

Reflection  
60.2



# Reflection

*Gonzaga's Journal of Art and Literature*

*60.2 - Spring 2019*

“The main thing is to be moved, to love, to hope, to tremble, to live.”

—Auguste Rodin

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# Letter from the Editor

*Sarah Kersey*

Dear reader,

Something no one ever tells you about being a creative is the fear that it tends to carry. You don't hear about the nights lying awake, staring at a blank word document or journal, trying to bring yourself to turn the ideas dancing in your head to marks on a page. No one ever tells you about the distress you experience in those moments, about how terrified you become of the possibility that the feeling you need to get out is not translatable. When I first started writing, I didn't know that I would spend nights combing through poems of 32 words, replacing verbs and adjectives with stronger ones, only to look at the piece as a whole afterwards and discover with utter dismay that the meaning had been completely lost.

I refuse to paint the picture that practicing creativity is "clean" or "pretty". "Clean" or "pretty" doesn't produce art that moves us. Creativity is an uphill battle through gentle chaos; the world around us remains completely undisturbed, and yet our brains are scrambling, searching for ground to stand on.

There are times where I find this absolutely debilitating. It takes an immense amount of determination to create, knowing that it may be futile, that it may result in nothing but frustration and awkward sentences strung together in efforts to communicate a feeling to the world. It can feel as if we're just pushing different variations of the alphabet together that don't fit.

And yet, more often than not, I find so much hope and potential in the chaos. The creative process is sometimes long and painful. But, if the final product ultimately holds even just a sliver of our innate humanness, I think we're doing something

right. Every time we create we are venturing into uncharted waters, finding pieces of ourselves along the way.

So maybe all we're doing is rearranging 26 letters into different patterns, over and over again, hoping to create something meaningful. Maybe we're just painting strokes on a canvas and hoping the lines find a connection along the way. Maybe we're just picking up the tools and trying to shape something out of nothing. Maybe it's a lot more than that. Maybe it's up to us.

Thank you for reading our journal.

Best,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Skersey". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style with a long, sweeping underline that extends to the right.

Sarah Kersey

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# Shostakovich

*Sydney Bernardo*

I imagine the Russian countryside to be so expansive it burns,  
Like a lit match on cedar.  
The jade-colored hills smothered with snow,  
And the peaks in crooked harmony.

I imagine a man with fierce, darkened features,  
He sits by the fireplace in infinite battle,  
Against time, and life, and legacy.  
He writes his name into notes,  
D, E-flat, C, B  
And then writes a letter. It will be his suicide note.

The note reads:

“I figure that nobody else would write a song about me,  
so I wrote it myself”

The letter and music in a sealed envelope.

The pages show black and white rapture,  
Written with unscripted fate’s fury,  
His family, companions, music and future gone.  
He was the only one not taken.

I like to think,  
That if you sit alone in the Russian tundra,  
You will hear his music and voice,

Saying:

Let them hear your name. Here, write it down.  
They will understand this pain.

# Autumn Honey

*Konner Sauve*

No one knows what love is  
but I've seen it in bloom  
as we walk side by side

breathing in maple and pine  
it expands our lungs  
while trickling on the tips of our tongues  
the trees are ablaze  
within autumn's time  
though their spark fades to the earth  
a few embers remain nestled  
among the branches

it is here where love  
harvests the secret of affection  
melting the last golden colors  
before the frost  
begins to nip at its wood  
then slowly the final colors—  
red, orange, and yellow—  
have a natural drip  
as they splatter  
upon our heads and toes

but when it falls upon our tongues  
a rush of sweet and bitter  
coat and gild our lips  
with a golden sugar  
an autumn honey so pure  
that seals our love

as red hot wax on  
yellowed parchment envelopes

love is sweet in short doses  
bitter in long  
but I know this...  
I have seen it in bloom  
the honey may dissipate  
but our tongues and lips  
linger and long  
for just one last taste



# The Inside

*Brigid Healy*

Downcast eyes. heart in shambles  
Faith and hope blown up, up away  
Tears, flowing in a stream  
Alone, alone

Shame hanging like a weight  
Music, fire to the wound  
Heart strings in threads  
Breaking, breaking

Emptiness living, breathing  
Joy, a mockery of reality  
Loyalty, a dream  
Dreaming, dreaming

Head up, chin steady  
Eyes dry, smile ready  
Heart black, then blue  
Hiding, hiding

Back to life  
Heart in a sling  
Eyeing the horizon  
Hoping, singing

# What We Took and What We Left Behind

*Kaitlyn Johnson*

*2019 Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Awards  
1<sup>st</sup> Place - Fiction*

There was something disturbing about the orchids in the grocery store. Their fleshy petals were drenched in color, lush and vibrant even under the severe florescent lighting. Their perfection seemed contrived. I walked by slowly, running my fingers over the small pebbles in their terra-cotta pots. Someone on the overhead called for assistance in the bakery. I wandered towards the produce aisle, towards rows of waxy apples and bruised pears.

I had four crumpled dollar bills and an expired bus pass in my oversized sweater. It wouldn't be enough, and I had already resigned myself to slipping items in my tote bag, seeing how far I could push things before someone would call me out for the thief I was. As of yet, I had been met with the dull, lofty gazes of workers in red aprons who, for all appearances, seemed more fixated on the prospect of their next cigarette. A middle-aged woman snapped her gum, digging her fingers into the wiry net containing the bulge of her yellow hair. She was about to hack at a roasted turkey with indifference, then wrap the meat in a crisp paper for the young, harried looking mother of two. Everyone was dripping from the storm outside. The air felt sticky.

A cool mist sprayed over my palm as I took some lettuce, a few tomatoes, button mushrooms, and a sad looking eggplant. Johnnie emerged from around the corner; his stocky and clumsy walk drew a few glances in our direction. His presence demanded all the attention in the room—his barrel chest, dark beard, and casual manner made everyone feel at once suspicious and flattered. He loved talking

to strangers.

“Hey pretty lady, what have you got there?” He didn’t bother to lower his voice, which annoyed me. He was clutching the neck of a bottle of cheap bourbon. His dark, drowsy eyes met mine and then he looked into my bag and smirked, rolling a toothpick to the corner of his lips.

I raised my brow and he followed me to the next aisle. “Aren’t you supposed to be cooking up brunch for the soccer moms right now? I thought you said you were going to work.”

“They didn’t need me anyway.” His hand brushed the small of my back as I leaned down amongst the gleaming jars of oil.

“You need to go to work. You know, some people would feel lucky to have a job at all.”

He grunted. As much as he resented me at times, he liked having someone call him out on his bullshit. He had the wild look of a boy who needed boundaries, who longed to have someone bother enough to notice that he seemed to welcome chaos with wide, reckless arms.

He had grown up in Alabama, the son of a sixteen-year-old mother with many vices. He described the way men had looked at her, and how she had taken them home to their sad little house on the edge of a forgotten town. There was not a lot of money to be made, but she had taken care of him in the only way she knew how, and he hated her for it. One night, they entered the front door in a cloud of smoke. She was in the arms of a formidable looking man, tall, with a peppered beard. He had not been local. His neatly pressed slacks and his shiny Oxford shoes, which he had carelessly kicked into the corner, seemed gaudy and a bit ridiculous given where he was about to lay his head. Johnnie watched them from the dark corner on the staircase, his hands tightly gripping the wooden railing.

Later that night, when that same man put his hands around her neck, Johnnie fumbled through his mother’s negligee drawer for the gun, throwing layers of chiffon in all directions. He said that in those few seconds everything seemed hard and breakable, like glass. The garments floated absurdly onto the floor in soft puddles at his feet. They were upstairs now, and his mother had shoved the man over the hope chest at the end of the bed. He stumbled. Johnnie

gripped the cold gun between his palms and shot into the dark, large body in front of him. He fell like a tree. His weight shifted over the floorboards, then he stumbled backwards before hitting the back of his skull against the corner of the vanity. It was a sick and satisfying sound. His mother began to wail. He was twelve years old, and would spend what little there was left of his childhood being dragged through the foster care system.

When I met Johnnie, he had recently left the military, having just emerged from the waters of Hurricane Katrina. The army had largely failed to instill a sense of order within him, and he found himself wading through a lawless, dilapidated city without much thought to his career. He didn’t last long, and the money was gone in almost no time at all, through a series of pool games, cocaine, and expensive whiskey. He said it had been fun while it lasted.

Like me, he had come to Minneapolis to start over and had rented a small room in what had once been a grand house. It was three stories tall, reconstructed to fit as many low-income tenants as possible for the least amount of financial investment. The walls were thin and it was hard to ever feel alone in such a place. The sounds of laughter and lovemaking seemed everpresent. The pipes on the ceiling hissed and gurgled, like the veins of some strange organism in which we had all been absorbed. Sometimes I could hear my neighbor Stanley talk to himself in the middle of the night-about the war, his brother, about the things he wanted to forget. I wondered who he was talking to, but was too afraid to ask. He would crouch on the porch and chain-smoke, his pale blue eyes seeing into a reality none of us could fully understand or perceive. That morning I had walked by and for the first time in the six months that I had resided in the basement I noticed that his door was ajar. Inside was the same, dull gray carpet and eggshell walls, same snake-like pipes lining the ceiling. His possessions consisted of a metal folding chair, a small cot in the corner with a thin blanket, and a dead poinsettia in a shiny foil pot. It made me want to cry.

“So are we doing this or not?” Johnnie came up from behind, lightly running his fingers over my cheek. I was staring at the neatly packaged cuts of meat, marbled with fat and wrapped in plastic.

“We can’t go out together.”

“Why are you being like this? It’s fine.”

“You’re going to draw too much attention to us.”

He sighed. “It’s like you think I haven’t done this before, but whatever. I’ll meet you by the drug store. I borrowed a car.”

He had this way of walking around the world as if it was all there for the taking. We had very different methods; mine being that I favored discretion and blending in with the sorority girls, and his methods being quite the opposite. He was friendly enough, but aggressive, preying on other’s insecurities and desire for attention before taking what he wanted—often they were complicit.

The buildup of anxiety and adrenaline never really goes away, no matter how many times you walk through those doors. You can’t walk too fast, nor do you want to linger. Much better, is to walk with a slow and steady rhythm across the linoleum floor, taking care to pretend you’re just like everyone else, that you know the difference between right and wrong. You are not an imposter. You are going home to make dinner.

It had stopped raining, and there was the smell of wet earth and pavement hanging in the air. Johnnie was leaning against a scuffed red car, a cigarette dangling between his lips. He was staring off into the high-rise condos being built across the street, deep in thought. When he saw me, he threw the cigarette on the ground and stomped out the ember with the heel of his boot.

He took the bag from me, putting it in the backseat amongst what looked like several crushed cans and old receipts. “Nice car,” I said. “Thanks for the ride.”

He pulled something from his jacket. “I have something for you.” It was one of the orchid flowers and it looked small and delicate and so beautiful in his palm that I almost wished he had left it in the store. I didn’t want it to wilt in my possession. He took my face in his hands and slipped it behind my hairpin, then smiled. “You’re so fucking pretty.” It was the kind of smile that made you want to rewrite everything you knew about someone entirely wrong for you.

The inside of the car smelled like pine and ash, and was speckled with cigarette bums. There was an open beer in the cup holder. A picture of the Virgin Mary and her child gazed serenely

from the dashboard. I wondered who the car belonged to.

“Take me for a ride? I don’t want to go home yet.”

“Where do you want to go?”

“Anywhere. Wherever.”

He yanked on the gearshift and pulled out quickly, making my body slide against the door. Someone honked from their SUV behind us, and Johnnie flipped them off through the window before speeding off through the parking lot.

“Light me up.” He leaned his head over towards me, and I touched the flame to his cigarette while looking ahead. We went over a speed bump and I felt myself lifted off my seat. I laughed, rolling down my window and letting the air sting the whites of my eyes and whip my dark hair into a tangled mess. There was always some god-awful feeling nesting inside me those days, in my throat and chest. For a moment I felt it fly out of me.

“Can you hold the wheel?” Before I could even respond he pulled out some weed and a glass pipe, and my heart lurched as I tried to keep us going in a straight line going sixty-eight miles per hour. We were going across a bridge now, and the car began to drift towards the railing. “What the fuck? Don’t you know how to drive?” He grabbed the wheel back and began coughing.

“I don’t have a driver’s license.”

He laughed then. “Well, shit. Neither do I right now. I lost my ID the other night.”

“Are you for real?” I wasn’t surprised.

The sun was slowly creeping out from behind what was left of the storm, a smattering of dusty purple clouds in the sky. Johnnie began to slow down a bit, squeezing my thigh through my pink cotton dress. Next to us was Lake Calhoun, blue and sparkling, and rows of gorgeous houses with high Tudor-style roofs and immaculate gardens. Then I thought of my family, and felt ashamed. I wondered if going home would ever feel normal. I imagined them, sitting down at the dining room table, my brother pushing the peas around his plate, my father sitting in comfortable silence, and my mother gossiping about work at the hospital. It was all so perfectly boring, but I couldn’t help but feel my throat burn at the thought of sharing a meal with them. I was too proud.

Johnnie gave another firm squeeze, and looked over at me.

“You okay over there?”

“Just thinking... Do you ever miss your mom?”

He looked taken aback, then annoyed. “I don’t know. Not really.” He flicked his cigarette out the window. “So what’s for dinner?”

“I’m making roasted eggplant and soup for everyone at the house. For whoever’s home, I mean.” I rolled up the window and bit my lip. I had been living off stale bread and oranges for days.

“Please tell me you liberated some meat too.”

It felt like we were going too fast now as we sped past several cars in the other lane. I began to feel anxious. “I didn’t liberate anything—I stole. Let’s not gussy it up. And the next time you feel like stealing food for everyone, feel free to take whatever you want.”

“So that’s how it is then. I guess the fact that I’m giving you a ride home doesn’t count for shit. That’s real nice.”

“You know I don’t eat meat.”

“Yeah, I am fully aware of that. Doesn’t mean the rest of us can’t eat like normal fucking people.” He was raising his voice now, and the anger was buzzing in the air like static. I tensed up, trying to stop myself from escalating the situation and remember his temper, which was beginning to simmer. I went quiet. He seemed to accept that I wasn’t going to fight him. “Baby, that’s just the goddamn cycle of life. It’s real cute and all that you care, but we’re supposed to eat animals. Survival of the fittest, whatever you want to call it.”

“Okay.”

He patted my leg, then he turned to look at me with what he thought were kind eyes. I had already decided to hate him for the remainder of the car ride. “You gotta think about this from a realistic standpoint. Human beings are—”

A dark shape darted from the corner of my eye, and then there was a horrible sound. It was the sound of sudden impact, of metal meeting animal. I felt the tire beneath me roll over something large. Johnnie wasn’t wearing his seatbelt and when he slammed on the brake he was thrown against the steering wheel. The groceries spilled across the velour car seat amongst the trash. Every inch of my skin seemed to vibrate, the fear of what had just happened was bubbling

inside my chest.

“Oh my god. Oh my god, what the fuck just happened?” It was my voice, but it sounded all wrong, like listening to a stranger. I felt all at once completely and utterly aware and somehow very far away.

Looking out the window I saw a young boy, maybe seven or eight, holding a blue leash. He was staring down beneath the car in terrible awe. I watched the image burn into the back of his skull and wished I could take it back. The corner of his lip twitched, then he looked at me with wide, brown eyes that were beginning to understand what he had just witnessed. We stared at one another for a long moment. His eyes began to shine, but he stood there not knowing what to do. None of us knew what to do.

I began to reach for the door handle with a shaky hand, then felt Johnnie grab my arm.

“Sit down.” He rubbed his beard and shook his head. “Fuck.”

“We have to get out, maybe there’s something we can do. Johnnie, we have to do something.” I began to cry, I felt all the anger and sadness radiating from that little boy. We had just killed something he loved, I could feel it. I reached for the door again and began to climb out, but was yanked back into the car by the hem of my dress. I felt it tear.

He grabbed me by my chin and turned my head towards him, making me look into his eyes, which were cold and hard. “Sit down. There’s nothing you can do.” A man peered from behind his front door and stepped tentatively outside. He looked at the boy, then looked at us, then down at the dog that was presumably dead. Johnnie put his foot to the pedal and we lurched forward down the street. Shaking, I looked at the rearview mirror as the boy ran to his dog, a pile of soft fur on the pavement.

“Oh god. We have to go back. We have to do something. Please, let’s go back.” But he clenched his jaw, his forehead covered in a thin sheen of sweat, and with a firm hand he clutched the beer and downed it in large gulps. We sat in silence, but the air felt alive around us in a terrible sort of way. I felt the tears drip from my chin onto my hands, laying clenched in my lap.

When we arrived at the house, the gravity of what had just occurred swallowed me up. Stanley was huddled by a rhododendron

bush, puffing smoke in short bursts, muttering to himself. He stopped mid-sentence and looked up at me with his blue eyes. I felt a state of complete acceptance and serenity emanating from him, like a soft aura. I wanted to ask him what it was he knew.

It was only when Johnnie called my name that I realized I had been standing in the middle of the yard, and that people were staring at me. He was holding the door ajar with his back, a bottle of bourbon in one hand and the groceries in another.

I watched myself drift towards him, and sit down at the kitchen table. I watched the gold liquid swirl in my glass, felt it run hot down my throat. The sensation of wanting to vomit brought me to reality, and I realized that people had heard us come in through the door and intuitively sensed that we were about to start dinner. I was no longer hungry.

Jessica came out in a stupor, still hungover from the night before. We had stayed up all night talking about men, birth control, and eyeshadow. It all seemed absurd at that moment. She said hello and sat at the table, giving me a quizzical look. Her pink hair reminded me of cotton candy, and her nails were always perfectly manicured. That day they were red and pointed, and she clicked them against the tabletop absentmindedly. Johnnie complimented her and offered her a glass of the whiskey, and it was like nothing happened. Jessica laughed. When she did, it was like she used her whole body. When I didn't join in, I could tell that my silence was making them uncomfortable.

Johnnie began to chop the vegetables while I quietly began to rinse the wild rice. The oil was heating on the stovetop, and the air was fragrant with the smell of shallots and sage. Others began to join the table; I felt someone touch my shoulder. Picking up the wooden spoon, I stirred the steaming broth one last time and then set everything on the table before turning to leave.

"What's up with her?" I heard Jessica mutter across the table. I felt everyone's eyes on the back of my neck. Johnnie's voice followed me as I turned to descend the staircase to the basement.

"I have no idea."

The air was thick and humid on my lungs, and I began to cry again. In the bathroom I leaned over the sink and saw my reflection.

It was like looking at myself for the first time, as if gazing into the face of a stranger. My eyes were raw from crying and my hair spilled around my shoulders in large snarls. The orchid had blown away somewhere during the car ride. I turned on the faucet and washed my face, then walked towards my room and let the trail of cold water run down my neck.

I lay down on the bed, and looked around at my few possessions—a floor length mirror, a dresser lined with nail polishes, and a pile of vintage dresses on a metal rack. I could hear the drunken chatter of my housemates above, but I felt so far away. I wanted to not care, to join them and get ragingly drunk, but something had cracked the facade I had constructed and it was beyond repair. Something had fallen away. We were on borrowed time anyway.

I picked up the phone, then set it back down beside me, curling into the blankets. I thought of the lawlessness of life, and the illusion of order I had once embodied. I thought of the Virgin Mary, and the coldness of religion, the hard lines between right and wrong. I thought of my parents, and about the boy and his dog. I wanted to go back; I wanted to do the right thing but I didn't know how. I wondered if there were some things you could never make right.

# It's a Disease

*Samantha DiMaio*

My limbs tingle,  
Like a cold fire spreading toward my nail beds.

Stomach rumbles and stabs at my insides—the origin of  
the flames.  
Extreme heat consumes my body.

Breaths shorten and become shallower and shallower,  
As if I'm trapped in a cloud of smoke  
Or drowning above water.

There's no escape,  
Yet nothing to escape from.

My mind is spinning with every thought I've ever had.  
Overwhelmed, I sink to the floor,  
Hug my knees in hopes of finding  
Relief.

Water fills my eyes,  
Like a kiddie pool to the brim,  
About to break.

A crack. A hole. A collapse. A flood.

What's happening? Am I dying? Is it a stroke? Food poisoning?  
Cancer?

Panic.

# Seeping Light

*Allison McHugh*



# Robin

*Grace Davis-Nicholson*

There is a Robin in my yard. A grey-backed robin with a vibrant, burnt orange underside. I read somewhere that the bright colors are to attract mates. But Robin's backs are grey to disguise them from predators. I wonder if that would work on people.

The Robin's wing is trapped underneath a rock. I wonder how she got trapped there. It is not an easy thing, to get trapped in such an open, bright place. Maybe a car driving by kicked a large chunk of gravel into my yard and onto the unsuspecting bird. Or maybe she pecked away at a smaller stone that the larger one was reliant on, a catalyst of sorts. Or maybe mother nature was playing a cruel joke and dropped one out of the sky. I wonder how her basic instincts did not tell her to move. I wonder what she did to deserve it.

I watch her squawk and jump, flapping her free wing. I can see the grey protective feathers tear as she strains against its weight. Then she tries to pick at the rock with her beak, as if she will be able to pick it apart, piece by piece. I wonder if she is a mother, and has babies to get back to. I wonder what they will do if she doesn't get free. She continues to go back and forth from picking to straining. She must long for the sky. I wonder if she knows that she needs the sky to be.

I don't know how long I stood, watching her. I'm sure if the neighbors have walked by to see me—frozen in my driveway, keys in hand, watching a bird struggle—they will soon stop inviting me to block events. All the more reason to hope they've seen me.

She is still fighting as I finally turn away and get in my car. Saturday is my day for chores. I like to save grocery shopping until the end. Saturday night in the store is like being the first one awake: peaceful and lonely. The drive seems longer than usual and I almost miss a turn. The air blasting from the front entrance of the store is cold, I notice the silence. I focus on my list. I need milk, apples, butter, and eggs—as I pick up the carton of eggs I see her. What

the fuck am I doing? I realize I need to go home. I have to save her. What was I thinking? Why did I leave that poor, helpless, thing stuck? What kind of a person lets someone die? I get in the shortest line with half of what I need.

“How are you, today?”

The clerk is older, friendly and kind. Her eyes are genuine. My lips automatically turn upwards as I go to respond. Suddenly I'm grasping, pulling at some emotion to put behind my eyes. Trying to grab a piece of me that cares about this old woman. I want to engage, to make a connection; to be. But it's so heavy and I don't have enough time. My words are boring and uninspired.

“Good! and you?”

Maybe my cheery tone fooled her. But by the way she lets the end of her sentences drop says otherwise. I wonder if she knew, if she could help. Try harder to connect, help me lift the weight. But no, it's not hers. She packs my bags and I attempt a smile. But the meaning is trapped. I'm too far away.

I rush home and jump out of my car. I'm not too late, she is still there, still moving, still alive. She is going to be okay. I gently lift the stone off her and she hops a few feet away from me out of alarm. She doesn't try to take off, just stares at me; beady, empty, eyes. I shoo at her with my hand.

“Go on, you're all right now.”

My words startle her, but she stays. Heat rushes up into my chest. If she wasn't going to fly away, if she just wanted to sit here and stare at me, why did I bother to save her? What's the point? Why doesn't she take what she fought so hard to get? Why did she fight to get nowhere? I get on to my feet. I can't help her if she won't help herself. Then, I see her trapped wing—its broken.

The heat disappears and now I am empty. Oh, I see. I understand. I understand why her eyes are empty. It must be hard to struggle so hard for something, only to be stuck despite it all. To move that rock and get nothing from it. To fight so hard to exist as you should, only to be nothing.

I understand. I look down at her, and pick up the rock. I hold it and there is a moment of hesitation. But to exist without being, is

a cruel hell. Her eyes lock with mine and she doesn't flinch when I drop it.

There was a Robin in my front yard.

## Salt: a Somanka

*Paige Buccola*

I am ashamed  
to venture into your desert eyes  
as rain cascades from mine. Please  
absorb it. It dries my thirst.  
I can taste it.

Look at me  
to be lost in my eyes though dry,  
a white-capped sea for you to dance on.  
I promise. I will bear it. Indeed  
my sands are made of you.



# Bastion

*Alexandra Balkovatz*



# Hiding in the Pews

*Matthew Williams*

**April 1, 2018**

My fingers caress the once-smooth pew brim, acknowledging every crack in the surface brought on by the decay of time. Surprising that this church still stands amid the recently reconstructed sprawl of one of the most earthquake-torn cities on the planet. Yet somehow, my half-day of exploration has brought me, at its end, to a man-made construct I have entered no more than three times since the fall of 2016. Stained glass windows that serve only to distract, a congregation barely surviving through a celebration of their beliefs, a choir pulpit without a choir, and a priest with no life or conviction behind his statements fulfill the recipe for my first self-imposed excommunication (I mean, who knew you could slow dance to “Canticle of the Sun?”). So why does my voice keep getting louder and my heart wider and my cheek muscles tighter? I dare not blame divine power because I still want free will and I gave up on finding His presence in churches long ago. Yet what else can explain this dopamine and serotonin imbalance that makes me think my depression is a choice? Like a ship passing by an island in an old castaway movie, or the last piece of pizza from a college dorm event, I somehow know that holding on in this godforsaken mess of a life is my only way forward. I just hope I have a good enough answer to the question that has haunted me since—

**March 18, 2014**

The static nature of my Confirmation sponsor’s pristine office unnerves me. Even the air molecules don’t move, stationary against my attempt to justify my belief in God with something more personal than 16 years of Sunday morning mass and 12 years of Catholic education to inundate Catholicism’s truth monopoly. I have

discovered the hell of good intentions on earth, formed by my bipolar sense of vulnerability expanding the space between us without either of us moving. No wonder I am the guy everyone respects instead of the first invite to Friday night parties. People make my home, books make my refuge, how else can you tear a person in half? Speaking of books, hers are organized perfectly alphabetically, like mine, suggesting a personality type too familiar, too distracting for me to answer any questions intelligently or truthfully. The desire to leave too great to ignore, the pressure to stay too great to defy, perhaps explaining the tension I feel on—

**November 22, 2018**

Pews again. Unyielding, yet unsupportive. Does breeze or bare feet induce constant shivering? Although I know the love that surrounds me, my diaphragm barely gives away enough to keep me awake, any chance at singing long forgotten. Even if my diaphragm could move, my shoulders, abs, and tongue would keep anything but whispers and screams from escaping. My body, the bowstring, separates heart and mind, keeps them apart to maintain my mind. The simple path my bandmates believe, denies too much experience to follow their lead. I try to speak, to confess my bisexual nature, but questions of acceptance keep me silent too long. If only someone could see past my raised cheeks to my iron jaw, maybe I could stop believing my confession is the final straw. How long must I persist to silence 19 years of Christianity, whispering that God can't possibly love me anymore? I have no more need to ask why God exists. Instead I ask why he made me like this? Morality confuses my eternal interior; no divine presence can help me choose well. Dr. Seuss wisdom may fill my mind, yet cannot change this endless, repeating rhyme.

## mask

*Sierra DeAtley*



# Downstream

*Sarah Kersey*

She skips rocks  
as if she's trying to inflict pain  
upon the river.  
She's been there for days,  
or maybe it's been eternities.  
Regardless, she's tired of sinking,  
tired of standing still  
in a stream that keeps abandoning her,  
that won't carry her out,  
out and away  
from the mundaneness of it all.  
So she throws stones  
as if they were ammunition  
against the rolling glass,  
hoping to make a dent  
in the unheeding waters  
that screams,  
"Goddammit, I was here  
and that should count for something."

# A World of Ants

*Teresa Yandl*

*2019 Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Awards  
2<sup>nd</sup> Place - Fiction*

I pressed up against the window of my door until I was as far away from Marlene's rancid sweat as I could get. Marlene, either oblivious or deliberately malicious, leaned toward me to fiddle with the radio settings.

"You drive an old man car." She said, turning up the bass as far as it would go. The windows shook even though I kept the volume low. "Your mama pick this car out for you?"

I shook my head. I had bought the car myself back when I was still in college. It was on its last legs, now. I had my eye on a little Ford Focus in the used car lot by my apartment. It was just a matter of time before I got that raise at work and could afford to splurge.

Marlene scoffed and sat back in her seat, absently pushing the seat adjustment buttons. Her other hand opened and closed on her thigh. Opened and closed. I wondered if she was going through withdrawal. Her friend hadn't said anything about drugs when she called me. Just that Marlene needed a ride.

I hadn't realized Marlene still had my phone number.

"Don't put your feet up like that." I said when Marlene kicked off her shoes and lifted her feet to rest against the dash. "If the airbag goes off, you could die."

Marlene didn't so much as twitch. "Don't crash, then, Chuckie," she said. "You worry too much anyways. That's your problem. You need to seriously chill." Her knees bounced up and down. Tiny jitters rattled her entire body against the faux leather seats.

Her toenails were long and yellow. The nail of her left big toe was ragged and I shuddered when Marlene reached up and started to

pick at it. “Marlene, I’m not kidding around. Put your feet down.”

She kept them up until the ragged nail broke and the top peeled cleanly away. As she lowered her legs she dropped the clipping onto the carpet of the passenger footwell. “Man, you’re a real wet blanket, Chuckie. What happened to you, huh?”

I hadn’t seen Marlene in nearly eight years. Her mom and my mom were sisters. When we were kids they used to get together all the time. Marlene and I would sneak out of the house while they watched their soaps and go to the convenience store at the corner. I’d buy Twizzlers and she’d get a Snickers and we’d sit in the parking lot and count the cars that passed, heading out of the city. Back then, Marlene wore Lisa Frank clips in her hair and told me that she was going to be a real famous singer someday. She said that when I got my spot in the NFL she’d sing the National Anthem before my first big game. I hated football.

Our grandma died when Marlene was fifteen and I was twenty. Her mom was a mess by then, drunk most times and mean the rest. My parents didn’t like to talk about what happened, but I was pretty sure it had something to do with Marlene’s dad. No one really mentioned him, though. Not even Marlene. After the funeral, Marlene and I snuck out the back while her mom was making a scene at the buffet table. We went to the convenience store and I bought Twizzlers and she bought a beer with a fake. She offered to share with me, but I said no. We counted cars until my dad came to find us.

“Nothing happened,” I said after a while. “I guess I just got older.”

“You need a girl, man.” Marlene told me, nodding her head sagely. “Someone to shake things up a bit. I know a couple girls you’d like. Want me to introduce you?”

I held up my left hand so that the gold caught in the street lights. The reflection flickered in Marlene’s glassy eyes. “Three years married. We sent you an invite.”

Marlene examined the ring critically, then shrugged. “Still could meet some girls.”

I gripped the steering wheel tight. My foot twitched on the gas

and the acceleration pushed me back against my seat. “No. Thank you.” I said.

Marlene shrugged and went back to playing with the window and tapping her hand against her thigh. The bass thumped and the windows shook and we sat silently. The El Dorado Park Golf Course stretched out to our left. It was lit by bright LED floodlights that made the green practically glow. It was the last nice thing off the highway before we got to Marlene’s neighborhood. Marlene sat up as we passed it.

“Listen, Chuckie, stay on the 605, would you? I’ve gotta get to El Monte.” She wouldn’t meet my eyes.

I accelerated again. Something sour pooled in my stomach. “El Monte’s forty minutes out of my way.” I said, already resigning myself to the drive. “You got someplace to stay out there?”

Marlene shrugged again. We passed the exit that would have transferred us to 15 and taken us to Commerce. I changed the radio to a late night talk show. Marlene changed it back. We didn’t really talk except when she told me what exit to take.

El Monte was green. Even in the summer, the grass and everything was fresh. I rolled down the windows when we got off the highway so that I could breathe past the stale stink of Marlene’s sweat. The air felt fresh and damp like dew.

Marlene told me which streets to turn down. The further we got from the highway, the more animated she started to get. She mostly talked about parties she’d been at. They all seem to have been hosted by someone *nearly* famous. Some rising star Marlene said I should keep an eye on. They blurred together a bit after the first five.

I tuned back in as we pulled into a tiny culdesac nearly twenty minutes off the highway. “Wouldn’t you like to go the Grand Canyon, Chuckie?” Marlene was saying, “Becky’s friend James has a house there. You know James? Jenner? He’s not directly related to *the* Jenners, but he is Aaron Bruno’s second cousin once removed on his mother’s side.”

I didn’t even know who Aaron Bruno was. “The Grand

Canyon's overrated." I told her. "Is this where I can drop you off?"

Marlene grinned and hopped out. "Thanks, Chuckie. We should do this again." The door slammed shut behind her. I watched her go stumbling up the sidewalk to one of the houses with a bitter taste in my mouth.

I waited while Marlene pounded on the door. The porch light flicked on. I couldn't see who opened the door. Marlene threw her hands up and started shouting something that I couldn't make out. I put the car back in drive, but kept my foot on the brake.

Someone inside the house reached out and thrust a duffle bag at Marlene. She took it and suddenly leaped forward, hands extended. Her fake nails gleamed like claws in the dim light. There were a few people shouting now. I couldn't separate the voices. I hesitated with my hand on the door handle but before I could get out, Marlene pulled away and stomped down the steps and back to the car.

"To your mom's?" I asked as she climbed in.

Marlene grunted and I pulled out of the culdesac and started back toward the highway. She kept her face toward the window and didn't protest when I changed the radio back to my talk show.

We had to stop for gas halfway back to Commerce. Marlene borrowed five dollars from me and went into the gas station store. It took her awhile to come back. I thought about calling someone while I waited. My wife, maybe, or my aunt. I didn't. It was late, I thought, and they were probably asleep. I shouldn't bother them.

When Marlene came back she had washed her face and changed. Her eyes were a bit clearer, now. She smelled like gas station soap: sick-sweet flowers almost overpowered by disinfectant. It was better than BO, though, so I kept quiet.

"Listen, Chuckie," Marlene said real slow as I started up the car, "I've been thinking. We should go to the Grand Canyon."

"We should get you back home." I said as we got back on the highway. "Grand Canyon's seven hours away. I've got work tomorrow."

Marlene shook her head. "Do you hear yourself sometimes? So what, you've got work. Skip. Everyone does it."

By which she meant, she does it. "Not tonight, Marlene. Let's just go home."

She clucked, bobbing her head absurdly and tucking her hands into her armpits to make mock wings. "Chi-chi-chi-chi-ken! Chicken Chuckie!"

"Quit it, Marlene. Stop that." I said, smacking at her when she started poking roughly at my arm.

Marlene sat back with a heavy sigh. "God, you always were such a chicken-shit. Even when we were kids, Chuckie. You know that?" She looked at me like she expected me to reply. I kept my eyes on the road. My fingers ached with the tension of clutching the wheel. "You ever do anything that was your own idea? Huh? Ever think for yourself? Mister I-can't-because-they-said-so."

When we were kids, Marlene had always been what my dad called spit-fire and my mom called just plain stupid. I can't remember a year when she didn't have a week or two of suspension and she was always in and out of detention. Usually out. Mom and Dad used to shake their heads and say they were lucky. Said that they were glad they had me and not a troubled kid like Marlene.

We were almost past the exit. I twisted the wheel, bumping over the double white lines and cutting in front of the car that was starting up the exit ramp. Marlene shrieked over the blare of their horns. "Jesus, Chuckie! What the fuck? What are you doing?"

I stopped at the intersection and unlocked the doors. The car behind me honked again, then went around. The driver peered out the passenger window, trying to see what crazy idiot had cut him off going eighty on the off-ramp. "Get the fuck out." I said, not even meeting Marlene's eyes.

She sat for a minute, staring at me. I clicked the unlock button again. The soft ke-chk of the mechanism startled us both. Marlene grabbed her bag and threw the door open, practically falling out of the car. When she slammed the door behind her, I shook.

In my rearview mirror, I watched Marlene walk away. She'd head East, then. Hitchhike to the Grand Canyon, maybe. It wasn't my problem. I could go home. Back to bed. I could pretend I never got that call.

I pulled off at the next exit and parked my car in an empty park'n'ride. I held my phone in my hands for a long time before I called my wife. She said a lot about my generous spirit and familial duty, but she said it in a way that I knew meant she was angry and that she wanted me home. I told her I loved her and she hung up.

I called my work.

Marlene was a tiny silhouette walking along the side of the highway. Her bag kept slipping down her shoulder and she walked a bit lopsided to make up for it. When I pulled onto the shoulder, she climbed in and turned the radio back to her music station without even pausing to buckle. I let her.

I drove for a few hours. Eventually, I pulled over and bought us some McDonald's. Marlene and I switched places and I slept.

I woke up to a gunshot. Or that's what it felt like. Marlene screamed and the car bucked wildly. I jerked up and grabbed the wheel, holding it steady when Marlene let go to put her hands over her face. "Brake!" I screamed, steering us onto the shoulder. "Brake, Marlene!"

She slammed on the brakes and we skidded to a stop. For a minute, we sat breathlessly still. The road was dusty and I couldn't tell if the tires were smoking or if we had just stirred up a cloud of dust. Marlene began to laugh.

I got out of the car before I could give in to the temptation to smack her. We'd blown a tire. I didn't have a spare. I called AAA and leaned against the hood while I waited for them to arrive. Marlene joined me and lit up a cigarette. She offered one to me, but I said no, thank you.

The mechanic said that when the tire blew, something went wrong with the axle. He could fix it, he said, but it would be a few hours. I needed coffee, so Marlene and I went to the cafe just down the street.

It was quiet, like a ghost town. We were just an hour out from the Canyon but the streets were empty. When we went into the cafe, the bell over the door nearly startled me.

A fat old lady with crimson hair poked her head out of the

kitchen as we came in and waddled out to the front with a grin. "Welcome, visitors!" She said. Her voice was shrill and nasal. "Welcome to Polly's Cafe!"

"You Polly?" Marlene asked, sauntering up to the counter.

The woman nodded and smiled. She looked like a bobblehead. "How can I help you, dear?" she asked, looking between me and Marlene. I wouldn't meet her eyes. I wished I had stayed at the mechanic's.

Marlene ordered a coffee and a cinnamon roll, then looked back at me. I got a small black coffee and paid for our orders. Polly rang us up, chatting the whole time about the weather. "And you're in luck because mid-season we usually get a bit of rain, but this week is set to be lovely." She concluded as I signed the receipt. "Here, dears, you two sit at the bar. We can chat while I fix this up for you!"

We sat. Marlene grabbed a sugar packet from the tray and began tapping it against the counter like a maraca. "Say, Polly," she said, watching the woman with beady eyes. "You know a James Jenner that lives around here?"

Polly thought for a moment before finally deciding that no, she didn't know anyone named Jenner. Was Marlene quite sure that he lived near Jacob Lake?

Marlene shrugged. "He's got a house. A real nice house." She said, like that meant something.

Polly hemmed and hawed and gave us our coffee. "He might live over near the Skywalk, then. It's so close to those big cities that a lot of well-to-do folk settle near there." She looked at me conspiratorially, "Not me, you know. Too much fuss out West. I much prefer the quiet life here on the North Rim."

Marlene scowled. Now that it was light, I noticed that her face was pockmarked all over. The shadows under her eyes were so dark that they were almost skeletal. When she frowned, she looked like a villain from a stop-motion film. "How far's the Skywalk from here? Couple hours?" She asked.

Polly laughed. "Oh no, dear! It's about seven hours west of here."

My laughter bubbled out of me like carbonation. I didn't

mean to. It felt like I would burst if I didn't. Marlene glared like she wanted to punch me, but I couldn't stop. I laughed until I was gasping for breath and even Polly looked a little unsettled.

"You don't even know—" I gasped, "where he lives!"

Marlene really did punch me this time. Hard. On my arm. "You shut up, Chuckie!" She said shrilly, "You shut up now. You hear?"

Our breakfast was mostly silent after that. Marlene picked at her cinnamon roll and I sipped my coffee and Polly watched us both out of the corner of her eye. I kept having to hold back giggles that tried to escape whenever I thought of Marlene driving in the dark, in the wrong direction.

When we finally finished, I pushed my cup back and hopped off my stool. "I'm going to wait at the mechanic's. As soon as they finish, we're going home."

"Home!" Polly cried, clutching her hands to her chest like my words had wounded her. "You only just got here! Don't you want to see the Canyon?"

"Come on, Chuckie." Marlene wheedled, apparently forgiving me for my laughter in the face of this new distraction. "We've come all this way."

I crossed my arms over my chest. "It's a seven hour drive home, Marlene. It'll be another two hours before the mechanic finishes. I'm not adding two more hours of driving on top of that."

Polly clapped her hands, face easing into a wrinkled smile. "Oh, dear, is that what's got you in a tizzy? Why don't you take the shuttle bus? It runs every hour to the viewing platform and back. You can get there and back before your car is done!"

I shook my head. "I don't think so."

The bus was stuffy and the engine roared and sputtered over the rough roads. Marlene sat up front, talking to the driver, but I sat in the middle with my head pressed against the window. I wished I'd never gotten out of bed yesterday. I wished I'd never answered my phone.

I wondered if my wife guessed what I'd done or if she thought I was dead in a ditch somewhere. I pulled out my phone, half thinking to text her, but I didn't have service. I put it back. Outside, scraggly trees grew in clusters. Their trunks twisted and bent around themselves, knobbled shadows in the expanse of packed dirt.

The driver finally pulled to a stop next to a tall pole with a bright purple flag on top. There was a metal bench next to it and not much else. Marlene and I got off.

There were a couple wooden sign posts with arrows pointing in all different directions. I stepped up to read them. "Lookout (.01)" one read and "Bright Angel Point (.5)" was another. I pointed toward the lookout. "Unless you want to take a hike," I offered Marlene, "We've got an hour."

Marlene scoffed. "Not in these shoes, Chuckie." She said, sticking out her leg to show off her strappy sandals. The straps were too tight for her feet and her skin stuck out around them like my mom's Sunday pork roast in its roast netting.

We walked up the short path toward the lookout platform. It was all uphill and, even though they had cut stairs, I still felt like I was moments from sliding all the way back to the bottom. Marlene followed behind me, panting like a bellows.

When I finally got to the top, I was so focused on catching my breath that it took me a minute to take in what I was seeing.

Everyone's seen pictures of the Grand Canyon. It's big and red and goes for ages. Cool for geologists and tourists, I thought, not for anyone with more than two brain cells to rub together.

I'd never wondered, before, what it would be to be an ant. This. This felt like I was about to fall up, up, up into the sky. Like the world was too big to keep me down and I'd just float away if I didn't hold on to something. I gripped the rail in front of me.

Marlene whooped. "Aw, Chuckie! Aw, man, look at you! You scared, Chuckie? You all green!"

I shook my head. I didn't look at her. I didn't want to look away from the Canyon in case it swallowed me. I'd never felt so small.

She threw her arm around my shoulders. "See, Chuckie! I told

you! I told you. The Grand Canyon, huh. You ever seen anything like this before?”

I shook my head again and shrugged her off. She laughed and went to sit at the bench in the middle of the platform that they have for old people and for kids.

We were sitting quiet for maybe forty minutes. Marlene had pulled up a game on her phone and the tinny pings it made echoed softly in the open air. I was still trying not to fall away. Finally, Marlene stood. “Well, Chuckie—”

“Charles.” I said, cutting her off completely. I kept one hand on the railing and turned to look at her. Somehow things felt both worse and better when my back was to the Canyon. “I hate being called Chuckie. I hate it. I’ve always hated it.”

Marlene reeled back. She opened her mouth to say something, but I felt braver now than I think I ever had in my life.

“I never liked football. I don’t understand it, I hate playing it. Football culture is idiotic and—and,” I paused, it was hard to breathe. “And you’re never going to be famous. You keep going to these parties, but none of them are going to be famous either. You have to have talent to be famous.”

She slapped me. I’d never been slapped before. It hurt more than I expected. When I put my hand up to touch my cheek, it came away wet. Marlene’s fake nails had gouged my cheek.

Marlene left. I went back to gazing out at the Canyon. I heard the bus come, then I heard it leave. I went down to the little bench they use as a station and sat down. I thought to get my phone out and play a couple games while I waited but, when I went to grab it, my pockets were empty.

I remembered Marlene putting her arm around me. I thought I’d be angry, but deep inside I still felt too small to be much of anything. I sat on the bench beneath the purple flag and rested my head in my hands.

## Loose Tooth

*Grace Nakahara*





# The Black Woman

*Olivia Antoine*

In the darkness of the night  
The only thing moving are the hands of the black woman.  
The feet, tired and bleeding  
The hands, worn and calloused  
The black woman is the unrecognized laborer of the people  
At the sight of the black woman you are not able to grasp  
The strength that lies in the seam between her sweat and her skin

I know that I am made from the generations before me  
What will I choose  
The allure of expectations or the beauty of surpassing them  
The skin of the black woman or the history behind it  
Hate slashes the black woman  
Empowerment fills the scar

# How to Spell God

*Anonymous*

Hands shaking, gripping the wooden legs of the table, I am hiding from my grandparents. My grandmother's steely grip on my forearms and my grandfather's golden watch that I can hear ticking when he places his hand on my head to say hello. I have only been to church once, when I was very young, very small, and I was very scared.

To see the benches all lined up along walls of stained glass that make my sister's hair look green and blue, to hear the hymns, and to think they are speaking a different language from mine, something that I will never understand.

For my father, a silver watch this time, and for my mother, a book of poems that will bring her closer to God.

And before family dinners, we all join hands and bow our heads to respect our God, to be grateful and loving and obey his rule. I bow my head to show my father I am listening and that I will fold my hands in my lap when I am done and I will be grateful.

Yet I still neglect the duty of tending to my sins. To watch my father and my mother slowly slip their crosses behind their bed, gradually bury the books of salvation, and accept that there is no Holy Ghost revolving in my head.

Sometimes I believe in Him, a belief tied only to my desperation that someone will hear me.

Is it okay that I fear my grandparents? Is it okay that I will never forgive my father, and that I will never love my mother again? Is it okay, God? Are you listening, God? Why don't I believe in you, God?

Is it okay that I don't believe in you, God?

To wander through the halls of my childhood home at night, and to wonder why my parents gave in, why they gave up, and why they left. To cry and to bleed onto the bathroom tiles, hearing the whir of my mother's tubes in the other room, the cancer eating her

away, while my father dances across country borders and ignores my calls.

My mother is dying, God. Can you hear me?

Grandmother, can you hear me? Why haven't you said goodbye yet, to your own daughter? You let her lay here, and suffer alone, while she desperately misses you, typing your number into her phone only to realize you will never speak to her again. Is this what God told you to do?

To join hands at family dinners, and pray to our Lord and Savior, someone I have never believed in, to know that my father and mother lay in his protective hands of love, and to know that I was never taught how to pray. To neglect my own salvation, my own redemption, and to understand that I will never believe in my parent's God. I will never believe in your God, simply because every time I prayed to him, I got no answers, except my own hands, my own heart, and the will to continue to care for the people who abused my innocence and childhood.

Thank you, God, for your patience, your kindness, and for your acceptance of my deepest confession. And to remember, wearing my sister's dress and sitting underneath the kitchen table, to fall asleep in a glorious room with high arches and people singing, and to ask my father how to spell god. G-O-D. G-O-D. That is how you spell God, with a capital G.

I am sorry. I will never speak your word.

## After Work

*David Landoni*

*2019 Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Awards  
1<sup>st</sup> Place - Poetry*

You're alone in your apartment, your bed,  
a living room, another empty space,  
another day exchanged, exhale to exhale.  
You turn on the TV. Rich and warm and red,  
cool blues and green take turns, face parade

Word motes across the room      they're yours      to pare  
away layer after layer, until  
it's you and nothing      but a sweet, dim sound

like flowers before their meanings      petals carried  
on waters that      once      ran deep      and still

# Red Spur

*Judge Thomas Kearns*



# A Liberal Walks into Cabela's

*Kevin Carr*

Cabela's with my hands in my pockets. I'm wearing skinny jeans and Toms shoes, a carefully-pressed, button-up short sleeve and not an ounce of camouflage. Google "awkward" and you will see me, the hipster caricature of a thirty-something progressive liberal, nervously loitering near a retail display of tactical scope covers.

If you're unfamiliar, each Cabela's store is about the size of a Walmart Supercenter. Outside, there is generous parking for trucks, RVs, and boats—room for the oversized herd to imperiously graze along the asphalt, radiating territorially at the lesser, more compact animals. Looking at the sign on the building one sees a slogan: "World's Foremost Outfitter." The marketing fits, but one might imagine a more appropriate slogan to be "America's Rural Disneyland." In fact, Disneyland's Big Thunder Mountain (may it rest in peace) comes to mind as one walks inside the cavernous retail space and finds similar aesthetic tones and textures; the major difference is, of course, that Cabela's offers air conditioning and Big Thunder Mountain had Democrats. Take it in. Look closer. One discovers Cabela's is more than just a place to pick up ammo or try on waders. For weary conservatives facing persecution day in and day out via the progressive ideologies of left-wing politicians and the PC armies of social media, Cabela's offers cultural validation. It is a church. A safe space. Believers come here to freely worship and tithe.

Today, I have come for a gun.

No surprise. As I walk inside the first thing I notice are the guns. In Cabela's, guns hang on the walls like telecasters in a Guitar Center. Here, however, they are locked behind counters and guarded by alpha males. But the second thing I notice is that there are more dead animals in the store than living humans. "It is a lovely room of death," Ace Ventura would say, and it's true. The taxidermic

menagerie is grandiose and impressive as dead animals scatter into a faux landscape of boulders, trees, bushes and streams. I find myself wanting to touch the stuffed bighorn sheep and I wonder about its origin. A sign tells me not to pet the animals.

Camouflage is king at Cabela's. Its cabal insists that proper hunting apparel requires the use of camouflage, but only a small percentage of the store's inventory can be labeled as active wear. Casual camouflage for the football/backyard BBQ season is apparently a big thing. And don't forget the accessories: camouflaged coffee cups and keychains. These seem like the last thing anyone would ever want blending into the surrounding scenery, but what do I know?

Off to the right I see a food court. I imagine elk burgers, bunny kabobs, and Bambi sausage, but it's probably just cow burgers and fries. To the left, on the other side of the store is a customer service booth. There, management wants me to become a member of some club. Something about loyalty. I avoid it for fear they'll make me take a citizenship test.

As I begin to browse for my gun, I realize I have no idea what I am doing or how I am supposed to do it. How does one "try out" a gun? Does one test it out by aiming and pulling the trigger? Can a shopper ask a worker to stand in the distance and act like a deer? "Here, put this twig in your mouth." Is there a mirror nearby, one wonders, to see how it looks and if it matches one's body type and/or general sense of style? Surely gun design is not entirely utilitarian. There must be some aspect of self-image found in the shopper's source code. My theory is proven when I see a pink handgun. Next to it is a steel handgun with, yes, a camouflaged grip. But the gun I am looking for is neither of these.

I look above the counter to the rifles on the wall and I am lost.

"I am looking for a Henry .22 rifle," I say, and for a brief moment I wonder if any of the words that came out of my mouth made any sense at all. Thankfully, the man behind the counter nods his buzz-cut and I follow him towards a display of what looks like shiny, brand-new guns. I see I have made my first mistake.

"Used?" I ask.

"Oh," he says. "You want the gun cave."

"The gun cave?"

"Gun cave." He points. The used guns, he explains, all of them are in the gun cave. I walk over and I find a small room with the affectation of a World War II bunker. Upon entering, however, I soon wonder if I've stumbled into a museum exhibit. Here, used guns are propped behind plexiglass in well-lit racks that line the room. Make no mistake, the gun cave is awe-inspiring. I stand paralyzed. My motionlessness reminds me of squinting at the sky as a child while biplanes pass overhead, and I experience that exhilarating reminder of a whole world full of views and people and agendas and skills and hobbies that are not my own.

I see one of his guns.

The Mosin-Nagant is a glorious WWII-era, Soviet rifle. This one really does belong in a museum, or so I hear Indiana Jones say in my head. Instead, this archaic gun, once carried by exhausted hands through trenches and up ravines, sits here on the floor of a Cabela's waiting to capture the interest of wandering collectors on their lunch breaks. I am wandering, but I am no collector. These guns were my grandfather's.

I see another familiar one, his 12-gauge shotgun, a beautiful Smith and Wesson with mahogany finish. Next to that sits his all-black Mossberg 12-gauge. And next to that is the 20-gauge, also black. I rest my hand on the plexiglass.

Someone approaches. His nametag is white with—you guessed it—camouflage text. It reads *Jeremy*. His smile is welcoming, but one can never be certain under the nebulous light of the gun cave. When he says, "You need some help," I wonder if this is a question or a statement.

"You had a big purchase come in," I say. "Yesterday? An older woman with a Subaru full of guns." Jeremy's only response is a disappearing smile. From a general lack of confidence, I look away and continue to browse. The ground feels like moving coins, and I worry I have awoken Smaug. We are certainly sizing each other up. I

leave a smudge mark on the plexiglass.

“Maybe you weren’t working yesterday,” I say.

“No, it was me. About 20 guns. Helluva lot of paperwork.”

Jeremy rests his body against the wall with his arms crossed. He is reminding me that he is more comfortable here than I am. Jeremy is in control. He talks with a chewing-tobacco accent, but I don’t see the bump. I don’t see my gun, either. “It was a fair sale, you know. Gave her a good price, and she was motivated.”

*She was grieving, is what she was doing.* But I don’t say that. Instead, I say: “I’m looking for a Henry .22. Pump rifle, I think is what they call it.”

“The Henry?” He’s genuinely surprised. A hint of a smile returns. Perhaps I would be surprised, too; I find out later it is certainly the cheapest gun of the lot. “It’s over here,” he says, leading me to another grotto of the cave.

Somewhere, my dead grandfather is laughing his ass off.

Work hard, shoot guns, and vote Republican. He would tell me this during dinner, while driving me to my friend’s house, in line for groceries, all the time, every day. Occasionally he would rant about unemployment benefits and food stamps and all those slackers taking advantage of the system. Despite my grandfather’s best efforts, however, I came out the other side of his GOP working man’s idealism as a progressive realist who votes independent. I found my own philosophical and political path and I like to think that made my grandfather proud. I know the truth: it infuriated him. When all was dead and done, I think he would have preferred I think, act, and vote like he did. He would’ve wanted me to take the path he had cleared for me.

I think all grandchildren feel the pressure of wanting to please their grandparents. I tried my best to show him that, yes, I was his disciple. That he was *right*. That the world had gone mad and that guns weren’t the problem with society. But the truth is I came to believe the exact opposite. I just couldn’t help it. It wasn’t my friends’ fault. It wasn’t the liberals in Hollywood. It wasn’t my liberal arts education, either. I reached a conclusion that guns—while

certainly not the root of evil—had become evil’s favorite tool.

My grandfather died of cancer. When I came back to his house, after he passed, I entered his empty bedroom and counted 25 guns. We are still finding ammo throughout the house.

Jeremy hands me the Henry. It is a small simple gun. Nimble. Lacking all the weight that I wanted to feel. Someone with a different world view might say this is a gun for a child.

“It was my grandfather’s,” I say. I attempt to explain the situation. I mumble through a pitiful story about my grandfather passing and my grandmother selling the guns. Maybe I am fishing for a discount, I don’t know. “He asked me to take the things, you know. But I couldn’t do it. I just…”

“So, you’re buying it?”

“This Henry, you see, we all got it for him for Christmas one year. He—”

Jeremy hands me an iPad with a form full of questions. “That’s nice,” he says. “Stop me when you get to question 22.b.”

Before long, the form will be filled and I will be ushered out of the gun cave and back into the bright, piercing lights of Cabela’s primary shopping area. At checkout, different men with whom I have no rapport will double check that I am who I say I am. They will search me in some database. They will make me wait a long time, purposefully, perhaps, to see if I start fidgeting and acting suspicious. I will leave the store with my grandfather’s gun, and I will cry in the parking lot.

But before any of this happens, I remain in the gun cave for what will surely be the final time, and I realize I am once again leaving my grandfather behind me. I find that this was never a museum at all, but a mausoleum. A strange tomb. His guns surround me like the stalactites of memory, and in a fantastic bout of earnest fantasy, I hear his voice. It comes from the Ruger, his Ruger, and it’s lecturing me on WWII history. The Remington chimes in and it drones on about the Democrats. A Smith and Wesson laments the

middle class of the 50s. The Marlin reminds me to work hard and to take care of my grandmother. The Winchester laughs about water skiing on the Colorado River. The Henry gives an impression of how I used to talk as a child.

“Do you need any ammo?” they will ask me at checkout.

“No,” I will say. “I am a pacifist.”

And with the courage of all grieving grandchildren, I will take my plowshare and find my way back home.

# Rain Drop

*Eleanor Johnson*



# sunflower

*Molly Gianarelli*

I fell in love in the Star Bar bathroom  
Pink tiles, fluorescent lights  
We were picture perfect for a fleeting moment  
Models in our own rights

I scrape the residual love from beneath my fingernails  
Left over from holding on so tight  
Trying not to let it slip away

# Q&A: Visiting Writers Series

*Elena Passarello*

Elena Passarello is an actress, writer, and recipient of a 2015 Whiting Award. Her first collection *Let Me Clear My Throat* (Sarabande, 2012), won the gold medal for nonfiction at the 2013 Independent Publisher Awards and was a finalist for the 2014 Oregon Book Award. Her essays on performance, pop culture, and the natural world have been published in *Oxford American*, *Slate*, *Creative Nonfiction*, and *The Iowa Review*, among other publications, as well as in the 2015 anthologies *Cat is Art Spelled Wrong* and *After Montaigne: Contemporary Essayists Cover the Essay*. She lives in Corvallis, Oregon and teaches at Oregon State University.

*Q: Why creative nonfiction?*

A: I think my imagination needs boundaries. I think [creative nonfiction is] more fun, like those games where they give you a bunch of letters and you try to make as many words as you can, versus “here’s a piece of paper, draw something.” I also really like the world. I want to stay in it and I like knowing it. And I think creative nonfiction allows you to think about the world, talk about the world, learn about the world, and have an authority to seek those things out. I think that’s part of it. I like thinking. I like talking to people who are processing things. I also think creative nonfiction steals from the other genres in great ways. So they steal lyric essay stuff from poetry, and they steal literary journalism stuff from journalists, and all the great scene work of fiction. I like that, too. I like that it’s kind of like the Wild West of genres. I feel there are a lot of rules in the other things, and with nonfiction I feel like you can be a little wilder. There are not as many boundaries.

*Q: When you do these visiting writer gigs, are there common questions that you get asked?*

A: One time I was asked “who would win in a fight between a grilled cheese sandwich and a taco?” I think it’s got to be the taco if it’s hard shell, but if it’s soft shell then it has to be the grilled cheese. I’ve only been asked that once though.

I usually get asked research questions. I think people are afraid and think that the research I put into my book is some kind of Herculean effort, like I’m a pilot or something, like I know how to keep a plane in the sky. I mean I have a responsibility to my sources, but I think that people ask those questions because they think that there must have been some major preparation and vetting, but really I just keep finding people who can help me find resources, and if I have questions I either find the answers myself or I find people who can help me find the answers. The process is long and arduous but it’s easy to ask for help and read and then just take crazy notes.

*Q: When you write, do you write in spurts or is it a careful sentence by sentence process?*

A: It is very careful sentence by sentence. I do a ton of research and then I very slowly write the essay. And it doesn’t matter if I do it sentence by sentence, by the time I get to the end I have to review the whole thing. But while that essay is getting started, sometimes if I have kind of looser, wilder thoughts, I always have another notebook or something nearby, that I can kind of explore the details in, like, “I’ve been really thinking about this,” or “What are the options here?” I have a backstage writing process that I use pen or a pencil for, and then I have the performance on the page, which is really slow.

*Q: When it comes to revision, what does it look like for you?*

A: I spend a lot of time revising. Usually there’s like a global revision where I look at the argument of the piece, the way that it’s

kind of coming together, and I do a kind of revision that way. And then I do a deep dive into fact checking where I look at the different concepts and make sure they’re essentially true, that’s when I’ll often call somebody. Like for my Mozart essay, I called a musicologist I had met. Sometimes when I’m revising, I’ll realize that there are certain sections that are too long, or I’ll give myself a challenge if it feels like wrong still. I’ll be like, “can I write this essay in a thousand words?” “What would this essay look like if I added something new to the beginning?” I’ll just sort of poke at it. That’s the third revision. It feels very important, more important than drafting, but you have to draft because you have to make something to revise.

*Q: How long does it usually take you to revise?*

A: About a month maybe. It depends on when my deadline is.

*Q: What’s your favorite piece that you’ve written?*

A: Well there’s like three different kinds of favorites. There’s the thing that ended up delighting other people. There’s the thing where I still love the subject matter, like the fact this historical thing existed. There’s the thing that you think maybe you did your best writing on, and then there’s the thing that was just a real challenge, and you’re just so proud of yourself for finishing it.

The thing that I’m just proud of myself for finishing is the rhinoceros essay, which just required a lot of work and thought. It was hard, and I think its super flawed, but I did it and I’m happy about that. I really wanted to write at least one time before I died an essay where I kind of got out of the way and let the facts do the work, like remove the narrative. It was really hard, but I also wrote this essay about elephants. It’s very long, required a ton of research, and then it’s just put together like this timeline, so maybe that’s the writing thing. The subject matter that I love... there’s too many, there’s so many great ones, I wrote this one about a cuckoo bird that I love because they’re so great, and I was just so excited about everything that I learned about them. But I really think I could name like six



essays in there. And then the one that was just the big hit, I think it is the most Mozart starling or the spider, which is really fun to talk about readers' experiences with those things. It's fun when you write something and it makes you able to communicate with people more. I like that.

*Q: Do you have any advice to people getting ready to apply to MFAs?*

A: Know the programs. This is more controversial than that but I would have a hard time understanding why someone would want to go into a program that put them into a significant amount of debt. Some people say don't, only apply to programs that are fully funded. I wouldn't go that far, but there's a certain amount of student loans that you could probably make up with the kind of jobs you can get with an MFA, and then I bet it's under \$10,000. So, if you have to take a couple of loans out, by all means do it, but those programs where you're going to be 20, 30, 40 thousand dollars in debt, there are too many other good programs out there.

*Q: Last question. I want to know what your favorite books are.*

A: I love *The Sound and the Fury*. Then there's *Teaching a Stone to Talk* by Annie Dillard. I'm also a big fan of James Baldwin's *Notes of a Native Son*. I read that about a billion times. And then there's a lot of plays: I love plays. I love *The Tempest* and *No Exit*. I love all of Samuel Beckett's plays. I love this playwright named Paula Vogel, and my favorite playwright is probably this woman named Caryl Churchill. I think I'm more likely to have a favorite play than a favorite book.

# A Day in Dover

*Maya Fletcher*



# The Faery Garden

*Alex Clay Hutchings*

Dark becomes the day  
In the garden of the fae,  
Casting rays of luminescence  
On their playful cabaret.  
Scintillating, twinkling,  
Setting bronzy bells a-clinking,  
Tending flowers in the hours  
That the glittery sun is winking.  
Then the day becomes the dark  
In the faeries' verdant park,  
Sleepy weary wings a-wilting,  
Eagerly waiting for the lark.  
But while the leering owl is perching,  
Where the gloom is dimly lurking,  
Faeries flit in airy dreamland  
And let the shadows do their working.

# Dead Man Walking

*Peter Jonas*

I look in the prismatic reflection of a low window. Glasses, long hair, and a small mustache look back. I can hear what my dad would say right now if he were standing here next to me, some joke instantly queued up like “Guess you never heard of the fifth beetle”. Fitting. Below I look like I can tell you about craft beer with my ripped flannel and a red puffy over it. Black pants. And then the shoes. They are worn like old books. White high top Nikes that are spattered with patches of use and have sunshine smile creases to show where they’ve been. You know the type—where the edges fray and split and the fabric’s true colors peer through the outer shell. Those shoes act like they have something to prove. They make me step a little wider, saunter a little slicker, pop my heel out when it needs to speak up. They have life in them.

But they aren’t really my shoes. I mean, now they are, but only because I say so. A year or so ago I’d found them waiting in a basement box like unopened Christmas presents. And at first I didn’t know where they had come from. Just some cool kicks in a box. Suddenly, murky memories of them came clawing up from the back of my mind. My dad, stretching out on his backswing, leaning back with his feet ratcheted in, and hanging upside down to stretch out his tight back. He’d always need to stretch in the morning and then use the backswing in the evening or at night. After he would get home from work, I would creep down the stairs to get a glimpse at the phenom. Inverted, he looked like he was some sort of action hero, like Indiana Jones or someone when they get captured by the bad guy and are all tied up over a volcano. And those shoes were there, holding his ankles in place under the grips of the backswing, all that kept him from falling into the fire. His face would scrunch up as he arched his back and he’d breathe out a slow breath of either relief or pain, but I never really could tell which.

Stilled for a second, in that basement with that box with his

shoes in my hands, I unwrapped them as if they were glass slippers.

And I'm a year ahead, standing by a window on campus, but they still don't fit. They're not my shoes. No matter how I wear them, they'll always belong in that one place of my dad on his backswing.

Cocking my head I can see the waves of hair curl up at my shoulders and the ink stains on my left hand. My pants rolled themselves up, so they wouldn't bother the shoes. And those shoes way down there look confused like a dog waiting for its owner when a stranger walks in the door. Sometimes I wonder if I should even wear them. If maybe walking around in another man's shoes is sacrilegious or something. It's clearly not so much of an issue of permission as it is sizing. A shoe grows accustomed to a foot. They belong to it. With time and pressure an imprint-fossil is left in the rubber to stay for the next million years, and I can feel that fossil now underneath the arch of my foot, digging into all the wrong places.

I wonder, if all those years ago my dad looked in mirrors. If he glanced by windows on campus and held up his father's old World War II uniform to himself, maybe sported his army helmet out every once in a while. All the students would whisper how retro and slick he looked in that helmet as he casually strolled to class. I look down at my shoes and they feel just as out of place. They don't look like it—I said feel. To every other kid I pass they're just some old shoes. Just some old shoes. I want to yell at them and force them to look at where they've been. They're not just shoes. They're not just some old shoes. They're like Lincoln's shoes, or John Lennon's, or a saint's. They're not supposed to be worn lightly like this.

Maybe they weren't even important to him. Maybe like the scraps of texts and plates we find buried for thousands of years, they were just the lucky ones to survive. All the jewelry of Pompeii was probably held in the arms of those braced for impact and the expendables were the ones left deep in cellars to endure, but my fossil shoes are relics to me. They bring back unexpected scents of him. A flash of him reaching up to smell a Lilac bush. Shooting hoops right when he got back from work. Hiking and his pair of

jumbo binoculars.

I see a guy standing in some action hero shoes in the window. They don't quite fit right, but that's okay. Above I got my black pants, ripped flannel, and red puffy, which fit fine but just don't change the way I walk. My hair is long, longer than my father's ever was. Looking at all this is nice, but I'd better be on my way. I've got places to go, heels to pop, and some shoes to fill.

# hedgehog

*Sophia Maggio*



# The Virtue of Courage

*Kylie Urbanek*

I grew up in a small town. I lived in the hills.

I used to roll down those hills, grass stained, sunshine filled.

So did Meredith.  
Eating linzer tarts.  
Jam spilling out.

I was not a fan of raspberry.  
I remember telling her that right before she moved.  
Where is she now?

Maine. With lavender fields that sprawl forever.

I might've missed her when she left but little kids forget easily.

I saw her name on the news the other day.  
And I wondered if I could've saved her.

Do you think she would've stayed if I had told her I liked raspberry?  
Do you think that Maine treated her well?

I hoped that she had fallen in love.  
I hoped that she had tasted summer and snow and rain.

When we were 6, Meredith gave me a silver ring  
For my birthday.

Sisters.  
She thought we were sisters and rings made us related.

That ring laid on my windowsill for years  
untouched  
before I threw it away.  
I wondered if I had saved it, would I have saved her as well?

People tell me that courage is a virtue.  
But it feels like a burden.

Too much courage,  
Not enough.  
Too much life,  
Not enough.

Deception Pass,  
That's the bridge.

It's far.  
Nowhere near Maine.  
Nowhere near home.  
Nowhere.

I loved the beach  
I loved conquering the mountains  
And forests and fire.

Meredith taught me to love all of that.  
She lived for it.

I hate bridges  
And rushing white water  
And the taste of salt.  
And loss.

Meredith taught me to hate all of that. And now.  
It's been six years.

I still hate bridges  
And I still wonder  
Could I have saved her.

# Lefse

Emma VanderWeyst

*2019 Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Awards*

*1<sup>st</sup> Place - Nonfiction*

Cookies are the crowning glory of Christmas in my family. Each year we whip up at least seven kinds as, my mom insists, all good Norwegians do. Creamy chocolate kisses burst out of soft peanut butter dough. Pumpkin cookies made with six sticks of butter. Rich chocolate fudge covered in crunchy bits of candy cane. And lefse. Always lefse.

Every year, my grandma brings her huge lefse iron and bowls of pre-made potato dough from her house to ours. Lefse, a crepe made of potatoes, flour and milk, is a staple of the Norwegian Christmas table. As a toddler, I climbed onto a kitchen chair to flip the light pancakes on the griddle, counting five bubbles as the signal it was time to flip each pastry. We used a thin wooden knife to flip each lefse and pull it off the iron, rolling it up with butter and cinnamon sugar inside to be sliced for our cookie platters.

My grandma is not Norwegian. She married my grandpa, a Norwegian-American immigrant, when she was 18. He was 40. They were set up on a date by a mutual friend and married a year later. Though the marriage lasted only about five years, my grandma fell in love with Norwegian culture and cooking. When my grandpa moved back to Norway in 1982, my grandma kept the cultural traditions and recipes alive in her home in the United States. She decorated with beautifully carved Norwegian horses, wore large, knit Norwegian sweaters and continued to make her favorite treat, lefse, every Christmas.

Food and culture walk hand-in-hand. My family's Christmas cookie tradition was not created as a functional solution for the desire to eat cookies (though a kitchen full of cookies at the end is a nice reward). Instead, cooking together each year, and letting my grandma show us how to make her favorite traditional treat, has

become part of our cultural identity. We mail photos of our seven kinds of cookies to relatives in Norway, who send photos of their seven kinds back. My cousins send us new recipes every year, and we send back photos and videos of our finished products. But lefse, the thin, sweet Norwegian favorite, remains the centerpiece of our cookie tray year after year.

During my childhood, my family and I went to a Norwegian Christmas party out on a lake west of Arlington, Washington, where I grew up. In a small lake cabin, at least six women in their 60s and 70s (including my grandma) stood at their lefse irons, wearing full traditional Norwegian bunads—thick woolen dresses covered in intricate red-and-black stitching, usually worn over white blouses. Each hauled her personal lefse iron from home—quite a huge feat, as the irons are generally cast-iron and at least twice the diameter of a dinner plate. The women spent the day teaching children how to make lefse, all the while explaining the importance of the cultural tradition. Into my high school years, I stood to the side of Mary Lou, or Janis or Barbara as they spread the dough out onto the hot iron and handed me the wooden spoon for flipping. You have to count the bubbles, they would say. Once there are five bubbles, it's asking you to flip it. When I pulled the pastry off the iron, my lefse mentor was waiting with butter and cinnamon sugar, and a sticker for my shirt that said "True Norwegian!" with a picture of a roll of lefse.

Over the years, those Christmas parties have ebbed. The Norwegian immigrants who started the festivities, including my grandpa, have either passed away or lost the strength to plan and organize a large party each year. Instead of filling into the small cabin by the lake each December, it's just my mom and my grandma and me in our kitchen. The warmth is the same, though. My grandma lugs her huge iron into our kitchen each year instead of the cabin, standing next to me and giving tips as I work to produce the perfect golden-brown lefse. As we cook, she fills the kitchen with stories of my grandpa's life in Norway, and my mom chimes in with anecdotes from her childhood summer visits there. This dance of cooking, creating and sharing stories in the kitchen has shaped how I view my Norwegian identity, and helped me understand the value of keeping culture alive.

As my family passes around our trays of seven types of cookies this Christmas, the lefse will remain the shining star at the center of the plate. It isn't the prettiest cookie, or even the best tasting. But with each flip of a piece on the lefse iron, we are creating and sharing a piece of my family's background. Until my grandpa passed away, we sent him his own cookie tray across the world each year. He always commented on the lefse. He had become too frail to make it himself, and wrote back, saying how thankful he was to see us still making his very favorite traditional cookie. As my grandma ages, my brother and I have been working on learning the recipe. Food can be sustenance, but it can also be more than just a combination of potatoes and flour.

When I bring out my own heavy lefse iron each year to teach my children and grandchildren how to make their own version of this traditional treat, I will tell them about my grandma. About her standing next to me, in her favorite thick Norwegian sweater, patiently rolling out dough balls on the counter. About her running for ice water when my hand inevitably slips and hits the hot iron each year. About her recounting stories of her and my grandfather's adventures, as he explored life in the United States. About her warm presence filling the kitchen each year, as encompassing as the smell of the lefse cooking on the griddle.

## Butterfly Screws

*Maya Coseo*

Your first mistake was thinking  
the cheap coat rack would hold  
your purse, sweatshirt, jacket *and*  
a (empty) backpack. Because it doesn't.

At first you try to fix  
the growing holes in the plaster.  
But the coatrack won't be put back  
on the wall again, and you need  
to vacuum the carpet. So you pile  
things on the desk—  
and isn't that always how it ends up?

That night you text your dad, asking for help.  
He says you need something to plug the holes—  
the screws you're using now  
won't work any longer.  
Either you need to visit Home Depot  
and buy Butterfly Screws yourself  
or wait for him to send them to you.  
And isn't that always how it ends up?

You decide to wait.  
But the holes stare at you  
and annoyance builds up  
as things that should be  
hung up instead pile up.  
And isn't that always how it ends up?

Why did you have to try to hang a backpack up?  
Weeks later the screws arrive.

Your dad sent instructions,  
but you still have no idea how to do this.  
Do the clips on the screws  
go *close* to the coatrack  
or at the end?  
Do they *stay* shut  
or are they held shut?  
It's time to ask for help again,  
and isn't that always how it ends up?

The holes aren't large enough,  
so you jam a screwdriver into the twin gaps.  
"This would have been easier with a drill," you mutter.  
Your dad cautions, "A drill can do a lot of damage."  
You know that. Even so, it would have been more effectual.  
And isn't that always how it ends up?

The damn clips don't stay shut;  
you just *cannot* push them in.  
"It's not that hard," your mystified father says.  
But it *is*. You have to reach up at an awkward angle,  
juggling the clips and the coatrack,  
which you can't see through.  
Finally you plug the holes.  
But now you've still got to secure  
the whole mess to the wall.  
Easy tasks never end up being easy.  
And isn't that always how it ends up?

It's been ten or twelve minutes.  
Your dad—still on speakerphone—  
listens as you continue to struggle.  
Asks what you're doing (the implication is wrong).  
But at last, after several minutes more,  
the coatrack is back on the wall.

"It will probably hold a backpack now," your dad speculates.  
But you're not about to tempt fate again.  
And isn't that always how it ends up?



# Lucca and Sophia

Grace Nakahara



# Blood ≠ Family

Lizzie Vosler

I no longer feel the same sense of safety as I used to at home. This person who lives in this house, my family, no longer seems to hold the same level of unconditional love in her heart. She, and she alone, begins to pin me down into her premade boxes, her conditions. I am me, and me alone. We share the same blood.

The same DNA runs through our veins, but blood does not necessarily make people bound by it family. This stranger within my own home, I can't seem to pinpoint who she really is to me anymore. My home; the people who love and support unconditionally are my kin. My mother seems to no longer understand me.

I suppose it's not "unsafe" that I feel; inside of me; no, it's more of a sadness I feel in my heart. Like a pin prick. A hole that grows; internalized because a woman I thought was my family will no longer accept me for me. She has not pushed me out of my home, she has not spewed hate in my face or drawn any physical blood. But this woman who birthed me, had suddenly decided against unconditional

love. But she is alone. My brothers both unconditionally support me. She is completely alone against the rest of the family. Aunts, uncles, brothers—even my father. Distant relatives feel more like home. My mother's best friend—I wonder if it would infuriate her to know she holds me to conditions, when her best friend in the entire world loves me like flesh and blood.

Sometimes I feel as though my life has begun to feel like a game of pin-

ball. Flying around uncontrollably, unable to pin point my emotions down. I cannot help but feel as though the blood inside of my veins is boiling. Anger's fingertips grasp at me, pull at me, and I do everything I can to not let the flames explode at home.

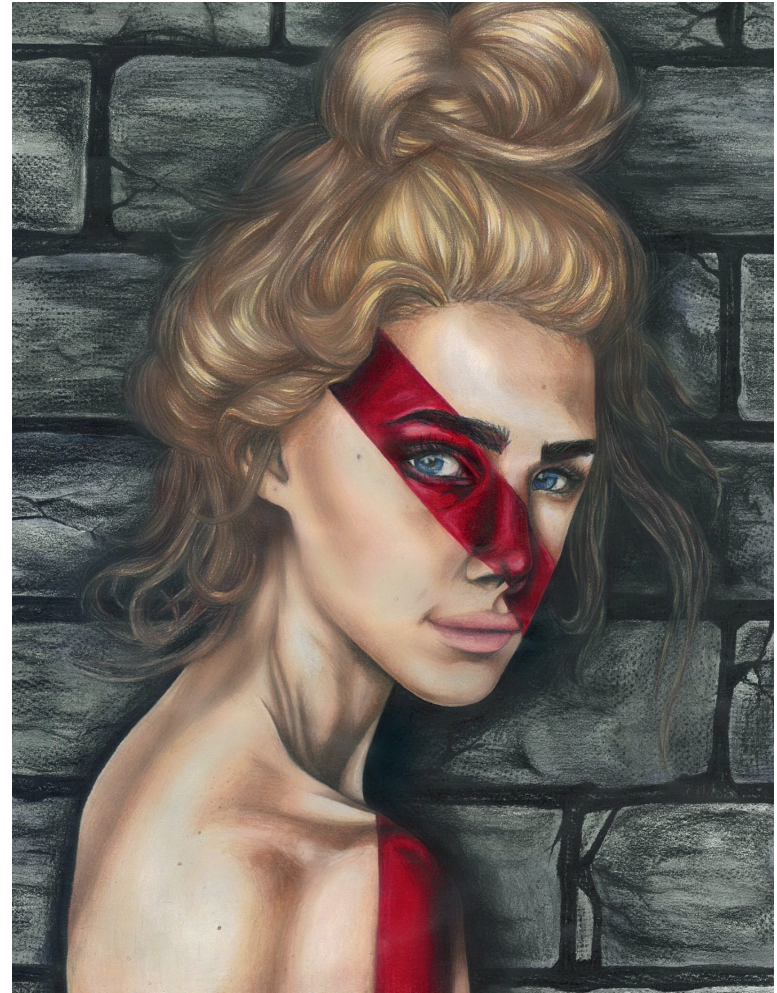
The anger at her, at the woman who gave me everything except for unconditional care and love and support. The anger at her, for not being enough "family"

to care for her only daughter in her time of need. Her sense of "family" apparently does not include her daughter's sexuality. The heat contained in me threatens to explode at any second, any minute. How could she forget, the same blood runs through our veins, connecting us? How could she forget the unconditional love a mother is supposed to have within her? How can she stick that pin into my side—the same pin that begins to tear a whole in our home?

Why don't you love me anymore, mama?  
Why is your love not unconditional?  
You're the one who stuck the pin into our lives mama, into our home.  
This crimson that runs through our veins, this blood;  
it does not make us family.

## Red Stripe

*Sierra DeAtley*



# Mother Tongue

*Anonymous*

She wants to remain nestled up  
in the pages of old calendars  
wrapped in bleary memories of the past

when her daughter didn't know  
the burden of carrying  
a beating heart  
and two left feet

when her husband didn't look at her  
like she was another  
40 hour-a-week job  
he just had to grin and bear it through

when the rest of her life didn't feel  
like it would play out on the news  
before she even had a chance  
to open her eyes

when  
    she  
        was  
        (felt)  
            safe.

# Growing Season

*Katherine Tibbits*

*2019 Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Awards  
2nd Place - Poetry*

it started in the summer.  
my skin was a field and  
I cut red lines into it  
like I was plowing soil, thinking,  
*if I tear the ground up,*  
*maybe things will start to grow.*  
I ripped up the earth  
like I could create beauty  
if I just slashed hard enough—

when you found me, it was autumn.  
the field was covered in thorns,  
my arms a mess.  
you put my rake to rest,  
told me I *sparkle*—  
said it so simply,  
I couldn't cut into my skin.  
for an instant the earth was soft.  
through rotting leaves I smelled hope:  
new flowers, fresh grass, dewfall—

but you left  
when the first snow fell.  
I wanted to rip away the soil—  
*how can I trust in the growing*  
*when the grower is gone?*  
I cried in the fields, lost track of time.  
opened my eyes in the spring

and saw the soil, wet from weeping.  
yet somehow, the earth was green.

you guided my hand in the summer  
but when the winter came  
I was alone in the fields.  
in the spring I reap my own harvest,  
and there is no bitterness,  
only grace.  
*you are not here  
but I still am.*

## At the Crosswalk

*Luke Kenneally*



# How Nana Made Tortillas

*Anna Regula*

*2019 Michael and Gail Gurian Writing Awards  
1<sup>st</sup> Place - Poetry*

Chalky flour sits on fingertips  
the Virgin Mary's vela fades

the maza is quicksand  
and we sink together

I now pour the lukewarm water  
globes of taffy batter stretch out  
salvaging our kitchen's culture

poner en harina (put in some flour)  
solo un puñado (but only a little)

Abuelitas rolling pin smooths  
memorias with soft laughter  
I still smell her Macy's perfume

y su café fuerte (and her strong coffee)  
dos azúcares, sin leche. (two sugars, never milk)

ma tosses each tortilla high  
con dedos poco quemados (with slightly burned fingertips)  
next tucked in old kitchen towels

y me das una tortilla mullido (she hands me a soft tortilla)  
pesado de mantequilla, (heavy from butter)  
sentamos al mesa (together we sit at the table)  
para dar gracias. (to say grace)

# Hallucinations of Eve

*Sydney Bernardo*

The bleeding virus beats,  
Red on the paisley tablecloth,  
Sucking oxygen,  
In hungry convulsions.

It will be still,  
Soon.  
I will be still too,  
No more noise to tempt me.  
I will be  
A woman,  
Free of sin.

# Debacle at Bingo Burger

*David Landoni*

Inside Chalmer's head, she heard her mother's voice conclude the news was bound to be bad when Chalmer arrived at a Tastee-Freez knockoff called Bingo Burger, the restaurant at which she was head manager, to find that police had sealed off the entire building and wouldn't let her in. It was bound to be bad, but Berto answered the phone and confirmed her suspicions:

"Something has happened, *real* not good. Come over to my house and I will show you," he said over the phone, so she did.

Chalmer's given name was Kate, but she knew and despised so many Kates that she started going by Miss Chalmer after college. It didn't take long before she got annoyed by the way it sounded when patronizing men would say it, *Miss* Chalmer, so she dropped the *Miss* and was just Chalmer from then on, even to friends. Only Berto was still allowed to Miss. She liked to imagine it was a courtesy descended from some form of Old-World chivalry, and Berto liked to imagine it kept him in her good graces.

Chalmer arrived and Berto opened the door—she demanded to know what was going on. He requested she lower her voice so as not to wake his sleeping wife and children. Berto worked as head fry cook at Bingo Burger on Tuesday through Friday, and was also Chalmer's closest advisor when she made business decisions. He was a thick man, and sported a bushy mustache like a long-lost Super Mario brother. He also had installed the restaurant's interior security cameras himself and knew how to access the feed, which was why he had asked her to come.

At first she didn't want to be shown any video at all. "Just tell me what happened." Berto said, well, somebody burned up inside Bingo Burger today. "What? Burned up?" Yes, Berto said, right inside the restaurant, but now he had second thoughts about the whole meeting and discouraged Chalmer from watching the video. She didn't understand, demanded he show her, so he did.

The two watched the camera feed: a customer enters the restaurant parlor during slow hours. He orders a medium combo, sits down, and eats it. Then, sure enough, in a manner reminiscent of the venerable bodhisattva Thich Quang Duc, who self-immolated in 1963 to protest the oppressive treatment of Buddhists by the Catholic South Vietnamese government, the unnamed customer left the restaurant after tossing his trash, returned a minute later coated in gasoline, sat down on the floor about halfway between the door and the counter, struck a match, a real wood match, the kind you get at cigar shops and places that sell camping gear, raised the match over his head and set himself ablaze in the middle of parlor. He sat there for a few seconds until the phosphorous-white flames overloaded the monochrome security footage, obscuring most of the shot and sparing the pair the grizzlier details. But the content was clear: he sure burned up alright.

After he turned off the feed, the two huddled in front of Berto's computer in a moment of stupefied shock. Berto strained to think of something he could say to lighten the mood. He had no idea what Chalmer was thinking, he usually didn't, but he knew her well enough to know that everything went better when she wasn't upset. He pointed out that the wood paneling on the walls and the counter were left unscathed, and only some of the tiling would need to be replaced.

For a while Chalmer didn't say anything, but then she did. She asked if there were any customers in the restaurant. Berto said no there weren't, and the cashier was in the back. By the time the smoke detectors went off and somebody noticed him it was already over, and when paramedics arrived, the cooks were still using fire extinguishers to foam down what was left of him.

The two agreed it would be wise to try to keep things as quiet as possible about the event. They could imagine what would happen next: a local news outlet catching the story, pushing the story online with a punchy headline, readers reading the headline and nothing else, alarm and confusion, and ultimately Bingo Burger's ruin. But since no customer had seen it and only the police had the tape, they hoped to contain their predicament as much as possible before it

went public and spiraled out of control. Berto offered her a glass from the sherry he and his wife shared every Sunday at dinner, “to help calm your nerves in this trying time,” but Chalmer didn’t need any help and could calm her own nerves just fine thank you very much, and thus concluded Berto and Chalmer’s first emergency immolation meeting.

Chalmer often heard her mother’s voice emanating from somewhere inside her head, usually to nag her. This time, as she was leaving Berto’s place, it was going on about how Chalmer only learned one way to talk growing up. *Kate, you never sound like you’re happy or sad, only like you’re annoyed. Too many cartoons on TV, she would say. Chalmer retorted that just because she was comfortable using her Professional Voice didn’t mean she always talked like that, that and it wasn’t because of cartoons, but her mother insisted. We didn’t have a TV when I was growing up. You used to have to talk to people, and that taught you how to talk right, do right. Otherwise God only knows why you act the way you do.*

Chalmer didn’t tell her mother this, but she did wonder if their conversation was related to a problem she had been trying to work out independently. Namely, she was getting the feeling that nobody wanted anything to do with her, and she didn’t know why. Well, she understood why her old friends didn’t want to talk to her. While they spent their college years floundering around with little direction or ambition, *jerked each other off and reading poetry* her mother chimed in, Chalmer had grown up modest and paid her own way through school, lining up this managerial position before she had even graduated and with virtually no experience. And since she brought it up to herself, and the incident notwithstanding, she thought she had run the Bingo Burger pretty well in the few years since then, given the capriciousness of the student employees and a general waning enthusiasm for hamburgers that weren’t delivered or picked up at a drivethru window. That was why sales were on a slow decline. Of course, Chalmer’s mother had other thoughts: she thought society was on the verge of a total collapse caused by decadence and technological advancement, of which Bingo Burger was only one

casualty in the midst of a civilization in the throes of degeneracy. But Berto agreed with Chalmer on this issue, so she told her mother to shut it so she could listen to the radio on her drive home.

The next few weeks P.I. (post-immolation) were, as they feared, not good for business at Bingo Burger. The police report described the incident as a tragedy in which a brilliant, wistful young gentleman, overcome with grief after murdering two drug addicts a few days before, had taken his own life. The immediate aftermath of the incident saw a surge of customers from all the bad press, who were hoping to see some burn marks on the floor, smell the smoke stuck in the walls, or otherwise witness some evidence that the immolation had occurred—arriving to find a clean, unremarkable restaurant parlor waned their enthusiasm. The tri-county area quickly lost interest and became obsessed with local celebrities Jonathan and Jammies, a four-year-old Mongolian throat singer and his tabby cat that could meow the first half of the alphabet. The duo would eventually go on to national stardom, making rounds on the talk show circuit and meeting scores of celebrities (and one head of state) before cashing out on internet crowd funding and starting their own clothing brand. But for now they were simply diverting media attention away from Bingo Burger. On top of that, police were coming by the restaurant every day wrapping up the immolation case: conducting interviews, surveying the interior and exterior of the restaurant, and making any customers who showed up uncomfortable. Cops who happened to be around were arresting employees on possession as they smoked weed behind the back dumpster on their lunch breaks. One of the Saturday Sunday cooks was being loaded into a police cruiser as Chalmer arrived for another emergency meeting with Berto.

Berto’s mustache was drooping with anxiety. “Miss Chalmer as things stand right now we are not doing too good. Not too good,” he reiterated. They were losing staff at an alarming rate; their regular customers were spooked and the restaurant wasn’t generating any publicity to make up for it. A cashier said he had seen envoys from Buffet Palace scoping out the lot earlier that week, no doubt hoping to open up a new location if Bingo Burger didn’t last much

longer. All this Berto recounted shaking his fist in a righteous rage. They couldn't let Buffet Palace win. As he saw it, they were being pulled in two different directions: they either needed to normalize their image and get things back to the way things were as quickly as possible—and they both admitted that business-as-usual hadn't been particularly good—or they needed to lean in to the publicity, garnering enough attention to keep customers coming, even if out of morbid curiosity. Berto said he knew someone who could help, someone who was good with branding and image, so Chalmer said ok, yes, great, bring them in.

Berto's contact turned out to be an eighteen-year-old high school senior named Makenzi Millett, an up-and-coming Instagram model making money on the side selling t-shirts and fancy bars of soap shaped like curse words. She was Berto's daughter's cousin's best friend and had flown all the way from San Francisco California baby, where "The advertising scene is becoming so meta-ironic, I just can't stand it." She had all the looks of a girl whose claim to fame was posting pictures of herself on the internet, but her vogue aesthetic and color-coordinated outfit (including shoes, phone case, and eyeshadow) proved to Berto and Chalmer her oneness with the cultural zeitgeist. Makenzi said the way to reclaim the public's attention was to embrace the immolation incident as their unique branding angle. "People aren't as sensitive as they used to be, and as Jonathan and Jammies clearly show, their attention spans aren't very long either. You're going to have put a bit of edge in your image if you want to give people a reason to come."

Chalmer immediately couldn't stand Makenzi and wasn't thrilled about the plan either, but everyone seemed to understand that this was Bingo Burger's last chance. Even the voice of her mother agreed it needed to be done. *Whatever must to be done to save the business, there's no morality anymore. The only way out is to accelerate.* Chalmer was just happy she wasn't getting scolded. That Thursday the Bingo Burger was kept closed all day so that Chalmer, Berto, and Makenzi could usher in its complete metamorphosis. The pizza-parlor tables and chairs were removed and replaced with cubist furniture designed to be both inviting and severe.

Ironically tacky orange-and-black flame decals were plastered on the front windows, and the restaurant's new tag line "Can't take the heat?" was added below the sign out front. On the inside, the array of vintage Coke-brand decorations adorning the walls were replaced with informational plaques (and some graphics) that highlighted the rich history of self-immolation as political protest. Everything related to Tibet got its own wall; same with the Vietnam war. A small portrait of Norman Morrison, a Quaker who committed suicide outside the Secretary of State's office in the Pentagon, hung near the fountain machine. Under Makenzi's discretion the less PC selfimmolations, those protesting the spread of Islam and the like, were kept near the restrooms, so that people could find them if they wanted to but so they weren't too in-your-face either. The wood paneling was allowed to stay by virtue of it having been through so much already. Thus Bingo Burger was transformed into a daring, postmodern art project in the course of an afternoon, a work simultaneously detached from and aware of itself, a victim of the absurdity of the human condition and yet also its testimony, its ambassador, and its agent.

After she took out ads in the tri-country's local papers, Chalmer and her A-Team waited in anticipation for Bingo Burger's reopening day. Berto had deep-cleaned the whole kitchen he was so anxious. But on the big opening day the public hardly took notice, and the following week the restaurant got little business. Chalmer was furious. It was one thing to suffer embarrassment and bad business from this shmuck who could've burnt himself alive in any other restaurant in town, but she had toiled and troubled to convert her tragedy into a golden opportunity, and no one could even be bothered to notice. Shifting to a different tactic, she wrote an anonymous post on an online forum with pictures of the restaurant's interior, written from the perspective of an angry customer. It was genius. Chalmer even leaked the security camera footage, hoping to shock potential clientele with a sense of immediacy (and to contrast the interior with how much better it looked now). She thought about her friends from college, who maybe still hadn't graduated or were working some dead-end job, pissing away every chance life ever threw at them,



suffering little and achieving even less. She wished they could see her now.

As it turned out, though, the tri-county area was really not ready for a burger joint whose theme drew on the recent event of a man burning himself to death in the burger joint in question. Chalmer had been right: posting the photos and video had thrust Bingo Burger into the midst of a public frenzy, but the reaction was pure, vitriolic outrage instead of morbid curiosity. The community called for a boycott; protestors began picketing the restaurant with such fervor that employees couldn't even make it into the building. A city councilwoman in a town hall meeting called the it one of the grossest, most distasteful things she had ever seen in all her time as a public servant. The mother of the immolator filed a suit against the restaurant for emotional damage (her) and defamation (her son), but Bingo Burger was already doomed—several times over. Chalmer was forced to use the last of the business' liquid assets to pay a settlement, then promptly filed for bankruptcy. Berto swallowed his pride and agreed to work as a cook in the Buffet Palace that would take over the lot. Makenzi would suffer zero repercussions while milking her proximity to the catastrophe, eventually launching her soap-selling career into stardom.

Chalmer visited Bingo Burger one last time before she had to forfeit her deed to the bank. The interior had been mostly trashed in the brief post-posting protest period. She wove through the piles of cubist chairs toward the kitchen and could hear how her mother had told her when she was nine years old that *you and you alone are responsible for making your fortune in life. I worked for everything I have. All the things that have happened to me, I deserved them, and so will you.* At least that's how she remembered the conversation going. There was still cold grease filling the fryers. As Chalmer coated the wood paneling on the walls and on the counter she thought about Berto, her closest and most intimate business advisor, saying Hello Mister Buffet Palace or whatever the owner's name would be, and wondered what her college friends were up to in that moment as she lit the grease ablaze with a culinary torch. The flames

were roaring in no time, and she let out a laugh when they reclaimed the pictures on the martyr's wall. It was pointless and fucked up and kind of funny, and she just let it happen.

# Minimalism

*Maya Fletcher*



# Red Door

*Christine Carero*

It was never fit for a family  
The snow white building was  
only interrupted by a cherry red door  
The steps leading up to the house  
were built for eating oranges

The sunshine pours through the windows  
the day breaks against the building  
like the yellow yoke running down a breakfast plate  
Curtains drawn up tightly to provoke another hour of sleep

The house is lopsided,  
there are cracks in the panels,  
and the light above the porch is broken  
But the red door stands proud

It looks like paper, the entire structure  
It looks like you could blow it down with just your breath, knock it  
over with the tip of your finger  
And yet it used to hold so much

The people would scurry back and forth,  
windows would fog up from the breath of endless conversation  
The dim glow of that broken porch light  
Would illuminate off those too white panels

The fire engine red door: closed,  
to contain the crimson red hearts within

Now, the walls are too thin to keep the cold out  
The grass is never trimmed,

it is thick with mud and dirty snow.  
It is not a welcoming place, the door tightly sealed

The railing is broken,  
the sidewalk is cracked and  
the paint is chipping off the too white panels,  
No one eats oranges on the steps anymore

## Days Gone By

*Zach Albertson*

*Inspired by Ernest Hemmingway's "Hills Like White Elephants"*

A man and a woman sit together at a small, white round table, chairs pulled closely side-by-side. The man turns the page of a photo album which rests on the white laminate before them. The album takes up almost the entire surface. A lily wilts in a little crystal vase on the sliver of unoccupied tabletop.

The two gaze silently at the pages, then the man speaks,

"Look here, at this one. It's from my brother's wedding in Nantucket."

The woman leans in, "I forgot about that trip! What a beautiful old house that was."

"Yes, it most certainly was. And the smell of the salt air, that was my favorite part. It felt so refreshing."

"Yes, it was wasn't it? I miss the ocean. It's been so long since we were there together."

The man nods and turns the page slowly. The pages are stuck together and he has to lick his thumb to gain a purchase and peel apart the cracked plastic.

"Wow, look at you."

"Oh! I had forgotten that dress, I wonder whatever happened to it. I liked it so much."

"It was always my favorite of yours. It's a perfect match to the sky in that picture."

"Oh yes! And look, I'm wearing it in this one too!"

The man turns to the final page, and the woman rests her finger on one photograph in particular. It was a picture from her twenty-second birthday.

There is a long pause.

"I miss those days. I miss when we were only twenty and the world was ours."

"It was ours, don't you remember?"

“For a time.”

She looks up and into his eyes, then out the window.

“It was all so long ago,” She sighs, returning her gaze to the album. A lily petal weeps from the vase onto the surface of the album.

The man turns to the back of the last page. “I’ve missed you terribly, you know.” Behind them, the clock strikes the hour.

“I know. It’s been so long since I came around. I’ve missed you too, ever so much.”

They look down together at the last page, and the man brushes the petal onto the floor.

“It was all such a long time ago.” He says.

She rests her chin in both her hands and plants her elbows on the album’s pages. “It was, wasn’t it.”

A knock comes at the plain white door. The man stands and strides past the bed to the white door. He turns the knob to open it.

“Hello Martha, nice to see you. Punctual as ever.”

Martha smiles sweetly. “It’s lovely to see you too dear. Here you are.” She reaches into the pocket of her white apron. He holds out his hand.

“Thank you.” The man makes a small move as though to reach for the door.

“I’m sorry, but I must observe, as per usual,” she says before he can reach the knob.

“Very well.” The man lets the hand return to his side.

“Would you care for a glass of water?”

“Please, thank you Martha.”

“Of course Mr. Astor.” She smiles at him.

Martha holds out the glass, and the man takes it from her.

He tips the glass back, then holds it out again for her.

“Thank you.” She takes the glass back from him, setting it on the cart behind her.

“Lovely. Of course dear. I think that will be all. Enjoy your evening.”

“I will, thank you. Goodbye.”

Mr. Astor closes the door as Martha wheels the cart away

from his room. Even with the door closed, he can hear the squeaks of unoiled wheels fading down the hall. The man turns and looks past the starched white sheets, past the little white table, the wilting lily, the open album and out the window. His gaze travels beyond the gravel drive, the grounds and the distant fence line. It comes to rest on the reddening sky and the remains of the setting sun. The man sighs a long sigh and closes the album. He removes the tired lily from its vase and lets it fall into the wastebasket. He dutifully clips a new lily from the bunch on his nightstand and places the fresh flower into the little crystal vase. Mr. Astor returns his gaze to the softly fading horizon. Alone in his room, he reminisces about days gone by.

# God Told Me to Bleed

*Kaitlyn Johnson*

In the summer of my youth I held no fear for serpents  
In the garden we shed our strange skin and basked in a warm glow  
I polished apples against my thighs like  
so many gorgeous gems. The promise of their sweetness  
glistened in my hands  
I was not afraid.  
The fern fronds grazed my calves as I ran through the trees  
lush and glazed with sunshine,  
and the fish wriggled against my hand, speaking  
a secret I already knew. This knowledge lay coiled  
Against my spine, above my belly  
waiting to be unraveled

Later they gave me a velvet dress, painted  
my lips crimson, handed me a purse full of stones  
I began to bleed. They told me  
there is a deep wound inside you, something evil  
moving slick and terrible inside this body  
A fountain of red shame, an otherness  
hissing between your thighs, a fierce voice that said  
You are not you  
You are changed  
You are the paints but not the painter  
You are the soil but not the harvest  
You are a post-industrial commodity  
You are a loaded gun but you are not  
the shooter  
You are a woman  
and someone will always want to rent the space inside you  
We brand you a woman  
and you belong to no one  
and you belong to everyone—you are two sides

of the same coin—a coin tossed carelessly on the hot pavement  
by so many takers  
caught in throes of a dangerous bet. The bet is:  
Will she put out? The bet is:  
How far can we take her  
from herself?

I was a tangle of desire, rearranged in your image  
To want is to not have, to fear  
is to draw these things closer. I want  
to follow the rules but  
the rules keep changing  
I stand roped to the stake of my ancestors  
The flames lick at my bare ankles. They made me stand close  
then accused me of wanting to burn.

I am heavy with your identifiers, not sister not wife  
not brown not white  
I am some stranger's pretty china doll, a fetish  
of dark eyes red lips and kimono wings—the promise of some exotic  
and strange land just begging  
to be plundered

God told me to bleed  
so I bled  
They told me to cover myself  
so I hid  
They said  
take it  
They said  
You are a woman

I stand before you now, a garden  
stripped of its promise

You are not worthy of my abundance

# Dark and Light

Sierra DeAtley



# Because I may not make it to your heaven

*Chelsey Hand*

Because I may not make it to your heaven,  
this moment of mine is also yours

your words to me are honey and your time is gold  
and your soul, right now and always, is worthy  
of more love than all the hours of the day could provide  
...even if I gave each one of them to you

I would have a hard time believing God made an eternity  
so I could meet you upon this earth  
but not have the chance to know you until we get there

I think when we do, maybe, He will look at our calloused hands  
and ask where the love went with all that work

And I hope  
And I hope  
And I hope  
it was in this heart of mine, each moment it was beating  
that I never once held it back from you  
or from the grass my feet caressed  
or the songs my mouth sang  
or the air my lungs changed  
or the sun my face collided with  
or the birds that welcomed my ears each morning to another day  
of loving,  
each day that I was alive

Forgive me if I have not heard all the rules right, from way up there

But God always gave my heart the love it has needed for  
always loving,  
which is more than enough for me in this life  
and sounds a bit like heaven anyway

But if still you are afraid, just know I will love you with every  
inch of this life

# Return to Sender

*Konner Sauve*

I have mailed you letters, just so you know  
that they have been stamped and sent,  
piling at the doorstep of your empty chateau.

Paper-cut tongue sealing envelopes with a longing 'hello'  
only to rewrite, in hopes of fending off my lament  
I have mailed you letters, just so you know.

My memory is fading like luscious landscapes buried in snow.  
So I'll write these tender words amid the torment,  
piling at the doorstep of your empty chateau.

Years are passing, my fingers starting to slow,  
still sending letters with the envelopes sweet glue scent  
I have mailed you letters, just so you know.

Tears start falling, as my eyesight begins to go  
warm wax grows cold concealing words I meant  
piling at the doorstep of your empty chateau.

I'll send the last in the beak of a crow  
I hope you'll find love that leaves you content  
I have mailed you letters, just so you know  
piling at the doorstep of your empty chateau.

# Mourning

*Grace M.*

I mourn my grandmother  
JoAnn, who was taken out of her house  
and beaten until there was no other  
choice for her children to call the police on  
their own father

I mourn my mother  
who couldn't have the one thing she wanted most in life  
Me  
So she, being a perfect wife  
ingested so many hormones she will die from becoming  
the one thing she always wanted to be

I mourn Sylvia  
and Esther  
completely alone, except for the feelings inside  
Waiting to break out  
until they broke her  
because there was nowhere for her to hide

I mourn Edna  
and her sex  
My sex  
that took the world from her  
until she took herself from the world  
Ha

I mourn Virginia  
for hunters keeping her from the natural world  
for intellectuals keeping her from libraries  
and for her, taking her mind away



from the patriarchal ideologies  
that kept her oppressed, anyway

I mourn myself  
I mourn my body  
I mourn the word whore thrown at me  
I mourn the day  
where I was dragged to the kitchen  
by men  
who called me  
their friend

I mourn the day  
a man who told me he respected women  
had sex with me until I cried of pain  
And he ignored me  
and continued  
and he told me  
it was my fault  
I mourn my body for betraying me  
and I mourn the world I live in  
for making me feel  
I am  
Not

I mourn Mary  
for being placed on the pedestal  
she did not ask for  
Virgin, mother  
bound to fall  
bound by a secret  
Upheld  
No one can hold her up for long  
Upheld by God  
or the Church  
Who can tell?

We never question Mary  
and I'm sure she does not either

I mourn Amanda  
Woken up by a man inside her  
stunned and paralyzed  
Her trauma is not only hers  
as she was raped I slept beside  
her, completely unstirred  
and I ask myself often  
why didn't I wake up?

I mourn every woman  
who must bear the truth of their bodies  
That truth is  
their bodies are not theirs  
their bodies are battered and bruised  
from a battle they did not choose  
The blood they shed is not natural  
It is not peaceful or womanly  
It is against them  
It flows like a river, mighty and strong  
and no one chooses to respect it  
Protect it  
Protect us  
I am angry  
I am betrayed  
I am afraid  
because I know no matter what happens today  
tomorrow, there will be another mourning.

# Weight

*Grace Davis-Nicholson*

Grime caked on the bottom of my dark bare feet, splinters in  
my palms.  
Stale air closes in and dust covers my heavy skirts and heavy hair.  
I close my eyes and try to use the calm darkness to sew myself  
up, but I'm not quick enough.  
My mind crumbles and my strength dissipates. I widen and on to  
the floor IT leaks.  
All around me, I lose feeling.  
Arms slack, neck relaxed, and my head rolls back. I struggle to  
stand, dust swirls.  
My back arched, no control as my feet lurch in an attempt to glide.  
In a circle, slow and awkward. My chest still open, my lips still  
drip, but the weight is lighter.  
Drowning in IT beneath me.  
My feet stop, but now my hips align and they sway.  
The bottom half of me steps, legs crossed, toes pointed and I  
spin again faster.  
Breaking the air.  
Suddenly my chest falls forward into place and IT pours  
My eyes blink open, my fingers brush IT.  
Everything fits together.  
My head snaps, arms flung open and my feet fly above the splinters.  
Crossing the cramped space, arches and twists, free and soft,  
hair swinging against my back.  
Leaving the room onto the cobbled streets I don't stumble but leap.  
IT stays, pushing against the threshold  
I turn and bend, moving down the street,  
to the music in my head.

# Buoyant Force

*Allison McHugh*



# The End of the Road, Hawaii

Maya Coseo

The end of the road is hot, dry, barren, rocky. If it weren't for the  
glittering, crashing waves—  
like so much shattered crystal—one might think this was  
Mars (Hell?)

We grow up learning that roads have no end—or at least that  
the modern American highway system does not.

Roads are supposed to be paths to distant futures, promising escape,  
rebellion. They market  
an identity to our would-be wildest selves—the ones who only  
watch others having fun  
at the festivals featured in Instagram stories instead of attending  
them themselves.

Roads are not imperfect, bumpy, cracked, lava-rock-strewn *things*.

There is something disquieting about a road ending. This idea, this  
*fact*, is a semicolon  
which follows our ideals of what a road should be. But in this case,  
the end of the road  
is a real place, not just poetic, a metaphor for death, or criticism of  
our society (though it *could be*).

On the island of Maui, if you drive past Wailea, down the dusty  
one-laned road, you'll hit it  
after a while. The road's end. It is flat. Not even a beach marks  
the location.  
Instead of sand, there are sharp, black, igneous rocks. It looks  
nothing like Hawaii.

However, the broken-crystal waves still glimmer. The sky is still  
tropic blue.

You are still in Hawaii. But not the one tourists know.  
Black gravel crunches under your shoes. Gray dust rises,  
the product of thousands of feet, crushed over many years.

You look, but there is no sign, no official notice that *here* is where  
the road ends.

It feels strange, unmonumental, that such a mystical,  
idea-laden, liminal space as this  
should go unremarked upon. But maybe, that is part of its appeal.

# Teal, Rose Pink, & Cobalt Blue

Sophia Reynolds

I fold the teal thread over tightened strings. *The cobblestone walkway is lined with simple bikes against the stone-built walls. The rocky path leads me to a castle like entrance. The large wood doors greet me with a hollow hello, drawing me in. Immediately, I am taken back by the perfection of the grass and charm of the horse in the middle of the yard.*

Next, I pull the thread through the loop, creating a flawless knot. *Streaks of sunlight leak through the shades piercing my eyes at the crack of dawn. The peacefulness of the campus suits the morning dew. The cold stone stairs lying behind my dorm room door haunt my thoughts. I will soon have to leave my cozy room and enter into the chamber of freezing echoes.*

I continue the pattern thread by thread, alternating to the next color: rose pink. *Gentle giggles fill the air, lunch is upon us. We go to the punting dock and load the boat. All of us, with our lunches in hand. Slowly the boy maneuvers the boat down the river. Ellery offers a gentle wink to the boy in topsiders, the rest of us snicker—Ellery always gets the cute ones.*

When the rose-pink exhausts itself, I pick up the cobalt blue. I never realized how smoothly teal, rose pink, and cobalt flattered each other until today. In fact, I hadn't noticed many beautiful things until that summer. *The man in the moon appeared shortly after dinner. Again, we are all together. However, this time our bodies disrupt the perfection of the grass. Our whispered voices are whisked by the wind holding secrets and stories told for the first time. I have never found it so easy to share my secrets and fears with seemingly strangers.*

I repeat the pattern once more, color by color, thread by thread. *I sit alone in a room with a boy I barely know. I don't talk to boys very often, not because I don't want too, but because I don't know how to. But this boy, this boy is different. I love the way he shares*

*his dreams with me, with such ease and confidence. We dream together into the dead of night, hoping, waiting, wishing as one. This was the first time I fell in love with a boy; not for his looks or physique, but for his mind and heart.*

I complete the last knot of the bracelet. *For the last night we all sat in the dorm, me, Ellery, the boy, and the others. Together, we sat quietly for one last time. Tears filled the brims of our eyes and each goodbye came with a stabbing pain. Although, we know that one day, someday, we would all meet again. But until then, our bracelets will provide us with bubbles, bubbles of memories reminding us of when the times were good, and the days felt ceaseless.*

# Katherine

*Filmon Abraham*



# Honey

*Kylie Urbanek*

I have some days where I'm honeyed. I have some days where I'm amber and warm and free flowing. Everything's sweet, saccharine and rich.

These days are few and far between. It takes a lot to extract honey.

In a beehive, there's a frame that holds up honey combs, a brood chamber. Laced with larvae and nectar, the honey's too difficult to remove.

I've wondered what that's like, those combs being so full of life. On good days, I've wondered what it would feel like to stick my eye inside the chamber and see the golden workers within, so full and purposeful. Nowadays, I can't even imagine the energy within the chamber. I can't even remember how that feels.

Scents and machinery coax the bees from their hives and when the bees have left their hives, the frames within are removed. Some rip the honey from the frames all at once, refusing to savor the phenomena.

I'm sure some would say that these harvesters are driven and purposeful but they seem reckless and unrelenting to me, careless.

I wonder if those who collect their honey in pieces enjoy it more. I wonder if others enjoy the honey that's been savored more, if it's sweeter.

There's a jar of honey sitting in my pantry. Emblazoned on the front is a honey bee with fat wings and curved legs. I'd say he looks

content. Just looking at his fat wings, I would've said that the honey was collected in pieces and that he'd never once questioned his role. I don't think bees question their world as much as we do. Their eyes bring more stability and reassurance than our eyes do. We look at the world and we wonder what exists. Bees see the world as it is. They see the sun and light and darkness, and they can use it. Bees live a good portion of their lives in the dark with a hive that is black and barely brushed with light. They use their rounded bodies to communicate in a twisting, huddled dance. For them, the darkness brings a moment of recognition, a realization. One twist, three degrees. One twist, food is found. One twist, clarity.

Part of me wishes that it was that simple for us. I miss feeling like I could use the world, like I could know it and walk it and be motivated by the darkness of the hive. But as I stare at the honey bee, the one on the jar, I see a cartoon.

When I go to place the jar on the shelf of my pantry, my hands feel sticky and stale and I head to the sink. As I stare into the bathroom mirror, I see a honey bee.

# Fevered

*Sarah Kersey*

I was telling you about the dry summer heat,  
mostly the smell of it,  
like something was rotting in the back of my brain.  
I told you it felt like the world was emptying itself of me.

Trying to see if you could relate,  
I asked you this:  
Did you ever used to sit in your backyard  
in the dead of night,  
looking up at the empty, thankless sky,  
waiting for a rain that wouldn't come?  
Did you ever think that if you hoped hard enough,  
begged long enough,  
you could somehow conjure it,  
and it would sweep you out of that goddamn desert?  
Did you ever feel like there was a drought coming,  
only to find you'd been in one all along?

I was mid sentence  
when I realized your breathing had changed—  
slow inhales, crawling exhales,  
your eyelids fluttered shut.  
I didn't know how long you'd been asleep,  
but I knew that you were an insomniac.  
In the moment I needed you to tell me  
that it would rain again,  
my pain lulled you into a state of dreams,  
and you were never one to pass that up.

They ask me now where it all went wrong,  
when I realized that it was over,  
and I always come back to this moment.

# The Age of Joy

*Teresa Yandl*

My father has a dip  
at the base of his spine. It forms  
when he lies down, peering at my scattered dolls.  
It cups my cheek as I sprawl,  
reckless with cheer,  
while he growls and shakes with laughter.  
A booming rumble that resounds  
throughout our brown-gold home.

My father has a sweatshirt  
that he roots out when my mother  
nags about the chill. It smells of oak,  
and humid soap gone dry  
in the summer heat.  
My father pitches it over my head  
and shards of stars shine  
inside my makeshift tent.

My father has a ring  
that he wears tight on his hand. It shimmers  
beneath the bubbles of the bath  
as he splashes suds on my face,  
and I scream laughter to my little world.  
I twist it on his finger  
as I'm woven, rapturous, into stories  
he tells until I fall to quiet sleep.

My father has a crease  
at the comers of his eyes—  
Deep,  
with an age of joy.

# The Void

*Judge Thomas Kearns*

I can feel the beautiful and empty energy of the void.  
A void of uncertainty, loneliness, and full of love  
That continues to live in waves of cloyed  
Emotions, as well as emotions seeking thereof?

No, I seek emotions not thereof but of love.  
Is love a boundless and arbitrary circle of hell?  
A circle of hell that revolves on pleasing the kind of,  
Or disappointing the kind of heart that does, indeed, quell  
Under the envelopment of this so-called love?

Is there sense in releasing, or trying to release,  
This senseless void that sucks my heart from liveliness,  
To emit these words to the world that aims to please?  
Who is being pleased in this world of emptiness?  
Can there be meaning in a world full of non-existent peace?  
There must be a meaning to all this suffering and restlessness.

Will there be an anecdote that saves my soul from pain?  
Do I emit these crazed emotions to my torturer?  
Is my torturer aware of the insanity that one creates from  
    love's stain?  
How am I able to emit or escape love's stain from the sufferer?  
Do we both suffer in this foul game of lovers' pain?  
At the end of this course, what will we be for each other?  
I wait for the salvation of love or non, to release my  
    soul's bloodstain.

# Source

*Tom Hoag*





# Bloom Where You Are Planted

Christine Carero

## **Sowing Outdoors:**

*Place seeds directly into the ground; allow it to soak up the earth's nurturance.* Sunshine, sprinklers, sand and sea. Outdoors is a place to learn, sunshine helps the seed stretch and raise to its full potential. The seed should drink in the ocean water and inhale the salty air in order to properly develop. *The perfect temperature for seeds to thrive is between 60 and 90 degrees Fahrenheit. Spread seeds 50 inches apart in order for individual growth.*

## **Sowing Indoors:**

*Place seeds into potted plants, set pot by a window and watch carefully until sprouted.* Hot chocolate, rainy days, finger prints on the windows. Inside is a place for reflection, being coddled; it is a place to rest and regain the strength to grow. *Seeds should be taken inside after dark, transport the seeds outside the house permanently after 18 years.*

## **Growing Tips:**

*Seeds bear separate male and female flowers on the same branch. Research shows that a female flower needs to be validated 8–10 times by a pollinator for adequate pollination.* Teach your girls to settle for nothing less than perfect. Make sure your seed understands their own worth before the 18 years are over.

## **Fertilization Tips:**

*Apply a fourth cup of blended organic fertilizer around each hill to provide the nutrition necessary for optimum production.* Surround your seeds with love and trust. Allow seeds to talk openly about any topic and make sure that they have a safe and loving environment to come home to. Make sure to take the time to pick them up on time from school and to check in on their homework. Make sure to ask

about the boy in second period who always waves goodbye. Taking an active interest in your plant keeps them alive and healthy. Allow them to always vocalize what they are feeling and remind them that their feelings are valid.

## **Insect Prevention Tips:**

*Major insect pests can be treated by using floating sow covers and/or Rotenone applications.* Keep your seed away from people who are untrustworthy; they will break her heart. Cover your seed from knowing too much, but inform them that the world is not always good. Make sure your seed does not take on the world on her shoulders; this weight will keep her from sprouting up from the ground.

## **Seed Spaces:**

*Usual seed life: 78–82 years.* Seed's lifetimes are limited, so ensure that they have all they need in order to properly bloom and grow. Seeds will thrive into beautiful plants if you allow them to do so. Never tell them they are not capable.

## **I am six years old.**

*I am just a sprout; I have just cracked my head through the hard California soil.* The world consists of the dirty swing set in my backyard, driving my sister crazy, and strawberry smoothies. I hate the soup my mom makes me when I am sick, and I don't like the way my hair takes forever to dry after I shower. I love the sun, and I spend most of my time after school picking petals off flowers and throwing them into the pool. My dad is at work until past my bedtime every night, but he still makes sure to read me a story each morning.

## **I am ten years old.**

*I have just started to bloom, I can feel my roots developing and I now have leaves stretching. I am green and fresh, brand new to the world, soaking in every bit of the sun.* The world consists of the park by my house, stickers on my notebook, and carving my name into

any tree I can find. I love the way the sky turns orange when the sun sets and I ride my bike out each evening trying to catch the changing colors in my hands. I hate the way I have to wake up so early to go to piano lessons and I don't like the scratchy tights I have to wear to ballet each night. My mom talks on the phone too much and never lets me eat junk food anymore. Friday nights are now reserved for slumber parties, giggling, and matching pajamas.

**I am twelve years old.**

*I can feel the buds start to form on my leaves, ready to burst into flowers.* The world consists of pointe shoes, popsicles, and everything pink. Each morning starts with a blueberry muffin and now I am old enough to sit in the front seat next to my dad on the way to school. This is the year of boys and boyfriends and holding hands in the parking lot and denying it the next day. This is the year that I first kiss Aidan Gilbert in the driveway at his end of the year pool party. The next day I carve A+C into the tree by my house. This is also the year that my parents extend my bedtime to 10 p.m. because I do not end dance rehearsal until 9:30. Friday nights are now reserved for long road trips to dance competitions; during these car rides I rest my head against the window and imagine when I am 16 and my life is perfect.

**I am sixteen years old.**

*I now have beautiful flowers blooming on my leaves. The nurturance from the sun has helped me blossom; my roots have stretched but I am rarely inside anymore.* The world consists of drives to the beach, lying more than I should, mixed CDs, and temporary tattoos. I can taste freedom on my tongue and I drive too fast at night. My hair reaches my hips and I hate now more than ever how long it takes to dry after I shower. I skip dance almost once a week to tan on the beach with my friends, falling asleep as the waves crash over my responsibilities. I call too many boys I don't trust to pick me up after cheer practice and I break curfew each time. I think I am old enough to know the world and I refuse to let my mom put my hair in French braids anymore. Friday nights are now reserved for gossiping, night

swimming in the ocean, and falling in love.

**I am eighteen years old.**

*My roots have been firmly planted in the ground I was in, but I have been uprooted and taken two states away. Washington soil is different, more firm, but not bad. Some of my flowers have wilted but new blossoms are about to sprout.* The world consists of dorm rooms, bagels, homework and snow. I don't like how cold it is when I walk to class, and I hate the sound my shoes make when I step on fresh snow. I love late night talks with my roommate and laughing until my stomach hurts. I miss the soup that my mom used to make me when I was sick and I call her everyday just to hear her voice. There is no ocean and I don't have to check in with anyone about where I am, yet I lie less. I don't know the world at all, but I do know heartbreak now and I will not be calling any more boys I do not trust. My hair is chopped and it dries much faster after the shower. Friday nights are now reserved for makeup, loud music, pizza, and friends.

With the right amount of care, sunlight, and water, plants blossom and release oxygen. If you do everything in your power to raise a seed correctly, you will be rewarded with a lifetime of love. Allow your seed to explore, reach their roots in every direction and encounter as many other plants as possible. Remind her that she is not the center of the universe, some trees will bloom more fully and that is okay. Gardening is not always simple nor easy; however, once the plant blossoms every bit of work will be worth it.

# The Salty Escape

*Paige Buccola*

The salt fills my nostrils as I gaze ahead of me. The very soul of the sea clings to my neck, chest, back, legs, and toes. I hear it coming. I see it coming. They have always been small here, but it's smaller this time: a roaring cloud of foam rolling towards me. It makes me feel wanted.

I fill my lungs with salty air and close my eyes, freely sinking below the surface. The canals of my ears are flooded with silence. I hear nothing, but I know I will soon. I wait.

My lungs politely ask for fresh oxygen. I gently refuse their request as my heart warms my arms with fresh blood.

A few moments more.

My heart now warms my legs. My lungs ask again, this time begging. Again, I refuse. "A little longer," I tell them, "Shhh..."

It happens then. A mighty roar getting louder and louder and louder. For the quickest second a woosh of oceanic wind tramples overhead, a ceiling of serenity defiled with power. My body shifts toward the shore, towards the earth below. It shifts back.

The silence returns. I hear nothing, so I know it's time to return. My lungs thank me, my heart ceases to panic. I now remember my legs, and they do as I command. My arms follow suit, escorting me through the melted skylight above. I fill my lungs with salty air and open my eyes, now buoyed gracefully above the surface.

I open my eyes and gaze ahead of me. The next is not far behind. The very soul of the sea drapes over the top of my head, clinging to my hair as a veil does to her bride. The sun kisses me softly. It makes me feel wanted.

# Jamie

*Sierra DeAtley*



# Ice Cream in Autumn

*Sara Frings*

Last Friday of September,  
the air biting noses and ears  
as leaves change, while  
the joyful sun's in hiding.  
Orange, imitating streetlamps  
illuminate the harsh night.  
I get lost—wrong turns  
down dark streets.

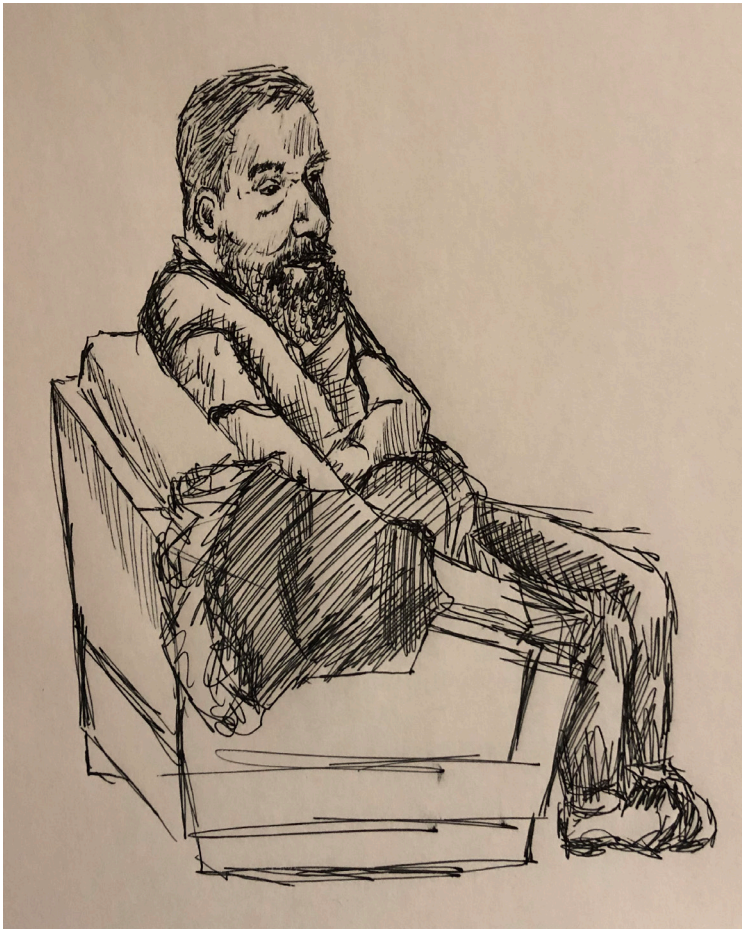
We came in summer  
with easy smiles  
on blue sky afternoons,  
journeyed from the brick  
daycare structure, past  
tidy, fenced-in lawns,  
to the retro icecream stand.  
We gripped the leading rope,  
connected, but not quite.  
Told to pair up, stay in line.  
The way seemed clear  
in the bright sunshine,  
an adult-in-charge directing us.

But this time—  
I find my own way,  
despite the fallen sun.  
Park the car a block  
from the yellow and green  
neon, walk holding hands  
with someone I chose  
all my own.  
As a child, I never

wandered here at night  
the artificial light  
is unfamiliar, new to me.  
But the full moon shines down  
through almost bare branches,  
bringing light to dark corners  
neon and streetlamps  
can't reach.

# Man Sits in Hemmingson (for several hours)

*Bridget Foster*



# Lamentations of Christ's Martyr, Upon His Execution

*Alex Clay Hutchings*

How cruel a master did my wrecked body find,  
To succor me on crust and crumb and rind,  
And fetter me with iron chains to bind  
My feet and wrists, and with a dagger blind  
My wandering eye, yet leave the shelter of my doubt so far behind?

Why might the holy hosts in Heaven conspire  
To move poor Prometheus to buck, and steal the fire  
To light the flame of God's grace, but require  
The faithful to dwell in cold and dark desire?  
Why must mortal baseness meet with heavenly ire?

Amongst entangling and encumbering reeds,  
I've sown a thousand ragged, beleaguered seeds,  
In good hope they find the water and the light each need,  
But seeing nothing but that thousand thousand-fold their greed  
For a martyr they must break upon the wheel, and bleed.

# frida

Sierra DeAtley



# A Meditation of Flowers

Chelsey Hand

I would like to ask  
if there is something I can do for you?  
Would you let me plant some flowers?

Here, you can watch me at first,  
if you would like,  
if you are hesitant.

Watch me start with this packet,  
seeds held in a paper that muffled their cries of origin—  
cries of a wildness we have not yet been raised to hear.  
Watch me place them unafraid in this hand of mine,  
life holding life.  
Life setting life free.  
If only we were always gentle with one another.

Yet even still, we continue

To this second flower my cat always plays with in the yard,  
biting its leaves in lightness and joy.  
It holds the sound of his purr  
and the knowledge that sometimes we harm even that which we  
love most,  
here a reminder for you to love anyway.

This next one is being replanted,  
from where the small child once knelt to the ground in pain,  
crying onto the soil  
then wondering how  
saltiness effects growth.  
I made a promise

there is enough growth to go around,  
both hers and the flowers.  
Let us let them begin again now.

This beauty came to me,  
in a glass of water,  
before I told him I prefer the ones with roots.  
Beauty unafraid of associating with the less beautiful soil it took  
to get there.  
Roots just as lovely as petals.  
Yes, my friend, that's what I would want too—  
someone planting a tree for me,  
instead of tossing rootless flowers on top of my grave.

This one was stolen from my own sick bedside  
some time in the past  
where you had placed it for me as an offering of health.  
I stored its colors here in my heart.  
I want to give it back to you now.  
For the sun is dying  
and some yellow may be good for your soul.

These ones choked in the smoke and burned with the wildfire.  
Would you spread its ashes with me?  
Wildly into the air,  
before we dig our hands into the earth  
to plant and fill our fingernails  
with the dirt that promises new life.

These ones I thought I lost years ago,  
carelessly,  
when I felt myself too ugly a thing  
to care about flowers.  
But somehow the world is forgiving,  
for they still return each year  
when I remember to water.

Now, if you were wondering why we would be planting today,  
maybe these last few can answer for me.  
They are from the hands of a young soul in an old body  
who, during her fifteen minute break each day,  
took her shoes off to water her feet  
while she watered the planter  
she filled with flowers outside her work building—  
flowers she planted because every person inside  
deserved the space they passed each morning to be beautiful.

Every cubic inch of space is a miracle,\*  
a wise man once said  
and the young soul understood.  
And it is you, it is you.  
The miracle.  
I see the garden inside your heart,  
seeds just waiting to be watered.  
And I hope you water them.  
I hope you water.

Take these flowers as a small prayer for you.  
You who was made for the flowers, the fields, the sunshine.  
You who was made to walk the darkest of places and be kind.  
These flowers are planted for you.

\* Walt Whitman

# Solitude

*Allison McHugh*



# You've Got Mail

*Konner Sauve*

I remember the moment  
I glimpsed your face  
snagged in the corner of my eye  
then fancied itself  
by lingering in  
the back of my mind  
there we danced and dined  
but never in the sunlight  
only in the shadows

We met again  
under some grey clouds  
and staring in between  
wooden file organizers  
our eyes playing tag  
neither looking too long  
except to toss glances to and fro  
your words tumbled out  
a greeting and my body shook  
paralysis coiled around my chest  
my words spilled out in return  
a mumble or two  
before we returned to the dark

I awoke one night  
after a dream of you  
surfaced in and planted itself  
in my sight—we were a perfect pair  
yet it was all just a lie  
caught up in the back of my mind



The next time we met  
our fingers brushed  
across cold countertops,  
a shiver that I can never shake off  
still clings to my bones  
caging my heart  
within the depths of  
my barred rib dungeon

We spoke once more  
just enough to let the shiver shift  
sliding through the bars  
striking an unspoken chord  
freeing my heart—  
the treachery of it all

I wish I could despise you  
when we glance across  
crowded rooms, dim-lit streets, and brick pathways  
yet I still feel that touch  
sending my heart into a flutter  
as it takes control of my mouth  
and the words *I love you*  
will sway like leaves  
to fall at your feet

Shimmering in reds, oranges, and yellows  
but you'll simply walk away  
leaving them to rot  
right where they lay

## Contributors

*Filmon Abraham* is from Seattle. His work consists of digital illustrations and he tries to be intentional about drawing people of color and people of different backgrounds. He thinks it's really important to have this kind of representation in art and it's really empowering for him and the people he draws, which usually are his friends. He usually uses reference photos from his friend's Instagram pages from images they already like of themselves, and try to draw them in a way where they will feel beautiful and represented in art through his style.

*Zach Albertson* is a sophomore Economics major.

*Olivia Antoine* is a junior at Gonzaga majoring in Public Relations with minors in Leadership and Promotions. The discrimination she experienced growing up as a biracial woman in Portland, OR, has shaped her personality. Olivia has a passion for learning by questioning the things around her. Olivia spent the summer of 2018 studying abroad in Zambezi, Zambia, where she encountered more challenges than ever before. During her trip she chose to lean into challenges rather than to turn away from them causing her to learn more about herself and her ethnicity than ever before.

*Alexandra Balkovatz* studied abroad in Madrid, Spain, this Fall but she travelled all over Europe. She travelled to Budapest, Hungary and this was one of her favorite photos she took there.

*Paige Buccola* is a sophomore from Huntington Beach, CA. She is studying English and plans on teaching English to high school students. She also hopes to one day publish a collection of poetry!

*Christine Carero* is a senior at Gonzaga from Camarillo, CA. She is an English major with a double minor in Psychology and Women's and Gender Studies. She has been on the Gonzaga Dance Team

for the last four years. Her favorite critically acclaimed film is the *Emperor's New Groove*. Christine will be teaching high school English in the Richmond, CA, next year and is excited to share her passion of literature and get back to the sunshine.

*Kevin Carr* is the marketing manager at Gonzaga Law School and founder of the music journalism website, *BehindtheSetlist.com*. He is an accomplished journalist, blogger, playwright, so-so guitar player and awful drummer. You can usually find him perusing books and CDs in Spokane area thrift stores.

*Maya Coseo* is a junior English major (with a creative writing emphasis) and Spanish minor. The Pacific Northwest has been her home since she was three. Her passion for writing developed after she took a creative writing course in high school and had one of her poems published in a student anthology. Since then, she hasn't stopped writing and has had four other poems published. After she graduates, she hopes to find a job at a literary magazine and, eventually, to produce her own book of poetry. She loves coffee, reading, and her cats.

*Grace Davis-Nicholson* is the namer of bands, certified in tattoo emotional support, and stressed™.

*Sierra DeAtley* is a junior at Gonzaga who is an Art major and a Psychology minor. She has been doing art her entire life as a hobby, but now hopes to translate her love for creating art into a future career after attending graduate school in New York City.

*Samantha DiMaio* is a sophomore with an English major and a double minor in Spanish and Psychology. She has loved writing since the third grade in which she was constantly making up stories about talking animals, but she loves all things creative, especially music and movies. After graduating, she aspires to be a screenwriter in Los Angeles, but she has also been dabbling in the journalism field since she started writing for the school paper.

*Maya Fletcher* is a junior Biology major and is currently studying abroad in London. She likes going to cool places and taking pictures of cool things.

*Bridget Foster* is a junior at Gonzaga. She is an Art and English major. She finds the random people who wander into Hemmingson to be fascinating.

*Sara Frings* is a junior studying English and Secondary Education. She's a pretty interesting person, but she can't really think of anything to write in this bio, so she would just like to tell you to have a great day!

*Molly Gianarelli* is a senior Public Relations and Journalism double major. She spends her free time in the theater, with her friends, and putting up with her angsty cat Auggie.

*Chelsey Hand* is a senior studying Sociology and Environmental Studies. Her hometown is Reno, NV.

*Brigid Healy* is a sophomore pursuing a degree in Sport Management with a minor in English. Her hobbies include running, creative writing, and exploring all the amazing beaches at home in San Diego, CA. She is a member of the off-campus sorority, Alpha Pi Phi, and helps serve GU's University Ministry.

*Tom Hoag* is a sophomore Biology major and an Art minor at Gonzaga. He loves to ski and be outdoors as well as do as much drawing as he can. Art is a way for him to relax and step away from the world around him. He can be fully present by sinking into the drawing and finding a place where all of the worldly pressures disappear.

*Alex Clay Hutchings* is a native of Las Vegas, NV. He is currently a second-year law student at Gonzaga University School of Law. His work has previously been published in *Reader's Digest Magazine*,

and his play, *Dominio*, was produced in Reno, NV. He is married to his wonderful wife, Marissa.

*Eleanor Johnson* is a sophomore Biology major at Gonzaga.

*Kaitlyn Johnson* grew up on San Juan Island in Puget Sound. She is an English major and junior transfer student. Her short story “What We Took and What We Left Behind” won first place in the statewide League for Innovation writing contest and went on to win second place in the national contest.

*Peter Jonas* is a freshman English major from Denver. He enjoys being outside in nature, rock climbing, and petting dogs—whether they are his own or a stranger’s.

*Judge Thomas Kearns* is a Psychology and Communications double major.

*Luke Kenneally* is a photographer and photo editor of the Gonzaga Bulletin.

*Sarah Kersey* might be having a life crisis. She is primarily concerned with the fact that *A Cinderella Story* with Hilary Duff, the greatest movie of all time, only got 11% on *Rotten Tomatoes* while *Stuart Little*, the world’s greatest atrocity, got 67%. She considers this a personal affront and a signifier of the downfall of the movie industry.

*David Landoni* wants everyone to know that Earthworm Jim is a series of side-scrolling platforming video games, the first game of which was released in 1994. The series is noted for its platforming and shooting gameplay, surrealist humor, and edgy art style. Four games were released in the series: Earthworm Jim, Earthworm Jim 2, Earthworm Jim 3D, and Earthworm Jim: Menace 2 the Galaxy. The series lay dormant for almost a decade before Gameloft remade the original game in HD for PlayStation Network and Xbox Live Arcade in 2010. Interplay announced Earthworm Jim 4 in 2008, but little

has surfaced since. The original two Earthworm Jim games of the series have been praised for their detailed graphics, well developed platforming, and wacky humor. The original game was received very well, being rated the 114th best game made on a Nintendo System in Nintendo Power’s Top 200 Games list. Earthworm Jim 2 was also received very well. Both were better received than many of the other projects Interplay was working on around the same time, such as Boogerman, which was criticized as being cretinous, disgusting, and patronizing, and Cool Spot, a project Perry and Tallarico worked on, which was criticized for having a “lack of personality.” The music from Earthworm Jim has been praised, with music from Earthworm Jim 2 being included in Game Central’s Best of the Best CD compilation of video game music. It has also been requested at concerts where game composer Tommy Tallarico has had his music performed. The first two games were compiled into a package called Earthworm Jim 1 & 2: The Whole Can ‘O Worms for the PC. Next Generation reviewed the package, rating it four stars out of five, and stated that, “This is what the PC really needs sometimes—a nice, fast-action game that will distract the player from the more mundane pursuits of word processing or data entry, without requiring the commitment of a huge RPG or strategy title.” Earthworm Jim 3D started a downward trend for the series’ popularity, being considered neither a critical nor commercial success, with many reviewers claiming the game was uninspired, mediocre, and unable to compete with many other similar, higher reviewed platform games at the time, such as Super Mario 64, Rayman 2, or Banjo Kazooie. Earthworm Jim: Menace 2 the Galaxy was even more poorly received, with reviewers claiming it had lost of the charm of what made the originals good, and pretty much “killed the series.” The character Earthworm Jim has been recognized as one of the greatest animal protagonists in video game history.

*Grace M.* thanks all the women who raised her, made her, and gave her the confidence to write. Her piece is dedicated to them.

*Sophia Maggio* is a sophomore majoring in Psychology with a Research concentration and Art. In her free time, she likes to draw

and paint, watch old *Scooby-Doo* episodes, and listen to podcasts.

*Allison McHugh* is a junior majoring in Psychology and minoring in Special Education. She enjoys staying very busy by opting outside or by continuing her quest for the best milkshake in Spokane.

*Grace Nakahara* is a senior majoring in English with a writing concentration and Studio Art. She's pretty stressed out, but it results in fun, creative things.

*Anna Regula* is a second year student at Gonzaga. She is an English Major with a writing concentration, with minors in both Spanish and Women & Gender Studies. As a Mexican-American female, she's incredibly motivated to write about her cultural experience growing up in a family of mixed ethnicity, searching for where and how she fits into the world.

*Sophia Reynolds* is a freshman at Gonzaga. She is currently studying Biology. She loves working out, playing basketball, and being outdoors.

*Konner Sauve* is a senior double majoring in Psychology with a Research Concentration, English with a Writing Concentration, and a Leadership Studies minor. He has had the pleasure of leading Gonzaga's Story Slam for the past three and a half years, while also holding various roles on campus. He enjoys long walks around Spokane with friends, exploring and hiking the Pacific Northwest, karaoke with the Lit Lang Gals (OTPYG) at Star Bar, and living in the Logan with the On A Mission Boys.

*Katherine Tibbits* is a sophomore at Gonzaga studying Religious Studies and English. In her free time she likes to write amateur poetry, sing songs, and go for walks around Lake Arthur. Her ramblings are awkward but honest and hopefully help the reader understand that even the most illogical of emotions deserves to be felt.

*Kylie Urbanek* is a sophomore at Gonzaga. She is a Biology major.

*Emma VanderWeyst* is a junior studying Political Science and Leadership. She discovered a love of writing through a love of reading—her favorite books include *Just Mercy* by Bryan Stevenson, *Being Mortal* by Atul Gawande, and Michelle Obama's *Becoming*.

*Lizzie Vosler* was born and raised in Bozeman, MT. She loves to ski (she lives 45 minutes from the Biggest Skiing in America, how could she DISLIKE skiing). She ran Cross Country for 6 years (Middle and High School) and participated in Speech, Debate and Drama for two years. She has loved reading and writing for as long as she can remember. She loves the feeling of getting lost in a good book. Her favorite books are *The Book Thief* by Markus Zusak, *The Name of the Wind* and *A Wise Man's Fear* by Patrick Rothfuss and *The Princess Bride* by William Goldman. Her ultimate goal in life is to be a published author. But in the meantime, she's getting her degree in English (Creative Writing) and Secondary Education so she can teach Creative Writing to high schoolers.

*Matthew Williams* is your resident modern quasi-renaissance man. While he plans to pursue a PhD in Astrophysics, he is also quite the spiritual guru, the simple chef, the who-knows-which-wave feminist, the personal photographer and filmmaker, and the intimate author and friend. Seeing him smile is a rare pleasure reserved for no more than one hundred people per day. He offers himself as evidence that liberal amounts of chocolate and ice cream can stand as a coffee supplement in a healthy diet, and he will definitely bake you cookies if you ask nicely.

*Teresa Yandl* is a senior Business student with a double concentration in HR and Operations and a minor in Writing. She enjoys long books, bad puns, and good coffee. In the future, she plans to explore a career in management in the Pacific Northwest.

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