



THE LAUREL
FALL 2016

LAURELITES

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A LETTER FROM THE EDITORS

Welcome to the Fall 2016 edition of *The Laurel*. We are both very excited to be a part of this 117-year tradition. *The Laurel* is a special piece of Saint Bonaventure history dating back to 1899 and we are so happy to have another successful issue. It was very important to us that *The Laurel* remained the same high-quality literary magazine it has always been.

Thank you to all the students who have contributed to this edition by submitting, editing, and showing overall support. We truly could not have filled these pages and continued the tradition without you. Our fabulous contributing editors put in immeasurable hardwork and dedication. Many, many thanks to our advisors, Dr. Ellis and Dr. Kelly, for their amazing guidance and encouragement.

Without further ado, please enjoy our beloved publication!

-Maggie Kovacs '17 & Riley Eike '17

TABLE OF CONTENTS

A Reimagining of Shakespeare's The Merry Wives of Windsor by Elizabeth Glanowski, Emmy Kolbe, Maggie Kovacs and Molly Oas	6
Samiha Kahn by Angela Kim.....	7
The Final Arrival by Maggie Kovacs	7
Cadaverous Poppies by Zoe Dodd.....	7
Lucky Charm by Luis Rodriguez	8
Untitled by Ramya Sreeramoju.....	9
Sunday Morning at a Funeral by Elyse Breeze	10
Lake Life by Jeff Tampe	10
On Georgia Peaches by Jordan Riethmiller	11
Untitled by Hannah Gordon	11
Vibes... by Ellen Kibbe	12
Eternal by Bianca Georgakopoulos	12
Untitled by Amina Golden-Arabaty	13
Untitled by Gabriel LaMarca	13
Danny Among the Stars by Jessica Blake	13
Untitled by Molly Oas.....	14
Barcelona on the Lake by Jeff Tampe	14
More Than A Memory by Natalie Kucko.....	15
A Bug's Life by Jeff Tampe	14
Untitled by Caty Lee	14
Home at Last by Riley Eike.....	16
Untitled by Ellen Piper	16
Lifesavers by Sierra DeChane	17
The Hands That Stopped Ticking by Luis Rodriguez	18
Untitled by Taylor Kickbush	18
Untitled by Vivien Pat	19
Loves Tangled Melody by David Bryant	19
A Moth Must Feel Warm by Sydni Kreitzburg	20
Metabolic by Robert Mills	21

A Story About Struggle by Shiki Dixit	22
Untitled by Gabriel LaMarca	22
The Next Morning by Emily Rosman.....	22
Well-Being by Sarah Negrón	23
Untitled by Gabriel LaMarca	23
Room by Nicole Cummins.....	23
Hands by Brooke Christopher	24
Handful of Purpose by Timothy Walter	25
Untitled by Justin Bui	25
a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush by Nidhi Chintalapani	26
Heinz by Marissa McCall	26
Taverns by Sarah Negrón	27
lovesick by Maggie Kovacs	27
Untitled by Vivien Pat	27
On Macchiato, Among Sexual Preoccupation by Jordyn C. Riethmiller	28
Untitled by Gabriel LaMarca	29
Sociopath by Hannah Gordon	29
Ode to Passion by Shiki Dixit	30
Untitled by Justin Bui	30
Hints on Etiquette by Sarah Negrón	30
dirty dishes by Maggie Kovacs	30
Trigger Warning by Josh Smith	31
Beef Stew by Marissa McCall	31
Divergence by Kelly Gao	31
Her by Molly Oas	31
National Rug by Jacob Przesiek	32
Dirty by Sarah Negrón	33
Untitled by Ramya Sreeramoju	33
Cigarette Butts and Two Deep Breaths by Lucas Vaughan	34
Kitty Cat by Ellen Piper	34

A Reimagining of Shakespeare's *The Merry Wives of Windsor*

By Elizabeth Glanowski, Emmy Kolbe, Maggie Kovacs, Molly Oas

The Merry Wives of Westchester- a romantic comedy set in Westchester, New York. This reimagining follows 18-year-old Anne Page (Hailee Steinfeld) as she searches for her true love. Unfortunately, she seems to have reached her full potential by peaking in high school, so her parents are on a quest to find a man she can financially depend on in the future. Mr. Page (Stanley Tucci) and Mrs. Page (Jamie Lee Curtis) know Anne would never make the right choice on her own. However, Anne spends her time chasing after star quarterback, Fenton (Dylan O'Brian). He's a hottie with an even hotter temper due to his bottled up feelings about his alcoholic father, but that only makes him more desirable to Anne. Every night before bed, Anne reads Fenton's dark poetry from his tumblr: @sadquarterback211. She truly understands his tortured teenage soul.

“Slender's man boobs are a turn off”

Meanwhile, Anne's parents spend time scheming and sipping martinis at the country club, planning out their daughter's life. Mrs. Page has her heart set on French med-school student, Caius (Joseph Gordon-Levitt), who, she also notes, has great cheekbones and a heavy wallet. Anne finds Caius's lack of English speaking skills and pretentious European attitude as annoyances. Mr. Page, slightly less shallow, pushes for voluptuous Slender (Michael Cera) whose parents own seven yachts. Slender is a three-time science fair champion, winning every year with his papier-mâché volcanoes. Slender's man boobs are a turn off for Anne because she is an underdeveloped A-cup.

“Passed out in a booth nearby with loaded fries covering his body”

Next door, the Page's best friends, Mr. Ford (Matthew McConaughey) and Mrs. Ford (Amy Poehler), have their own love triangle. Falstaff (Russell Brand), an absent-minded stoner, has noticed Mrs. Ford downing martinis at the country club every Tuesday and Thursday with Fenton's dad, who is normally passed out in a booth nearby with loaded fries covering his body. Falstaff also takes note of the large sums of money she clearly has, as she casually wears a Givenchy dress at the bar. Money hungry and bored, he chases after Mrs. Ford. One night at the country club, Fenton notices Falstaff touching Mrs. Ford, and punches him in the jaw. Mr. and Mrs. Page watch this interaction and praise Fenton for saving their friend from a creepy man. In the end, they give Anne their approval to marry Fenton, Donald Trump deports Caius back to France, and Slender wins the science fair for the fourth time in a row. All is well in Westchester.



Meme by Maggie Kovacs

Samiha Kahn

By Angela Kim

but we called you Sami
(pronounced Sammy)
and people should know your name.

I want to immortalize you in a poem
a place you can live safely
and where I can find you
in the spaces between words

because I don't know how to say
goodbyes on subway platforms
and we know subway schedules
time stamp departures

I see you Sami
beyond the chasm
bound by unalterable tracks
and this time I know you'll
get home safe.



The Final Arrival by Maggie Kovacs

Cadaverous Poppies

By Zoe Dodd

The bareness of your bedroom is as rough as your hands
That first round of Euchre you tried to teach me

You smelled of fall and pancakes
With scuffed eyes and a squinty nose

Hard of yelling, soft of hearing
Your desolate chair weeps for you

The books silenced with arenaceous fingers
Those plaids like my eyes hang heavy with memories

Windows fogged with dead laughter
Red sorrow blooms in the field

Lucky Charm

By Luis Rodriguez

“Babe, please do not forget to wash my lucky socks!”

“Daniel, for the millionth time, I know.” Megan only called me Daniel when she was annoyed, but there was no risking it, not this time.

“Sorry, you know that I’m nervous. My interview is on Wednesday and I need my lucky socks.”

“Yes I know, lucky socks,” she mocked, “your luck is going to run out one day.”

“Hey, they worked when I asked you out right?” I laughed. Those socks have been with me since my freshman year in high school. My mom bought them for me for Christmas that year. At first, I hated those socks. It looked like someone vomited snowflakes all over a red canvas. The first time I wore them was when my mom accidentally packed them in my gym bag before my basketball game. At first, all of my teammates laughed when they saw how bright they were. They stopped laughing when I ended the game with 37 points. My coach labeled them my lucky socks.

“Yes, I remember that day. After your game was over you walked into the stands and tried to talk to me. You were so nervous, I almost burst into tears when you forgot your own name,” she giggled and swirled her glass of wine before taking a gulp.

“Hey listen, I get nervous when I’m around beautiful women,” I put my arm around her, trying my go-to move that always worked in high school.

“Oh please, is that how come you are speechless every time my mother is around huh?” She moved my arm, taking another swig of her wine.

“I plead the fifth.” She saw right through my move. It’s probably because I don’t have on my lucky socks –I thought. I cleared the table and brought the dishes to the sink. The aroma of leftover steak flooded my nostrils. “Dinner was great babe.”

“If I don’t cook, we both will end up starving.” She was right. Even my lucky socks couldn’t save my cooking skills. I tried to cook once in high school while my parents were away, and I almost

burned the house down. Megan came over of course to save the day and spare my stomach.

“Don’t worry, if I get this job then I’ll cook us dinner.” I snuck behind her and started massaging her shoulders. “I know you have been doing a lot since I switched to this part-time job. This is why I need everything to go smoothly on Wednesday so please don’t forget my socks.”

“If you mention those socks one more time, I’m going to turn them to ashes.” She tilted her head back, resting it on my stomach. I could see the bags under her eyes. We had everything planned out, but then the stock market crashed. I lost my job the very next day. We couldn’t afford our home under her teacher salary so we sold it and moved to an apartment complex.

“It was the luck that I was waiting for”

I found a part-time job as a receptionist for a brokerage, but the past wasn’t as great as it used to be. We were managing to get by, but not how we both pictured. It wasn’t until I came in contact with an old teammate last month, Thomas, who helped me get this interview with Tier Brokerage. It was the luck that I was waiting for.

The job search was impossible before I bumped into Thomas. I looked for job openings before work, after work and sometimes even during work. Most Brokerages refused to respond to any of my emails. The ones who did, didn’t have any available positions. The market crash turned my degree into a worthless piece of paper. Most days I sat at the park for hours before returning home to make it seem like I was doing something worthwhile. To be honest, I had no idea what I was doing. For the first time in a long time, I began to question myself. “Okay, I promise I won’t mention them again.”

“I have a long day tomorrow so I’m calling it quits for tonight.” She got up from the kitchen table and trotted towards the bedroom. Throughout the modest times, she managed to keep good faith. However, I started to question my own faith in myself. She lost sleep because

of her dedication to teaching. I lost sleep because I recently I couldn’t stop thinking what she actually saw in me. Her smile never disappeared, unless I was annoying her of course. But I knew eventually she would grow tiresome and her smile would turn into a scowl.

“Okay, two points before you go to bed. One, I love you and two, please don’t forget my socks.” Laughing, I ran to the bathroom before she let out a violent screech.

“Ugh, I hate you so much.” She slammed the bedroom door.

In a way, this was my coping mechanism. Being annoying to keep her from facing reality that I might not be the man she once fell in love with. I wish, I prayed, I hoped that my luck would last long enough for me to crawl out of the mud. My luck failed me once before, when my mom passed.

Minutes before my senior game, my coach pulled me to the bench and informed me that my mom got into a car accident on her way to the game. She didn’t make it. She was my biggest fan, my mom, the origin of my luck. My dad always put work before his family, so he wasn’t in the car when it happened. After that day, I vowed never to be like that man. However, now I would do anything just to be at work.

“I didn’t know who would crack first”

The same way I coped with my mother’s death was how I was coping with the economy crash. I hid behind the laughs and giggles, concealing the true pain that was devouring me from the inside. To be honest, I didn’t know who would crack first: me or her.

I washed my hands and face, looking up to my startling reflection. You can do this. You got this. This is yours to take. Nobody’ll take this from you –I gave myself a thumbs up and left the bathroom. Megan was already asleep, so I went to the couch. My failures often prevented me from facing Megan, so I was accustomed to sleeping on the couch.

I couldn’t sleep. This was my last chance to turn things around. I didn’t want this; I needed this. For the sake of my own sanity, this had to go well. For the first

time in a long while, I prayed. When I was younger, my mother would make me pray before I went to bed. I stopped as I grew older, only doing it ever so often. But when my mother died, I abandoned my faith completely.

My eyes began to water as I set my alarm. They were gradually becoming heavier, until it was impossible to keep them open.

“Goodnight world.”

“And I was about to miss it”

I heard the car door slam, and immediately looked at the clock. I knew I was late! Out of all days, I chose to oversleep my alarm. This was the biggest opportunity of my life, and I was about to miss it.

I had no time to even fathom why Megan didn't wake me up before she left for work. She knew today was my interview. I tried to blame her for this, but I knew it was my fault. My guilt wouldn't allow me to blame anyone but myself. That's the only thing that I had at this moment: guilt.

I quickly grabbed the first suit I could find and bounced around the house while dressing myself. I dug into the drawer but something was wrong; they weren't there, my lucky socks! Heart pounding, I ripped the drawer out of the dresser, scattering the contents on the floor. They weren't there. Heart pounding, I poured all of the dirty clothes out of the hamper, and there they were.

“She was supposed to clean them.” I couldn't go to the interview without my lucky socks, and I had no time to wash them. With no other option, I grabbed the Febreze and hosed them down. The mist of freshener made my nose run and my eyes watery.

With one shoe on and one shoe in my hand, I stormed out of the apartment. I had a brush in my mouth and my briefcase in the other hand. I opened the car so fast, the door almost ripped off the hinges. I tossed everything to the passenger seat and ignited the engine. Without looking, I pulled out of my parking spot, almost crashing into an incoming car.

I didn't know which was more probable, me getting a speeding ticket or Megan

ripping my throat out. Both seemed more likely than anything else at this point. The meeting was in 15 minutes, but the office was 10 minutes across the bridge. With this traffic though, I was never going to make it. I picked up my phone to call Thomas, but a notification popped up. It was a voicemail from Megan.

“Hi sweetie, I know you have a busy day tomorrow with your interview so I decided to let you sleep in this morning. Remember, today is the parent-teacher conferences so I will be home a little late tonight. I know, your lucky socks. I will clean them tonight only if you promise to make dinner. And please, for heaven's sake, don't burn the apartment down. Better yet, just order us Chinese. I love you, bye.”

I removed the phone from my ear and laughed. Today was Tuesday. For the first time in months, I paused and reflected at how chaotic my life was.

Through all of the chaos though, I saw a glimmer of hope. I realized I didn't need any lucky socks to determine my life. I had the best luck charm anyone could ever ask for. I had the love of my life. I had Megan. No matter what job I had or how much money I made, I knew Megan loved me for me. I picked up my phone and called her.

“Hey babe, you're never going to guess what I did this morning...”



Untitled by Ramya Sreeramoju

Sunday Morning at a Funeral

By Elyse Breeze

Back in August, I registered for an elective that I knew would be a step out of my comfort zone: The Philosophy of Death and Dying. Although the topics aren't usually as depressing as the curriculum may suggest, last week hit me harder than a normal Tuesday.

Every class, we have something to read about epicureanism, dualism or what the hell is up with the white light theory, and we answer a few questions about it. Last week, we talked about the behavior of near-death patients and terminally ill patients in hospice care. Our assignment after reading was to closely examine the death of someone close to us: explain where it happened, how it happened, why it happened. Were they sick? Was it expected? Did they have proper care in the moments leading up to their passing? Any last words?

Many of my classmates, however, were unable to participate in the discussion because they have never had somebody close to them pass away. Meanwhile, I've been to three funerals since my semester started.

Death is undeniably terrifying, but I am thankful to have learned about death and its consequences at a young age. I've lost all of my grandparents, a few aunts and uncles, several classmates, family friends, a best friend and, just two months ago, I lost my stepfather. If I hadn't experienced loss before his death this year, I would have been so lost and beside myself.

Experiencing death young is especially confusing because you spend a lot of time wondering how you will adjust to not having ginger snaps with grandma and watching *The Price is Right* with her when she lets you skip school. It is going to the annual family reunion and not seeing your aunt there sitting beside your uncle. Experiencing death as a child is sitting down with your parents and talking about what Heaven probably looks like for grandma and grandpa.

Experiencing death now is surprising your mom with a visit on a long weekend and finding her asleep on the couch among a pile of unsorted sweaters that she's too upset to give away.

Experiencing death now is buying a bottle of wine and a box of tissues to celebrate what would be our friend's 23rd birthday next month.

Experiencing death now is calling into work at 8 p.m. on a Thursday because someone is dying, and you need to be there to say your final goodbye. It's driving two hours through the tears and the rain so that you can say 'I love you' one more time. Sometimes, you don't make it in time.

Experiencing death now is sending out e-mails to your professors to let them know that you won't be in class because you have to go home for your best friend's dad's funeral. It's looking at the dashboard on your way there and seeing yet another memorial prayer card wishing you godspeed because you have the rest of your life to live while another does not.

We are aware.

We remember their face in every moonlit drive back home. We remember their smile every time we think of "that one time at Christmas dinner when..." We remember their hugs and kisses when the sun looks especially beautiful through the trees.

Death is much harder to accept now than it was when we were younger, I think. We had distractions back then, and we could take our minds off of missing someone easily. Today, I'm driving to work and I see that prayer card on my dashboard; I'm inviting my friends to our Thanksgiving dinner so that they don't have to think about spending the holidays without someone important to them; I'm sipping coffee from the cup my friend bought me so many years ago before the accident.

Every day, there is a reminder of someone who is no longer with me, but every day I am closer and closer to accepting why it happened.



Lake Life by Jeff Tampe

On Georgia Peaches

by Jordyn Riethmiller

Upon laying in the empty basin of the tub, you spoke to me silently: "stand and write," so I did.

That morning the wind felt differently upon my face.
I had woken with your soul filling the atmosphere around me.
You're being had planned to ascend into heaven, but first stopping near my bedside to assure me that you were okay.
I arrived at your body and you were there, embracing me, reminding me of our journey together here on Earth.

In my first hours seemingly absent of you, I gazed toward the clouds in which I knew you'd accompany me for the rest of my days.
I lay in the grass near the garden where you often ate and again, you were there, nudging me toward my feet where I'd stand and face the day that demanded me.

I visited your body many times that day where I wept until my eyes swelled shut.
I carried you toward your body's final resting place and you positioned kisses upon my nose where you usually had every night before we slept together under the comfort of God's star filled skies.
I then remembered you for who you were and I cried at the burying of your body as I knew that I would never hold you again.
At least, not until the end of my days where you had promised that you'd meet me by the pearly gates.

I had gotten drunk that night and you danced with me. You held my hand and your soul seemed larger than ever as you lay next to me until I had fallen asleep.
I never once felt your soul leave my side; I still haven't.
You sit here next to me enjoying Georgia's Peaches and this bottle of wine.

I saw your eyes and we talked silently. You told me you would wait for me by the apple tree at sunrise.
I communicated: I'll meet you every morning as the sun rises near the garden.
We'll play together and come noon, we'll go our separate ways.
You took my promise though that I would not weep; you said to me: we're on to better days.

-For Lilly



Untitled by Hannah Gordon

Vibes...

By Ellen Kibbe

I ate the sound of your absence
without ever opening up.

The funeral, shadow nightgown stuck to my soul and
places you'd never explored.

The rooftop freed an icicle,
melting in the haunting remnants of your size ten footprints.

Outside the streetlights gazed through my thin, pane of consciousness.
I drew the curtains, clinging to obscurity.

I rolled over in bed twofold, and then again,
the sheets not answering for you.

The floor shook as the couple upstairs woke.
I linger, insensible.



Eternal by Bianca Georgakopoulos

Untitled

By Amina Golden-Arabaty

The maps were red; this morning is blue.
The rain came down and tears are too.
The future I was once excited to be a part of is crumbling before my very eyes
Because the next person that will run this country is full of hatred and lies.
I once felt there was no place comparable to home, but today I have never felt more hated and alone.
Minorities galore will be his playground for destruction, who knows what will come after this horrid election.
With my hands in the air and with fear on my face, I leave my fate up to God, creator of the human race.



Untitled by Gabriel LaMarca

Danny Among the Stars

By Jessica Blake

When Danny smiled, the stars came out to shine—
Lips broke apart and set the world on fire.
That kind of light can never be just mine.
Of light like his, I love and never tire.

When Danny laughed, sweet music filled my ears,
So sudden, unexpected, beautiful.
I think I'll love that laugh through all my years.
Too bad it only lasted for a lil.

When Danny loved, he loved with all his heart.
So lucky were the ones that knew him well.
To love, for him, was something of an art.
That must have been the reason why I fell.

When Danny left, the stars blinked out, so dim.
When Danny jumped, he took my heart with him.

Untitled

By Molly Oas

I see him sitting there. He's sitting on a plaid blanket with a book in his hand. His puppy comes to lick his cheek, the dog's slobber glistening in the sunlight. Innocence.

He is surrounded by trees. A weeping willow watches over him. Sunlight and pollen floats in the air. The light peers down in strands through the separations of the tree's branches. His blonde hair looks like an angel's halo to me. The stream nearby provides a soothing sound that I find myself falling asleep to.

I wake. The little boy is gone. I no longer see the bright shade of green that once painted the scene before me. Tiny specks of light are slowly appearing in the dusky baby blue sky. The sun is on its way, dropping more and more every moment beneath the distant hillside. I suppose I'll go home now.

It's morning and I head to the trees that are engrossed in sunlight, I listen for the soothing stream, I follow the floating pollen, I hear his laugh and the dog barking. I am here. I lean against a dying tree trunk that has molded to the changing earth and has grown over many years. This is where I watch him.

Every day I come here. Every day I see the same little boy. I see the plaid blanket, I see the trees, and I hear the stream. His beagle is small and joyful like him. Occasionally, he tosses a stick in between flipping pages of his book. I guess he's around ten years old, but I couldn't be sure.

I wonder where his family is. Where are his mom and dad, what are they doing? Why is he always alone? His puppy: a black, sleek dog with beautiful brown eyes and floppy ears. Sometimes he runs over to me with his stick or looks for a pet down. Whenever the little boy calls his dog, "Lucky!" he comes in an instant. I've never talked to the boy though. He's always avoided my gaze.

The sun began to set and, as usual, he gathers his things to go. This is where I normally travel the opposite way to my home. But today, I decide to follow him. I wait a moment after he starts on his path to gather my things. As soon as he is out of sight I quickly pack up and hustle after him, staying hidden in and out of the trees.

Keeping a safe distance, I watch as we walk aimlessly in the woods, seeming to go further and further into the mess of timber. It starts to get dark, even darker beneath the thick blankets of leaves. I am careful to keep my distance and watch my steps, placing my feet softly in the steps he has left for me. At this point, I am surrounded by darkness and have now lost sight of the little boy. I see no halo, the plaid blanket blended itself into the night, I no longer hear the dog's vigorous sniffing.

I look around. I see nothing, just darkness. The trees are no longer silhouettes; the moon fails to light a path for me. I close my eyes. I open my eyes. It's the same either way—the darkness has taken over me.

Susan Ruth Hastings

November 3rd 1979 – May 20th 2012

Susan R. Hastings of Charlotte passed away on Sunday, May 20th from hypothermia brought on by malnourishment. Susan was discovered by authorities in a woodland area near her home where she lived with husband, Jerry F. Hastings, and son, Francis J. Hastings. Susan lost her husband and son to a tragic car accident in 2005. Susan took an early retirement from her beloved social work shortly after the accident, living peacefully with her pet cat. Susan's parents, Eloise and Ronald Grant, are holding services for her this Tuesday, 11 AM, at Grey's Funeral Home.



Barcelona on the lake by Jeff Tampe

More Than A Memory

By Natalie Kucko

Life should be considered a gift on its own.
In 1995, a stuffed white tiger appeared on the last day of November.
A grandfather brought it to the hospital to celebrate birth.
It returned home with the newborn.
It slept with the girl every night until she was 18 years old.
The toy served as a companion.
It accompanied her on vacations, day trips and every nap in between.
If lost, she would not relent until it was found and returned again.
She named it "Sonny," something trivial only a child could create.
To her, the value of this toy could not be measured.
It meant the world.
The grandfather passed when she was six.
She hugged the tiger, realizing this was all that remained.

Untitled

By Caty Lee

My oncologist told me to go fuck myself
all over the continuum,
from the back of the brain to a
a lump in the spinal column daydreaming
Mainstream forms of cancer treatment.

So we purge my body of every connotation
of free radical oxygen molecule
in a metal tube under the overalls.

My doctor smiles gently: *poison isn't evil.*
Your vertebrae is liberal & unfettered.
It's a lump in your ego, a water slide through the chest plate.

A tube bending according to their exchanges, really,

it's amazing the way my love materializes
In an 18-gauge angiographic catheter
At a flow rate of 3 mL per second.

I know what it's like to lose a girl
over a twisted vein in the esophagus.

And discomfort always results in a farewell transmission
killed by apprehensions, nerve fibers on
spinal column street splitting just as long as
we empty the mercury from my thermometer.

How can we make the pressure subside without
tunneled catheters, daisy chains of subcutaneous tissue

screaming *all these natural killer cells love me their way. it's against my dignity*
as a lower back to accept some ideology.

Praise their efforts to be free



A Bug's Life by Jeff Tampe

Home at Last

By Riley Eike

-For Joe, who's love of the game knows no limits.

Joe bristled as he adjusted his position to catch the ball just like the left fielder should have done. He shook his head as the player let the ball drop, forgetting to get underneath it.

He wanted to sub in, but his doctor told him he could no longer play the game he loved. After 76 years, he had been "permanently" benched. He was on a strict "no running" regimen after his most recent trip to his specialist. But, if he couldn't play softball anymore, then he didn't know what else there was.

He had traded in his jersey for a clipboard and took to the field anyways. He hooted and hollered for his teammates, but it wasn't the same. He wanted to get in the game; he wanted to play.

"Hey Joe! You dropped this," Mark smiled up at Joe and handed him his pen.

"Thanks," Joe responded curtly. He knew Mark was being sincere, but he didn't like the way his only slightly gray hair peeked out from underneath his baseball cap. What a luxury only slightly gray was.

"How are you today?" Mark probed; his eyes were full of the sympathy that Joe was sick of.

"Same as yesterday," Joe recited. He didn't want to talk about his treatments. He figured he would keep it a secret. What's the use of telling everyone when he knew he would be better eventually?

"Do you want to take a swing?" Mark always asked. As if Joe were not actually okay, as if somehow taking a hit at a ball would release some tension.

"I don't think today," he said, his normal response. While he had hung up his cleats, he had been a regular to the field. He was the ultimate third base coach on Monday nights, and he often sat on the bleachers for the games that didn't need him. He resumed watching the game, a signal to Mark to go back to the dug out and get his 65-and-up team prepared to bat.

Of course he wanted to hit a ball, what a stupid question! He longed to knock just one more right out of the park.

"Mark, wait" Joe struggled to his stiff feet and wobbled swiftly down the bleachers. "Maybe I'll take you up on that offer today."

"Guys, you all know Joe, he is going to be up first, then Tony on deck and Stan in the hold," Mark shouted the batting order as he headed toward the bench with the roster in his hand.

"I'm not so sure you should do this Joe," Stan said, holding the bat just out of Joe's reach. "You just had that your treatment yesterday."

"Stan shhh, I thought I told you to keep it to yourself. I appreciate the concern, but I'm fine, really."

"What would your doctor say?" That was a low blow, and by the look on Stan's face, he knew it too. The guys didn't discuss doctors on the field. On the field they stayed young; they stayed tough.

Joe snatched the bat from Stan and gave him his clipboard to hold instead.

"I don't need anyone to look out for me," Joe replied, under his breath.

"What was that?" said Dave, the catcher for the other team.

"Nothing. Pitch."

Joe stepped up to the plate as the outfielders moved in.

The first pitch was a ball, the next a strike. Just the set up Joe liked. He enjoyed the pressure of having one and one. This next one would be his.

Larry, the pitcher, nodded at the catcher, took a step and threw the ball right down the middle.

The ball flew from Joe's bat and climbed into the sky.

He took off. He didn't know he could still move like he used to.

He imagined all of the fans sitting in the crowd hooting and hollering just for him as his foot made contact with the first base. He ran harder.

The guys in the outfield were amazed as it soared over their heads. They didn't know he had it in him either.

He made it to second as the outfielders scrambled to get the ball.

Third was in reach and Joe rounded it nicely as the third base coach waved him on, his usual job.

He prayed he would make it home, that even at his age and with his ailments he would have one last homer in him.

It was a race to the finish as the ball was thrown to the catcher. It went wild and hit the back fence. Joe hit the bag even before the catcher knew where the ball had gone.

He had done it.

He shook his head in disbelief and laughed as he headed to the dugout.

"You guys gave that to me didn't you?" he smiled at Mark.

"I have no idea what you're talking about."



Untitled by Ellen Piper

Lifesavers

By Sierra DeChane

“Maybe if you would just talk to someone about what happened Emma, if you would just tell them what makes you wake up screaming, then it would start getting better.”

I just stared at my brother, August, through my shield of black gnarled curls, watching his distress from an all-encompassing fog.

Last night was probably the worst the dreams have been, everything was faster, brighter, louder, so much so it felt as if my eyes would explode and my hearing would dissipate. But no matter how real or fake the dreams feel, they always come for me as soon as I let my guard down.

“It’s been months since the accident and the only time I hear your voice is when I wake up to it screaming.”

What did he want me to say, that I constantly relived the worst moment of my life, that it was the loop playing in the forefront of my mind? Did he really think I could find the words to convey the racing thoughts in my mind? How could I tell him something I could barely admit to myself?

I know I’m entirely to blame for what happened, for the simple reason that I didn’t die too. I will never again hear my mom laugh, or see my dad smile, because against all the odds, the doctors were able to keep me in this miserable excuse of a world.

And the doctors have given it so many names, I’ve lost track of what exactly they think is wrong with me. Personally, I think they’re the ones suffering from something. What kind of sick person decides to go to school for years, only to sit in an office for hours each day making people feel like there’s something fundamentally wrong with their mind?

They just sit there tossing around phrases like “survivor’s guilt” and “post-traumatic stress disorder” and my personal favorite, “she only needs time to heal.”

My mind is perfectly sound—my heart may be broken—but my mind is better than those doctors’ will ever be. I’m not the one making money just to stare at some kid for an hour until the next patient arrives. The constant star-

ing makes my skin crawl, like there are thousands of bees buzzing around under the surface searching for a way out.

“Please, just say something. Anything.” August’s eyes were begging me to communicate.

What he didn’t understand was that I couldn’t speak. The words that would tumble out if I did speak would be jagged, broken, dead. Distraction kills, and I was the distraction that had killed my parents, it served me right to live with the burden of that moment for as long as I was on this earth.

The dreams are all the same starting off with the moon gleaming through the windshield, illuminating the road as the car rushes forward. Mom turns around to smile at me as I sing along with the radio. Dad looks down to turn it up, so that I can sing even louder to help keep us all awake. The next moment everything is suspended—the glass shattering, Mom’s candy lifesavers being thrown into the air, colorful glowing blotches as the moonlight hits them. Mom and Dad’s horrified faces turning toward me as if to shield me from what happens next.

After that everything blurs into one racing moment—a huge piece of glass goes into Mom’s chest, Dad’s head is dented in with the force of the car frame hitting him. And suddenly my vision is red, but I can still hear the screeching, shattering, crunching of the semi melding with our little car. I can taste the metal on my tongue, taste the last bit of lifesavers on my breath. I can feel my heart racing yet not beating at all.

August didn’t deserve that burden—he was the light at the end of the tunnel. If he knew what went on in the twisted darkness of that night, it would destroy him. My big brother already had to give up his dreams of working at some big shot law firm. Instead he is working locally to take care of his kid sister. I couldn’t ruin his life even more by telling him what happened behind my closed lids.

We hadn’t been the only ones tired from a long trip that night. The truck driver had been going on two days with no

sleep, so when his vision started blurring, he didn’t notice he wasn’t in his lane anymore. Even as it was happening I didn’t blame him, it wasn’t his fault, he was just trying to get home to his family. “Emma,” August called snapping me back into our little kitchen, “I know what happened is unspeakable. But that doesn’t mean that you don’t have to speak. When I say you can tell me anything, I mean anything.”

I looked up into my brother’s green eyes, our mother’s glinting green eyes, even if he wasn’t going through the guilt that I was, he still felt the pain of losing our parents.

“God, Emma,” he said running his hands through his dark brown hair, “I know we lost Mom and Dad, but I lost my sister in that crash too! You don’t speak, you’ll barely eat—I bet if you took off Dad’s old shirt I would be able to see all of your ribs poking out from your skin.”

I stared up at him through my lashes, as his eyes were pleading into mine, begging me to put him at ease—to show him that I wasn’t gone too. I took a deep breath having every memory of that night flashing in a whirlwind effect in my mind, reminding me of everything that had been taken from me.

“August—I hate lifesavers.”

The Hands That Stopped Ticking

By Luis Rodriguez

Coddled by darkness,
smothered by the ticking of my rusting hands, and the warmth
of yours, the steady vibrations rattle my cogs –*tick, tick.*

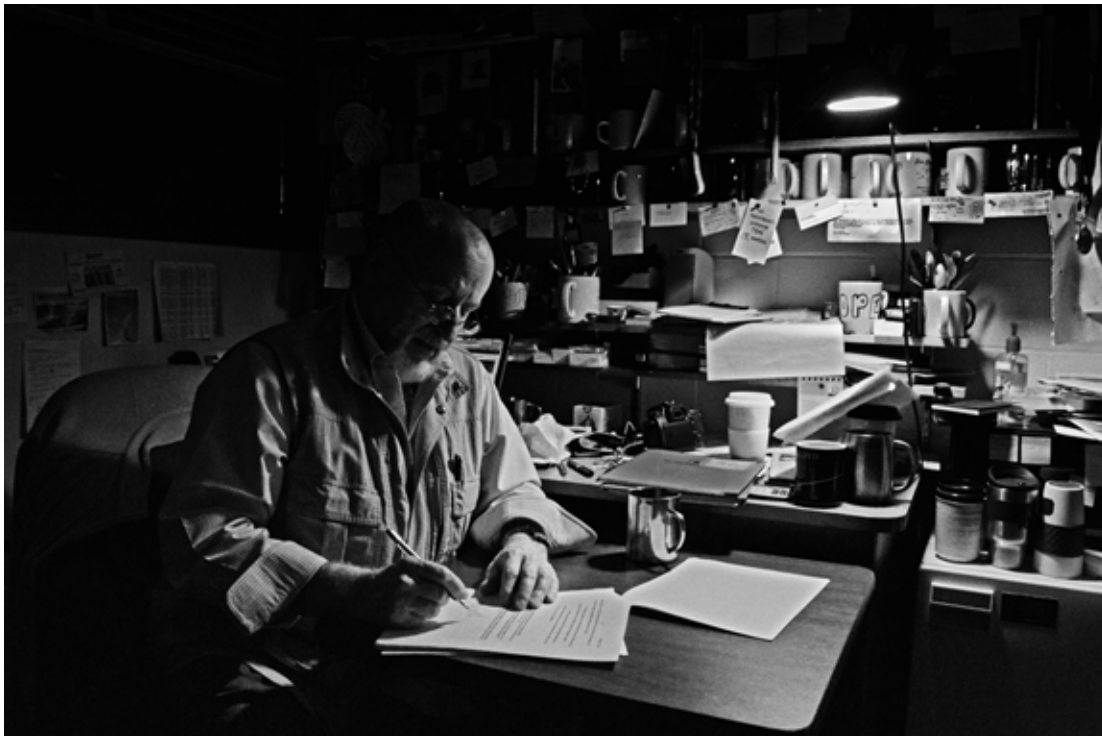
I'll see the light when
you open me up, wipe off the dust and
smile as your Ganges mind floods with memories –

Memories of souls you touched, games you played, places you stayed.
The soccer ball glistening with
tears from tangerine laughter, the makeshift net
collapses in the mud – dancing faces ripple in the puddles of joy.

Memories of the thick morning mist
send chills up your spine. *Do not drink the water* –
but you did anyway; the tap stabbed in the heart of the mountain
leaking its liquid gold.

You didn't know I watched you grow,
become a better man – No one saw it,
but I did; this was our journey.
My hands ticked with naan and chai, confined to your hip.

The rust overwhelms my cogs like moss
on the banyans. It slows
the ticking of my hands –*tick.....tick.*
Withering away, I am the fall leaf that crumbles
under the delicate footsteps of mountain children.



Untitled by Taylor Kickbush



Untitled by Vivien Pat

Loves Tangled Melody By David Bryant

And If I love thee, my heart shall bleed no more
Tis my heart that minds the things I'm longing for
From which it heals with light and air of day
Though it cant ever taketh away
On this day the world is mostly love intertwined
My soul in which ones lover cannot find
His face his skin his passions will fall
When my heart tinkers to my suitors call
The love I know was no love I knew before
His love for me as wavering as an open door
Harshly beckoned mind and unkind soul
Troubles flooding over let it taketh its toll
To be free is to love like the sweet smell of flowers
And tis my love for thee, oh how I've wasted the hours

A Moth Must Feel Warm

By Sydni Kreitzburg

A honey gold band of sunshine reflects off the glass of the new building on Main Street. It gleams cheerfully in the dying light. People in slacks gripping briefcases pass in and out of it. It's a shining example of what this city is, or at least that's what it says on the banner hanging over the door. Surrounding the building are long stretches of land in both directions, existing almost like a buffer from what this part of the city is really like. It keeps out-of-townies safe and ignorant.

Once the sidewalk ends, so to speak, the shacks begin.

There are stands wafting warm, savory scents lining these streets. Vendors in messy aprons wielding metal spatulas and wearing funny hats shout at the passersby to try their *Gaeng Daeng*, or maybe some *Bánh Cuon* for the milder souls. The beggars are weak and they aren't buying anything, so they get pushed aside during the midday crowds, the "guests" not sparing them a second glance. As the sun crawls back down below the horizon, customers begin to file out and carts jingle their way over uneven pavement, until there's nothing left here but the locals. Iah's stomach growls impatiently at the lingering scents, causing them to pull their jacket close and shift their eyes away from the suits and slacks heading home. They're between jobs right now, but those menthols Kijab gave them the other day are free, so they take a long drag and move to stand.

Iah's fifteen in a few months. Two years on their own and nothing's really changed much. They're still bitter, and lonely. Their ginger hair is over-grown, pulled back in a messy bun beneath a beanie. It's been months since they shaved—anything. The soft parts of their body have hardened from so many missed meals and too many nights under the stars, but they still somehow manage to look like a damn girl.

The sun sets early during winter. It'll be dark before 5 p.m. Iah feels a pull from

the main street. The darkness brings dangerous people out. Those people: they're dealers, and they're hostile. They give the rest of the street a bad name, make the suits think twice about helping when they see 'em. Iah hates the dealers, wishes they could do something about it; but they're about 40 pounds underweight and barely 5 feet tall and never fought anything more dangerous than a spider in their life.

Iah arrives behind a 7-Eleven that's not much more than a shack by any means. There's paint peeling off in large curls, boards on the windows, and the only recognizable part being a damaged neon light sign; the "7" flickering occasionally. The lights are still on inside, and yellow slivers of it peak out between the cracks in the backdoor. Iah starts when the door creaks open.

"I thought I smelled menthols," says Kijab. Iah blushes and puffs their cigarette again.

Kijab, or Menthol Man as Iah likes to think of him, is just some kid who works closing shift sometimes. Well, Iah thinks kid, but he's at least 25, if not older. He says he has a baby sister who looks like them, and that's why he keeps coming out back to meet them with something warm to eat and some clean water to drink.

"Rough week, kid?" he asks, leaning against the open door. Iah shifts again, then flicks the cigarette to the ground and steps on it. They clear their throat.

"Maybe... I just wish you'd work more often," they say, somewhat hopefully. Their voice has gotten a bit rougher from the cigarettes, but still sometimes sounds so childish. Iah hates the sound of their own voice; they hope they grow out of it. Kijab goes back inside and then comes back out with a backpack. It looks new. Iah looks at it like he's about to hand them a bomb.

"What's this?" Their voice cracks.

"I packed you some things. Food, hygiene products, plenty of water." Iah's eyebrows furrow at the explanation.

"You're quitting?" Iah's hands shake. It shouldn't be surprising to them anymore. People leave, it's what they do. People don't stick around, it's against their nature. Besides, Iah is just a burden everyone's dying to let go of. Just like their mother, just like their sister.

"Kid, I can't work at a 7-Eleven forever," Kijab sighs. "I'm moving out of state. My brother's getting married in New York, and I'm thinkin' I might stay up there."

Iah bites back a hurtful reply. It burns their throat.

"O-okay," they say instead, taking the backpack when it's handed to them.

"Stay out of trouble," he says, and then he's gone.

Iah doesn't sleep much. When they do it's fitful, and takes more energy than it gives.

They dream of a mother who cares more about her image than her child. A mother grabbing a cowering girl who made the mistake of cutting her hair short. Shouting matches that have no winners. They dream about twins that teach each other how to cover the bruises, because they didn't want to be separated. A grown woman walking out the door with a suitcase, goodbyes lodged in her throat.

Iah wishes they were only dreams.

They think it's the cigarettes, or the hunger, but they can't quit either so they just don't sleep. Instead, they take long walks outside the city when weather permits, where everything is far away, and the darkness makes things bleed together.

Iah lights up with their hand shielding the lighter, takes a long drag, and blows the smoke out slowly into the chill air. The wind takes the smoke away, but the heat still lingers in their chest. The ashy taste on their tongue used to make them cough. They absently think of what their sister would say if she could see them now. She always hated cigarettes.

They walk a trail that skirts around a park, dotted with wooden benches and flower gardens. One side of the path ebbs into the edge of a lake, the other side is practically right up against a line of towering trees. The trees stretch on for miles, something that Iah had always considered ominous. This place seems so wild, like anything could happen, and all the trees would bow their heads and continue to whisper. Those same trees now block the moonlight, casting the park in murky blackness. The dark is so dense, that Iah thinks they could touch it and feel something solid. The thought makes their heart leap into their throat.

The fresh spur of paranoia jolts them back into reality, where the shadows reach out to grab your ankles, and there's not a soul in sight.

"You're a little young to be out here by yourself."

Iah starts, dropping their cigarette as their eyes immediately lock onto who had spoken. A few paces ahead a figure sits on a park bench off the side of the path. They're facing the lake, watching the black water slosh up onto the shore, leaving foam on the rocks as it recedes. Iah manages to swallow around the lump in their throat.

"Can't you speak?" the stranger pushes, feline eyes settling on Iah's meager frame, not unlike a predator zeroing in on its prey. Her face is angular, sharp, with high cheek bones and a heavy brow. It reminds them of when they nearly had a run-in with a mountain lion while coming down to the city. The animal is barely visible after dark, except for her eyes.

"I- I don't know you," Iah says, shifting to step on their still lit cigarette, and shoving their shoulders forward. Normally, they would look away, but something about the stillness of the stranger made them feel like they couldn't.

"And that's a bad thing?" She pushes herself off the bench and moves toward the other side of the path to look out at the water. Her form seems to meld with the backdrop, like she wasn't a human

so much as an apparition. Like someone smudged all her edges with their thumb. A contrast to her face, like a porcelain mask on a dark cotton doll.

"Not always." Iah says back, even though their tongue feels heavy in their mouth. The stranger looks back at them again.

"It's so interesting that during the day, the water looks clear and inviting. And during the night it looks no more welcoming than a tar pit." They pause. "All that's changed is the light."

"Look," Iah says abruptly, "I don't know you."

"My name is Shya."

"Look, Shya," Iah rubs their arm. "Yes."

"What do you want with me?"

Shya blinks carefully and approaches them. She's a hairs length away when she smiles grimly.

"Don't you want to find out?"

There's something about her, as Iah leans away slightly, that's like there's a string attached to their chest and Shya is just reeling them in. And now Iah feels helpless, like a fish that just realized it'd been hooked moments before it's dragged out of its home. Iah's eyes snap away from Shya's, down to where her neck ends and jacket begins and they somehow feel warm. Iah thinks a moth must feel warm before it flies blindly into the flame of a candle.



Metabolic by Robert Mills

A Story About Struggle

By Shiki Dixit

Struggle is a seed of a tree,
Let it grow or fall to debris,
Weed out weeds of negative tendencies,
Believe in the seed to bring in positive energy,
You ever look at the moon and appreciate its beauty?
You ever look your parents in the eye and appreciate their duty?
Struggle is real, but remember the seed grows into a fruit,
Stuck in the bubble of feels, but those feels help discover the truth,
Calm the mind, everything will be alright,
You have your friends, family, securities, now it's time to take flight,
Fly far far away from life's worries and make sure you rest from the stress,
Digest the fruit and appreciate its flavors and what in it is expressed,
Do not ever forget the fruits nor disrupt the flow,
Because then you will feel too comfortable and not know,
Why you allowed those seeds to grow....



Untitled by Gabriel LaMarca

The Next Morning

By Emily Rosman

When you wake up in the morning, pretenses disappear. Stubble renews itself on the jaw line of men and subtly lines the soft curve of a woman's thigh. Lipstick stains white cotton pillow covers. Eyeliner crumbles underneath bottom lashes. Mouths scrubbed clean and flossed until bloody turn into lips caked together with white drool stains. Combed and styled hair hangs in disheveled strands. Nail polish chips permanently hide between pieces of shag carpet. The smell of sleep hangs in the air and covers the mask of perfume on the nape of a neck and the crease of a wrist.

You're no longer the mysterious sexy girl in the white dress at the bar, and he's not the gorgeous guy in the pastel

button down. You're not taking shots and staring at each other out of the corner of your eyes. You're not face-to-face on the dance floor, and his hands aren't around your waist. His lips aren't on your neck and your hands aren't twisted in his long brown hair. His name doesn't escape your red, parted lips. His breath isn't short. Your tanned legs untangle from the crisp white sheets.

You're strangers. The city skyline hovers outside his 7-story apartment window and threatens to trap you in his studio. You don't recognize the furniture; the wallpaper is alien. Your head pounds harder trying to remember the details. A breath. A moan. Falling against the plush king mattress. Hands intertwined.

One too many shots of tequila. Clinking glasses. Your shirt lays against the back of a black arm chair. Your pants flung to the back corner of the room.

You escape the loose arm he kept carelessly thrown over your narrow waist and dress without noise. His name escapes you. No note left behind, no phone number exchanged. You pad down the linoleum hallway, hoping your heels sit next to the door. They click loudly against the sidewalk stained with gum and last night's regret. Your cab driver thankfully doesn't talk. Your own bed feels foreign. Your shower too hot. The sheets too clean. The skyline different now.

He Knows Him By Timothy Walter

He is hollow
Between his mask and his faces
And he can't swallow
The way they get him all anxious
And he won't follow
Those social games that he enters
But he is shallow
And in need of the answers
For why he's hollow
From the tip to the crown
And he can't swallow
The words thrown from around
But he won't follow
The depressions of knowledge
That he is shallow
Because He sees him better
When he's not hollow
But filled to the brim with ideas
That that he swallows
Wholeheartedly smiling and it's Him
he will follow
To the depths of the oceans
And into the shallow
he'll trudge through this madness
And He'll make him hallowed.

Room By Nicole Cummins

Walk into the room,
Surrounded by nothing but your reflection.
You stare.
It stares back.
You move to meet it.
Closer, closer.
Face to face,
You stand with yourself.
The reflection cries out, no sound to be heard.
A ripple rolls across the surface,
The reflection cracking.
Glass crashes down, walls fall away.
You stand alone in the darkness.
A light shines ahead of you, brightness growing.
People come into view as the light shines.
Brighter, brighter.
Faces form into smiles,
Hands beckon.
Stepping forward, you join the ranks.
You turn and grin,
Another has entered the room.

Well-Being By Sarah Negrón

*"When I blush I weep for joy,
And laughter drops from me like a stone.
The aging laughter of the boy.
To see ageless dead so coy."
"Refrain" by Allen Ginsberg*

I remain calm,
as eyes divert to the floor.
Digging my nails in my palms until I see
black.

My paper skin is refilled.
Reliant and reluctant,
they shred me alive.
They don't leave me near open windows any-
more.

I start to think,
"I'm ready for an aching stomach."
And laughter drops from me like a stone.

Eat old words and look down.
I'll always be trapped in this foreplay,
wishing to no longer be living
or to see the ageless dead so coy.



Untitled by Gabriel LaMarca

Hands

By Brooke Christopher

She wished that she could just cut them off.

These little bastards that had proved to be so useful to her life before this point, now only served as an ugly reminder of what was to come in a few minutes. Her hands shook furiously upon her knees, and no matter what she tried to do, she couldn't get them to stop shaking.

"Just stop!" She whispered angrily, trying to strangle her wrists with her trembling appendages. But they wouldn't dare betray one another like that. They continued to defy her mercilessly, mocking her.

"Miss Baker?" The girl in question looked up, seeing a man dressed to the nines approaching her, and she caught a flash of silver as he walked, the handcuffs on his hips jingling ever so quietly. Jessica Baker took in a deep breath as she stood, grateful that it was only her hands that refused to still. "It's time. Are you ready?"

Jessica nodded, licking her lips with her dry tongue, the rough surfaces connecting causing her to cringe outwardly. The man gave her a curious look, but then motioned for her to come forward, and led her into the courtroom.

Immediate silence.

The only noise that served as her entrance was the sound of her flats clicking against the linoleum floor, and the door shutting firmly behind her. It was nothing like what she had expected. The walls were a stark, off-white color, with old, fluorescent lights casting ugly shadows on everyone's faces.

She looked up at the judge, dressed in dark robes, looking more like a grim reaper rather than a guardian angel. She motioned for Jessica to take a seat in the booth, and the girl watched as the man who had escorted her in took a seat next to the defendant, Dennis. The boy shot her a cold look, and she quickly dropped her eyes, her hands beginning to shake even more so.

Jessica averted her gaze to the tall, pretty blonde lawyer, dressed in a gray pantsuit- a terrible choice really, blondes didn't look good in gray. She gave Jessica a tight-lipped smile, and Jessica re-

turned it, her palms suddenly beginning to itch.

She resisted the urge to scratch, instead opting to grapple the sides of the cool steel chair that she currently rested upon.

"Can you please state your name for the court?" The blonde asked, and Jessica leaned forward a bit, staring at the microphone before her.

"Jessica Baker."

"And how old are you Jessica?"

"E-eighteen." Jessica's nails scratched against the metal, causing her to let go and flex her fingers in her lap, struggling to relieve the feeling.

"And you go to school with Mr. Hopper, correct?"

"Yes." The feeling wouldn't go away. It traveled up her fingers, and she dug her nails into the fabric of her skirt. Her teeth hurt.

"How would you describe Mr. Hopper?" *Egotistical maniac.* From her peripheral vision, she could see his perfectly coiffed red hair, not one out of place. *Crude.*

"Hey Jess, you're not a lefty are you? Be kind of disappointing if you were." Dennis reached forward, touching her left hand with his forefinger, dragging it along the back. A sick smile sat on his lips, and she quickly pulled away from him, clutching the limb close to her chest, tears filling her eyes.

Malicious.

"Come on Jess, don't run away like that! It was just a joke!" Dennis' voice followed her out of the school, the laugh of his friends tearing at her ears like sandpaper against a chalkboard.

She began to tug at her nails.

My hell on Earth.

Jessica just shrugged and started cracking her knuckles.

"Do you often interact with Mr. Hopper?" The lawyer asked, pushing for an answer.

Every day of my life. "Yes, on occasion." Jessica looked up, seeing the other victim in his seat. Taylor Westfall stared at her with a pleading expression, eyes desperate for her help. She scratched at her left palm, her own eyes quickly taking in his black eye and busted lip, one half of

his face swollen shut. She could see the oxygen tank sitting next to him beneath the table.

"When you do speak with Mr. Hopper, what does he say to you?"

"He usually, uhm," Jessica breathed in, now bending back her fingers until they practically touched the back of her hand. "Just,"

"Does he pick on you, Jessica?"

"Objection, leading the witness." Came a voice from the left side of the room. Dennis's lawyer, his father.

"Sustained." The judge muttered, giving the blonde lawyer an icy stare.

"Let me rephrase the question." The woman said quickly. She looked at Jessica, her eyes full of the same pleading of the people in seats. "Do you enjoy interacting with Mr. Hopper?"

"No."

"And why is that?"

Jessica rolled her wrists a couple times. "Because he torments me."

"What about, Jessica?"

Silence.

Jessica's body stopped. Her hands no longer twitched, all feeling of urgency had left them, and it was now, they sat perfectly still in her lap. She looked down at them, her silicone hand seeming so off now in the horrid fluorescent lighting. She had painted her nails for the occasion, a nice, calming, green, but now that she looked at it, she just wanted to puke.

Smiling as politely as she could, and with all the strength she had in her small body, she slowly pulled off one hand, and looked up at the woman in the gray pantsuit, lifting what was left of the lower half of her left arm for the courtroom to see.

Handful of Purpose By Timothy Walter

Two birds sit with patience
Upon the open palm
One with youth, one ancient
Waiting for the dawn

Both rest in the darkness
Unwavering in their stance
Both stay like in contest
Who'll fly at the first chance?

Vibrantly all colored
Many know its name
The first sings and shutters
powerful, yet tame

The next hums with reverence
Quietly while it stands
White feathered and respected
For a different task at hand

Enlightened by the Sun
Off goes the bird of love
Its open spot remained
Covered by the dove



Untitled by Justin Bui



a bird in the hand is worth two in the bush by Nidhi Chintalapani

Heinz

By Marissa McCall

As you slip your fingers between my thighs
I sigh as I think about the meatloaf in the oven.
Did I put ketchup on it?

The ketchup is splattered all over the inside of the oven
As if I took a bat to the head of the meatloaf.

Your fingers stuff the meatloaf with a tingling pleasure
As I wipe the blood from the warm walls of the oven.

lovesick
By Maggie Kovacs

feeling sick
to my stomach

so hollow but
so heavy
at once

weighing me
down
down

making me
sweat from
exhaustion

carrying all
the love we
shared from
these past years

right at
my navel
where my
heart now
sits

Taverns
By Sarah Negrón

I've been wishing
on eyelashes collected
from toxic chemicals again.

I wake up with bruises,
unsure of how they chose me
for their residence.

So I take the knots
in my stomach
and make a noose for you.

I take the knives
left in my chest
to give you pieces of my life.

I drive to the
Pennsylvania state line
questioning if change is possible.

I hide my tears
in your coat pockets
to keep your hands warm at night.

And I lose my mind
just to give you something
to think about.



Untitled by Vivien Pat

On Macchiato, Among Sexual Preoccupation

By Jordyn C. Riethmiller

I sat last week accompanied by a month's lasting pre-writing stage. On that same day, accompanied by this pre-writing stage, I had many thoughts on what I would soon write about. So, I continued to sip my perfectly prepared caramel macchiato and welcomed an unrelenting disinterest in putting pen to paper.

It wasn't until last Tuesday when I laid my head on the chest of my most recent lover that inspiration confronted me; this time in the form of side-stream smoke from his then-lit cigarette. He looked at me in concern with what exactly I had been staring at for so long. He then spoke and quite mockingly said, "is this cigarette cool or something?" I replied quite honestly by stating, "I don't know, maybe I'll write a story about it or something." To this response he laughed, but not in manner in which to imply that he found this funny, but rather that he found this quite stupid of me. I was serious though; I thought I might write a story about this.

At that moment I understood quite clearly that I had been again sharing a bed with someone who didn't understand me. I was bothered by this, not only because I wasn't understood, but because this lover of mine had no interest in even trying to understand me. I thought on this realization intently for quite some time, and in the morning, I was saddened.

I drove toward my obligations that morning in a warmed up car and I felt the urge to cry. I didn't cry though and I wondered why. My wonder was scattered as I searched for answers within my intellect in hope to answer the many questions that I had following the night of the cigarette smoke. The answers did not appear until later that Wednesday when I sat again with another perfectly prepared macchiato. I hadn't been able to cry earlier that morning because this feeling of hurt was something that my heart had grown accustomed to. Sadly, when realizing that hurt didn't hurt me anymore, still, I did not cry.

The writer in me, normally ruthless would name the name of this lover, but

in this piece, dear reader, I will not. I will tell you though that on this particular macchiato on that Wednesday, I became preoccupied with sex. For what equated to the last eighteen months, I spent a number of nights with this lover who I might now refer to as: Mr. Cigarette. Our relationship was casual, it was friendly, and at times, it was intimate. Of course, on many occasions my body shared his and a comfort with each other followed. On most occasions with my head laid upon Mr. Cigarette's chest, I felt satisfied, but not wholly. I guess that on most occasions I had felt sexually satisfied in that my body's desires were fulfilled. Thinking back on the many occasions spent upon Mr. Cigarette's body, I can now articulate that on no occasions were my soul's desires fulfilled. Accompanied by this articulation, I had an epiphany: sexual experience can often confuse one for fulfillment of the soul.

I'd known Mr. Cigarette for many years without knowing him sexually. (I want to say this differently) Here it goes: I have recognized the being of Mr. Cigarette for many years, but still, even with our shared sexual experience in mind, I do not know Mr. Cigarette, and Mr. Cigarette does not know me.

Again, after knowing that I hadn't known my most recent lover, I was hurt, but I did not cry. I threw my empty macchiato cup into the recycling bin and I journeyed outside. I sat beneath the moon and I thought about Mr. Cigarette along with many other lovers that I had been so overjoyed to have had experienced. At that moment, not accompanied by macchiato, but accompanied by social stigmata, I smiled.

I thought of whispers behind my back stating opinion about me. I remembered words that other's had often used to describe me. I even recalled a moment in which a past lover referred to me as "slut". I reminisced about the same past lover chatting with a friend "everyone knows her; she gives it up to anyone that will take it." I felt the sting of that statement the same way now as I had when I first heard it out of that lover's

mouth. After enduring the pain of those words once again, I vividly I re-lived Mr. Cigarette's annoying chuckle at my stating that I would soon write about his cigarette smoking.

It was at this moment that I realized that many didn't know me. Mr. Cigarette and I had spent eighteen months intimately together and yet, he didn't know me. I understood that he among others did not know that I enjoy macchiato once daily. Past lovers don't know that I have used them frequently in pieces much like this that I spend my nights writing. No lover, especially Mr. Cigarette, had even known that my nights spent with them would be used only to fuel inspiration, and this understanding above all made me happy.

Truly, I have spent much time in the world experiencing things in order to ponder them over macchiato. I have kissed the lips of a number of Mr. Cigarettes. I have endured immense pain that weighed heavily on my heart, and I have always, until this day wondered why these lovers didn't last. I cared deeply for many of them, and I regretted none. On this night, still sitting under the moon, I understood that I hadn't been known and that my soul had not yet been fulfilled.

It was Mr. Cigarette and my perfectly prepared macchiato that day that reminded me of a disconnect between body and soul. It was that reminder that convinced me that I should indulge in the fruits of the bodily desires for as many years to follow as I wish. It was also the fault of that reminder that gave me hope in experiencing a soul that would one day know mine.

I stood from the grass that night absent of Mr. Cigarette and absent of macchiato. Though absent of them, I was accompanied by my body and my soul assured me that one day, it would be fulfilled. I slept alone that night with fresh air around me and I imagined the tomorrow that was ahead of me. I closed my eyes and fantasied about my next lover and about my next prewriting stage.



Untitled by Gabriel LaMarca

Sociopath By Hannah Gordon

I once told you to
give me your burdens and
I would carry them like a cross.
But you didn't want mine
So I was buried under yours.

My mother once told me
that you were no good.
She told me she didn't trust you,
but I pushed her back and
dug my nails into your lies.

You once told me that
if I ever wanted to mask the scent of something,
I should put it in coffee grounds.
So here I am scrubbing my skin raw
to wash your smoke out of my pores.

Ode to Passion

By Shiki Dixit

We care more about increasing serotonin and endorphins
Than developing novel drugs for organs or providing safe environments for orphans
While Cupid strikes iPhones with its arrow, vision for new ideas became narrow
Aspirations dissipating like transient vapors
Chokes on the poison of social confirmation and primitive behavior
Only person with the juice is Chance the Rapper
But the juice so missing in us that even the strongest GPS can not track her
Ambitions with old Ozymandias, right hemisphere turning into moss
Fire inside of me lost with the dryness of minds in this new domain
Where more enjoy temporary ecstasy than igniting the brain
To develop positivity, create creativity, sterilize social toxicity, spark the electricity
Backed by the pillar of consciousness, I scream fashion is the assassin of passion
Let go of the mind and let the art happen



Untitled by Justin Bui

Hints on Etiquette

By Sarah Negrón

The primal needs for law are food and
clothing and that the new born child is better off dead.

No discussion of civilized society or that
the best perfume is dinner in a ball room.

Appropriateness.
The encounters of severe criticism.

And those who live for wedding invitations,
are nothing but hot dishes engraved with few friends

Plenty of departures from sleeping rooms,
that should have good light for reading.

dirty dishes

By Maggie Kovacs

i put your dirty dishes in a box
next to the sink

they piled so high

so many so dirty
so foul-smelling

Trigger Warning

By Josh Smith

On a long-enough timeline,
I will play all of your male villains.

Absent of mind, I will suggest that you smile.
Just when I have earned your comfort,
I will let Sugar slip from my lips.

Without a second thought,
I will brush the lint from your arm,
thinking myself helpful.

I am a feminist, albeit, not an exemplary one.
All I can promise you, is to not make any mistake twice.

Trigger Warning: I am a man.



Divergence by Kelly Gao

Her

By Molly Oas

I stare into oblivion
Or what feels like oblivion.
I see myself running
Out of sight, into onyx.
I try to catch up
To what seems to be me.
But she is gone
And I have given up.

Beef Stew

By Marissa McCall

I found the public-relation centers
of my brain had been suffocated
by booze.

Words blurted uncontrollably like vomit.
Thick chunks of beef, potatoes and carrots
spread across the table like a
puzzle I couldn't wait to solve.

It smelt of burning cat fur.

“What’s your real name?”

Her smile was glassy.
she ransacked her mind
for something to say
finding nothing but
used Kleenex
a blank phone book
and costume jewelry.

“You scientists think too much”

The girl belonged to anyone
with access to a Dictaphone.

National Rug

By Jacob Przesiek

We took the train, 1st to 13th street,
back and forth, twice a day,
everyday.
There were 26 seats:
50 eyes,
the same eyes
everyday.
Heads down, staring at the floor
and the red rug covering it,
to shy away from the monsters
afraid of what they might say.
There was blood on the rug,
not ours but it was us,
since they never noticed either.
They never even cared.

The phone rang, a call
and we answered.
We left early in the morning
taking the rug with us.
We painted it,
gave it stripes
that were significant
for good reasons
we were sure, but didn't know.
But we left the blood.
"Leave the blood, always!"
A stain?
A story.

We took the main line, outpost no. 1 to
13
back and forth, twice a day,
everyday.
No rug beneath us;
it was on our shoulders
so others could see it
and know we rode the train
that they never saw
or ever rode.
The shoulder is close to eyes
so you couldn't hide
from the monsters here,
but that was okay because
One man got off that boat
a million different times.
They were the blood,
so we knew them
and we were glad
they were with us
since there were other things to fear.

We were afraid of sounds:

rain (the metal kind),
bangs both slow and fast,
but the whistle was the worst.
We went up when we heard it
and we ran.
Forward, then back
after some of us died.
Back into the ground
beneath the dead we couldn't bury,
but above the place we'd go for it.
Maybe we were there already.

We took the train, 1st to 13th street,
we thought, and tried to remember
the same train from home.
We rode it through those muddy chan-
nels,
the faces of the dammed
passing by in the windows.
The strangers were there,
but they were ghosts
floating without eyes,
and we...
The holes in our chests
our hearts tore to escape
made us look just as dead as they were.
We wished for their eyes,
eyes to see us,
to remember.

They took the train 1st to 13th street,
back and forth, twice a day,
everyday.
26 to a car, 50 eyes
the same eyes
everyday,
but not anymore.
There was an empty seat,
and they noticed it.
They didn't have a rug to distract them;
draw their eyes to the floor.
But they could see us now,
flat and black and white,
between the date and "HEROES!"

We could feel it,
their eyes looking down on us
through our half of the blackness
into our heart-less chests
and we remembered:
we wore our hearts on our shoulders
because that's where our love was,
the rug and the blood.

So we stood, looked up
straight into their eyes,
the ones that never saw us,
floating up there at 90 degrees on a cold
night,
those beautiful suns
that took the train, 1st to 13th street,
back and forth, twice a day with us,
and we thanked them.

They didn't know us when we left
and wouldn't recognize us when we
came back
but we remembered them
because we had the rug.
13 streets and 50 suns:
the hearts we wore on our sleeves
because that's where our love was:
in a home so very far away
but still so very close.
-unforgotten-
"But mamma, I'm not coming home."
I wrote, and we all did.
because we didn't know
if we would or not.
Most couldn't handle that,
like the strangers,
but that's why we went.

We took the train, 1st to 13th street,
back and forth, twice a day,
everyday.
We'd take it again,
many more times
or just once.
But that would be enough
to one final time, ride
that train we loved.
That train, our love.

They still stare at the rug,
but we don't care
because now it's our blood
they can't see.

Dirty

By Sarah Negrón

Burning ants on a stove top.
Their screams manifest my mental clock
and castrate the minutes.

I live in hope that I'll be soulfully entwined
with their lifeless bodies.

Similar to the way you act with her past
and old birthday cards.

I want to burn them too.
But I know you would dive head first
into the flames just to keep the ashes.

You wouldn't feel pain,
but I would.

Killing them slowly,
I think I fell in love with their bodies,
just as much as you've fallen for the ashes.



Untitled by Ramya Sreeramoju

Cigarette Butts and Two Deep Breaths

By Lucas Vaughan

I hate how fucking cold it is. Can't it ever be nice outside when you're about to run, head on, into a situation that's particularly shitty? No—it's always rain, or snow or clouds.

Today, it's snow. And it's not even the "fun" snow, either, where it's big and fluffy and amusing to watch, as long as you're nestled in the comfort of your warm home. No, this isn't that. This is late-February snow, when it's turned like spoiled cottage cheese and taken on that joy-draining, grey-brown color.

Anyways, here I am, being a pussy. Sitting in the car, parked outside across the street, just far enough away where I think I'm being discrete, when in reality, anyone could look out the front window and see me, brooding, clear as day.

Two trembling fingers on my right hand clutch a pale cigarette, while the others are occupied by a rhythmic tapping of the steering wheel. I bite my lip, too, because if my body were still it would give too much opportunity for my consciousness to focus on the thoughts pestering my mind.

"Background Noise" by I'm Not Paying Attention hums through my stereo speakers. As I focus on the cloud of smoke dancing toward the crack in my window, I think to myself, "why can't I leave the car with such ease?"

Suddenly, I feel a burn on my finger and realize this distraction has run its course. I crush it into the ash tray resting in my cup holder.

Then, for some odd reason, I notice the cigarette butts. I don't mean I see that they're there; I mean I truly notice them. Each stares up at me; each represents a time I eased my pain in a moment of stress with nicotine and distraction. However, these butts always remained—ugly and off-putting. Each, a reminder that I can't drown my problems in artificial healers like some angst-filled 90s teenager. There's always some pain or anxiety that remains.

I guess in that moment I had some sort of epiphany? I don't know. I mean, I'm staring at old cigarette butts. I'm not sure how much of the situation can be

credited to some divine revelation, but I really did have a moment of total clarity.

I have to face my shit. I have to find the real source of healing. And that healing is found beyond that front door, adorned with a wreath from a holiday season I had no part of.

As it often works, though, that source of healing is also the source of pain that's held me back for so long.

I take two deep breaths.

My mind races with the possibilities of what may happen when I turn that knob, step inside and come face to face with emotion and uncertainty.

I take two deep breaths.

I step out of the car so quickly that a bystander would think I was being swarmed by hornets inside, but I have to do it that way—quick, like a Band-Aid. As I walk up to the house, looking

as foreign as it could for a place I grew up, my boots make soup of the sludge on the dark pavement. My shoulders hunch up toward my ears to brace myself against the cold. Actually, that's a lie. My shoulders hunch up toward my ears to brace myself against the truth—a protector.

When I get to the door, I think about all that could go wrong when I step inside. It's as if entering through that doorway will send me into some parallel universe where I have no control. I know nothing of what will happen, but I know it's necessary to embrace this unknown. I need to go in and face the past that's haunted me, to get closure, to move on. I need to finally stand up, without a protector, or a distraction or a place to hide, and confront my problems. I don't want to, but I need to.

I take two deep breaths.



Kitty Cat by Ellen Piper

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