where your mouth
used to be // Isabella Thomas*

Its cape like legs stretch the curve
of your lip, I see it dancing on your jaw
chirping words through a sieve so that
fractured letters find each other again
when listen becomes silent
I blame the swiftness of its flight,
freedom unfastened from clipped sentences
and I wonder if ideas glide through the air
whether you'd let them ride on its back
or spear them down with the fork of its tail

I hear through the thick of my thighs
Only when the holes of my ears are wide enough
phrases heard, unheard, then not repeated
and I think maybe a cuckoo has laid its eggs
in the hallows where my eardrums should be
hatching translations born of foreign thought
trailing to the tip of my tongue
sick of captivity they need to be spoken

My parasitic mouth moves in tandem with
the wings that flutter in the space where
your lids and lashes meet
I'm hoping you twist what I say
make a nest from the threads of my phrases
rest in the nuances of my understanding
So then when I speak
Your throat is wide enough to swallow
What's not easily explained

I guess I could never really paint. I was always more of a mixed media girl, a collage of everything I saw and felt and dreamed about. I spent one summer in and out of an art gallery, thinking about how anyone could possibly use paint that way, how anyone could make, of brushes and oil, light and yearning and hope. I still feel that way around great art, wondering how people can use ordinary materials to create such transcendent feelings. Making art hooks you. You see great work and you want to chase that feeling, to create it, to find a way to squeeze your heart out of tubes of acrylic. That's how I ended up in Observational Painting.

The studio was all the way across campus, a chilly walk through the woods in February that I never made unless necessary--until it was half past midnight and I had canvases due at 9 a.m. I would drag my feet the whole time, reluctant to try and translate the subtle highlight on an apple from presence to canvas. I would shuffle across the lake to the studio, leaving behind the comfort of my warm dorm and my friends, all huddled in blankets, lucky to be stuck with papers and words instead of acrylic paints and baskets of fruit. I had to lock myself in the studio while there was poetry in motion in the not-quite-spring air, in laughter by the window and stars over the lake. I felt, sometimes, that I was abandoning art in pursuit of "art," the little exercises that I couldn't bring myself to feel passionate about.

I hated to paint with other people in the studio. It was stressful and not quite quiet and lonely, too. But at 3 a.m., it was almost nice. I'd set everything up and mix colors and timidly paint that first stroke. That first streak of color is always the hardest. It demands precision, courage, a flash of artistic brilliance. But I'm not brilliant, I wasn't brilliant. So I'd waste time, texting the guy I was seeing, getting yellow ochre and vermilion and burnt sienna in the crevices of my phone. Eventually he'd fall asleep and leave me hanging, alone in the studio with my Red Bull and my still life, and I'd paint until I couldn't stand it, the soft beckoning of a silvery night through the skylight and the brilliant color frosting my fingertips and hair. I'd go home smelling like the harsh, stringent chemical burn of pigment, with the echoes of morning already in my head. I'd fall into bed and when I'd wake up, there'd be a text from Calvin, and I'd have to walk across the lake to the studio again, everything on repeat like I was living in a dreamworld or sleepwalking through my days.

I didn't make anything very good. I didn't know how to paint an apple full of life. I just knew that it had life, that there was something humming at the core of it, at the core of us, transforming seed to blossom to fruit. And after class, I'd be moved to write, somehow, by my own solidly mediocre paintings, about my feelings and my hopes, about travelers and warm sunshine and first dates. I'd sit down with my sketchbook and I'd fly through the pages with my paint-stained hands, writing about everything I felt inside me and around me, a jerky stop-start of essays and poems and short stories and ramblings. I would pour myself three cappuccinos while I did this, and I'd head to Russian class shaking, jittery with caffeine and the overflow of thoughts that ran over the rim of my mind and soaked me with a deep feeling of saturation of potential.

I was cold and tired and a freshman, and I never painted anything I truly loved, excepting three pieces. The frosted green glass, for one, that I painted quickly and lightly and gently. I watched it truly come to life, vibrating with light and trueness on a sunny Monday morning and, for a moment, I could hear the humming of the world in that cup. It was the color of seaglass, of youth, the color of a pool when you let your body sink to the bottom and open your eyes, everything blurry and emerald and fantastic. It made me think of these little green glass trinkets my grandmother kept on her windowsill that never fail to remind me of my summers as a kid, windchimes and diving and bare feet on soft grass.

The second, a self-portrait, shortly following the breakup. I painted into the night and then early in the morning the day it was due. And there in the morning light, I stood back and thought that it wasn't perfect. The shadows were everywhere at once, because I'd painted at all different times and I'm desperately impatient, and the features looked "off," somehow, which I attributed to the fact that we were painting not from photographs, but from Vaseline-smearing mirrors. But this visage certainly was me, the image of some nineteen-year-old kid, pensive and content and adrift all at once, missing someone, or maybe just the memory of the shadow of someone, a yearning which I found embarrassing, out of character, and really quite melodramatic, given the very predictable nature of that relationship and its crack-up. I thought I'd hidden all this, but then my professor remarked that I had perhaps exaggerated the lips and the collarbone, and I felt a blush because surely she knew, surely she could read my life story in the late-night strokes of my brush. Lakes reflect wandering students, the outside reflects the inside, life imitates art, and so, to paraphrase DaVinci, art, like teenage girls, is never completed, only abandoned.



Watch II // Nene Diallo

And the third, the last one, was a landscape of sorts, a project I had crafted so independently that I couldn't bear to dislike it. I had nailed together the boards myself, sawed to exact lengths, and covered them with gesso until I was ready to paint the tableau of my bay window, snatched from a photograph I'd taken on a glorious spring day of fresh air and green buds. I brought a white dress into the studio, from an evening of candles and letters and proclaiming things in the dark tenderness of a chapel, and painted that dress in, fluttering in the blissful April breeze. On our exhibit day, I imagined what my classmates saw as they looked at my painting: a window, with a windowseat and a dress hanging from a peg, looking out onto Marsh Hall and a bright green tree. It was one of the last days of class, and that tree had once been heavy with snow. I had opened that window in the afternoon to hear the notes of someone's radio drifting on the breeze. I had graduated in that dress and I had become a part of Westhampton College, too. I had sat on that window-ledge and turned it into a windowseat with blankets, where we could sleep and think and watch the autumn leaves or the first flowers of spring. And I can remember crying one night in February, when I woke up at four and all I could hear was the loud, terrible voices of men laughing as they cleared snow outside the window, and the harsh, red-burning glow of the streetlight, my mind spinning into clouds that felt like waking nightmares were pulsing from that window.

Katie Baines-Herrin, VCU grad and full-time art teacher, liked it, because she thought it was some sort of commentary on Hillary Clinton. I don't know about that. I guess I'll always think of that piece as a different sort of representation. The reflection of a semester of thinking and walking and writing and wondering, my tea and cappuccinos and Red Bull, my warm bed and the cold woods, the friends who stayed up for me and the boy who fell asleep waiting on my colorful texts. I'd discovered some truth, I swear, those nights, those days. I'd discovered stories that I'd never seen before, a side of myself that I thought I'd forgotten, a version of myself that could soak up the colors and shadows of the world and spit them out in words. And now I'm older and different, I guess, a painting constantly edited and reshaped and transformed. You can spend hours in the studio and feel like you've made no progress, each new shadow or stroke imperceptible and indistinguishable from its last form. But then in the morning light, maybe a few weeks or months later, your head is clearer and things really have changed, and for the better. Or maybe everything looks better in retrospect. I always used to hate practicing piano, but some nights, on my way out of the studio and into my bed, I'd stop into the practice room and, with paint-stained fingers, I'd stumble through an old minuet that still echoes around my head sometimes. So I keep my paints, just in case, in my drawer of pills and soap and silverware. Sometimes, when I'm walking late at night, in a certain mood, I can look across to the woods and the lake and the studio and that first draft of myself, forever immortalized in a sheaf of coffee-stained pages and a portfolio of bad self-portraits.

Sonnet DCLXVI // Emilie Erbland

Missed last stairs and strangers' vagrant stares
Raise hairs and introduce me to fear.
She is a coy and coiled ploy for choleric
Theft of joy — call her up, you'll see.

She listlessly whispers sinister lists and
Twists my bliss with her insistent hiss.
"Such unusual turbulence, no local ambulance"
The succubus fucks with my quiet sobriety.

Insincere fear jeers as I frantically panic to
Usher the manic shudder from my spine.
Unannounced, the louse flounces in my
Doubts and scouts out my last ounce of grace.

Ashes to ashes, fight or flight, fear renews my
Zealous passions and sends me running back to life.



Arachne // Zachary Cain

We Never Called Her Abuela // Kayla Solzbak

My grandparents, as a treat, used to take my brother and me to breakfast at Jack in the Box, an eclectic fast food staple in Southern California. On each occasion we parked and walked into the restaurant, eschewing the drive-through in favor of greasy tables and coin-entry bathrooms, and every time my grandma walked to the counter and ordered four Breakfast Jacks with no ham, egg well done. We all knew Jack in the Box hadn't produced runny eggs since the 70s, but she insisted each time. No ham, egg well done. The words carried a warning. I half expected a tape recorder running secretly in her pocket, evidence of her demand in case the teenager behind the counter dared defy her. Jo Ann Sinclair held high expectations no matter the circumstance. She'd have the same teenager scrub the grease from the tilted table before we sat down for our three dollar meals.

It took me too long to understand her stubbornness. I felt her upper class insistence didn't match her coupon cutting. She never seemed ashamed of our simple delights, but those delights had to be immaculate. There was no room for cracks in what I sometimes thought were illusions: McDonald's sundaes, motel breakfasts. Though I didn't inherit my mother's embarrassment of her, I couldn't see the role I was playing in a story that didn't belong to me. I saw her through her relation to me. How she made me feel. What she expected of me. She was a Jackson Pollock painting I was too lazy to understand. Indecipherable in her finished form, but made of layers and layers of crucial paint cast on a canvas. Meaning can come from an appreciation of process.

When Jo Ann Sinclair was Jo Ann Opina, she lived with her eight siblings in California's Imperial Valley, a home for migrant farm workers and their gringo bosses. Her mother had largely grown up in Mexico, but work and an early marriage kept her in California. Her father, who was a stepfather to my grandma's older siblings, emigrated from the Philippines as a young man. They married and settled in Niland, eight miles north of one of Imperial Valley's bigger towns, Calipatria. The farming town reported 7,710 people in the most recent census, but only because of the 4,000 men sitting in Calipatria State Prison.

When Jo Ann wasn't at school, she picked grapes. Her older brothers picked tomatoes, the weight of each full box shaping the spines of the dark-skinned boys. Half of her childhood was before the grape boycott, before "Si se puede," before Cesar Chavez and United Farm Workers visited her small town. Time marched forward with the success of the movement, but the Opinas' pockets were always empty. Eight children wiped out a loaf of bread every morning. Jo Ann escaped through her schoolwork, where everything came easy. Algebra didn't callous her fingers like the grape vines. Chaucer asked her to think, not to obey. At every step toward her ascension out of the valley she did what she had to do. When she had to pick grapes, she picked grapes. When she gave birth her junior year of high school, she still graduated on time. She harbored little empathy for my mother's incomplete homework, for my brother's reluctance to do chores, for unmade beds in hotel rooms. I remember clearing the dinner plates from the table each night when she would return from work, late as usual, exhausted but never defeated.

My grandfather describes the girl he fell in love with as bookish, the smartest and most beautiful girl he knew. He came from Calipatria and went to school with her. Niland's children were bused in. The son of a successful farmer, Larry Sinclair spent weekends diving into his aunt's swimming pool. When he was twelve, his step-father taught him to use a tractor, though it was more hobby than necessity. He tried baseball and football as a freshman in high school, but didn't thrive until he picked up a basketball. At 6'5", Larry was a holy union of height and raw talent. Colleges offered him scholarships, but a newborn and a musician's dream kept him home. He told me the first time he truly saw my grandma was at her house, where he played basketball with her brothers. She sat on the porch, washing her feet under the relentless Niland sun, her cascading dark hair tucked behind an ear as she looked gently toward the water running down her leg. It was the most beautiful thing he had ever seen.

Now she has a pedicure every month at the salon beside our local Rite Aid. She always asks me to go with her, to share in a bonding experience over tickled feet, but she rarely succeeds. I was eleven the first time I obliged, and the Vietnamese woman assigned to the child stared horrified at my lazily self-cut toenails. When I told my grandma of the humiliation, she shook her head. "You're paying them for a service," she told me. "You should never be embarrassed."

We moved in with my grandparents when I was four. The same people who wonder why my grandmother has pictures of white babies on her desk think it was our home that my grandparents moved into. But it wasn't. We couldn't afford a San Diego life on our own, so I grew up playing in the same yard as my mother had. I spent too many years dodging conversation with my grandparents to reach my room, and when I did take pause, the topics were Shakespeare and Spanish architecture and far from the personal stories I needed to hear, and they needed to tell. It's been 16 years since we moved in, and I'm just starting to learn.

Jo Ann wore her prom dress when she married Larry. At sixteen, she was radiant, and just a few months pregnant with my mother. They don't talk about the wedding. I recently hunted down a photo in an old, yellowed album. The ceremony looked quiet, but not somber. They were undeniably enamored, just had to grow up too quickly.

My mom says that kids used to think her mother was a maid. Though there are clear resemblances between the two women, kids saw brown skin picking up white in the elementary school parking lot, and that meant nanny. My mom took French to distance herself from my grandmother. She married a pale product of suburban San Diego, but I still don't know which box to check. My life was formed by nonwhite experiences I feel no ownership of. I present my heritage as three parts privilege, one part fun fact. My grandmother talks about the way she sees the world as if I will never understand. Because I won't. But although I will never be watched as I consider jewelry in a department store, my identity is still tied to the fields of Imperial Valley, to migrant workers in Mexico, to a young entrepreneur from the Philippines. I feel a loss for the culture my grandmother never wanted to pass on because it is both who I am and not.

Sometimes my grandmother reveals glimmers of her past, passing clues I collect for my patchwork understanding of her life. Her first language was Spanish, but we never called her "Abuela." For her, the language is for travel, in a pinch. She won't make Mexican food for guests. Enchiladas, tacos, tamales, it's poor people food, she says. As our mouths water for her mole sauce, it transports her to a cramped kitchen in Niland, where her mother serves dinner and retires to drink her poverty away. So we have lasagna on Christmas. And we go to Olive Garden on her birthday. And when she takes us to Jack in the Box she orders four Breakfast Jacks with no ham, egg well done.



Peaceful Shoreline // Casey Murano

"Daddy, I'm scared."

I wasn't there the day she was born. I wasn't even in the same state. It was Christmas Eve, and everyone seems to think it's reasonable to wait until the day before the big holiday to fly in to see their families. The airport I was working at was filled with angry people in Santa sweaters who believed that screaming at me would make the snowstorm disappear so they could make it home in time. I was a nervous wreck. Cara's sister had called me about an hour after the storm hit. My wife's water broke. Cara was screaming in the background and her sister was screaming at me on the phone and I was screaming and panicking, and let's not forget the lady screaming at me to un-delay her flight. I never got to hear my daughter's first screams as she came to greet the world. I wasn't there when my wife named her Emmanuelle.

"Hey, what do I always say about fear?"

Emmy rolls her eyes but she recites with a smile. "Fear is not a feeling, it's the stuff we eat for breakfast."

I grin. "Atta girl."

Emmy would always sing around the house when she was little. My proudest moment was when she wrote her first song. I remember hoping that her first word would be some variation of the word 'daddy,' but instead her first word was 'no,' which also happened to be her favorite word and the word preceding most temper tantrums. I didn't get to see her first steps either; I had been grilling something in the backyard when Cara shrieked something awful. I dropped my spatula and ran inside. It was only Emmy, walking like a pro. These were moments that I couldn't have. I was a part of them, but they weren't really mine. Emmy's first song, on the other hand, was meant for me alone. She called it "The Daddy Song." I don't remember most of the words. They were written by a four year old and didn't make much sense anyway—but I do remember the line about the little girl who would always love her daddy, and I remember thinking it was the most beautiful song I had ever heard.

"I just need you to wait," Emmy begs. "Wait just a few more minutes and the ambulance will be here. Just hold on, please."

My arms feel heavy, but I'm strong enough to lift one and brush a flyaway hair from Emmy's face. I want to wipe away the tears too, but attempting it only makes her cry harder.

I taught her how to ride a bike and pick a lock and how to punch a bully in the face so that it'd look like an accident. I couldn't teach her everything. I couldn't teach her about periods or choosing a bra. I couldn't teach her how to live after her mother died. I didn't know how to live after her mother died. Somehow I was able to offer my daughter a shoulder to cry on, and she gave me a foundation to stand on. Somehow the days continued, and one of those days I saw Emmy smile for the first time in a long while.

The sound of the gunshot rings in my ears, but I barely feel the wound. It's funny how things that should be painful don't hurt when you're focused on protecting the people you love. I saw him take aim at my daughter and everything else stopped.

Emmy was fifteen when she had her first boyfriend. She was fifteen when she had her first heartbreak. I was forty five the first time I truly felt the urge to kill someone. There couldn't be anything worse than seeing my baby girl with tears rolling down her face. She would just look at me with those large, pleading eyes that once belonged to her mother. She needed me to take the pain away, so I sat her on my lap like I used to when she was four and told her a story about an ugly Prince Charming who came to rescue a princess, but the princess kicked his butt when she found out that he was part of the reason she was trapped in the first place.

My eyelids were getting pretty heavy. When I let them close Emmy sucks in a violent breath before she grabs my hand and presses her face into my neck. "I love you," she says, repeating it over and over like a mantra.

There was a father-daughter dance Emmy's senior year of high school. I almost cried when I saw her in her beautiful red dress, hair in soft ringlets splayed over her shoulders. She looked so grown up. She looked so much like her mother. She rolled her eyes when I started to gush about how proud of her I was, but whether I was being cliché or sappy or whatever, I meant it all. Music was already playing when we got to the reception hall. Emmy and I had been practicing for three weeks, and at this point I felt that I could do a waltz like nobody's business. We were getting into a good swing number when the first shot rang out.

I don't have enough energy to say it out loud, but I think she knows. *Daddy loves you too, Emmy.*



In a Pickle // Casey Murano

A Very Serious Bar Poem // Spencer Yacos

I may be a lens
But very little in my life is clear:
I couldn't make it as part of a camera
Or as a telescope for any astronomer
My wife left me and she took our son
And I'm behind in my rent payments
So I went to the bar to think
Because if there's one thing we lenses are good at
It's focusing.

I quickly start to drown my sorrows
Couple drinks later
And everything's become a lot fuzzier
I spot this other lens across the room
Now he's downing his drink
And dare I say he's looking back at me
Polycarbonate convex
With a focal length of, like, 60 mm
A real hotshot.

I walk up to him, he goes to me
And we start arguing
I forget about what – something stupid.
Lo and behold we start yelling
And fighting, grapple back and forth
Then we're on the ground
Two lenses, banded together
The bartender leans over and yells
"Hey you two! Stop making spectacles of yourselves!"

To Extinguish a Sunset // Lillie Izo

I wonder what we all may see
When night grows darker suddenly,
And water ripples halt at once
From whistled vows at timberline fronts.

Soft caresses fold in air
Breathed out by former lovers there.
It reeks of sorry, smoldering ash
Once gone, now blooms, so unabashed.

A tinder holding by a thread,
All precious cargo hanging red,
While trying hard for one more spark
The sunsets kiss us in the dark.

*

The sunsets kiss us in the dark
While trying hard for one more spark.
All precious cargo hanging red,
A tender holding (by a thread)

Now gone; once bloomed so unabashed.
It reeks of sorry: smoldering ash
Breathed out by former lovers. Their
Soft caresses fold in air

From whistled vows. At timberline fronts
And water, ripples halt at once.
When night grows darker suddenly,
I wonder what we all may see.



Canoe // Nathan Burns

2018 Award Winners

The Margaret Haley Carpenter Award for Poetry:

This award is presented to a student who has had an outstanding poem submitted for publication in the University of Richmond's literary magazine, *The Messenger*. The winner is chosen by a panel of three English faculty members.

Lillie Izo, "Commentary from the Neighborhood Hummingbird"

The Margaret Owen Finck Award for Creative Writing:

This award is presented to a student who has had an outstanding fiction or nonfiction piece submitted for publication in the University of Richmond's literary magazine, *The Messenger*. The winner is chosen by a panel of English faculty members.

Savannah Etzler, "Father of Mine"

Commentary from the Neighborhood

Hummingbird // Lillie Izo

Those fucking useless,
Leaky spout scoundrels
Making love to a symphony,
Purloining precious metals
Could've hot glued to my hair comb

Silly-string-whispered sonnet
Strung up with clothespins
Like a choker, like when the concert
Pianist banana-peel-slipped on
B-flat major arpeggio—

And yet, I think he loved it
The collective gasp from the hall
Waxed on mother's poetics
Yes, the infantile coos and gurgles
Only babies fully comprehend

The hall people's mouths
Crowded full of grasshoppers
Gape, swollen bottom lips drag heavily
Upon carpet soaked with surprise,
The bad kind, the kind that crawls

Out of wrinkled mouths twisted
By television schedule changes
Which made them miss their favorite
Show that aired at eight-seven central
But it didn't matter what he loved

Show was canceled after favorite
Character died like the scoundrels died
After the tremoring applause died down
Not because they didn't love him but
Because the banana peel was green

I sat in the hospital psychiatrist's office. He was an old man, portly, with graying hair, square glasses, and shifty pig eyes. His office was crowded. It felt like a closet. It didn't seem like the office of any real health professional. The blinds were drawn over the window in the door, it was dark and the air was stagnant. I avoided eye contact with him. After he gave me a prescription I walked out of his office and breathed deep, even if it was only the slightly less stagnant air in the hospital hallway.

My dad texted me, "Here. In lounge." When I read that every muscle in my body grew tense and my heart rate sped up. He picked me up once a week from school in his mini-van that reeked of dirty dogs, sawdust, and stale cigarettes mixed with his potent B.O. But he never came in. I briskly walked out of the library. He had left my mom and I a year and a half before. She told him to make a decision, to either do what was right, or leave. Soon after that his truck broke down and without a functioning vehicle he started walking to the city and sleeping on park benches. He was never the same after that, even when he got his life together enough to buy the mini-van. When I looked at him, all I could see was the unwashed man who had chosen homelessness over providing for his family. I walked into the lounge to see him sitting on one of the big couches, many of my classmates relaxing on adjacent couches. I didn't want to approach him and reveal to everyone that he was my father. The dirty man with filthy clothes and a pungent odor that stretched 6 feet out, was my dad. I didn't see who was in the lounge. My only thought was to leave with him as soon as I could. When he saw me he got up and we walked out of the school. He took me home in his van and by the time I got out, my skin felt caked with squalor.

Hysterical, I ran downstairs to my mother, crying in that panicky, four-year-old way. My father wouldn't wake up. We had been playing on their bed. I would stand up and then fall down on his beer gut, shouting, "Belly squash!" Suddenly he stopped moving. I yelled at him, pushing and pulling on him, but with no response. I knew he was dead. I ran to my mom, "Dad won't wake up! He's dead!" When we rounded the corner of their bedroom he was sitting up, laughing. I looked at him, amazed, and beyond hurt.

When my dad had his heart attack I felt nothing. I was 16 and hadn't lived with him for a year. I sat in the waiting room with my sister and her family. I thought about how I would feel if my dad died. I tried to feel sad, and I did muster up some sorrow, but it felt wrong, not the right kind of sadness that should accompany the death of a parent. As I walked into his room he seemed small, broken. The hospital had given him a teddy bear after his surgery to hug to his chest whenever he coughed. It was a brown bear with white shirt and a red heart on it. I stood to the side of his hospital bed, my sister carrying the weight of the conversation. I didn't know what to say to him. I didn't know if I was supposed to cheer him up, or tell him how much I loved him, even though I, myself, wasn't even sure of that. I felt betrayed. My father wasn't strong. He had emotionally abused my mom and I, walked out on us. He wasn't my father or my protector, he was a damaged man from the inside out.

I laid in bed, drunk, incapacitated, horny in that non-committal, inebriated way that too much Jack Daniels makes me. Eli drank more than I did, but he could put away most of a fifth of bottom shelf vodka and only feel buzzed. As I sprawled across my bed sheets, looking up at the spinning ceiling and feeling my lips tingle, he climbed on top of me. I stared into space, eyes not able to focus on anything, while he pulled my clothes off. I didn't really mind, I always felt obligated to have sex on the weekends when he wasn't at the military academy. An insecure, college drop out, I traded sex for the opportunity to pretend that I had a strong, military man who would take care of me, be my protector. He spread my legs and started. In a moment of clarity I looked up at him and asked him to get a condom. He didn't. He continued doing what he wanted. I tried to tell him we needed to be safe. I told him to get off. Using what

little coordination I had left, I tried to push him, but I couldn't phase him. He fucked me 'til he was done. He had told me he loved me and wanted to take care of me, that he wanted to build me a house and marry me. I spent the next morning crying to my mom, wishing that he could have been the man I needed.

I lay on the hood of my car watching a meteor shower, the shimmering lights falling through the sky. I prayed, bargaining with God. I wasn't particularly religious, but I prayed as hard as I could, repeating the same phrase over and over again, until the words became fuzzy, foreign objects in my mouth. It was a chilly October night. I sat up, pulling my barefeet closer and bringing my knees to my chest. I lifted a Marlboro Red to my lips and took a deep drag. As I chain smoked through the cosmic light show, I felt at ease with my brokenness. Revelations wouldn't save me, love wouldn't save me. Maybe I just wasn't meant to be saved. I watched the universe from the hood of my car, smoking and praying in futility.

I stood in the doorway of my sister's house. It was Thanksgiving and my dad was coming over. Interactions with him were painfully awkward, the inevitable catch-up-talk uncomfortable. I was 20, past the high school 'daddy issues' phase, but I still had a hard time maintaining a conversation. As he walked up to the door he had a new dog in tow. He lived alone in his woodshop and his dogs were the only company he kept. A he came up to me, a little, brown and white beagle mix trotting by his heels, he said, "Her name's Savannah." He chuckled to himself as he squinted his eyes and the tops of his cheeks grew round and rose up like Santa Claus'. I didn't laugh. Apparently she had come to him sharing my name. I couldn't help but wonder, "Who names a dog Savannah?" My nephews thought the name was hysterical, hollering, "Savannah, don't jump on people!" or "Savannah, don't poop on the floor!" Dad derived great pleasure in shouting, "Savannah, no!" in his most dominating voice. Sometimes he just growled, guttural and terrifying, "Savannah...no...." I had flashbacks whenever he did this to the times he roared at me in the same demeaning way. Whenever he yelled at the little dog that shared my name, my hands grew sweaty and my eyes would widen, darting around, mapping out escape routes.

I'm a runner. I remember flight in vivid detail. I remember the time my father chased me through our single-wide trailer. I flung open my window and jumped. I ran down the road as fast as I could, barefoot, asphalt stinging my feet. I remember, Christopher Darling, one of the first boys I liked, told me he liked me at church and I took off running, awkward pre-teen limbs flailing. I ran all the way around the building, there I breathed deep and composed myself. When I returned he laughed and said he liked Zoey. I laughed too. I remember running away from my military-school ex-boyfriend, out the backdoor into the darkness, socks still on my feet, growing soggy from the wet grass. I ducked through the shadows until I reached the back of my car where I crawled in to hide. I remember the time my dad said I was worthless and untalented. I ran outside barefooted to the back pasture where I buckled over, throwing up an entire spaghetti dinner.

