



Art and Literary Journal



Online Edition

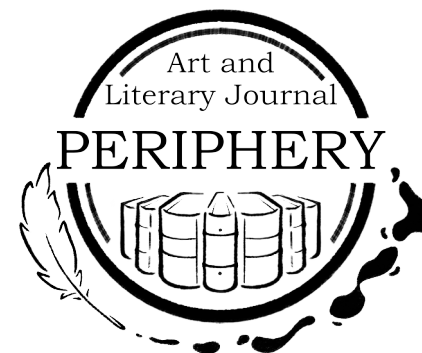
Periphery Art & Literary Journal

*Edition 62
2025*

About

Periphery Art and Literary Journal is an annual, student produced publication at Drake University. Funding for *Periphery* is provided by the Board of Student Communications. Contents and opinions in this journal do not reflect those of Drake University.

For more information: www.peripheryjournal.com



Submission Process

Submission to *Periphery* is free and open to undergraduate students from around the globe. *Periphery* accepts stories, photographs, poems, songs, essays, paintings, videos, interviews, digital art, sculptures, graphic narratives, spoken word, comics, and other creative works, including works from genres that have yet to be recognized. All submissions are sent through a blind review process by the Editors-In-Chief, Art Directors, and Editorial Staff. *Periphery* reserves the right to edit any and all submissions, but does not claim the rights to any published work.

Acknowledgements

Periphery 62 was greatly aided by Carol Spaulding-Kruse, Lakshmi Tirumala, the Board of Student Communications, Drake University, and Sigler Printers.

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Letter From the Editor

About five minutes away from Drake's campus, there's a Caribou Coffee on Ingersoll Ave that I frequent. In the store, they have a chalkboard where they'll write a question for customers to leave responses to. Usually the question is something simple asking about people's favorite animal or favorite Thanksgiving food, but one time there was a question I found shockingly profound: "What keeps you up at night?" As soon as I saw that question, I became attached to the title *Up At Night* and filed it away as a potential concept for *Periphery 62*. I pitched the idea to the staff this past fall semester, and everyone got on board with it. Now you're holding it in your hands.

Though this was my third year as a staff member, it was my first year being Editor-in-Chief. It was a lot of fake-it-till-you-make-it and asking questions when I was confused. I'd like to extend thanks to Carol Spaulding-Kruse, Gina Ryan, and Lakshmi Tirumala for being such supportive Drake faculty and always answering my questions when I had them. I'm also lucky to have an incredible staff working with me, and I'd like to express my gratitude for their continued commitment to making *Periphery* a quality journal. Both Emma Masso and Stella Pilhstrom deserve an extra round of thanks for going above and beyond to help me this year.

Most importantly, I'd like to thank everyone who submitted their work for consideration, whether accepted or not. I'm constantly surprised at the creativity and skill of our applicants, and I'm honored to work for a journal committed to showcasing the excellence that undergraduate artists have to offer.

Finally, thank you to all of our readers. I hope you find many pieces within this journal that speak to you and maybe even a couple that keep you up at night.

Avery Hjelm
Editor-in-Chief, 62nd Edition

Edition 62 Theme: "Up At Night"

What keeps you up at night?

Are you out in the city under neon lights, dancing to dreamy synths and heavy bass? Are you hours deep into a conversation with your closest friends? Do you lay by yourself in the dark, gripped with anxiety and dread and unanswerable questions? Are you creating by lamplight, inspired by a quiet world?

Whatever the case, one thing's for sure: night is where the magic lives.

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Literature

Kuchisake Station

Abigail Taylor

TW// Gore

3:04 a.m.

The smudged watch face doesn't show any injury, but Sato taps it anyway, frowning with an impatience he doesn't really feel.

"I've gotta get this thing checked," he mutters, scanning the deserted subway station. A broken analog clock hangs near on the left wall but provides no greater clues—merely a uniformly black minute hand perched precariously pointing to 4.

Sato resists the urge to facepalm and continues looking around. The 25-year-old salaryman had decided to take a different route home from his weekly karaoke, for better or for worse. As he had begun to regret the whole endeavor, sometime around 3, the unmarked station revealed itself like a blessing from the heavens. Though right now it feels more like a hex.

Another train speeds through without sparing a glance, the third since Sato arrived on the platform. The shrill, roaring vibrations make his teeth rattle and the lamps flicker, disrupting the hazy yellow that illuminates the grimy platform.

After a moment, the electric humming settles back into a steady whine. It just barely provides enough light to see the walls, which must have been white once; time had stained the tiles into some color Sato doesn't care to put a name to. A few advertisements for indistinct products plaster the walls at regular intervals, and the faint but insistent glow of the watch still reads 3:04 a.m.

Pulling the phone from his pocket, he immediately returns it as the dead battery icon flashes onscreen. "Terrific. Just my luck."

At least today's a Friday, he muses with a sigh. Squinting and yawning widely, he tries to convince himself that the station holds the same comfort as the cramped apartment waiting in Shibuya. It doesn't work, and he elects to just close his eyes instead.

The fourth train speeds through, and Sato nearly gags, the rushing wind carrying a lingering stench of carrion.

As his eyes open to stare out over the tracks, the click of footsteps abruptly reaches his ears. They come to a stop close to the man—just over the faded yellow line keeping riders from an excruciating death on the rails. From out of the corner of his eye, he spots a tall figure in a white yukata, though long, black hair covers its face.

He checks his watch again.

3:04 a.m.

"A bit of an odd station, isn't it?" He asks, swallowing a yawn. The figure in white doesn't respond. When he opens his mouth to try and disrupt the humming silence again, she speaks.

"Am I pretty?"

Sato's polite icebreaker dies in his throat. "Pardon?"

The woman turns to look at him, and he takes a step back. The white surgical mask that hides her mouth sets off alarm bells in the brain of the germaphobic man, but that doesn't stop him from dimly noticing her clothing. She folded her yukata wrong—right over left.

"Am I pretty?" she repeats flatly. Blunt bangs just barely brush the tips of thick lashes, but her dark eyes have the dullness of a corpse.

Sparing another glance at the 3:04 a.m. on his watch, Sato clears his throat.

"You shouldn't judge yourself by others' standards of attractiveness," he says, wincing at the stilted delivery.

"What—"

"The, uh— the image of beauty that society pushes on women is way too harsh, in my opinion. I guess it doesn't really matter since I'm a guy, but I think it's pretty messed up."

The woman stares at him.

He continues, trying to ignore his reddening cheeks.

"Uhm— I'm trying to say that it doesn't matter if I think you're pretty. What matters is that you think you're pretty."

Her incredulous gaze follows him as he makes a hasty retreat up the dingy stairs; the remains of the wall clock seem to mock him.

Tokyo's cool night air helps settle his senses, thankfully. He runs a hand through his hair, silently cursing.

"She was flirting with you, idiot," he scolds. "That's— that's definitely how flirting works. You should have just told her she was pretty. Ugh, what a nightmare..."

He turns back towards the subway entrance, hoping to head back down and try salvaging any shreds of dignity. The sight that greets him freezes the man in place.

The woman stands before him, mask now dangling from a limp hand. An open Glasgow smile slits her face from one ear to the other, creating a permanent grin still oozing blood from its jagged, blackened edges.

A Kuchisake-Onna.

Sato tries desperately to unfreeze his brain and recall any information about the folkloric figure. A spirit with a permanent scar that corners solitary travelers...

His eyes fall to her other hand. Rusty scissors rest between sharpened nails, and it recalls with icy dread the rest of the urban legend to his mind.

He'll be wearing a scar that matches hers soon. That is if she doesn't just kill him for answering so stupidly.

Her frowning lips move, voice nearly too soft to hear.

"No one's ever told me that before."

Before he can convince his heart to beat again, she turns. The spirit's steps echo as she descends again into the subway, mist trailing in her wake. It crowds the sidewalk before clearing to reveal an empty expanse of Shinjuku pavement.

He lets out a breath—it fails to calm him, but it's at least a reminder that he's still alive and unscarred. Approaching the spot where the station had been, he sticks a foot out and prods the concrete. Completely solid.

"Okay—" he mumbles, immediately backing up.

"Okay, that— hm. Okay. That's— that's, uh..."

After getting a good distance between himself and the spot where the Kuchisake-Onna had stood, he turns and immediately begins power-walking away. To where? He doesn't know. His apartment, hopefully.

When he's a safe few meters away, he checks his watch.

3:05 a.m.

Rind

A. J. Frantz

Bitter fruit, so plush
and round, waxy iridescence.

She cups its face between her thumb
and her knife, an effortless caress
of steel that reveals its flesh—

rows of blood-red pearls
and pockets of bone.

She watches her hands
trail its ink, trying to mend
each cut back together

but juice is already flowing
and pooling,

staining the air
a fragrant pink.

Patch Un-Stitched

Chris Stephens

the question I keep returning to is what love is supposed to feel
like;

I'm not certain I've ever felt
it before and the not knowing makes me feel so, awfully, not
human. Where, in the body, am I supposed to feel... this? Is it
sparks, bubbles, a sharp piercing? A cutout of a heart made in the
soft fabric of a calico cotton ribbon skirt, I'm hanging it up on
a clothes line to dry in the wind; I've been
trying to meet your eyes through
the ho <3 le. Is
love the space
between us? I dug
my fingers into my po-
cket and they came out cover-
ed in chocolate, I wanted to save
something for you but ended up with
periwinkle jeans cover ed in cordiform goo;
it melted away before I even had the – chance to say
I... I ask myself not who?, but when? and what? Not you.
But now, and then foxglove comes to fruit; my fingers smell
bittersweet like soap mixed with skin– but I'm solemn it's salt
and sucrose instead of you. Was it love? I ask. Was it love? That
made me stay when everything was telling me to go, is it love
that bleeds on our memories in sanguineous blue washing away
any hope I have of hating you? Tears trickle down my face like
rain running in rivers from the mountains to the moon; any-
little-thing could destroy me, I think. In my culture we do not
touch so I touch you

with my words praying that you understand what I'm trying
to say –even though I know you never will. I let the snow
frost over my sugar cookie of a heart, a winter in the storied
silphium blooms of this:

my spring

The question I keep returning to is what love is supposed to
feel like;

A cutout of a heart made in
my fabric,
blank,
but filled with writing

The Eagles are Coming

Patricia Kowalkowski

Wings of an Eagle may raise you up
but the Crows descend in plucking blows.
Sharp beaks piercing, aiming at the chinks or your armor,
Drowning the once protected self in a sea of inky feathers.

A breath of dawn, a signal of hope, opens wide across the
sky, but the mist of death slinks into the cracks we hide.
A dense fog suffocating, and entrapping,
pulling you down to its hallowed halls.

Rays of sun cut through the horizon ushering in the day,
but the night reigns again in its absence.
An ever-present shroud of shadow that licks away at any
blaze,
extinguishing the fire within.

Through pestering hordes, that beat you down
Through heavy trials, that burden you.
On Eagles wings your dreams fly unchained,
Soaring to unbounded heights.

Fox and Hound

Charlie Jae

TW// Child Death

The creek, voice a whisper, callin' her name,

"Have you ever heard of the game Fox and Hound?"
Ellie asks, picking up a stone and tossing it into the river.

"The urban legend?" Marcus replies, looking up.
"Vaguely."

"Wanna play?"

"Remind me how to play."

Ellie immediately launches into a long winded explanation. Rather quickly, Marcus grows bored of listening. He catches bits and pieces of her explanation, but he misses a majority of what Ellie explains. Honestly, if he could have it his way, he wouldn't even be hanging out with his cousin. Quite frankly, he finds her rather annoying.

A lullaby carried on the night's cool flame.

"Got it?" Ellie asks, smiling.

"Yeah."

Ellie hands him a dish soap bottle full of baby powder, smiling. "And remember, don't lead the trail back home."

Oh, the fox is runnin', but the shadows are near,

Marcus doesn't respond verbally. He just gives a noncommittal grunt. Immediately, Ellie starts the timer at five minutes, setting Marcus off. When he first starts walking, Ellie calls to him, urging him to run. So he does, but only because he's competitive, not because he secretly enjoys playing childish games like this with her.

Through blood-soaked earth, fog thick with fear.

As he runs, he leaves sprinkles of the baby powder. Time passes, not that he's properly counting. He's too busy running and huffing. Ellie is on the middle school's track team and has won gold at every meet she's ran in. He's never cared too much about long distance, more into pole vault. Marcus's bottle is about half empty at this point, and he's unsure how long he's been sprinting.

The hounds' breath howled, like the wailing of graves,

In the far distance, he hears Ellie begin to scream and holler. Another rule, he assumes. It wasn't one of the rules he caught in her tangent. He also knows now how long he's been running and that the five minute headstart he had is over. Hopefully she catches him rather quickly so he can go home and do literally anything else.

Dark begins to set as he continues. The screaming and hollering only gets more distant as he goes. It doesn't sit right with him, but he figures she's trying to drag this out longer. He tries to ration the baby powder now as well, leaving smaller and smaller hints as to where he's running as he goes. Even still, the baby powder eventually runs out.

And the trees bent low, oh, 'ere whisperin' in waves.

Sighing, Marcus stops and looks around for where he can hide. He had heard the rule about hiding once you run out of baby powder. But he knows Ellie had said something else that he had, in fact, not caught. Eventually, he settles on climbing up into a tree. As he starts to climb, his breathing gets loud enough to drown out Ellie's distant noises. Which, honestly, made him feel good about his chances of winning.

The night fell silent, but the moon turned red,

Marcus settles on a branch big enough to hold his weight. Sighing, he waits to hear Ellie's noises only to hear absolutely nothing. The light breeze rustling leaves is gone. There are no birds or no distant screaming from his cousin-just deafening silence. He almost starts to climb down the tree when he hears leaves and branches cracking as someone approaches.

Oh, the fox's last breath was a cry for the dead.

A hand grabs him, yanking him off of the tree branch. His body hits the ground hard. He lets out a wounded noise as pain shoots up his spine. Before he can react any further, the hand drags him back, across the leaves and roots. He screams, realizing Ellie could never drag him like this. She can barely lift her younger brother. Marcus tries to catch sight of whatever is dragging him, but leaves are quickly covering his face as he's dragged into the ground.

For when the hounds caught, the ground did they stir,

He screams and claws at the dirt. Panic fills him as the dirt refuses to give way. Seconds melt together as he struggles against the dirt, terrified as he keeps growing colder. His movements grow more sluggish, more rigid. Marcus finally grows still, waiting. Moments pass before paws breach the dirt. It's scent dogs, barking. People approach quickly. Two pull the dogs away as another two keep working at the dirt. Of the two remaining, one freezes as the other gags, staring at Marcus' decaying body.

Oh, but something before had taken her.

Babylon

Marguerite Gillaspie

When the tide turns
And divine wrath rains down upon you
When the rein is pulled taut against the
Bridle in your mouth and you feel your
Teeth
Grinding and grounding themselves to salt
When you wish for your tongue
To be cut from your mouth
To communicate with your hands
To violently gesticulate

When Babylon falls
You imposter queen
Mother of whores, of late-night screams and wails
Will find yourself among the ruin
In the tower you watched from
Writhing in dirt and mud
Thighs pressed together arms taught
You wretched things will burn with
Those beautiful ones

Age of Apples

Julia Cote

TW// Self Harm

I made an origami swan of all
apples I wished to stop rotting
but died regardless—which the dying
often do. With one quiver of my eyelashes
I send it across this lake I've been collecting.
In it, dreams bloom like algae in August
and then seasons do what seasons do.

In each crease I also tucked, "Kill me!
I still feel seventeen!" with variations that
reference the drugs I was given or that I took
to stop any number of self-inflictions,
but as its me, surely no less than fifteen.

It sails slow, for it is heavy, unlike
all those bottles I found the bottom of—

such dying stopped time and I haven't
aged a day since. If you don't believe me
watch how long it takes a bouncer to
read the
birthdate
on my
ID.

We Called it the Old Bridge

Isabel Jungclaus

It looms silent
and stark from sweet
late autumn decay,

the foundation of stone and mortar,
relic of a bridge long
burned in a brothers' war,

now a shelf overshadowing
the Susquehanna's winding about the toe
of old Columbia's muddy boot.

A vagrant sheltering here—
only a stumble's distance
from the railroad which

mirrors the course of the river
as it slopes southward,
Chesapeake-bound—

as they might doze under
spirits' phantasmagoric veil,
precarious as their head

inches down with
the current's magnetism,
might perceive dimly across

the long line of illuminated
islands of pylons supporting intervening
sky clear across to the other side

like sentinels under a red moon,
flames glowing, rioting,
and lapping about the skirts

of tawny rocks that jut
dangerously in times of drought,
conjuring them into writhing

salamanders and bringing
the Susquehanna to a boil
with singeing lashes from their tongues.

Atavistic whooping might echo, rifle
cracks might snap over the flat
black water from Wrightsville,

as had happened once
a century and a half ago.
At length awaking to the violence

of dawn's deep violet,
the vision fades, submerges
again beneath the surface.

Marked by Winter

Lucy Dale

I wearily step on his tracks in the snow,
created by the laced-up boots I gifted him
for Christmas, wrapped in yellow tissue paper
and placed gently in a box. Now, his boots mark
my path, and we walk in silence, only interrupted
by huffs and announcements of hidden ice.

We hiked this trail when the sun had melted the ice.
I hate winter. I am not an angel in the snow.
My face flushed then, for his body didn't interrupt
mine, my face did not freeze, it heated for him
and when he uncovered his small knife to mark
our initials in the bark, I loved him, not just on paper.

If we fall in summer, when the air is as thick as paper,
what is there left to do in the fall? My ice-
roller evaporated the puffiness in my face, marking
my cheeks red, my heart still swollen. It's snowing
in Australia, we will escape the chill he said, he
promised not to let the Mid-West's seasons interrupt

our summer of sweat and sweet glances, interrupted
when our eyes close and lips touch. He had a paper
pinned on a bulletin board, stained with my kiss, his
reminder: we weren't always surrounded by icing-less
trees, we bloomed, then began to freeze in the snow-
covered field behind the house with the bed marked

with my purity. Snow can only last so long unmarked
by something deemed impure. Him. He interrupted
me and I was grateful because he told me to be. Snow
melts to slush, seeps into my boots like water into paper,
but he says I should've worn thicker socks, a heart of ice
would have also been nice. Fall's wind separated him

from the hero he presented as in the sun's warmth, he
didn't speak of Australia. I added layers and marked
the days until he stormed out—a frozen calendar, icicles
on its cover. He spoke without interruption,
like the dictator of our love. His glares slice like paper-
cuts, sharp and unseen, so I walk behind him, my snowy

footprints in his line. In our ice-covered conversations, he
never tries to melt the snow. His words, like frostbite, mark
me red and puffy. He is an interruption better left on paper.

Thaw

A. J. Frantz

Even in the dead of winter
in the city of dogs,

some warmth exists
in the glass dome by the river
where men twiddle around like pill bugs,
shuffling between the orchids and snake plants.

Across the ice, trucks
rush back and forth
with bellies full of rum,
melting the world
into slush beneath them—

back and forth,
gray and black
liquified
onto asphalt.

The ball cacti blush, so far from home,
on an island, in a river
in the smog-painted snow.

Their roots try to take hold
in curated soil
as the conservatory
grabs white sunlight
and doesn't let go.

Transmutation

Florina Petcu

TW// Suicide

From the perforated windowsill
the sunflower watches
her unrestrained sisters
turning in unison
east to west

it tries to reach out to them
from its confinement
in the early hours
when they are laughing
at the world's problems

nimbostratus reigns the sky
in the dark
the sunflower still bends
seeking for a sliver of light
desperate to survive.

the scrawny girl
with blue striped dress
and braided yellow ponytails
embraces the pot softly
desperate to survive

seed offering

the little hand plucks
the dark tear shaped seeds
hand tremor, kernels scatter

the girl gathers them
with ravenous desire
she fits them between her dry lips

all that she ate that day

stiffen by lignin
the sunflower carries the weight
of her dark thoughts
the darker
the stiffer
cold sidewalk cracks
have filled with empty hulls
have filled with empty hopes
too many mornings pass too fast
no one remembers it survived

but her

the scrawny woman
with black dress and glassy eyes
unbraided faded yellow hair
her feet rush in broken shoes
desperate to not survive

she holds the potted sunflower
in a tight but gentle grip
taste of kernels and lost youth
sweat hugs her temples
desperate to not survive

cemetery ahead

dirt under the nails
chapped lips on the yellow crown
in a last kiss
a black shadow confined
by crimson rivulets

pulse offering

the sunflower watches
broken pieces of its confinement
that brought the long-desired
freedom to be unrestrained
like her sisters.

Twelve Steps from the Grail

Isabel Jungclaus

...and the wisdom to know the difference.

Amen.

Would anyone care to share? How about you, sir?

*We're all proponents of anonymity here,
but perhaps you could lift up your visor
so we can hear you?*

Ahem.

My name is Parzival, and I'm a recovering chivalric.
I chased the Quest before I ever learned the Code;
chafing for the next damsel, the next duel,
the next relic of recondite marvel—
each lovelier, more illustrious, more sublime than the last.

(Even as I sought the Grail, I won much else
which was rare and renowned—
the Thirteenth Whisker of St. Francis' Favorite Cat,
for example,
ah, and St. George's Scorched Fingernail,
in its reliquary the size of a raspberry...)

With every victory I craved more; I cared not
for the corpses I robbed of armor,
the maidens whose honor I spoiled.

(Oh, but the maidens...
The blameless Jeschute, serpent-tongued Sigune,
bewitching Repanse de Schoye—
though, certainly, none of these shone

with the brilliancy of my Condwiramurs
of the blood and the snow...)

It is true, I was a puissant knight of high conceit,
but I had yet to learn that there are no alchemical solutions
to spiritual problems.

It was thus that the Grail in its arcane glory
guided me to the Table of Bill and Dr. B.

It began with my mother, of course,
who coddled me in perfect "purity"
(to put it in plain English,
I was a paltering simpleton)

She once slit the pretty throat of every bird in our meadow
because their song made me melancholy.
(The somber state of your visages suggests
that some of you can relate)

Finally one morning she set me on the road,
a born knight in my prime dressed in a flour sack,
fool in essence and in aspect,
sowing sorrow wherever I went.
I know accountability is the cornerstone of the steps,
but really, who wouldn't have wound up a mess
raised in ignorance of one's noblesse?

*Please be aware of the time, Sir P,
it's getting late...*

The pale arms of my wife couldn't satiate,
so I left to press my mettle as a man-at-arms.
Supremacy in combat was not enough,
so I traveled further in quest of fame
until I found the House of the Grail,
that fugacious fastness of the Fisher King.

Blinded by dreams of Parzival in the ballads of bards,
 and the addling elixir of the blessed cup,
 I never thought to ask the King what ailed him
 (never mind that the gory red lance they paraded around
 should have made it fairly bloody clear)
 I left Anfortas unlamented to his fate,
 failed to break his curse,
 blundered to the bottom, but it gets worse—

One minute warning, Sir P

Well, progress not perfection, so they tell me.
 From lance to fine destrier,
 the very armor off my back, I lost all.
 The bard has long forgotten this chevalier;
 who among you knows the name Parzival?

...

I see. But perhaps you know me by another name,
 you see, there are many different spellings—

Alright! Sir—

Galahad claimed quest and prestige,
 and I am Parzival the Peasant once more.
 This is my last resort:
 my fellow fallen knights of the order of the Program,
 Sir Gawain, my sponsor,
 and the steps set forth in many a mildewy church lair
 that I would haunt to win
 worthiness of the Grail, and peace within.

Thank you for letting me share.

Weeping Clocks

Clover V. Gislason

Weeping clocks ticking
 faces. Time makes
 a fool of itself. Hands
 dance in a circle, though
 their master is no infinite thing.
 The end of the line
 drawn up in a circle. Looping
 looping. looping. Stuttering
 fools find not
 fault nor folly, as
 time carries on. They wonder. What if
 forever doesn't exist. What if
 time forgets itself. Do the clocks
 care if they stop ticking. The
 clocks have faces, though no
 mouths. If they tried
 to cry in warning. They would
 stutter a second then tick
 ever forward. Fear is written
 over their faces. Hands
 waving frantically. Gears rusting
 plastic decaying. They
 weep. Ringing, buzzing, pleading
 for their fear is not unfounded. Time
 stops like a heart. Bleeding
 numbers and nonsense. Simply
 forgetting to beat. Their gears
 slow. Without reason, without sense
 time stops

and the clocks scream.

Imagine Dancing

Greer Engle-Roe

Out on the lake for the first time,
I took pictures of the darkening sky,
how the airbrushed pastels caught

on the texture of the clouds.
I wanted to tell the dog
about the sunken pines

but he was looking left
at the buoys. If he leapt in
I wouldn't follow. My father

was the one who followed, kept my brother
in touch, gave him his breath back,
drove him to Indianapolis

to dance for the ballet. My brother
now spends his days in spin—
even his feet point outward

as he walks. I tell him
to imagine dancing by the Danube,
crawling through the catacombs

under the Stephansdom, to witness
the construction of Vindobona.
Here, touch the textures of this faded map,

where my coat is left on a sidewalk
bench, only one of many things
I've left behind. My brother tells
me he's sitting onstage, sitting

not lying down, still waiting
for the mice to carry him off in a chalice.

a familiar scene

M.S. Blues

the blackbird awaits
on the splintered remains
of the tree she called home,
for the liberation she was
promised by the fibbing
mouth of Activist.

Dandelions are the Prettiest Weeds

Ellen Lombardo

Hair strands flutter and bang against the back of her neck. She dances right on. Her socks waft along the chips of the floorboards as her knees tangle about in circles. I never knew a good time til my mom. She'd have 80's hits ringing in my ears the second I got home from school and she'd belch the lyrics as if judgment weren't a thing. It was just how she lived. Her energy had to fill every cranny of that house. That's probably why I can't do with the quiet now, why I have a song playing at every interval of lull, and why I can't stand wasting away at a single moment. She must be the reason I strut about when places are empty, why I talk too loud at the wrong time, why I can't ever seem to get my mind to shut it's ass up-

"Dandy!"

"I'm sorry, did I drift off again?"

"Yeah sweetie you did, where'd you go?"

Dandy didn't know why, but she thought more than she spoke. Her brain was a load of past feelings and ideas never quite good enough to get out. So they stayed there, pinned up and left to dry.

"Oh I didn't go anywhere, just a little sleepy is all."

"Long night?"

Dandy was a spare head kid. She wore clips in her hair

even though there was hardly enough to keep back, and her outfits were often just tee shirts with junked phrases. "Stinker Time", "Bugs Rule" and "Go to Heaven" were her favorites. She was her own for sure, got thrilled to sit atop a rock, call a dear friend, doodle on the edges of her paper. For her it was the little things that mattered. She walked with herself, talked to herself, sat by herself, and was alright in all of it. Like no kid was these days. The boring and the still, the ecstatic and the loud. Dandy could do it all. Though last night was an in-between. She stayed up writing lofts of new stories, feeling bulges of light. But her mood just so quickly turned sour by the sound of her mother in the other room. It was 3am by the time the glasses quit clinking, and her eyes were finally at ease.

"I guess you could say it was long."

"Was it your mother that kept you up again?"

"Partially, yeah."

Dandy was irked by her mother. She had annoying tendencies, like the tapping of her fingers on the table and the chewing of her gum at full volume. There were so many fixes, she couldn't help but contain. Like the slap tapping of her feet and the incessant blinking of her left eye. Her mom wore the ground down and made her eyes pant. Dandy wished she wouldn't.

"How did this all start?"

I was 5 when I first noticed. There was a bottle of sweet red wine tucked in between the dirtied clothes of the laundry bin. I was just trying to find my favorite striped shirt. But

the shirt was so petite in there, and that bottle was big and half empty, bulging right out at me. I couldn't unsee it. The shirt and the bottle. In the nooks of the couch cushions, behind the pots and pans, under her ruffled bed skirt. It was always cheap stuff, nothing to fuss over, just to get the job done. I never saw her drink, but I knew everytime she did. There was forever the stench of booze permeating from her mouth, the pursing smack of her lips. She hid it well, but not well enough.

"Um, I guess it started when I was younger and I found her empty bottles."

"Do you think she knew?"

"Knew what?"

"That you knew about her bad habit."

"You know I'm not so sure. I want to say no, but how could she not have. "

It took Dandy more than a little to get herself out there. Lots of kids her age were fine off doing these sorts of things- babbling on and on about their problems, opening up to complete strangers, outing every past mishap they've ever had. It was bullshit. She couldn't bring herself to it. Guess mom had edged it in her brain not to have problems or at least talk them into existence. So she bottled them up, cruised them to the outskirts, and plopped them over the side. That was Dandy for you. Friends had to nonstop berate her to get a bad word out. Family had to beg her to say what was wrong. And even then, she'd never be harsh. There was perpetually a bright side to all of Dandy's bullcrap.

"Dandy, you still there?"

"Oh geez, I'm sorry I keep doing that thing don't I."

"Yeah, a little bit. Could you tell me- does this happen a lot?"

"Um for a while now, a few times a day. In algebra and after 2nd period. In between lunch and recess. On the car ride back home. It's like I think I'm paying attention, in the present, and then all of the sudden- I'm not. I don't get the math problem, I don't know what we had for lunch, I don't see out the damn car window. I'm leaps and leaps away from what's happening."

Dandy fiddles with her thumbs and itches at her knees. It stings. She makes eyes around the room. It swells. She fixates on poster after poster, each claiming to solve her problems through the magic swing of a wand. She budes around in her wobbly chair. "The process works!" "On your journey to clarity." "Let go and let God." Her peepers move to objects. A buddha holding up a peace sign as if that will get her to chill the fuck out. She hated it. A dandelion with the tiny bristles flying away catches her iris. To be free. It was such a lie, but she really wanted to believe it.

"Okay, let's try to focus here, can we get back to your mother? Do you have anything that reminds you of her?"

There were pale notes written in startling bright ink taped sporadically across the walls of Dandy's room. She got them handwritten everyday in her lunch box, by her bedside, on the floor beneath her feet. All from her mother. Dandy kept hold of them till the day was over, pasted them when she was back home. If you ever got a glimpse into her room,

it was like walking straight into her mind. Crazy, absolute fucking insanity! Not one inch of wall could be seen. I love yous, reminders, and sweet farewell messages permeated any cracks, and Dandy was at ease. Her mom had that much to say about her.

"I said, do you have anything from your mother?"

"Oh sorry, just a few notes."

"Alright then, how do they make you feel about her?"

My mom was like being held when you got hurt, or the rosyng of your cheeks by the chimney. Or what I can only imagine freckles feel like in the sun. Good and full, held right in their spot. That's all I thought when I was younger.

Lately I've been pissy around her, then so quickly elated at the seams. But she's so much of me that I can't stay mad. The epitome of a fine thing. She'll scream for none other than a blue sky, and sink her teeth into being kind. It's wild. I want to be liked in all the ways she is, but I don't want to be hated for all the things she does. Gosh. I wanna be good, so goddamn good that that's all anybody ever says about me. There can't be shit tied around me, I can't be pinned to alcoholism. I can't get up everyday knowing I screwed up that bad. I'd be miserable. But then I think of mom. And if she is so much like me, then she must not like how she is either. No, she must be doing real awful deep down under all that brightness. And then I just feel bad.

"I feel confused, I guess. I don't think it's as simple as good and bad. Do you really have to feel all one or the other?"

"I think there's a lot to be said about the in-between, Dandy.

The not so sure and the completely spot on. You've figured that out, that's something."

"Yeah, I have. But now what? Knowing seems to have made me worse. Every time I think I've figured something out, I don't know what to do with it."

"Well-

"How am I supposed to go about my day when the good only accompanies the bad, and there is no one or the other?"

"I don't think anyone knows, we all just do the best we can. Dandy, would you mind being more specific about your mother, what is she like?"

Her mother had skin that sparkled gold. A body that was by no means pristine, but always felt homely when it was fixed right. She was outside a lot, hosing the grass with Dandy, painting the fence line when it turned dusty, and hanging the laundry on the wires. Her mom's hair had gotten scorched from all the hours she spent with her back turned to that lump of fire. But she didn't really care. Dandy and her mom became dotted specks of might, living their stinking lives of solitude, doing the tiniest of chores no one seemed to like to do. It was just kind to them. When they would finish working, Dandy would get spun by her mom, and the two would stretch out in the backyard till the sky went black.

A woman of simple pleasure. That was what she was. Dandy knew their life wasn't large, that there wasn't all that much going on. They watched their little drama filled shows to forget and played silly tunes to distract from the

lack. Her mom liked solid things though. A page in a book right before bed, her tea in the early morning hour, the mail at her doorstep by the afternoon ...

“My mom’s kinda like a dandelion.”

“Oh Dandy, what do you mean by that?”

You can be screwed up, and still be a good person.

My mom confused the baloney out of me. But a lot of things did. Like why weren’t there blinds on car windows, and how come I couldn’t ride in the driver’s side seat? Why did we have to wait in lines and who let there be a price on flowers? Rules exist for silly reasons, but we all abided by them. Why? I had a lot of questions for my mom. Like how come she always left for the gas station around 6, and always came back different. Why’d she talk funny and walk funny, and make just about no sense when it came time for dinner? And how come she passed out so early in the night that I went to bed after? I didn’t get it. But I couldn’t ask any questions, it was the rules.

“I mean a dandelion. Some people see them as ugly weeds that ruin their yards, some see them as sweet little flowers to pick. I think dandelions are the prettiest weeds.”

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Strength is a Myth

Lucy Dale

I stir from side to side, in the bed
that remained still, like an untouched
pond, as my body grew and my head
stayed furious. I wonder—if I brushed

my hair more, could I loosen the knots
inside my mind. I would provide the shears
if my mom could cut the tangled thoughts
out of my anatomy, saving me years

of wishing and hoping and taking multi-
colored pills—my bottled-up genie,
if I had three wishes, I’d beg for 16,
17, and 18, too. Strength is a myth;

I am no stronger. Wrapped in floral sheets,
I am strapped to the bed by my curls.

The Myth of Dry Drowning

Dashae Engler

I met the black boy,
his eyes coffee-brown in the dark
and honey-brown in the sunlight.
He creates an energy that is hard to articulate
because it must be felt.
So when I touched him, my hands were steady and sure.
And his were welcoming
with a tad bit of lonely,
We truly don't deserve him.

I listened to the black boy,
when he asked me,
Is there a place for me here?
Is there only room for forgiveness for the people we love?
I want to become the man my father wasn't able to be.
I promised him
wherever I go,
I have a special place for you
because my heart holds you there.
In that special place is my room
of space
for the people who have wronged me.
He worries so much about becoming his father,
but he is simply not made that way.

I pray for the black boy,
every time
he goes to the convenience store
takes a jog
or walks home with Skittles and Arizona Iced Tea.
I pray for myself
every time
I'm at a routine traffic stop
or pressing my bonnet on my pillow
with my eyes closed.
Because *you* don't deserve us.

Let me make myself clear.
How our humanity tastes on your tongue,
is not for me to understand.
I do, however, understand
the black boy
because I love him.
And all the complexities he has to carry.
Why can't the world see him through my eyes?
He is, after all, just a boy.

Cannibal

Ayla Danabasoglu

*TW// Self Harm,
Eating Disorder*

The creature that claws into the nooks and crannies of the brain
 The voice whispering what it promises is only the truth
 Crooning calculations designed to carve calories from curves
 It starts small.
 But like an invasive species, a parasite, a predator,
 Its hunger grows as yours diminishes.
 But it's not starvation. No. It's salvation.
 Devouring every iota of esteem, ignoring the gnawing in your gut
 Until your life narrows in on one incessant sensation: emptiness.
 But still the taste of guilt on your tongue weighs more
 Than the insatiable beast sucking dry every morsel of morality from
 The crevices of every organ, siphoning the body's fuel
 And demanding less, less, less, emptier, emptier, emptier.
 It infects, assuring consent, insisting symbiosis.
You are in control, it cajoles, even as its icy poison
 Trickles through constricted veins
 Traveling into hollowed wrists and narrowing fingers
 Wringing out the neglected stomach and integrating into protruding bone
 It permeates every sour breath expelled from exhausted lungs
 Until every living moment is consumed with food,
 Or rather, the lack of it,

And you can't remember a time when the whispering wasn't there.
 Perhaps the voice was always there, knocking around in the background.
 Waiting.
 The voice promised to help.
 It was a siren singing on the shores littered with jagged rock
 A phantom lighthouse luring in the tired sailor
 The trembling mirage of an oasis that catches the traveler
 Hook, line, and sinker.
 Now, it ingests your identity, snacks on your soul,
 Feasts on the fertile and futile promise of fulfillment.
 What was once invisible now emerges like a ghost, a skeleton
 In the closet of clothes that once fit and now hang,
 But its roots are so deep, tapping into spinal fluid,
 Drinking the liquid of life, sapping, draining, manipulating, exploiting
 A voracious weed weaved so deep in the brain
 That untangling it seems more troublesome
 Than simply letting it continue to grow, fester, infect.
Take me out, it whispers. *Take me out, and what will you have*
To fill the cavernous void that I leave behind?
What else but self-hatred and twisted scars?
Look in the mirror and into my eyes and
Tell me that you don't love the wretched creature
That stares back in your fragmented reflection
Tell me that you don't feel a shiver of pleasure –
 Shivering, it's cold, always cold, blue lips, purple fingertips–
Tell me you don't love the image of perfection.

So it nibbles and it gnaws with gnashing teeth
Canines snapping in ravenous mandibles
Its appetite will never be satisfied
Until it consumes you, mind, body, and soul
And still, it will suck the (nonexistent) fat from your bones
And lick its greedy lips with your tongue.
Still, it will stare you down with beady eyes
And tell you that you are the glutton.
And you, a matchstick memory, will believe it.

No More Summers in December

Sara Costa e Silva Santana

There are no more summers in December.
Sunbeams now are so flimsy and featherlight –
Like a cold hearth that won't abandon its dying ember.

I loathe the last week of every November.
Trees cry as they wither with the blight in sight.
Because there are no more summers in December.

Traces of my dear Melanin left me to dismember
A heart that curls inward to each pulse in fright.
Like a cold hearth that won't abandon its dying ember.

Birthdays with fireworks on Christmas – that I remember.
As clear as I recall my rosy cheeks, tight and bright.
And there are no more summers in December.

My visage ashens at the prospects of September,
When my blood is denied singing under sunlight.
Like a cold hearth that won't abandon its dying ember.

Should I let myself wrinkle and fade to a bland amber?
Become a bystander until my soul knows no delight?
There are no more summers in December.
Just a cold hearth that won't abandon its dying ember.

Lost Voices of War

Florina Petcu

Why doesn't the world care, mama?
stillness is untimely death
of young soldiers,
proud fathers,
courageous brothers
screams trapped
in the naked branches
of the silver birch trees
aligned
like soldiers falling in formation
at 0600 hour
Why do we have to be quiet, mama?
the silence is no longer safe
soundless lament
the cold lead demands
the respite of the night
worn out by chaotic spirals
of fire and smoke
in the morning crimson dew
When will it be over, mama?
the shrilled voice cuts through
the dark fog
hastier than the sirens
of our last breath
dark circles
new wrinkles
clenched teeth
shattered dreams

piercing questions
crush the chest harder
than the bullets
when they hit
the scarlet streets
guarded in vain
by the naked branches
of the silver birch trees
at 0600 hour
Why doesn't the world care, mama?

Breaking Ground

Kailey Morand

1.

On my first night, cramped in the abundance,
I clash with the confines of two-foot tall
sleeping quarters. Trained to be small, I'm
relentlessly successful. This travel trailer can hardly
hold a family of four, if you can call us that.

My moms are living in a compact vehicle
at the center of an empty acre, haunted
by the ghost of an unborn home. All but me
are given room to breathe; my space
is enclosed with bars, elevated and far.

Land must be cleared to allow
for new growth. The lesson we are taught Here
is that history can be eradicated
to make way for something fresh. Though I wonder,
will the shadows of trees past always loom?

Isn't it beautiful? Mama asks me,
of the land. Her wife Crystal, my stepmom
lurks to hear my response. Yes, but
are you two ever going to do something with it?

For the future to transcend
projection, blueprints must leave the page.
A custom home that can hold it all
must be outlined in carefully considered wood.
Catalogs, an exhibition for all

we could become. When does choice
empower, and when does it overwhelm
us until we are left frozen, decision-less?
The man who gave me half
of who I am has never seen the impact
of his donation. He'd be shocked to find
I look just like his mother.
His qualities were laid out
in front of my original mothers like charcuterie.
A slice of Ivy League with D1 athlete spread
on top. His dream was to sail the world.
Sprinkle that wanderlust on there, with a side of looks
like Brad Pitt. Who would I be
if they had chosen differently?
I am persistently astonished
when I come across photos of the two
of them, the originals, especially with the company
of smiles and cahoots, wine glasses in the corner
before my mother became my addict.

This coffee pot was transplanted
from the house that held me to eighteen,
their temporary home a museum
for all we grew out of. I wish I could find joy
in limbo the way they do, aspirant domesticity
seamlessly disguised as adventure. Flip flops carry them
to the joint they'll share on the barn porch:
through these images I find ancestry
in our bloodless relation.

The acre's dirt wouldn't budge
at first. It took them years to break
ground, the plans for years living
inside Mason's spiral notebook,

left over from the sixth grade. Those like us
were welcomed into a world to carve
our own home from unyielding dirt.
For them, there's a sort of ease about Texas.
A relation built seamlessly on allowances:
growth, family. With any sign of give, they forced
their roots further into the ground. In 2015, Texas gave
them marriage; they locked in. Maybe it is possible
to make paradise from purgatory.

2.

The home my first mother gave me was carpeted
by half-finished soda bottles. Virtue was unattainable;
effort was celebrated. I live now
in the first home I've built for myself, my first encounter
with the novelty of agency. Here I fall
asleep alone in a queen-sized bed,
the biggest I've ever had,
and out of my window is an eternal constellation
of other lives lit up like mine must be.

To rescue me she must penetrate the haze.
So many mothers in this story
I lose count. Ascending the endless
gravel driveway in the dark of 6am,
her headlights shine onto all she gave up.
I am weightless in this car, feet up
on the dash. This mom lets me play my music.

Now we will go east until we're barely in Texas
anymore. If I leave part of myself behind every time,
will anyone have the energy to remake me?

Once a girl traveled through me, once and then again
and again. I wish she would touch me again
the way she did before she knew
too much. Knowledge burns me every time.

I succumb to the spell of the trees, mesmerized
tirelessly. We make this drive four times a year,
and every time, I say I'll get my own car soon.

The nights I slept over, we'd decide
where we'd meet in our dreams next.
When baby monkeys are taken from their mothers,
they grasp desperately onto anything
that can hold them as tight. We worshiped
those tangible figments we met at night.
At the square park downtown. On a cloud,
waving into an airplane. I wrote
in a journal to her when I had to go
to Mama's. Mine had a lizard on the cover.
We'd switch each week, exchanging
that tugging longing that kept us bound together
even when I couldn't reach her. Physical space
will never hold as much as thought,
whose abundant capacity is a great host
for that gap between a daughter and her mother,
which always feels bigger than it seems.
But right now, she's in the driver's seat.

Begging my attention to turn to the fleeting,
the forest sings a strobe onto my page.
I put the book down. She speaks.

Is my worth buried in my provision?

Was I ever anything more
than the best available option?
They chose me once. I beg to be chosen
still, I never quite become
the image they form me in.
They set me aflame
to stomp me out. I regrow, resilient,
but exhausted.

Be careful with how much you ask
of me. My virgin pine
is only unharvested once.

3.

Mama and Crystal flipped through choices
of light fixtures and ceiling fans,
sure that one misclick could change
the course of the life they are building custom.
They share their progress. My language adapts
to unprecedented expansion. Flourishing. Joining
in a collaboration with the dirt, once it made way.

They say they'll FaceTime me next week
to take me around. I say we should set a date.
Interaction becomes codified. *I can't wait
for you to show me the next living room
I'll sit uncomfortable in.* Isn't it scary,
that one day soon it'll all come together?

I'm starting to think I'm wanted for what I may
become. A promising young woman, I am.
Clear areas for growth, but overall? Lots of potential.
My burns are not as controlled
as they seem. Walk through me and see singed
leaves on my branches the further inside you come.

I am their experiment, carefully concocted
from a catalog of possibility.
Inherently rootless, I embrace
opportunities to derive.
Last summer they closed me down. The whole
time she was home from college, they constructed me.
I allowed it, but yearned
for the whole month of August
that she could dive into my waters
while she was still somewhere
warm.

I'm what's best for her, I know it.
I constantly surprise them all
with my neverending accomplishments.
They need me to be good, because if not,
what was all that time and money spent for?

I've decided I won't go back
until my room is finished. I no longer fit
in the sleeping loft and I refuse to shrink.
I admire from afar
as Mama and Crystal craft a life
that will hold them,
their love, and their children
without question. As they build,
I take notes. It's a miraculous thing
to force the dirt to make space
for you.

Happy Birthday

Ayla Danabasoglu

My mother's birthday is tomorrow

My mother's birthday is tomorrow
Yet we all stand, clustered in front of the
Television, watching matchstick houses burn
Like candles on cake
Crackling flames and splintering wood
Crescendo into the melody: "happy birthday
To you, happy birthday to you"

My mother's birthday is tomorrow
But the sky is choked with fumes and our throats
Are choked with emotions
Everything is burning, burning, burning

My mother's birthday is tomorrow
And I can't close my eyes without seeing
Hungry flames devouring
Photographs, childhoods, livelihoods, dreams
Physical places that now exist only in memories

My mother's birthday is tomorrow
It is midnight now, eight hours of hell
As I stare at the ceiling
Of my grandparents' living room
(Sleep is elusive when your home is ablaze)
I can see the ghostly windows of houses
Illuminated by flickering flames

My mother's birthday is tomorrow
But when we wake up (if I fall asleep)
There may be no home to return to
Because there is no phoenix to rise
From the sooty ashes of
Unspoken goodbyes and charcoal wood
Still smoldering with the phantoms of flame

My mother's birthday is tomorrow
I toss again fitfully and in desperation
My brain tricks me into thinking the porch light
Outside is the wind-fueled flames
Famished despite their feasting
No gust of breath to blow them out with a wish
(I wish our home would survive)

My mother's birthday is tomorrow
There will be no candles on her cake
Smoke spirals in twists away from the blaze
Leaving a graveyard of memories in its wake
Tomorrow's blizzard will bury smoky remains
An apocalyptic juxtaposition of elements
Pure, tainted; beginnings, and endings
The cycle goes on, as a new dawn arrives
There will be fireworks tomorrow night
Even though it is New Year's Eve
It seems in poor taste, like candles on cake
But
My mother's birthday is tomorrow.

Make a wish.

Ignorantia Est Causa Belli

Patricia Kowalkowski

Muddy green, smears of dirt on men and tanks like white-gold banners adorning horses,
Knights of green kids, warriors of incessant turmoil.
Children play war, men act stoic holding guns, but few fire,
most posture, run, submit;
Shots fly amiss, into the air, into the bodies of shadow figures;
Suits in armchairs play dictator to protect, war is civil
Forgetting barbarity that lurks in every crack,
Man vs Man. Man vs woman. Man vs World.
Beauty only found in the rivers of vermillion and fleeting souls.

Pride. Duty. Attention, soldier!
A Spartan Mother bears children, admires their prowess,
strength, might, valor, honor,
Yes ma'am-ing until death;
Raise the child, the shield, raze the nation for *she* made the
Ultimate Sacrifice.

In rose tint, a woman cooks smiling broadly,
A "Good Wife" preparing dinner, prepping the house, caring
for children,
staying Silent and Obedient.
'Tis a man's job to protect,
Father children, innocent wives, a nation;
Women forget the power of the past, hidden behind men,
safeguarding peace and beauty-
Reverted from tigers to house cats.

If war is code, it is a tactical language to diminish life,
seductive in power.
If war is glory, it is a fanciful dream of innocent men, told
by fathers to "Become a man."
If war is just, the law is chaos forgetting "What is an
innocent?"
Is it noncombatants suffering as feared opponents,
Civilians living and dying, women, children.
Blurred lines are crossed repeatedly;
Life is not guaranteed the only rule.
Forget that it is sweet to die for one's country,
and ask why does man die and fight for a nation,
Question what is universal; as failure indites
The firm Truth: *Ignorantia est causa belli-*
Ignorance is the cause of war.

January

A.J. Frantz

I spend these winter days
finding ways to fill them,
adding art and music
to my colander body and
hoping they won't fall through.

These nights, the strain
of sunlight trickles away
and it's only myself and
the chipped plate in the sky
that seems to reflect
plush blankets of snow.

Layers of down replace
the harshness of sunlit skies
as they cradle me, pulling
me along these crunchy,
shiny, slippery streets.

I follow, finding the
stoplights where brakes
give out in seas of slush
and the church parking lot
where someone first called me
beautiful.

The steep shore where lake waves
crash on themselves is sculpted
with branches of ice, building

frozen husks of water that
once was, its low purr
quiet under inky stillness.

I find myself falling into the snow,
the fields of white flowers
and hydrangea clouds
that stain blue under my skin.

The ghost of my breath
lingers in the air
before fading away,
leaving me alone again
except for the silent
flurries that bury me.

Mother

Greer Engle-Roe

I watched you from the tired arm of the couch.
You strode down the stairs, passing the window
briefly—I saw the red of your cycling
cap. You left your broom folded up tight.

I listened hard to ignore you, gave you
my lost gaze, a single ear, the finger
I cut chopping kale. Mother, I can't say
I'm sorry. You've run down the street to grab

the last ingredients for dinner: broth,
rotisserie chicken, and shiitake.
My brother hasn't spoken of the note
crumpled in his pocket. A telephone

calls out softly in the cafe below;
it's the neighbor's retriever who answers.
We were not hungry, no, I should write it
down, I had lost my appetite to stay.

Cinematic

A.J. Frantz

We joke that this scene
is overdone, reserved
only for teenage protagonists,
as we stand in the rain,
kissing goodbyes
at the Greyhound station.

Is love not a little cliché,
as a story told
millions of times before,
each iteration and
generation continuing
the world's greatest trope?

Watching your bus pull away,
something finally clicks.

I feel each sonnet, ode,
and ballad settle deep
somewhere in my bones;
I tune into a tradition
as old as time and as fresh
as rain-soaked earth.

The Visitor

Yucheng Tao

As the golden color tenderly recedes,
With a sigh, a visitor
Is surely on his way.
Within a corridor
A harsh sound slowly approaches:
Claw prints,
Without a deep trace, only a meter away.
Perhaps a dark shadow looms,
Casting shades on the flickering light.

I fear the visitor is destined to arrive.
I can feel it bent on the reek
That is me.
I sink into my daffodils in the bedroom.
Drooping, their white petals briefly
Cover the glimmers of the dying moon,
When darkness is there, only a meter away.

Black feathers, with the coming night, intertwine
With a raspy voice, turning into a tapping.
No matter how I struggle, the visitor
Must follow its schedule,
Unchanged for eternity,
To the ferry of the Ghostdom.
My ticket is printed
In the age spots on my hands;
The final mark before decay.
The visitor glides inside my door, its smile
Gently arching, waiting, only a meter away,

For me to initiate the eternal sleep.

As the midnight tenderly rises,
My body trembles
Like willow branches.
Sitting up, I say,

“Mr. Raven, I’m not ready yet.”
Mr. Raven smiles,
He describes the other world,
Lacking the powerlessness of my world.



Artwork

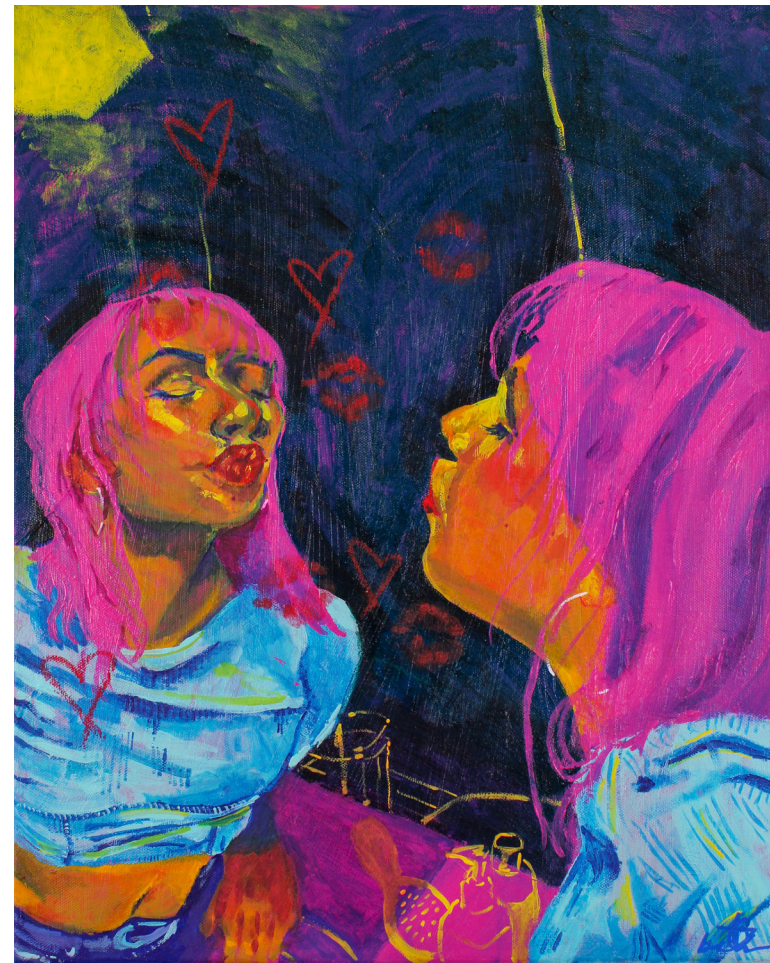




Chewed Nails

Kate Dredge

Medium: Charcoal



i knew i'd find you one day

Belen Thompson

Medium: Acrylic Paint



Morsel

Lily McIntosh

Medium: Oil Paint



Bugtopia

William Bankes

Medium: Charcoal, Graphite, and Pastel



Land Vista 6

Max St-Jacques

Medium: Photography



Land Vista 2

Max St-Jacques

Medium: Photography



Wednesday Night

Cameron Danger

Medium: Acrylic Paint



Split Down the Middle

Rachel Roen

Medium: Oil Pastel and Charcoal



Metro

Belle Dorcas

Medium: Digital Collage



Symbol of Friendship

Kenji Sazawa Bachmann

Medium: Woodcut Print



Newspaper Dress

Gianna Barker

Medium: Newspapers, Tape, and Velcro



On The Rocks

Andrea Gravseth

Medium: Acrylic Paint



lo

Eve Loehrer

Medium: Chalk Pastel



Beautiful Error

Leannah Choi

Medium: Acrylic Paint



Body
Leannah Choi
Medium: Acrylic Paint



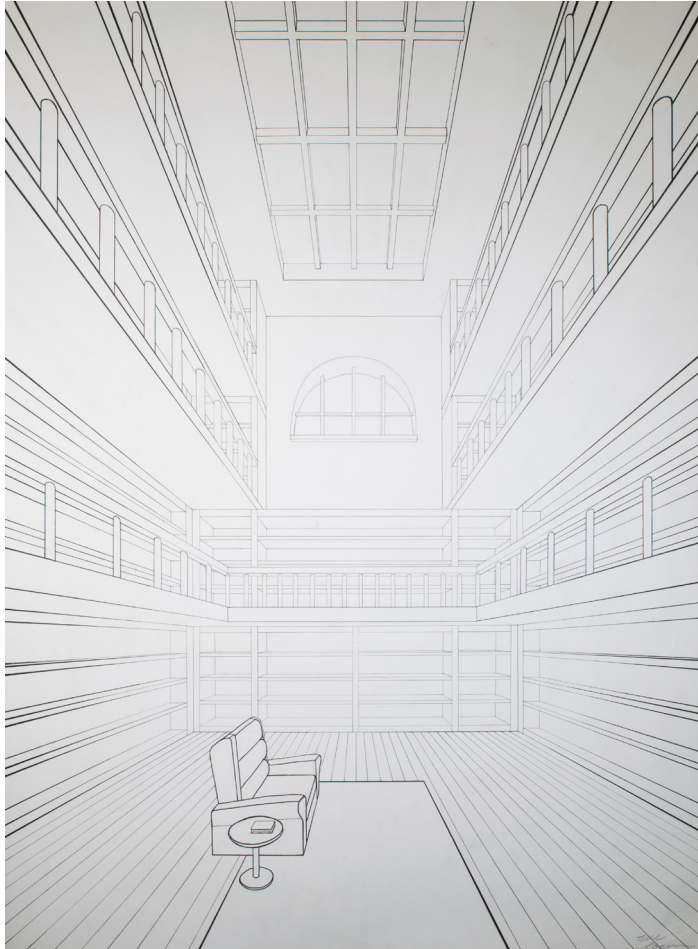
Helical Heart
Lily McIntosh
Medium: Alcohol Marker and Colored Pencil



Harrison Ziegler
Medium: Woodblock Print



Binary Stars
Lily Clark
Medium: Photography



Alexandria, 2024

Eve Loehrer

Medium: Ink



Primordial

Rachel Roen

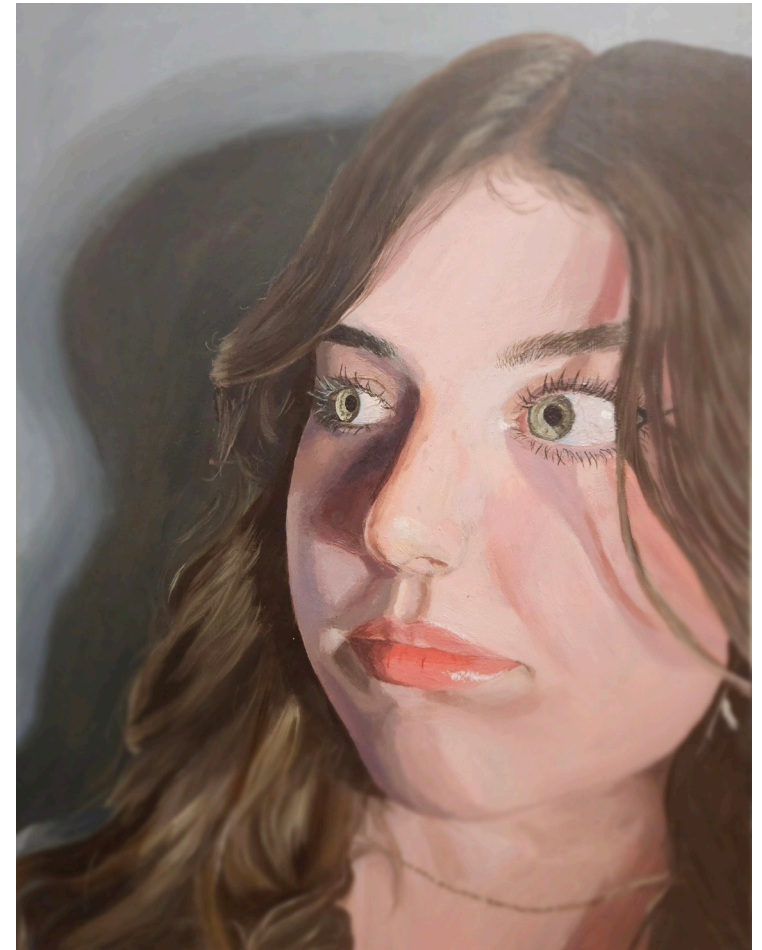
Medium: Ink and Gouache



AWKWARD

Geo Brooks

Medium: Digital Art



Agitation

Andrea Gravseth

Medium: Acrylic Paint



Flora and Fiber

Trinity

Medium: Crochet



Days with Frog and Toad

Sophia Reeves

Medium: Crochet and Collage



Waiting
Lily McIntosh
Medium: Oil Paint



Undercover
Andrea Gravseth
Medium: Acrylic Paint



Looking

Kenji Sazawa Bachmann
Medium: Photography



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