Letter from the Editors

To our readers,

Spectrum represents the range of human emotions, ideas, personalities, and experiences. It is the distribution of thoughts that cannot be precisely measured, and rather, are illuminated by unique means.

Different colors of light become visible when reflected across a prism - this magazine works as that prism, allowing the diverse ideas of our artists and authors to take shape. All this unified light is from one source - our humanity. Each page represents a band of color that exists as part of the larger continuum of artistic expression.

We hope that, with each turn of the page, those colors become more pronounced and your appreciation of the spectrum increases.

Sankhya Amaravadi
Hoda Fakhari
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Editorial Policy

The Red Shoes Review is a journal of free and creative expression. The views expressed here are those of the authors and artists, and do not necessarily reflect those of the editorial staff or the Honors College. This journal welcomes and publishes work that represents a diverse range of beliefs, and does not discriminate against race, ethnicity, religion, or disability. With the exception of grammatical changes, the content of this magazine is presented as is and is chosen through blind voting and panel review. All works presented are created by UIC students who were of undergraduate standing within the course of the 2016-2017 academic year. They represent only but a small portion of all UIC writers and are not necessarily associated with the UIC Honors College.
Fields

by Brody Ford
The Spectator
by Lauren Jones
The Smoke Will Rise

by Tyler Benavides

I found the door again.

I had walked down the steps that were
Encrusted with dust and age;
I noticed the walls on either side of me
Begin to blacken.

Soot.
I felt sick at the realization
Of where I had gone.
I ran through the dark halls
Until I heard the crackling and beating,
Of knuckles against wood.
A door I was made to forget about.

I found the door again.

It was no longer locked,
As I always remembered it to be.
The heat radiating from behind it
Gently cloaked me in familiarity.
My hand on the scorching handle
Did not burn.
The second the door was cracked,
It overcame me:

I found the door again.

The largest fire I had ever seen
Took hold of my meek being
And suddenly,
Everything he had tried to burn
Singed itself through the cracks
Of my bones.
It was not painful.
I cried out of delight.
The fire was a part of me
Once more.

I found myself again.
Queen of the Cranes

by Haley LeRand
The Waiting Maiden
by Darlene Ymson

Once upon a time, there was a beautiful maiden who fell in love with a handsome prince. The handsome prince married her and they lived peacefully in a castle made of stone and marble.

One day, the maiden decided to ride into the mountains to gather purple lilies for her handsome lover. Because she wanted it to be a surprise, she did not tell the prince where she was going. She kissed and hugged him goodbye, saddled a horse, and rode off into the mountains.

When she arrived, she saw the purple lilies glistening in the sun and reflecting like the waves of an ocean. She picked one, then two, then three. When she picked ten, she lost her footing and fell down the mountain.

When she awoke, she saw that the sky had turned black. The purple lilies were gone except for the ten she had in her hand. She did not know if she was still on the mountain, and the maiden could not see where she was.

Suddenly, a traveler with a hunchback and tattered clothes appeared on the path she was standing on. He held two lanterns that lit the road ahead.

The maiden approached the traveler and asked:
“Excuse me, sir, where am I?

The lilies are gone and I don’t know why.”

The hunchback laughed and replied:
“You are on the crossroads, my child.
You have died.
Left is hell, right is heaven.
And you must decide.”

The maiden cried and said:
“Impossible, how can this be?
I still had a whole world to see.
And now I sit here in the dark.
My lover is not with me.”

The hunchback scoffed and answered:
“Your loss, madam, not mine.
You might see your lover in time.
Now, I must go left. Hell awaits.
This lantern sees God’s line.”

The hunchback took one lantern and left the maiden with the other. The maiden went up on a hill overlooking the crossroads and sat on a rock. She watched many travelers make their way towards heaven or hell.

She pondered, then said to herself:
“There’s no heaven without my lover there.
I shall sit on this rock and stare.
He will come soon, I know it.
We will remain in God’s lair.”

The maiden attached the lilies to her hair to remember her lover, and she sat on that cold, dark rock overlooking the paths between heaven and hell.

She waited and waited and waited.

The lilies are gone and I don’t know why.”

The hunchback laughed and replied:
“You are on the crossroads, my child.
You have died.
Left is hell, right is heaven.
And you must decide.”

The maiden cried and said:
“Impossible, how can this be?
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“There’s no heaven without my lover there.
I shall sit on this rock and stare.
He will come soon, I know it.
We will remain in God’s lair.”

The maiden attached the lilies to her hair to remember her lover, and she sat on that cold, dark rock overlooking the paths between heaven and hell.

She waited and waited and waited.
Ten years passed, and a boy approached her on the rock. He was small and frail, shivering in the cold.

He called the maiden, and said:

“Excuse me, miss, where is heaven? Please show me the gates to heaven. I long to see my mother and father. Please show me the gates to heaven.”

The maiden smiled at the boy, and answered:

“I shall show you the gates to heaven. To the right are the gates to heaven. But I must return promptly here. So my lover and I can go to heaven.”

She took the boy’s hand and together they walked on the road to heaven. Gleaming gates of gold greeted them when they arrived. The gates stood tall and majestic before them and at the entrance the boy’s parents were there. The boy ran to embrace them. He smiled and waved goodbye to the maiden, thanking her for helping him reach the gates of heaven.

The maiden took her lantern and returned to the rock overlooking the crossroads.

Ten years passed, and a young man approached her on the rock. He was energetic and lively. He didn’t mind the cold.

He called the maiden, and said:

“Excuse me, miss, where is heaven? Please show me the angels of heaven. I long to sing as one of them. Please show me the angels of heaven.”

The maiden smiled at the young man, and answered:

“I shall show you the angels of heaven. To the right are the angels of heaven. But I must return promptly here. So my lover and I can go to heaven.”

She led the man to heaven. The golden gates stood tall before the maiden once more, but this time she and the young man entered. Heaven was bright and full of joy. The sun was always shining, people were laughing and singing, and there was an abundance of trees and flowers.

The maiden followed the sound of singing and led the man to the choir of angels. The angels were flying in the clouds, singing praises to their God and King. As the man began to sing, he grew wings and became an angel. He smiled and waved goodbye to the maiden, thanking her for helping him reach the choir of angels.

The maiden took her lantern and returned to the rock overlooking the crossroads.

Ten years passed, and an old man approached her on the rock. He was peaceful and pleasant. He was warm against the cold.

He called the maiden, and said:

“Excuse me, miss, where is heaven? Please show me the face of heaven. I long to see my God and King. Please show me the face of heaven.”

The maiden smiled at the old man, and answered:

“I shall show you the face of heaven. To the right is the face of heaven. But I must return promptly here
So my lover and I can go to heaven.”

She took the old man’s arm and escorted him towards heaven. They walked past the tall golden gates and ducked beneath the choir of angels.

The maiden followed the light of the sun into God’s domain.

When they lost sight of the joyful people, the trees, flowers, and the angels, they heard a loud voice:
“I am the face of God.
And here, all I love may trod.
You can enjoy life anew.
I rule happiness and love with my rod.”

The old man began speaking to the thunderous voice. He smiled and waved goodbye to the maiden, thanking her for helping him reach the face of God.

The maiden took her lantern and returned to the rock overlooking the crossroads. But as the maiden arrived, she saw the demons had taken her place.

She screamed as they dragged her by the hair towards hell. They chanted:
“Three times she denied the gifts of heaven!
She does not belong in heaven!
The fires of hell are perfect for her.
She feels no joy in heaven!”

But God, noticing the persistence she had in waiting for her husband, sent angels to fight the demons and they rescued her. She sat on the rock once more, and a light shone brightly above her head.

She heard the loud voice once more, exclaiming:
“My child, my child, you have waited for your lover. Here you sat, cold and somber. You have denied heaven, but sacrificed it for another. And finally, your wait is over.”

On the path below, she saw the handsome prince riding a white horse. She ran down the hill and embraced her lover, kissing every part of his face.

She cried, and held him tightly, exclaiming:
“My lover, my lover, I have waited for you. Here on this rock, I have waited for you. And now you’re here, my wait is over. Let us go to heaven, my lover.”

The prince, so in love with his beautiful maiden, smiled and hugged and kissed her. He caressed the lilies in her hair, and replied:
“My lover, my lover you have waited for me. I have not remarried, don’t you see? Life was sad and lost and empty. We are together for eternity.”

Together, the maiden and the prince rode towards the glory of heaven, where they lived happily ever after.

THE END
Visions

by Jackson Krause
Your Dead Body
by Ronald Josh Ytem

The life of a dead person
Or should I say a dead body
Because everybody
Says when the soul leaves, it’s no body
Let’s talk about you, the nobody

Hello, how was your death?
How did you feel taking your last breath? No?
Not to worry.
We have three options to make your stay more... Comfortable.

1. Welcome to the hotel SEL room 2070.
Here you’ll have 10 roommates
With your own separate beds and moist towelettes to keep your skin, skin-like
You can spend the rest of your days scaring and scarring undergraduate nursing students,
as they spend a year poking at your brain,
Fainting at the sight of your intestines where you heart should be,
And your lungs on the table next to you.
They spend a year sawing your face open to get a better look at your throat.
Is that how you want to live?
Just a couple hundred strangers doing what they feel they need to do to you.
You’ll only ever be living for other people but I assure you it’s very rewarding
Knowing a young mind is being filled with knowledge by untangling your spleen from your kidneys
Students will laugh as they pick up your hand against your will and wave it
“Hello” and his friend will reply “You’re disgusting”
Is this how you want to live?

Or 2. would you rather live like a celebrity for a week, get lain in a wooden and silk throne that we call a coffin
and have a curtain of earth packed on top of you and never opened again
It would be like being in a dramatic play.
You’d get made up,
Put on some fancy clothes and lay there in your final scene as an audience of your loved ones
(Granted that you have loved ones)
Cry and mourn your death
(Granted that they’re mourning)
Yes, after the celebration subsides and the roses are thrown
You lay there...
In your throne... Forever... Alone
Not to worry, you’d have time to think
About how great life was... Used to be,
Think about the people who were there
And now aren’t
And you can’t get them back
Cuz you’re dead
You keep living
Only you’re not living in the days
where you felt alive
Those days are gone
Your 15 minutes of fame are over
No such thing as rest in peace
You only have eternity to think
about it
Is this how you want to live?

Or 3. perhaps the most cost efficient
option to spend your life after death
Decomposition
Your own stomach basically starts to
eat you, you’ll get bloated because of
the gas created by the energy conver-
sions and yes,
This means dead people DO in fact fart
Everyone will end up decomposing
but this way, your life will be just
another thing that happened
Nature’s cool...
And decomposing,
You’ll be like one of those leaves in
the fall that look real nice
But the in the spring are just... Gone
Or you’ll be like that mouse in the
middle of the forest that did that thing. Remember that?
No?
Of course not!
It didn’t matter. It didn’t even try
Its life was just a thing that hap-
pened.
I hope it has a loved one.
You have a loved one to tell us about
a thing, anything that you did that mattered.
It doesn’t have to be being a leader
in the civil rights movement,

It doesn’t have to be curing cancer,
Just tell me what you did.
Unless that’s how you want to live,
Without ever have actually lived.

Optional:
(Or 4. Resurrection: as far as I
know, only two people have done it.
Jesus,
the son of God.
And Tupac.)
Shattered
by Rabia Iqbal
Syria
by Nayfah Thnaibat

And
I too,
have a dream that our
Children won’t return to us
encompassed in body bags
becoming silhouettes
in our
Minds.

And
I too,
believe they
will go on to play with the
lyrics of the
Skies.
Temerite

by Brody Ford
Left Behind

by Anastasiya Loos

“Is it over?”
“I don’t know.”

Seconds have folded into hours, the hours into days. Smoke clouds the air with a layer of brittle, decayed oxygen, like a weighted vest of dust. Allister’s gold pocket-watch displays the time—the time of another world. Here the stars are receding, indolent blinking as the sun creeps upon them, beckoning slumber; dawn appears yawning, stretching her sleeves of yellow and pink.

A whistle hums above the men and an interrupted cry precedes the flames that ignite twenty paces behind. Hot breath breathes down their damp backs.

“We can’t stay.”
“I know.”
“We need to keep moving; our only chance of getting home is staying alive.”

Home. The word is foreign, a faint trace of a memory clinging to Allister’s thoughts by a thin, fraying string. Gunfire erupts, the shots individual explosions ticking by the seconds. Allister stares at the pocket-watch, fingers tracing the engraving of his grandfather’s initials.

“Let’s go,” Allister replies.

He watches the flames consume their base camp, watches the men in the distance, the army, march closer towards them. It isn’t over. He hears the woes of war: wails, shouts, grunts. Allister’s companion slings his rifle over his shoulder and begins west. Allister follows. Thoughts of home forgotten, survival operates his fatigued legs. The pocket-watch glints in the waking sunlight, wet mud cushioning the ticking clock.
Dye An Egg

by Tyler Benavides

Take the sharpest edge,
Just tap it against the shell,
And watch,
And be satisfied
With what pours out.
Take a soft brush
And swirl the reds together,
Mopping up the excess.
Art heals
The person inside;
I just took it one step further,
And used my insides for art.

I wonder if I tap the edge
A little harder
That my art
Will look
Richer
And
Darker.
Sewing of Vocal Cords

by Yu-hui Huang
I’ve Heard that the Eyes are the Windows to the Soul

by Anastasiya Loos

I’ve heard that the eyes are the windows to the soul, yet, I hesitate to agree; if the soul is a color, why sure, it’s a decent analogy, but aren’t souls worth so much more?

I confess I disagree with this satisfactory metaphor and invite you to consider my proposition: could you imagine the mouth indeed as the window to your soul?

Enter the intellect with his epiphany “Aha! Surely she discusses language!” but no, sit down, dear sir, I do not speak of tongues.

We agree that the pupils and the mouth are entrances, but pupils—gateways to the optic nerve—are those the doorway to your soul?

Now I implore you: what emerges out of your saliva-drenched, chapped-lipped, cavity-candied mouth?
Language? No, sir, words!
Words take flight from that despicable hole
and these
I knight
your soul.

Once free, these words flap
their gold-plated wings as their feathers
waltz through the air, and a hum chimes,
alerting the listener to be silent
and marvel at those spoken words.

Words are lullabies, passionate promises
of adoration and faith. Jubilation
and elation are words, telling the listener
how the speaker feels and offering
a glimpse of what drives that emotion
—a soul.

For you see, sir, language is shared
and unites mankind, but only a soul
can alter the delivery of such dialogue.
Only the soul can manipulate every
spoken detail to enlighten,
to distinguish.
   Souls escape the mouths of speakers through words.

Now tell me again how
the eyes are the windows to the soul
as I look into your microscopic pupils;
I see my reflection and I agree with you
it’s a rather pretty sight, but frankly,
I lack
to see
your soul.
Brandon

by Sydney Rinehart
V. to run your fingers through your lover's hair

You have an adorkable smile
and a crooked nose from the time you and your brother got into a fight,
and he won.
You have chubby cheeks,
which your family sometimes makes fun of you for.
You have baby hands
which engulfed mine
that one time we stared at the ceiling at 3 am.
You have soft hair
that you usually grow too long
in an attempt to cover up that “ugly” face of yours.
It’s a shame that it ends up covering your eyes,
because, if eyes are windows to the soul,
I want to look straight into yours
and try to find my reflection
somewhere,
if that’s okay with you.
Blush

by Nidhi Suthar
It’s Christmas Time!

by Tam Au
RESILIENCE

by Kit Henry

The urgent luring beckoned through the night—a requisition not to be ignored. I stumbled in a fretful haze to trace the route which ushered me along hushed streets and past abandoned cars, until I reached the place where pavement turned to cobblestone and barricades barred entry to the scene. The fear compelled my mind to reminisce about the sorrow of calamity, the absolute shock of mortality. Amid the echoes resonating through the empty shrine, I felt a calm sublime, a baffling stillness in the heart of fear. The steady beats reminded me of life—a thumping promise that tomorrow comes despite the paralyzing dread of fate. I rested, weary, near the flowers left by shaken mourners pained with thoughts of death and countless questions yet to be resolved. I pleaded for an understanding there, where terror harrowed victims void of sin. The flames of candles flickered in the mist of gloom and gleamed in shadows cast by doubt—the silent proof of fierce, resilient hope. Through awful flashes of reflection, one uncertain thought arose, inspiring will: unburdened spirits cannot hear the sigh of faith that gently lures the ones who know a shattered, fleeting sense of safety to the hallowed ground where peace is absolute.
The Cliff’s Edge
by Liridona Ashiku and Rebecca Cinfio

Before

The sun shined brighter than usual that early morning, making the heat almost unbearable, and Iris smelled of sweat and dirt. Her muscles burned from fatigue, making her angry at everything in the world. The worst part was while she wanted nothing better than to vanish in thin air, Levy walked beside her with a hop to his step, smiling along as they went. She kept quiet, while he whistled a song only he knew. Halfway through the hike, her mom joined him in a little camp song. She thanked God that her dad was back at the campground with her four-year-old brother or else he would have joined in too and probably would have started dancing.

Levy wrapped his arm around Iris’ shoulders, and she shrugged him off with a glare. He merely laughed at her vexation. She cursed her mom for the millionth time for thinking that a camping trip would be a good idea.

“You okay there, Iris?” Levy asked, as he saw her struggle to catch her breath. His smile wavered for the first time since the beginning of the trip. “I thought you loved the woods?”

“Yeah, I love staring at it,” Iris retorted, with an exasperated frown, “not trying to survive it, you idiot!”

“Oh, don’t be so over dramatic.” Her mom said with a teasing smile, and Iris’ anger immediately dissipated away. She could never seem to be mad at her mom for long no matter how hard she tried. Her mom was a glowing light in a pretty dim world. She held life in her hands so gently yet firmly like a prized possession. She was her mother, and that meant she was invincible.

Iris cracked a smile as her mom hugged her tightly, almost lifting her off the ground. Her mom’s love was contagious. Out of the corner of Iris’ eye, she noticed Levy watching them with a longing expression. He never spoke much of his private life at home, even though the two of them had been best friends since they were in diapers. Iris’ dad once said that his parents were complicated folks. She did not necessarily know what that meant, but it must have been a bad thing since Levy spent almost every day with her.

“I’ll be right back,” her mom said, releasing Iris from her bear hug, “I just have to take a picture of that view.”

Iris nodded and watched her go. She was about to follow her mom when she felt Levy tug on her arm. He smirked when he caught her attention and put his pointer finger to his lips, telling her to stay quiet.

“Come with me,” he whispered, and she did without further questions. Levy led her to their pond, hidden by trees and bushes. She watched as he took off his shirt and jumped in without a second
thought. He splashed her with the lukewarm water, when he realized she chose to stay out. In fact, Iris was just about to join in the fun, when she heard a scream.

It was not just anyone, though, it was her mom. Iris ran towards her voice to the edge of Eagles Point, where a part of the cliff clearly fell off, along with her mom. She saw her mom’s body down below, splayed in an awkward position. She was still alive, Iris just knew it. She yelled out to tell her she was coming. She scrambled down the edge to get to her, but she was too high and it was too steep. Her knees scraped against the rock as she tried to climb down, but her ankle twisted and she slipped. Iris closed my eyes, expecting a weightless fall towards her death, but Levy was there as always to catch her. She fell instead into his embrace and cried her heart out.

“It’s okay, Iris. Everything’s going to be okay.” Iris embraced his empty promises, wanting nothing more than to believe him. But she just could not.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

Iris sat on her worn-out couch staring at the black screen of her television set, wondering how she got there. The air was empty of sounds, except for the clock on the wall and the broken faucet. She, herself, was empty too of noises, tears, feelings. And, yet, Iris could still feel her unwanted presence. Goosebumps rose on Iris’ pale arms as she heard the familiar, yet unfamiliar, whistle that only Levy knew come from her lips. Only she knew how to irk Iris to a point where she had to acknowledge her.

“What do you want?” Iris said, her voice sounding dead even to herself. She stopped whistling and tilted her head slightly to the side, observing Iris like a predator.

“What?” She asked, snapping her head up to meet her intense gaze, but she was not there anymore. Iris screamed for her, but it was no use. The Girl was gone.

After Tick

Tock

Tick

Tock

The silence was deafening.

Drip. Drip. Drip.

Iris woke up in a cold sweat with only one thing on her mind. Carter. She checked the time on her nightstand as she tried to piece together what was causing her heart to beat frantically like an untamed bird. It was 4:32 a.m.

Her feet led her to Carter’s room, where she found an empty bed waiting for her. Then all hell broke loose. Iris ran to her dad’s room, screaming repeatedly Carter’s name.

Her dad was already up, reading his newspaper. He looked more in shock by how Iris was making any
noise than worried about why she was yelling in the first place.

“Iris, what’s—”

“Have you seen Carter?” He looked confused. She also noticed for the first in a long time how truly awful he looked. He had almost a full beard, and there were heavy bags under his eyes.

“Isn’t he in bed?” He asked. She shook my head. “Bathroom?” No. “Kitchen?” His voice squeaked at the end, giving away just how scared he was now that he realized the situation. Seeing her dad this way broke Iris’ heart, but she had to think straight. When was the last time she saw her brother? The fact that the last time she saw him was when he left for school yesterday morning hit her hard across the face. She did not notice he was gone until she woke up the next day. Iris did not make him dinner. She did not talk to him or help him with his homework. She did not tuck him into bed. She was so used to ignoring everyone, including him, that she felt like nothing was missing. Iris was not being a good sister. She was not being his sister.

Her dad started to pace the room, mumbling to himself. Iris just stood still, trying to piece together what went wrong. Blood drained from her face when she noticed The Girl hidden in the corner of the room. She could not see her face, but she heard her voice, clear as day:

“Call the cops.”

Before

Iris’ body felt dead as she spread her mom’s ashes over the forest. She could not enjoy her first ride in a helicopter or the pink sunset on the horizon. The only warmth she felt was coming from Levy’s body next to hers. It was a rare sight not seeing him smile, and Iris hated it. She wanted to hold his hand. She also wanted to push him far away from her.

When she got home, her dad went straight to his room, and Carter was thankfully at her aunt’s. She carried the now empty urn to the front door and was about to enter her dark home, when Levy reached out to stop her. Her eyes hesitantly met his, and she saw how much he wanted to comfort her.

“Are you okay?” Iris almost scoffed at the dumb question, but she had to refrain because it was Levy, and he meant well. Instead, she nodded. “You know I don’t believe you, right?”

Her eyes watered, and Levy reached out to pull her into his arms, but she stepped away from him. He looked crestfallen, shoving his hands into the pockets of his black, leather jacket as in a way to say whatever.

“I’m fine, Levy. Really.” Her voice sounded more confident than she felt, and Levy did not push on the subject.

“Alrighty, then. I guess I’ll see you tomorrow.” He sounded unsure of himself as if Iris would be gone by
sunrise. She had a million things she wanted to say to him, but she just could not form the words to say. Instead, she nodded and left him alone on her doorstep. She did not look back once because she knew that if she did, she would break down. A part of her stayed behind with him. It was the part that was full of light and childish ignorance, the part that still had a mom and a chance at a happy ending. She closed the door on that part of her. Without it, Iris walked into her home with an empty soul and resentment towards the boy with sapphire eyes for stopping her from reaching her mom in time.

Somehow in between the time of leaving Levy behind on her front doorstep looking like a kicked puppy and entering her bedroom, her mom’s empty urn ended up thrown against the kitchen wall in frustration. Iris watched as it shattered to pieces, while the ugly, yellow wall remained untouched. That only seemed to fuel her anger. Why do all precious things get broken, when the ugliest and most worthless objects seem to be permanent? Her fists flew at the wall until her knuckles were split and burning from pain. Then, she collapsed on the floor of her bedroom, curling into herself. Her eyes stung from the tears and her chest ached in a way that could only be described as heartbreak. The worst part of it all was that Iris could feel herself slowly become a cold and hard shell of the girl she once was.

It was the first time she felt The Girl’s presence, and certainly not her last, as she laid behind Iris, sweeping her dark hair away from her face like her mom used to do. If Iris was not so on edge around her, she would have melted in her embrace. She felt like ice, but Iris barely felt her. It was the whistling that sent chills down her spine. Almost as if The Girl could feel Iris’ fear, her arms tightened around Iris’ small form.

“You are so stupid, Iris.” Iris nodded half because she wanted The Girl to go away and half because she actually agreed with her. “Levy doesn’t love you, you know. He pitied you, the girl who lost her mom.” A sob broke from her sealed lips, as she struggled to escape The Girl’s vice grip. “He didn’t save you. He prevented you from saving your mom. Poor boy probably thought she was already dead, but you know better. Don’t you, Iris?”

“No!” Iris screamed as she refused to listen to The Girl, but part of her could not help but take her words to heart.

“Yes,” The Girl whispered. In an instant, her hold was gone along with her. Lying on the cold floor, Iris realized she never saw her face. From that day on, Iris never tried nor did she want to. Whenever she would almost get a glimpse, The Girl was out of sight or hidden by shadows. Many have said that insanity comes in many forms, and
Iris considered hers the worst. It was that day too that she stopped speaking to Levy. It was not until her brother disappeared that she could look at him again without feeling agony and regret.

After

“Levy, honey, you need to wake up.” There was a slight pressure on his shoulder and the distant murmur of a voice, but it could not be his mother; the last time she woke him up was the day of the—“There’s been another accident.” And just like that Levy was out of bed, nearly knocking his mother over in the process.

“What happened?” The words came out strong and harsh despite the hammering in his chest. The room spun around him. Was it from getting up too quickly? Nausea? The room spun faster. “Mom,” he said more urgently, “what happened?” His windows were covered in thick, dark curtains, but he could still see her tight firm lips, her wringing hands. When her words finally came out they were strained.

“It’s Carter. They think he might have gone into the woods—”

“Oh God. Not again.” Levy could feel her eyes on him, waiting for him to say something more, but there was not anything more to say. He turned his back on her, rummaging through his drawers, more to collect himself than to get clothes. Eventually, she got the idea and left him alone in the darkness, and for once he actually welcomed it. Levy jumped from one leg to the other, slipping out of his sweats and into jeans; they hung low at his hips and tight at his ankles, just the way he liked.

“Okay,” he breathed into the mirror. “Okay.”

Levy flew down the stairs, stopping at the door only to ask what car they were taking. His father did not even look up from his papers; his mother flashed a sympathetic smile, and he knew what was coming. He was about to be let down. “We’re just so busy with the expansion of The Export sweetie, you know that. You go ahead. They’re starting at Eagles Point. Maybe we’ll meet up with you later, okay?”

“No, you won’t, he thought. “Yeah, whatever,” he said, walking back into the kitchen. His hand slid over the top of the counter snatching the keys to the Jeep, and he grabbed an orange hunting vest as he slid out the door.

The drive to the woods was long, or felt long. In actuality, it was only a ten minute ride from Levy’s house to the rendezvous spot, but being left to the deafening silence of his own thoughts was a dangerous and distracting thing. He watched the road snake over the curves and hills of the road with tall, dark pines lining the black pavement like soldiers. Colorado summers were warm enough, but a look at the clock said otherwise. It was morning, and
morning meant brisk air no matter the time of year. Levy silently cursed himself for not putting anything on over his thin Ramones tee. And then because it felt good, he cursed his mother and father for being selfish, Carter for being stupid, and Iris. He cursed her for a million reasons and no reason at all. Levy let the words tumble out of his mouth that had been built up for years. And then he had to stop because he was truly losing it, and it would do him no good if he died before he got there, before Carter was safe.

The familiar welcome sign peeked into view, and Levy knew what it said without having to look at it—“Come as an observer. Leave as an expert. Sleepytown State Park.” Yeah unless you don’t leave at all, he thought bitterly, allowing his mind to go back to that day. It was sunny. We were happy. That cliff should not have collapsed. She should not have died. That was all he allowed himself to think. He parked and unbuckled, but did not get out of the truck. Instead, he sat there repeating it over and over in his head: She should not have died. When the wallowing of his grief became too monotonous Levy got out of the vehicle, slipping the vest on over his shirt. Immediately bumps covered his forearms and biceps, and the hair on his neck stood on end. “Damn,” he breathed. His hands ran helplessly over his arms in a desperate attempt to stay warm.

It was quiet except for the distant cawing of birds. There was a stream running along the left side of the trail, bubbling and splashing over the smooth stones. The air smelled damp and muddy. Levy continued to come here even after the accident, and he had the feeling that Iris did too, but they never came together and they never crossed paths. The ground was moist from the spring, his feet leaving a trail of footprints, and for a moment he wondered what the animals thought of them, if anything. The sun forced its way through the trees speckling his neck and back. Levy was further lost in the thought of the animals, of a much younger Iris and her belief that they talked. She used to think the forest was so magical. He fought down a lump in his throat as he imagined balling his thoughts up and hurling them over the cliff; they would rest alongside her mother.

Shouts pulled Levy from his reverie. Everyone was gathered at the base of Eagles Point, safe from the edge. Everywhere people in orange vests were waving hands and walking back and forth, some held dogs with snapping jaws on leashes, others guns. It was the most chaotic search party he had ever seen and amidst it all was Iris. She looked tinier than she actually was, dark hair spilling out of her knit hat and tumbling over her shoulders. Her slight frame was hunched in the cool air, her body distorted by her thick coat. It was not until
Courtney

by Sydney Rinehart
she looked at Levy that he saw her eyes, her mother’s eyes, the eyes that haunted his dreams. In them he saw everything: the time in elementary school when they raided their homes to build a fort in the woods, the endless hours they sat freezing in trees watching for animals, when he realized he would sit forever in a tree for her. He walked over, shoving his hands deep into his pockets, so she would not see how they shook from the cold, or nerves. “Hey,” he said, not knowing how else to start.

“I see you’re still an idiot.” She replied, gesturing to his clothes. She had not changed a bit. “And you’re still a smart ass,” Levy commented, grinning. She did not grin back. They stood there uncomfortably for a few moments, him with his hands in his pockets, her arms wrapped around her thin torso. A man shouted off to left of them announcing the start of the search. Her eyes lingered on him, at his neck, before she turned to leave. He lifted his hand to his throat feeling the familiar metal canine; she had always loved that necklace. He wanted to say something, but he did not know where to start. An apology did not seem like enough. At the same time he was not sorry, not for saving her life, not for coincidentally having left when her mom fell. Of course, he blamed himself for her pain, but he knew he saved her from a lot more. He would make it up to her or he would spend the rest of his life trying because when he looked at her, Levy saw the innocent, full-of-life girl he started to fall in love with. In that moment, he promised to himself that he would help her find happiness again, and he would start with finding Carter.

Levy walked off, following in the direction of the search party. They were in a V-formation, starting at the newly “secured” Eagles Point and spreading out into a straight line the further inland they came. For a while he went along in the line, searching behind trees and large rocks, calling out to Carter incessantly. He started humming some notes that he remembered from his beloved grandma. A sudden wave of déjà vu washed over him, for he had been humming that same tune on that day, on the way to the pond. The pond. Levy ran to find Iris, calling her name out to the trees instead of Carter’s. His necklace thumped against his chest, stinging every time the cold, metal tooth struck his skin. However, he forgot the cold. He forgot everything, except for what he needed to tell her. He ran down the line of orange vests jumping the rocks and dodging the trees he should have been searching. He was so caught up in being a real-life Indiana Jones that he barely had time to stop before crashing into Iris.

“Hi,” he said breathlessly. There was something in her eyes— Hope? Regret? Desire? —but only for a moment before her dark exterior replaced it.

“Is there a reason you’re call-
ing my name out at the top of your lungs and running through the forest like Tarzan?”

Tarzan. Wow, okay. Levy thought he was something a little bit sexier than a monkey man, but he decided to let it go. “I wanted to talk to you.”

She sighed, “Yeah, I got that.” “About where Carter might be,” he said more urgently. She looked over her shoulder, her dark hair fluttering from the movement. She took his hand in hers; it was cool and firm pulling him after her, away from the group.

“You know where he is?” She clutched his shoulder.

“No.” Her hand loosened its grip, but did not let go. “I have an idea though. Remember our, I mean, the pond we went to? I was thinking—” She turned away.

“I thought you had a legitimate idea,” she said, beginning to leave.

_It was a legitimate idea._ “It is a legitimate idea!” Levy was desperate for her to stay. She could not walk away from him, not when he was just getting her back.

“Do you remember how old we were?” He called out to her. She stopped in her tracks, her dark hair swirling against her back. Slowly Levy walked up behind her, and the closer he got the tighter her shoulder blades knitted together. He repeated himself. “Do you remember how old we were when we found the pond?” There was silence for several minutes, and he wondered whether or not he should repeat himself again.

“Seven.” The word left her lips like a secret, a dark and embarrassing secret that you hoped no one would ever find out. Her head inclined just a hair above her shoulder, her jaw was wavering.

“Seven. We were seven years old. We were younger than Carter is now. God knows we were more reckless too, so what makes you think he can’t be there?”

“Because he just isn’t” Her words were screamed at the trees standing witness. They echoed around the two, and he was assaulted by them. If it was not her, he would have said okay. He would have turned around and walked in the other direction, but it was her. He grabbed her wrist as she started to walk away again. She tried to pull free, but he held tighter. Spinning her around to face him, her hand twisted between their chests. Despite the seriousness of the situation his heart began to beat faster.

“What happened to you?” Levy whispered. He studied her face. How had he not noticed the dark crescents that haunted her gray eyes? Her hair hung in tendrils across her face, on her lips sat every word she had been too afraid to say. He wanted to say that she could tell him, that he was there for her and it would be okay, but because it was her he did not say a word. The seconds in between his question and her response felt like an infinity; it felt longer than the last four years of
silence.

“I… I just can’t afford to hope like that anymore.” Iris’ words were directed at the ground as she tried not to cry. Levy could feel every part of her tremble through her small hand. She grew suddenly fierce, lifting her head so her eyes stared directly into his. He swallowed, fearing that the sound was magnified in the silence, that she could sense his fear. He was afraid for her, for her brother, but more than anything he was afraid of losing her again. “Just leave me alone!” She yelled out. He pulled her hand gently towards his lips, stopping just inches before they touched.

“I left you alone for too long.” The words were murmured to her hand, a sad smile across his lips. He dropped his hand to his side, but she did not move hers. Instead it hung there, suspended in the air, as though it were hung up by string. Levy held his breath waiting for her next move. Her hand wavered between the two of them, leaning just inches before they touched.

“I left you alone for too long.”
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***

She was gone, out of sight. Far from the world that needed her. Iris knew that she had to keep looking for her brother, but it felt like it was too late. She watched as the rest of the day dragged on from her spot hidden behind a waterfall. It seemed as if she found herself back to square one, where it all started: the pond. Her jacket was somewhat wet, so she took it off. The cold was more bearable than expected, but then again the cold nipping away at her skin distracted her from how her entire world was falling apart. That was not even the right way to describe it. It was disintegrating right in front of Iris, in her own hands, and she only had herself to blame. She sat on the ground of the cave, tucking her knees to her chest and leaning her head back against the wall. Words and phrases written in non-permanent, black ink covered her pale skin. The words trailed along the blue veins on her arm and up over her heart. They were her mom’s words, things that she said, so Iris would never forget.

Her favorite was the one on the side of her forearm. It was short and simple: I love you. But it was inscribed perfectly in her mom’s handwriting, just like Iris wanted. She was so consumed in her thoughts that she did not notice Levy sitting beside her at first. It did not surprise her, though. He seemed to always find her, intentionally and unintentionally.

“You know I always blamed you.” It was the slip of the mouth,
but she felt a little less tense after she said it.

“Why?” He asked, but it seemed like he already knew what she was going to say even before she did. “I could have helped her.”

“Iris, the doctor said she died on impact.” Iris shook her head, refusing to even consider that. Her mom was invincible. She could not just die like that. Where were the explosions? The big bangs? She burned as bright as a star. A simple fall could not have been the end. Could it?

“I could’ve helped her. I could’ve—”

“No! There was nothing you could do!” Burning, hot rage ran through her veins. He was wrong. She wanted to hit him, to curse him out, to spit in his face. She wanted to do anything and everything that could hurt him like he did to her.

“Well, of course not, there’s nothing I could do when you held me back!” The second the words left her mouth she wanted to take them back.

“I won’t apologize for saving your life!” Her face scrunched up in confusion as she pondered over his words.

“What? What do you mean?” “You were going to jump.” He looked and sounded defeated.

“Why would I have jumped? I have Carter.” Reality dawned on Iris as she considered her own words. “Had. I had Carter.”

Levy hesitated, not knowing what to say. Oh god, he must be disgusted by me. Who says such a thing? Before either of them knew it, Iris was off with the wind again.

***

Somewhere between the blur of green as she rushed past and the rocky ground, Iris found herself on Eagles Point. However, why she was on the other side of the railing was a complete mystery to everyone, including herself. She looked down towards the bottom, half expecting her mom to still be there. Wisdom seemed to finally catch up to her as she realized there was no way her mom could have survived the fall. It had to be at least fifty feet, but she surprisingly felt no fear. Iris was a ticking time bomb, and she had accepted it.

“Mom?” She yelled out. She did not expect a reply, but it felt nice to acknowledge her out loud for the first time since her cremation. “I miss you so much!” Tears rolled freely down Iris’ cheeks as she gripped onto the railing. She was on the edge of life and death. All she had to do was let go.

The Girl showed up beside Iris, just like she had expected. She kept quiet as Iris sobbed. “Mom! I love you!” She reached out to her and Iris let her take one hand, while the other remained on the railing.

“Mom loves you too.” Time stopped along with Iris’ heart. She faced The Girl for the first time. She had long, black hair that was in tangles and a very skinny torso. She was in all black like Iris, just without
the orange vest. Words that matched Iris’ trailed up and around her arms like a silent prayer. The handwriting belonged to Iris’ mom. Her delicate frame resembled a ballet dancer’s or even a fallen angel. She was the perfect example of being tragically beautiful. She was the spitting image of Iris’ mother. It was her eyes that finished the job. Her hazel eyes with specks of gray mixed in. It made sense why Iris was so afraid of her. She was Iris. Iris was The Girl. Iris’ biggest fear was herself, and she made herself the villain of her own story.

Iris looked at her, memorizing her own face. She was so broken, but she still had a fire behind those hazel eyes. There was still hope. Slowly then all at once her world worked its way back together like a messed up puzzle. Iris let go of her hand and gripped back onto the railing. The writing along her arms was smudged, but it did not matter. The Girl watched in a confused and amazed daze as Iris’ soul turned from black to blue to red to yellow to green to white. Iris would be no damsel in distress. She would be her own hero.

“Carter needs me,” She said with conviction that would put a king to shame. “Carter needs you.” The Girl proudly smiled and nodded.

She brushed Iris’ hair out of her face like the first time they met and looked past her. “Levy needs you too.” Iris turned to find him waiting by the trees, worried she was going to jump. That was his worst fear. A chill swept through Iris when she found herself alone on the cliff’s edge. Iris also surprisingly felt a permanent loss when she realized The Girl was gone for good this time. As Iris had thought before, insanity takes many forms, but this time she concluded that hers was possibly the best kind. She felt fully awake finally and saw she really did need help with Carter and with her own health, and Levy was offering.

Iris climbed over the railing and made her over to Levy. “I’m ready to go home now.” His eyes widened and his mouth hung slightly open as he watched her pass, but he made no comment. He just simply turned and caught up to her.

The car ride back in Levy’s car was peacefully silent except for the music. There was a Beatles tape in, filling the car with the familiar notes of “Blackbird”. Iris’ legs were tapping restlessly, while she opened the glove box and sifted through the CD’s pulling out a classical compilation Levy had made. She switched it with the Beatles before lying back into her seat. Her legs bent out in front of her against the dash, and she grabbed his hand. He looked at her out of the corner of his eye. Her head was rested against the back of the seat, looking out the window. Levy squeezed her hand a little tighter, not wanting to let her go. Sometime between Beethoven’s
“Moonlight Sonata” and Chopin’s “Prelude in E minor” they arrived back at her home. He slipped his hand from hers and turned off the car. Walking around to the other side he opened the door for her. Iris sat there for a moment before taking his hand again and hopping down. Her eyes were downcast as the two walked to the front door.

Finally, she looked at him with those big, brilliant, hazel eyes, one hand on the door and one in his. She was right in front of him and yet Levy could not bear to let go. It was like she was still on the edge of the cliff, suspended between life and death. She moved her hand from the handle to the oh-so-familiar pendant around Levy’s neck, her eyes leaving his. Instead, they admired how sharp the bottom of the metallic canine was and how the roses were carved at the top of it like a perfect balance of delicacy and strength. Like Iris and Levy.

She just held it there in her hand, transfixed on it. Taking his hand from hers, Levy reached around and unclasped the chain, lifting the bit of metal from his throat. That was the first time he had taken it off since his grandma had given it to him, and his neck felt strange and empty, but then he saw her face light up and knew it was worth it. Levy leaned in close, clasping the chain around her neck, his lips brushing her ear, “It always suited you better anyways.” He kissed her forehead before pulling away. She smiled up at him.

“Goodnight Levy,” Iris said, while laughing for what was probably the first time in years. God, she was truly beautiful to Levy when she did that. He squeezed her hand in reply before smiling and turning away. As he drove down the street, he watched her in the rearview mirror, standing alone on the front porch. She looked so similar to the way she had this morning and yet so different. Her hand was raised in a still wave, her fingers curled.

***

Some time passed before Iris entered her home to find her dad on the living room couch with his head in his hands. Carter was still gone. Her feet carried her to his side. Tears silently rolled down his face, and he did not seem to have the energy to wipe them away. She held his hand gently as a way to not alarm him, but then she decided that she did not care for comfort or support or any of the crap you would find in a Hallmark card. Iris needed her dad just as much as he needed his daughter. She gently wiped away his tears before throwing her arms around him, burying her head in his shoulder as she cried quietly along with him. “Shh...it’s okay. Everything’s going to be alright. I promise you, Iris.” It was cliché, cheesy, heartfelt, and everything she needed it to be.

***

Levy was whistling when he stepped into the house, locking the
door behind him. His mother and father, huddled around their papers, looked up. His mother rose from her seat at the table and walked over to him. “Honey! Did you find him?”

**Nope, though if you really cared you would have been out there helping.** “No,” he paused before replying, “but I found Iris.” Her face squished up in confusion, and he knew she had no idea what he was talking about.

“That’s nice honey.”

“Yeah,” he replied and then walked up the stairs to his room. It was darker than it had been that morning, but he could just make out the window open on the other side of the room. **Okay, that is weird,** he thought. “Mom!” No reply. “Mom!” He called again, still nothing. He felt the wall for the light switch, filling the room with a light orange glow. He went to close the window when a noise stopped him dead in his tracks; he was not alone. Levy looked over his shoulder and there he was. Carter was sitting on his bed and in front of him was a pile of Legos. Levy did not know what to say, for shock had its hold on him. Thankfully, Carter did the talking.

“There you are! I’ve been waiting for you!” He jumped off of the bed and ran to Levy, burying his face in Levy’s shirt. Breathless, he crouched down next to Carter, hugging him. “I... can’t... breathe,” Carter squeaked. Levy let go, placing his hand on the side of the younger boy’s face. Levy did not take his eyes off of Carter as he slipped his phone out of his pocket. He dialed the number he had memorized so long ago. The phone rang. “Are you calling my sister?”

“Yeah,” Levy nodded. The phone clicked as Iris answered.

A true trickster’s smile crossed the young boy’s lips. “Good.”

***

Many mixed emotions passed as Iris saw Levy’s name: love, excitement, happiness, and lastly worry. But she hid that all as she answered the phone with a somewhat confident tone, “Hello? Levy?”

His voice came out as barely a whisper as he said, “**I found him.**”
The Magician

by Jackson Krause
Low Tide and Sunrise

by Gregorio Illner
Once

by Haley LeRand

I once loved a woman.
She sits in the same spot with her notebook and Earl Grey
At the cafe on the corner of Clark
And I see her through the same window
That now separates us.
How lucky to breathe the air she breathes.
I once loved a woman who asked why;
No small talk of weather graced her tongue,
No interactions swam safely at the surface.
I once loved a woman who painted with words
While I merely wrote.
She dipped her brush in a palette of literary devices
And adorned her canvas with similes and images.
I once loved a Sinope;
Fiercely independent, averting Zeus’s charms.
I once loved a wallflower;
You saw her in the audience, but never the performance.
I once loved an afternoon moon;
You saw her in the sky, but never as conspicuous.
She spared the spotlight for the sun and the clouds.
I once loved a midwestern springtime:
Unpredictable, fickle
Cold, warm.
I once loved a woman;
But she’s not the one holding my arm
Who asks me why we always slow down
Then we walk past the cafe on the corner of Clark.
Resigned

by Serena Korkmaz
Tongue-in-Cheek

by Lauren Grudzien
Forgotten Colors

by Sydney Rinehart

I’m afraid there’s something below
Under my yellow, pink and orange
Under my cheesy smiles and goofy dances and my kisses at the sky
Under my warm bed and my best friend’s hugs and my favorite movies
Under my freckles and bright eyes and swinging steps
Something hidden and creeping
And I can’t quite remember but
I know I’ve met it before
It’s just been piled on top of and forgotten
Like a sea of grey and sleet and pitch black
And I don’t want to touch it
But every so often it growls
And reminds me
That my
Yellow and pink and orange
Can be blended with
Grey and sleet and black
To make something not
So pretty
Something people don’t quite want to
Touch
And put their hungry hands all over
Quite like they do
Now
“Thirty-two”

by Emily Nepomuceno and Mariana Reyes

In grade school, I never gave much thought to who was actually “bad.”
It was always “bad” people do “bad” things, and those “bad” people who do “bad” things end up in “bad” places.

And that was the end of the conversation. I never realized that ending the conversation there was also...bad.

Because we played Cowboys and Indians, cops and robbers, superheroes and villains.

It was us versus them.

Games of good versus evil. They were innocent games, but as we locked up the Indians, the robbers, and the villains behind bars, we unknowingly forgot that these “bad” guys, too, were people.

Locked up in a cell—we grew up thinking that that was where “bad” people belonged, That the “bad” guys were Scary, Big, Evil, That jail made sense. …

“Don’t worry about it, they’re bad people,” my mother told me.

Staying up late to prove the feeble point that I was all grown up. I was 10 years old, watching cop shows on TV because that was the only thing on at Eleven.
Midnight.
One.
Two.

Flashing lights, sirens, and hands in handcuffs,
“They” were taken away,
and I was a concerned 10-year-old,
so I asked my mom,
“Where do they go?”
She answered, casually, simply…
“Don’t worry about it, they’re bad people.”
...  
As long as the bad people are punished,
we’ll be safe.
As long as we lock them away,
we’ll be safe.
As long as we help the victim,
we’ll be safe.
We’ll be safe.
We’ll be safe.
It’s the mantra we proclaim
because why would you ever help a criminal?
...  
When I was 17,
my best friend fell in love with a boy
who frequented the inside of a jail cell.

When I was 17,
I fell in love in with a boy who frequently
refused to put his book down.

I couldn’t fathom how she could love a
boy whom society thought was nothing;
a boy whose shadow was made to be

99% prisoner and 1% human.

It continues to be a system of paradoxes--
it’s funny.
He and my best friend still talk,
but I haven’t spoken to the boy with the
book glued to his hands in over two years.

…
It’s senior year and high school can’t be anything but hell.
They say, “My school’s a prison!”
When we’re discouraged with our education and the institutions we attend,
school becomes hell; school becomes a prison.
As a teenager, it’s as if the worst places you could be were jail and hell and
school,
but I’d never have imagined that some students would actually see the inside
of a jail cell.

“It’s a prison.”
It’s so casual,
so accepted.
And yet,
we reject people in prison,
dehumanizing prisoners to the point that
they’re less than

Nothing

…
How can you be less than nothing
when my parents invited you to dinner,
when we went to school together for the
last 12 years,
when I promised you that you’d be the
godparent to my children,
when millions of you are locked up in the
United States,
when families and friends continue to fight to
set you free,
when your picture hangs in the TAMMS Year
10 Living Room,
when our English 161 professor invited her friend,
a former prisoner, to speak with the class,

when you’re sitting right here.

…
We readily refer to school as a jail,
but do we even understand these implications and analogies? It’s a term that’s tossed around; it’s a part of our own vernacular, but a devastating reality for 1 out of 32 Americans. A devastating reality for

1,2,3,4,5,6,7,8,9,10,11,12,13,14,15,16,17,18,19,20,21,22,23,24,25,26,27,28,29,30,31, You.

... Is the boy in orange on your television screen in your area? Is the daughter in orange down the street? Is the mother in orange your neighbor? No? No? No? At least they’re not a danger to you!

... Mug shots of convicted felons on the news--Present me, a child, with a man in orange; I’d have never known he was a dad, a brother, an uncle, a son. Tell me why they made me forget we’re all human.

...but at least they’re not a danger to you.
Twirlies

by Llanet Nuñez
Mermaid

by Samantha Tupas
Laces
by Adela Arceo

Laces
Brand new laces. Mama doesn’t want them getting dirty.
Tall, clean white laces to tie my shoes.
She pulls them through the holes, securing them,
putting a border between the Earth and my feet.

Tying end to similar end, looping them together
to ensure they stay in place, to make sure I do not trip,
“That would be the worst,” she says.
She leaves me by those big doors for the first time,
and I cry and cry for her.

A barefoot little girl is dancing all over the playground.
The beads in her braids make swish swish sounds.
I want to join her but remember my shoes,
remember my ruffled socks and clean dress,
remember what Mama said.
I do not play with the little girl.
Fall Souvenirs

by Rabia Iqbal
Crushed

by Rabia Iqbal
BOSTON,
SHATTERED:
BOMB NO. 2
by Kit Henry

The glass undulated before exploding into thousands of glistening blue slivers, slicing through flesh, and clinking when they hit the ground. As the shards fell, they reflected the unfathomable—:

the unexpected blinding fiery sun
that singed hair turned plastic
into paint choked the air with acrid smells,
the delicate drink menus
that fused onto white cloth café tables
next to crab cakes
martinis
miscellaneous delicatessen,
the runners wavering
mouths dropped open in petrified awe
witnessing black smoke engulfing their finish line,
the decisive declaration of race clock numbers frozen paralyzed at 4:09:43
as if time itself had fled the crime scene,
the stomped-on sullied Celtics cap
soaked by discarded water cups
instructing runners to endure never waver never fall,
the fragments of nails screws ball bearings

formerly packed into pressure cookers nestled gently into backpacks
whistling through the air searching for soft targets,
the blood that dripped into a sidewalk crack
drowning pebbles
staining cigarette butts
streaming into the gutter like a miniature Red Sea
(but the prophet who would have saved his people
was napping golfing praying nowhere to be found),
the spectators-now-victims
who unknowingly unwillingly ventured into a war zone instead of finishing their taxes,
the scraps of clothing
ripped from bodies launched skyward
to fall as confetti
or dangle from tree branches like white flags
waving with every gentle gust,
the tourniquets
fashioned from these scraps or other scraps or belts or shoelaces
pulled tight above wounds that city streets had never seen,
the atheist
who swiftly found god
falling to her knees
praying pleading shrieking
pleasepleaseplease don't let them die,
the flashing lights of ambulances
firetrucks police cars
as they wailed inhuman cries,
the first responders
clambering over barricades
to reach traumas they were
never taught to treat,
the slow stumble of the stunned
shuddering
as they sought escape routes
and back alleys
and anything that relieved them
of the sickening shock,
the skeleton of a stroller bent so
catastrophically unrecognizably
out of form
left abandoned
against a curb,
the pale-faced grown-ass man act-
ing like an infant curled into fetal
position
screaming sobbing sniveling
for the horror-hell to end,
the cell phones with their no
signal screens and the numbers
repeatedly punched
frantically trying to say goodbye I love you
to oblivious carefree loved ones,
the beautiful blooming daffodils
planted along the Marathon
route
speckled with blood vomit tears
physical responses to evil,
the lacerated limbs the severed
arteries the spontaneous amputa-
tions
the undeniable revolting re-
minders of mortality fragility,
Secrets (Tear You Apart)

by Chloe Baratta
Sunset Memories

by Serena Korkmaz
Weltanschauung
by Anjali Chacko

n. Sorrow at the woes of the world

She was crying when she asked for a wheelchair. 
Lo siento.
“My grandfather collapsed in the bathroom.”
Her parents carried him out,
No quiero recordarme 
their arms supporting his. 
de toda la tristeza.
She held the bouquet of roses 
No puedo 
he’d given her 
aguantarla.
as she softly cried. 
Lo siento.
Crystal

by Michael Yu
June’s Rain

by Anastasiya Loos

Why does rain leap with such grace and chatter?
Why does she seduce and lull with such patter?
She comes with the darkness, with wind, with thunder
and although the town may look up, gaze, wonder,

She depresses me

The cars are swimming, but that’s not what they want
In puddles do trees flaunt; they flaunt
The houses are struggling, their backs are breaking and roofs— they cave
Trees— they’re shivering, their branches are clapping and leaves— in their grave

I don’t like the rain

Air is still, but the earth reeks of decay
The sky is vacant, but one stray
There is thunder grumbling and lightning fuming
Nature is a garden conducted by thunder, and lightning is blooming

But she is beautiful
Side Eye

by Lauren Jones
CAROLINE
by Kit Henry

Caroline's mother, Jacqueline, had gifted her a pair of Spanx on her first day at Brearley. It was essential for a Brearley girl to look the part, Jacqueline had said. Caroline was by no means overweight; she stood an unfortunate head taller than most of the other girls, which gave her the appearance of greater girth. As Caroline sucked in her tummy and shimmied into the restrictive shapewear, swearing to herself that she would never wear Spanx again, Jacqueline tapped her shoe impatiently, alternating between her mantra, “Beauty is pain!” and curt reminders of her benevolence. She had made exactly seven phone calls to secure Caroline’s position at the finishing school and her efforts were not to be disregarded.

Caroline herself had little interest in Brearley or its haughty milieu. Money understood money, and Caroline didn’t speak the language. While her peers placed emphases on brands and manners and the perception of perfection, Caroline struggled to distinguish between mascara and eyeliner. She felt like an outcast in the unforgiving world of privilege and class. That feeling was cemented when her classmates unearthed her adoptee status.

“Oh, Caroline, I am so sorry,” a girl said to her during Latin, dragging out each word until the apology sounded disingenuous.

“Sorry for what?” Caroline asked.

The girl looked to her left, then to her right, as if she feared being overheard. “You know,” she whispered. “Your parents aren’t your real parents.”

“Oh. Right.”

“I heard Lauren — you know, that girl with the tramp stamp? — I heard she got an abortion last year because she didn’t want stretch marks.” She put her hand on Caroline’s shoulder and leaned in closer. “Is that why your mom adopted you? She didn’t want stretch marks?”

“No,” Caroline promptly clarified. “She just couldn’t have kids. She’s infertile.” As soon as the dreaded i-word had left her mouth, Caroline cringed. Her filter always seemed to be a few seconds too slow.

“Oh.” The girl frowned as if Caroline had disclosed a deadly diagnosis. “So your mom wanted her own children and ended up with you?”

“Well, I don’t think—”

“That must be so hard,” the girl continued. “I don’t know what I would do if I found out my parents didn’t want me.” She paused, squeezing Caroline’s shoulder and gesturing to the alumni portraits on the wall. “Don’t worry. We’re your family.”

The Brearley School for Girls was founded in 1884 by a man who thought so highly of the Manhattan beaver fur trade that he managed to incorporate three beavers into the school’s seal. Though Brearley boasted a west-of-the-East-River address, the faculty pretended they were unaware of the billionaires seated so daintily cross-legged in their classrooms. The artifice of denial permeated the col-
lective mentality. We are just like you, but better.

Caroline couldn’t cross her legs. The difficulty could have been attributed to her inflexibility or her fat distribution — her thighs and hips carried most of her weight — but whenever she tried to sit like the other girls, her skirt rode up and her leg jutted out awkwardly, almost horizontal to the floor. Still, she attempted. Practice made perfect.

Every morning when she arrived at school Caroline ducked into the bathroom to make sure the pleats on her skirt hadn’t been ruffled by her walk. She checked her reflection for missed pimples or blemishes. She fixed makeup irregularities as best she could — she had mastered charcoal blending but she still couldn’t figure out how to make her concealer match her skin tone. When she finally conceded that her appearance was as neat as possible she hurried to her home period where the Brearley Statement of Etiquette crooned over the loudspeaker.

A True Brearley Lady is the lady whose attitude is appropriate to all occasions, whose kind greetings are offered graciously with a kind heart, and whose self-control exceeds all else. A Brearley Lady listens earnestly and smiles often; she does not flatter or brag but merely attempts to make all feel welcome. She dresses tastefully, never showing too much skin. She sits promptly when a man holds out a chair for her, arrives promptly to all of her engagements, and speaks promptly when spoken to. A True Brearley Lady thinks of all others before herself, maintains her dignity in the most demanding of circumstances, and always stands by her word, by truth and toil.

After Caroline’s daily performances concluded, she hopped on the subway at 77th Street and traveled the twenty-six stops to the Kingston Art Collective, an open studio for young artists. There, she could breathe without second-guessing her intentions. Occasionally, the studio was rented out for private galleries. The money helped the studio stay afloat. But on most days, Caroline was free to sprawl out on the floor and do whatever she pleased. She kept to herself, sketching her thoughts until the sun told her it was time to head home.

Elix befriended her at the studio. Elix was a Brearley girl too, in the same year as Caroline, but she wore pants and kept her hair cropped short against her neck. She was crude and blunt and Caroline found her confidence intoxicating, almost contagious.

“How do you feel about porn?” Elix asked her one day.

Caroline’s cheeks flushed a deep pink. She looked up from her charcoal, raising her eyebrows. “What?”

“You heard me,” Elix said, crossing her arms. “It’s not appropriate,” Caroline responded. “How so?”

“Well, I mean, the women… they’re naked.”

Elix laughed. “So nudity makes porn inappropriate? Jeez, do I even
want to ask you how you feel about sex? Never mind. You’re probably still a virgin.”

“You’re not?”

Elix smirked, gently rolling her eyes and glancing sideways. “Nope. Gave it to some guy after I blew him in the alley behind school.”

“You lost your virginity in the alley?”

Elix clarified. “I didn’t lose it, dumbass. I gave it away.”

Shortly after they met, Elix and Caroline enrolled in art class together. All of Brearley’s art classes were taught by Ms. Wick, an unmarried middle-aged woman suffering from severe arthritis. Her experience was limited almost entirely to paint but she acted as if she had known Michelangelo himself. She prepared lecture after lecture about the great Baroque and Romantic painters, presenting gaudy PowerPoints to illustrate her vast knowledge. Ms. Wick always lingered several seconds too long on Caravaggio’s Cupid, clasping her hands together in front of her chest and sighing, “Such an attractive visual.”

On the rare days when Ms. Wick had not readied a presentation she permitted her students to work on their portfolios, ever-critical of the slightest deviation from realistic portrayal. She hovered over the girls, peering at their projects, hissing critiques into their ears.

“Caroline,” she harped. “You know I would strongly prefer a painting over charcoal.”

“Yes. I just like working with—”

Ms. Wick cut her off. “It’s too messy, and you really need to solidify your practices in traditional art. Use oil paints and focus on chiaroscuro for your next project. Finish this experiment of yours today,” she ordered, lumbering back to her desk.

“What a bitch,” Elix said under her breath.

Caroline turned to face her.

“What do you mean?”

“Are you serious?” Elix asked. Caroline nodded. Elix groaned. “Why do I have to explain this?”

“She’s just trying to help me develop a greater understanding of art,” Caroline argued.

“You would think that,” Elix spat back.

“What’s that supposed to mean?”

“You never stand up for yourself!”

“She wasn’t criticizing me!”

“Caroline,” Ms. Wick interrupted. “Please don’t cross your legs. Your panties are showing.”

Once, when her cousin Amy had stayed with them, Caroline had felt beautiful. Amy worked as a professional makeup artist for Michael Kors. Tsk-tsking at Caroline’s beauty collection, Amy had offered to give her a makeover and take her shopping. Caroline never forgot the look of approval on her mother’s face when Amy revealed her transformation. Jacqueline had managed a half-smile – a rare phenomenon – and spent nearly half an hour chatting with Amy about the stores that she and Caroline were planning to visit on Fashion Avenue.

Caroline chased that approval
now. She lounged on her bed and watched makeup tutorials. She attempted to imitate them, caking blush onto her cheeks and temples and just under her chin. She read magazines like Cosmo and Vogue and practiced her ‘come hither’ look in the mirror, lowering her glasses and running her tongue slowly across her lips, trying to avoid excessive salivation. She even attempted waxing once, but wound up with a bright red burn under her left eyebrow. She had elected not to wax the right.

As a model in a training video chirped about the benefits of concealer, Caroline flipped through the homecoming issue of Seventeen. Brearley’s annual ball was rapidly approaching, and Caroline was determined to make this one perfect. She envisioned herself featured in one of Edgar Degas’ portraits, wearing a pale blue strapless dress cinched with a dark sash. She would dazzle her mother and all of her classmates with her beauty. She would have to learn how to walk in heels.

Caroline heard the front door open and close. She hopped off her bed and shuffled into the hallway, leaning over the balcony railing. There Jacqueline stood, vigorously shaking an umbrella, cursing the rain.

“Hi, Mom,” Caroline said.

Jacqueline looked up at her, scowling. “That makes me feel old. I’m not old. I’m only forty-seven!” She threw the umbrella in the corner, leaving it to dry on the floor. “Stop calling me ‘Mom.’”

Caroline walked down the stairs and said, “Why? I’ve been calling you that forever.”

“Caroline,” Jacqueline warned, lowering her voice slightly. “Change is good for you.”

“Okay.” There was no use in arguing. “How was your day?”

“Ugh,” said Jacqueline, rolling her eyes. She seemed to believe that working as an art dealer was the hardest job imaginable. “It was awful. Artists are the worst. So particular! They hire me to display their artwork and complain when my vision doesn’t match theirs. As if they’re the experts!” Jacqueline threw her hands up in the air in exaggerated offense. “I’m the reason their artwork even has exposure. Without me, they’d be nothing. I cannot believe—” The tri-tone trill of her cell phone interrupted Jacqueline’s thought, and she glanced down at the glowing screen.

Caroline wasn’t sure how to placate her mother, so she shifted her weight and gnawed at the inside of her cheek.

“Clean your room before your father comes home next week,” Jacqueline ordered, texting a response. “My room is clean,” Caroline said.

“Clean something else, then.” “Where is he again?” Caroline’s father traveled frequently for business, and his destinations blurred after a while.

“I don’t know.” “What day is he coming back?” “I don’t know, Caroline. Check his calendar,” Jacqueline responded, still fixated on her phone.

“Do you know if you’ll have time to go shopping this weekend?”
Jacqueline reached into her purse for something and spilled a handful of business cards. She ignored them. “For what?”

“Brearley’s ball is next month. I need a dress,” Caroline responded, kneeling to pick up the cards. Her mother’s name, title, and personal information were written in a flashy gold calligraphy font next to an encircled J. J for Jacqueline.

Her mother’s phone dinged four times in rapid succession. “Can’t you just go with your friends?” she asked.

“I kind of wanted to go with you,” Caroline said softly, handing her mother the cards.

“Do you have a date?”

“Well, no…” Caroline responded, blinking at the floor.

“Really?” Jacqueline said, glaring at her phone. “The venue isn’t good enough for your work?” Her fingers danced furiously across her phone screen.

Caroline waited.

“What was I saying?” Jacqueline asked, but before Caroline could respond, she waved her hand. “Never mind. I don’t have time to talk. I have to go settle this negotiation.” She went into her office and called behind her, “Remember to clean your room!”

Two weeks before the ball, during her free period, Caroline overheard some of the other girls talking about decorations.

“I’m thinking wall-to-wall streamers with string lights for the ceiling,” one of the girls said. “With balloon clusters for accents.”

“Ooo, yes, and lacy white tablecloths for the dessert and punch tables,” another suggested.

Caroline’s mind wandered, picturing Édouard Manet’s final masterpiece – the drinks, the flowers, the chandeliers, the lively dance – and sighed.

“Mood lighting!” a blonde exclaimed. “Candles!”

Caroline chipped in, unable to contain her excitement. “I can draw a backdrop to cover the wall behind the stage!”

The girls stared at her blankly.

“Or…” Caroline stumbled.

“No!” one of the girls exclaimed, looking quickly at the others. “I mean, no, you should totally draw a background.”

“Yeah,” seconded another, smiling. “You’re applying to an art college, right?”

“Yes!” Caroline said, surprised they had remembered. “Gallance Academy of Art!”

The girls giggled.

“That’s awesome that you’re branching out,” the blonde said. “We’re all applying to Harvard and Princeton.”

“Yeah, I really hope I get in,” Caroline said. “A major project like the backdrop would be great for my application!”

“Cool! We’ll let you know when we decide a time to set up the decorations.”

The bell signaled the end of the period. Caroline beamed as she made her way to her art class, eager to begin
her new project.

Elix couldn’t seem to stop talking. “I hate this school, man. All this bullshit about how we gotta look, what we have to wear… I don’t want to shave my legs every day!” Elix had been criticized again for wearing pants.

Pick your battles, Caroline wanted to say. But she stayed silent. It was best to let Elix tire herself out.

“I told those girls to fuck off,” Elix said, smirking.

Caroline grinned. Regardless of the circumstances, the girls in question probably deserved the profanity.

Elix blew a bubble with her gum, let it pop, and continued her rant.

“You gotta stand up for yourself, you know? Do your own thing! I hate when you’re forced into situations where you gotta compromise yourself.”

Caroline cocked her head to the side and stared at Elix. “Really?” she asked. Shaving wasn’t that important.

“Jeez, I don’t mean you, personally,” Elix said. “I mean the collective ‘you,’ like when rules are imposed on society and shit…”

Caroline tuned her out then, distracted by the figures on the paper in front of her. Two silhouettes on a moonlit night, walking hand-in-hand along a riverwalk. Two more kissing passionately in the rain. A silhouette on bended knee, presenting a ring to another – echoes of Leonid Afremov’s aching love scenes. Caroline’s charcoal felt delicate in her hand, powdery, waiting to be blended into her masterpiece.

“Are you even listening to me?” Elix asked.

Caroline nodded, reaching for her kneaded eraser. That cloud needed fixing…

“You have charcoal on your face,” Elix said.

“Mmmhmm,” Caroline responded.

Elix smacked her gum loudly, startling Caroline.

“Stop,” she said. “I’m trying to concentrate.”

“What, I can’t enjoy my gum?” Elix asked. “What are you so focused on, anyway? I thought you wanted to wow Ms. Wick with that chiaroscuro tradition bullshit.”

“It’s nothing, just an idea,” Caroline responded, covering the edge of her sketch with her arm. Elix would never appreciate Caroline’s involvement with the decorations. Elix never appreciated anything that involved Brearley, and Caroline didn’t want Elix to ruin her delight.

“Nothing, huh?” Elix reached over Caroline’s arm and snatched the butcher paper from her, hiding it behind her back. “Why don’t you want me to see it, then?”

With a sigh, Caroline said, “Give me my drawing.”

“No,” Elix said, taking slow steps backwards. “Not until you tell me why it’s so important.”

Caroline dropped her eraser and glared at the other girl. “Seriously, Elix—”

“Seriously what?” Elix asked.

“Seriously you’re mad at me? Seriously you’re gonna stand up for yourself? Seriously you’re going to hit me? Come
on, Caroline! Do you give a shit about anything?”

“I’m not even going to dignify that with a response,” Caroline said.

“Psh, whatever.” Elix tossed the paper at Caroline. “At least you don’t give me shit for wearing pants.”

The girls never contacted Caroline about the decorations. Working almost continuously, she had finished the background by the end of the weekend. She spent the rest of her week working on her application to Gallance and highlighting her involvement in the ball, idly wondering if she should track the girls down herself. Surely they had forgotten. Finally, the day before the event, she packed up her masterpiece and carried it to the atrium.

The girls were putting the finishing touches on the trimmings. At the back of the room above the stage, a massive banner had been hung, showcasing the three Brearley beavers dressed in tuxedos.

Everyone except Caroline seemed to be disappointed with her decision to apply to Gallance. Elix complained about the distance. Her father, away on another business trip, informed her via Skype that he would rather have her attend a more prominent university. Her mother was fighting with another client about a new gallery issue.

“Harvard, Princeton, Yale,” Jacqueline had said between texts. “Ivy Leagues. That was the point of getting you into Brearley, Caroline. I made seven phone calls for you. Seven.”

It was true, Brearley girls went on to attend the Ivy Leagues, most earning their MRS degrees long before they were handed their diplomas. These girls were born to perpetuate the cycle of conformity, taking pride in the exclusivity of their formality.

Caroline added Harvard, Princeton, and Yale to her college list. She wrote and rewrote her personal statements, sent in her transcripts, and waited for the decisions.

Caroline stood across the street from Kingston Art Collective in Brooklyn, staring at the endless foggy clutter of New York City skyscrapers, waiting for Elix. Today was the day Caroline would be touring Gallance Art Academy. Her acceptance letters had arrived in the mail the week prior – not surprisingly, she had been granted admission to all of the schools she had applied to – and she had already visited the ostentatious Ivy Leagues.

Caroline checked her watch. Her bus was scheduled to leave in fifteen minutes.

Elix was late.

Maybe she thought they were supposed to meet inside.

Caroline trekked across the street, pushing past a group of confused tourists, searching for Elix’s pixie haircut.

The doors of the studio were locked. Confused, Caroline pulled the handle again. The door refused to budge. She peered through the windows, unable to see inside. Why were the doors locked? Did the studio relocate? Caroline stepped back from the building, glancing up at the aw-
ning. Kingston Art Collective. No, it hadn’t moved.

Caroline wiped sweaty palms on her skirt and tried the door a third time. Still locked. She crossed her arms to stop her hands from shaking. Pacing back and forth, she tried to remember if Elix had mentioned anything about the studio closing.

Ten minutes.

Caroline texted a message to Elix, letting her know that she couldn’t wait any longer. But before she headed for the bus stop, a piece of paper taped to one of the studio’s windows caught her eye. The Kingston Art Collective is CLOSED FOR RENOVATIONS. We will reopen after the fall gallery showcase.

At the bottom of the paper, the golden logo glinted in the sun, momentarily blinding her. It was an encircled J. J for Jacqueline.

The Dean of Admissions’ office was small but the charcoal and graphite artwork more than made up for the constricted space. Depictions of sweeping landscapes and exotic animals covered the walls from floor to ceiling. Caroline had ventured into a daydream. She stood in the entryway gaping at the artistry until the dean cleared his throat.

“Would you like to come in, Caroline?” he said, his voice smooth and low. He was an attractive man, younger than she had expected, with a defined jawline and a small scar above one eye that reminded her of the time she had tried to wax her eyebrows.

She rushed into his office, nearly tripping over the carpet. “Yes! Hi!” she said. “How are you?” She thrust her hand over his desk.

He shook it and grinned. “I’m well. How are you?”

“Good, thanks,” Caroline responded. “How are you?” She blushed, realizing her mistake.

He laughed. “Why don’t you take a seat?”

Caroline misjudged the distance to the armchair, plopping clumsily into the cushions. She fidgeted, searching for a more dignified position in the low seat, and settled on crossing her legs. She brushed a hair away from her face and waited for him to break the silence. A drawing above his head commanded her attention. It looked familiar: white petals falling from a peony flower as its vase shattered, spilling water over the table. Suddenly curious, she asked, “Is that a Balliet charcoal?”

The dean followed her gaze. “Yes it is,” he replied, turning back to face her.

“He’s one of my biggest inspirations.”

The dean tapped his finger on his desk. “Now that you mention it, I can see his influence in your work. Strong focus on contrast, impeccable detail.”

“Thank you,” Caroline said. “I really admire his realism.”

“As do I,” he said. “Let me ask you, how did that most recent project of yours turn out?”

“What project?” Caroline asked.

“You mentioned in your personal statement that you were working on a large-scale silhouette project.”
Caroline’s ears turned hot. She swallowed, her mouth suddenly dry. How could she explain that her work had been discarded in favor of tuxedoed beavers? She struggled to fabricate a story.

No.

“I decided to reserve that piece for something more appropriate.”

“Well,” the dean said, “we surely welcome your work here. Your talent is impressive.”

“Thank you,” Caroline said, then added, “I look forward to confirming my intent to attend.” She uncrossed her legs and stood, only to find that one of her feet had fallen asleep. She hobbled out of the office, desperately trying not to lose her dignity.

At Caroline’s graduation ceremony, Brearley’s program stated that she would be attending Georgetown University.

She chalked it up to a misprint.
Lullaby Cove

by Uliana Solovieva

Insecurity speaks within gated walls of your tambourines
They clasp and clap to the dance of your soul
But the jingle changed and you are one beat off.
Don’t will on good fortune, Fortuna’s your friend
But she won’t hitch a ride in the land of the dead.
Unsurpassingly, knowledge for her is a bliss
Use it, abuse it, inquire her kiss.
Through gentleman’s honor she will share her oath
Of sunken red ships that she won’t let go of.
We know oh-so-little, discover her bliss
Through passionate touch of encircled resists
She’s not good with words but experience speaks
Forget “verbalize,” let her energy speak.
She won’t let you drown in the lullabies cove
The next level up is a few steps below.
Recline

by Nidhi Suthar
Mojave Longing
by Haley LeRand

Sunrise doesn’t hit your cheekbones
In the same way as sunset.
Oranges of the East cast paler glows than those of the West;
But you wouldn’t notice such detail,
For you prefer rushing to savoring.
I thought I could make you the road-tripping type,
But your eyes always wander to “Arrival time” on the GPS.
I thought we could pull over and converse with the Joshua trees
And ask them why they lift their arms towards heaven,
But your left-dominant brain couldn’t play pretend.

I know you miss the New York sunlight
That peeks through the foliage and adorns the grass;
But I like my landscapes bathed in sunlight;
No oak tree leaves creating sunlight patterns on the turf
Or tall buildings obscuring Ra’s treasure.
I know you like to see your breath on our midnight December strolls;
I know you like the company of snowflakes on your morning commute down
5th Avenue;
But leave me here with the yuccas and succulents.
I’ll greet other wanderers with open cactus arms
While you’re in the city greeting some greedy Wall Street grifter.

That grifter calls you as our van slows down,
Your beeping ringtone rhythmically complementing
The thumping of the front tire and the blinking of the tire pressure warning
As we slow down, down, down.
The sweat trickles from your forehead,
Down past your mouth which spews expletives,
And onto your phone screen,
Obscuring the phrase “1 missed call from Boss.”

You yell,
I listen
Not to your words,
But to my intuition,
Which tells me our December walks
Will soon become your solo strolls.
Mindfulness

by Yu-hui Huang
Night is Cold

by Timothy Nguyen
Nemophilist
by Anjali Chacko

*N. a haunter of woods; one who loves the forest and its beauty and solitude*

There is nothing like the feeling of cold air
filling your lungs and breathing deeply until it
hurts.

There is nothing like looking out upon a clearing
after it rains and noticing how the gray sky makes the chlorophyll
more
vibrant.

There is nothing like running freely over gravel paths and
feeling the earth move beneath you
with every step.

There is nothing like standing still in the middle of nowhere and just
being, without needing an answer.
The Final Retool

by Brody Ford
Holy Spirits
by Damon Horn

It’s the easiest thing in the world to say yes,
The holy coolness of glass against hand;
The warm, smiling glow in stomach,
The promise of absolutely everything.

I took my first shot when I was 15, after Kyle’s funeral.
It was some awful vodka. Svedka.
I tried praying for a little bit,
But I needed a holy spirit with more proof.

And what’s more real than a God you can swallow?
Jesus turned water into wine,
Which was probably the world’s first happy hour,
And ever since, I take communion liberally.

I drink like Budweisers are cracker jacks
And I need to find the prize at the bottom of every bottle.
I drink like “Beer before liquor, never been sicker”
“Liquor before beer, then beer, then beer, then beer, then beer”
I drink like I can hold my liquor
Much better than I actually can.
And I don’t have a problem.
Because I’m just working towards my minor in binging.
And I don’t have a problem,
Because I know my limit, even though I’m 5 drinks past it.
And I don’t have a problem,
Because I don’t drink alone. I invite friends over so we can drink alone together.

This is my church.
Every day I worship,
Until I can’t stand,
Until this God brings me to my knees.

It’s the easiest thing in the world to say yes,
The translucence of holy water.
The satisfying burn of prayer in throat.
The promise of absolutely everything.
Ouroboros
by Jackson Krause
Rebirth Through Progress

by Anthony Carlsen
Sometimes
by Lauren Jones

it feels like an eternity,
sometimes
the way you kiss me, tenderly
sweeping me
off into indefinitely
sometimes,
I’m swallowed
then chewed
rapidly
by the lustful infinities
you utter into my soul
plentiful glimpses
of what whenever could be
catching. my. breath.
sometimes,
the pause
just seems to long
time has no worries
when you’re near
but he’s
lethargic
when you’re not
I hate it when
you go, sometimes
the anticipation
of your return
creates attempted climaxes
until further notice
and I don’t want
it
to
be
over
sometimes.

I forget to remember,
purposefully,
the repeated surprise
is refreshing:
opened-ended
invitation
of how you taste.
How You Sound
makes me
F E E L
like forever…..
sometimes
A Letter from Neil Perry to his Father

by Ronald Josh Ytem

Dear Mr. Perry,
You know, I’ve tried to write a poem about you.
About how much you cared,
about how much you were there
when I had everything,
or when everything fell to pieces.
I’ve tried to write a poem about how much
I loved you,
but I couldn’t.

I read the rehearsed words
knowing that they weren’t real.
I had trouble figuring out how to say it.
If I should emphasize "I" or "love" or
you wouldn’t even know I was writing this because you’ve seen me perform once
or twice and I’m not even sure you were paying attention because all I got from
you in response was
[no comment]
You wouldn’t even know I was feeling this because I’m scared to talk to you.
Not because I’m nervous and when I say these words, it burns,
but, because if I do
talk to you,
you’re gonna push me so far gone,
I don’t think I’ll ever come back.
You wouldn’t even know I was healing because you’re the only hunter I know who
can shoot me down from fifteen thousand feet of freedom
and I don’t think I want that kind of negativity in my life.
But you, Mr. Perry, have a grip on my life.
I condone the inevitability of the fact
that you won’t be there when I need you most.
I don’t want you to be there
Because it isn’t you that I need the most.
It’s my Father
that I need the most.
You’ll only make the worst out of a bad situation.
You don’t bother to know my situation.
It’s like you don’t want me to be happy.
It’s like you don’t want me to achieve anything greater than your approval.
Heck, I don’t even have your approval.
I’m working only to get your approval.
That poem I was writing, it was meaningless phrases. Nothing about you amazes me more than the amount of times I’ve felt really truly unconditionally loved by you. Less than three <3
You, with your words under oath, depicted dedicated decades of hardships and darkness. I hearkened these words but they didn’t match the tone of your voice. Whatever you say might as well be noise, incessant ringing, imbedded stinging, from the sharpness of your “I L Ys”. You have my pride under lock and key. Never was I ever supposed to say "Let go of me" when I get my annual hug. I’m fine. I don’t need you to care about me. It’s the mystery that kills.

You think you’re holding onto my hand, but you’ve got a rope around my neck. It may be my finger on the trigger but it’s your gun held against my head. You’re the only reason that I’m still here. I don’t wanna hurt you, but I’ve forgotten what love feels like through the thickness of these scars. Hold on. Let me open the window, check if there’s anything colder than your eyes. I can see my breath. My lungs are the last source of warmth that I have. It’s getting colder. Hold on. Let me take off my clothes, check to see if the scars are really that bad. Oh right, I don’t have any because you only broke my spirit, ripped open my heart. Hold on. Let me surround myself with the things always on your mind. Check for the reason you’re blind to the hole in my chest you created. Check my work. If there was a miscalculation, an error I made that I can fix and make everything better, check to see if I make it to where you’re taking me; then I will know why I wasn’t viable enough.

Dear Mr Perry, I’ve gotta go. Neil.
Crane Wonderland

by Haley LeRand
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