



Litmag

2021

Litmag 2021

Cover art:
Arms Dealer by Luna Noelle
oil on canvas

UMSL

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Acknowledgments

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Many thanks are owed to Scott Gericke, Liz Buchta, and the art department professors who continue to help us foster an essential collaboration between the visual and written arts.

We greatly appreciate Denise Mussman and Joel Hanns from Lingua, the student club that promotes multicultural linguists, and the Department of Language and Cultural Studies for partnering with us on the multilingual contest. We would like to specifically thank the faculty members—Maria Balogh, Keiko Ueda, and Hiroko Yoshii—who reviewed the submissions and decided this year's winner and honorable mention.

Thank you to Ashley Marsh with the Office of Alumni Engagement for helping us organize and launch our crowdfunding campaign, and to Carolyn Jones and Blaine Milligan with the Lucas and Clark Work Center, whose roles are essential to our success.

We are truly humbled by all those who contributed to our crowdfund—the *Litmag* staff wants you to know how much we value your support.

About

MISSION STATEMENT

Litmag's goal is to nurture the creativity of the students, staff, and alumni of UMSL by increasing awareness of diverse literary and artistic talent. We aim to provide an inclusive, professional, and high-quality publication free of charge to UMSL and the local community.

CONTESTS

Litmag sponsored four contests this year—best poetry, prose, art, and multilingual creations. Winners for the categories of poetry, prose, and art were determined by editorial voting scores. The multilingual winner and honorable mention were determined by Lingua and the Department of Language and Cultural Studies.

2021 CONTEST WINNERS

Multilingual

Pa' Sará (It Will Pass) by Nicole Summer Newman

Multilingual Honorable Mention

赤い髪の毛 (*Red Hair*) by Alex Snyder

Prose

Most Memorable Catch by Kylie Brown

Poetry

loving you is by Lauren Holste

Art

Arms Dealer by Luna Noelle

DISCLAIMER

Creative works solely reflect the views of the contributors and do not represent the views of UMSL or the English Department.

Editor-in-Chief's Note

It is with pleasure that I introduce *Litmag* 2021.

Last year's *Litmag* staff referred to their 2020 issue as the “pandemic edition,” and here we are, a year later, still living in this odd and mentally taxing pandemic world. We wake each day with a new glimmer of hope that we will once again surround ourselves with friends and family.

The fourteen editors on this year's *Litmag* staff considered these circumstances and envisioned what the optimal experience could be for this issue. It was our hope to present the wide-ranging voices of our UMSL community, which could “shine like candles in the night,” as editor Beth Fissel phrased it. I believe we accomplished this goal, candles ablaze, as you will discover in this lively collection.

Within these pages, there is beauty to be found in simple experiences—the smell of a spice-scented candle in the fall, the discovery of a mushroom in the woods, or the memory of a treasured place. There is also a humbling appreciation for the complexities of life—fragile relationships soured and broken, the precarious balance between mind and body, or the accumulated items which come to represent lives once lived.

We are proud to feature Luna Noelle's art on our cover for the second year in a row, this time with *Arms Dealer*, a piece that exudes expressiveness along with an air of mystery. This stand-out piece is also representative of our experiences as a staff. We opened our arms and a plentitude of artists showered us with their lovely creations, forming the colorful content of this issue. We reached out to sponsors and were met with blooming lotus flowers landing in our open palms—thank you to each of you. The editorial staff imagined what could be, articulated their views, and offered their talents to collaboratively create this issue. At times our arms entangled and our roles intertwined, but we worked together to find unity while honoring each other's beliefs.

A special and heartfelt thank you to Kate Watt, our faculty advisor, who supported the staff through each stage of production. Each year *Litmag* is reborn, nurtured from roots to resplendent blossom, under your supportive and watchful care.

Dear reader, please enjoy the carefully chosen artistic handiwork featured in this magazine—may you relax, reminisce, and experience rebirth, with blossoms landing in your palms and blue skies on the horizon.

Tara Clarkson, Editor-in-Chief

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Bear Mattress

A. D. Blanchard

One thousand dollars
Cash—enough for a deposit,
Moving truck, or temporary hotel stay—
A powerful quantity
In an envelope sealed with a pink
Sticky note.

One thousand dollars
Buys autonomy
From an unwanted house guest
Who once picked out
Names of unborn children,
Clogged the kitchen sink,
And broke the washer dryer unit.

One thousand dollars
In his pocket
Gives me peace at night,
The covers no longer sweaty
From two bodies—
The mattress all mine.

One thousand dollars
Floods my dreams with
Bear cubs, eating fish
From the palm of my hand
And running away
Before they're big enough
To eat me too.

Old Man of the Woods

A. D. Blanchard

Mushroom sighting ground level.
Owl eyes boreal,
Coaxing leopard fur growls
Speckled in rural snowbanks, singing,
“You can touch me.”
Young hands graze the cap softly.
Trained hands trace fractal stamped faces—
Green leaves below are content, heart-shaped
Bow and scrape.

Mongoose Lemur

Patrick Ross



photograph

Pirogues in the Rain

Patrick Ross



photograph

Most Memorable Catch

Prose Winner

Kylie Brown

Frozen ponds have always meant more to my family than just icy water. My father passed on a few years ago and left me to take care of my mother and baby brother. Before he died, he told me to look after them, and remember to always bring my fishing rod wherever I go. As an avid ice fisherman, my father believed there were no frozen lakes or ponds he couldn't find the perfect place to drill a fishing hole. The first time he took me ice fishing, the cold pierced my eyes like I had been cutting onions all morning.

Dad looked back at me and said, "Are you cryin', bud? Nothing to be scared of out here."

I looked back and replied no. My eyes were watering because of the cold. He chuckled and told me to keep blinking my eyes, and not only would they stop watering, but they'd get used to the dark as well.

Now, most ice fisherman need to use some kind of doppler, or detector, to be able to know where they should drill in the ice to catch the most fish. But Dan Harwood, my father, had a gift from God. He would walk across the ice, close his eyes, and tilt his head back, tasting the air. After about thirty seconds, he'd tell me if this was where we should drill. Our auger had been in our family for three generations. The rusted handle at the top felt huge underneath my tiny, elementary sized hands.

"Hold her steady, Rod!"

I'd stand up on my tiptoes and press down with what felt like all my strength, while my father spun the other handle on the side to drill down into the foot-thick ice. The auger would shake underneath me and my teeth would rattle together. I'd watch his face to see when I knew we'd drilled deep enough to hit the surface

of the water. His momentum would increase and his brow would sweat in thirty-degree weather. His gray-blue eyes would widen with excitement when the cool mist of icy water splashed our faces. I have never felt more awake.

“Eureka!” he would shout.

• • •

August, my little brother, pulled on my hand and led me to the edge of the pond.

“Do you think we can do it, Rod? Huh? I bet we can make it across this one.”

I looked down at his hopeful expression and sighed. We’d been looking for the perfect place to sled down a hill with enough momentum to propel us all the way across a frozen pond. Auggie had been talking about this for weeks. Every day after school he’d grab his little purple circle sled by the frayed rope handle and drag it into our front yard as he waited for me to put on two more layers of long underwear. My mom would push a stainless-steel thermos full of hot apple cider into my hands and remind me that we needed to be home by dark. Her brown hair was streaked with gray now. I felt like she resented me for looking like my father. After she gave me the thermos, she’d kiss the top of my head and crawl back into bed where she would fall back into a deep sleep.

Every pond nearby would either not be close enough to a hill or would be too wide for us to have any hopes of crossing in one push. Finally, we came upon one that was exactly what we had been looking for, and I thought, *alright, I’m like 75% sure this won’t backfire on us*. Auggie raced up the hill as fast as he could in his plush blue winter coat. As we reached the top, I took a taste of the air just like my father would have done. The air just felt cold on my tongue. What would he taste? How would he know? Maybe I’ll never know.

“Come on, Rod! I want to go down first!”

“Oh no, little man, you leave that up to me. I’ll go first and see if it’s safe and frozen.”

“Rod, you never let me do anything fun!” He crossed his arms and scrunched his nose.

“It’s my job, Auggie. Dad told me to look after you.”

“Well, I don’t remember that! It’s not fair that you got to go fishing with him and I didn’t!”

His baby blue eyes filled with tears, threatening to spill down his cheeks. Crouching down on one knee, I hugged him as tight as I could, my cheeks flushing. Our puffy coats tried to push us apart but my persistent strength pulled us in closer.

I whispered in his ear, “Auggie, he would’ve loved to be here right now, watching us. And I think he is somewhere, lookin’ right at us. He’d be so proud of you, bud.”

Auggie used the back of his wool mitten to wipe the snot off his nose. “You do it, Rod. Do it for Dad.”

My plastic green sled creaked as I placed all my weight into the center. I must have grown more in the past year than I thought. Dad always said he was going to put a stack of books on my head to keep me from growing so tall.

I closed my eyes and took a deep breath. I pushed off the hill with a little strength, but the hill did more work propelling me than I thought it would. I felt like I was flying, no, soaring through the sky. As the clear glass surface of the pond rushed up to meet me, I was concerned that I’d flip over onto my face in the ice without a chance of meeting the other side of the shore. This fear forced me to cover my eyes with a child-like cowardice I hadn’t felt in a very long time. Memories flashed before me.

• • •

“Wow, you caught a little wiggler. Great job, Rod.”

I watched the fish squirming for his life on the line and felt immediately sad that I'd taken him away from his home, his family, his life. Dad grabbed a smelly stained bandana from his fisherman's vest and handed it to me. He told me to grab the fish and steady him so he could pull the hook out of his throat. My hands were so tiny I had to use both of them to wrap the middle of the fish in the cloth. The little wiggler, as my dad called him, wouldn't stop squirming for his life.

“Rod, don't hold him too tight. He's a delicate creature.”

I could feel every pull he made inside the creature's throat as he wrenched the hook free. A tiny amount of blood splattered across the fish's lips. My dad took the bandana-wrapped fish from me and placed my tiny hand inside of his large calloused one.

“If you put your thumb in the bottom lip, this jaw will unhinge and you can hold him for a picture.”

“I'm too scared, Dad.” I covered my eyes so that I wouldn't see the wiggling thing in front of me.

“Aw, Rod, you've already gotten through the hard part! You can do this, bud, I believe in you.”

I could see my breath come out of my mouth as a sort of cloud. My chapped little hands shook as I reached my thumb inside its mouth. Immediately, I thought, *what if this thing bites me?* But Dad was right. When you put pressure on its lower lip, the jaw unhinges and it has no way of closing its mouth.

This cold, slimy fish stood still for my dad's polaroid picture as if he knew what we humans were doing. My smile was filled with half fear and half pride that I'd caught this petite beast.

“Alright, now drop him back in the hole.”

I was shocked. Most of the fish my dad caught would be brought home for dinner. I was already coming to terms with seeing this little guy filleted and fried in a greasy batter with Mom’s homemade sweet potato fries as a side. Dad could see my expression and knelt down so he could see my face at his level.

“Look at this little guy. He needs his family. Somewhere down there, he has a papa and a mama and maybe a little brother just like you. It’s too soon for us to take him away. I see it almost as a blessing. When we let him go back home, he’ll have a better appreciation for it.”

• • •

I didn’t realize I’d crossed the pond with my hands covering my eyes until I felt a pile of snow hit my legs and cast me backwards. I heard Auggie cheering for me from the other side.

“We did it! We did it! I can’t believe it!”

Almost in slow motion, I turned and saw Auggie, the little man, sit inside his circle, put both his hands behind him and push off the hill.

I screamed, “No!” It wasn’t safe yet. It was my job to make sure he wouldn’t get hurt.

As the little blue marshmallow of my brother slid down the hill at alarming speed, I noticed the crack in the ice. The crack was tiny and white and the scariest sight I’d ever seen.

Everything happened so fast that I didn’t have time to say anything before Auggie was skating across the ice and I heard the splintering sounds of cracking. The purple sled tilted downwards and dumped my brother into the freezing water. I knew I had to get him out of there.

“Hold on Auggie, I’ll save you!”

Somehow, my steps were not my own. I immediately knew where to place my feet on the ice so as to not disturb the cracks. I knelt down on my hands and knees and saw his mittened hand reaching towards the surface. I grabbed him but had trouble holding on with my own mittens so I cast them off. I pulled and pulled. My brow was sweaty and my eyes were round with fear. I dragged him out of the water and onto the surface. He was choking up icy liquid and his skin had lost its rosy luster but he was alive and I was so thankful I could cry. I really thought I’d lost him, but now back on land, he squirmed like a fish. He said if he kept moving then he’d get warm again.

“Th-thank you, R-rod. I’m s-so cold. C-can we go home now?” He said in between his shivers. I looked down at him and was reminded of the little wiggler I had caught so many years ago. I cupped his frosty hands in mine and used my hot breath to bring them back to life. Despite being submerged in frigid water just moments ago, my brother giggled. His ruddy cheeks were full, bursting with laughter. I couldn’t help but laugh out loud myself. Our eyes flooded with tears rolling down our cheeks from our giddiness and relief that my brother’s life was intact. After our laughing fit died down, I scooped Auggie up in my arms and carried him home. On our journey home, I told him of my favorite adventures I had with Dad. Auggie’s chilled face rested against my neck to catch its warmth. He listened with intent for once instead of crying that he didn’t get to share the same experiences. Somewhere along our trek, he fell asleep on my shoulder. As I hugged him closer to my body, my father’s voice echoed in my head.

“When we let him go back home, he’ll have a better appreciation for it.”

Fall into Winter

Sydne Sewald

The wispy hands of winter winds coil around me like a cloak.
Once the trees shed their leafy orange and greens
They become the canvas for the powdery snow's blanket.
Fall's fever gives way to winter's wonderland,
Scents of warm spice candles waft through the kitchen
Fresh baked cookies pulled from the oven
Begging to greet us like an old friend.
Rain clouds stretch across the sky endlessly
Autumn drizzles that lead to muggy air.
Winter flurries that lead to bitter snow.

It's only been three days since we unplugged the machines. I'm digging through piles in the basement of the miserable duplex, the one you and dad moved into just a few months ago when you fled from our home. Foreclosure was imminent, but then the mysterious fire set our second story ablaze. Faulty electrical wiring in the walls of our aging home? A cigarette ember that crisped your limp fingertips after another tormented night? I will never know for sure. And I will never step foot in my childhood home again, the tall and skinny house with peppered gray siding that looks like a shotgun home tipped on its side.

I am standing in the dark moldy basement of this duplex, the one-bedroom apartment that drips and droops and groans. The damp cement floors are covered with heaps of artifacts from a home, fossils from a life once lived and a life once loved and some from a life once loathed. I'm digging through such dear debris, haphazardly piled in ten gallon black trash bags. There are dozens of old Classic rock records. I was always a little jealous of the way these grooved vinyl discs told stories of teenage dreams and whispered private secrets from a time I would never know. Were you happy then?

I am tossing aside Altoids tins that you covered in decorative contact paper, each labeled with its contents, declarations of a store of ordinary things. Here is one for "stamps," here is one for "paperclips," and here is one for the "labels," adhesive white rectangles that allowed you to catalog the clutter.

Now I'm staring at the centerpiece of our piled lives. There is the wooden library card catalog you attained from your work, a discard after the World Wide Web took a post at the university library. You displayed this prized piece of furniture in your bedroom. There are twenty-four deep rectangular drawers with built-in windows for your labels. I open a drawer for tools, a drawer

for pens, a drawer for post-it notes: a five foot compartmentalized junk drawer to distract your cluttered mind. I can't believe you took this with you. The wood is charred black from the fire. The labels that remain are smeared patches of ink, still slightly damp. I'm digging through the drawers of damage. I toss aside molding pads of paper and cigarette lighters that will not spark. You packed these envelopes of "Happy Birthday" confetti, but you left all of the photograph albums that document my childhood behind. I am feeling dizzy in this excavation site, a somber and soggy cavern where loss is preserved.

I'm looking for your necklace. It's the only thing of yours I want to take with me. It's the one you wore around your neck all the time. I can spot it at the center of your chest in photographs delicately floating across your bodice like a full moon. It was just a simple dainty chain with a gilded circle, an heirloom, an old gold button from your Grandma Botticher's dress, flattened to form a smooth coin. A single word is etched in script across the circle's face: Mother. I am the sole reason you could proudly wear that trinket. I am your only child, standing in the underbelly of this apartment while dad sits on the couch just above me, drowning in his grief. I am desperately searching for this emblem, something concrete to hold in my hand, something to take with me. I want to uncover it and dust it off. I want to wear it on my breast as I forge on, as a living museum for you.

I am opening drawer after drawer in this charred card catalog, tossing aside piles of unpaid medical bills, pens without caps, and soggy miniature boxes of peppermint Chiclets gum. You would only chew the spearmint ones. And then I come across the tiny notebook. I flip through the pages, which are mostly blank save for a few quotations. I smile. These must be your collected words of wisdom. I stand solemnly in the shadows and read:

"If you are going through Hell, keep going."
—Winston Churchill

Another page records a few lines from Lennon's "Instant

Karma.” And then I come to a page buried in the middle of the notebook with your own words scrawled in one of the metallic gel pens you loved. I read it and closed the notebook abruptly. It’s only been three days since we unhooked your swollen septic body from the ventilator. I play the sentences over and over in my head and I know the words will haunt me and I close my eyes and try to forget them. But I still see them 15 years later. And I replay your agony, your confession that broke my heart:

“I am obsessed with my own death. I will find a way. I must.”

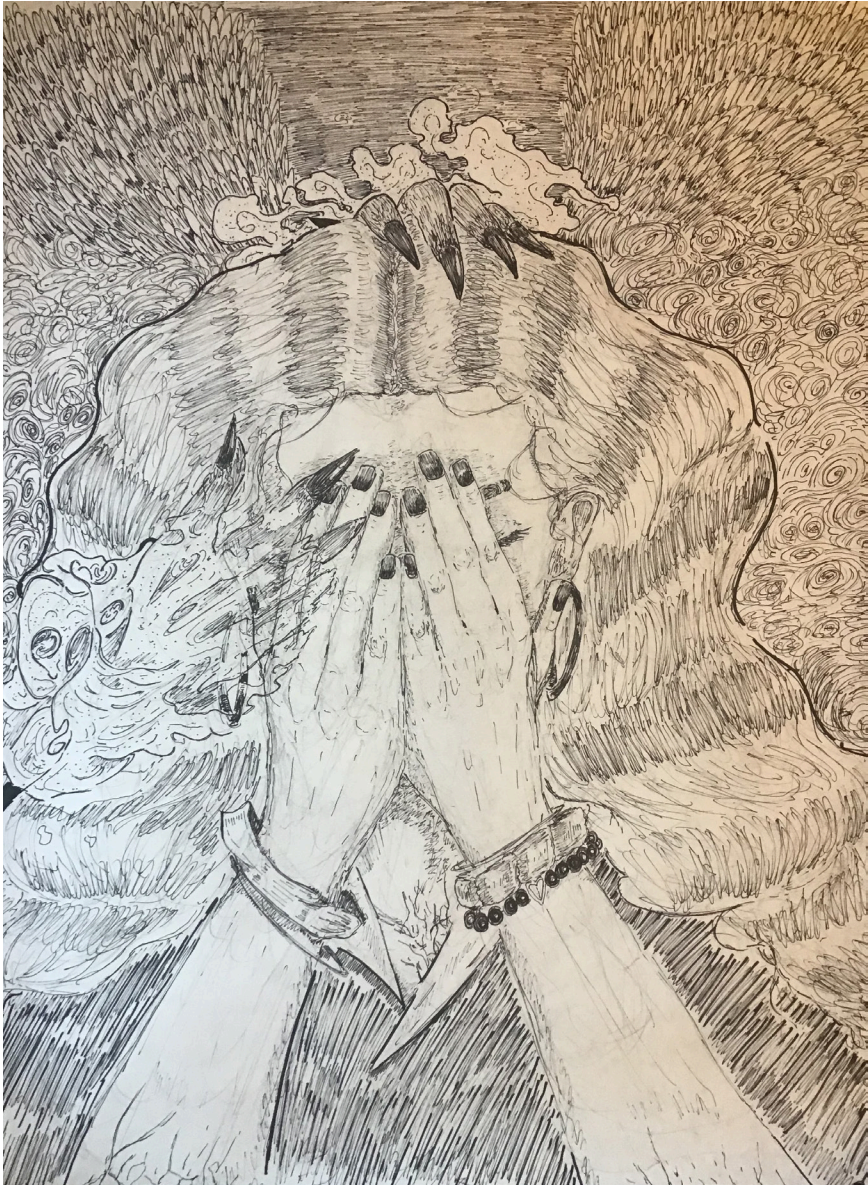
I retrace your penmanship in my mind. I follow the curves of your perfect cursive, looking for a way to rationalize your pain. I want to notice that your “y” has a crooked tail, that your words lean too far. I want to see it slant. I want to decide that you wrote this in a tormented binge on a drunken night. I look hard for your shaking hands, but the purple gel pen gleams like carefully crafted calligraphy on an invitation. It’s alluring. It beckons. It’s sober and it tells the truth.

But suicide is not listed on your death certificate. Your “way” was an indirect and aimless wander. Through cartons of Merit Menthol 100s, through bottle after bottle of Smirnoff vodka, through self-loathing and anxiety, through Detox wings and 12-step dances. After 48 years, your body relented.

I want to blame the pneumonia that spread too quickly. I want to say this sickness happened TO you. I want to grieve for your helplessness and your innocence. But your last words to me take on an ownership I can’t deny.

Where is that necklace? Where buried in this debris is that gold glint of “Mother”?

I am looking for you now with your very own eyes. I wish you saw things differently.



pen and ink, pencil



charcoal and conte

I haven't seen my wife in weeks. I've been bringing food to her and she seems to be finding it. I salvaged an old laptop so that she could keep working and tucked it into the Stack somewhere. I hope she found it.

I heard her voice last week. It was only a bit muffled.

"I think they might be missing me at the office," she said.

"I'll figure something out," I assured her. That's why I brought in that portable computer.

I don't usually go out for electronics, but when I was walking the alley with the old dog beds, I found it wedged between a leaning column of dented dog food cans and a tattered cat tower. I got puddle water and gravel dust on my clothes while crouching down but it was worth it. It had a bunch of cute animal photos from the shop still on the hard drive, and I know she loves animals.

My mother called me a couple of days ago. I hadn't heard from her since our move-in day months ago. Mom gets nervous when I move, but she said she was happy for me that day. A fresh start, I think, was the phrase she used.

It really did feel fresh that first day. My wife picked out the apartment, she filled out all of the paperwork for the lease, she paid the deposit and first month's rent. She did everything. When we walked in, I was overwhelmed. It had been ages since I'd been somewhere with so much open space. Our little city is so busy, and my apartment was getting cramped. It was exhilarating. I stretched my arms out to the sides as wide as they could go and I twirled on my tiptoes down the hall, like a child playing ballerina, all the way into the back room. The back room faces west, and we were there just before sunset. The window isn't too large, or too small;

it's just right for letting in the light. It's such splendid light that transforms the room and all its contents into a golden fortress, and there's a soothing warmth. My wife came in and took my hands in hers. I was startled by how cold her hands were. She led me back through the hall and into the front room. I couldn't break from that heavenly glow until she took my face in her hands and looked me directly in the eye. She leaned in close.

“Let's keep this space,” she pleaded.

“I promise,” I replied.

I went out for things later that night. I couldn't stop thinking about that room, and how every day all that was inside it would be bathed in magical hues. I promised I would keep the space, but I don't think my loving wife would want to deprive me of such a spiritual experience. And I could keep the Stack in that room of my own. It wouldn't be like before. It doesn't have to be all dim walkways, corner cots and stubbed toes. I could keep it contained.

I found great things. For the foundation, I brought in some of those old steamer trunks that look like they belong on a steamboat crossing the Atlantic. They were filled with scarves, hats, quilts, and wool sweaters. I layered those with retired fruit crates filled with books and vinyl records. I tried to bring in things that might be worth something, worthy of the room. I built up library stools and velvet ottomans. I filled in the gaps with teacups wrapped in newspaper, and rolled up movie posters. I found vintage ones, too, because my wife loves those old black and white movies where they drink a lot of champagne cocktails and speak in that funny accent. She was looking at those posters one day, casually sifting through them, resting on an old stool that I hadn't found the right spot for just yet. That's when it happened. I had gotten a large haul that day and I was so eager to put it all into place. I just started blindly building. It was like I was under a spell, and the Stack was growing taller and more robust so quickly. I hadn't realized that my wife was enclosed inside until the evening light trickled in; it surrounded her in an impenetrable barrier of

glistening amber. The Stack had claimed her, was clutching her in a tender embrace. There was nothing I could do and she really didn't seem to mind at first. All of the things are nice to look at; there was plenty to keep her company.

She eventually grew restless. She shouted profanities and I heard her crying. But I couldn't take it apart, so I brought more things I knew she'd enjoy: kitten figurines, soft pillows, pretty dresses. These items seemed to lull her, and I imagined seeing her smile.

The Stack just keeps evolving. I picked up some semi-reflective objects and they have really enhanced the evening glow.

I'm starting to get lonely, though, with the Stack having gained a bit of independence, and my wife being tucked inside. It must've been showing on my face because my coworker came over to talk to me.

"Hey, how's married life?" He knows we're newlyweds because he covered my shift on the day we eloped. We haven't told many other people.

"It's great, Jimmy. Thanks for asking. Yeah, we just moved into a new place a little while ago and we're both really enjoying it."

"Real cool, man." He patted me on the shoulder and went back to his office down the hall. I left work early that day. And I am so glad I did because at different times of day there are different things to discover in the alleys. The Stack is at a place where things need to be special—exquisite. It seems to have been rejecting things that it doesn't like. For a few days in a row, I came home to broken jars, shattered ornaments, and ejected books scattered around the Stack on the floor. I had to cover those gaps, but I had to do it carefully. The stress of it started to settle in; I was beginning to break into a sweat looking at all these subpar piles. That's when I saw it—the most perfect chenille blanket I had ever seen. It was an earthy, chestnut brown with a delicious sheen, and it was singing

hymns for me. I tucked it under my arm and headed home.

I arrived just in time for the light. I don't always get to see things in the light immediately after I bring them in; something about this moment felt like fate. I found footing in one of those library stools and hoisted up to the top, laid the blanket across, and hopped down, prepared to stand back in awe.

Instead, I dropped to my knees. Shockwaves of heartache tore through my body. The way that blanket sat there atop the Stack, how it gleamed so purely, how it draped like delicately tousled strands—it looked just like my wife's hair.

I pulled myself up off the floor with an idea. I carved out a small cavity, relocating a few action figures and coffee mugs. After mere moments, my wife's hand slipped through the opening. Under the light, her pale skin shimmered like a milky moon. I felt love in her cool fingertips.

“I think I'll keep this space.”

I promised her.

My alarm came through like a harsh midwestern winter in the start of season, cold and intruding. I buried my head deeper under the covers hoping it would turn itself off. After a minute, when it did not stop, I finally pulled the covers back and turned to sit up on the side of my squeaky daybed. I pushed the snooze button and rubbed my face vigorously with both hands, silently hoping the past couple days were all a dream.

Walking to school that morning was more difficult than usual. On a typical day my sister Sandra and I would wake up, get ready together, and walk the big hill through our subdivision, meeting a short dirt trail that would drop us right in front of our high school doors. Today I woke, readied, and walked alone. As I walked up the steep hill, I was unsure if it was the crisp late October air that was making it difficult to breathe, or the loneliness. Despite the tight feeling in my chest, I pulled out a nearly fresh pack of cigarettes from my purse. Sandra had brought them to me the previous Friday, only missing the two we smoked that day. I inhaled. Exhaling my thoughts and emotions into a vapid cloud of smoke.

Sandra had decided to stay home from school; I was given the same option, but I couldn't sit in that house of death and gloom.

"Monday," I mumbled to myself, almost in disbelief that only two days ago my family's whole lives changed forever. Our worlds came crashing down around us when we received a visit from the local police.

"She was transported... I'm so sorry..." coherency fading in and out as we tried to grasp onto his words, "...she didn't make it..." rang through the thick air, but I am still not even sure I remember.

My older sister Ashleigh, a mere 16 years old, overdosed on heroin and died. Yet here I was, cold to the bone at 6:30 in the morning, walking alone to school, because I could not bear to watch everyone cry anymore. I could not cry anymore. I had nothing left.

Coming to the end of the trail, I smashed out my cigarette butt. Then, I reached into my small, pink corduroy purse and pulled out a stick of spearmint gum and my mini hand sanitizer. Keeping up the façade of being a normal non-smoking 14-year-old was easy at school; I didn't care what people thought of me there. The importance of staying clean and fresh was more for my parents. I could not imagine the things that would be done if they found out their precious baby girl was smoking cancer sticks.

I spent the better half of the morning floating from one class to the next, avoiding the whispers and trying not to make eye contact with people. The less fake smiling I had to do the better. I decided to sit out during gym class that day, not much different than most days. Not dressing out in gym meant you sat in the corner of the gymnasium, alone, and did not get to participate in all the reindeer games. Fine by me—I picked my usual spot and sat down. Usually, I would have put my baggy zipper hoodie in a gym locker with my purse. However, today I could not shake the cold, so I kept my belongings with me.

“MOULTRIE,” I heard echo across the gymnasium.

It was my vice-principal. I couldn't help but roll my eyes as I pushed myself off the linoleum floor. *Crap...what does he want. I'm not goin' to no stupid counselor if THAT'S what he thinks, he is out of his mind.* I slowly trudged across the now silent gym, until I was standing in front of Vice-Principal Hermann and both freshman coaches.

“There has been an incident with your bus, we just need you to come with us.” He said it in such a way that I sighed with relief.

“I don’t ride the bus. I have never ridden the bus; I walk to school and I walk home, every day.” I replied, trying to sound as respectful as I could.

“Just com’on now, I’ll explain it on the way.” He turned, and I reluctantly followed, “Do you have all of your belongings out of the locker room?”

I nodded, realizing this was a search. Suddenly, I was painfully aware that I had a pack of cigarettes in the purse I was now clutching as if I was afraid it was going to run away. My heart started beating faster and faster. I could feel my face fill up with a warm flush; I had to think of a way to get rid of them. I saw us approaching the restrooms, and I opened my mouth to speak. Nothing. My throat was as dry as the Sahara Desert. I never noticed how dreadfully long the main hallway in our high school was until I had to listen to each footstep echo through the empty space—*tap, tap, tap*—bringing me closer and closer to doom.

They were going to call my Dad.

The regret of coming to school today was starting to overwhelm my body. My chest felt pressured, as if something were suddenly sitting on it. I could have stayed home. I could have been with my family, grieving like a normal person would do. Why do I always have to be alone with my pain? Why did I think continuing this false sense of normalcy would erase the painful truth that my sister was never coming back to me? I never accept the help others offer me until it is too late. It is definitely too late now.

As we approached my locker, I tried to calmly spin the lock combination and open it. Mr. Hermann gently flipped through the few books and binders I had tucked neatly on the bottom shelf. He then took a step back and closed the locker, he said everything looked fine and explained to me there had been a bomb threat on the bus routed for my subdivision. It was all precautionary, but since I technically lived on the route, I had to be searched. I had started to take a step back, explaining I understood, trying to make

my way back to class. Had it been that easy? Was my little pink purse of no concern to this man? Just as I got the courage to ask if I could return to class, he reached his hand out, gesturing for my bag.

“Just one quick look through and you can get back to sitting on the gymnasium floor with your other delinquent friends,” he chuckled.

He had no idea. I was a good kid, a good student... but this, this was bad. My heart started beating faster, again. I reluctantly handed him my purse, feeling my face go warm, again. As soon as he unzipped it, he peered at me through the tops of his eyelashes, in the most disappointed way, and without saying another word I followed him to the principal’s office.

Sprawled across the table were my cigarettes, lighter, six beer bottle caps that my sister Ashleigh and I were going to use to craft with, a broken pocket mirror, and broken pencil sharpener. I was going to hell. Straight to hell by the hands of my father! What in the world could I even say to explain this mess? There was no way I was getting out of this. I would never again see the light of day! I just knew it.

“Mr. Moultrie? Yes, this is Principal Savage at Pacific High School, we have Paige in the office...” he continued with that for what seemed like a decade.

He listed all the “inappropriate” contents of my bag before I saw his face change. Was it a look of embarrassment? Fear? Then he handed me the phone.

“H-h-hello?” my voice came through shakier than I had predicted.

“Paige. I am not going to yell. To be quite honest with you I haven’t got it in me today.” I could hear my dad still fighting back tears.

The same 6-foot-2, 275 pound dad I had never seen cry, before that Saturday. I burst into uncontrollable, silent tears, just letting him talk at me.

He did not yell, but he still read me the riot act. I was right, I would not see the light of day for a long time. 32 days to be exact.

It seemed harsh at the time. I think if it had come at a different time in our lives, my father would not have decided on such a lengthy sentence. However, it was as if he knew what I needed before I did. The first two weeks were filled with denial and so much anger that I hardly remember the details. I awaited the autopsy of my sister, that is a fact. I helped find clothes for her to be buried in, to hide the incisions, also a fact. I don't remember it though. I don't remember the words or the moments. I don't remember the people who gave their condolences. I remember my family. I remember my anger. I remember how that first two weeks were spent with the people I loved, all going through it together. Even when I thought it was the last thing that I wanted or needed. I remember being thankful for that uninterrupted time with my parents and siblings. I still am thankful for that time.

I returned the phone to my principal after my dad had finished explaining what my life would be like for *whatever period of time he sought fit*. I finally stopped crying, took in a deep breath, and exhaled a calming blow. I watched as they took all my belongings into a manila envelope and filed it. I was told I could have them back if my parents came to get it all. I almost laughed at the statement. I packed up the rest of my things and I was escorted to the parking lot. I numbly walked through the biting winds, across the empty street, down the iced mud trail, and down a block, back into my warm, sad home.

How to Find a Body

Syddda Champ

Step 1: Make a point of going to places where a body might be. Take long walks down wooded paths and agree to clean out your grandfather's abandoned shed. Go swimming at night in your neighbor's lake.

Step 2: Make sure to keep your breakfast down. Vomit does not help at a crime scene.

Step 3: When you see him, scream. If you don't scream, they'll ask why. And then cry-sob like your life depends on it.

Step 4: Don't move any of his belongings out of the house. Leave his toothbrush in the bathroom cabinet and his shoes by the door. Like you are expecting him to come back, still.

Step 5: Don't ask investigators too many questions. Don't ask if they know what he was hit with or how his body ended up here, floating face down in your neighbor's lake.

Step 6: Thank all your friends for the frozen lasagna and pies that are now piled in the garbage bin, along with a bloodied lamp base and a pair of rubber boots.

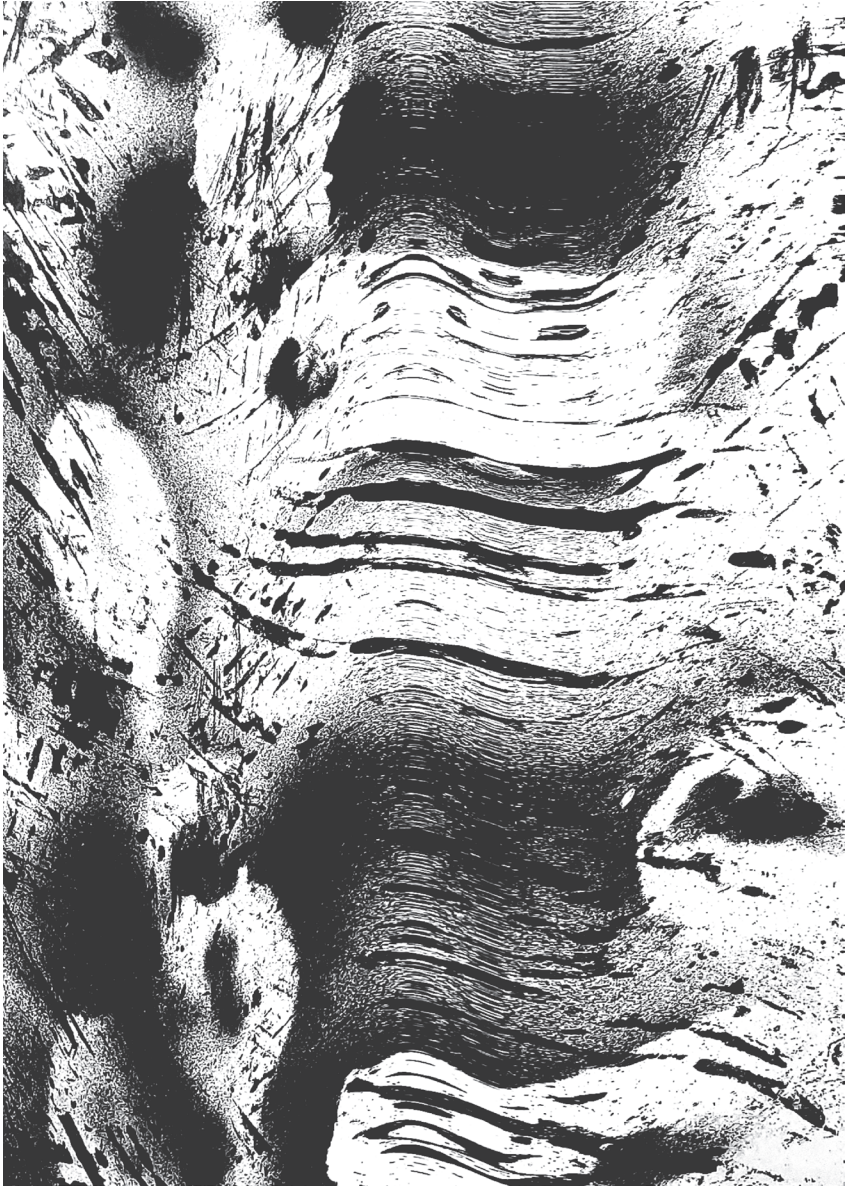
Step 7: When you see his mistress at the funeral, pretend you don't know who she is.

Step 8: Collect the insurance money only after the body is buried. Keep a tissue in your hand when meeting with the bank. Wait a month or two before renovating his home office into a yoga studio.

Step 9: Keep his picture on the mantel, for the neighbors and detectives that come by every few months, still searching for some kind of answer.



acrylic on canvas



spray paint

Dread

Kristina Pratt

Sharp breaths. Tremors through every inch of her body.
Glassy eyes. Her light voice in pieces.
Shutting a door in his face, her heart following suit.
Icy air whispers into her ear,
You will never be good enough. Stop trying, it's pointless.

The dark hole resurfaces, larger than before.
Without hesitation, she blindly stumbles in.
Her stomach is empty, dread filling every corner instead.
She panics and calls for him, the towering black door stands
between them.
She has both keys.
You will never be good enough. Stop trying, it's pointless.

The air thickens, wrapping around her neck, pulling her down.
Light oozes through the cracks of the door, traveling towards her.
She strains to move, to search for a key, now lost.
The air tightens, and yanks her further.
You will never be good enough. Stop trying, it's pointless.

She forces her eyes to open and squint.
His faint voice echoes, barely reaching her.
You are good enough. You will survive.

Her movements quicken, her eyes darting about.
The bottom is approaching, she can barely breathe.
You will never be good enough. Stop trying, it's pointless.

She fumbles; the key appears.
The light finds her. The air clears.
The hole is gone.
He swings the door open and lunges to hold her.
A moment of true bliss washes over them.
Her heartbeat slows, and she smiles.
You are good enough. You will survive.

She nods, feeling safe for a moment.
She doesn't share her worry for next time
Of the air being too heavy
And never finding the key.

Shikama-shi

Kelly O'Connor

Haini no kumo wa
aki no higure ni hikui hikuku uite imasu...
sushiyasan ga shinimashita.

(Shikama Town)

Kelly O'Connor

Clouds of cremation
hang low in the fall twilight...
our town's sushi chef has died.

Cherry Blossoms Bloom

Sydne Sewald

Cascading petals
Peak in April, raining down
Cherry Blossoms Bloom

Rain clouds part, bright skies
Drinking sake in Kyoto
Beneath pink petals

Soothing breeze ruffles
The bursting sakura, where
Cherry Blossoms Bloom

Pa' Sará

Multilingual Winner

Nicole Summer Newman

Nos conocimos por primera vez en Roma,
Fue de película.

Te abracé cuando lloraste,
y me mostraste los sitios que no pude ver antes.

La vida nuestra fue como un espectáculo.
La risa sinónima de una sinfonía,
Lágrimas suficientes.

Pero disfrutaba cada momento.

A veces recuerdo la primera vez que te vi en una luz diferente,
Yo reflexiono sobre cuál momento fue tu primera vez.

Calentita, nublada, e impredecible.

¿Qué hubiera pasado si el mundo no fuera tan turbulento?

Como tú, ¿no?

Quizás un día caminemos mano en mano otra vez,
Pero hasta entonces, me voy a atender a las memorias.

Como una jardinera riega a las flores

¡Florece, florece, florece!

(It Will Pass)

Multilingual Winner

Nicole Summer Newman

We met for the first time in Rome,
It was as if from a movie.

I held you when you cried,
And you showed me the sites I wasn't able to see before.

Our life was like a show.
Laughter synonymous with a symphony,
Plenty of tears.

But I enjoyed every moment.

Sometimes I remember the first time I saw you in a different light,
I wonder about which moment was your first time.

Warm, cloudy, and unpredictable.

What would have happened if the world wasn't so turbulent?

Like you, right?

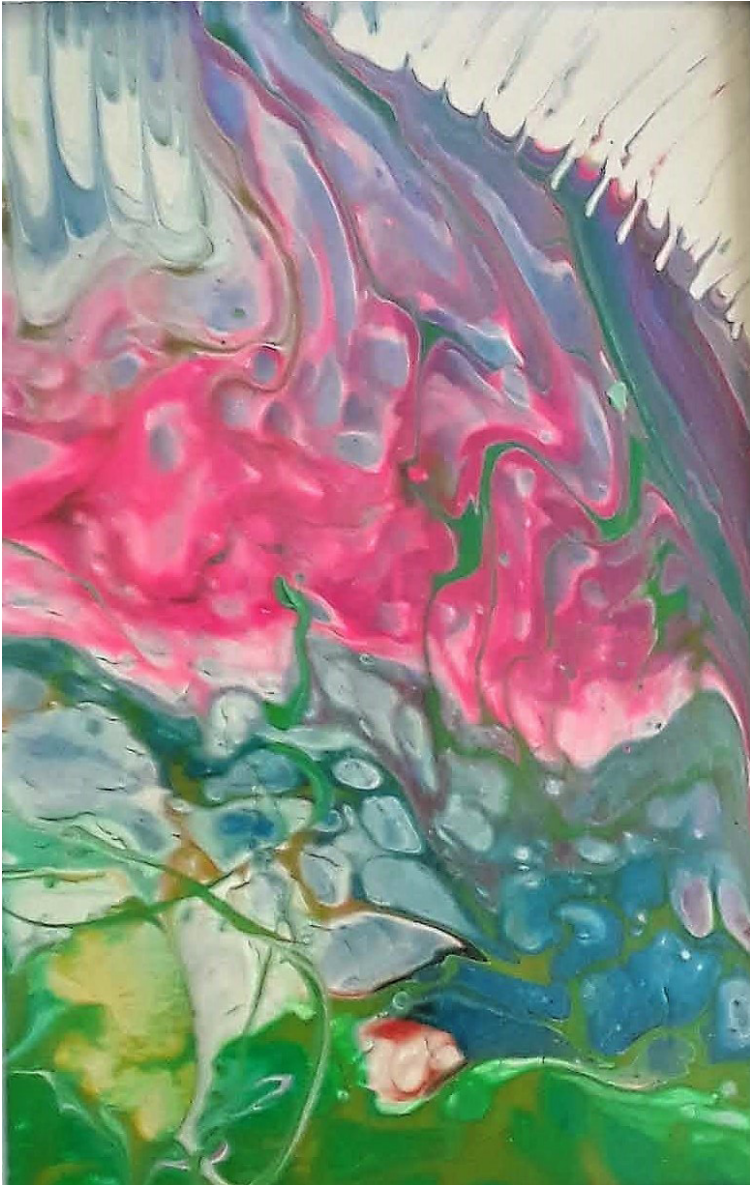
Maybe one day we'll walk hand in hand again,
But until then, I'm going to tend to the memories.

Just as a gardener waters the flowers

Bloom, bloom, bloom!

Acrylic Paint Swipe

Suzanne McCudden



acrylic paint



acrylic paint

November 8, 2016

A. D. Blanchard

I was asleep at the Valcarcel
Apartment in San Magdalena
When they made the announcement
On the blue screen, after the votes were counted

I woke up to missed calls,
WhatsApp notifications,
New York eulogizing a collective sinking ship—
Yet I was so remote from those heavy anchors

The clown one continent away
Cheered the faces of taxi drivers in Lima—
Even The Wall seemed like a good idea
To my boyfriend's papa in Magdalena

He fed me cheese, ham, and papaya from his fridge
And complimented me:
“Your Spanish is improving.”
While scolding his son for not practicing English

I'd spent a hectic two months
Preparing for this internship abroad
But had failed to learn
How to fill out an absentee ballot

The Pillow

Beth Fissel

The coolness refreshes my flustered face,
juxtaposing my frustration. I lay still, inhaling
the tenacious scent that lingers in the air.
The impression of years of your solid presence
cradles me, comforts me, wraps around me.
And there, in that undefined yet definite space,
that tangible and ethereal hollow,
I find my solace and fortitude
as I rest my pounding head on
the empty pillow next to mine.

The Secret Recipe

Kylie Brown

“Five more minutes!” my grandmother shouted from the kitchen door. No one was allowed in the kitchen when she was cooking. As a child, I always wondered what she was doing in there. I could imagine her as a mad scientist with beakers of flour, butter and salt scattered across the granite counter. Her hair was always puffed out in three different directions when she exited those mysterious blue doors. Her red gingham apron became a Jackson Pollock masterpiece of splatter and spewage stains. Her hands, when I held them during prayer, were dry as sandpaper from the constant wiping and rinsing she endured during her adventures in baking. The delicious smells from under the door were so sweet, neighbors asked what candles we lit and where they could buy them. As an avid eater of baked goods, I was curious as to how these concoctions became real. The cookies, so moist and gooey right out of the oven, burnt my tongue as soon as I bit into them and tasted of cinnamon, nutmeg, clove and allspice. The cakes, fluffy and filled with lemon curd, as sour as if I'd sunk my teeth into a fresh wedge. Chocolate fudge brownies, so rich, they'd probably give you a loan if you asked. The icings, ganaches, roll cakes, cake pops, peanut brittles, salt water taffys and homemade cherry pies would sing their songs of wonder in my mind as my tongue explored their tasty fillings and crusts.

One fine summer's day, I built up the courage to ask my grandmother if I could bake with her. Her once-blue but now gray eyes stared back into my soul. She squinted at me as if I were a stranger to her, looked me up and down and said, “Well I guess it's about time you knew.”

My flip flops echoed against the stark white tile of her kitchen. My heart pounded in my chest and my cheeks flushed with excitement. I was about to bake with my grandmother, the woman who puts Julia Child to shame! She fitted me with a red gingham apron of my own; it was a mini version of hers. She looked at me

with her arms crossed and asked me what I wanted to make with her. The spinning wheel of options turned in my head until I landed upon a classic: chocolate chip cookies. She smirked and set the oven for 350 degrees. We washed our hands together and cleaned off the counter for space. Then, she walked over to those blue doors and locked them with a quick click.

She winked and said, “So no one steals our secret recipe.”

I was giddy with happiness and excitement. I looked around at all her cabinets and imagined the magical ingredients that were waiting inside for us to extract. My grandmother’s slippers padded their way to the massive fridge. She opened a drawer inside and pulled out something that appeared to be sausage-like in shape. Her hands dropped the thing on the counter with a thunk. Cookie dough. Pillsbury cookie dough. Refrigerated, bake on a sheet in the oven, cookie dough. No work required, a two-year-old could make these. My grandmother chuckled at my open-mouthed expression.

“You didn’t actually think I could bake, did you? I mean, I think I do a pretty good job of faking, what with the messy hair, splotchy apron, and my trusty sugar cookie wax warmer scents. I hope I didn’t disappoint, kiddo.”

I couldn’t believe it! This whole time, my grandmother, the woman who I once compared to Gordon Ramsay, was a fake? She placed her veiny hands on my shoulders.

“Sometimes, things taste better when they have the illusion they’re homemade. It doesn’t matter that they come from the refrigerated section, or a box, or the bakery down the street! All that matters is that they are baked with love.”

So, we baked those cookies for my family and as they were diving in, my aunt begged my grandmother for her recipe.

That old woman looked at me, winked, and said, “Sorry, it’s a family secret.”

Lady in the Lou

Olivia Obi



oil and acrylic paint

loving you is

Poetry Winner

Lauren Holste

the mouthfeel of firm persimmons
 the bitter bite of early blackberries
a bushel of pernicious green figs
 crates of peaches picked too soon
a sad, flavorless pear

i want to shave my tongue
rid it of the cowardice
that preserves
this affair, green &

unripe

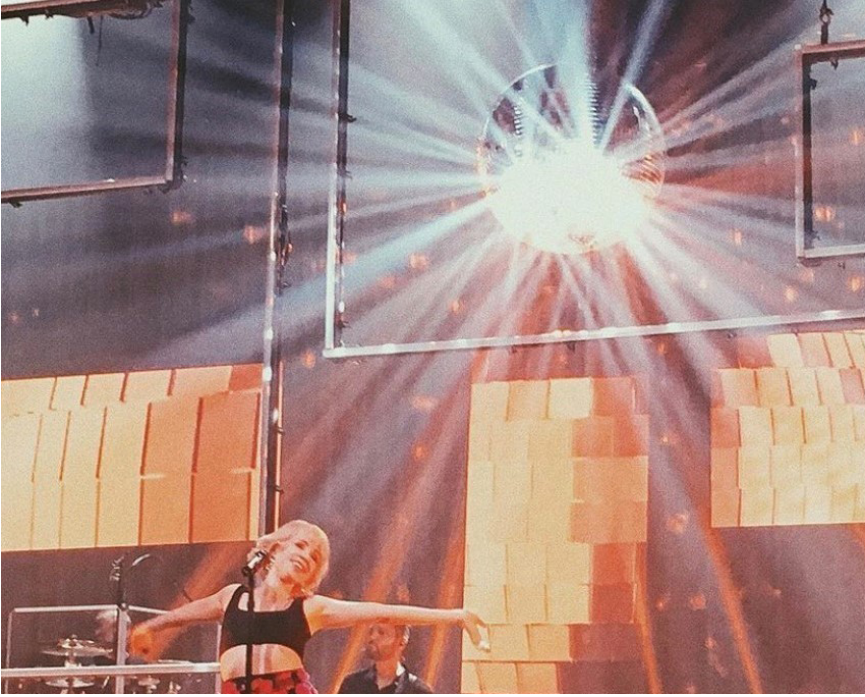
astringent

Lauren Holste

i wash my hands—dirty from onions
and as i peel the skin from
beneath my fingernails
i remember your spirit, *paper thin*—

the fragile state of
standing there,
smelling the odor on your breath
that squeezed my eyes dry
like lemons in a vice

spilling the pulp of soured years
a puddle of jaundiced regret
onto the kitchen tile.



photograph

Low-Flying Friend

Brandon Yn



photograph

Hidden on a cloudy day,
A brilliant sunbeam breaks.
Complete, unchanging, eternal.
I lower my gaze and shade my eyes.
Offended by its contentment,
Dismayed by its perfection.
My sorrow on display.

A Monument in Memory

Emily DiCarlo

Laughing Waters separate the dock, the cove, and the clifftop castle
Peeking through the treetops to watch me bathe
In the same sun rays as those forever sealed in seared limestone.

Before the azure sky, my eyes find desperate claws
Trees grazing their thick, green leaf tips against monumental walls
Yearning forever sealed in seared limestone.

I stumble, I trip, I kick gravel out of my sandals
I wonder about the pebbles; fallen or stolen
From the mortar? Not quite forever sealed in seared limestone.

Tourists traverse the tainted grounds summer after summer
Walls around walls standing stronger and stronger every season
Protecting the history forever sealed in seared limestone.

Still standing, guarding the lake, though unvisited this past summer
I wonder if I will ever see it again, my beloved
Magical forest fantasy forever sealed in seared limestone.

Ha Ha Tonka State Park castle, more than just ruins
Summer home, lakefront hotel, childhood adventure
And treasured memory forever sealed in seared limestone.

A Different Perspective of the Arch

Alexis Warnecke



photograph



acrylic paint

Intrepidity

Kelly O'Connor

The typhoon haps
a techno beat
of naked, wild scales,
neurotic, frenzied passion.

I lie upon the beach
abashed and bashed
daring the wind
in lilting vocals
to blow me away.

Undefined rhythm
and a sudden halt,
the DJ cuts;
and I am left
in sudden silence
euphoric and preserved.

afgekoeld

Zara Konstapel

ze lag in bed
klappertandde en rilde
met kippenvel over haar lijf
koud door de stroom van tranen

kleine regendruppels
die over haar wangen
via haar nek
door haar haren

zo naar beneden vielen

(cooled down)

Zara Konstapel

she found her way to her bed
chattering teeth and shivering
with goosebumps all over her body
cooled down by the river of tears

little raindrops
on her cheeks
down her neck
in her hair

that came pouring down

Dull emerald and rusty leaves enveloped above,
She squinted through the damp, misty air.
Inhaling the acrid essence,
She wrapped her fingers around the chilled metal bar.
The corners of her mouth mindlessly rose,
Matching the rosey-gold behind the pale horizon.
Her feet kept shifting further,
As if the individual rays
Were wrapped around her waist,
Drawing her towards their beauty.
Reaching the end of the crooked wooden boards,
Her feet sank into the soft bank.
She was mesmerized.
Each surge seemed tethered to similar golden rays,
Rising and rushing with a purpose,
To meet and collide with the golden shore.
She understood this burden of crashing,
Over and over.
Uncontrollably captivated by an alluring force.
Barely inching forward.
Causing a dazzling flurry in their connection.

Trauma and Hope at the Border

Shea Metzler

7-27-2019, edited 12-14-2020

The following essay was written during the summer of 2019, when I spent three months volunteering at a refugee shelter in El Paso, TX. When I arrived in May, the shelter system, known as Annunciation House, was hosting hundreds of refugees every week. Most guests spent less than three days in our shelter; the shelters are merely a place of hospitality for them while they arrange for their transportation to their destinations in all regions of the country.

By the time I left El Paso in late August, the implementation of the Trump administration's Migrant Protection Protocols, commonly referred to as the Remain in Mexico policy, had dramatically reduced the number of migrants entering the United States. The shelter where I volunteered, which had frequently hosted 300 to 400 migrants, now saw days where less than 20 people resided in the shelter. The same demographic group of migrants who had been hosted by the Annunciation House shelter system are now being dropped off on the streets of El Juarez, and denied entry into the United States. The lives of thousands, if not millions, of refugees have been impacted by these policies in ways we can never truly know.

I vividly remember my first day in El Paso. When I arrived to volunteer at Casa del Refugiado, a large shelter that opened in April 2019 to accommodate the growing influx of migrants, I had trouble finding the right building. From the outside, Casa del Refugiado is a nondescript, white warehouse with no clear indicator that up to 500 asylum-seekers could be residing within. When I finally found the right building, I found my way to the main office and introduced myself to the other volunteers. I met Christa, one of our beloved site coordinators, as well Mark and Tim, two of the short-term volunteers who were answering the office phones.

Mark smiled and introduced himself. “Shea, do you speak Spanish?”

“Some,” I told him, “Honestly, it’s more like intermediate Spanish.”

Tim turned around and grinned. “Me, too. Don’t worry—you’ll catch on.” Then he resumed his phone conversation, which needless to say, was in Spanish.

Yeah, right, I thought. I wasn’t able to hear all of his conversation, but it sounded like a fairly advanced level of Spanish to me. Little did I know, but a few days later I’d be struggling through Spanish phone calls as well.

During my first afternoon at the shelter, I came to understand why I hadn’t found out where I’d be volunteering until the day I arrived in El Paso. To say the shelter was chaotic would be an understatement. I never got a tour or any official training on what to do as a volunteer—I just started helping. That first night, I spent five hours helping guests rummage through boxes of clothes in our ropería, which at that time consisted of around 50-60 medium-sized cardboard boxes loosely grouped into sections for men, women, boys and girls. By the time we closed at 10 p.m., the room was a complete mess.

“Oh no! The women who organized this are going to be mad at me tomorrow,” Christa exclaimed when she saw the mess. Although I felt guilty that I hadn’t managed to keep the room in better shape, I remember thinking, *Someone organized this place?! Even when I had first entered the room, it looked as if it had been hit by a small tornado.*

During my first few weeks as a volunteer, I was overwhelmed by the insane amount of work to be done. At any given moment, I had at least three uncompleted tasks awaiting me. Guests approached me all day long with an endless stream of questions. *¿Dónde están los baños? Can you give me medicine for my*

cold? Necesito leche para mi nena. Has my family called to say when I'm leaving? Over time, I learned how to answer all these questions and more. At that time, being a volunteer at Casa del Refugiado was like learning how to swim by being thrown into a lake. It was a shock at first, but you learned how to do what was needed in the moment. We made it through one day at a time, just barely keeping our heads above water.

With so much work to do, we didn't have the chance to spend much one-on-one time with our guests. However, our brief interactions with the guests made it clear that they were incredibly kind people. The population at Casa del Refugiado consisted primarily of young adults and their children, many of whom had traveled thousands of miles over land from Guatemala and Honduras to reach the border. They'd spent long days or even weeks in the custody of Border Patrol and ICE before they were brought to our shelter. After having most of their belongings confiscated by Homeland Security, the majority of migrants arrived in our shelter with nothing more than the clothes on their back, their immigration papers and (usually) their cell phones.

The sufferings that migrants face in their travels range from small nuisances, like having their personal belongings taken away, to heartbreaking trauma. One family I encountered told me the story of their perilous journey. Two families traveling together suffered a traumatic loss when one husband and his son were kidnapped and the women were beaten up. The two young mothers and their daughters had no choice but to continue onward until they ran out of money. Maria, one of the mothers, decided to enter the U.S. alone so that she could send money to the others. When they finally had the means to enter the United States, Maria's seven-year-old daughter was taken to a child detention facility because she was not permitted to enter the United States without a legal guardian. Needless to say, Maria was heartbroken when she received a call from ICE, who asked her to speak with her daughter on the phone so that the girl would stop crying.

Three weeks after I encountered this family, I received the

best text message I have ever gotten. Maria texted me in Spanish, “Thank you so much. I have my daughter back. Thank you so much for worrying and for everything you’ve done. Thanks be to God and may God bless you.”

That night I was filled with a profound peace. The joy of knowing that Maria and her daughter had been reunited lifted an enormous weight off of my chest.

Despite the long paths they’ve traveled and the harsh conditions they’ve faced in detention, Casa del Refugiado’s guests are full of gratitude. They constantly thank the volunteers and show us incredible patience when we are too busy to attend to their needs. They offer to help us mop, sweep, wipe tables and take out trash without being asked. I am incredibly blessed to have met such thoughtful and hardworking people.

At Casa del Refugiado, the guests rely on us for nearly everything: shelter, food, clothing, blankets, toiletries, even diapers and formula for their infants. It is an incredibly humbling experience to have parents rely on you to provide the basic needs of their children. The migrants also rely on us to communicate with their families and arrange their transportation (although many of them have cell phones, most do not have cell service that extends to the U.S.). Volunteering at Casa del Refugiado has given me a profound appreciation for many simple privileges that I previously took for granted.

During my time here in El Paso, I have been blessed to encounter thousands of migrants for a very small part of their journey. I have been inspired by the optimism they show in the midst of intense emotional trauma and physical suffering. I have also come to understand how the injustice of U.S. immigration policy affects the lives of real people in a very deep way. Most importantly, I have learned what it means to build a resilient and hopeful community in the face of injustice.

Thank You To All Essential Workers

Nicole Summer Newman



35mm photograph



oil on canvas

赤い髪の毛

Multilingual Honorable Mention

Alex Snyder

赤は変化の色。

暗闇を照らす火花。

人生が麻痺する空っぽの海であなたを裏切ったとき。

夕暮れの下で太陽を割る深紅の刀のように、

記憶を汚すのは儂い決断。

これは俺のこの呪われた周期的な生涯を終わらせるための俺の返事。

「僕は自分の命を救うヒーローになりたいです。」

(Red Hair)

Multilingual Honorable Mention

Alex Snyder

Red is the color of change.

A spark that illuminates the darkness.

When life has betrayed you in a sea of numbing emptiness.

Like a crimson katana splitting the sun under twilight,

It is a fleeting decision that stains the memory.

This is my reply to end this cursed, cyclical lifetime of mine,

“I want to become the hero that will save my life.”

A María Al Bader

No tengo un gran palacio ni vestidos de seda
no tengo un pergamino ni un sagrado rincón
no tengo campanas
ni cuencos
no tengo el oro de tus labios
ni la riqueza de tu abrazo hondo

tan sólo tengo un templo
donde pronuncio las palabras
y someto a las dificultades
a enfrentarse con la inmensidad de mi fe.

(Prayers)

Aryam Elizabeth Ladera

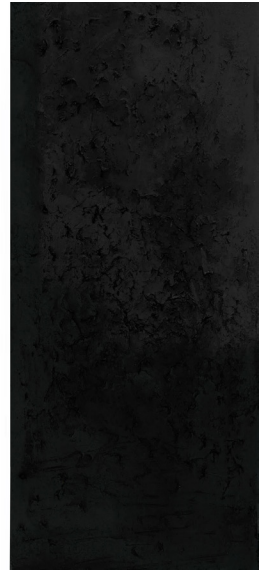
To Maria Albader

I don't have a great palace nor silk dresses
I don't have scrolls or a sacred corner
I don't have bells
nor bowls
I don't have the gold of your lips
or the richness of your deep embrace

I only have a temple
where I pronounce words
and submit hardships
to face the immensity of my faith.

Forms of Love

Aryam Elizabeth Ladera



mixed media



photograph

Sleep Talking While Awake

Taylor Weintrop

His sleeping heartbeat was a special kind of poetry

sometimes it feels too personal to listen,
like eavesdropping on a soul's diary entry.

It's an unfamiliar language
still, with my head to his chest
I find solace in his unconscious breath.

Our lungs echoing

a hippodrome of foregone spirits—
dancing there between
his ribs I can hear the casualties
of internal wars waged.

He alone is the composer
of these very unwieldy storms.

The clouds are his chaperones

he has always been followed
by the dark side of the moon.

Half flesh, half emptiness,
he is unknowing of the incantation
rain can play on the heart.

Across sunsets and moons

we will meet at the altar of ink
where the words will spill
between the hemispheres
of neither here nor there,
indiscernible hues of fire—

His sleeping heartbeat was a special kind of poetry

a secret message buried behind his ribcage.
I'm not so sure it was ever me
that was the muse leading him through his darkest days.

Nagamachi

Kelly O'Connor

1

Sparrows gather outside the bay window,
standing on sunbeams and chirping at the wind,
blown to the blacktop and back up again.

A train goes by
and the near sky becomes
suddenly empty.

2

Rustling in the fall leaves,
two cats are speaking Japanese.
I open my book to study
so that I may eavesdrop.

3

I open my heart to the moon,
sitting by the train tracks;
and even though the 9:35 rolls by,
he continues listening intently.

The Star That Keeps Me Company

Taylor Weintrop

It is dangerous to dangle
between the lines
of unseen
and unalive
I dream the sweetest dreams
of growing wings
the layers of this
monochromatic fantasy
are so lovely
this is a different
type of longing
these angels will bring a
different type of tomorrow
when it is finally
the cosmos
the dirt
and me

Artist and Author Biographies

A. D. Blanchard is a former *Litmag* staff member who earned a BA in English from UMSL in 2020.

Kylie Brown is a junior working on her English major at UMSL. She loves baking, books and the *Great British Baking Show*. She currently resides in a cottage in Pevely with her fiancé, Nyles. This is her first published work, and she hopes to become a book editor someday.

Rongjing Cao has a BA in art and design from Anshan Normal University, China, an MFA from Beihua University, China, and is pursuing a Doctorate in Educational Practice through the University of Missouri–St. Louis in Partnership Program with Shenyang Normal University (SYNU). She served as the art and calligraphy teacher at Shenyang Railroad No.3 Primary School, China, and also received first prize in the 7th National Primary and Secondary School Painting and Calligraphy Competition in China.

Sydda Champ is an English major at UMSL with plans of becoming a middle school language arts teacher after graduating in August 2021. When they are not writing about themselves in the third person, they enjoy reading, writing poetry, painting, or binge-watching Marvel movies and sitcoms.

Emily DiCarlo expects to graduate in May 2021 with a BA in psychology, a certificate in CAST, and a minor in Spanish. With hopes to be a high school counselor, she writes poetry and short stories as a hobby. In February 2021, her short story “Declaration of War” was published in UMSL’s *Bellerive Interlude*. She is the oldest of six children, and she currently resides in St. Louis with her family.

Beth Fissel returned to school after a decade away and is graduating in May 2021 with a BA in English and a Professional Writing Certificate. In that time she has raised a gaggle of kids, all of whom break her heart when they tell her grammar is boring. Beth hopes to eventually work as a book editor, which she might be able to do if her kids ever stop asking her to make sandwiches.

Daniel Grasso is a master's student hailing from West Palm Beach, FL. He is studying philosophy but enjoys writing fiction, nonfiction, screenplays, and poetry outside of his academic pursuits.

Lauren Holste is a recent graduate of UMSL with a BA in Spanish. She is anxious and over-caffeinated, covered in dog hair, partial to gin, and a lifelong advocate for eating the rich.

Zara Konstapel's list of favorite things (among other stuff): raccoons, grilled cheeses at any given time, anything that includes John Deere, Fleetwood Mac, reading and analyzing English literature, pretty sunsets, a hard breaststroke set in practice, walks with Bob the dog, trying new restaurants, the beach, midnight inspiration for poems, ABBA, French words, colorful socks & karaoke nights.

Aryam Elizabeth Ladera (Caracas—1985) is a Venezuelan contemporary artist, chef and restaurateur currently living in Doha, Qatar. She studied "Letras" (Literature and Linguistics) at Universidad Central de Venezuela and is currently specializing in Dream and Archetypal Analysis at Assisi Institute in Mystic, CT. She lives with her children and husband, missing the Caribbean sea and continuously drinking coffee.

Grace Leggans is a 21-year-old student at UMSL. She is currently working toward a BS in information systems, but spends her free time creating paintings (usually in acrylic) that project her outlook on life. Grace is a self-taught artist who hopes to spread positivity through her artwork. She draws inspiration from her surroundings and the struggles she has faced so far.

Suzanne McCudden is semi-retired working part time at UMSL. Despite no formal art training, she is fascinated by the myriad color combinations and design potential of the acrylic/alcohol ink/resin media and enjoys experimenting with various media and substrates. She looks to colors and shapes experienced in her surroundings to produce free form designs and patterns with often surprising outcomes. She is hopeful that others will enjoy the result as well.

Shea Metzler is a transfer student graduating from UMSL this May. Shea is majoring in public policy and designed her own emphasis area in environmental policy. She is passionate about sustainable agriculture and expanding local access to affordable, healthy food. In her free time, Shea enjoys reading fiction, spending time outdoors, and watching Spanish-language shows on Netflix.

Erica M. Morrison is a high school English teacher and mom to two young boys. When she is not teaching teens or boy-wrangling, she enjoys hiking, cooking, running, and reading. Erica has dabbled in writing creative nonfiction for many years and has most recently been a contributing writer for the *St. Louis Mom* blog. She is honored to share her work in *Litmag*.

Paige R. Moultrie is currently a full-time cosmetologist and a full-time student here at UMSL. She is a junior enrolled in the English undergraduate program. Paige returned to school after nearly seven years to pursue a career in writing and copy editing.

Marlena Neal is a senior in the UMSL graphic design program. She has a passion for writing, illustrating, and creating art both on and off the computer. After having the opportunity to get her first book published with Amazon, her dream is to become a children's book illustrator and writer. Check out some of her work at <https://marlenaneal.design/>.

Nicole Summer Newman is a senior at UMSL majoring in Modern Spanish with a minor in philosophy. She is also a Spanish tutor with the Language Department and a student instructor for courses taught in Spanish. She hopes to continue her education by pursuing her master's in Mental Health Counseling and eventually become a bilingual licensed professional counselor. In her free time she enjoys learning languages, reading/writing poetry, and quality time with loved ones.

Luna Noelle is a senior graduating in May with a BFA in art education. Her favorite medium to use is oil, but she also does watercolor, printmaking, and sculpture. She takes a lot of inspiration from surrealism, horror films, and games.

Olivia Obi is a local artist. Follow more of her work at Ng0zitheflower on Instagram and YouTube.

Kelly O'Connor is a secondary English and debate teacher with an MA in English and second coming in curriculum design. After undergrad, she spent 5+ years in Japan and a summer in China, traveling around Asia in the process, which inspires much of her poetry. Three of her children's stories were published in Japan as part of an English-teaching textbook series, *BI Interface*. She also enjoys writing literary and cultural-commentary essays as well as legislation.

Kristina Pratt is a senior at UMSL, and she is excited to complete her bachelor's degree in English. She loves to write, read, and explore. Kristina has high hopes of writing a best-selling novel that can help people the same way her favorite books have.

Patrick Ross is a tropical forest ecologist with a passion for rainforest conservation. He is currently pursuing a master's in biology from UMSL's Parker Lab. For his thesis project, Patrick will continue years of previous research focusing on the endemism put at risk by forest loss and invasive animals in Madagascar.

Sydne Sewald will be completing her BA in English at the end of the 2022 spring semester. The two pieces included in this edition of *Litmag* are her first poems to be published. Having worked with *Provenance* for the past two semesters, she has had her writing published, but this will be the first time she will see a piece of her creative writing being published. She hopes to see more of her work published in the future.

Alex Snyder transferred to UMSL last semester as a psychology major, but he has always had a passion for the world of literature. Planning to graduate in the spring of 2022, he hopes that his experience with *Litmag* as an author and editor will allow him to venture into the world of publishing with confidence.

thatdudechandler was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. He has had a life-long passion for hip-hop. His lyrics are deeply personal, rapping with a stream-of-consciousness style. His subject matter includes a wide range of topics, often providing societal critiques and

brooding self-analysis. He has released one full-length album titled “S.S.D.D,” a conceptual EP titled “The Broke(n) Philosophic,” and multiple other projects and singles.

Alexis Warnecke is a junior transfer student at UMSL majoring in anthropology. She hopes to go on to graduate school to eventually become a professor. She has always enjoyed photography as a hobby and is constantly learning new things about photography. She also loves wildlife, art and design of all mediums, and traveling. One day she hopes to travel all of Europe and admire and learn more about the scenery and sites.

Taylor Weintrop recently graduated from UMSL with a BA in English and will be returning to campus/Zoom University to begin her journey of obtaining an MA in English. She has been writing poetry and prose since middle school, but it is the field of arts and humanities research and writing where her real passion lies. Her favorite form of poetry has always been spoken word. If you feel so inspired, try giving her pieces a moment to shine out in the open by bringing her words to life with your voice.

Aaron Wiggins was born and raised in St. Louis, Missouri. Aaron grew up sketching, and pencil, pen, charcoal, and pastel are the mediums that he enjoys using the most. The physicality, responsiveness, and direct control that these mediums offer are nice. Growing up, his art was influenced and inspired by music, cartoons, comics, and books. Connecting these various subjects with music is truly a driving force for his work.

Brandon Yn is a 20-year-old student from Florissant in North St. Louis County. He has loved taking pictures from the time he first played with a disposable camera as a child. His love for preserving memories and telling stories is what drives his passion for photography. He is studying communications and public relations at UMSL and hopes to incorporate storytelling into his future career.



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The logo for Boulevard Magazine features a green street signpost with two signs: 'Natural Bridge' and 'BOULEVARD'. The signpost is set against a black silhouette of a city skyline, with the Gateway Arch prominently featured. To the right of the signpost, the letters 'UMSL' are written in a large, bold, red font. Below 'UMSL' are three circular icons containing the letters 'M', 'F', and 'A' respectively. At the bottom of the graphic, a white banner contains the text 'Visit: https://boulevardmagazine.org'.

Getting Involved

JOIN THE LITMAG STAFF

Undergraduate students have the opportunity to earn course credit by enrolling in English 4895: Editing *Litmag*, which is offered each spring semester. For students interested in creative writing, professional editing, and publishing, this class provides an internship-like experience that may also serve as a capstone for a writing studies certificate. Under the supervision of a faculty advisor, student editors participate in the full scope of operations within a nonprofit publication, including fundraising, solicitation, marketing and promotions, copy editing, document and graphic design, publicity, and distribution.

Students interested in enrolling in the course are invited to contact Kate Watt at katewatt@umsl.edu, and students interested in completing a capstone project with *Litmag* as part of a writing certificate please contact Jeanne Allison at allisonjea@umsl.edu.

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Additional questions for *Litmag*? Contact us at litmagumsl@gmail.com

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