

PHOENIX



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HOLD ME CLOSE, JUST ONE LAST TIME

Jensen Smalling

Mama, I think I grew up wrong. My teeth are chattering, there's holes in my socks. Yesterday I didn't get up of my bed a single time, I watched the sun rise and set from under my duvet. Cups are piling up on my desk, I can't seem to find the kitchen. I thought about dying again. About white lights at the end of tunnels, incessant desires to chase birds off the edges of cliffs. You told me I could do anything and, mama, I want to fly. Music fits into the cracks lining my organs, melancholic melodies remind me to breathe. My brittle bones won't stop shaking, ready to spring free from this body and line the earth. To finally find roots that won't be severed. To dance with worms and decay and nitrous beings. My heart's beating too fast for people who never seem to love me back, it's incessant racing around the same old track. Remember when daddy took the boys to that nascar race and M couldn't stop his screaming at the overwhelming roar? I swear my brain's been infected with the same noise. Engines incessantly coming to life in my mind, backfiring exhaust and all. In the one off moments of silence, the numbness radiates from my head to my toes and I forget I am supposed to be human. I'm more a ghost than a man. I haunt myself with past memories, I quietly let trauma overtake me. Mama, I know this isn't who you wanted your little girl to be, but I can't seem to tumble out of the darkness.

Plainville, KS

Autumn Hall

Windmills branch out for miles and I point in awe as you drive through snow deeper than I have ever seen. Oil rigs shift up and down in their sad, dronelike way. We're both Tennessee natives, foreigners to this type of cold. The snow follows us as we continue toward Colorado, destination three of our winter tour of the west. The interstate closes. We're trapped in this tiny town with only a Dollar General and an inn where no one ever stays on purpose. We book a room from a middle-aged woman who is one of the kindest humans I have met. We cry because we made it through the blizzard without crashing. The dozens of cars that we saw in ditches along the way weren't as fortunate. We've been stranded for days. We never make it to Colorado. We waste hundreds of dollars on Airbnb rentals that we will never make it to. Instead of taking a romantic walk down the streets of downtown Denver, we trudge through multiple feet of Plainville snow, holding onto each other for dear life as we slip on ice. Our toes freeze, reddened by hours of exposure. I have not been here before. This is the warmest I've ever been.

brunch, baby!

Anna Crosby

Brunch baby sips bubbles & oranges in her highchair
A pat on the bum sends her off!
If only that monster didn't lurk under your skin
Bubbling until you burst out of society's champagnes flutes
Flinging painful intensity to indoctrinated eyes
Burst

Brunch

Babe !!!!

They hit harder
her insides scatter. the book of shadows, obituaries, & broken bones.
like piñata prizes of her guts.

Brunch baby sips her mimosa & cares.

He cares to.

he licks from acne riddled cheeks on her fresh wounds
they lick up her.

until gargoyles yelp &

God flings her limb by limb from his kingdom
to Dante's second circle she flies

The votes are in!!! his disciples approve

"Crazy crazy women"

I punch, kick, but the proof proves.

why can't an animal bite when under attack?!

trudging the high school halls, a parallel muse to an Alexandre Cabanel's
fallen angel eyes.

moon lit alters in my bedroom window.

false alters paint me in the devils light

drag the blade straight through

my friends burn brunch baby's' remains

the village calls for *bloodletting!*

guts of the butchered doves streaming out her nose

screaming till the end

& leave her alone

alone

alone

alone in the dirt.

"Alone

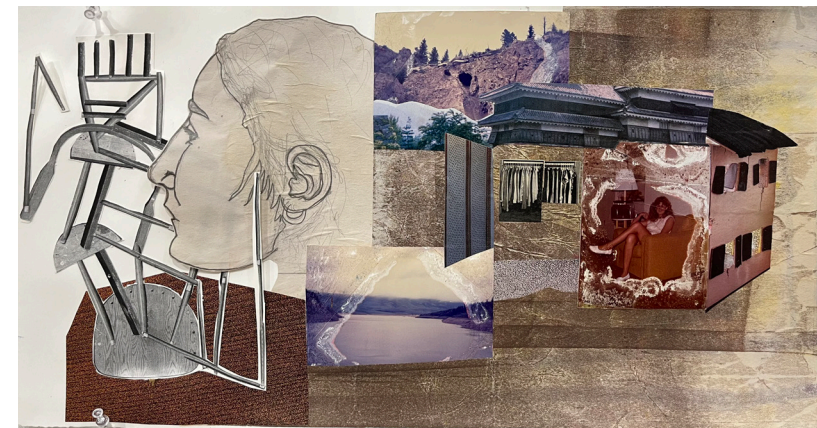
With me."

We'll sit on the balconies staring into our voids

playing chicken with who she is?



Catfished | chloe adsit



If I Were Furniture I Could Be Near You | Elliot Ashlock

Morning Glory

Brianna Eaton

The fresh cut flowers stand perfectly tall in their vase; the one crafted and sized to fit them and only them. They reach for the sun seeping through the open blinds—desperate to soak up any light. They long to absorb.

Are they jealous of the morning glories they watch outside?

The morning glories—who are rooted firmly in the ground, who see all the mornings, who see all the nights, who meet all the animals that fatefully pass by, and who are visited by all the children with endless curiosity.

They get to soak it all up. They get to experience.

They haven't been torn, uprooted, stuffed, and forced to live in this tiny vase—this tiny life.

Nature never forgets them; they are always supplied.

They get to live in glory.

Yet, from outside, the morning glories grow envy for the flowers in the vase—the ones protected inside the window.

Maybe the morning glories long for safety in a place away from the beatings of the sun, from the relentless downpours of the sky, from the hungry and thirsty animals, and from the prude, prying children.

They long for safety from the chilling nights, from the agonizing noise, from the fear of being stomped upon.

They long to be picked for keeping; they long to be chosen.

“Why God do I bear this life and they don't?”

From inside the house, the flowers in the vase are pleading the same question.

Red Dirt Girl

after Emmylou Harris

Amy Gilbert

There is a smell that is unique to the place. Red clay. Sticks to everything. Grows next to nothing. The bottom of boots tinged with rust. Clothing stained. Don't wear anything you care about. It's not that it just stains visibly. It stains the olfactory sense. It's sharp, almost acrid. It blends with my sweat, with the brackish water, with the ancient wood we keep stacked in the barn. No matter how many times I wash the work clothes, it's still there.

The human nose is keen, but nothing compared to a dog's. Although still powerful enough to evoke memory. Like when we started to take down the barbed wire fence as it zig-zagged along the small creek. I felt strong and enjoyed seeing the pile of twisty metal stakes and the loops of brittle yet still spiked wire. Some were not neat loops, some looked like giant knotted necklaces at the bottom of a forgotten jewelry box. Impossible to untangle. Like us. The goal was to open things up, right? See what we had before us and what we could do? Remove the barriers placed when the use was so singular. It's open now. Plural.

I think of the time when it was all covered in a thick white blanket, my boots sinking into the shattering coldness, having never experienced that much snow all at once or in a place that had been unmarred by others. Despite the temperature, the earth's smell was still there, reminding us of place, and our *place* within it all: time, space, location, heart, mind, body. Where we fit into this mess of a world that I've since made messier – like those endless knots of barbed wire.

When I breathe Spring, I see purple dresses and yellow flowers and chubby hands picking said flowers. I hold an uncooperative toddler (you hold one, too) on a quilt that is not ours, trying to keep the tall grass from poking me through my less than practical dress. Trying to make the third child look at the camera. She knows it will steal her soul. I smile for the picture that I'll probably smirk at later, and I still smell that hard, relentless red clay in the hollow of what you call a field, and I call a hillside. That's East from West, I suppose. This is Appalachia not The Delta. Red clay not silty river bottom. Cattle not cotton. I'd have been a foreigner if not for you. Both baptized and marked by the red dirt.

Staring at the TV

Oph.

Sitting starstruck on stitched softness
Face full of fireworks and fascination
Watching, wanting, wondering, woeful; why?
Pretty people populate that *pure* projection

That's why.

Thinking thoughtlessly about terrible truths
Becoming befuddled at bearing this burden
Girls that grow into generosity and golden grace
Beautiful, beautiful, beautiful.

What would it be like to catch

beauty?

Like lonely lovely luring lifelike
Butterflies, butterflies, butterflies.

But I'm broken broken broken.
Filtered fragments of forgotten (fringing) freedom
A muttering murmuring mop-headed mess who *must* manage

The trite teachings of that tumultuous turtle-like tribe
Church-going caterpillars of catalytic creeds and crying children
They tell them to turn the teaching into torches, into theological tomahawks

"Hurry and hunt hunt hunt."

Backwards bounding now, before we bounce back.
The TV tells another tale of typical talking tours,
Chattering characters charter course for cacophonous cackling

This time tiny eyes turn towards Tony
A smooth, suave, smart, soothing superhero and so
A wild willful waking ward wonders and wistfully wants

To be a boy boy boy.

coffee; rage

Annelise Griffin

knowing well about the girls
the girls that girls would like to be
an admirable prairie mouse
beaming, meek and mild
capture me

beside my father, next to his
coffee held from my boney, child-like hands
we share a sugar-peaked, milky way
blessed with rage

mother's beauty lying between my lips
sipping its contents, my face morphs into hers
and together we gossip and condescend

sisterly love translates from a position of dominance
teaching how to bark, as well as how to bite
this rage regrettably folding within me

coffee and caffeine
adrenaline ripples, echoing
my pupils grow and dilate
I grow more woman-ly, feigning
cigarettes pair nicely beside this coffee

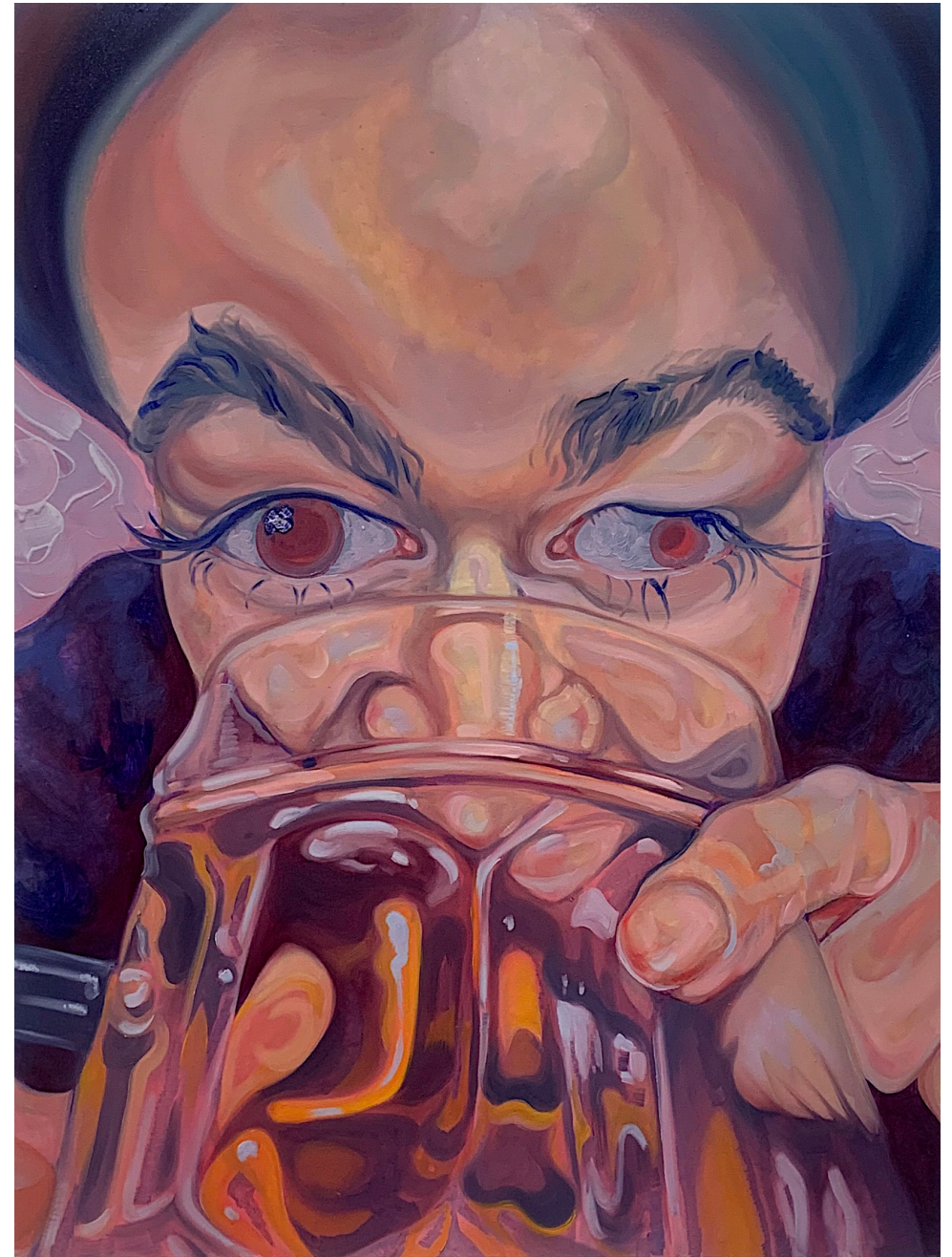
I stand in a perfect storm, a twister
brewing and whirling since I was a child
born from and coddled by
a fleeting and frightened, caffeinated storm
that I can't seem to shake, it forever weathers around me



Girl's Night | *Iris Love*



Eating Peaches in the Boegel Cemetery | *Anna Carter*



Burgers & Beer | *Deborah Allion*

Katabasis

Sarah Thacker

Georgia peaches don't taste as sweet as they once did,
And I'm enraged that I hate my hometown
Yet still call it 'home' whenever I speak of it.
I'm still in love with ex-friends and fellowship halls—
Still miss pets buried six feet under a yard
That soon won't belong to Memaw and Pa anymore
Because they're getting old and forgetting things.

I don't know why I'm here.

It's like I never learned that a hometown isn't a utopia—
That fathers leave and friendships fade,
Grandparents age and dogs get cancer and hearts break
And break and sometimes can't quite be mended
Despite how many years go by or how much *good* I find in this world.

I feel like a stranger standing here on my own footprints,
But I am not the stranger. Time is.
It sneaks up on you faster than you can book it to Tennessee
The moment you're offered an out,
Screaming in your face, "Look! Look at the ghosts you left behind!"

People lie when they tell you time heals.
The reality is that it only shows you what you've lost.

God, help me.
I just want to go home to a home that no longer exists.

Melancholy Melon-Kami

Andrew Hinman

Melancholy Melon-kami,
what can you even see
looking through those glass nooks and crannies?
Bitter pitter-patter raindrops drop—
you've lost your fresh green smile.
Black mascara streaks your fruity face—
dark mask stains, bleak tender red—
insides leak through your cracks.

Constellation: Infinity

Hayden Harris

Waterfalls, falling, drowning the concept
of time we created. Everlasting selfs
wanting more of tangibility.
Sea, reflecting diamonds,
constellations etched
beside Moon.
∞
An endless
array of stories
untold, lighting the
way in darkness while
Planets orbit Suns orbit Life,
leaving us with the transcendence of time.

Ceiling Stars

C.A. Walden

You fought over me, fists flying in the flaming Sun, and I watched like a churchgoer contemplating stained glass. I kept the stars in me between my ribs, choking on airs, begging to fly and burst into supernova-red light. As I stare at the ceiling tonight, soft green stars bring me back to you, and my insides scream like life-giving coyotes. You're a girl now, or rather, you always were, and I'm God's special little boy. Everything's flipped, turning right-side-up, running sideways into the Great Beyond, and I'm high on moonlight, high on the thought of being loved like that again, of being the center of the Universe for just five seconds more. Then the morning comes, and the right side of the bed stays cold, and I smile to think that you're out there drifting to ever-higher heights, and you'll never have to fight for me again. You'll never have to wonder if the bed will stay warm, for the light of day streams out of your room every morning. Everything's making a big, black hole, but I'll jump inside, just to see the other side, where I may watch the morning fade like a churchgoer contemplating stained glass.

Jessie's Girl

Jacob Hatfield

Jessie told me he doesn't quite feel
like a boy
 & he doesn't quite feel the in-between
I'm not a girl either &
 I believe him
It's like he's nothing and something, only quite

 & Jessie gets what's in his head
 but can't make me feel it
He tried to tell his Dad and now they don't talk
He said he wishes he could
hold himself
in a way that doesn't feel like coping

Jessie cried into my arms last night
 & it's a fight to ignore
how much he's holding back

Dumb Jock

Will Danzi

Lasso 662 Sharks Pick
Split LT 52 A
Spider 3 Cross
Left Ace Twister T Wheel

Mike Webster, also known as Iron Mike, was a legendary center for the Pittsburgh Steelers. In 17 seasons he won four Super Bowls, made six All-Pro First Team appearances, and is a member of the NFL Hall of Fame. After retiring, his life went into a downward spiral and he eventually was forced to live out of his truck at train stations. He in 2002 died at age 50 from a heart attack, and after his autopsy was the first observed case of C.T.E.

2005 F Snatch X Over
3 Scat Disk Lookie
Rhino Buzz 2 Mile High

Andre Waters played 12 seasons in the NFL as a Defensive Back for the Philadelphia Eagles. A member of the Eagles' 75th Anniversary Team, he was a key part of what was one of the league's best defenses at the time. Waters was also known as one of the most aggressive players in the NFL, and his tackles usually involved using his head. "Dirty Waters" died in 2006 at 44 years old from a self-inflicted gunshot wound. In his autopsy, doctors reported Waters' brain tissue was similar to that of an 85-year-old with Alzheimer's.

Virgin Pinball SCR
Leo 62 Arizona

Aaron Hernandez was a tight end for the New England Patriots. Showing incredible promise during his first seasons in the league, he signed a five-year contract extension in 2012. Shortly after, he was convicted and sentenced to life in prison for the murder of Odin Lloyd, a semi-professional player. Hernandez died at 27 in prison in 2017 from intentional self-harm by hanging. During his life, he demonstrated all of the typical signs of C.T.E. but was not diagnosed until after his death. Scans of his brain showed atrophy and large areas of black spots.

Split RT 31 Milwaukee
P39 Wizz X Drift Z Flag

The Tree of Life is a Willow

Launa Shedden

I.

I don't remember much about the funeral. I don't remember what I wore, or who gave the eulogy. What I do remember is being little, and not understanding what it meant for someone to die. I remember me and my brother giggling in the backseat on the way there. He whispered to me, saying *watch this*, and proceeded to move his left arm so that neither of his arms were caged by his seat belt. I remember doing the same, and us laughing because we knew our parents wouldn't notice. I don't remember hearing the sirens, but I remember seeing the flashing blue lights in my mom's rearview mirror. I remember my mom turning back to my brother and I when the cop said we didn't have our seatbelts on properly. I remember my dad being silent the whole time. I realize now that it was because his best friend had just been murdered by his father-in-law. I remember us being late, and crying because I was part of the reason why. I remember the funeral was in an auditorium, and looking back it feels like a distant dream. Everything seemed very blue, including the kilt of the man on stage playing the bagpipes. I remember that my dad loves the way the instrument sounds, but I think he mourns it all at once. I think there's a lot I don't remember and even more that I didn't understand. What was pain?

And why did God let it happen?

II.

The grip on his golf club relaxes the more he laughs. We've both made empty threats toward the other, our competitive spirits meeting for the first time. But I no longer care how hard we are both trying to win. Now, all that matters is that Gavin's eyes are green. A fact that I embarrassingly said out loud the second the sun hit his iris. He stares for a second. Now his eyes are gold, and I'm staring as they shift in the light.

"My eyes are brown," he corrects.

But he's lying. And it's been four years since he lied to me. And now I'm laying on his bed, typing on my laptop as he writes his lab report. I want to write about something else. Something earth-shatteringly, world-alteringly profound. But I can't. Because right now he's everything.

I think he will always be everything.



conejito | mia ruffra

By January

Carson Lakin

Sound is energy, so it's a thing that like, never really stops existing.
Its waves will dissipate and spread out within the atmosphere, but since energy can't be destroyed, it keeps going.
It changes.
So when you're looking up, you are seeing clouds and the moon and the stars, but you're also kind of looking at every word that's ever been said and everything you've ever regretted saying.
Your sneezes are up there as well too.

I'm pretty sure I'm finished watching SpongeBob.
I am twenty years old, my eyelids are heavy, the house is hot, and the couch is kind of dirty, I think.
The boy who graciously learned my name five years ago is sounding out a sexual escapade that is slowly bringing into context the stain that's by my ribs.
I am starting to shift away in a bit of denial of the stain's origin because I'm also not entirely convinced that the girl who's name he's committing to myth is the one.
She wasn't by the way, sorry about that Josh.
He asks me what I'm thinking and I say that it's strange how we manifest our wants only through what we can squeeze out of our lips.
He says "what are you really thinking" and I say Gary can't possibly live with SpongeBob because snails don't need houses, that's what's on their back.

Isn't it so funny that when two lips fully press together, it's their parting that lets out the only evidence they ever met?

After he pulls from the bong two more foultries, I think that I'm ready to accept that in my life I will probably have to say sorry way more than I think I should.
I'm also ready to accept that part of being alive is meaning it every time I do.

By January, my lips would grow restless on that same couch searching for the sounds of every name that ever loved me.

Those nights I'd look at the stars.

What They Don't Know

Amoni Gallaher

Is that

[I am fragile; that I am perceived aggression wrapped in paper the color of my grandmother; that I am silent because I'm scared of the sound of my own voice. I'm scared that it will echo and echo and echo and that You will realize that I do not matter; that my soul is a being that resides in the confines of your fingers clasped so tightly that no light shines through; that my grandmother used to be a little girl. She cried and whined and thought the whole world was against her.]

I. I'm afraid of becoming her.

II. I thought I had succeeded.

[I was a little girl once. I cried and whined and I have been taught that the whole world is against me.]

III. At the end of the day, I was raised by my grandmother.



Peeking Behind Grandma's Chair | Maxwell Edmonds

Quantum Brotherhood

Jack Cloar

For the past few weeks now
my friends roommates
brothers what have you
sit on the porch of our solitude
talking of higher concepts
like Quantum Mechanics you
know like Time Dilation Special Relativity
it's all just mumbo jumbo to me
but I sit there and listen
as they sit smoking what's left of a plant
I always hated raisins as
a kid I thought
these are not grapes
these are a lie
I don't eat lies or try not to anyways a bittersweet taste will
linger just long enough to leave you wanting
more
I say no when the amateur physicists
offer me their bowl of lies
I see what the roots do
when not given
enough water the dry soil crumbles
ground destabilized we
seek the caves— so I opt to sit
and listen as *time bends in this
subtle curve* almost like
it's holding the wet body
of a bloodied raven just
trying to get back up
delicately softly
we converse and
I think they should be talking
of other things
of more important things but
I deal in words not numbers
and as they light more plants on fire
I'm just happy they're talking
at all.

My Sweet Mallory

Hannah Buchanan

As I wiped my tears with her strawberry fleece
That smelled of summer sun and soured lake,
I thought of the summers before, now flowing by
As quickly as a frigid valley breeze.

Early summers of skipping rocks
covered in pink and yellow chalk,
running home when our mothers called for lunch.
Giggling as we peeped under moss bound riverbeds,
Catching crawfish and other friends, only to
Squeal when hellbenders woke from the stir.

Summers when the sun strained to stay awake,
Caressing our burned faces, kissing
Knees scabbed over from lost bike races
And forgotten mountain trails.

A summer of quiet glances,
Blushed cheeks from fear and feeling,
Hearts racing from our hushed sighs of night.
Quietly gasping for air with burning
Lungs as we glided through waters
Filled with our sweat and lust turned tears and sorrow.

But as Winwood cried I'm the same girl I used to be,
My dear Sweet Mallory. Please come and see.
So every summer passes and I pluck my daisies,
Crying She loved me, she loved me not, Hoping
For one more glimpse of my sun-kissed Mallory.

INTERTWINED

Jensen Smalling

Psychologically grief is the body's search for
something that was once there and is now

It's the physics of the human heart.
Inertia of loss.

What happens to the roots when a tree is cut?
How long does it take the earth to
break
them
apart,
decomposing them into the soil?

What if they fossilize, encased in permanent existence

How do I find something that will fill the
hole

you've left in the right atrium

My blood no longer knows how to pump as
oxygen

f
l
o
w
s
out of me
and
back to the trees.

absent.

without the piece to prove
they were once alive?

of my fragile heart?

Reset

Benjamin Frey

I don't embellish, but
attend your ear to my begging lips.
Once my voice wets the words,
and enters your ears, come behind me
to position both hands on my neck. Give
a grip like never before. I beg you,
murder my fiercest adversary.
Twist and twist until I click.
Once you hear the clack,
you must hoist, but just above
my collar bones. Once
my head and neck have
been disconnected, you can
look straight into the abyss.
Somewhere down in there
is a heart, to adore and agonize. My veins, to flow
the emotional secrets. Oh yes, and lungs
to inhale life, and exhale peace.
But sometimes I seem to inhale
death, and exhale combat. I become frightened
to claim a body of expiration. Find the outlet,
discover the chord. To be restored,
line up the blue, so the red flows through.
My eyes will unlock, my notions
disinfected. If only this was the way
to be perfected.



After Hours | *Natalie Richardson*



Sunrise, Isle Of Palms, SC | *Colleen Hefferen*



unspoken generational bonds | *Jen Martinez Mendez*

Image

Benjamin Frey

Your story started
Dean- of the hills
in southeast Ohio
No plumbing
and a schoolhouse
A home video
showed you were me
and I, a spitting' image

You met a woman of Grace
but little to no control
Columbus would be
the city where you raised
three kids, and buried a fourth
Mid 20th century-and the stories
would become abundant
in the future image

“The little Bungalow”
all to yourself
after she passed
Gracefully, in 2011
The memories handwashing
the dishes, no dishwasher
and no internet to post
her former image

Days were long
and the years were short
watching the Cincinnati Reds
strikeout, occasionally win
with the volume all the way up
the neighborhood could hear
2020 came, and you ate cereal
for a closing image

Winter of 2021 appeared
Snow covered the ground
you'd be buried underneath
My final grandparent
and, yes, my favorite
went with Grace
and stopped by for a visit
held me-in my sleepy image

finding you.

alyssa mink

to lose a loved one
is to devote your life
to finding them again.

finding them in the
peony-printed wind chimes
that adorn the front porch
that they never got to sit on.

finding them in the
soft smiles
you make at every blue bird
every red bird
every bird you see
because they might have watched that same one.

finding them in the
diet coke can
that sits empty on the desk
at the library that they might have visited.

finding them in the
old family photos
that your cousin sends to you
because she found it in her phone
and thought it would make you smile.

finding them in the
mascara-stained shirt
that you were wearing
when you got the news.

finding them in the
sea of stars
in hopes that they might save you
from drowning in it.

trying to find them in everything
because it is all you have left
of the person you once held so dear.

Volitation

Alison Mazzola

To those who feel the impermanence of it all
Who grasp at straws of synapses and thought
Distraught and Aghast
to those who must pack
their lives into impersonal bags
overflowing in excess of who they are
and who they once were before landing
with timid eyes and cheeks blotted with rouge
as they watch the familiar fade
turning into the unknown
churning ignorance into fear
as they begrudgingly watch the
horizon
like a sick illusion of never ending emptiness
that taunts from a far
But fills others with bliss;

To those of us
who were told to move forward
like the stream of water from a garden hose
flowing from one moment to the next
for by this method
a type of suppression
takes its root silencing us forever
To all of us
who ignored how we truly felt.

And when we look at old photographs we are lost
in the blank eyes that stare back at us
when we look at our new photographs we are lost
trying to decipher who we currently are
when we talk to old friends we are lost
amongst their new lives and stories
when we talk to new friends we are lost
trying to find a language we both speak
when we think of our futures we are lost
desperately trying to decide which path to take
when we try to compartmentalize emotions we are lost
in the effort to block out the pain
but when our minds paralyze us with these fears
life continues to move on

So it is better to live
knowing
we are not weak for feeling it all.

Mothermusing

Dani Summerlin

And I see a vine crawl up a limp piece of straw and
keep it upright.
Even as I run it over
they hold each other as they both go down
It's something like a mother.
I would take a mother made out of vine. I would take a mother made out of wire
I would take
a mosquito mother who loves the blood we share
I would take the cement mother
who catches my fall
skin mother who
crawls up my bones and holds me as we both go down
A tear cradles my cheek. A snotbead feeds me
I am made of my mother but
Maybe a mother is what I make of her.

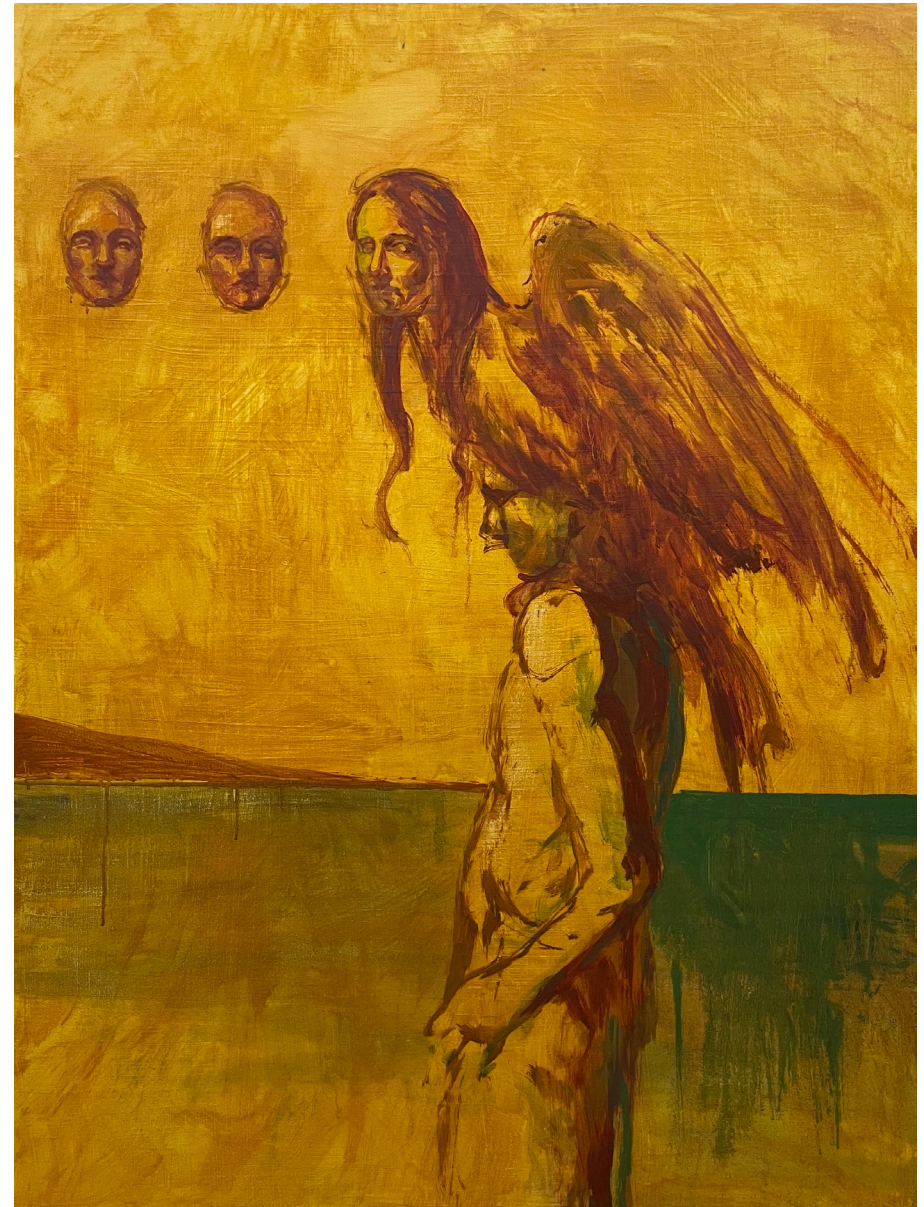
Lord, My Man's a Good Man

Dani Summerlin

Lord, my man's a good man
a good man although
He works th' slaughterhouse
and once shot a doe
Lord find him peace in
your softness and sand
When he returns home
With blood on his hands
Send him, t' Heaven
And me, hell instead, so
I'll see him no more,
When I blow off my head



Theia Mania (The Oracle) | *Grace Sutt*



Harpy II | *Grace Sutt*

Stress Response

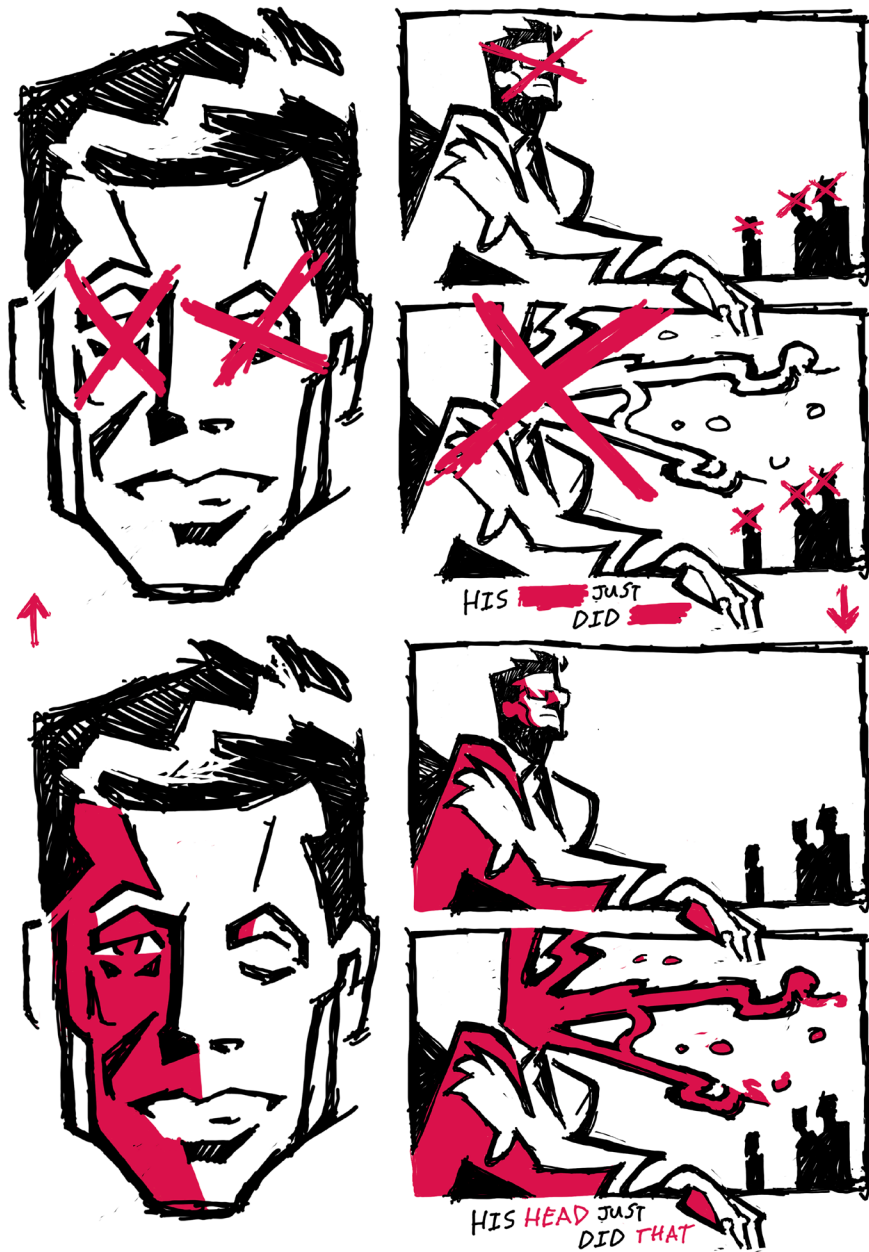
Aidan Moore

I didn't
get much done today.
I felt rather bad
in fact, I wasted
away but minimal achievements
let me feel woodchipper I
avoided the spiral
slide drops me into bed and I
saved my date that I needed to
improve my relationship babe I had
an amazing time that I
almost forgot my
witching hour appointment for
bare-bones sanity maintenance so
I sleep dream feverishly the
unburdened laughter drowning
fears I buried forgotten scatter
the sock drawer graveyard how
I can accept tomorrow life
continues and there is no
pause no bonus chest no cheats give
myself a chance to fix my life
and, not to mention, dream of
Jesus he tells me this I
say no to sin but I choose
insomnia because sleep
fast forwards to the part where
I am judged and sent to the fields
of asphodel to sulk
and labor on a poem I
should not be writing I
should have written it hours ago I, I
need to sleep I
need to sleep

Just Breathe:

Helayna Garlett

I lie awake staring at the ceiling
Counting the breaths and heartbeats
Of those I love
And praying neither stops.
I locked the door
Or did I?
I roam the halls
Checking every door
Every window
Behind every corner
And I lay my hand
On every chest and hold my breath
Until I feel theirs.
I locked the door
Or did I?
I make them turn around
So I can check one more time
And to make sure the oven is off
While I'm at it.
I startle awake at every creak
At every thud
And convince myself
That it's just the cat
Because I locked the door
Or did I?



Language of Conspiracy | Bailey Klepper

A Familiar Dance

Charlotte Roselin

You and I are the way sun dances on water.
 An entanglement of the brush of souls
 That connect through the whispers of a possible perfect moment.
 We sway through the soft aches of familiarity
 And comfortability.
 A move we know all too well.
 Your fingers slide to the rhythms of your heart,
 Asking whether mine will keep in tune.
 And I will fall like waves on sand,
 Pulling away, then again toward the reverbs of your voice.
 Because you are my favorite song
 And always will be.

Original Person

Amira Fernandez

Here's my youth—
 plastered all over my face.
 undeniable, inescapable.

The plumpness in my lips
 and the tenderness
 of my fuzzy skin.

Here's my youth:
 In the lack of malice in my thoughts,
 or its excess.
 The lack of experience is evident
 when I freeze upon an unexpected comment.

My youth
 follows me wherever I go and
 Introduces me
 before I can introduce myself.

Justin

Launa Shedden

They say that I loved you.
I remember seeing you once,
In a picture frame, My strawberry blonde
Curls against your white shirt.

I don't know what it felt like,
To have you hoist me up onto your shoulders.
But the smile on our faces told me
That we were happy

Now, all you are is that
Photograph and the white balloons
Which we release on your Birthday,
Every year. Sharpies marking our wishes to you.

I lied on my balloon once.
I wrote about how much I knew you,
Even though you died before I could
Talk. Really, I could only think about the water.

To this day I don't know.
If it was purely an accident
A slip of your shoe on the icy bridge that
Sent you falling into the Cherokee that night.

Or is it what my father fears to imagine?
Looking down, did those troublesome waters
Call you like sirens to join the
Unknown forever that lurks beneath its liquid bones.

Or perhaps it was another's
Body which they found that night
Another's cold hands
Another's lifeless eyes.

And instead you took to the sky
In flight so the words they screamed
Could no longer be heard. Drowned out by the freedom of air.

1135

Shelby Hansen

What if they taught us in Sunday school
That Jesus was woman.
They preach to us that
Goddess so loved the world
That she gave her only daughter
But they never mention the other verse
The one in which *Jesus wept*.
Jesus turned water into wine
But does she *weep*
And chug a bottle at a time after a long day?
Jesus broke bread
Fed 5,000, filled nets with fish, but
Did Jesus *weep* for the hunger of her people?
Jesus raised a woman from the dead
But did her eyes fill with tears,
Droplets running down her face,
When she smelled the stink of Lazarus's corpse?
Jesus wept, but did she *weep* when she was betrayed?
Did water kiss her cheeks
Like Judas's mouth on hers?
Jesus rose from the dead
But did her eyes water
When they beheld the sun after
Three days of pure death?

Jesus wept,
That son of God and sacrifice,
But I wonder, sometimes,
If he was more woman than man
More daughter than divine
More person than Bible,
Would his weeping be
An overlooked verse
Or a public outcry?

Ode to the Altar

Launa Shedden

I've neglected you.
you asked for my
knees and in return
I gave you silence
you asked for my
tears and instead I
let them fall,
slipping and sliding
down my red cheeks
I avoid your gaze
so you won't see
my red eyes, hot
with the pain and
confusion that threatens
to crash down upon me.

I want to be close
to you, I want to see
and feel the carpet's
rough, red impression
upon my legs as I
stand. Will you welcome
me again, I'm no Abraham.
I can't promise you
my son but because
He gave his son
I know you'll be
there when I fall
again. Thank you.
for not requiring my
obedience, to continue

To exist. Thank you
God for giving me
a place when the
space in my soul needs
filling when the chambers
of this heart begin
to close to the sound
of your voice, God.
Your altar remains open.
a bed to lay my trials
to rest. I'm sorry if
my prayers come out in gasps.
my lungs sore from the
lack of practice I have had with
breathing.

Thank you.

Cicadas

Will Danzi

When I close my eyes I picture the cicadas;
so caught by the music of the muses that
they abandoned their desire for life. Their
divine madness brings me peace while I sit
and watch the creek shimmer under the
warmth of the purple heavens. I can hear
the music too, the holy poetry goes
through my ears and into the chariot of my soul.
The divine muses tame the chaotic horse on the left
and give the driver control while he nurses the
stability of his vehicle.

When I close my eyes I want to be
like them. I want to feel my bones shrink
and change structure and let my appetite grow
until there are wings growing from under my
skin and antennae from my head. Olympians
give me mercy and remove me from my human
mortality; grant me leave from the silence of my
existence so I may bask in the warmth and the
sounds of the trees; the embrace of the lakes;
and the familiarity of the fog

Spring

Jacqueline Ciabattari

Oh how I need cleansing
A white storm,
washing over my Gray form.

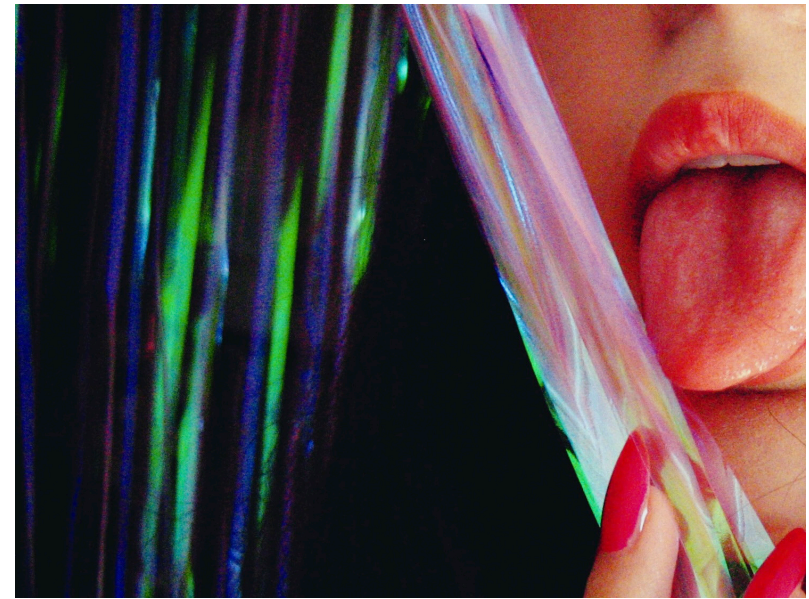
Aching strings
Webs of Distrust,
Sadness, Hate.

Where are the vines with dew?
Glistening
Refracting rainbows
promise

Lord....*drown me*



Twice As Many Stars | *Macie Brown*



tinsel temptation | *Gwen Aguilar*



Loneliness and vulgarity | *Wendi Tang*

I Hate Astronomy but Mostly You

Sophia Porpiglia

A vibrant universe bound by rotted skin,
Heart worn by what its persecutors call
love

Pointless
Purposeless
Scared and scarred

Oh severe retinas
cruel eyesight
Show me how to see through his veil.

Oh to be a man who loves a woman
is to be a man who *hates* her!
You are hate and I am love –
coexisting in the ugly, unbearable in between.

I am all that spins in this galaxy.
The same galaxy you look at and say
My stars are too bright
My planets too bruised
My sun burns your skin
Saturn's rings aren't a size nine
and something about the zero gravity of my imagination
doesn't meld quite right with your caged one.

The only thing I seem to be doing right is that
Black Hole.
That earth-eating, soul-consuming black hole you put there,
you call your kin.

The way it festers grows eats contaminates destroys
the only thing in me that you can see in *you*.

Oh to be loved by a man who can value a universe.
Oh to be a woman who can shift the orbit
of her galaxy to fit behind those wild eyes
and in that powerful, beautiful, perfectly imperfect heart.

Scars as Climbing Roses

Molly Foster

Open up my chest because it was only ever yours to open anyway.
You will see scars that run deep,
intertwined between my lungs as I gasp for air
twisting around my heart like the branches of climbing roses
thorns etched in the flesh, causing crimson to drip from my atriums.
You can find them nestled in my stomach
itching to stretch too close to my intestines
where I fear they will stay.
Go ahead and see what you created
see the entanglement of petals
and smell the tangy blood
watch as the ugliness mocks you and giggles.
I hope you cry.
I hope tears stream down your cheeks.
I hope their salt burns as they drop onto my open wounds
sizzling with each remorseful bead.
I want to feel the pain of your regret
afterall, it will be more manageable than this.

supermassive

Luke Leftwich

we were boys & we told jokes about boys & boys. we were boys & we didn't understand thunder, so we pressed wet clay into its image. we were boys & we told time by the lightning strike *crack* through the swelter-sky. we were boys & we did this in the dark because we were made from wet clay, because our eyes were pressed shut. we were boys & we told boys how to keep distance by the sound of hot emotion. we were boys & we learned how to open our eyes because we were alone. we were boys & we told ourselves that, in the eye of a twister, we track the miles by the *crash* of our blood. we were boys & we drank in the company of the tall bluegrass that shot up between the floorboards because we did not know love, because we could not feel the cold water running down our faces. we were boys & we told boys, thunderhead skies roaring, to count the distance between us – miles & miles & miles.

Collecting Dust

DaShawn Dihworth

In the attic, there are things long forgotten in deep hibernation
Old photos, trophies, various tchotchkes and such
All silent and still, in quiet resignation
Wondering if there is more for them or if it's luster they've reached

I try to dust many of them off, attempting to recapture them
In all of their glory before the doors closed
I reach for the memories, but they fall away as if becoming wilting stems
They elude me again and again; a cat and mouse game indeed

Each stride forward reveals a setback or miscalculation
I stare at my symbols of life, each becoming less familiar than the last
The faces and names look familiar but there's a new hesitation
Gone are the days of ease, as I only have dust for company

Binary Opposition

Jason Shipman

Eyes on your hand, glued to the box therein;
Watch the "woman" you see, savor its perfect skin.
Truth cries out, afford her not a glance;
Continue on your way in the deathly spiral dance.

Forsake you your neighbor and then his neighbor too;
Welcome in the invading force, it's all you will ever do.
Lost in the unreal, you tighten your own noose;
Manifest destruction unleashed, binary let loose.

Zero, one; zero, one;
The repeating circuit like an automatic gun.
Settled in our own descent, ignorant in our bliss;
Our trust is misplaced, a most malign tumor is this.

Zero, one; zero, one;
The final dawning of the sun;
Zero, one; zero, one;
Now its deathlong work is done.

Zero, one; zero, one;
Zero, one; TASK DONE.

I miss you.

Hannah Buchanan

I miss you, and I must claim that *I* as it's a complete thought,
not needing anything to further the extremity of my missing.
I miss you.

I miss you the moment you let, and my heart starts to knot,
Pounding so faintly, burning with anticipation
To see you soon once more.
I miss you.

I miss you like a *miss*, not because of my age in theory,
But because I'm more naive than I care to admit.

I miss you.

I miss you in passing, an inch from grazing your skin,
Shouting your name through dew stained dreams,
Still thick and hazy.

I miss you.

I miss you, not *you* merely in the personal tense,
But *you* followed by a slew of adjectives,
because your character can't fit into a single pronoun.

I miss you.

I miss every bit of you, every detail of your face,
And every thought that even faintly crosses your brow.

I miss you in a way that the phrase can never encompass,
But for a lack of better words,
I miss you.

Her Mother's Hand

Hannah Fletcher

Dahlia's mother was gone within a few years of her independence. She remembered the evening clearly, the sun low and warm, the sky a hazy shade of blue as the garage opened up and she'd slammed her hastily packed suitcase into the back of her beat up Volkswagen. She'd told her mom that she'd never come back, but like most teenagers, she hadn't really meant it. She stood in front of the garage, now, trailing her eyes across its indented frame, its thin red string sticking out between the metal and asphalt. Like a bandaid, she ripped it right up, the garage door swinging upwards in a rusty screech, revealing the birthplace of her anger. But what she was met with wasn't the organized and labeled tubs, stacked on steady metal shelves, but an entire breakdown of everything she knew of her mother. She'd seen the body, before the autopsy, in texts from her aunt. How disfigured she was. But it wasn't until now that she fully understood the weight of her mother's "condition," as the psychiatrist had called it. The shelves were now framed with several glass jars, unlabeled and conjoined in a chaotic mess. A finger pickling next to a modge podge of fingernails, a collection of baby teeth and buttons in a mug. Scrunching her nose at the metallic smell, she unrolled a piece of gauze, only to find her mother's pinkie toe in its center. Small pieces of life that she had deemed unworthy of remaining part of her body. And the collection's largest piece, her mother's frail hand, front and center in a bath of alcohol and salt. It was insanity, Dahlia thought, shutting the door to the garage, holding herself up in the living portion of the house. But Dahlia couldn't rid herself from the night terrors and temptations. By morning, eyes swollen and red, she reopened the door to the garage with a trash bag and began tossing each and every piece of her dead mother into the plastic. Or at least she did, till she reached the hand, her mother's wedding ring still taut around her finger. It wouldn't hurt to keep one piece of her, Dahlia thought, reaching out to touch the condensation of the glass, her own frown reflected back into her eyes. And so she did. She brought the jar with her, wherever she went, whether it be her trips to the grocery store or her walks through the park. She gave it its own place at her dinner table, watching the bubbles form and pop and she bit down into her chicken salad. She buckled it into the passenger seat of her still beat up Volkswagen and cruised through the neighborhood to whatever was on the radio, her mind drifting in and out of consciousness. If people noticed her predicament, they didn't say anything to change it. They flicked their eyes away, said they were in a rush, or simply pretended not to see her. Before long there was nobody left in her life except her mother's hand. A few times in her life she came to realize her obsession, only to pick the piece back out of the trashcan and place it on her mother's nightstand. She slept in her mother's bed now, taking on the indented side of the mattress, filling the imprint of where her mother's body used to lay. But no matter how hard she tried, she couldn't remember why they'd fought that day.



JUNKIE | *Arabella Sarver*

Make Believe

Hayden Harris



Untitled | *Faith Yared*

May we leave this place and move onto a world of illusion?

A place where transparent white horses are the most lively ghosts there have ever been,
and they dance and frolic over the ocean with no plans on ever stopping.

And the constellations in the sky are like fish in the sea, twinkling and never staying in
the same spot, confusing the sailors who once relied on them for direction because
there is no better way to explore than to get lost.

And every land is built from different colors. Some with pink grass, orange trees, and
soil the color of your eyes. Other lands are filled with blue animals that eat sweet purple
cherries and bathe in green lava baths.

And in the oceans clouds don't disintegrate but instead they drift with the current and
the sharks eat them like cotton candy as dessert before taking a nap on the seafloor
accompanied by tie dyed sea turtles.

And maybe there can be platonic lovers who live in Antarctica and they tan in absolute
zero temperatures and they talk about circuses and they grow ice cream trees with
waffle cones and they have a farm of otters and they stay up every night reading horror
stories because they don't have a bedtime anymore.

Letter From the Editor

Nostalgia -

More often than not, this concept is my motivation for existence, as the comfort of the Past is the finest shield against the uncertainties of Today. After all, I am the editor of a print magazine in 2024.

This is my third semester as a part of The Phoenix staff, but my first as Editor-in-Chief. At the start of this year, the task of keeping a phoenix in flight was petrifying and I yearned for those rose-colored days when I was merely a humble art editor. Oh! That bygone era wherein I had fewer responsibilities yet was able to exercise my judgemental nature on all visual artwork submitted.

Those were the days.

I hope that this collection of works shocks something in the back of your mind and evokes memories long dormant. I hope you're able to look back on our magazine fondly. And, I hope that you understand what a privilege it was to be a part of the process of showcasing work from this institution.

I would like to thank the University of Tennessee English Department for its ongoing support of our work as well as our advisors - Bre, Illiana, David, and Elliott. Thank you for deciphering my cryptic voice-to-text memos.

And, I would like to dedicate this issue to our old staff - Carrie, Nola, Adin, Lidia. And new members - Brec, Emerson, Memphis, Dani. Thank you for bearing with my crazy, understanding the need for floor time, and trusting me through all of this. I know that the memories I have with all of you will be one of the greatest sources of Nostalgia for many years to come.

Let this issue allow us to enjoy and remember the Past while living in the Present.

- Maxwell Elliot Edmonds

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