

Exhale

Victoria Horn

Our sighs mingle and freeze

midair.

The warmth from our mouths

floats there between us

in dreamy white gusts

that tangle together

like tongues

The sight hits me in the gut

and I can't tell him

I want to cry

I want to hold my breath

I have to look away

now.

I let his sighs dissipate

against my turned cheek,

the cheek pounding a rosy heartbeat

I inhale the sweet winter air, hoping

it will fill me with the words

But looking away is worse

because my eyes find our fingers

clutching to keep the cold out

and my finger brushes

his wrist.

I feel the bumpy memories there

I see the shiny, white scar

and the puckered skin rising up

against the phantom feel

of the jagged razor's edge

I can't tell him—

I can't tell him that I wish
he had wanted me before now

I can't tell him that I fell
for the boy he used to be,
full of words and
breath laughed out

I can't tell him that when he slit
his wrists, he bled
out the boy

I could have loved
and left me alone

with a ghost.

Now, his cheeks are flushed
from December's cold slap

His lips are still open
from the last rounded 'o'
of three scary words

I should

not

say back.

But I say them anyway,

letting my lips round
in a red pucker

like the proud scars on his wrists
His open mouth presses over mine
and I exhale,

letting him take my breath

he needs it

and I never breathe in,

afraid of his sigh

inside my lungs

Victoria Horn is a sophomore Writing & Rhetoric and Literature double major at Northwestern College in Orange City, IA. She has been obsessed with the written word from the moment her mother and father began reading to her as a child. She has avidly been writing poetry and short fiction since junior high. Throughout her love affair with writing, she has cultivated a heart for writing poems about the people and experiences that have shaped who she is today, as well as writing romance fiction that isn't cheesy. After graduating from Northwestern, she plans to get a Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing and pursue a career as a YA fiction author. This is her first publication.