

Phoenix

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“I forgive it all as it comes back to me”

—Ethel Cain, *Sun Bleached Flies*



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Please, Let Me Remain

Audra Spencer

To whoever may find this,

This is a eulogy for the body you see before you in a
Shallow grave.
If you would be so kind, let me explain
Why I rest here in your backyard.

Before I laid here,
This was my grandmother's backyard,
With a tire swing hanging from that ancient tree
Always shading the lawn, always
Providing me with relief.

I loved that swing, as any child would,
Even though it collected rainwater at the bottom
And always splashed me with dirt and leaves.

When I came here,
I brought along a body to burn.
My twin, compiled of paper,
Tears, and repressed memories
Who I then set aflame,
Letting the smoke clear my lungs.

Purified, I dug myself a shallow hole
Right underneath that tire swing,
Loathing the dirt underneath my nails as I
Covered myself up, leaving this letter
For the poor soul who may happen upon
My body.

Please, let me remain here, with my tire swing.
Please, rest easy knowing that it waters me, on occasion,
With the scarce few remnants of a happy childhood.



Deadflow

Sara Caoile



An Unshareable Meal

L. Nathaniel Adams

The food is free
Silverware not included
In the corner of the room
Stands a small round table
Draped in a white table cloth
Set for one
A dinner of lemon and salt
Lit by an unburned yellow candle
The chair is empty
Fork, knife, and spoon untouched
We glance at that table
And eat with our hands.



Sailing

Keira Wilcox

The fog is soup.
But not the warm tomato soup my mother makes when I am ill—
No this is a soup that suffocates, clogging my
Nose and encompassing my
Eyes and slipping between my
Teeth to wrap around my
Tongue.
I know this because it has been
Hoursdaysweeks
Since I have seen a thing but fog,
Drifting over these solid black waves that I cut through in my sole boat
(bed?).
I peer out into this soup
(fog?)
But don't know what I am looking for. It's not the moon—
The last time I saw the moon it was a swollen pumpkin,
Rotten and oozing and sinking from the sky
To swallow me whole and stuff me with seeds
(stitches?)
Until I am no more.
I peer out into this soup
(fog?)
And I want to
Screamcrylaugh
But it chokes me and the tears dry before they fall.
I cannot see but I can hear...I can hear the waves—
But I have not heard waves like this before, waves that beep and murmur in dark tones
And stuff my ears like cotton swabs...stuffing my ears stuffing my ears
Stuffing my ears
LIGHT
Bursting through the soup
(fog?)
A lantern calling me home and the tears can fall now, can fall freely as my boat
(bed?)
Reaches the shore and rubs across the pebbles and I
Break
And I wake



In a bed in a white-walled room where the fog is gone and the beep is a machine and the seeds
from the moon are stitches and the moon is a light overhead and the tears flow freely.
A man in a white coat pokes his head above.
“She’s awake”

Here’s to Swimming

Maggie Lamons



maybe the moon is made of cheese

(for my sister who killed herself when we were young)

J. Thomas

graceless souls such as I are always losing our things
we set our keys our memories on wrong tables and countertops
miss them slipping into the gaps between sofa cushions
and without someone
to ask us where we've already checked
where we haven't
to help us dig through the cracks of our lives
scoop our missing things back up
which are already falling toward the center of the universe
to help us hold them close to our chest and remember
we are helpless and lonely and lost

here in this dusty gray laundromat
the ghost of my sister stands before me
and although she is silent I know
her

a day ago or maybe two or three I sat at the table of the Thai place we loved
plastic menu sticky with old conversation old understandings in my otherwise empty empty
hands
listening to the man in the back barking orders
beneath his voice was my sister's talking about meaningless things

through the space between our bodies hers and mine
she said

*I order of the drunken noodles for table 2
table 3 wants it extra hot*

there must have been a coin in someone's back pocket
because it's rattling the machine

whenever I lean forward to peer through suds-stained eyes into strangers' intimacy
my view is blocked by a face I cannot recognize but know I should
she who looks like my sister has the same round face
long lashes catching dust like grasshoppers in our soft hands
I must have seen her before



there is a secret I would have told my sister had she found me in the
limp cracked plastic seating of that Thai place we loved leaning forward to hear ourselves
over the peanut oil dancing in the belly of the kitchen's pans and it is this:

the moon is made of cheese not rock and dust and airlessness like her official spokespersons
would have us believe
smoothed along the edge of absurdity bejeweled with humble craters nadir to my feet
no longer heavy enough to walk the aisles of the store I wandered off in
ten years ago maybe twenty now searching for the familiar back of my mother
whose narrow shoulders my sister inherited
without drifting away
thick enough to fill the grooves of my molars as I orbit
circumpolar to her body my sister's collimated toward her own line of sight
my sister's

this is another secret (so listen closely) but I
must have misplaced my love
because it has been replaced by grief
and I cannot dig it out of whichever corner it has been forgotten in

my body still fits in the dimple of her couch the one I had slept on many nights before
falling away to the sound of the showerhead raining over her hair
her body still fits in the crevice of my shoulder more hollow now that
she is gone

if I could just keep a grip on your hands
if I could just keep a grip on your hands

softly I speak again I tell her
I lost something
and she finally asks me
Where did you have it last?



lunch on a sunny day

Joy Zhang



Smoke Break

Lili Call

God, I could use a smoke break. Right now. Just a minute or five to sit and be alone. It's time I could use to solve all the world's problems. Or maybe my mind will go blank. It's a way I could talk to new people. Gotta light? Or I could just sit in accompanied silence. I never get a break. Hell, nobody does. It's constant, constant, constant. All

the time. Every day and night. Always talking, watching, typing, reacting, listening, thinking. We don't know what it's like to take a break. I hope I'm never alone. But I will still mourn my smoke break because if I could spend time alone, that's how I would do it. Anyways. I don't smoke cigarettes. Never have. And so I guess I'll never get a break.



southern summer nights

Brenden Driskill

cicadas chiming.
they sing summer melodies,
hidden in the weeds.

moonlight coverings.
midnight approaches shyly.
all has settled down.

a dragonfly glides,
grazing a lavender stalk,
browsing the valley.

there! some crickets leap,
bouncing from soil to the leaves,
near the stillest pond.

birds breathe humid air,
and make home upon rooftops
in warm, dampened winds.

restless children run,
skip, jump—full of energy—
then fall onto grass.

lightning bugs scurry,
glowing atop the suave breeze,
avoiding glass jars.

the grownups relax,
discussing carefree matters
with a drink in hand.

distant barks arise
from across the endless field.
dogs stir up trouble.

elders on a porch.
they dissect each memory,
rocking to and fro.



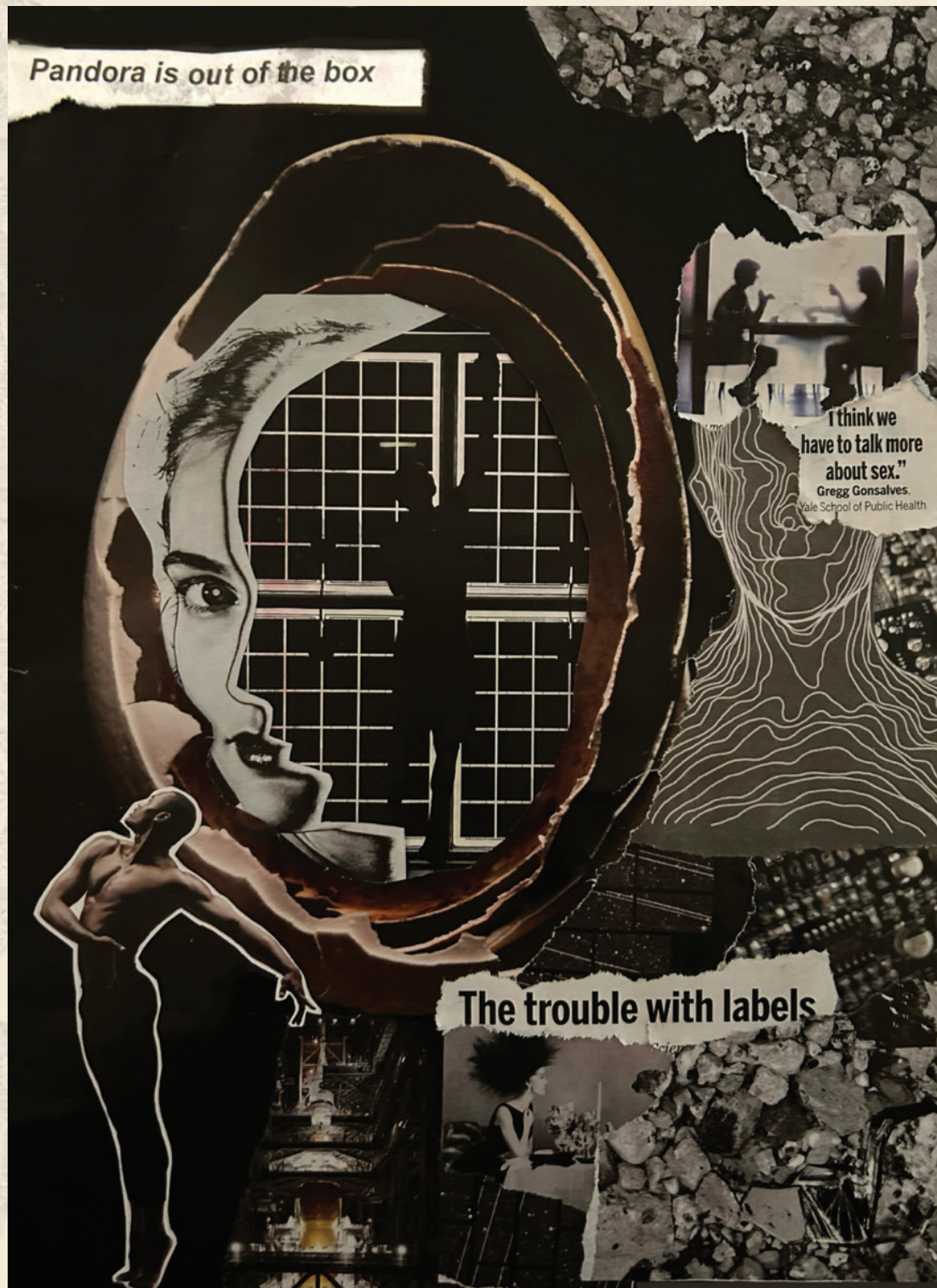
Groom

Kyndal Tobitt



Hatched

Everett Rich



Window at Le Gras

W.E. Blevins

Ask the universe a question.

It's a noisy place; you're bound to hear something. Just listen for the echo. But it really is a noisy place. A hum, a whisper, a "something" all around, a babel even far away from crowds and streets and ever-loud quietudes of homes with lights left on. Even on country hills with nothing but the stars to give you comfort, there is no "nothing." You can try. You can try to part the sea like Moses; think your question is so important it could split the infinite to reach a single ear.

But you've tried it all before. You tried it when you still made sense of things by scratching charcoal over limestone. When you still walked with knuckles scraping the dirt and made council by your little fires. Around those flames you craned up your tired heads, saw an infinite canvas above you with its own dustings of light, its own councils convened under the silhouettes of trees and bug-purrs trying to understand yours. That's what you thought.

So by that herald you came out of your caves. By those mysteries in the sky you raised up homesteads, towers, raised your minds to better grasp the roots of trees from which you built. You saw the number in the heavens and chose to challenge it. Stand on a hill. See all the fires you made. See the homes and the cities all mirroring the stars as your warbled lake-light tosses back their clarity and realize you're alone.

One of you realized it. Maybe it was on a farm as you watched a calf succumb to illness. A street as you saw a plague of the mind take form in steel-

drawn blood. Where was that great dying in the sky? Where were the towers the higher assemblies built to reach you? Then you saw it. Then you saw the stars weren't yours to hold.

So you stopped making sense of things. You waged conflicts, fought for lands belonging to no one, started fires that kindled only the aches of that abandonment with no longer a memory to give it reason. Still you stretched your minds, dug into the bowels of the earth to give your wildest dreams substance, but only in building wider, for you saw there was no upper limit to be attained.

And none of it mattered.

None of it mattered until you learned how to hold the light.

Look! The tunneled chamber in which the world may be given form! Brewing in the veiled primordial womb! amniotic pewter-plate! nutrients the bitumen of the holy land where only war had ere blossomed! A reflection! A second-story dream!

Life!

And what you call the grip of time loosened a finger. What you call memory delineated, if only slightly, when you could hold its lucent crystal in your hand. But you looked at it, and saw exactly that—a memory. You saw around those formless buildings the nameless grains that permeate a dream. You saw the same fog through which past loves and forgotten faces will be forever veiled. The same noise. Always the noise.



So that was the mission. The tower you had long stopped building.

To capture the light that abandoned you.

From the earth you threw silver, breathed over it your toxins, cracked the light like an egg and from its yolk settled another image, yet still there was the grain; behind it a reflection of the self you had formed it to escape from. Emulsions! Silver halides suspended in embryo! Salt of the earth! Glass! a window! made! a mirror! But no . . . No, it wasn't enough. The memories . . . held back by the fluid. No, they must be dried . . . No, they must incubate in the dark . . . No, they only show reflections, this time of the monochrome . . .

"Why?" you ask. "Why must everything remind us?"

The solitude broke its voice shouting but your spirits cried louder. Your windows grew smaller, the light more concentrated—you must destroy the grain, you must break free from the noise. You rolled it into spools, made your memories dance, made life breathe life into whomever's eyes would watch, shedding tears for a world and a time made to bend the knee. But look at those silent visions. Look at them. No matter how hard you try. It's still there.

You tricked your eyes and painted your memories colored. The noise. You gave your windows to everyone that some eye may see a different world. The noise. You told stories and reaped beauty and painted again your cave-wall ravings with music and lights and romance and theater and you roared

your standing ovations for the noise you thought you had conquered, threw ceremonies for the stars you had become.

And then it told you what it was.

Memory? A spiritual presence? A truth, a morality, a reason?

An answer?

Signals. You spoke through signals, played music through signals, evangelized through signals, built towers to gather them as treasures and amplify them as gifts. But you threw the towers into the sky, made them float around your rock, do that all for them.

So the horned ghost of a gift-giver sat searching for signals past the bounds of sky or earth. To find if the fire-councils above sent them through smoke like you through air down below. Yet from every direction, it heard something else. A garbling, a murmur Interference from lights below? No. A bird nesting in the antenna? No. Seemingly, the static of a lost signal now asserted somehow its presence.

Everywhere.

But where? From what?

To reach high you spread your arms once more, consulting, divining, charting the noise of all the universe's sea from your pelagic raft. Gathered the noise in your arms with your earthborne tools. Put it on a monitored map to stand up on your hill once more.



You took a step back, and saw no signal. You saw an afterglow. A residue. A memory, though not from you. From *them*. Humming its symphony from all corners of space—a noumenal background of radiation. An infinite afterimage of visitors from the moment everything began.

And so the time you tried to conquer took on a different form that day. Time and light signed to you their autograph on the universe's embossment, though in no language you could read. You knew silently what it was the light tried to show you. You understood the infinity that flooded every stretch of nothing. That the visitors who swam in nebulae, witnessed firsthand the geriatric stars be fused into birth, who looked upon your solemn waiting for the sky's reply were the same who paved the age of living room radio through entropic wavelengths, the same who crackled through the haze of that second-story window.

So you ask yourself, "is that it?" You go away from the chaos to look at the stars, but find that infinity still looking back. Listen for the visitors. Fourteen billion years, saturated into every one. They're selfish, you say. They press Time on glass and paper, put your ages in their wallets, hang eons through their homes yet don't spare you a drop.

But you close your eyes. You listen for that familiar noise. Wind howling. Birds hooting. Life around you. And you hear another din. You see the neon stars below. Hear that wall of a world that never sleeps. Where experience and memory dilate in every office, every home, when the countless worlds

slow down to breathe a steady sigh. That's your noise. That's yours. Then you wonder, "Are we not visitors too?" Capturing Time, whether through light or a blanket thrown over the outlines of eons, that neither can quite understand.

Ask the universe a question. You'll hear it asking too.



You decided, finally, to break up with her on Thursday. Her mom decided to die that Wednesday.

It's an odd, cooling feeling, sitting beside her in that hospital. It's not from the uncontrollable weeping she'd sloshed onto your shoulder or even the frigidity in the air that wouldn't cease, regardless of the bundling. The feeling concentrated at the lowest point of your spine and spread upwards, climbing through the expanse of your vein network to settle low and icy in the hollows of your bones. You wish you felt more. Maybe that's what made you feel worse.

Katey's eyes had not dried. You remember the drive home from the hospital, when the sterile smell of the hospital clung to you like saran wrap, that she couldn't speak. Her gaze was trained on streetlights and the way they'd flicker just enough to cast light on her empty face, then not at all as you got closer to the house. You remember turning the car off with one hand and reaching to place the other on her thigh. She remained unmoving. You held your breath and sat with her in it for a minute because, even distantly, you can acknowledge that she deserves this in the way anyone would.

"My mom's dead." Was the first thing she told you. Maybe whole minutes or hours or days passed in the time it took her to speak. Her voice fluctuated like an audible mirage.

You didn't know what to say, so you said nothing. You squeezed her leg and climbed out of the driver's

side and, after smoking half a cigarette in the driveway, you opened the passenger's side door. She didn't move.

There are a hundred things you know about Katey. You know that she is someone who feels things so intensely, it is almost an eclipse of emotion. You know that she is passionate and loyal and hardworking. You know what she looks like when she's frustrated, when she's mad, when she's fed up. The strangest thing about looking at her now is you still know her, but it doesn't mean anything to you anymore. You parsed the context; you didn't care about the implications.

"Paul." She called out to you. Her hand latched onto the upper part of your arm, a decisive leech sinking its feeble teeth into the sensitive skin. Your first imperious impulse was to swat her hand away. The second was to cover her hand with your own. You smooth your thumb over the side of hers. Look into those dirt-colored eyes, accentuated by the red rimming. "My mom's dead." Katey repeats.

"I know." You whisper.

"My mom is dead. She's never going to be undead ever again."

Never going to be *alive* again, you think. "I know." You repeat.

Lear/ning Curve

Solomon Davis

Let's go back to the basics.

I'm talking consonants,

vowels,

sy/lla/bles.

From there we went to verbs,

nouns,

adjectives,

pronouns,

conjunctions,

prepositions,

and ar/ti/cles.

After that we learned sentences,

paragraphs,

essays,

informative,

persuasive,

rhe/tor/i/cal.

But cuz of my diction, you think we ain't talkin the same language.

And that's hor/ri/ble.



Lashes

Tony Roca



control

Joy Zhang



Paranoia

Hannah Buchanan

I lie awake at night, listening to the tick of a clock running in my mind. Nightmares of days past come in flashes, surfacing back more vile than vomit, paralyzing from their mere frame. The bargains I whispered in shameful tears and tormented shouts replay in my mind, flooding in as late-night frights induced from my misjudgment. They come with no courage, mumbled domestically. They come with a

bite, but in my own direction. They come not from ghosts of the said, but the unspoken. Thoughts never dismissed only diminished in a corner, with a slip-knot above the teetering chair. Each night the same one regurgitates with such guttural vengeance. A minuscule voice only heard in the pounding walls of my mind, a too young girl so dismembered, and shouting.

For my grandmother

Hannah Buchanan

The morning always comes cold and abruptly, jolting me forward, forcing me upward. I bathe myself and wonder who bathes you? Sometimes I pray that today I receive the call that it's done. It's selfish but you are too. We're alike in that way. Stubborn as you are, I cut your hair, thick with age and neglect, its sadness piling at my feet with shades

of gray. I wash your hands and your feet, peeling back years of your burdens and stash them beneath the balls of my own feet. Some days I hate your temper, but most days I see glimpses of your smile crawling out to warm the room, sterile with the hum of oxygen and dread.



The Right to Mourn

Jason Shipman

It's been a while.

I've never been good at reconnecting with people. I never know what to say or ask—I don't know where life has taken them, how they've changed, or whether they'd still appreciate my company.

I thought about it sometimes—about you. Wondered where you'd wound up. You always had this spunk about you that told me, *she's going to go places*.

There were a couple times you talked about the future. Remember? That came after you burst through the bushes along the property line unannounced and it was the highlight of my day. We'd ride around our little Gators and pretend we were on real roads as we went in loops around the landscaping.

Did we imagine the rock river was a railroad, or did I only dream it?

It's been so long I don't remember, and that frightens me, because that means there may come a day when I remember nothing at all.

You had a lisp in those days. A lot of us did. Sometimes I wonder how long yours hung on. I can't remember how long mine did. It doesn't matter. Lisp or not, I want to hear your voice again.

Is it fine for me to say that?

There was that one time you came back, I remember.

I had that Lightning McQueen wristband you got me before you left. My mom teased me about it and neither of us knew what to say. She teased me because I said it reminded me of you.

It did, you know. That's why I always kept it nearby.

I lost track of the time I spent looking for it after I got the news.

Admittedly, I wanted to write this to you two years ago. I just didn't know if I had the right. I suppose that's still my question now, in truth. Here I am, loafing around like an idiot at one in the morning questioning whether I should even be writing this because God, or Satan, or life itself, or something beyond my ability to comprehend decided to put a dot in your head.

Somebody told me it's okay to mourn somebody you know, or knew. You know, she shares your name. Maybe that's why she later became my closest friend, too.

Or maybe it's a coincidence. Life is full of those, you know? I've certainly come to know that.

But can I really say I knew you?

I definitely did at one point. But was that you?



I know that rotten little self-important bastard wasn't really me. At least, not in full.

But if you asked me the same question—if the roles were reversed, just like I wished they were for months thereafter—I suppose I would say he was me in part.

So can I say that I knew you partly? Does that qualify me to grieve? How much does one need to know to grieve? If a tree falls in a forest and I haven't seen it in a decade, do I have the right to mourn its felling? Certainly, from an environmental standpoint, I could make a fuss with the timber company. I could cite any degree of malpractice or make up some nonsense about injustice or find something to get pissed off about.

But is that really mourning?

If I curse out God, or Satan, or life, or something beyond my ability to comprehend for putting a dot in your head, am I mourning you or the dot?

Admittedly, I'd almost rather not answer that.

In truth, I don't know whether it's right for me to mourn or not. I've heard differently from different people. What I do know only too well is the existential dread that follows your face—knowing that you, my first friend, have already departed and knowing that on any day, at any time, I could follow you beyond the thin veil that fights to be rid of us. And every time I think of you, one question gnaws

away at my infamously unwavering demeanor: when will it put a dot in my brain, too?

I guess you'll find out sooner or later. And when you do...

Let's catch up.



Retch Like Me

Brenden Driskill

The first time I threw up was when I was ten. I had eaten a cookie, and I was all alone in my bedroom. The flavor of my treat was fine, but it made me feel like I had to get something out. I began to cave in. Then, from the pit of my stomach, a rushing wave overwhelmed me and exited my lips. I don't mean to be repulsive, but is it bad that I liked the thrill? A week later, after the excitement, I ate another cookie. This one tasted even better, so I had another one. Then another, and an extra one for good measure. I tried to moderate myself, but they were too enticing. I ate one after another until there were only crumbs in the jar. At that point, my stomach was full and began to bubble over once more. I learned my lesson. That was the last time I ate those cookies, but not the last time I vomited—I simply changed my source of sweets.

Sometimes, I begin to regurgitate what I last ingested. People may think it's distasteful, but I never know when I've had too much. Who are they to judge anyway? I see their heaves. Their gags are hidden within the paths they walk, the words they speak, and in the ways they look at others—the eyes reveal what the mouth won't. They overindulge on that which is vile, whether they realize it or not. It's appealing; it's appetizing. They feast on what they shouldn't consume, and they vomit as much as I do.

Throwing up ought to remind us of the thing that we love—the thing that we love so much that it's overflowed out of us.

What type of twisted longing is this—that we desire something so much that it exudes out of us? This is no love anymore. Maybe we devour it out of habit. Maybe it's a consolation. Maybe we're bored. Maybe it's easier to not think about—I think I'm feeling queasy again.



Shadow Beach

Maggie Lamons



There Is a Me in Every Immigrant Child

Jen Martinez Mendez



The Science of Politics

Rheagan Haynes

James Madison once said
that if all men were angels,
there would be no need for government.

If all men were angels,
there would be no need for forgiveness.
If all men were angels,
there would be no need for flags and boundaries.
If all men were angels,
there would be no need for liberty and justice for all.

Yet,

how angelic it is to be able to admit that we are not angels.
How sacred it is to be given the option to choose goodness.
How holy it is to be taught how to care,
how to fail,
and how to try again.

James Madison once made Government sound like the ugliest word in the world,
but government is a structure—
built to reveal the cracks in society,
but also built to show how we grout them back together.
Government is a reminder that we need one another because we are not,
and we will never be perfect.
Even the angels need Jesus to hold them together.
Yet, out of many flaws,
one promise remains.

E Pluribus Unum.



Human Frailties and Critiques on Kinship

Hannah Buchanan

I wish I could wake up and be forty-three—
past the prime my mother tells me I've stumbled into
when all I ever wanted was to close my eyes
and have the door of my twenties shut
tightly behind me.

I want to wash my mind in the blood
of a steak I cooked on my own grill,
with my own hands that I eat
ravenously—indulging in the
sweet, erotic, red-iron nectar she
gifts me like I'm her own golden calf.

No more dates that tell me my hips feel just right
in the crux of their hands.
No more hot breath mixed with smoke and beer
from a mouth that roams in all the wrong places.
Those hands hold the world and suffocate it,
choking out her color, along with my own two cheeks.

No more dinners drowned with red wine,
or skirts that ride up my thighs for
eyes I never wanted to meet.
No lacey black lies that cut into my
womanhood when I know bourbon in bed
would be more comforting, like a luxurious
fur coat bought with my own money.

I could hold my younger
portrait in the rearview mirror,
so she can see the worst
and the best of every choice I've made,
without a painful 22 years of what-ifs and
nights in sheets that smell of sour sweat.
Maybe then I would see myself as fragile—
breakable, beautiful, and no more
rugged than my worn-in slippers.

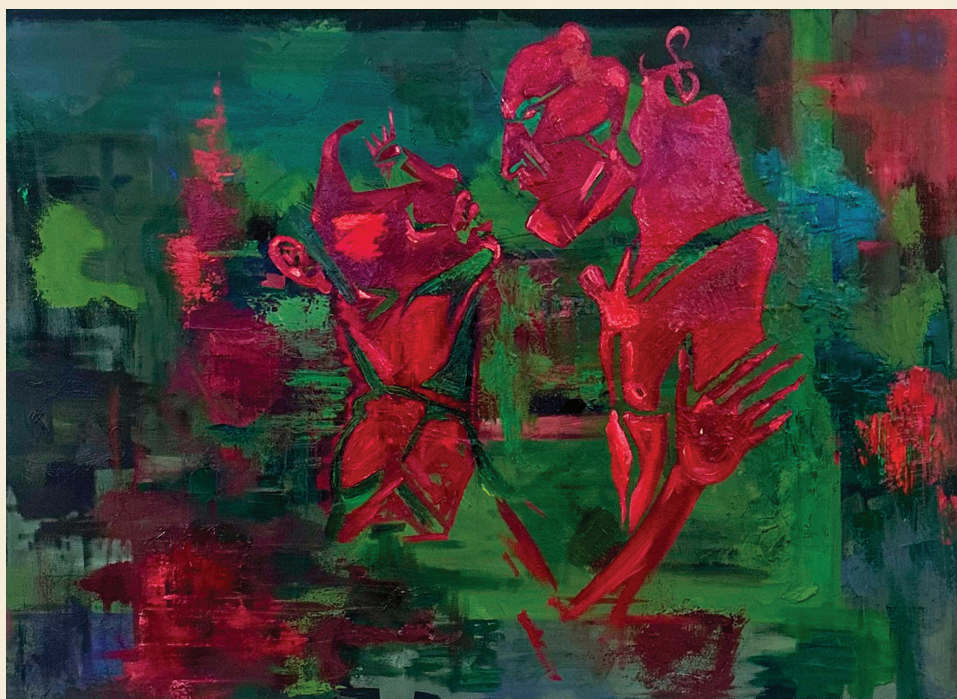


But I've spent my youth in the laps of men
old enough to snap careers between their forefingers —
intoxicating enough that I lie to myself beneath them,
praising those unappeasable hands
for meeting me where I am, a sacrificial love —
numbing my mind and blurring
the twenties I try so desperately to abandon.

But *these* hands have done nothing
but corral me close enough to connection
that I can smell such sweet salvation —
and then they remind me the blood running
from my lips comes from the hands
that fed me to the world.

Temporal Lovers

Greta Grier



Eldritch

Tom Fortner



What Once Was

Anonymous R.

Soft, quiet. Heavy feeling, but not a bad one. I feel the weight of what once was. I can feel the weight of who you were, who all of you were. It's where you have come to lie in death, at peace, but this place is bursting with life, *if* one knows how to feel it.

If no one was there to appreciate you in life, know that I am. If no one has come to your grave to see you, know that I am...whoever you are. I am watching the sky turn over your tombstone.

You were a strong woman, with a lot of friends. You liked to go out on Saturday nights with friends, in your old age you had a book club with those same friends. You had so many hobbies but could never pinpoint your favorite...at least I think so.

I am trying to imagine what your life was, all of your lives, without your saying so. I am making it up as I stare at the hard cold stone in front of me, the stone that's just stone but somehow carries your life. I'll never truly know, but I like to imagine. Is that ok with you?

I am anyway.

You deserve respect, and I'll never know if you got that in life or even in death, so the least I can do is offer that now for each and every one of you.

Why is that written on your stone? Why that statue in particular? Why this particular marble or kind of stone? Did your family or friends choose this? Do you hate your family? I only have what is written. Only so much to go off of. How strange to condense a life, a soul, to only a few sentences. Breathed life into the earth only to suck it back in and be reduced to a stone in some grass...I hope you're doing ok, if there's something after this.

I can feel you, all of you. That leftover life from these stones reaches out and brushes past me, grabs at my ankles and legs and stomach and heart. Do you want me to hold your hand? I can if you'd like, as I can feel your emotions just as I feel mine.

And I'll never know who you are.



Mi Querencia

Amira Fernandez

I'm sorry that you embarrass me
after all you've given me

childhood, family, dreams

But you've just
fallen so low.

Why did you let all those men
take the goop from your bowels
and the metal from your caves,
then walk on your soil *undisturbed*?

You could've at least shaken a little
or swallowed them whole,
dried up their water
or poisoned their crops

Now I'm forced to look at you from afar
and nod when people call *us*
Your people
Thieves, pests, and bums.

All I do is nod!
All I do is sigh!

While all they do is say:
"I know something is wrong with it,
I just don't quite know what it is."
"Venezuela? Is that in Africa
or the Middle East?"

And I don't know whether to take their hand or
punch them in the face before
ripping out my heart from its cage and saying

"It's here!"

Venezuela's here
just,
look in the crevices
where there's sprays and spurts,
right there
you can see her trace

in the way my blood spills when you mention
her name



Cross of the Martyrs

Greta Grier



Wild Flowers

Helayna Garlett

The air smells like gunpowder
and my ears are ringing

There is blood on my hands
But I feel no wounds

The grass around me is yellow
like it is unloved and unwatered or

Like my tears have fallen
more than the rain

And the salt in me
has killed everything it's touched

My nose finds the deer
before my eyes do

I have stayed here so long on my knees
that the rot has set in

I look at the broken body
and back down at my hands

There is no blood on them
they hold only antlers

I look at my reflection in the pond
and meet the eyes of something once wild

I get to my feet and
I use the antlers to dig a grave

The deer is heavy and fly-covered
but I welcome the weight

When the dirt is settled
I use the antlers to write in it:

'Where wildness lies'
the flowers I lay on top are dead



Tussle

Tom Fortner



yowch

ren

snap.
bite.
satisfy
the aching
pulsing in your gums.
a good dog never bites. you do.



ice cream multiplication

Anonymous

in my body, there is a memory of
torn cuticles and bloody nails—
nine-year-old contraction; cotton shame
i look down; it's always there—
flesh chain; hair of the dog; scrambled eggs
(ain't you regular? ain't you

figure d it out
Yet?

clots descend—thirty-three expeditions—
vertebrae cry in pain
cradles, a longing for
water

a

floating

strength

in the stomach—

this is something
i'd like to burn.

once, it was your knuckles,
now the ends of your fingers—

one time we had
to take these tests

the paper was warm and
smelled like ink and the crinkle
and sludge of
the friday Target trip
just with mom



if you passed one, you
got to color a scoop

of ice cream—

anyway, my pencil was covered

in purple glitter (it was
my favorite color at
time)

and the stale cheeseball timer
went off in 5 and

I was sat; I was good—

I knew my nines like
how to brush my hair;

the eights I failed—

56 becoming 64 was
unnatural, like red marks

on a worksheet;

like a training bra in a
Kohl's dressing room

it's ironic because

I was writing when

I started melting;

(to defrost this
hen you have
to take her out
of the freezer)

I wasn't ignorant, I wasn't
dying (yet)
but there were ice cream scoops left
to color;



I felt it
slide out
of me
as I sharpied
a rudimentary
sentence about
The Middle Passage
(like I understood
what really happened)
and I tried to breathe
out but God decided
He needed to dig
the chunks out of
His dear pint
of Uterus and Ovaries

I felt the melt
creep down my
inner thigh
in the carline
and I wanted to cry
but I wanted the scratch
and sniff ice cream
sticker reward more
so I kept my mouth
shut and surprised
my mom with
an afternoon of
lysol wipes and
sympathetic pats on
the back



everyone knew I
was on the rag
 when I brought
 my pink purse
 to school
 that monday;
 even though they
 designed the pads
 how a girl my age
 might doodle on
 her math notes;
 I bathed in
 A Thousand Wishes
 so that no one would
 think I was sticky
 or animal—

I didn't pass my eights—
but I'm made
of ice cream.



The Resting of the Soul

Wendi Tang



The Skittish Kitten Learns

Jenna Bryant

Ceramic speaks; ears flick to the sound.
Footsteps keep their distance, soft as moss.
A voice lowers itself like evening light,
threading the air with careful warmth.
Time learns the shape of waiting.

Three months pass like falling of leaves.
The bowl fills. The bowl empties.
The wood remembers the heat of day.

The porch holds its breath

Hands open and stay open.
The porch keeps breathing.
Fear loosens its thin knot.
A back arches in the language of touch,
one careful pet, then the quiet of staying.

Please let the night be kind to small things.

I rest my ribs against her chest,
listening for the place where cold ends.

j-walk haiku

ava

together we walk
in search of a quiet scene
to huddle and smoke



Rear Ends Stamping Couches in the Countryside

Daniel Johnson

The councilman will lie to you
It snows that night
The powder lining the black street
You thought it wasn't going to cling to those streets,
the way you had
The silence is what you notice first,
then it ices quicker than you thought.

The councilman would show you the lashes on his back
The purplish blues melting into reds pouring out lies,
as his snake eyes look at you from above
that brown podium that he stands in front of,
his clean new suit that you bought.
Six figures Seven would be enough to be a public servant.

He lies to you with a belt in his hand,
a close neighbor to his tongue.
It is three doors down
the murderers' in between.
You ate too much and spilled a stain on your shirt.
It's green and it smells like disease.
You know it's there but you can't do nothin' about it.

My granddad watches as his cancer gnaws away with sharp teeth
Ripping viciously into his colon
There's a squelching.
Look hard enough and you can hear it,
see the old man lose weight.
A corpse rotting beneath your nose
you can smell it.
How much more of that soft tissue can he give
The councilman says not enough,
blood dripping from his mouth
sharp tooth smilin'



My granddad swears by the venom of the snakes
They dissolved his Medicaid months ago
Watch as he feasts loudly with the council and calls it knowledge

They are eatin' him
Blood tearin'
Teeth rearin'
Belly rumblin'
Eatin' him.

I had to pay \$3 extra when they shot that poor woman down
Too many people watching that city burn on one account
The second one has lies built in
Decided it was better to pay green than be lied to
Rear ends stamping couches in the country side
Paid green still got lied to.

intentions

Emery Ball



all i know

Gwen Aguilar



Devotion to What Made Me

Jen Martinez Mendez



university of tennessee

Emery Ball



An Ode to John Cena

Harley Miller

December 13th
8 PM.
One last time.
A few good hits to start it off.
A staple shoulder tackle,
Or two.

Can this go on forever?

Cheers, slams,
“You can’t see me.”
23 years’ worth.
Iconic.
It all seems to be going
Just the way we planned.

What is a legacy?

A long-lasting impact,
A plastic figurine,
Or a Tumblr dedication page.
A way to connect with
My brother.

Why can’t we see you?

Cena goes up,
Cena goes down.
The rise
And fall
Of a man with promise.

I see you.

You left the ring
With one last loss.
To tell yourself,
Really,
It is over.



It Cuts Deeper

Iris Love



Dusk Ritual

Will Perkins

Little birds flutter where they please
As little wings rush through trees.
A softly swallowing stream glides by
As whispering willows murmur and sigh.

Shaking legs bow down to sleep
As soft eyes settle for night.
Mother lows and licks her calf
Till morning's pale dawn light.

Leaves dance, flutter and fly,
Gently gliding to water's murmur,
Ripples shimmer as one falls,
Creek and trees settle in wind's whispering call.

Little feet climb to feather
Beds and woven sheets, light
Dimming with slumberous night,
Sleep tight my dear.

outdoor dog

ren

mean as
an outside dog.
you snap at every touch,
but melt into a soft hand. What
are you?



Lyra

J. Thomas

In the wild, sickly heat of summer, [*there is a blank here*] and I spent our days, stretched tight
Around our joined perspiring bodies, pulling strings of sadness from each other, ears cupped

To the music. We passed slips of paper—*run away with me*—in between mud-stained palms
Behind the wide back of the soccer coach and swatted away the poker-point words of our

Mothers. I tapped my sister's old shoes against the hard flooring of the hairstylist's, flipping
The pages of a beauty magazine, while [*there is a blank here*] squirmed in the leather seats,

Choking on the smell of hairspray, willing the scissors closer to her scalp. We licked ice cream
From each other's salted cheeks, pulled back the scabs of our knees to inspect the rich, warm

Blood underneath. I peeled apples across my arms as her hair darkened each year, even with the
August sun tousling it, until [*there is a blank here*] had lost her baby blonde and I had lost my

Thoughtlessness. Our love was delicate as the blades of grass she balanced perfectly atop the
Back of my outstretched hand and resolute as the stale gumballs I chewed first and handed over

To her, saliva spilling from my callow mouth; Unwetted, they hurt her brace-bound teeth. Once,
Constellations forming between the joints of our coiled limbs, [*there is a blank here*] told me

About how she'd tried on the lips of another girl, wriggled her arms through, smoothed them out
Over her. She had the jeans to match. We giggled at the prospect of adolescence, pulling the

Belly of the sky up and over us, hiding beneath its foggy humidity, lost between the dusty blades
Of fans. [*there is a blank here*] said goodbye to me as I stood on the edge of my porch one

Summer night, and I, weak with affection and unacquainted with the consequence of adulthood,
Could not help but look back. Dry your skin, dripping with chlorine and the scent of your

Mother's love in the wrinkles of memory my clumsy hands have pulled taut once more. Fall
Asleep counting the vertebrae of my thin, beaten back once more. I will be here when you wake.

[*there is a blank here*], everything I write is about you.



connection

Emery Ball



Geese

Lili Call



All of My Childhood Pets Are Dead

Helayna Garlett

and my grandparents are moving. They have lived in that house my entire life, but it is two stories, so the ones I grew up hearing don't really matter. There are stars on the ceiling of my uncle's bedroom. I wonder if they've torn them down or if they'll stay there longer than I get to. The leg broke on the dining room table, which was my favorite spot for hide-and-seek. I wonder if it didn't want to leave, too. There are scratches on the hardwood floors from their dog, who couldn't get up those stairs in his old age, either. My cat is buried in the yard of a family friend who's in the ground now, too. I have a cross I painted for my puppy, who sleeps in the dirt of a place no longer my home. I have moved

too, and we live on the second floor. Those stairs don't matter because they don't really visit. We have lived here the longest I've lived anywhere. Longer than the ever-changing faces behind identical doors. Longer than we lived in the town where my cat and my puppy are buried. Not as long as the house my grandparents have lived in for my entire life. All of my childhood pets are dead, including the dog named Kitty, who belonged to the uncle with the stars on his bedroom ceiling in the house my grandparents have lived in for my entire life. All of my childhood pets are dead, and my grandparents are moving into the house right next door. It has one story, and none at all.



Place

Finlay Walker



Discount Fireworks

Justin Smith



Green Tea

George Culpepper



On My Lack of Greens

Grace Rook

If I could grow even one tomato
I believe I would sprout a complex straight
Up and out of the top of my dome

I'd give it a seat at the table
"Here is the tomato," I would introduce
The red baby to my friends

They would probably throw something at me
Because they are good friends. But I would say
"You're green with envy," and they would leave

Because even saints have their limits
And so I do not garden, not because
I am lazy, because I know myself

A green garden would be too much
I would be Adam, except without
A wife to blame for my hubris



Climate Change through the Perspective of a Fire

Anonymous

I expand my existence across the universe
As I attempt to repress my heat
They run from me farther and farther
Watching me in breathless horror

I am a fiend that slaughters all in my path
My path gets narrower
And narrower
All I can do is destroy

I lose track of what's left
Every oak, every redwood
Every deer, every bear, every fish
Torn to shreds
I hear their screams in anguish

Forever vanished
Through the monstrous
Hands of my own, his creation
I prowl alone

My creator
He continues to feed me gasoline
They allow him to
He says it helps him breathe



The Dream of the Olive Tree

Wendi Tang



untitled

layla moore



Goodyear Arts' Mannequin

Blaine Atkins



1221 Laurel Ave

Lili Call



ester st.

Brianna Eaton

ester st.
up the hill.
across from the college.

it has seen daughters
turn into wives,
turn into mothers,
turn into grand-mothers.

it has seen babies,
graduations,
christmases,
and occasionally deaths.

but not hers,
the Lady in the window,
who waved at us from the porch,
and then the window,
and then from the bed,
and now from the sky.



First Breath of Spring

Miranda

The weather is starting to warm, so is the heat in my cheeks.
Spring has made her appearance, the day starting soft and pleasant.
The cool breeze tickles the air, just the same as your kiss, as it glides over the soft skin of my neck.
Birds have returned, their small chirping reminding us all of their arrival, similar to the soft sounds escaping from parted lips.
As flowers blossom with rich color, opening their petals to bask in the gift of warmth, my thighs follow suit
Deer out in the open, intent on eating freshly sprouted berries, a peckish wolf descends to his own meal. You both share a look of hunger; you mimic the wolf's movement.
Finding your prey, eyes never leaving your target, your mouth meets flesh.

With the rebirth of spring, a fresh faced new-born, it must be fed.
It starts to drizzle, a soft, steady pace nurturing the fragile state of desire, within the soil, within my soul.
The rain starts to pick up, turning into a downpour, and the earth begins to respond: writhing, groaning, running.
Wind pulls at tree limbs, swaying them in song like rhythm, as I tug your tightly coiled hair in the same cadence.
Thunder rumbles a heaven-sent cry, a shout it buried beneath, lightning painting the sky with electricity, I feel the immensity of the storm course through my own blood.
The storm comes to a final close.

Earth has been well-fed, and so have you.
My skin is sweat slick, and the flora is blanketed in their own droplets of water.
Both of us pleased beyond measure.
Small animals burrow together in their homes, settling after the storm. I curl up to you like the rabbits cuddled together under the wild oak.
I chuckle, "Nature is all but one."



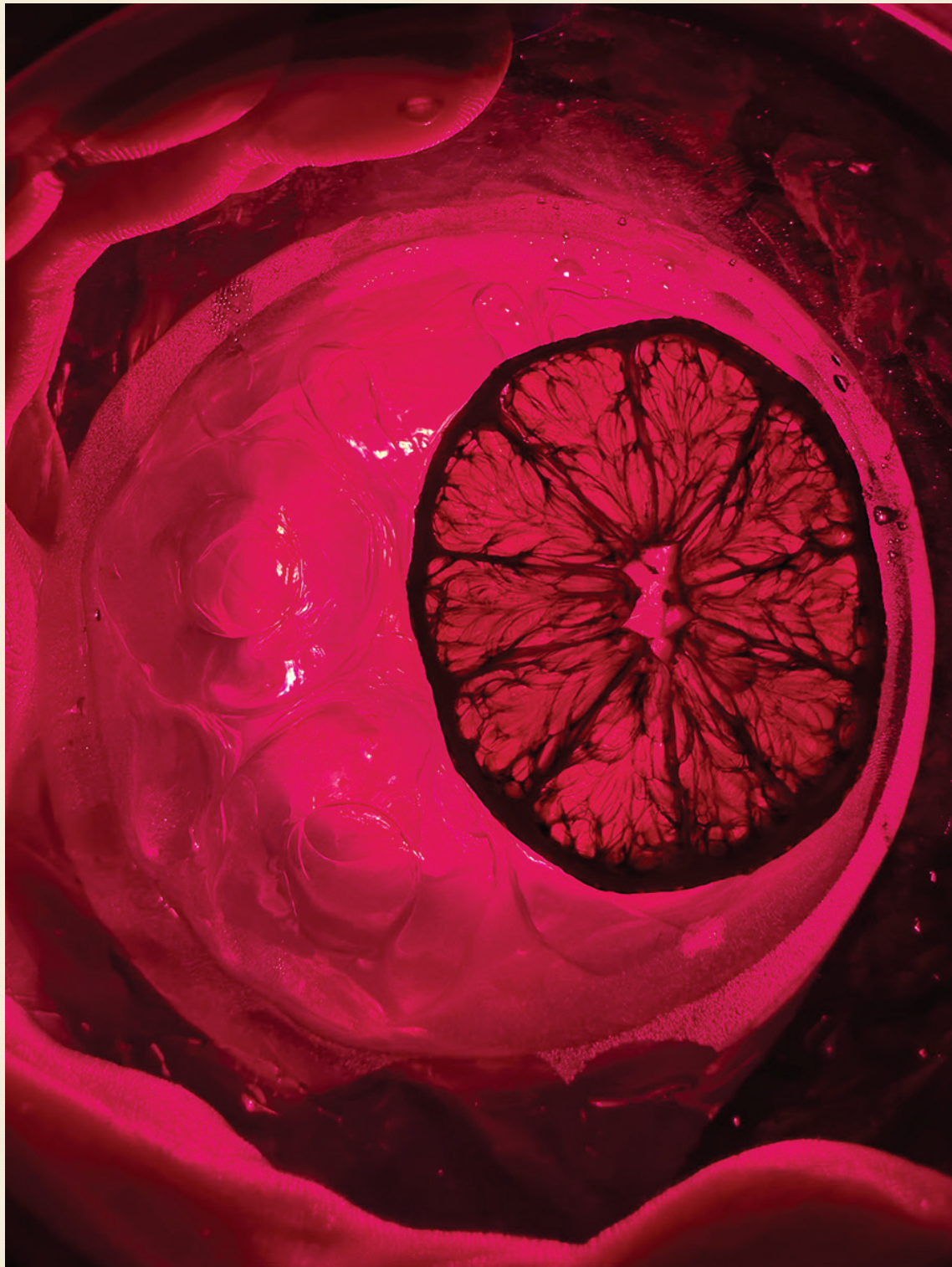
11:59PM

Iris Love



Can I Eat This?

Lili Call



Elegy of Tatsuya Nakadai

Austin Jacob Shelton

There was a man,
who had taken on the world,
again, and again.

At one moment, he called for revenge
against those who oppressed his friends.

Another, he fought with all his might
for his family, by going through the horrors
that only the human mind could
conceive of.

Another, he fought his friend to protect him,
only regretting that he lost
in that gateway to torture.

Another, he ruled the world
by impersonation, trying his best
to hold against the power
of the times and the current.

Another, he succumbed to his
own madness, never seeing
anything other than his bloodshed.

Another, he won through deduction.
Another, he lost through seduction.
But, despite it all, he never lost
my attention and love.



One Chili's Triple Dipper Togo

Sarah Redding



can't help seeking corners

Gwen Aguilar



soho

Brianna Eaton

the safest i ever felt was in the lake in middle of
the mountains / peak of summer / deep appalachia /
encapsulated far from town / where they can't find
me / a run and jump off the boat / into the cold /
depths / below / a silence in the noise / a slow float
to the top / a climb up the rocks / bare feet gripping
the gravel / clasp of the fingers / a break of a nail / a
run to the edge / free fly to the bottom / a mile long

swim back / a beg to drive the boat / face up to the
sun / soaking every ray into a burn / a freckle / a
streak of red in my hair / spin in circles / *it's about
time to head back* / being pulled up limb by limb /
an attempt to weigh myself down to prolong the stay
/ an escape / my lake in appalachia / our reflection
below.

Glaze

Sara Caoile





Letter from the Editor

Hey Y'all,

First and foremost, thank you for picking up a(nother) copy of the Phoenix. Your support is what runs this publication, and without your creativity, we wouldn't be here. And if you want to read more about how much I appreciate this team and the (honestly, quite overdone) message of growth, then go back and pick up the fall issue #72, Wistful, because I want to talk here, more bluntly, about the scariest part of graduating:

Starting all over.

People can talk about how this is just one big journey, but the truth is, we're always going to go back to the beginning, to our roots. It can look like home. But it can also look like a place we want to forget. I've spent the last few years trying to figure out who I am, and though I finally secured myself in the English department, where I've met amazing peers and mentors, it wasn't going to last. I knew that. We all knew that. And in a couple of years, nobody in the Phoenix will know me. Nobody in this department will remember me. Because human existence is tied down to the people we connect with, and without them by our side, it's easy to prioritize the people who are actually in our lives now.

But this isn't meant to be a cynical letter from your editor. Instead, I'm saying all of this to tell you that nothing in life lasts forever, but in a "so what" manner. It means you shouldn't give up. It means that the relationships you have are not meaningless because we're all going to be devoured by the sun. It means that everything you've done isn't nothing. Even though I'll be starting all over again with no meetings and no classes, I still love how I spent the last three years in the Phoenix. Don't live your life waiting for the next chapter, because you can't go back and rewrite what you did yesterday. Look at what you've done and what you've made, at who you were before and who you want to become, and let's all laugh about the friends we made along the way (ha), and live more earnestly. Thank you. For everything.

Sincerely,
Your Editor-in-Chief
Carrie Cheng

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