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Exile Vol. LIX

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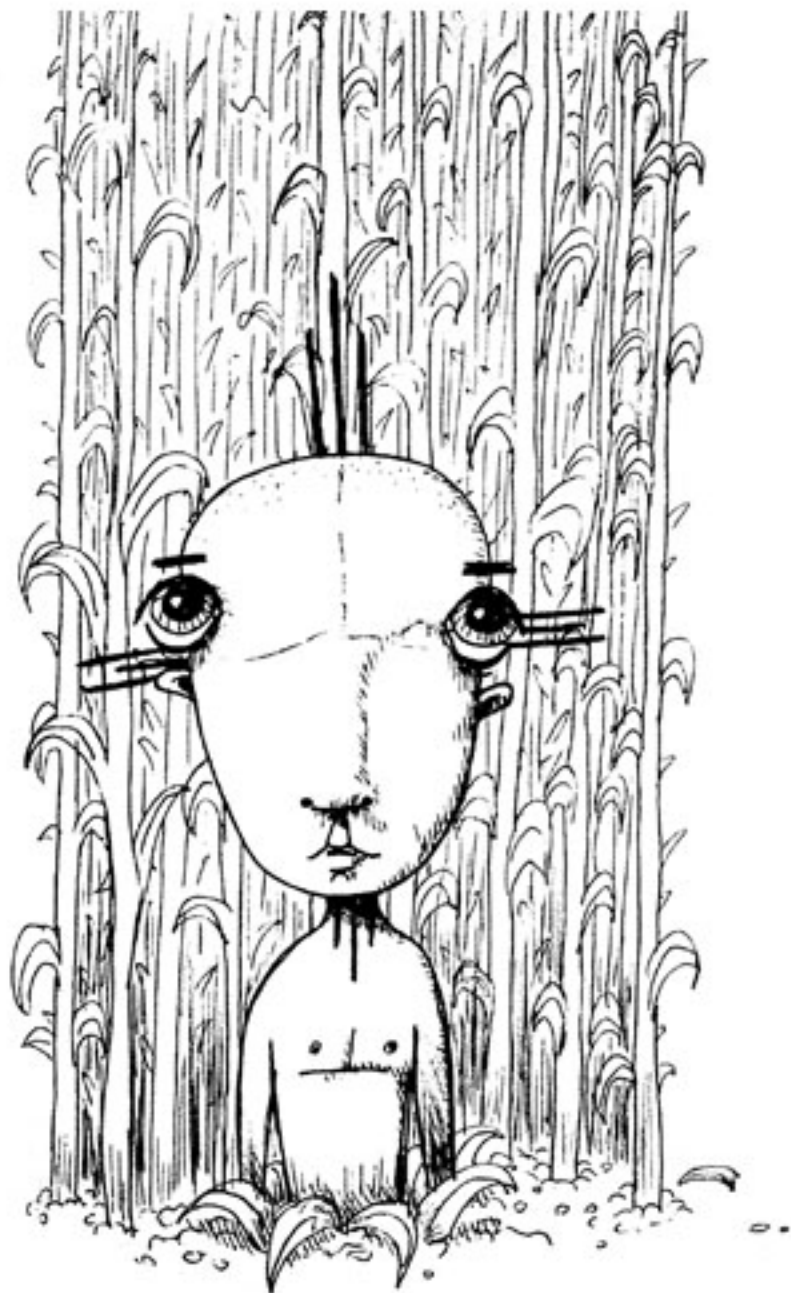
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Exile Vol. LIX

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exile 2013

EXILE

Spring 2013

Denison University's Literary and Art Magazine
Since 1955

You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought.
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

Ezra Pound

MASTHEAD

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Creamery Road

By Makenzie Shaw

My brother shot pellets
till Warhol's soup was spilt.
Dad said, "effective,"
as tomato pooled
on that freshly cut pine.

The driveway was long,
so when he saw Mom,
my brother would hide the gun.
She always knew, scolding
him on their evening walk.

While I cleared the yard,
of sticks and stones,
mom kept him inside
making lavender wands for hours,
ribbons and ribbons and ribbons.

With the motion of lighting a match,
he declared his knife ready.
To make blood brothers, he said,
we have to shake hands,
then use these leaves.

As we trekked back,
drip by drip, he slowed.
We walked to the tomato stump,
which was stained and familiar,
and called for mom the whole time.

The leaves couldn't stop
what was coming and coming.
The driveway paused for my brother.
He rested his hand on that stump
to look at a daisy with pink petals.

Now when I shoot,
mom drives right by.
No looks, no eyes for me,
a lavender wand hung from her mirror,
while dad shuts the screen door with a snap.

Ears to the Ground

By Daniel Persia

It's not the tame murmur of a powered-on television
or the static of the radio, we hear,
my sister and I, with our ears to the ground.
It's not the heat sifting up the vent

or the brass brushing against the strike plate
as the door echoes, forward then back.
It's not the swiftness of the closet rollers
or the metal twang of a hanger dangling from the rod

stretching her wool sweater, like ice.
It's not the splitting of a box spring
or the subtle cling of two magnets
on her jewelry chest, hiding the ring he gave her.

It's not the rush of the creek flowing through the drywall
or the melody of a jay dripping outside their window,
but the window, we hear, shattering.
My sister and I, with our ears to the ground,

hold out for a ceasefire, for some silence to delay.
But it's not fiction, or some made-up game:
Bombs are flying; both are packing;
it has to be this way.

Erosion

By Adrienne Violand

There are streams
in my back yard.
Small and thin, hiding,
until you trip, not looking

where your feet were going,
into a stream, breaking
the hard glass surface.
Bruised body: a testament.

I sometimes wonder
what my backyard looked like
before the dam broke
and flooded the field.

Where there was soft dirt,
grass, tall pines,
there are now streams
violating the earth.

The water worked its way
into my field, forcing itself
from the source.
It rolled through,

washed the layers away,
drowned the earth
and left a permanent mark.
I think about the Grand Canyon

that once was whole
before the streams and rivers poured out,
unending until all that remained
a chasm of red hard rock;

a void, years in the making.

On the walls you can see the layers
washed away by the current.
I wonder

if my streams will grow wide and deep
no matter how I try to contain them.
They might swell and overflow

taking more land away from me

or dry up in time,
a cocoon, an empty shell
of what was once there.
I wonder

if he saw the layers
washing away. Streams
working their way
into the hairline cracks

breaking them open. I wonder
what he saw when he held me down,
hands like water. Underwater
no one can hear you.

River Talk

By Mia Juratovac

You watch the water rush under your feet, brown with silt and boiling around the stilted legs of the bridge like it wants to climb up and devour you both, you and this stranger next to you, both balanced on a ledge, both watching the water. Well, he might be watching you. It isn't important, so you don't look up to check when he asks, "What happened to you?"

You tell him that you failed two courses at university this semester, that they dropped your funding and now, because your parents are not rich, nor are they willing to pay for your schooling, you are being forced to drop out of college and are not invited to Christmas at your parents' house and they won't email you back. You mention your little brother, about how smart he is and how proud you are of him and everything he's done, how much you want to hear from him.

You don't tell him that your little brother is smarter than you, better than you at the things that matter, math and science and sports, instead of flowery writing. This stranger doesn't need to know that his school costs thousands of dollars a year and that your parents don't even blink as they write his checks, and that they buy him new hockey equipment every year. You also don't tell him about the first time your mother yelled at you for bringing home a B on a test, nor about the many, many times the situation repeated itself. These are things the stranger does not need to be told, that you are insecure and conditioned to be terrified of failure. You think probably he can see it in the anxious twisting of your hands on your scarf, in the lines on your face that you are too young to have, but are too tense to avoid.

"That ain't so bad," the stranger says, and when he sees you scowl, he adds, "about the grades, I mean. College just ain't for some people. It wasn't for me." He attempts to say the words earnestly, but your ears are conditioned to hear the unsaid "because they're stupid. Because I'm stupid."

You look at him. You tell him, "I don't think you seem stupid." He seems surprised you picked up on it, but quickly realizes all it means is you are both broken in the same ways. He gives you a tired smile, and in that moment he looks very, very old.

“You didn’t plan to come here.” It is said with that same smile, now knowing and wise but still tired, and you are compelled to ask him how he knows. “You’re dressed for the weather.”

You look at him again, and realize how out of place his jeans and light shirt are in the biting chill. He is many years older than you, maybe with a family back wherever he is from, maybe not. You hope not, strongly and suddenly, as you watch him gaze at the water like he is coming home, an exhausted relief in his eyes. You wonder, as you look him over, slightly stooped but not yet weak with age, why he is here, what he cannot fix. You can’t bring yourself to ask.

After a few minutes, he looks back to you. “How old are you?”

“Twenty,” you tell him. You can give him this truth.

“Too young to be up here, then. You got time to fix the shit you’re in.” His eyes turn back to the water, still dancing and biting at the bridge like it is trying to tear it down, something in his face a little darker. “Old man like me, I got nothing else. Sick, tired, lonely, why the hell not.”

You’re not old, you want to tell him, fifty isn’t old, you have years to go, and I bet your parents still talk to you, if they’re alive. The words stick in your throat, tacky with insincere reflexes and blind assurances. The wind pushes at your back and you have to pull your hands from your pockets and flail just a little to keep your balance, not ready to fall, not yet. Maybe he’s older than he looks; maybe his parents never liked him. There’s no way you could know, so instead you hear “No family, then?” sliding out of your mouth like some timid animal, barely audible over the rumble of the water.

He hears, and shakes his head, without words. You wonder what happened to them, if he had a wife and children, or if it was just him and his parents and siblings and they’re gone now, if he sees their faces in the eddies of the water. What’s worse, you muse, having no family because they won’t talk to you, or having no family because they’re dead? After a minute of thought, you decide it has to be the latter. At least when your family won’t talk to you, it’s because they’re alive and well and angry.

A silver car zips by, and the air it displaces shoves at your backs. This time, it isn’t hard to adjust your balance, to avoid falling until you decide if you want to. You hum, a silvery pool of transparent mist dripping from your mouth. “... It’s quiet around here.” Your eyes drag over the gray buildings, far away on either side of the bridge, only slightly darker than the cloudy sky they’re silhouetted against.

“Two people standing on the bridge, ready to drop, and nobody’s called the cops.” It’s the closest you’ve gotten to sarcasm in at least a week.

“I’ve been comin’ out here for the past few days or so. Standing up here thinking about just.” He shuffles uncomfortably under your sudden gaze. “... Takin’ that one step off. Just one little step, and it’s done, you’re fucking done.” You can hear the realization as he speaks, can see it in his tired, tired eyes when he lifts them to meet yours. “... Everybody said this was the easy way.”

“It’s very hard,” you agree, and suddenly you are fifteen years old again, standing on the 16-foot platform over a rippling diving well, toes gripping over the edge of the chipping cement, looking down into deep blue and wondering how badly it would hurt to just give up down there, sixteen feet down where the lifeguards can’t get to you. You are fifteen, you are the fat friend, you are the disobedient, lazy daughter, and the bad best friend, and the one who can’t draw, and the bitch who doesn’t earn her A’s, and, and, and. And then you are breaking through the surface of the water, cold crystal clear blue swallowing you down, until your feet hit rough concrete and old, dead leaves. You are looking up at the rippling sky, eardrums sending screeching pain through your head, chest wanting to collapse and release all the air and take water in, in, in.

That was when you made that realization, at the bottom of the pool: it is not easy to do this, and maybe it would be easier to try and live even when it hurts so much you can’t draw breath. Which, now, you can’t anyway, and your lungs are beginning to spasm, so you push off the bottom of the pool in a swirl of dead vegetation. Your head shatters the surface of the water, and you take in a huge, gasping whoop of air, and you are back on the bridge, with your family not speaking to you, and this stranger watching you like he’s afraid for you.

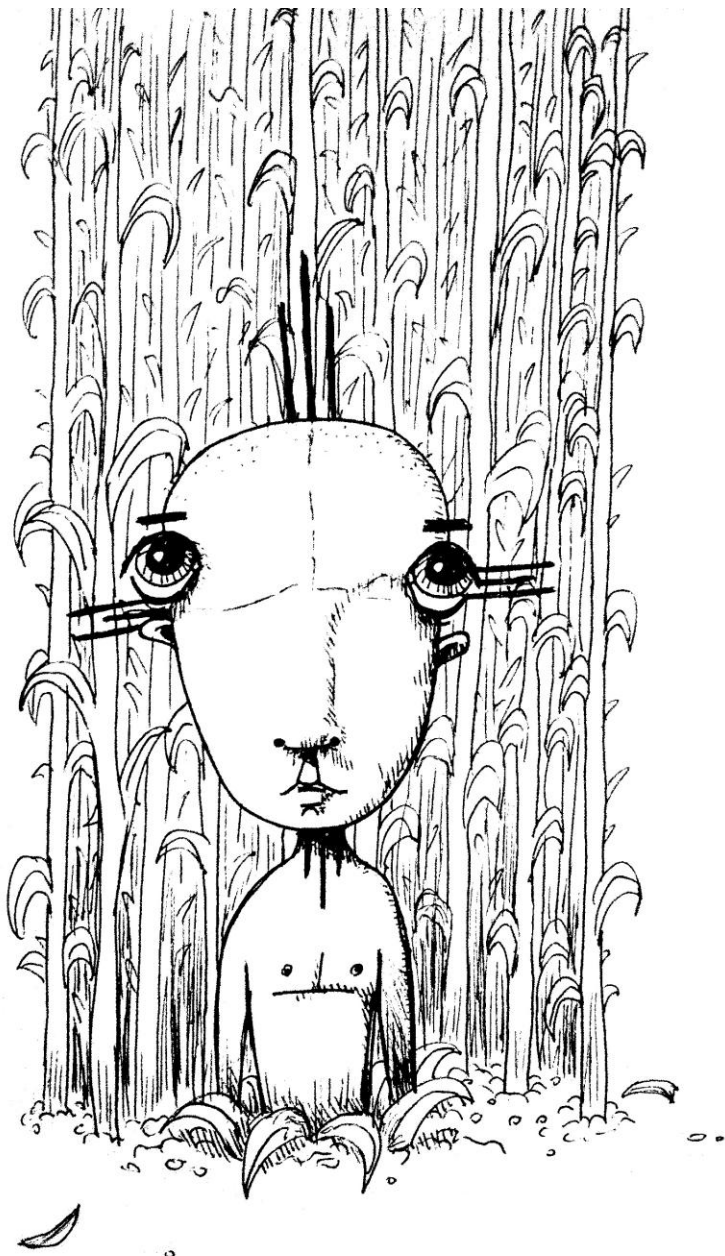
You steady your breathing, trying hard to get all the shaking out of your throat, the anxious flutters out of your stomach. Carefully, so carefully, you shift sideways toward this stranger, shoes scraping against the barrier, grains of cement tumbling down to the hungry, eager water. When you’re close but still far enough that he will not feel crowded, you catch his eyes, and extend your hand to him.

His weary, dark eyes flick from your hand to your face to your hand to the water, and then back to your eyes, and slowly, after a long, tense hesitation, he lifts his hand and takes yours, gently at first, and

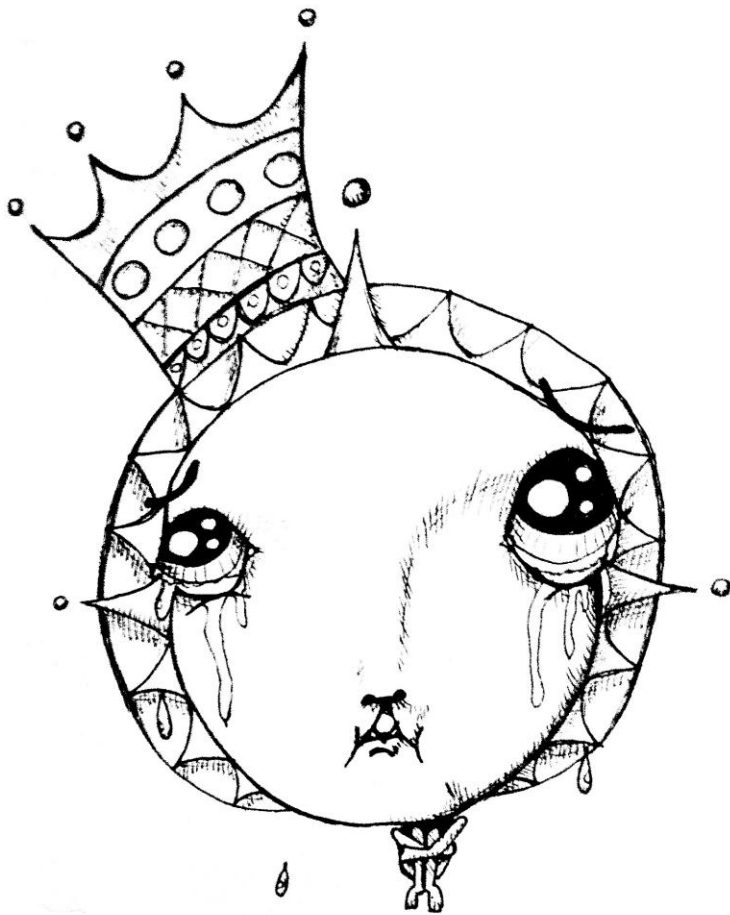
then gripping hard enough that it hurts a little. The pain is good though, you think as you squeeze back; you can only hurt when you're living.

"It isn't easy." The tremor is back in your voice, hoarse and wet as you choke on the words.

He looks again, stunned, from your hand to your face, one last time. The river roars and laps at the bridge as his leathery face falls into the smile his wrinkles hinted he had. His own eyes are exhausted but now moist. His calluses dig into yours as he squeezes just that little bit harder, grease-stained hand strange but comfortable in your ink-marked palm.



Sun King 1
Jillian Koval



Sun King 2
Jillian Koval

Winter Came Twice, That Year

By Autumn Stiles

In winter's faded, flannel-gray,
I pressed my palm against your cheek,
Where rosy heat bloomed from the fray
Of winter's faded, flannel-gray.
Chiseled by wind's sharp soiree,
You seemed Bernini's - marbled greek
In winter's faded flannel-gray,
I pressed my palm against your cheek.

The scent of pine slashed through the air,
As December's doldrums lumbered on,
"A la guerre, comme a la guerre"
The scent of pine slashed through the air
"Ne me quitte pas, il faut oublier"
The bread was burnt, the wine was gone
The scent of pine slashed through the air
And December's doldrums lumbered on.

Iceland

By Zoe Drazen

Someone told us the settlers named it Iceland
because it was so breathtaking that they wanted
to deter newcomers and keep it for themselves.
And being in on this secret, you wanted to go.
Rather, said you needed to. I hate flying,
but packed a bag to accompany you.
Like the Vikings and their new land,
I wanted to keep you for myself.

You found a spectacular mountain road.
And luckily I was there,
since you'd never found the time
to get a driver's license. You sat
in the back while I drove on black ice.
And with all their naming tricks
and slyness, I guess the Icelanders forgot
to build guard-rails. I saw you write about it
from the rearview mirror,
your new muse passing by.
We hit a rough patch and you didn't even
hear me scream. We skidded until the front wheels
hung over the road's edge, the Icelandic sea
pooling beneath, waiting
to keep us for itself.

With some miraculous combination
of reversals and turns, I got us out.
And a few years later-
long after our trip and long after us,
I browsed the non-fiction section
in a small bookstore in my new city.
And there was your book.
The chapter titled "Iceland" began with our story.
But in it, you had yourself behind the wheel.
Because just as we did to the Vikings,
you never let me keep anything
for myself.

Crimes So Great

By Emily Metcalf

About three years ago, he was led in by two guards in black uniforms, his hands restrained behind his back, and blinded by a dark hood covering his face.

“Crimes so great,” the jury had said, “He will be forced to live. Death is undeserved.” That jury condemned him to the torment he arrived at just three years ago.

When the guards unlocked his specially made cell and freed his hands, he made no move to take off the dark sack that shielded his eyes. He didn’t want to see his personalized punishment. But in a final hateful gesture, the guards removed the hood, along with sweet ignorance, leaving him to face his fate.

The cell was made entirely of glass, forcing him to see just exactly what they wanted him to see. A library. Shelves and shelves of books surrounded him, the glass walls separating him from everything he could know. Even if he craned his neck to the point of pain, he would only see more books. Titles etched into leather spines and stamped methodically onto books mass-produced and glossy. He nodded and sat down on his institutional cot. He should have seen it coming. He closed his eyes and let out a breath, his lips forming an “o,” like he was going to whistle or kiss someone goodbye. He held his eyes shut tight like that for a few hours, until he heard the door, also glass, click open and admit a guard with the same black uniform and serious expression as the other two. The guard set down a tray with dry chicken breast, canned peas, and a tall plastic cup of water, and then stood silently in one of the transparent corners, waiting patiently for the man to finish the meal. After the man had eaten, he handed the tray back, and murmured, “Thank you.” The guard gave a curt nod, and then strode out, locking the door behind him before disappearing in the maze of shelves.

Three times a day, after every meal, his hands were tied and eyes were covered by the dark hood as the guards led him to a bathroom before removing the hood once more. He was allowed extra time in the mornings to wash himself. He avoided the mirror. Had he glanced up, he would have seen almost exactly what you might see today, if you’ve the inclination to go see him at the library. A slight

man, tall, with glasses in gold-wire frames. His scalp flirts with balding. He's not old, though. Just nervous.

After two months or so, the guards quit using the hood and handcuffs. He wasn't dangerous or deranged. Just a different shade of pathetic.

Around the time his guards became lenient with protocol, he began exercising. As his cell wasn't conducive to running, he was limited to push-ups and sit-ups. 100 of each, twice a day. He wasn't preparing to break out, like some believed when he'd first developed the habit. He had no elaborate plan. He just desperately needed to kill time.

For three years, the man paced his cell, counting the days and the books in sight. He would read their titles and imagine their content. He could see a book of Grimm fairy tales, and he recounted all stories he could remember. There was a cookbook on what he was pretty sure was the eastern side of the building. He'd never cared much about fancy food, but it hit him that he'd never eat any delicacies like scones or quiche. He could see a book on quantum mechanics on the opposite shelf and he practiced the equations he had memorized so long ago, utilizing velocities and distances and constants whose meanings simpler minds could only guess at. Surprisingly, he was in view of a collection of essays by those who had worked on the Manhattan Project. Next to that one sat a biography on Schrödinger. It reminded him of his cat. He'd told the jury she was in his apartment, but they didn't seem to take much interest in her survival. Maybe there was some kind soul who saw his trial on their television, and was now taking pity on the poor creature.

Sometimes when a book was removed from the shelves parallel to his cell, new books were revealed to him, taunting him with all of the worlds he would never travel to. Books containing knitting patterns were hidden behind one of the shelves. A how-to guide on canine agility was on another.

He wanted them all so badly. He ached for their words, spelling out the facts he would never know. He craved their company, the only company he'd ever needed, and would ever need again. If only he could reach them, touch them, devour them.

There were people around him, of course. Patrons of the library, citizens of the world that didn't want him. They were poor substitutes for company, though. In the beginning, some had tried to

engage the man; he was exciting, a novelty. Children would come up and breathe on the glass, until their mothers pulled them away.

Teenagers after school would try to initiate staring contests or would flip their middle fingers at him then run away laughing. But when they realized he wasn't violent or interesting, they started ignoring him. Though he never lunged at the cell walls or tried to communicate silently, he continued to make them all nervous. He reflected their choices as a society. We all put him there, and that made most people feel a twinge of guilt. So the majority of the library's patrons avoided his eye contact, like strangers passing on a sidewalk. If they stopped looking, maybe he'd stop existing. They only served to reinforce his solitude, his inhumanity. But those books, oh, how they could soothe him, shelter him from his own mind which slowly deteriorated in full view of all who would watch him.

He had to content himself with titles and authors' names. Once he'd guessed the content, or repeated all he knew of the subject and writer, he'd start inventing facts. He created where Giovanni's room was air-locked, and where Willa Cather and Sherwood Anderson were drinking companions.

He had, of course, considered leaving his confinement. The books just drove him mad, taunting him, playing with words and concepts he would forever remain ignorant of. He could maybe chisel away at the glass of his cell, or make a blind dash for it when the guards led him to the bathroom. But society didn't want him, and he respected that decision. And he was too cowardly to kill himself. So he followed the rules, and waited for insanity to claim him.

About a month ago, a young woman walked past his cell, and looked directly at him. Not through him, like most people did, but at him. She'd caught him mid-sit-up, and he stopped, looking back at her. Her brown hair was pulled back into a bun. A white buttoned up shirt, brown skirt, and sensible shoes gave him the impression she had maybe stopped at the library during her lunch break. She didn't smile, or wave, and neither did he. Did he know her? It was possible he'd forgotten her; he hadn't paid much attention to the people in his life. But it seemed much more likely that this was a stranger, for though he did not know where this library was, he knew it was not somewhere he'd been before. He knew those old haunts by heart. And as he'd never seen a familiar face here before, it seemed unlikely now.

Without any gesture or change in expression, she turned and went into the stacks of books he could not see. He went back to his sit-ups, and decided the encounter was meaningless.

A few hours later, around 5 or 6 in the evening, she came back. And this time, she was holding a book.

That caught his interest. He stood up, heart beating too fast. She pressed the book's front cover to the glass for him to read. *The Sun Also Rises*. He'd read it before, and quite possibly knew it by heart. She tilted her head a little, and raised an eyebrow. His eyes widened, starting to see her plan, for though he was sharp-minded with experiments, both social and scientific, acts of kindness took him a while to grasp. They were illogical. His heart pounded too hard, it began to hurt. He couldn't take his eyes away from the book, he nodded, worried the motion might shake the tears from his eyes.

She opened the book to the very first page, and held it to the wall, letting him soak in the publishing information. His eyes flicked up to her when he was finished, but they didn't stay there long, for he returned to the pages, imagining how they must feel between her fingers. She turned the page, and he read the dedication. Then the cover page and table of contents. He began to shake. The more ink filling the page, the more he was allowed to soak in, the more he shook. Had the book been in his own hands, he would have dropped it on accident by the time the story began.

Patiently, the woman stood there, watching his eyes fly across the words, turning the pages when his eyes met hers for less than an instant. He read until the woman checked her watch, looked to her left, and quickly strode away. Devastated, the man turned to see what had happened to her left. A guard in black was arriving, holding a tray. The guard came in and waited as the man's trembling fork shoveled meatloaf and corn to his mouth. After he finished the meal, he was hooded and taken to the bathroom. At the sink, he splashed water on his face, and looked at himself like he was asking a friend, "Can you believe it?" The guard returned him to his cell, and left him alone.

As he lay in his cot, the man began to doubt himself. The book was a figment of his imagination, a sort of mirage. By the morning, he'd decided the woman didn't even exist, and chose to go back to his familiar routine and not think of it again.

But she returned. It was positively blissful to see her again, with the same book under her arm. She sat down in front of his cell right where she had stood yesterday, crossing her legs and spreading

her skirt to cover her knees. He paid no attention to her movements, there was none to spare for it was all focused on the book. He had been sitting on the floor when she arrived, and now scooted himself across the floor, like a child in grade school eager for story time. Instead of holding it up though, she scribbled a note on a piece of scrap paper and held it for him to see.

“You need to let me know when the guards are coming, ok?”

He nodded. He’d have agreed to anything to get her to open the book. She must have been satisfied, because she opened the book to a dog-eared page, and pressed it against the glass. She turned pages for hours, while he absorbed every word, sometimes reading sentences twice to be sure he would remember them.

When he knew his guards would appear soon, he looked at her, and mouthed “Thank you.” He may have actually said it, but there’s no way she could have known that. She gave a small smile, folded down the corner of the page they stopped at, stood up, and walked away. The guards took no longer than 5 minutes to appear, and he was glad he’d alerted her to the time. He did not want anything to happen to her. She was his access, his medium through which to enter thousands of words.

They went on like this for a while. She never failed him. Every day she returned to see him nervously awaiting her, his eyes raking the stacks. She would bring him books and turn their pages. After Hemingway, she brought a book of Flannery O’Connor’s. Then one on modern social injustices. A scholarly journal on North American animal species. A book of scientific findings dating back to the 1800’s. One day she brought him a time line of the past five years. He was flattered to find himself. He read all she brought him, hardly noticing the woman behind the book. He always roused himself in time to warn her of the guard, though, knowing another chapter was not worth discovery.

But yesterday, while she held up *Brave New World* for him, he failed her. He sat reading the very last chapter while she listened to something through headphones. Classical music probably, or an audiobook. He was too engrossed. Too enamored with the beautiful dark ink that curved and angled to form letters, words, ideas. He had never read it before, and it was rare for her to bring him a novel he had not experienced before. He was too in love to see the guard in black walk up behind the woman. He didn’t even notice the danger she was in until her head hit the glass and she slumped down into the

floor. Her blood smeared on the glass, next to smudged handprints of the children who used to stare of him. Her body lay on the tiled floor, a small pool of blood spread from somewhere under her tight bun. The man leaned to the side mirroring her body, heart racing. He needed that last page. It was almost over. He was so close.

But her body obscured the last page. Her blood was seeping into the beautiful pages, ruining them. The man screamed, high pitched and primal. He clutched what little hair remained on his head, nearly ripping it out. He would never know what happened. No conclusion, no closure. It didn't end, it just stopped. Everything stopped. He kept screaming as one guard picked up the woman and carried her away and the other picked up the book, stealing the damp scarlet pages away from him. He just sat there in despair, crumpled on the floor, not bothering to move to his cot.

Defeated and broken, he's still there. Still crying and scratching at the walls of his cell while I write this in front of him. I'm new, working the morning shift, so the guards on duty don't recognize me. They watch carefully, stationed at opposite corners. I asked one of them what was to be done. He told me to mind my goddamn business and keep my notebook away from the convict. The other guard, friendlier, but still stingy with information, told me two guards would be stationed at the cell 24/7. He's the reason I'm employed. He's got no hope now.

But I don't want him to hope. His greed killed a woman. He cared nothing for her. Still doesn't. That blood stain was left as a reminder to him and to anyone who walks by, but that's not what's making him scream. It's the loss of his precious books. Those words are his air, his blood, his love; everyone knows it. He won't last long without them now. He's broken. And I'm glad.

Tori's Garden

By Nick Borbe

There, in that bright, bright, poisonous place,
Tori broke down and let him inside.
Now, there's only stillness in his face.

She had deep curves and a slender waist.
His drive was both desire and pride.
There, in that bright, bright, poisonous place,

they made a home in a bedroom's space.
The Garden was just a place to hide.
Now, there's only stillness in his face.

Inside at last, tired from the chase,
Henry ate from the hand of his bride.
There, in that bright, bright, poisonous place,

the apples smelled too sweetly to taste.
At that time, he smiled with his eyes.
Now, there's only stillness in his face.

No longer his is Tori's embrace.
To this day, Henry's smile still resides
there, in that bright, bright, poisonous place.
Now, there's only stillness in his face.



Starry, Starry Night
Quiyi Tang

Swan

By Jillian Koval

I left feathers
All over your passenger seat,
Like I was some exotic bird
You caught but couldn't keep.

His Shadow

By Jillian Koval

All his darkness is held in the shadow tethered to his feet,
But I do not look at the ground when he speaks,
Instead I look into his glorious eyes,
Wherein all his goodness lies.

Suburban Housewives

By Jillian Koval

We dream of exciting deaths
In a porcelain bathtub with a radio
Teetering on the edge of an eternity
Where we plant roses by a tall white fence.

Departure

By Adrienne Violand

I'll be flying from Columbus on the twenty-fifth.
You could come see me off, I'm sure
if time allows us to hold on
to coffee stains on lab reports
with notes in the margins. Notes I've noted
over the months; your breath and mine.
Two lines running parallel for a while.

I don't think we knew each other last year,
but now I've seen you: a cup of coffee,
a pregnancy scare, and broken glass
with hairline cracks running away
from the point of contact,
but still intact. Still intact.
The letters rolled out of your mouth,

I breathed them in easy, even though
they sometimes scraped against my throat.
Scrapes that made sure my immune system
was in perfect working order.
Though my tongue swells and twitches
and my restless legs call me away,
I'll remember

to pack my bags with community fries,
Ramen (so much Ramen), and burnt popcorn—
You'll still find pieces in your sheets a week from now.
Pieces that are like a tattoo you forgot was on your ankle
and every time you rediscover it, you notice
another detail you missed before.
Pieces of popcorn that I'll take with me.

I'll be flying from Columbus on the twenty-fifth,
but this is just a test run. I know
in a year we'll be lapping up
job applications. We'll go out and buy staplers

even though staples don't always hold. They'll hand us each
a piece of paper and shake our hands.
Congratulations.

Stacks ML410.B34

By Lindsey Clark

She comes first
and rests against the shelf
letting the metal cool her

Michelangelo
reaches out to paint her lashes
color her cheeks

He's here
hair dark against his scalp
light at the edges

Masaccio
begs to sculpt his biceps
define his torso

They meet
and the Medici cheer

Machuca
erases the rose smudges
redefines her lines

She straightens
out her buttons
centers the pleats

Mocetto
wipes clean the glasses
opening his eyes

He realigns
his plaid flannel
untucks the collar

The beauty leaves
and the artists mourn

True Oysters

By Autumn Stiles

the oyster creaked then cleaved
under the fisherman's blade -
 "true oysters yield no pearls"
he murmured as seawater flowed
down his worn and calloused palms.

blunt fingers cradled the briny hull,
a bowl of bone and milk -
tender, pure - almost

an atonement.
 but true oysters yield no pearls
offering only raw ridges and folds -
alive and quivering,
meat.

Baking Cookies

By Hannah Chiodo

The light was fading on the residents of apartment 224 as they sat in front of the muted television. George was fidgeting with a fold in his khakis, thinking about that night weeks ago when Amelie had appeared before him. Brushing against the borders of sleep, he'd felt rather than seen her presence as she slipped through his door and moved over to his bed.

Realizing that she had entered George's room rather than Kevin's, she'd whispered, "Oh!" and her presence had faded out, leaving a sweetness, like the last glow of weed in a spent bowl.

"Oh, God, man, last night was great," Dominick was saying. He slapped George on the shoulder. "Hey, what is it?"

"The girl," said Harry, grinning. "Yeah, what's up with her? What'd she slip in your drink?"

"Man, I don't know." George seemed serious, unsettling his roommates. "I can't predict the future, but...." He shrugged, thoughtful. Harry and Dominick glanced at each other.

"She's a crazy one and you know it," Dominick said, leaning back in his chair. "She's hot."

"She's a little freshman whore," Harry said. He compulsively glanced at the nearest door, as though Amelie might still be lurking in the vacated fourth bedroom. George ran his fingers through his hair, tugging at the ends.

"I know," he said. His eyes were fixed on the Budweiser ad on the wall, but he was thinking about the soft sigh of Amelie's exhale.

"Hello, boys, I'm here!" Amelie talked like she was singing. She threw open the door and skipped into the apartment. Her dress filled with air with each leap, just revealing the quiet curves of her thighs. Three other honey-toned freshmen followed her in, wearing tentative smiles.

"Drinks, anyone?" Harry poured red cups full of vodka and Crystal Light.

"Pink lemonade! Oh, Harry, thank you," Amelie said as she took hers. Her cheeks were already rosy. George marveled at how clean and girlish she was, flushed like she had just gone on a jog. The other girls faded beside her.

“How’s it going,” he said, inflecting it as a statement rather than a question.

“It’s going,” she replied, flicking the switch between brazen and coy like he had seen her do so often in her conversations with Kevin. She smoothed her hair, flattening it across her collarbone. “How’s lacrosse? Still got Harry chasing after you?” George glanced over at Harry, but he was deep in conversation with Amelie’s friend. “It’s got to be better now, that Kevin—” George’s shoulder jerked involuntarily at the mention of his absent fourth roommate, and Amelie stopped. She watched him with her big blue eyes, then said, “Econ is kicking my ass.”

How could she just toss his name out like that? They had a thing for months, before Kevin got kicked out. Because of another girl. George took a gulp from his beer. “Yeah, it really depends on the professor, though. You got to get Levides. He’s really chill.”

Amelie used to ask him for help with her homework, back when she was with Kevin. She would listen to George’s explanations, nodding silently, but she’d perk up to ask a question whenever his lectures got too obscure for a student of Intro to Macro. He loved the way she looked when she did that, eager, her lips pursed. When Kevin had gone home she’d stopped coming by, until he’d messaged her about tonight.

“See you at 10,” was all she’d written back.

Sometime later they were alone in the narrow living room.

“Hey,” George leaned in and whispered into Amelie’s ear. “You good?”

Amelie smiled. He thought she was a living doll, all blinking eyes and even limbs formed around the curves of the couch.

“Do you ever think about space?” she said. The question caught George off guard.

“No, not really.” Was she high? He could only smell her perfume.

“Oh. More drinks?” She got up and followed a meandering path towards the kitchen. Heaving himself up from the couch, he followed and caught her focusing intently on the last few drops of pink cocktail as they dripped from the pitcher.

“I can make more,” George said, but she ignored him. He moved in closer. There was a small pink mole just at the edge of her mouth. “Amelie.”

“This isn’t even strong, you know.” The last word was muffled as George pressed his mouth to her still vibrating lips. They kissed for a long moment before Amelie pulled away. Harry had entered the kitchen and wasn’t bothering to hide the grin that rounded out his already full cheeks.

“Just getting beers.” Harry removed the tops with two pops in quick succession and pressed a cold bottle into George’s hand. “My boy.” George couldn’t suppress a low laugh. Harry could throw all the verbal jabs he wanted tomorrow, but now he was being a true bro. And Amelie was as soft as he’d imagined. Beneath the floral notes of her scent, there was something earthy and sexual, the way the lacrosse field smelled after it rained.

Harry turned, knowing it was time for him to leave, then spun back around. “Hey, George.” Amelie had grabbed her half-filled cup and was taking big sips. Chugging ever so daintily. “I put a little Xanax in there,” he murmured from the side of his mouth. George stiffened. “Just a tiny, tiny bit.”

“Shit, man, really?” He ran his hand through his hair, but Amelie seemed all right. Besides, he had heard she was into stuff like that.

“Oh my god!” she said suddenly, raising her hands like she had forgotten something. Her eyes scanned the cabinets before settling on what she wanted. Shaking, she put on bare foot on the countertop, just catching the hem of her seersucker dress as it threatened to fall back, and then more surely she pulled herself up, sidestepping to catch her balance. George and Harry watched, beers in hand. “Careful there,” George muttered, too quiet for Amelie to hear. His eyes lingered on her hair as it slid over her bare shoulders. It was the color of Nantucket sand through shallow water.

Amelie grabbed a bag of flour and froze in a half-turn, eyes wide. She brought the flour to her chest, clutching it with both hands like a child clinging to a teddy bear. Then she sprung into motion, making a catlike leap to the floor, and landed with a bang. Along with the way her knees threatened to buckle when she touched down, the noise almost ruined her gracefulness but then she caught herself with a dancer’s skill and spun and pulled open the fridge with a raucous clinking. Flour still dangling from one hand, she searched the fridge, shoving aside bottles.

“There’s no milk. There’s no eggs,” she murmured. She turned to look at the owners of the apartment. “There’s only alcohol.” There

was no accusation in her tone, just regret. Harry was still grinning but the owner of those big seashore eyes confused George. Her mood had changed so quickly.

"It's okay," he said. "We'll get some later." But even as he spoke Amelie was preheating the oven, buttons beeping in response to the urgent motions of her fingers. George wrapped an arm around her waist and gently pulled her out of the kitchen. Her feet slid and stumbled over the tiles. "I'm baking cookies," she whispered. "Shh," he said, and laid her down on the couch. He watched as her lashes dipped once, twice. On the third time they stayed down. He wondered if he could do it. Really, Kevin had just been dumb to get caught. Then he remembered the next morning, the crying girl and the smashed lamp, Kevin's uneasy laugh. No, he thought. Not tonight. Her eyes are closed.

Sometime later Amelie stirred, letting out a little moan. "It's late," she said, blinking her eyes. "I should be going." She kissed George lightly, rose, and disappeared into the four a.m. haze.

* * *

Someone had sent him flowers. He carried the bouquet up from his mailbox and set them on the folding table in the corner of the living room. There was a note stuck inside the foil, spelling "George" in dignified calligraphy. He stuck his thumb under the corner of the envelope, tugged the card out. "Dear George," it read. "We're so glad we got to see you play in the game this weekend. We are so proud of you. Love, Mom and Dad." He put the card down on the table, found a tall mug for a vase, and in his room shoved aside his textbooks to allow for the bouquet on his desk. His cheeks were burning; he was glad he was alone in the apartment. When he retrieved the card from the table, some of the paper tore off, stuck in beer residue. George frowned, but the table wouldn't be worth cleaning before tonight.

* * *

George and Dominick seemed to run into half the senior class at the Giant Eagle. While Dominick marshaled underclassmen lacrosse players lugging cases of Natural Light, George hovered over the wine racks. He preferred beer, thick, fuzzy, and cold on his tongue, but girls loved wine. He picked up a bottle, dark liquid swirling like blood inside. Made in California. No, he thought. Amelie had spent the summer in Paris. She'll want something French. He picked up another bottle. It was forty-five dollars.

"Let me help you." A blonde girl was laughing at him.

“Hey, Lisa.” George nodded at her, but she was already pulling another bottle from the racks.

“Where have you been lately? We’ve missed Georgie.” He and Lisa had been close since freshman year. “You should maybe leave your room sometime?”

“Hey, I’ve been busy,” George replied. He had doubled up on econ classes in his final semester, and wanted to make up for the bad grades he gotten during Kevin’s trial. Too many weekday nights had been spent drinking in the apartment Kevin had no longer been allowed to leave.

Lisa waved the bottle of wine she had selected.

“This. This is good.” He tried to take it from her, but her small fingers refused to let go. “Who’s this for? Your mom, I hope.” George blinked at her. “Seriously, what’s it with you boys and freshman?” She shook out her hair, and then laughed again. “See you at the bar later.”

“I don’t know if I’m going,” replied George.

“Come. Please,” said Lisa, and she pressed the bottle into the center of George’s button down. She shook her head once, and then turned back to the wine racks. George frowned. Sometimes the older girls could get so jealous of the freshmen.

His phone buzzed in his pocket. Looking around the market, Dominick and the rest of the team were nowhere to be seen. He rushed to the counter to pay.

* * *

Three hours later George and Harry stood behind a makeshift bar, talking into each other’s ears over the methodically pounding bass.

“Look, Jude’s dancing with that ugly girl again,” Harry said, nodding at one of their teammates. “I told him to be careful with the 151 shots. But am I gonna save him?” Harry’s laughter disappeared between rap lyrics. George handed beers to a cluster of girls waiting in front of the counter, then glanced towards the door, only to be shouldered by Harry. “You idiot. Stop waiting for her. Get that one.” He nodded towards one of the girls.

“She said she’s coming. I texted her,” George said.

“Yeah, I got you. Go! Have fun!” Harry goosed George as he was squeezing his way out onto the dance floor.

* * *

Amelie didn’t show up until two a.m. She appeared in George’s open door, silent and glowing, like raindrops on a windowpane. The

girl that George had been talking to looked at Amelie, then back to him, and got up and left without a word. Amelie took her place on George's bed with a light bounce. Her eyes were like the shallow end of a swimming pool.

"I got wine," George said, pulling the bottle out from behind his bed. There were two wine glasses on his desk, mismatched ones he'd found in the back of the cupboard. One was clouded acrylic and the other was a gold-rimmed goblet emblazoned with the Chi Zeta crest.

"Really?" said Amelie when she saw the glasses. "I should have brought my own." But she picked up the fraternity glass and blew on it. She smiled as she examined the gold trim.

George poured Amelie's glass half full of red, and then filled his own. They sipped together, and George was surprised by how bitter it tasted. He put his glass down, but Amelie kept hers hovering close to her lips.

"Are you having fun?" George placed a hand on her bare shoulder. Her dress was green and orange, a small, intricate diamond pattern.

"Yeah. I was just hanging with your friend Harry."

"You've been here for a while?" George felt a slight stabbing in his chest, like he had just missed a game-winning goal. Amelie's hair, twisted into a bun, listed to the left. One strand had worked its way out and stuck around her neck.

"You have cool friends. I like them." She stretched the syllables, her voice cracking a little like it was early in the morning.

"I was beginning to think you weren't gonna show up." He slid his fingers under the thin straps of her dress, tracing a line across her collarbone.

"I'm a busy girl. Are those begonias?" She was looking at the flowers George's parents had sent him. "In a beer mug? Of course." George blushed, but she smiled and leaned her head towards his hand, blinking slowly. "Begonias are my favorite." She was whispering. Her breath was cherry Koolaid and Everclear.

And their mouths were together, they were falling over, sealed in and breathing each other's air, like miners trapped in a subterranean cavern.

"Wait," she said, turning her face to the side. "I really should go."

“No. Don’t go.” George shook his head. “Please stay here.” He held her between his arms until he felt her muscles relax. Her head fell back on his pillow, and he leaned in to smell her soft neck.

Amelie was motionless beneath him, her inhaled breath tickling his ear. He traced his fingers down her arm and grabbed a hand, but her cool fingers didn’t curl into his. Her dark eyelids were awnings threatening to drop. “Oh,” was all she said, when he pulled his face away from her. “Oh.”

“No, no, keep those open.” George pulled at the skin around her eyes. It was damp. “Look at me.” She couldn’t meet his gaze but her dress was falling off her shoulders and her eyes were still open. “Amelie.”

* * *

When George was younger, his family had spent every summer at their beach house. The year he was eight he had been playing in one of the neighbor’s yards with the other boys when they found a fox at the edge of the woods. It must have gotten hit by a car, because its back legs were mangled and matted with shining blood, but the front was still a soft pretty red. There was a faint dark trail where the fox had dragged itself through the grass.

He had seen the fox before, darting through his backyard. “It eats the baby bunnies,” an older boy had told him. His sister had cried.

The boys stared, unsure of what to make of their sudden discovery. One of the neighbors reached over and picked up a stone they had collected from the beach. He wound up, like he was pitching a baseball, and released. The fox recoiled from the blow, but made no move. Why didn’t it try to run away? Its black eyes were looking right at George, and he, frozen in place, met their gaze. More stones were flying through the air; all the other boys were throwing them now. George was aware that he was turning a rock over and over in his fingers. It was still clear in his mind how marble smooth that rock was, how its weight was light yet satisfying in his hand as he drew back and then threw it.

George had snuck back over to look at the fox later. Its corpse was bruised and swollen, with eyes red with blood. In a panic, George had bent over, grabbed it, and thrown it in the gully, where he could no longer see it.

* * *

Though it was late at night, the stacks in the library were still bright. George flipped another page in his textbook and stared at the

notes he had written in the margins. He sipped from his mug, forcing himself to swallow the cold coffee, and realized he'd lost his place again.

Approaching footsteps gave George an excuse to lift his eyes from the desk. He glimpsed the floating hem of a dress between rows of books and then she was there in the central aisle, not five feet away from him.

"Amelie." She'd hesitated when she'd seen George, then made as if to keep walking, but now she stopped. He pictured the way she'd looked that night, when black lines had appeared on her face and he had realized she was crying. How she had moaned quietly, like she was deep in a fever. She left the next morning without even a kiss, and it wasn't until then that he understood what he'd done to her.

"I've been wanting to talk to you, but I haven't seen you around." He stood up and leaned against the side of the desk. Her downcast eyes seemed like the deep ocean, murky and impenetrable. "I've thought a lot about what happened, and I really hope you're not upset about it." He couldn't look at her. "I'm sorry."

Amelie stood there, books tucked under her arm. George was examining the holes in the sides of the shelves. When she left, he didn't look up. Her boots clicked on the tile, echoed, and faded away. She had been so still beneath him that night. Why couldn't she have just walked away then?

George sank back into his chair. Graduation was in two weeks, and he would never see her again.



The Chinese Lady
Quiyi Tang

Our Ice

By Daniel Persia

There was the one about the boy
who invaded the living room
with a swarm of little green men, shot them
down, one by one, while his father
flew thousands of miles—in uniform,
sergeants and medics

flanked by his mother—
she set off a bomb and brought out
a tray of chocolate chip cookies.
And there was the one about the boy
who put on a suit coat
with shoulders twice his size, kneeled

down, next to his father
and listened to a story—in uniform,
dozens of strangers
greeted by his mother—
she lifted a card and put it
into his oversized front pocket.

From the roof of a small suburban home
in Baltimore, a row of icicles
drop and split and rest
one by one, they surrender
to December's snow
to be born again.

Christmas Without Armistice

By Zoe Drazen

They never got through mass without a fight,
but still curled toes into stockings and fastened ties.
At 5 they sat in a pew, arguing about the Christian right.

The choir turned, shielding themselves from the sight
of a mother shouting at her son, despite the usher's sighs.
They never got through mass without a fight.

They had agreed not to voice their differences on this holy night,
but when his gaze lingered on the altar boy, she began to surmise.
At 5 they sat in a pew, arguing about the Christian right.

*"Thou shalt not lie with a man as with a woman. Sinners must be
contrite,"*
she made sure to tell him with fierceness in her eyes.
They never got through mass without a fight.

The brown-eyed boy whispered, "I did not choose this out of spite."
And the mother tugged his masculine jacket: her store-bought
disguise.
At 5 they sat in a pew, arguing about the Christian right.

He knew the parishioners felt the scene was impolite,
but took his mother's chiding anyway- an ally of compromise.
They never got through mass without a fight.
At 5 they sat in a pew, arguing about the Christian right.

Barn Dance

By Brittany Menning

On the stone wall
you can barely make out
sounds from the barn dance.

The full moon
tosses light on the broken see-saw
outside the sliding doors.

It was made by someone's father
not yours.

From outside
the strike of a fiddle cues the dew
as it begins to cling to each blade of grass
like I know you cling to images of the back of
their heads as they walked away -
to their rusted pickup trucks or motorcycles
or simply took a right out your door and walked.



A Shell of My Former Self
Jenna Mansfield

The Closet Door

By Sam Heyman

[Lights up on CHIP, sitting on the couch in his dorm room, texting on his cell phone. Stage right of his couch is a door leading to the hallway, while on stage left is a door leading to an adjoining bathroom. CHIP should finish texting within moments of the lights coming up, close his phone and then wait a few moments before receiving another one.]

CHIP: Seriously?

[The text is from BRETT, who CHIP has been in a relationship with for some time now. Neither of them are 100% comfortable with their friends knowing of their non-standard sexual orientations, but BRETT is much shyer about it. He's worried that, it being daytime, someone might hear something/walk in/otherwise determine what they're up to, and that might create complications with his friend group, which mostly consists of athletes. CHIP replies, and then expresses his opinion aloud.]

CHIP: Come on, Brett, it's not like people go out on Gay witch-hunts. This isn't Alabama.

[Just then, JESSICA jiggles the handle of the door, finds it locked, and knocks.]

JESSICA: Chip? You in there?

[CHIP mutters something under his breath to the tune of shitballs.]

CHIP: Yeah?

[While JESSICA is talking, CHIP straightens up stuff in his room, and then unlocks the door about when JESSICA stops talking.]

JESSICA: Mind letting me in? Also, why's your door locked while

you're in there? Are you...? No, wait, that would be inappropriate.

CHIP: *[having unlocked the door]*: Sorry, force of habit. Hi.

JESSICA: Hi. Are you going to let me in?

CHIP: Uh, sure. Did you need something?

JESSICA: I just thought I'd, you know, catch up with you. This semester's been so busy.

CHIP: Yeah, uh, it has been. Really busy, like, I have this essay for my Poli Sci class that's due at 5, and I'm only about halfway through.

JESSICA *[energetic]*: You're taking a Poli Sci class? You know, I took a Poli Sci class once—You remember, don't you? Those readings murdered my sleep schedule—maybe I can help you. What are you taking? Analyzing? Politics of Marginalized Groups?

CHIP: Yeah, uh, one of those. Listen, I think I've got it under control, I just need some time alone, to get it all squared away.

JESSICA: You sure? I mean, I can go grab my notes—You know, I got an A in that class.

CHIP: Jessica. I'm sure. But thanks.

[CHIP motions to the door. JESSICA willingly, but reluctantly, exits. Once the door is shut, and locked again, CHIP lets out a sigh of relief and sits himself back down on the couch. He gets another text from the phone in his pocket. It's from BRETT, who has actually arrived at his door. BRETT knocks just as CHIP starts sending his reply.]

CHIP: Jessica, I really don't need help, I just finished half a page since you left.

BRETT: Jessica?

CHIP: Brett? Crap!

[CHIP gets up and unlocks the door. BRETT enters quickly and moves stage left until he's past the couch, facing away from the door.]

CHIP: Well hey there, handsome.

BRETT: Could you close it?

CHIP *[closing the door and locking it]*: Sure. Are you really that freaked out?

BRETT: It's not that I'm freaked out. It's just... you know. This floor's pretty much the entire team, you, and Tyler Yarborough. There's not a lot of room to breathe around here.

[CHIP senses the tension in his voice. He approaches BRETT tentatively.]

CHIP: There are a lot of eyes out there who might not like what they see.

BRETT: Pretty much, yeah.

CHIP: Well, you know I like what I see.

[Just as CHIP reaches for BRETT'S shoulder, some loud knocks sound from behind the door. It's JESSICA. She's upset.]

JESSICA: Chip, can I talk to you for a moment?

CHIP: Hey Jess, it's not actually not a great time, I'm sort of on a roll here, five more minutes?

JESSICA: Not to be unfairly demanding for someone who clearly isn't your mother, but please would you open the goddamn door?

CHIP: Okay, okay, uh...

[He and BRETT have a wordless gestural conversation about their course of action. BRETT ultimately decides to hide in the bathroom. Once BRETT'S safely tucked away, CHIP opens the hallway door.]

CHIP: Hi. Sorry. What?

JESSICA: Have you been avoiding me? Be honest. I understand if you have been, I just, I'd like to know, if you are, why, and if you're not, how's your essay is going, because I'm really actually concerned you're going to write a terrible one like that one I had to read in our FYS.

[CHIP gets out of JESSICA'S way as she advances forward, into the room.]

CHIP: Jessica, calm down, I'm not avoiding you. Is something wrong?

JESSICA: It's just, we used to be so close, and I thought maybe... but now it's like we never talk, and I know we're both busy, but friends are more important than work, that's what you always used to say. I mean wasn't it?

CHIP: It was, and you're right, I'm sorry.

[CHIP and JESSICA hug, with JESSICA facing the hallway door. Though JESSICA recovers quickly, the two remain in close proximity to each other.]

JESSICA: It's okay. But yeah, I'm fine.

CHIP: You sure? You were practically banging down my door a second ago.

JESSICA: If you'll allow me my moments of overemotional weakness, I'll tolerate your irritating habit of not accepting my help.

CHIP: ...Okay.

[CHIP has noticed BRETT peeking out from behind the bathroom door. BRETT'S not sure what to do. CHIP pantomimes flushing the toilet, and BRETT takes a moment to get it, but eventually does and retreats again. This happens during JESSICA'S line.]

JESSICA: It's all socially constructed gender performance and I should want to fight against it, but I don't, really. It helps if I don't think of it as a gendered quality. It's just Jess being Jess.

CHIP: And Jess being Jess is just wonderful.

JESSICA *[laughing]*: Shut up.

[The toilet flushes and moments later, BRETT emerges from the bathroom. JESSICA spins around to see him. Before she can say anything, CHIP fills in the gap of silence.]

CHIP: Finish up in there alright, buddy?

JESSICA: Chip... what's Brett doing here?

CHIP: Well, he was...

BRETT: I was just using Chip's bathroom. Someone ripped the door off the number two stall on my end of the hall, and I appreciate the privacy—not to mention the lack of bacterial rot on the floor.

JESSICA *[to CHIP]*: You clean your floor? I'm impressed.

CHIP: Must be the adjoining room. Brett, did you want to stay over? I think Jessica and I were about to watch some TV.

[It takes JESSICA a moment, but here it is: a chance to reconnect with CHIP.]

JESSICA: We were? I mean, we are?

BRETT: Uh, sure. What are we watching?

JESSICA: Chip! Have you been watching Rupaul's Drag Race?!

[This catches both CHIP and BRETT off-guard.]

CHIP: Uhh, no, not particularly—I mean, I don't think I've ever seen an episode.

JESSICA: This season, you mean. We used to watch it all the time, remember? Oh wait—that was probably really embarrassing. Brett, did you know Chip was...? Are you...?

BRETT: Gay? Uhh, no, not particularly—I mean, not that there's anything wrong with that.

CHIP: But yeah, Brett knows. *[semi-flirtatiously]* He knows, all right.

[BRETT is now very uncomfortable, though not for the reasons JESSICA suspects. JESSICA gives CHIP a light tap with her fist.]

Jessica: Chip, don't be a flirt, straight guys hate that. Or at least, I think most do. Do you, Brett?

Brett: I don't... hate it.

Jessica: Good. I'm sure you get it a lot, from both sexes, as handsome as you are. It's funny how men are starting to be objectified more and more in the media, almost as much as women. Though you guys probably don't interpret it to be a signifier of oppression, do you?

Brett: Yeah, I... No, we... Should I leave?

Chip *[quickly]*: No.

Jessica: Yeah, stay—stay and watch how the other tenth lives!

[CHIP grabs the remote and turns on the TV, plopping himself down in the center of the couch. JESSICA sits to his right, and BRETT, after a moment of hesitation, sits to his left. Meanwhile, JESSICA half-apologizes for her joke.]

JESSICA: I'm not saying all gay people are drag queens—Lesbians are actually drag kings! Sorry, sorry, that was terrible, I'll stop.

CHIP [*letting out a sigh of relief*]: Thank you.

[The three sit in silence watching TV for a few moments. JESSICA holds onto CHIP'S arm, leaning against his shoulder, while BRETT keeps his arms at his sides. After a few moments, JESSICA breaks the silence.]

JESSICA: Why are drag queens so good at looking beautiful? I mean, they put on globs of makeup, sure, but these girls make it work. Have you ever seen a drag show, Brett?

BRETT: N-No. Why w-would I have?

CHIP: Jessica, now you're the one making him uncomfortable. Stop.

JESSICA: Okay, okay. I'm sorry, Brett—I was only asking 'cause I wanted to see what a straight guy thought about drag queens. I mean, they may look hot, but does it bother you that hidden underneath all that lace and sequins there's just some dude? Like take Jade, for instance. She's got nails on that could scratch your eyes out—but she could be the guy who puts bacon on your BLT at Subway.

[It takes BRETT a moment to say what he wants, but he's honest about what he says.]

BRETT: I don't think... it should make any difference. If someone dresses up like that, and they enjoy it, then it shouldn't make any difference if they're a man or a woman underneath.

JESSICA: ...Good answer, Brett! Seriously, why don't we hang out sometime? You seem like a guy with a decent head on your shoulders, I mean, for a LAX bro. No offense. Goddammit, I'm mean, aren't I!

[JESSICA laughs at herself, self-deprecatingly. She's flirting with BRETT, and he laughs awkwardly because he thinks he's supposed to. When the laughter dies down, CHIP speaks up.]

CHIP: So Jessica, it's been a busy semester for you, hasn't it? It's 4pm on a Sunday, don't tell me you've already finished all of your homework.

JESSICA: Ha ha, hardly. I'm actually doing some research for my Comm class—it's cross-listed, of course. I have to watch 6 hours of programming on a specific network and write a paper on how it reinforces or breaks down traditional gender norms.

CHIP: Wow, six whole hours. So you're just starting?

JESSICA: Yup. I'll be here till 10. Unless my roommate gets done fucking her boyfriend and texts me between now and the next commercial break. Seriously, who does that? It's Sunday. Isn't there some sort of Church statute, "Don't have sex on the day of rest?"

BRETT: I think that's Friday. And it's not like they could enforce that.

JESSICA: Whatever, I'm not a Religion major. I just think it's insensitive—*[her phone starts ringing, she fishes it out]* Crap, it's my mom. I've gotta take this. *[As she exits]* Be on the lookout for gender norm deconstruction!

CHIP: It's a show about drag queens, how hard can it be!

[The door slams, and BRETT and CHIP are left alone. BRETT lets out a great sigh of relief, and buries his face in CHIP'S shoulder/chest. CHIP rubs his back, comfortingly.]

CHIP: Gonna be okay, big guy?

BRETT *[into CHIP'S shirt]*: Lock the door, come up with some sort of lie, just don't let her come back in here.

[CHIP gets up and “locks” (i.e. pretends to lock) the door as he says his next line.]

CHIP: I can lock the door, but that’ll only stall her. Was that... ‘uncomfortable for you?

BRETT: The most uncomfortable I’ve ever been. And I like girls! First she asked if I was gay and of course I said no, so I was pigeonholed into that “jock-ish, possibly intolerant straight guy” character. And then she started flirting,

[‘Flirting’ sends BRETT into a swoon of stress. CHIP tries to bring him down to earth with a hug, but BRETT pulls away. CHIP settles for his hands on BRETT’S shoulders.]

CHIP: Brett. It’s really okay. She doesn’t know. And if she did, it wouldn’t matter.

[BRETT breaks away from CHIP’S hold and paces the floor.]

BRETT: Like fuck it wouldn’t matter! She talks the most and the fastest of any girl I’ve ever met. If she finds out there’s a gay varsity lacrosse player, from anyone, she’s gonna know it’s me, and she’s gonna tell everyone!

CHIP: No she wouldn’t. She may seem like a gossip columnist, but she’s more like a--like a journalist. She’d come to me first and ask me if it’s true. Besides, it’s not like she knows anyone that you know. Come to think of it, she doesn’t have that many friends.

BRETT: Okay, so if she did that, if she came to you and asked you, *[impersonating a vapid girl]* “Is Brett gay?” What would you say?

CHIP: Well, what would you want me to do? Lie? Keep up this façade of you being straight and me being the gay friend you hang out with sometimes? Brett, I would protect you if anything happened. No one would tie you to a fence, no one would spray

paint faggot on your locker and not face repercussions from the school. This isn't Laramie, Wyoming. This isn't high school.

[BRETT is quiet, calmed down, but still scared. CHIP walks up to him, and embraces him. They transition into a kiss as JESSICA returns from her phone call. They're still kissing when she enters.]

JESSICA *[as she enters]*: Wow Chip, you didn't lock your door for once—

[BRETT and CHIP continue kissing while BRETT and JESSICA have a gestural conversation. BRETT waves JESSICA off and JESSICA nods profusely and exits, giving him two thumbs up of approval. After JESSICA has hustled off stage, CHIP and BRETT come out of lip lock.]

BRETT: I thought you locked the door?

CHIP: You can't keep locking the world out forever, Brett.

BRETT: So you... Chip, I can't come out yet. Not here.

CHIP: Then don't. Just stay with me.

[The lights go down on CHIP and BRETT in some intimate, non-kissing pose.]

End.



Toy Camera
Tawnee GreenRiver

Slayter Sushi

By Kristof Oltvai

Burgers, French fries, doused in grease? – No
My taste's inclined to her, exotic,
Rolled by Eastern hands,
But then shipped trans-Pacific
"Warning: Raw"

How many times have her teeth crushed
Salmon, avocado, a sprinkle of paprika
Or rice, or rolls of seaweed –
The teeth
I have counted with my tongue a hundred times?

She is leaves of ginger
Pink and bittersweet,
Cleansing my palate between –
Booze – and books – and Huffman food

She is slices of sashimi
Uncooked tuna, albacore;
"There's more fish in the sea,"
Yet Santiago chased but one,
Plucked a single treasure from the quivering waves.

She is wasabi
Spice, overpowering
Complementing the pang of shrimp and clam
Until I place a great green blob on the end of my chopsticks
And suddenly
I don't know why I'm crying.

Every man has got to eat;
But mercury adds up.

Jou Va, Jou Vyin

By Hannah Chiodo

Jou va, jou vyin. Day goes, day comes.
The sun washes dark from the dirt.
The head wraps of the women are tied
And the men wear straw hats like mine,
Askew to shade my good eye, sitting by
My tree the hot has bleached all life from,
Leaving cracks and crevices like concrete
In the shaking days following the quake.

But still I take its shade, my white straw,
My trade—spin it, wrap it, weave it.
My hands are scarred from the small pokes
Of angry dry stalks but my feet are shod,
I am clothed, beside me my wife crouches:
Gold hangs from the fertile soil of her lobes,
Fecund unlike the dust that cakes my sneakers
And creeps under concrete doors.

I am making the brim wide, wide like
The wings of the sun. I twist the straw.
A woman is coming, my wife says.
I know who she is before I look
And see her black lens as another foreign face.
It blinks once, twice, snatching a piece of us.
She leaves. I finish my hat, start another—
Nothing changes. *Jou va, jou vyin.*

The Dead

By Sam Heyman

The dead stand
in front of windows and
feel their fingers through
the blinds, and moonlight shines
on their bones, while their
shadows slip and slide
and fall in heaps
to the floor.

The sounds the dead make
Are felt more than heard, their dancing
makes the wood yawn and the joints of
the house creak, and when children
awake from sleep to pour glasses of
milk, they suck in their guts and lose
themselves to the dark.

The dead do not see through walls
but know through them and go
through them without a clack
of bone or a shuffle of shoes.

The dead visit the spaces they once
called home and to them it's as if
nothing has changed. Moved objects
stain the walls they once slept against
with ashen outlines and abandoned
shells, of thrown pillows and shelves
shifted slightly to the left, though
they have been gone from there
for many years.

To the dead the world seems
anxious, like a pot of boiling water or
A child about to take his first dive,
Always at the verge from one thing
To another, afraid to move but

Moving all the time. But
nothing moves from
here to there that
was not here
before.



Woman with Sunglasses
Tawnee GreenRiver

ugly grey 2003 sedan

by Kelsey Hagarman

shit. he turns the key over
at the stop sign, jumpstarting its heart as we sit
in a moment of silence and darkness
nestled inside the ford taurus, an ugly grey 2003 sedan

whose flimsy exterior shudders from the wind tonight, paper
thin skin like my grandma's, etched with scrapes and bumps
like the bright yellow gash on the bumper, a scar
I made my first time driving, the screech
of the fire hydrant as it clawed the car and our laughter

and fake leather seats that grow cold as we wait, our feet
rustling trash on the coarse grey carpet amidst stains
of my sticky dried puke that still smells
like summer, long island iced teas
and cigarette smoke and sweat, sour blemishes

and its radio and cassette player, now silent, lungs tired
from playing the same song that sounds best
when it rattles the windows and drowns
out our attempts to sing along as the dim headlights shine
down the empty streets of the suburbs
that are always this quiet

these memories and others bleed into the present
but then suddenly the car comes to life and the radio and headlights
cue us to move, and we both feel uneasy
and he taps the gas pedal more gingerly, eases the steering wheel
gently into each wide turn, creeping below the speed limit for once
when finally, we can't ignore it anymore

when the billows of smoke erupt from the hood like a signal for help
so we swerve to the shoulder of the road, he pops the hood and listens
to the hiss of the leaking intestines, the radiator fluid bleeds
onto the side of the road. I stay inside the remains of the
ugly grey ford taurus 2003 sedan, and I'm sorry
and sad we never drove further

Beth and Bridget's Patterson House

By Lindsay Martin

Patterson Street is now long overgrown tenement housing, amidst the part of Akron where the mayor's tribe has not yet rebuilt, not even thought about. The area now belongs to one of the worst public school locations, crime, and empty businesses. Yet, it used to be a beautiful neighborhood, filled with full families and nice cars, fresh paint and updated landscapes.

1949

5566 Patterson was once home to Russian immigrants, descendants of czars, and down the street there were Catholic families, and teachers. It was the time of the World War II and the Goodyear Blimp, and a couple with a daughter named Kathy playing house with the name Popovich.

1969

Kathy got picked up at a bar by two policemen for attacking a man behind the counter. Unstable, pitiful. Always in the county jail for something. She had two daughters in the jail cell while the female officer held her hand and the doctor took the children away. She saw them for two days, then was released. She collected most of her things and left without the babies, tired already of being their mother, carrying them for too long. So, the Russian immigrants named Popovich cleaned up the upstairs bedroom, picked up their granddaughters and took them home to Patterson.

1973

The granddaughters played with immigrant's children. They went down to the corner store for cherry cola, skipping down Patterson, saying hello to the children in each lawn. Every year, marking their height and their growth inside of the walls of the home, roaming front yards and the park down the street, attending mass in green hats and white gloves, tiny old fashioned, but loved and raised by an aging grandmother. They became taller, grown up. Beth and Bridget roamed Firestone High School, riding the waves, ruling, until they dreamt of other places.

1985

They took a train across the nation. Or a couple trains, a few buses. They packed their bags, had a few picked locations. Wanted to meet their dad in Santa Barbara. They traveled lightly, they left the records at Patterson, but followed the Pretenders, pretending. Drinking in what their petite frames could possibly ever thirst for, a night life, a life of noise. Meeting The Minutemen, dancing on a tour bus, with smiles, cigarettes, Robert Smith (but he was very prestigious, didn't like fun girls). The Smiths album morphed into the back of the stage, where the lyrics were louder, more beautiful. Staying, holding back until the dawn rose over the hills, unlike an eastern sunrise, then falling asleep until the western sun tipped into the Pacific. Bridget dated Joey Ramone before she decided, "He was so nice, but so awkward." Beth and Bridget danced, dabbled. Finding out how to exist without limits, rules, crafting networks to live and wander. Friends, lovely nights, ways to exist with little cash, crashing, thriving.

Black polyester, red and green plaid. Bleached hair, Doc Martens. The concept of unequal earrings dangling, piecing together, the route of a rock star—but the star always pointedly fixated. And the stars always higher than God granted. White dust chalked among black sweaters, heathens, smoked feathers. Black and white like The Germs' first record.

1988

Patterson was dying like the neighborhood that surrounded it. Bridget and Beth were dropped off at the empty house in a dark purple van on its way to New York City. It was quiet. And the house was worn down. Sad. Beth was tired. Someone had squatted for a while, but only to have shelter, nothing stolen. Lost and lonely shoes, hats, coats of their grandparents, the name Popovich only left for the later generation.

Slowly, their cousins and friends crept in from the past, rising, like embers finding new heat, fresh paper.

They were from the nostalgic main street back into the picture.

The embers cradling dust, pleading for companionship.

They tasted Akron's finest it had to offer, but it was too expensive. Not like California. It was gray and harsh, heavy. Like the Midwestern weather sitting on top of Patterson.

It wasn't the normal hook, the normal rock of the star. But they weren't born stars. They were born in a cell, with four walls of gray. They tasted what they could afford, and liked it. Jumped up, train to the liquor store down the street, right by where the Catholics were replaced by AA, and the school nearby became a clinic for users to donate their blood plasma in exchange for twenty dollars a week.

Race, roll, put down, rest. Race, roll, put down, and rest. Shriveled up, crunch, taste. Feel. Seeing gray spots, feeling ticking, constant ticking. Speeding up to the stop sign. It's like California on a very old dusty couch, in a falling down house on Patterson. It's a reason to stay put. When the California memory fades, they realize Ohio sinks deeper. Feels deeper. Cracked teeth, pocked face, dried skin. Putting their records in the attic because now the world would rather play music on a silver disc.

1991

1991 was the year Beth got pregnant. She had a baby girl, Kailyn Mae, and Bridget had a boy named Anderson soon after. There was crying in Patterson, so Ronnie, the father of Anderson, put a swing set in the old backyard. Beth grew cucumbers and cleaned up another room to put the junk in. And their friends all had babies. Babies were just another way to figure out something to do. Or babies made time schedules. Or they didn't want the babies, but had them. Either way, the babies came. And the babies played on the rug in Patterson's living room, threw up and cried and pooped in the house, and needed anything and everything. The twins babysat their niece and nephew and kept the basement door locked. And everything grew.

Patterson died the day the police showed up, banging on the door, yelling. The children were upstairs taking a nap. They must have found out that the side door was a place of enemies, a harbor. Rocks of past rock stars resurfaced. Sink or swim, but the little children, and California was nothing they could handle anymore. Ronnie saved what could be salvaged and they moved. Not much was salvaged, and the basement was filled with concrete.

They left Patterson in the hands of the Section-8 housing department, who moved a dying woman into the falling down house. You can still drive past it, although the house now looks entirely different from when the Goodyear Company filled the neighborhood.

1996

I asked my mother how she met Aunt Bridget, and she says at a concert in Miami. I asked her what Aunt Bridget and Aunt Beth did, she said they were groupies, and then cocktail waitresses. I asked what a groupie was. I asked what a cocktail was. She said they were fun girls, and she was a fun girl. And they had a lot of fun for a while. But they wanted to be mommies, they wanted little girls. They got two little girls, two little boys, and had more fun than they ever thought they would. I asked if they still had fun. She said yes, unfortunately.

Contributors

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Lindsey Clark ('15) thinks writing is a way to share an experience, idea, and feeling with an infinite number of people. Whether it is online or in print, the words you write will affect someone even if it is in the smallest of ways. This is why she likes to write and is proud to be double majoring in English and Economics.

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Daniel Persia is a junior at Denison University. He is currently studying Creative Writing, Mathematics, and Spanish and has a deepening interest in literary translation. He also works as a Writing Center consultant and is a tour guide for the University. In his free time, he enjoys traveling, writing, downhill skiing, and spending time with his friends and family.

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Adrienne Violand ('14) is a German major and Spanish minor. She is involved in German Culture Society, Writer’s Club, and Kaffeeklatsch. She hopes to find a job in translation after her time at Denison. Some of her hobbies include adding the German suffix “chen” to everything, drawing (cartoons mostly), and playing video games.