

ELEMENTIA

TEEN LITERARY ARTS MAGAZINE ISSUE XV



Spoiler alert!

by Romila Santra

screaming letters warn
cautioning, threatening
but I lean in
revel in the reveal
most don't like spoilers
but I live for them

as I turn page after page.
I lose control, the story
gets away from me.
takes its own course
until I know the ending
and then I can brace myself

for the inevitable fall.
biographies are nice
packaged with its pre-spoiled endings
Helen Keller?
she graduated college.
Anne Frank?
she died.
it's good to know before

I read a lifetime.
A messy timeline packaged into
a neat six by nine prism
ready for someone to
share its journey through
the ups and downs

of chaos.
With each chapter there's
A new piece to the puzzle
some are pristine, shiny pieces
others are weary, cardboard peeling
but it's okay
because I already
know what the puzzle will
look like when

it's done.

From the Editors

Welcome to *elementia*, a magazine edited and designed by teens in the Kansas City metro area and published by Johnson County Library. This year, our artists and writers submitted work around the theme of time.

We watched for 160 seconds as day and night collided in a total solar eclipse. We set our clocks back and had a second go at 1am on a breezy November day. And we contemplated the past, the present and the future (but not always in that order.)

We were challenged to think through not just the ways time impacts our lives, but all the ways time can serve as a device for telling our stories. Inside you will find art and writing by more than 80 teens from Kansas City and beyond. Find information on how to submit to next year's issue, *Breaking Free*, on our back page!

This publication may contain controversial material. Kansas law prohibits the suppression of a student-based publication solely because it involves political or controversial subject matter. Johnson County Library and its board members, officers and employees may disclaim any responsibility for the content of this publication; it is not an expression of Library policy.

Cover: Imprints of past selves by Anna Krutz



A Road Trip Through Time
by Amanda Pendley

elementia Issue XV

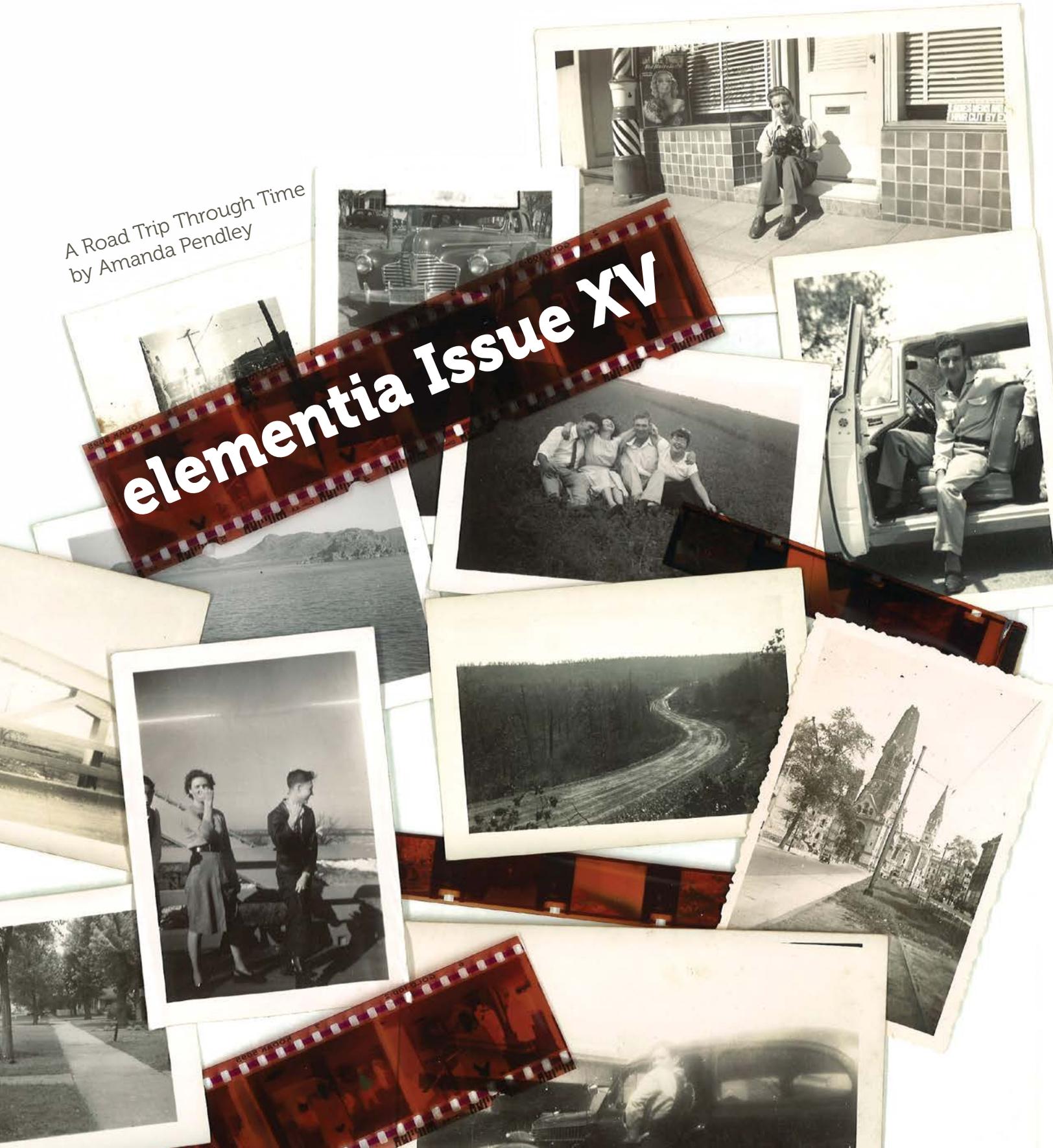


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Like what you're reading? Head to our YouTube page at youtube.com/jocolibrary and find the *elementia* Playlist to watch performances of some of the poems in this issue.



Johnson County Library is honored to dedicate the 15th issue of *elementia* to author *A.S. King*. Throughout the past year, *King's* works have inspired the designers and editors of *elementia* to view life through the eyes of time, including all of its unique interpretations.

Speaking of time, *A.S. King's* words fit well with our current day and age, focusing on the empowerment of young people as they are encouraged to take charge of their futures and learn to speak their own truth. In books like *Glory O'Brien's History of the Future* and *Still Life with Tornado*, *King's* characters learn to cope with their inability to control time as they grow up and accept their past as they head into their future. Whether the focus of time is on mortality, regret, progression or hope, *A.S. King* serves as an important voice to guide readers through growth.

We thank you and we honor you, *A.S. King*, for encouraging us to share our memories, our current selves, and our aspirations as we continue on our journey with time. In this magazine, we not only get the chance to champion our own stories and accomplishments, but also to gain multiple other perspectives over what you may call "the history of the future."

Hourglass

by Elizabeth Joseph

I break down in the supermarket grocery aisles
because I only have five minutes to make the choice
between a variety of granola bars.

I count the moments until everything stops
because someday I will be forced to catch my own breath
and pace it against the metronome's slow count
a pendulum swing between empty space
and the pulse of thoughts in beats per second

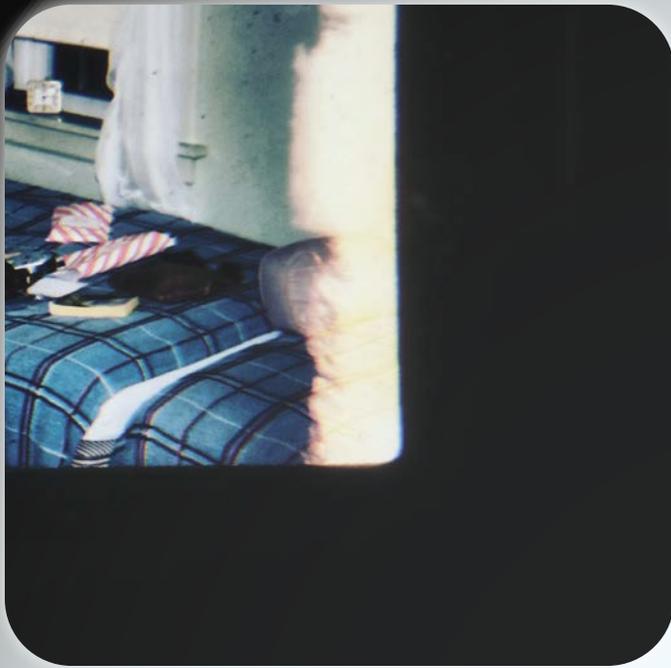
I share the accrued space in my thoughts
you all amass because I know
each day is a slow crawl
an unwinding, where I can't come back for seconds,
I can hear repetition at the base of my skull
echoing tick-tick-tick –

tick
another flutter of anxiety in my chest
tick
retread the same thoughts over and over
tick
grasping the present like water in my fist
tick
immortalize everything before it fades
tick
registering the clock as my time runs out.

here I am:
in the aisle
wondering
when I start
(and where I end.)

Coexist pt. 1 by Julia Rosher





Old Photograph by Olivia Miller

I found this old photograph of my great aunt that my grandma has kept all these years. She looked so young and lively, a version of her I never knew. In my time, she needed oxygen support, and she could barely leave the house. It just struck me how much of a difference time makes. This picture is really special to me. I think that it represents how we all have a time limit on our lives.

Polaroids

by Anna Schmeer

Your polaroids next to my polaroids
Yours taken with your 'new' polaroid camera (1960)
Mine taken with my friend's 'new' polaroid camera (2017)
Yours, yellowed, colors fading,
Mine, stark white with bold colors.
In yours, you and your husband outside your new home
In mine, I hold a candle
You, your daughter, my grandma, at the circus
Me, my friend's dog in the snow

Your papery-plastic album is filled with old polaroids
My sleek silver phone snaps photos with 'retro' polaroid filters
Your hands shake as you warn me of their fragility
My hands are strong as I roll my eyes

My eyes flit over pages, barely see what I am looking at
Your eyes staring longingly at my polaroids for the days that used to be

4 a.m.

by Magda Werkmeister

a house can feel like a whole world
when you're lying in your bed at 4 a.m.,
too early to rise in a coup against the lingering stars,
too late for the soft black of the backs of eyelids to last long enough,
light switch flipped up so as not to have to stare at the dark
but staring at the slow meandering of the fan is not much better.

the stillness is eerie, unsettling, unnatural,
as though you are invading upon a time too sacred,
a holy time sensing that you have stumbled upon it.
you would think that music could ease the tension
and it does for a while until you hit the space between songs
and that silence screams with a pitch unprecedented.

it's the nervous sort of false serenity,
a deer in a meadow with ever-twitching ears,
ready to flee but not yet sure from what,
and then you realize you are fleeing from yourself,
fleeing from what you are because you don't truly know
when you are the only one alive in the twilight.

4 a.m. exists only in our guts and in our poems;
confrontation of self exists only within.



Barcelona, July 4th 2016 by Julia Rosher



okay jared pt. 2 by Kaitlin Yu

Sei la mia vita

by Abigail Cottingham

The boy from the apartment below yours writes you letters about the birds and calls you a sunset.

"Tu sei il sole del mio giorno." You are the sunshine of my day.

He wakes early in the morning to sit on an overturned orange crate below your terrace, a small notebook and charcoal pencil in his hand. You lean over the iron and ask him what he's thinking about today, and he looks up at you with his rounded glasses and a coy smile.

Sometimes he writes about the swifts that fly high above the rooftops, the ducks that nest around the lake in the park, even the pigeons that hobble around the square. His handwriting is smudged and messy but you don't need to read his words to find beauty in them.

He'll sing to you every night when your window is open until you invite him upstairs to whisper sweet nothings into your ear. He calls you things like *"Luce mia"* and *"Anima mia"* behind closed doors. His words scare you, promises of forever that make you shiver even when it's warm being wrapped up in his arms.

"Sei la mia vita." You are my life.

Your bed was only meant to be a single but when you're wrapped around each other, there's room enough. Though, he'll still disappear sometime during the night. If it weren't for him leaving behind his sweaters, you'd imagine being with him at all was just a dream.

He'll bring you flowers from the river market until you run out of vases, he'll bring you seashells until you run out of shelf space, he'll bring you his heart when your apartment is full but there's still space for him.

This gift is not as easy to accept. Polite smiles and *"grazie"* will not suffice, but then again, you've always found him more beautiful than the flowers or the shells. But unlike them, you cannot cradle this decision in your hands for hours.

So you make up your mind and when bring your lips to his, he tastes like sea salt and honey. You no longer feel suffocated by the chance of empty promise but rather living in the euphoria that comes with kissing a requited lover in the twilight of Venice.

The boy who has your heart died when you were young lovers. Like the ancient clock on your mantel, you didn't realize how little time you had left until the cogs were too broken to continue counting. The sunset was never the same when you were no longer its envy. The birds became synonymous without language to give them personality, adjectives floating away like a feather in the breeze. There were nights when you would wake alone, still grasping at the empty space beside you.

When the flowers were long withered in their vases and the shells had since gathered dust, you decided to leave the apartment. You spent the rest of your life trying to find him again, in music, or art, or literature. But he had already been a masterpiece.

Your time ran out too, too soon for your family, but not soon enough for your exhausted heart. You died without ever wrapping yourself in another lover's arms, keeping that space reserved for the person who could bring you the sunset in a cup.

But Fate knew better than to separate you forever. Your souls were made to be intertwined like hands held together while walking in a cobblestone alleyway, like vines growing together in a vineyard, like the iron railing you clung to to avoid physically falling for him as well.

The boy with charcoal eyes will spend an eternity following you through the universe, giving you the stars and asking for nothing in return.

ambition, love, ambition

by Samiya Rasheed

Hours are not spent well in lethargy
nor in deep-seated exhaustion
Hours are rarely spent
more – lost

I live in a state of competition
Each breath a race to completion
I have almost spent more time
crying than sleeping
But my resume will be beautiful

Reflect: I am clawing over the gaping maw
the pitfalls of failure, of burning out too soon
I don't have the minutes to breathe
the air is thin on this Godwin Austen we built
I'd still summit with my lungs collapsing

I hold in this brittle absence of warmth I made
where my joys drained out into obligation:
a ladder rung towards those burgeoning heavens
where the oxygen is honeyed sweet
tinged acrid by ozone
and Nike will smile sphinx-like and proud

For now I am drinking
the chalk pastel fumes
and bunsen burner lights
Talent is unattainable as it become the scale
the colors have never been so vibrant
I try, yet

Script. Running letters, rushing water, ink in motion
My craft is lovely – I am not so fine for it
I am ink boiled down
globules, mucus: it does not run well
the time taken
I cannot keep up

My dreams are out-lapping me

Ambition, love, ambition
fake the talents you don't possess
Cheapen their worth –
inflation in the face of the girth of expectation
paint all you do in jewel tones even as you drown
the more that you have, the better
Don't pause and leave your fields fallow
the seasons are quick

It is not so far now
I will approach that great leviathan – presenting
what I almost could have built,
in the cherry red ink I siphoned off my veins,
the eldritch horror I assembled with every mercurial hour
Pleading, am I enough?

It will not dredge the void I insisted upon
nor erase the hours I spent hefting a reverent ideal
I'll chant ascension in *glory glory glory*
Though I am no more than the sum of my parts

The answer
will be mundane
Take that as it is



Textile by Marissa Olin

Identity

by Maddie Bauman

When I was a little girl,
I wanted to be a princess,
then a vet,
then a president.
I know many girls who at my age
shared those dreams.
The ones I look at now and think
What was I thinking?
Those aren't possible!
But for a little girl,
that's ok.
I was so sure then.
I was positive I knew who I was
and who I wanted to be.

Now,
10 years later,
I'm unsure of myself.
Doubting the choices I make.
Thinking they will one day come back and haunt me.
I don't know who I am.
I don't know who I'm supposed to be.
But I'm sure I will find it.
I have to.
And once I do,
I will be as sure as I was
when I was three years old.

room 502

by Amanda Pendley

If time could be measured in words
I would handwrite novels until my knuckles bled
Analyze every single piece written by Steven King twice
Type poems so complex so that the meaning gets lost
Construct every screenplay to give you the ending you deserve
Switch my major to songwriting and throw in a full-on band
Become a motivational speaker to find the right tone
Scream the lyrics at a rock concert so loud they land on the stage
And whisper to myself that I'd find the right words eventually
I'd find the right time eventually

I hope you know that as much as I love words
there are not nearly enough perfect ones in existence
And there is not enough time left for me to find them

You know my voice as well as you know your own
Who knows, maybe you even hear me in your head sometimes
So just imagine the syllables coming out in that fragile way I always let them go
These words are made of glass and if they shatter
it will sound a lot like my headspace while writing this

To the women of many words; to the women who can alter time:
I found a home in you in room 502
Each and every one of your stories deserves to be heard by the world
And the stories that we sculpted together still stand as a monument to who we will become
as our plotlines wind down unknown alleys and onto sacred grounds.

I would write forever if it meant our story could withstand the tests of time
And I think I will.

Awakening by Kylie Bergdall

Something to Care For

Lilly and Her Ball II
by Cormac Palmer

by Anonymous

Every Saturday, after work, I visit my grandmother at her nursing home. It's about a half an hour drive to get there, but it's worth the drive. Grandma G isn't the normal nursing home type you'd think of: sweet, unsuspecting, a kind of elderly innocence. No, well kind of, while Grandma G is sweet she's a unique brand of it. The one who insults you because she cares.

"Really, that's what you wear on a first date?"

"I swear on my god damn life if you go through another one of those phases they'll publish a book on your life about coping with multiple personality disorder."

"If that skirt were any smaller you'd make a whole penny standing on the corner."

Obviously what she said hurt, but in our household – me, her, and my father – that kind of thing was welcome as long as you could take an insult coming right back at you. In fact, by the age of sixteen I could almost keep up with my grandmother in a game of wits; of course I never could and never will be able to win.

When I arrived at Protecting Pines I was pleasantly surprised to see that they had already put up their holiday decorations. It was mid-November. But I guess around here it doesn't do any harm to bring Christmas out a bit earlier. Grandma G's room was on the second floor of the main building and her room was the easiest to spot as it was the only one without some cute little handmade Christmas wreath hanging on the door. I knocked, and after a few seconds of shuffling I heard the door knob click open and the door swing open to show me Grandma G in her usual attire. A sweater, loose-fitting dress pants, and pink fuzzy slippers.

Grandma's glasses sat on the tip of her nose as she looked up at me.

"If you're going to visit me at least do me the favor of not wearing such an offensive outfit." She said before turning to go to the kitchen leaving the door open wide for me to walk in.

"Well, you know how I can't waste your time." I said back.

"I'd rather kick the bucket early than see my granddaughter wear that color again."

I didn't have a response for that so I just sat in the kitchen. We talked for a while about the usual stuff. How's life? How's work? Is this a new recipe? Are you and your boyfriend still together? Nothing out of the ordinary, until I asked her one specific question.

"Why don't you have a wreath on your door Grandma?"

It was silent before Grandma G tried to change the subject.

"It didn't come in the right color."

Well I saw multiple color options. None of them were good?

"They were ugly."

Well, I thought they were quite cute.

After a few more excuses Grandma got exasperated and looked me dead in the eye saying:

"Shut up Caroline and finish your food."

I did as I was told until I got the courage to ask again.

"Grandma G are you sure you don't want a wreath?"

While Grandma wasn't necessarily a festive person, she always went out of her way to make the decorations the best she could to give me, and my father back when he was a kid, something magical.

"Damn it, Caroline how many times do I have to tell you I don't want the wreath!" She snapped at me.

There was silence for a second before she spoke again. In a

much softer tone. "It's not right to do it just for myself." She told me.

"It used to be, I would always have the motivation to do anything for you and your father, but now..."

She trailed off and looked away, but my eyes never

went away from her. She continued: "Now there's no reason to do anything. Your father's an adult, and now you are to, and I don't have enough time to decorate for your grandchildren."

It had been a year since Grandma had moved to assisted living. She had said tending to the house was too lonely with me and dad both gone. We had assumed things had gotten better after the move, but clearly not. She was quick to change the subject again to how my cousin was currently studying literature, a useless major in her opinion.

My grandmother had made sacrifices again and again for me and my father. So, while she went on to tell me other stories and gossip, I couldn't stop my mind from wondering how I could fix this.

The next day, with the help of my father I came back to my grandmother's with a large crate and wearing our best out of season Christmas sweaters. Not only were we going to show her we still need her to care for us, but we'd give her a child to care for her own. The second she opened the door we opened the door to the crate and released a small shaking Pomeranian. Immediately it ran to Grandma G weaving between her legs and yipping to get her attention.

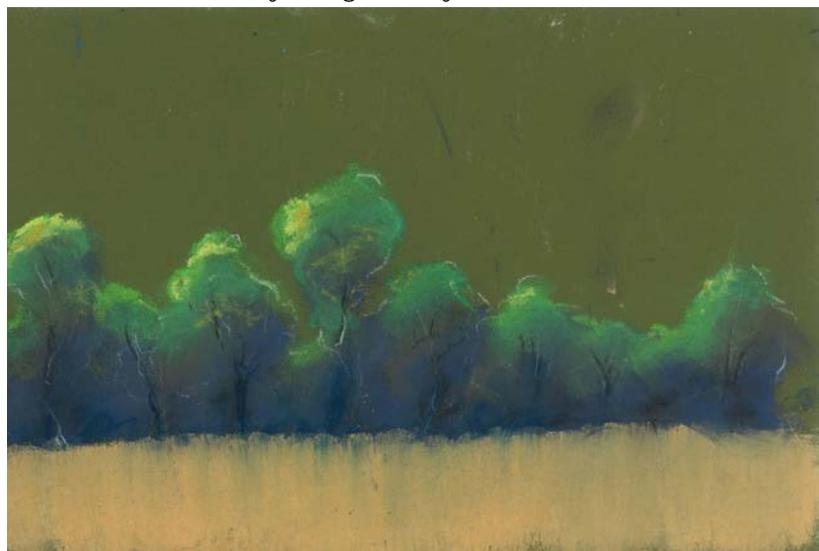
"Is that a rat?" Grandma G asked. She tried to have her usual sarcastic bite, but it hardly showed at the sight of the dog's small, adorable face.

I just smiled. "It's someone to decorate for."



CP.

Trees in Missouri by Abigail Meyer



Childhood

by Gillian Knaebel

Alone to my thoughts, to my terrors,
Wishing upon days we were careless,
Remembering a time,
Like a nursery rhyme,
Where our greatest fears were that of the fearless.

Memories fade through time,
Like a candle flickers then dies,
But a light still shows,
Bringing warmth and a glow,
To fun times turned from new to old.

Where I'm From

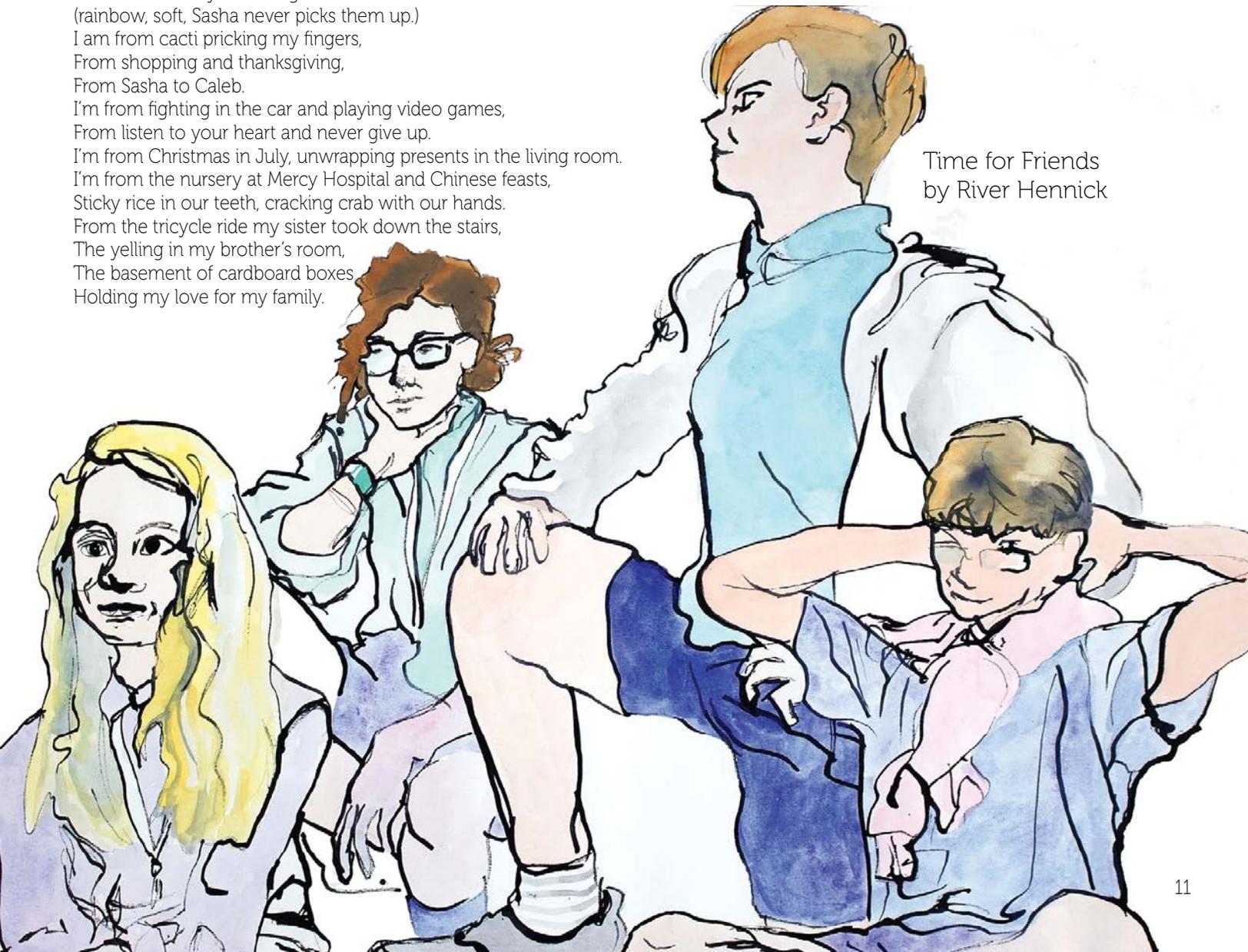
by Ahna Chang

I am from the nail polish in my room,
From holographic glitter and high heels.
I am from the toys on the ground
(rainbow, soft, Sasha never picks them up.)
I am from cacti pricking my fingers,
From shopping and thanksgiving,
From Sasha to Caleb.
I'm from fighting in the car and playing video games,
From listen to your heart and never give up.
I'm from Christmas in July, unwrapping presents in the living room.
I'm from the nursery at Mercy Hospital and Chinese feasts,
Sticky rice in our teeth, cracking crab with our hands.
From the tricycle ride my sister took down the stairs,
The yelling in my brother's room,
The basement of cardboard boxes
Holding my love for my family.



Flowering Friendships by Kathryn Jones

Time for Friends
by River Hennick



PLAY

by Dawson Holloway

Jim didn't plan on leaving his birthday party. He didn't even plan on leaving the building, going outside – he saw Barry the Polka Bull walk out the door, and it stayed hanging just open, calling to him. Barry the Polka Bull and his Bovine Bonanza had only just finished playing their set for the birthday boy and his guests, and the crowds of Jim's friends were now pushing their way to the playground – scrambling, shoving, screaming. Every father was on hunt through the birthday room for the elusive servers, begging for alcohol – every mother was fused to their cell phones, half on their cameras, half on their Facebooks, vying for information and gossip about who the bad kids there were. Every table was laden with half-eaten burgers, stray fries and unfinished sodas. The party was in the full swing of chaos that any birthday boy would thrive in. Not Jim, though. For him, whether he realized it or not, it was the perfect time to slip through the door outside undetected.

Jim was outside now. The cold winter winds were biting against his naked arms now, the sun about exhausted after ages trying to break past the icy clouds. And there he was in front of Jim – Barry the Polka Bull.

Jim's eyes widened as he stepped out from the door frame, fully engulfed by the winter. A putrid blend of fast food aroma and shit stinks filled the air as Barry leaned up against a dumpster, in all of his bovine greatness. His legs were lined with the most luscious fur, strapped with lederhosen and green pants – his Awesome Accordion was slung on his belt – matted, graying black fur lined his chest, and two proud horns emerged from his head. Jim stared deep into Barry's two enormous smiling eyes, his smiling cow mouth, the hole in his neck that was hardly noticeable to the four-year-old's eyes. The cow did nothing to acknowledge him. He had his arms jammed into his pockets, navigating through them with his hoof-hands.

"Barry!" Jim shouted.

The cow whirled around to face the boy, shrieking in a much lower voice than what he had sung in.

Jim only shouted. "It's me!" he said, as though to a best friend. "It's my birthday today!"

A pause lingered through the shipping

area before Barry uttered an "Oh," and slid a half-exposed box of Marlboros back into his pocket, returning to his fluffy, bubbly cartoon voice. "The party is inside, John!" the cow said, mouth unmoving. "You don't want to miss it! Why don't you go back in?"

"I-I-" John's smile kept widening. "I wanted to meet you!"

"Everyone inside is having so much fun! I know you don't want to miss-"

Jim ran up to his cow hero, wrapping his arms around his waist in an enormous, warm hug. "I love you, Barry!" he shouted into the matted fur.

"Oh, God," Barry said, the cartoon voice fading away again.

"Do you want to play with us?" Jim looked back up into the eyes of his cow hero, smile stretching from ear to ear.

"You should go back!" Barry said, hand still hugging the Marlboro box. "I'll meet you in there in a second, alright?"

"Can you come now?" Jim asked. "You are such a good singer and I want all of my friends to meet you and I want to play with you because I am your friend."

Barry chuckled, mouth still unmoving. "You are my friend, huh?"

"Yeah," Jim nodded. "And you love to play with us."

Barry chuckled again, leaning back against the dumpster. "You aren't going back in, are you?"

Jim smiled, shaking his head.

"My God . . ." Barry muttered again in the raspy voice. "You've got to go back inside to play now. You have to."

"Why?"

"Because you only have so much time to play!"

"Why?"

"Because the party will end soon!"

"Why?"

"Because it will."

Jim snickered. "Why?"

"God . . ." Barry's voice was becoming tense, mouth still unmoving. "Because."

"Come in and play with us!"

"Not now!" Barry said. "I will come inside in a second!"

"Why not now?"

Barry took a heavy breath, his glossy painted eyes still beaming with a false joy. "I just need to take a breath."

Jim waited just long enough for Barry the Polka Bull to take one lone breath.

"Okay," the boy said, hugging the cow's leg again. "Let's go!"

"You need to go back inside by yourself for now," Barry said. "Give me some more time."

"Why?"

"Because you only have so much time to play!" Barry said again.

"Why?"

"Because!" Barry was shouting now. "It won't be long before you are stuck in a filthy cow suit singing stupid songs to snot-nosed kids!"

Jim's face melted into a frown, and his arms unlatched from Barry's legs. His eyebrows arched up, tied in a knot.

"You'd better start playing now!" Barry kept shouting. "You never know when you're going to have to stop!"

Jim began to back away as Barry stood off of the dumpster, towering high above the boy.

"There is no greater lesson that I can teach you," Barry the Polka Bull said, "than this: someday, you'll start walking through a field of shit, one that you will be wading through for the rest of your life, and then you'll have to learn how to scrape it off your shoes so you can get a whole new coat the next day! Play now while you can, or-"

"Jim!" a woman's voice rang through the shipping area. "There you are!"

Jim turned around, tears streaming down his burning red-hot cheeks, to see his mother at the doorway to the party room, shooting the most twisted, vengeful glare she could muster at Barry the Polka Bull.

Barry reached one hand up to wave at the both of them, just as if nothing had happened – the other was back in his pocket, fishing for the Marlboro cigarettes. Jim's mother swooped down and slung him over her shoulder, storming back inside with him. Jim kept his tear-flooded eyes on Barry as he was carried away. All he could see was the mats in the fur, the holes ripped into the horns. All he could see was the tattered prop accordion, all he could see was the lying painted eyes that smiled far too brightly, the stitched-on smile that stretched too wide.

All Jim could see as he was dragged back into his birthday party was a costume that he never wanted to wear.

disillusioned revolutions

by Hailey Alexander

An Ode to My Innocence

by Kathryn Malnight

You ruffled dress.
You lip glossed,
clean tongued, classy individual.

An ode to my innocence:
I remember my childhood through rose colored glasses.
No hurt, no tears, no worry –
nothing I knew, I knew . . . nothing.
I lived in a utopia where
I didn't cry myself to sleep,
didn't tie nooses or
swallow pills for the hell of it.

You trampled spirit.
You slave to depression.
You hot spotlight,
but hey, I didn't want to see this anyway –
you haven of hell.
You girl interrupted by the screaming of your own mind,
you wilted body as he shattered
any ounce of childhood you had left –
but you deep, curved body.
You badass feline.

You know more and don't regret it
red lipstick, black eyeliner
queen.

An ode to my innocence:
I used to scrape the bottom of my soul,
used to pick a fight with every demon I came in contact with,
only to fall into the grave I was just trying to avoid.
I am not a greater person for losing you.
A weathered heart doesn't make someone more beautiful.
Then again, I am stronger.
I can fight like a girl,
I can kick and bare my teeth,
I am more tiger than woman.
An ode to my innocence:
Thank you.
RIP.

The clock glares at me,
with the steady
accusations
of her hands –
Where will you be
In an hour,
In a day,
In a year?

Her disillusioned clicks
and clocks sear
into my brain
as I stare back at her,
trying to gain control
of her calculated revolutions.

But she is relentless.
Never slowing
for a break,
for a chance,
for a breath,
of air.

Gasping for another moment
between the mismatched rhythms
of her hands
and my heart
I wonder,

How many hours
has she stolen
from behind an empty screen full
of things I was told
to adore?

How many days
has she drowned
in pools of dried tears
and unrequited love?

How many years
will I sit, gasping
for one extra moment
while so many others
pass by?

Faded by Taylor Rowan

Fifteen

by Abbey Roschak

Age is just a number
We all start out at one
But someone's first year
Is another's seventh
Their neighbor's eleventh
My fifteenth

I spent my thirteenth
Thinking of my fourteenth
Praying for my fifteenth
But I didn't think it'd turn out like this

Mirrors are reflections that have us believe
They mirror what we don't want to see
A defect in my eyes
Led to Sunday night cries
And picture-perfect lullabies

I hummed the rhythm of my musical stomach
Which made me go to sleep
I beat the drum of my self-worth
Which left purple bruises
And a strong flinch reflex

I ran to the sound of my sloshing ears
Which were deaf to compliments

But sharp to insults
I strummed mascara across my lashes
To take away from my summer rashes

But none of my songs
Could stop my body from harm
For I still became diseased
When I turned fifteen
And my belittling ways
That I had total control over
Turned into involuntary feelings
And incorrectly-fit jeans

I used to pray for a slim waist
But now I beg for a day
Where I don't waste away
I took for granted things I had forgotten
Like running half a mile
And soaking up the sun
But now my mind is the athlete
And the sun makes me melt

I strived for a gap between my thighs
Until the only thing holding them together
Were loosely fit bottoms
For my shame of an unknown illness
Took up more space
Than my thighs ever will

I starved myself of needed nutrients
So that I could feel thin
Until my body stopped absorbing them

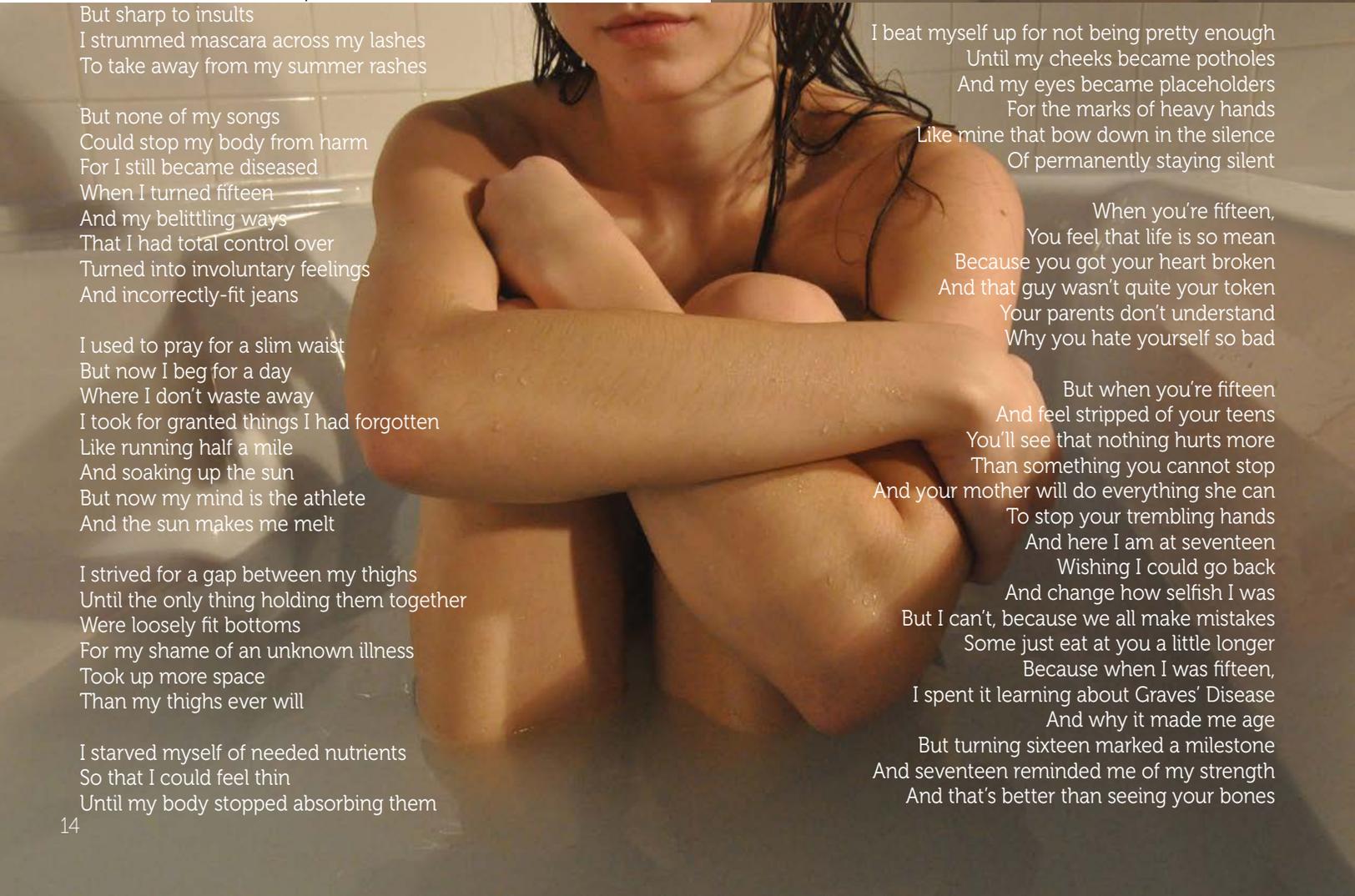
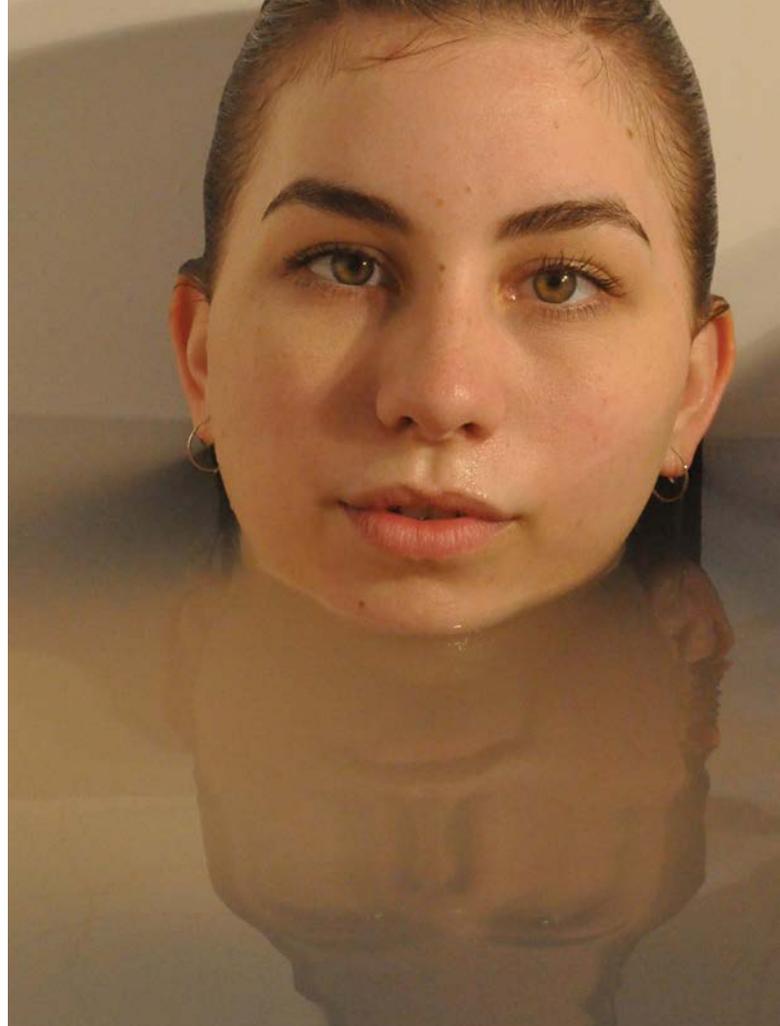
Distortion
by Kira Higgins

Uncomfortable
by Kira Higgins

I beat myself up for not being pretty enough
Until my cheeks became potholes
And my eyes became placeholders
For the marks of heavy hands
Like mine that bow down in the silence
Of permanently staying silent

When you're fifteen,
You feel that life is so mean
Because you got your heart broken
And that guy wasn't quite your token
Your parents don't understand
Why you hate yourself so bad

But when you're fifteen
And feel stripped of your teens
You'll see that nothing hurts more
Than something you cannot stop
And your mother will do everything she can
To stop your trembling hands
And here I am at seventeen
Wishing I could go back
And change how selfish I was
But I can't, because we all make mistakes
Some just eat at you a little longer
Because when I was fifteen,
I spent it learning about Graves' Disease
And why it made me age
But turning sixteen marked a milestone
And seventeen reminded me of my strength
And that's better than seeing your bones



childhood home

by Emily Martin

she is four years old
toddling around
on wooden floors
like a spinning top,
too short to reach the cabinets or
see above the sink,
clambering atop
countertops
to reach her
pink plastic glasses

she is six years old,
a big girl now,
backpack hanging off of her shoulders,
bounding down the bus steps
after her first day of kindergarten.
through the garage and
into the kitchen,
into the smell
of freshly baked cookies
and into a mother's arms

she is sixteen
curled up on a couch
in the dim lit basement
in the arms of a boy.
in love.
they smile as their lips part ways.
and when he leaves
(later than her parents had asked)
she knows just where to step
so the floor doesn't squeak

and suddenly,
she is eighteen
graduated,
her room bare now,
unfamiliar
reduced to boxes
and packed in a car for her move up north.
old toys, clothes, letters, and trophies
are the ghosts of her presence
and the house feels empty without her

twenty two now
returning home from college
visiting her siblings
visiting her old room
visiting everything,
the walls are different colors,
the carpet is new,
paintings and pictures have moved.
everything smells different than she'd remembered.
the house had kept on without her

she is forty years old
dressed in her best,
children in tow,
walking up the old porch steps.
the house is cleaned,
immaculate,
removed of its usual dirt and clutter,
memories and comforts
from childhood.
the way you'd prepare it for guests.

The Sweet Curse of Nostalgia

by Sankara "Le prince heritier" Olama-Yai

I love the smell of cigarette smoke
Not because I'm a smoker, I love the smell because
It takes me back, back to the piss stained streets
That raised me, where the overwhelming aroma
Of freshly lit cigarettes plagued the air
I love the taste of wine, the fermented freshness swims
About in my mouth, skipping merrily atop my taste buds
The slightly bitter aftertaste takes me on a journey
Through nostalgia seeped memories, back to familiar scenes
Summer afternoons in Paris with my grandfather
He'd always give me a sip as my curious eye latched onto his glass
I fell in love with the succulent juices of Italian vineyard wines
I feel a tinge of comfort, let slip a smile, on packed trains and buses
Which remind me of my crowded commute in Moldova
I reminisce on hot sunny days and bumpy rides
Dragging out and dusting off ancient memories of
Those sweltering school days in Congo
The best days of our lives are trapped in the closet of our minds
Little things help float them to the surface unwithered
These little drops of reminiscence that drip from the cave of our souls
Are both a gift and a curse
The bittersweet taste of nostalgia, so warm and fleeting,
Yet forever painful

Multitudes

by Lauren Yoksh

I won't remember this in the morning. The way her arm feels wrapped around my shoulders. She is helping me into the car, her car, which is red like mashed up cranberries. The last time I ate cranberries was when I was seven. My aunt had just left her husband, who hated cranberries and raspberries and strawberries with obvious passion. She showed up on my parents' front porch in the rain, which looked very dramatic like a scene from a sad movie. In her hands were bowls full of the berries her husband detested, and so we all sat around the coffee table with crisscrossed legs and ate red berries that stained our fingers and chewed and swallowed in silence pretending that my aunt wasn't on the verge of tears, that her life wasn't dramatic and upsetting like a sad movie. I don't like sad movies, because I like to live in denial. That's what my girl told me, anyway, that I like to live in denial. I don't want to acknowledge all the disappointments of this world, because then I'll be sad like the people in the movies, and maybe then I'll show up on someone's porch in the pouring rain wearing squeaky shoes and the wrong type of jacket and I'll pretend not to be upset even though I am.

She's asking me where my home is now. I've never called the place where I live home. Not for any specific reason, but I guess I've always considered where I am now as a stepping stone, a rest stop on the journey to a successful future.

I never thought I would live in a shitty apartment next door to a crack addict and a low budget porn star for more than a year. "This isn't my real life" was always my state of mind. But it's been three years since I moved in and I still don't have a couch, because like my girl told me I live in denial, and I still refuse to believe that this could really be my life.

I told her where I live and she's taking me there. I don't recognize this street we're on, but she's telling me that we are close. There's something poetic about the way lights look at night, big and round and bright, juxtaposing the blackness and infiniteness of the sky. Traffic lights are beautiful at two AM, and I think that not enough people have realized this. Not a lot of people are outside at two AM, and I don't know why. This time of night is the only time I feel like a human, like I'm real, like I'm a manifestation of atoms and nerves and thoughts that get to ponder how we got to now and where we go from here. I don't know where to go from here, because even though I can ask the questions I don't always have an answer. But it's at two AM that I'm certain of my existence, that I am human, and she is too.

She says we are here. My home. The heat in her car is still running because I left my coat at the bar. It was my favorite coat. I wonder if it is someone else's coat now,

or if I call the bar tomorrow they will have it in their lost and found. Living makes kind of a game out of lost and found. You lose yourself, you find a new you, or maybe you don't. Depends on how good you are at the game. She is helping me out of the car, her car, that is red like the bowl of cranberries my aunt cried into, and I feel again her arm holding my shoulders which I will not remember in the morning, or the morning after that, or seventy-two mornings after that. That's the truly disappointing thing about memories. After they are forgotten once, they are forgotten forever. Into the void, no second chances. Maybe that's where we go from here. The earth forgets us, and all our atoms and nerves and thoughts drift off into the void, lost in the sure infinite blackness of the night sky, where traffic lights flicker and glow, trying to compete with the beauty of the stars.



Intergalactic Thought by Kylie Bergdall

Familiar Hands

by Kali Ray

Time's hands are surprisingly familiar for all the change they bring. Their grasp is a feeling we all know and yet always seem to forget until they put us a down.

We're never where we are left for long, but the crevasses in the palms of Time are paths we all tread unknowingly, ignorant that the path we chose on a whim were carved into the skin of Time long before we set foot on that dirt.

I always convince myself that somehow I can surprise Time, that I can somehow outrun it and it often leaves me late to a friend's house or early to a funeral.

When I'm creating I like to turn the clocks in my room to the wall, my phone lost in the sheets of my duvet and my alarm clock unplugged even though that means I'll have to reset it.

I do this because I like to think some things are too sacred to allow Time's fingers to touch; however ancient the digits may be something feels wrong in allowing such a force to change the one thing that may outlive me. Maybe it's because time is the one thing that can take away my creations, allow them to fade into their natural oblivion or rush their ever shifting perfection.

I sometimes think Time is jealous of the art we make, it's the one thing Time has trouble wiping away. Shakespeare died centuries ago and yet his name so common in today's conversations and something tells me that irks Time.

Not to compare myself to a Shakespeare, I'm nowhere near that kind of magnitude. But aren't all our words all as valuable as that name? Aren't our hands the same shape and shouldn't what we create be held with such esteem?

We are mortal and insignificant, our bodies are wasting away right now as Time takes what is rightfully his, but our words are like demigods, our creations Gods themselves and those creations that top the others Titans of this world.

Humans have just one universal language, we have just one thing in common that has stood the test of Time, and it baffles Him to no end.

We have stories. Stories of days and people past, stories of now and stories of what's to come. No one remembers the author's name; we remember how their words made us feel, we remember the characters and the faces we gave them, we remember what they went through,

and we remember how much they meant to us.

We remember them so well we pass them on, and on, and on, and on until there is no one left to tell except one.

The only one who will outlive us mortals, but cannot outrun our stories.

Time.

On the Drive Home

by Grace Willcox

white road lines merging under
our worn out tires,
taking us away
the radio vibrates with
noise over the homeless
man on the curb,
boombox over stereo
used to be versions of me
over what we're left with
maybe he wants to get hit
i thought
maybe i want to
do not enter warning signs
what happens when you do?
if only it warned me
about you.



Transparent to the World by Cody West



Supernova Sings Goodnight

by Ana Schulte

7 am

Giant star rises in the east to greet the girl buried underneath the heavy duvet. Her arm is draped across the stomach of her onetime lover, rising and falling slowly. Golden light dances on the ceiling above her, refracted beams from the curtain swaying to the beat of the ceiling fan.

She quietly rises up and swings her feet to the edge of the bed, finding her ground. On her way to relieve herself, she stops to admire her onetime lover, who has red hair – which reminds her of her little sister – and a scar that runs from left temple to chin. Good. She thinks. To be here last night.

10 am

She watches herself in the mirror, foggy from the steam of the shower. In between brushing her teeth, she sings to herself. Hums as she gargles mouthwash. Water pressure. She thinks. Is subpar in hotels. She shakes her hair out unto her back, admires the way water droplets perch atop her freckled shoulders. She lets the towel slip to the tile floor beneath her feet and leaves it there as she exits the bathroom. Waiting.

12 pm

She can't decide between the history channel and entertainment news. It's been a thirty minute battle between the two, and the remote has taken the beating. But it's not like it's her remote, and it's not like it's her TV. She is free to do whatever she wants in this hotel, though she is limited to the space of her one bedroom suite. One man's weekend business trip rendezvous is another girl's playground. She thinks.

She settles on entertainment news. A blonde woman is describing a fight between a notorious reality star and her well-to-do mother. She sits cross-legged and listens to details of the fight in anticipation.

3 pm

I should call Mom. She thinks. Let her know I'm okay. She reaches for the landline, traces patterns across the display of numbers. Punches methodically. Dial one! Says operator. Dial two! She nestles the phone between her ear and her shoulder, weaves the cord through her fingertips and steps towards the window.

The phone rings four times before she hears a small click, and static pours in from 2,403 miles away.

Dirty Sponges

by Peter Mombello

The tabletop
Dirty
With years of paint.
A paint knife
A sponge
A cup of water
The only things that remove years of memories
A fresh palate
Orange watercolor
Pink tempura
Black acrylic
White wall paint
And hot glue
All stuck to the table
The water hugging the cup.
Memories scrub off the table like the
Tempura.
Memories, like drawing with Lizzie
Writing infinite amounts of birthday cards
And tears falling to the table as I learn that Grandma has died.

Strands by Taylor Rowan

"Hello?" A woman's voice. Muffled cries of baby.
"Hey! I'm calling for Mom."
The other line drops something on the floor.
"Oh my God, hold on. Stay on the phone!" Hushed demands
across the country. Calls for attention. Probably of the husband.
Good man. She thinks. Good smile.
"What's up? Just put Mom on the phone."
A pause. She imagines her little sister handing off her little
daughter to a highchair. She imagines little sister rushing up
the stairs.
"Where are you? We've been trying to get a hold of you
for weeks."
"Ohio."
"Ohio? Who are you staying with?"
"I'm staying at a hotel. Is Mom there?"
Little sister is quiet.
"Which hotel? Are you sure you're o-"
She hooks the phone back onto its home on the wall.

7 pm

Alright, she splurged on room service. She never orders room
service, because she hates the clutter of silver plates and folded
napkins. But dammit, this hotel has this beautifully boozy menu;
dessert comes with wine and the sandwich bread is toasted.
So yeah, she splurged. Now she lies on her stomach and forks
haphazardly at the piece of cake on the silver plate. The TV is still
on. She stopped watching hours ago.

8:30 pm

A dark sheet of clouds looms over Ohio. A young girl stares
dreamily out the window of the room she is cleaning, watching
fat drops of rain race down from the sky. She holds a wet mop
steady behind her in one hand. She shakes herself out of her
bored stupor and drags herself down the hall to the next room.
"Cleaning! Are you occupied?"

No reply.

She raps on the door. The hallway is silent. The girl sighs and
stares into the keyhole. She raps more urgently, fiddles with
the door handle. She calls out once more. She presses her
ear to the door and listens carefully. She imagines she
hears the muffled sounds of a shower, and a woman
singing softly. She raps once more.

Nobody answers. She moves on.

11 pm

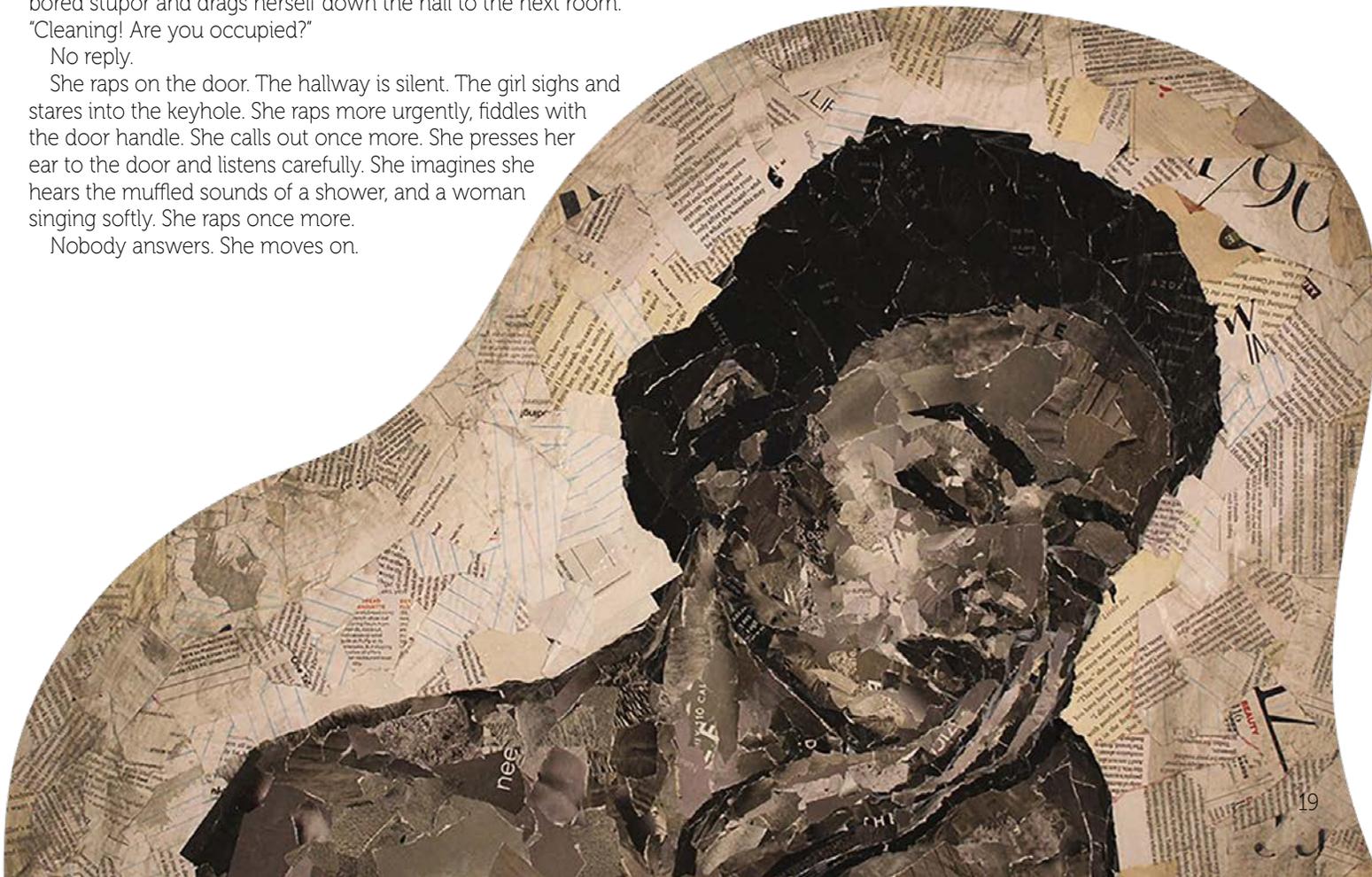
She steps out of the shower. She does not bother drying
herself; the towel still lies in a damp this morning. It's time to go
to sleep. She thinks. I am tired. She rummages through the pile
of clothes in the corner of the bedroom. Pulls out a phone and
detangles earbuds, carefully places one in each ear, and presses
play. A familiar tune spills out and fills the empty room.

Somewhere, a long time ago and a long time from now, she
is dancing to this song. Vibrant lights swim around her body,
turning her fingertips pink and gold, and they carry her to the
ceiling. She rests there for a while, looking down at the universe
below. She sees her Mother sunbathing in their old backyard in
Columbus. Across the galaxy, little sister makes anxious phone
calls to relatives and friends. A boy she dated in high school
waves to her and begs for her to come down to meet him.
She politely declines. She is made of starlight, an enigma of the
cosmos. Dessert wine! Red hair! She defies gravity.

She cannot lift herself off the floor.

"Goodbye," She sings. Goodbye, goodbye, goodbye. Softer, and
softer. "Goodnight."

Paper Lady by Kathryn Jones



Time Flies

by Connor Richardson

Time flies.
I was in love with you.
You said "ily2".
I treated you with respect and love.
You said you appreciated it.
That was 1 year ago, oh how time flies.
I continued to love you unconditionally.
You said "ily2 bb".
I tried to be your best friend and your lover.
You pushed me away and said I was too much.
That was 6 months ago, oh how time flies.
I was heartbroken, I wasn't the same.
You went and fooled around with another guy.
I went out to eat, and saw you for the first time.
You flipped me off and laughed with your new boyfriend.
That was last night, oh how time flies.

Dimensions

by Alexa Newsom

Dimensions, our world
Minds comprehend first through third
Fail at the fourth, time

Voicemail

by Olivia Humphrey

Please leave a message after the tone.
I love you. I really do.
I had so much fun today.
I'm so lucky to have you in my life.
We're just an amazing, perfect match.
Text me to plan a date for next week.

Please leave a message after the tone.
I hate you. I really do.
You broke my heart.
I don't know why I ever loved you anyways.
You're just a spoiled, inconsiderate brat.
Don't ever talk to me again.

Please leave a message after the tone.
I miss you. I really do.
I'm sorry I wasn't good enough for you.
I never deserved you anyways.
I was just a whiny, sensitive crybaby.
Please call me back.

You have reached a number that has been disconnected or is no longer in service.

You have reached a number that has been disconnected or is no longer in service.

You have reached a number that has been disconnected or is no longer in service.

Queen Elizabeth by Darby Rolf



Moving Forward by Brooke Portz

January

by Kali Ray

It's not January. It just isn't. The leaves are green and dance together in hoards above my head, almost mocking me in their togetherness as I shrink into my loneliness. I miss her, I do. The loops beneath her b's remind me of the crooked smiles we shared skipping along the sidewalk and tripping over its cracks. The slant to the left puts me back to when I leaned against her shoulder, finding comfort in its warmth, the sound of her heart beneath cotton clothes and soft skin stretched across a delicate frame making me wonder what paradise could be when this moment existed in the world.

The note she left for me sits so calmly in my hand as the summer breeze sends chills down my spine in a way so different from the winter winds I took for granted. The laughter of eating ice cream despite the temperature dropping was as curved

as her l's. The empty branches chattering are her weirdo f's that I still don't understand. The shivers of cold weather and leaning a bit too closely are forever etched within her k's and I don't think she knew the way her y's dipped and curved were the way she made me feel. Her t's taste like mint and strawberries, and when they're next to her i's I can almost feel her lips upon mine again. The softness of her skin compared to the round of her h's and I wonder if summer has taken away her taste, or if strawberries and mint are as comforting in the middle of August.

The way she walked had the saunter of her lower case 'a' though I can't find relief in their capitals because that is how she walked away, the only piece of her left for me a small scrap of paper in my hand.

"I wish I still remembered how it felt back in January," were the words she left for me. How would eleven words ever be enough for a lifetime of time without her? Would I be enough if I'd managed twelve more?

She wishes she could feel the happiness of our January but I find I wish I didn't. Because it's not January, and without her, it won't ever be January again.



Cyanotype of Rowan
by Elizabeth O'Connor

A Living Anachronism

by Amanda Pendley

As the years go by and we outgrow our old faces and our old skin and our old identities,
I wonder to myself if we are really becoming new people at all, or if we are simply just accumulating more years and more selves the same way we layer our bodies with coats and scarves in the wintertime.

As I learn more about the world, I realize I am not merely a child of the nineties any more but one of every decade and every moment since the earth began that has lead up to my sense of becoming.
Even before I existed, I was in the process of becoming.

I believe in past lives as strongly as I believe in the future, which is to say that although my assurance falters, that sense of knowing without truly knowing is always persistent.

And here is why:

My great aunt left home at the age of 17;
she went to California for purposes left unknown besides the fact that she wanted to become someone other than her previous self.

I'd like to think that she became a movie star or an artist, and there's no way to tell, but somehow in the back of my mind I know that she was.

The same way I know without truly knowing that there is truth to be found in past lives and in the future.

Her name was Goldie: a name reflected by the color of her hair, but nowadays she is reflected through me.

We are mirror images, just trading off our time in the world. Sometimes I wonder if I am a reincarnation of her, for I feel too much for all of the emotion inside of me to be solely mine.

Maybe I'm an anachronism in itself someone stuck in a body not her own with a mind that's simultaneously both brand new and ancient.

Maybe this contradiction is why I am so thoroughly black and white, but feel nothing but grey.

Sometimes though, grey is revolutionary. Black and white photos of marches and protests serve as validation that humans in the past felt the same way that I do now.

The same way that Goldie did, I presume, as she sought to make something out of herself: to become someone.

I was 17 in 2017.

I was taught that I need to make something of myself, but now I know better.

All of my years have convinced me that I am a woman who is continuously making herself,

and will continue to do so until I die and am born again; until time is circular, or maybe until scientists find out that in a way it already is.

I revisit the past and dream up the future, creating worlds in which I can have both at the same time.

I feel all of my past lives communicating with each other inside my head.

They say, "Enough with this whole idea of making something out of yourself! I already am someone, someone who has been making herself all her life, creating and destroying and rebuilding and I say that's enough."

All I do is create.

I write my way out of the past and into the future, even if that future seems fictional and unattainable.

I believe in its truth nonetheless.

Those old black and white photographs of protests and marches are revolutionary they still exist inside of us today.

Even if you do not believe in past lives

there is no doubt that the traces of those who lived before us are still here.

They are the voice of your subconscious and the whisper of intuition

We are more than ourselves.

And if we are forced to keep "making something of ourselves," then we will.

We will write, and we will fight, and we will speak.

We will rewrite time.

After all we are just trading off time in this world; we are mirror images, Goldie and I.

I know this to be true as much as I believe in the future, as much as I believe that we wear our years like layers to keep us warm, as much as I know that I am a living anachronism in itself, and as much as I know that just like my great aunt, I am constantly becoming who I'm meant to be, **even if my life is left as a memoir unfinished.**

And how do I know?

I will tell you to close your eyes and notice how even in the dark, you can still sense where the light is coming from.

You can't necessarily see it because well, your eyes are closed, but you can tell it's there.

It has a presence, it carries weight.

There is a place in the universe, a place in time, where this exists.

This sense of knowing without knowing, this sense of light.

The voice of all of the things in which I know to be true;

A different kind of belonging.

A living anachronism in itself.



mango juice

by Magda Werkmeister

mango juice drips from my fingers
seeps into the brown dirt
dirt that holds roots that reach across countries
roots that stitch together centuries
roots that spread and cannot be confined

mango juice drips from my fingers
plunges to the earth
earth my mother raced across
earth that felt the weight of bombs
decades ago but the shrapnel still rains

mango juice drips from my fingers
plummets to the ground
ground my predecessors coaxed
ground that proffered flor de izote
proffered resting places for the collateral

mango juice drips from my fingers
soaks into the soil
soil that holds my cousin once removed
removed from life by an agent's bullet
abuelita mentions this offhandedly

mango juice muddies the ground
falls onto the heads of conquistadors
mixes with blood and semen and amniotic fluid
mango juice soaks my mother's hands
spills onto the floor

prison-sanctuary of 1979
mango juice drips from my fingers
i am an infant

abuelita is glad my skin is light
abuelita is glad my brother's hair is chocolate
i cannot condone
i cannot condemn
abuelita talks of her abuela
blonde hair blue eyes
cruel cruel cruel

mango juice drips from my fingers
i feel the ripples always

Peeking Through Blue
by Julia Rosher

Fading
by Kathryn Jones





Bloodlines

by Ayush Pandit

My blood is not pure.
Siphoned through custom it puddles as an unholy poison.
A mixture between castes that courses sin through my veins
Broken tradition seeps through my marrow
and pools black in the hardened pupils of my grandmother
every time my parent's marriage is brought up.
16 years, 2 grandchildren, 8,000 miles and still
her wounds scar enough that tears bleed from her eyes
whenever her mind fades into the past and my father's betrayal
the betrayal I am borne from.
Ritual binds her in barbs as my first new memory
of my grandmother I have not seen in 10 years is a gesture to my father
then her averting her gaze as he pulls me from the dining room
and explains how time has turned discrimination into a tradition, Grandma's tradition
that my existence is a splatter spilled outside the lines of scripture she follows
that I am split between castes with my mother, that to my grandmother, I am unclean.
Rules scald through my skull and dye my memories
I cannot taste the same dishes,
I cannot use the same plates,
I cannot drink from the same cups,
I cannot eat with my grandmother, because I am unclean
because though her faith overpowers our bonds in hemoglobin
it feasts off our blood sacrifice.

Salt Water People
by Samiya Rasheed

Baby

by Alice Kogo

am i to be concerned, or
content with the glimpse of congruent shapes?
meaning can be found in misunderstanding.
example.
baby boy girl infant child man child sleeps in the womb.
cryogenic.
wet, dark, illuminated by invisible / ultrasound echoes
warning of baby, traveling south, nearing destination, final
exit point, the train stops here child.
it's time to leave, please, we
won't hold you mis-
sing you dearly

exit slip is umbilical cord is lifeline is leave, please
exist in my cubicle of
warm flesh. don't arrive
because i don't need you now – later,
when your appetite has
chilled to nothing but
liquid, not my life's nutritional system. i
enjoy you when
drop
goes the container you reside in
drop
into the dresser drawer of hidden things after you exit. maybe
you never
arrived.

Rebirth

by Ashley Honey

Hair up
Tarp down
Pop
My mother uses her strength to cradle
Our liquid gold
Douses the pan with potential energy
And snaps the blade to its wand
The brush crackles and crinkles
Screams
She slaps more gold on the canvas
Drowns out the cries and begs
Until we are met with silence
The new vibe of our humble abode
Warms my soul
With hope
The new yellow walls have never witnessed
Tear-streaked cheeks
They are new
Like us

Self Portrait on Wood by Darby Rolf





A Blessing or The Victory of Another Eighty-Two Years

by Molly Hatesohl

I remember Pauline Miller. Before she moved,
She lived in an understated, light green, box of house
on Raldoph Avenue.
She lived there for a long time.

One day a wide, green smear appeared on the side
of her fat, white Cadillac,
And the next month my mom helped her liquidate
the contents of her understated, green
Box of a house
(because it was no longer a home.)

I remember Pauline Miller's 100th birthday party.
They served peach ice cream. The walls were almost the same
shade of green as her house. The celebration was almost as
understated as her house.
almost

One day I looked at the sprawling, wily forsythia
that lived outside my bedroom window
and realized its roots were so much longer than mine, but
certainly not longer than Pauline's
(because my house was no longer my home.)

I remember my 18th birthday party.
They served Hennessey with Red Bull.
The sky was as heavy with rain as it was on the day I was born.
The celebration
Was almost as understated as the dorm I'd move into four
months later.
almost

Decades earlier
miles away from her home and her Cadillac
Pauline Miller must've felt a similar way.
Because on her 18th birthday, she too,
must've looked up at the sky
liquor on her breath
and grit her teeth for what must come
(never knowing that fate would one day afford her the victory of
another 82 years, the familiarity of green, and the mellow taste of
peach ice cream.)



Collage 2
by Morgan Hickman

I Want to See My Face on a Milk Carton

by Alrisha Shea

and when you talk in your sleep the voice is never your own
and when the world ends and the next begins our radio stations
will still patiently recite their numbers. (dear mx. god,
is this how it feels to be replaced?) In the wilderness,
where everything has a name, I found your body with holes
all over. I started to ask you if you needed water, needed help,
but you looked me in the eyes and I knew. In the wilderness,
where everything has a name, you had lost yours. You spoke
and your voice was mother's. You looked me in the eyes
while you dangled from the electric pylon, and you looked
nothing but bewildered. Back in the days when I lived in
the theatre rafters, I would look down from the catwalk

and idly fiddle with the trigger of a sniper rifle. You
would have liked it there – each second blurred into
the next, with dust specks congealing on the floor
in record time. And after I'd shot each bullet,
the body would rot faithfully in front of me. See,
everything obeys their own rules. Not like the
carcass preserved in river-ice. Not like the fern
who defies classification. Goddamn you all to hell.

I can't do this on my own. I couldn't live without a name.

11:54

by Nora Larson

Vanessa and I talk.
We like talking.
The smell of acetone and wine
fight in the warm air.
A lull of
Avett Brothers music fills the
silence.
Our nail beds
burn,
from too many attempts at
"Nail Art".
The clock reads
11:54 pm.
Tears
trek down our beautiful faces.
Sniffles out of place for the
humid
summer air.
Bonding never looked so
ugly.
Soon,
we will go to bed.
Soon,
we will get up
and be blissfully ignorant
to what is right.
Soon,
Vanessa will leave.
She will go back to her
"crash and burn utopia".
But for now, it's
11:54.

The Passing

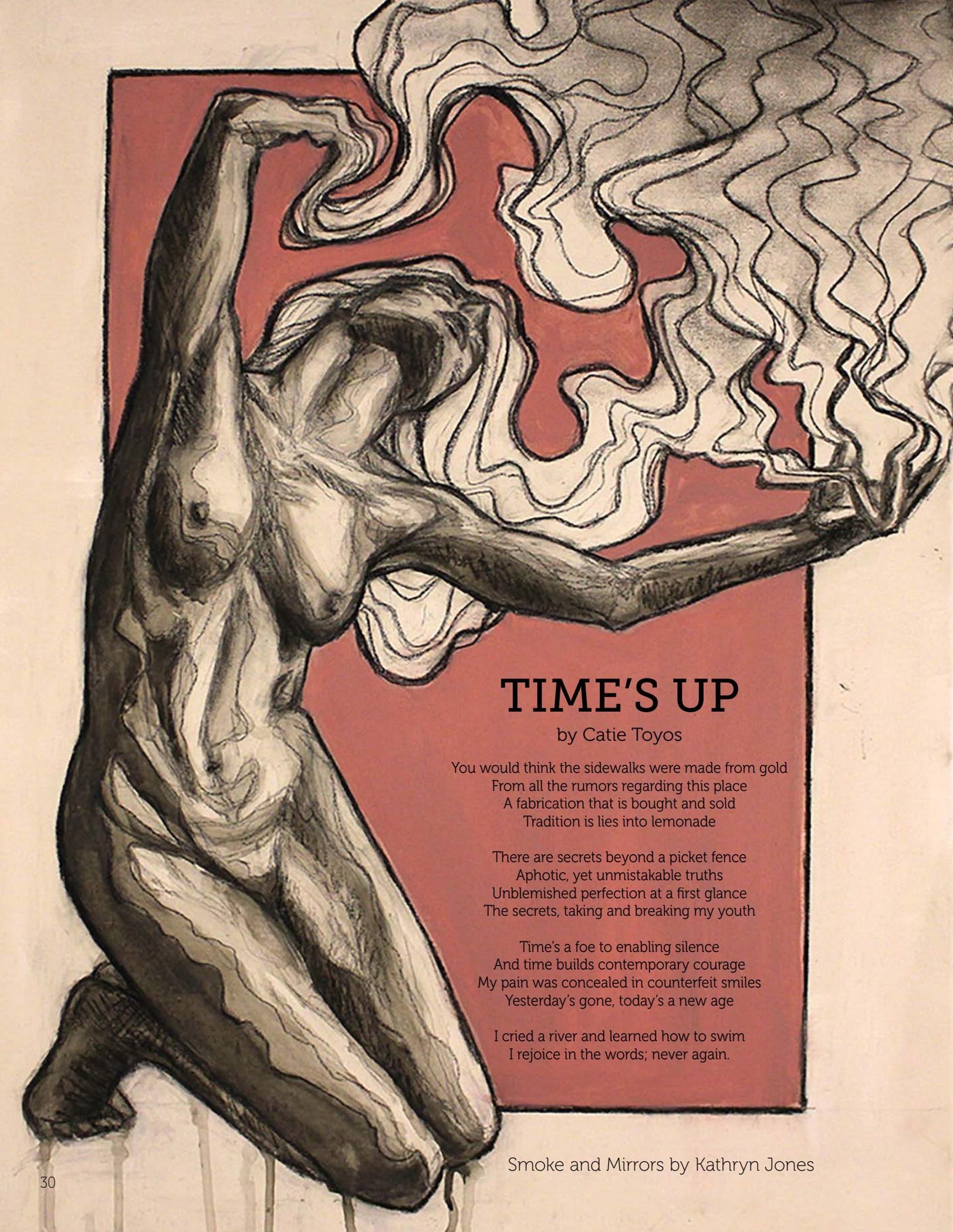
by Sophia Terian

The fragility of life will always terrify me.
Sometimes I feel so vulnerable,
thinking of all the ways my life could spontaneously end –
the accidents
the inflictions
what I inflict.
The fragility of life will always astonish me.
Sometimes I drift away from the facts and
sometimes they're too close,
a weight on my chest,
paranoia in my head,
and tears on my cheek.
The fragility of life will always amaze me.
Sometimes I marvel at the way flower petals fold into the perfect cup –
the way the body is made
the balance of health
the likelihood of error.
The fragility of life will always whisper meaning,
"Do what you can, with what you have."
Sometimes I hate that the fragility cannot be made strong,
sometimes I love that strength can be made in fragility.

Dia de los Muertos
by Ava Tronoski



Collage 1
by Morgan Hickman



TIME'S UP

by Catie Toyos

You would think the sidewalks were made from gold
From all the rumors regarding this place
A fabrication that is bought and sold
Tradition is lies into lemonade

There are secrets beyond a picket fence
Aphotic, yet unmistakable truths
Unblemished perfection at a first glance
The secrets, taking and breaking my youth

Time's a foe to enabling silence
And time builds contemporary courage
My pain was concealed in counterfeit smiles
Yesterday's gone, today's a new age

I cried a river and learned how to swim
I rejoice in the words; never again.

Smoke and Mirrors by Kathryn Jones



Clock Work

by Kahill Perkins

Like clockwork revaluations to new forgotten ideas lined up in my mind like young adult novels on my ratty old grey bookcases, I live stories lined up in many different tenses dog-eared identities taking place in crises fueled hourglass clocks, if there is one thing I'll never run out of it is time and dust, I want to live forever because I never want to repeat this same life again, for I awake some midwinter mornings and so terribly recall that maybe this isn't the first time I have been hurt or the first time I've lived
And that I have always taken forms
as a midwife
and a suffragette
a doctor
a dying child
a cicada
and as a young woman struggling to keep her head above bills and painful memories woken up by the clanging of a broken grandfather clock in a wooden paneled house in a long sought after memorial dream, taking myself back to a time when I wasn't screaming in an era fueled by hate and sorrowful sick-minded men at the controls,
I want to paint flowers on to the faces of the white supremacists that govern, so that I could stand to look them in the face when I spit in their eyes,
I want to take back time
and live forever
so I don't have to relive an era of pain
because I already have,
So many times before,
and I am running shin deep in white snow and bloody shins, broken down to the bone showing white against the crimson pools in the spotless snow, fear and prospect coursing through my mind, my mouth filled with bile and the dust
that I'll never run out of
like time
and I feel as if
time's up



Control by Kathryn Jones

Stitches by Kathryn Jones



life

by Anna Schmeer

a cherry

a seemingly harmless
red, round fruit

you pop the whole thing
in your mouth

bite down on the
soft sweet juicy pulp

then suddenly
you reach the middle
expecting the soft flesh
you get a solid pit

you can't eat the pit
or it will make you sick
you can't wallow it
around in your mouth
all you can do is spit it out

and keep going

Are You Ready by Marion Farnet



Risk by Jane Markley



dad

by Lauren Yoksh

you are like the sun:
oblivious to time's existence
wake up at noon to eat dessert
and watch television reruns.

you are sleepless nights
and grease stained fingers
covered in cuts and bruises and scabs.

you are like the war
you were too young to fight in
and the silent ones

you fight every day
behind the shadows of your own laughter
when your daughter says something
that makes you proud.

you see it in your eyes
and wonder if everyone else can see it, too:
creases around the corners of your mouth
from a smile that has never changed,
a tightened wristwatch that you pretend to ignore
incessantly ticking, so second by second
another thousand moments gone
another memory faded
your lifetime vanishing
right in front of your sun-strained eyes.

the moon rises above your head
as you count the stars:
the same number as the night before
and the night before that.
consistency puts you at ease
while you await another day
of certain, unchanging fate.

Shades of Pain

by AonB

Another black kid got shot by a white cop.
ANOTHER BLACK KID GOT SHOT BY A WHITE COP.
ANOTHERBLACKKIDGOTSHOTBYAWHITE COP.
ANOTHERBLACKKIDGOTSHOT
ANOTHERBLACKKIDGOTS

Ten ...
Nine ...
Eight ...
Seven ...

I count the amount of breaths they have taken
Six ...
Five ...
Four ...
Three

I watch as the bullets approach
Sir Newton can't stop these apples from falling
My mouth voices my shock
As screams run out in a panic my legs do the same
I try to help you
But a man in blue blocks me from saving you
You did everything for me
And in return I sit and watch you as you bleed
How is that fair?

The tick of the old clock never seems to stop
I count the minutes
As I did the bullets when you got shot by the cop

Two ...
One ...

I watched as your blood greeted
the pavement
Like a river flowing to its end
Hands in pockets
not visible to Blue eyes
This cliché is way too overplayed
Like roses are red
Violets are blue
Your black body bleeds red
That cop wears blue
This whole white cop shoots innocent black kid
Dates back to slavery
Master vs slave
White vs black
Always has been
Why did I think it could change?
Why did I think that the color
of your skin wouldn't automatically
grant a bullet in your head?
I try to scramble to you
But a man in blue keeps me from reaching
You
My brother
Please don't die on me
Hold on just one more day
Why did we have to hang out today?

The tick of the old clock never seems to stop
I count the minutes
as I did the bullets when you got shot by the cop

Mom hasn't been the same
Church hasn't been the same
When you sang
The community hasn't been the same
The world, however, stays the same
The headlines read something new
The earth continues to circle round and around
The clock continues to tick and tick

The tick of the old clock never seems to stop
I count the minutes
As I did the bullets when you got shot by the cop

The tick of the old clock never seems to stop
I count the minutes
As **I** did my heart beat
when **I** got shot by the cops

Systemic racism took ahold of the gun
Profiling cocked it back
And a white man pulled the trigger

Shooting me with eyes wide open
Like Bruno said
He kept his eye wide open

Each breath spreads adrenaline
Through my limbs
And I'm becoming numb to the pain

My Once Upon a Time not reaching a Happily Ever After
And like every modern day Cinderella
People already know the lines of the next chapter

I hope you read my story in today's news
And don't toss me aside
Like that history project that's been overdue

Let your heart cry for me
Let yourself feel the pain
See my pain
Don't be numb to my pain
Don't close your eyes to not see my face
Guess Emmett Till was left in disgrace
Look at my face
Don't be numb to my pain

Let that pain be the staircase that leads you
To make that change
Like Morrison, face the how and not the why
And maybe if you do, no other
black momma's cries will be sounded at night

Black boy got shot and he's numb to the pain.
Black boy got shot and the whole world is numb to his pain.
Don't become numb to the pain.
BLACKBOYGOTSHOTHE'SNUMBTOTHEPAIN
BLACKBOYGOTSHOTANDTHEWHOLEWORLDISNUMBTOTHEPAIN
DON'T BECOME NUMB TO THE PAIN

A Candlelight Insomniac

by Kylie Volavongsa

It's midnight, and he finds that it's impossible to sleep. He isn't exactly sure why, though he suspects it's because his mind has wound itself into a series of complicated knots. There's an abundance of loose ends as well, and he wonders which one carries the most weight.

His pillow is getting too hot.

12:45 AM. Not even an hour gone by, but it feels like he's been craving sleep far longer than that. When he looks out the window, he doesn't even see a moon, let alone the sky itself. What appears to be a cloudy evening, he decides, is his new least favorite thing.

It doesn't take long for him to realize that he simply can't close his eyes. Instead, he settles on waiting for sunrise. He's never witnessed one anyway, and the more he thinks about it, there are a lot of things he's never seen or done before.

Despite the activity in his head, he finds that his body is glued to the mattress and bound by the sheets. Solitary confinement, he thinks to himself. When he tries to hum something he'd heard on the radio to pass the time, he realizes that his voice is gone, and that a glass of water would actually be wonderful right now.

His arms and legs seem to ignore this, as well as the possibility of perhaps being useful.

The more minutes that tick by, the more he believes that his situation really is similar to that of a prison. He's trapped, it's dark, and there's nothing to do but wait. Come to think of it, he can't even make out the shape of his fingertips in the inky black that is his surroundings. It's boring.

It starts to rain, beginning as small, erratic taps on the bedroom window. And he wonders for a minute if someone is throwing rocks outside. Then the wind picks up, and he remembers that he

doesn't know anyone who would want to summon him for adventures in the middle of the night or share secrets that can only be told this late.

He heaves a solitary sigh and tries to ignore how his blanket has become a furnace.

It's been over an hour, and he's worried that the rain is unending, that maybe he'll just have to suffer through a different sleepless night for his first sunrise (waking up early just isn't an option). A newfound resentment, hot and bitter, pools in his stomach. More than anything, he wishes for the clouds to disperse already. By this point, all this sighing and staring at the ceiling has gotten just about as stale as the air in the room.

Silence and raindrops, 2:47 AM.

It reaches about 4 AM when things get interesting. Unfortunately, the rain still hasn't ceased (and he curses it again for its horrible sense of timing), but there's at least a somewhat larger variety of things to observe from his cell. He's pretty sure he's hallucinating thanks to sleep deprivation, a possible heat stroke, and whatever else there could be to blame for his insanity. But he'll take what he can get for a little entertainment. After all, the sky never seems to make guarantees.

He thought smoke began to creep in from beneath the bedroom door at first, that it began to slither and coil in tendrils toward the ceiling, then towards him. When he blinked, it was gone, and now a faint orange dances somewhere just beyond his peripheral vision.

Maybe it's sleep paralysis. Then again, he doesn't see the illusion of a demon loitering by his bedside. Maybe it isn't. Whatever it is, it makes his pupils shake.

He spends the next several minutes blinking furiously to expel the burning glow. It doesn't work, and he decides once and for all that maybe this really

is some strange cocktail of all sorts of sleep related issues.

The temperature beneath the blanket grows warmer still, and he wishes that he had a hammock instead of a bed.

5:58 AM, and everything from his frustrations to his hallucinations is figuratively roaring when a thought crosses his mind. That maybe he's dreamed this same dream before. That a strong sense of *deja vu* is coming on. That his anxiety is oddly familiar.

Meanwhile, his surroundings die down to a low simmer. His eyelids begin to droop. This is okay, he supposes, but so much for that sunrise.

He feels himself entering the void, body losing substance.

They return to the residence as soon as it's bright enough to. And as soon as the weather lets up. Because at this point, there's no margin for failure, for any stone to go unturned, for any sort of shadow (whether it be an actual obstruction of light or plain doubt) to sabotage their task.

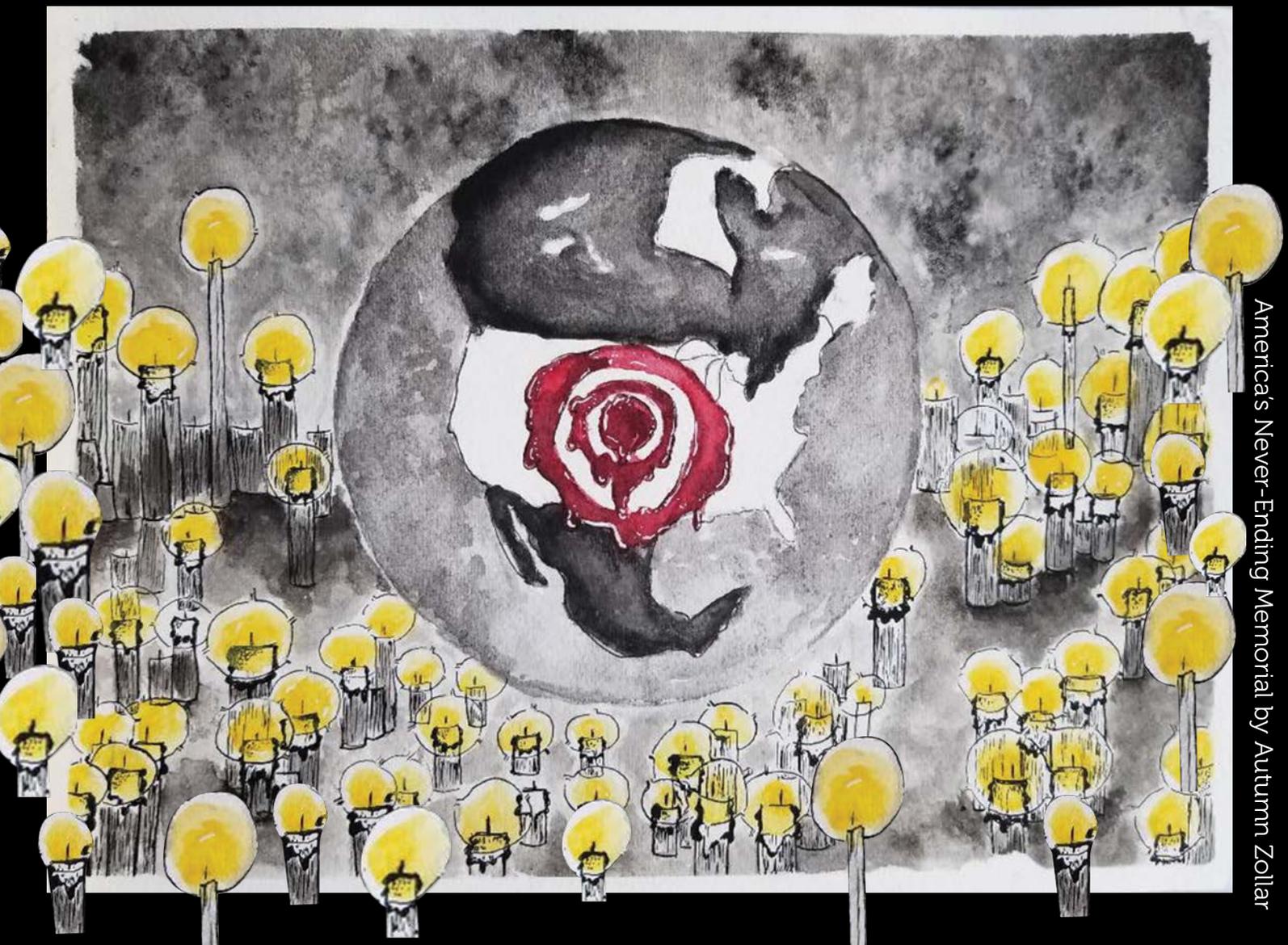
Maybe this approach works a bit better than attempting to sort everything at dusk. Underneath a charred and surprisingly large plank, someone finds what seem to be the remains of a large collections of candles. A hardened amalgamation of various colors, splinters, and dark flecks of ash. It isn't much, but it's something. Very possibly, a clue.

It pushes the search crew harder. A neighborhood fire as large as this couldn't have been victimless, no matter how many people escaped that night.

Still, they have a long way to go.

It's midnight and he's restless again.





America's Never-Ending Memorial by Autumn Zollar

In my final moments

by Sankara "Le prince heritier" Olama-Yai

I hear the gunshot, I do not see
The bullet but I know it's coming
Aimed to perforate my skull
They say your life flashes, once death's
Shadow is on your tail and grips you in
Your terror's wake. I have 0.05 seconds
To let my spirit divulge the entirety
Of my fickle existence on this earth
A fraction of a second is enough
The moments in our life that matter, when
You cut away the excess, the lazy days that
We lay waste, not knowing time's hot sands
Were slipping through our ignorant fingertips
Those true moments that define us are but truly
A flash of frozen time. A solemn stream of consciousness
Broken shards of memory, crippling like autumn leaves
Beneath my foot. I feel my soul drown in those regrets
I feel them like never before, tiny needles that pierce
The thin skin that layers me like a warm winter blanket
I'm drowning in a beautiful mirage of a life that might've
Blossomed had I made the right choices

Time It Takes to Sober Up

by Emme Mackenzie

"What is one factor that affects the Blood Alcohol Level and is an extremely important factor (in order to 'sober up')?"

I stare at the question on the computer screen. The hum of conversation in the DMV provides constant background noise. My driving permit is just one more correct answer away, but an ache in my heart makes it feel like 20. I can't do this. I begin to stand up, but when I turn around I see my mom on the phone. She catches my eye and gives me a weak thumbs-up. I lower myself back into my seat. No, I have to do this. I swallow what feels like a rock in my throat. Turning back to the screen, I read the question again. "What is one factor that affects the Blood Alcohol Level and is an extremely important factor (in order to 'sober up')?"

I know the answer. It's Time.

My brother called his car the "Red Beast." We got the old red jeep for his 16th birthday. It was everything he'd wanted. I still remember him screaming like a little girl when we revealed the car. Now it just sits in some junkyard, rotting away, probably with dried blood clinging to the broken windshield that my brother flew through.

My brother's first sip of alcohol was at church. He sipped "the blood of Christ" at his First Communion out of the wine glass. That makes me laugh now. If only God had looked after him just for another moment, maybe he would still be alive today. Same with that girl he hit.

I focus back on the question in front of me.
Time. Time. Time.

This question and answer are both engraved inside my head because I understand it. An important factor that affects the Blood Alcohol Level and is an extremely important factor (in order to sober up) is *Time*. I memorized the exact times of my brother's faulty death so well that I can map it out in my head. I can present it as a historical event and get an A+. Not sure my parents would be proud of that one.

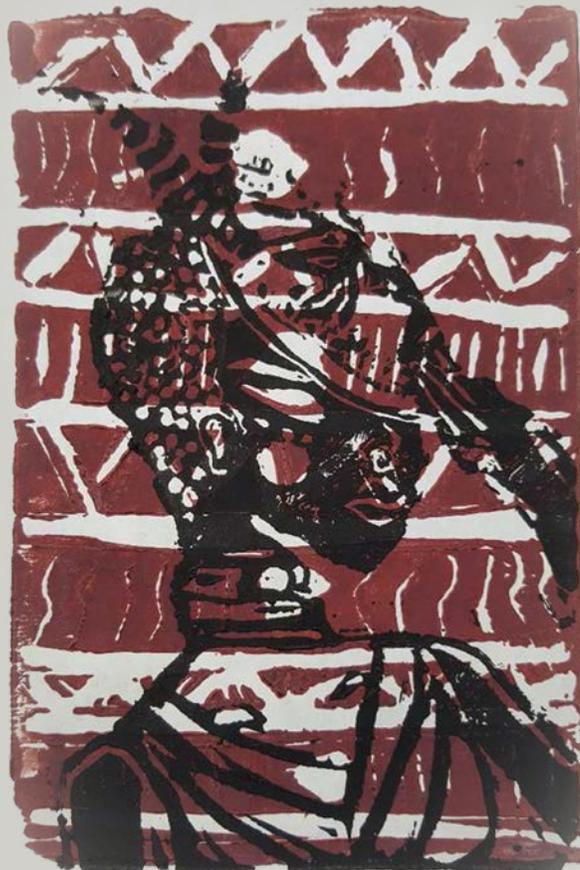
23 minutes after my brother downed 3 beers, he got into the Red Beast.
15 minutes after he got into the Red Beast, he hit her.
38 minutes after trying compressions three times on both my brother and the girl,
The doctors stopped trying.
12:07 AM was the time of his death.

For five weeks after, I stayed up every night until 12:07. I saw the clock change, and I pictured my brother taking his last breath. His breath probably smelled like beer.

I hate him for it.
I hate him for getting in that stupid red car that I always thought was ugly.
After all of the lessons in school, he still did it. Sometimes I wake up and forget he's gone, because this stuff just doesn't happen to us.

Not to me, and not to him.
No one is supposed to die drunk driving.

I reach out my finger.
Click.
The answer was Time.
It will always be Time.
I never knew how much Time I had left with my brother.
And when he disappeared, I wanted all of that time back.
I still do.



Stylin' by Dai McKinney

Rubble

by Ayush Pandit

They've run out of garbage bags to use as body bags.
Power lines cracked in half like splintered pencils are strewn through the streets
neighborhoods panic as the ground forgets what being solid is again
aftershocks bigger than most earthquakes bend steel and rebar
like toddlers bend fuzzy pipe cleaners.

My dad speaks to my 3 year old cousin
born in Nepal 5 years after I left

"Uncle, why is the ground shaking?"

I can barely hear him over the sounds of sirens
a cacophony that is a funeral song for those
pinned to the underworld by concrete slabs

"Uncle, will it be alright?"

The empty beeps of the telephone cord wrap around my neck
choking out half-truths and false optimism
until only pellets of reality remain.

I woke to the sounds of my people dying
Torrents of headlines sweeping like mudslides
carrying mugshots and scrolling white on black text names dismembered
from people reduced to tally marks on body counts.
The telephone line is down; there is no power; there is no water;

And then I learn
my government in Nepal couldn't afford to pay for earthquake resistant housing
with banknotes and defaulted with 10,000 death certificates.

10 years lost to a civil war

10 years lost to political bickering

10 years swallowed up by the rubble of a nation that was already dying.

10 years since I've been home

Now, I wonder if when I return I will greet my people
or their ashes.

Rough by Kaitlin Yu



After by Faith Smith



What to Wear by Jane Markley

PTA to AA

by Annie Barry

She stood in front of a mirror
Clean and sober thinking about how she feels taller than her own reflection

Then she took an injection

She started as
A PTA mom perfect in her Johnson County way
Carrying around a cleanse smoothie everywhere she goes
She spikes her smoothie but nobody knows
Walking around in her workout clothes in the AM
Ripped panty hose in the PM
But her short skirt covers those holes
Talkin' about bank rolls
And relationship goals

While her kids sit at home with a nanny asking where's mommy

Stumbling home through a portal
called a broken trim, paint chipped doorway the next morning
and takes her kids to the park so she can sneak a smoke
A pack a day gonna make her broke

He was 5 years old on the playground yelling "watch mommy watch"
She looks up at the boy who spoke
She hardly recognizes him anymore
5 years old she doesn't remember his middle name anymore

5 years later
Now she's in AA
Got a
Mental monologue going
Thinking, "okay okay pretend for a day just say you're sober"
She takes a breath
"Hi I'm Katherine"

Exhales as she talks, almost like a sigh
Her breath reeked of the mixed drink she had earlier
A mix between vodka and desperation
Drowning her kids in deprivation

Her kids are noticing
She's becoming menacing

Is she
Hungover or just forgetful

She's not a role model but she pretends to be a model as she
Struts down the crosswalk like a catwalk
Delusional and delirious
Detrimental to her kids' health
He doesn't know his real dad's name but
He knows how to roll a blunt because mommy can't do that while she's driving
She's driving her kid insane
He's growing up now knowing that
His friends' houses don't have bloodstains in every doorway and normal people
don't take codeine when they're not in pain
And sustaining a house, maintaining a family is not typically the job of a
10 year old boy
And raising your baby sister who might not even be your sister is not what
most 10 year old boys do

A 10 year old boy
Stopped asking his mom which man in the house is his dad
He doesn't sleep because
Mom is still baked
Boy is half awake with studying because
Everything is at stake
Sister cries

He lies there
Debating existential crises of 25 year old boys even though he's only a 10 year old boy
Does he do school work
Does he get up and do the housework
Does he care for his baby sister who's crying like she's hurt
But he knows
She isn't quite hurt yet
She doesn't know yet
Her mind can't develop memories yet
So she isn't truly as dead as him yet

He craves an end to the madness
Boy is beat down and broken beyond brutal under eye baggage
Band-aids can't bind this
Edging closer to the edge of life
Just before he steps off the ledge
His brain breathes
Puts down the knife
1 year old baby sister's life

Boy grows up

17 years old watching his mother break the bathroom mirror because she doesn't like the reflection anymore
He's yelling "stop Katherine stop"
Refusing to call his mother mom

Angry mother yells "Anthony – Johnson! Don't talk to your mother like that"

"What's my middle name" he asks
Exhaling passionate breath like poisonous gas

The mother who went from PTA to AA to HEY boy hand me that bottle

Boy is 23 years old walking home from work
Walks past a play park
PTSD pokes his ears
At the sound of a child yelling
"Watch mommy watch"



The Passing
by Peter Mombello



Fall Leaves and People Do Too

by Rylie McDaniel

It was mid-October and I was laying outside under the large oak tree reading a novel. The tree's branches swayed in the wind, arms moving as if they were protecting the leaves and everything surrounding it. As I was flipping the pages, I shifted my weight under the crunch of the dead leaves. I had been reading for quite some time; the sun was starting to set and weave its way into the branches, giving me only a bit of reading light.

The yelling got louder inside my house. I could hear Dad as he slammed his bottle on the kitchen island, shattering it. Mother continued to screech at him. I pulled myself into a ball, concentrating harder to try and ignore the anger that floated outside from the house windows. My little brother Jayden ran outside, toy cars in his little fists, and dipped down beside me under the old tree. I wrapped an arm protectively around him and began to

read aloud. The fighting began to quiet, and the light outside began to dim. The wind picked up, swirling the leaves around on the ground. It tore away leaves from the tree, and as they floated down to Earth they settled around Jayden and me, forming a blanket of protection.

Mother finally came outside. She had a matchbox in her hand and slowly shuffled over to the Jack-O-Lanterns we had carved a few days ago. It was the first time they had been lit, and their smiles sagged as the light poured out of them. Her back was turned away from us, shoulders heaving as she tried to wipe away her tears on her shirt sleeve. We had noticed every movement, barely peering over the book in fear that she would notice. Mother sat down on the front porch step, her eyes wandered over everything except for us.

Dad left through the garage door and slammed it shut. He had his work boots in

his hand as he climbed up into his truck.

I tried not to take my eyes off of my book, even though it was too dark to read. Jayden squirmed next to me, running the toy cars along the leaves and dirt that protected that tree. We sat there long after Mother went inside. Our toes had begun to numb. We waited for him to come back and tell us to get inside for bed like he always did when we were outside for too long. It got so late that Mother came out, turning the front porch light as she went, and finally walked over to us. She picked Jayden up, half asleep, and motioned for me to follow her inside.

Dad didn't come back after that night to clean up the shattered glass and the mess he made, leaving us in the blankets of leaves and newly forming October dew.



Defense Mechanism

by Alice Kogo

words bubbling on my tongue are not metaphors,
They are a message, a warning of future plights to come.
I should thank this body for that, thank
you. piece of flesh you
distracted woman you
girl, mere girl, who cares more about making a living than making happiness
you
who's future has begun, yet to become a winding twisting turn of events which can be made a biography out of, you
should be grateful to this body
shouldn't you. shouldn't
you weep at the thought of compliance, at
coercion and the past term vocabulary verb coerced, the way it encapsulated
your very being in the moment. your introduction gave way to the need to hide darkness in a pure
white room. thank
you for this defense mechanism, this
shielding of the eyes for the past decade, making me feel like the need to hide blackness as a default understanding, part
of how the world works. part of the way the world spins on its axis.
it is simply a fact, a term,
like I said, the verb
coerced. remember that. remember
me in the back of a classroom as I sat, the only black girl in the room. remember those advanced math classes that you
didn't want to take (that your parents didn't want you to take), but you knew you had to take because
remember the way that the winding twisting turning makes me care more about making a living than
making happiness. remember
that software development pays \$112,000 per year. maybe
that's enough to get me out poverty. maybe that's just enough to make me (lol sarcastic) happy (but that's not the
priority). maybe even though it's just 12% versus the winding 88% of males in the field, maybe I'll be
the one out of the many that will grow. even though happiness is not a default.
even though writing is a default way for me to vent. this passion
out
this passion for
(in)justice
seeking for its
attention
to be seen in the eyes of the media even though it will never be *seen
remember
defense mechanism
r e member
new ways of life
r e m ember
living
remember
making happiness
you. should. be. grateful.
weep.
coercion.
very (buried).
moment.
white.
room.
thank.

Leg Work by Taylor Rowan

The Mannequin and the Doll

by Tara Phillips & Anton Caruso

i'm a mannequin, a marionette man, my actions preplanned.
i go through my motions, i do a little dance. My movements based off the crowd's applause
i give a little wave because
that's what i was made to do, that's what i'm made to do, that's what she makes me do.

I'm a doll, a pretty porcelain face all dressed in lace, skinny waist, bitter taste, black shoes never unlaced
pretty posed in the perfect place,
encased in a glass case doll. He calls me his doll, one breath and I fall
I bow to him, his pretty porcelain doll.

I used to be barbie, now i'm just his malibu property
I put her on display, every part of her is up for play
I'm not feeling this today, it's okay
stop touching me, it's okay
stop touching me, it's okay
what, do you not love me? trust me?

she's my persecutor, my puppeteer, wiping away puppet tears, masking my problems from my puppet peers
controlling every one of his puppet gears, exploiting every one of his puppet fears
Her voice in my heads is the only thing this puppet hears. She's in my head, hand held and hand fed
I've got him in a chokehold
a nylon noose thread, she's pulling the strings inside my head, i'm holding on by the end of this thread. She's sentenced me to death but I'm already dead.

Abuse take two, thats me and that's you. Roses are red and our bruises are blue
it's hard moving on to something new
When someone's sucking the life out of you, So we sit and we listen to what they ask us to do
Because, what's a doll, What's a puppet to do

when i'm lied to by the person i'm tied to, escape these strings, i've tried to, but without these strings we have no use
so please, cut me loose



Are We Gods

by Paige Kring

the void beckoned.
i stood softly
quaking
afraid
what is there is to do in the void?
i pondered quietly
the void answered,
nothing.
perfect.
i replied
i need time
i need time
i need time

i need rest

i'm tired of reds , blues
if i see oranges and greens i'll scream
i can't bear seeing his face
i can't live on this planet anymore

i want to go to you
i screamed into the void
the void laughed
everyone does, my dear
everyone wants to think they're special for wanting what they can't have
i am not yours to have, however
i am my own

i kept screaming.

i kept searching.

searching for a lack of color

searching for a reason to be
searching
always searching

lost but never found
wondering what makes up the stars
wondering what causes the sky to be blue and the grass green
is my green your green?
what do you see when you look into my pink cheeks and blue eyes?
are my blue eyes the same as your brown?
are we the same?
are we entirely different celestial bodies?
am i a galaxy or am i an ant?

i kept screaming.

i think i forgot who i am.

i remember your fingernails
i remember your belly button
i remember the smell of your kitchen when your mom makes grilled cheese
i smell smoke.

i miss your dog.
am i a part of the infinite span of time?
do i breathe in seconds or minutes or years?
what happened to last week?
it's right now and later and in the past
it's more than it seems

i am more than i seem.

is my time your time?
do we run at the same speed or am i in fast forward?
i am caught in a fast forwarded loop replaying the same fate
faster than i would like.

faster than you it seems.

i miss your dog.

do you remember when we drove around on the moon?
i think we were a thousand years old by then.
i think i forgot who you are.

i am aware of the entire universe in my pink , shriveled brain.
i am tired of pink
i am tired of blood red and sickly yellow
i relish in the lack of everything.

the universe in my cranium is expanding
i don't know what it is expanding into
where is it going?
can i go there?
before there's anything
i want to rest and sleep in the nothingness that is the non-universe

i am made of antimatter
i am fundamentally repulsing all atoms around me.

where did the time go
where did you go
you are the entire universe and i am suffocating in you
i am drowning in your pores
in your eyebrows
in your eye crinkles
in between your toes
in your ears
you're crushing me
i can't breathe
i can't breathe
i can't breathe
let me breathe
i can't breathe

the void asked me where i went.
i thought you were ready
the void spoke softly
i don't need you
i moaned
i'm hungry for more.
i need his eyes
i need his chest
i need his fingers
i need more i need more I NEED MORE
i screamed
the void quaked
afraid

the substance i am abusing seems to be made of the night sky
i am addicted to blue
i overdosed on the clouds
i breathed in the quantifiable size of everything that has ever existed.

the trees turn towards you
the sky bends towards your force
the birds, the bugs, the monsters follow and stoop to your power
i think you used to be a god

i think we all used to be gods
i am trapped
my immortal body is floating
my impenetrable armor is permeated
with reds, oranges, greens, blues, yellows
i think i am dying.
i think i am fatally mortal
i wish i wasn't a god
i wish i was in the void

i miss your dog.

Counting by the Calorie

by Tara Phillips

145: i looked normal for a girl my size, a little extra meat on my bones but nothing to make me despise the body i lived in. Until i started comparing myself to the girls around me. maybe i should lose a couple pounds see that's how it started.

130: it's september, a well visit at the doctor she asks me "do you realize you've lost 30 pounds in two months? that's eating disorder level." an eating disorder level, not a disorder hell hole, not an eating disorder that's in control. i tell her i didn't do it on purpose, that i've just been working out a lot this summer, that i'm sure it's just the fat i've lost this summer that i'm sure it's not my mind i've lost this summer, that i'm sure it's not myself i've lost this summer that i've got it under control, i thought i had it under control, i think i have it under control.

125: telling lies that i ate dinner with my friends, "oh yeah mom we went to [insert first food place that comes to mind]"

i lie to her compulsively, i like her to think she's close to me, so she never questions why my clothes don't fit. she just doesn't know what it feels like to want to eat but forcing yourself not to it's like wanting to fall in love but knowing you'll get hurt so you don't, so i don't. so i don't fall in love with myself or my body. so i don't eat.

and if i do i excuse myself to throw up my sanity in a bathroom stall trying to crawl out of my skin out of the bones that have been given to me out of the body that's eating me alive. "just eat one bite" they say, they don't understand.

it's compulsive, it's repulsive, it's disgusting, i can't stop myself

120: just eat, just eat, you'll feel better if you just eat, i can't just eat.

115: i've got it under control, i have it under control. i count food by the calorie, eat meals less rapidly, bones push through skin more graphically, i lose pounds irrationally, I'm a catastrophe. my oversized demise, look me in the eyes screaming at myself "WHERE DID YOU GO WRONG"

i can see my ribs through tight shirts, i don't eat the lunches my mom packs anymore, i throw up in bathroom stalls of restaurants, i don't know where i lost control. i thought i had control.

"when's the last time you ate?" i step on the scale to calculate my weight
113.4: "i'm not sure, i'm just not hungry anymore"

Little Time

by Renee Born

The night was warm and a blue haired girl sat alone at a bar. She was at one end, trying to catch a glimpse of a woman sitting opposite, a woman with long dark hair and caramel skin. Robyn knew her from somewhere, she was sure of it. A memory floated just out of reach, like a dream slipping away when you open your eyes. She was about to give up when she saw the tattoo on the other woman's wrist. There was a moment of recognition and then – the sketch of sprawling pastel flowers and the hand above it colliding with her own hands, a full mug falling to the ground, the unmistakable shattering of glass, a thousand wet shards shimmering in the dim light of the pub. Robyn pushed away from the bar abruptly, stricken by the vivid images that had already begun to fade.

"You're going to have to trust me when I say this isn't a pickup line, but have we met before?" Robyn said, suddenly standing next to the stranger.

The other woman looked up with glazed eyes, as if noticing Robyn, or anyone else, for the first time. Robyn looked finally at her face and she felt the sense of recognition again. This time the barrage of images was less startling. She saw the woman before her, shirt stained with drink, her lips forming a forgiving smile.

"I don't believe I've had the pleasure," she said in the present, one eyebrow raised in curiosity. The expression seemed foreign to her.

"Really? I could swear I just bumped into you and spilt my drink on your shirt. Of course, that doesn't make sense because I've only ordered one drink, which I drank, and your shirt is in perfect condition..." Robyn trailed off. At that point she was feeling rather foolish, but when she looked up the other woman was

staring in disbelief.

"How could you possibly remember that..."

Robyn began to feel as if she had missed something, fallen behind in the conversation. The stranger's eyes changed then, they became clear and bright.

"Your hair is very blue," she said as she stood from her barstool and put on her jacket. "I like it. What's your name, blue-haired girl?" Robyn shook her head, trying to clear it.

"I'm Robyn," she managed eventually.

"It was good to meet you Robyn, both times. If you still remember running into me by tomorrow and you want to know why, meet me at the south entrance to Chestnut Park, four PM." She moved toward the exit without missing a beat.

"Wait!" Robyn shouted after a moment of confusion. She just managed to catch her on the way out. "Who are you?"

"Oh, right. I guess it's been a while," she said quietly. "My name is Quinn." And then she was out the door, leaving Robyn with nothing but a draft of night air and a curious smile.

~

"So, you can time travel?"

Quinn and Robyn lay on their backs in the grass, looking up at the sky through a break in the trees – Quinn had always found it relaxing. So far, she had spotted two bunnies, a horse, and a dragon floating above them. The clouds were just beginning to turn pink as the sun set.

"Yeah, but only backward in my own time stream. When you ran into me last night I got covered in beer, so I just went back in time and avoided walking into you," Her tone was casual, as the notion of time travel had become causal to her. "But then I had to continue living my life from that point on. So like, if I wanted to go back by months – or even years – I'd have to live those months or years all over again because they would be different after whatever change I made."

"Does that mean you could relive a year fifty different times but only be one year older? Do you remember them all? All the times you've lived over?" Robyn asked, sounding genuinely curious.

"Yes I can, and yes." A subtle darkness crept into her voice. "Yes, I remember every version of every decision I've made over."

Robyn propped herself up on one elbow, looking over at Quinn. Quinn watched her from the corner of her eye. Strands of her startlingly blue hair fell into her face.

"Aren't you afraid I'll think you're crazy?"

Robyn asked at last.

"Not really," Quinn responded. "If you do I'll just go back to last night and not tell you."

Robyn frowned.

"Nope, definitely don't do that," she said, still

frowning slightly. Quinn looked back up to the peach and purple sky.

"And as far as I know, you're the only one to ever notice. I didn't think that was possible. It shouldn't be. Nobody technically even lived that reality besides me."

"That sounds really awful." Robyn flopped into the grass again and it was Quinn's turn to prop herself up and look at the other girl.

"Why do you say that?"

"Well, not only have you lived in countless worlds that no one else even knows existed, but every decision you make is pretty much meaningless. You never have to worry about consequences because if anything bad happens, you can just go back and change it," she pondered.

"Most people would see that as a good thing. I can live a life free of worry." Quinn responded without conviction, turning onto her back once more, though she had lost interest in the clouds. She could always come back and see them again.

"You could live endless lives without worry. You never have to deal with tragedy or negativity ever again, but without bad things you can't really have good things either. I've been thinking about it while we've been lying here. If you don't have to be nervous about telling me then you won't be relieved when I believe you."

Quinn felt a twinge of surprise when she realized what Robyn was saying, but no relief. "You're right. I'm not relieved. I'm never relieved. I'm never much of anything now." She sighed and wondered again what she had done to deserve her curse. "It makes it easy to forget why I keep living at all," she said quietly, feeling the pointlessness of it all begin to suffocate her.

"I guess the only solution is to stop doing it."

After a long silence Quinn managed a cough of disbelief. She sat up and looked at Robyn. It had been a long, long time since she'd been reduced to shocked silence.

"Stop doing it? Well if it's just that easy-" She scoffed. Quinn was reminded then that though Robyn believed her, she could never understand her. Robyn sat up and looked at her seriously.

"I never said it would be easy. Frankly it's going to be hell, but I believe you can do it. Plus, I can help you." Then, like she was closing a business deal, she held out her hand for a shake.

"You don't even know me..." Quinn muttered, staring at her hand.

"Maybe not, but I will. I think part of you wants desperately to live again. Why else would you tell me all this, if not to ask for my help?" She sounded so sure. She made it sound so... possible.

For the first time in as long as Quinn could remember, she felt nervous. She hesitated.

She took Robyn's hand.

~

Robyn watched the steam rise off the rich cream-colored liquid in the mug across the table. Quinn wrapped her hands around it, as if to absorb the warmth. Robyn lifted her own drink, a much darker mixture of coffee and caramel, and took a sip. The city bustled by just outside the cafe window, like her and Quinn were sitting in an observatory, looking in on a world unaware of their existence. The first hints of fall had begun to show themselves, taking a particular liking to the early hours like these. Robyn looked back just in time to see Quinn taking her first eager sip. For a moment nothing changed, and then her nose crinkled and her face twisted in an unmistakable expression of disgust.

"No good?" she asked trying to keep a smile from her face. Robyn had been skeptical when Quinn had ordered the sweetest, richest, drink on the menu – something called Vanilla Milk. Now it seemed her doubts were founded. Quinn pouted.

"It's supposed to be delicious! This just tastes like sugary milk. Warm sugary milk." Robyn almost felt bad for taking such pleasure in Quinn's disappointment. Almost. "I knew I should have gotten the chocolate..."

Robyn's smile vanished. She had learned over the past three weeks to recognize statements like that as warnings. Just as Robyn expected, Quinn's expression had gone slack and her eyes unfocused. Without a moment for hesitation Robyn's fingers reached out desperately. They wrapped around Quinn's wrist, tethering her there.

"Don't. Quinn are you listening? Don't do it. Can you hear me? You can't do this." Robyn's fingers finally found what they were searching for, her index and middle finger pressing gently into Quinn's wrist. She felt the other girl's pulse, pounding sluggishly but returning to normal. Then she felt a pressure on her own wrist and Quinn was looking at her with guilt in her eyes. The two sat there for a moment, feeling each other's heartbeats. Quinn pulled away.

"It's not a big deal, it's just a drink. A really gross drink." She wouldn't meet Robyn's gaze.

"We talked about this, it doesn't matter how insignificant the difference is. You could go back seconds or years. You could change a drink order or save someone's life, but either way you are only hurting yourself. If you want to recover you can't ever go back, not for anything." She knew Quinn had heard it all before, but the memory of her unnaturally slow pulse still echoed through Robyn's fingers. "Plus, it can't be that bad."

Quinn raised an eyebrow.

"Not that bad, huh? Well go right ahead and have a taste then," she said, pushing the beverage toward her. Robyn hesitated, but refused to back down. She took a small drink. A moment passed.

"It's... it's not that bad. It's... fine..." Robyn made her best effort to keep her expression in line.

"It's disgusting."

"Yeah, it's pretty disgusting." Robyn caved and her face contorted. "It's like warm milk? But somehow..."

"-somehow it's also like drinking granulated sugar," Quinn finished.

"Exactly!" Robyn agreed adamantly, and at the same moment they burst into laughter. The cafe's other patrons gave disapproving glances, but neither of them noticed.

~

Quinn fiddled nervously with the little bundle of pastel flowers. She shouldn't be nervous when she could simply undo any mistake and relive it successfully. Only she didn't do that anymore, she hadn't for nearly two months. And those two months had changed her. She had suffered inconveniences, and some physical pain. She had found a job from which she was fired. She had made mistakes and let people down and eaten things she didn't like and arrived places late. She had felt real fear. They had been the best two months of her life.

And it was all thanks to Robyn. If she hadn't remembered that one, random, insignificant encounter...

As if on cue Robyn stepped through the trees and into the little clearing, walking with that bounce in her step and light in her eyes that never failed to make Quinn smile.

"I remember this place," she said with an absent-minded glance at the sky, undoubtedly recalling the clouds they had watched that day. "What's up Quinn?" she asked, coming to a stop in front of her.

"Um..." she began confidently. "Uh, here." Quinn held out the stems and felt her cheeks begin to burn. Robyn accepted the meager flowers graciously and smiled, the breeze catching her short blue hair and batting it playfully into her eyes. Without thinking Quinn reached up and brushed it from her face.

"You have such lovely blue hair. When you got it re-dyed yesterday it reminded me of the first time I met you. Well, first times. I was such a different person then. I had no sense of self or purpose. I was the one who picked this place but when I got here I was lost. When I was left I... I had hope. You gave me hope." When Quinn went to take a breath, she risked a glance at Robyn. She was still smiling, smiling and waiting. Her mask of calm and patience was like an anchor. Quinn clung to it against

the turbulence within. She took another breath.

"What I'm trying to say is you are unquestionably the best friend I have ever had and it's honestly unfair you were able to change my life so completely without allowing me to even make a dent in yours."

"That's not-" Robyn started in protest, but Quinn kept going.

"So, if you're up for it I'd like to make my best effort. I'd like to take you out to the movies and see something that very well may be horrible, but if it is horrible, I still want to have seen it with you." Her heart raced and her train of thought had been seriously derailed. Honestly, she was a little preoccupied fighting the urge to travel back right then, but she had to know what Robyn would say.

"Correct me if I'm wrong, but I'm pretty sure you just gave me flowers, complimented me, thanked me, and then asked me to the movies. Are you asking me out on a date Quinn?" She was smiling, and as far as Quinn could tell it wasn't a gesture of pity, so she nodded. "In that case, okay."

Quinn stared. A moment passed. A minute passed. The birds sang and a breeze ruffled gold and crimson leaves.

"So..." she hesitated, Quinn wasn't the best at interpreting people's expressions. "So, you'll go on a date with me? Does that make you my... does that make you my girlfriend?" Before she could say anything else dumb, Robyn was standing on her tiptoes, wrapping her arms around Quinn's neck and pressing her lips to Quinn's. It was soft and sweet and everything Quinn had ever hoped kissing Robyn would be. Before she could even react, the pressure was gone and Robyn was there, centimeters from her, smiling with those round honey eyes.

"I think you could say that, yes." And all of a sudden Quinn wasn't frozen anymore. She swooped down, wrapping her arms around Robyn's waist and lifting her into the air. She swung her around all of two times before they both collapsed.

"I..." she panted, laying on her back. "... am not... very strong." Robyn laughed, and when she had the breath, Quinn joined in.

"Quinn?" Robyn asked after a while of companionable silence.

"Hmmm?" she responded, absentmindedly playing with Robyn's hair.

"You have to promise me something, okay?" The serious tone of Robyn's voice made Quinn stir, and she propped herself up on her elbows to meet her gaze.

"Anything."

"I know I don't have to ask this of you, but also I do. I have to be sure. Will you promise me that you will never undo any of this? I know I can never truly understand, but one

thing I do know is that it's not just about you now. If you undo any of this then it will never have happened to me either. I don't want that, no matter what happens."

Quinn looked at her and she could not think of a single reason why she would ever want to go back to a time before this.

"I promise."

~

"You promised me!" Robyn yelled, her insides churning. "Five months of progress and you didn't even think!" Her voice was raw from shouting.

"Of course I thought about it! What did you want me to do? Let it die? That would have been on my shoulders! I was behind the wheel, not you!" Quinn spat back. Tears stained her face.

"I don't care about the damn dog Quinn! Its life is not worth yours!"

"You act like this changed everything! It was seconds Robyn, seconds!"

"And you seem to have forgotten that when I met you you had forgotten what the point in living was! I don't ever want to see you like that again." Robyn's own eyes welled with tears at the thought. Quinn had to know that the amount of time or the reason didn't matter. It was like an addiction; any slip was dangerous.

"You pretend like you know how I feel, but you can't! Every mistake I make I have to live with the fact that I'm choosing not to fix it! You would be no better!" Quinn's voice became quiet and she looked away. "When you can't see the toll it takes, you're just a reminder of how alone I am." Robyn jerked back as if she'd been struck. Her eyes widened.

"How long do I have Quinn?" She was quiet, tears flowing freely now. Quinn looked up, anger quickly giving way to confusion. "How long before you decide I was a mistake, just a painful reminder? How long before you go back in time and undo me?"

"Robyn I would never-"

"How long do I have with you?" Robyn's shoulders shook with sobs as she thought about the possibility. At any moment Quinn could change her mind and leave, undoing everything.

"As long as you can put up with me." Robyn's vision was blurred with tears, but she felt Quinn's arms wrapping around her and her breath was soft and warm on Robyn's neck. She let herself be wrapped up and her tears stained Quinn's shoulder. "I didn't mean any of that. I just felt guilty about breaking my promise. I was afraid . . . I was afraid you'd leave me. I wouldn't even blame you." They stood there, arms wrapped around each other, for a long time.

"I love you, Quinn."

"I love you, too, Robyn."



~

Robyn stood next to her, both of them swaying uncertainly on their feet. They looked down at the kitchen floor, or more specifically the round orange cat sitting in the center of it. She purred loudly and moved to rub against their legs.

"You're sure she was the fattest one they had?" Robyn asked in a loud whisper, trying not to draw the cat's attention. Quinn giggled.

"Robyn you were there, we were both there. She was the roundest one we could find." She whispered back. "What do we call her?" She asked, nearly losing her balance but covering it by crouching down to stroke the orange tabby.

"George."

"I see absolutely nothing wrong with that name. Hello George," Quinn cooed, and Robyn joined her. Quinn laid on the linoleum floor, curling her body around George.

"We got to go to bed babe, it's nearly 3 AM," Robyn insisted.

"You want me to get up and leave George here? Cold and alone? Our bond is new and feeble, I can't break it with a betrayal like that," Quinn muttered drowsily.

"I love you so much," Robyn said fondly, wiggling into position behind Quinn and wrapping her arms around her waist.

"You do?" Quinn whispered, and it broke Robyn's heart a little to know she was still unsure.

"Of course."

"I love you too," Quinn sniffled.

"Are you crying Quinn?" Robyn pulled a lock of dark hair away from her face.

"I think so, yeah. It hurts, but like, in a really really good way," she said, sniffing again. "Is this what being in love feels like?"

"No, this is what being alive feels like."

~

Quinn crouched, her back against the wall and her hands in her hair. She could hear her heartbeat ringing in her ears, feel it pushing against her rib cage.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, are you Quinn?" Quinn looked up. A middle-aged man stood before her, the knees of his jeans were smeared with dirt and oil. His hands were freshly washed.

"Yes, I'm Quinn," she said without meaning to.

Tension by Kira Higgins



"My name is Dave, I was at the intersection when..." Quinn's head shot up and in a heartbeat she was standing.

"You were there?" Blood rushed in her ears.

"Yes, I helped pull the blue haired girl from her car." Quinn stumbled back, the wall catching her. "She was asking for you. Did you know her well?" His voice was soft, apologetic.

Quinn looked down at her hand. It was shaking, but she hardly noticed. She was looking at the ring.

"She's my – she's my fiancé." Her voice shook and tears finally threatened. She forced them back. "We haven't picked a date yet – but – but the ring means – it means she's stuck with me." Quinn attempted a shaky smile but she couldn't breathe. She felt dizzy and suddenly the world swayed.

All she could see was a ring, a beautiful sapphire engagement ring. It looked warm against the ashen skin. She could feel the stiff wrist beneath her fingers. She had stood over that body long after it grew cold, searching, searching in vain. She had placed her fingers on its wrist.

"She used to do that to tell if I was about to

rewrite time. My pulse always slows down..." Quinn had begun feeling for Robyn's in return after a little while, as an anchor, as a reminder. But this time it was quiet and cold.

"Ma'am are you okay? Are you alright?" She looked up to see the man from before – Dave – crouching over her. He looked worried.

"I'm okay, I'm fine." But never in her life had that been less true.

"Ms. Robyn, your fiancé wanted to say something to you but I'm not sure what it was." He waited, probably wanting to make sure she was paying attention.

"What did she say – tell me everything you can remember." Quinn was listening.

"I'm certain she was saying she loved you, but it was the other thing I couldn't make out. It sounded like... well it sounded like don't do it." He looked confused and concerned, but Quinn knew exactly what that meant. The poor man probably just wanted to go home to his family and forget everything that just happened. Who was she to deny him that?

"I'm sorry Robyn," Quinn whispered.

It had been nearly three years since she'd traveled back in time, but it wasn't difficult. For a moment everything slowed down around her, then it snapped back into place. The

most violent part of the transition was her emotional state. She had become accustomed to traveling back into her body with a numb mind past and present, but this time her state of utter upheaval was met with the serenity of a Tuesday morning. She thought her brain would be torn apart as the emotions battled for dominance. Soon, though, her memories settled into place and the thought of – of that broken body was enough to tip the scales. She settled back into shock and despair shortly.

Quinn picked up her phone checking the time. She had eight and a half hours. Nothing felt real. She didn't know what she was doing until the phone was dialing.

"You're up early for a day off. What's up?" Quinn's breath caught in her chest and when she exhaled the tears came. She cried longer than she ever had before and every time Robyn asked what was wrong she cried harder. She thought she'd never stop, but she ran out of tears eventually. When she had relieved the sorrow, guilt hit her like a spear.

"Um..." she began, unable to force the words from her lips. "I... I finished that book you kept recommending." She said lamely. It was a poor excuse but Robyn didn't bat an eye. Quinn made a mental note to prepare herself for a sad ending if she ever read it. She had the burning visceral need to say something, anything. "It's just that it's over and I can't – it's like saying goodbye to the characters." What am I doing?

"I know exactly how you feel, it always hurts when good things end. But if they didn't, if TV shows and books went on forever we'd take them for granted and lose interest. You know better than anyone how important endings are."

"I know but it feels like – it feels like they're... like they're dead." Her voice cracked.

"Quinn, they're fictional. And even if they weren't you wouldn't want them to live forever would you?" Her voice was scolding as it echoed through the phone.

"Why not?" Quinn asked in a small voice.

"You know very well why not! You know the knowledge that any time could be our last time is essential to being human. I wouldn't wish immortality on anyone I cared about, fictional or not. I know you wouldn't either." Quinn knew, but that didn't mean she understood.

"So you want to die?" Quinn struggled to speak through the tightness in her throat.

"Well, preferably not tomorrow, but the knowledge that that could happen is what makes life interesting. Honey I really have to go, I'll see you tonight. We can talk more about the book then, okay?"

"Okay, sorry for interrupting you at work."

I'm sorry. I'm so sorry.

"Love you Quinn."

"I love you too, Robyn – more than anything in the world."

"Bye sweetheart."

"Goodbye."



The Girl and The Timeless Wood

by Renee Born

In a far distant and long forgotten land, there stands a great forest. An ancient power is said to live within, fed into the earth through deep and powerful roots. The vastness of the strange forest covers a mountain from its base to its peak, brushing the clouds. If you were to visit it, what you would find would depend entirely on where you came from and where you stepped inside. If you came from the plains to the north, no matter the position of the sun or the turn of seasons, you would find bare and frosted branches. Snowflakes might be tossed around, like perfect white feathers in the air, before landing on your coat, or – if you were unprepared – melt upon meeting the warmth of your skin.

If you came from the shores to the west your boots or soft soled sandals would find their way through dry leaves, crackling orange, red, and yellow sparks around your ankles. At the southern boarder a hot breath of sun baked air would welcome you, though with the heat would come full leaves of emerald green, casting deep shade to rest in. Finally, from the east you would discover a forest brimming with life. Plants would unfurl at your feet, fresh and shining in their infancy. Flowers would be just beginning to bud and the creeks would be running full with fresh rain water.

Just outside this final eastern edge, in a valley between one mountain and the next, there stood a village called Aulkura. It was a small and isolated affair, but strong and sturdy and old enough that even then, nobody alive could remember a time before it had grown old. One year, many decades ago, Aulkura fell into a long, deep winter. Night after night, snow tumbled from the heavens, settling upon itself as it draped the valley in white. Roofs were laden and creaking with ice, cold air cutting mercilessly through any crevice it could find. The passage from the valley was thick with snow and, try as they might, impassable. The crops were long dead and supplies of food, as well as medicine, were running low. The people did all they could, but as the cold dragged on hope of survival seemed to dwindle.

In a home on the outskirts of the village a young boy had grown very ill. His mother was preparing to send his sister to fetch the doctor when the little girl asked, "Ma, why don't we just go to the forest where it is still warm?"

"Don't go near the woodland, Irska," her mother said. "Sorcery is the only thing keeping those plants alive, and it poisons them." Irska did not understand, but her mother's expression was dire and she knew when to hold her tongue.

Her mother wrapped Irska in her warmest purple cloak, and reminded her again to go straight to the doctor's house. Though, despite her mother's warning, when the door closed behind her she did not go to fetch

Hands by Taylor Rowan

the doctor.

She knew the doctor had been called to help Miss Elena, but Miss Elena was gone. Irska did not want her brother to be buried in the snow like Miss Elena. She did not want to say goodbye to him, so she knew what she must do.

It did not take long for her to reach the forest's border, less time than it should have taken to be sure, but soon she was stepping from the last drifts of snow onto soft brown earth. Little sprigs of grass and tiny flowers leapt up to meet her and the flakes of snow melted from her clothes until they were nothing but a distant memory. She stepped carefully over brightly colored toadstools and patches of wild clover, beginning her journey toward the glow of the sun.

Irska, who had spent so many days in the shelter of her village looking over the fields and wondering what it would be to walk the forest floor, was now a brush-stroke of violet in a landscape of green and yellow. She marveled at the glowing plants and wide-eyed animals who knew too little of humanity to run and hide when she passed by. It was in studying one of these creatures, a shiny silver squirrel, that Irska noticed a root breaching the damp soil. She had climbed over many a twisted, knuckled strand of tree already, but none compared to the one she saw now. Only a small part was visible, and yet it was almost as wide as Irska was tall. When she reached down she could feel it was warm to the touch. From it came a soft golden glow. She knew then, if she could only find the tree the root belonged to, she would find what she came for.

"I will find the sun, Miguel, and I will bring it back to make you better."

Irska followed the root on a twisting and turning path, but the longer she walked the more unsure she became. Despite her best efforts, young Irska could not remember how long she had traveled or from which way she had come. The only direction she had was the root at her feet and the growing fear for her brother, tightening like a fist around her little heart. She picked up speed until she was skipping over rocks and dashing past bushes so quickly their little branches whipped against her arms and legs.

Finally she found it. Behind a tangle of roots even bigger than the one she followed, stood the tree's massive trunk, rising into the canopy above like a strong and graceful god. A steady yellow light pulsed from within the bark of the great tree, as if with a life of its own.

Irska wasted no time pulling off her boots and stockings, and began to climb the nearest root. When she reached the top of one she climbed to the next until she was standing atop them all, looking towards the trunk. It curved out of sight in either direction, and if she had followed it all the way around, Irska would have passed through all the forest's seasons.

Just ahead of where she stood, there was a high archway carved into the tree's trunk. It looked dark, but a golden light beckoned Irska in. She took a deep breath, summoning all her courage, and walked inside the ancient tree. She followed a corridor that walls stretched high above her, so high even the yellow glow couldn't reach the top.

When she rounded a final corner a second archway came into view, this one bathed in warm, comforting light. The end in sight, Irska ran the rest of the way, but as she reached the end of the narrow path, the vastness that opened before her stopped her dead in her tracks. The sheer size of it dwarfed poor Irska, and for a moment, she felt so terribly small and helpless she wanted nothing more than to turn and run away. She wanted to keep running until cold and hunger wrapped their arms around her once more.

That was when she saw the man made of golden light. He looked as terribly small as she felt. He sat in the center of the great hollow, his arms resting on folded legs and his eyes closed. The sight of his

calmness brought a sudden shame to Irska as she remembered her promise to her brother.

Having overcome her fear, she entered the glowing hall, and padded toward the golden man. He was much further away than the time it took her to reach him. She saw he wore loose linen clothes and his hair fell to his shoulders in white waves – his long beard like a cloud that had gotten lost on its way to the sky. She sat down across from him, mirroring his position. Soon his eyes flickered open.

"What brings you here, my child," he asked, fixing her with an amber gaze.

Irska knew he was the one who kept the forest warm, she knew it was his light that brought the spring, so she begged him to help her village, but he only shook his head. It was not within his power to do so.

"I am not what you think, dear child. Because of me spring arrives, but it is also because of me that winter lingers. Do you know why your mother warns you away from this place?" Irska shook her head.

"Because sometimes people wander into this wood and they never leave. They are not lost, but they are afraid – afraid of the passing of time. They stay here because time does not pass in this forest, but even as they hide, their friends and family are left to wonder what happened to them. Those who cower in fear leave the rest of the world to face their fate alone. They do not die, but without time they do not live."

Irska was silent for a long time, trying to understand. Finally, she said,

"If I brought my brother here, I would never have to say goodbye."

"If you brought him here now he would not die, but he would not get better. He would remain sick forever." Irska knew how much Miguel hated being stuck in bed, how much he longed to go outside and play with her again. She didn't know if it would be helping him to bring him to this place.

"Who are you?" she asked, looking past the golden light at the aged man before her.

"I am Father Time. I wandered here once, but now I stay, as a vessel for time, so that it can reach the whole world – so that no one has to be sick forever; so that no one has to live on while their loved ones age and fall away; so that spring comes to every village eventually. I am the guardian of time so that no one else has to be."

Irska knew then that she would not bring her brother here, and that there was nothing she could do to bring the sun back before it was going to come. She saw Father Time for what he was, a kind old man who had spent such a very long time all by himself.

"I have to go now, but I will come back. I promise." She did not fully understand her own decision then, but she would come to. She returned home to Aulkura, to her mother and her brother, but she kept her word. She sat in the tree again the very next month when her brother died. Spring finally arrived and flowers grew over his grave, so she went and told Father Time about their beautiful colors. She visited many times when nothing at all had happened, and again when her mother passed. She would walk, and climb, and sit, and they would talk and smile. The more she came, the less sadness could be read from the lines around the old man's eyes.

Until one day, when she had lived well, Irska made the long journey to their tree, and she did not leave. Not long after, an old man with amber eyes stumbled from the strange, timeless wood, and made his way to a nearby village.

So if you ever find yourself taking your time for granted, or wishing you had more, remember the forest and the village, and the girl who made both her home. Remember she still waits there, bleeding her endless life into the world; Mother Time.

Lover of Time

by Willow Vaughn

I seduced Time

I brought her thorny flowers, held her worn hands and kissed her softly
I caressed her flushed cheeks and played with her hair, long like a timeline
I ran my hands along her battle-won scars and her strong but delicate body
I buried my face in her neck and left little marks there, proof of my presence
We spent countless hours together and I hoped we would stay forever like that
She would come to me in the night and wait out the dark with me
But she never spoke with me, which I found funny because Time never told
Instead, I told. And I told her everything
But it's not like I could keep anything from her
She knows everything
Everything about me, and about all else
Yet, she remained in my bed and let me hold her in my hands
After all of this, I thought Time was on my side
I thought she favored me
And again, she came to me when the sun was low and the stars were high
And I, so sure of myself, let Time catch up to me

And Time put her hands on my blushing cheeks and told me "I gave you all I could."
Then she kissed me
She scooped the air from my throat until I could breathe no longer
My body went limp as my lungs failed to produce oxygen for my muscles to use
I looked in her eyes
Eyes that had seen every trick in the book
Eyes that saw through me like I wasn't even there
Eyes that held no remorse
And I realized that Time stops for no one
Not even for those who set out to romance her
And certainly not for those who fell in love along the way

Two Faced by Alexandra Moyer





A Slow Breath by Kylie Bergdall

Time's Beauty

by Willow Vaughn

Time is a girl with curly hair that bounces with every step and twirl she takes
She talks with her hands but never fails to find the right word to say
She can be by your side one second and gone the next
Getting lost in the crowd is fun to her
She is bipolar with moods that seem too intense to handle, but somehow she does
Her tears come like storms, heavy and all at once
Her anger feels like an earthquake that shakes the world beneath her feet
She likes to tangle her hands in people's hair
Her sleeves are dyed with stains of paint and blood
There are small calluses on the sides of her fingers
Her shoulders are weighed down but her back is always straight and proud
Her smile is watery; sad but hopeful
She enjoys the theater and art museums
There is always soil under her fingernails
Modern medical practices fascinate her
She doesn't know what career she wants; says there are too many to choose from
Hard candy is her favorite, especially the coffee flavored ones
Her eyes are brown like a worn leather journal
She knows all of the past and present, but never the future
She can't keep secrets
When she smiles, everything around her seems to stop
Time is a girl, and she is beautiful

Ecliptic

by Meghan Dillon

Self Portrait
by Sydney
Crawford

The sun dawns upon me
Again I'm greeted to gasps of reality
Holding onto dreams I can disappear into
until the day breaks, bright and true
Every morning I breathe incapacibilities
but I still wake with a certain heart
Knowing you'll rise over the hill, I race to see
You are unaltered energy stirring motion in me.

Daylight settles, illuminating all I wish to know
If only I had run back
to collect what was left of your horizon glow
Because suddenly I notice you have shifted my shadow
I'm out of time.

I search the soil for your reflection in raindrops dried
and I feel your warmth from above but can't look to the sky
Staring down to scorched ground or up to burn my eyes
You leave only one option, saying to me:

It is now time to look ahead.
Take the first step as I set over your grand expanse
Don't worry as my radiance fades
Instead let shivers send you into a celestial dance
And in your discomfort you can find peace
knowing we'll soon be pulled together again.
But don't forget the night also has a special kind of embrace
Draping you in shadows of unknown opportunity
And unmasking constellations that glitter of destiny
In places of doubt, remember that I have not abandoned you
Rather, my shift reminds that change always continues
Whether you find yourself in hours of safety or unease
Do not fight my movement, this is where you are meant to be.

– Sincerely,
The Sun



Where Are You Going Today by Esther Cheng

In the Deep Time

by Alrisha Shea

When we wake, we stretch to
fill out our expectations of where
what should be & then we look in
the mirror for confirmation *is this
me is this me is this* & we know it's

silly but we do it every morning. At
least everything here is honest about
their mistranslation; I don't expect
something with mouths it doesn't use
for mouths to call me the right name

or to sing from their diaphragm. See,
there I go, with the analogies. I wonder
if something without photoreceptors knows it could
look at the sun, but these aren't the animals
we call animals or their cousins-twice-

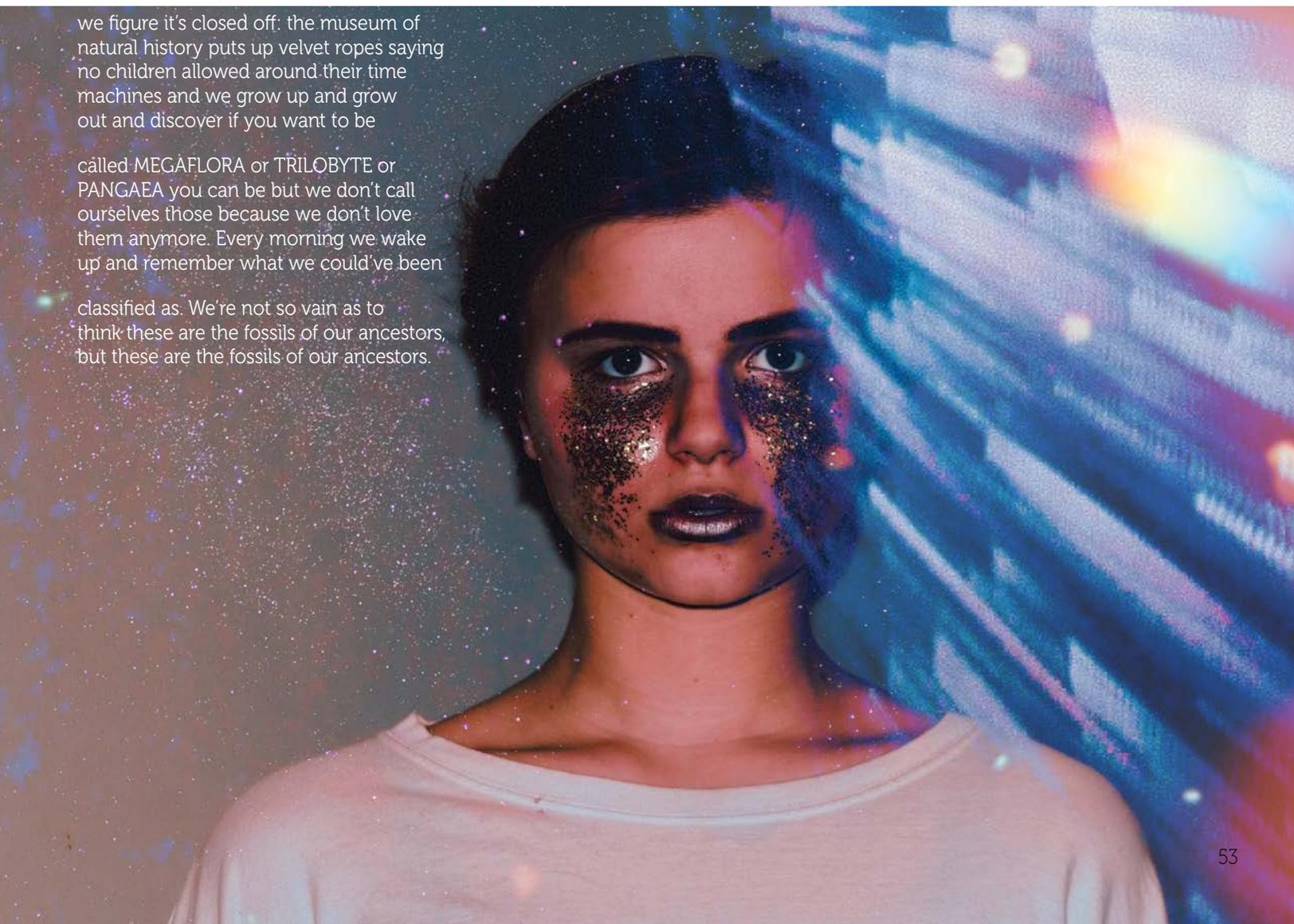
removed; these phyla have proboscises
and carapaces and jagged lines all over.
When we're little the first thing we fall
in love with is the past *steam engines
dinosaurs space programs* and then

we figure it's closed off: the museum of
natural history puts up velvet ropes saying
no children allowed around their time
machines and we grow up and grow
out and discover if you want to be

called MEGAFLOA or TRILOBYTE or
PANGAEA you can be but we don't call
ourselves those because we don't love
them anymore. Every morning we wake
up and remember what we could've been

classified as. We're not so vain as to
think these are the fossils of our ancestors,
but these are the fossils of our ancestors.

falling minutes by Lydia Crist





Space Project by Gabrielle Perdomo

god bless

by Samiya Rasheed

Varuna pulled forth the world the heavens the stars
With a roll of his tongue he wrenched time in her place
A word on his lips and the floods would recede
From sludge he said let there be more

He said let my light pierce through a thousand pillars and a
thousand windows

Let me rule all that is and all that will be
Let gods bow their heads to me from the seas and storms
Let there be worship wherever I travel

And let there be people below to long for my love
Let them grovel and fight and pray to a scale they cannot grasp
with such hands

Let them build temples in my name
Let them live – under me in this new world

He did not say let them be saved;
We have never let our creators save us.
Creators cannot be kind, I think. To have created us. Sister-brother-
father-mothers.

We write off myths and pantheons of old
They cannot possibly be true
But I wonder where when why
we created the kindness of gods.

– In his arms are two slumbering children, strange and sweet with
dewy eyes and delicate limbs. It is odd, their make. Carved of clay

molded over pale stone bones, they are fragile in a way nothing yet
is. But All will be and All will cease, and fatherhood always seems
preferable.

“Not of fire?”

The pause holds in absolute silence. Old stars twirl in a muted
horizon like forgotten tops, eternities away. They’re suspended in
an ever-growing, ever-colder universe, bright but empty. He runs an
inky grasp through their fledgling hairs. When He speaks, it resounds.

“The world is warm enough. There is light. Now there will be
earth to yet grow.”

“They will be our brothers, like those before.”

It hangs, whistling through the heavens above.

“Not that.”

I. the end began without care
ruin in a people once just
blame greed blame heresy
the ramparts are crumbled minarets buried
inhale divinity but all that’s left to choke on is ash
prayers drifting – grasping to an answer absent

they have run rampant, gone amok a messenger says, cold true
infallible
there is a new order, this world was never to keep he says burning a
crimson power
under smoke, under a halo of brilliant glaring light that could not
be echoed

i am sorry, what else can be said
there is no counter
no saving grace besides the one before them
your people are not sorry the messenger gazes back *it is not enough*

it is understood
the scythe will hang heavy in the messenger’s hands
he will not tarry
he cannot
he is not the All Merciful

II. The jinn have seventy-two kings and the news must be
trumpeted to all of them. They are of fire, like angels, but it is not
the same vivid flame. They are His subjects before His army. Surety
is afforded to them by the whistling, creeping, shifting, singing,
shrieking words of their brethren.

(Angels do not need surety. The knowledge is dug deep along
their cores and into their veins. What they know is true. Without
argument. Without protest. Without concern.)

Each king knows, nods. Accepts what they cannot contest.
There’s defeat traced into the curves of their wrists, in their arteries
and paths. Is it a mark of turning times or did He keep it there,
foretold?

Their people –

(Pray for the souls that came before, before your supreme
oceans, before your brittle grasses.)

Their prayers were not taken.

III. the apocalypse arrives – on the spines of beggars on children’s
lips

help us they plead

no

and so will be His answer when the jinn begin to wail

oh dear Allah, what have we done?

swallowing locusts, tearing under their eyelids to find
cockroaches digging under capillaries there’s not enough room

not enough room to keep them all and they are false flames under
His trial by fire

plague fell like a fine snow on the land of smokeless fire
the halls of revelry fell silently to the sad heft of their bodies
oh Allah please save us
each man his own pyre each woman crematorium
the children starry eyed and guiltless
stained glass tragedies
tell me which martyrs are willing to be so
for it is not these

IV. The angels are readied, draped in truths sharp and lethal and heavy like irons. There is no call for sympathy, sympathy for a people so like them, for they are only given directions for what is *right*, and the jinn have fallen.

They are not the first.

Curving on their tongues tightening along their flaring windpipes are the invocations, orisons, begging benedictions. Iblis is what crawls from their raw red guts. Shaytan jinn is what peels from their neighbors brows, wary even in a world like this. Wary because of.

There is not much farther fall, and there is a new order.

(do you not worry? angels do not whisper in the face of omnipotence if He may do this to our brethren do you not worry for those that come next? do you not worry for yourself? do you not worry he was right? we do not govern the afterlife beyond, but how do beings of fire fare in Hell?)

eyes trace the other, wings paring peeling seams holding what was not meant to fly. *worry for yourself. not i.*

and then he is alone under the endless sky

lies are cloying and they do not tell them

but his wings neither can hold the heavy sword)

The angels are readied.

V. the line between unholy and divine bright is called blindness

that from so far above

was never meant to be looked upon with mortal eyes

the angels are silent stars called near

the angels are warriors

a crimson stain unfurls over the world

(Babylon to Durban will stand on copper silt soil now)

oh Allah why? an angel weeps

halo crumbled into

loam and snow

beside earthbound soles

and what was left of –

as it comes

VI. The end is swift. Jinn had little when all the heavens were opened against them. So, so many breathed their last, exhaling the smoke they'd kept, painting the sky listless black. So many died at their own hands, but the right to die is called sin, so the less said.

So many died, and fell, and met the crossroad of their own embers and brimstone.

So many, but not all.

VII. it begins in a garden

renewed

adam

eve

and onward down

– Humans are –

The world is strange now, all spectrums and colors and so cold, chock full of bursting flora and sanguine fauna, and there is still fire, at the center of it, but bedrock lays heavy. A land made new; verdant imitation of Paradise built atop the blushing ruby sands of before. But familiarity is still found, threads tracing back the uncountable millennia the angels bore between. Found in the slopes of marble thrones and the sharpness of tin bus stops and the glass spires reaching ever heavenward. The seasons have changed to suit, but the heart of it, the primordial mistake, the— Humans are inconceivable.

The angels *know*. Even as they fall – the great magnificent view, a star burning in orbit – they *know*. Cold, hard, true. The jinn knew. Continue, strewn as they are, to know. Angels were not so distant from them once.

The humans know nothing but doubt. Left with His word (cold hard true) heralded by prophets miracle tragedy history, they don't *believe*. It seems as though they began where the last age was condemned, worshipping beguiling idols and falling to the greed leaking from their pores. Erecting reverent marvels to themselves in cities lasting horizons, forming tides all their own. They are simply so like what came before.

And yet.

Maybe the angels are simply not ready to fight once more. Ranks withering wings gone, so many are so near human now: fire to ash to sandstone skeletons. And they grew close to, endeared. Caught on the cross wire of soldier and protector. The humans may barely pray, do not believe, but in their clay hearts is an inherent softness, kindness. To give and grow better even among the convoluted mayhem they bury themselves in. Something revelatory in abnegation without the belief that He is watching, tallying, judging.

Then the angels fell for the inanities. Perched on power lines and parapets, they saw asinine holidays wrapped in streamers and warmth, and flower arrangements so precise and with meanings picked for each petal. River ships, small and wooden over brown deltas passing flooded rice fields. The gummy smiles of infants and toddlers with mud puddles and the saccharine sweet of hard candy; and humans are not like them. Fitting dearly as His children where those before could not. Protected so dearly despite –

(There are still jinn. Not many. Scarce in these lengthy miles. They are not all real anymore, meandering between what is and isn't. A half life, veil pulled between. There's a miracle in their existence. There's another in – *how do you still pray?* asks a fallen seraph, hat pulled low and silhouette too small – having fallen from His favor and the sky in one – *how can you? I cannot.*

this is what saved me. so i pray the jinn responds. Leaves.

is that what saved means? the angel-no-more ponders skipping stones, imagining a world without touch.)

The humans are still here, but snow sometimes appears like ash, and the angels are bowstrings drawn, bracing for a holy war. A cataclysm for Judgment day for All will be and All will cease. These times cannot stretch to eternity and this world was never to keep. The skies grow heavy and mankind are already blotting out their own stars. How long, How long.

Angels, fallen flying fair – or trying to be, call *mercy, mercy. Not once more, not once more.*

(But All Merciful is not their title to hold. They are not their own.)

The responding silence – it hangs, whistling through the heavens above.

And onwards down.



Can You Keep a Secret by Kinsey McCormick

Movement

by Paiton Stith

I am the only thing on this planet that moves. Drifting through crowds of statue people on a beach covered in sand that doesn't shift. I am like a ghost in the land of the living. Or maybe, more likely, I am alive in the land of the dead. Their faces are frozen in time, joyous and laughing and talking and teasing but I am alone here.

Sound exists in pockets where the waves froze when the world stopped turning and I walk through them. Voices to seagulls to crashing water to silence.

My phone is frozen on a call but I hold it to my ear anyway. "Update again." I smile to myself as I reach the wooden docks. "I haven't found out why everything stopped yet, and before you ask, even though I know you can't ask because you're stuck, I don't know why I'm the only one left." I stick my hand behind my back and let my knuckles rest above my skirt. "All these frozen people are starting to creep me out. It's okay though. I'm still on my way. I've made it to the North Sea, actually." I rest one shoulder against a wooden beam and survey the beach. Thick dewy clouds hang low and obscure the horizon. The people are smiling, all such good creatures full of light and movement even as they are motionless. Like kinetic art. "I'm lonely," I whisper to my phone.

I imagine him replying: *Well why are you wasting time, then? Get over here.* He'd sound like a crackling radio, like he'd lived so long even his voice had wrinkles.

I tuck my phone into my back pocket and head toward the water. I stop at the edge when something glints in the sand, a shiny shell, white and constructed in a tight swirl. I pick it up, and slip it into my bag, eyes on the sea as I imagine the continent on the other side. I'll admit, part of me hopes that Europe isn't any different from before, but if time is still moving I might drown on my way there when the water shifts again. I'd worry over the journey if I had anywhere else to go.

I don't hesitate when I step off the sand. The sea holds beneath my feet, cold and comforting. I walk into the misty depths of sky, leaving behind all those statues of life. The sun is off hiding somewhere and I wonder how long it will be before this beach sees any light. No time at all, I suppose, even if I might grow old and die during the wait.

The walk isn't as difficult as I expect, especially when I can take breaks as often as I want. There's food in my bag, along with water and even a book I read when I'm bored. It's amazing how still the world is now. I used to watch outside my window in the mornings when I thought that swaying grass and empty streets was as still as it got, but there's a new stillness now. I don't think I like it quite so much. Now, I'm alone in a blur of motionless fog standing on a floor like glass.

Despite my fears, I make it to Belgium without incident. Still, I don't breathe a sigh of relief until my bare feet hit the sand and I can see buildings. There's a young boy in the distance, squatting in yellow Crocs where the sand gives way to grass. He's looking intently at something, intently enough that I let myself hope that he isn't frozen, just concentrating. "Hello!" I sprint across the sand, ignoring how it holds like concrete. "Can you point me to the Seashore Hotel?"

He's poking at a beetle. He doesn't look at me. "That's alright," I say. I rub the inside of my elbow with my thumb, begin walking into the grass until I find sidewalk and then I follow that. I've been gone for so long I'm not sure I remember where to go. It's dim enough that some of the streetlights have come on, and a few signs light up the approaching night, but I can't find the sun when the buildings tower above me. People stand about, empty-eyed just like the others. I dig my thumb into the soft spot of my elbow.

Finally, I come across the hotel, a tall stone-gray building with a rusty sign. I bolt inside, jostling statues that don't complain in my efforts not to waste one more second. I don't bother checking his room. I know him too well, for that. I find a concrete stairwell and go straight up to the top, bursting through into the delicious height. I linger in the doorway, panting and swallowing several times, to take in the sight before I walk up to him. I haven't been here in so long.

He's silhouetted by the sunset, sun split in half by the horizon and showering sparks into the clouded sky. His hair flutters from his head, glinting silver, in spikes from a wind that must've been here before. Breathless, I hurry up to him and scramble to a seated position. I pull my backpack off and set it beside me before digging through to find my seashell, that wondrous little swirl is the closest thing to movement I've seen in a long time.

He has his hand out, palm up in the middle of a gesture. I stare at his face in profile, and I put the shell in his hand. "It's a pretty spiral," I say and I look to the sunset. My feet dangle in open air, heels banging against the wall. "People say spirals are everywhere in nature. Flowers and galaxies and seashells and time." My eyes are dry when I look at him. He doesn't move, just keeps smiling at the sunset with those wrinkles sunbursting from his eyes. "Grandpa? I think something went wrong with the spiral."

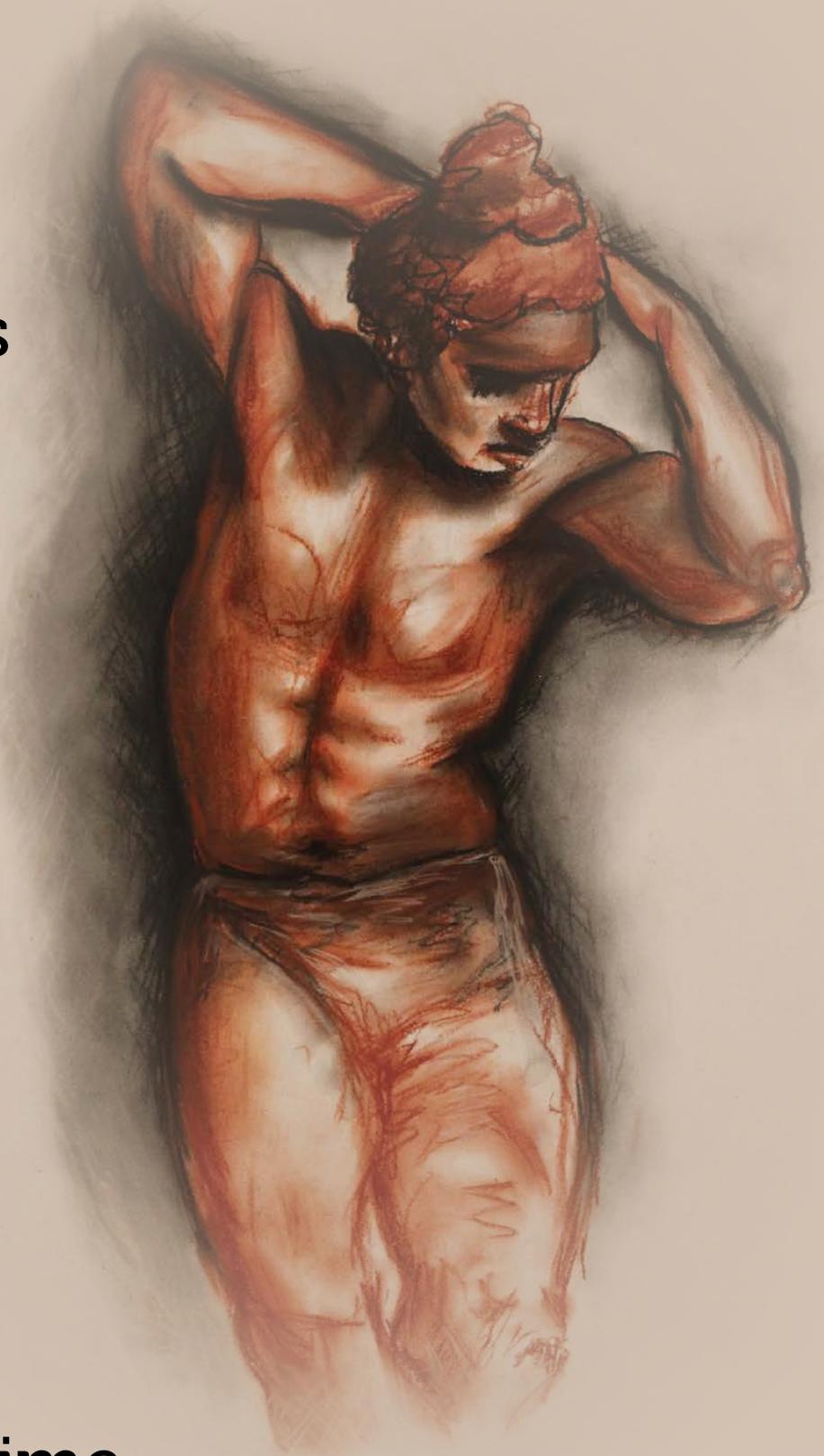
Silence.

I look down to the brilliant statues below and back to him, holding his phone to his ear. Slowly, I pull mine from my back pocket and press it against the side of my head. "Update," I say. "I made it back. Now I'll see that sunset you talked about." I look at the edge of the world. And wait for night to fall.

The Ancients

by Mario William Vitale

It's my last day with the old giants
In mourning I hike the lost trails,
sniffing the aroma of the bark,
that cinnamon of the forest
Under tepees of wood
in a membrane of shadows,
I stalk the earth, its mammal traces,
its elusive tracks,
to sit on a fallen log
where spiders macramé,
moss sloping to my knees
unaware of invisibles within,
grubbing in their tunnels
A lizard taps my foot,
responding, I muse to its touch,
my thoughts like Indian visions,
And when daylight mushrooms into night,
and an owl hoots from cedar,
I still sit with a lizard on my shoe
Huddled with the ancients of the woods



Mother Time

by Anonymous

Between her slender fingers she pivots the earth
Amused by how the blues and greens twirl
We let the motion power us
Letting it rock us and push us, haunt us and slow us.
Our lives are dictated by her constant motion.
A motion beautifully blind to us.

Red Confidence by Kathryn Jones

Rebirth of the Earth

by Isobel Li

2079

The sky outside is an awful dusty grey-red color.

Outside the glass dome of the city, you can see toxic clouds clutter the dirty colored sky.

Inside though can be described in one word – vibrant.

It's a rain fest, and although real rain can't enter the Glass Dome City (not that you'd want it to – the rain would be acidic), the rainmakers at the top of the dome let down a steady drizzle of clear water.

Strings of colored lights decorate the streets and houses within the glass.

It's beautiful but it's fake.

Inside the dome, people laugh and run through the streets, enjoying the 'rain.'

Outside the dome, there are curling wisps of smoke and radioactive substances climbing into the sky.

2225

The real sky is blue.

The first people of the Earth recorded about this blue. They recorded how it was blue and perfect, then the greys cluttered the sky.

The blue came back, along with the greens.

All the greenery inside our City is genetically modified from plants that the people saved. But outside the dusty glass, all you can see is a blur of greens.

Dark forest green. Jade green. Lime green. The trees and plants have begun growing back and it's like a new Earth.

But inside the dome, glass panes have started cracking. Repairmen are constantly being called to fix things. We can clean the glass within the dome, but on the outside, there's no way. The oxygen cleaners and temperature keeping machines have started breaking down, which causes a mass panic.

And conflicts have arose in the once safe-haven for human kind. Everyone

asks the same question: should we leave the City?

back to 2043

We were the reason Earth lost its beauty. We killed it.

Slowly, but surely.

So all we – the corrupted governments, the terrified people, everyone – can do is to wish that the future generations will not make the same mistake.

Reporters run around in a mad dash, interviewing terrified pedestrians and worried-looking politicians.

2043 – THE END OF THE WORLD, newspapers blare. WHAT COULD WE HAVE DONE TO PREVENT THIS? WHAT ARE WE GOING TO DO NOW?

People are fighting others, desperate to get the last bit of food and supplies. Governments are on the verge of collapse from the angry responses from the commoners.

But not all hope is lost yet. The uninhabited Glass Dome Cities are all perfect places for the people to live, only requiring a few minor adjustments.

So now it's a race for the people to enter

the Cities until they're filled to maximum capacity.

back to 2027

A few genetic scientists have become the world's laughingstock. Planning to create several animal domes for genetically modified animals was their goal. What they got? Failures.

The hybrid prototypes all ended up dying. But by then, the domes were already built, the money already spent.

Little did they know that the Cities would come in handy one day.

2226

A new world.

A new start.

They promised to themselves that they wouldn't destroy Earth again.

Through time, a lesson was taught.

A story was told.

A future was created.

Bedridden by Cody West



divination for the divine

by Alrishia Shea

look at them,
so cavalier, drinking
future-liquor in a future-

bar kissing the wounds
of future-lovers and
crisscrossing their future-

scars
look at them,
so ambiguous, with

their they/them body
and name and
baggy clothes. look at

them, going to future-coffee
shops just to hear a barista say
their name and believe each syllable. look

at the sky with its
gaping-wide pupils in
its switched role with

our globe now neon
gleaming and bloodbright.
we are the light we see.

we are
the light we see. we are all
asterism now, not the prim

& proper of
constellation. we are
starless and proud, stellar

pollution be damned to hell
with the rest of them. we
cannot decide between light-

-house or
lampshade, but what's the difference? sleepy
pattern-finder, rest your desperate

eyes; there are no constellations left
to reach for – the whole astral
succession

has spun apart, the sky
our idols saw is gone. there
are no stars left to see, there is

no new zodiac,

and thank god for that.

Boy Without a Pearl Earring by Gavin Mullin



Jasmine People

by Emma Olinger

On a Friday in the middle of January at about 12:30 in the afternoon, a little less than 10 people occupy the Chinese Cuisine. Among the nail salon, the boutique, and the FedEx office, it waits for customers. Everyone has been there at least once, but no one has really noticed the significance of this place. I sat alone at a table, knowing I should return to school, yet also being intrigued by the small restaurant. I wanted to see normal people having a normal lunch at a normal restaurant. The waitress hovered over my table, waiting for me to order. I knew what I wanted, but I also knew I couldn't sit there with nothing more than six crab rangoons stuffed onto a small plate. So I ordered something as a lunch special and waited. I was intrigued by my phone, but more intrigued by the people who sat around me.

When I entered, I noticed a man sitting alone, watching the political commentary show on the flatscreen that hung diagonal from where I sat. He appeared as if he were waiting for someone. His mannerisms dictated that he was worried. I watched his foot peer out from underneath the table, tapping quietly on the ground. His hands were folded. The show took the worries off his mind, I suppose. After a few minutes, a waitress walked to his table with a check, and the uncomfortable look on his face was swept away. They stumbled through a conversation due to the lack of the waitress's English knowledge. However, they still talked like normal people, and I couldn't take my eyes off of it. She asked where he worked, he told her. He asked if she liked her job, she replied. They shared a couple jokes and smiled at each other. As he exited, the waitress went back into the kitchen, and chattering, exited the bright room. I leaned back in my seat and glanced up to the television that sat in the corner of the room, pursing my lips as I watched the headlines scratch across the screen. Bored with the program, I started to notice people talking around me. A conversation that brewed behind me was that of two middle-aged women. I made up their back-stories in my head. One lived south of the restaurant on three acres with her husband and daughter, who attended my school. The other was her friend who was visiting from out of town. They talked about the program on the television, praising the same conservative ideals I despised. As I listened, I felt a wave of discomfort come over me. They complained about immigration, called president Trump an "articulate man," and insulted the restaurant unknowingly. I wanted to turn around and say something; anything. I wanted to tell them to stop their conversation and continue it in the privacy of their homes. I wanted to educate them on their perceived ignorance. But while I read these options off in my head, I realized I was just as ignorant to them as they were to me. The waitress returned and sat a small bowl of sweet-and-sour soup before me. I thanked her and began eating.

Suddenly, a familiar tune came to my ear as I heard two people, one man and one woman, singing happy birthday to a hefty man that sat across from them. He chuckled and waved his hands at them, wanting them to stop. Much to his dismay, they persisted. At the end, he smiled and clapped for them, deciding that the opinions of those who sat in the restaurant did not matter. It was his day. After listening to their conversation, I assumed they were co-workers for some company that stuffed them in cubicles. They could have taken their food back to the office with them but decided they could miss an extra hour from their lunch break for the man's birthday. He wiped his scruffy chin with a napkin and set it back on the table, drumming his fingers on the glossy wood. I thought of how his birthday dinner would look; I saw his wife standing behind him, his two kids at each side, aiding him in blowing out his candles. I also saw him sitting alone in a dusty apartment, eating a bowl of ice cream while watching TLC on his television.

I handed the waitress my money and stood to leave, making sure to grab my wallet and my phone. I peered back to the table and noticed a single fortune cookie sitting ominously, its plastic casing just as glossy as the wood it sat upon. Swiftly, I picked it up and took it with me to my car. Back at the restaurant, I imagined the man who sat alone at a table hoping his fortune would give him some clue as to how to approach a relationship with the waitress. I saw the two women open their fortune cookies to find something that gave them a little more perspective on the world. I witnessed the man with his co-workers crack his cookie open and find a slip of paper that contained winning lottery numbers. As I drove away from the Chinese restaurant, I watched it disappear from my rear-view mirror. I wondered what the Jasmine People would find in their fortunes, and I wondered what I would find in mine.

Sitting at a red light, I decided it fit to open my cookie. I was hoping to find some meaning to that lunch, some meaning to the stories I heard, to the time I spent with people I had learned to know but who would never know me. I felt the cookie crack in my hand, and glanced down to find my fortune. What did I find?

Nothing.



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SHOOTING STARS SCHOLARS

Special thanks to the Shooting Stars Recognition, Scholarship and Awards program from the Arts Council of Johnson County. Authors and artists with * next to their names are part of the 2018 program. For more information about the Shooting Stars, please visit them on the web:

artsjoco.org/shooting-stars

MAP Testing

by Stephanie Kontopanos

"Take all the time you need,"
They said.
But now I'd much rather be in bed,
Because I'm 76 today.
My life is beginning to fade away.
"Take all the time you need,"
They said.
I hope you're happy.
Now I'm dead.

young old man by Te'Rasya Khalifah



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elementia
issue xvi

BREAKING
FREE

Standing up for what you believe in is a big part of growing up and learning how to break out of your shell. Whether it's something as little as changing the way you dress or as big as taking charge of your own future, we are wondering what makes you bold-how do you defy the status quo?

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Variable

by SJ Dahms

They say that time is a constant,
In math world it is an unchanging letter k.
But I say that it becomes a variable,
A perfect letter x.
Time can be carefully controlled, ceaseless,
A cascading current.
But time becomes elastic, expendable,
An extraordinary extreme.
We can not change the flow of time,
But daily we bend and create extra minutes.
Time is ever present and immovable,
Yet we often lose track of it.
Time is fixed history and a changing future, the never-ending reminder that nobody has forever.
Time keeps a repetitious rhythm, freezing just when we thirst for rapid rays of sun.
It can be bought, wasted or stolen. Lost or uncontrollable.
Time is incessant,
Yet we contain an unknown supply.
Time is always expensive,
But it is valued at different rates.
Oh yes time is a variable that we constantly seek and don't know why.

