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FALL 2024  
SPRING 2025



# THE PLUM CREEK REVIEW

FALL 2024  
AND  
SPRING 2025

PUBLISHED BY  
THE STUDENTS OF OBERLIN COLLEGE  
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## Early Morning Moon

*Heather Ann Shepard*

Early morning moon—  
yawning with me as I count  
the stars next to it.

## **tomorrow**

*Elizabeth Martin*

i remember  
when today was tomorrow  
when i wished and wished and  
wished  
on shooting stars that kept  
dying.  
i remember  
when hope hurt  
and laughter flirted with tears  
and i'd lay and lay and lay  
and sink  
down  
into the stillness of the ground.  
i remember when yesterday was  
today  
and today was tomorrow  
and tomorrow  
was impossible.

# Kiosko

*Fernando Garcia Biestro*



## **simon says**

*Evelyn Moskowitz*

simon says put your hands on your head  
simon says put them down  
simon says clap once  
simon says clap twice  
simon says wave goodbye to your friend  
you will see her next summer and the one after that  
but you will never be close again

simon says go driving with your dad  
simon says go two miles under the speed limit and ten slower than you'd go if he  
wasn't there  
simon says crane your neck dramatically at the stop sign so he knows you looked  
both ways  
simon says you're too far to the right  
simon says pull into the grocery store parking lot  
buy the chips your little brother liked last year  
gotcha

simon says apologize to your mother  
for the hundred things you said in the heat of the moment  
and the thousand things you never did  
simon says hug her  
simon says tell her you love her  
simon says promise her you'll be more conscientious in the future  
simon says if you keep saying it it'll someday be true  
promise her you'll call every day  
gotcha

simon says your little brother is a year older than you think he is  
(no, really.

fine, simon says go ask him.

see? simon's always right)

simon says take him out for ice cream

simon says drive exactly the speed limit

you wouldn't want to teach him bad habits

simon says ask him about school

simon says interrupt him two sentences in to reminisce about your experience

simon says grow up

simon says try harder

simon says your target is arranged differently now and you don't know where  
anything is

simon says find the toy section and spend fifteen minutes admiring the legos

simon says pick up the millennium falcon set that you wanted when you were  
eleven

simon says it's fifteen dollars more than you expected

simon says put it back

you were never going to buy it anyway

simon says drive past your old high school and don't stop because you're not  
ready yet

simon says your ghost is still sitting third chair cello and your f#s are still flat

simon says your friends are all gone now and you don't know where because you  
never did get that coffee over winter break

simon says you grew up

simon says you moved on

simon says they did too

simon says clap once  
simon says clap twice  
simon says put your head in your hands  
simon says weep for the yous you could have been and the yous you couldn't have  
but like to think about  
simon says keep driving  
don't look back  
gotcha

## Prozac for Pilgrims

*A. J. Frantz*

Instead of a miniature devil on my shoulder,  
I have a dismissive old man  
who tells me that Puritans weren't depressed  
and that SSRIs are not in the Bible.

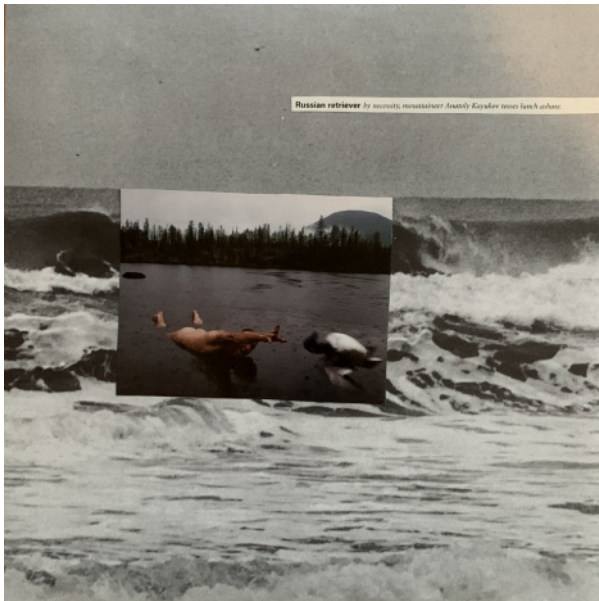
Maybe exercise, community, and vitamin D  
really are the keys to happiness.

Maybe crop yields are less stressful than student debt  
and witch trials aren't as scary as world war.

Or maybe there were hordes  
of pilgrims on the *Mayflower*  
who couldn't talk about their feelings  
and were born too early for psychiatry.

# Russian Reciever

*Celeste Wicks*



# Rocky Neck

*Eve Moniz*



## Friendsgiving, Freshman Year

*A. J. Frantz*

Friday, 5pm, my place.

I'll bake the bread and you can bring  
the tales of best friends I've never met  
and places known only through postcards.

Pass the butter, please, thanks, and tell me  
about each drunken midnight hike up Mount Oread,  
about your roommates' girlfriends' boy-friends, and the  
new memories you're making in Lansing and Boston.

I struggle to swallow your stories, they're too thick,  
they get caught in my throat before I wash them away.  
The chorus of your laughter sings of someone else  
and my once-favorite melody now rings through my ears.

On this day I give thanks for sharing a timezone  
until tomorrow, when we'll share nothing but memories.

# Sa Fille Gentille et Affectueuse

*Eve Moniz*



# Grandma Ruby's Refrigerator

*Lucy Burton*

## Part 1: ENTRY

Scuffed elbows, knees, knuckles,  
i flocked to crumpled papers covered in scribbles

Boiled chicken soup

A secret recipe

My mothers blood, sweat, and tears.

floral napkin placed in my lap

Spills were inevitable

Savoring every sip as it dribbles

down my chin

*"You're so mature for your age"*

## Part 2: JOANNE

My ears perked at gossip oozing from the pores of perfumed leathered skin and  
costume jewelry

i always had a nightmare in the same bed my father wore matching pajama sets and  
still had hair.

Goosebumps crawling up my skin, even though she breathed

*"Good night god bless"*

into my ear

i hid a crystal cup of Manischewitz under the table in a dress I outgrew the next day.

My grandma would be waiting for me, tapping her freshly painted nails

and every sugary cereal

and playhouses

and uncomfortable couches

and highschool musical on dvd

and twenty-five ashtrays that were out  
of commission.

I sense you within the woven layers of sweaters that once clung to your body.  
*“You’re so mature for your age”*

### Part 3: THINGS IN MY GRANDPA’S KITCHEN

two boxes of cheerios (one honey the other plain) two boxes of frosted flakes (one half  
the size of the other) One box of rice krispies, cream of wheat, two boxes of cookies.  
Believed to be my mother?

Sociable smile plastered on in defense.  
bathroom smelled like your wife, now a faceless name within the heap  
within a mind of peanut butter scraped at the sides, I’m now a woman where a doll  
once stood  
imprison a moment in a bronze frame that will collect dust,

dissipate. within the hour.

Dementia driven, wearing wool sweaters, generous (waiting for a thank you),  
*“You grew up so fast”*  
*“You’re so mature for your age”*

### Part 4: ARM CHOPPED AT THE JOINT

I’ll hold you hostage in the box in my closet  
Go on, mingle with memorabilia.

lone socks  
and self hatred  
and stains  
and sequins  
and barbies with faded faces.

i overextended an supple hand to reach for dried up markers, squeeze every ounce left  
Breasts budded, bleeding, a burden.

Designated as scribe.

Recall, remember, retrieve, recollect.

but end up

wandering.

*“You’re so mature for your age”*

### Part 5: THE POINT OF NO RETURN

Trusted me with keys to a metal box, a death machine

I used scissors to cut my bangs      badly

Hairs on the back of my neck perk up

my mother held me

My clothes fit but my skin is tight

How long do I linger at my front door

Before it isn’t mine anymore

i remain yearning for monkey bars and calloused palms

Napping against seatbelts and having socially acceptable tantrums.

*“You’re so mature for your age”*

### Part 6: FLY

When i turned seventeen they sewed feathers into my spine

I jumped out of the nest, arms unfurled only to find myself

falling.

i will crawl back up the steps to the house that isn’t mine.

find sanctuary in my bones

Feathers depart from vertebrae

Spiraling

down.

And they still tell me.

*“You’re so mature for your age”*

# Lover's Musings

*Veronica Mahoney*



## Street Scene, Midnight

*A. J. Frantz*

The woman is splayed across the gutter,  
again, nodding her head to some distant rhythm  
as nightclub buzz seeps across the sidewalk.

She stirs, leaning back, and as I watch  
I can almost guarantee she's about to  
roll over, pass out, chuck up.

But she only stares, eyes aglow, fixated  
at the dusty saucer in the sky, brown irises  
reflecting the speckled atmosphere.

Just once, I wish she'd  
look at me that way.

Reflections  
*Veronica Mahoney*



## Music Box Ballerina Wannabe

*Suna Erdim*

Release yourself  
and tell me I'm vain  
Then maybe, as you say, it'll all go away  
Pick a book off our nightstand  
where my Camel packs lay  
Read its dense, refined words, trust its sober despair  
Believe me when I gush that the human condition looks ravishing  
on your white floral shawl and your sleek golden hair

Numb me of love  
Let me carve my own space  
And don't stop me, my dear, from living in this state  
But be every bit as earnest as your blossom-pink face  
when you say that I'll fade into bone at this rate  
Only be what you are when you look down the drain

Don't be right, don't kiss me, just tell me I'm vain—  
perhaps like a sylph on the brink of decay  
perhaps just a bit pretty in a terrible way

**Torren**  
*Eve Moniz*



## second hand

*Elizabeth Martin*

sometimes i feel like  
that robot from that movie  
made entirely of second-hand parts  
—it's not easy to be pre-loved—  
and i know i should be grateful that i'm  
not  
actually  
broken  
but i'm creaky in all the places  
i shouldn't be  
and my body is  
too loud  
for anyone to hear.

## cavity

*Nick Barr Bono*

maybe im wrong about it all.  
maybe god is an unguided hand  
and people cruel and senseless.  
maybe i could crush the world  
between my smartest teeth  
and find nothing but blood for juice.  
then again, the filling there.  
then again, the man who filled it  
and the drilling before the filling  
and the whole ordeal of care besides.  
then again, my teeth sit in a row  
like children before a teacher  
so, within the bitter and the numb,  
there must be something to learn.

# Swallowed

*Eve Moniz*



# Live Observation

*Eve Moniz*



## It Wasn't Such a Great Time

*Violet Green*

When we were together he called me 'kid'. He said things like 'Come home kid' and 'I miss you kid' and 'you're alright kid' and I asked him once if he thought I was pretty. I asked him because I was unsure and because he had slept with Katie, whose grace empties mine out into nothing. She is pale and frail with long black hair and gray eyes. Her face is like the sea. And she is always there, making tea and asking if I'd like some. *Yes thank you I would like some tea.*

He told me that when I was beautiful I could be very beautiful but mostly I was full and dead, and he said I was a whore.

"Why am I a whore I haven't done anything. And you slept with Katie again. She told me."

Then he said "You know what you are," and he called me useless and I called my dealer.

Christmas: I arrived at the place and Katie said she had a gift for me, so did the bad man. Katie turned back into her room to retrieve it, came out with the white fur coat I would always steal from her rack, said I could keep it. He had a white fur coat in his arms as well, leaning tall in his doorway. When he saw Katie's gift he said I only needed one coat, he set it down and gave me a hammer in its place.

When the phantom hands (of past, involuntary lovers) took hold of me where I lay next to him in his bed I took the hammer to my legs. I tried to beat them away and they wouldn't go. He said he watched me go at it for a while and then later took the hammer. My bottom half was purple afterwards. Some days of that week he'd press his lips against the sad bruises, gentle. Other days his fingers roughly into them, laughing while he fucked me.

Strange girl brought about by my man once seized up on Katie's floor. Katie and I stole her cigarettes before checking she was alright. She was alright. She said it was DT's, that she was trying for sobriety.

“Good you stopped.” I told her. She couldn’t find her cigarettes, so I offered her one of mine and told her to go. “We don’t know you very well.” Katie said.

“Just for today. Easy does it. But for the grace of god go You! Wish you well.” I sang into her back as she walked out the door, tripping over herself.

Katie said she was lying, “Delirium Tremens is rare, and she was not afraid. For me, with that, the world fell in on itself. The walls spoke, saying awful things. Men were without faces, saying awful things.” I said it was a pretty descriptor for a sad position.

One night I told her over a bottle of something that I thought I loved her more than I loved him and she said she knew. She said she loved me too and she said she was sorry she loved him but that it wasn’t fair how he hurt me. I asked her if he hurt her too, when he was with her, and she said “Of course not, he loves you with everything he has, me only with parts.”

Halfway down the bottle I said there must be something wrong because I couldn’t remember most of the stories she told me. They were all about me, and I couldn’t remember them well at all. Sometimes I wasn’t high for days and I still couldn’t remember. The walls were very thin. She heard more than I did through those walls because even when I was inside that room I was very far away. She heard him shout and she heard things fall and it seemed she felt my hurt more than I did. I didn’t feel it much at all except when I was away from him. When he stopped shouting and hurting me he held me and it felt better than anything else. It felt better than anything I will ever feel again and he almost killed me but I didn’t mind, didn’t have a mind for that.

I woke up one evening in October in Katie’s bed and she was crying, she said “Please don’t ever do that again.” I reached into my pocket to check if I had the rest of the baggies and they were gone. I screamed at her.

She had administered the antagonist when she found me on her bathroom floor. She found me on her bathroom floor after she had asked me for space because she couldn’t stand his screaming and my silence anymore, it was making her sick. She found me on the bathroom floor after I said of course you can have space, and I guess in a depressed blackout I’d bought the baggies and gone back upstairs to get the rest of my things, went into the bathroom to do just a couple lines but even one was too

many and I woke up to Katie's crying and the baggies gone. I screamed into her eyes that I hated her for waking me up. I told her I wanted to be left dying and she had ruined everything. But that wasn't true. I had only wanted a high. I let her hug me and then tore out of the room, taking the trash can from underneath the kitchen sink and bringing it out into the hall. I found 7 full baggies in there and left with them and none of my things, the trash can still there in the hallway.

Another evening late in the October of my love for the bad man: I wore a pale blue tulle gown, custom made and shipped from overseas. I arrived back at Katie's to find that he had finished what was left of my bottle, when I had said specifically to leave some for me. I turned out the door immediately after having come in, telling him I hated him and leaving him seated at the table.

Outside then, in Alphabet city, I began to run. My dress dragged and caught but I kept running and people watched. I ran for ten blocks and somehow amassed a little line of homeless men at my trail, I think because of the dress. The bad man found me all the way at east Houston, crouched at a corner and surrounded by the people who'd decided to follow me. I had purchased some little blue pills that matched perfectly the color of my gown. He told me that a man living out on Katie's doorstep had said to him, when he first stepped out to come find me, the man had said: "Are you looking for the princess? She went that way." Delirious I giggled, and kissed him hard. He carried me home.

Tattoos all across his face and body, so thick those who didn't know him referred to him as the Maskman. Horrible nightmare tattoos but beneath them his face was sharp and hard and terribly beautiful. He stood tall with broad shoulders and people turned their heads away when he walked, afraid. Or turned their heads to me as I stood by him, concerned.

Back at Katie's I sat at the living room table and took out a plate, slamming the empty bottle on one of the pills I'd picked up and inhaling fast. Music I didn't like played too loud in the room but for me it was just there, like the air. A mangled illustration of Christ hung on the wall above the table, it bore its eyes into someone, not me. Nothing could see me.

Then someone was slapping my face as I leaned back, he was slapping me and I was falling out of the chair. Katie was holding a light to my eyes and I was grinning

madly. Someone said something about the pills being laced and I laughed, I thought I laughed. *Of course they're laced.* A man who was there I guess for Katie was commenting on the similar color of the powder and of my dress. They said they had no narcans, and I tried to say I didn't need any, but I couldn't speak at all.

For one month of that year Katie went off to see a sweet ex-lover who'd bought a farm somewhere quiet and asked her to come join him there for a while. I left on her bed an old telescope and when she found it she called me and said I'd left in the box six unfinished letters, all barely legible and unfinished, and only one making much sense. I asked her to read me that one: *I love you to anything.* I didn't remember writing them at all.

Death lived on me like a stain when I was with him but he was never the one doing the killing, even though he often promised that he would kill me, if I left.

Tonight I plead with the sun again that it not fall so fast from the sky. It ignores me completely. I fall to my knees whispering come back. And I am cold. It can't hear me, it doesn't matter that I'm quiet.

Death lived on me in that way because in many ways I chased it mightily. My favorite drug is the deadliest one and at that point in my life I had it on me all the time. I lived only for it and him, and sometimes for the music that shook me awake. I was shaken completely awake when I found my brother dead in his bathroom and I called my man, broken from shock and still hadn't brought myself to remove the belt from my brother's blue neck. I called my man and he said "Come over" but when I did he told me he had seen worse, lost three brothers of his own when he was young, and I needed to get over myself. I cried and he took my drugs away and I clawed to get them back and he hit me twice. I drank myself empty and felt something in me disappear.

My brother never said anything when I went to sit in his bed and sob. He just sat there and he didn't have to say he was there for me to know he was. He held me without touching me and it was more than enough, most of the time.

It was my brother who was the one to tell me the thing that took my love away from me. He said while I cried, "He only has the power you give him." And that tore everything away. Not immediately but after he was dead I knew it was true. I couldn't give him anymore. It wasn't right. But knowing is only that. It takes awhile for knowing to become movement, especially when there is a fear like the one that

lived in that house.

A year after Katie had moved away, and by that time I had gone too, she called me and said she still had one of the baggies she'd taken from my pocket when I fell in her bathroom. It was locked in a jewelry box that she kept on her dresser. And she had never touched it. I asked her on the phone why she kept it and she said *It is locked in a silver box. I don't know.*

She said she wishes she hadn't left, sometimes. She feels, like me, that umbilical tug. Some places you can never leave. You leave and you're gone but you never really go. The place could burn down and you're just there inside, still and soft and new and dying in perpetuum.

She said: *you died in front of me.* I said: *I love you to anything.*

# Horca, Colorado

*Eve Moniz*



## Empty Beer Can in the Pennsylvania Woods

*Clara Carl*

You rest neatly, rust  
quietly in clover. Held one last time  
in the hand you fed, preening  
as you shone your cold, thin shine.

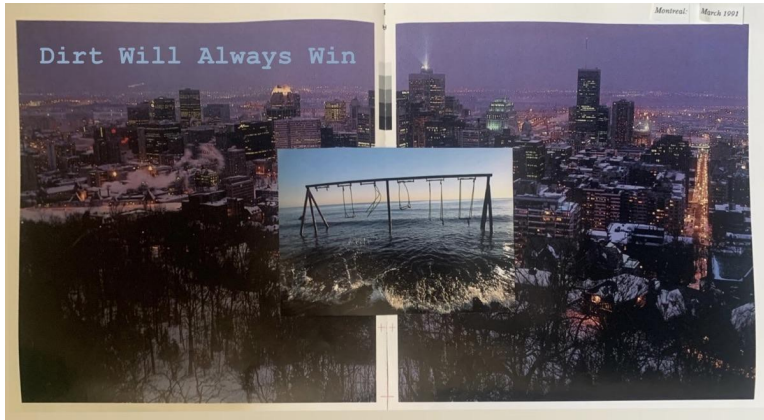
Once, you sagged with life. Firm, damp, gasping  
when the seal was broken. Bubbling up inside,  
somebody was drunk on you. Somebody's  
face flushed as they took you in. I see it:

Thick flannel. Plaid, played out.  
A man seeing forest through warm fire and  
plastic lawn chairs. A man sleeping  
in a four hundred dollar tent called nature.  
Truck running with the radio on, bed planted  
over clover clusters that cradle your body now.  
He plunged his strong hand into ice for you,  
scooped you out of unforgiving winter.  
You twinkled in that pink firelight.

Now you've turned brittle: Blistered by Sun,  
corroded by rain. Grass cradles your fragile,  
sleeping form. What do you think about in long dark winter?  
Do you miss his broad, needing hand?

# Dirt Will Always Win

*Celeste Wicks*



As night gives way to morning  
I reach the violet views  
"All cities die!"  
And what a shame  
That Dirt Will Never Lose

These hills will turn to islands  
That day, who sees this view  
My eyelids shut  
The wind tastes clean  
I remove my hat and shoes

My Grandma's name was Dorris  
Before that, I don't know  
And when I'm grown  
I'll have a son  
And I'll trace his name in snow

The dirt, right now, is thumping  
And buzzing in our hands  
Thinkin' stones break glass  
And steel won't last  
And dirt will cover skin

It tingles in my hands and heart  
Like, "Where do we begin?"  
Pull on my cap  
And spread my toes  
Singin' Dirt Will Always Win

# Umbrella

*A. J. Frantz*

Why does everyone else  
seem to own an umbrella?

When it pours, I only ever  
get spilled over.

Rain drags this mascara  
in black rivers to my soles

as these water-logged limbs  
try to stay afloat.

Maybe I missed the part  
where we all held curved handles

between microscopic hands  
to shelter ourselves from breaking waters.

Maybe there was a memo I missed  
on a sick day in kindergarten

where we learned to stay dry  
and never face gray skies alone.

Things might be clearer if I joined along  
in the parade of red, blue, polka-dotted

rayon clouds that hover around  
when storms come to linger.

But wouldn't it just be simpler  
if it didn't rain here

so damn  
much?

**Bloom**  
*Eve Moniz*



## My Nine Hours on a Portuguese Bus

*Iris Kreilkamp*

Now how do I approach this,  
(Like a bird with a branch, like little things for big things)  
How do I explain that one of those infinities you see in a night can live untouched  
In the olive grove where order is made from the twisted and gnarled fact of life.  
This is a jar of oil, so marinated am I (you know I'm briny, pickled by nature).  
Maybe every olive branch in the stories came from this tree  
In this field where we cross the Spanish border, maybe peace was born on a hill  
with a cow.  
How do I believe that all this sin came from a fruit,  
When a fruit is the closest to an act of heaven I'll ever get? So of course  
That is why I see god first in olives and strawberries,  
And that is why I know they got god all wrong.  
I'll tell you, it's in the olive jar, it's in the ground, it's in my stomach when it flips.  
So sin came from this fruit tree in the Spanish sun  
And I ate it and now I wish for a grove without rows,  
where olives unpicked fall on the ground, our infinities untouched decompose.

## Carretera Querétaro

*Iris Kreilkamp*

I watched a cactus keel over in the dust next to the highway.  
It's a giant, it's bigger than the sky  
and now it bows to some ashes in the dirt beneath it.  
This is a kinder sort of burial, one that stretches from beneath the black  
ground with a groan,

like an old man,

these hills face me bald with scrub brush like a question.  
(I have no answers. I'm rotten, becoming fragrant now,  
turned upside down and strung up to dry on the bones of the cactus,  
fruit like me don't discuss those sort of questions—  
pertaining to dead horses and dead cacti and the sunshine)

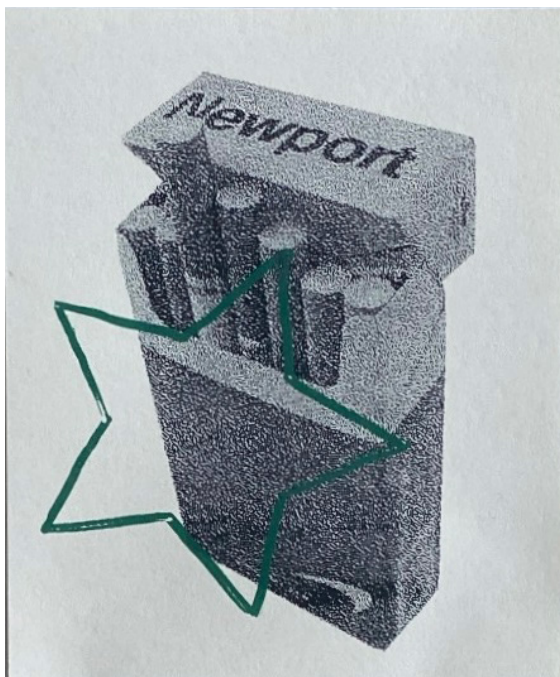
If god is anywhere it's probably here. It's written on the rocks.

So give me your sunniest spot,  
bury me halfway with red dirt by the roadside.  
Put me up on the mountain so I'm the first to see the sun,  
drape me in robes and water me good.

But since I cannot be a plant or god,  
make me a hummingbird  
so everything beautiful needs me,  
or make me a flower blown across the sidewalk.  
Sucked dry by the bird,  
Condemn me to a pretty oblivion underfoot.

# Untitled

*Ellis Liebeskind-Blaufarb*



## YOU ARE IN A THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

*Rafael Hart*

You opened the box and the cat is dead. You can close the box but the cat will still be dead. You are allergic to cats. You are still allergic to dead cats. Dead cats are still cats. You sneeze at the dead cat and close the box. Maybe it should have been Schrödinger's Rat. Nobody gives a shit about a dead rat. It should be noted that you did not put the cat in the box. The cat has always been in the box. You just opened the box. No one else wanted to open the box in case the cat was dead. You didn't want to open the box either but you did anyway in case the cat was dead. You are the only one here who is allergic to cats. No one else is looking at you or the dead cat in the box. No one saw you open the box. Maybe the cat would not have been dead if someone else had opened the box.

Enough about the cat and the box. You are in your house / apartment / dorm room / hotel room sitting on the bed. It's cold and you look at the goosebumps on your forearms. In between the goosebumps are faded little scars. If someone asks you say cat scratches. Remember you are allergic to cats. There is a window behind you and the sun is setting, rippling colors onto your forearms and the wall across from you. This part is real life. (This whole thing is real life.) Your mother is calling you—you can hear her through the door. She is not behind the door but your phone is ringing next to you. She'll have too many questions so you hang up. You feel like a little kid, like nothing is really that serious and you can stay in here forever, or climb a tree and let someone else help you down. You are not a little kid anymore but you have skinned knees and sometimes your voice still cracks. Don't get up. The sun has not finished setting yet. You can watch it project onto your off-white wall for a while, it will still be there years from now.

When the sun has set the room gets cold and the goosebumps on your forearms increase in number. This means that it is time to go outside. See the stars. Your bed will not disappear. Your house / apartment / dorm room / hotel room will not

disappear. Your feet sink into mud and leave no impressions, like you're a ghost, like you're weightless. You are going to pass people you know and they are not going to acknowledge you. (You are not going to know if this is because they do not see you or because they don't want to see you. To you it's both at once. Everything comes back to the box.) Mosquitos fill the air, gnats too, flies. The flies are relentless. They've blossomed from nowhere. They land on your shoulders and siphon out your blood so your shoulders itch and sting. There are fewer stars than there should be because of light pollution. It doesn't matter where you live because there will still be light pollution and the air will taste stale and you'll feel constantly like you have hair in your mouth even when you don't. Last night you took a Benadryl to fall asleep. Its residue still coats the backs of your teeth. You wonder if mosquitos like the taste of allergy medicine. Can a mosquito fly into your mouth and take your blood and leave your tongue itching. Light pours from people's windows. You can see them doing things, cooking, bending over a desk, watching television. Making out. Having sex. Who the hell has sex with the blinds up and the lights on. Like they want you to watch or they just don't care. Keep walking. Your feet are on asphalt now so they no longer sink. You think too much. You live in your head.

Your mother is still calling you.

Eventually you reach the edge of the city / town / campus and your feet burn from all the walking. Mosquitos and gnats and flies line your forearms, smooth now. No more goosebumps just bug bites. You feel like they've sucked away all your blood. You can still see the little faded scars even though it's so dark here. No one else can see them even when it's light out. You live in your head. You live alone. There's still light pollution at the city / town / campus border but there's less of it, you can see every star in the Big Dipper. The point of coming out here was to get high. The problem is the air tastes bad enough as is. The person you are thinking about won't leave your head so the weed will drown them out. The person you are thinking about would probably look so good under the stars.

Enough about the bugs and the stars. You are in your house / apartment / dorm room / hotel room lying in the bed staring at the ceiling. When the sun comes back up and projects onto your off-white wall you won't see it because you'll be staring at the off-white ceiling. You're burning up under the blankets. No goosebumps. The

floor is cold and your feet shy away from it. Something stinks of cat food. Remember you are allergic to cats. Your mother is calling you through the window. Her voice sounds just like glass. If you answer her you'll tell her everything. You'll tell her about the mosquitos and the person and the cat. The opened closed box. The hair and the Benadryl on the roof of your mouth. This is when you ask yourself who the fuck made this real life. (Who said this was real life?) This is when you open the window and stare straight into the blinding sun.

You closed the box but the cat is dead. No one saw you open the box so you can walk away and everyone else will think the cat is also alive. (Someone saw you open the box. You can walk away and he'll tell everyone or he won't. You won't be there so everyone will know and they won't.)

## Enough

*Elizabeth Martin*

It is not worth wasting a life  
trying to be all the best things.  
It does not matter if you run,  
or walk,  
or sit completely still.  
Lay your soul down  
in the cradle of this beautiful,  
terrible world  
because it is enough.  
It is enough to be alive.

# Rumi's Field

*Celeste Wicks*



## this is a love poem

*Marney Harris*

we drag  
our mattresses  
off the springs, to the floor  
blankets piled high  
pressed together  
six arms six legs  
two empty hands

my mom asks me  
if they have  
something  
more  
something  
other  
(yes)  
(what isn't)

we embrace  
the present gentle night  
pebbles crunch beneath  
six uneven rhythms  
three hearts steady  
four hands cling  
fending off  
the lurking scornful dark

friend or  
partner or  
(yes)  
lover  
(what isn't)

we intertwine  
arrange my  
two pillows for  
three heads  
one bed  
too small for  
three bodies  
dozing, dreaming, breathing  
as one

# Vote with your feet

*Eve Moniz*



# Fantasy Aphasia

*Celeste Wicks*





SPRING 2025

# BLACKBIRD AT NIGHT

*Chloe Mance*



## Seven Blackbirds

*Heather Ann Shepard*

In a moment of utter despair  
I looked out my window  
And the universe gave me a gift

Seven blackbirds  
gathered  
on a snow covered cherry blossom tree

For a moment sorrow's voice was quieted

And there was light

To be present is like a prayer  
Wind lifting worry's wings  
Until it disappears  
Landing in a tree, unseen.

## A Prayer for Springtime

*Trevor Smith*

Autumn has brought its fire  
So the geese gather  
In the shape of arrowheads  
To slice open the sky  
Spilling the blood of dusk  
Into the cupped hands of heaven

Follow them  
You will taste  
Clean water and burning light  
You will know that their hearts  
Are filled with only faith

They trust that the land  
Will be green and warm  
And all they leave  
Will be theirs again someday

Hear them cry  
It is a summons,  
An invitation,  
A devotion  
To you  
To each other

*This is love*  
They sing  
*This is love*

## two hicks talk sweet blood

*Alifair Durand McDonnell*

i can only ever find it in me to be melancholy. i never did cut my hair that summer and no one came to see me before i left. i watch you dip your toes in the dark water, clogs and soft wool socks still on.

“did you know that only female mosquitoes bite?” you say, slapping the warm expanse of your shin, the space between your carhartts and merino stripes. i laugh. it makes sense. in a month or two, i’ll become ravenous with the need to run to you, october, cranberries bobbing in the stagnant marsh.

“they like you,” i say into my arms, knees drawn in. a wavering, golden crescent begins to rise above the crabapple treeline.

“maybe you’ve got sweet blood.” and i can picture it, too, cascade of bruises down your appalachia spine. we never had crickets like this in virginia.

“what’s your type?” you ask suddenly, except it isn’t really sudden.

i turn to study your face, switchgrass-bright in the autumn dusk. it’s real loving, the way you look at me, and for a moment i feel chokecherry guilt pressing against my ribcage—like watching a foulhook struggle in the net.

“i like boys with bright eyes and dark hair,” i reply, easy. i think of the heron tattooed on my back, the dips and twists of the creek below. i’d kiss you again if you asked, still wouldn’t pull away first. that’s your job, sweet-blood.

## “I am running away to the mountains in August.”

*Zoe Cox*

I am running away to the mountains in August.  
Sometimes it is a certain headache that tells me so  
sometimes it is a text from a friend  
or the feeling of waking up without having slept;  
I am going to class or eating dinner, and then I am elsewhere.

Find me stepping among the nightshades  
baptism white bonnets bowed against the alpine rain,  
Here I am wineberry-tinted, rosy in the sun  
communing with the russet cows in the golden hour of their pasture,  
If not there, I am sewn into the pillow moss, eroding at the water's edge  
a cell washed in the dilation of a nest of arteries,  
Find me resting my eyes.

Often I am fallen to roost on a boulder fortress roof  
dropped by unseen hands in thunder and then silence,  
Or forty four hundred feet up, tucked into bedrock  
(through a narrow window of summertime tundra I smell snow I cannot see),  
And then laying unblinking beneath the wide amber respite of the wildflowers  
for they are hardier than I and with luck they might obscure me,  
Friend, find me weeping.

I am in the mountains in August, and the wind is high.  
Watch me throw my tears so they might be carried down into the valley  
and become too small to recognize,  
to the roughened south face stoop

where coffins take the things that fall  
or if my arm is good, across the village  
and become currents in the lake on the other side.  
I throw my tears but I am downwind and I am weak and they are thrown right back  
to me  
I swat them and they sting.

There is an imprint of my body in the hillside, foxglove-overgrown.  
Threads that tied me to the water's edge wither, come unsewn  
I lose my balance on the blunt flatness of the ground;  
I am running away to the mountains in August, and then I am here.  
Sometimes it is a certain headache that tells me so  
sometimes it is a text from a friend  
or the feeling of waking up without having slept.  
It is the restless right side calf cramp after 5 hours on the turnpike, still not halfway  
home,  
golden hour waning and I smell snow I cannot see,  
a walking hurt that blisters under a march of headlines  
and I am going to class or eating dinner.

# That Town

*Tommy Chen*



## Ocean City

*Zoe Cox*

I am fascinated by the aesthetics of the seaside  
that peculiar Atlantic flavor of Americana—  
Partitioned pastel condos with their Victorian turrets, bay windows, white trim  
punnett square sprawl of cousins  
trailing towards the shore  
Boardwalk Kitsch; fiberglass faces hawk hermit crabs in wire coops  
painted ladies lounging like friends you almost knew  
Display glass scrubbed by salt-skimmed air, anemoia windows recall back further,  
foggier, foggier  
Inside you spy a legion of parasols, two thousand two hundred fifty-six strong  
diorama waves play chasing games with children on the shore, scatter and squeal like  
gulls  
Blue-brown stirring at the bottoms of bottles for sale,  
world's widest bifocal  
but you forgot the glasses in the car so it's all sort of one  
beneath the motor racket of advertisement biplanes  
and the incandescent open hand of the sun  
Even after you leave, the sand follows you home.

## North Carolina Beach

*Audrey Healy*

Yesterday, as I stood at the edge of the road  
I thought I heard waves in the cars rushing by  
Soft foam speckled my thoughts  
And I was reminded of the ocean  
And as I think of the ocean, of course,  
I think of you  
*I think of sand between our toes  
And salt water in our eyes  
I think of late-night swims  
And digging for crabs by the shore  
I think of your cruel words  
And mine  
Like spit from my mouth  
I think of holding hands as the water crashes against our ankles  
While the sun stings us  
and splatters us with raw, red patches  
I think of Bathing suits and the reminiscent scent  
Of sunscreen lathered on our backs  
And the shrieks of seagulls above  
I think of getting lost on that North Carolina beach  
Trying to hide from you  
And you crying, looking for me  
And I recall the feeling that overwhelmed me  
When I saw your tears fall  
It never once rained on that beach  
But somehow, I remember it did*

*Hard and rough*  
*With thunder booms like our father's voice*  
*And lighting strikes like our mother's*  
*Tearing me down until my guts spill out on that beach*  
*And the sand soaks it up*  
*And the seagulls take the rest*  
*And I can no longer speak*  
*I can only stand, speechless, with wide eyes as*  
*The wind makes my hair dance,*  
Like it does when cars rush past me  
And I hear the waves  
And I see the ocean  
And I think of you and me  
On that beach in North Carolina

## Where Branches Grow

*Trevor Smith*

From the wellspring of heaven  
Comes flowing, unstained wings  
The cardinals still radiating  
The gift of dawn, settle on ice-laden branches  
Bobbing their heads, eyes keen to catch  
The shifting haze of unburied insects

One of them, scoops low,  
Swallows the wind without song  
And crystals burst from its feet  
As crimson sings the muddy treeline

Out where the forest ends  
And hands have claimed the soil  
For the tidiness of wheat and corn  
The stalks, once broken, now reach,  
Whole and fruitless, toward wings  
Longing to be rootless, longing to be bright,  
Longing to return  
To where branches grow

## Star Burning by the Northeast River in August

*Alifair Durand McDonnell*

The last six months of June found you running: racing to the tadpole-creek, smooth and cold, glimpses of flashing-velvet scales. Laugh thrown over one blonde shoulder. Heavy-ripe tomatoes dropping into your cupped hands. Found you wading through raspberry-saltwater thickets with bright calves bleeding, currant-sweet, into the surf. The chicory and asters burned the earth that summer, pinwheels blinding against tall, brittle grasses. The last six months of June found you packing dry soil into crescents beneath your fingernails.

## Late June

*Zoe Cox*

There was this cranberry juice chromaticism to the air;  
unphotographable  
meant for backdrops of films immortal in spooling mylar  
and the lull after birthday parties

I vacationed in the rosy sweetness of the almost-night.

Awe-struck tourist, you dressed up for this?  
oh, but summer loves me as her own  
still knows me through the Alençon nest of my hair  
and the foggy eyes of humid periphery  
in careless lamplight sings me lullabies—

I was cast in her windblown shadow on the driveway.

Crushed as paper, wound as ribbon roiled the clouds;  
wax footprints down red velvet dripped the sun  
lightning winked and interlaced pale distant fingers  
bade me back to the easy orange beyond the storm door, tucked inside

And she kissed my palms through the fireflies.

## **Orange**

*Jackie Todd*

I wish I could  
Peel the orange of my mind  
To let the world know  
Its citrus mist  
And leave these narrow peels  
Somewhere to rot  
And grow again into fruit

## **Focus**

*Jackie Todd*

Synaptic bramble path  
Flows like an undersea current  
Resigned to efficiency's math  
No hermetic force can stir it  
It is good at what it does  
It is lost on care and love

# UGH, MORNING

*Chloe Mance*



## On sinking.

*Shannon Schulz*

When I can't feel the golden sun move low  
Or see reflection in black mirror's face  
Because the mirror shows a tepid glow  
That set and rise of the sun did replace

Reproaching eyes will ask me where I've been  
To their distress, I have nothing to say  
Despaired, I know I'm gone, but unsure when  
My spirit left this husk and slipped away

Except—Hoping all will pass in phase,  
Weak, I provide, "I'm not myself these days."

**, and empty of rain ...**

*Liam Campbell*

The must fire blinking  
is caught in dry wind,

And then quiet wailed over like I've mazed out of wherehood  
And empty of traveling coins, and empty of rain ...  
And stolen of blue like I've sunken from something,  
And I hum like a dragonfly's wing in deep water ...

In the throat folded  
sits written a poem  
in hunger one chooses to eat and retain.

## Shine

*Audrey Healy*



Shine, baby  
No, don't look away  
Let it burn your eyes,  
Set your skull ablaze;  
Taste it in the way  
It coats your nerves  
And licks your retinas  
Then tell me really,  
If it truly hurts,  
Or if liberation  
Has more worth

## Sweat Sestina

*Alexandra Ingram*

Intimacy is impermanent and the room was hot.  
They were in the Mojave Desert, where the Joshua Trees grow  
sideways like the subtle curve of a back pressed down.  
Out the window, the air smelled like the breath of a saint.  
Inside - the man was birchwood, stale and hard.  
*What is it like to be etched in blue?*

As they retired to bed, the sky turned a sunken blue—  
that was more like a denim, darkened from being too hot.  
They slipped under the damp sheets, and as he grabbed her neck hard,  
she thought about how it takes Joshua Trees 50 years to grow.  
It takes a man an immense skill to deceive—to be a saint.  
But it takes a woman a sharp will to preserve—to get down

on her knees. Her throat was smooth, coated down  
in knob creek bourbon. As his grip tightened, she turned blue,  
but her eyes stayed soft like a saint.  
Their skin began to melt together, too hot—  
like the searing spirit after it tries to grow,  
but ends up stuck in place, hard.

It has been getting harder  
to find love in this blinding sun. And as he looks down  
at the woman in front of him, who can't grow  
out of the buried blue  
that sits in her chest, burning hot  
like the trying saint—

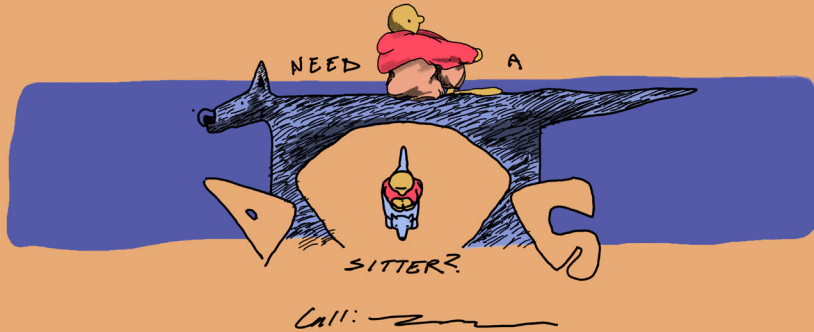
he weeps. Tried to hold her like a saint:  
discovered salvation is hard  
when the sweating desert is too hot.  
She has been slipping away like sand down  
the dune. He's sculpted her unfair, painted her blue—  
but asks her to be green, and grow

like the Joshua Trees. It takes a Pinyon Pine ten years to grow  
to its fullest height. It takes a saint  
to tell the man that the veil will always be blue.  
And one day the woman will slap him hard  
on his crooked nose and shove him down  
with a shaking hand when the desert is no longer cruel, hot.

Can growth happen when soil is hard?  
Can saints still breathe when their heads are shoved down?  
Can a blue sun keep the heart beating? Can it keep it hot?

# Dog Sitter

*Julian Cross*



OVERNIGHT CARE WILL BE EXTRA. IN THE HAPPENSTANCE YOUR DOG KEEPS ME UP I WILL ALSO CHARGE EXTRA. I LIKE MY SLEEP. DONT WORRY I WONT SIT ON YOUR DOG. THERE IS A CHANCE I MIGHT FEEL THE NEED TO KEEP YOUR DOG THOUGH. I ONLY SIT LOCALS.

## A Commoner's Guide to Arthurian Romance

*Evelyn Moskovitz*

Welcome in, sit round the fire, I've got a tale to tell  
Of a fair English court of old, so listen for a spell  
We open in great Camelot, or maybe Caerleon  
Or even Winchester will fit the purpose of this song  
Follow the river, mind your step—d'you see that castle there?  
There lives King Arthur, noble man, and his Queen Guinevere

Within the walls stands circle board, with many seats around  
Arthur's knights sit equal there, in numbers all abound  
Gawain is near the man himself, as suits kin of the king  
But Mordred is quite far away, though same blood does he bring  
Sir Kay's been here the longest and Sir Galahad the least  
And Lancelot's the best of them, though Frenchman does he be

Hold fast to your attention—hark! A stranger has arrived  
The noise drops to low murmurs, queries, and asides  
Who might be this damsel, both tearstruck and quite fair  
She must have need of a strong knight to help in her affairs  
Or is this gent another knight from quite a different court  
Has he a game or challenge, what thing does he purport

The crowd clears quick, allowing through this unexpected guest  
And, though the questions do not cease, the volume lowers, lest  
A person miss or just not hear the judgment of the king  
So pilgrim him approach, with haste, in search of fair ruling  
Arthur awaits upon his throne, unsure of what he'll do  
But here, fair reader, here and now, our story splits in two

A needful lady quester must dispose of some crude cad  
Arthur will pick the bravest knight, or a plucky kitchen lad  
The two of them will off, away! Take down the loathsome brute!  
And in the process, fall in love, as a romance does suit  
The knight will stab and slash and strike to demonstrate his skill  
And when the time is right, look now, he won't go for the kill

Rather, send this erstwhile rogue back home to Camelot  
Or Caerleon or where'er else Arthur has placed his lot  
Meanwhile, our knight so brave and true, can claim his just reward  
In marrying the damsel, he becomes a landed lord  
Oh, he was probably an asshole, or used excessive force  
But in Arthurian Romance, that's just par for the course

But if the mystr'y visitor be instead a mystr'y knight  
Then he must have a game to play, a challenge, or a fight  
A game would be quite welcome from a solid Englishman  
But if the man be French then he's against our citizens  
He's likely got them locked away and asks now for the queen  
And for a knight to test himself upon this Frenchman's green

Poor Artie boy won't take this well, he'll give up right away  
But fear not Guinevere, fair queen, Sir Lance shall save the day!  
Though first Sir Kay must lose you, and his honor as well—  
But what if the knight's English? Well, this game will be swell!  
Gawain will prove himself to be just short of what he thought  
He'll take the garter belt and flinch from Bertilak's just shot

Gawain will doubt his own self worth, and Lancelot will thrive  
Gareth will always get the girl, and Kay will always whine  
And as we followed every knight around where they had been  
The angels took Sir Galahad, for, if he lived, he'd sin  
'Cause though Sir Bors is virtuous, a virgin but for one  
Only the son of Lancelot from woman's charms could run

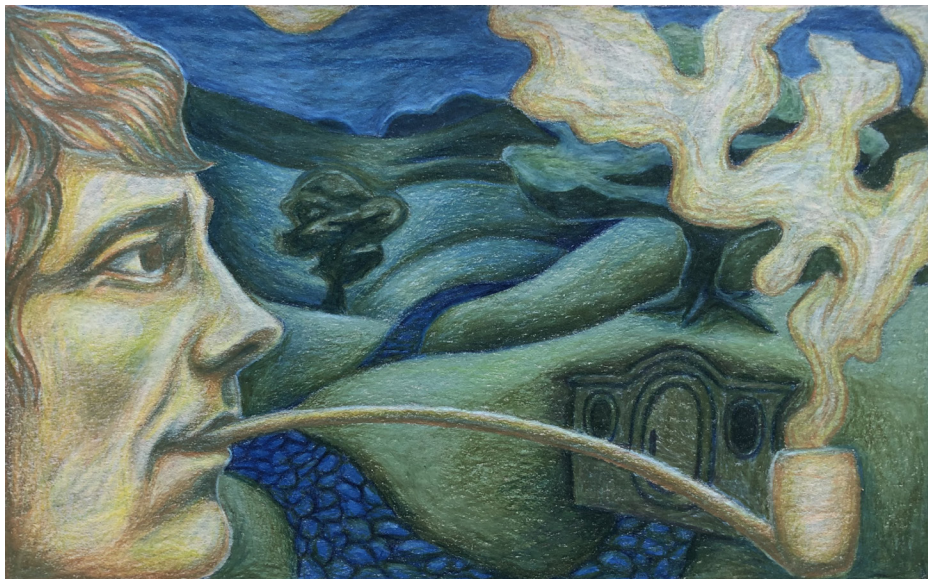
And through all this does Mordred lurk, for hero he is not  
No matter who's telling the tale, he'll destroy Camelot  
Whether he's Arthur's nephew, or incestuous, bastard son  
The land will be in ruins by the time ol' Mordy's done  
Yes, he divides the kingdom, but Gwen suffers the cost  
For always to a nunnery does she go when all's lost

Her love affair with Lancelot has brought Arthur's court down  
Yes, that was happ'ning this whole time, don't give me that frown  
I gave quite clear allusion—were you not listening?  
In their second meeting, he slew the son of a French king  
He dominated tournaments and gave her all he earned  
Far from a deftly hidden love, if Agravain can learn

And so the kingdom went to war with two secrets unskinned:  
Gwen's love defied her wedding vows, but Art slept with his kin  
And always at tale's end is mighty King Arthur killed  
Carried off to Avalon by women of magic skill  
Excalibur is cast away, ready for use again  
When Once and Future King returns to merry old England

# Bilbo in the Shire

*Camila Ciembroniewicz*



## White Roads

*Audrey Healy*

Simple white roads  
In an empty town  
Not enough salt to erode  
The snow weighing down

So my feet get stuck  
On walks with no direction  
Lest my boots fill with dust  
And I become my own reflection

Staring uselessly into myself  
Lost soul in a tight frame  
So I throw on soft felt  
And begin to make my way

# Right Here

*Julian Cross*



## **Blueprint**

*Liam Campbell*

The anger lives in a toolshed.  
I hid it there.

## **Story Haiku**

*Liam Campbell*

I sit at the rain  
Without a story to tell  
Myself this morning

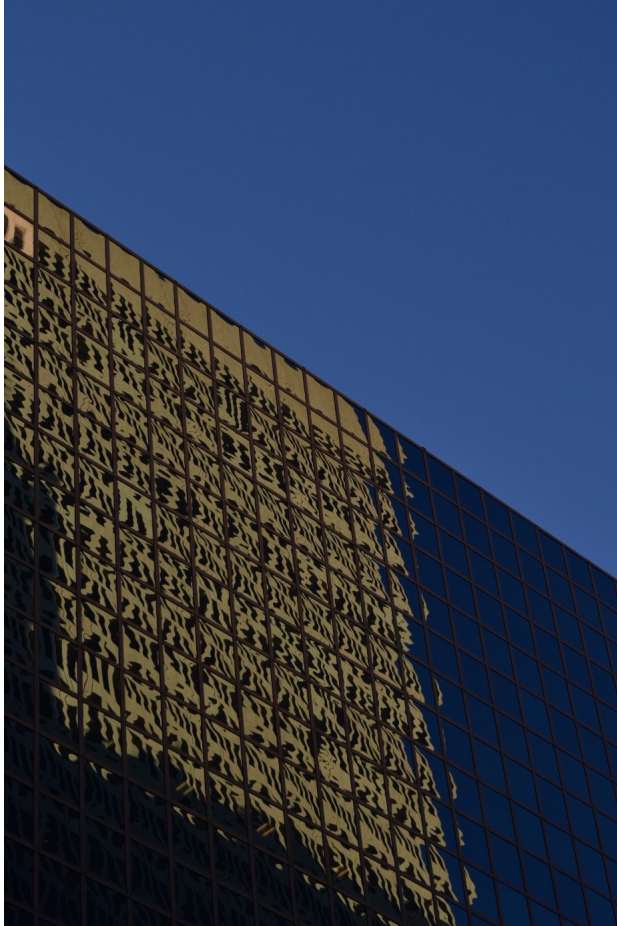
## **Truce**

*Liam Campbell*

A mirror on each side of my head,  
Two versions of my devout lisp,  
Recently I am interfaith.

# the remains of the day

*Anni Yang*



## Immutable, inescapable:

*Audrey Healy*

I sit by the window,  
As I often do,  
Looking at bleached grass  
And dimpled roads  
I think about a past that  
Does not exist in a future  
That will never be,

I think of traveling through time,  
To a place that cannot survive  
In the energy of our universe  
Because it sings to a  
Different frequency

If I twist the knob just right on  
The radio, will the static part  
To reveal a new dimension?  
One where time is stringy  
And stretchy, can be folded or  
Cut with sharp enough scissors  
Or bounce back onto itself

A conceptual theory is tangible  
In our minds—close your eyes  
And picture time, can you touch it?

Can your fingers brush an  
Effervescent aura of pure light  
Does it feel like carbonation?  
Or does it burn through you like fire?  
Does it wrap around you,  
Or does it shy from your touch?

Does it smell like smoking livewires?

Time and movement are not the same  
You cannot move through time,  
It is not tangible, it does not  
Exist in any scape beyond our thoughts  
In a brain that can only function  
Through repeated illusions of a  
Tangible force

Think about going back in time  
How nothing would change,  
Because your future already  
Exists, no efforts of regret  
Can alter what you already  
Know will come when you  
Open your eyes again

Try to touch it

Try to touch time, just try  
And then you will see

## Faith

*Trevor Smith*

The lotus flower  
Bursts from water  
Clotted with the dead

Its petals turn pink  
In the dawning light  
The sun, a sugar  
On the tongues of morning

On the path by Schenley Park  
A bird's body lies so flat  
You would think its beak  
Was its only bone  
Open toward the sky  
Waiting to swallow forever

The flies sing their psalms  
From ribcage pews  
They are so joyful,  
Meditating beneath  
Still feathers

# a pale view of hills

*Anni Yang*



## Altars

*(After Kiki Petrosino)*

*Lily Naifeh-Bajorek*

Broken shoe, dusty altar, the words for ritual fall short—  
badly cut and pasted pictures on a graying canvas.  
Stained rug from the kitchen gets beaten on the porch,  
covers us in motes the vacuum misses in its dances.

Freshly baked bread smell, bed a kiln of body heat.  
Broken shoe, dusty altar, the words for ritual fall short—  
so we make up our own language in the movements we repeat.  
Stained rug from the kitchen gets beaten on the porch,

bamboo beads that shimmer when strung up on a line.  
Freshly baked bread smell, bed a kiln of body heat,  
warmth of my lover's forehead pressed gently close to mine.  
We make up our own language in the movements we repeat,

make delight of them each time— in the winter we stay sweet.  
Delicate and swooping move our shoulders and our necks, swaying  
bamboo beads that shimmer when strung up on a line.  
Warmth of my lover's forehead pressed gently close to mine.

Languid breakfast in bed as crumbs imprint into hips,  
make delight of it each time— in the winter we stay sweet.  
I pencil shimmer on your eyelids, paint mascara with a flick—  
your blue flecked with gold is my cherries jubilee.

Several hours, superpowers, morning triumphs and is free,  
languid breakfast in bed as crumbs imprint into hips.  
Church bells and skin, the ear is whispering to lips  
'make delight in sacred grip' – in the winter we stay sweet.

## the office moved into your brother's old room

*Evelyn Moskowitz*

the office moved into your brother's old room  
the glass shower door doesn't block your view of the new paint  
the front door stopped sticking when dad fixed the hinge  
the kitchen floor's covered in vinyl that's flawless and smooth  
the couch stares down wine glasses you've never touched  
the carpet replacement creeps closer each time you come home

prithce: remember thy roots  
remember red in the squares of the old bathroom tile  
and the door that swallowed dad's key  
remember gazing upon birthday cards from the sunken three-seater  
even when thy foundation is gone  
replaced by blue-gray vinyl, seamless and fireproof  
and the busted baseball bats under thy brother's bed  
have been graciously given to goodwill

let's play a game of spot the difference  
here, i'll print out the sheets  
oops—I didn't realize your fire truck was still back here  
oh man, you haven't played with that in ages

## Plain for All to See

*Anonymous*

The shy boy leaned 'gainst the wall's nubby edge,  
His car'mel face hid from Black eyes probing,  
And steadied ears list'ning 'round the corner  
To his fulsome-bellied aunts' biting laughter.

Cackles rained down judgments swiftly rendered,  
The deluge swamping the boy's spongy spirit.  
Were his aunts not darker-purer than he,  
The tender nephew might've joined in their glee.

His dear mom's stance? That he couldn't make out.  
So he searched for a buoy, a lifeline – her voice! –  
Yearning, grasping, for sweet sounds to re-member,  
Any echoes of fam'ly be-longing...but found none.

Astute though he was, the boy did not know this:  
They suffered the same fear, his mother and he,  
That who they were plainly was not enough.  
So down the wall he slunk, alone, plain for all to see.

## The Things We Can Never Change

*Elian Lee*

last night the bugs were singing and i swear when i strained my ears, i could hear the  
sound of  
my father breathing in his sleep.  
shallow inhale too close to snoring  
exhale too close to a sigh of relief  
the kind of deep breathing that you fall into  
when you're too tired to run your heart any faster.

that's the only kind of breathing i know my father to know.  
aged kind of breathing. deep kind of sleep that sinks into the living room couch,  
the journey to the bedroom much too arduous  
for heavy, worked feet.

i closed my eyes and pretended i was breathing with him,  
and i wondered if he was always tired.

but it's just like that, i think.  
to miss someone so badly you search for the sound of their life in crickets of all things.  
to realize regrets only in the presence of absence.

the night before i left i held my ear to my father's heartbeat;  
ours didn't beat the same like i thought they did back then.  
it turns out if you're five and scared of the dark  
your father's heartbeat swallows you so perfectly you can't even hear your own.

but now you have to make your own sound—  
and really,  
what do you do with that?  
i wanted so badly to memorize the rhythm of his breath that night  
yet all i can remember is the tired effort of it.

a week ago i asked my parents to send me a package.  
*sorry*, my father replied sheepishly when i asked him why it had cost so much to ship.  
*i got a little bit greedy*  
*with wanting to send you so much.*

and how is that greed and all of this wanting,  
anything but love?

## Rosa

*Micah Kircheis*

We are only getting younger  
You and I.

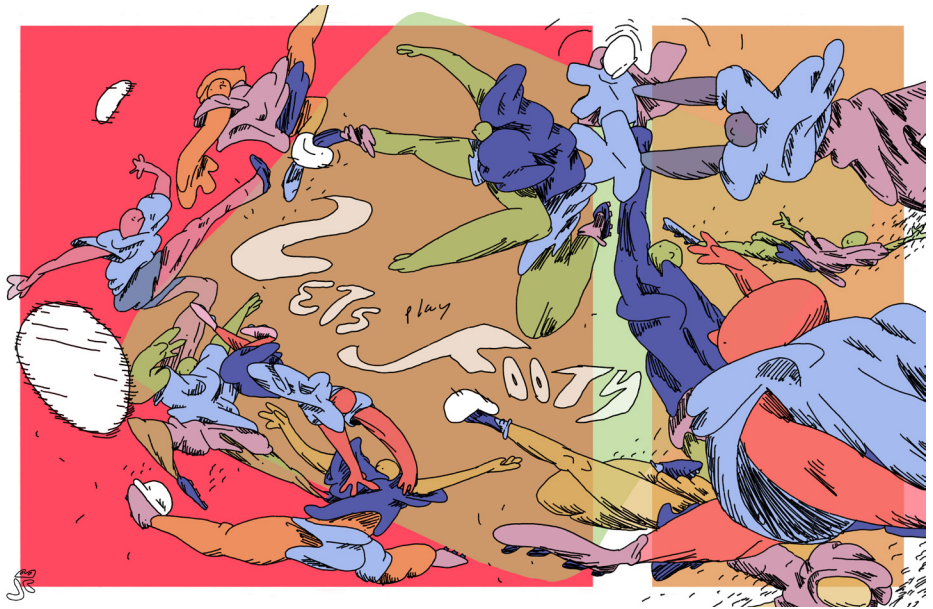
We are eating pizza and talking about our lives.  
I am you in this moment. I am the one getting in  
arguments, trespassing, stealing, lying.  
Less than a week ago—I had dreams adrift,  
chartered by the dying.  
But I feel loved. I feel safe, there are no longer  
nails wracking my spine.

We are fathomless molecules that make up a  
machine.

We are so small.  
I want to fall away in the face of it all.

# Let's Play Footy

*Julian Cross*



## Thinking Back on the Night When I

*Alifair Durand McDonnell*

bled aching-ragged on your mattress, rabbit-snare thirst, darting, flashing silver in the pomegranate net, your fingers carving salt-cut stars into each coldwater collarbone, shale, left hand dragging down for miles, virgin-iris, stepped in and out of my plum-pearl skin one hundred times, you didn't notice, passed through the poppy haze to trace a spiral on your spine, telling you i was sorry i wanted it, sorry i hit your teeth with mine when i kiss you, too-eager fox cub chewing on bone, straighten up and turn around and let my eyes slide past your easy jackal-teeth-bared-bright, i'm sorry i want to devour, never save, never set-aside-for-later lust, sturgeon fins fanned between your clean knuckles, i'm sorry i want to pry open my snaring jaws and force myself through them into yours, tender-rabid, silt, canines catching on my ribs when you swallow, i'm sorry i never pull away first, lapping at marrow, feral when i knew you the first time and every time after that, clothes and tongue stained nicotine-sweet.

## Wet Teeth

*Sarah Clemens*

Fade in. James opens the door, meets my living room with a slam. There is an easy style to him, a way of walk that makes him incandescent. His hips, they speak: *“Are you cool?” “Are you beautiful?” “Are you gonna hit me with your best shot?”* I turn from the couch and—not really—dig my thumbs into my eye-balls until they pop and bleed. Then I say hello, he says it back.

We’re going ghost hunting. It’s what boys do.

When James races right past me and into the kitchen, then back again, it’s to steal me and mom’s orange juice supply. He can never pour himself a cup, he has to one-hand the jug. “Hello,” he says again, holding the juice over his head. “Can I have this?”

I say yes.

Cut: James’ dad has a gun. Totally legal, for shooting deer. I know this because I’ve known James for a million years, and because last month we went werewolf hunting and he brought the gun with him, plus some silver-looking bullets, to take those wolves out if we got the chance. While we waited, he would press the barrel to my top-thigh, colder than the night. He made me want it.

No guns tonight. If a wall won’t stop a ghost, neither will metal. Tonight is a spiritual battle. We’ve been scaring all the monsters off with our tech, we figure. They see the guns and the radios and the thermometers, and they know we’re ahead. Future-men. So tonight, we get on the ghosts’ level. Then with the strength of our pure, God-fearing souls, we banish them from this mortal realm. Or we die. Not a big question.

Cut back: James sitting next to me, resting his chin on his fists. “Are you fucked up?”

“I’m OK,” I say.

“We can cancel.” He scratches his nose, then the patch between nose and mouth. “If you are.”

“I’m not.”

“Dude.”

I let the talk die in our mouths: I taste my spit in circles until we’re walking into the dark. Fade to black.

In the mornings my body is elastic. I lay in bed and experiment. Tap my fingers on the windowsill—tap-tap tap—until my arm gets a strain. Press down my neck, tilt till I feel dizzy. My stomach begs and the pillow tastes like me. I’m not real.

Fade in: James walking next to me, stomping his hiking boots. We’re halfway to the Frank House, this old, rotting haunt by the river. I think they’re tearing it down next summer. But for now it’s there in the woods, two stories, no locks. I guess it’s so far off the road, they can’t get security to watch it. James with his huffs and jacket. Head down, he always looks at his shoes when he walks. I want you to see him as I do, rotate around his chin, neck, crown. I don’t want you to look anywhere else.

When he graduates, he’s going into medicine. Did you know this? They’re going to let him do whatever he wants.

I’m going to make movies. Write, direct, produce, light—I’m going to do it all, total control. They’re not gonna be able to run a set without me. There’s gonna be more boys, and they’re gonna come unscrewed without my zoom and my filter. It’s about the frame.

This is the thought: I am very young, and some day I am going to be good.

Cut to the Frank House door, swinging at his touch, whining like a beat dog, Dark inside. Dark out. We hold our breaths and focus on being lights for ghosts to find.

Cut to the staircase, our steps echoing into the other, blob shadows on the wall, until we're one whole big man, not two kids.

When I'm alone and the shame spills over, I shout without reason: "I'm evil! I'm evil!", or "I don't love you!" I don't know who the "you" is, I don't know any of it, only that I've got to say the words.

Cut to the second floor. Cut to the roof, cut back. Cut to the roof. I want you to see him laughing with me on top of the world. It's late and far enough that the sky is choking with stars. I want you to see him on his side. Hand under his head. We lie on our backs, we don't shiver.

When James isn't moving, his body bores, and he starts running his tongue across his teeth. Up, down. I do it too now, as we lie, as I wait. I slip into his body this way: I become something not easily replaced.

"Hey, thanks for coming," James says.

Then I—not really—kick my foot hard, send him falling off the edge.

The snap of the creek water.

You have to understand, I didn't really do it. I pray, I've got a good heart, and when I sink my teeth into something, I taste it forever. There are beautiful people in this world, so beautiful you have to make them. I was never gonna shoot a wolf. I could never kill a darling.

But I can see it—they finding him by the riverbed, all split open. The greatest change a boy can make to a body. And then by the evening air I'd heal him, resurrect him with a lightning strike. He'd wake from his death flush with thoughts of me, love bursting from his sewed-up tongue. We would climb this roof forever, alive, then gone, then alive, then gone again.

## Call her later

*Audrey Healy*

Nothing is ever easy:

Huff and puff

Cry about it

Shit it sucks

Lie about it

Rake the muck

Trip in it

Taste the dirt

Sit in it

Burns your eyes

Don't cry

Don't cry

Spit it out

Taste it

Sit it out

Waste it

Kiss goodbye

Don't lie

Don't lie

Ask about it

Shake the cradle

Spin the drillbit

Call her later

Whisper, please

Keep it quiet

Keep it clean

Don't deny it

Make it stable

Call her later

Open it

Pinch the skin

Take the hit

Drop the pin

Ask her why

Don't deny

Don't deny

One chance

Let it slip

Hold the stance

Watch it drip

Kill the sound

No defiance

Make the round

Cut the quiet

Turn your head

See the picture

Make the bed

Write the scripture

Grasp it tight

Don't forget

Not a slight

Not a bet

Don't be sly

Never lie

And don't you ever cry

Listen nice

Cut some slack

Roll the dice

Don't call her back

## Thank you for being my new friend

*Lily Naifeh-Bajorek*

Thank you for being my new friend  
like wooden stakes in the froze-over ground,  
like those wooden snakes  
that go clackity clack, you know  
those? You ever play with one of those?

It's now warm  
and thrumming.  
Eight hours in seed-sown sun  
makes it easy,  
makes my skin readjust  
itself firmly,  
become a tough cracked heel  
all over splinter beam,  
its loose exposed imprints  
on strip-screwed wood.

I was once eighteen here,  
was once a girl  
listening and waiting,  
making up tests for myself  
like clapping mosquitoes  
and stinging bees on their furred backs,  
making my own cobwebs, you ever do that?

But I am not dangerous  
I am just a soft belly  
waiting, poised for a new tickling  
on the balcony outside my window  
I can hear you whistling inside  
my room, are you ready?

I'm gonna show you  
the woods, the water  
the warm insides of rocks  
and the small hairs and bites  
hidden from distant voices  
underneath my plumes.

## Considerations of What Could Become

*Natasha Kometz*

She is lost. She has gone down five different corridors and none of them led to a familiar location. She was supposed to be visiting a professor for office hours, but this building is trying to eat her. That must be it, she decides, and sits down to let herself be digested. A campus safety officer finds her as he's closing the building. She was ten feet from the exit.

She has found a skeleton in her closet. It is not plastic— she's licked it to test that theory, which she has no real basis for except for something she saw online— and is now washing her mouth out with a third round of mouthwash. Her eyes tear up from the burn. She could get a less harsh version, but then she'd feel like it wasn't really doing anything for her. The pain is a reminder that it's working.

The skeleton is bleach white, its eye sockets stuffed with crumpled newspapers from various student publications, its mandible lodged inside its ribcage, its hands groping for the misplaced bone. She considered how such a thing could have ended up in her closet in the time she was at class. Maybe her roommate was trying a new art form. She would have to talk to them about that when they got back from wherever they were. The skeleton looked like it would be in pain. Of course, she thought, that makes sense— its jaw is in its ribcage. She thought about what it meant to have something so fundamental displaced like that and felt the stirrings of sympathy for the creature it once was. She wondered what it had gone through to get to this state. She wondered what it thought was working and did not think about any possible similarities. As gently as she could, she picked it up, marveling at its lightness. With as much care as she was capable of, she stuffed its disassembled bones in the compost bin.

She does not want to email her professor. She has asked for too many exten-

sions, not turned in too many essays, done too poorly on the recent exam to ask for anything—memorizing dates has always been her weakest point and if she can't remember the dates she has no context. But at this point she either has to send the email and be done with it or spend the night slogging through the essay, which she would probably get max a B- on anyways due to the conditions she would have done it under. Despite the amphetamines and caffeine she can feel herself drooping, her functions shutting down, her eyes closing. She wants to do so much. She does not know if she will have time to learn the balance. She does not know if she will have time to be all she wants to be.

She considers running away. She could buy a shitbox car, pack up her stuff, and be halfway to Canada before the car gave out on her. She could leave this mess and the people she wishes she could have met differently and the circumstances she has created for herself. She doesn't think she would feel like she'd done anything worthwhile with her life. But maybe she'd be happy.

She squints against the bright sunlight. There are nearly three thousand bodies in the audience. The stage has come up seemingly overnight, rising from the ground like a monolith, a stark symbol of the future to come despite its apparent age. Moss covers it in dustings and spirals. Its crenulated pillars have been worn smooth, and its flagstone tiles have chipped and cracked. Still, it stands, where it very much had not before. She thinks of the skeleton in her closet. She reaches for the fingerbone in her pocket.

The dean stands at a podium made of the stage itself. He has a face, that is certain, but for the life of her she cannot quite make out its features. She does not know this man. She does not know this campus. She does not know for what course of study she is being handed this diploma, and she does not know the faces watching her receive it. Her eyes swim with brimming tears.

“Congratulations,” the dean says, and even his voice is shifting. The crowd cheers.

# an artist of the floating world

*Anni Yang*



# Ephemera, or The Fire

*Owen Shirrell*

## The Fire

Fire consumes the town. Houses are reduced to bones and foundations, their occupants to blackened shells. Heat does not distinguish between living and unliving, a final equalizing force leaving all as soot and dust and drifting flakes of ash. There will be nothing left, in time. Years pass. The people who lived there are forgotten. The name of the town is forgotten, as are the names of its oppressors, those who swept across the land and salted the already-ruined earth, until the reason why the town ceased to be is as lost to the wind as the ashes of the town itself.

## The Town

To rebuild would imply that something of a legacy remains, so instead a town is built anew over the skeleton of the first. People live, and die. And when this comes to pass, the men with spades come to make a place for them, their shovels biting through a layer of charcoal just below the topsoil. Clean bone is set gently atop blackened bone, or burned itself to be cast out and mingle with the ash that still nestles in the roots of the grass at the edge of town. And on one such occasion, the men with spades find a box buried deep in the earth. Inside, glass bottles, warped from the heat, but still intact. Inside, scraps of paper, smudged with charcoal, handwriting desperate, but still legible.

## The First Bottle

“There are these sunsets, maybe once every week or two, where the light catches the clouds just right. The skies over the hills stretch out into this remarkable sight, each fleck of cloud fading from darkened gray to gleaming rose-gold, columns of brilliant light flickering and guttering behind the trees at the horizon line, and you’re suddenly afraid. It’s already darker outside, the light dwindling, color giving

way to dull monochrome, and it's all happening too fast.”

### The Sky

The sky is still there, above the town that has been built. The men with spades, who set those spades to the side as they huddle around the first opened bottle, look up, as though to confirm. It's too early in the day for a proper sunset, too overcast, but a ray of sun gleams through the clouds and illuminates the hills in the distance beyond the village.

### The Second Bottle

“Music echoes through the bar, shouting voices and laughter overshadowing any finer details of the harmonies and tuning, but the musicians and the crowd alike are far too drunk to notice. There's a roiling, electric energy to the people here, bodies pressed up against each other and thrumming with the beat. You raise your hands to the rafters and whoop, joyful, bleary-eyed, but through the haze of the room and the noise of the band, there's the thought in the back of your mind that tomorrow morning will be silent.”

### The Crowd

The men with spades are quiet, almost reverent, passing the burnt scraps from one to the next, but the town behind them is not. Maybe there's no music, but there's a crowd gathered for a small farmer's market in the square, and people shout to wayward children and try to draw the crowd to their wares and most of all they laugh, and there will be music tonight, and perhaps one of the men with spades will stop by the bandstand in the center of the town later and move among the crowd, and throw his arms to the sky and whoop with joy.

### The Third Bottle

“It's late at night, maybe early in the morning, and you're sitting with one or two people who you've known for a very long time, passing a bottle back and forth, voices low but animated. You're talking about creating things and why it matters, not to society but to you, or you're talking about love, and the ways you've cared about

people, or you're talking about how you're scared, of what's coming and what's going to go away. When the fire starts, you wonder if you'll be remembered by the people who follow, if there will be anyone to remember you when the sun rises again. You wonder how many more conversations like this you'll get to have."

### The Truth

Once, many nights ago, as they set down their tools and walked back towards their homes, one of the men with spades had pulled another aside, one who he'd grown closest to, and admitted to him the state of the world. He told him who he had lost, and who he hoped to find, and what he feared might be ahead. And the other man told him a truth of his own, of what used to frighten him, and what frightened him now, and what he feared was too far behind him to hold onto anymore. And they did not share any more words than that, but they understood, and held onto that understanding, and their eyes meet across the pile of opened bottles and they remember.

### The Fourth Bottle

"Affection is a part of the language of the town. People hug when they meet and when they depart, idly curl into each others' arms or lay their heads on each others' laps without the slightest thought, and you're not sure if any of them understand. Contact grounds you, telling you that if only for this moment they are here and will continue to be for as long as you're touching them, but it's not enough because it doesn't last, because none of it lasts. You can't let go, because what if this is the last time? What if you need them after they're gone? Who can you hold then?"

### The Warmth

The sun is setting, now, and the glass curves of the bottles are growing cold with the chill of evening. The men with spades, who pull jackets over their overalls and light lanterns with which to see the few remaining scraps by, are growing cold as well, and a few of them lean into one another for warmth as they pass each paper from hand to hand. Some of them have lovers back home, others friends, others no one at all, but for the evening they have one another. As they take hold of the next scrap, burnt edges crumbling away under their fingerprints, the warmth of their bodies sinks

into the yellowed paper, and the words glow with heat.

### The Fifth Bottle

“It’s sometime in the late summer months, where crickets pulse from within the tall grass and luminescent eyes glint on the outskirts of the town, and you walk away from the houses and the lights to stare up into the stars. Out in the hills, the darkness is true and complete, and the sky is so very bright. Thousands of stars, tiny glimmering pinholes struggling to contain some unimaginable light on the other side of the blanket of the sky, dazzling and infinite. Light flares from behind you, a sudden orange and yellow glow that swells to overpower the details of the sky above, and you turn to see the town aflame. They’ve come for you. The stars are lost.”

### The Dusk

The rest of the bottles are empty or broken, their contents ash, their meaning lost. Night has fallen, and the men with spades set down this last scrap of paper and turn out their lanterns in silence. Stars stretch above them.

### The Fire

When the fire comes again, in time, it is the men with spades who write. Amid the chaos and the screaming, places holding memory and people holding each other all reduced to choking ash and blackened bone, they gather at the edge of town with bottles in hand, and remember. They record what they fear they will lose, or have already lost, and they record what has been lost long before them, but will live on through whatever comes next. Everything will be lost, and it will still remain. They begin to dig, past layer after layer of alternating soil and charcoal, and once the box has been buried safely, they set their spades aside and turn to face the inferno. Fire consumes the town.

Senior Year

*Julian Cross*



## The Ephemerality of Bobby Pins

*Lily Naifeh-Bajorek*

Jovial on the street  
he says into the phone  
that he's going to get a torta,  
new coat and an easy way about him.  
Unencumbered by the seeming futility  
and simultaneous direness,  
he does not feel as though he must change  
every single thing then get to the point of not  
being able to start on any of it,  
but rather acknowledges that things will be  
as they will be and does his part accordingly,  
full of innate change and new learned ways  
on which he locomotes along with the current.

Sinking backwards into the dark blue water  
I let the roots entangle me, staying in that  
soft, muddy creek bed for days and nights,  
allowing water insects and aquatic silt to  
become a part of me, and I try,  
this is my trying.  
Anything like this that I may do is  
always my trying.

Perhaps I am not so bad.  
I try to gauge the situation,  
as if that will make anything more  
or less true.  
I tell them I am confused but  
I am not really confused.  
I am just trying to reconcile  
seeming opposites on the couch.  
Trying! Doing! Supposing!  
Always forgetting my phone in the car,  
little mermaid-shaped silhouettes  
left by long lost stickers once picked  
from its dirty shell.  
Always misplacing my delicates  
when I bring them in and hang them to dry,  
and we talk about the ephemerality  
of bobby pins.

## whatsapp god poem

*Andy Roshal and Robbin Sachs*

writing is prayer

poem

writing is prayer and god is not on my google doc

writing is prayer and god is illiterate

god is chasing you with his garden hose

the lord has backed you over in the driveway

out of the frying pan into the fire then back into the frying pan then back into the fire  
and then into a sandwich and god gets to eat you.

whats that phone note youve got. god is a house that eats people

god is a house

you stab it and it bleeds

when people die god eats them

there's an immeasurable amount of sadness and grief in the world

and we can't do anything except feel it

and make art about it

isn't art just feeling it

or maybe not feeling it

and it's still there

and it never gets less

we only get more

what was it rafael said? "the dog is already dead."

"the dog dies no matter what," he said.

god.

it's a conspiracy of grief.

anticipatory grief but it's anticipating me

that or we're all just waiting for each other.

oh god. maybe.

maybe grief is a house and its doors are open  
maybe grief is a house and we can build a swing set in the garden

god is  
a house  
grief is

if you sit on the swing set on a sad day

sometimes god comes along to give you a push.

and sometimes it's just

you.

sometimes god pushes you too hard

and you keep thinking you're going to fall off

but you never do

you try to do the thing where you swing so high and so fast you go around once

but it never works

instead you get a little nauseous and a little dizzy.

do you think the swing set creaks?

only when you want silence

never when you feel alone

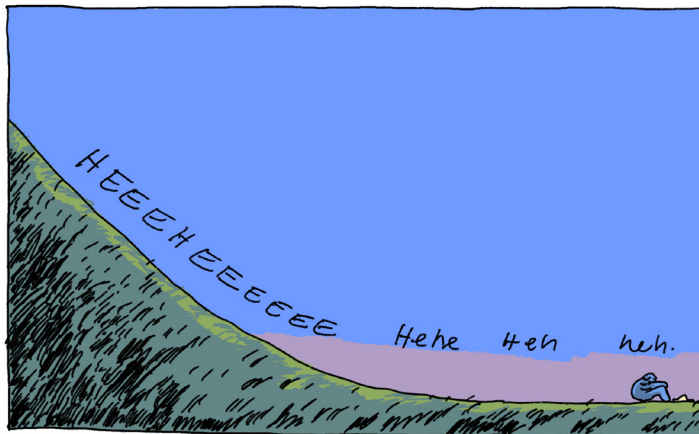
# Sorry Fellas, I Married an Onion

*Annabel Swansey*



# Man

Julian Cross



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