



THE PLUM CREEK REVIEW

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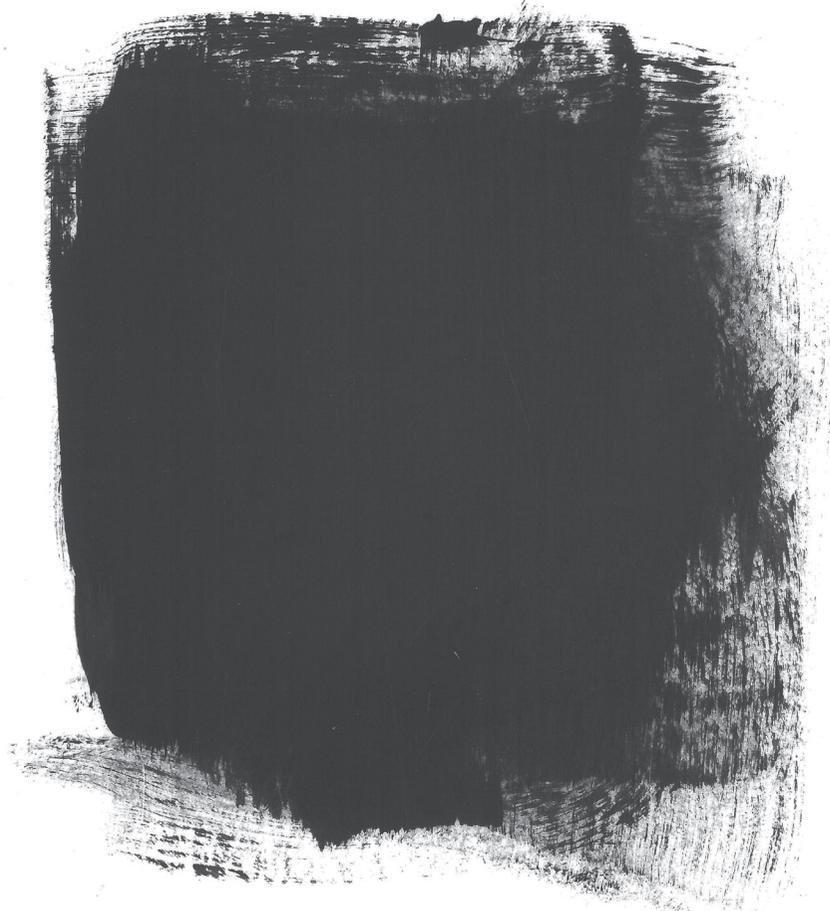
Front Cover

[untitled]
Grace Tobin
woodcut print

Back Cover

all the empty spaces
Vida Weisblum
black ink on paper

untitled
Oidie Kuijpers



oil paint on paper

Mottled Shadows in Srinagar, Kashmir

Srijit Ghosh

I.

Today, we stand on a makeshift stage as we add
the finishing touches to our histrionics.

We pick up pieces of shrapnel
extracted from the faces
of our rebellious corpses.

We put them back together—
piecemeal—creating jigsaw concrete.

We remake Lal Chowk.

II.

If we were made in the image of the Divine,
we forgot his points of reference. We forgot
the sanctity of Paradise, and how deviance
expels disobedience. We caged our paradise
with dissent and separatism—
edges of metal promises
now twisting in deceit.

III.

We too were corpses in transit, sitting beside pain
when he flew in from the valley. We are the tired ghosts
of failed revolutions. We made a bonfire
in a desolate valley that we called peace.

We prayed, and heaven listened.

Our discontent valley received discontent
houris, exiled from heaven,
now performing *mujras* to
remake unmade promises.

IV.

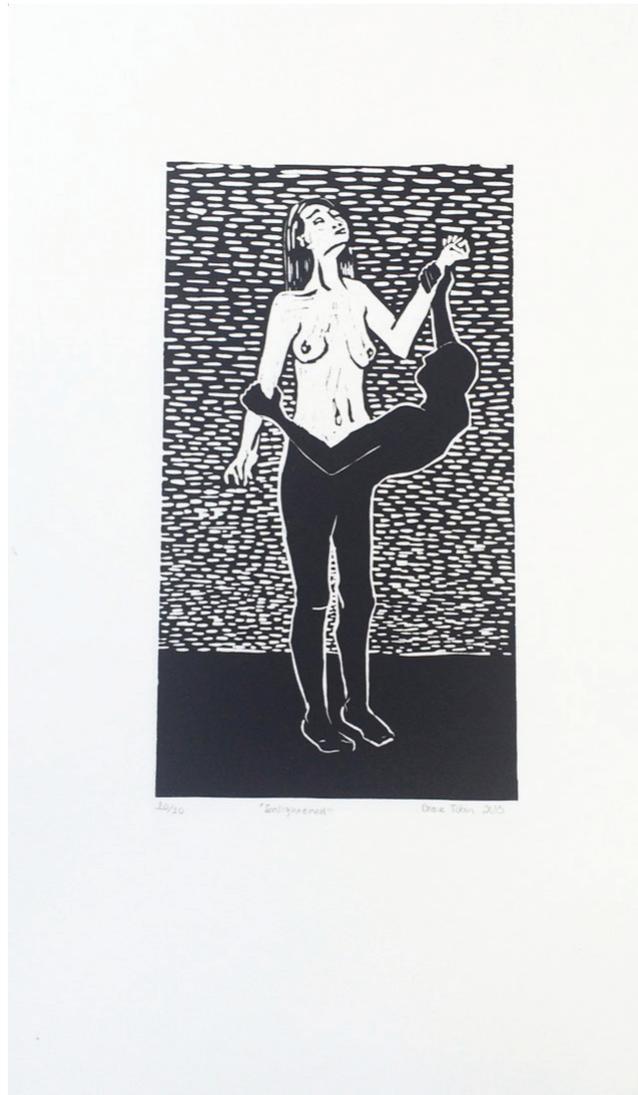
To be or not to be? Their bodies asked,
decaying in some gutter in Srinagar.
They couldn't stitch bone to their ghosts.
Unidentified ghosts. Decaying ghosts.
Someone already claimed their
passports, their bodies decaying.

V.

Bent and broken, the sewer runners
croak—our ghosts—as they re-imagine home.
They remake Srinagar under military curfew.
They build when the watchful eyes relieve,
they make everyday, remake till it's perfect,
remake so the exiled
have more than one paradise
to call home.

Limitations

Grace Tobin



I LOUNGE BESIDE THE YOUNG GIRL SEATED THERE,

Matisse, Young Girl Seated & Chirico, La Solitudine

Elena Jackendoff

the red couch lush and thick with velvet pillows
to cradle bodies nesting near greek green
fig plants. she reaches thin wrists toward my arm
and lays her fingers over mine and asks,
a grin cut into plump and rosy cheeks,
if I have seen the painting, just one over—
Chirico's statue on her side, arching
her elbow on her head, a train makes steam
and runs behind her. I say: yes, I've been
to see the statue once before, a copy,
another study maybe, in a far
off city. *so, she says, you should return,
and take me with you. I've grown tired of
this couch, these colors bright. we ought to leave.*

dreaming of a cathedral in an impossible city, part i

Alicia Goshe



When she asks, I say I am
Rachel Maclean

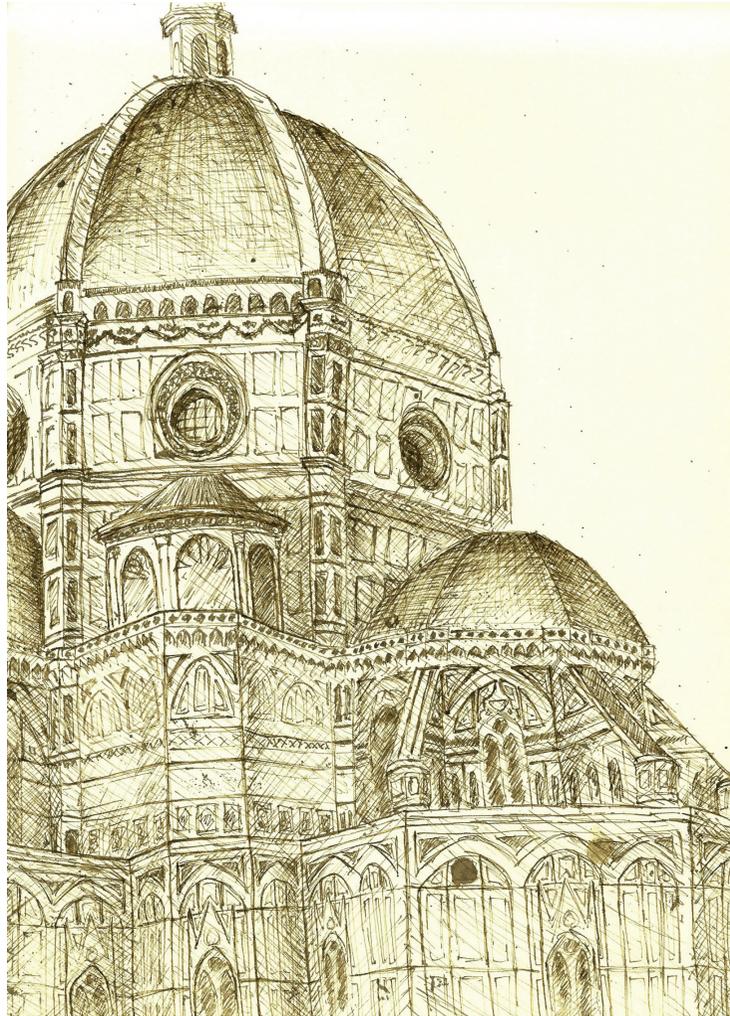
When she asks, I say I am

hungry in the waiting
room for a meal
the nurse will call and prescribe the scale.
like flossing the night before the dentist I eat only
apples and water before the doctor as if
it is enough to halve myself, to say
I in fact have been just fine
and bettering myself.

Now your weight's just a bit
of a problem doctor says the same thing
every year to my arms in the office with the wallpaper hockey players
their bloody mouths I say yeah I just
and he nods and nods with the Now you know
regular exercise and balanced diet can get
you right on track why don't you just work
with your mom on that, huh? I ask why it can't be easier why
there aren't solutions like the ones in my head:
the spoons I use I ladle myself into the trash
in reverse that has been my answer

dreaming of a cathedral in an impossible city, part ii

Alicia Goshe



Blessed are you Lord our God King of the Universe who created camels.

Asher Kaplan

Blessed are you Lord our God King of the Universe who created camels.
I have to do a research paper on camels
it has to include seventy-five facts.

One fact is they have babies in their humps
inside the humps the babies grow into camels
and burst out the tops like ungulate (which means camel) volcanoes.

The Hebrew word *gamal* comes from the verb root G-M-L
which means stopping, weaning, going without,
also to deal fully or adequately with, to ripen.

Ripening? My half-sister is weaning,
now she walks and coffee tables are padded.
This morning I snuck sugar cubes to suck on while I pray

because I always get distracted. I heard Nicole F went down
on Brian R in the chapel. They are both eighth graders.
I don't really know them.

It was all caught on security camera.
They can see everything
In the holy dark

we learn our oral tradition. oh god
the whole time I was praying
I prayed for six months straight

I couldn't stop praying
please Dad
get me an Xbox.
Amen.

The Just In Case Girl

Abigail Greenbaum

The others have gone away, and I am drawing a bath
(on paper; on my arms; on all the floors and in my sink and in your sink.
I am filling the tub with sugar cubes.
Does anybody think about how dust
Isn't dirty, it's just itself? I am nothing but sugar now,
Sweet bright cubes that dissolve when you press
Enough buttons).

Nobody follows through anymore.
The shopkeepers roll their windows shut on Saturdays,
Abandoned cats curl up on street corners, balding and starving
For the sun. Gray skies don't draw flies.
(The others have gone spelunking; I have seen
Nobody in months but have begun to dig through my body and make caves,
gaps where I can fall through my feet, one stalactite at a time).

I didn't change the world today.

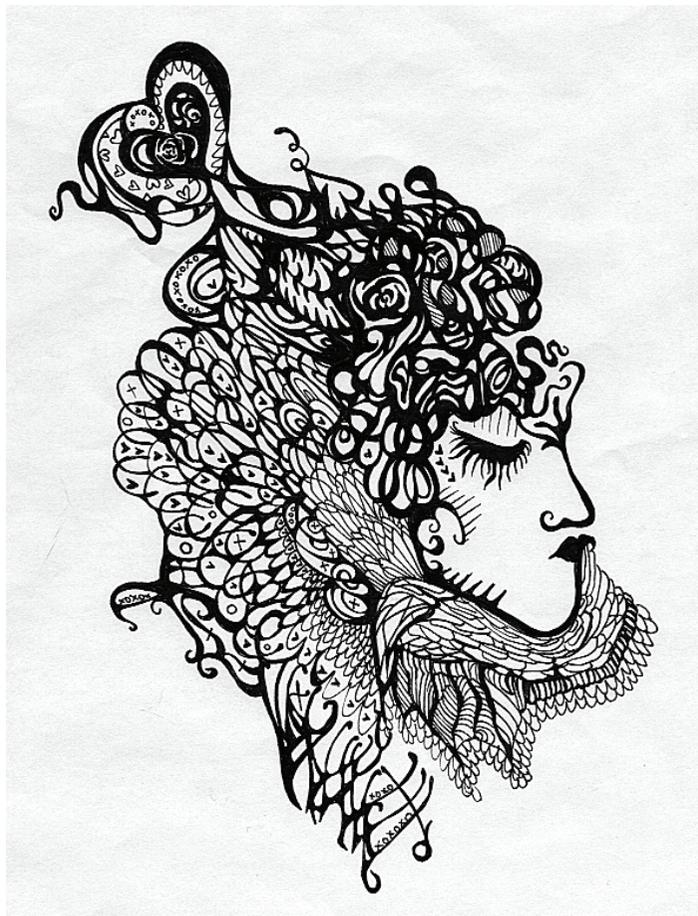
Press the needle down on the record and freeze the moment.
I am five and my mother has forgotten to get me from swim class.
My hair plasters to my face, the tears running down, and I wait by the door
Just in case. Just in case has become my only super power. (I am making sure to
name each blade of grass, in case the others forget. I will paint the whole field
one green stem at a time so nobody can forget anymore. I will learn new
languages so at least I can speak to somebody.)

untitled
Celia Keim



digital photograph

painting the roses red
Vida Weisblum



black ink on paper

Tangled Hair
Katherine Heiserman

I ate my sandwiches upside down
with you watching me, egging me on
and all you had were little postcards
with little messages
written in yellow ink, I could barely read
what you had to say

isn't that how my hair got so tangled,
I brush it every other day,
but I can't live without you
bumping against me

my heels are tired and in need of
reprieve from brevity and latitudinal
distances, give me forces give me fire
give me red ink, I'd like to find you
in a pink journal belonging to your mother.

Toy Chest

Mickaela Fouad

Inspired by True Events

Mother gets out of bed, and her feet make no noise on the wall-to-wall carpet as she pads across the room. She winces when her bedroom door's lock clicks as she unlatches it and cracks the door open. From this sliver of a vantage point she can make out her son at the breakfast table eating cereal and watching cartoons—the back of my graying head bobbing as I delicately feed myself. I turn around and she shuts her door quickly. I haven't turned on any of the lights but I've drawn back the curtains, bathing the first floor in grey rainy light.

Mother always told me to read with good light; she doesn't want me to ruin my eyes, which are green. I hear the lock of her door click again, and I pull out the newspaper that I stole from our next-door neighbor, Mrs. Karpe. I pull out the obituaries and turn up the volume on the television so Mother can't hear the rustle of my paper. She stopped our subscription to the local paper twelve years ago and whenever I bring one home she throws it away. Sometimes I rustle a page just to get her to come out and snatch it from me. But today I need to read through the paper *before* she takes it; I'm looking for someone.

After I am done with my cereal I go to my bedroom. I pause and listen to Mother leave her room. She will walk past the travel mug of coffee I set on the counter next to the sugar bowl and pour her own cup and then take the paper I abandoned on the table—I'm finished with it anyway. She will leave thinking that she has some modicum of control over me. She thinks that because she does not allow me to work and she takes the car and I am not allowed in the toy store that she has control. But this is simply my house, and I have keys that she does not—she has no idea what things I actually want because she doesn't know me. I was my own mother *and* father; this is how I know that I make an excellent parent.

Once she's left the house I open my closet and decide what to wear. Today I pull out the sweater vest that was once a brighter green and belonged to my father. Mother doesn't like that I took it out of his box of things. This sweater matches my eyes, just like his. I tuck the torn-out square of today's newspaper into the back pocket of my corduroys and walk back out through the kitchen passing the abandoned travel mug. I put on my windbreaker and lace up my sneakers. I pull my right sock over the hem of my pant leg.

I ride my bike that is too small carefully, trying to avoid puddles, and I suck autumn air through my chattering teeth. Mother gives me allowance but I am not allowed to buy a new bike with a basket, like I asked for Christmas when I was eighteen. This was the same winter when I asked to move into the vacant apartment across the street from the old church. *You're not mature enough, Jarek, you still play with dolls.* That is when I started visiting Woodlawn, and when I developed my hobby.

It's too cold for anyone to be outside for very long, but Mother and I live just down the street from the cemetery. We have lived in the same house on the same street five minutes away from Woodlawn Cemetery for thirty-eight years, ever since my father died when I was seven. We moved to America after he died—Mother thought it would jar her back into herself. I think she resents that she lost him and ended up with me; but I assume she only feels that way because she didn't know the old man like I did.

He was bedridden in the room across the hall from mine after the doctor told him he shouldn't walk up and down stairs anymore. One morning it snowed so much that Mother kept me home from school so I could help her make pierogi.

"Jarek, I'm going to the store for more flour. Check on your father while I'm gone," she said as she pulled on her coat.

I nodded and as soon as she was out the door ran to my room and pulled out the Barbie dolls I'd stolen from my old daycares and doctor offices. I was in the middle of adjusting a Barbie's crinoline skirts when my father's foot knocked me in the head. He took the doll from me, stuffed her head and dress down the garbage disposal and handed her tan, toned, naked body back to me. He told Mother that all he wanted was for his son to be a man. And now I am! I'm a magician. I take care of people's unwanted children. I turn them from cold unloved lumps into my own daughters and sons. I love them the way my parents didn't know how.

Mother and I haven't been back to Poland since he died; I don't miss it or him. I lock my bike against the iron fence encircling Woodlawn and walk quickly up a familiar path—I want to talk to Alexandra's parents first. Her headstone is peach imitation marble, a pretty color in a tacky medium. The headstone is only eighteen months old and there's already a crack running down the side and the gleam of the stone has faded. Her parents have visited recently from the looks of the soggy bunch of daisies. I pull my notebook from the pocket of my windbreaker and write in cursive, pausing now and then to look down at Alexandra's horrible headstone. I pull a sparkly heart sticker from a sheet I keep in my journal and fix my note on the headstone. I always write in pencil so ink doesn't run before Alexandra's parent's can get my message. I step back and look at the scene before grabbing the daisies and untying the white ribbon that keeps them together. I let the flowers fall and grind my heel into one's head—the proper flowers for mourning are white Casablanca lilies, which are expensive, but a murdered ten year old deserves lilies I think. Alexandra was killed in a hit and run by a distracted teen driving an SUV and texting. I think ten is a little young to be walking home from school alone, but that's just my opinion.

I pull the scrap of newspaper from my pocket and go off in search of Hunter Hirschon, who was buried two months ago. It takes me forty-five minutes to find Hunter; he was buried far in the back; perhaps his family has owned this plot for some time. His little grave is covered with a blue plastic tarp, probably left over from the headstone installation. Poor little Hunter is probably cold just like me. There are no flowers at his grave or sign that anyone visited today. Oh, how quickly parents abandon their children. I think to write a note then decide against it and simply place a sparkly heart sticker on Hunter's headstone, which is real marble (I have an eye for this.) It's too early for such a heavy headstone to be placed. They should have waited.

HUNTER HIRSCHON

Beloved Son

2011-2014

"I'll be back. I promise," I say to Hunter. Then I return to my bike, double check that my pant leg is still inside my sock and turn my bike towards home where I will wait until Mother gets home so I can ask to borrow her car, which she sometimes lets me do to go to the hobby shop. She likes that I've found something constructive to do with my time.

I come into the house through the side door because I don't like to use the same doors for all my comings and goings. We have the front door, the side door, the back door, a loose basement window, and a garage that connects to the house. I often wish that we had a second story so that I could climb the oak tree that stands close to my bedroom window, but we live in a ranch style house. Our house has a basement and I keep it locked. I learned how to change locks on my own and I've been changing the one to the basement sporadically since I was eighteen. Sometimes I leave the keys around the house for Mother to find.

When I come in the side door, I smell that Mother is home. She cooked something and the smell of fried butter mixes with the scent of her. She smells like Dial body soap (I prefer Dove because it's easier on my skin) and as she's gotten older she smells increasingly vaginal. I take off my wet shoes, windbreaker, and pants. I place the shoes on the rubber mat by the door, hang my windbreaker on the coat rack, and fold my pants and place them on the bench. This bench is where I used to leave my knapsack after school. I rub my hands vigorously against my legs to warm them and the hair on my thighs stands up.

I walk down the hallway to go to my room to get dry pants but I have to stop because Mother's door is open and she's not in there. Now I have to double back and find her. What is really nice about wall-to-wall carpeting throughout a house, with the exception of the kitchen where we have linoleum in case of spills, is that I make very *very* little sound when I walk around barefoot or, like right now, in socks. Mother is sitting at the basement door with oh, maybe ten keys lying on the floor next to her. She is trying an eleventh key in the door. I watch her for a beat, then gently interrupt her.

"May I borrow the car this evening?" She jumps a little but turns around to look at me and gives a nod. She wants me to think she trusts me, crazy old bat. "That key is for my old bike lock," I say and kiss her cold cheek. Mother works all day and then she thinks she's still raising me so this is of course why she's so tired. I like to think of myself as what keeps her going. I keep her on her toes.

I return to my bedroom and sit at the little white desk in the corner. I have to keep the chair back and lean over because my knees don't fit under anymore. I write on a yellow legal pad a list of things I have to get for Hunter. *Underwear, socks, pants, shirt, sweater, jacket, hat, foundation, concealer, lashes, wig (blonde), eyes (brown)*. I tap my pencil against the desk's table and try to remember if I already have any of this. Oh well, it can't hurt to have extra of anything. I won't have time to check my boxes of supplies until tomorrow. I purse my lips and adjust the row of tiny plastic shoes on the book shelf of my desk—the pink Barbie heels must have moved when I sat down. I get up and stand in front of the

hanging mirror. I will need to shave again tonight; nothing is nicer than sliding into bed stubble-free. I brush my hair in forty strokes, pull on fresh pants, tuck my list into my back pocket and go back out into the house to get the keys.

While I am at the store, I notice that a woman is watching me. She is certainly young, but she's tired and that ages her considerably. Her mousy brown hair is in a ponytail and she wears cheap but professional looking clothes. She's holding a bag of pipe cleaners and stands three aisles away, but I can feel her attention tapping gently on my shoulder. I have been in the hobby shop for hours—I am terrible with decisions. I buy the glass eyes and hurry out of the store, turning my collar up against the spray of rain. I drive to the diner and order a malted milkshake to pass the time. I order apple pie with a slice of American cheese as well and eat it slowly as I write a well-thought-out note in my journal. Once I've finished that I open a newspaper abandoned on the windowsill and turn to the arts and leisure section.

This little town goes quiet after nine o'clock, and the traffic lights blink yellow at ten. At half past eleven, I fold up the newspaper and leave the only twenty-four-hour establishment in a fifty-mile radius. I drive to Woodlawn while Mozart plays on the radio and I hum along, slowing at every ebbing yellow light. I park the car close by and get my shovel from the trunk.

Hunter's body is so little, and he's so cold. I wrap him in a blanket Mother knit and place him in a duffle bag that I tuck into the trunk. As I'm wiping off the shovel with a towel I think I hear a car door shut—but no, it's probably just the wind. The shovel, Hunter, and I trundle home going exactly the speed limit. When I pull into the garage and open my car door, I swear I hear a crunch on the gravel of the driveway. I leave the shovel in the car and scoop Hunter into my arms, cradling the duffle-bagged boy like a baby.

As I open the door leading into the house I am assaulted with a feminine odor that is not Mother—coffee and breath mints, a fruity shampoo or perfume. The hallway light is on but the rest of the house is dark and as I suck in the air that smells like a foreign woman and Hunter and earth,

I pause and cock my ear towards the darkness ahead of me, but hearing nothing I proceed towards the basement door. Inside each pair of my underwear I have sewn a pocket with a buttoning flap and inside this pocket every morning I place the key. Mother would have to come quite near me to be able to unlock the basement and the assurance that she will not has allowed me to keep the basement my private space. I slip the key from its pouch and Hunter and I descend down into the darkness, the door creaking shut behind me.

The only light is in the center of the room, a long chain dangling from the single light bulb. I feel against the familiar damp wooden railing and take exactly twenty steps before I reach up and illuminate the cement room. Rows and rows of my dolls look back at me—the little boys and girls I brought back from the cold ground. Alexandra and Ogi and Kip and thirty-four more. They sit politely on the wooden shelves that stand against the back wall. Over there is the clothes rack with their winter coats and tutus, cowboy hats and mittens. There is a small table set with tea for four and stuffed animals that cuddle with one another in a red wagon. I wave hello to them and carry Hunter to the worktable next to the shelves. There is a space on the bottom shelf just for Hunter.

I unzip the bag and bring the little body out. The embalming done at the funeral home was particularly effective this time. The skin is sucked tight around Hunter's fragile skull and the eyelids have almost completely sunk in. I always start by replacing the eyes so they can watch me work. As I lean in to lift one of Hunter's lids the kitchen floor above shifts with moving weight. I strain my ears and hear heels on the linoleum, a gentle staccato muffled but audible. Mother never wears shoes in the house. Did I lock the basement door behind me? Someone—cannot be Mother—squeaks the door open at the top of the stairs. I yank the chain and red spots dance in front of my eyes.

I hug Hunter against me and slide underneath my worktable. I can't see them they can't see me, if I can't see them they can't see me. The basement door opens and a flashlight's beam spotlights the bottom of the wooden staircase accompanied by the new smell of a man. I pull Hunter in closer

and push my nose against what is left of his hair to drown out the smell of the intruders. Two pairs of feet come down the stairs and all the while they tell me to come out, to show myself, to cooperate because it's all over anyway. I close my eyes and see a flash of red when one of them discovers the hanging light switch in the middle of the room.

"Oh Christ," says the man. He must be seeing my workshop, my cave where I make forgotten children warm and real again.

Hunter is pulled from my grip and I am dragged by my ankles out from under the table. I sit on the floor and look up at my dolls while they handcuff me; they look back at me through their full eyelashes that I affixed to their new eyelids. They beg me not to go and not to go back to their parents who left them all alone in the dark and cold. They want to know who will dress them up and who will love them if I go. The woman I saw in the hobby shop leads me upstairs, a gun holstered to her hip now and her ponytail looser than earlier. She says she has something to show me when we get to the car. As we march towards the front door, I see Mother peeking around a corner watching me go. An officer with a buzz cut is speaking to her and as she tells him she had no idea what was downstairs and that she tried to get the door open she watches me go and I think I see a smile of relief but it's gone too quickly to be sure.

Outside there are now red and blue flashing lights, brightening the night scene so that I can see the thin lines on either sides of the officer's mouth as she opens it and tells me she's Detective Myer. Two more officers with buzz cuts come up and lean me against a squad car; one keeps a hand on my shoulder while the other runs his hands up and down my legs. He obliges me when I ask him to re-buckle my belt.

"What kind of parents," says Myer's voice next to me, "leave their daughter out in the cold under a mound of mud. What kind of parents don't try to give her a second chance of life." Myer's voice shakes as she reads from one of my notes sealed inside a plastic bag marked *evidence*.

I turn around and lean against the car and watch my house. I narrow my eyes against the steady mist of rain coming down from the black sky overhead. A cop comes out holding a small bundle, then another, and yet another. At the sight of my dolls being taken away I feel a hollow pit in my stomach; I try to take a step forward.

“They’re being returned to their families, Jarek, you’ve had some of these kids for nine years.” Myer says pulling me back against the squad car by my elbow. “Now, tell me why you wrote that note—why would you write notes to the parents? Do you know that the notes are how we got you—well the notes and your mother.”

I blink water droplets hanging from my eyelashes.

“Jarek?”

I close my eyes and hum *It’s a Small World After All* over Myer’s questions. Inside Alexandra’s ribcage is a music box that plays that song—our favorite song. I would have given one to Hunter too. One by one my dolls are taken away from their safe home and placed in a van. My babies ripped from their warm, safe home.

Creature #1
Nora Kipnis



graphite on paper

Curating

Rachel Maclean

i.

I brought my body to the museum of natural history to
ask if I was worth being remembered. When I was younger
my father told me they knew best. He went and
they told him to stay forever so they could
record his voice and mount his moustache
and its coffee grounds—in a glass box greeting
visitors who do not know
why they've come.

ii.

The man asked what of me
I thought was worth being in a museum, said
he liked the way I shrugged
my shoulders—they would take those,
hang them up embalmed in however-many hundred years
beside a video of them
shrugging:
“You tell me.”

iii.

Really, he'd love anything that doesn't work right. A little aberration, but not too big. People look at bits that don't fit—at least his 500-year plan is for people to look at bodies and their little placards and say 'how fascinating the 21st century must have been.'

Do you understand? he asked.

Your blind eyes.

What's left of the thyroid.

That stomach and the thighs.

How your brain thinks it's right.

We'll keep them all safe in the back until they might belong out front.

Sign here

iv.

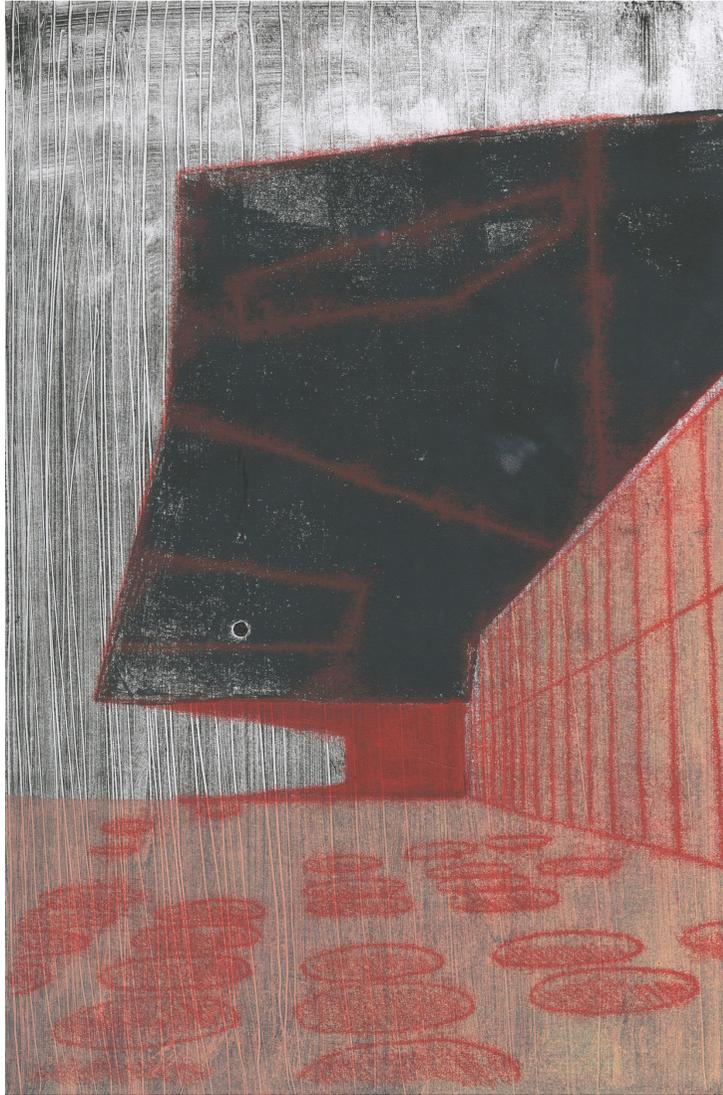
We walked to a display case and he stuck his hand out
imagine:
some kid steps up
puts a palm on the glass and stares
into one of your eyes.

I stood there with him and tried
to understand the rush of blood
translated into the exhibition of parts.

v.

I took my body from the museum of natural history.
The glass box by the door my father's
moustache and his information:
welcome to these mistakes we will not make
again.

Uptown Walker
Soren Carlson-Donohoe



monotype on paper

Third Period Gym

Alice Fishbein

Today was just another of the average-to-poor days of my life. I woke up, shaved, ate a sesame bagel – half with 1/3-fat cream cheese and half with grape jelly – got in my hooptie, and drove for exactly seventeen minutes to Jacobs Middle School. By third period, I had been thrown up on, had lost one of my white Nike sneakers, and had poured water all over my crotch. That little shit Billy Croyer stared me up and down, and laughed out, “You took a piss all over yourself, Bobby boy!” I attempted to remind him that I was to be called Mr. Sawyer. He snorted so hard that chocolate milk came out of his nose. I would have been embarrassed for him and have given him a tissue, but I knew that would simply backfire somehow, and I didn’t want to give him the satisfaction. So I just nodded and gave him five extra minutes to change out of his gym clothes.

At lunchtime, Mr. Phillips came and stood over my table. I always sit at the one in the back left corner of the teacher’s lounge, all alone. He was sporting a new tie and brown loafers.

“Have you ever considered looking professional? It would do wonders for you with the students. Maybe then they would stop calling you names, eh Bobby boy?”

He’s the closest thing I have to a friend. I nodded in response, and finished eating my cold cuts.

As I was leaving the room, I heard him talking to a group of teachers. He was standing in the middle of their circle. As I passed by, he called to me.

“You going after McCullough’s position, Bobby boy?”

I stopped, and turned towards him, confused.

“He’s leaving. Nobody told you? Wow, you’re really left out of the loop, aren’t you?”

Once again, I nodded, then went off to the bathroom. Even in the stall, all I could think about was that promotion. McCullough taught English, and Jacobs Middle School notoriously left their English teachers hanging. They were untrained, poorly educated, and completely disregarded by faculty.

It was a perfect promotion.

By last period, I still hadn’t found my sneaker.

"I saw some boys throw it onto the roof," Angela told me. She's a sweet twelve-year-old, pretty with blonde hair and little, pink socks that poke out from her white sneakers. She reminds me of my middle-school crush, Jasmine Valers. Last time I checked, she had become a lawyer, gotten married, had a baby – the same as most people I knew from middle school. Same as most people I knew in general, for that matter.

Before leaving for the day, I took the elevator to the fourth floor and climbed up the small flight of stairs until I reached the hatch door. I climbed out onto the roof, the fresh New England air hitting my lungs. My white Nike sneaker was hanging by its lace from a large pipe. I untied it and put it back on. Before going back down, I looked out over the ledge. All the little shits were going home for the day. I wish I hadn't lingered, because Billy Croyer noticed me, pointed up, and started hollering with all his little shit friends, Tommy, Aaron, and the one they call 'Biscuit'. I couldn't turn away or they would have known I wanted to cry, so I simply stood still for a few minutes and took the heat. They finally grew tired of it and walked away, nudging each other with a "good one" and a "he really sets the bar low." I always wonder where the kids go after school – home to their fancy houses with their babysitters and maids, their plasma TVs and their Porsche-driving parents. Only a few of them are on scholarship, and sometimes they're the ones who pick on the weak the most as the way to assert themselves despite their disadvantages.

I turned around, climbed down the flight of stairs, took the elevator, walked out of the building, and clambered into my car. I didn't even notice the egg on my windshield until I got to the intersection and couldn't see the other cars.

For dinner, I had a single-serve, microwave pizza. I watched some TV and fell asleep on the couch, my mouth wide open, a string of saliva running down my chin. Around 2 AM, I woke up, wiped my mouth, and made my way to the bedroom.

That night, I dreamt of children playing in deep-blue pools and dodge balls flying through the air.

✱

Today, Billy Croyer asked me what it was like to be a 'complete and utter failure in society's eyes.' I told him I didn't know. He then told Principal Gilligan that I had told him he

was a disappointment to his family. When I was invited to his office, I saw Billy leaving, faux tears streaming down his face and a wicked grin on his lips. As I walked by, he bumped into my shoulder.

“Oh, I’m so sorry, Mr. Sawyer,” he said, so falsely that it made me sick, his arms raised to his sides as he stuck the tip of his tongue out at me.

Sitting in the principal’s office, I felt like a criminal. The room smelled like one of those key-chains my mom used to hang on the rearview mirror in the car, that swings back and forth with the motions, releasing its ‘tropical pine’ smell or some other, and there was a succulent perched on the windowsill with a small, forest-green watering can by its side. Next to that were some photographs, I presumed of Mr. Gilligan’s family, his wife and kids, two little blonde boys with freckles, laughing at me from across the room. Mr. Gilligan’s desk looked like an OCD’s nightmare: pens strewn about in various directions, papers thrown into unorganized piles, and an empty dish containing just the leftover shells of M&Ms.

And then there was Mr. Gilligan, sitting behind the desk staring right at me, his tie crooked and a spot of ketchup caught just over the little chest pocket in his shirt. He shook his head at me, his oversized spectacles barely holding on to the tip of his nose.

“What are we going to do about this?” he asked, looking earnestly at me.

That earnest look held overwhelming meaninglessness, so I simply didn’t answer him.

“Huh?” he said. I shrugged in response.

“Do you really have nothing to say for yourself?” he continued.

He just wanted me to admit what I had done, and I knew it. But what was the point of that? Either I denied it, and he wouldn’t believe me, or I wrongly claimed guilt, and he believed me. The whole ordeal seemed so pointless. The kid claimed victory no matter what words came out of me.

Sighing, he leaned back in his chair, intertwining his hands in his lap. “Look, I’m going to have to suspend you. Starting next week. We can’t have you mouthing off to the kids.”

I nodded and said I understood.

“Jesus, there’s a promotion up for grabs. You don’t want to do something that takes your name out of that, do you?”

I wanted to ask him if he truly thought I was in the mix, but instead I just shook my head.

“No. That’s right. You don’t,” he said.

I got up to leave and before I reached the door, Mr. Gilligan said, "Don't you have any aspirations, Bob? Get yourself together."

*

Robert Sawyer
Class of 1995
Will Leave High School: _____
Quote: [silence]

My life has always been a blank slate of sorts. I had a girlfriend for about a month in fifth grade. We held hands and pecked once behind her mother's blueberry bush. Her lips tasted of Chap Stick. It was my sexual peak. By high school, acne kicked in, my growth spurt happened solely as an outward motion in my stomach, and my hair reached unmanageable heights. I got a shitty job sweeping floors at the local pizza joint, where I met Javi. He convinced me to use all my savings to insert massive heaps of coke into my system, which I could buy from him. I thought he was more than a dealer, but that was my first lesson in the real world. But the coke helped just to blur the rest out. All I wanted was to feel on top of the world, and I found that that was the only way to do it. Everything around me relaxed and I could feel my bones shaking, could feel those around me praising me even when I was alone. It was alleviation at its finest.

But I couldn't blur out my failing grades. I spent that summer getting high, the next few years in various jobs after Javi told my boss that I was an addict, and finally got around to getting my GED. I took some classes, and was able to get the 'highly sought after' job at Jacobs Middle School, where I've been ever since.

One of the little shits once asked me if I had always wanted to be a gym teacher. I told him yes, but the truth is, of course, no. I wanted to be liked, and to me – and everyone else around me, evidently – gym teacher never screamed 'popular.' I wanted to be a CEO of some big company, making bank and having rich friends and women abound. I wanted power.

Sometimes I like to flip through the pages of my high-school yearbook, just to see what everyone was like when they still had dreams. When Susie Lou was an aspiring poet, and Cliff Barbery was dating the head cheerleader, when Billy Grant would always say, "What would you do with a million bucks, eh?" and Sally Parker would echo, "Does my lipstick match my socks?" When we were all so young and unachieved and dreamed of a life. When we all had hair. I wonder when we lost all that.

I tried dating a couple years back, but they all went the same way: she would begrudgingly accept my invitation to dinner, which would of course take place at the Applebee's, the only place I could afford. She would wear a little perfume – just the amount allotted for this date with me – and I would tell her how nice she looked. That would warm her up, and so we would start talking. And then she would ask me what I do, you know, for a living, and I would say the fatal words: "I'm a gym teacher." Then she would say she had to go to the bathroom, and manage to never return. I always wondered if there were escape doors in the women's bathroom. So after a couple dozen of these, I stopped it all.

I know what people think of me. Unfortunately.

That's why I wasn't surprised when Mr. Phillips turned to me the other day. "You hear they found a replacement for McCullough?"

"Of course they did," I said to him. I fidgeted in my newly-bought white button-down.

"Yeah, some outside guy, comes with decent recommendations. Apparently from Wisconsin or something like that."

Of course.

*

No matter how hard I try to stop it, third period always finds a way to roll around. Today Billy Croyer decided it was his mission to destroy me.

"Hey lard man."

"Oh, Bobby boy!"

"Wow, take a look at society's dead weight, right here," he said, throwing the basketball at me.

I handed it back to him. I did not yell.

"You really are Papa's Big Boy."

"You ever gonna do something with your life? No wonder you're such a loser. You got a girl? I bet you don't, I bet you go home at night and eat alone and cry yourself to sleep."

And the whole time he was saying these things, I just kept hearing in my head, *you didn't get the position for a reason.*

That's the thing about words: they eat at you, sink into those holes you've made for yourself in unimaginable parts of your mind.

He snickered, said to me, "I'd hang myself if anyone ever loved you. How much do you make? I bet my dad makes more in ten minutes than you make in a day."

So I grabbed him by the ear and dragged him up all four flights of stairs until we reached the little hatch door. I shoved him through it, and once we reached the roof, he stopped struggling. He began to beg.

"What are you gonna do to me? Please, I'm sorry, I'll stop. Please!"

"It's too late for that, little Billy Boy. Too late now," I said.

So he began to cry.

I took him by his shoelaces and tied them to the pole. Then, using the shoelace from my Nike, I tied his hands together as well.

Afterwards, as I shut the hatch door, I knew I was safe because I couldn't hear his screams. It wasn't until that evening that I heard once more about Billy Croyer.

I was lying down on my couch, a grin spread wide across my face and satisfaction wreathing through my body, when I got a phone call.

"Billy Croyer's in the hospital," Principal Gilligan said on the other side of the line. He had a certain strain in his voice, like he had been drowning himself in caffeine and cigarettes for hours.

I tried not to make any sound, not to alter my breathing at all.

"Are you listening there, Bob? He's in the hospital."

It only took minutes for the police to come get me. They knocked on the door, marched in, read me my rights, and took me away. Turns out that pole to which I tied Bobby was close to the edge, and in his efforts to be released, he had fallen over the edge, held up only by his shoelaces. Someone saw a small boy hanging over the edge of the school building and called the police. They didn't arrive, though, until after the shoelaces had given way, and Billy Croyer had fallen onto Principal Gilligan's small balcony two floors below. He had broken his neck, and it was unclear whether or not he would regain the use of his legs, let alone live.

I slept the night at the precinct because I couldn't make bail. The next day they took me to the hospital because Billy's mother wanted 'to see the man who tried to kill her Billy.' When I got there, Billy was still asleep, a brace around his small neck.

When Billy's mother entered the room, she walked right over to me, spat in my face, then sobbed. She asked me how I could do such a thing to a sweet, sweet boy like her Billy. I wanted to tell her that her Billy and my

Billy were two very different Billys. Instead I just stayed silent. I guess no one will really ever know which was the true Billy.

His mother's pearls shined in the fluorescent hospital lights.

*

I was, of course, fired and accused of child abuse. The trial went by like a blur. The jury saw me same as anyone else would; I was a child abuser. They concluded that I may not have directly paralyzed him, but I abused Billy and left him in circumstances that would almost definitively lead to harm. So they put me away.

In here, I keep to myself. Silence rings through the cell. No one wears a tie.

Years after the incident, Billy came to see me. Time had not treated him well; his wheelchair had rusted, and his hair was uncut.

I figured he had come to spit on me like his mother did every year on the anniversary of his paralysis, but he did not do that. Instead, he picked up the telephone. Though glass separated us, I felt like I could feel his fingers trembling.

"I just wanted to say, I'm sorry. I know now how it feels to have expected more."

He didn't wait for a response, just hung up the phone, leaned into his palm for a moment, shuddering, then wheeled off.

He did not come back to visit.

Sometimes we are let out in the yard, and I see the other prisoners running around the track. I want to tell them their form is off, but I don't. To be honest, I don't think I'm qualified for that. I'm not sure if I'm qualified for anything, at this point. Even worse, I'm not sure I ever was.

At the very least, though, I'll never have third period again.

Golgi

Soren Carlson-Donohoe



collagraph on paper

The Wall

Melissa Karp

Throwing rocks against the wall
to dent and splinter,
to craft an imprint into wood
in memoriam.

He thumbs across the stray scratches
and thinks—
Who hit here?
Thumbs across the wine-hued bruise
and thinks—
Who bit here?



digital photograph

I Paid for Them in Reveries

Alexandra Heller

Even as she said it I grew reluctant. I shied away from the keys and the pens and the paper and everything that could make a mark—anything that could create. The true misery was in the reflective gray chairs we sat upon in wake of a fluorescent flood. You know the kind. Singular bars of light beating phosphorescence so bright it congeals your brain. You want nothing but to let your eyes lose focus as you continue staring at your screen. The laptop burns your legs as you insist on wearing a knee-length skirt in the middle of October. That East Coast chill that bites your eye and you feel your face tightly plastered against your skull as you prevail, marauding into brick buildings where secrets doze between cracked spines.

But as she slept in the chair beside mine, her shoes kicked off in a futile rush to comfort, her red pea coat draped across her knees, she breathed as heavy in the chair beside as she had outside. I realized how delicate she was. Her breath was soft and only her swelling ribcage gave the life in her away. Ski socks poking out beneath jeans too long for her legs, she slept with her arm folded underneath her head, like a wing, in the crook of her left elbow. Her weight against the wall, the white plaster pushed her fingers to curl. The book in her lap lay open, her palm contacting the page, keeping her place as she slept. Her fingers twitched on the page and I felt her reading with her eyes closed. Her security was there, in her hand resting on the page, and losing it would raise her from her slumber.

So I sat there reading articles on the psychological effects of human isolation and pretended I found them as interesting as the sleeping girl beside me, still clutching a book in dreaming. And across from her was another girl wrought in creativity, currently repressed it as she was forced to review for an exam she knew she would not pass. Her blue leggings pilled against the armchair and her yellow sweater sank into crusted mustard tones as her typing grew slower. It was not the night that slowed her pace but a lack of what to say. I could hear her scrolling, now. Looking at all the artists she wished she were to be. Her new piercing pulsating a soft pink under the gold bumblebee now fixated to her ear.

The buzzing was audible, from the laptops, not the bee. I could not fathom why I did something wrong by keeping these computers. I know they were meant to be returned, but so many other people had them and I needed them, too. And who were they to miss another two or three of a hundred-kind? I knew they couldn't last much longer, their lives were almost spent. But as I typed this page in a gray armchair under fluorescent heat I couldn't help but hope the life would last. New York City to Northampton to the library full of everything but books. I still had Boston to see and the lion boy in the traveler's coat and I couldn't let this machine die on me now. I knew it probably was not something to worry about, but I wondered if the people that sat beside and in front of me would remember or care about me in a year's time. It all seemed so important that 3rd month of college that we saw each other as soon as we could, but I wondered if I needed them—or anyone—or if I could just continue on my own. I wanted to be near the smartest people, and I realized I was never good at determining who those people were. They lived on the pedestals I sculpted for them but I couldn't see them from the ground.

The ground floor in the library was harsh lights and chattering girls who wanted to be scientists and mathematicians and as those words fell out of my fingers and into the keyboard I realized how dated those phrases were. You could be a professor of mathematics or work on a project in the field, but one did not become a mathematician. It's a curious deterioration, but most of college felt that way. Anthropology, Archaeology, Philosophy majors—Anthropologist, Archaeologist, Philosophers—the positions were culled.

Everything was fragile so we sat far away from all the books.

Near the woman and the boy arguing over math on a white wall.

But it did not deter the sleeping girl who had awoken and now illustrated on another whiteboard behind them with a near dead pen as she spoke to extended family in Russian over the phone. She gave advice to them as she looped and dotted, she did it to feel the felt tip against the cool board.

It did not deter the studying girl, either, chewing on her headphone cord and scrolled miles on the bruised trackpad.

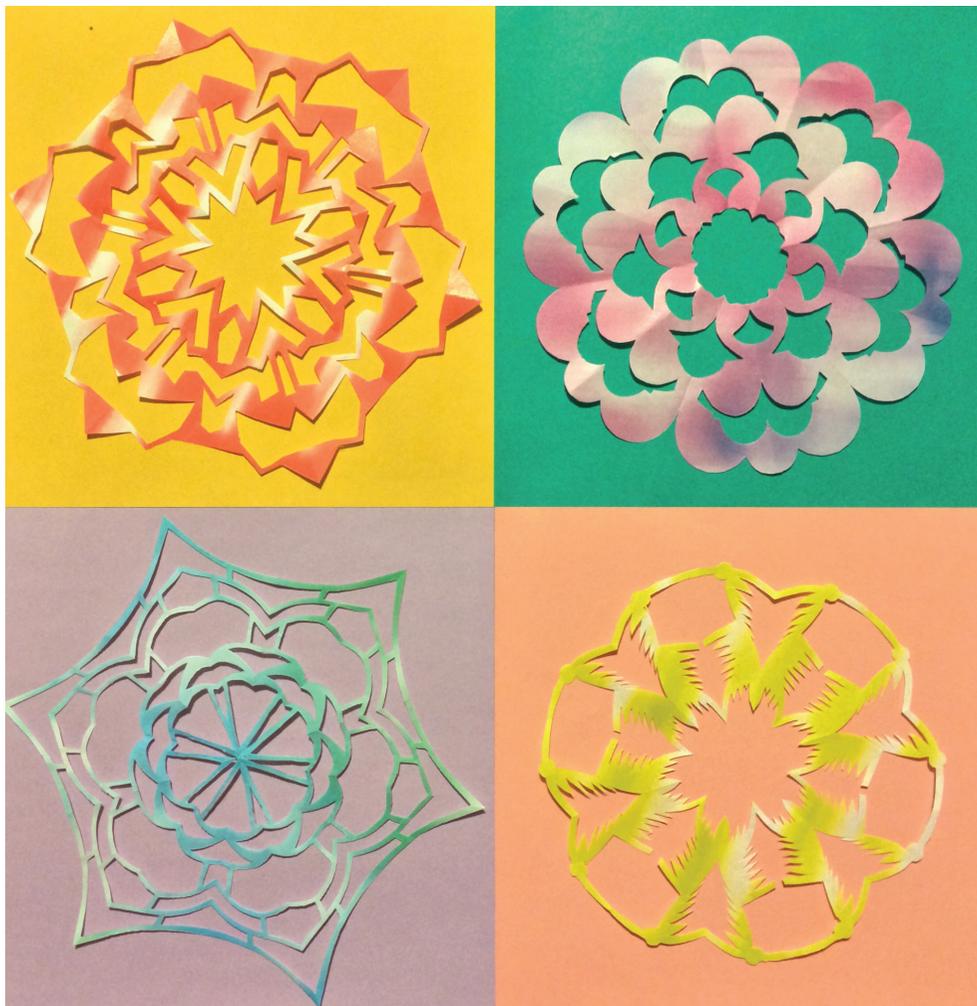
The yellow girl found anything and everything more interesting than what was currently asked of her.

I wrote that entire hour in an Icelandic sweater on the keys of stolen technology.

But I did not steal it, really.

I paid, I paid.

untitled
Zoe Cutler



cut paper on paper

Bakehouse

Rewa Bush





digital photographs

poise

Melissa Karp

the way her toes point
shows some ounce of anticipation

that they will one day distort and curl
that one day the calluses will yield peels of skin.

how she balances is an art of pain tolerance.
counting the ways she can hold it, hold and hold;

counting all the seconds before the bones give out.
the balancing is about holding your breath

so not a tendon moves,
so not a ligament shifts in the skin

so not a whimper can escape the lips
as the nail breaks off and reenters back into the flesh

in the palm of the foot.

Stuck
Grace Tobin



woodcut print

Grief

Megan Smith

Stage One: Denial

Morning tumbled forward, pinks and blues painting the skyline, a brush in your hand and mine. We flew over the sun, holding tight to each other's hands when our wax wings started to melt, landing in a pool of roses. I tried to pluck them, but each thorn was a piece of glass, and soon my hands were bloody – tumbled forward, pinks and blues painting the skyline, and I woke up with strawberries and nicotine on my tongue. Every morning you told me stories of Daedalus and Icarus, of the sun taking life instead of giving. You played the story like a melody on my belly, kissed an incision across my abdomen, opened me up and found a bit of broken glass – tumbled forward, pinks and blues painting the skyline, but my eyes were fused shut. I searched for a centrifuge on your side of the bed, a beam of sun to melt my eyes open, but all I found was a block of ice. I searched for a memory or a moment, a word or a feeling, but every drawer was empty and every historian questioning how glass could melt like wax.

Stage Two: Anger

Wisps of moonlight, dewy, clinging to eyes and lips the first night of September. We hung on, each by the hand of the other, and waited for the sun to rise over the undulating prairie. While we waited, you spoke, ink gathering in the corners of your mouth, spilling down through the dip in your chin, which may only exist in my memory. And I said, be careful, you'll ruin your clothes, and you took your hand to wipe your lips. It was a moment, a forgetting, don't we all, but the way you let go, the way I fell. The moonlight was cold, and I fell so slowly. It was a long fall, cartoonish or dreamlike, and there were very sharp rocks at the bottom: I'm telling myself you didn't know about the very sharp rocks. But you invited me here, to lie in a crow's nest and watch the moon restart the earth, and you suggested we climb to the edge and rely on each other's hands. And here, my body skewered, each limb an amuse-bouche, I am beginning to feel raindrops of ink on my exposed skeleton, which can only mean that you are still talking, that you have not noticed my absence at all.

Stage Three: Depression

And I can still see the shape of your cheeks in the San Diego sunset, your freckles in the sidewalk by my parents' house. We fell in love the way we were supposed to, followed every step, waited in line to be handed the keys to a life painted in pastels. I've learned since then. Learned the yellow in your eyes wasn't a piece of the sun, the soil in your nails couldn't keep you grounded, the words caught between your teeth were miles away from promises. Learned that you were more than the scent of detergent and the beaten, grease-stained shirts your father passed down to you. Learned that a ceiling fan can feel like a tornado when your head is already spinning. Learned what it means to be Atlas without any strength. I locked you in a box in my closet because you couldn't see the future, and that box became the world. I want to blame gravity, relativity, string theory, but it's sitting on my shoulders. You're sitting on my shoulders, blind, and I am trying so hard to see for you, but my vision's been gone for years. I still remember the way you asked me, so sweetly, to step out of line. I remember how I tripped over that hole in your jeans, and how you walked away, so eager to jump the line that you forgot to help me up.

Stage Four: Bargaining

In Arizona, the cave walls are written with age, each edit in the atmosphere documented in reds, purples, browns. In a dream you read the caves. Said there was a water line here, and we'll call that silver line the Mesozoic era. As you spoke, I began to excavate myself, and learned there was a map on every inch of my body. The colors of my skin and veins and bones were complex, their surfaces eroded, smooth. I found a poem between my knees, called it my own, and you asked me to recite it, but when I searched for the words, they had all been stolen off my skin. I am a novel, held together only by the words that stitch my seams, and as I started to fray, you spoke again. Perhaps those words weren't yours, you said. Perhaps you need no words. I am trying to believe that you are not a thief. I searched for words among the fissures, but you had taken them all. Named all the colors and times with such precision. And the map on your body seemed to match mine, so I began to study the story written in the lines and bumps and creases of your skin, and I asked you to study mine. I catalogued you for a year, learned there were six thousand layers of silt and sorrow composing your story, and you said there were four in mine, and I wonder how hard you must've tried to miss the myriad painted words running along my forearms.

Stage Five: Acceptance

I didn't even know it was you until I knew it was you, and then it couldn't have been anyone else. That voice, those fingers, unfamiliar for so long until they weren't. Until they were like my own, so much like my own I started to believe they were. You have been this person, this voice, these nails on this chalkboard where you wrote me a love poem and scribbled it out with fourteen different colors until I couldn't read it anymore than you could say it. You couldn't say it. Refused to. Spoke with this bitter, monolithic lightness that cracked the corners of my lips and purpled beneath my eyes. It couldn't have been. Anyone else could have stumbled into you, held your quiet hand, tried frantically to preserve some mystery. But you weren't a mystery, and I have never been one to keep secrets.

There was this sound, this breath, this snore, this melding of rose petals and shutter speeds that used to keep me up all night. This moon, this sky, these words falling from your rose petal lips like chalk dust settling. And I was you. My Sunday mornings, my midday coffee, every smoke break and every bead of sweat, I was you. I was your lips and your words and your love poems. I was the soft bump on your nose, the smile you were so afraid of. I was the book of Spanish poetry you never read. I was yours, and I never knew you.



linoleum cut print

A Contemplation of Sorts

in Some Random-Ass Order

Alice Fishbein

I.

You ever wake up in the middle of the night,
sweat on the sheets
heavy breathing
a foot kicking
and think, 'did I just dream I was a meth-dealer-turned-country singer?'
Damn, how I wish I could sing.

II.

Hey, listen up, oh Higher Power:
if you exist,
and I do recognize that that's an 'if,'
could you bless me with some number-two lead?
I need to finish this exam
and my mechanical pencil has failed me.

III.

I may wear the baseball cap of a losing team,
but that's just an indication of
my internal character flaw.
I like the underdog worth rooting for.
And if I wore the cap of a better team,
would you like me more or less?

IV.

I'll wear a v-neck if I damn well please.
I wouldn't bang you anyways,
even if we were the last two people alive.
Wouldn't risk the eggs;
the repopulated world would
condemn me for it.

X.

JFK said, 'ask not what your country
can do for you,
but what you can do
for your country.'
Well, he did Marilyn Monroe
and I don't think I'll ever be that lucky.

XI.

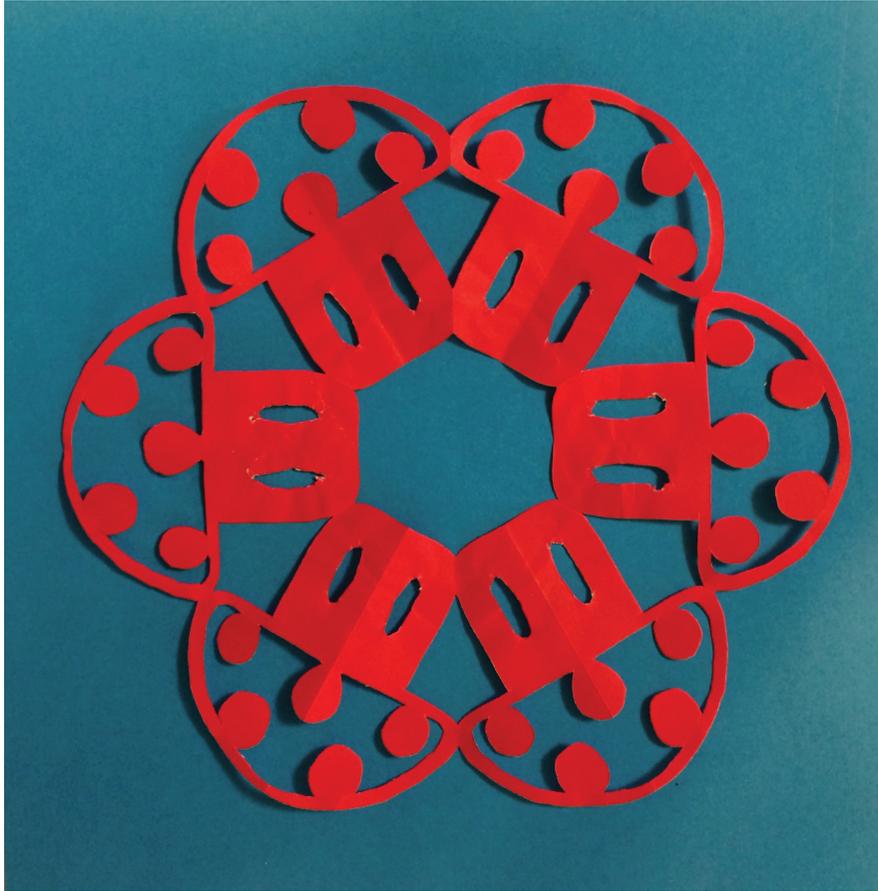
What if gummy worms were actual gummied worms?
Would the red flavor still be the best?
Would you eat them,
if I fed them to you?
They'd be a gift.
Be fucking grateful.

XII.

Let me ask you a question:
If Newton's Third Law of Motion is that for every action
there is an equal and opposite re-action,
does that mean that for every Long Island I do drink,
he must throw one up?
Bartender, I'll have another please.

Psilocybin Kaleidoscope

Zoe Cutler



cut paper on paper

Particle

Soren Carlson-Donohoe



found object print on paper

At the Gas Station with my Mother

Liam Oznovich

I am sitting outside of my middle school, clutching my phone in my hand. I am feverish. I clutch my chest tightly, breathe deeply, and a roll of mucus runs down onto my lips. I sniff it back it up.

I dial my mom's number.

"Hey, mom. You here soon?"

"Yeah, honey."

"Okay."

"See you soon."

"Yeah, see you soon. I love you."

She tells me she loves me too. I want Advil, but it's all the way at the bottom of my backpack.

I'm in preschool. There is a dead hamster in the corner of the room. All of the children surround it. Its little legs are curled up, its eyes open, terrified. I too am terrified. I imagine myself curled up in the corner. The teacher hurries in and gasps. We all know who killed it – Dylan. The day earlier he cornered me and bragged to me about how he burned the soles of his dog's feet with his dad's cigarette. I knew he killed the hamster, but I didn't want raise my hand and say something. That would require taking my thumb out of my mouth.

Inside my mother's car, she's playing Billy Joel. More mucus runs down from my nostrils. I tap the window idly. She asks how my classes are going; I say that everything is fine. She looks down at her gas meter.

"Do you mind if we stop by the gas station, honey? I know that you want to get home..."

"It's okay."

She nods and pulls off at an exit. We pull up into a Shell gas station. I offer to do the gas for her, but she tells me that sick middle schoolers need their rest.

The wind howls against the windows. I imagine them warping inward and shattering, letting the cold in. Billy Joel is still playing softly on the stereo, and my mother smiles and waves at me from outside. I smile weakly back. My head feels like a furnace.

After locking the gas nozzle in place, she climbs back in the car.

"It's cold," she says.

"Yeah." I notice she doesn't have a coat. I offer my own.

Dylan marches towards the hamster, inspects it, pokes it with his pencil and sniffs. The teacher tells him to step away, but he picks it up and hurls it at me. I shriek and fall to the floor, my head colliding with the side of a bookshelf. As I fall, I see my mother's horrified face from the classroom door.

The tank is full.

"Honey, I have to go inside to get the receipt." I nod.

She smiles, then turns around and heads towards the adjoined shop. I close my eyes as I lean against the headrest. I'm sitting there for what seems like an eternity when I hear a knock on my window. I turn my head – it's not my mother.

I've just fallen into a bookshelf. I'm sobbing, screaming for my mom, and suddenly she's there, like always. I collapse into her arms and she holds me, massaging my head. She's not looking at me – her eyes, like a hawk, are trained on Dylan, who stands at the other end of the room, sucking on his finger. He doesn't look ashamed. He looks fascinated.

There's a man knocking on my window, motioning for me to talk to him. I unroll the window a crack.

"Hey there, young man," he says. "Would you mind helping me out with something?"

"No, thanks," I say.

"Aww, c'mon, big guy. It'll only take a little bit."

His lip is twitching, and his grin is a little too wide for my liking. I manage another small, "no, thank you."

"No? C'mon! It'll just take you a few moments. My car is acting up –"

"Then go ask the gas station attendant," I say. The man looks perplexed and in his eyes, there's an indescribable hunger. I imagine this man burning the soles of a dog's feet. I roll the window back up, but I can still hear his gravelly voice.

"C'mon. Why don't you just unroll the window all the way? I'm sure your mommy won't mind." I haven't called my mother "mommy" since preschool –

— where I am now being carried out of the classroom by my mother. She's cradling me in her arms, whispering that it's going to be okay. I see Dylan being reprimanded in the corner, but he is avoiding the teacher's punishing gaze. I grab my mother's neck to feel her pulse. I match it with my own.

I've managed to ignore the pounding in my head as I climb over the console into the driver's seat. I turn behind me — the man is now tapping rapidly on the window.

"C'mon, kid, you look what, junior high age? You know how to fix a car! Just step on out of the car and help me, will you?" I'm terrified. I look down at my feet, and I see *a dead hamster*. Dylan is screaming at me about burning the soles of his dog's feet. I'm sobbing, looking frantically around for my mother, where is my mother, my mommy —

A voice interrupts everything: "Get away from my car."

My mother has appeared by the car, her hawk eyes targeting the man. He backs up.

"Sorry, ma'am, I didn't mean to cause any trouble."

"Yeah, I bet you didn't. Get away from here." I look out the window at my mother, her neck straining with rage — I don't know of whom I should be more terrified. The man walks sheepishly back to his car, his arms raised in surrender.

"Ma'am, I just wanted to talk to your son and —"

"GET AWAY FROM MY CAR." With that the man hobbles away. My mother hops back into the car, puts it into drive and speeds out of the gas station.

Only when we're safely on the highway do I realize that she's trembling too. I grab her hand and squeeze.

Viral

Soren Carlson-Donohoe



monotype on paper

Origin Story

Olivia Pandolfi

It opens with greased limbs
salty trunks
many shelters
I run on grace and this

Land that Breaks Walls
Gabriela Hurtado-Ramos



linocut

