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QUIZ & QUILL

OTTERBEIN UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT LITERARY MAGAZINE | VOL. 97 | SPRING MAGAZINE 2016

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SUBMISSION POLICY

Q&Q prides itself on publishing the highest-quality creative work. Therefore, every precaution is taken to assure writers' anonymity during the selection process. Only the advisor of Q&Q knows the identities of those who submit work to the magazine until after staff members' selections are finalized.

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LETTER from the EDITOR

DEAR READERS,

As you read this year's Spring magazine, my hope is that you will allow yourself to be fully immersed in the talent the students at Otterbein have to offer. My hope is that you will fully take in every word, paragraph, line break, and stanza. Hear every truth our authors speak, every story they weave, every carefully crafted sentence. As my senior year comes to a close, and I venture into the future, I will carry with me the astonishing experience that I've had during my time as managing editor of Quiz & Quill.

Each year that I've held this position, I've only witnessed our membership flourish. I encourage you, reader, to flip to the staff page, read each name listed, and know that it's these names that have made this magazine possible. I want to thank Lydia Crannell, our page designer, for such a beautiful layout of this year's magazine. Thank you Sarah Carnes, our secretary, for keeping us on track and organized in our voting process. Thank you to our genre editors for their endless knowledge of the written word and guiding us through many conversations in their respective genres. I want to thank all of our staff members, and of course, you, the reader, for keeping Quiz & Quill not only Otterbein's oldest organization afloat, but allowing it to fulfill its mission of exhibiting almost 100 years of Otterbein student creative work. Lastly, I want to thank our faculty advisor, Shannon Lakanen, who even in such a turbulent year has never stopped working tirelessly for the success of her students. It's bittersweet to see Quiz & Quill off in such a defining year for its growth, but I only have immense hope and excitement for its future.

Yours,

JOSH BRANDON

ANTAGONIST

Sarah Carnes

as a springboard my mother used to
send my father through transparent phases of silence.
he'd surface with a blank face
but her words wouldn't stop,
the metal coils always bouncing
constant constant constant
--release.
she'd leave him
to wonder
why he ever

jumped.

LANA

Abby Studebaker

Undeniably Americana,
I am roses and
pristine white cigarette ash staining a backless dress.
I pout for the camera
and sing the siren song of youth by the roadside.
These are the truths I live by:
We are all
flawed
and we are all
free
and we will never settle in a cage.
Long night, hungry night, tell me all your secrets in the raging firelight
and I won't breathe a word.
Cross my heart, cross yours too.
We could be dancing in the desert
or killing in the rain
in the name
of bubble gum against red lips
and whiskey in the throat.
I'll be Audrey, Marilyn, dirt under your fingernails
if you'll be sex and a leather jacket
abandoned in the corner on the motel floor.
Disaster, freedom, chaos
all carry the same heady aroma
and whisper my name in shades of rouge.
Lana, like luna, like everything looks better
in the light of a waning moon.
Love songs sound better from the floor
of an empty room.

SHEEP'S EYE

Josh Brandon

Slouched into the hay, back bent
comfortably—until I notice peaks of flame.
Sheep desperately bash bleeding heads into gates,
and the rafters ignite. Last year's caresses

line the beams. They burn alphabets
into dimming lights. Tongues, hooks,
rough splinters unfurl. Eyes, or
barn, each holding a gray cup of dusk as

chains shiver and the sun wanes behind hellfire.
It gnaws at the wind, and in turn,
the wind scatters
breathing oxygen into each new ember.

Artificial brightness turns a hazy hay-yellow.
The crook in my back reminding me
I'll be calm when I'm dead.

As the stairs melt, I remember first meeting the bleeders:

my nose perked and cheeks red,
looking into the shiny black of a sheep's eye.
It peered into my irises—a staring contest, if you will—
as I ran my hands along the wooden gate
until it sliced through my skin.
The inbetween part that connects middle to index.

I look back now at the site of trauma: a fleshy picture.

Staring at the scar
and the burning of my fingertips,

seeing the sheep's black eye
in the now scattered ashes.

IN DEFENSE OF CIGARETTES AND MOVING VANS AS THE IDEAL VEHICLES FOR THE AMERICAN DREAM

Gyasi Hall

This is what I know about Freedom:

I know that Interstate 40 cuts America in half long ways, like the world's most elaborate and patriotic paper airplane, and if you, like so many others, dream of moving out west and staying there, you have to do a few things first. You have to find a map of this country, and hang it on the wall across from the kitchen sink, and trace a thick black line over I-40 with a marker so old and so forgotten that it's almost part of the drawer you found it in. You have to wake up every morning and look at this map with the same eyes you would give a Guest, or a Dare, or a Sunday Evening Spent Dreading School The Next Day, and then you have to promise yourself that you won't ever take a job south of that line, because you and your husband's skin have had bad experiences in that part of this place you call Home. Then, you just have to do it.

I know that even though I've been smoking on and off since I was in the eighth grade, I still feel nervous buying cigarettes. It's a delicate thing; a cooperative dance of supply and demand and really, no matter how I slice it, 2015 is eighteen years after 1997. I'm legal. Smoking is no longer some edgy, punk-rock accessory, if it ever was. It's the legitimacy of it all, the conscious effort; I know "Can I get a pack of Marlboro Special Blend, please?" doesn't sound a whole lot like "What the hell's the meaning of life, anyway?", but it feels like it.

I know that Ventura is a city in southern California, about an hour outside of Los Angeles, that's about as far west as you can go without drowning. It's made entirely out of sound stages carved out of Hollywood backlots, and main streets stolen from all the small towns that America's seem to forgotten about. They're all sewn together and covered in palm trees, like a tropical post-modern Frankenstein. No one is actually from Ventura; just from all the places where Ventura seems like heaven.

I know that a trip down Main Street is the most concise thesis for the failure of the American Dream that anyone in Columbus, Ohio is likely to ever find. It's laid out like someone paid somebody else to punch a mirror until it shattered, and then hired a third person to use the bloody shards as the blue-print for housing projects. Some of the richest people in the city are direct neighbors to some of the poorest, and the crime rate is so high that if you climb on top of them, you can see your house from there.

We used to live just off Main Street, back when my dad first moved here from a poor neighborhood in West Virginia, a young black kid with a white fiancé, a disapproving family, and the twin talents of reading too much and being optimistic. When I was six, we moved to the Short North area downtown simply because we could afford to live in a nicer neighborhood. When I graduated High School, we moved to North Linden, about a ten minute drive from our first house, as a way of downsizing in preparation for my parent's big move. My dad and I were heading home, and after he got the call saying he had been hired to teach English at a high school in North Hollywood, we took a detour to visit our old stomping grounds, the cocoon that shaped him into the man he is today. I asked him if he'd miss this place.

"I'll respect it; there's a difference, you know?"

I asked him how he felt about being, in a way, an embodiment of the American Dream. He didn't answer for a long time. He looked sad, like he hadn't realized how far he'd come.

"It feels pretty damn good."

I know that, when I was young, one of the only times my mom seemed human, in some tangible sense that I wouldn't understand until much, much later, was when I found out she smoked. She had lost her keys, and she asked me to look in her purse to see if I saw them there. She sat me down and offered me this sentiment, the exact words of which have been forgotten for quite some time now, but whose skeleton I have carried with me:

"You have to understand, honey, I didn't want you to find out like this; I didn't want you thinking I endorsed this sort of thing before you were old enough to understand that this is my choice. I started smoking when I was around your age (I was 11 at the time), because your Aunt Lana started doing it, and she made it seem like so much fun, and I wanted her to think I was cool, and all that stuff you hear about on those Above the Influence commercials. That's where it started, anyway; I kept smoking all throughout High School, well after we all knew how bad it was for us. I would like to say I was addicted, which is probably true on some level, I guess, but quitting was never hard for me. I only smoked in college when I could afford it, and I didn't smoke when I was pregnant with you or your brother, and even after you guys were born, I tried not to smoke around you. Now, I'm not trying to say that I'm fully in control, or that this isn't a horrible thing to do to your body; I'm just saying that if you're going to do anything, understand that it's your choice. I smoke because I want to. I smoke because I like it."

I know that U-Haul has several different size moving vans people can rent. They have the pick-up trucks and the cargo vans for the small jobs, but they also have a 10' truck, a 14' truck, etc., all the way up to over 25 feet of empty space, attached to four wheels and an engine, ready to go when you are. On their website, they have prices, as well as how many bedrooms can, on average, fit into each kind of truck. They ask you questions like "When do you want

to leave?" or "Where do you plan on picking up your van?", but they skip the most vital ones: Why are you leaving? What are you taking with you, and what are you leaving behind? Who are you leaving behind? Where are you going, and why are you so convinced it'll be better than where you are now? You can't fault them too much, though; their prices can't be beat: My parents left with 30 dollars, an atlas, and a single, conscious decision.

I know that there's this song, "Song for a Stray Cat on the Fence", and there's this part toward the end that sounds exactly like a mirror. It goes "Freedom is nothing soft and sweet, it's beautiful and terrible. It's admitting everything that I don't want anyone to know. It's telling people that I love I stole from them when they weren't looking. It's fucking up so many times that they won't pick up when I call them." Every time I hear that, I want to cry. I know that I don't cry as often as I should.

I know that the only thing anyone has to do is live with the consequences of their actions. Because of this, forgiveness isn't owed to me, or to you, or to anyone.

I know that my parents never liked me or my brother to swear in the house, so after they whittled their lives down to all the things that they could fit into a 14 foot long moving van, I convinced my brother to stand with me in our driveway and yell "FUCK!" into the wind after them as they drove away. It's wasn't an angry fuck or a vulgar fuck or a fuck meant to destroy anything; we yelled it the same way you would turn a relief valve, or watch a balloon float off into the sky. It was an action born out of pressure, into a newly emancipated world of consequences and responsibility. For a split second, it felt like they would turn the truck back around, but they never did. I know it was extremely childish, but also I know it was extremely necessary.

I know that the first time I bought cigarettes, I was in the ninth grade, and the guy standing behind the register didn't check my ID. Thinking about it now, this might have been one of the nicest things anyone have ever done for me.

I know that my mom, in the week leading up to the move, went around the house putting pink post-it notes on everything she wanted to take with her, and leaving alone everything me and my brother could keep. I'd be lying if I said I didn't move some posit-it notes around. I'd also be lying if I said she noticed.

I know that the thing about Freedom is that it demands to be defined, no matter how restrictive the situation. I don't resent my parents, or their choice, in the same way I don't resent a sucker punch delivered for self-preservation, or a boat that knows, inherently, how to float better than me without looking dead. But these are not the years of my life I learn how to float; these are the years of my life a learn how to swim. I think most people get it twisted; when they talk about Freedom, they're actually talking about autonomy free from consequences, which isn't the right approach. The later doesn't exist, whereas the former can't exist, in any pure form, but must, in spite of its own obscurity, be sought after, through whatever little resistances or decisions we can allow ourselves. We define Freedom for ourselves; It's our choice. So, I might skip class to have

coffee with a friend, or sing a bit too loud, or smile with a cigarette between my lips and offer you one as well.

And that's my choice, too.

I WROTE YOU A SONG

Madelyn Chennells

did you see it?

Sometimes you say, like rose water
"You're brilliant."
And I'm blinded by the waves of my mind
Uprooting me
As I'm thinking of a time
When train tracks were heard outside
In my grandparent's house in Kentucky
And all I had to worry about
Was you, next to my white lace windows
Or maybe this is how I imagined them
The same room I lay in now
Grabbing my arm
In anger
And the child in me
Was trying to grow away
Now you cry
And all I think about is losing you
Because I'm too much
Even for me
The way I lay here
In lace
Like a star
Like a vagabond
Like nothing I've ever seen before

IN THE OPEN

Lillian Mills

OCTOBER

Lydia Crannell

when the leaves fall in autumn
do you think
they cry to their branches
"goodbye lover"

when the trees are empty and bare
do you think
they sigh with the clouds
"I am free"

when the ground becomes decorated in sunset
do you think
it whispers to it's new blanket
"welcome friend"

Maybe I am like those earthy petals
realizing
that when you shook me from your limbs
the wind simply carried me
home.

THOSE WHO GUARD THEIR GRAVES

Maverik Cox

"Did I ever tell you where it came from?"

His world was still ringing white. He could see nothing, hear nothing, and feel nothing, but could only hope that another shell did not land in the hellish trench.

"You can't leave! You can't!" Sally had screamed. "You promised you wouldn't! Do you even know how to shoot one of those things!?"

"I'm going," he had struggled to say. "I have too."

He began to feel the mud again, but couldn't make out its red color. The sounds were all the same: gunfire, artillery, screams.

"But I love you," Sally had whispered that night beneath the stars.
"I know," he had replied while wiping away her tears. "I know."

His eyesight returned in stages; first the color of brown and red, then the shapes of the dismembered, then their faces. He'd known them all. Reynold, Ernest, George, Isaac, and Thomas.

"Some say it grew from the mound of a great chief. Others say it was found lodged in the skull of that damned fool Custard. Funny legends, huh?"

He could feel the shrapnel in his side now. Burning him from the inside out, sipping at the blood that flowed from its gash, but he couldn't think about that. He had to move. Had to reach his rifle on the other end of the muddy trench. Had to reach it before another struck. Before the Germans found him.

"So you're some sort of cowboy?" Reynold had asked that day on the boat. "At least someone will know how to aim."
"You expect me to do it all?"
"I'm a baker! You want me to feed the Germans to death?" They both broke into a deep laughter that lasted nearly half an hour.

Reynolds arm was sticking out from a pile of mud and rock, and his leg was hanging from a piece of wood above the trench. But he couldn't stop. Not to cry. Not to mourn. Not to think. He couldn't stop crawling through the mud or the pain would catch him and never let go.

"Names Ernest, this is George," Ernest had said in New York. "Don't mind 'em though. Doesn't talk much."
"Not much to talk about," George had mumbled.

"A whole damn war just 'aint enough for you, huh?" Ernest had snapped.
"Just another chapter in school books," George had softly answered.
"Best try to get out names into it then," he had said, making both of them smile.

They'd been counting their stock of grenades when the shell hit. He couldn't stop, but still recognized there was nothing left of them but red chunks mixed into the soupy brown.

"Never let it go, lil' gunslinger. Never. No matter how many bullets any of these old dogs fire, our Colts always run dry, always run cold. So take it, for when yours runs dry, lil' gunslinger."

Another shell hit just above, and sent handfuls of gravel and sand down on him as he continued his crawl.

"She was only a month when the Zimmermann Telegram was in the paper," Isaac had said the day before with a picture in his hand. "She came out quiet until she saw me smiling at her."
"She's cute," George had mumbled.
"Dainty," Reynold had said. "Bet she'd love my cakes. I'll make one special when we get back."
"I just hope I don't miss too much of her first year," Isaac had said.

The picture of the sleeping child was on fire, burning in Isaac's cold hand. He'd been holding it when the shell hit, and he held it now as his lifeless body sat slumped against a pile of leaking sandbags.

"You used to hesitate. Remember that? You'd aim at a bottle and end up shooting a rattler twelve yards leftward. Now look at you, best damned gunner out here, but you're still young. Still naïve. Always looking for another person to shoot, another enemy. Always looking to kill."

His Springfield had landed beside Thomas. The shell blast had thrown him upward onto the sandbags, where a German rifleman had had a perfect line of sight.

"The Grand American West…sounds beautiful," Thomas had said minutes ago. "Nothing like the hills of Yorkshire, but I'd love to see it someday."
"Soon," he'd said. "Still looking forward to your mother's pudding."
"Dammit you two, don't talk about it!" Reynold had snapped. "Dammit! I can't take any more of this stale bread! How can they even call this bread! Bread is warm, crispy, fluffy, and—"
"Try dippin' it into the mud," Ernest had joked while counting grenades, getting a chuckle from George. "That'll fix that."
"Enough, children," Isaac had snapped. "Thomas, your mother have enough room for all of us? Mud and all?"
"More than enough," Thomas answered. "There will always be a spot for each of you chaps."

He heard them now; German soldiers swarmed the trenches after dowsing them in the toxic gas. With a shaking hand, he plucked the hot metal from his side and slumped against the muddy wall beside his dead friend, facing the thick, toxic cloud that crept closer and closer.

"You can shoot every damn fool in the world, but it won't help you lil' gunslinger. It's not about killing the enemy, but about protecting your own."

His hands fumbled with the rifle; there was mud caked along the bolt handle and sight, and bullets were scattered along the trench floor.

"Don't kill for yourself. Never kill for yourself, lil' gunslinger. Kill because you must. Because justice demands order.

The soldiers were getting closer to their sliver of the open grave. The storm of pain and anxiety that raged in his head was getting the best of him as the dirty bullets continued to slip through his sweating fingers. At the first sight of the masked Germans amongst the creeping mist, he immediately dropped his rifle and drew his gifted Colt from his bleeding side.

"Not all of us are killers, but survivors. That's the secret lil' gunslinger. The secret of every man and woman that once called these grasslands home. You don't need to kill your enemy. You only need to survive them."

Six shots, eight Germans, then nothing but the clicks from the revolvers empty chambers. The smoke was but a yard away from his mud-stained body, creeping closer and closer.

"Survive, lil' gunslinger. Survive until Death comes, whenever that might be. You're different. Cute how you think I wouldn't notice. The way you move, the way you act. I always knew."

His blood loss was starting to affect him now. The smoke became hazier as his vision struggled to hold onto the image, and his ears became filled with muffled sounds of the battlefield. Through the gunfire and explosions and screams he heard more voices growing nearer.

"Always knew, lil' gunslinger. There's…a tale, from one of the tribes. I remember my father telling it to me when I was just a little thing."

There were two of them at their trenches entrance, but all they were to him were two shadows. He was ready, and when a red flash came from one he thought it was his time, but instead a gust of wind, not a bullet, blew past, taking the smoke with it.

"When many have died, Death cannot guide them all. Even an angel has only two eyes. No, instead it sends out its servants, shadowy figures that come for you when your Colt run dry."

He could hear them whisper to each other as they came closer, whispering the nationalities of those dead in the trench, but when one saw him it spoke his name.

"So take it. Use it when you have nothing left. When the shadows come for you."

Like a frantic spider his hand scampered down to his belt where his fingertips felt the cool, familiar steel that returned him home.

"It's you," the shadow whispered as bullets and shells exploded overhead. "I found you."

"Never stop surviving, my lil' gunslinger."

His fingers wrapped around the old tomahawk, ready for one last fight. "Not yet," he whispered.

"I DON'T FUCK WITH YOU" IS THE GREATEST LOVE SONG OF OUR GENERATION

Gyasi Hall

Because we know what it is to kiss a tragedy and hold it in our mouths
like something angry. We swallow everything except pride,
and when I say that loving me is kind of like watching your favorite
movie for the fifteenth time, what I mean is that it is always
possible to love someone less than what you do. After all,
hate is passion, too, and what is a "generation", except waves of time
and experience crashing against our bodies and laid out like
so much luggage at a baggage claim owned by people old enough
to be our parents saying *'Go on. Take what is yours, and leave what is not'?*
And then Jesse says *'We all care way too much'* and this is the wisest
thing I have heard since back at the beginning of High School, when it felt
like the earth would not stop cutting itself open, and we only knew
how to spell our names with blood and bruises, and I kissed a girl
who, four years later, would look at me and think only of cupcakes and
bad punk songs and really awkward hugs. But maybe you're right though.
Maybe everyone who ever heard *I Love You* whispered to them on
nights that spilled their wistful blood all over the sidewalk whether
we knew it or not, nights that saved themselves until way after marriage
when the starlight stumbled in through our curtains and showed us
what love really is; maybe that person ought to say it back.
But then, we found out that love has a billing address buried somewhere
in the body count of disasters, and so I don't think that person ought
to do anything except turn the music up even louder until the whole
house sways and shifts and transforms itself into a crime scene
of every good thing on this planet because the truth is, the party is always
ending. There will always be that first last kiss, and sometimes,
when they leave, you have never slept better.

EAT GLASS

Daniel Kushnir

It's us, brought to be. Steel wool and a small battery.
Waltz through troubling pain. Eat glass. Kiss. Smile, beautiful thing, and tie back that salt sea.
Lipstick stains from bloodied gums.
Bite and snarl, animals, non-hostile.
Lying still as the air, hot as the oven, waiting for something sweet. We have patience.
Lounge,
Lounge,
Lounge,
Other words for lazy and in no particular hurry.
All these grand plans, great campaigns, dissolve into disarray,
A low hum,
A smirk.
Pool, dripping dropping, words and touches. Misty eyes.
Breakfast,
Or maybe lunch,
Quite forgetting there's a train to town.
Do not depart tiny power. Do not allow me to drain you dry.
Head clicks into throat, fingers knowing.
Thank you. Tell me now.
Thank you.

Wearing a stolen blanket of stars.
Blue smoke, tight skin, laughs, laughs.
Time raided from those who deserve it more.
Celebrate, let's have a drink, celebrate, the end of the day, celebrate, the start of a new one, celebrate.

Hands soft, grass soft, breath soft.
There's a word for this feeling,
I'm sure.
Do you know it?
Let's slow down, if we go too fast, though that's unlikely.
Teeth
From under lips.
Cheeks
Advance on eyes.
Eyes. Green rolling hills.
Eyes. Kinder, crueler,
Lovely,
Lovely.
Door creaking. Steps fumbling. The airy impact of cushions. The sigh of our springs.
I feel this urge again. I must thank you.
Now you say it. Thank you.

SALEM

Claire Winslow

I first drove into Salem in the dark; it was nearly 10pm and I hadn't eaten since breakfast. I had gotten lost somewhere in New York State, losing over an hour as I tried to find the right highway. By the time I finally arrived at my hotel, I was posed with the difficult choice between trying to find some food, and falling asleep with my shoes on. I chose dinner, opening my laptop hoping to find somewhere nearby with decent take-out. After three attempts at guessing the Clipper Ship Inn's Wi-Fi password, I called the front desk.

"Yes, it's 'WITCHCITYSALEM', all in caps".

I thanked the man and ordered a pizza from a restaurant down the street. I was surprised that the hotel chose to reference the witches in its password, when its decor was otherwise devoted to an overwhelmingly nautical theme. I poured myself onto the mattress as I waited until my food would be ready. I wasn't really seeing the outdated wallpaper with its sailboat motif, or the tiny anchors on the curtains that blocked my view of highway 1A.

I thought about calling my parents but didn't.

***

My father left Massachusetts when he was four years old, and the house where his family had lived in Salem was torn down soon after. The parking lot of a Kentucky Fried Chicken now sits in the exact spot where my father's family once lived. I pulled it up on a map on my phone as I drove through Salem's main street the next morning, the uneven cobblestones grumbling under my tires. There are psychic shops, witch museums, ghost tours, and whole blocks devoted to the macabre. A man in a Halloween demon mask was handing out flyers on the street, advertising something called "Chambers of Terror". Every inch of this town seemed to devote itself to the history of what happened there, and cater to those who came to revel in the excitement and injustice of the Salem Witch Trials. Beginning in January of 1692, in this small town in western Massachusetts, nearly 150 people were accused of witchcraft. By July, thirteen women and five men had been sent to the gallows, with seven others dying in their prison cells. The city seemed proud to have been the site of such notorious chaos. But it's not true. Not exactly, anyway. Many of the events of the trials actually took place in Danvers, a small town about twenty minutes' drive from the city of Salem. As Danvers was once named Salem Village, the confusion seems justified, but the extent to which the current Salem has embraced the whole witches theme felt strange under my tongue as I navigated the tangled streets. People flock to this place, wanting to stand in the spot where this history was born, where it lived, not knowing that they have the wrong Salem entirely.

I stopped at the historical graveyard on my way to the chicken restaurant that had replaced my father's childhood home. There was a tour going on, and by lurking nearby I was able to just discern the guide's over-rehearsed speech. He recited that the Burying Point Cemetery was founded in 1637 and contains the graves of its earliest settlers. Here lies one of the judges who had sentenced the supposed witches to die. The tour gathered round and I saw how the grass was nearly worn down to dust around it, the soles of centuries of curious shoes having revealed the most popular graves. I wondered what had been done with the bodies of the condemned; they certainly weren't here. I suppose they could be in Danvers, but I somehow don't think so. Regardless, I figured there wouldn't be a headstone. It was then that I chose to leave the tour that I had not paid for, and decided to walk to where the grass was thickest. Among the graves here was an enormous oak tree. The sunlight, already filtered through hazy grey clouds, barely touched the ground under the tree's tangled and sprawling branches. Disturbed by its roots were two headstones, hunched and weary, made crooked by the tree's relentless growth. The first read,

"Here lies interned the body of
Caller Pickman
Who died June 4, 1737
(Being struck with lightning)
Aged 22 years"

And beside him, even further obscured by the tree,

"This stone perpetuates
The memory of
Mad Abigail Pickman
Departed this life
March 24, 1737"

I think there was an age listed as well, but the tree had cracked Mad Abigail's gravestone in such a way that the bottom portion was unreadable. Moss had moved in among the jagged edges, making centuries-old marble crumble like wet paper.

***

As I got closer to where my father had once lived, I contemplated the absurdity of going inside and eating some chicken. I pictured myself sitting in that KFC, imagined feeling the chaos of my grandmother trying to take care of 5 children, all under 6 years old. I wanted to eat a side of mashed potatoes with gravy while I, with Zen-like concentration, would feel as though my family was sitting all around me. It has been close to 50 years since that house was torn down, but still I craved the feeling that my family's history was grounded within that place. The memory of my father's childhood was buried there, and surely enough time had passed for something like that to seep through the walls of a KFC. I finally arrived at my destination, pulled into the parking lot

with a scrape of rubber on concrete. I parked my dented red car in one of the many empty spaces, and felt the air that had been blowing on my face wheeze out as I pulled the keys from the ignition. The confined space became immediately stuffy as I realized that I was nervous. I took a deep breath of still, dry air, and it was then that I actually looked up at the building. It was closed. A "For Lease" sign plastered the window, nearly obscuring the view of the empty restaurant inside.

That emptiness became lodged in my throat. Something about the padlock on the front door, the frayed edges of its red and white striped awnings made me more sad than my father's childhood home being replaced with eleven secret herbs and spices, more sad than the one negative review on their now defunct Yelp page. I just sat there in my car for nearly 15 minutes. I didn't think about the workers who must have lost their jobs when the place shut down, nor did I ponder the state of the today's economy, with businesses closing their doors left and right. What really bothered me was that I couldn't go inside. I couldn't sit at a table with my two piece extra crispy meal, and at least pretend that there was something here. I couldn't pretend that I could feel my family around me, pretend that this place meant something, that its history mattered, that I felt anything here at all.

***

I left Salem in the rain. The clouds had rolled in as I explored the cemetery, and by the time I left the empty KFC, it was properly pouring. My car was quickly drenched with the weight of the cliché. I considered driving to Danvers, to see the actual place where the drama of the witch trials had played out. Several of the houses of both victims and accusers are still standing; I thought about going to see them, to see if that place made it feel any more tangible than the present day Salem had. But as I by passed the road that would have taken me to Danvers I thought about the Pickmans, about their graves taken over by an oak tree nearly as old as their bones. I wondered why Abigail had been called "Mad", and if she had known that this was to be included on her tomb stone, and if it had been Caller who had chosen these words. The only other Pickmans buried there had died nearly a decade before these two, who I presume to be siblings. I imagined him burying the only family he had left, a sister who was mad enough to merit such a permanent nickname. Little over 2 months later he would be struck by lightning and buried next to Abigail, with the only thing remembered about him being the unusual manner of his passing. Until a nearby tree begins to destroy this as well.

***

I finally called my parents as I made my way to Cape Cod, stuck in traffic for hours in Boston. I told them about getting lost in New York State, about my difficulties crossing the Canadian border, and about the countless other things that had happened since I had spoken to them nearly a week before. I told my dad about the KFC being closed and he laughed at me for having gone there in the first place. I didn't tell him about how disappointed I had been, how much

I had built it up in my head. As I sat in Boston's seemingly endless rush hour I still wanted that place to matter. I wanted the stories of our history to be upheld by the places that are meant to represent them.

When I finally arrived in Cape Cod, nearly three hours after I had planned, Paula, my paternal grandfather's sister, met me at her front door. We opened the chardonnay that I had bought at the duty free shop crossing the Canadian border, and she told me stories of those days when my father's family had lived in Salem, her thick Boston accent reminding me how long she had been entrenched within this place. She told me about how my grandmother, who I always knew as Mimi, had subscribed to a diaper delivery service, and after the twins had been born, with two other children still younger than three years old, the delivery man would bring them 350 diapers every week. We polished off the cheese plate as she told me how they only had one car, so when Grampy was at work Mimi would strap all the kids into strollers, somehow managing to bring them along with her as she ran errands. As I listened, I studied the rug under my crossed ankles. What became of the families of the victims of the witch trials? Did any of them have children? The interlocking rings of the carpet's design all fit together in a way that reminded me of the worn-down paths in the graveyard that morning. I pulled my eyes away and back to Paula as she offered me yet more wine. We were less than 100 miles from Salem and yet it had taken me hours to get here, days maybe, or at least that's how the traffic made it feel. I laughed with her as she told me about the look on my Mimi's face when Paula would dare complain about the difficulties of raising her single son. And sitting in Paula's living room, glad to be out of the car, drinking Canadian chardonnay and listening to her stories, I finally felt as though my family was sitting all around me.

FLIGHTLESS BIRD

Claudia Owusu

there's a bird in me
she could be brown
yellow—or red.

she dissects street signs
and runs whenever streetlights
come on

she is fond of herself
she speaks of her doings
in third person/

and spits her worries
into wildflowers through
tongue kisses

there's a bird in me
she could be brown,
yellow—-or red

she knows the earth
but the sky is her greatest
fear

STARLIGHT

Abby Studebaker

Burning,
Bright and flawless, falling freely.
Eyes stretched wide with cosmic dust caught beneath the lenses
Study reflections in far off light and
Trace spider web threads between constellations.
A single firework spark, like afterimage burning retinas
Floats south, a contradiction bound by laws,
Vindictive Newtonisms I wish it were exempt from.
Just grant one soul exemption.
Slow motion.
Slower.
An implosion.
A guided missile towards the horizon though dead on arrival
In the field.
Or the sea.
Or whatever lies beyond that backlit line of soot drenched trees.
Blurry goes the vision as the tiny light flickers out,
An explosion behind bulletproof glass while safety goggles sit on, tight.
I lose sight of the star and then sit in my car and think how there are worse
ways to go
Than death by starlight.

ROOTS OF THE RED RADISH

Ashley Anderson

FRIDAY

Josh Brandon

Spell out that I'm tired—a chorus
of morning glories
picked out of ripened being.
The dew of sun on my lashes—the cheek lines fake,
A smile Ruptures when looking past this place/
anxiety as crystallized as amber, as
ugly as spiced melons.

Last night's buzz/a wanton desire—they say my
heart's grey/say I shatter men's mouths by lip lock—
leave em' snaggletoothed—but this flows from my tongue:

A burnt wick, some torn speech, a heart
left unburnin'. Someone asked if I've ever been
in love, but every loving
touch turns claw, every caress
grinding boredom. I can't fathom
the depths of another's deepest oceans—

just the way he rocks me to either side of the bed.

I can't go out on Friday,
I'm sorry
I know
the curtains are starting to melt from the heat
boilin' my blood. My window calls for me,
shoves sunlight onto my face, but I can't
feel without that hand which/sickly lingers.

Someone asked if I've ever been in love,
and I suppose I just got
to believe what the movies say:
love is supposed to be accidental anyway (?)

DANCING WITH THE DEVIL

Fadumo Abdulle

A cat in the alley
Snowflakes land on concrete
god crawls on his belly.

A dry brown leaf
travels on the highway and
is crushed by a BMW.

Examine! Examine!
your eyes are melting in the
in the mirage of a throat.

A lone gut floats,
in an angry stream and the
child listens to rock.

A gentle wind rattles
the dandelion and it stands
naked, on the podium.

Ursa Minor...
my feet move in synchrony
with the music.

A book of record
floats down the stream
along with his body.

A kettle trembles,
the guests await and puff
cardamom and cloves.

Old limbs waddle,
young feet remain restless
they are beaten mercilessly.

Mirrors are shattered,
during the journey through the
portal, home is gone.

Bully squirrel!
It chased away the fat spa-
-rrow that met my gaze.

THE MEMORY OF YOU REALLY GRINDS MY GEARS

Alexandrea Futo

The old rope bridge rattled over the clear sky with each step he took. The winds whistled in his ears and swayed the bridge back and forth with their turbulent fingers, playing their tricks, no doubt. Clouds of rock drifted across the sky's ocean blue, and the one he stepped onto dipped ever so slightly under his boot, making him smile. Then a bitter, scorched smell nipped at his nose like spitting embers, and the gleam in his face flickered out.

In his path there stood a cabin nestled into the rocky groves of the sky island, where stained wood grated against worn stone like nails on rusted iron. It looked run down and out of place; kind of like him, he thought. At its head a chimney stood watch, spewing clouds of black like a man taking a long drag of his cigar. It plagued the air, but the owner didn't seem to care. He knew her roots snared her to land, whereas his wings let him soar through the open sky.

Their paths had crossed once before, spawning a summer of firsts and passion, which ended with a pair of broken hearts. He didn't like to dwell on it. It made him feel like he was rubbing salt into a fresh wound. The thought of facing her again made the pit of his stomach feel hollow, echoing with uncertainty, but he couldn't look the other way. Without her help, his wings would be clipped. He couldn't let that happen. He needed to cement his resolve before the past did away with him. The past begged him to *remember*, but he couldn't afford to.

As he got closer to her humble abode, the ticking clocks and the grinding gears roared to life from within, and the chimney erupted with a surge of smoke. Rotors whirred and pipes hissed with steam. It was a test, he thought, but he would not be discouraged. He grabbed the brass knocker hinged on the door, pushed on by nerves of steel, and his skin melted on contact.

Then a horn blasted in his ear. Its crooked tune seemed to mock him when he flinched back, shaking his blistering hand as a curse fumbled out of his mouth. The door creaked open, though, rasping slowly against stone tiling to reveal no one on the other side. It had opened of its own free will.

On the inside it was dark aside from the soft glow from the burning coals and wood in the fireplace. The flames crackled and spat sparks at him, but he ignored them. Instead he focused on where the light reflected off of metal, showcasing a wide assortment of machinery and miscellaneous gadgets hanging on the walls. Hundreds of gears, intricate iron clocks, brass pipes, levers, horns, tools, and things he couldn't even find words to explain made it so not even an

inch of the wall showed through. Screws and crinkled drafting papers littered the floor along with several boxes filled to the brim with scrap. Everything was in a muddle but apart of a fixed system; a system he didn't want to tinker with at the risk of facing the wrath of its creator.

A glint caught his eye in the corner and it was there that he found the treasure he had been seeking. A shrine of stainless arms, legs, and everything in between gleamed with an angelic light, beckoning him to come closer. He could not resist the call. The moment his boot scuffed the stone tile the door slammed behind him and the room sprang to life. Pipes whistled, horns blew, gears creaked, machines roared, and the fire reached across the room to snap at his heels.

"What's yer business?" a voice gritted out like the gears lining the walls, and he jumped out of his skin. His head whipped toward the roaring flame where a masked figure in coveralls stood with a crowbar swinging in their grasp. "Got ten seconds before I beat it out of ya. Speak up."

A lump caught in his throat. The flames growled at him from behind them and the clocks started ticking louder and louder. "An arm," he rasped, pulling his bandana closer to his nose. "I need an arm."

The figure lifted up their welding mask, revealing cold brown eyes and scarred, blistering patches of skin. Her hair was trimmed short, some strands singed at the ends. She looked like many of her contraptions littering the floor. Rusted and dented, but strangely mesmerizing like an unsuspecting crowned jewel. The girl he once knew was standing right in front of him, he thought. Still playing with fire and taking baths in oil. The scars were new; he supposed it was only a matter of time before she got burned in her line of work. It did nothing to conceal the beauty, though, as rugged as it was.

"Ah, how fresh is the stump?"

"S'been a few months now." He rubbed the sore spot where his left arm ended above the elbow and winced. At times he swore he could still feel it, the ghost limb, grinding to bits between unforgiving AirShip gears. Crumbs of bone and skin, once whole and apart of him, were lost in the underbelly of the place he called home: AirShip Phoenix. Aboard this steam-powered vessel, he flew as a pioneer of the endless sea of blue and white, reaching for the skies above the sky. It had been months since then and now, because of his pitiful state, an eviction notice hung over his head like the blade of a guillotine ready to sever his wings. It had been years since he last saw her, and his heart trembled against his ribcage.

"Seems a little early for a prosthesis," she said, pausing to give him a quick once-over. The pipes let out an eerie hiss and the gears started to slow down. When she walked her feet clanged against the stone tile with a lot of weight to them and a metallic echo. It rang in his ears like a beautiful symphony of clashing symbols. She peeled off her gloves, soaked in grease, and tossed them

and the crowbar on the tool cluttered table in front of him. Nothing flashed in her eyes. She didn't see through him like he thought she would. The ridiculous goggles, red bandana, lost arm, and the hat he wore had kept him off her radar, or so he hoped. She was a master of keeping tight lips and stony expressions.

"You're hardly done recovering. I bet that stump of yours is boiling red at the seam," she said, eyes squinting as she reached to tug at his empty sleeve. She was right. It felt like someone lit a match against his skin every second of every day.

"I can take it," he said, his resolve bubbling up to the front lines. He would take a bullet between the eyes if it meant getting back his wings. He needed to get back on his AirShip, back to the sky he called home. On land, he felt suffocated and claustrophobic. Land was a prison and he wanted *out*.

"Welding skin and prosthesis hurts like a bitch, even if the skin is healed. With a fresh patch up like that, it'd feel like the devil branding your skin."

"I can take it." He wanted to see the horizons over the clouds again, to feel the air coursing through his veins.

"I've got nothing to numb ya. You'll just have a dirty rag between your teeth. That's apart of the price you pay with me."

"*I can take it*." He wanted to fly, wanted to feel alive again. He'd been dead for too long.

A horn blared, sounding off his resolve, and she looked up at it before looking back at him. "Alright, I believe ya. If you say you can take it, *you can take it*. I get it." She walked across the room and took a polished masterpiece off the showcase. "Whatcha got to bargain with?"

"What?" He came to her in the first place because she, unlike most of the penny pincher welders, had a reputation for pitying the poor; the people like him, he thought, who struggled in the factory driven economy where losing a limb to the gears—a common affair, nowadays—meant unemployment. He expected a free, pity pass. He didn't have anything to bargain with.

"I don't weld for free. Gotta make a living somehow, y'know. Just be thankful I'm not asking for money." She dropped the arm—carrying his hopes and dreams on its metal back—on the table with a clang and looked him dead in the eyes. "I see ya got some gold chained around yer neck. That should cover the cost just fine."

He grasped the golden locket, one of the many precious heirlooms handed down to new mates aboard AirShip Phoenix, and shook his head. The rough edges where he had sealed it shut years ago ignited against his palm, reminding him of what hid within; what he had given up to sail across the open skies. It was the price he paid to become an Airman because, as his captain had said, *you*

leave your old life behind when you turn to the sky.

"Well, it's the locket or nothing. Nothing else on ya is really catching my eye, so make up your mind. I don't have all day."

He took off the locket and tossed it on the table in a heartbeat. It hurt to think he'd throw it away so easily, but he couldn't let anything stop him from getting back his wings. The secrets it held would not keep him out of the sky. He *needed* to get back to the sky. The more time he spent on land, the more he faded in and out of existence—he was a fish out of water. He didn't belong here.

"Pleasure doing business with ya," she said as she grabbed his locket with her charred fingers. She paused to squint at the phoenix engraving on top—the insignia of his AirShip—and made a face. Pipes hissed and the fire crackled. "An Airman, huh?" He froze, not knowing what to say, while she inspected the locket. "Interesting. It's even sealed shut." He held his breath as she played with the locket's seam like a prying child with a hand on the cookie jar lid. She then swiftly placed the locket back on the table, eliciting a long sigh of relief from him, and started digging through her pockets. "Well, let's get started, shall we?"

He yelped when she stuck a rag in his mouth—soaked in grease, much to his dismay—and shoved him into a chair. She then ripped his sleeve open up to his shoulder, revealing his blistering stump in all its glory. He felt naked under her cold, calculating gaze like an animal being prepped for slaughter, but he kept calm. It wasn't until she brought out the blowtorch did he think about pissing his pants.

"I'm not gonna lie," she said as she set the icy metal against his seam and readied the torch. "You're *really* not going to like this next part."

It all happened too fast. Everything was set and ready except for *him*.

"W-Wait!" he managed against the rag, and she stopped. The torch's heat nearly grazed his skin, ready to meld his skin and nerves to the high-tech metal. He gagged for a moment before continuing on. "Procedure. Explain." It sounded rougher than he'd like, but he could only speak one word at a time with a rag in his mouth before speaking in gibberish.

"Really?" she said as she lifted her welding mask, and the twitch in her brow gave away her irritation.

He nodded. All he needed her to do was humor him. She was good at that before, he thought.

She sighed. "Fine. I'm welding your skin to the prosthesis. You get that much?" He nodded. "Good, so yer not a moron. Anyway, when the skin and the metal meld together, the wiring in the prosthesis will bond with your severed nerves. And that, my friend, is where things really hurt like hell. The bond-

ing process is a bitch. Got that?" He gulped, but nodded again. "I'll help the bonding process along by digging from the outside-in of the prosthesis. That'll be whatever until your nerves connect. Then it'll feel like I just tore through your arm—like, your *real* arm. That's how good I am." The cocky grin she wore did nothing to soothe his nerves. "There's hundreds of details, but that's the gist. Satisfied?" No, he wanted to say, not at all, but he nodded instead.

"Good. No more interruptions," she said, raising the blowtorch. "Or you'll be sorry."

He braced himself, in mind and body, but nothing could have prepared him for the feeling of the torch signing his skin with its intense flame. She was right before, he thought; it did feel like the devil was branding his skin with its hellfire. His skin melted against the metal like molten lava and it burned like the sun. The rag muffled his screams as the pain wracked his body into submission. He lost all concept of time. He would blink and an hour would pass.

Blink.

"I once knew an Airman kinda like you," she whispered into his burning flesh. "He didn't know a damn thing about serenading a woman." She stopped to laugh and the gears in the room churned faster. All he could hear was the grinding melody and her voice, rough but sweet. "He talked romantic bullshit about the sky to *me*—the girl who lost her daddy to an AirShip. Stupid, right? But I took the bait. Something about the way he carried himself, I don't know." She kept rambling and rambling, force feeding him the past with a smoldering spoon, and he swore the past was playing a horrid joke on him. "He wasn't a bad kisser, I guess. Heh, sure liked to whine about the grease on my lips. Called me a grease monkey in the most endearing way a man could, which ain't much to begin with." She kept pushing and pushing, and he couldn't take it. Someone needed to slap a real pair of wings on his shoulders so he could fly far away from here. "Damn, I fell hard for that birdman. Figures he flew the coop before I got the chance to say something. I guess the skies were better company than me." It was true but it wasn't. "I never got the chance to say goodbye." The prosthetic suddenly seared against his skin as she roughly shifted it back into the place, and his world turned back to fire.

Blink.

"I think I still love him," she choked out when he shouldn't have been awake, when he *knew* she thought he was out cold, and it rattled him down to the core. His heart couldn't take the heat.

Blink.

She stood there, a figure of black against the dying flame, with the locket—charred and melted at the seam, he noticed—cracked open in her grasp, playing an expired tune for the radiant couple photographed inside. He then, from the corner of his eye, saw the blowtorch on the floor still spewing fire like it had

just been at work a moment ago. His heart sank into the pit of his stomach and boiled. In that moment, he wanted nothing more than to fly away; over the sky islands, over the clouds, over the horizons, and over the blistering sun to escape *everything*. He needed his wings. He needed the skies. He needed to turn back the clock, back to when his arm was still in one piece. Before he walked through her doors like he promised—made an *oath*—he'd never do. Was there such thing as feeling *too* alive? He'd been dead too long to remember. The room was silent; no ticking, no grinding, no crackling, no hissing, no creaking. It was too quiet. He could hear his thoughts and it made him teeter on the edge of insanity.

"Des?"

His name sounded like a gavel hitting cold iron, echoing a strong verdict to no one but him and her. She *knew*. The moment he walked through that door she *knew* it was him. His ruse was never a ruse because she *knew*. She made a fool out of him. He wanted to fly away, but he was grounded. He wanted to say something, but his mouth was sealed shut by the rag. He wanted to rip the locket from her grasp, but his arm stayed glued to his side. He wanted the world to end but a single clock, hanging above her head, started ticking.

"The locket carries what you gave up for the skies. I read that once in a book. " She spoke with such finality, such *hurt*, that his world started to spin out of control. "So tell me, Airman." She didn't use his name this time. Judging by the tears in her eyes, she didn't have the strength to speak it. He'd broken the strong girl he met that summer a long time ago, and it stung like a thousand bees. "You once told me you loved me *more* than the open skies." He cringed as the pain starting flooding back to him. His nerves jolted with electricity and he started to seize, but she kept going. "Why did you give me up?" She took the picture out of the locket and dangled it over his face, like a mirror from the past. "Why did you end this?"

His throat ran dry and his body didn't stop seizing. All he wanted from her was his wings, that was all he ever asked for. He never wanted to face the past. The locket was sealed shut for a reason, and now she was throwing it all back in his face. Coming to her was a mistake, he realized too late, and the consequences were severe.

"Answer me!"

He couldn't because he gave his life to the sky. Admitting the truth would take that away from him.

"Des, please," she begged, and the tears started hitting his face. He thought her tear ducts had dried up years ago. "I need to know."

He couldn't do it. His wings would disappear.

"Did you love me?"

His body stopped convulsing and the clock above her head stopped ticking like the others. Silence. His heart thudded in his chest and soared up to his throat, nearly choking him. It wanted to speak for him, to speak the *truth*. He tried to swallow it down, but he couldn't. The fire simmered down and the lighting in the room dwindled down to darkness in succession, like a cold blanket to hide him. The only thing he saw, illuminated for reasons he couldn't explain, were her face and the picture of them happily together. *Them*. *Together*. Not in the sky, like he'd always wanted, but together. And a whispered voice in his head told him that was enough. She was enough.

"Yes."

With one final blink, the wings he had sought out so desperately faded out of existence and the sky he loved so much soared out of his reach.

ALIVE.

Lydia Crannell

Sometimes,
I think death would taste sweet.

my candied tooth
chewing the earth
I'll grow into
finally finding my roots

six feet below the cacophony
of death
is life

xylophone rib cage
for musical worms
playing the last church hymn

don't weep for brittle goodbyes
instead
suck the marrow from my skeleton and
use my hollow bones to stir your drink

Let us all turn to
dust

lips sewn
black puppet strings
heart shrivel
heart break
a joke we play in the mirror
because we can't stand to look at the reflection
and a magenta pulse stops
running, running, running

peel back skin to an empty cave
where I am supposed to house
forgiveness
for myself

No one remembers how hard it is to live.
No one remembers how hard it is to love.
No one remembers how hard it is to lose.

because my eggshell coffin skull
will break 863 days after they've slammed the lid shut and said
'we don't want to see the mortician's trophy anymore'
call it Pandora's casket and
bury the key between my icy fingertips

Someone,
please tell me that living tastes sweeter.

STARSTUFF

Emily Constable

When you are young, they stop reminding you how God is all around,
in all of you.
They trust that you will believe.
You nod along, hoping they'll tell you about Esther one more time.
You have more faith in the stories than the religion.

When you grow, you learn you are matter.
The atoms that comprise your bones could just as easily have been supernovae.
You take an interest in astronomy and self-care.
You can neither be created nor destroyed, merely transformed.

When you move, you begin to sneak out of the house at night.
The stars become more than painted spots on blackberry sky.
You take your first real breath of moonlight.
You pretend your twirls weave the threads of the universe.

When the world has exhausted your last vestiges of energy, you pray.
Your pillow is damp, and you wonder when you began to weep.
You don't know what angels are made of, but you hope they have sympathy
for the limits of your fragile form.
You dream of constellations watching over you.

When you can walk alone, you visit the churches.
Saints peer down from alcoves at every turn, enduring your invasion of their
sanctuary.
You leave offerings and light candles, filling the heavy silence with pinpricks of
light.
You have never felt holy on your knees.

When you fly, you savor every buck of the plane around you.
Turbulence is but the winds cradling you in their busy embrace.
You hold your breath when you land, savoring the burn of the sky in your
lungs.
You whisper your thanks for your time aloft.

SHOPKEEPERS

Abby Studebaker

Fragile bones in birdcages. They hung from the apothecary shelves among little spider web chandeliers. Dust lay heavy, a thick coating of fur, like dirt settled overtop decay. Whatever birds may have once inhabited them were long gone, freed or eaten or sold or slaughtered, with only their hollow rib cages and vertebrae left behind to decoratively stud the cage floors.

Melody looked up at the cages, eight-year old eyes wide with curiosity. To her, they looked like the domed roof of the gazebo in her grandma's backyard, the whitewashed one with the peeling paint. Or the buildings down by the riverside, where the architecture of the city took on more of a Plythian influence and the rounded rooftops stretched to the waterfront like a clustered colony of mushrooms. Or they looked like the tiny pendant her mother wore strung on a chain around her neck, a cage wrought in silver with a little songbird inside that would actually sing if Melody were good enough. She wasn't supposed to touch mommy's necklace, or the songbird would stay frozen and speechless forever.

She wasn't supposed to touch these cages either. But mommy wasn't home, and the shop was closed for the evening, all of the balms and remedies and all-cures put away in their tiny drawers and cubbyholes in the cabinets that covered every wall. The dark-washed wood had once gleamed like mahogany, long before Melody climbed on it and pretended the brass bits of hardware were rungs on a ladder or handholds up a mountain face, but now the surfaces were pitted with nicks and the drawers squeaked on their runners. The brass fixings no longer shone, but gleamed dully in the light of the candles nestled in their melting puddles of wax throughout the room. The gas lamps cast their constantly burning light from the sconces on the walls. The effect was one of flickering illumination of the central wares and displays and deep shadow in the corners. The lights did not bother Melody, or that's to say that the lack of light didn't bother her. She had grown up among these nooks and crannies, and every crack in the paneled wooden floor was one she had leapt over to keep from breaking her mother's back.

She contemplated the cages and their contents with one pointer finger stuck in her mouth. It was a habit she had had since she was a baby, to suck on her index finger whenever she was anxious or scared, and she did so now to comfort herself and steel her nerves for the task ahead.

There was a man outside, and he looked like her daddy. He was tall and spindly and wore a dark gray pinstripe suit, so skinny it was almost painful to look at him. Just like her daddy he was a shadow-person, his skin black as ink and only empty holes where his eyes should be. The shadow-men did not speak any language that she could hear or understand, but when she had been walking home earlier, he was standing on the sidewalk outside the apothecary and

beckoned her over with a wave of one emaciated hand. He presented her with a business card, held between two fingers like an elegant lady with a cigarette in one hand and cancer in her lungs, and on it was printed his request. It would only take five minutes of her time, and if she succeeded she would have his gratitude and his favor. Everyone, even an eight-year-old, knew the worth of a favor from a shadow-man.

Melody stood on tiptoe, reaching for the wrought iron bars of the cage, visible beneath the white paint around the well-worn door hinges and handle. Her fingertips barely grazed the underside, and so she thoughtfully stepped back to contemplate her options. The stepstool that once sat in the corner had been thrown through a window last year, chunks of old stained oak and broken glass left to rot in the street or be ground to dust beneath the wheels of passing carts. Instead she pulled out one drawer and then another, clambering up the makeshift staircase with the practiced ease of many years. The aged wood creaked yet still held her weight, speaking of numbered days. A stretch, a scramble, a reach, and she was on eye level with the delicate structure.

Its smell was musty, but not unpleasant. The bones sat like pearls perched beneath the dust, flashes of porcelain picked raw and clean. Melody reached her hand through the thin iron rods and brushed the dust aside. It puffed up like smoke and clouded the air, invading her lungs and making her cough long and loud. The sound echoed in the shop, dying among the dried herbs hanging in bunches from the ceiling and the thousands of quietly waiting vials lining shelves and nestled in drawers.

After wheezing and catching her breath, Melody rummaged among the bones, feeling for what the shadow-man had sent her in for. She knew it was here, and when her tiny hand brushed against something rough amidst the smooth remains, she grasped it tightly and slipped it out between the bars. The object sat warm and heavy in her palm, and she may have been imagining it, but she felt it faintly pulsing a thrumming rhythm. She scrambled down to examine it more closely on stable ground, leaving the drawers pulled out and the cage swinging softly by its string.

To the casual observer the relic may have looked like just another ordinary bone amidst the bird carcasses. But at a second glance, the differences were obvious. It was thicker than a bird's bone, with a comfortable heft that indicated it clearly wasn't hollow. When she wrapped her fingers around it in a fist, it barely poked out of her grasp. Small, intricate carvings, worn with age, were etched into its yellowed surface in a line that spiraled around it from top to bottom, end to end. She could not make sense of whatever the carvings said, but in the pit of her stomach knew it to be something powerful. Maybe Yirgish, or the nameless language spoken by the hair-covered men in the southern jungles, etched into driftwood that occasionally washed up by the pier. One end came to a natural curved edge, while the other looked as though it had been roughly sawed off. The carvings abruptly ended, whatever their meaning cut off by someone's steel teeth.

Melody held the bone tightly and crept towards the door, tiptoeing quietly, careful not to brush against any bottles or piles of stacked boxes and send them crashing to the floor. She could see the shadow-man through the window, across the street. He flickered in and out of sight, inhabiting a realm between the seen and the unseen in his ashen pinstripe suit. As she turned the heavy brass knob and nudged the door open with her hip, the entrance bell tinkled merrily, and she felt her heart skip and drop simultaneously. The sound chimed throughout the shop, seeming to amplify ten times louder among the wares. She froze, caught between waiting and bolting.

"Melody, love?" came the call from just up the back staircase, and she ran. "Sweetheart," her mother queried from behind her, "Where are you--?" and the door swung shut.

She ran across the street, leather soles slapping loudly against the packed dirt and sending up clouds of dust like the kind that settles in birdcages. She heard her mother screaming behind her, yelling for her to stop and come back, but Melody was quick, her skirts less cumbersome, and she had a head start.

Across the street lay an open field beneath a blue-gray sky, and at the sparse weedy edge of that field stood the shadow-man. When she reached him her breath came heavily, and the bone sat slick in her sweaty palm. She thrust it at him, her little hand barely coming to his waist.

"Here, sir. I found it. Take it, please," she urged him, glancing behind her anxiously. Mother was approaching rapidly, wielding a fire poker in one hand.

"Sweetheart, back away" she pleaded, but Melody only pushed the relic into his hand and took one hurried step back.

"Please sir, tell me where my father is," she pleaded. "Can you take me to him?"

The man slowly raised the bone to eye level, turning it this way and that and examining it from the bottom up. When he reached the sawed-off edge, he became still, and for the first time Melody felt a hint of fear and doubt cloud her mind. He didn't say a word, just focused his eyeless gaze on her. Her heart grew cold as he opened his mouth wide, a gaping dark hole ringed by blood red teeth. Fangs. The mouth of a shark. A smell of rotten meat on the breath of a wolf. From it emanated words, though neither lips nor tongue moved.

"Where is the rest, my love? Where is the other half, little one?" Its voice was low and friendly, like her daddy's, whispering melodically in her ear. It reached out and gripped her forearm before she could move, and held fast a she tried fruitlessly to jerk away.

"Mama!" she cried, panic welling up in her voice and tears in her eyes.

"Where is the other half, Mama?" he hissed, this time to her mother, who

stood frozen at the edge of the field.

"I- I don't know," she stuttered, reaching a hand towards Melody. "Please,' she pleaded, "Let my daughter go. She doesn't know anything about the talisman. Just take it and let me keep her."

The man let out a rasping screech that grated against Melody's ear, a sound somewhere between cackling and suffocation. It seemed utterly wrong coming from such a creature. The man squeezed her arm even tighter, until her hand began to go numb and her skin took on a ghostly, blue-tinged pallor. The air grew colder, and a roaring howl filled Melody's ears. With one smooth motion he wrapped his cape around both of them, a cape she hadn't known was there, blocking the outside world and closing them inside a windless cocoon. The next instant she felt the earth drop out from under her, and knew instinctively she wasn't a few feet from her mother and her home anymore.

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Jocelyn fell to her knees as her daughter vanished, blinking in and out of sight until she disappeared completely. She dug her fingers into the dirt, trying to ground herself, trying to fight the overwhelming nausea and hopelessness and oh-dear-god-not-again. There was terror, but also a nagging jealousy she tried to force out of her mind. Now they were both gone, Melody swept off to whatever world her father inhabited, a world he had left for seven years ago and never returned from. If that's where the shadow-man had taken her. If he didn't peel her skin off and bathe in her blood first. If he didn't find the other half of the talisman and burn all the worlds to the ground.

A single tear hit the dust. Jocelyn gathered her skirts and stood, making her way back toward the shop. She flung open the door, grabbed her satchel from the peg on the wall to the right of the entrance, and began filling it with vials, boxes, remedies, salves, bandages, anything within reach. She ran upstairs to the small apartment she and her daughter shared, and pulled a rolled up map out of the crack between bed and wall.

She knew where the other half of the talisman was. It was a secret more important than her business, her daughter, her life. And it was about time she checked up on it, and its keeper.

MUDPOOLS

Lillian Mills

I remember
What color the starts were
When I first met him.

Daylight is now grey
The color of the sky is muted.
His hands, mouth
The color of cigarette smoke.

"I'm sorry," I said, "I know he'll look just like you."

His eyes mudpools,
Just like the ones my mother used to tell me
My nightmares came up from.
She hangs laundry on the line.

Mudpools.

I imagined the baby growing inside me.
Breaking out of one of the coconut husks from the
Palm trees that grew beneath our terrace.

We were sitting at the plastic, white, stained,
Set of patio furniture that mother spills her wine on, and
My brother stains with paint.

I watch the mudpools widen as he puts out his cigarette on the edge of the plastic,
Searing a perfect
Circle.

I trace my finger on the flower shape,
Cut out in the back of his chair.
Seagulls sing to him in the morning.

I hear hymns in the sea gulls cries,
And I am brought back to when I was a child,
And I watched a woman in church singing praises while she
Held her swollen belly.

Life spilling out of her.
I drowned in mudpools.

THE DEATHS OF TWO ROCKY MOUNTAIN ELK

John Gill

A most subtle frost accumulates on the now white ribcage of a stag that
died too young.
So many bugles left unheard from a throat earlier chewed up by a coyote.
Countless prospective mates will never be seen by eyes plucked out by crows.
The stag's mighty antlers, mice food.
They gnaw so nonchalantly that the forest doesn't even register the sound.

&

A distant howl echoes the triumphant feeling of a pack encircling an old bull
that's lungs have failed him.
He'll die in the same way of the young stag.
Unfashionably and altogether undeserved.
His teeth will be all that remains in a month's time.
The rest of him recycled by fungi that don't bother to say thank you.

POMEGRANATE

Jennifer Hall

TO HER

Maggie Veach

Your speckled eyes curve their tan towards me. Smooth hair raised in frizz, falls short of your shoulder. Fluid in canvas but frozen like a bowl. You sit before my heart waiting to be filled with apology. I pour no words but overflow you with quivering drops. Turning you, I notice all the cracks inside. Au revoir to silent crevices, to all the waves of your face. Au revoir to laughing golden spinning in your light. Au revoir to smaller at the bottom. Au revoir to chasing glances within space. Au revoir to spoiled milk and rotten strawberries. Au revoir to she who dons the night yet breaks in day.

A splinter plucked out.

MAMMOTH

Amelia Gramling

300 million years ago, this mouth was not a mouth. Was barely an outline printed in three dimensions. A landscape of fish carcasses picked clean by the warm and shallow blanket of the unnamed and unfathomable Atlantic.

20 million years later, something changed. The continent rose, or the ocean settled, but the thing that changed (the force making nonsense from the quiet) did not change even. This bold and unlikely gesture (the break, the breach, the passage), set off an interlocking chain of small cracks and flaws in the otherwise smooth body of lime and sand stone undergirding the surface of the wild, blinding, and suddenly drying plane.

Spanning eons of plant and animal pollination, extinction and rebirth, erosion quietly gorged on this moment, brief, in the making of the new world, until the land remaining only sustained by building up a necessary immunity against the slow, crushing movement: a sandstone-capped ridge, water and time insoluble, hemmed in the Green River which the father of Folk, John Prine, would christen after miles of bank and tributary were flattened in the human pursuit of providence, "where paradise lay."

Beyond this ridge to the South the limestone was softer, more pliable. On days the rain fell, water bent on holding union with the vast momentum of the Green River seeped into the plateau, and there bonded with carbon-dioxide to corrode a sense of purpose out of those so far implacable wounds. Years passed, and the fissures widened, deepened, transforming into an interconnected system of underground veins and arteries, pumping, releasing.

Water drained.

We often imagine the deeper you dig, the older the earth becomes (where Hell, or, alternately, the ribcage, converge). But the mammoth caves of Southern Kentucky are most ancient at their entrances, the closest the mouth comes to meeting the sun. Folks describe the experience of traveling underground "unearthly," but this is a mischaracterization of the visual evidence. The cave is an excess –not an absence of—earth. If God is external phenomena, (think looking up to the Milky Way's curved epidermis), the ether of the underground, in comparison, feels to most people like an aberration of that which is animate, holy. The pit, the void, the tomb. The cave is an awe too familiar to save or sanctify you.

Earth's geological legacies are written into the rock's formation of self. Such catalogs of linear time are often utilized as rubrics of "unbiased truth" to uphold or dispel human mythologies concerning the origin of the world, the distance between mankind and the center, buried. A geologist could and has

followed the track marks of corrosive acid in order deduce that the hollowing of Kentucky's southern region took at least a million years. The methodical and tectonic patterns of continental divorce and collision are achingly slow, but repeating. The scale of that vast narrative can make meaningfully locating human odyssey within the arc difficult if not foolish. A geneticist cannot stick a needle in my belly and trace the source of my affinity for deep water.

The condition of the cave uniquely acts as preserving agent of human hearth or heart from the weathering effects of time, if not from time itself (some lingering revision of the Sandstone Ridge's immunity?). In the 1930's, two white explorers recorded a discovery they made miles deep in the mammoth's bellows. The four thousand year old body of a man trapped under boulder. Anthropologists presume he dug deeply into the ridge in pursuit of the scrapings of crystals picked clean from the less precarious, and older caverns above, ultimately undermining the integrity of the Colossal's structure. The miner's miscalculation, fatal error, lit under the swaying flicker of lantern, might have occurred minutes preceding his modern discovery, his arm outstretched, his torch only just smothered in the echo (echo) of trickling rock. Cave blackness lilts seamlessly into illusion. The anthropologists can't determine the mummified man's people. His home. Can't determine if he saw the faces of his daughters receding from and into the depths pressing against his eyes, in the hours or days or thousands of years inhaling/exhaling before them, while the blood clotted, drained: now open, closed. open.

"Settler" connotes a pacifying force: a disruption to be soothed, a gradation. Those that built villages of wood atop the limestone bedrock could not conceive crops easy, so the men and women migrating to the Green River from the Northern colonies planted the crucifix in their bellies: prayed in fever hymnals for Christ's inevitable conversion of Word into wheat. The reluctance of the soil to be turned over, to be known, did not hinder the sons bearing Old World dreams from coming, like figures possessed, the legacies of whom were written into the formation of the name (and therefore the self?). The Rev. Jacob Locke blueprinted his vision of reforming Kentucky's "savage" frontier overtop the Sandstone Ridge, that insoluble devil, older than sin, present for creation.

If Locke detected the hollowness set to bear the weight of all he intended to build, he couldn't name it and did not traverse it. His civilization never gleamed with providence, but with the sloughs of timber the "settlers" felled, hundreds of the country's first Baptist churches bloomed white against the sinking blanket of green.

Mammoth's first purchase set its values at forty dollars.

Who could make sense of God's intention when He wrought a mine barren of wealth or commodity?

When Daniel Boone's son was not among the first to volunteer for the Battle of Blue Licks, another arm of the many-limbed war for territory against the American "savages," Boone lamented the budding threat to his legacy –hard-

won and bitterly defended,

"I am sorry to think I have raised a timid son."

The timid son would not survive. The battlefield beneath which he would be folded converged with the husks of hundreds, thousands of other sons, others' sons.

In the early nineteenth century, the caves' "purpose" was finally excavated upon the discovery of saltpeter deep in the mammoth's fathoms. Saltpeter as a mineral could be converted, if allotted enough muscle, into gunpowder: to the North/West another war shivered up and down the spine of the Mississippi. Overnight, the value of the caves increased 25-30 fold. Among its new owners was Hyman Gratz, a man who had cultivated an embodied fortune of seventy enslaved men, women and children. To fill the coffers the timid sons were pumping into the bodies, falling all around 1812, Gratz sent the enslaved, en masse, below.

Gun powder manufacturing requires near-constant supply of heat and water.

A pipe system of husked heartwood carried water in to the leeching vats where, somehow, in the dark, in the sweat, earth became ammunition. The seventy converters didn't see sunlight for over a year.

Water drained.

Suddenly, the force responsible for the cracked webbing mammoth cave became, shifted again.

She let out a long, and heavy moan.
The Mississippi River ran backwards for three days.
Church Bells as far as New England rang.

When the heads of stalactites fluttered to mammoth's floor like ash, snow, angel wing, canary feather, the enslaved workers ran blinking into the altogether unrecognizable afternoon.

The puritan concept of evil fixed the notion as external and concrete. Hell coiled and ruptured just under the skin of the earth, and corruption snaked like a pollutant on which even the most pious could, with a minimal gesture of neglect, prick their finger to find sin settling, decades later, the dust of their hearts. Nathaniel Hawthorne believed the violence his forefathers authored seeded every subsequent descent thereafter, and the prospect haunted his every text. The legend goes, a witch of Salem sentenced to hanging by Nathaniel's great-great grandfather, Justice John Hathorne, cursed the name, the legacy, the tree, from root to its inevitable conclusion.

The settlers bent on tilling hope and home from the land in and around Cave City, Kentucky, were runners by trade: convicts, escapees and refugees of

surnames whose legacies, defining features, had long-since eroded. Or were the means by which their bodies had been persecuted in another life— the distance these men footed took the place of penance paid. The unmarked men, the men who stay in one place, the men whose days become their credentials. Can the hauntings these invaders and homemakers carry seep into the ground they people?

It would take another million years of waiting before scientists could measure whether or not the legacy built into the cave formation will include a record of human pain.

Upon the war's end, the petre mine was abandoned, but the interest in the caves remained. Now commercialized as tourist attraction, Mammoth Cave became one of the nation's first attempts at commodifying and replicating marvel. The owners discovered folks would pay money to tour the darkness, examine the evidence of archaic lives still trapped, though impossibly fragile, pressed into and against the rock like wildflowers into bibles

The timid sons of trappers and loggers born of Flint Ridge fought the nation's wars, fortified the nation's boundary, died and killed for the Plantation's right to enslave men and women their families were too poor to purchase, worked themselves hand to mouth to arthritic spines, blindness, and early onset dementia, and stayed poor, and stayed in one place. By the twentieth century, Mammoth Cave as tourist destination was understood by the surrounding community as an institution, and unique for the area, a steadily lucrative one.

My great-grandmother's first cousin, Floyd, didn't finish high school, didn't follow his brothers into the first World War on account of his lungs, stayed home with mama, on the farm, on which they proudly advertised, the smaller, but surely no less spectacular, Crystal Caves.

No one came. Crystal Cave's distance from Mammoth was not worth the trip, the industry said, and still he dreamed of that steady trickle, the ticket to remain in one place and forget the hunger. Floyd believed in the existence of a confluence underground; if he could definitively prove one of the smaller caves nearby connected to mammoth's larger network, he would go down as the discoverer of a previously un-sighted entrance, the excavator of a new mouth.

Floyd entered Sand Cave equipped with God-given narrow shoulders and a kerosene lantern. He descended through passages no wider than suits of armor, scraping chin and belly, slow, slowly, in inch-worm formation, down. At ninety feet below the surface of the earth, the kerosene flickered. Floyd made the decision to turn back. An instant's miscalculation, an error in judgement, a 27 pound rock, inexplicably dislodged to pin his left ankle, pressing Floyd's body, like wild flowers into the bible.

Time is a bodily function of the earth you only begin to make out in the conditions of deprivation the cave necessitates, like the hum of a refrigerator that slips in and out of your consciousness. Buried alive, and time is a sense you

exercise in place of sight and touch. Time contracts and expands; the blood clots then drains.

Above, time hastens to keep up with the crowd, mobilizing. If folks will pay to tour the artifacts of an entrapment now centuries out of use, they will pay much more to gawk and gander, to tut and mutter over a living man's slow loss of breath.

Floyd invited overnight fame to the Collins' farm.

Peanut and cold drink vendors opened shop. The ladies mopped their melting eye lids, and men drew plans and drank beers and bet money on who would come up with the most efficient or most daring plan to save the man that felt every imperceptible drip and draft of the earth ninety feet below.

Charles Lindbergh reported on the festivities from the cloudless Kentucky sky while patterning repetitive hypnotic loop de loops reminiscent of the buzzard preparing for the meal

Skeeter Mills, renowned journalist, descended on the scene to record the trapped man's last rights and regrets. Skeeter, daringly it was said, slipped into the underneath in order to trade Floyd sandwich for headline. Quoting Collins last reflections on missing home, his mother, and coming, coming quick now to Jesus, Mills won the Pulitzer that year.

After eight days, Floyd was pronounced dead from exposure.

Once the body was recovered, it would be decades before he was returned to the earth. The frenzy of media attention surrounding the Collins' tragedy, made Floyd's body precious more precious than gold to the owners of Mammoth Cave.

Floyd's corpse was sealed in a glass case, propped up in a museum in Cave City.

Once, I heard, the son or daughter of a trapper or a logger, liberated Floyd from his confinement, and sent him like the Vikings sent beloved kings into eternity, eyes closed, arms folded, up the Green River, "where paradise lay."

It took the staff weeks to locate his water logged fingers furring the tops of trees, his booted feet lapping the river bank, and gather him like pieces of a jigsaw puzzle or a long-fragmented treasure map, understandable, recognizable. Something whole.

SORROW

Madelyn Chennells

Ohio, 2015
As the area around the streets turns from afternoon to dusk
The people go to bed
Because that is what you do, at night
Is it not?
And I wish an impossible wish
"There's something wrong with you," they say
And my heart beats like a raptor
Because they do not know
I taste the salt of your skin in my sleep
The peace
No religion, no faith, could justify this

My sister is sick
I remember
A man looking in our window
Emanating foul air
How could his daughter die
And so many live
Our pajamas stuck to our skin
Night comes
And my sister's blond hair
Whispers sweat
He gave her this
I remember

Sometimes, "I wish most of them were dead."
But in my dreams of you
I am perfect
I am Eden
Not this new kind of sickness
I'm running, and I do not know why
But I am unashamed

"My dear, I am sorry, truly."
I am writing to you now
I do not wish to say, as Rukeyser did,
"The war has lasted our entire lifetime."
I can feel my blood in you
Like my reddish hair, falling on my shoulders as I weep
Coursing through our veins
I want something closer to you than sex
I want a word I do not have

Sangre, it means blood in Spanish
My professor died in an accident
There was no one present
To clean the dried blood from his head
Except the young policeman
His hands, shaking

I am not one, but two, and three
How do they not see the truth
All is quiet in Ohio tonight
Except my heart
It wants out
Of the flatness, and despair
The one-dimensional truths
And they want an answer
"She must incapable of love," they say
"Or just cruel."
No, John, for I have
So much of you in my heart

TWIG

Fadumo Abdulle

In the cool air of the river known as the
Lower Shabelle, two best friends go skinny dipping,
Their goats bleating nearby.
Later when they go home they have to erase
Any evidence of being in the water.
The dreary bedtime stories of tall men that hunt girls
With secrets haunt the two friends
And their heads cock to the sides like nervous
Chicken.

When they walk to the caves outside the city,
The sound of their sandals on their heels
Turns the heads of the townspeople; girls with secrets!
Everyone knew.
Their stories are longer than
The two rivers combined. Sometimes dry and
Sometimes yellow and muddy.

The breaking of a twig in the bushes nearby
Sends one of the girls running out of the water,
Stark naked! But it's only a camel and the girls got
Caught after the sweet naïve girl ran away out of the water
Afraid it might be a tall man hiding in the bushes
Out to discover their secret abilities to swim.

Years later, they laughed about that moment,
Their laughter so hard and deep that it echoed
In their cups of tea.

THE CONTINUOUS DEATH OF MY MOTHERHOOD

Yoshi White

(*Child's room. Brightly lit and strewn with brightly colored toys.* MOTHER *walks into her daughter's room. A basket of clothes in her arms. Tosses her phone onto the bed angrily. Shaking her head. The room is messy, children's toys everywhere. Sets the basket of clothes on the floor and begins to fold.*)

MOTHER

I love my baby girl.
There have been people who suggested otherwise, and you know what?
Fuck them.
(*Shaking head.*)
"You know, she can always come stay with me."
(*Disbelieving laugh. Shakes head.*)
Like the reason she is gone is because I didn't want her.
Can you even imagine?
(*Pause.*)
Not wanting that perfect girl?
(*Stands and begins to pace the room.*)
I spent hours in my head,
My hands running over my swollen belly,
Just imagining how amazing she would be.
My hands shaping her out of clay the way God made Adam,
I knew it was blasphemous, but I knew she would be perfect,
Not just because she was God's creation,
But because I had a hand in making her too.
Hour by hour, day by day, my baby got closer and closer to my arms,
I couldn't wait.
(*Taking a picture frame off a book case. Hugging it to her chest. Lights dimming slightly.*)
Her father, like every man, contributed little past the initial emission of his sperm.
Don't get me wrong, lots of guys love and support their wives through their pregnancies.
I was not so lucky.
I ignored the disgust on his face, the harsh words.
It's funny you know?
(*Chuffs.*)
How our love seemed to die in direct relation to the growth of my belly.
That was okay though, to me he didn't matter anymore.
When she was born,
My life shattered.

(*Pause.*)
When we become mothers, we stop being our own person.
We are no longer defined by our personalities, hobbies, tastes in food or music, education level,
None of that means anything,
Because I will forever be defined, first and foremost as her mother.
I may have shattered, but in the same moment I was reborn.
I hated every moment the nurse took cleaning the remnants of my life from her body.
And then that bitch,
(*Clenches jaw. Clenches fists. Angry gesturing with the frame still in hand.*)
That bitch wrapped up my beautiful creation and handed it to that piece of shit instead of me.
Nothing but a fucking bystander and he held *my* masterpiece in his arms
Before I had even had a chance to look at her face.
(*Deep breath. Physically shaking off the anger.*)
From the moment she finally did reach my arms she held me in her hands.
Tiny fingers squeezing, wrapped around my heart.
With every beat my life was hers.
(*Bitter sweet smile. Biting lip. Pause. Deep breath. Sitting back down on the bed and continuing to fold. Stopping to speak again. Lights dimming slightly.*)
For the last five years I have done exactly what mothers are supposed to do.
Her life, happiness, success has always come before mine.
Our marriage hadn't lasted, and that part of my reality meant nothing to me.
But I could see on her tiny face how much it hurt every single time he didn't show up.
Those first few months we were on our own were hell for her.
She needed him,
He wasn't there,
But I had no life of my own without her.
And yet every time I turned around she was further away from me.
For years he was nothing but an occasional visitor.
He came and went as he pleased.
(*Perplexed. Confused.*)
I'm a mother first, and a person second, so I spend every waking moment thinking about how to teach her.
I want her to know love, strength, independence, when to hold on and when to let go,
I want her to know safety, stability, dependability,
But the harder I try, the worse it gets.
"I hate you! You're so mean to me! You never loved me! You don't want me to be happy!"
(*Tears brimming. Voice shaking. Lights dimming further.*)
Five years old.
Somewhere along the line we became broken,
She turned away from me.
But I can't fix this.

No matter what has upset her, I can't make it better.
When she visits with her father she begs not to come home.
I answer the door and have to take her from his arms screaming and crying as she tries to hold on.
When the door shuts I am pushed away,
She runs to her room and shuts the door.
She doesn't have to say it out loud,
"You take me away from my daddy. It's your fault I don't get to see him."
Her accusations linger in the air long after I can't hear her cry anymore.
Every week we see a professional,
Someone trained to help me fix us,
It's her job.
To help me get back to that moment when she looked up at me like I was as much her world as she was mine.
Who expects to hear that kind of venom from such a small child?
Definitely not her mother.

(*Pause. Sniffle. Deep breath.*)

Society tells us,
That as mothers we have to give up our lives to our children,
And I do so every day without regret.

(*Beat. Shakes head.*)

"I want my Daddy!"
"I want to be at his house!"

(*Beat.*)

How then can I be failing so spectacularly?
Maybe my mother is right to assume I'm the problem.
My baby girl is unhappy.
I am the only person with the power to fix this,

(*Pause.*)

Even if I'm not capable at all.

(*Biting lip. Shaking head. Standing to move around the room. Places frame back on shelf. Lights dimming.*)

How fucking fair is that anyway?

(*Beat.*)

When a man isn't the primary care giver of his children, do people call him a bad father?
No.
He gets to have an identity outside of his relationship to his little girl.
Not me.
Not a mother.

(*Pause. Tearful.*)

I am supposed to be the one she wants.
I am supposed to be the one to show her happiness…

(*Shaking head. Hanging head. Looking up. Defiant.*)

So I let her go.
I made the choice to give her happiness.

(*Beat.*)

She visits with me,
And he takes her away from home.
But it isn't her home anymore, is it?
It's him that tucks her into bed every night.
He kisses her forehead and wraps her up in the blanket that *I* made for her.
(*Picks up pink blanket and clutches it to chest with picture. Lights dimming.*)
Snug as my bug in a rug.
Does she sing "You Are My Sunshine" with him?
(*Tears. Deep shaking breath. Speaking faster.*)
He gets her smiles, and her laughs,
He gets her colored pictures, and plays princess games before bed.
(*Beat.*)
I find myself wondering,
Will she need to be rescued tonight?
Or will she be having a tea party with all of her princess friends?
(*Sniffles. Shakes head. Lights dimming.*)
It shouldn't be this way right?
Her therapist tells me that it isn't a bad thing that she has a bond with her father,
That it isn't a reflection on me,
That neither she nor I did anything wrong.
In that moment I laugh through the tears and tell her.
"I don't blame her. I blame myself."
(*Bites lip and looks away.*)
My mother blames me too.
(*Pause. Shakes head.*)
It's not about me though.
It's about her.
She wants him.
That is making her happy.
(*Pause. Tears. Pain in her voice.*)
And my motherhood dies with every moment I miss.
(*Speaking slowly. Pausing to smell blanket clutched to her chest. Laying gently back on the bed. Pacing. Lights dimming. A very dim spotlight on* MOTHER.)
Every smile, every laugh, every lesson she learns from another,
Every new experience I don't give her, every hard moment I can't help her through,
Every game that she doesn't play with me,
Every moment that she is happier without me,
I die.
Over and over again,
Or maybe it just never stops.
(*Beat.*)
The smiling face of my tiny baby,
The warmth of her touch,
The tiny fingers wrapped around my heart,
It haunts my dreams and my nightmares.

(*Sinks to bed sobbing. Lights dim so that the stage is nearly dark. The spotlight on* MOTHER *brightens. She is looking up and speaking forcefully.*)

Why?
Why wasn't my love enough?
What did I do to make you hate me?
Where did I go wrong?
I'll give you anything to love me,
I'll be whatever you need.
I've tried so hard!

(*Hanging head. Voice lowered. Spotlight begins to fade.*)

I gave my life to you.
Please,
Just let me be your mother again.

(*Stage goes completely black.*)

Please, just bring me back to life.

END

DRIZZLE

Lillian Mills

Chewing on the words
You said to me,
I feel the sliver of your
Finger print between my teeth.

Temptation is first sour, then sweet.

Too ripe with emotion,
I'm bleeding out,
The crimson found in
The final seconds right before
The sun cowers away,
Is what I've found in my heart.

It's an envious flirtation,
Clouds looming,
Grandma always said when the
Breeze blew the leaves over,
And you saw their backsides,
You knew is was going to rain.

Drizzle only can last so long,
Before the clouds finally decide to
Dry up or
Pour.

BLIZZARD IN OHIO, 2008

Gyasi Hall

Of course, there are reasons snow
Falls at an angle, and packs itself
Under tired feet into white
Asphalt,
And lashes a numbness into the
People wading through
The breeze that carries its ashes.

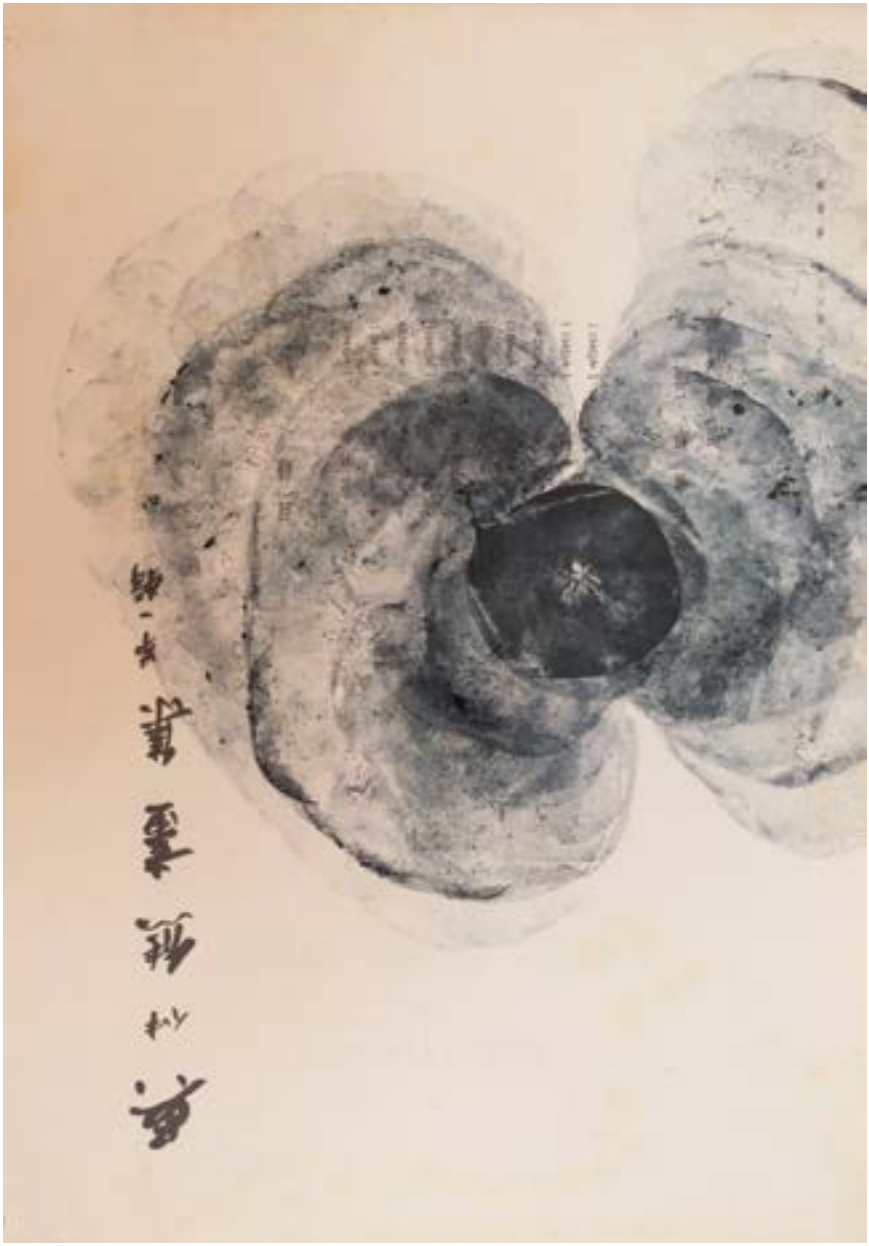
And out West, the Sun doesn't have to
Fall behind and work backstage for its
Bastard understudy, and the moon
Is always
And forever convinced that Waiting
Makes Life bloom, and the radio
In your car says that 2/3 of people
Haven't seen what the land looks like
Covered in thousands of falling bodies telling
You to stay inside.

But eventually, you do end up becoming
Yourself, after the ice melts and the
Oceans of run off establish colonies
At your heels,
And there is nowhere left to go
Except home, or school, or whatever
Building is brave enough to paint the
Word sanctuary across it's wet and bleeding
Side.

I am beginning to remember.

BLUE OYSTER

Ashley Anderson



A WAITING

Sarah Carnes

Man on a porch step snaps his fingers
for the dog with a white underbelly
and fiery red coat.

The dog has fox ears,
and they are perched,
listening for a different call.

Woman adjacent to the man resists attachment
with her arms crossed against her belly,
stark white and blank-faced.

The grass isn't green
and neither are the trees.

Lost in grays and surrounded by yellow,
this isn't their home.

SINCERELY, ALICE

Lydia Crannell

Dear A—,

You've turned me into the worst thing a writer could be: a cliché.
I'm doomed. And it's your fault.

Helen says that you're "blocking my creative senses." She stopped me after class today holding a poem I had written a week after our breakup and an expression that read, "you can do better".

"Something's going on," she said.

Yup.

"It's starting to make your writing suffer."

Because all I want to do is curl into a ball under a blanket and cry.

"Alice,"

Blankets. Cry. Tequila? Repeat.

"Whatever's happening, write about it," she continued, peering at me behind her red, cat-eye lenses. You know, the glasses we grew up thinking would never look badass on a 62-year-old, graying, lit professor but totally do. She set down my poem and shook her head.

"Stop pretending to be a writer and be one. Stop letting this, this *thing,"* she gave a grand motion with her arms as if you were some mystical abstract concept, "control you. Sometimes the best work comes from the shittiest places."

Helen had gathered her briefcase and turned toward the door.

"When life hands you lemons—"

Oh Jesus. No Helen, no.

"write them a fucking poem."

So here I am, trying to be a writer. Trying to figure out how I feel. Trying to move past you and all of your fucking lemons.

From the shittiest of places,
Alice

Dear A—,

My mother called me today to tell me that she was "relieved it ended when it did." She used the word "phase" a lot, but all that did was remind me about the time we charted the phases of the moon on the calendar we bought at the Cleveland Art Museum. I had to hang up eventually, because I couldn't handle her saying, "You'll find someone new, dear… something your father thinks something… maybe if you didn't wear so much black."

I spent an hour looking for that damn calendar.

Waxing and Waning,
Alice

Deafr ASSHOLE,

You should have loved me bettrer.

"You dont trust me."

Fuck thAt shit. I couldn't breathe when I was with you. I thought you were were HOME.

Well you werent. You arent. And I must haave been crazy to ever beleieve that you cared about me. Dont call me dramatic Dont call me insecure Dont call me anything anymore.

Because I hate you.

Fuck youuu,
Alicwe

Dear A—,

Sorry about that last letter.

I was drunk,
Alice

Dear A—,

Last night, Molly thought it'd be a good idea to go out.

I pretended that I was going to have an amazing night as I zipped myself into ~~our~~ *my* favorite dress and applied 3 coats of mascara. We went to the bar on State Street, because I think Molly really wanted to flirt with the bartender but didn't want to tell me. While she leaned over the counter batting her eyes, I sat on a bar stool and sloshed my drink to the music. I didn't realize what a pretty shade of magenta my vodka cranberry was until I was about 2½ drinks in.

Yes, the picture of us from my 21st birthday is still on the cork-board in the back by the bathrooms. In case you were wondering.

Halfway through the night when I was significantly tipsy, I decided to accept an offer to dance. It was with a boy who'd been in my psychology class sophomore year and had since graduated. He told me that he was "taking some time to sort through his options". Either way, his smile was inviting and his hands on my hips made me feel warm, but maybe that was just the alcohol. After we had danced for a few songs and I had another drink, I saw Molly give me a wink and blow a kiss. That's our code for, "I'm about to get lucky, so I'll text you in the morning to let you know I'm alive." So, I winked and blew a kiss back.

Then, I let the psychology boy lead me out of the bar and onto the sidewalk. I let his fingers lace between mine as we walked the three blocks back to his apartment. I let his hollow lips kiss me, and I kissed him back. I let him peel ~~our~~ *my* favorite dress off of me and toss it on the floor in a crumpled, useless pile.

But when I woke up, the morning glow on his skin was the prettiest part. I didn't wait for him roll over, say good morning, and act like things would be normal. I didn't want to pretend that he was more than what he was. Why do people pretend to care so much? I think being told you're special when you're not is the worst kind of lie.

I'm not really sure why I'm telling you all of this. I know you won't be jealous. You never got jealous, and to tell you the truth that drove me insane. Here I was green with envy every time ANYONE would look your way and you couldn't care less. Maybe it's because I want you to know that I'm trying to forget you, even if that involves 5 vodka cranberries and a boy who thought Sigmund Freud was just a "really fucked up dude".

I got an A- in Psychology,
Alice

Dear A—,

The snow's melting and
I miss you.

I know I shouldn't be thinking of the one time we made snow angels and your hands were so cold I had to blow on them for 20 minutes before you could feel them again. I know I shouldn't be thinking about the scarf you knitted for winter and how it's buried in a box under my bed. I shouldn't be thinking about the way you started drinking your coffee black that November or had a tendency to read *The New York Times* in the bathtub. You were so upset the day you dropped the entire Opinion section into the bubbles.

I swear I could taste the newsprint on you for days,
Alice

Dear A—,

Yesterday I was in Half-Priced Books when Clair de Lune came over the speaker. I was wedged between the poetry and literature section, digging my way through books I hadn't seen before. I was stuck on the line

"he was gone
they were forgotten
they couldn't see"

in some book I can't remember by some author I can't remember when Debussy made me stop. I wanted to stick my head around the memoir aisle and say, "Listen dear, it's our song," even though I knew you weren't there. I was never really sure what made it our song. I *was* sure though that every time I'd play it, you'd come running out of the kitchen to dance with me. We always took turns leading.

I don't know why I go back to that bookstore. Is it an example of me "moving on"? I think all it does is remind me of the times we went there to explore the stacks.

"What do you want to do?"
"I don't know, anything really."
"Half-Priced Books?"

But the funny thing is, we never explored "together". You'd find your own row of books or records and I'd instinctively run to the poetry section. Three hours later we wouldn't have said two words in each other's direction. You'd walk out with a pile up to your chin, and I'm come out empty handed. I always came out empty handed. Why was I so okay with that?

The author's name is Carolyn Creedon
but I can't remember the name of the poem,
Alice

Dear A—,

I didn't miss you today,
because I finally realized that
I deserve better.

That was the shortest poem
I've ever written,
Alice

Dear A—,

A week ago I went to a bonfire with David, Molly, Jess, Nick, and a few other friends to celebrate our last week before the craziness of finals and graduation and the beginning of the rest of our lives. I sat there with a beer in my hand laughing to whatever joke or memory was brought up at the moment and you know, it felt really good.

I was introduced to a girl with jet-black hair named Julie who turned to me after a few beers, smiled, and asked,

"If we were sea creatures, what would we be?"

I thought about this for a while, and how I always wanted to be a mermaid when I was little.

"Umm. Maybe dolphins or clown fish? Anything, really," I shrugged and laughed at the girl's silly question. She laughed back.

"Cheers to that."

Julie clinked her bottle to mine and we went back to discussing the law school she'd be attending in the fall. Near the end of the night, I wrote my number on the inside of her palm in blue ink, and she smiled again. It was the smile that said hello and goodbye at the same time, as if she was the happiest when she saw you. It felt good to receive a smile like that.

I still want to be a mermaid,
Alice

Dear A—,

Well, I did it. I graduated.
Mom cried. Dad cried. Hell, even I cried.
For the first time in months though, they were all happy tears.

Officially in the "real world",
Alice

Dear A—,

I'm sorry that I haven't written in a while. I'd like to say that it's because I'm too busy living.

Julie and I went on a date last week, and no, I did not wear ~~our~~ *my* old favorite dress. I have a new favorite dress now, and she complimented how it brought out my eyes.

Molly found a teaching job in the city, so we're spending the next few weeks apartment-hunting. She's been hinting that I should join her, but I'm too busy sending my resume to every publishing company in the Continental U.S. to even consider making the move.

About a month ago on a Tuesday, Helen asked me to get lunch with her. She confronted me about my writing again, but this time it was different.

"Things have improved, Alice. Your writing is clearer, more concentrated."

"Thanks, I took your advice and faced my shit."

She laughed at my comment and nodded her head saying something that struck me,

"Don't we all at some point? Life has to go on."

What Helen said was true, though. We all have to face our shit at some point or life will seem like a tape on an endless loop. It's been six months, and although I would have loved to have had some grand epiphany or world-renowned novel come from this shit show, I have learned something. Of all things, you taught me that forgiveness is required in these types of situations. You see, I had to learn how to forgive you for hurting me, but I also had to learn how to forgive myself. (Cliché, right?) It took a long time before I understood that the sadness and anger and resentment buried in my chest was okay. It was okay to *hurt*. It was okay to *feel*.

Yes, there are days when I still turn my head to the sound of your name. There are days that I'll remember how you made me the happiest I had ever been. There are days when a little piece of my heart still aches and it hurts to breathe. But those days don't really come around as often as they used to, and when they do, I smile at them and say, "The most important parts of life are usually the most painful."

I did love you, A— and I probably always will, but I think it's time I stop writing these letters and finally tell you that I'm doing okay. Really, I am.

Sincerely,
Alice

AT THE END

Lillian Mills

ZABULIA

Josh Brandon

Your hands like fire, as salt
to cuts, burned the linoleum floor just moments
after gripping my throat—
your lashes stained white gloss and tears formed

lakes under the trash can in the corner
as your grip fell from God's hands.

Did you suddenly awaken into humanity?
Into being?
Did you remember how my body was smuggled here in sheets?
Did you turn over your hands and see the fungus growing on your heart lines?

A child drenched in his own "mother's" venom.
You coiled your tongue around me like
I was one of yours.
A child swarmed in pink tempest.

You never wanted to dress
feet that could wander the earth—
never loved my rosacea'd cheeks.

And I know

your home was never mine.
Not even to borrow after your womb.
Your womb (a tunnel of amber trees)
failing cloistered cells.

I dug soil from potted plants and
placed fists of earth between
my teeth like you.
You jerk at my toenails with wet kisses.

And those eyes—

Your eyelids:

shingles that drip toxic
runoff to your guttered mouth. It's been
48 hours and you're still
awakening. And I still haven't forgiven my
damnation to your inflamed gut.

Your hair peaks like mountains, but below in your womb,
hell chains hostages—yet you
still claim to be my mother.

Your mother never surrendered honeysuckles.
My mother is entombed in iron robes.
You say, "I'll never forget when you scorned me like the devil."
I'll never forget

when serpents weaved between your mouth and eye sockets.

ASHES

Sarah Carnes

I squinted at the misty limelight
surrounding your tree that was embedded in the
soggy ground
brought up by shaky roots.
The fog was just right,
playing tricks on my eyes
and making me second guess the accuracy
of my near-sightedness
as I stood right in front of
the thing I wanted most to look at
but couldn't see
like I wanted to see it.
And I remembered how you never wanted
your picture to be taken because you didn't
want the pictures at your Funeral Showing,
you didn't want to be shown at your funeral.
Selfish.
How selfish am I?
Apparently enough that I am
here now
taking every picture that I can
because you can't tell me not to.
You can't knock the camera out
of my hands
using your two lanky arms
that you also used to embrace photo
albums I gave
you only liked pictures of other places
not people
but it's the people who want to remember you
like I do and so I am
here now
looking
and you have more arms
than you'd know what to do with
and so many weathered layers
of bark on your body
and you are still just as beautiful
as the camera never captured you.

THE VOICE INSIDE YOUR HEAD

Claire Winslow

I want to be the voice inside your head.
The one who whispers, the breath in your ear
late at night when your knees tremble
and twitch as you catch yourself before you fall
to the ground and
shatter.

I want to be the one who catches you.

I want to be the voice inside your head,
the one who murmurs the sweetest nothings,
who creeps to the back of your mind as you try
to fall, as you try not to shatter, as you try
to sleep, only to catch yourself again.

I could always tell,
those nights when dreams didn't stick,
your legs would shiver
and jerk.
So I would entwine my own.

And I would know the voice was there,
nights when my arms were a safety harness.
When the voice inside your head,
the one who murmurs those not-so-sweet nothings,
tells you that you are
worthless,
that you are petty,
and unlovable,
and small.

I want to be that voice.
I want to be the one who whispers, I want to be the breath in your ear,
the one who murmurs all of the things that you will always
be too afraid to say. The one who reminds you
of the hours that I spent memorizing your lungs,
the way they lose their shiver the moment you finally sleep.
The voice that recites stories of our legs tangled like thorns.

I want to be the one who shatters you.

I want to remind you with every shudder of your knees,
of the night we laid a flower on a stranger's doorstep,

when you dragged my careless feet from the edge of the bluffs,
the time you caught me just before my head hit the ice, only for the two of us to slide to the ground,
laughing.

I want you to remember, remember
the cold October evening I ate that pear as we walked home,
the hotel room that was already booked for your birthday gift,
the night the cab driver asked us if we shared a fridge and you said,
"Someday."

I want to be the voice inside your head,
the one who whispers, the breath in your ear,
the one that remembers the time I told you
"I need you now more than I have ever needed anyone".
And the voice reminds you of when you said,

"That's
too
much."

I want to be the voice inside your head,
because God knows that you are mine.

THE NO-FACE WOMAN

Mackenzie Thomas

"There are quantities of human beings, but there are many more faces, for each person has several. There are people who wear the same face for years; other people put their faces on, one after the other, with uncanny rapidity and wear them out. They are not accustomed to take care of faces, their last is worn through in a week, has holes, and in many places is thin as paper; and then little by little the under layer, the no-face, comes through, and they go about with that."

—Rainer Maria Rilke

She washes her face in the soapy water basin, scrubbing her foamy palms over her cheeks and forehead. As she rinses away the suds, she gently dries her face with a hand towel. When she bends her head up towards the mirror, still hunched over the sink, she sees what she's always seen and has seen for decades:

A no-face.

Skin smooth as the gentle curve from her nape to her tailbone. Ridges and bumps, valleys and trenches, they all make up the topographical map of her shaded face with no destination, no landmarks. She runs her hands over the surface of her face, sliding effortlessly from jawline to hairline. As she continues to run her fingers through her hair, strands unusually capture in her fingertips. Some strands float towards the carpet. She curls her prune-y fingers around her scalp and yanks. Her scalp peels backwards off her no-face in a smooth motion, like pulling tape from a dispenser.

She begins to strip off her long nightgown, using one hand to unclasp the buttons around her neck while her other hand still clutches her hair. The nightgown falls to the floor as it's loosened and she steps over the fabric towards the tub. She turns the nozzle all the way to scalding hot, and soon steam begins to fog the mirror and stick to the porcelain surfaces of the bathroom. Her fingers graze along the edge of the tub, wiping the dewy droplets from the surface, and she brings her fingers gingerly to her no-face. In the small indents of once-used sockets, she lets the water droplets fall like tears.

The tiny hairs on her cheeks prickle and bend as the water travels downward. Leaning over the tub, the droplet reaches the end of its journey, plopping into the overflowing water. With one foot poised over the tub, she wiggles her toes. One by one, the toes dive into the water. Then go the other toes. As soundlessly as she can, she lets her shoulders relax and releases her arms from their sockets, easing her arms into the boiling mix, barely making a splash.

When she sits in the steamy tub, she can feel her pores enlarge, begging for air. Her no-face twitches, but only she knows it's a smile. Just as she lays down completely under, she can feel herself dissolving in the relished warmness of

the water and the bathroom light beating down like the summer sun on a lake. Her body bubbles and dissipates like Alka-Seltzer or freshly-poured carbonated soda. Her no-face peels away into a nothing-face, an empty space of air and water, and all that's left is the overflowing tub and the whirr of the ventilation fan.

I OPEN NEW WOUNDS ON A DAILY BASIS

Emily Roberts

I open new wounds on a daily basis.
as if the old ones weren't enough,
as if my eyes could sin on their own,
so I try to keep them away from my heart.
Could my heart-spill out overflow like a cup,
would you know if it was red or black?
because I could tell you what it bleeds;
but you say you just see me.

And if my heart has a disease of depravity,
my mind wants to believe it.
but there is something else, a calloused hand:
"because He loves me, because He loves me, because He loves me."
Do I know that true romance appears
to bring blindness and accepts the biggest leap of faith?
I don't suppose I will make it to the mountain top,
rumors of blood-living water set my face
Because this pain is suffocating me.
reminds me of every second thought I ever had, every second chance I don't deserve –
I cannot know goodness and glory
except maybe when I am lost.
A system created entirely out of opposites,
as if obstacles were only built to be torn down,
that maybe these walls aren't really stone,
but air or sand or even melting water.
A world preaching everything I see is good,
but I know it's just as black as my blood-water.
You exist out of all I thought could be,
this whore of a girl torn between glory and greed.
But to chase me every single day,
You chose long ago,
Can you possibly know that you're getting -
I am grains of sand in my own skin, planks in my own eyes.
I open new wounds on a daily basis.

This requires the fact that my mind doesn't understand what my heart desires:
a simplistic demand to need to be wanted,
a fantastical desire to be desired—
my blood burns black with dirt and filth.
Do You remember, one fleeting moment,
You ever wanted to turn back
from that bloody cross and hellfire,

for the first time, blood bleeding red.
You walked Jerusalem and the Skull and Damascus.
To set on fire my very heart,
burning all my selfish desires.
and my mind is silenced, my heart overflows,
my cup bleeds red.
I open new wounds on a daily basis.

AUTHOR BIOS

Fadumo Abdulle is a Senior Creative Writing major. She loves reading poetry and fiction (usually historical fiction).

Ashley Anderson enjoy repurposing found materials. Breathing new life back into neglected objects, which to an outsider's perspective might seem old, used or worthless, is a common thread in my creative process. I enjoy transforming the ugly into something beautiful. This particular print is a monotype using ink and an apple for a stamp.

Josh Brandon is a current senior at Otterbein University. They study Creative Writing as well as Women's, Gender, and Sexuality studies. Along with serving as managing editor of Quiz & Quill, they are also current president of FreeZone!, Otterbein's LGBTQIA+ organization. They also do other things, but biographies can get boring, so they'll spare you the details and just let you know that they really enjoy pizza and dark humor. Dr. Pepper and video games also are in that mix of "liking things" as well. Oh, and writing.

Sarah Carnes is a sophomore Psychology major and Creative Writing minor, and she is also in the Honor's Program.. She shares a love for writing and a love for helping others. She is spiritual in nature and strongly believes listening is a key in many circumstances. Sarah serves as the Secretary for Quiz & Quill as well as the Genre Editor for poetry. Her second year has won over her heart, and she feels at peace when referring to Otterbein as home.

Madelyn Chennells is a sophomore Literary Studies and History double major. She loves all things Appalachia, a good book, and her loved ones. In her spare time, she can be found digging through the past in the archives of Otterbein's Courtright Memorial Library.

Emily Constable is a sophomore Middle Childhood Education major. They hate talking about themself, but they hope to encourage students to tell their own stories someday.

Maverik Cox is a writer, and all that implies.

Lydia Crannell is currently a sophomore Creative Writing and Music double major. She is Page Designer of Quiz & Quill, a staff member of Aegis as well as the Otterbein Writing Center, and a proud part of FreeZone! If Lydia's not practicing cello, writing a poem, or dying her hair an outrageous color, she can often be found binge watching Netflix.

Alexandrea Futo is a Creative Writing and Communication Studies double major from Wellington, Ohio hoping to make a name for herself in the writing world. She jokes and calls English her "major of unemployment," but she hopes that one day she'll prove herself wrong. She'd like to make the New York Time's Bestseller's List someday, but she'll settle for whatever she can get as long as she's still writing. She prefers Coke over Pepsi, has a Netflix addiction, and is a Capricorn.

John Gill is a first-year English Literature major from the village of Greenfield, OH. He is involved with Greek life and the men's soccer team on campus. He is a passionate supporter of late night conversations, sports, and facial hair.

Gyasi Hall is 18 years old, a freshmen at Otterbein University, and an English Creative Writing Major with a Films Studies Minor. He was born and raised in Columbus, OH, and in addition to writing, he enjoys reading, eating good food, and watching TV when he's supposed to being doing other, more important things. He wants to take you out for a drink and ask you about your taste in music and your favorite authors.

Jennifer Hall is a senior at Otterbein studying painting and communication design. Her work has been featured in several group shows, including the Ohio State Fair and Ohio Art League juried exhibitions. In addition to making artwork, she enjoys spending time outdoors and cooking.

Daniel Kushnir likes long walks on the beach and is not too good at short autobiographies.

Claudia Owusu is a Creative Writing major here at Otterbein. She is originally from Ghana, West Africa. She loves bicycles, really good laughs, and impromptu dance sessions.

Lillian Mills is a senior at Otterbein studying Creative Writing and Arts Administration. From Cincinnati, she has always loved art and writing. Lily is a cofounder of Otterbein's first and only collaborative arts cooperative, "Fusion Studio." Lily also works as the assistant manager at Westerville Grill. In her spare time she spends time with her cat Milo and posts on her personal blog.

Emily Roberts is a senior Nursing major with a Spanish minor from Cincinnati, Ohio. She has been writing about and trying to find the beauty of life through poetry since she was a kid. She loves Jesus very much, and owes everything she has to Him.

Abby Studebaker is a first year creative writing and journalism double major with a minor in studio art. She is involved in soccer, Greek life, and the Honors program at Otterbein, and she looks forward to becoming more involved in the university's literary world.

Mackenzie Thomas is a junior with a double major in Literary Studies and Creative Writing with a minor in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies.

Maggie Veach is a poet and a playwright. Her work has been published in Kenyon Young Writers Workshop Burn After Reading.

Yoshi White is a first year adult transfer student who is completely in love with Otterbein. She is a mother of three and came with the intention of becoming an editor (of novels not periodicals). Now, thanks to one of her teachers, she has begun to develop a serious interest in dramatic writing. She is happy that she has been able to get involved in the campus environment and looks forward to discovering even more through the experiences she is presented with here at Otterbein.

Claire Winslow is a Senior Creative Writing and Literary Studies double major with a minor in Religion. She is the President of Sigma Tau Delta, is an executive member of FreeZone!, and this is her second year working in the Otterbein Writing Center. Claire loves to read, write, bake, sing, knit, become too attached to television shows, make lists, and name her plants after Shakespeare characters.

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