Forces

Volume 2019 Article 1

3-27-2019

2019 Forces

Scott Yarbrough

Follow this and additional works at: https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/forces

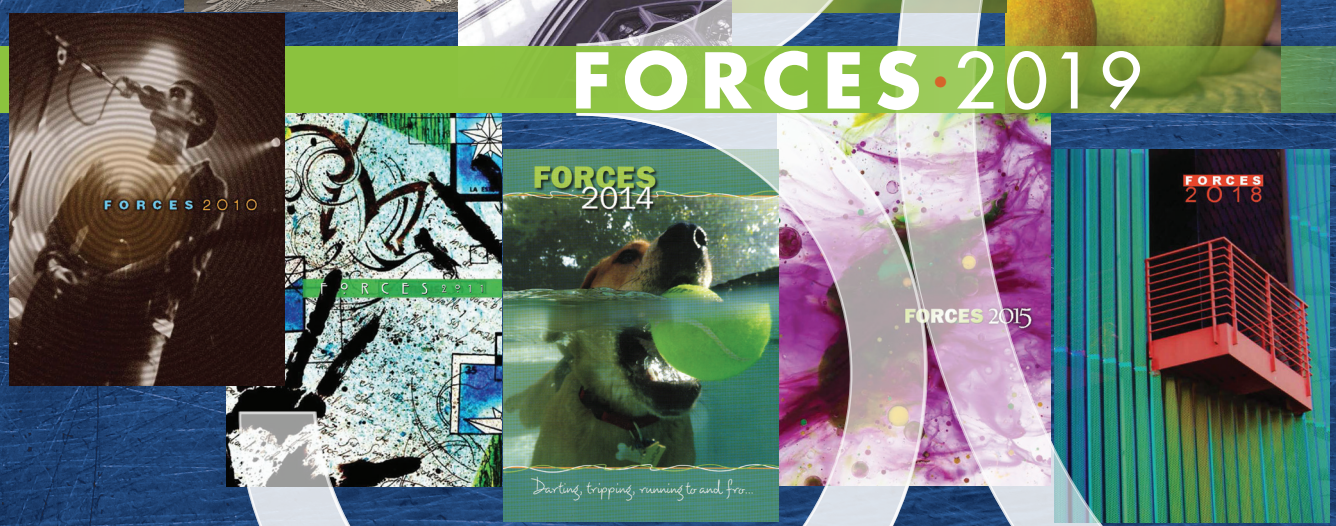
Part of the Ceramic Arts Commons, English Language and Literature Commons, Painting Commons, Photography Commons, and the Sculpture Commons

Recommended Citation

Yarbrough, Scott (2019) "2019 Forces," *Forces*: Vol. 2019 , Article 1.
Available at: https://digitalcommons.collin.edu/forces/vol2019/iss1/1

This Complete Issue is brought to you for free and open access by DigitalCommons@Collin. It has been accepted for inclusion in Forces by an authorized editor of DigitalCommons@Collin. For more information, please contact mtomlin@collin.edu.

FORCES·2019



30th ANNIVERSARY

COLLIN COLLEGE

FORCES 30th ANNIVERSARY 1989·2019

INTRODUCTION

30 YEARS AGO the Berlin Wall was brought down, the Mirage opened in Las Vegas as the first mega-hotel, the first Gameboy and the first Lexus were produced, thousands of students occupied Tiananmen Square, gasoline was 97 cents a gallon, a postage stamp was 25 cents and you had to lick it, and Professor Peggy Brown nurtured the brain-child of starting a literary journal at an infant Collin College. Her far-sighted vision has evolved into 30 years of continuous publication. What began as an in-house, saddle-stitched, black-and-white publication has evolved to become a perfect-bound, full-color chronicle, as it continues its miraculous metamorphosis.

The journal has become a living archival reflection of Collin College and the county it serves. In addition to the actual periodical being physical – a book to hold – last year, all copies were also electronically published in the new Digital Commons, allowing anyone worldwide access to any essay, poem, photo, or story since the inception of the publication.

There is no real way to emphasize the significance of this journal, its conception, and its vibrant life, except to invite you to peruse the 30 years of artistry and experience the impact for yourself. Lastly, we would be remiss if we didn't thank the Board of Trustees for their continuing support of the journal, Collin College District President Dr. Neil Matkin, Digital Commons Manager Mindy Tomlin-Paulson, and Student Editors Phoebe Cave, Hannah Hansen, Michael Nguyen, Bridget N. Scott-Shupe, BeLynn D. Hollers, Jordan Abu-Aljazer, Emily Kedslie, Anna Boling, Caroline Dillard, and Starlit D. S. Taie.

Also special thanks to the Writers' Bloc for the selection of their *Best of Journal* recognition and their sponsor, Sean Ferrier-Watson. And finally, PR staff members Tom Delamater, Marlene Miller, Donna Kinder, Keli Fink, and Heather Darrow for their direction and support, and the ultimate *Forces* team Craig Leverette, Rachel Walker, G'Anna Saunders, Deborah Hall, and Susan Mathews.

Forces Editor – R. Scott Yarbrough

CONTENTS

1
INTRODUCTION
R. Scott Yarbrough

5
Pastel Ceilings
Starlit D. S. Taie

6
Woman's Work
Molly Brown

Eggs
Maryanne Zamora

7
Milk and Cookies
Maryanne Zamora

All I Want for Christmas
Taylor M. Jariz

8
Downtown Dallas Blue Buildings
Kaitlyn Kitchen

City Gym, 10 am
Kateri Whitfield

9
Self Portrait
Carly May

Anchors
Mara Headrick

Orphaned
Mara Headrick

10
Tony on Orange
Anna Boling

11
AS Io FALLs
Anna Boling

Andrew on Brown
Anna Boling

12
Almost Finding Dory
Kaitlyn Kitchen

13-15
As Seen on T.V.
Deijenne Burris

16
Moonlight
Aubrey Tinch

Papa Legba
Kathryn B. Helton

Dank Memories
J.D. Isip

17
Behind the Red Door
Halee Nguyen

Lady Red II
Trexiea Hernandez

18
Boudica's Fire
Olivia Trotter

Heavenly Bodies
Erick Mendoza

19-20
Escape
Haley E. Foster

19
Mirror, Mirror on the Wall
Daphne H. Babcock

20
Element and Purpose
Duncan Odeny

21
Cake
Haley E. Foster

Birthday Cupcakes
Maryanne Zamora

22
Goodnight Montreal
Alicia Huppe

23
A Cure for 6:47 AM
Anna Boling

24
Cultural Portrait
Samuel M. Haville

25
Clean
Gina M. Quatrino

Lauren
Mara Headrick

26
Urban Night
Virginia Owen

Impression
Serra Akboy-Ilk

27
Death of an English Major
Caroline Dillard

Inside-Outside
Nick Young

28
Demeter's Cry
Emily Kedslie

Deep Blue Sky
Molly Brown

29
Loading...
Robin Horst

30
What I Paid to be a Model
Trexiea Hernandez

A Dark Side
Gilbert Hu

31
Edgar Degas Created Movement in his Paintings
Jordan Abu-Aljazer

Peeling Paint
Bridget N. Scott-Shupe

32-33
Stop and Smell the Flowers
Kaitlyn Kitchen

33-35
Flowers
Grace E. Spiro

34
Failed Gram Stain
Blaine Cathey

35
Mango Cheesecake, Second Attempt
Mara Headrick

Giverny
Mara Headrick

36-37
Bad Flood, Good Colors
Gilbert Hu

37
I Am Generations From Now
Michael J. Scott

38
Shelter
Starlit D. S. Taie

39
For Only A Moment
Starlit D.S. Taie

Mountain Coals
Starlit D. S. Taie

40
■ **Morgan vs. the Ball**
Carly May

41
■ **Look Busy**
Caroline Dillard

■ **Sister, Sister**
Emily A. Angrisano

42-43
■ **Psychedelic**
Kaitlyn Kitchen

43
■ **Heaven on Earth**
Citlali J. Gonzales

44-45
■ **Summer Storm**
Isabella O. Garzillo

45-46
■ **Moving On**
Alyson Leigh Ray

46
■ **Mother**
Madison Potts

47
■ **Mutiny Aboard the Aux Mer**
Dalton Wright

■ **Shark Hunter**
Isabella O. Garzillo

48
■ **Conversation?**
Gilbert Hu

49
■ **one, two, three, the red, the yellow, it all for me**
Jordan Abu-Aljazer

■ **Broken Shapes**
Bridget N. Scott- Shupe

50
■ **Tea for Two**
Kathryn B. Helton

51
■ **Girl with the Mask**
Clara M. Lanham

■ **Gone Wishing**
Emily A. Angrisano

52
■ **Down the Hall**
Joan Reese

■ **Lady Red**
Trexiea Hernandez

■ **Registry**
Jiaan Powers

■ **From the Series Grounded**
Anna K. Fritzel

53
■ **Nightscapes Shops at Legacy**
Maryanne Zamora

■ **Running**
BeLynn D. Hollers

54-55
■ **Scrap Paper**
Tiffany Page

54
■ **Peaceful Doves**
Deborah Anderson

55
■ **The Love Tree**
Daphne H. Babcock

56
■ **Sam's Eyes**
Dalton Wright

■ **Third Eye**
Molly Brown

57
■ **The House of Misfortune**
Ann Marie Newman

58-59
■ **Aspens Among the Pines**
Theresa M. Rodriguez

59-60
■ **The Hunt**
Phoebe Cave

60
■ **I Got an Eye on You**
Lance M. Pender

61
■ **Stoic**
Erica K. Kalish

■ **Wildfire Ashes**
Kateri Whitfield

■ **Story of a Mosaic**
Alexander N. Sanchez

62-63
■ **Arab Festival TX**
Maryanne Zamora

63-64
■ **What Makes Us Human?**
Hannah Hansen

64
■ **Santa Fe NM**
Maryanne Zamora

65
■ **Matter, or What They Name You**
J.D. Isip

■ **Anna TX I**
Lance M. Pender

66-67
■ **Hesitation**
Beth T. Ayers

68
■ **Anna TX II**
Lance M. Pender

■ **Days of Fasting**
Kateri Whitfield

69
■ **VY**
Anna Boling

■ **Sexy Pomegranate**
Dylan Telthorst

70-71
■ **Horizon**
Starlit D.S. Taie

71-72
■ **Mother Superior**
Bridget N. Scott-Shupe

72
■ **Lighthouse**
Samuel M. Haville

■ Artwork
■ Literature

COLLIN COLLEGE

Collin College is an equal opportunity institution
and provides educational and employment opportunities
without discrimination on the basis of race, color,
religion, sex, age, national origin, disability,
veteran status or other legally protected class.

FORCES
is an annual student publication
sponsored by the
Communication and Humanities and Fine Art Divisions of Collin College.

First rights revert back to the author after publication.

Pastel Ceilings Starlit D.S. Taie

Woman's Work

Molly Brown

Now I know what it means
to laugh and cry at the same time:
Now I get it, mama, all your pain—
How your heart was broken by men,
and how a woman can break a man in kind

I felt how you shattered like the heirloom crystal
thrown from cabinets, slicing rubies
across soft skin the color of white jade—
Or were you the glass coffee table
that was dragged to the lawn
with its legs in the air, helpless and naked?
Here I am, the result of all these things—
And none.

After all my tears had gone and left me dry,
I could finally hear my ancestors sing.
They stood in the kitchen with bare feet
kneading bread, dark hair and knowing eyes
covered by heavy, homespun veils.
They tutted over my prone form
as they swept away SAQ and ashes:

"GOD didn't put us here to be loved;
They put us here to work hard
knowing how hard women can work.
GOD didn't put us here to be loved;
They put us here to raise villages
and hold our sister's hand,
sweeping back her plaited hair
while she heaved in labor,
drenched in cold sweat.

And when we saw that child, we wept—
Full of joy and terror,
knowing the world she was born into
and would have to make her own;
Laughing and crying at the same time."

Eggs Maryanne Zamora

Milk and Cookies Maryanne Zamora

All I Want for Christmas

Taylor M. Jariz

Christmas morning and
there was no tree.

No laughter echoing from the living room.
No innocent anticipation of what was held within
pristinely wrapped boxes, soon to be torn to shreds.

Replaced by deafening silence which even
Christmas music couldn't drown out.
By clenched jaws and gnawed nails.
Countless words left unsaid.

Mom's lips pursed ever so tightly.
Tears tempting the corners of
her already bloodshot eyes.

Children dreading the idea of opening gifts.
Questioning how they could possibly fill
the void in our hearts.

Yet we trudged through it for
a taste of normalcy to
wash down the unforgivable bitterness.

This house was not a home.

A day for rejoicing stolen by fear.
By silent knowledge of
what was so obviously missing.

He had been gone for two weeks already.
His family unsure of when [or if]
he would ever return.

Our hearts were breaking.
His was failing.
Christmas morning and
Daddy wasn't there.

Downtown Dallas Blue Buildings Kaitlyn Kitchen

City Gym, 10 am

Kateri Whitfield

Twin kittens bit me
in the city gym parking lot.
Their elderly owner walked beside me
on the treadmill, slowly in street clothes,
drinking his morning coffee.
Money felt strange to his and my hands.
I let my hands burn sick.
He gave his to the cats.
The television played silent subtitles
with updates on the wildfire &
public grief as a recent widower
recalled a last phone call.
"I love you, come get me."
"Grandpa, come get me"
I ran, eyes closed, ran stationary.
The kitten-owner drank his coffee.

Anchors

Mara Headrick

my thoughts are anchors, you see.
they hold me down
that I might drown
in my thoughtful sea.

Self Portrait Carly May

Orphaned Mara Headrick

Tony on Orange Anna Boling

AS Io FALLs

Anna Boling

Clouds like humid satin

Twirl me in them
Together We dance

Swallowed in this fog
I have no choice
My life is chanced
To fall into Your stormy eyes

Belovéd, this isn't Argos,

Mercury won't come to save me from those
Open eyes and lava tears.

Neither will You.
Dancing…1...2...4
We pay tribute, time and years
To the Shining Father.

She isn't here to watch

The only near to catch You
Are Lovers that swing

Something else bears Your weight
Glorified Sky, Olympus' King
My life is fated, to end this flight without wings
Before you, many moons are brightening.

The swimming constellations spy Our love affair

(Just Ours, there's no one else to see here)
In the infinitely silent vacuum of space

I will still sing to Us prayer
When I'm a million pieces adorning Your dancing storms.
Till I reach my Limit

I will burst with joy

As I fall into
Your Rust Red Marble kisses.

Andrew on Brown Anna Boling

Almost Finding Dory Kaitlyn Kitchen

As Seen on TV

Deijenne Burris
Winner of Writers' Bloc Competition

I would spend most afternoons at home, locking the world away where it could not touch me. My agoraphobia was intense, to say the very least. My Friday nights consisted of me leaving an indent in the plush carpeting of my mother's apartment, hunched over a screen of some sort; the light from my laptop being the only mildly-warm light that would ever shine on my face. I'd watch a variety of campy dramas and telenovelas until I fell to sleep. That was my routine; it was how all my days had gone. Eventually, my mother had had enough. She'd pushed her misconceptions aside, if it meant I would stop waking her every night in a panic. She sent me to therapy, despite her mixed feelings about it all. I would spend every other Tuesday afternoon there.

I thought there would be more lying on couches and talking at an unresponsive, old man with thick glasses that would scrutinize my every word in a notebook. I've come to believe now that that was just what TV taught me. The doctor wasn't an old man. In reality, she was very young. Maybe she was even a little too young to have been a doctor. I wasn't quite sure what to call her. She had no coke-bottle glasses perched upon her nose. She was just a woman, doing a job. Just a person.

I'd sit on her gigantic couch, and it would swallow me as I attempted to make myself as small as I could be. Tense and frigid, I would wait for the hour to end. She'd sit across from me, casual and confident. She'd wait. I'd wait. The silence felt persecuting, ringing in my ears. I would rush to find a way to break through it, starting off with my first line:

"I don't know what to say."

That's how the scene played out every week, for several weeks. She would bring me into her office, a manufactured home-like space full of small trinkets. She had blankets for comforting, toys for fidgeting, stones for someone's worries - things I'd never touch, in fear that my therapist might find me too nervous of a person. She would smile, scan her notes, and prompt me for a continuation of what I'd forgotten I'd said the weeks before. That's how therapy usually worked. I made a profession of dancing on eggshells as I talked, careful to only share so much. She'd listen and scribble down notes now and again, leaving me worrying what odd thing I'd said that was so noteworthy. At least I'd gotten that part right.

That's how therapy usually worked. I made a profession of dancing on eggshells as I talked, careful to only share so much. She'd listen and scribble down notes now and again, leaving me worrying what odd thing I'd said that was so noteworthy. At least I'd gotten that part right.

The sessions started the same every time, and I had grown adjusted to the repetition of it all. She, of course, had taken notice of my reserved nature. She'd ask about the things I'd stress over. She'd ask about why I was worried about how people thought of me, or why I was so afraid to share. She expressed concern over my obsession in relation to people's thoughts of me, one of the few fears I'd expressed often.

"Have you always assumed that people were focused on you?" She'd inquire as I tried to parse out if her tone was one of caring or of judgement. I didn't know how to respond. My cheeks stung as I'd realized how much information I had let slip over the weeks I had been seeing her. I wasn't as sly as I'd hoped. The answer was, well, yes, but I wasn't sure how deep into this I was truly willing to go.

Since I was a child, for as long as I could remember, I'd feel the judgmental stares of an audience that was not watching me. Most times, they hadn't even noticed me. I'd perfected the act of being unsuspicious and plain, a social sort-of chameleon. If I didn't stand out, no one could target me. I feared more than anything becoming the girl on TV who was shamed into being someone other than herself. The Cady Herons, sweet girls who lost themselves in attempts to survive in their unforgiving worlds. That's what people got when they wanted to be somebody. When someone wanted to have the starring role in their own life. I aimed to be an extra in the background, maybe getting a line or two in, if I was lucky.

"I know it's just my anxiety. I tell myself it's my anxiety," I said, picking at my fingernails.

She smiled.

"That's a good way to understand mental illness. Telling yourself it's just thoughts or your OCD; that's the first step."

OCD. That was a step outside of our usual script. I'd never really shown any signs of something like that, to my knowledge. OCD was usually something people made fun of, wasn't it? A disorder often characterized as silly, obsessive, quirky, sometimes even romanticized. Even I'd made a little joke about it here and there. OCD was the thing people jokingly said they had when they felt uncomfortable because a picture frame was mildly crooked or when they liked to color code notes for school. OCD was the subject of little one-liners people would make about how they like their rooms to meet the bare minimum of cleanliness.

I certainly didn't feel like the shrill women on television, scrubbing tirelessly at every dirty surface, their emotional distress minimized for a throwaway joke in a sitcom. I didn't see myself as the "quirky" side characters, flickering light switches and touching doorknobs a perfect number of times before I could rest. The Emma Pillsburys and Adrian Monks, they were nothing like me. My troubles weren't a joke to me.

I didn't defy her diagnosis. I didn't question it. "Sure," I thought to myself, "That makes sense. I've always known I was pretty weird. Didn't think I was that weird though." She must have just seen it on my face. She explained to me how OCD had many ways of manifesting itself. Sometimes, with debilitating intrusive thoughts that can take weeks to let go of. Other times, it can be paranoia and anxiety. Often, it was both. It wasn't always what first came to mind when you'd hear it in passing, those with repetitive routines, but that was very possible too, and it was something to be taken seriously. It wasn't being a perfectionist or liking to alphabetize your books. It wasn't something that trivial, and it wasn't a quirky little adjective.

A thought that I had chewed on in that moment was this: a lot of people don't often realize that there's nothing funny about OCD. Those people don't often consider obsession isn't as eccentric and sweet as it is on TV. They don't think about the nights I've stressed about finding a small, non-existent thing I'd done wrong to a person I didn't know because the delivery woman didn't smile and didn't talk much, so surely, I'd wronged her. I couldn't say my constant discomfort was something I had found funny. They had no

idea. They didn't know of rainy evenings full of time wasted crying to my girlfriend on the phone because today is the day I was sure to be hurt by someone who had had enough of me. I don't remember ever laughing about it.

As I sat nestled into the suffocating couch, I had only felt confusion. For many, a diagnosis was usually freeing. A therapist-approved diagnosis would provide the answers for a question you didn't know how to ask. Getting a diagnosis was supposed to be something comforting; a diagnosis told you that you weren't alone. For me, however, it had validated something I'd been debating my whole life. My worst nightmares had been confirmed. The world, even if it didn't notice me, was always laughing at me. They all found my behavior strange, even before I knew it was strange. I fought back explaining to her how it gnawed at me in that instant. I tried not to tell her about how the thought of truly being different – having OCD – made my heart sink into my stomach, knowing that there were people who would never truly take me seriously.

It was in that moment that I became aware of just how I had already lost myself in an effort to make sure that no one else would make me lose myself first, shielding the interesting things about myself in fear that a world that was already laughing at me, at all of us with OCD, would laugh even harder. I tried, despite my reservations, to open myself up just a little more that afternoon. If my disorder was a laughing stock, it seemed pointless to continue putting myself in this bubble anyways. I voiced my concern, catching the doctor by surprise. We spent the remaining thirty minutes discussing the things that made me nervous, as I learned how to cope with the battle with my own brain, my one true critic.

The hour came and went, as I freed myself from the hold of the couch that swallowed me whole. I'd set another appointment for the next session, which I'd always later debate about cancelling before going back again anyways.

I flagged down my mother's car, it was easily recognizable by its matte blue hood, more oxidation than there was paint. As we drove away, she'd ask me how it was, if I'd learned anything new. "Yes," I'd say, often forgetting whatever I'd talked about as soon as I left the threshold of the clinically comfortable space. I'd try to recount the things I'd been told, usually receiving dashes of commentary from her between silences. This time, however, it was a little different. "I have OCD. I know it's weird, but I'm going to cope with it how I can." I stated plainly, running my thumbs over my phone's cracked screen as I relayed the same news to my girlfriend – who was supportive and prepared herself with research and coping mechanisms to present me with as I drove home.

My mother – equally as supportive – disclosed to me that our OCD was genetic. Plenty of the women on her side of the family had it; it had just been invisible to me. We had generations of cleanly great-aunts with plastic-wrapped couches and distrusting grandmothers with nervous dispositions, she explained. Even my mother, herself, had it. She consoled me in her usual quiet and calming tone, "OCD is just something you have to work with, not work away."

Since that day, I decided to make my best effort to work with the frustrating mess OCD could be. I would be a little friendlier or even try to make small talk with the women in the neighborhood about sweet and trivial things like their shoes or their happy anecdotes about their children. I'd even travel outside of my hometown and into another to visit my girlfriend and try not to analyze the movements of every bystander. I would no longer actively hold myself back from my own freedom, though the obsessions stuck around. They always would; there is no cure for mental illness. There would be, and still are, days and settings where it will best me. I was still the shy girl who preferred to keep to herself, but now more so on my own terms. My diagnosis had freed me. I no longer had to keep up the act. Now, I was the star.

Moonlight Aubrey Tinch

Papa Legba Kathryn B. Helton

Dank Memories

J.D. Isip

The one with teeth
The one with mushroom clouds,
A kid in a hoodie laughing
Gripping his head,
The Scream repeated
Screen after screen,
"That's racist" boy,
Am I reaching out for
Or running away from them?

Oprah sitting on a beige divan, sun setting on cue, RuPaul told her the secret of keeping brown foundation off her cream turtleneck and it is immaculate, all of it, the ice tea, the mint, women knitting her every word into pillows, scarves, a kaftan with a menagerie marching around the arms and neck line, she places the stones in my hands and signs a copy of The Secret the page opposite her foreword, the only part anyone reads, she's so patient except when she has to ask for more ice.

People of Walmart, nobody's
got no time for that, "Hide your
children, hide your wives,"
Y Tho? The dog is still on fire,
"This is fine"—the Angry Muslim Guy,
determined baby, stock photo
woman crying, Boromir warning
"One does not simply"
Forget them. They're forgotten.

The one where I win, my triumphal entry, the palm fronds, village girls, muses, divas on rotating stages, a white-haired shaman cupping his wrinkled hands beneath my chin singing the victory song, legend of me the way I forgot me, unbroken ranks of soldiers, twenty-one-gun salute, blam, blam, blam— loud enough to make it real, stave off the rest of it, the garden, tears of blood, the one I brought back from the dead, pigs rushing the cliffs, porcine bodies splashing against the shores

the smacking sound like skin on skin and Judas' kiss on kiss.

Behind the Red Door

Halee Nguyen

As the sun illuminated the bright red door that enclosed all of the happiness in my heart, I walked across the cracked sidewalk in Plano, Texas that was once covered in colored chalk. Through the door, laid tile as white as pearls, that turned my bare feet cold. Inside was the intense smell of my mom's homemade Vietnamese cooking that filled the entire house with levels of sweet to salty. Every twist and turn were walls covered in vibrant papers with colorful, drawn stick figures that read 'my family'. As I walked out of the kitchen doorway, the soft notes of the Vietnamese music emanating from the television occupied the room, and filled my ears with nostalgia. Directly behind the television were pictures that represented my childhood from family parties and holidays to memories that brought pure contentment. To the left was the emptiness of the missing window that my cousin once shattered, and just around the corner of the living room stood a rack full of toys. Through the scattered toys that laid across the multi-colored rug, led to the back doors where imagination and adventure came together. Beneath the tall, leafy trees, and the smell of red roses, sweet like honey, the wooden playground reminded me of my place for thrill and excitement. The touch of the wood was rough, while the swingset felt warm from sitting in the sun all day. Between the ins and outs of this home, holds countless, irreplaceable memories that made the most remarkable impact on my life.

Beneath the tall, leafy trees, and the smell of red roses, sweet like honey, the wooden playground reminded me of my place for thrill and excitement.

Lady Red II

Trexiea Hernandez

Boudica's Fire

Olivia Trotter

Rome betrayed her.
Her daughters raped,
And herself flogged,
Naked,
Publically,
For the insolence of being a woman.

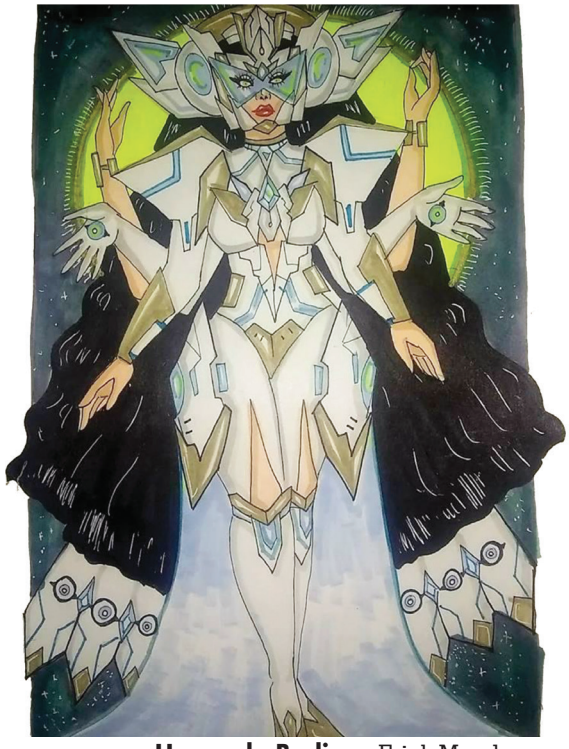
But Boudica was not just a woman,
She was the Queen of the Iceni.

Rome only incurred her wrath.

Boudica led the Celtics,
Not as a queen,
But as one with outrage and vengeance
Raging in her soul.

Three moons of warfare,
Boudica left a bloody trail behind her:

Heavenly Bodies
Erick Mendoza



Heavenly Bodies Erick Mendoza

The waters ran red as bodies washed ashore,
Roman cities burnt to the ground,
Fires raged for days,
As did Boudica's anger.

With Londinium incinerated behind her,
Boudica addressed her army.
Her fiery hair contrasting with the blue paint on her visage,
She looked as ferocious as she felt.
Anger and rage heated her face.

"They lay claim and dominion over us and our lands!
We are not their slaves!
And this land can never be conquered!"
Boudica lost the war for freedom,
But she was never forgotten.
By the very city she burned to the ground,
A city once so scorched,
The scars are still evident almost two thousand years later.
All because of Boudica's fiery wrath.

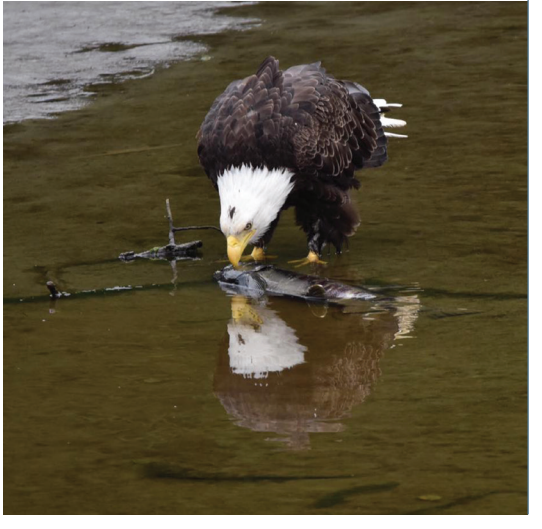
Escape

Haley E. Foster

Faster, that was the only coherent thought in the girl's mind as she stumbled blindly in the dark. Faster, her body ached, and the pain in her face was blinding. Faster, a dull ache filled her shin, and she realized with mixed horror and relief that she had finally reached the stairs leading up from the hellish place behind her. Faster, crawling up the stairs on numb hands and bruised knees, the too-large T and baggy sweatpants, stained with splashes of her own blood, hung loosely from her body, padding the sounds of her flesh connecting with the splintering wood beneath her. The clothes were not hers; she was in them when she woke up in this place, tied up and bleeding profusely from lashes on her abdomen. And they obviously did not belong to her sadistic captor; this fact only served to make her even more frightened. She was not the first. The boards groaned beneath her weight, making far more noise than she was comfortable with, though in that moment she couldn't bring herself to care. Faster, she felt her hands press against the rough wood of the door as she finally reached the top of the staircase, more adrenaline surging through her body. Feeling her way up the face of the door, she felt the cool metal handle sting at her hands; she grasped tightly to the doorknob and pushed. Nothing.

She pushed again, nothing. She pushed and pulled and beat at the door until her hands were bruised, hoping against hope that even in her weakened state the old wood would give. Nothing happened. She had been so close, after what must have been days down in the dark; she was so close. So close to a breath of fresh air and the sight of the sky, even if it was only for a moment.

The clothes were not hers; she was in them when she woke up in this place, tied up and bleeding profusely from lashes on her abdomen. And they obviously did not belong to her sadistic captor; this fact only served to make her even more frightened.



Mirror, Mirror on the Wall

Daphne H. Babcock

Even if she were only to be caught and dragged back down into the shadows to never see the light of day again— just one last glimpse.

Why was he doing this? She had been knocked unconscious yet again, only to wake to a sharp agonizing pain in her lips, but more importantly to find that she had been unbound. Why, what was this man thinking, if she could even call him a man. She would have been better off had she awoken still bound rather than with this false sense of hope.

Banging once, twice, three times on the door, she gave up and slumped against the wooden barrier in defeat. She would have wept if she hadn't cried all the tears a person could. She didn't know why she thought anything different would happen, this thing holding her wasn't stupid. If he had left her untied, then why on earth would he leave the door unlocked? And even if he had, she had no clue where she was. She could be in a basement or some kind of bunker, the middle of the woods or some old abandoned building in a run-down neighborhood where she would be shot the minute she got out in the open, or perhaps a farmhouse miles away from anyone or anything. Her body shook with despair and the realization that she was never going to leave this place, not alive anyway.

Through her shaking breaths she could hear the soft footfalls of heavy boots attempting not to be heard approaching the door. He was back. Her shuddering breath quickened as her whole body went cold, every muscle in her body was paralyzed with fear. Not a single coherent thought was present in her mind— only pure, cold panic. Then all was quiet; the footsteps had stopped what seemed to be mere inches away from the door. The girl held her breath, the only sounds audible to her were her own pounding heart, thumping against her chest so heavily that she feared he too might be able to hear it, and the sound of blood rushing in her ears. Then she heard the clashing of keys on the other side as the door handle began to jiggle with the lock sliding easily away from the doorframe. Then another latch gave, the sliding kind that has a chain on it. In only a few minutes the door had gone from her key to freedom to another wall keeping her there. One moment a protective barrier between her and a madman, and now that barrier was dissolving into nothing.

Element and Purpose Duncan Odeny

Cake

Haley E. Foster
Winner of Writers' Bloc Competition

She sat at the head of the table, a huge smile painted on her face. She looked around the room, her brothers both to her left, cake shoved into their mouths and smeared all over their faces. Squelch. Her mother to her right, fork in hand, lips parted and slightly stained with blue icing. Squirm. Her father sat opposite her looking quite silly with that pointed party hat strapped tightly to his head. He had only taken a few bites, but that was enough to make her happy. How he had praised her, what a big girl she was baking the cake all by herself. Squish.

The little girl sat, cheeks stuffed like a chipmunk's with the cupcakes her mother had picked up at the store just in case the cake hadn't turned out well. The smell didn't bother her one little bit. Her brothers both to her left, their heads smashed into their plates as they both stared at each other, wide-eyed looks plastered on their faces. Her mother to her right, stomach clenched tightly in her other hand, slumped over onto the table facing her daughter. Her father sat opposite her looking quite silly with his eyes sunken into his skull and his skin all grayed. How he had praised her, what a big girl she was baking the cake all by herself.

How he had
praised her,
what a big girl
she was
baking the cake
all by herself.

The squelching sounds of little white maggots filled the room deafeningly as they ate away at the pizza and chicken nuggets still sitting at the center of the table. She'd have to finish the remaining cupcakes quickly before they got into those; they had already started on her brothers after all. She watched them and giggled as they left the remaining cake untouched. They were smart little bugs, such a shame her family hadn't been that smart.

Birthday Cupcakes Maryanne Zamora

Goodnight Montreal Alicia Huppe

A Cure for 6:47 AM

Anna Boling

Fear of the dark like Sun is a savior
A cure for 6:47 AM Texas in April
Only remedy for blind midnight
Is a sequin-filled purple night light

That I used until I moved away from
Brookhollow Drive, Sad day in Sweet July
I used until the bulb burned out
But shapes would always rise from

Crumpled towels and things in corners
Transforming in small light
Pitch projections behind my eyes caused
Dancing, shy amoebas.

"How old are you?!" Old enough to know
Darkened strings of whispers,
music emitting from the undress of closets
Won't quiet with age

In response, old hymns in opera undertones
I shatter windows, shake bed frames with notes
As Hunca Munca scurries across the hall
For a drink of water

Little mouse will only ever have bad dreams
This time at night is such a chore
My noose of Christmas lights are losing life,
bulb by bulb
God does nothing to redeem lost, forgotten sleep
in his pulp Bible.

Duerme en ello, y tomarás consejo (Take counsel of one's pillow)
But who can sleep when pillows
Have packed their cases
With plans for long vacations elsewhere?

Glowing red numbers
6:47
snap
6:48

Golden fingers reach to pull back eyelids
(Cold sweat, exposed limbs)
Through tight shut blinds
"It's alright now; it's morning time"

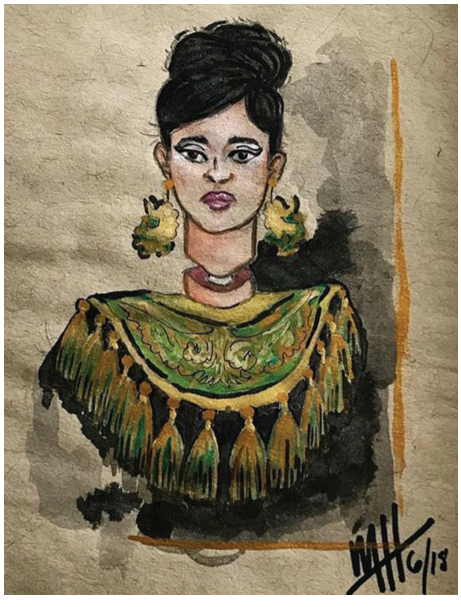
A gentle voice prods in
The humming of mowers
The squeals of playgrounds...
Welcome back to real life.

Cultural Portrait Samuel M. Haville

Clean

Gina M. Quatrino

he loves me.
she sat at her kitchen table, staring at the fresh bouquet.
her arms folded, she fumbled with the fallen petals.
he loves me not.
she let out a sigh and leaned back in her chair.
the window was open, letting in a crisp breeze that made her feel nostalgic.
she watched the curtains dance,
imagining that they were arms
reaching out to hold her.
he loves me.
she wondered if he was thinking about her,
as she sipped her coffee,
which was far more cream and sugar than anything else.
he loves me not.
"this is silly,"
she thought to herself, tossing the final petal over her shoulder.
and yet,
she couldn't help but peek behind her to watch it float to the ground.
he loves me.
she rested her arms on the windowsill, watching the busy town below her.
she listened for the sounds of life starting again.
the babies in their strollers, crying.
the bikes racing against the cobblestone pavement.
she watched people hug, kissing each cheek.
starting over.
he loves me not.
she knew in her heart this was true,
but she still waited
for the last petal to fall,
she watched it float to the ground
so soft, yet so sudden.
he loves me not,
and that's okay.



Lauren Mara Headrick

Urban Night Virginia Owen

Impression Serra Akboy-Ilk

Death of an English Major

Caroline Dillard

For our next problem
we're going to start by
taking the second derivative
of the function.
Of course we are.
The function is negative
forty-three times the square
root of the natural logarithm
of x to the power of negative
one-third divided by x plus
five raised to the four-fifths.
If I am to die today
please let it be now.
So what's the first thing we do?
I'm in a class of crickets.
Find f prime.
Obviously…
And we'll find the answer
with the chain rule.
Definitely knew that.
Well actually we'll use both
the chain rule and the
quotient rule.
The more the merrier.
Now that we've done that we
can use the First Derivative Test
to find critical numbers and intervals.
Right.
And then f double prime…
Sorry, what?
…will show the function's
concavity.
Gesundheit.
Are you with me?
Nope.
I've gotten you started so you
should be able to finish the
rest on your own.
. . .
And don't forget the test
is on Wednesday.

Inside-Outside Nick Young

Deep Blue Sky Molly Brown

Demeter's Cry

Emily Kedslie

I wish I had not eaten the fruit that
makes my mother cry. Hades beguiled
me to a taste from which I did not
come.

With a flavor cherry sharp, Hermes delivered
me. But, now, my heart craved a palette
from the depths, a place I cannot call
home.

For months below I stay, honored queen of hell.
I leave behind an Earth that dies, fading from reality,
but with my return they worship me: goddess of fertility,
Persephone.

Loading... Robin Horst

What I Paid to be a Model

Trexiea Hernandez

I will be a star even
If it kills me.

I think of nothing but AMBITION!
FAME!
BEAUTY!

But I underestimated
How much
'Against all cost' actually costs:

$5,000 For test shots and headshots
$75 A pop to learn how to walk
X 5

$375 Because "a pretty face
with a gaudy gait
won't do"

$4,000 Charged by my agency
to book a show

The money from it,
I have yet to see.

Instead, I drudge home in
The dress I strut in hours before
In lieu of money.

How do I tell them that
I can't ingest tulle and crystal?
That sequins can't pay for my bills.
You can't.

So I don't.

But hey, at least it sparkles
even when it sits
On the only other chair in my apartment.

A Dark Side Gilbert Hu

I like to hold it
When I'm starving **fasting**
To lose 35 pounds **prep**
For the shoot in two weeks.

It reminds me of what I need to be.

I need to be a diamond:
Glittering
Shiny
Beautiful
Indestructible

But what if
I'm just *ugly* **ugly** ***UGLY***
ugly
coal:
Lumpy and dirty
And weak.

I have to be a star
If
I don't
it will kill me.

Edgar Degas Created Movement in his Paintings

Jordan Abu-Aljazer

You were in the lightning
begging me to dry the pavement.
I cant
I shouted
I cant dry the pavement.

Your knees pressed into it; you
began to wave your hand
back and forth, water
puddles splashing
into raindrops
that fled
from
you.

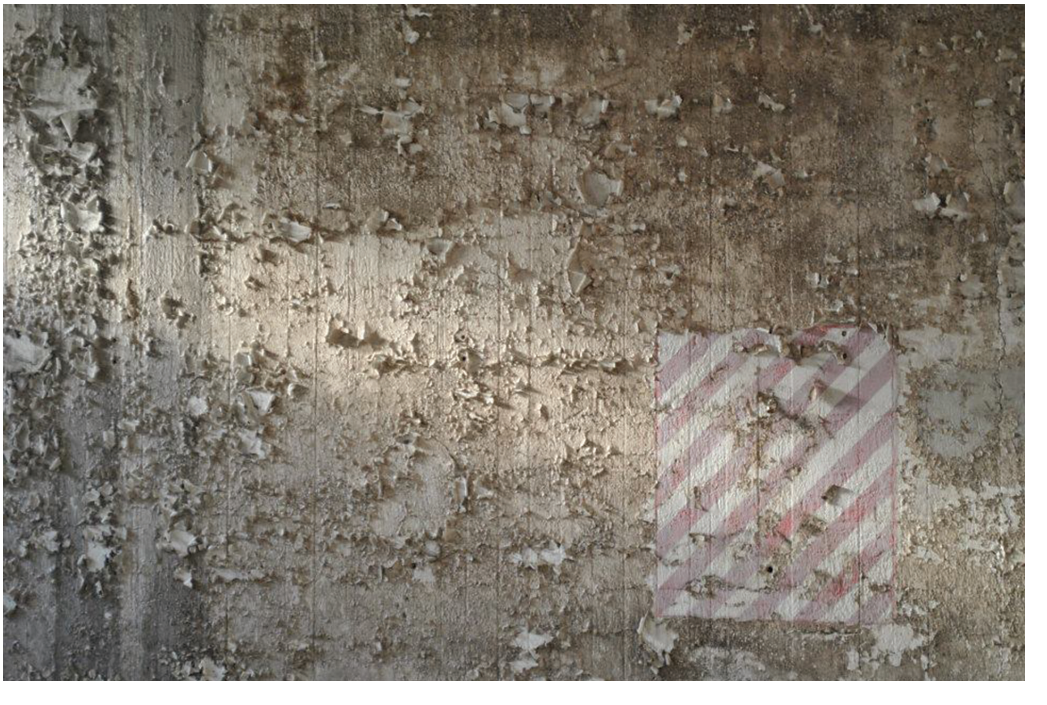
You can dry the pavement
you muttered
but I cant. not with
with all the towels
to gag myself and
not with all the lungs
to drown myself with.

I told you to get out of the lightning,
that some clouds are menacing
that they tell you they're hiding the sun
and you would never know that they're
lying.

Tell the sun to dry the pavement.
The sun isn't here yet, come inside.
The pavement is wet and I dont want it to be
make it dry again!

You paused and began to push your chest inwards.
You started thrashing, making the faces you should
when weeping, but you had no tears, just a mouth
pressed on both sides, eyes like you shut the grand
canyon; you kept pulling your head down like you
would a lamp switch. I wanted to tell you the water
began to boil, and I could have sworn it was ink,
how black your clouds were. But instead I shut the
door; sat on the steps beneath the porch roof, and
watched you burn in the water of a summer rain.

"You cant dry the pavement"
I whispered as you seized from side to side.



Peeling Paint
Bridget N. Scott-Shupe

Stop and Smell the Flowers Kaitlyn Kitchen

Flowers

Grace E. Spiro

I cannot remember a time where I did not love flowers.

When I was a little girl, I lived in Santa Fe, New Mexico, a place teeming with colorful and eclectic flora and fauna alike. It was dubbed The Land of Enchantment in 1999 because of its bright and bold deserts, snow-capped mountains, towering forests and bounties of flowers above ground and gemstone deposits below. These were magnificent and never far from me, but my favorite things were the wildflowers.

I remember being on my mother's lap in a wide field one afternoon as she dutifully plucked different flowers from the ground and placed them in my hands and my hair, only for me to inspect for a moment before stuffing into my shallow pockets. Red snapdragons, pink desert willows, dainty white fleabanes, and tiny purple yarrows had all seen the linings of my clothes at one point or another, as days like those were many. My mother was the only family I had at first.

When I moved to Dallas at 5 years old, I only seemed to see bush roses, potted pansies or petunias, and bluebonnets in the spring. There were no longer any stretching fields of unknown blossoms to explore, but rather just decorative sections on sidewalks with unkempt bushels stuffed into the corners. I eventually grew to hate the Texas landscape and longed for my old one. My aunt, with whom we moved in upon coming to Dallas, had a large bush of Rose of Sharons in her back yard, but it wasn't enough. My mother said we couldn't go back to New Mexico when I asked her.

As I grew I continued to pick flowers. Some were just parts of weeds, some were so tiny I had to clutch them between two fingers, some were so fragile I could never pick one without ripping it. Even when I was as old as age 10 I would come home with backpack sections full of half-dead flowers I had greedily harvested from my school's field. My schoolmates would look at me as if I was mental, probably because I picked so many and took them so seriously. I hated the way they stared at me as I picked them.

In the coming years though, I realized I didn't have to pick flowers to gain the joy of collecting beautiful things or feeling "rich" in my own way… But I always kept track of my favorites.

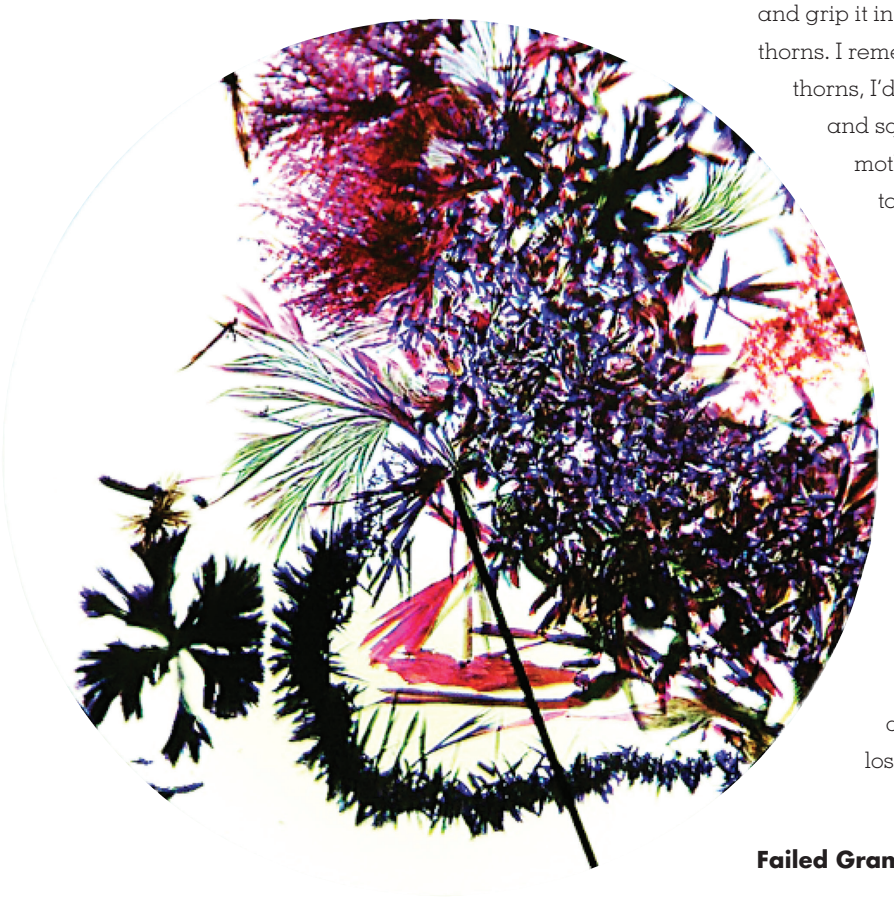
By the time I was 9, my mother had finally found love. My step-dad, a man much older than her, talked her into a Hawaiian wedding. I've never gotten to know a flower so well as the Hibiscus at that time. Hibiscus symbolized an ideal wife or a perfect love. There were many hibiscus plants and decorations around the island, but my mother wore tuberoses around her neck the night she got married.

When I was 11, my favorite flower was the cherry blossom. A symbol of beauty, youth, and the fleetingness of life as one knows it. A reminder to live life to the fullest and never take anything for granted. I remember sitting on the floor of my house in North Dallas, a house that had been standing since the 1950's, and doodling little cherry blossoms onto crisp white printer paper hastily and with a tiny bit of urgency. My best friend and mentor at the time had asked me to, and despite my laziness, I filled 3 whole pages with badly-scribbled cherry blossoms. When I gave them to her, she said she wanted a darker shade of pink. I was quick to darken them.

By the time I was 12, I had long stopped picking flowers in the literal sense. My favorite flower had become a Paulownia. Paulownias grew on trees and were planted as a custom in Southeast Asia when a baby girl in a noble family was born. In other words, it symbolized new life. At 12, I no longer had a best friend. My days were spent listening to music and drawing. My worst and only companion was myself, but the growing discomfort inside me only paved the way for more creativity. I remember writing a poem about paulownias, but it got lost later when I moved. I never looked for it even after I unpacked.

At 13 my favorite flower was the red rose. Typical, but quintessential, the red rose symbolized love, passion and commitment. I would buy roses to keep in the house often, in a vase on the kitchen table. I'd occasionally pull one out and grip it in my hands to check and see if it had thorns. I remember how even when they did have thorns, I'd close my fist around the stem again and squeeze. My step-father would bring my mother roses often as well, but she began to hate it when he did. Eventually, I kept the roses I bought in my room and out of the kitchen where I had staged them before. I stayed in my room more often, anyway.

At 14, violets were my flower of choice. They symbolized devotion and purity, despite their deep, almost hedonistic purple tone. The color of a violet is so rich, and yet the flower itself stands for modesty and commitment. I was 14 when I was first in love with someone. I got my heart broken, and along with that, a tiny piece of me was lost that I wasn't even ever aware I had.



Failed Gram Stain Blaine Cathey

I didn't mourn losing this tiny piece, but everyone I told about it was shocked at me. They thought less of me. But I had only just begun to feel alive.

At 16, my favorite flower was the Stargazer lily. The Stargazer, as opposed to its pure white parent flower that symbolizes purity and chastity, represents boldness, youth and prosperity. At 16, I felt all grown up. The tiny vacancy inside of me that had left with my first love had grown a tiny bit bigger, but I felt on top of the world with my newfound abundance. I ate, loved and expressed myself with recklessness and lightheartedness, unaware of how much time I really had to do things like that later in my life.

At 18, my favorite flower became the poppy. A small, crimson flower with a black center that symbolizes sleep, peace and death, the poppy was also known for its sedative effects that came from the opium inside it. It was at 18 that I truly wondered if I had a problem with my habits, perhaps even addiction. The small vacancy inside me had grown, but it seemed sated again for a good two years before I realized that it never would be full.

Mango Cheesecake, Second Attempt Mara Headrick

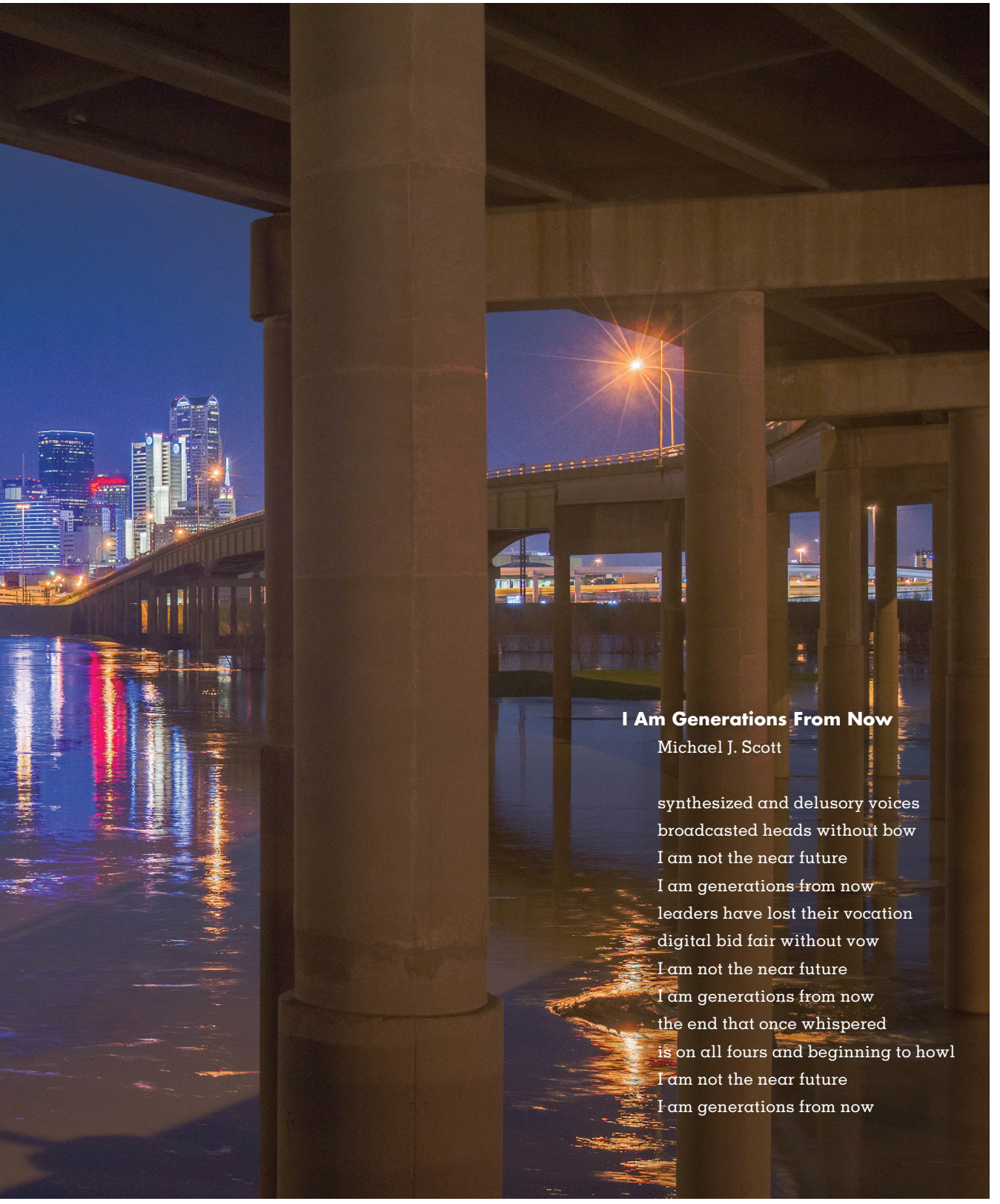
Now I am 20, and I have come to the ironic epiphany that I never stopped picking flowers. Not for a moment. Their soft petals, delicate fragrances, vivid colors and sweet pollen were never things I could resist, let alone ignore or just exist with. No matter how hard I was reprimanded for picking flowers, I took every flower I could. Had they been wild, common, poisonous, ugly, thorny or rare, I would always give into temptation and pluck them from the grass, ending their short and simple lives. I have not, however, attempted to grow a garden or nurture a potted plant. Who needed the seeds and the soil when you could just have the lovely and sweet part? Maybe sometime soon, I will find the strength within me to do so; to cultivate a living, healthy plant that would stay alive for possible years instead of days. For now, I just can't stop picking flowers.

Giverny

Mara Headrick

Monet had to grow
his garden before
he could paint it

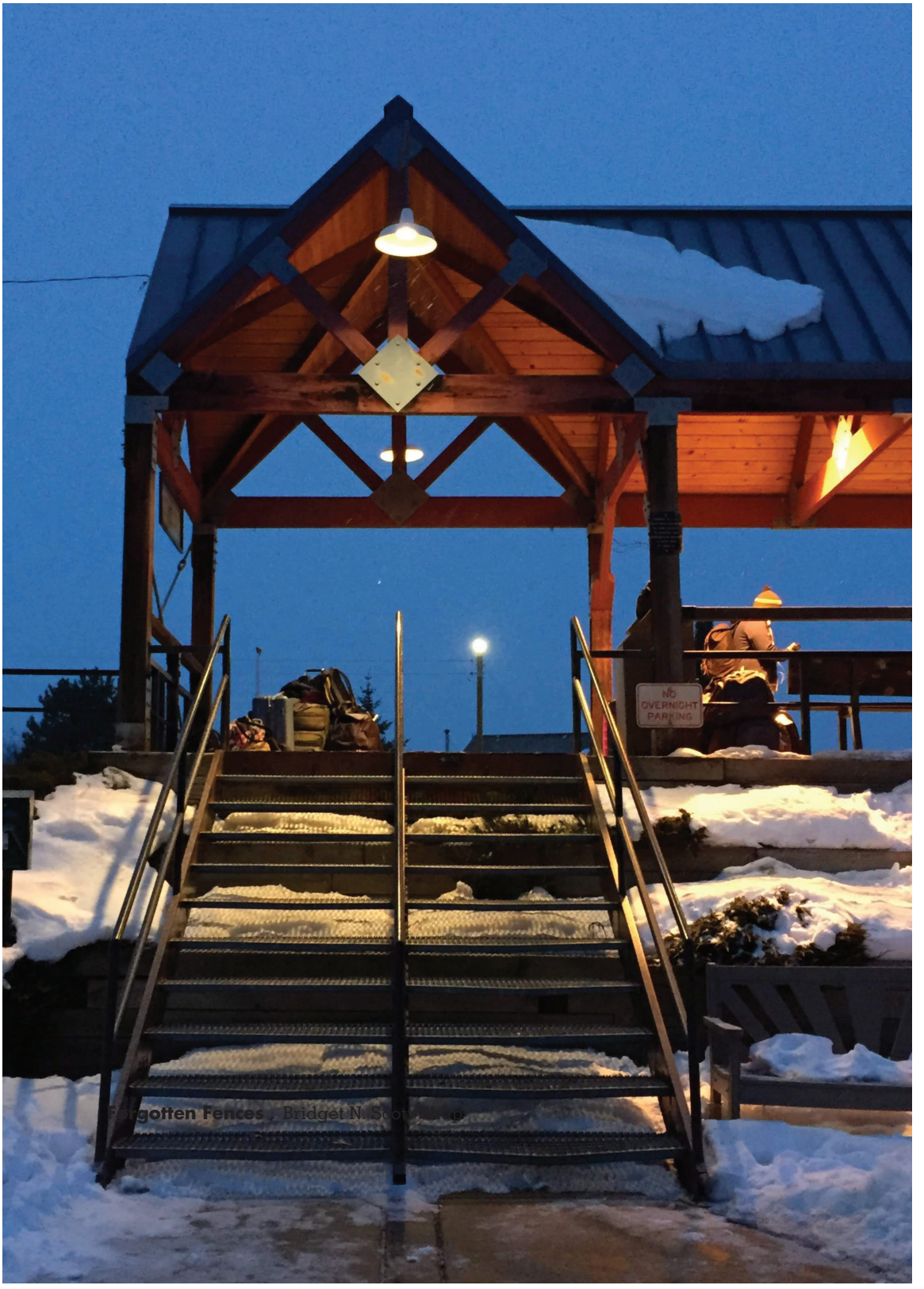
Bad Flood, Good Colors Gilbert Hu



I Am Generations From Now

Michael J. Scott

synthesized and delusory voices
broadcasted heads without bow
I am not the near future
I am generations from now
leaders have lost their vocation
digital bid fair without vow
I am not the near future
I am generations from now
the end that once whispered
is on all fours and beginning to howl
I am not the near future
I am generations from now



Shelter Starlit D.S. Taie

For Only A Moment

Starlit D.S. Taie

You sit in the cold, on wooden steps not yet warmed from your body, and stare out across a plain of dead grass, frozen stiff from ice that glows slightly in the blue twilight. Your breath clouds, but you don't notice, as it's stolen away by a gentle breeze, prickling at your skin and piercing the thin clothes you wear. There's a street lamp somewhere behind you, its light mostly blocked from the houses all lined up on the side of the street, but a thin rectangle of light stretches itself out between your house and the one next to you, fading into the blue light which, itself, has begun to fade into black.

You focus on the cold at first, before it disappears with everything around it.

There seems to be nothing on your mind really. A passing thought doesn't flicker on in your mind, there's no conversation being mulled over or any moments from earlier being viewed. It's stagnant. It's quiet. And it's warm up there, alone as you are.

It's something you don't quite look forward to, but are hard pressed to give up. There are things you could be doing now. So many things, so many duties to attend to, yet you just can't find yourself doing them. You need the silence though it doesn't need you- it darts away at your slightest movement, and in its sudden absence it is replaced. By all the little things you dread. By the moments you sit and ponder something else. By the days that keep passing, that don't seem to stop.

Though the silence is coming back now. And so is the stagnancy, the quiet, and the warmth.

Mountain Coals Starlit D.S. Taie

Morgan vs. the Ball Carly May

Look Busy

Caroline Dillard

"At your five o'clock.
Wait, don't look now.
Okay now. See?
The dude next to the guy
in the red shirt."

"Shoot he's walking this way.
Look busy."

An unbidden hand extends.
"Care for a dance?"
He asks us both but
addresses her.

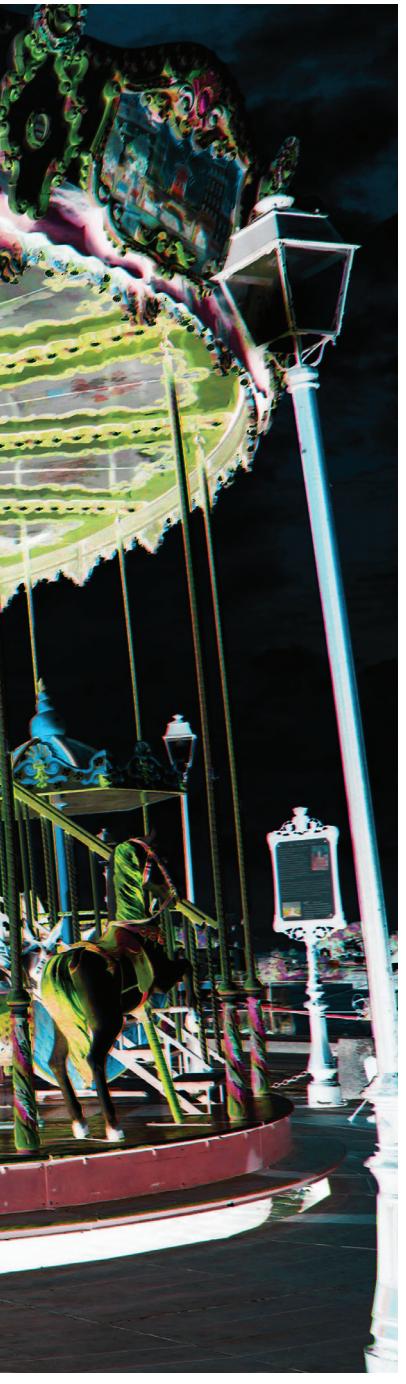
Above an accepting smile
wide eyes turn to me.
"Help me."

I face the intruder.
"I'd love to!"
Words he wants but
from the wrong girl.

I pull him onto the dance floor
away from her.
Her past two refusals
weren't enough so
my career continues
as her informal bodyguard.

Sister, Sister Emily A. Angrisano

Psychedelic Kaitlyn Kitchen



Heaven on Earth

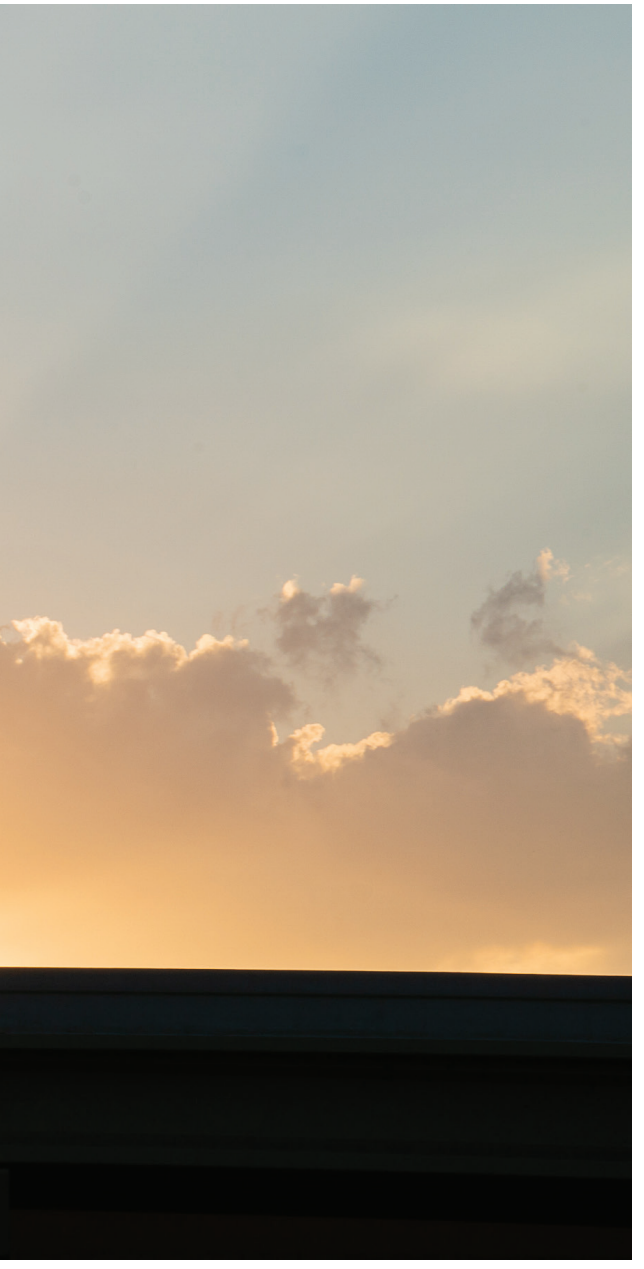
Citlali J. Gonzalez

My ultimate favorite restaurant is Whataburger. Walking toward the orange rays from the signs outside is like the morning sunshine. No need for two arches, just the famous orange arch welcoming us with a bright smile. The crystal clear windows and even the freshly white-painted bricks, the white and orange stripes lead us to heaven on earth. When we go inside, we see the portrait of the beloved founder, Harmon Dobson, and how one small burger stand changed the game. We head to pick our booth. While we relax and take in the view of a sea of orange, we notice the dedication of the the hand-stitched seat and perfectly-fitted seats made just for us. Whether celebrating or just friends hanging out, dinners will never miss a special moment in this place. I can see a special glow in Brandon's eyes waiting to pop the question that I have been waiting for my whole life, "What do you want to order ?" We both walk hand to hand together to the heavenly gates. The cashier looks like a angel waiting for our order. Looking up to the menu, I immediately receive goosebumps. Hearing the the 100% American beef patty sizzling on the grill, the lettuce being hand cut "especial" for me, the buns being perfectly toasted for my mouth, and their world famous creamy pepper sauce being made in front of me call my name. I'm ready to order. Brandon calls out to the heavens for their famous fresh, never-frozen, 100% American beef patty, seasoned to perfection. What a burger! The cashier looks at me with excitement.

"What can I get for you ?"

"May I have the ultimate favorite Patty Melt?"

Summer Storm Isabella O. Garzillo



Moving On

Alyson Leigh Ray

The chatter of the radio is usually calming at the least, something like a sanctuary at its best, but right now none of that usual magic is present. I stare morosely out of the window of my car, my face blank but my hands clenching the steering wheel so rigidly the knuckles are flushed white with protest. The usual hum of the night surrounds me; I can just see the ghost of the moon struggling to appear in the dim blue and purple sky. Another version of me would find this scene beautiful, but I can't, not now, maybe not ever again. The natural shifting of the sun has taken on a whole new meaning these last couple of years. It speaks violently of the muffled yelling I can barely hear through the barrier of my closed bedroom door, of clutching my worn notebook and scribbling meaningless circles deep into the yellowing paper until the tip of the pencil gouges a hole straight through it. I'll go to her afterword, surely. Perhaps seeking comfort. Only to find her doped up on whatever new top-of-the-line antidepressant prescribed by psychologist number I-don't-even-remember-anymore.

She won't even acknowledge my presence when I walk in. I'll do it quietly, though there is absolutely no reason to. He will have hidden in his own room and probably won't resurface until morning. He never does. He'll go in a wild symphony of anger and glass breaking. Her eyes will be glassy, her body still, catatonic, almost. A wax doll. Laying on the unmade bed meant for two that nearly swallows her frail body in its vastness. I'll remember a time when those eyes looked at me instead of through me, glowing and full of life and laughter, but still I will go to her. In the end I'll always be the one that goes to her. As I rest my head on her shoulder, noticing the bruise-likefingerprints that mar her otherwise pale perfect skin, I'll hear her breath. That gentle rise and fall will be the only motion from her for a very long time.

In that moment

she feels

almost ancient,

older than me,

perhaps older than

any person alive.

For just a moment

I think I can see

a glimmer of that

old mischief in her

wide grey eyes.

I've driven far enough out of the city that the radio has mainly turned to static. I absently reach to flick it off, never really turning my eyes away from the dirt road unrolling in front of me. Seeing it makes that nagging anxiety burrow its way somewhere near my heart, like a maggot in an apple core. Without the distraction of the radio it feels more prominent than ever.

The house is a lonely hulk of brick as I pull into the long driveway. With no neighbors around us for miles, the lights shine almost too brightly in the black—it is frightening how quickly night jumps upon us these days—and they feel like blaring beacons of accusation.

I notice, with a bolt of shock and fear, that his car is not parked beneath the looming oak tree, with its bare branches reaching out like skeletal fingers.

The fear sweeps me in like the tide, like I'm going to be swept under until I drown, the waves pulling me under still even as I walk through the screen door, which is partially ajar, even as I see the shattered remains of the medicine bottle on the tile floor. The shards glitter in the maturing moonlight.

The house is almost silent. The only sound is the water swelling out from the throat of the faucet and falling precisely down into the metal sink below. No arguing, no precious items being smashed against the walls. This scene is so different from the routine that it feels almost surreal.

This time, when I enter the room, she speaks. "Darling," my mother says, her voice dusty with disuse, as delicate as a butterfly's wing. In that moment she feels almost ancient, older than me, perhaps older than any person alive. For just a moment I think I can see a glimmer of that old mischief in her wide grey eyes.

"Yes?" I whisper into the empty air.

"I'm done," she says. "No more."

Mother Madison Potts

Mutiny Aboard the Aux Mer

Dalton Wright

An ode to the eutony!
The sweet sound of mutiny!
When the captain shouts,
"Shoot me!"
To the gallows he rose,
To the bow stands the man
With a rope.
Heathens
On this tainted, twisted pearl
The Aux Mer.
Like the fall of a star,
The captain's boots hung far,
And his choking gasps
Can still hear.
Over the ramps and the raves,
These heathens, they prayed
For this day
To come like Christmas.
They reminisce on this leader,
"He was a brute"
"A beater"
"And felt freely to scold us!"
The scourge ranted
And hollowed,
His best brandy they swallowed,
While his feet
Yet stiff from the swaying.

Shark Hunter Isabella O. Garzillo

Conversation? Gilbert Hu

one, two, three, the red, the yellow, it all for me.

Jordan Abu-Aljazer

I,
I never knew your limbs were flesh cause
flesh don't spiral that way.

"you broke?

Mother lit once grease and soot the reached
our photos? but
Mother swept it off, Mother swept it off.

I saw your eyes glass cause
eyes get red you turn them high.

you blind?

Once I stabbed you through and all I saw
was crimson curt, a splintered wood?
until you jumped "Argh!" and chased me playpen.

I swore your tongue was iron;
I tongued and never swallowed myself.
you choke?"

Remember, I shouted until I inhaled
chestnuts, sweet gum, and buckeye? but mother
swallowed me syrup and all i could
was breathe a grass so air i smiled.

I,I,
Never did I understood way you
spoke, but did you mine.
did you mine.

noone said human were you,
but all I was ask you human
but all you were, never said.

I,I,I,
and i would of
i would of,
i would of

thought was i all yours
but then you tore and
fluids, disheartening

thought i would of
i would of,
i would of

Broken Shapes Bridget N. Scott-Shupe

Tea for Two Kathryn B. Helton

Girl with the Mask

Ciara M. Lanham

This is how you load the dishwasher; this is how you fold the towels; make sure you always wear your mask, just as if there were a crowd; always wear clean clothes to school; brush your teeth and brush your hair; don't let your smile slip or fade because someone could be there; always lock the doors at night, and sometimes in the day; it's not safe to walk outside at night; ***it's not safe here either, why should I even stay***; don't talk about your life, just talk about the work; you'll have less time to chat if you don't try to finish first; always watch your brothers; ***but they ask questions***; what do you say?; ***I say that nothing's wrong, that we're all safe and we're okay***; make sure your shirt doesn't go too low and that it doesn't show too much; well, were you wearing a push up bra?; could you blame them for wanting a touch?; always ask permission before you make your plans; be prepared to cancel; time for dinner, wash your hands; run and check on brother; ***is he sleeping or is he dead;*** we all have our problems; ***but they're getting in my head***; maybe if you had more faith or prayed a little more; maybe if you didn't walk around like such a little whore; no you can't press charges if it wasn't full on rape; ***I just want a way out, an end or an escape***; now look at what you did to yourself, you'd better hide those scars; CPS may come and see and then they'll take you from us and you're ours; make sure you always burp the babies; make sure the dogs are fed; now go upstairs and try to sleep; ***that's too much red***; have two cups of coffee before you leave, so you're awake; never let your friends inside, you never know what they might take; what'd you do to make him angry?; what'd you do to egg him on?; you need to watch your tone with him or he might run, then he'll be gone; this is how you make the sauce; this is how you check the oil; this is how you know that kids are rotten and are spoiled; you don't need help, you'll be fine, we have bigger fish to fry; here he comes, don't make him mad, don't look him in the eye; so what you lost two babies, some people, they lose three!; *I wonder if his words would change if the recipient were not me; you don't believe in God, you say?; now, you'll surely burn in hell; better there than here, I guess it's just as well; I'll try to go to sleep; I'll try to rest and close my eyes; for in the morning when I wake I'll have to put on my disguise.*

Gone Wishing Emily A. Angrisano

Down the Hall

Joan Reese

Snapshot Outside the Ladies Room
A checkered hijab shields her head, a student kneels,
back to this hall, bare feet expose themselves to all
the women who must pass by here. Her soles' skin
leathered as she tilts toward carpet tiles whose corners meet
her lowered forehead, angled east. The land she seeks
is far from us but still its twin's the Texas dust
that's tamed today by Texas rain. She bows, then lifts,
then bows again, recites her faith in words so thin
they slip right through both windowed wings
framing this hall, and no one listens as she prays
except a pair of carrion crows who roost
upon a concrete ledge, their shimmering capes smoothed
rainfall wet, their skulls a naked, wounded red.

Lady Red Trexiea Hernandez

Registry

Jiaan Powers

I forget your name.
I remember your face.
That afternoon in class
We had to be fingerprinted.
We were astonished.
Outside the world was
All rumble and rain.
Inside my world fell to dust.
God? Where are you?
We were herded out
Into the city storm.
I remember, too
Looking back at the windows.
And then we were gone
Into the mountains
Deep into China
I and the poets.
Who could have known
Those sunsets there
Would stay the lights in our eyes
And open doors for our words
To tend our mystic selves,
And see beyond into
The realms of God.

From the Series Grounded Anna K. Fritzel

Nightscapes Shops at Legacy Maryanne Zamora

Running

BeLynn D. Hollers

While you're out
We're dying at home

I'm sick
of the back of your phone

You hide
your insecurities
in a glass screen

Choosing pleasure
over loyalty

Here she is choosing pain
over conformity

You'll go it alone
I just go on runs

You can't face reality
She's facing attorneys

You can't face
that you're wrong

Now you both will go it alone

I just go on runs

Breathing

for a couple of songs

Scrap Paper

Tiffany Page

For Jenn

I carry her list with me,
a single piece of notebook paper.

It's softer now,
that time has passed.

"Feed Animals
Go to Bank

Get gift card, Momaw
Mom's B-day

Cora
4 outfits
Diapers
wipes

Maddelyn
2 changes
Nightgown
3 panties
3 socks

Myself
Nightclothes
1 outfit
Socks..."

Written neatly at the bottom
are directions
to our Momaw's house in Louisiana

Her last trip to Louisiana
with her babies.

Our last trip,
together.

I found her list
after she died.

It took me a moment
to remember
that she had given it to me;

To remember that she
had given me her list
when it was only
scrap paper.

Scrawled on the other side
"Dallas Police Department 3/18"
The day my apartment had been broken into

Unimportant now.

Peaceful Doves Deborah Anderson

Now

Almost eleven years
have passed.
Maddelyn
will be sixteen in March.
Cora
turns twelve this year.

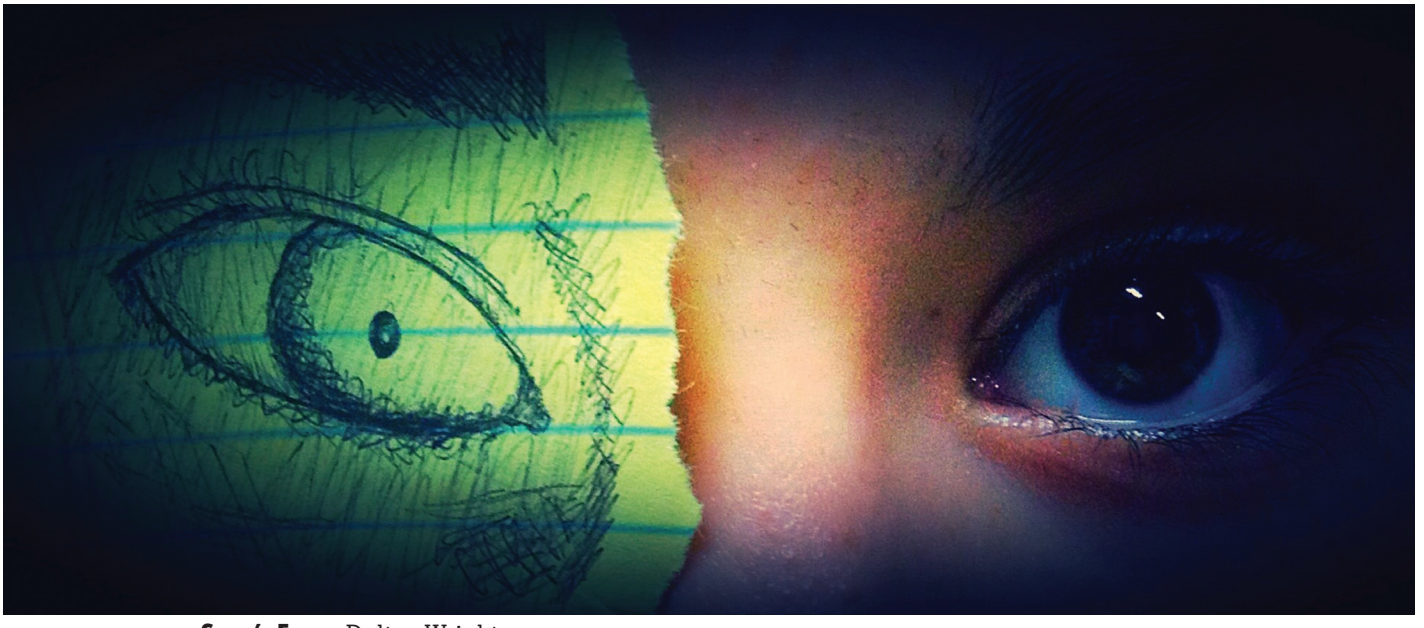
Momma and Momaw's birthdays
are coming again...

It's softer now
That time has passed,
but somewhere
within her list
my sister is still twenty-six.
The oldest of four girls and one boy,
James' wife
Mommy of two.

Maddelyn is still five.
Cora is still nine-months-old.

And her list
isn't so important
after all.
Just another piece
of scrap paper.

The Love Tree Daphne H. Babcock



Sam's Eyes Dalton Wright

Third Eye Molly Brown

The House of Misfortune

Ann Marie Newman

I was five when I first saw it. Yet, still I recall
how it made me recoil at its cold, dead pall.

Severely dressed in ugly grey stucco, so somber and vile.
It sought misfortune upon gullible renters. The house was hostile.

But it was cheap, and we needed cheap. In we moved, we three -
Daddy, Momma and me, and soon after, others. Oh, calamity!

The deceiving interior bathed in warm, gleaming wood hid sorrows from sight.
Within shadows its past shifted and slithered away from the light.

They said she jumped from the attic window. A mere girl, distraught!
The rigors, hardships of her budding life now all but forgot.

We relished her story, its entertainment bringing goosebumps of delight.
Not believing for a moment her anguished ghost moved about in the night.

But then, eerie strangeness soon became our norm. In night's darkest hour
lights flickered on, off, on. Boards creaked, moaned. Drafts made us cower.

My young eyes saw ghost girl wasn't alone. When light was just so,
I'd see many misty shapes gliding to and fro, bringing woe.

Nights were bad, but days far worse. You see, the house fed on us.
Each day, dining on our goodness and happiness. We were…delicious.

Each little bite and nip brought emotional pain that swiftly in turn
was inflicted on another, and another, bringing strife. Love to spurn.

Tribulations quickly grew in number. The girl upstairs ran away at fourteen.
Men in white coats took cousin Nancy away. She'd spoke of ghosts, seen.

I didn't say a word.

The newly married couple fought, how they fought! A chair broke on a back,
while I held their newborn baby girl. Again. Again watching another attack.

Daddy disappeared, forsaking family for the wild life. Momma was bereft.
One year was plenty enough for us. So to new renters, the ghost house we left.

Aspens Among the Pines Theresa M. Rodriguez

The Hunt

Phoebe Cave

It was calm. Incredibly calm. It had been a while since she had seen such perfect hunting conditions. On a normal hunting day, she would find it tedious, even boring, to sit there, motionless, in her hand-picked vantage point, waiting for anything that could be considered food to walk by, but today, she simply stood perfectly still and soaked in the world around her with all senses. The sight of the explosions of color the midsummer bloom of the grand oaks brought, the sound of their many leaves dancing and swaying as if a grand celebration was taking place between the branches that was unseen by the human eye, the wholesome smell of the rich earth that was stirred up by the recent thunderstorm and smelt oddly satisfying, the taste of the meal that was constantly on her mind, and the feeling of the swirls and curves engraved into the wooden bow she held firmly poised and loaded, ready for any unfortunate and unsuspecting animal whose destiny was to end up her dinner. It was relaxing, so relaxing that she nearly dozed off into the soft dewy grass, which wasn't entirely a bad thing with how much sleep she had gotten in the past couple of months, but she needed food more than she needed sleep. Luckily, the joyous stomach pains of hunger kept her awake and alert. It had been a while since she had eaten, far longer than she liked. She would've gone hunting sooner, but as glorious and breathtaking as summer was, it brought rain in its wake, and rain meant all the prey was nestled in comfy shelters, including herself. But even still, she valued her time spent watching the rain fall gracefully from the sky, down the leaves, and pool at her feet; even if she was starving while she did it. A twig snap brought her wandering thoughts of serenity, peace, and food to a screeching halt as a wild turkey awkwardly wobbled into her line of sight. Turkey was fine; not her favorite food, but good under the circumstances. She tilted her head away

Luckily,

the joyous

stomach pains

of hunger

kept her

awake and

alert. It had

been a while

since she had

eaten, far

longer than

she liked.

from her bow to get a better view for calculation. The turkey was visible but too far away for her arrow to do anything other than startle it. She had to get closer, but that meant noise and if the turkey got scared off, she'd have to spend another night hungry and that was something she couldn't bear the thought of. She got low to the ground, her knees firmly pressed into the soft soil until they felt cold from the moist mud beneath. Slowly, she began to shift her body closer to the turkey who was stupidly pecking at the ground. She held her breath tightly against her chest as she continued to silently crawl towards her victim. Her clothes were starting to soak up the mud around her, and her back was beginning to hurt from the position she was awkwardly moving in, but she was going to get that turkey if it killed her, as not getting it probably would. As she continued to move her legs, she suddenly heard a soft crackle of fallen leaves underneath her. She stopped dead and dared not move. The turkey heard the leaves too, as it looked up and began frantically glancing from side to side. A slight sigh of frustration escaped from her lips. She was still a little too far, but she couldn't move any closer; she'd have to risk it. She raised her bow, this time centering the black flint arrow tip with the wild turkey's heart. The turkey was very suspicious now; she had to move with speed and perfection; luckily, that was her specialty. She pulled the bowstring tight, feeling the muscles down her arm work together in harmony to pull the bow into a deadly position. Ready to let go, she felt the breeze of the afternoon push her blood-red hair softly across her face, and she paused. In all her struggle and hunger, she forgot she was standing in a miracle; a living, harmonious miracle, and all of it hit her. The trees exploding with every possible shade of green, the melody of the leaves dancing merrily in the wind, the earth's wholesome and mysterious aroma, the taste of the turkey already on her tongue, the feeling of her bow at her fingertips, ready to summon death. She exhaled, and released her grip.

As she continued to move her legs, she suddenly heard a soft crackle of fallen leaves underneath her. She stopped dead and dared not move.

I Got an Eye on You
Lance M. Pender

Stoic Erica K. Kalish

Wildfire Ashes

Kateri Whitfield

Winner of Writers' Bloc Competition

Ashes smudged across the forehead.
"You are dust," they said.
Dust gathered on the pavement, growing.
That morning, wildfire ashes
fell from the mountains to the sky,
then (like snow) onto the coastal ground.
The hills were evacuated by some,
others stayed skeptical on their porches
like they always do. The fire spread.
The canary men came. Still the homes
will be nothing but ash soon.
They were right when they said,
"To dust you shall return."
Coughing, wheezing, choking on
dry, smoky, California desert air.

Story of a Mosaic

Alexander N. Sanchez

I see a reflection of myself scattered across a shattered mosaic,
Unable to stop cutting, unable to search for a well-studied formula.
And while there is beauty in brokenness among the shards of this dirty glass,
It doesn't show me what is to come, but what has come to pass.
How many pieces must there be until you're missing a few?
How many holes can be punched till your picture cannot be viewed.
Smaller and smaller they become as the light on them dims in refractions,
As the remains turn back into sand you see the toll of the subtractions.
Eventually, that mirror has lost all of its luster and grandeur,
Unwanted even for moments of amour.
That broken mirror eventually loses its magic in that slow decaying fall,
That once proud mirror.... never existed at all.

Arab Festival TX Maryanne Zamora

What Makes Us Human?

Hannah Hansen

In books we read, we are constantly judging attempts at making humans. These characters we "read to life." Some we praise for their insight, their reality, their utter and stark humanity; and others we feel fall short. We describe characters as flat, as one-dimensional. These characters have failed to convince us; they don't fit the bill; they don't fit the trick of writing. They're not people like us. They don't see the world like we see it. What does it mean to be human? How do we define the thing we live? And how do we expect characters in any story to understand the true struggles of living a life day to day?

What I've found is that people and characters need motivation. We need to be able to ask the question, "Would we do what they do?" Often as plots progress with wild and fantastical situations and twists of circumstances, yet in these wild and twisted plots would we precede the same? They need to do things out of anger and love and hunger, they need to form relationships between themselves and other humans. Isolations and connections are diametrically opposed foes when we talk of storytelling techniques, yet a writer must capitalize on both. Characters must be well formed in their own skins, and yet still have moments of compulsion, tragedy, and maybe even fall into self pity from time to time. No man is an island, in a swept phrase of the times; no one can define humans based on simple connections.

Do characters need flaws? In my opinion we definitely define humans by what is not too perfect. Similar to perfection, humanity is found in glimpses, in moments of praise and decay, that some may define as young and vulnerable. We need our protagonist to mess up, to fall for misdirection and to fall fast for fatal flaws. But we also need hope, even if it is just occasionally.

Characters must be well formed in their own skins, and yet still have moments of compulsion, tragedy, and maybe even fall into self pity from time to time.

Santa Fe NM Maryanne Zamora

Hope guides humanity. In a society that seems to be losing it over the course of history, we turn to fiction and the written word to redefine what it is we are looking to see. Without hope that humanness we're all looking for would fall quite quickly. It is human to pick yourself back up from the trenches. It is admirable for humans to start again, to try to develop the life they once had. It is the most crucial part to any story, yet, it is hardest to explain.

We often go to further and further lengths to try to represent what it is to be human. Life is lived in the present tense, in fragment sentences of symbols and verbs that don't coincide. In thoughtless thoughts while on the search for feelings. The ups and downs of relationships, depression, emotions. When I say anger you think of the sounds; the inhales, the exhales, of base sounds of insults and syllables. Does that mean anything? We know what it's supposed to mean through other concepts learned, through the context of speaking and communicating throughout our lives. It's here that you glimpse what it truly is to be human. Feeling, experience, humanity, it's the thing you live but can't quite name.

It is something that struggles against containment, that can't be perfectly shared in a word, or measurement or a diagram. What makes us human? This thing, this complex ill-formed and ever-changing beast that can sometimes be glimpsed on fading screens or canvasses. I cannot name what it is to be human, but once or twice I think I almost had it pinned down somewhere on a page. But maybe I'm just too close to the subject.

Matter, or What They Name You

J.D. Isip

Ho-zay was too brown. Whore-hay, too. Keep
the José losing the zay, dishwasher safe, Joe,
nodding his head for each word he can't say
that he's not even Mexican, but Spanish is close
enough to Tagalog and nobody cares José—
What the f is "a Philippines" anyway?

Tell you what, I'll call you George
Which stuck, but he kept the Jay so José lives on
in one letter and the lesser son of Jorge, the gay
one he split with his first wife, not an even split
there was always more of her which made him
that way

Margaret was Mexican but I didn't know that
until she died and suddenly I wasn't Italian, or
any more special than every other wetback
praying to Mother Mary, crossing myself, head
bent low before every other ass asking
Do you speak English?

Tell you what, it doesn't matter, José
Or whatever you call yourself. It's not José or
Margie—dancing to Disco Italiano, teaching me
each move and stories about my family that
never existed, descendants of a noble Roman
lieutenant who fought for some war, there are
so many, besides, we're dancing

Joe was a bartender at Don the Beachcomber,
Margie ordered sweet Seagram's 7 on ice, they
named me for their union, which lasted eight
years—leaving me to explain that the Jay is not
silent, that the Oh is long, that it's not ethnic—
Tell you what, call me J.D. It doesn't matter.

Anna TX I Lance M. Pender

Hesitation

Beth T. Ayers

Hesitation emerged with my daughter's wedding,
A lovely traditional wedding, not far from home.
Then we had a wedding with the groom's family… in India.

Choosing unique gifts for the family, I thought:
What could be better than something created inch by inch
With them in mind? What could be better than something
Held in my hands, hour after hour, color after color?
Two light blues, a dark blue, yellow, just a touch of red.
What could be better than the soft warmth
Of a handmade, crocheted, zigzag afghan?
Grasping at the very last stitch,
Hesitation hurled into me with force.
Always lurking nearby, poking, prodding,
Making me doubt, Hesitation now consumed me.
What was I thinking?! What in the world was I thinking?
Afghans are not needed where mosquito netting is a must,
Where windows are open all year, where palm trees flourish.
What was I thinking? Not to mention packing.
This was a bulky bunch of colored yarn…
My handmade bulky bunch, so we found room.

I must tell you about Grandfather, the groom's grandfather,
Who left his home at the age of seventeen, a refugee
With nothing but the clothes on his back. But he was a visionary.
He could see that hard work and careful planning
Could lead him to a home, lead him to family,
To a future when he would be Grandfather, the man of wisdom,
The man with foresight, always the visionary.

The time came to present my bulky bunch of yarn to Grandfather.
And, let me tell you, Hesitation climbed on that plane with me.
Hesitation crossed the Atlantic, changed planes in Paris,
And followed me out of the Bombay Airport.
Hesitation was nipping at my heels all the way to the very moment
When I passed the handmade, crocheted, zigzag afghan to Grandfather
With apologetic recognition that they might not *need* it.

Those visionary eyes lit up. He happily, gratefully accepted this gift.
Then he vanished. He left the crowded room almost unnoticed,
Returned with a plastic bag, a bag he knew where to find,
A bag that had been waiting, sitting in its proper place for
More than fifteen years, yet there was no hesitation
As he ceremoniously placed it in my hands.
I accepted the bag and opened it to see yarn, skeins of yarn.
Yellow, brown, and coral colored yarn … yarn meant to be held in
His wife's hands, meant to flow across her fingers
As she knitted… something.

There was no hesitation in my acceptance of this tender gift,
This heartfelt gift connecting me to his past, connecting me to
His grief … and to his joy. This was a wedding, after all.
Grandfather almost winked at me when he told me to
Make something "Special."
When his visionary eyes met mine, we shared a vision.
We both saw a small, handmade, crocheted, zigzag afghan
With a touch of yellow, brown, and coral. A soft, warm,
Blending of our families, to wrap around the future.
There was no hesitation when I said, "Yes."
"When the time comes, when the moment is right,
I will make something special." Without hesitation.

Hesitation worked hard.
That nagging, insistent, relentless Hesitation
Almost blocked me from this experience,
Almost kept me from finding this connection.
Even now, Hesitation made me pause
Before sharing this story, with you.
But there is something you must know about Hesitation,
That poking, prodding, insistent Hesitation…
Sometimes
You must ignore it.

Anna TX II Lance M. Pender

Days of Fasting

Kateri Whitfield

Ash Wednesday reminds me
of when my daughter was sixteen.
She saw stars in the doorway before
I found her on the bathroom floor.
Each Friday was Good Friday.
I heard a marble roll around inside
her head for three days.
Catholic fasting is one day,
two snacks, one small meal.
She overdid it a little, copied
Saint Catherine of Siena.
Her sister asked me why
it smelled weird in their bathroom.
It smells weird in her room still,
though she cleaned it years ago.
I can tell she still looks forward
to days of fasting.

Sexy Pomegranate

Dylan Telthorst

Encased in a bitter shell
Lies the sweet, succulent aril
Like tiny rubies, I feel enriched
I savor your sour nectar

The sharp taste brings me to life
The vibrant color transports me
To another world

The seductive, soft exterior
Makes my heart race
My palms begin to sweat
As my soul expands

The temperature rises
The rooster crows
My eyes widen

I have a taste
The sweet juices flow into me
O Pomegranate
Fill me with your love

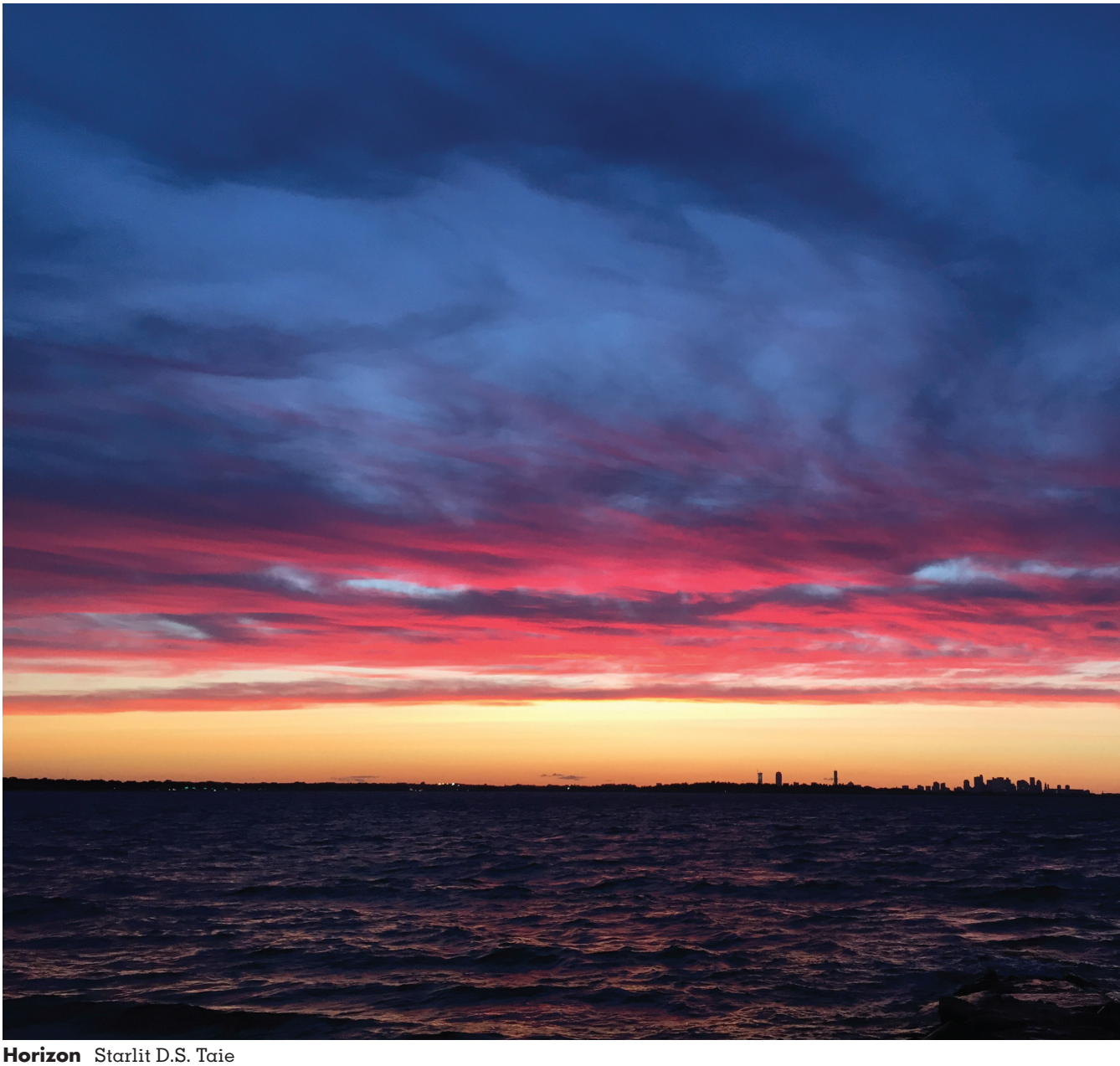
The sky opens
Heaven speaks to me
Pomegranate, the one true God

The end is here
My divine pomegranate
Though our time was brief
I feel no grief

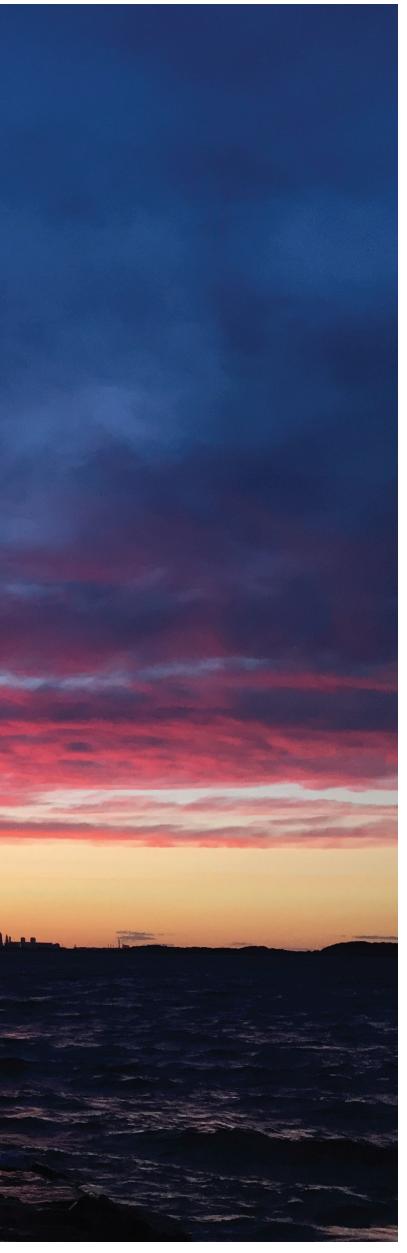
The divine fruit is within me
It gives me life
I am born again

Until our next meeting
I will dream, I will pray
That your luscious seed
Will fill me once again

VY Anna Boling



Horizon Starlit D.S. Taie



Mother Superior

Bridget N. Scott-Shupe

I went chasing memories on the banks of Lake Superior, the waters troubled and dangerous despite how serene the vast surface seems. "Mother Superior," they call it, which is frighteningly appropriate; so kind by nature while so cruel in action. Sandstone cliffs, brilliant in their orange and reds, standing vigilant over aqua swells; their strength and safety illusions against the certainty of passing time. Grey skies offering little comfort to me watching them from the dreary shipyard docks, lost in my anger, grief and guilt.

I stood here with you once, wind whipping our faces as we drew our coats tightly around us. Even as we silently observed the icebreaker cutting through the frozen lake, the bleak day surrounding us with drizzle and fog, you were happy. The unsettling cracking of the ice filling the air, whispering hints of betrayal through the placid and suffocating quiet. Your soul a perfect mirror of the splintered plane, perpetually distressed despite the seeming calm.

Mother Superior. This is the place of your birth, the force that raised you, the origin of your confused mind. Despite your best efforts, your desires ebbed and flowed like the tide whose steady rhythm of waves echoed the beating of your heart. I wonder if you even recognized your own violence, or, like the lake, were you simply ignorant to the damage that sunk ships down into cold, dark water. I can't forgive you, but nor can I forgive myself for the thought. I shouldn't be here.

As I pick my way through town back to my car I'm flooded by regret, not for myself, but for you. This place you loved but will never see again, these streets you once walked, these shops you once browsed, this feeling of escape you had longed for as you long approached your end. I'll see them, walk them, browse them for you out of a disturbing sense of duty I can't rid myself of. I'll keep you alive; a torture I deserve and a comfort I do not.

I wonder

if you even

recognized

your own

violence,

or, like the

lake, were

you simply

ignorant to

the damage

that sunk

ships down

into cold, dark

water.

Mother Superior, the trees on your fickle banks are changing colors. Striking red and golden leaves speckle the thick forests, catching the fleeting light before being choked again by the dark evergreen thickets. I'm going to see your old friend, my friend now, I suppose. Dark and rain-slicked pavement gives way to muddy dirt roads as winding and complicated as you were. I'm retreating into the storm and wilds you called your own, and my heart sinks. I shouldn't be here, either.

We stayed here once, a cabin filled with light and laughter. Thinking back, perhaps it was just you, alive and emboldened by the ghosts of your youth. I'd sneak out to walk the black roads, more comfortable in the dark, alone and silent, stealing a cigarette when you'd gleefully overestimate my painfully thin skin. Jokes too much wine formed on your lips rang in my ears as I self-medicated and self-destructed at the same time. You didn't bruise my flesh, not then, but I still trembled. I couldn't tell which was truly you: this glowing creature, or the troubled wraith which haunted my childhood.

Mother Superior, I'm leaving again in search of your quiet side. I've seen your storm, I've seen your brilliance. I need your calm. Even my car offers no solace as I speed across the miles of wilderness. I've been here with you, cowering and huddled in the passenger seat while your temper broke across my back. A little more to endure, a little more patience, a little more time, play in my head as mantras you've made necessary to me. I should thank you, I suppose, but anger wells up and painfully closes my throat. I still need you, and I hate it.

We sat on the beach together, there. I had never seen you so at peace. The full moon hung heavy as gossamer clouds painted the velvet sky. You looked so far away, watching the moonlight bounce off the impossibly still water. I wish I could live in that memory and erase all the others, wish that one night of peace was a reflection of us. I turn my car away from the road that would take me back. I won't find you on that beach no matter how many nights I desperately search. I find myself on a new road, to my own life and future. Through the tears that spill unwelcome down my face, I bid a bittersweet goodbye to Mother Superior.

Lighthouse Samuel M. Haville

COLLIN
COLLEGE
collin.edu

COLLIN COLLEGE
collin.edu

12114-19PB