

The Asbury Review

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quiet love *Alex Nicholson*

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worms, probably

Tiffany Rutledge

drag me out of the ground
like i'm a shiny rock
peeking through the dirt
and you want to see what i'm hiding.
worms, probably.
if you're lucky you'll find
ants building and rebuilding
my childhood home. even better
you'll understand why i became
this heavy.

—Oh God, I Do Mind

Geneva Wise

I don't mind coffee stained teeth
The frayed lining of my mouth, my scarlet splotched skin — my
chest, kissed again by unease

I don't mind corduroy inseams, a catch and release of
each step — soft fabric fingers brushing in a drawn out goodbye

I don't mind February Sundays, October only a shadow
The shallow arches of my feet that ache each morning anew

I don't mind the sheen on my palms when your
fingertips have grazed mine,
Wordsworth's reminder: *dejection taken up for
pleasure's sake.*

I don't mind the oils from your hair,
your skin, left on my pillowcase
Anoint me with them, my own complexion
blemishing in protest; sink into my weak spots.

I don't mind — Oh God, I do mind
My bitter collections of lies through gritted teeth
and crooked lips choked down like last week's
leftovers

I mind that I can't crawl into your skin
whole and pure, so please, let the remnant of
you lie begrimed beneath mine

I mind fresh sheets and soapy skin—
No stain, no scar. Just your bag in the corner and your flannel
in the drawer.

quiet love

Alex Nicholson

the wind through my hair on a cloudy day. a butterfly through the heart: the golden light of sunset on a to-go coffee cup. a cat that jumps in the air at nothing. a dog that refuses to learn how to play fetch in favor of cuddles. the feel of a slab of rock underneath my sneakers. the sweat on the back of my neck after shoveling the driveway; the heat despite the deepfreeze. the smell of the alleviated ground after a light drizzle. the sound of all of my best friends' laughter. a quiet cup of tea past midnight. comprehending the lyrics of a song for the first time. the sight of a double rainbow in times of doubt. the pounding and rushing and misting of water on my back in a waterfall. the smell of a new old well-loved lightly seasoned book. the exchange of poetry simply because i think they might like it.

the sensation of being a life; the buoyancy above the storm.

of wind through my heart: the gold

quiet comprehending for a

a well-loved

life .

rough art:

quiet a

love .

Short Month (February in Haiku)

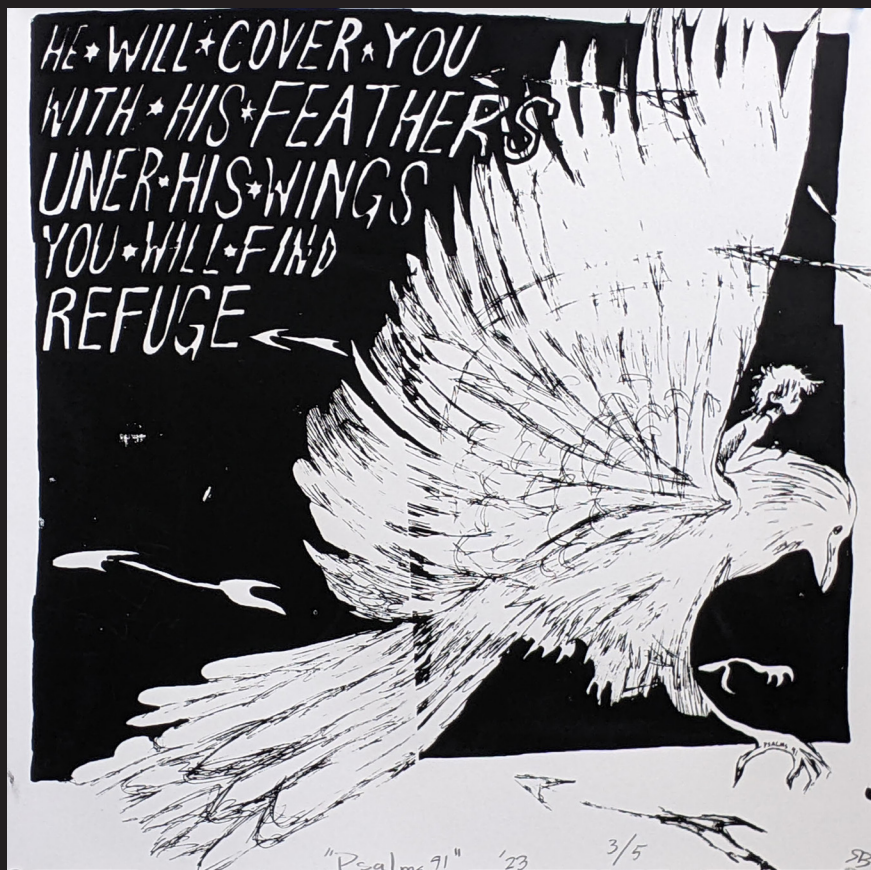
Mark Wood

1 Silver tree branches sparkle in cold mithril sun; melted by midday.	2 Blue-tipped pine bush un- frost tree bud and red berries: six more weeks of wind.	
5 Springwarm wintertime— roadside plastic greenery edged with brown bushfence.	6 Banks of the cloud stream water spring's horizon tree whose boughs look icy.	
9 Blue sky tumult grey— flak bursts in fierce wind from south- west emptinesses.	10 Greyscale fallen world of browning grasses and sod that never grows in.	
13 Yellow berries sit in dead bush under cloudless sky— light only painful.	14 Through deep heather grey, sunbeam pierces clouds at dusk— deep starless night.	
17 Freckled green sweater, knotted cord in left hamstring— wind blows back my breath.	18 Cheery lunch table— friends laugh, joke, whisper to full; I remain silent.	
21 Your voice, I hear, Lord in the morning, then look up: a brace of ravens.	22 Summer rain at night; Remember that you are dust— smell no petrichor (it is in my lungs).	
25 Green branches, brown leaves; rainslick window and mist air — sun cold in dorm room.	26 Live in a world of red treetips and tables are red and skin and hair and ground is red.	

	<p>3 The first verdant greens, clothes worthless against morning-- windchill twelve degrees.</p>	<p>4 Sleep til noon, wake and languish in grey afternoon; see brown blossoms low.</p>
	<p>7 Sandy bottomed sky— sifting memories of silt while I sweat indoors.</p>	<p>8 Grey sky at morning foreboding spirit-movement; sun does not come out.</p>
	<p>11 Branches tipped Pripyat orange; indoor trees dropping leaves-- grass is white in shade.</p>	<p>12 Whiteness surrounds me: it clings to my tender skin; when scrubbed it shows red.</p>
	<p>15 Constant light hum drone; slow stars covered and revealed; breath comes with effort.</p>	<p>16 Nightlong thunderstorms— supersonic silences jolt me oft from sleep.</p>
	<p>19 Heaven and Earth— electric limbs, dark sky— must I remember?</p>	<p>20 Flowers start to bloom— trouble soon will be over— patches of brown grass.</p>
	<p>23 Rosepink frosted glass; people, people everywhere— not a soul to speak.</p>	<p>24 Yellow-dusted earth, crimson blossoms on the trees: How long til next frost?</p>
	<p>27 Warm rain this morning, by noon, only warmth and water: air feels like home.</p>	<p>28 First lilies bloom, dogwoods burst in white flowers— no breath in empty lungs.</p>

Post Scriptum:

I pass five-trunk trees
on my way to class- broad, fair;
I don't know their names.



Pinions, Psalms 91:4 *Rose Branan* Screen Print, 15" x 15"

Collectors

Ella Fairbairn

Little squirrels that scurry
With mouths full and feet light
Chasing autumn breezes
And catching summer fruit.

You chatter with each other,
Claiming territory and pitch
Leaping, fishlike to your trees.
What else are you collecting?

Ascend

Abbi Bodager

Ascend, small sparrow,
past these rusted bars of fear –
springtime is calling.

Tree Climb

Asher McDaniel

Muscles bunch and tense, then I leap.
My hands catch hold of rough bark:
Mountain and canyon, crag and gulch,
Seen from the eyes of a miniscule bug.
Skin and tendon burn; I heave myself up,
Find a place for my boot, then shoot upwards.
My hand hits the next branch. I latch on
And pull. And now I'm up. A new world
Surrounded by a veil of brown and green.

Heart-shaped leaves, diverse chunks missing from their flesh,
Where hungry insects have decided to make their meal
What does it feel like to be eaten, one microscopic
Bite at a time, until you are covered with holes, until only your veins,
Like open ribs, remain to bring life-giving fluid to nothing?
The breeze shakes the branches, a sound like laughing water,
And the pattern of dappled sunlight that falls across my body
Shifts, warming different areas. I settle into the rough embrace
Of the stiff arms. What starts as comfort turns to pain,
Then matures into dull discomfort. Countless creatures
Throw their many spindly legs across the ravines
And raises, propelling themselves upward to a busy task
Or a daring hunt.

Saplings

Kaitlyn McCracken

We called the tree pregnant. It arched to the side and in combination with the massive knot at the median of its roots and branches; it looks like a woman with a swollen belly, waiting. A woman with a sore back stretching as far as the knot of her stomach would let her.

The campers named the tree Sarah because that sounded like a pregnant woman name. Each day, as they passed on their way to the river or the snack shop or wherever it was they were going, their hands would shoot out to touch Sarah's stomach. Some brushed the tips of their fingers against her bark gently; others used the force of a high five. The youngest of my girls pushed it like a button and asked me if that was how babies came out, to which I responded, "I don't know. I've never had one."

I watched as a boy ran down the sidewalk, dramatically turning with the curve of the pavement. His river shoes slapped against the pavement and towel hung over his shoulder and blew with the motion of his sprinting. The rest of his group walked behind him, so I know that they saw it all happen. He pulled his whole arm behind his back, winding up like he was on a pitcher's mound. He slapped the tree's knot with all of his might. The town could probably hear the scream from the other side of the river.

You couldn't really call it a splinter. It was too big for that, but a piece of bark was roughly lodged in the boy's skin, red pooling around the sides, and his counselor was physically restraining him from pulling it out of his palm. I shushed one of the girls in my group as she whispered, "He deserves it."

The boy watched from the window of the camp director's car as his friends clambered into the water. He ended up needing six stitches.

The next day, hand wrapped tight, the boy passed the pregnant tree and snarled silently as if he were the victim. It wasn't long before the other kids joined him. Some looked angry, others afraid, but no one touched the tree anymore – no more swipes or grabs or pokes. The tree stood in all its curved and swollen glory, and no one touched it.

The boy's mom threatened to sue the camp. Everyone gave the same diplomatic response of it being "an accident." I saw the camp director smile in the way that only her staff members knew to be afraid of. The word liable was thrown around for a long while. They came to a compromise sometime between summers. But I came back the next year, and a sandy scar was left where the knot used to be – now completely flat but showing the lighter color of the tree's interior in a way that felt too intimate to look at. The tree looked awkward. It was gangly, and all that was left was the curve to its spine. To its trunk.

"She had her baby." It was the same little girl from the summer before, now a year older. Maybe not old enough to know that I lied to her yet.

"Yeah," I told her and watched as her little fingers traced over the bare spot. There was still sawdust. "Yeah, she did."

Sundering Castor and Pollux

Mark Wood

The Moon is a bowl of cereal that someone spilled;
just across the table stand two brothers, arm in arm,
just four centimeters apart at arms length.
That doesn't sound so very far, but remember the fingertips of lovers,
and consider that Orion's waist is only an inch wide.

Snatched from earth, slain by his cousin,
the lesser son was brought up to half-godhood
with his twin (or was he brought down from full?).
Twin sons of two fathers — from one mother, born
Gemini, a noun with no singular. After all,
what does it mean to be one
twin?

Will you allow me to try?

Geminus

gé, yñ — earth, land

minus — less, smaller

- less — without

To make a twin one is earth diminished,
a life without land, man without country, homeless.
It's two stars, pursued by Cancer and Leo just to be gored by Taurus,

Four centimeters apart.
Don't look up how many light years that is.

Conversation Stars

Joy Hibshman

“No man is an island”
but I remember a girl aloned to death
and step outside onto bitter winter pavement.

Starlight doesn't cheer.
It blears from the highest heaven
down to a weary me.

I can't tell if the stars feel alone in a vapid galaxy
or like a happy host in a bright cosmos.

“He can be found,”
except I'm not looking for a man but a dead girl
who couldn't be found just as I can't find the stars by sitting under the massive maple
and staring at the frost bitten grass frozen at wild angles
like the frigid spikes of my thoughts,
divining vainly in the night frost some vague reflection of the sky.

“No man is an island”
but what am I?
Cold feet on concrete
under an obsidian vault set with stones:
beautiful, unexplainable, unattainable, hard.
The grass can't catch a glimpse,
and there is no conversing with the stars.



CASE
SCHOOL OF
APPLIED SCIENCE

Don't Forget Your Flashlight *John Teoh*

Digital Photography, 4000 x 6000 pixels

Enlightenment

Aiden Gaither

At the age of thirteen, I began to lose my vision by sitting too close to the TV screen. In the decade that followed, my vision narrowed to about the size of a straw, I learned that the culprit was actually retinitis pigmentosa, not my cartoons (leave it to my mother to use a Nickelodeon scapegoat for her bad genes), and I finally had an unstoppable argument in favor of getting a dog, I promptly named him Timmy Turner. With Timmy by my side, and my “blind but still finds the yogurt aisle” shirt on (I think), I set all of my items on the conveyor belt.

Timmy must not like whoever is at the register, he’s making more of a fuss than he usually does in public. He typically does better than me with the noise here. Constant squeaky wheels, scuffling feet, and ever persistent scanning.

“Something’s happening...” The cashier is distracted by something. Outside, maybe? I see the vague color of the sky out the windows, but nothing more. A low mechanical hum begins. A truck? Possibly every shopper in the store makes their way to the front in a disorganized fit as the volume overtakes the aforementioned wheels, feet, and scanning.

“What is that?” exclaims one shopper.

“What do we do?” says another.

Timmy tears himself away from me and yelps like I’ve never heard before. He bolts through the checkout, and into the crowd that now surrounds the front windows.

“What is that?!”

“We need to go!”

“EVERYBODY GET DOWN!”

The climax of the ruckus is a crack beginning at my far left that ends on my right. Every window pane in the storefront has sequentially been shattered. The crowd disperses with shouts of confusion, haphazardly moving back through the checkout lanes. I know because of the multiple hands that push me out of their way until I trip over someone’s cart and wind up on my back. Feet shuffle past me with great determination. Someone’s boot takes the glasses off my head, only after leaving an indent between my eyes, I’m sure. The screams scatter throughout the aisles, turning from fear and confusion to outright terror.

More sounds come from the windows that I can, without a shadow of a doubt say, are not from a truck. It is mechanical but guttural. A meat grinder meets a lawnmower. The noise invades the store and passes around me. Over me, perhaps. Shelves collapse everywhere. The lights above me shatter, and I once again feel the rain of glass. The screaming dissipates some. I uncurl from my huddled ball of protection in front of a Pepsi cooler. Crawling out of the checkout lane, I feel a shoe that I would recognize anywhere. Connected to this foot is the man who nearly concussed me. I reach farther, shaking his unresponsive body by the shoulders.

“Sir, get up! What’s going on?!” The soundscape now consists of a few distant agonizing screams and that low hum from before accompanies them. I shake the man more. I slap him, and it isn’t even out of vengeful spite for his boot. I’m terrified, and I’ll take answers from anyone. But nothing. He remains still. One noise gets a little too close for comfort. She’s running — running away from something. The hum crescendos behind her until —

She collapses. A light, hardly distinguishable pitter-patter of bare footsteps finds her body. I’m about ready to leave the man on the floor, and I inadvertently place my hand on his chest. Or, I should say, through his chest.

My palm meets the tile, covered in a mess of blood, and whatever else was left behind with the gaping hole in this man’s chest. I stifle my screams with no idea how close those things are. I scramble to my feet, aimlessly bouncing off shelves. What could possibly have done this? Just outside an aisle, a voice panics me. A middle-aged man, I believe, stops me in my tracks.

“Is it over? I really must get home now.” He is dazed, and his words taper off at the end. His wound is bad enough for me to hear the flesh. His fists grab hold of my arms, nearly taking me down with him, crashing to the floor.

Drifting further into the store, I am terrified of meeting the same end as the rest of this dwindling population of grocery-goers. All I hear now is the electric whir of the freezers, the quiet air, and my shuffling feet against the tile. Is anyone left at all?

CRACK. A can falls from the shelf, revealing that I am deep in the canned goods aisle. It rolls long enough for me to estimate its distance of seven to eight grocery-cart-lengths. I listen closely, honing in on the source. A scratch on the left shelf and rustling of the cans on the right, inching closer.

I feel the warmth as it approaches, almost comforting. The awful growl engulfs my head and I swear it’s the loudest thing I’ve heard. It entrances my ears, growing ever deafening. A comforting human touch, I’m certain it’s a human hand placed on my chest, it must be. But I think of that man, “I really must get home now.” The man with the boots, and that burrow where his sternum should have been. I know this feeling.

It feels like going home.

I flail my arms, orienting myself. I scurry through the remainder of the aisle, refamiliarizing myself with my body, checking that all vital organs, chest cavities, and appendages are where they should be. While stumbling away, my foot catches on something dense, seemingly glued to the floor. I’m thrown to my hands and knees, scurrying farther from the thing that follows, and it follows closely.

I find the end of the aisle first with my skull, striking the knee level back-of-store dairy refrigeration unit. I fall to my side and crawl backwards against the shelf, destined for disembowelment by the abomination. I bleed from my scalp down to my lips, but I feel nothing. Nothing but the approaching warmth. It radiates familiarity, and I trust it wholeheartedly. The church organ drone of the creature begins again, just inches away. I’m ready for whatever comes to me.

I rest my head against the frost that contrasts so greatly to the heat in front of me. A hand places itself comfortably on my chest, and I do not fear the end. The man was right, we really must go home now. *Take me home.*

An unholy shriek unlike any earthly noise pierces my ears. It comes from my side. A second, similar sound follows the first. A sound which resonates with the hand now removing itself from my body. I don't feel so warm anymore. A conversation ensues between the two, that extends past my range of hearing and comprehension.

They cease their bickering and all is silent. My hand, which rests on the tile, shudders. The creature's hand — which is lacking in human elements — grabs hold of mine, lifting it towards the heat. My fingers recoil as they meet the soiled, bark-like skin. It insists, bringing my hand closer, showing me the face responsible for this extermination. It all feels the same. Like leathery wood left in the rain.

Its hands now find my cheeks, navigating human anatomy, locating my eyelids. Several moments pass, and it removes its hand from my face. I'm not sure how, but I understand the thing. "*We cannot see.*" The warmth of the two creatures above me fades to the sound of crawling, walking, slithering, or however else they may move. Suddenly, I can feel it. I am left alone in this store.

As if to prove me wrong, only a few minutes pass before a tuft of hair brushes my right hand that sends me into a brief frenzy. It ends with me lying on my back, and Timmy in a huddled ball of reassurance on my lap. He's okay. I have no clue where he hid from those things, or if they even cared to find him at all, but he's okay.

With quite literal blood, sweat, and tears flooding my eyes, the six percent or so of vision I had left seems to fade away. Void of pain, the tunnel narrows and narrows until an imperceivable, distant glimmer is left. All I can think of is that creature showing me without words, "*we cannot see.*" I join you, friend.

We lay for what feels like hours while my eyes are drained of the last of their usefulness. An interspecies baptism into nothingness. I finally catch a sound. So distant, almost a sine wave echoes through the suburbs and into this store. The pitch rises and falls. A tornado warning? An air-raid siren? Something tells me it's just a last effort at sending a message to all who hear it; *Hide and do not stop hiding.* I understand it, however, to mean something greater. A symphony proclaiming a far holier message.

Soon, you will come home too.

Perception

Grace Clark

Woolf calls us the most
discussed animals in the universe¹
And I can feel every eye on me
like some crawling thing,
scratching and wrong,
no matter how many times I try to hit it away,
Because the language of violence is not
given to me— I must
understand but never speak it.
 Take it like a compliment,
 and, god, you're so uptight,
 so sensitive. It only means he loves you.
Take the knuckles and the insults
 Because you will not get more than that.
 You will learn to be grateful.
I don't like this. I don't want it.
And no one's listening. I can only hear the bugs.

¹ Virginia Woolf, *A Room of One's Own*



Perception *Vanessa Fischer*

Acrylic on Paper, 8.5" x 10"

solomon's porch

Reagan Gibbs

I heard it said once by someone
that some places contain poems
so thick in the air
that you can pluck them right up
And if there ever were a place like that
I think it would be here

There is a poem in the brick walls
laid here a hundred years ago
and adopted over and over again
by a heart burdened heavy with a dream

There is a poem in the painted windows
that change with every season
and still bear the fingerprints
of the bright eyed person
who layed the paint with care

There is a poem in the miss-matched mugs
once cold and orphaned on a thrift store shelf
but that now carry the warmth
of a kitchy-named latte

There is a poem in the old ladies on the couch
talking about C.S. Lewis, the price of eggs,
and the grief their daughters left with them,
in the deacon in the corner
glasses on the tip of his nose as he scours the classifieds,
in the girl at the counter who told me
she loves to listen to Taylor Swift in the Fall

My soul lives here
soaking up every sentimental image
knitting together words with care
I will never write a poem as lovely
as the one I breathe in here

everyone tells me that feeling is living

Tiffany Rutledge

- I. my earliest memory of consciousness is when i was a five-year-old girl in the backyard, staring, squinting, melting my own eyeballs in fascination at the way the sun found me through the trees. those trees were tall enough to swallow me whole and i wouldn't have said no, but my parents might have.
- II. the first time i looked death in the face i was carrying a dying man to his bed, his body shrinking into itself. i wanted to say yes, yes, of course, you will be fine and death is not real and i forgive you.
- III. when i was thirteen my best friend was a pomeranian and i can still feel his fur under my hand.
- IV. i so badly want to grow old with you. can we please hold each other's hands like we did when they looked freshly pressed and my hair was thick and your beard grew out every single color except white.

10th Life of a Cat

Sam Alexander

I like to imagine it is not what it is: a dead cat. I like to imagine the stray we gave around nineteen years of shelter and family didn't just die. That her final moments were not spent hugging the door of the garage, perhaps in the hopes of dying in the arms of someone she loved, and not alone on the cold concrete floor.

So I unwrite her ending. What if we were wrong and she was hanging on to her last breath when a wizard came? While we weren't looking, he'd take her back to his tower. His dirt-orange broth left simmering over the fireplace would restore her to a more lively and youthful state, and she, finding herself alone in a new place, would obviously explore it. Such a tower would only have one room. The curved walls were almost totally covered by shelves containing all kinds of oddities: bronze mechanisms whose paint was wearing off, books about dragon remains and fungi, jars filled with glowing creatures, and all kinds of ancient and homely things. It was more museum than house. There was one window in the room, and a desk was in front of it. The wood must have soaked in so much sunlight that it'd fry an egg if cracked over it. She must have spent a good while looking at the room before the wizard, named Maron, came back. He popped his head from a trapdoor near the back of the room which would have led down to a thin and tall spiral stairwell. He looked to be forty-ish, neither skinny nor fat, with an unruly black beard and locks of a similar style. His skin was tanned, and his green robes were simple and designed for moveability. He had a two-handled basket full of herbs and mushrooms.

"My lady, will you join me for tea?" She was surprised that he spoke her language, but she nodded in acceptance. There was a small table in the center of the room with two chairs pulled up to it and on the table was a square wooden box with detailed patterns burned into it. He pulled out one chair and placed a stack of books from the desk on it. That way her head would reach above the table from the chair. Then he took the wooden box into his hands and opened it, releasing a small swarm of rhinoceros beetles. They flew wide, but spiraled towards the table, landing and gradually changing into a crystal tea set that split the sunbeams. "Glad to see you up and about. What is your name?" She'd have straightened up and straightened out her tuxedo coat a bit before giving her reply, "Sir, I have two! I was just a kitten when that wonderful and crazy clan adopted me. The first daughter wanted to give me a really strange name, but the first son wanted something more... conventional. They settled on Liberty since it was similar to her original idea, but Libby-Lou, the original, was still often used as a nickname." Her green eyes welled up at this like coral reefs.

“Where is my family?”

“Do you know what happened to you?”

“Yes. I was dying.”

“They think you are dead, and sadly, we must let them.”

“May I see them?”

“Well... I can show them to you.”

He rose and pulled a giant goblet from the shelf. It was styled as a satyr with rubies for eyes. He poured water into it.

“Look in and see.”

“I see my collar on the metal shelf.”

“The youngest son gingerly took it off you when they found you.”

“He’s come back, and he’s reading the tags, gently rubbing them and gently picking the hairs off the collar. He was always one for tidying the small details.”

“I know how much you meant to them and they to you.”

“Thank you,” she, always the cordial type, would have replied. “Why did you heal me? Do you need me for something?”

“Not much. Companionship. I must live as a hermit because I am a wizard, but it gets lonely.”

The sunlight was still streaming through the window. Liberty jumped on the desk and bathed in the sunbeams, feeling the warm wood on her side. They were in a forest, and she could see there was a cliff just a bit farther off into the trees. She could smell the wild, untouched earth that was brimming with animals to hunt.

“I could keep pests out of your tower for you.”

“For me? We both know that does more for you than it does for me. You are not my servant.” At this, I think she’d crack a smile.

“That reminds me of another name I have! The youngest son, he was only a small child when he did this, but he would carry me around, barely tall enough to lift me off the ground, and call me his ‘cat weapon.’ It was a little game of ours.”

And I like to imagine the two would talk like that forever, and she would chase the field mice to her heart’s content and come back to a saucer of milk when dusk was setting. But that doesn’t change the fact that she did die in that garage alone. It doesn’t erase the lifelessness that made her fur and fat and skin feel more like cat-pudding. It doesn’t erase my father’s fatal frugality that led him to scoop her remains into a plastic bag and throw the bundle into the garbage can. It doesn’t change the fact that I, dumbfounded, did not stop him. I like to imagine because at least in some way I can give her the honor she was owed and denied.

Diet Dr. Pepper

Emelia Conley

You deserve love, but I won't be the one giving it to you.

Ice clinks in the sun, a drop falls, exhausted by effort.

You should be listened to, but Don't be so loud.

Let the sky speak, how could you not listen?

Contradictions I can't even see

Wrap around my stomach, tighten my hips.

I hold marks from growth I didn't want.

Are they beautiful?

Lion, follow me ...

Was the life I was promised supposed to be so silent? I am young, desperate for a glimpse of youth.

The peace under me tried to leave.

The kind above me almost looked away, distracted.

I stand in a terrarium. Roots crawl through my feet, under my skin, and out of my head to crown me.

"What is the ground for?" he breathed to the sky.

Your lips, when they should be night and moon, touch my skin and whisper "monster".

That which is hevel blossoms where it should die.

I will abandon beauty if beauty means I am like you.

A cup of tea asks the wind, "What did I do?"

The wind did not reply.

I would rather believe the lie of a man a million miles away than wait for you to speak a truth worthy of my time.

*A policy born of arson should burn with its casualties, but still,
they call me "pacifist".*



SO DESPERATE
FOR TONGUES OF
FLAME
THAT I SET FIRE
TO THE
WHOLE HOUSE



housefires *Kaitlyn McCracken* Multimedia Poetry, 9" x 9"

Sheol

Evangelina Dongell

/shee-ohl/ (Hebrew)

Noun

- 1. The abode of the dead or of departed spirits*
- 2. hell*

My feet go down to death

What once was the enriched summer dirt quickly turns to disease

Sunken. Wedged. Sticky. Oozing sickness into my toenails

Useless words and falsities pinpoint my birth marks and embed into my skin

And I am left content in my Sheol

I make a bed among the dead things and lay my restless mind to sleep

I only awaken when light appears in my dreams and I am once again on solid ground

spirit or virtue?

Alex Nicholson

when i was 12 my father told me to go on a walk to save my soul.

the park's copse of pine trees hide the entrance into my neighborhood. steps on the old wooden bridge, solid and relieving giving way to cold pavement. mounds of dirt in between trees testify to childhood innocence, a boy with a mountain bike and a dream. the lip of the creek ("crick") where that fox ran over my foot that one time, as overrun as ever. puffs from the willow tree rest in the grass, to be carried away by tomorrow's rain. a man sitting on the crick's park bench has a McDonald's cup that hides drugs for his next deal and waves to passersby. security cameras, recently installed, warn against rapists. where did that poor girl suffer? every shadow becomes woman's personal hell. the soccer fields where boys used to pick on me because i am, or was, a girl in sports are full of dying grass now.

my father tells me it is perfectly safe but doesn't see the way i hold the keys when i walk to save my soul.

my father told me to	save my soul.
i hide	my
childhood innocence	and
	run . will
	i
	suffer?
full of dying grass .	i am a girl
my father	doesn't see the way i hold the key to
my soul.	

my father told me	
i hide	my
childhood innocence	
	i hold
my soul.	

Christmas Morning

Jenna Hauser

It's Christmas morning, and I am awoken by "God Rest Ye Merry Gentlemen" blasting on the speakers. I turn over in my bed and smile at the pale green walls with pink flowers that my dad and mom painted while she was pregnant with me. As I get up, the bed creaks from age. It was once my crib, then my daybed, and now it is my full-sized bed. There are old, torn, and faded stickers on the wood, with the occasional scratched word or paint stain, marks of the child that was raised in this very room.

I slip into my Christmas pajamas (they're too hot to sleep in) and tie back my hair. I open the door at the same time as my brother directly across the hall, and we laugh at the coincidence. He isn't wearing his matching pj set, he never really liked them. We run out to the living room together.

There on the couch are you and mom. I smile at you, and you smile back. My big sister is on the sofa, and my brother sits on the ground. Mom tells us it is time to find the pickle ornament to determine who opens their present first. My siblings and I hurry over to the Christmas tree, decked out in colorful ornaments, each with their own story of family adventures and memories made. My brother shouts with joy when he finds the treasured pickle. We each grab one present from under the tree and sit down. My brother opens his first, then my sister, then me.

I tear apart the wrapping paper and fling it away from me. There, in my hand, is a handmade mug painted with an American flag, the interior a patchwork of coffee-stained cracks. I close my eyes and hear the faint echo of a spoon clinking against ceramic, the sound of someone awake in the kitchen, getting ready for the day. A sound I grew up to. There, too, the sound of your ancient handheld coffee grinder, which can only grind a few beans at a time, with its distinct roar that gets louder and quieter as it is shaken. Every time I use it, I think of you.

We all get up and grab the next round of presents. I wait for my turn, watching my siblings open their gifts, everyone *ooohing* and *aaaahing*.

I pick up a small book-shaped package and hold it carefully. The weight is familiar. I unwrap it and find a picture in a beautiful, ornate white frame. The photo is of you holding me as a baby. It was taken at the creek near this house, where we often go to skip stones, gather sticks for the chiminea, and have picnics. The picture is water-stained and the frame is chipped. I stare at it for a bit, seeing it posed on an old bookshelf, then a small white desk, then hung on a wall, then sitting on a dresser. I wonder what this picture has seen. I look at it and I see you, as though this photo is, by itself, who you are.

We get our final presents. This time, mine is a gift wrapped in tissue paper and tied with a bow. I open it gently. It's a small pillow. One side is a fabric decorated with balloons in the sky. The other is a white fabric, and I can make out faint crayon writing. There is a face. A star. A cross. Faintly, and in a child's scrawl, are the words "I miss you, dad. I love you". My heart breaks for that child.

A tear streams down my face.

You wipe it away.

"Dad?"

"I'm here."

"Why are you giving these to me?"

"I want you to carry the memories."

"What memories?"

You smile, sadly. "I'm sorry we never had the chance to make them."

I choke out a sob. My hands tremble as I look down at the pillow.

Did I make this? Was I that child?

I cannot remember.

Something within me aches, and I lean into your chest for a hug.

You rub my back, just like mom always does. I don't know what you smell like. I don't know what your voice sounds like. I cannot recognize you by your walk. I can't mimic anything you do. I don't know what you do.

But you hold me.

And when I'm ready, I pull back. I open my eyes.

And it's not Christmas morning.

And you're not there.

And I wonder at how unfair it is, that my first Christmas was your last.

And though you are not here beside me, and though I cannot remember you, and though you are but a story to me, these few things are proof that at some point in this life, both of us existed at the same time.



Americana
Emma Wold
Collage: Vintage
Magazine and Gel,
14" x 17"

Adulthood

Emily Ellis

Adulthood greets me like a stranger
at a family reunion—open arms, a warm
smile, and the impression that we should know
each other but don't, because the last time I saw her
was probably two decades ago when she cradled baby-
me in her arms and told me to never grow up
(they all say this and regret it later).

She asks what I'll miss about childhood. I tell her:

my mother's steady hands slicing watermelon
wedges for summer Saturdays, big bowls of Frosted Flakes,
legs crisscrossed on the couch and Perry Mason re-runs
on the box TV. The sound of my dad's keys in the kitchen door.
When he leaves. When he comes home.

The ash trees before they cut them all down. Before the bugs could
kill them first. Before the birds could find new homes.

I'd miss 7pm bedtimes, summertime evenings marked
by chirping crickets and the neighbor's car. Summertime morning
sightings of a cardinal. My elderly neighbor who loved cardinals.

Keeping my window open at night.

Being safe. Sleeping soundly.

I'd miss grass, the kind that falls soft under little barefoot toes—
the kind that grows on nothing but summer earth and
sunshine. The glassy surface shimmer when looking up
from underwater. Sledding headfirst down ice-
slicked hills and Christmas as Christmas should be—

When she asks what I'll miss most, I answer this:

Simplicity, the songs of birds, & the ability to remember.

Currency

Krysten Meyer

pennies.

vowels line the cambric purse,
pinched in chubby child's fingers.
consonants clink together in little wooden tiles,
arranged on desks to entice the neighbour.

nickels

conjunctions folded into cards,
sweetmeats connecting fragmented words.
subjects roll into pocketed verbs,
hills and valleys border the empty page.

dimes

lines march across the proffered palm,
admiration tied with twine benefits each rhyme.
indented chapters stacked in a wallet,
midnight dealings bottled in ink.

quarters

poems buy a quarter-ton of tears,
necklaces of stanzas arranged on velvet.
parables hang like meat on hooks,
sustenance for the evening table.

half-dollars

stories hide in brown wrapped paper,
carted home by loyal oxen.
legends ship across the sea,
property of ruling kings.

talents

priceless gems adorn the dirt,
awaiting polish and trade.
sold for food, displayed for wealth,
loved for all their gleaming worth.

ode to a childhood stuffed animal

Reagan Gibbs

ragged little cow
i cling to in the night
you look not a year over twenty
the once-plush cloth of your neck
now bare bones thin
tenses under the intensity
of my midnight thrashing
until your flesh frays away
and your milky white fur grows muddy
and i get the urge to package you up
and hide you away
where my dangerous embrace
cannot reach you
but before the thought has left my mind
you whisper gently in my ear
“my darling,
do not hold back your love
for the fear of hurting its target”

The Rabbit Who Saw the World

Sabina Boyer

In the planes of the Sahara, there was once a rabbit. To be more precise, there were many rabbits, but one in particular was not quite the same as the rest. While all of the others stayed close to the safety of their burrows, sheltering out of sight from predators and stormy skies, this rabbit made her way out through the tall grasses, hunkering down in logs and brush to shelter for the night.

One morning, rather than waking to crawl out from her hiding place, the young rabbit started as the bush lifted up around her.

“Well, this is a surprise,” said Peeved Ostrich, ruffling her feathers as she stared down at Young Rabbit. “I’ve had many an egg hatch beneath me before but never one to reveal a creature like you. Tell me... what brings you under my roost, Young Rabbit?”

“I have no burrow,” replied Young Rabbit, blinking up at Peeved Ostrich, “and I am going to see the world.”

“You are too short of limb to see the world,” replied Peeved Ostrich, stretching one long leg proudly. “Even if you hopped for weeks, you could never see all of it.”

Young Rabbit didn’t waste time arguing, but instead raced quickly away on her journey. For days and days, she hopped over the planes, sheltering under bushes and following the little stream until it finally widened into a watering hole.

“Here’s a pretty sight,” said Lone Wolf, lifting his eyes from the cool, fresh pool. “The river brought a morsel to help me wash down. Tell me... what brings you out here all alone, Young Rabbit?”

“No one else wanted to come with me,” replied Young Rabbit, her ears twitching. “But I am going to see the world.”

“You are far too vulnerable, Young Rabbit,” said Lone Wolf, licking his chops as he stepped nearer. “The world will want to gobble you up.”

Young Rabbit didn’t wait for proof but instead leapt back through the tall grass, not stopping to look back at the sound of Lone Wolf’s howling. Finally, after days and days traveling on, Young Rabbit finally let out a sob, settling down and crying underneath the shelter of a spreading tree.

“What is the matter, Young Rabbit?” came a voice from above, tumbling down from among the leaves. “Tell me... what brings you crying to my tree?”

“I wanted to see the world,” replied Young Rabbit, not bothering to look up, “but I don’t think I’ll ever be able to. My limbs are too short to travel, and I’m far too vulnerable to show myself, for the world is too big for me.”

“Who told you the world was too big for you?” came the voice, lowering down so that it hovered nearer over Young Rabbit’s head.

“Everyone that I’ve met on the journey,” replied Young Rabbit, burying her head. “And I’m sure that they must know.”

Yet just as Young Rabbit was ready to give up, something nudged the side of her face, making her look up. Beside her, curving down from its tall, powerful form, floated the soft head of a giraffe, its eyes dark and knowing. “They have not seen the world, Young Rabbit,” he said quietly, his ears flicking in the twilight, “but I can show you, if you’d like.”

Slowly, very slowly, Young Rabbit stepped up onto the top of Old Giraffe’s head, bracing her paws against his tiny horns. And as he lifted her up, she let out a tiny gasp of wonder, her eyes wide as he began to gallop. “Where are we going, Old Giraffe?” she called, her ears flapping in the wind. “Where are you taking me?”

“To see the world!”

So from her vantage point in the sky, Young Rabbit watched as Old Giraffe climbed the slope of a tall hill, finally coming to rest at its very top. “There,” said Old Giraffe, craning his neck towards the whole, round moon. “There is where you’ll have to go.”

“Aren’t you coming with me?” asked Young Rabbit, looking down into her new friend’s eyes.

“I can’t, Young Rabbit,” replied Old Giraffe, his voice soft. “I’m too large and heavy to make the leap. Only someone small and agile can make the hop up there.”

“Then what about you? Where will you be?”

Looking up at Young Rabbit, Old Giraffe smiled, brushing her with a flick of his ear. “I’ll be watching you go.”

Feeling the tears returning, Young Rabbit planted a tiny kiss on the top of his head before leaping with all of her might, flying up onto the shining, round perch.

“I can see it, Old Giraffe!” she called, her eyes gleaming as she danced across its face. “I can see the world!”

And so, to this day, while the birds of the desert are roosting and the wolves of the planes howl for Young Rabbit to come back down into their reach, Old Giraffe cranes his neck to the sky to whisper with his little friend on the moon.

Floating Around *Cole Sherry*

Photography, 4272 x 2848 pixels



The Current

Jimmy Hale

The Brain bubbles
and squirms in its cradle:
I am sick with thought.

Buzzing cells melt together
'til they become one electric mass
and I am not heartless
but I am thoughtless
(and wordless)
and line three contradicts line seven
and- goddammit- I'm tearing up
another piece of paper.

I watched the world drown in snow
and begged myself to respond; you could've
put some on my head
and watched it melt.

There must be words that can reify me.
There must be a way to make myself real.

Distorted

Crowner Beck

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY

ROSE (16) in a black hoodie, hood up, walks to her locker with her opened backpack lazily drooped over one shoulder, clearly listening to HEAVY METAL loudly in her Beats headphones.

Rose opens her locker and proceeds to put her books away from her backpack.

She notices something is missing from her bag.

She panics and frantically searches her backpack and locker.

MUSIC DISTORTS

Rose rips headphones off, breathing heavily.

BACKGROUND NOISE - DISTORTED

Rose continues to search in locker and bag.

BELL RINGS - DISTORTED

Rose slams locker shut and shoves through crowded hallway bumping into classmates. Her eyes darting around.

INT. CLASSROOM - MOMENTS LATER

Rose walks through the door and shuffles to a desk near the back of the room, visibly distressed, trying to calm herself down.

TEACHER (40) enters classroom with satchel over shoulder.

TALKING - DISTORTED

TEACHER

(unheard/muffled- to Rose)

Please take your hood off.

Rose stares blankly at Teacher.

Teacher motions for her to remove the hood.

Rose slowly removes hood, feeling exposed.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

(unheard/muffled- to class)

Alright let's begin. Everyone quiet down and listen up.

Teacher begins lecture while Rose struggles to focus in.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

Okay, so we talked yesterday about gerrymandering. Who can tell me what that means again?

Some students raise their hands.

TEACHER (CONT'D)

(unheard/muffled)

Rose, do you remember what gerrymandering is?

Rose again blankly stares and begins to panic.

ROSE

(muffled)

Uh...Um...I...Uh...

TEACHER

(unheard/muffled)

Speak up Rose.

ROSE

(forcing words out, whispering)

I...Ah...Oh...

KNOCK ON DOOR - DISTORTED

Teacher motions for STUDENT to enter.

STUDENT (16) enters the classroom, makes brief eye contact with Rose, walks up to the Teacher's desk and hands Teacher an object.

Teacher studies object while listening to Student.

He motions for Rose to come to his desk.

Rose slowly makes her way to the front.

HEART BEAT - SPEEDS UP WITH EACH STEP

Rose makes it to the front of the classroom.

Teacher hands her a small box.

HEART BEAT - STOP

SILENCE

TEACHER

(Without eye contact)

It seems you lost these. Please make sure to hold on to them from here on out.

Teacher motions for Rose to go back to her seat.
Rose, cheeks red with embarrassment, recognizes box immediately, takes it and walks back to her seat.
She opens the box, sighs in relief and puts in her hearing aids.

BACKGROUND NOISE - BACK TO NORMAL/NOT DISTORTED

INT. SCHOOL HALLWAY - DAY (FLASHBACK TO OPENING SCENE)

Rose walks to her locker with her opened backpack lazily drooped over one shoulder.

Rose's hearing aid box clearly falls from her backpack without anyone noticing.

Student sees hearing aids on the floor after Rose walks to class.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY

Student knocks on classroom door.

Teacher motions for student, making eye contact with her.

INT. CLASSROOM - DAY (PRESENT TIME)

Teacher continues lecture.

TEACHER

(monotone)

Anyway. Let's pick up where we left off. Now the 1952 electoral results for the Wisconsin governor saw republican candidate Walter J. Kohler Jr. sneaked past...

Rose with a blank stare, reaches up to her hearing aids, and slowly turns them off.

BACKGROUND NOISE - SLOWLY DISTORT

FADE TO BLACK.

Shoulders & Knees & Arms

Tegan Merrick

Periwinkle beams soar across the ceiling,
A watchful guard for the rows of books beneath.
None of your jeans have any holes in the knees
And I can't help but hope
You'll take care of me with the same dedication.

The hum of heating vents and carpeted footfalls
Make for a bumpy silence.
Your arm draped across my shoulders tethers me in place,
As the chasm between couch cushions threatens to consume me.
The timbre of your voice turns from sonorous to satiny
While you whisper the day's grievances.

And when you lean in to tell me about the book you're reading-
Your shoulder pressing into mine,
Our skin separated by four layers thanks to the January chill-
The tangy scent of your dinner an hour gone nestles into my lungs;
I want you to eat well.

All this to say:
I'm excited to love you tomorrow.

everything bagel

Bryce Martin

a butterknife guided by green fingernails
paints a bagel with cream cheese.
there's the scowl of concentration, an elbow-driven
whirl of motion, legs crossed with one foot waving.
this is breakfast, this is all there is:
the miracle of you in you.

The Quaker Meeting

Klara Kinman

There is substance to silence.

Feet shuffle, the birds sing hymns
out the window. A cough,
eyes open, eyes close.

We are waiting for slow
and still revelation.
For knees to unbend,
for a hesitation before words.

It is good to practice listening.
There is music between the notes.



Montmartre Ashlyn Hamby Ink on Paper, 11.5" x 8.25"

Ballroom (A Tribute)

Katie Jornod

You are my anchor
Center of gravity
Holding me close
As we fly

We are Kings
Stepping among the stars
Majesty
You and me.

My center
As the worlds whirl
Away from us—
The key that set them spinning

We are the world
As the music
Destines our orbit
To the sky

The Puzzle

Emily Ellis

The puzzle on your mom's antique dining table will eventually show golden autumn branches curling their red-tipped fingers over the crook of a river, but for now there are too many parts missing & all I see is your steady hand placing one piece. And another. And— I can almost see how it ends.

It started like this: an accidental exchange of numbers, post-class confusions (*I don't understand chemistry either*), friends. We've had one conversation— simply because we never ended it with *goodnight* & one day you texted me *we are two halves of a whole* & I knew it the instant your hand found mine.

Tú eres mi media naranja

is how my Spanish teacher taught us to flirt, & I think it's funny—each of us is one half of an orange, waiting to be reunited, but how do I tell you that *tú tienes todo de mi*?

I think about forever as I place the final piece, feeling as if you were cut from me at creation, & now we have finally found our place.

My Fantasy Life Sucks

Hunter Smith

You ever have one of those days where every little thing just goes wrong and by the end of it you wished you'd never rolled out of bed in the morning? Let me tell yah, I have those a lot. Like, last week I woke up before my alarm went off, because Keith the Gargoyle above-street preacher was screeching out a sermon in his native tongue. All respect to the guy, but my room is just below the roof and sound travels real easy. Anyways, I got dressed, went downstairs, and who did I bump into? Philius my landlord. And he wanted the rent extra early. Now, was I gonna argue with the guy? No. Because you never want to argue with a goblin when he wants to clink-clank his little coins together in front of his friends to show them how much more successful he is compared to his orc cousin, Grogneer, who invented a dragon-grilled steakhouse that has five Michelin stars. Trust me, we've had the conversation a million times. And you've never heard such spiteful fury, until you listen to a 3-foot-tall goblin pontificate through tears about how the unbridled power of a dragon's fire can't cook a steak to anything other than a crisp. I owed it to the little guy for sure.

Now, it takes about 15 minutes for a taxitaur (Taxi centaur) to get to the Dwarven Bank on Excalibert Avenue, maybe even quicker, if you can get through the initial conversation without staring at his bare chest. Just be sure that you don't ride with an oracle centaur, because then you'll either become the last hope in some ruined kingdom's war or you'll hear about the exact millisecond that you'll die choking on some hummus at a Harpy and the Blowfish concert. No, I don't speak from experience. And no, I don't like hummus.

Anyway, we were getting along okay until we ran into a massive traffic jam at a troll bridge. Normally the trolls who operate the bridge give you a simple riddle, you say the obvious answer, and we move on with our lives. However, today there was an old Ent on his way to the hedge cutters, and his aged, ringed ears could not understand anything that was being said. It is the law of the troll, and the state's labor code, that he was not allowed to let anyone pass who did not answer a riddle. You can see the issue.

Four hours and an old woman who knew sign language later, and we finally got to the booth. This troll, who by this time was utterly disheveled in his sweat-stained chainmail polo shirt, looked up at me and asked me what was in his pocket. I am a reasonable man, but this was the final straw. That's not even a riddle! It's a question with an answer that's impossible to know! So, I did what any sane individual would do and went off on him so much that a wizard father nearby cursed my speech to audibly censor itself to avoid tainting his children's ears.

By the time we got to the bank, all the centaur wanted for payment was to get rid of me. Can't say I really blame 'em. Anyways, I walked up to the building with the intention of using the ATM, but I was delayed for some time because Greg from accounting saw me and had to brag about his blind date with Medusa. I never want to hear in so much detail how he made out with each of the little snakes ever again. When I finally got to the ATM, my carrier Griffin dropped off my debit card. Believe it or not, it's cheaper than getting a wallet. So, I stuck the card in, waited those glorious monotonous seconds for the beeps-boops, and the ungodly screeching of the banshee at the Starbucks across the street to stop, and finally...my card got shredded. It was an ATM mimic.

Shit.



Bitter Wine, Proverbs 31:6 *Rose Branan*
Markers and Colored Pencil, 12"x 9"

The Unicyclist

Sabina Boyer

I think that if Time were a person,
he wouldn't be the type of person you would easily forget.
 Passing by you he'd be tall,
 tall with a tall hat,
 top hat,
that would ride a bit uncertain on the hill of his head,
always leaning either one way or another as he went,
so even he wouldn't know where it would fall.

And oh yeah, he'd be riding a unicycle.

I think that if you ever caught sight of him,
he'd be coasting down some silent, silky slope,
 waving as he went,
 the wind making his long coat flail,
 coat tails,
with a lengthy two-pronged wake furrowing out behind him.
Just impactful enough that you only truly notice it
once you were past and looking back.

And oh yeah, that's when you'd notice the unicycle.

I think that if you ever listened for him,
you might be able to hear in the distance from some quiet corner,
 the scratching of his pencil
 and rattling of the cog work,
 clockwork,
on his one-wheeled steed as he went past.
And even though you'd know you'd never heard that sound before,
you wouldn't have a doubt who it had been.

And oh yeah, there are two circling arrows on the wheel of the unicycle.

I think that if you ever talked to him,
he would listen with intention to every word,
 his eyes twinkling like starlight.
Then he'd whip out his notebook,
 quotebook,

and write down every word of your exchange.
And it would never occur to you until he'd pedaled away
that those words could never be changed.

Just another thing lost to his unicycle.

And I think that if you ever asked him for a favor,
his expression would slowly grow more serious,
until he'd show you how his mount worked:
how there's no kickstand there to prop it,
stop it,
even if he wanted to.
And as he'd ride off into the distance with the squeaking of the wheel,
somehow you'd know how he must feel.

Knowing that not even the unicyclist can control the unicycle.

I made friends with a girl in line today

Lilianna Fischer

We laughed and danced and even fell
To our knees
Heaving great grinning breaths
Buzzing off of each other like tossed
Oval magnets

I will see her in the lunch rush tomorrow
And for the first couple times
We might catch knowing glances
And a shadow of a grin

But I know me
And I know that I last
A small bright second, then ash
“Oh, what was that?”

For times like these, I muffle
My ears in headphones
And listen to a science podcast
If I'm a vibrating mass of electrons
Then I think you might never move
Though when I look at you
You're farther
And farther
Away

Do you know most short term memories
Only last 20-30 seconds?
Or that nothing (legal) can increase
The human metabolism?
I don't know if I'll ever forgive you
The tiny, biting injustice
Of forgetting me so quickly
Of letting me burn out

Like a red giant
Like a subatomic particle
Like a supernova
Like a stranger that made you laugh
Once and not again



Darling *Olivia Mansfeld* Oil on Canvas, 8" x 10"

The Name of Things

Ellie Eberhard

I dig my fingers into
earthy brown, giving a new home to
curled roots grown too unruly for their
previous cage. Silver Satin Pothos,
“*Scindapsus pictus*,” spills over the side,
falsely named as they are not
pothos at all. Next comes
Devil’s Ivy— a pothos in actuality,
though not in name, not associated with
the devil, except that it grows in the shade.
Then, the Split-Leaf Philodendron
a name misleadingly applied to “*Monstera Deliciosa*,”
a chipped terracotta pot barely visible
through the holey foliage. Finally,
a Money Plant gets rehoused, a
vague name confusingly used for
over four distinct plants,
vastly different in looks and needs,
though verbally indistinguishable.
But they grow all the same, no matter what
we call them. Names hold
little meaning to the leaves that
unfurl. We name them for
our sake, not for theirs.

Roadkill

Kaitlyn McCracken

The deer lies cork-screwed
on the side of the road
its hair tufts still caught
in the shattered grill

windshield unbroken
hood popped
driver untouched.

They called it God's hand.

That must have been one big deer.

"Lord bless you and keep you"
hangs from the rearview.

No, it was actually very small
the driver was just going too fast
and couldn't see over blades
of grass and Indiana drop-offs.

Eye for an eye:
totaled car and dead thing
sprawling on the rumble strip
and there was no blood on the road
just oil and gasoline
puddled.
And a broken necked deer swollen
and flung to the shoulder.

I hope no other deer saw it happen
but I don't know
I didn't see.

And I don't know if the deer was corkscrewed
and I don't know if there was blood.
I don't know because
I couldn't bring myself to look.

The deer that I killed
lies dead on the side of the road
and I don't know if I want to believe in a God
that didn't make a heaven for her.

Dandelions

Morgan

When we flee from this earth
We will lie in one grave
In the middle of the forest
Where dandelions will grow overtop

Our bodies so intertwined
Such that we will not be able to tell
Where my bones end
And yours begin

And when our skin begins to rot
My corpse will melt into yours
We will leave our parents
And we will become one flesh
Closer than we ever were in life
Closer than we were ever allowed to be

Years will go by and the world will move on
And when our skeletons are freed from the ground
We will be returned to the graves that held us when we were alive
You will be ripped from my grasp
And an entire death's worth of grief will pour from my bones

“What great friends they must have been!”
All of my love will be heard by no one but you
Our hands held under the table will remain unseen
They will take our rings as evidence
Against the vows that sustained us

But I will stay forever with you in the forest
A crown of dandelions perched atop your head
Your eyes locked on mine
My mother's ring glistening on your finger
Our limbs tangled in an eternal dance

Silk Road

Rissa Green

I speak to you in my mother tongue and yet
 I cannot translate everything
my love comes to you
 Sugar bruised, shipped
 in crates from the foreign land of
My ribcage to yours
still
 you call it precious, miles between us,
years to go, we meet in the middle. fine-china
Feelings exchanged in second language
 shards, but you,
You treasure my weary sweetness
 So I'll seal your cracks with gold

Sunset Asher *McDaniel* Charcoal, 12" x 18"



The Opposite of Haunting

Grace Clark

I've been going to this pond for years. It's been decomposing for most of them, the kayaks eaten by the cattails, and someone spilled blue yellow red pink plastic beads across the sand. I don't know if the fabric of the dock was ripped by nature or man and I don't care until I nearly step on a staple and look for someone to blame.

I bring you up there anyway, because I showed you too many pictures of its sunsets not to. And you can look past the docks to the dragonfly, to clouds on water. The sun sees through us, but give me five more minutes out here—the clock ticks backwards as you shout shiny new delight at a worn-out place.

I am new to staying somewhere long enough to see its ghosts, but whatever you are is the opposite of haunting. You take the dissolving molecules and remake them into home.

Contributors

Sam Alexander is a sophomore English Education major.

Crowner Beck is a senior Media Communications major with an emphasis in Audio Production from St. Louis, Missouri. Growing up, his mother would find him reading historical encyclopedias for fun and as an obvious next step he chose to major in Audio Production. Somehow, he has yet to disappoint his parents even though the likelihood of living in their basement for the foreseeable future is higher than anyone would like to admit.

Abbi Bodager is a sophomore who loves all art forms, but especially writing. When Abbi's not crafting poems or stories, she enjoys being out in nature and spending time with her family. You can read more of her work at www.heavensdeclarepoetry.com.

Sabina Boyer is a freshman Screenwriting major and Creative Writing minor who moved from her home as a missionary kid in Skopje, North Macedonia. Since discovering her love for writing, Sabina has written four full-length novels, various stories and poems, and a current short film script that she is co-producing with a crew of fellow Asbury students. When not writing, Sabina can be seen around campus jogging, wearing a red sweatshirt, and being an overall nerd.

Rose Branan lives in Wilmore, except when she doesn't.

Grace Clark is a junior Creative Writing major from everywhere and also nowhere. She can be found staring at those pink trees by the library, searching campus for rubber ducks, and forcing (hesitantly asking) her friends to read her poetry. One of her proudest achievements is being described as having "Frog and Toad vibes."

Emelia Conley likes Ireland, cats, trees, parentheses, tea (but also coffee) and any form of storytelling. Her major is International Communications (in pursuit of more stories) and her year is Ignited, but also complicated (she is a senior, but also completing her Masters). This is her third publication in the *Review*.

Evangelina Dongell is a sophomore Creative Writing major and Theater minor.

Ellie Eberhard is a junior English and Media Communications double major. She is fond of the color yellow, something warm to drink, cows, and a good story (in any form). She hates squeaky Styrofoam, orange-flavored things, and thinking about the future.

Emily Ellis, a senior Creative Writing and Sociology double major with a Christian Ministries minor, keeps writing love poetry but would rather be traveling solo across the States in her beloved Mazda. If you don't know that she's from Green Bay, WI., then you've never heard her say "bag" or seen her cry whenever the Packers lose. Her post-grad plans consist of opening an '80s arcade, publishing exactly 57.5 books, and taking over the world (naturally).

Ella Fairbairn is a senior Creative Writing and Equine Training double major. She loves spending her time outdoors, and that is where she gets most of her inspiration, as well as hoping that her work will encourage others to spend more time in creation. Her work was awarded Editor's pick in the *Outrageous Fortune* magazine, and she won an honorable mention for her poem in the college poetry contest by the *Lyric Magazine*.

Lilianna Fischer is a senior Film major from the armpit of America, Ohio. She can be frequently found frolicking frough Fwilmore or slurping blackberry matcha at the Hiccup. This is her first and last publication in the *Review* because she is LEAVING.

Vanessa Fischer is a sophomore Art and Design major with a minor in Equine Studies. Devastatingly, she's from Ohio, where the corn grows high and accents come to die. She's a HICCUP barista and musician, and this is her first publication in the *Review*.

Aiden Gaither is a junior who is now writing his second bio because the first one was denied due to its controversial nature. This is his second publication in *The Asbury Review*.

Reagan Gibbs is a junior Media Communications major with a Screenwriting emphasis. When not spilling her emotions into the Notes app and convincing herself that she will DEFINITELY edit it later, she enjoys infodumping about Star Wars and making way too specific Spotify playlists. This is her second time being featured in the *Review*.

Rissa Green is majoring in art as well as writings of the creative variety. She longs for the sea because she has the immune system of a sickly Victorian child, and she dreams of future days filled with homemade food and endless time for reading.

Jimmy Hale is the kind of guy who never says what he really is. He's had to write a bio for the *Review* three times now, and each time said bio has been riddled with lies, save for the final line. His hobbies include starting forest fires, eating lightbulbs, and writing romantic operas for his totally real girlfriend in Canada.

Ashlyn Hamby is a junior Art and Design major with a Creative Writing minor. She is from Blue Ridge, Georgia, and spent last semester abroad studying in Paris, France, where she was inspired to create art capturing Parisian life and style. Her favorite French treat from a boulangerie is pain au chocolate paired with a cup of espresso.

Jenna Hauser is a Beloved class freshman, majoring in Communication with a minor in Art and Design. Jenna's passion is art and all things beautiful. She loves exploring themes of faith, growth, and the human experience in everything she creates. A day is not a day for Jenna if she hasn't listened to music, buried herself in her mountain of pillows and blankets, drawn something, and/or written some heart-wrenching one-liner in her notes app.

Joy Hibshman hails from Pennsylvania, a language and literature student. Her class she claims with ignited fame and states she's not a truant. A fact it is that Doritos naught she ever dared to try; she also hates adhesive things—don't ask the reason why!

Katie Jornod is a senior English and Media Communications double major. She loves creating stories in all mediums and hand-writing poetry in her poetry notebook – to be read over tea, of course. This is her second time contributing to *The Asbury Review*. She hopes sharing her work will bring readers joy!

Klara Kinman (she/her) is a junior English major from Louisville, Kentucky, and a survivor of the 2024 Oxford Hilary Term. While in Oxford, Klara developed strange habits such as waffling, drinking ungodly amounts of Yorkshire Tea, tripping over cobblestones, and attempting the excruciating journey up Headington Hill every evening (public transportation is for the weak). In the wee hours, you can find Klara perched in her favorite armchair, contemplating the relationship between female identity and the changing body in Lucille Clifton's poetry.

Olivia Mansfield is a sophomore Art Education major, intending to master in English as a Second Language. She is from Indiana, where she has trained in the arts of Wii Rock band. This is her first publication in the *Review*, and more of her work can be found on her Instagram @clark_innovations.

Bryce Martin is a senior majoring in Creative Writing and English. He's a 28-year-old Hoosier graduating this semester, and he's ready to take on the world! When he's not writing for the *Review* or for Friday Night Live, you can find him in the woods dodging cryptid hunters.

Kaitlyn McCracken is a junior from Pittsburgh, who studies English and Sociology. She is constantly forgetting to nix her Oxford commas in AP style for *The Asbury Collegian*, and the jury is still out on whether it's intentional. When she is not reading, writing, photographing, bingeing podcasts (oh, or doing school, that is important), Kaitlyn can be found in her even nerdier pursuits: namely Dungeons and Dragons.

Asher McDaniel is a junior with a double major in Adventure Leadership and Art and a minor in Creative Writing. He is a student of the small mountain hollows where the tragedies of moles and beetles play out in the space of a Sycamore's sigh. He is a lover of adventures that scratch and sting and freeze, from which you emerge with a body more rough and a soul more free.

Tegan Merrick is a junior English major with a Sociology minor from the Chicago suburbs and enjoys seeing the magic of the mundane, bright colors in every context, and cracking jokes no one else finds funny. Check out *The Asbury Collegian*, where Tegan works as a Copy Editor.

Krysten Meyer is a junior from Colorado, though she would argue her residency is in fictional worlds more than ours. She is a Creative Writing and Equine Studies double major and a proud member of the Asbury Tumbling Team. When she's not buried in a book, Krysten can be found at the barn training her horse Ophelia or practicing bleacher diving with the Tumbling Team.

Morgan is a senior who will gladly infodump about their cats, Taylor Swift, or their favorite movie (Cocaine Bear) any time you like. Their poem "Dandelions" is their first publication in the *Review*.

Alex Nicholson (she/her) is a senior double major in Creative Writing and Bible Theology. She hails from the harsh land of Canton, Ohio, and fancies herself a writer when she's not consuming video games like an elephant in a peanut factory. She is the proud owner of a lightsaber and four swords.

Tiffany Rutledge (she/her) is a junior at Asbury studying Psychology and History. She enjoys making music and entertaining the masses. By the time this is published, she would have just celebrated her "Taylor Swift birthday."

Cole Sherry is a junior History major with a Theater minor from Emlenton, PA. They love going on walks, reading, and taking photos. If you like their work check out her Instagram @photos.by_cole to see more. This is her first publication in the *Review* with plans to submit more in the future!

Hunter Smith is an elusive creative writer wanted by the world government. They are said to be extremely dangerous given their senior status and penchant for deflecting with humor. Should you have any info on them, contact our undercover agent Grace Clark and we will move in to apprehend. Thank you for doing your part.

Having developed a sharp eye from his love of nature as a child, **John Teoh** is a photographer and filmmaker, passionate about capturing moments to tell a story. Growing up in the metropolitan city of Singapore, John's first foray into his craft was through architecture photography, resulting in images inspired by strong lines, vast spaces, and attention to detail. You can find his photography and film work online at johnteoh.strikingly.com.

Geneva Wise is a sophomore English and Spanish double major from Steubenville, Ohio. She is an enjoyer of bread bowls and loves her cat, Soup, more than anything in the world. This is her first publication in the *Review*.

Emma Wold is a senior Sociology major and Art minor who's closing out her final semester here at Asbury. She likes drawing, collage-making, playing Stardew Valley, and listening to podcasts. When not doing those things, she's really wishing she could. She's weirdly good at drawing Tom Selleck.

Mark Wood is a fifth-year senior who remained undecided until his third semester and (at time of printing) now has less than one month to decide what happens after graduating with a degree in Latin. These are his last two features in *The Asbury Review*, for a total of twelve published poems.