Litmag

2019

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This year’s issue of *Litmag* is dedicated to the students, faculty, and alumni of the University of Missouri- St. Louis
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Acknowledgments

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Additional thanks to Katherine Volandt with Lingua and Sandra Trapani in the Department of Language and Cultural Studies for partnering with us on the inaugural Multilingual Contest. Thanks also to our contest judges in the Language Department and Bob Lowes with the STL Poetry Center.

Special thanks go out to Chelsea Brooks, our fall intern, for keeping the journal on track in the off-season, Eliza Sanders with Advancement Services, and Kyle Igel with the UMSL Office of Alumni Engagement for helping us organize and promote our crowdfunding campaign.

And last but most certainly not least, a huge thank you to all those who contributed to our crowdfunding.

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About

Sponsored by
Publication of Litmag is supported and sponsored by the UMSL English Department, Master of Fine Arts program, and readers like you.

About Litmag
Litmag is a student-run literary and art journal published annually each spring through the UMSL English Department.

The mission of the journal is to nurture the creativity of the students, staff, and alumni by increasing awareness of the vigorous literary talent on UMSL’s campus. We aim to produce a professional, high-quality publication that gives budding writers and artists a venue to display their work and experience the exciting world of publishing. The journal is offered to the campus and local community free of charge, a service we are committed to maintaining.

Submissions are open to all UMSL students, faculty, staff, and alumni. All submissions are reviewed anonymously, and selections are determined after thorough discussion by the editorial staff.

Litmag has been recognized for “the quality, dedication, creativity and entrepreneurship of our students” by the College of Arts and Sciences, as well as the university at large, as an outstanding artifact of student achievement and literary merit.

About Litmag Contests
Litmag conducts four individual contests for the Best Poem, Best Prose, Best Multilingual, and Best Artwork submitted to the magazine. Finalists for the contest are determined by the editorial staff, then sent to a third party for final review, and are based on a variety of qualities related to technique, composition, insight and originality. The multilingual winner is determined by the Department of Language and Cultural Studies based on similar criteria. Winners receive a certificate and monetary prize, and they are also recognized at the Litmag launch party and the English Department awards party.
About *Litmag* Editorial Staff

Undergraduate students have the opportunity to earn credit by enrolling in English 4895 Editing *Litmag*, a course in editing and publishing a student literary journal, which is offered at UMSL each spring semester. The purpose of the class is to provide students interested in creative writing, professional editing, and publishing with an internship-like experience that serves as the capstone for their writing studies. Under the supervision of a faculty advisor, student editors participate in the full scope of operations within a nonprofit press, including fundraising, solicitation, marketing and promotions, copy editing, document and graphic design, distribution and publicity.

Students interested in enrolling are invited to contact Kate Watt at katewatt@umsl.edu or Jeanne Allison at allisonjea@umsl.edu for more information.

Creative work solely reflects the views of the author and not necessarily those of UMSL or the English Department.
Welcome to *Litmag* 2019,

Being a part of this year’s *Litmag* has been an amazing experience. The editorial staff consisted of nineteen incredibly creative and enthusiastic individuals, who offered insight culturally, intrinsically, and intellectually. With so many different views on the world and writing, the *Litmag* staff worked tirelessly to publish each and every voice that we could find. I am honored to have had the opportunity to work alongside the student editors who helped make this year’s issue possible.

The mission of this year’s issue focused on being able to present a collection of poems, stories, and artwork that offered a representation of the diverse student body and local community surrounding UMSL.

One of the most amazing parts about working for *Litmag* is being given the chance to read and view the works of the authors and artists who submit to the magazine. On behalf of the 2019 editorial staff, we would like to offer our sincerest appreciation to all those who were willing to share their stories with us.

One of the most exciting elements of this year’s magazine is the collaboration with UMSL’s Department of Language and Cultural Studies, and their student organization, Lingua, who facilitated the multilingual contest. The 2019 editorial staff would like to send a thousand thank you’s to each of the writers that submitted to the contest as well as the judges who ensured that the contest happened.

The editorial staff and myself hope that you read and enjoy each of these pieces that offer a look into a different culture. While reading please note that each of the translations were completed by the original author, and that there is no one-to-one translation of a word.
or sentence from the original to the English version. These pieces were judged and read based off of both their knowledge and ability to write in both languages, while offering readers a remarkable piece of literature.

It is the hope of the entire Litmag staff that you will be able to live a thousand different lives from the stories within this year’s issue. From the eyes of a Vietnam war hero, to a foreigner, to a friend, and to a fairy prince, we hope that each piece captures a view of UMSL’s diverse community.

Jorie Sims, Editor-in-Chief
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*Denotes contest winners for the art, poetry, multilingual, and prose submissions
Extranjera (Foreigner)

Angela Blash

medium: acrylic paint on stretched canvas

winner of the art contest
Introspection

Jessica Tonyan

medium: oil on canvas
1912. A Paris Salon

Marcel Duchamp Completes Oil on Canvas
“Nude Descending a Staircase, no.2”

Patrons overfill the room,
An effort to consume meaning
Built up behind layers
Of line and shape and form
The body like a storm
Growing feverishly
Upon a great ocean liner
Forcefully pulled across sea.

You and I hunger to escape words.
Our flesh draped, our mouths agape,
Dark caves coolly connect
Breath over breath
Until we break, make our way
Down brown winding stairs,
Become a double version
Of the solo masterpiece.

As if squeezed from paint tubes,
Like oil colors, we slowly run
In opposite directions,
Empty handed midnight thieves
Unable to rob the art of time
Your gold watch fob left behind
Among dried drops of white wine
Pooled upon the table.

The ticking face glowing inside anticipated
Darkness, closed velvet curtains provide,
Divide the controversy
Surrounding our rendezvous,
Duchamp’s unfolding movement.
狐色の目

笑う時
君が私を仰ぐ。
瞳孔が開いて
君の狐色の目が
真っ黒になる。
Fox-Colored Eyes

Abby N. V.

When laughing
you look up at me.
Pupils dilating,
your fox-colored eyes
become pitch-black.
In the Depths of Unicorn Vomit

Kelsey Kuntz

“Sloan, I can’t help you if you don’t talk to me,” Dr. Collins says in a voice full of the patronizing superiority only a doctor can achieve.

I lay on the faux leather couch parallel to him, keeping my gaze intently on the window just beyond my feet. There isn’t much to see beyond the glass besides an array of windows that belong to offices I assume are identical to this one. They probably have the same pink walls that appear to be painted with unicorn vomit, meant to soothe the mentally ill, but instead invoke a headache the size of my mother’s ass pre-op. The essence of simplicity, the only décor on any of the four walls is an assortment of three watercolor portraits spaced evenly apart over his mahogany-stained wooden desk. Outlined with a cheap gold frame, they each depict a scene personifying different mental illnesses with idiotic phrases written under them like “win back control over your depression.” Fuck whoever wrote that. It isn’t that simple.

Lips pursed, brows drawn together as if in deep thought of the answer to a question he didn’t ask, I scan the room for the hundredth time this session. My eyes settle on a fern that withers away in the corner of his office. It hangs from the ceiling by linked chains: a highly inappropriate method of display considering the type of patients the doctor sees. The first time I saw it, it was a lush green, full of the promise of life. But over the last few months it has made a fruitless descent, withering away into moribundity.

I wonder why the plant is in the state it’s in. Whose fault is it? The doctor’s? The maintenance crew’s? The plant doesn’t say it needs sustenance, sunlight or water. So how is anyone supposed to know it needs any? It just suffers in silence. When something suffers without calling attention to their problem or seeking help, it becomes their fault, right? That lack of acknowledgment changes their status from victim to enabler.

He clears his throat and adjusts himself in the cloth throne he judges me from. Clipboard in his lap, he watches me through thick
glasses. Whatever he sees in my expression causes his face to pinch and lips to purse. It’s a look similar to concern, but he doesn’t quite achieve the authenticity of it. The superficial manner in which he regards me reminds me of the role my mother steps into when my father returns from his business trips, as if she hadn’t been dreading his return.

Dr. Collins turns and sets his pen and clipboard on the desk behind him, then leans forward with his hands steepled. “How are your new medications helping with your mood?”

“Fine.” I examine the pristine condition of my freshly gelled nails.

He and I both know I don’t take that poison. Every anti-depressant he prescribes turns me into a zombie. But he just moves on.

“That’s good news.” He leans back in the chair. “Do your moods feel more stable?”

Stable? What terrible word choice, Doctor. “Sure.”

“Any extended bouts of mania or depression?”

“Nope.”

“Your tone makes it sound as if you’re just answering my questions to appease me and not being honest.”

Somebody give this guy a fucking gold star.

“Are you accusing me of lying?” I lift my eyes to his.

“That’s not what I’m say-”

I cut him off. “Whatever,” I say, returning my attention to my nails.

A pause. The air conditioner hums its soft tune in the background. “Is there anything you’d like to speak with me about?” he asks.

Is there? Do I tell him that in a desperate attempt to extend my elation, I spent last weekend on a cocaine binge that nearly landed me in the hospital? Do I tell him how it takes more and more stimulating drugs each time to free myself from my mental restraints? Or that I drink myself into oblivion just to fucking cry? Or maybe how I spend most of my time so completely enveloped in an impenetrable barrier of ice and stone that I can’t feel anything? Is
that something worth discussing?

“Brett wouldn’t like you to continue on like this.”

I feel his words more than hear them. Like a blow to my chest, they rip the air from my lungs.

Since he died two months ago, no one around me has dared to say anything about him for fear of my reaction. Everyone chooses their words so carefully, as if I’m so fragile that the slightest reminder of my dead boyfriend would propel me over the edge.

Maybe it would.

I picture Brett before the drugs had whittled his limbs into malnourished twigs. When his skin was a healthy olive tone and he would look at me with clear brown eyes and smile. My chest begins to flutter at the thought. I almost feel him press his lips to my cheek.

But instead of his warm, slightly chapped lips, I feel the pricks of thousands of needles. I look up to find the image of him warped. I see him in his coffin, black suit covering the track marks down his arms. I want to trace them with my fingers. I want to climb into the casket and wrap my body around his. Wherever he goes, I go. That’s how it’s supposed to be.

Why the fuck did he leave me?

How the fuck could he choose a dirty needle over me?

“You’re my favorite roller coaster ride,” he’d tell me when my self-hatred had torn my psyche into tiny pieces.

I feel my depression wreaking its havoc upon my internal wiring. It has rerouted me, sometimes sending my body into overdrive and sometimes propelling it into a conscious state of sleep. I sleep for endless hours, yet never feel rested.

I am tired—so tired—of being alone. I’m tired of being empty. I want to feel in a way that isn’t drug or alcohol-induced. I want to feel emotions; any fucking emotions. I want sad things to make me cry again.

I want happy things to make me smile again. I want to be free of from my emotionless prison.

I want help.

Will anyone ever understand me the way Brett did? I glance at Dr. Collins who watches me as if he can see the thoughts inside
my head. Will he understand?

I swallow the lump inside my throat and am about to tell this man, this professional who supposedly cares, but stop myself as he pulls out his phone from his pocket. Deflated, my motivation shrivels, and I retreat into the familiarity of numbness.

Just like everyone else, he doesn’t really care. My mental illness and pain are just a paycheck to him.

My eyes return to the window. “Your plant is dead.”
The Loss of a Father

Andrea Reynolds

Hamlet saw his father’s ghost and went mad; not allowed to mourn the death, he unraveled. How can a brute take a loving father from his son?

I.
When I was a child, I didn’t know that everyone had a dad. I thought dads were like aunts, cousins, and step-parents—some kids had them and others did not, but the reality was that single mothers were my neighborhood and my world. My father fled incarceration when I was one. I couldn’t understand why he never wanted to meet. Numbness endured for years. When he died, I mourned the possibility, not the man.

II.
My husband’s drunkard father died when my husband was yet sixteen. At sixteen, he dropped out of high school and became the lone provider for his family; he refuses to talk about those years—now erased. Sunken grey eyes, watery, blinking, he refuses to admit the loss, the stress, or the pain.

For our own sons, we pretend to know what a functioning family might be like, but family isn’t intrinsic. Longing to be close without vulnerability, we thirst for nostalgia to measure the value of family.
III.

Yet today, I am standing roadside
to watch the funeral procession. The wind
sweeps the leaves in spirals around my feet
perched between a father with two sons and a grandma
waving flags. Across the street, uniforms place the coffin.

The hearse stops in front of me. A phone from the back seat
of the limousine records my respect to show the young son
when he is old enough and trying to understand.
How can a brute take a loving
father from the child?
What madness.
“Remember that one time we rode up to the playground in sixth grade and those older boys were there? They were asking us to come closer. I don’t know how, but we knew they wanted more than that; they were gonna hurt us for the fun of it. A gut feeling. We jumped on our bikes to escape down the nature trail. Remember how I went too fast? I hit that sewage pipe that sticks out of the ground. I flew. All I saw were the pebbles and dirt. You helped me back up. You carried me, trying to manage the bikes too.

We came out from the trees onto the parking lot. The blood sludged down my leg. You leaned me on a car. You were a foot shorter than me then, so I know you were exhausted. I cried, begging you leave without me, to let me die. Your face was flushed redder than a rose but, between the panting, you shook your head no.

‘Those perverts probably didn’t chase us. No one wants to hunt a couple of tomboys. Not worth the trouble. They’re probably just smoking in the tube slides,’ you said. I thought this over, looked at my bloody knee, and agreed to go on. A lesson later learned the hard way: not even tomboys are safe. Nearly nothing is sacred and everything dies, but you already know that story.

Although home was only a block away, I didn’t think we would make it. Things seem smaller now. You brought me in. Your mom put me in the tub with my clothes on. Your dad said it would need stitches, but that it wasn’t for them to decide. They sighed and smiled. They always knew what was up. Your mom used peroxide and tweezers to pick all the rocks out. The bath towels stained red. You couldn’t bear to watch, but you stayed in the bathroom with one of those long popsicles, the cherry kind. You would lean over and share some with me. The ice melted in my hand. I remember that we were happy. Anyway, I just wanted to say thanks for all of that. It means more than you know.”

I look it over. I delete “more than you know” and change it to “everything.” Hit send. We haven’t spoken much these days. That’s just how it goes sometimes. I’m sitting in my car outside my
apartment. The winter is grey cold. The wind shakes the car. The CD is scratched but I still listen. Blood on the Tracks - Shelter from the Storm. The lumpy pink scar peeks from the rip of my pants. I remember how, after it all, I went to my house and no one was there. Still, I was never lonely.

My phone lights up.

“T'd do it again.”
It Stands

Kelsey Kuntz

It stands
small,
underwhelming,
the last remnant of what was
once a beautiful assortment of
potted jewels.

A survivor of
drought,
bullet-like rain,
eglect,
careless acts in the name of
nurturing.

It stands,
Above soil that does little more
than exist,
barely resembling
the home it once was.
Once youthful,
lively,
Now a graveyard of empty
shells,
   bodies,
      parasites
Whose toxic natures are masked by
good intentions.
It stands
On a shriveled hulk of a stem,
Leaves in tatters,
Petals siphoned of the vibrant
Allure they once boasted.
Time is a leach, sucking life
away,
Accelerating the unavoidable
End to all existence.

Prognosis, unsure.
  And yet,

It stands.
Kakemphaton

Abby N. V.

Mérite-t-on une explication —
Sans doute, mais à quoi bon?

Puisque tous les bonjour étaient des casse-têtes
Et tous les au revoir étaient des kakemphatons.
On ne pouvait pas s’empêcher d’entendre des mots non-dits.

Il n’y aura jamais une explication satisfaisante
Pour un mot qui n’a jamais été dit.
Kakemphaton
Abby N. V.

Does one deserve an explanation — certainly, but what good would it do?

Since all our ‘hellos’ were riddles and all our ‘goodbyes’ had double meanings. We couldn’t help but hear the unspoken words.

There will never be a satisfying explanation for a word that has never been said.
Calm

Alicia Price

10/15/18

She said, “fuck you,” as she stared into my eyes, testing me. It took her over two and a half years to be able to utter these words. She didn’t mean them. She thrashed around and kicked close to my face. This is the only time I would grab someone and hold them against me after they’ve uttered such an insult, after they’ve attempted to cause bodily harm. This… is parenthood.

Today, my toddler made me cry. Today, my toddler made me threaten her with putting soap in her mouth (I would never put soap in her mouth). Today, my toddler just about made me lose my shit. But, you see, my toddler can’t make me do anything.

Too often, we forget that we are the adults. We are the ones who are able to control our emotions, whether we think we can or not. We have to be the calm in their storm, as they search for some type of shelter. We have to institute nap times or they become a danger to themselves and others by 6 p.m. We have to make them eat something besides cookies and cheese even if that means we have to bribe them with cookies and cheese. We have to put our hurt feelings aside and grab them up when we know that it’s love that they’re actually demanding between kicks and cuss words. We have to just be.

There are times, okay, a lot of times, where I feel depleted. In these moments, I feel panicked, wondering how I’m going to keep giving from a tank that’s empty. From a tank that’s been empty, but has had to keep giving. Then she does it. She says, “I’m excited to see you, Mommy” after a ten-hour shift. She grabs books at bedtime and asks that I read, and when I’m done reading, she asks for me to make up a story, and when I’m done with that, she asks me to sing. Most nights, I’m guilty of being annoyed, of thinking about my homework that’s due in a few days, of things that take me away from her. Most nights, I have to remind myself that she’s already too big for me to rock her, as I’m rocking her. I have to remind myself that she’s not always going to want my undivided attention. I have to remind myself that the days are coming where she says, “fuck you,” and means it.
Cardinals

Nachammai Palaniappan

medium: acrylic paint on canvas
Geometric Dress

Camillia Zachary

medium: thread, watercolor, and collage
No line is direct –
There are a million points
From A to B.
Some cement us,
Locked without key.
Others kindle
Crossing the seas.

And of diversions,
Most are caught flirting with
Fragility:
The signals red
(if left unseen)
Erase the way
From A to B.

How sweet it is, then,
To see you at B,
In a dirty shirt
At breakfast with me.
What do you see?

Leo Van Dillen

The man who used to be a woman
But the body still shows
You what you want to see

What do you see?
I see the man who crawled
Up from the dark hole
Of what his female persona
Did and said to keep him safe

What do you see?
I see the face of a free man
Who can now see the person
He is meant to be

What do you see?
You are not the woman
Who was supposed to be married
By a man who cannot see the man inside

What do you see?
What could have been with my last love
But that would have ended in killing the man
And keeping the woman

What do you see?
The makings of a man who can see himself
Only for the first time
Only to be invisible by others
What do you see?
*What do I see?*
I see both femininity and masculinity
swirled inside of one body
To encompass the person
I’ve always been
Me.
The Syndicate

Kenny Dickens

The glossy white tiles of the monorail station reflect holograms advertising cheap food and cheap drugs, the light further refracted in the lenses and faces of the multitudes within the station. The world is a dingy hum of neon and faded pastels and rust. People surge in their vibrant clothing, patterns of flowers and images of telephones and cameras and incandescent light bulbs on loose fitting shirts, old tech immemorial in the fashion of tourists and addicts. Sitting down on a hard plastic bench, I squeeze myself between two bodies buried deep in the haze of the newest drug and wait for the monorail to arrive. I look towards a large screen on the wall that is playing various infomercials, the brightness and color of them at odds with the stark urban utility of the monorail platform: women advertising beauty tech, the newest microprocessors, personal air filters. Without warning, the scene on screen switches from a sleek hypercar speeding through city streets to a reporter sitting at a desk, the insignia of the City Police next to her.

“This is a notice to all citizens,” she begins, her now amplified voice reflected in triplicate across the hard cavernous space, cutting through the din of the sea of bodies. The words “WANTED: ARMED AND DANGEROUS” appear in the upper corner of the screen in large red letters. My picture appears next to the reporter’s face, and a slew of information scrolls across the bottom of the screen. Jacob Baker. 6’2”. Male. Human. Born 2037. They know everything about me.

I flip up my collar. Nobody notices. Nobody stops moving. One of the bodies next to me laughs, showing silver teeth and yellowed eyes, pupils watery and dilated. The reporter continues, “Any information regarding the whereabouts of this man should be reported to the police immediately. He is to be considered armed and extremely dangerous. If seen, do not approach.”

Getting out would be harder than I thought.

Behind me, the monorail glided silently into the station. “Next stop, 45th street. Mind the gap,” the monorail chimed. Making
my way through the crowd, I pushed my way onto the monorail car. The police report continued to run on the screen in the station. I stood in the middle of the car, supported not just by the pole I held but also by the writhing mass of people surrounding me. Silently the monorail accelerated, speeding through the city, lights flying past the windows in a continuous blur. I felt something hard being pressed into the small of my back, undoubtedly by one of the Sayaka assassins. The Sayaka Syndicate has agents everywhere: the bars, the tech boutiques, the monorail cars, as one of the largest gangs in New York, the Syndicate was free to operate however they pleased, so long as the police received their monthly check.

“Are you here to kill me?” I asked quietly, not moving, not turning to see my attacker’s face.

“If I wanted to kill you, I would have done it already. I know you, Baker, and I know you want out.” It was a woman’s voice.

“How can I trust you?” I replied, attempting to move closer to the door, to no avail. People were packed in too close together. I felt something small and heavy slip into my pocket.

“Rat isn’t who he used to be, Baker,” the mysterious attacker said. “The Syndicate got to him, but it might not be too late.” Rat, the arms dealer. The one I was going to see now. I should have been more careful with my movements; taking the monorail directly to 45th was a mistake.

“How exactly is he different?” I asked, the weight of the foreign device pulling on my coat and shifting it to one side. The Syndicate has their own ways to get people to work with them: their back alley surgeries and memory implants are a black stain on my conscience. Veins replaced with wires and steel, memories of entire families erased and replaced with vacuous hatred. I considered memory implants myself once, to forget all the things I’d done. Whether it’s better this way or not remains to be seen.

“The device in your pocket is an electro-pulse. Good for disabling electronics. If the conditioning didn’t work, you might still have a chance to get through to him. If not, you have this. Good luck, Baker. You never saw me here.” With that, the gun was moved and the figure behind me shifted. Turning around quickly, I saw nobody
who could have had her voice. The mother holding her wailing child perhaps? The junkie two seats over? The cop by the door? No, as quickly as she appeared she was gone. I only had her word and the electro-pulse to go by.

“45th street,” chimed the monorail, coming gently to a stop. Hopefully, Rat was in the same shop as before, like old times. I made my way down the street quickly, avoiding cameras and sticking to crowds. Rain began to fall. I fingered at the electro-pulse in my pocket. Why would the Syndicate give me something like this? Holographic projections floated over the street. Some were advertisements, monochromatic flares of pink and blue and purple; others were red glaring images of my face accompanied by warnings and a number to contact the local police. Up ahead was Rat’s shop, steel shuttered windows and dully thrumming neon adorned what was essentially an old garage. I knew it was the right place. I opened the door and stepped inside.

“Hey man, what can I do you for?” The door closed heavily behind me, blocking out the bustle of the street. Purple and pink lights pulsed with no particular rhythm from beneath the glass counter that Rat stood behind. “We got all the newest product, man: ocular implants, spectrum analyzers, all the newest microtech straight off the factory floor.” I remained silent, shifting slightly, looking him up and down. It was clear that something was different about him; I don’t think he recognized me. He smiled the best smile plastic surgery could give him. A small, barely visible scar stretched across his temple. I would need to be careful.

“Cut the shit, Rat. You know why I’m here.” Folding his arms indignantly, he bared his sharpened platinum teeth in a scowl, the purple leather of his jacket enwrapping him like the wings of a bat. “Do I know you? Throwing names around like you’re from this place. That type of thing gets you in the ground fast.” His eyes did not move from mine. The conditioning was further along than I thought it was.

“I need to kill a man,” I said. He froze for a quarter of a second with the kind of fear of a man who expected but was not ready for such a response. Was it recognition? His face changed
quickly back to its default arrogance. The surgery. “I need to get out, Rat. I’ve been doing this for too long and I know you can help me.” I felt for the switch of the electro-pulse in my pocket, slowly, methodically.

“Do I have my ears in right? You said kill a man?” He screwed up his face and made an exaggerated gesture with his hand to indicate he couldn’t hear. “Sorry babe,” he continued, smiling widely. “I don’t got the tech for that, we do have electro-pulses though. Little chip’ll fry any biotech within a ten-foot radius—”

“I know you have what I’m looking for. It’s just one more job, and then I’ll leave you alone. Don’t you remember me?” I pressed, stalling for time as I prepared myself for the inevitable. The woman from the train was right; the Syndicate got to him. I removed the electro-pulse’s safety through the cloth of my jacket. Rat’s left hand was moving almost imperceptibly slowly towards the underside of a small table. Muscle stabilization. This was all wrong. Was he even human anymore?

“Nope,” he said, eyes flat. “I can’t say I remember you.” In the fraction of a second I had left I flipped the switch on the electro-pulse. The room went dark as the sickening wave of energy washed over me. The shop became a mausoleum of fried electronics, quiet, and still as death. I pulled out my lighter and struck it in the new darkness, hoping to see what I had done. I recoiled instinctively from the cold barrel of a handgun now illuminated in the fire glow of the antique lighter. Moving the lighter, I followed the rigid arm to its owner, Rat, my friend turned would-be assassin. He had been instantly killed by the pulse; in that split second he moved fast enough to grab the gun and train it on me, and had the second concluded I would have been dead.

Maybe this was for the best; he wasn’t my friend anymore.

The door opened behind me, filling the room with a sickly pink glow from the holograms on the street. I turned around slowly. Silhouetted against the light, I could barely make out the silhouette of a woman holding a gun.

“That’s enough, Baker.” The same voice. She addressed someone nearby. “Adams, set up a perimeter. We don’t want him
getting away again.”
   “Yes ma’am,” they replied.
   This wasn’t happening.
   “Jacob Baker,” she began again, “You are under arrest.”
She was a cop; I should have known. She pointed her pistol. “Walk towards me and don’t try anything stupid.”
   “Okay, you win,” I said, putting my hands up lazily as if to stretch, fingers brushing the gun held by Rat’s outstretched arm.
Extrovert

Jessica Tonyan

medium: oil on canvas
Reaching

Sarah Krueger

medium: photography
Under a canopy of sheets, with the ceiling- 
and floor-fans whirling, 
I ask how we feel – together – and you say:

“peachy”

or the word 
a sarcastic waitress says 
of her evening, 
not how our two halves 
should be noted.

Because what I know of peaches is their softness 
– and how every peach carries a sunrise on its skin; 
how wrinkles along their furry scalps 
are signs they’ve likely ripened, as we do in time.

If I flick your peach and mine against the sink, 
will it bounce back and say that we’re okay? 
No. We’d have to be cranberries, 
because when they’re sound, 
they still hold their air inside.

Whereas, in our case, 
I’ve known of an emptiness for some time 
– I just needed you to tell me. 
Hearing you say “peachy” helped, but it still hurt 
– and I know we won’t bounce back.
Tiempo Para Nada

Cómo deseó tiempo,
Tiempo para nada.
Verás si tengo tiempo,
Veinticuatro horas por jornada.
Pero estudiando, trabajando
Y sin sentirme descansada,
Planeando mi futuro,
El presente se me escapa.
Añoro mis días de niña,
Pequeña afortunada,
Viviendo relajada,
Cómo extraño no hacer nada.
Time For Nothing

Celeste Vega

How I desire time,
Time for nothing.
See I do have time,
Twenty-four hours in a day.
But studying, working,
And without feeling rested,
Planning my future,
I’m losing the present.
I yearn for my days as a child,
Little fortunate thing,
Living relaxed,
How I miss not doing a thing.
“Well, are you black, or are you white?”
Not knowing which response was right,
bench-bound, alone... that was me.
Interrogators stood as three.
**Observe**—they can’t see a color like gray.
**Stunned**, when the children asked me that day.

Small mocha hands, family’s the same.
Except mom is pale, but why proclaim?
Once meaning nothing, being brown,
‘til unforgettable playground
**bemused** the boy just wanting to play.
**Difference**—dividing and pushing away.

Well, was I black, or was I white?
Crucial point for suburbanites.
Colors cross, yet color un-blurred.
Challenge ferments as I matured.
**Take heed!** The wrong choice will damn you to blue.
**Yellow**, I give in and let racists subdue.

“Celebrate Martin,” teachers say.
Students slam, “Happy Nigger Day!”
Chameleon who fooled them all,
back shudders ‘gainst cold frozen wall.
**Ashamed**, I conform, concur, and withdrew.
**Guilty**—though free from their prejudiced view.

Well, I was “black.” I was not white.
Visually condemned birthright.
Question festered, then it rotted.
Hand caught-red, my blood rust-clotted.
**Neither**, but surely not looking the one.
**Surprise!** Unable to hide nor outrun.
“We’ll spare you not! Spic! Arab! Chink!
You’re one of them, that’s what we think.”
From orange flames, myself acquit.
A phoenix now, no hypocrite.
**Soaring**, from racists I fly toward high sun.
**Freedom**! Hoped moment decidedly done.

So, am I black, or am I white?
Damn the query! Too long a plight!
Open minds somehow do exist
in towns that spew scorn, shit, and piss.
**Stubborn**, on this point shall I not digress!
**Daring**, to hate they will not acquiesce.

Bright future green, we can descry,
when skin does not personify.
Surface brown, dark black, light white?
Erase fake color from our sight.
**Value**… We’re rainbow but nevertheless,
…**reason**, from within our worth is expressed.
The evening twilight absorbed the sun’s brutal Vietnamese heat, and it offered some relief. I slashed at the earth, digging a fighting hole, to hold off any assault on our platoon’s flank. Stepping back from my efforts, I took a moment to admire what I had carved from soil and rock: the same earth and rock that Americans were dying for every day. It was a hole deep enough to conceal my position, but with enough room, I could stretch out for the night. I jumped in and began positioning my rifle and pack along the outer edge of the hole. I was glad to be off the trail and ready to enjoy a meal of ham and beans, C-rations I had with me.

“Doc.” First-Sergeant Hammond, a career marine from South Georgia, broke my brief moment of quiet. His gravelly southern charm chilled my spine. He was never one for small talk, only the business of being a marine. “Get your gear. You’re going out on ambush tonight.”

“I’ve been corpsman on the last three ambushes, First-Sergeant. Don’t you think Danielson can do this one?” I said.

“Get your gear and your ass up to command. You’re going out with second squad,” he said.

I could tell any further protest was over as he turned and walked off. The three previous night ambushes had rendered little more than lost sleep. A part of me, the darker part, warned that odds were growing against me. One of these night soirees would become a shit storm of chaos and death. It was like loading a bullet, spinning the chamber, holding the barrel to your head and before pulling the trigger you ask, is this the one?

I organized the battle dressings and other medical equipment for Unit One, grabbed a few ammo clips, my rifle and climbed from the safety of my hole. Someone staying back with the platoon would move in and not break a sweat as I had done digging it. On the positive side, I thought, I hadn’t dug my grave. That hole wasn’t where I would die tonight.

As I reached command and joined the second squad,
Lieutenant Simpson was explaining our objective.

He stopped momentarily to make it clear I was late. “Glad you could join us, Doc,” he said. His sarcasm wasn’t lost on me.

He continued, “Third platoon is tasked to observe and report any river traffic moving up the Dong Hoa River. The North Vietnamese are running resupplies down to the south, according to our intel. The ambush tonight is more listening and watching than killing and capturing. There’s not supposed to be enemy boots on the ground, so the possibility of contact tonight is negligible,” the Simpson explained. “With no questions,” he said, “good luck, and I’ll see all of you tomorrow.”

Our mission sounded simple enough to me. Higgins was our squad leader for tonight. He was a short timer for the Nam, only weeks before his rotation date back to the states. He was going home with medals and all his body parts, so I felt confident he wasn’t putting us at risk to make rank or any heroic gestures. My odds for another quiet night in the unknown were getting better.

Waiting inside the perimeter for twilight to melt into complete darkness, the second squad saddled up and walked toward the river. We had an hour, maybe hour and a half hike ahead of us. It would be slow going to keep down the noise of seven marines moving through the night in high grass and dense jungle. Everyone was on high alert, easing through the night toward the river. It was in these moments on the march that we could easily become the ones ambushed.

We reached the river only feet from its southern bank. Higgins, with only hand gestures, motioned where the gun team was to deploy and signaled two of our squad to set the claymore mines. Once everyone was positioned, each man burrowed into the brush, trying to make himself quietly indistinguishable from the jungle floor.

Two-hour watches were assigned well in advance of reaching the river. Mine wasn’t scheduled until much later, so I hoped to find a little sleep before my turn. Sleep was always hard to come by on these night ambushes. Fear and adrenaline pushed it away, but I was exhausted.
Thankfully, I must have drifted off because my deep unconsciousness ignited with a staccato tat-tat-tat of outgoing rounds from the M-60 machine gun, followed by the claymore’s explosion. Everyone began firing in the direction of the river. They had no target, and their shots were random, harmless, and wasteful, I thought. No rounds were coming inbound. Only our gunfire and angry yells into the darkness broke the hours of tension that everyone felt.

Higgins called out a cease-fire. The river bank fell silent, and after a time it was evident that whoever had caught the attention of the gun team was dead or wished they were. Higgins sent Cortez and Smith down to the river’s edge to find any bodies. Only minutes later, Smith rejoined the squad. He wanted Higgins and the rest to see what our ambush had caught.

We stumbled down the embankment to the river, and on the shoreline were two lifeless bodies. One was an old man. I had to guess because most of his head was shot away. A small boy laid awkwardly by his side, shot only once through the heart. I could only speculate why just one round had hit the boy with everyone shooting in his direction and claymores going off. But it didn’t matter; dead is dead.

I could see that Higgins was calculating in his mind what he should do. Finally, he said, “Cortez, you and McGregor take these bodies out to the middle of the river far as you can and let them float with the current, away from the ambush site.”

When the two returned, Higgins, brought us close to kneel near him so he could tell all of us, “Look, here’s our story. We opened up on some bad guys, working their way up the river. We let loose on them, but they got away because we didn’t find any casualties. The ambush site was secured and we hiked back. That’s going to be the report. I’m not spending more time in this country than I have to, testifying to a bunch of JAG officers about collateral damage.”

Higgins stopped only a moment to draw a breath and look each man squarely in the eye, affirming his intention.

He started again. “You have the story, and no one says
differently.” As he spoke, he kept tapping the trigger guard of his rifle to send another message. He continued, “This was an accident. These people weren’t supposed to be here and shit happens. Those two were collaterals, gooks, who cares?”

“This was murder,” I spoke up. “A kid and a father or grandfather just out fishing. They were checking their nets for the day’s catch. How many of us did something similar with our dads?”

Even in darkness, I could see as well as feel Higgins’ eyes penetrate to my shattered soul. Others in the squad began to back away from me. I knew I had chosen the wrong time to argue ethics. I heard the charging handle of Higgins’ M-16 draw back and slam a round into the chamber. I felt then that I could be the next body floating down the Dong Hoa River.

“Doc, do I have to repeat it all just for you?” he asked.

I shouldered my Unit-I bag, grabbed up my weapon, and began walking up the river bank. I looked back at him. “No, you don’t. It’s just war where shit happens, right?” I said.

It’s fifty years later, and Higgins’ report is a vague action summary, a lie, somewhere in the annals of history. Besides, next to My Lai, what really happened at the river was collateral that went unreported and unknown except to the family whose hearts and minds we were there to win.
They didn’t even wait for everything to be over, the scavengers. I would feel a presence behind me, turn around, and see a gang of them at the back of the bus, one winking and holding out a gray beret. I never touched the beret. I could picture the instant I did: the lining clamping shut, my fingers rubbed raw every day trying to pull it off, only to find it further fused to the scalp. No, no thank you. I could wear that ugly thing as my skin crimps and sucks on its color, or I could skin a cheetah, drape it over my ass and let everyone who comes to the yard pet me for $5. Gray is not the color of someone who could do anything and have anyone she wants.

But boy, are these fuckers persistent. They send me text messages, glare at me from parked cars, repel down the windows of buildings I walk into. They’ve flipped some of my friends, who now have gray bandanas poking from their pockets. Even worse, they pretend to be other people. My therapist will say, “You know, it’s okay to feel sad about your divorce.” I back her up against the wall and tear at her hairline, and sure enough her face slides off Scooby-Doo style and it’s just a Gray Beret. They get that silly gotcha look and wiggle five fingers like they’re casting a spell: the stages, the staaaaages.

Even if I were to join this cult, what would I learn? How to turn a calendar into a land mine? How to hate half the songs on your Spotify? How to turn alcoholism or junk food consumption into an aesthetic? How to stand in front of a mirror, squeeze out three tears, and make an “I’m sad” post for Facebook? I already told them, I cried exactly once. Never again. I found them sitting on my patio the other day gnawing on grief like old gum. “You gotta chew it until it doesn’t taste like nothing. That’s how it works,” they said. I said, “Call me irreverent, but wouldn’t it taste like nothing to just not put it in your mouth in the first place?” Their leader raised an eyebrow. “It’s a little late for that, ain’t it?” They all squawked like crows.

Damn. Touché.
Eiffel Tower

Nachammai Palaniappan

medium: acrylic paint on canvas
Combed Scarf
Camillia Zachary

medium: watercolor and ink
A Religious Experience

Cassie Backowski

Intrigue. Greed. Betrayal. When I first bought them, I had no idea that they would encapsulate all of these and more. I bought the first one when my husband was deployed, fighting for freedoms such as these. I was deeply lonely and struggled with finding a higher sense of fulfillment.

Friends and the few coworkers I confided in were concerned about me; they lovingly and optimistically told me that they had felt this way before, and that I would get through it. At times like these, we all need someone or something to turn to, they said. I had heard others talk about this religious experience and how their lives had been forever altered. You should at least try it, they said, and if it isn’t for you, at least you will know.

I was curious how something so simple could bring such change to a person’s state of mind. Would it bring me peace? Would it help me sleep at night? I didn’t know, but I was out of options and fighting to see the light in a dark time of need. I finally agreed to go with a friend of mine, who introduced me to his own place of worship. It was located in a part of town where I would usually lock my doors before hitting a stoplight. I was doubtful, but he seemed so enthusiastic that I told myself to keep an open mind. I walked in not knowing what to expect. The first thing I noticed was how brightly lit and colorful everything was. The people there were friendly and wanted to help me, and I found myself at ease pretty quickly. I left that day with the free gift that they gave to all first-time visitors.

I couldn’t wait to get home and open it. The smell of new paper wafted up to me as I opened the box, and I opened it carefully, reverently. It was purple with gold lettering on the side and came with a small black storage bag. I awoke the next morning feeling refreshed and hopeful. I kept it in the drawer next to my bed so it was always right there when I needed it. If I couldn’t sleep, or if I had extra time before work, I would get it out. That quiet, devotional time became my time. Sometimes I would go days without thinking of it, but eventually I would pick up right where I left off.
Quite some time later, I went back, and the same man that had helped me the first time asked if it had met my needs. I smiled and said it had, but I noticed a newer, prettier one on display. It was smaller and red. I had never realized they come in so many shapes, sizes, and colors. They all filled the same need in my life and seemed sent by God when I needed it most.

My husband returned from his deployment and was at first doubtful about my newfound passion, but eventually my enthusiasm even won him over. Over time, my collection grew from two to significantly more than two. I cultivated it with the precision of a museum curator, choosing only versions that I found exceptionally beautiful or practical. One of my favorites was slender, the baby blue color of the sky just before sunrise over the ocean. Of course, the color didn’t much matter, but I loved it nonetheless. It had cost more than I was willing to admit, but it was my favorite. It captured my imagination every time I saw it.

Apparently, it had that effect on someone else as well, because one day I found that some had gone missing. I thought maybe my husband had moved them, but he, looking quite confused, denied having touched them. At some point, I had moved them to a box in my closet, so I was not even sure how long they had been “lost.” Frantic, I searched the entire house for them, making up ridiculous stories in my head as to how they had moved anywhere but where I was certain I had left them. I began to feel like I was losing my mind. My husband found this hilarious, and he teased me. He had me convinced that I had donated them to a church or accidentally thrown them in the trash, but I was (mostly) positive I had not done anything of the sort. A year passed, and I tried to forget about it. Another year passed, and my collection slowly expanded again. Sometimes one or both of us would remember and laugh about it, but we were still puzzled. It became a never-ending joke in our household, a ghost story of Biblical proportions, our very own unsolved mystery.

Until the weekend I visited my close friend a few states away. The day before I returned home, she asked me to grab a blanket from her bedroom and as I walked past her open closet door
to get it, something caught my eye. A set of clear plastic drawers and in it, something blue. My favorite blue. The blue of the sky over the ocean. I looked closer, and that’s when I noticed something red. My eyes widened. Without even opening the drawer I immediately recognized three of them. I shook my head, blinked, and looked again. With so many choices in the world, the odds of us having picked these same three were astronomically high. She didn’t have much money, and I knew that the blue one alone would have been out of her price range. I thought back to the time she had last visited me, maybe a couple weeks before I had noticed they were missing, and I knew exactly what had happened.

I never mentioned my discovery of her betrayal, because I was hurt and could not imagine what I would even say. I loved my friend more than material things, but I was horrified that someone would take something so personal that belonged to another, especially a friend. When I got home, I triumphantly told my husband that the mystery had been solved. I was cleared of possibly giving them to someone’s grandparents by accident, and the longstanding joke came to an abrupt halt because the truth was more disturbing than any of the humorous possibilities we had invented over time.

I have told this story to two or three close friends, and every time the reaction is the same: shock and disgust mixed with giggles. Because honestly, none of us can imagine it. Who would steal someone else’s vibrators?
Le Flux

Tarika Walton

Il n’y a rien.  
Juste la silence ici. 
J’assis et entends. 
Le frigo vrombit. 
Il siffle la liquide. 
Aucune horloge n’est sur le mur. 
Il y a un signe 
pour les heures de tranquillité 
d’une place qui est 
tranquille peut-être pour toujours. 
Je suis à demi endormi. 
Le sifflement vient. 
Le sol est en terre. 
Tout bouge. 
La pièce se déplace. 
Il y a un flux. 
Le serpent rampe. 
Le corps monte. 
La demi est en haut. 
La demi est enroulée. 
J’assis et regarde. 
L’ombre s’étend. 
Le plafond est devenu une canopée. 
Les murs sont devenus des cascades 
au loin. 
L’armoire est devenue un couloir 
dans des tons de vert. 
Aimez le serpent. 
Le bureau est devenu une dalle de pierre. 
Un autre serpent se tisse. 
La commode est devenue un arbre creux. 
Plus de serpents s’accrochent. 
Tous les arbres mènent 
à une clairière.
Les serpents attendent là.
Je suis passé les sentiers
de fils téléphoniques.
Je m’allonge dans la clairière.
Les serpents m’habillent.
The Flux

Tarika Walton

There is nothing.
Only silence here.
I sit and listen.
The refrigerator hums.
It swishes liquid.
No clock is on the wall.
There is a banner
for the hours of quiet
from a place that is
quiet maybe forever more.
I am half asleep.
The hissing comes.
The floor is earthen.
Everything moves.
The room shifts.
There is a flow.
The snake slithers.
The body climbs.
Half is up.
Half is curled.
I sit and watch.
Shadow stretches.
The ceiling becomes a canopy.
The walls become waterfalls
in the distance.
The armoire becomes a corridor
in shades of green
like the snake.
The desk becomes a stone slab.
Another snake weaves itself.
The dresser becomes a hollowed tree.
More snakes cling.
All the trees lead
to a clearing.
The snakes wait there.
I am past the trails
of telephone wires.
I lie down in the clearing.
The snakes dress me.
Suburban Beauty

Daniel Andrés Brown-Schnurr

Emerald fields
Under an ocean of sapphire
Immersed in the mosquito buzz
And fireplace crackle
Of electric tightropes
Bouncing and swaying
With tiny acrobats
Because nature’s silk road
Doesn’t sleep
A Sunflower’s Sunrise

Vincent Blount

medium: photography
Observation

Jessica Tonyan

medium: oil on canvas
Ferryman

Kenny Dickens

Fog rolls in slow on the river,
In hearses with polished silver lanterns.
Roll slow, roll slow
The ferryman takes his due.

Slat board barges take off their hats
And croon a melody.
Clink-a-tack clink-a-tack,
Two silver dollars.

The ferryman turns
The water to oil,
The stones to eels,
A hard tack Hallelujah.

Parishioners with cinder block feet
And a thousand thousand hands
Sink in devotion and
Eels claim their eyes.

Gather tins of ash and bone
And secondhand suits
Down in linen tightly bound,
Two pennies in a tin cup.

Let he who is without
Sin cast the first die
Roll slow, roll slow
The ferryman takes his due.
I remember seeing him play solitaire at the kitchen table quite often. He wore a button up flannel, open in the front and exposing his white pit stained, v-neck tee shirt. His blue jeans that used to be new, some time ago, are now a faded hint of blue with stains here and there. Remnants hang around from various types of projects and escapades that a hardworking man finds himself involved in, ground into the blue jeans as a reminder. He wore those boon-docker boots, weighing about 15 pounds each, worn leather clods of polish and stitching, heels worn unevenly. The cracked black leather belt around his waist was there to hold his pants up and that is how it was used.

Not once did that belt come slip, slip, slipping through the belt loops in a rush to inflict a medium of punishment on me. The smell of the Winston cigarette that was always in his mouth, with about three inches of ash precariously looking for a place to fall, filled the kitchen. His glasses were a style only seen being worn in porn movies and by history teachers, yet the eyes behind them held so much experience and love. The wrinkles around those eyes and the age upon the face gave way to a sense of accomplishment and comfort in this man.

Looking at his crew cut styled silver hair seemed to invoke a stare from me always; I wondered how he made it look so perfect. “Perfect.” That was a word that I could not fathom as a teenager. This man made it look easy, almost as easy as breathing. I didn’t know how to react to him, whether to look up to him, flinch when he moved or avoid him all together. He was like a rock, unmovable and solid in his ways, yet always there for those who needed him.

His leathered hands were rough and calloused, but gentle and supportive. They never reached out to punch or slap me, only to offer support. Those hands, if they could talk, would be able to tell more stories than anyone I know today. Hands that worked on a farm, hands that joined the millions of other hands fighting in World War II, hands that were scarred and weathered while welding boilers.
in a metal factory for over thirty years, and eventually the relaxing
yet arduous task of those hands mastering the new technology of the
remote control, hands with an amazing history.

Those hands now laid cards out on the kitchen table in a
unique pattern. I watched night after night, not knowing how to
connect to the man in front of me. The one man that offered what
I most wanted in life, the man who did not judge or punish for his
own amusement. The grey-haired legend in front of me was alone.
I could see the pain in his eyes from time to time, the long look of
sadness a person gets when a loved one passes away. He hid it well,
but we both felt the pain and never spoke about it. Instead, we tilled
the garden, split wood, welded metal things together and drove
exceptionally slowly on the highway.

Every now and then I would catch him looking at me,
wondering what I was going through. I wish that I would have been
a better grandson to this man, but I could not be that. I was still
reeling from years of mental and physical abuse and as such, I was
like a dog that had been kicked too many times. I would not let him
get close, nor anyone else for that matter. I did learn a lot from him,
though. I understand what he was teaching me now.

Those nights alone at the kitchen table, dealing out the cards
and flipping them down lightly, slapping the table with each one,
caused me to lie awake in bed and listen to the sound of protection.
He was there protecting me while I slept, ever vigil and watchful,
proving to me that I no longer had to be afraid. He may not have
known how to talk to me, nor I with him, but the sound of those
cards and the smell of the Winstons made me feel secure and safe.

I will always picture him sitting there, playing that game
waiting for time to pass and daylight to come, beginning a new
day. It took years for me to understand and fully comprehend the
meaning behind the game and the solid posture of the war-torn and
weathered man in front of me. I understand now and I can see his
strength and courage and it fills me with joy to know how much he
cared. I wish I could have let him know then what I know now. He
will always be in my memory, playing solitaire.
Drawer

Kenny Dickens

One open drawer.

A very small piece of paper used to write even numbers.
A watch,
Broken.
Time, 12:34.
AM or PM?
A small roll of green twine, scratchy.
A candy wrapper
Three pencil sharpeners
Thirty-nine cents
A book on numismatics
A pocket dictionary
Numismatics
n. (used with a sing. v.)
The study or collection of money, coins, and often medals.
One ballpoint pen.
An incomplete deck of playing cards (47)
A folder of sheet music
A phone number
Is that an eight or a six?
Five playing cards.
A complete deck of playing cards (52)
One $25 gift card to a local bookstore.
A photo of us,
A note.

One closed drawer.
Combed Dress

Camillia Zachary

medium: watercolor and ink

2019
Peacock

Nachammai Palaniappan

medium: acrylic paint on canvas
He was watching her. She could feel his eyes running along the length of her body. He had been watching her for eight years, and she had grown accustomed to the way his gaze felt like water rolling over her—just as the water rolled over the stones and fell into the pools beside her.

Haesel’s bare feet sank into the soft ground and her breath caught in her throat. She stopped moving—frozen in terrified anticipation, but upon looking down she saw that her foot had only sunk into a puddle of mud. She curled her toes, mud spilling over the tops of her feet as she let out the air in her lungs, the fear and disappointment that coursed through her leaving with it.

A soft breeze rolled over her bare shoulders as she continued down the trail, and with it she swore she could hear her name. It was whispered softly, in a caressing manner that she would not have noticed had the hairs along her arms not stood straight up towards the sky.

Again her breath caught, nerves overriding her anticipation and slowly morphing into a steady fear. She turned her head toward the forest’s edge, searching amongst the pine trees for him, though she knew he would be hidden behind thick trees.

But just now, she could have sworn that he had called to her from wherever he hid.

Her hands trailed along the tips of the long grass, leaving dew coating her palms. She twirled around, as though in the middle of a dance, her dress billowing out around her. The wind brushed through her hair and rolled along the length of her arms—she imagined they were his hands trailing along her milky skin.

She had been coming to the faery pools each morning since the age of ten, wishing to catch a glimpse of the Fae prince her grandmother had woven throughout her childhood stories. They were meant to frighten her, and yet with each story she began to yearn for the world her grandmother wove each night; fantasizing about the world that lived just under her feet.
As a child she had grown fond of the Fae prince who was bid to choose a bride amongst the humans, bringing her to his world by a small primrose flower. To find his bride he would visit these faery pools each morning, watching and waiting along the forest’s edge for a woman beautiful enough to drag beneath the soil to his own world. But he had never found her. Instead, in his outrage and impatience over the years, he had begun to take each woman that crossed the fields—not as his faery bride, but as payment for his suffering and waiting. It was said that these women littered the underground, left to choke on the soil that filled their throats for eternity.

Each night after the story, her grandmother would warn her of the Fae prince who still came to the faery pools, watching and waiting for the woman beautiful enough to be claimed as his bride.

Haesel had never admitted the fear that coursed through her each morning as she crossed the field to sit beneath the waterfalls. She had ignored the threat that seemed to pulse beneath her bare feet, and instead had realized that each day she came home meant that he was waiting for her.

“Haesel.”

She spun, her hair whipping around her; he had sounded as if he were standing right behind her, purring into her ear. But there was no one there, just the tall grass swaying in the wind.

As she continued to walk through the field, she watched the tree line—she could not hear his steps from where she stood, but she knew that he was following her—walking along with each step she took. He was admiring her and the way her dress moved against her skin, and the way her hair brushed along her bare shoulders.

The wind whipped through her hair, tangling it; her dress rising around her, skimming the tops of her thighs. She forced herself to smile. She could feel his desire for her and his want to see her bare skin.

Fear crawled through her as she remembered her grandmother’s warnings. She hesitated at the pool’s edge, the water lapping at her feet, its brisk touch sucking the heat from her toes. She felt cold then, even as the sun warmed her body. Dread coiled through her as she realized today could be the last time walking
these fields; the last time feeling the sun warm her skin, the last time hearing her grandmother tsk as she walked back into the house well after the sun had rose.

The wind’s warm caress blew her dress to skim her upper thigh, and she found herself pulling it over her head; it slid to the ground, spilling at her feet. Water rushed up her legs, stealing the breath from her as it raked farther up her body. The ripples of water lapped against her bare breasts, rising along her neck to encase her shoulders, before she slipped her head beneath it—the field disappearing from view.

Water ran down her face as she came up for air, the droplets blurring her vision. For a split second, she wondered if the icy water had gone to her head as she rubbed it away from her eyes and saw who sat along the pool’s edge.

He sat on a flat rock, watching her carelessly from across the pools. His green eyes seemed to sparkle with mischief as they followed her movements. His auburn hair curled at his ears and brushed his forehead as his head tilted to the side, inspecting her.

Haesel flushed, in fear or anticipation she couldn’t tell, but the water’s coolness warmed as he continued to look at her.

“Oh, my dear Haesel,” he sighed.

It was different—seeing his gaze travel along the skin that peaked above the water, rather than feeling it rake down her body from afar. It burned into her, the embers within his eyes blazing to life as the water pulled away.

She had not realized that she was gliding through the water towards him, as if drawn to him, regardless of the fear that warned her to stay away. With each step her bare breasts peeked over the waterline, his eyes darkening with each teasing glance.

“You truly are beautiful,” he purred.

She did not know if he had meant to say it aloud, or if his shock at seeing her had allowed for the words to slip past his lips. Pleasure mingled with fear as he pulled at his bottom lip with his teeth—she could almost feel those teeth trailing against her skin.

His lip slipped from his teeth, stretching into a thin smile. “You’ve been patient with me,” he continued, laughing softly.
She opened her mouth to say something, but only a soft squeaking sound escaped.

A deep rumble rolled from his lips, a growl-like sound.

“Come.”

The anticipation and flush that had been coursing through her body left as the word hit her. The power behind it, and the way she knew he would accept nothing less than her obedience. She realized then why her grandmother had tried to frighten her with the stories—he was not the loving prince she had envisioned as a child, but a powerful being.

Her fear of that power drove her forward, not wanting to displease him. She did not want to be one of the victims that stood beneath the soil, choking.

As she waded out to him, the pools deepened, and she found herself swimming, her feet no longer able to touch the bottom. She did not think about what could be swimming below her, and instead took the time to admire him.

He wore a thin white blouse, thin enough that she could just make out the muscle beneath. His pants were loose and a dark black, the sun’s rays seemed unable to touch the color—or him. She looked at his face, marveling at the marble coloring. His eyes followed her, the green in them that had before seemed to hold small warm embers, yet up close she saw that they seemed to resemble more like shards of glass—sharp and piercing.

His eyes flickered to see something behind her, back towards the pool’s edge where she had entered. She turned slightly, following his gaze, wondering what had distracted him. Along the flat plains she could make out a lone morning hiker—her blonde hair pulled back and bouncing with each step. Jealousy gripped at her as she swung her head around to look back at the prince. But he no longer sat upon the flat rock.

A scream echoed across the fields—shattering the stillness that had been there moments before.

Haesel spun, water splashing around her. Where the female hiker had been just moments before, there was only the tall grass swaying in the wind.
“Haesel.”

She froze, turning her neck. There he was, sitting upon the flat rock as if he had never moved.

Dread coiled through her stomach, her muscles seizing. He beckoned at her with his hand, almost impatiently. She took a deep breath before turning around fully, hesitating only slightly.

“You’re—” Haesel gulped. “You’re him, my Fae prince.”

He nodded. “Come here, my dear.”

She forced herself not to turn back around to look at the shoreline—where her dress, the hiker, and home lay—and instead pushed through the water towards him. As she reached the rock, her hands brushing its flat surface, he gripped her hands and pulled her out of the water and onto his lap. His arms enveloped her waist, pulling her flush against his chest. The loose pants he wore were smooth against her bare skin, and his white shirt became damp with the water that rolled off her—she could see the hard muscle clearly now as the fabric stuck to his skin.

His hands ran down the length of her side, caressing each curve of her body, while his eyes blazed with fire as he took in her breasts.

Haesel blushed, her eyes dropping, too nervous to hold his gaze.

“You have never shown yourself before?” she questioned. “Are you here to take me with you?”

She reached to the soil then, wanting to have something in her hands—anything to keep her eyes off his own.

A small patch of flowers was nestled at the foot of the rock; she picked one, twirling it between her thumb and finger. The silence that stretched across them made her uncomfortable, and she found herself glancing up at him through her eyelashes.

The fire in his eyes dimmed as he watched the flower in her hands. She wondered if he was disappointed in her questioning or at her picking the flower. She opened her mouth to apologize, but he gently plucked the flower from her hand, twirling it as she had.

“Perhaps, Haesel,” he said, answering her question.

Warmth ran through her when her name passed his lips, her
mind reeling over the thought that he was here to take her. Fear, however, tainted her thinking as she watched him examine the flower, then carefully lay it back into her palm.

“I—” she paused. She could not stop thinking about the hiker and the scream that had echoed throughout the fields. She shivered in his arms.

She felt it then, the desire he had for her, but it was more than just desire; she knew that her grandmother had been right to try and make her fear the prince beneath her.

His hands tightened, curling into her waist. He leaned in, whispering in her ear. “Go get dressed, my dear.”

She stood slowly, in a daze—her heart pounding, searching for a way out of her chest. She could no longer discern if it was in anticipation that he could want her, or if it was in fear and dread. The soil around the pool sunk slightly with each step she took along the bank, her breath stalling as she wondered if it would be her last within this world.

She faced him as she picked up her dress. His smile held no warmth, the red in his lips stark against his skin, and his eyes blazed like green shards of glass piercing through her.

The dress fell over her eyes for a moment before pooling around her. A breeze rolled over her shoulders, and she heard her name pass once more over his lips, before hands circled her ankles, pulling her below the fields long tall grass.

A primrose flower falling to take her place.
Hummingbirds

Nachhammai Palaniappan

medium: acrylic paint on canvas
Britti Mosby

Durag Dragon

medium: digital art
A Red Herring

Scott Winfrey

A Red Herring swims
in a stream of thought,
but diverts away
when it is sought;
For you see,
this is what a Herring is taught,
to swim away
before it is caught.

A Red Herring springs
when it is caught,
And tells a lie
that lies in your thought;
For you see,
This is what a Herring has brought,
Something fishy
To get you distraught.

A Red Herring swings
to get it uncaught,
Using the lie
to untangle its knot;
For you see,
This is how a Herring does plot,
polluting your mind
and damming your thought!
The Hamlet Paradox
Nicole Ashley Marie Caldwell

He enraptures them—words flowing like honey
Drop off his tongue;
His sword meets flesh with fury and justice and Divine Intervention.
This king:
He forms a shield against the winds of wicked men.
O, God!
Why do you taunt his heir!
Seeds of mad deceit blossom into poppies;
Judas, with his tethered rope, cowers in his presence.
A man concealed in robes of blackest despair,
Yet suffocated with the tendrils of purple posterity
Weeps, wallows, and whines to sew himself a breastplate of petals.
This prince:
He has nothing
Nor a father, neither.
Shall a cross blast away the damned fiends lurking in robes?
Christ hanged for his father-bringer of life.
This prince:
He hangs on his sorrows.
He engulfs the land with his tears;
Rivers pour from his eyes—suffocating everything in his path.
This prince:
He is the destroyer of life.
He gleams—shrouded in an angelic mist.
Where is the noble king?
The immortal man in the mortal ditch.
Here lies Alexander (The Great).
The Mighty Emperor stands guard in this domain;
Hark the trumpets of angels!
He crushes mountains, he crushes armies, he crushes all machinations of the Devil;
Though mother’s force soon possesses him,
Further and further down she pulls him,
Further to the flames licking at his heels and loam leeching at his
palms.
As he sinks into her sickly embrace, he begins to feel a tingle rising from toe to head.
Worms.
How they feast on squalid hopes, dreams, sweet flesh;
Fear of this inevitable supper drives us all.
At their touch, the innermost core recoils, decays and releases putrid gases
That await living men.
Who is Alexander to I, and who am I to Alexander?
Nobody.
Once, Midas did bless the armor of noble men;
Now Alexander’s ashes fill the throats of men who drink of a wine barrel:
Lying awake.
Memories stored in items for pleasure as his body rots.
The lovely girl: she rots too.
Her face pale as a dove, her grave black as a crow.
They tell her she cannot be married, she cannot be buried, or on clouds to Heaven be carried.
O, misfortune!
Of innocence she was robbed!
For her, mountains would push into the heavens;
Shall a challenge be had with the Almighty on His battlefield?
Believe, sweet: he would.
Droplets of life fall from his eyes, blessing her grave
From which violets spring.
Things to Do on the Edge of a Cliff

Kenny Dickens

I.
Grab the railing.
Look out over the trees and see
Far below
Their tops, reaching up to you.
Laugh at them.

II.
Look forward and up slightly
To see a hawk
Or possibly an eagle,
Some legendary taloned bird
Dive down
Claw
And hold on.

III.
Lie down on your stomach
And slide closer,
As to be on the very brink,
The true edge,
And cast a single pebble.
Watch as it falls and you lose it
Among the trees.
IV.
Sacrifice something valuable to you,
A watch perhaps,
A cell phone,
An object the value of which
Is nothing
To the trees below.

V.
Consider jumping, but at the last moment
Do not.
Ask yourself why.
The Child

Taylor Meyer

We had been driving for almost an hour not saying a word, but I had inherited my silence from my father. He sat in the passenger seat with a cigarette between his fingers and his phone in the other hand. He was playing a game, hypnotized by the shapes and the colors and the way the screen lit up when he’d score points.

When he had called me last week, I had not expected to hear from him. Over the last year we had talked only four times, and we had seen each other even less. In the past, our phone conversations had drifted into silence after the initial, “How are you doing?” At thirty years old, my husband and I were trying to start a family; I had stopped feeling the need to force mine into existence.

Cool air rushed in through the cracked windows and there was nothing in front of us but two lanes and the sprawling fields of grass that were illuminated in the brightness of my headlights.

“You think we could stop soon?” he asked me, and I looked over at the clock. It was already eleven, which meant we wouldn’t be in Springfield until almost one in the morning.

“Do you have to go to the bathroom?”

“Yes,” he answered, and flicked his cigarette out the window.

“Why else would I ask you to stop?”

“I don’t know,” I lied.

He reached over and flipped through the channels on the radio. The small white band with black lettering hung loose on his arm. He had been waiting for me in the lobby of the hospital when I came to pick him up this evening, dressed in the same tattered jeans and gray t-shirt I had dropped him off in a few days before. He smiled and hugged me, and it wasn’t until we were putting his bags into my car that he told me the rehab we were heading to didn’t have a bed open for him. I spent the next couple of hours calling around to different facilities until I found one that would take him tonight. We only had to drive three and a half hours.

When I was a kid, we used to drive to Branson once a year as our designated family vacation. I would watch my dad from the
back seat where I sat with my younger brother. He would tell us about the music that played on the radio, what was good music and what wasn’t worth listening to. My brother had been too young to remember these trips—they had stopped by the time he was three and I was seven—but I remembered. Driving across the state with my family made our lives feel normal, but once I started middle school I began to notice differences when I’d go to friends’ houses for dinner or to spend the night. I’d hold up the photographs of my childhood and compare them to those of my friends. I learned that on their family vacations, their dads didn’t have beer cans in the cupholders. Their dads didn’t leave after dinner and return to the hotel room later, glassy-eyed and smelling of sweet liqueur.

“There’s a gas station off this exit,” he said, pointing at the glowing blue sign.

“I can see.”

He shifted around in his seat. “I’m just making sure.”

We pulled up in front of the gas station and I decided to use the restroom as well. They were single person bathrooms and smelled of sewage and cleaner, smells I was familiar with. Even though it had been over five years since I had hid away in a bathroom, a needle in one hand and a spoon in the other, being under those harsh lights made my skin crawl.

Someone pounded on the door, startling me.

“Just a minute!” I called, and finished washing my hands. I pulled my short brown hair back into a ponytail as much as I could and then studied my reflection; I was tired, but I could still see the whites of my eyes and feel the blood that pulsed under my skin, full of life. Sometimes I needed to remind myself I was no longer in that place.

As I made my way through the gas station, I could see my dad through the advertisements glued to the inside of the window. He was standing out on the sidewalk, smoking his cigarette, and he was talking to someone: a kid who looked no older than sixteen or seventeen. I walked faster and the bells attached to the top of the door clanged as I forced my way through.

“What are you doing?” I asked him. The heavy lights from
the gas station created shadows on his face where they hadn’t been before, where he had lost weight and his skin sagged, where there was hair on his cheeks and jaw that hadn’t been shaved in days and was turning gray. He looked tired. He was shaking.

“He needs someone to buy him alcohol,” he shrugged. The kid held a twenty dollar bill in his hand. I could remember standing in front of our house when I was seventeen. The noise from my graduation party seeped through the windows and the front door, and I watched as my dad climbed out of a car with some boys I went to school with. “They needed someone to buy them alcohol,” he had said as he stumbled onto the front porch more drunk than most of the people at the party. I had laughed with everyone else; they thought he was the cool dad.

“Come on,” I told him and moved towards the car.

“He said he didn’t care,” the kid explained to me, but I kept walking.

“I told him I’d buy him some,” my dad tried, as if buying an underage kid alcohol was the right thing to do.

“I don’t care what you told him, get in the car, Dad!” My voice had come out louder and sharper than I had expected. He stood there and didn’t say anything.

Before I had gotten clean and before my mom had left him, we would have explosive arguments, all of which ended the same no matter how or where they had started. We would have competitions to see who was more at fault. I used drugs because he drank, and he drank more because I used drugs. Things were different now.

“Dad, please get in the car,” I asked, and this time he walked over to the passenger side and climbed in. I got in after him and pulled out of the parking lot.

“I know I messed up,” he started, “but you don’t have to treat me like I’m a child.” I bit down on the inside of my cheek.

“I’m sorry if I yelled at you, but it’s midnight on a Tuesday and I’m driving you three and a half hours to rehab. We are doing things my way, and I need you to not make this harder. Please.”

He got quiet again, so I turned up the radio. The Beatles were playing Blackbird. We used to sing along with The Beatles,
and my father and I would dance to their songs. Twenty-five years was such a long time, and when I looked back I couldn’t remember how we had gone from jumping around the living room with music blasting to sitting in this car, fighting to stay above water. None of my other family members had ever understood it though, neither my brother nor my mom. They had never heard the voice that was inside of our heads and the way it disguised itself as our own. They’d never feel the depths of that infinite pit we hid inside of ourselves, or know how far we’d go to try and fill it.

We drove on the remaining hour and a half not saying much. Sometimes he’d begin recalling moments from the past, memories from a time that was long gone, that he hadn’t realized were few and far between. I forced a smile and tried not to imagine the memories we could make if he stayed sober.

There were tall lights that lit up the empty parking lot in front of the rehabilitation center. There was no movement in or around the place, and there were only a couple cars parked on the side of the building. There was nothing in the surrounding area but fields and lines of trees, and the light coming from within made the building seem as if it were floating there in the darkness, unattached.

My father took a deep breath in and then exhaled, “I think this was a bad idea.”

My chest grew tight. “I know you’re scared, but you have to trust me; this is the best thing you can do for yourself. If I did it, you can do it.”

“Just take me to the nearest hotel,” he said. “You don’t have to bring me back. I’ll find a ride, but I can’t go in there.”

“What are you talking about? You are going. We drove all this way. I’m not leaving until you’re checked in.”

He got out of the car so I did too.

“Dad,” I called, but he was pacing now, the shadow on the pavement growing longer and then shorter as he moved.

“Don’t try and guilt trip me,” he said, his voice growing louder. He stopped and looked over at me. “I never forced you to do anything. We knew you had a problem, but you weren’t ready to get help. After all you had put us through...” but I cut him off.
“You should have made me go! You were the parent!”
“You’re my daughter,” he argued. “I am still your parent.”
“Are you though?” The words fell from my mouth, and I scrambled to pick them up and put them back.
“I’m sorry. I didn’t mean that.”
His eyes glittered and then he pinched the bridge of his nose with his thumb and forefinger and squeezed his eyes closed so hard his eyelids turned pale from the pressure. I used to find him slumped over on the couch when I’d sneak down the hall late at night. He’d squint his eyes like that when I’d wake him and tell him to go to bed. It was as if he were trying to wish himself away, force himself into another reality. I imagined him sleeping on the couch now that everyone had left, his head tilted forward in an awkward position. What had he done when there was no one left to wake him?
“I’m sorry,” I repeated.
As I watched him, I could see that the roundness of my face, the tall, slender build of my body, the nervousness, had all been cut from him. So many parts of me were reflections of my father, and as we stood there before these doors of the unknown, the only thing I knew was that he was my father.
“Dad,” I started again. “All I’m asking is that you check yourself in tonight. Give it a week, or maybe two. See how things go, and then you can decide what you want to do.”
He didn’t respond.
“I love you,” were the only other words I could find.
There was silence, but then, “I love you too.”
He moved towards the car and opened the back door, and after grabbing the duffel bag that sat on the backseat, he turned towards me.
“One week,” he said. “Maybe two.”
Common Beauty

medium: photography

Sarah Krueger
The Willow

Tara Clarkson

medium: watercolor markers
The Invisible Hero

Jeffrey Pryor

We have all heard the story about how American Marines stormed the beaches of Iwo Jima during World War II. Thousands of troops, crowded onto troop transport vessels, clambered over the sides and down the nets into Higgins boats or landing crafts, bobbing like toys in the massive waves. These men could hear the barking Japanese machine guns, echoing off the warm water of the Pacific Ocean. Many young men lost their lives that day, yet the survivors pushed forward to take the beachhead, forcing the Japanese back. All this bloodshed and heroism ultimately started the demise of the Japanese war machine. The sacrifices and heroic acts of the young American troops are told in stories, movies, and poems, yet most of the heroism will fall prey to time and remain unnoticed.

As a teenager, I lived with my grandparents in a ramshackle house tucked away in the woods. My grandfather always minded his own business, quietly blending into society. He retired from a local factory and enjoyed his “Grand Ole Opry” and Dolly Parton’s two sisters, as he referred to them. He never stood out to me, just another old guy that smoked Winston cigarettes in the truck with the windows rolled up. I knew that he had served in the Navy during World War II, and nothing more. I never asked questions and he never told any stories. I came to know him as a quiet, gentle man who loved his family, dearly. This was a new concept to me and I did not know whether to trust it or keep my distance, so I chose the latter.

The relationship between my grandparents was amazing and they were the best of friends. Every summer, we used to travel to Wappapello Lake and go fishing. As a young teen, it seemed to be some sort of twisted torture to me. We would drudge on for a week in the aluminum, flat-bottomed boat. I dreaded the humid Missouri summers that cooked me alive while we rode around on the lake fishing, or more than likely, searching for the fish. I never understood the idea behind what we were doing, but I will admit that the fish fry
in the evening was superb. Even on the lake, grandpa was quiet, soft spoken, yet always in thought.

I remember one time on that lake, we were fishing on the far end away from everyone and everything, as usual. A storm welled up and quickly closed in on us. The sky became bruised and angry. Lightning streaked the sky and thunder crashed all around us, permeated by a torrent of relentless hail, banging off the aluminum boat like machine gun fire. My grandfather calmly told my grandmother, brother, and me to get down low in the bottom of the boat. He stood up, stretched, turned around and pulled the rope on the boat’s motor. It whirred to life, sputtering and bucking until it reached a rhythmic crescendo, shaking the boat ever so slightly as it idled and anxiously awaited direction. He turned back around, sat down and pulled his hat a little lower over his flat top haircut, white hair poking out. We started moving forward slowly, slamming into the waves as we went. Ice cold water and mist poured over the side, hail pelting us from all angle, balls of ice slamming the boat with distinct report. While we huddled together in the bottom of the boat, I looked up to see my grandfather, steadfast, unafraid, fiercely focused on getting us to shore safely. Lighting struck behind him and thunder crashed all around, yet he was on a mission. We made it to the shore, drenched and cold, yet safe and sound. That memory faded from my life for many years; I chalked it up to time and replaced it with new memories.

I never spent much time getting to know my grandfather, the gray-haired man everyone called “Hobe.” I was deployed to South Korea when my grandfather became a victim of cancer. It was over quickly for him. Not until after my grandfather’s death did I find out about the role he played in World War II. My grandfather was a Higgins boat coxswain: he piloted one of the small landing crafts that delivered Marines troops onto the shores of Iwo Jima. He made repeated trips to the beach on February 19, 1945, dropping off troops to fight the Japanese. I was told that after his first wave, most of the men were slaughtered by machine gun fire as soon as he dropped the ramp door.

When he returned to load up more troops, he requested
molasses from the galley (sailor speak for kitchen). When they brought it to him, he dumped it into the fuel tank, creating quite a stir from onlookers. This caused the engine to start smoking profusely but did not affect performance. Once his boat was loaded with fresh troops to fight the Japanese, he piloted the craft toward the hellish nightmare on that beach again. This time, he made a couple of passes parallel to the beach, emitting smoke from the landing craft which engulfed the beach, making it nearly impossible for the Japanese to see. He hit the beach head, dropped the ramp and all his troops made it ashore.

Word was spread about this trick and other Higgins boat coxswain did the same, dumping molasses in the fuel tanks. No one knows how many lives he saved that day, nor will anyone ever know. When I look at the photos of the Iwo Jima invasion, I see smoke up and down the beachhead and I wonder if that is the result with this uncanny idea. When I heard this story, I remembered how fearless and determined my grandfather was that stormy day on the lake. I realized that I saw him, even if just for an instant, as the hero he was. Most people will never get an opportunity to see that. I am lucky I did, and I will never forget the invisible hero.
The Happy Genius in the Kitchen

Jessie Eikmann

after Danse Russe

Every day I laugh
at my hopelessly unraveled,
useless apron, unravel myself
(khakis, shirt, bra, socks, underwear
if I’m feeling ambitious),
and cook dinner.
It’s just as icky
as you’d expect:

vegetable pieces
jumping down and slapping
my bare thighs and invading
anywhere I sit and
anywhere I step
with carrot ends;
curls of celery,
or the slimy scabs
of potato skin;

my hand slipping
and vegetable stock
or soy sauce
or half-and-half
getting splashed
on the tapestry
of my breast;

garlic’s scent sneaking
into every unexpected
fold of my body
that clothes would cover;
oil sparks
kissing my groin
before I can duck away.

But even though
I push a slotted spoon
through that oil
thinking someday
I will shrink myself
to fit through holes,
someday I will be weightless,

and even though I always
sit contemplating
what I’ve made,
fiddle with the rim
of the plate, and realize
the sad absurdity
of that wish—

I dare you to tell me
that this sensory assault
is incongruous with joy,
or I don’t love food,
or food doesn’t love me.
With the first fairy flick
of salt in water
I conjure up
perfect, shining
shards of color,
a canopy of heat,
a soundscape rich with
rasp and sibilance,
and in that world
I am, in fact, weightless.
The Only Visible Stars

Catherine Howl

In Los Angeles, the early sunset idles,
Withered by the brown leather skin of smog.

Your teeth become the only visible stars
Aligned as a moist half dome,

Your lips a way to hold back the the organic wall
Of your protruding tongue, almost forming words.

I find you unusual, in an ordinary way that fades
When the repeat of a heated summer sky

Is draped like a shawl,
Thrown over my stucco home.

We lay back beneath skylights that loom,
Overexposed to the sun drenched

Temporary happiness stripping us
Of our beach clothes.

With the changing current
Of Santa Ana wind and rain,

Our desires are like the last beads of water
Formed as natural bullets in toy guns

That shoot through us, piercing our nipples.
4:00 a.m. is an ungodly hour to be awake. My entire body protests as the alarm goes off and I crack open my eyes. I quickly shut them again as I think to myself, not for the first time, why me? My reasoning for agreeing to open at work today escapes my brain and I mentally kick myself for being such a kind person. Ha! More like a stupid person.

I slouch out of bed and stumble to the closet to gather my work uniform. I then head off to the shower but stop as I enter the bathroom and flip on the lights; I look like total shit. Not that I pride myself on being Miss America in the morning, but this morning in particular I look like death warmed over. There are bags under my eyes that seem to carve into my face and crazy hair that sticks out from all sides that acts to emphasize my sunken cheeks. As I take off the rest of my clothes, I notice that the skeletal features have taken over the rest of my body as well. My thighs look wasted away like two toothpicks, my arms are as thin and weak as noodles, and I can see the beginning of my ribs. I have to be dreaming because my body has not looked this small since I was in middle school. I squint at myself and sigh; today was not going to be a good day.

While stepping into the hot, nearly boiling shower I am struck by a wave of nausea and have to catch myself on the towel rack. I steady myself and shrug the feeling off as early morning fatigue and continue with my shower. But again the wave hits me as I reach for the shampoo and I nearly slip and fall. As I turn off the water, I catch myself panting as if I have just run five miles, something I have never done before, and sit on the side of the tub as I work to catch my breath. Finally, I stand up and dry myself off and struggle into my work clothes. As I put on my glasses, the yellow arches that signify the devil’s kitchen come slowly into focus along with my gaunt and hollow features. Though I quickly ignore this fact as I notice my pants are fitting much better these days. Maybe I have been running in my sleep, or taking the stairs every day is finally paying off. Either way, this weird body transformation is something I
can work with.

I try to go through the rest of my morning routine as best as I can but quickly realize that there might actually be something wrong. I keep stumbling over my own feet, I fall both down and up the stairs on my way to let the dog out to the bathroom, and my legs shake from the exhaustion of walking across the room. I struggle to think of what the problem could be and finally decide that I just need more sleep. I text my boss saying that I’ll be in a little later, so that I don’t miss my whole shift, and crawl back into bed, falling instantly asleep.

Three hours later I arrive at work feeling only slightly better. I clock in and begin to head off to my usual position when I am stopped by a hand on my shoulder. My boss turns me around and looks me in the eye, “DeLancy, you okay? You look a mess. I was worried about you this morning; you never call in.”

I muster as much energy as I can and smile at him. “Yes, Arvell, I’m fine. Just tired. Is it okay if I work in the grill? I’m not really up for human interaction today.”

He takes another long look at me before nodding and sending me off to my position. Everyone I work with gives me a strange glance as I pass by them. I methodically start to grab food supplies when I am again, stopped by a hand on my shoulder. This time it is my coworker Maria, “Are you sick, Katelyn? You forgot your gloves.” She holds up the clear sanitary gloves and I realize I was about to start making a sandwich without them. I nod my thanks to her, as that is the only gesture I have the energy for, and proceed to make breakfast for the hungry customers of McDonald’s.

My fatigue plagues me continuously and starts to take over my brain like a fog. I find myself looking at the order screen over and over again trying to remember what it is I am making. Or I close my eyes for what I think is only a second before someone is bumping into me and jolting me from sleep. Finally, my boss throws his hands up and says, “DeLancy, just go home, you’re making me feel miserable.”

I start to protest but quickly think better of it; I didn’t want to work today anyway. I pass back by my coworkers as they give
me pitiful looks, which I hate because I feel like some wounded creature. I would disagree with them, but I concede to the fact that they may be right when I arrive home without really remembering how I got there. I shakily walk back up to my third-floor apartment and climb into bed without changing. The last thing I do is call my mom to tell her something is wrong before sleep takes me again.

I wake to pounding on the door and fall out of bed trying to get to the door fast enough. Opening the front door, I give my mom an irritated look before moving aside to let her in, but she doesn’t move. She stares at me with her mouth ajar in a look of disbelief.

I can see the beginning of tears forming in her eyes as she asks, “Katelyn, are you okay?”

I tell her, “Of course, I’m fine, just tired,” and move to the couch and wave for her to close the door. She walks in and approaches me like I am a frightened animal.

“Katelyn, you do not look okay. You’re so...so skinny!”

“Well, that’s a good thing isn’t it?”

“No, honey, I just saw you two days ago and you were...different.” At this, she gives me a look like I am one of the starving children of Africa.

“Well, I don’t know, I just feel groggy. I slept like hell last night and I had to get up at 4:00 a.m. Did you bring anything to eat over with you? I haven’t eaten yet today.”

“You haven’t eaten? It’s almost 4 o’clock. What have you been doing this whole time?”

“Sleeping,” I answer simply, and this seems to send her into mega-mom mode.

“Okay, that’s it.” She stands up and gets our purses.

I give her a perplexed look and ask, “What are you doing?”

“I’m taking you to the hospital. Something isn’t right.”

“Oh, come on, you’re over-reacting. I just need some food and rest. Plus, what are you going to tell the doctors? ‘Something’s wrong with my daughter, she’s skinny!’ I don’t think that’s going to work, Mom. I’ll go and see a doctor later. It’s the weekend; it’ll cost so much more if we go now.” I sit defiantly on the couch because I do not want to go to the hospital. Not because I am scared or
anything but mostly because I am lazy and it is expensive. Hospitals charge you from the minute you walk in for breathing their air. No way was I going to pay for a medical bill at age 21 when I have enough money problems as it is.

“I don’t have the money to go to the hospital. I’ll just make a doctor’s appointment and go later. Please just make some soup or something and I promise I’ll feel better.”

My mom isn’t paying attention to any of this and continues to pack things, throwing a change of clothes at me.

“Katelyn, something is definitely wrong and we are going to the hospital. Put those on and I’ll call your dad.”

Now I know she is serious because she never calls my dad unless absolutely necessary. Since the divorce, they have not been on the best of terms even though it was nearly seven years ago. Though they both still love and care for me equally, they do not like to interact with each other if it can be helped.

So, I decide not to argue with her further and put on the sweats and t-shirt she has picked out for me. After she sees that I have changed, Mom bustles me down to her car and all but speed to the nearest hospital up the road. My dad works security at the hospital and was just getting off when we arrive, so for the first time in nearly seven years we walk into the building as a family. This feeling lifts a weight from my shoulders that I hadn’t even know I was carrying. My parents were able to care for me at the same time. They were able to put aside their feuding and see the bigger picture. Even though the circumstances were less than desirable, the three of us could still come together to overcome this. We could beat anything as long as we were together.

Within 20 minutes, I am sitting in a waiting room answering the nurse’s basic questions. My mom interjects every now and then with a comment only she thinks is pertinent and my dad tries his best to help from the corner. He keeps saying that he’s pretty sure he knows what’s happening but won’t say anything concrete until he hears from the doctor. Though his words are less than comforting, his presence here still helps me to stay somewhat calm as the nurse puts me through a series of tests. He has been my rock throughout
my life and understands me even when I don’t understand myself. And my mom is always with me through everything, no matter what. Even though our family is broken I still consider it to be the highlight of my life as we have all grown into better people throughout our lives.

Finally, the nurse weighs me, and I have to take in a small breath as I am confronted with the near impossible numbers. I weigh 106 pounds, a weight I haven’t seen since I was a freshman in high school. I was now almost a junior in college and weighed 135 pounds only two days ago.

This is when I start to worry. My leg pumps with anticipation as we wait for the doctor to join us with the results. I look nervously between my mom and dad as they too exchange worried looks. We all nearly jump as the doctor knocks before coming into the tiny waiting room.

He looks at each of us in turn before saying, “Hello, I’m Doctor Wallace. It seems that all the preliminary tests point to diabetes, a late onset version of Type 1.” He waits for a response, but when there is none he continues, “This would explain your sudden weight loss as your body has been struggling to function with your high levels of blood sugar. Basically, to compensate for the high amounts of sugar, your body starts to attack your fat and your muscles to gain extra nutrients.”

I look up at these words and stare first at my parents. My mom is trying hard to hold back her tears and my dad pats her shoulders reassuringly. They are both trying to be so strong for me in this moment and in seeing this, I want to be strong for them. I must take in the news that I will have to take medication, every time I eat, for the rest of my life.

I should feel upset, or angry, or panicked, but those feelings don’t come until later. The first thing I feel is irritated, annoyed even. “You mean I haven’t been losing weight? My body has just been eating itself?”

The doctor’s eyebrows lift in brief surprise before he answers, “In effect, yes, your body has been feeding off of itself.”

I let out a small laugh then and say, “Well, I guess I’ve been on the Diabetes Diet.”
Chromosomes (Forty-six + two)

Tarika Walton

All the chromosome pairs that dictate what is sex assigned at birth. What is health or disorder? Guide the future better than any clairvoyant could. Science knows better than I ever would. You tell me of this life that should belong to me. Tell me what I should look like. Will I be short or tall? Will I have wavy or curly hair. Black, brown, or blue eyes? Surprise is enemy to fate, to destiny, to DNA. The pairs don’t care if I want to be tall, small-boned, flat in the chest. They don’t care if I want to be good at math. Twenty-three pairs
say to me,
“This is what I
make of you.” It
doesn’t matter what
I believe to be true or
what I try to do, who
I desire to be, in flesh.
Chromosomes
argue
by
not arguing
their point. Is
nature truly so
cruel as to deny
my identity?
Forty-six
+ two.
Biographies

**Cassie Backowski** is a dreamer, a world traveler and the lucky mother of two funny and kind individuals. She will graduate from UMSL in May 2020 with a BA in Secondary English education and certificates in both creative and professional writing. She is excited to share her love of words with her future students. In her free time she loves watching hockey, finding beauty in all the colors of life and getting lost in bookstores for hours at a time.

**Angela Blash** is an UMSL alumna (2017) and master’s student at Saint Louis University studying Hispanic Literature. Her research interests center around underrepresented and discriminated populations: how the concept of “a people” was (re)presented in late nineteenth-century newspapers, periodicals, and journals in Argentina and Uruguay by both the white and black press. In her art, she uses mainly acrylics and watercolors, creating both realistic and abstract art.

**Elizabeth Blankenship** likes to think of herself as an extroverted introvert, as she spends every free moment traveling to new and exciting places; whether this is by her own two feet or through the worlds written by others. She has no active desire to continue writing, and instead wishes to acquire works for publishing houses. She will be attending George Washington University in the fall for a degree in Publishing.

**Vincent Blount** is an UMSL alumni who graduated with a B/A in Criminal Justice. Born and raised in St. Louis, he loves the Cardinals, has a disdain for the NFL and still refers to Panera Bread as the STL Bread Company. He uses his love for photography as a way to capture the simply beauties of life’s little moments and appreciate the miracles in everyday life.

Proud St. Louis-native **James Bragado** considers moving from the country to the city as one of the best decisions he ever made. He graduated from the University of Missouri-St. Louis in 2016 with degrees in French and History. He currently manages UMSL’s Triton Telefund.
Daniel Andrés Brown-Schnurr is a first-generation Panamanian-American, proud of both cultures, and excited for his debut in UMSL’s publication. He is a senior pursuing a degree in English while also having completed his Certificate of Creative Writing. He is currently the longest standing member of the Hispanic Latino Association, with an avid love of learning, as well as a soft spot for animals. He plans to keep writing in the hopes of future publication.

Tara Clarkson is completing her bachelor’s degree in English at UMSL in May 2019 and starting the Master of Arts program in English at UMSL Fall 2019, as well as a teacher assistantship.

Katelyn DeLancy is a senior at UMSL University majoring in English with a passion for literature and art of all kinds. She comes from a small town in Jefferson County and uses her keyboard to write the tales of her life with her faithful dog Dusty at her side. Through the variety of life, we learn the variety of love.

Kenny Dickens is a junior at UMSL, studying English. The works presented in this issue of Litmag are among his first published works, and he hopes they are the first of many. He thanks his professors and the Litmag staff for their continued support, as well as the campus geese, whose vigilance and ferocity ensure he moves promptly to his next English class.

Jessie Eikmann is a third-year MFA student who collects Best American anthologies, vintage hats (not gray berets), and sexual partners. This is her sixth appearance in Litmag. She will graduate from UMSL in May 2020, and until then plans to continue writing salty poems about her ex-wife and risqué poems about her pansexual, polyamorous, and nudist inclinations. Sadly, as she lives with her parents, cooking naked is not currently an option.

Sydney Hart is a bit quiet. This is usually because she’s thinking about Middle Earth. Flowers, disco, and the color yellow are some of her interests. She is proud of her wiener dog, bass guitar, and boyfriend. She loves her huge family of people, who are all funny in different ways. Also, she’s published in Bellerive. She writes short stories.
Catherine Howl holds an MFA in creative writing from UMSL. In part, Howl’s poetry is influenced by the visual arts and landscapes of California. Her poetry has previously appeared in the last few issues of Litmag, as well as literary magazines found in Southern California. She was selected as one of “Missouri’s Best Emerging Poets” in the 2018 anthology by Z Publishing House. She is also a visual artist who paints with acrylics on recycled canvas.

T.L. Kirk is an UMSL graduate and former Litmag staff member. Tyler Lloyd “T.L.” Kirk now works as a marketing consultant in St. Louis, MO. He lives in the city with his wonderful girlfriend and their cat, Winnie. Follow @tlkirk on Instagram to go on a chronological adventure of all the cheesy love songs he wrote when he was in high school.

Sarah Krueger is an Economics major, who enjoys hiking and photography in her spare time.

Taylor Meyer grew up and attended school in Florissant, MO. After school she worked different jobs before finding a full-time position that eventually led her to want to further her education. She started college at 26, and through her courses she was reunited with her love of writing. She is now pursuing her Bachelor’s in English, with hopes to continue on to graduate school.

Brittni Mosby is a senior majoring in studio art. Her work primarily consists of figure drawings in a variety of media, including graphite, gouache, charcoal, and paint. In addition to drawing, she also practices digital art. More of her work can be seen @brittnidianeart on Instagram.

Abby N. V. is a political science, foreign language and psychology student. Her work in English, French, and Japanese has appeared in Litmag, Bellerive, Bad Jacket and The Current. Abby is a two-time veteran of study abroad programs. Her main career interest is peace and development. She finds creative writing to be an outlet for life’s many stresses.

Nachammai Palaniappan is a freelance artist. She was interested in art
and painting right from her childhood. A volunteer program sparked her interest on the canvas medium. She started exploring the medium and combination of colors more. She is inspired by the beauty of nature, birds and different painting styles. This is reflected in her artwork.

**Alicia Price** is an English Specialist at Southwestern Illinois College and a graduate student at UMSL, studying rhetoric and composition. In her free time, when not corralling kids and/or animals, she enjoys reading and writing, getting tattoos, drinking overpriced coffee and being a bit of a sasshole.

**Jeffrey Pryor** is a 2018 graduate of UMSL’s MA/BA History program. He earned his Certificate in Museum Studies and is currently pursuing a BA in French. As a veteran, the challenge that comes with the transition from military to civilian life can be challenging. Jeffrey overcame this by keeping one foot in each lifestyle. He also co-chairs the only Adult Survivors of Child Abuse meeting in Missouri and is spreading awareness that survivors can become thrivers if they believe in themselves.

**Andrea Reynolds** grew up roaming the neighborhoods of South St. Louis. She was recently accepted to the MFA Program at UMSL, where she also earned her Bachelor of Science and Master of Education degrees. Andrea is a full-time teacher and the English Department Chairperson at Cor Jesu Academy in Affton, Missouri.

**Leonardo “Leo” Van Dillen** will graduate with a B.A. in English and a Creative Writing Certificate in May 2019. He has aspirations to become a published poet and author in YA literature. He writes on topics that include issues relating to family, gender fluidity and dysphoria, and the human experience. In his free time, he enjoys cooking, trying new foods, hanging out with friends, and long bike rides. He plans on receiving a master’s in the fine arts with the emphasis of Poetry in the near future.

**Celeste Vega** was born in Asunción, Paraguay in 1995. She is a
psychology undergraduate student, Spanish tutor, and art aficionado. Celeste enjoys all forms of creative expression, and believes they are the most wonderful and innate representation of human consciousness. She hopes to become everything and more, and eventually have time to do absolutely nothing.

**Tarika “Starr” Walton** writes short stories and poems that challenge the conventions of identity, love, and reality. Her work features solemn characters, vivid description, and themes about the darker side of life. She fills her free time with audiobooks, podcasts, and fiction-writing research. Her greatest aspiration is to have a massive backlog of published books. Currently, Tarika is a dual major of French and Secondary Education.

**Paul Watkins** is Professor Emeritus with Southeast Missouri State University. He and his wife live in Ballwin, Missouri. They have two adult children, a son who lives in Houston, Texas, and daughter, living in South St. Louis. Paul and his wife have three amazing grandchildren.

**Scott Winfrey**, a senior, will graduate in the Fall of 2019 with a bachelor’s degree in educational studies (BES) with an emphasis in youth and adult development. A believer in the power of positive thinking, hard work, and giving back, Scott enjoys working as a substitute teacher and at his internship at the Community Innovation and Action Center (CIAC). Most of all, Scott is truly blessed to have had such a great experience at UMSL!

**Camillia Zachary** is a senior studio art major at UMSL. Her artwork consists of stylized renderings of fashion illustrations in a variety of media, including marker, thread, ink, watercolor, and collage. Drawing inspiration from spontaneous gestural marks, her work celebrates fashion in the form of fine art and emphasizes silhouette, mark making and abstraction.

**Biographies were not provided by**
Nicole Ashley Marie Caldwell, Kelsey Kuntz, Cullen Landolt, and Jessica Tonyan
Irish Studies

The Smurfit-Stone Corporation Endowed Professorship in Irish Studies, at the University of Missouri–St. Louis offers a variety of programs for campus and community audiences including public lectures on Irish culture, literature, history and politics, and performances of Irish music and dance.

Summer Program Galway
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Our Summer programs welcome undergraduate, graduate students, and life-long learners.

Classes in Irish Studies
UMSL offers courses in Irish and Irish-American Studies. For more information about Irish Studies, please contact:
Dr. Eamonn Wall
Smurfit-Stone Endowed Professor in Irish Studies
International Studies & Programs
University of Missouri–St. Louis
314-516-5589
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UMSL International Studies & Programs
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Submit to the Magazine

*Litmag* accepts submissions from October to February. We accept poetry, prose, and art submissions from UMSL students, alumni, faculty, and staff. Multiple submissions are welcome. As we are tied to the semester calendars, we are unable to read submissions during the summer months.

**Submission Guidelines**

Poetry: Submit up to 5 individual poems

Fiction and Nonfiction: Submit up to 5 individual pieces of 4,000 words or fewer

Photography and Artwork: Submit up to 5 individual pieces, all styles, mediums, and subject matter considered.

- Artwork should be scanned (rather than photographed) and saved as a JPEG file with 300dpi resolution or greater
- Photographs and artwork submitted will also be considered for cover art

Only original, previously unpublished work will be accepted.

**Instructions**

Send your submission with a detachable cover page that includes your name, email address, and phone number. Contact information should not appear elsewhere on submissions.

Attach your submissions to an email and send to litmagumsl@gmail.com, or place a print copy in the green *Litmag* box outside of the English Department office, 4th floor Lucas Hall.

We look forward to reviewing your work for the 2020 edition!
Support the Journal

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**Advertise:** *Litmag* can promote your business or organization with an advertisement in next year’s edition. Our ad space is extremely reasonable, so we encourage advertisers that can to please contribute more than our list price as a donation.

**Donate:** Donations are welcome, and all donations are tax-deductible to the extent allowed by law. We thank you in advance!

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