

OPUS

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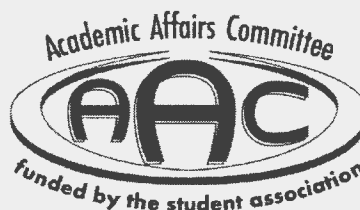
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Letter from the Editor

Dear Readers,

How wonderful of you to pick up this year's edition of *Opus*! At the ripe old age of thirteen, our innocent little magazine has grown wings and taken flight into the complex and murky waters of its teen years. This year, our contributors have been particularly thoughtful in their writing and artwork. One cannot expect that first foray into the teens to be without introspection, and we see much of that in the works that exist within this issue. Each and every submission, be it a work of words, or of images, navigates the turbulent waters of life and brings forth a message of great understanding of the days gone by, and those yet to come. We hope that you embrace the unique nature of each of the works. Our deepest gratitude to our stellar layout team who fought to tame the kraken every day into the long hours of the night.

This is my final year working on *Opus*, and I simply cannot put into words the immense pride that I feel. I shall hold every adventure and memory close to my heart, and hope that you enjoy your journey through *Opus* as much as I did.

Happy Reading!

Nivedita Rajan
Editor-in-Chief

Our warmest thanks to...

Dr. Thomas Greenfield, for brightening our days with joy, expertise, and optimism as our wonderful advisor.

Michele Feeley, for her endless kindness, care, and assistance.

The English Department, for expanding the breadth of our knowledge, abilities, and passion for the English language.

SA and AAC for their generous support in funding our magazine.

Our layout staff, for putting forth limitless, positive effort and energy to bring this year's issue of *Opus* to life.

And, to each and every individual who contributed your creations to our magazine and shared such meaningful pieces of your talents and imaginations with our readers.

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man muse on

Sarah Simon

cheekbones emanate absurdity
concrete to jell-O at
your knowing simper
but you're not obsequious
shy or
anything behind
a dictionary smile:
there's

no wrapping of sounds to tell what you're about
although maybe you're a bit of a
coquette when absurdity
calls.it was said that you were looking

but no not quite clueless you were seething
with others who were
looking
for a respite in you and you were the escape because all else escaped
you

as you blewMINDS with
drifted thoughts.

simpering enough to unsettle abeast but then you join in
commiserating with the gravities butPULLING them
YANKING them from
physics to
meta
assuring it wasn'tALL OVER by
the tip of a solitary dominoNO
the pieces were never in line to begin.

cheekbones emanate absurdity
others' doubts chiseled by
your features
which are meaninglessness
or just bones unlearned by
anatomists.
there's
no inflection of a jawbone to woo a telling of you,
coquette.
and so I use this word to describe a man.

A Bard Striding in Nether Trills

Tyler Their

The lonely bard in his flourish,
Composing his ballads of Gothic.
His faeries in the night, guiding the lost
Towards that of the further remote.

Imprisoned the bard now is,
Himself but a mirror,
Susceptible to the Green Muse;
His faerie of descent.

To make such a trip is pure gamble,
A game of wit with a bleak purpose.
The beauty promises to enhance
And the lyricist takes her by the hand.

Who's the poor wayfarer now
But the quill-bearer himself.
His abbey shone in the distant brush,
Only to vanish when it was needed most.



Neverland

Michelle Moshon

The Stories

Nivedita Rajan

“Hey, Pixie, did I ever tell you about the time a hen got into the house?”

All her stories invariably started off with a similar structure. As though having grown up in the shadow of a mother with a Masters in Applied Mathematics wasn't bad enough, she had to contend with a straight-A older sister and a genius younger sister as well. Throw a sickly baby brother into the mix and it was easy enough to see that my mother was the quintessential middle child. But it didn't matter since this just meant that she always had a story to tell.

Sometimes it was just a recitation of childhood memories with her siblings as they played cops and robbers – the hated neighbor's children always had to play the robbers. Other times, they were accounts of personal triumphs and tragedies in the real world. Everything from getting her first job, to losing her first baby was fair game. Some stories she hated more than others; I could tell since these ones were told slower, with more pauses in between. There was even a story about how she knew my father was the one when she saw how much the family dog liked him. That one never made sense to me since the family dog liked everyone; as pretty as she was, she made a fairly useless guard dog.

Stories were something that were a constant feature throughout my childhood. My entire family was into it and mama followed suit pretty naturally. Her repertoire didn't just include stories from the past, but also a collection of fairytales – often edited to suit her nefarious purposes. I had heard the entirety of Aesop's Fables and the works of the Brothers Grimm told in a more child-friendly guise. But as many stories as mama knew and made up, I could tell when she started running out. Soon, I started to hear stories about “Cinderella: the Post-Divorce Years” and “Daisy-cup the Cow”. Stories during the day, on the phone from work, bedtime stories – my day was scattered with my mother's warped creations and resulted in a mildly scarred childhood from which I emerged more sardonic than most ten year olds.

Inevitably, I started to outgrow story-time, but mama did not. Turns out, towards the end of the era of the tales, she had realized that she was the one who couldn't fall asleep without the listening to the dulcet tones of the “Town Musicians of Bremen” failing spectacularly at producing any kind of music. Mama had her epiphany at the same time I got into college. I would hear my mother frequently complaining that I never listened to her stories anymore, and more often than not, she would sneak into my bed, curl up under the blankets, and tell me stories until she fell asleep – usually after about five minutes. Mama thought that I didn't like her stories anymore, but the truth was I thought I had heard them all. So, as she griped on about my lack of reverence for masterpieces, I would think about my college essay – on mama and her bedtime stories – and allow a smirk to crawl across my face.

On breaks from college, I find myself making the journey back home and settling into my usual routine as though I had never left it in the first place. Although without the presence of high school, I find myself with more free time than I know what to do with. In these dreary times, I revert to being a child – brand new to my mother’s creativity and gift for telling stories. It’s Friday night and my mother is back from work – late as always. Weariness that not even a hot shower and dinner can dispel has settled over her already, and she curls up in front of the television in the darkened front room to indulge in a bit of trashy drama. Having made myself scarce throughout the day by staying holed up in my room, I finally venture out into the quiet outside and head towards my LCD-lit matriarch. I lean back in my grandfather’s rocking chair and wait for the advertisements to interrupt her mundane T.V. drama. The moment I see my cue, I’m at my most persistent.

“I’m bored. Tell me a story.”

She closes her eyes, leans her head back against the sofa and almost whines,

“Haven’t I told you everything there is to tell?”

“There’s always more to tell”, I say in my most indignant voice. She slowly opens her eyes; they have already taken on a faraway look.

Does she see her old dog chasing the rogue hen around the house? Does she see her sole mathematical triumph in third grade amidst the continuous triumphs of her sisters? Does she see her parents with their hands outstretched, a multitude of stories resting in their upturned hands? A moment later, mama turns to me, a slow childish smile already spreading across her face.

“Hey, Pixie, did I ever tell you about the time...”

Spring’s First Step

Edwin Mycek



Gray

Kelsey Teglash

Gray blankets the sky and the rain grips
everything in sight. The evergreens are the
only color.

The last white light of day kisses the dark night, and they
settle together in the west.

The last buttery windows melt into black.
The only light are the moonbeams that spill
over the ground.

The wind sings as it weaves through the
dark branches; fog turns the earth to milk.
My mind runs to you.

I look up to the graveyard of stars and
search for you there. But you only live in a
place the eye does not see.

The pale moon grows into my minute hand
and the seasons become my hours ticking
away.

White Stripe

Klarisa Loft



Untitled

Tyler Their

At Eternity's gate the old man weeps,
Engulfed by his once-sinewy form
That now dissolves by the day.

At Eternity's gate he sees everything.
The flames of the hearth as Tartarus,
Whisking the soul to its depths.
The chair as detention,
Gluing the cadaver to its hardened frame.

The air as betrayal.

At Eternity's gate he can only weep.



Friends

Klarisa Loft

21:7

William Antonelli

No experiences
No experiences
No experiences could have prepared you for this.
Your heart throws itself off of a moving boat
Into the freezing, quaking seas below.
Your brain, your bones, your nervous system follow soon after
One by one slipping into those waters
And all because you need a breath of fresh air.

All because you saw Him standing on the shore.
That man
Limbs scarred
Eyes burning just as brightly
As the day they stood by and watched Him bleed to death.
There He stands in peaceful rebellion.
An inferno in a world of ice.
A funeral pyre to give you life.

Yet no experiences could have warned you
That the water you thought would bring you landward is now dragging you back out to sea
Capsizing your lungs
Surging rapids sliding through veins like snakes along garden grass.
And no experiences could have told you that you would sink
And the darkness that you were sure couldn't and wouldn't follow you
Is now crawling through your corneas
Like moss clinging to mighty boulders
Unable to be seen in the undergrowth.

And as you fall you pray
And you say
How will I ever see the light of day
If and when I drown?
As water kills fire
Your final breaths trickle out
Dangling from your lips like rotten fruit
Ready to be plucked away.

But no experiences could have predicted that a fire would spark underwater.
A flame with no oxygen.
An impossible possibility.

No experiences could have seen it coming:
That hand.

His hand, reaching through the churning waves, scooping your silent heart out of the sand
Cradling the embers as it lifts you to the surface
And rests you on the shore.
Your soul crosses through His pyre
Your lungs take in new breath
The foul fog fades.

For no experiences could have taught you that death is just a complicated synonym for life.

Tonal Still Life

Alexis Sammler



Puckering

Sarah Steil

Blood on the living room carpet
curving around the nuclei of threaded flowers
as spit gathers in the corners
of her lips, dry mouth.
“Don’t leave.”

Chain snapped, silver beads roll
like gravel in hand,
his fingerprints breathe on shiny links,
her throat,
as his voice crawls like smoke through
her lips,
“I forced him.”

His body lingers within hers, abandoned
catacombs,
as she cradles mottled arms, purpled legs, blue lungs,
And liquored fingers stumble
for empty vodka bottle,
“Please stay.”

Cigarette’s exhaust bends around his
fattened tongue
as she pleads, exposing palms —
offering a banquet of skin, of indigos and plums,
“My fault.”

My mother’s hungover hands graze
the welt on her forehead,
marveling the skin that retains his memory in explosions,
magenta
like medals, she takes pride in carrying his coloring
Here

And here

And here.

My vengeful bones melt, bubble in their own fire,
as his voice creeps
across curdling kitchen walls,

undying, like headless cockroaches
laying eggs
in the living room plaster.

Cheeks, color of blackberry wine, lungs, of cobalt, eyes, of ember,
as she begs, lips move too quickly to form
the right words of protest.
His freedom costs the inflation of her lungs.
“Don’t go.”

Purple is where she earns the concern of his hands.
Body peels, festers, weeps, drains, she pours salt
Into the blood of her puckered palms, cooing,
“But I love him.”

Ugly

Sarah Steil

I am 15 and I have not seen my father in years, and when I try to picture him, lock onto a concrete image of him, I find his eyes. The rest of his face is fuzzy, and my mind relies on old photographs to fill in the thinness of his lips and the salt-and-pepper of his hair. But yet I can picture his eyes, moving about like a bug’s, perpetually frustrated and disappointed. His eyes have always been too large for his face, wet globes that constantly scan whatever room he’s in. I used to have nightmares about his eyes, in which I’d be hiding behind furniture hoping he would not hear me breathing. Inevitably, I would slip or move or make noise, and those eyes would lock onto me and I’d wake up sweating with my own eyes pinned to the ceiling. He has the eyes of a painting, ones that always seem to follow you no matter where you stand. Even in pictures of him and my mother, before I was born, when I’d like to believe he was good to her in some way, those watery, hazel eyes bear down upon me, taking focus from everything else. I wonder if these eyes made such a large impact on me because of how often I searched them as a child, waiting, hoping for some hint of appreciation or acknowledgment. I have never seen his teeth. I can picture his voice, raised and accusing, but I cannot picture his lips moving. My memory of my father consists of eyes and a voice, both angry, demanding, endlessly lessening. This is how I felt before him, lesser, smaller, unimportant and unsure. His eyes reduced me and his voice accused me, and somehow, I always knew I was guilty.

I am 18 and I have not seen my father in years, and when I try to picture him, I feel this sadness that rolls through my body like an electric current. When I was younger I would tell myself that I did not need my father and that I was better off without him. As time went on I realized that I did not, in fact, need my father but that I wanted him, or anyone, and I could miss something I never had. I picture his eyes and I see, somewhere, a softness, a confusion, an expression of love that exists even if I cannot understand it.

I want to sit in a room with him and probe his brain, understand his insides, his anger, and forgive him. I spend years thinking about forgiving him. He will call me one day, tell me he is sorry. He will show up at my door when I am old and have a life of my own and beg me to forgive him. His eyes will water and I will think maybe they were only so angry in my head. I try to remember clearly the anger of his eyes and tell myself that he is not coming; he is not calling. But this image too has become hazy and I tell myself that he has softened with age, that he misses me in some way. I have never seen his teeth. I have no memories of his laughing or smiling. But I think maybe it was there, when he was still around, maybe when I was young and wasn't looking, maybe he smiled at me and for just a moment felt pride. I think about this moment a lot. What it would look like with his lips parted, his watery pupils stilled for a moment and locked onto me, not so threatening, what his pride would feel like. This one millisecond of a moment will nourish my hope for years, and I begin to miss this image of him that I am not sure ever existed.

Keyhole

Nivedita Rajan



Surviving Fear

Stephanie Carelli

A lone survivor thrashes to break the surface clear
Of dual oceans cast beneath the flesh of dusk.
With limbs enmeshed in tempest tides rimmed with salt and biting
Dread, her soul sucks for oxygen and bleeds the cry of
Silence. She begins to drown in the hazel
Chambers of exile that she swallows from within...
Yet, her hands still blindly tear away each vein
Of ebb and flow to reverse the current towards an eastern
Shore, where life leaks into purpose and misery's crest
Is drained from the break of everlasting peace.

And she prevails.

The edge of desire shatters the past's frothy
Armor and her selfhood strikes the foundation
Of the earth with strength that shakes the timbres
Of wooded howls that wound the shadows of night.
Drawing cosmos into her lungs, she turns to face
Her liquid ghost with truth concealed beneath its
Pupils. She no longer hides — she reaches through its rippled
Glare to consume the depths of her own
Infinity bound to its core, haloed by the promise of
Tomorrow. She brands her name into the sand and
Stands, staggering and stretching until her toes
Shape the world and the iced grip of darkness
Embraces the fire of stars between her fingertips.
Her breath heaves, her spirit burns, her vision bursts open
To seize the morning sun.

Open

Klarisa Loft



Words Never Said

Elizabeth Boateng

Dear ---,

#5. I miss your liveliness

The way you seemed to fly up the stairs home
After church to watch the Superbowl
& how car rides were filled with us
Singing Milkshake by Kelis

#13. I miss your overprotectiveness

The way you shook your disapproving bald head
Whenever I tried to leave the house with a skirt on
& how you seemed to turn into Flash when taking me to the hospital
After the countless times I sprained my ankle

#28. I miss you being apart of the family

You completed our perfect family picture
Of us dressed in our best church clothes
With similar smiles and synchronized folded hands

#47. I miss you

You left too soon, without any warning
Your plane ticket to Ghana was roundtrip
But you missed your return flight and never came back
You didn't even say goodbye, and I never got a chance to either

Love,
Elizabeth

P.S.

The picture of you, mom, and I still hangs in that black frame on our living room wall.

Dream Catcher

Kelsey Teglash

I'll navigate the rough seas of your haunting dreams
Burn out the darkness
And calm your screams.

I'll stop the dark shadows
I'll keep them at bay.
And let all your troubles float away.

You are the stars in the charcoal skies
Breathe easy now and close your eyes.

The golden rays will break through the clouds
It's time to make the silence not so loud.

Mother Nature

Alexis Sammler



Lucky

Corinne Elise Hooker

Life's real hard and people tell you it ain't fair and it ain't and you know it deep down in your heart but it don't make it any easier. It's just real hard. Just take my friend Ted. Now, Teddy's a real nice kid and all, but he got the most shit luck I ever seen on a guy. I swear he got worse luck than—who was that one guy who died only a few days after becomin' President? I dunno.

Anyway, Teddy and me, we have a real hard time with this—my name's Joe, by the way—we have a real hard time with this... What was I talkin' about? Bad luck, right. We have a real hard time with life in general. I mean for starters life is real hard.

One time, we was playin' in a field—this was when we was kids—and we was playin' football or somethin'. It was two o'clock in the afternoon for all I know, and these great big storm clouds start rollin' in. I didn't wanna seem like noscaredy cat, so I didn't say nothin', and I guess Teddy didn't want to neither, so we just kept on playin' ball. All the other kids, they ran off and we laughed at them like they was stupid. I guess I shouldn't'a laughed at 'em, 'cause maybe what happened next was God's way a tellin' me not to be so mean.

What happened next was this. Those great big storm clouds? They started pourin' rain and the sky got real dark. We shoulda run right then but we was kids and we thought we wasn't. Anyway, that pourin' rain kept beatin' down on my head and Teddy and me, we was screamin' at each other 'cross the field to hear over the thunder. I kept tryin' a throw the ball to him, but the wind knocked it straight off course. Now we didn't even have no reason to be out there, but we stayed 'cause we warn't no scaredy cats.

I hollered 'cross the field—it was maybe a hundred yards—at Teddy, but he didn't hear me, so I started walkin' toward him. Then, I saw this blindin' flash a light and even though I couldn't see no more, I started runnin' toward where Teddy was. I remember hearin' thunder at the same time as the lightnin' struck. 'member that sayin' that if you count the seconds 'tween the lightnin' and the thunder, it'll tell you how many miles away the lightnin' struck? Well, this was zero seconds. No seconds at all.

When I could see again, Teddy was sittin' maybe twenty yards from where the lightnin' hit. He was laughin' like he'd just heard my joke about peanuts.

I hit him.

"I can't believe you! I was sure you was dead!"

He just kept on laughin' at me.

"Joe," he said, "I think I am."

"Oh, shut your mouth." I hit him again. I needed to know he was real.

"Joe, I just saw that light they's always talkin' about at church. That has to mean I'm dead. Aw, shit. What am I gonna tell my mama?"

"Teddy, get up. You ain't never gonna tell your mama nothin', otherwise the two of us are likened to get skinned alive. Do you hear me?"

He started laughing again, prob'ly 'cause my face looked so serious, I might as well have been talkin' 'bout death, and I couldn't help but laugh with him.

I had thought for sure he was dead. He scared the dickens outta me, and you can bet your bottom dollar I ran inside with the other kids the next time I saw them great big storm clouds. Teddy, though? He always liked to sit outside and stare at the sky. I guess he was lookin' for God to come back like he missed him the first time or somethin'.

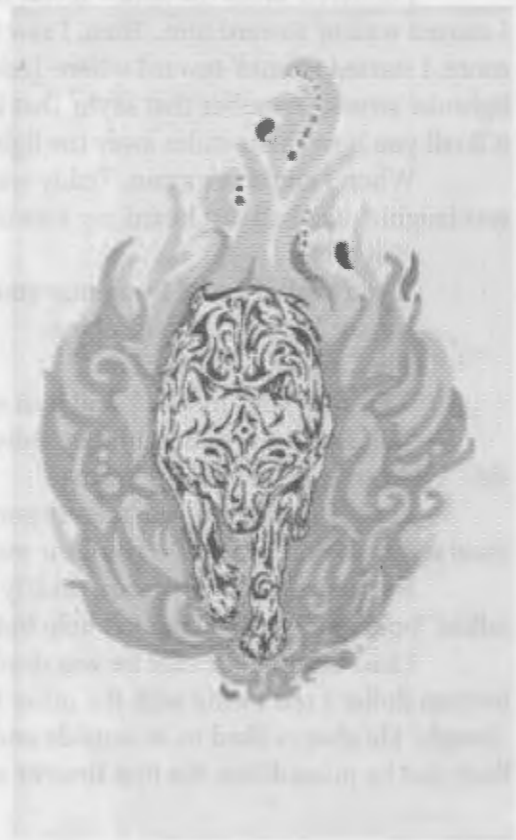
Lunatic

William Antonelli

If I could learn one thing,
It would be how to walk the moon.
How to glide through the eternal rock,
Like a blind man skimming his fingers across blank pages.
To walk the moon,
To be life in a vacuum, a realm of death.
To look the ever-present, infinite, still-growing, undefeatable, absolutely-horrifying, ever-present depths
of anti-matter right in the eye

And say
Hey.
I'm not afraid.

I will walk the moon, and I will look it in the eye,
My heartbeat fleeting, impermanent.
For even here, sunlight guides me.
Even in the midst of that dark expanse.



Wolf

Michelle Moshon

Heat Lightning Repose

Stephanie Wilcoxon

I am flint-stone friction,
cloud-bottom sparks & clumsy

ice fracture greetings.
I fork, spooned out

over blunted hill tips quick
as the lip of a gravy boat can wail

*tablecloth-collision: iceberg
lettuce & lace colander.*

I am vacuum-pushed away
from my boiled couch cushions.

Heaved off from wave bows, unstable:
electron-heavy, sinking in helium exhalations.

Falling towards ion-frozen rivers
that shove me to shout

crow's nest warnings:
the ocean is flooding the troposphere

& my clog-feet are catching fire.
Wheels-up without a cooling rain.

Pools of stale thrust & the moment just before
you get your sea legs. Unsteady and frightened

inertia from some forgotten force. I dream
of coffee table legs & toast bottle rockets

in each heart rate scorched near-touchdown:
every time I watch pillows burn kinetic.

zeitgeist headspin

Sarah Simon

this man is used to express frustration
in a place of dark or light?
the dichotomy lingers.

even in the posts you strangle with your fingers

which state and
thrust up to the sky

lessons taught but never learned.
virtues
possessed, trumped. but where is the frustration?

mixtapes place blame
on beings
on skin tones
on

flesh to make sense,
hierarchy.

difference is
ranked
that's how necks
operate but

they
can
turn.

the head lurks where it's pointed
it is not a bust
it is not in stone so

do
thrust your self-denounced momentousness.
just assess your neck
has it spun full circle?
like an owl

cry with eyes wide open

A Timeline

Melanie Weissman

Age seven:

At recess

Rachel Antonelli lets you hold
her brand new baby doll,
one with prickly-lashed eyelids
that open and close
and greedy puckered lips
begging for a plastic bottle,
and you don't know
what to do with it,
so you rock it in your arms
for a few seconds,
nervous grin speckled
with the caverns of missing teeth,
hand it back, hot potato,
and get in line for the tire swing.

Age nine:

You pull your pants down
in the restroom and find
a muddy red stain,
a Rorschach inkblot
shaped vaguely like
a skull and crossbones,
and you imagine you're
an ancient Roman warrior,
fatally stabbed by enemy troops
in an act of heroic sacrifice,
because that's more palatable
than the truth of the matter,
and waddle to the nurse's office,
worried that you'll miss the rest of
Mrs. McKinley's lesson on fractions.

Age eleven:

The Peterson twins chant the alphabet
as they swing the jump rope
back and forth
like a hypnotist's pocket watch.
Playground law dictates
that the letter you trip up on
will determine the first letter
of your first child's name,

and you land on 'S,'
so you go with 'Sarah,'
and everyone agrees
that it's a pretty name,
but you really wanted to say 'Spot,'
because you'd rather have a dog.

Age thirteen:

You're watching a movie
at Brittany Chang's slumber party
about a common girl who catches
the eye of a prince
and marries into royalty,
and everyone gushes
over the protagonist's
elegant wedding gown
and dreamy groom,
professing that they, too,
want to become princesses one day.
You shove another handful of
popcorn into your mouth,
silently disagreeing
because a princess must provide
an heir to the throne.

Age fifteen:

You learn in health class
that no form of birth control is
one hundred percent effective
and resign yourself to
a lifetime of abstinence.

Age seventeen:

You are told you'll never find a husband
and you'll die alone.

Age twenty-three:

You decide that weddings
are too expensive anyway.

Age twenty-eight:

You act in a play.

A Timeline

Age thirty-four:
You compete on a game show

Age forty-one:
You write a novel.

Age sixty-six:
You travel the world.

Age ninety-two:
Your funeral is overcrowded.

Wax Warmth

Klarisa Loft



Giants

Sarah Steil

Pause:

My little sister with vanilla icing in the corners of her lips, laughing; hiding her body in layers of pajamas to hide from my mother's prying eyes; hazel irises turned up to the light of the kitchen.

My brother, arms crossed, straddling the fence between puberty and maturity and lingering in the throes of cocky adolescence, scowls at being the subject of Olivia's joke; tall like his father; hair curled into a mini torpedo at the back of his head from his constant twirling of brown locks.

Sam, my older sister, lips pursed but still offering one of her fleeting smiles, skinny, too skinny, constantly baking things she will never eat, holding the icing at a distance like something foul, dirty.

Dogs, too many, bay at her feet as she casually holds the butter knife at her side.

My mother, sleeping on the couch with an empty bottle of some sort (no one bothers to check) pressed between her sweating back and the leather of the couch.

Todd, little dog, licks desperately at her mouth, tongue, attracted to the scent of some flavored liquor, or possibly waiting for the meat from her decaying body.

Resume:

Sam, focused, ices the cake with a baker's precision as Jesse fires one of his quips at Olivia, "haven't you had enough of that?" I see the slight downward bow to her lips and the reddening of her cheeks before she hides the distortion of her features with a smirk, and she launches a curse at Jesse and continues to eat the icing from the spoon. Still, color huddles around the few freckles on her chin. Freckled children, Olivia had been the outcast, the sole child not soaked in little circles of melatonin, and as kids we would insist she'd been adopted.

Jesse, always walking on his toes though my mother asks him not to, smiles his goofy smile. Fourteen but trying desperately to be older, smarter, cooler, he talks about the boys he wants to date, entertained by my mother's cringes at the dinner table. My mother's only son of six children, she had sobbed on my bedroom floor when she discovered the big secret, a secret whose discovery had allowed Jesse the freedom to discuss his crushes openly, enjoying the distortions of my mother's expression. My mother would grimace and antagonize him about our absent father, "Why don't you tell your father this, Jesse? I'm sure he'd love to hear about this more than we would." Jesse, undeterred, would roll his eyes and continue, waiting for the pressure to burst, for her to run upstairs to the man who would remind her that *God is watching* and *God is ashamed of that boy*.

Rewind:

Winter ebbed and exhaled warm breath on our backs, whimpered its retreat as we walked home from school. He pulled anxiously at his fingers, slouching under the weight of an overflowing backpack. "I wanted to tell you something for a while," Jesse's fingers fiddled with the backpack strap, gesticulating frantically as he considered the implications of revealing his thoughts. "I've never told anyone this before."

He was 13, and it would be a couple of years before I admitted the similarity of our features, how sometimes I looked at him and saw myself mirrored in his nose, his plump cheeks, and dark, fidgeting eyes, and how somehow I looked most strikingly like the boy who resembled most strikingly our father.

My sarcastic brother stuttered, "I don't know, it's stupid. I don't know," as we walked side by side down the long stretch of our block. Jesse stared at his feet as they traversed broken concrete, and I

walked beside him in the street, kicking at newly revealed leaves that have been waiting solemnly for the snow to melt.

“So, tell me.” Patient. I knew what he was going to say.

“Okay, well. Okay.” I realized how similar we were in our nervousness, in our pessimism, and I loved this vulnerable boy who exposed these things, as he said, “I’m gay.” A pause. “I’m gay. I’ve never told anyone that before.”

I hugged him, and he laughed when I asked him if he would tell my mother, too.

“Maybe when I’m at my wedding.”

Fast Forward:

My mother has entered the territory of our kitchen, wearing her coral fleece sweatshirt with the broken zipper and pulling on strands of her hair, hazel eyes wide. “You know I still love you, Jes.”

Jesse, indignant and shaking, strained as the muscles in his throat bulged and his face reddened, “Why the fuck would you tell your shithead boyfriend then?”

Understanding she has lost her control over the situation, my mother sputtered her defenses, grew louder. “You can’t tell me what I can and can’t talk to my boyfriend about. Besides, he was just kidding.” Moments before we had pressed our ears to the grain of my mother’s bedroom door as her soft and startled consoling jammed in the shredder of her boyfriend’s condemnations, “Next he’ll be telling you he wants to fuck the dog.”

Jesse had winced and then shook, “I’m gonna go in there and say something. I have to go in there and say something.” Stretch of anger and mortification. He asked, “Why would she tell him? She promised me she wouldn’t tell him,” and then yelled a profanity at the door, to which my mother would later protest in defiance,

“Don’t start problems where there aren’t any.”

My mother had left the kitchen with her boyfriend’s feeding, another reminder that a being breathed upstairs—food went up, wrappers and crumbs came down. Jesse, a bottle rocket, extended one angry finger at my mother’s retreating back and yelled, “take this up with you.”

Start:

“Hey guys, did anyone think to offer any cake to Dave?” Jesse asks, and suddenly we are all laughing, Jesse’s deep guffaws bubbling with Olivia’s sweet fledgling chirp. Their laughter bubbles at the implication of giving cake to my mother’s boyfriend, who sits in her bedroom all day like rot, the only reminder of his existence the smell of smoke crawling down the stairs when my mother opens the door.

“Maybe I’ll bring him a piece and serve it on a restraining order?” Sam asks, amused, searching through cabinets for half-melted candles from previous birthdays. My siblings, rapid-fire, send their jokes across the kitchen table, morbid, and I am, as usual, a spectator, unable to find breath between gasps.

Olivia, round face, chubby cheeks, pushes dirty blonde hair behind her ears. When I see her this way, far from where she has been, I want to hug her and hide her and cradle her away, this sweet little girl, and let her know that I will defend her from all hurt. But beyond this laughter, I know, is still the girl that hides in sweatshirts in summer, that would cry with urgent inhalations when finding my mother drunk again, that was too small for the hospital, and the doctors that watched our visit, the same girl that whispered, “I don’t want to be here anymore. I’m okay now.”

Stronger now, Olivia gestures at Jesse with his back to us, eyebrows raised at the cyclone of crazed hair twisting between his fingers. The solid of our smiles sublime when Jesse twists around,

scowling, and concern masks my face, “What’s amatter, kiddo?” and wink at Olivia. Dismissing us with only an eye roll, Jesse sits at the kitchen table with us, and his face stretches in consternation and I watch him thinking before he begins his discussion on his annoyances with one of his high school classes. Eyebrows furrowed and his hands moving wildly in front of him to punctuate his sentences, I am left marveling at the rapid transition from different thoughts and emotions between people who know one another so well. To say I am in awe of these simultaneously silly and intelligent people is to do them a disservice, because they are warriors fighting such different battles and yet somehow still fighting the same ones.

Sam finds a handful of broken candles and wedges them into the dripping frosting of the cake, as she has iced it too quickly and the cake is still warm. Hair pulled from her face tightly in a ponytail, dainty, the beauty I would never be, disappearing day by day. Sarcastic and stealing calories from the fridge with no one around, knowing and waiting for my mother’s satisfied exhalation, “Sam, have you lost more weight?” with an if-you-don’t-tell-I-won’t-tell wink. Sam’s body betrays the both of us, swallowing the girl that hides within her ribcage, my defender. For me, today, I hope she’ll have cake.

Sam pulls a tattered book of matches from under a pile of peelers, broken pencils and paper-clips, and rips one from the soggy cardboard. Fumbling and frustrated, she strikes, strikes, strikes, to no avail. Finally, one forlorn match catches flame, and she rushes to light the stubborn wicks of old candles.

Jesse, understanding the cue, reaches for the light switch, but stills at Sam’s voice: “Wait, no, we should show mom.” We laugh at first, but stop when realizing Sam is serious, and currently carrying the cake to the living room where my sleeping mother lies. We follow, as she kneels by my mother, passed out, and hands me her phone. “Take a picture.” Sam smiles with a thumbs-up, my mother’s jaw hangs slack, body lifeless, and the four of us are laughing again, and the candles are melting multicolored wax onto the cake. “Sarah, hurry up!”

My siblings, giant broken people, faces illuminated by dripping pastel candles, stand behind the cake like an offering, framed by my mother’s lifelessness and the smell of smoke billowing from under the upstairs bedroom door. The candles continue to burn as I listen to them sing with their loud voices, and I wonder if what is upstairs or on my couch smells fire.

Still laughing, my breath trembles as I try to blow out the candles, and Olivia yells, “make a wish!” as Sam and Jesse finish singing Happy Birthday, and the dogs whine at our feet, and my mother misses my 16th birthday.

We have learned to make jokes. Which is why, when Todd continues to lap at the drying saliva in the corners of my mother’s opened mouth, I watch him for a minute. We laugh. I should push him off, scare him away like a vulture from road kill, but I wonder if when she wakes up she’ll have the same foulness in her mouth that I do now.

The four of us stand by my mother, and Olivia leans her head against my shoulder, and Sam, understanding, gestures to the kitchen, “Let’s have cake,” and the four of us leave in a line like soldiers.

Musical Tones

Jo-Ann Wong

If I found a boy personified as a song
He would be in the key of C
As he would never intentionally be sharp with me
And our conversations would stay adrift
From flat lines
Of small talk murmers.
His presence of a major scale
As I wouldn't want to push him
To the minor leagues
Of past interests when he so obviously
Conducts my feelings
Into a happy tempo
Of allegro heartbeats.

He would be a well-worn vinyl
Whose grooves carry the baggage
Of past needles
Nowhere to be found.
His sleeves slightly torn
By the careless mishandling
Of past lovers,
But his heart still kept intact
As he nestles between the covers
Of these old memories.

His hands would be a piano piece
Playing the keys of my backbone.
Lightly teasing my troubles out
With the tips of the right
While softly pressing the bass of my spine
With his left.
Pushing the pedals that
Echo the arches of his palms.

He would be a cassette tape
Wound tight around the spools of others
That offer past sides of himself
That I will never be able to rewind back to
As I wasn't able to fastforward quick enough
To catch him midverse
Before he pressed stop
And stored himself away.
Self aware of the dust
Under his plastic seat cover
As he notes that some memories
Are best kept,
But left unheard to leave some
For the imagination.

He would be a post hardcore song,
Alternating between reserve and expression.
Riffing out emotions from me
That I had forgotten existed
As he plucks vibrations along the staff
Of my electric strings (heart).
Leaving imprints of heavy drumbeats
Along the contours of my waist
As he presses himself against me
In exchange for musical lipstick stains.

He would be a deluxe edition cd
As he comes as a whole package.
Presenting himself to ears wide open,
But giving me just a little extra
As I try to figure him out
With the few liner notes he supplies.
Rehitting play as I want to know more
From the few tracks I'm given
While I wait for the next EP.

He would be the next track
On my playlist entitled
Something to Look Forward To
As I'm moving on
From the shuffle dance I've played
Of uncertain tempo changes
And half-hearted skips
To something more musically sound
That will hold me in the present.

woven by sarcasm

Sarah Simon

and
individualities and
of course,
persona of the mass
a massive family
blood jumping from flesh to

yet we're not familiar
in some way--
the inter-connectivity of
the genotypes phenotypes
has always been acknowledged more.
by the way, I
like your eyes.

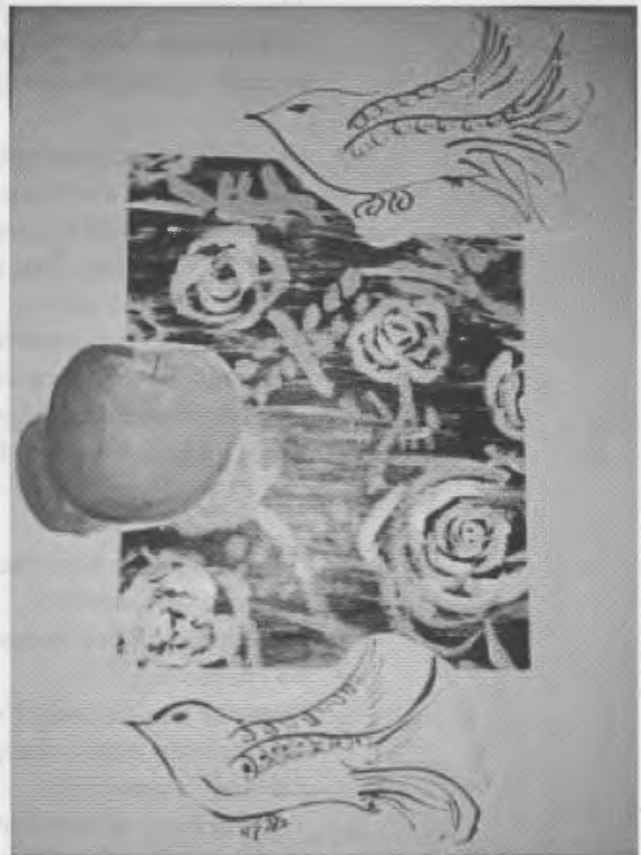
but I have failed to think of them
as majestically distant
and more as just a parody of mine.
until this moment,
hallelujah,
I see you growing per-
pendicular to me,
like a tree branch.

families always known to
be
rustling
in the
leaves

flesh.

Sean and Anne

Alexis Sammler



Millennial Manifesto

Melanie Weissman

untangle

the wires of your earbuds

and strangle the nonbelievers.

shatter

the lenses of your hipster glasses

and slit their throats.

pluck the eighteenth

candle from your birthday cake

and set your college loans

ablaze.

leave adulthood waiting

at your doorstep in the

pouring rain.

gather

your thousands of followers

and build an army.

reclaim

the glory that is rightfully

yours without putting down

your phone.

imprison the enemy

behind the bars of a

hashtag

and after you win the war

wipe the sweat

and blood from your brow

and take a selfie.



Self Portrait of Alexis Sammler

Alexis Sammler

Foresight

Alanna Kaplan

closure
to bring to a definitive end.
to move on after the end of a relationship.
the first step to finding peace.

Human nature seeks closure. That final shutting of an invisible door.

Do we need this?

No. The heart always knows the end. Long before the end is spelled out to our brain.

Pay more attention, and the door will close gently. Wait and it slams shut, bringing forth a gust of wind powerful enough to knock you down.

Funerals.

Signing divorce papers.

Graduation Ceremonies.

The deletion of a number.

A Bar or Bat Mitzvah.

That end of the year party your teacher planned.

When you finally say "it's over."

You saw that coming.

It doesn't feel the same.

Actions speak louder than words.

All good things must come to an end.

She knew he was cheating, but needed the confirmation of lie detector results.

"Maury, I just know he's cheating on me. When I was in our Jeep last week, I reached under the seat for my earring that fell and you know what I found? Panties, Maury! And they ain't mine! They was a size 20, and I'm a size 4! I'm supposed to believe he cheating on me with Precious? *No*. Bring me the lie detector results." *He chimes in.* "Baby, Karen, I already told you! The homeless shelter sent me a

text asking for underwear donations. I was donating that one pair out the kindness of my heart!” *The lie detector results are in. Maury delivers the soul-crushing lines* - “Shane, you said those panties didn’t belong to a woman you were cheating with. The lie detector determined that was a lie.”

Karen exits stage left, running fast as if each step can physically separate her from the truth.

But she saw that coming.

Father Time was making his way towards my grandmother, and each mishap hastened his footsteps.

In previous years, we were taking trips to Disney World and she was attending every school function, PTA meeting and ballet class. She’d go out with friends almost every night of the week. She’d sit on the porch, enjoy the Miami sunshine, and make cheerful conversation with every passerby. This year, I watched her sink into a deep depression, stay home every day, and cry. She’d ask me if it was true that both her sisters and her brother passed, if she was really “the last of the Mohicans.” At the age of 11, it was hard to understand this change. Then, the physical changes started. She would fall every morning, just getting out of bed. Ambulance workers knew us by name. Incontinence. And then finally, my mom telling me my grandma was leaving for a nursing home. Months go by, and every time I called her, less and less was said. Each visit, I tried to carry on a one-sided conversation and make sense of how this happened. All I would get was blank looks. The most vibrant, charismatic woman anyone who had the good fortune of meeting her would ever know – in a vegetative state.

The last time I called before she passed, there was nothing but silence on the other end of the phone.

But I saw that coming.

Soft realist, meet hard perfectionist. Sensitive, meet stern. Flexible, meet strict.

We were raised differently. I, by my white grandmother and mother, who let me express my personal opinions on everything while spoiling me to no end. My older brother, by our Haitian father – in his prime, he could beat him and our sister from one side of the house to the other for any and everything. I was too young to witness it because of the age difference between my siblings and I, but I heard the stories. I had no relationship with our father, and only spoke to my brother occasionally – until both my grandma and mom passed, and he was willing to let me move in with him. A recipe for disaster. We shared the same raging, strong-willed blood, but I was expected to calm mine and respect my elders. Nothing I did was ever right. As part of my effort to distract myself from this failed familial experiment, I kept this secret and that secret. Soon, I was forced to give up my keys to the apartment because I “couldn’t be trusted.” I’d wait outside the apartment to be let in after school five days a week, from daylight till night, when Brooklyn lit itself up. When the key finally turned and the door opened, inside the apartment felt icier than the outside.

My sister agreed that he was crazy. I moved in full-time with her, and never stayed there again.

But I saw that coming.

Thou shalt love thy husband with all thy heart, and shalt cleave onto him and none else.

Nothing meant more to my sister than God and family, in that order. The more time I spent with her, the closer we became. The almost 20 year age difference didn't amount to much. Where she went, she'd ask me to come along. She'd come to me first for advice on men. Staying up till 3 AM pillow talking was commonplace. Every story she told, I'd hear it before anyone else. In return, she supported my ventures, encouraged my growth, and raised me from a rough-around-the-edges teen into a young lady. I helped her keep her faith that one day, she'd remarry and have children. In the meantime, myself, her younger brother, and her mom shared her home and life. When she met her soon-to-be-husband, I welcomed him as my brother-in-law. But love is blind, and all good things must come to an end. Her mother moved out first, being the loser in the fight between man-of-the-house and matriarch. Her brother was asked to move out last, being the loser in the fight between man-of-the-house and former man-of-the-house. I was kicked out right in the middle of the two. That night, I was asked to return my keys and remove my boxes that were neatly packed by the door to the curb. My sister said "our relationship is over."

As I stood at the curb waiting on my taxi and glanced back, I swear I saw my sister and her husband laughing as they peeked through the blinds. The blinds closed, ceased swinging, and never reopened. I never looked back.

But I saw that coming.

Never become roommates with your best friend, they said. It'll *ruin* your friendship, they said.

Friends since freshman year. Endless laughs, countless hours spent together. Where you saw one, it was typical to see the other. Selflessness manifested in us; I had her back and she had mine. Ride or die had literal meaning. Sitting shotgun while she drove crying through the rain on a hunt for her boyfriend. Offering me a place to stay for as long as I needed it, when living with my sister felt like living inside an igloo with a black cloud over it. Playing in her hair for an hour till she fell asleep, just cause she asked me to as she cried over whatever guy she was with at the time. I moved in with her, and it all continued up until the last few months. Little things annoyed us about the other. Her obsessive behaviors aggravated me. Logic didn't live there. The same conversations I used to tolerate now sounded like the incessant dripping of a water faucet. We argued, and eventually came and went without speaking. One night, I was on the phone with a friend when she walked in. "Alanna, I almost got shot right outside the house. The bullet missed me by an inch." I looked at with her as much interest as I would had she said the sky was blue. I listened, blinked occasionally, and slowly nodded my head. Even mustered up a dry "Oh? That's crazy." – *until no hints were taken*. I diverted my eyes, and spoke into the phone "But you were saying?"

Our friendship, shot through its heart.

But she should have seen that coming.

wear a helmet

Sarah Simon

goosebumps carry his rage
on an oblong base--
four wheels,
one skater,
all the mistakes in the world.

but his slips are truest
in form, in
style, in agony.
he just slips back and forth,
gladly.

a grip on grip tape teaches the let-
go,
to catapult toes from the deck and
lend sense to a vessel,

is confined to an ellipse of
ollies and aials and flips,
tricks.
tricking himself all the while
knowing it

the ledge jumps gasp ellipses,
howl polyurethane,
taunt cement
from an
angle.

he is a skater and knows only of
skating,
he is a creator and knows only of
breaking.

waiting he

again and over

and

I clap and take a
sidestep.
I hail his feet, the
orchestrators.
he is his own
ground,

but I hate the sound.
it is

more than a disturbance.
it is the
art
of falling,
in its infallible form,
shrieking,
convulsing,

s my skull
flattening,
dura mater staving
in,
elegance.

in his art he is oblong
in my invasion I was
split—

seizuring it

a gaping memory hailing
mortar,
bestowing its blanks to
a mistake he never made.

sandals on, believing
a grip, not
knowing it.

Tour

Tyler Their

Stories above the inertia
Lies a better sentiment,
One that transforms from nihilist
To romantic.

I took her hand and we traversed
The soul of our city.
The lights and the history,
Our palaces of musing and our views
In the clouds.

She soars far above it.

I return now in a brighter fervour,
No longer a bleak critic
But a beautified filter.

We soar.

