



Voices

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Voices

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Voices is a literary and arts magazine that showcases the diverse voices of West Valley College. It is published once every spring, and is produced by the members of the Voices Literary Arts Club. Current students, alumni, faculty, and staff of West Valley College are invited to submit their works of original fiction, creative non-fiction, poetry, and art for publication.

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The Kiwi

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Grecia Rivera
Versace

Mary Rose

The Clock

The house was silent save for the incessant tick, tick, tick of my grandfather's timeworn clock. This object was very dear to him for reasons unknown to me. The echoing tick never failed to scratch at my mind, most analog clocks now are virtually silent but my grandfather insisted on keeping it. It was worn and weathered by decades of simply existing and I never understood why he kept it around. I love that man but this is one of his many oddities. Throughout the years, it was always displayed prominently in the entryway or in the living room.

Every once in awhile he would polish it, every week he would dust it, and every day he would wind it. It seemed like a lot of work for something that was as plain as it appeared for there were no intricate carvings, it wasn't made of an expensive material, and it always seemed like something was wrong with it. Over the decades of my grandfather maintaining the clock, he had accumulated enough knowledge to rationalize never getting rid of it and always said "In my day you didn't throw things away when they could be fixed". Whenever I would whisper under my breath about the clock, I heard my grandfather tell me that I was becoming materialistic and that I enjoyed helping him with it when I was a boy. It almost hurt that he saw me that way but I tried to pin it to the age difference.

One night we were going about our quiet evening routine together, He was always reading a book and I was always fixing his usual jasmine tea. My eyes are drawn down the hallway when I heard something that sounded like metal hitting wood and I knew exactly what it was; it was the old clock. He said nothing as he got up and slowly walked over to the clock that stood taller than him and when he opened it I saw his shoulders slump. It was then that I knew, he would spend even more time repairing it. I couldn't help the frustration that rose within me when he opened the case. It almost seems like an endless cycle of breaks and repairs yet he does it without complaint.

"Grandpa Rod, why do you keep fixing that thing if it keeps breaking? Why don't you just leave it alone?" I asked as my hand reached for the mug. His voice caught my attention

“Son, c’mere.” He asked and I looked up to see him staring at me, I immediately feel guilty though I don’t know why.

I rose to my feet and stepped carefully as my bare feet hit the cold wood floor. When I reached his side where he knelt on the floor I just looked at him, not knowing what to say.

“Do me a favor and get me the toolbox” he asked as he used my arm to help himself up like he had so many times before.

I let out a frustrated sigh but I did as I was told. I padded through the dark hallway with walls of framed photos. My grandfather had always believed that picture could express what words couldn’t. I felt bitterness rise in my heart as my eyes landed on a picture that featured a woman that shared my eyes and a man that shared my height. I had to remember that they left me, they left their child behind. I swallow my own bitterness, I had learned to not think of them but I couldn’t help myself whenever I walked past this wall. She said that they would be back in an hour, only that hour never came.

I turn down the hallway and walk through the quiet kitchen and when my hand reaches for the door and pulls it open, light from behind me cast a shadow on the concrete floor. When my hand reaches for the light switch to my right, a couple of dim bulbs come to life as if to sufficiently light my way to the old workbench. I scan the shelves beside the cluttered table for the familiar green metal box.

When my eyes land on it, I reach for it with both hands and gently lift it off of the shoulder high shelf. When I have the cool box in my hands, I turn back to the doorway that seems to be radiating light into the darkness. I quickly walk over to the few steps leading to the door, almost as if there was something waiting for me where the light wouldn’t reach.

I feel a sense of relief when I finally feel my feet on the floor that now feels warm in contrast to the cold concrete of the garage. I walk through the kitchen, down the hallway, and past the pictures. He must have heard me coming because I can hear him say

“Just put it on the floor over there and c’mere for a minute” he asked. I listened and after I carefully placing the dented old metal box on the small end table next to the old clock, I leaned up against the wall next

to the old piece of wood.

“I know you wonder why I keep this even though it’s falling apart but there is something about it that I never told you.” He said with his old gravelly voice that held hints of sadness and longing. He never brought this up, whenever I asked he had always told me that he would tell me when I was older, I guess I was older now. He turned his head to look at me.

“There is something I want you to see” he puts his hand on my forearm and gently pulls me to stand next to him, he pulls my shoulder down so that our heads reach the same height and he points to the back wall of the clock, at first I wasn’t sure what I was supposed to see and eventually as my eyes began to adjust to the shadows I could make out aged scratches.

A.W. + R.W.

“You know that your grandmother’s name was Amelia don’t you?” he asked as the pieces finally began to fit together. Why he maintained it and why he kept it all these years. I felt guilt rise in my heart for saying the things I did, I felt guilty for telling him to just get rid of it for now I understood. I had never met my grandmother and I was always told that she died when my mother was little. I know that her death still affected my grandfather but I never made the connection between her life and the clock. Maybe he thought that if he kept it ticking, that she wouldn’t truly be gone. I said nothing as I waited for him to continue.

“She found this clock not long after we got married, we were young and she wanted something with a story, she loved things with history.” I turned my eyes to him to see that his eyes were transfixed on the old carving. “We carved our initials the day she brought it home, I still remember her taking my truck without telling me.” His face cracks with a smile at what must have been a fond memory. I say nothing as I take my hand and place it comforting on his aged and slumped shoulder. I tried to swallow the lump in my throat, “I, I didn’t know” I felt guilt rise in my chest for all of the times I had told him to just throw it out or get rid of it and that it wasn’t worth anything. Now I understood. He lovingly places his hand over mine.

“Not everything that’s valuable has a price tag, my boy.”



Angelina Yin
Not a Security Footage



Angelina Yin
Leap of Faith

Josie McGuire
Frankenstein Gone Hiking

beside you I climbed the tree
to see the mountain of God turn red
so natural to be erased
o, beside you I sat and crumbled
how could something so small be so big?
how could something so big be so small?

when every mirror is only my sneer
when every mirror shows your reflection
your face is superimposed over mine
if not in body, then in spirit

degrees of separation
blame is a game I have never played
consoled by the beige of my
soul; I was angry for a moment
but I have kindness enough for you
and now I have kindness for myself

my soul is build to order
constructed to your ideals
stitch me up and fill me with
such currents of validation

my friend



Felicia Alvararenga
Old Man with Guitar

Jared Baker

*Not a Holy Sonnet: Again,
in Response to John Donne's "Death, be not proud"*

I die.

Now, let me clarify,
With a simple falsehood,
Oft quoted for those who,
With their sense of pride,
Would foolishly believe,
Themselves better,
"Death, thou shalt die"

I die,

Yes.

However,
I keep dying.
I am never done.

-

Unlike you.
The immortal mortals' fear
Is I.
And all are mortal.
I do not find pride in this.
Those else taste it,
Shorter, or induced,
To visit.
Know I am both.
The rests received,
And given,
Are a pleasure.
That is the only
Debt I would pay.
Yet,
I feel the finality,
But I am beholden
To my mutability!

I am
Mighty.
I am

Dreadful.

For I,
Myself, fear.

Tell me,

Then,

How I,

With all my ceaseless ends,

Can be,

Foolishly,

Accused of,

Ever,

Being defeated.

I would cherish that, for all I want is to stay the same for longer than a
Moment's passing.

Lily Tsurumoto

Narcissism

Hidden in the muted tones
of complacency, a misled
idealism, saccharine sweet
as placebo pills, a pavlovian
surge of religious imitation,
Homo(cidal)-erectus, Sui(cidal)-dae,
what we believe, what we are
respectively.

My greatest pride, my humility,
my hypocrisy, the delicately
structured assertion,
axioms, maximums, felicitated
fallacies, ad populum and tyranny.

Et tu Brutus, Tu quoque Cassius,
sonnet spindled webs of
venomous things.

Caught narcissists, I tear
their petals apart and grind them to
salve my wounds.
Their mephitic nectar burning,
down my esophagus
let it poison me, disorient me, provide
me with the courage I need.

A Room of Her Own, a superiority complex and
a completely rationally minded, middle
class income, is all I need to fight the hellions,
the demons, the claws of remorse and shame
tittering on the precipice of
humiliation. The fall of king's and queen's
heads, rolling around a guillotine.

Crawling steadily towards
oasis, the water gleaming
entrapped a beautiful,
lovely thing, I'd
die over and over
to see.

My love, my ecstasy and sickness,
wither my throat, my lungs, take
the peace from my tongue,
gorgeous narcissist in the stream.



Laura Prilutsky
Daily Anxiety

Emily Sanderfer
Plainville, Kansas

He gets up in a hurry, leaving his sunglasses and hat behind. He throws on a random arrange of clothes, grabs his wallet, and leaves.

His kids are playing in the front yard. The two children—a boy and a girl—are throwing a rubber ball around, catching it, bouncing it, dodging it. He pauses, hand frozen on the doorknob.

What a perfect scene, what a perfect life. His kids play on the freshly clipped grass—grass he just mowed yesterday. It's green, soft, the perfect cushion to fall on.

He turns, looking back at the house. His house. The house he bought. The mortgage has his name on it. He should know. He burnt it this morning.

The ground floor of the house is covered in hardy brick. It's orange-red, pristine, no cracks or tears. Five shrubberies stand next to the white door—the very door Mr. Johnson clutches to right now. The shrubberies are dense, bushy. These are the type of plants found in untamed woods, not Plainville, Kansas. A small bird had built a nest in one of the shrubs. She now tends to her babies.

Upstairs, on the second floor, the brink is replaced with bleak white wood. Just like the brinks, this wood is pristine, no cracks, no imperfections. A small bug scurries across the wood. The bird in the bush eyes it.

Windows are conveniently placed on the house. There are two large, horizontal rectangles on the bottom brick floor. Two vertical rectangles on the second floor. All the blinds are down. Somewhere, in this house, Mrs. Johnson is following her husband's orders: she is shredding the documents.

“Daddy?” The daughter says, losing interest in the game. “What are you looking at, daddy?”

The dad turns away from the house. Across the street, Mr. Campbell is watering his grass. It's green and probably soft, too. Mr. Campbell's house has orange-red brick too, but no bushes and no second floor. He is watching Mr. Johnson.

Johnson waves at his neighbor. The neighbor waves back. "I'm just looking at the house, sweetie."

"Why?"

"It's nice to admire what you have."

The son piques up.

"Where are you going?"

"The store."

The son shrugs, throwing the ball at his sister. His sister catches it, losing interest too.

"Get me a soda?" The son asks.

"Ooh, get me a Snickers," the daughter says.

Johnson walks down the lawn.

"Yeah, yeah, sure." He unlocks his pickup truck, gets in, and drives off. He turns right onto West Mill Street.

Plainville, Kansas is a rural town--the type of town where nothing ever happens. Once a year there is a corn festival, but besides that kids around here entertain themselves with movies, board games, petty drama. The adults find alternative entertainment, like Mr. Johnson here.

West Mill Street is a dirty little road. On the left side lies a blotchy field. Little green grass clusters dot the dirt field. Rocks the size of hands litter the field too, providing shade to the mice and squirrels. There are no mountains, no hills, no piles of dirt. Kansas is as flat as a blade. It gets real nasty in the fall when the wind picks up. Dust tumbles through the air, smacking the Johnsons' house and blinding passerby.

Thank God for the abandoned shacks on the field. Without them the wind would be much worse. There are only a few of them, eight or so, all spread out across the lot. They lean, and they rot. Insects and termites coat the wood, eat it, shitting on it, living on it. It smells awful. The rot seeps through the cracks in the car. Johnson covers his nose.

Those shacks scream during the wind storms. They shake, and they shutter. Their wood groans and the metal roofs wail. The kids think it's ghosts.

Right before the field, where the lot meets the road, is concrete. The concrete is old, blotchy, just like the field. A weird pipe peaks through. It's rusty.

“Slow and steady, Paul,” Mr. Johnson mutters to himself. “Slow and steady wins the race.” He inhales deeply, ignoring the smell. He is nervous. He wants to calm down.

On the other side of the road, across from the field, is civilization: houses, playsets, even a community playground and pool. Mr. Johnson’s own house is across the field—on Wyoming Street.

Driving down West Mill Street, Mr. Johnson can see the sides of houses and their respective backyards. Most backyards have playset equipment: swings, slides, those small plastic playgrounds for toddlers. Plainville is a family town—a place to settle down. No wonder it’s so damn boring here.

The houses in and of themselves are quite similar to Mr. Johnson’s house. They either are white, have brick, or some combination thereof. The brick is sometimes orange and cracked; sometimes it’s pristine and red. Some houses are fat and only one story. Others are skinny and three stories. Some are shaped like horizontal Ls; others, Ts.

He passes the community playground. It’s huge and made out of wood. The wood is chipped, splintery. A small slide is attached to the structure, along with monkey bars and climbing walls. No one plays on it. Next to the playground is a worn down basketball court, made up of the same sticky sand. The community pool is on the same lot as the playground and basketball court. Kids splash in the shallow pool. Parents watch, sitting on the lawn chairs. Mr. Johnson wants to play in the pool.

He keeps driving. The field on his left ends. Huge warehouses—the size of two stacked school buses—littler the next lot. Houses continue again after the playground on Johnson’s right.

Mr. Johnson grows impatient. Anyone of these side streets leads to the grocery store. But Mr. Johnson isn’t going to the store. He is going to the bank. The only bank in town. It’s at the end of West Mill Street. A ways away. He steps on the gas.

The warehouses on the left fly by. So do the houses. He goes forty in a twenty-five.

Soon, the warehouses and the houses thin out. The road expands and parking spaces become available on the side of the road. Store replace the warehouses and houses. They’re simple rectangular build-

ings. Some are made out of orange-red brick; others, concrete. This is the town center of Plainville (if you'll call it that). It's small. Dirty.

Luckily the bank is here, at the very tip of downtown. Johnson parks in front of the bank, stepping out onto the sidewalk.

The bank is small, like everything else in Plainville. It's a tall, two story building. The bank offices are on the second floor. The tellers are on the first.

First State Bank is sprawled on a white canopy in all capital letters. Next to the F in First is the bank's symbol—a blue eagle in mid flight. Below the canopy is the bank's glass door. Large windows surround the glass door. They tried to make the bank inviting, warm even. Johnson smiles.

Above the canopy is the second floor—an all brick block. There is just one window on the second floor, located on the very left side of the structure. Unlike Mr. Johnson's estate, this brick structure isn't pristine. Where Mr. Johnson's house has uniformed orange-red bricks, the bank has dingy red brick. Here and there clumps of bricks are severely discolored. Cracks crawl their way through this. Bugs enter and exit these cracks.

A few people mill around the town center. Some walk just to get out, enjoying the fresh, rural air. Others enter the hardware store or the pharmacy with clear intent.

"Mr. Johnson?" A bank teller has opened the door. She stands in the threshold.

"What you looking at?"

"I'm just admiring the building." Johnson walks into the bank.

"But I'm here to withdraw some money from my account."

"Sure thing, Mr. Johnson." The teller--Molly--walks to a desk. Johnson follows. They sit. The teller asks for the typical stuff--name, account number. Johnson gives it to her.

"How was your dinner party, Mr. Johnson?"

"My what?"

The teller blinks.

"I-I didn't mean to intrude, Paul. You know I live on Wyoming Street too."

“So?”

“So, how could I not notice all your friends coming to your house for dinner? You must be mighty popular, Paul. They even brought food too, or whatever they were carrying in those boxes.”

“Yes, yes. I’m sorry. I forgot. Yes, my dinner party last week. It was very nice, thank you for asking.”

The teller smiles. “They must not be from around here, huh? They drive such expensive cars.”

“Yes, yes, they are from out of town. Quite a ways away.”

“Is that why you’re always away on the weekends? You’re visiting them?”

Mr. Johnson pauses. “You’re curious today.”

The teller shrugs. “David says you’re up to something. He doesn’t want the kids to play in the street anymore. But he has always been the type to worry. You know that. You know he worries. Answering some of his questions might keep him at ease. I’ll be sure to pass along the answers.”

“I see, I see.”

“It isn’t just my husband who has been noticing your guest. People talk, Paul. You of all people should know.”

Johnson smiles. He picks his next words carefully. “My friends are nice people. You don’t have to worry about them. My friends are a little intrusive, but aren’t we all?”

The teller nods. “Yes, aren’t we all? How much would you like to withdraw today, Mr. Johnson?”

“All of it.”

“All of it?”

“Yes, Molly. I want all of my money. Is it a crime to take what’s mine?”

The bank teller looks at the computer screen. “All twenty grand?”

“Yes.”

The teller excuses herself, gets up, and walks upstairs. The stairs groan with each step. Johnson remains seated.

The bank is a dingy little place. If the brick exterior were to be

transformed into a room, then it would look like this room. The carpets are black, probably to hide the dirt. The walls are red, and the desks are brown. They tried to make it pretty, and maybe it was pretty at one point. But now it's run down. It smells of dust.

The teller comes back soon enough. She carries a metal box with her. She sits, opens the box, and begin counting the money for Mr. Johnson. He watches. Once she finishes, a pile of hundreds lies on the table. Mr. Johnson asks if he could have to box too.

"I need to put the dough in something," he says. "I didn't bring anything. I can't carry it."

The teller obliges. She puts the money back inside the box. Mr. Johnson takes it, "thanks Molly," and leaves.

But as the bank door closes behind him, Mr. Johnson has a selfish epiphany: it's not safe here for him. Sure, his family is in danger too. But, hell, it's not safe here for him. For Mr. Johnson himself.

He is vulnerable. He has all of his money, right here, in a box. He is in broad daylight, nothing to hide behind, nothing to defend himself.

The men know where he lives. They visited him last week for 'the dinner party.' They visited him because he didn't pay the monthly due.

Yes, yes, Mr. Johnson isn't safe here, on the sidewalk in the town center. He isn't safe at his home. He isn't safe in his car.

He must leave.

Johnson hops into his car. He throws the money in the backseat and drives down West Mill Street. He drives the opposite direction of home.

He passes the salon, the pub, the liquor store. He passes the Chevrolet and Ford pickups trucks, the Volkswagens on the street.

The sidewalks are cracked and discolored everywhere. Funny, Johnson never noticed this before. They slant in some places and black gum stick to them in others. Some pedestrian in front of Johnson throws his cigarette bud on the sidewalk. It lands in gum.

People walk, avoiding the landmines on the ground. Here and there, groups of people walk, laughing, talking, having fun. They head to the pub. Others head to their cars. Others enter shops.

The stores begin to thin out. Before, they were apart of one big building, with only internal walls dividing each store. Now, the stores stand on their own. National Creek Restaurant—an artsy establishment built with rocks and bricks—blurs past Johnson. He took his family there yesterday before he had received the phone call.

The street contracts, getting smaller. There are no more spots for cars to park. A tax office and a warehouse flies by. Johnson realizes he is speeding again.

West Mill Street turns into East Mill Street. He passes a gas station. He realizes only after passing it he should stop to get gas. He doesn't turn back. He flies through West Mill Street, going forty-five in a twenty-five. He passes house after house. Houses made up of different color wood. Of brick. Of rock. Some houses have matching garages; others don't. Some have pathways consisting of cheap stone work leading up to the front door. Some have grass. Some have dirt. Sometimes Johnson would turn his head, peeking into the backyards of the houses. They have playsets. Maybe the men forgot what house was his. They all look the same anyway.

Then no houses. The lots are empty. They become barren, like the lot next to Johnson's house. Now and again little clusters of grass clutter the dirt. Sometimes, Johnson would pass a rock or a tree or some type of molehill.

There was no going back now. Johnson, swallowing any pride he has left, rages forward, away from Plainville. He travels with the barren fields now.



Neni Silva
Where To



Fareeha Qadir
Red

Evan Brown

Poem for a Retrospective Track Star

It was a punishing track season. If you could run
as well as you could complain
about it, you would have placed

first place at every postseason meet. However,
she saw a better young man in that
picture you gave her, a wallet-sized still

that concealed your moaning: you in mid-stride
on the inmost lane, your desperate
face perched above a spare excuse

of a chest, all your flesh
crimsoned by an adamantly
warm spring — overall, a cadaverous

machine in too-high shorts. She said you moved
the way the sun moves: beam-like legs grazing the track
aglow, your forefoot strikes smooth and

surely moving — hushful
and undetected, suddenly elapsing
opponents' singlets on the other side. She insisted

your angular poise maintained something
resembling confidence. Then, assuming such,
you'd straighten to her words, your body

filling your tracksuit more fully.
You often wonder where
you went, that little two-dimensional

digression of yourself, whether you
slipped behind wads of drugstore receipts, or if
you had come out of her wallet

altogether. You have a notion
that you're caught somewhere between amnesia
and her bedroom wall, or lost in her nightstand drawer.

It seems that, though abandoned
in the darkest of places, these pictures make
themselves known again by hurling their color

irrationally in qualities that no one ever quite
remembered when looking
through the viewfinder. The penny-dull

copper shadows cast by nostalgia pole-vault
her conscience, a bar you placed
at an ambitious height. You both had so devotedly

lived these days now fastened
onto photo paper, classifying reminiscence as an act
alongside taxes and salary jobs: much too much

to fathom, inconsiderable and far off
like severing a finish line ribbon
or your knees' rose-russet scabs you can't help

but trace the silhouettes of, their fresher iterations
percussing from the next room over inside a shoebox
you must rummage, every fortitudinous

gamut making its way under your thumb.

There are no more scowls to lift from you
after a spoiled race, but about two miles

of memories to run through — an event
you can't train for. This is why, in your return
to the field to chase the start of autumn,

you now look to the sky's
corners, searching for dimensions of
a photograph you feel you're stuck

eternally within. You waited — as you do
when you're fifteen, manic, and in love —
for whatever phantoms

would drift into the stadium. The shrill mirage of bells
that always echoed on your last lap, the late
ruby glint from off the bleachers, occupying

more of your vision than you can
account for. All that shone was a dying sun, red
as the spring heat, our bodies, the leftover flash

stunning our eyes from a team photo, blistered heels
and the gauze, even this fading Tartan track
we used to round.

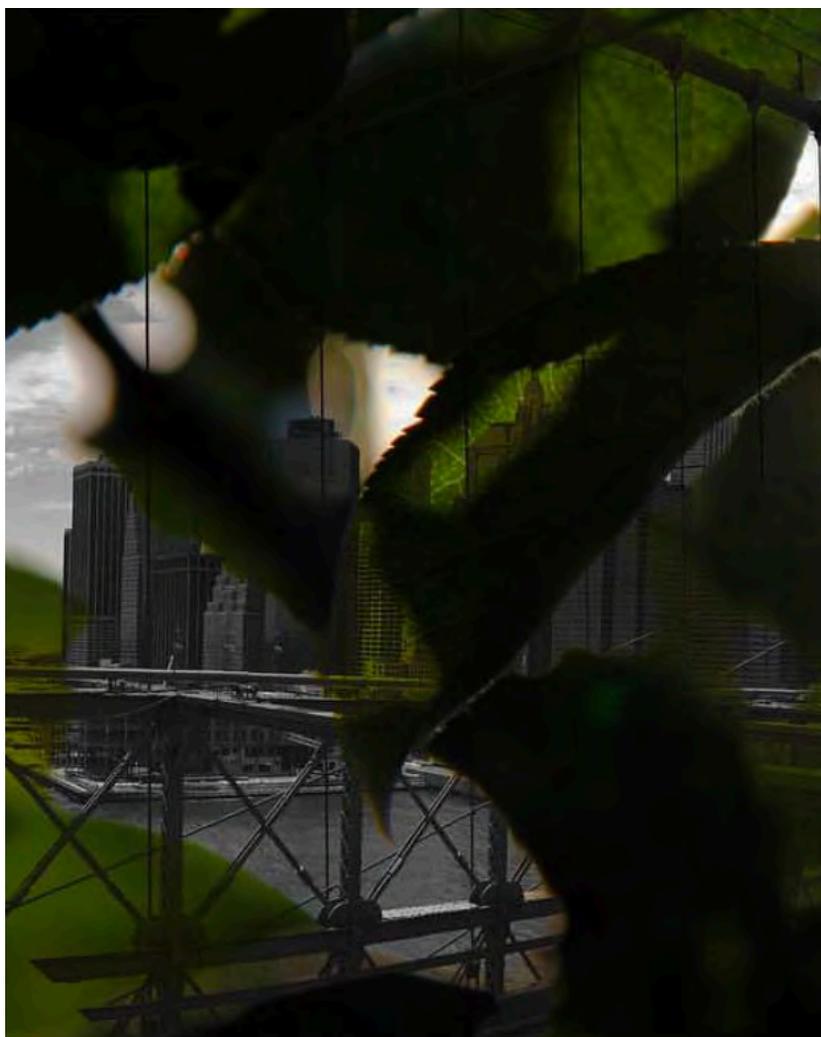


Danny Brogden
Hiker with Flag

Evan Brown
Do You Remember
(for Frieda)

By means of your hands,
 Beethoven's Moonlight Sonata flowed
 from beyond you, leaving the walls
saturated and sonorous. I could
 feel the low firing of hammers striking
 thin string triplets, arrays of
legs (the instrument's,
 my own) throbbing from
 the rumble. You'd wedded those keys
with sure sense of their weight,
 being held not by a man's
 embrace, but by pure joy of mastery —
your own, your pupils'. You know
 the endeavor of practice, and
 I mean real practice. You told me
each day was ablaze
 in your living room: Eight straight
 hours, never a dry
arena in your eye, or in
 your cheek's dimple, where sad arpeggios
 pooled. I'd heard these stories
 before, the dynamics on the page
 dismembered, pulled endlessly
into perfection. Pianissimo wrists
 turned to purposeful wrists while
 your fortissimo mother made sure
that music, molecule for molecule,
 could be evoked in the distance on your eyes'
 closing. I'd heard it
before that your kind of practice
 succored your brain, that this discipline made you

all you wanted to be. At Saturday
lessons, you weren't so
wanting of me, but on my
hitting a key amiss, you'd caution,
"careful," leaving it to linger on my fingers
louder than the sour pitch
I struck. Oh, how I wish for something
sweeter to resonate. I never worked
like you did to make
these eighty-eight keys obey me, but
I worry these pedals,
press as you may, can't sustain your
augmentations anymore. It gets
rancidly quiet in the practice room
these days, watching you perform
pauses that aren't in
the staffs. Such dissonance
between them, between kids'
faces gaping like a whole note,
reminding you that, yes,
today is Saturday and it's always
been this way. Your toiling embers
cooled and darkened as you failed
to remember why this strange, sweet
Indian family is here at your doorstep.
Tonight, from your living room, I could barely
detect it, the quietest diminuendo: a thick
Yamaha Grand, and you
at the bench, blank like a page
of unwritten music, trying to remember
how you got there,
how you got there.

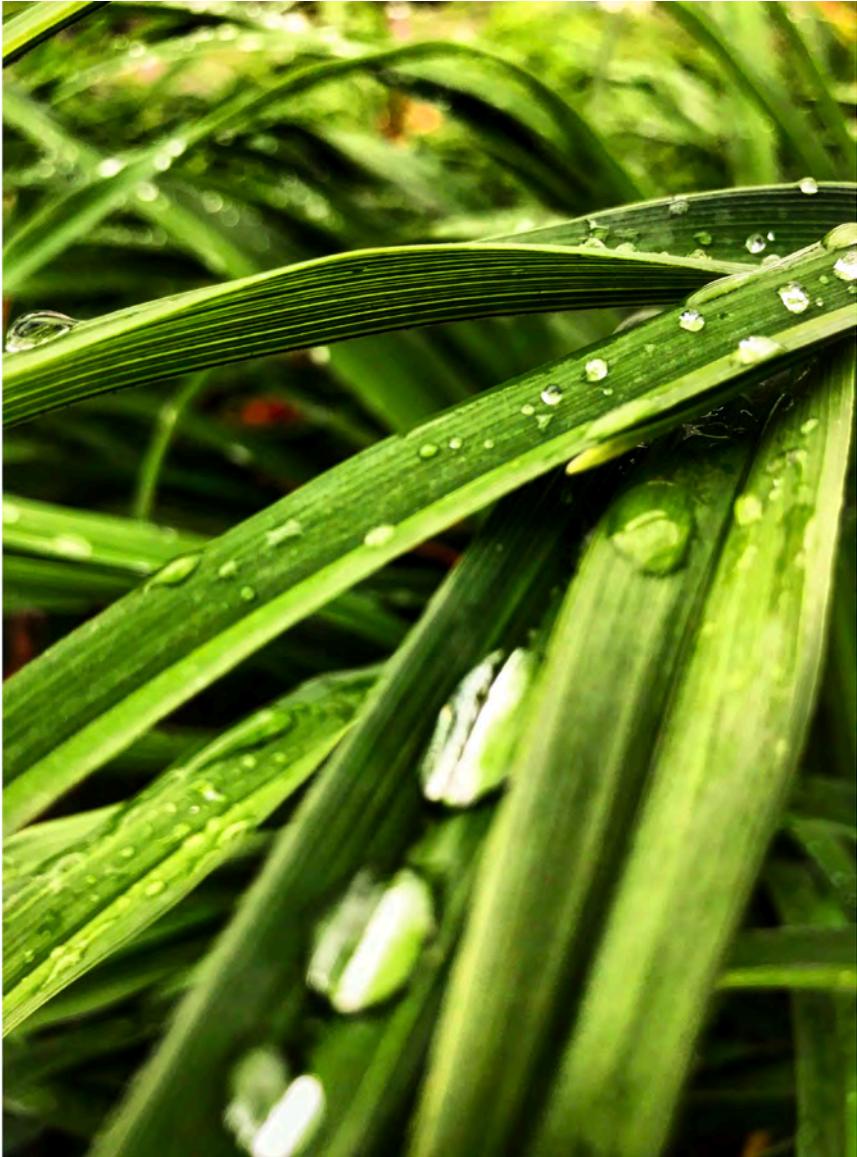




Neni Silva
Untitled

Ana Hahs
Lawns

Every time someone crosses a lawn
a small rebellion occurs.
A sweep of green is suddenly interrupted,
shaken
out of its still restraint.
The conquerer, a gray boot, cares not
for the audaciousness of borders and lines
which mark perimeters
keeping even
the scratched black dust away.
It cares not for these fortifications which can be broken
by wind and rain,
swooping and pelting and picking up
grimy bits of grass.
Tossing them overboard.
It seeks the softness of earth and mud
on the graying grass.
Bits of earth smear on skin-like leather
clinging to it.
Empty indents,
left behind.
Delicate aberrations made to
slip away.
The lawn is broken up.
After all this time
the dust creeps
around and in.



Neni Silva
Walks Like Rain

Liz Maglio

A Eulogy to My Love

He came in like a snake
Hypnotic and smooth-
A boa constrictor of a man
squeezed oxygen out of me
Like fire to a room
suffocating
Face and hair like raging
wildfire.
Soft in heart
Tender in hands
Tears in his eyes
Locked behind
impenetrable fortress of
Steel armor
no door for me to walk through
A chink in the armor
A weakness in the chain
I was not enough to bridge
The Gap
Between sweet adoration and
barren desolation
Shards of broken
agony
Our love was a storm
Wild unbridled
Violent winds and
Broken limbs
His father's words
like a drum
Shattered the tender glass
heart
And became the heartbeat
That killed us-
a heart attack.

Liz Maglio

Moonlight

Winter is so dark and cold
With air that bites my lungs
Inky darkness blankets the sky
And envelopes this heart into darkness

I met you brown eyed
Beautiful lonely man
Six thousand miles away
I looked there
deep inside your soul
And saw a reflection of myself
In your heart

The night is so dark and cold
And the moon glows in the sky
Two lonely hearts beat
Together

Because we share the same moon
Under the same sky
And suddenly it's not so dark and cold
But warm and gold



John Nieuwsma
Salve Regina



Evan Brown

Snow in the Valley

Have you seen it snow like this in the valley? Probably not since '76. You've locked it into a Polaroid picture you can no longer find: your daughter unbound on Mission Street, her head peaked above a fuchsia parka, tilted toward the sky with a tongue ready to catch what it could of the rare whiteness.

As you gaze beyond the traffic you've been stuck in, the sky appears lusterless before you, like everything you ever captured with that Polaroid. A hot breath from nowhere steams faces of hills in the way your post-shower proximity fogs the mirror when you respire too closely to it. This smoke, possessive and relentless, chokes the evergreens, looking soon to make them nevergreens, everything blending into the gray, decrepit highway. You reach your exit, your world shrouded in translucence. Like little ghosts, white ash flecks loom by, seizing all things in passing. Incredulous, you tune into what people say they know on the radio, half-expecting some consideration of your dusty photographs. They say the Tubbs fire has leveled neighborhoods by the acre. Some, with sole luck, have evacuated.

No wonder the sky looks a bit less cerulean, the fuchsias a bit less fuchsia.

You wonder, as the hollow snow drifts past you, what all these bits once were --

Someone's personal library?

Forgotten wine corks, perhaps.

A child's crib?

The child inside it?

Jordan Zachary Ellis
Food For Thought

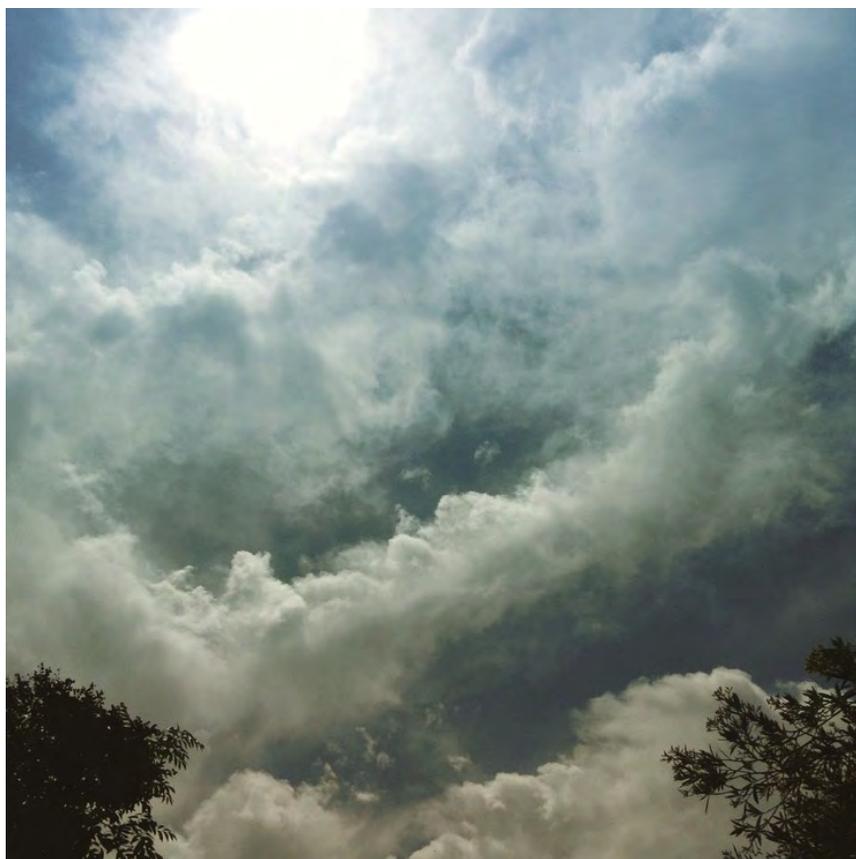
I've never really felt like
I tried to pull at heartstrings,
so I guess in terms of poetry
you'd call me a vegan.
It's not that I can't get
down and dirty,
into the meat, so to speak,
of this language.
It's more that we live in
this overprocessed world,
and my tongue is tied to
this paleo vernacular.
it's similar to how love
has become oversaturated
with likes, our language has
become genetically modified,
labeled with a list of ingredients,
capped so the true contents
cannot escape.
we readers
digest more than simple similes
and metaphors about a life that
none of us lived.
The picture on the label looks delicious,
so we eat up the words we're told
taste the best, that cover the most
diverse number of taste buds
across the vast varieties of palettes.
We've become gluttonous,
craving happy meals with plastic wrapped
quotes about our broken hearts.
I've never been one to pull at heartstrings,
but even my teeth can find this flesh.

Greg Brown
Dying Breed

Way low down this feeling,
always seemed to burn like fire,
In a pit so deep,
you could feel the heat,
as the flames tried to reach higher.
But time marched on,
like a soldier,
who fights a war in vain.
And even as that fire burns,
that pit conceals the flame.
I thought I saw that sun rise,
and my flame would soon be seen.
But it's the sun just setting,
over pastures oh so green.
I want to take a few more steps,
and try to take the lead.
I don't know if I'm just dying,
or I'm a dying breed.
Passion keeps the fire,
in a man's heart burning hot.
When plans don't seem to go his way,
and passion's all he's got.
He replays imagined moments,
he believed he'd realize.
When truth is hope,
and hopes are dreams,
a man won't shut his eyes.
I thought I saw that sunrise,
a flame no time could kill
But it's the sun just setting,
by the river oh so still.
Before I go I'm trying,

to plant that final seed
I don't know if I'm just dying,
or I'm a dying breed.

So all you gather near my embers,
they'll flicker as they spark,
I'm walking through that valley,
and the days are getting dark.
Your love has lit my way along,
this long dark winding road,
It kept the fire burning,
and that flame has finally showed.
I'm grateful for that sunrise,
a flame to start my day,
And the sunset always follows,
it's never far away.
If my final breath sounds like a sigh,
rest easy, I've been freed.
I don't know if I'm just dying,
or I'm a dying breed.
Am I only dying,
or am I a dying breed.



Angelina Yin
Paradisio

Lynda Monari
Ode to my First Love

Each morning to your tender words I cleave,
drawing light for my awakening soul—
stealing precious moments you take control
Before demands of life hasten my leave.

A calming, secret escape from my world
longing fingers gently hold your spine
lingering moments drawn between the lines
Wound up snug in a blanket we're curled.

I revel with joy in your serenades,
Lo, the day draws nigh, entranced by your charms
I fall asleep, holding you in my arms.
Eternally bound in our escapades.

When we are done I will find another.
Too many great tomes for this book lover.

May Alexandria Freitas

Me Too

He saunters in the room
oozing with charm and grace.

Captivating all those
young naive babes.

But she does not know
his true malice intent.

She can't see past
those piercing blues orbs.

Nor what lurks
just beyond those doors.

I wish I could caution her so,

“NO STOP! NO STOP!

PLEASE DON'T GO!”

She does not know
the peril she's in.

She does not know
he wants more than just a kiss.

For young naive babes
scarcely realize
what lurks behind
those malevolent eyes.

She screams and cries,

“NO!! PLEASE STOP! PLEASE STOP!

But he does not care
about her pleas.

He rips and tears
and pushes her to her knees.

She screams again,

“NO PLEASE! NO PLEASE!!

But he does not care
about her pleas.

He rips and bruises her so,
but his true damage
he does not know.
With every painful thrust
she loses more and more trust.
She closes her eyes
to find a far place.
She thinks to herself
“God Please... God please...
Make him stop;
make him stop now... please...”

He grunts with loud “aaahhhhh!!”
Then stops and pushes me away.
Pulls me to my knees,
and grabs me by my face.
Looks me in my eyes;
then with an evil smirk.
Warns me with that evil glare..
“Tell no one or beware;
no one believes little whores!”

He leaves me in that dark little room;
without a second thought.
I struggle then fall,
and then pull myself up
with tears streaming down my face.
I wandered back out that dark little room.
Then suddenly I JUMP!!
She touches on my shoulder,
and with her sweet little sad face.
She kisses my head.
Then states...
“me too”



Neni Silva
Hora Dorada

Winners of the Mirrors Contest



Laura Prilutsky
Social Anxiety

Josie McGuire

A Mirror, But Without Reflection

We had just gotten back to the car when she called. I slid into the backseat, staring at the orange street-lights lining the shadowy parking lot. They resembled the color of that orange sauce at Panda Express, unhealthy, inhuman, unreal. I watched Mom's face assume artificial patience as she answered the phone. My aunt Leah had found herself in prison one day, apparently for some sort of catfight gone wrong. The prison charged money for outside communications, with phone calls topping the list. My poor mother begged Leah to preserve what cash she had and email, but no such luck. Leah called daily.

"Hello?" I leaned in. Both my parents had a habit of being uncommunicative- one could be commandeered into "family fun" at any moment, regardless of outside plans. Mom, in particular, favored inviting guests over when my older brother and I were likely to be in bathrobes and boxers, without informing us until it was far too late for such a ridiculous and unnecessary thing as personal dignity. Eavesdropping was the only way to keep on top of our schedule, and if the necessary eaves were not dropped, the price could be steep. Mom's voice sharpened, and she glared at the uncompromising dashboard.

"Leah, are you lying to me?" The resulting electronic gargle sounded offended.

"You've told us this before, and it's never been real. I love you, Leah, but why should I believe you? Have you even gone to a doctor yet?"

My mother's hands tightened around around the steering wheel, nails digging into silicone. The car rumbled under me. The Target neon sign glowed against the wine-dark night. The grocery sacks shifted, and after an eternity of air-conditioned heat and silence, Mom hung up. She turned to face me.

"Leah's pregnant. She wants us to adopt."

"Are we?"

"I don't know yet."

It had been been six months since our last baby. Well, since

our last baby and toddler, I mean. We had had our foster kids, Skyler and McKenzie, brother and sister, since little McKenzie was a day old, in fact. They were eventually returned, after endless court hearings and delays, to their respective fathers, one a former drug addict and the other a man recently released from prison. The house was silent that day. During the half-year reprieve, I was amazed to find myself the object of parental attention again. They had been so busy that year, I had felt like just another couch in the foyer. But here we go again, I thought. Hop-ping right back on the carousel ride. But still, the parents and I tossed names around blithely, and when the time came, we blithely headed off to Middle of Nowhere, North Dakota, and together, in pure concentrated and utter blithe, we waited in desolate motels for Roman's birth. When I saw my aunt again for the first time in years, she was surrounded by men in uniform and stern sunglasses. Apparently, she had given the hospital the slip one too many times. It seemed to be forever, but eventually, the day arrived, and the most beautiful and perfect child that ever lived became a McGuire.

It wasn't too much later that Leah also joined the bosom of our blossoming family in California, while finishing parole. We had set her down very solemnly and told her all of our very solemn rules. The parents did, anyway. I sat awkwardly next to a trapped-looking aunt. I felt a need to say something, encourage her, hug her, tell her, "You're with us now." But I didn't. What need would there have been for someone as inconsequential and useless as I was to speak?

Leah struck a bold figure, with her heavy makeup, midnight hair, neon fuzzy socks, and clinging yoga pants. She had come to us somewhat destitute, so she was on the hunt for a job, any job, every job. My parents tried to convince her to save money for an apartment back in North Dakota, but Leah preferred boxes and boxes of hair dye. My towels never regained their silky lustre. I had seen Leah only a few times after my childhood days spent at Grandmama's. I knew her in that family way, love born of circumstance rather than choice. But what love is love without choice? I chose to befriend her. Meanwhile, my mother's sanity was slowly deteriorating. She was the sort of woman who liked to eat big bowls of microwaved broccoli, and Leah was the sort of woman to look

over the bowl, and say,

“Oh, that looks good. Does it have any carbs?”

My mother would reply. “Yes, a few. Not enough to matter, though.” Leah thumbed her nose at all foods containing carbs, despite the entire family’s agreement that carbohydrates were both impossible to escape and actually necessary to function. She never ate vegetables, and “water makes me feeling like gagging. It’s just gross.”

“Meat. Cheese. And eggs, Rachele.” She would chant, clapping her hands for emphasis. “When I was in rehab, I was doing. so. good. I lost so much weight, Rachele. So much weight.”

“Yes,” my mother would reply. “Because you were starving your body of a necessary nutrient it needed. You can eat a few vegetables and maintain a state of ketosis, I promise.”

“Being carb-free is the only diet that has ever worked for me. Maybe you can do it, being so skinny and all, but I need to keep to my diet.”

Mumbling through a mouthful of chips, she said, “I’ll eat what I want today, and then tomorrow I’ll eat absolutely no carbs.” This conversation would happen ad nauseam around the house, until Aunt Leah went to the ER with a case of nausea of her own. Turns out water is occasionally helpful for proper waste disposal.

“It’s that medicine I was taking, and you know it.”

Mom agreed to disagree. Roman has his biological mother’s good looks and strawberry blonde hair, not to mention a forehead slope steep enough to ski on. Aunt Leah of course fussed over him, but only spoke to him in a high pitched baby squeal sharp enough to make your ears bleed. Combining this with her usual teenage girl-esque nasality, being in her very presence was hard to stand. The thorns of my lovelessness and impatience pricked me deep, and I yearned to not feel my feelings, to be the person I believed myself to be. Roman felt no such compunctions, and loved her without reservation. Sidling by her side, he stuck his finger in the crack of the refrigerator, and Leah accidentally shut the door on his pudgy little starfish hands. He bawled, but it was Leah who truly bawled, crumpling onto the couch in fluctuations of pure

agony and shame, long after Roman was playing cheerfully. Mom sat with her, stroking her hair. My mother was the second oldest in the family, but after the divorce, Mom was left to raise her siblings as my grandmother fell into a downward spiral of drugs and depression.

She was Leah's mom far before she ever was mine. I was under orders to never allow Leah to watch Roman, but I didn't quite take Mom seriously. Leah would not hurt Roman, and as a fully-grown adult with a previous daughter of her own, was at least competent enough to not cause too much damage. Passing through the kitchen, I heard an offended Leah tell my mother that,

"I don't even know what the deal is. I would never sell Roman for drugs!" I vowed to never leave Roman with her again.

For Roman's sake, my parents had decreed if the house-rules were broken, twas to be moved into a rehab. Leah assured us that it wouldn't be necessary. We believed her, until my parents found her drunk on Listerine, vomiting mouthwash over the bathroom tiles. Dad insisted she be booted for her own good, and my mother, pale and uncertain, agreed. We visited Leah once at the rehabilitation centre. We were sitting outside together eating lunch, and Leah was discussing the other inhabitants of the rehab.

"It's been so long since I've been able to talk to any cute guys. I wish had had some better jeans. These ones make my a** look big."

My mother had bought her those pants. "Please don't try to talk to these men. Just focus on getting sober and coming back home." Leah sulked. "I've been to rehab before, Rachele. It's the same thing every time. I don't even need to be here." I tried not to make slurping sounds, but it's hard with ice in your water. It's hard to pretend you don't exist.

Leah struggled through rehab, and managed to return for an uneventful few days. I perched upon the staircase, observing, as Leah informed my parents that her friends would drive her to an AA meeting. My father shut the door carefully behind her when she left. She didn't come back that night. We lived in frozen stasis. We washed our hands, ate our breakfasts, did our various tasks- Mom her administrative work for the church, Dad his patent law, myself heel deep in school work.

There was nothing to do or to say about it. What could be said? Three days in, Leah called. There in the kitchen my mother stood, breathing in the condensation of cooking steam and fear. Pushing the pan to the burner over, she asked,

“Where are you?” I chewed on my handful of cashews and swallowed as I tipped my dining room chair back. There was no door between the rooms.

“Leah, if you do this, you know you can’t come back to our house. Please. Think about Abby. Your daughter needs her mother.” Abigail Dietch was nine years old, lived in North Dakota, and had blonde hair and blue eyes, just like Leah. She hadn’t seen Leah in years. Leah rarely talked about Abby. Leah hung up on my mother, and we didn’t hear from her again. Near the end of the week, I was reading by the door and heard a knock. I opened the door, and stared at the apparition of illness before me, her hair ratted, her labored-over makeup smeared, pale as death. I swiftly ushered her in, retrieved the parents, offered her some water, and waited patiently for the next opportunity to learn what had happened. The version I gathered was scattered, erratic, dreamlike, and it wasn’t until later I was told the real story.

Rather than attend the purported AA meeting, she had left to party with her friends, and had decided to drive to Oakland to visit her friend’s boyfriend and do drugs together. Having been left behind for whatever reason, this boyfriend had thrown her out of the house to wander the streets. Being both ill and high, she approached some men in an alleyway to plead for a ride. They drove her out into the middle of nowhere in their unmarked white van, to their unmarked establishment. They left her in the car to negotiate with the men coming out of the building. A woman approached her window and asked,

“What are you doing here? Don’t you know they’re going to sell you?” Leah fled with the woman, and that is how I found my beraggle aunt, waiting silently at our doorstep. Even to this day, there are pieces my family hasn’t quite fit together, and it is likely we will never know what really happened that week.

I took a gap year between high school and college and attended a Christian missionary school in Australia, Germany, and Spain. When

I returned, things were as they had been before I left, replete with Leah living in our home once again. She greeted me half-heartedly when I came back to the house, her lips curved in a false smile.

“It’s so good to see you, Josie! Welcome home!” Her hug was limp. We had suddenly switched places in the cycle of coming and going, and her tenure at our place was over at last. She chose to return back to North Dakota. I hold my little brother tight, these days. There’s nothing to be done but live, and that’s a difficult task enough for any superman. A few months later, Leah posted a picture of herself on Facebook, pouting duck lips extended, posing seductively, her eyes drugged and dim.



Sophia Ison
Greater than Art

Ana Hahs
The Day I Understood

The day I began to drop
did not hit me like a gun
did not drag me roughly out of my
naiveté.

It ticked forward like a clock
sounding the inevitable hour.

Like a gavel that does not
make much noise.

Buckets of lists,
marked off.

But this would not be on a bucket list.

Abstract knowledge became a certain point,
a smeared dot,

on the calendar of my life that I could look back to and say
this, this is when it happened,
on this day, in this year, at this time
this is when I realized why.

Tile. Mirrors. Walls.

Looking in the mirror, barefoot on the tiles, ringed by the walls.
A two-faced person stared back at
me.

Shifting, morphing, splitting
my face and the other breaking.

Certain knowledge bled on it, ruined it.

I could not wipe the stain.

I could only cover it up.

So I picked up my face and explained why it could only ever be mine.

No one else should be allowed to see,

I fastened the gate

and kept the knowledge of the smeared dot to myself.

When a thought is in the world it must stay there

deathless
even if we are not.
The wheel turns
clocks run on and on and on and on
I am a speck of salt desperately swimming to shore.
What would happen if I
let the sea
—take me away.



Joycelyn Ho
Into Fog

Jelena Cheyiam

The B

The rain poured down around them, soaking Greg to the bone. The citizens of the city had taken shelter from the showers hours ago. Behind him, the bright fluorescent lights of the convenience store flooded the parking lot in front of him, illuminating the back of the woman walking away from him. He clenched his car keys in his hand. It wasn't supposed to happen like this. The first time he's liked a girl—really liked a girl—wasn't supposed to end with her walking away from him. He clenched his hands into a fist and winced when his car keys dug into his palm. No, he wouldn't let it end like this. What they had was special, and he wouldn't just let it slip away from his fingers.

“Amanda wait!” he ran forward, his shoes sloshing with rainwater. He reached forward and gripped her elbow. She whirled around and he pulled her to him, roughly pushing his lips against hers. Her slurpee and grocery bags fell from her hands, spilling out onto the cracked, sparkling asphalt. Her hands came up to his chest and began slapping wetly at his collarbones. He persisted, moving his mouth against hers. Finally, she succeeded in shoving him away, though he still gripped her arm firmly in his large hand. He looked at her, breathless. Even in the rain, with her red hair matted to her head and her makeup smeared down her doll-like face, she looked stunning.

“Dude, what the fuck?!” she shouted. She yanked her arm away with a grunt. His hand stayed frozen in the air and he stared in stunned silence as she bent down to scoop her groceries back into her bag.

“Made me drop my fucking slurpee,” she muttered.

“Amanda?” he asked timidly, “What’s wrong?”

“Are you joking?! You just tried to shove your tongue down my throat!” she snapped. “I just said I wasn't gonna date you!”

“No, you said you can't date me. Which means there's something holding you back,” he corrected very matter-of-factly.

“Fine, I'll reword it. I don't want to date you.” Her words pierced him like an arrow and he stumbled back in shock. “And even if I did want to date you, I wouldn't after what you just pulled,” she added.

Greg didn't know what to say he watched as she whirled and stomped away from him.

"Wait, what do you mean?" he asked. He ran forward again and placed his hand on her arm. She pulled away from him as if she had been stung and he looked at her, hurt. The rain eased up on them and suddenly there was nothing but silence between them.

"What do you mean?" he repeated.

"I-I thought..." he trailed off. To be honest with himself, he wasn't quite sure what he had been thinking.

"You thought that somehow forcing someone to kiss you would make them like you, right?" she asked dryly.

"What? No! I would never force you to do anything you didn't want to," he reassured her.

"How can you say that when you literally just forced a kiss on me?" she threw a hand up and let it drop to her side again.

"I mean, don't I deserve a chance?" he asked.

"Don't I deserve to date who I want to and only who I want to?" she shot back. She turned and began walking away from him again. He followed, but did not touch her anymore.

"I mean, of course you do, but I think we'd be great together. I've been nice, I'm worth a shot," he said, speeding up his pace to keep up with her. Even if she was a very petite girl, she moved fast.

"Being nice," she said, making air quotes with her free hand in the air, "should be default behavior, not a privilege."

He was quiet for a few minutes, chewing her words over in his brain. "I agree with you, but-

"Enough of this!" She stopped and looked at him. "I am not going to date you. In fact, no one will. Because you're not a nice person, you're an asshole. Nice people don't chase after someone who just rejected them and force a kiss on them. Nice people don't try to persuade someone who just rejected them. And most of all, nice people don't think they deserve a chance just because they were nice, only assholes do. Go home, Greg. You left your car in the parking lot. You asshole."

Greg didn't follow her this time when she stormed away from him. Instead, he huffed and spun and began stomping back the way he had

come. He kicked a lone trash can over in frustration.

“Whatever,” he spat. He didn’t want to date a bitch like that anyways.

Lauren Oliver
We Live as Stone

We paint our skin so they can't see us,
Freshen our breath so they can't breathe us,
Hush our screams so they can't hear us,
Dry our tears so they can't feel us.

Hide our hands so they can't hold them,
Grasp our dreams, that they can't unfold them,
Whisper fears so they won't know them,
Clothe our monsters so they can't woe them.

Nail down heart so they can't take us,
Never speak, that they can't blame us,
Cover our wrists so they can't chain us,
We live as stone, so they can't break us.



Selina Chih and Marion Chen
Dance Theater @ West Valley

Nicholas Singh
Sunshine Through a Blue Moon

Now, I can't lie,
In your smile there's sunshine,
I haven't met another girl so fine, and yet so kind

But hold up, rewind,

As I'm on a mission, may I ask your permission?
Let me be honest before I start this.
May I keep it true?

I don't bark up many trees, but I'll howl at the moon,

Especially if that moon is you,
I pray that this time, the moon is blue.
With your moonlight, even darkness you make bright,
You can bring light to the night sky.

Now I'm facing rejection, must be approaching the third time,
I should know better. However, when I look into your eyes,

Know that I go blind.
So please don't blame me if I try,
To draw near to your side,
But if I fail to make that climb,
And here I fall,
You shouldn't feel responsible,
If you don't feel it, this isn't possible.

I'll be fine.
I'll survive,

Even if a connection sublime, wasn't to be mine.
Could I be somewhere.. somewhere in your mind?
Sometimes, I just don't know.
Last time it hit me, I bled so..
Found myself wilting, a dead rose,
Until struck by your smile, revived!
Like the dead rose.



John Nieuwsma
Saint

Stephanie Todd
The Space of You

To witness your presence
is to find another realm of that stardust soul.
I feel the drum of your beating heart
in a recognizable constellation -
forming intricate patterns like those
ocean-speckled orbs
radiating from your luminescent
canvas. Staring at my awestruck gaze,
I sense as if you're celestial -
then there's me, just floating,
in a weightless daze of adoration.
But how can I feel adrift in space?
For your vow is the tether
and I am tied to a million galaxies of you.
To witness your presence
is to find light within an inescapable black hole.

Ted Peterson

Surreal Strangeness of Becoming

Within sunglass

I see strange dragonflies

upon a hill of sage and wild grass

her long black hair reflects the seasons

and the tides

a black robe she wears with red inside

within sanctuary lies her naked body

with visions drifting through

her mind of night,

as she gathers the mystical wonders

of all things, and of all sights

the red and the black illumine

by the white light, within darkness is the birth of night

her long red hair and lovely fair skin

she stands upon a hill of green grass

she is a lovely woman,

a fair lass of sweet bloom

she enters the threshold by long red strands

of her mystical hair of sweet wonders

the red and the black illumine

by the white light, within darkness

I see the birth of the sight of all things

she stands upon a hill, invoking her will

a strange beauty in red hair and fair skin

my eyes are opened by the strange magic

she makes, as she rides upon a distant night

seeing the light of all kinds; of all things

shining through her eyes; of all sights

Within sunglass

I see strange dragonflies

upon a hill of sage and wild grass

her long red and black hair

reflects the seasons, and the sweet tidings

of all things, that she may bring,

and also bestow upon those who
may listen to her "Many Sacred Voices";
and also many visions of the darkened night
she speaks to me of a deepest desire

rising my mind, yet ever higher
within a state of knowing,
and glowing so brightly
am in love with the hidden sight
and am inside her robe of night
she gives me the reason of life
a strange wife of all natures,
hast thou been fully sanctified



Tami Whiting
Wine, Cheese and Mice



Kalina Karbowski
Composure

Stephanie Todd
Towering Giants

look.

gaze up high, see?

see that auburn of a thousand
year-old redwood.

can you picture a life so long
ago. neither one of us could see this Sapling
before it's Growth. feel the rough bark bite
your skin with love and wisdom.

breathe in the scent

of binding Roots beneath your feet, below
the soil, Connected as one, twisting and holding
tight like two lovers' hands.

rays highlight those needled
leaves which sway above us. it whispers to you,

perhaps sounds
unheard to those
who bear no cones.

how can we not
prize towering
giants which roam
coastline hills of
gold promises?
branches beyond
our reach, branches
stretching far and
wide, sturdy limbs
that consume fog
ridden mornings,
seeping through tall
treetops above -

no wood is more
red and no leaves
with quite such age
and Infinite
Evergreen.



Fareeha Qadir
Lips Art

Jordan Zachary Ellis
Early Birds

They say
the early bird
gets the worm,
and the word is
morning traffic
requires my presence.
The essence
Of the sun's rays,
which hit harder
than any
of last night's drinks,
soar into my eyes
from the rear view.
Staggered by the shine,
the smell of smog,
accented by the sound
of incessant
honking like
two ton geese
struggling
to accept the loss
of ascension
drifts into
and then out of
my self.
Motorcycles
flitter between cars,
like hummingbirds
looking for
their next fix
in a flower.
An early morning rumble

between a Roadrunner
and a beat up Firebird
gives reasoning
to the chips
and chirps
that seem to flitter
from, and to,
all the cars.
This early morning
egosystem
that is created
from
too many early birds
looking for
the same worm
may have taken them,
but the rest
fly on.
The moment nine o'
clock hits
the flock
disperses
like smog in the
air, seen clearest
from a distance.
Flying from
robotic lives
that end at five,
the current
takes them, envelops Still,
it all reminds me
that this is real,
that this bird
might finally
find his worm.



Angelina Yin
Mirror



Sarah Vue
Sunday Afternoon

Greg Brown

Warren Wants to Give Birth

Warren visits a Psychiatrist, Dr. Leonard Tanner, on the advice of his wife after he admits to her that he has always fantasized about giving birth. He explains to the doctor that he has this overwhelming desire to be able to experience pregnancy and childbirth. More than anything, he tells the doctor, he wants to know what it feels like to bond during gestation and to finally “bring a new life into the world.”

Dr. Tanner listens patiently, then asks Warren if he thinks that maybe he really just wants to become a woman. Warren scoffs at the idea and reminds Dr. Tanner about the unfathomable hardships and physical adversities endured by women – menstruation, hormonal spikes, discrepancy in pay and employment opportunities, worry about the potential of cervical and breast cancer, menopause. Warren assures Dr. Tanner that he would never want to be subject to those types of concerns and complications. He would much rather only experience that beautiful feeling after “a few grunts that resulted in the gift of a new life”.

Dr. Tanner tells Warren he might be able to help dissuade those urges, even by the end of their session, by doing a few simple sensory exercises while they talk. He asks Warren to lie on the couch, and when Warren is comfortable, the doctor picks up a large box of medical books and places it on Warren’s stomach.

“We’ll do the next part of our session with those books on your belly to simulate pregnancy”, the doctor teases through a smile. He then asks Warren question after question about his quandary. What his mood is, how he copes and rationalizes his odd desire, how his wife is dealing with his birth fantasies, what he thinks psychotherapy could do to help him.

After almost 30 minutes of discussion Warren labors in his breathing and tells the doctor he really has to go to the bathroom because the box is pushing on his diaphragm and bladder. Dr. Tanner removes the box and excuses him to go to the restroom. When Warren returns, the doctor asks him if he realizes that the discomfort he felt for those few minutes is like that 24-7 for a woman in her last trimester.

Warren, a little embarrassed, admits he never really thought about how uncomfortable pregnancy really is.

“Well doctor, I guess I could do without the pregnancy part, what I really want to feel is the labor and the birth.”

“Are you sure?” Dr. Tanner scans Warren curiously and raises his brow. “Even after what you experienced during the pregnancy experiment?”

Warren pauses for a moment. “Women do it everyday.” he replies.

“Yes”, the doctor says, “but labor and delivery is rather uncomfortable and painful and can last hours and hours.”

“They all say it’s worth it in the end”, Warren sits up straight and nods confidently.

“OK”, the doctor sighs, “but with labor and delivery, you can’t go back...you have to follow through.”

Warren looks his psychiatrist in the eye. “I’m ready”.

Dr. Tanner looks around his office. “Well! To begin with, we don’t have a proper bed or stirrups so we’ll improvise a bit.”

The doctor asks Warren to stand up with his back against the wall and squat as was done by many cultures before more modern birthing methods were available. Warren excitedly gets into a squatted position against the office wall. Dr. Tanner then tells Warren to begin breathing in long, slow breaths, and to close his eyes and focus on some object, theme or focal point other than the pain to follow.

Warren closes his eyes and says, “What do you mean ‘to follow’ doc?” The words are barely off of his tongue before Dr. Tanner kicks Warren squarely between the legs.

Warren goes down in a heap. He holds his stomach and moans. As he writhes on the floor in agony he occasionally groans out an expletive. As the pain lets up, he pants for breath and the doctor now stands above him, smiling.

“A kick like that is about how labor pains and contractions feel to a woman...more or less.”

Warren, still in pain and propping himself up on the wall, sheepishly looks at the doctor just as the second kick connects.

“These pains occur every 5 to 8 minutes,” the doctor continues matter of factly.

As Warren repeats his previous fit of pain and profanities, the doctor goes to his desk drawer and returns to a barely recovering War-

ren, now kneeling with his hands cupped over his privates.

“Why did you do that again?”, Warren whispered incredulously.

“I told you, Warren: with childbirth, you can’t go back – you have to follow through. Your wife followed through, your mother followed through, it’s not something you can just stop once it goes into motion. We still have almost 5 minutes left in our session today.”

Warren looks up and notices the doctor is holding a pair of scissors.

“What are the scissors for Doctor?” Warren’s eyes grow wide.

The doctor snips at the air a few times and says,

“You know Warren, your situation and yearning is not the first case like this I’ve had. I’ve actually had more than you might imagine, and I’ve cured them all. Usually my patients lose all their inclination after we go through the pregnancy simulation and some discussion. A few need to experience a labor and contraction exercise...or two. If these fail to get results, an episiotomy usually does the trick...”



John Nieuwesma

Heartaches by the Number



John Nieuwsma

In the Shadow of the Valley



Danny Brogden
Reflection

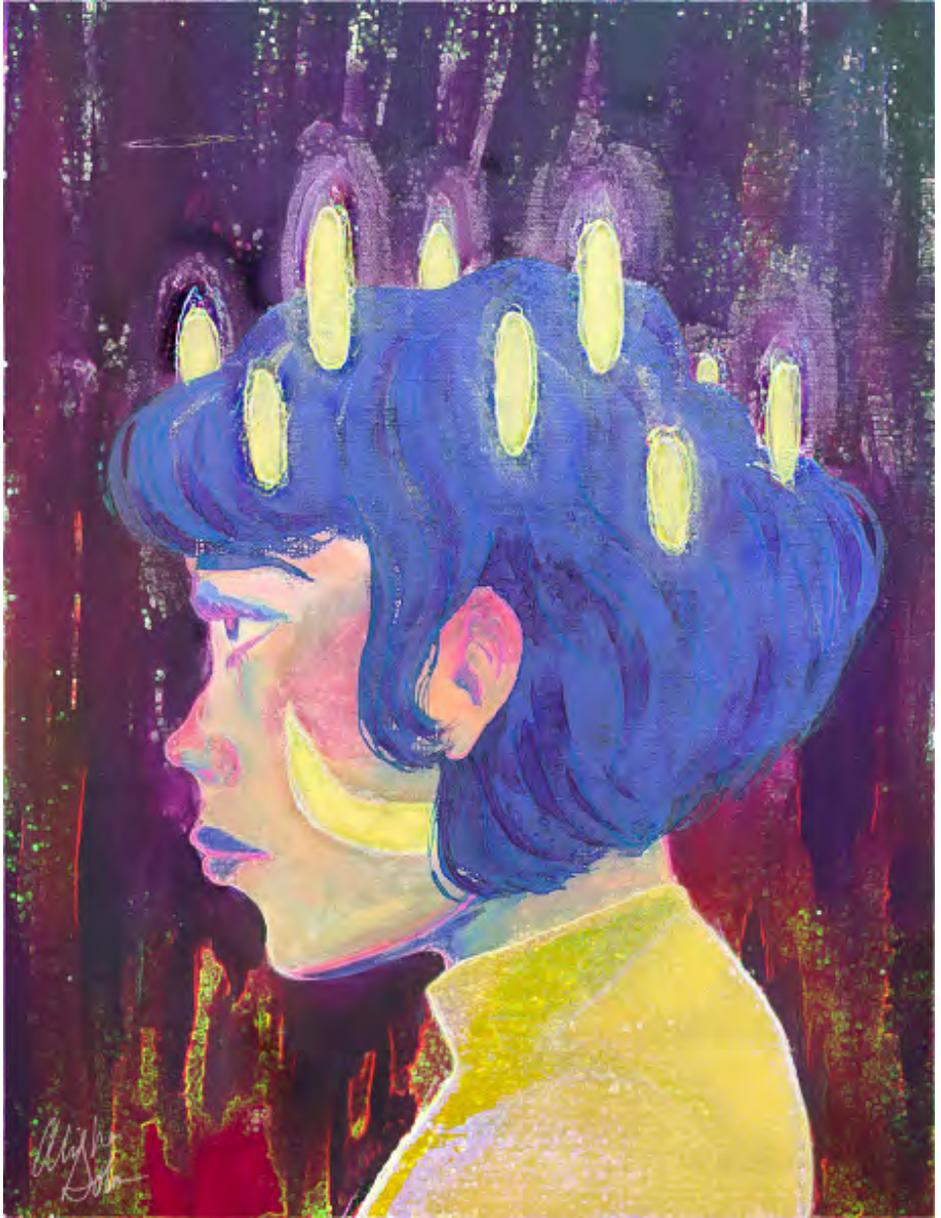
Noah Cooter

Sumac

There must be some sort of design.
To gently alight
like a snowflake on tongue,
the shivering child
bastard landlord becomes.
A chain such as this does not break.

A dust on the lens settled fine.
To wake without sight
though the aperture flung,
completely beguiled
the machine steady hums.
Cruel mirror—you've made us opaque.

Do climb from the mud as a vine.
To reach such a height
climbing sumac is strung,
allure of the wild
each young seedling succumbs.
There must be some sort of mistake.



Alisha Solomon
Yue

Liz Maglio

Paradise

I am walking in the forest where I grew up. The familiar damp dirt beneath my feet reminds me of joyful days spent wandering my childhood home. The wind whistles through the pine trees and creates a symphony of bird-like trilling that calls me home. As I weave through cluster after cluster of trees, I brush my palms along familiar aged bark; each groove is a maze of experiences we have shared together. These elder trees grew with me. My fingertips caress each and every tree in greeting as I pay tribute to my old friends. Sauntering through to the densest thicket of trees, I raise my face to feel the warm sun on my skin. I can't help but sigh deeply in a rich, warm, contented release. The birds are chirping a joyful chorus, their symphonic melody the soundtrack to this visage of peace. After a brief respite I continue on, a skip in my step, gaze still lingering on the sky. I've walked these paths many a time and I know my way around the familiar dirt roads.

I am content to meander the day away until cool clear night sets in, and the owls come out to ponder "who who who," and the crickets play violin legs, and the frogs accompany them with their croaking bass calls. Calmed by the familiar music, I decide to find my way to my favorite meadow, to lie in the sweet smelling tall grasses and gaze upon the magnificently twinkling stars. With a destination in mind, I change my pace and swiftly trek towards the field where I will gaze upon the stars and dream of far-off lands and tall, dark, handsome heroes until the sun peeks over the horizon and I can dream away another day. But just before the river where the two otters play, I stumble on a bramble, trip, and find myself falling down, down, down, into a deep, dark, pit.

The darkness startles me. Gone are the stars and the moon and the crickets. All I can see are the tops of pine trees, their thick branches obscuring the light. The darkness is all-consuming, and the gentle breeze that I was once at peace with has turned against me, into a bitter, chilling storm.

"I will escape. I will escape. Climb. Climb. Climb." The words come to me from nowhere and I allow them to breeze through my lips, carried out with my startled exhalation of breath.

I squint against the darkness and try to find a foothold, anything to grasp

and pull myself out. My eyes fall on long thin roots that I attempt to get a grip on, but just when I begin to climb, the roots cut my palm and I am on the ground, bloodied and so, so cold. Determined not to give up, I grit my teeth and dig my fingers and toes into the packed, unyielding dirt. I spend what must be hours climbing, sliding, and scrabbling up the side of the merciless pit. Despite my every effort, I cannot get more than a foot or so off the bottom before I fall. I fall so many times.

Eventually, a sob gets past the stoic bodyguard in my chest and rips itself from my throat, and with an unbidden gasp, tears pour down my dirt-covered cheeks. I'm stuck here. For how long? Maybe forever. Despair drowns any joy I was once capable of feeling, and I curl up into a cold, sad ball with my knees drawn tightly to my chest. The earth that was once a comfortable pillow, a reminder of home, now feels hard and unforgiving.

An unknowable amount of time passes in a haze of tears and numbness. It must be days, or weeks, though I do not see the sun or moon from my place underneath the ground. My only sight is a caked film of dirt and blood that I cannot bear to attempt to clear. The crickets and the frogs and the owl stay gone, and I can only hear my own gut-wrenching, soul-searing cries, too loud in the otherwise-silence around me. I lay unmoving, no longer cold, just numb. I fall asleep, and stay under; it's much safer there, away from the painful nothingness.

I do not rise from the numbness until I feel a soft, strange wetness plop on my cheek, then another, and another. A cleansing rain slowly washes away the pain and grime and sorrow from my eyes. I sit up, dazed and confused, and look around, not recognizing my new home. Out of the corner of my eye, I see a rope, dangling over the side of the pit. I give it a gentle tug, and meet resistance. Curiously, I use the rope as a tether, and climb my way out of the pit of my despair, ignoring the sudden sharp, stabbing pain emanating from my slashed hand. By the time I reach the lip of the hole, both my arms and my lungs are screaming in protest, and the remnants of dirt and blood mingle with fresh sweat on my mistreated skin. After awhile I'm done breathing heavily; it takes some time look around for my savior. I see nothing and no one, except a small puddle of water left over from the rain. I look down to see my reflection, and catch my first glimpse of my own ghastly face, gazing proudly back at me. She looks at me with her head cocked to the side.

“Finally ready to save yourself?”

I nod twice, once tentatively, and once assuredly. I save myself from the darkness, so that I can once again gaze upon the magnificent stars. I pick myself up and, stepping cautiously away from that ugly pit of despair, I walk into the cool sweet water from the creek and wash my face and hands. The water is a healing balm and feels so good; I have nearly forgotten what “good” feels like. I shake off excess water like a dog after a bath and stride to the meadow that’s now in sight, flopping down into the grass. The sun warms me to my very core and somehow, I manage to drift off to sleep.

When I have had my fill of rest, I grab some gloves, shovel, and a lighter, and make my way back through the dense heart of the forest until I come across bramble, the ugly plant that tripped me up. I set down everything but the shovel and exclaim at the top of my lungs, “Time for this bitch to go!”

I dig up that traitorous bush and toss it into the dark, cold hole, and toss my lit lighter in with it to burn the darkness into ash, so that it may float away on the next melodic wind and leave my paradise to me.

Jared Baker

Moonlit Tarn

The sharp sound of steel sliding through dirt startled the scene. Birds halted their cheerful chirping in the trees. The waves receded after crashing to the bottom of the cliff. Only the man dared to break with a sigh, releasing his grip from the hilt of the sword. His eyes traced down the blade before reaching the ground. He stared down at his feet, the pair of bottles he had strapped to his torso with a rope in his vision. He took to grasping one, holding it tight as he shut his eyes.

The world seemed to come in again, another crash of the waves below shook his internal focus. He released the bottle as the world clouded the thought. Starting up again, the birds drew his attention to the trees, oddly grouped down the way on the edge of the cliff. The limbs stretched out over the drop and to the sun above. His left shoulder ached, so he took to the tree's example and letting his right hand eclipse the sun. There was no threat of a storm in the sky, as he peered through the shafts of light beaming through. The sun was hanging high, providing little to no shadows to cast. The man grimaced at the position, his right arm tensing in wake.

His arm fell to his side, and his head returned to a more comfortable resting. The vast expanse of the horizon, light blue sky over dark blue ocean, caused him pause. He held and stared. Soon, however, the activity proved to be a poor practice for furthering time's ticker. He shook off the action, but not the thoughts. Those forced him to bring his glare closer, to where he planted his sword. To the left of him and the blade, a boulder, half his height, rested. It was a few feet before the cliff's dropping point. It didn't share the ground's shades of green grass, or the moss that blanketed surrounding rocks. This one shone white and perfect, weathered by the force that most would call water.

He placed his right hand to it, caressing the smoothed surface with his thumb. He nodded, having to make one more reassurance, just so he could believe himself. Placing the weight of his body on his hand, his left side slide down the face, allowing him to sit. He kept his hand near the rock, allowing his fingertips to know the silk touch. His head rested with his body, on the boulder, and, as the sun beat down upon him, the birds sang their songs, and the waves gave their beat, and the wind soon

whistled past the sharp of his blade, and the rock his left ear was placed began to hum. The sounds invited him, and he followed, with closed over eyelids. His right hand soon dropped from the rock as his breathing settled. The pure white boulder singing him to sleep.

Screeching; the hum betrayed his ears, and he pushed back against the rock with his left arm. Startled he gripped his left wrist. He did so to the extreme of self harm. That sensation was surprising enough to prompt him to halt. Nevermind the boulder's rude awakening or his own fascination with his left arm, he was struck with panic at the visibility. The boulder that woke him was as perfect as it had been but the world was mute. His head whipped to the sky to see the Moon replace the sun, lagging behind it's placement. Only the clean white rays of moonlight gave the scene its color now.

He shot up, springing to his feet, and ripping his sword from the ground. In his frantic play his left hand came to his chest, patting the couple of bottles. Again, this demanded his attention, forcing him to look down to see his left hand fondling the glass. He had to shake the rapture, keeping in mind his reasons.

The steel of his blade gently knocked the perfect white stone, appearing to glow in comparison to the somewhat blackened steel he held. Nothing happened, though. He knocked stone to metal once more, yielding the same results. For affirmation he side eyed the moon, before turning to the cliff itself and taking caution to peek over. The drop was far more than the crash of the waves would have made him believe. On cue, knowing his eyes were trained, the cliff shed some slivers from its edge. A shock shot down his left arm to his finger tips. Forming a tight fist with his left, and, gripping the handle of his sword a bit too tight, he readied himself.

With a gingerly glide fo the blade, much like the one he gave the white boulder, he waved the blackened steel before him. Below. The sword was aimed after the cliff ended. The sword did not, however, slice so easily through the air, but knocked against it. The man allowed his lips to curve into a smile. He gently skimmed the object that kept itself out of sight, but nonetheless was there. His smile wavered in his blade on being able to etch out a two foot wide path, of invisible base. His nostrils flared with forced breath.

He got to his knees and right hand, still holding the sword. He

looked down. He replaced his position, forcing weight on his left hand as his right brandished the sword in front of him to acknowledge the unseeable path. He inched closer to the cliff. The resistance against his sword proved the object's existence, but he couldn't help hesitation in pushing down with his left hand onto it. The force held true. With it, confidence flooded in, and he scuttled forward.

He suppressed laughter, his excitement cutting through the trepidation; that was until, of course, his sword stopped finding pathway. The levity he delighted in was quickly snuffed out. All his joints locked up. He would scuttle backward if the prospect of missing the straight shot back wasn't so paralyzing. He attempted to turn the stiffness into resolve, but that only limited his movements. He took to resting his stomach completely on the path, and feeling the edges. The path did not end, it simply sloped down, and curved. Once realizing this, the man shut his eyes, letting his forehead knock the hardened path he lay on. Opening them back up sent a shiver down his spine. The surface kept him up, but the fall to a watery grave was still everclear. Luckily, with this vision of doom, he also spied the light. His destination, carved into the side of this cliff, as far down the edge as it was up from the waves. Clenching his fists and gritting his teeth he worked his posture back up and crawled down the slope. He did so with more caution and less speed than before, flinching at every other inch when the path was not exactly where he expected.

This game would have been better suited for a blind man. Then again, however, he would not have been able to see his salvation if that were the case. Arduous as the process was, he was making adequate time, even if the moon was hanging low. That, and the proximity of the cave he sought, gave him haste. His etching of the path before became less detailed, as the path proved to be a straight shot to the mouth. Closer and closer, the sound of those crashing waves faded out; their rhythm replaced by hums. The dull moonlight could not compete with the brilliance before him. He almost forgot the precarious foothold, almost. Once the ground of the cave itself was set upon he leapt onto it with force. He stood tall and gleeful, sheathing his weapon he glared at the solid rock. The light was what pulled his eyes, as it danced on the ground itself. The blues, greens, and purples blended and swayed. Their gleam took his sight from the floor to the walls, to the ceiling and deeper. He abandoned the moonlight for the light of the cave.

Greeting him with civility, he found the Tarn. It was shallow, but was ever fed by the stalactites above; dripping. Like a new sun and moon the pond itself radiated pure. Every drop of liquid sent a perfect circle out to the rest of itself, letting the cave know of this addition. The man let the sounds and the lights occupy him. He stood perfectly still. Far too long.

His two glass bottles clinked, alerting him of his goal. With this reminder he came to the lip of the pond, dropping to his knees. His prayer and offering was much too quick. So much so that the Tarn had been able to barely calm itself, ceasing the stalactites' contributions, before the man's first bottle was uncorked and dunked into the pool. Water filled the glass. The cork was in his teeth, but was spat out to his left hand. Scooping the bottle out with his right hand he pressed the cork back with care. Cradling it with both hands the man could have burst. He pressed it to his chest in an embrace, letting few tears flow. Not too disgraceful.

However, after securing the filled bottle he readied the second. Plunging the empty glassware caused the light of the water to fix. He couldn't be bothered to notice, focused on taking more. Much to his dismay, the bottle he pulled from the water was not filled. His brows furrowed. He looked from the bottle to the Tarn, and then he noticed the lights. The waltz upon the rock had stopped and the colors blended to a muted pink. The waves crashing outside jolted him as he turned to see the mouth of the cave and pale moonlight.

Take only what is needed.

He stood, frantically eyeing the cave, as he drew his sword with his right hand. His search was fruitless. As he steadied himself his left hand proved light, and as he looked upon it the bottle was gone. The cork and the bottle hung in the air above the pond. He kept his sword out, brandishing it as he gazed upon his floating possession. The black steel defied the Tarn.

Be calm.

He did not heed and took a step. He was to take another, to step within the Tarn. He was not allowed, as the cork vanished and the bottle was flung to him. The glass shattered on impact. He staggered back pressing his left palm to his forehead. Blood poured from it. He had to shut his left eye, trying in vain to comfort the wound. His right eye was attempting to search for the shards of glass that scattered to the ground, but there were none to be found.

What is deserved.

The sharp click of his sword being sheathed gave him fright. He had to look between his sheath and his hand to confirm the sword had moved. The Tarn took his trepidation and rectified itself, letting the hum return. This signalled the stalactites to resume feeding the pond, and lights to dance on, shifting colors once more.

Leave, now.

The filled bottle pounded against his chest, binding to the rope. His left arm ached. He heeded, looking to the mouth of the cave once more to see the moonlight waning. Wordlessly, thanklessly, he scrambled back outside. The blade did not leave its sheath, as he took to simply sketching out the path with his stained left palm. The blood was a blessing for this, as it stained the air and conformed to the shape of the path. Marking edges needlessly he made his trek back. The moon losing its battle with the sun, falling to the horizon. The sun's rays, the colour of vibrant white light overtaking the world. With every beam of light for the new day beating upon him the man cared less for his paintings, his blood, and clawed his way forward. His body almost tumbling off the path as he lost footing time and again. He made his way up the spiral and to the straight shoot to the cliff. To that perfect white boulder.

Well-nigh.

His ears rang as he stared at the boulder, rising in his vision. He was falling. The path could not sustain with the Sun burning it away. His hands came to grasp the cliff side, fingers digging into the rock itself. His body swung to slam against the cliff face. The pain was nothing to him. The accompanied sound, the same he heard in the cave, caused him anguish. A creeping cold and wet battled on his torso against prickling warmth. Shards of glass piercing his chest and abdomen, leaking blood to mix with the water of the Tarn. Now did the salty tears ran down his cheeks. His teeth threatening to crack if he clenched any harder. He wanted to scream. He was cut short, as the portion of cliff his right hand had grabbed came loose. All his weight tugged on his left hand. His left arm felt as if it would tear. It did not, as the blood, clashing red to compliment the green grass just above it, proved to slick his hand. He fell away, like a sliver of the cliff, down. His fall let him gaze upon the cave once more. The sunlight could not outshine the caves colors, the Tarn's lights gave the man a beautiful display as he flew past. He shut his eyes quickly, want-

ing that to be his last sight in life.
Charmed.

He jolted. His eyes shooting open with a sharp inhale. The sun was high noon, just as it had been when he had first rested beside the perfect white boulder. His left side felt sore, resting even for a short time against hard stone left it numbed. He pushed with his right hand to sit up. The blackened steel blade was still planted firmly to his right. There was a ringing in his ears, but the waves and chirping birds fought for his attention nonetheless. He took to settling his heart, breathing in meditative rhythm. His head throbbed, but upon caressing it with his right hand no gash or dried blood was felt. His eyes crept down, finding his chest obscured by a bottle. He couldn't help but shudder. Taking the bottle in his right hand, he swirled the contents - perfectly clear water.

The man stood. Going to the edge of the cliff. He gripped his left shoulder tightly. Adopting the kneel for prayer and offering with grace and respect, he took time. Standing after a brief time, he plucked his sword. Looking back to the horizon, he pressed the blade to the stump of his left shoulder. Nodding once, in this awkward stance, he slid the black steel across his skin. He swiped the blade at the horizon, letting droplets of blood fling forward and down to the waters below. He sheathed his blade, and pressed his right palm to his left shoulder. Turning to the white stone that accompanied him in his sleep a black hand print was now stained on its face. Left hand print, painted with black blood.

The man reassured himself and left the area, returning from once he came with the bottle filled with my blessing.



Sawyer Dell'Aquila
Highlighted Beauty

Athena Santos
Souls

Lost-
in the middle of my greatest storm
I find you
 We wander
Through the endless chaos

And though our purpose
may be to roam,
though our bodies
force us to
Ricochet
 Against the stars

I will thank the empty voids
we dare to fill

For allowing our collision.

Even though the cosmos never speak,
our voices fill the stillness.
And in those flashes of space we share;

Silence sounds so much sweeter
 Between beats in your chest.

Cradled through our unconscious flights,
The endless, tumultuousness of our minds—
 too full to keep to ourselves.
Force my skin to remind me
 I've experienced something
 Powerful

And don't let go-
Not until I feel like an earthquake
imprisoned
in bone.



Kalina Karbowski
Sensations

Athena Santos
Magic Mirror

She walked up to the vanity as calm as a cloud, gently floating across the sky. She was as beautiful as an autumn breeze with the poise and agility of a dryad tree. She sits and stares for a minute or two before uttering the words her mother used to recite every night

“Magic Mirror on the Wall- Help to fix me, once and for all.”

“you are ugly,

you are fat.

let’s give anorexia a try.”

The voice from her eyes whispers.

She feels a presence at the nape of her neck as it slithers down her collarbone towards her heart and seeps into her skin. Her perfection wavers for a moment when she replies, “I already have, Master. Its been months since I’ve eaten more than lettuce and nuts. What more can I do?” She pleads.

“look how fat you are,

do you even fit in a car?

just look at you.

you look pregnant and eat like it too.

but you’ll never get that way,

with the way you look today.”

Her eyes glaze over and she breaths deeper into the abuse. It fuels her, motivates her, inspires her and the whispers grow into speech.

“your face is so big,

your chin has a gizzard,

you smell like a pig,

and have the skin of a lizard.

your hair finds the static from balloons miles away,

get ready for a lifetime of, ‘you want fries with that?’

Okay!”

The room begins to shake, the vanity twitches in possession. Her nails dig into the wood, leaving another set of marks on the mahogany veneer as lights flicker overhead.

“You don’t just have thunder thighs
But a whole God Damn Storm,
With lightning streaks of cellulite.
Has That Become the Norm?”

“No Master, I will aspire to be better. I promise I will be pretty one day. You’ll see.” Her voice is monotone now, her trance has consumed her and she absorbs the Mirror’s words. The Mirror is screaming now, beating her esteem black and blue.

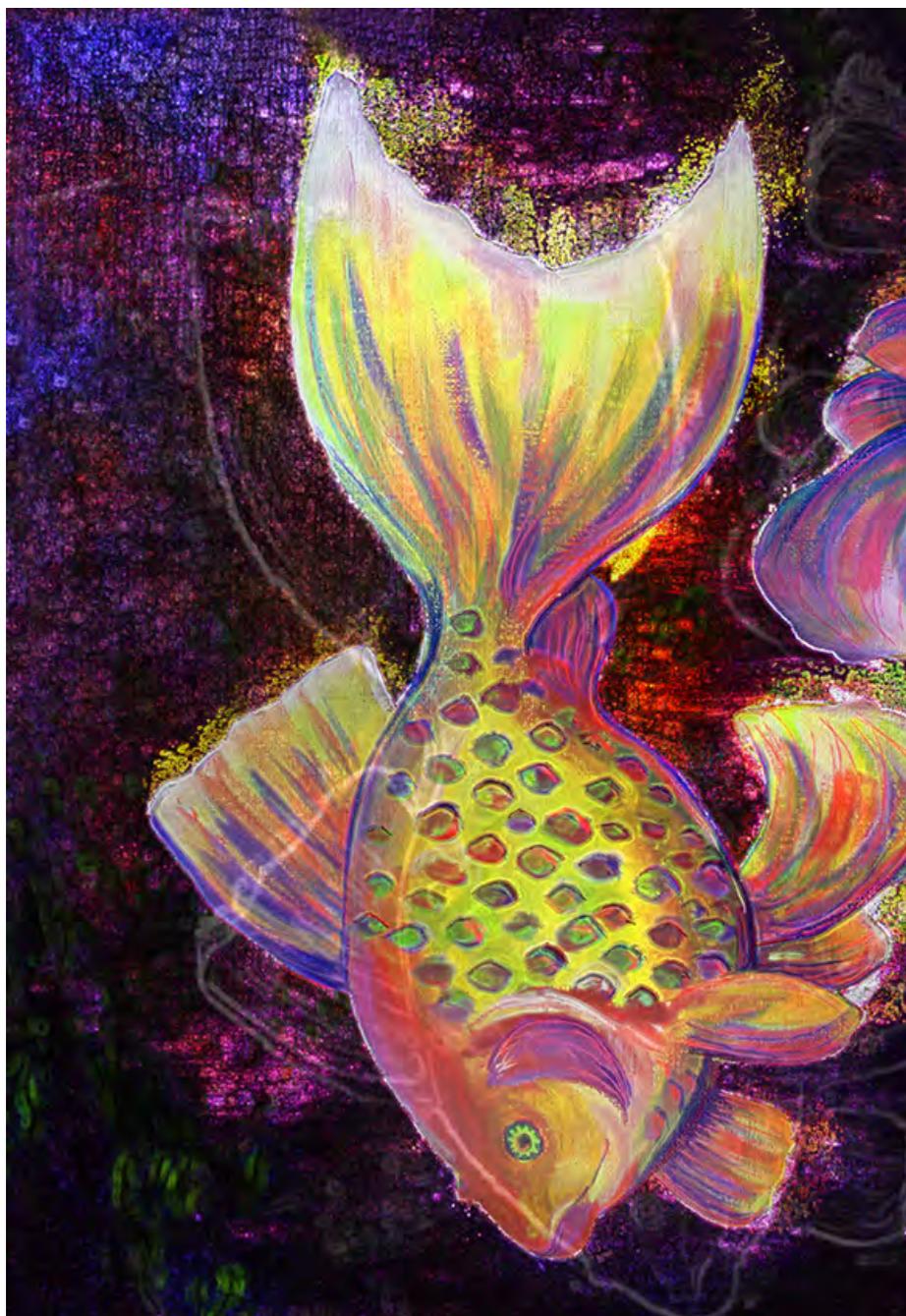
“JUST STOP TALKING!
YOU SOUND RETARDED AND LAME!
YOU’RE ELOQUENCE IS NON EXISTENT
AND YOUR DISCRETION IS
ANYTHING BUT TAME!”

She is shaking now, she is breaking, she is destroyed. But she loves getting lost in all the noise.

“SILENCE IS GOLDEN,
AND DUCT TAPE IS SILVER,
UTILIZE BOTH FOR OPTIMAL RESULTS.
GET USED TO THE SILENCE,
SOMEONE ELSE CAN SAY
WHAT YOU HAVE TO SAY
TEN TIMES BETTER THAN YOU.
SHUT UP.
SHUT UP!
JUST, SHUT UP!”

She gasps. Her face recomposed, she looks back and sees the same girl staring back. Nothing has happened, no change ensued. She is still the most beautiful woman in the room. She sighs and smiles, her radiance returned. Then she pulls out her laptop and stares at the screen. She sees a beautiful woman, whose smile is like the sun, her hair like silk and joy emanates from her every pore. Then she clicks on the comment box and types,

“#JabbaTheSlut... what a fat hoe.”



Alisha Solomon
Acidification



A large, colorful koi fish with blue, white, and orange patterns is swimming in a dark tank. The background is dark with several bright red lights creating a dramatic effect. The fish is the central focus, moving from left to right.

Felicia Alvarenga
Jared Baker
Danny Brogden
Evan Brown
Greg Brown
Noah Cooter
Ian Chew
Jelena Cheytam
Sawyer Dell Aquila
Jordan Zachary J. Ellis
Keren Franco
May Alexandra Freitas
Ana Habs
Joycelyn Ho
Sophia Ison
Kalina Karbowski
Liz Maglio
Joste McGuire
Lynda Monari

John Nieuwsma
Lauren Oliver
Samantha Pendleton
Ted Peterson
Laura Prilutsky
Fareeha Qadir
Grecia Rivera
Mary Rose
Emily Sanderfer
Athena Santos
Neni Silva
Nicholas Singh
Alisha Solomon
Stephante Todd
Lily Tsurumoto
Sarah Vue
Tami Whiting
Angelina Yin
West Valley Dance Theatre