

The Messenger

Volume 2014


Issue 1 *The Messenger*, 2014

Article 57

2014

The Messenger, 2014

Follow this and additional works at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger>

 Part of the [Fiction Commons](#), [Fine Arts Commons](#), [Nonfiction Commons](#), [Photography Commons](#), and the [Poetry Commons](#)

Recommended Citation

(2014) "The Messenger, 2014," *The Messenger*: Vol. 2014 : Iss. 1 , Article 57.

Available at: <http://scholarship.richmond.edu/messenger/vol2014/iss1/57>

This Complete Issue is brought to you for free and open access by UR Scholarship Repository. It has been accepted for inclusion in The Messenger by an authorized editor of UR Scholarship Repository. For more information, please contact scholarshiprepository@richmond.edu.



The Messenger

Spring 2014



The Messenger

Spring 2014

University of Richmond
Literary Arts Magazine

Letter From the Editors

Dear Reader,

Just as a collection of yearbooks align on a shelf as pieces of a temporal puzzle—2012, 2013, 2014—The Messenger is taking a similar approach, with clean white binding marking each new edition in our narrative of student innovation. Instead of conveying the passage of time in photos and superlatives, we are recording memories with pen and ink, paint and paintbrush. Each new volume of The Messenger literary arts magazine opens up another chapter of the artistic ingenuity emerging throughout our campus in a successive and progressive style, chronicled in a consistent fashion. We are proud to continue the legacy that began with the Spring 2013 edition of The Messenger. These two issues embody a reimagining of our literary arts magazine as a crisp and sleek representation of student creativity at the University of Richmond.

These artistic *chefs-d'oeuvre* don't appear between the pages on their own, though; there needs to be a little creativity behind the creativity. In addition to our Messenger staff and the talented students whose work fill these pages, we would like to thank Creative Writing professors David Stevens and Brian Henry, English department chair Suzanne Jones, as well as Art & Art History department chair Olenka Pevny. Your aid and advisement have helped to ensure the professionalism and quality of The Messenger, and your support has helped in its growth over the years. We hope the artful visions from the following pages inspire you to pick up your own pens, pencils, paintbrushes, cameras, or other instruments of choice. Perhaps your artistic lens will capture some of the content for our Spring 2015 issue.

Happy reading,



Elana Richmond



Rebecca Wilson

Editors-in-Chief

Table of Contents

Cover Art: "Untitled," Screenprint
by Alyson Fraser

FICTION // MICROFICTION

"In Defense of My Involvement with the Victim" — Benjamin Sales	1
"The Unknown Child" — Masnoon Majeed	7
"Believe in Me" — Brennen Lutz	15
"Progressions" — Elle Moshova	19
"2, 3 and 5" — Sabrina Islam	25
"Just Run" — Tina Liu	27
"I Broke" — Liana Saleh	35
"Crayons and Shoestrings" — Elana Richmond	47
"Two Hearts for One" — Alexandra Hunt	49
"Destiny" — Katie Skipper	57
"The Dream of the Bull" — Lucy Graham	61
"Loose Gears" — Olivia Anderson	79
"Sixty Percent" — Meghan Roberts	81
"The Dance" — Masnoon Majeed	93
"Thirteen" — Tracy Akers	103
"To my beloved one:" — Sabrina Islam	109

NONFICTION

"I Came a Stranger and Left a Maasai" — Nabila Khouri	29
"The Girl with the Braid" — Molly Rossi	75

POETRY

"a blind man's rainbow" — Madeleine Gillingham	3
"Échappé" — Brittany Capps	4
"Free of Me to Be" — Tucker Tyrrell	6
"Scatterbrain" — Esther Outlaw	9
"I Wrote You" — Richard Jennis	11
"To be a Butterfly" — Tucker Tyrrell	21
"War and Dirt" — Alexandra Hunt	23
"Some Like It Hot" — Madeleine Gillingham	28
"Stand Your Ground" — Whitney Paul	41
"Psalm" — Micah Farmer	42
"Ring Dance" — Jasper Gunn	43
"Always" — Tracy Akers	53
"Green Day" — Esther Outlaw	59
"Dancing Dahlias" — Zak Kerr	60
"Inexplicably" — Juliet Siu	68
"Aesthetic is Key" — Esther Outlaw	71
"Pronouns" — Brittany Capps	72
"The Box (all but eleven)" — Zak Kerr	74
"Definitions" — Brennen Lutz	86
"(March 8, 2013)" — Hallie Carroll	89
"Patience" — Mariela Renquist	90
"Wake Up, Open the Door, and Escape to the Sea" — Brennen Lutz	95
"When I Died" — Richard Jennis	102
"Untitled" — Tucker Tyrrell	106
"The Fear of Everything" — Alexandra Hunt	107

ART

“Remember” — Camille Fagan	5
“Best Kept Secret” — Pooja Patel	13
“Revealing Your Inner Light - Nicole” — Laura DelPrato	22
“The Celebration” — Nabila Khouri	34
“Ocean Song” — Melissa Mitchell	40
“Fan House” — Grace Gibson	48
“Spring Sun” — Kristin Neil	52
“Arif the Moose” — Deanna Dong	67
“Caye Caulker, Belize” — Monika Payerhin	69
“Trees on the Lake” — Langyue Liu	73
“Narwhal” — Isabel Moffly	80
“Vine Whip” — Laura DelPrato	87
“Nautical Sunset” — Kristin Neil	101
“Joshua Tree National Park” — Laura DelPrato	105
“Hands” — Katie Skipper	111

In Defense of my Involvement with the Victim // Benjamin Sales

First things first, I want to say that I accept absolutely no responsibility for what happened. It was tragic, there is no doubt about that, no one could possibly deny the overwhelming tragedy of it all. But it was still an accident nonetheless. Well, perhaps accident isn't the right word. I think that there was a certain amount of inevitability involved in the situation. Right from the beginning (and please don't misunderstand me when I say this) to some extent she *had it coming*. In any case, you can't burden me with the blame; I'm not guilty of anything.

I mean, what would you have had me done otherwise? Or at what point would you have had me intervene? There was no single time when I could have made a difference. Surely you can't blame me for laughing when it first began, when it was all just a big joke. We were just children then, and none of us could predict how the situation might develop. You can't blame children for being naïve. And then, later, when no one would sit with her or even speak to her, would you have had me ostracise myself from the others by interacting with her? And suffer with her – two pariahs instead of one? It wouldn't have done any good. By the time the name-calling got really out of hand there was nothing I could do to stop it progressing. It was too therapeutic, too cathartic for us to have someone we could hate so unconditionally, and who received our hate so *well*. And to be clear, I wasn't even the one who came up with the names, and, while I do admit that from time to time I might have used them, I always took care to make sure that she wasn't in earshot when I did. And the names were funny, for the most part. I'm sure that if she had fostered a different outlook she could have seen the humour in them. But we all know that she wasn't one to see the comedy in her circumstances.

And that, I think, is the best explanation for why the situation unfolded so neatly into its sad conclusion: she played the role of the sufferer too well. Now I'm not saying that I endorse this view, but I hope you realise that there is a particular consensus amongst my peers which understands that the only real person to blame in all that happened was the victim herself. They say that a different person would have reacted better, that anyone else would never have teared up and whimpered in such a wholeheartedly

pathetic way. And it is undeniably true that she had a knack for it, that she could make the staunchest pacifist want to hurl abuse at her just to see her flinch in the brilliant way only she could, and to do it again and again because she was so wanting of it. She thrived as the victim, it was something about her eyes, how beautiful and round and wet they got. And the way her red lips would pout and tremble, and her whole face would begin to flush... She revelled in the abuse, and we couldn't help but give it to her. Anyone could tell that she was asking for it.

So I do confess that some things may have been said by me, and some physical contact might have been made, but that involvement hardly warrants blame. I don't even identify with those actions any more. And everybody knows that a full and proper conception of blame requires that the actions be autonomous, and autonomy requires a schema of acceptance and identification of actions as one's 'own', an integration of effective will into a performative agency which-

What do you *mean*: 'It doesn't matter.'? Of course it matters; of course it counts for *something*. Of course it does.

And besides, it was so awfully long ago...

a blind man's rainbow

// Madeleine Gillingham

i asked him what color the sun was and he hummed:
mmmm mmmmmm yellow rhymes with mellow and tastes
like a picnic. it's breezy and brackish like the sea but also
heavy and marred like a used car and if we really want to
get interesting: indigo. well isn't that just the color of sinister
all mixed up with the flavor of sleep and the sound of a
bullfrog... it feels fuzzy and a little bit empty, to be honest.
that's not what i asked i said and he trilled eeeeeee eeeeeee
silver is young, slim, and flitting. plain old disappointing. but
gold that's for the old. wise. wrinkled. and is it ever like the
odor of blue cheese. so silver is bluish i asked and he said
now red. that's just plain shrill deep and reminiscent of the
renaissance... never mind the alliteration. and robust and
determined but destructive like a little boy and the color
orange. which is plain obnoxious in name and wreaks havoc
on my nostrils when i get a waft of it. unlike pink which is,
contrary to popular belief, not for girls but rather for old men.
you mean like you i said and he said it smells of tobacco and
the stench of a radio broadcast with a hint of that feeling you
get when you're utterly alone. and oh i can't help but wish
people heard blue my way with tinkly bells and the rip roaring
sound of a chainsaw at work. it tastes like paprika which is
much better than cinnamon... a greenish spice which doesn't
leave much to the imagination because it's always so joyful.
my favorite color he said grinning a bit is purple because it
reminds me of grandchildren and feels like opportunity and
a worn out leather sofa. and i said what do you know and he
said what do i know i know Roy G. Biv must have been a little
funny in the head for making all of these. and for boosting
the ego of such a stuck up little color like
white.

Échappé // Brittany Capps

She stands in the center of the wide-open stage,
Just a girl in pink tights.

Changement.

The heel of her right foot presses into the arch of
her left
Waiting for the piano to sing its song.
She is the lyrics.

Dégagé.

Eyes closed, she tiptoes across the floor
Unaware of the men in spectacles
Scribbling ferociously on paper before her.

Relevé.

The rhythm flows effortlessly from her bones to her
fingertips,
And she pirouettes until she floats away
Like a feather in the wind.

Échappé.



Remember // Camille Fagan // Photography

Free of Me to Be // Tucker Tyrrell

Read through my thoughts and decipher the code, what am I thinking? Only eye really know. Sift through the bullshit, right down to the core, discover what lies there, aghast it's a SOUL. Clouded by nonsense weighed down by distraction, strip down to be naked and let free true reaction. Let free, myself, from my own bound chains, I have the key buried deep in my brain. Somewhere inside my free subconscious, trapped outside my self-shackled nonsense. Chip at the chains with breath and awareness, break free from the nest of conscious impairment. Always these chains are repairing themselves, finding old ways to stay under their spell. Spending the time to regain touch with my mind knows no bounds for what has yet to be found. What possibilities could find sometimes crosses my mind, but that ego's impeding, just be and stop leading. Discover what lies beneath the hard surface, the roots of a tree hold where the true earth is. Always digging deeper, ever searching for strength, as is my conscious never taking a break. Smoothing things slowly and finding my groove, breaking the shackles, I can finally MOVE. My consciousness's dance together as one, allowing what words could transcribe to none. Practice this dance and remember the steps, I'll never take them again and nor will the rest. Always enforcing the bridge to my mind, smashing through shackles to reach the DIVINE.

The Unknown Child // Masnoon Majeed

There exists an image in my mind. An image of a five-year-old child. He has dark brown skin and big wide brown eyes. In those eyes live a hopeless energy, a satisfied sorrow and an evil despair. These emotions flood anyone who dares to make eye-contact with him. He is rather short for his age. He appears solely on the streets.

I was about six years old. It was a dark winter morning. The smog of the city blurred her divisions. I was looking closely outside the window of my car, unsure of what I was doing. Maybe, I was trying to find a distant star somewhere hidden in the darkness of the winter day. Maybe, my aim was to forget that I was being transported in a boxed and four-wheeled vehicle called a car.

Something struck the car window, right in my face. Something real. It made a loud sound but no wound. The sound disturbed me. Someone had thrown a stone at my car. I looked deeper into the horizon. I did not look any farther but just looked deeper. I found the unknown child. His big wide brown eyes instilled a fear in me. They looked at me, and I noticed his wide evil smile. His dress was poor but his spirits were rich. Probably, he was the son of a beggar but he assumed himself as the son of an emperor. He was laughing like the general who crushed his foes in a one-sided battle. The sense of loss started to boil in my soul but it cooled down as quickly as it had emerged.

We were not on different sides. I was on his side, and maybe he was on mine. I did not want him to not throw the stone. Why was he on the streets throwing stones while I were to go to school? Maybe, there were no differences between the two children, me and him. The difference lay in the location. I was in the car, and he was in the street, and I did not like that.

I met him again about 7 years later. It was a breathlessly hot summer afternoon. I was standing at the edge of my roof waiting for either the crucifixion for my sins or the titanic life to hit an iceberg. Being 13 years old, I had questions in my mind. If I had no meaning in life, then was my life even worth living? What is the point to life? What is if I do not deserve to live? Questions which bred questions and never any answers. I did not have answers. It

seemed like life was not worth living.

But I saw someone, someone who seemed to have jumped time. He was still five-years-old. This time he had lost his evil smile. It had been replaced by a dire somberness. I could listen to his cries. He was standing there, under the scorching summer sun, on a donkey cart. The driver of the cart was lashing the donkey. He was crying. I could almost touch his tears, and feel his pain. At that point, he snatched futility from my life, and shoveled aim into it. He made me decide that maybe life is not worth living for myself but I have to live for him. After all, I had resolved to help him once...

Maybe, he is just a creation of my imagination and mom's stories about the "bad-behaved impoverished -- bad -- children," but he appeared frequently in my life. Maybe, my mother did not want me to be him. Maybe, I did not become him. But I did not want him to be him either.

I wanted him to be me. I envied my own life. I feared for his existence, hated that he could not have mine. Maybe that is why that day under the scorching summer sun, I decided to live for him rather than for me.

What is he doing now? Maybe, he is just waiting to haunt my life again if I ever get freed from his slavery. Maybe, he will be right back in my face when I will forget him.

Scatterbrain // Esther Outlaw

And so the cold wind blows,
on and on, straight through one ear and out the
other.

Where is your brain, you might quarry.
Where did it go, those things don't have legs.
They can't get up and walk away.

But how wrong you are, sir.
When your mind goes, so does the rest of you.
A chain reaction of dismantlement.

Take a piece here, take a piece there.
Soon it's all gone. There's nothing left.
And all that remains is a wisp of soul,
that can't cry out for help, and can't convey it's
feelings.

A wisp of nothing that will never be understood.
Barely alive, but waiting to step through the fiery
gates beyond.

Beyond all that is sacred or holy.
Something that lives in the caverns it bore into your
heart,
and only comes out when everything around it has
fallen to pieces.

That was all that was left of me,
by the time you were gone.
So naturally, I had nothing to say.
I had no voice.

For it was taken with the rest of me.
And all that I am is that wisp of a soul,
Can you feel me floating past your cheek on a cold

day?

When the grass is hard with frost and the children
prefer to stay indoors,
You go out and gaze into the snowy world, as I
watch you carefully
with the sad excuse you might call eyes,
I'm there with you. I'll always be there
hoping someday in the near or distant future,
you'll manage to recover the shards from every
corner of the world,
and reassemble me into a normal human being
once again.

I Wrote You // Richard Jennis

Simply because you breathe
And because you can dream
You are tempted to believe
You are alive and free

You know you are alive because you know that you
can think
You can breathe and reproduce and you can sleep
and drink
When you pinch yourself, you do not awake
Your reality is genuine, so nothing here is fake

You're wrong. I wrote you.

I wrote your gap-toothed smile
I wrote every joy and trial
When you fell in love with you-know-who
Guess what? I wrote her too

I thought you up in the shower, then slipped you in a
book
You can see bits of me everywhere you look
The girl you love has nuanced traces of my love's
hair style
She has her lips, interests and hips and even her
pearly smile

It's true. I wrote you.

I wrote your dreams
Your inquiries

But writing your heart
Was my favorite part

And when I had you lying under the stars, staring at
the sky

I wrote myself inside your world as a passerby

I said good day and asked if you simply found it too
damn odd

To accept the notion that one could have devotion to a
human god

You know it to be true. I wrote every part of you

I wrote your tears

Your words, your fears

Your breaths and sighs

Your startled eyes

I wrote you into existence, but you needn't be
thanking me

You've given me far more, you are my published
legacy

And now that I am finished, and I have had my fun
I regret to inform you that my story is all done

Tonight, before you fall asleep, listen, but do not look
In the fading silence you will hear the tender closing
of my book.



Best Kept Secret // Pooja Patel // Photography

Believe in Me // Brennen Lutz

Danny-boy was lying in bed, listening to the pipes calling his name, the floorboards creaking accusations and the wind howling a chorus to the cat's melody. He listened. And he waited, for the inevitable arrival of the monsters that had tapped on his window each night for the past week.

They crawled along the grassy knoll and over the hills. They crossed the yard like shadows expanding from the hills and rocked his tire-swing as they crept closer. Danny hadn't thought about it much, but it was only on moon-bright nights that he would see them coming for him. He stared out his window and feared that tonight the monsters would catch up to him before sleep did.

His bed was nestled in the corner of his room, as far from the window as possible, but close to the door where his father would enter if he screamed. Danny had screamed once before, but his father, Michael, had been exasperated by the lack of monsters upon his arrival. Michael had slept in Danny's tiny twin bed the whole night to make the 7-year-old boy feel safe.

The next day, Danny had watched his father crack his spine and wince in pain while he put on his suit jacket. The suit jacket was really the defining characteristic of Michael in Danny's mind. While Michael was suited up, he was a figure of parental authority, albeit mostly absent during the hours between 8 and 6.

On this sinking night, Danny debated screaming for help once more. The monsters were at his window, he could here them tapping. But he wouldn't look at the window, and couldn't because he was hiding beneath his covers. The tapping became a scraping and he thought he heard the window opening. He drew the covers tighter around his body and tried to look as small and unappetizing as possible.

A small hiss from under the bed was what finally broke Danny's resolve not to call for help.

"Daaaaaaaad!" He shouted.

The creature hissed once more. Louder this time, almost in Danny's ear. Fortunately, he heard the soft footsteps of Michael on the hardwood stairs. His fear, pulsing loudly in his throat, subsided when he heard his father turn the handle of his door. Danny waited until the lights were on before he poked his head out from under the covers.

“What’s wrong Danny-boy?” Michael asked, his eyes red from lack of sleep.

“There’s something under the bed.” Danny whispered.

Arching an eyebrow, Michael glanced at the terror on his boy’s face before bending to look under the bed. “Nothing this time neither, pal. Come down here and take a look for yourself.”

Although Danny protested with an “I don’t wanna!” Michael lifted him from the bed and placed him on the ground to take a look with him. “See? Nothing there, pal.” Danny looked, and although he couldn’t see anything, he was not entirely convinced that there were no monsters in his room. He had heard the hissing loud and clear.

“Maybe they went in the closet?” Danny asked.

Michael sighed and said, “I doubt it bud, but I’ll check for you.” Michael walked the few steps from bed to closet and opened the door. There was nothing but cheap clothes and shoes that would soon be too small for his rapidly growing son.

“Only monster in here is the mess you’ve left me.” Michael said as he turned with a smile. He did need to buy some new shades for this room, he thought. The moonlight was bright and probably cast the shadows that had scared Danny in the first place. “I’m going to go back to bed now Danny. There’s no monsters here okay?”

“I don’t think so dad, they’re here. I heard them.” Danny pleaded. “What if they get me?” It was difficult for Danny to imagine anything beyond the monsters pulling back the covers, but he knew that if the monsters got him, he would never come back.

“Shhhh Danny-boy, there are no monsters here. Go back to sleep and say your prayers.”

Danny looked confused but didn’t seem as afraid as before, so Michael decided it would be safe to leave the boy without worrying about him calling again. He glanced around the room one more time in an attempt to see where the shadows would be that scared Danny. Unsuccessful, he turned off the lights and quietly shut the door.

As soon as the door closed, Danny curled into a tiny ball and ensconced himself in his covers. He hoped that his dad had scared away the monsters, but he wasn’t entirely sure.

Two pinpricks of light glittered golden reflections of the moon in the closet Danny had thought they would be in. The eyes were attached to a horror that had yet to reveal its form. A long slow hiss announced its presence to the child lying in bed like a steak on a plate.

Danny was S-C-R-E-W-ed and he knew it. The monster had indeed crept in, and somehow his father had missed it. The hissing he heard from his closet made him stifle a scream, but instead a whimper crawled out of his throat. He was going to die; he was going to be eaten. Or taken to some far away land of death and pain.

And then, he had an idea. If he could just turn on the lights before the monster reached him and crunched him in its teeth, then maybe it couldn't get him. This thought gave him hope, and he stirred a tenth of an inch in an attempt to line up with the light switch.

He caught a glimpse of the glowing eyes in his closet as he frantically scrambled up and out of his covers. Two huge steps later, and he was turning on the lights as an angry hiss breathed down his neck, causing the hairs on the nape of his neck to stand on end. Whatever had breathed on him vanished with the light. Only the pounding of his heart served to remind him of the peril he had just braved.

Danny stood in thought for a moment. He was now sure that there were monsters in his bedroom. The window was certainly no longer a barrier to the hissing shadows. He needed some way to keep himself safe, but he couldn't leave the lights on all night or his father would be angry with him in the morning.

He had heard his teachers refer to him as a "little terror" when they thought that he was sleeping in class, so maybe, he could be scarier than the monsters. He went to his closet, filled with trepidation at the thought of looking through it, but it had to be done. Rifling through the amorphous blob of discarded clothes and shoes, Danny looked for what he hoped would keep him safe.

"Crap!" Danny whispered, hoping his father wouldn't hear him saying the c-word. He couldn't find what he was looking for, but then he remembered that he had placed it in his plastic bucket filled with his toys. The red bucket held a number of items that

Danny thought could help him out, but chief among those items was a mask. He had worn the mask on Halloween, a skeleton mask that had caused shock and terror for the adults whom had opened their doors and showered his pillowcase in candy.

When he found the mask, he pulled it over his head and instantly felt like he would be scarier than any monster that had snuck into the deep dark corners of his room. Just in case though, he hefted his wooden sword that his father had bought him at the Medieval fair last year. He had whacked his dad in the shins with the sword once, and he had been grounded for a week, but his dad had only limped for two or three days.

Danny felt much more secure with both the mask and his sword, but he still worried that the monsters would get him when he turned out the lights. Fortunately, this time, he wouldn't have to stand on the floor to turn off the lights. He could stand on the foot of his bed and knock the light switch with his sword.

So that was what he did. The skeleton-boy with the wooden sword turned out the lights and lied down in bed. This time he didn't hide away under the covers, but rather, he left his upper body uncovered so that if he needed to swing the sword, he would have some range of motion.

As soon as the lights were out, the shadows once more leapt into motion. They came sliding out from under the bed with thoughts of blood on their minds. The monster previously hidden in the closet came out and rose from the floor menacing to behold. It was tall and dark, its features largely obfuscated by the shadows that gave it shape. It mumbled its disappointment when it saw that another monster had already taken the morsel it had wanted to eat from the sheets.

Progressions //Elle Moshova

I'm four and sitting on the shiny black and white checkered linoleum of her kitchen, gazing around at the dated kitchen cabinets that squeak when you open them and the refrigerator plastered with pictures of all of the grandchildren at various stages of their lives. She is standing at the stove and cooking dinner, dancing and singing nursery rhymes to me in Greek with her melodic voice. She messes up one of the lyrics and laughs her contagious laugh, the kind that makes everyone else laugh with her, even if the joke isn't funny. My favorite parts of her house are the pigs. Piggy banks, plastic pigs, stuffed animal pigs, my favorite being a pig necklace my mom gave to her a few years back. The warm shades of pink emanating from all the different animals surround me and I feel peaceful and happy in their presence.

I'm eight and we're sitting on the porch of her house in Greece, lazily eating some figs from the tree in our yard. I sit and peel the ripe green skin away from the red, plump, seedy inside. Her sister comes over from her yard next door and sits down next to us around the white plastic table. The two put up their feet and laugh about their swollen ankles. *Never grow old!* They warn me, but I am too full and sleepy from the figs to reply. A lone cicada lands on the table, and we slowly capture it. Soon enough, with the help of her sister, she ties a string around its body and lets it fly around to my enjoyment. I giggle and watch the bug zoom around on the string, flying just out of reach and then back to me, over and over and over again until it's time to go.

I'm twelve and the whole family is unwrapping presents. I open up my box and inside are exactly the boots I wanted. I run over to thank her, and start rambling about how grateful I am but she stops me because she can't hear. *It must be all the noise everyone is making!* She proclaims. I nod and laugh along, and repeat what I had to say, a little louder. We take a family photo and I am sitting next to her. She takes my hand and gives it a squeeze. I squeeze back and smile for the camera. There is so much life in those old hands; it surges through me like a bolt of electricity.

I'm fourteen and we are all sitting around the table for thanksgiving. Everyone is there but her. My dad finally walks in with her on his arm, her tiny feet shuffling across the carpet in small steps. He sits her across from me and reminds her of who

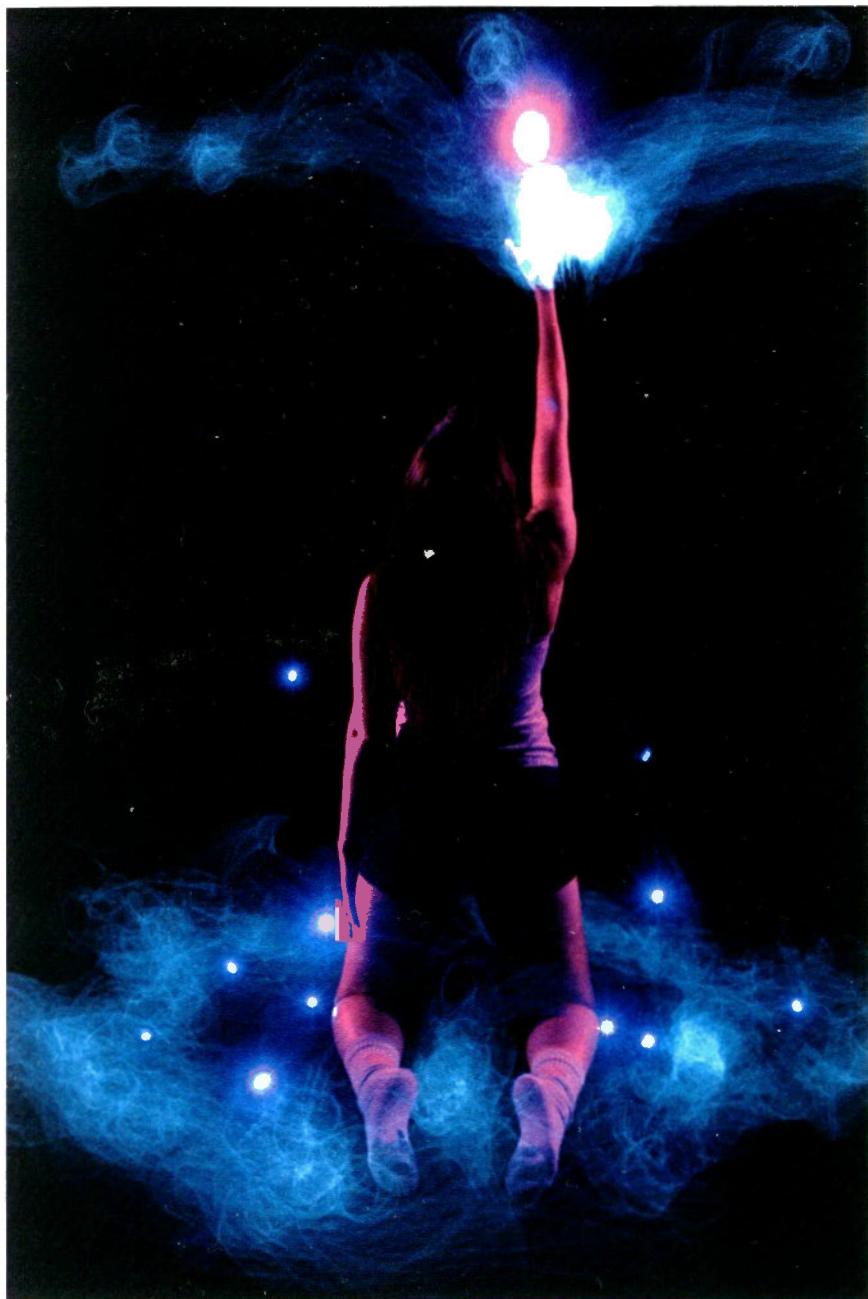
I am. *You remember, don't you?* He says. She looks at me and nods, but it's an automatic response. There is a vacancy behind those brown eyes that chills me to the bone. I try to smile and start eating my food so I don't start to cry. The turkey is dry in my mouth and I chew for what seems like a lifetime while everyone else pretends that this a normal, happy family dinner. There is silence. Someone laughs and it comes out harsh and staccato. I miss her laugh.

I am sixteen and sitting next to her on the hospital bed. Her favorite singer is playing softly from an iPod in the corner of the room and the IV put in her arm drips to the rhythm of the music. She not awake but not sleeping, in a semi conscious haze. I need to feel her presence, so I lightly take her hand and give it a quick squeeze. There is no response.

I am at the funeral parlor the day of the wake. The funeral director tells us that he opened the coffin for our family to view. I take slow steps up to the mahogany casket and look down. She looks different, my mom says to me. I think the morticians finally fixed that broken jaw of hers. I quickly put the pig necklace into the casket before they close it and start walking away, repeating the words she once said over in my head. I'll never get old. I'll never get old. I'll never get old.

To be a Butterfly // Tucker Tyrrell

To be a Butterfly
Not a care nor a whim,
but the air on your wing.



Revealing Your Inner Light - Nicole // Laura
DelPrato // Photography

War and Dirt // Alexandra Hunt

Soldier on,

they say.

Boots beating

on a broken path.

Ringing fire and

ringing ears

do not pause

when a brother falls.

You move without motion,

simple days now,

a calculus of commotion.

Same thing tomorrow,

they say.

Metal bit

where a lover's hand

never lay.

You sit,

head bent.

Pause.

You cry.

Unpause.

The Mother

On her second day in labor, she was wondering when the colossal pain would come out of her body. She had been here before. This place, this pain—she knew it all. The white and brown curtains were dull to a normal eye, someone who didn't have to give birth to a stillborn for the second time. To her, the curtains represented an ominous terror that suffocated her but did not kill her entirely.

It had seemed strange the first time around. While the usual pregnancy was associated with new life, joy and happiness, she had had a dead creature existing in her body for a week. The creature was like a piece of furniture—motionless matter that was real only because the observer knew it took up space. Her dead baby took space in her. When it was living it took space too, but it was different then. It had life.

She understood and she accepted it the first time, as difficult as it was. But it was heartbreaking to lose someone she didn't know, again. Someone she had anticipated to know for so long. It was simply unfair, she thought.

This time, her belly had become hard while she slept at night. She woke up in shock the next day because she knew what had happened. It was the worst *déjà vu*. Her baby had died two days before the delivery date. Again. She knew what was wrong, but her child was already dead.

Lying on the hospital bed, she thought of a name. She was running out of pretty ones so she started, quite ironically, giving her children strong names. According to her, a strong name echoed the strength of the person who previously carried it. She thought that a rose called by any other name would be quite different, and she believed that the mere pronunciation of a name created waves that vibrated through the body and touched the soul, directing the person to become what the name had gathered in its meaning. Her baby girls were never going to become anything.

The Father

Hour 26. The contractions were nowhere strong enough for a delivery. He was sitting on the floor outside the room in which his wife was struggling. He was forcing himself to think of his work, but the efforts were futile. It was as if he were pushing clouds to block a spear.

He could see the day he had softly placed the child into a hole. He could taste his dry mouth yearning for a cigarette. He could hear the prayers, and he could hear the shovels scooping dirt. And he could feel the path on which the warm water rolled down his face. He didn't remember smelling anything. His nose was congested.

A fortune-teller once told him that he'd bury three of his children before they could learn to breathe. Numbers 2, 3 and 5. This was number 3 and she was second in line.

It will happen again, he thought.

Just Run // Tina Liu

You see your relationship dangling from a cliff. How did you even get on the cliff? You have no clue. But you do know that this is not the question to be pondering at a time like this. So what is? You try to estimate the distance between you and your relationship. Roughly 99 meters, with an error range of 2 meters. You calculate the time it would take you to reach your relationship and take into account that your best place for the 100-meter test in high school was third to last. But you also feel your pituitary gland signaling your adrenal glands. You rub your moist palms together and give yourself 16 seconds. You know that your relationship won't be able to last that long, you can see it starting to slip. A part of you wants to yell for help and frantically wave your arms until Superman swoops in. But you don't. Knowing that there is only one thing left to do you break into a run, blaming yourself for not slipping on a pair of running shoes before you came here. But then you suddenly remember that you didn't even know you would be on this cliff today...

You run towards your relationship but you don't understand why every step forward brings you a step back. Confusion transforms into frustration as you push yourself to take larger strides. And then a thought strikes you. Perhaps you should try taking a step back. But you brush the thought off with a shake your head and you try to focus on your irregular breathing. The echo of a hollow thud brings you to a sudden stop and you almost lose your balance. Exhausted, you bend over and put your hands on your knees as you try to catch your breath. You welcome the feeling of closure that is beginning to stem from your heart and let it gradually fill you. You let out a sigh and wipe off the beads of sweat from your forehead with the back of your hand. At least you tried.

Some Like it Hot // Madeleine Gillingham

He wore a thin white t-shirt with Marilyn Monroe's face dead center. BEAUTY, the block letters screamed out across his chest as he stopped dribbling and arched into the air, slamming the ball through the net. BEAU, they suggested as he shrugged to use the edge of her face to wipe the salty pride from his temples. BE, they whispered as he took her off and threw her to the ground, red lips sodden and crumpled and grimaced.

I Came a Stranger and Left a Maasai

// Nabila Khouri

The sun hangs heavy through the bare trees surrounding the village. There are sounds of chanting, dancing, beating and feet pounding the earth. The ground is dusty and smells of dried cow dung; it is a scent that I have gotten used to living in the bush. It lingers in the air as goats and children play around the village, kicking up dust as they run around. As we walk through the we are greeted by the men who have had too much honey beer. They shake our hands and greet us kindly but some continue rambling in Swahili, as though we'd understand them, even if they weren't drunk.

It is a Saturday afternoon and we are guests of honor at the most sacred ceremony and celebration for all Maasai people. We have come to celebrate the circumcision of six boys in the sub-village of Endebezi, in Loibor Siret, Tanzania. The houses of the children who are being circumcised are painted beautifully. The white paint is a bold contrast against the deep red color of the clay homes. There are words of celebration, love, joy and welcome written in the paint and scenes of sunrises and children playing in the cattle corals, more commonly known as bomas. They are scenes of this very day.

We are greeted inside the village gates by our dear friend Kurusha. He is a night watchman at Noloholo, our camp on the Maasai Steppe, and is the one who invited us to the celebration. As we look round the village, every man, woman and child is dressed in the traditional red and blue kangas. They are brightly colored as if they have never been washed. Kurusha's beautiful dark skin, reveals his gleaming eyes and teeth as he sees us come through the thorny gates into the village. He hugs us all, welcoming us to his village. A thin woman, perhaps even darker than Kurusha, approaches us draped in a beautiful red-orange, zigzagged patterned shawl. The intricate green beaded earrings she is wearing glimmer in the sunshine. She introduces herself as Kurusha's mother and gently places her hand behind our heads and pulls us to her chest. It is a gesture of love and acceptance. She recognizes us as her own children and gives each of us a small token of her love. She removes the earrings she has on and takes off the ones I have on, replacing them with hers. The graciousness and generosity of these people will always amaze me. This woman has given me a pair of earrings that she could have sold in a market to some oblivious tourist for \$10 American dollars. That money could have fed her for a week. She gives the other interns I work with a gift of about the same value. In that moment I wish I had

brought my wallet to buy some of her jewelry for my family and friends.

We have accumulated a small entourage. Children and adults stop what they are doing to look up at the *mzungu* (white people) who have come to visit their village on this very important day. They see that we know residents of the village, that we are accompanied by workers from APW and they soon lose interest. Almost everyone in the village of Loibor Siret knows about the African People and Wildlife Fund (APW), because the organization works directly with the village, helping to monitor and reduce human and wildlife conflict.

We are led over to a group of warriors who have gathered in a circle to dance. The chanting is mesmerizing and I gape with camera in hand, at how their feet seem to rise to effortlessly from the ground to about half my height. It is a sight that one only ever sees in issues of National Geographic or programs on the Travel Channel. The shades of blue and red jump from one side of the circle to the other. Groups of boys rush into the circle holding hands and smiling widely. We are, by far, the most out of place items in the village, but no one is paying attention to us. They are focused on the celebrations, and as far as I am concerned, I am a part of it too.

Kurusha ushers us away from the crowd of dancers a few minutes later, inviting us to eat the meat of the cow they ritually slaughtered that morning. The air just outside the gates of the village is thick with the smell of burning wood and blood. Thirteen heads of cattle were slaughtered for the two-day ceremony. Behind some brush and thicket we see one of the cows laid out on a bed of banana leaves. It's throat is slit, but the majority of the blood has already been collected for the warriors to drink later on in the evening. There is a slit from the breast to the flank of the animal but all the innards are still neatly tucked inside. A few fresh chunks of meat, are roasting on wooden stakes only a few feet away. The air is now dense with the smell of roasting meat and dripping fat. It drips from the meat and splashes onto the coals below, igniting a small flame for a few seconds. Through some more thicket there lays another cow. One of the warriors is gathered around it having his fill of honey beer. He greets us and motions us to take pictures of him with the dead cow.

We sit on a few logs right around the slaughtered creature. It has suffered the same fate as the one before. I wonder if I can stomach eating meat from the animal slaughtered in front of me. I am

overcome with guilt, not for the cow but for how stupid it would seem to these people if I were to refuse meat because I couldn't bear the sight of what I was eating. It's ironic, we can be content with it on the dinner plate but never think twice about how it got there.

Kurusha brings the best cut of meat that has been cooking for some time. He kneels and begins to cut small chunks off of the meat and hands each of us a piece. We eat the meat from the animal that is dead only three feet in front of us. On the last piece I can fit in my bursting stomach, I get a whiff of the fresh blood spilt in random patches around the area, and I almost lose it. Almost. I manage to swallow the last piece and quickly get up, gesturing to my camera saying that I want to take pictures.

As I point my camera down at the man beside the cow he opens the flap of hairy skin that covers the innards. He gently places his hands on the parts of the animal that most Westerners won't find in the display racks at their supermarkets. With reverence he shows me each organ. Gently picking up one, to make space to show me the other. It is as though he is showing me his place of worship. In that moment I realize how important these animals are to the Maasai. They represent everything to them. More than currency, they represent worth of people, offerings and sacrifice, livelihoods and family.

When we have all had our fill, Kurusha shows us around his small community. I count all the houses that are painted. There are six painted, of the thirteen in this small sub-village. Children walk beside us. Some reach for our hands, showing us the boma where they keep their cattle and goats. We gather to talk to few of the community villagers and I attract a group of young vivacious warriors who are looking for a laugh. With the help of my colleague Elvis, I understand their marriage proposals. They ask how old I am and when I tell them I am twenty-one, some of them sigh disapprovingly while others get more curious.

"You look like you were born Maasai," Elvis translates from one of the shorter, chubbier men.

"You are very beautiful, therefore you are Maasai."

I laugh hysterically at all the attention. They ask me why I haven't married yet, as though I must have some sort of disease to be 21 and still unwed.

I say, "If only men in my village were as wise as you. I'd be married."

They get the laugh they were looking for and get me a Co-ca-Cola before leaving to get ready for the procession of the meat into the boma and into the house where all the circumcisions will be performed.

I ready my camera and wonder from group to group, finally coming to a group of women who are dancing and chanting. They jump almost as high as the men and their jewelry flies through the air as they move. It's like watching a movie, or some sort of surreal dream. I am in the middle of these women and they don't even care that my camera hasn't stopped snapping pictures. I am just another bystander in the celebration. I spot Kurusha's mother on the other side of the circle and she motions me over to her. Her beautiful skin wrinkles with a wide smile and before I can even realize what is happening she pushes me into the circle of the women who are jumping and dancing. Some of the women chant words I can't understand at the top of their lungs, others hold my hands and we jump together. In the center of this circle of women I have never felt more welcomed or embraced by strangers.

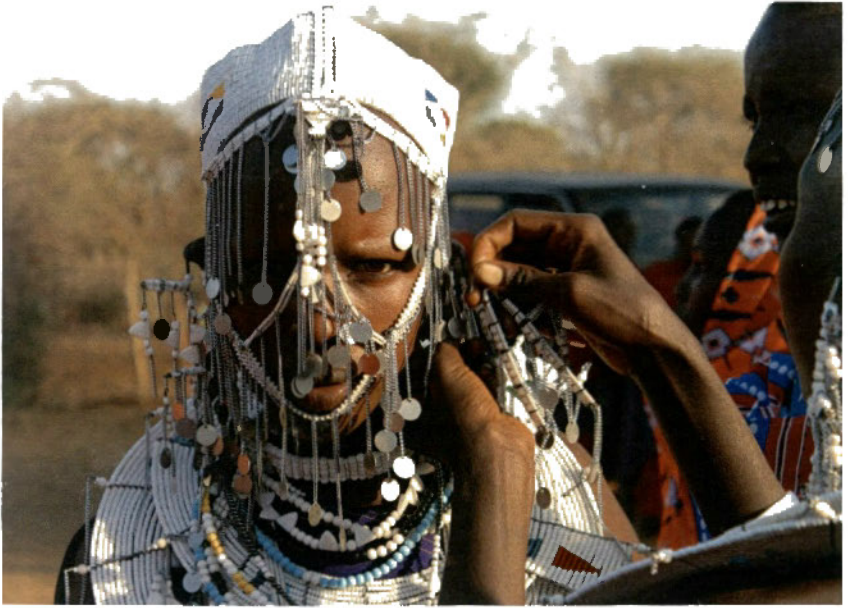
This ceremony and celebration is as important to the Maasai people, as my wedding would be to me. And yet I find myself thinking that under normal circumstances I wouldn't invite strangers to my wedding, allow them to eat my food and take pictures of me or gawk in amazement at my fancy attire.

The group soon disperses moving the dancing to the entrance of the village. They are preparing for the grand entrance of the elders and warriors. I watch from the sidelines while children grab my hands. I try to break free from their grips and grins to snap a few pictures. The sun has started to set and the lighting is refracted through the dust that is being kicked up as the procession begins. The men are chanting loudly with more spirit than I have ever seen. Some carry branches of the sacred tree that represents the ceremony, while others carry their spears. In the back of the crowd comes a thin strip of flesh from one of the cows slaughtered earlier that day. They proceed into the boma. Still chanting, they move into the house where the circumcision will take place. Some of the men are now far too drunk to even stand, much less dance. They move oblivious to the people around them, and I see a few sit down outside one of the houses to catch their breaths and settle their stomachs. After the branches and leaves, spears and meat are taken into the house, they gather in a

circle outside to dance again. This time the women and men come together, gyrating like maracas and shaking like pods in a windstorm. This dance involves no jumping, but rather shaking of the shoulders in a motion that I fear I will never master. I am pulled into dance once more surrounded by all the people that have welcomed me into this community so openly and graciously. My fiancés gather around and Kurusha's family cheers me on.

The sun is setting and we have to return to camp before nightfall. Much to our disappointment, myself and the other interns are forcefully pulled away from the crowd of dancing friends that we didn't know only three hours before. We don't stay for the circumcision; it is off limits to anyone who does not live in the village. My questions about the sacred ritual are answered later by my co-workers who are familiar with the custom and what it means to the Maa-sai. The ceremony only happens every seven to ten years and it represents the first step in the stage of a boy becoming a man.

I think about all the children I encountered on my journey and how desperately they all wanted to grow up, much like western children. They want to dance and chant like the men they admire in the village. They want to herd and care for their own cattle and slay the fearsome lion that might attack the bomas at night. I think about children in my neighborhood; the only things they will slay are the monsters in their dreams.



A young Maasai woman has her earring untangled after dancing and chanting with other women in the sub-village of Endebezi in Loibor Siret, Tanzania. She, as well as many others, were dressed in the intricate, traditional beaded jewelry worn for the circumcision ceremony of young Maasai men. The ceremony only happens every seven to ten years and celebrates a young man's transition from boy to warrior. As western culture imposes itself onto Maasai culture, the circumcision ceremony remains the most respected ceremony and celebration for the Maasai people.

I Broke // Liana Saleh

There were four bodies in the rain. Two were alive. I was one of them, but only barely. I was blinking as much blood from my eyes as raindrops and I could not move the fingers on my right hand. Leaves were imprinting themselves on my muddy cheeks and my nose was filled with the scent of the pines that surrounded me.

The rest had stopped struggling a long time ago, and I knew that I was our only chance. Luke was still alive and I was still alive and we needed help or we would both die. I shut my eyes and took a deep breath that brought with it the dirt I was sprawled on and pulled one of my knees under me. I used my good hand to support myself and brought myself to a standing position. I steeled myself and glanced at my agonizing arm and saw a swollen purple mass where my elbow should have been. My breath hitched and I swallowed down my rising panic to turn my attention to Luke.

Despite my efforts to be strong for us, the sight of him forced my chest to start heaving with grief and pain. He breathed with the labor of a dying man and his limbs were bent at angles no one should ever have to experience. And there was so much blood. Blood leaking out of his hairline and blood slowly flowing out of his ankle. I could see his ankle, see the bone peeping out of his mangled skin, and it almost brought me back to my knees. I turned quickly and vomited into the wind blown bushes behind me, then wiped my mouth on my soaking sleeve.

Beyond Luke lay the two bodies of the two people who were my best friends. Mary's dark hair was tangled with dirt and sweat and blood and water ran in rivulets down her still face. An open gash in her chest bragged bright red about the death it had caused. Her hand, with dirt under desperate, broken fingernails, held the pale hand of the boy next to her. A boy with hair red like a setting sun and skin like a newborn baby's. But his hands were strong, and she died with their strength seeping into her heart, even as he hit his head on a rock and bled out.

It was ironic, because Adam had died with hair more red than ever.

I looked at them but stopped myself from seeing them because I knew that would destroy any chances of me saving Luke.

And saving myself.

"Luke." I leaned down and the whisper came out with a spoonful of gravel. I cleared my throat and wiped my eyes with trembling fingers and tried again.

"Luke, please. Please wake up Luke." My voice was not strong enough to pierce through the black of his unconsciousness. I straightened and walked a few steps, raising my head to the frigid pounding rain. I let it wash the mud out of my eyelashes and felt it run down my neck in lazy streams. I could still see the moon through the trees above my head.

"Luke. You have to wake up, or we're both going to die. We have to find a way to get out of here." My voice tore through the heavy night air this time and he stirred, sputtering rain out of his nose and mouth.

"Oh my god. Luke, can you hear me?" I cupped his scarred cheek in my palm and tried to trap his searching eyes with mine. He coughed and arched his back and I placed my good hand behind his shoulder-blades, bringing him up so he could breathe.

Even with his dark hair in knots and his emerald eyes red with pain, the sight of his beautiful face made my heart beat with the good kind of anxiousness.

"Luke." I said it quietly and into his ear and he finally met my eyes.

"JJ, it hurts," he whimpered. "It hurts so bad." Tears rolled into my eyes and I laid his head against my chest, kissing his forehead.

"Okay. I'll get us out of here. Do you have a phone? Anything?"

"Where's Mary and Adam?" His words were slurred. I was silent. "JJ! Where are they?" His eyes unfocused and he began to panic, grabbing my hurt elbow. I bit my tongue so hard to keep from screaming that it began to bleed into my mouth. I turned and spit it out, taking deep trembling breaths.

"They're gone Luke." I was wincing with my sleeve against my mouth to soak the up the blood.

He broke down then, went limp against my frail body and started crying like a child.

It was the first and last time I'd ever see him cry.

"Shh. Shh, it's ok," I croaked. It was harder for me to keep my composure when the boy I had counted on for so long to be my man was curled against my body in a broken, shaking ball. I buried my head in his wet hair for a moment and squeezed my eyes closed, willing back the tears that insisted on leaking out of me. The knot that formed itself in my chest the moment we had started drinking had been tightening as the hours passed by and the empty cans piled up outside the window. It was now a solid, coiled mass in the center of my ribs, pressuring my lungs, making it hard for me to breath, sending guilt and regret streaming through my veins.

"Luke?" I whispered, attempting to infuse my voice with a strength I didn't have. It didn't work, and he knew it because he grabbed my good hand with his, slick with blood.

"Okay. Okay, I'm sorry JJ. Okay..." he said, wincing with a pain I could not comprehend. "What can we do? Where are we? Wait, wait... what even happened?"

"I don't really know. We were all so drunk and then we decided to drive somewhere, I think. I don't... I don't really remember. But we were driving, we were in the car and Adam was driving and we were all singing and drinking more and then I think Adam turned around to tell me something. But then it was really bright all of sudden and everyone was screaming and my drink, it spilled all over us. But then, then the brightness turned all black and I don't know what happened after that except for when I woke up, and I was in the mud and everyone was quiet. And I knew you were alive because I could hear you breathing and yelling that it hurt. And I could hear Mary whispering at Adam to stay with her." My voice dropped to a pained whisper. "I couldn't move. I tried, I tried but I couldn't and then I heard Mary start crying and I knew Adam was gone. I blacked back out then. When I woke back up, you were quiet and Mary was quiet. She was too quiet, and she was laying in a pool of her own blood. It was running in the rain, running over my fingers. I was laying in her blood. I thought you were dead until I saw you breathing."

"JJ, why are we so stupid?" he said. I didn't answer him. I didn't have an answer. His fingers had locked themselves in mine.

His hands were so cold, and I wanted their warmth more than anything. "What do we do now? I think my leg is broken. I can't... I can't feel it." A substantial fear laced itself through his voice.

"I'm sorry. I can't look at it. I can't fix it, and it'll make me too scared to think," I told him, untangling my fingers from his and trying to stand.

"Where are you going? Don't leave me," he said urgently.

"I'm just going to see if I can find the car or the road or anything. Maybe the police? Accidents get reported right? Someone at least has to be wondering where we are?" I began to stumble through the overgrowth, feeling the rain begin to slow slightly, the storm beginning to pass.

My toe suddenly ran into resistance, something other than the dripping greenery. I bent down, ignoring the protests from my battered body, and felt with cautious fingertips for what had met my toes. It was metal, a ragged edge. I could not see the details in the dark, but I took a step back and saw a large form covered beneath the blackness in front of me. It was then that I began to smell the wreckage and I knew I had found the car. Now that I knew the stench was there I could not stop smelling it. It was burning my nose, winding its way up to my head and making my eyes water with the sourness of it. This was the machine that had killed Mary and Adam and bruised Luke and I for good. We would forever have the blood of this night pulsing beneath the first layer of our fragile skin, threatening to spill over at the slightest prick of a fingernail.

I broke down then. I dropped to my knees and hid my face from the crying sky and let my tears join the falling rain. My fists fell on the innocent metal that had once been roaring with life and I knew it was our fault and it was young and childish to blame the car. But I could not stop my anger from cascading down onto this hopeless heap that had lost its life too.

It was then that I heard the sirens. The blaring noise that had so many times woken me up from a nap in the backseat of a car or made me curse with frustration at the interruption it had caused to a phone call. But now, it was a sound sweeter than any I'd ever heard, despite the throbbing it brought to my tender head. I stumbled up to the side of the road and watched numbly as the

police car came closer, my tired arms hanging limply to my sides. I could imagine what I looked like then, to the police man stepping out of his car. A rain drenched teenager, caked in the blood of her friends, her own blood still escaping her wounds. Helpless. Utterly helpless and lost. Dropped so quickly from the intoxicated vigor of indestructible youth to a cowardly shaking wreck of a young girl.

“Miss, what happened to you?” The police man came closer, a large grizzled slab of a man. His hand was habitually inching towards the protection on his belt. I could not speak, so I could not tell him that everything had happened to me. Everything that everyone always assures themselves will never happen to them.

And so I stood there, shoulders hunching in around my frozen heart, sobbing.

“Miss, I can't help you if you don't tell me what-” He stopped mid-sentence. “Is that a car?” I nodded miserably, bringing my soon to be scarred hands up to my face.

“Oh.” And that was all he needed to know. He sped into action then, speaking quickly and urgently into his phone. When he had finished, he took me by the arm and spoke vehemently, directly into my ear. “Was there anyone else in this crash?” And the clouds in my head temporarily cleared to let a sliver of moonlight shine in my eyes. Luke.

“Yes. Yes, Luke is still alive! He's still back there, but his leg. His leg is broken I think. I could see the bone, it was so scary and horrible. You have to save him, you have to, please. And Mary... Mary and Adam. I think they're dead. I mean, I'm pretty sure... I'm pretty sure they're gone. They're back there too,” I rambled, finally able to speak, to do something to save Luke's life. I would have said more, spilled more raw fear out in words, but the police officer told me to stay where I was and ran back towards the woods I had come from.

More sirens. And the lights began to blur into each other, becoming one solid mass hurtling towards me. It was like the sun had fallen out of the sky and was determined to consume me in all it's heat. I threw my arms up in front of my face to protect myself. And then everything went black. Again. This time, I welcomed it.



Ocean Song // Melissa Mitchell

Stand Your Ground // Whitney Paul

I looked for you between
rocks of Jack and honey,
you were never sweeter.
Chasing toothpaste dinosaurs
(down oxidized drains)
with regurgitation and
Ethanol infused names.
Roaring out *Salutations*
to stark white porcelain
men. Who will be rewarded
(because they lack melanin)
for the boys they're collecting.

I looked for you between rocks
of nothing. And your pillar read:
Honey,
As if, "*you were never sweeter.*"

Psalm // Micah Farmer

I have always been a soldier
without a weapon, one palm fired into my vertebra,
a sacred protest soused in hymnal strains.

The altars of me murmur through muzzles.
I try a pronouncement of grails from the alluring sip
of grace.

To be quenched by the dust that is drought.

Then I desiccate. Appalled by the chalice
prepared before me in the presence of mine
confidantes. The little thorns

broken for consumption. The little clots
gulped. A sacrament solicited.
A salve for my blistered soul.

I wept a baptism that shed the salty
sorrow of a crocodile. The most outward parts of me
suspect the confirmation. I feast while others

fast. The hunger in me quips a
Hallelujah chorus of sin. I find no rest
for the worldly warrior.

Ring Dance // Jasper Gunn

Maybe we could benefit
if I add my voice to the conversation
about these changes, about tradition,

But how can I share my words
when that voice falls dead
before it passes my lips?

I've heard too many times, whether intended or not,
that transgender people are too few
'we can't just go about changing things
just for such a small minority.'

I feel, why bother speaking,
when I feel so small?

This is a tradition for women,
it's not for me, not for some genderqueer in-between;
they don't make traditions for me here.
I have to make my own way every time.

How do I summon the courage
to face the vulnerability
that comes with saying
"Hey, I may feel like the only one
but my pain hurts too. It does matter."

I left the country my junior spring
partly because
I didn't even want people to ask me
if I was going to ring dance.
I didn't even want to be around
for people to keep reminding me
that being put in Westhampton College
is supposed to mean I'm a woman, a daisy, a lady.

Instead, last spring,
I pretended the dance wasn't happening,
Instead, I had Indian shopkeepers, children, strangers
asking me everyday
"Are you a boy or a girl?"
I didn't mind so much
this chance to be visible, to speak my truth,
as I hardly ever get to in the States

I'll be honest.
I stopped reading most emails from WC,
I didn't go to proclamation night.
I have no reason to put myself
in those situations
where someone speaking to a crowd of women, and me,
calls us "ladies" calls us "women."
and I feel tiny
I feel invisible, forgotten, ignored.

it's not because i'm against being a woman
you see it's just
i'm not one.

I wanna tell you more
like what it feels like,
rushing to find a gender-neutral bathroom
without being late to class
like the way my mood sinks
when another friend calls me "she"
a stranger says "ma'am"
how the words choke up in my throat
to correct them, again
please use "they" instead
please correct each other and yourself

I'm so tired of always
trying to be less invisible

for some people it's exhausting
to just live as yourself
day after day
in a world that feels
like someone else's

I wanna tell you more
of how it feels
but there's this voice in my head
that says "Hush."
"Hush child, they don't care."
says "Hush now, your pain is your own.
You're just one in a thousand.
Why should they care?"

I know this is a voice that hides
in the back of the minds
of many of the other people
that face oppression
that face discrimination that's hard
to pin down, to point to, to tell others about

I know that I don't know
exactly what it's like for these people
that also hear this voice
but that we have some things
in common
and can embody
the power to resist
and can stand
with one another

But knowing these things
for some reason
still doesn't quiet that voice
that finds me
at my most downtrodden
and whispers "Hush."

I still don't know
what benefit
my own voice, my stories
might have
but here it is anyway.

Crayons and Shoestrings //Elana Richmond

To find ourselves, we must look inside for something that is no longer hidden where we thought it might be. For the self we find is never the self we seek. We search for the porcelain version of ourselves from childhood: Before love, before loss, before regret. The one who loved to read and write and think, before the world grew too cold. We search for this self because it is the only memory that we can be certain we do not regret. Before every action had a reaction, every decision had a consequence, and every path was lit with darkness. We stumble through the confusion in our hearts to bring ourselves back to that from which we came. But our hearts are too tangled, and one wrong tug could break them to pieces.

In childhood it all is so simple: Be yourself, do what you love, care for others. But reality twists these lessons into what we are forced to become: Be yourself, but only when it is what others expect of you. Do what you love, as long as it will make you rich. Care for others, but never more than you care for yourself. The Utopias of crayons and shoestrings wash away into the unbearable truth that sometimes our best isn't enough. That sometimes we must lose ourselves in order to feel.



Fan House // Grace Gibson

Two Hearts for One // Alexandra Hunt

She entered the operating room and nodded to her nurses that she was ready. Her patient was an older gentleman with a heart condition previous doctors had not been able to diagnose. With steady hands, she sliced open his chest and exposed his thumping heart. As Dr. Shea manipulated the heart, she detected an abnormality on the lateral side. It was a door with a handle. Startled, Dr. Shea peered closer, allowing her body to block the nurses from her view. She had read about such strange findings in old textbooks that had retired to dusty corners of medical libraries and groaned when opened. Slowly, she lifted her head and looked one of the nurses straight in the eye.

“Clear the room,” she said, slow with hesitation.

The nurse frowned at her request. Dr. Shea drew to her full height and spoke with much more certainty.

“I said, clear the room,” her voice rang out.

The nurses scuffled out of the room and Dr. Shea turned back to the door in the heart. Gently, she rapped on it with the back of her scalpel. Within moments, the door had flung open. An older woman filled the doorway, her hair wild, unruly, and an angry red. She eyed the surgeon suspiciously.

The surgeon's face twisted with surprise.

“I'm-uh-I'm Dr. Shea. Mr. Austin has been having a heart problem; I am trying to find the cause of it. Do you have any idea what that might be?”

The little lady crossed her arms defensively, but she leaned against the door as if defeated.

“He gave it to me,” she almost whispered. “He gave it to me, and then he took it away. It was always supposed to be mine.”

“What did he give you?”

She shot the surgeon a look, annoyed that she had to be so explicit.

“His heart, of course. I've been taking care of it since he married me.”

“Oh, how long were you married?”

“For thirty years. But then he left.”

The little lady swallowed hard and ducked her head. Dr. Shea's eyebrows raised as she realized the situation. Rearranging her arms, Dr. Shea leaned in closer to the operating table as the

heart keeper began to talk.

She spoke then, of how long and how hard she had loved him.

"It was wonderful at first, of course. It always is. But slowly, I noticed Tyler looking at me differently. And then he just stopped looking at all. I had moved into his heart on our wedding day. I've maintained its upkeep the best way I know how. It just wasn't enough."

By now, the heart keeper was sitting in the doorway to Ty's heart and was crying. Slowly, gently, Dr. Shea began to talk about Tyler's heart condition.

"From what I have noted of Mr. Austin's heart condition, he appears to be experiencing the same symptoms as he would with a parasite. This occurs when the body detects a foreign substance as an invader. The body then works to push out the foreign substance. I believe his body is no longer recognizing you as its own."

"What does this mean?" the heart keeper cried, desperation riddled in her voice.

"This means," Dr. Shea said gently, "that you are hurting Mr. Austin as long as you insist upon residence in his heart. His body is fighting to rid itself of you. If you don't leave, his condition will only worsen. I know you love him; I am sure you do not want to hurt him."

Dry-eyed, the little woman nodded. She stood up and set her jaw.

"I'll get my things then."

"There is one thing I have failed to mention," Dr. Shea cleared her throat. "I have read about such cases in the past. When a heart keeper takes up residence in a heart, the heart develops a dependency upon the heart keeper. While the heart is no longer recognizing you as its own, you still must leave a piece of yourself behind in order for the heart to survive."

The heart keeper looked up, confusion sprinkling across her face.

"But won't his body reject that too?"

"The piece that you leave should be small enough for the heart to live with."

The heart keeper looked down at her hands.
"But which piece am I supposed to leave?"
The doctor's eyes glimmered with sympathetic tears.
"I think you know."

The heart keeper swallowed and walked inside, shutting the door to the heart. Dr. Shea moved a respectable distance from the table. After a stretch of time, she returned to Mr. Austin's side. Little footprints spattered across his chest and down his arm. The heart keeper's own trail of tears.

Dr. Shea stitched him back up.

Later, doctors would come to Dr. Shea and ask if she had figured out what was wrong with Tyler Austin. She keeps with her a copy of his EKG report taken after the surgery for these times. She shows it to them and asks what they see. Always frowning, they peer at it and claim they see nothing wrong. Look closer, Dr. Shea tells them. Most frown at her and walk away, muttering about who they let into medical school these days. Some examine the paper every which way, yet complain they still see nothing. But there are a select few take only a few moments to survey the report and look up without saying anything. These are the ones who have seen it. These are the ones who have seen Tyler's heartbeat and its accompaniment. These are the ones who have seen her heart beating next to his.



Spring Sun // Kristin Neil // Photography

Always // Tracy Akers

so young,
 but how young?
so old,
 but how old?
summer on the outside
 green eyes
 copper skin
 mocha curls
summer on the inside
 heart beats
 finality
 words unspoken
summer breeze
 take me
 to summer
take me
 to the
 inside
 before the outside
 fades
 there's plenty of room
for your heart
 in my hands
thump
 finality
thump
 the sun
thump
 the breeze
thump
 you and me.
somewhere there's yellow
 but never
 another

summer
like
yours
freedom
in my hands
in your heart.
Somewhere there's green
but never
another
summer
like
yours
hope
in my hands
thump.
somewhere there's blue
but never
another
summer
like
yours
strength
in my hands
in your heart.
somewhere there's red
but never
another
summer
like
yours
laughter
in my hands
thump.
somewhere music plays

but never
another
summer
like
yours

magic
in my hands
in your heart.
somewhere trees sway
but never
another
summer
like
yours

peace
in my hands
thump.
somewhere voices whisper
but never
another
summer
like
yours

echoes
in my hands
in your heart. .
sometimes hands weaken
at some times
hearts move
somewhere
new hands
seasons change
but with...
finality

but never
your
thump
heart
I'll always
thump
have
thump
Summer.

Destiny // Katie Skipper

"That possum don't belong to you, boy." The young boy looked up wide-eyed from the road kill he was cradling in his arms. A plastic toy doctor kit was spread out next to him, and empty band aid wrappers fluttered across the porch in the breeze. "I said," the man repeated, cocking his rifle, "that possum don't belong to you."

"Yes it does," the boy said, completely unconcerned by the man's gun (this was, after all, hill folk territory, and guns were a common sight). "I found it. Finders keepers."

The man narrowed his eyes under his thick, bushy eyebrows. "Just 'cause you found it, don't make it yours, boy." Lumbering over to the boy, who paused in the middle of putting a band aid on the corpse in his lap, the man stooped down to stare him in the eyes. "Now, you be a good boy and hand over the possum."

"No! I can't give you Henry!" said the boy, clutching the possum and scooting as far backwards as he could from the man.

"What? Who in tarnation is Henry? Did you name the damn possum?"

The young boy nodded. "Yes. His name is Henry, and I'm going to fix him because one day I'm going to be a veterinarian." They both stopped to stare at Henry, who was missing several limbs and slowly oozing blood. Several band aids had been stuck on the patchy fur remaining in a half hearted attempt to heal the possum. "Once he gits better, Henry is going to be my pet cause Ma and Pa say I can't git a dog."

"Now boy, I'm gonna be straight with you," the man said, putting down his gun and sitting next to the boy on the porch steps. "You can't keep Henry fer a pet."

"Why not?" the boy asked.

The man looked at him as if he wasn't quite sure himself. Finally he said, "Because you see, I ran over Henry to be my dinner, and that's exactly what he's gonna be. You don't wanna stop Henry from fulfilling his destiny, do you?"

The young boy's eyes widened. "His what?"

"His destiny!" the man said. "You see, all his life, Henry has been growing, gittin, fatter and fatter so that one day he could be eaten by me. If you stop that from happening, well... you'd be

disappointin' Henry. And that'd be a mighty shame."

Staring at Henry, who made no move to confirm or deny the man's story, the young boy slowly spoke. "So if I give him to you then Henry will fulfill his destiny?"

"Thas' right," the man assented. Slowly, the boy lifted Henry out of his lap and stared at him.

The boy held the possum out to the man, but at the last minute pulled him back onto his knees. "No. I can't let you eat Henry."

The man spat on the ground (this also did not upset the boy as it was a common occurrence in hill folk territory. In fact the boy had been practicing spitting when he found Henry). "Is that really how you feel boy?" The boy nodded soulfully. "Well, I guess there ain't much else I can do then. Just... do you suppose I could hold him? Just fer a minute, to say my goodbyes and all?"

The boy nodded and held Henry out to the man. The second he did, the man had grabbed Henry and sprinted back to his truck, hollering "Woohoo! I'm gonna have possum stew tonight!"

As the truck sped off in a cloud of smoke, the young boy wiped a tear from his face and began to pack up his doctor kit.

"Are you out here – oh, good lord. Have you been playing doctor with road kill again? That's the last straw young man, I'm a talking to your pa about that dog. I won't have a son of mine playin' with dead things! Now go wash up for supper."

As the young boy scampered inside, he sent a mental thank you and goodbye to Henry the possum. However, Henry was oblivious to this as he was many miles away and in the process of being slow cooked on an old woodstove in a big iron pot along with carrots and the questionable remains of what might have been another possum but was possibly a squirrel. Not that it mattered much, because all road kill tastes of only one thing: destiny.

green day // Esther Outlaw

“wake me up when September ends..”

what was that?

it's December, you say?

dangerously high degree days, welcome to global
warming.

it's raining.

the nice noises fill my head as I fill my lungs with
nicotine.

oh, wondrous life. wonderful wondrous wandering
life.

happy birthday, motherfucker.

cream cheese, spread too thick for anyone's taste
but mine.

poppy seeds, onion, salty salt.

“i hope you had the time of your life”

Dancing Dahlias // Zak Kerr

The flowers swirl in pink
And purple and white,
Which causes me to think—
No, remember—that night
When we danced, played, and chased
Each other through the halls
As our minds and hearts raced,
Blowing papers off walls
That faded as I sank
In your arms and we drank
One another all night,
Because it felt so right.

The Dream of the Bull // Lucy Graham

As I headed home my contentment began to fade into something else. By the time I arrived back in the flat, I found myself hoping to God that Uncle James was asleep.

But no, he sat perfectly still in the living room chair. He reminded me of a praying mantis: long arms folded, hands clutching his book, and glasses opaque, reflecting the lamplight. I tried to drift through the room smoothly and silently, like a flower moving with a stream.

As I was passing his armchair, there came a “Hello, dear.” It could have come from anywhere; his body didn’t appear to move at all, not even in the mouth or throat.

“How is Aileen doing?”

That’s what I’d told him, that I’d been at Aileen’s flat. I wasn’t going to tell him about Ted.

His eyes were on me. They were hidden, but I just knew. And my clothes—there must have been some rumple that hadn’t been there before. It was on my body like a bug crawling, in no place in particular. It was in my hair, my skin, my smell, everything suspended in the dimness, for him to examine and dissect.

“She’s good.”

“Good. That’s good.”

And he returned to his book.

Ivan the bull was in my room. Not in my dreams, where I’d always seen him: in the cities, or the jungles, or the brown mountains. No, he was here in my room, sitting off to the side like a dog sits: back-side on the floor, torso upright and supported by his forelegs.

I wasn’t as surprised as I should have been.

“What are you doing here?”

“I know what you did.”

“Of course you do.”

He flicked his tail.

I sat on my bed. “Tell me why you’re here.”

“I told you I’d always know where to find you.”

“Yes. But that doesn’t mean you have to follow me there.” I removed one of my shoes and dumped a pebble out. I wondered: if I reached out to touch him, what would I feel? Anything?

I let my hair down and shook it around a little. It was still wet from the rain, from my sweat and Ted's sweat.

He only stared at me.

"Look. I'm going to shower now. *Don't* come in."

But he appeared before me as I was bathing. Only the front half of his body fit in the shower; the rear half was outside, beyond the curtain.

"Am I supposed to feel guilty or something?"

"Do you feel guilty?"

"No, I feel like I want you to leave me alone. I know you're a bull, but you have to understand that humans are very particular about who sees them naked."

"Clearly." He paused. Then, "I told you not to stray from my path, Hazel."

"You weren't even here when I strayed, to show me what that path was. Besides, you never said your rules applied in my waking life." It was easy for me to argue with him here, on my own territory. There was no getting lost or eaten alive.

He sniffed and said, "How are you so sure I wasn't here?"

"Well you certainly weren't watching me bathe."

Ivan stayed there, watching, for the rest of my shower. I continued only because I knew there was nothing else to do.

Later, as I curled up in bed and turned off the light, he stood in the corner. I doubted he intended to sleep. Maybe he wanted to make a point, or maybe he wanted to act as a guardian against something. I had no idea what that something might be.

But in the morning he was gone.

I saw Ted again the following week. From the moment he opened the door I was entranced by all the normal things that entice the eyes—the way his clothes clung to him in places and sagged in others, the loose knot of his tie, the dull glint in his belt buckle: he was dressed to be undressed. Probably not his intention, but he struck me that way all the same.

We talked first. Ted liked to share things, and I liked to listen. He spoke like a story teller. He loved incongruities, unexpected stupidity, and non-sequiturs. One story he told was about a

doctor's appointment he'd had as a teenager:

"The doctor looked at the wart on my finger for a long time. I think he was in awe. And then he said, 'I don't think that's a wart. Warts aren't usually this . . . domed, and smooth, and perfect.' He looked at me, and then back at the wart, and then back at me. Eventually he said, 'I'm going to . . . I'm going to recommend a dermatologist. I have no idea what that is.' It seemed like he'd fallen in love."

"Was it a wart?" I asked.

"No, it was an abscess. I asked him, 'what do you think it might be?' He only said 'I have no idea' again, just staring relentlessly. And he told me it wasn't cancer. I got it removed no problem."

And in the hospital where Ted worked there was one doctor who blinked excessively, and another who always focused on the same eye when she spoke to you, never switching between them, never looking at anything else.

We went to bed in his purple blankets. Like the last time, he looked surprised as if it were all new to him. He was both ecstatic and unassuming.

There was no difference between getting to know him and revealing things about myself, because the two amounted to the same thing: with each of his heavy breaths, I saw a little more of myself stepping out of the shadows. This aspect of me had emerged before, of course—when I was alone in the dark, or in public, where someone had unwittingly set me off; or in cozy spaces just like this one, but with different company. Nobody wanted to believe it was there, and no one wanted me to believe it, either. It was gross, strange, unfeminine—not the way things really were. Nobody said it like that, of course. Nobody said anything at all.

And yet here I was, face to face with it: hot and unruly, a pale reflection of myself that bloomed out of the dark like a moonflower. I hid it away every time, a secret kept from myself. But whenever it came out I knew it was familiar, more familiar than I wanted to think.

When I walked in I found James' eyes blinking at me, small and heavy like stones, from behind his lenses. He was standing in the sitting room, putting a book away.

"How was your night?" His voice was smooth. It hit me like a raindrop, and goose bumps rippled over the surface of my skin.

"It was fine," I said. He took an enormous stride toward the kitchen. I felt the cold sweat coming as his face moved into the yellow light, and those arrogant angles defined themselves, even glowed. His lenses were glaring again, too, like goggles.

"What did you and Aileen do? Anything interesting?" I wondered whether his eyes were focused on me. I couldn't see them.

"We just hung out."

As his long fingers cracked open a can of pineapple juice, I imagined them creeping and crawling all over other bodies, my body, it didn't really matter. They moved into weird places, knowing what should never be known, things that should only know themselves. I asked myself how he was configuring his reality behind those lenses, with knowledge like that. I shivered just imagining it: that strangers could enter his world and welcome his touch, asking for it, even paying for it.

While he gulped, his Adam's apple bobbed over his long throat. I wondered if he even had appetites, if he'd experienced sexual intimacy at all. Anything like what I had left over—the sticky remnants of sweat and saliva on my neck, the moisture hidden in my clothes, the cramp in the arch of my left foot—was impossible for him: it had to be, almost by definition. I thought, too: what would his child have been like, if he'd had one? Long-necked like him, but too stiff to be graceful or swanlike in any way. The child would be white, like milk or paper—quiet skin, silent voice, gray eyes cast down on a picture book, and later, a heavy text.

James finished gulping his juice. He moved his face a little, and his glasses became clear again.

He looked me over: my little body—compact, curved, muscular—my ragged hair and stale clothes, Ted all over my stale clothes.

"Glad you enjoyed yourself," he said, brow bent.

I had to leave. He was crawling through me, and I felt infected.

“Yes, I did.” Enjoy was the wrong word.

“You know what”—I tried to sound casual, even spontaneous—“

I think I’ll go for a walk.”

He only sipped his juice in response, until I was halfway out the door. I heard his voice then, but the shapes of his words were obscured by the walls and furniture.

This was another wet evening, misty and purple. I walked fast because I knew Ivan was out here somewhere, keeping step. He was always about to appear out of the fog, just around the next corner—dark and shapeless, faster than I could even imagine. I found the cathedral in the center of town. I wasn’t a Christian, but I didn’t know where else to go for darkness, silence, and aloneness. Through the giant doors and down the aisle, I found only a few people kneeling, hands clasped in prayer.

At the altar I knelt and bowed my head, arms tired and sagging. I intended to whisper a prayer, at first—just to soothe myself, purr myself into a little meditative bliss. But all I could do was breathe, hard. I didn’t know God at all. I had no understanding of what God meant, what the whole idea even attempted to mean. It was someone else’s truth.

There was the dark green velvet and the incense, all still and silent in the dark. Every little noise—a footstep, a whisper, a breath—swelled to a mighty echo that drifted into the faraway loft of the ceiling.

James didn’t know what I’d been up to. Or maybe he did. There was no way to be sure. And yet here I was, trembling—chased across town by a phantom. Ivan was still striding through the rain, not yet swallowed up by reality. His hoofs continued *clocking* against the cobblestones, hard and fierce. I could hear and feel them in my own heartbeat.

I rested there awhile, slumping in a pew near the altar. The moment I stepped outside the cathedral I would find him there, waiting to trot along with me, to blend in with the rain and say what we both knew. I could tell him he wasn’t real, but it wouldn’t matter

right away.

When I was ready—body solid, breath relatively settled—I stood up, found my balance, and sent my own footsteps bouncing up the walls.

There was only one safe place now, and that was Aileen's flat.

Several minutes later, and several blocks away, I arrived at the door to her building, sheltering myself against the rain that had begun while I was in the cathedral.

And she appeared at the door, dark and warm and untouched by the rain.

In her apartment I told her what had happened.

"You? Sexual guilt? *Why?*" She was messing around her bedroom while I sat on her bed with a small shot of liquor. Natalia, her young Weimaraner, was weaving hurriedly through the room. Her ears were pricked, nose wiggling and eyes wide open. Her sharp alertness reminded me of a pot of water about to boil over.

"Not in the usual sense. I just feel . . . I can't escape James and all the weirdness he makes me feel. But at the same time I know it's not true—not inevitable, at least—that he knows."

She looked at me. "Do you think any of this is real, or is your mind toying with you?" Aileen's eyes were coffee colored—not as saturated as Ted's but rounder, like pennies or buttons. Her skin was dark, too, browned and freckled by the sun.

"I can't tell. Could even be both." My thoughts were still racing but my heartbeat had slowed. Aileen's sheets were soft and cool, and her green blanket was heavy, some kind of velvet. I felt my weight dissolving into it, sick of my own mind, sick of the beast who still pranced around the damp and the dark outside, like a monster sinking back into the sea: unknown and unmanifest, but alive.

He wouldn't come in here.



Arif the Moose // Deanna Dong

inexplicably // Juliet Siu

every boy I've ever loved
had warm hands
and I was wondering
if it was because
I only want what I don't have
or if it was because
I want to feel things that I cannot have
or if it was because
I've convinced myself that this is what I want



Caye Caulker, Belize // Monika Payerhin //
Photography

Aesthetic is Key. // Esther Outlaw

damp leaves sprinkled like powdered sugar on a funnel
cake.

the sky is so grey, i don't know what to do with myself.

the funny thing is, i'd rather be outside...

trudging through pools of water formed on top of the
earth.

so when everything has turned to mud,

and you're soaked through to your bones,

come find me out there in the mist.

splash into a puddle and look down at your reflection.

are you aesthetically pleasing?

Pronouns // Brittany Capps

We would tell you that we love you,
But since we met
The only pronouns we know
Are the ones that include us.



Trees on the Lake // Langyue Liu // Photography

The Box (all but eleven) // Zak Kerr

Goldenrod, Pacific Blue, Cerulean,
Caribbean Green, Outrageous Orange, Tan,
Salmon, Blue Green, Red Orange, Fern, Green Yellow,
Turquoise Blue, Sky Blue, Sunset Orange, Sunglow,

Forest Green, Shamrock, Dandelion, Fuchsia,
Chestnut, Orchid, Mountain Meadow, Sepia,
Purple Mountain's Majesty, Periwinkle,
Timberwolf, Pine Green, Tickle Me Pink, Thistle,

Unmellow Yellow, Copper, Cotton Candy,
Brick Red, Razzle Dazzle Rose, Mahogany,
Shocking Pink, Silver, Screamin' Green, Razzmatazz,
Midnight Blue, Hot Magenta, Purple Pizzazz,

Apricot, Electric Lime, Laser Lemon,
Granny Smith Apple, Peach, Wild Watermelon,
Mulberry, Wild Strawberry, Aquamarine,
Yellow Orange, and Atomic Tangerine.

The Girl with the Braid // Molly Rossi

One day of our journey was foggier and rainier and more piercingly cold than the rest. This was the day we went to Auschwitz. As we walked among barracks, gas chambers, and crematoriums, the sun was nowhere to be seen. It was dark, and so bitterly cold that we huddled together for warmth, sharing umbrellas between every stop on our journey.

I felt the fog all around me, but it was within me as well. This constant feeling that something so huge was right in front of me, something I was failing to see no matter how close I came to reaching out and touching the overshadowing relics of the past that surrounded me. The past was so present, but for me it seemed to lay covered in fog.

In Room 5 of Block 4 at Auschwitz, there is a glass wall full of human hair. As you walk past it, it looms over you so massive and monstrous and inescapable that you can neither look away nor look directly towards it. This hair, cut from the heads of an estimated 140,000 victims after they were killed in the gas chambers, is only a fraction of the hair cut from the heads of the Jews at Auschwitz; the rest was sold in massive quantities to textile companies in Germany. In this room, I remember the sickening feeling in my stomach that began to develop as my fog started to fade away.

It was here, in the room of hair, when a moment came that I can never forget. On a smaller wall apart from the encasement of stolen hair, there was another glass window. Inside the window was a collection of braids cut from the heads of women. Lying among them was one long, thin, wispy blonde braid. 70 years old, but lying there so gruesomely perfect it looked as if it had just been cut. It stood out from the rest. Emotionally, it was like a knife, a piercing clarity through the fog.

The moment I saw that braid, all the shards of death that surrounded me became pieces of life. The girl to whom the hair belonged became someone; she became everyone. She was the

next-door neighbor I used to babysit, whose blonde locks sometimes turned green when we spent too much time in the pool. She was the quiet girl who sits next to me in history class, whose laugh always reminds me of the California sunshine from which she came. The girl with the blonde braid was one of my best friends, who loves Disney princesses even though we are almost 20, who takes care of her younger siblings like no one else, who sees right through me when I pretend to be okay, and always asks the question no one else is asking. The girl was everyone. She was the people I love and she was the person I hardly knew. The braid lying there so unattached was intertwined with everything.

I felt like I knew her name, and just couldn't remember it. She was more than a victim, she was a person, she was a woman, she had a life and a family and a job and a beautiful mane of blonde hair that she tied back into a long, thin braid before she boarded the train of death she had ridden to this desolate place.

I felt all of this in less than a moment. I didn't stare at that braid, I barely glanced at it. I looked and looked away within the same breath, stunned, overcome, and sick to my stomach with reality.

However brief my encounter with the braid was, the feeling didn't go away. I was pierced. In order to get through the rest of Auschwitz and the rest of our trip, I had to lock away the image, try to force it to a place deep within my mind. But it was always in my consciousness. The girl with the braid haunted me. She was everywhere I looked, every blonde streak in the crowd. My mind would get lost thinking of her, this girl with the braid, who was anyone and everyone all around me. I couldn't make sense of her. I couldn't let it go.

Even in moments of faith and hope, my search for her hung over me. I prayed about her a lot; I just kept praying for this woman I didn't know. I did not know where she came from, but when I looked at her hair, she had taken on a new life.

It wasn't that the magnitude of this event, the Holocaust, was any clearer than it had been before. Rather, it was the smallness of it that consumed me. I was haunted by the singularity of that braid. History, life, death, beauty and despair had expanded before my eyes. The braid, and the way it looked so freshly cut, had cut a gash in my heart. My empathy was so deepened that I didn't know what else to do but to bury it.

In a way, it felt like her story was the truth of a Holocaust. It is so enormous, like the 11 million who lost their lives. It is as vast as a wall of stolen hair, and an endless barrack filled with 900,000 pairs of stolen shoes. But it is also small, as tiny as a little red shoe in a children's size 6 that stands out among the mountain of gray, brown, and black ones. It is as little, as personal, as a wispy blond braid. But whether it was big, or whether it was small, it was all gone.

On the final night of our journey, we went to a synagogue in Warsaw. I was a little lost and confused because I had never been to Shabbat before. Fortunately, the kind lady next to me explained that I had been reading the prayer book backwards. It amazed me that even in the midst of unfamiliar ritual, I felt wholly welcome. This congregation was full of warmth and light. It felt like we had found a beacon of renewal in what had once been a city of death.

At one point in the service, the Rabbi called a girl up to the front who was to be married the next week. As she looked out at us, she was glowing with happiness, smiling at us as if she was among her closest family. She was so beautiful. Young and fresh and full of a life that lay ahead.

As she turned towards the Rabbi to embrace him, I glimpsed the long, thin, beautiful braid that was hanging down her back. It was blonde, unmistakable against her dark sweater.

And that's when I understood.

The girl with the braid was still here. I did not need to be haunted anymore; I did not need to keep searching for her. I no longer needed to try in vain to pin her to one face, one name, or one life.

Because it wasn't just about the loss. It wasn't just about the emptiness. It wasn't just about standing in the freezing rain and trying to feel a suffering that happened in a time and place that are so beyond what we can truly imagine.

It's about life too.

It's about the fact that here in a city where 97% of a thriving Jewish population had met a merciless death, that here, on the grounds of unimaginable suffering, I can walk into a Shabbat service in Warsaw, full of life and welcoming brightness, and I can worship God with a group of people that someone once mistakenly thought they could remove from this earth. I can shake Anna's hand as she walks out of the temple with her fiancé, and congratulate her on her marriage, on a life of happiness and love and hope and faith.

I don't know the face of the woman with the braid; I will never know her. She was stolen from us. But if we can think and we can feel and we can discover empathy for someone so far away and so faceless, her story is all but lost. Her story can live everywhere. So in some sense, I do know her. The girl with the braid is the face of hope. She is a story of renewal in a land of ashes. There is hope for Poland, there is hope in the face of death, and in the life of a braid, in the memory of the smallest things, there lies hope for us all.

Loose Gears // Olivia Anderson

Phoebe built a time machine, but there's a small glitch.
Phoebe built a time machine, but there's a small glitch. Phoebe
built a time machine, but there's a small glitch.



Sixty Percent // Meghan Roberts

Mrs. Gilbert told our class that approximately sixty percent of the human body consists of water, which is kind of a lot. I remember this fact not because I like school or anything, especially not Mrs. Gilbert, who smells like gasoline and B.O. and has skin that sags off her face like wax on a candle. I remember this fact because I am afraid that my own body will drown me, swallow me whole, erase me completely.

My mom signed me up for swimming lessons a few years ago. She said that nine-and-a-half was too old to not know how to swim. But I knew she only signed me up because Auntie Monica told her to. Mom's impressionable like that.

Auntie Monica drove my cousin Alexis and me every Tuesday and Wednesday to Instructor Debbie's house, which had a cobblestone driveway and a giant pool with a waterfall and a black Labrador retriever that barked so loudly he scared away any nearby squirrels or birds. I felt embarrassed walking into the backyard with Alexis, who was only five and tiny with evil brown eyes and evil brown hair. One time, at a family barbeque, Alexis tiptoed over to me and knocked my orange popsicle to the ground. I forced myself not to cry even though I really wanted to, like the time Alexis teased me for crying after I dropped a bowling ball on my toe at my other cousin Rachel's birthday party.

There were two other kids in our swim class: Melissa, a skinny blonde girl with constellations of freckles on her face, and Amber, who laughed almost as loud as Instructor Debbie's dog barked. I was the oldest, which made me squirm sheepishly in my 25%-off flip-flops from Target.

Instructor Debbie had a no-nonsense-under-any-circumstances-ever attitude. I swallowed a bunch of water ten minutes into our first lesson and started coughing like crazy. But Instructor Debbie didn't care and just thrust my head under water again until I really couldn't breathe and scrambled to the surface.

"You're not going to learn to swim if you act like a baby," she scolded. Amber giggled. I glanced over at Auntie Monica, who was too busy gossiping with Melissa's and Amber's moms to pay attention to my near suffocation. Melissa would stop and beam at her mom's camera every two seconds, which for some

reason, Instructor Debbie didn't seem to mind.

By the end of our first lesson, my legs felt like Jell-O and a string of snot dribbled down my face. Alexis pointed and laughed, and then Amber laughed (loudly), and then everyone laughed, even Instructor Debbie, and I just wanted to go home and never come back.

Auntie Monica praised Alexis on the ride home.

"My baby, you did so great! Perfect! You're going to be in the Olympics one day, baby, I just know it. Isn't she, Nicole?"

I nodded because Auntie Monica gets really red-faced and yells a lot when people disagree with her. But secretly, I wanted to drop a bowling ball on Alexis' toe and watch her cry instead of me.

Our lessons continued as the summer dragged on. I was pretty sure Melissa was part mermaid, because Instructor Debbie complimented her strokes over and over again but criticized mine. Still, my ability to hold my breath underwater improved. My goggles no longer hurt my head after wearing them for two hours. And I learned that in order to get the chlorine smell out of my hair, I had to rinse and repeat, even though I usually skipped the repeat part.

Alexis pouted when Melissa, Amber, and I began treading water in the deep end of the pool because Instructor Debbie said she was too young to join us.

"You'll be in the deep end one day," Auntie Monica assured her on the ride home. "You're going to be a star, baby. You'll out-shine them all."

On our last day of class, Melissa, Amber, and I performed a synchronized swimming routine in the deep end for the moms. Melissa did most of the tricks, because she had learned how to do flips underwater, and that made Instructor Debbie proud, even though Melissa said her dad taught her in her pool at home. Amber and I mainly treaded water and swam from one end of the pool to the other when Melissa did. Melissa's mom videotaped the entire performance, while Auntie Monica talked on her cell phone and Amber's mom complained about her sunburn.

Alexis threw a tantrum about not having her own performance, so Auntie Monica demanded that she have her time in the

spotlight over in the shallow end. Alexis' performance was boring because she was so slow and only swam a couple of laps, no tricks. Still, Auntie Monica applauded and cheered so loudly that even Instructor Debbie's dog fled the backyard.

After Instructor Debbie fished a huffing and puffing Alexis out of the pool, we all went inside to change into our clothes and have some ice cream. I was last to change and entered the kitchen as Instructor Debbie gushed about Melissa's talent to her mom and Auntie Monica and Amber's mom gossiped and Amber and Melissa ate their ice cream while whispering and giggling. I held my ice cream cone very close to my face and glanced around suspiciously for Alexis, but she was nowhere to be found. I sneaked outside through the back door and found my cousin perched at the edge of the pool, staring into the still water.

"Alexis!" I cried, hurrying across the grass to her. "You can't be there. Instructor Debbie says you're not allowed in the deep end."

Alexis turned and scowled at me.

"Shut up. You can't tell me what to do."

My hand clenched tightly around my ice cream cone.

"Instructor Debbie is going to get really, really mad when she sees you out here."

"She's not gonna see me, stupid. She's inside."

I looked over at the house, expecting Instructor Debbie to storm outside hollering up a fit. When I turned back to Alexis, she was leaning closer to the water, her face inches away from its surface.

"Alexis, no!"

Alexis stared at me hard with her evil brown eyes and didn't blink, not once. My heart started pounding. I wanted to yell for Auntie Monica and Instructor Debbie to come, but no sound left my throat. Besides, I knew Alexis would only call me a tattletale if I did.

After a few moments' staring contest, I blinked. Alexis must have sensed my defeat, because she turned back to the pool and slowly, suddenly, silently slipped into the water.

I gasped. Dropped my ice cream cone. Dashed to the

pool but skidded to a stop at its edge. I could see Alexis' body flailing in the water, bubbles floating up in swarms around her. But I couldn't jump into the water to pull her out. I was fully clothed and wearing socks and shoes, my new ones, too, with the sparkly pink laces. Alexis' mouth appeared above the surface of the water, wet and red, and then she tumbled down again.

I felt panicky. I couldn't move.

"Alexis!" I called. "Alexis, if you can hear me, say something!"

I listened as hard as I could but Alexis didn't respond. Her left flip-flop detached itself from her foot and floated up to the surface, where it bobbed up and down like a rubber duck in a bathtub, or an apple on Halloween.

My stomach lurched and my throat burned and my legs wobbled and I staggered over to a bush and vomited until my insides sat in a puddle before me. I lay on the ground trying to breathe, but my breath felt funny and raggedy and my skin burned like I had a fever. I heard the back door open, and Auntie Monica started calling for Alexis and me.

"Alexis, Nicole! Come on, we're leaving!"

I wanted to stand, to speak, to at least point to Alexis' sinking body, but I couldn't move, and imagined Auntie Monica exploding with rage and accusing me of pushing Alexis in the pool myself. So instead, I pressed my face into the grass and squeezed my eyes shut.

Auntie Monica called our names a few more times. Paused every few seconds, probably to check the messages on her cell phone. And then she screamed. Her scream was the worst, most awful thing I've ever heard in my life and will ever hear again. It was harsh and crackly and dripping with tears; it felt worse than a hundred haunted houses or a dozen fevers or even throwing up in your swim teacher's bush.

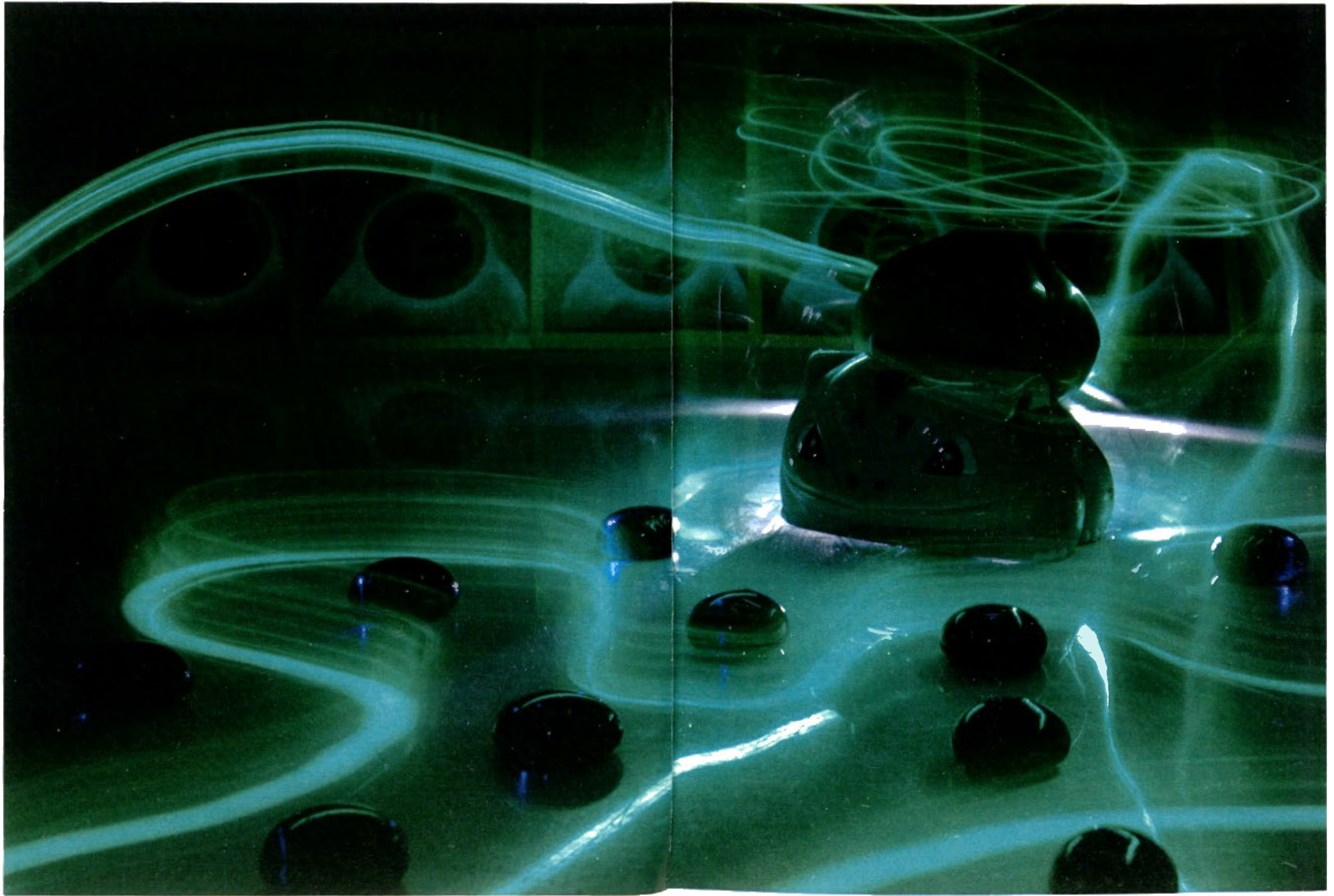
I heard feet scramble outside. More screams erupted. A splash. Melissa's mom sobbed into her phone to a 911 operator. I peered around the bush in time to see Instructor Debbie, clothed and all, shove Alexis' body onto the concrete. Auntie Monica was screaming into Alexis' ear, but she still didn't respond.

I crawled out of the bushes as an ambulance squealed in the distance. No one seemed to notice me at this point, so I curled myself up on the pavement and cried, wishing, for the first time in my life, that Alexis was responsive.

All I could concentrate on as I shivered on the ground while the paramedics swarmed the backyard was my melting ice cream cone a few feet away, now sprinkled with ants. I watched the ice cream become liquid, and thought about my liquid, the sixty percent of my body that I had probably puked up half of in the bush. And Alexis, who had plunged into a pool that was one hundred percent water, combined with her sixty percent, which was one-hundred sixty percent, and that couldn't have been a good thing, and I wondered how much water it took to drown, to sink, to stop responding to the point that you couldn't even make fun of your cousin's tears. That day, from us being greeted by barking at the gate to Alexis' plunge to Amber's mom scooping me off the ground and wrapping me in a towel and driving me home, became the reason behind everything. It was the reason, according to Mom in a hushed voice on the phone, that Auntie Monica started drinking booze in the mornings before even getting out of bed. It was the reason that Mom had to force me to drink Gatorade to stay hydrated because I was too afraid of drinking water and increasing my sixty percent. It was the reason that I started drinking my own tears in the middle of the night, and the reason I stopped, because I knew Alexis was only laughing in her grave.

Definitions // Brennen Lutz

I am nothing from nowhere.
I am something from nothing.
I am the convicted.
The falsely accused on the stand
I am he in the agony of a choice.
I am the writer
The fighter
Creator
Heart breaker
Debutante villainous blasphemer
Killer of self-made dreams
I am not who it seems
Father struggling to meet his bills
I am the blood clotting on razor thrills
I am the king on his throne
I am the god playing with his own
I am none of the above
I am the answer is c
I am found in the sea
All that you see
I am lost love
I am that above
I know not what
I am, but that
I am something



Vine Whip // Laura DelPrato // Photography

(March 8, 2013) // Hallie Carroll

In the private moments
 Of grief,
The heart cries for
 Some release.
To be hidden away
 From pain.
And given the chance
 To Relieve
The all-consuming weight
 That death
Leaves in its wake.

It wrecks my body.
Cripples my mind.
My every bone screams.

Tears – come.
Anger – dissipate.
Confusion – abandon.

But in this pristine bubble,
There is no chance of relief.

The expectation to be
 ABSOLUTELY PERFECT
Rules this place.

So, I sit in my tower.
Biding my time.

Until I explode!

Patience // Mariela Renquist

Patience is a virtue they say
Well, let me tell you something about waiting.
It's a virtue because it's hard to do
To spend every day watching a ticking clock
Tick tock tick tock tick tock
Like a child in a horror film, my pulse begins to
 speed
Tick tock tick tock tick tock
I hear the monsters under my bed begin to walk
Tick tock tick tock tick tock

We are the culture of instant gratification
I want- I want- I want
So why is it so hard to say yes or no?
We play with people more carelessly than objects.

Patience is a virtue they say
Well, let me tell you something about waiting.
I've been waiting my whole life.
I simply slept in the womb, didn't cause a fuss
When my momma was ready, she'd give me up.
I stood under a tree for days at a new school
Not speaking, not playing, just waiting
Until someone came along who would hold my hand
 and run.

I spent four years of my life waiting for a boy that
 would never love me
Maybe next year, he said. Maybe then. Never again.

I spent 3 months waiting for my best friend to speak
to me

She who had decided I suddenly wasn't worthy.

I spent 4 months waiting in bed because my body
gave up on me

And 9 months after that waiting for food because I
didn't think it should be given to me.

I spent six months waiting for a boy that finally
cared

And a year spent waiting for him to say so

343 days spent waiting for him to come home

22 spent waiting to see him

90 spent wondering where I would go

150 spent waiting to get there

2,208 hours spent waiting to get back

72 hours spent waiting for judgment when I made a
mistake

1,440 hours spent crying when he left

216,000 minutes spent waiting to feel alright

57,600 minutes waiting for something new and
finding someone

129,600 minutes spent waiting for my brain to
realize I truly cared

And 60 minutes spent watching it crumble.

So when you asked me for time and space I said,
oh yes.

I know time and space.

I, who know what I want the minute I find it,

Yes I know how to spend time.

188,870,400 ticks of the clock, monsters under my
bed, waiting for them.

515,808,000 seconds spent waiting for others to
decide what they want with me.

So can I wait for you?

Well, let me tell you something about waiting.

The Dance // Masnoon Majeed

A light October breeze relieved the air of her heat. The scant remnants of the mystical moonless glow penetrated the slow and shallow waves of the small lake. Sounds slept while the silence stirred.

Amidst the tranquility, a drop fell. It cracked the peaceful air, and agitated the sleeping lake. A sound was heard. The drop awoke the sleeping lake. It painfully teared her down. Her waves ran towards the edges seeking shelter from the fissure caused by the drop. They acted like a tear from the eye of an angel which escaped her face in embarrassment of having spoiled her beauty.

And Tear it was. A despondent boy stood on the desolate bridge. His eyes gazed at the mountains afar. Without the love of the moon or the shine of the sun, they lie there. Incomplete. Even though they wore a dense blanket of the majestic trees, when the mountains glanced at their reflection in the dimly lit lake they detected nothing but barren blackness.

The despondence of both, the boy and the mountains, reflected daringly on the thin black surface of the lake. It caused the lake to burst into tears as her waves overflowed and confusingly ran away from life.

The wind heard the cries. She rushed from the East to rescue the lake from her burdens.

A strange sound alerted the boy. The wind had breathed life into the dead leaves. They left their mortal abodes to become immortal in the dance of life. They gracefully danced and lit up the environs like fireflies in a deep dark cave. And thus, the tranquility happily gave way to the joviality.

The mountains heard the trees thanking them for the fertility that gave them life. As more and more trees sang the leafy prayer to their parents, a life blossomed in the mountains. The boy felt that life. Soon, the leaves made the entire atmosphere their stage, and danced freely under the music of the wind.

He closed his eyes, and breathed the entire scene. The dance of the leaves and music of the wind found home in the distant corners of his body where they rushed his blood flow. He listened to the prayers of the trees, and found their whispers throughout his heart. He had never lost love. It was all there. Al-

ways. Inside him.

Amidst the conviviality, another tear appeared. Like the life-giving tear of the Phoenix, it blessed everything that it impressed with the power of rejuvenation. It reanimated the somber lake, and allowed her to hear the music of the wind and to see the dance of the leaves.

As, the calm drop found its way into the distressed lake, it settled the dazzled waves like the body of the child who slowly falls prey to his mother's beautiful lullaby. And thus the lullaby soothed the lake, and propelled her back into her deep sleep. Soon, the sound slept and the silence stirred.

Wake Up, Open the Door, and Escape to the Sea // Brennen Lutz

There could be something knocking my window
But I won't look upon its face. Keep on
Knocking witch. These monsters could be under
My bed or in those small dark corners the
Red and blue lights cannot touch. Dark inside.
The vampires have been at this door for nights.
They are here for blood. Mine. Little do they
Know, I won't be another meal. Black cats
Skirt the room's edges. Cannibals whisper
Nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing...
I turn from this scene to the bottle. Empty.
Looking through the dark glass, obscuring sight
Now I realize the swimming shadows
Have eyes that stare into my spleen. Liver
Protests against an abundance of dreams
Drowned by a sour whiskey. My stomach
Aches now. I don't want to vomit in here.
But the great white vampires are still bang bang
Knocking at my window. I want to run.
I could open the door, and if I fought,
I could reach the sea before they tore me
Limb from limb. Blood frothing and bubbling
Like foam floating above the waves. Maybe.
But not tonight. Tonight is for dreaming.
Dreaming of cities, people long deceased.
We ran down desperate streets, maroon stained
Jeans were too hot for the dead summer night.
But we had to keep running or they would
Have caught us. Little did I know that once
Bitten, she was theirs. And she had told me

"I love you," A time too many. To love
Would have been to never speak such words
For our words are bonds that must be broken.
They bit her on the first day, but not I.
We managed to work our way from the streets
Where people crunched and vampires increased their
Numbers innumerable. As cancer
Metastasized from city to city.
We safely spent the night in my office.
At least they spread quickly enough that
Electricity remained active for
The first few hectic and dangerous weeks.
I had never greeted the spreadsheets with
Such pleasure and relief as we had that
Lonely night. I would have thought others to
Think, as I did, of shelter in the bank.
But no one appeared. The streets had claimed
The police who had responded to fear
And loathsome gruesome sights of blood and pain
Unlike the daily terrors they had faced.
I watched as bullets gave way to numbers.
The books were wrong. Vampires bled as we do.
They died rather the same too. Blood was their
Life. Stolen from us. No immortality.
She told me that if we could reach the shore
We would be able to cross the river
Banking on the notion that they can't cross
Running water, we would be safe at home.
My home lies secure beyond the river
Along the coast, seldom frequented by
Out of towners. This fact comforted me.
I believed we could be safe boarded up here.

I'm here now, and as usual, I was wrong.
So much went wrong, but I am so alive.
The only way to cross the damn river
From the city was the underground.
We decided to leave the office that
Morning. The sun seemed to drive them away.
It burned bright that July day. 89
Degrees. We walked. No weapons. Blood had caked
Upon my clothes while I slept beside her.
The city was empty save the witch birds
Cackling above our heads heralding death
Of a city, a nation. Of a race.
Doubtless, we were not the last of the breed.
Were I a smarter—or a stronger man,
I could believe myself the last. But, no.
I saw no others after the tunnel.
And that old wizard was the only man
We met along the way. I would believe
Him to be an angel, sent to help us,
But—he was probably just an old man.
A beard like Santa Claus and half the girth.
The man's staff was an old hunting rifle.
In truth, he typified the rednecks south
Of the city. So why we met him there,
At the tunnel, I will never know. Maybe,
He was going to look for a grandchild.
The gnarled wizard coming down from his watch
Among the trees and forests west of here.
I know he never found that child. He died.
A man like him would never turn to blood.
When we met, he raised a palm to heaven.
Hello, or an oath he was safe to us.

He said he would accompany us through
The tunnel, for he thought it dangerous
To go without a weapon beneath light.
We entered as a car would, though we walked
It was probably 400 meters
From one end to the other. Run or walk
Was the question the wizard asked of me.
Walking seemed more likely to keep us whole,
Together as a group. I liked the man.
In the darkness, he said a thing I loathed
To hear. "Once bitten they're damned to suffer."
He suggested I keep an eye upon
My love, beautiful, even through the blood.
Halfway through the tunnel, something stirred.
I gave my ears a moment to listen
For wind or other natural causes
But none appeared. It could only be them.
The wizard skipped my listening step or
Was aware before I was of others
In the dark. The orange lights glowed dim but
Warm. The wizard fired three shots in rapid
Succession at vampires who had shambled
From behind gray cars parked along the walls.
We sank to the edge of the corridor.
Not at a sprint, but running, we made for
The end. More sharp cracks echoed through my head
Loud enough to drown the grunts as they pulled
Him down. A momentary scuffle, and
A spray of blood. One more gunshot.
The vampires were content with one victim.
Salt air greeted us when we came up to life.
I'm a fair few miles from the tunnel though.

It took the rest of the day to reach home.
Luckily, summer days are forever.
Around 7:30, we were still boarding
Windows. It's knocking. Oh god. She's knocking.
She fell as night fell, with little warning.
A burst of colour across a gray face
And then darkness descended. I could not.
I thought of ways I could have saved her.
Nothing. Terrified, I pushed at clawing
Arms. Grappled for a moment. Teeth exposed
In a terrible snarl, out the window
She flew. Did I know vampires could pass out?
No. Can they? Someone is knocking. Knocking.
I boarded that window while she was out.
Everything is boarded. I'm not safe
Though I thought I would be. Could be hundreds
Outside. I don't know. Too many to count.
That whiskey was the last I would drink. Now.
I rummage my closet. I have to try.
I pull out a thick canvas jacket, camo
It's not. But a dark grey blends as well with
The sea. I thought the day was safe, but no.
The sun shines through cracks in boarded windows
And still there is a knocking. I owned a
Gun. Once. It's locked away as it should be.
But I pull it out. It's an old pistol.
But it should still fire straight enough for me.
I have no more food. The ocean calls me.
I check the gun and see that it's loaded.
My jacket is pulled high around my neck.
If my coworkers could see me now, with
These workboots tied around my feet. Who would

Think I would have been so prepared to fight.
I was not. The gun is a dead uncle's.
The scene swims again. Shadows on my floor.
All cats are grey as I yank the door off
My hinges. Unhinged. I look upon it.
The sea is darkly green and blue and red.
Vampires peer from behind parked blue cruisers.
They'll never get me alive. Sledgehammer
Red, explosions in my skull. I have to
Reach the sand. My blood tastes awful bitter
Somehow, I dropped the gun, and made the sand.
So much blood. But waves lap at my fingers.
At least the red will wash away. No stains.



Nautical Sunset // Kristin Neil // Photography

When I Died // Richard Jennis

I died once, it sucked at first
But then it was okay
Because nothing dead
Stays dead longer than time

Time is just an ingrown toenail
It's curled so tightly into your skin
It cuts and bleeds you
But that does not mean you won't be okay

I was okay when I died
I didn't expect to be
But Death is something no one expects
So it wasn't unnatural to be surprised

The cosmos seems smaller when you're dead
Like it's a rolled up blanket
A place where you can nestle in and make a home
Where billions of souls intermingle and then
disperse

When I returned
And don't get me wrong, I'm no messiah,
I just mean that when I returned, it was better
A palpable tension had been lifted.

Thirteen // Tracy Akers

So this is what it felt like, to be alive.

"Where are we?" I looked to him and asked, the wind whipping my hair back behind my shoulders.

He squints his eyes in the sun, looking as far into the landscape as he can, "Somewhere in the Northwest, I think."

He nods and points to the river below, "Snake River."

Any bridge, no matter how sturdy, finds a way to sway if the wind is strong enough. I was swaying. I mean, the bridge was swaying. I could close my eyes and feel the bite of the wind even stronger on the lines of my neck, exposed. My stomach twisted. *Alive.*

Jeb was wrong, no matter how beautiful, no matter how battered. This was real life.

"Do you really want to waste one, off this bridge?" His eyes leave me, they go someplace else.

"Do you really want to argue with me about it?" It spits from my mouth; they were my lives to give.

If there were ever a better time to wake up, now would be the time. But I knew this was all real. Jeb talked about another life, where people live out each day until they reach their last. He said we both lived that once. This was the only life I knew though, and I had thirteen of them. I let the world's sway carry me to the ledge, and the next thing I knew I was falling, alone. So Jeb didn't want to waste one of his thirteen lives on Snake River—that's fine. I was one life closer to the future; not that dying was the easiest of transitions.

My lungs were collapsing, the air escaping them, the atmosphere thick and heavy. I was gone before my feet even touched the water. I had hoped for the sensation of creaming onto a concrete street. That's what I'd heard people say about jumping into water from high up, that it was like hitting concrete. Seconds pass over me like the water swallowing my senses, and then somehow, life hits me again. I was living number nine.

I gasped coming out of the water; I wanted to flail my arms until they brought me to the shore side, but my veins were fresh and blue beneath my skin and my muscles only softly pulsing. I took my sweet time; Jeb could wait.

Snake River was a mixture of rapid water with the calmest hints of retaliation. Like it could take away another life at any moment, but was simply choosing not to. It was transitioning into my ninth life that I learned the difference between all the lies, the lives. Jeb and I had different futures. I wanted us to end up at the same place after our last life was gone, our time run out. But it was all different for him. He saw the world through a lens of loss; he almost seemed to be missing something. He always had memories and thoughts I didn't have, never had. If Jeb were even right, then what's the point? Why worry? I mean, if you've already died the biggest of deaths, the one of the living, what's death to the dead? All I knew was that I was alive, and had nine more chances to convince myself of it.

I laid on my back, looking up at the Pacific sky, the ground gritty beneath me, breathing in, breathing out. His hand swept the back of mine. I only had nine lives left to live, left to die. He still had thirteen. I was losing him. I'd be gone before he even—

"What was it like?" He asked.

I'm choking on the space between us. "An adventure," I replied. I couldn't tell who was winning.

"Only nine more of those adventures, huh?" He sits calmly with only losses from another world. He can't stand to lose something here. But does he know what he's failing to gain?

"Thirteen you'll never have." I say, maybe I was winning.



Joshua Tree National Park // Laura DelPrato //
Photography

Untitled // Tucker Tyrrell

Wonders of the wooden world
Shine life to conquer darkness
Act to see the love unfurl
Embracing fears as harmless.

The Fear of Everything // Alexandra Hunt

Before I was born, I was scared.

I was scared of being ugly

(cacophobia)

I was scared of being ugly because being ugly meant life would be hard.

But I was scared too, scared of that knowledge

(gnosiphobia)

the knowledge that I was scared to be ugly because being ugly meant life would be hard.

And being scared made me scared of being scared

(phobophobia)

and I was scared of being scared of the knowledge that I was scared to be ugly because being ugly meant life would be hard.

But then I was scared that I might be contagious

(tapinophobia)

with being scared of being scared of the knowledge that I was scared of being ugly because being ugly meant life would be hard.

And I was scared that my mother would have a poor opinion of me

(allodoxaphobia)

for being scared of being contagious with being scared of
being scared of the knowledge that I was scared of being
ugly because being ugly meant life would be hard.

So, of course, I was scared I was insane

(maniaphobia)

for being scared that my mother would have a poor opinion
of me for being scared I was contagious with being scared
of being scared of the knowledge that I was scared to be
ugly because being ugly meant life would be hard.

When I was born, I was scared to open my eyes

(optophobia)

because, of course, I was scared I was insane for being
scared my mother would have a poor opinion of me for
being scared I was contagious with being scared of being
scared of the knowledge that I was scared of being ugly
because being ugly meant life would be hard.

(pantophobia)

To my beloved one: // Sabrina Islam

Darling,

We have spent a life together that was everything but happy. I hope you know that we both failed to ever find content in what was present. Oh dear, dead lover of mine, I wish we both desired what we had instead.

Now that you are gone, I can see things clearly. Myopia has turned to true vision again. What was it that came between us? Do you remember the first story you wrote? It went out on a free newspaper. I found it in our study, which somewhere along the way became only yours. You were so happy and you said it was the best day of your life. Sadly, it probably was. We could have always been dreamers like we once were.

The grey tiles became yellow then became white. Change, dirt, soap. I care about the sun seeping through the leaves and the shadows that haunt people in the night. Water makes the only straining noise that's peaceful to me. So do I state them all? Everything that's beautiful, all that drains me of my breath? The red flowers I don't know, the green leaves I can't name. Everything that I see, slowly I breathe in. Everything that takes all my power in mockery, do I tell you about them all, one by one? We missed them all.

There was a time when breathing you took all my power. Vision blurred, scents vague. Obligated by my obsession of loving and not loving you. The nebulous time has passed and now sitting here, I can't bear to see all of these wonders alone.

It got boring my love. There were no more surprises when the equations were no longer working. I didn't need the study anymore but I did wonder for a while whether you missed me being there. But then I didn't care. Breakfast, lunch, dinner. We were two of one and one of two. I put left, you put right, and we walked. Lost in our own minds. For each other we turned into the reminiscence of an age long gone. I stopped reading your paper the night you

told me working there felt like being in the pit of hell. Why didn't you try to get out? I scribbled on every sheet in our home before giving up. I even wrote on the edges of your papers. I was looking for real solutions, you were looking for real news. Did we forget something?

I found this stunning memory that was hidden in my mind for years. We were lying on grass on some warm afternoon. I had forgotten my sunglasses. I told you that there was light everywhere. You put your arm over my eyes. Though I meant something very different, I was happy that for a moment we weren't the same. I liked saving that thought all to myself until I forgot about it.

Was it that I didn't want to hurt you and you didn't want to hurt me? Was every expectation hopeless? All or none dear, all or none.

As the sun sets, I stand and wait and for the writhing shadows to come out.

Bound by an eternity of misery and the whiff of my old lover's air.

I miss you, again.

Yours truly and forever,
Me



Award Winners

The Margaret Haley Carpenter Award for Poetry

Micah Farmer, "Psalm"

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 and will receive \$1180 this year.

The Margaret Owen Finck Award for Creative Writing

Meghan Roberts, "Sixty Percent"

This award is presented to a student who has had outstanding creative work 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 and will receive \$830 this year.

The Messenger Staff

Editors-in-chief: Elana Richmond, Rebecca Wilson

Section Editors

Poetry: Haisten Bonner, Juliet Siu

Fiction: Meghan Roberts

Nonfiction: Molly Rossi

Visual Art: Michelle Shuman

Assistant Editors

Poetry: Clara Ng

Nonfiction: Liana Saleh

