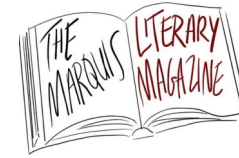




The Marquis Literary Magazine

Volume 43



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Table of Contents

Jefery Alexander	
<i>Love to a Fly</i>	29
Robert Armknecht	
<i>Desert Lights</i>	61
<i>Between My Fingers</i>	81
<i>Florescent Love</i>	95
Marissa Bocchiaro	
<i>galaxy</i>	24
<i>amethyst</i>	25
<i>earth</i>	26
<i>elements</i>	26
<i>ocean</i>	27
<i>ink self portrait</i>	35
<i>pencil self portrait</i>	35
<i>florence</i>	50
<i>skull</i>	77
<i>colordrain</i>	88
<i>shutters</i>	97
<i>capri</i>	100
<i>tattoo</i>	103
Sarah Candido	
<i>Cassandra</i>	56
Cynthia Capotosto	
<i>9/11</i>	82
Kelly Carlotz	
<i>Four Years</i>	14
Mia Coutinho	
<i>Take Five</i>	19
<i>Study of Ballerina II</i>	21
<i>Navasana</i>	58

Caroline DiTrollo	
<i>no one stole your damn heart</i>	49
Shannon Dyke	
<i>him</i>	66
<i>ended</i>	98
Zahra Gandhi	
<i>Keyboard, 2012</i>	17
Rochelle Greenridge	
<i>Controversial Debate Topics of the 21st century</i>	36
Kyle Low	
<i>Mothman Finds Love</i>	30
<i>A Cosplayer's Dream</i>	31
<i>The Most Important Thing At Lafayette College</i>	111
Sarah Mastrocola	
<i>Ballerina</i>	20
<i>Wasted Time</i>	68
Lindsey Mauriello	
<i>Almost Routine</i>	1
<i>False Representation</i>	39
<i>Mother Morphine</i>	89
<i>College Shower</i>	92
Kaitlin McNamara	
<i>Paranoia</i>	73
<i>to remember/to never forget</i>	86
<i>Of all the things you could have been</i>	94

Caroline McParland

The Forbidden Kiss 51

Hoodie 96

Maya Nylund

Bad Backs 37

Ashley Sanchez-Payano

Where Do I Belong? 105

Sarah Scally

A Guarded Message 2

What Do I Know? 22

Worth at War 38

Claim 52

Women of Marble and Jewels 54

Apollo Named This Flower 57

Will I Ever Get Over Him?/ Will She Ever Get Over Me? 59

Gamble 74

There Were Soldiers 78

Raindrops on Tree Trunks 85

At the Edge 107

Olivia Faye Scott

RE: You and Me 3

Julia Soares

Raindrops 16

Icy Fear 65

AJ Traub

The Day of Christmas 28

How a Cards Against Humanity Card was Created 33

nystagmus 70

Audioverwhelmed 71

They told me I look like her 84

From the Unofficial Therapist 104

Stories from the Arts Trail 108

Helena VanNatter

Lucky Daze 12

Beaten Path 13

Early Bird 15

Beware of Dragon 32

The Rainbow, Period 34

Patriarchy 48

Monarchy 53

Ripening 55

Morning Crash 62

A Possibility 63

Anything for the Shot 64

Puddled 67

Unfocused 69

Look Up 72

Early Bloomer 91

Crushed 93

A Verrazano Bridge Sunset 99

A Decade's Difference 101

A Dot of Hope 102

Will I Bloom? 106

Seeing Triple 109

Brambles 110

Show Of Delights Contest

<i>Carpool Karaoke</i>	1st Place	Caitlyn Carr	121
<i>Photographs</i>	2nd Place	Evan (Cuong) Vu	117
<i>That Night</i>	2nd Place	Evan (Cuong) Vu	119
<i>Sunbutter and the Toilet Kit</i>	Honorable Mention	Jennie Richardson	116

Flash Fiction Contest

<i>A Mother's Suicide Note</i>	Winner	Keeshawn Murphy	130
<i>The Creek</i>	Honorable Mention	Zahra Gandhi	128
<i>Inertia</i>	Honorable Mention	Sarah Scally	127
<i>Dusie's Babies</i>	Honorable Mention	Jennie Richardson	125
<i>Post Apocalyptic Pop Tart</i>	Honorable Mention	Roman Daniel	123

H. MacKnight Black Competition in Poetry

<i>To Go Back</i>	Honorable Mention	Mia Coutinho	133
<i>aloneness</i>	Honorable Mention	Marcy Laufer	131

Jean Corrie Competition in Poetry

<i>Psalm for Claire Fisher</i>	Winner	Maya Nylund	139
<i>What do Criminals Look Like?</i>	Honorable Mention	Fatimata Cham	136

Almost Routine

Lindsey Mauriello

It was the fact she hadn't been home in two weeks, three days, and seven hours. That I felt every moment of her absence tick by like the steady bass line of a funeral march. And yet we walked through the door, and we fell into our Friday night routine as easily as I can fall into her eyes. Without speaking, I know to call the restaurant while she goes to get changed. I know she will walk out of our room wearing old light blue shorts that match her favorite salmon tank top, which has a few too many holes in it, so she only wears them around the apartment. The guy at the pizza place, who's name we can never remember, knows exactly what we'll order. Half pepperoni and bacon, my half plain. We both know the order total, method of payment, address, and instructions for delivery.

It was the fact I was right about the blanket. The cheap blanket on clearance from some big-box store. The soft, ugly, lime green blanket with cartoonishly simple flowers dotting the surface. But because the flowers were light blue and a pink that looked like her salmon top. The one she always forgot to wash. So, when she shouted from the room that her blanket was missing, I knew to yell back to check the dryer, where I had left it so it would be warm for her. It was the smile that hurt my cheeks when I saw her walk past me, wrapped tightly like a neon, moldy burrito, burying her nose into her shoulder to inhale the clean scent of detergent.

It was the fact that when I walked into the living room with the food, she already had the coffee table set with plates, napkins, and my favorite drink. That she made popcorn, and I could smell the special garlic butter I usually add reeking out of the bag, just the way I like it and she pretends to. The cat was curled onto her lap, already asleep and gently purring, comfortable with her in a way he never is with me. She's laughing at something on her phone, and she beckons me closer to show me. And maybe we've been together too long, but I fell into a fit of giggles synced with hers.

It was the fact that she tried to snatch the box away from me, like she always does, so I was already moving my arm back and tapping my finger to my cheek. That I didn't even have to look to know she was pouting. That when she gave me a peck, my heart raced, forcing me to surrender the pizza.

So, when she asked me what I wanted to watch through a half-chewed mouthful of food, I could only answer with, "Will you marry me?"



A Guarded Message

Sarah Scally

RE: You and Me

Olivia Faye Scott

Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu> Tue, Sep 3, 2:13 pm
to Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu>
Subject: I found your student ID!

Hello!

I found your student ID on the ground outside the science building. I would be panicking if I lost mine, so I grabbed it for you! I hope I guessed your email correctly. Do you want to meet up so I can return it to you? I might have a hard time finding our meeting place though, I'm a freshman and I keep getting lost!!

Let me know :)
-Aubrey Fletcher

Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu> Tue, Sep 3, 3:30 pm
to Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu>
Subject: RE: I found your student ID!

My Savior:

Oh my God, THANK YOU SO MUCH. I knew something like this was going to happen. It's only day two and everything is already going wrong (I'm also a first-year). Could we meet at the library? I figure that might be a place we both know? Are you free later today?

Thank you SO MUCH
-Cali (aka Damsel In Distress)

Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu> Tue, Sep 3, 3:34 pm
to Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu>
Subject: RE: RE: I found your student ID!

Damsel in Distress:

No problem, I'm glad I could help! Yeah, we can totally meet at the library! Are you free at like 5:00? Email me back if that doesn't work, otherwise I'll see you then!

-Aubrey (Your Savior)

P.S. I'm sorry that things are going wrong! I hope things get better for you soon :) we can talk about it if you want?

Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu> Wed, Sep 4, 9:32 am
to Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu>
Subject: thank you

Hey Savior,

I just wanted to say thank you again. I can't tell you how much I appreciate you reaching out to me. More than that, thank you for listening. I know you probably don't care about a complete stranger's problems, but you sat through my rant anyway. It's been tough and you made me feel so much better. I really, really appreciate that. Let me know if you're in need of a good monologue or a meal swipe- I owe you one.

-Cali (Damsel)

Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu> Wed, Sep 4, 1:20 pm
to Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu>
Subject: RE: Thanks again!!!

Damsel:

What a coincidence that we bumped into each other this morning! Thanks for pointing me in the right direction, I'm completely hopeless with maps. (I did make it to class on time, if you were wondering!)

I didn't see your email until after we spoke! Cali, you don't owe me anything, I was more than happy to help out. Remember it's ok to ask for help :)

-Aubrey (Hopelessly Lost Savior)

P.S. Maybe we should just text instead of sending emails??? 372-358-7284 :)

P.P.S. I was too nervous to tell you in person, but I really liked your hair today :)

Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu> Sat, Oct 12, 3:24 am
to Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu>
Subject: ur a dork
ATTACHMENT: formalposter2020.jpeg

hey loser

did u see theres gonan be a fromal next weeeek
we shuld go
be my date bcause bois succ
thank
love
damsel

Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu> Sat, Oct 12, 8:43 am
to Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu>
Subject: RE: ur a dork

Drunk Damsel:

Oh my God, I cannot believe you DRUNK EMAILED ME. Literally only you!!!
If Sober Damsel still wants to go to formal, I will absolutely go with her!
Sounds like fun and as a giant lesbian I agree that bois succ

Love
Aubrey (Loser)

PS. I've kind of noticed that you've been staying up late more often than usual? Going out on the weekends is great of course but like during the week you seem more and more tired. Is everything ok?

Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu> Sat, Oct 12, 1:35 pm
to Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu>

Subject: RE: RE: ur a dork

Loser,

...oh my god. DELETE THAT EMAIL.
But Sober Damsel definitely still wants to go to formal so let's do that

Love
Cali (Sober Damsel)

P.S. yeah I'm fine just having a hard time sleeping :) thanks for asking

Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu> Sun, Nov 18, 2:56 am
to Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu>
Subject: grand theft sweater

Damsel,

I was gonna text you, but I think you fell asleep on the phone with me and I didn't want to make your phone buzz against your face and wake you up!

I just realized I still have the sweater I stole from you after formal last month! Didn't even notice until my mom washed it with my laundry. Remind me to give it back when I get to campus :)

Love
Aubrey

Cali Farraday <farradaycali@umhc.edu> Sun, Nov 18, 3:24 pm
to Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu>
Subject: RE: grand theft sweater

Hey Savior,
Thanks for emailing, I haven't slept in a while and idk if I could have drifted off again if you'd woken me up!

You can hold onto the sweater if you want, I don't wear it much :)

Can't believe you went home for the weekend and abandoned me :(I miss you. Come back soon please

Love
Damsel

Aubrey Fletcher < fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu > Tue, Dec 29, 3:34 pm
to Cali Farraday < farradaycali@umhc.edu >
Subject: Long time no text??? :/

Damsel!

You haven't responded to any of my text messages in a few days, so I thought I would go back to our roots with an email ;) Where've you been?? I had so much fun FaceTiming on Christmas, I'd love to hear from you again! I hope you're enjoying Winter Break!

I miss your voice, get back to me soon!

-Love, Savior!

Aubrey Fletcher < fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu > Thu, Jan 1, 12:03 am
to Cali Farraday < farradaycali@umhc.edu >
Subject: Happy New Year!!!!

HAPPY NEW YEAR, DAMSEL!!!!

Best wishes to you and your family for a happy and healthy year!!!

I really really miss you! Please text me soon!

-Savior <3

Aubrey Fletcher < fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu > Wed, Jan 7, 1:23 pm
to Cali Farraday < farradaycali@umhc.edu >
Subject: Everything ok??

Hey Damsel,

I'm starting to get worried. Is everything ok? What's going on? Did I do something or say something to offend you? I hope you know that you're the

the best friend I've ever had. I don't want to lose you. Please, please respond.

Aubrey Fletcher < fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu > Fri, Jan 9, 2:43 am
to Cali Farraday < farradaycali@umhc.edu >
Subject: All the things I should have told you

Damsel:

You've been silent for so long, I'm starting to realize that something may have happened and I wasn't there for you. Or I did something that upset you. Either way, I should have pushed harder when you told me you were OK. I shouldn't have believed you. I should have recognized all those sleepless nights and done something about it. I'm so, so sorry. I've been a terrible friend.

But the truth is that I don't want to be your friend. I think you are exceptional and beautiful and I've had feelings for you since the moment I handed you your Student ID in the library. I was so upset when my mom washed your sweater because it doesn't smell like you anymore. I was lying when I said I didn't notice I still had it. I used to wear it and imagine you were with me when I missed you, which was always.

I should have told you so long ago. I feel like I've missed my chance, and if I have it's my own fault. I just want you to know.

Yours- really, truly, hopelessly yours-
Aubrey (failed savior)

Aubrey Fletcher < fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu > Mon, Jan 12, 8:34 am
to Cali Farraday < farradaycali@umhc.edu >
Subject: Hey :)

Cali,

I'm really sorry about that last email. I should have kept my feelings to myself! Our friendship is so important to me and I don't want to ruin it. Please don't feel obligated to respond or acknowledge it, I promise I won't act any differently around you as I did last semester :)

Speaking of, welcome to Day One of our second semester! Maybe I'll see you around campus soon?

-Aubrey :)

IT support <ITsupport@umhc.edu> Mon, Jan 12, 8:34 am
to Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu>
Subject: ERROR

ERROR 306: The address you are trying to reach [<FARRADAY-CALI@umhc.edu>] has been deactivated or is otherwise unavailable.
Please check the spelling of the address and try again.

Cali Farraday <cali.f263@gmail.com> Wed, Jan 14, 4:34 pm
to Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu>
Subject: you and me

Aubrey, my savior, my loser:

The plan was to stay silent forever, but after your last few emails I just couldn't do it. How do I even begin to apologize? I shouldn't have disappeared on you. I should have said something. I should have done a million things differently, but I can't change them now, so I'm just going to try to explain.

The truth is that my mom has been really really sick for years now. She started to get worse while I was at college and it tore me up to think that she was suffering and I wasn't there for her. That's why I couldn't sleep. I barely studied. I failed two of my classes and got a D in the other two. The day after Christmas, she took a turn and we had to rush her to the hospital. I was so so scared.

I called school and told them I was dropping out. I thought there was no way I'd be able to survive being away from my mom again. But when she found out, she was PISSED. She told me I had to call again and re-enroll. We had a shouting match in the middle of the hospital. It was pretty bad.

After a few days, we got a new doctor and he decided to try a new treatment on her. It's pretty experimental but it actually seems to be working??? I'm scared to have hope, but I'm trying. My mom is really optimistic. We made

up and decided on a compromise. I'm going to take a semester off and come back next year after I've gathered myself a little.

I closed myself off from you and I shouldn't have done that. You've always been there for me and you're the reason I survived until the end of the semester. Every call, every text, every email was a relief from everything that was going on. I have you to thank for so much and I'm so sorry that I let you down.

If you still feel the way you felt about me in your last email- but I understand if you don't- I want you to know that I feel the same way. I didn't think I would ever have a chance with you, and it's possible that I still don't, but you are the kindest and most radiant human being that I've ever met and I adore you. I don't deserve your forgiveness, but would you consider it anyway?

Love,
Cali (your Damsel in more distress than usual)

P.S. I have to come to school next week to do some paperwork. Maybe we could go on a proper date?

Aubrey Fletcher <fletcheraubrey@umhc.edu> Wed, Jan 14, 4:40 pm
to Cali Farraday <cali.f263@gmail.com>
Subject: RE: you and me

My Damsel:

I had no idea about what was going on with your mom. I'm so sorry, I can't imagine how hard that must be. I am so, so glad to hear that she's getting better! Please give her a hug from me and tell me if there's anything I can do for her or your family.

I can't say that I'm not upset that you won't be here this semester, but I'm glad you're not leaving forever! I'm counting down the days until you'll be back and we can have dinner together and take our walks and go to formals together again.

In terms of letting me down, you haven't. I totally, completely understand why you closed yourself off. In terms of my forgiveness- it's yours! And my heart is yours, and I am yours. I still feel the same way and I won't embarrass

myself by describing how I danced around my room when I read that part of your email!!!

Thank you for explaining everything! And thank you for dropping your ID. Sending you an email was the best decision I've ever made.

Love,
Your Savior, your Loser, your Aubrey <3
P.S. I thought you'd never ask!!!



Lucky Daze
Helena VanNatter



Beaten Path
Helena VanNatter

Four Years

Kelly Carlutz

SAT'S and ACT's
It's all about the score
Financial aid, decisions made
The final campus tour

College dorms, new found norms
Laundry's such a bore
Greek filled life, adventure rife
Lifetime bonds so pure

Study abroad, achievements awed
The thirst to make a mark
Wisdom gained, confidence plain
Successful track embarked

Lessons learned, diplomas earned
Four years gone too fast
Caps tossed high, the future nigh
Memories made to last



Early Bird
Helena VanNatter



Raindrops
Julia Soares

Keyboard, 2012

Zahra Gandhi

I loved the old one so much,
despite not knowing enough numbers to assign all the keys,
because it played sounds I don't think I'll ever hear again.
It was the star of every playdate,
blasting relics from the '80s we had never heard before,
yet we sang along to like we were there.

Soon, we sent the old one away
to a concert hall, a shop, a warehouse.
I liked to believe it made its way to another child,
bringing along its mysterious melodies,
ready to be the star again.

Meanwhile, I was left a new one.
It had a much wider stand.
All 88 keys.
Fewer sounds:
Grand piano, jazz organ, harpsichord, and, of course, electric pianos 1
and 2.
No songs.

With a new instrument came a new attitude.

My instructor had tired of the mauve-flowered wallpaper
and the convulsing bronze pipes
that framed the shabby side room of the veterans organization/post office
at which we held our weekly lessons.
He boasted about the change like a once-in-a-lifetime business opportunity:
"You need an electric piano"
"You're getting better at it"
"You should take it more seriously"
Because he
was going to prime me for Carnegie Hall.

So I, jaded by my new prodigy-producer,
swapped the days of half-hearted key pushing

for the parachute of high-school band.

Playing pieces in a group like swimming with floaties.
The piano in my room, covered by a blanket, collecting dust.

A few days ago I went to clean the carpet around it,
and when I leaned over a little too far,
An erratic set of sounds shoved me away.
The power button was still on.



Take Five
Mia Coutinho

Ballerina

Sarah Mastrocola

Her tippy-toes go pitter patter.
See her spin and spin and spin
like a little toy swinging from a mobile,
whizzed into a twirl by a baby's curious foot.
Watch her glissade and – ah!
She leaps as high as Heaven,
as if lifted by an angel's hand.
A breath of release and she's free
to float back down like a delicate bubble
and be carried away with the swirling flute.
Her shiny blush slippers kiss the floor
and she begins again to spin,
her legs as thin as knitting needles,
swiftly weaving in and out of yarn.
A perfect stitch, she never wobbles or strays
until her garment is complete and,
like a fairy upon a rose petal, she lands
center stage under the rays of the spotlight.



Study of Ballerina II
Mia Coutinho

What Do I Know?

Sarah Scally

Ask what I know of the universe
I will wax poetic about the stars,
or perhaps spit out facts about the Sun.
But what can I know if I cannot fly?
And yet, I sit here staring up at the sky
knowing more about it than of you.

Standing right in front of me, it seems, you
are more elusive than any universe
that I have seen in the night sky.
This is not to compare you to the stars
but to say that talking to you is like flight,
I'm Icarus on the way to his Sun.

Now it seems I think you are the Sun,
no, I am aware of how human you
are. I truly mean talking to you is flying,
like making journeys out into the universe,
trying to reach and study every seen star.
Speaking to you would be touching the sky,

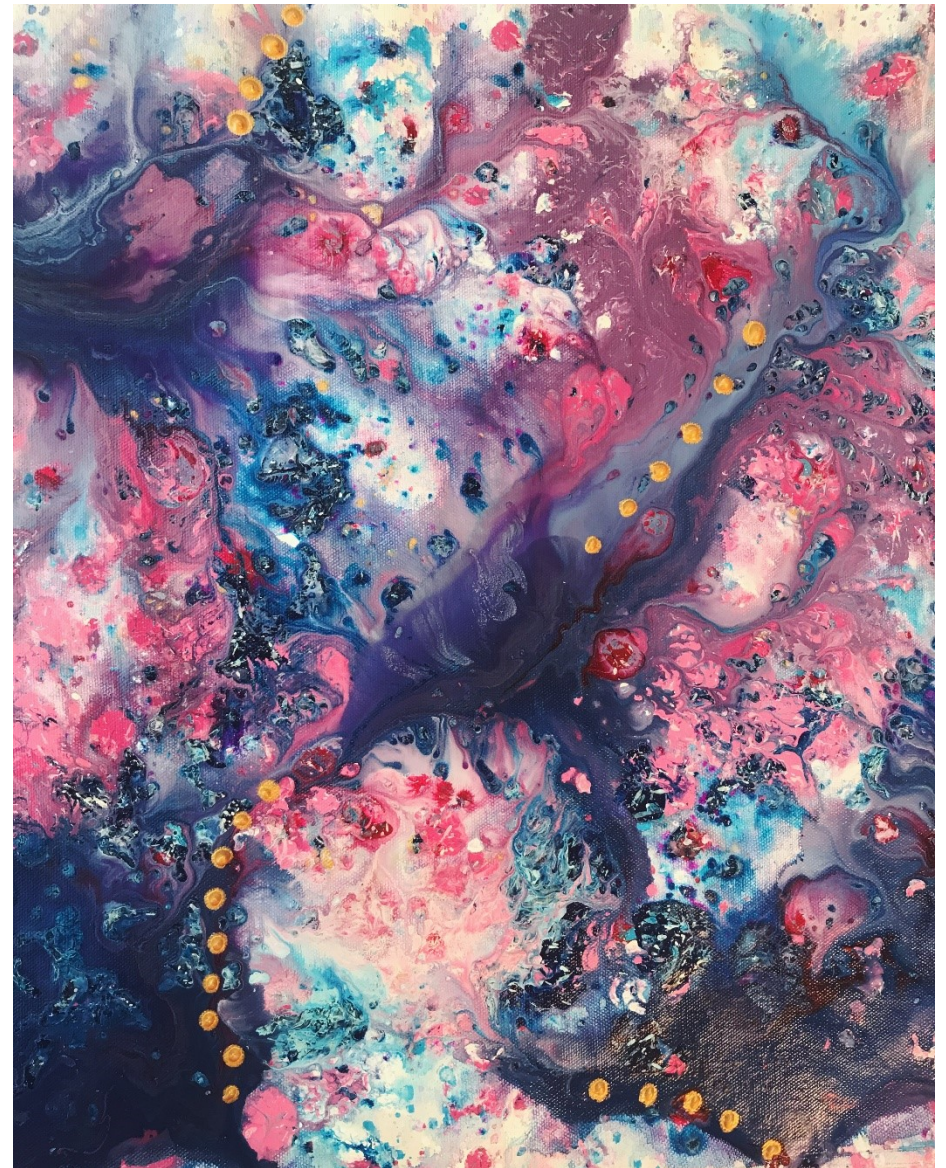
It's finding the point where air turns to sky,
it's more difficult than staring at suns
or naming all of the different stars.
When asked what the scariest thing is-- you
come to mind before anything else in the universe.
And though I will not deny, I want to fly,

I can settle for sight. I know flying
will likely disturb the perfect night skies
and I am not one to throw the universe
out of balance. I'm here to see the sun
not to reach it, I am here to see you
and to dream about us out among the stars.

But there are reasons that humans aren't stars.
There are reasons we were not made to fly.
Why am I scared at the mere thought of you?
Why I'm simply writing about the sky
and not trying to make myself a sun?
I know my space in this small universe.

I know you and I don't belong with the stars
That the universe didn't want us to fly
And the sky will only ever hold the sun.

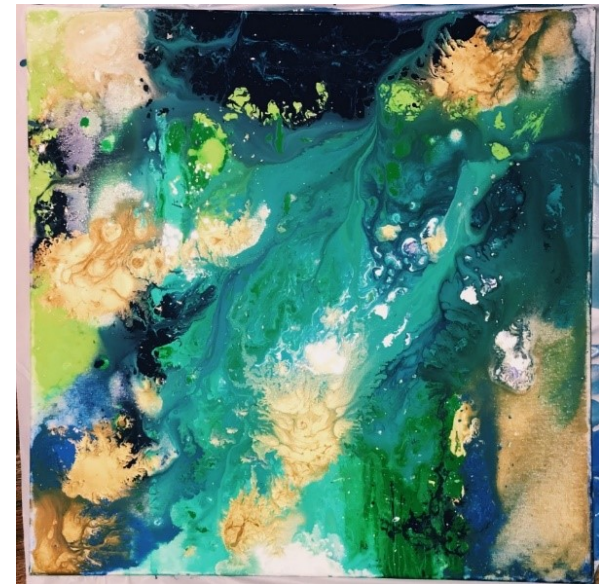
But can my space in this small universe be by your side?



galaxy
Marissa Bocchiaro



amethyst
Marissa Bocchiaro



earth
Marissa Bocchiaro



elements
Marissa Bocchiaro



ocean
Marissa Bocchiaro

The Day of Christmas

AJ Traub

'Tis the day of Christmas and all through the pew,
not a single Christian suspects I'm a Jew.
Down the aisle a five-year old barrels,
and now it's time to sing several carols.
The lyrics are fun but the singing's appalling,
chamber choir is no one here's calling.
They read some stories from the bible and then
everyone stands up and chants "Amen."
The service is over but no one says hi,
I get very few looks as churchgoers pass by.
No one's giving me a gift? It's my birthday, that's not right;
No one noticed I'd risen. I guess they thought I'd be white.

Love to a Fly

Jefery Alexander

love is an egg, and another, and another,
and three hundred others
that may never mature
to be something foul, something detestable, something putrid
which can only be enjoyed by a fly.

love is a small,
vulnerable
crawling
larvae
desperately
searching
for a sliver of salvation in the folds of
trash, of filth.

love is a cocoon,
a shell,
a home,
a place where the larvae hopes to become a fly
whether alone or with a swarm.

love is the sweet nectar on the gentle leaves
of a venus flytrap.

love, from the perspective of a fly, is twenty-four short lines.
from egg, to larvae, to pupa, to fly,
wallowing in their filth, their trash, their pupa, their nectar,
because to a fly, love is —



Mothman Finds Love

Kyle Low



A Cosplayer's Dream
Kyle Low



Beware of Dragon
Helena VanNatter

How a Cards Against Humanity Card was Created

AJ Traub

It was just an average Wednesday when I decided I wanted to start playing basketball. I am generally quite athletic so I figured I could see if I am any good at it. I dialed the sporting goods store when my neighbor just strutted in and started talking to me. He started yelling something about borrowing my lawn mower, so I had to tell the employee on the phone to wait for a minute. I told the neighbor that he wasn't to lay a damn finger on my lawn mower after he fucked up my screwdriver last time. I was asking about the different brands that sold basketballs when my neighbor called me a bitch. It was just a second after that my boyfriend Richard's phone number showed up on the phone. I told the store employee to hold as I asked "What?!" a little louder than I intended. He asked me if we could talk about our relationship and my head was spinning. I told Richard to call me back another time, but he was persistent. I had just switched back to the sporting goods store to apologize to the employee when I saw my neighbor running across the front lawn with my mower in his thieving hands. I ran outside and yelled, "Stop! I can't handle *three dicks at the same time!*"

The Rainbow, Period

Helena VanNatter

Red
All I see is red
Pain, anger, blood;
But I'm also seeing orange for the sun that may shine tomorrow;
I'm seeing a little yellow, hope for a brighter future;
Some slight green for the jealousy I have of my friends seeing success;
Blue is there too, because the sadness encompasses me;
A bit of purple because I want to be better;
But mostly, I just see
Red.



ink self portrait
Marissa Bocchiaro



pencil self portrait
Marissa Bocchiaro

Controversial Debate Topics of the 21st century

Rochelle Greenridge

Sock-sock-shoe-shoe or sock-shoe-sock-shoe? Ahhh yes what a fine question in structuring opposition. Only a barbarian would choose the latter. Let's not stop with that question. More heated debates must be considered. Milk before cereal or cereal before milk?

Bad Backs

Maya Nylund

my friends and I in the 98th percentile of PSAT test-takers
took the burden of the sky onto our shoulders
because Atlas dared us too
our reflections were wrong when they called us spineless,
our playlists off base when they told us we were
born into this world to die and our mortal geniuses were mortal
we could hold the sky! we were gods amongst demigods
and titans, just like mom and dad and our third-grade
English teachers had always informed us
then we looked around and saw that
Atlas had left us
the dare was not so exhilarating any more
we felt the weight hit our shoulders after the all-nighter
we all pulled to finish our AP Statistics presentations so
that we could get good grades and go to good colleges
and make good mortal geniuses that proved to be more
than mortal. our necks ached, and our joints told us
they wished we could forget the damn sky and
go to the gym every once in a while and
stop slouching when we read
we tried to convince them that
the sky was too important
we held it up for others
it was a community service project
if we did not hold it, it'd crush us all
they did not believe us and we did not believe us either
still I am bracing the sky and I don't eat
breakfast when I am running late
and one day we will all be forty and still
skipping breakfast to get ahead of traffic,
still trying to convince our joints it was all worth it,
and all we will have to show for our mortal geniuses
will be blank Word docs and bad backs

Worth at War

Sarah Scally

*Inspired by Helen Menyer nee Stevenson's
Letters to her family during the Korean War
Found in Skillman Libraries Special Collection*

the others stay away from married men
but i pity them the most in some ways.
the rest of the girls scurry off and then
the men are left, nothing to do all day.
they are much more dependent on their wives
not only in menial tasks, but all!
listening is worth more than realized,
even more than letters holding wives scrawl.
so i smiled and listened, perhaps too much,
grew closer and closer to a soldier.
listening is still worth less than a touch,
my morality given cold shoulder,
i smile again and i kiss him once more
pretending cheating is worth less at war.

False Representation

Lindsey Mauriello

It was Thursday, ten o'clock at night, that a knock echoed through the house, cutting through the drowning sound of a northeastern thunder-storm.

Her pupils were blown wide like a cat who has just come upstairs from a pitch-black basement. She was trembling, not from the downpour that drenched her down to the bone, but from the effort to breathe between sobs. Her mascara never stood a chance, as it streaked down her cheeks like claw marks. I had seen this once before with another woman I loved. So to see Layla, clutching herself in a hug to keep all the pieces from spilling out and getting washed away by the pounding rain, set off a five-alarm fire ringing through my ears.

We didn't talk right away. I gave her a towel, sweatpants, one of my t-shirts, and showed her how to work the shower. I checked on Maisie. Fast asleep with her cloud night light and stuffed rainbow spotted giraffe scaring away the monsters, she was fine. The water turned off and I was still standing in her doorway until the low groans of the floors in the hallway pulled me back to Layla. No makeup, dark hair still wet and stringy, looking ten years younger in my far too large clothes, but the weight piled high across her shoulders, a weight that would make Atlas wince, stole her youthful, radiating joy.

A bottle of wine and a box of tissues later, she was at least smiling. After splitting the last pint and a half of Breyers cookie dough, she had chuckled once despite herself. After putting an ice pack on the black eye that was forming, she started to talk.

One drunken threat whispered between hiccups and kissed foreheads, and now I'm being held in the police station.

I don't know why they moved me out of my cell. The only times they seem to move me are for questioning, but that song and dance already had its time in the spotlight today. For the past three days, it has been constant and uncompromising interrogation their questions and my answers never changing. Then they try to bait me in the most comically unoriginal ways possible.

"You know, she doesn't like this either. I get it, you're both getting tired, we've seen this plenty before. It's a shame, really. I thought she loved you."

"I'm sure you did."

"She started to rat on you. She says you tried to kiss her multiple times before that night. Before his affairs. Do you have any idea why she would say that?"

"Nope."

"Are you denying it?"

"Yes. Because she didn't say it."

"How can you be so sure?"

"This is the fifth time you've tried some crime show psycho-mind-manipulation trap, so excuse me if you don't seem to be the most credible source."

"But you had feelings for her, right? You two, together all those days. She was playing with your daughter in the park, buying her clothes and doing her hair, helping you pick out groceries. It was all a cute fantasy you liked to live in, wasn't it? Playing house?"

"Nope."

"Come on, seriously? Not even deep down? Did you repress those thoughts so much you can't even admit them to me?"

"I know my rights."

"Then call for a lawyer if you won't talk."

"My lawyer is out of state, and I'd rather wait to give her a call until you can present any actual evidence. Or charge me. You can only hold me for so long."

"In no rush to see your daughter then? Maisie okay staying at home alone at seven years old?"

"She's with my in-laws, out of town."

"That's odd, that they would be so willing to lend a helping hand to you so generously."

"The babysitting bill is being mailed to the station, so what do I care how big the tab is?"

"They charge you?"

"It's a joke. I know I've been kept pretty isolated, but they still have those in the world, right?"

"Did Maisie stay with your in-laws the night of the murder?"

"No. No one would make it that obvious they committed a crime. Not that I did, obviously."

Maybe that was too brazen. A little too confident. After that, he just pressed his mouth into a tight line, nodded his head, causing the lights to reflect off the sweat sheen on his bald scalp, and tapped his fingers on the table, until he finally left.

At this point, there is nothing I can do or say that will lessen their suspicion. With Jacqueline bringing every major news outlet into town to collectively breathe down the police's back, they are rushing, trying to find any bit of progress they made so they can parade it in front of the cameras. It looks like I'm the progress for the week. Which is unfortunate, because I did it.

It was a perfect day. A chilly breeze swept a few half yellow leaves

away while rattling the windchimes that dangled from the branches. The flowers were still in bloom, as open and vibrant as they had been all summer. But the occasional crunch of dead leaves beneath my feet and the childless streets in the middle afternoon hinted that summer was officially turning to fall.

My feet were rhythmically pounding against the gravel of side streets, my breath came in wheezes, as I tried to accelerate my pace. I was almost at Layla's. My chest was tight, from what, I can't specify. I'm always nervous on that side of town, the wealthier side, despite having lived here for longer than I can remember. Each estate grander than the next, sitting far back from the street, with perfectly manicured lawns, and driveways that disappear behind the house, because God forbid anyone sees the garage. That area doesn't fit in my town; the Glenbrook that I was raised in.

But there were other things on my mind. While I always get short of breath around Layla, that day was slightly different. It wasn't an average visit. I went to walk through a condemned man's house, deciding how best to stage our crime as someone else's. How best to murder him.

*It was the first time I called it murder. Something about that made it too large, too somber, too malicious. It's something I still wrestle with. What gave me the right to decide who lives and who dies? What crime did Warren commit that was so atrocious? What had he done? Cheated? Objectified Layla, hit her once? Are those crimes, *illegal crimes*, that a judge could carry out the same sentence for? Can they only be made right with another, more horrific offense? While he may not be a saint, he was better than me. Oh my God, he was better than me. I am the knowing participant in Layla's affair. I can't feign ignorance of their relationship; we both went into this understanding fully what it meant. And to keep this beautiful, dangerous secret, to keep Layla for myself and to keep him away from her, I murdered the sinner who will spend his time in Hell laughing, waiting for when I fall to meet him. What never-ending circle did I begin? Warren cheated on Jacqueline, Jacqueline was publicly humiliated, Warren cheated on Layla, so Layla cheated on Warren, I killed Warren. What would be next? What's worse than murder?*

There was a cherry mahogany door, decorated with an ornate gold knocker. I could have turned around, right then, and left. Walked back to my house, called her, and said that we took this joke too far. That she should just divorce him, take him to court, and have him sign monthly alimony checks larger than my salary. I could have done it.

A click came from within the door. The knob rotated. Hinges squeaked. And there she was. Dark brunette hair braided tightly and pinned in an updo, wearing a baby pink sundress spotted with roses that could have been stolen from the bushes under her bay windows and a faded white apron draped over her front. She simply looked up at me, sage green eyes crinkling

as her ruby stained lips stretched into a grin, and I couldn't seem to move. I could only smile back with soft eyes.

"Eli, you made it."

My casual chuckle came out broken, my fear held me hostage in one last moment of hesitation. But she smiled. I had let my muscles slacken and my guard down. I could never be afraid around her. "Of course, wouldn't miss it for the world." She stepped to the side and pulled the door open wider, gracefully extending an arm to welcome me in.

Standing in the foyer, two things became clear. One, it was very easy to see why this house would be targeted for a robbery. Two, it was even easier to see why Layla spent as little time in her house as possible. The white marble floors, winding staircase with black iron railing, and crystal chandelier all make for a cold, daunting impression. There is a table against the wall with nothing but a jade vase holding a pastel bouquet and one gold picture frame from Layla and Warren's wedding, centered underneath a thinly framed mirror. The walls are also white, I had to squint despite being inside, and the only interruptions are a few impersonal abstract paintings with no meaning to them. The grandeur is offensively tacky, existing only to prove how much money he had to burn. And among these towering monuments to obscene wealth, she had never before looked so small.

Her bare feet might have frozen together from standing on the cold stone floor for too long, and her hands were clasped delicately in front of her, back rigid and head lowered, as if afraid to make eye contact with me. That woman, who can chase my seven-year-old around the park for hours gleefully screaming together, who fully bends in half to cackle at my dad jokes in the middle of the grocery store, who dances around my tiny ranch house while helping me prepare dinner, is standing as still as the Greco-Roman columns that support the portico outside.

A smell wafted through the house toward me. She was baking.

"Shortbread cookies. Warren's favorite. He's been a little grumpy lately, I figured I would surprise him, cheer him up a bit." She padded her way to the kitchen, her steps not making a sound, as I followed close behind, every footfall echoing. The timer counted down the last twenty seconds and Layla prepped the cooling racks before she put on her matching pink oven mitts and removed the tray of golden biscuits. She quickly transferred each treat off the baking sheet, her back to me.

I had hoped he would choke on them, briefly wondering if that was her new plan. It wasn't.

We wandered through room after room. One painting, a one-of-a-kind, was simply a gray canvas ruined by dry brush strokes that cut through the paint.

I had skewered it onto a senseless statue on an end table. The jade vase was thrown against the floor with a vengeance. It was a gift from Layla's mother-in-law, apparently a replica of the one she gave to Warren's first wife. Their wedding picture also sat face down on the stone, with a halo of glass shards around it. But the real mess was upstairs.

She turned further down the hallway to the left, standing in front of a door. "The master suite is in here," her honey voice turned metallic. She looked at me for courage, wincing as she walked in. My stomach dropped. It took her a few deep breaths before she could keep going, cleaning some of the furniture to distract herself. "Right, so, jewelry boxes on each dresser. His is mostly filled with cufflinks and his college ring, and mine is packed with everything from necklaces to earrings to bracelets, all of it is worth a small fortune. Be sure to grab from them, and just dump them down the sewer drain. I'll pull out the few I want to keep that morning, everything else is fair game." She was already pushing me out of the door, slammed it close behind us before sucking in a gulp of air.

"Sorry about that, I just-" she trembled again, just like that night, "I hate having to sleep next to that abusive, disgusting son of a-, I-I can't wait for this to be over." I wanted to hug her, to cradle her in my arms, squeeze Warren's darkness out of her, but Layla stormed to the end of the hall, shoved the door open, and headed straight for a safe.

"Here is his office, you'll probably find him here, and that's good since he keeps his stupid safe here as well. The combo is Jacqueline's birthday, in UK notation, 13-11-70-"

"Wait," I interrupted, "he didn't change it?"

"No, he changed it to her birthday. Who would ever guess the combo to a secret safe in his personal office is his ex-wife's birthday? With the day before the month, nonetheless. Hate to admit it, but he sometimes has a good idea." She continued turning the dial. "I'm betting he's in here and if he isn't, chase him in. I want the bastard to die in that chair." What she called a chair, I considered a throne, as I relaxed into the black, buttery leather behind a rather ornate, walnut wood desk. The room is painted a dark gray, with a cushy navy-blue carpet. A carpet that would be very hard to clean blood out of.

I could still see it, clots between threads, splatters on the walls, a pool on the desk. Red, red, red.

The safe opened, Layla held a small box in her hands. I went to lean forward, but I was stopped when she cautioned, "I wouldn't touch the desk without gloves if I were you."

Her entire body folded under the burden of his mistreatment, and that was the last straw. Doesn't she get to be happy? When is she done paying her way? Everything was taken from her when her parents divorced, her own mother completely fine with barely seeing her once a month. Then they both remarried, both had new children, and she is the last remaining piece of their former lives. A stranger. She never felt like she belonged. Two happy families that she orbited outside of. She had to get out, had to work her way through college, and when the affair broke, she had to escape the scrutiny and the tabloids and the suffocating city. And then she had to pay Warren back for her ticket upward in life; every day she compensated him with interest, stepped into the shackles of a doting trophy wife to a reptile of a man. She deserved to be handed something for once.

"What's in the box?" My gentle, calm voice surprised me. Her muted yellow polished nails lifted the latch and opened the lid. A polished, silver revolver with intricate etchings on the handle sat in a perfectly molded sea of green velvet. Twelve bullets, soon to be ten, rested in a crevasse above the gun. We sped right through the point of no return. The only way out is forward. I didn't need to ask, but she told me anyway.

"I want you to kill him with this."

We are nearing the 72nd hour, they either have to charge me or let me go. I find myself back in the torture chamber.

Well, I can't really call the room that. It rolls off the tongue better, and it certainly looks like the disgusting, underground room where they bust out the live wires and phonebooks, but none of that has happened. The white plaster isn't ominous, but the water damage is. Not to mention the mold that could be hiding under the surface. That, with one of the hospital-style lights flickering every hour or two, and my chair squeaking if I breathe too heavily, tips me off that this may be low on the budget's priority list. As far as I could tell, the decrepit state of this room can be accounted for by simple underuse. High school kids breaking quiet hour laws and getting caught with the cheapest vodka and beer is no means for interrogation. Traffic violations are paid without fighting it out in a hearing probably 90% of the time. Online, nonetheless. So, torture isn't really the right word. Intimidation isn't either. Let me try again.

I find myself back in the mildly-inconvenient-but-might-as-well-welcome-the-change chamber. As always, they lock my wrists into the handcuffs hooked under a loop in the table; apparently, I'm classified as a "dangerous suspect." When the pimpled face rookie opens the door to let whoever is calling on me in, I'm surprised it isn't more police trying to make their deadline. The rest is equally unexpected.

The first to saunter in is Jacqueline Talbot, Warren's first wife, who radiates coldness as if she carries the ninth circle of hell in her oversized Hermès handbag. She's wearing a sheath, knee-length black dress, and a white decorative belt that is fastened one notch too tightly. Her ashy brown hair is hanging stiffly, with the tips brushing against the tops of her shoulder as she moves. She probably used a whole can of hairspray, she's not the type that would ever let herself be seen with a stray strand of frizz. Her eyes are perfectly made up: black winged eyeliner, dark smokey eye, and thinly sculpted brows. Somewhere around middle age, there are frown lines creasing her foundation, and I understand why. Her matte cherry lips rest in a permanent pout.

But there is a second pair of Louboutin heels clacking against cheap quarry tile floors. The woman behind Jacqueline is taller, slightly older than me, and terrifying. She's wearing a dark Prussian blue pantsuit, with a white collared shirt underneath. Her short, light blonde hair is trimmed close to her head, in something much more controlled than a pixie cut. Her eyes are unsettling, perceptive with the underlying sense of hostility. A look that searches through a person's weaknesses and picks them apart until she finds something she can use. That's when I recognize her. She stays towards the back, but in every TV appearance, she's scanning the reporters, staring down the back of her client's head, and occasionally, glowering down the camera: she is Jacqueline's lawyer.

"Eli!" Jacqueline's shrill voice pierces through the obvious tension in the room as she sits across from me. Her forced smile has difficulty forcing its way past her pout, so her lips seem pursed. I don't know what game she's playing at, as we have never met, so I decide to play along.

"Jacqueline," I respond, much less enthusiastically, mimicking her expression. "And your friend, Miss -?"

"Gemma Williams. My lawyer. Best of the best." She crosses her legs, bejeweled hands resting atop her pointy knee. "Gemma Williams, Eli Holt." Gemma steps forward, placing her English tan leather briefcase on the table.

"You'll both have to excuse me for not reaching to shake your hands but," I pull against the chains locking me down, "*little* tied up at the moment."

"Oh, that is just disgraceful—" Jacqueline starts, but she is quickly cut off by the professional to her left.

"It's a necessary precaution Ms. Talbot, now if you don't mind, I think we should get started." Her voice is matter of fact, clear and decisive, cutting through a room and immediately making everyone listen to her.

"I absolutely agree." I lightly smack the table for emphasis. "I think the first order of business should be explaining why you are here in the first place."

Another puckered grin, this time from Gemma. "Mr. Holt—"

"Eli, please."

"—Eli, I will be your lawyer in all legal matters regarding the death of Ms. Talbot's ex, Warren Abernathy."

"That is very generous, but I already have a lawyer on yellow alert. My sister-in-law is a lawyer; she's currently in another state but told me she'd fly home to help me out. Besides, unless this is your pro bono quota for the year, I can't afford your services."

"I will be paying for your representation." That shrill voice pipes up again.

I've been holding it in, but I simply can't anymore. I laugh. "I'm sorry ladies, I am, but this is just ridiculous. I am suspected to have murdered your ex-husband and you're paying for my legal team? Isn't that just a little bit suspicious? Might come off as you trying to get the hitman you paid for out of trouble - can your reputation take another scandal?" If I thought the room was cold before, I was severely mistaken, as I feel each degree drop with the hardening of Jacqueline's stare. And while it might not be smart to keep biting the hand that is trying to feed me my freedom, I seem to have some leverage that I don't know about. So, I keep going. "Already two decades his junior and he has an affair with some waitress 17 years younger than you, less than half his age. The signatures on the divorce papers haven't even dried and they're married, moved out of the city, and you're left with the mess to clean up. Now he's dead, and you want to get his accused killer off?"

"Oh, you're not getting off, lover boy." She leans in slowly, spitting her words at me. "Without me, you're getting a life sentence, I'll make sure of that. As you've seen, I'm good at playing the grieving widow." That's true; get a camera on her and any ill will against her ex-husband turns into weeping cries for justice. "But it's not you I'm after. It's the whore."

"Her name is Layla." I snap back before I realize, and just like that, we've both exposed our weak spots.

"So, you do love her. I wonder how much."

"The cops already tried this."

"The cops are small-town hicks who can't tell shit from Shinola. I'm actually offering you something."

“You still haven’t told me what I’m paying yet, and I’m not talking monetarily.” The sound of a briefcase’s locks opening echoes through the room, with the sound of pages turning, but I hold my stare with Jacqueline, both of us not moving.

“Remember to bleach everything when you’re done, baby.” Gemma’s voice fades into Layla’s in my mind. “Of course. Used the one in the house, can’t trace it back to me.” “Oh god, I love you so much. Grabbed some jewelry too?” “Yeah, made a mess of the place while I was at it, smashed that vase your in-laws gave you.” “That’s so sweet, you remembered how much I hate that thing. I love you so much.” “I love you too.”

My jaw is unyieldingly clenched. “How did you get those?” Jacqueline shrugs. “How. Did. You get. Those.”

My question reaches deaf ears, as she just barrels on. “Testify against her. We’ll blast the media, tell your side of the story, how she manipulated and seduced you to do her dirty work. They already hate her. The waitress, the mistress, homewrecker, the gold digger. That’s the easy part. I’d call them vultures, but they don’t even wait for the carcass to stop moving. We’ll make a deal with the prosecution, get you to testify the whole thing was her plan, and they’ll give you a lesser sentence.” My eyes narrow with caution. “Lesser than the death penalty or life in prison, no parole. You still killed a man. But I want her to rot in a cell like a dead fish.”

“It’s your best and only option,” Gemma says. “There’s already a media frenzy covering this case. Once you’re charged, and you will be charged, they will dig up everything they can to get front-page exclusives while public interest is piqued. Do you really want to put your family, your daughter, through that? If you have me, I can divert the attention, and we saturate the market with the story of the sympathetic widow and single father, betrayed by an unhinged close friend, forced into doing something diabolical. To save his child.”

“Do we have a deal?”

I bask in the silence; watch to see if they sweat, if I can find another way out of this. I hate the smugness in Jacqueline’s voice. I hate Layla’s words on Gemma’s tongue. But most of all, I hate that they mentioned Maisie. She doesn’t need any of this, but I did it to her. And they will dig up everything, slander me and her late mother. Any and every mistake, real or false, will be slapped on a headline next to some pictures of her they’ll stalk her to get. I hate that my other option is press releases with her dolled up and posed, held hostage by this cover story. And maybe, if Gemma is as good as they say she is, I’ll be able to see her again. Not handcuffed and not behind glass and not talking through a phone.

I swallow my pride and the venom in my voice. It’s for Maisie I say-
“Deal.”



Patriarchy
Helena VanNatter

no one stole your damn heart

Caroline DiTrollo

no one stole your damn heart. you have the most inordinate safe in the universe. acknowledge your body. emotions are capricious. your thoughts flow like quicksilver but your ribs are steadfast and will always safeguard your heart.

so it's still there. if you don't believe me, take two gentle fingers and press them to the side of your neck. and you'll feel *ba dum ba dum ba dum ba dum*.

you'll *ba dum ba dum* when you stand in front of your bedroom mirror thursday night in that black dress that makes your tits look great. maybe you'll cry, but your heart is there and it's not broken.

you'll *ba dum ba dum ba dum* in a flurry of tears and thoughts of what could have been. you'll cry and scream and kick your pillow and think *jesus, i must be going mad*. you're not mad. you're in pain, but your heart is still there. in fact, in that moment, it's most likely louder than ever.

you'll *ba dum ba dum ba dum* when you sit on that statue overlooking your sleepy college town, and try and convince yourself something is *bigger* and *better* than where you are. and nobody is going to sit next to you.

what you do in this moment is run a tender hand over your ribs, remember what they're there for.

adam gave eve nothing. the myth is a lie. those ribs are yours and yours alone and they will do their damndest to keep any man from taking what is not theirs and what never will be anyone's property but your own. remember that.



florence

Marissa Bocchiario

The Forbidden Kiss

You placed upon my ruby reds
was the crisp bite
of the poisonous apple

You knew she could give you paradise for eternity
and that I would only bring you shame tomorrow
but you could not resist the temptation
of your inner serpent

For the snake slithers within us all
But he whispers louder in the ears of those
who would dare surrender Eden
for a cursed love

Caroline McParland

Claim

Sarah Scally
A Response to "Whoso List to Hunt"
By Sir Thomas Wyatt

Please don't trust him when he claims to love her,
when he claims she loves him, when he claims that
the soft look on her face belongs to him.
He will tell you these stories where she is
just the apple of his eye, as if she
only exists to be devoured by him.
He will tell you about this elusive
hind who is running through the king's forest
but notice she has no name. She could be
free and fallible and real. She could be
adaptive, looking for who she should be.
She could be human. But to him, she is
a golden doe, something to be hunted.
To him, she's a prize he can claim to win.



Monarchy
Helena VanNatter

Women of Marble and Jewels

Sarah Scally

I know I've mentioned her beauty before,
made her eyes into jewels and crafted
her soul with words that tried to make it more
divine than any human. I fashioned
a woman of marble who had no name
and no truth between her heart and her head.
For my silence, I have to take the blame.
All the poems I have written have led
you to believe there's nothing in her mind.
I might have told you the sound of her voice
is chimes in the wind but the words behind
her melody should be heard. Given choice,
many poets will turn women into
muses. That doesn't mean they should be statues.



Ripening
Helena VanNatter

Cassandra

Sarah Candido

Child, she knew
what was coming
and it was the leash
that kept her from running.
Cassandra's only smile
was erased in the muted silence.
The weight of her human heart
never lessened
and her hands braced for impact
on the train she wouldn't be able to stop.

Cassandra's glowing eyes
diminished the darkness
so she could see into the pit of the night.
But mortals were never meant for such.
The princess tried to save them
But there was no knight coming.
She knew we were the slaves of fate,
it is us who could not believe her.

I'm sorry to say
he killed her with a double-edged blade.
No one could listen
or ask why she was crying.
Her gift and her curse
to know and to see.
Don't cry, my dear,
Please don't cry.

The glimmer of the sun in his smile
made a sliver of her heart come free
but she held it close and out of reach.
she knew the truth, but it was too late.
She was not in his stars.
And his music lashed out
to scar her
forever.



Apollo Named This Flower
Sarah Scally



Navasana
Mia Coutinho

Will I Ever Get Over Him?

If you ask me
Will I ever get over him?
I'll without hesitation say *Yes*
Of course, is that even a question?
I loved him, he left me,
and now it's over.
I'm over it, over him.

My thoughts do not wander
to him anymore. His laugh
hasn't plagued my every moment
and the silence that allows is...
beautiful, peaceful, truthful
his eyes were never that truthful,
~~though they are just as beautiful.~~
His words? Are just words
they hold no special meaning.

Because I'm over him!
I'm not staring at him,
I don't see him,
I can't see him,
just as he won't see me.

Only, I'm lying through my teeth.
Even noticing him for a minute-
even a second- will bring my progress
to a crashing halt.
I'll see that he seems to
have more freckles than when I last saw him.
Or I'll see his lips and
~~remember what it was like kissing him.~~
I'll see the way his eyes glaze over
as he looks at something with that dopey grin
and I want nothing more than
for him to look at me like that one more time.

When I ask myself
Will I ever get over him?
No, I think
I don't think I will.

Sarah Scally

Will She Ever Get Over Me?

If you ask me
Will she ever get over me?
I'd without hesitation say *Yes*
Is that even a question? She already has.
I left, we broke apart,
and now I can't go back
even if I'm not over her.

I wonder sometimes if
I conjured her out of a rosy-tinted memory
and if I brought her into a world she doesn't belong to.
If after I abandoned her, she was left
hovering around the edges of my vision
to remind me that she held me in her heart before.
That I held her in my arms before.
But every time I try to hold her in my gaze now
she vanishes

Maybe, I'm just broken
because everyone else can see she is real.
Because she is over me, but I still love her in a
~~How did I lose the only good thing left in my life?~~
way.

But that doesn't matter anymore
because she doesn't need to see me.
Because even if she's not broken yet
I am worried I will hurt her again.
Her smile, her eyes, her words
~~I love her~~
I left her
I see her not looking at me
And, if I'm honest,
I want nothing more than
for her to look over at me.
But she shouldn't

When I ask myself
Will she ever get over me?
I always hope the answer is *Yes*
because she is better off without me



Desert Lights
Robert Armknecht



Morning Crash
Helena VanNatter

A Possibility

Helena VanNatter

Is this real?
It never felt possible
That someone would like me as I am
I may not be alone

I met you online, and that's scary. I know you aren't a catfish, because you've been snapchatting me at all hours with your face. We're having real conversations and that's a change for me. I haven't had anything like this in five years. I'm excited to finally meet you. Our conversations have made me incredibly happy; I smile whenever your name pops up in my notification bar. We've talked to the point where you're my best friend.

This could be real
A month of chatter
And you actually like me
I am not alone

One Friday night, while I'm watching Grease, you invite me over. You've said you're afraid you won't wake up to make a Saturday lunch, so I change out of my pajamas and meet you in your room. To anyone else, it would look like more happened. But really, we just sat on your couch for hours and just talked about classes, politics, pop culture and everything in between. I mean, a little while later you kissed me. But that was it. I said goodnight and went home.

It wasn't real
You took my time and a kiss
And you left me behind
So I am alone again

The next few days continue as normal. We talk consistently throughout the day, and it feels like all is well. But then suddenly, you stop answering. I leave it alone for couple of days, because I don't want to be pushy; but then I asked if you were busy or if you just wanted to be done with me. You claimed it was a lack of time, but I'm still doubtful that was it. So I say that I'm fine with what happened, and I think I am. But I'm still kind of mad at you, and I don't think that will stop.



Anything for the Shot

Helena VanNatter

Icy Fear

Those icy words of yours chilled my bones.
Their teeth latched on to me and did not let go.
The sharp edges of your hisses cut me deep.
They scraped against my heart, into my soul.

This was not the first time they had hurt me,
Nor will it be their last.
Their sharp teeth tore into my skin.
This time the pain did not pass.

The pain did not subside,
Filling me with fear.
I won't let you inside.
Do not come back, my dear.

But alas! My wounds miss you.
They miss your icy touch.
They miss all the pain you have caused.
They miss you very much.

Julia Soares

him

I was cold, alone, and with a sore heart
when he came along, offering refuge
as a platonic companion, no more,
until the first sudden dusk, where
he abused my delicacy as an excuse
to fulfill tasteless desires, with blatant
disregard for my fragility. My skin,
set on fire, recoiled from his reach
and I hoped my adverse answer was enough
to make it stop. It didn't stop. He used
night as an advantage, full of liquid courage
for him, poor choices for me. On my skin,
still blazing each morning after every "no,"
my painted happiness was smeared from tears.

Shannon Dyke



Puddled

Helena VanNatter

Wasted Time

Sarah Mastrocola

Is time not something precious?
Why treat it like your bathwater,
slouch, submerged,
watch your grime melt and turn it brown.
Notice how wrinkles infect your hands.
Faucet whimpers while you lounge, indifferent.
Drip...drop...
Ripples the murky film into a bullseye.
Drip...drop...tick...tock...

Between each drop an hour disappears.
Check your wallet;
you were plenty rich this morning.
Nothing but filthy water in that pocket now –
Look here, it recedes,
sucked into the sewer's belly,
though never full,
nourished by wasters like you.



Unfocused
Helena VanNatter

nystagmus

AJ Traub

my eyes are tired
as daily events
become a spiral of disbelief
and next week is never
the easier week

and my eyes twist
in the face of
what may or may not be real
because what eyes see
isn't a confirmation
of really anything

while my eyes are burning
because tears are not
reliable extinguishers
for virtual flames
you can't fix
what only appears to be broken,

but now my eyes are broken
and only now I know why
but nothing works
for my eyes
because they still see
as far as I can tell

Audioverwhelmed

I can't distinguish from vibrations
of shadows of sounds shooting
off walls or shells shackled
by the machinery
shaped for me
by science
sandwiched
with my skull
between noises
of silly conversations
switched to static shock
boxed in with no escape
starving for some silence
from sustained startling
saying or shouting
shaking shaking
shut it off
sheesh

AJ Traub



Look Up

Helena VanNatter

Paranoia

how in the moment
before unlocking the door
every noise
 sounds like footsteps

Kaitlin McNamara

Gamble

Sarah Scally

n.

1. a bet/ for pretentious people/ idiotic little shits/ yes/ they'll gamble/ or deal/or make an agreement/ a sum of money/ and money is nothing to people who gamble.

2. Harry wasn't one to gamble his own money/ money was never something thrown away in his house/ but he also isn't one to throw away an opportunity/ like a lagging TV/ like a broken slot machine/ like a deal with some pretentious rich assholes/ they're hardly ever gamblers/ but Harry always had been/ Harry had always been a really good gambler.

3. a gamble/ a bet/ a game/ a job/ a really fucking profitable job/ all they wanted him to do was take a few things out of the house/ insured things/ and he would get two years' worth of rent money in a night/ he could practically taste the relief on his lips/ not having to worry about his landlord for two whole years/ wasn't insurance fraud worth that kind of security.

4. yes/ in fact/ insurance fraud is worth a lot more than security/ a lot more than two years rent in a dingy apartment/ Harry knew this too/ and he knew/ even if he didn't want to/ that this deal/ gamble/ wasn't legal/ and that he was the one doing most of the dirty work/ he was the one getting the least out of this.

v.

1. but Harry was a gambler/ that was all he was/ and even if it wasn't a good the best bet/ it would be worth the risk/ an easy job/ so/ he broke into the house/ crept into the house/ walked right in through an open backdoor/ and decided which way to go to get the open safe upstairs/ the open safe/ the open safe/ god he was stupid/ so he snuck threw the house/ up to the back staircase.

2. Harry was a gambler/ he walked up the stairs quietly/ he kept quiet even though he was invited/ he knew there were cameras watching him/ he knew he was acting as a burglar.

3. Harry was a gambler/ so he knew how to act/ how to bluff/ was a bluff not stealing a win right out of your opponent's hands?

4. Harry was a gambler/ he checked the first bedroom/ a little girl's room/ he didn't think the safe would be in there/ he closed the door/.

5. Harry was a gambler/ but he wasn't stupid/ even if he was invited to steal things from this house/ he still wore a mask/ he was being watched/ he wouldn't exactly need two years rent if his new bedroom was a 6 by 6 cell.

6. Harry was a gambler/ the next room he went into was clearly a master/ it was overly extravagant/ just like the douchebag he made this deal with.

7. Harry was a gambler/ but he maybe wasn't as smart as he thought he was/ the only thing he knew about the safe was that it was upstairs and open/ so he started looking.

8. Harry was a gambler/ he looked in the closet first/ he didn't have a safe in his apartment but he knew that hotels had safes in the closet/ he scanned the walls/ nothing/ that's where things got complicated/ from here on out Harry would have to work on his knowledge of spy movies as hints/ spy movies are not a reliable source for where safes are hidden.

9. that was when Harry heard the first sirens.

10. He wasn't worried/ this was an easy job/ the guy had practically rolled out a red carpet for him/ he kept looking/ he moved on to across the hall/ an office/ no a fully laid out library/ he rolled his eyes/ of course/ there was a library.

11. He heard a whimper/ a cry/ the squeak of weight shifting on wood/ and then the entire house was silent again/ but it was too silent/ someone else was in the house/ Harry's breath left his chest/ he was breaking into a house/ he was going to get caught/ where was the open safe?/ the easy job?/ the two years rent?/ the sirens didn't get closer to the house/ maybe it was okay/ or maybe they had turned them off once they got here/ not wanting to tip the intruder off/ the intruder/ the bugler/ Harry.

12. but Harry was a gambler/ he was tipped off

13. Harry tried to remember everything he touched/ why hadn't he wore gloves/ he wipes off the door handles/ hides away anything he might have left out of place/ and then heads towards the stairs/ the kids room he remembers/ he turns to the door opening it with his sleeve as barrier/ wiping it off quickly/

14. he hears the shifting of weight again/ it's in the kids room he realizes/ it's a kid/ he can see sneakers barely covered beneath the bed skirt/ the unmistakable blue light of a cell phone/ there wasn't supposed to be anyone home/ there wasn't supposed to be a child here/ god Harry hated kids/ god Harry couldn't imagine how the kid felt about him/ he wiped the handle and practically ran down the stairs/ he ran down the stairs and right/ he ran down the stairs and right into the gun/ the gun/ there was a gun pointed at his chest.

15. Harry froze at that/ he froze not in fear/ but anger/ because he knew better/ he knew a good play when he saw one/ a good deal/ a reward that outweighed the risk.

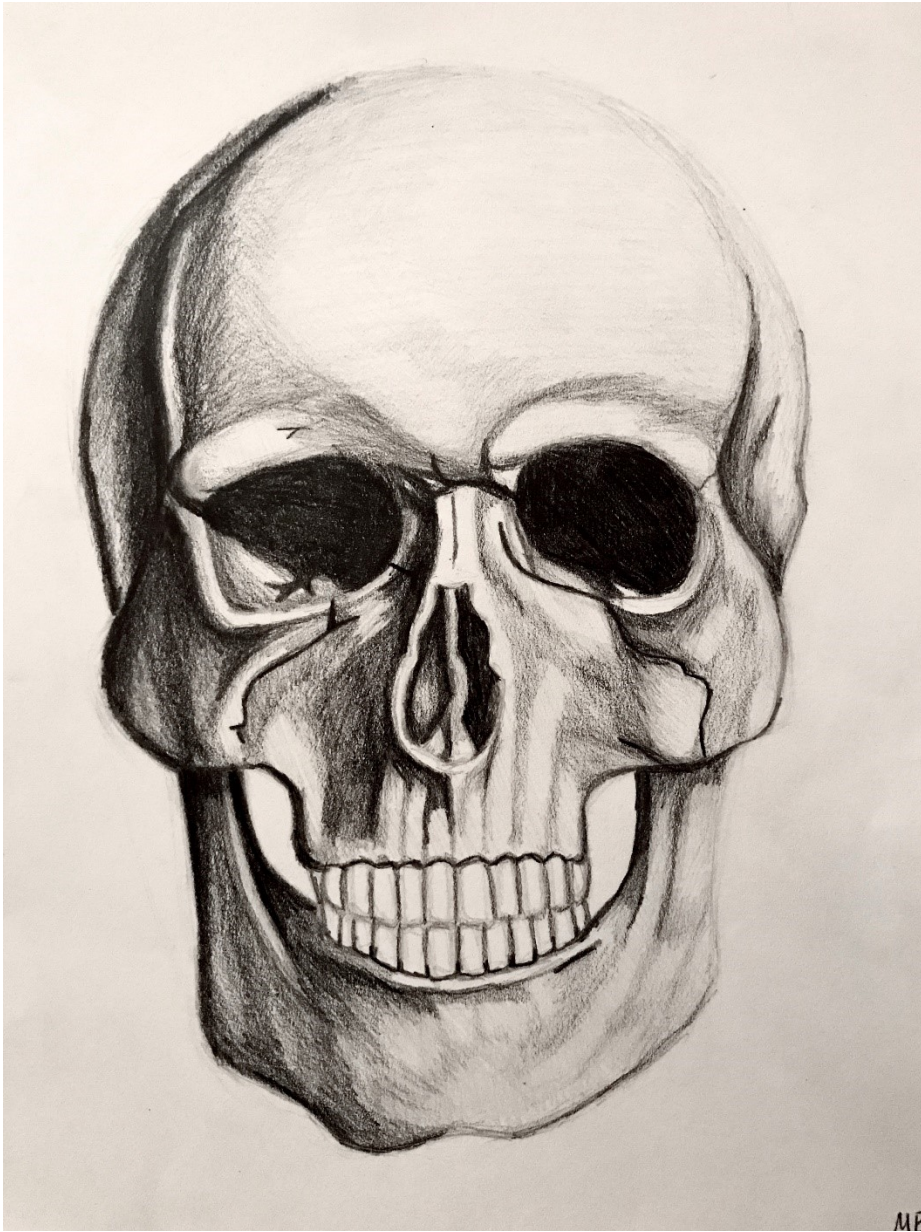
16. Harry was a gambler/ but this was no gamble/ and that was a gun/ pointed at his chest/ so he froze.

17. And from the staircase/ little footsteps came/ the kid/ he turned around taking his eyes off the gun/ the kid was walking down the stairs/ the gun was pointed at his chest/ the gun was pointed at the footsteps/ and before Harry could even understand what was happening/ the gun went off.

18. It was a little girl/ Harry hated little girls/ he also hated blood/ blood/ and blood/ and blood/ and the sound of a little body falling down the stairs/ he looked back at the cop/ the gun/ and the cop looked at him/ fear splitting through both of their eyes/ before he jumped into action/ towards the girl/ and Harry ran once more towards the back door/ he wouldn't get away/ he knew he wouldn't get away/ he wouldn't get away from/ the cops/ the blood/ the smoking gun/ the unlocked door/ the open safe upstairs/ the child dying downstairs/ he wouldn't get away from the deal that he made/ but then again neither would that child's parents.

19. She died.

20. Harry was never caught/ she died/ the officer was so distraught and distracted/ a rookie/ he never even reported seeing the intruder/ she died/ the door was open/ she died/ the 911 operator said the girl heard someone go into the house/ she died/ Harry never heard from the girl's father again/ she died/ but he heard her whimpering/ crying/ shifting weight on floorboards/ he heard her footsteps for the rest of his life



skull
Marissa Bocchiaro

There Were Soldiers

Sarah Scally

*Inspired by Helen Menyer nee Stevenson's
Letters to her family during the Korean War
Found in Skillman Libraries Special Collection*

There were 150 patients here when I arrived,
most of them ambulatory enough to play ping pong in the lounge.

There were 170 soldiers here the next week,
we played cards and set up talent shows and
took them to all the base's dances.

There were 300 soldiers come October.
Every bed full and Halloween plans made.
100 people joined the bingo game,
cigarettes for prizes.
There were too many people,
the prizes only lasted so long.

There were 240 the week after that,
the buses went in shifts,
the patients got impatient.
We started magazine runs.
The base didn't have many comics;
but the soldiers
were already sharing
too much
to ask them to share
These, too.

There were 274 patients.
There were no shifts,
we put up sign ups
for soldiers to go out.
We put out exchanges
to see if the patients needed
more cigarettes or clothes

they wanted to exchange
for clothes or cigarettes.
They wanted to exchange
Korea for Home.
Thanksgiving was coming.
There were parties
and cigarettes exchanged
and clothes exchanged
and orders given.
By the end of the week
there were 250 patients
and 24 more soldiers
back in Korea.

Hospital capacity: 300.
200 patients arrive,
497 patients,
300 beds,
fewer supplies.
The new men
came without
toothbrushes
combs
cigarettes
letters
Hope.
We do as much
as we can.
Burn patients come.
Now the halls
smell like burnt flesh
and a supply room
becomes a bedchamber.
There weren't many
supplies there anyway.
This wasn't the worst,
these were lucky ones,

with burnt skin,
with shell shock
and blown eardrums.
Those who lost limbs,
lost lives;
they were sent back
state side.
Soldiers might disagree
about who was lucky



Between My Fingers

Robert Armknecht

9/11

Cynthia Capotosto

I look down and see red splotches on my new blue shirt, the one my wife had given me a few days earlier. She said I'd put on some weight and needed new clothes that fit. She was always good with that sort of stuff.

'I've ruined it,' I think, the ringing sound still filling my ears as my mind tries to catch up. 'She'll have my head for th-'

The ringing gives way all at once to shouts of fear, constant yet unpredictable crashes as the building falls down around me, the cries of someone in unimaginable pain. And then I realize, those cries are my own. But the pain is not physical. It's coming from the terror and desperation and hopelessness I feel as the reality of my situation sets in. I will never see my wife again, or my daughter. I know I'm too far up; the building won't hold long enough for someone to rescue me. I had been trying for this office for years, working hard to get promoted. 'Maybe a little too hard,' I think now. 'I should have spent more time at home with my family, not here, trying to get a raise we didn't really need. We were doing fine.'

My thoughts are racing and I'm breathing faster now, struggling to catch my breath as my chest tightens. I feel trapped.

'This can't be happening. This can't be happening,' I repeat to myself. 'I have to get out of here.'

I pick myself up from the ground. I know I'm hurt, but I can't really feel it. The pain is distant. I make my way, stumbling, to what's left of the nearest window. The glass has mostly been reduced to a fine powder on the floor. I glance down through the few shards left hanging for dear life onto the frame, but my view is obscured by the dust and smoke. I look up instead. Not much better, but at least I can catch a glimpse of the sky. It helps.

I think again of my wife and daughter, but also my parents who will survive me, and my brother who is always joking about how I was immortal, living through some very stupid, but fun, stunts during my teenage years.

A piece of the building comes flying down past the window and my gaze follows it.

'I'm going down one way or another,' the thought strikes me, and I'm slightly taken aback.

"I don't want to die," I sob. "I don't want to die!"

But I'm not going to survive and waiting for the building to collapse on top of me is not how I'm going to go. I've always wondered what it would be like to fly, like a superhero, out in the open air. To feel the wind on my skin.

So I take a step, onto the ledge.

I always imagined it would be cold up this high, but I'm not cold

now. My vision blurs as the tears that had subsided come back in full force.

‘I’ll be free,’ I think to myself. ‘I won’t let myself be crushed. I’ll fly free in my last moments. I may not have been a real superhero, but I was in my daughter’s eyes.’

I close my eyes and fill my head with images of my daughter smiling up at me, holding out her arms for a hug, the feeling of my wife’s peck on the cheek before I head out to work each morning, the scent of oranges and rosemary lingering after her. I look up to the sky one last time, fling my arms wide open, and jump.

They told me I look like her

AJ Traub

They’ve said it since as far back as I can remember. That day, family members would say it with an emotional hug. Some people I didn’t recognize at all would say it, and I would just respond with a weak smile and they would say they remember when I was “this big.”

People always told me I looked like her, so I wasn’t surprised when everyone was saying the same thing that morning. It didn’t always occur to me when they first said it, but when I saw her face and saw mine, I could understand how we resembled each other. As much as it’s a common observation, it wasn’t what I wanted to hear. Not then.

I brushed off the comment at least a dozen times in the crowded armory arts hall. The past few hours were a long day for me and everyone else there. I was done speaking and I was done crying and I didn’t want to be there anymore.

There’s only so long I can stand to be at a funeral, even one for my own aunt. I’d agonized over my eulogy for the past week only to end up not reading off my script. I could never read as well as I wanted to speak. I knew when I was done that I did it right. I did her right.

When I got back to the house, I went to the bathroom to hide away from the big group for a few minutes. I caught a glimpse of myself in the mirror. I didn’t see her. It was me, alone. I realized it wasn’t my face that reminded them of her. I wasn’t done crying.



Raindrops on Tree Trunks
Sarah Scally

to remember/ to never forget

Kaitlin McNamara

The entire time I knew him his father was dying
 I don't remember being told, just knowing. I remember the first,
 soft "hey" as we sat on just close enough on separate couches in the school
 library.
 I remember the mutual friend who introduced us, I don't talk to her any-
 more.
 I remember the questions that we soon grew brave enough to ask each other
 like
 "Hypothetically, what would you say if someone asked you to girl's ask guy
 dance" to
 "Hypothetically, what would you say if someone asked you out"
 and both of our "Well, it depends".
 I remember two hands
 crossing miles worth of couch cushion to find the other,
 an unhealthy amount of microwavable popcorn,
 curfews five minutes overdue,
 long conversations starting and ending with "don't worry I want to be with
 you"
 and longer conversations of "don't worry I still do",
 a dance I spent in a corner, on the floor, with him because
 he didn't like the crowd, but I didn't like sitting down.
 I remember the conversation that I planned but he saw coming
 I remember returning to a friendship that left a better taste in my mouth than
 having
 to force up another "I love you too",
 but just about anything was better than that.
 I remember the fight, the accusations, the name calling,
 the hours standing in the parking lot arguing who was more wrong,
 and the phone call that created four months of sporadic awkward eye contact,
 and erased everything else.

I don't remember becoming friends again, but
 I'll never forget the wake, filled with more bodies than the room knew what
 to do with, the line I waited on before I even saw him, the eye contact we
 made as I entered the room.
 I'll never forget the funeral, I spent the whole time watching him and his sis-
 ter, how they comforted each other.

I'll never forget how cold it was the night we walked the nature trail by our house,
he needed a distraction and I needed to feel useful.
It had only been a few weeks, but the world, now covered in snow, already looked so different from the one his father would have remembered.
I remember how he didn't wear a jacket, he said he wasn't cold.

I don't remember all the things I said to comfort him,
in those fleeting moments we shared,
but I will never forget the hug I gave him those three times,
a tightness,
I can only describe,
as the weight of a man, who thinks he is drowning.



coloredrain
Marissa Bocchiaro

Mother Morphine

Lindsey Mauriello

Everyone thinks Nostalgia is a mother.
They pull out the photo album
To remind you of who you were,
Creating a gallery displaying all the different versions
You had painted of yourself over the years
That *of course* Nostalgia had kept.
Because *you* made them.
And did *such* a good job.
And Nostalgia was *so* proud of you.

Nostalgia is morphine:
Take as needed, in small doses,
To treat moderate to severe emotional damage.
Warning: Nostalgia is *highly* addictive.
Harmful side effects may include:
Delusions of a past that never happened,
Disdain for the present,
Fear of the future, and
An overall inability to face challenges.
Nostalgia is not a defibrillator.
It cannot revive what is dead.

I learned this recently,
When the only way to get you to laugh at what I said,
Or to look in my direction,
Was to rub my Nostalgia against yours
And hope for a spark.
Something I could use to shock you into remembering
Why I was there.
Which was odd, since you asked –
You *begged* –
For me to see you.
And despite every nerve telling me not to,
I went.
For *you*.

Trying to convince myself this was the hospital bill I needed to pay
To keep our relationship on life support.
Just a *little* longer.
Just until the monitors could be turned off.
Because your heart would no longer be beating alone;
Mine would be there.
My steady, thumping heart
Guiding yours back in rhythm,
Guiding your runaway train back on track
Heading home to *me*.

Instead, I walked into a funeral,
Standing beside a grave
That you were already throwing dirt into
With only Nostalgia to hold me while I mourned.
Warning: Nostalgia is *highly* addictive.
Nostalgia is convincing me to stay.
Whispering beautiful memories,
And wiping away tears,
Nostalgia cradles me like an anaconda.
And the longer I go without air,
The more beautiful the delusions become,
The more suffocating the present seems,
And the grimmer the future gets.



Early Bloomer
Helena VanNatter

College Shower

Lindsey Mauriello

You are like a college shower
Because you disgust me.
Because I come to you naked and vulnerable,
Bleeding or crying or both,
And you promise to wash it away.
To cleanse me.
You have seen the dirtiest parts of me,
And you still let me come back
Wearing fresh muck day after day.
Yet recently I gag as I step away from you
Feeling filthier than I did before you touched me.
You are like a college shower
Because when the shit goes down the drain
You scald me.
Burning my skin and making me shiver with pain
You then embrace me again once you've cooled down
And soothe my red flesh.
I have learned your tics,
How the water will hesitate to leave the nozzle
I know to dodge the flames before they eat me.
And then I return to let you finish purging me of my impurities
Blaming myself if I don't move away quick enough.
You are like a college shower
Because I have nowhere else to go.
When my face breaks out,
Displaying all the pus my pores have held in for so long,
I can only go to you to make me beautiful again.
To make me fit for everyone else's consumption.
Because only you see past it.
Only you can accept me as I am.
Right?
You are like a college shower
And I am a freshman.
Terrified of graduating from you.
Terrified of three complaisant years.

Crushed

Helena VanNatter

...
it hurts.
seeing you be happy.
i don't have that right,
since you've never been mine.
but my heart still aches.
i could say something to you,
but i know it's not my nature.
so i'll unfairly wallow,
knowing i could do more.
my stomach burns with anxiety
at the thought of talking to you;
at least i'd have an answer that way.
but i'll only admit it in sleep
or with lowered inhibitions.
i don't know if i'm more anxious about you saying no
or you saying yes.
i'll subtly show my feelings,
even when i know that will not work.
because life is not a movie
and little hints rarely make it happen.
so i'll keep on living,
and maybe doing something someday.
so for now, i'll just do nothing,
sitting silently in my pain;
and in my heart,
hold a wish:
that you'll notice.

Of all the things you could have been

Kaitlin McNamara

you had to be
average looking
enough, that I see you everywhere.



Florescent Love

Robert Armknecht

Hoodie

Caroline McParland

It was the chill of April
that brought your warmth to me,
a gentle gift of comfort and safety
that settled the goosebumps on my skin
but uncaged the butterflies in my stomach.
For this gesture is more than a shield from
the cold of a night by the shore--
you are love, you are ownership.

Soft sleeves hang just over my fingertips
so my hands may hold yours even from miles away.
When I miss you, I hold you close to me
and twist your drawstrings between my shaking hands.

I've laughed with you,
I've cried with you,
I've slept with you,
I've loved with you.
But each wash wipes away your scent
until you are one of mine, no longer one of his
And you've forgotten all of the moments we've shared together.



shutters
Marissa Bocchiaro

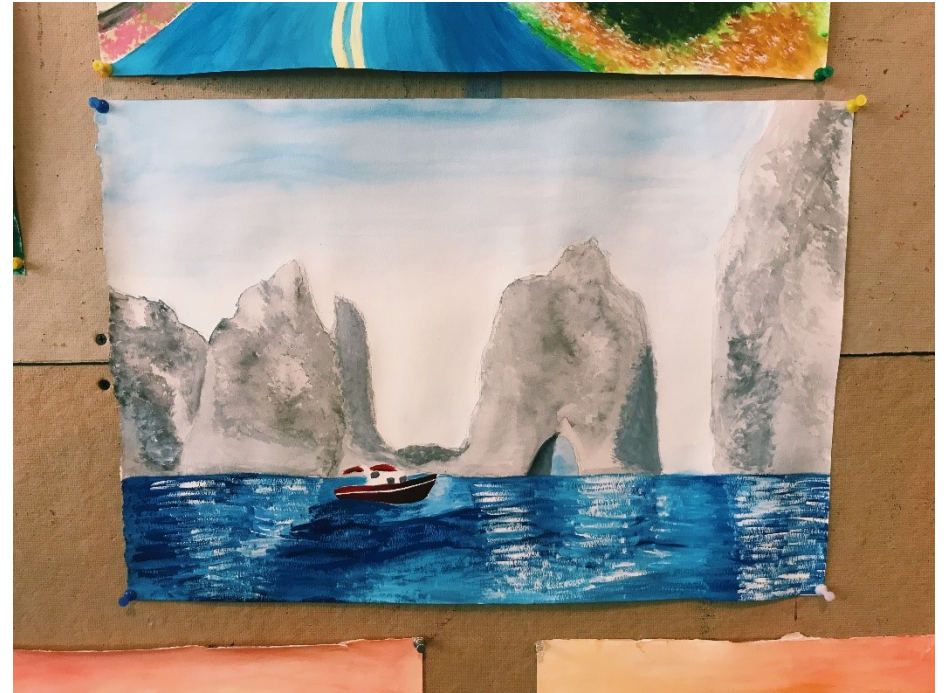
ended

when she left,
he needed her.
she felt the end
less messy.
even when the end held them
he fell,
netless.

Shannon Dyke



A Verrazano Bridge Sunset
Helena VanNatter



capri
Marissa Bocchiario

A Decade's Difference

Helena VanNatter

Isn't it funny? The way things turn out?
Almost her birthday and she wants to shout
She's not happy with the day
"Kill me" is all she wants to say
This day is meant to be filled with happiness and joy
Not a day that's meant to annoy
The bad thoughts keep filling her head
All she can think is how much she wishes she were dead
It's funny right? How things change?
It's not abnormal, it's not strange
Years and time will affect anyone
Even when we think we've won
Age six, she wanted to grow up and live life to the fullest
Ten years later and she wants to disappear and rest
She tries and tries but the thoughts don't leave
And the funny thing is, that girl was me



A Dot of Hope

Helena VanNatter



tattoo
Marissa Bocchiaro

From the Unofficial Therapist

AJ Traub

They say it's "what you're going through,"
but I know it's all being done to you.
I'm no therapist but I've been here before
and I know what it means to hear your knock at my door.

I stay up late, I won't sleep well
but I know inside that it's not my hell.
I'm doing it again, I know, I know,
but it's my job, for being "the stable one" though.

So tell me everything, I'm all ears.
Your life. Your feelings. Your struggle. Your fears.
I'll be with you while you sit and cry
and I'll feel your pain so I don't have to face mine.

Where Do I Belong?

Ashley Sanchez Payano

Many may say, “Hey come hang”
But how do I know it’s not another gang?
I come from the projects, not many can relate,
But when you noticed, now it’s too late.

I am a light skin Hispanic.
I am not black enough or white enough.
It’s just tough, and never enough.
To be or not be in a play I see,
It’s just me.

It is not easy to be me,
But I am trying to be who I want to be.
“Stop”, they say. “You won’t make it”
But who are you to tell me I don’t deserve it?

You see, I come from the dirt, the hate,
the slave, the love, the Spanish, the French,
But most importantly to obtain what was taken from me,
My identity.

This is my nation, yet some say I don’t have an occupation.
Let me tell you that without consultation, I don’t need your delegation.
Passion is in my blood, therefore I don’t need your sense of fashion.

My mama said “keep your head up and good things may come”
But the moment I close my eyes everything is gone
Mama, I’m scared, and she says “just be prepared”.

Don’t you ever dare to compare,
Thur you’re unique, keep in mind it’s okay to be a freak.
So, when you have something to say, speak.
Speak loud and clear, so that everyone can hear.



Will I Bloom?

Helena VanNatter



At the Edge
Sarah Scally

Stories from the Arts Trail

AJ Traub

Sea salt floats through the calming breeze
as sunlight freckles the pavement below the leafy trees.
The current of the river shimmies through the valley
by the low, barriered Arts Trail in a levied alley.

The faint roaring of a ten-wheeler rumbles in and out,
a rolling monster among frightened buggies in a teeming town.
The driver crosses the truss style bridge daily without a care;
he's been disenchanted by the wondrous horizon of the sparkling Delaware.

Standing at attention are verdure spring grass blades
by viridescent Scott Park where an eager family plays.
On precarious swinging seats sit a young son and daughter
with the peaceful steady motion like the flowing river water.

Their joyous thrusts toward the clouds drifts their minds away
in the airy ocean skies of a warm bright non-school day.
Their pendular swings reflect smiles in their parents' eyes
over the thick Jersey trees sprinkled on canvas of the other side.

A pensieve teen squints up at the distant train tracks
counting the numerous cables as they continually pass.
The harmony of each individual section cruising
and how every following car is still amusing.

Toward the south the path descends into the riverfront tides
in an asphalt beach adjacent to the barrier divide.
Flocks of birds perch at the mouth of the ceiling-less cave
at the quiet reserve of water separate from the moving wave.

Every downtown story is reflected in ripples of the stream,
embedded in its course on the stateline seam.
For miles and miles they're carried on their way
and emptied out in the delta of the Delaware Bay.



Seeing Triple
Helena VanNatter



Brambles
Helena VanNatter

Dear *Kyle Low*,

The Most Important Thing At Lafayette College:

Don't end up in the South College dormitory. If you do, I'm sorry.

The subsequent feelings follow. Calm when your Resident Advisor asks you to be quiet at 10:00 pm for talking one decibel too loudly whilst playing a video game. Disturbed when your RA lets your roommate have a rage party in your room at three in the morning. Annoyed when your roommate kicks you out for the second time in a weekend. Grateful that you don't live in Ruef Hall where a fifty-two key piano was just thrown down the pit for the second time since last Tuesday night. Tired when you realize that you left some important items in your room. Wishing that you had slept five hours ago. Confused when you see a sock on your door and hear loud banging sounds when sneaking in. Emboldened as you decide to creak your own door open. Traumatized.

Frustrated so much that you decide to leave your room for good. Curious when you see a group of friends watching Toy Story 3 in a common room. Reminiscent when you recall that you cried in public for thirty-two minutes and twenty-nine seconds because of that movie, which is a slightly below average time for you. Feeling something missing inside of you that makes you ready to try a new adventure. Adventurous when you decide to talk to these people you haven't met before. Excited when the movies they watch, and their interests line up with your own. Humorous when a conversation turns into a lasting exchange of jokes. Humorous is also a bone. Receptive when your new friends tell you to work on your jokes. Belonging when you're brought into this very formal group called the "Meese Squad". Exuberant when you celebrate by dabbing at your friends repeatedly. Surprised when they respond by placing a permanent ten Kyle Low, the dabber, lifetime ban on dabbing. Ten billion lifetimes or until the inevitable heat death of the universe, whichever comes later.

Loving when at a valentine's day dinner in the Marquis dining hall, you explain to your friends that despite the fact you don't have a girlfriend it's okay because you have the banana you're holding in your hand. Elaborative in your description of the importance this banana has to you when you're alone. Blessed because it has great uses in hard times. Slow thinking to understand how you just passionately dug your banana peel filled grave. Banana Boy. Inquisitive when visiting your friend's single in the Farber Hall dorm which has a bunch of glow-in-the-dark stars. Fascinated by the various shapes formed on their ceiling which your friend tells you about. Truthful as you state to your friend that a cluster of them look like a certain banana-like "appendage". Astonished when you check the group chat later that night and see a new group name. Banana Boy.

Bewildered because time has passed and there are suddenly replacement freshmen. Somber because you had already said goodbye to some past senior friends. Attentive to the situation in the present. Intimidated because there are now people around that are almost as overly giddy and energetic as you. Open to making new friends because these freshmen are as good at understanding the Area 51 raid strategy as you are. Enlightened when they teach you memes you had never comprehended before. Big brain moment right there. Surprised when you hear that one of your new friends is living in South College. Oh boy. Knowledgeable as you gift the wisdom to some first years that the earth is one hundred percent most definitely, certainly, confirmed flat because of the Pacman Theory. In the classic arcade game, Pacman can teleport from one side of the map to the other using a secret passageway. By this thread of logic, the actual earth may have a similar mechanism which would allow flatness. In conclusion, the earth is a flat pancake and suddenly your joke has started a flat earth "cult" at Lafayette College. Devastated when after your dissertation on flat earth theory you learn that three of your new friends live in Ruef and their dorm's sink was just detached from the wall and a smoldering, smoking couch was thrown down the pit. Oh Lafayette. Accomplished because you've found and mentored people that you are almost as mature as. Freshman.

Junioritis. Busy and doing everything, five things at once to be precise. Such as building compost tumblers for sustainable education in the Easton community with the Society of Environmental Engineers and Scientists, dabbing, Civil Engineering some epic steel bridges that can take over a thousand pounds of weight, dabbing, organizing an environmental conference that brings together many alike minds from the PA area together, using your position as the event's closing speaker to dab at the conference (Note that the dabbing actually made sense in the context of the speech), and being surprised when your meticulous plan that you try every day to stealthily sneak up on your friends goes wrong because you bolted loudly towards them in the open of the main college quad while wearing a bright neon green coat that opens up like a fighter jet. Utterly terrified because as your catching your breath a hand lightly taps your shoulder. Easy to mess with.

Excited when you go to watch How to Train Your Dragon 3 with your friends. Sad when the movie ends on an emotionally resonant note. Really sad. Heartbreakingly, heart throbbingly sad. Deja vu like that one time you were watching that comedy anime that was a parody show where a high school boy found the girl of his dreams. Recalling that this true love was five minutes long for which this boy left his Rockstar friend with a five-foot chin and his other friend with a removable haircut that's only function was to literally hold beef stew. Beef bowl cut. Swearing on your mother's maiden name to your friends who are dying of laughter that Senpai Club was a show worth shedding tears over. Still swearing to this very day. Okay Senpai Club

crier.

Adventurous when you go with some of your “Meese Squad” friends to the land of the Meese, Canada, to see Niagara Falls. Awed by the sheer grandeur of this world renown landmark. Awed by the deeply cathartic memories of Senpai Club which are reanimated by the falls. Awed by the leap in quality of the Canadian gift shop compared to the American one. Awed that the border security guard asked if you had consumed weed recently. Awed by the accuracy of his intuition because you ate some weeds in your salad the night before. Pothead.

Entranced as you stroll through Times Square in New York City. Angered as you remember the last time you were in Times Square. You were going home after visiting some friends during a winter break and spent 80\$ on a mixtape that some random person on the street sold to you. After realizing you were scammed you shattered the disk in a Subway. Eight friends have asked you to go to Times Square with them since then. Attentive to the present where people are bustling around in costumes and selling merchandise to anyone that enters shouting distance. Understanding that you’re not actually in Times Square but are instead in the convention center of New York at an anime convention. Excited as you intimidate strangers and friends alike in your own costume, an inflatable Godzilla that looks like a new and hip version of Barney the dinosaur on an unspeakable amount of caffeine that bobbles like a parachute with every inflatable step. Receptive as your friends offer you yet another new name. Scaley.

Loved as you’re celebrating your twenty-first birthday in the most adult way possible by going to the local bar-code of the Simon Economic Center to play hide and seek. Lying in a dark room together and whispering jokes as the last seeker awkwardly stumbles awkwardly through the pitch darkness has never been so fun. Happy as you then unite your friends from different circles together in a casual game of running around the college and fearing for their very lives. Manhunt is a game where every breath, step, and hilarious full body slide down the grassy and muddy hill in front New Oechsle matter. Clumsy.

Complacent as you continue the daily life with friends you began soon after you came to this college. Entertained as jokes, activities, antics, and experiences proceed without fail. Shocked when you check the calendar and notice the short number of days left until graduation. Overwhelmed because your time at Lafayette College will soon end. Detached suddenly from the world around you. Attached to the future where you will soon have to leave the place you’ve spent so much time at these past four years. Scared of the future. Very scared of the future. Separation from your recent life and experiences. Broken as you are sloppily crying alone. Alone like you were at the start in your South College dorm room. Alone like deep down inside you think maybe, just maybe, you should be. Alone. Alone. Alone.

Alone. Alone. Alo-

Interrupted as you hear something that cuts apart your train of thought. Cognizant that there are many voices calling for you. Doubtful. Unwilling to hear them.

They rush towards you anyway.

...

“Banana Boy. Freshman. Civil Engineer. Easy to mess with. Senpai Club Crier. Pothead. Scaley. Clumsy. A ball of positive energy. A passionate worker. A source of laughter. A great hugger. A voice I can always be encouraged by. A shoulder to cry on. A friend that I will never let go.”

Realization that you have in your very reach the most important thing in Lafayette college. Determined. Refusal to forget what you’ve been given despite that the inevitable future tells you it’s pointless to try. Challenged because its importance is so profound to you that you can’t describe it with words. Thinking. Trying. Remembering. Typing. Persisting. Running. Sprinting. Sweating. Leaping. Catching. Laughing. Crying. Embracing.

-I wrote this so you can never forget the wonderful friends you’ve made at Lafayette College

With Love,
Kyle Low

Contest Winners

Sunbutter is actually disgusting, but when you're on a mountain somewhere between New Hampshire and Maine and it's one of your few sources of protein, it actually becomes something like the equivalent of Nutella. Except, this Nutella is made from sunflower seeds and doesn't have any chocolate in it. The thing about backpacking, is that the most standard rules are: 1. Pack light and 2. Eat lots of protein. The thing about packing light when you're someone like me, someone who packs for the movie theater like it is the last time I will ever leave the house, is all of a sudden, every item you own becomes *the* most valuable item. So there I was, a junior in high school spending a semester in Maine, packing for my trip on the Appalachian Trail, and I honestly had no idea how to pack light. Because I really *needed* my mini pillow. And a paperback to read at night. And extra hair ties in case the two French braids I'd had my friend do for me the night before the trip came loose. And yet, I knew there was no room for a hairbrush, and anyways, I wouldn't be showering mid-trip.

The Mahoosucs are apparently the most difficult part of the Appalachian Trail to backpack on, or hike on, or walk on, because there are a lot of up-hills, and there's also this section called the Notch that is literally just one mile of boulders and rocks that have fallen into the crack between two mountains. It was grueling. It meant getting up early in the morning, cooking breakfast on our little travel stove, washing the dishes and then spending a full day walking. And climbing. And sometimes sliding while sitting down, because the idea of falling down one of these muddy, slippery mountains honestly scared me more than getting mud all over my rain pants. Lunch was our only real break during the day, and it was always Sunbutter or cheese with crackers or bread or hummus. Cheese and hummus sandwiches, Sunbutter smeared onto granola bars. Then would come the walking, and it was so tedious, that we would play these games of imagine, or else tease one another. The conversations that you have while climbing uphill with a large backpack attached to you are unlike usual conversations, in the sense that you're exhausted and sweaty and also you got assigned to carry the toilet kit (shovel included) because everyone has to carry an extra item but you over-packed and you also already have weak arms. And yet somehow, somebody gets you laughing so hard that your backpack shakes and your eyes tear up. Those moments, those are really nice. You could even say they're delightful.

Photographs

Evan (Cuong) Vu

Tied for Second at the Show of Delights

This is a photo of my parents.

I took it a year ago, when our family was dining out for my brother's 23rd birthday. It was at a Thai restaurant on Bui Vien Street. The food wasn't great in particular, but I still remember its taste, for I have promised myself to imprint within my mind the context of each and every photo I take of my mom and dad being together. It sounds in itself like some endeavored tribute a child would make to its parents, but it's not really. We don't take photos that much as a family. Not that we don't want to, nor there exists some hindrance to it, just simply because there lacks the occasions for such photos to be taken. We would attend weddings, parties, feasts and dinners of friends or of our own arrangement, but as my brother grew older and became more frequently absent from home, we felt more and more deterred from going out and spending our time together. Part of the reason why lies in the money we always dread to spend, especially when it is for casual festivities and whimsical causes. But I think it was also because we still cherished the concept of "full attendance" very much – it only counts when everybody's there. So as occasions like these grew scarcer and scarcer, my conscience started feeling overcome with unrest and uncertainty of the dwindling possibility for moments like these in our future.

Whenever I take a look back at these pictures, I feel a sense of genuine love. We were not a perfect family. We had our ups and downs, our days of exhilaration and desperation. But throughout my childhood years, there have not been a moment in which I was deprived of the feeling of being loved. I felt loved every day, when I went home after school to see my mom with a smile sitting on her face, all for her son. I felt loved everyday on my morning rides to school, sitting behind my dad's broad and warm shoulders. I felt loved everyday, waiting for the weekend to come when my brother can sit down and play FIFA with me. People say family is where your heart resides, where your feeble and tender soul is nurtured and fostered to know the ways of the world and to know how to love. My family is where harbor the fondest of my memories, the treasures of my youth and my greatest joys. My mom told me that I was the most precious gift that my family has ever received from the gods. But I think I am not the one who was given, but rather gifted, with a beautiful sanctuary with endless affection.

I still wish we had more times like these as a family. Even after my dad had retired and my brother had gotten his first long-term job, my mom would still have to go to work. Time was still a luxurious commodity to us, and no matter how many promises we made about trying to put aside some time for each other, it never got more affordable. But I always felt lucky. Well partly because my parents always told me that I'm already very

fortunate to be able to wake up everyday under a roof, with food in the fridge and loved ones around me. But also because I know for a fact that one day I will have to grow up, one day I have to taste loss and have sleepless nights, eyes dampened with tears. I know one day I will have to bid my family farewell to embark on my own journey, all alone. One day the world will stop being so loving, so tender and sweet to me. It will yell at me in the face every morning, complaining about some tasks I did wrong, or some ridiculously ugly graph that shows my monthly performance, that it has been going down so terribly and that having me in its company is a horrendous reality. One day the world won't need me like it once did. One day there will be nothing or no one that waits for me at home, drives me to school every morning, wrestles with me then hugs me into my dreams and cries for me.

The day I left for college a 20-hour flight away, I asked to take our family photo album with me to the States. My parents told me that some of the photos in it were the only copies and that I shouldn't take the whole thing with me. So I brought the photos we took in my brother's wedding, which were safely available as digital copies. I still look at them every morning as I wake up, and although I do not feel terribly homesick, I always feel an overwhelming sense of gratitude and delight that I have all these people back home to support me when I need to. Then I can leave my room and feel ready for the day, for anything and everything that would possibly come at me. My little endeavors are now my daily biggest delights, and the things that help me carry on.

I can't wait to be back with them next summer and create more delights. It is a long time from now, but it is worth the wait.

Until the next photo.

That night

Evan (Cuong) Vu

It was 3 am and there we were, on the turf of a random park. There were neither lights nor people, just the 6 of us in the pitch-black air falling on the grass. Alex and Oscar were on the swings, flinging around like the pendulum of a clock on steroids. Sufjan and Rey sat together, back to back, as still as sculptures, as silent as stones, just staring at the glittering sky full of stars. I was walking with Joan, along a nearby lake, whose center stood a fountain, spitting water as white as pearls. We had been to a dance earlier, in our tuxes and dresses. We had been waiting to surprise Sufjan with a birthday present. Rey had been stressing out for a test and reluctant to leave her room. All of us were exhausted after the dance and craving for our beds. Yet Sufjan dragged us all out for a walk. After a directionless 15 minutes, we ended up here, with as much confusion as astonishment in ourselves.

Even weeks after, I still can't, for the life of me, figure out why and how we ended up in that park. Probably for the same reasons, I still ask myself why a few nights before that, we had also decided that going around campus and giving out free bread that was leftover from the school's Homecoming party. But there is something I know for sure is that those moments were spontaneous - we had not had any plans. I also know that whenever I think about joy and happiness, it is those moments that I always think about.

When people ask me what moments make me the person I am today, the answer won't be those that involve a crowd, a competition or a heartbreak story. My highlights are rather moments like that eventful Saturday night, where nothing crazy happened but everything that matters did. My delights are spontaneous late nights, on which I either walk to a random park, embark on a free bread giveaway trip, water-paint the walls of Easton (of course with permission) or eat ice cream on the Quad with my friends. Yes, "with my friends", that part is important. I find it miraculous how these moments are the only time when I get to know the people who have always been around me, when we actually see each other being something that we truly are, that we want to be. Spontaneity always brings out the purest of people.

That night at the park we talked so much about how we feel. I talked about how hard it was being a kid 20 airplane hours away from home - though I never told this to anyone. Joan told me about this vision she had been having since 10 years-old of going to medical school and becoming a neurosurgeon, because of how hurtful it was to watch one of her relatives pass away because of a brain hemorrhage. Sufjan and Rey told us they were dating and we were all so happy for them. I felt as if we were nocturnal flowers - there we were in the dark, just blossoming without any sunlight.

I guess it is hard to explain this delight because it is not a concept, a hobby or a routine. It is more like a situation. I say that because I never put any effort into this delight - if I ever did then it would have not been the same. It just happens - spontaneous situations with the right people at the right time. They just make me feel that no matter what happens, no matter what decision you make in life, those people will be there with you, even in the darkest of nights, to warm your soul and make you feel safe. That, to me, is the most delightful thought ever.

Caitlyn Carr

Placed First at the Show of Delights

How's this for an example of irony? My last name is Carr, and I hated driving.

There were too many random delays and too many drivers who wanted to get to too many places too fast. I couldn't bear the impatient honks when you were in a turning lane you didn't want to be in but you *didn't know* you didn't want to be there and then you tried to get out of that lane because you realized, "Oh no, I do not want to be here!" and you had to hold up a lane of traffic to try to get over.

Yes, I somehow passed my driver's test. No, I didn't pass with flying colors. Yes, I did eventually have a car of my own to drive; his name is Sebby. No, Sebby was a driveway car for a bit and I took the bus and train home from school every day. Yes, I really was that afraid to drive!

Eventually, I reached the shameful point where I was the only one not driving to school, so I put on my big-girl pants and crawled through forty miles per hour zones at breakneck speeds of thirty-five miles per hour.

If you're wondering how this can possibly be an essay on delight when everything I've described has been filled with dread and anxiety, this is where I make my U-turn. It is better than any U-turn I've attempted in an actual car.

Driving with my best friend was always one of the greatest and simplest delights. In fact, Sarah was my first passenger apart from my father or driving instructor! When driving home from school, we had it down to a science; we'd exit the building, walk up the driveway to the left, make the right down Major Avenue, and I'd get into the driver's seat of the little red Bug before realizing poor Sarah was still locked outside. As the official DJ, she would take the aux cord to decide the soundtrack of the day, and we'd begin our journey from Staten Island's north shore to its south shore.

The best drives were accompanied with the best music. We never listened to Top 40, but the most memorable drives featured screaming along to Disney music, songs featured on TikTok, or "Rock and Roll McDonalds." We blasted the National Anthem, "God Bless America," "Yankee Doodle," and the favorite "God Bless the USA." We had terrible, awful taste in music, but our singing was even worse and anyone on Hylan Boulevard who had the misfortune of being our audience would agree.

Sarah was my most frequent copilot, and I loved driving with her. No conversation was off the table; we could talk our way through issues

with friend groups that disliked each other, discuss school work, or simply crack jokes and laugh until we cried. One time, we were driving to Applebee's, and we were so caught up in our conversation that I drove an entire mile past it. When a friend meeting us there called to ask where we were, we had to repeat ourselves multiple times because we were laughing so hard we couldn't speak.

Every ride was its own mini-adventure. We discussed plot theories on the way to *Avengers: Endgame*, and we sat in stunned silence on the way home. We laughed the whole way home after making innuendos throughout the entirety of our second viewing. We were surrounded by the most intimidating flock of prepubescent teenagers on bicycles who taunted us as they moved into the middle of the road. We made many pit stops at CVS, so many more than necessary.

The last time I drove Sarah home, I didn't know it was our last time driving together before college. We shouted our way through "God Bless the USA" and butchered Andrea

Boccelli's classic "Con Te Partirò" with our lack of understanding of the Italian language. We'd mumble through the verses and imitate the words of the chorus. We weren't good, but we were passionate and loud, which is convincing enough.

I'd make the left onto her street and pull into her driveway. We'd say goodbye, but usually continue talking for another ten minutes. She'd get out of the car, and then walk around to the driver's side, where the mailbox was located. I'd roll down the window, and another conversation would begin based on the mail she received. As she walked to her door, I'd occasionally do my best *A Star is Born* Bradley Cooper impression. "Hey," I'd say, and when she turned around I'd hit her with the, "Just wanted to take another look at you." We'd both laugh despite the joke being made multiple times, and I'd tell her to say hello to her mom for me. Once she was inside, she and her mom would give a little wave, and I'd back up to drive home.

Maybe some people just think of carpooling as an efficient way to get from Point A to Point B, but I treasured every single second of those drives. When the end of the summer was lurking, I found myself hoping for more traffic, longer red lights, or that the song we were listening to would surprise me with another verse. I know we'll be driving around together soon enough, and I'm excited to share my college stories and hear her own experiences. The idea of getting behind the wheel with my best friend in the passenger seat again is simply... delightful!

Floor 53 of the Pontiac building was just like every other floor: sticky. A shattered window had exposed tasteless carpet to the elements. The decades had not been kind. Even now a thin layer of moss was creeping up pet photos, and little flowers peeped out from between the computer keys. And then, of course, there were the bodies. Very sticky.

I stepped lightly, human remains being a tripping hazard. Funerals wished their corpses were this well dressed. All the ragged, faded suits were tailored. Pocket squares matched the ties and everything.

Picking through the bodies was probably useless, but I did it anyway. I was pretty sure “practical” wasn’t in vogue when they died, but you never know. So along I went, with all those rotted, vacant eyes looking up at me.

Near the back past all the cubicles was a little room with no door. On the wall next to it was a sign that read *Break Room*. What a novel idea, a room dedicated to breaks.

Inside was a broken refrigerator, a few cabinets, and a table. There wasn’t much of note, a few granola bars and some chips. Then I found the box. It had a pink sticky note next to it that read *Gary’s*. I peeled the flaps back to reveal a row of glittering silver cellophane. I peeled it back to find two identical rectangles. I could smell frosting and chocolate. In that tiny kitchen I said a silent prayer thanking God for preservatives.

I didn’t even bother trying the toaster. Instead, I went back into the cubicle farm and started looking for cigarette butts. Someone told me we used to inhale hazardous chemicals for *fun* long ago. I gave my gas mask, snug in its pouch, an appreciative pat.

Apart from the main room was a smaller room with much nicer furniture. The wooden desk glistened in the evening light. Lying on its side was a skeleton that put all the others to shame. The suit was flawlessly fitted over fleshless limbs, and the watch looked heavy enough to stop a bullet.

In the back of its head was a rather suspect opening. Sure enough, on the wall behind it was a telltale hole flanked by brown stains. I patted the skeleton on its cheek.

“Better men than you have done the same.”

The gun was gone, so I moved to the desk. Nestled in one of the drawers was a wooden box filled with cigars. Next to it, a gold lighter. A few flicks and I had a flame casting wavy shadows along the skull’s recesses.

To round out my plan I went back over the bodies, plucking out every pocket square as I went. Soon I had a little funeral pyre of Jos. A. Bank. The feeble blaze only lasted long enough to toast the edges. I took a bite and

and felt a tear rolling down my cheek. I’d never tasted anything so stale.

Dusie's Babies

Jennie Richardson

Honorable Mention in the Flash Fiction Contest

When Little Dusie got old enough to finally attend Kindergarten, she was too excited to pay much attention to Mama's rules. Dusie bounced in her seat while Mama explained that she must keep her lenses in at all times, and that she must never take off her wig. Dusie didn't really like the rules, because she didn't see why she had to cover up. But Mama had been so insistent, gripping Dusie's wrist in fear.

"Please be careful, my sweetheart," Mama said. She then told Dusie that these rules were for her own safety, and that she had to follow them in order to go to school. Dusie didn't really understand, but nevertheless, she followed Mama's rules. Dusie really wanted to go to school.

Kindergarten was so exciting from the start, with cookies and crayons and dolls and toy cars, and recess—Dusie *loved* recess. Her favorite thing was going on the swings, kicking her legs so high and with so much pressure, that her body would almost fly above the swing set.

Dusie made a best friend named Po, because Po liked Dusie's long red hair. Dusie sometimes felt weird that he liked her fake hair so much, but of course, Dusie adhered to Mama's rules and never told Po or anyone else her secret.

After a few weeks in Kindergarten, school got tiring, and Dusie always looked forward to going home. At home, she could take out her lenses and take off her wig. The babies were always angry after a day inside the wig, and she was careful every day to apologize to each one of them with a little kiss on the head.

"Mama, I think Po would like to meet the babies," said Dusie, on a Tuesday in October. Mama jumped out of her seat.

"You didn't tell him, did you?"

"No, Mama, he doesn't know about them. But I think he would love them." That day, Po had said Dusie was his best friend in the world, and apparently, best friends told each other everything.

"Not this, my darling," said Mama. Dusie was angry that she couldn't tell anyone, not even Po, and that night after a dinner of chicken and rice, Dusie stormed up to her room and buried her face in her pillow.

The next day, Dusie came to school with a plan. During recess, she had Po come with her to the swings, and then she began to pull off her wig.

"You wear a *wig*?" Po said, but he shut up as soon as the wig cap underneath came off, and the babies started hissing and snapping their heads.

"Snakes!" Po screamed, backing away from Dusie.

"They're really sweet," said Dusie innocently, but Po would not stop screaming. Remembering Mama's rule and seeing heads start to turn, Dusie plucked out her lenses, and then she looked Po directly in the eyes. Po stopped screaming. Dusie put her lenses back in and her wig back on.

n. 10. You found the phone first / you were going through the forest on a bike trail / early in the morning / too early in the morning / and the phone had the same ringtone as yours / and you picked it/ you picked it up. 9. "Ethan! Where on earth are you? I wouldn't have given you the keys if I thought..." 8. You hang up / later you'll wonder why / why did you hang up? 7. You're about to continue on when you notice the car / how had you not noticed the car?. 6. You stop cold / because the car isn't all you see / a boy / Ethan / laid out on the hood of the car/ the glass of the windshield halos his form/ you type 911/ you type 911 and drop the phone before you see his hand move. 5. It's not a jump into action / but a crawl / because you can tell he's not going to live / maybe you're a pessimist / but sometimes you can tell / and despite what Grey's Anatomy may tell you / there are hopeless cases / but still you walk towards him. 4. You fight the urge to ask if he's okay / cringing at the thought/ he wasn't. 3. His eyes were open / shooting every which way as if trying to take in everything / "Ethan..." / his eyes can barely focus on you / they start to droop / you put a hand on his head / as if trying to keep him awake / your hand becomes slick with blood / you gulp / hopeless. 2. Fighting the urge to move your hand / you haven't been around a lot of death / but you knew enough to lie / "You're going to be okay, just keep your eyes open." / but perhaps he knew enough to know you were lying / his eyes fluttered shut / hopeless/ "No, no, no, eyes open. You're not dying today" / yes / yes he was. 1. "Sorry, mom..." / you shake your head / "I'm-- I'm not--" / he's barely whispering now / barely breathing / "no... tell her... the car..." / his eyes shutter close again / you don't shake him awake again / instead you go teary-eyed / his eyes don't open again / but you know enough / to sit there holding his hand / "It's okay... trust me, she's not mad" / "You just keep fighting, that's uh-- it's what she'd want. Okay?..." / you'd like to think he nodded / you take your hand off his head and hold his hand in both of yours / you know enough to know he's dying / "You're not alone okay...Ethan?" / he breathes in / "I-- I know you don't know me... but I'm here-- and- and I'll tell your mom how brave you are, and then you'll wake up and- and I'll introduce myself, cool?" / he doesn't say anything / but you know enough to know he's listening / you know enough to tell yourself he's listening / "You seem like a good kid... I'll be there when you wake up okay? And I'm here now...". 0. His last breath comes before the ambulance

The half who didn't hear the gunshot were already deep into the creek.

The other half perched like statues at the top of the path, cautiously peering over at each step their dearest family member made. Those family members looked up in awe at their black silhouettes shining against the greenery, like birds in the sky. When the shot went off, it was their silhouettes that shuddered and flew like birds out of the trees.

"Relax, someone's probably just hunting!" a father yelled up. He stretched his arm across the fallen tree trunk where the pink sneaker lay, on display. "We found the second shoe."

Their anxiety first began when the family spotted a pink shoe left upturned on the path.

"This is a sign," one of the grandmothers announced. "We should go back home." She had a point. After 30 minutes of wandering along the deserted roads in search of the vaguely defined outlook point, everyone had enough.

"Ma, they probably went swimming."

"But where is the other shoe?" the grandmother asked. "What, are they going swimming with one shoe?"

Then the party split into the concerned and the confident. The confident marched down the rocks and roots, hardly an excuse for a path. So the adults created a chain, passing the children down the rocks and safely into another's arms. The concerned, made up of worried mothers and aging uncles who didn't want the strain on the knees, remained at the top, taking responsibility to worry for the rest.

But with the discovery of the second shoe, the confident had an edge.

From below: "Okay, we're going to go--"

A second gunshot fired.

"You're not going anywhere!" from above.

"Someone get him please!" a wife begged. "Look how far he's gone!" Her husband's feet were firmly planted on different rocks as the creek gushed through. Their two-year-old son bobbed on his shoulders.

"Come on, it's fine!" He pointed to the opposite shore, "We're almost there."

"Okay, bring my baby back, and you can go get shot," she half-joked. The husband persisted through the creek while 30 people continued screaming up and down the path. If someone really was ready to shoot, this should've pulled the trigger.

Finally, the harsh mosquitoes were enough to persuade the confident to retreat. The adults resumed their chain to bring the little ones back to their mothers.

“Maybe this is why there are so many graveyards around here,” thought one child as he was being lifted. “Everyone on vacation gets killed!” His mother made a slapping gesture loud enough for the water to take a sharp inhale.

“Hey, look,” said some kids, “it’s a flag!” They proceeded to wave a soiled old fishing net in full view of the creek, so all hunter-swimmer-trigger-happy people knew about their surrender.

As they packed themselves into five cars, a third gunshot erupted. The stragglers were pulled into the whatever negative space remained, and the drivers sped off, the sun sweeping the tips of their hair.

A Mother’s Suicide Note

Keeshawn Murphy

Winner of the Flash Fiction Contest

Sit like a lady. Say your prayers. Always make the right decision. Never change the calendar before the new year starts. Use the bathroom before you leave the house. Wash your hands before you go in the refrigerator. Never buy a man shoes, he’ll walk away from you. Don’t let anybody take advantage of you. Respect your elders. Spit on the broom if you sweep over somebody’s feet. DO NOT have sex before you’re married. Don’t get married too young. Don’t let the looks fool you. Remember, boys tell you lies. Stay focused. Be good to your momma. Sit like a lady. Fix your hair. Wear makeup. Don’t wear too much makeup. Wear shorts under that skirt. Keep your legs closed. That skirt is too short. Just wear pants. Look at me when I’m talking to you. Don’t look at me like that. Didn’t I say look at me when I’m talking to you. Sit like a lady! Fold your clothes like this. Fold your towels like this. Always hang your tops facing the same way. The hanger should hook inward not outward. Know the difference between cleaning up and straightening up. Puff the couch pillows when we have company. Always have emergency money. Sit like a lady! Remember life isn’t fair. Throw this away after you read it, no need to add to clutter.

aloneness

Marcy Laufer

Honorable Mention in the H. MacKnight Black Competition in Poetry

we did laundry
the day that you left,
a green nightgown
laying on the table
folding his white shirts
and handkerchiefs creased
into perfect triangles

it poured that evening
while we ate baked ziti
and talked about you,
cheese dripping from our lips
a brief moment of normalcy
while the sky opened up
to cry for us

we did laundry
the evening that you left,
struggling to find his keys
he almost fell over
toppling out of the desk chair
he frantically moved
to call the funeral home,
they had gotten your name wrong.

it poured that evening
when we said goodbye,
our grief filled the hospital walls
little rivers flowing into an ocean
where you went swimming together
off the coast of Italy -
in a small boat
you sailed the world together
an adventure of a lifetime
where you now float silently
away from one another

we did laundry
and stared at the green nightgown,

lost without a body to cover.
but what do you do with things
once they are just things
and no longer someone's?

it poured that evening,
so we put it back in the drawer
where you kept your socks,
fingers closing the door gently
while we watched him struggle
against the weight of aloneness

To Go Back

Mia Coutinho

Honorable Mention in the H. MacKnight Black Competition in Poetry

I would like to go back.
And pick up the pennies.
Pick them up off the chalky classroom floor.
And swallow the warmth that rose in my throat.

I would like to go back
and hand those pennies that were thrown at me
back to the boys who tossed them.
Who called me a
Jew!
And made me think
that word
itself
was
an insult.

I would like to go back
and raise my hand
and tell him to shut up.
And tell my teacher that what he was doing
was not teaching.

I would like to go back
and tell my teacher that we could
continue the conversation
in the principal's office.
If he'd like
to tell me more about how
I was more suited to
be a
nurse
than a doctor.

I would like to go back
and tell them that I was not wrong.
That there's no way they could prove I was wrong.
That I could believe what I wanted to believe.

I would like to go back

and tell those boys
who pointed and howled
when I
called God by the pronoun
"She"
it was no less
right
or wrong
than any word
they used.

I would like to go back.
And say.
And do.
And change.

I would like to go back.
But I cannot go back and tell
my young self,
that little girl,
that she can say NO
that she can REFUSE
that she can SPEAK UP.

So to honor that little girl,
and every girl,
who has ever been on the other side
of hurtful words
and malicious comments,

I will not go back.
Not back to
nodding,
smiling,
and biting my tongue.

I would like to go back
and change it all.

But
I will never go back
to that defeated little girl
who sat with her head buried in the green bus seat.

I will instead go on to be
who that little girl
desperately needed to see.
Who that little girl
ought to grow up to be.

What Do Criminals Look Like?

Fatimata Cham

Honorable Mention in the Jean Corrie Competition in Poetry

What do criminals look like?
At a young age, I've always wondered because
To me
All I saw were women and men who looked like me
Melanated
With brown eyes
Golden specks
Just when the sun hit them
You see light
Black hair
Curls
Kinky or loose
Rough hands from all the work they do
What do criminals look like?
Was it the men who stood outside my house
And protected me
Told me to stay in school
What do criminals look like?
Was it the men with low hanging pants
Who would never dare to go shoot up a school
Because they got too much heart
What does a criminal look like?
Is it the man with strong arms
5'8
Who made sure my dreams
Were his
He was mine and I was his
The man who would sing me lullabies at night
Who stayed awake so I could fall asleep
Peacefully
The man who cared so much
That he'd die for me
The man whom I always worried about
Wondering
if he would come back home
Every time he stepped outside his house
There was a clock on his life
Ticking ticking
Society painted him as a criminal

But he was my father
 The one who spoke my native tongue
 So well
 There were never goodbyes with my father
 Only see you later sunshine
 What do criminals look like?
 Are they the people who sit in Congress
 In their gray suits
 Pens in hand
 Writing legislation
 To enslave my people
 Mass incarceration
 What do criminals look like?
 2468
 We don't want to integrate
 What do criminals look like?
 Does a criminal look like
 Parkland shooting
 Sandy hook five
 Columbine
 Amber Guyger
 What do criminals look like?
 Trayvon martin
 A bag of skittles
 Tamar rice
 Toy pistol
 Sandra Bland
 Traffic stop
 What do criminals look like?
 Do they have this beautiful scarf wrapped around their head?
 Do they have Melanated skin like mine?
 Do they prostrate in prayer 5 times?
 Or
 Do they fast for 30 days
 From sunrise to sunset
 Do they give Zakat
 Do they wait for the Athan
 To ring in their ears
 What do criminals look like?
 They never wait for our hearts to beat twice
 They pull the trigger and were gone
 Left alone to die
 Blood covering our bodies
 Leaving our vessels empty

Lifeless corpses
 But when we don't get honored
 Until we die
 We aren't celebrated till we die
 There's always a clock on our lives
 Ticking ticking
 And I'm still asking this question
 What do criminals look like?
 Do they look like these people who have become hashtags
 Or do they look like the people in blue and white uniforms
 Saying they are here to protect us
 Or do they look like politicians
 In grey suits and their deafening silence
 What do criminals look like?
 I ask myself silently
 Looking into the mirror
 And wondering if the criminal was me
 Because sometimes
 People tell you so much
 You start to believe it too
 It doesn't matter if I prostrate in prayer
 Or wrap this beautiful scarf in happiness
 Or if I held my father's hands a little tighter
 I always end up losing
 Either someone
 Or the person staring right back at me
 So I ask again
 What does a criminal look like?

Psalm for Claire Fisher

Maya Nylund

Winner of the Jean Corrie Competition in Poetry

Dear God,

This week in school I learned about this girl who killed herself the day after Thanksgiving. Her name was Claire Fisher and she lived in San Antonio, but before she lived in San Antonio she went to my school. She left in eighth grade. I never met her but I already knew her name. I heard it via the Student Council President. She was his first girlfriend. He was being ball-busted by his buddies and he called the relationship a mistake.

Dear God,

In the picture on Claire Fisher's funeral card she's wearing too-orange foundation. Below her there is a garden of magenta-ink lavender. She has blue eyes crinkled at the corners like a Baby Ruth wrapper, an All-American Dream. Her shirt is pressed and collared like the ones I used to wear to MUN conferences. Her hair is the color of mine before peroxide. She has Colgate teeth & above the early crow's feet her brows seem somewhat jaded. They twist upwards slightly, like a tragedian.

Maybe that's grasping. But, in all honesty God, I swear Claire Fisher looks just like me.

Dear God,

When I first switched schools, I stopped seeing colors and spent daily lunches in the art room trying to rediscover them. I think the issue might've been my tear ducts; they had the slowest reflexes. Those days were hungry.

On one of them I met Matthew. He does photography & was Claire's best friend. He goes to church every Sunday and he is gay. And he knows he is gay; and I know he is gay, and everybody at school knows he is gay, but he cannot say the words "I am gay". I don't know if he ever will while other people can hear.

Dear God,

Now Claire Fisher is just a body and a half-developed print in the darkroom of my mind and I do not know if I will remember her name.

Dear God,

The teacher in his 50s in the corduroy jacket who spoke at Claire's memorial said she was a little bossy. She used to argue with Rohan from my AP English Lit class about whether or not y'all was a real word. He said she always won. He told us he was jealous of her because in middle school she also won this speech competition where she gave a treatise on

the importance of loving yourself.

Matthew told us he used to joke that she would be the first female president. Someone read a psalm about how we are all fearfully and wonderfully made.

We all received lavender cuttings on our way out.

Dear God,

Sometimes you are so quiet I forget you are there. Are you there? I thought I heard you at the memorial when Claire's ex-boyfriend got up to speak and had to sit back down because the tightness in his throat was threatening his vocal chords with snapping. In the hush of the mourning, I thought I heard your breath bubble up like static from somewhere central in the room.

But I was wrong. It was just feedback from someone's phone: an old friend tuning in through FaceTime.

Dear God,

Claire Fisher should've been the first female president. Her old homeroom teacher says she used to be the first one to volunteer to make cakes for people's birthdays when no one else wanted to.

Everyone should have known Claire Fisher's name.

Dear God,

This is not Judy Blume I am no fucking Margaret. I want you answer me. You need to answer me.

Dear God,

Were you with Claire Fisher that day after Thanksgiving? God if you were there why did you let Claire Fisher die? Why can't Matthew say those words?

Why does Claire Fisher look so much like me? And God if you weren't in that room who was there to exact the taste of Claire Fisher in my throat?

The warmth at the wrist, the tautness of the smile, the roughness at the neck, the bitterness on the back of the tongue- did you feel it too?

And God if you were in that bathroom or bedroom or musty attic could you also see Claire Fisher standing in the sunbeams streaming cool and quiet to give life to a million motes of dust in the air?

Dear God,

Today I gave Matthew a chocolate bar and a note with an isomer of these lines carved on its insides. Later he thanked me and we spoke in clumsy, weighted generalities.

God I am not sure if you were there or are here presently but I

know Matthew thinks you are and I think Claire Fisher might have too.

So God if you are with Claire Fisher now please tell her *I see her*.
Please tell her I am sorry. Tell her I know her name.

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