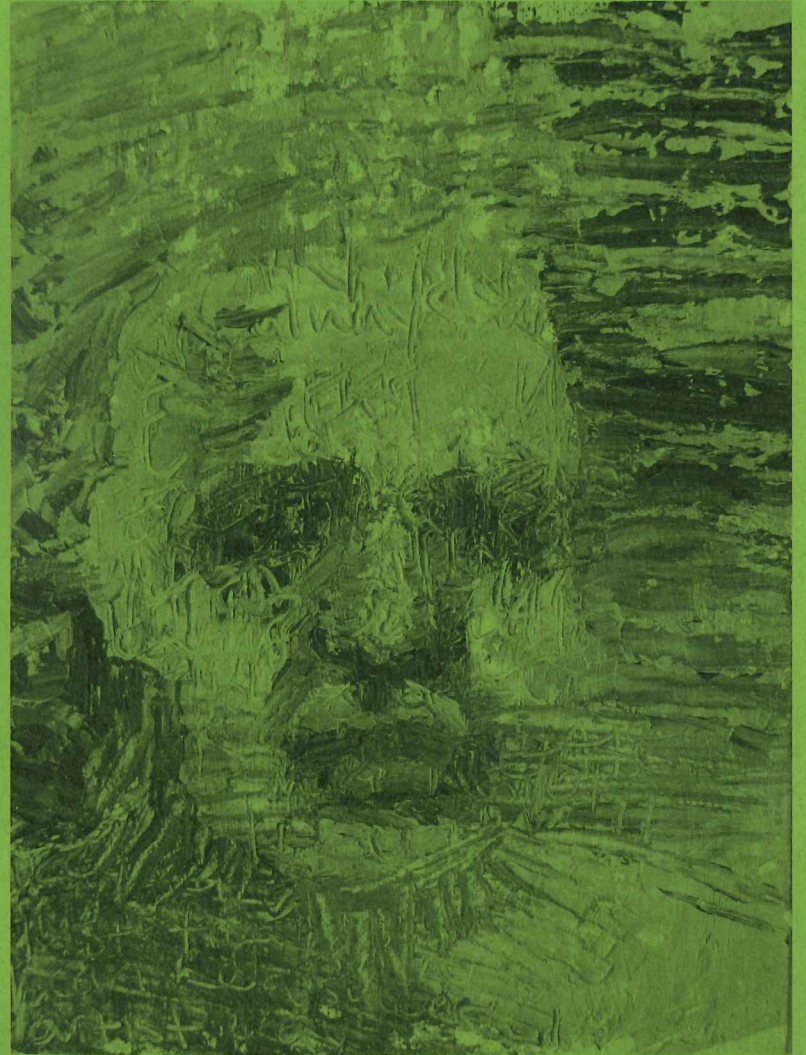


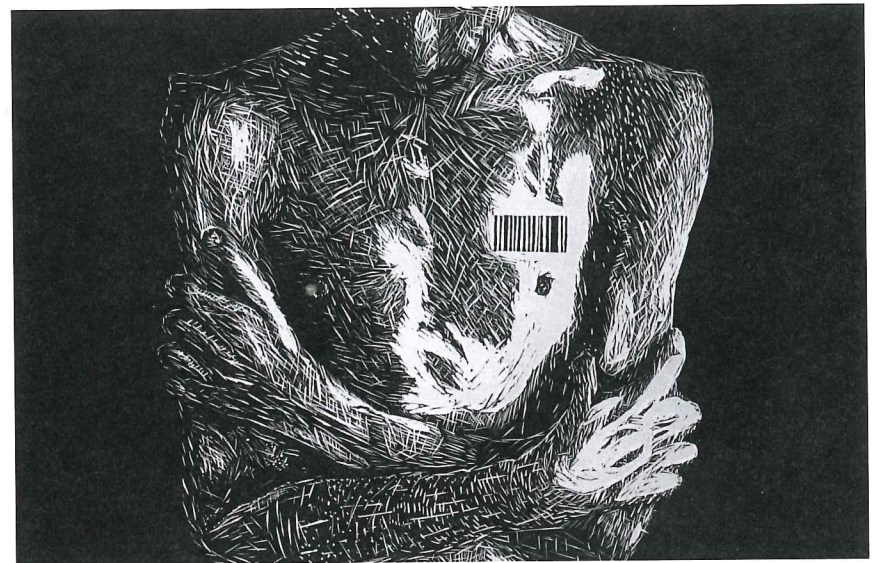
Zephyrus

2017



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2017



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Jim Wayne Miller Poetry Award

Alina Verenich
"On the Rocks"

Browning Literary Club Poetry Award

David Hormell
"I Want to Touch Lightning"

**Ann Travelstead Fiction Award
of the Ladies Literary Club**

Mikaila Smith
"She Liked to Talk"

Wanda Gatlin Essay Award

Adrian Sanders
"Linens"

Zephyrus Art Award

Carrol Sandman
"Unwoven Identity"

Writing award recipients are chosen by the Creative Writing faculty of WKU; the art award is chosen by *Zephyrus* staff.

Table of Contents

Carrol Sandman	“Unwoven Identity”	7
Heather Borders	“To Learn You”	8
Phi Chu	“Father”	9
	“Mother”	11
	“Brother”	12
Cassie Kulig	“Propagation”	14
Brent Coughenour	“{ <i>Reminiscent of Sugar</i> }”	15
Cameron Tutt	“Portrait Digital”	22
Katie Glauber	“The Rising Sun”	23
Sydney Herndon	untitled	25
David Hormell	“I Want to Touch Lightning”	26
Devan Felts	untitled	28
Emily Houston	“Ars Poetica”	29
	“Last Light”	30
Mara Lowhorn	“Things that Stain my Fingertips”	32
Autumn Minor	untitled	33
Madeline Rafferty	untitled	34
Jessica McCormick	“A House”	35
Alicyn Newman	“My Heart is a Jungle”	37
Celeste Rehmel	“Death of the Paper Tree”	38
Ashley Witt	untitled	39
Natalie Marguerite Rickman	“About Frozen Carrots”	40
	“Cherry Thoughts”	42
	“Fresh Water Baptism”	44
	“From Spring”	45
Elizabeth Manning	“Identity”	48
Adrian Sanders	“Float”	49
	“I heard a Timer buzz”	50
	“Linens”	51
	“To Write”	53
	“Water as my mother”	54
Frederic Ndayirukiye	“The Pen Is Mightier Than the Sword”	55
Christina Scott	“Untitled 7”	56

Mikaila Smith	“Eight”	57
	“A Self Portrait”	58
	“She Liked to Talk”	59
Cole Sweasy	“Dear Son”	65
Karly Manuel	untitled.	67
Natalie Turner	“First and Eighteenth”	68
Elizabeth Upshur	“I Don’t See Color”	69
Alina Verenich	“On the Rocks”	70
Tevan Morton	“Missing”	71
Bridget Yates	“When I Was Done Dying”	72



Carrol Sandman

Unwoven Identity

To Learn You

Heather Borders

I took it slow to learn your name.
I gathered each letter by ebbing time
across the lines and spaces,
dragging it to every corner
in search of your epigraph.

I discovered the first by lifting your hair,
it was curled against your ear.

The next came from the bite of your lip,

it fell onto the third between your breasts
where I licked it clean.

The fourth camouflaged itself on your nipple,
surfaced when you blushed, and it didn't.

The fifth came from the spread of your legs,
in the deep V my hand cupped to keep in the warmth.

The sixth one came from the stretch of your back,
rose in goosebumps across your skin.

I whispered your name to release the time tethered to me,
and have it take shape of you.

Father

Phi Chu

I slipped out of the sheets
when the walls started to moan,
working myself up
to that sliver of moonlight
and peered inside.

You have told me to
leave the ocean for the one
I love
yet there you were,
lost in the waves
with a face of a woman
neither of us knew

The moon seeped through the window—
the one chipping at the beam.
I saw hands and legs and mouths
lost in the black tides,
one hungry,
the other wanting to be.

Was it the grief?
Did it extinguish the sun
and eat away your soul,
like rust?

Was it a monster
trapped by the cage in
your chest, making music
by snapping your bones?

Or could it have been that you needed
something you could caress

and break,
to respond to the pull of your fingers
and the tap of your heel?

My vision softened around the edges
like an old photograph
and I wanted to scream,

but that woman beat me to it.

Mother
Phi Chu

She has a voice

that can pull you into her fairy tales,
that can stiffen your muscles between strides
and make you spill what you tried to hide.

When nightmares woke us,
she would kiss us on the cheek and
tell us about Orpheus and the jinn.

When brother died
she closed holes and bailed water
until she was sure we would float.

When I told her about dad,
she told me that demons walked the earth
singing love songs.

If someone asks how she copes so well,
she would tell them to touch the sun
and immerse in the sea.

When she thinks no one is looking
she pulls out a flask
and forgets that all ever was,

and her tears watered her years.

Brother
Phi Chu

On gray days I still find myself thinking of you,
about a time before the dirty walls
and tired eyes,
when we were happy throwing pebbles
at the stars,
at the endless skies.

Even then, you saw the earth as a den of thieves
ready to sink their daggers into your
porcelain skin
and leave you splayed across the ground
in lusters of reds, blacks, and whites.
To you, life was a firework:
Short, bright, and violent,
already ending after it began.
Meaningless, you'd say.
You're right, I'd go.

And so you went astray with sanguine eyes
but you never let me follow through,
no matter how hard I tried.

Inhale. Exhale. Relax. Shoot.
Needles and drawers; paper and matches.
Creeping through the shutters, the gray of the day.
You were burning and itching and scratching away.

What do you even know about death? you said one time.

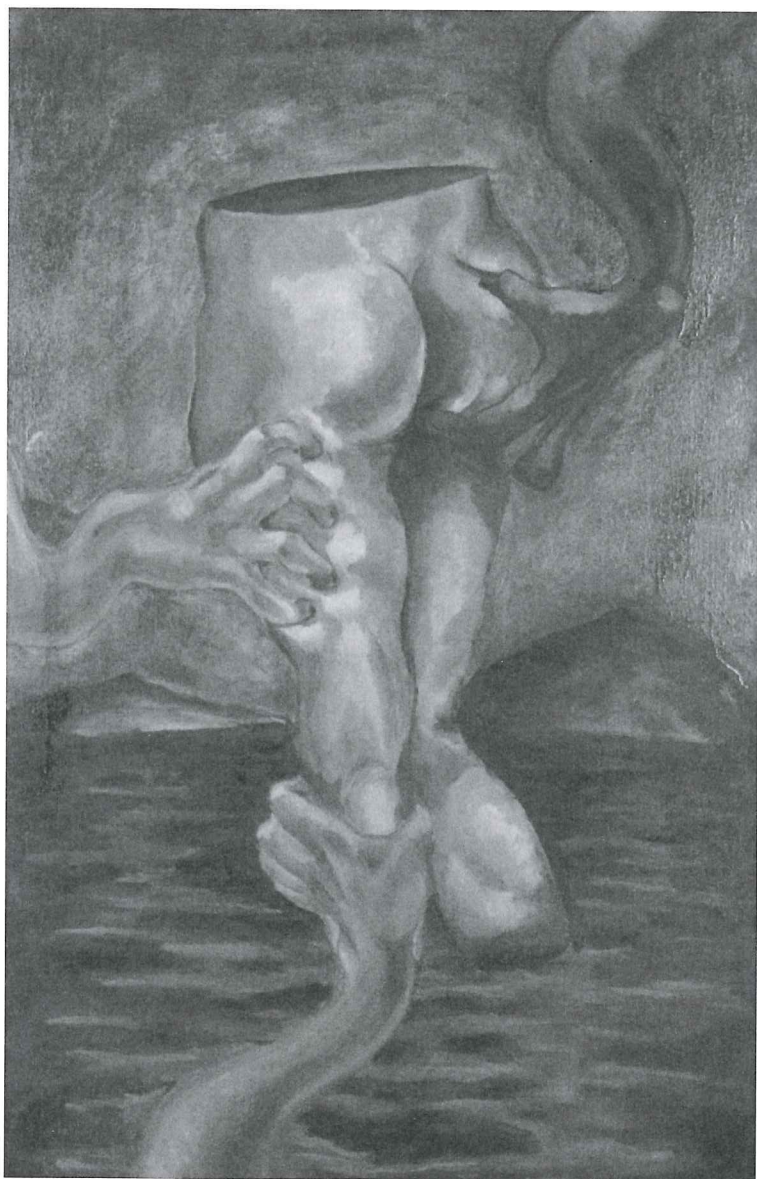
When I think of death now
I see a young man who's misunderstood, who misunderstands,
who loves both the blurred faces of company and the gentle
solidarity of autumn.

I see his slow decay—the red, the peeling, the eyes. The guilt
eating through and through.
I hear him whisper, *It's a damn cold night* as he takes his old
black car
into the woods with his father's gun.

Inhale. Exhale. Relax. Shoot.

I see a life splayed across the ground
in lusters of reds, blacks, and whites.
How could you not see that the firework was
beautiful every bit of the way?

I tell you this because now when I throw
stones at the stars, the whole sky comes tumbling down.
And that is far from meaningless.



Cassie Kulig

Propagation

{Reminiscent of Sugar}

Brent Coughenour

You remember this city well. I know you do because even now it's almost all we think about. There's something sticky about it and its ability to trap us, to keep us down and oppress us even when we have the world at our fingertips waiting to be explored. Maybe "oppressed" is the wrong word, and I'm sorry. You remember this city, and I want you to know that Bowling Green remembers you, too, and it remembers us. Our smells are trapped in its Ozone—that perfume you bought at the CVS, the one that smelled like sweet wine: faintly alcoholic but reminiscent of sugar, a damp sweetness that tickles my nostrils. You never used the deodorant, but I would always joke that you smelled like Teen Spirit, even though you were already gone by the time Nevermind became popular. Even now this city still feels like you, despite the stone and concrete that define its space and harden any charms this place may have had. When we arrived here, Bowling Green was wet cement, and by the time you left me it had hardened, holding your memory here forever. Forever.

* * *

Bowling Green is a town that modernizes very slowly. The streets don't make any logical sense, as if they were designed in the 50s and haven't been re-designed since—there are no turning lanes on most of the major roads, everything is painstakingly confined to a five square mile section of the city, and when the university is in session you can't get anywhere because the traffic is too terrible. On Friday nights, it takes people 45 minutes to get somewhere that should only take 15. Road rage is rampant, and I've heard stories about how often car accidents occur, but I've never personally seen one—probably because the citizens always drive below the speed limit, infuriating the students who only live here eight months out of the year, but I am not letting these good ole Southern folk dictate how I drive. Everyone in this town drives exactly the same: slow, pre-cautionary, and meaningless. No one uses their turn signals. It's as though all the residents were taught by the same driving teacher and now they're all emulating him by dragging their ass throughout the entire town, honoring him and his horrendous teachings. Bowling Green is inhospitable for those who haven't spent their whole lives here; it's a hell hole. It's 1992, but it feels like Bowling Green is stuck in the 1940s.

Much of the activity in Bowling Green—outside of the endless amounts of fast food restaurants and the newly opened Walmart on Campbell Lane—is situated in what the locals call The Square. Here the popular culture of the day takes hold, and the young adults who make up 20% of the town's population can fulfill their Generation X fantasies of not being defined by any set of characteristics. In the mind of the Baby Boomers who lead Bowling Green's economy and government: the kids can go down to The Square and smoke marijuana, rot their minds with the words of Kurt Cobain, and go home at 3 in the morning so they can sleep all day and do it all again. None of them have jobs or responsibilities,

after all.

* * *

We frequented The Square on a lot of Saturday nights. Even before we were officially an item I'd bring my friends to the bars, and you'd bring yours, and we'd meet up. Was that intentional? It might've been a subconscious ploy to get you to talk to me. Truthfully, I just wanted to hear your voice again, that rhythmic tone that people associated with anger or with the uneducated. That wasn't the case for you, though, people never thought a negative thing about you. Those nights at the bars I got to know you, and it was all on purpose. I loved hearing about the Navy Pier.

1989 was coming to a close—only ten years until Prince's big party, you joked—and we were in The Square with our who's who of close friends and confidants. Your friend, Darla(?), made the suggestion that we go out to that old water tower, the one overlooking the Square that used to have Big Red painted on it before the soda company got pissy and sued the school. Neither of us had been up there before. Graduation was two years away, but for us two years felt eternal instead of ephemeral—we could act like we could stay here forever, and that graduation wasn't approaching us, unrelenting, but it was. Meredith would hand us our diploma and we'd be out of there, dust in the wind to this university and the city as a whole. On New Year's Eve the faint remnants of a giant Big Red guided us.

The slope towards the water tower was slick, covered in the dew of a chilly, but not frigid, night. We were bundled up nonetheless with scarves and thick undergarments trying to shield our legs from the substantial breeze that traveled across Bowling Green's infamous hill. Most of our friends wore gloves, but we didn't. One of the things that bonded us was our love for the cold, and our bare fingers found warmth in one another as you led me up the hill, the red of your fingernails pushing into my skin in a way that I would never mind. You pulled me in the best way possible.

The tower was closed, yet our friends were persistent. Darla—I'm really confident it was Darla—probably had a little too much to drink and was hell-bent on climbing to the damn tower. The fence around it was shut, bolted together with a thick rusty lock that left red particles scattered across her palms, yet she tugged and cursed trying to get it off. Her next step was to hop over the fence, but we had already left by then. I never even bothered to ask her if she got over the gate the next time I saw her. While you always made the effort to talk with my friends, I was always lacking in that department. Writing about us and writing about this city has made me realize a lot of things, it seems. If you're still in contact with her, will you tell her I apologize for not asking?

I don't remember if it was my idea or yours to go back down the hill and explore the other side of the city, but I'm inclined to believe it was yours. Nevertheless, we walked on, and at times we rolled on. Do you remember when I tripped down the broad side of the hill and ate shit at the bottom? You've got to remember because I never stopped complaining about that pair of jeans that had

grass stains on them, and I spent two years trying to clean them before I finally donated them to Goodwill. We relived childhood by pushing each other down the slope, aiming for the playground connected to the old church. Our arms slapped the wet grass, producing a sound that I would have thought was someone getting punched in the face over and over again. Your giant laugh shot off your tongue and exploded into the clear, silent night. I got a headache from spinning in circles and smacking my head on the damp grass, but I couldn't help but laugh, even after my jeans were stained. Your laugh made me laugh, and it thundered all the way to the playground.

The playground was for children—most of whom were probably trying to avoid churchtalk of the book of Genesis or the forbidding nature of Leviticus. The best part about it was a swing set, and I pushed you for at least twenty minutes before my arms threatened to fall off my body and numb themselves against the dropping temperatures. You didn't offer to push me, but I didn't want to be pushed anyway.

When we made our way back to The Square 1989 had become 1990, the only year in my life when I didn't watch the ball drop. The bars were letting out and we mixed into the crowd as we walked back towards the apartment, lit cigarettes in hand and the smell of three dozen cans of spilt beer fermenting into the night sky. In the middle of the crowd, and next to a particularly drunk guy singing Mötley Crüe's "Girls, Girls, Girls," I told you I loved you. Not for the first time, but this one was meant, emotional and pregnant with emphasis. You responded "I know." You always were a big fan of Empire Strikes Back.

* * *

The Square is Bowling Green's Garden of Eden, the hub of culture and center of gravity in an otherwise listless and non-thought provoking slice of land between Louisville and Nashville. On most weeknights and every weekend, The Square is commandeered by the youth of the city, who take shelter in the shade of the maple trees that form a circle around the circumference of the park. Two local bars situate themselves in The Square—Dublin's and an unnamed bar that the locals just call a watering hole—and college students trip out of the bars' facades into the street in thirty minute intervals from 11 until closing time. They light their cigarettes against the darkness and inhale as the music from the bar trickles into the streets, drawing the next crowd in. On nights when there are live bands, they play the popular songs that they know will please the students: an out of tune cover of Queen's "Fat Bottomed Girls" sandwiched in between half-decent versions of Pearl Jam songs. The guitarists are always better than the singers, and you've gotta think that they might actually make something of themselves if they lived in the Pacific Northwest. Rumor has it that the lead guitarist of Soundgarden played in Bowling Green once, shredding out an early version of "Spoonman" late into the hours of a boring Wednesday night, but not many people believe it. Still, if he did play in Bowling Green, it would've only been once; most of the people who come into town don't stay for very long.

* * *

Of course, you know all about this. Isn't that why you left? This place was never your home, just a stop on the roller coaster trajectory of your life, it was never meant to be permanent. I never expected it to be permanent either, but it always felt a little closer to home for me than it did for you. Not that I blame you—I had to drive two hours to get home, and you had to drive seven, not necessarily an easy thing to do, or a fair trade off.

I arrived here first. I remember that well because you told me on the day we first met that you hadn't unpacked your bags yet and you complained wistfully that the smell of your home still lingered on them. When I got here, I didn't have any inclination of my future feelings towards the city and I certainly didn't dread coming here like I would every time I had to return. Certain parts of it actually impressed me—in Louisville the nearest park was miles away, yet in Bowling Green one was right in my backyard. Waking up early and walking through the park enticed me, and the subtle breeze that blew in to my apartment made me comfortable, gave me a false sense of home that would quickly erode. I can't chalk up my distaste of the city entirely due to homesickness, but perhaps that had something to do with it. Maybe my mindset coming here wasn't positive enough. I didn't intend to ever make a home here, yet I also never intended to fall in love. Sometimes these things happen whether you want them to or not.

I had a grandfather who warned me to never fall in love with a girl from a big city; to him, Louisville wasn't big, and I didn't heed his warnings. So when I saw you that uncharacteristically hot day in '87, walking into our University Experience class back when Reagan was still president and America didn't have anything to be pissed off about, my grandfather's words flew out of my head, even though that Chicago Cubs cap should've been my warning. I don't think there's much merit in love at first sight, but I can say that I loved the idea of you immediately. You introduced yourself, the soft, confident, pronunciation of your "a's" and your tendency to say "da" instead of "the," giving you a wispy persona of superiority, but you never bought into that. I did though, and whenever I sit and think about you, my mind always turns to that accent, the one that made Chicago seem like a far off place but one so tangible, a place that made me fearful of you and made me love you in the same breath. The professor naturally did her best SuperFan impersonation—are you a fan of "Da Bears?" she asked on that first day—but you weren't a Saturday Night Live skit. Chicago ran through you.

That night when you were homesick, not too long after we started dating, stands out to me, brooding in my memory like a speck of food stuck in my teeth. I don't remember if you cried, but I wanted to. Seeing you miss home so intently, so fiercely, struck me as sad. If I wanted to go home I could, and be back in Bowling Green the same night, but it was a task for you. There wasn't a quick getaway; Bowling Green didn't want you to leave. It wanted you to know that it was your home now.

I tried my hand at Chicago-style hot dogs. I bought the poppyseed buns that made the bread taste like dirt, and the all beef hot dogs that were supposed to fool you into believing they were healthy. I made them in my tiny little apart-

ment on 13th Street, stuffed in between two other apartments like the giant pickle spears that we topped our dogs with. It always smelled like fresh-cut grass, you've got to remember that. It was next to a giant field that was going to become another complex, and it was mowed constantly, almost every day it felt like. The town kept putting off building the complex, so the lot stayed there—a haunting reminder of some sort of building that I'd never see. Not long before you left I made that joke about how the lot might've been home to an apartment building where dozens of people were killed, just like that Dahmer guy up in Milwaukee, but you didn't like the joke. It wasn't funny then, it feels less funny now.

The flavors of the dogs quieted the normal scent of the apartment complex. The relish and the mustard—but not ketchup, never ketchup—killed the smell of the grass, even though it was right back where it left off the next morning. That night we watched my VHS copy of Ferris Bueller's Day Off—although any John Hughes movie would've made you feel at home. The Cubs played the Dodgers out on the West Coast, and we caught the tail end of the game, a victory for the Cubs, which we both celebrated. You didn't stay over, but you did kiss me goodnight, and I caught my first smell of that perfume, and my first taste of your lips—reminiscent of sugar, just like it always would be in the chapter of your life in which I was a character. Thanks to that night, and our many conversations before and after, I can never think of you without thinking of Chicago, and vice versa. You ruined the Second City for me, or maybe I just ruined it for myself.

* * *

Things don't change often in Bowling Green, but when they do, it comes very quickly, as though its citizens were embarrassed by how long it took them to get with the times; this year, change comes by the ballot. Bowling Green hasn't voted Democrat since Johnson in '64, but word around town has it that President Bush could lose to Gov. Clinton, or even Perot, on a local level thanks to all the college kids registering to vote here instead of at home. Some people are more skeptical: college kids don't vote, they say.

* * *

You probably already know this, but Kentucky did send its eight electoral votes to Governor—President—Clinton. What a fucking surprise, huh?

* * *

More change comes to the local businesses. Some open up, welcoming customers in and hoping they become regulars: some shut down, closing their doors for the last time and blaming a politician or a turn of fate instead of their own poor business models. (Do you remember that old barber shop on College Street? The one with the tin ceiling on the inside of the building that sent your words bouncing around the tiny room like a tennis ball thrown against a wall? It's the same one with the huge glass windows instead of a fourth wall, the one that made sure everyone walking through The Square knew you were getting a long overdue haircut. People always said that the wide fluorescent tubes illuminating the store blinded them because of all the reflected surface in the room and that they had to squint their eyes when looking at themselves in the mirror so they

wouldn't start tearing up. One girl said that she would take her glasses off as soon as she walked in, even if she wasn't getting her hair cut right away. When you take away someone's ability to see, they no longer have the desire to see, or something like that. Anyway, that barber shop went out of business. They cut their last head of hair around the time Clinton was wrapping the Democratic nomination and Los Angeles was burning out there by the ocean. A chocolate shop was supposed to move into the old building but it hasn't yet, something about the lease not being worth the price.)

If there's anything to be said about space, it's that someone will pick it up eventually. Buildings aren't torn down here, merely recycled and refitted to meet the needs of the new leasee. The old bar without a name was once an office building for a dentist, and the Subway used to be an apartment. Everything old is old again. Maybe that's the real reason why the kids don't think Bowling Green is hip to the stylings of today. The population is aging, the buildings are crumbling, and the maples which dot The Square are older than the kids that sit under them, smoking like a bonfire and wishing the time away. If they knew any better, they'd know that time would pass them by soon enough.

I think there's a habit here to wish everything away, not just with the younger kids but with the older population too. It seems to me that everyone who works at the school—except maybe for Prof. Miller (did you have her?)—is desperate to get the hell out while they still can, before it's too late.

I don't blame you for leaving. I understand more than maybe you can even realize why you left when you did and why everything happened the way it did. Writing is just so damn cathartic sometimes that I find it hard to stop, even when it seems like I'm pointing blame. I tried to write about this city, and to develop my thoughts in a more coherent way, but it hasn't worked out that way. When I try to put my thoughts about this place together, they can't help but turn to you. You're my muse, but also my greatest damnation—everything I write is you. Even now, when I know I need to wrap this up, it's hard for me to stop. To put all that I want to say in context and to get my themes across the best way I can. You always said I should've dumped the broadcasting major and switched to English. Now that I'm attempting to finish this, I realize I should've done exactly that; maybe then I wouldn't have missed the class on how to write a final chapter.

From the start of our senior year I could tell that the news was coming. I've said before and I'll say it again that Bowling Green was not the place for you. More so than anyone I've ever met you embodied the notion of something bigger, something better. Can I blame Chicago for that? I don't know. It's always easier to put the blame on something intangible, right?

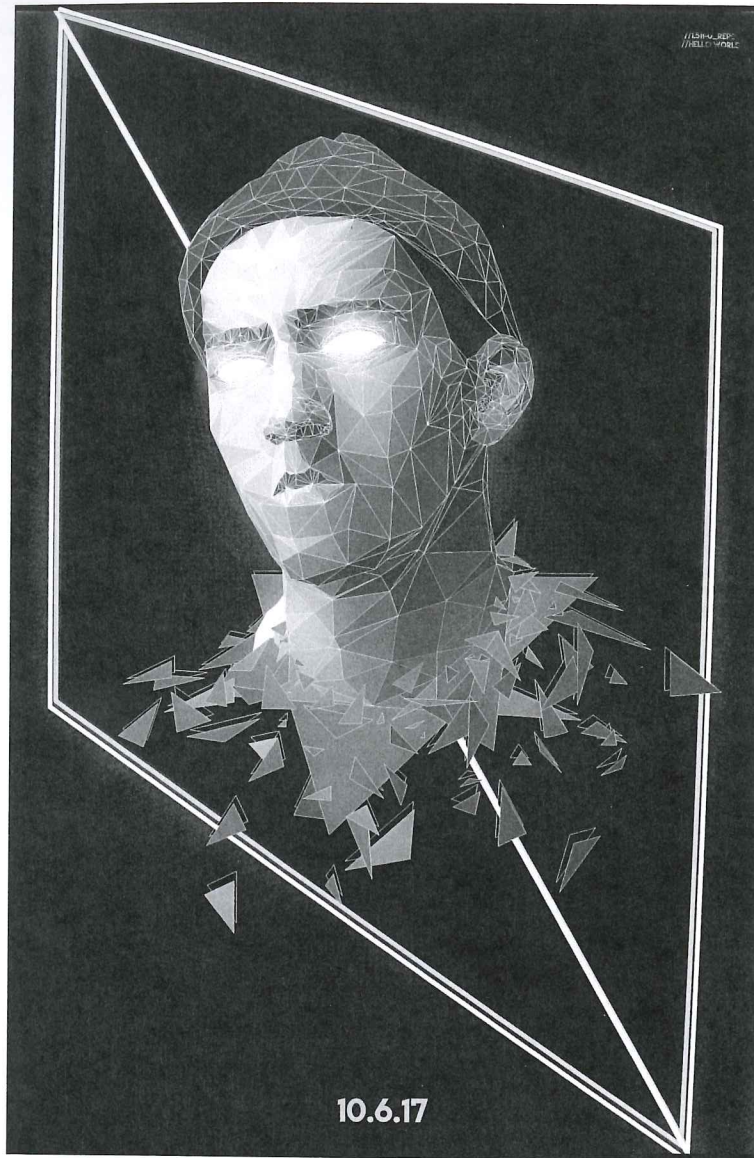
I'm happy you waited until after Christmas to tell me your plans, and I'm happy you didn't wait until graduation to break my heart. You always were good with timing—you came into my life at the right time for me, and you left my life at the right time for you. There was no drama and no fanfare in your announcement, and I appreciated that, even if it wasn't anything you could control. It would've been such an English major cliché had Pearl Jam's "Black" been playing on cas-

sette as you told me you were moving home, but I had just switched it off as I heard your key clicking into the door. When you said the words "I'm moving home after I graduate to figure some stuff out for a while," I could've performed a spit take, spewing my tea across the carpet, but I didn't have my kettle going that night.

Really, I don't remember much of the details. It seems like I do, right? With all the words I've written down for you and memories I've relived, you'd think I'd remember that last night before everything changed but I don't. It's the only memory of ours that I can't honestly reflect on with 100% certainty. I've repressed it, I guess, but I wish I could repress a lot of other memories that I made in this city before I go.

I don't know where I'm off too next, but I know now that Bowling Green is not my destination, either. I thought, after you left, that maybe it was. I met you here, and I had my happiest moments here, relishing in the Central time and walking out of Dublin's feeling like it's 3 in the morning but it only being 1. Now though, my lease is up, and out I go. I've written enough about this city in the past months to know that I can't claim to hate it, although I want to. I hate what this city has done to me, and I hate that everywhere I turn I see you looking back at me and swearing up and down that the Cubs will someday win the Series. Still, I owe this city something. I've sat in every Waffle House in the region late at night, when my thoughts and my writing kept me awake. I've watched and written about the lives and adventures of all the real people that I'd never know and I've drunk so much coffee that I don't know if I ever want to again. I can't bring myself to put sugar in my coffee anymore, either. In a way, I associate sugar with you. Maybe you didn't ruin Chicago for me, but you absolutely ruined sugar. I should probably thank you.

I'm not sure where I should send this, and I'm not sure where I should send it from. Louisville will be a stop on my way, but I can't be confident that I'll stay. After four years of my life here, I don't know how anything will top it. I try to hate this city and I try to hate most of the things in it, but for me, Bowling Green is special, giving me a twisted sense of love and admiration for it. I can try to forget the memories I've made here as long as I want, but I'm not really kidding myself. I'll continue to remember this city, and I'll continue to think about it every time I see someone put mustard on a hot dog, or put on a Soundgarden record. Bowling Green and you will dominate my thoughts, even though we will no longer dominate its. Bowling Green moves on, focusing its stony, Southern gaze on its next set of lovers, star-crossed or otherwise. We are no longer there, but it still remembers us, just like we remember it. Nothing lasts forever, but everything is permanent.



Cameron Tutt

Portrait Digital

The Rising Sun Katie Glauber

"The rising sun in Alaska is very different than in the south. Of course, anyone could and would say that, but few actually know it."

A man led his son down the dark, rocky beach, a lantern held in his left hand. The boy had a small flashlight, a birthday gift from his mother. It was about 5am and they had walked about a mile so far. The child's feet were getting sore. It was hard walking on the shale. It shifted around, sometimes falling against his feet and ankles, sometimes making him slip. He wanted to complain, but he wasn't sure if he should. He waited a bit longer, listening as he struggled to keep up with his father.

"In the south, the sun comes up hot, and only gets hotter. Here in the Arctic," he paused, giving the word the respect it deserved, "the sun is more resigned. It doesn't owe us anything, and everything down here knows it."

The father slowed to a stop, leaning over himself, his right hand on his knee. The boy stood respectfully beside him, a few steps away in case of emergency, but not close enough to seem like he was there for any particular reason. In Alaska, people depended on people, they had to in the cold and darkness. There was nothing wrong with needing people, and no one ever thought it was bad to be dependent on the community. However, no one admitted it. It was just another unspoken law of the wild.

In Alaska, people were made up of wild. The people that moved here from the south, they came to find the wild, and eventually, they get remade up into wild as well. The boy knew that because his grandmother had told him as much. She would take him outside every morning, down to the beach, into the forest, or even just the little stream. Together, they would look for the perfect rock. It had to be small enough to fit in your hand, and big enough so that it wouldn't get lost in a full pocket.

Once they found the perfect rock of the day, they would bring it back and add it to the row. Slowly, they lined the edges of the front path up to the house, and were starting to line the perimeter of the shed. Since she had died, though, he hadn't picked up a single rock, if he could avoid it. He kept looking at the unfinished rock row around the shed, hoping that one day it would magically be complete and he could stop feeling guilty about being behind. As he waited for his father, the boy's eyes fell to the shifting rocks under his feet. Shale rocks were usually very good for lining a path—

"Alright, let's keep going. What are you waiting for?"

"Nothing, Dad," said the boy. They continued down the beach.

"Actually, um, Dad, I've seen the sun rise quite a few times, even the special peak rises. So, what are we doing out here? It's awfully damp." The father

grunted a laugh, which the boy took as a good sign. Maybe he could start complaining soon.

“This isn’t a peak rise, it’s a real proper sunrise. It’s got the same time and appearance like it does in the south, only it’s the Alaskan sun. Cold and colorful.”

“Is it not colorful down south?” The boy knew that southern sunrises were very colorful, lots of red and orange in anticipation of the yellow sun. What he really was wondering was if “colorful” meant something else when a sunrise was involved.

“Oh, it’s plenty colorful. But in Alaska, the colors have to fight for the sky.” The father looked back at his son, a hint of a smile could be seen in the lantern’s light. “And the colors aren’t alone in that fight.”



Sydney Herndon

untitled

I Want to Touch Lightning

David Hormell

Someone yabbers at their dog
and the pollen count tethers me
to a permanent state of sniffles
but the fickle Kentucky skies
weren't always unkind.

There was a time
when I could dream
outside of the lines
and I didn't do anything
for anyone's approval—

but now, everyone
is a digital witness.

I ran outside, regardless
of the air quality alerts
and caught fireflies
in glass mason jars.

Sometimes, I cupped them
in my hands and

wanting to touch lightning,
smushed them.

Nothing ever happened.

Instead, I looked at the yellow
fluorescence on my hands

and tried to wash it away
but it never went easily
and a bitter smell lingered.

From that point on, I lived
my life tinted with guilt.
I burdened the crushing weight
of a life snuffed, all due
to my crashing carelessness.

When I attended church that Sunday,
I got down on both bad knees and prayed
that God was negligent and didn't see my
regretful self, the cold, calculating man I'd become
or my hands, glazed in a lightning bug's blood.

Devan Feltz

untitled



Ars Poetica

Emily Houston

The wind snaps free of its leash
peeling faded letters
as it beats at the city walls
to reveal the forgotten layers.
Leaves tumble to the ground
and separate—some crunching
under hurried feet,
while others drift down unspoiled pathways
to settle,
unaware
that the virgin landscape has conceived.
McDonalds, receipts, and cigarette boxes
spill to the cold concrete
on top of the unsuspecting feet of
the business man,
and as he kicks the trash away to resume
his short journey to Wall Street,
a lone wad of purple gum clings to
the bottom of his Oxfords.

With one last gust,
flapping coats still
and amidst honking horns and jabbering tourists—
an echoing silence.

Last Light

Emily Houston

Where did you go when you died? I ask you.

Two summers ago, we were sitting on a porch swing,
cast outside by a frustrated mother,
skin melting in the suffocating heat
with the pink guts of watermelon slices
dribbling down our chins.

Your feet touched the splintered wood of the porch,
propelling the swing
back and forth, back and forth,
while mine dangled,
helpless to the rocky motion.

“Where did she go?”
I voiced the question that had been
rattling in my skull after days
of watching the house across the street empty itself.

You looked down at me,
eyes drilling into mine and
face twisted in thought before
you glanced back to the house,
pointed one finger to the tree standing beside it and said
“She went inside the tree. So she can always protect the house.”

When the last light left the sky,
I crept across the splintered porch
and the weeping grass,
dragging the worn blanket from my bed.
I draped it across the tree’s roots

and prayed it would keep her warm in the night.

Where did I go? You answer.
I buried myself inside your chest.

Things that Stain my Fingertips

Mara Lowhorn

You gave me 18-across.
The morning paper, the puzzle, at breakfast—
A four-letter word, meaning “to care deeply for someone.”

You gave me 18-across, straight from
the palm of your hand, resting on my knee—
a silent introduction, a quivering greeting.

You gave me 18-across in the middle of the ocean,
sun pounding, green and smothering, when your hands
were callused and biblical and wrapped around mine.

You gave me 18-across with that laugh,
its conspiracy with my own, the togetherness
a punchline of a joke we never spoke aloud.

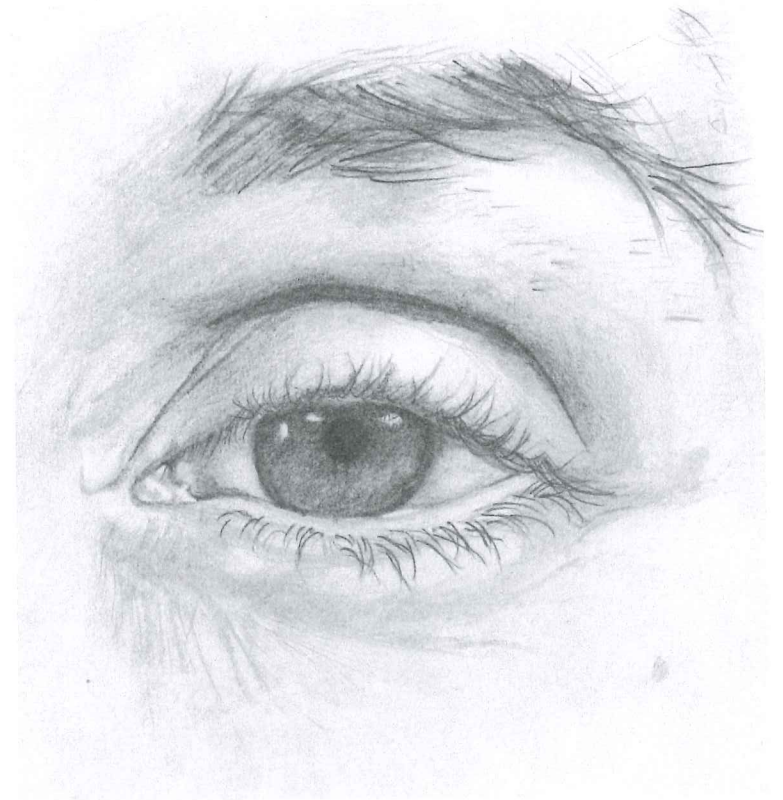
You gave me 18-across in that heat—
your breath writing lyrics in cursive,
as our heartbeats collaborated in the orchestra pit.

You gave me 19-across that one night in the park—
the happy moon, the restless crickets. And
the night after that, and the one after that. And

You gave me 18-across every day.
Sun-bleached, moon-warped, rain-rusted, and all talked out.
For almost a year.

You gave me 18-across when you walked away—
you showed me. A four-letter word—
what happens when you care deeply for someone?

You lose them.



Autumn Minor

untitled



Madeline Rafferty

untitled

A House Jessica McCormick

I checked behind the shower curtain for sixteen months because I didn't trust locks. The light switch dimmer goes exactly in the middle. The volume can be fifteen, thirty-eight, or fifty-one, but it cannot be six, seventeen, or forty-four. Line up the blanket and the sheet. seam-to-seam, or it's going to be a sleepless night. I count wherever I go—steps, calories, firsts, lasts, hellos, goodbyes. I'm watching a documentary about a forty-year-old woman who can't even leave her house because she can't make breakfast because the egg won't crack at exactly the right spot. I pick up new habits.

I force myself to switch off the television. Four in the morning is a lonely time. I make sure the garage door is locked before climbing the fourteen steps. I skip every few stairs because they all squeak, but I know which ones squeak less (two, five, seven, nine, ten, twelve, to the top). No one wakes up. I feel my father's snores before I hear them. Crack my bedroom door a finger's width, no more, no less. Check the time before turning my phone over to the night. Wipe off the fingerprints on the screen. Alarm volume at twelve. Maybe tonight will be the night I stop counting sheep.

I don't think anyone has ever been killed in my house. I watched too much *Monk* when I was a pre-teen. Mr. Monk was a detective who touched every fire hydrant he passed and cut his pancakes into squares. I have only tried to explain my inconsistencies to three people in this world. I count your syllables when you speak, I told my sister when I was thirteen, and she was eighteen. We sat cross-legged on my bedroom floor as I tried to detail to her how I am a walking abacus. She nodded for a solid half hour because there isn't much else to do when your little sister is entering high school, and you're leaving.

While everyone in the ninth grade was learning how to touch themselves, I was obsessed with the incessant ticking clocks that followed me wherever I went. A quarter past adolescence, ten minutes to adulthood. I had to count all the way to my seventeenth year before the walls saw me discover pleasure. They played telephone between floors to spread the news like my legs.

My substitute teacher I had a crush on brought his wife and five children to my house for my graduation party. I played with them like they were mine. The littlest one drooled his sucker spit over the ottoman, and I didn't clean it up. I took him outside to the garden, and together we followed the stepping stones—one, two, three, four. I caught at least six stares from his wife as she watched me tickle her children. I pretended she wasn't there.

This morning I made coffee, and I don't even like coffee. It burns off my taste buds, and I feel it swallowing me. I go out the pale French doors to my

backyard so I can cool down. Eighty degrees at 8 AM indicates that the first day of summer will be fiery. I have three more summers before I have to grow up.

The still-green grass in the backyard has grown in where we used to have a playset. I was the queen of the yellow slide. My sister broke the teeter-totter when she was sixteen, and the world decided she was too big for toys. I couldn't fit my hips in the swings by the time we dismantled my castle. I can't fit my hips in most swings. Only sizes ten and below can enjoy swings that don't dig in at all the wrong places.

I take my devil drink in my mug over to the patch of grass where the slide was. I can hear my ten-year-old self giggling. I can hear my mom calling me in for dinner. I can hear the crashing of the tiny waterfall in the pond that my dad built seventeen years ago. I hear a while for attention and spot Henry the beagle nuzzling into the fence between backyards. I'm allergic to dogs, but I gingerly pat his nose with my right hand as I hold my mug in my left. Henry will be the happiest he's been in months for the next twenty seconds.

There have always been two beagles in the backyard. Before there were two beagles, there was a golden retriever named Jack. Jack got old over a short span of time. Jack's owner ran him over in his truck, and his left eyeball fell out. I like to imagine it rolling into a ditch on the side of a highway, cascading into a drain and swimming along the Ohio River before it decomposes like the rest of us. It will see more than the backyard that is full of beagle shit and the four seasons that never change.

I think about how my sister changed. She used to play Barbies with me until she broke the teeter-totter. She used to chase me in infinite circles around the main level and stop halfway around to scare me, but I never figured it out, so each time I would jump and giggle with glee. When she left for college five years ago, she became addicted to Jesus, and I was a sinner. I didn't have a Bible, so I wouldn't find redemption.

I sit on the worn, wooden deck that's starting to cave in from the weight of my house. Nails are death traps. I consider how it would feel to drive one through my hand. Maybe that would be enough to score me a seat next to my sister and St. Peter. I think that it probably won't, and I count my taste buds as they return to my mouth.

My Heart is a Jungle

Alicyn Newman

My heart is a jungle,
a place of rot and revival
where passions flit like macaws
and esperance is a mist that veils
the knotted vines within.

My heart is a jungle,
an infandous coalition of
steely snakes and tiger kings,
of scarlet wings and doe-eyes,
predators and prey.

My heart is a jungle,
guarded below a canopy of
woven limbs and leaves, so tight.
But often that protection silences
its canorous song.

My heart is a jungle,
where creatures lurk and murmur
and the soil calls for holy water
while the wild things rattle the branches
and the night, howling.

My heart is a jungle.
It is feral, though not inhospitable.
And I can assure you that when you enter it,
you will find butterfly wingtips and vibrant feathers,
beautiful things in the gloaming.

Death of the Paper Tree

Celeste Rehmel

Tissue paper flowers grew on the trees.
Accordion-folded pastel and translucent
blossoms that spiraled to the ground
with a gust of spring wind created
a delicate, pink carpet.
Tread lightly; it's savage to crush
the frail beauty of the slowly dying.
And when the spring showers come, the pink petals
will wilt, bleed, disintegrate
in the murky mud.
One day, the tree will grow sturdy
construction paper leaves
and what is left of the tissue paper
will only remain in the inky type
of a newspaper memory.



Ashley Witt

untitled

About Frozen Carrots

Natalie Marguerite Rickman

You broke our two-month silence today
with a message,
a photo of the willing martyr;
You were at his presidential rally.

I'm glad you did
because I'm making pot pie
for dinner
and I forgot
if you used to use
frozen carrots
or fresh carrots
when you made it,
or if it matters,
or if I liked it better
with one or the other.

There's always so much
I need to ask you,
want to tell you,
like when they stopped carrying
those spicy chips we like
at the grocery store.
Did you notice?

You tell me it doesn't matter
about the carrots.
Vegetables are flash frozen
for freshness
and nothing is organic anyway.

This poem is about
telling you the truth.

I let this overweight guy
freshly home from Thailand,
a freelance photographer,
take me to a hockey game
and fuck me until I bled.

I woke up this morning at 6,
my belly muscles sore
from contracting,
a pounding headache
from too much nicotine.

I wanted to call you.
I wanted to tell you
I am glad for the pain
because I'm feeling something.
I wanted to tell you
I never feel anything anymore.

I wanted to say
It hurt so bad I vomited
or maybe I have food poisoning,

either way I miss you

when I'm sick
or when I make pot pies
or when I can't remember anything anymore.

Cherry Thoughts

Natalie Marguerite Rickman

These are cherry thoughts I can't put out
as I walk the marble halls
of the hallowed and rich
institution where you first told me
I love your mind.

I'd never heard it that way
or believed it.

I walk every day by the couch
where we first kissed
where we first began to notice
only each other,
and the blue in our eyes
was never bluer.

Where are you today
Or right now?

I drive by your house and sometimes
think about hitting your car,
putting a shiny dent in the side of
your dad's BMW,
so we could have some force,
passion, angry.

Some Interaction about the grey scrape I sideswiped
suddenly again in to your quiet life,
in front of your girlfriend.

So I could slap you for parking so loosely
and away from the curb.

You would be angry and I would remind you,
this accident was born from ignoring
just like the heat we had
when you became my mistress lover.

We'd have to meet for coffee,
settle the claim.

Maybe I'd finally meet your dad,

even if he was yelling at me
he would see the light in my mind
and notice the shine in my hair—
the way you did, the way only a lover ever does love dirty hair
and I would be noticed again
and we would smoke cigarettes in bed
and I would walk around on air
and I would forget you again.

Fresh Water Baptism

Natalie Marguerite Rickman

I live now in the constant lock tight
of a fresh water baptism.

My sins are dissolved in the water,
the weight of everything I've killed
freezes there, breaks open
along fault lines, blame lines
crumble in pieces.

I have prayed for this liberty,
choked on thick whispers
like burning house smoke,
repented by fasting,
atoned and atoned,
screamed my defense
to a faceless authority.

No one has answered
or called back to me like the water does.
No voice or embrace has soothed me
or relieved me of my crimes
asking for nothing in return,
like the coo of the owl on the shore,
hiding like God but professing to me loudly
the firm resolve of my sins in the waves.

From Spring

Natalie Marguerite Rickman

Country road where I'm from
early-cold spring morning

the time of the year for sudden showers

a gray sky that barely gives way
to the power of a desperate star

birds running from cars in the road
where they bathe in potholes
of cool spring rain water

goldenrods sprout next to gray pavement
and the words in my mind
yellow and rooted

Pass over the highway

white buds are brighter
than any holy light
and fluffier in my mind
than popcorn balls

there's a highway church
with room for twenty
and no room for opinions
of God
or when he rose
or if he's coming

Spring in the south

time for rainbows

and resurrection
but I'm still waiting
to be excavated
from my tomb
to be found six feet under

dead-woman Christ-figure

and we celebrate your birth-death
a thousand times over

I excavate my thoughts
from spring last year

from spring when I was six
shivering on a softball field
waiting for a pop fly
and hard ball thuds
easily in my leather hand

I don't have to dig long
to find memories here
or to slightly turn on country roads

My mind was born here

and my memories of you and you
live here for a lifetime

And I'm leaving
for a new state in spring

a new mind
words found in unfamiliar air
and fresh country roads

I will make my home in Michigan
find my mind again
on an Island
on a lake as big as the sea

the air and the mountains and the sea-lake
most of all the distance
will make me Easter

I will wear a purple robe
on a steep cliff
and I will be born again like him



Elizabeth Manning

Identity

Float Adrian Sanders

“There with fantastic garlands did she come/Of crow-flowers,
nettles, daisies, and long purples”

--Gertrude, *Hamlet*, Act IV, Scene VII

I've always been so scared of everything. Even the things I liked because I'm obsessive and partly stupid and I would end up hurting myself immensely in one way or another. Water was one of those things that scared and thrilled me all at the same time. In my grandparents' pool, as a beg enough baby, I rocked and wobbled myself enough to tip my floater upside. I don't remember this, but I've heard the story enough that I remember it all as an intruder, peeking through the blinds of the back door. My papaw jumped in, overalls and boots and dirt and hat and all. Before I had a chance to really know what was happening, I was right side up, giggling through the water, scaring the ever lovin' shit out of my elders.

I'm not a great swimmer; I don't want to get too brave. The first time I swan in the ocean, I nearly drowned and worse, I nearly lost my glasses. I walked hand in hand with my father till our feet were floating. The water mostly carried me. I was short with rails for arms and legs. When we got out to the buoy, a wave came. Dad told me to jump but I couldn't jump because the weight of the water was too much and jumping wouldn't let me keep holding his hand so it got me and my glasses and I forgot how to breathe. The wade back to shore and my mother and brother was quicker and I lied and told them I had fun. I spent the rest of the trip lying where the water was shin deep and laughed every time a school of itty bitty fish would swim around me. At night we would walk on the beach, skipping and wobbling to miss all the dead jellyfish because they'd sting you anyway, just like a dead wasp. I still don't know if that's true but I believe it.

It was almost 10 years before I'd see a beach again. In the interim, I had too lukewarm hotel pools and hot tubs taken up by the parents of the kids swimming in the too lukewarm pools. I had rain. I had my bathtub that I'd fill too full and too hot every time, no matter how precise my fingertip could tell the temperature of the water coming out of the faucet. So I'd lay my naked body half in the water and half on the side of off-white PVC waiting for my skin to melt or the temperature to cool. Whichever came first. I would work against the natural float of myself and sink to middle where only my nose would stick out enough to breath but also if I inhaled too hard I'd choke and my hair would fan out like a fin. Dramatic and Ophelia-like.

I heard a Timer buzz

Adrian Sanders

for Emily Dickinson, after "I heard a Fly buzz"

I heard a Timer buzz
when I was born,
the steam in the room
like the steam in the
water-webbed dew
of a new morning.

My mother's legs
parted, hanging,
ache with me, a heavy
naked fowl—and for moment
unmoving we all were.

I willed my body,
move, move, make it quick
and then it was there
a set of hands reaching
and then

there I was in screaming blue,
hot, fresh, and done.

Linens

Adrian Sanders

Strewn there in a colorful mound, spilling from the hampers out on to the floor. I couldn't close the door. I couldn't walk without sinking into the den-cottonpolyester blend of a mess. After three days of staring at it, I looked up and stared at the washer instead. I didn't understand any of the markings or have any inkling of what power the dials pointed to. I stared at the bottle of detergent. Hoping this plastic, heavy container of cleanliness had an answer.

My mom had put herself underneath a thick heap of blankets and body pillows. She was winning at a game of hide and seek only she knew about. *Ma, it's after noon. Are you hungry?*

Ma, do you need anything?

Ma, I'm gonna turn the light on. I'll be back in a second and watch TV with you.

When I came back, she had moved from the bed to the loveseat. Tucked in the corner, wearing blankets like Mary Magdalene. Head tilted back on the suede, barely holding her neck up. We watched old shows. We ate. Well, I ate. Every time she sniffled, I looked at her, wondering if I could get her in the shower today.

I got tired of not knowing what the shirt on a hanger symbol meant and I shook the washer. It didn't move. I kicked it. I kicked the detergent and the piles of dirty clothes and the door and the hamper. Then I threw myself on top of the mound. Like a twenty-something baby. The only thing I could figure was to not wash the towels with the sheets or clothes and to not wash my momma's clothes with my clothes and to definitely not wash my dad's clothes.

So I divided them into piles out in the hallway and scooped up as much as my arms could hold and stuffed in as much as the washer could hold. I dumped a whole capful of detergent in there and trusted the buttons were in the right place.

Mom being on the loveseat by herself made her look puny, so I moved myself over there and wrapped my arms around her. *Can you please take a shower today? I'll put your towels on the warmer and you'll feel better in clean clothes.*

Shrugs.

I'll pick you up myself and stick you in there. Clothes and all.

Little laugh.

Okay.

After washing and drying about six loads of laundry, I folded. A piece of domesticity I had confidence in. I folded carpal tunnel into my wrists. The only pile left was my dad's clothes. And it was the biggest. He only took a duffle bag's worth with him.

Fresh from the shower, mom found me sitting on the floor, in front of the pile. Staring. *Hold on*, she said.

She came back with a handful of plastic Walmart bags. *Start stuffing*. Before we knew it, we had a few dozen sacks tied off and tossed in a corner by the front door.

Now what?

We throw them out.

My mom stepped out on to the porch for the first time in weeks. We had a two person assembly line. Passtosspasstosspasstosspasstoss. Watching her reminded me of spring. Like throwing out handfuls of birdseed. I think she was hoping it'd trigger something innate, send him flying home. But birdseed can attract rodents too.

To Write

Adrian Sanders

My palms itch
in a place that doesn't exist.
Morning, fresh fingers
like newborn giraffe
legs stretching
 fist to an open palm
 fist to an open palm
 fist to an open palm
until sunrise pricks
the skin awake.

A welling up,
a flow to the hands,
tips of fingers stretching
to tiny pregnant bellies

weeks of tonguing around
the sounds, personifying
accents, trying
not to chew too hard.

A burst you can't control
leaking hot ink,
staining paper as it pleases,
saturating my sleeves,
drying on my skin. I've heard

ladies don't sweat, they prepire, but
when you're full of linguistic yearning
don't be ashamed—
you are blessed to be soaking.

Water as my mother

Adrian Sanders

I was born of a riptide
raised by a torrent

When the days were calm,
they were a somber float among her current

but when they were crashing
the flood would knock me off my feet

You're a life source and a source of wreckage
but I needed you Mother

you were supposed to guide this vessel
not attempt to piece it back to life after the crash

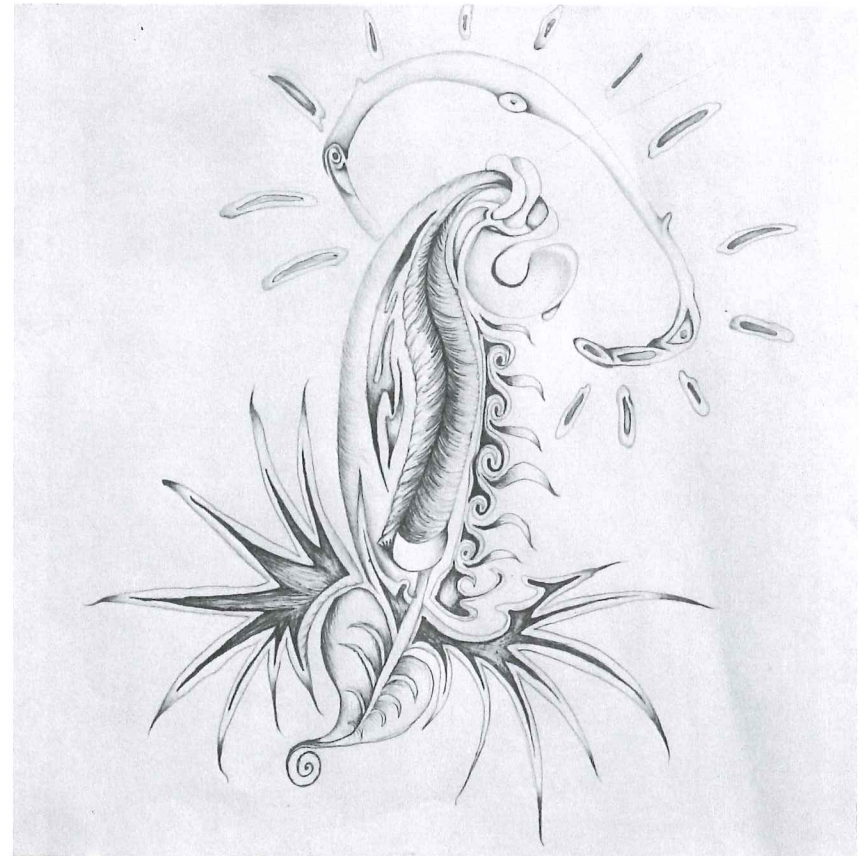
I took advantage of the calm that
bridged the end

and beginning of the storm
making a camp just out of sight of the shore line

knowing it wouldn't be long until
the pull of the moon and sun

will line up just right again and
I'll embark with a new destination marked

on a map reading
"Don't drown yet; there's more water."



Frederic Ndayirukiye

The Pen Is Mightier Than the Sword



Christina Scott

Untitled 7

Eight

Mikaila Smith

We will have eight minutes
From the time the sun explodes
Until our world turns upside down

8 minutes to rapture
7 minutes to despair
6 to tell your mother goodbye

5 to hold your lover's hand
4 to keep a steady heart
3 to keep those languid eyes wide

after 3
comes 2 and 1

my love, what if I'm the world?
And what if you're the sun?

A Self Portrait
Mikaila Smith

I have bruises on my heart from dropping it so much
I have habits no worse than my thoughts
I don't have many words; I don't write any more
Alone time is the one thing I've got

I'm skin-sick and weary
With freckles of doubt
And I'm trying to learn
How not to rhyme

My marbled eyes
Caramelize
In front of mirrors
Cracked with my own bad luck

I am all at once the frost
And the thaw
The paper cut
And the page that you turned
I am the storm and the eye

The sapling
and the oak that you burned.

She Liked to Talk
Mikaila Smith

Pinpricks of light drifted across the front yard as the sun rose up behind the trees. Spider webs glistened, swaying as a breeze swept through the grass. The only noise came from the weeping willow branches trailing on the earth; even the morning birds seemed to be enjoying the quiet. The garden was empty, save for a large barn owl whose shadow dripped over the cracked walkway leading up to the house. As if on cue, the owl took flight almost as soon as the stirring started from inside. There were faint footsteps in the house, creaking their way from one side to the other, and stopping before the big front window.

From the gravel drive you could see her shadow, and you could just make out her hands, moving strangely back and forth. All at once, the movement stopped, and a musical score swelled up, loud and crackling, pouring out of the window and seeping across the garden. The shadow in the house came closer towards the window, where you could just start to make out her face. In the light, you could see her smile.

If you walked a mile down the road, you would spot the Patton house straight away. Hulking and white, it squatted amongst the greenery, with big picture windows staring blankly out on the front yard. Mr. Patton stood at the end of his walkway, examining a fence post that had started to rot. He mumbled to himself, puttering around the post and looking closely to see how bad the damage was. A breeze shuffled in from the west, carrying with it the strains of music. All at once, Mr. Patton straightened, looking towards the woods at the edge of his property. His face broke into a smile, and, with a nod to himself, he left his fence post and set off for the house.

"It's started again," Mr. Patton called out as soon as he opened the front door.

The air was full and hot with the clatter of breakfast. The smell of cooking sausage was so overwhelming that Mr. Patton promptly forgot why he had walked to the house in the first place. The big wooden dinner table was already heavy with dishes, and Mr. Patton couldn't say another word before he stole a biscuit out of the basket in the center of the table.

"You know better than that. Now what's this about starting again?" came a voice from behind Mr. Patton's shoulder.

His wife stood, clad in an apron and house shoes, with frizzy hair and a light smile, watching her husband guiltily eating his biscuit.

"The girl," he said around a mouthful, "she's started that music up again."

Mrs. Patton's smile fell away almost instantly, turning instead to a taut and worried frown.

"I guess we'll really have to do something about it," she said airily, turning back to tend to the sausages on the griddle.

Mr. Patton opened his mouth to speak, then thought better of it and went on with his biscuit.

"Now, I don't think she's doing any harm," he said softly after a moment, watching for his wife's reaction.

"It's not natural," she replied without turning around. "You know there's something wrong with her, there has to be. We have children here, and I just don't feel safe with that girl so close to the house."

With the last word, Mrs. Patton made for the stairs to call the children down for breakfast, and Mr. Patton knew that their talk was over. Whatever happened would happen, he supposed. No sense in worrying about it now. Not while there was breakfast on the table.

"Well what exactly can we do about it?" came a shrill voice from the rocking chair on the far side of the room, "Since she isn't breaking the law or nothing. If she was, we could have Sherriff Walker down here in a jiffy, you know, he's a good friend of mine."

Mr. Patton listened to the voice politely, secretly thinking to himself that this meeting was a terrible idea on his wife's part, as so far all that had happened was quite a bit of talking from Ms. Lucy down the road. And Ms. Lucy sure loved talking.

"Sherriff Walker and I go way back, he ran around with my boys back in the day. You know he used to be a real little fella, and now look at him! Little Don Walker a big shot sheriff. Well, I'll be!"

Ms. Lucy stopped to nod to herself, and then looked as though she might continue, so Mr. Patton quickly took his chance and excused himself to the kitchen.

He shook his head as he helped himself to a lemon cookie, and he stood dazedly in front of the kitchen window, thinking to himself that this was an awful lot more trouble than it was worth.

After his announcement this morning, his wife had made the call around to the neighbors to talk about that girl and her behavior. They had showed up, every one of them, bristling and full to the brim with complaints. Didn't seem right, he thought, how worked up they could get over nothing. She wasn't doing any harm.

After taking as long as he could to eat his cookie, Mr. Patton came back to their full living room, only to find Ms. Lucy still going strong.

"And you know every morning she comes out to get her mail, and she talks to the mailman for a good twenty minutes. Every single day! Why, she must like to talk, that one."

"Something is wrong with her," came a new voice from the corner, "the other day when it rained, I saw her out in the yard with that little mutt of hers, and

she was dancing. It's indecent is what it is."

This voice came from a grizzled man in a button up shirt, with a wrinkled forehead and a peppering of age spots across his face. Mr. Martin was the one who lived closest to the girl, right across the road and back a ways into the tree line.

"Dancing in the rain?" Ms. Lucy looked shocked, "Maybe she really is sick..."

"Now, we know what all she's done, but what are we going to do about it?"

This comment came from Preacher Tippet, who sat prim and proper in a straight backed chair, and looked every bit like he could just as well be on a pew bench.

"I've seen her outside reading the good book, sitting on the ground with it, reciting scripture and making a mockery of it. It makes me sick to think about. I don't want my kids around that kind of girl," he said confidently, nodding his head to Ms. Lucy who had been trying to get a word in.

"Well we know she checks her mail every day, and Joe Turner is the mailman, so I could slip him a little note to put in there. She would never know it was from us, and it would get her out just like that, I bet." Ms. Lucy was getting excited, her words coming fast and jumping in octave, but the others in the room seemed convinced by her idea.

"Alright, so what should it say?" this came from Mrs. Patton, who had reached for a pen and paper on her coffee table and looked expectantly around at the others.

"We don't want you here," said Mr. Martin slowly, "and we think it's best if you go on."

Mr. Patton felt a prickle of shame down his back, and had almost worked up the nerve to say something before his wife moved to speak.

"Ms. Lucy, we'll get this done tonight and then you can give it to Joey before he gets to her house, right?"

Ms. Lucy nodded importantly, then perched back up on her chair, quiet for the first time since she arrived.

Mr. Patton watched as his wife's careful script filled a blank page with those words, and he thought desperately of a way to make it stop.

"Now, we don't want to be rude or nothing," he said quietly.

His wife turned sharply to look at him before saying "Well why on earth not? That girl has been nothing but trouble since she got here, and I don't have a lick of guilt telling her she's better off gone."

Mr. Patton sighed and then retreated back into his shell, watching blankly as the others discussed what to put in to the note, and laughing at how clever they were to come up with it.

Maybe he'd go talk to the girl before she got the note, and maybe then it wouldn't be so bad.

The next morning came with a quickness to it, and the sun rose in a hurry over the fields. Mr. Patton was up early to feed the animals, and then he sat in the kitchen, listening to the clock tick in the stillness. The mail would come around eight, he knew, and he needed to be well on his way before then, especially with the walk being a mile, and his leg being bad like it was.

He soon set off in his nicest work shirt, and he brought with him a little jar of canned preserves from his wife. She wouldn't know they were missing, and anyways, it wouldn't do the girl any harm to think people cared about her. Walking down the road, he watched the summer birds fly from telephone line to telephone line, chirping and twitting to each other. He thought to himself that they were about as talkative as Ms. Lucy, and caught himself laughing at his little joke.

His smile was driven away by the sound of tires coming from a little way down the road, and he saw with a start that the mail truck was here early today, making a straight beeline for the girl's house. He made the move to walk faster, but with his bad leg it was no use, and he watched as little Joey Turner drove past him, throwing a hand up to say hello as he passed.

Mr. Patton waved sadly, and stopped for a moment to decide what to do. He had missed his chance to explain to her what was going on, but it seemed wrong to leave things the way they were. And he couldn't just come back to the house with a jar of canned preserves and no explanation. With this thought, he set off, his jaw set determinedly and his stride only wavering every other step.

By the time he reached the break in the tree line, he could see the mail truck stopped, and the girl standing in her yard in a white night gown. Her feet were bare, and her little dog danced around her ankles, jumping and nipping at her toes.

Joe Turner looked shy for some reason, and he seemed to be sinking back inside of his truck as the girl spoke. She didn't seem to notice, and she waved her arms animatedly as she talked, almost losing her handful of mail in the process. She laughed often, and Mr. Patton realized with a start that it was a nice sound, not unlike the music she played so often. He felt a lump of shame wallowing in his throat, and he stopped dead in his tracks, just out of the line of sight.

The girl seemed to be done talking now, and she waved happily and turned back to her house, where the little dog followed happily behind her.

The mail truck took off with a start, and Mr. Patton couldn't blame Joey for leaving so fast.

He watched the girl comb through her mail, stopping a few times to say something quietly to the dog, who watched her lovingly from below.

At one piece of mail, the girl stopped, and then opened it at once, reading with her back to Mr. Patton. He watched her skinny shoulders drop a little, and then give a little heave as she took a breath. She put the letter back in her stack, and then moved quickly to the brick steps, taking two at a time and only stopping to hold the door open for the little dog trailing behind.

Mr. Patton stood in the cover of the trees, shock rooting him to the ground. His hand gripped the preserves tightly, and his mind went blank in an instant. He had to speak to her, he knew. But how?

As if she heard his question, the girl was all at once back outside, this time with a suitcase in one hand and a big record player in the other. She made her way to her car in the driveway, and set about putting her things inside. She made one trip back inside for a box of what appeared to be records, and then scooped up her little dog and sat him in the passenger seat. Within minutes, it was done, and Mr. Patton hadn't moved an inch from his spot, watching in horror as the girl made to leave the driveway. She backed out onto the road, turning the car to face Mr. Patton, and she didn't even look shocked as she saw him standing, red faced, in his overalls and nicest work shirt, clinging desperately to a can of preserves. The girl gave him a watery smile and a wave, and then took off.

As suddenly as her music had started, she was gone, headed down the road in her beat up car with a cross dangling from the mirror. Her little dog rode with his paws on the edge of the window, nose up to face the sun.

Mr. Patton watched all of this stone-faced, and then walked over to set the preserves on her mailbox. He watched her cloud of dust all the way down to the turn off, and he could have sworn he heard a yell as the car made a left for the interstate.

"Can you believe it? She just took off- just like that! Whooping and hollering like a maniac down the road!" Ms. Lucy looked shocked beyond repair. She fanned herself delicately as she restated what she had seen that very morning.

"Just unseemly," chimed in Mr. Martin, "How she left without even telling anyone. How could someone be so rude?"

Mr. Patton listened quietly, his hands clenching quickly as though he were holding something.

Mrs. Patton had called another meeting to discuss the girl and her wild behavior. The neighbors were all there again, troubled by her response.

"Joe Turner said he gave her that letter, so I have no earthly idea why she left the way she did," sniffed Ms. Lucy. "I guess some people were just not raised with manners."

That night Mr. Patton tossed and turned before rising to sit at the kitchen table so as not to wake his wife. His thoughts swam with the image of a car racing down a gravel road, clouds of dust blowing everywhere, and the watery smile that the girl gave him as she passed. He was finding it hard to sleep any more.

The next morning, he left early for town. He returned later with a box from the secondhand music store, and set to work. Soon a record player sat atop the coffee table that had held that letter, and Mr. Patton took time to carefully place a record down, jumping back when the needle at first scratched, and then

filled the room with music.

He played the music softly at first, and then unbearably loud, letting it shoot out of the windows and stretch across the yard. He stood, unbelieving, as the music filled him with something he didn't know.

After a while, he put the machine back into its box and moved it to the closet in the basement, behind boxes of old coats and books, long since outgrown.

Ms. Patton returned home from a prayer meeting to find her husband working on the fence post, humming softly to himself. He came in for dinner and then washed up before bed, and waited for the lights to turn off before he asked her quietly.

"Do you think that she'll be all right?"

"What is it, dear? You whispered." She replied sleepily, her eyes already closing.

"Do you think that girl will be all right?"

Ms. Patton was already asleep, head nodding off of her pillow, and mouth already drooping open.

Mr. Patton watched for a moment before adjusting his wife's pillow, and then turned over to go to sleep himself. In the moments just before sleep, he didn't see any cars, but he heard her music, and he knew he was forgiven.

Dear Son Cole Sweasy

Dear Son,

I haven't met you yet, and I don't know if I ever will. But I'm not one to let uncertainty stop me from writing. Often times I lie awake at night, thinking about whether or not I want you in my life, and whether or not what I want really matters. Most children are accidents, right?

I was. My parents probably didn't want children. They don't tell me exactly what their marriage was like for the first seven months or so before I existed, or for the following nine months and a couple of weeks before I was born. I know that my mother sat down in a patch of poison ivy while pregnant, and the doctor told her she's have to wait the rash out. They didn't want to risk hurting me. She talked about how miserable that time was before I even knew poison ivy was a plant. I know that my dad told my mom on the week leading up to my due date, and the week that followed my due date, that "any day now!" I'd make my grand entrance. Well, Meghan Caroline or Scott Robert would make their grand entrance. She hated my dad for repeating it. But after my mom was induced and I finally, reluctantly, decided to show my face, my mother looked at me and changed her mind. I wondered what Meghan or Scott would have been like.

My sister wasn't an accident. They didn't want me to be lonely, see, so they planned for Natasha Louise or Scott Robert, attempt 2.0. After Natasha showed up in the middle of the night, gray like a fish, silent as emptiness, and near strangled by the umbilical cord, they decided not to have any more children. I never told my sister I wish she had died when I heard about her birth, but growing up I wondered if I would have been better off if she had.

Sometimes, I wanted children. I was ashamed because for many years I dreamed of being a mom. And I was supposed to be smart, a career woman. I wasn't supposed to want children. As I gained knowledge of our social norms, I found myself wanting children, wanting to be dumb, and especially wanting to be anything but woman. I wanted you to be you and me to be anyone but myself. I wanted something, and often times, I didn't know what it was I wanted.

I hope to be able to meet you, especially since I never met your brother. (I suppose he could have been your sister, but I am going to call it like I felt it.) He was alive a little longer than your average high school crush. He was alive just long enough to let me know he was alive, and then he wasn't. But I already knew him. Desmond Ray. I knew him long before I knew you. I knew him the second I lay eyes on his father. I knew he was going to have dark blonde hair and brilliant blue eyes, my mind and his father's heart. Desmond was an accident. But he was going to be my purpose.

You will never meet your brother Desmond; you will never meet his father. Sometimes, it doesn't feel like I truly met either of them. When and if we

meet, I doubt I will ever tell you. You don't need to know. But I'm not one to let my uncertainty keep me from writing.

I want to show you everything I've grown to love. I don't care if you want children. I don't care what your ambitions are. I care that you are happy. I want to show you the world, explore fearlessly, and love without restriction. And I'm not afraid of exploring the great unknown Earth anymore. Among the other things the world has taught me, I have learned I cannot get a rash from poison ivy.

Love, M.



Karly Manuel

untitled

First and Eighteenth

Natalie Turner

She's Mars—roisserie chicken
Radiation sickness
Set her the fuck on fire and
Send her packing
A day trip to Empathica, launching
Rocks into her noggin
Watch us colonize her couplets and
Treat her to a drink

Shaved ice still solid on heated hands
She moves her eyebrows
To the rhythm of republican heartbeats
Blood vessels bursting into bad politics
Bad politics birthing big ideas that
Screw college students into four-five-ten
Year degrees. She plays piano
with extension cords
Phobos sweats in her fist
Mankind in spacesuits

We attempt to terraform the pores between
Her gamma ray gaze. She's become
The reason we invented astrology
She's cursed, she's done, she's going up
To not-quite-heaven where
The old gods burn themselves to death
And blink wine into water and
That's life.
That's what we wanted.

Right?

I Don't See Color

Elizabeth Upshur

between the liminal space between sensitivity and paranoia
--Ross Gay

Responses to the phrase are stark online,
that term is passé like Negro or Oriental
to what else don't you see about me?

"I don't see color" is synonymous with I don't like
your kind of color, like the country grey beard who went
for his rifle when I was selling insurance door to door
think of how we say nasty soup is colorless, tasteless,
odorless. How chefs make their signatures with
savory, sweet, shocking with garlic, onions, peppers.

you the white director who casts one light skint
girl of some ambiguous brown and that was
the quota for the whole series.

think how Lafayette could utter that true,
as the slave crop grew lighter and lighter
darkness draining, feeding the soil for perfect white cotton.

On the Rocks
Alina Verenich

Jack Daniels had his hands around me,
up my thighs,
down my spine,
across my collarbones
as if I was the field
the Buffalo Trace,
providing peace and shelter.
So quiet, you could hear the
honey drip, Knob Creek ripple,
tossing rocks like ice cubes.
He was making his mark,
sending me up to Heaven Hill,
only to descend alone.
Little red patches trickle
down my neck,
my Four Roses without thorns.



Tevan Morton

Missing

When I Was Done Dying

Bridget Yates

“I suppose the question to ask you is, where have you
been all the time you were dead?”

William Faulkner, “Delta Autumn”

Go Down, Moses.

It was like a tulip peeping
out of the warm, wet earth
in some long forgotten place—
like an azalea burning
above a greenly sea with
waves that had grown so tall.
It came without grandeur.
It crept and clawed through soil
between rocks and roots
to emerge into a wheezing sky
that worked so frantically
to give breath to what it birthed:
a bud that had slept season after
season beneath the dark damp
waiting, waiting to be alive.