

The Laurel



Fall 2009

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**Flash Fiction Contest Winner*



Pruned Plumes – Talbot Eckweiler

Snowy Pine Trees

Arise!

Arise daybreak, and bring your friends:
Bright skies of blue, a warming red,
A calming breeze in which to send
The leaves and dew of morning's tread
Into my mind.

This mortal coil and all its toils
Weigh heavy upon a soul;
The looming shadows of the unknown
Encase decisions, forever frozen
In the ice of what could have been
And what refuses to be.

But, alas! Winter's frost is not one of lethargy;
'Tis a joy in color, bringing light to where there is none.
And the highest green needles wear their hats of white.

A tragic joke this life is
When snowy pine trees bring no bliss.

Patrick Hosken

Zoology, Abroad

One day you'll come to the zoo that is me
And find I've flown off to better places
Without bothering to leave a single feather
For your needy fingers to hold on to.

Flabbergasted! At the sight of my empty cage,
You'll prowl around the perimeter
In a silent search party for my deceitful remains
Brewing a storm to quake me back into your leash.

(But, my dear old friend,
I think you know as well as I that
Even your most occult natural disaster
Won't send me running back behind bars.)

Abandoning your search,
You'll scrupulously pick through
The ruins of other animals' cells
In hopes to find me buried beneath the rubble
You left them to lick their wounds in.

Incredulous! That even my whimpers left you,
You'll take a last look around
And finally understand that
You can't clip my wings anymore,
I won't drool when you dangle yourself above me.

(There is no primal fool
Left for you to abandon,
Nor any weak mammal
Willing to play dead.)

Desperate, You'll discard your white gloves
As your borrowed blue blood begins to boil
And sweat your apologetic self into a letter
Reminiscing of how we were "back then..."
(Back before you put my little legs on display
And stamped my tongue with your number.)

"I'm wrapped in marmalade sunlight,
Drinking up a cerulean sky
In a place where orange trees grow;

My windows are Big Big Big!



Photography by Zack Domes



Enough to let summer's adoring gaze in
Enough for every dancing light to twirl in
And slow enough
For me to slowly slurp all of it up,

Gloriously free
From the ceiling that was you."

Samantha House

Smoking Ritual

On the front stoop, together we smoked moist tobacco
rolled in thin paper with wild Mullein and Coltsfoot
gathered by mountain hands in West Virginia

and the sky grew grey and thunder chords rumbled
and electricity, in jagged notes, lit up the hills
over the village tucked in the valley of the Allegany

and we spoke of our rugged time together: working,
giving our lives away on the edge of the fields,
like, when everything else is dying, Goldenrod

unfurls her fans of stray light.

remember when we drank three cups of black coffee
and listened to stories of war, how a black leather cap
worn for forty years recalls a brother in the bush

and you painted pictures with Dakota, drawn apart from family
by poverty's dark colors, who, holding his midnight blue crayon,
looks up to you slowly and finds himself, surprisingly – smiling

and Margaret, who is hunched over with one arm
holding up an apocryphally heavy head, mouthed these words,
“I wish in this world everyone had a daddy like you”

and all those hodge-podge hours, we stood shooting shit
with Bob in his “walk-in,” scheming, trespassing, tinkering,
always traveling into abandoned buildings and made-up worlds

My brother, we might never know in this grey goodbye
to these charged years in the Bonnie Valley – how much life we lost,
freedom we gained, or smudges we ceremonially wear,

but here on the front stoop, surrounded by another summer squall,
we made this old smoking ritual to be another memory
that will rise and dissolve like smoke,

so close it coats our lungs and skin and smell with each long gusty drag.

Trevor Thompson

Staring Across the Distance

I like this fear
lingering my fingers
making its whispers
on my warm skin,
brushing my hair—
I want it to stay.
It sits right there
and creates uncensored images
of the gripping and uncontrollable
grasp of my drenched mind.

I like this fear—
It steals my breaths
and I spend my days hydrated.
I'll pull you into me more
so I can please you
as you see me fail one more time.
That grin—
that pity you render when I sleep—
How can I hold your hand
and call you my companion?

Alex Henry

Henry Calling

Set down upon the supple bank
to feel river's breath.
In the Bittern's booming call
I hear my old friend's voice.
He bids me, wander west.
While the sun sinks fitly into the flow,
I wonder how much time should pass
till this river should cease to pass me by
and rise to lead me back where bold truth lies.
Where the sun lies down to rest.
How long should I be compelled to wait
till I choose my brother's path?

Tony Zambito

Dear Maybe,

You are the bubble that burst at the touch of my finger-tips, the trapped heat under blankets in the morning—fleeting like thoughts before daydreams. You shook me like thunder rumbling under my bare feet—no longer. Like the tattoo on my wrist, your face has blurred. Your voice is harder, but lingers in my ears like an old friend staying past dusk for that third cup of coffee. We danced, or you danced with me, spinning me around, catching me on my clumsy feet. What chance did I have against your weight? Surrounded by your facets, the answers are not clear. I see my face in each of those mirrors.

Bree Rehac

Dear Buffalo,

You used to pop me on your knee and tell me stories of Babushkas and the old neighborhoods that grown-up grandchildren still visit on Sundays, hot pierogis sold on Broadway and snow in May. Lake-effect is tame compared to the static we face now. The sun surrenders to the neglect, weeping for rusting Fords and wasted space. But, the kids play hockey on frozen ponds and crawl through driftwood jungles. Will they stay to climb skyscrapers? To raise their sons on Bills and wings? The cars over the Skyway flock to new nests, but loyalty roots deep in your clay and its limbs grow in your sleep.

Bree Rehac



Francis at Night – Talbot Eckweiler

editor's note: The sonnets on this page are part of a larger series.

Wasting 15 grand

I'm not really paying attention
And in the back of my mind I register that it's costing me fifteen grand
This laziness and lack of focus.

But my eyes strayed to the floor and the button lying there.

Who does it belong to?
Where did it come from?

I cannot say.

There is an army green tin whose color makes most say yick
That sits in Apartment 2 Lossen Garden Drive Apartment 11

It weighs down old mail
Prudential statements from 1994

Off to school that year.

100 days have gone by
Let's have a celebration
100 things—it could be anything she said but preferably small and light enough to put on a poster to hang
on the walls.

What could I do that no one else could do?

Nana

What can I do

Lisa

100 buttons

From a tin of the most wretched hue

This container comes down from its shelf
Onto the tablecloth that has a hole in it from someone's recklessness

Lovingly the box came to sit before me to pick out 100 buttons.

Some were very old
You could tell—and some were from a time that could have been yesterday.
Some were very big
And some were very small
And some had a little jewel right in the center spot

I only needed a hundred
And since there were a few of that kind
I took 101 instead
And kept one bedazzled piece which I put into my pocket.

Knick Nack Patty Whack
Keep it safe and sound
Things you wouldn't see as sticking out
Become a nostalgic timepiece that I still keep in a safe place.

14 years later
Sensory memories are my thing
They are potent as I see a black ribbed button with a dazzling jewel in the center lying on the ground near the feet
of dirty hat kid

And I think over a ten-minute period of time that I haven't called my Nana in a while
And that I'm wasting fifteen grand.

Lisa Aeschbacher

You Suck

Looking at you is like reading a trashy vampire romance novel. Bite me.

Bree Rehak

Mind

The mind is truly the most beautiful of God's creations.
I work all day in the effort to learn
so that my far off dreams
dreamt deep within the blanket of sleep,
given to me by none other than the mind itself,
might one day come true
so that I might have the time to do nothing but dream.

Zbigniew Anda

A Revolution of the Mind

I have come across a reason for evolution
(A revolution of the mind)
Sacrifices are made. I turn away
From Obligation.
And let the flood gates open.
Flashing forward,
You will not forget my name.
And Today is the beginning—
My glorious creation.
I evolve with hope and time into
A revolution of the mind.

Emily Tronetti

The Pause

Though the boy liked to walk in autumn's breath, he could barely find time to appreciate October's miniature gifts through a maze of textbook dribble and wrist cramps.

On a typical Tuesday, after he strutted past a lawn littered with fall's fiery leaves, the boy sat in poetry class, and for once, the words resonated. The echoes of past patriarchal wordsmiths inspired him to open his mind and, for once, pause.

Though as the boy sat down with pen in hand, he found no words, save for the interjection, "Wow."

But three letters have never composed a more beautiful word.

Patrick Hosken

note: Flash Fiction Contest Winner

The Scarf

The scarf was an amazing sight to behold. Its dark hues were a mixture of black, red, purple and blue. You wouldn't think it would be so gorgeous but just looking at the smooth glossiness of it made you want to run it over your skin. It looked like the softest silk, the kind of fabric that you wanted to feel all the time because it was almost like touching a cloud or a little piece of heaven. But when people snuck up behind her to cop a feel, they were so shocked to find out it actually had a horrible, scratchy feel to it, and it made them wonder why she wore it all day, every day.

Soon enough a lot of people knew the truth of the scarf and of course they began talking. The luminescence of the scarf pervaded the senses of those far away and drew them closer and closer, until they had no choice but to reach out and run their fingers along it as it swayed in the breeze. They speculated on how it could look so beautiful from far away and even until they felt it for the first time, and then it seemed to transform in front of them into something hideous. It scratched and cut the skin, and if you looked close enough you could see all of the strings that were coming undone, with its frayed edges and missed stitches. The patches on it were so apparent that they drew the eye and made you cringe.

One day, a little girl ran up the lady with the scarf, and asked, "Ma'am why do you wear such an ugly scarf?"

The lady responded with a sad smile as she ran her hands over the scarf, "Ugly? It isn't ugly dear. This scarf is my life. It was given to me at birth by my mother. I never go anywhere without it." The lady leaned down and looked in the girl's wide, innocent eyes. "But pray tell why do you think it's ugly?"

The little girl seemed to think for a minute and reached out to run her hand over the fabric. Her eyes widened in surprise, "It's so soft! But-but my momma said it felt horrible!"

The lady laughed sadly and replied, "My dear, sometimes adults see things differently than we do."

With that last line spoken the lady stood up and continued to walk. Her horribly frayed scarf flapped in the wind, shinning to the people across the street, drawing them closer and closer until they had no choice but to reach out and touch it...

Jessica Richardson



Autumn Jewel – Talbot Eckweiler

Untitled

This space seemed bigger when I first climbed under here. Still quiet and dark, I didn't feel this fear. I feel small, this space seems smaller. He seemed big, now looks taller. That sound? My heart pound blood past my ear, so loud, he will hear. Standing right in front of me, I can smell the grass on his shoes, he looks around, if he looks down, I will lose. The floor creaks, he steps away, he's angry and frustrated, then I hear him say to me "Olly Olly Ox in free."

Sadie Jay-Edwards

The Creation Story

Not so long ago, there were two very prominent and well-established archeologists; each individual considered to be the best in his respective field. Over the years, they had each achieved universal fame as well as staggering fortunes for their accomplishments in the field of anthropology, and for this specific reason, they were chosen to lead an archeological expedition together. Supplied with a grand fleet of bulldozers and other necessary machinery for the job, they began their mission as soon as possible, and as was soon proven, this particular task was one that would yield so many discoveries that it would propel these two gentlemen to unprecedented amounts of fame. All the while, they were aware of their immense, mounting success, and they were quite pleased with themselves.

Unlike most coordinators of similar projects, these two men often found themselves side-by-side with the members of their staff. On this specific instance, the rest of the crew had halted their work to eat lunch; the sun was relentless that day and nobody wanted to risk their health with so much work to be done. But given the passion of these two men, they continued to toil through the unyielding ground while the others rested. After years of experience, their limbs had become tireless and their eyes remained consistently sharp after hours of work.

While they worked, they spoke lightly between each other, relishing in their achievements and discussing further plans for the expedition. “I am thoroughly convinced, sir, that this mission of ours will truly be one that is resonated throughout history books for ages after we are gone”, said the first man. His partner turned towards him with a satisfied grin and agreed, “Indeed, my good man. We have indefinitely embarked upon—THWACK.” Before he could finish, his statement was silenced sharply by the sound of metal connecting solidly with something firm below him. They approached the object slowly, not wanting to rupture anything of worth. After several minutes of surveillance and careful handiwork, they managed to remove a very ornate chest from the ground. Retaining their steadiness and caution, they employed their tools and were eventually successful in prying open the lid of the chest. Inside was revealed a very delicate scroll with writing scrawled across the inside of the parchment. Masters of the ancient world in general, the two men were convinced that, between the two of them, they would be able to accurately decipher the contents of the scroll. The other workers, still enjoying their lunches a few hundred yards away, were completely unaware of the discovery. The two men silently agreed not to immediately share their knowledge of the relic with the rest of the crew; they understood the potential wealth that could come from such a discovery. They instantly retreated from the center of the action and began their translation, being careful not to tear the frail parchment. About a half an hour later, the two men had successfully completed deciphering the contents of the scroll onto shards of paper they found lying around the work-site. The others had returned to their work by now, completely ignorant of the secret project. The two men stood next to each other in silence as their eyes scanned the newly translated manuscript lying before them on the table. It read:

In the beginning, there was God alone.
He created the Heavens and the Earth.
With His hands He molded the lands,
Pulling the mountains from the valleys,
And scooping out the depths of the oceans.
He shaped all the vegetation of the Earth,
Forming every single tree,
Every bush,
And every leaf.
God created all of the animals,
Placing them in the lands, seas and skies,

And breathing His breath of life into their bodies.
Lastly, God created man in His image,
To care for all of His creations.
The man was grateful for this new world, and God was pleased.

But soon enough, man began to interact with other men,
Leading to advancements on Earth.
As time went on, the world became riddled with unnatural things,
And man, forgetting his responsibilities, lost interest in the creations of God.
Care for machinery replaced care for the lands,
Trade replaced concern for the vegetation,
Lust for money replaced awareness of the animals.
God worried, but did not punish man.

In the coming years,
Earth became riddled with war,
Brought on by these new creations of man.
Soon, the land became scarred,
The vegetation began to wither away into ash,
The animals began dying throughout the lands, seas and skies.
And man began to kill other men.
God was very displeased.
His world was not as He wished it to be,
And so He destroyed it.
Man was almost totally wiped out,
Except for one.
But He warned this man,
That should evil invade Earth again,
God would not hesitate to invoke devastation.
And so man was reborn.

The two men stared at each other. Without speaking, their eyes turned to the project before them. They saw the massive force of the bulldozers devouring the Earth beneath the pressure of their wheels. They saw the intimidating pillars of smoke floating into the endless, blue skies above them. They watched as their workers hacked away at the core of the Earth with rugged tools of destruction. They thought about the mass of wealth and praise that they would soon receive for their efforts. Their eyes met once again. No words were spoken, but the looks on their faces were enough. They understood what needed to be done.

The two men slowly resumed their conversation as they walked back towards the crew. Behind them they could still feel the heat of the flames, could still smell the smoke. Fresh embers blew away in the opposite direction as a gust of wind flew by their faces. They reconvened with the workers, picking up where they left off. There was still much work to be done; no time could be lost.

Christopher James Radey

Tomb of the Unknown Soldier

Taps
Sends shivers down my spine
And brings tears to my eyes
Every time
I remember
You—who
Those—Who
Honor the memory of _____
Taps.

Today— and every time
The sky is overcast
It is cold
It stings
Remember _____
Taps.

I see one soldier
I see two soldiers
They pass each other
There's a red carpet today
And a wreath
One tomb— to hold many
Unknowns
One Two Three
Bagpipes today blaring the anthem of another
Taps

Taps
Sends shivers down my spine
And brings tears to my eyes
Every time
I remember
You—who
Those—who
Honor the Memory of _____
Taps

Lisa Aeschbacher

One Night Stand

It's like death
releasing its most awful creature
from the grave,
waiting to exhale the demon
that was stowed away for centuries.
It sets a bushel of fiery anger
in my innate being,
unleashing falling skyscrapers
and burned papers.
It makes me weep-
having to give in to this venial sin
Wrath owned me for one night
My master, my unauthentic creator,
the one who laughs and scorns
at my stupidity
Ignorance at its heighest,
concealing the truth,
concealing my true being.
Or is it mocking a masquerade ball?
Wrath-the one I cannot trust
led me to believe this is who I am.
Clip off the love, the admiring attributes
Am I really that malevolent?
Must I conform?
Or is this really a hypnotic trance I'm in?
It's like Hell when I close my eyes.
The welcome mat is placed
on a perfect view.
It's alluring; it's beseeching.
How can I say no?
To do evil; to become an accomplice to it
reveals our true nature
Or am I wrong on this notion?
It makes me weep having to doubt
the evil in my sins.
Must I mourn to the one up above?
He must understand
He must be considerate
that I must sin everyday.
Echoes and shouts-
fear lurking in every step I take.
He must understand that it's
hard to please Him.

Alex Henry

True Limbo

Thin grey clouds,
Horizontally spaced
Like broken lines transposed
Against a blueblack sky.
Gothic pointed arches
Stand firm, silhouetted
In October's genesis.
Fitting for this time,
This in-between time
Of shadows and crescent,
Ignited spheres in a stupor,
Pondering decisions
Or the lack thereof.

Patrick Hosken

Cotton Candy Clouds

I build a wall for the clouds to climb
so I can sing to them from my window
without their cotton candy fluff
blocking the safari sunset.
A giant Daisy flower
sings rainbows to the horizon.
I don't want the cotton candy clouds
to block my window.
I like to listen to the rainbows sing.

Anthony Sarnelle

To Believe...

To believe is to know that everyday
is a new beginning.
It is to trust that miracles happen,
and dreams really do come true.
To believe is to see angels dancing among the clouds,
To know the wonder of a stardust sky
and the wisdom of the man in the moon.
To believe is to know the value of a nurturing heart,
The innocence of a child's eyes
and the beauty of an aging hand,
for it is through their teachings we learn to love.
To believe is to find strength and courage
that lies within us.
When it is time to pick up the pieces and begin again.
To believe is to know that we are not alone,
That life is a gift and this is our time to cherish it.
To believe is to know that wonderful surprises
are just waiting to happen,
And all our hopes and dreams are within reach.
If we believe.....

Tawana Jones-Smith



White-breasted Nuthatch – Talbot Eckweiler

Wood

Fibers of which had broken off from something greater,
one small chip of wood the shape of a state.
I threw it off the edge of grass
into the large glass spring below.
Against the wind it made a mark,
multiple ovals spreading from the crater where it splashed.
Then the ovals went away
but I remember the ripple it made.

Anthony Sarnelle

Aint Over Till I Say So

Im cold, yet bold
hear much
But it doesn't phase what me of what I've been told
See my hunger comes from within
you can't undue whats did

Hope...I don't live for that
faith...thats where my heart is at
Writing this makes my emotions grow founder
I don't know but I hope you found her...in me

You give me reasons to not stop this
steady emotion
If this was our world I would stop your heart and hold it
You could take mines... its frozen
Well when the day comes
fast forward "kissing you" now my feelings have spoken

And in all the midst of this I wont wish
I wont force it, I'll only recognize what I see and with you (fate) will bring...
And if not well free is what you'll be
but I cant let these feelings take over me, take control of me

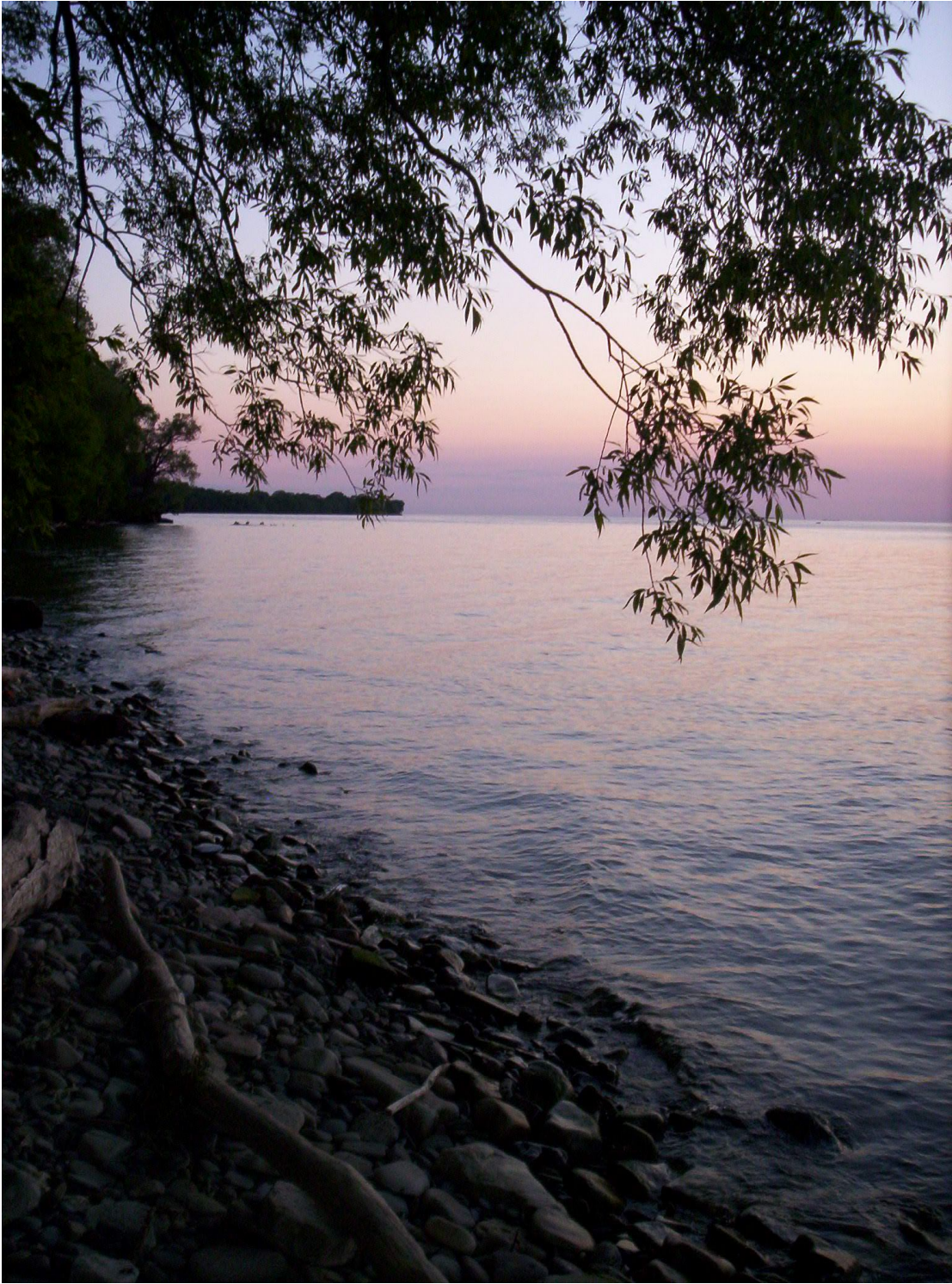
Cuz you don't have control of me and technically
There was never a "we"
Therefore this wont end til the fat lady sings
Well I cant sing
So get a good rest because this aint over till I say so.

Ariam Frezghi

Dance

She woke up and cooked me food
like a lion killing a sleeping zebra
for its cubs.
I held her
like we would have danced at prom,
dancing to the humming music
of rice warming on the stove.

Anthony Sarnelle



Water's Edge – Kaitlin Lindahl

Saying goodbye

Smile going numb, hands forgotten in back pockets.
I left myself too exposed and unaware,
Everything I was, hanging in a locket.

Kaitlin Lindahl

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The Laurel

...is a student-run publication funded through the student government at St. Bonaventure University. This magazine is printed

by Falconer Printing, Inc. Falconer, NY.

This publication accepts submissions from all students, faculty, staff and alumnae/i.

The Laurel has been alive for 111 years.

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