

CONTRAST

2023



CONTRAST
LITERARY
MAGAZINE

SPRING 2023

EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear Readers,

I first encountered *Contrast* as a timid freshman and budding poet in the fall semester of 2019—before COVID and before I truly found my writer's voice. At the sole meeting I attended that year, listening to my peers read works I considered leagues above my own writing, I couldn't have imagined I'd one day find the magazine in my own hands.

From having my own poems published to serving as co-editor-in-chief, it has been an honor to be a part of *Contrast's* legacy of capturing the creative culture of McDaniel College—a legacy that dates all the way back to 1957. Likewise, it is an honor to be trusted by so many of my peers with their art. We received an overwhelming number of submissions this year, and I am ecstatic at how many people embraced the act of creation as a weapon, a salve, a prayer, a lifeline, an embodiment of feeling and celebration of identity. I am all too familiar with the sense of vulnerability that comes with sharing your work with the world. It can be as terrifying as it is empowering. Whether your submission was published this year or not, thank you for placing your art into our hands.

I want to thank everyone who made this issue possible: our fantastic Editorial Board for their many hours spent poring over submissions and giving thoughtful feedback; our advisor, Dr. Kate Dobson, for her unwavering patience and confidence in her students' creative pursuits; and my co-editor-in-chief, Emily McGraw, whose honesty, artistic vision, and sense of humor have made running this publication as fun as telling ghost stories—we've been in this together since day one.

Finally, to our readers: thank you for picking up this book. This edition of *Contrast* has given me a million more reasons to love poetry. I hope it does the same for you.

— Grace Maglietta, co-editor-in-chief

EDITOR'S NOTE

Readers,

Contrast has always been a celebration of the creativity and individuality of McDaniel students, and I am so grateful to help run such an important magazine. From being on the editorial board one year, to then being one of the two people who run the magazine the next, it felt unreal. Helping to create an edition of *Contrast* has been an amazing experience—to connect our campus through art as the magazine has done so before. To be included in *Contrast*'s legacy is an honor, and I cannot wait for this legacy to continue past me.

Contrast would not exist without the amazing McDaniel students who submit their work. I know how daunting it can be to share your art; it is something I have never been brave enough to do until this year. So, thank you to everyone who submitted.

I would also like to thank the editorial board. Their hours of work and discussion through cheap pizza are the backbone of this magazine. Your contribution is more than appreciated. I would also like to thank our advisor Dr. Kate Dobson. It was with her patience and readiness to help that made creating *Contrast* feel like a breeze. Most importantly, thank you to my co-editor-in-chief, Grace Maglietta, whose intelligence, hard work, and creativity have truly brought out the nuance and brilliance *Contrast* has to offer. She is one of the best writers I know, and I could not imagine running *Contrast* with anyone else.

Lastly, thank you to our readers. Through you, we are able to spread the incredible art of McDaniel students. *Contrast* has been one of my defining moments here on the Hill, as I hope it will be for future Green Terrors.

— Emily McGraw, co-editor-in-chief

CONTRAST LITERARY MAGAZINE

McDaniel College

2023

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“SO LONG AS YOU WRITE IT AWAY REGULARLY
NOTHING CAN REALLY HURT YOU.”

- *Shirley Jackson*



RURAL DOMESTICITY

2ND PLACE ART

Kate Cramer

LOOKING OUT

Aj Kitzinger

My window was the world
No filters, only a screen to hold
Looking through the clear lens
Gave me a sense
Outside of myself—
Grass, green, long, freshly-cut, withered;
Trees bending toward each other,
Dancing to the wind's tune
And the rain's percussive 'boom';
The moon illuminating it all.
Sometimes, I feel as if I'll fall,
Even though I'm standing on solid ground.
No window can fix that,
The mental state that I hate.
I haven't yet found
A window quite like that one,
The one that I can only return to for brief bursts,
The one I stared out of for so long.
I miss that window,
I miss the younger me,
The youthful girl who had limitless dreams,
Brightened by the sun's rays, the moon's glow,
The sunsets that never seemed to end and their ethereal glow.
The sky no longer looks the same,
The stars aren't as bright,
And the window is no longer mine.
But still its view's ingrained in my brain,
How the rays of sunshine fell,
The shadows splayed across the room.
Maybe one day,
I will once again become someone
That can embrace the world
The same way I once did
Staring out of my window when
The window was my world.

CARDINALS

Emily McGraw

Cardinals like to perch themselves in my grandmother's garden. I don't think she minds.

She has tied back her permed blonde hair. Wearing green pants that are stained with white paint and covered in holes—the ones she always feels the need to wear. Dirt finds its way under her nails, and despite working in the sun, her skin is still cool. There is a slight tang in her voice when she speaks. When she talks to me, she makes exaggerated faces as if she is entertaining a child—as if I'm still a child to her.

Never wanting my help, she prefers to do the yard work alone. She's practical, focusing on the facts that life handed to her, unlike me, who focuses on daydreams. It's a charm of hers from growing up poor. She'd rather be content than happy.

She'll always be found in two places—her garden, growing her picture-perfect peonies, or in her cheap little chair, reading romance novels. The curtains of her front room always pulled back, letting nature's sky dictate the room.

I sit with her in the garden. I never know if she hates company or yearns for it—if she enjoys being alone or if she just is alone. I don't like thinking about it, because I know I can offer only a pathetic amount of presence.

(I wish she had a better granddaughter.)

She's not very good at telling stories, or maybe I'm just bad at listening. Her stories are forgotten as soon as they're spoken. I want to be more attentive, but I'm always lost in daydreams.

We are both the youngest in our families, and we both have the bratty nature to show it. We are both people who care from a distance. We assume our love is a guarantee, rather than something that needs to be shown. We both trap our personalities in locks, only to open to those we give the key. We observe rather than act, too afraid to reveal ourselves and the consequences that follow.

Yet she is the definition of the women I come from. Her life has been one

long continuous fight, where small victories only lead to more battles, all so I can live in daydreams. We are together, but inches feel like feet, and feet feel like miles—we're both getting older.

Her strength is silent, but she wears it on her sleeve. An unintentional slip from her lock. A strength as obvious as a cardinal in her garden—a stupendous red, radiant against white peonies.

IRIDOPHORE

Lyra Houghton

Iridophore,

You are neon sign and stained mirror
Tequila air and rainy pavement
Cloaked in the scent of night before
snowfall.

You are the color of 3 AM taxi
And smoke unfurling from your best
friend's lips.

Iridophore,

You are garden shears and regretted yells
Mom's books and brother's curls
The entry in your old school diary with its
magazine cutouts.

You are the shape of your little sister's laugh
And forsythia baking by the asphalt in
summer's heat.

Iridophore,

You are strangers' eyes and crowds' voices
When you look above your sink
Staring into chips of stone and sky and
sidewalk,

You are the form of throngs
That traipse past your building's window in
casual sonder.

Iridophore, I see how you thrive
In sun and motion, soaking it all
Into your cells for the comfort of
Other

Wrapped around you like an old ally

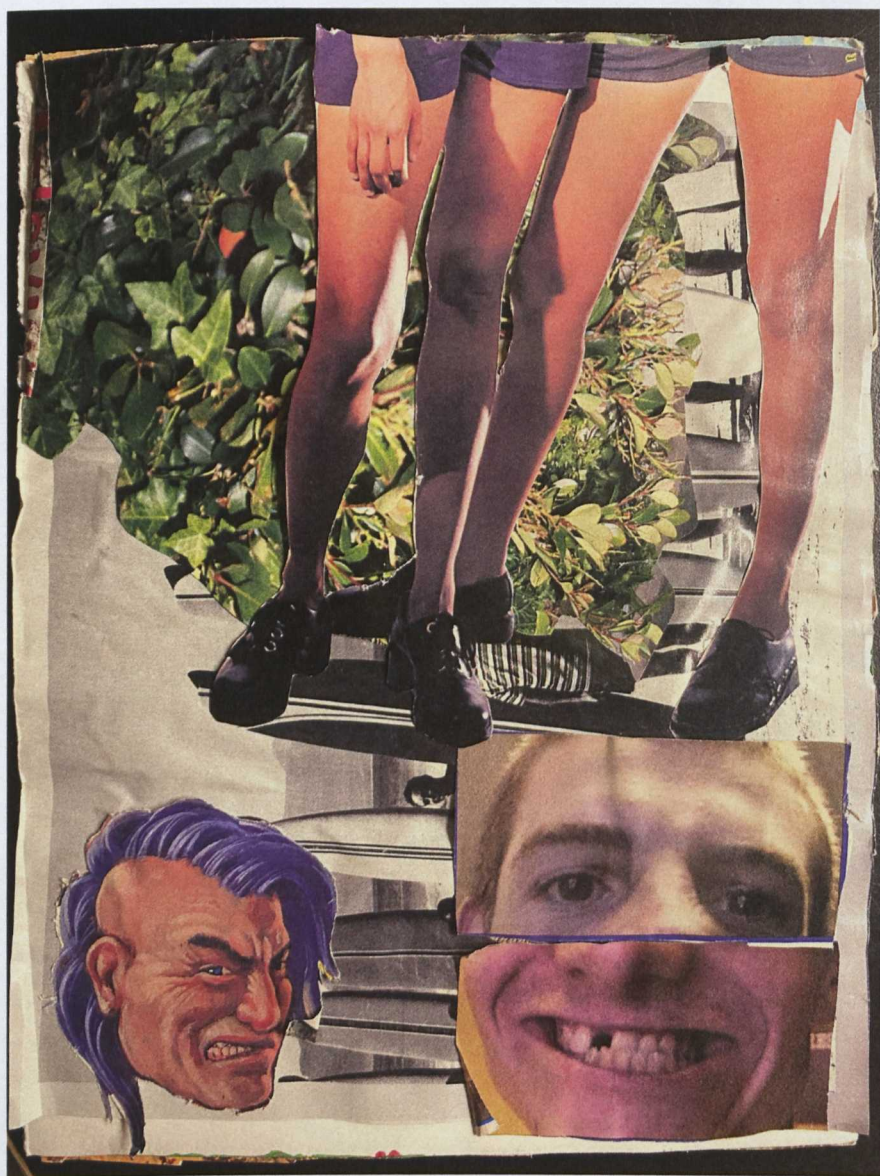
Feeling, welcoming, hiding from and amongst
the world
around you—

And iridophore, you love
How, when you turn the lock closed
And shut your blinds and wash your
face,
No one but you will know
All the light reveals when it leaves you
on your own.



POOT

Ashley Farrington



MAKE YOURSELF AN ASS 2

Lily Miller

A HAUNTING WALTZ

Caroline Willis

I remember how it feels to dance

to be at peace with my body

I remember old choreography like a curse—

it plagues my mind when I hear a song—
it rushes back.

Labored breathing

stumbling, blocking, r u n n i n g across the floor.

stand up straight
open your back
elongate your neck
open your chest
elongate your arms
don't lock your elbows

be elegant

chin up

eyes over your fingers.

My favorite ballet teacher

was a cloud of coffee,

and could touch the sun when he jumped.

My favorite tap teacher

was my neighbor,

and choreographed on her kitchen floor.

Oh, how I wish to dance again.

I tap dance in grocery aisles

because the crackly speakers remind me of that old dance studio:

quiet whispers in the corridor

glitter from old costumes embedded in the carpet

scuffed marley floors

classical music

grand allegro

pirouettes
leotards
pink tights

pop music
toe stands
pullbacks
cincinnati time steps
riffs . . .

Point your toes
spot your turns
you can raise your leg higher
 don't compare yourself
 to your best friend
 to the girls younger than you

stop staring at that mirror
that's not you who's staring back

the other girls . . . they might have the bodies
 the look
 the attitude
 the flexible legs and
 the turns that go on for days,

but I have the rhythm,
an elegance they lack
my spirit runs high.

And so
here I am,
waltzing across my floor past midnight
with music singing its siren song
and ghost choreography as my partner
leading me into a whirlwind of memories.

HOUSE OF PRAYER

Grace Maglietta

I did not understand how the son of God
could be fully human
until I saw your temple, too,
become a den of thieves.

In seas of plastic votives lit in vain
by strangers peddling propaganda,
I, too, was overturning tables
and casting out the money-changers
like the sole protector of something sacred.

Lord,
if it is rage that makes us human,
then Your son is as flesh and blood as I am.
And if it is suffering that makes us holy,
then in the wake of My grief,
I must be wholly divine.

SECOND COMING

1ST PLACE PROSE

Harrison Booth

I

“Holy shit—”

Jake had just lit up and taken a big hit. He kinda turned back to us as he said it, and his eyes were all wide as he handed the bowl to me. He shoved his Boston Red Sox lighter in his pocket and kept his hand there while he made eye contact with each of us. I couldn’t tell if he was gonna laugh or something, or maybe throw up. It was like his third time or something, and in my opinion he was going way too hard. He started coughing like an eldritch hag trying to clear her throat, but quickly stifled it and turned back to look at the guy.

He was literally face-down. Way ahead of us too, maybe 40 or 50 feet. I don’t remember. Catie says it was like 20, but she was stoned as shit—unreliable narrator, to be sure. So the guy couldn’t hear us super well yet, we figured, but we were close enough that we all kinda huddled together, looking at each other with that big “*oop!*” look on our faces. Only this was a little more serious than what we’d usually encountered whenever we walked around town. Like, that three-pawed cat was nothing compared to this. So anyway we were kind of close to the golf course, down the street between campus and the produce market up the hill, and it must have been 11pm or so, and this guy was off to the right of the sidewalk not too far from the intersection. And we couldn’t see his face, because his whole fucking *body* was in a bunch of literal poison ivy.

“Oh my fuck,” Catie said. “Wait that’s like...literal poison *ivy*, right?”

“Fuck...I think it is,” I said. We were both environmental majors, and we knew a guy that got poison there before. His eyes had swollen shut for like two weeks.

Danger nonchalantly grabbed the bowl from me while we stared. The pipe was still lit and he seemed determined to finish it, as if in defiance of the absurd situation. (With a name like that—and yes, I swear to God it's his real name—he had kind of built an identity on keeping cool in the face of absurdity.) Then he sorta just...walked towards the dude.

“WAIT!” Jake kinda loud-whispered at him. We were all pretty taken aback. “Dude what the—”

Danger stopped walking as the guy *got up*. He sort of did a scrawny push-up or something. And then he *looked at us*. Exactly like the three-pawed cat had looked at us. His hair was long and dark and all askew, and he had a pretty sizeable goatee. He was wearing a pair of shorts that looked like they'd been thrown out of somebody's car window a few months ago. They were bright green...just like—

“Ohmigod wait it's *those* shorts!” Catie whisper-exclaimed. She put her hand to her mouth, worried he had heard us, but he just looked back with his big woebegone eyes. They *were* ‘those shorts,’ too. They'd been thrown in the ditch there for weeks and weeks; I walked past them every few days or so. God knows how these assorted clothing items end up in such places. Maybe guys like *this* are the only ones who know.

And okay, we all jumped a little when he started walking towards us. But our guards went down really fast. We talked about it afterwards, and though none of us could have described it at the time, he just felt so... *benevolent*. Like he was our best friend. Or maybe halfway between a best friend and one of those family-friends who you call “uncle” even though you're not related. But like, way nicer than that. And he was really hot, too. Like, definitely a tad gaunt but kind of “gentle wizened-sexy.” Like a bonsai tree. I'd fuck a bonsai tree.

“Hello,” he said, and extended his hand to us, palm upward. His voice was hushed but ecstatically hot. And his eyes seemed super shiny to me, but I figured that was just the weed. We all looked back in a kind of awe; there was just something *about* this guy. It was just like a movie, my stoned brain posited. Just like a fuckin *movie*. I glanced around at the

others. Jake looked like he was about to take a sublime shit in his pants. Catie looked like she was ready to grab the pipe and offer the dude a hit. I probably looked like a middle-schooler playing Pokémon Go who just bumped into his weird neighbor on the way back from the skate park. But the way this guy looked *back* at us. He was like...he was like *Jesus*.

"My name is Jesus," he said.

Danger had been finishing off the bowl, and he did a sort of smoke spit-take mid-hit and the charred weed went flying from the pipe onto the sidewalk. He was coughing like a madman, and the rest of us felt deathly silent in comparison. We were in shock, but it wasn't...a serious shock. I don't know. Like...just the way he *said* it. So earnestly. He met our gaze like an Australian Shepherd that just walked in on his owners having sex. Like, *we* were just out here fucking around. Was *he* just fucking around? He sure didn't *act* like he was just fucking around.

Danger stopped coughing and then Catie *walked up to him and shook his hand*. Like, what the actual hell. Normally we would've whisper-freaked-out at her, to say the least, but we were just dumbfounded. We watched him intently. And...he didn't seem like he knew how to do a handshake? It was the most dead-fish shake I'd ever seen. That fish wasn't just *dead*, it had been flushed down the toilet a solid week ago. Dude was wack as hell.

"I'm Catie," Catie said. She definitely wasn't the most sober of the four of us (or the *five* of us, I reckoned), and I guess she was just feeling spontaneous. "Can—"

"Hello, Catie," he said. Awkward silence.

I counted a full five seconds. "Can we help—"

"—You know that was poison ivy right?" Catie and Danger had started speaking simultaneously.

"...you?" Catie finished. Crazy Jesus looked back at us like...like a lamb,

to describe this guy's vibe. Like, he just felt *completely* harmless. Hospitable, even, though I might have just been projecting. Everyone else seemed to have picked up on it, too, and was completely complacent with this little excursion. At worst, we suspected, he was just a weird townie who had taken a gram or two too many and gone wandering off down the sidewalk. At best, we were fuckin saving *humanity* here. (Which we didn't believe, of course, but when you're stoned you can be pretty open to entertaining possibilities. If you know, you know.) Either way, having taken for granted that the guy was harmless, we were in it for the bit.

After much more stumbling and trying to balance on the rails ('Why yes, I *can* walk in a straight line, officer!'), we saw the bridge up ahead in the moonlight. It was low to the water, maybe 8 or 10 feet above the surface of the lazy leaf-stained riffles. The river itself was about as wide as a train car is long. A month ago, on the first weekend after the semester started, the four of us had been down there at sunset, and had all gone swimming in our underwear (you know, as you do). It was actually a little warmer on this particular night than last time, so we thought it was a great idea to have Jesus jump on in there and give himself a good scrubbing. And I kid you not, there's a bottle of Dawn dish soap down there tucked up under a steel I-beam—I think a homeless guy must have put it there once, or maybe a benevolent freshwater Naiad. I bet water nymphs use Dawn.

The others waited at the top as Danger clambered down to get the soap. Crazy Jesus seemed a little reticent about this whole thing, which I would be too, if I had taken as much shrooms as him. Jake didn't like it either, but about ten minutes down the tracks he had started playing Spotify songs to try and ease the mood. We couldn't decide on what to listen to so he just put on Temple of the Dog. Like, the grunge supergroup. What the fuck. I'm pretty sure he was playing their whole debut album, too, and I'm not complaining, but I didn't think Jesus really wanted to hear "Say Hello 2 Heaven" after he like, *just* got back.

So anyway, we had just gotten to "Pushin' Forward Back," and Catie was holding up her phone flashlight while Danger was literally *slathering* Jesus with Dawn. I told Jake to turn it the fuck off, and he did like

halfway through a verse, so it was super awkward. The katydids and crickets were now the only sound around. Jesus apparently still wasn't on speaking terms with us, either, so I thought I'd try and break the ice.

"You can just jump in from up here," I said, pointing to the bridge. "I did it last time, there's a really deep spot right in the middle."

"Yeah," Danger added. "You can just jump, it's right in the middle." (Thanks D, very helpful.) "Then just rub this shit all over ya. Get that poison ivy oil off and shit. It's called urushiol." (Actually sorta helpful. Google it.)

With his hair and chest drenched in green dish soap, Jesus looked like he had just been birthed out of an Uruk-hai spawning pod. Being stoned and all, it was pretty freaky seeing the Son of the Lord our God standing there in the moonlight like he had just hatched out of ectoplasm or whatever.

Jesus looked back at me, then Danger, then Catie (who didn't realize she was shining the flashlight *right* in his face). He squinted and looked away at the dark water. He nodded with this "I know what I must do to pass this sacred Earthly trial" look on his face. Like deadass, that's exactly what he looked like.

"You know what you must do to pass this sacred Earthly trial," Danger said forebodingly. He grinned like a three-pawed Cheshire cat and I literally smacked him on the back of the head. Damn guy just can't leave the unspoken things unspoken.

Jesus walked to the middle of the bridge like he didn't hear a damn thing, his gaze glued to the water like he was being beckoned by some cute Naiad down there. There wasn't a railing on this bridge or anything, and he had gotten right up to the edge of the wooden beams. He bent his knees and leaned forward to jump. Just as gravity started to pull him in, he jerked his face over in our direction, his eyes wide as Catie's mouth. "Wait!—" he exclaimed, at the last second trying to do a double take and step back—but it was too late. He plunged off the edge of the bridge

like a cinder block.

We all kind of snapped awake, expecting to hear a violent splash. Instead what we heard was more like the sound of someone body-slamming a bag of potatoes into a sandbox. A physical *thud*. Then a viscerally uncomfortable three-second silence, followed by a long, shaky gasp from down below.

“Oh my *fuck*,” Catie said. She sort of scampered to the edge of the bridge with her phone flashlight, and the rest of us hurried after her. What we saw was just...I don’t know, it was fucking bonkers.

So like, okay. He was lying on his back, ON TOP of the water. Or at least it *looked* like that. We speculated later that a goddamn log or something had washed under the bridge and he had somehow hit *that*, but things looked kinda off. Like he was photoshopped on top of the water or whatever. As if he couldn’t actually fall through the surface and was just splayed out on top without submerging.

Catie just kept saying “oh my fuck” over and over and over as Jesus groaned, and the rest of us clambered down the bank to the water, asking if he was alright ohmigodohmigod. Danger, being the strong one, waded in and plucked him out. Jesus had kinda rolled over to the shore, or maybe *washed* there—who the hell knows. I just remember that Danger’s calves were submerged, but Crazy Jesus’s whole body somehow never went under. He kept breathing something hoarsely; it sounded like “can’t swim.” Catie kept the flashlight aimed down at us from above, and brushed away moths as they started to flock around her face. “Of *course* he can’t fucking swim!” she started to repeat to herself, as if it were the most obvious thing in the goddamn world.

III

Jesus was getting blood all over the Subaru. We hadn’t really seen how bad it was until we got under a street lamp back near town, and by then it was matting up his hair and trickling down his left arm. Danger’s sweatshirt had gotten drenched. He and Jake had tied the sleeves around

his head real tight to block up the wound, and the four of us were taking turns carrying him. He was really, really light, actually. Like, he weighed about as much as a kid, even though he was (obviously) much bigger. At this point, I didn't feel like questioning the nature of Messianic physics. I didn't know what phase of matter this dude's hydrophobic ass was in, and I honestly didn't care too much by the time we got in Catie's hatchback and were running yellow lights down Main on our way to the ER.

So last time we were in the Subie Jake had connected to the Bluetooth (we were getting Biggie Bags at Wendy's—freaking *phenomenal* deal), and now his phone decided to automatically connect and pick up where it left off earlier. Yes, that's right, viewers. In the middle of the Temple of the Dog album. Chris Cornell was positively *wailing*. "PUSHIN, PUSHIN, PUSHIN FORWARD BACK I WAS PUSH—" Catie cut the volume. Car rides to the ER are awkward enough, but the bone-chilling silence in the wake of an accidental 5-second grunge mosh whilst a violently concussed prophet bleeds out in your car is something otherworldly.

Jesus stayed quiet. His eyes were closed. He was leaning against my shoulder in the backseat, seated between me and Danger. He smelled kind of good. I didn't know why.

Jake turned his head back from the passenger seat to whisper to me. "Smells like *wine*," he said.

Holy shit. He was literally right.

Our highs were all coming down at this point, and in the stark light of sobriety I was becoming increasingly doubtful of my mushroom theory. I mean, this man had fallen *on top* of water. And he was bleeding literal *wine*...or he was just, like, really really drunk. I don't heckin know. But he had definitely not gone through the surface of the river. To be fair, though, I wouldn't call that "walking on water," either. Again, I'll leave the physics to the biblical scholars. I still think about it a lot though.

We pulled up to the ER just as Jesus opened his eyes. He was mumbling to himself while Jake ran inside and grabbed a wheelchair. Catie and I stayed with him by his bed while the medics took their goddamn time. The others stayed out in the waiting room. The interrogation at the front desk had gone poorly; the receptionist had this habit of asking “Come again?” when she couldn’t quite catch what Jesus was saying, and every time she said that particular phrase he just answered “Yes.” I did my best to answer questions for him, but we knew literally nothing about him besides...you know. We didn’t want to sound like crazy people. “I’ve come again, I’ve come again,” Jesus kept stuttering as the medic pushed him down the hallway.

Who knows if he had “come again.” Who knows anything, man, I don’t fuckin’ know. But I can tell you a few things. For one, the doctor said Jesus was concussed. The doctor also said he smelled like alcohol. But the doctor never got finish his diagnosis, because at that moment Jesus’s eyes had turned bright golden white, and we knew who he really was. Our nape hair stood on end. Then Jesus had, without warning, sneezed louder than I’d ever heard anyone sneeze in my life, and all the lights in the room had gone out, and when we pulled out our flashlights, all that was left of him was his hospital gown—with a perfectly crucifix-shaped burn mark slicing right down its center. At this point the doctor had reached for his water bottle. He had taken a sip and abruptly spit it out.

It was wine.

Epilogue

Danger listens to Temple of the Dog now.

There were no stains *at all* in Catie’s car.

Jake didn’t believe me about the hospital gown. I don’t know what I expected.

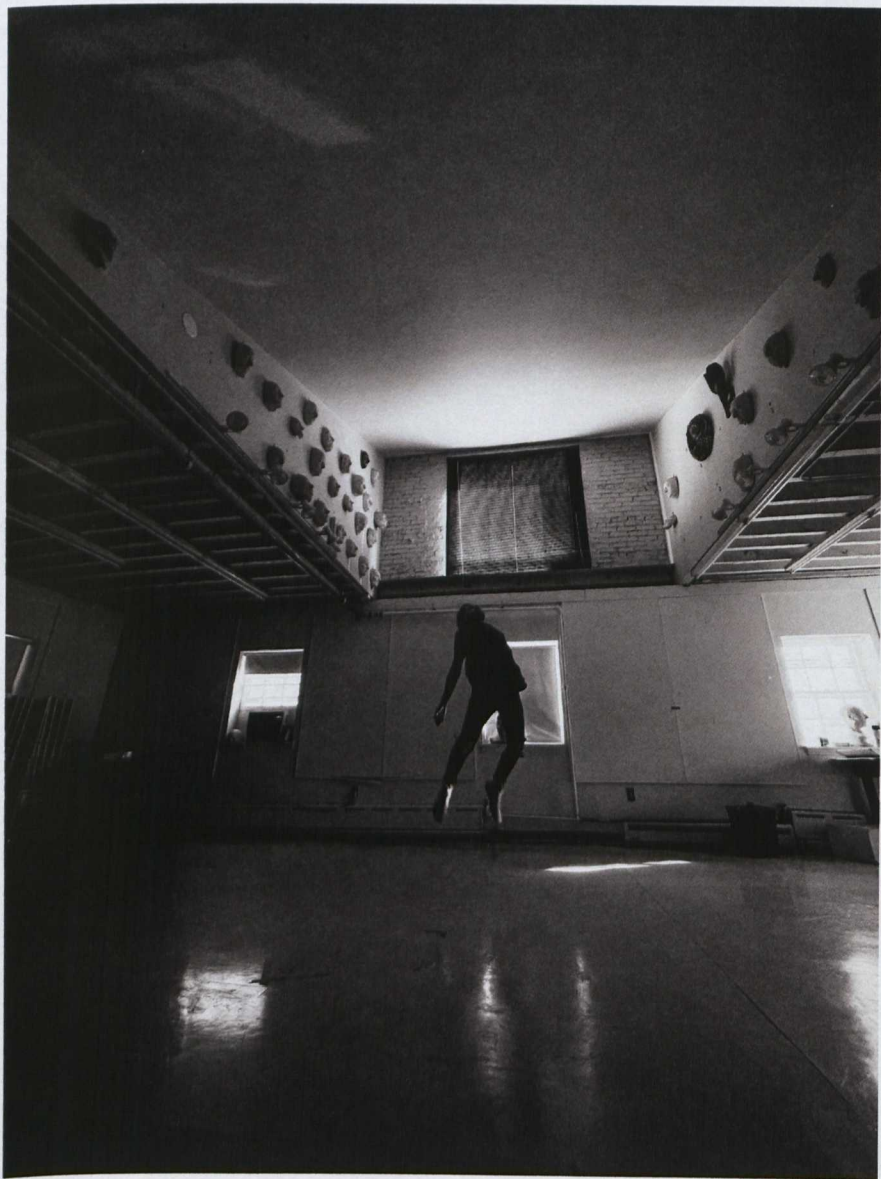
Every time I see a random piece of clothes along the road I write down the location in hopes of something like this happening again.

I've been going to therapy.

I don't smoke anymore.

I've been journaling about this.

All I can think about is how Jesus got the wrong drop zone.



IT'S DRAGGING ME IN (SELF-PORTRAIT)

Collin Beattie

THE INHUMAN CONDITION

Larkin Diener

What does it mean to be human?

Because the gazes i meet don't seem to recognize me as such
Unique specimen, not something you see often in the wild
Zoo animal for the viewing pleasure of the public

They look at me like it's my choice

They ask me as if I wanted it

Why are you so pale?

Why do your eyes shake like that?

Why is all of your hair white?

Why are you always squinting?

What exactly are you?

I'm not human, I suppose

Because if I were, wouldn't they just assume

I was formed and born and genetically coded

With flaws and errors and features from my parents
just the same as them?

Yet I'm here

And they're right there

Staring at me through a barrier I can't perceive

Wide-eyed, curious, fingers pressed against the glass

And I know there's no point in pushing back

Because it seems I'm strange and nothing I do will change it

So instead I ask myself the same

Repetition, reflection, rejection of the self

Why are you so pale?

Why do your eyes shake like that?

Why is all your hair white?

Why are you always squinting?

What exactly are you?

But no amount of resenting myself changes form or figure

I cannot escape the body I was born into

Fingers stay pressed against the glass

Strangers' hands from behind comb through my hair in the grocery store

Unwanted wide-eyed stares follow me down city streets

and I can't outpace them

Curiosity considered over my own autonomy

Because my strangeness

is unspoken permission to stare, to touch, to approach

And the questions keep coming

Always the same

And I find I can't answer anymore

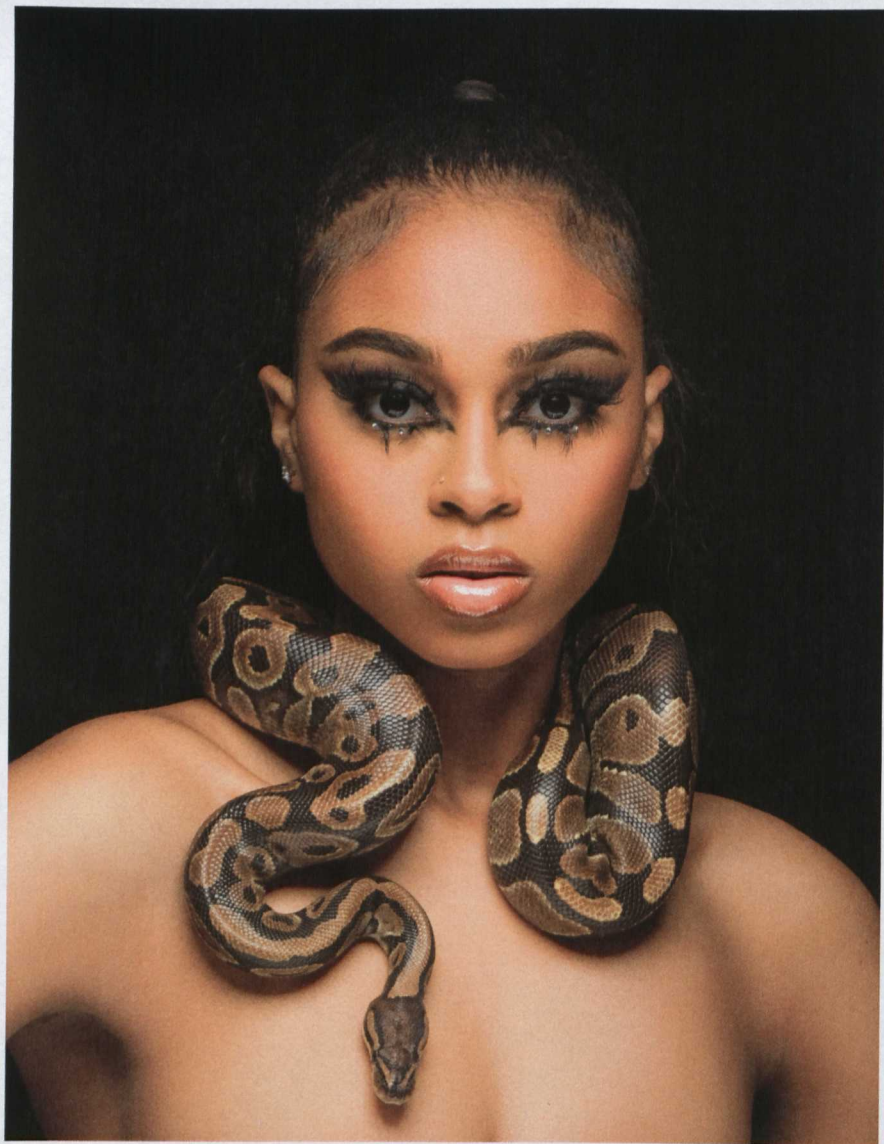
Because what they seem to be digging for

Is something deeper than genetics or parentage

And something I'm sure they couldn't answer if asked themselves

Why do you exist as you are?

Why aren't you human in the way I am?



POISON

Simone Smith

POISON

Simone Smith

i placed him around my neck
and begged him not to squeeze
fell victim to his tongue
as Adam did Eve
the irony of faith
when he revealed himself my enemy
how naive
or rather the mask of bravery
i can still feel his skin
both cold and dry
a reflection of his lies
my god, my god
why have you forsaken me
have I not spilled enough blood
have I not planted enough seeds
are my prayers not just
i have repented my lust
i have fed my greed
when you sacrificed your son
did you not think of me
my god
do you not see the pride
in the eyes of this serpent
or maybe in mine
my god
are you there?

UNTITLED #1

Danté Martin

she was european.

from a city that embraces the culture
of vices,
for bittersweet relief.

a city where its people
create their own clouds.

close enough for their reach,
swift enough to elude their touch.

a city that listens
to those with golden teeths.
philosophers,

who wave
tiny burning torches
as they speak.

so it was only natural for her,

when she found her american boy.

when she kissed his cigarette stained lips.
to be reminded of home.

YEARNING

Ra'Nya Taylor

I want to be cared for
Cradled
Treated like something delicate

I want to be handled with care
Loved and Craved
Cherished like a prized possession

I want to be sat in a sacred box
Placed
Right in your favorite spot

I want to be caressed and admired
By my soft edges
Leave others astonished and breathless

I want to be claimed
Owned

I just want someone to care
Like I do
No one cares like I do

So I protect my fragile casing
With sharp edges
And crass words

I protect my peace
With aggression
But I care so deeply

And I love you

I want to worship your uniqueness
Appreciate your companionship
Cradle your friendship in my hands

I want to carry you in my heart
Like a locket around my neck
Your picture pressed to my chest

I want to bring joy to your world
To smile when you smile
And to laugh as you laugh

But I ask for too much
This I know
Who am I to demand such emotion?
To desire such companionship?

Who am I to believe in such things
Like friendship
When I have never once had one
A friend

Just people
With whom I share my energy
Always to come out
With the short end of the stick

Because I love people who cannot
And I give to people who take
Thinking the resources I give are infinite
Only for my tears to refill the lake

FIGURE SKATING (SOUNDS FUN IN THEORY)

Kaitlyn Barker

Blood runs hot like it's lava.

Ice settling in my bones.

Gliding, swirling, thoughts racing,
turning. Voices echo with the music;

"Be better"

"Learn faster"

"Just do it"

Words said by others, in my own voice.

The ice feels cool against my knees.

The air makes my sweat stick to my skin.

Earmuffs and gloves don't protect from
anything. Turn backwards, foot out, toe pick
down and

L

E

A

P

I forgot to put my foot out.

Start again.

Dye frozen into the ice in patterns,

Suddenly blurs from all the spinning.

Music sounds distorted (am I going crazy?)

I feel like I'm flying

(I feel like crying)

My fingers grow numb as my brain does too.

Stomach churning but not from the motions.

Expectations weighing me down (I need to jump up).

My teacher barks commands at me.

I can take the pressure

(I can't I can't I can't)

My skin is crawling from the judging
eyes. Pressure without consequences

(How can people do this for a living?)

I refuse to compete,

But I still feel like I'm losing.

ROADKILL

Simone Smith

I often pass discarded carcasses
of some varying species of prey
and as mundane as it may seem
you drive by as if you don't see me
as if that disfigured body
does not match mine
like the spillage of its guts
does not reflect the love i have lost
on roads curved like this
as if those vacant eyes
have not met yours
you've met death before
you have seen my skin
peeled and bloodied
you have traced my wounds
and promised to love me
you know that me
and this dying deer are the same
you know we both have faced
enemies heavy in chase
we have both been blinded by light
that we mistook for warmth
we have felt the impact of pain
so when you next drive by
please brake
and carry me home again

A LETTER TO A FRIEND

Victoria Walker

Dear, the friend I'll never know,

Were we destined to forever be apart? Every inch of our being stretched out farther from each other, unlike any elastic—as we never find one another as quickly as a band may snap back. I miss you by mere seconds, catching the sliver of your red and white striped sweater. The moss green bag you carry around.

Were we ever destined in the first place? Whatever deity may be, their magic was not made for us. It is something I am remorseful for saying. To acknowledge our division is like instigating the very knife of realization that stabs me each time I recognize your silhouette, falling from my vision—as swift and quiet as air.

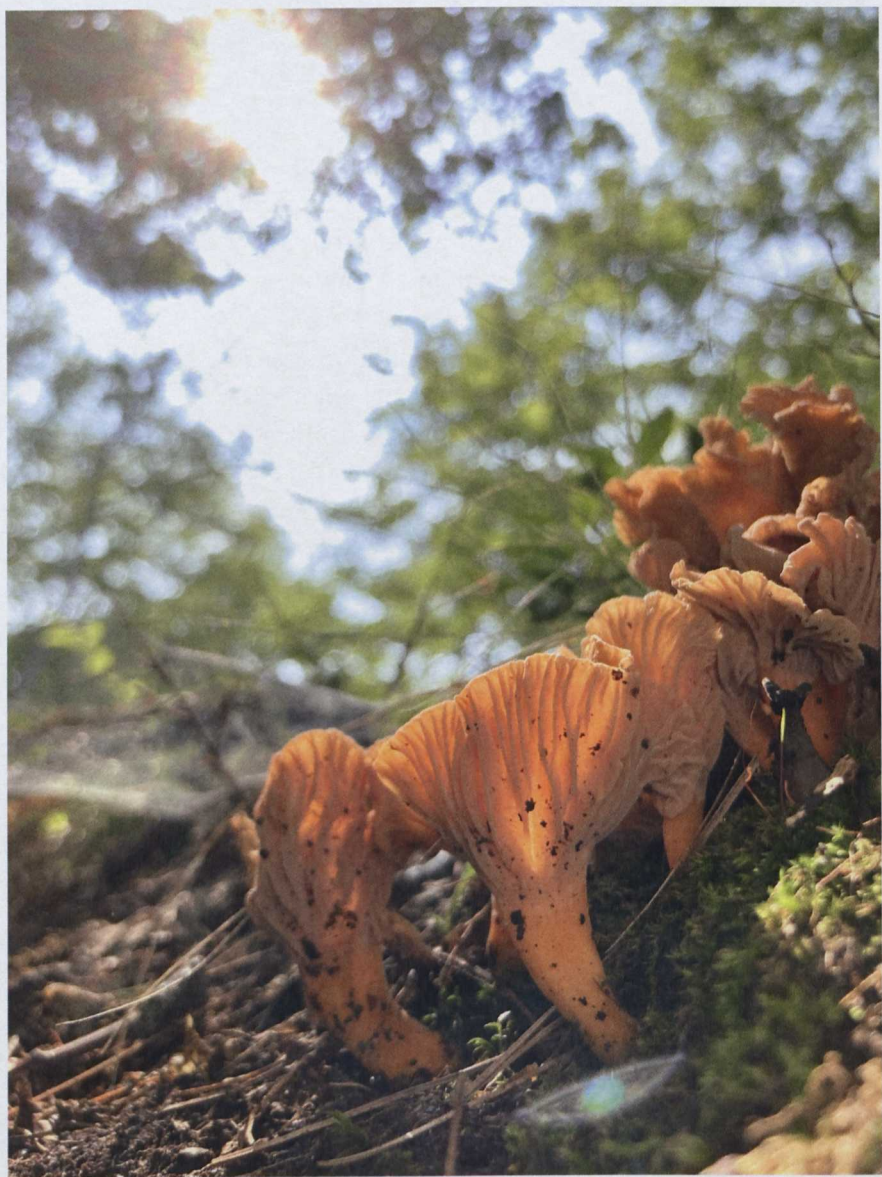
You upset me every time you leave when I come. It isn't fair.

Yours truly,

A CHILD SHAMED

Emily Hollwedel

-
there, at the glorious end
 (of my street)
the trees whisper every two steps forward.
 from passersby accounts,
 stories vary.
but the vines slither around your ankles
 and flowers grow from your lungs
 and if you sit in the soil
 long enough
the earth will swallow you whole.
 and ever so often
wanderers glimpse a figure, barefoot,
fingertips grazing every inch of the woods they can.
they listen to the trees, they say. they talk back to them.
 but when spoken to
 their round eyes widen
 and they vanish.
and the trees and the wind begin to sing.



REACHING
Harrison Booth

MISS MILLER'S TURQUOISE NECKLACE

Lily Miller

i've been thinking about the silver and turquoise necklace i wore
to school in the fifth grade.

i wasn't allowed to,

even though it was mine.

it slid off my neck when i was bouncing down main street,
so proud that i had broken my mom's rules.

it was gone before i even walked in the school doors.

i didn't notice until halfway through math time.

my eyes blew wide and i scratch my neck
as if i were choking.

mrs. miller (not my mother) thought i was.

after realizing it was only fear blocking my airways
she pulled me from the class and i hiccuped sobs in front of her,
like i was confessing to my own mother.

i was so mad at myself for breaking one of my mom's rules.

my mother is also a mrs. miller
teaching in her own classroom.
comforting kids who are not her own.

—

i hope someone digs it up.

i hope someone gives it to their daughter
thinking it's an artifact turned up by the soil,
meant for them to find.
thinking it was owned by a respected elder woman
who knew what her silver was worth,

but it was a silly little girl
bouncing her way to school

proud she broke her mother's rule.

i don't think my mom remembers the necklace,

but i've been thinking about my silver and turquoise necklace.

PASSENGER SEAT

Sydney Lewis

In Our old, run-down Toyota Previa
that mom loathed,
i found myself in the passenger seat
in my Cinderella car seat
glowing because i felt so grown up
and because i got to sit next to You.

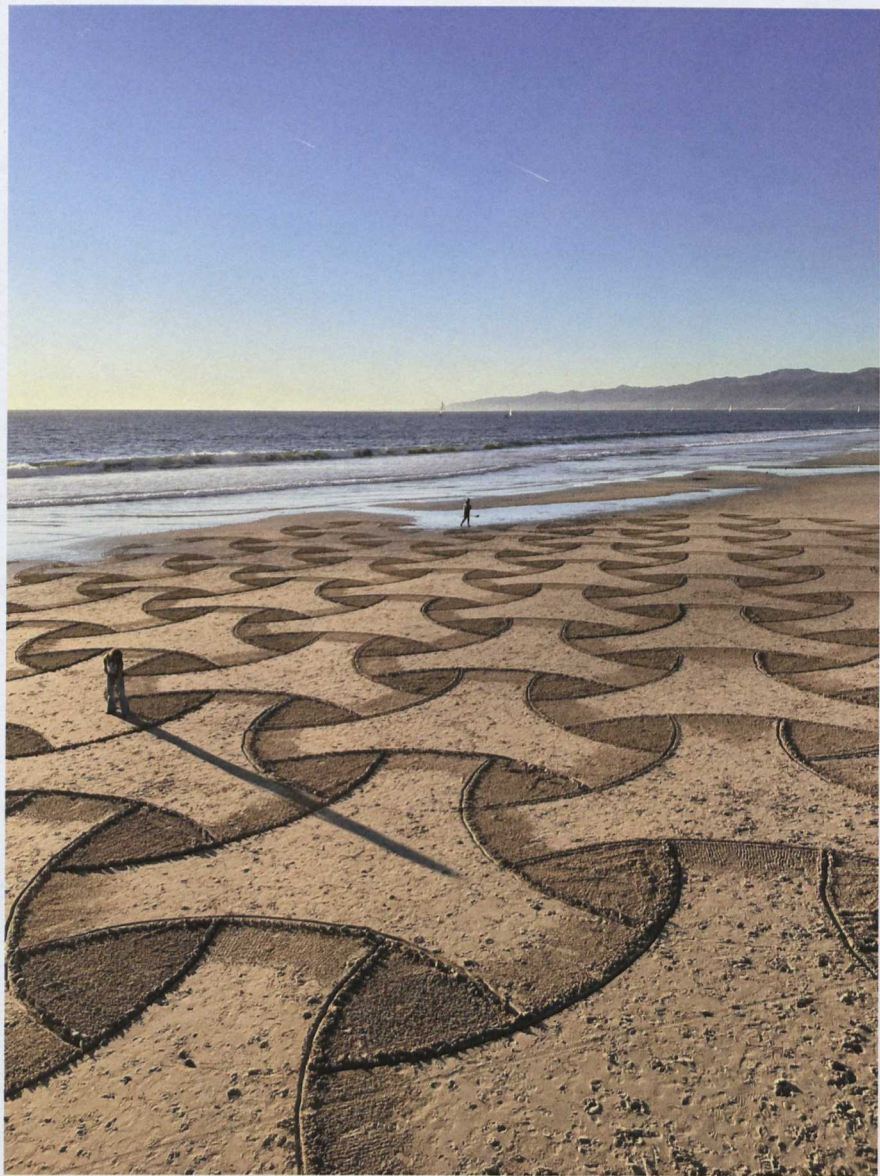
You made me learn the music
You listened to as a teenager.
You covered the name on the radio
and made me guess the artist
ACDC? Guns N' Roses? Def Leppard?
You laughed so hard at me
because it was actually Phil Collins.

After my Sunday games, I rode with You,
anxious to hear Your thoughts,
sticky on the leather seats of Your New car.
we rolled down the windows
to feel the warm breeze on our faces
and I held on to Your every word,
an eclipse of the stereo's silence.

On our final drive leaving Philadelphia
we discussed our favorite cheesesteaks
and pretended the distance between us
was only as wide as the center console.
I blasted Fearless (Taylor's Version)
because You said I could choose the music this time.
I thought I was fearless too.

Now when I climb into the passenger's seat
there is no hand covering the radio

and when I look to my left
all I see is an empty driver's seat,
a barren steering wheel.
Then I can't help but look forward
at the long, dark road ahead of Me
and thank God
that You taught Me how to drive.



GEOMETRIC SANDS

Mackenzie McCarter

HOW THIS SEMESTER HAS ME (SELF- PORTRAIT)

Collin Beattie



ONCE UPON A TIME (IN THE WEST)

2ND PLACE POETRY

Emily Hollwedel

for mark maggiori's piece of the same name.

brotherhood, deeper than the roots slicing the ground
and just as bristled and tight.

silence drips slow, like a drop of sweat on a brow
glistening down rich, dark, sun kissed skin
eyes up.

behind are shadowy mountains that seal away
the past, the reasons they have burnt the breeze,
and any faces in the rock are merely ghosts.

if he reaches high enough, he's certain he could
clutch the clouds in one hand

with the other gripping leather reins

and urge them both forward on their steeds. but-

this is a quiet place, where the wind echoes amongst
greenish shrubs and plateaus of rusty red.

blood prickles the inside of his skin. but heat
won't last. it's breathy, like the first harmonica note.

once the sun falls, they'll have to settle down,
build a fire,

scrape a spoon through a tin can of beans,

and amber tinted whiskey bottles will be drunk,

until their cheeks are flushed and worries
are left for waking up.

he runs a finger along the velvety brim of his hat

when he meets his eyes. smiles collide.

there may be no glory (yet),

but they've got dreams, and each other,

which is more than they

ever thought they could say.



SNAKE COIL POT
Allie Scharnberger

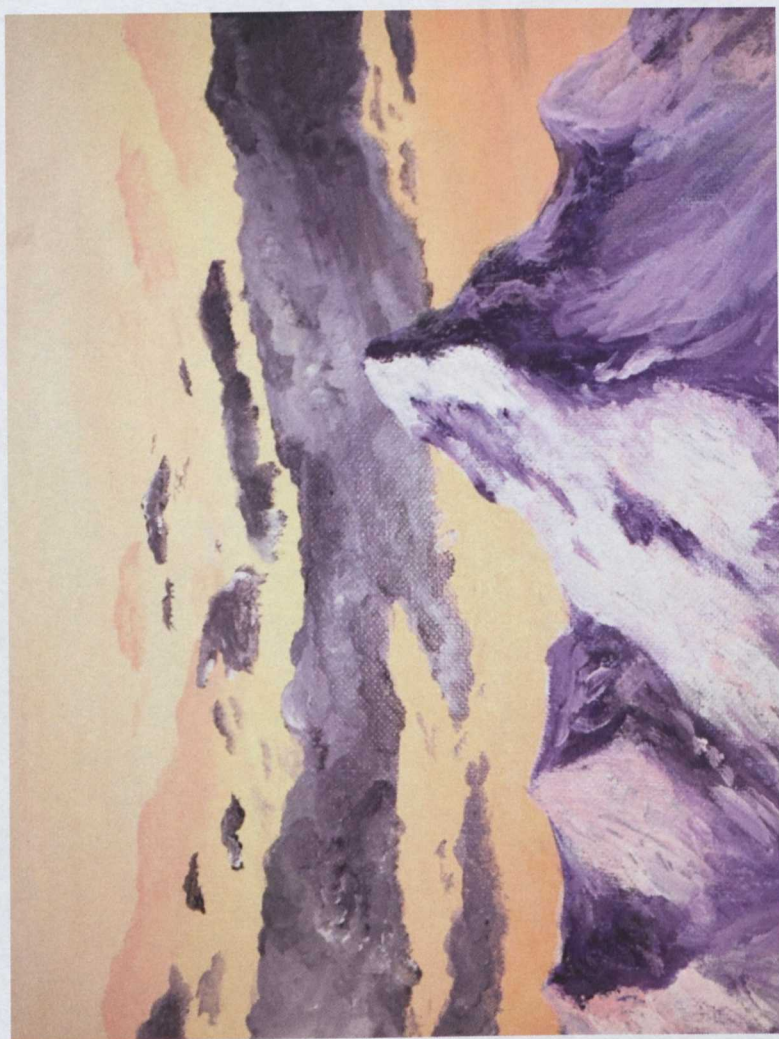
TCHOTCHKE

Grace Maglietta

I did not feel that I was real until
I had been handled like some
shameful shiny trinket on
my lover's shelf—collected
and object-
defied at last,
I am a gash in which he lies
and where he carves me out
and sands me down with
hands and mouth and hungry eyes
he makes me not the absence of—
I'm firm and fixed and fragile but
he handles me
with china care,
a fired ware he sets upon the table
and devours from, and when I come
to realize he can see me
I am not someone but some
thing and I'm
grounded in
whatever
way
he makes me

MOUNTAIN PAINTING

Emily McGraw



ROCK, TREE, AND DUST

Robin Odom

I am born from rock, tree, and dust.
Every different foundation equally forming,
To make an entity that may be me.

I come from the dusty streets of a time capsule.
Every soul I pass is family,
United in the freaks we are.

I come from the woods that are a thousand years old.
Once the greenman's daughter,
Now a sprig of oak on my own.

I come from the rocky mountains of age.
Heart torn apart from its residents,
But I am as strong as the mountain.

They think I am too loud,
I want them to let me be quiet.
They think I am too feminine,
Can the oak not wear a skirt of moss but still stand strong?
They think I am too strange,
Does the bright bird not feel at home amongst the flowers?

Who am I? That can only be answered deep,
Far away from the straight lines and perfect hours.
I am the dust of the past,
I am the tree of the forest,
I am the rock of the mountain.

AN ODE TO A COWBOY AND HIS BOOTS

Emily Hollwedel

ostrich leather boots, used
and not quite broken in yet.
it might be harder
than breaking horses
(because one subject is infinitely more stubborn.)
do you put your jeans on
one leg at a time?
(is there any other way?)

liquor stings going down, sure
but it makes you feel warm.
isn't it funny, how life works
the same way a breathy note on a harmonica
might whine into a song?
there are wild horses
living in your veins.
they leave trails of dust and sand
to seep into your
bones.

they are pieces of you
unrecognized
(or unadmitted.)
a suede jacket with tan fringe
hung by a front door.

the sun looks so lovely
refracted through a glass of dark oak whiskey.
but
life wasn't meant to be lived
on the sidelines.
there's another pair of boots beside
the ostrich leather. rusty orange and hardly worn.

there is no standoff. no tumbleweed blowing by.
all you have to do
is get up.

TETHERED TO THE TIDE

Max Sweeney

There is a string around my ankle,
A fraying twine weathered away from summer's past
that tethers me to a simpler time;

Running through sandy beach and muddy forest,
Air fresh in my lungs,
Sun beating down my brow,
Bands of silly string cover my whole body,
Brighter laughter than has ever escaped my lips,
This is peace;

My feet kick hard against the weight of tons of water,
Blue pool chlorine tastes of s'mores and firesides,
As I test my skills to swim in the deep end;

They tie the twine around my ankle,
Semi-permanent proof that I am strong enough,
To tread, to float,
To venture further and further from the shallow safety,
of your embrace;

Life jacket keeps me afloat in the gentle sway of the river,
The twine floats in the murky water,
Proof that I can keep my head above the waves,
Proof that I have waded through worse;

Bask in the crisp night air,
Reaching with outstretched arms towards the stardust,
Twist the twine between my fingers,
Try to comprehend life without you here;

Stuffing soiled clothes into a duffel bag,
Tight knot deep in my stomach,

*You don't have to go home,
But you can't stay here;*

The grey twine fell off my ankle,
A few years ago,
The tide had taken its toll,
Ebbing and flowing through thick and thin,
There will always be an imprint of what once was,
An invisible string,
Tying me home.



RIPPED PAPER STILL LIFE

Kate Cramer

THE TRAGEDY OF THE FRONT YARD

Emily Hollwedel

It always happens when you least expect it, but the day that damages your pride stays in your mind forever. It almost comes automatically to me: second grade, age seven, a beautiful spring day with a crisp blue sky. Always the nice days. I was wearing a favorite shirt—a very mid-2000s Bobby Jack brand Fourth of July long-sleeve (pretending to be a short sleeve with a white long-sleeve beneath) that was just a little too small for me. My front yard, a patchwork of grass and dusty dead zones, the concrete porch my father tended to sprawl on in the rain, our minimalist seasonal garden still bare and filled with faded mulch. It was here, standing at the obtuse angle between our big oak tree and the dreaded slip n' slide porch, that the stars aligned and my fate was sealed. It was here a key component of my personality would disappear forever.

The deciding factor which destiny had aligned me with was in the form of a small Olde English Bulldogge (yes, it's spelled this way) puppy named Ike. We had adopted him the previous fall, and he was growing rapidly to be the true fraternal love of my young life. At first, he could fit in my seven-year-old lap and had a slightly less squished face than his stumpier siblings, despite a precious disposition for running headfirst into our living room couches and walls. By the spring, he was probably fifty pounds of muscle and wrinkles, and developed a reputation for demonic possession at the sight of any animal or inanimate object at random intervals. While indoors, this usually involved a low rumbling bark that would explode in contended silence at the sight of a shadow against the window. Outside, however, he bristled on his stocky legs and gave his best impression of a battlefield charge. Usually, if whoever held his leash braced themselves, they could withstand the savage, unbridled strength of the beast.

I was not so lucky.

I was standing in the yard waiting patiently for Ike to relieve himself—pee or poop, I didn't really care, I was just happy I had a dog's leash to

hold. It was a polyester blue number to match the stylish collar we'd gotten custom-made for him. This was my first time owning a dog, and I was thriving—at long last, I had been bestowed the honor of man's best friend. Piss, shit, and all, I was more than ready for it. In fact, I embraced it with open arms. From the yard, I beamed at my father waiting patiently in the doorframe. He had suggested a better bathroom method than this, something like an electric fence, but I wondered what could possibly replace such an experience.

A breeze was blowing. The sun was warm on my skin. I knew peace.

The trouble came when I saw a neighbor idling down the street.

Just like any other human being who approached me at this time, I felt a legal obligation to establish that my new puppy was, in fact, my personality. I waved at her wildly with my free hand, the left still clutched around the scratchy leash material. I pointed to Ike with all the strength a seven-year-old could muster.

I don't remember exactly what she said, because, at that same moment, it appeared that Ike had seen something of interest himself. It could have been anything—a rabbit, a squirrel, the wind disrupting the bloom of our giant forsythia bush. Regardless, if I had noticed it, it would have been far too late.

Some people say traumatic moments happen in slow motion, and I say bull-fucking-shit. This moment happened at the speed of light.

The demon was unleashed.

A split second after I felt the strain of the leash in my palm, my body was yanked midair. My legs flew behind me as I was pulled to the ground, making contact with the dirt spot my dad had over-mowed the day before, the air punctured from my lungs. I didn't even have time to breathe before my world, now sideways, shifted violently forward. The polyester fabric burned against my tender skin, making my eyes water. Or maybe that was due to our traveling speed. Regardless, I felt my body

being dragged across the freshly mowed grass at a considerable pace, bumping across hard spots along the way. My vision was distorted to the point where the beautiful blue sky and the green horizon it sat on blurred together into a mass of particles my mortal eyes could no longer comprehend. I couldn't seem to differentiate where one stopped and the other began. My shoulder feeling nearly pulled from its socket, trapped by the leash wrapped around my knuckles, I was unable to break from the grasp, no matter how many vain attempts I made to claw free.

I was taking a first-class ride to hell in all of its glory, with absolutely no chance of getting off. My voice dried completely. I gave in.

Time passed simultaneously as quickly and as tediously as ever, in this universe between sky and ground. At last, though, the leash loosened from my wrist and fell limp into the grass, my lifeless body, at last, coming to a stop beside the porch. I lifted my weary head as the world shifted back into place, unsure of exactly where I fell in it. Below me was Earth, glorious, still Earth, and above me was that clear spring air. I opened my mouth to gasp for a deep breath of it, expand the fresh relief of life into my lungs, and promptly coughed out several clumps of cut grass. Delicious.

It was then I recalled the shirt I was wearing and looked down in horror to discover green stains akin to skid marks running down my white sleeves. My eyes welled with tears. "No," I murmured, running my hands over the soiled garments. "No."

And when I asked myself, *Who could have done this to me?* My eyes turned to the side of the house and settled upon him—the voracious traitor, the dastardly villain, the demonic beast that was the only answer. He gazed down at me with glittering eyes, wagging his stump of a tail and shimmying his hips to compensate for the loss. His wrinkled face was scrunched into what could only be described as a smile.

It was then, from my defeated position, I heard my father laughing. The sound echoed in my head as church bells do in an empty chapel. It was his genuine one, the wheeze that sucks all the air from his body until

he's red in the face. I was suddenly aware of my neighbor's eyes on me, and my other neighbors' eyes on me from their yard and front doors and windows. And, of course, once the story was relayed over dinner tables in a few hours, more neighbors' eyes would be on me the following day.

At first, tears stung my eyes. I wanted to lie in the dirt like a worm and disappear forever.

I sat up in the grass, vision blurred and hot, and started crying there instead.

It hurt too much to get all the way up so quickly.

Eventually, though, I did stumble to my feet, inspecting the grass stains streaking across my sleeves, still picking blades from under my tongue and out of my hair, and, yes, still bawling my eyes out. I was enraged, embarrassed, and covered in dirt. So I did what anyone expected me to do—stormed around the side of the house onto the porch, but only managed a few steps on the concrete before I turned to look back into the horror of my front yard.

Ike still stood there, right where I had left him, the strange wrinkled smile plastered on his face, utterly oblivious to his destruction, waiting patiently for some unlucky victim to pick up his leash and guide him to his next adventure. I glanced at my father, still incapacitated, and let out a long, deep sigh.

But then, a switch flipped.

I knew what I had to do.

Sticking out my slightly scraped chin with a newfound gusto, I made my way back to the front yard and picked up the now muddy leash in my tender palm. I was aware of the eyes on me, the laughter of my own father, but something was different this time. Standing here, holding the same dog that had caused me such destruction, I felt almost invincible, like I didn't need to care anymore. All of my worry dissipated with my

pride. I eyed the puppy with the sternest of glares, to which he wagged his stump of a tail. My face broke out into a small smile and I shook my head. I couldn't help it—he was hard to stay angry at when he had to wiggle his whole body to compensate for it.

And with that, battered, beaten, and bruised, but not defeated, we made our way back up the porch together, just as we had come.

RED

Lyra Houghton

she's one of those people
who lives in parallel with the past,
speech running over river stone memories
until they are round and perfectly smooth
to the touch.

a shimmering amber haze
of dancing light on water,
she is twenty-three
and talks like an old woman reminiscing,
her stories repeated enough that soon
they are enmeshed within my own.

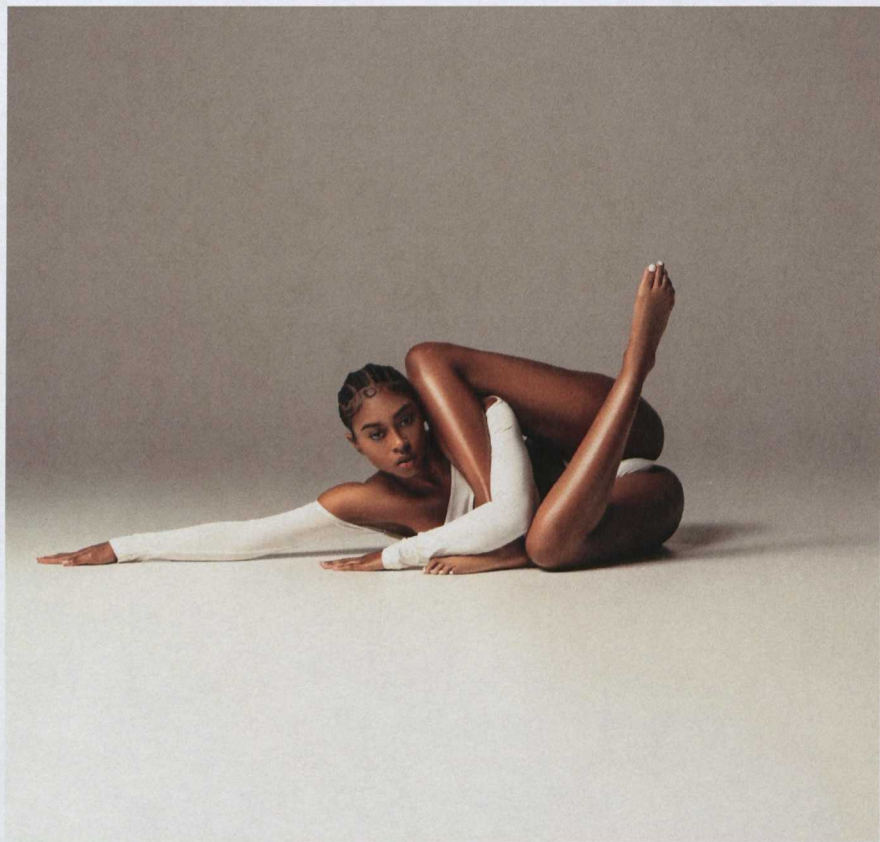
riverbed witness, I know all
she cherishes.
every tumbled time and leveled place.
each of our adventures
(always adventures, in her words)
sinks, settles, seeps into her repertoire
of selective recollection.

*oh my god, it's like that one time—
you know the one,
where we were camping by that river
and all those coyotes started howling
all at once, and we thought we were so grown up
smoking sassafras leaves and looking up
at all those stars, making up new constellations
in our heads—*

and I didn't know the word, but I remember thinking,
for other reasons,
crazymaker.

but I also remember
doubting she was scared of **anything**,
though her flashing eyes sought approval for each sentence,
ash on her jeans, firelight in her laugh
and she had this warbling affect, up and down
to round out her words

in such a pleasing color.



BEAUTY IN SIMPLICITY
Simone Smith

STEALING SKIN

2ND PLACE PROSE

Robert A. Borst

Last week I was Samantha. A bright young girl, a shiny white smile and long brown hair. My mother boasted and bragged about my height, my proficiency at volleyball, and how I was making my school proud as team captain. Her skin was soft, without any blemishes or scars. It fit snugly around me as I hid myself within. But, her friends were bratty and prudish, annoying. I think that's what finally drove me away; those girls in that group made it so uncomfortable for me. Not my crowd.

The week before, I was someone named Sean. I didn't know his last name though, that's what gave it away. All the spying and snooping before and I couldn't find it. Not on a college notebook, not on a room placard. I couldn't get into his phone, it was locked with a passcode, nor could I get into his computer for the same reason. I asked his friends, did anyone know about it? I had forgotten it, I told them, a trick that worked before. But none of them knew, he didn't share much. I gave up when I had to sign a document, I couldn't print his last name.

The question of who I am keeps coming back to me, as I slink off into the night, leaving all those to wonder where is the man or woman who I took with me. I keep searching, searching for a shell. Like a hermit crab, I seek the one that fits me, one that makes me feel whole. I want to feel at-home, I want to find a place where I belong, but I always fall short. I slide into each one like a new set of clothes, but they itch and constrict me, leaving me wanting to escape from them, to tear them off.

I look at myself in the mirror, and despite all these identities I have, I don't know who I am underneath.

This week, I work in an office. Sandra is my name. I don't know how our filing systems work or how my boss likes his coffee, even though he swears I 'make it the best'. I stop in the bathroom, excusing myself for a break.

I stare, pull at my eyelids, tug at my lip, glare at my teeth in the mirror. I don't feel comfortable with it, the glint in my eye, it doesn't feel right. I think this one is a bust, a waste of time. I should go looking again, a new face in a new town, maybe I'll find the one for me?

YELLOW DAYS

Eli Ciabatoni

We are cradled in the palest yellow
The mid July sun protecting and mellow
These days were my favorite in Summer
When I got to see my favorite fellow

You wouldn't think we played war
Giggles of joy for a battle score
My general is a lion with the dandelion fur
Hummingbird wings replace gunshot's roar

We are kings with plastic gold crowns
Snatching highlighter colored paper bricks for our towns
Throwing "soldiers" to knock each other's tower
Battle scars from our own carpeted grounds

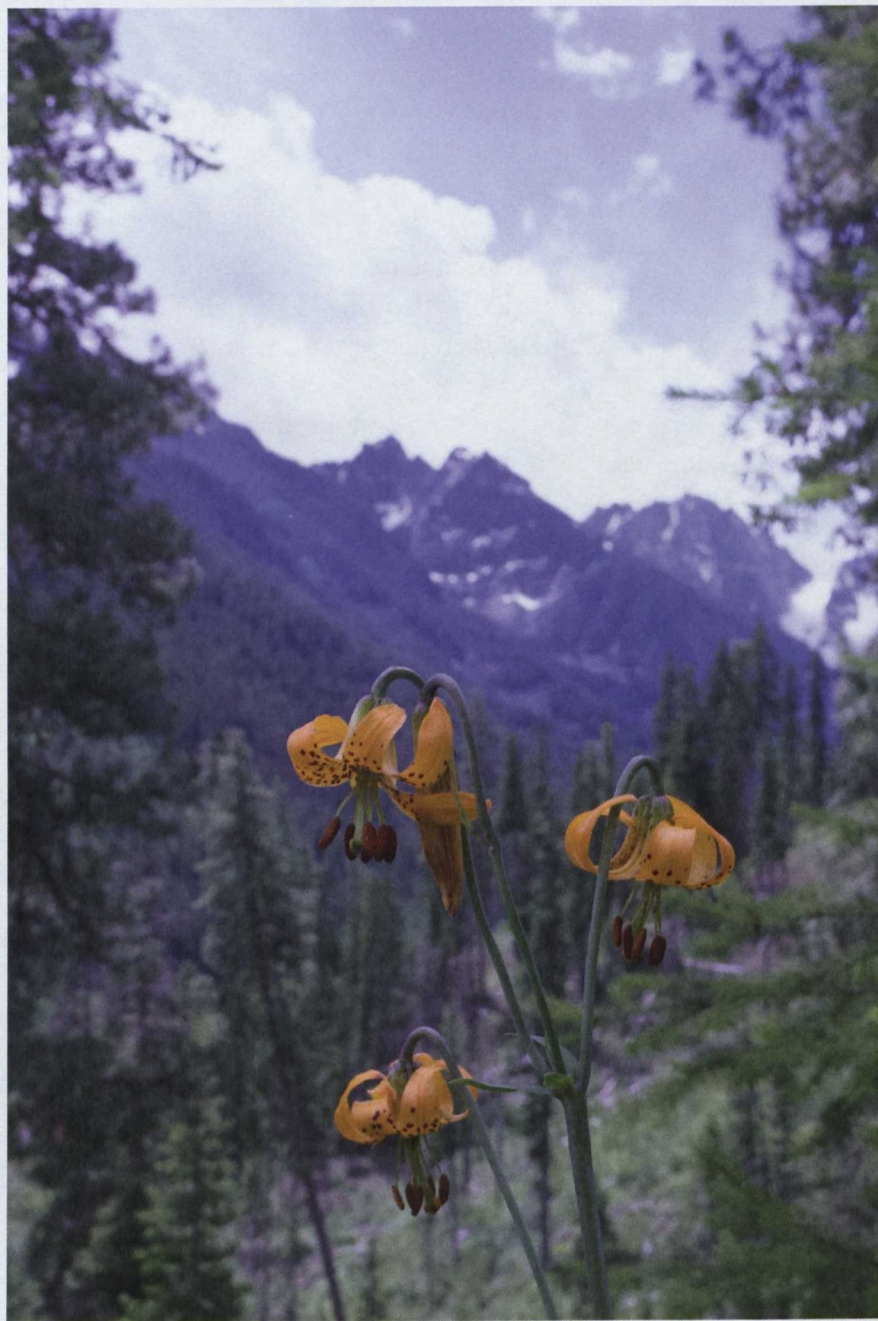
A blue door opening breaks our imaginary bubble
My time to go fading our life vs. death hubble
The "cannons" on our shoulders are high, filled with power
Mid throw, ready to launch at the command, risking trouble

I prepare for my last strike, movement rehearsed
But his arm lowers his chosen ammo first
It raises again waving his surrender, smile dopey
Then offers me the last lemon starburst

My trophy.

THE 8-MILE HIKE

Kaitlyn Barker



OPHELIA

Robin Odom

Rosemary for remembrance, Pansies for thoughts
The woods are never really still. Burbling stream, singing birds. I am not scared, not here, amongst
the flowers and moss. What will they think of me, brokenhearted martyr or mad maiden?

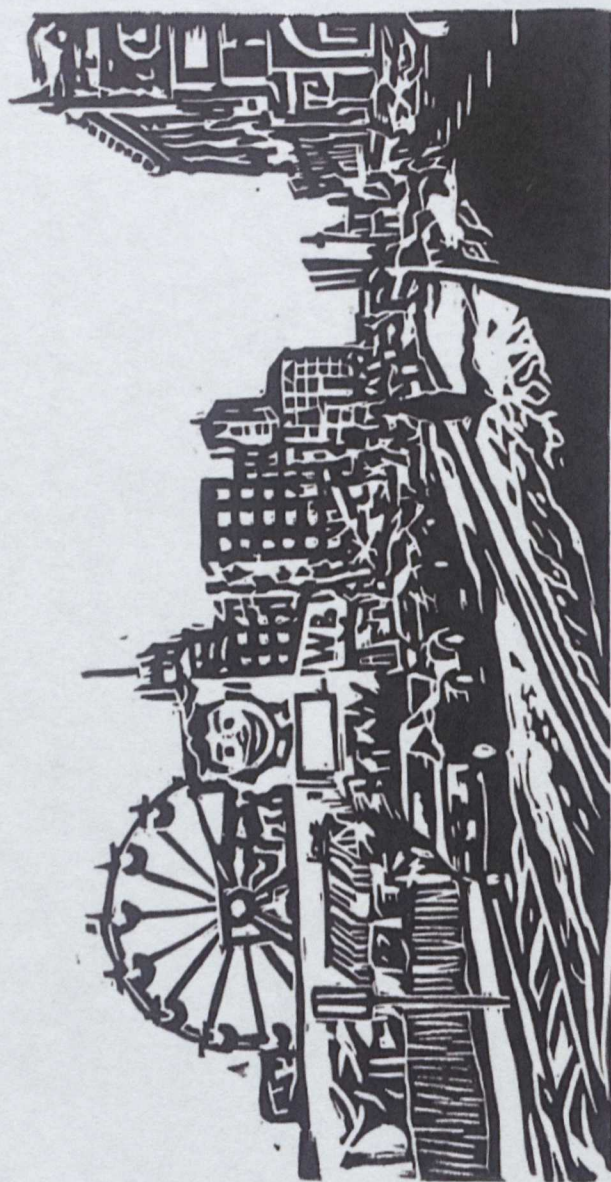
Fennel for flattery, Columbine for faithlessness
The cold water engulfs my calves, thighs, stomach. My petal bed swirls around me, the spirits within
beckoning to join them

Rue for bitterness, Daisy for innocence
It's a new world underneath. No more kings or treason, just the weeds of the water. The
animals part, bowing their heads for my royal procession.

Violets for fidelity
They found her at the base of the river, halo of curls framing her face. Perfect, peaceful, surrounded
by her messages

ASBURY PARK

Ashley Farrington



AF

'Asbury Park'

SUMMER GLOAMING IN ELLICOTT CITY

1ST PLACE POETRY

Sofia Divens

Me and my cousins
arms interlocked,
like strands of hair in a fishtail.
Firefly guts unspool out
on the concrete
like jam on hot toast.
Look at their glow the littlest of us says.

The boys ride their bikes around the block.
You forgot to wear your training bra. My aunt's
words. It waits for me on the second floor,
in my overnight bag, pretty
pink pair of lungs. Freshly unearthed
edges and corners, parts of me

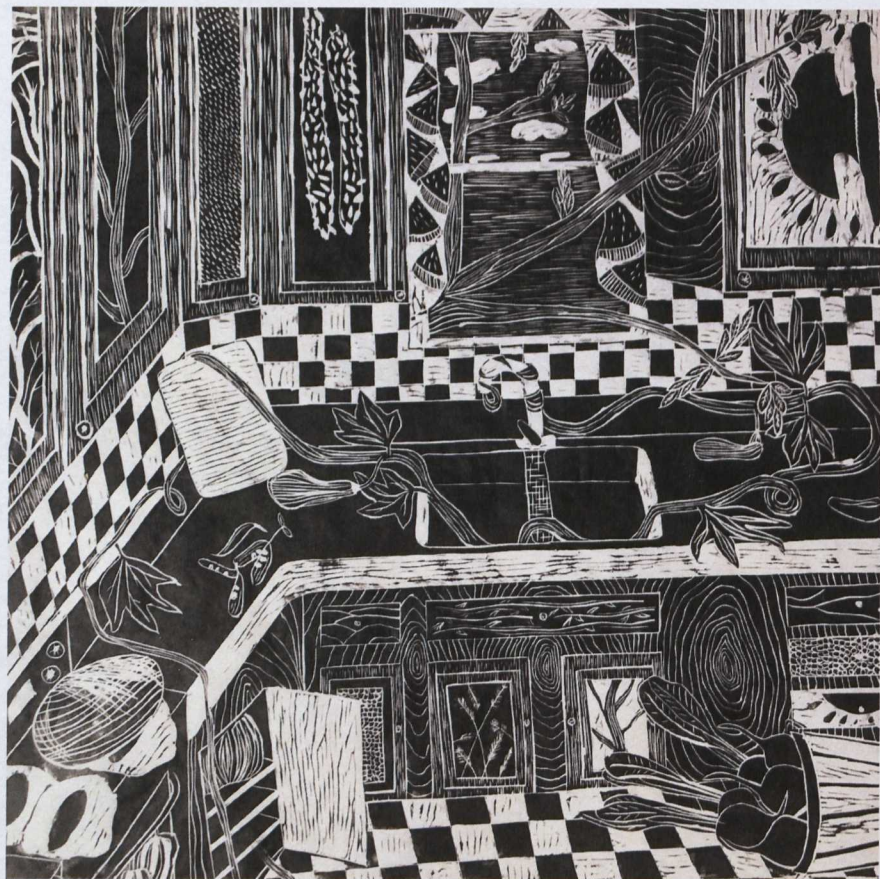
I can't yet afford to keep.
My uncle and his friend are smoking by the steps
while the sun sets,
apple-shaped rouge on the horizon.
Their stare lingers.

We play ball instead.
Tanning oil, sliding slick
against my back. My cousin's cheeks
are burned pink—grapefruit flesh

caught in a baby-tooth wiggle
smile. Her watermelon lip gloss is smeared across her
Cupid's bow, prepared to launch confused obscenities.

Defending her sister and me—best friend necklaces and
matching bubblegum toenail polish. Sweat dots along my scalp.

Our collective prayer for menstruation.



KITCHEN OVERGROWTH

Kate Cramer

REMINISCING

Caroline Willis

The kitchen smells like blueberry pancakes,
Five For Fighting on the radio,
matching pajama sets,
running through the living room of the crooked house we call

Slopey.

My height is marked on the wall in the background of my puppet show,
and I giggle into my wooden spoon microphone.

Books piled up:

*Cranberry Thanksgiving, Henry and Mudge,
High Rise Detectives, The Snowy Day,
Frog and Toad, Madeline*

— waiting to be read aloud again.

My dad ices the cake my mother blows out
the candles on,
with happy birthday wishes swirling in the air,
as the smell of autumn rushes in

we are whisked into crisp New Hampshire air.

Cows moo and donkeys haw—
chickens clucking and pigs snorting.

The fireplace is lit as mist takes over Mount Monadnock,
its fiery colors blooming like the season.

It's quiet,

except for the walkie talkie my sister carries.

Our small boots crunch the gravel beneath our feet,
and small puffs of warm air escape our lips.

The screen door on the farmhouse strains and
thwacks behind us, and

the screen turns black.

I sit with my family on the couch
and load another forgotten film tape into the
camera
(this one labeled *Family trip to Disneyland*)
as we watch our memories take us back in time,
and take us home.



MAKE YOURSELF AN ASS 3

Lily Miller

MATURE FOR MY AGE

Emily Liszewski

Warning signals are flashing in my mind.

I miss my light up sneakers..

In the back of my head, there's screaming.

My face is wet...

Are those tears?

I'm having a tantrum..

I'm too young for this.

We're too young for this.

My little fingers can't grasp the sand, it's slipping through..

He trapped me here.

Bath tubs are meant for bubbles, rubber duckies..

Somewhere out there,

The door opens.

Two grown eyes find mine.

Stranger danger.

The words come,

But they're distant.

I remember recording my voice before..

The girl I hear isn't me.

So unfamiliar..

She fakes a fight,

She wants privacy for the conversation.

I miss arguing with my brother..

I don't want privacy.

I don't want to be alone.

I'm still afraid of the dark..

The door closes.

I fall into the pits of his eyes,

I can't find the ground.

I was always afraid of heights..

He hushes me.

Begs me not to tell his parents,

Not to tell my parents.

I'm no good at secrets..

Yet she complies.

Yet again,
He gets his way.

I'm too little to play with the big kids..

Once more,
She protects him.

"If a boy is mean to you, it means he likes you"..

Seven years later,
She still holds the power.

Who's protecting me?



CATNAP
Mackenzie McCarter

FELINE FANCY

Sophia Gilbert

Witch hunters are a bitch, thought Penelope, ducking and weaving past pedestrians on the busy town street. She could feel her strength waning and knew she didn't have long before she'd have to take a break. That left her with two options: keep running, or use the last of her energy on a spell in the hopes of losing her pursuers. She risked a quick glance over her shoulder, not immediately seeing the bulky black-coated individual who had been trailing her and ducked into the nearest doorway. She found herself in a vintage-type bookstore, wooden floors creaking under her feet. The store seemed relatively empty, only one or two customers leisurely perusing the dusty shelves of the small shop. At the counter, Penelope could see a sandy-haired figure with their nose in a book of their own, clearly not too worried about potential shoplifters. *Perfect*, Penelope thought, ducking towards the back of the store. As she went, her mind raced with possibilities of how to get herself out of the mess she was in. There were minor transportation spells and temporary invisibility spells she could manage, but transfiguration magic had always been her specialty, and as such, the easiest for her to do correctly under pressure. She didn't want to accidentally botch her spell and transport herself right in front of her would-be captor.

Think, Penelope, think.

She could try to change her appearance, but she wasn't sure that would be enough to throw the witch hunter off. He would be looking for a simple trick like that. Not to mention, eventually she would have to go back out on the street. All of a sudden, she was very, very tired. She had been on the run all morning, and a week earlier, had been in the process of criss-crossing the country trying to find a quiet corner of the world where she could try to start over where no one knew her and no one threatened her life. All she wanted to do right now was curl up in one of the sunbeams falling along one of the soft chairs in the front of the store and take a nap. Like a cat.

Wait just a minute.

Penelope had thought of the perfect cover. Something so inconspicuous and in plain sight that the hunter would never think to question it. She would become, at least for the short term, a bookstore cat. The only point she had to leave up to chance would be whether the owner would take her in, but she would do her best to convince them to let her stay. As much as she could without being able to speak.

Penelope focused inwards on the transformation, picturing the type of cat she would become. Transfiguration and transformation had always been her strong suit, even more so than the minor illusion magic that would allow her to become invisible or change her outward appearance. It also was a lot easier for her to maintain, as after the transformation was complete, it wasn't one that required her focus. It did take a bit more energy to undo, but if she had the chance to rest, it wouldn't be difficult. She could always switch back if necessary for a while before returning to the store if the coast was clear.

Penelope finished the process of the transformation and her vision blacked out. Briefly, she had the sensation of falling before her eyes fluttered open to a very different point of view. Where before she had been face-to-face with the shelves full of books, she was now even with the lowest shelf. She had no current way to judge her appearance, but she had aimed for shifting into a long-haired brown tabby (a black cat would have been far too cliché). Having thus set her plan into action, cat-Penelope found a gap in a nearby bookshelf and decided to hop up and curl up for a nap.

When Penelope next opened her eyes, the store was empty with the golden light of dusk filtering into the large paned bookstore display window. She jumped down from her perch, stretched, and padded to the front of the store, ready to put the next step of her plan into action.

Finding that the blond figure at the checkout desk was just starting to close their book and rise, Penelope got into place, sitting centered in front of the entryway with her best "aren't I cute?" expression on her

face. She hoped it translated as a cat as well.

The figure rounded the counter and stopped stock-still once they saw the small brown cat in the store. Penelope offered a mew of greeting and mentally prayed the owner wasn't allergic to cats. Now that she was looking, though, she was shocked at the large hazel eyes and soft smile the figure offered at seeing her. They were much more attractive than Penelope had first noticed during her harried entry.

"Well, aren't you a cutie," the figure said, kneeling down to offer a hand to the small brown cat. "How'd you get in here?"

Penelope butted her head against the proffered hand, purring lavishly. She could think of much worse covers than becoming a spoiled bookstore cat for a spell. Especially with such an adorable owner.

The presumed bookstore owner checked her for a collar, and when finding none, simply muttered "where'd you come from, tiny thing" and continued petting her face and neck. Penelope did the best she could to look cute, rolling over onto her back with her belly exposed. The owner laughed, reaching down gently to stroke the soft fur of her belly.

"You're awfully friendly for a stray, but I'm not seeing a collar. Maybe you should stay with me until we figure out where you came from," they said at last, standing up and tilting their head as they looked down at her cat self, still stretched out along the wooden floors of the shop. Everything was going according to plan.

"I think I'll name you... 'Sasha'. You look like a 'Sasha'."

She didn't hate it. It was no "Penelope," but at least it wasn't something ridiculous like "Marshmallow" or "Fluffy." Penelope flicked the tip of her tail and purred to show her acceptance of the new name.

The owner, after checking on their phone, presumably for any lost cat posts in the local pages, went out to get things for "Sasha," setting her up before locking the bookstore and heading to their apartment upstairs.

Penelope was in.

Penelope settled into her new life rather quickly. It was nice, in a way, to have nothing to worry about for once. She passed her days as a cat sleeping in the bookstore window or one of the shelves and the night as her human form, occasionally sneaking out of the bookstore but mostly just... sitting and reading one of the seemingly infinite books the store contained. If there was a hard part to her new life, it was coexisting with her new “owner.” It wasn’t that she disliked them. Rather it was exactly the opposite—she was beginning to worry she liked them too much.

She quickly learned that their name was Theo, that the shop had been their mother’s before they took over. She learned they always drank Earl Grey tea in the mornings and that they added far too much cream and sugar. However, Penelope also watched them help a young girl find a book to gift to her friend, dutifully asking questions and offering different titles. She watched them sit and read when there weren’t many customers, horror and fantasy and romance depending on the day. They would even come in the next day with a different treat or toy for Penelope and had a jar of free dog treats for people to take. Theo was adorable, nerdy, and sweet, and human-Penelope was worrying that she was beginning to fall for them.

After weeks turned into months, Penelope could be fairly certain that she wasn’t in any danger. She knew Theo’s routine to the minute, knew when she could sneak in and out safely without notice. All the same, part of her wished she could tell Theo the truth, give them a chance to meet Penelope the human. Even if it could put her life in danger all over again.

Penelope daydreamed about finding a way to talk to them, to introduce herself and explain everything. As it turned out, fate took it out of her hands (paws?). While she had been careful not to be noticed coming and going by Theo or anyone on the street, she didn’t realize that the old lady at the antique store across the road often stayed late, cleaning and organizing her wares. She would sometimes come over to Theo’s store and chat, asking how they were doing and if they were eating enough, much like she had been Theo’s own grandmother. Normally, it was

incredibly endearing to Penelope, but today it seemed like trouble was brewing.

The antique store owner had come over to tell Theo about some antique books she had gotten in from the early to 1800s when after a while of back and forth, she interjected with “I’m sorry, deary, but you know I can’t not ask about that lovely girlfriend of yours.”

It was hard to tell whose surprise was greater—Theo’s or Penelope’s.

Theo, whose face was now bright red, cleared their throat before speaking.

“Laura, I’m not entirely sure what you mean. I’m not- ah- not seeing anybody at the moment.”

“Then who’s the young lady who leaves the shop right after you in the evenings?” Laura replied, as confused as Theo.

“Are you sure you’re seeing them come from my store and not next door?”

“It’s possible my eyes aren’t what they were, but I could have sworn—”

It was at this point that Penelope jumped up on the counter between them, knocking some books off in the process.

“Sasha, careful,” Theo said, kneeling to pick up the books off the floor. Conveniently, one of the books was an edition of Jane Austen’s *Northanger Abbey*, and Laura got to talking about her idea for a Victorian Romance book club, and the conversation about Penelope’s coming and going from the shop was forgotten. Or so she thought.

That evening, Penelope intended to stay in just in case the earlier conversation hadn’t truly been forgotten, but after several days of sitting inside, Penelope had been getting antsy. She decided to wait an extra 15 minutes past when she normally would sneak out and shifted back into a

human. She had carefully unlocked the front door and shut it behind her when two hands grabbed her shoulders and spun her around. Her first instinct was to kick out, but the person was faster. It had to be one of the hunters from before or maybe a different one. And she was stuck. Before she could even think of a spell, though, she realized the figure holding onto her had sandy blond curls slipping past the hood of their jacket.

“Theo?” she asked. Then she realized that she wasn’t currently a cat.

“Who are you? And how do you know who I am?” they asked as Penelope stopped fighting and went still.

“Okay, I swear I can explain everything, but we’re making a scene, and I don’t want either of us to be in danger if we can maybe just *go inside*,” she said, hissing the last two words for emphasis. Theo stared at her for a second or two as if trying to get a read on the strange girl sneaking out of their store before letting go of her with one hand and opening the door of the store behind them. They followed her in before she sat down in one of the chairs, and Theo leaned against one of the bookshelves.

“Are you going to explain why you were breaking into the store now? And apparently have been for weeks?”

“Ah. Yes. So I wasn’t exactly breaking in so much as breaking out.”

It wasn’t a quick or easy conversation, explaining the existence of witches even to an avid fantasy reader. It was harder to explain that the cat they had been calling Sasha was actually a powerful magic-user and they had been harboring a fugitive. Theo, to their credit, didn’t actually interrupt except to pull a bottle of whiskey out from underneath the counter and pour a glass as Penelope kept talking.

“I wish I could have said something sooner because I can tell you’re a good person, and I didn’t want to get you mixed up in my trouble. I actually think you’re quite lovely, even though I know you have no idea who I am,” Penelope finished.

After another strong pull from the glass, Theo rubbed their temples and sighed.

“You know, this is either the wildest dream I’ve ever had or one or both of us is crazy,” they said.

“I... I normally never do this, but I can prove it, if you like. Just... please don’t turn me in. You don’t even have to let me stay,” Penelope said, hands up beseechingly.

“Go on then, prove to me that this isn’t the best attempt of someone talking their way out of a robbery that any small business owner has ever seen,” Theo replied with a bit of a laugh. The laugh was cut off as soon as Penelope the human disappeared and was replaced with Sasha the cat before transforming back.

“Shit,” Theo said, eyes like saucers. “So... you really are a witch. I’m harboring a witch.”

“Please—” Penelope started, before Theo put a hand up.

“If I’m really going to be harboring a witch, I feel like it’s only fair that I get to know you. Do you want to come upstairs for some tea?”

“You’re letting me stay?” Penelope asked excitedly.

“Might as well. It was getting a bit dreary on my own.”

It turns out Theo and Penelope got on even better as humans. It wasn’t long before they got together and Penelope herself moved upstairs into their apartment. It was their one-year anniversary, and they were having dinner in the bookstore recounting their first meeting when Theo spoke up.

“You know what we should do now?”

“What?”

“...We should adopt another cat. For the bookstore.”

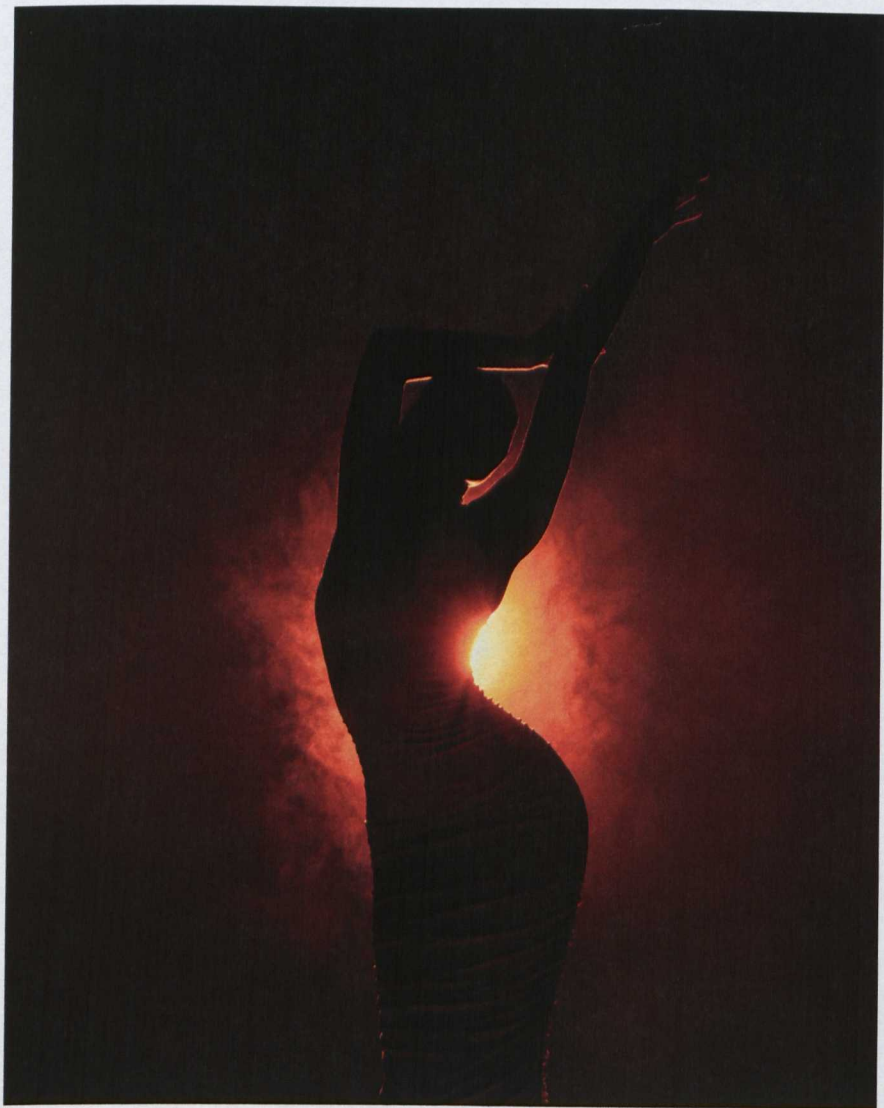
“You trying to replace me?”

“Not a chance. But I do kind of prefer you as a human.”

“Fair enough. One condition though.”

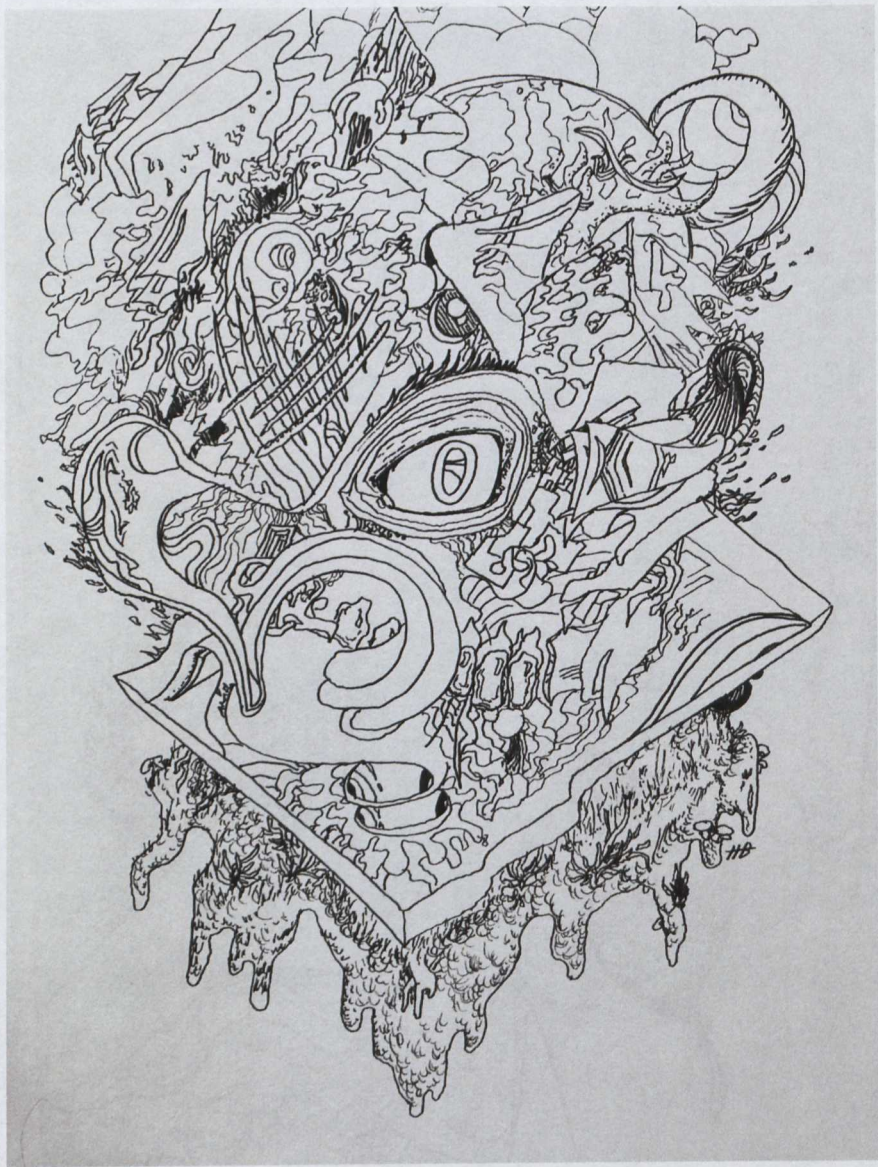
“Yes?”

“...We’re *not* naming it Sasha.”



HORIZON
Simone Smith

PSYCHOID NATURE
Harrison Booth



THE ASSIGNMENT WAS MALE AT BIRTH

Harrison Booth

*The assignment was male at birth,
and you've failed the assignment*

I

I have felt ashamed.

I have felt ashamed of being insane.

Like, the shame that if anyone else knew what was going on inside of me,
they would loathe me in the way that I loathe my
absence .

II

Here's the thing.
Is there anything to feel shame *for*?
After

all,
my answer of "yes" would be backed only
by a searing, staticky wall of
pure shame,
with nothing behind *that...*

And we've already established that
the burden of proof is on the

shame.

But nobody built this staticky wall.
Every/body did.

III

Why have I been writing,
In these past years,
As though I've been trying to get published in an academic journal?
A panel of disillusioned scholars gleaning by words even as I write
them—

How come I've been
 Acting
as though I'm

 five or so
mental years younger when I'm around my parents?
watching, watching,
What do I have to do to be Good?

It is as though

I'm straying too far to one side of an egregiously thin line.

—[But alright I see how this works. I've put the blame on myself
for making the line.
—as insinuated by the word “egregious.” (Quite an egregious
move, I'd say.)

And so I

lay blame on myself for laying blame on myself, and I so ask,
—*is there a bottom to the questions I ask—*]

[It's shame of shame. It's shame all the way down, isn't it—fucking John Green.]

.IV

My mental railways

Belong to a man.

My phones auto correct belongs to a man.

My moral compass's North Pole is occupied by a scholarly marxist

man.

And the friction sparks on the r

aileroade tracks

are the deep, flushed-pink

shæm.

When hasn't my most leering emotion
been shame?

When lately

hasn't

hasn't my most visceral emotion

yet

been on the level of

a dulled,, deadened stupor?

Like the sinking of a scarecrow

into the dullest of dusty,
oak-fringed
fields?

Hello! Would say the sun,
and I would ~~cower~~ turn away saying,
No thanks I'm trying to become a transcendentalist over here !

And then I couldn't hear it.

When haven't your tersely-punctuated semiotic systems been
the morse code tremorings
of a man's
finger ?

When ~~hasn't~~ have you ever tasted
a single breath of air
in your
mouth?

When have you listened lately to what sparrows are saying?
to what anything, all over, is saying?

saying
sayi n g
-- _ _ _ _ --

--
And as I'm writing this,
right [V] now,
I've already submitted everything in this room as my honorary graduate
dissertation, to a panel of
men,
and flunked myself
scoffingly—
another man's red ink stamped boldly, dismissively upon

all of the thoughts I've ever

\
-had. --
/

IN MEMORY

Alishia Mitchell

Your mind is one admired for generations
If I could, I'd show you how much you mean to me
But, instead my anger widens the divide

When you ask if I believe in you
I want you to know that I've practiced your eulogy in case the call comes
sooner than later
I want you to know you're not the man I knew
I want you know that some days we're nothing more than strangers

I'm sorry that you're drowning
I'm sorry the world hasn't been the kindest to you

I want you to know that I'm tired of waiting for better days
I want you to know that I know my brother is in there
I want you to know I'll drain the seas if it meant we'd be closer
I want you to know the love I have for you is stronger than the sun

My sun is aimed towards your clouds
And I know that I'll just cause a drought
Please, let me help you
I need this

I've tried to send you a collage of our memories
But my phone autocorrects it to "In Memory" and I don't want to lose
you while you're still alive

When you left, a piece of me left, too
And I'm looking for the both of you

You've blown our moments away
While I inhale yesterday
With hopes I can find what went wrong

And bring you back

I don't want this poem to be in the past-tense
But, I worry that soon, I'll have no choice

FAMILY SICKNESS

Larkin Diener

I'm afraid to be remembered
If I'm to be remembered at all
Lest I become a subconscious specter
A memory that haunts the mind
Like my mother before me

When I recall my mom, it's not her face or her presence
But the last silent moment we shared
Because I refused to turn around

A last act of defiance
For the last time we'd see each other

The hospital was quiet that night
But each aspect of it was familiar
The ammonium coated linoleum floors
Cornflower blue curtains the hue of cold lips
And the procedural rolling of carts,
an hourly procession
Had become more permanent than my own home

Though we all knew it, nobody said it
She was running out of time
And in this unspoken knowledge
We all acted the same as always
A patchwork family playing house
All afraid to break the illusion
Because we couldn't foresee the consequence

I remember thinking as I stood apart from them,
"Maybe I should feel more pity for us all"
Because we all paid in our own ways for my mom's sickness
And we were all sinking whether we understood that or not

But I couldn't muster anything
but frigid acceptance

When visiting hours were ending,
My mom's voice rose as she addressed me

There were no apologies for harsh things said
No kind words as keepsakes
Only tension as taut as ropes around all of our throats,
Confirmation that she stood by everything she'd said last time,
And a final reprimand.
One more scathing critique for the road

I was 13 when my mom died
And the tears I shed at the news felt like rebirth

People may reassure: sickness makes kind people mean
But my mother was never kind
In sickness and in health
Her words were like paper cuts that left you bleeding out
Tearing, slashing, stinging,
Until you were still and quiet and compliant

So, long after I forgot her face
And no longer heard echoes of her voice
Long after even the house had forgotten to carry her scent
Her words remained cancer in my mind

LIGHTHOUSE

Ashley Farrington



ODE TO BETHANY BEACH: A WALK FROM THE BEACH TO THE BOARDWALK IN WINTER

Emily Holhwedel

i.

the ocean wears a navy blue coat this time of year,
foam crashing against the shore, pure as snow
before melting into the sand's golden glow.
the swell of salt and sea prevails against all odds,
the reeds still rustle in the bitter winds,
and the beach rests.
the waves are every inhale and exhale
of frozen air and white sun
and sandpipers and pelicans and black-headed gulls
and one stranger,
my stagnant self,
knee-deep in the icy water,
letting the silence cleanse my soul.
a gray blur in the corner of my eye—i just barely shift to look.
a harbor seal, big black eyes glittering
like onyx stones observing mutual solitude.
breathe in.
breathe out.

ii.

sunstained boardwalks have a different light in winter
(perhaps the angle of the sun's kiss changes things.)
i grew up here, i realize, the wind freezing the water on my legs,
and suddenly i look up and see my life in front of me.
for once, i am satisfied
just looking back at my childhood instead of reliving it.
the sky is clearer, crisper,
as if the cold cleans the air
of smells of brick-oven pizza, deep-fried funnel cake, fries and vinegar,

sweat and smoke,
sounds of screaming gulls and children,
(so similar!)

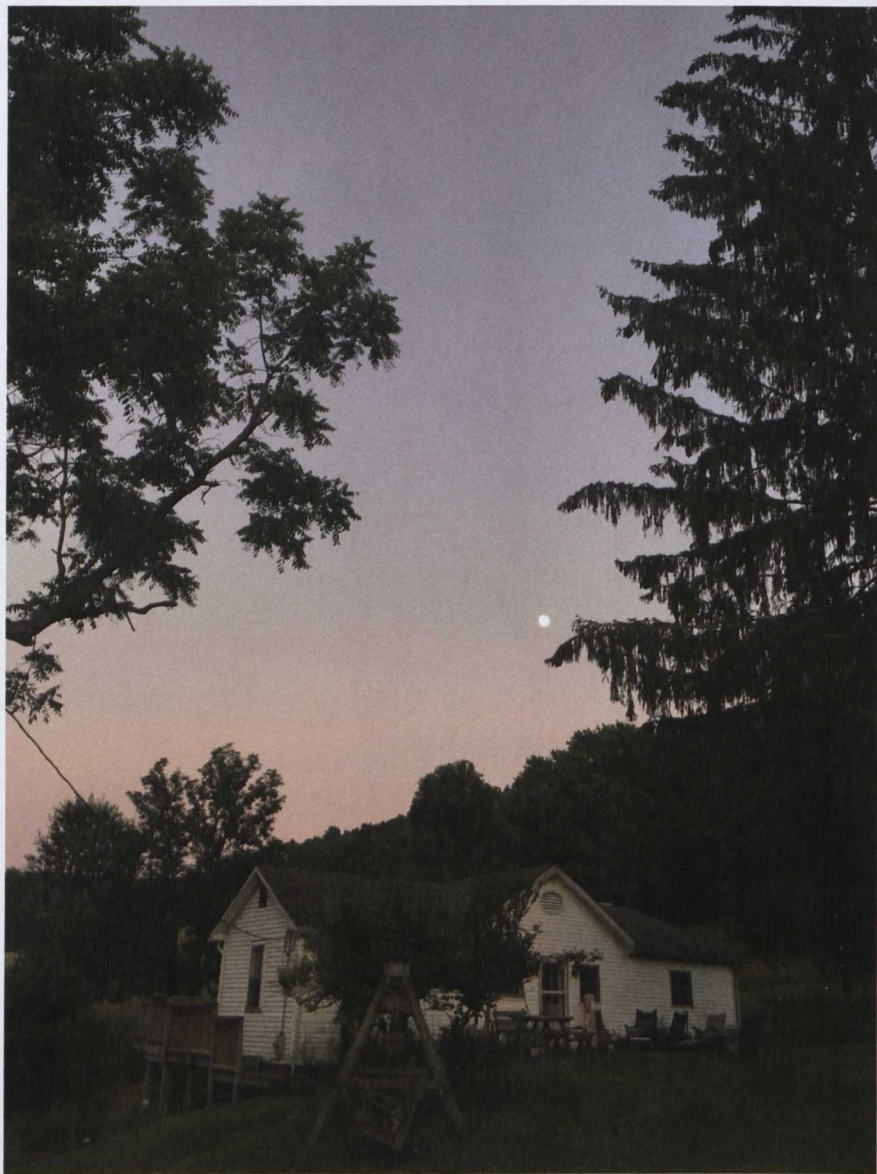
and overlapping music from every open store door, now sealed shut,
lightless, merely reflecting me amongst warped views
of colorful fabric
locked away for warmer days.

the cold cleans my lungs, too, of every word i've ever said.
it is another world.
a still one. a bright one. a lonely one.
even hovering on the street, looking back,
the winter shuts off
everything
except the waves.



SEASONS

Kate Cramer



THE VACATION HOUSE

Emily McGraw

LILACS IN JUNE

3RD PLACE PROSE

Victoria Walker

Entry One: Her Favorite Color

Date: June 11th

Solitude captures him the most here, resting against the wide oak tree at the peak of the meadow's hill. Reese allows the lingering sensation of emptiness to grow to consume him whole. He envies the grand tree offering him comfort; he's insulted at its fullness, its ever-growing life that sprouts from its arms and out to the world. He could only wish to be as open, as loving, to the Earth like this tree is. He could be, if only it didn't appear so gray under every layer in his eyes.

A peculiar sensation washes over him as if he's been here, under this tree, lost in his mind, before.

A presence settles beside him silently, pulling him out yet pushing him further into the sense of déjà vu. Reese glances to his left, not entirely prepared for the glimmering irises of a young woman. Immediately, he's dragged into the mesmerizing shape of her eyes and the little sparks of life jumping at him. And it's when he realizes who she is, that he does remember why he's here.

Mavis, you're here.

He doesn't speak to her, allowing his eyes to communicate for him. When Reese comes back from in between a daydream and reality, color springs into his vision. Green coats it the most, spilling from the soil underneath miles of land. Yellow follows with dotted orange, and it all rests under a clear sky of blue.

A burst of laughter carries him to his right, and nostalgia tugs at his heart. Two bodies swaying with the wind, dancing without a care. It's him and her, Reese and Mavis. It reminds him of a thing, something that holds weight over him, the same thing that brought about his emptiness.

How could he forget? The color purple.

SEVERANCE OF THE MIND; DETACHMENT OF TIME

Brenay Spencer

Growing up felt violent. Unlike a flower softly bouncing open but as if a new flower is growing straight through the stem of the one I used to be. Bursting and benevolent. I often wonder if my green self would like who I am now. I hated being green, I hated when she called me green, especially since it was her fault. I taught myself the color spectrum since she wasn't there to paint me a color wheel. Poor flower. I wish someone hadn't peeled back the petals for me, I wish I didn't rip them off either. I was told I'm always supposed to be a beautiful fresh flower. But all I am now is a pistil. I love love, but love doesn't me. Where is the blame? I miss when it was innocent, now it's intoxicating and I am never full, never drunk enough on the blindness. My heart is muddled and I always need more. Who is to blame for that? One side of my face is angry, and the other is soft. I wonder which side my mother is.

Sometimes I hear her calling my name in the sharp winds that pass the ear during a storm. Or in the screams silence creates in an empty room. I wonder if her green self likes who she is now. I wonder if we are the same shade of green inside. Why can't I see rainbows on my eyelashes as the sun catches them anymore? Is it because I no longer have childishly fresh eyes? I wanted to be a bird, not a flower, but my feathers were in the water too soon. I am not a bird, and I am not a real flower anymore. Poor flightless flower. So who can I blame for my disintegration?

I let my thoughts swirl as I stare blankly at my computer screen. The quiet steadily fading away. A single sentence to start my English essay, only nine hundred more words to go. I close my eyes and let my mind drift once more. Quiet creeps back in. Thoughts going off like a cannon, I let them fire freely. Flashes of a failing grade start to overtake. I guess it's time I stopped putting off my work. My therapist says I shouldn't let my contemplation consume me anyway. I pull myself out of the cavern that is my mind and finally open my eyes. I look down to my feet only for

my eyes to be met with a pair of shoes I haven't seen since middle school. Black high-top Converse. Chatter slowly envelopes me as I realize I'm in a room with other people. I quickly glance around, seeing music notes all over the walls, an old wooden piano in the corner and a violin in my hands. I was sitting in the front row; I know what that means. First violin. I played for eight years before I just let it go as I did most things. Who is to blame for that? But why am I here now? Why am I green again? A long bell chimed signaling the end of the school day and my peers flooded out of the room.

I sat for a moment stricken with bewilderment. Rage simmered under my skin, as my mind raced. Piercing silence rattled my furrowed brain. Home. I have to go home and see if this is real. If I'm here that means she is too; my mother. I rode the bus home like I used to, and when I arrived it was desolate as always. The silence was deafening. My anger turned to sadness. Sadness up and down my veins for my green self. That soon turned into courage; will. I finally have it in me to tell her off. Tell her it's her fault I'm back here. I know it's because of her I've been dragged back here...somehow. I vow to speak my mind even if my voice shakes. Something I couldn't ever do. I heard the front door close, the smell of fresh linens mixed with sweet vanilla filled the room. Her perfume. My eyes were glazed and raging anew. I stomped over to her ready to let my words consume the space between us. She turned to me and stared, waiting for me to speak.

But I couldn't, my body felt so heavy I could fall through the earth. I truly am my green self again. I settled on a simple greeting and small talk, to which I found myself replying through gritted teeth. I let the space between us become even more vast by exiling myself to my room. It's just as I remembered it. Brimming with books and video games. My mother and I spoke silent conversations. My throat is burning from internally screaming all the things I wish I could say. I climb into my twin sized bed and let my body sink. Am I stuck here? Why am I here? My eyes closed as my thoughts pile up. I open them again to see the lonely sentence. As I read the sentence over and over again, "You can't hold the tides with a broom, only when you flow with them do you understand how they crash." Now my vision is clear.

I don't know how long it's been since I saw my past. It must have been real; I felt the cold breeze on my face from the open bus window. I could feel the heat run through my body as anger coursed through me because I didn't speak up. As I lie in bed pondering what had happened, I let my eyes mesh everything around me. Until my surroundings were a mush of hues. I try to force my eyes to focus. Focus. Focus. Focus. I tried to hone in on this brown amorphous shape in front of me. As my vision begins to clear up, I realize it's my mother.

Once again, I am green. I caught just every other word as my hearing faded in from a loud ringing sound. She was yelling at me because I dried my hands with her "good towels" that were hanging in the bathroom. My chest tangled and throat clotted. Thoughts of retaliation brimming in my mind like surface tension. I could tell this was about more than just expensive towels. Her eyes kept secrets. Her tone sharp and painful. The dam in me had burst. Venomous words flowed out of my mouth as if someone had turned on a spigot. I finally said everything I have ever wanted to say to her. Give her back the ache she gave me. As I liberated my colorful self, I could see a flash of her green self. Scared and scorned. In that moment I understood. She is just like me. I am her. She made me of her, she unwillingly forced her green self upon me. She gave me her green life. We are the same shade of green.

This revelation made my skin hurt. My heart shattered all over again, just for her. I had false vision. Enlightened. I smiled an empty poisonous smile, as I could still feel the residue of my words falling from my lips. She looked back at me stunned; my tirade seemingly set her off even more. I apologized for using the towels and let her finish her beratement. I have been this disasterly hue this entire time. We both are. I sullenly slink into my old room and collapse to the floor. Eyes pouring like torrential rain. My head became dizzy as my vision started to drift again. Focus. Focus. Focus. I stare at a blue figure until my sight cleared.

"And how has your dissociative episodes been, have you been having any at all?"

What? Why am I in therapy right now?

“Has our talks of your strenuous past and coping strategies been helpful?”

Now I understand. It truly wasn't real, it was what I wish I could do. I was trying to heal the rot from the inside out. Illusions are seen with the heart, not the eyes. Now both have truly been cleared. Now I understand. Finally, green no more.

SINISTER

3RD PLACE POETRY

Eli Ciabatoni

Why is Sappho and Celia at sunset scary?
What's so sinister about it?
The sickening kisses in sunlight?
The shameful selfish celebration?
The symbolic shearing of one's shell?
Well I'll sin with sirens and sing shanties
Of seducting saccharine sloppy, SEX
I'll slack on sun kissed sand
I'll sneak away with sultry, sensual, salivating worthy somebodies
I'll slow dance with silly, submissive, slutty men.
I'll suck face with sapphics as my heart sinks into their safe, "salacious"
trap
since Sinister is sailors sweetly smooching
And "swingers" saying sugary psalms
Call it saddening, sadistic, satanic, with your
Saber toothed, sardonic, smile, so shyly so slyly

Sinister.

8008

Ashley Farrington



MAKE YOURSELF AN ASS 4

Lily Miller



DUCK!

Collin Beattie



THE LIFE I WANT BUT CANNOT HAVE

Allie Scharnberger

I want to be sweet
The kind of person who leads with love
And concludes with kindness
All smiles and compliments and warmth
But I was soured
When my saccharine niceties
Meant more to him than my “no”

I want to be gentle
Like a ballerina
Flitting and floating across floors
As if they were feather-light
But I was toughened
By the pounding of my little feet on tiled floors
Rushing to hide under desks and in cubbies
Behind tiny jackets and my Blue’s Clues backpack
From the ghost of a man with a gun

I want to be warm
The kind that exudes comfort
Like a cozy fireplace
In the dead of winter
But I was frozen
By terror
By planes crashing and buildings collapsing
That they say to never forget
But that I can’t remember

I want to be soft
Like a cloud
The white fluffy kind
That you could fall right through

But I was hardened
By Iraq and Afghanistan and Yemen and Pakistan and Libya and
Uganda
And Syria

And Niger

And Ukraine

And the war, conflict, and death that filled my screens every day

I want to be safe
And live beneath a blanket of benevolent protection
From everything that could harm me
And from all the knowledge of what is wrong with the world
But I was threatened
By the hail of rubber bullets that rained down
And the clouds of tear gas that rolled in
Over crowds of peaceful protesters
Covering me in the reminder
That I have no power

I want to be social
Like a butterfly
Pollinating every flower in the room
With her charm and cheer
But I was isolated
By something no one understood
That kept us from school, from work, from each other
Something that irrevocably damaged human connection
Something that I still don't understand

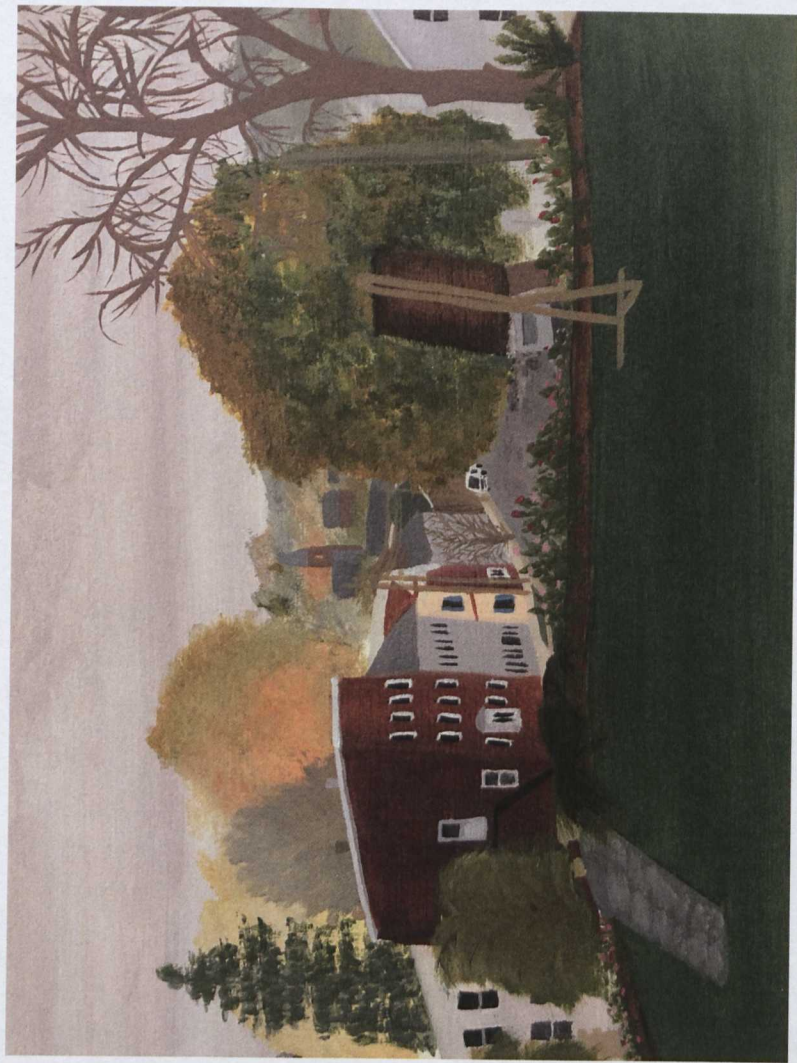
Who am I without the world?
The answer I will never know
For I am me and she is she
And I will work my whole life to change her
Change her into allowing me to be sweet, gentle, warm, soft, safe, and
social

Into allowing anyone to be sweet, gentle, warm, soft, safe, and social
While all along hiding my fear close to my chest
My fear that my sourness, toughness, coldness, hardness, instability,
and isolation
Are not, in fact, her fault at all

THE CITY OF WESTMINSTER

3RD PLACE ART

Kaitlyn Barker



SWINGS

Emily McGraw

I'm doing my best to smile. It's midday, and clouds cling together to form an abyss of grey. I forced you to take me to the park, the one hidden on the back road by the highway. Where people only come for little league games or drug deals. I wanted to go on the swings.

Your mom has been dead for a month. I'm trying to be fun and lighten any semblance of a mood. Trying to pretend that things are okay. Like we could go back to a time in the past when the swings would call our name—ignore that our first year of adulthood has been plagued by her death. Pretend that we aren't drowning in the sky's tears.

And you placate me. Joining in my fake smile.

So, I lead the way. To the annoyingly bright set of swings that hesitate in the soft breeze, that stand proudly amongst wood chips. The cusp of flying, calling for our attention. I'm quick to get on, while you linger behind.

Before I can even persuade you to join me, a little girl, no older than five, comes running up to us. She doesn't say anything, just stares with wide eyes. Eyes of a child that has a place on the swing. Not whatever false sense I have, trying to grasp at something that is long gone.

It's awkward, none of us know how to act. I want to swing, to admit that this scene is really a selfish endeavor. That I want to cling onto what's left of being a child. All under the pretense that it would make you feel better. I've gotten only a spoonful of what it's like being an adult—and I fucking hate it.

You drag me away. Away from whatever façade I was trying to create for us, for me. I want to cry. I was annoyed, mad, and embarrassed. I wasn't like you—I can't accept it all.

But the swings are no longer ours, no matter how many tantrums I throw.

I DON'T THINK HE KNOWS

Grace Maglietta

I first met you cotton-mouthed and standing
on a street corner,

begging for correction the way you hung
around a lamppost,

waiting for trouble to find you
and knowing it wouldn't be long before it did.

The city-slicked boys told you
they weren't looking for a fight,
but you always were—

amber bottles shell-shock shattered
on the frying pan pavement,
brown leather armor heavy on your
hand-me-down shoulders,

towheaded, half-abandoned screw-up of a son,
how you stood,
brow furrowed,
hip cocked like the

heater in your pocket,
twice,
three times removed,
shoved down throats and busting

open

brains

in smoke-clouded playground dreams
of old friends drowning,

bloodstained butterfly
knife in the side of an

enemy, wiped clean on soiled grass,

and in the scarlet haze
you watched them run,

run

through martyristic flames
and down train tracked
escape routes, searching
for solace in sunset
stained glass

opportunities,
few and far on this side of town,
and through it all you were
fast
and hard
and never scared—

but when I last saw you, it was
crawling,
heat blind rage,
grief clawing you
open, entrails
splattered on Poseidon's drive,
and you cried,

choking up the feelings you could never beat
down with black-greased violence.

And I should've known,
since that first golden summer,
that you'd go out the way
you barreled in:
like the bullet through your own chest.

CAT PEERING FROM THE THICKET

Harrison Booth



DYING WIND

Robert A. Borst

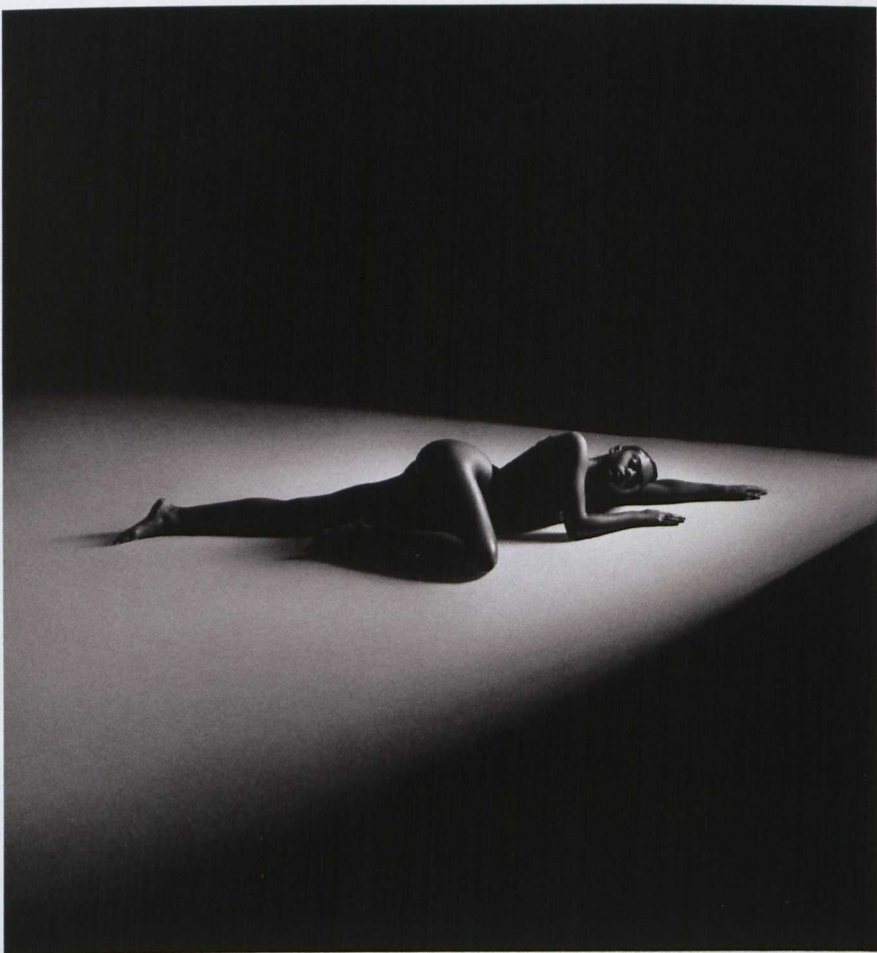
I feel the autumn wind brush across my face, slow and soothing. An end to what I was, and it was comforting, like a warm meal on a cold day. Everything turned dull in my view, devoid of color, devoid of life.

I couldn't remember what had happened before this moment. I stare at the dense green sea that is above me, fluttering leaves falling slowly, one by one from the flowing foliage although they lacked their vibrancy. I shut my eyes briefly, losing track of time and space around me before opening them to see my surroundings had not changed much at all, and that no one had come to find me.

I could feel the winds change when the man laying next to me passed, his bloody sputtering and the sounds of air finally leaving the holes in him. I turn my head, weak and sluggish, to see that his chest no longer rose. Leaves were falling to cover him, camouflaging him in the shrubbery and strangling weeds where he lay. Slowly more and more, Mother Nature was sweeping her windy hands to drape him in a blanket of her own making, bringing a peaceful silence and a natural grave. Would she grant me the same love?

I turn my head back, and it falls to the opposite side with a rough movement. I see another man dashed on the rocks next to me, in pieces. How many? Who was he? I cannot see over the red stained rocks of which he fell upon. The winds whipped harsher now, his torn clothing fluttered in her breath. He seemed peaceful, the agony had long passed for him. What would I be brought by Mother?

I felt her tears start to fall to meet the earth, distant patterns of droplets across the grass and stone. Was she weeping for me? I turn my head back to the sky and wonder as to my own fate, would the winds soon change for me?



ECLIPSE
1ST PLACE ART
Simone Smith

ODE TO ICARUS

Max Sweeney

Driving alone with the windows down
is the closest thing that I can get to flying these days,
And it's enough for me—I think,
I still get the wind in my hair,
the feeling of freedom;

I feel a lot like Icarus,
The boy who flew too close to the sun,
The father-son duo that was destined to fail,
but so beautifully,
so poetically that it just seemed like it was destiny;

Icarus knew the sun was dangerous,
But he flew towards it anyways,
He just wanted a taste of warmth and light
after being stuck in a cage for so long,
He had no regard for his own safety,
He knew this taste of freedom could bring him to his demise,
But he didn't care;

I see myself in Icarus' tale,
I am the wax on Icarus' wings,
Melting off like sweet honey dripping from the hive,
I am the decision to see the sun,
Just one last taste of warmth and light,
Before I am consumed in the depths below;

Icarus' fall from grace to the ocean was a beautiful one,
The wax burned his skin,
Branding him with a permanent reminiscence of his mistakes,
But at least he felt something;

But then, I see the sun,
And then I am the father,

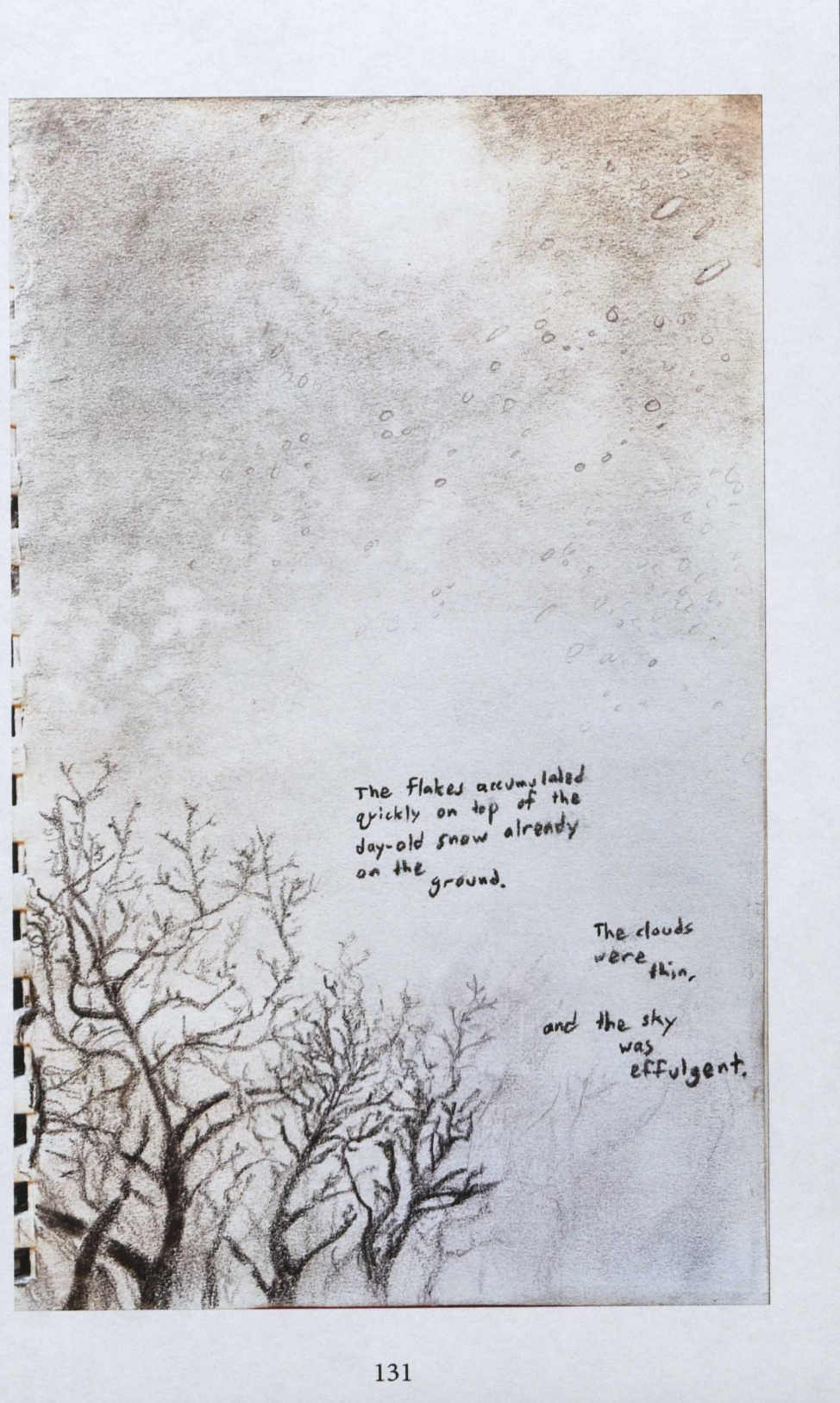
Begging Icarus to fly lower,
To be more careful,
I am the crafted wings,
Delicate and fragile and oh so easy to dissipate into nothing;

There are 2 ways this story could've ended,
Icarus could've been saved if not for his own willingness to put himself
last,
So, I'd like to think I am going to fly lower;

I'll drive my car,
Blast my music with the windows down,
Fly a little further,
Because I refuse to fly too close to the sun.

SNOW SONG
Harrison Booth

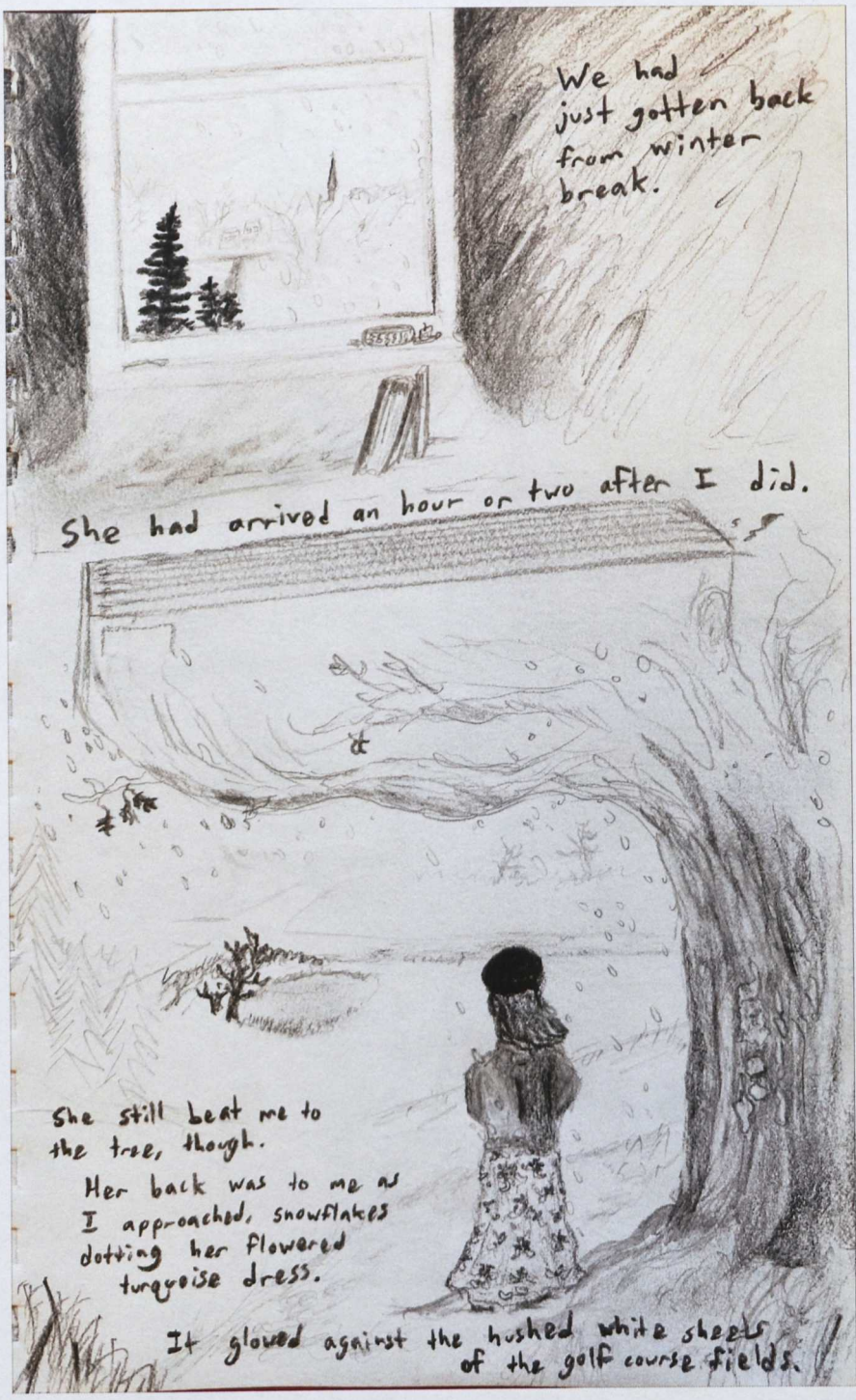




The flakes accumulated
quickly on top of the
day-old snow already
on the
ground.

The clouds
were thin,
and the sky
was
effulgent.





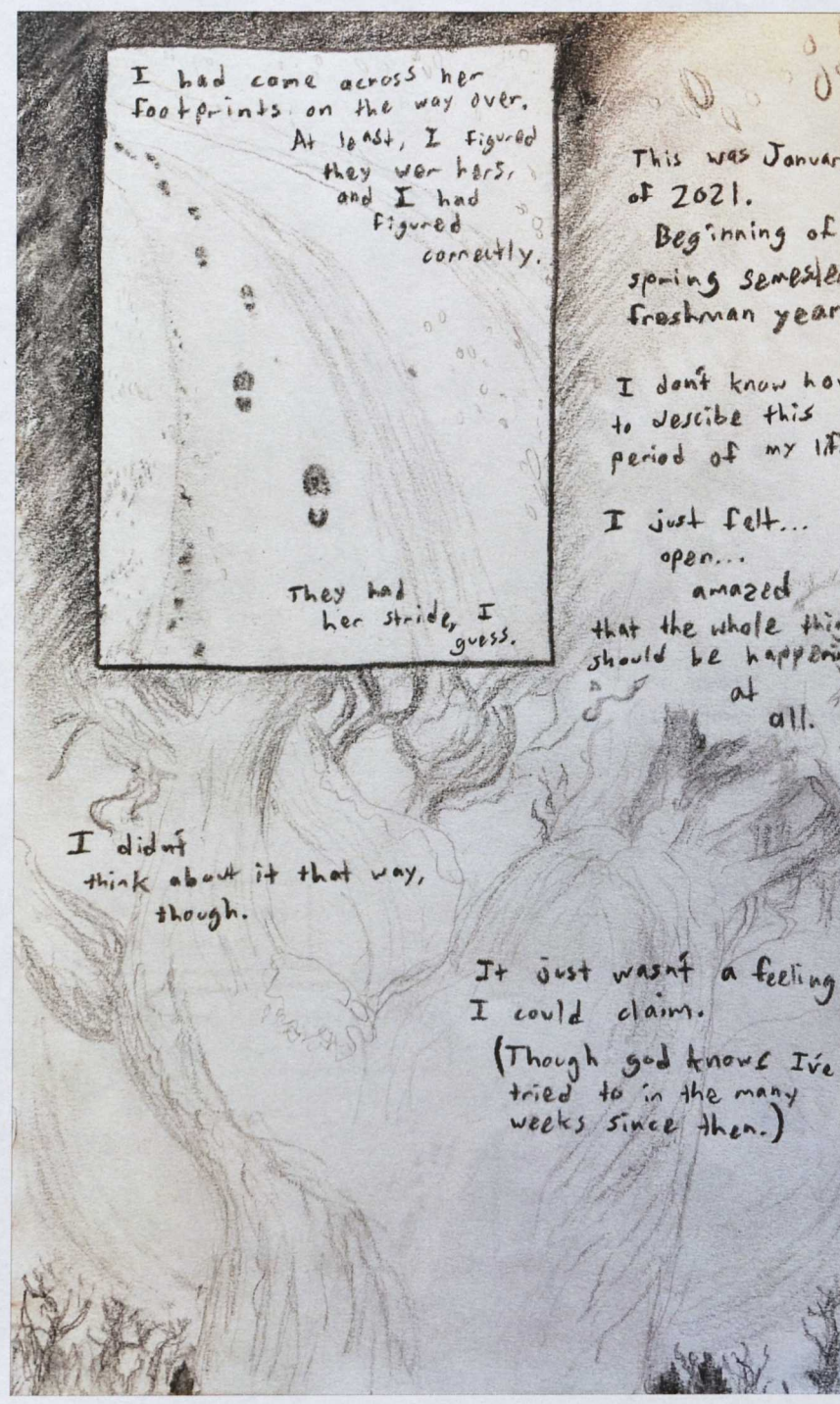
We had
just gotten back
from winter
break.

She had arrived an hour or two after I did.

She still beat me to
the tree, though.

Her back was to me as
I approached, snowflakes
dotting her flowered
turquoise dress.

It glowed against the hushed white sheets
of the golf course fields.



I had come across her
footprints on the way over.

At least, I figured
they were hers,
and I had
figured
correctly.

They had
her stride, I
guess.

This was January
of 2021.

Beginning of
spring semester,
freshman year.

I don't know how
to describe this
period of my life.

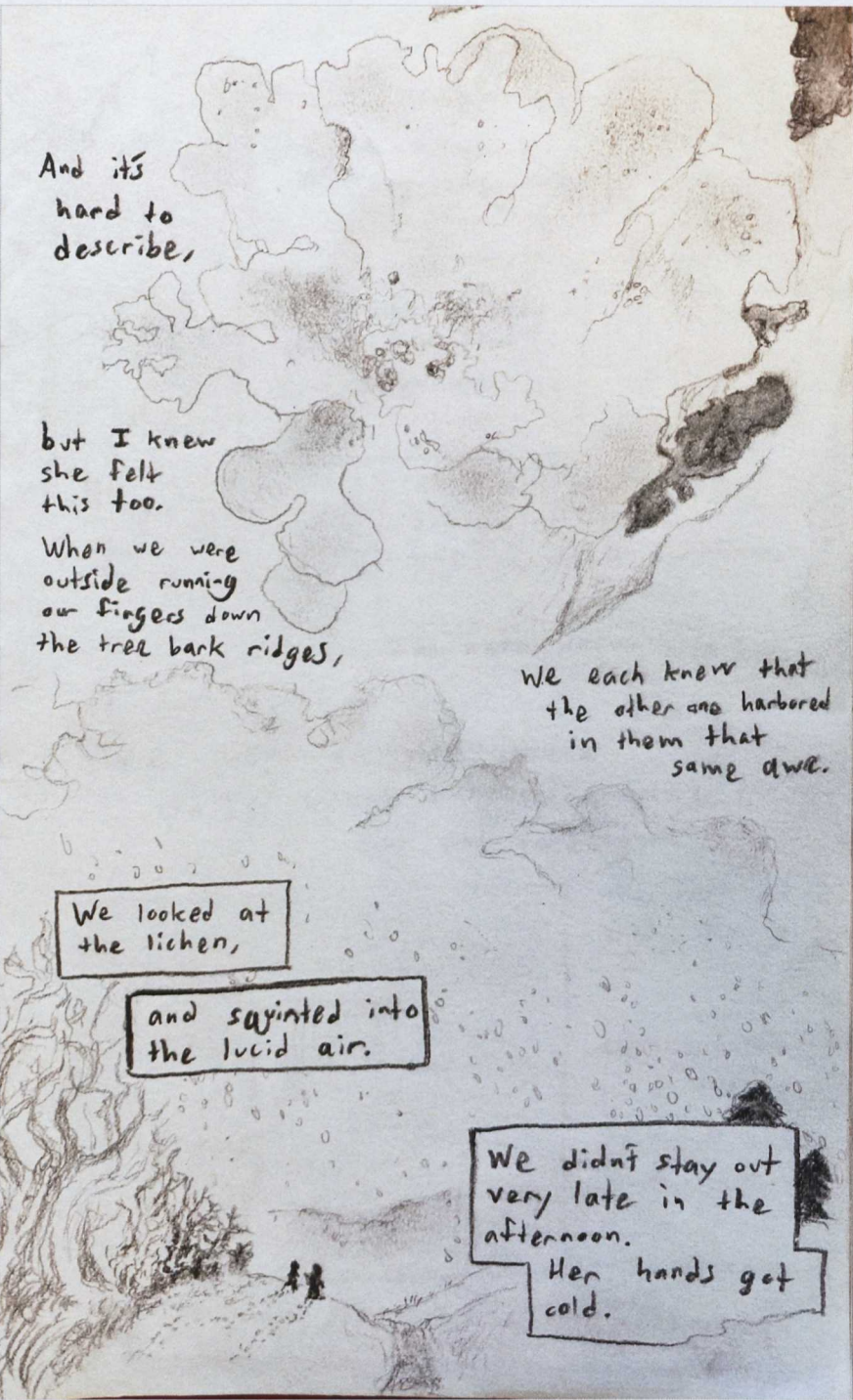
I just felt...
open...

amazed
that the whole thing
should be happening
at
all.

I didn't
think about it that way,
though.

It just wasn't a feeling
I could claim.

(Though god knows I've
tried to in the many
weeks since then.)



And it's
hard to
describe,

but I knew
she felt
this too.

When we were
outside running
our fingers down
the tree bark ridges,

We each knew that
the other one harbored
in them that
same awe.

We looked at
the lichen,

and sayinted into
the lucid air.

We didn't stay out
very late in the
afternoon.

Her hands got
cold.

I think about
this day sometimes.

I wrote a song
about it a few
days after our
walk.

It doesn't have a title,
but I call it "Snow
Song." I sing it sometimes,
quietly.

I've never shown it to her.

We went on many more
walks, spent many more hours talking—
and not talking—

the rest of
that spring.

She transferred
to a college in
Vermont the
next fall.

The snow stopped late that afternoon.

HB

ODE TO A COLLEGE ROOMMATE

Grace Maglietta

It is strange, the way
she's come to know me
through fractured retrospectives
spilled and sparkling in the young-drunk
haze of twin beds flush
and grimy,
barred fluorescence.

How we,
two women, lived and livid,
wrapped arms and souls
on feathered floors
and under rattling bathroom pipes,
so swiftly swapping stories by the season,
all summer in a day—
all winter in an evening.

And I cannot tell
if our life lines will stay
intertwined for much longer than
these dorm-bound days,
but I am glad for now
that even through the wordless dinners,
she hears me,
and I know she understands

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors of Contrast 2023 would like to give a special thanks to:

Dr. Kate Dobson for trusting us not to fuck up a beloved part of McDaniel culture.

The Ed Board for reading five million pages of submissions and fighting with us about them.

Professor Katy Stanton for cultivating and deepening our love of the written word.

Professor Chloe Irla for giving us the design skills to assemble this issue.

Kathy Edmondson for all her help securing rooms and issuing prize money.

Professor Suzanne Nida for bringing us together through ghost fiction.

Allie Scharnberger, Isabela Hernandez, Stephani Portillo, and Chelsea Teye for tolerating the Sticky Note Walls.

Grace's cat, Jamie, for posing so wonderfully for the cover art.

Domino's Pizza for fueling this year's Ed Board meetings.

Smash Mouth for their album, *Astro Lounge*, the unofficial soundtrack to this year's cover-design sessions.

The late, great Shirley Jackson for being an eternal literary inspiration to us both.

We thank you all with ghoulish delight.

Oh, yeah, and Dr. Kachur for giving us the phrase "ghoulish delight."

