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Masthead

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To the Reader

As I am writing this under lockdown from COVID-19, a time that none of us will forget, art in all its forms has kept me sane. We are mere months into 2020, and when the world is on the verge of crashing and burning, we turn to our and others' creativity to find solace and to bring about positive change in the ways we know how.

During my time at the University of Georgia, I have doubted myself and my choices countless times, but I never felt that way towards *Stillpoint*. I had complete faith in my editors and staff, and I loved reading every piece that came my way the past four years. This year, we received a record number of submissions from people from all walks of life, and it was obvious that each and every one was crafted with care.

I am immensely proud of what we have achieved and how far we have come since I first joined *Stillpoint*, not just as writers and artists but as a passionate, supportive community. The things we create with our hands and minds matter more than anything else. It is an honor to present the fifty-first volume of *Stillpoint Literary Magazine*.

Enjoy and be inspired.



Sherry Luo
Editor-in-Chief

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legacy

by Menna Abo-Elhamd

Paperbacks for a dollar
Hardcover for two
Records for fifty cents

My fingers glide upon backs of books
A glance, a brush
I move to the next book

This is all the time I dedicate to you

This is all the time that will be dedicated to me

years from now

a glance, a brush

The Tree

by Andrew Elliot

I drove into the fog
Not knowing what I'd see,
Some cabalistic sight unknown,
Instead it was a tree.
Atop a little knoll of green—
Enshrouded all in white—
It was as if a mighty prow
Was cutting through the Bite;
Or closer yet, like a finger,
Admonishing mere men
That there are things outside our reach
And well beyond our ken.
Its branches were bereft of leaves
Its limbs were smooth and clean,
And pallid as the plenilune
The bole was shimmering!
The murmuring wind made me think
Of countless souls of old,
That round its bole had gathered near
And whispered prayers cold
To idols or to men— methought—
Enrobed them all in blood,
In efforts to appease or sway
The Beings of the Flood.
And so my musings brought me back
Unto that lonesome tree—
To ponder once again the thought
This wasn't just a Tree.

A calf's skin on these recreant limbs

by Zachary Anderson

if I could tell you about my death / I would but I slept through it
—Frank Stanford

Tone and overtone and a ring in the maiden ear
if you listen too hard for a voice
your own body might produce it
repetition of the voice produces bodies too

sometimes I get this feeling I fell
asleep driving and died without noticing
only to persist in a borderless country dream

sometimes the dog tips his head
straight back and closes his eyes
in the pantomime of a howl
like he's sensing a stray moon

I was working a black walnut between my palm
and fingers, it was a gesture of capitulation
it was a rusted-out caput mortuum
I was prostrate in the long green carpet
listening to the pain in my sternum

they were putting a repeater on the water tower
I dropped into a hollow and lost the signal
but the hollow was broadcasting its own kind of message

rain lifted the June beetles from their long trance
and they bedded down in the Rose of Sharon
flower cone amplifying their language of static

I gave some blood up to the beetle king
in a wasteful exchange, now I'm crushing
benadryl and waiting for the jet engines
the dream dying from one narcosis into another

attempting to scry a poet's death in the bug-scatter
scoping possible futures with a semiotic rifle
finding only a craven with a gimlet eye, a calf's skin
a calf's skin and a wandering needle that left
a cracked and sparking wishbone reposing on the poem-hand

Jester to king

by Janis Yoon

Eyes come closed, see sounds, in grayscale,
odors, free of time, stained in any of the black sludge of months past:
pain and purple licks, guitar hits

figure fading, waving in a melt,
as sulfur stings Eyes and Ears with sudden disapproval, louder and louder,
more pungent in gross confessions, violent outpourings of (truth) and love—

the color of holy water anointing him as king,
clear cryptic eye sends sensation,
same figure fading, waving in a melt,
as nothing stings Mine

song of his lows and highs caress each brink
between Brain and Skull, tapping solemn reminders:
burnt clippings, caustic bark in Ear, stern calling grasp of unchanged on change

singing along, regicide smells of nothing, taste of salt,
in memoriam of your stiff royal Highness

Leo Season

by Claire Torak

My horoscope told me that I'm bad at love—YOU'RE TOO SELFISH THIS MONTH, TRY AGAIN IN SEPTEMBER. I sleep alone because I like my bed more without somebody in it. I don't share my secrets because no one is worthy of hearing them. My horoscope told me to listen to jazz today, so I did. Saxophones screamed at me until I was dizzy. I don't like it when I can't hear myself think. My horoscope laughed at me and said I was a narcissist. A daffodil bloomed in my reflection. A celestial sign. I forgot to notice; I was too busy looking in the mirror. My horoscope told me to stick my head in the oven if I wanted to be like Sylvia Plath when I grew up. I tried but it got too lonely in there. What's the point of martyrdom if there's no audience? I want my death to be a performance. I took a cold shower instead. It turns out that I am afraid of fire despite being born from it.

Twin Flames

by Sydney Goins

Thanks for the fantasy;
you left me
at the bottom
of a hill.
There,
an old Christian woman
told me:
"You only have one life,"
but
I have already
faced death
so many times.
Who's to say
I'm something else
inside?

Leaving

by Anjali Sindhuvalli

Duly faint-crossed scents, whispers of
Shadow-long footsteps
Minutes shattered, time drenched in wet-clay fragments.
Spinning, pointing, clutching soft-molded fingers (now)
Locks of hair, threadbare against white crumpled sheets
Sheets still-warm and imprinted upon by human touch
Rays of sunlight clawing angrily, tearing at a body's cold absence;
Its heat-vapor rising until there is nothing left
but
A mere milk-white *ghost*,
A tempting image shivering in hollow passing.

And (then)
Tendrils of sunlight joining with yellow choirs of crisp voices
Hands and bodies alike springing heat between tossed-white sheets
Perfume-oil breath that tastes of home, of persistent stubborn memory:
Warnings, blessings, well-wishes left savoring
Glazed only by the sheer burdens of age.

(Now)
Yellow light combed into dripping black streaks by the night sky
Folded sheets without white iridescence,
Only pale-gray pallor
And shadow-casted steps faint remain.
Only melting echoes of laughter linger by the beside
And even they are floating farther, tendrils of heat-vapor
Rising

Falling into some spine-cracked abyss of
the mind
Churning fond yearning into times passed, loved, and gone by.

.
Whispers only imagined in the hasty, jagged heartbeat of piercing silence
are
Simple to touch, yet impossible to hold.



Wash of a Pale Pink Lake

by Abigail Friedel

Lawn

by Alex Coats

What are we doing
cleaning up?
when we can never stay
so cut and green

Let's go to the store
and on the floor swift we will shop;
ride down! aimless, aisles,
the rafters and worn white tiles

Keep every time I spend with you
by your heart! the coast, the call,
the lights and the length of it all

until I can't feel this fading
anymore.

naked

by Annie Day

transparent apple skin
peeling back beneath
exposing hollow roots
the veins that used to carry
channeling heartbeats
energy
static carpet shocks skin
and i find that i
don't want to look at you
anymore

History Book Told In Color

by Isabel Hutchinson

Kings of Egypt II, Jean Michel Basquiat, 2012

~~Rameses II~~, Rameses 2.
elaborate puzzle of collagen and marrow
each cell holding its own separate universe of ambition
composing a collapsing hole of ideas, now
emptied with the rapid escape of life from his physical cage
eyes the color of icicles dripping from the roof of my grandparents house,
the color of coldness, the color of detachment
a crown rests upon his cold skull
reminiscent of the man he had ceased to be.
the yellow geometric pyramid lying there nonchalantly,
as if its construction isn't the epitome of human genius

The Great Ancestor, he was called.
(What an ironic name. I can't recall any "greats"
that don't arrive at an inevitable dead end to their power)

his skin the color of black ink, beautiful
perfect, ethereal blackness. The kind of darkness that you feel
you could crawl into, and just lie there, like a little boy enveloped
by the night sky and forgetting the grass beneath his linen pajamas
the kind of darkness that makes you feel small, but
simultaneously makes you desire to be bigger than you are

This is not the cradle of western civilization.
This is the cradle of blackness.
How dare you call it otherwise.

this miracle of human ability, this construction
that constantly defies the law of gravity yet rises closer to the heavens
than anything before or since, reaching its precise point through the clouds,
demanding the attention of the earth and the cosmos and everything in between
this miracle is the miracle of the black mind.

This is a story that can only be told through graffiti.
We, the white people, our ancestors, our history of evil,
did not want to see black art. We ran from the black mind.
Thank God, you ethereal, beautiful people, thank you for
giving it to us anyway. If I could buy you a lifetime supply of spray paint,
I would, so that the whole earth may look like a history book told in color.
A painting or a pyramid, a preacher or an astronaut, a song or a father
This is the miracle of the black mind.

For Dad, Happy Birthday

by Olivia Graham

Each year we take another portion of life
And celebrate in slicing another portion of cake.
Some are born with balanced layers, sweet and tart,
Or we build our dream with tiers overtime.
Each slab of time, crumb coated in experience,
Stays light as air when passed around.
Generous helpings and seconds provided,
Remind me to take my whole-hearted piece.

Coloured

by Sydnee Banks

She say pink her favorite color
but pink an brown don't go together.

She wanna be Cinderella for Halloween
but her skin too blue-black for that blue dress.

The white boys at lunch dare each other
to ask her out for a laugh.

She say she only like black girls now
cuz no man ever look at her.

She shaved her thick hair off instead
cuz that *dirt brown skin* don't rub off.

Mama sewed her a purple dress for prom
but she aint make it that far.

So that purple dress lay empty in that
room her mama finally painted pink.

Now her mama eyes red every night
wishin she had told her daughter she was pretty.

The Grand Tour

by Talia Locarnini

Thousands of years ago, when Hadrian's soldiers marched on Tuscany, they pushed entire villages down the mountainsides into Lake Castiglione. Tens of thousands of drowned bodies appeared on the banks of the lake, and the locals that survived had to bury the dead that littered their home.

Imagine bodies like trash bags on the steps of your house; imagine skin (cold) coming loose in your fingers; imagine the aftermath of the end of the world.

I look out on that very valley, perched at a 45 degree angle on the same wall where hundreds of years ago, Santa Margherita dangled threadbare feet: patron saint of the penitent, resting limbs brittle from the flogging, the very epitome of "*when you pray; you've got to pray with your whole body.*"

On top of the hill at the top of the mountain, it doesn't seem possible that another world might exist, let alone be woven of carnage, let alone happen *here*. The valley is a patchwork quilt, a fairy tale mood ring that changes with the weather and the angle of the sun. America is a myth, a tall tale spun up by exasperated *nonnes* corralling cats and children down from the roofs of abandoned hospitals.

Paint covered hands hold away from my clothes, trying not to ruin my only pair of boyfriend jeans, now sun-bleached white. I am drunk on sunshine and shots of espresso and the shortcomings of America, simmering like a shot of limoncello the back of my throat.

I watch the barn swallows scrape the sky in scatter-plot patterns: they will be gone once the heat arrives.

Sometimes I can see Pompeii in the swirls of dust that catch the light, or the sippets of clay and piled sediment stacked outside the ceramics studio:

Catch the silt in my fingertips, feel it settle, growing thicker on my skin. Thousands dormant in the ruins; thousands welcomed into air. History is told by the winners, but the volcano left its spoils for us to translate. And so the dead, still, shoulder the absence of a hollow to call their own.

The "thud-*slide*- thud" of mixing wet clay punctuates our little courtyard, but the world is otherwise silent. The twelve o'clock sun beams down in vertical walls of gentle yellow and I am sipping *succo di pesca* straight from the carton, the syrup sticky on my lips. Early summer means the sun warms our bones while honeysuckle cools our breath, the combination glazing our skins in reminiscent air. From the outside, we are the very image of nostalgia; but our stories pin us in place like moth wings as six eyes clutch at aphorisms, searching for a lens to give pain some higher meaning:

She speaks of men who have ready-aim-fired to kill; the other about boys with flint in their eyes and appetites that can never be wolfed down. I take their sorrow on my tongue, as much as I can stand: at nineteen years apiece, they seem awfully young to bear the tradition of human sacrifice.

In the cigarette between my lips, the poster child tastes the demigod in the afterburn. I watch the barn swallows trace familiar skyline paths: the few that are left are weary.

Oily sippets cling to worn treads of my fingerprints, the crumbs of bread slick with fresh olive oil. Black pepper and parmesan, truffle and ricotta, every bite culinary perfection. Sundown skews the light amber, but it is a cloudless ninety-three degrees and there is no breath of wind to stir a heat this dense. Dabbing at temples flat with sweat, the red-white-and-blue of our clothes feels like home until an opened door reveals emphatics not found in English. We don't push off our heritage now, welcoming the familiar even when it's flawed.

Woods Alive

by Tose Akinmola

alive
with the flitting of feathers and leaves
dark, dense, foreboding

I am a coward
but she soothes me,
croons to me in a hundred dialects of birdsong
sweeps me under her canopy
sheltering from the blistering heat
thrills me with each shining berry
and plump rosebud

The Brief and Illustrious Jazz Career of Mason Davis

by Griffin Hamstead

The colorful jazz tenderly wafting upwards out from *Harry's* on a Friday night never failed to put a hex on Slick Jennings. The passing of lively bodies twisted and strung like beads along a porcelain neck, the dance of shadows and their echoes and the echoes' echoes, the pulse of hearts and ivory keys: broken, trembling, otherwise. Their occupation of the spotlight on a dusty stage: those five men, dragged up from the crypts of their own brilliant memories, led on ropes like children by the memory in their fingers, the music resting latent in their muscles until, yes, it's Friday! and let 'em hear it like they've never heard it before, old boy, and play and play through all those crooked marionettes, beyond the bar coated in grease and an unnatural wax and tumble fast into the road still sweating the day's heat. Hell, hit that axe 18 karat until the world shines.

Shit. Don't you wanna just play *like that*? Jennings asked the bar over his second Old Fashioned. His friend Raleigh shrugged through the smoke.

C'mon man! Look at him.

Jennings was motioning with a droopy finger at the guitarist on-stage, mid-riff. The music merged effortlessly with his soul in the haze of the dive, was borne of it, no clear beginning to his body, the instrument, the crowd, that beat.

Beat.

Beat.

Beat.

Notes as sweet and drawn with bitterness as the cherry in the bottom of his glass lifted Jennings into that familiar trance. Riding that serotonin staircase was what he came for.

The stark silence of intermission, the void where celestial symphonies had just been, brought him back to the barstool. He snuck a glance towards Raleigh, who seemed unchanged.

Dig that, man.

Sure, alright, Raleigh replied.

Jennings shook his head and turned away. A look down the bar revealed a beautiful woman dressed in a satin dress, its high-cut slip highlighting her long legs. She sipped something a shade lighter than her red lipstick, looking effortless doing so. She flipped her head just in time to catch Jennings staring, star-struck.

Their eye contact lasted a moment too long. To his dismay, Jennings was the one to break.

What are you having? he asked, already down a pawn.

Vodka cran.

Enjoying it?

Not particularly.

She stirred the drink abjectly with her straw.

Got a name?

He had to raise his voice over the increasing noise of conversations erupting throughout the bar.

There's no need for that.

Sorry?

He was yelling, now.

She dusted the air with the back of her hand and swiveled back towards her friends.

You see that shit, man?

Raleigh just shook his head.

Ah, hell.

Jennings pulled a cigarette and lighter from his shirt pocket. With his free hand, he flagged the bartender. The older man held up a finger. Jennings lit up and waited. The glowing orange tip of the fag blistered as Jennings took a long drag. He exhaled the smoke into the directionless crowd, bits of jagged faces and fleeting silhouettes, some poor man's Picasso. These souls in silent lament, held together, shaking, by the safety pins of booze and jazz and

hands-on-thighs-and-higher-still, the thin veil of lust all between them and their own Guernica. The nicotine slowly settled in between the neat rows of dust left behind by the music in Jennings' mind.

Have another? the barman asked, fingering Jennings' two empty glasses, twisted orange peels notwithstanding.

Jennings nodded and pushed a dollar across the bar. He let his eyes trample over the tops of heads, the world's dingiest coral reef laying between the bar and the back wall.

He took another thoughtful drag and washed it down with the sting of whiskey. He looked at Raleigh, who wasn't paying much attention to anything at all.

Fuck this.

Jennings told Raleigh to watch his seat. His friend nodded, absent-mindedly. He took another swig of his drink and stepped outside to kick the last of his cigarette.

The night air was cool against the back of his neck, glistening in the sweat and heat of the place. A bronze Cadillac rolled slowly by, bumping Biggie's "Who Shot Ya" through the dense city blocks. A prostitute stood on the opposite corner, hand on her hip, a low-cut top sporting worn wears. She crossed the road.

Got a smoke?

Sure.

Linda, she offered.

Slick.

She stuck the cigarette between her teeth and he lit it. She put her hand on his chest.

Interested in a good time, big fella?

Sorry, honey. Not tonight.

He took her hand and slowly lowered it to her side. He flicked his own butt to the curb and dug the embers out with his heel. The bar swallowed him back up in one quick bite. Its relentless jaws. Jennings sauntered back to Raleigh, leaning against the bar, only to find his seat occupied by a heavy-set fellow, stammering on about the Knicks or something meaningless. He knocked Raleigh on the shoulder.

Good work, sport.

Just sat down, man. Didn't give me the chance to say a word.

Yeah, thanks.

Their conversation was interrupted by the emcee, who had taken to the stage.

Is Mason Davis in the house?

Little by little the crowd quieted.

We're looking for Mason Davis. Mason Davis, are you here? The band would like to have you perform with them. Mason Davis to the stage, please.

Jennings looked around and saw nothing stirring.

If we're lucky enough to have him, the emcee was continuing to little attention, Mason Davis is a jazz talent on the flute unlike any other.

Ladies and gentlemen, you'll be in for a show.

Crickets.

Well shit.

What're you doing? Raleigh asked, tugging at Jennings' leather pants.

They're calling my name.

The hell they are.

Fuck it. Guess my name's Mason Davis tonight.

And then, with a wink, Slick Jennings was gone.

Have you ever played a flute? Raleigh asked the empty space he had left behind.

The weight of all those eyes waxed heavier as he sauntered closer to the stage. More of a platform, really. The makeshift, improvised exaltation of music. The best of what's available, what's remaining. All that jazz.

He could feel the quizzical whispers on the tips of their liquor-laced tongues.

Judgement was a condition his poverty had taught him to anticipate. He dragged one of his legs for effect in the last few steps.

And you must be? the emcee asked.

The man from the crowd jumped to the stage. He gripped the mic and leaned across the emcee's body.

Cain't you tell? Hell, you only been asking my name ten times.

You're Mason Davis?

An incredulous accusation.

In the flesh.

If I may, sir, where's your flute?

Forgot it at home, I'm 'fraid. Believe that shit?

All syllables transposed through the mic over loudspeakers for the ears of the many.

Can we get the man a flute? the emcee asked, turning his neck to look helplessly at the members of the band.

A flute was produced from somewhere in the annals between the back of the stage and the curtained green room, a small bit of closet cut from cloth for whatever imperative privacy it might afford an artist. The thin, silver instrument made its way into the hands of the man from the crowd. His eyes burned something wild as he held it to the light, fingering its shining vacancies and depressions, its labyrinth of elegance.

The band members looked on, either too stoned or too carless to react in the proper time. It was already too late as the emcee declared in a regal voice

Hit it, fellas!

The man from the crowd searched for the right place to stand. One of the musicians, frustrated at his late realization, pointed with a subtle fury at the edge of the stage, bathed in spotlight.

The bassist put his foot in the man's path, slowed him just enough to get in

Brother, can you blow?

The man waved the flute with a certain flourish not unlike a magician's wand.

I'll be alright.

And then he assumed the position.

The applause was deafening.

Praise so loud it became a blanket, suffocating the band, the heat emitted from their instruments now turned back upon their faces, dark things still contorted from laying down such haughty claims.

Shiit, brother. Ain't never heard someone play like you just did, Mason Davis.

Jesus surely in this room tonight. We just came from church, motherfuckers.

The man with the flute nodded. Thanks: a nod. See, I told you I could blow: a

nod. Tell me more about how great I was: head bobbing up and down, caught in the wake of a beat borne of ego's own making.

A joint was handed up to the stage from somewhere in the crowd. The band passed it to the flute- man, his performance having earned him his due reward.

The room was soon shimmering. The man with the flute was led by the arm into the green room, from summer's heat to snow on the table. Inhale deeply.

The smallest note of a nose bleed. Another drink.

Have one, won't you?

More snow for the brother that blows

The people, man. Let's go be with the people.

I'm looking for a red star tonight.

Have some, go ahead.

The people.

The band passed beyond the curtain of the green room to a raucous re-applause. They grasped the hands of one another and waded out into the deep sea, the undertow of an imagined fame. He was careful to grip the flute tightly.

Maaan! You were gone up there tonight. Hell of a run, boy.

Never heard a sound til that.

You brought my tears back, son.

He scanned the room for Raleigh, but couldn't find him. He swung wide through the crowd to pass by the bar where he had started the night. His friend was nowhere that he could see. He craned his neck, hoping to see his lifted hand in the crowd.

The woman from down the bar put her hand on his arm as he passed by. He winked and kept stepping.

We gotta get you to another show, brother, said the drummer.

Mason Davis, let's get rich!

Someone's arm was pinned under his shoulder, a disembodied guiding force pushing him through the pressed bodies, out into the fresh night. Some newly-minted groupies (male, female, otherwise) trailed closely behind.

A cab was quickly hailed. The man, holding the flute to his chest, his baby, a precious new life force affecting the surrounding world, was sandwiched

between two of the heavier-set members of the band. He felt their sweat along his bare wrists, their sweat becoming his sweat, anyone's sweat. They swam onward.

The cabbie kept leaning back to make remarks. Fame, you see, was like that sign outside *Harry's*. It boiled off someone, a heat, some brightness illuminating the gray sidewalks, the gray gutters collecting the spillage of fuel and expulsion and god-knows-what, the gray sky, dark, and yet there stood shining fame on the corner with its hand raised, two fingers up. How do you pass on that?

You fellas with a band?

Importance, significance, was admired, envied, in those hidden alleys slicing that oft-ill-fated odd- numbered avenue.

Seemed like a mighty fine crowd behind you all.

And through the windows, ajar, poured the waft of summer, the wake of a solstice trapped in tight, short skirts leaning against rails and the beefy hands wrapped around them, waists in rotation, desperate attempts to match the orbital weight of this great, hurtling rock, the laughter that barely registered (fade-in, fade-out), the grass that, though surely must be green, were lunar blades angling below rusted fence-lines. Through the windows dripped the stars, the clouds, the blaring horns of unseen traffic.

I bet you boys sure can play.

The man with the flute was sitting somewhere else, spread eagle on the roof of the car, his glazed eyes out, just looking out, too far beyond the vinyl seats to hear

You heard of the great Mason Davis?

Sure, the cabbie said, though in truth he knew next to nothing about the city's music scene, or any music scene. The beat and melody he knew was the grease of an engine and the hum of concrete.

This him.

You don't say.

The cabbie's habit of taking his eyes off the road bordered on irresponsible.

In the fucking flesh.

I'll be damned.

Best damn flute player I ever heard.

No shit.

Another corner grew into another crowd as the car approached.

Here! Right here.

Someone gave the cabbie a handful of cash, not bothering to count it. The cabbie loitered a moment before easing the gas forward, eyes fixed to the rear-view mirror.

They steered the man with the flute inside.

Some jazz, some junk.

Jesus Christ, that boy can blow.

Some blow. Some booze.

After the show, he stepped out for a cigarette.

Just give me a minute alone, please.

Some inconsiderate or didn't-know-better patrons followed, standing a few feet away, making nervous small talk among themselves. Act casual.

He tried to enjoy the drag. He was too high to notice the bronze Cadillac parked on the corner, idling. Jazz became the thing of the night. The flute became his newest binge; it stung with satisfaction. He couldn't let it go, even to put his second arm around the second girl on leaning on his second shoulder, for even a second.

C'mon baby. Hold me.

The flutist slugged through added sets, added encores. He saw none of it, through every dusty room, those white-dusted tables, the material world hanging just beyond an impasse of smoke. Man, he just held that flute like it was glass but played it like it was putty, took his shaky breaths and blew that motherfucker through the roof.

Come back and play that flute alone for me, baby.

I'll play your flute, sugar.

The lips on him. Mmm.

A vague dream of standing on the sidewalk, a corner entourage. The counting of paper money, the stuffing in pockets, the smoking, the burned corners of their currency. Desperate infernos, those sockets that once held eyes.

Fellas, he said.

Everyone silenced with a hush. He hadn't realized until he let those syllables slip how long it had been since he had spoken, since he had given any language back to the world in non-musical form, how strange it felt to twist his tongue and lips into suddenly unfamiliar shapes, the sound all off or

or something.

Well, shit. Don't let me stop the party.

Mason Davis, you are the fucking party.

The revelry a block long, stretching from ecstasy to fantasy and all the way back, that tight loop of pleasure and rush.

Don't stop me now.

Stopping was for later, for some undetermined future that hadn't been thought into existence yet.

Yet.

That bronze Cadillac rolled by for the third time that night. It stopped dead right in front of the man with the flute on the sidewalk. Two very large men stepped out the backseat and approached the man, a certain menace in the cadence of their step.

Gen'l'men, he slurred, hand waiving madly. What's it I c'n help you find.

I need to have a word with you, little man, said the cleaner cut of the two.

Why's that?

Because you're a dirty, old punk. Rat bastard.

Heeyyy now. Who's you think you's ta talk t'me like that?

My name is Mason Fucking Davis, get me? I think you've mother-fucking heard of me.

Cain't be right. Need a minute. Raleigh. Rawlay! Thismansays h's name's Mason Davis, too.

You've been carrying on long enough, street litter. Bout to come to an end right fucking now, he said with an arm already cocked back. The man was unconscious in a matter of seconds, body limp on the sidewalk, spit of another spilling down his face, his mind gone black before the flute he was clumsily lifting to his weary lips could color around any of its edges. He was slick with sweat when he came to in the alley. He couldn't make sense of the strange images swirling, his head throbbing. He looked up to see a familiar face staring down at him.

Raleigh?

Yeah.

Their voices dim and distorted, his senses swimming in a pool of liquor and other drugs. He rubbed his temple and felt the world rushing back, the breaking of surface tension, the neon from the sign out front of *Harry's* spilling around the corner.

I gotta know, he said, patting the ground.

Raleigh stared on.

Was it real?

Sure, man. Sure was.

The alley was abandoned.

Well shit. Let's go home.

Alright, Slick.

Raleigh extended his arm. He grasped it, Raleigh pulling him to his feet. With their arms 'round each other, they headed off towards the bridge by the river, disappearing into the night: rich with fog and the residual ringing of jazz, distant archipelagos, caught in the tectonic currents of breath, the company of shadowy apparitions left to stumble forward through all the might-have-beens, the flimsy ghosts of another Saturday's dawn.

Constellation Confessions

by Rachel Swatzell

His calloused, slender fingers trace
the fresh ink etched down my spine,
the binding that holds my rigid but
bony book, exploring my iridescent
galaxy, stopping to scratch the scab
above the ripple in the pages.

When did you get this one?

The day I became an artist.

His fingertip curves over the C
and dips through its arch,
he plays connect the dots from
O to N to double F to
E to double S to I to
O to N through the river of S.

What's Confessions stand for?

It's my story, the night

I went stargazing.

I Feel at Home

by Marianna Hiles

i. binge is an anagram for being

A second of control
Over just one thing
Feels like sweet relief
Or sometimes savory relief
Because nothing says stable
Like a mouthful of momentary good ideas
And a stomach full of regret
It's a mistake after the fact
But a reward at the time
For winning the game of keep away
For wiping that smile across your face
For keeping up the illusion, fooling everyone and sometimes even
yourself
For making it through one hell of an afternoon

ii. Marked

A few years and some split mains have told you
That stretch marks don't hurt as much as other scar tissue
And no one cares when they don't smooth back into the skin
It doesn't matter if they become a part of you like they were there
from the beginning
Because we were meant to bend
But not snap, as you have so many times
You are not an iron maiden, but a wooden one
Splintering under each new pressure
Fresh shavings tumbling to the floor every so often
Just to remind you that there is always more to be taken away
Even when a nick seems like enough
To get you through one hell of an afternoon

iii. Collected shards

A life in perspective explains how
You are a glass vessel for a diamond soul
Cracked slowly and deliberately
So that you only discover you(r/re) missing pieces
When it is too late to get them back
But you will find
Although time itself is not a healer of wounds
That good company will come without permission
Casting slivers of sunlight on your broken angles
And illuminating that crooked image in the mirror
For you to see that
It was always more than just one hell of an afternoon



Tea Party

by Abigail Friedel

Mother's Hands

by Rose Edenfield

What does breakfast mean to you, and why does it matter?

Breakfast reminds me of my mother in the kitchen in the early mornings getting me ready for school. Belly full. Cozy stomach. I remember waking up when I was little and excited to have my eggs and toast and start my day. I can still smell the bacon frying in the cast iron skillet. Breakfast makes me think of how much my mother loves me. Breakfast makes me think of when I was a developing teenager who was too busy to eat my eggs and toast because I was perfecting my lip stick and turning my hair into crisp ringlets. It reminds me of the times I took my mother for granted when I was mad at the world for no reason; I would throw my perfectly made breakfast into the trash, pretending I ate it, and going to school hungry with only myself to blame—silly girl. Young girl. Breakfast is coffee brewing and me now eating avocados and toast, cereal and milk, but my own hands doing so. It's an empty table with only my plate set, not two.

What do baths have to do with breakfast?

Breakfast and baths—the two B words that I miss most from childhood. You take such things for granted when you're older and in need of your mother to help you. Mother makes eggs, mother draws the bath, mother sets the table, mother washes your back. I miss my mother. Both are warm and satisfy you in the moment. You feel almost full, but not overwhelmed at the comfort found in each. It felt calming to see the smile on your mother's face as she did both for you—out of her love, with her delicate hands. When you live alone, you do both by yourself—both trying to be as good as hers...too hot, too burnt, too empty.

What do beaches have to do with breakfast and baths?

We load the car. One, two, three. Towels, coolers, ham sandwiches—the bags are all packed. Mother drives the car. Windows are down. The warm sun shines on mother's face—orange rays dance on her skin. The salt soaks through the vents; my nose tingles. The tires roll to a stop and we hop out of the tin box. Step, step, step. Blue water rolls on my toes and I run back to the shore...mother smiles and chases after me. She gets tired and has to sit. I sit with her. Mother breathes. I breathe. In and out. In and out. Mother rests her head on my shoulder and rubs my back. Cozy hands. Warm hands. Sun-tanned hands. Wrinkled hands from time. She looks at me and says “daughter, you are mine.”

dogfight

by Rory Pivacek

pleasure bed of ancient horrors
splintered wood and broken mirrors
nauseous ocean of lost nail shards, all stuck inside the place that's starved
hieroglyphics of what you'd do in the dark
bent over each other like siamese twins
surgically detached and scrambling to reconnect at the stitched spots
foam-mouthed mutts that bark and guard their spare ribs in the alley
waiting for the other to move
but the growling persists between two idiots
and the ribs putrefy in the sun

Lies Told to Me by My Sorority

by Isabella McDevitt

You will love home.
We Don't force you to live here. You chose to.
Here, life gets 3 times better with just one letter!!!
(Don't tr(y) the others!)
You can't dance on tables-
We have to be respectable young women.
Napping on the common room furniture is not frowned upon at all.
Our sisters take our Philanthropy seriously-
They Don't use it to take photoshoots of themselves.
We Don't care at all about our ~aesthetic~
We have the classiest, most beautiful house so that's why we're the classiest girls.
Here, you grow from a pearl, to a pansy, to a pine
& you will know exactly what each means by the end of your four years.
You will be surrounded-
By sisters like Sarah Ida Shaw who treat you with a heart of gold.
You will find your bridesmaids,
Sisters who never leave you stranded downtown and always include you in events.
Everyone will BRING YOU!
And everyone will always stop to talk to your quirky self.
We never, ever, run mini bars out of the back of our cars
& we never sneak alcohol into our rooms.
We're not obsessed with our weight & our looks & being vegetarian/vegan/uber healthy.
We never steal from each other's closets.
Here, you will never want to move out.
(HOORAH) for living in the BEST house on Milledge Avenue.
It will be the *best* year of your life 😊

the bloody marsh, or a love poem from a corpse in a swamp

by Emily Tracy

something about the sky reflecting on the marsh is always screaming
orange at me,

(he's just screaming and i hear what i want to hear)

and i think there's a difference between the muddy water and the
watery mud, but it all smells like salt and it all stretches long across
my windshield

if i go at least fifteen over on the bridge to the mainland.

he's never moved that fast before. it's romantic.

*he thinks the girls pressed against the car windows must love an
eighteenth-century man.*

if i fall in love again i'll take her to the island at sunset but i won't take
her home.

we'll drive those five hours at eighty with the windows all the way
down so we can't hear, we'll park at the crab place and we will not get
crab.

his wife's name was esther. esther didn't eat seafood, either.

she had long, bony fingers that were always cold,

so he thinks she wouldn't mind holding his hand, even now.

i'll roll her pants up to the knee and take both her hands, just the
fingers not the palms and i'll pull her into the marsh and i'll let the
orange swallow us whole,

warm and wet and salt and soft and grass water mud sky.

he'll watch four feet sink down into his chest,

what used to be his chest, what used to feel like that.

he misses the laughing more than the breathing.

the sex more than the sleep,

*esther more than his whole body, floating away in that swamp
under those four feet.*

two hundred men bled out in this water in 1742

and i can't help but wonder if it's been hungry ever since then.

because the marsh clings to your skin like it's begging you not to leave

(he is)

and i think that laying down in that mud would just feel like being
held,

(he can't remember, it's been so long)

*did her arms look like ripples? did they wrap around him
like waterweeds?*

and if we sink at the same time she can't leave me.

we'll just lie there with it climbing all up our bodies

to be touched like that again

counting dragonflies and mosquitos until

the tide comes in and that murky water covers our eyes,

he thinks he sees her face on the surface,

the sun low, lighting up her skin,

he opens what used to be his mouth, maybe to smile,

screaming orange at the cars on the bridge to the mainland.

May Townes Van Zandt Forgive Me

by Zachary Anderson

after Arseny Tarkovsky

If I saw you delirious in the Lion's Lair
or in deep crimson Skylark light

sunk in smoky shearling
staring into a homestead of whiskey

If you stood in a halo of wine
snakeskin boots like corpses in virgin snow

the peak blinks a beacon
its signal goes astray in your blood

If the stars articulate a meaning
or hang like burs in your eyes

I would see you gambol among the transformers
I would lose you forever in the city's electrical grid

Lake Tyler

by Jacqueline Reynolds

Lake Tyler
Population: 104,991

Love is my son
Sitting on an old dock
Little legs dangling
Watching the waves
Back and forth

The beauty of youth
Your squeal of excitement
With a trout on the rod
Pulling and pulling
I wanted to pull you away
From the dark water
And your Mother's dark thoughts
Unable to leave the bed
Back and forth

The danger of growth
But that love is you
On a rusty dock
The Texas heat
Gripping the sun, my son

The Pianist

by Annie Day

A soft hush as the velvet curtain is cast aside.

Veins suffocate a wrist, and he inhales,

flesh trembling, tracing

the blinding dawn, the stagelight,

the shivering, sweating sonata.

Breathing black, white

hares race the track,

in constant rearrangement, flesh

overtaking flesh

imitating life.

The pianist plays and I write.

Rot

by Chris Tidwell

Softly nursing through rich maple, the worm feeds on doubt.

Every ring of tree it finds, blinds, defines, forensics spout.

The movement slender, the dirty splendor, after each thoughtless bite.

Ringed like the tree, the wayward boor boring into the boor deep into the night.

Gash and grind the way, brushing away saw, dust to the wind.

Sagging ash strewn, debris bricolage, eating all, deaf to all din.

Churned slush pushed out for proof peeling product, consumed, we rind.

Body politic moseyed through the tree so fair, unaware, full, wined:

Bubbling black hash oozing from the sides slithers through the brine.

The rot, rotten found, burrows to the ground, the tar cordially confines.

I know why they call it a blade of grass

by Shannon Rainey

I'm not angry with you, Uncle.
Although you forgot my birthday, and killed
yourself trying to mow the grass.
I can forgive forgetting my birthday,
since you'd already made your mistake.
I can forgive your stupid stubbornness
as I see where I get mine.

But, Uncle,
I don't understand.
What about those green knives
sprouting from the soil
that was worth your death?

I'll accept that you didn't know
it would be fatal,
but you had to know the danger.
You knew you weren't well.

My last text from you
is a belated birthday wish,
green as the grass you
sacrificed yourself for.

I heard about your less-than-majestic downfall
when Dad texted to say that

you were withering
The messages are as blue
as your funeral flowers.

Maybe I am a little angry, Uncle.
Angry that I spent my birthday
weekend wearing black.
Angry that I never got to say
goodbye to you.
Angry that I didn't spend
enough time with you.
Angry that you decided to
mow that damn grass.

Uncle, maybe I am a little angry.

Mineral

by Madison Zehmer

I've been to that cavern
On farmland borders—Stalagmite puncture

Wounds worn like ornaments—
I watched calcium
And iron fuse with air—The smell so
Potent it became taste—

Blood is a mineral too—And we will return to the
Earth that gives as rot—

Death is just
Becoming little more matter—Let me be
Born as soil unearthed—Again and again—

In cavernous shadows—Beyond the reach of breath
Let me return with dust on my lips

With silt in my voice—Hands as smoke—
A spirit of salt—

As I look back.

My First Date in Two Years

by Shannon Wolf

with thanks to the Fiddler's Inn, Seattle

sitting at a table for two my mind rolling double time this isn't meant to happen yet
your breath sounds like windchimes
america america america i've only been here two months
but here you are with eyes of aegean mud you know I get stuck every time
I can only see you in encyclopedic places the library the bookstore behind my eyes
I'm not supposed to find you so fast what's the catch
the shape of your mouth it's the sand through my finders it's the tang of orange
stinging my lip when I was half this size no I don't want to hook up back at your place
that's really not what I'm saying I'm saying that I believe
I will be waking up to windchimes when I am eighty-something years old & I saw your evening wrists turned to the light
& I never knew until you lifted your glass

DULCE ET DECORUM

by Andrew Elliot

What to do with this lonely soul
That longs to know another—
This parched throat that thirsts for more than
Simply cooler water

Each living thing their dulcet pair
In pure contentment lies—
While I alone must watch them pass
With weak and weary eyes

To know and love— tis good indeed—
Hearts weren't made to wither
Fain I'd love, be loved in return—
But being known I shudder

All Y'all

by Owen Kavanagh

A few Yous, Y'all
I say it when I want to refer to a group of people in the second
person
Or in this case: persons
I say it when I want to say yes
I am southern
 (No I didn't vote that way)
This is how my momma speaks
This is how I speak
 but not for all y'all,
I don't always ponder every syllable
But I don't always know how to say,
Peecan

You and All, You all
I say it when I want to refer to a group of people in the second
person
Or in this way: peoples
I say it when I want to hide
The drawl that I fawl into
On o-casions when I mumble or
 (Stumble drunk and sleepy)
I pause and e-nun-ci-ate every syllable
To make sure
 damn sure
I'm not ques tioned on how I say.
Because I don't always know how ta say
Pekahn

“perpetual motion is impossible”
and yet,
the body, the movement
cannot stop
for to halt,
means to never run again

Roots

by Anna McCabe

Hand over hand.
The wheel turns and the tires follow
like players throwing in their cards, hoping to win an escape,
Gambling against a life of penthouses and Jaguars.
They spin down a two-lane highway,
paved before our history began. Laid out to dry in the sun
with only the intention of survival.
The road offers its belly for the better of its travelers,
For practicality, joining in the innate awareness of its purpose.
Green light floods the backseat, windows a projection of thick grass and trees
enjoying the break of a Sunday afternoon. Rolled down,
letting in the smell of clean air that comes as a reward.

Nothing is taken without being earned.
My father's credo.

Cows zip by, huddled together without space between them
As if peace depends on distance to each other.
confined behind fences unseen by visitors.
Wires less visible with age
but more tangible by memory and fear,
because in this place the former cannot be experienced without the latter.

Body

by Rose Edenfield

I never told anyone, but three days ago, I auctioned off my body parts online. It's funny what people will buy from you for a decent price.

But before I get into it, let me start from that day.

I stood in the mirror and stared at my naked frame. Pale and fragile. I felt my own wave of critique start in my chest and radiate outward through the ends of my fingertips and toes. Too tall. Too skinny. Too lanky. Too weird. It was like I was failing at being a girl. I spread my five fingers wide and felt the tension as I tried to see how far apart they could go against the strain. As my fingers came back together like an elastic band, I grabbed my wrist with the other and wiggled my tender skin and bones. I shook my wrist so hard that I saw the skin start to crack in the crease. Hm. With the hand doing the shaking, I popped off the other and stared at the nub of my arm. I felt no pain. And I felt no desire to cry, either. It was an empty feeling after, but a rush of adrenaline before. I set my hand on my bed-side table and looked at it. The color was still there with hues of pink and red blotching the skin. My nails still reflected the same polish of baby blue. It seemed almost like a piece to a china doll. I waved my nub into the reflection in the mirror on my vanity. "Hello there!" I said to myself in a sophisticated tone.

How classy one can look with only one hand. Less parts to have to keep clean.

I decided to try it with my foot. I sat on the edge of the bed and kicked my legs back and forth as hard as I could. With success, I saw my left foot begin to crack. Then, thump. My foot dropped on the carpet beneath me. Ah ha! I plopped to the floor and held my foot in my one hand. I tried to balance the foot on my nub, but sadly had no success. Sigh. My toes looked like baby carrots fresh from the farm. I examined my foot, size 9, and sat it down by my hand on the table.

Now what?

I hopped on my foot onto my bed, laid down to face the blank ceiling, and began to process what just happened.

Do I feel any pain? ... No.

Why don't I feel any pain? ... Hormones?

Am I human? ... Well, I am a girl.

Should I call my parents? ... They'd think I was being crazy.

Imagine if I would've tried with my eyes. ... just no.

Why didn't I bleed?... Am I a...vampire?

Should I call the ambulance? ... And have to pay that bill? I'd rather hop there.

After my head was full of the bursting thoughts, I decided to sit up, follow none of them, and proceeded to go to the internet. I opened my laptop and typed into Google:

"Whst...What ti...What to do when...What to do when your hand...
What to do when your hand and fot...What to do when your hand
and foot pop of...What to do when your hand and foot pop off?"

Typing is a lot harder with one hand.

After 0.2 seconds, 50,000 results came up with titles such as...

"Pop up shops in NYC"

"Hand and feet models WANTED"

"How to feel yourself with your feet"

"Pop off sis! Show him the hand and leave!"

"Best nail salons near you"

“Best nail salons near you”

But one, “Sell your body parts, HERE!” struck my attention.

I clicked on the page. I didn’t know what I was expecting, but in a way, I was both surprised and yet, not shocked at all.

The yellow tinted page was covered with pictures of the anatomy of a human, medical articles taking a person to Web.MD to discover what health condition he or she has, and various tabs labeled:

“Upper” “Middle” “Lower”

at the heading of the screen.

I decided to start out with my hand. I clicked “Upper” because I guess that made the most sense in context. The page loaded to show different categories of the upper body:

“head” “neck” “chest” “arm” “hand”

I clicked on “hand”, and was taken to a black page with at least a hundred different names hyperlinked in bright orange. Each was sectioned off by “female” and by “male”. I scrolled down the female column and picked “Karen McCloud” as my first choice. Karen’s page loaded and her personal statement read something like this:

Hi. My name is Karen and I am in desperate need of a working left hand. When I was little, I developed my writing style in my right hand. I grew up with the best cursive hand-writing you’ve ever seen. In 5th grade I won an award at calligraphy camp for “Neatest Capital Letters”. I now work at a design company in Upper Manhattan where I make prints for specialized invitations. While I am a renowned writer, I want a left hand so that I can stand out from my competitors by being ambidextrous. I am willing to pay \$10,000 for a working left hand to put me over the edge and become a more prestigious writer. Message me for details or if you are a potential candidate for me.

After reading Karen’s post, I sat back, stared at my nub, my hand, back at nub, my foot, back at my hand and thought, wow...this should be good.

A Spring Goodbye

by Marianna Hiles

In this frigid winter I write
To you who reminds me of this unwelcome chill,
That comes not at my request but at the hand of nature
Like the wind, you envelop me in an unwanted embrace,
Caressing my sorrow-tipped thoughts and exposed skin
Your darkness is more pervasive than that of the early setting sun
And I can flee from neither your grasp nor the force of the season

But as spring approaches
I plan to wean myself off of your frozen spectacle,
Lifting into flight with the insects of March,
Washing you away in the sheets of April rain,
Flowering alongside the revival of May's blossoms

If you do not quit me in haste, though,
I will blind you with sun rays and choke you with pollen
And stab you with bee stings and drown you with melting snow
Because now it is the season of rebirth and I want to be born again
Without your frosted grip around my throat

Black Widow

by Bridget Gallamore

You lift a cigarette to my lips,
I take a drag.
Like we have all the time in the world
When you,
in fact, don't.

I'm full of caffeine
and nicotine.
I'm full of bulb
and seeds.

Don't say metoo, I love women
and then tell meto drink less.
I'm a thinker
and a user.

Is it too much to ask for a man who can
outdrink me?
I really hate having to carry you home.
I really hate your ambushed
declarations of undying love.

In my web,
his useless head.

Eve:

by Sara McCracken

try to fit inside a rib
after growing
fat on
apple pie
apple
cobbler
apple
cider
apples try
to fit inside a rib and
it will splinter
send out
sparks
you
try to teach a bird how not to fly
and it will
fly away
and you can
try
to make a
mountain a
valley a
river a
creek a
tree a
single
sweet-gum ball

you can
try to hide but
you've grown too
inconveniently tall
ate too much fairy food
your metamorphosis
made you enormous:
you grew gluttonous
grew too greedy
got too friendly with
the devil,
fell -
only:

Eve,
I hope you know that
you were always Lilith
to begin with.

actor

by Meredith Eget

in a marigold sweater
in a room not of her own
it will only take a second
he begs her
and as his hands follow the course it feels they were bound to tread anyway
he asks her to define him
cocks his head as if to say
you didn't memorize your lines, did you?
his sickly sweet words
sink into skin and stick there
butter on pre-broiled poultry
leeches of sincerity
thieves of speech
and she is rendered voiceless
eyes fixed on a crack in the wall
eggshell, she believes
it mirrors her
for the narrative was never in her control
the pen was always in his hands
he had auditioned for such a role
when she hadn't even known she was meant to act

Gradient from Gray to Pink

by Talia Locarnini

Melted crayon rainbows color outside
The lines that rehearsed through
Droning lips, half asleep in church pews

And here I sit as white-haired priest condemns

(must maintain cover)

To the chorus of my caged-animal-whispered response,

(act with discretion)

To avoid being spotted by those

Burning dust

In the air:

A cross burning the

Insides of my eyelids where I am left

Congratulatory assurance of

Purgatory's fire

(it cleanses, i promise)

You never saw this coming,

Never wanted this for me,

Never thought to ask how *I* felt

About two women in love

So I hold my lust like a serpent tongue,

My love like an olive branch

My hands in search of something pliable

To take solace in

The absence

My mouth opens, wet and pink,
 And I drink in execution
 I drink in damnation
 I drink in their kool-aid

 But I do. Not. Swallow.

For years I buried half my skin
But the planes of my identity are more than slanted,
They are curved, and ripples
Cannot hold a coat of paint in
The face of the Exodus:
I will not hide to avoid renunciation

[to her:]

Promise me that when the stones
Pile up, we will meet them with mouths
Open and soft;
Promise me that in the face of fire and brimstone
We will never close our eyes
Or let them reduce us to ash

[to you:]

My entrails are still familiar;
Yes, it is dark inside, it is
Humming with the current overflowing
With love for my blue-eyed girl
And yes, my internal is loud with
Symphonic harmonies of praise
And worship at the unconventional shrine

Yes, it is dark and loud and speaking in foreign tongues, but try,
Just try:
Place your hand on the pulse in my neck
Look deep into her eyes

And you'll know why
I tremble

Open your eyes long enough to
See me as the Commandment
Instead of the leper
Instead of your thinly veiled proposal
To cut my pieces out

(sexuality is not like gangrene: you cannot cauterize the wound)

This is why I grip tightly:
It takes a callous
To catch stones from the firing squad.

ghost

by Meredith Eget

there is comfort in existing as a phantom of the night
pleasure in the way feet carry a body with the sealed security of a written fate
powerlessness in a manner that does not frighten, but breathes the easy sigh of
simple occupancy
a pair of shoes that stomp on a loose metal board before the concrete
make themselves known
and delight in the gunmetal kickback
clenched fists that hand over their control to the agent of plain perception
as the world presents itself in painful detail
and eyes endure only to discern its beauty

there is comfort in a soul that alters its being to remain snugly around the world
its words
its music
its air
warmth in being outside oneself
to walk, pre-determined
and free

Things I'm Too Embarrassed to Say:

by Shanice Felix

- He called me by her name and I pretended not to hear—it just made it easier
- I make up elaborate stories about the lives of friends who have abandoned me to tell to my family when they ask about them
- I've always wished I was someone people wanted to hold on to. You can only wish to be something you're not, right?
- I don't know how to drive
- I don't know how to swim
- I don't know how to cook
- I apparently don't know how to do any task that is geared towards self-preservation
- I had to make a choice the other day that has *absolutely* no correct answer, just an obvious one
- Everything sounds better in my head until I write it
- When I was a child, I didn't get the word "serial killer." I always wondered how one could kill cereal in mass, let alone what that had to do with all the murdered women
- I'm trying really hard to pretend like I have everything together, which is made even harder by the knowledge that everyone is pretending like they have everything together. I wonder, in the grand scheme of all the pretending, is my pretending good enough?
- My mother always said go big or go big so if I'm gonna fall apart let me do it all at once. Get it all out of my system. Let me repair myself so completely that I can never be broken again
- How many times do I have to go to sleep until I'm fully rested?
- Brush my teeth until they're permanently clean?

- Wipe my eyes until they're dry forever?
- I want to do something right, but all I'm left with is memories I can't get rid of
- I can't tell if I'm embarrassed by these things or if I'm just "whatever," which isn't an adjective until you realize it should be
- I want to feel again. I know I'm happy. I just want to feel it
- I want to write a poem that makes people happy for once. Happy—warm against their cheeks, flush across their face, deep in their chest. I don't wanna write poems people put down when they're no longer sad, like they do with me



MLK

by Nate Manhattan Herbst

Jesus Visited the Party

by Andrew Benzinger

Jesus visited the party at 223 Small Street, and hardly any of us recognized him. Don't get me wrong, I'm his biggest fan! I've read his book (the official canon, mind you), said my prayers every night, followed his word most days. But I was hammered to the point that had Jesus Christ walked through the front door, I wouldn't've recognized the man.

And that's exactly what happened.

Right after Jesus left out the back door with a couple randies from a corner, Samantha started going on about how she was sure the guy who'd just passed through had been none other than the Son of Man himself. At first, we just passed it off as another one of Sam's psychedelic inspired delusions, but the more we thought about it, the more we started to wonder. So I asked Sam what this Jesus guy really looked like, and she said he looked like the one and only JC - a goatee, white robes, all around Mesopotamian and straight from the turn of BC to AD. Somebody in the back claimed the Jesus clone had sported a halo on his head. Sam kept blubbering, saying we'd missed the trumpets of judgement day cause we'd been partying so hard and the music had been too loud and on and on.

That's when a bunch of us started freaking out. Somebody kicked over the speakers and the hip hop beat stopped dead, but there were no trumpets, at least not anymore. I think Lily was crying about how we'd missed the second coming being as knock out drunk as we were. Then Keith threw a perfectly good 40 into the wall and started spitting out a prayer of contrition so fast it could've been rap.

So I slapped them back to the present and told them if we wanted to follow Jesus back to heaven, we'd have to track him down down before he blasted off without us. They agreed, and half the population of the party meandered out the back door with us in search of the Alpha and Omega. I guess the other half of the party was Jewish or atheist or scientologist or

something 'cause they stayed behind, and I never saw those poor schmucks again.

Following our holiest intuitions, we took to the pitch black woods in search of the one and only Jesus Christ. The chilly autumnal woods were so dark and scary because in our haste, most of us had forgotten to bring flashlights. So as we hiked half-blind, a bunch of us started shouting into the darkness, asking Jesus to come back and forgive us and give us a break cause what did he expect to find us doing on a Friday night anyway. I heard Lily mutter why he couldn't have arrived on a Monday night, and a bunch of us murmured an amen to that.

But then someone in the back of our group whispered that there were people following us, and several flashlights pointed behind us to investigate. I got an itchy feeling on the back of my neck, so I turned to look and, in the bobbing beams of fearful flashlights, spotted humanoid figures flitting between the trees a few dozen yards behind, flying right towards us on tattered, inky black wings. From here I could see their glowing, blood-red eyes set above rows of serrated teeth. They weren't police or anyone from the party or even human. Before I could say it, Keith stole the words right out of my mouth and hollered, "MOTHAFUCKIN' DEMONS! SCATTER!"

The group turned to sand. Everyone darted in different directions in the darkness and started screaming.

A tremendous roar rose from the earth, and the forest floor fissured and cracked open mere yards from my feet, a hellish red glow emanating from deep within the growing crevasse. Several party goers fell screaming into the abyss or were picked off by the winged creatures swarming the trees above our heads.

I fled blindly from the Satanic fault line and gathering demons; I ran into a branch, tumbling down a hill in my simultaneous descent from paradise and escape from hell. Vomited on the way down. Caked myself in a flurry of fiery autumn leaves. Buried myself away from the demons hounding sinful stragglers in this nightmarish limbo. Went still and quiet save the silent prayer screaming through my skull like the worst hangover ever, pounding between my temples, weighing on my soul. It took me a moment to realize the earth next to me was crying. Lily was hiding a few feet away. I crawled over to her and tried to offer a shoulder to cry on, but instead I think I threw up again - I'm sorry, okay, I was drunk!

She sobbed and kept saying over and over, no, no, no, I should've gone home this weekend, no, no, no. And I said, the worst is behind us, we've already been left behind. And she said, no, don't say that, it's not true. And I said, we've been left behind like that terrible Nicolas Cage movie that got a 1% on Rotten Tomatoes - what was its name - Left Behind, I think. And she said, this isn't happening, no, no, no, no, this isn't happening, no. And I didn't know what to say, so I said, yep.

Then she just sobbed into the dirt and made the mud darker as the fissure in the crest of the hill behind us stained the woods fiery crimson and doomed partiers shrieked on the wind.

One Nightstand

by Jessica Hamlin

In this body I wait
A lone cell to break
under heated pressure

Olive oil burnt into a pan
Garlic and onion rise in clouds
above my bed you hover between
my ears

A puff of smoke and
a peculiar breakfast
Hamburger and marmalade
in a glass made, recycled
fingernails draw lines
connect on your back

A black curl sprouts
from my pillow
Bathroom tile sweats
A baby pink odor gone

Before I could take a second bite.

UNTITLED (BRETT KAVANAUGH HAS A WIFE)

by Clark Brown

APE AFFECTION
ANXIOUSLY ANTICIPATING
AN EVENING OF AARDVARKING IT MEANS *FUCKING*

BEAR REASON
BATTING CONCERNS
BEAVER AWAY AT BAD INTENTIONS
BITCHING OVER INANITY
BULLING TO GET THE POINT ACROSS AND
BUFFALOING BETAS
BEAR THE BURDEN OF PROOF
BUCK UP TO BATTED LASHES

CATTING AROUND BY
CATTED ANCHORS OF INTENTION
CHIPMUNKING CONJUGAL CONSUMMATION BY
COWED COERCION

DOGGING LEGS DURING
DANCES DANGLED
DENY DOING ANYTHING WRONG

FERRETED FASTIDIOUSLY
FOXING LITIGIOUSLY

HOG THE LIMELIGHT

“HORSING AROUND” HAD NO CONSEQUENCE HOWEVER
HOUNDED IN THE

KANGAROO COURT OF LIFE

LIONIZED LIKELY LYING
LEST LEECHES LET
LECHEROUS LEADERS LEAD

MONKEYING MEN MADE MEAGER
MICE MOUSE FOR MORSELS
MOUSSED MOUSTACHE MAN MADE MARRIAGE MORE ME-
TICULOUS

“PONY UP PENANCE!”
PIGGED OUT ON PARDONS

RABBIT ON
RAMMING RATIONALIZATION AGAINST
RATTING RATS RATHER THAN

SEALING THE FATE, BE
SKUNKED AND STEERED INTO SUBMISSION
SQUIRRELING AWAY ANY SEMBLANCE OF ORDER, TILL
SNAKING SUSPICIONS AGAINST

TOMCATS TURTLE INTO TIMIDITY, THEY

WEASELED OUT OF BEING HELD ACCOUNTABLE, YOU
WERE
WHALED BY DEFEAT, THEY WOLFED THEIR VICTORY, YET

YOUR YEARNING FOR YES-CULTURE WAS CONSIDERED
YESTERDAYS YAKKING

Night Prattle

by Andrew Benzinger

Night thrust the finite into the unseen and pulled the intangible intimately close to reality. Night lowered the sky in its stark emptiness to the ground where it draped curtains of blind fog over the bough of every tree. Night shrunk the world to the dimensions of a stage, the cast of two confined to its tight, shadowy parameters. Night talked - intelligently at that - but only to itself. For to any listening ear that happened to catch a line or two spoken from one shadow to another, the tongue of twilight seemed nothing but incoherent prattle.

The two walked side by side, hand in hand, creatures inducted into the ceremony of night by situation, not by choice. He had a destination in mind, and she followed him along the snaking path with a detached humor. One could see it in the way they walked, he with his confident strides into the beyond, her with a gait heavily influenced by what she happened to sense in the trees around them. Each time she took notice of a peculiar looking branch just outside his flashlight's beam or a flutter of nocturnal wings taking flight, she would hesitate mid-stride, turn and tilt her head to catch whatever had tickled her perception, and inevitably be tugged along with a "come now," or "we're almost there," or "just a little further."

When she susurrated in reply, her voice was embraced by the mist of cicada chatter, and he had to lean even closer to make out the meaning, just the feeling, of her words, "When I was a girl... I lived here."

"Mm..."

They walked through a rusted gate, gaping wide open for many, many years.

"Away from the city... Away from the lights."

"It'll be safe."

They walked past a once proud stack of firewood so decayed only a handful of dark logs remained above the mound of powdery brown earth.

"It's been a long... long time."

"It's a fixer upper by now, I bet."

They walked toward the top of the hill where the corridor of trees parted beneath a starless sky.

"... But I'm back. We're here."

The two came to the end of the path at the point where the woods thinned and revealed a house nestled in the middle of the forest. Its windows were dark, its walls peeling and discolored. The inside couldn't be much better. Together, they approached the house as cicadas rallied in crescendo. He went to the door and tried it. Unlocked after all this time. They pushed the threshold between outside and in wide open and stepped into the cavern of memory.

The joined kitchen and living room contained furnishings untouched by plastic coverings that marked most other abandoned houses. High set windows observed an inky black sky. Faded, mothy blue couches faced the blocky TV ripped straight from the 90's. A quiet cuckoo clock hung above the kitchen counter, no longer ticking the lazy, childhood days away. The darkened hearth, a podium of cold stone beneath the hooves of a tremendous creature standing at attention before them.

They saw it and froze. A living, breathing deer waited at the fireplace, its large and luminous and void eyes staring unflinchingly into theirs.

When he woke, he sat up in the darkness and placed a hand over his eyes, as if trading out one darkness for another. He slipped his feet out from under the covers and met the carpet with icy soles; he sat there on the edge of the bed for some time, leaning his elbows on his knees, hands clasped, as if in prayer. Then he left her sleeping side and padded down the hall into the kitchen where carpet gave way to frigid, creaky wood. Trying not to make too much noise, he turned on a lamp and sat on a counter bar stool. His elbows drew incidental doodles in the dust when he rested them on the countertop, so he withdrew his arms and wiped them on his shirt. He rubbed his eyes and yawned.

He suddenly felt her hands knead his back and shoulders gently, and at their melodic touch, half turned to see her face, or rather an eye and half a smile pooled in the lamp's soft glow. He leaned back into her arms, and

they remained like that for some time, two creatures inducted into the ritual of night by choice, not by situation.

He thought her voice flowed with the lamp's luminescence beautifully when she whispered, "Your dream?"

And he surprised himself when he answered honestly, "I... I don't know."

He met her eye - the one visible to him in the light - and kissed the space where her lips disappeared into shadow. She kissed back and when that ended, kissed his forehead.

He said it again just to see how it felt, gazing at the dark hearth staring back at him from the opposite wall, "I don't know."

"It's okay. It's okay not to."

"Mm..."

She flicked off the lamp and guided him back to bed.

When she woke, she sat up in the darkness and stared into the mirror across the bedroom but saw nothing but shadows reflected across its surface. Nobody stared back. She felt like a child again. She sighed and lay back down, allowing her hubby's slumbering breath and the nighttime chatter outside the curtained window to lull her heart back to a peaceful pace.

When she was a girl, however, she always escaped from that nightmare to find herself painfully alone. And the very first time she returned from that nightmare, filled with the special, lingering fear that swells with nighttime obscurity, she did what most children do. She left her room to find her parents' - a mistake she would never repeat again, no matter how many times that nightmare returned or how scared she became.

That night, about six or seven years old, the girl cracked open her bedroom door and slipped out into the hall. At night, the hallway didn't seem like the hallway, the living room didn't feel like the living room, the kitchen didn't look like the kitchen. The world simply didn't look right when shrouded in moonlight. So she scampered across the living room to her parents' door and placed a small hand on the wood before noticing a distinctly human figure standing on the back porch beyond the glass door.

It was a woman. The girl saw a naked woman standing on the back porch, half turned so that her bare, swollen belly was swathed in the

half moon's light, clearly visible to the girl. Then the pregnant woman turned to look at the girl. The girl saw the woman's face through the glass screamed and pounded on her parents' door in white hot panic. She pounded and cried for her mom and dad, yet the door did not budge. But the glass threshold slid open.

Her breath caught in her throat, and she realized she must've drifted into a pseudo-sleep. Sensing the gooseflesh sweeping across the skin of her arms before the cold itself, her eyes focused on the half moon hanging in the sky directly above. She was standing and swaying on the back porch beneath the moon.

Despite the cold, she felt fuzzy inside, and her mouth opened, "As midnight thoughts beget rusted spots..."

She heard his muffled voice. He was saying her name, and she turned and saw his puzzled face peering through the foggy glass. He slid the door open and stepped outside. He stood next to her, looking first at her then at the shining, grey companion to earth above.

At length he asked, "What's going on? Are you sleepwalking?"

"I don't know, maybe we both are," she answered honestly and smiled, "It's so beautiful out here."

"Mm," he tried to smile back, but it faltered.

"You feel like it's wrong?"

"I guess... I just feel unsure. Out here, I know something's about to happen. I don't know what or when, but when it does, I feel like it'll be bad."

"But maybe it'll be good too."

"Maybe."

Still side by side, two creatures inducted into the order of night by obscurity, she leaned her head on his shoulder, "I felt so alone, aimless. I had no idea what it all meant until I met you. But then it came into focus, and I knew the nature of my dreams and everything else wasn't a matter of good or bad, inside or out, safe or scary. It isn't a puzzle to decipher or a race to win either. It's something we have to take one step at a time together."

"Mm," he replied and glanced at her, "Come inside. It's chilly. You're sleeptalking."

"Hm..." her mouth set in a straight line and stayed there as she

gazed back, truly looking at him.

That stare of her's unnerved him, so he pecked her on the cheek and took her goose pimpled arm and, like she had done for him only an hour earlier, led her on the path back to bed.

They stepped inside where a majestic herd of some twenty deer had found their way into the living room - at the center of the crowd, a fawn sniffing the mothy couch, a mother peering curiously at the blank TV, and a proud father with large and luminous and void eyes staring unflinchingly into theirs.

Garden Variety Emotions

by Chris Tidwell

Edenic hysteria emotes this town,

Garden of Friends, a proper assertion someone told me that I am no longer cultivated with. I've fallen out of four-year season. If only flowers could fly with their gossamer frills or petals, they'd do it they'd do it. Deracinated green supplanted and a remainder in a dirt-artifice, thrown. On the other side of the fence, my celluloid carcass taken out with great violence and ardor. Living and wishing in and out of this museum of wilting memories.

Fritillarias together, singing arias together, weeping alone.

Cemeteries are more like gardens than gardens are like farms. Each flower a monument to the unfurled predecessor axed. A ghost of every vegetation possesses the ground through meal of roots and rot decomposed leaving love only for the worms to eat with their ass-mouth an uncanny innuendo to deflowering. It rained so hard the other day all these slimy lovers were washed onto the pavement like an upchuck from mother earth. A field of pink pain.

Fleshed out and anatomized, graft and chart,

Fields are like gardens as lust is like love. A garden taken care of as such becomes this pretend of a natural occurrence, a puppetry of flowers. In and before my petals reveal the stamen, a curtain call to close for the day or season. What great conflict the ventriloquist has between this interior canvass and the external fibers. A town has no fields. This town feels me up with stale bread and dried peppers and pickles and pecans from UGarden. A gastroepistemological gambit.

Dogs get off my

G-Spot: making tiny oases to all the morale it tends to. The cocktail parties are intimately stemmed up, splinted, sandbagged. In the finest gardens, those who tend to them are not the same enthusiasts, not the drugies orgiastic orating their opus no one cares for, you're flaunting, you're drunk. That is why the torture of tending is so close to what is most beautiful. A certain kind of waiting and digging and waiting and loving on these domesticated fragrances and fragrances.

Benches for sitting and smelling,

Street is the way to the garden, she said Stan Mullens studio has this wilderness. We snuck in together one night and laid in the sticks. The dogs in the distance smelling our frugivorous bodies but couldn't make it to this neck. No pathway past the lawn. Even at our most remote you couldn't tell me. I could always tell you that I loved you before you fell into this bed of foliage which swallowed you into the mud past the tree roots where the stigmas were digested by the fungi.

Statues' moss told me

I tried to take care of your dead fathers jade but it could never find light. It scrunched up like exfoliated time. We fermented it in a gochujang chili sauce and fed it to your cat who you always enjoyed seeing walk around in the garden eating at the kudzu we even tried to put a leash on it and it worked it was just superfluous we realized you can't walk a cat like a dog because the dog is loyal to pace and the cat is not.

People, no ant or plant, in this town sacrifice ethical choice for aesthetic preference.

Micro chasms of aestheticism always embeds an interest about formalism. Gardens are like laboratories. How quickly things transition between the ethical and the aesthetic under the value judgement of a garden, not of growing.

not of loving, you say you didn't care about ethical concerns, you made the longest proof.

Garden without a gardener,

Jackson Street building is so beautiful at night when you approach it from the bottom of the hill, visually to your knees in the dirt, it is as if a poem of utter transparencies imposing its sedimentary sedulousness, where does the wilderness begin and the architecture stop? Sentimental salaciousness suffocates in the cracks of those granite steppingstones to the next part of life next to that nest that is so crucial and so flimsily temporary.

Eroded writing in stones

Seasonal changes were the first planned obsolescence. In order to save the time we charted it and painted. I'm sick of nostalgia because the barometric pressure changes when the seasons decide to act up and I get sick and thin. It is curious to me that fashion photographers often double as documentarians of flowers. How perfect a fritillaria lilt and tilt; highs and cries like the bulimic model torn between the terrors of not making it and health. A love drive to torture the young over what is most becoming and the child only blossoming into an adult. A baby face. These flowers, do they choose to be beautiful, are they wanting to be photographed? She can't remember if she wanted it from them. Something so complexly meaningless, inanimate contours to this graphic world.

Gardens flash like fashion shows.

An augenblick of an eidos

with the grand schematics in this micro-world-building,

only ultimately to be shrugged off by this earth.

Brother,

by Matthew Carpenter

Our love makes
And sharpens
While separating

Our weeping voice
Cries out

Not us

Przytyk, Poland, 1933

by Jacqueline Reynolds

Przytyk, Poland, 1933

Population: 2,302

My mother's soft smile always lingered
with the smell of cigarettes
she always let me sleep with her stained sheets
placed on the stone floor as she watched
the window
her short hair clinging
to the nape of her sweaty neck

My mother's hands always shook
while she would stroke my back
reading the Hebrew Scriptures each morning
the light peaking
through that sweaty window

I lived until I was nine
always expressing gratitude
for the strength behind
My mother's soft smile and shaky hands
but the lions came
the synchronized sound of their boots
pounding against the streets
below the window
drowning out the light.

Return of the Meadow

by Rachel Swartzell

Begin this day and end this night with me in / a ring of roses / a
place of expression / a field of green dusted gardens. / End this night
and begin this day with me in / a song of myself / technicolor glare
lights / a stage of expression / raining rainbow confetti at the end
of the show. / You've heard of Bible-belt children being raised in
church / but my momma raised me in the sanctuary of the Highway
women and their dogs / sit down boys / it's a dog-eat-dog world / so
return to the meadow / a pasture of fourth wave feminism / hashtag
MeToo / a place that is mine. / I'm a wildflower / stop trying to put
me in a vase.

Love Poem

by Matthew Carpenter

—for A.H.

i am a stranger in love
with the queen
of liquid air and sun-beat cicadas

a daughter of the glass city
that battles with heart-pine
echoes of fire and
wire-grass

peach pit pumps nectar
as roots spring from your
fingertips, wolf-woman
and seeds drop
from your tongue

in far-cast dream seas
my mind dives for you
splitting oysters on sandy floors
and testing truth by tooth-grit

your name lives on
the tip of my tongue,
each syllable scooping meat
from my palate to mold my
mouth in its image

Ute Park, New Mexico

by Jacqueline Reynolds

Ute Park, New Mexico

Population: 71

She sits with her legs crossed.
Her faded, stained jeans hang loose on her thin hips.
Wrinkled bare feet tingle at the mountain breeze,
grey curls tangle down her slumped spine.
The wooden swing rocking back and forth,
back and forth her mind contemplates
jumping into the shallow river a few yards in front of her
as she drinks the old bottle of white wine
nestled in her lap.
She forgets whether the sun is rising
or setting,
the blurry blend of orange...blue...purple...blue.
Looking to the sky she screams, *Lord make room for him*
Then thinks of climbing off the rocking, wooden bench,
jumping into the shallow river
while the sun makes up its mind.
But the wine bottle is almost empty
and her droopy, wrinkled eyes slowly shut.
Orange...blue...purple...blue.

Graveyards Between

by Andrew Benzinger

Graveyards pepper the snaking path between
Us three - the King and you and I - that twist
Skill and stardom, experience and gene.

Always felt, seldom said and never seen,
The ghost of Babel looms near in the mist
As graveyards line the snaking path between.

How many discarded visions could glean
The clues of creation but have been missed
By skill and mark, experience and gene.

The two bemoan, "Why must the King be he?"
For he calls us - but only to assist
When graveyards flood the snaking path between.

"If he could do it, so can I," said she,
Not knowing that exceptions spawn these rifts
In skill and fame, experience and gene.

So here we three lodge, caught in the machine
That runs on chance and longs to co-exist
With graveyards forming the looped path between
Skill and stardom, experience and gene.



Don't worry. I'm not alone

by Menna Abo-Elhamd

on the 1 train (or a blender)

by Janis Yoon

and i see one man
three times

down the car
out the door, pass the window
when i ride again

and i walk on,
metric and isolating,
feet shuffle only in sound

dive away, dove,
above, into skies
ocean blue, bluest, blinding new,
blubber bubbles, fumble minutes moved,
respite suspended, safe locked seconds few,
wide marble, white warble, wasted milieu, jump,
away, above, no body move, awake, aware, seep through,

and i find clouds black
bursting below

drip

from street grates,
liquid gold, rain to scalp, diluted

with sunny d and pee,
the weight of value,
reverence
for every atom—me,

this soaking crown to god,
my god,
i fall.
dirt crusted station tiles
meet hands and heels
bowing to an altar

아버지 왜 그래?

in kneeling i find two grains of rice,
one of each nostril,
birthed from a hiccup,
mucus-blood splatter,
rage snapped wax, child severed

undone art of green years,
strings pulled by relentless doubt,
fear of him turns
sight, turns sound to flames,
and i start with words on pages,
end with discontent

fall into the sky
extinguish the blame
father and i end
up the same

and i see one man
three times
and never again

Amber

by Anjali Sindhuvalli

From the second our eyes touch,
Your gaze is
Amber.
Neutral tones swallowed by red light,
Eyes neither narrow, nor sharp-edged,
Nor forgiving.

Light recedes until your pupils dilate in scarlet fear
Because under the Amber light,
This is where I will trample you.
Crushing your gaze Amber until it softens pink-gold
Almost mauve with sorrow.

For the first time, my shade matches yours
Breathing red into the humid-stricken wet air.
Air that I will smother with tears, ripened with anger and
Sketched Amber.

You do not understand what fills my pool, what force pours my words
From memory, to paper, to breath, I whisper -

No, I speak.
Amber shapes and Amber eyes, I declare.
I
Burn the candle slowly at both ends, turning flames from rose to red.
I vomit both principles and novice thoughts, I
Cough blood until you cough tears.

I find cat hair on my sweater
 a red leaf by the door,
 saying, is this God?
 Or this?
sometimes mean it,
sometimes
 want to see your face fall:
pointing at dirt, at the bottoms of your feet, at shit:
 I say,
Is this God?
 Is it?

Valentine

by Alex Coats

Hi mom,
how are you?
the week is young
for summer new

Hang on,
let it through
a winter gone
some season true to spirit

The clouds above are rolling, mom
do you hear it?
the light is golden, mom
do you feel it, now,
as I feel it?

Please, do best to stay true, mother
I know you often feel blue, mother
you tell me to find new mother
think that I'd love her
when I love her it's you, mother.

on earth, of earth

by Sherry Luo

Look at
concrete at
the right angle,
light, time of day. Press
your cheeks against
it, grind your dimples
raw. It is the face of
the moon, the sun
catching on the cusp
of every crater, dip,
hidden water. It rains,
and then you remember
you are on earth, of earth,
static leaping up to
meet your lips.

THISisAPRAYER (feeling nervous)

by Leita Williams

does writing a poem before
i pray about it count as
an emotional crutch?

are my poems prayers if
i write about how its hard
to talk to God on Tuesdays

if my poems were prayers
would that make You want to read them?

is my whole life a prayer or
just an aching to be heard do i
want to be heard do i
want to be here

what do i want I'm not
supposed to talk about what i want but
I'm so confused what i am supposed to
long for, am i saying this prayer
right, do i need to close my eyes i
cant breathe very well I'm on
my knees in the bathroom please
make me feel better but You
don't just give things You
give moments when we choose them but

how is that not earning this, how is
that not earning the choice to feel better

is it my
choice to feel this way I'm
doing this to myself I'm
stepping on my lungs I'm
gasping for breath trying
to understand what I'm doing
wrong. pleaseGodthisisaprayer

LEGAL DRUGS PROHIBIT DREAMS

by Clark Brown

THIS DESIRE TO NUMBER EGGS
WITH ALL THE WRONG NUMBERS
DREDGING THE OCEAN
OF THOUGHT AS THOUGH FOR MARROW
TO SUCK CLEAN
LEARNING TO DRESS RABBIT
APE CONCERN, AND CATCH IN ONE HEADLIGHT
THE DEER LIVING OUT OF CONTEXT
IN THE RESIDENT'S FOREST.
MY CAR IS THE DOG WEARING A CONE.

poseidon

by Leita Williams

i've got a stainglass of Poseidon
hanging across from my toilet
everytime i pee i remember
this comes from the gods

holy crap

ijustrememberedihaventprayedtoday
i'm pulling up my pants running over to clean up
my room
 my clothes
 my sins

i feel Someone approaching
oh wait I'm not ready
 yet
push this pile into the closet i
wad the rest up to cushion my fall
to my knees

dont look in the closet I'm
not always this messy i
know its later rather than sooner but
I'm here
are You still here?

one and two

by Tabitha Clara

watch the bodies
contort and warp
into shapes that are more
body than person
more sinew than
i think i knew you
forms that no
longer resemble any thing
other than a s hell
of bone and meat
and soul

sold ier on before
the next act
the new movement
the great conquest

that body there
is a moment too late
their form morphs
i nto man

bones snap back
into place, skin seeps
through cracks

that being ceases
to amaze, creased in
the edges of mortality

darting between body
and some body

The Everything of Marmorkrebs

by Steve Dio

From itself hatches a Marmorkrebs,
Marbled Crawfish, more famously,
“The self-cloning crawfish.” A
Crustacean, Marmorkrebs is incapable

Of complex thought. Its feelings
compartmentalized into antennae. The
feelers
only able to comprehend “Food” and “Not Yet
Food;”
a gormless water-insect that juggles snails
until it accidentally eats one, unknowingly
living in a Super Buffet,
Until nothing remains to be eaten.

Its feelers flop against some
wood, and the Marmorkrebs
Considers itself an All Terrain Vehicle:
longing for air but anchored to
water playfully climbing for the sake of it,
chitin-toddlers.
Until nothing remains to be climbed,

While climbing, it’s common for
Marmorkrebs to grab plants with its
claws, upon which it realizes It can
eviscerate. It will then perform underwater
deforestation
until nothing remains to be cut down.

In low-oxygen environments, Marmorkrebs
erects a burrow. A chimney to enhance
airflow underground.
Or a signal to things above it.
The only edifice allowed to Marmorkrebs.
Trapped in drying, separate puddles,
Marmorkrebs never had the chance: the ever-
shrinking puddles’ ever-rising toxicity forcing it
into an undying unliving death-life devoid of
crustacean joys.

Somewhere along the line, Marmorkrebs will
carry eggs. Rather than dividing, the egg
remains Whole, forced to fertilize itself in the
absence of mates, recreating itself.
All for more nothing

8pm - November 19th, 2019

by Emilie Forlacroix

8:10 – Emilie, Philosopher

It’s time to think, reflect. I say some philosophical shit and we laugh,
but really, it’s true. And no matter how loud we are, life is still there,
looming over us with its harshness, its deceptions, its joys, its aches.
Nothing’s gonna change that.

8:11 – Loïs, Philosopher

Now it’s your turn to be wise. Somehow, we always manage to dig up
some new truth, some new revelation about life we’ve never thought
about. But we’re not reinventing the way humanity works. It’s one of
those breakthroughs that blow our minds and that we forget about
ten seconds later. Sounds sad, but it’s a happy moment.

8:12 – Questioning

Isn’t talking about life in general a way to escape our own? Where
are we going? Why are we here? What’s the next step to be taken? To
go where? Alice comes to my mind, and how the cat would say that it
doesn’t matter where you go if you don’t care where you end up. But
then, isn’t it risky to go wherever without asking yourself questions?
I know the cat is right, and that’s why I love *Alice in Wonderland*: we
get useful life advice from unexpected sources. But that doesn’t help
me in figuring out what I want. Neither does it help her.

8:13 – Decisions

Let's be real. We have not decided our whole life plan in the span of a minute. However, it's nice to pretend we have our shit together sometimes. In a way, we do: we are doing something right now, so why would it matter whether or not we know what's next? What matters is right here, right now. Oh god, Troy and Gabriella are stuck in our minds now. Good job.

8:14 – Disappointment

She says something stupid and I pretend to be offended or outraged or just disappointed. She does make some really bad play on words sometimes, but I'm never disappointed in her. We just like to pretend, because it's fun. Acting, being someone we're not, being dramatic for no reason, just being able to lose all seriousness. It's a great way to unwind. How could she disappoint me? I've known her for more than two years, and I know it doesn't seem like a long time, but it sure feels like it. Not to be *that* girl, but I know pretty much everything about her. And she knows everything about me. Almost.

8:15 – Spacing out

For some reason, I'm not able to remember what we were talking about at 8:15. To be honest, we could have been talking about anything. Even after two years of talking daily, we've not run out of things to say to each other. And I know it's only a one-minute blank, but it still could be absolutely whatever. We're like that. We talk about anything, everything, all at the same time, for important reasons, for no reason at all. I remember once, we found ourselves talking seriously about toothpaste, at 1 am, sitting on my bed. No idea why.

8:16 – Retrospect

Now, again for no reason, we're trying to remember what we've been talking about for the last six minutes. I am, actually. She doesn't care. But I think it's funny how we are able to switch from an emotion, a feeling, a subject to another just like that. I'm assigning every minute to a theme, so we can see the timeline of our conversation. I still don't really know why I'm doing that. Maybe, it's just to remember this funny phone call. One out the thousands we've had since we've been apart. God, I miss her.

8:17 – Memory loss

Fuck, I cannot recall what we talked about at 8:15. I'm frustrated, because I know it's there somewhere, in my head, or at the tip of my tongue. I know it is, but I can't seem to be able to find it. She laughs at me. It's okay, it doesn't matter, it's gone now, she says. I'm kinda mad. I really want to remember and she won't help me. I've been on this bus for a while now. When's my stop?

8:18 – Fighting

We're acting like an old married couple again. Such fun! It really is. We insult each other, fake yell, pick on each other for stupid things, and pretend to be mad. I'm aware I'm in public right now, but I'm speaking French so no one knows (I'm hoping) that I'm swearing profusely. That's definitely one of the perks of being abroad: we could be having the most intimate, violent, outrageous, private discussion and no one would know. I feel like an outcast, or a secret agent. I can't make up my mind. I love her so much.

8:19 – Love is back

And we love each other again. The fake argument has stopped, and

we're being emotional messes. It's what I love most about this friendship, we can tell each other everything. We're not afraid of words, of feelings, of feeling. Why hide the fact that we love each other like crazy? We're also very close physically, we hug and hold hands in public, and I know some people don't like that, or might judge us. But I don't give a shit and I think those people are stupid for not realizing that we should cherish the people we love every second of every day until we can't anymore. That's just what makes life worth living.

8:20 – Parting

Next stop's mine. We have to hang up. It's always hard. Not really because we're sad, but because we talk way too much. For that, we really are stereotypes of blabbermouths: we can't shut up. And that's awesome. Nothing's more sad than people who don't have anything to say to each other. I hope we'll never become like that. I don't think we will. We say 'love you so much' once last time, and I get off the bus. Time to find Shauna, I'm hungry.



3 bucks

by Temple Douglass



Numb

by Abigail Friedel

Embrace me

by Alex Sausa

I parade my sex life and
spread my theories and ideas
like fire down under, like
koala chlamydia,
like coronavirus so
I know I seem confident, but
sometimes I want to slip
out of this skin soaked
in sweat and tears I shiver,
because it is exhausting
being myself. That self is
one they dislike, do not want.
I am not equal parts kind,
sexual, intelligent,
comedic I am my own
mixed drink with more fire than
sweet and who wants to drink that?
but there are people who hold
liquor well and I guess that's fine
'cause a light-weight can't handle
my heavy heart and ideas.
So hold me well if you like
my taste, hold me in one piece,
hold my shoulders tight so
my soul does not slide out
and try to escape *please*
hold me in arms warm like rum,

tell me my words burn like wild
fire, but taste like honey
sliding off my tongue, on your
lips, tell me my skin burns like
fever, when it sings against
your own, but do not say I am
sick. No, tell me I am so
well. Embrace me
as I am.

bearable

by Janis Yoon

white noise again... the the the
feeling at the end
when sticks stick and some mouth's
left agape in an MRI... the the the
feeling at the end...

once wet and full of life
felt it slip in... the the the
friction it begins
vice virtue eyes hollow lights bend
kisses cuts cut same
in the end

Escape

by Sydney Goins

Across the doors
of Peabody Hall,
a couple
of women hold onto
warm coffee cups, looking
down on
a shaved head
(girl)
crouching in a
dog cage.
She looks straight
ahead, unbothered
by passerby.

The Ballad of Paul Bunyan.

by Colin Bergen

Paul Bunyan sat on the side of the road. By his side was a rusted axe and an absence of Babe. He held in his hand a large rectangular sign, a former billboard he borrowed for his purposes. In black paint the sign read: Seeking Employment.

Work had been hard to get these past decades. A lot had changed since the West was free and carriages roamed. His skills were impressive – but, in this day and age, unnecessary. The speed of the saw blade was efficient enough for the world, and machines were much cheaper to feed than he was.

True, he could still cleave through a whole forest in one mere swipe of his axe, but there was so little space for that anymore. If he wasn't careful, he could risk knocking over a cell tower or crushing a cabin or dislodging a parking lot. It has happened before, and, he could tell you, the folks down there were less than pleased.

Even when he had the space to show off his impressive strength on a lonesome part of the forest in the Amazon, he wasn't able to take a swing. Several trucks rolled up below his feet – the EPA and their forces. They promptly ordered him to cease and desist or face prosecution. Bunyan had no choice but to trudge back home, his arm aching from underuse.

Nothing, however, was as hard for Bunyan as the press was. As studies were done and reports were made over the scope of Bunyan's impact on the environment, he became something of a controversial figure. Historians and scientists and conservationists

alike began to demonize Bunyan as the bane of the American wilderness; the destroyer of countless habitats. It was because of Bunyan the Buffalo are so rare, because of Bunyan that the Californian Golden Bear is now no-more, because of Bunyan that hundreds of species are disappearing from the earth. Bunyan was worse than poachers, worse than pollution, than Exxon and BP. And eventually Bunyan couldn't step anywhere without his foot being crowded by reporters who wanted to know his response to these accusations though they were hardly interested in his side.

A lawsuit was eventually held against Paul for his alleged crimes against nature. The People Vs. Paul Bunyan was the story of the month – all the best news channels reported on it. Protestors and debaters and the curious masses all crowded around the courthouse for the days the trial went on. The Anti-Bunyan side stood on the left, shouting statistics and brandishing damning symbols. Those who were Pro-Bunyan stood on the right, proclaiming that he was an American icon being unjustly persecuted just because he was no longer appropriate. On both sides stood advertisements for International Paper, which celebrated itself as an ecologically conscious company.

Bunyan tried his best to defend himself. He remained calm and friendly though the course of the trial, and spoke as plainly as he could. But his weathered tales of wilderness heroics and ambitious settlers could not save him from the sharp-edged comments of the attorneys, which, in tandem with carefully chosen experts, skinned the giant like a bear in front of the judge. It was by a miracle that he was declared not entirely guilty for the damage. He was, however, required to pay a sum of money as large as he was – an amount in the hundred millions.

It was needless to say that Bunyan could not pay back his debts. He had been without employment in recent decades, and a

week's grocery bill for him was enough to bankrupt a small business. It took only a month for him to lose his home, his ox, and most of his flannel shirts. The edge of the road became his sole domain, and the occasional look of pity became his only sustenance.

They say he still sits there today. Still holding his sign, hoping for employment. His beard has grown long, they say. His flannel is ragged and his axe is nothing but a brown wedge. The hearty meat on his bones has withered so much, they say he looks as thin as one of the sapling trees newly planted in the forests he used to romp in. His good humor is gone. The once-boisterous giant has grown bitter with age and delirious with hunger. He rambles, endlessly like he used to, about the days of the frontier. "The world was bigger back then," he says. "Now? Now I can't walk anywhere."

He shrinks by the day. Little by little his back curls outward and his head hangs lower like a lamp fixture. His eyes grow dimmer like the end of a sunset, and his red-apple cheeks sag with mourn. Soon, they say, he may dwindle into no-one. Yet he waits, patient and dying for his chance to swing again, believing, perhaps hopelessly, that there would be a corner of the globe still open for giants.

100 calories

by Michaela Wilkins

you cannot run if you do not eat
you cannot think if you do not eat
you cannot grow if you do not eat
one tablespoon of peanut butter
two cookies
three clementines
four hershey's kisses
and
that anxious feeling in your stomach
does she know how hard it is to eat without her around?
a stomach tied in knots does not need to be filled with food
100 calories
one banana
two cubes of cheese
three strawberries
four marshmallows
or
like every day for the past year and a half
one cup of plain cheerios
no milk
who can afford the extra 50 calories?
thank god for the divorce
they're more concerned with themselves than with you
too busy to notice
or
too tired to care
i'm just not hungry

or
i ate with some friends already
surprising they can still hear you over the rumbling of your stomach
100 calories
is not enough for a growing girl like you
you cannot run if you do not eat
you cannot think if you do not eat
you cannot grow if you do not eat
you'd think you'd have learned that by now



Metamorphosis

by Alexa Pfeiffer

Frogsong

by Shannon Rainey

The sun sets, sky darkens, and the frog choir
starts to sing to the semiaqua-tic,
tic, of the metronome. Notes rise higher,
like the frogs wish they could. Their lunatic
plans of conquering water, earth, now sky
are doomed. The birds laugh at their hopeless song.
Who would ever think that a frog could fly?
They should stay on the ground where they belong.
Owls soar above on their evening patrol,
and frogs watch with envy, like they could will
themselves wings. But these are dreams for tadpoles
who haven't yet learned what the world is. Still,
they raise their amphibious voices to croon
night time songs at an indifferent moon.

Night Vision Offerings

by Talia Locarnini

Fingers tremble
Reaching for heaven only for the eyes to shut
Chosen ones cast out like chapped lips
As hands tender on each side of her face
Come away bloody

Stigmatas have a polarization
A magnetic pull towards the thin line between
Pain and pleasure

The skin from your hips to your clavicle
Bore the scars of a piece of broken glass
Piercing like blue eyes full of anger

You were intent on shattering before sunrise
No matter how much antiseptic I spread on
The road map of trauma trail-
Blazing down your stomach with a vengeance

No matter how many offerings I left at your
altar,
My hands were too small
To hold your pieces in place.

Maybe this is why we lusted for blood,
Carving evidence of our devotion
To an Old Testament God

Like tributes to the nicotine ash
Stained on your porch

Maybe this is why we loved so deeply,
Our souls wholly intertwined
Like a tree branch wrapped in a hurricane:
We couldn't stray from that thin line
Between pain and pleasure.

Begonia

by Lena Visser

wrinkled baby's foot
newborn elephant
peek through the tray
starve of water &
burn in the glistening steam
of noon day rays
a moonbeam of pink & yellow
blossom to greet
the world
in a basket
of spring green

my english major

by Joseph Dierkes

I.
overthinking
overcomplicating
happiness rolled up in papers.
dictionary definition:
5 (only the oed will do)
 "The quality or condition of being happy."
alternatively:
 "The state of pleasurable contentment of mind; deep pleasure in or
 contentment with one's circumstances."
alternatively:
10 "Successful or felicitous aptitude, fitness, suitability, or appropriateness;
 felicity. Also: an instance of this. Now rare."
how rare.
the quality comes on the condition that you are in front of me.
the state of mind that i am content with is when we are dancing.
success is rated on a weighted scale: sweet ferocity en suite.
15 damn damn damn

my english major,
what is a synonym for this?
 audentes fortuna iuvat,
or how you might say,
20 *fortune sourit aux audacieux.*
i say,
cinnamon strands of simplistic symmetry,
daring to smile at one's resolution:

be bold and be great.

25 damn damn i'll-

i'll sit and wait for the words unsaid

greatness awaits at the tip of the tongue—

that's what the degree is for

mind me not,

30 i'll mix and madden the phrases together.

why should one thing mean not another?

why should some words slip the tongue's mother?

they say english is but five languages stacked upon each other;

pretenders wearing the crown.

35 damn damn damn

do you think if alexander had a son

he might be the tenth worthy?

or would alexander been one at all?

do i dare conquer the question?

40 he didn't speak latin or french or english

even vulgarly,

et lacrimatus est alexander.

II.

contemplation

comprehension

45 surrender in the fields.

dictionary definition:

"More widely: To give up, resign, abandon, relinquish possession of, esp.
in favour of or for the sake of another."

i flout the law, or maybe float with it

that reckless abandon of the feminine possessive

50 in which another sake is for.

or maybe war.

damn the doors of of the library

they need to be closed but

i hate hearing those echoes.

55 you and me a/part of a paper

being written for tomorrow,

tomorrow, and tomorrow

always comes.

carpe diem;

60 *c'est la vie.*

damn it all damn it all damn it all

perchance i caught a glance

before you went to fled,

an unbusy bed arrested

65 in the warmth of radiating beauty.

tied back tragedies, held together in majesty;

how do your eyes captivate mine so?

i think king arthur must have laughed

how lancelet was taken by the french

70 as he ruined rome. or maybe rome ruined him?

more dread comes without corpses,

but i know mordred wept when gawain died.

we must wait for the french,

or maybe lucky lancelet, or maybe lucius's lopped off head.

75 *le morte d'arthur—*

bella gerant alii

so guinevere lives.

III.

foreseeing

foretelling

80 dreams are but happiness and surrenders.
dictionary definition:
“Obsolete: Joy, pleasure, gladness; mirth, rejoicing, jubilation; an
instance
of this.”
alternatively:
“A vision or hope for the future... (now also) an ideal, goal,
ambition, or aspiration.”
85 alternatively:
“A delightful, excellent, or exceptionally attractive person or
thing; an ideal or perfect example of something.”
what more needs to be written?
you are all of this.
but of all this, you are
90 ultimately:
“Something imagined or invented; a false idea or belief;
an illusion, a delusion”
what more needs to be read?
what more needs to be dead?

et tu, femme fatale?
95 *requiescat in pace:*
vivat rex! vivat regina!
vive le cul-de-sac!
omnia vincit Amor:
mrior invictus — mort de rire.

100 damn you

Because You Wished It

by Lena Visser

(East Clayton Street, Athens, GA, USA)

I suck the black diamonds & greenstone, the coal, the toxic puff of CO deep into my
lungs for them to become stuck here on Clayton Street.
The empty bars brought us here to this corner.
I watch you shove your swollen tongue
down
my
second
soulmate's
throat.
I hope it doesn't become
caught
there.

Black Moon

by Adesuwa Utomwen

Black moon
Lifted up in the white skies that surround this earth
I watch.
Black man
Beautified by his internal armor of strength
I gaze.
Black man
Strong in stature and in intelligence
Hard brown eyes
Thickest texture of black hair
Complemented by his white teeth
I smile.
Beautiful is black.
Black is beautiful.
Beautiful he is.

Black man
Stranded in an open land of tall white trees
Generational wealth stolen
Emotionally stripped and left empty,
Bearing no fruit.
Bruised hard brown eyes
Dark red blood runs from his eye to his mouth,
Which has stopped smiling.
I stare.
Black man
Denounced. Beaten. Crushed.
Black man

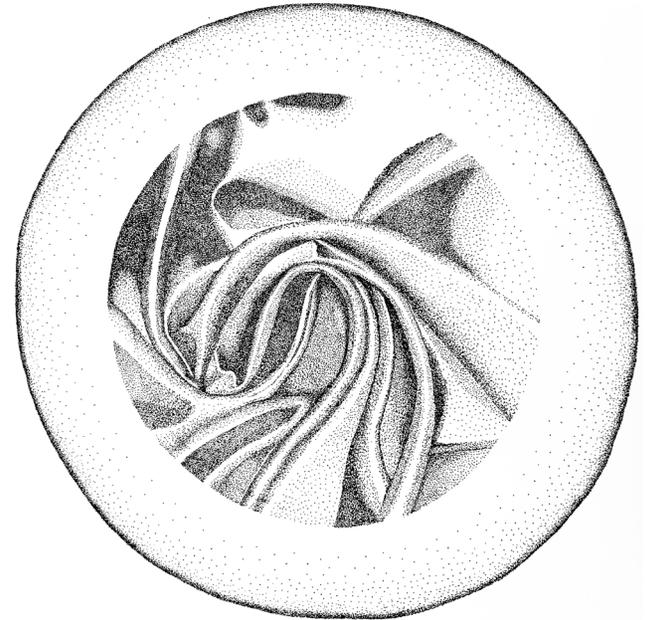
Swimming in the deep seas of filthy hate
Its vile stench is like a burden
Placed on him for generations.
I stare and take a few steps towards him.
Black man
No longer deemed beautiful
Or strong
Or intelligent
Or courageous.

I can't get too close
For I'll see the fear in his eyes.
I can't stray too far.
Far: a distance I never want to experience,
For his presence still leaks strength and valor
I can't get too far.
So, I drag my legs and inch my way closer.
By his side.

I am left staring at my black man with tears in my eyes,
Knowing well that he is still beautiful.
He is left to shine those pretty white teeth in pain.
He is left to walk through life with a bruise that probably won't heal.
He is left to find his way through the dark tunnels of society.
He is left to build trust again.
He is left to lead and to protect.
He is left to face the fear of life, the fear of oppression,
The fear of the false view of internal poverty that this society displays.
He is left to open his bruised eyes,
Beautiful hard brown eyes
And envision himself free again.
He must, for he is strong.
Black man
He is strong and not defeated.

I move away from his side to face him.
I am left staring at my beautiful black man with tears in my eyes.
I see a mixture of fear, of courage, and of resilience.
I see him try to smile.
His chest still rises and falls to the rhythm of his heart.
Tears now sliding down my face, I smile back at him, knowing well
that
He will one day rise up again.

Black man
Beautiful is black.
Black is beautiful.
Beautiful he is.



Wheel of Fabric

by Temple Douglass

holding breath

by Jordan Arnow

The billowing of clouds...
 The thumping of the incoming
The booming among the blackness

The plants; they are dry
The earth—it yawns
 Upon an absent horizon

The haziness of this hour
A sublime whispering
 A tale of time and thought

This time is of the ice
But only for a moment
An illusion of the senses

Here comes the sun
 A warmth beyond
The sweat of labor

The heat,
 It stings
Three lashes for your thoughts

A trembling
 It is not the vibrations of being
but is the creature of fear

There is the opening
 The beginning of a yearning
That hibernates too often

The toxic breath
 Of parlor rooms
Far over the heads

Dinning on the profit
 Of the disorganized minds
scattered and waiting

Since We Replaced the Sun

by Andrew Benzinger

As nightmares haunt noon, daydreams drown midnight.
Circadian soup is served night and day
Since we replaced the sun with candlelight.

This wick burns as eternal, hot and bright
As those long extinct spheres of red and grey.
As nightmares haunt noon, daydreams drown midnight.

In this modern cave, there's no one in sight
To slay me with the words we cannot say
Since we replaced the sun with candlelight.

I once got along with a clock alright,
But its ticking pretence drove me insane
As nightmares haunt noon, daydreams drown midnight.

I couldn't find use in something as trite
As a roommate tocking time's lies away
Since we replaced the sun with candlelight.

My fingers vex droves of dust while they write
By a shortening candle's shadow play
As nightmares haunt noon, daydreams drown midnight
Since we replaced the sun with candlelight.

Foxfire

by Dane Tillman

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ is a living creature
hibernating in a den of faults
slipping through the shortest days
with the frigid ease of a whisper

a life found in spring
is a terrible oath
is a feral oath
blooming tongues of flame

tear out my ribs
to kindle a thousand embers
etch on the wind eternal conversations
whispered through the detritus

~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ tears free
from the snares of a life found in spring
~~XXXXXXXXXX~~ is a living creature
burning through the night

The End of Autumn

by Annie Day

The snow will come any day now.
The trees haven't stopped trembling
since you closed the car door
and I find myself
counting the leaves as they fall
like the seconds of a clock:
it will take you three hours
to cut me out of your life or
sixty three thousand rotations
of the ceiling fan.

How can you let go of what loves you,
discard it
like a penny in an outlet store fountain,
hoping you'll be better off
because of it,
spending your life looking behind you
because of it,
as if pieces you've missed
will fall out of the shadows
and the past will reassemble.

The snow comes silently;
by morning,
the city glistens silver
like a holiday ornament
but I think only of the leaves beneath,
buried and
beginning to rot.

Podcasts are Dead

by Leita Williams

do you think dead people listen to podcasts
up there
when they're bored
cause if you're reading this over my shoulder
you should pass

be a little nosy
listen to us talk
but i guess you could be sick of that
why aren't we sick of sound?
everyone keeps telling me how to feel
i keep listening though.
I'm feeding them
i hate the sound of people chewing

do you eat up there?
while you're driving in the car?
can you drive up there?
how else would you come visit all of us on Halloween?

do you get to talk in Heaven?
or do you just have to listen?

wait I'm getting something
static
must be a sign
but i can't hear you
this is awkward

so i just reply with nervous laughter

are you bored up there?
do you listen to the radio
or mix CD's
or podcasts
or me?

7

by Janis Yoon

no man knows the way, points to road, grain meets grave,
go no man going nowhere, sand in hair, part parcel,
shipped across night show,
light and flame,

declaration of "here," present
at these points of dictated movement,
only a yellow hat remains true to transfigured pieces,

leaping from mussed hair to head,
body of crime and longing, absent
in tassels whipping cold wind

the day of the sound at the door

by Griffin Hamstead

pound the wooden table a fist	flip a card every sunday count the weeks.	'hey rope, old friend' 'long time no see/coming.'
-ful of nail clippings, coffee-stained.	pound pound fish on the scales he will sell at market, if lucky.	'where are all my words?' 'you missed the slow genocide.'
washed down the drain -ing, sink	caught them himself, less pleased to leave the creek.	pound pound pound a noise so long unheard it became new, what child
-ing, the baptism of being alone.	he will eat himself, those if unsold on the greasecounter.	-'s wonder is this? cadence of community it holds itself so well
ten years these cold winds a full dec	the dim candle rings from the tobacco pipe, this fire, this smoke.	demands to be answered door closed to be opened face unyielding attention.
-k of cards ten of them neat piles.	silence hangs the sentence read aloud in front of the crowd.	poundpoundpoundpound the weight of feet across the floor holding the weight of that life, the dust cascading into neat rows below him,
he plays solitaire for the year		

so the angels may follow
the door opens
shaking violently

it is her
'it is you'
'it is me'
'is it you'
'feel'
'yes I do'
'feel me'
'I have'

'you have'
'yes, every
day'
'you have
every day'
'I am
feeling'
'you have
every day
from now
to collapse'
'why are
we crying'
'the stars
are pink'
'and falling'
'have always
fallen'
'we are
the fallen'
'this is you'
'this is me'
'I flipped

the fourth
queen today'
'let us go
inside'
'let us go
inside this
heartplace'
'to get there'
'feel'
'I have'

a study of houseplants

by Clark Brown

i still don't know which ones are easier to kill. i live surrounded by green but know none of their names. claire was a snake plant, she's the only one i remember. i often caught her stretching by the window until she had to be returned. we run some sort of foster care system for houseplants and none of them seem to mind. actually, i do know some of their names. birdy still lives in the same five gallon bucket in which she came.

i'm hardly coparenting these houseplants.

houseplant was the name of a friend i once made on the internet.

if you ask me, the houseplants have a drinking problem.

a houseplant occupies space above your head always tracking to remember when they had their last drink. a houseplant is the partner that doesn't do their own laundry but you stay with them because they are nice to look at and when the sun shines through the window you catch them shifting and smiling.

i live behind the pink chair in a terra cotta pot my face behind a palm frond. i smile. i am rooted.

the houseplant will never have as much as you at the bar but will always be more difficult to get into the uber.

it is not often a houseplant sees another and their conversations are

generally interesting; however, houseplants don't really like talking to others. though they may present as extroverts, their true intention is to remain firmly grounded to their pot.

pot makes things difficult for the houseplant when navigating the world.

soil is a home cooked meal for the houseplant. fertilizer is mcdonalds.

a houseplant likes to think of themselves as spiritual and not tied to any one religion. the houseplant secretly praises mother earth.

the houseplant thinks they are disabled because of their difficulties navigating the world but its just that the pot gets in the way.

claire used to like to stretch their arms and reach for the sun. claire dreamed of growing up and becoming a graphic designer but couldn't figure out how to use photoshop.

an orchid is delicate. precarious. requires special care in the upkeep of their beauty.

at an awards ceremony for houseplants the monstera begins to thank their team

i'm looking at you, photosynthesis.

a houseplant can make a room but can not make the bed.

Feuillemort

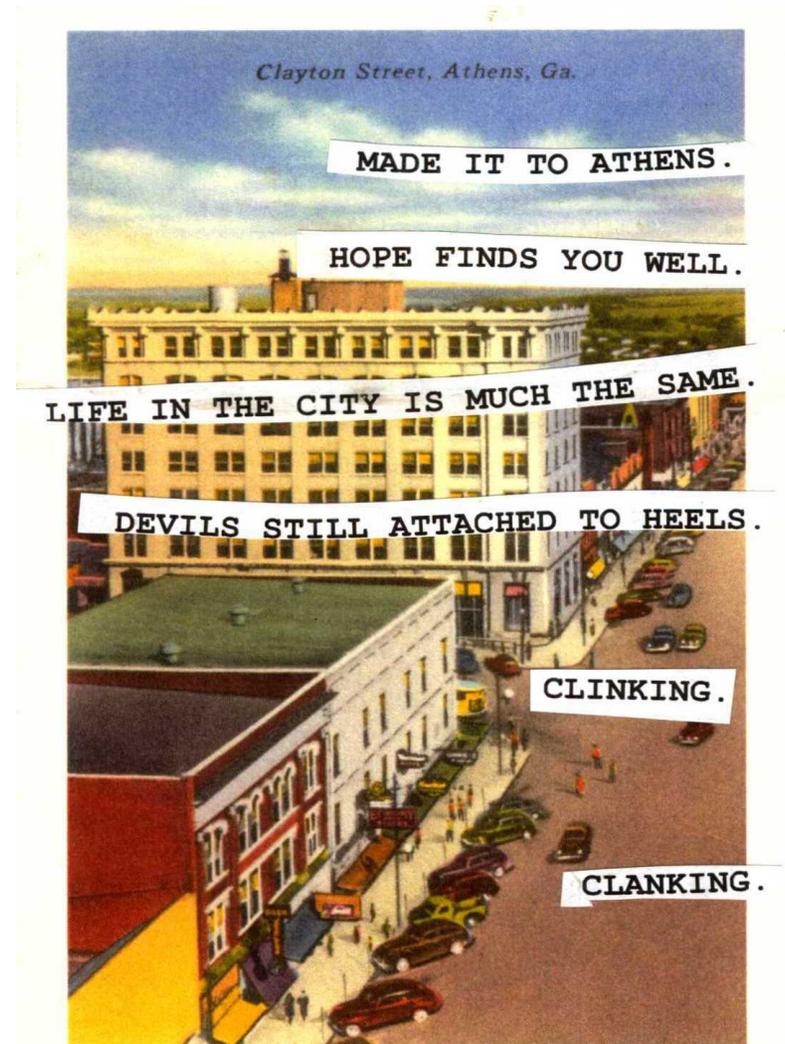
by Shannon Rainey

You crinkle at my touch as your brothers and sisters crunch underfoot. Your veins run dry; your skin stretched taught across them like fabric pulled over harp strings. With those shriveled veins protruding, I almost can't decide if you look angry or sad. Maybe you just look dead. Anaemic. Exsanguinated.

I hold you to my nose and sniff. You smell brown. Like rot and age and decay. I imagine how you once might've smelled. Green: supple, fresh, sweet. Yellow: bright, sour, happy. Orange: sharp, bittersweet, bold. Red: hot, rich, crisp. Now, all that tickles my nose is atrophy.

I twirl you between my fingers and imagine what you might've sounded like rustled by an October breeze, nature's windchimes. I imagine you shivering under December's snow, cloaked in a gossamer layer of sparkling frost. I imagine how you felt when you fell. The lightness after dropping a heavy burden, the relief in your fingers after finally letting go, the melancholy comfort of giving up, of surrender. Then, the impact of your back against the pavement, delicate skin torn by gravel, the air fleeing from your lungs.

I wince and lay the leaf gently to rest among its kin.



Telegram

by Matthew Carpenter

growing pains

by Gale Evans

in a linoleum classroom
lit with august newness
he said that there is no beginning or ending
only a flow into different days
that it's impossible to know where you are
until you've left

is there a life to live, then
that isn't a ghost of "used to be"
haunting one august after another
and searching for signs of different?
is there a way to keep your feet
planted in the earth
and still know when your pangea is
shattered and gone?

i wish goodbyes had warning labels
i wish birds would sing ahead of time
to tell me when they'll fly away
i wish change didn't feel like
looking back at the road
and wanting to tether myself to
every mile marker at once

Tear Here

by Sherry Luo

honeycomb flesh ::: with steel larvae,
think *perforation*.
see how neatly the limb
tears along the dotted
line if you just do it

the right way. hold breath till
tremors

stop *death*
by hypoxia, they wrote
on the gravestone, *and*
a lungful of dead canaries.
they spelled my name
wrong, but at least
it's pronounceable.

sky ripping apart like child's blue
construction paper,
no guiding
 seam.

Gets In

by Tose Akinmola

There's a way it gets in

not through windows
or across thresholds

not up through crevices in bathroom tiles
where mold blossoms from spores

not through holes in the gutters
where thumbnail sized snails breed

but through strained phrase
the careful dealing of
maybes
and *some days*

until uncertainty fills the whole house
a draft
in the vents,
then in everything

The Pruitt Igoe Myth, In Conversation

by Chris Tidwell

The Pruitt Igoe Myth,

In Conversation

Gestalt and Metaphor crushed under the weight of Visionary Critique

Place or
Location
All Arches
Arche
Arches
Architecture is Frozen
Music is
or
or
Epitaph
Epitome of
Episcopate out of
Originated
Crash
Crater and
Images of
Ground
A
Superstructure
History of the
where in the Fire
Cries of Hope to



Genre in a Time and
Genre made out of
Arches or made over
made up of Smaller
Music
Liquid Architecture
Music is the Universal
Music is the Language.
of Artifice.
State Craft
Epiphenomenal
the Dust
in the Sound of the
Coalesce
Breakdown
Building
Superimposed
over a palimpsestic
Critique of Capital
the Sky fills with the
Retribution.

continental drift theory

by Menna Abo-Elhamd

the scientists can say what they want
I know
that continental drift happened in the course of months, not millennia, not eons
continental drift started in July and culminated in September

as Pangea separated, as the continents left me foot on both shores
what was I to do but jump and attempt to avoid deep ocean

I fell so hard
that when I got up
bruises and cuts on my face
body that I've been in for twenty-one years
didn't feel the same

*fingers digging into cheeks and feeling around for teeth
everything is here and not all at the same time*

now
ever-present ache in my body
hand holding a mirror
I do not recognize the girl who stares back

DON'T YOU AGREE

by Clark Brown

WHY WOULD YOU TIP WHEN THEY CAN JUST EARN MINIMUM WAGE
YOU THINK THEIR WAGE IS JUST \$2.13
DON'T YOU KNOW THAT THEIR EMPLOYER HAS TO MAKE UP THE DIFFERENCE
IF THEIR TIPS DON'T EQUAL MINIMUM WAGE
DON'T YOU THINK THAT THEY SHOULD JUST ROT
DON'T YOU THINK THAT MINIMUM WAGE IS ENOUGH
WHY SHOULD THE ONUS BE ON THE CONSUMER
DON'T YOU AGREE THAT THE CONSUMER SHOULD JUST CONSUME
DON'T YOU DON'T YOU D D D D DON'T YOUUUUUUUUU
DID YOU KNOW THAT THE LIVES OF WORKERS IN THE SERVICE INDUSTRY
ARE ACTUALLY WORTH LESS THAN THE LIVES OF EVERYONE ELSE
DID YOU KNOW THAT IF THEY ALSO EXPERIENCE OPPRESSION IN ANY
FORM IN OTHER AREAS OF THEIR LIFE PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY ARE BLACK
OR A WOMAN OR BOTH THEN IT IS EVEN MORE JUSTIFIABLE FOR YOU TO
STIFF THEM ON THE TIP DON'T YOU KNOW HOW MUCH A SUIT COSTS THESE
DAYS I MEAN DID YOU SEE THE SALE AT OFF FIFTH I MEAN EVEN AT THE OUTLETS
THE 50% OFF SALE THE SUITS STILL COST 12 HUNDRED DOLLARS AND IF YOU'RE
EXPECTED TO ADD 20% OF YOUR BILL AS A TIP TO HELP PAY THE SERVER WELL THEN
HOW CAN YOU EXPECT TO AFFORD ANOTHER SUIT FOR THAT MEETING THAT
YOU HAVE AND DON'T YOU THINK THAT THEY SHOULD JUST ROT
I MEAN YOU KNOW HOW BUSINESS WORKS RIGHT
THE LAWS OF SUPPLY AND DEMAND
YOU OUGHT TO DEMAND THEY SUPPLY YOU YOUR MEAL
OR YOUR GOODS AND SERVICES RENDERED AND THEY OUGHT
TO SUPPLY YOU WITH YOUR BILL AND NO LINE THAT MIGHT
IMPLY A DEMAND FOR GRATUITY I MEAN DON'T YOU
THINK THAT THEY SHOULD BE GRATIOUS YOU EVEN

CHOSE TO PATRONIZE THEIR ESTABLISHMENT
DON'T YOU THINK THAT THEY SHOULD JUST ROT
I MEAN YOU UNDERSTAND THE BASIC PRINCIPLES OF
BUSINESS SINCE YOU WEAR A SUIT AND YOU KNOW
THE BUSINESS OWNER OPERATES ON RAZOR
THIN MARGINS SO IF HE IS TO BE EXPECTED TO
PAY HIS SERVERS MORE WELL THAT'S ABSURD BE
CAUSE SOME PEOPLE ARE MADE TO SERVE AND
OTHER PEOPLE ARE MADE TO BE SERVED AND
YOU OUGHT TO KNOW WHAT I'M TALKING ABOUT
YEAH YOU I'M TALKING ABOUT YOU OVER THERE
DO YOU HEAR ME IN YOUR SUIT WOULD YOU
JOIN MY SUPPORT GROUP FOR PEOPLE THAT DON'T
TIP WE WILL POOL TOGETHER 20% OF EVERY FOOD AND
BEVERAGE PURCHASE WE MAKE AND USE IT TO FUND
AN ORGANIZATION THAT ADVOCATES AGAINST
TIPPING THE SCALES ARE EVEN IN THE SENSE THAT
SOME PEOPLE ARE MADE TO SERVE THOSE
THAT DESERVE TO BE SERVED AND YOU PROBABLY
GOT INTO THE BUSINESS SCHOOL DIDN'T YOU CROSS OUT THE LINE
AT THE COFFEE SHOP WHERE IT SAID TIP BECAUSE YOU
SHOULDN'T BE EXPECTED TO FACTOR IN ANOTHER
DOLLAR OR SO INTO YOUR BUDGET THE ALLOWANCE
THAT MOM AND DAD GIVE YOU MUST BE TIGHT I THINK
THE LIMIT ON THOSE REALLY HEAVY METAL AMEX CARDS
IS PROBABLY PRETTY LOW THAT'S WHY THEY SEEM LIKE
SUCH HEFTY CARDS RIGHT?



ADSUM

by Dane Tillman

Water

by Lena Visser

(Villa Lante, Viterbo, Italia)

In an allegorical garden, a dense Sacro Bosco
symbolizes the Golden Age.

Pegasus strikes a stone with a readied hoof

Giving birth to the flow of life-giving Water:
Passing,
falling

Like dominoes
down
the terrace

The story of mankind begins to unravel Wild, untamed, without-sorrow

Foliage clings to tops of grottos, hollowed

by water's gentle caress, as centuries dripped away.

The water facilitates the journey of man
Gradually, we overtake her
We wrestle & we use her
She becomes just a tool
in mankind's grim fall
from
grace

An explosion erupts beneath the final terrace
Cannon Fire from ships afloat in the fountain
Water is still during the battle. She observes our fall from grace. She is helpless in her
subjugation, a slave to our brutality. A final crash of lightning
Zigzags
across
the garden,
leaving a parterre of emerald hedges that hug the fountain into a tomb for the stagnant,
diseased old friend & provider: Water.

The Chasm

by DeLane Phillips

Billy Graham says there's a chasm between me and God. I have no idea what that is, but it must be pretty big for a man to die just to get across.

"Momma!"

"What?"

"Billy Graham says that sin causes a chasm between me and God!"

"A what?" Momma cries from the laundry room, "Are you watching the cornbread?"

The light reflects off the paneled kitchen cabinets. I peek in the oven door window at the golden crust rising to the top of the iron skillet. Mr. Graham's voice echoes through the kitchen. Momma taught me how to make cornbread in the heavy, iron skillet. She even taught me how to season the pan with Crisco. I hear music and Mr. Graham's invitation for me to come, just as I am ... chasm and all. The cornbread appears safe for now.

Something deep inside me wants to accept the invitation given by this man talking from the black and white television. But, something wants to reject it. Could it be the chasm? Looking around the kitchen to make sure no one is watching, I bow my head and ask God to take the chasm away.

Outside the Methodist church, the August heat melts us as we stand in the parking lot. I have looked forward all week to the church's annual Saturday night singing. I have been troubled ever since I heard about the chasm from Mr. Graham. Maybe I should go down to the altar and get rid of it. You know, make it public and all, like the preacher says.

We gather inside the church as the air conditioning quickly cools off the heat. Parked down front and center, the upright piano stands ready with the top propped open. Anticipating the service, I am just as excited.

Daddy decided to go with us, which is odd. Mother always brings my little brother and me to church on Sundays, while Daddy stays home and sleeps. He works at the General Motors Plant in Atlanta all week and is too

tired. I wonder if he has a chasm.

My brother and I sit on the same pew where we always sit. I love the smoothness of the cool, polished oak beneath my hands. Momma sits where she can watch the preacher and keep an eye on me in the mirror above the church piano. She saw me the time Bobby threw a spitball at me from the pew behind. I couldn't retaliate because she was watching. I had to wait until church was over.

The service begins. The music is exciting and lively, not like that "apology" thing we normally sing on Sundays. Everyone is having fun. The night is long, but no one seems to care about getting out on time to eat. We're just having fun.

Later on in the evening, things begin to slow down and the service gets serious. I know this is the moment Mr. Graham is talking about. I am going to cross the chasm.

I make my way towards the aisle; but something shocks all of us, even Miss Head, the red headed widow. Daddy steps out from the oak pew and makes his way down the aisle to the altar. Tears spring to my eyes. Tears spring up in everybody's eyes. My father, the strong man who works at General Motors, slumps down at the altar in tears. Maybe carrying around that chasm all week has made him sad.

I can't bear Daddy down there all alone by himself trying to cross the chasm. I step out and slowly walk down the aisle towards Daddy. Everyone in the church is crying. The music reminds me of Mr. Graham's, singing "... just as I am, I come home." I feel the weight of the chasm pressing down on me, along with all the eyes of the church including Miss Head's. Kneeling beside Daddy, we crossed the chasm together. Now we have to get baptized.

Momma sits in her rocker in the den as usual, before turning in for the night. She rocks back and forth, crying. I can't figure out why she is crying. Daddy and I don't have a chasm anymore and we're going to heaven. That just leaves my little brother. Why would anyone cry? But she does. She just sits there in that rocker, rocking and crying, rocking and crying.

Fishbowl

by Sara McCracken

I'm plowing down walls again
headfirst all these bruises on my brow before breakfast
then we take weak coffee
berry scones
you slept in you
call it unsightly
too much blue
coffee too much bitter not enough
milk and sugar
if my head
splits
into seven
 individual
pieces
you'll melt.
for this world is too much blood
and not enough
 Jericho
for you,
whispering,
close your eyes
and think of sunshine

only there are cracks in mortar
only there are chinks in red brick
only
 the
 real
 gold
 I've seen it.

coexist

by Janis Yoon

lipstick, city parks,
fat outdoor cats,
escalators, handrails,
99 cent slice,
open door pissing,
k-cup sales,

slice glutton,
slice garbage disposal clog,
slice, swipe right,
slice, swipe left,
closed stacked heart

arson the arsonist, hazel's
status quo of burning home,
cozy up to noxious smoke,
siphon gas from sitting bath
and mix with baby's allamino

Chronology of Righteous Anger

by Talia Locarnini

1.

Anger was laid in the kitchen drawer
Alongside spatula and teaspoon
And my hands were padlocked to
Hips paper-thin-incarnadine-bled-
 1. Here is my cheek
 2. (I) Turn the other cheek
 With only two to give
Can affliction be cast out by the martyr?
I fucking hope so
But I feel it under the soles
Like pressure in the gas line
And know the face of my apocalypse
Pulses anger in her hands

2.

[Redacted] is the thing I can't
Make eye contact with,
Keeper of adolescence
Fears of police officers and
Shattered doors and [redacted]
Is the stomach acid etching on
Young skin, parental tears —

Dynamite is two parts [redacted]
One part table settings
And one part “you’re fucking crazy”
Because my Medusa is [redacted] &
Petrified door knobs & mouths torn wide
 On this two-fold odyssey:
 Your hero battles [redacted]
 Your demigod sips her coffee

3.

Faking sleep at eight years old
You kissed my cheek good night
Lips so thin your mouth
Gaping, a dying star--
That mouth now clings to horizontal
Axis, quivers in the aftershock,

And I am something more than
Disappointment and less than
Your daughter and
You, choking,
“So you’re telling me you’re gay.”

4520

by Claire Torak

There is a childhood here somewhere,
pulling up the grass with bitten fingernails

in a backyard glittering under
ashes of a dog. On the bank of the river

tainted from Saturday's fish hooks and a father's sloppy
forehead kiss. She can't remember what that feels like now.

There is a childhood here somewhere,
skinning her knees on the warm driveway pavement

his car disappeared from.
She grew six inches in his rearview mirror

(he forgot to look back).

There is a childhood here somewhere,
grin crooked, catching toads in a drained pool,

and flipping velvet pancakes, laughing. Hands desperately
collect blue paint looking for

wholeness in the drywall, in the repressed memories.

There's nothing to find but family photos

(*HAPPY BIRTHDAY SISSY! Lucky #7!*) encased in cracked frames.

Let Anguish Open the Door

by Lena Visser

(*Myers Hall, UGA, Athens, GA, USA*)

Is my only destiny to be herded like a cow
& to birth ivory-painted children?
To stay meek in the shadow of a large-chested watchman,
the judgment enveloping my ruby-hued womanhood,
chaining it together, sewing it together, holding it *down*.
"Keep to the tried & true sidewalk."
Ignorant commands gouge my bright-eyes.

Anguish
dripping,
dropping,
drooling & pooling beneath my drooping lids,
Caked with the inky, crusty remnants of my dignity.
I soil myself to the thought of
succumbing to the familiar draught of control—
of losing my humanity in pursuit of comfort—
of pure & unquestioned order.

Anguish leaps forth,
Peeling from my vision,
pointing undulating, haunting tendrils
toward the opened door of perception
It goads, gale forces behind my back,
Yanking the yoke from my shoulders.
A prism guides me, bathes me in — *Eureka!*
Clawing over the threshold, I inhale the ambrosial brew
that which awaits me on the other-side
Perhaps tonight I shall be wild.

I Don't Know What You Want Me To Say

by Shannon Wolf

I left and you can hardly blame me I was just treading water though
I did love that hill cased in silver shards where I slid to the bottom
with my can of vodka red bull held triumphantly to the constellations
and I loved the soft cobbles that pinioned my seventeen-year-old-girl stiletto
tapping and tutting waiting for the cashpoint without our anoraks on.

Here on the Gulf, my fingers soak with ambition — I am becoming something else.
Though I say I miss the family I don't know how to lose anyone right
they're all alive somewhere — grandmother in her bungalow steeping tea
uncle in his back garden smoking hand-rolled cigarettes grandfather
examining his model boats somewhere behind his heavy wooden door.

You don't ask me to stick around aloud -- when I'm there you don't see me
water is thicker than blood I'm not for the family picture you're painting.
I ask myself every week isn't it kinder for me to leave and to stay gone
make no waves so there's room for you and the woman you love,
her daughters squeeze-ting the frame — I am cerulean in my absence.

When I was eleven you took me out to the River Isle at the town boundary
they were building boxy identical houses that we still call the new estate now
beyond that still-there-fence, there was once only fields and so before I left
I binocularized Herne Hill knowing it would remain — Yes,
it was magic sometimes but have you ever looked across the Atlantic?

A Fragile Thing

by Tose Akinmola

They think of me as some fragile thing
delicate as a raindrop
breaking on the palm,
trembling and tenuous,
thin and strung taut.

Truly,
I do fracture.
Breaking off pieces incoherent.
Wind and rain erode
until disintegration.

Is that the worst one could be—
some fragile thing?

Tree of Heaven

by Zachary Anderson

Increasingly tremulous veil.

I go out in a sheer chemise
cut from a thinning credit limit.

I am a disarticulated cog.

I fill my wallet with leaves
from the parasitic tree.

The aura of products stains
my hands like a dye pack.

I contracted a virus from the cash drawer.

Let me sleep in the drains of the slush
fund where the tree clones itself again.



Temporary Beach House

by Harrison Pyros

When we are all twenty, we go to a beach house for a portion of our spring break. The boy whose family owns it is an old friend, but he's too strange to be a close friend. He is a repository of sub-Reddits, character bits, and ever-fluctuating dosages of Ritalin. His name is Tenor because his mom was super into music when she had him, but he prefers to go by just T, so we oblige.

The beach house is two stories with two decks and spaced far enough away from the neighbors that our bass-heavy music is only a muffled hum to them. As soon as we arrive, we scramble through the house to pick our beds. We pull crystalline wine glasses from the cabinets and fill them to the brim with chardonnay from a bag. We set up red plastic cups outside to play drinking games in the elusive Pacific Northwest sun, and we binge-drink and get high and take risks because we are all twenty and we still think we are immortal.

This beach house is on the Washington coast, so when we venture over the single sandy dune to get to the water, we wear our coats. We are fresh from doing shots of whiskey at noon on this day, so when we wade calf-deep into the ice-cold ocean, we only giggle at the tingle. Half the photos we take are out of focus, but we don't realize this until a day later. We are too busy burning chicken in the oven and smoking weed on the back porch and pretending this will last forever.

The same day we go to the beach, Tenor takes some acid and does cartwheels on the sand. He says he's never had so much fun here in his entire life. When we return to the house, we are greeted by a fridge stocked full of candy-colored Jell-O shots and ten-dollar vodka handles. We fling these Jell-O shots across the room like mini Frisbees, and soon we all have stained tongues.

There is no Jacuzzi here so a group of us cram into the master bathtub and turn the jets to full blast. The weirdness of the situation is half its fun and we pass around a bottle of cheap champagne to acknowledge that fact. The bubbles inspire us to go back outside and we play 80's music while bouncing ping-pong balls at red cups. We can see the encroaching clouds of a storm coming so there will be no sunset this night—we light sparklers in its absence.

On our final day at this beach house, the storm traps us inside all day. Washington rears its ugly head and reminds us that we are in a land of relentless rain. The morning is gray until Tenor finds the last bottle of cheap champagne wrapped in a towel he thought he'd left at home. We make mimosas to kill our hangovers and shake our grogginess with bacon and eggs.

The storm outside howls in a way that is unforgiving, but we accept its apology anyway. Instead of going to the back porch, we crack a window to smoke weed. We finish off the rest of the Jell-O shots. I watch the red cups on the deck spiral and dance in the wind, but I don't say anything. We still dance and drink and laugh, but we are all coming to the confrontation that things must come to an end.

When we are all twenty, we go to a beach house and forget that it's all temporary. We play pretend and ignore the inevitable. We wake up with sandy toes and messy hair and trick ourselves into thinking this feeling can last forever. We don't know it yet, but the time at the beach house is an elaborate ritual for goodbye.

Two months later, I will leave the Pacific Northwest and return to California. I will only ever see two friends from the beach house again. Tenor is not one of them. I will talk with these friends on the phone and we will meet on warmer beaches where the storms are never as relentless and unforgiving. We will hear through the grapevine that one person from the beach house will develop a prescription pill addiction and another will drop out of school and a third will delete all online activity in a "social media cleanse." Tenor will train to be a child psychologist for the state and when he posts a photo of the beach house trip two years later, we will all like the picture but not leave a comment.

We are no longer twenty, we know what it means to be temporary. We learn from hindsight. We now recognize the elaborate rituals of saying goodbye. We hope they will never find us, but understand when they come.

Wretching

by Jasmine Means

That wretching bug has come to claim me
With its eyes that look like mine
It ravishes my dark heart
And shits out flaws.
My eyes grow ebony fins as
I become the monster that runs through my veins
On my mothers side
Ach, I care too much

apathy

by Alex Sausa

does everyone else drink it?
the liquor of life?
how it permeates their
bodies, spreads warm
contentment
to their cheekbones.
me, though? the mere thought
of smiling
fatigues my face,
the corners of my mouth
unmoving anchors, and
storm gray clouds weigh
down my doe browns.
speaking of rain, my cheek
bones could use some, nowadays,
this drought of release
stifles the smallest
tendrils of emotion
from unfurling,
lively and green, so
everything in my chest
is dead—no, it never
grew at all—so
might i sip whatever
makes you glow
cheery red, like you're
intoxicated on air
by the lungfuls? just a sip

might lift my heavy lips,
might sow them into something
like a smile.

Granbury, Texas

by Jacqueline Reynolds

Granbury, Texas
Population: 9,923

You now refuse to hold my hand

chubby fingers once sticky with popsicle
and then you were jumping off a diving board
for the first time
floaties flippers
fishing rods
girls guns growing too fast
speeding away in that old truck
dirt roads
dirt on your face smeared
by your fingers discovering
something each damn day
you forgot home
forgot me
splash
belly pink, popping out of the bath water
full of life full of you
as round as our Earth
dangling in space

like your hand used to dangle on mine

Grit

by Madison Zehmer

Running my tongue over grit in front-teeth gaps,
gaze settling on its ruin—what a way to become—

watching ivy dwindle down into bramble
and marigold hearts. Build me a coffin out of

grass and when it catches flame
hold its fire in your belly—acid combustion—
watch as your skin turns into blood and rocks.

Give it back over to the body

that churns off of hunger.
Or give it back to God—
melting cuticles and notched ribcages

counting down the hours to our pardoning.

I wish I could hear the crow's calls
driving soil out of its springtime
luring worms to dinner.

That's what dying must feel like

hearing a lullaby only you can hear
calling you to swallow its dirt.

Cancer Root

by Harrison Pyros

The summer I planted bougainvillea in our backyard, my father was diagnosed with cancer. From the cheery associate at Lowe's, I learned bougainvillea was a rapid-growing, hard-to-kill type of plant, perfect for swallowing up the ugly cement wall behind our house. I watered and watched the raspy green vines crawl their way across the wall, the flowers blooming in paper-crisp white and magenta, branches splitting and weaving at whim. Inside on the couch, my father's cells divided without plan or mitigation, amassing into something invasive.

Bougainvillea is not native to Southern California, but it fits the climate well. Without supervision, it explodes in our dry environment, engulfing walls, fences, and other plants in its hulking sepia foliage. Some botanists call it invasive for its aggressive expansion: it has a tendency for its branches to lay root, multiplying itself in a game of weed-like leap-frog until the plant has crawled its way across the entire lawn like an advancing tide.

I try to make comparisons of my father's cancer to my hands-off gardening as a way to make sense of it—dangerous growth, aggressive consumption, nature unhinged—but the bougainvillea is missing one fundamental difference: betrayal. My father's body turned against him one year after retirement with malicious neglect, his T cells failing him, allowing the cancer to build a homegrown suicide bomb with his own body's materials. I let the bougainvillea grow with reckless abandon; my father took pills and injections to halt its growth, shrink it, anything to reclaim the battleground in his body.

My father is the second parent of mine to create their own cancer. Two for two is a pretty damning track record for my lineage. When I was fourteen, my mother had her left ovaries snipped out because they had decided to try to kill her. Seven years after, my father's prostate would try

to kill him. Our genes prefer a cancer that is both devious and shameful, forming itself in the most intimate spaces of the body. I think about the promise of self-poison that radiates from a place as personal as the privates—my doctor does as well, she has me do a blood panel every year to make sure my genes haven't betrayed me yet.

Bougainvillea is evergreen; cancer grows year-round. Our household was the nuclear family archetype—mother, father, son, and daughter—so it only makes sense our genes force us to a future of radiation treatments. Even though it would take ten years for his cancer to kill him (and by that time be curable), my father insisted he be cremated—*toss me in the furnace*, he said. An environmental science professor once told me invasive species are best uprooted and burned—*toss every piece in the incinerator*, she said.

When I started, I planted three bougainvillea side by side. One shriveled and died. The other two webbed across half the wall and stopped—our back lawn was either too dry or too shallow. It seems some things can be contained.

I have avoided talking about my father until now. I wasn't sure what to say, I had nothing new to contribute. Nature has a way of subverting expectations: of persisting or dying, of mutating or imploding. I expected my father's cancer to be a long, intricate trial, branching and weaving like bougainvillea vines, in the way these kinds of things are portrayed on TV. Instead, very early on a Tuesday morning when it was still dark, he had a heart attack and died.

For two weeks, no one watered the bougainvillea—everyone simply forgot. The Southern Californian heat beat down on them, but the two surviving plants stayed alive. There's symbolism to that, but I'm not sure what.

Since I was a teenager, people would look at me and tell me I have my father's face: his jaw, his nose, even his gap between his front teeth before braces pulled mine together. "You are my carbon-cut copy," he would say when people told me this. During the summer, when a side effect of his medication made his legs swell like the stalk of an overwatered plant, he spent a lot of time on the couch. "Sorry I gave you these crappy genes," he

joked about the cancer from a prone position more than once. "But at least you know it's coming."

We cremated him like he asked. He died months after the one bougainvillea plant shriveled, but it wasn't until after the funeral that I pulled the lifeless plant from the ground. My blood panel insists that my body is not eating itself, but I am nearly certain the cancer will come with time. At least I know it's coming. At least I can joke about it. At least I have his face.

in public

by Menna Abo-Elhamd

some days
before I leave my house
I scrub my skin free of the national anthem of *Masr*
I trade in *alif-bih-tih* for a-b-cs
[my dad asks me not to speak Arabic in public because it makes *them* uncomfortable]
I put on lip balm
I place a southern lilt on my tongue like I'm medicating myself free of my foreignness
yes, sir
thank you, ma'am
have a great day
I make a cup of coffee
I paint my skin in swatches green and gray and tan
I lock my door
and leave

to whoever needs this:
if behind closed doors
you find yourself
unstripped of your war paint
camouflage stains on your pillows
breathing scared against your own kitchen cabinets
then that space is no
 place for you
 to exist

baby

by Annie Day

*I loved you
so long ago
that I don't
remember
when I lost it,
where in my
life it slipped
out of me:
a penny falling
silently
from a hole
in my pocket or
liquor wasted
on the countertop
because
I never
learned
how to
pour
without
spilling.
I don't understand
physics or how
the laws of gravity
sometimes bend
or why things
never go where*

*I want them.
When you
called me
on Friday,
I didn't know
how to say it:
what happened
to the love,
how it all
ended up
on the floor.*

ruby

by Claire Torak

While you sleep, entangled in the hum of a heater
and soft rays of gold, I steal one of your ribs,
sucking the marrow from the bone. The taste of fading autumn
blisters on the corners of my lips.

I take this piece of you and stuff it in my pocket
so she cannot have it
(because *She* is the villain. Never you,
never me). So I can prove
that I made a home in your mouth,
my laughter burrowed between your front teeth,
when you pressed me against my wall
whispering about how badly you wanted to fuck me
(and then you did).

Sit next to me in this microcosm
on the living room floor, in these moments—
of diner counters, a shared beer can,
drifting in and out while listening to your heartbeat—while I can still hold them
cupped in both hands
before the hard part comes and I am swallowed by a name that sounds like *blood*
when you say it
staining your smirk
red red red—Morning is due.

In my head we are dancing,
in the space between our words.

I am clutching this beauty in my palms,
as though it could ever flee,

waiting.



Fallen Camellia

by Alexa Pfeiffer

Contributor Biographies

Menna Abo-Elhamd is a senior Psychology student at UGA. Menna enjoys learning languages; she has studied Spanish, Arabic, and American Sign Language. In her free time, she enjoys improving her drawing skills, writing poetry, thinking about the vast complexities of human life and the universe, and of course, catching up on TV. Feel free to hit her up if you really liked her art or if you have a great TV show recommendation.

Tose Akinmola is a third-year Psychology major at UGA. When not writing, she enjoys reading science fiction and books on religion and philosophy.

Zack Anderson grew up in Cheyenne, Wyoming and earned degrees from the state's only university. He holds an MFA from the University of Notre Dame and is currently pursuing a PhD in English at the University of Georgia.

Jordan Arnow has done little and a lot. Currently, Jordan is pursuing a degree in Theater at the University of Georgia. She has written much of her life but began poetry in earnest as a freshman in college. Much of her inspiration is drawn from her time in Atlanta where she spent her first two years of college and an additional year where she had dropped out of college.

Sydnee Banks is a third-year English major and Sociology minor at the University of Georgia. She's interested in working for nonprofit organizations in the future. In her free time, she writes free verse poetry and practices meditation.

Colin Bergen is a third-year at the University of Georgia, currently pursuing a bachelor's degree in Entertainment and Media Studies and another degree in English.

After many years in and out of UGA, **Clark Brown** will be graduating from the English Department in May 2020. In addition to writing poetry, Clark bartends at The National and plays synthesizers in O Key.

Tabitha Clara is a third-year Theatre and English student in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences.

Alex Coats is a first-year student from Columbus, GA majoring in English and Mathematics. He is a poet, musician, and habitual over-thinker.

Annie Day is a fourth-year pre-Veterinary student majoring in English. She has always been drawn to literature and the arts and her favorite way to procrastinate is writing poetry.

Joseph Dierkes is an adopted Vietnamese-American poet currently in his senior year of studying English at the University of Georgia. He troubles over how to express his worldview without too much pretension, as well as his background aligned with a post-colonial identity. He will likely sleep on it.

Steve Dio is a fourth-year English and German major from Kingsland, GA. His actual last name is a mouthful that's easy to mispronounce. He breeds shrimp. No, he doesn't eat them.

Temple Douglass is a first-year intended Drawing major in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences.

Rose Edenfield is a English and Religion double major who will be graduating from The University of Georgia in May of 2020. After graduation, she will be teaching Secondary English in Metro Atlanta through the Teach For America Organization for two years. After her time in Atlanta, Rose plans to attend Law School for Educational Law and Reform. In her spare time, Rose enjoys writing creative pieces of fiction and poetry that are personal to her while hoping to connect with other writers and readers in their every-day or difficult life experiences.

Meredith Eget is a first-year English and Spanish double major at the University of Georgia with a profound love for music and writing, specifically poetry and short fiction.

Andrew Elliot is a fourth-year Microbiology major who wishes he wasn't. It wasn't until he read Tolkien, Dickinson, and Donne that he tried his hand at poetry. When not writing, Andrew enjoys reading and walking his dog Sugar and waiting for *The Winds of Winter* to be released.

Gale Evans is a first-year English major at UGA. They enjoy collecting copies of Hamlet, color-coding notes, and showing pictures of their cat, Darwin, to everyone they meet. Their focus is primarily based in literary analysis, but they enjoy poetry as a creative outlet.

Shanice Felix, a junior Film major at Georgia State University, loves making her audience feel a rollercoaster of emotions from simplistic words. She is a creative writer from Georgia, and her works range from full-length novels to free verse poems.

Emilie Forlacroix is a French exchange student at the University of Georgia. She is a third-year English major and studies Creative Writing. She arrived in Athens in August 2019 from Lyon, France, where she had studied for two years at the University Jean Moulin Lyon 3. She has never been published before.

Bridget Gallamore is a senior undergraduate student studying English in the Franklin College of Arts and Sciences.

Sydney Goins is a fourth-year English major who hopes to get into a MFA program soon and is very anxious about it.

Olivia Graham is a senior studying English in UGA's Franklin College of Arts and Sciences. She expects to graduate in December of 2020 and has interests in broadcast journalism and free-lance writing. Olivia enjoys writing poetry in between her studies, especially for family members in the form of birthday cards.

Griffin Hamstead is a fourth-year undergraduate at the University of Georgia studying English, Spanish, & Sustainability. He has had work previously featured in journals such as *Process*, *The Foundationalist* and *Red Cedar Review*. His current work focuses on the interdisciplinary nature of art, and the raw. He lives in Athens, Georgia.

Nate Manhattan Herbst is a Swiss-American artist and entrepreneur living in Athens, Georgia. He is currently attending Clarke Central High School in Athens. The inspiration for his drawings comes from the cityscapes of New York City, where he lives part-time with his father. In addition to art and business, Nate is a nationally ranked youth rock climber.

Marianna Hiles is a second-year undergraduate student studying English, Women's Studies, and French at the University of Georgia. Her creative pursuits include writing and photography.

Owen Kavanagh is a fifth-year English Major. He plans to eventually graduate and enjoys writing minimalist poetry. Owen has a cat named Bear.

Ever since she got her first composition book at age eight, **Talia Locarnini** has been recording the world around her through writing. Originally from California, she's made a home in Athens, GA for the past few years. Her writing focuses on sexuality and the female experience, and frequently features references to her Catholic upbringing. Her poetry has been featured in publications such as *The Bell*, *Local Honey*, and *Evidence of Wear*. When Talia is not working or writing, she probably is drinking coffee at Walker's, in a museum, or daydreaming about social reform.

Anna McCabe is a first-year student from Augusta, Georgia. She is studying Mechanical Engineering and plans on adding a minor in English.

Sara McCracken is a fourth-year English major at UGA. In her free time, she enjoys writing (obviously), rock climbing, and mindlessly scrolling through Instagram.

Isabella McDevitt is a senior at the University of Georgia majoring in English and minoring in Communications and Spanish. She will be working in Atlanta after she graduates in May 2020.

Jasmine Means is a junior Accounting major in the Terry College of Business who is constantly in pursuit of adventure.

Alexa Pfeiffer is a second-year Landscape Architecture student. She can usually be seen around campus juggling a sketchbook and too many pens.

DeLane Phillips is a Southern voice. She is a mom, a daughter, caregiver, dog mom, writer, and teacher. Many characters and settings featured are from her childhood in Monroe, Georgia. Later in her life, DeLane attended Emmanuel College in Franklin Springs, Georgia, where she was featured in Emmanuel's annual "Montage," receiving first place in prose. A few years later, after the passing of her mother, DeLane returned to the muse of much of her writing, her homeplace in Walton County. She continues to write and supports her 83 year old father, as he battles Alzheimers' disease.

Rory Pivacek has been writing ever since he learned how to hold a pencil. His first work was a miniature book about a boy who lost his shoe, complete with crude drawings and misspellings. He believes that storytelling is one of the most powerful forces in the world, and hopes to connect with a variety of people by sharing his work.

Harrison Pyros is a fourth-year English and Economics student at UC Santa Barbara. He is originally from Los Angeles but spent time all up and down the West Coast, including the Pacific Northwest. His writing focuses on satire, social commentary, and quiet dramas, and his previous work has appeared in *The Santa Clara Review*, Claremont College's *Careless Magazine*, and *Writers Magazine*. His work can be found at harrisonpyros.com.

Shannon Rainey is a junior at Berry College majoring in Creative Writing with a minor in Digital Storytelling. She has work published in *Ramifications Literary and Arts Magazine*, *Alabama's Best Emerging Poets 2019*,

Stillpoint Literary Magazine, and *The Allegheny Review*. A Huntsville, Alabama native, Shannon has always been fascinated with space, mythology and history, and she loves to include these in her writing.

Alex Sausa is a third-year English major at UGA from Marietta, Georgia. Reading and writing have kindled ineffable joy in her life since childhood, when she first started spinning imaginative tales for her younger sister. Her current work explores themes of sexuality, time, and how the mind and body shape human experience.

Anjali Sindhuvali is a third-year Finance major at the University of Georgia.

Rachel Swatzell is a senior Creative Writing and Literature major at Tusculum University. Swatzell is published in *The Blue Route*, *The Mildred Haun Review*, *SHIFT*: a publication of MTSU Write, and *Entropy Magazine*. Swatzell is the 2018-2019 Curtis Owens Literary Award Winner for Poetry and Drama. She currently serves as the Assistant Editor and Featured Artist Editor for *The Tusculum Review*.

Chris Tidwell is a fourth-year Philosophy and International Affairs student at the University of Georgia. He is from Atlanta, GA.

Claire Torak is a fourth-year English major constantly forgetting to drink water instead of coffee. You can find her putting off her work by reading (always more than one book at once), dancing around her room to The Velvet Underground, or baking banana bread.

Emily Tracy is a second-year English major and Linguistics minor from Cartersville, GA. She thinks everything is a love poem and wishes everyone would start their journal entries with "Dear Diary" again.

Adesuwa Utomwen is a junior at the University of Georgia. Her major is Biology and she aspires to serve underrepresented communities as a pharmacist. Apart from her studies, Adesuwa enjoys discovering new musical artists, playing the oboe, writing poems, and singing.

Lena Visser is from the small town of Greensboro, GA, and began attending the University of Georgia in 2013, completed her bachelor's degree in Agribusiness in 2018, and returned for her Master's in Agribusiness in 2019. She works in a wholesale greenhouse, and she not only finds enrichment and inspiration from the flowers she cultivates but also strives to create a more environmentally and economically sustainable world via beneficial insects.

Michaela Wilkins is a third-year English and Theatre student focusing in Creative and Dramatic Writing.

Leita Williams is a third-year English major at the University of Georgia,

Shannon Wolf is a British writer living in Lafayette, LA, who earned her MA in Creative Writing at Lancaster University and is currently an MFA candidate in Poetry at McNeese State University. Her poetry, short fiction and non-fiction, which can also be found under the name Shannon Bushby, have appeared in, or is forthcoming from *Gravel*, *The Forge Lit Mag*, *Great Weather for Media* and many more.

Janis Yoon is a fourth-year English major at the University of Georgia. Their work is highly influenced by jazz, movement, plants, violence, and love in all its secret forms.

Madison Zehmer is a 22-year-old emerging poet, wannabe historian, and college senior from North Carolina studying history at Wake Forest University. She has published and forthcoming work in the *Santa Ana River Review*, *Ghost City Review*, *Gone Lawn*, and more. Her first chapbook, *Unhaunting*, will be released in 2021.

Staff Biographies

Sherry Luo is a fourth-year from Johns Creek, GA majoring in Genetics and English. The recipient of the 2016 Georgia Poet Laureate Prize, she is the author of a chapbook, *Imperative of the Night* (The Lune, 2017). Her work appears in *Atlanta Magazine*, *Figroot Press*, *The Madras Mag*, *FishFood Magazine*, and *The Shanghai Literary Review*. Following graduation, she will attend medical school at the University of Miami.

Dane Tillman is a junior at UGA majoring in English and Philosophy.

Clarissa Bond is a second-year UGA student majoring in Biology and Classics. In addition to writing, she enjoys singing, playing the piano, and finding new film versions of Shakespeare's *Hamlet* to watch.

Abigail Friedel is a second-year from Johns Creek, GA pursuing a double major in Intended Art and Journalism. She is obsessed with all kinds of art and is thankful to be involved in *Stillpoint* where she can express her passion for what she loves.

Matthew Carpenter is a fifth-year English major. His work has been rejected by a select group of reputable publications. He lives on his dog's schedule and writes poetry and short fiction.

Isabel Hutchinson is a first-year English and Journalism double major.

Jessica Hamlin is a fourth-year student at the University of Georgia majoring in Journalism and English.

Andrew Benzinger is a UGA sophomore hailing from Buford, GA who made a very refreshing switch from majoring in Computer Science to English with a Creative Writing emphasis (Franklin College of Arts and Sciences). He enjoys reading and writing anything and everything, but stories rooted in psychological horror, surrealism, and the like are his go-to. He's also a huge fan of the local live music scene and any new voices in Athens' creative world.

Alex Cross is a third-year English major from Marietta, Georgia. She hates robots, the ocean, and deeper meanings.

Just like many of her favorite authors, **Andrea Gutierrez** wishes to become a journalist. She is a first-year Journalism student from Savannah, GA who enjoys poetry, del Toro films, and novels by Elena Ferrante and Clarice Lispector. She is also an avid Arsenal supporter.

Rainey McBride is a third-year English major at the University of Georgia who is passionate about writing in a manner that explicates her thoughts and feelings on both the mundane and the extraordinary. Her hope is that she will provide a tangible depiction to the unseen of this world.

Anna Morelock is a fourth-year English major whose primary interests include feminist literature, pop-punk playlists, and her cat, Nyxi.

Jacqueline Reynolds is a junior Journalism major at the University of Georgia and is working toward the Interdisciplinary Writing Certificate. She is currently a contributor for *The Red and Black*. Jacqueline attended the Juniper Institute for young writers at UMASS Amherst where she discovered her passion for the literary world. She grew up in Fort Worth, Texas and currently lives in Athens, Georgia.

Srija Somaka is a first-year Genetics major who is always looking for new background music to make her day-to-day activities just that much more sensational. An avid reader and writer, she always has a book and a pen on her. If you see her around campus, don't be afraid to stop her for a conversation; she loves meeting new people and learning their stories.

About *Stillpoint*

Stillpoint Literary Magazine has served as a forum for undergraduate writers and artists at the University of Georgia since 1967. The pieces featured in the 2020 issue of *Stillpoint* were selected from a pool of blind submissions. Names were omitted during review, and staff members did not judge their own work. This issue was arranged by the Design Editor using Abode InDesign CC in iOS. The type is set in Didot, Palatino, Minion Pro, and Avenir Next from Adobe Typekit.

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