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Quiz & Quill

SPRING MAGAZINE 2024 | VOL.107



OTTERBEIN UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT LITERARY MAGAZINE

QUIZ&QUILL

OTTERBEIN UNIVERSITY'S STUDENT MAGAZINE | SPRING 2024

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Faculty Advisor | Jeremy Llorence

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Ayaan

Nevada Blake

Joseph Breslin

Charlie Ryan

Submission Policy

Q&Q strives to publish high quality creative work by current Otterbein students. We review all submissions blindly and take every precaution to protect our contributors' anonymity during our selection process. During review, only the faculty advisor knows the identities of the writers and artists who submit work to the magazine. The advisor only shares contributor identities for accepted work once staff has finished its selection process.

Cover Art:

Strawberry Snail

Rachel Malek

Spring 2024 • 3



Letter from the Editors



Dear Readers,

It's a special time of year for your Co-Managing Editors as we move through our last spring semester at Otterbein. It's getting warmer, and the days are getting longer, and by the time fall comes around again, we'll both be in different places.

It has been an honor to serve as your Co-Managing Editors this year. Thank you for submitting your work, attending our events, and reading our publications. To our Editorial Board and Staff: thank you for your input in the construction of this magazine, as well as for the many laughs we've shared over this last year. We also extend our gratitude to our faculty advisor and fearless leader, Professor Jeremy Llorence, for his unending support throughout our time at Otterbein.

When we started in our Freshman year as part of Staff, neither of us had any idea that we'd be writing this letter now. 2020 was a tumultuous time for everyone on campus. Online classes brought disconnection to communities, and *Quiz & Quill* felt this impact intensely. Our time at *Quiz & Quill* has been spent trying to regain those connections with students on campus, from submission calls to open mic nights to cover art contests. We regard *Quiz & Quill* as a creative unification point for writers of all genres, regardless of field of study, and we're glad to see so many submissions this spring from across campus. It's a bittersweet feeling to leave behind all that we've been working on, but we both have the utmost trust in the upcoming Managing Editors to continue the magazine's legacy for another year.

This semester, we both submitted pieces outside of our typical genres, choosing to step outside the box as a final goodbye to the publication that has helped us grow as writers over the last four years. We hope that *Quiz & Quill* continues to serve as a source of inspiration for you as it has for us. We urge you, readers, to continue experimenting with your writing style and submit pieces that reflect your creative journey.

With love and gratitude,

Madison Newman & Harper Wood
Your Managing Editors

Table of Contents

- 8** **Stand Still**
Ayaan
- 10** **Red Slates**
Amaya Serrano
- 12** **Immaculate**
Kate Hedrick
- 13** **Wicker Basket Womb**
Charlie Ryan
- 14** **“Why is it floating...?”**
A. W.
- 15** **Nobody**
Dalton Mosley
- 24** **Queer as in**
Gracie Barton
- 26** **I Need Some Time to Reflect**
Rachel Malek
- 27** **The Sanctuary of Marriage**
Harper Wood
- 30** **Someday, A Soon Day**
Maya Sivillo
- 31** **House of God**
A. W.
- 33** **Generational Mirror**
Kendyl Householder
- 34** **The Études of Roots**
Wrenne Grone

- 36 Feb. 14**
A. W.
- 37 Thanksgiving**
Madison Newman
- 39 Infinite**
Gracie Barton
- 40 Outbuilding**
A. W.
- 41 Scarecrow**
A. W.
- 42 Monster on the Hill**
Jane Cook
- 44 Once Remembered This Street**
Freddie Borer
- 45 Take Out the Butterfly in My Rib Cage**
Wrenne Grone
- 47 Stable**
A. W.
- 48 Shallow Roads / At Our Doorstep**
Ayaan
- 50 the parking lot**
Zoe Florence
- 51 I Grab a Drink with the Ghost of Julie D'Aubigny**
Madison Newman

stand still

Ayaan

time snatches our pinpricks of happiness headline!
in the end it is the children who bear the burden scandal & sorrow in the
same breath
pressure cooker system horror genre a neighborhood that has prepared
us &
destroyed so much blurry wounds distorted notions of love riddled
with hurt
it wanes but lingers fueling anger & hatred & apathy we are choking
in this circular haunting an enraptured youth cathartic violence
headline!
do not fret the ground can hold us all bloodshed is inevitable
uthman tells us that he will be okay he knows that his intent will be
the end of him
he tells me that not everyone can go in vain someone must answer
for this for ali
for his brother he is ready to lose all of his days we told him to leave.
we told him none of
it was worth it
i tell him we must save ourselves we must push
forward or we will be crushed our anger will trap us vengeance will
harm us
futile hope yearning for something that will only be tamped down
these things recoil & rear their ugly heads he is sure. his voice is soft.
he is still a child.
his anger is swallowing him whole.
i read over uthman's prison letters
again & again
the first of ours to leave
is never coming back.
innocent youth gone. nights spent running around &
around in circles
& into nowhere gone.
parents told us to be careful they hoped we would remain
obedient
their parents never leave my mind one son dead. the other gone.
both invisible. left
alone.

thousands of miles away from their home & yet the trauma returns
did it never leave were their children simply made to inherit this
do we only exist to be proprietors of pain
i am unable to retrace the grooves of all that we lost
these wounds will not heal
they will not be given a chance to disappear our returning surface
haunt
it's all expected withered spirits a surprising comfort we've
settled in this routine
i can only be angry for so long i return to his fervent letters
read them over & repeatedly pour over
pour over
& memorize like prayer.

Red Slates

Amaya Serrano

Berlin Wall

On August 13, 1961 my 11.81' self took over shadows and sun, recreating both. I would be the torment they dreaded to realize there was no way over. People's hope would slowly seep into my cracks and out into the open, but no one would answer their calls. Instead of trying to break me down they painted my exterior. They wrote words and drew pictures, even found a way to make blood splatter art. Their little minds couldn't comprehend what would happen if they got too close to me. So it became a contest of which soldier could perfect the art of stains. Which soldier could aim their gun the right way. Which soldier could get more color out of a person. Which soldier could make their gun ring loudest.

A Soldier

Maybe it was how the child thought he was being secretive about the whole situation. Or how the wall left a nice space for his blood to splatter. He didn't seem to care though, which was unusual. Instead of holding a bent little can, his hands carried a paint brush and a bucket. It wasn't small either and this kid must've been 9 or 10. He intrigued me, to the point where I let him touch the wall. His hands were shaky as he put them against the cool stone, admiring the empty space. I positioned my gun. It was like he could sense my movements, taking extra precaution in opening the bucket and dipping his brush in, but only the tip. Maybe it was time to aim for his head.

The Child

The wall had been calling my name for some time, and it left this spot blank for me. Soldiers didn't shoot anyone who was near the wall for orders anymore. They put bullets through our skulls just for fun. Yet there I was, with a bucket filled with anything but paint and my brush. I could feel the soldier watching my every move, I reacted slowly. I opened the top lid and dipped the tip of my tool into the substance. The end of the brush touched my face and colored my skin which sunk into my soul. Red. Onto my arms. More red. He didn't like this, he didn't like my red, our red. In a rush my black spray can flies out of my pocket and rushes its words onto the cool slate. His gun moved back, trained on my head.

F

He's contemplating.

R

Positioning it between my eyes.

E

Waiting for me to move.

E

I don't react.

D

No longer contemplating. He shoots.

Immaculate

Kate Hedrick

Trace amounts of hellfire
burn in her veins, but
they burn

hot enough to forbid her
from any semblance
of the cold

the late night
early morning snowfall
shines without contest

Reaching out a hand
to catch a stray snowflake, she sighs
when it melts
before touching her skin

the demon cannot sleep

this restlessness plagues her
most holy days

Wicker Basket Womb

Charlie Ryan

I think in a past life I was a mother. I got nauseous one morning and threw up in the garden into my daisies and ran to my husband that was too old for me and told him I knew. I traded floral, ruffled day dresses for cloth, plain gowns that flowed at the waist, a begotten house goddess. I frowned over every stretch mark and I came out of the first birth at death's doorstep. I stared at the infant with a postpartum anger, wishing they were a miniscule blood clot washed away into the river nine months ago. And I raised them anyway. I embroidered cursive names into suede jackets and I mashed potatoes in an iron pot for supper. I yelled at them for nothing. I praised them for everything. My face grew wrinkles like my decades old stretch marks and my tired lungs breathed their last. And then I was reborn a boy. Yet, her basket remained, tied to my hand with a red ribbon, never to be removed from me. Her basket holds her regret, her grief, her girlhood, and her blood, and now it's mine. I have to carry it with me since she carries on through me. She hates it when I deny myself kindnesses yet still longs for that which is not good for her. She misses her routine while still yearning for her autonomy back. I humor her with patterned linen shirts, kitschy stationery, and glittering objects of all kinds. She laughs and smiles and pats my back. I thrill her with my leather work boots and my unkempt hair and my vocal range. She gasps, and claps, and cheers me on. I disappoint her with explicit music and dreams of tattoos and bad financial decisions. She pouts, and glares, and chastises me. Sometimes we sit and have picnics, other times we leave each other stranded on rainy streets. She tucks herself into my bed every morning and cries to me when I go to sleep at night. I love you, I care about you, and I'm sorry, mom. Your garden has wilted, and it is my job to go dig up the weeds.

“Why is it floating...?”

A. W.



Nobody

Dalton Mosley

Dreary nights weren't uncommon for Nobody; they seemed to be the time when they were most active, however morbid a thought that was. Starless, blanketed by dark clouds, torrents of rain showering from overhead to worsen the sting of the cold, and a poor soul who, under the weight of a miserable existence, had only moments ago finally given up. Lying there in the alleyway against the frigid outer brick wall of the restaurant, slick with rainwater, their fingers loosely gathered around the neck of the water bottle that was just emptied. The drenched wrapper of a half-eaten burger sat right next to them; the ingredients spilled over one another onto the concrete. Nobody manifested there just seconds after the man passed, watching as his limp body gradually slumped over, leaning over before falling on his side. It was a sight they had seen all too often.

"You poor thing," said Nobody. "For all the great things you humans have achieved, you are still such fickle little beings. So easily does the control over your own life slip away from you like sand through the fingers."

Nobody waved their pale, bone-thin hands over the lifeless form, and in their palms gathered a luminous white energy that sprung forth from the body like water from a fountain. The energy shifted and warped itself, spinning in the space between Nobody's hands as it began to mold itself in the image of the man who passed, until eventually, it had done so. Rigid, the man gazed off into the distance, his face flushed with an amalgamation of emotion. His pale, ghastly eyes locked onto Nobody, their dark, tattered robes a blotch on the rays of the dim streetlight that flickered weakly as it, too, began to die out.

"Am I dead?" The man asked.

"You are free," said Nobody.

"Who are you?"

"To you? I'm nobody," they replied. Nobody then erected a single finger, pointing skyward. "They're waiting for you."

The man looked up to see the sky itself transformed. No rain, no clouds, no scattered rays of moonlight, just an endless expanse of blackness parted by an aurora borealis that glimmered in the same scintillating white energies as the man's current body. He and Nobody were standing on a patch of sand dark as the night sky, surrounded by an endless ocean that reflected that very same darkness, rippling in small waves. Countless wisps of white energy shined out the clearer, shooting across that endless darkness like stars falling in reverse and becoming one with that aurora, and it seemed to glow ever more intensely as the countless wisps were called home. Nobody eyed the man from the under the veil of their hood, analyzing how his expression changed as he stared at it.

"It's beautiful." He murmured.

"It's home," said Nobody, "and it's calling to you. Be at peace."

"Will anyone remember me?"

A brief silence passed between them, but eventually, Nobody muttered back, "I will."

The man smiled. "That's good enough for me."

The man rose, the essence of his body becoming pure energy as it shot upward towards the aurora as so many had done before. Nobody watched it travel the entire way before it merged with it, inwardly gratified that they had guided another soul to true peace. It had been their job since existence, well, existed. Since time immemorial, by their hand was life brought forth from one world into the next, a job they had not asked for, but a job they weren't keen to give up. Nobody knelt down, running their hand through the black sand beneath them, waiting for the next moment in which a soul would pass, knowing it could be just seconds away. However, an emerald light flashed behind them, and another presence joined them at the shore. Without looking, Nobody knew who it was.

Behind Nobody stood Eminence, the Lady of Green, her hair a shade of emerald so deep it resembled blades of grass, loose foliage intertwined with the tresses. Much like Nobody, she wore robes, but rather than being dark and tattered, they were flowing, elegant, and greenish white,

and they seemed to glow faintly even when surrounded by darkness. Though there was no wind, they billowed around her, flowing like water. Vines wound around the skin on her arms and shoulders, and her eyes shone the color of the verdant forests of her domain.

"It's been some time since you've come to visit me, Eminence," they said.

"Hello," she said, her voice cool and gentle as she approached them.

Nobody continued playing with the sand. "To what do I owe the pleasure?"

"Do I need a reason to check up on an old friend?" She asked.

"You've had one before."

Eminence replied with silence and strode over to Nobody. She sat down next to them, bringing her knees into her chest, staring off into the distance. For a moment, Nobody stopped, and just out of their peripheral, eyed their companion.

"It's not like you to be silent." They spoke. "Something troubles you; what is it?"

Eminence shifted her jaw back and forth, narrowing her eyes in contemplation. "It's funny, you know? You and I, we've been around since the dawn of time, and through the millennia, through the ages, I've never once felt as confused as I do now."

Nobody stopped playing with the sand and turned to face their friend, sitting cross-legged in the grass, and placing their hands in their lap. "Well, life is confusing, I suppose."

"That soul you helped earlier."

"What about him?"

"I'd been watching him, and others like him all over the earth," Eminence said.

“I watched them struggle, suffer, and ultimately pass. I tried as hard as I could to keep them all alive, to give them hope, but —”

“You can’t stop death,” Nobody finished for her.

“You were right when you said that they were fickle.”

Nobody hummed, nodding slowly. “I see. That’s what’s troubling you.”

Eminence shrugged. “You know me so well. It’s not like I’m not used to life ending, it’s only natural, part of a cycle that you and I are meant to uphold. Any soul I lose in my domain is given to yours, and I know you take good care of them.”

Nobody’s gaze dropped to their right palm, flickers of that white light sparking in between their fingers. “All of them.”

“But humans,” continued Eminence, wincing a little, “they don’t just live and die as all things do, they ... *suffer*.”

Nobody shrugged. “Suffering is a human concept. It didn’t have meaning until they evolved to make it so.”

“But they don’t just suffer either. They create their own suffering and that of other living things.” Eminence locked gazes with Nobody. “No other thing lives like that.”

Strangely, Nobody grinned. “Most intriguing. Life herself puzzled by life itself.”

“You have to admit,” countered Eminence, “their existence befuddles you, too. You said it yourself: for all the great things they’ve accomplished, they still wither and wilt. They hurt each other, and everything around them.”

Nobody opened their mouth to say something, but their head shot to the side. The cry of a soul echoed from the distance, remote and far away. Nobody could feel it within their very being, that desperate call, and they rose to their feet. Silently, Eminence did the same thing. Nobody strode to the edge of the shore, and Eminence followed. The moment

their feet dipped beneath the water's surface, reality itself shifted around them. What was once darkness soon faded and became a forest in flames; the sky blackened with ash, and the dirt scorched into a molten gray as loose flames lingered on fallen trees. Nobody's head turned slightly to look at Eminence, whose face was contorted with horror.

Her hands rose to cover her mouth, eyes wide and glazed over. "Genocide!"

She rushed to one of the trees, ashen wood flaking off from the fallen trees and sending embers into the air. Over the fallen wood she saw a doe lying on its side, crying out weakly, its voice barely above a pained whisper. Its side was badly charred, two of its legs broken. Eminence rushed over, dropped to her knees, and cradled the wounded animal's head, bouncing it lightly on her thigh. She looked into its eyes, pools of despair, doing her best to keep it conscious, but to no avail. The moment its body went limp, the white light of its soul leapt from its body and found its way into Nobody's hands. Many others did as well, jumping from all over the infernal forest to reach Nobody, who cupped their hands so that they may have been gently held in their palms. Nobody pivoted and held their hands aloft, letting the light spring from their hands in all manner of shapes. Deer, birds, squirrels, chipmunks, butterflies, they all manifested and galloped away, joining with the aurora above. Emerald tears fell from Eminence's eyes, and from afar, she could see men in gear torching the forest, burning it to smoldering cinders.

"This is what I meant," she wept. "They cause suffering."

"As they are victims of it," replied Nobody as the last of the light materialized into the souls of a man and woman in hiking gear. With a hand movement, he guided them forward, pushing them upward toward the aurora. "Be at peace."

Eminence scoffed, though the sound was mired in her sobs. "You feel nothing. I shouldn't be surprised."

Instead of replying, Nobody looked downward at Eminence, their eyes veiled by the hood of their robes. "Is that what you think?"

Their conversation was cut short when Nobody jerked to the side again, feeling another soul cry out for peace. They walked forward, and yet again, reality shifted. The forest fire became a small domestic home in an impoverished community. A woman, frail and sickly thin lay on the dirty couch in her living room, her leg and arm languidly hanging off the edge. Loose magazines, eviction notices, and old newspapers lay on the coffee table in front of the couch in a mess. The static on her retro television was the only source of light in the room, sending scattering rays of blue light throughout the room.

As Nobody sauntered toward the woman, the process repeated; their hands waved, the light gathered, the soul formed, and Nobody bid them a peaceful transition into the afterlife before they ascended, joining that same aurora in the sky.

Eminence squinted at him. "Does it not confuse you?"

"Does what not confuse me?"

Gesturing to the woman, Eminence said, "This." She then held her arms out, twisting to either side as she gestured to reality around them. "All of this. Humans. This capricious nature that they call existence. Does any of it make sense to you? They cause suffering for other living beings, yet they live lives of suffering themselves. However, that suffering they undergo was created by them, or those of them that are more fortunate than others."

Reality shifted again, and the two beings returned to Nobody's domain, standing alone on the patch of black sand under the starless black sky, the white aurora large and shining above them. Nobody stepped toward Eminence, glaring at her through the darkness of their hood.

Pointed, though tender with their words, Nobody said, "Eminence, what are you really asking me?"

She squinted, tilting her head. "What do you mean?"

"If anyone should understand the lives of human beings, strange as they are, it would be you, yet you don't, and you've come to me looking for

the answer." Nobody responded. "So, I ask you again: what are you *really* asking me?"

Eminence sighed, her head dropping somewhat, shoulders slumping. "Before humans evolved, life itself was quite simple. Life was circular, and even though there was death, there was no suffering, no pain."

Nobody hummed again, nodding.

"Then humans came, and things weren't the same. There was no circle of life and death. They separated themselves from the very thing that gave rise to them, and created things that both harmed them and helped them." Eminence said further. "They destroy one another. I don't know how I'm supposed to feel. On one hand, I welcome their extinction for what they've done to their own planet, but on the other, I feel every ounce of pain, joy, or sorrow they feel in their lifetimes. As they have defined what their lives mean to them, so too have they defined me. What should I do? How do I make sense of it? Of them?"

For a long moment, Nobody was silent. Their gaze drifted off, eyes looking into the aurora above as they held their arms behind their back. "You said earlier that I felt nothing when life is lost. You were wrong about that."

Eminence raised a brow, intrigued.

"Every time a soul passes, no matter where they are, or how many, I am there, you know this," Nobody mused. "In that moment when I gather them in my hands, I feel everything they felt at the time of their passing. Their hopes, their dreams, their regrets, their fears, I feel it all. You'd think, given the billions of them, that what each of them wishes for would be different, but over the thousands of years that I've guided them in the afterlife, I've discovered that, in death, they all want exactly the same thing."

"And what's that?"

Nobody looked directly at her. "To have been happy, and for everyone else to have been happy all the same."

“To be happy?” Eminence repeated. “All of them?”

“All of them.” Nobody repeated. “Their pursuit of happiness is a destructive one. They’ve created a world where they must hurt one another to survive. Some of have even killed their kin in pursuit of a happiness they’ve warped and twisted. They’ve yet to truly define what it all means to them.”

Eminence’s gaze drifted off. “And because of that, I haven’t either.” Nobody nodded. “You feel their need for happiness because it’s become your own, just as their desire for peace in death has become my own. They wish for someone to remember them, so I do. They search endlessly for happiness, so you do. Do you understand, Eminence? We are becoming human ourselves.”

Eminence froze, eyes widened with shock. She placed a hand over her chest, breathing deeply. “Becoming human.”

“Indeed.” Nobody agreed. “Each time a soul passes, they all ask me if anyone will remember them. That their lives meant nothing upon their end is their ultimate fear. They forge themselves through the search for fulfillment, or the threat of unfulfillment. How tragic, then, that they don’t know how to achieve that fulfillment without destroying one another. I’ve seen every war, every conflict, every murder, every accident, and it’s all the same. They are a young species, and they have much to learn.”

“And now, so do we.” There was resolve in her voice, a resolve Nobody was gratified to hear. A small grin pulled at her lips, and she flicked her gaze to her companion. “You care for them, don’t you?”

Despite it all, Nobody smiled back. “Nobody does.”

Eminence laughed lightly at that. She strode over to them and wrapped them tightly in an embrace. Silent as a cool morning, Nobody remained rigid.

“What are you doing?” They eventually asked.

Eminence giggled at them. "I'm hugging you, silly. I've seen humans do this as a way of showing affection, and I wanted to give it a shot. It's nice, isn't it?"

"I ... suppose."

Throughout the ages, never once did they ever touch one another, let alone embrace. Nobody figured, maybe even feared, that she'd wilt in their hands, a delicate flower in the winter's chill. However, when Nobody returned the embrace, she didn't, and they would've been lying if they said they weren't pleased with that knowledge. Much to their surprise, it was nice.

"Thank you. Without you, I would have been lost."

"The meaning of life is found in death, it would seem, and death has no purpose without life." Nobody remarked. "As you find yourself in me, you give me my purpose."

Pulling away, Eminence smiled. "I enjoy these talks of ours, you know?"

"As do I."

She snickered. "I'll be seeing you."

Nobody nodded, smile remaining strong. "I'm sure you will."

In a flash of emerald light, Eminence vanished from Nobody's realm, leaving the robed one to kneel down on the shore, the gentle waves washing over their knees. Once again, they began playing with the sand, waiting for the next soul that would cry out for peace.

queer, as in

Gracie Barton

Queer — definition

1. adjective, meaning strange or odd
2. noun, meaning one identifying outside of heterosexual and cisgender norms.

Queer as in gay, lesbian, bisexual, transgender, etc etc.

As in rainbow.

As in identity.

As in me and the word I knew by 11 but couldn't say until much later.

(It's still hard to say.)

Queer as in shaky hands, as in quiet voices to not be overheard, as in
watching my words so
closely I can see my lips from them.

As in queens throwing bricks, as in ACT-UP and act out, as in
revolution.

As in pink triangles, as in government negligence, as in "If I die of
AIDS—forget burial—just
drop my body on the steps of the FDA", as in no contact.

As in my first Pride Parade, as in letting myself think about it for once, as
in standing in the
street and feeling like I was about to catch on fire.

(I'm trying. Am I still burning?)

Queer as in bars and nightclubs and the back of cop cars and the back of
my mouth keeping
company with my molars and the spot within my bookshelf where I hid
my first pride flag.

As in the Pulse of life within us and the sound of heartbeats and praying
it isn't bullets.

As in holding keys between your fingers, as in mortality rates. As in
holding your breath, lest it
be taken from you.

Queer as in hiding, as in being found, as in not telling my family until I
was 15 because I didn't
want them to stop seeing the me they'd always seen, that little kid with
big eyes and small hands
who cried when she thought she hurt someone's feelings.

(I think it's time.)

As in exposure, as in "Top Ten Celebrities You Didn't Know Were Gay,"
as in outed, as in

holding your trust so tight it cracks.

As in media, as in stereotypes, as in I didn't see somebody with a
sweater-sleeve heart like mine

until I was 14, as in guidelines drawn in chalk and blown away by the
wind but still held in

clenched fingers.

As in anger, as in every day I wake up and I am a political statement
against my will, my body

and my heart and my mind all being used as evidence against each other
in court.

As in all of the bad, but also the good. As in the past but also the future.

As in learning that it's okay to be happy, that I am allowed to like who
I've been and who I will

be. Queer as in, I think I really, really do.

As in ours and yours and mine.

As in my joy, my fear, my rebellion, as in my everything.

Queer – definition

1. adjective, meaning strong

Queer as in me.

I Need Some Time to Reflect

Rachel Malek



The Sanctuary of Marriage

Harper Wood

I grew up watching my grandpa officiate my parents' wedding. Every year, with fingers still sticky from our free Slurpee, I knelt down beside my siblings in the second week of July and watched the grainy VHS tape documenting this event that was the precursor to our collective existence.

My grandpa has a fuller, darker head of hair, a far cry from what bright silver still remains today. He stands at the center of the altar in the Presbyterian church he is a pastor at, the same place my parents grew up attending, week after week. His son's haircut has aged poorly since 1997, and is the subject of repeated teasing year after year. My dad's suit is classically black and white, the perfect image of a groom. My mom is the perfect image of a bride, too, in her white wedding gown and veil, looking at my father with a practiced smile of adoration and joy. I do not know if she was at all afraid on this day. What I do know is that the day my mother got married, she was not yet old enough to drink.

I am older now than my mom was when she married.

I don't think she would have wanted me married by this age, even if I hadn't turned out as the kind of asexual queer who has no interest in the institution of marriage or the romantic expectations that fall alongside the event. I want to hope the future she created for me while she carried me in her womb was at one that prioritized me and my personal fulfillment over who I could become entangled with. I wonder what kind of future she envisions for me now that I am so staunchly disinterested in any kind of normative relationship, and I know that I will never ask her that.

Back when my mom still had those initial hopes for my future, and back when we watched the tape of their wedding day every year, our families were still attending my grandparents' weekly dinners after church. They lived on the same block as us, close enough that when it was warm, my siblings and I could run through the shared backyard to the swings that hung from the great branches of the old oak tree, to where our cousins were waiting for another afternoon of play.

My cousins and I grew up together, we experienced the trials and tribulations of school and puberty and graduation all within a few years of each other. After dinner, our parents forced us outside to play, and we

would push each other on the swing or kick a ball back and forth until it was time to depart. These memories of summer heat, ice cream dishes, and dirt underneath our fingernails hang shimmering in the sky. They are the last glimpses of the stars that hang in the air as day breaks and the future marches forward.

Gone are the days me and my cousins were small enough to hide behind the office armchair to sneakily watch videos when we thought no one would notice our disappearance. Gone are the days of hiding in the bushes and digging holes in the ground to hide the leaves we were so intent on storing. We are no longer sitting on the front steps or underneath the honey locust tree, sharing secrets that will never be repeated.

We've grown too big to hide behind the coniferous bushes in front of the house by now. There aren't any as many Sunday dinners, because my cousins and I aren't the only ones who have gotten older. Dinners every week turn into monthly events, none of which I make it to because I'm hundreds of miles away. I return home for Thanksgiving and Christmas, and I sit around the table and learn the big news:

My cousins are all getting married next year.

With their fiancées squished in at the table beside them, I listen to one engagement story after the other, and I hold my body very still. Tension winds tight inside of me, a kind of despair that claws its way up my chest using my ribs like rungs on a ladder. I don't make a noise of this until I am in my car, alone, where I can scream at the barren fields as I drive past barren fields. I knew better than to ruin everyone else's joy, then.

None of this is their fault, anyways. There is no blame here that I'll waste the energy directing at a single person. I'd rather direct my fury and tears toward the institutions that encouraged my cousins to get married so quickly. I am sure they are happy with their choices, and I want nothing more than for them to be happy. One of my cousins will be the same age my mom was when she married. I wonder what my mom thinks when she sees the ring on my cousin's hand. I wonder if I will have the courage to ask her one day.

I could speak at length about the pressures from the institutions of marriage and religion, and I could remove myself from this issue entirely, but to do so would be to ignore the selfishness of my tears. There's a part of me that's less concerned with their futures, and far more worried about the eyes that will turn to me once they reach the pinnacle of relationship fulfillment. Once they're all married, I lose the protection my cousins unintentionally provided me. This unspoken protection, until now, shielded me from any prying questions about romantic relationships. This self-professed asexual identity comes under scrutiny as I am questioned whether that still holds true, or whether it was only a high school phase that's now fading away. So, have I found a partner yet? Have I thought about marriage? Kids? Wouldn't another wedding make my grandma and grandpa happy? Have I thought about making my family happy?

When my cousins get married, their weddings will be officiated by my grandpa. Same as he did for my older cousin years ago, same as he did for my parents. He will stand in the center, with a smile underneath his silver beard and a twinkle in his eye as he officiates another wedding for this family that he loves so dearly. They will all be so beautiful. And I hope, desperately, that they will also be happy.

I do not know where my cousins' weddings will be, but I imagine them taking place in the same space of memory as my parents' wedding day. That same sanctuary with its wine-colored carpets, dark wooden pews, and the organ pipes that act as decoration to frame the central stained glass window, shining light down onto the blessed union.

I will not marry. Even if I ever do, it will not be in a white wedding gown, it will not be at a Presbyterian sanctuary. It will not be officiated by my grandfather. There is no bridging this growing gap between me and my cousins. I am taking a plunge off this cliff into unknown waters where no one will follow. Please do not place me at that wine-carpeted altar for the funeral.

Someday, A Soon Day

Maya Sivillo

Someday, none of this will matter
Someday, my grief will turn into growth

With seasons I shift from the glorious sunlight
To the bitter winds of snow
These winter elements of which I suffer upon
because
I do not observe the beauty of the frost
And the significance of life's cycles
Because the snow melts
And quenches the Earth's thirst
Then green is renewed:
The land is awakened with life.

But naturally, I know that
After this period of fluorescence,
The grass will yellow
And be overshadowed
By fallen leaves,
Informing every creature
Of the longer nights ahead

So what will I do when winter has come
Back upon me?

I'll need to wear a heavier coat
And make the most out of it.

Because as long as our star
Keeps burning
And our marble
Keeps tilting
Nothing lasts forever.

The summer leaves, but so does the winter.

House of God

A. W.

it stood on
the hill

rusted steeple
metal roof
above the
fields of corn and
sprawl of black
birds swallowing
the grain
spread over
the till

there
on the hill

arched frame
cross of lath
broken boards
crumbling ashen
limbs the skeletal
hands scraping
the sides of a
rotting altar
blades of wrath
thorns in our
scalp the muscle
and the bone spikes
in our wrists split
with razors in
my temple
warped with bruises
busted lips and scars
in my snow
skin the flesh
and the body the
cup and the
blood running
down the road
ahead paved with
cracked asphalt

and railroad ties
roadkill and
barbed wire
tied around our
necks as we
hang from the
rafters pocket
of cobbles the
sermon and the pulpit
screaming christ never
coming the end
growing closer
the rust
ever near

Generational Mirror

Kendyl Householder

It first hit me when I was saving videos of people cooking. It reminded me
Of when I was a child and you sat on the old sofa
While you put sticky tabs on recipes you'd like to try in
Old *Tastefully Simple* cookbooks
And I haven't stopped seeing it since.

I write my daily to-do list just like you and I find
I've adopted the way you curl the tails of your Gs.
I started carrying a purse, and inside it is
A pouch holding spare earrings and a hair tie.
My hair used to be too short to keep one around.
You still said it framed my face nicely.

I pick out fruit at the grocer and suddenly you've
Taken me to the edge of our yard and
Let child-me reach my tubby hands through
The vining thorns to pick fresh blackberries.
It was so early in the morning that I can still feel
The dew and grass clinging to my bare feet.

I make a cup of tea in the morning
And I make it just like you do,
With two sugars and a dollop of milk.
I think of you every time I pour the hot water.

I see you everywhere, it's easy to.
I am your ilk, your blood runs through me.
I have your eyes,
The eyes that were *your* mother's, too.

I find myself busying my hands when I worry,
For if I work the body I work the mind,
Which seems to do well to soothe my sorrows.
And it brings me so much peace to say I miss you, I love you.

I love you.

The Études of Roots

Wrenne Grone

She fought the urge to shout from the rooftop as she lifted her hands up to the sky, a broad smile on her face. Raindrops were light on her cheek as *chords* flew through the air. Dancing on her tiptoes, the girl swept her hair over her shoulder and looked at her fern sitting precariously atop the rooftop's ledge. There was something so beautiful in the act of risk. A light wind tugged her as she hopped forward. The light scent of petrichor greeted Ashira as she pulled herself closer to the fern. Her secret garden of one. Cupping her hands around the fern's clay pot, she lifted it up. Long roots curled around her hand through the holes in the bottom of the container. She would need to repot it soon, she murmured to herself.

Just then, a call from the lower floor let her know that she wasn't supposed to be here. They must have heard her dancing, she ruefully noted. She placed the plant on the ledge as a flighty *ballade* began to pick up in the wind. The doorknob began to rattle. Her heart began to race, and she smiled. She sprinted, leaping off the roof, into a nearby oak tree, its bark still wet with the rain. She slid into the branches like a hug. Her *ballade* began to transition into a lighter *minuet* as Ashira found herself hidden within the leaves of the oak tree. Peering up, she could see a heavy-footed figure move toward her fern. Ashira held her breath. Don't touch it. Don't touch it. A scowl accompanied the man's narrowed face, and a deep *requiem* followed his movements. He looked disgusted at the plant that looked so out-of-place atop the barren roof's ledge. His voice rumbled as he snarled into the sky, voicing his complaints, *dissonant chords* and *crescendos* followed his frustration. A tense anger accompanied him, and he surged at the plant, galled by its lack of belonging; it was just enough to tip his scale of patience, though the plant had done nothing wrong.

Ashira screamed, half-scrambled, half-dove to save her fern. Her *minuet* paused. As she tumbled down the tree, she saw the shattered remains. Delicate hands tried to put the pieces together again, but Ashira winced as the sharp edges cut her, blood seeping around her arms like roots. With a gasp, she realized that fern roots were coming out of her arm, holding together the pot. Her paused *minuet* began to pick up before branching into a lighter, *scherzo* melody. Ashira watched as roots swept around and atop the building to where the man was still standing, shocked. When he saw the roots, he took a step back, not believing what he was seeing. He reached out a hand, tentatively, pressing the fern

leaves in between his fingers before hobbling over to the rooftop door, and shutting it behind him as he walked out, leaving Ashira to continue her garden.

Feb. 14

A. W.

black leaves gather in the gutter
mist puddles by the wet street
drenched in a cold sweat
sending snakes of steam into
hot air where frozen ground
meets the wind

I look at you in the yellow
glow of the 10 PM lights
a set of pale eyes staring out
from behind the wall of black
a subtle expression
a smile
or something else

*who were you
all those years ago*

your eyes blink
and I turn toward the window
content in shadows alone
without intention
withdrawn from your vision by
half-absent memories leading me aimlessly
down abandoned allies
towards abstractions of
sedated loneliness

the streetlight flickers
casting the lot under constant dark
and when I turn back
a silhouette consumes you
and I see nothing

*I want to know you
why can't I know you*

Thanksgiving

Madison Newman

after Roxane Gay

I sit silently with a like-new used copy of *Difficult Women*, marking the page with a three-year-old metro card from an unspecified city forgotten in my wallet. She sits next to me but does not hear me when I speak. She does hear the preheated oven click ready. It is Thanksgiving and we are both far from home; she is familiar with this feeling, I am not. I sit silently turning pages detailing women in unhappy relationships, describing husbands' affairs and drastic stunts committed to prove they are too insane to possibly be left alone. I scan the tension rod nestled at the top of the sliding glass door leading out to the leaf-matted patio, lined heavily with hanging planters. I revel in the thought of the noise it would make if I yanked it down—the heavy clang, the unignorable mess and shatter.

She sits silently next to me until she doesn't. I don't notice when she rises to slip the flimsy aluminum tray of turkey and stuffing into the oven, which I'd retrieved from my aunt's doorstep at dusk like a scrap-fed stray. It is Thanksgiving and I cannot return home; she is familiar with this feeling, I am not. She snags her arm on the oven door and swears. I notice her now. I ask her if she's alright, but she does not hear me when I speak. She does hear a spoon rattle to the floor, splattering shocking red cranberry sauce across the linoleum.

I sit silently and read about a deer hunt, about a woman who claims she is a knife. I think about politely picking away at a pale, dry slab of turkey, despite none of my family being here to critique the small movements of my fork. It is Thanksgiving and we methodically chew while avoiding each other's gaze; I am familiar with this feeling, she is not. We valley the mashed potatoes and guide green beans through the newly-made mountains, smearing gravy in careful spatter patterns. The turkey is, predictably, untouched. I trace the steel point of my clean steak knife with my thumb, waiting for her to stop me before I prick myself; she doesn't, so I put it down. It's not worth the stain on the carpet.

When we both think the other will believe we have eaten enough, we cover our plates with paper napkins like body parts shrouded in the morgue. I am dead to her—have been for a long time now, but neither of us can say it out loud. From the moment I arrived, I have been nothing but an apparition, a slight breeze, a voiceless disturbance in the curtains. I tell her about a dream I had in which my arms were made of

glass. She sits across from me, but she does not hear me when I speak. She does hear the close growl of the HVAC system as the heat switches back on. I pretend not to notice her flinching at the sound of her electric bill rising. I imagine the entire system catching fire, flames tearing at the walls, gnawing at the baseboards, wolfing down our dismal meal. It is Thanksgiving and neither of us are full nor happy; I am familiar with this feeling, she is as well.

After dinner, I sit silently and read another story, this one about a human man and his wife who is made of glass. I remember my dream. In the story, the glass woman can shed her clothes and disappear, clear as a freshly polished window. When she learns her husband is having an affair with a human woman, the glass woman does just that, leaving nothing behind but her dress piled in a neat ring on the kitchen floor. Her husband doesn't try to search for her. I liken myself to the glass woman; I wonder if she would even realize if I left. She sits next to me but doesn't notice when I rise from the sofa and methodically collect my things, a displaced ghost.

I tell her goodbye. She does not hear me when I speak.

Infinite

Gracie Barton

nobody held my bike as I rode
I was a Big Girl now
not a little kid.
Big Girls weren't weak
they didn't need anyone
to help them on their bikes.

I didn't need
any help either.

I strapped on my helmet
princess-pink and tire-rubbered
tied my shoelaces an extra knot
making the bunny go through the loop
one more time
just to be safe.

I climbed onto my bike
started pedaling
as fast as I could
I was grinning as I went

faster
faster
fastest

the orange sun a popsicle drip
on the horizon.

rock-sailing and sidewalk-skipping
bug-smashing
the great pink giant in the sky
my pigtails flew on fairy wings behind me
in the wind

I was infinite

Outbuilding

A. W.



Scarecrow

A. W.

that man
in the field

leaning
pick stitched
fraying open
tears in canvas
flesh spewing
harsh snapped
straw deteriorating
enigmatic cross
reaping malice
a silhouette

come farmer
harvest my
weak bones

rip them
in violence
from my
broken body
like stolen
grain from the
tortured
blood-fed land

yet the crows
on his hat
on his sleeve
relaxed
unfazed

odd

I guess some
days we
don't notice

Monster on the Hill

Jane Cook

I have not been small a day in my life. My parents took one look at their lanky three-year-old and enrolled her in ballet classes so she would know how to carry herself. I'm eternally grateful because, beyond standing up straight, ballet has enormously enriched my life and shaped who I have become. However, ballerinas are not tall—a fact that was never kept hidden from me. What people tend to want in a ballerina is a mere wisp of a person who conversely possesses astounding strength and athleticism. I am no wisp, so there were never boys tall or strong enough to partner me, my costumes routinely had to have their hems torn out, and I single-handedly destroyed the aesthetic of every formation.

An older dancer I looked up to once told us, “It’s hard to have a body.”

I repeat those words to myself often and fantasize of living in total freedom from the pressures and expectations of having a body. While that may sound like Eden for a moment, I quickly remember that my body is my instrument of expression, and that dancing stills my mind and fills my soul. So, with the concrete knowledge that I would never go on to be a ballerina, I was able to experience a different kind of freedom, where I only danced for myself and for the friends I had the joy of creating beauty with.

I do covet sharing the height of 5’10” with some pretty iconic women—Princess Diana and Taylor Swift. In 2022, Taylor Swift received criticism for the lyrics in her hit song *Anti-Hero*, “Sometimes I feel like everybody is a sexy baby, and I’m a monster on the hill.” Immediately, many listeners were taken aback by what they considered strange and poor writing, but to some of us Monsters, it was illuminating. These lyrics are not meant to divide short and tall people, young and old people, or shy and loud people. This is not an alienation or degradation of those who are, in any capacity, small. It is, instead, a candid admission to the overwhelming sensation of feeling you are “too much.”

My height is not all that makes me a Monster on the Hill. Being tall is forgivable because, after all, it’s hard to have a body. It’s more difficult to accept the Monster on the Hill that I am inside, whose feelings are too big, whose opinions are too strong, and whose laugh is too loud. I feel the most shame in moments when someone points out these ways in which I am too much. Time stands painfully still as I transcend that body of mine and inhabit the haunting satellite view in which I can see how

much space I truly consume. I move through water, perceiving myself-buried six feet under with my cheeks still flushed. It's when who I am at my core is too much that I desperately long to be a Sexy Baby. I promise myself to reign it all-that I will be less annoying and abrasive. For a few days, I can manage to speak softly and giggle faintly-but it is not who I am. I'm no wisp and I'm no Sexy Baby, not even on the inside.

At times, I feel a responsibility to keep my existence small to accommodate the excess of vertical space I consume-as if taking up space in more ways than one makes my Hill taller and exaggerates my exile. Is my conceit to never become a ballerina enough? Does it absolve me of my Monstrosity? Tip the scales in my favor? Scrounge up a bit more space for my oversized personality? In truth, there is no cosmic balance sheet. I like to do impressions, talk with my hands, use strange voices, cry hard, sing out, make up words, scream-laugh. I hope that, one day, I internalize that there is infinite space for personhood, and there is no need to shrink my own. Having friends who feel they share this Monstrous disposition is deeply comforting because it means that not *everybody* is a Sexy Baby. To be a Monster on a Hill is also to be in good company. Together, we invoke these lyrics as an anthem in acceptance of what we can't change, and what we don't want to.

Once Remembered This Street

Freddie Borer

I find myself walking down the familiar street that I once grew up on. Only this time, it doesn't look the same as it did years ago. I remember it as a vibrant street with pedestrians crowding the sidewalk, roads with vehicles flying down the street, and buildings advertising various commodities that enclosed the people outside of them. Now, I see none of that. The streets are empty of people but full of memories and unfamiliarity. The streetlights are all either burnt out or broken. Not that there's anyone around that the lights would've guided. The once imposing buildings that I remember are now hosts for various vines and shrubbery that reclaimed their home, tearing the building's flesh from both inside out and outside in.

I look down at my gloved hands in the coldness of the night. I came back because I wanted to. That's it. I thought maybe if I came back, things would be the same as they were; where life was normal, or at least, appeared normal. Now, it's quiet, save for the small gusts of wind, the chirps of insects, and the echoing footsteps against the cracked and fissured street.

Whether intentional or not, I kept recalling memory after memory. I looked over at the bakery. For a brief moment, I saw small children running out of the store with stars in their eyes and sweets in their hands. Then I saw that the storefront read "BA...RY" with its windows shattered and its door torn off. I then looked over at a street-side bench. I saw an older couple; arms around each other's shoulders, watching people and cars pass by with smiles on their faces. Then, I saw that the bench was mangled; torn from its grounding bolts and twisted into an unrefined piece of metal covered in green and brown rust.

I keep walking and looking, shifting between past and present. My eyes feel dry, but I can't stop looking. I must keep looking, for what if I forget? I don't know what happened to my street after I left, and I never will, as it seems everyone else left too. I wondered if anyone else had come back. Come back reminiscing about the bustling community that they once knew, only to see everything but community, just as I did.

I turned around. I hadn't even gotten to my house. I didn't want to. My street wasn't what it used to be, and it never will be again. Now it's something else. Something unfamiliar. An empty husk, but a husk can't be empty if there's someone in it. So I left, craning my head back every so often.

Take Out the Butterfly in My Rib Cage

Wrenne Grone

Empyrean night sky stared at me
Hoping for a sublime dream to lure me into its depths
I descended into the endless bliss
Night had granted me passage

As if it plunged its teeth into me
I fell

deeper

and

deeper

It would never let me go

Drowning into the fabrication of my own
imagination, I sunk deeper into the sheets
Mendacious dreams swept me into nothing
And for a moment it was bliss – I felt nothing else but
the kiss of a lie

But for a second, I briefly reached for the one
thing keeping me connected with reality

Its bleached light lit up my sleep-torn face as I
dragged myself back to my actuality

My fingers tore at the skin of a body I still had left

I let the blood stain the milky sheets

And I knew my delusion of a dream was a mirage

A mendacious phantasm that reached its tendrils
toward my sanguine soul and wrenched it into the cold,
empty apparition of fallacious truth

Carve me out, I choke out, and take the
butterfly in my rib cage out

Why is it still there

Why do I still dream

Of something that will never happen

That can never happen

Deeper and deeper swept into the memories of my fallen
delusions, my thoughts tear at me again

Like soldiers who lost the war

Desperate to regain what was lost but too scared to go
through it again

I tried to cut away the dried blood on my heart

Feeling the butterfly still fluttering in my rib cage
Almost made me wish for a fool's paradise
Just to be on cloud nine again
But I haven't waited this long just to deny my
realization, my pain, my suffering, my self respect—
So I reached up to take the butterfly out of my rib cage
And listened as it fluttered away
The empyreal night sky still stared at me.

Stable

A. W.



Shallow Roads / At Our Doorstep

Ayaan

This place — This graveyard
has pulled people

under

— Our rotted / atrophied / burial ground of a land

— unable to bloom

— no space to move beyond

Northside / Westside / On / Every / Fucking / Side
the soil is soaked with blood

bones are never buried deep enough

We sit with

mothers

& fathers

& siblings

& grandparents

& cousins

& friends

& neighbors

& strangers.

We are all made witnesses

You died

Yesterday.

Someone will die

Today.

They will die

Tomorrow.

I am

still here

We are

still

here.

Our manifested phantoms

Our unmitigated grief.

To

my brother Samatar —

To

Ali/Osman/Lorenzo/Abdi/Wobe/Mohammed/Musse/Suleiman/Said
Dominic/Mando/JJ/Issa/Chris/Tay/Demo/Tyre —

To

all those who have slipped through the hold of this hood
may God honor you all in ways they wouldn't

We will not forget.

This place — Our home
has pulled people

under
& fossilized them at our feet

My prayers

carry me into the last third of the night — every night
tempest tears are held
in search for our wraiths
hoping their souls return
to peace

abiding creed
comforting

my hollowed-out faith
water reflecting sunlight

Their remains lie under our prayer mats
let them be
let us be
leave us —

Leaning on God.

the parking lot

Zoe Florence

under a canopy of the deepest blues
stars wink and shine with each note.
birds sit across the powerlines
dancing to the rhythm.

the moon is watching too,
her light cascading to create a most gentle spotlight.
illuminating our dance, two twirling souls.
the sun is jealous that he cannot see our coarse dance floor.

the asphalt echoes our laughter
and the scrapes of our shoes.
we create a ballet together
in the quiet corners of the parking lot.

the world fades away as music softly sings
from the car stereo.
love teaches us its choreography
and all we can do is pay attention.

headlights scatter by,
rain under their wheels as they pass.
yet in our little world,
it's just us and time hasn't moved a second.

frank sinatra and ella fitzgerald
will forever live in parking spot 72.
and you get to say that that's the spot
that you learned how to hold me.

"same spot next week?"

I Grab a Drink with the Ghost of Julie D'Aubigny

Madison Newman

Julie D'Aubigny (1673-1706) was an internationally famous, openly queer opera singer with the French Opera from 1690-1694. Her hobbies included challenging men to sword duels dressed as a man, burning down nunneries, and romancing noble-people. Her death date is more-so a disappearance date, as her infamous globetrotting lifestyle erased her true death date from history.

and when I slide her the glass, she says,

you look like somebody who loves a good story.

*I never wanted to be remarkable – I just wanted
to be feared. Sometimes
the only way to keep existing
in a body is to do so
fearsomely.*

*I let the rumors truth themselves
until I became a figment, then re-rumor themselves
until I became a man.*

*I insisted my death date rebirth me
into another body when I'd worn the old one
out at the elbows.*

She's wearing a men's bomber and boots two sizes too big, blonde hair down to the small of her back twisting like flames. I ask her about fencing, and singing opera, and whether the burnt remains of the Algiers nunnery were the result of love, or spite, or another holy ghost entirely.

You told me you're a writer, she says.

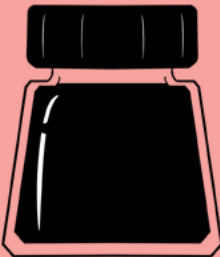
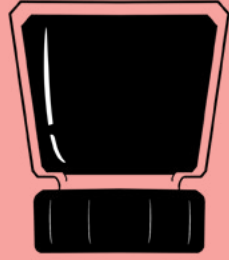
*I tore out my own prewritten pages,
wrote myself just enough woman
to be doubted, just enough man
to be safe. I don't know
how to live in these bones
without the ritual distraction
of a sword and a love
I shouldn't have.*

*But every time, it ends
just how you'd expect it to.
Almost every time, one way or another,
it ends in flames.*

I follow her out onto the patio and watch her smoke a cigarette. She doesn't offer me one, and I don't ask. I focus on the dirty yellow filter, the searing ash still hell-orange and growling. I give it its space. This woman has never not been armed, never not been running.

Let's burn something down together sometime, she says, smoke furling out like a collapsed roof, a vapor promise.

*I might stay this time, at least
until the coals
stop
smoldering.*



Contributor Biographies

Ayaan is a senior majoring in Political Science and English with a minor in Legal Studies and a concentration in Creative Writing. She “accidentally” fell into the English major and is increasingly happy that she decided to move forward with it (even if it is a little stressful).

Gracie Barton is a freshman at Otterbein University in the Creative Writing program. She enjoys music, long walks on the beach, and correcting typos.

Freddie Borer is a sophomore at Otterbein who writes by smashing his fingers into the keyboard until something happens and somehow forms a story. He may or may not be qualified for writing intelligently, but he deludes himself into thinking that he is anyway.

Jane Cook is a BFA Creative Writing student with minors in Dance and Film Studies. She is from Canton, OH.

Zoe Florence is a student and writer at Otterbein University. She is majoring in Psychology along with minors in English and Art History. When she isn't studying, she is most likely thinking of different ways to expand her love for poetry or rekindling her love for music and dance. She hopes that you'll enjoy her poetry as much as she enjoys writing it.

Wrenne Grone is a double major in English Creative Writing and Equine Pre-Veterinary Studies. In her spare time, she enjoys helping out at rabbit rescues when she's not away writing prose or getting lost in the beauty of nature.

Kate Hedrick is a freshman majoring in English with a concentration in Creative Writing. She is a copyeditor for *Quiz & Quill* and a member of the Aegis editorial board and Fables on Tables.

Kendyl Householder is a sophomore English & Sociology double major who's just grateful to be creating again. She's likely enjoying a hot cup of tea and thinking about her cat right now.

Rachel Malek is a second-year student, majoring in Art and Psychology. She is passionate about drawing, painting, and photography. The most important source of inspiration for her is nature. She emphasizes birds native to Ohio in many of her pieces. When creating art, Rachel enjoys experimenting with various mediums and materials. Although she leans toward realism, she's exploring more comical pieces. She loves making others laugh and hopes you enjoy her art.

Dalton Mosley is a third-year Creative Writing BFA and Film Studies major with a minor in Journalism. He enjoys investigating contemporary concepts such as the nature of humanity and the meaning of life and exploring philosophical questions of morality through the lens of fantasy and sci-fi. His favorite stories are those that make readers think critically about themselves, and he loves challenging readers to consider what kind of person they'd be in his settings.

Madison Newman is a senior triple major in English Creative Writing, Sociology, and Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies. When she's not writing or in class, she enjoys reading, making art, cooking, hanging out with her cat, and caring for her copious amount of houseplants.

Charlie Ryan is a trans masculine sophomore at Otterbein University. He is an English and Philosophy double major and a WGSS minor. He has a deep love of words and all that they can do. He loves using his words for healing and for aesthetics. He also loves gender and all its complexities. He dreams of fancy shirts, fruity desserts, and a better world for all.

Amaya Serrano is a junior at Otterbein University, double majoring in Creative Writing and Political Science. She is from central Florida and has been writing since middle school. She has won a Silver Key and earned an Honorable Mention for her poetry in the 2021 Scholastic Art & Writing Awards. She is involved in many campus organizations such as Ohio Student Association, Tau Delta Greek chapter, and Otterbein's chapter of Sigma Tau Delta International English Honor Society.

Maya Sivillo is a first-year student at Otterbein University. She is majoring in English with a Creative Writing concentration, as well as Music with a Vocal concentration. Her hobbies include reading, writing, singing, drawing, cooking, and swimming. While she is reserved, she loves writing poetry because it is a way for her to express her sentimentality and perception(s) of the world.

Adam Willis (A. W.) is a writer & artist.

Harper Wood loves to write but, like most writers, also loves to procrastinate. Instead of writing, they're usually playing video games, listening to Dungeons & Dragons podcasts, or playing with their cat, Chai.

WRITING & ARTWORK BY:

Ayaan

Gracie Barton

Freddie Borer

Jane Cook

Zoe Florence

Wrenne Grone

Kate Hedrick

Kendyl Householder

Rachel Malek

Dalton Mosley

Madison Newman

Charlie Ryan

Amaya Serrano

Maya Sivillo

A. W.

Harper Wood