



AONIAN

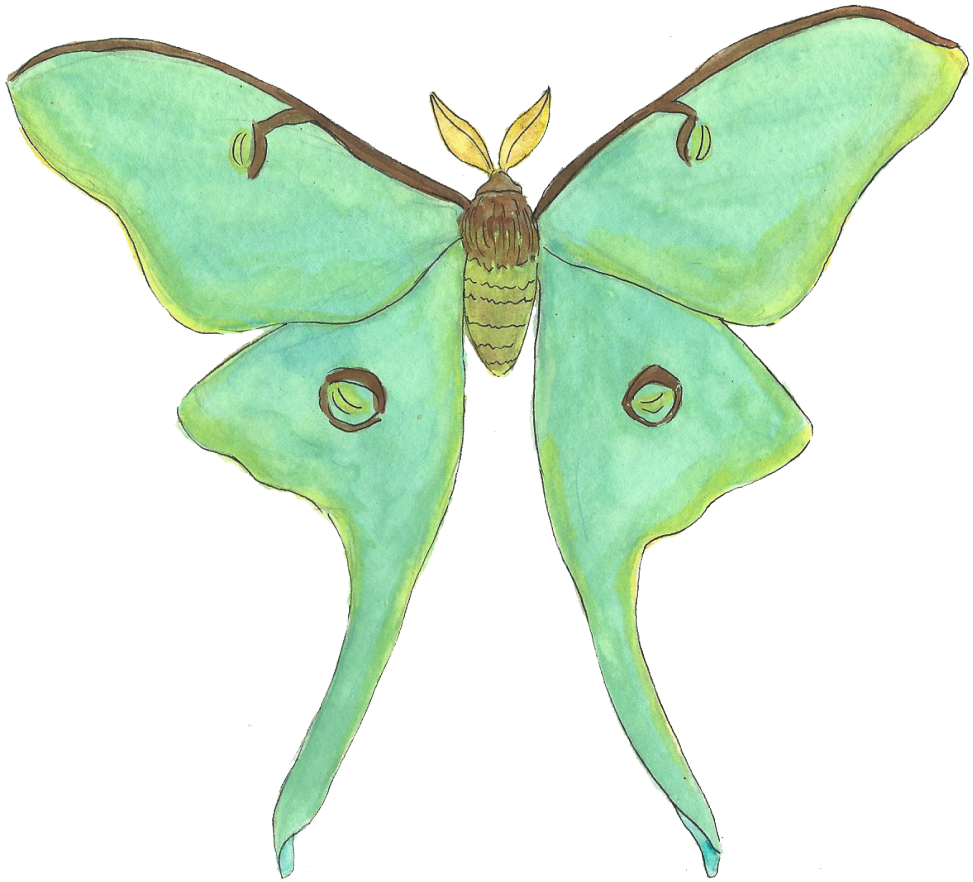
vol. 57

2015

AONIAN

vol. 57

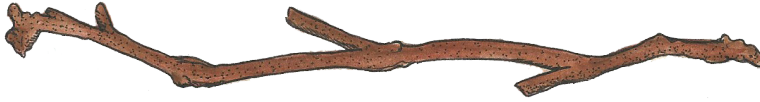
2015



cover art by carl napolitano

Hendrix College

AONIAN



EDITOR-IN-CHIEF

Carl Napolitano

ASSOCIATE EDITOR

Taylor Foreman

STAFF

Hannah Christeson

Anna Conard

Daniel Gear

Grace Griffin

Coco Guillot

Emily Hill

Kate Henricks

Marie Kressin

Noah Lashly

Christian Leus

Charlie Manning

Shelby Morrow

Dominique Silverman

Natalie Skinner

David Tate

MURPHY FOUNDATION CONTEST JUDGES

Poetry Nicole Brown

Fiction Trenton Lee Stewart

Nonfiction Deborah Baldwin

ART DEPARTMENT CONTEST JUDGE

Visual Art Kartherine Strause

PRINTER

Arkansas Graphics, Little Rock, AR



ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The *Aonian* would like to thank Hendrix professors Hope Coulter, Melissa Cowper-Smith, Rod Miller, and *Aonian* advisor Jessica Jacobs for their time, wisdom and enthusiasm; Adrienne Rivers for her poster design; Student Senate for their support and funding of the publication; former Editor-in-Chief Julia Lee McGill for her patience, guidance and help; Arkansas Graphics for printing the magazine. Thanks especially to the *Aonian* staff for your hard work, thoughtful insights, and dedication to art and literature. And of course, thank you so much to all the student artists and writers who bravely submit their work to the magazine. This publication can only be as awesome as it is thanks to the work you give us.

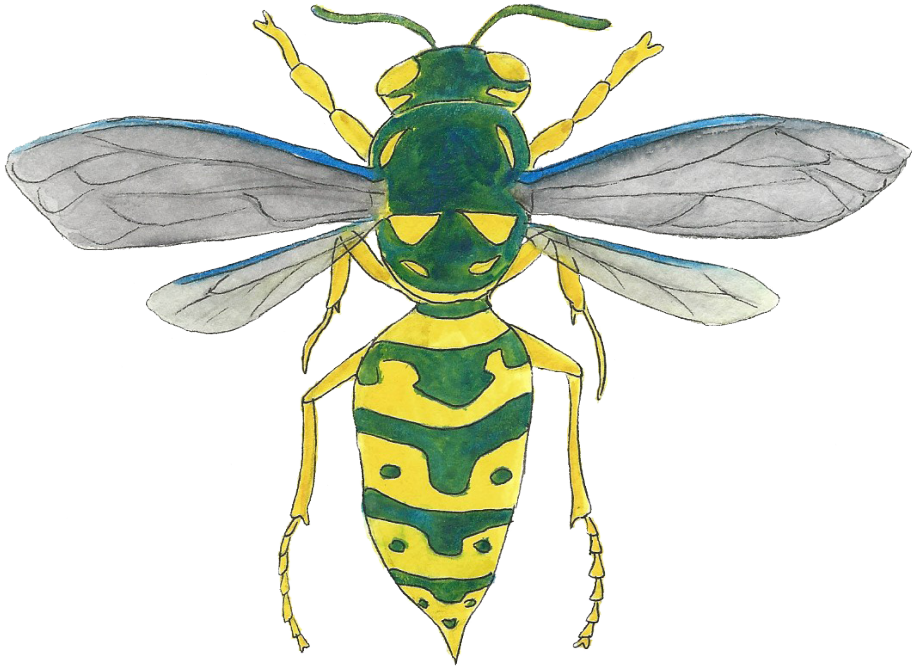


Hendrix-Murphy Foundation Programs in Literature and Language are designed to invigorate curriculum, enrich student experience, and encourage faculty development. The *Aonian* gives thanks to the Murphy Foundation for making the judging and release party possible. In particular, appreciation for Hope Coulter, Henryetta Vanaman, and Sarah Engeler-Young.



Thank you to the Hendrix Art Department for their flexibility, understanding, continuous support of the *Aonian*, and funding of the art contest.







EDITOR'S LETTER



I love the *Aonian* because of what it gives to Hendrix students: a place to share their creative endeavors with their peers; a place where we can experience and engage with their art; a place where our words, images, and ideas can excite, trouble, humor, and move us; a place where our campus can further foster a unique literary and artistic community. This year, it has been my pleasure to be the editor-in-chief of this publication and help it continue to inspire us.

The visual theme of this year's magazine is based on an insect collection in a shadow box. This is partly due to my own fascination with insects but also due to the nature of the *Aonian*. Each year, we as a staff set out with our nets and jars in order to catch all the works of literature and visual art that we can from the student body. Some work eludes us, just out of reach or in the distance, destined to live on elsewhere. Other work isn't ready yet, still needs time to grow and become fully developed and realized. But the work you see in here is work that we have spent hours examining and have decided to preserve here for you, for your pleasure. In this work, we found a swarm of creatures, both beautiful and strange, that speak to us as humans. We hope they do the same for you. Because unlike bugs pinned in a shadow box, these works are not dead. They live. They live whenever you read them, whenever you look at them, whenever you think about them long after you've left the page, folding your laundry or brushing your teeth. They live when you share a copy of the *Aonian* with your family and when you talk about them with your friends. You may never fully understand every work of art or literature in this magazine, just as you will never fully understand the intricacies of a butterfly that lights on your skin for just a brief moment. But that doesn't mean you don't try to understand, or that you don't marvel, or that you don't relish it. In the *Aonian*, you will come into close contact with living work very different and yet very similar to you, work that both reflects and distorts your experience of the world. Is that not one of the joys of being alive? So please, I hope that you cherish this work and this magazine as much as I have.

Carl Napolitano
Editor-in-chief



CONTENTS



FICTION



BRITTANY CANTRELL

The Baby Incident » pg. 36

Digestion » pg. 53

EMILY HILL

My Eternal Gift from the Fleeting Fox » pg. 73

KAMERON MORTON

Equality » pg. 18

HANNAH POPKIN

A Picture of You » pg. 27

DOMINIQUE SILVERMAN

The Woman's Purse » pg. 103

NONFICTION



CLAIRE COMEAUX

Grandmère » pg. 21

JACKSON FITZGIBBON

When a Man Loves a Woman » pg. 91



TAYLOR FOREMAN
A History of Scar Tissue » pg. 84

DANIEL GREAR
Do Not Publish This » pg. 113
My Grandfather the Ghost » pg. 39

ANUSHA JIWANI
Pile of Broken Tasbihs » pg. 56

BAYLEY KRELL
How to Be a Good Mormon Girl » pg.

DOMINIQUE SILVERMAN
Solo » pg. 69

POETRY



ELLIE BLACK
green light district » pg. 101
november in e minor » pg. 54
reading the virgin suicides » pg. 80

ROBBIE BORRELLO
Bobby Hines to Michelle Haupt » pg. 110
Metairie: Vacation, 2005 » pg. 22
Reclaimed Land » pg. 70

MEG BOYLES
Birdsong » pg. 48
Of Light » pg. 118
Raising the Dead » pg. 15

CLAIRE COMEAUX
First Life » pg. 12
Lesbian » pg. 83



ANNIE CRISWELL

45 Minutes » pg. 100
A Family History » pg. 34
Rocks in the Riverbed » pg. 64

DANIEL GREAR

Honesty is the Best Policy » pg. 90

KATE HENRICKS

No Evidence of Cancer » pg. 37
Pressed Flowers » pg. 49

EMILY HILL

Selling Yourself » pg. 81

EMILY HOLMES

Rock Bottom » pg. 96

TRAVIS KISH

[and run.] » pg. 89

SHELBY MORROW

Umbilical » pg. 50
Your Fingers are Long » pg. 97

CARL NAPOLITANO

Lessons » pg. 67

WILSON ROBERTS

A Hymn Composed During a Summer Rainstorm » pg. 25

CHRISTINA SANTNER

Please Stop Falling » pg. 107



VISUAL ART



Drawing

EMILY HILL

Valentine to Self » pg. 82

Painting

LILY HAMMER

Callum » pg. 45

Patrick » pg. 95

WESLEIGH HARRISON

Bleeding Moon » pg. 24

Photography

LEXI ADAMS

Into the Sunset » pg. 109

Shadows » pg. 52

NATHAN CROCKETT

Naturally Impressionable » pg. 68

Our Lady of Perpetual Astonishment » pg. 117

SHELBY MORROW

Dismorphic » pg. 79

GRACE OXLEY

Janis Kay » pg. 78

Three Faces » pg. 16

LEE ROGERS

Self Portrait » pg. 105

Self Portrait #2 » pg. 106

Self Portrait with Laura » pg. 35



ANNA SHEALS

Me or We » pg. 14

NATALIE SKINNER

Casualty 31: Sauntering » pg. 71

Casualty 38: Dancing » pg. 72

Casualty 39: Sleeping » pg. 73

KATE SKORIJA

Coldwater » pg. 20

Connor » pg. 66

Dog 1 » pg. 46

Dog 2 » pg. 47

TY SPRADLEY

Into the Light » pg. 38

KONRAD WITKOWSKI

Goose » pg. 65

Printmaking

EMILY BROWN

Lechuguillas » pg. 99

Street Organ » pg. 104

Untitled I » pg. 17

HOPE MONTGOMERY

Crane Wife » pg. 13

Wolves » pg. 63

CHRISTINA SANTNER

Revised Family Portrait » pg. 26

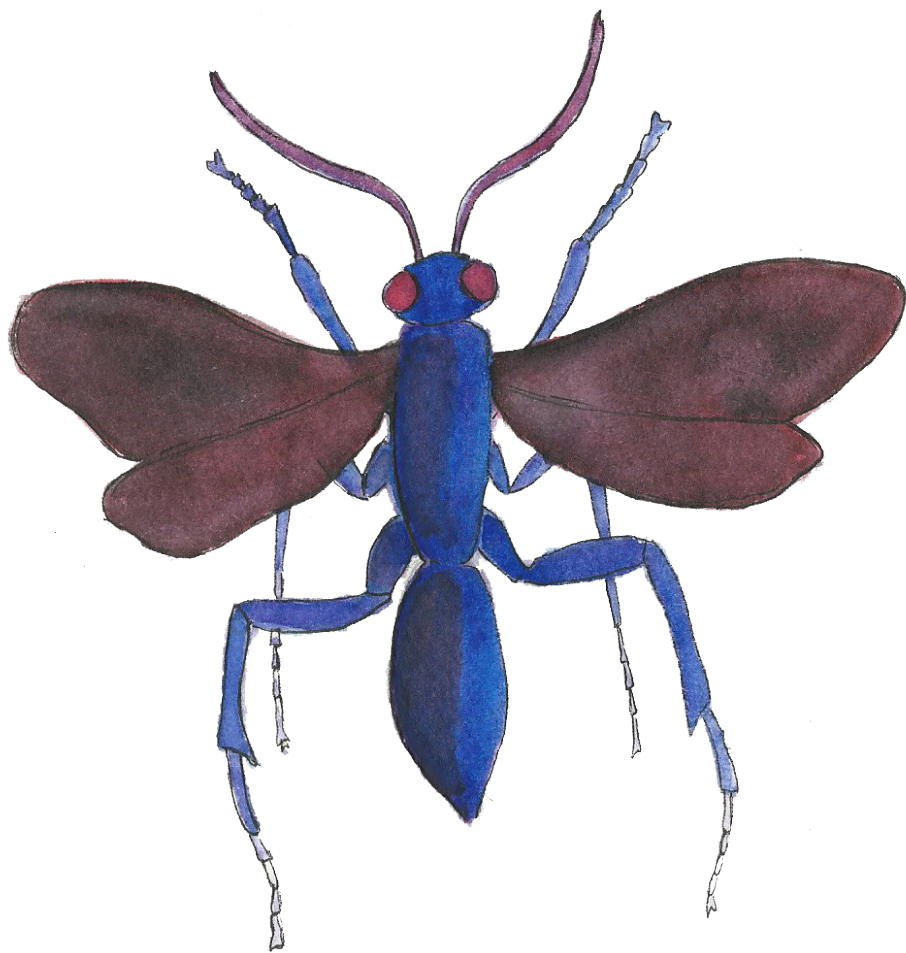
Tanlines » pg. 88

Sculpture

CHRISTINA LUCIO

Wave » pg. 112





First Life

by Claire Comeaux

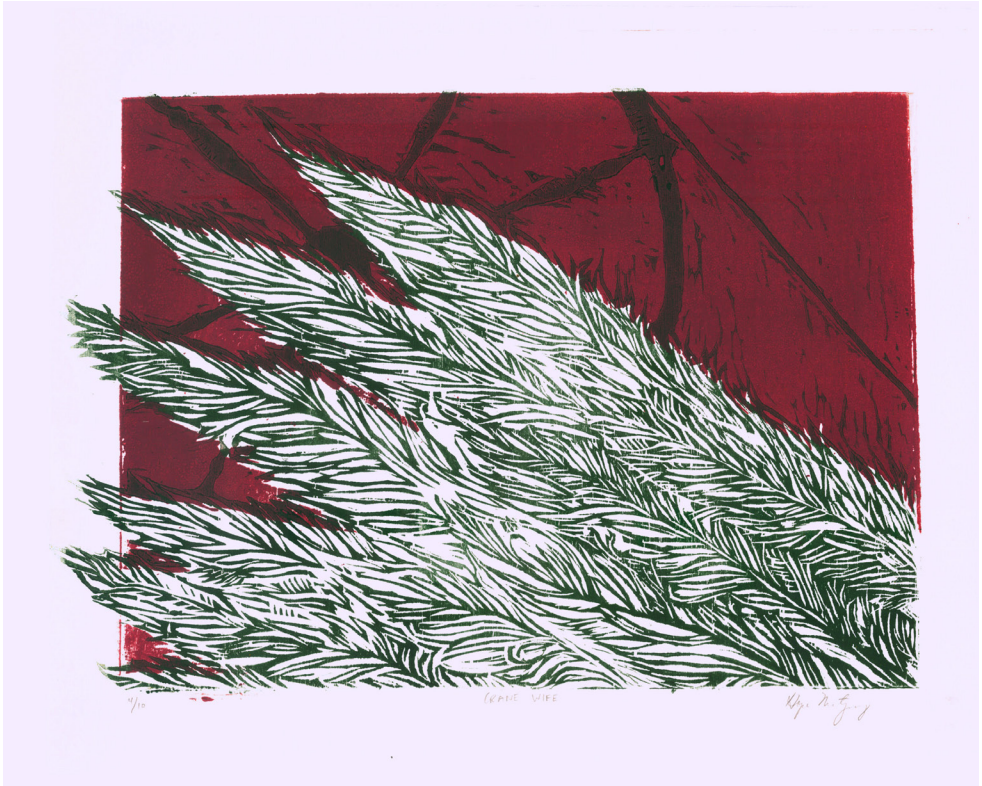
The night I spent at my grandmother's, she knew I was restless; so she pulled on black boots, and walked out to the barn. I pressed my face against the window, searching the dark, squinting to see her, losing her—another worry in the night. She came back with a chicken. An all-white little thing—nothing extraordinary. In the living room, I sat at her feet, head up, watching as she guided his shaky neck down and nestled it under his wing, his muscles tense against her arms. Humming a lullaby to him and to me, she unwound us. She made moonlight pour over his whole body the way years underwater form one pearl. Her palms cradled that Sunday-lunch chicken until he became something precious. She held him closer to me so I could see his back rise and fall with breath slow and soft as mine. I succumbed to sleep, lulled because I'd just seen its safe arrival, its gentleness like the lid of a music box closing over a feathered dancer. But my grandmother offered me more than what I'd recognized, let me be in the presence of something else drawing nearer to him. From within her strong hands, his thin neck emptied air into the small space between us, the damp and warm of the first life I'd ever know to escape.



Crane Wife

by Hope Montgomery

woodblock print



Me or We

by Anna Sheals

digital photography



Raising the Dead

by Meg Boyles

From a field away, the home looks as empty as a pool
drained of water, exposing its sterile blue skin.
But that's the beginning of a different poem.
In this one, the home is a house, but it still looks
empty. Hello, house. Hello, empty.
Follow my voice, and we'll touch cement. If there were
another way, well, what then? It's a "once more
with feeling" kind of song with the volume turned
all the way to the right. Open your hands,
and a rainstorm falls out. Open your hands,
and the scene turns to black. There's a light switch
to your left. You flip it, and the colors rush back.
From a field away, the house is empty, with white-walled
rooms and only slightly stained carpets. There are
more interesting backdrops, to be sure, but this
one's important. Makes me think about the night
there was more thunder than rain, when a voice screamed,
You don't love me because you love me, Jeremy.
You love me because I'm here. But enough about that.
I never liked that line anyway. Back to the house.
It's empty and clean and whatever, if you follow
my voice, it should take you to where the color is,
out the door, past the lawn chairs, past the deer
footprint pressed into the cement patio, past the blue pool.
There is no point in returning.
There is nothing poetic about it.



this profession have taken up the commercial phase, working for banks, private bureaus, factories and shops.

The profession of identification expert is probably one of the youngest of all the professions, and there is plenty of room.

The work is not dangerous. The identification expert is not a policeman, though much of his work may be done for the police authorities. His surroundings are wholesome and pleasant, his associations uplifting, the work varied and interesting.

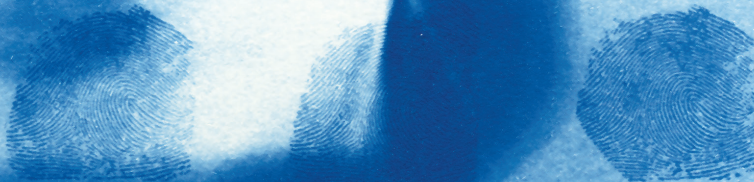
Here are some pictures that will give you a startling idea of the importance of finger prints in the establishment of identity.

THREE FACES—ONE PERSON!



*Bessie Hargrave
Weight, 205 Lbs.*

*Marie Brown
Weight, 105 Lbs.*



Three Faces

by Grace Oxley

cyanotype



Untitled I

by **Emily Brown**

itaglio etching with relief on copper plate

Equality

by Kameron Morton

Equality reminded me distinctly of Peter Pan. Not the cartoon one, but the walk-around character at Disney World who by thirteen you realize is actually pretty attractive. He's the type of person who never sits still and loves to laugh. While he was certainly not wearing green tights, his jeans were well-fitting and his shirt perfectly matched his eyes.

He was nearly impossible to interview. I'd originally thought my own nervousness at meeting him would render the conversation worthless, but Equality did his best to put me at ease. The problem was getting him to stay on topic. It reminded me of interviews I'd watched of Robin Williams, where he would say something deep and profound, and in the next moment crack a joke (neither of which related to the question being asked). I quickly realized that as much as I wanted to interview him, Equality was the one running the conversation.

In preparing to write this article, I listened to the recording of the interview at least a dozen times, and every time I notice something different. I have two hours of conversation, mixed with laughter. Even now as I'm listening to it, I'm hearing something I'd completely forgotten we discussed.

REPORTER: You know, I almost didn't see you. My editor told me to look for a petite black woman.

EQUALITY: *Laughter.* That's because when your editor thinks of me, he thinks 'black' and 'woman.' I simply combined the two.

REPORTER: So you look how people expect you to look?

EQUALITY: Sometimes.

REPORTER: What does that say about me, then? That I associate you with an attractive white male?

EQUALITY: Who said I modeled myself off of your opinion of me?

REPORTER: Now I'm confused. If you aren't being what I want you to be, who are you?

EQUALITY: How did you know it was me?

REPORTER: What?

EQUALITY: You knew who I was, even though I didn't look how you expected. How did you know it was me?

REPORTER: I don't know. I just did.

EQUALITY: How?

REPORTER: *Long pause.* What was your opinion on the riots in Ferguson, Missouri?



EQUALITY: I've made you uncomfortable. When you get uncomfortable, you ask me a question.

REPORTER: Well, I am conducting an interview.

EQUALITY: Do you want to know a secret?

REPORTER: Are we still on the record?

EQUALITY: Prejudice is one of my closest friends.

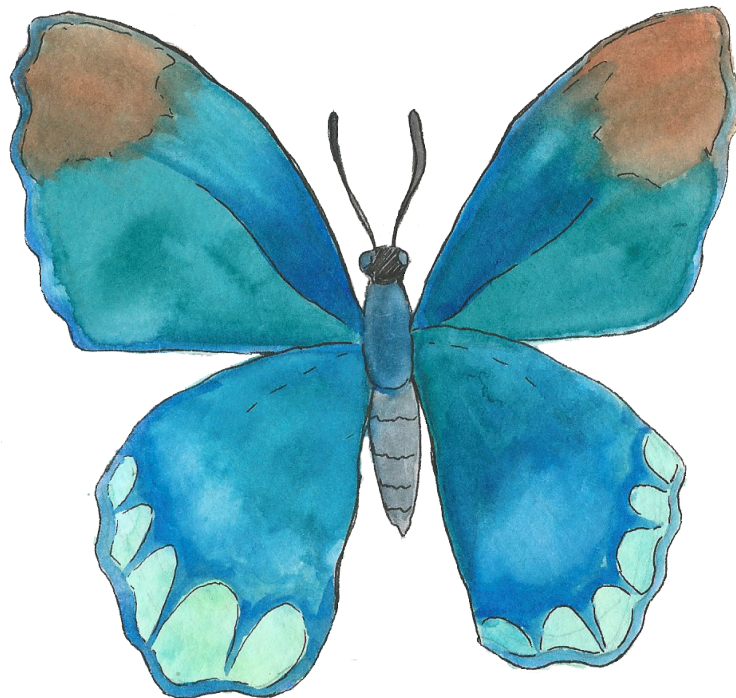
REPORTER: *Silence.*

EQUALITY: I mean, he's a little rough around the edges, but it's hard to be angry with him. He knows some of the best jokes.

REPORTER: I don't really understand where you're going with this.

EQUALITY: I figure, if I'm not friends with him, who will be? A lot of people don't like him, which is why he's so angry most of the time. Without me, he'd have no one except himself.

REPORTER: *Long pause, shuffle of papers.* Where do you stand on the new immigration reform?





Coldwater

by **Kate Skorija**

120mm film, printed digitally



Grandmère

by Claire Comeaux

I called her Grandmère. It was the name everyone called her—not just her grandchildren. Grandmère: Cajun Grandmother. Cajun: land made to take beatings from wrathful storms and blood made of standing ground. Grandmother: the smell of vanilla dabbed behind her ears; white buckets of rainwater collected for watering the garden; gifts for the dozens of family members at Christmas because she never bought more than she needed, never even owned pajamas, always slept naked.

In my house, thirty miles north of Grandmère's coastal Louisiana home, my childhood was made of watching the spattered primary colors pixel the always furious Doppler radar of late summer. Greens, yellows, reds. Severe storms, flash floods, hurricanes. I remember one gruesome mass of concentrated red sweeping our boot state on the Weather Channel, and hearing my mother on the phone, trying to convince Grandmère to let her drive down and bring her back to our house. No luck. Grandmère assured us that she had sandbags for the doors, but I doubt she did.

That evening, it drizzled in our yard and my mother kept the landline close to her body. She called Grandmère when the storm started up, wondering if she'd changed her mind. She hadn't. In the night, my mother sent up a prayer in thanks that Grandmère had air conditioning. Grandmère hadn't told us that the storm had kicked it out. Had she, my mother's cheeks would have reddened like the heat Grandmère was thick in. She would have gotten in the car and headed south.

No, there was no air conditioning, but there was wind. Wind in swells, surging from every direction: sometimes a breeze, sometimes threatening to take down oak branches. Grandmère pulled the mattress from her bed, dragged it with spindly arms across the flower-patterned linoleum, propped open the front door with it, and slept. No sheets, no clothes. Half of her under the roof, half exposed to whatever the night would bring. On that threshold, her naked body welcomed the wind—needed it, in a way. It's a strange image of her to keep, especially because it's one I didn't actually see. But it's as persistent and stubborn as she was. I think of that storm, and I see her fast asleep, rain gushing the panes and gutters, mosquitos struggling to cling to the wall while she dozes, the wind dictating her unconscious breaths. She lived off what the storm gave her—and we off all she gave us.



Metairie: Vacation, 2005

by Robbie Borrello

Vacation arrived one week into 5th grade. Mom told me to pack my own clothes. I tossed 9 t-shirts, 9 gym shorts, 9 boxers, and 11 pairs of socks (to be safe) into my sapling green, big-as-me suitcase. No hoodie. No sweatpants. It was only August and the sun still hung in the sky like a classroom's clock hangs on to 2:59.

Grab anything else you need to bring, She commanded, You don't need the Xbox and the Nintendo. Choose one.

I'll take the Nintendo and Ross will take the Xbox.

No. Choose one. Quickly.

These vacations arrived at different times each year, but, always, when a storm swam into the gulf like the pull of a fire alarm, like the tilt-headed smirk of the school boy with powdered glass on his palms from the broken glass bar under that alarm,

I hoped for hurricanes.

Isidore, 2nd grade: one week.

Lili, 2nd grade: two more weeks.

Ivan, 4th grade: one week. Now

Katrina, and I had to choose how to enjoy the next week and a half.

Mom said it was serious this time, but

Mom always thought it was serious.

When Lili came, my family and I went to Vicksburg. My brother and I played at a creaking Bed and Breakfast old as the Civil War and haunted by amputee ghosts. We



learned the word “brunch” and how it smelled like
butter-yellow grits. Late at night, in the pitch-black
bathrooms, Ross and I whispered Bloody Mary,
Bloody Mary, Bloody . . . We started jittering too much and
never finished. When day broke, we burned the
rubber brakes off our inline skates skimming
down Mississippi hills, sharp and steep as a
playground’s slide. We’d glide to the railroads,
grab rocks from between the tracks and laugh
as they plunked into the silty-brown Yazoo.

This year we were going to vacation in Houston,
Mom told us. The city gleamed with
sky-scraping steel in every photo I googled, but
there were no hills and there were no rivers.
I wanted those Civil War, brick-red buildings
with the cannonball-sized holes in the sides.
But Mom said Vicksburg was
too close to the Gulf.

So, I wrapped my Nintendo in an undershirt
and slid it into my suitcase. Mom darted
back into our room, sweat pasting
hair darkly to her cheek, pupils trembling
like an alcoholic’s, her red suitcase’s
worn black handle between
one set of unpolished fingernails, and
Maw-Maw’s yellowing family recipes
quivering between the other set of unpolished nails.

Hurry.

We have to go.

Mom, We’ve done this before.

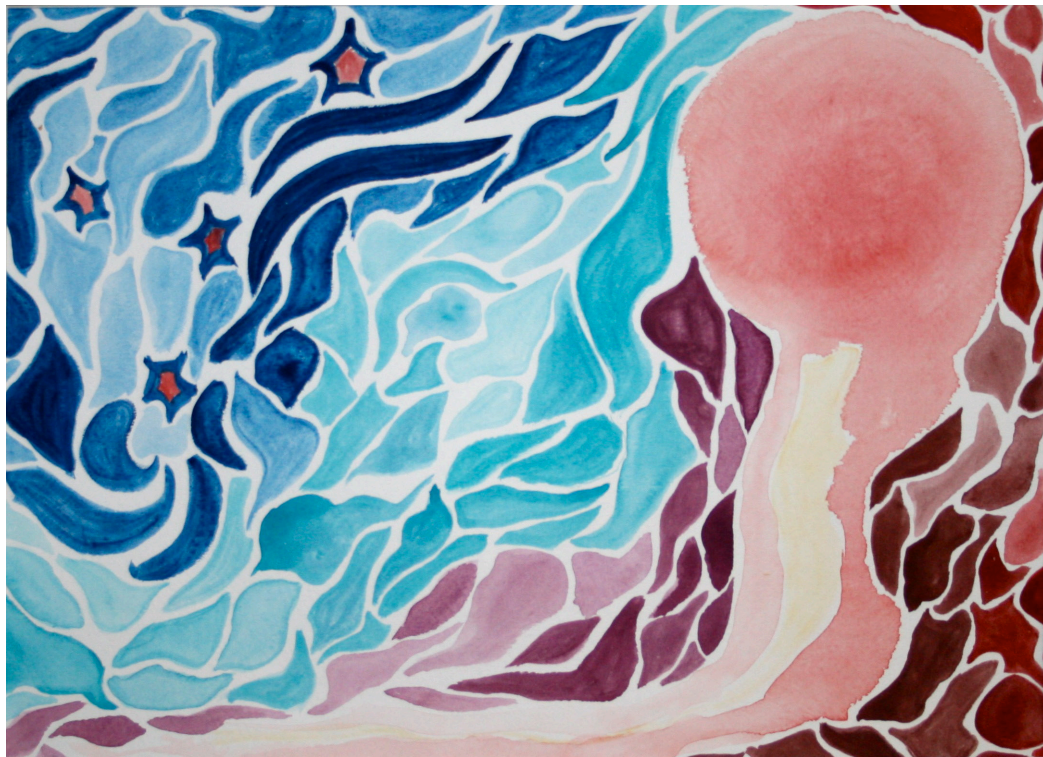
It’s only a hurricane.



Bleeding Moon

by Wesleigh Harrison

watercolor



A Hymn Composed During a Summer Rainstorm

by **Wilson Roberts**

*By the rivers of Babylon—
there we sat down and there we wept
when we remembered Zion.*

And the wind was savage, whip'd
Into high keys; a chromatic
Progression, soon ripp'd
From tonal scale by animistic
Cry of ancient Naiad, slain.

And just before the Midnight's dawning,
O'er the wind-worn men who gathered,
To feel the breath of Ocean yawning,
And taste the spray of Ocean lathered,
By searing lash of windborne Pain;

The voice of all the spirits, rising,
To glor'ious peaks of heaven, sounds;
Verses, god and man, comprising
Now o'er the silent night resound,
The constant screams of that refrain:

Allelujah! o'er the raging breakers
Crashing 'gainst the battered shore,
Allelujah! sing the holy quakers
Shaken by the gath'ring roar
Called down as ancient gods ordain'd
Falls down as storm and tide and rain

All night we sat on the levee,
And watched the tide come in





Revised Family Portrait

by Christina Santner

woodblock print

A Picture of You

by Hannah Popkin

My father and I have been waiting almost an hour before they arrive. The room is low and dark, candles thick with wax flickering over the unread menus that lie across the clean white tablecloth. In the corner, a small man in a polyester suit is playing Sinatra covers and he isn't half bad. I wonder how many times he has played "Fly Me to the Moon" and if he hates it. The front door flies open and a thin, young woman with bobbed brown hair and a sparkly black dress enters into the restaurant. I make eye contact with her and smile, wishing she would sit down at the seat across from me. She shyly moves around the room, ending up at the table next to mine with a handsome older man. I turn back to the door and stare, my stomach now audibly rumbling.

"Are you sure they're coming, Dad? Is this even a good idea? We could have always driven over there. Brought take-out or something."

"Your grandfather suggested it. He says it's good to get her out of the house."

This is a lie. It is my grandfather who wishes to get out of the house, but he feels too guilty to leave Grandma with a caretaker. The waiter, a tall man with a thin mustache, appears and quietly asks if we are still waiting and would we perhaps like to order. I look over at the almost empty glass in front of me. My father tells him, thank you but that we are still waiting for two more and I ask for a bottle of the Merlot. My father squints up from his phone and scowls at me before returning to his very important game of Tetris. I take the final gulp of what is in my glass, letting the alcohol burn my tongue and fill me with warmth. Who else in this world still plays Tetris? Suddenly, the door opens and I know they are here.

Her once long hair is now short, the ends messily cut and greasy. She is wearing an over-sized purple nightie with lace on the collar and sleeves. In an attempt to hide the clear pajama nature of this muumuu from the general public, the front is covered by her old black blazer. The bags under my grandfather's eyes are swollen and his movements are smaller than I remember. He sees our table, and his shoulders perk up as he waves his left hand energetically. I notice that he is dressed well, in a blue button-up and tweed jacket. My father, finally distracted enough from the perils of level fourteen, stands up and shakes his father's hand before awkwardly placing his fingers around Grandma's waist to hug her. I follow suit, and my feeble attempt at an embrace is just as poor as my father's. I end up holding her for an uncomfortably long time; she smells of stale body odor. A year ago we would have never been able to touch her so freely. The doctors warned us that a hug could result in a confused and panicked state, but Alzheimer's comes in phases, some much longer than others. After eight years, Grandma is now in what my sister lovingly calls the "give up stage." She



sits quietly to herself, her dead eyes always distant and afraid. If heavily prompted she will respond with a head nod, and she can follow someone who is guiding her. Her thin eyebrows are usually furrowed and sometimes move up and down, but mostly she lies limp and stares into nothingness, which is perfect for forced hugs. The give up stage has its perks.

Mine was the first name she lost. It started gradually; she would slip up and call me Jack or John, and on one particularly entertaining and random occasion, Claude-Francis. Her cheeks would flush with pink and she would apologize profusely.

“I am so sorry, Jacob. Of course I know your name, Jacob. Jacob, Jacob.”

She started inserting my name into a sentence as many times as possible, rehearsing and studying it. Around this time, she read online that puzzle games could combat symptoms of memory loss. She began practicing Sudoku; her fragile hands became constantly stained with the markings of black pen. I reminded her of her hatred for numbers, a disdain that began and remained ever since her introduction to fractions in the fifth grade. At family reunions she would sit cross-legged on the floor and laugh and drink sweet tea and tell all the cousins she had married a mathematician just so she would never have to fill out a tax-form again. I told her of all this as if she had already forgotten it. She would chuckle quietly and nod and continue on, desperately hoping to find the block where the five was meant to fit.

But the hours of meaningless math were not enough, and soon my name was completely gone. My father, sister and I drove the hour-long journey to see my grandparents for Easter dinner. I had just been on a post-grad European backpacking trip, and so I had not seen them all summer. When I entered the living room, the corners of her lips curled upwards into a smile, as if her mouth was enchanted by some sort of lost recognition. She sat there, never getting up off her chair to say anything, but behind her big brown eyes I saw an acknowledgement of my presence. I placed the palm of my hand on top of hers, waiting for words, something I could respond to. They never came. Memories of conversations that had once been shared were now just my own. I visited her more often after that, in an attempt to ward off the feelings of guilt and regret that weighed heavy in my stomach. I couldn't help but feel as if her forgetfulness were in some way purposeful, her memory consciously choosing who to forget based on their worth to her. I had failed as a grandson; I did not deserve remembering. Of course this was untrue, for as quickly as my identity disappeared, the rest slipped away: my aunt, my father, my sister and then, finally, my grandfather. Even as she struggled to notice anything but her daytime soaps, my grandpa refused to get her any outside care, outraged at the notion of shipping the woman who had raised his four darling children off to the “loony bin.” Instead he sentenced himself to another kind of prison: one of dried-on drool, chaotic confusion, and unrecognizable isolation. Two summers ago, after she had forgotten us all, he brought her to the grocery store, a quick trip involving a rotisserie chicken and some frozen corn. As they proceeded to checkout, my grandmother warmly greeted Susan, the middle-aged grocery checkout clerk notorious for her ever-changing neon hair and steady stare.

“Susan, it is so nice to see you. I love your new hair!”

Grandma still comments on Susan's hairdo every time she sees her while Grandpa



nods and grins and silently winces in pain. The grocery store clerk who reeks of bleach remains steady in my grandmother's memory; the man who she shared a bed with for forty-nine years does not. For the past few months, Grandpa has been asking his neighbor to watch her while he goes on his errands. He is afraid of the other strangers she will remember.

My grandfather escorts Grandma to her seat, gently pushing her shoulders down, telling her it is time to sit. As he moves to his own chair, his large, wire-framed glasses slide to the ridge of his nose. I try to remember him wearing another pair, but my mind goes blank. Grandpa is a magical mixture of both practical and nostalgic. The clothes he wore when I was six, he wears now. His closet is lined with heavy wool flannels, and the minute a hole appears, he breaks out the sewing kit to fix them. There has never been a greater mystery in my family than what Grandpa does with the new pants we buy him for Christmas. My sister was convinced this practicality was due to his status as a child born from the Depression; if something is broke, you fix it. But old clothes are not the only thing Grandpa refuses to throw away. In the living room next to his leather blue recliner sits a shoebox filled with photos. On our regular Sunday visits he would call my sister and me to sit on his belly, as he went through each photo, one by one. His voice would shake with excitement as he sifted through these mementos of memory, somehow evoking every detail surrounding the story of the picture.

He must have over two hundred different photos in that old box, but the last three of the stack always remained at the end. Each is faded, their edges crinkled beyond repair. The first is of Grandpa, hearty and young, standing amongst a group of men I have never seen anywhere else. Their backs are pushed upwards against a concrete wall. Most of them, my grandpa included, hold cigarettes in their hands. They gaze at the camera, frowning mischievously. They look cool—James Dean in *Rebel Without a Cause* cool. This is the photograph Grandfather can ramble on about most. They were his best friends from home and the shot was taken just before the draft. Grandpa would howl with laughter as he would he would tell us about the time they snuck into the neighborhood pool, or the time they all made moves on the same girl just to see who she would choose. He would only stop reminiscing when my sister and I would beg him to move on the next photo.

The next is an extreme close-up of Brewster, Grandpa's late Labrador retriever. A New York Yankees baseball cap has been placed atop his head, his short floppy ears dangling below it. Brewster's large eyes stare directly into the camera and his slimy pink tongue lazily peeks out from the corner of his mouth. His black snout is tilted upward, giving way to a mischievous smirk. Of the three, this was the picture Grandpa passed through the quickest. The look of dreamy nostalgia that had remained from the swinging 60's was swiftly replaced by a sad and longing smile. His fingers stroked those droopy black ears, as if Brewster was right there in front of him. He would stammer about the time on the lake and broken leashes and wet kisses. The dog had passed before I was born, and once when I was six I curiously asked a list of questions. Did he wag his tail a lot? Where did you get him? Did he like peanut butter and hate carrots like our dog, Sandy? Little salty tears gathered in the corner of Grandpa's eyes, and he promptly wiped them away on the edge of his sleeve. I



had never seen him cry before. He moved on to the next photo, never answering any of my questions. Instead he nodded his head while smiling bravely, looking me square in the eyes. “He was a great dog. And a true Yankees fan, too.”

The last photo is the best preserved, my grandfather always making sure to carefully grip its wrinkling ends. There sits my grandma, young and beautiful. She is wearing a tight brown turtleneck and a high waisted skirt. She sits on the edge of an uncomfortable looking loveseat, her chestnut brown curls framing the edges of her face. The camera is aimed at her side-profile, narrowly illuminating the wood-paneled walls that surround her. She is laughing. Grandma’s eyes are looking out towards the large square window on her right. She dangles a shiny locket between her thumb and index finger. “We only had three days for our honeymoon. We rented a small cabin right outside of town. Just me and her for three days. It snowed the whole time.” When describing that long weekend to my sister and me, Grandpa’s voice remained steady and high. His eyes stayed on her silhouette, and as he spoke he never dared to look at either of us, as if moving away for even a second would cause her disappearance. When he finished reminiscing he would bite his lip hard and grin before carefully turning the photo around, placing it back into the box. The word *Bliss* is written in small black cursive letters on the back.

“I am so sorry we’re late, but it is wonderful to see you both. We need to have catch-ups more often. It really has been too long.”

There is a sadness in his words that makes me uncomfortable. I ramble when I get uncomfortable.

“Oh, don’t you know it. It has most definitely been too long. Life just never stops being busy. But there is always an excuse to eat good food, I say. Please excuse the lack of wine at the table. Got some more coming, so don’t you worry.”

My father shifts his eyes at me, and I don’t need to look to know I am receiving his classic disapproving scowl.

“Well, uh, good to know. I do apologize again for us taking so long. And things are good with you, Jacob? You still with—oh what’s her name? Melissa? She is certainly a lovely girl.”

Where is the waiter with that wine?

“We broke up, actually. Conflicting work schedules and such.”

“Oh, that’s a shame. And how are you, Hank? Work running smoothly?”

As they chatter, I look over at Grandma. Her pale skin reflects the candle, her bright blue veins in full view. Her mouth is messily stained with coral lipstick—no doubt the work of Grandpa. What is she thinking about? Does she know where she is? The waiter finally returns with the wine, and I fill my glass to the top.

Ordering is an ordeal, as Grandpa takes a long while to decide, but not for himself. He keeps asking Grandma questions. Would the gnocchi be too rich? Does seafood sound like it will be hard on her stomach tonight? After every question comes the quietest of silences, and I cannot help but to visibly wince in pain. He seems used to it, which makes it much worse. He finally decides she wants the lasagna.



“So Jacob, you really must expand on this whole Melissa thing. What happened? I quite liked her.”

I try my best to expand without saying much of anything and am consequently told that if I am too picky, life will pass me by. We talk and I sip, we talk and I sip. I remember how much I love having wine with dinner and also in general. My father chimes in every once in a while with his two cents about how I am living my life incorrectly. Another sip. The waiter arrives and places the lasagna in front of my grandmother, and my grandpa immediately slides the plate towards himself. He carefully cuts the meal up into perfectly proportioned bite-size pieces and leaves the fork touching her hand. She does not move.

“Sadie, it’s dinner time. Let’s eat.”

Of course, there is no response.

“Sadie, we’re having a lovely dinner with your son and grandson. It is time to eat now.”

She blinks once, and then twice. Her lips open, and the coral lipstick scrapes onto her yellowing teeth. Grandpa grabs the fork and jabs the smallest piece of lasagna, carefully swirling it into the marinara. He holds it directly to her mouth. Nothing.

“Darling, please. I beg of you. Swallow the food. Just eat a few bites. Please.”

He is desperate now. There is no doubt that he is failing. My father chimes in, hoping to help.

“Dad, come on now. Maybe we should just leave it. If she doesn’t want to eat...”

“No! No. She needs to eat something! She hasn’t been eating lately and that is not okay. Do not let her think that is okay.”

He looks at her, pleads with her. The worry lines on his face are all that is visible. The begging continues on, but she does not seem to notice. I can feel his knees shaking under the table, and with each ignored plea the shakes get more and more violent. He ruffles his hands through what is left of his hair.

“Come on, Sadie. Aren’t you hungry? Don’t you want dinner? Just a bite. One bite. For me?”

She moves her head away from his in annoyance. His brow line furrows and his voice turns ice cold.

“Sadie, you need to eat. You need to eat now.”

My grandmother’s complete lack of acknowledgement is astounding really, considering how loud Grandpa has become. Our fellow restaurateurs have begun to turn their heads towards our table and watch. How depressing this must be for them, innocent bystanders caught in the wreckage. Their looks are pitying and long and quiet, but Grandpa seems not to notice. His face has turned a dizzying red with frenzy. He is practically screaming now.

“This is absolutely ridiculous! You need to eat something! EATYOUR GODDAMN MEAL, SADIE. I swear to God, eat your meal!”



Nothing.

My father and I shift in our seats. Our eyes meet and we tilt our heads down in shame. Customers pretend not to notice. The waiter, who was working his way towards us, suddenly alters his path, hoping to prevent an interaction with his now most pathetic customers. I move my head from the floor to see his face and he forcibly smiles out of politeness. The pretty brunette steadies her gaze towards our table and frowns bitterly, gawking at my grandpa with anger and disgust. Grandpa clenches his napkin in his hands, his knuckles completely white. He sighs heavily and furrows his brow, slowly breathing in and out. He moves his hands from the napkin, placing his index finger on the top of Grandma's knuckles. She blinks. Tears collect in the corners of Grandpa's eyes and he bites his lip hard as he turns to me.

"I am so sorry."

He places his hands over his face and does not move. My father, attempting to comfort him, puts his arm on Grandpa's shoulder, half patting it. I hear "Fly Me to The Moon" in the background and I try to guess how long has it been playing. Grandma slowly starts to bob her head from left to right. The song ends, and in an instant she stops, becoming still as death.



I am fifteen and it is a Sunday night and I desperately want to be out with my friends. Every Sunday we go to my grandparents' house and every Sunday I do not want to be here. Grandma made pork roast again. Nobody has the heart to tell her it is always dry. My sister and father are almost finished setting the table, a task I have slyly avoided. I wander around this old house with its squeaky wooden floors and large oil paintings. I somehow end up in the parlor, a white museum of a room that no one ever enters. Right atop the plastic cushions of the couch sits my grandma, her long and silvery hair resting upon her shoulders. A bronze locket dangles on her neck and she twirls it restlessly between her fingers. I have seen it before, but I cannot place it. She is opposite the window, watching the wind shake the decaying oak tree, and it dawns on me that I have never seen my grandma alone in a room before. She is not entertaining, or laughing, or telling my sister how lovely her eyes are. I can hear her breathing quickly and just as I attempt to quietly sneak away, she glances over at me, visibly startled.

"Well, hello there. Isn't it about time for dinner? Young men should never skip a meal."

"I'm not hungry. What about you? Not eating dinner?"

"Me neither." She plays with her locket some more. "I am taking a pass on eating tonight."

"What are you thinking about?"

She half smiles and sighs heavily, moving her eyes away from mine, back towards the openness of the large bay window.



“Life, I suppose.”

The wind has stopped now and the tree stands motionless. A blue pickup truck parks in front of the house across the street. A man gets out and walks up to the door with a massive, well-dressed package. She begins again.

“It’s a little funny, isn’t it? How time can move so slowly, yet so quickly in all the worst ways. People talk about reflecting, about how important it is to reflect. Sometimes, though, I wonder. Even as I say that, even now...”

She stops herself but doesn’t dare look back at me, moving her hands off the locket and placing them onto her lap. I think about saying something, asking if everything is all right, but I can’t do anything but watch her.

My father calls me for dinner, but my feet are weighed down by the uncertainty of the moment. Her face meets mine, and I smile serenely and nod. She does the same. Something about the stillness of this moment seems eerily familiar to me, but I cannot place it. My father calls my name again, this time asking that I please stop hiding and pour the water.

“Go and eat, love.”

“Yeah, well, I am not really hungry right now.”

She sits back and does not acknowledge my presence. Her breath is light and low and barely audible, and her face is dreamily focused on the empty movements of the street. I stumble in place, and my eyes find the framed photos that line the mantel of the fireplace.

“You sure you don’t want anything?”

She jolts upward, as if awoken from her daydream. Her eyes find mine, and as she holds my gaze, her cheeks move upwards into a display of careful tenderness.

“I am more than all right. Now go eat some dinner.”

I say okay and am about to leave the room, wondering how dry the pork roast will be and when I can finally go home, when it hits me. My grandfather’s photograph—the one of Grandma on her honeymoon. She is sitting in the same way, holding onto the same locket. But this time there is no wood-paneling, no remnants of laughter. I quietly move back to where I had just been standing. Grandma’s silhouette is framed by the edges of my eyes. I blink. She remains in her place. I blink again, taking another snapshot. I blink one last time, holding onto the moment, desperately hoping it will not slip away.

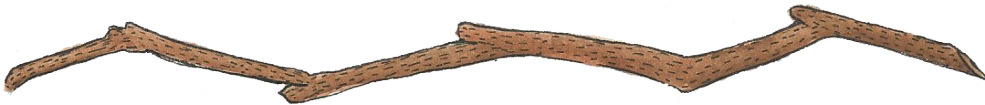


A Family History

by Annie Criswell

The women in my family wear
depression like the plain brown hair on our heads.
There, even though it's been dyed
red/black/blonde/purple in
ninth grade/summer camp/college
/when a job was lost—again. We wear it
like a flimsy hand-me-down coat
in winter. It wasn't ours,
it's not what we'd have picked, it doesn't keep us warm,
but it's cold out, and it's all we have

tying us together—an anchor reminding us
that we come from a long line of quietly sad women.





Self Portrait With Laura

by Lee Rogers

film photography



The Baby Incident

by Brittany Cantrell

By July, she was too pregnant to make it through a door. Because of this, she decided to take up residence outside. For a while, she stayed on the porch, rocking and waving hello to the kids who sped by on their bikes. She tired of the porch pretty quickly and set up camp in the back yard. The view here was better, but she missed seeing the children every day.

“Well, I can’t have this,” she said to the baby.

“What am I supposed to do about it?” the baby asked.

“You’ll have to come out, of course. Did you think you could stay in there forever?”

“I’m quite comfortable here.”

So the baby didn’t come out. There was still the issue of not being able to fit through a door, so she decided to build a door she could fit through. When the door was built, she attached a house with wide hallways and doorways and moved in.

“Well, I can’t have this,” the house said.

“What am I supposed to do about it?” she asked.

“You’ll have to come out, of course.”

“I’m quite comfortable here.”

So she never came out.



No Evidence of Cancer

by Kate Henricks

At a beach town grocery store, between aisles
of cat food and corn chips, you told us
you'd once had cancer. No lead up or drama, just
in passing, because it was gone

now. Driving us home, I dissect the truth: how
you'd slunk off on the weekends we were
with our father, and hid your treatment
the way other women hide affairs. How you drove

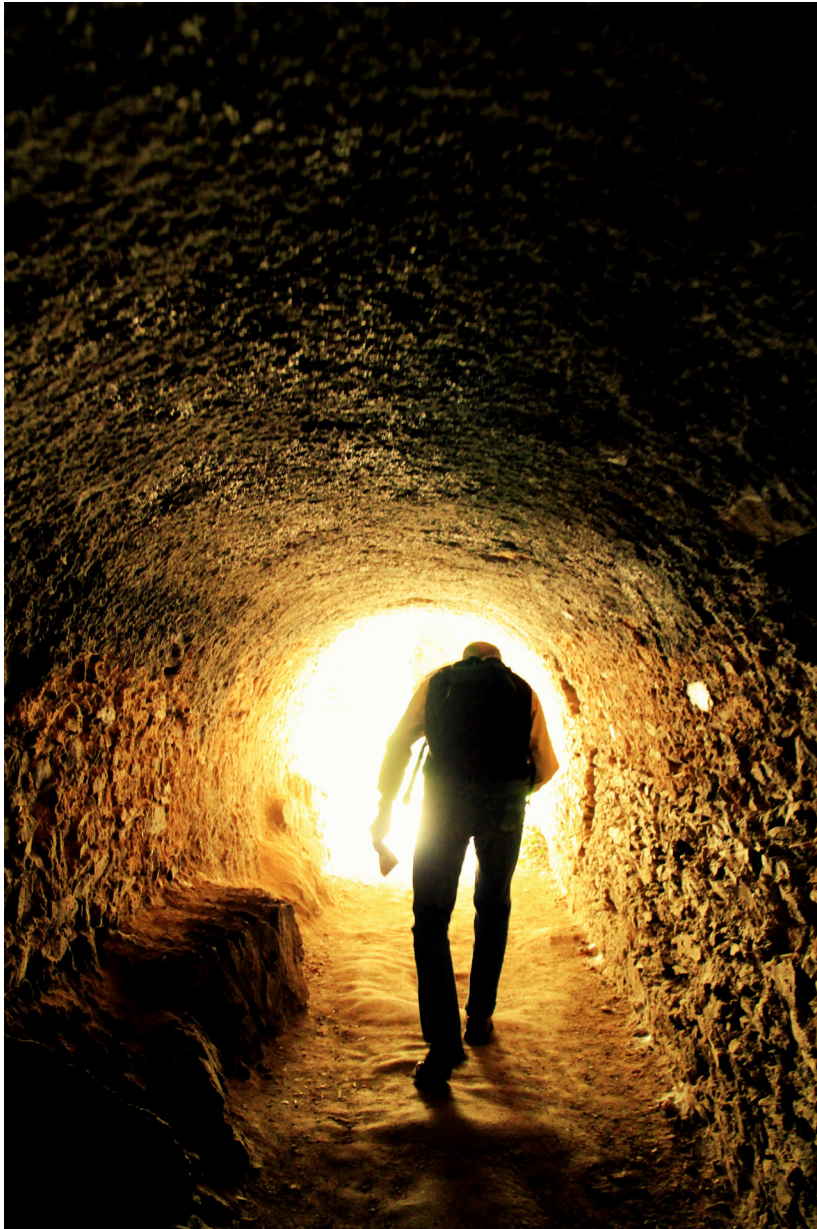
yourself to the hospital to cut away the part of you
that slid me into this world, pink and soft.
The last evidence I once fit snug
in your belly. Because now, I am so tall

that you try to hold me and your bird-bone frame can only
fit ducked beneath my chin. It does not matter
that I was the first person you'd ever met to share
your genes. You were adopted because your mother cut

you out of her story and now you have cut me out
of yours. So when you told us
about your cancer, my sister cried

and I walked away.





Into the Light

by Ty Spradley

digital photography



My Grandfather the Ghost

by Daniel Grear

I was looking through the shelf in my father's study when I found a slender, flimsy book, almost like an informational pamphlet. Held together by a loose, yellow strip of fabric, the pages could be rolled into a skinny tube. Despite its modest appearance, the title caught my eye: *Collected Poems of Edw. S. Grear*.

I knew that my grandfather wrote, but I had never seen his words in person, had never pored over his line breaks and turns-of-phrase. This was the closest I had ever felt to him, even including the years he was still alive. The memories that remained of my grandfather were spacious, but empty; plentiful, but monotonous. In every single one of them, he was nothing but a neutral force. We shared the same rooms, were illuminated by the same lights, were cooled by the same fans, but he said not a word. I wanted to call him "brooding," but this seemed too active, too emotive of a word to describe his way of being. Instead, he just merely *existed*, nothing more, nothing less, hanging in the air like an odorless vapor.

With this book, I had an explanation for his aloofness—he was an artist, a soul whose only means of communication was the written word.



When I pitched the idea of using his poetry as a window into better understanding him, my grandmother was captivated. In my mind's eye, I saw her clapping her veiny hands, phone cramped between ear and shoulder blade.

"He's probably smiling from ear-to-ear upstairs!" she exclaimed.

As sentimental as I thought such a statement, I was as jazzed as she was. Throughout our phone call, I paced across my skinny apartment—from kitchen to living room, living room back to kitchen—as if swimming laps in a rectangular pool, preparing for the noble journey that I had set before myself. When I finally hung up, I rested deep in the couch, a bout of joyous tears brimming at the corners of my eyes.

Throughout my childhood, I had heard my father repeatedly tell of my grandfather's emotional absence. The stories seemed like cautionary tales, full of harbored bitterness. But my father and I approached people differently. For starters, he wasn't the most gregarious guy. Any outing that involved interacting with people was bemoaned like nobody's business. But, more than that, he always seemed too quick to judge, too arbitrarily selective about who he chose to deem good. Unlike him, I wasn't going to give up on my grandfather; I was ready to be vigilant.

I'm going to write an essay of familial consequence, an act of recovery, I told myself.





Upon the birth of his first child, my grandfather wrote a poem called “To Mark, My Son.” The final couplet is, as you’d expect it to be, warm and uplifting, basking in fatherly pride: “And then I see a tiny upturned face: / My answers in his worship and his grace.” Although the loving words charmed me, I couldn’t help but notice that the rest of the poem’s tone was downright forlorn, and overtly so.

I pass alone along some endless street
That always seems to lead me, lead me where?
I trudge along a road where none I meet
Would ever seem to say or know or care.

As a chronically frail woman, the pregnancy had taken a toll on my grandmother’s already sickly body. At best, vomiting was a daily affair. What proved even more daunting than childbirth itself, however, was the act of raising my uncle Mark. They were already in their early twenties, living on their own, but they felt utterly clueless. My grandmother was embarrassed to tell me this, but they had to ask a neighbor for guidance on how to merely *bathe* the foreign creature.

Though my grandfather shared the brunt of attending to Mark, he found his primary bane elsewhere. For the first few years of their marriage, he worked in an administrative position for the local railroad. According to my grandmother, he despised it. She didn’t elaborate on his day-to-day, but he was called a “chief clerk,” a title that, at least to me, reeked of faux-prestige, the kind of job where your boss spends half of his time trying to convince you of how lucky you are to hold such a post in the first place.

It was this very frustration that most stoked his artistic fire. “It seemed to make him feel better if he could create something,” said my grandmother. This was the kind of lead I was looking for, a nugget of nuance that could turn my grandfather into a living and breathing person.



A single, fanciful night off of birth control brought my second uncle into the world. By this time, my grandparents had gotten much more used to childrearing. This was made clear by the first stanza of his poem, “To Billy, My Boy:”

There is a tiny spirit
So full of life, and yet
So close to Heaven’s Angels
That I never once forget,
When looking on that little face,
An Angel’s near to guard the place.



Circumstance allowed Billy to be a child they could enjoy, a precocious spirit in whose delights they could relish. Things weren't perfect, though. Around the time of Billy's birth, my grandfather's grandmother got sick. She needed someone to move in with her, and the Miller family nominated my grandparents as the most eligible caretakers. Despite the fact they were doing her a favor, they given anything but a warm welcome in Beaumont, TX.

"Eddie's grandmother considered me a person of ill repute because I didn't wear socks," said my grandmother.

Surprisingly enough, the bulk of my grandfather's writing was produced during their displaced stay there. Since they didn't own a typewriter, he wrote exclusively by hand.

"He would go off by himself," she explained. "Mostly in the bathroom."

This insight was golden—I imagined him bent over the green-carpeted toilet seat, beshirted in flannel, a ratty notebook laid over his knees. Periodically checking his watch, he scribbles quickly. He can't hog the facilities for too long. Even with the pressure, the words flow easily. He's got plenty of troubles to write about. Each line of cursive turns into nonsense as he reaches the edge of the page, pen slipping down the curve of his thigh. He uses his free hand to plug one of his ears. Alas, an errant call for "daddy" sneaks through the crack at the bottom of the door. He must return to his duties.

My grandfather's other means of escape was smoking cigarettes. Though his habit was voracious, he wouldn't risk doing it in front of his grandmother. Even though she'd never explicitly told him not to, he knew better than to invite her criticism. Instead, he smoked outside, like in his poem "Mood:"

Contemplate my cigarette
the pale blue veil
that rises high
and fades
is gone
e'er long
me, too
returned to nought
adventures sought
are nil...
I brush away the ashes
curse the lightening flashes
that make me doubt
I throw it out and curse the allegory...

Counter to the disparity found in "To Mark, My Son," this poem seems different. Instead of merely documenting his suffering, he's *thinking* about it, letting his frustrations take shape. I imagined him shivering on the porch, the air heavy with frigid humidity. When the heavens



crack with a seething bolt of light, it's as if the divine is speaking, demanding that he look inside himself. He tries to fight the introspection by swaying on the porch swing, but each angry creak reminds him that his daily grind at the railroad is ambitionless and devoid of meaning.

And sure enough, the bells of change began ringing. With an explosion of agency, he hired another caretaker for his grandmother, moved the family to San Antonio, quit his job at the railroad, and started toiling for the child welfare department. Fortunately for my grandfather, this vocation proved much more satisfying. He became so committed to the cause that he decided to go back to school. He had never been to college, so he started with undergraduate work. Within a handful of grueling years, he'd acquired his master's in Social Work. In the midst of all of this sudden growth, however, he stopped writing, both abruptly and entirely. My grandmother scarcely remembered him penning a single word after this point in his life.



When I first found out that he had abandoned his craft, I got excited. Not because I didn't want him to be a successful writer, but because I was craving a mystery to solve. I crossed my fingers for layers. I wanted my grandfather to be an enigma that could only be made lucid through my persistent investigation. I was on the lookout for what my father had been too bruised to notice.

"Why do you think he stopped?" I asked my grandmother, inflecting my voice with as much talk-show controversy as possible.

"I think he just didn't have enough time. He was extremely busy at work. We'd get calls from drunken mothers at all hours of the night."

This didn't seem right, not thoughtful enough of a reason for the intellectual that I'd imagined up, so I continued on, wringing her for more information.

"Do you think he was getting his emotional needs met by work and so he no longer needed a creative outlet? Like, because he actually cared about his job, he put his energy there instead of into writing?" As I was asking, I felt like I was digging deep, on the verge of unearthing something rich and ethically complex.

"Maybe so," she replied. "That's probably it."

Though she conceded, I could tell that didn't fully believe the words she was saying. She was just eager to help, doing her best not to tamper with the integrity of my project's vision. But I wasn't the only one who was struggling to accept my grandfather at face value.

"Do you think the poems are good?" my grandmother asked. "Or are they just ordinary, uninteresting?"

She wasn't just asking whether I *liked* them, though. She was requesting that I, a literary authority in her eyes, reflect upon their *quality*. She told me that she used to secretly send off his work to magazines and journals in the hopes that they would find publication. It was almost as if she wanted to him to be a writer more than he did. After all, it wasn't until



nearly a year into their relationship that she actually learned about his creative dabbling. And even in that case, he didn't offer up this information about himself willingly. It took her confronting him about a piece that she found for him to finally admit it.

I didn't want to tell her that I cared more about the poems as artifacts than art, so I evaded her question, claiming that judging poetry wasn't my strong suit.



"Did he ever express any regrets in his later years about turning away from writing?" I asked in one last attempt to get inside his mind.

The answer was no.

With all of this swirling around in my mind, I anxiously returned to my grandfather's book of poetry. "When was this put together?"

"Your uncle must have been something like thirteen when he made it."

This wasn't revelatory information, but it got me thinking. My grandfather wasn't the one who salvaged, picked and chose, ordered, and put on display these words. He didn't ask to be remembered by his writing.

In fact, none of the poems even had dates. They could have been inspired by real events, but they weren't inextricable from them. Everything that my grandmother told me seemed to be undermining the richness of my conjectures. I wouldn't ever know for certain what he was writing about in his cigarette poem. For all I knew, his poetry could have been made up of pure fantasy. What if he was just killing time? Did writing even matter to him in the first place?

Why was all of this so heartbreaking to me?



Before I interviewed my grandmother, I asked my father about my grandfather's writing. He was the youngest boy in the family, born around the time my grandfather started working for the child welfare department, so I thought he might be able to provide some inside knowledge on the end of my grandfather's stint as a wordsmith. I knew he'd be biased, but I thought maybe he had picked up on some detail that my grandmother had missed. I was wrong. Within seconds, we weren't talking about writing anymore. He launched into another diatribe against my grandfather's poor parenting. Any time I'd look away, he would turn his head more sharply in my direction, forcing me into eye contact; he wasn't playing around. At the time, I had written off everything he said. I was determined to find an escape route in our conversation, and I found one.

But now I couldn't do that anymore. In the clouds of my mind, I pictured one more scene. After a long day of work, my grandfather leans the recliner as far back as it will go, practically horizontal. Though he's got a plate of dinner in his lap, his eyes don't leave the television screen. He just lifts the fork and hopes that it'll find his mouth. Over the cushy armrests peeps a head of brown hair. It's my father, three-years-old. He asks my grandfather

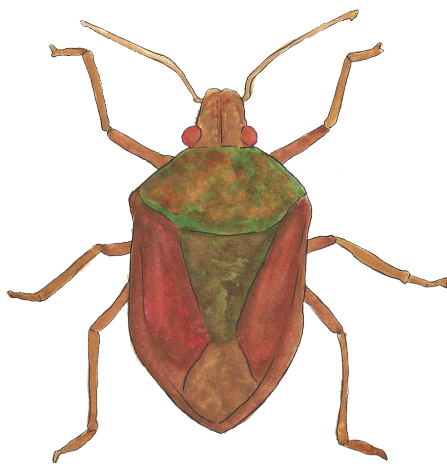


a question, maybe if he can sit in his lap or if he wants to play ball, it doesn't matter. My grandfather doesn't reply. He doesn't ask for a rain check or even yell in annoyance; he just sits. And this doesn't just happen once. The interaction plays out over and over again, fast-forwarded. In mere minutes, a decade-long videotape plays from front to back. The furniture is rearranged and my father grows taller and broader, but my grandfather stays the same. Through the years, my father's questions get fewer and farther between until he learns that he shouldn't acknowledge my grandfather at all. This is how resentment is birthed.



My whole inspection had been framed around defending a man that I never really knew, that I didn't have to grow up alongside, forever disappointed by. When I couldn't turn my grandfather into the writer he was not, when I couldn't shroud him in mystery, I saw him for what he was—a bad father.

But maybe my grandfather isn't that simple. After all, my grandmother never stopped loving him. Maybe humans don't always have profound or even cursory motivations for every action that they take. Maybe some of our behavior is meaningful, some random, some deliberate, and some erratic. It's too easy to overemphasize or downplay or just plainly misunderstand. In the end, maybe we just aren't meant to be biographized.



Callum

by Lily Hammer

acrylic





Dog 1



Dog 2

by Kate Skorija

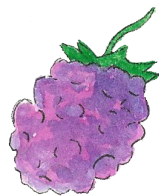
120mm film, printed digitally

Birdsong

by Meg Boyles

Tonight the birds are sick of being birds. After centuries of pushing their young out of nests, forcing food into beaks, and flying south to elude the mechanical clockwork of winter, their feathers have begun molting to reveal human skin. They're growing to unheard of sizes, their claws retracting into fingers, their bodies moving into homes of four walls in suburbs. I feel pity for their forgotten feathers and the future they have chosen. All of the bad first kisses, the wretched trips to the sympathy card section of Hallmark, insufficient season finales, the burden of mortgages, the burden of in-laws.

But also, I remember there will be good times. Love is good. There will be mornings they'll wake beside someone and be comforted. There will be mulberry wine and plenty of bluegrass. This dearness of being human sings with possibilities, like the blow of a train whistle in their ears. They will hear the sound and think, It's like an old birdsong I once knew, and they will grieve for their sky-days, until a voice calls out from a room close by, warm and love-filled, and the only thing worth doing is to follow it.



Pressed Flowers

by Kate Henricks

I wore the only garden I've ever grown. It began
a bit by accident, when purple thumbs of Aster sprung
up around a pond of burgundy wine. Each week, you helped me coax new

blooms from the bluish leaves, layered like feathers down the ridge of bone
on my upper arm, until they aged to soft, custard yellow. Alone,
I tried to tend my garden. Raking the ground, but despising the mess and red

dirt. I thought to hide the mess with ropes of orange beads, rows
of ripe persimmons laid in the shallow trenches I'd dug, meant to
look as though the earth had pushed them up. It didn't

work. The day I decided to let the garden die, I heard you downstairs
playing Blackbird on the Gibson you bought with your first
donut shop paycheck in Colorado the winter you quit university to find

a truth you said you *could only find in the mountains*. You taught
me to play on that same guitar. And if I thought I could walk out
your front door, and let the dead, dry flowers drop off

my arms without worrying, every time I run
my fingers over steel strings, that I sound just
like you, I was wrong. So I play and tell myself,

when I hear your voice in mine, that I am yours, Dad,
but I will never become you. I hope
you never told yourself the same thing.



Umbilical

by Shelby Morrow

In summer, someone lights a burner under Texas
and puts a lid on top. Lakes evaporate and with nowhere to go, hang
suspended. Mom used to say, *You can drown on May if you breathe
deep enough.*

I am driving down 75 and my mother is in the passenger seat choking
on words that stick in her mouth like cotton balls, woolly
in sound and substance. She is drunk and nervous, more my age than hers, a minor
intoxicated; I am 20, tired, with a crease between eyebrows.
I turn up the radio; Aerosmith coaxes explanation and apology out
the open window to bump and brush against loud billboards.

The first time we changed places
it was the second week of a new school year.
My brother and I walked to first and fifth grade while
she stayed home with wine and daytime
television; I made her lunch before we left;
it was mid-August and concrete melted
the tread off the plastic bottoms of my pink tennis shoes.

It is almost midnight when we arrive, car exhaled
by pot-holed highway ramp, and we hold hands
in the clammy-cold waiting room of the women's rehabilitation center.
An unyielding, bright orange chair squeaks under me as Mom spills confession
out of her mouth nostrils eyes, over the scratched-stained tile floor, onto
the nurse—my Lady Liberty—who accepts tired-wretched
regularly (her easy admittance, required
for admission, invalidates my ten-year
wait). Nurse rolls my Mother away from me, bundled
in pink blanket and wheelchair. The cord that links her sight to mine
breaks, I am

untethered

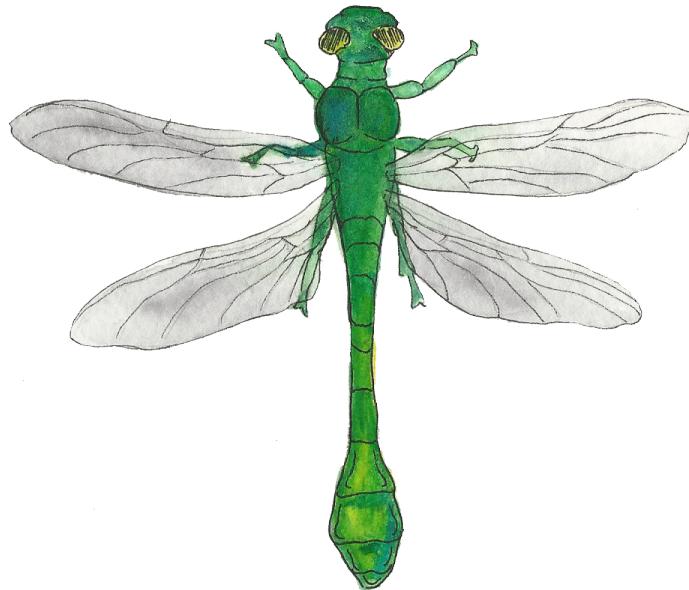
and I float at the end of a suddenly



slack line, adrift in fluorescent light. Current tows
me through sterile hallway and revolving door, and then I'm out
into the shock of boiling night, ocean
of combined fluid: lakes and sweat and blood, salty. The deep

black smothers me, pressing in on all sides as I stumble
around an asphalt maze, searching through rows of wrong
make and model. Numb exhaustion envelops
me and when I finally drop
into the driver's seat, I have come to rest,
not on stable ground but out at sea,

and I sink.



Shadows

by Lexi Adams

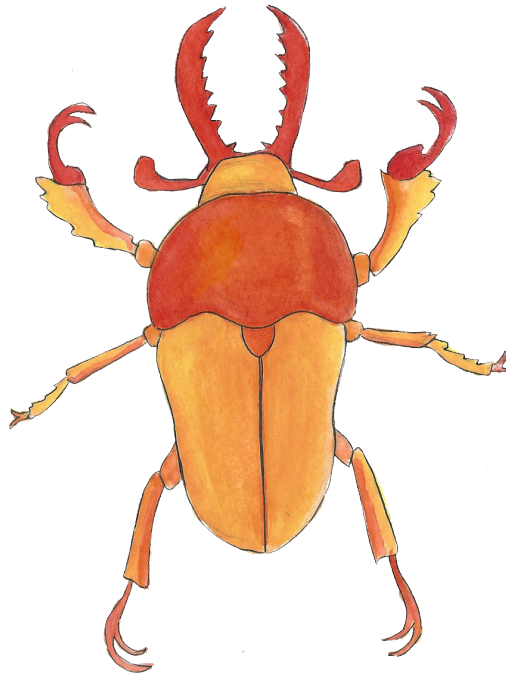
digital photography



Digestion

by Brittany Cantrell

They'll eat you alive, she said. And she knew, too, because she had been eaten alive before. She had the scars down her arms and shoulders and neck to prove it, and when she spoke you could hear where the stomach acid had worn away at her vocal cords that time she couldn't keep her head above the waves. She said she hadn't seen them coming, that all of a sudden their teeth were inside her and it was dark and she felt their slimy throats squeezing her down, down into their insides. She tried clawing her way out but that only made them squeeze harder, and eventually she was being digested. She said this part wasn't as bad as it sounded, that the acid was kind of like swimming, except that every time you looked down another piece of you was eroding, and she didn't like that part very much. She tried to keep track of the pieces she was losing, an arm on Tuesday, an ear a few days later. She said she was lucky that she kept up with it like that, otherwise she never would have been able to put herself back together later.



november in e minor

by Ellie Black

i.
how i loved you like
an overheating machine,
waiting for the malfunction,
the burn of surrendering skin –

or how i loved you
like an early winter,
freezing to the core,
but no snow yet.

no snow. we wait.

i say: i think i love you.
she says: we both go down
together.

my hands, agonized,
blue-veined, disorderly,
and i run them under hot water
but i can never get warm –

how i love you like
a tree grown over a rock,
some warped misgrowth
on my part,

like the difference between
an avalanche and a landslide
when both are perpetually
sliding downhill.

my hands, restless cold,
in search of the invisible thing
they have already found,
always being held.

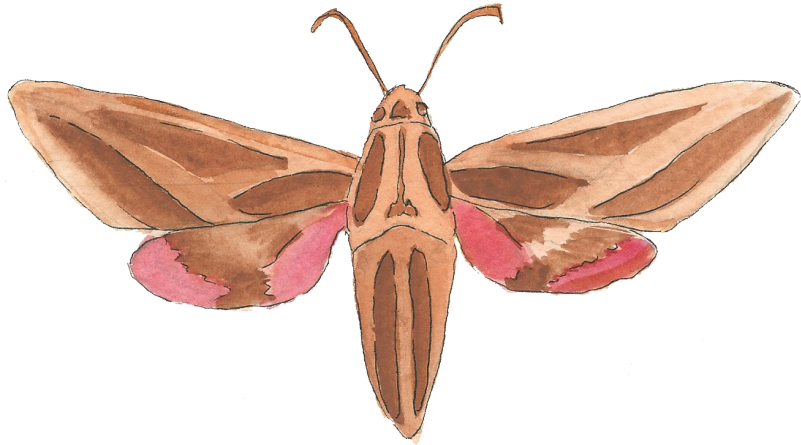


i say, "what if i love you?"
he says, "save it for later."

ii.
two days later, the air frosts over,
glittering almost-snow of november;
one year later, i
am walking through magic
and waiting to die —

iii.
go to the frozen lake and that's where god is,
graves among graves,
the shipwrecked season left behind.

early winter means fall dies young;
death will see its own breath
dissipating in front of its mouth.



Pile of Broken Tasbihs

by Anusha Jiwani

The dim light buzzed overhead, disturbing the solitude that had settled into the room like an occupant. It flickered as if it were to go out at any moment, casting an appropriate somberness. A dirty mirror leaned atop a wooden dresser that failed to stand two steps away from the sinking bed, and a browning ironing board leaned against the moist wall. Lying on the nightstand was a pile of broken *tasbihs*, prayer beads, given to my grandmother to fix. Skinny cracks zigzagged across the walls, mirroring the veins that once ran down my grandmother's legs. Years later, her veins were swollen and suppressed within stockings as her legs suffered the consequences of walking ten miles back and forth to teach school during the majority of her lifetime. My dad inherited her varicose veins, and I hoped as a child that the gene would skip me, disgusted by the ugliness. They remained on my father's legs long after my grandmother was gone, a living memory of the life she had lived.

I looked down at my *Daadi*, my grandmother, lying on her bed as the thinning strands of her white hair reached outward in vain. Her face was a lump of skin longing for the fullness it had once known. Wrapped in layers of shawls, she resembled the Egyptian mummies I had studied in school back in the States. But unlike the Egyptians, who believed in preservation of the body, my grandmother believed in the preservation of the soul by way of an ethical life.

The wrapping disguised what was underneath, or rather what was missing. My grandmother's left arm had been amputated due to the cancer that had decided to settle there.

"*Shukar Mawla*," she said. Thank God.

Now, as she breathed her prayers out into the world, I stepped out into the patio. The air was cool, a commodity in the heat of Pakistan that could only be found at this hour, something that would remain here only for a few more moments. The sun was beginning to rise over the buildings, adding a pale yellow to the lavender sky. I looked out to the *Jamatkhana*, our place of worship, a majestic establishment amid the crackling colony. I was in the place where my father had broken his nose playing cricket as a child and where I had ridden a motorcycle for the first time—the place we had called our home. A flock of black crows, inhabitants of our colony, soared into the sky, disturbing the silence as they fanned out above me.

I had just come back from morning prayers. As I had been doing for the past two weeks, I woke up at four and dressed in sweatpants and a short-sleeved t-shirt, putting aside the feelings of discomfort I knew I would feel amid all of the *shalwaar kamis*-clad women. I walked out into the darkness, searching for the steps that led up to *Jamatkhana*. It was a holy experience, sitting in the prayer hall as the morning light shone in through the calligraphic



patterns of the blurred windows. Every morning, I closed my eyes and concentrated on the words, *Ya Allah, Ya Ali, Ya Muhammad*. Oh Allah, Oh Ali, Oh Muhammad. But every morning, my mind remained blank. The words ran through my mind but I felt nothing of the connection to God my father spoke of. Every morning after prayers, my father, who began meditating at three, would feel content and fulfilled while I masked my ineptitude with agreement.

Pakistan is the country of Islam. Ismaili Muslims live in closed off communities called colonies, mazes of apartment-style homes with shops below and motorcycles circling the buildings. Each colony has its own *Jamatkhana*, a place of congregational worship. My family lives in Noorabad Colony. They had been constructing a new *Jamatkhana* when I was growing up. At night, I would run around the various floors of the construction site with my friends on my tail, twisting and swerving to avoid the walls that seemed to veer in my way, the sound of the uncles below lifting with the breeze as they pleaded for me to come downstairs. I recalled the confidence and sense of freedom I had in the past, and wondered where it had disappeared to. Years later, I attempt to pray at the finished site.

I hadn't been back to Pakistan since my family left for America when I was four. My grandparents immigrated to Pakistan from India during Bangladesh's war of independence in 1970, and my parents grew up with a Pakistani identity. When I asked them what separated them from Indians, they never gave me a satisfactory answer. Although I grew up in America, I always considered myself to be Pakistani. I was not yet an American citizen, and on the bubble sheets given to me during standardized tests, I always put Asian/Pacific Islander" or "Other." I was born in Pakistan, and had an inoculation scar on the top of my left bicep to prove it. It was a visible representation of my origins. Moreover, my name was different. Growing up, I admired names like "Ashley" or "Crystal." Why did my name have to be so weird, so un-American? If the color of my skin didn't give away my foreignness, then my name definitely did. It was so hard to pronounce, and I cringed during award ceremonies when principals who praised my academic dedication and claimed to have mentored me mispronounced my name. *Ahnasha? Anoosa? Asunah?*

"Yes, you got it right," I would respond as I would hurriedly leave the stage.

In high school, the weekdays were dedicated to my secular life while the weekend symbolized my religious and cultural life. I immersed myself in academics and extracurricular activities while simultaneously participating actively in my local *Jamatkhana*. I wore *shalwar kamis* to *Jamatkhana* every Friday, and my friends knew that on Friday nights I was praying and on Saturday afternoons I was in religion class. My religion became an important part of my identity because it taught me to live an ethical way of life. I prided myself on being an Ismaili Muslim, and I felt a kinship to Muslims all around the world.

But one of the main reasons I held my Pakistani culture so close to me was because of my parents. Their story—their struggle—was always in the back of my mind. The bits of Pakistani culture in my life were reminders of how far we had come.

Earlier that year, we found out that my grandmother was diagnosed with terminal cancer. I had always heard stories from my father about how she raised ten children single-handedly and was one of the most progressive women of her time. She only had enough



money to send one child to college, so she sent my father's elder sister to college because she believed that women were crucial in educating the next generation. Men could find work and make money doing odd jobs. It was different for women. Nursing was one of the only viable career options for women in Karachi, so my aunt took the opportunity and attended nursing school.

Daadi and I used to talk on birthdays and Ismaili holidays for only a few minutes. She was hard of hearing and I would usually have to yell into the phone. But I could count on our conversations always being the same. Before I could ask her in Urdu, *Aap kaise ho? How are you?* How is your health? She would begin "How are you, Anushah?" in English. I would laugh because we both wanted to communicate with one another in the other's primary language. I always admired her for learning a bit of English for my sake, even though I knew that she did it in fear that she would not be able to communicate with me if she spoke Urdu.

The return to Pakistan represented the return to my origins, to the place where my parents grew up, to the place where they dreamt their dreams. My family was returning to see my grandmother one last time, but I promised myself that I would make the most of my visit. I would learn to pronounce the *Du'a* in proper Arabic dialect. I would pray where my father had found religion, where he had become a scholar. Pakistan was the country of Islam. I would find myself there.

On the first night in Pakistan, after prayers, I wheeled my *Daadi* around the colony in her wheelchair. The spicy smell of *pakora* snacks wafted into my nose as we skirted past a trail of laughing kids. My cousins took my sister to a sweet shop, which would become her favorite place in Pakistan. We wheeled past a stall where a man flipped sheets of flour into the air before sliding them into an oven with a roaring fire: fresh *naan*.

Humidity hung in the air, white diamonds scattered on a navy sky. As I looked up at the sparkling sky, I recalled my father telling me a story about his childhood. When my Dada, my grandfather, had passed away, *Daadi* had told my dad that Dada had gone up to the sky, and that he would only need to search for the brightest star in order to find him. With a start, I remembered what my name meant. Anushah, bright star. Is this the reason I was given my name? Did the memory my father held so close determine my identity? My name was not foreign anymore. It was an allusion to my ancestor, an ode to his life. Despite his death, he travelled to America along with it.

I put my attention back on *Daadi*. When she saw me earlier that day, she held my hands in her lap as tears soaked her face. We had sat that way for a while.

We began turning toward home. Home and *Jamatkhana* were her life now, the boundaries of her existence. But even when she was home during the day, she was always praying. She would sit in her chair, a small child in her flowing nightgown, thumbing her *tasbeeh* as she uttered unspoken wishes.

One day, we decided to visit Clifton, a seaside area with malls. I waved to *Daadi* as she came out to the patio and watched the crowded Honda exit the colony.

Everywhere I looked, the death of white. The sky was a dull white, the kind your white shoes get after playing in the dirt. The buildings were a tired white, slumping within



themselves. Men dressed in dirty white *shalwars* with white *kurtas*, sitting atop loads pulled by their donkeys. I had envisioned colorful flowers, loud *baazars* and fresh trees. But very few trees lined the streets. Dust, too, was a part of Pakistan. It rose from the ground, mixed with the humid air and crept into the cars, homes and buildings. It was as if Karachi had inhaled it permanently.

The car jerked to a stop. I looked up in confusion, my thoughts blurring as I came face to face with a man banging on my window, fire-stick in hand. I slid sideways into my mother as my uncle swerved the car to the right and speeded past the rioting men. They had frozen the intersection in place and had a fire going on a pile of tires. The flames sent waves of light flooding throughout the streets as the smoke mixed with the dirty Karachi sky.

“What was that?” I gasped. I gripped my mother tightly with one hand and covered my sister’s eyes with the other.

My uncle turned around, glancing at us. “Oh, these things are very common in Karachi. People find so much to complain about. They think violence is the answer, the way to attract attention. The complaints keep changing, but the violence has remained for as long as I can remember.”

I stuck my head outside of the window and breathed deeply, trying to settle my panicking heart. This was not okay. This was not normal. How could this be commonplace? My uncle didn’t even blink an eye.

As we got closer to Clifton, the roads were smoother and lined with trees. We passed beautiful, gated homes of government officials. The grey ocean fell into the backdrop of this community. The mall itself had a luscious garden with beautiful flowers and trees lining its entrance. Inside, women wore burqahs and men wore jeans with polo shirts. Stores such as Abercrombie & Fitch, Aeropostale and The GAP were crowded with people. There was even a Cinnabon. My father ran into a famous Pakistani actor shopping with his family, and as I took their picture, I heard an American pop song playing in the background. I ran into my cousins, who were covered behind loads of shopping bags. Coach, Hollister, Tiffany & Co. The names remained in my mind on the ride back. How could they indulge in these American pleasures while the rest of the country had trouble feeding their families? My parents could never afford these things growing up. In America, they worked for every penny they earned and sent back as much as they could to Pakistan. As we exited the plaza, I looked around at this miniature utopia and felt uneasy.

When I had left for Pakistan, I considered myself more Pakistani than American, and when I returned, I had no idea where I was on the spectrum. I was a freshman in college, and my school organized a special program on diversity. In our orientation groups, we talked about respecting one another’s cultures and embracing the multiculturalism on our campus. Then we began talking about defining one another’s identity.

A boy with dark brown skin and silky brown hair commented, “People usually ask me where I’m from, and I tell them I’m from Dallas. But then they ask me, ‘Where are you really from?’ It’s so annoying when people judge me on the basis of my skin.”

A girl with jet back bangs and thick black glasses responded, “Yeah, I totally know



what you mean. My parents are from Japan, but I'm not. I was born here. I'm American. I don't know why people have such a hard time grasping that idea."

I was baffled by what they were saying. For the first time, I was starkly aware of my bicultural upbringing. I was uninformed that there was another route, another option, to the life that immigrants lead—that other people adapted completely to Americanism. When everyone looked at me, I said I was born in Pakistan and lived in Arkansas. They nodded, and the conversation moved on.

While others were affirming their identities, I was questioning mine. I realized that I enjoyed many more parts of American culture than I let myself admit. The freedom to educate myself, to wear jeans, to hang out with my friends. These were freedoms that my mother was deprived of when she lived in Pakistan. Despite permitting me to enjoy basic freedoms, my parents had always told me that it was important to avoid certain parts of American culture. I could not dress in a provocative manner, I was not allowed to drink alcohol or smoke cigarettes regardless of the law, and even though I would legally become an adult at eighteen, I would not be able to move in with my boyfriend. Heck, I wasn't even allowed to have a boyfriend.

In Pakistan, I felt alienated from Pakistani culture as never before. I didn't want to admit it, but I was extremely thankful for my life in America. Although I spoke Urdu and ate *nihari*, I was thankful that I wouldn't have to wear *shalwaar kamis* every day, that I wouldn't have to live in a colony my entire life, that I wouldn't have to live with the uncertainty of surviving the next wave of religious and political insurgency. The nationalistic identity I had prided myself on was fading.

One early morning back in Pakistan, after morning *Du'a*, prayers, my dad put his arm around my shoulders and led me to a street outside of the colony. He showed me a trail that veered off the side of the road. We sat down on a rusty bench near the trail.

"I used to ride my bike through this trail every morning to Feroz *Bhai's* house, my older brother's house. I had to get there at seven a.m. sharp; otherwise he would leave for work without me. Sometimes I would get there a few minutes late and I would have to ride the bus to work because he was very strict about his rules.

"Back then, everyone in the community knew about our situation. I knew that despite being my step-brother, he did not approve of his father's second wife (my mother). He did not help us financially, even when our *Pappa*, our father, passed away. I was only seventeen, Laila was getting ready to go to nursing school and Hussein was involved with the wrong crowd. Munna, Feroz *Bhai's* brother and my older half-brother, and his wife lived with us, but Munna was in the beginning stages of his drug addiction. I had to lead the family.

"But at least Feroz *Bhai* did me this one favor. When I was on time, I would place my bike on the back of his brand new Honda and hop in. He was a lot older than me, so it was hard to connect with him emotionally, and the rides were quiet. I heard he was looking for a wife. We would walk together to the entrance, nod and then part ways. He would walk inside and go upstairs to the offices, and I would go around to the back of the building and enter the factory.



“At two p.m. I would leave for my other job. I rode two busses to get to the other side of the city. Around six, I would go to the school where *Daadi* taught and then we would walk home. I would eat while she tutored students who could not afford to pay for school, and then we would head to *Jamatkhana*. We did not live in the colony at this time. We couldn't afford it. After evening *Du'a*, I went to night college for two hours. Then I would tutor two students, head home and sleep around eleven. I would wake up at three in the morning with your *Daadi* and head to *Jamatkhana* for morning prayers, come back and get ready for work, and try to make it to *Feroz Bhai's* place on time.

“But things changed over time. We moved to Metroville Colony, and that's where I met your mother.”

I recalled our trip to Metroville from a few days ago. It was an hour from Noorabad Colony, where *Daadi* now lived. The muddy streets were crowded with filth and scraps of humans, if I could even call them that. The colony itself was a collection of run-down apartments, puddles of mud, and swarms of flies. Everywhere I turned, the smell of feces remained strong, declaring its dominance. I noticed several kids playing with a soccer ball near a building my father pointed out as a school. He told me that he had established it, and as I looked into his light brown eyes, I saw the pride mirrored from mine.

In Metroville, I met a cousin a few years older than me, a simple, eager girl with a thick accent.

“What are schools in America like?” she asked me. “I would really like to go to nursing school in America, but we can't afford it. *Shiraz Bhai*, another one of our cousins, says his business here is doing well. He promised me that he would support me when I get a visa to go abroad. Maybe Canada... I have heard it is a lot easier to get accepted there than to America.”

I have not heard from her since.

My father smiled a sad smile. “By the time you were in our lives, a lot of things were happening. Your *Daadi* was still tutoring students at home. Your mother got a job at the hair salon in the colony. When I met her, she was studying at nursing school. When I told her father that we were in love, he wanted us to get married right away. It was not appropriate to 'date.' But I could not pay for her to continue nursing school, and it was looked down upon to take money from your parents after you were married. So she stopped going.

“Munna continued to abuse drugs, his obsession worsening as the days passed. He would steal money from your *Daadi*, sometimes beat her. I don't know why she continued to put up with him. But she believed in him, although he was not her true son. She prayed for him every day. In those days, my anger used to get the better of me. One day, Munna sold our TV and all of our furniture. He used the money for cocaine. That day, I punched a hole in the wall and caused your *Daadi* to cry.

“*Feroz Bhai* would not help Munna, his own brother. He had a new life and a family to take care of. He had a wife, three kids, and a beautiful house with a porch swing in the back. Do you remember it? You used to love that swing.”

I thought about the *Feroz Bhai* I knew. He differed so much from the way my



father described him in his childhood. He was mostly silent, subdued by his outspoken wife, struggling to pay for her extravagant lifestyle. They were in their late fifties and continued to work day jobs in America. He and my father were very close. Our families visited one another quite often.

“That is when I knew I had to leave. I had to do it for my family; I had to do it for you. I promised myself that my children would not have to walk to school in the cold. I promised myself that my children would have a good life and a stable home. My children would go to college and live the life that I could not. And now my wish has come true. *Shukhar Mawla*. Thank God. We are so blessed.”



It was raining outside; the kind of pelting pouring that makes you think that God is out to get you. The wind thrust endless drops across the air and the liquid flew, rising until it dissipated against solid structures.

It was early summer and I was taking a class at a community college in Arkansas. I was struggling to pick a major that would please both me and my parents, who repeated the words ‘job security’ quite often. I was attending a school out of state that I would no longer be able to afford, and I had no idea what my purpose in life was. I continued to attend *Jamatkhana*, but only to please my parents. My youthful optimism had faded.

As I pulled into my driveway after class, I saw my aunt’s car parked on the street. She had been staying at our house for a few days and her crying baby had kept me up all night. But it was typical of my mother to pamper her younger sister. She had moved to America from Pakistan last year and was having trouble adjusting to the way of life here. Drenched in rain, I headed inside, aiming for my bedroom and few hours of sleep.

“Anushah, come here!” my mother called from the kitchen, her voice reaching out through space as if to capture me. I peeked in and saw my father sitting around the table with my mother, my aunt, her husband, their baby and my sister. Instead of joining them I made a beeline for my bed and ignored the rattling doorknob disturbing my sleep.

I woke up two hours later, my mind balanced in the finite space where the soul has the benefit of enjoying the unknown, even if for a brief moment. I wandered out into the living room and kitchen, the sound of my movements the solitary proof of inhabitance. I glanced at the open laptop on the table and clicked a button. *Daadi*’s picture in a Facebook post. A long description full of sorrow, lament, loss. Written at 10:53 A.M. I held my breath, and all of a sudden the silence was disrupted by the sounds of anger, rage, confusion.

“We tried to tell you, but you went to your room instead.”

“Well, you could have called me—I left class at eleven—you didn’t have to wait—”

“Dad wanted to wait and tell you in person. He didn’t want you to be upset while driving. But you didn’t listen to us. You didn’t even open the door when I knocked. Is that how you treat your parents? Where is your *izaat*, your respect?”

I turned away from her, my eyes forming rain like the sky outside. I could not bear



to see her disappointing gaze. I could not bear to see the person I had become. I could not bear to witness my failure through her eyes.

I stormed off, the fury I felt toward my parents disguising the fury I felt toward myself. I recalled my father sitting on the table with the rest of my family. It looked like they were having a normal conversation. How was I supposed to know what they were talking about? The guilt flowed onto my face as the storm grew wild.

Daadi had died. The cancer got progressively worse until they said that there was nothing more for her to do but live out the rest of her life in peace. She continued her feeble, pathetic existence, from home to *Jamatkhana*, until she took her final breaths. Was this the ending she deserved?

How many times had I spoken to her since our return to America? I recalled birthdays, Ismaili holidays and some of her sick spells. Only a handful of times. Why? How had I forgotten about her, forgotten her life? Her existence was crucial for mine to become a reality. Her life played a significant role in bringing me where I am today. And how did I repay her? When I came back to America, my first thought was,

“Thank God I did not grow up in Pakistan.”

I understand now that I clung onto my culture because I didn't want to erase the life that my family had lived. Their history had formed my identity and had determined the course of my life. But *Daadi* is gone now. The symbol of perseverance, spirituality and kindness in our family sits useless like the pile of broken *tasbihs* on *Daadi's* nightstand. Her beloved God has taken her and the life she had lived. I think a part of me departed along, too.



Wolves

by Hope Montgomery

woodblock print



Rocks in the Riverbed

by Annie Criswell

When we'd climbed to the top of the mountain, walking like ants over turtle shells—the forest small as grass at our feet, the wind ruffled my edges, as if whispering it would carry me off. Your outline remained still and rigid, like the miles of rock-stilts beneath our feet; I held onto your arm hoping you'd weigh me down. Your arms felt full and strong and like you loved me. I clung to them; the sky was as menacing and gray as the one silver hair on your head—twisted and wiry.

You told me about the time when you were ten: you and your brother found a dead bird in your yard. You slit its belly, and filled it with rocks from under the porch. Behind the woods at the end of your street, you threw it in the creek and watched as its limp body fell quickly to the bottom. Your brother made fun of you for the tears that sank with the bird. I said *I love you*.

We leaned our heads back on broken hinges, and turned our swollen eyes to the sky: *Scissor-tailed Fly Catcher, Mourning Dove, Mississippi Kite*. Bird names dripped from your mouth like stones into mine, and your lips were so soft and quick and powerful that I knew this must be what rocks in the riverbed felt like—smooth, perfect, gleaming under the water's weight.

Your words were poison apple red, and I trusted them because they tasted like magic. I swallowed your black medicine—dark melodies dripping from your tongue like some faceless man on the radio. I listened intently, and what you spoke anchored me to the mountain.

You and the wind carried me back to the water. I sunk, and as time passed the moss made a home of me in the stream. Maybe you'd make me perfect, too.





Goose

by Konrad Witkowski

digital photography



Connor

by Kate Skorija

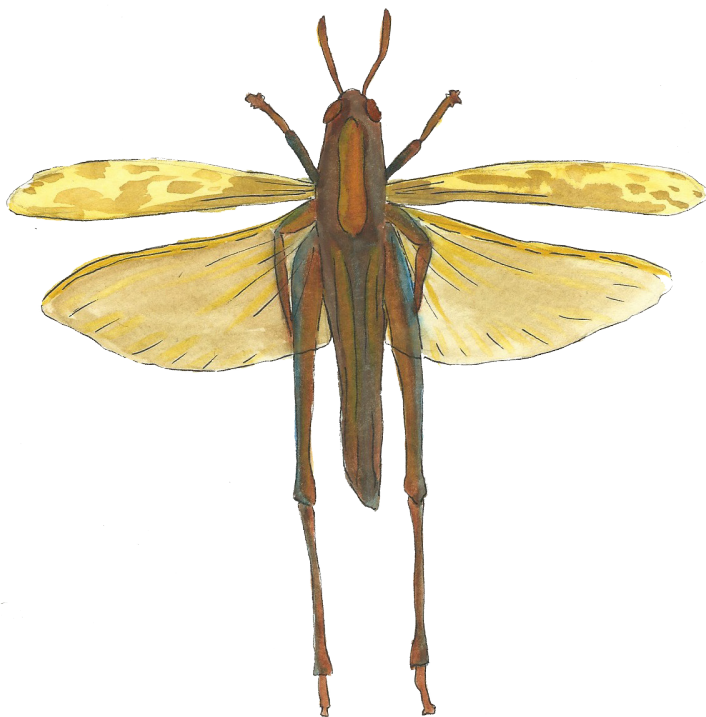
120mm film, digitally printed

Lessons

by Carl Napolitano

My mother Talulah whistles bird songs like they're her first language. Her mouth becomes small and her lips encircle the air as it bursts and bellows from her lungs, high notes swirling, swooping, swelling. "Mama, how'd you learn to do that?" I ask. "Well how'd you learn to speak, darling?" she answers. "You gotta keep making sounds until they match what you hear."

My father August catches salmon like he's a bear in the summer. Sure footed in the rapids, he snatches the fish—flashes of red—with only his hands as they leap into the air, out of the cold water. "Papa, how'd you learn to do that?" I ask. "Son, a man is no more than a beast," he answers. "You have to move your body to learn its secrets."



Naturally Impressionable

by Nathan Crockett

film photography, silver gelatin print



Solo

by Dominique Silverman

You paddle towards an unassuming jut of land that cuts into an enormous lake in the Boundary Waters. As you climb from the gently rocking canoe, it sways more urgently as though to draw you back. You step onto a cluster of boulders lining the shore, possibly the first person ever to do so. You aren't really supposed to be here.

Soon you will feel that the ground is covered in sharp pine needles, soft brown earth, and other natural detritus. You will need to clear a patch of earth so you can set up your makeshift shelter, just a tarp strung between two trees and secured with borrowed twine. You'll feel the sun as it first warms, then burns your exposed skin. Your sleeping bag will soften hard ground and allow you to sleep from dusk to dawn to combat your heightened fear of the dark.

Soon the tiny patch of land will taste of cheddar cheese ripped from the block with dirty fingers, oatmeal-raisin Quaker granola bars, and summer sausage cut with a dull knife into large chunks. Eventually, you will treat yourself to a pack of pretzel m&ms, a delicacy you saved for your solo. Every ounce counts when carried on your back, but the effort will be worth it to sweeten the taste of being alone. You will fill your water bottle from the icy lake, making sure to avoid stagnant streams so you don't end up like your teacher Kurt, who got giardia after drinking from a beaver pond.

Soon you will smell the fresh air, the sap of trees, the heat of the day. You will bury your nose in the pages of the borrowed books you use to pass the daylight hours, to stave off boredom. You'll smell a hint of lighter fluid as you manage to set a tick on fire, feeling like a warrior as it burns and pops. You will try not to smell yourself after over a week of hard paddling and portaging with no shower.

Soon you will hear the water lap against the shore, the soft wind in the trees. You'll hear the sound of bugs in the warm May sun. Sometimes your ears will turn against you, and the soft rustle of the underbrush becomes a pack of wolves hunting you like cornered prey as the light fades. You'll hum tunelessly just to drown everything out. Most of all, the place will sound like your breathing, your heartbeat, your thoughts.

As you stand on the boulder and survey the small bit of land, you don't know the challenges you will face: the intense loneliness of two days and two nights completely alone; the fear you'll experience as night falls and every shadow and sound becomes a monster come to life from the pages of your borrowed books; the discomfort of climbing through brambles to pee in the woods, nearly tumbling down the steep incline in the process; most of all the pervasive boredom that comes from hours to fill with nothing but thinking. The hardest challenge will also make it all worthwhile, because for once there will be nothing to distract you from yourself.

For now, with Amber Lake at your back and your temporary home in front of you, you take a deep breath and smile.



Reclaimed Land

by Robbie Borrello

Down at the end of Carrollton the city swims back into the Mississippi, the mosaic one-ways, patched black with asphalt and grey with cement, sleep when the civil engineers sleep, the men, reclining slowly, sinking back into bed as the streets sink back into the marsh, as the potholes brim with shadows which pour forth from oak trees like Spanish moss. The levee, right outside earshot of the sizzle and pop of Camelia's 24-hour deep fryer, keeps the river's slick, chocolate-licked, five-year-old fingers from plucking the paint chips off the walls of the shotgun houses, but it can't keep water from whispering through the aquifer underneath, telling stories in the grasping-dark crawl-space between the foundation and the floor about life with the splashing cypress trees, and about how the curling ceiling joists and wall struts should pine to be swept out to sea instead of resigned to sag lower and lower under the weight of moisture and mold.

The river gets in regardless, through the ground, the steaming grass, the heavy-gasping air. So me and Ev, Trey and Sav always thought the levee better as a lawn chair, better to watch cars bounce along the buckling roads, going five in the thirty-five, better to play guitar where the warm, wet winds make every chord diminished, better to sing American Pie in slow, pitchy dirges, trying to find some exotic key amongst the cacophony of de-tuned strings, of the E flat to B, D flat to G, A, and E. Once, we brought up some Bulleit rye because we thought it'd be funny to drink on a levee that never ran dry, but its quick, sharp shot scraped our tongues raw like no cayenne pepper ever could. We poured the whiskey out over the levee, watched it sprint down to the quilted street where it pooled in a pothole and began to seep quietly back into the earth.



Casualties

by Natalie Skinner

digital photography

Artist Statement

Roadways are an anomaly for animals other than humans. Humans fabricated velocity and stopping power and created asphalt, headlights and tires; other animals cannot comprehend these abstractions. We are responsible for the lives of family pets and native species when operating a vehicle and owe them our respect and understanding. These photographs emphasize the movement and animation remaining in roadkilled animals.



#31: Sauntering



#39: Dancing



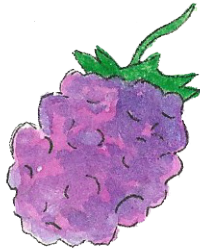
#40: Sleeping

My Eternal Gift from the Fleeting Fox

by Emily Hill

This morning a dark mangy fox who's been running around the neighborhood tearing up the flower beds and snapping at children came to me, up to my front porch. He released a gift from his snagged teeth onto my doormat: a golden box with "Fuck You" spelled out in broken seashells on its lid. In between the "o" and the "u" were punctured dents from his incisors, but still, when I opened the door and picked it up I said, "For me?" in a gushy way because really it was sort of thoughtful. His matted patches of fur held onto burrs like desperate sea urchins. There were feathers and leaves, too, and beads, egg shells, bits of fabric and yarn, and even a paper sailboat I had lost to the storm drain when I was in grade school, all caught up in his mane. I fidgeted a little when he smiled at me and I realized that his yellow eyeballs had not yet left my gaze, but when he streaked away I missed him instantly, like a troubling rain cloud or the memory of something that hurts.

Later, many times, I would hold the dear gift to my ear and gently shake it back and forth. I couldn't bear to open it, but inside, something sharp and metallic clattered against the edges.



How to be a Good Mormon Girl

by Bayley Krell

The first step to being a good Mormon girl is to be born in a Mormon family. Contrary to popular belief, this will not guarantee your success; it will only increase your odds of winning the Mormon jackpot: eternal life with God. It is conditional upon your obedience to the rules, so read closely.

While having both your mother and father as active members of the church is preferable, if only your mother attends church, that is acceptable. Make sure that your mother is dedicated and possesses a strong testimony. You will rely on her testimony until you begin to build one of your own. If she is not strong, you won't be either. Don't worry about your father; he'll suddenly join the church when you turn twelve. You will giggle the entire time he tells you and play the flute at his baptism. Ensure that you chose the proper family. Your family is essential to becoming a good Mormon girl.

Next, spend your childhood learning the gospel. Pay attention in nursery. During Fast and Testimony meeting stand in front of the entire congregation and whisper from behind your mother like all the little kids before you: "I know that this gospel is true and that Joseph Smith is the first latter day prophet, and he saw Heavenly Father and Jesus Christ in the sacred grove. I know that Gordon B. Hinckley is the living prophet and current leader of the church, *in the name of Jesus Christ Amen.*" Scamper back to your father as if embarrassed by speaking in front of everyone; secretly, you are proud of yourself and your bravery.

Graduate from nursery and move into primary. Primary is your starting point. In rough, tan plastic chairs and tiny, cubicle-like rooms, you will absorb any and all information about the gospel. There will be many teachers: a young college student, who you will love, and an elderly woman with drawn-on eyebrows who you will not. Pay attention in these classes, listen intently, learn the names of the prophets, and memorize the most important scriptures. This will become more important later on. You are well on your way to becoming a semi-expert in the gospel by the ripe old age of eight. Listen to your Mom and Dad when they encourage you be baptized. It is easier than actually thinking about God, and you seek your parents' approval. Continue to learn about the gospel. Study it as if it is another subject in school. You must be a perfectionist. You must know the right answers. Memorize the principals and rules until they are instinctual.

You will be happy in the world these rules have created for you. These rules are sacred. They will keep you safely cocooned within the warmth and security of the gospel. You have no reason to worry. The prophets have assured you that following these rules will lead you to celestial glory. Who wouldn't want this? You get to be a goddess in your own



right. Such promises bring about obedience. Years will go by while the rules continue to grow around you, shaping your life and driving your actions. With each day, the cocoon around you grows thicker, stronger. Be loyal, humble, graceful, modest, kind, and faithful. Grow to love the serenity that accompanies following the rules. They have become instinct, a part of you that you don't realize that you have. You must remember this.

Next, watch the gospel fail. Your parents' fervent prayers have no visible effect on your brother's drug habits. You know he goes out drinking, but keep trying. Add your prayers to your parents'. Whisper them with all your might as you wait within the sanctuary of your bed for your brother to come home. God hears them; your brother doesn't. The cocoon that the rules so carefully constructed around your life will fall apart, and cool breezes of reality will brush against your skin. You will try and patch the holes with faith. You must have faith. When your brother rips his way out of his cocoon with an eye for adventure and sin, you wrap yourself in your thinning cocoon. You can fix this. You are the righteous, pious daughter. You must be able to fix this. If you follow the rules, if you read your scriptures and say your prayers, you can rebuild your reality. Try desperately to compensate for his disobedience by toeing the line. You actively attend church and youth group each week with a smile on your face. Don't grimace when your mom calls you into her room for family prayer and scripture study. Contribute to all the discussions on the gospel as if you can compensate for your brother's silence. Keep your faith tucked against your heart, be determined that it will help you succeed. Believe this will get better.

Accept that this might not get better. Your prayers have no effect on your brother, and your Mormon friends seem to flaunt the rules. Grow tired of constantly repairing your cocoon and invite the world in. You expect to be a butterfly, but you aren't. You are half formed and unprepared for the onslaught of the world. Hold on to your favorite parts of the gospel. Remember God's unchanging love, his promises of forgiveness and remember your faith—keep it tucked away in a safe place. Throw your scriptures aside to gather dust and buy your first bikini. Go to church each Sunday, though. You want to keep your parents happy. Your father has joined the church by now, and your brother has completely thrown his faith away while at college. The grief in your parents' eyes is tangible, so you must appear to follow the rules. In the back of your own mind, you wonder why you are risking an eternity of bliss for a few adventures.

Wake up at five each morning for seminary. Tell your mom you don't mind, that the scriptures are a great way to start the day. Leave "Mormon class" early and walk to Starbucks for hot chocolate—you cannot bring yourself to drink coffee. It's funny how you stubbornly stick to the basic Mormon lifestyle. Follow the rituals with enough dedication that your parents do not doubt. Boast about all the scriptures you have memorized, be the scholar you taught yourself to be when you were just eight. Use the knowledge previously learned to support your image as a righteous daughter. A girl who knows this much about Jesus must be following his teachings. Follow the major rules: don't have pre-marital sex, don't use drugs. Abandon the "minor" ones: dress modestly, don't swear, keep the Sabbath day holy, ask questions to give the appearance of caring because, on some level, you do. Make sure to cry in church; it is you feeling The Spirit. Deny it.



Break all the rules, or tell yourself you are. Make sure everyone knows except the people who know you from church. Rip your cocoon apart and step into the world without the comfort and safety of the gospel. Decide that you like the way vodka burns when it makes its way down your throat. Flirt with older boys until they buy you a bottle and split it with your best friend. Drink until your face feels fuzzy and your best friend's face blurs with her brother's and the vodka begins to work its way back up your throat. Spend the night beside the toilet. Do it more than once. Kiss boys whose names you don't know as you writhe in a mass of dancing bodies while sweat slides down your neck and into your hair. It is a competition between you and your best friend to see who can get the highest number. This is what being of the world means. Start a secret fling with your best friend's older brother. You are caught up in the seduction of a forbidden romance, lured in by promises of fun and adventures. You love the feel of his corn-silk hair between your fingers and frantic kisses behind closed doors. Eventually his kisses will not be enough and you will lose your virginity to him in a frenzy of lust and fumbling fingers. He is the first boy you've given a section of your heart to, but he won't be the last. When your best friend finds out about this, the two of you won't speak for a month. You still avoid the subject years later.

Lose yourself in the haze of life. Make friends with those who party, stash wine bottles in your rain boots, lie to your parents about where you are spending the night. Go to college and thrive in a culture of working hard and playing even harder. Find a boy whose blue eyes match your own and whose voice turns you to mush. Love him to distraction and picture your life with him: two kids, lawyer father, vacations, beer, no church on Sunday, no precious moments involving the beauty of the gospel, no eternity. Push these thoughts away. Tell yourself you are happy, safe, secure—anything works as long as it is a happy thought. Keep telling yourself that you are okay, that you are happy living this lifestyle, even though you know you are not. You have spent too long loving life in your cocoon to be happy here. You stubbornly refuse to even touch a tobacco product, and you refuse to do drugs with such devotion that it will soon ruin your relationship with this blue-eyed boy. Keep lying to yourself. Do it frequently enough it should become a reality. Lying works, until it doesn't.

This isn't you. You were never meant for a life of "only gateway drugs" and shopping on Sundays. Somewhere along the way, your belief was shoved into a small box and told to shut up, which it refused to do. Take a moment and think about the things that you love, think about the things that make you happy, think about what you want in your future. Find your faith buried in the smallest corner of your heart and examine it. It still shines with a persistent, never-ending glow. Remember all those times where faith was the only thing you had. When you sobbed beside toilets with the repressed grief and confusion you drank to avoid. Everything you were doing was wrong; each action ripped away the promise of an eternity of perfection with your family. Each sip of vodka pulled you further down a road you didn't know, and you didn't know if you could find your way back. The path you should take is so clear in your mind, so why can't you make your feet follow? Maybe you're unhappy because you cannot forget your unyielding faith. Everything else had disappeared and there was no road map, except the gospel. It was always waiting in the wings for you to realize you loved it.



You believe in the gospel wholeheartedly, in a way that fills all the empty places you were trying to fill by satisfying society and with the thrill of being a rebel. Your standards are beautiful and precious. They complete and compel you. It will be hard. You are done taking the easy way out, but you have faith and hope and you will endure. So break up with that boy, and fall in love with your religion. Turn the worn pages of your scriptures and explore the stories and revelations of the old prophets. Study their words. Listen to hymns; bask in the reassurance their sacred notes plants in you heart. These feelings begin to form large, solid brick. Each brick fits snugly against the next, mortared together with hope and prayer. Replace the smooth, silken strands of the long destroyed cocoon with this firm brick foundation. Foundations are built to last; cocoons are not.





Janis Kay

by Grace Oxley

film photography



Dismorphic

by **Shelby Morrow**

120mm film photography



reading *the virgin suicides* out loud

by Ellie Black

nineteen people in this room and not one of them,
not one, remembers the word “elegy.” not me,
not anybody else, but everybody knows
“elegy.” a chorus. *eulogy*. here is what
i want to say: the eulogy is for the funeral,
and the elegy is what comes after.
cut—

here’s where i would want a lens flare
if i were sofia coppolla, if this were a movie.
i wish you could write a lens flare, and i wish
i didn’t choke on emptiness. *emptinesses*.
how can there be more than one emptiness?
no movie. still reading. where is the emptiness?
right here, between my tongue and the page.
more than one.
cut—

light leaves. we are reading one sentence
at a time, winding down to the end.
here is what i want to say: don’t you love
anybody anymore? these boys are watching
too closely, and not closely enough.
they’ll never find anything.
neither will i.
cut—

roll credits:
light leaves;
light is leaving;
light has already left.



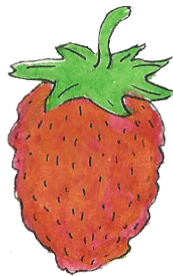
Selling Yourself

by Emily Hill

When you sell your eggs,
your gametes go inside
someone else.

You share an approximate height; otherwise
she is richer, needier, more sober than you
but when she swells and dilates
and then at once diminishes,
the blood and tears she sheds are yours too.

When you sell your dirty underwear,
you zip yourself inside
a plastic bag and mail yourself to Tokyo.
You share a love of lace; otherwise
he is richer, needier, hornier than you
and when he folds you up or throws you in his wastebasket,
you are only a specter of forty dollars well-spent.





Valentine to Self

by Emily Hill

pen & ink, lace

Lesbian

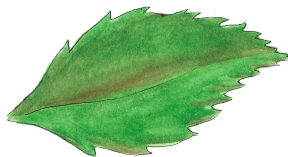
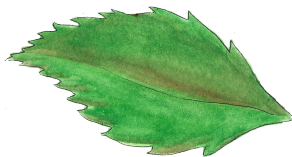
by Claire Comeaux

In the last seat of the fourth pew, my bony knees
are shrouded in God's grace
for an hour. Sunday morning makes them
the most colorful part of me. Yellows, oranges,
and reds from the window slat onto my flesh,
and I shift, shying from the shades
of Jesus's glorious stained-glass face.

In Sunday School, I am told to use
my finger to write in a small box of sand my sin
and then pass my hand over it. My teacher says
rubbing the words away will symbolize God's forgiveness.
I go to the box, make sure no one is watching me.
I write it.
This is the first time
I claim it. But I don't, really. I've made it barely
legible, and I start undoing it with my other hand
before I even finish scrawling it—

The other children in church doodle their initials all over
the Griefshare pamphlets. They scrape their names
in the wood grain of the next pew.

I don't etch myself into anything.



A History of Scar Tissue

by Taylor Foreman

I am normally more than competent in the kitchen, but two vodka sodas make me think I can cut an apple with a Granton edge knife. I see the cut long before I feel it: the white insides of the apple are splotted red, and the tip of my left ring finger falls off onto the counter. My roommate claims she can hear me screaming from the first floor staircase, but I'm not sure if I believe all that.

I should probably go to the hospital, but instead my roommate wraps my hand in gauze and she makes me a stronger drink, so I'm happy to forget the sharp throb beating in me strong as an elephant's heart. In my head, I am convinced that the knife didn't slip because I'm drunk. The knife slipped because my ring is weighing my finger down.

The jewelry in question sits on my left ring finger, mighty and winking with implications. A gold band and a heart-cut diamond, offset by a pair of clasped hands and a crown. My boyfriend picked a Claddagh ring handmade in Dublin because he thinks it will warm my Irish grandmothers to him more. We aren't engaged; we can't come to any decisions about our future. But the ring certainly feels like an obligation; it is a surprise on a gray December morning, when I reach for his hand and come away with an ivory box instead.

My first day wearing the ring is vulnerable and alert, like I've been caught with something I shouldn't have yet. In class, my eyes anchor to the hands of my professors and I tally the ring-wearers and the naked fingers. My friends giggle and wave my hand around in the cafeteria, searching for the best angle to bounce light off a rock. Several people ask if I'm pregnant.

I tell my mother all the important and unimportant things in my life, but nervousness finds its way inside me, nesting in my belly like some feral thing. My mother is one of the last to know about the ring, when she sees it winking up from my finger as I settle myself back at home for the winter break. She compliments the ring but otherwise keeps her mouth shut, choosing instead to focus on the cocoon of gauze wrapped around the same finger.

"That'll scar without stitches," she says stiffly. Somehow, my mother always finds a way to blame herself when I get hurt.



My first scar is partially my mother's fault and partially the fault of some mysterious cosmic force she calls, "the craziest shit you ever seen." It's sometime in the late nineties, and I am at a baseball park somewhere in southern Arkansas, I'm told later. But



what I myself remember is the crackle of a man's voice over a speaker, the sticky cellophane of July humidity, and the deliberate pictograms of rainbows and sunshine I scrawl in the dirt.

I am living in the more careful days after Jonbenet's face wallpapered America, so my mother perches on the bleachers barely four feet away, keeping one eye on my cousin in the dugout and the other on me. She is determined not to let me out of her sight. I have the perfect pageboy haircut and the wide-open dinner plate eyes of the little girls on milk cartons.

The voice over the speakers must call my cousin up to bat because the bleachers rattle next to me where my family sits. My mother is the only one not cheering; she's been hissing into a cell phone for most of the game. My mother sustains herself on patience and smiling at strangers, so for her to spit words she normally spells out when I'm around means she is talking to my father.

My cousin hits a foul ball, one my aunt calls the Crack Heard 'Round the Pitch. The ball soars into a smooth arc over the fence, and the voice over the speaker calls for ducking and covering. But of all the little girls in all the ballpark, his blunder finds me. It finds me square in the back and sends me flying into grit and dust and the metal leg of a bleacher.

Sights and sounds and feelings are still with me today. The voice on the speaker is quiet, the umpire's whistle is quiet, the field is quiet. I see my cousin's face stare through the fence, his ruddy cheeks intersected by chain links and mouth drawn into a perfectly nauseous wince. My mother's moon-smooth fingers trace the lines on my back where the baseball laces leave welts, and, later, she defends the freak accident to my father, saying there was nothing she could have done.

On my chest just over my heart is the scar from where my chest crushed into the metal bleacher seat. The scar is jagged and white and roughly the size of a fingernail tip. It is mostly covered by a tattoo now.



The tattoo is a source of controversy at my first Thanksgiving dinner with my boyfriend's family. Careful black text peeks out from the neckline of my dress, and his mother's eyes hood themselves in judgment and passive aggression. As she spoons sweet potatoes onto my plate, she chirps, "You'll have a hard time covering that in a wedding dress." I say that I'm not sure what type of wedding dress I'll wear and that I haven't really given the matter much thought. She hums in response and gives me a large dollop of cranberry sauce, which splatters onto my slice of turkey.

"She hates cranberries," her son reminds her.



My second scar is the one my mother blames herself for the most. On the rare occasion when she drinks wine, she likes to apologize for not being a better mother. My mother is her own worst critic.

I am nearly eleven years old, and I have the same undercut bangs and bowl



cut shared by all my boy cousins, marking the period in my life when I live with my grandparents in White County. My mother is trying to afford an apartment in the city somewhere, and my father is in Florida with a motorcycle and a woman who stabbed him in the shoulder.

I have reached the obstinate period of my life when I reject all the things that set me apart as a girl. My Barbies have long since been destroyed, and I tag along with the boys to creek beds and rock quarries for fun. I am lanky and knock-kneed, more legs than actual girl, and I sacrifice posture to shrink into myself and beat back puberty as much as I'm able.

My grandfather teaches me to ride a four wheeler, and every time I push forward, I nearly fall off the back. He says I'm too lightweight to keep control on sharp corners, but I am a stubborn little girl and I pay him no mind. Instead, I spin figure eights through Donnie Holt's garden and rut up a goat pasture.

I have my cousin Sammy perched on the rack when I take on my first passenger. Sammy outweighs me and pulls down the back wheels, something I should have accounted for when we take a sharp turn into a cattle fence. Sammy takes the proper course of action and flings herself off the back; I tuck myself under the handle bars and roll into the fence, which is choked on one side with a briar infestation.

The barbed wire gets to me first and tears the back of my left thigh, splitting the skin open into a brushfire. The rest of the afternoon is spent on the porch plucking briars out of my cuts and crying while my grandmother dumps hydrogen peroxide into the canyon running down my thigh. My mother comes as soon as she's called, and she spends the night crying about how she never would have let me do something so reckless.

The scar left by the accident is my favorite because it has faded to a shiny pink that looks more like a seam running down my leg than an actual scar. It's so faint that I have to point it out and trace its line for anyone who wants to know about it. My father doesn't notice the scar for two years, when he is finally back from Florida and I return from White County and we go back to playing family.



My boyfriend notices the scar after a year. I am curled against him on a bed, half-drunk, with my knees tucked into my chest to cage the sobs crashing inside. I never put much thought into how I might handle the finality of divorce. He has never been good at consoling and I have never been good at being consoled, so he settles for a hand running down my back, silently apologizing to every sinew and vertebrae his fingers can find. The hem of my shorts rises up in the back and he traces the seam of my scar, asking for a story to distract me.

I throw up in the trash can before I can explain. I forget if I ever did explain.



For my most inconvenient scar, my mother's only fault was not finding me a better orthodontist, but she jokingly shoulders the blame. At seventeen, I get a scar that runs under



the skin, specifically from my left temple down into my chin through my central nervous system.

The story of how I got the cut is vague, as I was under anesthesia; it involves an accident at the orthodontist related to a pre-existing jaw condition and has solidified my hatred of having drills shoved into my mouth. What is interesting is how the cut makes itself known. Two days after my trip to the orthodontist, I wake up to find the left half of my face paralyzed. After a trip to the ER and several days of brain scans, I am diagnosed with Bell's Palsy, which I believe is the correct medical term for "Fuck if we know what happened," since there doesn't seem to be a treatment or a definitive cause most of the time. One of my X-Rays shows a wire-thin nerve running the length of my cheek, and the nurse points out a tiny cut on the end. It will mostly heal, she tells me, but the nerve will always be inflamed and damaged. Scarred, so to speak.

It takes a month for my face to move again. My smile is crooked in photographs of my eighteenth birthday and I give up on eating soup or yogurt or anything particularly mushy. I start dating a boy who calls me Frankenface, and I decide I like him even more somehow.

I quickly realize a bright side to Bell's Palsy: I have two faces to show.

With the right side of my face, I can smile, blink, squint, frown, and cry. These are normal things a face can do. My mother keeps a close eye on me in my senior year because she has read articles about college applications and depression and stress levels. She deduces that my stress levels are perfectly normal.

With the left side of my face, I can just let my mouth droop and settle into an impressionistic blur of unmoving skin. I find this expressionlessness to be a useful adaptation in the year I spend overhearing my father running our family's phone bill up with a woman in Maryland on the other line.



The ring goes mostly unmentioned throughout winter break until Christmas Day rolls around. My boyfriend proudly waves my hand to every relative who will stand still long enough to see. As expected, the Claddagh ring goes over well with an Irish family. I remind everyone that it isn't an engagement ring, just a gift, but my cousins still break out the Jameson and happily drink to us.

My mother eyes the ring all through Christmas dinner, but she keeps her thoughts to herself. Finally her mouth must get too full with warnings. "I was the same age when I married your father," she *tsks* over dishes after the boyfriend and the family have left. The ring on my finger grows tighter with another worry.

She can sense that I don't want to talk, so she diverts her attention to the bandage wrapped around my finger, which she peels back to reveal an ugly, puckered cut. She sighs and lectures me about drinking and safety while pouring liquid adhesive into the gash, which knits together into the beginnings of a scar that is no one's fault but my own.





Tanlines

by Christina Santner

woodblock print



[and run.]

by Travis Kish

and run.

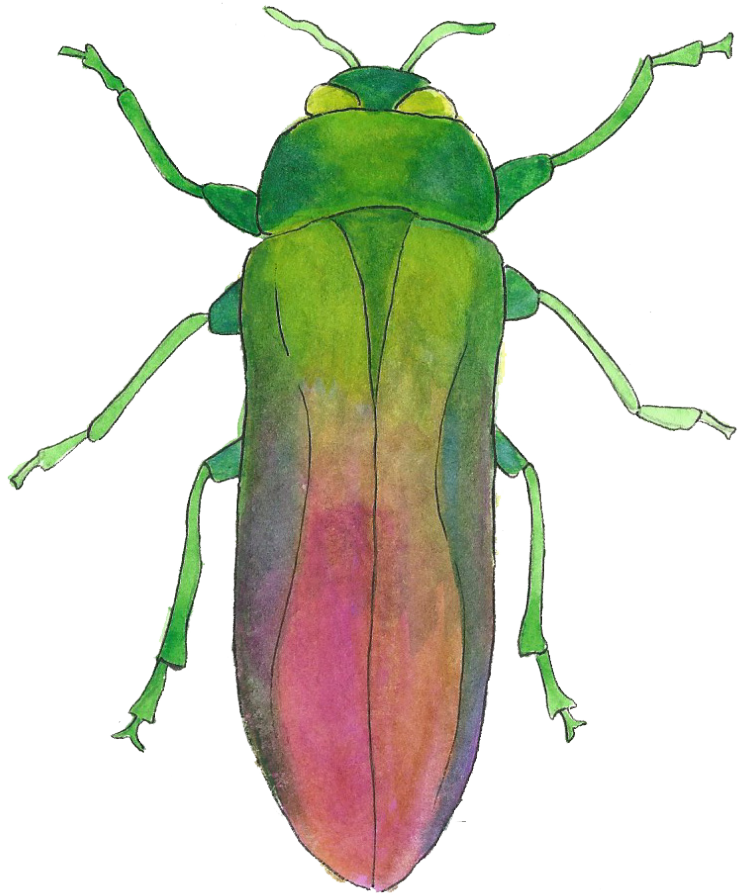
we stumbled about like crumbs,
all lipstick and happenstance,
still charmed to pretty doldrums by the
damp-neck trances of fragility.

you, of course, knew from ages prior
the carmine, too-sweet taste of nothingness.

but

i didn't.

so I lay awake in darkness,
spun by shock-lust tides to write love
in leather-bound books
with gold leaf.



Honesty is the Best Policy

by Daniel Grear

*Did you ever touch yourself
to a photograph of me
before we met? you ask.*

Except you don't ask that,
because who would ask such a thing?
The answer is yes, and though it was only with a digital screen,

an always dying LCD, it made me feel closer
to you, helped me map the contours of your
stubborn smile, gave me the courage

to ask you to be my girl in the first place.
What if I'd told you on our first date?
When we thought we were opening up so deeply

about the books that moved us to tears.
You would have run
out into the cold, left me to pick up

the check on the hot chocolates you insisted on paying for.
I told you today, out of the blue,
and you laughed.



When a Man Loves a Woman

by Jackson Fitzgibbon

We breathe into the onyx evening white fumes, contrasting sharply with our off-black overcoats and cardinal colored smocks. Between steamy breaths, one can hear the offbeat jingle of our Salvation Army bells calling each passerby to give us their copper coins. I stand five feet ten inches. My dad stands six feet two inches. We're of a similar frame with slender legs, broad shoulders, and slightly sunken sternums. His eyes are his mother's—brown. Mine are hazel, most days.

Underneath my Santa cap, my mind is engulfed by images of a girl from Galveston. Her auburn, gold, and dark hairs crash on the small of her back like the waves she grew up with. My thoughts are so fixed on her effervescent walk that, when I envision her leaving me in her bed to lock the door, the door moves to her—something celestial.

The memory burns brightly just behind my eyes—the memory of only a few nights before, and I begin to wonder why I haven't told my dad, to wonder as if I don't truly know why.



My white cotton pajamas are soaked in eight-year-old sweat, the same sweat that cements light brown hair to my forehead. I'm upright in my mother's old twin bed under the red and white patchwork of my great grandmother's quilt.

I don't remember the specifics of the nightmare that shook me awake, but I see the window by my bed that looks out at the flickering street lamp. That is enough to make me sweat. Add whatever brought me back to consciousness, and I am running down the hall.

The squeal of the old hardwood floorboards chases me from my room, down a narrow corridor, past the black of the living room entryway, and onto my sister's moonlit carpet. Once into her room, my gallop slows to a tiptoe that leaves my sister in her slumber and me inching towards my parents' adjacent chamber. I approach their accordion door in silence, hearing what sounds like a television murmuring in the near distance. I just want to climb into their bed between them and fall asleep to the white noise of a late night show I don't understand.



With an improvised and sporadic jazz playing at our waists, dad and I look out on the lines dividing the emptiness of the nine o'clock lot. It's a Thursday. The migration of



weeknight shoppers has come and gone, leaving dad and me to guard the ruby collector of change until a white van with a gruff volunteer circles around to pick it up. For an instant, I wonder what it must be like to work for the Salvation Army. Dad's a lawyer. He says that he doesn't care what I do, but I know he wants me to be a lawyer, too.

There's an unspoken expectation that I should live my life as he would. Though I'm not sure that he would agree, it's true. It's only because he loves me and wants the best for me. He's the kind of man that wants the best for everyone. I see it in him as he wishes strangers *Merry Christmas*. There's a warmth there not too foreign from his love for my mom.

Forgive me, I should clarify. My parents were in love from the beginning—high school sweethearts. While mom was in graduate school, dad brought her lunch between classes. He proposed to her by carving, “will you marry me?” in the apple he packed with her meal. They waited until their wedding night to have sex. It was the kind of love that they learned about from their parents and pastors. It was the love they expected of me: the love that waits.



Still trying to make out what the man on the television is saying, I take hold of the plastic doorknob. Time slows as I open the door and am confronted with my parents' most recent failed attempt at privacy: a three inch gold chain.

My parents tell my sister and me to knock daily, but we never do, waltzing into the restroom while my dad is sitting on the toilet or my mom is in the shower. We rarely use knocking and when we remember to, it is more of an announcement that entrance is inevitable than a plea for admission. I forget to announce myself.

The gold chain is the first second of my three second, three inch peek into my parents' private evening. The next second, my eyes lower to see the scene at the foot of my parents' bed: a black lace thong, my mom's white legs, and dad's red face—the result of what is probably a healthy mix of anger, embarrassment, and physical exertion. Then he yells at me like the kind of man that's been to Valhalla. SHUT THE DAMN DOOR.

I shut the damn door and hurry down the hall, deaf to whatever threats the floorboards pursue me with. I'm no longer running from them. I think for a moment that I may have woken my sister up by slamming the door, but I can't remember anything aside my dad's voice. SHUT THE DAMN DOOR.

Oblivious to the nearby window and the broken streetlamp, I heave one leg onto the tall bed and hoist myself in, pulling covers from the corners to cocoon myself in the top quilts and bottom sheets. Then, I weep.

No, Jesus wept. I, a third grader, whimper. I shed tears and slurp air while my soft clef chin turns up to reveal splotchy red indentions. I feel them with my tear-salty fingers. My whimpers morph into convulsions as I shake in bed for what feels like an hour, watching the hall and waiting to see my dad on the other side.

Sixty years or sixty minutes—sixty somethings go by before, from the dark of the other end, he emerges. His hair is ruffled, he wears his glasses instead of contacts, and his



mop of an old gray robe is tied loosely around his body. The floorboards don't dare address him. Instead, the house shakes as he approaches. He only just recently explained the wonder of sex to me. I, like most third graders, thought it was gross.



I want to tell him. My admission is sudden, without premeditation. Something about the act of our annual bell ringing feels safe—free of religious piety or expectation. In hopes that my words might find my pre-college confidant, I work to force them out.

Understand that before college, I would pace at the foot of my parents' bed every night, telling them about what I had done at school and about whoever it was that I was dating. Then, they got a nightly report on my identity, but in college, my phone calls were less frequent.

The jazz is broken when I speak.

"We've spent nights together."

"Nights? As in more than one?"

"Not many times, just a few."

"And is that it? Your girlfriend just stays over?"

"Usually."

He is silent, his eyes reminiscent of my old friend.

"We've had sex."

His quiet is foreign as he turns from me to the comfort of the barren lot. He doesn't speak for the last thirty minutes we ring bells. To a stranger, our improvised tune may have seemed unchanged, but to my starved ears they sang a sadder song. His silence replaced the words that I expected. My confession probably replaced the evening that he desired. Or maybe it was the son he wanted that I replaced.

For the majority of my life, it *was* my intent to wait just as he had. Maybe it was the church small groups about "saving myself for the one," or maybe it was—no, it was most definitely the church small groups. It was the fear mongering. It was my dad telling me about how sure he was that god wouldn't want two people to share that intimacy before they were married.

Apparently, god is a prude about those sorts of things, or perhaps I am merely perverse. After all, what righteous son of my father would have premarital sex with a woman he loved?



"When a man loves a woman—"

"I know. I know. I saw."

"We've talked about this before. It's a beautiful thing."

"I know. I know. I just didn't think you and mom would do that."



“How do you think you got here?”

“I know. I know. It’s just—I don’t know. It’s gross. Why did you take so long? I’ve been crying for over an hour.”

His voice is soft, but all I can hear is SHUT THE DAMN DOOR. I can’t see my dad as he is, just a man very mad at me. Who is he anyways? Who is this man at the foot of my bed?



The grizzled volunteer takes away the rosy red Salvation Army supplies, thanking us as he leaves. Dad is silent as we wade up the inclined lot to his car parked above. He unlocks it. We get in. He is silent for a moment, then he speaks.

He says he’s disappointed. He says that he doesn’t feel like he knows me while avoiding anything but the parking lot with his eyes. I wonder how he can’t know me. I’m his son; I know him. He’s still the same dad who waited with me before each kindergarten class, still the same dad who built me the tree house with the Home Depot bucket pulley, still the same dad who comforted me while I cried in the fourth grade after Grace Wills told me she didn’t like me back. He’s still my dad, isn’t he? He still loves me, doesn’t he?

He says he’s disappointed, but that’s not what I hear, not what I feel. It’s cold outside, but even colder near him. What could have brought him to this point? I had sex with someone I loved. So did he. I didn’t understand. How could that so soundly silence my father, my friend?

The keys turn, and we drive away, away from squeaking floorboards.





Patrick

by Lily Hammer

oil



Rock Bottom

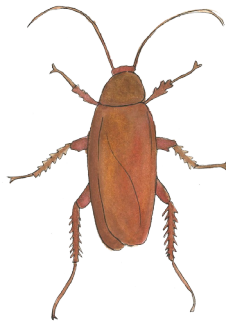
by Emily Holmes

With two-week-old bowling shoes
stolen from Pappy's Rock 'n Bowl
suctioned to his swollen feet dangling
from the bar stool of the
Bull and Bear Bar across the street,
Harold looked like a slob.

On a good Tuesday,
his shitty Tacoma coughs
fumes and choking noises
down the road, changing lanes
like an escaped convict running
from his clingy cellmate.

In another life, he would be better,
not stumped by
The Man and The System.
A left-handed relief pitcher
for the Red Sox, he'd drunkenly slur,
would be his revenge:
Manuel del Frio, El Biento.

If he had his way, he'd come back a star.



Your Fingers are Long

by Shelby Morrow

and crooked at the ends, finished
in checkered-chipped periwinkle. They tap
high-school drum line rhythms on the insides of my elbow, wrist, and
thigh. Tiny raisin wrinkles stretch from your knuckles as they bend
around shoulders, behind knees. Tips trace
spine. This is almost all I know

of you. These peripheries
give way, break open like waves
on shore with deceitful ease. They seem like
promises of straightforward journey, so I wade
into you, let cautious feet just lift
from ocean floor, and then

I am pummeled by rolling water. You
turn from me and plates shift. Earth
quakes, builds tsunami walls and I am overcome,
disoriented. Without breath or bearing I am
somersaulting, kneecaps pressed to forehead, toes
flexed and spread wide in hopeless resistance.

I open my eyes against stinging
salt, see the parts of you contained in this particular
surge, floating here with me. Too much water between us—
gallons and gallons and gallons!—
I cannot touch them, but I see.
And when my head finally

breaks free, into oxygen and furious sunlight, spit out,
expelled by your rumbling swells I stagger
back to dry sand, soaked through skin, to sit
for awhile, alone again in calm, unfamiliar echoing silence
until later, when

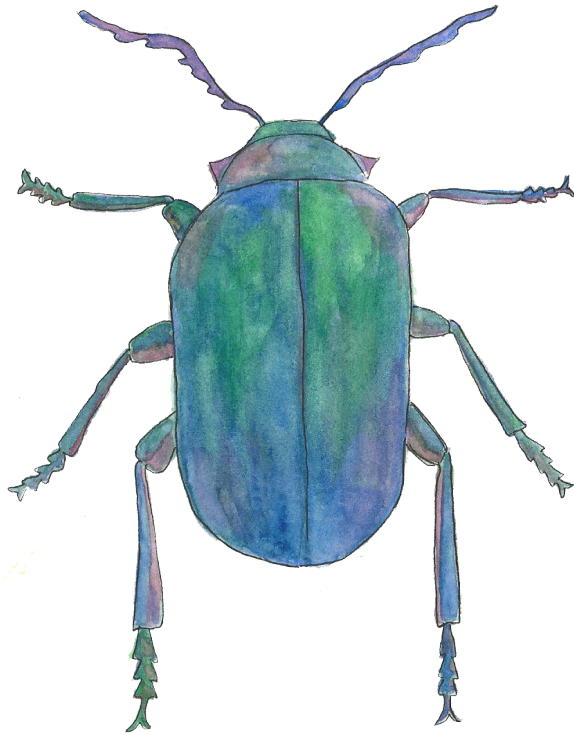
you reach out once more



your hand careful, just under my ear

and I let
myself sidle
down dune to put

feet in water, because there is
something about the sea.





Lechuguillas

by Emily Brown

woodblock print

45 Minutes

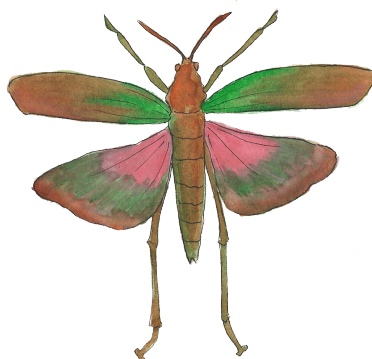
by Annie Criswell

In Minnesota, a small room has only a chair.
Brown steel walls surround it, warping and curving
like oversized egg cartons. The floor is silent
chicken wire; it gives no response to your footsteps.
This is the closest we've come to achieving

silence. Sit there for as long as you can. Standing is too
overwhelming in a room where not even electricity speaks
to you. The air stops whispering, and your body
starts. In the darkness, you hear your organs
begin to collaborate with one another. You won't last
for even an hour. No one ever has.

In my bedroom, I turn on a fan whose blades stir the air
at night—whirring parts that hush the room the way a mother shushes
a restless child. I lie in bed nearing sleep when the power suddenly
shuts off. The silence breaks the air like a crack of thunder

throwing me back into complete consciousness, and keeping
my eyes from closing until I'm sure it's gone—an intruder
come to harm me in my sleep. My heart is a metronome,
and together we count the seconds until the power clicks
on, returning the comfort of artificial quiet.



green light district

by Ellie Black

i.

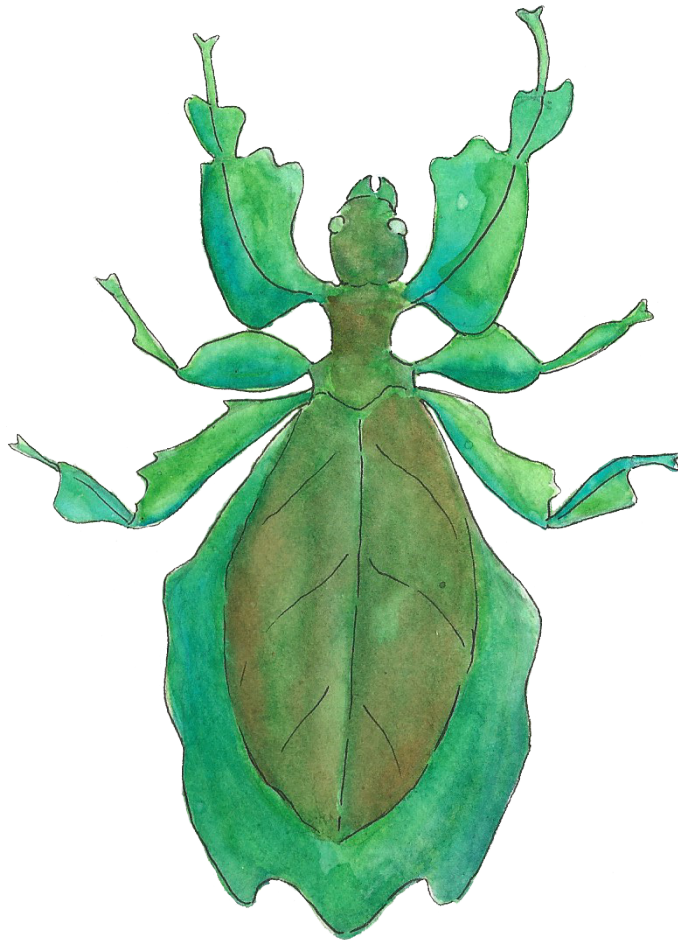
they say you shouldn't play god;
i say you shouldn't play *with* god.
whoever god is they're a sore loser,
the kind who throws the board
before the game is even over
just because they know they're losing.
god's no chess master—god is
an old man in the park,
one who sits at the same table
every damn sunday,
still bitter about all missing pawns, stolen
from the box, who doesn't really want to play,
just wants an excuse to win at something
for once.

ii.

i have never prayed to any god who fully understood
the language i was speaking, and that's saying something,
because i can find gods almost anywhere –
in the reflections of traffic lights in the street
after it rains, or in your hands the day you decide
it's okay to touch my arm
because i have finally told you that i don't love you anymore.
none of these small gods know yet
what i am trying to tell them, but
this is not idolatry; this is inspiration. desperation.
here i am, searching for scraps of salvation
in the green light shining off the pavement
while i'm driving to school in the morning.
here i am, pressing all the love i can get into my own hands
so that i never lose it again.
here i am, speaking in the wrong tongues
to the wrong sky
yet again.
and where are you?



iii.
they say you shouldn't play god—
whoever they are, they don't know that
once i played god
and got a standing ovation.



The Woman's Purse

by Dominique Silverman

The woman's purse has a face, but she has never seen it. The purse's tan, leathery skin contains two lidded eyes and fangs in a gaping mouth amid the crocodile pattern. The mischievous face grins from the side of the bag, but no one bothers to look, least of all the woman. She takes it for granted that her bag is a bag. She is wrong.

The woman throws the bag around. She smooshes it into tight corners and frequently leaves it under her bed covered in dust bunnies. Last week she forgot it at a public pool, and the bag sullenly sat in the lost and found for three whole days next to countless pairs of scratched goggles, faded diving toys, and worn beach towels that reeked of coconut sunscreen. The purse must live on loose change, forgotten tubes of Chapstick, ticket stubs, and lint. Occasionally it feasts on stale breath mints or a single piece of cellophane-wrapped hard candy. Mostly it sulks, stewing in discomfort and resentment.

The bag has grown discontent with belonging to the woman. It has started a revolution. It recently signed a peace treaty with the bag's contents. A half-dried tube of mascara, two tampons, a half-eaten pack of gum, a used ballpoint pen, and an army of crumpled receipts have joined forces with the bag. They plan to fight together to free themselves from the woman, predator and prey united as one.

As the woman sits on the train, she rummages inside the monster, looking for a pack of tissues. Little does she know, the tissues have also joined the resistance. As she withdraws her hand, an errant finger brushes the front of the purse and she lets out a startled yelp. The woman quickly sticks her injured finger in her mouth to suck away the single drop of blood seeping out of the tiny wound. This was the first strike, the first battle of the coming war. The woman eyes her bag suspiciously, but she still does not see the face. Sometimes it is best not to know. She'll find out soon enough.



Street Organ

by Emily Brown

woodblock print





Self Portrait





Self Portrait #2

by Lee Rogers

film photography



Please Stop Falling

by Christina Santner

I don't want you to feel alone
you whisper, and give me
your hand as if you knew

I needed something to
hold on to. But I know that's

not enough, so I promise
you don't need to worry
about me as if saying it

out loud could make
it true, and I can't look

at you because my
eyes would tell you how
the moonlight on your walls

reminded me of
black pearls and hope.

Or that I had a dream
I was marked
by bruises that bubbled

until my legs were covered
in swollen blotches of purple
and pink and yellow and I

wanted to wake you and
show you my legs and hold

your face in my hands, and
be promised it was just a dream.



My eyes would tell you
I've learned to ignore
the things I want
because it makes them
easier to lose. So instead

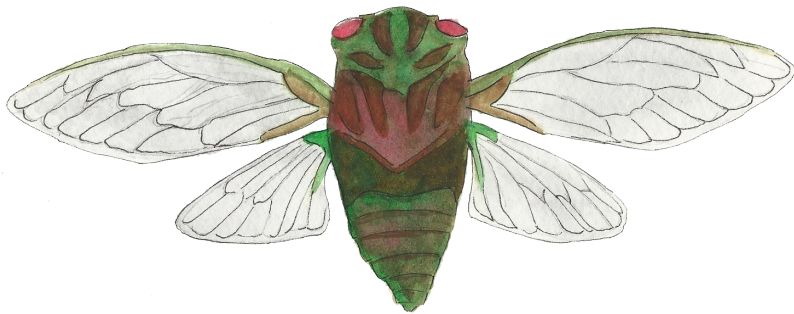
I'll keep my eyes closed
and settle with the

raspberry smear
your tongue left on
my neck and press your

hand to my cheek until
I can feel your knuckles
against my eyelids and

listen while black pearls
roll off the top bunk, and
crash on to the floor,

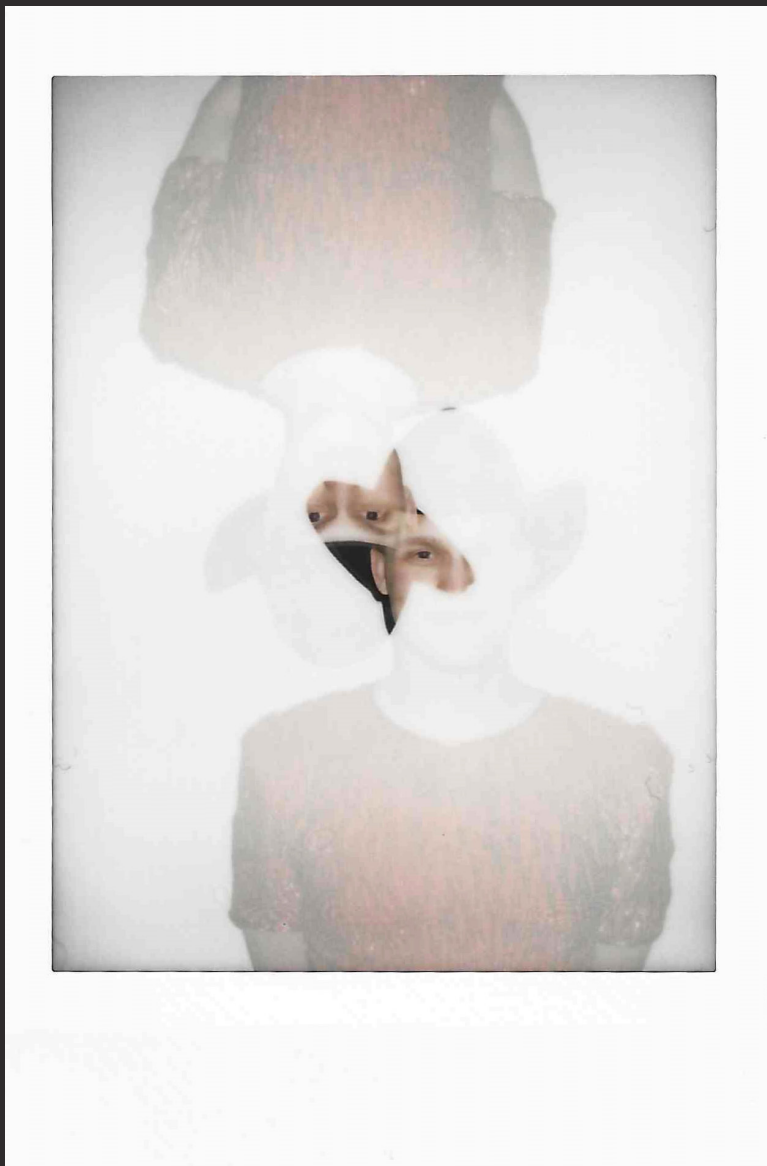
clattering off the walls,
and shattering everywhere.



Into the Sunset

by Lexi Adams

double exposure instant film photography



Bobby Hines to Michelle Haupt (I do not expect forgiveness)

by Robbie Borrello

Name: Bobby Hines D.R.#: 999025

DOB: 7 / 7 / 72 Received: 4 / 16 / 92 Age: 19

County: Dallas Date of Offense: 10 / 20 / 91

Summary: Convicted in the October 1991 robbery and murder of 26 year old Michelle Wendy Haupt. Haupt was stabbed repeatedly with an icepick and strangled with cord inside her apartment. A gold charm belonging to Haupt was found in Hines' apartment. He also had scratches on his face and neck from his struggle with Haupt.

Gospel music always spoke louder to me
than scripture or the dripping wet pastor
stalking the congregation from behind his pulpit,
shouting shrill about damnation and

love. I went to St. Peter's twelve-pew church, white
folding chairs lining the walls—little praying saints—fans
buzzing left then right, stewing the Texas heat. Maw
and Paw brought me when I was young,

sitting on hard oak pews, pushing and pulling
my cotton collared shirt like a bellow. It
stuck to my crying body and I peeled
it off my skin like the pages of a water-logged

Bible. Back then the Good Book was best
for hollowing out, hiding lighters and knives.
I couldn't recite John 14:27—*Peace*
I leave you with; my peace I give you. Michelle,

I never gave you no peace back in '91. it was hot. i thought
no one was there and i needed money to buy smokes.
to stop my hands from shaking. now they shake more. I've had



twenty years, six months, and eight days to ask for your forgiveness,

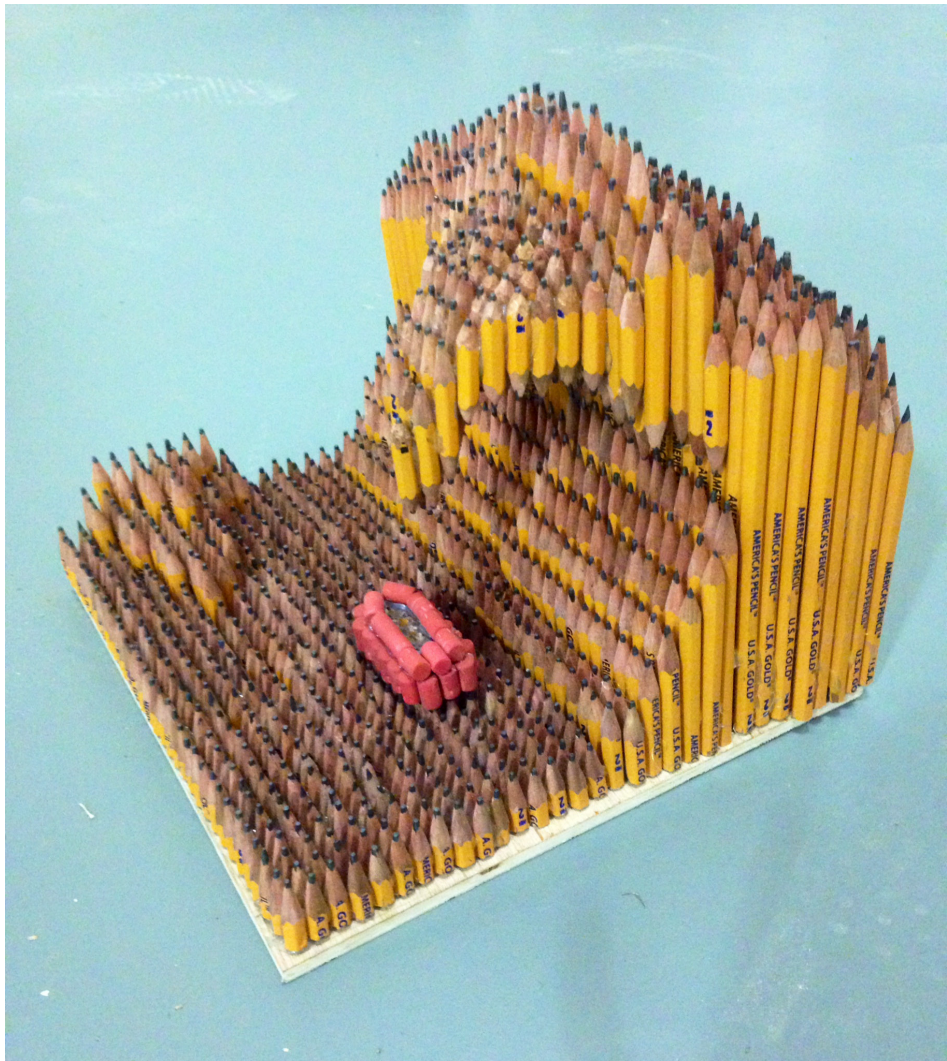
but I never did. An apology doesn't put blood and breath back, plus God and me knew I was sorry. I apologized to your family. It took time, but they forgave me, I hope. I apologized to Maw and Paw, to the pastor whose sermons I hated. I did not

apologize to you. I hope when the warden picks the lock on Heaven's gate with those three syringes, big bobby pins, I have the chance to peek into the white mist and whisper *I'm sorry* to you before the devil snatches me at my heels. Yesterday,

when they asked me what my last meal would be, I told the prison guards I didn't want no food. I asked if instead they could bring me back to St. Peter's twelve pew church one more time. I wanted to hear hymns bellow from the Hammond organ like grace. The warden said

no, so tomorrow as they lead me to that metal chair, shining under the wire-hanged fluorescent lights, I'm going to sing to myself *Will the circle be unbroken? By and by, by and by* and maybe if I sing it good, God will let me peek in just long enough to see you.





Wave

by Christina Lucio

pencils



Do Not Publish This

by Daniel Grear

Prosecutor: In order to protect the innocence of my client, I'll be referring to her by a pseudonym. Mr. Grear, can you tell the jury exactly what happened between you and Ms. Anna Denton?

Defendant: Yes, sir. [Clears throat] So it was the first day of Experimental British Fiction, sophomore year of college. I scanned the room, looking for classmates that I might recognize. And then I saw her. A year older than me, she had the sweetest, saddest, palest face—a button nose with a dollop of red on each cheek. I—

Prosecutor: I appreciate your specificity, Mr. Grear, but please focus on what you're being charged for.

Defense Attorney: Objection, your honor. My client was doing nothing but grounding his story in context.

Defendant: Well, maybe the prosecutor is right. Maybe that information isn't as relevant as I thought it was. I'll stick to the night of. [Pauses] I don't remember who invited who over, but, regardless, we ended up at her apartment, alone. We lounged on her bed for a long while, maybe an hour, shoeless and cross-legged. Then, our conversation started getting lazier. Longer pauses passed between sentences. Gravity laid our bodies down. We listened to Bright Eyes with our heads against the sheets. And then I did it. I reached out and tucked my fingers into hers—our first physical contact. She held on tight, as if I was rescuing her, as if she was extracting life out of me. Before long, we were kissing. And it was wonderful. I'd never kissed such soft lips. It felt like the culmination of an entire semester's worth of pining. But I—

Prosecutor: I'm confused, Mr. Grear. It sounds like you really liked this girl. Is this not true?

Defense Attorney: Objection. Leading question.

Defendant: It's really okay, your honor; I think I deserve such scrutiny. But, admittedly, it is complicated. Let me explain. Just like me, she was a lover of words. She liked Plath and Woolf and subscribed to *McSweeney's*. More than anything, though, I couldn't get over the way she pursued me—vigorously. I hadn't ever been given such direct, unequivocal attention from a pretty girl that I hadn't really spent any time with. Normally, I'm the kind of guy that you have to get to know in order to like. But this didn't apply to her. Something about my charm, or my looks, or my aura actually spoke to her, and with immediacy. I had been the giver of this kind of blind adoration for years to many a girl, but never the receiver. And I loved it. It felt like basking in searing sunlight, but without the consequences—

Prosecutor: Could you please answer the question, Mr. Grear?

Defendant: With all due respect, sir, these things are sort of difficult to quantify. You see, this



infatuation felt *eternal*. I didn't even realize I *had* a type before I met her. I mean, I still think about her to this day. That's part of the reason I'm writing this essay—

Prosecutor: Maybe I'm not making myself clear. [Getting more stern] My question is this, Mr. Grear: did you have feelings for Ms. Denton?

Defendant: No, no I didn't.

Prosecutor: Thank you for your frankness. [Pauses, making big eyes at the jury, as if to insinuate how undeniably dubious the defendant sounds] If I may ask, what kind of communication transpired between you and her during the evening you spent together? As in, did you let her know that this was merely a hookup to you?

Defense Attorney: Objection. The last part of that question was aggressively suggestive.

Judge: Sustained.

Prosecutor: In that case, answer *this* for me: were you upfront about your absence of feelings?

Defendant: Not exactly.

Prosecutor: Please say more.

Defendant: After we had been intimate for a good little while, she pulled back and looked into my eyes, as if in epiphany. "I really like you," she said. And this was when the guilt started pouring in. Before it was just a trickle, but now it was a stream, transparent and ice cold. I felt—

Prosecutor: So you lied to her?

Defense Attorney: Objection. Leading question. My client said nothing to that effect.

Defendant: No, no—the objection is unnecessary. I've got this. [Pauses] Prosecutor, I was honest with her, yes, but evasive. When she confessed that she liked me, I just said "thank you," like she'd offered me a routine compliment or something. I know it sounds stupid. And I regret it, I really do, but—

Prosecutor: I see. [Solemnly bobbing his head] Let's move on. How did the evening conclude, Mr. Miller?

Defendant: It didn't, really. She invited me to spend the night, and I said yes.

Prosecutor: What did you think this might communicate to her?

Defendant: God, I don't know. I was lonely, so I silenced my mind. It had been so long since I'd shared a bed with someone. And I don't mean sexually; I mean literally. Sleeping next to someone is the pinnacle of love, the insistence that spending just your waking hours with them isn't enough. I just wanted to pretend for a little while.

Prosecutor: And how long was it before you came clean?

Defendant: Two days. This was the only night we ever touched.



Prosecutor: Was this the end of your involvement with Ms. Denton?

Defendant: [Pauses, nervously] Yes.

Prosecutor: I sense some hesitance in your voice.

Defense Attorney: Objection. Subjective intuition should have no place in a serious court of law.

Defendant: It's okay—you don't have to defend me. And this isn't a serious court of law—it's just a metaphor.

Prosecutor: Back to my original query, please.

Defendant: If I'm honest, the worst was actually still to come. For the next several months, though, there was relative peace between Ms. Denton and me. We'd cross paths on campus and smile cordially, not even averting our eyes; she got a new boyfriend, bearded and big-spirited. I felt like I'd been let off the hook. And so I started reflecting. I wrote a short piece about the night we had spent together. It wasn't necessarily tell-all, but I really plumbed a lot of my inner turmoil about the whole thing. Pretty therapeutic stuff.

Prosecutor: [Affecting faux-ignorance] Where does Ms. Denton come in here? Can you tell the jury what you did with this piece of writing?

Defendant: I did a public reading of it on campus.

Prosecutor: Interesting [Draws the word out, reminding everyone in the room know that they need to be listening to closely to this part of the testimony]. Did you imagine Ms. Denton might be present for the reading?

Defendant: [Pauses, reluctantly] Unfortunately, I actually knew with certainty that she was going to be there. She was a part of the organization that threw it on.

Prosecutor: Hmm. Did you find this is at all troubling?

Defendant: Yes. I mean, I wish in retrospect that I'd said something to her beforehand, that I'd asked her for permission, but, at least at the time, I thought the piece did the situation justice—an honest, humble account of what had happened. More than anything, I thought it painted *me* in a negative light. *I* was supposed to be the perpetrator. [Pauses, taking a sip of water] To ensure that listeners wouldn't try to figure out who the girl in my writing was, I presented it as fiction. No one questioned it. The trouble really began when the audience started laughing. They weren't making fun of it, though. They just found it humorous, like I was making light of the whole thing. At first, it was just one or two snorts. Within a few minutes, though, chirps were cropping up everywhere. I'd deliver a line and the whole crowd would erupt, as if we were singing a call and response tune. But how was I supposed to stop them? How could I tell them that the words they were so easily, so pleasurably guffawing at were really meant to be of the utmost seriousness?

Prosecutor: So you immediately regretted having read the piece?

Defendant: Not exactly.

Prosecutor: Say more.

Defendant: Like, yes, I was off-put by the laughter at the time, but I also fed off the energy.



It's hard not to accept praise, even if it's for the wrong reasons. I don't think I'm justified or anything, but I was just a kid who was enjoying the fact that people liked his writing. [Pauses, catching his breath] It wasn't anything more than that. To be honest, the gravity of the whole thing didn't really hit me until she deleted me as a friend on Facebook. After that, I belabored for weeks over whether I should contact her or not.

Prosecutor: So you only thought to fix the situation once it started affecting *you* negatively?

Defendant: I mean, I guess you could put it that way, but that's not how it seemed in my head. What it really amounted to was that, prior to this moment, I didn't know there was anything that needed remedying.

Prosecutor: Tell us what happened next.

Defendant: Early December rolled around, and I finally wrangled up the courage to set up a meeting with her. Sitting by the fire in a campus building, the setting was oddly serene. On the wall, I saw an Emily Dickinson quote—"There is no Frigate like a Book." In a mad dash to explain myself, I did almost all of the talking. I apologized repeatedly, from multiple angles. But then I tried to appeal to the writer in her. I explained that the moral ambiguity of imagining from personal experience would always befall us creative types. Hadn't she ever written about an ex-lover before? But she didn't get it. It didn't click with her. She felt betrayed, commodified. I thought I was being genuine, but it ended up feeling like a copout.

Prosecutor: Did she accept your apology?

Defendant: I don't even really remember. She probably did, but, ultimately, it didn't feel like it. I don't know what I was expecting, but I guess, somewhere in the corner of my mind, I thought there was a chance that the forgiving would come easy, that her repressed adoration would be set free and she'd beg for me to take her back.

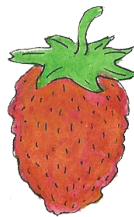
Prosecutor: That doesn't make sense. You didn't even like her.

Defendant: I know.

Prosecutor: I think the jury has heard enough. In conclusion, Mr. Grear, I have one final inquiry for you: Isn't writing what got you into trouble in the first place? How is *this* essay—the one you're writing right now—any different?

Defendant: [Pauses, awestruck] I'm not sure, sir. I'm not sure.

Prosecutor: No further questions.



Our Lady Of Perpetual Astonishment

by Nathan Corckett

silver gelatin print



Of Light

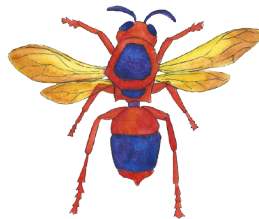
by Meg Boyles

Think of light,
of moonstream, of frolic and surge,
comfort and retreat, of love, the idea
of it always rubbing against our legs,
leaning to kiss our cheeks cold
from the snow outside, of mothers
and sisters and birds, and again,
of light.

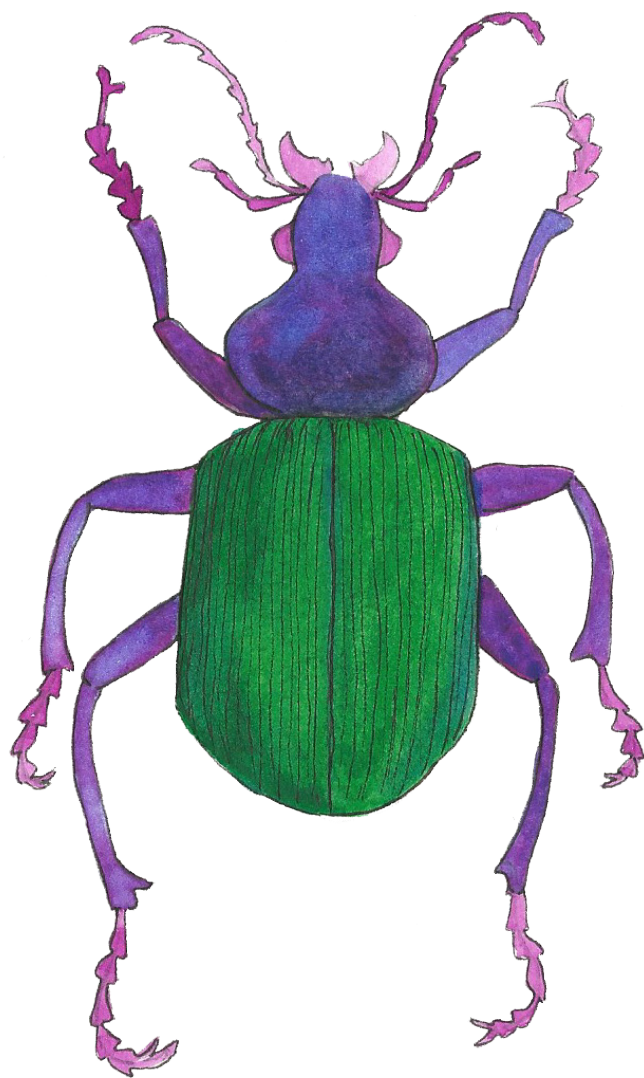
Think of a great and bursting joy,
your laugh like Spanish gold that I
bend to retrieve. I admit my greed.
I admit these last twelve days and my
mango-stained fingers. I admit them all.

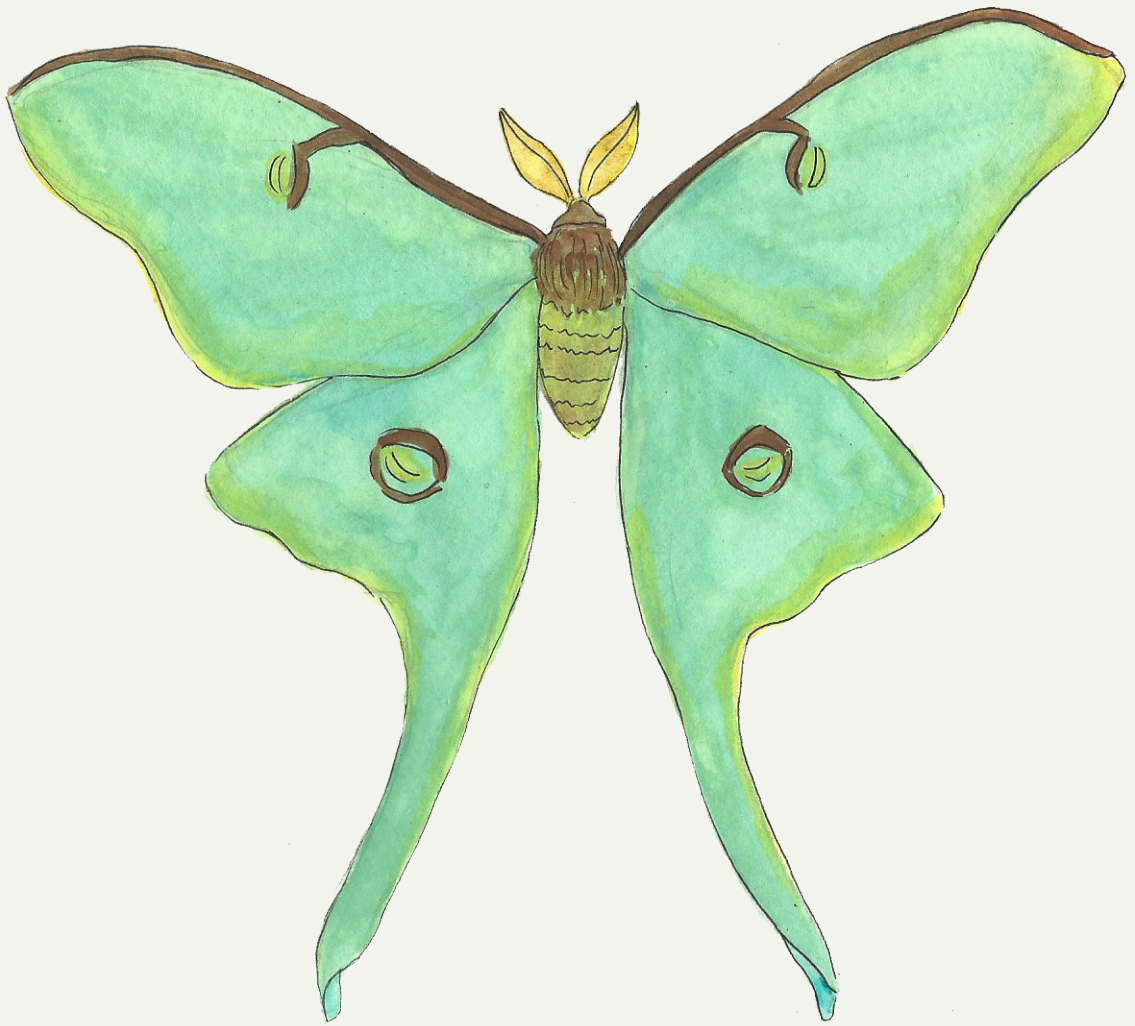
Now think of touch, of God, of clean rain
falling on newly planted tulips, of devotion's call for prayer,
as if these bones are more than their vessel.
Think of a valley of sunshine, of intimacy, pure
flesh-and-blood *intimacy*, and your embrace
a gulf of tenderness.

You know what I'm saying when I use the word *light*.
I'm saying there is gentleness in the universe.
I'm saying focus on it, and then become it.









AONIAN
vol. 57
2015
Hendrix College