



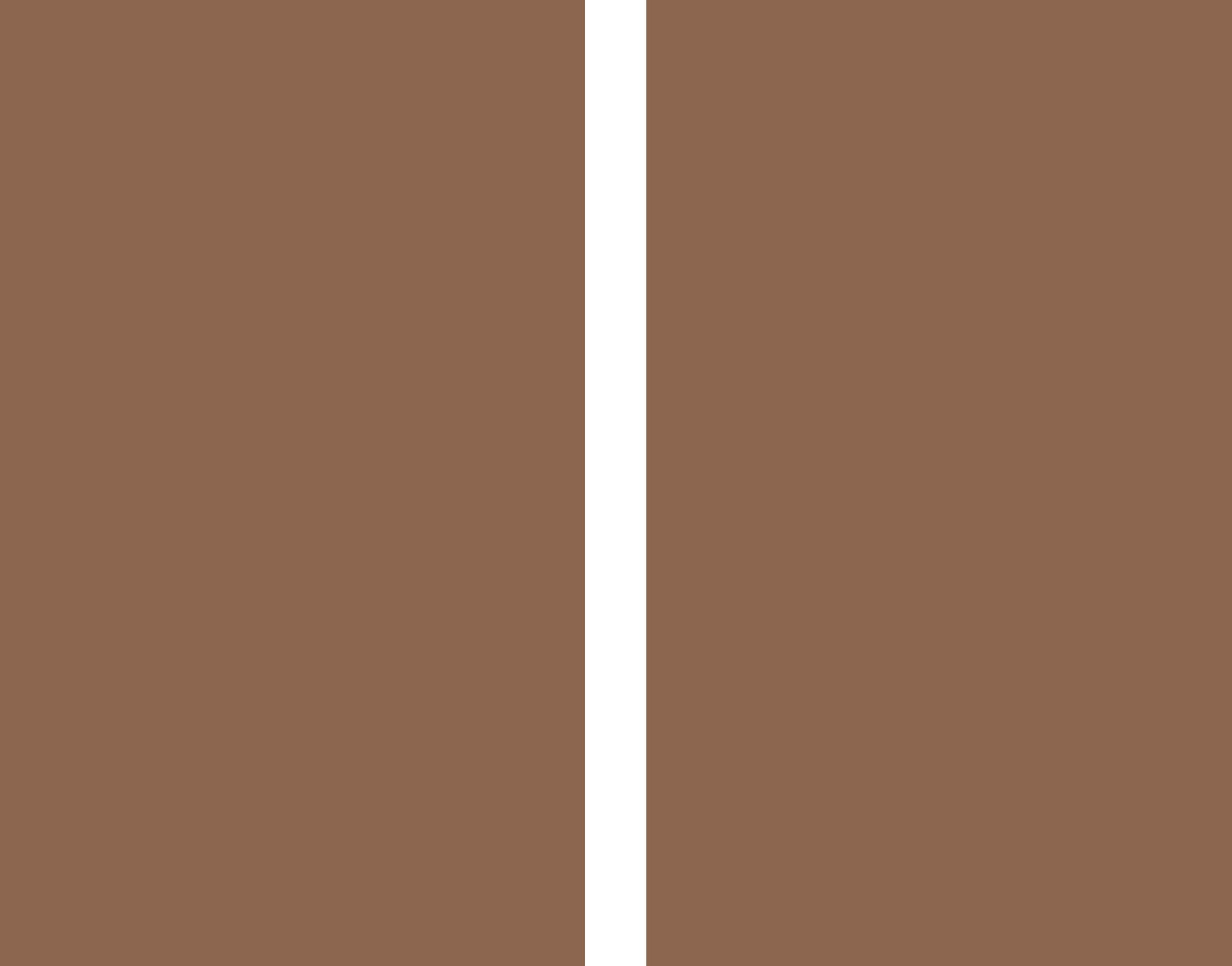
THE CAULDRON ON

2017-2018

VOLUME 38

THE CAULDRON

KALAMAZOO COLLEGE



**THE
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ON**



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All of you, our readers, for supporting the beautiful work folded into these pages.

And Diane Seuss, for guiding this ship into our harbor.

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Divine Crow Awards

The Divine Crow Awards are given each year to three exceptional pieces in *The Cauldron*. A writer from the extended Kalamazoo community judges the pieces blindly.

This year's judge is Fran Hoepfner, a Kalamazoo alumna currently living and working in Chicago.

The recipients of this year's Divine Crow Awards are "Apple Skin" by Kate Liska, "Paw Paw Nocturne" by Karina Pantoja, and "In Ohio My Father Teaches English Literature" by Boemin Park.



Stephanie Vibbert Award

The Stephanie Vibbert Award is given to one work which exemplifies the intersection between creative writing and community engagement. This award honors Stephanie Vibbert, a senior English & psychology double major who died in a car accident returning from a peace march in Washington D.C. in 2003. Stephanie's life was passionately devoted to both creativity and to community service. This award was created to encourage Kalamazoo College writers to use their creativity to reflect upon and explore issues of poverty, human rights, sexual orientation, race, class, gender, and cultural diversity.

The recipient of this year's Stephanie Vibbert Award is "*Beautiful, I Say*" by Katia Dermott.



Preface

As *The Cauldron* sets sail this year, it is guided quietly by the figure you see on the cover. There is a gravity to his body, to his motion, and to the air through which he moves. His steering wheel brings to mind our own memories of being in the car, from freeing drives spent with the windows down to constricting drives spent in the back seat without enough air.

We decided to split *The Cauldron* into three categories based on what we witnessed in our peers' submissions: "Bodies," "Gods," and "Breathing." Much like being at the steering wheel, these three things can also provide us with incredible freedom or frustrating constrictions.

The first section, "Bodies," encompasses the twisting, coarse, and often beautiful way some of the work in this book reflects on the human body. We're in love with the new ways our authors talked about the beauty and the grossness of the human form.

The second section, "Gods," holds the pieces that seemed to be governed by some higher power. This includes societal norms, actual gods, the desire for immortality, and a general belief and hope found in something larger than ourselves.

The third section, "Breathing," is *The Cauldron's* exhale. It's filled with pieces that explore lungs, mouths, and the power of letting go of something you've been holding in. Each of these pieces have a breath of their own.

We led each section with a poem that centers around a family meal. This illustrates the significance of our families and our homes, whatever they look like, on the way we view our bodies, our gods, and our ability to breathe.

We are honored to have read and worked on all the fantastic work found in this collection. We learned a lot, laughed a lot, and found ourselves inspired.

Thank you for reading *The Cauldron* – we are proud and grateful curators.

-The Editors

Emma Peters and Kate Liska

Family Dinner

Anonymous

Bloody hamburger meat and pickles
Gnashed between teeth and tongue.
Flecks of testosterone spewed
Onto Mom's placemats.
I am the excess mustard
That dribbled down
Their chins
And hardened.
A yellow stain on
Barbed wire whiskers
That Mom will surely
Wipe away
With a warm, wet finger.

A Handful of Fingers

Maggie Doele



Sage Infused, Illegal Pu\$\$y In The Royal 'Hood

Yuri Lucian Gutierrez-Garcia

*“There’s levels to magic and he cannot tell
He fuck with my bruja, my pussy a spell
My toto is special, got locks like a jail
It’s Polo, it’s Tommy, it’s Mecca, it’s Nauti”
-Princess Nokia’s “Tomboy”*

I walk with my abuela’s hands, burning salvia
‘cross the 2 a.m. hood. I tiptoe around
Millard and 27th with knives. I flipped
a santo on its head to get you, and made
an amarre for you to stay. I bear heaven,
with skyscraper pussy roses, and bring hell
with danzon dancing skeletons wearing carnations.
I wear thrifted ‘98 Prada and soak candles
in the shower, where my tamed plants dwell.
There’s levels to magic and he cannot tell.

My pussy magia, not in wetness,
not in tightness. My toto magic.
The knives on my thrift store handbag
got you ready to be cut from my red ribbon tunnel
you enter. In and out. In and out. In and out.
I got you on an amarre. My pussy swell
and pink. Choked, until the string unties
by itself. I ring the rain god in every time
it’s stroked and beckon devotion to everything I expel.
He fuck with my bruja, my pussy a spell.

Mami slapped my hand when it slipped
down there. Unholy Guadalupe!
Mami it feels good. Holy hoe!
I made my blood orange bleed when I
dug my fingers in too deep. Holy sangre.
Newly discovered pussy magic, all hail!
Racy, lacy pubes knit the pleasure path
going down. I Mexicana kiss the sage-infused
pussy folktale, and witness it prevail
My toto is special, got locks like a jail.

My gold hoops can’t be penetrated.
No finger, no dick is allowed through them.
Get down lil ma, but never without knives
at hand. Never without your K-Swiss shoes.
I spit rubbing alcohol, and resist fire on my tongue.
You can catch me at a juke party
wearing cempazuchitl crowns
and a baptism gold chain bearing my name.
You ask what I wear, ‘cause girls like me too po’, too naughty.
It’s Polo, it’s Tommy, it’s Mecca, it’s Nauti.

First Time Fireside

Madeline Lauver

—after Diane Seuss

You like it hard and fast, don't you, with
cream and lilacs strewn across the porch
and stones in a pot in the kitchen.

You like it swirled around with
a lazy pinky by Tiffany's, you like it
fifty years ago when the bodies in the river
wore gray sweatshirts, you like stray
hairs and unshaven dogs and Moms
cussing in the house when the thimble
falls off, landing in an ant's clatter
on the hardwood floors, not wood
like makeshift bed frame, but deep,
sturdy, nailed in nestled in no pillows
potato sacks or pillowed quilts. Stitched not woven, pierced

and all the kids gathering 'round to see
the blacktop blood pact stand in it, thumb to thumb
and we all fall down. You like it
cold on tile, self surgery slated
between dinnertimes, like stealing a second
for a cigarette hunched over and over
again, bumming quarters for a fresh tampon
off of peeing women in the gas station bathroom,
flushed and emptied and dirty and raw.

You like it first time fireside, not
rare not golden, you like it bronze
watch in the jewelry drawer just went off.

Apple Skin

Kate Liska

When the doctor said, "It's only a few cells," all I could imagine was my cervix, pink and pillowy like the inside of my cheek or the underside of my tongue, smeared with a cluster of peach-yellow dots, their edges cancerous and wiggling. I recalled the stretching that same cervix underwent when an IUD was implanted beyond it some years before, the painful dilation blurring my eyes and quivering my shoulders. I'd howled upon the exam table as a doctor quelled my fertility by way of my widened cervix. My cervix, once swollen with youth, now stretched and stained with HPV and the threat of cervical cancer.

"It's only a few cells. Nothing pre-cancerous," the doctor repeated. But those awful orange orbs wouldn't leave my eyes; I imagined reaching a hand up there myself and scraping away the looming cancer with a fingernail before a doctor ever had to. I imagined a nameless nurse raking a butter knife against that innocent tissue; I imagined her freezing patches of it while my feet hung strangely in stirrups. I imagined my cervix thin as apple skin after the procedure, forcing me to deliver my babies by C-section instead of the natural birth I'd for so long craved. Each month I stared at my ovulation fluid, searched it for a signal that I had passed what might someday be cancer. Weeks after that I prayed to bleed it gone.

I was 20 then, hesitantly partaking in college dating and hookups before my marriageable days would inevitably begin. I was 20, and I took good care of my vagina after years of chronic urinary tract and yeast infections. I was 20, and I was proud, because those ailments weren't my fault: no matter how many times I peed after sex or swore off tampons or wore sagging cotton underwear, my vaginal pH and e. coli-prone urethra would never play nice.

But this: this was my fault. Those orbs had implanted themselves gently into my cervix with my permission, their culprit nameless in the years-long list of bodies I'd agreed to writhe nakedly with. I was at fault for the cancer burgeoning in my uterus and the air between my legs.

"Use a condom. Just think of it as a wake-up call," the doctor chirped as she wrote me a refill for antidepressants.

I researched. When I read that more partners means more chances to contract these diseased droplets, I swore never to sleep with another man if I wasn't sure I'd someday marry him (against my mother's advice to never choose a husband without knowing what he's like in bed). When I read that the virus could spread even beyond the barrier of a condom, I swore it off even further. I delineated my risk in early and late detection; I compared survival rates and ages of onset. I imagined myself a harried 37, children on my hip as I underwent Pap after Pap, each time the Q-tip spelling *more cancer*. I imagined my cervix pressed onto a slide beneath a microscope, strands of me beeping "positive" on a machine somewhere.

But before then, I had to tell my lovers, whose replete condoms and

Apple Skin *(continued)*

urges were futile against my electric and invisible disease.

In January, weeks after the test results came back, I called Emmet, who was my boyfriend living across the state.

“I looked it up and read for, like, two minutes,” he mumbled a few weeks later. “I guess I don’t really care.” He didn’t care about many things, and a month after that, we broke up.

In July, I told Nicholas. We’d met on a dating app back in my hometown, where he was on vacation and where I was working another summer catering weddings. One night after I got off my shift late, we made out on a boulder by the lakeshore, and I pulled away.

“I have to tell you something. I had an abnormal Pap last December. I have HPV. I want to have sex with you, but I’m told it can spread even with a condom.”

“I don’t really care,” he said cheerfully through the thick mosquito-ey midnight. “HPV is ubiquitous these days.”

Didn’t it terrify them? I wondered. What about my lesioned tissue wasn’t menacing, enough to make their legs close like iron gates? Had they never heard the click of a speculum shooting from behind their belly button, through their stomachs and into their necks, ending in their ears with a letter from their doctor that echoed *you might have cancer someday*? I couldn’t possibly convey to these men, these hungry-hearted lusting men, that the very thought of my IUD strings dangling in my sickness for seven years to come made me want to vomit.

I believed, given all the man-shaped mistakes I carried, that I would have HPV for time to come. I believed it would someday morph cancerously, and that I would need elaborate procedures to keep it at bay. I believed the mauve, puffy cervix of my adolescence would forever be dappled and asymmetrical. But on the Christmas Day after my year of cautious contagion, my next Pap returned negative. Somewhere in that year, somewhere in the spell of lovers both regrettable and regrettably gone, in the nights spent fending off my cramping cervix with overnight pads and menstrual cloths, in the innocuous afternoon pees during which ovulation was surreptitiously discovered, I had shed the awful glitter of my virus. I had also likely passed it to one of the men who claimed they didn’t mind if it, too, infected their most intimate folds. Like every other misfortune, whether by my fault or not, HPV had passed through me before I could pass through it.

When God Lived in the Great Lakes

Ian Zigterman

My bare body embraces this meeting point
of night sky and Lake Michigan, in July.
As my toes struggle to touch the sandy floor,
my spine becomes soft and fluid, a wave

without reason to break on any shore.
The rippling of my viscous vertebrae absorbs the vibrance
of tonight’s sky, only to cast it back into infinite space—
a mirror of all that exists—until the stars begin to imitate the surf,

and reflect the light swelling
from the depths of my spinal waters.

Movement

Leah Wathen

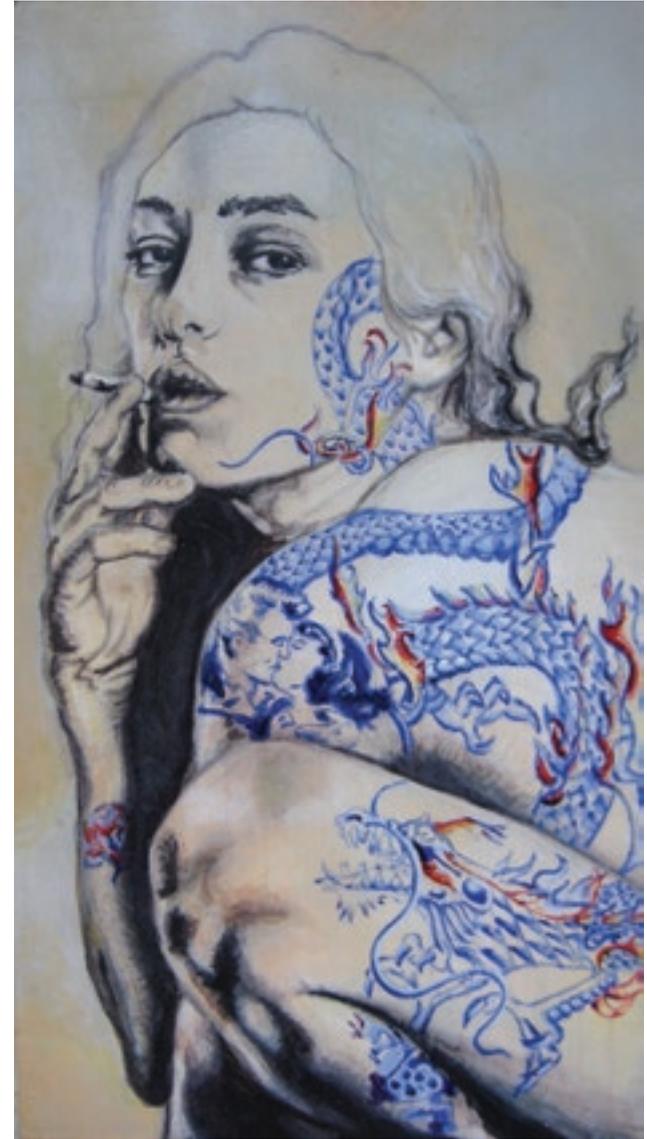
bend me, push me, scalding
touch of softness
brevity
reaction, is action.

We lean into each other. I am
terrace and she flower. She
creates art off of me, the two
of us building shapes with our
bodies. We melt into our joints,
bleeding sweatsalt, our forms
thawing, affecting. The floor is
our pedestal. The music ushers
us one way and back. Don't think
too hard. The mind is born with-
out limits. Only over time do clouds
feel solid impassable masses. In our
prompting we exist in another
dimension, unsurrounded by so many
other artist bodies. And more full of
life than we've ever felt before.

Mona Lisa After Hours

Claire Howland

—after “Layla” by Gabriel Moreno



The Next Morning Blackberry Juice Stained My Feet

Emiliana Renuart

—after “Port of Spain, 2002” by Olivia Gatwood

Once, we stole a car, you and I,
drove through sweet blackberry night until we couldn't
see straight anymore, sugar blind and now, at a motel, you bury
tiny pitted seeds between my
toes and the man at the desk, he won't face
us directly, like somehow your hands might push truth and rain into
his arid skin. I think you are pure honey don't worry, the
man at the desk knows nothing of strawberry sheets
and carpets of dripping moss or what is coaxed to grow only at
the corners of this dusty room, knows nothing of the
way you watered my feet with dusk and saliva at Sunset,
begged for sprouts in the bathtub of this insipid Motel.
You, honey, know all the ways to
suck the beehives dry until I scream
with ecstasy at the nectared drops because
never has anyone told me they
taste syrup in me like honey or blackberries, never have they smelled
my neck to compare its fragrance to the dank soil like
you when you took root in my skin, burrowing naked, a wet
seedling of a berry, waiting to burst and leak, a sickly sweet dew or sugared mold.

Frog Legs

Maggie Doele

After running the bath water, Maren knelt on the floor and began to undress Peter. His small, bird-like chest shivered under her touch as she unbuttoned his shirt. Maren marveled at how thin her baby brother's arms were, how small his hands, his fingers. How could they be so feeble-looking and breakable, almost, to the touch, and yet were considered evidence of a healthy, growing boy? They were nothing like hers, which felt clumsy and thick against Peter's bony figure. She didn't care much for her own awkward “growing” figure, but when she watched the other high school swimmer girls shower after practice, she noticed the older ones didn't look so disproportionate, so unbalanced. Sometimes Maren felt like a little naked tadpole when she was changing in the pool locker room. A little naked tadpole among a bunch of fully-grown frogs. Okay, maybe not frogs, but at least the stage of tadpole that already had its legs. Maren didn't have legs yet.

Out of habit, Peter, stretched his arms upward, allowing Maren to lift the garment off his narrow child shoulders. Maren folded the shirt, still warm, and set it on the bathroom counter. Peter watched her expectantly, his funny little arms crossed over his chest, likely to retain heat. She smiled and ran a hand through his thick blonde hair, what a dog owner might refer to as a “full coat,” what their mother referred to as “shag carpet.” Maren liked to trace the waves of Peter's hair across his scalp, which felt surprisingly similar to her own, though her head was covered in long, chestnut curls. It was strange to think about, but perhaps one day Peter would be like her. He was a boy, of course, so maybe not. But maybe he would look like her. Their parents' friends were always saying how the Harding children had the same green eyes.

Maren pried Peter's tiny belt buckle free with her fingernails, unfastened the pants, and motioned for her brother to steady himself on her shoulder as she slid them off one spidery child leg and then the other. She didn't bother to fold these as her mother instructed, as Peter was beginning to shiver more noticeably. Instead she draped them over the counter with a light toss and began removing Peter's Superman underwear while he remained balanced on her shoulder.

She knew this was nothing but the ordinary routine for Peter, but somehow she found her own fascination renewed each time she gave her brother a bath. For instance, now she noticed that his baby bottom, once round and fleshy, was beginning to appear more as a continuation of his stringy legs than its own entity. His belly, too, was losing its toddler definition. If she was a tadpole, what did that make Peter?

Maren glanced at Peter's small penis as she helped him into the tub. It still looked more like a weird little worm to her than anything else, even though she was beginning to get the idea male anatomy was supposed to evoke something other than slight intrigue. In all honesty, Maren

Frog Legs *(continued)*

didn't quite understand the importance surrounding such an organ. That was what her biology teacher had called it, right? An organ. Sure, she understood the importance of it, its role in reproduction, but as far as all of the talk she overheard in the locker room, as far as the discussion of swords and angry rams in English class, Maren wasn't convinced. Peter kicked his legs like flippers under the water, giggling, completely unaware of the apparent power bobbing like a baited hook between his legs.

Maren shook her head with playful disapproval as he began kicking harder, water splashing up out of the tub.

"Peter, you know what I am going to do if you keep that up..."

Peter paused, staring intently at Maren, his mouth slightly agape, and then shrieked with laughter and kicked more. Maren lunged toward the bathroom counter and grabbed a drinking cup from beside the sink.

"Prepare for a proper drenching, Gilligan!" she belted, dunking the cup into the bath water and pausing only to grin mischievously at Peter before dumping the water on his head.

"Next come the suds!"

Maren squeezed shampoo into her hand and worked it through his mat of wet hair. Her smile softened. Something about holding someone's head, someone's warm head, no, her brother's warm head, in her hands brought Maren a little closer to understanding her connection to it all. "It all" being her life, her purpose, the family. Peter's head moved in rhythm with Maren's gentle lathering, his neck loose and exposed. Maren dipped the cup into the bath water again and rinsed away the suds. She handed Peter a washcloth.

"You can wash yourself now, right?"

Peter looked at the wash cloth and then at his sister, apparently torn.

"Yes... But Maren?"

"Hm."

"Will you stay here with me?"

Maren squinted her green eyes at his, trying to see past something she couldn't understand.

"Sure, Pete. I'll be right here."

Amphibian

Elyse Tuennerman



A Eulogy for Dear Old Trout Face

Sarah Pobuda

her glass marbles
went rolling off the slope of her face.
on a bright and moony day,
she folded into a crane and floated out.

Excuse me sir, could you tell me if I'm headed in the right direction?

saltine cracker dust on the corners of her mouth.
blades of dried out, yellow grass,
imprinting her skin into patterns
more appealing than natural pores.

the match she struck
didn't want to get out of bed either.
she needed those little puffs of smoke
to make her feel more human.
she shed the pile of fur,
so it was hers to jump in and torch.

Excuse me sir, will you tell me when I get there?

old trout face cancered herself
right off of this bouncy ball.
breathing in air popped her bubblewrap.
isn't it happy that all she had to do
to end the game
was shatter a lightbulb?

well she's driving down some highway now,
pretending her car has window panes.
she thinks we're all just whizzing by,
blowing away each other's snot,
into a quaint tissue called a map.

Excuse me sir, can you tell me where I'm going?

Alcoholism Destroys Beauty, but What's the Deal With Beauty Anyway?

Ian Zigterman

The beer is starting to go to my gut,
and I'm trying to be okay

with this new found pudge
folding over my belt buckle.

When I was sixteen I became
a vegan who lacked compassion

for animals and the planet,
but was ruled by a fascination

with how ribs can poke through
delicate stitches of veins,

and well woven sacks of skin.
It was hard to fear death

when I opened up an intimate
relationship with my skeleton.

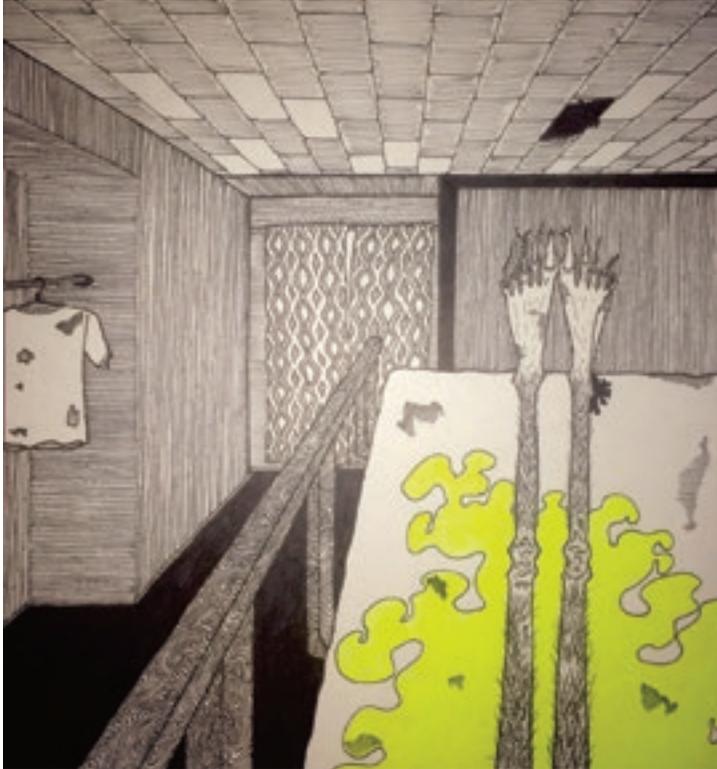
I even became enamored
with the suppleness of joints

when freed from muscle—
how beautiful I could be

when dancing alone
to the soft rattle of my bones.

Rise and Shine

Evan O'Donnell



there are ice cubes falling out of my ears

Karina Pantoja

there are ice cubes falling
out of my ears
and syrup from your french toast
is pouring out of your ivy eyes

you look out the window
at the street below—
the man with a mound of snow
for a head and pinecones for eyes
is taking a drag

he leans against the crumbling
wall of the corner store
looking down at his shoes

i wonder how lonely he feels in
this moment or if he's okay
with the fact that the headlights
from the cars that pass
might swallow him whole

i think we can fix each other
you whisper just before
the waiter comes and fills our cups
with coffee from his nose

i can feel the steam
lingering in the air
before it settles in my lungs
softening each crystallized breath

your hand reaches for mine—
branches for fingers—
patchy and nectar filled fingertips

i try to tell you about the time
i skinned my knee and kissed it
each night for a week
until it became infected

but only pennies fall out of my mouth
and the waiter swallows them whole
before he clears the table

i look out the window again
in hopes that the moonlight
will turn me into a dream

the man's head is a puddle
his cigarette butt afloat
nothing has ever made such sense

photos found on a dead brown girl's phone

Karina Pantoja

—after Natalie Scinters-Zapico

one: a man's hand dipped
in lavender tears

two: lips with ashes
filling in the cracks

three: a brown boy's smile—
burnt matches for teeth

four: labia outlined
in drops of honey

five: leaves crushed
in the crease of a knee

six: rosary breathing
on bruised knuckles

seven: hair between legs
dyed blue

eight: exploding iris

nine: collarbone lined
with rusted brass kisses

ten: lilacs crawling
out of gutted stomach

Pain Porno Initiation

Yuri Lucian Gutierrez-Garcia

When they kill a cow in Mexico, the butchers shoot
at the center of its head and drag it inside,

hang it from its hind legs and slit its throat to
empty it of blood. They cut its head off, and

send its skinless body to the supermarket while parading it
through the streets. No part of the body goes to waste.

*Burn it blue, heart running on empty.**

When the butchers skinned me, they slapped my flesh and
called it quality meat. They opened my legs so wide my
dead spine snapped. The last orgasm I had gave birth to
bleeding, red carnations and dead cempazuchitls.

They scraped out my bowels and heart, emptied me of blood. My
vagina and skin were the first things to go for foreign consumption.
Gave me a hollow ribcage, and a headless body. Hung me from my
legs and paraded my pain through the streets.

Burn it blue, heart running on empty.

I dream of the day when the butchers return my head
with eyes, tongue, and perforated brain still intact.

Dream they also return my uterus and heart. I dream the people
who bought parts of me, found the first bite of me hard to digest
and return whatever they didn't eat back to me. I will lie in bed,
waiting for the pieces to be harvested back into my body.

Burn it blue, heart running on empty.

**lyrics from "Burn It Blue"*

The Sunny Side

Madeline Lauver

Since it's easier to frame
it all in terms of birds that's what
I'll do; there were

Eggs on the table and dogs circling
the stools, eyes yellow and hopeful but not
prone, salt and pepper sitting spine-straight
next to the plate. Three birds

Mirrored the dogs through a frosted
window, they were like a family,
or like three birds pretending to be a family, or
like cannibals eating eggs and acting

As if they didn't miss the feeling
of flesh brushing the insides
of their cheeks. The baby bird

Looked up through the feathers
and the forks and asked his mother
if she would eat a dog. It was

A fair question considering everyone
wants to eat a dog, or a person,
or an egg. And in this case it doesn't even
matter if the egg is a person or if

the dog was a pet, because crows haven't
eaten flesh in front of a human before, so
their vegetarianism is somewhat proven, despite

How sharp beaks are! And how sharp
knives have become. The birdmother crossed
her middle and index fingers behind her
back and lied.

She said,

Let go!
Let the greatest joys of the world into your day,
like morning eggs, sunny side up, fried by an alcoholic father.

Happy Birthday Moon

Maggie Doele



wishes for god

Emiliana Renuart

i wish them skin.
supple,
cracking,
raspberry rash skin.

i wish them voice. i wish them
booming, hushed,
under the covers,
in the sunshine.

i wish them fingernails.
bloodied, soft, defensive, shells
pulled over pulsing heart.

i wish them two good hands
to reach me with,
brimming mouth to brush
against a cheek.
i wish them pumping silk
blood and balmy breath.

i wish them real.

Rain on the Berlin Holocaust Memorial

Madeline Lauver



How to Convince Your Sister She's Haunted

Madeline Woods

The first step to dealing with a ghost is to realize it is there. Pay attention. It is said that animals are more in tune to the supernatural world than we are. On the rare occasion that both you and your sister are home at the same time, watch your dogs. Do they act any differently? Do they bark at nothing? Do they get skittish when your sister is around?

Bella is as crazy as always. She alternates sitting on your lap and your sister's, though your sister is obviously the favorite. You can't use this as evidence; she has always liked your sister better. Coco, the one your family calls the sniper, is upstairs sleeping under your parents' bed. If she is up there hiding from a ghost she is giving it the same amount of disdain that she normally gives the living. Pay attention to Molly, the dumb but sweet and loyal one who is slightly blind. She is sitting in the living room with your sister and stares at a spot on the ceiling. This is not the first time she has done this, and the only time you have seen her do this is when your sister is home. This is your evidence.

You joke with your family about this. Molly continues to stare, a look of bewilderment on her furry cookie-and-cream colored face, her too small floppy ears pushed back in what can only be interpreted as concern. Your family can't help but follow her line of sight. You won't be able to see anything. Don't be surprised by this. After all, you are only human and you are not the one who is haunted. Try to get Molly's attention. If it is truly a ghost she will pay more attention to it than to you. After calling her name she will acknowledge you briefly, maybe wag her tail, get up and turn around in a circle, but she will return to her post. Her neck craned, her nose pointed upward, staring at the sunlight bouncing off the white paint.

Your sister will start to protest the speculation. *Haven't you seen any horror movies?* She tells you not to talk about the ghost, not to think about it. It will only grow stronger. You have trouble imagining how much stronger it could get. After all, she is the one who believes in ghosts and you are just trying to prove her right.

Think back to all of the occurrences in the past. Use the moments you witnessed first. Recall the vivid nightmares she used to have. Remind her how when she was small she told your parents that Santa Claus was sitting on the end of the bed and that millions of spiders were crawling up the walls. Remember growing up hearing her scream through your shared wall and how normal it was to you. Tell her again about waking up to hear hardwood floor creaking and cracking your door open to see her standing there, her eyes open, her pupils closed, her usually majestic curls twisted and tangled like a bed of snakes.

Tell her you think the ghost is Irish. Recall the time she had vivid hallucinations after your grandma took you both to see an Irish dancing performance. She wandered into your mom's room and asked her to dance, was led back to bed, but came back later to tell your mom she was a

How to Convince Your Sister She's Haunted (continued)

wonderful dancer. Tell her that you think there is a reason she now hates Irish dancing. This wasn't the last time she was possessed either. Remind her of the time she stayed in the Philippines with her then boyfriend's family for six weeks over the summer and she slept walked so she had to be taken to the cemetery where her boyfriend's Aunt was buried. The family introduced the two women, one young, beautiful, and haunted, the other in the ground, to appease the latter's spirit. Remind her of the time she ran into her suitemate during her freshman year of college and convinced her that there were frogs loose in their bathroom. You read somewhere that frogs are associated with the supernatural. Remind her about the time she actually saw the ghost, when she woke up her then girlfriend and said: *Do you see her? She's floating right above us.* Her girlfriend spent the rest of the night wide-awake in terror.

Don't bring up the drinking, even if it is your most compelling evidence that she has demons attached to her. Why else would she drink herself into oblivion except to escape malicious entities she can't get rid of? Except every time she touched a bottle to her lips, she was also feeding her spirits, and with every sip they dug their claws in a little deeper until each time she sobered up a little less of her came back so she drank again, trying to find the pieces that had been stolen. Remember that she finally woke up and realized so much of her was gone that if she went back to the demons whatever returned would not be her. Realize she has stopped searching for those lost pieces that her ghosts wrenched away and has decided to find new pieces to patch her soul together. Realize she hopes ghosts will not follow her if she is a new person.

Finally, change the subject. Decide it is not that important to prove your sister is haunted. Move into the kitchen so you don't have to watch Molly watch the ceiling. Let your sister deal with her own poltergeists. Let her starve them by moving past them until they are nothing more than a splotch of light on the ceiling that only a half blind dog can see.

family game Uyen Pham

[instead] [Quân asks the doctor for] [injection] [death]
[Vy's clothes & comestics] [Khoa's salary:]
[fifth time] [Dương's boyfriend mentions marriage]
[Khoa:] [a good man] [pays the hospital bills for his wife and son]
In this puzzle when pieces don't match, you keep playing.
[Vy:] [Khoa fell in love] [pretty]
[second child:] [first child:] [healthy; ugly] [pretty; ill]
[Khoa bought Dương a house in the city] [knows] [Dương's boyfriend]
[Quân:] [a small, fragile kid] [excels at mental bullying]
Is there an odd-one-out here?
[to know pain early in life] [his peers] [Quân wants] [like he does]
[Dương:] [takes after] [loves] [her father] [a gold-digger]
[Vy:] [too skinny] [couldn't give birth to healthy babies]
Taking all pieces out, the blank cardboard behind looks whole.

Metacognition

Kayla Park

In sleep, my body looms
as mountains over the horizon
of my bedsheets. I climb

carefully beneath my own eyelid,
move my lashes aside as foliage
shielding a cave entrance, step

forward along half dirt, half
wood-paneled floor. Oak trees
morph into mangroves as they grow,

illuminated by cloudy lightbulbs
hanging from branches. Creatures
slip through the woodland upon

fluid wings, tearing raw wounds
into green wood with thick claws
and crooked beaks. Their calls

echo off the shadowed walls
in a cacophony of human whispers,
shrieks of jungle birds, the water-heavy

hum of a bass clarinet. I sit beneath
a drooping cluster of orange persimmons
in time to hear the sun rise,

shooting stains of colored glass
over the landscape that melt
the moment their edges brush leaves.

A Less Religious Generation, Through the Lens of Kalamazoo College

Emma Theiss

Kalamazoo, Mich.—The millennial generation is much less religious than older generations, but equally as spiritual, as found by Pew Research Center and seen on Kalamazoo College's campus.

Sarah Whitfield, K'20, is quick to add her take on this data, emphasizing the importance of differentiating between religion and spirituality. "People use religion and spirituality as synonyms. Religion is an organized group with dictated beliefs and practices. Spirituality is more individual, and doesn't need to be associated with religion," said Whitfield.

Whitfield also offered doubts and reasons as to why our generation may seem less religious than most. "As a generation, we are not less religiously inclined, we are just in a religious drought in our lives that most that came before us had as well. College-age students are so busy that religion is not very present," said Whitfield. While we can only speculate the reasons for the data on millennial religion, it seems college is a time where many students falter in their faith.

Student Interfaith Leader and passionate Buddhist, Whitfield explains her belief that in order to be a well-rounded and healthy person, having some sense of spirituality or religion is essential, especially for college students. "Students brush aside religion when at school because they're too busy, and it can be really detrimental. You need something spiritual to be a well-rounded person, and a lack of spirituality contributes to the stress culture," said Whitfield.

Spirituality on this campus is still very strong, but students have pushed back against traditional religion, even against discussing it. Sarah Whitfield addressed this stigma, "There is a stigma against talking about traditional religion. If I told someone I was pagan for example, they would be like wow that's so cool, but if I said I was Catholic people would lash back and not be open to discussion," said Whitfield. Students on this campus seem to only want to talk about things that are liberal, quirky or different, and lash out at traditional ideas.

Chaplain and Director of Religious Life Liz Candido says the national statistics of millennials and religion are slightly different than at K. We have a slightly larger religious population. "We have tended to hover over 60% of K students who are religiously affiliated," said Candido. For her reasoning for the difference from the national average she said, "Because we are a unique, and highly selective school, we tend to draw a different type of student." Our liberal arts campus draws a very diverse and passionate student body, likely leading to the slightly increased percentage of religious affiliation.

However, while this campus may be more religiously affiliated than others in the nation, it is still a considerable decrease than previous generations of K students. K's smaller religious student body mirrors

A Less Religious Generation, Through the Lens of Kalamazoo College *(continued)*

the Pew Research that showed a big difference in generations' service attendance.

Our college used to hold a couple different weekly services at the chapel, but this tradition has died out. "There will likely not be any more regular services. We've tried about three times but there just isn't a community to sustain it," said Candido. The chapel is still put to use, but for interfaith based discussion and meetings, like community reflections.

Candido is a K alumna, and she spoke on the changes in religious community and affiliation since her time as a student here. "It was really different when I was a student. There was nowhere near as much diversity. It was a mostly Christian campus, despite the college itself no longer being a Baptist school," said Candido. The previous generation filled this campus with a largely religiously affiliated student body, without any of the diversity in religions or spirituality that there is today.

Jeanne Hess, former associate chaplain and current Professor and Head Coach of volleyball, has seen the movement of religion on campus over the years, and how it has transitioned from a largely Christian community to a diverse, liberal community. Stetson chapel is an example of this. "The chapel has become a symbol rather than a place of gathering or worship. It used to be overflowing full, and seen as a very Christian building. Now it is a vague symbol of spirituality," said Hess.

A lack of religion can be really detrimental to a community, so at K it is essential to find other ways of connecting. However, in a community with, in the words of Hess, "as many practices as there are people," it can be difficult. "Students tend to connect between what's wrong over what's right. We bond over stress and don't understand that religion or spirituality are things that can relieve our stress," said Hess. With a decreasingly religious generation, a culture of stress is highlighted. Students connect with each other through their stressful lives, and compete in some ways over who has more stress. and connection through spirituality (in some form or another) could be really helpful for K's stress culture.

The lessened millennial religious affiliation translates not only into less physical practices of religion, but desire among students to take religious classes. There is a small Religion Department at K, but not many students take advantage of those classes. Jeffery Haus, Professor and Director of Jewish Studies, believes many students don't take their classes because they don't seem as exciting or interesting. "Some classes in our department don't seem as exotic or sexy, so students don't take it, they don't branch out," said Haus.

While this generation is less religious than previous generations, this school does not ignore the topic. There is a lot of opportunity for interfaith discussion, and capability for students to grow as people through honest discussion about big ideas, without it being essential to identify with a

religion. Sarah Whitfield commented on the power of interfaith work, "It's a kind of unifier. Being able to talk to someone outside of your own faith or lack of faith is really important, and presenting these conversations is healthy for students." Religious or not, well rounded discussion should always be a part of a liberal arts education here at K.

Aphrodite

Sophia Hill

I keep Aphrodite framed on my wall, she overlooks
my livelihood with a blankness in her eyes that
indicates disinterest, or perhaps upon inspection,
affection. Some days I stay in bed where she can see me,
some nights I don't come home.

Those might be the nights she knows me best.

Or the nights I do come home, late, makeup slouching from
my eyes down to my cheekbones, contoured face looking gaunt
and my gaze feeling hollow, nights where I strip pretty clothes
quickly and without show, crawl into bed by myself, with myself,
and decidedly alone.

Those might be the nights she knows me best.

Vanity

Elyse Tuennerman



It's Okay

Talea Fournier

When I was nine years old, my parents decided to sell the minivan. A year later my grandfather died, and three months after that my mother miscarried ten weeks before her due date. I was under the impression that God hated us. For the first time in my life, I became aware of the fact that bad things don't need good reasons to happen.

Bad thing number one: Selling the Minivan. It might seem a bit melodramatic to mark the selling of a vehicle as the day that I began to lose my innocence, but I am a melodramatic person and that is exactly what happened. Besides, the van wasn't just any old car. It was the Fournier Family Minivan.

The earliest memory that I can remember of my existence involves the van. I caught my very first glimpse of Emily Benjamin, who unbeknownst to me would become my longest childhood friend, through the minivan's tinted windows on the day we moved into 311 Bingham Court. I remember pulling into our new driveway and clambering out of the backseat of the car to lean against the door, trying my best to look as cool and casual as a four-year-old can. Emily and I stared at each other from across the street. My mother and father flanked both sides of the van with surprisingly genuine smiles plastered across their faces. Emily slowly turned away from our stand-off and scampered back into her home, her purple pogo-stick abandoned in the driveway.

A few hours later Mrs. Benjamin arrived at our front door with a tray of her famous banana bars (still to this day my absolute favorite dessert) and verified the fact that although we were eccentric, the safety and trustworthiness of the Fournier family was better than most. My father tested this belief later on in the evening when he took Emily and me for a spin around the neighborhood. We drove through the streets with the side-door wide open. Our screaming cackles competed for who could reach the highest pitch as Dad hit the brakes and the door slammed closed. I was ecstatic over gaining my first real friend, although a bit confused over her enthusiasm. Emily seemed to think it was all an entertaining game of sorts. In reality, slamming on the brakes was the only way we could close the broken door.

Both of my parents have been elementary school teachers for the majority of my life, and we have always been solidly middle-class. We can afford to buy vehicles. But we held onto the ancient minivan for nine whole years. It is widely known that the Fournier family does not enjoy spending money. But keeping the car for that long wasn't due to our frugality, although that was the excuse we used for quite some time. The van represented the family that we were supposed to be, and after years of trying to live up to all that the minivan symbolized for us, we finally had to give up the act.

Around the time of my birth, my father was tasked with the responsibility of picking out the family car. Dad has always had the

monopoly on anything pertaining to safety, beef, and cars. Of the extremely obscure job positions he has held over the past 53 years, he is most proud of being the Safety Patrol Officer of the fifth grade, a busboy at Sign of the Beefcarver, and a supposedly legendary valet parker. It was obvious that he was the man for the mission.

Dad found the minivan in a newspaper ad. Before Lydia died and it was still okay to talk about things like the car, my mom would often tell the story of the day my father brought the van home. After parading around the already aged and weary massive piece of metal that would soon become our sole source of transportation for the next eight years, Dad knelt in front of my mom and spoke to me inside of her stomach.

"This car won't be empty for long, I promise you. Soon enough it will be full to the brim with all of you kids."

He was wrong, of course. The car would not be full to the brim with children. I would always be surrounded by empty seats. I was not familiar with broken promises up until the selling of the minivan. I was promised a car full of siblings. Instead, I had zero siblings. And they were selling the car, which meant I was going to continue to have zero siblings. My parents were giving up. They had never given up on anything before. Now you might see where I'm getting at with this whole loss-of-innocence thing. I fought with them. I kept insisting that they promised me I would grow old with this car, that my siblings and I would grow old with this car. They didn't really know what to say or how to explain to me why exactly they couldn't give me what we all wanted. My father still keeps the angrily-worded letter I slid under his office door demanding the repeal of the selling-the-car movement.

Moments like these are the ones that I am constantly looking back on with regret knowing the things that I know now which were hidden from me back then. I didn't know what my parents had gone through at the time. I didn't know that my mom had had any miscarriages, I didn't know that me throwing a tantrum about the car probably hurt them in ways that I won't ever really understand. I miss when being ignorant was condonable. I miss being able to be a complete asshole and not feel guilty about it because I literally didn't know what I was doing. After selling the car, I started being able to see when I was being a jerk. I also started to see that sometimes life was also being a jerk, which I thought was completely unfair because life knows exactly what's going on all of the time and it still messes with everything. I had grown accustomed to the idea that me and my small life were untouchable from all of the bad parts of the universe, but slowly my invincible shield started to fade.

When I was born, something went wrong with the umbilical cord inside of my mother and it ended up preventing her from staying pregnant. But they didn't know that for a while. It took two miscarriages to figure out that there was something wrong. Everyone was surprised by my mother's

It's Okay *(continued)*

third pregnancy, partly because of her age, but mostly because they had already established that her becoming pregnant was impossible. I was ten years old at the time and the minivan had been gone for a year. Opa had just died a month earlier (bad thing number two). I was devastated because aside from my parents, I don't think anyone has ever loved me as much as he did.

The night before my Opa passed away, I had gone to a church service with our family friend (who also happens to be our pastor) who had the designated duty of watching over me while my parents were watching my grandfather die. I remember that it wasn't our church. I'm pretty sure that it was a weekday, and our church back home does not have service on weekdays. I guess we went on emergency-service mode because we had to go somewhere so they could make me talk about God and my grandfather dying. The church had this fountain of water and these pieces of paper that you had to write your prayers on. Once you wrote your prayer, you dropped it in the water and it disintegrated. This was much fancier than anything we ever did at our own church so I assumed this meant that my prayer would be answered much more efficiently than back at home. But I guess to be fair no one actually clarified that for me. I wrote to God asking him to please not let Opa die. I slept extremely well that night knowing that I had single-handedly saved my grandfather's life. The next morning while I was with my pastor's family waiting in the to-go line at McDonald's, my mother called me and told me that Opa had in fact passed away.

That was the first time I ever remember being angry with God. I was pretty sure that it was against the rules to be mad at God, but I was also pretty sure that not answering my prayers was against the rules too. I thought maybe because I was at the wrong church the lines got messed up or something and he didn't hear me right. Then a little while later Mom and Dad told me about Lydia, and it all made perfect sense. Lydia was the miracle baby. She was finally coming now because we needed her so badly, because the world was too small for both Opa's large spirit and her small one, because of course with every bad thing also comes a good thing. I had one of those epiphany moments and I stopped hating God for a couple of months. But then bad thing number three happened and Lydia died and I still can't make sense out of what kind of lesson that was supposed to teach us.

There were two primary reasons I thought that Lydia dying was my fault. One was the fact that after I found out I was going to have a little sister, I made my father promise that he would always love me the most. This has led to a life full of superstition and an unshakable belief that I literally cursed our family out of my own selfishness. The other reason that I blamed myself was because I broke mom when I was born. My parents have tried to explain to me on multiple occasions that this is not true. Although I have always had a tendency to be dramatic, and although I

understand technically it wasn't due to my birth itself that my mother was incapable of having children but the doctors who botched the operation, there will always be a part of me that believes that if I hadn't been born, my parents would have been able to have the large family that they always dreamed of. Upon reflection I realize I have made this seem as though I wish I hadn't been born, which is not the case at all. I am after all selfish and I love my life and my family and I wouldn't give it up even if it meant that my parents could have millions of children. To compensate for all of that, I have lived my life since the age of ten trying my best to be the coolest daughter ever who basically contains the entire culmination of all of the finest traits of my ghost siblings. I am very bad at it, but my parents give me enough love to satisfy an entire army of children, so I guess I'm doing something right.

My father took me to a Steak n' Shake to tell me that Lydia had died. At the time I couldn't understand why he chose this establishment to break the news to me, but now I guess it makes sense. I don't even like the shakes all that much there. If he had brought me to Culver's I never would have been able to eat cheese curds again. Talk about hating God. We went home and Mom was in bed. Mom stayed in bed for a while. Eventually, she got out of bed and returned to school because she had to tell her fifth-grade class what had happened, which still to me seems to be the most difficult thing anyone would ever have to do. All of this with my mom was the worst of it all. I didn't understand why God was messing with me, but I *really* didn't get why he was messing with my mother. Ingrid Fournier is the best human alive. Within a year she became an orphan and lost her own child. Nothing made sense to me at all.

It still doesn't make sense to me. But I don't hate God anymore. And I know that He doesn't hate me either. Or my mom. Throughout all of this, I have come to realise that no one really has control over anything. God doesn't control what happens. My parents don't control what happens. I sure as hell don't control what happens. Things just *happen*. There's not much reason to it. I'm still fully in the process of growing up, and my innocence is constantly fading in and out of range, but I have learned a few things over the past nineteen years that help me feel alright about living. I know that I can't make sense out of most of the terrible or wonderful things that transpire in my life, but I know that I am a part of a world that is so much more than just me. Bad things happen. You get mad and you blame everybody, but eventually, things turn out to be okay. It might take days, years, lifetimes, but I believe with all of my heart that things work themselves out in the end. God isn't a jerk. And I guess for the most part I'm not either.

Beautiful, I Say

Katia Dermott

She always loved the Hallmark Channel at Christmas time— the heterosexual films, cheesy, unrealistic, boy meets girl at airport, boy meets girl at Christmas tree lighting, boy meets girl. *What a waste of manhood*, She said when Neil Patrick Harris appeared in the opening credits. When a picture of his family popped up on my Facebook feed, She shook her head. *I have no problems with gays*, She said,
I just don't want them married under God's roof.

When I came out as bi, the first thing out of my God's mouth was *let's not tell Her about this*. And sitting on the train, there's my future wife, but she'll never know because my girlfriends were prayed into the closet, door closed, light tight,
the last coffin nail forced by my hand. Afterwards She took me to get ice cream and pointed at boys, saying, *they're cute*.
The thick cream caught in my throat.

Luke Cole Swanson became Cole and my brother didn't invite her to his wedding. I always comment on Cole's photos, *beautiful*, I say. And when my best friend was avoiding a boy who liked him, I subbed for their joint kitchen job because
we both knew they would never walk down the aisle together. He was not allowed under Her roof. Cole was not allowed under Her roof. I am not allowed under Her roof.
So we'll all just get married in the rain.

Medication Matrix

Alec Juarez

“Hey, guys, check this out!”

Now that I had their attention, it was finally time for me to demonstrate why I'd dragged the majority of my kindergarten class into the (strictly off-limits) woods bordering our small, rural school of St. Patrick's. I revealed the incredible discovery I'd made: an old tractor tire, likely abandoned by the next-door corn farmer. Though it was nothing more than an old tire, my young mind had immediately thought of a use for it that I just *knew* would astound my classmates—we could piss in it.

I whipped out my penis and began to unload my bladder upon the weathered rubber. Just as I'd expected, it was an instant hit; everyone laughed hysterically, and some of the other boys even joined in on the fun. But just as quickly as the party had started, it was shut down. The boom of an angry adult's voice rung through the trees, and I knew we were busted - I looked up from my still-flowing stream of pee to see a recess aide barrelling toward me. With my member still dangling from my navy-blue uniform pants, I stood frozen like an animal in high-speed traffic—*what do I do? Fight or flight?*

I chose a combination of the two. With an exclamation of “You'll never take me alive!” I turned and ran, the stream of urine still spraying like a firehose before me. Now, for those unfamiliar with the physics of the human penis, I will say this: despite millennia of evolution and scientific advancement, there is still no known way to run forward and pee simultaneously without completely drenching one's legs in urine. My five-year old self was no exception to this law of nature—by the time that the recess aide had finally caught and wrangled me, my pants were completely soaked with my own piss. The poor aide had to carry me inside (in case I made another escape attempt), and appeared particularly disturbed by how little I seemed to mind that my pants were drenched with urine. I didn't care; I thought it was fucking hilarious.

Most of the trouble I got into at this age tended to follow the same formula:

- 1) devise scheme (must be funny)
- 2) gather audience (attention = desired effect)
- 3) perform (the more public the setting, the better)
- 4) run like hell and deny all responsibility (avoid capture at all costs)
- 5) bask in the glory of martyrdom (feel no remorse for your transgressions, it was funny)
- 6) use time spent in punishment to devise the next scheme (no rest for the wicked)

Medication Matrix *(continued)*

This campaign of domestic terror continued for months throughout my time in kindergarten, and eventually earned my parents a one-on-one, afterschool meeting with my teacher. Though I sat in for the entirety of the conversation, most of the discussion was effectively nonsense to my young ears; the talk of “classroom disruptions”, three and four-letter acronyms, mentions of medication—it meant nothing to me. All that I understood was my teacher’s opening statement: “There is something wrong with your son, and it needs to be fixed.”

The morning after my special meeting, I didn’t go to school. Instead, my parents drove me to a large, unfamiliar office building in a part of town that I didn’t recognize—they told me it was a doctor’s office, and that I’d be taking some tests. I can’t remember whether I asked them what *kind* of tests they’d brought me there to take, but even if I had, I’m sure they either lied or told me to just follow the instructions I was given.

Eventually a nurse brought me to a plain white room that contained nothing but a chair and table; atop the table sat a large, red button, almost like the kind that you would see used on a gameshow. The nurse told me that I’d have to sit alone in the room and press the button when I heard certain sounds come through the room’s PA. She asked me if I understood, to which I nodded yes, although in truth I had absolutely no idea when or why I was supposed to press the damn button—I don’t think I really cared. She seated me, told me to pay my best attention to the test, and left the room.

It felt like hours in there. Since my only understanding of the instructions was that I was expected to press the button at *some* point, I simply pressed it whenever I felt like it. After long enough I grew tired of sitting, and walked in circles around the room. Finally, the nurse returned with my parents in tow. She fed them a steady stream of “yep, uh-huh, just like we expected”, handed them a bottle of pills, and told them to call back when the supply was gone. My mother produced a capsule from the bottle, carefully yanked it apart into two halves, and dumped the contents into a cup of colorful yogurt that she told me to eat. Once I’d finished, we left the building and I was dropped off at St. Patrick’s just in time for lunch recess.

I felt strange at school that afternoon. For the first time in my life, I had no desire to enact my latest schemes—I didn’t feel compelled to try making my classmates laugh, and playing with my friends suddenly had no appeal to me. Instead I spent recess sitting alone underneath the jungle gym, counting woodchips and arranging them into neat piles. When it came time to head inside, I took my place in line without fuss and stood as still as a Marine undergoing bunk inspection at boot camp. I said nothing in class, felt nailed down to my seat, and didn’t lift an eye from my work

until it was completely finished.

When I approached my father’s car to go home at the end of the day, my teacher walked with me to the vehicle. Her usual tone of unbearable exasperation was absent; she spoke to me with the same gentle, infantilized voice that she’d always used with all the other kids, but never me. She helped me into my booster seat and told my dad that she’d never seen me behave so well in class—they both looked ecstatic.

On the drive home, my father asked how my day at school had gone. I told him that I didn’t feel like myself, and didn’t like it. He frowned and told me not to worry, that I’d feel normal again soon enough, and that he was proud of me. I tried to at least believe the last bit.

School became a new kind of education for me. While Bill Nye and math worksheets handed me academic building blocks, my new medication taught acceptable behavior and personality traits. Passing from kindergarten to first grade, second, and onward, my teachers were all too happy to guide my chemical rehabilitation into becoming a productive member of society. Obeying commands became as natural as following instructions to build Legos: I remained silent during Schoolhouse Rock and practiced my cursive without resistance. My classmates were confused by the sudden shift in my personality, but no one in school seemed to particularly miss the old me—I was a good kid now.

Bouncing from Ritalin to Adderall to Vyvanse to Concerta, my parents spent years trying to find a drug that could balance my new, teacher-approved state of consciousness with the unshakable feeling that I was becoming a shell of my former self at the tender age of nine. We tried everything, but each medication had the same effect: I wasn’t myself, and my awareness of this fact was growing more painful with age.

On weekends, my parents granted me the mercy of sobriety. For those two precious days every week, I was finally allowed to be me—though this freedom from my chemical shackles would naturally leave me far more inclined to stir up trouble, my family never seemed to mind my antics like my teachers did. Behaviors viewed as transgressions in the classroom were treated as mere facts of childhood at the park. What I could never figure out at the time was how to find the halfway point between these two sides of myself; thinking of the half-laughing, half-crying masks painted outside my school’s theater, I pondered how to reconcile two opposite sides of one face.

When I hit the fourth grade, my parents decided that it would be fair to try taking me off the meds. This, naturally, resulted in disaster within the classroom. In the eyes of my teachers, Godzilla had been unleashed to wreak havoc after five years of peaceful slumber. I started having special

Medication Matrix *(continued)*

meetings after school again, but understood their gravity this time: I was a bad kid again, which meant either extra homework, no recess, or a lethal combination of the two.

I became the class clown, as well as the class joke. Now that I'd relapsed, I became my teacher's test-dummy for public punishment and humiliation—to this day, I mentally debate whether he was making an example out of me or simply acting out a grudge. Naturally, none of my classmates wanted to be associated with an outlaw, so I was able to add 'friendlessness' to my growing list of worries. In my spare time at home, I began to watch anime series about misfits and problem children that would discover latent abilities and become heroes to everyone who'd doubted them; wandering through the playground with only my imagination for company, I wondered if I would ever get a chance to prove *my* worth.

To the surprise of no one, my fourth grade experience was, overall, a complete fucking trainwreck. I'd finally dug up the true 'me' that had been buried beneath prescription stimulants for so long, but all I'd learned in school that year was that *this* 'me' wasn't wanted—not by my peers, and certainly not by my teachers.

Out of options, my family quietly unenrolled me from St. Patrick's over the summer; my mother decided to take matters into her own hands and quit her real estate job to homeschool me for what ended up lasting three years. While, yes, my social isolation only got worse, the positives of the experience easily outweighed the negatives: I slowly learned how to function in a classroom without meds, and with time, I came to realize that I hadn't been the issue at my old school—the issue had been a classroom that insisted I *couldn't* learn without meds.

If you've ever seen *The Matrix*, or at least heard of the series, you're probably familiar with the film's titular concept: unbeknownst to the earth's entire human population, their perceived reality turns out to be a computer simulation created by malicious aliens to keep humanity blissfully ignorant of their slavery. While I can't say that I was proficient in the lore of the Wachowski sisters' series as a kid, whenever I reflect upon those years of medication I describe it as how I'd imagine it feels to be aware that you're trapped in the Matrix. The moment that I entered that plain, white room in kindergarten, my mind was thrown down the rabbit hole into a false reality from which I could not escape—I knew that the real world (and with it, the real me) was hidden behind my chemical prison, but I simply couldn't access it.

Although my mother and father had made the initial choice to trap me within the Matrix of medication, they also ended up being the liberators

that would bring me into the real world. I can't say that I blame them for falling for the early 2000s' ADD craze—they were just young parents trying to do what they thought was best for their son. Now, do I harbor resentment toward the educators responsible for scamming them into believing that first-graders ought to be pumped full of amphetamines? You can bet your ass that I do.

Thanks to the years of pharmaceutical speed, most of my memory from this period is a blur—at best, recollections feel like hazy, out-of-body dreams, and at worst, it's just a blank. Yet, despite these years that were robbed from the recesses of my mind, I will always hold onto the singular clear memory that remains untouched: the image of the little boy drenching himself with his own piss as he runs excitedly through the woods, recess aide in furious, hot pursuit.

The Only Emperor

Austin Ickes



Vacationland

Katia Dermott

The Maine state slogan is *vacationland*, or at least it has been for as long as you can remember. You used to look out the lead framed window at the snow plows and their greasy-haired drivers, scrunching your nose in disgust.

“Maine is no tourist attraction,” you’d announce to anyone in a feasible listening radius. Like most reactions to small children, people thought you were a cutiepie, commenting to your mom how outspoken you’d be when grown up.

Living on a farm, you didn’t spend much time with your parents. Between driving for wholesale deliveries, harvesting from the fields, and packing away the various leaves and sprouts that got dunked in the washing bins, no one had much time for you. Climbing trees and charging late fees from your bedroom library were the best ways to pass the time, or, if in a particularly devilish mood, swiping Thank You bags from the box marked for market and juggling them, if the breeze allowed.

When your grandparents invited you for a couple weeks in the summer, bags were always packed with giddy anticipation weeks in advance. With no TV on the farm, you were always thrilled to escape to what you thought of as your New Hampshire vacation home, specifically because you could lie in the reclining chair, intended for someone with much longer legs, and watch whatever show came across the screen. You didn’t realize how lucky you were to live in your beautiful Maine isolation.

Eventually people started refusing your library late fees and whenever you tried to juggle, the Thank You bags would run away in the wind. Even the trees shrunk so you could no longer be challenged to climb over their scratchy torsos and up into your leaf enclosed sky cavern. You began hiding away, writing poetry and short stories to escape into a new sort of vacationland—a utopia of sorts, you called it.

As you moved from state to state, you began to realize there was something missing.

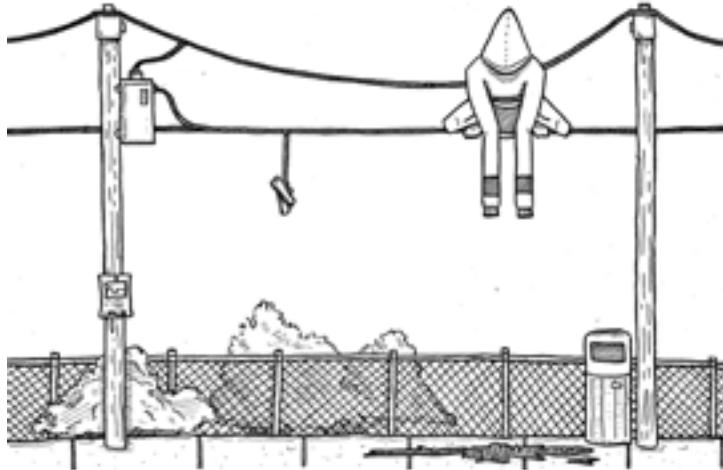
Family moved with you, your passions did too, but you didn’t have your childhood trees to climb and the books you once loved were lost in your travels. The scars left by Maine throbbed with every step you took away from the border of home and towards the unknown.

With nowhere left to go, something caught your eye. There on a tree in North Carolina was a Thank You bag. The wind lifted it off the branches and blew it into the distance. With nowhere left to go, you followed it back to where you began.

Welcome to *vacationland*.

Hanging Doubts

Austin Ickes



Camelot

Emma Peters

Your foundation is sunk deep into the earth of a small Dutch town on the western coast of Michigan. During construction, a tiny blue bottle of bitters is built into the walls of your kitchen when a man in leather gloves forgets to take it home with him. Slowly your street fills in, so it's lined with neighbors and trees. You're the tallest and you can just peek over the roofs of the others.

At first the people who live in you hang lacy nightgowns in the closets and wake up to the sun cutting into the windows. You were built with radiator heat, and in the winter they huddle around the radiators in their rooms, getting warm before sliding into their cold beds. At first you're quite dark—you don't have electricity.

Later owners install it, and suddenly you're bright inside. Your rooms feel bigger, your ceilings taller. More families come and go. One winter is brutally cold, and the radiator heat isn't enough. The father works for the newspaper and he brings stacks of extra or outdated copies home and the whole family climbs the stairs to the attic and lays layers of newsprint on the floor for extra insulation.

The next brood has a teenage son who falls hard in love with a girl from high school. He sneaks her into the attic and they crunch across the leftover newspapers to carve their names into a wood beam against the back wall. Sometimes the two of them sit crosslegged on the floor and pass a stolen beer between them, their bodies casting strangely stretched shadows on the attic ceiling from a plastic Christmas candle the boy had taken from a box of holiday decor to light their clandestine date. He moves out after college, and you never know if he makes good on his promises to marry the girl.

There's one family you grow attached to, maybe only because they're with you the longest. A man and woman move in after marriage, glowing a little from vacation in Cancun, still smiling and saying *babe* all the time. They fill the kitchen with sets of matching dishes from the wedding. A heavy Dutch oven decorates the stovetop and a cast-iron skillet nestles among the pots and pans in the drawers underneath. They like to cook. They fill you with spice and warmth, and often laughter floats up through the chimney while they sit in front of the fireplace and eat second and third helpings of masterfully home-cooked meals.

Alan, she calls him. He wears thick glasses that he keeps on the bedside table because he can't even get to the bathroom without them. There's a cat that follows him every morning, yawning on the radiator while he shaves and slicks his dark hair back with pomade. The first fight you saw was because of the cat: "Joan," he'd said, "I thought the cat was going to stay with your parents!" And she'd insisted, "Look, Walter's a great cat, you'll see." He did see. Only a few weeks later, Alan was absently rubbing Walter's fluffy black ears while he ran his razor under the sink, and

Camelot (continued)

now the cat sticks to him like glue when he's home. Joan only says "I told you so" a handful of times, but you notice that she often smiles to herself when she sees them together.

For a while their love is evident. They dance while they clean, Joan chasing Alan's ankles with a brand new vacuum cleaner, another wedding gift. Alan jokes while he sweeps Joan's soft brown curls from the bathroom floor. Together they move the heavy stools in the kitchen to mop the hardwood underneath, and sometimes on sunny days they splash each other with soapy water. They often let dust accumulate in your corners, especially on the staircases; cleaning happens mostly when they have dinner parties. Other couples come bearing appetizers and desserts, mere bookends for Alan's main courses. He's a carnivore to the core, so focused on the meat of the meal that Joan always takes the vegetables into her own hands. They make a table laden with heavy dishes and wine glasses, and the dinner conversation sometimes trickles into the early morning. Their friends stay in your extra rooms and drive home in the morning, filled with strong coffee and a breakfast of leftovers.

Dinner parties happen on the weekends. During the week, Alan and Joan leave you from early morning to early evening. It's quiet, but you still feel their presence—especially as Joan starts to mount her photographs on your walls. When she returns in the evening sometimes she pulls a new canvas or framed photo from the backseat of her car. "I had some extra time at the studio to print this one," she says to Alan as she hangs a large frame above the fireplace. "It's beautiful, Joan," he replies, adjusting his glasses in the reflection he sees in the glass over the photograph. You think it's beautiful too. It's a photo of you, your dark green paint glowing in the light of the golden hour and the trees around you alive with the yellows and reds of Michigan fall. You feel taller, larger, with your image so proudly displayed in so central a location.

Alan leaves his mark as well, often coming home and heading right to the basement to pull out drop cloths and paint cans. He's a whizz with a roller, adding coats of new colors to your interior walls. They choose natural tones, warm browns and deep grays. Especially when Joan isn't home, Alan talks to you while he paints, often complaining about the city's mayor, since he's on city council. "I would have made sure I had all nine votes before last night. When we're that divided in a public meeting, the whole council looks weak. She doesn't know what she's doing..."

"Mayor Betsy Kuipers" becomes a dirty phrase, invoked by Alan and Joan in sarcastic whispers. *She-who-must-not-be-named*. At first it's like a surface annoyance, a joke, but soon Alan's rants at your walls get deeper and louder. He brandishes the roller and wipes sweat from his forehead, eventually lapsing into moody silences when he thinks about her.

The wayward mayor doesn't steal all of their happiness, however.

Politics aside, the patterns of laughter and warm nights spent poring over meals keep them happy for a year. Often they creep up the front staircase at night, feet muffled by the deep purple carpet, hands running lightly over the dark wood banister. Sometimes Joan had made the bed and they slide in carefully, trying not to disrupt the clean, sharp lines of fresh sheets pulled tightly over their pillow topped mattress. Other times they shove dirty laundry off the rumpled white comforter and pull the blankets around them haphazardly, giggling. On many nights their voices get soft and close, and they fill the room with a different heat than the fireplace downstairs. Alan sleeps with your windows open even in the winter, letting cool air push through the screens and over their sleeping bodies.

There's a bright spring morning that brings a change to their usual dawn routine. On most days Joan rises first, leaving Alan and Walter with the snooze alarm. She dons her contacts and empties her bladder in the upstairs bathroom and then shuffles downstairs, arms tucked around herself, to make the first pot of their morning coffee. On this day, however, Alan comes into the bathroom to find Joan still seated on the toilet, hand pressed over her mouth and eyes full of a new brightness. "Joan, what is it?" Alan asks as Walter leaps up onto the radiator and settles himself on his haunches. "Are you alright?" She pauses before she answers. "I'm perfect. I'm pregnant." Alan's smile radiates on his own face and in the mirror across from him while he pulls her up and into his arms.

As the next months pass, Joan's footsteps get heavier across your floors. She's in the bathroom all the time, muttering mostly good-naturedly about how often she has to pee. Often when she gets to the bottom of the front staircase she lifts her shirt and examines her growing abdomen in the full-length mirror for a moment. The summer passes in a haze of big t-shirts and name debates, and the fall brings another paint project. This time Alan talks about his mother, Myrtle, and the way he hopes their child is like her. "She was kind and strong. She was selfless, but there was a glitter in her eye when she smiled at you. Like she could really dish it out if she wanted to. And she did, sometimes. She made me smile with my teeth even though I hated the gap in the front," he says on the day that he finishes the white wainscoting in the new nursery.

It's a new year when the baby comes. Alan and Joan have a handful of friends over for a New Year's Eve party that doubles as a baby shower, and they count down in the midst of powdery-colored wrapping paper.

Four hours after midnight Joan rouses Alan and they rush out of the house. You wait while the sun rises over your roof. You wait while it sets again. Walter prowls around, sleeping alone on the big bed. Finally, after a dark and empty night, they return to you, a bundle in Joan's arms. Your heavy front door opens slowly. "Welcome home, Helen," Joan says softly.

Helen sleeps and cries in the nursery in the shadows of a tiny Jupiter,

Camelot (continued)

a plastic nightlight made to look like the biggest planet. During the day Alan stands at the window with the girl in his arms, pointing outside and teaching her things. “That’s the streetlamp,” he murmurs. “And there’s an oak tree right there.”

That first night, Joan sits in a rocking chair by the baby crib and watches Helen breathe. After a while she stands and lifts Helen from the crib to hold her. Alan stands in the doorway and smiles.

In the next days, you’re full of visitors. Helen draws people to you like nothing else has. Relatives flock and neighbors bring toys. One of Alan’s fellow councilmen brings a small bag with a stuffed lamb, and Helen won’t let the lamb go. Her tiny fingers rub its dark velvet ears while Alan curses Betsy Kuipers under his breath and talks animatedly with his colleague.

The lamb follows Helen through her infancy and into her terrible twos, which are really not terrible at all. She does cry a fair amount, but usually just when her picture books are taken away. Joan reads to her all the time, and years pass as books come and go from the library down the street. When Helen is four, she can recite some of the picture books even if she can’t read them herself yet. Joan documents Helen’s days with her camera, and soon the walls are laden with photos of the girl. Your paint is beginning to peel, but you hardly notice because Helen makes you feel so bright.

During Helen’s fifth or sixth summer, Alan decides to battle your peeling paint. Joan and Helen wave to him on their way to the lake for the day. Helen’s arms stick out comically from her body, already stuffed into bright blue floaties. They drive away and Alan sighs against your exposed wood. He wipes sweat from his forehead and dips his paintbrush back into a bucket of primer.

Soon, Helen can read for herself. At night she reads aloud to you, carefully turning pages and pronouncing voices as if she was each of the characters. Her bedroom light stays on far later than all the other lights, and her soft voice keeps you company while the moon rises.

You realize she has the same effect on her parents. She sits with Joan while she pores over photographs in the living room, pointing at colors she likes and testing out her new vocabulary words like *reflection* and *particular*. Joan had given up her studio when Helen was born, but she was still selling photography. Helen is a near-constant companion, even going with Joan on photoshoots; you imagine her sitting quietly while Joan captures the right light and patterns. When she isn’t with Joan she’s with Alan, right next to him on the couch while he watches the local news every night. She and Walter vie for his attention in the morning sometimes, since Helen develops a habit of waiting for Alan’s heavy footsteps to pass her bedroom door before she jumps out of bed and follows him into the bathroom. She describes the drama she creates for her stuffed animals, the

secrets she thinks might lie in the attic.

When she’s older, she explores the attic. She reads the newspaper still stuffed into some corners, now yellowed and falling apart. She traces the names of the lovers carved into your walls. Quietly, she tells you their story. She creates a daring quest for the two of them, a tale of bravery and warfare, including an attic witch and a magical candle. You wish you could tell her that all they did was drink beer sometimes, and that the candle they’d used was only plastic. Still, you like her version of the story better.

Dinnertime is still the warmest. Helen scurries around the kitchen with Joan and Alan, finding the spices they ask her to find and adding pinches of salt when they say something needs it. All three of their shadows splash against the walls of the living room when they sit in front of the fire, and somehow that third body makes you feel taller and fuller than even the photo of you above the mantle. Though your lights don’t always stay on all night, you feel bright. You feel strong, like you could stand right there on your block for two hundred more years, and two hundred years after that.

Helen explores you like no one else—she has a story for every room, a tale for every crack. Another baby never comes along, so when Helen is left to her own devices for the day, you’re her playmate. She seems to imagine herself as existing within the ranks of a special tribe, to believe you’re a stronghold for something enchanted, that everyone who’s lived in you is filled with bravery and daring.

When Helen is ten, Alan tells you something while he repaints the laundry room. “I’m running for mayor,” he declares, rolling a new shade of yellow onto your walls. That summer, yard signs appear in the front yard and the front yards of the neighbors. People gather in your living room on Saturday mornings with clipboards, each vowing to knock on forty doors that day to campaign. Helen is in charge of the donuts on these Saturdays. She sits in the dining room and hands each canvasser a donut on a napkin. She also carries donuts to Joan, who often sits alone in the small office she’d turned into a make-shift photography studio.

On election day, you’re full of Alan supporters. They gather around the dining room table and discuss impatiently the fact that small town elections don’t have exit polls. Joan emerges and takes photos. Helen sits with Alan at the head of the table, writing notes with her small hands on a yellow legal pad. You can tell by the way her back is straight that she wants to feel important. The sun sets and wine is poured, and then Alan gets a call from City Hall. Suddenly you’re silent. No one says a word while Alan listens to his phone, and then a smile breaks across his face. “Fifty-eight percent,” he says to the room. “We did it. Bye-bye, Betsy!”

The next day, the paperboy throws onto your porch a paper with its front fold covered by a photograph Joan took moments after Alan’s announcement. There’s the gap in his front teeth, and his daughter smiling

Camelot (continued)

right next to him, a smaller gap in her front teeth and matching bright blue eyes. You realize they look alike. Helen sticks the paper to the fridge with a bunch of magnetic poetry.

Because you're paying attention to Helen and the way she listens to audiobooks and laughs aloud to herself, the way she likes to carry around a small wooden sword in her belt loop, you don't notice at first that Alan and Joan aren't the same as they were. Each of them talks more to Helen than to the other. While you listen to Helen read aloud from *A Series of Unfortunate Events*, there's a silence in the next room over that leaves no room for laughing under a crumpled comforter.

Soon, three people sleep in three different beds under your roof. Joan moves across the hall from Helen, into the guest room. "It's because your dad snores so much," she smiles at Helen, rolling her eyes. "I just can't get any sleep." Helen seems to shrug it off, but you start paying attention again to her mother and father. Alan stays away from you later and later into the evening, and when he comes back to you he retreats into city papers and blueprints and meeting agendas. Joan tries to talk to him but he's almost like one of your walls—quiet, hard, and without communication, whether he wishes he could emote or not.

Helen bounces between Alan and Joan, filling in their quiet naturally with her own voice and body. She picks movies for the three of them to watch together. She greets Alan at the door when he gets home, no matter how late, and sings a funny song for him while Joan leans in a doorframe nearby. A year passes, and then two, but still at night they're all in separate rooms.

Meanwhile, Walter can't jump up on the radiator in the bathroom. While Alan slicks his hair back in the mirror, his dark locks now salt and peppery, Walter watches him from the floor. His mews are softer and his purrs are hoarse. Helen lifts her voice when she talks to him because she knows he's gone deaf. There's a day when he goes to sleep on her bed and doesn't wake up. His slackened face is like a lion losing his majesty. When Helen comes home from school and pushes into the door of her room, right away she knows something is wrong. She kneels by the bed and presses her face into Walter's fur. She combs whiskers with her fingers and says, "Godspeed, my friend."

In the following weeks, you find that you miss the pleasant feeling of small paws walking on your floors. Joan and Alan helped Helen bury him in the backyard in the evening after he died, and Alan surprised the others when he choked up at their makeshift service. Now he spares a saddened glance at the radiator every morning, a moment of recognition for a lost shaving companion.

It's not long after Walter's death that Alan moves out. "It's just for a while," Joan insists to Helen. "We need a little time, that's all." Helen gets quieter, and soon she's gone on the weekends. Still, her room is always

warm and lit, and the same lamb that she dragged behind her as a toddler sits propped on the pillows of her bed. Your heart shifts to that space, the four walls that contain Helen and her dreams and the things she mumbles in her sleep, and that's what keeps you feeling tall. When she's home with Joan she retreats to her room and fortifies it, hanging handwritten quotes and thoughts on your walls to block out the stillness of Joan sitting alone in the kitchen.

But Helen's quarantine doesn't last forever. With her jaw set in a blade of determination in lieu of the wooden sword that used to swing from her waist, she starts to penetrate the rest of your rooms again. She reads recipes to Joan while she cooks, and she throws a blanket around both of them while they sit on the couch and watch movies they never watched with Alan. You don't see how she is with Alan after he leaves, except for one Christmas, when Helen says she wants both of them under your roof.

Alan sleeps in the guest room this time, and in the morning Helen gets them to sing *Auld Lang Syne* with her in front of the fire. There are only a few presents under the tree, but one of them is heavy and it's addressed to Helen. She opens it and finds that Alan and Joan got her a camera like Joan's. She pulls them both into a hug and doesn't let go for a long time.

After that Christmas you only see Alan when he picks Helen up for the weekend, and sometimes when his picture is in the paper that's tossed to your porch each morning. Helen still keeps these papers, but she hangs them in her room instead of on the fridge. Soon, it feels almost normal to have only two bodies living in you again.

Helen's high school years pass faster than you think they will, and then it's her last summer before she leaves you. There's a doctor's son who she brings to your attic, and he carves their names under the other lovers' scratchings while she reads her favorite old newspaper article to him. Already, it's like she's showing him a past life. In the dim light of an actual candle, she tells him about your rooms and her stories. You like him because he listens to her.

You're sold by the end of the summer. Joan, needing to downsize to an apartment downtown, times her move-out with Helen's move to college. They spend August packing up your rooms, and you realize the sound of packing tape is a violent one. It's a terrible rip. Slowly, you're emptied out. Joan takes all the photos off the walls except the big one of you over the fireplace. She and Helen look at it for a long time. "You should take this," Joan says. Helen lifts it away from its place on your wall and puts it in her own car, the beater she'd started driving her senior year.

Most of the boxes are in a moving van, and Helen's favorite things are in her car, waiting to be driven to a dorm room across the state. They pull away from you and you're left with echoes and the sounds of your creaks

Camelot *(continued)*

that their noises masked so well.

Helen comes back after a few hours. She drags the huge framed photograph back out of her car and comes inside, shutting your heavy door behind her. She breathes out, leaning against the doorframe for a moment before climbing the purple stairs, now faded to almost lilac in some places. In the attic she sets the photo against that far-back wood beam that holds a handful of names including her own. She stands back and admires it before going downstairs. You feel her footsteps slow as she passes her room—you know you'll always think of it as hers, no matter who moves in—and she pauses in the doorway. She says, "Godspeed, my friend."

Outside, Helen reaches into the car again and pulls out the camera from the last real Christmas. She centers herself in front of you and smiles. Though it's quiet, you feel the click of the shutter against all the glass of your windows. You hope you still seem tall.

I don't remember the feeling exactly but I remember remembering it

Madeline Lauver

Holding a dead hand is a funeral. Fresh and truly dead, bones leering like posthumous truth; the fingernails are flowers. It's not the same as a chemo hand, Death turns spindly fingers to stone. I didn't touch him in life; I was a stranger bent over the casket, whispering my secrets to the brown age spots and kissing his knuckles in front of his wife.

*This is going to rip it all out of you,
let's run away together, my statue,
I'll rob a convenience store and use
you as a doorstep.*

I remember my eyes turning to glass as I backed out of the room like Vardaman with a white liver, no satisfaction.

Hail Mary

Madeline Woods

Hail Mary,

The only source of light in the guestroom was a plastic glow in the dark Holy Mary. Whenever I slept over at my grandparents' house I would watch her grow dimmer as my eyes grew heavier. When I woke in the middle of the night it was to complete darkness, any light of Mary's long used up. I could only speculate whether it was given freely and generously, or maliciously siphoned off.

full of grace.

Right after my grandpa's heart surgery, four years before the stroke, he lay in a hospital bed, Rob and my dad with him. Thanksgiving was a week away. For the first time in my life it would not be in his over cluttered house across the street. Before the surgery, doped up, my grandpa reached up to my father and drew their faces close together, "Tom," he said to the son who he never understood but loved anyway. My father braced himself in anticipation. "Make sure you buy the turkey at Hillers."

My dad laughed about this. He emailed Hillers and told them the story. They gave us a free turkey.

The nurse walked into the room. My grandpa asked how he was doing. She replied, "You're doing fine. You'll be back when you start falling."

"What?" one of the three men asked.

"Yeah, old people always start falling."

My dad and Rob laughed. They haven't stopped telling the story since.

Our Lord is with you.

My memories cannot reconcile my grandpa with my father's father. They are not the same person. One was always there, the maker of burgers and waffles, the tender of skinned knees, the cheerleader at every gymnastics and diving meet. The other is conspicuous in his absence.

Whenever one of my uncles does something questionable the father of my father lets out a soft laugh and says, "Don't look at me. I was at work."

Blessed are you

We all go to Ireland. We visit my grandma's school, her childhood home, her church. My Jewish aunt points out to her Jewish children (who have the most Irish names of all of us) the Stations of the Cross on the stone walls. She tells her offspring that it is rare that the stations are all labeled with words. She tells them normally it is just the carvings. I know this is false; my church at home has all of the stations labeled. I don't say anything. When we walk around the tiny farmhouse that is still owned by a relative, we all ooh and ah, trying to think about how ten children would fit in here. We go to the cemetery where our great-grandfather is buried. We see Mulchahy written on a sea of gravestones. We are walking on sacred ground.

We never visit Detroit as a family. My grandpa does not take us on a caravan across the city, pointing out all of the houses that he moved into and then moved out of. We don't ooh and ah about how hard it would be for a single mother during World War II to drag her ten children and her grand piano from crumbling house to crumbling house. We don't visit the church they attended. The Catholic church that not only paid for all ten children's private education but funded my great-grandma's divorce. We don't talk about how my great-grandfather was an abusive alcoholic who passed on genes that continue to haunt us today. We don't talk about the paradoxes and the mess despite the fact that they are only forty-five minutes away instead of a plane ride across an ocean.

among women,

"I've never had to take care of anyone," my dad tells my mom. "It's like they are my little babies. You always dealt with all of the appointments and stuff with the kids."

"That's why humans live together. So we can take care of each other," my mom says, ignoring for the moment that she does all of the emotional heavy lifting for all of us. But she cannot lift this burden from my father. He won't give any of it up. He wears what is left of his parents like armor that is far too heavy for him to march in. He does not know how to hold the sorrow of another person the way she does.

and blessed is the fruit of your womb,

Four sons.

Three granddaughters.

Hail Mary *(continued)*

A grandson.

Five more granddaughters.

I will never change my name.

Jesus. Holy Mary,

“Jesus, Mary, and Shit!” Her Irish accent is always heaviest when she swears.

Mother of God,

Her daughter-in-laws tell us a lot about her:

She is unhappy. She is bitter. She never put in the work. She’s lazy. He’s been taking care of her for years. She is scared to die. She has never come to terms with her mortality. She thinks she is going to live forever. God, maybe she will live forever. I don’t know how much more of this your father can take.

My mother participates but later asks me this:

Did she get on a boat at the age of twenty-one to become a housewife and a mother of four on a different continent? How did her life turn out this way? How did we end up here?

pray for us

I don’t pray anymore. I don’t know if I ever really did. Even if She does listen, our heartbreaks have never felt big enough for Her ears.

sinners

My great-grandfather, Grandpa, Grandma, Uncle Dan, almost Uncle Rob, my sister.

My cousins: Veronica and Shelby probably, Fiona and Eamon maybe, too early to tell for the rest.

Me?

Our inheritance is a message in a bottle. A desire to drown.

now

They are dying. But they have been dying for years. Are they dying any quicker now? Will it finally be over soon?

and in the hour of our death

“I’m going to die from cancer,” my friend reflects after her grandma’s funeral. She seems so assured of this far off future that it comes off as a statement of fact. She is nonchalant and statuesque in her green dress, apparently unfazed by this.

I think about the strokes, the attacks, the surgeries. The pumping in my chest gets louder.

“It’s my heart that is going to kill me.”

Amen

X Marks the Spot

Kayla Park

—after evie shockley

acceptable asian
apparent asian
algorithmic asian
accessible asian
amiable asian
adorable asian
allegorical alien
apparent anomaly
appropriative aesthetic
admirable alternative
afterward apology
asian accoutrement
aforementioned american
approximate american
apportioned american
artificial american
ashamed american
admiring american
apprehensive american
accidental anathema
american accompaniment
assimilated asian

Ode to Baseline Birthplace

Emiliana Renuart

Birthplace lives under the surface of the lake on the poor side of town;
bluegills wriggle past it in the clear water, a paper house sent spinning in their wake. My
bed is stapled to the floor, designed to weather these kinds of storms and the
beckoning of schoolboys with matches.

Birthplace lives in my momma and my papa when they dance on the
bare subfloor where the carpet hasn't been replaced and when they dance in our
brittle little paper house, when the window they
broke with their one-two stepping fists and feet lets all the water come raging in.

Birthplace lives on top of the traffic light at M89 and North 34th, where
being small town means taking stop signs as suggestions. A
beat up Chevy pickup truck wrapping around that tree like a
bandage, me and the blinking light keep watch: red, then red, then red, then red.

Birthplace lives under the bleachers at the new football fields,
bright lights illuminate the rainwater and catch the cigarette smile of a
boy, wide and leering as the Cheshire Cat, glowing at me through the drizzle,
blooming into something sinister and slippery.

Birthplace lives between shoulder blades, wet and gleaming and dripping in the
black blue night, through the dock slats and back into the lake where
birthplace was born. My best friend beside me, soaking from the swim, and we feel
baseline birthplace is anything but a starting point.

Birthplace lives in the dirt of the cemetery where my Grandpa Gus now stays and
birthplace dies in the most beautiful of burials.

Horizon 2

Elyse Tuennerman



In Search of Memory

Sarena Brown

Craving simple orange tic tacs
In 2012 and seeing Aretha Franklin
In the checkout line at Sav-On Drugs.

Her bodyguard pushing a cart up front.
A mop head sticking out, nodding hello.

Not knowing she was her,
Without some glamorous hat.

Drinking pulp-free orange juice
With Vernors on sick days
Or rainy days or bad days.

Ginger ale calming the gut for centuries.

Not remembering who came
Up with that get-well potion.

Re-reading dad's bedtime story of a beached
Horse & some artist in the sand.

The mourning before some kind of belonging.

Forgetting how I too was shaped
By two palms and a wish.

Rebellion of a Good Girl

Savannah Kinchen

I pulled into the parking lot of Water Street Coffee shop at about four o'clock in the afternoon. My fingers were still stiff with numbness from scraping off the ice that crystalized on my windshield. The winter sun hung low in the sky, casting a dim light and tall skinny shadows over the cityscape. I cursed myself, as I often do, for deciding to go to college in Michigan where the winters are so bleak and unforgiving. I buried my face in my scarf as I hurried across the parking lot and to the door of the café. Inside I was met with a rush of warm air and the aroma of freshly ground coffee. My insides that had coiled up against the cold softened.

My eyes scanned the café for an open seat and I spotted one in the middle. I slowly unbundled myself as I crossed the room, my winter boots squeaking against the linoleum floor with each step. The room hummed with muted energy. The café was small; there was only enough room for about ten tables, and we all sat half an arm's length away from one another. Even though we were all sitting comically close to each other, we did not acknowledge each other unless someone sneezed, in which case that person was met with a chorus of "bless you." I found comfort in the collective social understanding that although we were all gathered in the same room, we were under no obligation to talk to each other unless to say "excuse me" or "is anyone using this chair?"

The room was a medley of sound—teacups clinking against saucers, coats being unzipped, coffee being sipped, computer keys clacking, phones pinging, chairs scraping against the floor, keys jingling, the crash of silverware in the dish depository, coffee beans being crushed into powder, slow jazz being played over the speaker system, "large white mocha latte", "triple caramel with whip", "chai latte with an extra pump" called out by the barista. All the varied conversations became one steady undecipherable noise that hung in the air, swelling and softening unpredictably. Occasionally the front door would swing open as another guest entered, blasting us all with a chill from the outside.

I marked my seat by hanging my coat over the back of my chair and walked up to the barista counter to order something. I wasn't necessarily craving coffee, I more so came to get out of the house. But another unspoken social rule declares that it is rather rude to frequent an establishment without ever purchasing anything. And so, I ordered myself a small decaf coffee and slid two bills across the counter with a polite smile and a socially engrained "thank you".

As I walked back to my table, gripping my ceramic cup with both hands, I noticed two people had taken the table directly next to mine. They were young, each in their mid-twenties, and seemed irritated with each other. The young man wore a black beanie, thick rimmed glasses and sported a full black beard, which quite frankly, could describe most of the men in this town. The woman opposite him had a small frame and thick

black curly hair. Her gaze was decidedly downcast, fixed on the coffee mug she gripped with both hands, while the man stared at the woman, craning his neck as if demanding she meet his eyes. He spoke with a muted fierceness. When I settled in next to them he was in the middle of speaking—his sentences strung together one after the other carried a warning tone.

"You're always keeping things inside. If you feel offended you have to tell me. You keep piling things up inside," he said. He had an accent that was thick and rough—potentially Eastern European. The woman kept looking down, shaking her head in frustration. "You don't try to understand, you just keep trying to make me feel worse," he berated. His words stumbled, one after the other, scolding her. The woman finally looked up, and started to say something, but kept getting interrupted by the relentlessness of her counterpart.

"You keep treating me like you're my father and I'm sick of it," she said. Her words were more ragged and came out one at a time. She also had an accent like his, though hers was thicker.

"It doesn't make any sense to me."

"You didn't understand why I was crying—"

"That's because you never tell me and you always keep it inside."

"I did tell you, I told you—"

"That is what is so frustrating about this is that you never tell me anything and you just do it to hurt me."

"I wasn't trying to hurt you I just didn't—"

"No, this is what you are doing *all* the time."

The couple went on in this fashion. I just sat there feeling like I was intruding on a highly personal conversation against my will. I considered turning to them and kindly suggesting that they have this conversation elsewhere, or perhaps just asking them if they were aware that even though we were at separate tables that we were in fact only about four inches from each other and I could in fact hear every word of what they were saying. Simultaneously, a deeper, perhaps more primal part of me, felt silently enthralled being able to overhear the drama of other people's lives. This gauche desire to eavesdrop is probably what makes *Keeping up with the Kardashians* and other reality television shows so popular, I thought to myself.

The couple continued, although the man did most of the talking while the woman tried insistently to get a word in. The familiarity of the situation resonated with me somewhere deep in my abdomen. I tried intently to focus on reading the book I had brought, but my mind kept wandering back to their words instead of the ones on the page in front of me. I wanted the woman to slap him across the face or spill her hot coffee all over his faux fur lined jacket, anything to get him to cease his unrelenting string of accusations.

Rebellion of a Good Girl *(continued)*

Time passed. Eventually, the woman got up and left, leaving the man by himself to brood. Then I did what I had not done up until that point—I looked over at the man who somehow felt my gaze shift and immediately looked up as well. Our eyes locked for a moment—his were black and intense. The moment lasted for less than a second but within that sliver of time I made sure to give him a look that showed my disapproval. Then I got up abruptly, sort of surprising myself, my table knocking his slightly, and I left. I was hoping the timing of my actions might tell him exactly how I felt about the situation. I pulled the door of the café open sharply and was met once more with the icy cold of the winter night.

all dreams are valid, no matter how small

Evan O'Donnell



Right-Side Down

Sarah Pobuda

Party hats like paper boats,
wind them up and watch them float.

I'm hiding in the creases of folded bark,
I can tell it's you, even in the dark.

Place a stamp on the top of your head,
so you may get to where you're going.
The river is frozen, but I'm still rowing.

I search for you in spots of sun,
for flowers poking from bottles of rum.

We filled the room with a layer of pollen.
You cried wolf, but I was the only one who saw him.

That's what happens
when you leave the windows open wide.
Like a cavernous mouth,
closing once you're inside.

My harmonica's holes are filled
with the beaks of singing birds.
They're made of wrapping paper,
ribbon which has long since been curled.

Twenty four ants marching in a band,
They're parading towards the grand stand.

On days when clouds roll through the sky like boulders,
they'll dribble cool rain upon your shoulders.

Pull the sand dollar like a plug from the bottom of the sea.
Everything swirls down the rabbit hole,

everything but me.

Asphalt Funerals

Sophia Hill

In my youth, I would gaze out
the car window and count
the animals
that had been struck to the side
and left out to fry in the heat.
I died—
counting the corpses.
I gave each raccoon
a special moment of mourning,
every raven to land on the road
was a priest.
I want to know why,
as I am still in my youth,
I avert my eyes from the feast.

Diner Booth Confessional

Sophia Hill

I rue that we were in public when I
pulled up my shirt sleeve and showed you
the long scabbing line, as grisly and conspicuous
on my skin as it was settled and clean.

It hadn't crossed my mind that you would
probably cry.

Can we have a couple minutes,
please? You kept your face turned away from
the smiling waitress so she would not see
that the world had just fallen from your grasp.

Our frigid silence made her uneasy,
but she couldn't have been more
uncomfortable than you were
or I was.

You took a moment to regain yourself
shuddered breaths slowing as you
dried your eyes on a napkin,
and we ordered our food.

I Will Hold the Whole of This Suburb in My Palm
and I Will Kiss It Goodnight

Ian Zigterman

Windshield is broke
like brother. Blue

and green puffy cheeks.
A stranger saw him

swerving into a back alley
and pulled him, barely

breathing, from
the driver's seat.

It is important to move
the body when it's suffering

from a heroin overdose.
Brother blue and plugged

into hospital beds
and fluids for not

the last, or the first time.
Brother can't remember

what shattered
the safety glass

into tiny glass beads—
can I call them beads?

Green and translucent,
filling the lines of my palms.

The Cover of Cold

Austin Ickes



Asthma Is a Glamourless Minor-to-Moderate Affliction but I'll Show You My Inhaler if You Ask Nicely

Emma Peters

I want to kiss you
and put on my wax wings.
If I spilled fire on you,
it was an accident.
Suddenly
I'm the kind of person
who needs to step outside
for air.
Sometimes you get
your power
from the bags under
your eyes.
I traded birth control
for fish oil vitamins.
My soul rattles
and you're taught
to back away
when you hear it
in this desert.

What I'm saying is
I'm sick
and you're a thermometer.
Sometimes I think
gills would be better for breathing
than lungs.

Tipsy Calls It Closure

Emiliana Renuart

Tipsy holds my hand in the muggy basement of someone's childhood home - drags me along behind her, wearing ruby plastic cups over dirty bare feet.

We go everywhere together these days, find our way in and out of mouths and dance in the dark along fences made of fingertips and want.

Come play, Tipsy says and wriggles under bellies, smooth but a sprinkling of soft blond hair, perfectly marked for the traveler's lost way.

We go everywhere together these days, find our way into a familiar body and the etched palm of its hand sends Tipsy away, into the muddy summer air.

You know this, she whispers and shows me skin painted with my name, a date: June 25. The body is long and lean and used to breathe the word *home* between kisses.

Don't you know what this is?

Tipsy's cheeks flush cherry wine and pull me under too - my face florid as we crouch in a yard, mouths slick. Everything comes up hot, sticky, and pink.

Five Cups of Coffee

Ehren White

The water sits on the stove for the fifth time. *Ha*, I say in an empty
Kitchen, waiting for my third cup of coffee.

I usually set a limit at two cups of tea (Earl Grey—
British, you can tell from the “e”—or Green), maybe less, so this is crazy,

This is crazy, I am James Dean racing down the freeway in my parents’ empty
Kitchen, inhaling five acrid cups of caffeine (three coffees, I started with two black teas).

The water simmers over the jamming flame, *rock star white girl, I am me*,
Fuck you, mom, flames dance like strobe lights with the swell of my name

I drink five cups of caffeine a day my tongue is burnt to ashes, gray—
Use cream, don’t drink it plain, but the harsh, lingering scent is luxurious:

A trick traced back to my parents’ kitchen before
Dawn, the coffee machine fizzling
As I walked down the stairs to my father’s
booming chatter, and my mother’s voice
Raised to match his own, filled with fake
Energy—dawn hadn’t risen yet, the yellow
Light in that small white kitchen harsh
Against the black, quiet night behind the window.
I smell those nights in every coffee pot—

The water boils, in a frenzy, debased, *look what you’ve done, flame*,
Sloshes on the counter and steams, burns my hand red and raw, fuck you, fuck you,

Fuck me, inhale my fifth cup of caffeine I am James Dean in my parents’ empty
Kitchen, throat raw, hand stings, refill the saucepan in place of a pot, relight the flame,

Look at me, look at me, I drink five cups of coffee

Think Pink

Rachel Carson



Paw Paw Nocturne

Karina Pantoja

I admit that when slithering pink-honeyed sky
is replaced by breaking charcoal-stained night
I swallow the busiest road in town and throw it

up, its spine tangled among pink hydrangea
petals, garage sale signs, wine bottles, and
crucifixes. I don't do much but barely exist

here among the moon's bloodless glow that
speaks its own kind of white language. I listen
to delicate lake water clapping against damp

land as you whisper, *You're beautiful*. When I was
seven I cried about having dirty skin; brown as
mud, not brown as fruitful soil. Desire burned

in my throat for ocean eyes and thighs that I
could grip with one hand. I tell you that I'm
still learning to hold myself in my own hands,

but maybe that's a lie. Maybe my hands are
ashy bone held by sadness at the joints and
if I stop clenching my fists for one moment of

serenity they will blow away and I will be left
with fragments of a body that I can only chew
and never bring myself to swallow.

Postcard From Where You Should Be

Katia Dermott

I walk for days. The paths sporadically
change from roots and dirt to grass.
Little towns creep up on hillsides
and the trails change to cobblestone
streets that click, shifting, under
the worn soles of my shoes. You know—
the ones we bought together.

Street vendors shout from canopies
barely large enough to hold their wares.
I buy foreign foods that I can't pronounce,
let alone identify. Cafes, some not
even as big as our room, cook food
from my personal supply.

Money barely exists, but you and I
can live off sun rays and smiles,
even raindrops suffice. But I get no
refund for your accommodations, just
a slow drizzle on my lonely back.

Realize

Heather Banet

I wear bandaids instead of bras
i perseverate on my flaws
I don't shave my legs frequently
but is that because I'm feminist kill-joy
level three
well there's that but deep down we all know
I'm just Lay-capital Z

I communicate good
But somehow, now
better in a poem
But i was never good at Haikus
Hi-yous
Or
Cute shoes

And I go on more dates to forget about the shitty guys that I dated
to forget about
the beautiful men that I have loved
but cannot openly
express love to any longer

They say love yourself first
what they mean is be selfish and get your own eight hours of sleep
before singing
a lullaby to a lover

Eat your own damn muffin before letting him
eat yours

but remember, selflessness is rewarding
and you know you love rewards
been thinking lately what more can I do to open up the doors
to a dance studio or a doctor's office that will support
not only my body but also my heart
and it's too easy to get caught up in what we don't have
literacy in our inner-city
competency in our presidency

so i keep telling myself go get that liberal arts degree
that high-knee
fine tea
hire me, please hire me, degree

or rather hide me, don't confide in me
or oblige me
to participate again in real life
after the real world
a real knife
showed up on our campus
or was it a gun

let's not go there. shhhh.

All i'm saying is, i really need my girls by my side
fighting with me to make this right

and i can see it now
Cat is painting an inspiring mural inside the hallway of a rebirthing
public school
where Jensen is teaching the hell out of our future
And miles down the road
Sydney
Is giving mouth surgery to a mom, a single mother of three
so she can go back to work Pain Free

Annie Lee
builds a business
a great wealth
a fashion trend
or aids efforts in mental health

and our girl Erin, over there, somewhere
with some wear and tear
tryna bring sane law and public policy back
or she's writing a bill to fix our growing gap

Realize *(continued)*

between the rich and the poor
And then next door
Jamie, saving a birds wing
Or Alex, Loren, Sansara, or Lizzie
Or any of my amazing friends banding together with me

and i'll be over here
probably
writing in hopes that someone will hear me

so before we shed another tear
i'm going to help women lose their fear
and rejuvenate
vibrate
encapsulate
all of the love
that they've ever denied
fantasize
and then realize
a better love
and
an exuberant life.

In Ohio My Father Teaches English Literature *Boemin Park*

at a community college. Once a student, bewildered,
asked how an Asian man could teach English.

If I ask for pizza, he proudly serves up
a bowl of rice. A "#1 Dad" sign hangs

from his rear-view mirror. He glances at it during his
weekly four-hour drives. Back and forth. Back and forth.

He tells me we didn't cross an entire ocean
just so I can sleep all day and call that

the "American Dream." At Sam's Club, a lady
lectured him on the word "pretzel." "With a z!"

she exclaimed. "Don't say it with a j." Pretzel. Prejel.
I watched my father, a man of many words, be reduced to one

that day. "Prejel, prejel," he repeated on the ride home.
Once, he wore traditional Korean clothing to the supermarket.

Embarrassed, I ran through the aisles, trying to lose
my father in this American maze.

I ask to leave the house, to see my friends.
"Home before midnight," he thunders,

"or I'll lock you out!" Though I know this not to be
true, I listen to his words because of the fear that

I will be locked out of his heart. In January,
he drove us through a snowstorm. Swaddled in blankets,

In Ohio My Father Teaches English Literature
(continued)

a child in the womb, I trusted
my father to lead us home.

Home. Home?
Where is his home?

His mind wanders in Korea, tracing paths
from the busy bus stations to the high mountaintops.

His body works in America, palely reflecting the life
he left in a country so many salty waves away.
His heart lives in his children, hope budding
in his bosom for their own blossoming dreams.

I think I carry our family, heritage, culture,
on my shoulders, the weight of two worlds

balancing upon me. Uncertain of where to go,
I hesitate. When I look to the side, my father

stands next to me, my Statue of Liberty,
and brightens the way with his torch.

Horizon 3
Elyse Tuennerman



Sugar Pangs

Evan O'Donnell

This year, February told me she'd do her best
to fill my stomach with something other than Funyuns and
Fun Dip sticks.

*their powder chalked my esophagus
shut. i wish i could vocally thank*

Last September, I moved out of my parents' house.
Since then, money's been inanimate, so
that brief thank-you note I scrawled out in
phlegm chunks
on the side of my next door neighbor's dull garage yesterday
was all my wallet could muster up.

*if only thoughts did more than just
count*

This morning, I stood alone and cold on my porch.
When I looked through my own breath, I saw the
scrawny tips
of onions sprouting up in the creaks of
my backyard's bank of sour poison ivy.

*she heard me, but not my gratitude.
she's just like everyone else*

By now, I've learned to brush off such jokes like the dirt
that'll father my dinner. I've made a checklist of
things I'll need
to dig up the bulbs, and if my next paycheck rolls through as planned
I'll try my best to buy them.

- 1. gloves, so my hands don't get dotty*
- 2. soap, so my innards don't get dotty*
- 3. a new coat, so my head can finally be*

confident

Sobriety

Ian Zigterman

A crow swoops over,
wings spread wide—the sky
and sun blacked out

by glossy feathers.
Crow lands on a pear
branch that bends below

talons scratching deep
into the bark. Head swivels.
Beak shatters through

the silence. Cawing.
Fog condenses to shining droplets
on warm skin and cool leaves.

Squirming within the sharp
edges of Crow's beak is an earth
worm and a blade of grass.

Crow leaves its perch
and lands on my shoulder
with a grip that bites

into muscle. He nuzzles
me and I nuzzle back, smelling
the dew rolling off feathers.

I raise my head
and slacken my jaw.
I allow Crow to drop

grass blade and wriggling
worm down my throat—
grateful to be fed.

