

OPUS

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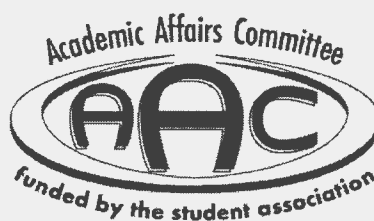
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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

First of all, I would like to thank you for picking up the latest edition of *Opus*. Our magazine is twelve-years-old now, and in true preteen fashion, this issue explores the intermingling of childhood innocence with the dark corners of maturity. The written pieces and artwork will take you trekking across unknown countries, slipping through childhood dreams-turned-nightmares, stumbling into the shadowy nooks of new and old relationships. Of course, none of this would have been possible without our stellar contributors whose skills with words, canvases, and cameras continue to astound us, as well as our fantastic layout team whose determination to wrangle these pieces into a single magazine is the only reason this issue exists today.

This is my fourth (and final) year working on *Opus*, and I could not be more proud of the magazine we have put together. Creating *Opus* is nothing short of an adventure, and I hope you enjoy your journey through these excellent works, too.

Happy Reading!

Megan Nolan
Editor-in-Chief

Thank you to...

Dr. Tom Greenfield, for his endless amounts of enthusiasm & musical expertise.
Michele Feeley, for her constant help, ready kindness & oodles of wisdom.
The English Department, for teaching us to master the intricacies of the English language & for readying us for a world without typos.

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To our layout staff, for their hardwork in putting together this magazine & to our members, for their ever-present help & wildly fun senses of humor.

And last, but by no means least....

To all those who contributed to this issue of *Opus*, we extend our heartfelt gratitude for sharing your innumerable talents with us & our readers.

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A Welcome

Meghan Kearns

Night paints the mountain black,
and otherness no longer glows
from my pores, but squeaks and crunches
below my boots.

My plastic sandaled host
walks way snow falls:
steady, silent.

The ground whimpers, protesting
my American foot.
It did not forget
the heedless toe,
the heavy heel.

There are ears in trees
we watered with blood
that wasn't ours.
The floor whispers to them,
rustling vines.

*They know,
they know.*

We reach a small house
in the forest-bosom,
a child of many mothers
tangled in arms.

My muddied shoes halt
unworthy at the entrance,
caked with crumbled remnants
of things once green.

I bend to unlace
myself, but her knees
press heavy to the earth.

Water sloshes from the pouch
of her hands.

I am no disciple.

Unfamiliar fingers
scrub my soles clean,
removing the scorn of land
from which I tread.

Forgiveness is the creak
of a wooden door
yawning inward:
*Bienvenido,
bienvenido.*



Elyssa Slawinski

Writing a Submission

Mademoiselle Clair

In a sprawling, heartless city, two figures watched the last rays of sunlight disappear from the sky atop a bland, unoriginal skyscraper. One sat on the ledge, his left side facing the open air and the unnerving drop. The other stood rigidly, facing forward, gazing so intently at the horizon you'd think she was watching something. The wind pushed her long hair forward, temporarily obstructing her face; after a minute of silence, the dull blue of the sky began to blacken. Then he spoke.

"It's so damned depressing."

The girl didn't move, but the man turned away from the view and closed his eyes, cracking a melancholy grin.

"It's moments like this that make you think about jumping off," he observed wryly, fishing in his coat pockets for a cigarette. The girl remained motionless.

"Think, perhaps..." She blinked slowly, as if pulling herself back to the present. "...But never do."

The man chuckled.

"That's right; we're too smart for that." Finally locating one, he put the cigarette to his lips and lit it up. He inhaled a bit as he put the lighter away, and exhaled when he spoke again.

"Just to be sure I understand," he said, finally looking at the girl, "Remind me what our reason is."

Her eyes remained fixed, but she smiled faintly.

"Well... living a life in this world, it's like buying a lottery card; one of those cards you scratch off to reveal the numbers, and 'every card is a winner, guaranteed.' Everyone buys them because they're hoping to win the million-dollar prize, right? But the truth is, not every card is a million dollar winner. You might win a couple hundred, a couple thousand, but you're most likely to win the ten-dollar consolation prize. Barely anybody wins the million."

"Then why play?"

She finally turned to look at him, a sigh in her eyes even as she grinned.

"Because ten dollars is better than nothing."

"True enough." He took another drag, then blew out, the smoke briefly rising before being carried away by the breeze. "But it's still depressing... No matter what you do, a story about yourself is just boring."

She turned back to the horizon. "Yeah, it's disappointing. If I stop to think about it, any story about me pales in comparison to what I come up with for fictional characters. I can't honestly put myself in literary form and come out with something good."

"So you gloss over some things, change a few traits," he commented. "But that's not the real problem, is it?"

"It's not the main problem," she conceded. "It's a vicious cycle really. I realize my fictional characters have better stories, but I'm soon distracted by my own; then I feel guilty about the shameless self-insertion, so I focus on theirs again; but I'm so lazy I never get anything done..."

"It's a challenge, to be sure." The man took one last puff, then ground out the cigarette on the ledge. He stood up and stuck his hands in his pockets, giving her a sideways glance. "But you're not going to give up, are you?"

"Nope." She turned away from the horizon, walking slowly to the exit.

"Reality may have beat me into submission about being a character in my own story," she continued, "but it hasn't managed to touch me being an author."

"There's still time for that," he replied, smirking.
"Yeah, yeah," she said, rolling her eyes. "Come on, let's get going."
The man frowned thoughtfully as he followed her to the door.
"That's another thing," he remarked. "Why are you so friendly with me, anyway? Why even keep me around?"
"You may be a bit of a downer," she answered, holding the door for him, "but it's healthy to keep some doubt."
He seemed surprised for a moment, coming to a halt; but he merely shook his head and chuckled once more. He obeyed her impatient gestures and walked through first. She made to leave, then paused and glanced over her shoulder, catching the first star twinkling into view.
"Of course, hope's good too." Smiling to herself, she stepped away and let the door swing shut.



"I Want to Fake My Death on Facebook"
Joey O'Connor

How to Satisfy a Sweet Tooth

Jim Ryan

Your tongue is a ghost-town:
black wicks and glazed windows –
as it should be. For once,

you exhibit me with rope, rock candy
shards tectonic-slow –

shades of Easter grass. Then I'm petrified:
something brittle crackling

to lips. Place your palms on my temples,
and with nails like plectrums peel back
the eyelids. As you craved,

let resin tributary my cheeks.

Crackle

Pam Haas

The kiss of fire pressed on skin
caressed the child filled within
of passion woken up this night.
He breathed out loud and tasted light.

The presence made by such a flame
exuded heat he could not tame.
A longing lit within his heart,
emerged from bed, he now could start.

The air began to vibrate then,
a crackle sounded, made again
within a soul so anxious now;
the boy would make this only vow.

He knew his presence would imply
a danger risked that dare deny
the others bound by older minds;
though young he was, he saw the signs.

So once before the gathered knights,
a child called through blood by rights
established kinship shared with men
who sought out peace in time again.

The fire flashing when he knelt
was one few children ever felt.
All readied, anxious, lived the boy--
he brimmed with light, awaiting joy.

On Not Smiling

Keara Roy Hagerty

The way my mother described me as a child was calm. I was not a bouncing bundle of joy, nor was I a gurgling menace. I was just calm. Photos placed precariously on mantle ledges and bare tables display a chubby-cheeked girl with pensive, unmoving eyes. These photos were arranged side by side with those of my brother- a blonde, curly-haired baby with wide blue eyes and the fat arms of a cherub. Bright and attractive, he had been asked to do baby modeling, I had not. Despite my failed modeling career, I was a happy child, and like all happy children I was naïve and cheerful, emotions which were stagnated under the weight of my dark eyes and downturned mouth. I was viewed as a sort of anomaly- a child who had yet to encounter any of the evil the world had to offer, plastered with the unnatural expression of deep thought and sadness.

There are others with misfortunes much greater than my lack of smiling. In comparison to those with facial deformities or acne so formidable it consumes its victim, I was lucky. My face was not the problem. It was simply my expression, my personality, my demeanor which labeled me as a loner, depressed, or simply, a bitch. Before I knew, I relaxed my facial muscles. I did not plaster a grin on my face simply to make those around me less uncomfortable. The years of my natural expression were memorialized through yearly pictures featuring a grim-faced girl, until in third grade when my first smiling school picture arrived wrapped in thin sheets of plastic to our Brooklyn walk-up. I watched as my mother examined each photo with the consideration given by archaeologists to crumbling dinosaur vertebrae.

My mother set aside the pictures meant for my Grandfather, who collected photos of his grandchildren with such relish one would presume his house was a strange museum in which the awkward years of pubescent youth were immortalized on shelves next to bowls of fake fruit.

What came so easily to most became an obsession and source of insecurity as time went by. Faced with any mirror or discernible image, I analyzed my reflection. Quick glances turned into narcissistic lengths of time spent mugging for myself, becoming a collector of smiles I had stolen from catalogues, teachers, and cashiers. My face was no longer relaxed, but remained hardened into a mask of what I believed was desirable. In fourth grade I took a new approach to smiling, inspired by a book cover I became obsessed with, idolizing the glossy blonde girl with the toothy smile. I brandished this smile with calculated panache, expecting my mother to do nothing less than swoon when I presented her with the finishes product. The sight of my bright pink tongue behind crowded teeth set my mother off on such a fit of laughter, its resonant cackling still hangs over south Brooklyn to this very day. Unperturbed, this variety of smile lasted until sixth grade, as did my obsession with bright red lip gloss and velvet paisley shirts. These were my dark years.

My school pictures sit on display now as they did when I was younger. I look at the frames containing the same girl with two faces and only see one I recognize, the miserable looking one with the downturned mouth and sad eyes. She does not yet know how the 17 muscles it takes to smile will become the strongest and most important ones she owns. She does not know yet that her brain which will love writing, her hands which will love drawing, and her legs which will carry her around the city for 20 years are what she needs. She doesn't know yet, but will soon realize that she owes no explanation for her expression, and no answer to the questions about her sad eyes. My father tells me I have a beautiful smile when I think no one is looking.

Interstellar Convictions

Megan Nolan

You spoke in a language constructed of planets-
&-space-ships: asterisked constellations
footnoting creases of folded sheets into maps
of telescopic freeways. I hated sharing
my room with you, except

for those cicada-summer nights—rusted
sunsets, days lived on repeat. Mom hated
snickering at Sunday mass & debating
tragedies at luncheons. You were limbs
of white gold & tombstone teeth: uniform,

engraved homage to beloved mothers—
she never divined resentment: meteors
chiseled, crucified into place. Your absence
is the brush of crickets on ankles: hoar-frosting
hair into beads, recite prayers with unmannered

vocabulary. You stole simplicity—daffodils
bowed beneath rainclouds, cataloguing thunder
into to-do lists. Denial: a black-hole eating
infinite hours bottled beneath your mattress,
notebooks dented with springs—safety pins
tether

my body to this room. I grid walls
with chalked galaxies & burn nightshade
on the veranda—in atlases, I starred home:
behind quilts Mom shelters globes
you finger-painted sun-yellow.



"Solitary Curiosity"
Ariana DiPreta

Unfurl

Sarah Steil

Fault lines blister in the crack between them, the hole left from the pressure of body heat and the senseless shuffling of sleep. A hand, liquored in slumber, lazily touches her side, bridging the gap, before dropping into its warm chambers. Sheets, disgruntled, contort around greedy bodies, tugging and twisting and turning. Wisps of hair fall over drowsy noses, fluttering in exhalations. His legs, forgetting themselves, touch hers, and almost instantly, she starts, and pulls away. Bodies force against each other like tectonic plates; trenches arise in the collisions.

This is the closest they come to peace. Her silent allowance of his fingers touching her thigh, pieces of her hair, close to his mouth, but never touching. These body parts forget their manners in sleep, forget their rigid positions in dark.

But oh, the things she had once fallen in love with: the matted tangle of his eyelashes, the way he'd scrunch his face and then push his nose into the sheets and inhale deeply, the way that, even if they went to bed with their backs facing, in morning, they were somehow always together again, his breath hot against her neck.

But these things are dangers now. She does not love this man.

They have hidden each other in the tediums of daily breathing, but yet sleep takes no prisoners, and there they are, exposed, and open, and somehow, quiet. In sleep, she cannot push him away.

Somehow, after all of these years, their bodies, unencumbered by silenced minds, still reach out to one another.

And perhaps the greatest tragedy will be when they start to repel one another even when asleep, as somehow, subconsciously, the motions will register: this is not safe anymore.



Elyssa Slawinski

Indivisible

Elise Silverstein

It started in third grade
when Ms. Benaksas
passed out practice exams
and we practiced
filling in bubbles with number two pencils
for the next two months,
perfecting the shade of lead.
It's called multiple-choice but no one asked.
I said I get it already and no one heard.
I should've known then
that school wasn't a place to learn
important things.
They do teach some things,
like how to hold a pencil
the same way as everyone else,
the Pilgrims arriving at Plymouth,
George Washington: the first president,
a war hero,
killing in the name of America
is acceptable, so is bullying
as long as you aren't caught,
igneous rocks, five paragraph essays, slavery
shouldn't have happened but it's over now,
a genocide: the Holocaust,
it will never happen again,
go to college, get a job, money, marriage, family,
don't worry.
I learned that teachers don't know everything
and sometimes don't know anything.
They do teach some things, though,
like how to care
what others think
and do as you are told
or else.
Be quiet, speak up,
write in cursive, work
in groups,
sit still
or we will find you
a diagnosis and feed you
Adderall to make you.
We will tell you what you can wear
and what you must do
and how you might fail, but
we are here for you,
just not afterschool

because we have kids too.
Interesting is not important. Boredom is
irrelevant. Grades, grades, grades,
conformity.
They poked holes in our hearts
and watched the passion leak out.
Keep your eyes open
or they might rust shut
and fester forever in this landfill
of wasted potential:
Public High School.
For 8,100 hours a year, I learned
to combat obesity,
to walk in circles or play bocce ball,
locked in a crowded gym.
I said, I'm not obese,
but no one cared.
I learned how to stare out the window,
roll my eyes, chew on my pen,
wait for the clock
and doodle on the covers
of notebooks,
while others were starving, dying
of Malaria, diarrhea, Cholera,
raped and shot with guns
that should not exist.
They never told us about white men
with assault weapons,
Native Americans
on reservations, terrorism
being fought
through terrorism, tiny children living
on the streets;
hungry, sick, addicted, abused,
begging, stealing, working
to survive.
We did not know that people
live in pain, in fear, in grief, in prison
that our prospective fortunes will
never be enough.
But I did learn how to tie
my shoes and zip
my jacket and pledge
allegiance to the flag
of the United States of America.

Plugged Into the Wall

Joshua Bauscher

In the aftermath we told stories of ourselves as if we were already ancient civilization, took comfort in the broken web of our lives' constant conversation, pictures of dinners and new bathing suits instagrammed to the flashbacks of bombs silencing mobs of starved children killing the world for its attention.

We got so caught up in that net we thought we set to snare the globe in our grip; we never saw it for what it was: us compressing ourselves into a coded screen taught to imitate all the colors of love, we were scientific proof that you can build a wall as small as a cell phone and keep the whole world out.



"Content Emily"
Jaqueline Christensen

Never Trust the Italian

Adam Camiolo

“Never trust the Italians,” says my girlfriend’s father as he slathers mustard all over his rosemary encrusted lamb chop. He knows fully well my last name is Zampetti and that my grandfather’s heart may as well pump Chianti, but that isn’t enough to deter him. My Mother’s family is from Poland, just like his, but clearly that isn’t enough. No matter what I say or do, his grudge against the Italian people (of which a third of myself belongs to) seems to be everlasting. I don’t think the Italians have ever done anything to Poland, unless you count the unfortunate little matter of being on the opposite side of the Big One. I guess sometimes, sticking it to a man’s daughter for several months is enough to write off an entire culture.

He’s a big man in a lateral way, though gravity must have given him a run for his money because my girlfriend has informed me that he was much taller when he was our age. That seems impossible to me but I know better than to contest her on such a trivial matter. Her name is Michelle, after her great-grandmother Mischa. She came from the old country on a boat before her back became twisted and her hair was hidden underneath a babushka, before she exploded into a dumpy gut that the majority of her descendants would inherit. The great-grandmother, not the girlfriend. Michelle is isn’t an ounce over one hundred and ten pounds, making her the equivalent to a unicorn in a family of mules. I sometimes get nervous knowing that sometime in the future she could succumb to her family genetics and inflate like an airbag, but I try not to be superficial. Good people aren’t superficial, good people are supposed to look past the exterior and find the beauty that lies within. Truth be told I only spoke to her because of that flawless exterior, I didn’t even know what her voice sounded like until I asked her if I could buy her a drink.

Michelle’s father has large rounded looking teeth that are separated by little gaps, making them look like little tombstones that mash and gnaw anything unfortunate enough to fall between them. His Mother, Martyna, didn’t believe in orthodontistry Michelle tells me. As if it were something one could simply dismiss like the Tooth fairy. The lamb is torn to shreds in that grave-like maw of his while a trail of juices runs down his chin as if to escape ingestion. For a moment, the other shoe of his upcoming anti-Italian tirade hasn’t dropped yet, and after what feels like a breathless lifetime, her father finishes, “They’re just too damn greasy.”

Her brother shifts uncomfortably in his seat, and understandably so. I can’t remember his name, but I can already tell that he seems more sensitive to his father’s disdain than Michelle does, or at least more aware of it. He gets a little wide-eyed every time his father winds up to deliver something uncouth, which has been six times this dinner by my count. He reminds me of a dog whose owner is a little too liberal with a magazine the way he jumps at every sudden move. But he’s been eyeing me in a way I don’t fully approve of and is making me just as uneasy as his father has been, though from a totally different direction.

I’m new at this. This is the first time I’ve met a girl’s parents, Michelle’s or otherwise. That isn’t to say I haven’t been with a few before, because you’d be misled if that’s how you’ve interpreted this. But it’s always been in the safety of the college bubble. There are no parents in College-World, and this is something I’ll sorely miss when I graduate in a few weeks. There are few obligations there, and I can come and go into peoples’ lives as I please, which makes it easier on them as well as on me when things don’t work out. Out there, in the real world, parents are everywhere. No, they aren’t the towering figures of authority they used to be when I was still in High School, but I still get antsy at the idea of winning someone’s approval.

I smile at Michelle, but I can already tell that it looks more like I'm baring my teeth, like a threatened baboon. She picks up on the signals and grabs my hand in clear sight of her parents and I can already tell she's only making things worse. "They're all crooks here," her father blurts out again, jettisoning tender flecks of lamb onto the table, "and if they're all like the ones in town then I wouldn't be surprised for a second." The mother, who's been quiet all night keeps staring at her plate and for a moment I'm one hundred percent certain that we are thinking the same thing: 'God how did I get here?'

Michelle is a sweet girl, that's for sure, but I don't think sweet is worth this type of irritation. She has long black hair that she usually wears down in waves, but right now it's pulled back tightly into a ponytail that must tug at her forehead something awful. Her makeup is minimal tonight and that isn't doing her any favors either. I don't know much about her personality past pillow talk since our only contact is through texts in the middle of the night when her sorority sisters are too drunk to notice her slip away. We met at a bar a while ago. I was with some friends and so was she. I had a lot to drink that night and I've only gathered little pieces here and there, but that doesn't matter. What does matter is that she doesn't mind that my hair is short now even though it was shoulder length when we met, and that she fucks like it's the end of the Roman Empire. Both are positives in my opinion.

Her lips are pursed into a tight fold and I can tell she's finally realizing the extent of the dumpster fire this dinner has been up to this point. Her brother shifts again to readjust himself into a more comfortable position (I'm guessing) and averts his gaze the same way his mother has not two seats away. Michelle says something to her dad along the lines of how rude it is to insult her friends from school and he replies that he's only stating the truth. I don't say a word because I know how disadvantaged I am at this very moment so I don't want to push it. Instead I pretend I'm back at school, sitting in my dorm room listening to something old and soft playing through my computer speakers. It's a trick that doesn't work too often, but if there ever was a time for it to work, now would be it. The song playing there is called "In Your Own Sweet Way" by Dave Brubeck. It reminds me of my Dad. He would play the vinyl sometimes from his work bench in the garage and I would catch a whiff of it from my bedroom. It would lead me downstairs by the ear like a scent from a cartoon pie; the entire way down it felt like my feet would barely touch the ground. I was beginning to need that music like my mother used to need her cigarettes.

I stayed silent too long and now they're yelling around and about me. The brother has already left the room and the mother is now desperately trying to calm everyone down but her intermittent sobs are having the opposite effect. Michelle is screaming about how this is who she is and that she loves me and that her parents should understand that. I've been here for less than a day and I already know that understanding simply isn't in the cards here. The man was willing to denounce the country that gave us the Renaissance over the issue, I doubt the weight of one daughter is going to tip the scales all that much. Her father is now shouting how she should have told them sooner that she had been describing a woman when she was writing home, or at least warned them that she wanted to be a dyke. I don't appreciate that too much but I'm already way too involved in this. Michelle's Mom weeps reassurances that it's just a phase, more to herself than anyone else. A plate gets thrown, by whom I don't know. At this point all I know is that I'm trying to figure out how dangerous it is to hitchhike to a place an hour away in this day and age.

I'm less-than-kindly instructed to leave and Michelle is too upset to drive. Her father's face is bright red now and I think he's either about to commit a heinous act of domestic violence or suffer from a massive pulmonary embolism. I don't want to be around for either eventuality. I collect my things and I try to make as quick an exit as possible. The door slams behind me and I hear a shout from inside the house. Michelle's voice quivers like her vocal chords are under serious duress. It's cold out for mid-April and my jacket is in Michelle's car, probably for good. I don't really know how to proceed in this situation. Like I said I'm new at this sort of thing. Well, I'm new at the parent thing anyway. I start

walking down the road without my luggage or jacket and I'm not sure if it's really the best idea, but I keep going. The main road wasn't too far off but I don't really think I had a choice. If I had to choose, I think the phase comment hurt more than the dyke comment. I expected that from her father, but her mother? I don't think I'm anyone's 'phase,' but maybe what I think doesn't matter.

My ears perk up as I get the full dose of the Doppler Effect. An ambulance, getting shriller and shriller races towards me with an urgent pace. The wails space out as the car disappears around the bend behind me until it dissipates as quickly as it appeared. I kept walking down the dark road unsure of what I should do as my phone started ringing off the hook, as they used to say. Michelle. I hit ignore though I'm not really sure why.



"Heaven Meets Scotland"
Ariana DiPreta

Small Talk

Meghan Kearns

I know you keep stories
in your pockets like stones,
bulging beneath denim and knocking
click clack
as you walk.

You speak with your fists
stuffed in cotton sacks
sewn into your day,
subconsciously cradling
various thought-pebbles
that spell out who you are,
textures repeating your name
in a personal braille.

Sometimes I think
you'll reveal just one,
allowing me to marvel
at its rusty speckles
or mustard swirls.
I'd welcome its cool weight
against my open palm,
sandwiched between my hand
and the column of universe above it:
your Virginia hitch hike,
your spaniel's puppies,
your uncle's funeral.

My mind conjures questions
to prompt such luck.

(Where was the sun in the sky
the last time you cried?)

But words are tucked
somewhere between
my stomach and tongue,
reluctant oxidize in air
that fills the lungs of others.

Sampler

Kaitlin Senk

But she loved him
from a cautious distance.
And she would have given him
her deformed heart.
But he liked to have his certain
templates.

So she stitched him
a sampler of her love
into the flesh
of a white canvas.
Threading red
on white.

The myopic eye
of the embroidery needle glared
at her cutting and
snipping,
excess white
in an attempt
to perfect the
bleeding
flesh.
As she treads through sinuous love.

She cuts the final, beating
strand.
Hands it to him
still lukewarm with life.
Square, alphabetical love.

Counting Change to Bread Crumb Distance

Megan Nolan

We fold paper airplane creases,
vanish into junk-drawers. Harmony is pop-tarts

at midnight exchanged for dimes, stacked
beneath pillowcases for insomniac jukeboxes—
light crawls in stutters & venetian-blind-bars lock

us into place. You abandon one sock, four nickels: a corruption
of your jigsaw body. I shear songs with quarters
to recreate your copper handshake & magnet

tea leaves to the refrigerator. Prophecy: you steep
on burnt asphalt & debate parking meters—
seven pennies jettison as you drive away. I follow

paperclips bent into stop signs & catalogue
churned gravel into blueprints.



"Splintering,"
Joey O'Connor

"You're too old for a night light, Finn."

Finnegan Riley watched as his Superman night-light flickered off. His mother had one hand planted on her hip, while the other examined the old night-light. It was only yesterday that she dumped it in the trash. She frowned and wrapped her fingers around it tightly. "What would your friends at school say?"

"I dunno," he said with a half-hearted shrug. He didn't think about it much. Ahmed Paracha was the only kid in class that tolerated him, and that was only when his mom packed Fruit Roll-Up with his lunch. The night light itself wasn't that significant either. It just needed to be there on the right side of his bed, glowing every night. He couldn't explain it himself, let alone to his mom.

"They'd make fun of you, that's for sure."

Finn really didn't know why it was such a big deal. It was a *light*. Had it been a baby blanket or something, he probably would have understood. His mom sighed, shook her head and planted a kiss on his forehead. She took Superman with her.

Then, she turned off the lights.

It was strange at first. He couldn't see his dresser or his desk. The closet in the corner looked weird, like a gaping black hole bursting through the wall. The shades moved at the slightest touch of the wind.

Finn flipped over onto his side and stared at the bare walls. Maybe he'd ask Ahmed to his birthday party next week. If he had the courage, he would try asking Haley Fischer, but she was too pretty to see his comic book collection mounted on his wall.

Finn tossed over to his other side. His door was slightly ajar and for some reason, it scared him. It felt like an army of spiders decided to crawl down his back.

He rolled onto his back.

Finn needed the dumb light and that fact was stupid. His mom was right, he was too old to be depending on a night-light. He liked it though, the subtle confirmation that everything in his room was in its place.

He clenched his eyes and everything went fuzzy and black. There was this overbearing sense of dread sitting on his chest. Just when he thought he was slipping into sub-consciousness, his floors creaked. Finn didn't think about it too much because his house was old and Daisy--his dog--walked around at night.

But the creak came from under his bed.

Finn pulled the covers up to his nose and envisioned sheep jumping over a white picket fence. It was probably just Daisy snuggling under his bed for the night, but he never heard Daisy come up the steps.

Creak, creak.

The floorboards bent under an invisible weight. Finn stuck his head under the pillow, his own frantic breathing warming his face.

Creak.

It stopped after that and Finn poked his head out. It was probably just something outside. He settled back into bed and told himself to relax.

That was when the pair of claws broke through the floorboards.

the greenness of her eyes

Hannah Canale

there's a fly buzzing loudly in the rim of my desk lamp.
bzzzzz. bzzz.

my roommate is breathing slowly,
in, out. in, out.
the redness of my water bottle shines in the light, as if it's on fire.

*Red, like her favorite dress.
She loved how it made her green eyes flare.*

the blank document is staring at me from my computer screen,
silently screaming for attention with every blink the cursor makes.
i give it no attention.
the webcam on my computer is only used as a distraction.
selfie. selfie. selfie.
the dust that has collected on my dark magenta pencil case is thick,
haunting.
I must clean that off, now, because

"there's no better time to clean," She always said.

while I'm cleaning this, i should sweep up the hair
collecting under my desk.
ah, sit back down.

the fly is now buzzing against the window.

wow. the redness of the trees outside.
fall-red. the red that only comes around this time of year,
that can only be described in trees and leaves.

*She loved this fall-red.
She loved how it made the green grass look greener.*

the red tree looks so small from way up here, from the fourth floor.
the sunlight shines on the green grass like a spotlight.

*Green. my favorite color.
Green, a harbor for beauty.*

a construction worker outside backs a truck up.
beep. beep. beep.

*Beauty found in the scent of the grass,
blowing in the wind.*

my fingers can't seem to type what I'm meant to type.

*Beauty found in the smoothness of the blades,
soft on bare feet.*

a paper. an essay. about what?

*Beauty found in her.
In her eyes.*

my eyes can't seem to focus on this blank-document screen.
they can't seem to focus on anything.

*They drift to the photo on my desk in a gold,
frayed frame.
My mother and I smiling,
big smiles,
with teeth and everything.
She was young. I was younger.
My two front teeth are different sizes
because I lost one before the other.
Our cheeks graze.
Her pale, pale skin, like porcelain.*

That stupid fly against the window.

*Her hair is dyed blonde, but
she was more beautiful with brown hair.
We always told her that, but she didn't believe us.
It made her eyes pop like a green firecracker.*

The fly stopped. Silence.

*The greenness of her eyes is something
we all took for granted.
That green, you can't find anywhere else.
Beautiful,*

*deep,
heart-wrenching green.*

Like the red that only comes in fall, this green only comes with her.
Her green eyes look at me through the glass of the frame,
they tell me to write this essay.

But the distractions.

Distractions.

If only I could tell her that now.



"Seeyum"
Jacqueline Christensen



"Glitz"
Joey O'Connor

Gay Bar Instructional

Joey O'Connor

Among other things, tuck this in you wallet. Check before passing
through the revolving entrance as a spirit:—wait to burn,

then neon plunged by some hypodermic needle: an invisibility vaccine
leaves you cursing incandescent. Like a trick candle, smell cakes

in urinals, swallowing streams of sterile piss: the cleanest thing going down
in those rest rooms. Watch out for humans willing you to bareback their trojan

horse. Communicate with only other vascular animals
flaming on the dance floor: bears, foxes, otters, etc.

To see that impossible boy from high school, maybe
that jock in his wrestling singlet? To see anyone but someone's father

reading asses like braille-bumps. Hold on to your stomach: wonder-
bread soaked in vodka. To fill the emptiness: sea-cucumber yourself

like tube socks mingling in your nightstand. Scan the anonymous panic for the first pair
of sober eyes:—headlights willing to ferry you away from this place...to their place.



"Tunnel"
Megan Nolan

The Child's Friend

William Hess

My first true "friend" was Carlos Regatta. A kid who went bald too young. I began our friendship on a lie. He asked me on the playground in kindergarten if I liked War movies. I told him I did. He used to make me play army. He was always the leader. I, the poor soul who always had to do the fighting, always had to do the dying. The truth of the matter was my parents wouldn't let me watch movies that glorified war. They were pacifists: why kill for God and Country when God and Country won't kill for you. I loved having to be rescued after shamefully botching each mission while he had toy guns and I had a stick.

Perhaps it was my position as military bitch to Carlos, but for the rest of my life I excused myself to the bottom rung of the relationship. Better to look up in splendor, than down in pity.

While the friendship was certainly one-sided, I truly believed myself to be Private Robert Red, and the army needed me. Such charisma causes genocide. How easily I became a disposable instrument of death, ready to kill and die in the backyards and fields of our town.

This went on uninterrupted for years until one Private Armstid joined our ranks in the third grade. A red-head, scrawny to the point of almost handicapped, new to our school that year. It was natural that Carlos would dominate him. A weakling.

Our mission was simple. Start in the woods. Traverse the snow-ridden ground a few houses down to Carlos's backyard. There lay a "bad-guy" bunker we had to decimate, and enemy intelligence that desperately needed extracting. Carlos gave us instructions, told us to bring him back the intel, or die trying. We hastily agreed and took off with branches in hand. Quickly, Dan Armstid fell behind, his short legs struggled in the deep snow.

"Hurry up," I said.

"I'm too tired," he replied, breathing asthmatically.

"Christ. Washington was never tired, neither was Patton. We have to get that intel." I was serious at this point. The third grade Robert couldn't handle disappointing Carlos. I marched Dan to the brink of madness, huffing and puffing as we trudged through a foot of snow. Pure torture.

We set up a right angle attack. When I was on the position at the flank, Dan would open fire, I would make my way, tree by barren tree, and swoop in to clear the Igloo we made with plastic boxes packed with snow. Inside would be the vital intelligence and approval I so desperately craved. As I made it to the igloo I heard a crack and an extreme sting suddenly bit my leg, mid-thigh. I dropped to the ground and searched for a breath to cry out with. I had never experienced something so painful. Carlos came running, new BB gun in hand.

"Oh get up, stop being such a baby. It can't hurt that bad." His words did nothing to assuage my rapid thoughts.

"No. I've had enough. I hate your stupid war. I'm leaving." That was it. The soldier had disobeyed his orders. After threatening to have my older brother go after him, I got up and limped home. As I took off my pants I noticed for the first time, the massive welt. Already dark and purple and ugly.

After that, he changed to me. He began to treat me as an equal. If it took a Red Rider to the thigh to get his approval, so be it. Together, we dominated Private Dan. Now he was the poor soul who fought blindly for a cause he could never understand. A joint-operation that wanted my world peace through his bloodshed. We made him run around and die piece by piece while we hid in the trees and pretended to smoke cigars. This was my first time feeling truly sorry for myself, maybe even a little depressed and I wasn't even out of elementary school. I learned it was better to quickly die in the mud than waste away cowering in the background.

I remember the pain of middle school. All of it, from losing Carlos. Not to an unfortunate accident or the splitting of a home, but to other people. After learning how to control us, he had grown tired of Dan and me. He wanted to sink his teeth into the flesh of everyone. He wanted power.

I fear I have given a wrong impression of Carlos. He was not a bad kid. His father, the epitome of blue-collar. Mechanic. Functioning drunkard. Borderline abusive. I watched as he was put down by his father, and in turn, put down others. Yet, behind his blue eyes lay the elusive sparkle that gave him his power. He could viscosly point out your flaws, and like a child who hasn't learned that stoves can be hot, you'd keep coming back for more. He was cursed with the drive for power. As he distanced himself from Dan and I, the two of us became closer. Years of squabbling for his scraps made tense brothers of us. Yet, without Carlos' demands, we were free to grow.

It was the eighth grade. Dan's father had snapped over a rough patch at work, beaten his mother savagely with a tire iron, and blown town. This stranded the poor boy alone with three sisters and a broken mother. I became an outlet for his frustrations.

We would lay lazily under a huge oak tree. Our Tree of Knowledge. Talking for hours, of life and love and God. How ignorant we were to the cruel, brutish nature of things. In spite of this, we knew. Under the calm surface of reality, primordial rage boiled over within us.

"I guess I just don't get why he would walk out on us. Every day I pray to God to bring him back, and he just doesn't do it." His face matched his hair as tears rolled down his cheeks. "I just want to see him again."

"You know, I used to pray to God every day, too. That I could be happy and free to do what I wanted," I replied. I knew this was the beginning. We began to question those bold claims that were regurgitated upon us every Sunday: with True Faith, all things are possible. We found that the possible was for the privileged. We, two kids from a typical struggling neighborhood, knew that from the start, we would be in for difficulties.

Dan eventually began hanging around the wrong kids: chain-smoking before high school, getting involved with petty robberies, and disregarding my existence. I did nothing to stop this behavior because I knew what it stemmed from. How easy it was to excuse it as his old man walking out. It was Carlos and I that made him start hanging out with deadbeats because that's exactly what we made him envision himself as. He joined the army right out of high school and was gunned down shortly after being deployed. I went to his funeral but to me it was as if he had been dead since he forgot about me. His mother cried into my shirt when I gave her my condolences. She knew we hadn't spoken in years. It had been over for a while. My Tree of Knowledge had been struck by lightning; shattered and cracked and charred. This, before he was killed by a cause he could never understand.

Perpetual

Pam Haas

Before the fuse even goes off
I'll flare into the sky at the pull of your hand.
In your name
I would topple metal block pyramids,
plant Edens,
freeze over leagues of oceans, or
dissolve monoliths with a well-placed glare.
My reaction to your every action—
and we'd dance like shadows
around the other's heart
thunder clapping lightning in the night.
But you would already know every time.

You, my dear, my partner in crime,
always set for the next flight
by plane through the ocean or ship across the stars,
we'll ignite paper impediments
under the reflected light of a satellite.
Your half-lidded windows
that could just as easily be shut and still see:
the conspiratorial smile,
the one that says: we have a secret

And before long
sunlight's last call will materialize
a vibrating set of footprints
the glowing color of your own light.
From me came painted lands
and words written,
fashioned eternally—
and every image in the night
was a message to you
while we both caught our breaths
and were made to wait for one another.

White Flowers

Maya Bergamasco

the young flower is wilting in the pot
it is morning and the mist spreads over
the fields like a bride's wedding veil
and the other flowers blooming
white are sheltered under
a green grass altar

i am riding my bike
and my face catches the homes of the spiders
sticky with dew
silky on my mouth
as i swat one-handed
the handlebar weaving
a black glinting trail
on the road studded with fallen leaves

my mother told me not to pick the flowers
they are white-webbed and their spreading
fingers
like tendrils are crushing the
tender red roses reaching helplessly
towards the sun
i pull them anyway
viciously with my fingernails
embedded with gritty dirt
i eat my dinner
and she tells me to wash my hands
of my noontime disobedience

it is raining
and i am baptized riding home from work
where the complaints of the customers
are shed away like old skin
i can see it now
like an exoskeleton it is floating away
like an opaque corpse sliding
on the side of the road
floating like a cream-colored waxy
effigy the rain hits it like bullets
and it dissolves with its heavy
milk limbs and i
pedal with my light
legs

The Land of Masks

Max Garnaat

I met a man from the land of masks,
who's wooden visage held the task
to hide his heart and soul away
from the lamp-light eyes of the Beast in the Bay.

The masks they wore, the stranger said,
did more than shield his face and head,
but hid their thoughts and minds from he
who watches them from 'neath the sea.

Under the bay, below the waves,
the blackest depths, the sunken grave,
the Beast has slumbered in the brine,
before the earth, before all time.

In coldest, rotting, crushing deep,
the Beast who dreams will stir from sleep.
Yellow, ancient, clouded sight,
peering dimly in the night.
'Round the sulfurous, spewing vents,
tendrils slither from the rent.
'Neath the conscious mud and slate,
a breach does form, and then the hate
and fate shall curse and blight the shore
around the bay, to heart and core.

Fingers reaching, yearning, sought
to seize men's feelings, wants, and thoughts.
Turning, burning, branding, bending,
distrust and rage, the Beast is sending.
The terror lives, and breeds to end
the love for neighbors, brothers, friends.

The masks they wore, he said with grace,
protect them with a falser face;
to hold the angry hate away,
and hide themselves from the Beast in the Bay.

"To hide yourself is the coward's way,
confront this beast!" I proudly say.
"Defeat this Beast Beneath the Bay,
you could be free from masks today!"

His glistening eyes stared for a spell,
"But you," he said, "wear masks as well.
Confront the Beast? What could we do?
When you can't kill the Beast in you?"



"Concert Stand"
Sarah Simon

Self-Portrait as a Faggot

Joey O'Connor

Save your stake—

I have been fashioned a bed
of fire.

Pitched onto the backs of my ancestors: the kindling
of kindred spirits. All of us uprooted, toiled down to size

to fuel the oppressive heat. Bundled together, left gasping
for air, for words. My heels begin to brighten,

flames lick at my thighs. Light me
so I might praise the smoke of those who torched before

me: charred fingers cradle a flicker nearly snuffed by cruel blows
from humanity. We carry on until ourselves extinguish.

It is not coming out of darkness; it is nursing lightness.
My earlobes sting. We write our history on the sides of matchbooks:
No more.

Resentment is a Two-Way Mirror

Megan Nolan

He corrugates his father's vinyl, dustpans splinters into help-wanted ads
demanding someone who is not a disappointment: voicemail left two days

& three hours after his unattended college graduation—Sorry, I forgot
to pick up milk, can you grab some on your way home? He missed the exit

for the cemetery & decomposed his father's favorite songs into car keys
tapped against the radiator. Unemployment is the sting in chrome wristwatches

clipping ear cartilage after I hate yous exchanged at dinner tables—asking his father
for his high school bedroom like cracking molars on ice cubes. His mother didn't cry

at the funeral—plucked beads from her rosary with her back turned: exhaust fumed
between slammed doors, she deserved a full night's sleep. He classified

finger-traced turkeys, glue peeled off beaded frames, model airplanes—
unfinished & plastic-bagged for the landfill.

Words splinter like spheres of glass in her mouth, gouging gums. His hands, bored, move rhythmically against a pulsating body, a distance that reminds her: you are a routine. Taking because he can, not because he wants, because he was bored and found an opportunity to feast on her insides. He moves without frill or finesse, belittling these motions to a business transaction: take quickly, leave quickly. The weight of another body baffles her own: force, movement. And perhaps she should mourn such a sacrifice, wallow, bleed and retreat inward. But the words are lost in her lungs and the anger consumes.

Anger. The word fits inside her hand like a hot coal, small, burning. It lodges itself in her throat, a knotted rope getting tighter and tighter. He pushes into her and her body yields though her mind is screaming. Her pores bubble with acid and her bones melt in their own fire and her blood is threatening to drain from her skin, black, thick as sludge on sheets.

Insides scream but muscles yawn, stretch, sleep inside her skin, betraying her with lethargy as her mind flies, a frantic bug. How can she feel so venomous and yet be so weak, so defenseless?

Cracked open on a motel bed, she wonders how many before her had bled out on these sheets. She had led him stumbling through the door just a few minutes ago but now it seems years have gone by since that small moment where she could still have walked out.

His liquored breath gathers between the pillow and her neck, and she tries to remember his name. Something polite sounding, a Matthew or Michael.

Her hands find sanctity extended away from her body like wings, a practice that renders her the patient victim, allowing them to take and leave her be. She does not touch. It is thievery, what she allows, she is stealing from herself though he is the one holding a hand to her throat. Face to one side, eyes twisted and contorted, a blackness of rouge, dark spoiled by the light above them. This realization causes her kneecaps to loosen and her shoulders to pop from their sockets: she will not say no.

She sacrifices herself again and again and somehow always feels cheated and stolen when it's all done. She says yes again and again and somehow always feels a "no" balled in the lining of her throat, waiting to spring from her lips when they ask her for another hour.

She has fed off of a life of inequalities and abuses, of meaning nothing and not objecting. She has let these men take her, contort her, steal from her. And here she is now, admiring the lives that were able to take instead of being the ones taken.

Michael-Matthew will not look at her. Lying in a motel bed that has seen many others come and go, she wonders how many women he has seen before her. She wonders why he does not bother to remove the ring from his left hand.

She remembers the first time she had been with someone, and the last time that was really hers at all: fifteen, rushed on a living room couch, fear and anticipation heating the room. Her boyfriend's awkward and uncomfortable apologies had brushed softly against her skin.

And she remembers all the rest, blurry, all melting into one colorless image: a face, expectant, unforgiving, pushing, pulling, mumbling terrible things into perpetually unprepared ears, the smell of skin older than her own, eyes staring at her awkward body like it was a thing, and not a being.

Only when these men stare at her does she feel so small. She thinks they'll discover behind red lipstick and black mascara a scared child playing in grown-up's clothing. At 19, she tells herself she is an adult and smart enough to make her own decisions. But every time she does, she wishes there were someone there to stop her.

She buries the small good truths within her to remind her she is still there: she is smart. She can recite the first 50 prime numbers with ease and memorized the first 45 digits of pi in 4th grade. She

could be a mother, if she wanted, one day. Her first kiss was at 13 with a boy whose lips felt like snow and who had shook when she touched his hand.

She has done this to herself. The stained and whiskeyed girls in alleys and on corners had told her it would hurt the first time, just the first time, but to hold your breath and follow the ceiling tiles until it was over. But months had gone by and it only hurt more each time. Each time she told herself it was the last time, that she only needed a little more money and she would be okay.

But inside the fantasies swim: there's a crunch and a pop and his nose shatters into a hundred pieces and his fist searches for her flesh but not before the first thrush of pain ricochets inside his skull and as blood pools down his face.

And another: she takes a knife from the side of the bed and buries it next to his spine, maybe even severing a vertebra or two.

Her hand tightens into a fist and clenches the sheets, and she wills herself to hit him just once, to push him away. Raising her hand she stills and her throat is burning, and her knuckles graze his side and she pulls back to swing. Hand extended from her side, her eyes well and her fist uncurls and she lets the feelings of cowardice consume her.

His body slackens and he grunts heavily against the side of her cheek, and his warm breath, smelling of cheap vodka and smoke, barrels past her teeth and up through her nose.

The sweat on his reddened face presses against her and she tries to move, to escape what feels like bloated slugs on her skin. But his body is all encompassing, and she finds herself swallowed under his fat and waits until he removes himself from her.

His departure from the bed allows sweet oxygen to coax its way into her swollen throat, and she devours it hungrily. She thinks: It's over. The worst of it is over.

But then he looks down at her like something conquered, and she feels lost and taken and no longer her own. And suddenly the anger melts into sorrow, and it barrels into her chest and she is crippled and devastated and cannot breathe.

Crumbling into bed sheets, she claws at her throat and so greatly wants to take it all back, to take what he has stolen from her.

But she watches as his thickened, sticky body dresses itself. She watches as he stares down at her disintegrating body. She watches as he examines her as a thing and smiles smugly. She watches as he removes his wallet and determines her worth in dollars and cents.

She watches as he says, "Money's on the table, sweetheart." She watches as he leaves and only then does she explode into thousands of pieces.



"Edinburgh"
Ariana DiPreta

Street Worms

Meghan Kearns

Perhaps their groveling bodies,
writhing noodles of muscle and nerve,
grow weary of holding the earth together,
carrying our weight on their backs.

Each dry afternoon spent grinding
yesterdays to dust:
calico tufts, a cotton sock,
the grape-stained note
she left on the counter
in a hurry.

Cool and stoic, they fling
treasures off the boat of time
before we sink
in stillness,
clutching heavy artifacts
from previous eras of ourselves.

Maybe they gather to steam
in collective martyrdom
on puddled sidewalks:

"We
are what make each sunrise new,"
they shout with their last
tiny breaths,
strewn with calculation
over concrete graveyards

while commuters slow to tiptoe
through this brave and final act,
before rushing
arms outstretched,
to catch tomorrow.

"Reflecting"
Sarah Pray



Jules

Zach Muhlbauer

Snow scattered from the skies, gravity a friendly ally to each feathery flake. The wind whispered a polite tune, swirling a brown plastic bag two stories high and back down against the frosty cement. The bag was buoyant and daring in the ivory chaos of today. Jealous of its ways, Cal clunked his knees together in frigidity, his ears growing pinkish-red as snowflakes materialized atop his frizzled black hair like leftover shampoo from a thoughtless shower.

It was just past seven in the afternoon and only a few stragglers still wandered behind the parking lot of the village library. Cal was one of them. He, however, did not wander; rather, he stood, ponderous, observing idiosyncrasies of Nature, its manipulation of the plastic bag, lullabies in the wind without repetition, without beat, without rhythm. Long shadows were cast across the lot like beacons of darkness. The sun was setting at an unusually swift measure. Two men smoked cigarettes under the cover of the library's overhanging eaves.

Earlier he had finished his shift at the local Italian cuisine restaurant, making pizza yet never tossing the dough in the air like the movies always portrayed people in his position. He was not that playful, nor nearly that wild in spirit. Instead, he would stand, unmoving, despite a tedious pressing motion of his palms against the dough, like a programmed mechanism primed for mediocre pizza production on a regular basis for seven twenty-five an hour. At lunchtime he would eat a bagel with cream cheese at the local bread-shop across the street, drink a can of Grape Fanta, and watch cars appear and disappear in the window on his right. He always sat in the corner; he always left the shop five minutes before his next shift; he always took a deep breath of relief when the pedestrian walkway was unoccupied. Sometimes, looking into the yogurt shop adjacent the walkway, he would tentatively smile to a blonde-haired girl with a streak of pink in her bangs—only sometimes, though.

Cal received his license several weeks ago, defeating the driver's test by a miniscule amount; that day was a good day. He, from that point on, had formed a midyear resolution to save up the money for a used Chevrolet Sudan his neighbor had been hoping to throw his way for some time now. It was why he was flipping—or more correctly pressing—pizzas for the past few weeks, forming impartial routines to occupy his uneventful weekday journeys.

"Want my Chevy, do you, Cal? I know the parents won't buy it; they're too smart for that, so it's up to you. Up to you buddy. You listening? Cal?" his neighbor would repeat at dinner parties in limbo between flame-broiled steak and seven-layered cake, leaning over the table to talk softly enough so as not to alert the whole group

"I wouldn't know where to start."

"Well, fill out a job application, you dud: name, number, address, hopes, dreams—"

Cal always chuckled here; he himself never knew exactly why. "Sure, why not."

"Well isn't that just wonderful! Call me a motivator. Who woulda' guessed?"

"Not me."

The walk back from work was Cal's favorite part. It required him to saunter alongside the Erie Canal, one of the more enjoyable historical landscapes in the area. Today was especially nice in light of the blizzard: it spiced up the habitual concerns people in his position hold deep in their gut. Much of the gusting snow swirled over the canal into his face and over across to the age-old village houses on his left. The canal was completely iced over, alabaster and beautiful in his periphery vision.

A barking came from the trees, skeletal and foreboding, across the lethargic canal. It echoed for a bit. After dying out, the grave silence storms always practice without fail felt all the more immense. Cal had stopped his overtly deliberate stride to listen. He shuffled to the right a bit, squinted his eyelids, put

his hands to his eye bones to mimic binoculars, and noticed a small, scampering squirrel run from the trees and athletically jump onto the ice. If Cal hadn't focused his attention upon the wild daredevil of a squirrel he would almost certainly have seen the large, driveling St. Bernard chasing after it, unwavering in its conviction, yet ill-advised in its oblivious pursuit onto the ice. Once Cal's attention diverted to the near two hundred pound beast sliding on the ice he stepped towards the canal, his feet sunk into snow-fall atop a foundation of rocks that lead into the ice. Snowflakes the size of quarters pounded against his face as his eyes, sapphire blue and glistening, grew large in a witch's brew of perplexity, amazement and skepticism. The St. Bernard fell several times, trailing farther and farther behind the squirrel as the chase continued. The wind chanted like some vagrant instigator. Trees shook their heads like subtle onlookers. Cal was beginning to question his eyes, his sensibilities.

"What the hell?" he repeated under his breath as if auditioning for a background character in a bad action movie, emphasizing a new letter each time. "What the hell?"

Hapless and determined as a California gold-miner, the dog, white with shapeless brown splotches on its fur, stood up straight, radiating dignity despite its failure. The Bernard barked with immensity, loud and guttural, reaming upon Cal's ears and echoing across the ice-covered canal. It then died off into the windy beyond. The squirrel was gone, scaling a bony, gangly tree, bent downward in accord with the oncoming flurry. The barking continued. Cal wiped off the rocks below and sat down solemnly, watching, crossing his arms and legs and leaning back. "Dog!" he bellowed into the blizzard. The Bernard turned its head, standing with equal measure on all fours. "Yeah, you." He stood up to gain further attention. Mounds of snow built upon his hair large enough for insects to sled down.

The dog howled in his direction louder than ever, intimidating as an overarching skyscraper, striking Cal like a rubber stamp to the face. Cracks of ice could be heard against several cyclones of snow. All that fell from the sky rested upon the ground shortly before, once again, until lifted up and condemned back into duty. It seemed to Cal that Mother Nature does, indeed, enforce her own military drafts on occasion. Blizzards and storms of the like, they are all just vicious wars on shapeless enemies, the world in conflict with itself. Men and women and children frowning at the mirror image of themselves, hurricanes in the open sea disturbing the cause that gives forth its core effect.

A chill climbed up Cal's spine like the squirrel and its tree. Perhaps it was the crack—the sound of something giving forth—that caused such a feeling, but the boy was less than aware. The St. Bernard boomed out another formidable bark into the white abyss ahead. To his return, freezing waters swallowed the dog's back left paw as the plateau of ice gave through. An ominous void cracked up along the dog's left-hand side, engulfing the correspondent front paw as the large, graceless animal fell, desperately shuffling into the Erie Canal, grunting, gnawing, grabbing at any stability the now broken plateau would offer.

Cal stood up from the rocks, slipping a bit but catching his stance. He rushed foreword, wavering down the rocks like a climber escaping an avalanche until stepping onto the ice and slowing down. Cracks and vibrations could be felt radiating from the middle of the canal where the dog continued to struggle, yelping in an unusually high-pitched tone considering the barks of before.

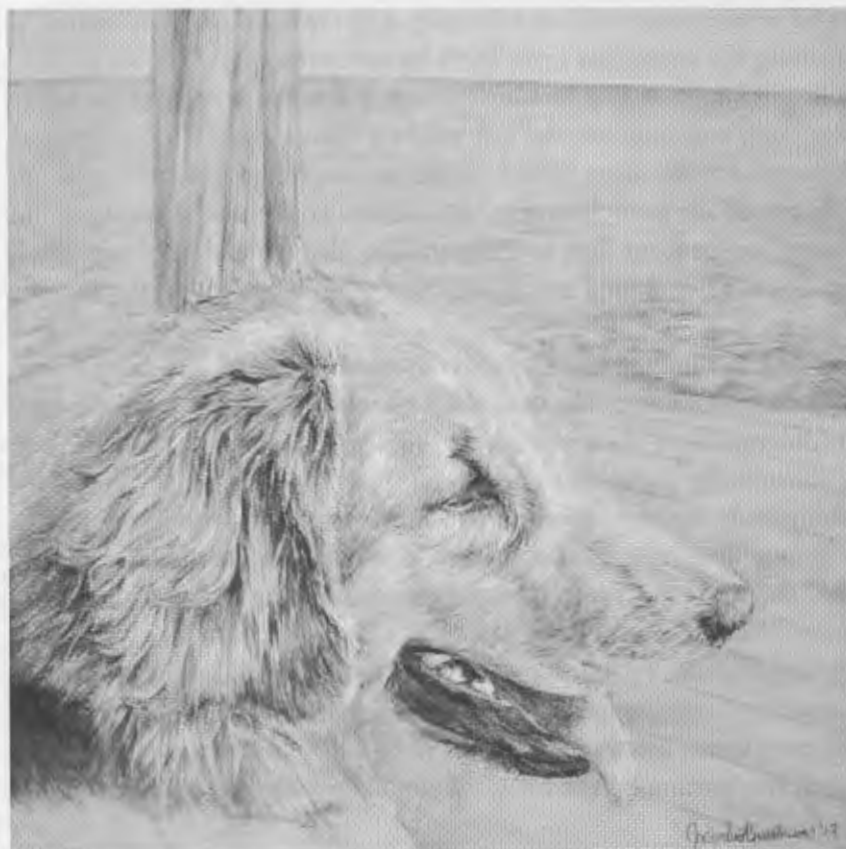
A woman materialized from the woods running down the hill across the canal with her upper body in front of her legs, yelped just like the dog. It seemed as though all was turning to chaos in one deeply interconnected moment. "Jules!" she bellowed, stepping on twigs and fighting off pinball snowflakes that rushed into her eyes like darts. "Jules! Help!"

The dog had its right paw engrained into the ice, but its weight was too intense. Cal had a swift, second-long contemplation of the plastic bag from earlier, shaking it off in his next stride. "Help him!" the woman continued, slipping down the steep hill and rolling head first into a painful somersault. She slid out from the tumbling at the bottom of the hill groaning like an old woman standing up from her wooden rocking chair.

Cal stuttered incoherence, his heart beating hard and true. "I—I will! I—I am," he muttered clearer this time. He felt like an asteroid hurdling through empty space. Falling to his knees and ripping open his jean pants, Cal propelled across the ice, coasting like that of a stone in Olympic curling. He grabbed after the dog, whatever limb or paw he could grasp, but the Bernard, Jules, as he had learned, was sinking, drowning in the inclement of Nature's collected tears. The ice was cracking further. His hand flung into the water and seized the dog's back left leg. This then allowed him to wrap his other arm around its stomach, which at first pulled Cal deeper into the abyss, but ceased once he was able to contract his momentum upward and defeat the water's resistance. Jules had been able to pull herself onto the plateau of ice, though, horrified and wet, she had bitten Cal on the arm, who, in this momentum shift had been pulled face first into the ice. Jules held on, cutting deeper, which helped Cal gain a mild orientation of where he was in the entropy of the present instant. He pulled the dog down, hoping she would pull right back and bring him right back up. To his favor, she did just that, pulling him upward. The next moment Cal sprawled out, back against the ice, wet and shivering in near hypothermic conditions. He gazed skyward at the storm clouds, each a humble grey, suddenly remembering the brown plastic bag of earlier, wafting with the wind like dust from past millenniums, empowered and free.

And then there was darkness.

Cal never made it home that day. Instead he enjoyed some twenty-two stitches in his arm and a night in a stiff hospital bed. Several days later he was back at work as he expected all along. His next shift, however, he worked up the guts to spin some pizza dough in the air like he always imagined yet never had dared. He still walked home along the canal at seven as per usual, smiling just a little bit more at the girl with the pink streak in her hair. Not much changed, really, but spinning pizza dough in the air every now and then was enough novelty to keep him coming. A couple months and he even bought that Chevy from his neighbor. It handled horribly in the snow so sure enough he named it Jules.



"Brody"
Jacqueline Christensen

Anonymous

Joshua Bauscher

That day I listened to my dad pleading to exchange the melted
wax of birthday candles for an infinity
symbol snug like padlocks around Bible verses.

Message of an aging immortalist: desperation
faithfully defies his wrinkled forehead. Deep-seated
frown dimples against his childish grin's slow-drain
reservoir. *"Those who believe in me will never die."* Idle,

I sat my gaze on the tiniest spider scrambling for cover
across the thin stalks of hair on my hand. A gust
erupted him into air where he held to a thread
of web secured at the back of my thumb. I was flying
a small, living kite: he was parasailing without water.

15 miles of Vermont's New York
border carried me and my letter,
both of us addressed to a stranger.
I broke from the country road's blacktop conveyor
belt as frequently as I thought
there was something worth seeing.

Colony of ants dragging a flattened garter
snake from murder site to storehouse.

Hills doubled low against the pine & oak
valley's oppressive majesty, grass still
stiff with the trauma of frostbite.

A cow followed the farm as far the fence-posts

allowed, growl dry on a grey tongue: *should be able to understand this by now.*

Tree fort with grown-up door and window, baby blue carpet,
and a single computer chair. One room
barely fit together.

When I reached the neighboring town, everything grew thick
with salt and mud-stain. The village message
board wrinkled with waterlogged small businesses
curled there, caterpillars that died on a hot roadside praying
for wings. I stuck one faded yellow thumbtack through
my envelope to the center of spongy cardboard.

To whom it may concern.

Mood-Ring Vows

Jim Ryan

I would touch your brain with my fingertips,
while thoughts buzz up nerve-ways like soft white
rodents and pop-rocks. I know that's a dying fad.
The thing is, I'm the kind of hermit-crab

who wears a dream after it turns
crowded, a shoebox to hide all the fragile parts:
Mom and Dad's wedding bands,
Grandpa's watch that keeps
its own kind of time, a polished orange
stone from my first sweetheart
(It still reflects nightlights the way
I imagine a soul might). Amazing
that we care for these orphaned things.

I know it's a dream, and that promise I feel
is the gust on the clapboards or a tiny heart
in the wall, thrumming between wires
hoping to go unseen. All I ask is that

when it's all over you'll crawl with me
through the fields of crabgrass and toy houses,
outside their plastic windows. We can love
them and the lies they tell because we once wrote
the same in crayon on our bedroom walls.

"The Leaf"
Elder Ferreira



