

2017

## Exile Vol. LXIII

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# EXILE



# 2017

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**Spring 2017**

*Denison University's Literary and Art Magazine  
Since 1955*

You of the finer sense,  
Broken against false knowledge,  
You who can know 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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*Ukraine, by Iryna Klishch*

## I FOUND LOVE ON A TRAIN

*Laura Lussier*

I fell in love  
with a woman on the metro  
who ate a peach  
and let the pit balance  
the whole way home  
on her head.

## 13 Styles of Distorted Thinking

*Brit Morse*

Filtering:	His grey tendrils took nothing from the veins bridging his tendons
Polarized Thinking:	and when his granddaughter pressed her lips to his knees, nibbling his corduroy pants, he saw the wedding day he would never attend.
Overgeneralization:	She curls and uncurls her fingers like a musician preparing for warm-ups,
Mind Reading:	to his humming of “The Weight” by The Band,
Castastrophizing:	The aluminum foil covering the pumpkin pie his wife taught him to make had half lifted from the rim
Personalization:	<i>it’s going cold</i> , he said aloud.
Control Fallacies:	<i>God damn it</i> , under his breathe.
Fallacy of Fairness:	<i>Ann can you come cover the pie</i> , he asked his daughter. <i>What?</i> She was in the other room. <i>It’s covered.</i> <i>The pie</i> , he said. <i>Please.</i>
Blaming:	Ann darted into the kitchen in her robe, mascara in one hand, coffee cup in the other.
Should:	She rolled the aluminum back over the edges of the plate. <i>None before dinner. And not five minutes before bed</i> , she said. <i>I know</i> , he said half-heartedly.
Emotional Reasoning:	<i>I mean it don’t give into her.</i> She bent over and retied his brown shoelaces, mangled from when her daughter played with them moments before.
Fallacy of Change:	Ann rummaged elbow deep through her black leather purse, emptied the contents on the coffee table. Her daughter picked up the lip gloss and licked the applicator.
Heaven's Reward Fallacy:	<i>Whatcha got there?</i> he asked. He smiled a toothless grin and outstretched his hand. She dipped the applicator and licked it again, smearing globs of pink glitter on her tongue as Ann shut the front door behind her.



## The Bridge That Is Gone

*Allie Vugrincic*

The big, black pipe that runs beneath the trail  
Offends eyes with its practicality.  
Those who come after me will not know that  
Before the pipe made passage for the brook  
A small bridge sufficed to make the crossing.  
A bridge I once did not know, and trampled  
With the wheels of my not yet rusted bike  
In an utter frenzy – a narrow pass  
That I made narrowly, flying too fast  
Down the path I had not yet discovered.  
It is known to me now, the path, the bridge,  
Where I would sit and read tragedy, myth.  
Was it brown or burgundy, the bridge that  
Is gone? Memory fails fragile senses.

I imagine my grandfather, he who  
Came before me, he that I did not know.  
Was he tall or undersized, the man that  
Is gone? It offends my mind to think my  
Children who come after me will not know  
Their grandfather, who slept at sixty-one,  
Made passage to the life after this with  
No frenzy, no complaint or harsh grievance,  
Into the still, undiscovered darkness.  
How narrow this life, what mystery and  
Tragedy the soul flies in the face of?  
With not yet weary feet, I cross the path  
Over the pipe, mourn that lost beauty which  
Will not be remembered when I am gone.

## ASH

*Landon Slangerup*

Consider the neighbor with a face of sand dunes, soon to be resting in cold soil, or the classmate—mouth glued, eyes of stone—so far in the class' corner, she might as well be a portrait on the wall, or perhaps the professor with a voice containing less sound variation than a heart monitor flatline. Considering any of these might be more back-breaking than splitting wood with a butter-knife, but alas, consider yourself in a wooded area of rural Ohio. Don't just place your eyes on the Osage tree, its rocky bark and nuclear green brainy fruit. Don't pick up the brilliant symmetrical maple leaf, resting on feathery grass. And don't let enjoy the scents radiating from the pine. Though these are tantalizing, remember to look at the dying ash tree, towering and grey. Though nearing its end, with its bark that peels like old yellow wallpaper, and rotting beehive branches, let your eyes move high above the other trees to the clusters of small, precisely designed leaves at the ash's top, blowing wildly while the others stand still.



*Mournful King*, by Allie Vugrincic

## I Write Because I Have A Lot To Say; I Write Because I Have Nothing To Say

Kirsten Elmer

I can't see my liver.

When I was younger I imagined the Pacmen inside of me and when my mom told me some of them were sleeping, I wondered if they were dead. I wondered what the ghosts were thinking as they blinked and ran free through the maze of my lobes. I wondered if they knew the Pacmen were dead. I wondered if they cried.

I can't see my liver.

I was in eighth grade when I decided to type *Hereditary Fructose Intolerance* into Google for the first time. They called it HFI, as if enough people were talking about it in their everyday lives. I read over the words *aldolase B* on three different websites, and although I used to picture an empty space where my liver should've been, I learned that all of it was there, it just wasn't working. I clicked through links and got lost, reading the same textbook definition over and over—*deficiency in enzymes, patients are asymptomatic, a disorder, a condition, an inborn error*. I learned that I could die.

\* \* \*

When I was twenty, I wrote a story called *Cake* for my creative nonfiction workshop class. I wasn't dying for people to hear my story, I wasn't begging to look in their eyes and to see that they understood—I only handed it in because I knew it would be easy to write. I waited until the night before my essay was due, and I spilled sixteen pages out on to my laptop in two hours.

The idea of *Cake* came from my 500-word college essay—finally I was going to make *what* I was a statement about *who* I was. I stayed home from school one day and wrote three different essays about being good at math or making up my passion for photography until I finally went against my own fears and thought about what my friend Sandy told me in tenth grade—at least that gives you something to write your college essay on; you've lived through tragedy. I didn't want to use it to sound interesting; I didn't want to say the words, or type the words, but after my three attempts, my story fell out from my fingers and onto the keys of my laptop.

I have a liver condition. It took me eighteen years to say it, and here I was typing it over and over again; as if I knew what it meant, as if I understood. Once I hit 500 words, I tied a nice

bow over all of my self-doubt and I lied and said I found myself. *Now I know that I can do anything I set my mind to. It held me back once, but I won't let that happen again.* After staring at the finished document that only took about fifteen minutes to write, I thought about my guidance counselor, about my English teachers, about my mother who had told me to ask as many people as possible to read over my college essay so they could tell me what they thought. But I knew I wasn't going to show anyone.

When I was in first grade, I started writing poems and songs in a small purple striped journal that I got from a holiday grab bag. After a few love songs about a boy named Paul that I used to chase on the playground, I wrote a story about a prophetic girl (when really I called her a creature) that was born with a curse. *Someone had to have this problem, someone had to be this way, someone had to cry her eyes out every single day.* After writing a full song with 6 verses and two different versions of the chorus, I used my mother's beginner piano book to try to create notes to go along with the song. I hummed to myself so no one could hear the words, and when I was done, I stuffed my purple journal and the music book at the bottom of the piano bench under loose music sheets.

For days I sang that song to myself wherever I was. I'd shout it out to the trees hanging over me as I rode my bike in the small dead-end street next to my house. I'd sing it quietly to myself in the shower where I thought no one could hear me over the running water. And every night I would go back to the piano and memorize the slow notes I strung together to make its melody. At twenty-one I can still hear the words sung in my head—I can still remember how it felt for my two index fingers to push down hard on the five piano notes.

That song became my whole life. I told all of my friends I was going to be a songwriter, and I held my purple journal to my chest while I rode the bus to school every morning. I hid it under my math flashcards in my school desk, and I zipped it up in my lunchbox when I left. But eventually, after a few weeks of humming the song to myself, I spilled my milk all over my sister at the dinner table when my mother smiled and told me she found my "diary."

My chubby cheeks turned hot red and the back of my scalp tightened. My mother joked with my father about having to "snap" for me at my future poetry readings, and I remember just silently staring at her. Her fork was held in front of her chest, but she didn't lift it to her mouth—she couldn't because she was laughing, because she was laughing at me. I didn't even feel the tears forming until I looked down into my lap and everything became blurry. Perhaps it was my

silent response or the fact that I stopped eating dinner or the bulb of water that slipped out and clung to the corner of my eye that eventually signaled my mother to stop talking. I remember the sound of utensils scraping against dinner plates, my sister ripping paper towels to clean up the milk that I spilled, my dad feeding the rest of his dinner to our dog. I looked up at the light.

The thought of my mother or other family members knowing how I felt sent a paralysis from the back of my tongue to the spine of my esophagus. I never actually asked my mom if she read my “Someone” song, and over a decade later I still don’t want to know. My liver condition has never been something I talk about with my family or anyone for that matter—the topic only draped itself over my tongue, hidden from everyone but myself. I couldn’t stand the thought of my mother reading about how it made me cry myself to sleep at six years old, and twelve years later I had no intentions of letting anyone read my college essay besides the nameless and faceless college administrators that I assumed, and hoped, I would never meet.

Still, there’s a reason why these words pour out of me when I sit down to write or when I’m wasting water in the shower or when I’m walking to class and my mind wanders. But I don’t always know whom I am writing them for. I want to validate my own pain, but I need readers in order to do that. Writing these stories, these feelings down makes them real—as if I’m assuring myself that it is not normal to hate yourself at six years old—but I don’t feel vindicated until the documents are saved with proper titles—*Elmer Workshop Piece ENGW384*—and I’ve emailed it or printed 15 copies to pass out to my workshop group. I’m not sure what to call it, but there’s a quick feeling of satisfaction or validation in knowing that my story will be heard. But once it’s my turn and the workshop comments are passed to me and every student in class has something to say about *the part where your mom is cleaning vomit off of you*, suddenly that feeling of satisfaction is ripped away from me like a Band-Aid over hair. I am told over and over again of the parts where people feel sorry for me the most or how they never would’ve known that something was *wrong* with me because I don’t even *look sick*.

There’s a reason why this confrontation—why people knowing that this thing that’s wrong with me affects more than just what I eat—has kept me from saying any of these words out loud, especially to my family. Although I can’t tell you what that reason is, I think I get closest to it when I type fast and raw strings of run-on sentences in the notes on my phone or the corners of my notebooks or when I don’t start my assignment until the night before it’s due.

I haven't touched *Cake* since my sophomore year workshop class. I've read it over, taken excerpts, emailed it along, but I'm not the me that wrote it almost two years ago. I open and close myself every year, sometimes staying closed for too long until I burst open, believing that I'm older, wiser, more mature when I do tell someone. I think that I've changed when I do this, but weeks later I always go back to shutting that part of me away. I go back to feeling confused about if I should tell someone, how I should tell someone, if I even want to know that part about myself.

For the past two years I've heard the workshop comments—*this is a story about love and bravery*—and two different professors calling it an illness narrative, but that's not what I want it to be; that's not what I want to be called. But everyone asks me, *what are you researching, what are you writing about*, and I say it, I say I'm writing my own illness narrative. My friends have told me they want to read it, and I tell them when it's finished, but I know that I've written words that I don't want to face—words I'm afraid my mother will read and call me crying about. Still, I want them to read it—to know without having to vocally tell them or without having to look in their eyes the moment they find out—but if I could, I would spill ink on paper and walk away, and a thousand years from now the splatter would live on as a monument, and people would say it's art from *anonymous*. They could call it an illness narrative and there wouldn't be the threat of being revealed as what I must be—a fraud. No one would tell me that I'm not sick enough, and I wouldn't have to wish that I were. I wouldn't feel those stones poured into my diaphragm as they ask me, *isn't that hard to live with?* I wouldn't have to fight between my outside and inside, wondering if I'm even sick at all.

\* \* \*

I don't want to see my liver.

I will never understand what's wrong with it. I've memorized lines from Boston University, but even I don't know what they mean; but I'm supposed to. Up until my twelfth grade anatomy class, I never even knew which side of the body the liver was on. For the last few months of the class, we dissected stray cats that had been killed by cars or died of old age and donated for "science." We cut our cats open and looked at their organs. The stomach had nothing in it, the rugae looked shriveled and dry. The trachea was still pinkish, its C-shaped hyaline cartilage rings still holding its shape. Then, beneath the bruised external oblique, our cat's liver sat tucked in under the diaphragm. It was reddish-brown, more brown than red, and the different

lobes looked perfectly sliced apart by a sharp kitchen knife. I cut my cat's liver open, but there was nothing inside of it; just an uneven pattern of curved lines, looking as though it had a graveled texture, but it felt smooth beneath my gloved fingers. Even with the thing in my hands I could not understand it.



## Leaving Without You

*Alex Parthun*

We lost you somewhere  
between that backyard playhouse  
and the creaking hinges  
of a rusted shed filled  
with cobwebbed toys.

You realized the world  
was bigger than our fenced in yard,  
so you closed the door behind you,  
and left us sitting on the fraying ends  
of carpeted stairs.

We waited until the lightbulbs  
dimmed, until the trees  
faded to gray even while our eyes  
still lingered on the door, so we ran,  
even though you would never know,  
and we'll be gone if you come back.

## HAIKUS ABOUT THE GOOD OL' AMERICAN HYPOCRITE

*Landon Slangerup*

Mud-less cowboy boots,  
Red flannels bought from the mall,  
John Denver—no clue;

Shouts of slurs at gays,  
A bible with no flipped page,  
A blue-eyed Jesus;

More guns, fewer books,  
Cherished pretty pennies,  
Rich Reagan rooters;

Plenty of puffed pride,  
McDonald's farm-less french fries,  
Flag—made in China;

When ordering food,  
Don't order the melting pot;  
Get chicken noodle.

Sam

*Gabriele Eimontaite*

There's a heavy smell of home-brewed  
beer on my dad's breath  
Beer he doesn't even like but drinks because  
He doesn't know how to ask "hey, you got a Stella instead?"  
And my mom figures now would be a good time to  
interrupt the silence with  
'Sam says happy thanksgiving  
And that she  
loves you'

Nik watches Peppa pig in his car seat  
Buckled in tight with his puffy blue jacket  
Spilling over the seat straps  
He doesn't understand  
He doesn't know that the dad who's had  
Too many drinks is the dad who finally gets  
angry  
He doesn't know that this is the dad who  
Shatters plates and who's loud voice  
Shakes the walls of the house  
He doesn't know this dad

He's a good guy, a great guy  
The funniest man I know, he's my dad  
He's lately an angry guy  
Angry that my sister left home  
Where she said she wasn't happy anymore  
He's angry he doesn't know where she is  
Or who she's with and what she's doing  
He's angry he gave her everything and she  
Walked away  
My dad's a good guy, he's a hurt guy

There's a staleness in his eyes  
Like they're frozen just before his mind reconnects with his body  
He begins,  
'My heart aches for her'

## Urban Cavities

*Brit Morse*

Two boys sat on a roof, spitting sunflower seeds over  
the side of a building.

They'd stuffed their armpits with kit kats and milky-ways  
and approached the cashier

moments before with pockets bulging like the blinding sun  
over the Highline mid-evening,

but the cashier let them go without a word, knowing they'd  
be back the next day.

Shells caught on the younger's lips and when he spit  
they dropped on the older's

hand like a snow covered leaf, wet and cold.  
*Da fuck man,*

said the older and shook his hand. The Manhattan bridge  
glowed into a body

of skyscrapers, an unreachable world meant only for the  
men in suits who shined

their briefcases on the subway and who's wallets they stole  
and gave to their mothers

for coke and cigarettes. They traced the imaginary lines  
of their neighborhood, from the corner store

to the b-ball quarts on the north side. *We should go,*  
said the older. *Take the C all the way up.*

*Yeah.* And the next night when they ate Twix bars  
and timed the wrappers

to drop on the bald forehead of the store owner  
below and watched cargo ships

glide their way up the river he said it again.

*Let's take the C soon. Yeah.*

And then they'd go home to their sisters with half-melted  
chocolates under their arms.



*Untitled*, by Micah Frenkiel

## All the Masks We Wear

*Grace Williams*

The first time anyone saw me naked in my adult life, I was under harsh fluorescent light. I wasn't allowed to cover myself. I just had to stand there, exposed, and look straight ahead. A petite, but authoritative female police officer conducted a strip search on me, prompting me with monotone force to take off all my clothes and to stand in front of her, arms and legs stretched out. In accordance with her rehearsed instructions, I turned to face the opposite wall, bending down for a squat and cough procedure I'd only ever seen in crime shows. My body was under a microscope of scrutiny—voices incessantly hissed in my ear, telling me which imperfection she was viewing at that exact moment. My eyes shut tightly as I tried to silence the taunting. I was being ridiculous. While she was concerned with the possible presence of illegal drugs up my bum, I agonized over every flaw that was on display for her.

When it was over she threw a baggy, striped jumpsuit toward my chest. It was pale blue, almost grey, and had the words "Valdosta County Jail" printed across the back. I hurriedly slipped into the oversized costume, wanting to hide my body from her, from the light. I was glad there were no mirrors around—the last thing I wanted to see was my body inside the ratty tent—being where I was would become too real if I could see myself. I wished she'd have let me keep my bra, though it was against protocol. It felt inhumane that I couldn't even have my undergarments. The jumpsuit was rough on my skin. I was not myself.

She stuffed my real clothes and my purse, which held the phone I had not been able to use to call my parents, into a large Ziploc bag. I was relieved that despite their dumping out of the contents in my large bag, police hadn't discovered the fake I.D. my friend had allowed me to borrow the night before. The girl in the picture looked nothing like me, with brown eyes and a

heart shaped face. I'd used the I.D. to go to a hookah bar, where they didn't question my age at all. I thought of the illegal activity Cole and I had engaged in the night before without being caught: underage drinking and hookah. Yet, we came out at the end of the night unscathed, just two seniors enjoying a Friday night. Saturday afternoon was much different. On September 6, 2014, I woke up with a headache, but decided to meet Cole, my best friend, for lunch. And now, only hours later, an officer shuffles me out of the exam room and hands me a pair of disposable Styrofoam flip-flops, gesturing for me to sit at the counter when I have finished.

*I don't belong in jail*, I thought. But I did. How could I prove I was any different from anyone else in here? I refused to cry, believing that tears would act as a sign to the police of my guilt for committing the crime for which I'd been arrested. They had spoken loud enough on the scene so that Anna and I could hear them from inside the squad car—they were laughing, smoking Cole's confiscated cigarettes and talking about how our offense would be tried as a State level offense rather than a local one. An overwhelming irritation consumed me; these cops were assholes. When they approached the windows of Anna's Acura, they beat on the glass with their fists, yelling at us to open the doors. We did without hesitation. The most commanding officer, a tall, athletically-built African-American man, was clearly in charge. He would be the one to write up the false report later on, falsely documenting that we had possession of three masks rather than two, that we had threatened the lives of children, that we had, in unison, confessed our guilt on the scene. None of this was true.

"How old are y'all?" he asked, clipped, impatient.

Though we were seniors, none of us had turned eighteen yet. I assumed that being minors would help each of our cases; instead, the arresting officer turned to the nine or so uniformed men behind him, yelling, "Yo, these kids are seven-fucking-teen!" An eruption of laughter

followed his remark. “Look who’s going to “Big Boy Jail,” he said, his laughter fading. My stomach turned and I slumped into the leather of the car seat.

Cole had been shoved into the K-9 unit van, with highly-trained dogs barking loudly into his ears. He had already begun to sob when they slammed him inside. I looked to Anna, a girl I had not been friends with since the fifth grade, and rolled my eyes. She hadn’t stopped crying since we left her car on the side of the road where we pulled over. On the drive to the jail, which seemed to last for hours rather than minutes, she couldn’t stifle her sobs, periodically wiping her tears on her fabric-covered shoulder. She looked like a damn mess, with mascara staining her bright red cheeks. It made me happy to her that way, disheveled, unkempt. Cole didn’t look much better, though, and I wondered briefly what I must have looked like. Probably like hell.

When the squad car pulled up to the gate, the sun was just beginning to make its descent. Soon my mom would begin to worry whether or not to make me dinner too, unsure of whether I’d stay out with my friends until curfew. Tires screeched to a halt to allow the slow-moving steel gate to allow us access inside. Barbed wire fences surrounded a cluster of nondescript stone buildings. From inside the car I could faintly hear screaming. The blonde hairs on my arms stood up as my skin raised with goosebumps. Soon I would know exactly where the hideous sound was coming from. I did my best to remain still; not only because the metal of the handcuffs pinched the flesh of my wrists with every fine movement, but because I did not want to seem unruly. If I was going to be detained, I would endure punishment with some semblance of dignity.

Even though the officers had treated us like animals, for some reason I assumed, or rather hoped, that the officer behind the counter would treat me like decent human being. How could he, though? I was just like everyone else in the jail, only a child. I kept checking that my jumpsuit wasn’t exposing my breasts. The buttons had either been picked off or worn off, of



course around the chest. Self-consciously I held the two halves of the suit together, looking around me to see inside the small windowpanes of the cells fixated in a semi-circle around me. My breath hitched when I locked eyes with a man in the cell adjacent from my seat; his dark face was tattooed with a symbol I couldn't identify. He surprised me when he began to speak, "What the fuck you want little white bitch? Huh? Goddamn, I hope they lock you up in here with me, bitch. Just you fucking wait," he said, flashing a silver grill at me and knocking his whole body against the metal door to scare me further. His show made Anna cry harder. My eyes darted away, but my body froze. I wanted to die.

The officer behind the glass took my name and information, recording my height and weight, my address, phone number, and school. He almost choked on his own saliva when I gave him the name of my College Preparatory School. "Oh, fuck," he said, trying to compose himself. I gave him a confused look but said nothing. "We ain't never had no Valwood kids in here. The paper's 'gon have a damn field day with this one." I stared at him, in disbelief that I *could* actually feel worse than I had only seconds before. He sent me to the nurse when he was done with me. I didn't lie to her when she asked me the last time I'd had a drink. "Yesterday," I told her. She wrote something down, looking unsurprised. I already regretted my answer. "And what was it you drank?" she said. I told her a margarita and some vodka. What she didn't know was that I didn't even have the gumption to finish either of those drinks. In fact, I had gone outside to dump the remnants of the bottle so that my friends would think I had downed it. I felt pathetic. "So, liquor," she said matter-of-factly. The word sounded harsh—it stung. I wish she had asked how often I drank, which was not often at all. Or had asked when I started drinking, which was just two months earlier.

No one cared that I hadn't planned to be with Anna that day, or that I hadn't participated in the terroristic escapades of the afternoon. I had simply been in the backseat, watching it all happen, acting as per usual, as the coward of the group. To police, however, I was a liar, or at the least, an accomplice. After all, the two Purge masks were found in the backseat of Anna's car where I was sitting. Anna had, in the midst of panic and confusion, decided to chuck the evidence in the back. When police opened the car door the plastic, artificial blood-covered machete sat beside *my* feet.

After we had been patted down at the scene, I pleaded with the female officer to believe me: "I never wore a mask," I told her. "I told them not to harass children, but they kept going," which I had. She continued to cuff me until there were only centimeters between the flesh of my wrists and the metal. She spun me to face her, "Listen to me, now. You are lucky you didn't get shot. We don't take multiple calls about terroristic threats from people in masks lightly. Now, you could have forced them to stop. And, if not, you could have extricated yourself from the situation." I searched her eyes for answers—at that moment she was the only motherly figure I had. I told her in earnest that I had no car, no choice but to stay with them. She was unfazed, "You could have jumped out of the car," she said, slamming me into the vehicle with Anna. It had to sink in that she was serious. I imagined myself jumping out of the car, then, and shook my head at the thought. *I am in deep shit.*

Everything happened in slow motion after that. I could not comprehend my situation; in fact, I continued to hold out for the moment of surprise when my parents would come around the corner, revealing enthusiastically that I was a victim of an episode of "Beyond Scared Straight." But it was not a test, nor a cruel joke, or even a lesson—it was a nightmarish reality. Six squad cars, one K-9 unit van, and four Sheriff Cars had pulled up to the scene to arrest three high

school seniors, to arrest me. They had pulled their guns and approached us slowly, as if we were actual terrorists. When I realized they believed that's what we were, terrorists, my heart felt cold in my chest. I stayed in the car because it was easy, not because I wanted to. I stayed so Anna and Cole wouldn't say I was lame; I stayed because it happened so fast, because I thought it would be over soon. I prayed that it would, and spent the last half of the escapades laying down in the back seat, my head throbbing. I admit I laughed once or twice, in the beginning, but I cringed when Anna pulled up next to a small boy outside the mall—one of the last victims. "Do you wanna play with us?" she whispered to him, cocking her head to one side. I ducked down again, wanting her to pull away. She didn't know when to stop.

Anna and I were placed in a cell adjacent from Cole's—we could see him through our small windowpane. His anxiety was flaring up, but, at least he was in there alone. I wished I was him. Being in a room with the driver felt like a death sentence, as though being physically near her made me even more directly linked to her. She was still crying hysterically, blubbering about what her boyfriend was going to think, and whether or not her name would be printed in the newspaper. "Anna," I said, exhausted, "I'm supposed to be applying for college. What the fuck am I going to put when they ask if I've ever been detained? Or convicted? This shit follows you wherever you go. This will fuck up my whole life." I sat down on the floor and brought my legs close to my chest. I didn't want to sit beside her, let alone look at her. She sat on the metal bench, her head leaning against the dividing wall between the bench and the toilet. For hours she seemed to alternate between sobbing, picking at her jumpsuit, and pulling at split ends.

All I could think to do was pray, something I suppose many people cling to at such a time. It all felt synthetic. Not to say that God didn't hear me, or didn't care about me; no, *I* was the phony. Why should I expect redemption when I alienate Him every other day of my life? I

continued anyway, begging for help, for forgiveness, for validation. Despite my surroundings and the events that had occurred, I was still *me*. Still a good person, right? A scary thought crept into my mind, whispering to me that perhaps I had never been a good person—that I deserved this. I stared up into the fluorescent lights again, noting the rhythmic flicker of one of the rods that needed changing. The corner I sat in began to feel smaller and smaller. Anna began to whine for her mother like a toddler, whimpering softly. It was the first time I felt connected to her in any way.

I spent my time in the corner driving myself insane, tying my stomach into deep knots whilst replaying every detail of the day in my head. I still hadn't cried. Instead, I counted the tiles on floor over and over, counting the white bricks of the wall and ceiling as well. Periodically I checked through the window to see if Cole was okay. His face seemed to have aged with a mixture of sadness, fear, and anxiety. The rings around his eyes were stained a purple I could see from my cell, and a seemingly permanent frown overtook his countenance. I mouthed to him, "Are. You. Okay?" He shrugged, defeated. I slumped back down into my regular position, feeling the same.

I did my best to gauge what time it was. It was around 4:30 p.m. when I had sent my mom the text message saying I was at the Halloween store with Cole and Anna, to which she responded with confusion, knowing my disdain for both Halloween and Anna. It was around 7:00 p.m. when we were pulled over, I noted, estimating how much time had passed. Surely by now my parents must be looking for me. I hoped they were, anyway. I never miss my midnight curfew. My stomach ache lasted for hours, as I had no way to reconcile that my parents must have thought I was dead.

The woman in the cell to our left screamed incessantly, begging for toilet paper. Officers yelled back at her, threatening to put her in general population where “most people get raped.” Every now and then new people were jostled inside, officers beating thugs until they walked forward into the facility. I watched as two men were tazed to the ground, their large bodies contorting in rhythm to their screams. Anna and I stood at the window to watch them, taking turns to see. We caught Cole’s attention again, and mouthed questions to him, adding signals to help illustrate our point. “Hey!” one of the officers snapped from behind the glass, “If I see you two signal at him again, I’ll separate you and put you in Gen Pop. See how you bitches like it in there.” Anna and I jumped back from the door and took our seats again in separate corners.

A few minutes later, she was ushered out of the cell to be fingerprinted. I was jealous of her. She had driven the car, she’d had the idea to wear the masks around town to mess with people, but she was going to get out first. At least her parents knew where she was. Because her car was on the scene, she had been able to call her mother. She was in the cell for seven hours before being taken away, given back her clothes, and sent into the lobby where her parents had been waiting. Before she left I begged her to make sure my parents knew where I was. She promised me she would make sure they knew their daughter was in jail, smiled, and then disappeared through the back room.

I tried to sleep on the short bench after she had left, but my stomach kept me up. I was happier though, now that I was alone. I hadn’t had the need to use the toilet the entire time I was there, thank goodness, and my appetite was nonexistent. A stale deli sandwich sat on the dividing wall when Anna and I had first arrived, but neither of us had touched it. I was parched, but after hearing the woman next to us get hounded for asking for toilet paper, I didn’t dare ask for a cup of water. It was torture to watch the officers working at the semi-circle desk walk over to the

water dispenser every so often. Again, I felt pathetic. In my poorly constructed Styrofoam flip flops, which resembled the kind they'd give you at a nail salon after a pedicure, I shuffled over toward the mirror I hadn't yet looked in to. Traces of foundation splotched my face, understandable, since I'd been resting my face in my knees for so long. I put my fingers to my lips and prodded them, unsure as to why they looked as pale as the rest of me. Flakes of mascara had begun to collect under my puffy eyes, and I ran the sink water to wipe it away. I then reached for soap, but like the toilet paper, it was out. I sighed in defeat, but looked back into the smudged mirror, back at my disheveled complexion, and chuckled a bit. Only once, but it felt a little better. My hair really did look ridiculous, with kinks and fly aways galore. I didn't try to smooth down my frizz; rather, I took my newly established position on the bench, back straight against the wall, and looked through the barred opening ahead of me, occasionally making eye contact with the working officers.

When it was finally my turn to be fingerprinted, a male officer led me over to a small desk near Cole's cell. He took my hand, dipping each of my fingers into the black ink. "Would you calm down," he barked at me, "Your hands are shaking and it'll mess up the prints." I took a deep breath. "I'm sorry," I said. He met my eyes and his face shifted; I think he felt bad for me. "Why are you here?" he asked, a hint of sincerity in his voice. I was about to answer when the man in the cell behind him began throwing a fit. The man looked emaciated, as though he were a dopefiend. But I felt bad for him; like me, he just wanted some water. The officer snapped back into an authoritative stance. "Well," he yelled, "Your ass ain't gonna get any water. Sit back down." He started to take me back to my cell, but stopped when the yelling man started banging on the cell door. The officer began to redden, paralyzing me with fear. "Man! What the fuck?!" the officer said. "What's wrong?" I asked, unsure if I was allowed to turn around to see for

myself. He was annoyed but not surprised, "He shit on the goddamned floor." I made an expression to the effect of, *Oh, dear God*, and the officer shook his head. "I'm not gonna clean your shit, so you're gonna live with it." For the first time, I wanted to retreat back into the safety of my cell.

I turned to the officer as he shut me back inside, knowing this may be my only chance to ask, "Can you call my parents? I don't think they know where I am." His eyes softened slightly. "They're already in the lobby. It shouldn't be much longer now," he said. Even though he locked me back in my cell, my body fell in relaxation. I began to cry in relief, knowing my parents were sitting out there, waiting for me. The knots in my stomach began to untangle, and I finally fell asleep for a few hours.

It was early morning when a woman officer brought around a breakfast I didn't want to eat. "Alright sweetie," she said. "C'mon, we processed you out. You're ready to go." I stood up and walked back into the strip search room to change. The olive green jeans I had worn the day before had dried, no longer sticky from when I'd dumped Dr. Pepper on them at the restaurant. My clothes felt like home, like me. I couldn't help but smile when I walked out, headed toward the mysterious back exit that Anna had slipped through many hours earlier. While waiting for an escort to take me to the lobby, I made eye contact with Cole. He had two charges on him, one for terroristic threats, the other, for underage possession and intent to sell tobacco. My smile fell from my lips when I realized he'd be there for perhaps much longer. I didn't want him to be left alone. He lent me a somber half-grin, and waved at me as I turned to leave. We had experienced something that day, something profoundly horrendous, but we'd at least had each other. I counted myself lucky for that.

When I walked into the lobby, my parents embraced me, taking my breath away, but making me feel safe. I could tell that my father had cried, his eyes red and swollen. Perhaps he cried because he was worried for his little girl, but I couldn't help but think it was because he spent too long questioning whether or not he knew me. I wouldn't blame him. In the weeks following, I cried often—I had consistent nightmares, and nagging obsessive thoughts about what I'd seen, about what people thought, about what I'd done. My parents weren't angry; it was confusing, even dissatisfying. It was anti-climactic. And wrong. I should have been grounded, but they let me go out more. I should have been yelled at, but I was comforted. This made me cry too. Did they really know me? What I was capable of? They blamed Anna, choosing to deny any active involvement on my part. They tried so hard to look at me the way they used to, like their sweet, smart daughter. But I could tell I'd surprised them. I surprised myself too.



## TOMATO SOUP

*Laura Lussier*

I'm thinking of a bowl  
of tomato soup and a tortoise.  
This cough drop tastes  
too much like orange  
and gives me a fever,  
a fever dream of a bowl  
of tomato soup that sits  
on the back of a tortoise.  
The tortoise rests on my stomach  
and I feel so warm.  
There's a bougainvillea flower  
that the tortoise wants to eat  
but he can't reach because it floats  
in the bowl of soup on his back.  
I imagine the bowl emptying.  
I imagine giving the tortoise  
his tomato heavy flower.  
I imagine feeding him.  
I imagine him eating while I sleep.

## Avocado

*Hadley Nugent*

I split you open, skin ripped  
across the green flesh.

Hack a blade into your seed,  
use it as leverage to pull out  
that silky, smooth ball.

I take a silver spoon and scoop.

You are so unfair. You taste like oil  
and slightly rotten, but I will not stop  
until I turn the skin inside out and scrape  
my teeth along the veins.



*Yang and Yin*, by Allie Vugrincic

## The Biochemist & the Filmmaker

*Allie Vugrincic*

I asked you, the week after we moved here,  
If it would ever look so new and beautiful again.  
“No” was your simple reply, and I wanted  
You to be lying, but I knew it was the truth.

Four years separates us from that day –  
The tree in the courtyard has been gone for two,  
And my father has been dead for one.  
We have since learned to laugh at these absurdities.

We never attended any of the funerals,  
But we can list the names like periodic elements,  
Those most basic substances into which they dissolved.  
Sometimes we count ourselves among the dead.

And yet, we stand in the first snow eating ice cream  
You tutor chemistry, and I swap lenses on cameras  
To open the aperture further, and shed some light  
On stories that only make sense in the dark.

We add to our list the broken people –  
Especially the ones who pick at our brains,  
Or we find asleep on our couch in the afternoon.  
They are alive, but they don’t always believe it.

Like the October vegetables sitting on our mantel,  
Beneath the silk poinsettias and empty bottles,  
Our time here has all but expired – and we rot  
From the inside out, or rather we bloom

With the flowers of May. Soon you will  
Not be by my side to speak your reason,  
But the story we shared will carry your echo  
Over a new and beautiful horizon.

## Stitches

*Cassandra Fleming*

The chipped skeleton of  
orange paint and metal bars,  
curled around itself in a dome,  
haunting our playground,  
daring us to climb.

My sister scrabbled up its sides,  
into the creamy sky, with only seven  
years to weigh her down.  
Her tiny fingers danced over the rungs  
until they tripped.

She was a falling cloud,  
wrapped in a fleece coat,  
I thought I would catch her,  
I knew I would catch her  
but gravity beat me to it.

The bars bit her neck,  
and the wood chips scythed her skin  
and the ground punched the air from her lungs  
and I just stood there and watched  
my sister crumple.

The morning after, before we even knew it would scar,  
I spilled my Cheerios all over the breakfast table.  
The milk ran onto my sister's bare feet,  
the color of yesterday's sky.  
"Sorry," I mumbled.  
A row of black stitches smiled back at me.

## The Sleepover

Kirsten Elmer

I could've been a murderer—it's not something you really hear us say when reminiscing about our childhood years. Still, we watch those 48 Hour Mysteries, we get hooked on teenage soap operas where the girls are wearing heels to tenth grade and getting stalked by their dead best friend, we spread a rumor that the girl who lives down the street killed her dog on purpose and buried him the backyard. No harm done, until you read the headlines—*From Best Friends to Killers, Teen Girl Killed by Her Best Friends, Killed Because Her Friends 'Didn't Like Her.'* There's something pulling you into these stories, maybe it's the disturbing thought of children capable of murder, or maybe it's the prickling at the nape of your neck as you think *that could've been me.*

When I was eleven, my friend Tara had an end of the school year sleepover at her house. I had been friends with her since kindergarten, and by second grade, we had clung on to a tight group with girls circling around us. Everyone in school knew us, we claimed the swings at recess, and we all wore jean jackets. But as the years went on, we were split up into different elementary school classes, and my first friend from kindergarten branched out. It was really her own fault, bringing three more girls into our group, forming an uneven seven that constantly shifted and clashed as we tried to exile one of our own. She should've known before inviting us all to her house to celebrate "graduating" from sixth grade. But this sleepover became the beginning of the end, the incident, the reason my mother took away my cell phone for two years and deleted my AOL Instant Messenger accounts.

I remember sitting in her basement, passing the phones around, Amanda coming late because she had a softball game, lucky her. I remember Julianna sitting alone in the corner; three different cell phones flipped open in front of her, one in her hand as she T9 texted out her message. I remember us all laughing in the background when we heard Lauren leave the last voicemail, ending with a loud *you're fat* and smiling as we all screamed around her. Suddenly, the memories shift to a bedroom, crying as our parents were called, silent and looking down as we're pulled one by one into the hall. Samantha walked back and forth from the door to the bed where we were all huddled, telling us what she heard from outside. I remember thinking about

how stupid it all was—where were these mothers when their daughters cornered me in the bathroom in fourth grade, or just last week when my lunch was thrown in the garbage as a “joke.” And that was our explanation, as it had been for the last five years; we didn’t mean any of it, it was all a joke, we didn’t think she’d take it so seriously.

It wasn’t until years later that I realized what was really said over voicemails and text messages to the girl on the other end. I was talking to my friend Kristen about this night—she wasn’t there. Kristen left our group about two months before this sleepover; fading out by leaving her seat empty at lunch, leaving our four square group, and ignoring me during choir. She saw the end coming, she heard the rumors we made up during lunch and she knew better than to go along with it. She got out before one of us went too far. Eventually she became friends with Korynne, the girl we were all taunting, and the day after the sleepover, when the rest of the sixth grade girls found out, she read the messages sent over text and heard our laughter and screams in the voicemails. She saw and heard the words we attacked her with—she said we told Korynne to kill herself.

I panic when I think about this exchange. I think, well it wasn’t me, I just said all of us hated her, I just said she didn’t have any friends, I just said she was a whore. And it’s repulsive—to think about this, but also to think about how I didn’t even know what it meant. Somewhere through the years of childhood development, we latch on to language we shouldn’t use because it’s daring, even when we don’t know what it means, and we throw it around. Somewhere throughout sixth grade Korynne became friends with Tara and Lauren but ruined it all over some boy whose name none of us can remember. So one of us started ignoring her during kickball, another one pushed her to ground during gym by “accidentally” knocking into her, and on the night of the sleepover I called her a whore while someone else in the room was sending her death threats.

Still, when I think back to this night, I don’t think about what I specifically said, unless it’s to clarify that I didn’t say *that*. I wonder who said it first, if I was the only one who didn’t know, if the mothers scolding me thought I was a sociopath because I rolled my eyes and said it was just a joke. For all these years I saw that night as parents overreacting; that without the knowledge of those words said, it was just another typical sleepover. A group of girls gang up on another—Isn’t this how everyone’s elementary school years went? Still, the fact that I didn’t tell her to kill herself doesn’t matter in the end. It was still seven against one, it was text blasts and

ten voicemails left, it was the next headline on *Dateline*. When I think about this night—the beginning of the end, the incident, the reason my mother questioned the girl she was raising—I realize that although I may not have told her to kill herself, I might as well have.





*For D*, by Shanti Basu

On a hill, a bland brick building in the upper Bronx, my old apartment  
*Imani Congdon*

I went back home on my own, when I was old enough,  
found the brick building where my family lived  
and listened, night after night,  
to the *Chicano* family of nine upstairs, as the littlest of the two sisters,  
Selena, turned *comunista*,

because one day  
she read three pages of Marx in the library  
and saw Frida Kahlo's *Vogue* cover  
and decided the decadence of food stamps,  
of her parent's backbreaking five jobs  
to support  
six kids,  
an ailing *abuela*,  
and the three-bedroom apartment  
they all shared  
were too bourgeoisie for her.

So she left home  
to sneak into NYU lectures on communism  
and slept with the visiting communist scholars  
in their suites at the Ritz,  
and saw absolutely no irony in that.

The rest of the family grew away eventually,  
dependent to the ever-fluxing rent rates, they left,  
and the *Rajasthani* family moved in with their one son, Samrat,  
whose mother cooked with her mother-in-law and her sister  
every other day—

We knew because  
we would always hear  
about the missing cardamom  
when she screamed at the cabinets  
to “give up her fucking spices”—  
her mother-in-law stole it every time  
and chewed the citrusy seeds in the hallway—  
and because she sent Samrat down every time with the surplus;

a full pot of *dal* and a little plastic tub of *gulab jamun*—  
with extra almond slices in the rose syrup,  
because I always begged for extra almond slices—  
and he would smile at me as I pressed his payment,

two loaves of cornbread, into his palms.

And now, all these years later,  
there is a little blonde boy playing on the walkway,  
his father,

tie loosened for the specific purpose  
of playing with his son,  
sits, glances up now and again  
from the papers  
that he brought downstairs  
to make sure his son hasn't run into the street  
and been hit by a cab.

There is a shiny new ten-speed bike strapped  
to the rack outside of the glass doors,  
which a young woman in creaseless yoga pants  
unlocks to coast down the hill,  
all the while on her phone  
"I'll be there in a minute, Rebecca—  
Rebecca? Can you hear me?"

I almost don't notice,  
but every unfamiliar voice  
drifting in and out of earshot  
speaks perfect, unaffected English.

And there I stand,  
a small fragment of what used to be,  
a poor example of what this building was once,  
staring at my old eighth-floor window  
and having no idea  
who lives in the apartment where I grew up.

## Ignominy

*Imani Congdon*

The first time I saw her,  
the magnitude of imminent doom fretted in circles about my head,  
hovered within a cloud of uncertainty.  
If this was roulette, I'd have been dead  
a hundred, a thousand, a million times over again,  
because her touch was oil, sliding my balance out from under me  
like it was  
nothing.

Sit, watch the blackberry grow,  
ripen and writhe upon its stem  
tediously considering the ground below  
and crying out for warning before the moment when...

the rot sets in, the frost,  
like honeybees, the people will hum,  
the berry sullenly hits the earthen floor.

*(and quoth the raven, "Nevermore")*

The last time I saw her,  
the magnitude of imminent doom drove a canyon through my skull  
and echoed into the void

I told you so.

## Poor Boy

*Rob Lee*

When the trains rolled by and the passengers looked out their windows at the countryside and saw the little cabin home a stone's throw from the tracks, they didn't think much of the people who lived there. If they passed by at night, they might see smoke coming from the chimney and a glow from the window, but no one ever thought that that was the only way the family could stay warm on a cold night. If they passed by at dawn, they might see the silhouettes of a man mending a wooden fence and a woman hanging clothes on a line, and they might think it to be a quiet, peaceful way to live, but they never thought of the endless exhaustion that came with it. If they passed by when the sun started to set, they might see a boy in dirty overalls watching the train go by, just close enough for them to see the whites in his eyes. They might think, "What a hard working boy he is," but no one ever thought that he may dream of being one of them on the train. They might see him leaning on the handle of a shovel or an axe, and they might nudge their spouses to look out the window and see how interesting this boy in the field is, but no one has ever thought enough of him to even guess his name.

Eli was eleven when the tracks were first laid. At the time, he was excited by it, but his father felt differently.

"I wonder where the tracks lead to," Eli said at dinner one night.

"The smoke will kill the cattle," his father replied without looking up.

Eli continued cautiously. "Maybe we can ride one day."

His father sighed and rested his chin on his hand. "No," he said. "We *can't*." With another sigh, he picked up his fork again and sifted through his dinner. Finally, he repeated, "The smoke will kill the cattle."

From the dinner table, Eli looked out the window and saw the faint lines of the steel running alongside the hills and tried but could see nothing wrong with it.

"Well, *I'm* gonna ride it someday," he said.

"Eli, hush," his mother said softly.

"Why? I am. I'm gonna ride it someday. I bet it goes out to California. That's what my friend, Henry, says—that it goes out to California. Says by 1880, you can take it anywhere—

load up in Cheyenne then off to New York or Maine, or off the other way to California. *That's* where I wanna go. Henry says it drops you off right at the ocean. He says he's going with his ma and pa over the summer. We should go, too—"

"Eli," his mother snapped. "Hush."

Eli looked to his father who stared at the table with a look of defeat about him. His forehead was still sweaty from working the land and his shirt had dark patches where the straps of his overalls had rested on his shoulders. He looked as if his head was too heavy to keep upright.

"Well, I'm *gonna*," Eli mumbled as he got up from the table. He walked to the door with excitement still twitching inside him. "*I'm gonna ride it someday.*"

Eli sat at the edge of the property and waited. The night was as dark as it was going to get, but the moon lit up the pasture enough for him to see the silhouettes of the clothesline, the cattle sleeping in the field, and a portion of fence his father intended to mend the next morning.

A throaty whistle sounded and Eli turned to see a faint cloud of smoke just above the hills and a train coming from around the bend. As the unlit cars passed in front of him, he felt their thunder deep in his chest. An undulant wind came across him as each car passed and the odor of combustion followed. He closed his eyes and pretended he was one of the sleeping passengers on his way out to California or wherever it was that the tracks led.

He had no way of knowing what people even did out there, but he knew it must be exciting. He knew from the folklore of his classmates that the West was a land of unimaginable adventure. It was a place where one could sleep till noon and wake up without a worry because there was never any work to be done. A place where bad things seldom happened and the little things figured themselves out. But most of all, it was a place far away from home.

A touch on his shoulder took him out of his reverie and he turned to see his mother standing above him. She was shouting for him to come inside, but the train made it impossible for Eli to make out the words. Finally, she motioned toward their home and he got up slowly and walked beside her, looking over his shoulder the whole time.

Eli lay in bed while his mother folded and put away his clothes by candlelight.

"I don't want you sitting so close to the train tracks again," she said. "All that whistling and screeching'll hurt your ears."

"I can hear just fine," Eli said, though his ears did ring.

"And I don't want you talking about riding that train to your father again. Y'hear?"

"What's Pa got against riding trains?"

"Eli," his mother said solemnly. She had no intention of explaining further, but saw in Eli that he wouldn't go easily without an answer. She stopped putting his clothes away and sat on the edge of his bed. "It ain't about the trains."

"What then?"

She looked at him with tired eyes and touched his cheek. "Your father works hard, Eli," she said. "Lord knows that when you go to school, he could use your help here. But he don't want you to be doing what he's doing when you're as old as him, so he sends you off to school to learn." She thought for a moment then said, "He bears the load for the both of you so you'll never have to do that for your own family someday."

Eli looked away from her with a strange, unfamiliar feeling of guilt.

"Eli," she said again, and he hesitated to look at her heavy eyes. "You're just a boy, so I don't expect for you to get all this—not yet at least. But just know your father wants what's best for you. Do you hear me?"

Eli tucked his chin into his chest and looked away again.

"Hey," his mother said, gently patting him on the leg. "Do you hear me?"

He nodded.

"Say you hear me."

"I hear you," he said. The words came out in a broken way.

His mother cupped his cheek in her hand again and smiled. "Now, get some sleep," she said. "I don't want you to be tired for school tomorrow."

But Eli had no intention of going to school in the morning. He lay awake in bed and pitied his father for the burden he held with him. His father's life, Eli now understood, was so unfulfilling that he had dedicated it just to making sure his son's wouldn't be the same, and Eli felt indebted to him for this. He also knew that if he went to school like his father wanted him to, he would always be afraid of embarrassing his father with the education he didn't have. It all

seemed so unfair to him. And so after a sleepless night, at the first glimpse of sunlight, he put on his overalls and boots and went out to the pasture.

The sun was just beginning to rise, and the dew hadn't burned off yet. It tinted the toe caps of his shoes as he trudged through the grass and soaked his hands as he rolled hay bales toward the cattle. The morning was still cold, but Eli already had sweat rolling down his forehead and cheeks.

He tried rolling one large hay bale toward the grazing area, but he struggled to push it up a small hill. He got halfway up before the weight of it drove him back, so he backed up some and tried rolling it faster to get it up, but he slipped on the wet grass and the hay bale rolled away again. Eli got angry, and so he dug the edges of his boots into the ground and squeezed his eyes shut as he tried to push it up. Somehow, Eli felt the hay was lighter this time and managed to get to the top of the hill. When he got there and opened his eyes, however, he saw another set of arms giving the bale a final shove into the pasture.

"Eli," his father said. "You should be getting ready for school." He looked composed even after pushing the hay while Eli was panting and red in the face.

"I ain't going to school today, Pa," Eli said, lifting his chin.

"Why's that?"

"I'm gonna stay here with you and help out with the land." Eli spoke with certainty, but coming from such a small boy, it wasn't enough to convince anyone. His father put his hand on Eli's back, guiding him to the house to get cleaned up and ready for school.

"Come," he said, but Eli ducked below his arm and stayed put.

"No, Pa. I'm stayin' here with you."

"Don't cause trouble, Eli. Come inside and your mother will make you breakfast before you leave."

Eli didn't move. "I *ain't* goin' to school," he said, and he turned to continue pushing the hay bale across the pasture. He heard the sound of a train whistle blowing from beyond the hills, but he looked forward and kept pushing.

"Eli," his father said, but Eli kept on. The whistling got louder. "*Eli*," his father said, but Eli didn't respond. The dew had dried up by now and the grass felt brittle beneath Eli's boots. The whistling got louder still. He struggled with the weight of the hay bale, but kept at it. The



louder the whistle sounded, the more Eli lost track of how hard he was panting. “*Eli*,” his father shouted, competing with the train. He grabbed Eli by the arm and turned him around. Holding him by the shoulders, he shouted over the train, “Go inside.”

“*No*.” Eli shook off his father’s grip and went back to pushing the hay bale.

“Why not?” The train had come out from behind the hills and roared as it rolled by.

“*Because*,” Eli shouted back to him. He saw the train passing by behind his father.

“Because *why*?” his father said.

Eli could hardly hear his father over the train. In a fit of anger, he ran over to the tracks. He scraped pebbles off of the ground, getting dirt beneath his fingernails as he did it, and threw them by the handful at the passing cars. He started to cry, but that sound and the sound of the rocks hitting the cars was overpowered by the whistle and roar of the train. His father grabbed his wrist before he could throw again and pulled him away from the track.

He grabbed him by the shoulders and shouted, “What in God’s name are you *doing*, Eli?”

“The smoke will kill the cattle,” Eli cried. “It’s gonna kill the cattle.” He threw another handful of rocks past his father at the train, then collapsed into him and sobbed. His father picked him up and carried him toward the house. As he was being carried away, Eli saw through his tears the last car pass by their land and disappear again into the hills.

“What’s this about, Eli?” his father asked him as he sat him down at the kitchen table.

Eli stared at the floor and refused to look up. “The smoke’ll kill—”

“What’s this *really* about?”

Eli shrugged.

“I know you did it for a reason. Tell me.”

“Ma told me you could use the help.”

“Help with what?”

“With the land,” Eli said. “Ma told me—”

“She tell you to skip school?”

“Well, no. But—”

“Then why did you?”

Eli looked out the window where the sun glared off the steel near the hills. Then the words came out as if a dam had burst. "Ma told me you make me go to school so I won't have to work the land all day the way you do. But that ain't fair. You shouldn't have to do it alone."

His father sighed and sat back in his chair. "It might not be fair," he said. "But that's how it is." After a quiet moment, he leaned forward and tapped Eli's knee to get him to look him in the eye. "But I'm alright with it," he continued. "When I was a kid like you, my pa didn't give me or my brothers the chance to go to school, and I know he didn't get the chance when he was young neither."

He sat back in his chair again and smiled reflectively while Eli sat stiff in his seat.

"I remember being your age and working my pa's farm," his father said. "We didn't have so much land back then, so we had to work hard just to make sure we got enough out of it, and we never had nothing to spare by the time the season was over. Then one day, I remember seeing kids running down by the road in the afternoon holdin' their books, and I asked my oldest brother, Joe, why we didn't go to school like those kids. Now, Joe was only five years older than me, but he was a good bit wiser. Joe looked at those kids then said to me, 'We ain't like them. And I know what ya thinkin', but don't ask Daddy about it.'" Eli's father chuckled then continued, "But I did ask him about it, and you know what he said to me?" He waited until Eli met his eyes. "He said, 'Boy, you just lucky I'm tired or I'd have at you for talkin' that way. You ain't leavin' this family behind.'"

His face fell solemn. Eli sat motionless, careful not to make a sound. His father said, "Even then, I knew that if I had a boy, I wouldn't want him working like that. I figured if I didn't change something, it would just keep going on that way."

Eli's eyes moved about the room. His chest felt tight and his stomach hollow.

"Hey," his father said, patting him again on the knee. "Look at me." Eli looked toward him then quickly away again. His father leaned in close to him and smiled reassuringly. "Look," he said, and Eli looked. "You don't owe me nothin', alright? I chose this."

Eli still looked unsettled and his father saw this. He saw on Eli's face the guilt he felt and the shame that followed from not being able to say it outright.

"I know it's a lot," his father said, "but just try to understand. Sometimes people have to sacrifice something of their own to help another. But it's worth it if they're grateful and try to make somethin' out of it." Eli's sobbing had since let up and he listened intently to his father

though he still couldn't look him in the eye for very long. His father stood up and smiled. "Listen," he said. "Since you're already late, why don't you stay here with me for today. But tomorrow I want you back at school. Okay?"

Eli nodded and followed his father back into the pasture. While Eli started lugging slabs of wood for the fence, his father walked to the clothesline where Eli's mother was to assure her it would just be one day home. She seemed to understand, and Eli worked alongside his father the whole day through.

At night, as Eli lay in bed, his body sore and hands hard from lifting, he tried to picture what his father was like at his age. He wondered if his father's hands hurt the same at the end of the day and if they hurt less the more he worked. He wondered if he would have been as excited had tracks been laid by his own home as a child and if he, too, would have wanted to ride. And then Eli wondered if his father ever dreamt of leaving home and what it must have felt like the moment his own father told him he never would.

Eli heard the distant wailing of an incoming train and thought about what his father wanted of him. It made him sad, but Eli felt his father wanted him to leave his home one day and never think of it again. He couldn't bare the thought of abandoning his mother and father and their pasture, but he knew it was the only way to make good on his father's sacrifice. The whistle grew louder as the train came around the bend and Eli's throat got tight and his lips trembled. He understood full well what his father expected of him, but it didn't make anything any easier. The whistle blew louder, and then the sound lowered. Then it was gone around the bend.

## Purple, Green and Blue

Alex Curran-Cardarelli

I've kissed men I never wanted to kiss  
    *26,000 unreported sexual assaults in the military*  
For fear of being called a fucking bitch  
    *-only 238 convictions*  
Most of the time there wasn't any lust—  
    *What did these geniuses expect...*  
Still I'm known as a dirty freshman slut  
    *When they put men & women together?*

Because I didn't want to be a bitch  
    *And the girls—*  
I let one of them bruise my so-called "tits"  
    *We're supposed to call them women*  
And still known as a dirty freshman slut  
    *But they're girls to me*  
I wrapped my chest with ice— never discussed  
    *Grab them by the pussy*

I let one of them bruise my so-called "tits"  
    *It must be a pretty picture*  
Because my approval had been dismissed  
    *You dropping to your knees*  
I cried as I wrapped my small chest in ice—  
    *A person who is flat-chested*  
For four or so days the bandage sufficed  
    *Is very hard to be a 10*

Because my approval had been dismissed  
    *I just kiss, I don't even wait*  
I couldn't stop the scratching on my hips  
    *And when you're a star*  
For four or so days the bandage sufficed  
    *You can do whatever you want*  
It was excused as his natural vice  
    *You have to treat them like shit*

## Arachnophobia

*Sophia Menconi*

See a spider in the shadow of your room at night and call your father.  
Tell him you can't sleep with all those extra legs  
taking up your space. He will cradle the small arachnid  
in his callused hands and release it into the night air.

See another spider and repeat the process,  
see another and another, wake your father up and keep him up,  
until you yourself become the spider and it's no longer catch and release.  
It becomes CRUSHCRUSHCRUSH and your insides  
are hanging  
delicately from the bottom of his work boot.

Wake your father again and apologize  
for spreading your whole self across the room and forcing everyone  
to stare at every unlovely, brutal part of you. Apologize to your father  
for holding fear in your breastbone, silk webs spinning from your mouth  
until you have nothing left to apologize for.



*Amsterdam, by Iryna Klishch*

## Falling in Love

*Sophia Menconi*

Icarus and his uneven tan lines  
always waiting to stretch out his own limbs, his own spirit.  
The Sun wishing to be held by a lover  
the way the Moon caresses the stars at night.  
Icarus, littered with hopes of freedom, fingers coated in warm wax.  
The Sun holding back the darkness. Icarus caught

in the space between the sky and the earth.

Pride, as it takes flight. Pride, as it spreads open its wings,  
as it rises, golden in the sun.  
Sunlight breaking through the skin, cracking  
the spine and bleaching the bones. Do you know who you are letting in?  
Who you have allowed to curl up in the space  
between your third and fourth rib?

Icarus reaches up to the Sun, he cries, "Darling, why must we fall?  
Why must we burn?" The Sun remains silent.  
She witnesses the ocean as it chews and swallows,  
and then she speaks: "Because, Darling, we must.  
We must."

## October Burning

*Sarah Wilson*

### I.

Jane is pulling the pins from her hair when the leaves burst into flame. She stops on the sidewalk, tips her head back to the still-blue sky, three pins in her palm and one between her lips. It comes early this year, the burning. She has come to expect it in November, when the cold sets in, but it is barely October, now. She doesn't even need a sweatshirt over her leotard.

Her brother John read in a book once that the trees in South Africa catch fire slowly, leaf by leaf. She likes the idea of it, of the flames and the branches clinging together like they don't want to let go, savoring their time together. The trees in New York light up like a screaming fight. They savor nothing.

They will burn for four or five days, depending on the weather. Even when it rains they don't go out, only smolder determinedly beneath the clouds. They leave piles of ash on the earth at their roots. Jane and her brothers used to fight over who had to sweep it up. She wonders whose job it is to clean it up, here in the city. Maybe it's no one's job at all and the ash will sit there, soft and grey, until the rain washes it into the sea.

Jane lets herself into the apartment. The cat brushes against her ankles in its haste to escape out the door; she catches him up and tucks him under her chin. Peter had found him, a tiny, vengeful thing in a cardboard box of kittens on the sidewalk. He paid \$10 and named him Orpheus, brought him home to their small apartment with the leaking ceiling and shuddering radiator. He thought it would make it feel more like home. Sometimes, when she closes her eyes and presses her face into Orpheus' fur, she almost believes him.

She dances Orpheus into the kitchen, puts a kettle on the stove. The tea she buys in New York tastes strange and chemical. She aches with missing her mother's tea that tasted of cinnamon and cloves, a cup always waiting when she came home from dancing. There was always someone waiting for her, either her mother or her brothers or an assorted cousin or two, the house brimming full of family. Now she has only Orpheus, settling with wrathful contentment in her arms, and Peter. Peter, sometimes, because he works so many hours that she only sees him now in the small hours of the morning, when she wakes up from a dream and he is asleep beside her, his face still and vulnerable. The yellow glow of the streetlight outside their



window makes his hair look oil slick dark . It is has become so familiar that when she seems him in the daylight, he looks almost like a stranger.

She takes the last apple from the basket, weighs it in her hand before biting into its sweetness. She remembers picking them, back home, climbing high into the trees and filling whole baskets of them. Her mama would make pies and jars of spiced applesauce. There would be no apples, this year, if the trees are burning so early. It helps to remind her that she does not want to go back.

When they left in the spring, her and Peter, they were newly eighteen and sure that they could catch the whole world in the palm of their hands. The kettle hisses. She reaches out but her fingers are sticky with fruit juice and it slips from her grasp.

## II.

When she was small, Jane and her brothers tried to hang a tire swing on the big oak trees in their small strip of backyard. For a summer, they wrestled each over who got to ride on it and who had to push, spun each other until their stomachs ached with laughing and then demanded to be spun again.

Then fall came and the tree burned and so did the rope. The swing fell with a sound like a body hitting the ground, and the next summer they found somewhere else to play.

## III.

She is awake, for once, when he comes in, so quietly that she almost misses it. Jane is sitting on the worn couch they bought at a consignment shop and dragged up it the service elevator. It is ugly and plaid. It once belonged to a smoker, and there are smudges of blue crayon under the cushions. She wonders where that child is now; if they're her age, if they're older and have children of their own. When Jane has children, will still be stuck in this small, dim apartment with the furniture that is shaped for someone else's body? Then will it feel like a place that belongs to her?

Peter comes into the room like a shadow and she is startled by his sudden presence before her, like a shadow in the flickering light from the kitchen. It is a new habit that she has not yet become accustomed to. As a child he always seemed to move at the speed of light, of sound, bright-eyes and breathless. He would crash into her house like a hurricane of dark hair and clever

hands to tug her away onto some new adventure. When she was small, she used to swear that he could fly.

“Hey,” he says, soft.

“Hey,” she says. “You’re home early.”

“Business was slow so they cut my hours short.”

“Oh,” then, “Is that bad?”

He looks out the window, at the low glow of the trees outside, their flames tempered by the rain. She can’t see his eyes well in the light. She wonders if this is the only thing he is hiding from her.

“I’m sure its not,” he says. “It will be fine.”

Jane knows that he is lying, but in the weak light he looks soft and young. She remembers his face at her window at night, how she would offer her hand and let him in and they would sit facing each other on her bed and talk about the future. The city, he would say, I’ve always wanted to go to the city. She would agree, and they would decide to leave in the spring, just after they turned eighteen, when the world would be bright and green and new. He looks like that boy, now, and it makes her feel so suddenly fond that she goes to him. She winds her arms around his shoulders and rests her cheek against his chest. She used to think that there was something infinitely precious about it, someone trusting you so much they will lay their head in the cup of bone in your chest, near your heart, that they will curl up and let you hold them, fingers slotting in between their ribs and you can feel just how delicate their bones are, how breakable, like a bird’s. Now, the point of his collarbone digs into my temple. They have both uncovered their sharp edges, these past few months. Whatever childhood softness they once possessed had been lost before the trees even began to burn.

She closes her eyes and wishes for summer.

#### IV.

There is a new girl in her ballet company on Monday morning. She sits in the corner during rehearsal and Jane would not have noticed her, except she catches her eye in the mirror once. The new girl is slim and strong, like all of the rest of them, perhaps a little less tall. She has a brown skin and a nimbus of curly dark hair, and the kind of eyes that make you feel like she is

peeling away your skin and seeing you, really seeing you. Jane is so startled, shivery and bright, at being noticed that she almost stumbles, falling out of her pirouette.

On their break, Jane takes her to the café on the corner. The girl's name is Emmy; she is from a town in Ohio so small that she can list the family names, one by one, from memory. She tells Jane about berry picking in fields so big they seemed to stretch to the ends of the world, about all the people she had left behind. Jane tells her about her brothers, about the tire swing and pliés at the kitchen counter. That makes Emmy laugh, and Jane laughs, too. It occurs to her that she hasn't laughed so hard in a long time.

## V.

Peter has the day off, when the letter from her mother arrives. She had found it in the postbox the night before and brought it up herself because Peter never had time to check the mail, but the letter did not feel quite real until now, in the early morning light.

It weighs very little. Her lungs feel too big for her chest. She breaks the seal. The letter is crisp and white. Her mother's handwriting is careful and self-consciously lovely; shy in the way it cradles an unfamiliar alphabet, a language that still fits strangely in her fingers. Jane has not seen her mother in six months. It is the longest she has ever been away from home. She is not quite sure, yet, how to survive this being born anew, a single being. Mother, John and Michael, it feels like they all belong in her chest as much as her heart does. Last winter, she had not realized what it would mean to tear away from them, to cauterize the wound and slip into a new skin.

Peter sits on the couch beside her, leans his temple against her shoulder. He is one of the only people she knows in this new life but she spends most of her days alone, and his touch feels strange. He smells of cold and paper and burning. It itches up her throat and she pulls away, extracts her limbs from his and folds them back up against her chest. He looks wounded or unsure; it is hard for her to tell. His moods used to be as familiar to her as the lines of her palms, as the sound of her brothers; bickering at the table while she practiced her pliés at the kitchen counter. The linoleum was peeling and sometimes the corner of it would prick the soft insides of her wrists. If she closed her eyes she could rebuild it, moment by moment: the scratch of the linoleum and the burn in her calves, the shuddering pain in her shoulders from holdings her arms up, but this is what she wants so she doesn't mind hurting for a little longer. She remembers the murmur of the local radio station that always played classical music, the rise and fall of her

brothers' voices, the smell of her mother's perfume. It's all there in her head, except now she is gone, and the kitchen and the radio and her brothers will keep going without her.

Jane feels like a sleepwalker who has woken up in someone else's life, recognizing vague impressions of what should be, or could be, but never truly understanding. The wrongness of it tugs at her chest, just beneath her sternum. She read once that the apocalypse happens over and over again, little things folded into the fabric of life. This feels like a small end-of-the-world, or perhaps the world ended in the spring when she left home and this is what comes after, the smoke and the uncertainty.

She reads her letter and he leaves so quietly that she does not notice until he is already gone.

## VI.

Emmy calls her, later, when it is almost midnight and Peter has still not come home. Jane sits on the kitchen floor, the phone cord stretched as far as it will go. The tile is cold on the bare skin where her shorts ride up but she does not want to lie in their empty bed and wonder if when she wakes up, he will be lying beside her with his face turned toward her and his hand warm on her waist. Jane does not want to wonder if she wants him to be there at all.

So she cradles the phone in the hollow of her collarbone and reaches for the cat and lets Emmy murmur in her ear as the night gets darker. "I'm afraid," Emmy says. "I'm afraid that I will be here forever and I will never stop missing home so much that it hurts."

Her mother's letter is still sitting on the table, unanswered. She will dance around it for a few hours, pretend that she doesn't need to answer right away, that her life is so full she doesn't have room for it. But she knows she will wake in the small hours of the morning to answer it anyway.

"I'm sure you won't," Jane says. Emmy sighs over the phone like all of the air has gone out of her body, like she doesn't remember how to hold herself up. Or maybe she has never had to, before. Jane is still learning all the ways in which there is no one left to take care of her. All the ways in which she needs to learn herself.

"Okay," Emmy says, soft. "Okay."

Jane smiles, even though there was no one to see it. She feels like sunburn and wonder, like her ribs are made of glass. It hurts but this is what she wants so she doesn't mind it hurting for a little while longer.

"It will be fine." She thinks, this time, that it might not even be a lie.

Outside, the trees burn and burn and burn.

Lichen  
*Maeve Quinn*

We grow from the inside out and I know this because  
the color brown seeps up under our skin  
and stains our flesh in flecks. It bleeds along imperceptible  
trails in skin the way ink creeps through grains in paper  
from a single dot made with the tip of a ballpoint pen.  
Under a microscope the crossed fibers of tree pulp pressed  
into sheets of paper would be indistinguishable  
from the constellations in the skin.

We grow from the inside out  
the way trees expand ring after ring from a deep brown  
core the size of the seedling when it began to sprout.  
Stripes of shimmering flesh band our thighs and our stomachs  
and mark us like the ballpoint freckles speckling  
our flesh.

## HOW-TO: AN ORANGE

*Laura Lussier*

*Something to do with an orange:*

Unpeel  
and tuck a wedge  
neatly behind the curve  
of each of your ears  
so that everything you hear today  
will be soft and orange.  
Listen - people  
are speaking citrus to you.  
It sounds like Spanish whispered.  
People are saying -  
Five minutes til the train comes.  
I don't have any cash.  
Today's another Thursday.

*When to do this with an orange:*

Do this only  
when the sun is round  
and the day is warm.  
Avoid rain.  
On a rainy day,  
the orange wedges  
will droop down  
over your ears  
and fall to the ground  
like two fat noodles.  
If this happens,  
leave them for the snails,  
who will nibble the fruit  
to hear citrus speak  
in echoes in their shells -  
The snails will listen  
to the singing  
of your rainy day sounds.

*What to do with the orange when you're done:*

When the sun is down,  
pinch your orange  
and let the juice  
drip, dribble  
down the funnel of your ears.  
It's cold.  
Don't mind the sting.  
Listen.  
All else is quiet,  
except the orange in your ears.  
Sleep to the sound  
of today's orange talk humming.



Euonymus Alatus

*Brit Morse*

She tended to the burning bushes,  
my mother. The bottom six inches  
were stripped naked by rabbits, so she

shoveled pockets of mulch from behind  
the radiator to the empty  
branches, filling the void with soil.

She'd spent summer afternoons trimming  
Boxwoods and Arborvitae, hedging  
blooming hydrangeas, and arranging

pots of Dahlias, so in August when  
her infusions began once again  
she could return from the hospital,

put her feet up on the patio  
table, rest her head on the back of  
a chair, her chin hanging, and pull her

shorts to her bikini line,  
baring her Varicose veins to the  
sun. But it was September now and

for two hour she shoveled soil,  
so no dog walker, no visiting  
neighbor would see the poison in her

bones, the rabbits nibbling her fire.



*Mistitled*, by Shanti Basu

## Sharing

*Shameel Mahzar*

My grandfather devoured a healthy serving of veal at a steakhouse in London a week before he died. He had never particularly enjoyed the meat, or the idea that it had come from an unsuspecting calf bred specifically to fill the dinner plate in front of him, but he knew that his breaths were numbered and that he might not feast on such a delicacy again. He said that he didn't want the grilled bone marrow that came with my rib eye- that it didn't appeal to him- but I put it on his salad plate anyway, next to the beets that stained the china with blood. After some feigned discontent, he scarfed it down anyway. It was the fourth day of September in 2013 and he was seventy-six years old. I started my junior year of college two days later, and flew back for his funeral in Pakistan within the week.

I had always adopted an apologetic tone when I talked to my white friends in college; I could never share their grief of 9/11 or even distance myself from it altogether. How could I? I was who I was, my skin and nationality dictated this. I had, by my very existence, been made central to the dialogue that plagued the world. I was an outsider, a sympathizer, a terrorist. For twelve years I had been stopped at international airports for 'random inspections' and was ostracized by anyone who wasn't Pakistani. I once had the pleasure of having a conversation about the uncharacteristically rainy weather in Ohio with an Apple 'Genius.' When I told him I was from Pakistan he chuckled and said, "I bet it rains something else there, huh?" I had to smile and laugh it off- pretend that it didn't bother me that he was referring to the drone and artillery strikes that claim mostly collateral damage along with their desired targets. He was just making pleasant conversation. Yet I could not make pleasant conversation. One wrong word could get me deported. Or worse.

When we brought him to London, we imagined that a few routine checkups for his arthritis and a joyous family vacation would ensue. We were in excellent spirits; my grandmother had always complained that my grandfather liked staying home far too much. 'His kingdom,' we called it. "I have no desire to leave, my life is already a vacation," he'd say, as he sat in the hundred-degree sun on a charpai reading an Urdu newspaper, barely breaking a sweat. Had we known he'd come back as airplane cargo, things would have been much different. He

would have died patiently and willingly. He had not yet reached the age at which he would look back upon his life.

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I remember when I first saw the footage of 9/11 on CNN. I was getting dressed for school. My parents had also recently awoken, and were going through their morning ritual of chai and soaked almonds. I their voices become shrill as they conversed and saw that the news was on. An outrageous amount of smoke escaping a skyscraper set the backdrop as reporters hysterically commentated. I did not know that this was footage from eight hours ago, just that a building was on fire somewhere in New York City. I began to ask a question but was immediately and rather harshly cut off by my father, who was also seeing the life-altering moment for the first time. I knew this because his mouth was open, his eyes alert. I don't remember my mother's expression, just that she shrieked when the second plane hit a few minutes later. I was eight years old and I had no idea what the fuck was going on.

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At the hour that I was supposed to leave for Heathrow airport, my grandfather sat at the head of the dainty dining table of a rented flat and ate lentils, spiced fish and rice in his undershirt and a blue pajama that had long ceased to fit him. His face was an unnatural grey, and a congestion of blood splattered tissues occupied his side-plate. As I leaned in to embrace him on my way out, my father locked eyes with me from across the table. It was a simple, apologetic look, devoid of any real emotion, but I knew what it meant. I already knew before he told me. I would never see him again. His ashen skin smelled of sesame as my nose touched his bare shoulder and a single tear fell parallel to his back. And as I took in my last memory of him, he slipped a hundred-dollar bill from his pocket into mine. "Study well, alright?" I looked around the table and saw that everyone but him was in shambles.

September 11<sup>th</sup> was a historical day contaminated with incidents of misfortune across time and space. It was the day that the Pentagon was inaugurated in 1941, exactly sixty years before it was hit by American Airlines Flight 77. (Goldberg, 2) It was the day in 1948 that Muhammad Ali Jinnah, the founder of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan, lost his battle to lung cancer, a disease he had kept secret from the entire nation. (Ahmed, 30) It was the day in 1952, when 33 people died in a train wreck, not one hour from Granville, Ohio. (Railway Age, 1) It was the day that two planes hit the Twin Towers at short intervals and devastated the universe. It

was the day when I began to keep my head down in fear that someone would mistake me for something or someone I wasn't and unleash their fury on me. It was the day my best friend and mentor was taken to the morgue so his lifeless body could be embalmed, boxed and sealed for travel.

I remember he died on my uncle's forty-eighth birthday, on life support in the Intensive Care Unit of St. John's Hospital in the City of London as my aunt clung on to his limp hand. On his bedside was a book that he had been reading called "No god but God." My father told me that washing his body a few hours later was the hardest thing he's ever done in his life. He was the new head of the family, and he was not given the opportunity to mourn. It hit him a year later, the fact that his father was gone; that every time he walked into his childhood home he would encounter only his mother, softly rubbing the fabric of static dress shirts with her fingers. She did not know that he had stage-four lung cancer until the end was near, before my world collapsed. Upon his death she fell silent, praying for his forgiveness. Now I'm not a religious man, but my grandfather doesn't need forgiveness. He never did. My grandfather was a modest man.

When Osama bin Laden was killed, I did not rejoice. I had no right. He was killed in Pakistan, and of course it was *my* fault for not knowing he was seeking refuge in a city six hours away from me. It was *my* fault that he had given the color of my skin and the region of my origin a reputation. How could I rejoice, knowing that he had changed the way the world perceived me, and in turn the way that I perceived the world? How could I show happiness, when the world expected guilt?

The world mourned with us that September 11<sup>th</sup> without our permission. I had been denied their grief, but now they shared mine. Perhaps one day I could share theirs too.

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## Bouncer (Pantoum Form)

*Kameran Mirblouk*

"This place is a zoo." Have you come to be caged?  
I don't need tranquilizer darts to handle your bull.  
Do I need to get tactical? We both know your ID ain't factual.  
If you're history, why are you so anti-historical?

I don't need tranquilizer darts to handle your bull.  
You must be 21 to use these coasters.  
If you're history, why are you so anti-historical?  
Hosted by Schrödinger, this party is dead and alive.

You must be 21 to use these coasters.  
Blue blazers and khakis green light my authority to conspire.  
Hosted by Schrödinger, this party is dead and alive.  
Black tie optional is my proverbial attire.

"This place is a zoo." Have you come to be caged?  
Blue blazers and khakis green light my authority to conspire.  
Black tie optional is my proverbial attire.  
Do I need to get tactical? We both know your ID ain't factual.

## APHASIA

*Grace Williams*

It only took three months of radiation,  
For seventy eight years of life  
To catch up to you,  
To be displayed by the sluggishness in  
Your movements, by your detached gaze,  
By the jagged rhythm of your breath,

They said this year's garden  
Would be your last,  
That soon you won't be able to drive  
Your Chevy, let alone be able to  
Stand for more than a few  
Moments.

I wish it was happening slowly.  
I wish you were fading—at least then I could  
Hold onto you,  
Just for a while longer.  
The lesions on your brain invaded  
My favorite part of you.  
Your illness  
Infected your mind,  
Made you recognizable only in appearance.

It ravaged your Broca's area;  
It silenced you.

Of all the ways you could deteriorate,  
This is the way?  
Sitting here now, frustrated,  
Wishing I could at least ask,  
"How are you?"  
Wishing such a simple question  
Could be answered by you  
Because it's the first time I've ever  
Actually cared how someone is.

Grandma and I sit on floral cushions,  
Staring in opposite directions,  
I at the broken grandfather clock,  
Her at worn cheery wood;



I feel her blue gaze on me.  
Violent, successive shudders roll down my back and  
    I'm embarrassed when she begins to hush  
    My tears—*she* is consoling *me*?  
She's the one taking care of you,  
The one guessing what you're trying to  
    Spit out.  
Communication for you has morphed into  
A frustrating game of charades:  
Except both players guess what you're  
    Trying to say,  
    Endlessly searching for something  
    That once happened so easily,  
I pity you.  
I pity her.  
And, right now, I pity myself too, because

When you walk in to greet me  
After your mid-morning nap  
    I can't squeeze you—  
I don't want to hurt your chest  
Now that there's a foreign object  
    Underneath your sallow skin,  
Pumping you with fluids.  
You wrap your arms around me  
    Too weakly,  
Too briefly to savor your wordless affection.

It's the first time you've been the one  
    To pull away first;

Hands freckled by age and life  
Cradle my supple cheeks;  
    I can't see my reflection in your eyes today.

## Detritus

*Hadley Nugent*

There's this dress floating in Center Pond  
It's been there for a few days,  
all lace and pleats and sweetness—  
translucent in it's privacy.  
I see it when I walk the dog.  
And from far away it's weightless,  
suspended in a glass grave.  
Pleats fanning out, terrible symmetry.

Someone loved it and then threw it by the side of the road.  
Brambles sticking to the stitched cap sleeves.  
Until its claimed by the water.  
There's no mannequin, but it's a perfect liquid window.  
I want to pull it out—I can save it.  
but you tell me not to,  
"Shakespeare's clowns," you say.

Then one morning it's gone—  
maybe someone else saved it,  
or it finally sank into the detritus

## The Scanning of the Bees

Iryna Klishch

It was mid-July. The month of orchids and delphiniums – swollen plastic skies, bitten skin, air tasting heavily of wax, wind: a shaking box of matches. But even the bees could hear the silence that morning. *An underlying endobronchial mass or tumor is of concern.*

On the way to the hospital, they have to stop at the gas station. It is early and the world looks as if someone has put a sepia lens on, everything moss-brown, all light and shadow. They don't talk to one another, watch each others hands. While the tank fills, a fat man eats his powdered donut in the next car over, she imagines he is late for work again, checks his cellphone, no answer from his daughter. In the car behind them, sits a young woman in lace, she attends Junior college off of I-94, paints her lips rouge, the color of berries. The cashier inside, her father – a dentist, no a priest: English is her third tongue, she loves classical films and fishing, oil paintings and the smell of lavender.

Once the car is alive again, they move to the hospital, find parking on the third lot. The B section is painted blue. She's not nervous, but walks slowly in her sneakers, hands wisp at her sides, hair braided in two. Inside, she says goodbye to her father. Inside, the nurses instruct her to change into a white gown, take off the necklace she's been wearing since last Easter, make sure the blood work is done properly, and when she warns them that she is prone to fainting, they don't make eye contact with her, instead the older of the two nurses – Elsie, from southern Michigan, thick accent, recently divorced to an ex-marine – asks her when she's eaten last, is she pregnant? The room has green chairs, an old television hanging in the corner, there is a documentary about some sort of bird: feet scratch carpet, a boy with a red neck, scars on his face, shaven head sits across from her, he reads an anime magazine, maybe Tolstoy, who knows, and taps his thumb against the cover. She watches him, the ways in which his jaw clenches, and he turns the page.

When her name is called, she stands, wrists full of hot liquid, she can feel it burning even in her teeth. They make her climb into a strange machine, ask her to state the date of her birth, ask for her name, if she's feeling okay. A woman with a small mouth walks in, wearing pearl earrings, dress shoes, cold hands. The machine makes her feel claustrophobic, she says she can't handle needles, not anymore, not since what happened last time, but the woman just smiles at

her, tells her to breathe, breathe, breathe, tells her she's just gotten back from *the* wedding, she had to wear an awfully ugly bridesmaids dress, there was glitter everywhere.

When the IV is inserted, the woman leaves the room, then her voice appears through a microphone, "breathe, breathe, breathe." A special dye, contrast, is needed to highlight the lungs. She tastes metal on her mouth, red in her stomach, against her ribs, between her thighs, crawling, aching, laughing. The room is a blinding white, the machines, the walls, the sheets, the gowns, the computers in the corner, the tiles on the floor, the pieces of papers on the side, all numbers and theories.

The room is small: if it were a person, it would be an old woman smoking on her lawn, a lemon tree growing quietly in between the rose bushes, her – wearing an apron with seagulls on it, hands dry from washing the dishes in the kitchen sink.

As they're taking the scans, the girl looks up at the ceiling, a poster of color: two palms trees and ocean. After it is over, she asks for the results. What is it? What's in me? Nobody replies, they say they'll call, let her know when she can come back for the answers. In the car, the radio is static, a woman calls in about her child. He's not eating again.

At home, she washes her hands, her feet, writes about a woman called Margarita: two sons, a loving husband. They take a trip to the East Islands, and she is so full of it – of life that she can barely swallow her words. There is music everywhere, in her lungs, in her hair, curled inside of her knees. That same night, they eat scallops and drink cold beer, talk about the election, how they should go to church more. That same night, she has a stroke, dies of a brain aneurysm a week later. Her husband, Frank, cries out so loud that even the bees start singing.



*Untitled*, by Micah Frenkiel

*LOOK*  
By Solmaz Sharif

*A book review by Audrey Metzger*

*Look* has been attracting quite the buzz since its 2016 release-- the book of poetry was even a National Book Award finalist and earned a spot on the New York Time's "100 Notable Books of 2016" list. This is Solmaz Sharif's first book. *Look* takes a unique approach to how we dissect the language of war and utilize it in artistic settings. Sharif, of Iranian descent, writes extensively about the Iran-Iraq war. But she does so by utilizing Dickinson's famous adage: "tell the truth, but tell it *slant*." We are reading "war" poems that are so much more than that. While these poems utilize language taken directly from the US Department of Defense's own *Dictionary of Military and Associated Terms*, they still harness subtlety, they still bring the reader into them with a sense of empathy. We are seeing a war, but we are seeing it personalized and filtered through one woman's eyes and one specific conceit of language.

From the outset we are met with powerful language and image. Sharif's first poem of the collection, also entitled "Look," immediately works to breakdown and rearrange how we as readers experience and examine language. Sharif takes us to the word *exquisite*, to the words *thermal shadow*, to the very word *look*. And in taking us to this deep level where the reader must inspect the language so carefully, Sharif brings us wholly into the book from the start. We are hooked by her reappropriation of language, we are hooked by her elegantly frantic need to make sense of vicious language.

The second section of the book, what could be considered the magnum opus of *Look*, is a poem entitled "Personal Effects" that the poet has written for her deceased uncle-- an unwilling victim of the Iran-Iraq war. Sharif writes a compelling elegy while still appropriating the languages of violence and war. This is a poem that utilizes these languages in an attempt to get closer to that lost familial bond. This is a poem that can move the reader to tears with its pervasive desire just to *look* at this uncle, just to hear him say "*hello*." The beautiful desperation throughout the poem heightens those moments of militarized language to a place few poets can go-- Sharif goes without hesitating into the crux of what war means for families and humanity, she goes without fear. In "Personal Effects," Sharif makes that long-desired contact with her uncle, she is able to *look* and see that she has indeed made him proud.

*Bastards of the Reagan Era*

By Reginald Dwayne Betts

a book review by Megan Van Horn

In Reginald Dwayne Betts' second full-length collection of poetry, *Bastards of the Reagan Era*, Betts delves into the grit of the political poem head first. However, Betts goes beyond the standard rhetoric of the political poem by both being viciously biased and viciously aware, by showing his anger, but also showing another facet to the treatment of his subject matter. The title of the collection itself also mirrors this duality in the nature of his poems. His choice of the word *bastards* functions in an expletive sense, but, in conjunction with the rest of the title, refers to the children left behind by the fathers sent to prison through Reagan's policies.

Incidentally, Betts chooses to begin his collection with a duet of poems dedicated to his sons that are beseechingly soft in their language, praising their simple existence. However, the later works in the collection deal with rockier topics, as seen through a quick scan of the titles. Out of the twenty-three poems presented, four of them are titled as elegies of various kinds and eleven are all titled "For the City That Nearly Broke Me." This leads the reader into the understanding that the subject matter of Betts' poems are subsumed in rawness, in the harsh nature of the unforgiving system. In this case, the system refers to criminality, to prisons, to the loss of humanity in the justice system. Betts narrates this from beginning to end in his poem titled "Bastards of the Reagan Era" through a series of parts named for songs off the album *It Takes a Nation of Millions to Hold Us Back* by the American hip hop group Public Enemy. The last few lines of the whole extended poem, however, epitomizes the undercurrent of grief and pain throughout the collection: "...and I was / Like them, unwilling to admit one thing: / On some days I just needed my father."

The names that Betts uses in his various poems ground the subject matter into real, visceral locations and bodies. Many of his works contain lists of proper names of both people and street names to give a personal nature to the stories that he tells in each line. A poignant few lines from the last piece in the collection, "What We Know of Horses," personifies this through the description of the narrator's brother: "...Running / these streets, he was a horse— / graceful, destined to be / broken. Why admire horses?" In Betts' second collection, he hits upon all of the

criteria for political poetry with ease and grace, tackling the rage and frustration and channeling those powerful emotions into painfully personal, painfully beautiful narratives.



## Author Bios

Brittany Morse is a senior Creative Writing major and Music Performance minor from Canandaigua, NY. On Denison's Campus she is a member of Delta Delta Delta, captain of Denison Ladies Ultimate Club, and Intern and Tour Guide for Denison Admissions. She's also a Content Intern at Tribute.co.

Laura Lussier is a senior creative writing major from Altadena, California.

Allie Rose Vugrincic is a senior studying filmmaking and creative writing. She is involved in Big Brothers Big Sisters and theatre, and her pastimes include taking excessive photos of random events, eating ice cream, and going for long, contemplative bike rides. After graduation she is considering going to Ireland to pursue a master's degree in creative writing.

Alex Parthun is a Junior creative writing and film major. She spends most of her time studying conspiracy theories, baking, and reading.

Shanti Basu is a First year, from Salem, Oregon. Studio Art/Communications major

Landon Slangerup is a double-major in Communication and English, with a concentration in Creative Writing. Generally, he writes free-verse poetry and short stories that either aim to address current political events and climates, or describe how families find cohesion in the wake of dramatic changes and reorganization.

Gabriele Eimontaite is an English and Women and Gender Studies major at Denison University and while she has little experience with writing her own poetry, she does appreciate the art and literary magazines like these that give writers the space to have their work recognized.

Iryna Klishch is a Junior Creative Writing major. She's from a small town of Nadvirna, Ukraine but currently resides in a suburb of Chicago. She hopes that her words find you.

Hadley Nugent is a senior Creative Writing major from Old Saybrook, Connecticut. She is currently working on a collection of poetry, which will be ready in the Spring. Her interests include reading, writing, zine making, drawing, and Taekwondo. She would like to thank her parents for their unconditional love and support.

Cassandra Fleming is a Communication Major and Creative Writing minor at Denison. Her two great passions, beside speculative fiction, are hedgehogs and Harry Potter. Cassandra would like to thank her family, Marc, Pamela, Rachel Arianna, and Scott, as well as her boyfriend Ben for always supporting her writing and more importantly, putting up with her terrible puns.

My name is Kirsten Elmer and I am a senior Creative Writing and Women's & Gender Studies double major at Denison University. I am a member of Kappa Kappa Gamma, Rho Lambda, on the senior class gift committee, and one of the managers at Denison's Annual Fund. I am originally from Connecticut, and I love writing creative nonfiction and poetry.

My name is Micah Frenkiel. I became interested in photography during my freshman year of high school. I'm fascinated by the relationship between humans and their various environments, and try to capture that dynamic in my photos. A few of my photography idols include Slim Aarons, Donald Weber, Pete Souza and Helmut Newton.

Imani Congdon is a first-year student at Denison University. She has spent a lot of her life involved in the arts, starting violin and voice training at a very young age, and writing creatively throughout primary school. She majors in both Classical Studies and Creative Writing.

Rob Lee is a junior from Cleveland, Ohio studying creative writing and Bluegrass music. His writing is an attempt to blend the two and tell stories with a Southern sensibility while focusing on the rhythm and music of language.

Alex Cardarelli is a creative writing major and art history minor from Salem, Massachusetts. Whether it's through writing or art, she has a passion for storytelling, and aspires to either work in a museum or in the narrative journalism field one day to in order to channel that passion.

Sophia Menconi is a first year English and Theatre double major from Potomac, Maryland. She is thrilled to be published in *Exile*.

Sarah Marie Wilson is a first year English and Theatre double major. She is from New Hampshire and is thrilled for her first *Exile* publication!

Maeve Quinn is a first-year student from Wheaton, Illinois double majoring in Creative Writing and Spanish. On campus, she is involved in Big Brothers Big Sisters, Yearbook, and Delta Gamma, as well as tutoring other Spanish students. Mild obsessions include: food, The Book Thief, and her dog, Ralphie.

Shameel Mazhar is a food blogger, journalist and golfer. In his spare time he concocts monstrosities in his kitchen, which he then attempts to feed his family. He currently serves as the Deputy Editor for *Newsweek* Pakistan.

Kameran Mirblouk, class of 2018, is an English major with a focus on Creative Writing. Riveting television chaps his lips. He takes screenshots of your deleted subtweets. He waits in line to buy churros at Costco. His heart's an alcoholic, a deadbeat.

My name is Grace Guilliams, and I am a sophomore English-Writing major with a Narrative Nonfiction concentration. I hold two on campus jobs as both an admissions host and a writing consultant at the Writing Center. Although I have lived in several states, I came to Denison from South Georgia after attending the Reynold's Writing Workshop and falling in love with the campus. I am the secretary of the Deaf Culture Awareness club, and am currently undergoing the steps to create a club for students suffering from mental illness looking for peers to talk to with the similar experiences. In my spare time I enjoy writing, drawing, and visiting nearby family.

#### *The Editors:*

Audrey Metzger is a senior creative writing major with a studio art minor. She is the student manager of the university Writing Center. She is a self-proclaimed cat lady and wine mom. She loves poetry of all kinds and hopes to one day occupy the title of "poet."

Megan Van Horn is a senior chemistry and creative writing double major from New Concord, Ohio. She will be attending graduate school for chemistry in the fall.