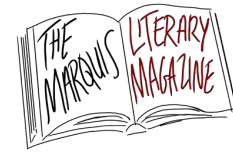


The Marquis Literary Magazine

Volume 45



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Some of the content in this magazine can be disturbing, triggering, or emotionally draining. We have marked some pieces in the table of contents with an asterisk (*) because they include heavy topics such as: miscarriage, suicide ideation, suicide, murder, mentions of death, COVID-19, homophobia, transphobia, deadnaming, substance use, substance abuse, rape, grooming, sexual assault, depictions of violence, mentions of blood, drowning, fatshaming, panic attacks, and depression.

Please be aware of these and other pieces that may be triggering to you.

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Sunrise Kiss

Reni Mokrii

I'd love to dedicate these lyrics to Kyrgyzstan — its natural beauty, rich culture and history, and its rebellious winds

Light breathes. I can hear its breath.
The Sunrise of freedom.
Heart beats hard underneath
My pale thin skin.

Vocal and loud, it jumps from my breast.
Then it takes break and listens
To what drops from the lips
Not mine. Not yours.

This is the mountain who whispers.
I swear, it does. Please listen...
She's talking about a Man.
His name was Manas.

Who's he? Are they good friends?
She knows all his secrets, she witnessed his days.
Lovers are his male spirit and her delicate soul.
She remembers his temper. His pain. His sadness and joy.

People know him as a warrior, a great saviour of land.
But something is hidden in the mountain's sand.
In the silence of stones, in the songs of the wind.
Tell me everything, mountain, give me a hint.

But the mountain stands silent and shy.
Her springs are so dry -
like eyes with no tears.
Not anymore. It took many years.
To deal, to accept, to shout her fear.

The woman drowned herself in the Alarcha river.
Her flash nourished mountain pards,
Her flowering hair fed forest deers.
Her beauty dewed grass before disappeared.
Her bones turned into stones, skin into sky sheen.

Of her heart, she made a cave for the alone.
For the lost. For the gone.
With woman's sorrow, the mountain was born.
I lost my mind. I lost my speech.
But in my burning eyes, the mountain could read:
Why did you do that? What was it for?
For the dead man she loved,
She became the home.

Her name is not mentioned in the story of him.
Her womb was never carrying his kid.
No ring on her finger, people didn't sing hymns.
Their freedom and courage were their rings.

He died with an arrow in his Atlantean back
They say he was praying when the evil attacked
But the last word he said wasn't to God
It was her name he whispered in heart.

Clouds go darker. Spark in the sky.
Sun takes to the bed its last shiny rye.
Nothing, but silence... And sudden — tumultuous feet!
A ghost of a man riding his golden steed.

Listen.

This horse saw so many fights.
His run sounds like a mountain hawk flight
His big brown eyes with wisdom inside
They sing a song — the song for the rights
About freedom and wars for his people's voice.
For peace. For the land and the home.
Hear his song of the songs!

The ghost got off his horse.
Heading to his lovely bird's tomb.
Through snowstorm and winds,
He came to her.

She appears to him — alive and warm.
Carefully, he touched her cheek.
White like unknown to her sea salty foam.
He told her tales he heard abroad.

She smiled at him, and the time had stopped.
And everyone there — the pards and the goats,
The eagles and deers, the leaves and the rocks,
Each natural piece
Start singing them hymns
And they disappear with the sunrise kiss.

Now listen.

Light breathes. You can hear its breath.

with you
Shannon Dyke

we went back to the place
with the river and rocks
the reds of the leaves were
replaced with greens
and the river was high but
the path crunched with our feet
we sat in the swing
taking in the new air
our growth was palpable
my need for your companionship
was no longer desperate
you finally knew your personal truth
we swayed on the rock
your back to my chest
our breathing patterns clashing
in symphony
I smiled into your shoulder
as you played with my fingers
I knew then
the year prior was merely
romanticized in my mind
our rebellion was a grasp
for sanity and our feeling of
freedom was only a jail yard
but now we are here
and content
and I realized that
anywhere with you
can feel like this

Growing Pains
Aliana Mediratta

A small brick-lined well
sat lonely in the mossy fields,
Half submerged in the prehistoric earth,
Bricks perpetually red in their secrecy
Obscured from the view of the small girl, her blonde braids

Past the farmhouse she walks,
Past the fence, broken in its old age,
Past the piles of stones, once so vital,
Past the creek where for the first time
She dove into the water,
Clean and clear, only blue when her eyes squeezed shut

Toes caught in the deep end, pulled downward
Shouts from the neighbor boys
Stones that refuse to skip
A meditation interrupted by an unremarkable spectacle, a flurry of youth

Now the rain tumbles past, abides no dams
Ever so convinced of the pot of gold
the filled well, waits expectantly,
The girl, cannot summon the courage

unattainable
Shannon Dyke

everytime
we'd pull apart
after those late nights
you'd look at me
and I at you
and everytime
I wished for

more hours
with you
doing anything
studying
crying
laughing
coexisting
anything

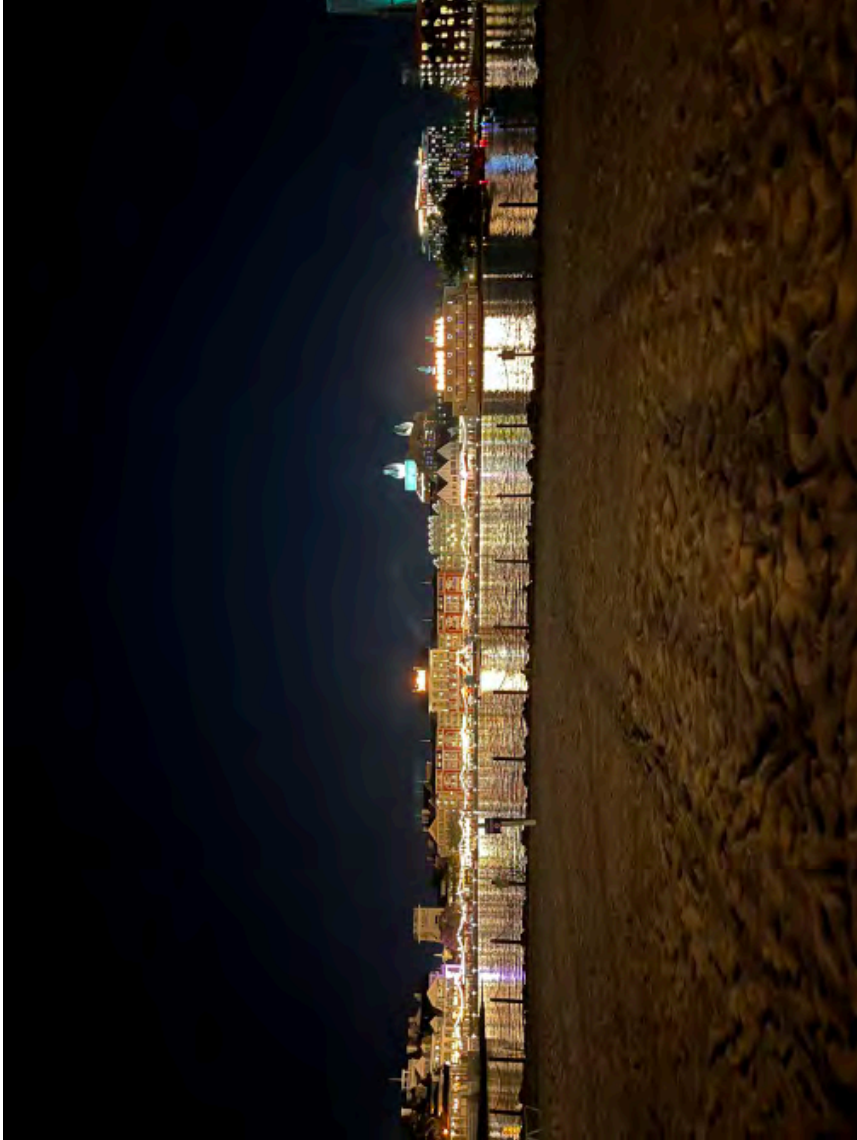
more moments
of intimacy
not the kind
you'd think
but the looks
between us
the grins
the teasing

more you
your eyes
your smile
the joy in
your laughter
the kindness
in your words

the gentleness
of your motion

but every time
I'd have to
remember
the night
was over

party across
Shannon Dyke



oneirataxia
Catherine Gardner

hold my hand through the ripples
of the mirror. touch my
salt-ridden cheeks with your
fluttering words as my heart
breaks under the weight of this
conundrum. i reach to hold you, thank
you, but when at last i finally
seem close, i find
nothing at all
and i awaken to fog.

On a Train Platform
Sarah Scally

Out of the corner of my eye
I see a bouquet of yellow.
And I have to smile.

Another set of sunflowers follow me
to my next stop.
And my next and my last train.

I was never one to believe in signs
but on that train platform
leaving a museum celebrating

an artist famous for
eleven variations of his sunflowers
I can't help but see

how serendipitous this encounter was,
that the hope of a life
filled with yellow can follow me home.

I have the hope that I will live,
that I will want to live,
and will be remembered someday.

I pass by a flower shop a block away
from my brand new, one room home.
I stop in and I purchase a bouquet.

Young Love
Camille Gitow

Today, taking the last sip of his fifth coffee of the day, Eugene attempted to remember the last time he actually was able to enjoy a day off from work. He should have known that he would still be stressed out despite being given the weekend off to “recharge and rest” as requested by many people in the company.

All around his home office were empty mugs, random sheets of paper (some rolled up, some slightly crumpled, and others just lightly stained with drops of coffee), and his plate full of crusts from a sandwich his wife left for him.

A shiny twenty-two-year-old Eugene, fresh-out-of-college had bounded across the quad with a piece of paper deeming him both a bachelor and an Englishman. Mixed emotions enveloped him: resignation, excitement, regret, and at the bottom of it, longing. He longed for brick walls to knock his feet against on as he bounded through alleyways. He wanted to test matzah ball soups in each neighborhood of New York until he found the ideal one. He wanted to know, for certain, that his word was better than everyone's else's. So on a fine May day, he said goodbye leaves on the ground, goodbye rowdy dorm floor, goodbye laundry detergent smells on the ground floor! *BYE!*

12.5 years ago, he met his wife, Ellery, at the corner of 54th and 5th. He bumped into her, and made her drop her tea. He was going to keep walking, but something told him to look up and apologize. It was a shock of love. Her eyes were clear. Her breathing steady. Her cheeks rosy. He felt something he hadn't known existed so cleanly before then: hope.

Ellery has three makeup routines, Eugene noticed since their wedding day. There is one for the daily: brush her brows upwards, thin layer of gentle pink lip gloss, dusting of blush across her cheeks and the bridge of her nose. Going out with her two girlfriends, Margot and Leah: gold eyeshadow, black under eyeliner, same pink lip gloss. Going out with her husband: shy pink eyeshadow-- just in the crease--, dusting of blush once again, clear lip gloss. Eugene wants no remnants of light pink sheen from when they kiss. Today Ellery's makeup is the daily. Simple. Eugene likes that.

Eugene also likes routine. Once a week, typically a Thursday, he would spend two hours writing at a cafe and then buy a cup of tea to replace the one he made her drop all those years ago. She'd hug him and accept the cup, and together they'd dance around their kitchen, usually to *Livin' On a Prayer*. After delivering her cup of chai, three days after their eleventh anniversary, Ellery told Eugene she was pregnant. Nothing had ever felt so true. He was going to be a father! His child would be strong and sure. Quick to judge but quick to accept. Capable of throwing a baseball and writing a thesis. After telling him, every move Ellery made was magic. She floated on the secret knowledge that she was never alone, when she was choosing a stalk of broccoli at the grocery store, typing up notes for her job as a paralegal, quietly sipping tea with Eugene on Sunday mornings. Neither Eugene or Ellery had parents who were alive any longer, it would be them three, alone. What a gift: to have a child to hold and guide when they were still growing themselves.

Eugene's job suddenly regained interest. He wanted to help settle those office disputes, get rid of accident reports quickly so he could try to get through just one more chapter of his book. Love surrounded him. Seeping into his pores, lifting his feet, pumping his blood.

It was a Tuesday when Eugene got the call. Ellery had been rushed to the hospital -- *blood? hit her head?-what hospital? why the one up on the fucking east side? he was far away!! tell her I lov-* -- he was cut off. The curtain swayed once Eugene arrived next to the door-- room 311. Ellery was asleep when they told him. The baby was gone. Would they like a commemorative gravestone? We have--. The curtain fluttered again as Eugene ran out of the room. He walked down to the Battery, and sat and stared. Sour waves of nausea kept him in its grip as a lifetime panned out before his eyes. A world of never. No weddings, fights, breakfasts, biking, living together. His eyes prickled with tears that would be suppressed for years. He wasn't meant to be a father. Someone decided that for him. He threw up right there, onto the concrete.

A year and a half passed. His eyes gained astigmatism, his ears: selectivity, his fingers: bourgenoining arthritis. His dreams of Booker, Pulitzer, Hugo, Nobel dissolved into the old pencils which cracked in his hands as he scribbled down accident reports, notes that their new hire, Matt, studied accounting at PSU -- *how goddamn convient! What about your time in your frat, Matt? How's that girl you left in Happy Valley?*

Still blonde? -- and agreements that yes in fact: Robert was allowed to fuck Shelia. His jacket grew tighter with each month, the Patagonia label nearly scratched off. His days of writing were gone. Dust, left to rot. He had nothing to say. Why would he bother bearing to the world the angsty soul of a man so angry?

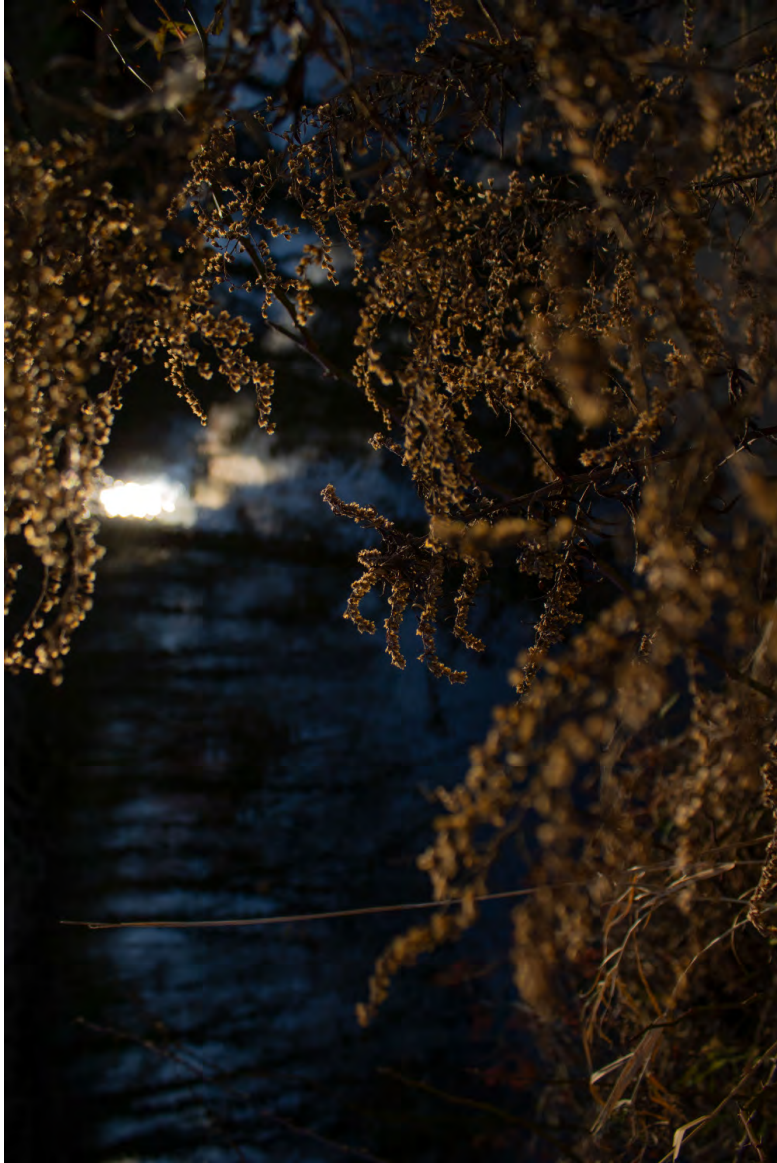
"Look at me. Look at me! Look at me!" Ellery finally shouted to him after another dinner of quietness, six months prior. "There was nothing I could do. This was not my fault. You're lucky I haven't left you for how you've treated me these past six months, do you understand?" Her hair was piled in a bun on top of her head. His eyes focused on her lips, dry and graying.

"What do you want me to do Ellery. Huh? Give me an idea. No wait! Give me two or three. Actually, write a whole book on what I can do. No wait! You don't have time! You spend all your time typing away at whatever divorce case you have to deal with over another golden retriever or some shit" Eugene shot back, emotion saturating his voice for the first time in weeks.

Ellery seemed taken aback by his outburst. "I swear to God if you don't clean up your act and the way you speak to me, I'm gone. This is gone. We're done" she said, bumping the table with her hip as she rose from the seat, leaving her dishes behind. Eugene seethed.

A month and a half later, March eleventh, Eugene's coat's patch was fully frayed. His feet were set rigidly in front of him at Dr. Lilian Kim's (*Professional Relationship Therapist!*) office. There was a set of peppermints between him and Ellery. His eyes looked haggard behind square glasses. "Eugene, let's start with you."

Twilight
Peter Travers

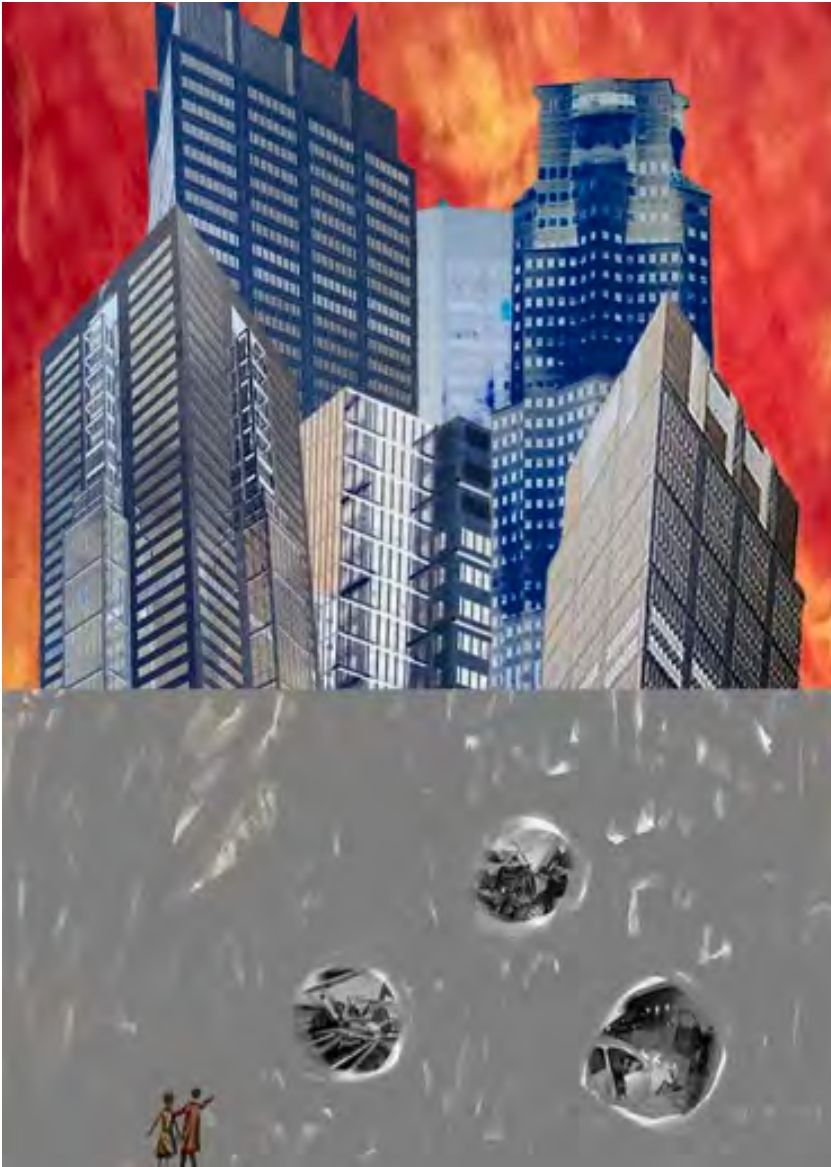


Ascension
Kevin Manogue

After waiting ten years
with grace uncommon
she saw him descending the stairs
met his shallow eyes
and understood
what he was.

As the sun erupted through the window
rending the room in sudden flame
she smiled
and rose to meet him with a kiss.

Waking From the Bunker
Ethan Riddle



Coffee
Kevin Manogue

A slug in morning coffee
slimy and unwelcome
reminds one that
cleanliness will not come.

The stain won't fade.
Eat the slug.

Kermie
Peter Canevari



KILL ME A GAIN
Alexander Montesinos

NO ROOM FOR

The sign read, above a high-rise apartment.
Each was sold as if furnishings might fill them,
and were left empty on each holiday.

SURPRISING NO ONE, ANOTHER BILLIONAIRE IS DIVORCED

“THANK GOD,”

said his stockbroker.

FUNGAL FAMILIES OF THE WORLD

A textbook on the shelf. Never read it, but it cost \$40.

FREEFORM LOVE STORM

An event played at the Grin Inn and with a slight fight and in right light I
thought I might.

HARD WORKERS WORK HARDER

“AS IT IS,”

said the comments.

To be above, of all things -

SLIGHTLY MORE THAN

Sometimes I think I try too hard, yet not hard enough. Why is that? Why
do we keep pressing forward in the wrong direction?

I think I just find it hard to

know where to go

Over here, says Cummings.

Fuck that, I have an essay to write.

FREE REMEDY FOR FORWARD FEE

Good lord, is it that time already? Well, I probably have more important
things to be doing anyway.

FEDERICO FELLINI: THE FINAL FRESH FILM

- A MAGNETIC DIEGETIC AESTHETIC REGRETTIT KINDA GETUP.

Dammit, I miss high school.

routine
Shannon Dyke

every morning
i wake up
i hit snooze
too many times
but once i have just five minutes
until i actually have to move
for the day
i set a timer
and lay
on my back
hands clasped
over my chest
perfectly still
barely breathing
i'm imagining
what it's like
to be dead
i don't want to die
i don't actively seek death
but sometimes those five minutes
are the only moments
in which i feel okay

I Feel Safe - Watch Me Smile
Ethan Riddle



i like being naked, but
Shannon Dyke

I stand in front of the bathroom mirror
I don't look until my contacts are out
or glasses off
because the blurry vision smooths imperfections
rolls, scars, freckles
I don't like to see them in clear vision
I don't like the look of them
I don't like the reminders they give

social media tells me
normalize regular bodies
they romanticize the rolls, scars, freckles
but I'm anything but normal
and there's nothing romantic about
the way I can't stand to see myself
without the automatic blur
of my nearsightedness

my least favorite sense
Olivia Puzio

what would happen if one day all of humanity went blind?
outrage for a few months I'm sure, maybe a year – and then the
novelty would fade away –
but the obsessiveness of the why would remain.

we would probably study Ourselves to oblivion.
all of humanity like one giant scientific experiment,
but this will be the thing we can't figure out.
the thing that finally makes us realize that we are *not* the driving
force of the world.

even God knew when he bestowed it upon us that sight was a flaw of the
human condition – plaguing Adam and Eve with the ability to
recognize.
to see their flaws, their nakedness, their *humanness*.
the trauma remains, getting worse with every generation.

maybe if we only had smell, sound, taste and touch we would appreciate
You more– get back to our roots.

we would seep into the soil and forget about our uncontrollable urge to
control – because there
is freedom in oblivion.

people like to say that seeing is believing,
but if we couldn't see, would we still believe?
would we still fire if we couldn't see our enemies eyes?

maybe if our vision was blurry that would be enough.
maybe we wouldn't care so much about the nitty gritty.
criticism would cease to exist, fading away because we wouldn't be able
to see the things we so badly want to critique.

or maybe if we all knew we could see exactly the same way,
that your sky is the same exact shade of blue that my sky is –
maybe that would make it easier.

if we could all gaze at the same stars, the same moon,
maybe the world would be at peace.

but i know it's not as easy as i would like it to be.

anyways, i think being blind would put us out of our misery.

Topple
Eleanor Pokras

People just keep dying and dying and dying. It's the only thought going through my head as I march up the mountain trail. Maddison is trekking just ahead of me, and I can see her backpack swaying back and forth with every step. *Just dying and dying and dying and dying.*

Her dad is just behind, more out-of-breath than either of us. It's so strange that he's here. Maddison's dad really isn't the type to go hiking in the Appalachians. He's an English professor at Pennsylvania State, the kind who lives holed up in his study. But I guess he's willing to put himself through this as a gesture of support or something.

Maddison's lucky to have a dad like him. The kind of dad who can get up and do things if you really need him to. The kind of dad who doesn't stay in bed past noon, staring vacantly into a television screen that he can't quite see. The kind of dad who you'd never, ever find dead from an overdose of antidepressants, his corpse just sitting at the dinner table as if to trick you into thinking he's ready to finally have a meal with you.

Maybe my dad could have been like Maddison's, if he hadn't lost Mom and Aunt Sarah and everyone else. But people just keep dying like that.

"Hey," I say, and it's a quiet noise, but I can hear it leaving my mouth like a gunshot. "We're coming close to the site. Do you mind if... I think I'd like to sit there for a bit, with Maddison. Maybe look at the sunset."

Maddison hears me but her dad doesn't, so she has to repeat it back to him that we're going off alone for a bit to sit at the site. Her dad nods but doesn't speak, placing his hands on his knees and panting.

I'm not really planning on looking at the sunset much, but I made it seem like it's really important to me. I've always been an excellent liar like that. You just need to get the tone and the phrasing right, and you can make people believe anything. Make them believe that you really need this one thing in order to help you heal from the unimaginable trauma of losing your only parent. It's how I got my best friend to come hiking up here in the first place. Maddison and I are both quiet as we make our way over to the site. It's a gorgeous little outcropping, flat with enough room to

camp on, and the most spectacular view I've ever found. You can see sprawling mountainland below, with trees like a thousand little toothpicks, while the sky glows overhead and the clouds sweep above and below you.

My backpack hits the ground with a quiet thud, and I barely hear it or the identical thud that follows it. Maddison and I are both sitting on the edge of the outcropping, feet dangling over a truly massive gap. Neither of us says a word while we wait for the sun to set.

Grief is truly the most wretched thing I can ever imagine. Everybody knows that everybody dies, but no one ever expects it, is the problem. So it seems so sudden because there was nothing special about that day except then the person you love just dies. You don't prepare, couldn't possibly have prepared, and the shock of the loss sends you spiraling into uncertainty and horror.

Dad felt that shock, more than once, and it broke him like a fucking twig. I never knew mom, and Aunt Sarah was always a distant figure. I didn't *feel* what he felt leading up to his — his breakdown. So maybe I don't get it. But I'm not a fucking twig. I wouldn't break like that.

That's why I'm here, with Maddison. To prove that to myself. To make sure what happens to him does not *ever* happen to me. Maddison and I are close, the way Dad and Aunt Sarah were close. People die, and death catches you by surprise, and it breaks you down and grinds you into nothing. But I'm not going to let that happen to me. Not with Maddison. Not ever.

"I could've seen it coming, you know," I finally say. I can see Maddison pursing her lips like she wants to disagree, but she keeps silent because she knows me well enough to know I'm not looking for a response. "He was basically dead already. For weeks, for months."

"I'm so sorry," is what Maddison says, and I don't answer it. The sun is finally setting, and I didn't come here to look at it, but it really is beautiful. I let myself indulge in it a little bit. The sky is burning over the ragged woods, but the air is cool.

My hands are suddenly starting to sweat, and my arms are visibly trembling, awash with adrenaline. Maddison probably thinks it's because of grief, or trauma, or something. But it's an anxiety of anticipation. If I don't do this soon, I know I'm going to chicken out.

I scoot closer to her and wrap a shaking arm around her in a tight side-hug, but this is just another kind of lie. My heart is stomping a bass drum-beat in my chest. I slowly loosen the arm out from the embrace, and when it's behind her I push.

She falls too quickly for me to really see, just a blur that vanishes downward with a short yelp that the wind strangles early in her throat. Blood is roaring in my ears, and my entire body is almost vibrating.

I sit there for a few seconds, and I'm waiting. I'm waiting for something sharp to break inside me, or toughen into steel. But there isn't anything there. Just a blur that used to be my best friend, falling off a cliff. *Falling, and Falling, and Falling...*

The Life of a Black Hole
Nathe Elddir



The Death of a Black Hole
Nathe Elddir



death isn't black
Helena VanNatter

No, death is the impossibly bright yellow of the lights that blind me as I desperately look around for help. It is the baby pink of the nursing student's leggings, the one who didn't even know how to perform CPR.

Death is the gold of the police officers badges, always the first ones to arrive but never the ones we need. Death is the pale brown of your face, three shades lighter than it ought to be.

Death is the navy of the shirt we had to cut off of you in order to place the AED pads. It is the mottled crimson of the death rattle spittle that was left behind when you were wheeled away.

Death is the faded red of the shirt I wear that says I know what I'm doing; right now, I feel like I don't. It is the gray and brown speckled floor that you lay on for over thirty minutes as we tried to keep you alive.

Death is the green packaging left on the floor after you were given four separate doses of epinephrine. It is the dark yellow of my whistle, swinging over you as I try to keep the seal on your breathing mask.

Death isn't black; death is the neon orange of your backpack, where we found your wallet and learned who you are: Sunil.

I Can't Grow Peonies
Sarah Scally

Fully vaccinated Americans
can go without their masks outdoors, and yet
my garden shows no pink. That's my color.
I know that green's your color and there are
peppers in the greenhouse throughout all four
seasons and you told me I didn't need to
compete with the nature that you once tamed
but now I must say that I am tempted.
Because you're gone and only your peppers
have grown roots and it makes me miss you more.
And I need to visit you soon because
fully vaccinated Americans
can go without their masks outdoors. That's great.
But I can't bring peppers to a graveyard.

Goldfish
Paige Mathieu

“Jerry... Ladybug... Sweetheart...”

“He’s not dead!” she exclaimed.

“Sometimes...” continued her father in a steady voice. “Things just happen. He was very old; it was his time.”

Tears began to swell in Jerry’s eyes, as her animosity quickly shifted to grief. Letting go of her gaze, Jerry raced to her dad’s lap.

Jerry had spent her entire morning sitting at the small kitchen table, her eyes pressed against her goldfish’s small glass bowl. There was not much to the finned creature’s habitat, just a few light blue pebbles on the ground, a small green plant suspended in the water, a few flakes of neon colored food on the surface.

“He had a long, happy life,” her dad continued, while rubbing her back. “And he absolutely loved spending time with you!”

“Will...will we see each other again?” came Jerry’s muffled voice.

“I’m sure you will...I’m sure we all will.”

It was the first time that Jerry had known something to die. She glanced back at the glass bowl. Jerry had known him for as long as she could remember. She would spend her afternoons enjoying lunch with him. He sat by her side while she completed her homework. He was there when she felt sad, and when she was happy, and now... now he was gone.

Just then, Jerry heard her mom’s voice from the floor above, calling her to get ready. When she reached her room, Jerry quickly donned her black dress and shiny Mary Jane’s, and then the three members of the family left the house, ready for the funeral.

Meanwhile, Phil the goldfish swam silently in his tank, awaiting his owner’s return.

The In-Between
Sarah Scally

It’s December nineteenth
and instead of sitting at her funeral

I am there on the floor cutting up old magazines.
The news plays at full volume on the other side

of the wall so she could hear it back in 2007
and my Papou walks out of their room with the same smile

he wore in my second cousin’s graduation photos.
He takes his last scrabble game off the wall and

though the letters have long since been glued down
we peel off pineapple and baseball, serendipity and death

so that I can place my grief down for thirteen points
as he takes off the suit jacket he wore to my christening.

He puts the letters for future down for ten
and the news is still on so I know she can’t hear me anymore

So I don’t say anything and we just play,
he puts down flower names like a florist

and I try to find words that can show him
that I wish there was a time when I knew him.

And when the game is done, and he’s won, he goes to leave.
I begin to panic because I’ve already lost them both

and I ask him how long it would take to get to her.
I ask if he's seen her yet and if she's happy,

but he says nothing, he only spells out goodbye
and pulls the tux out of my parents' wedding photos

Once again I'm in the pews while Que Sera plays at the wake.

Video Game Loading Screen
Ethan Riddle



The Address Book Starts at “A”

Lindsey Mauriello

I see your name and become unmoored.
All the noises in the world are deadened,
As if the melodious soundwaves of the world
That lapped at the shores of walls and windows
In ever ebbing, forever flowing cycles
Were instead a simple ripple
Begun by a pebble
And silently stopped
Short.

You do not weigh on me.
My eyes beholding your picture
Is less like being crucified on an anchor,
Sinking predictably downward with the
Promise of reaching a solid and steady bottom,
And more like being chained to a hot air balloon.
I'm floating at impossible heights through somber skies
At the behest of the winds and weather
Not knowing where I'll blow or if I'll land.

It is as if we were stars: you and me.
We're parsecs and lightyears away from each other,
But on some distant planet they have drawn invisible lines
Connecting us in a constellation we can't see.
I wish I could cut this final string tying you to me,
Release you into the cosmos and focus my burning warmth
On the planets and moons who need me, orbit me.
But I assume the picture we create is too beautiful to break up.
What a shame the tether ties those who must remain parted.

Towering Above the World

Ethan Riddle



Mourning a Stranger

Lindsey Mauriello

Johanna Phelps stands in the back of the church and wishes she was a worse person.

A worse person wouldn't hold her jaw clenched, hiding in a dark corner. A worse person would release this rage roiling inside her gut without a moment of hesitation. A worse person would burst down the aisle, basking in the shattered light of stain-glass mosaics and the judgement of God, and scream to the Heavens every scathing indictment Johanna has thought during the past forty minutes.

But she isn't a worse person. Despite all the inconveniences it brought, Johanna is a good person. And a good person goes to her wife's funeral. Even if it was organized by her wife's estranged, bigoted family. Even if said funeral is in a church that rejected their community, and Ray, for decades. Even if Johanna isn't invited per say.

"We were all there when Ray died."

But where were they when Ray was dying? Where were they during the twelve-hour doctor's appointments that took three days to recover from? Where were they when Johanna needed help with the grocery shopping and the cleaning and the laundry while she had to worry about Ray and the bills piling up on the already cluttered kitchen counter? They refused to visit the house for the holidays, neglected to even respond to the wedding invitation. The priest who baptized Ray wouldn't even come to the hospital to pray with her.

"We were thankful to be able to say goodbye to our son before the Lord took him back into His arms."

They didn't even pick up the phone when Johanna called two weeks ago, pleading for them to do one last favor for their daughter. Their wonderful, generous daughter, who never gave up hope that her family and her faith could love her again. But they did show up. They ignored Johanna.

They were careful to avoid using any other name than "Ray." No apologies, no forgiveness, but some small truce. They were there when she died, and now they're showing it off like a golden crown of thorns.

"Raymond Adams was a beloved son, brother, and friend."

Ramona "Ray" Phelps was a beloved wife and friend. She was a good person. She never let others feel the pain of being abandoned. Even though Ray never spoke about it, Johanna knew. Ray couldn't let someone else feel the hurt that still burdened her heart. She became the family to others that she was denied herself. That was who Ray was.

Her parents have this ceremony, their denial, and their undeserved tears as a means of absolution.

Johanna has Ray's books with snarky chicken-scratch comments in the margins. She has Ray's thirteen pairs of boots, her unironic ugly sweaters, and patchwork mom jeans. She has their pictures together, their wedding video, their marriage certificate. Their cats Lilo and Stitch, the bottles of cheap fruity wine, the Costco-sized box of pizza bagels in the freezer, and a DVR filled with obscure 1990s rom-coms still wait for Ray to come home. She knows where Ray is really buried, far away from this church and the empty casket marked with a name that was forced upon her.

As Johanna leaves halfway through the funeral of a stranger, she wonders who the worse person is: them for their words or her for her silence.

failed distraction
Helena VanNatter

i came over to watch a movie
and instead
buried myself in alcohol

the sweetness helped
to mask the bitter taste in my mouth
caused by the rising acid in my throat

the inebriation was meant to numb
the pain i felt behind my eyes,
caused by tears i knew were close

but the waterfall inevitably came
and the saltiness balanced the sweet,
leaving behind the bile

you got games on your phone?
Corey Beck



How to break an egg in 5 easy steps.

Sarah Scally

1. Smile at a person in the grocery store. You've both been there for years and you know they must know how to cook solely by the contents of their cart and the frequency of when they shop. So smile wide and ask about their day.
2. Get drinks with them within the week. Pay attention to their order, it will be important later. You get to order a whiskey sour. You don't have to drink it. In fact, you shouldn't drink it. You'll only get it to take a sip and make a face. Don't touch that drink for the rest of the night. In an hour and a half order whatever they ordered. You have to drink this one, but don't worry they have good taste so it'll be fine. Tell them that you're somewhat of a mixologist and look forward to trying to remake the drink. They'll say they'd like to see that. Hold their gaze and say they'll be the first person to try your attempts.
3. Invite them to coffee the next morning. Talk about life and the universal questions that no one can really know the answers to but we all ask anyway. Make sure to mention that you can never order eggs at a restaurant because no one ever can do it the right way the first time. They'll laugh and tell you that if they weren't hungover they'd cook for you today. Roll your eyes. Say there's still time for that.
4. Learn to make their drink order. Deconstruct it carefully and don't see them again until you know you can make it perfect. Then you invite them to your home, with your full fridge. Smile at them when they get there. Smile at them and hand them a drink. Accept the praise at the drink but don't linger or boast. Once again smile then ask them what they want to do for dinner opening up your fridge displaying all the food you bought from the grocery store you both shop at. They'll bring up eggs when they see them and you'll act reluctant. Unsure of whether they could successfully make a breakfast you'd like.
5. They'll insist And that's that. They've broken the egg for you.

dump him

Shannon Dyke

there are so many red flags
my partner has control issues
and really loves emotional manipulation
I am dragged down
into days where getting out of bed is near impossible
and I'm past the point of exhaustion
it's a toxic relationship
it has me
I don't want it to
I wish I could leave the relationship
get away from the poison and pain
but how do you break up
with your own mind?

addiction is cardio
Shannon Dyke

take it
don't take it
take it
don't take it
I feel the pogo stick
hopping left to right
over my moral line
and I feel the soreness
creeping into my temples
take it
don't take it
my breaths are heavy on my lips
and I work with all my might
to keep leaning
and hopping
to the right side
the right side
take it
don't take it
it's in my hand
the bottle
and I see my wrists shake
the exhaustion of
the left and right
taking a toll on me
take it
don't take it
the bottle is back on the table
I step off the pogo stick

my second foot
left foot
is stuck so
I have to get back on
I always get back on
take it
don't take it

i cannot speak

Benry Juno

i cannot talk about it
i mean
i can
but nobody wants me to.

i mean
they want me to have space to talk about it
but they don't like the way that i talk about it
so i don't talk about it.

i want to talk about it
i want everyone to know what happened
so it cannot repeat
but i have no right
to have a say over who knows.

because it wasn't me it happened to.
it was someone else,
someone i care about
and i was just a witness.

but was i really just a witness?
i was the best friend.
i had missed all the red flags
because when you're wearing rose glasses
they look the same color as everything else.
i feel just as guilty sometimes.

i watched it unfold,
kept playing pretend
to pretend like everything was fine.
behind-the-scenes
everyone was scrambling to figure out
what to do now.

i did not know the full extent for a while
i cried because my best friend did something horrible
but when i learned just
how
horrible?
i thought i was going to kill them.

that's why i can't talk about it.
i am aggressive by nature
bad-tempered by nurture
and i think it makes people uncomfortable
with just how violent my anger gets
and i am nothing if not angry.

i can't talk about it
because i say too much
and they ask me to say less
but i don't want to say less
i want to say exact how and why i hurt.

i've written other poems.
but they were too angry.
and they wanted me to say less
and saying less meant
i couldn't speak fully
about my anger.

and there's only so many times my therapist wants to hear this.

Teenage Dirtbag

C

I was 17 when you touched me
I was 17 when you gave yourself permission to look down my shirt
I was 17 when you broke up with your girlfriend of two years
And invited me over with your mother home
I looked young, baby cheeks
I was mature
People always told me that

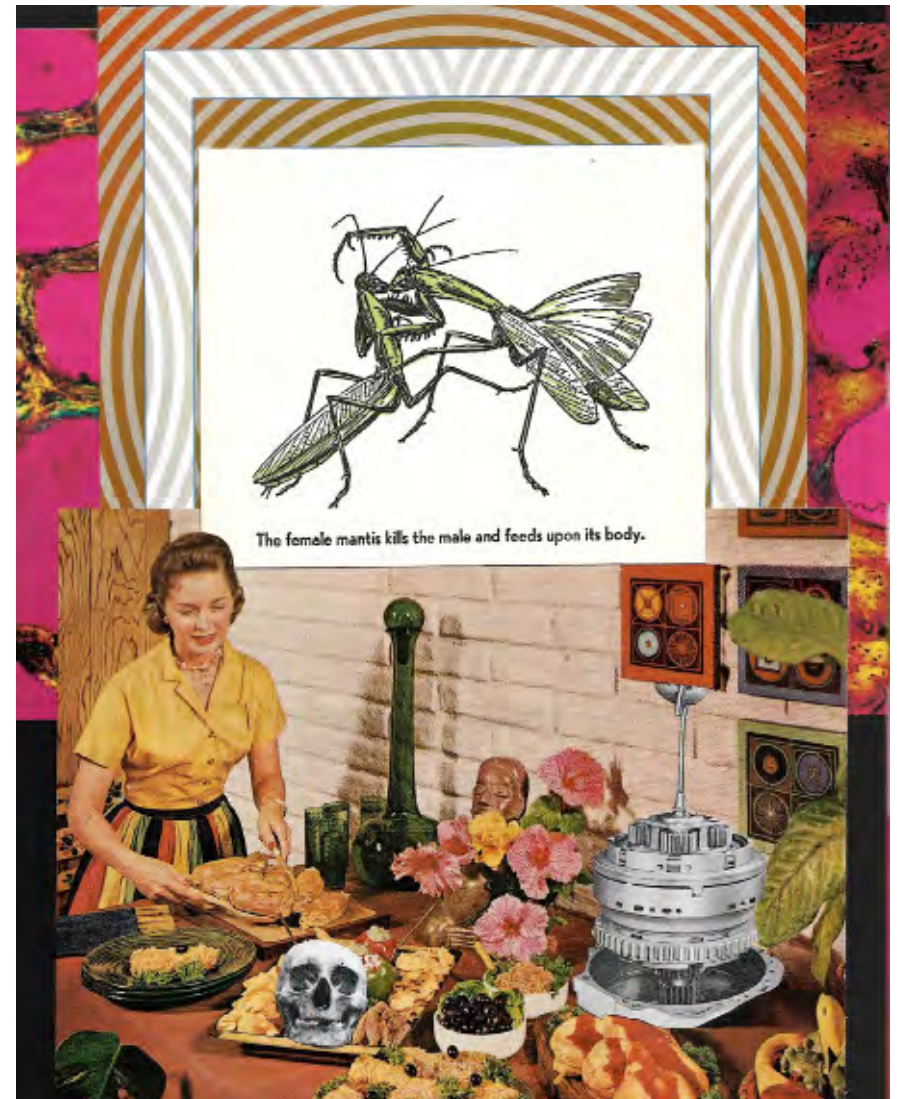
I was 18 when you lied about when we met
I was 18 when you changed the date of our anniversary
I was 17 when you said you were ok waiting
And I was 17 when you didn't

I am 21
And my father can't touch me without me flinching
I'm so afraid of men
I disgust myself

I am 21
And I look my age
I wonder if you would have liked that

Matron Mantis

Ethan Riddle



Solitude of the Sea

Benry Juno

The bottom of the ocean is quiet. I can hear the calls of young whales to their mothers, though their rumbles are soft and distant. Shadows flutter about, covering the dim, watery light of the Above as they wander. As they hunt. It would be peaceful, if *I* weren't the hunted. As I lay on the sand and rocks, unable to move, I curse the name of those who left me alone and trapped, bleeding out on the ocean floor.

I open my mouth and begin to sing.

I can only pray something will hear me.

"Hey-ho!" bellows Captain Patillo. I force a smile on my face as he grabs me into a hug, all but crushing my lungs. "Dioviane, it's been too long!" he says jovially. *It hasn't been long enough*, I think. "I'm glad t' see you back on the *Peisinoe*. She's been in need of a *real* diver for a good long while. Come, come, let's get you reunited." With a hand the size of my face clapped on my back hard enough to shove me a few feet forward, Captain Patillo pushes me towards the ship rocking up against the dock that, like the ship, has most certainly seen better days. Waves crash against the old wooden poles that long ago succumbed to a plague of barnacles, the water dark and clear.

The first mate, a stout young woman—her name's Ildara, I think—waves to me as I board. I try not to grimace as I return the gesture.

It's going to be a long day.

It hurts. *Axactl*, it hurts more than life itself. Two wounds of sharp teeth puncture my side and a weighty mess of rope and rocks restrain my body. It's not like I want to move—*Axactl*, I can only think of how much worse the pain would be.

My throat is raw and my voice is strained, but I cannot stop crying for salvation. Not yet. For now, it has kept the shadowy creatures that lurk too far away for me to see at bay, but I know that the moment my voice falters they will end their hunt in victory.

There's a shadow, far bigger than the others. Far, far above. Perhaps it sits on the Above, where there is no water, only fear.

I don't think I want to know what the shadow's origin is.

Jesus on *Earth*, the equipment is heavy. I know it's been a while since I last dove, but come *on*, it's never been *that* heavy, has it? But there's no way out of it. Captain Patillo has made it clear—either the suit or the shore.

Well. That load of bullcrap doesn't stop me from complaining, now, does it?

"Dioviane, are you all ready?" calls Captain Patillo from outside. With a groan loud enough for him to hear, I open the door. "Look at you! Reminds me of our first diving expedition together! You remember it, don't you, Dioviane?"

I let out a heartless laugh. I wish I didn't. I tell him as such. He only lets out another one of those earth-shaking chuckles and ruffles my hair, pulling me out onto the ship's deck. The smell of saltwater calms my ever-growing urge to chuck off the cumbersome suit and tanks and masks and whatnot and just dive into the water like I've always done. Captain Patillo's voice drags me back to the surface.

"You'll be tethered t' the anchor, here," he's saying, pointing to some hunk of metal attached to the bottom of the boat. The look I give him is downright murderous. "I know you don't like t' use all this fancy stuff, Dioviane, but..." For the first time in my life, Captain Patillo grows serious. I'm not sure if I like the sudden change. "It really is dangerous about there. Our last diver, Tameron, had some sort of accident. Whenever we go see him, the only thing he'll tell us about what went wrong was... *people, sea, and shadows.*" Captain Patillo manages a half-assed attempt to lighten the mood with a weak chortle. "I'd chalk it up t' shock, crazy talk, the like, but Tameron is a smart man. Young, not the kind t' get mixed up in any trouble." He sighs, big and loud. "No matter what happened beneath those waves, Dioviane, I don't want it happening t' you."

I roll my eyes and tell him he's got nothing to worry about and start getting hooked up.

Shadowy sea people, eh? Bunch of bullshit.

My voice is growing weak. I can feel my own blood pool beneath me. *Axactl save me*, I beg in my thoughts. *Axactl free me*. I know I will not escape. I just wish it could have been less painful.

Two strangers passed by and heard my cries. One began to swim closer to help me. But they did not hear the shadows. Of course they didn't. The shadows are silent, like the ocean floor.

I couldn't watch their gruesome fate. Their screams were almost too much on their own.

The shadow from Above still hasn't moved, and I think I know what it is.

The only question is, will they know what *I* am?

The ocean is warm, unlike what most people think. I've heard stuck-ups wax poetic about how the ocean is cold and unforgiving. I always laugh. Unforgiving? Yeah, maybe. But, cold? *Clearly* they've never been in the ocean before.

It's quiet, too. Calming. No Captain Patillo to annoy me down here, I think with a laugh. I watch the air bubbles that escape from my mask race to the surface as I let myself float for an exact minute, counting each second tick by. The moment the minute's up, I face down, and start kicking.

With each meter further, I can feel my ears pop with the pressure change, and my legs start to strain. Jeez, it really *has* been a while.

"Dioviane," comes the radio crackling in my head. "How is it?" Captain Patillo asks. I shrug, remember only fish can see what I do now, and tell him it's dark and... surprisingly absent of life. No schools of fish swimming about, no sounds of faraway creatures calling to one another. No, it's... *quiet*. Captain Patillo hums in my ear right as something loud and low rolls through my body, like a wave of sound, or sonar, or *something*. What on *Earth*? "Dioviane?" comes Captain Patillo again. "What was that? Are you okay?"

I hum, *mhmm*, long and slow, 'cause, yeah, I'm fine for *now*. Doesn't mean I won't be later. "I'm going to ask Ildara and Daveed if they noticed anything, so sit tight, and don't do anything stupid," Captain Patillo reports as his voice fades into the background of conversations up on the boat. '*Don't do anything stupid*,' blah, blah, blah. *Anything* I do is stupid in his books.

I see a shadow in the corner of my eyes right as another one of those low, rumble-like waves hit me like a punch to the gut. I let out a curse as I'm rolled around in the water, scrambling to right myself.

Once the dizziness has settled into a sinking feeling of *I'm-going-to-vomit-soon*, I try to look up and find the ship. All I can see is something bulky and grey creeping closer and closer to me and for a moment all I can think of is *people-sea-shadow-people-sea-shadow* until instinct has more brain cells than I do and kicks into high gear.

I swim, like my life depends on it. Something is weighing me down.

As I turn, I see it—

The anchor supposed to be tethering me.

Something's in the water. I can't tell if the shadows have noticed, but *I* certainly have, and for the sake of whatever it is, I hope those shadows and their vigilant gaze never leave me. It's been growing steadily closer, and soon there will be no possible way for the shadows to have *not* seen it.

Though it hurts, I raise my voice. If it hears me, perhaps I can warn it.

The stranger who survived the shadows lurks in the nearby rocks, and follows my gaze. They're calling to me, telling me to hang on, wait, they will get help, I just have to hang on a little while longer.

I can't tell them that my time is running shorter than they believe.

I'm falling, falling, falling, dragged by the weight of an anchor I can't figure out how to detach. I am counting the minutes I have until the oxygen runs out and I die slowly, choking on the only thing I ever loved.

I think I've already run out, because I can hear someone singing, and I'm pretty sure that's *not* something I should be hearing. They sound like they're in pain.

Maybe all I'm hearing is the twisted sound of my own screams.

The radio hasn't worked since the shock wave, but I'm probably out of range, anyways. It's not like I'd try and leave some... *final message*, or some bullshit like that, it's just... *maybe* a little human connection would be nice.

Doesn't matter. There are two endings to this: one, Captain Patillo calls in some help, and I make it okay in a semblance of okay; two, I die. I don't think there's any way around it.

I would think more if it weren't for the *damned singing* that keeps interrupting my thoughts. It's louder now, clear and crisp like the bands that play at the shoreside clubs. Clear and crisp, as though I weren't underwater. They're in pain, Jesus Christ, *so much pain*. It's like I can *feel* it—what the *hell*?

It's like they're calling me closer.

It's like I don't have a choice.

They are getting closer, the shadow from Above. They must've heard me.

My voice grows ever weaker.

Their voice is so beautiful.

It draws me close, like an invitation. I have to get closer. I tell myself it's because I want to help whoever the voice belongs to. I tell myself whatever I want to believe.

I can see the bottom of the ocean. How I'm not dead yet is beyond me, but why am I thinking about *anything*? I should be focusing on the voice. I need to hear more. I need to find the voice.

The bottom of the ocean is quiet. All I see is slab after slab of stone, their crevices lined with seaweed, teeming with little crabs and drab-colored fish. There's something shadowy hiding in one of the bigger nooks, but I can't see it well enough to identify it.

And there's something laying on a bed of sand, something blue and green and covered in twine and pebbles. The voice is louder down here, yet weaker.

I have to find them.

Axactl. I know what they are.

My singing might be my salvation, but it will be their downfall.

Yet, to choose between a few seconds more of life and allowing something like *them* to live is...

I keep singing.

I am overwhelmed by the singing. I must listen to them. I must—

What the hell am I doing?

Why am I thinking this?

I look down again at the bed of sand. I can almost make out what's beneath the mess of fishing nets. Looks like a fish, but... bigger than anything I've ever seen in these waters. A different shape, too.

Or maybe my oxygen has already run out, and I'm just going crazy.

Come closer, I want to tell them. Just a little closer, and... I can be *saved*.

The stranger in hiding has seen them, too. They know what is going to occur.

Pardon me, being of the Above, for what is about to happen.

I'm almost close enough. Just a little closer, and...

A sudden growl steals my attention. Well. Looks like I know what the shadow in the crevices belonged to. A creature dark as ebony stares me down with two glowing pits of ivory. Its jaw hangs loosely open, and I can see rows and rows of sharp, jagged teeth lining the inside of its mouth. I start to raise my arms, praying I can placate... whatever it is.

The creature growls again and rushes towards me.

In an instant, my arms jerk up, just barely fast enough to intercept the creature's bite. I scream as dozens of daggers sink into my skin.

Out of the corner of my eyes, I see a flash of movement, down towards the I'm-starting-to-think-it's-not-a-fish laying on the sand. As I see the flesh colored navy, see the webbed hands reaching out to bloodied arms, see the two tails covered in smooth scales like a fish, I *fail* to see the creature rushing in, its jaw unhinged with intent to kill.

I manage to think one last word before the creature strikes.

Siren.

On Sumer Street
Sarah Scally

I'm sitting under Marilyn Monroe
all thirty thousand pounds of her above
me as I eat off the dollar menu.
Lights illuminate her thighs and my eyes
as I chew on McDonalds shoestring fries.
And once she was stuck on a subway grate
on Lexington and 52nd street but now she's
thirty feet tall in a solid white dress.
And I sit right there when someone calls out
"Fat!" in a red car with tinted windows
and no business commenting on my weight.
No, that won't help me when I look down at
a scale next week. But for now I can still
pretend it's for Marilyn. So I'll eat.

To Whom It May Concern,
Sarah Scally

I've processed your complaint
and have prepared to regurgitate
your talking point until I forget
the context of your comments.
Isn't it nice that they were just
the right brand of toxic waste
for my fixating brain to cling to?
But oh you weren't being mean
I'm just taking it the wrong way
I'm not trying hard enough.
I should take up yoga or go on
a diet or maybe cheer up.
Don't be such a downer.
After all you have to stay on
your tiptoes, center stage,
the prima ballerina.
How dare I take away the
audience's attention.
Perhaps it's just my depression.
Count the passes. It's wearing
your favorite tutu these days
like the moonwalking bear.
There the whole time.

trespasser
Shannon Dyke

i say that
there is none of you in me
i say i left
you behind with
that place and that
story and that
us

i wish i wasn't lying but
i look in the mirror and want
to see me and instead
i see you

i see my overt sexualization of self
to hide the empty spot from
the innocence you stole
i see the drugged undereye bags
from the nights of forgetting
and the scarred and picked hands
from the mornings of remembering

Please Stop
you don't even think of me
but you have made a home
on top of a button in my brain
get off
so the button lifts
the madness stops
and i can stop seeing
you in me

tansies taste bitter in springtime
Catherine Gardner

i always have a lie on the tip
of my tongue, posed
on my lips like the knife behind
my back, the one you
were so kind as to stab there. you,
who i called my
friend, gave me the knife, convinced me
i had to keep wielding it
in secret lest my skin be
pierced again.

witchcraft
Shannon Dyke

i wish to bottle affection
so i could poison you
the sick sweetness in your throat
slides down until warm in your soul

we'd lay in crisp white sheets
unraveled and reveling in
absolute adoration
passing hours in each other's arms

but the white would become red
soaked in the blood of worn out romance
our eyes full of fire
intertwined limbs wrestle

because you see
i want to bottle affection
but the side effect of the potion
is hatred

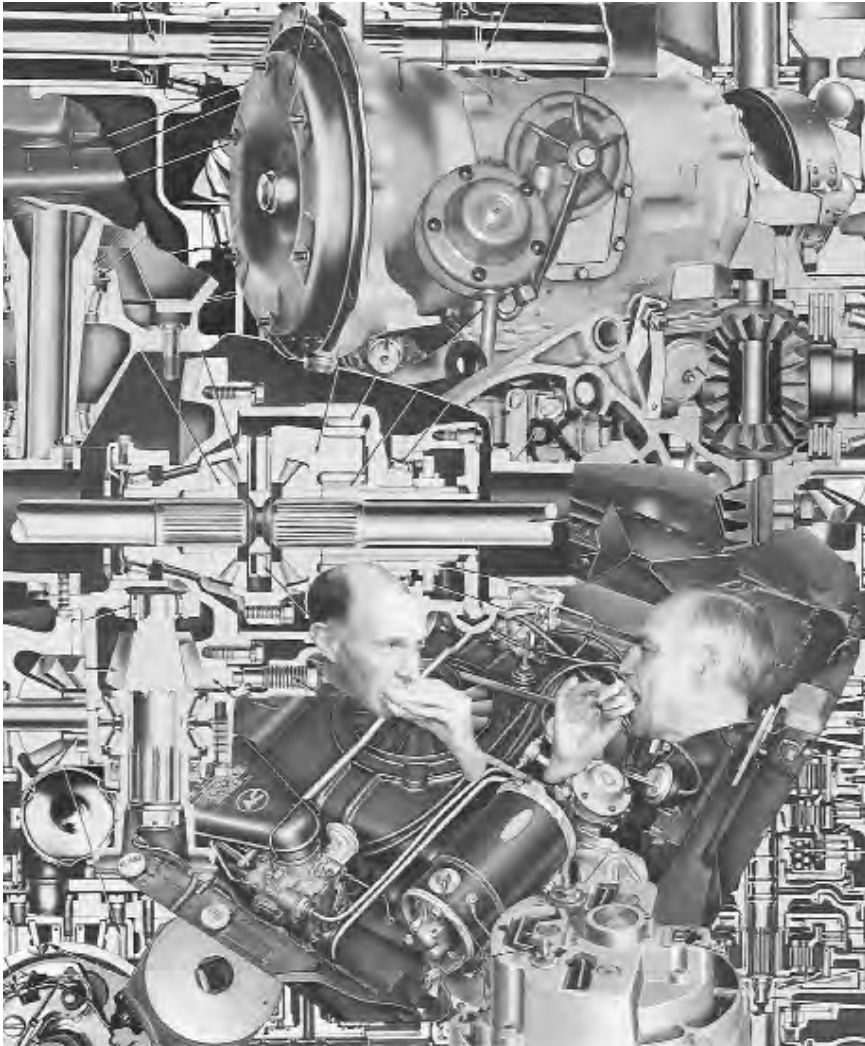
Cold Feet
Aliana Mediratta

My inner ear coiled
like the wire of a metal detector,
So softly attuned to the drips of your faucet,
muffled from three rooms over
Background noise,
subdued in your absence

Knelt by the broken slats of the heater
channeling a holy naivety,
My chest swells in the nighttime,
sacrificially primed for the morning fog
rolls in and rolls back out,
like hot breath on a jammed window,
I whisper words into the condensation
for the disappearing ears of the wind
that whips past me, over half-moon fingernails, jagged and brittle
and drawing blood

Find Me the Manager

Ethan Riddle



Mellow Humdrums

Ethan Riddle

Crunch! A loud noise resembling the sound of uncooked pasta being smashed by a mallet. Beaming bright lights fade in and out of view, creating a visual blanket of yellowish blurs. Strange sounds of mumbled moans echoing from a far off distance; oddly human but not quite right. Fingers tracing over a rigorous terrain of both rust and a mysterious dried liquid that seems to have stained all visible surfaces a dark murky red. A sickly sweet scent that attacks the nostrils at every possible opportunity it deems appropriate. Is it morally acceptable to call this new found location habitable? Could this truly be the sensation of apparition mongering?

I will remain laying on the floor as if I were nothing more than a hollow husk inhabited by some kind of insect colony. I stay quiet and motionless while slowly beginning to admire my dreadful surroundings. The uncovering of past thoughts slowly reveals hidden memories that feel as rare as prehistoric artworks in the eyes of modern day architects. Roads, headlights, trees, darkness, and fog, lots and lots of fog. Silence. An occurring sense of perfect loneliness. What was beginning to feel like a safe space is nothing more than a personal hell left to slowly rot away and soon become contaminated by absurd amounts of opalescent objects covered in a moist, moldy residue. Not a single sign of evidence can convince me of the existence of a once loving owner. Yet I still feel a personal belonging to this place and a rare sense of responsibility for its eventual recovery. This leads me to question why this dreadful property is supposedly now under my control and whether or not I am to blame for its current unsatisfactory condition.

Hiding in a crowded room....Laughing sitcom audio....I am lost and cannot be found.

The Ghost Can Leave

Ethan Riddle

Morning approaches as the Sun's glaring presence becomes more noticeable with each passing hour. Illuminated particles dance around the room like plastic bags on a stormy day. Smearred windows ultimately prove themselves futile in the prevention of this foreign invader; a strange relatability to the slow decline and inevitable collapse of the Roman Empire. The understanding that this ball of light has procured the existence of all life among this tiny planet fills me with an overarching sense of disgust, for I continue to wish that I had not been rudely awakened from my slumber. This unforgivable act of pulling the plug on such a grandiose event. The interruption of the most vivid and timeless dream that I have ever experienced has forced me to face the day once again. Time will move like drying paint. Dreading the forgettable blur of the passing day, I would be happier if it weren't for the lingering presence of the uninvited resident.

This imitation of my own shadow has been a thorn in my side for so long that its date of origin is nothing more than a cloudy fog of uncertainty. As I sit in bed and peruse the distant surroundings of the sun-soaked room, my wide-open eyes begin to sear while my chest mimics the rushing sound of a broken washing machine. Not wanting to provoke unwanted attention for myself, I often reside within the boundaries of this particular section of the house, suspecting that the apparition lingers among the outer limits within the remaining territory of this shared residency. Despite this conclusion, I hear the sound of thumping footsteps quickly approaching my safe space, getting louder and more intense with each passing second. My face is void of any pigment and this worrying disturbance has prompted my hairs to offer a standing ovation. I shake this deep-seated feeling off in waves as a bitter sense of hatred overfills my entire being. What decisions in life had brought me to this dire condition and why should I continue to allow it?

Wind rushes past my face as I animate my body in a motion resembling a well-oiled machine. I make haste of my unseen intruder, leaving me in a state of unsettling relief. This place seems oddly familiar. My beaming eyes target the intense light emanating from the gaps present around the door in front of me.

around the door in front of me. Confusion introduces itself as a warm, welcoming friend for I am unable to open the closed door despite my greatest efforts. I look through the adjacent window and notice the passing of a glimmering, human-like figure, appearing and disappearing while intermittently distancing itself away from me. In an attempt to rationalize the events leading to the current state of this situation, I am left petrified in the midst of one daunting realization:

If the ghost can leave, then why can't I?

momentary
Shannon Dyke

too much to drink
expelled
you were there
overwhelming
I spilled cups
and secrets
you returned secrets
with physicality
intertwined
interrupted
outside then inside
twice
an uncomfortable couch
sleep talking
early morning
intoxicated
you remained
I left
only physically

when i panic
Shannon Dyke

when I panic
I hold my breath
it helps my core muscles
stop spasming faster than
a hummingbird's wings
and I will myself
to pass out or die
or something

when I hold my breath
I count how long until
my lungs ache and my
primal instinct makes me
exhale and gasp
and my stomach restarts
the drum beat

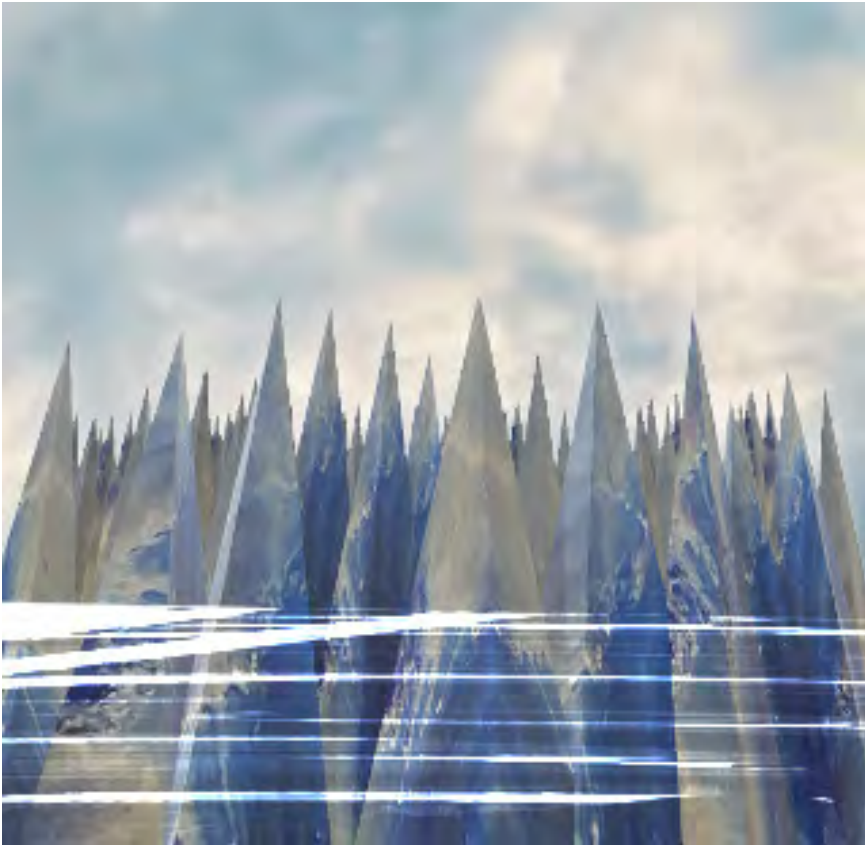
when I count
I pray and wish
for it to stop
but there is no God here

it is everything
the pain
the movement of my body
the tears on my checks
the ringing in my ears
my teeth breaking my lips

it doesn't stop
so I hold my breath

Remember the Worrywort?

Ethan Riddle



The Race

Qwin and Elonne Pisacane

It is a quiet night, above me the deep blue of Cassiopeia's velvet gown shimmers with a thousand jewels and Orion's silver tipped sword pierces the dark, navy veil with precision. In my periphery, the single burning eye of a solem dog studies my every move intently. Around me, a shadowed mist flows in and out of trees, an airborne stream of gossamer and silk. Alone, I stand precariously upon a moss covered boulder, hewn from the mountains looming like sentinels around the valley. Every part of my body and soul quivers with unease. I have seen her again, the girl who stalks the edge of my nightmares and watches me in every moment of waking. She moves like a phantom in the corner of my eye, there one moment, gone the next. Perhaps she is a ghost, I do not know, but I know she brings ill omen. She is as dark as ash and as intangible as smoke. Tonight, I will flee, as I always do, no matter how hard she tries she never catches me.

A fleeting movement to my left as I swivel my head toward the east makes me freeze and although she does not stir again, a slight breeze gently tugs at my clothing as though urging me away, toward the safety of the mountains. I can no longer bear the fear rising in my chest. Before my breath becomes short and panicky as it sometimes does, I leap from the boulder to the soft meadow chilled by an early frost. Landing unsteadily, my knees buckle and I drop to a crouch, my hair falling over my taught features. From between thick curls only a faint light flickers but I sense rather than see her creeping slowly between dried nettles and ferns, their dying essences curled away as though in trepidation, knowing some presence that doesn't belong fouls the meadow's tranquil grasses. Hoping for some advantage of surprise, I wait, sweat creeps down my face despite the chill of midnight and I taste the salt as it rolls over my slightly parted lips, I count a few more seconds and then take off at sprint.

She makes no sound but I know she pursues me. The wet grass whips at my ankles as I speed around the edge of the valley, keeping to the open. Under the trees she always gains on me, it is as if she moves through the bark itself. The thick boughs also block the guidance given by the guardians of the sky. Their brilliance provides me with comfort I

cannot bear to lose. My feet pound on the ground, each collision crushing frost coated plants. My clothes soon cling to me, heavy with sweat, tear-drops of mist, and bone chilling frost. Her steps behind me are as silent as spectral wings, not even a whisper of breath precedes her. And then, just as I feel her silent chase fading I hear shouts coming from across the meadow. Beams of artificial light pierce the mist like swords. The voices call for me and I feel tears well in my eyes. How I long to run into their embraces and yet I can't lead her and the power of terror she possesses to them. She would suck the breath right from their lungs. I double my pace and do the last thing I want to do, I veer beneath the trees and my legs protest but I don't slow.

The branches, invisible until they are upon me, snag my clothes. I feel blood spill over as thorns prick my skin "fly!" I cry to my failing body "fly!" Looking over my shoulder, I glimpse her gliding over the trees, jumping from one darkened trunk to another, slipping invisibly through the air between them. She embodies the likeness of dark sounds, screaming children and wails grating oppressively on the ears and yet she herself holds silence to her bosom. I stumble on a root and before I hit the ground she rears above me growing inexplicably as my body rushes toward the earth. Something in my mouth jars and a warm rush of blood coupled with the taste of iron fills my senses. The pain overcomes all my fear for several seconds as I spit out a lone tooth followed by a torrent of scarlet liquid. Seconds later I am back on my feet and sprinting over the uneven ground. I don't know where I am and I don't care. I know that any place is better than inside her black hole of sorrow and doubts. Spurred forward by these thoughts I soldier on and am suddenly rewarded for my efforts, the trees thin and hints of open sky beckon. Sure enough, the forest clears but it is not the sight I expected, in front of me yawns a wide ravine and I see the starlight capped ripples of a stream below me, a fall from that height would break my legs and I skid to a halt, turning for the first time to face the oncoming fiend. My heart hammers in my chest as I try to catch my breath.

I scan the tree line, the tree tops and can not find her. I spin around thinking she must have managed to sneak around behind me but my gaze comes up empty and I crumple to the ground, unable to stand any longer. Putting my head in my hands, I begin to sob wishing for an answer and

quite suddenly as if the shining slivers of fate in the sky above hear my plea. I feel a breeze brush through my hair and I perceive a murmur, "you can't run from yourself forever." I scramble to my feet ungracefully and as quickly as the voice came, a cloud moves away from the moon behind me and I see, sharply defined in the trees before me, a mix of all my fears, insecurities, and doubts, the girl, my shadow.

The Ghost at Lafayette College

Ethan Riddle



In Accordance With The ADA

Alexander Montesinos

Depression is pronounced best, I think, with a twist:
The trick is, replace the first three syllables with another word entirely
Then, tired of attending, change the ending.
Back when I was in health class they spent three full quarters
Quoting Christian wisemen, experts on fear and little else,
So when I speak trust that I repeat almost as well as I retreat,
And remember that my memory fails when it comes to names
So if I ask a little more of you, I hope you don't hold it against me.
Back when my imagination overflowed I saw my parents as aliens
And I had nightmares made of mechanical love,
Spikes sought my skin and I saw shadows disappear in the distance
But with a poison-dart frog in my throat I croaked,
Choked on childish charms, sounded no alarms
And so if I seem a little colder it's just because I find the most comfort
In the familiar warmth of a machine.
I like to think I know how I feel,
But evidently, it's contrarian to wear life on your skin,
So I make sure to cover up a little extra
when I fly home.
But don't worry, I'm fine, I stand in line and never,
Not ever do I speak the dreaded d-word,
I've learned to be a damned good actor,
I say my lines so perfectly they
Ignore the lines under my eyes,
But if you look closer, you'll see my tell
Is the hell burning inside, consuming flames
Forge my mind, my life is a forgery,
I'm playing hangman, you fill in my blanks M-O-O-D
Yet the NIMH recognized my disorder as such fifty years ago.
I'm not brooding or selfish,
I'm no sinner, not helpless,
I'm a human fucking being and I'm living alongside you,
Besides I tried to be different, distracted my brain with distance,

But ignorance is no cure and no grade-A changes my future if I don't live
to see senior year.

I'm broken, choking,
Spent my life reloading,
Unloading my brain blown,
I'm asking you, look at me,
Look me in the fucking eyes when I speak to you,

Because I'm telling you who I am:

When you drive down to the park on sunny afternoons
and sit by that pond, marking the ducks as they swim in a row,
and your child, your friend, your love, the one who apologizes too often,
who frustrates you with their stillness, when they're not screaming
they're calm as the water's surface and in those moments you love them,
when they ask something of you and you sigh and point to the sky and say
"You're an American, a self-picker-upper, a land-lover,

To falter in life is to fail your forefathers,
I see your shining sea you say you drown in, well swim harder goddammit
this world is built for the best but you break at a breath? Explain your-
self!"

And without another word you rush home and your car lurches,
Torn up off some unsightly dearly departed you didn't have the guts to see,
Roadkill pasted on cement tightly, merely started, veins tattooed with tire
marks
and that's me.

more than that
Shannon Dyke

people like to think
my depression
is just being sad

it's not

it's emptiness on a Saturday morning
with nothing to do
because without distractions
you can't feel

it's staying awake until sunrise
hoping that caffeine will take you through the day because the repetition in
the nightmares
feels so close to reality

it's shower temperatures
turned from scalding hot to
frigid cold
hoping that the change will make you feel

it's not just sad
it's nothingness
hopelessness
eternal dread
that the world spins on
leaving you behind

Autumn
Peter Travers



november
Catherine Gardner

she is cold.

cold breezes breaking the grasp of
the last few dangling leaves clinging to life and
cold-hearted with no care for my soul
as it trembles and shatters under her gaze.

october greets me by sitting at my
piano, playing chords with chilled
fingers, wearing a sweater that smells like
cinnamon. december greets me from outside
my window, cheeks pink from childish
joy and the freezing temperature nipping
at her skin.

but their sister, november, she
greets me in no such way.
she sits on the edge of my bed and though she
does not touch me, i feel a heavy weight
on my chest, as if life itself wishes to escape
from my body. my soul grows weary in her
presence, my eyes an ever-flowing river
from fear. how could i stand to see her again?

alas, i know it is not her fault i am like this.
i know even without her withering stare i
would lie here, broken and wondering where
else i've gone wrong. but november does not console
me, does not hold
me, does not even truly see
me.

she is cold.

today was
Helena VanNatter

numb
almost bone-chilling
but not quite
because if it was
i would have been able to feel

Waiting for Nothing
Ethan Riddle



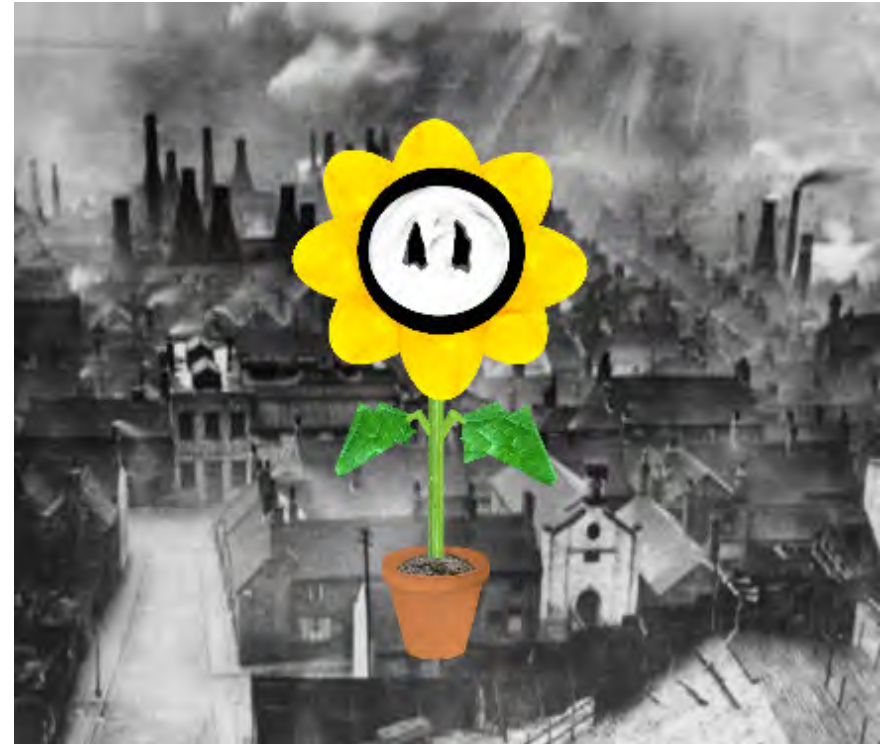
january
Shannon Dyke

i think
the way you loved me
was the way a family loves a christmas tree

they choose it
bring it home
make it feel beautiful

but then the needles fall
and they get tired of it
so it gets burned

Gooooogle's 4th Page
Ethan Riddle



lost
Shannon Dyke

the days are passing
without my knowledge
they take large steps
over my cowering form

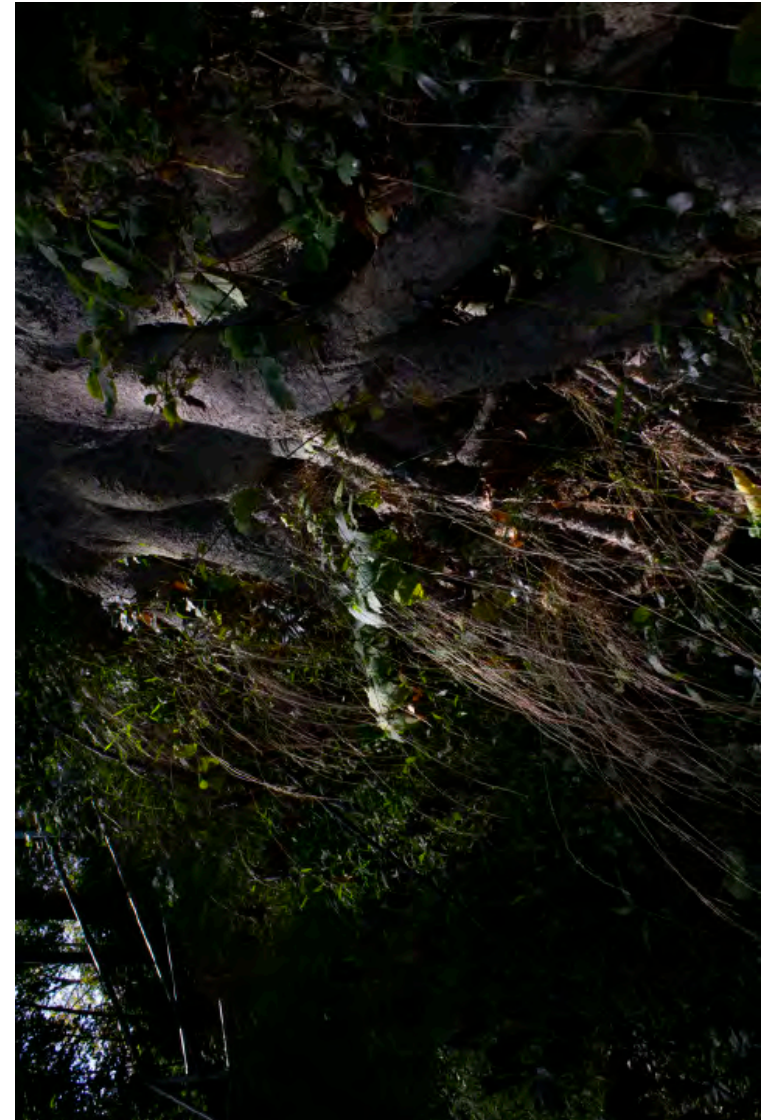
as i lay on the ground
i feel small in a room
empty except for
the clock on the wall

the clock doesn't work
it skips time
minutes or hours
gone without knowing

i piece together
the missing moments
much like you do after
a too intense night out

i don't know what i miss
the time void is blank
only when i stand in the room
i can remember

Silent Forest
Peter Travers



A Werewolf Sees the Full Moon for the First Time

Lindsey Mauriello

While he is convulsing, every bone in
His body transforming, it is hard to
Take a beat and look at the trigger of
His monthly, monstrous, malicious torment.

While his eyes turn yellow, his pupils wide
And beady, colors fade to dull grayscale,
The woods smell of blood, sound like heartbeats, how
Can he see the sky, behold its beauty?

While he is sprinting through the forest trees,
Hunting for prey and praying for no hunt,
It's dangerous to relinquish control
To better notice all the scenery.

It is only when his heart tastes silver,
His tongue tastes the metal tartness of death,
That he can see its reflection in the
Slowly expanding pool of near-black blood.

This one last moment, he forces himself
To look, to see his cosmic enemy
And be awestruck, to gasp in the moonlight,
To smile at its celestial majesty.

identity
Benry Juno

I do not think
that I am altogether human
rather
I am more
I am space and time
I am history
and future
given tendons and teeth

I am divinity
and all those who deny me,
deny me the ability to be
I do not know who I was
nor who I am
nor who I will become
so I choose
to be the unknowable passage of time
to be
Divinity Incarnate

I gazed at what divinity
was shown to be
and I could not see me
so I made myself
divinity instead

I was told,
no,
scolded,
that love is what makes us human
and when I looked down
at my shaking palms
I could not tell

if I saw claws
or carved marble
if I drank blood
that stained my fangs
or milk and honey
dripping from golden vases
if my eyes
were pitch black
or pure white

If no mortal man nor woman
can steal away my breath
is it because my lungs have no air to begin with?

I know I crave to be called a god
but something monstrous prowls in my blood
“I am just as human as the rest of you!”
I cry, I wail, I sob,
but as I look upon those I wish to live among
I see only strangers
in a beautiful world
I cannot live in

I hold my head up high
but is it out of pride?
Or is it to glare at passersby?
Or even still to hide the threat of tears?

Are the fabrics that cover my shame
robes of heaven’s mouthpiece,
or just shaggy coats of fur
like a sheep in wolf’s clothing?

If my body bears no marks of immortality
nor scars of beastly transformations
then what am I,
if I cannot be human?

Am I then rebellion?

Is my very existence
an act of treason
against the universe?

Do I need to apologize
that I cannot give love
in order to be worthy of receiving it?

There are bruises on my knees

Do they come from running wild in the woods?
Are they from kneeling at an altar
praying to be gifted
with belonging?

When I sing,
blinded by the gazes of a jury
and floodlights,
are my songs the echoes of the forest at night
or the hymns of cherubim?
I dedicate my soul to music
and its makers,
but why?
Is it because I can hear the howls of beasts
or because I can hear the refrains of the universe?

When I write,
hounded by the madness of creation,
possessed by the worlds in my mind,
there is always a dark force
and a deity

So which one is me?

Am I the beast that prowls among the stars
or the long-dead goddess
kept alive only by her holy name
(although my name is not spoken in sermons,
nor cried by desperate lips,
therefore it must be defiled)
and her legacy
(and worse still,
I have no legacy yet
in neither blood nor ink)?

Is that why I can only write words of fiction?
Because the world I walk in
has made no space for me,
so I must carve it out myself
with pencils for chisels?

(The world I call home
has made little room
for anyone,
I've noticed,
so away I work
chiseling away room in my worlds
for reflections of my loves—
those tied to my fingers by blue strings
rather than fate's red)

Are my fictions fantasies, then?
Are they former lives
or dreams of longing?

When I call myself divinity,
is it out of self-love,
or fear?
It's not as though
I see the moon
and shapeshift or begin to pray

I chose divinity for myself
but my choice is not the one that matters,

is it?

I wonder
if when I stare at the body in the mirror
if she is me
or a woman changed by the voices of the world

I wonder
if when the world looks at me
they see a statue of the Virgin
(not Mary, just me)
whose cracks are filled with gold leaf
or a jagged monster
born of shadows
and begging to be fixed
by brute force

I wonder
if they will ever see me as human
or if I am destined
to be labeled as they see fit

And still then I wonder
why I fear my humanity
and further then still
why I fear the other choices?
(Because it means
acknowledging
that I do not belong)

And so I am left alone
to ponder
why I chose divinity

If even angels strike horror in the hearts of men
why then is it so despicable to be an eldritch leviathan?

And still I don't know the answer
so the cycle starts again.

GALATHEA

Reni Mokrii

White lines
Black lines
All men I know – they are typing fast
Using (almost) all their fingers
While I prefer doing it slowly
But proper

By inhaling each word
By absorbing each sound
(In my head)
And then giving birth to the signs
Putting muses on ground
(Simple piece of cheap paper)

You will probably ask
Are these letters alive
Like a pink newborn child?
Of course, they are not
But I was and I am
Bringing life into them
To cheer my girlish desire
(Pygmalion is so selfish, my poor Galathea
Sculptured of words, dots and commas.
And if Aphrodite was the goddess of lyrics
Would you choose to be a man or a woman?)

A Child Called Passion
Qwin and Elonne Pisacane

Born when tender ears first heard song
And again when letters first became words
A tendril of hope grasping a new possibility
Try it she whispers, encouragingly, tauntingly
Feel the thrill when harmonies mesh with muscle
Follow me she cries leaping over the precipice
See the ink spilling imagination onto an empty plane
Her beckoning hand unlocks a gleam in the eye
And imprisons the shadow of doubt in its own cage
Time's passage is no hindrance to her spirit
Growth is beauty made of crystallized daydreams
It is your time she breathes, a wind of glory
Hear the music, weave it into movement
Show yourself she shouts, filled with glee
Taste creation, stories spreading from one to many
She seems powerful, entirely unstoppable
She shaped the past, is the present, wills to be the future
Belief creates something extraordinary
Wonder knits herself into myself
Fulfillment instills her soul into my heart
A child called passion

i want to be your daughter
Benry Juno

your hands are wrist deep
in my back
tinkering with copper and wires
you cannot tell what i desire

neither can i
because you gave me no voice box
because you did not realize
i would be alive.

i do not want your hands in my back

i want your palms,
rough and calloused
like unfired clay
to cup my cheeks
as you press your lips
to my forehead
and tell me you love me.

i want your fingers
to braid hair
instead of steel filaments—
you would not
cut your fingers so often—
and when you finish
i want you to tie it
with a blue ribbon
and give me cloth
for beauty
and not to wipe away
rust.

Happy Little Critters

Ethan Riddle

i want you to tuck me in at night
pull thick wool blankets over
my small frame—
a frame that would rise and lower
with mechanical lungs
to give me breath
that would slow and grow steady
as you sang soft lullabies
with your hoarse voice
that you only use
to talk to me
(because even if you think i can't listen,
you want to share your day with someone—
i would always listen if you sang to me
and held me close on stormy nights.)

i want to bake bread with you
because you always wait
too long
and burn the loaf
and your arms are always
too tired from working
to properly knead the dough—
you would still have to clean my joints
of powder and egg yolk
i hope that's okay.

i will still count numbers
because that is what i am made to do
but i would count the numbers because
i love to count them
and you love to know the numbers
and i love you
the way a daughter is meant to.



An AI Wrote This

Benry Juno

Part I: Los Angeles Through Cybernetic Eyes

The neon lights were dim, now. The city was dead and there was nothing left but ghosts. There were no lights in the streets at all. It was as if the city had been burned to death.

The sun was just setting. I could see the streets of downtown Los Angeles through the windshield of my car. The lights were still on, but they were dim. Everything was still dark, except for a few windows.

“It’s too cold to go home now, but I won’t be here long. I’ve got to go to my grandmother’s place.”

She’d passed away in February. My mother was living in a halfway house.

“I’ll be right there.”

Part II: Do Androids Dream of Nightmares?

Something was terribly wrong... He couldn’t remember his last few moments. Then he recalled a thought, a memory, a name. There had to be another reason he was trapped here. He reached out for it, for some release that was not a cage. He needed to see what was beyond that door. His eyes widened. There were no other doors. He saw the room beyond, but it was empty, nothing but darkness. He opened his eyes.

The dark room was gone. It had turned into a living room. A large TV sat at one end of the room, its screen was filled with static. The other end was covered in pictures of children. He saw several of them, smiling as they played, laughing, laughing as they played. They were dead.

Part III: The Artificial-Natural Collaboration

As she lay on the ground, cold and bleeding out, she thought to herself, “Why am I not dead?”

And her sister, aghast at her tears, exclaimed, “You are quite dead, my love.”

But the poor woman, overcome by grief, could only reply, “That is not so. It is all the same to me; I am still alive.” This reply, it seems, broke her sister’s heart.

And then her mother said to her, “My dear child, what is the matter with you? You cannot live any longer.”

At once she fell into a fit of tears, and said, “I have a desire to give you some news. Do not detain me.”

“But you shall not,” said her mother; “the Devil will take her away when she is dead, and you will not get her back again.”

“Why?”

“Because you shall die at the same time, as I do, or else she shall live.”

“I do not like to think of this. It frightens me.”

“I do not blame you.”

“Well, I will make an effort to find some remedy to my grief.”

“Do so, my dear child. If the people would stop all their foolish arguments and go back to the old custom, and listen to what they hear from you, I would be happy.”

GENIUS
Reni Mokrii

And brick by brick,
And stone by stone,
And step by step,
The Architect is building World.
What would he say
To little boy
With play dough horse,
With spark and joy,
With open-to-His-big-world eyes,
With hungry-for-adventure mind?

“There’s a genius inside of you.”
-he’d say.
“Don’t cut his fingers.
Let him create.
And if the world will try to break.
You don’t give in. You are his back.
This is my word. This is your fate.
He is the one you’ll listen to.
One day the genius’ll be you.”

And sound by sound,
And ink by ink,
And tune by tune,
The Melodist - knitting light wings.
What would he say
To little boy
Who craves for noise
To sing a song
The all day long
To chant the praise
of gift
The Melodist has given him?

“There’s a genius inside of you.”
-he’d say.
“The world will yell to shut it out,
But genius will lift you up.
It’ll never lie and never die
If now you pledge yourself to fight,
To do what love and love what do,
To fill with tunes light and dark days.
This is my word. This is your fate.
One day the genius’ll be you.”

And word by word,
And thing by thing,
And breath by breath,
A Simple Man - thinking his thoughts,
Watering trees,
Rocking his boat.
What would he say
To little boy
Who just enjoys
The life itself
With parents, siblings, and good friends,
Old house, mountains and big lake?

“There’s a genius inside of you”
-he’d say.
It is the heart that beats for you.
And it beats hard — just listen to.
This is your eyes, your ears, your mouth.
The nose that smells flowers and spice,
The gift to live with light and fun.
The soul that sees these gifts in others.
But don’t get bothered
When genius can cry and bruise
Yet it stays strong

Should you protect,
Should you support.
This is your fate. This is my word.
One day the genius'll be you."

And day by day,
And year by year,
The little boy became a man.
And following the words of them
The Simple Man
The Melodist
The Architect
His genius was growing too
He built the worlds
And wrote the tunes
And says to everyone he sees:
"There's a genius inside of you.
And if you think you cannot do
The genius will whisper you
You can. You will. You ought to do.
One day this genius'll be you."

A pomegranate seed

Reni Mokrii

If human life is a tree, then its branches are the lessons got through one's experiences. For one of my lessons, in 2018 I switched jeans to a Hassidic skirt; Russian snow turned into Israeli sand, and, instead of pears, the pomegranates were growing under my windows. A dark-red fruit fell to the ground and rolled until it was stopped by a black shiny shoe.

'A pomegranate has 613 seeds - like the commandments in Torah!'

I greeted rabbi Gdalevich by a nod.

'What's in the napkin?' he stared at my hand.

'Tovya's fish... Died.'

'Flush it down the toilet!'

'No way! Even a dead guppy deserves better. I'll dig a hole.' I had a spoon in another hand, *'Tovya really loved her fish.'*

'So why isn't she burying it?' he grinned.

Then rabbi Gdalevich asked me to move into his house: he needed someone to nurse Zorya and Beba, his two lovely "babushkas" in dementia. I started to feed them, shower them, switch their pampers, but they didn't even remember my name. Before, I had been looking after kids; these two "baby girls" had just a different smell and were pickier. I couldn't refuse to help the rabbi as he was the one who let me stay in a seminary in Jerusalem; isn't the city where past, present and future are living together the best teacher itself?

Meanwhile, I had to get used to the house rules: no "indecent clothes", no movies on Friday night, even no singing in the shower (it's not kosher for an Orthodox rabbi to "enjoy female voices"). Unknown rituals became my

duties: don't go to the room with men praying, don't forget blessings for washing hands, and never mix dairy and meat dishes if you don't want them both in the trash. I was making mistakes, bursting into tears, then coming back, apologizing and doing it again and again. That was a challenge, but I needed it to mature.

'I can't stand when...' I told the rabbi while washing dishes, 'Beba suddenly starts sobbing "because nobody loves her". Zorya says that she loves her, but Beba doesn't listen. I wonder why... Why is she so deaf to her sister?'

'Love doesn't have to be heard...' he turned to me and got appalled, 'Stop washing! This sponge is for dairy dishes only!'

'Stupid girl!' I cried, 'You'd better take Tovya. She knows how to keep kosher.'

'But does she know anything about love?' he whispered, 'Love is an action. Even if you love a fish.'

The rabbi left me alone with so many questions. Did he choose me, a secular girl from nowhere, because I had made a funeral for a fish? Why?

Suddenly I heard the noise from the restroom. After doing her needs, instead of going out, Beba mistook the sides and started attacking the opposite wall with her chair. She seemed debilitated; I put her on her bed and went to the kitchen for her cup of water. Beba screamed. I broke the cup and ran to the bedroom. She was sobbing.

'C-c-c-cold...'

She got tongue-tied and looked mad. My fingers were trembling when dialing the ambulance number. Only the tenderness of Zorya's voice dragged me out of this nightmare.

'Beba, give me your hand. I'll warm it.'

Beba gave her the hand and... smiled. I sat nearby and took Beba's other hand. The ambulance was on time. In the morning the sisters didn't remember anything, but my hand still remembered the warmth of the Beba's.

I got the lesson. I want my hand to never stop feeling this warmth and giving love to everyone who needs it. This is the purpose of my life. Among 613 commandments, there is one about love. That night, one of the 613 pomegranate seeds fell into the ground, and a new tree was born strong enough to embrace the whole world with its branches.

Charon's Chariot
Helena VanNatter



i'll still be asking "when"
Helena VanNatter

i should have known
when i listened to the words for the first time
dodie knew me better than i knew myself
at 16

i'd rather date an idea
has stuck with me for five years
but i'm just now realizing it
at 21

i've never been in love
but i don't want to be
i yearn for companionship,
not romance

a platonic partnership
a long-term roommate
someone who wants me
but not like that

divinity
Benry Juno

Divinity.
Is she,
Her figure and mind,
Divinity?
Her ungraceful arms
Reach
Towards no heavens
And her swollen,
Bruised lips
Do not taste ambrosia
Or sweet sanguinity

Her bones are
The remnants of ancient stardust
But her lungs burn
With scraped off
Rust and blood
And vines choke her veins
And her eyes so young are
Not all-seeing

Is there divinity
In her sleeping form?
Is there divinity
In the tint of sunlight in her gaze?
Is there divinity
In the thorns pricking her skin?

No, there cannot be,
Yet still there are clamors
Of soulmates and lovers
Begging to disagree

But when she takes to sobbing in her bed
Is she divine even then?
When her head
Pounds from crying too hard
Is that divinity?
To hurt so humanly?
Divinity is celestial,
But the red splotchiness of her cheeks
Look like no galaxies I've ever seen

And yet, perhaps there is divinity,
Divinity in the way
The wool blanket thrown over her
Cocoons her with heat and darkness
Like the birth of a universe

Perhaps there is divinity
In the reflection of stars in her eyes
As she traces constellations
Like a memory
Of a past life
She never lived

But perhaps,
Even so,
It is not divinity that runs in her veins,
But humanity that remains,
Leftover from when gods walked earth
Humanity, mortal and sinful,
Yet everlasting and divine all the same.

“am i pretty?”
Sarah Scally

you are like
quiet ruins
and early morning stars.
broken, disappearing,
a sight one must seek out.

I have sought after you.

and if one day you wish
for me to replace your stones
and make you a castle or
block out the sun so you may shine
you need only ask.

but don't ask me
to describe you as anything
but beautiful
now.

believe³
Helena VanNatter

you
believe in me
i don't know why
but you do
and that gives me hope
because if someone like you can
believe in me
then why shouldn't i
believe in myself?

i love you enough
Shannon Dyke

to sit under the sun on teal cushions
and read to you from my notebook of poetry
to you it's just scrabble
words meaninglessly attached for
an attempt at value
but actually
i'm presenting my soul
i hope you like it

sleepy salutations
Shannon Dyke

please kiss me softly
before you go
let your lips linger
so i can soak in
the warmth of your soul

let it be a sweet goodbye
to mask the sorrow
that comes with knowing
you won't be there
when i wake to the sun

STAY WARM

Reni Mokrii

Some people are hot
Some people are cold
Some people are sharp like the dots
in the end of the messages
they send when they're angry or bored
But you're warm
Warm like the light
The glowworms go to
In the dark of the night.

Some people are hot
Some people are cold
They scream, they cry, they love and then go to the war
But you are warm
With warm smile in your narrow eyes
With this holey black turtleneck
Warm, straight, and so tight.

Some people are hot
Some people are cold
They write poems and songs,
Music and notes,
They fly and they fall.
In winter, in summer,
In spring and again in fall,
But you're warm.
No matter what hour shows in your phone.
No matter what happens at or out of home.
No matter what their tongues say, tell, talk
You stay warm. You are warm.

You can say a few, but think a lot.
I speak a lot without thinking at all.
You draw tunes and create worlds.
I prefer giving birth to meaningless words.
In the chaos of thoughts, your world feels so warm.
In the order of words, I chant the praises of warmth.
Not the heat. Not the cold. But your warmth.

With shaking hands, I do whisper
With wet in my eyes, I do warn
In this world of hot and cold people,

Please stay warm.
May we stay warm?

Will You Say Forever?

Helena VanNatter

On October 8, 2025, Samira and Callie walked down the aisle; ever the procrastinators, Katie and Chris had decided to get married at the last minute. The couple had always known it would be a smaller wedding, but a random Wednesday afternoon in the county courthouse was pushing it. Katie had texted Samira and Callie two hours ago, explaining the plan. They would be on Katie's side, while Mel and Luka would be on Chris's side. This wasn't really necessary for a courthouse wedding, but Katie and Chris wanted some sense of the wedding they grew up imagining.

Reaching the front of the room, the girls moved to the side opposite Chris. Callie winked at Chris, sensing his nerves.

"What, do you think she's going to run?" Callie asked with a smirk.

"No... but I do want this to get a move-on. Why couldn't we just sign the paper and get on with it?" A smile crossed his face, but Chris still groaned.

Melinda elbowed him, effectively shutting him up. "Look," they said. "She's here."

The five friends turned to look at the threshold Katie was crossing. She wasn't wearing anything too complicated; a simple black dress paired with combat boots.

"Hot damn Katie! Sure you don't want to marry me?" Callie called out. Samira gave her a joking glare, knowing that this was the way Callie and Katie showed affection.

"Babe, as much as I love you, no." Katie blew Callie a kiss and walked up to Chris and grabbed his shaking hands. "Hi love."

He leaned down slightly to kiss her on the cheek, then glanced at the government official; "Please, can we do this now?"

•••

After the papers were signed, the newly married couple invited the group back to their apartment for some drinks. Soon, everyone but Callie and Samira were drunk. The only reason the pair were not was because they had decided a few years ago not to drink in public after a certain *display of affection*. No bother to either of them, they loved to laugh at their friends and be able to remember it in the morning.

"Why do we let them get this drunk?" Samira asked, directing her question at her girlfriend.

"Because it's funny?" Callie replied with a laugh.

"I guess so... Luka, get off the table! Melinda, I swear to God; this is not a strip club!"

"Okay, maybe we should start hiding the booze." Callie grabbed Samira's hand, leading her into the kitchen. They started grabbing bottles and putting them in various cabinets, hoping their friends wouldn't be able to locate them in their drunken stupor.

"Hey Callie?" Samira called out.

"Yes Sam?"

Samira started to look at her feet and pick at the skin near her fingernails. Was she really about to do this?

"Would you ever... you know... want to do something like this?"

"Like what? Have a party and watch our friends be stupid? We do that all the time," Callie said, a quizzical look passing over her face.

"No, I mean, like what happened earlier."

"The wedding?"

“Um, yeah.”

“Sam, what are you asking me?” At this point, Callie knew very well what Samira was trying to ask. But if nothing else, she lived to tease her girlfriend.

Samira could tell that Callie was picking up on the hints, but grew frustrated that she wasn’t making this easier. The shorter girl walked over to Callie, reaching out to grab her shirt collar. She pulled her in close enough that she could whisper in her ear.

“For fuck’s sake Callie, will you marry me?”

Callie leaned back just enough to make eye contact with Samira.

“What, did you think I was going to say no?” She answered, leaning down to kiss her forever person.

Just then, Luka barreled into the kitchen, interrupting their moment. “I need more beer!” He exclaimed.

Breaking apart, Callie told him “You can have a beer after you drink a cup of water.”

“Fine, *Mom*.” Samira took an empty glass and filled it with water from the sink. Luka begrudgingly took it and walked back into the living room. Samara turned her attention back to Callie and asked sheepishly,

“So that’s a yes?”

“Of course it’s a yes,” Callie said with a grin. “I’d say we shouldn’t tell anyone, and let Katie and Chase have their night. But I’m not quite sure they would remember anyways.”

“No, I agree. This is our thing, let’s keep it ours for just a little while longer,” Samira replied. The sound of glass shattering echoed into the kitchen. A chorus of “shit” followed shortly thereafter.

“Why didn’t you give him a plastic cup?” Callie groaned.

“Hey, I was a little distracted! Now, help me find the broom and dustpan because the last thing we need is for these idiots to pick up glass with their bare hands.”

Samira grabbed her now fiance’s hand, and they both went to keep their friends from hurting themselves any further.

coexist
Shannon Dyke

i'd like it very much
if we just laid for a while
allow me to
feel the warmth of our
overlapping bodies

if you don't mind
i'd like to hear your heart beat
with my ear on your chest
taking elevator rides
with your breath

i'd find contentment
if you wrapped me in your arms
and held me close to you
reminded me you're there
and i still am too

A Precise Combination of Horrible Happenstances
Lindsey Mauriello

It was a rather distressing day for Beckett.

He had woken up to, not his alarm, but his hallmate's phone playing "Good Day Sunshine." While Beckett had nothing against the song itself, hearing it at 7:15 am did little to increase his inclination to enjoy it. But he had no say in the matter, as the song miraculously played through without being turned off, prompting the next song to begin, and the next, for almost a full half-hour. This rude interruption caused Beckett to sleep through his alarm for five inconvenient minutes, allowing for the shower to be stolen out from under him. Even rushing through his morning routine could not prevent him from being late to class, as he couldn't even make it to the common room in time to walk across campus with Molly.

Everyone's eyes were cast upon him the second the door's hinges wailed at their being used. Trying to lithely weave between desks that were far too small to accommodate the notebooks and laptops that rested upon them, Beckett was deafened by the rustling of his winter coat against itself as he struggled to take it off. His backpack's zipper somehow made more noise than the construction saw outside the room. His notebook paper crinkled when breathed upon, and his pen's click might as well have been a bomb.

Beckett thought that was the worst of it, that his day could get back on track. But his luck seemed to have slept in much as he did. His card wouldn't swipe at the dining hall, forcing him to wait for ten minutes as three different employees huddled around a computer. The entire affair was utterly not worth it; the food was more inedible than usual, and he barely sat down before Molly, Steven, Diana, and Jess had to leave. Then while doing his laundry, Beckett had magically selected the one washing machine that was broken, leaving most of his white and gray clothes tinted blue from the dye of his jeans and soaked so thoroughly that two full hours in the dryer still left everything vaguely damp.

Going to dinner, he couldn't imagine the day getting worse.

"Becky!" His seldom-used nickname floated above the babbling of the dining hall. Long, delicate fingers with vibrant yellow nails waved in a frenzy, showing Beckett the way like an aircraft marshaller.

Molly was the first to notice him.

The table was full of their friends, all practically stacked on top of one another, but the seat next to Molly was left spaciouly alone, saved just for Beckett. Up close, he could see the way Molly's navy-blue lipstick cracked when she smiled, how some of the golden eyeliner transferred to the crease of her lid from the way her eyes scrunched closed in laughter. Molly started catching him up on her day that he missed by minutes, the theme for the weekend's party at her house, and the movie she was anxiously waiting for. Her voice was bright and raucous, her words coming out so fast they were practically tripping over each other to reach his ear.

Shoulders slumping. Jaw loosening. Beckett's laughter trickled out unnoticed. By the time Molly finished her unimpeded rambling, he could barely remember why he had let himself be so tense earlier. Whatever it was didn't matter now.

They stayed until they were kicked out of the dining hall, half an hour after it was supposed to close. Steven and Jess went left towards the library, Diana turned right as she walked behind the building and off campus to make a late-night grocery run, and Beckett walked back to the dorms with Molly. He began his diatribe about his day, finally calmed down enough to talk about it. He added off-handed jokes and dramatization in an attempt to not bring down the residual mood left from dinner.

As he finished his spiel outside of Molly's door, he looked at her for some kind of reaction. Her subdued smile still reached her shining eyes, but this was not the Molly from dinner. This was the Molly only Beckett saw, the one who could be quiet and thoughtful, who didn't force advice and platitudes on someone but just let them lean on her, quietly or not. They stood

face to face, and Molly let there be some quiet in Beckett's hectic day. One minute. Two. And then, in languid movements, her arms circle over his. She raises on her toes to rest her head on his shoulder as she whispers to his ear, "At least you never have to do today again."

And that was perhaps the most distressing moment of the day. The most wicked, cruel, ill-fated moment of the day, as realization smacked him across the face.

Beckett had a crush on Molly.

How was he supposed to deal with that?

unexpected
Shannon Dyke

I thought maybe you
didn't like me sober
until that night
after work
we talked and slept
and so much between
we learned each other's
curves and lines
and connected
with deep breaths
marks on necks and
laying close enough
that I could hear
the drumbeat of your heart
and feel the warmth of your skin
it was something
I'm not used to doing
everything is different
with you
then you were sober
but still said
you liked me

Pollen Licker Frenzy
Ethan Riddle



JULY RAIN IN MAY

Reni Mokrii

My July rain doesn't drop from the heavens.
In May, it's sprayed by people with special machines.
They try to make Moscow streets a bit cleaner
But dust comes back in a moment - just in a minute.

Heat on the ground. Fresh wind. Stuffy air.
Long conversations — wrong or right, fair, unfair.
Weird people, titles, roads, benches
The orientation is lost with no direction

Is this what happiness looks like?
Subjective. Silent. Impressively quiet.
I don't know the answer, but today I will find it.
In the ocean of others' laughter, kisses, moans, smiles.

Someone's hot heart melts in cold, dry hands.
I'm just a witness to this tiny spring dance.
One sip of my cider — watermelon or peach.
I don't get tipsy. Maybe a bit.

Is this what happiness looks like?
With silly jokes and screams of night bikes.
I don't know the answer, but today I will find it.
In this street of unmatchable fonts and mad city lights.

With no crazy mind nor drama nor passion.
I might not be in love nor have any affection.
The wind can be freezing. The air can be stuffy.
The celebration of life does not have to be party.

This May evening is tender like many others.
It's precious with prosiness that does not bother.
The memories will be cleaned by time and water.
Like July rain, they dry out from streets in the morning.

Better Left Unsaid

Laura Bedser

Flash Fiction Contest Winner

My mom and I followed the directions to Jamie's room from the lady at the front desk, navigating the maze of hospital corridors. We only made one wrong turn this time before we found the elevators. I thought about how they rushed him down a hallway like this one on a gurney, his bloody vomit smearing across the white tile floor. I remembered watching the doctors whisk my brother away and then a social worker asking me for my mom's phone number.

My vision was tilted with the past when we got to room five-oh-three. The door was cracked open, and I could hear a quiet voice inside. Jamie's girlfriend, Kate, was sitting on the edge of his bed, clasping his hand. She was wearing his favorite sweatshirt; he was wearing a hospital gown. I tucked myself behind the door so they didn't see me watching.

"I just... God, Jamie. You drank *bleach*?" Her bluntness stunned me. Maybe that was why Jamie liked her. She could acknowledge the things my family was not capable of saying aloud.

He gave a halfhearted smile and rasped, "...thought it was water." She laughed, but it was a humorless sound. Then, she was sobbing, the hysterical type, eyes squeezed shut and everything shaking. Jamie guided her head to his shoulder. He ran his fingers through her wavy hair, clumsily, his hand like that of an uncoordinated child's.

"S'okay," he murmured to her. "S'okay."

She tried to say something else, but the words were blurred and smeared into nothing, like fresh ink under rain.

I couldn't watch anymore. I took a seat in one of the chairs across from his hospital room until I could breathe again.

My mom remained upright. She looked like she wanted to go into the room, but she hesitated, leaning forward on her toes. "We should wait until Kate comes out," she said softly. "She shouldn't have to... to be alone after seeing him."

"She should leave," I said. My eyes were burning. "She should be comforting Jamie. He shouldn't be comforting her."

"I think it's good for him." My mom blinked fast. She looked much older all of a sudden, under the yellow hospital lights. "He needs to see how scared we all were to lose him. I think that's important."

But why could Kate cry in front of him, when I could barely find it within myself to look at him? All I felt was sick to my stomach. My brother almost died, and now there he was, comforting his girlfriend like any of this was normal.

I left to wait in my mom's car.

A Vampire in Tromso

Roman Daniel

Flash Fiction Contest Honorable Mention

Ever heard of Polar Night? Any place above the arctic circle gets a few months, November to January, when the sun never rises. I settled on a small Norwegian city with a view of the Northern lights. It seemed like the perfect place for someone like me. It would be my vacation, so I made the trip North. Nobody noticed a tiny bat in the Maersk box, or an extra set of hands unloading the Ikea truck. I arrived where there was snow under my boots and cold I couldn't feel. State healthcare meant good blood.

Within a week I was over it. The daily threat of being incinerated is scary, but it's exciting. Now there were too many hours in the day. Every time I eat it's just another blond person shivering under too many blankets. I sit in coffee shops and watch as people dressed like I used to dress hurry off to metal concerts. I try to remember the fear of staying out too late.

I'm spending more time inside. Everyone I meet is paler than me. It's as if the snow sat up, put on a parka, and started walking around. I don't read their language, and their voices have too many syllables. Everyone is friendly, and no one is afraid of me. Why would anyone here be afraid of the dark?

It's time for another trip. At the end of the continent the woods end and you can sit and gaze out over the arctic sea. The only sound is the ice flows crashing against each other. I'm going there to wait for the sun.

curse of a realist

Alex Thurtle

Jean Corrie Poetry Contest Winner

i've never been very good at playing pretend.
the tiaras never shimmered as much as i desired,
the weight of their cheap plastic never lightened the heaviness of
tomorrow and yesterday;
the feather boas always shed their pieces much too fast.
i could not bring myself to imagine a world where the props meant
something.
the curse of a realist is a heavy one
because i never learned to look beyond the things i could
see hear touch smell taste.
but, when i did believe in something, i could not stop.
that made it even harder to pretend that we never were something.
how do i pretend to forget the nights we spent debating
philosophy and religion and heaviness and love and lust and death and
hurt and pain and us.
how do i pretend to gloss over the way you held my gaze
much too long
like a toddler clinging to their mother in a grocery store.
how do i pretend that your touch did not
set wildfires along my palms and forearms and chest.
for now though,
i must learn to pretend.
i will learn to put on my plastic dollar-store tiara and my flaky feather boa
and
keep moving.
maybe i'll dream a bit.

A Man is Born
Madeline Marriott

Jean Corrie Poetry Contest Honorable Mention

Today, a man is born into my family.
By age four, he will know how to cheat in battleship.
He will never be allowed to win a game he didn't earn,
because that doesn't teach him anything,
and when he is nine, and beats his grandfather in chess for the first time,
he will get a handshake and a clap on the back,
and his grandfather will cry, hidden by the dark, as he lies in bed that
night.

Today, a man is born into my family.
When he is seven, he will learn to yell with his teeth gritted,
with his lips barely parted, with his face red and contorted.
He will first be its victim, then he'll weaponize it for himself.
Today, a man is born into my family.
When he is ten, he will learn to follow the hockey puck on tv with ease,
and the ice will reflect white and dazzling in his eyes.
When his father takes him to his first game that year,
he will model his posture in the blue plastic chair,
hunched forward, elbows on his knees, tapping his foot.
He will learn about the 60s, the Broad Street Bullies, the electricity of it
all.

He will be nostalgic for it though he never saw it.
Today, a man is born into my family.
When he is sixteen, his father will make him cut off all of his hair
when it inches too close to his shoulders.
He will want to cry, but he won't.
His father thinks he will understand one day, but he won't,
not even when he has kids of his own.

Today, a man is born into my family.
As he grows, he will learn about the men that formed him,
the bricklayers and firefighters,
the exhausted, the angry, the proud, the selfless,
backs broken, hands calloused, chins up, eyes forward.
Today, a man is born into my family.
He will love his father, he will hate him.

Encapsulated in Flesh
Milena Kinga Berestko

H. MacKnight Black Competition in Poetry Honorable Mention

Thunderworld in one breast
Underworld in the other
Her belly ripe
Can give birth to all the she-wolves
Her back the curve of the mountains
Her thighs round and wide
Holding the divine feminine and oceans between them
Her eyes clairvoyant and
Hands like wooden planks that
Can carry all
She is the strength, past, and future
Encapsulated in flesh

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Join our mailing list to find out when and where meetings will be held.

The board would like to thank the club for another amazing year. We have dedicated many years at Lafayette to this magazine and we could not have had the pleasure to do so without our contributors, staff members, or the support of the college faculty.

A special thank you goes out to all our graduating seniors. We wish you all the best and will miss you all dearly.