

The United States Naval Academy's  
Literary-Art Magazine



# LABYRINTH

2017

WITH MUCH APPRECIATION THIS BOOK IS DEDICATED TO LAWRENCE BRADY  
[USNA '65] WHO, WITH HIS WIFE DEBORAH, HAS GREATLY SUPPORTED THE  
LABYRINTH MAGAZINE AND CREATIVE TALENT OF THE BRIGADE.

# LETTER FROM THE EDITOR



In your hands is our 41st edition of the Labyrinth Magazine, a collection of your classmates' thoughts and stories. Each piece exposes a side of the midshipmen at the Academy that usually remains hidden. We would like to bring that out for you in this publication.

Our big goal for this year was distribute this issue at the Mids vs. the Johnnies Croquet match at the end of April. If you received your copy of this issue at the croquet match, we were successful!

I would like to thank the entire Labyrinth Staff for their hard work collecting and editing the pieces in this issue. Our Faculty Representative Professor John Beckman and Officer Representative CDR Derek Handley, USN have also advised us thoroughly with the production of this issue. Ms. Diane Green, thank you for your careful coordination of the details of this issue.

And finally, thank you to the midshipmen whose writing and artwork is featured in this issue.

EDITOR-IN-CHIEF      Olivia Czerewko  
PRESIDENT     Jonson Henry

## SENIOR EDITORS

ART	Maddie Evans
FEATURES	Jason Chan
FICTION	Evan Wray
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IN OPEN AIR  POETRY

JOSEPH GUGGENBERGER

In weather of different sorts  
Through the canyons and to the peaks  
A majesty in the world  
Proudly displays his golden beak.

For life, for liberty, for happiness  
He stands as a symbol of principle  
Guarding our intellectual property  
Through the claws a colossal.

It is he whom we look up to  
It is he who looks down at us  
It is in a relationship that has flourished  
That we have gained each other's trust.

A House that is built up  
From one's many roots  
Becomes the basis of life  
With opportunity for personal pursuit.

In the day he is guided  
By the sun that warms the earth  
Shining bright rays of fellowship  
Reminds us of our worth.

In the darkest of the night  
The North Star provides direction of flight  
It is a God from above  
That glimmers a streak of light.

Through the gates of Heaven  
And through the dark pits of Hell  
It is internal motivation  
That will strive him to excel.

Eagles soar high with sudden movements  
Striving to reach a conclusive goal  
Similarly our footsteps wander  
Following stars drawing to it our soul.

## DAYDREAMS ABOUT A TROPICAL NORSE BURIAL



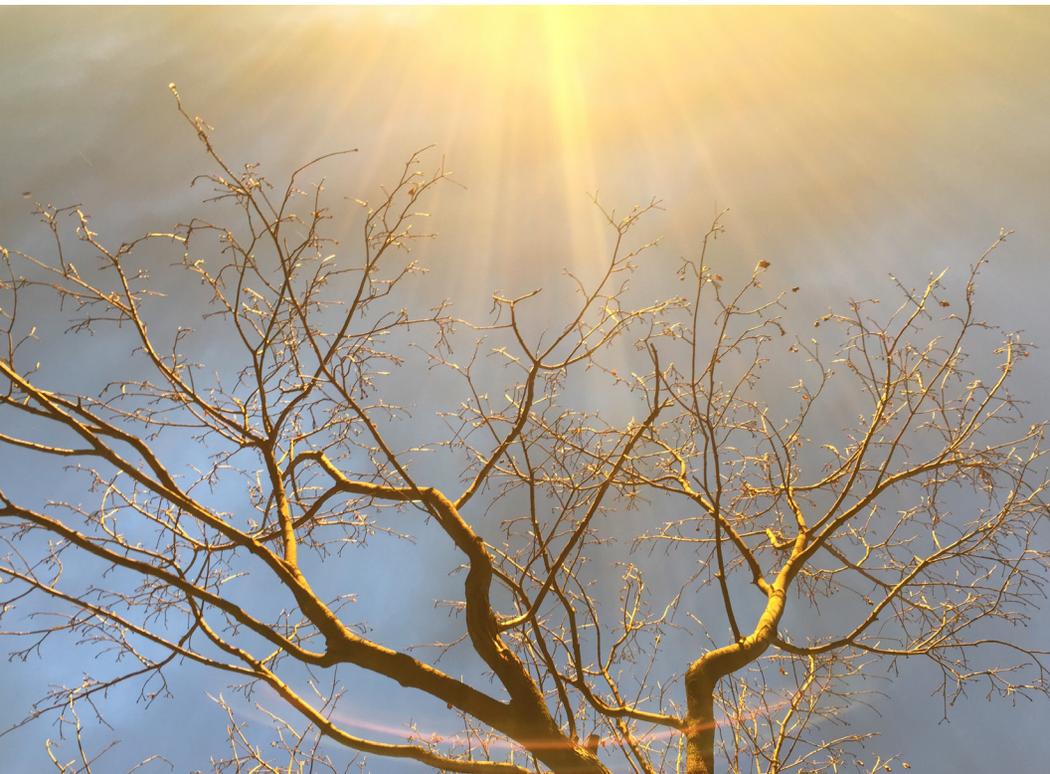
When I die, I want a Viking ship to carry  
Me across the wide, green water, to a distant  
Paradise, the island that grows Barbados cherry  
Trees. The Bermuda Triangle. I am insistent

That must be where heaven lies, where my Viking ship  
Shall take me. I will meet the pilots of Flight 19,  
Davy Jones, and Jonah. A Bugatti dealership  
Of red French cars is where I will get a new machine

To drive across my Atlantis, my waterfront utopia.  
I will lounge on the beach, sunshine on my smiling face.  
Everyday I shall eat from a rich cornucopia  
And want for nothing, except a cloudless airspace.

As I lay on my beach towel, sipping sweet iced tea,  
I stretch, lean back, and sigh, this is the life for me.

JULIA ZHU ◆ THE TREE



POETRY



HEIDI  
ZISSELMAN

## URBAN UPRISING

POETRY ◆ BETHANY SPANGLER

Some people call it defacement,  
I call it defiance.

Street-wise punks pounding the pavement,  
A group of thugs, a gang, an anarchist alliance,  
Fighting for a cause, starting a revolution,  
Proving a point, breaking the institution.

Artists, a form of expression,  
But all they get is cold rejection.

Leaving a mark on the city-wide canvas,  
Belligerent enlightenment, the pursuit is relentless.  
Put out there for its meaning to be discovered,  
Can't be removed, just begrudgingly covered.

There one day, gone the next,  
Lost and forgotten, society expects.  
But as people walk by casually staring,  
Pretending that they aren't really caring,  
In reality the spark is made,  
And the ideas, once planted, will never fade.

Blood of the street,  
Voice of the walls,

No law can compete,

When the revolution calls.

It wont change society, but it's a start,

Some people call it graffiti,

But I call it art.

REGAN KIBBY

The dry air scorched Jim's lungs as he breathed in. "Why can't we get the air conditioning fixed?" he rasped out, his throat raw from hours in the car.

Sonia sighed. "We've been over this, Jim. I just can't afford it right now. Maybe after we get to Harrison and I settle into a new job."

She hated lying to her kids, but she didn't want them to give up on their lives. She didn't want them to give up on her.

Jim knew she was lying. Shifting his feet, he felt his toe poke through the hole in his sock, bumping against his ratty shoe. He reached across the back seat and grabbed Rachel's hand, feeling her dirty nails biting into his skin. They looked at each other, knowing the air conditioning wasn't going to get fixed. Harrison might be home for a few months, but before long they would have to leave. Just like they had left Melville, and Clinton before it.

Sonia watched her kids through her rear view mirror and saw them exchange glances. She gripped the steering wheel tighter, resisting the tears in her eyes. Don't cry. Don't let them see you cry.

### DON'T CRY. DON'T LET THEM SEE YOU CRY

Since her husband left them two years ago, life had been rough. They were never well off, but they made with his dish washing work and her work as a maid. When he left, everything changed. Sonia barely made enough to feed her kids as it was, but then the hotel fired her and she was out of options. So they moved. And moved again. They chased rumors of jobs, they ran from unpaid rent, and they lived with no security.

Sonia did what she had to do to support her kids. She picked pockets, she shoplifted, and when she was out of other options, she became the kind of woman she hated. The police had been getting uncomfortably close to her in Melville, so once again, they packed it up and moved.

And now here they were, pulling into a gas station in their battered '95 Camry, fuel gauge reading dangerously low.

Sonia told her kids to go to the bathroom and come straight back. She pulled her wallet out of the center console and cracked it open. 5 dollars and maxed out credit cards. Don't cry. Don't let them see you cry.

Sitting with her head resting in her hands, she almost didn't hear her kids coming back. Opening her door and standing up, Sonia mustered a smile that didn't quite reach her eyes. She told them to wait in the car. They just nodded, not saying anything.

The bell chimed as Sonia walked into the store. She walked up to the counter, behind which stood a middle aged white man. Sweat shined on his forehead and his stomach protruded over his large belt buckle. He leered down at her, taking her in from head to toe.

"Excuse me, sir. My kids and I really need a fill up to get on our way to Harrison." She shifted her stance, avoiding his eyes. "The thing is, I'm running a little low on funds right now and could really use a bit of generosity. Maybe you could let me fill up and I can do something for you in return? I could clean the bathrooms..." she trailed off, looking up at his face. He grinned like he had just won a prize. Adjusting his jeans, he smiled down

### "HOW ABOUT YOU GIVE ME SOMETHING ELSE?"

at her. "How about you give me something else?" His gaze roamed her figure, lingering at her breasts. He reached across the counter, grabbing her wrist. "Something a little...sweeter?" Sonia's stomach dropped. No. Not again. I won't. Then she looked out of

### "SOMETHING A LITTLE...SWEETER?"

the store window. She saw her car, she saw her kids sitting in the back seat. She pictured the fuel gauge on empty, she remembered the look Jim and Rachel exchanged, she remembered the drop of sweat tracing its way down Rachel's face.

Sonia hated this. She hated all of it. She hated this man, she hated her husband, she hated that her kids were stuck in a life without comfort.

His tongue darted across his cracked lips.

She hated herself.

She nodded.

MARISSA AMODEO

Falling,  
fearing,  
forgetting,  
feigning.

Wishing,  
wanting,  
wondering,  
waiting.

Life's too short  
to sit down and waste time  
fitting puzzle pieces  
into a rigid picture  
of prospective idealism.

Forget the frame,  
Wouldn't it be easier,  
to toss them all into a  
golden, blue net,  
and watch them tumble to  
earth  
in a jumble  
of chaotic beauty?

Wouldn't it be easier,  
to leave them where they lie,  
recklessly present,  
and then proceed only to  
shower the air  
with another whirl  
of colorful collisions,  
Each one destined to  
clutter the earth with  
scattered pieces  
of unsolved puzzles?



"I love you."

"I love you, too." A smile takes over my face as his fingers intertwine with mine, almost encompassing the entirety of my hand. A flurry of butterflies dance in my stomach, following the beat in my chest when I look at him. His dashboard clock flashes "3:36 am" and offers only the slightest of his face, but I don't need it. I already took the time to memorize that face; I already know how lucky I am. I'm lucky to find anything that can even briefly help me forget about what's waiting at home.

I ALREADY TOOK THE TIME TO MEMORIZE THAT FACE; I ALREADY KNOW HOW LUCKY I AM.

Thunder begins to rumble as we approach my house. I look outside the window to prepare myself for reality. However, something feels different. Every light in the house is on scurrying around inside. I feel for my phone: "25 new messages, 7 missed calls, 2 voice mails" silently flashes in and out of its screen. Reality strikes, butterfly in its path. I force my core; I can handle this. No one in that house can do any worse than they already have.

....

"I love you."

"I love you too, Brandon," I whispered into my phone and huddled closer into my pillow and squeezed myself into a hug.

"Madeleine!" My mother's screech pierced my fantasy.

The door of my room swung open and the light of the hallway shined behind her, her shadow on my wall. She hastily waddled over to

I REFUSED TO TEND TO MY WRIST, CHILLED FROM HER COLD, TIGHT GRASP, REFUSED TO ADMIT THE WEAKNESS SHE INSTILLED IN ME.

my bedside and snagged my wrist. She dragged me out of my bed a little too quickly; straining my arm. She released me to take her power stance. I refused to tend to my wrist, chilled from her cold, tight grasp, refused to admit the weakness she instilled in me.

"You have swim practice tomorrow and you're up this late! You're throwing

your life away. Don't play dumb, you know what I'm talking about! That, that *boy* will ruin you. He's your *boypren*, isn't he? You're going to give away your future for a *boy*. Don't try to hide it, your brother told us everything. I can't believe this! Since when such a *whore*."

One of the many strikes to my pride.

"You think this *boypren* actually cares about you? We are your family; no one will care about you as much as we do! What do you need him for? For *kissing* and *hugging* and, and holding hands? Of course, a whore like

THESE SPECIAL MOMMY-AND-DAUGHTER TALKS OCCURRED REGULARLY AND LASTED FOR HOURS AT A TIME.

you would need that much. I can't believe you let him touch you like that. Disgusting! I'm so disappointed in you. Aye, what did I do to deserve this? Y'know what? I'm taking you to church first thing after school. Maybe God can cure you..."

These special mommy-and-daughter talks occurred regularly and lasted for hours at a time. I never lied to her when she asked if I was going to stay with him; of course I was. And in the end, the hours soaking my pillows in tears, spittle, and muffled screams equaled her hours of vocalizing her disappointment and prayers to God that her whore daughter might find Him once again. The longer I resisted her control, the less sleep I got. The less sleep I got, the less functional I became. According to my mother, every mistake I made, every low grade I earned, every problem I struggled with, every time I forgot to pray, it was because of the *boypren*.

On a September afternoon, I practically pranced out of bus ready for that autumn chill to greet me. I came home that day with pride and pure joy straightening my back and lifting my chin up. I felt powerful with my successful election posters under my arm and my chest beating quickly from the adrenaline. I had been elected president of my class of almost one thousand students. A majority of one thousand of my fellow peers believed in my success, in my leadership, in me. It was enough acceptance to put anyone in a happy frenzy. I approached my house, excited to tell everyone the good news. While balancing the posters in one arm, I stretched my other arm into the bottom of my backpack in search for the house keys. I fumbled around until I heard the creaking of the garage open and the back door alarm chirp. Mother opened the front door to let me in. I could no longer contain my excitement and relayed the news of my new position to her. My own happiness reflected onto her face. She pulled me into a hug and whispered how proud she was. My posters fell to the ground around

MY OWN HAPPINESS REFLECTED ONTO HER FACE.

us and along with them my phone landed neatly on top with a clattering thud. It began turning slightly in a flurry of vibrations and flashing "Brandon Kuehnhold." We both saw it. She dropped her arms. She took a controlled step back. She muttered her disgust at me. She looked at me, fury fueled her eyes. She turned around and walked away from me.

...I take a step out of Brandon's car and immediately my brother bursts out the front door. He begins to charge at me with a terrible yell and his fists in the air. Brandon quickly places himself between me and unrestrained terror. I don't know what Gabe plans to do and neither does Brandon, but all we could comprehend is the wild hostility that he emits. Brandon, still

### EACH STEP BECOMES HEAVIER AS I REALIZE THE GRAVITY OF WHAT'S TO TRULY COME.

protecting me from my brother, walks me to the door. Each step becomes heavier as I realize the gravity of what's to truly come. My mother is already at the door frame and motions for Brandon to leave.

"I'll call the cops if you don't. Leave us alone."

Suddenly, I'm alone. I'm alone with these people. I want to drop to the floor in defeat until I look up the stairs and I see her. My little sister, Louise, staring down at me with those stupid doe eyes. Those huge eyes that watch everything, that watch me, silently. She's shaking, gripping those pillars as if to keep her still, scared for me. She's showing the pathetic fear that I refuse to feed our parents' power. And the loving concerned parents have never offered. I hope she leaves so she doesn't see. I hope she hides under the pillow so she doesn't hear. I hope she doesn't experience this feeling; this prayer whispering in her mind to be struck down by God at that very moment because she would rather be struck down by God than struck down by our parents. I hope she doesn't

*Smack.*

I hope she's gone.

*Smack, smack.*

I hope she's hiding.

*Smack. "You whore!"*

I hope she's covering her ears.

*Smack. "You are no daughter of mine!"*

Eventually, the strikes follow a tempo. I know exactly when to tense up and prepare myself. I keep up my stoicism for as long as I can. I hope she doesn't also think I'm a whore. I hope Louise doesn't follow my footsteps. Thunder and lightning strikes, and the lights go out. ....

Louise's alarm clock flashes a red "12:00" in my face remind me of the storm shutting down the electricity. The clock begs me to reset it to present time, but I turn over instead. I want to focus on the sound of raindrops tapping at my window and imagine the droplets sliding down, cleaning off the dirt but it is not enough. The clock light is too bright, too demanding. I cast a shadow on the wall. I can still see myself flash in and out with the clock's . I can still hear the metrical beats. I can still feel the tempo.

I turn over in the bed. I try to curl myself into the blankets and feel the sheets fail to comfort my cold body. I try, but it isn't enough. This won't protect me from tomorrow. The clock flashing, the thunder booming, the rain pattering, the smacks. It all echoes around me. It keeps happening over and over again. I lay my head down only to intensify the hot stinging on my

### I CAN BE LIKE THE RAINDROPS. I CAN JOIN THE FLOOD.

face.

The entire room lights up and crashing thunder follows. The windowpane rattles and the raindrops splatter themselves against the glass as if committing some gruesome . An escape. I can escape too. I can escape from the strikes, the booming, the stinging, just like the raindrops. I can be like the raindrops. I can join the flood. I ca-

Huffing beneath me find my little sister cradling herself in the bunk below. I hope she understands I hate it here. The house is constantly electrified with hostility because of me. Home is just yelling. I make it hard for everyone else. Mother probably won't look me in the eye for the next few weeks. She'll probably take it out on Louise when I don't react. That isn't fair at all. I want to leave for her. I want to leave all of this. I hope Louise doesn't follow me. I hope she doesn't follow my footsteps. I'll leave for her; maybe for me. I silently climb down the bed. I avoid bumping into anything. I slowly inch closer to the door. I reach for the door knob. I've gotten out of this room so many times without waking her before. I don't know why this should be any harder.

"I love you, Mad."

Oh, that's why.

"I love you too." I make sure to close the door as I leave.



An unlit warehouse strewn with supplies,  
Houses one.  
Whose very eyes seem to mirror that of the skies.  
Greyed, with no hint of sun.

He straightens, head lifts, as mind begins to race.  
Spindly hands to grasp the strands of an undiscovered place.

WHAM-goes the hammer, in its fits of rage.  
The anvil then rings, setting the stage for  
Something new.  
Born in joy and pain, under sun and rain,  
With power the world will rue.

Still weak, it flees, leaving master to ponder;  
Of Aftermath, consequence for a God's own blunder

For many years later, his child's return  
Will Herald demise, for however wise  
He cannot stop the coming burn.

After the ashes have settled on ground  
The mighty have fallen, little struggle nor sound  
That which was feared will gaze upon  
His master's tools, from which it will dawn:

He is not beginning, he is not end.  
Link in the chain, a river's new bend.  
What is destroyed must be replaced,  
And so it dost renew.  
The tools are collected, the workshop rebuilt,  
A place with power the world will rue.

MAX BEVILL  
MOTHER GANJA

SHIFTS POETRY

ELIJAH

POETRY JADE

VERNON

A lithograph of beloved sights  
Hues and shades, darks and lights  
Detail deep, wonder ever-springing  
Sheet music of a song people swear they are singing  
Parchments!; whose wonders are only skin deep,  
You swear it only takes, of faith, a leap

But they feel smooth,  
not soft, but unforgiving  
No brushstrokes or tool marks  
Just tricksters, sins spinning

You wonder through existence, equally numb,  
To finer pleasures, through this we succumb  
To the dangers of life, each equally deadly;  
Survival not a tune, but a medley

What you practice every day,  
From storm, is your respite.  
When worlds drown and darkness reigns  
One thing still lends it's light.

At its entrance, paradigms are shifted  
Life springs forth, sand is sifted.  
Under her touch, senses do not lie  
Imperfections and mistakes  
Now Landmarks to sail by

Portraits once printed; are painted with grace  
Detail etched, with care they are laced  
Eyes once drooping, dart side to side  
Tastes once weary, return full tide.  
Hands once clenched, are now caressed  
Life may be better than proffered, I must confess.

Breathe In.

The crisp autumn wind wraps around my body  
like a cold, unwanted hug.

Breathe Out.

I need to escape. I need to crawl out from under my Past.

Breathe-

He grabs my throat. Wraps his large coarse hand around my throat. He  
won't let me breathe. Won't let me forget, won't let me exist without him.  
He begs me to fall back into the red mist. He screams for me to follow him. I  
can't. I can't let him drag me back into him.

He whispers my name. He knows me. He knows what I want- or what I've  
been taught to want.

I don't want this.

I feel the blood coursing through my veins, bubbling up, begging me,  
dragging me out of this reality and back into him. I can't escape my past. I  
cant escape his grasp.

I see him. I must end him.

Breathe In.

I lace up my. Pulling the laces tight.

Or are they boots. No. These are running shoes. I'm here not there. I'm  
in the now not in the then. Or am I?

No I'm here. My wife is here my kids are still asleep. I'm here.

But so is He.

He never leaves.

Breathe Out.

I need to run, need to shake him from my mind. Need to shake his dark  
whispers of how it was.

All the blood.

All the bodies.

I did this.

I moistened the cracked ground with the crimson flow. I took away brothers  
and sons and fathers. I did that.

And I want to do it again.

He drew me back in, he won this time.

I'm not strong enough to fight it.

But I don't care.

I need to bring color into my gray life.

Nothing gives me fulfillment.

I need him-I need the red.

Breathe in.

They are charging. Coming towards me. I must end them before they end  
me.

My heart pounds and my blood boils.

I can do this.

I will do this

I did.

I look down. Expecting to see my opponent begging for his life.

This is not right. He feels so small. So unmatched to my prowess.

Where is his armour? Where is his protection?

Then the scream.

What did I do? I shake away the red. Rip away from His grasp.

I look down.

I see myself. Well part of me.

What did I do?

I'm no longer in the field, no longer among my men.

Now I'm among no men. Just red, no grey, no red.

Breathe In.

I just destroyed the only part of me that was left.

He's choking on the ground, spitting up his own red, trying to release th red.

That's all we both want.

And then he does. He finally gets his gray. And then his black, and then he's  
gone.

He's gone and I'm sitting here.

In my own red.

I stand up. And I see him. Hes not going anywhere

Breathe out.

I follow.

"Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,  
Who bids the mighty ocean deep,  
Its own appointed limits keep  
Oh hear us when we cry to Thee"  
Save us from the terror of this rising sea

THE NEW NAVY HYMN ✦ POETRY

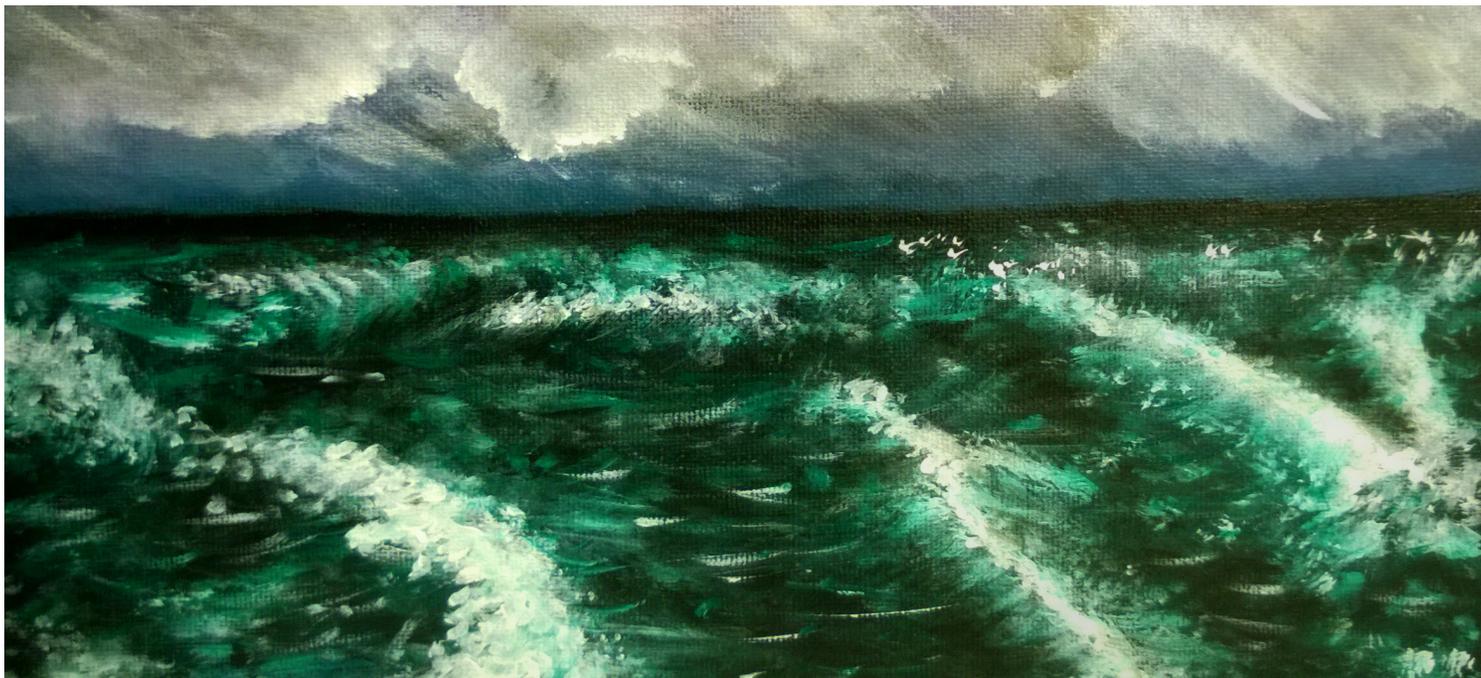
MADISON EVANS

She grows slowly but all at once  
Posing to drown our beloved beach fronts  
Give it another 50 years and we'll no doubt see  
How useful a Naval Academy swim class can be.  
'Cause the new trend will be "Paddle to Work Days"  
And we'll all have no choice but to get in on the seafood craze  
The canals of Venice Beach will have relocated 600 miles inland  
And we'll sail ships to ports in the Grand Canyon

I make jokes because it's really hard for me to comprehend  
How we can sit here and do nothing to try and mend  
This life-threatening reality that is pooling in our mind  
Except when I look for concern, it's only apathy that I find

And global warming is as much a myth  
As the idea that Miranda knew in the 60's he could plead the fifth  
People love to avoid the truth  
But it's time to start changing to protect our unborn youth  
Yeah, I just told you to "think of the children,"  
Since they're the ones who have to live with a Grand Canyon that's been filled

POSEIDON'S RAGE ✦ BUSTER DODGE



in  
By water we idly felt rise  
As we averted our eyes  
Back toward the ease of irresponsible, fossil fuel-loving ways  
Because we love that the worst effects of climate change won't be seen in our days

But I'm here to tell you that their problem is ours too  
Because the only healthy polar bears left are the ones in the New York Zoo  
Because those "colorful" coral reefs we love to see  
Are being bleached white by H<sub>2</sub>CO<sub>3</sub>.  
Because Malaysia, Venice, Florida, New York, and New Orleans can no longer  
withstand  
Massive erosion and frequent flooding of their land

I can stand up here and preach and rhyme  
And you can sit down there rolling your eyes because you've heard it for the  
thousandth time  
Or we can all start being truly worried  
That that a solution to this problem needs to be hurried  
Otherwise we'll be singing a different hymn  
Because at this point, the futures of our delicate coastal ecosystems and hu-  
manity itself, are looking pretty goddamn grim.

"Eternal Father, strong to save,  
Whose arm hath bound the restless wave,  
Who bids the mighty ocean deep,  
Its own appointed limits keep  
Oh hear us when we cry to Thee"  
For we have drowned all your creation in the sea



CHOICES  
POETRY  
BRIAN DAUGHTRY



Choices, the ever ending question that everyone faces  
Rich, poor, young, old encounters the chase  
Silence or hesitation fills the space  
One decision away from a totally different race  
The race we call life filled with grace  
Choices, the many digressions one must embrace  
To merely reach one's pinnacle accession on life's staircase

CLIFF DIVING ◆ POETRY ◆ MADISON EVANS

When you go back to the top, wait for me. And when you go back to the river, let me know before you swim. I don't think I'll be able to keep up with you, and it's a long way down.  
At first, I asked the river where you went but she couldn't call you up. You had been out of reach for far too long.  
I told you not to go that high because the fall is only good for a few seconds and then all at once the rain hits. The rain splattering on the pavement can't wash off the stain of a fall, so tell me next time you go up there.  
I want to hold your hand and keep you dry instead. When you lay on the bank, I want to anchor your legs to the shore and stop you from sinking away.  
You find your hands around your neck for just a little just to see how it feels, and I try to pull them away. And still you always put your hands around your neck for just a little just to see how it feels.  
I tell you I love you I show you I love you but you don't believe it. So I spoke to the sea and asked her if I could visit you but she didn't respond. She probably didn't even hear me.  
I've given you sweets and hugs. I've spent time with you, but you won't believe when I promise that I don't feel sick around you. I can't see what you despise in yourself. "You're okay, you're okay." I say it repeatedly.  
You smile and laugh with me every day still. Then the feeling starts to seep into your chest. It starts at the corners of the lungs and fills them up and you're drowning again by the end of the night. Your eyes can't even compensate because the water in your lungs is endless.  
I'll come for you every time and pull you down.  
They stare at you with their tiny eyes, and it makes you sick. You're shouting at them to stop talking. You're through with listening.  
I won't stop you can't swim back up you pulled me down.

KELSEY ASHBROOK ◆ HUMPBACK FLUKE



TED  
POETRY  
JOHN BARRY

He was the first person I remember swearing.  
Earliest hums of what it meant to live  
A cozy life with a nice wife and a pleasant dog.  
He continues to exist on a different map.

He toiled to show me new things.  
I saw antlers, Arrowheads, Powder Horns,  
Old Colt Revolvers.  
I became cultured in constructing cabinets  
And full tang knives  
Stories about hellacious fireballs and rowdy bars.

He fought for anything wholesome.  
Honesty and laughs from a stoic  
Who still has things to do.  
The river, the plains,  
The friends and brightness  
He is the leather and the rivet.

His craft will go when he does.  
Clouds collect as the sun sets.  
The person who goes into harm's way  
Is not always the first one to leave.  
Still a few hours until night  
His old ass has things left to do.



JEANELLE  
SEALS

SUMMITTING  
JEBEL TOUBKAL

QUETZAL KELSEY ASHBROOK



HEIDI ZISSELMAN  
POETRY



To Do:

To Do:

- Grocery Store: orange juice, bananas, plain yogurt, cereal
- Paleontologist for a day: find a dinosaur bone
- Bake Cupcakes (party June 12th)
- See the bright waves of the aurora borealis
- Bank, transfer account
- Hike across the orange dust of the Grand Canyon Trail
- Dinner with my family, 7 pm
- Travel through the Panama Canal by boat
- Tape Law and Order, starts 8 pm
- Visit the Vatican, see the Sistine Chapel
- Schedule haircut, cut off three inches
- Hear the Vienna Philharmonic Orchestra, live
- Buy multi-tool for car glove compartment
- Become fluent in Japanese
- Refill prescription
- Bike across North America
- LAUNDRY!
- Cross the equator, at least once
- Order photo prints
- Research my family ancestry
- Clean kitchen
- Bungee jump off a waterfall
- Empty litter box

TO OUR DEAR FRIENDS  
POETRY LOUIS WOHLTZ



To our dear friends  
Felled in this battle of life  
By encroaching darkness  
That ushered in your night  
We curse your Oppressor  
It took your company  
From us it stole a bit of you  
The bit that we could see  
Friends now you are gone  
But only in this plane  
Your love lives on within us  
Even despite pain  
Oppressor thinks it took you  
And is right in part  
But it can NEVER take you  
NEVER from our hearts  
Oppressor brought us pain  
And that we don't forgive  
We never will forget you  
Never so long as we live  
Dear friends we miss you  
We your friends still here  
The pain you leave to us  
With we will learn to deal  
The pain you leave behind  
Our time will wash away  
Changing from dark hurt  
Into brighter day  
We spite your oppressor  
By honoring you, dear friends  
Living our lives to the fullest  
Until we meet again



My best friend dies today. That is my first thought as I wake up. My eyes fixate on the gray ceiling over my bed. I can feel him curled up at the base of the bed; his chin resting on my ankles with a slight dribble of drool pooling on the bed sheet. Long ago, when I was much younger, I would have been annoyed by this habit; now I only feel guilty. I lay still, not wanting to wake him on this fateful day. Tears well up in my eyes burning my sorrow into my iris. I suppress them, trying to be strong for him and my family. This is a happy day. Not because I am losing my furry friend, but because we are all celebrating his life.

### THIS IS A HAPPY DAY.

I slowly raise my torso up, resting my weight on my elbows. His once sleek, golden-brown coat is slightly ragged; claimed by the same sickness that ravaged the rest of his body. I can feel his head perk up as he senses my body become alert. His big brown eyes dolefully look down his graying snout and up into mine. Despite his pain he gives me the same goofy grin that he always greets me with. I cannot help but break into a smile too. I pat him on the head and greet him. I tell him that he's a good boy for the millionth time, but not nearly enough times. He starts panting; his tail wagging quickly in agreement. I swallow hard, trying to push the rock that has formed in my throat back down. Slowly, painfully, he climbs up onto his broad, furry paws in order to lick my face. Every movement is a struggle, yet he happily does it.

### EVERY MOVEMENT IS A STRUGGLE, YET HE HAPPILY DOES IT.

We gradually make our way to the kitchen. My entire family is waiting for him. Big, toothy smiles are there to greet him as he limps steadily toward them. The smiles and enthusiasm are half forced as we all try to hold it together for him, and for each other. He returns their smiles with a happy pant. A huge stack of pancakes lathered with peanut butter is waiting for him. The excitement is visible in his eyes as he spots it. He immediately begins to drool. We laugh as he eagerly lumbers over to it. After he slobbers down the meal, he looks around wondering what's next. His eyes move from face to face as he tries to figure out what is going on. They finally land on me and I motion for him to follow me.

We lead him outside. Happily, he absorbs all of the pats, rubs, and good boys thrown his way as he walks by each person; pausing for just a moment at each person. He gives us all a turn before heading out the door. In the yard is a huge pile of balls, toys, and treats. It almost seems

like he is jumping for joy. Had he been a year younger, he definitely would have. Wobbling over to the pile he gives each toy a fair test, picks a stuffed dragon and promptly rips its head off. White stuffing billows out in a snowy plume. Holding the decapitated toy in his mouth, he looks over at us telling us that we had done a good job buying it. This is greeted by a howl of laughter; music to his ears. He plops down on his favorite patch of thick, green grass, joyfully chewing on his newfound toy in the warm morning sun.

Lunch at McDonalds (A couple burgers is the least I can do for my best friend of 13 years), and then the Park. His tail hasn't stopped wagging since we woke up this morning. We drive the two blocks to the park. Wind whisking back his fur and drooping tongue as we drive down the road. When we arrive at the park, he is greeted by the neighbor's dog barking and hopping slightly as she spots him. They play for a while, but he quickly grows tired. The sounds of birds chirping in the trees, dogs barking as they run excitedly, and kids playing loudly at the playground echo around the park. The sounds makes him happy as he watches contently from the shade. He glances quickly around at the scene playing out before him, his eyes resting on one thing for only a minute as he tries to absorb everything. It's the most alert I've seen him in what feels like forever. I try to remember every detail. This is going to be one of my last happy memories of him.

### HE RECOGNIZES THE ROADS WE ARE TAKING, VISIBLY TENSING UP.

All too quickly we are headed to the vet. He recognizes the roads we are taking, visibly tensing up. In the few minutes from the park to the vet he has seemingly grown years older. My mom is bawling in the back seat. The rest of us can barely hold it together. He rests his head on my lap as the car rumbles down the road. When we arrive at the vet we are each given a few moments alone with him. My parents both bravely go before me. Neither come back with dry eyes. As I walk into the room, he sits alert waiting for me. I wrap my arms around his body, holding him to my chest. I tell him that he has meant the world to me over the last 13 years. Every bad moment I have ever had, every bump in the road; he's been there. Every day after school he was the first face I saw when I returned home; greeting me with the smile that only a dog can give. He provided an unlimited supply of affection and never asked for anything in return. My bad days never seemed so bad when he was staring up at me in adulation. I sit crying holding him against me for the last time. The warmth of his body permeates my shirt, but the world still seems so cold. He is licking my neck softly as the vet tells me its time. He does not know what is going on, yet it is easy to tell that he knows something is wrong. I tell him that I will always love him, and say my last goodbye. Tears are streaming down my face as he slowly, and peacefully falls asleep in my arms for the last time.

LISTEN AND OBSERVE ✦ POETRY

NATHALIE CAMACHO

I stopped to listen and observe today.  
To listen at how serene silence can be.

The sound of chirping birds and leaves rustling in the wind.  
And every sound that brought music to my ears reminded me  
of your voice and how every word you speak is a note on the  
staff that composes a perfect melody I could listen to endlessly.

I stopped to listen and observe today.  
To examine the small things that are often overlooked.  
Like the morning dew on the fresh blades of grass.  
And how the sun reflects off of small intricately designed webs.  
And the way that light shun through the tops of the perfectly  
painted foliage reminded me of that sparkle in your eyes, and  
how just one glance from you can make my smile grow, and my  
heart race, and my stomach turn.

I stopped to listen and observe today.  
And I came to the realization that I am inevitably and helplessly  
in love with you. And I know that the future is oblivion, and that  
time is capricious, but I learned that I must live in today and just  
take everything in.  
And so until I have to kiss you goodbye, and our lips must part,  
I will breathe every inch of you in and you will never leave my  
mind until the minute we are together in each-others grasps  
again.

FINITE INFINITY  
POETRY  
✦ ✦ ✦  
DIRK SWAIN

This single moment, a fraction of time,  
Stretches out before me, infinitely.  
No end in sight because of hate or glee?  
These emotions, not opposed, do rhyme.  
Permanence embodied, everything prime,  
Could this moment show how it all should be?  
If only time always flowed like this, slowly.  
Each second, raging at the bell's evil chime.

Then suddenly it's over, all of it done.  
The infinite intricacy lays slain.  
The change allows growth, but at what cost?  
Time's unrelenting flow kills even the sun.  
Its movements may cause joy though often pain.  
That's why we write; to save what would be lost.



DOLORES  
  
FICTION  
CAROLINE FENDER

Ever since the night when The Nightmare happened, a woman had taken up residence in the Johnson household. She had not been invited to come and stay in the family's home, but neither was she driven away when she showed up, neither by Mr. Johnson nor Mrs. Johnson, and their daughter, Erin, certainly didn't seem capable of making a move against her. Dolores was the new woman's name, a woman seeming to be in her mid-twenties with raven black hair and a smile that twisted her face into a hideous grimace. Her face was pointy, and her eyes seemed sunken into her skull, maybe from lack of sleep. Dolores wasn't big, but she had a presence that made her seem seven feet tall, and if she got close enough there was the faint scent of motor oil coming from her skin as though she worked in a garage when she wasn't busy spreading fear.

**SHE HAD NOT BEEN INVITED TO COME AND STAY IN THE FAMILY'S HOME, BUT NEITHER WAS SHE DRIVEN AWAY...**

Erin had just turned sixteen, and this woman became her new constant companion. When other friends would ask Erin if she wanted to go out for dinner or a movie, she would bring along Dolores; she was incapable of shedding this new shadow. If friends asked Erin over and specifically said Dolores was not invited, she would end up sneaking her along. Sometimes this worked, and the friends didn't know about the woman secretly in their midst. Other times the smell of Marlboro cigarettes or the sight of a Mazda sports car would cause Dolores to emerge from wherever she was hiding and Erin would leave the gathering in an effort to hide her tears and fear. No matter where she was, those things that her mind had linked with The Nightmare: the Marlboros he smoked, the Mazda he drove, his mechanic smell, would bring Dolores running. Erin couldn't go anywhere without Dolores, no matter how much it hurt her.

Mrs. Johnson did not like Dolores nor the amount of time that she was spending with Erin. However, she seemed to think that Erin had the right to keep Dolores around, so Mrs. Johnson refused to kick her out of the house. If she was honest with herself, she didn't think anyone but Erin actually possessed the power to get rid of this nasty woman. Mrs. Johnson tried to take Erin to extra church; one morning they went to a service on forgiveness, and Dolores sat right behind the family's pew. For an hour afterwards

Erin seemed to be more of her old self, yet Dolores' control came right back the next day.

The family was plagued by this terrible woman. She would skulk into any room that contained laughter, and if her foul mood didn't ruin any happiness around her she would be sure to whisper in Erin's ear. She'd murmur questions and comments about The Nightmare, and Erin would leave immediately to hide her tears somewhere else, and without Erin there could be no joy for Mr. and Mrs. Johnson. One month after The Nightmare, the Johnsons had begun to get through entire family meals again without losing Erin to Dolores' comments. Now, instead of sitting in the corner of the dining room muttering to Erin, Dolores took up a seat inches from Erin's chair at the table. When Erin dared to giggle or show a small smile, Dolores would sulk and clang silverware to try and disrupt the conversation. Guests would come to the house, only to be scared into hasty retreat by this disgusting woman. Many a friendly neighborly dinner or card game was cut short when Dolores appeared in the kitchen.

**MANY A FRIENDLY NEIGHBORLY DINNER OR CARD GAME WAS CUT SHORT WHEN DOLORES APPEARED IN THE KITCHEN.**

The first two months after The Nightmare, Erin wouldn't spend time with her parents. She would come home and immediately go to her room, where Dolores would spend the rest of the night with her, keeping Erin awake in fear. Three months after The Nightmare, Erin managed to watch TV with the family, but as soon as someone on a show would smoke she would run up to her room with Dolores. When Erin began to make it through those parts of a show, Dolores would make her presence known by throwing biting words at Erin, comments like, "It's your fault," and "If you just hadn't gone out that night." No matter how well Erin began to be able to ignore Dolores during the day, she couldn't make it through a night without Dolores slapping her awake.

More than half a year after The Nightmare, Dolores stopped making appearances during the day. She hid in dark spaces, and around unseen corners. She walked with Erin when she was alone, but while Erin was in the company of other people, Dolores had less power. Erin started smiling again, she laughed at Mr. Johnson when he told his lame dad jokes, and she even agreed to go on a date with a small nerdy boy from her AP Physics class. All her friends laughed at her, told her that she could snap him like a twig, but they were secretly glad that she was even going out. Little did they know, there was a reason she said yes to someone so fragile; he couldn't be dangerous. He couldn't so much as open the hood of his minivan, much less work on the engine; he'd never have a single hint of that repulsive, horrifying smell.

Dolores had disappeared into the back corner of Erin's closet, only to emerge and slap Erin awake in a cold sweat a couple times a week. Otherwise, she was generally absent from the daytime and any interaction with loved ones and friends. She still had her moments of influence, like when Erin and the small boy were at the movies and walked past a man smoking a Marlboro outside the theater. Dolores turned up behind them and poked Erin, "Run," she whispered, but for the first time, Erin said no. In her pocket she felt the solid presence of the pepper spray she had carried since that night as a just in case, and knew she could protect herself now. Erin kept walking away. That was the beginning of the end for Dolores. She was no longer welcomed in the family's home.

One morning, Erin woke up after two weeks of not being slapped awake by Dolores. She breathed deeply and there was no lingering smell of Dolores' perfume, so she checked the back of the closet and the basement boiler room, no Dolores. There was no fanfare of epiphany, Dolores had simply gathered her things, packed up and slipped away unannounced in the middle of the night.

BRIGHT LOVE  
POETRY



MADISON EVANS

I picture us buzzing upward,  
And as we land upon your shine—  
That blonde hair I need next to mine—  
I wish only to hear one word.

Your denial is impure wax  
That, hot, scalds my face as I cry,  
Boils the salt that drips from my eye,  
So seek I lotion among cracks.

Those fissures you drove in my heart,  
When you answered wrongly with "no,"  
Each day I feel them slowly grow,  
And gently tear my wings apart.

DESEA BUSH  THE WOMAN IN WHITE



UNTITLED

POETRY ♦ REGAN KIBBY

Someone once told me  
The air we breath  
Filled the lungs of Cleopatra.

I wonder if there's any truth  
In that child's tale,  
As like a cloud, smoke fills the air.

The smoke enters my lungs,  
I cough, he laughs.  
Daddy's little girl, come home at last.

Someone once said  
The reason my parents stay together  
Is because opposites attract.

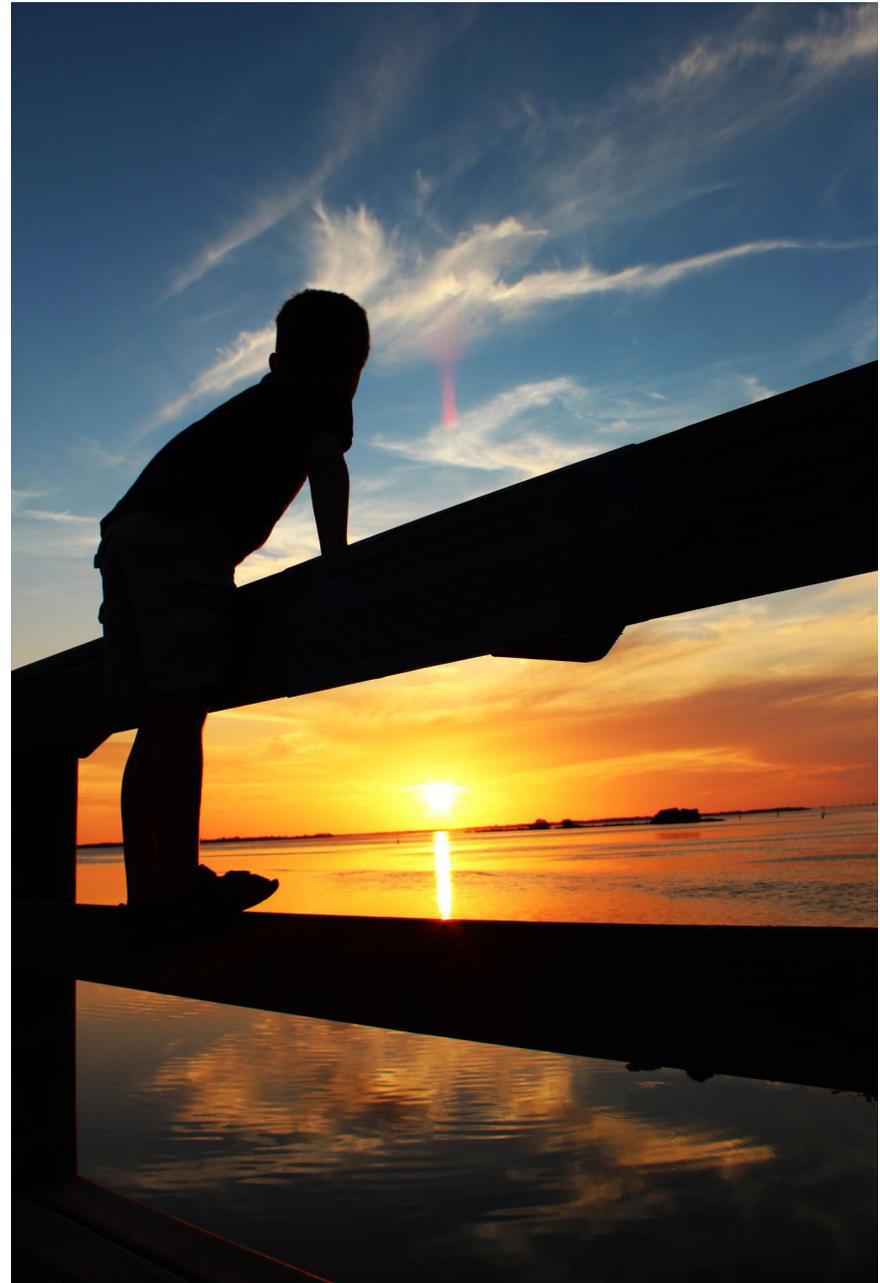
I wonder if there's any truth  
In that wishful tale,  
As unlike magnets, their forces repel.

Mama up at night crying,  
Praying for that winning scratch off  
So she can finally tell him to f--- off.

Someone once read me a story  
About a young man's journey  
Toward forgiving his dad.

Somehow I can't see any truth in that,  
As his last name follows me,  
A brand on my chest.

If I believed in a god,  
I'd thank them every day  
That at least I look like my mom.



STAY GOLDEN ♦ BRITTANY WEBB-MARTIN



KEVIN MCGINTY  
BALDY MOUNTAIN

JOHN GIRARD  
POETRY  
SHELLS

Empty faces travel across filled spaces.  
 Unknowing, untethered, we are masks.  
 We cross these places but cannot recall shell's faces.  
 We are too intent on doing our own tasks.

And as time flies by and our empty shells shatter,  
 What we know is now gone  
 And what should have been important,  
 No longer matters.

ELIJAH VERNON POETRY  
DREAM OF THE DAMNED

I thought it would be different  
 From where I was before  
 That life was just a scale  
 And soon, settled would be the score.  
 I did not ask for all of this! I did not want to come.  
 But forces far from my control made my objections numb.  
 So I planted a voice, in my mind  
 Both fictitious and fact  
 It tortured me and made me stay, but brought some hope back  
 That the people I would meet would exceed all written wish, that they'd share my  
 own volitions,

... I had never been more foolish  
 My bones broke first. Then went the mind. And when friendships fell  
 it was so very hard to be kind.  
 But I was. I am. It was how I was made to be.  
 Before they stole my power, I served everybody.  
 I comforted and supported all of those in need, in the hope that when I

Stumbled  
 When I starved, they would feed  
 And I was wrong.  
 A simple mistake.  
 To hope against what I felt.  
 And yet they never understood:  
 All I wanted to do was help.

They are cruel, they always are.  
 No matter how you act.  
 I just hope that, someday,  
 I can be cruel back.  
 They'll stumble to my door, in a cloud of sweat and tears  
 They'll pound and pound 'till fingers bleed, running from unseen fears,  
 And I will answer.

And hopefully, I will have done enough,  
 For the world that once belonged to them.  
 I'll smile, turn,  
 And shut the door.  
 Not.  
 My.  
 Problem.

MY FATHER'S DAUGHTER ◆ MCKENNA NIEMER

My father is good at everything.  
He taught me how to change a tire  
When I was young.  
"My sweet pumpkin pie"  
He called to me  
"Do you want to learn how to use a lug wrench?"  
If my father can change a tire  
So can I.

My father is good at everything.  
He taught me how to cook meals for three  
For when he was away.  
"My sweet pumpkin pie"  
He would say  
"Come help me knead the dough  
While I chop the onions."  
If my father can feed a family  
So can I.

My father is good at everything.  
He taught me how patience can fix anything.  
Sometimes I would be so angry with myself I couldn't see straight.  
"My sweet pumpkin pie"  
He called me  
As he held me.  
Even when I had calmed down  
He held me still.  
If my father can be patient through anger  
So can I.

My father is good at everything.  
He taught me how to write a eulogy.  
He has had a lot of practice these past few years-  
Both parents, two brothers, one nephew and three best friends.  
He keeps it light and he always maintains his composure.  
"My sweet pumpkin pie"  
My father writes to me  
"Will you read my mother's eulogy and make sure it sounds okay?"  
They are always beautiful.  
If my father can sum up a life  
So can I.



My father is good at everything  
But try as I might  
I cannot always be like my father.  
Unlike my father  
I find myself struggling to handle my self-destructive thoughts.  
Unlike my father  
I have what they like to call "suicidal tendencies".  
But I like to think of it more as a personal failure to cope  
Because unlike my father  
I do not love myself.  
But I do love my father  
And some days  
It is only the thought of him being incapable of  
Changing a tire  
Feeding my family  
Being patient through anger that keeps me  
From stepping over the edge.  
Because my father could not say goodbye  
To his sweet pumpkin pie  
And deliver one of his beautiful eulogies  
If I were to end my life.  
And if my father cannot do it  
Neither can I.

MARJORIE BONNER  
POETRY  
FLOWERS ON MY BOOTS



I skip through the swaying grass  
Laughing in youthful naivety.  
I come upon a meadow, the sky like glass,  
And filled with flowers of colorful variety.  
I stand in the center smiling down at my feet  
The boots I wear covered with flowers so sweet.

Then years pass with adulthood closing in  
And I now stand to take on the future.  
I fear I am not suit for the path chosen  
But my determination I will nurture.  
I step outside to breathe fresh, free air,  
My flowered boots ready to go anywhere

In the months passed there was no rest  
And it is now that I feel finally ready.  
My training shows upon my chest  
And in the face of uncertainty, I am steady.  
We wait now for the bird in our battle suits  
The dainty flowers waving under our combat boots.

The weeks start go by but in one second...stop.  
There is ringing in my ears and my set frame  
And I start to see my friends quickly drop.  
Heart-pounding, I run to those calling my name.  
I kneel over frantic eyes that know death is looming  
As they look at my boots with red flowers blooming.

I stand back at home, but feel so far away.  
Loved ones cry over those lost and I heavily look on.  
Sadness fills my heart for what happened that day  
And I salute the comrades that are now forever gone.  
I walk away, passing the stones of all who have fallen,  
My boots treading past flowers that will never be forgotten.

Decades will pass, but we will always remember  
Those who fought for freedom and honor in our name.  
Their courage will forever burn like an ember  
In every man and woman who chooses to do the same.  
They will all go off to battle when the enemies beckon  
And willingly fight till their boots are covered in heaven.



Impeccable, Jim! Now, go grab your son.  
What else is there for two boys on the run?  
Don't leave your hat or forget to fasten,  
Faster now, since the hounds are barking loud!  
If his feet begin to drag, pick him up,  
And turn your ears toward the whistling sky.  
They've forgotten which way to sniff out,  
Whose tracks beget freedom and whose, justice.  
To stop now would be to lose forever.  
Already drunk on the scent of next week,  
You're excited for that unstuck feeling  
Revealing faces unseen before now.  
Yet, the anxiety festers inside  
Because you cannot flee from your own mind.

This world is a crazy place  
With its hills and its bumps  
And an unrelenting pace.  
The dips and dives all through your life  
Make it seem as if the world gives no trife.  
No trifle as to when you're here or when you're there  
Or even if you're not even nowhere.  
There's no falling into a safety net,  
Or some big man to bail you when you place a bad bet.  
There's no telling you yes or telling you no,  
It's up to you to decide where to go.  
Where to go and what do  
So that you live your life through and through.  
It's up to you to pick and choose  
The decisions it takes to win...or to lose.  
So as you continue through this place keep in mind  
That sometimes you must look past the daily grind.  
Look at the decisions every day you make  
So that you, in the end, live a life all but fake.



TWENTY-FUN



A night to remember of moments amiss  
Celebrating with close friends and friends closer—  
She arrived

POETRY



GRANT

THORNTON

Denials past made her presence emasculating.  
Scars split with every intimate word said regardless.  
Oh she cared, but never asked for that known truth  
Buried in this boyish heart, and cutting deeper.

But what is deep would have stayed well hidden,  
And that putrid rot would have stayed well masked,  
If not for what she wore—

Blue

A blue royal to trumpet her arrival,  
Radiant for the clearest frame amidst a film of haze,  
Piercing to shatter all falsehoods of getting over.  
Audacious, she wore the stolen jewel of grey skies.  
Incriminated, she seized my stolen glances and made off  
Leaving me sentenced to sway my way into that good night.

How else could I respond to this daughter of Medusa?  
Her penetrating eyes rolling  
Her neglectful words penetrating  
Her denial devastating...

What else but melt and rot wasted under the cowl of a great night?

VIENNESE WHIMSY



CLARA NAVARRO



MAX BEVILL



NEW YEAR'S DAY AT THE TAJ MAHAL

SPEAK



POETRY

HAYDEN BURGER

Look back at the past  
And say what you see  
As time branches out  
Like an old, dying tree  
I hear shouts of laughter  
I hear cries of fear  
I hear sobs of sadness  
For the loss of those dear  
Now look to the future  
And say what you guess  
I hear fears of the worst  
And hopes for the best

I hear muttered plans  
And of high-lofting goals  
I hear aspirations  
From minds young and old  
Now return to the present  
And love what you are  
Don't waste time dissecting  
Past selves from afar  
Don't ponder the future  
Those things that aren't real  
Just look all around you  
And say what you feel

A man stumbled along Main Street as the wispy hordes of fog began to roll in. He clutched his aching back as his mangled gray beard crackled with the frost of a brisk November. Where has the time gone? he thought to himself. He glanced up at the moonlit clock tower in Town Centre ringing one in the morning as a whirlwind breeze swept dead leaves from the previous fall. He looked aside to see the old Sunoco gas station sign hanging, rusted and weathered. It had been there for nearly ten years. Or was it eleven? No matter, the days ran into years, each one almost indistinguishable from the last. He remembered his old life and his wonderful family. I would do anything to go back to that day and change what happened. His tired feet plodded along the worn sidewalk, thinking of the distant past. Lost in his thoughts and secluded from the world, he played the same old story in his head. Over and over he recounted the episode, like a lucid dream constantly invading his soul. Nothing would ever be the same, he thought as he walked. His legs began to feel weak. The world went cloudy. Not again, not now. His tired knees gave out as he slumped to the unforgiving ground. The doctors said it would stop. The gloomy street nestled between the Tavern and the boiling springs had only felt so lonely once before. The stars are so beautiful tonight, almost as bright as her eyes once were. He was never safe from the scars.

THE STARS ARE SO BEAUTIFUL TONIGHT, ALMOST AS BRIGHT AS HER EYES ONCE WERE.

"Sweetheart, where's the salt and pepper?" the man asked his wife curiously as he rummaged through the cabinets while balanced on top of a leaning chair. Savannah bolted through the open kitchen to catch the chair just as her husband began to fall. "Ahh! Here it is!" he exclaimed. "Perfect for the venison stew I'm stirrin' up." He, contrary to popular belief, was a skilled cook, modeling his style after generations of hunters and farmers. "Stir it while I'm gone, would you?" he asked Savannah while reaching for his plaid down jacket from the coat hanger in the parlor. "Of course I will," she said with playful sarcasm, "You would probably die without me doing everything, you baby!" He smiled and kissed her on the cheek as he strolled out the door. The man had to pick up his kids from soccer practice, a biweekly event for the young, twin elementary-school-aged boys. He jumped into his sky blue, aged truck and flipped on the radio, then rolled the windows down to allow the crisp but tolerable autumn air to flow freely through the cabin. He slowly pulled out of the dirt driveway that led up to their farm and sang along to John Denver's Take Me Home, Country Roads as he drifted through the countryside. All he could think about was his beautiful family, and how lucky he was to have met his wife Savannah, ten short years ago.

A few short minutes later, he carefully pulled into the gravel parking lot entrance to South Middleton Park, silently acknowledging the sun setting along the western tree line. He shut off the vehicle and strolled over to the soccer field to catch a few minutes of his sons' practice. "Hey neighbor, how are ya?" somebody behind him said. He turned around and shook the voice's hand. "Andy! It's been so long. We're gonna have to get the kids together and have a barbecue or picnic or something." "I'll get my wife to call Savannah, we'll work somethin' out," Andy replied with a smile. He and Andy had grown up together a few farms apart, transforming them into lifelong friends. "How are you feeling about this year's harvest?" he said to Andy with slight concern in his voice. "Well..." his voice trailed off, "I don't know. The bugs've been really bad here the last few months and the summer heat we had doesn't help either. We're both half way through our fields, and it's been much less than last year. I think we're in for a rough one." The man sighed, silently acknowledging the firm truth of what his friend was saying. "Anyway, looks like the boys are out, I'll see you around, Andy," the man said before shaking Andy's hand once more as a gesture of farewell. "Take it easy, brother," Andy replied.

THE MAN SIGHED, SILENTLY ACKNOWLEDGING THE FIRM TRUTH OF WHAT HIS FRIEND WAS SAYING.

"Nate! Bryce! How was practice, guys?" Nothing comforted him more than seeing his kids. All that was right in the world seemed to be contained within them. "Dad!" they screamed. "There they are. Ronaldo and Messi, straight from the World Cup!" he said as he picked them both up in his strong, weathered arms. They laughed as he knelt to the ground and pretended to wrestle with them, letting the boys pin him on his back in the cool grass. After a minute it was time to go, "Alright boys, let's get home. Mama's got dinner ready." As they walked to the car, he could not help but worry about the harvest.

HE COULD NOT HELP BUT SMILE AT HER GENUINE CONCERN AS HE QUICKLY MUTTERED, "LET'S TALK ABOUT IT LATER..."

With the boys seated at the table, he went into the kitchen to help Savannah dish the plates. "Baby, what's wrong?" She pleaded. He could not help but smile at her genuine concern as he quickly muttered, "Let's talk about it later..." He should have known she would not settle for that. "No. Tell me what's going on. Please." He sighed and told her his fears and worries of the harvest. "We could lose the farm, Savannah." She nodded, small tears welling up in her eyes. It tore him apart to see her like this. He promised her a good life when he married her. She had walked the hard road growing up, and he promised nothing like that would happen again. He held her and whispered, "Everything is gonna be alright."



PRAYERS  MAX BEVILL

As a boy growing up on the farm, he would always help during the harvest season; gathering stray cornstalks, pouring diesel fuel into the tractor, and jumping into leaves were an everyday affair. He loved the crisp smell of autumn, the quiet tranquility of it all. His father was a hardworking man, a weathered veteran of the Korean War, who instilled core values in his son: family, duty, courage, perseverance, loyalty. He could hear his father's words echo frequently, "Family is everything. You're either in, or you're out."

**EVERY STRONG MAN MUST HAVE HIS BREAKING POINT.**

One year, the harvest was far less than usual. The summer drought and general lack of rain had taken its toll on the land. His father would be the most run down at times like those. Pennsylvanian farmers build their livelihood solely on the profits and return of the previous year's harvest. Late one night, as he got up to get a drink of water, he heard his father sobbing quietly in his parents' bedroom. He had never heard a grown, tough-as-nails man cry as his father had that night. Every strong man must have his breaking point.

At around eleven o'clock, Savannah told him she was going up to bed. "I'm leaving the fireplace on, make sure to close the windows before you come up; I think the wind is going to pick up tonight." "Of course, sweetheart," he said before kissing her goodnight. He sat down on the couch for a second before the phone rang. He reluctantly sat up to snatch the phone from the kitchen, annoyingly ringing away. "Hello?" he said groggily. "Hey man, it's Andy. Me and some guys were gonna go to the Tavern and have a few drinks tonight. Are you up for it? Things have been rough lately, and I think we should get out for a bit." He thought for a second about his sleeping wife, and then how stressed he has been about the farm and the fall harvest. "Ahh, I guess I could come out for a couple hours," he said. "Alright, I'll pick you up in five." Shuffling towards the door, he grabbed his plaid jacket from the brass coat rack and laced up his worn boots. As he held open the screen and shut the door behind him, he thought that maybe he should stay. Something did not feel quite right to him; just then, he saw truck headlights as his buddy pulled into the dirt driveway. "Get in old friend!" Andy hollered from the driver's seat.

He and Andy opened the door to the Tavern and stumbled in. "Look who finally showed up," he heard as he took a seat at the dimly lit bar. The Tavern roared with life. All his old friends were there, it was as if the whole gang

was back together again. "Let's get a round on me," he belted out excitedly. He felt all was well. After a couple hours, his eyelids got a little droopy. Not drunk, just exhausted from the weeks of hard work, he slumped in his high chair, drifting off to sleep.

Sirens awoke him. The firehouse was located right outside the Tavern, prompting the entourage to rush outside, eagerly nervous to see the direction the truck was heading. A sulfuric smell lit the air as he spotted a glow off in the distance. "It can't be," he said aloud. The rest of the men turned towards him with curious ignorance. Andy grabbed him by the arm, pushing him into his truck. At break neck speeds, they thundered down the familiar country roads, neither saying a word. Andy looked over, sorrow filling his eyes. The man silently sent a prayer to heaven, to anyone willing to listen. He could see the fire roaring from around the bend. Andy's truck jerked to a halt next to the frantic volunteer firefighters, desperately trying to put out the fire. Tears streaming down his face, he bolted towards the house, distantly hearing someone shout, "The wind ignited a fireplace through the open windows, the house was consumed within minutes." It was a blur. His mind went blank. Adrenaline fueled his veins. He rushed into the burning house, the smoke billowing out the windows and stinging his senses. He crawled into the living room as he heard his wife's voice as she called for the boys, cut off by a vortex of fire. He sprinted up the first flight of stairs as a smoldering support beam dropped from the ceiling, slamming him into the floor and knocking him nearly unconscious. It instantly seared the flesh on his back, scorching his body. He heard their agonizing screams once more, pleading for help, for anybody, for God. He tried to get up, but the weight of the heavy wooden infrastructure was too much, and he had begun to go into shock. Never had he been so helpless. Ears ringing with pain, he heard voices come through the living room. The smoke had muffled his family's cries for help; he knew no one could hear them any longer. He felt a weight lifted off his shoulders. As Andy dragged him through the living room towards the door, he pleaded with heaven, "Take me instead, let them live." He cried out once more before he drifted out of consciousness and into the darkness.

**"TAKE ME INSTEAD, LET THEM LIVE."**

"Excuse me, sir, are you alright?" he heard as a voice tricked his mind to wander back into the world. He felt somebody help him up as he opened his eyes. Where am I? Who is this kid? He thought as he regained his bearing. He was perspiring profusely, his sweat freezing to his worn jacket in the cold morning air. I must have had another episode. He had collapsed in front of the Tavern, a place that ripped his heart for reasons unknown to him. They say that certain traumatic events can affect a man in such a way that they cannot recall them specifically, as if his mind erased the memories. Sometimes, he would see things that would trigger those memories, sparking intense, vivid flashbacks. He thanked the boy for helping him, handing

him one of the few dollars he had left. He shuffled down the street as he spotted the sun rising in the east. The last time I saw something like that was... His thoughts trailed off as he looked at the ground. Enough pain for ten lifetimes. He plodded along with his hands in his pockets as a car drove by, echoing a song he recognized by the Rolling Stones, "So if you meet me have some courtesy, have some sympathy, and some taste." Have some sympathy? Yeah. Sympathy for the devil. He shook his head as he sighed in anguish.



CONSOLATION



POETRY

LOUIS WOHLLETZ

When the demons rush you  
And distractions are all numb  
When body and mind are tired  
That's when the darkness comes  
The worst of your existence  
Shoved in your face to see  
It takes all control  
And there's no way to flee  
The blackness comes and binds you  
To unpleasant hours  
Mind is tortured over  
Memories that are sour  
The things you wish you hadn't  
The things you wish you did  
The hurts of heart that plague you  
When you're in your bed  
There's nothing to be done  
Except to be consoled  
That every other person  
Must face these monsters' hold



GIFT OF LIFE



POETRY

MARJORIE BONNER

Life is too much a gift  
 For one to simply end it in a rift.  
 Not a day should go by,  
 Nor some troubling night,  
 That some poor unfortunate soul should cry  
 Or cower in fright.  
 For though the road may be long and treacherous,  
 Each memory made will be all the more precious.  
 The dark days will give way to blinding light  
 And even the most sorrowful of souls will see with unclouded sight.  
 See the wonderful thing called life.  
 The majesty of the day  
 And the beauty of the night.  
 It is necessary in this way,  
 To take pride in your right to delight,  
 And see with all your eyes, this gift called life

For years gone by, I sat on my ass gazing up  
 At the blackened blanket of saturated chemicals  
 Escaping the grounded pool of stagnate sludge.  
 But today,  
 The sun shone through the hovering ash cloud;  
 What a good day for a picnic – I thought –  
 With someone special.

I packed my basket with the nearby debris,  
 Then I met her at the foot of the landfill:

About her frame an azure dress  
 (The sky-blue taunted gray unrest  
 That lie beyond her noble stance,  
 And stretched beyond this place – so scant)  
 A modest piece of decent cloth  
 Which rustled with a subtle gloss.  
 She nobly stood in dark blue flats  
 Awaiting me and time to pass.  
 Patiently, Death had brushed  
 Her long, blonde locks of honeyed hair  
 That fell so soft, so trimmed, so sheer.  
 Her lipstick matched her dewy eyes:  
 A Sapphire glow that harmonized.  
 Around her perked and gentle nose,  
 Freckles danced with quiet boasts.  
 Juxtaposed against tenured bile,  
 She welcomed me with her demure smile.

I wiped off my scum, and took her hand,  
 And we climbed the hill of rubbish.  
 She kept footing well, as I trudged on,  
 My cumbrous, mangled leg dug into the ground and trailed behind.  
 On the side were some rascally, fatherless kids  
 Digging for metal scrap:  
 Derelict signs. All is Well,  
 Could be Worse, Cleaner Coal.  
 "Shoo you away; you'll ruin our day!"  
 They sulked on and we both giggled.  
 Trash turned to Earth the higher we went  
 With a hope of brown grass here and there.  
 When we got to the top, we couldn't see much;  
 The smog was thick, and the sun was gone.  
 Alone was a tree, shriveled and burnt.  
 We saw its last green pass when we reached our spot.

PICNIC  
 POETRY  
 DUNCAN  
 FARRANT

I laid out my rug on a rough patch of ground,  
Collapsed, and she sat beside.  
I closed my eyes and took in the charming stench,  
And opened my ears to the industrial grinding.  
"Do you hear that bird coughing?" She nodded to me.  
"So sick and so lonely; what use are its wings?"  
I grinned.  
She smirked.  
I opened my eyes to wheeze into my hands.

She looked in the distance to gods' creation  
As I set my gaze on her cordial face.  
The hot sulfur wind ruffled her hair.  
It seared my eyes, and boiled my skin –  
I had fallen so drunk with love  
That I vomited a gleefully thin layer  
Of blood and pus.

I opened my basket ready to dine.  
"I don't have much; do you mind if I eat?"  
I took out my sandwich, and unwrapped it:  
Between two slices of cardboard was,  
"Part of my neighbor Pete."  
I chewed feverishly (It didn't hurt that much),  
Until I realized my vulgar display,  
"Bardo-me!"  
Some of the meal fell through my gums  
Onto my rags, and I chuckled briefly.  
She crinkled her nose and rested her chin on her hand.  
After I consumed the feast,  
I felt instantly ill.  
Food poisoning for sure.  
"Oh, for Pete's sake!"  
We laughed for a good, long time.  
She took my hand in hers,  
Her consoling grasp keeping my remaining two fingers from slipping away.  
We laid back on the rug and stared  
Into each other; I liked what I saw.  
As we sat, some friendly maggots came up to join us.  
Squirming and biting and making the world a better place.

A crack of gunshot thundered through the air,  
Then it began to rain.  
The acid burnt holes on my exposed flesh,  
So we both got up to find some cover.  
We ran toward the ruin of an old bank,  
And I twisted my ankle on the way there.

We squatted beneath some ceiling remains,  
And oozed around us a yellow shower.  
The storm outside threatened to level  
This artifice that gave us shelter.  
My tatters were soaked,  
While raindrops glistened on her skin.  
In this moment of safety and grief,  
I looked deep into her eyes.  
I took her face in my hand,  
And brought it close to mine.

"Stay here with me, I love you so;  
Your beauty coats with sheets of snow  
A world that's less than what we're told  
That temperate is, in fact is cold."  
I shed a tear. She closed her eyes.  
I felt her breath, and dropped my guise.  
They say it ends with icy grips,  
But it was warm when we pressed lips.





Black Beauty,  
Your pungency is sweeter than any field of flowers  
Your blackness prettier than any sunset  
Your effect greater than any drug  
Your bitterness more delicious than a candy shop  
Your pull an infatuation  
Your wonderfulness better than any world's  
Your essence entirely beyond words  
In times like these (and what time isn't like these?)  
You are my savior, my love, my everything  
Without you my life would lack focus  
Be the dullest of the dull  
Dragging this body through eternal mud  
You give my life meaning, motivation, mental motion  
I cannot describe my love for you  
You have my eternal gratitude  
My Black Beauty

COFFEE  
POETRY  
LOUIS WOHLETZ

CYCLING THROUGH  
POETRY  
MADISON EVANS

Cold and sterile  
Staring up at the ceiling  
Seeing your mistakes piling up  
Ruptured heart and ruptured skin  
Scars marring the arms you use to hold  
Used to holding onto painful emotion  
Motionless in your bed  
Begging your mind to calm down  
Drowning yourself with tears of confusion  
Fueled by years of self-doubt  
Down goes the mood in the room  
Ruined by an inability to just move your eyes  
From that cold and sterile ceiling

STAYING AWAKE

DORY LUSTIG

A CHRISTMAS EVE BEDTIME STORY  
FICTION  
AUTHOR: YAO YI  
TRANSLATOR: XINHE JULIA ZHU



1

When Ms. Goose woke up, she realized that the snow above her head had been blocked. Mr. Snowman was caringly holding a piece of broken cardboard above her head.

"Thank you, Mr. Snowman." Ms. Goose said.

"No problem at all! I am more than happy to serve someone I love." Mr. Snowman replied with a shy smile on his face.

Ms. Goose felt warmth in her heart. She thought, the warmth of spring time was nothing compared to this.

2

The child coughed a few times while looking at the snowman with sorrow in his beautiful hazel eyes. The child was sick.

"When I just made you, you looked very happy." The child said to the snowman.

"Ah, I wish I can do something for Ms. Goose. But I can't even move. I feel so useless... So I am not happy right now." The snowman looked down after saying this. The child found snow covered Ms. Goose lying next to the snowman.

"Poor thing! What can I do to help?" the child asked.

"I need something to block the wind and snow for her. Sorry for all the trouble. Thank you." The snowman said.

"No problem. We are friends, aren't we?" the child hugged the snowman before leaving to seek the materials.

The snowman felt warmth in his heart. He thought, the warmth of spring time is nothing compared to this.

3

On his way to the court, the man saw a child trying to reach for a piece of cardboard on top of a dumpster.

"Sir, may I go help that child?" the man raised his hands that were cuffed in a set of heavy handcuffs and pointed at the child. "Reaching for cardboards like that can be very dangerous."

"Oh, a murderer can't also be sympathetic as well!?" The policed was greatly surprised by this request. He replied the man with a sarcastic tone.

"Please, in the love of God." The man begged with an embarrassing smile.

"Fine." The police agreed with the man's request. He took off his



SHOW ME MY PICTURE! ✦ CLARA NAVARRO

own scarf and covered the man's handcuffs with it. Then, the police escorted the man to the dumpster and helped the child.

"Thank you. You guys are very kind." The child's eyes were filled with happiness.

"No problem! More than happy to help little angels like you." The man wants to pet the boy on the shoulder, but he stopped himself half way. He didn't want to let his handcuffs scare the child.

The child felt warmth in his heart. He thought, the warmth of spring time is nothing compared to this.

4

The woman kissed the man through the cold glass window in the visiting room in jail.

"Even if it is the worst decision, you will have to accept it. This is the price that we have to pay." The woman said with tears in her eyes.

"I know. I am prepared for the worst. Maybe I won't be able to see this coming spring." The man had tears in his eyes as well.

"But remember, my dear, I love you. I will give birth to our child. I will raise him up. I think our baby will become a handsome guy just like you. Have the courage to accept whatever verdict the court might make, my love. I love you no matter what."

The man's heart ached slightly. He never realized how much he loved the woman whom was sitting in front of him right now. The love she gave him was so warm, he thought. The warmth of spring time is nothing compared to this.

5

Just blocking the snow and the wind cannot resist the cold. Ms. Goose's soul finally went to the south. It wasn't even the end of winter, yet. After a short warm-front and continuous rain. Mr. Snowman disappeared into a paddle of water. It wasn't even the end of winter, yet.

The child's sickness never improved, neither medicine nor prayers worked anymore. The child went to heaven to meet up with his grandparents. It wasn't even the end of winter, yet.

As the man expected, the worst result occurred. He said goodbye to his wife one last time and was buried in a public cemetery. It wasn't even the end of winter, yet.

6

"This is the worst Christmas Eve bedtime story I've ever heard! They are so unfortunate!" the little girl told her mother sadly after her mother finished the story.

"No, on the contrary, they are fortunate." The mother answered warmly. "Migratory birds cannot survive in the cold; the snowman cannot resist warm temperature; not every cancer patient can win the battle against illness; and criminals cannot escape the punishment of the law. These are the laws of nature and laws of life, no one can ever change them. But, no matter if it is Ms. Goose, Mr. Snowman, the sick child, or the man who broke the law, in the end of their lives, they were still able to find kindness and love in others and feel the warmth of this world. I think, there is nothing more fortunate than that. What do you think?" The mother looked at the little girl and asked.

The girl did not answer her mother's question, but asked a different one. "So... you will always love me right?"

"Of course."

"How much love?"

"This much love." The mother opened her arms.

"How much is this much love?"

"The distance between two arms. It can go out for miles. Anyways, I promise that I can and will hold you tightly whenever you need me. Anytime. Anywhere." The mother held the little girl in her arms.

"Thank you, mother. Merry Christmas Eve!" The girl smiled and kissed her mother on the cheek.

"Merry Christmas Eve!"

"I love you." She said it and I immediately choked on my own saliva, coughing into the collar of my shirt. When I finally regained my breath, my gaze locked with Hannah's. Her eyes didn't particularly inspire a reaction of any kind. They were a shade of brown which in and of itself isn't very distinguishing or exciting, although a more poetic man than I could probably find something to say about their particularly light hazel tone. Her hair too I now began to realize was also a sort of dull, ordinary brown – not the color of mud per se, though certainly not an amber or a chestnut either.

**I spoke the same language as its engine, which told me what it desired with a simple purr or cough.**

The Cessna really was a thing of beauty though. For a small four seat plane with probably about thirty years of experience dancing through the clouds, it had proved itself to be extremely reliable. I could feel how still the outside air was through the control stick, and the Cessna seemed to be content with sitting straight and level without the need for my input. It really was a spectacular thing, this plane. The white paint was peeling from the rusty wings and the compass was always off by fifteen degrees, but it answered my every command. I spoke the same language as its engine, which told me what it desired with a simple purr or cough.

The sun had already set, but a crimson hue still hung over the sky, setting a perfect backdrop for Hannah's nervous grin. An empty wine bottle and two fold-up lawn chairs sat in the luggage space behind our seats, an ode to the romantic outing we had just spent on a small Cape Cod beach



that night. Some might even say that it was the perfect way to celebrate my new purchase of the Cessna, with the colors of the beach and the ocean before us as if painted across a canvas.

Now, however, Hannah's words drifted about the cabin pestering me, and I racked my brain for a solution to this conundrum Hannah had managed to contrive from this otherwise beautiful evening. Her face was flushed red and her eyes were large, as if she were trying her best to supplement her embarrassing declaration of love with a message embedded in her facial expression. Whatever that message was, I decided in that moment that there were more pressing responsibilities before me on the dashboard. I played the carburetor heat knob, flipped some lights on and flipped some lights off, and to my grave amusement, I even turned the runway lights up to a blinding brightness at an airport a few miles away with a few clicks of my transmitter. The Cessna played along with me, flashing strobe lights and beacons. Its sputtering sounded like chuckling to me, and while I fooled around with buttons and switches, it affectionately tossed Hannah and me around, sending needles on my instruments flying in every which direction.

### Hannah's words drifted around the cabin pestering me...

When I finally looked over to Hannah again, who had impressively managed to maintain that same contorted expression, I realized she wouldn't give in without a response. I knew what she wanted to hear from me, and it filled me with dread. In an attempt to stall, I finally spat out a bold "What?"

Her eyebrows rose slightly, and I could tell she was biting the inside of her cheek. It looked painful. "I said, I love you," she said, articulating each syllable - probably to ensure that I could hear her loud and clear. I wanted to be able to read her face as easily as I could read the instruments in front of me; if not for her sake, then at least so I could release the uncomfortable air between us.

As if she was listening, my Cessna's left-seat window popped open and a surprisingly comforting gush of cool summer-night air rushed into the cabin. The plane tossed Hannah and me to the side as the air got caught to the fuselage. Without losing a moment to take advantage of the opportunity to turn away from Hannah's enigmatic expression, I fiddled with the window's hinge until I managed to wrestle it back into place.

I turned back to Hannah, who I was now convinced was out to ruin my evening. Her hand was on my leg, but I couldn't figure out if she was trying to seduce me into submission by rubbing my leg or was trying to aggressively coerce an answer out of me by digging her nails into my thigh; Either way, I was ready to be done with it so that we could move on from this unnecessarily uncomfortable hole Hannah had managed to dig us into.

### The Cessna kept Hannah asleep with a soft vibration, leaving me and the plane alone for the first time all night.

"I too.... love you. Also," I said, and to my relief, Hannah exhaled a breath she must have been holding onto for minutes and finally released the pressure of the situation, as if finally prying open a rusty valve. She reached her hands out for my cheek and puckered up. I squirmed in her grip in an effort to keep my eyes forward on the sky and I'm fairly sure in doing so, my elbow hit her in the ribs. But in the end, I successfully deflected her soggy kiss which ended up landing somewhere between my ear and my jaw.

An hour or so later found Hannah deep in sleep against the passenger side window. There she was with that stupid little grin stretched across her face. The Cessna kept Hannah asleep with a soft vibration, leaving me and the plane alone for the first time all night. I popped the window open and stuck my hand out into the strong wind. I rubbed the outside of the fuselage, scratching flat a small bump I found in the paint. As the Long Island sound came into view, I canceled flight services from approach control and punched 1200 into the transponder. I took off my headset and sat back, looking out onto the horizon where some red was still seeping into the sky. I ran my hand across the dashboard and whispered, *I'm so glad I could share this moment with you, my love.*



A WALK HOME  
  
NELSON CHANDLER

A fox tail lies dormant in the grass, detached, staining the innocent green around it with guilty red; three minutes pass and Thom stands transfixed by the image of power lost. An unexpected stranger pulls him back to the present. A commanding voice echoes from a beat van with the inscription “Stetson’s Windows and Glasswork” that had pulled up to the curb unbeknown to the ponderous Thom.

“Do you want a keychain?” thunders the van.

“Pardon?”

The driver’s side door swings open and out saunters the only possible man physically capable of housing the voice by which Thom was so surprised moments ago – a perfect pot belly encapsulated by a short-sleeve denim shirt, capped by a rubicund face covered in beard.

“I said ‘Do you want a keychain?’ These things make great little trinkets.” The man says as he stoops down to retrieve the severed tail, simultaneously digging a box cutter from one of a thousand pockets. Snip. The minimal exposed bone and ligament are gone; only fur remains.

...he stoops down to retrieve the severed tail...

“Hold this.”

The burly stranger disappears into the sliding door of his blue-collar sanctuary and leaves Thom in trust of the treasure. In seventy seconds the man returns, but this time he returns with a swatch of leather and a thumb tack. What does a window artisan need leather swatches for?

“Give it here.” Thom complies.

“What exactly are you –” the question is cut off.

“Here you are; enjoy that now.”

The glassman turns around and jumps into the driver’s seat without another word. Thom is left, tail in hand, forced to comprehend the events that had just unfolded. He turns to the road and begins his trek homeward.

Thom does little critical thinking on his journey; he idly poses a series of

questions to no one. What were the preceding global actions that led to the loss of this unknown fox’s tail? Was the image of the tail immovable in the grass meant to be solely witnessed by Thom? If that is the case, will the appearance of the magnanimous stranger have an inconsolable but imperceptible effect on the life of Thom, and how will he tell the difference? Does the Stetson’s representative have a name? What does a window artisan need leather swatches for?

At this point in Thom’s pilgrimage the sun gives way to cloud coverage and a light drizzle. Thom puts the fox tail keychain in his pocket. The smell of wet fur is particularly unpleasant to Thom.

What does a window artisan need leather swatches for?

The young man hugs the curve of the sidewalk into his neighborhood and begins the final stretch of his quest for sanctuary. Thom looks into the homes of his neighbors; most of the blinds are drawn. Thom knows the name of three families in his development. Upwards of sixty families live in Thom’s neighborhood. Met with a cornucopia of shut-in lives, Thom realizes that the unnamed stranger who encroached on his private scene and forever altered his life could easily be one of the unnamed residents of this suburban fever dream – provided that the beat van is left at Stetson’s nightly. Thom has never heard of Stetson’s Windows and Glasswork, nor has he ever seen the business’ storefront. He will attempt to find an official website when he arrives home.

Thom stands at the threshold of his driveway and looks forward to his residence. He has never stopped to appreciate this angle of his modest house. The slight rainfall has not yet dissipated but the sun has begun peak out from behind the clouds. If ever there were such a thing as bright grey, it was happening now. This melancholy picture of Thom’s home is a meteorological manifestation of countless memories associated with the building. Thom’s glasses are fogged up and the rain has saturated his canvas shoes. His socks are becoming soaked.

If ever there was such a thing as bright grey, it was happening now

The threshold of the curb passes behind the wet young man as he walks up his driveway. The impertinent questions of the day’s walk home melt away from Thom’s mind as quickly as excess moisture falls from his nose. What does a window artisan need leather swatches for? Thom has to use the restroom. He removes the fox tail keychain from his pocket, throws it in the trashcan in the side alley of his house, and enters his garage. The smell of wet fur is particularly unpleasant to Thom.



NATHALIE CAMACHO ◆ POETRY  
DEATH'S GAME

In this dark cruel world, where Death holds sway  
Each second we grow closer to breaking away  
As tears roll down like streams of lost hope  
Each day the pain increases, it's harder to cope  
Your heart is being squeezed and your lungs being crushed  
Each time you yelled louder, but silent screams are never enough  
Shaking and trembling as fear rushes through your veins  
Each moment you realize you're slowly going insane  
Death wanted to play game, knowing you struggle to stay alive  
So now your one objective is to win, overcome, and survive

DIRK SWAIN  
POETRY  
OFF INTO THE INKY BLACK



Off into the inky black.  
Goodbye my friends,  
Goodbye my foes,  
For I will not be back.  
  
Off into the inky black.  
Forward for glory,  
Forward for hope,  
Sailing favored tack.  
  
Off into the inky black.  
Fighting the darkness,  
Fighting the void,  
Continue the attack.  
  
Off into the inky black.  
Embrace the vacuum,  
Embrace the edge,  
It embraced me back.

LOUIS WOHLETZ  
POETRY  
YOU



How is it conceived	To see you is to peek
That such a girl exists	Through the pearly gates
Perfect to look upon	Lithe, pretty, beautiful
And sends me to such bliss	But too, more than ornate
The maker did us proud	Behind your pretty face
When sculpted you he did	Resides a mighty mind
He took the finest flesh	Full of love and smarts
And made you soft as kid	Quite quick, and always kind
Your face is curved and cute	So stunningly cute
Amazing beyond words	My brain cannot compute
Pure, shining, angelic	The beauty within you
Graceful as a bird	From which nature takes its cues
Your legs are toned and strong	This world is so large
So lovely to behold	You make it less dim
They carry you as you dance	You would make it less empty
Graceful, deft, and bold	If you loved me, not him



NATHALIE CAMACHO POETRY  
BROKEN HEALING

Even the longest time with you will never suffice  
I start to miss you the moment you leave my side  
Even the thought of heartbreak seems fine  
Because at least I had you in my life  
And though I never want this to end  
Knowing you was enough to mend  
This broken heart I had locked inside  
And corrupt thoughts that go on in my mind  
I can say I had the privilege of knowing love  
Because you gave me the chance to love you  
And whether we make it through, or we fall apart  
I'll never forget that you once held my heart

Hunched over at a funeral  
Crying my eyes out over someone I've never met  
There were just enough seats in the chapel  
For the people to sit  
And the grief to cram into the pews

That's how we felt it  
The unlucky who had never met this kind soul  
We were suffocated by the loss  
Empathetic to the pain  
Of those who had loved him before

His name was Jason  
And he was our brother, gone too soon  
We sang him music and they carried him home  
Tears fell, tears dried  
And salt remained

I played the violin  
Never felt such beautiful sorrow  
I felt something different in the music  
We sang Amazing Grace  
And I'd never felt so sweet a sound

Salt, bitterness, grief  
Crusted our cheeks  
And my violin played on  
The choir sang  
And the music healed

In this life  
There are truths  
We hold self-evident  
That our grief makes us human  
And that our love makes us whole

In this life  
We will cry salty tears  
We will make music  
But the tears will be healed by the music  
And the music will be the cause of our tears

In this life  
In the end  
All we have  
Is salt  
And violins

 SALT AND VIOLINS  
POETRY  
JACQUELINE NEVILLE

IN MEMORY OF JASON JABLONSKI, WHO GAINED HIS WINGS OF GOLD  
SOONER THAN THE REST OF US.

