

# Diamond Line Undergraduate Literary Magazine

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December 2020

## Diamond Line - Fall 2020

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## Diamond Line - Fall 2020

### Authors

Autumn Blaylock, Emily Corn, Heather Drouse, Claire Hutchinson, Elise Lusk, Alexis Jamilee Carter, Lauren Dial, Toby James Haymore, Caroline Jennings, Heidi Kirk, Brittaney Mann, Anna Karen Olivo, Hadley West, Tabitha Novotny, and Lexie Price

# THE DIAMOND LINE

AN UNDERGRADUATE LITERARY MAGAZINE

Fall 2020



Issue No. 2

# Acknowledgements

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## Colophon

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*Artwork by Claire Riddell*

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## A Letter from the Editors

Dear readers,

In following up the premier issue of *The Diamond Line*, the fall 2020 editorial staff had big shoes to fill. We took on the challenge of creating something that would uphold the framework of Issue 1 while simultaneously branching out from its margins.

Like the editors before us, we had a vision, but ours took a new form – bright, warm colors. *Sunset colors*. Moons. Playful lines. Isolation and introspection. A stroll through an art gallery. A coming-of-age story bound between two groovy orange bookends. While Issue 2 does not have an overarching theme, we chose the cover art, “Pandemic Prom” by Autumn Blaylock, because it beautifully encompassed the pages within and the vision we were working toward.

With all that 2020 has brought, our team was also faced with the challenge of forging new ways to come together for the magazine’s production. We created Issue 2 from fifteen separate spaces, communicating only through virtual platforms. While none of us would call these circumstances ideal, we each gained immeasurable insight into the work that goes into curating a literary magazine, and we will hold this experience close to us long after we graduate.

We believe that the writings and artwork in this magazine best represent the talent of undergraduates here at the University of Arkansas. We have taken great care in showcasing their artistry, and our editorial teams have chosen each piece of fiction, poetry and visual art with our readers in mind. We extend our thanks to every individual who contributed to the production and publication of this issue.

Despite the challenges this year has brought, we hope this magazine will allow readers to escape the chaos of real life for a short while. We are immensely proud to present the fall 2020 issue of *The Diamond Line*, and we hope you enjoy reading it as much as we enjoyed making it.

Sincerely,

*Kate Duby – Editor in Chief*

*Cassidy Cole – Managing Editor*

## Orange Series, Groovy Girl *by Emly Corn*



thinking about how long it may take  
for the trees around me to go  
from their spiny empty look to  
a beautiful tangled-up  
green and my words are sticking  
in my throat because I'm not  
quite understanding how talking  
about the kinds of cars we liked got us  
to this taciturn moment and something  
about the way his hands are so far  
from mine makes me fidget  
with the buttons on the passenger car  
door but then I remember that just three  
months ago this road was lined with  
full trees until the harsh air of  
the season crawled deep into  
its limbs straight to its core so  
instead of trying to find any  
words I'm staring at the dashed  
lines in the road combine and stay  
together and imagining the future  
trees flying by again in shades  
of dark green and olive green  
and maybe even a little yellow.

*car ride by Caroline Jennings*



## Queen Dido of Carthage

By Elise Lusk

## For These Sins, The Flames are Furious

by Alexis Carter

They're burning witches tonight.

The local news channel runs a special segment on it. Greg Gallagher, the local anchorman with hair a little too stiff and a smile far too forced, narrates a touching piece on the strength of the community while he walks around the makeshift pyre in the middle of town. His eyes never leave the camera. He says he would've never believed such a heinous crime could happen in a town this nice. His voice breaks on the word, 'tragedy,' but his teeth gleam as he lets everyone know that the diner is offering half-price snacks to anyone who wants to watch the triumph of justice at seven on the square. It's the fifth execution this month. The popcorn industry must be booming.

Andrew turns the volume on the television up when they start to recount the details of the trial. His suit is wrinkled and rumpled and not completely perfect in the way that he only lets it be when the doors are closed.

"A damn good thing it is, that they caught them," he says, pulling at his tie. He says it feels like a noose, and I wonder when he felt such a thing.

I nod along with everything that he's saying but I don't agree. The kids lie on the floor in front of the TV. Frankie is coloring and oblivious. He only has one crayon, and it is red. His page is bleeding crimson straight through to the floor. My daughter, though, she is watching.

A woman's eyes, a stranger's sobs, and a girl's silhouette accompany the recording from the court room audio as the sentence is read. They show footage of the police escorting three figures being down the stairs of the courthouse. Coats hide their faces, and handcuffs glitter around their wrists. They make no sound but the audio echoes static regardless as a mob screams profanity and hatred at them. References to their upcoming trip to hell seem to be frequent and unoriginal. The girls do not respond.

There's a knock at the door. Andrew doesn't look up from the screen as I stand and answer the call. It's the neighbor and his wife. He is a big man with a big voice. I'm not sure

his wife has a voice at all.

"Is it five o'clock already?" I ask as they walk past me towards the dining room. The dinner that I made for us is simmering in the kitchen, but I can smell the roast from here. The neighbor doesn't bother answering, but he grins at Andrew.

"Can you believe that they tried to get a plea deal?"

His wife stands beside me.

"It didn't matter, did it though?" Andrew asks, stock images of fire flash in sequence behind Greg Gallagher's head as he does what he does best.

I go into the kitchen. The neighbor's wife follows me. Dinner is almost ready, but there is still more to do. There is always more to do.

I decide that tomatoes should be sliced.

"Are you going to the burning tonight?"

She nods, getting a stack of plates from the cabinet and fishing silverware from a drawer.

I've always liked the neighbor's wife. She helps even if she doesn't always speak.

"Did you go to the one last week? What about the one the week before that?" I ask, cutting the vegetables haphazardly, liking that the glint of metal is sharper and faster than the sun shining on a pair of handcuffs. "How are you getting the smell out of your clothes?"

I start to think she might say something but then the kids and the husbands bluster their way through the kitchen to the dining room. They want to eat. They are hungry. My stomach is still full of dread for souls that I don't know and the ones that I do but I know that I must put dinner out for these people anyway.

The neighbor's wife helps me again. We carry platters and plates and premonitions, and we lay them on the table as sacrificial lambs to the slaughter. Frankie bangs his tiny fists on the table, clamoring for food and attention. Neither of the men notice. They argue about the best way to light fires like

they argue about the best defense the Chiefs ran during the last game. I chew my food until it tastes like nothing then I try to do the same to my thoughts. It doesn't work.

The first witch they burned was a girl, just a girl, but she was pretty enough and the story was sensational enough to be the only thing the world talked about until her ashes were in the wind. The next woman they burned didn't scream once, and TIME magazine slapped a picture of the flames licking her skin on the cover.

The hundreds that came after her were rarely as pretty or as strong. They were just women in the wrong place at the wrong time with circumstance and the public damning them for crimes accused. Witches are everywhere, they tell us. We must remain vigilant against letting the devil into our homes.

It's worse in the small towns like this one, I think. The cities are already bored with charred bodies but not here. Here we are bloodthirsty, and we mask it as patriotism. We crave the smoke and the screams.

We leave in a group at six-thirty. Andrew and the neighbor want to get good spots for the burning. They're in a good mood, and they liked my roast. Andrew bounces Frankie on his shoulder.

"It's good for him to see how the world works," my husband says to me, pride dripping from his tone.

I wrap my arms around my daughter. Yes. Yes, it is good for the children to see.

The neighbor elbows my husband.

"Twenty bucks, the first one screams before the wood even starts to smoke."

I don't like those odds, and I don't like the bet. Before I can say anything to either of the men, the crowd parts. It stills. It quiets. Then it erupts.

Someone in charge decided to get the show on the road. People shove at the slip of a girl that is dragged between the waves. The officer leading her through the crowd doesn't stop anyone from ripping hair from her scalp or clothes from her body. They want souvenirs. They want magic.

I grip my daughter's hand only a little too hard. The child being tied to a post on a pile of plywood didn't flinch either. She's wearing jeans and a sweatshirt stained with chocolate and spit. I stopped looking for pointed hats and crooked noses after the first execution. It's no use looking for monsters on a platform when they stand right beside you.

She doesn't scream when they light the wood. She doesn't scream as the crowd pushes itself into a frenzy. She screams when her skin starts to burn. The smoke turns black, and the sky gets darker. The roast comes alive again in my stomach when the smell slithers into my nose. Burnt popcorn and burnt flesh. It's the worst thing I've smelled since I smelled it before. It isn't something a person would ever forget.

"You see that, Frankie? That's what we do to them," Andrew says, bouncing and bouncing our son.

They take away what's left of her when the crowd starts to calm. The next girl is crying, and she doesn't stop. I make it through half of her burning until vomit tries to crawl up and out of throat. People cheer so loud they drown out the screams. There's not even a girl still tied to the post anymore. The smell gets worse, and it does not relent. It's on my skin. It's on my clothes. It's inside me and on me and around me. And I cannot breathe.

I push my daughter towards my husband. He isn't paying attention to me, and I don't blame him. Not with the scene that's unfolding in front of him. I hate him for his

unbridled glee though. The neighbor's wife grabs my daughter's hand instead. She nods at me while I stumble away from the crowd and away from the screams. The smell follows me. So does the neighbor, but I don't notice it, not really. My world is a blur of detached limbs and disembodied voices.

The sea of spectators does not part for me. I am not noticed. Frantic energy is building inside of me. It doesn't ease when I slip through the outer edges of the square. Nothing changes when I edge down a back alley. I lean against the bricks of a building. The rough edges scrape against my back as I slide down it and place my head between my knees. I can't outrun it. I wish I wasn't the type who had to run anyway.

The neighbor places his hand on the small part of my back.

"An alley's no place for a girl like you. You okay, sweetie?"

I nod and push his hand away as politely as possible. He moves his hand, but only to place it on my thigh. I never noticed it before but this big man with his big voice does not have a very big smile. No. His smile is thin. He still manages to show too many teeth.

I shove his hand away.

"I think we should be getting back to our families now."

He smiles at me. "I think we should enjoy ourselves a little first. We really need to mark such an important event."

I don't remember getting to my feet, and I certainly don't remember trying to slap him. He grabs my wrist before I could. He looks more pleased than if I tried to kiss him.

"Well then," he whispers, "There are other ways to celebrate."

He starts to drag me back toward the crowd. I tell myself that's where I was going to go. Back to my husband, my family. But the public turned into a

bloodthirsty mob while the third girl burned.

My confusion is shifting to fear the closer we get to the square. My blood turns to ice in my veins when this man, my neighbor, starts to shout.

"I caught another one," His booming voice carries over any lingering screams "She was in the alley doing God knows what, trying to save her little friend."

The crowd notices me now, but I'm not sure that they see me. They listen to him with such rampant attention.

"Burn the bitch," he urges.

These people feed on his righteous indignation. I tear myself away from him and fall into the waiting, outstretched hands of demons.

When they push me onto the pyre, I can finally see the faces of those who have condemned me. They are so similar and familiar and so, so angry. I don't see Andrew, but I see the neighbor's wife. She is quiet but her eyes are kind. She holds my daughter tight and hides her young eyes. She covers my daughter's ears. The neighbor's wife has always been so helpful.

The sky is dark, and I can't see the stars. Smoke smothers everything. The church bells start to toll. Eight chimes, but each one sounds final. I wonder if my screams will sound like singing, and I wonder who's taking bets on me. I wonder if anybody knows my name. I know what the town is believing even if I don't know what they are thinking.

There are ashes at my feet and agony is heavy on my tongue.

They're burning witches tonight.



# a monster's guide to girlhood

by Lexie Price

1. kill a girl named safety-constance with hair that falls in waves of 'should' and 'shouldn't,' she works hard at spinning sugar and spice and she always says please and sorry for everything, begging to exist while apologizing for the fact that she does, and i can't tell you about the hate, but it isn't her fault, not really, and now i'm the one that's sorry,
2. apologize for killing her, be sorry that she didn't die, i'm sorry about the hair she loved, i know, i know, i love mine too, i'm sorry for the claw marks, i'm sorry that even now i can't regret it, i promise apology often and always because i know she needs me to, because we're stuck with each other, because it's all we know to do,
3. tell her something secret: sometimes i still think in shoulds and shouldn'ts, sometimes i miss things being that simple, sometimes i'm still a girl, the girl, and sometimes i'm the beast of feminine grief,
4. know that to be a girl is to be blamed, to be something more wrecked than human, and i don't know how to walk this tight rope, i used to but i think i must've fallen, and now there are sharp teeth where my knowing should be,
5. shiver at the definitions, be so yourself it feels wrong and when it does dye your hair or change your name, laugh with other monsters, and rewrite the goddamn fairytale, you've got to know by now that it doesn't matter what you do anyway, because to be a girl is to be more flaw than flawed, so be something else
6. be anything else



# Just a Bathtub and a Uke

by Tabitha Novotny

the fisherman's daughter  
knew how to bait a hook, catch some looks  
trout scales decorating her hair instead of glitter

the fisherman's daughter  
taking her father's ship by the helm  
armed with a net, a spear, and a smile

the fisherman's daughter  
learning to be sure-footed on a bucking deck  
tangled in ropes, tangled in hopes

the fisherman's daughter  
laughing in the wind  
sights set on the horizon

the fisherman's daughter  
plotting her path by the stars and heavens  
confusing the sky with its reflection

the fisherman's daughter  
staring at the waves  
trying to ignore the way the siren's call beckons

the fisherman's daughter  
always such a strong swimmer  
disappears on her own adventure

she once was the fisherman's daughter  
than she was no one at all  
just sea foam

(CW: dog attack; sexual assault)

## Twenty-Five Smiling Dogs

by Lauren Dial

Any expressions the dogs make, their lips are upturned.  
It is a language of faked, crammed yard greetings.  
Hitched to the walls: The chewed hose, the bottles.  
A mass storage of potential energy. Strong enough to pop their neglected cherry eyes.  
Twenty-five haphazard grenades. Over a thousand teeth.  
Whether play or intentional punctures, it's always sharp.

and then he bit me

again. again.  
my breasts, my legs, my stomach.  
gravity rips my flesh downward as he clings to me. the more i move toward  
the gate,  
his grin widens.

It is a silent walk to the closet. The dogs rub their nails against the fences  
Till red paw prints speckle the concrete, flicking their bodies' thick paint.  
I too, am red. In the mirror, spit crusts over the rim of the wounds. I skip  
The alcohol pads. My openings are allowed to breathe. Stain.  
A match to the other scratches they've given me. And will give me.

# Firehouse Red

by Lauren Dial

Its umbilical cord was still attached. Iron, the smell of red, reeked off of it as drops of blood splattered onto the tiles.

Charlie rushed the baby inside. He shouted for someone to get a doctor and began pulling off taffy wrappers, cigarette buds, and other trash still stuck to the infant's sticky skin. I tried getting a better look of the situation, but Charlie kept pushing me away.

"Down, Mars. Down! Get Back!" Charlie kicked my back legs out from under me. He had never disciplined me that way before. I stood back up, but this time made no attempt to get any higher. As other firefighters and cops came into the room, I was shoved away from the desk. They dragged the stench of nicotine from the office room with them.

"She was in the dumpster, right outside Jude's Parlor. Thought it was a pussy cat yowling at first."

Charlie's comment was ridiculous. How could he have made that mistake? Cats smell nothing like people. Their breath smells like dying salmon swimming upstream, and their fur is thick of the stout urine they roll in. This wasn't the time for making bad jokes. A mother just lost their baby.

"Did anyone see anything?" One of the officers asked over the cries.

"Don't know. As soon as I found her I brought her here." Charlie yelled again. "Would someone call the ambulance back over?"

"The Dodge is on the other side of town, just past Acreage."

"Damnit... well, someone get the wool towel out of the truck. Find some scissors and that bottle of alcohol in the cabinet."

Men scattered about the station. The air was more metallic now. The blood in their veins rose toward the surface of their skin as they darted place to place. The child's safety was handled. The investigation was left to me.

The golden tags around my neck jingled as I trotted down the hallway. I held these badges for three years now. They were a token of my authority. At least, that's what the officers and fighters said about their badges and hats, so the same must be for me. Detective work was not in my expertise. I just kept people back as Charlie put out fires. Sometimes I got to howl down the street if our sirens broke. Such skills, while important, would not be as helpful in this situation.

I nudged the door open to Charlie's office. It was just big enough for two fold out chairs and a modest wooden desk. Files filtered out of the drawers, save for the one with the lock. I couldn't understand why the magazines named Star Models and The Male Figure got their own lock and key. It was probably vital evidence in an ongoing investigation. I revered them with distance and respect. What I lacked in skill I made up for in knowledge. Perhaps in time I would learn how to seamlessly identify culprits. This was only my third year on duty. I still had much to learn from Charlie and his vocalized thoughts.

The chair squeaked when my weight fell onto the padded seat. The screws holding the window in place were loose. They had been since the kid in blue suedes threw eggs at the station a week ago. I think his mother whipped him with a rolling pin when she picked him up. That's what Charlie said. Sometimes he says weird things when he's upset, especially about the station. The window pane opened with a slight tap. Tires rumbling down the adjacent street scraped the intersection's pavement. My nose became filled with peeled onions. Charlie's potted marigolds. Blech. If they could keep away the bad guys like the mosquitos, maybe their perfume would be worth it.

Bee was tied out back, lounging in the shade of the slope roofed dog house. If he wasn't out on duty tracking down a felon hiding out in a wheat field, he'd be right there. Sun beams glitter across his black nose. They kept him out back because some of the citizens found

him scary. I thought it was the snaggletooth. They said he looked like a wolf, and I didn't have that problem with my spots. People like spots.

"Emergency!"

Bee's black eyes snapped open. His sniff took in the situation faster than his retinas. The hair along his spine fell, and his muzzle scrunched.

"Sleeping on the job? Good, you're not busy." I could hear Bee making a buzzing grumble from his throat. I continued. "There's a situation that requires your expertise."

He closed his eyes. "Then wake me when my handler gets back from lunch."

I pulled the rope around off his neck with my teeth. "It might be too late if we wait! We need to find her now!" I tried grabbing onto the scruff of his neck to pull him out of the house, but he quickly stood up, looking down at me. I could tell he had eaten raw chicken for breakfast, probably had beendropped on the floor.

"Find who?"

"A mother lost their baby. Charlie found it in the trash can. She must be so awfully worried!"

"How could a human lose a baby in the trash?"

I lapped up water from his bowl, my black splotches absorbing the summer heat. "The way I see it... You remember when that Labrador down three blocks had a litter? A lady called saying she saw Mr. Gambles trying to drown them in his backyard kiddie pool. Remember that?"

Bee's ears fell back. "Don't remind me."

"Poor mama. She wouldn't stop yowling. She kept going on about how it was her fault for not finding them quick enough after Mr. Gambles took em'. Rumor is she got all sluggish at the pound. Didn't hear much after that."

"So you think someone took a newborn and threw it away?"

"We might have a vile criminal in our town! Just think Bee, there might be another Gambles, another black cat lurking the streets at night."

"That's quite the conclusion you came to, Mars."

"The mother must be scared to death!" I paced around in circles. I was ready to travel a long distance. "If you catch whiff of a trail, we might be able to find her before her heart breaks."

"Why worry?"

"Bee! When a heart breaks, people die! That's what happened to Patty May two weeks ago."

"That was a heart attack. That's not the same--"

"The thing that makes the blood stop working, and they die. If we don't find her, what if my heart breaks? Is it contagious? I might die."

"You're not going to die, Mars." He began to walk back into his house.

"Please, Bee? We're supposed to be the good dogs. If we don't do anything, I think that makes us bad dogs."

He took a moment before making a long exhale. "I'll humor you for an hour."

Everyone was making too many jokes today. That aside, we made our way out of the back and down the street.

The station was planted on the far end of the square. The multi-shop buildings circled around the center fountain. Wafts of jelly filled strudels from the morning's farmer's market still lingered. The lunch crowd was just starting to arrive, and the doors to the diner let out the jukeboxes sound. Charlie called the singer The King, which didn't make much sense. I thought we had a president. It was something about a hound dog. Ribbons climbed up the lamppost, dawning blue, white, and red. At least, I think it was red. That's what Charlie said. It looked like pine bark to me.

We trotted toward the back of Jude's Parlor. Crowds outside were sparse. They hid like rats in the shadows since the little dot in the sky they called Sputnik appeared at night. The little

dot covered the front page of the daily news for a week now. For big creatures, it was always the small things that scared them. They'd flail their bodies like bucking stallions at wasps taking sips of the puddle water and dropped root beer floats. I, however, was bigger than the mice in the oxidized dumpster, tasting the dried blood on the garbage with the tip of their tongues. They scattered about as we approached the scene of the crime. Bee cleared his nostrils with a forceful huff and went to work. He inhaled the iron and the other elements foreign to my untrained sense. The aluminum of cheap earrings. Salt from sweat and the eyes. A single breath of bile. Cotton fibers lingering in the air. Wilted lettuce ends brought in the plastic bag the day before. Flecks of guano from loose eyelashes. A dribble of cherry chapstick.

Bee stepped down from the lid. "I can smell the mother, but no second party."

**Drat.** This case was turning into a real mystery. "Our culprit must have been able to hide his scent." I ignored Bee's scoff to this. "Well, at least the mother's trackable. Do you have the trail?"

"Down there." His nose pointed to the back of the alley. The gap between the parlor and the watch store lead out to a sprinkling of matching houses down a dirt road.

I took the lead. The kids were all inside gulping down sour lemonade and lunches that had some form of cold cuts jammed between two slices of white bread. Those blue, white, and I guessed red ribbons continued down into the suburbs. I recognized two houses, their embrace to smoke and embers extinguished months ago. The butt of a cigar lit the front lawn up. Charlie made me sit with the kid in the blanket as the front porch crumpled like fallen leaves. They called him Paul. He was nice, except for the tail pulling. The grass has all grown back now, save for the holes where the fence planks were set in. Whoever dropped that light must've been an evil man. Every action is intentional. Every lion knows when they sink their canines down the throat of a gazelle who hasn't even grown their pronged horns. I couldn't smell the black and white lion inside the black box Charlie called a television, but it didn't seem like it had any regrets.

Maybe they were a communist. Charlie was always scared of those. He tried convincing the staff to paint the firehouse side of the station blue as well. It was the first time I had realized the station wasn't the color of defecation. The paint didn't have the same metals mixed, a thread of hidden lead.

Once Charlie sat up from his bed at midnight, waking me up with salt leaking from his pores.

"Nicolas isn't a soviet." He shook his head in his hands. "Crazy. Crazy. Crazy..." He looked down at me on the floor. "I wonder if you could smell one out. There's gotta be a difference, right? That's what all the films they send keep saying."

Unfortunately, my research never produced any results. Perhaps there was an auditory difference. If only I knew what to look for. If I could check his mate, then Charlie could sleep better at night. Or at least, maybe those dreams would go away. I couldn't help with the ones where the station would catch on fire, and the floor would open up like a bear's mouth, swallowing us whole. I got those nightmares too.

I waited at the end of the street for Bee to catch up. For each seventh step, he whipped his head around, pricking his ears stiff for a moment. He made his way down to the right lane, and I followed suit. Soon enough, my pace took me ahead.

"What are you watching for?" I asked.

"... I smell black powder."

"The stuff your handler has in his holster?"

"Mmm."

"Well, that's good. Good people are nearby."

"Or accidents."

"What?"

Bee's muzzle scrunched. He froze for a moment, back to a memory. His memory was better than mine, but he said it wasn't a good thing. Maybe if he told me about those pins on the

corkboard, those scenes in life forever embedded in his brain. I've never seen a decapitation from a ford and semi crashing head on. The skull was cracked open, and the brain was replaced with sunflower seeds. I've seen cats stuck in forty foot trees, but never one's liver and intestines nailed into the tree branches. A man opened up his wife's feline alive for her infidelity. I've never had to fear Charlie getting shot in the eye by a Five and Dime thief, or a fourteen year old filled with opium. I never had to attend Charlie's funeral. Markers for time.

He turned back around.

"What is your handler's name again?"

"I don't remember."

"Don't remember? You have a better memory than I do."

"Hmph."

"Is it close to your old handler's name? What was it... Ben?"

"... No."

Down three, four, five, and six more streets. Whatever trail we found was diminishing. Bee's pace became slower along with the moments of looking back.

"We'll be entering Stewartville soon. She has to be near now."

"Why couldn't she be in the next town?" Bee looked back again.

"Now that would be ridiculous."

"How so?"

I pawed at the dirt on the edge of the road. I let the dust rise and settle on my body, trying to detect whatever the boy in blue could. "The baby's blood was fresh. The fiend couldn't have gone far after stealing the child, meaning she must be in this town."

His eyes rolled for a moment. His head took to the ground again, filtering out information between thin grains of rock. I followed him as he turned down a road half the width of the former streets. Potholes decorated its slender frame. At the end of the path laid a house of yellow paint. The garage was open behind the picket fence.

"The trail ends there," Bee said.

"Great job Bee! Now we're closer to bringing the kidnapper to justice."

"If there's a kidnapper."

"Of course there is." I circled back around to face him. "The bad people do the bad things."

"Did they? I found no evidence of another party."

"They covered their tracks. That's what bad people do."

"Have you ever considered there was no one else? Why I could smell her tracks so clearly?"

"...Sh-she's the bad guy?"

"No--"

I bounded down the side of the street. "Now we have even more a reason to find her. Justice must be wrought."

"You're not an authority of law. You can't determine what course of action we take."

"I know enough to know what is right and wrong."

"Hardly."

My mouth felt dry. "What?"

"Are all fire's bad?"

"Yes--"

"No!" The hair's along Bee's spine flared. "Meadows smother themselves to make fresh soil."

"That's absurd. Ash is the smell of death."

"Death has other scents, flavors, and shades." I could see his black gums above his exposed canines. "They could've planted marigolds instead of houses."

"Shelters are bad?"

"No. Shelter is good, but not in excess. Half of those houses are vacant, growing termite

nests inside."

"And?"

"They're a breeding ground for pests. You were good, but you did nothing. You breed too."

"Enough!" I snapped in his face.

He stepped away, but going in the opposite direction, haunches sloped.

"Hey! Where are you going?" I stepped back in front of him once more again.

"I have no business here. It's not my job. The justice you want is made up by people." Bee pointed his nose toward the sky, towards the dot the humans called Sputnik. "The same people that fear tiny, tiny stars."

He continued to press backwards, but my blocking was making it difficult. Slobber drooled down my neck and legs. My spots were on fire, and so was my chest. He barked, and he growled, and he howled, and he put the tips of his fangs against my whiskers.

"Turn around."

"..."

"We have to find her! We have to find the bad guy!"

"THERE IS NO BAD GUY! I've wasted far too much of my time going along with your cat-shit ideology. Now, Out of my way!"

"No! You're being a bad dog!"

"You're the bad dog."

I yelled, "We can't both be bad dogs! We're going in opposite directions! No wonder they keep you tied out back. Dumb mutt."

"And no wonder you're so upset about this mother, considering yours was a bitch."

The next seconds of my memory failed me. There was salt and water, turning the dirt to mud. A sharp pain erupted from my shoulder. I saw Bees jaws taking hold of my tendons. The sound coming out of my muzzle was not that of a proud protector dashing alongside a red truck, toward a blistering heat coming from twisting devil horns. This was the sound of a plea a rabbit made in distress, calling out to any predator nearby to end its ongoing suffering. I sounded like black cat kicked in the ribs, or the baby it stood over.

The dust around use flew up like a twister. The lines Bee made in the ground by dragging me around were crop circles. The scratches I managed to make across his legs hardly phased him. He continued to naw deeper into my shoulder. He was used to this pain. I was not.

He was making me hurt. Charlie said those who hurt others were bad people.

"People should mind their own damn business." Charlie said when he attached the lock to the drawer. "Right, Mars?"

I couldn't tell him yes, but he nodded for me. He could read my mind sometimes.

"I'm not hurting anyone. Have I ever hurt anyone?"

There went Charlie again. He would always act silly sometimes. Every time he got silly the scent of his dead skin got stronger. It would flake off as his hairs would stand up across his goose-flesh. Maybe the magazines were from communists. Perhaps communists smelt like male figures.

"If someone ever hurt you Mars, I would probably kill them. I mean- maybe. You're such a good boy." He patted the top of my head. "Only the dirtiest of rats would wanna hurt you."

Bee shook me around like his chew toys. The world was shaking.

*Dirty rat.*

I kept my mouth open, trying to grab anything. I sensed heat. I closed around the target. A front leg. I crushed harder, and soon, he too was screaming. We yelped like newborns left in trash cans. We shouted like Charlie waking up in cold shivers, shredding magazines one night and books of law in the other. We sounded like animals by the side of road, kicking and screaming, both predators and prey-

The weight on my shoulder fell. I let go of the limb, laying on the ground to catch my breath. Bee was staring into the trees. The whites in his eyes were shining, his ears up and armed.

I coughed and tried to understand. "What is it?"

"Black powder."

BOOM.

Bee darted toward the other side of the street. I scrambled to my paws, Iron coming from where he had bit me. I peered toward the sky, where a bright light had soared into the clouds. It had exploded into a million tinier lights. Blue lights. White lights. There was a third light I couldn't tell. They swam from the center of the first spark, every direction possible was accounted for. They all ended up the same, disappearing, fizzling out into nothingness.

I had seen these before. Charlie called them something like wire-smackers. Sometimes the sparks would catch oak trees on fire in the dry years, but no leaf took flame. I turned-

Bee's tags jangled from the bushes. Then it became quieter. Quieter, till all that was left of him was the fur and blood stuck to my lips.

The yellow house was vacant. The trail stretched for miles and miles...

*"I'm not  
hurting  
anyone.  
Have I  
ever hurt  
any-  
one?"*



## Earthy Tones



*By Heidi Kirk*

# Polar Vortex Claims Lives as Cold Snap Continues

*by Hadley West*

My TV tells me that the Midwest will be colder than parts of Antarctica this week. It tells me that homeless people in Chicago are bracing.

When I'm cold, I come inside. I make hot chocolate with marshmallows. When I'm cold, I uncurl from the weight of my blankets, turn the thermostat up a few notches, pick something new on Netflix. What do I have

To brace against but a frozen screen? In 2017, my family took a trip to Chicago after Christmas because why not. It was the first time

I had seen a bus freeze in the middle of the street. Outside the stores, snow filled the streets like a flood and the ice in the wind stung my eyes while we waited our turn to get inside.

It was three degrees and we took off our coats to eat pizza in a hip restaurant and then we went back to our hotel but not before stopping at the 7/11 for some playing cards. Inside,

There was an old woman bent over a shopping cart filled with things: too-thin pillows, empty soda bottles, Walmart bags with holes, a pink shoe. She was sleeping

While standing, right there in the candy aisle. It was three degrees that night and the gas station was warm and safe, but I remember the gas station clerk going up to her and tapping her awake, he said Hey

Hey ma'am? You have to leave the store if you aren't a customer. Ma'am? And she just opened her eyes and looked at him for a second and then looked out the window, where the ice was coming down in sheets

Outside the frozen glass screen and then she wheeled herself out into it. That night it was three degrees but we ate pizza in the warmth of the hotel room, the sound of ice tapping against the windows lulling us to sleep.

My TV tells me it will be twenty degrees below zero in Chicago on Tuesday. I can't help but to wonder, from my couch, if that woman will

Be in that 7/11 again or if she'll be in a shelter or if she'll be dead. Outside, it starts to snow. I put on fuzzy socks and light the fire.



# Messina, Sicily *by Claire Hutchinson*

the frigid january air snaps at what skin is exposed  
to the grey sun—all clouds, no sky. the mediterranean waves bite  
the boardwalk planks and the black rocky coast, all salty  
spittle and angry roars, crashing, crashing.  
this is the place where poseidon becomes neptune,  
simultaneous yet never overlapping.  
with my black boots unsteady on the cold wet rocks,  
arms stretched out toward the tip of italy, black coat whipping in the gale,  
i know that this  
is how mortals knew they were mortals.  
the old god shrieks his rage at the modern city lights, still crashing, crashing,  
and the skin of my fingertips prickles blue with the sea cold.  
“forgive me,” i beg him.  
“i have to go.”  
back to the paved roads, away from the slick and treacherous fury,  
up two blocks past old worn street signs, hands pushed in damp  
coat pockets to evict the cold settling in my blood.  
inside the old cement hotel, there is no crashing—just  
the soft breathing of the front desk clerk dozing before his shift ends  
and the squelch of my boots on the marble floor.

# What's Left of Fish Bones

*by Lauren Dial*

Hairworms destroy grasshoppers  
Inside out.  
Foot long ringlets,  
Wandering calligraphy,  
Ebony ink...

Salmon were swimming uphill

There was a chariot  
Drawn by silver carousel ponies in October,  
Manes shaped and shaved like zebra spikes,  
And their bells signaled the duke's arrival.

I think he grabbed her by the waist.  
That's what they say,  
And spun her round till the bottom of her dress  
Fanned like lily petals.

They dragged their dull, dead tails against the current.

He'd be back Tomorrow.  
'Wait here at the stream's edge,' he said. She'd wait  
Any amount of time to read the braille  
Of his lips again.

The next step was life or caviar. It always starts the same.

She made a nest using  
Dying leaves  
Tumbling close to the shore.  
She crafted a coat of night crawler skins  
And notes in the dirt.

They leave a strong taste of iron in the water.

Tomorrow, Two Winters later.  
Gold carousel ponies halt at the river.  
The duke played all summer with pheasANTS.  
He found her nails covered in clay, and  
Her notes:

I want to kiss him again.

I need to put more logs in the pit.  
My lovers were all musicians.  
For some reason I'm still waiting... hoping...  
They had a language I could understand but not speak.  
I need to wait for it to dry before I try lighting it again.  
The sun's setting. It's getting cold out here...



## Sage Fields Forever *by Heidi Kirk*

## The Shoebox *by Elise Lusk*

"Holy shit."

I whip my head in the direction of the shout and see my Grandma on all fours, a puff of grey barely poking out from under the yellow sun hat she's sporting. Her face, covered in two inches of soot, gives her raisin skin an airbrushed look. From a distance she looks as youthful as the creepy china dolls Mother displays on the cedar shelf in the living room. If I snapped a picture and showed it to her she'd feel inclined to spend the whole day admiring herself. Grandma's known to ramble on and on about how beautiful she once was: olive skin, long dark hair, thin but curvy.

"Not much different from you, dear, except for that awful nose of yours," she once said. "You can blame your father for that."

"Grandma, if the neighbors hear you, they'll start talking and then I'll have to start defending and I really don't feel..." my voice trails off. Grandma's not listening. She hasn't even turned around to acknowledge my presence. I'm tempted to hit her over the head with the shovel laying on the ground next to her. Rose probably would've. We both agree that it isn't fair that I have to babysit an adult.

"Bee Ellen," Grandma calls from the other side of the yard. "If you contained half as much enthusiasm for gardening as you do analyzing my every move, you might've noticed the giant pile of dog shit lingering in the mulch."

A sly smile peeks through the corner of Grandma's mouth. It reminds me who I'm dealing with. Grandma knows I hate it when she uses my full name. I know she hates it when I try to do things for her.

"Would you like me to run and get the scoop?" I say.

"No dear, I don't want you to scoop

it... I'm afraid you couldn't possibly understand."

I'm not sure what I could possibly be misunderstanding, I'm just as smart as Grandma even though I know she thinks I'm dumb.

One time I heard her and my Mother talking about how they think I have my Dad's brain. She's always comparing me to him. It's probably because she was a mean girl. At least, that's what Rose and I think. Rose knows all about mean girls. She told me she used to be one too so it's easier for her to spot them.

"What do I not understand?"

"I want you to look at the poop and tell me if you feel anything."

She's crazy. Usually I'd just ignore her but I know Rose will appreciate the story more if I play along. We walk back to the flower bed. The mulch is spilling out of a True Value sack and onto the grass. She's neglected to pull any weeds. We've been out here for four hours and the only thing she's managed to do is find a piece of shit. I planned to pull the weeds myself, but Rose thought it would be fun to put her to work. She's probably been day dreaming the whole day. Day dreaming about shit. What a waste of time.

I can feel her staring at me: waiting for confirmation that this poop, somehow, moved me.

"Well I, uh, I guess I did feel something," I say.

"Dear, there's no sense in lying if you aren't going to be convincing. When I knelt to pick it up, a shiver pierced my spine and I felt warmth."

I start to giggle. I can't help it, the whole story is ridiculous. My grandma



really is crazy. A story like this means that we'll probably have to move her into some sort of home soon. Most kids would be sad about their Grandma moving out. Most kids don't have to babysit their grandma. Plus, when she leaves, Rose can sleep in her room again.

"Are you going to continue mocking me?"

I bite down on the inside of my cheeks to stop myself from laughing any longer and shake my head no, so that she sees I'm ready to hear more.

"You see, dear, I've been possessed several times. When I was around your age, probably sixteen or seventeen, my girlfriends and I meddled with witchcraft." I'm twelve.

"My friend Aggie summoned spirits after school. It was a trick her grandmother taught her and I doubt I've ever mentioned this, but I was quite beautiful back then." Only every day.

"And Aggie must've agreed because she insisted my aura was alluring: perfect for possession. Soon, various spirits were jumping into my body every afternoon. I sat in a wicker chair on the front porch while the girls walked around me chanting incantations: the volume of their voices working in a gradual build. The first few times my body grew heavy until I fell asleep. I never remembered a thing."

Well that's convenient.

"On the fourth try, however, my whole body stung like it'd been torched but when I looked down, I saw thousands and thousands of beetles gnawing their way through my flesh. I tried to stand up and shake them off but then the curtains fell over my eyes and all I saw was black. Nothing I've felt since ever compared. When I touched the poop, I automatically assumed a spirit ran through me, but the feeling was off. This one felt warmer, I liked the feeling of this shiver. It took me a

minute to realize, but that dog shit isn't haunted. It's holy."

"Holy shit," I say, finally understanding.

She's told countless stories over the years but this one might be the absolute weirdest. I mean, there's no way she ever actually messed around with witchcraft. Mother says our family is very Catholic. Of course, that hasn't stopped Rose and I from playing with magic, but I'm not really supposed to talk about that. Rose says we can't tell anyone. Ever.

"I was thinking about putting it in a shoe box. That way none of the other animals can get to it," she says. "I would hate for us to lose it. It's a real gift, you know. If we keep this in the house the Lord will bless us. Trust me."

Disgusting. I've really screwed myself over by playing along. My Mother will smell it the second she steps through the front door and blame me. If Mother grounds me, Rose says I should take the holy shit and smear it all over Grandma's face.

I'm leaning over the bar working on a crossword puzzle when Mother arrives home from work. The glare from the setting sun reflects off the kitchen window, making it impossible to see without squinting. I've gone over my plan of action several times at this point: get rid of the box, convince Mother that Grandma's problems are beyond my care, and distract Grandma so she forgets about this afternoon.

The last one shouldn't be hard. She forgets everything all the time. The other day she called me Tiffany, my mother's name. I almost yelled at her, but she realized her slip up almost immediately and looked kind of sad. It's hard to yell at someone who looks sad. Even if they forget your name and make fun of your nose.

When I told Rose that I felt sad for Grandma she told me to stop being soft. Apparently, Grandma was manipulating me. Rose thinks lots of people manipulate me.

The first thing Mother says to me is: "Where's Grandma?"

"Yes! My day was wonderful. Thank you for asking," I say. She cocks an eyebrow at me.

"We can talk about your day later," she says. "Something happened at work that I need to tell Grandma about. Why isn't she down here?"

"I want to know what happened! Tell me what happen--"

"Not now Bee," she interrupts.

I point at the stairs sheepishly. Grandma's been in her room since we came back inside, and I haven't checked on her. She was drenched in sweat so I assume she showered or took a bath, but I can't tell Mother that because then she'll ask why Grandma needed a shower in the middle of the afternoon. Grandma really isn't supposed to do yard work. She could have a heat stroke, but both Rose and Google said she would probably be fine, so I took the chance. After all, Mother left me in charge. I guess my demeanor gave me away, though, because Mother sprinted to Grandma's room after telling me how selfish I am. Maybe I should rub the holy shit all over her face instead of Grandma's. I follow her up the stairs to see if I can eavesdrop on their conversation but when I reach the top step I'm met with a roar of laughter. Mother and Grandma have a way of making you feel left out when you aren't even in the room with them. They don't laugh like that with anyone other than each other. Especially not with me or Dad.

Sometimes I think my Dad left because he felt like Mother loved Grandma more than him. I don't remember them ever fighting before Grandma decided to

live with us, but pretty soon he was all "I'm staying late at the office," and that turned into Mother saying "Can I see your phone? I want to see who you've been texting."

I don't know what lady my dad was texting, but Mother threw him out of the house when she found out. He brought her flowers every day until she let him move back in. They sat me down on our leather couch and told me all about how they planned to "work on things" but Dad left again a week later. I haven't seen him since. Rose says that people get divorced because of dads texting women who aren't their wives all the time, so I'm not sure why married men are even allowed to have phones. They're as bad for your relationship as having your mom move in. Mother calls me from Grandma's room.

"Grandma and I are going out for dinner. We'll grab you something to-go." After they leave, I start the trek down to the basement. I stashed the shoe box there and know I need to do something else with it before it attracts flies. When I open the door, the stench immediately fills my nose and causes my stomach to turn on its head.

I sprint to Dad's old tool box, rummage through it until I find a painter's mask, throw it on, and rush out the side door. I'd like to bury the box behind the apple tree at the end of the street. Rose despises that part of the neighborhood and I don't want her to see where I bury it.

By the time I reach the tree it's nearly dusk. I've never heard of any laws against digging holes in other people's lawns, but I figure I better be fast anyway. I forgot to grab the shovel, so I struggle to use my hands to scoop the dirt and toss it behind my back.

"Bee, is that you?"

Shoot. I recognize the voice immediately; it belongs to a girl named Molly Flannigan. Rose and I used to be best friends with her. We attended the same elementary school

and sat by each other on the bus. Rose doesn't like many people, but for a while, Molly was an exception. She's the only other friend we've ever had.

"Oh, hi Molly. You're probably wondering why I'm digging a hole in your yard."

She cocks an eyebrow at me.

"I, um, I'm trying to bury this s hoebox."

"Yeah, I can see that. Why? Whats in it?"

She reaches for the box but turns away and plugs her nose.

"It's private Molly. I can take it somewhere else if I need--"

I don't know how I will explain if she looks in the box. I knew I shouldn't have come here.

Rose is always right about people.

"No, no, its fine," she interrupts.

"Aren't you going to go tell on me or something?"

I snatch the box up and prepare to run home, but she stops me.

"Look, I don't know what's in that box, but it stinks, and I'd like to get it underground. Besides, we should catch up. How's your Mom doing? My mom told me that your Dad left. I'm sorry. I know that's tough, but at least you have your Grandma to keep you company."

"Yes, at least I have her."

I keep my eyes focused on the ground in hopes she'll leave, but instead, she sits down next to me. I shoot her a questioning look.

"What? I'm trying to help. We used to be close friends. Don't you remember?" I do. Rose just always said that Molly forgot all about us. Molly is super popular; she talks to everyone at school and has more friends than most people have acquaintances. Why would she even care that we used to be friends?

"Of course, I remember."

We loved playing red rover and dolls

and braiding each other's hair. I'd never tell Rose this, but I really enjoyed having another friend, but one day during recess Molly coaxed me into playing tag with her and our other classmates. Rose can't play tag so she felt left out and told me Molly was trying to ruin our friendship. I've seen her around a couple of times since then, but Rose made me swear to never speak to her again. I always try to keep my promises.

While we dug, we talked about our school and our teachers and the drama she has with her boyfriend. Well, she talked, and I listened. It was completely dark by the time we finished. She gave me a hug and made me swear to sit with her at lunch when school returns in September. I walked back home under the light of the lamp posts and thought about our conversation. I realized she never mentioned Rose. No one ever mentions Rose.

"I was not trying to kill Grandma yesterday Mother," I say. The flyer she stuck on my door this morning read: "Bee Ellen is grounded until further notice after receiving word that she tried to cook her elderly Grandma in the Florida heat."

"I asked you to do yard work. You. Not Grandma. If I wanted her to do it then I would've asked her. Sometimes, I don't know how I gave birth to you."

I struggle not to roll my eyes. It wasn't even my idea. It was Rose's but I've tried blaming Rose before and Mother never believes me. Besides, Grandma is going to die no matter what. Rose told me that sometimes it's better to speed up the process.

**I realized she never mentioned Rose. No one ever mentions Rose.**

She says the younger you are when you die, the less you suffer. Still, I wasn't trying to kill Grandma yesterday. Though, Rose might have been. She's sick of sharing me with her all the time.

"Grandma was more than willing to help, and I assumed she was fine considering I heard you two up there having one of your secret talks and laughing at me."

"We weren't laughing at you; we were just laughing. You know how close we are. Also, I was joking when I said you tried to kill her. I... I know you're not capable of hurting anyone."

I can't help but notice how her voice lacked confidence.

"Bee, I just wish you looked out for Grandma more. We're all she has."

I haven't heard Mother's voice sound that hollow since Dad left. Her eyes start to get all wet and I think about hugging her but stop myself. Rose is already furious with me for hugging Molly.

She will throw a fit if I hug Mother too. I really thought she wouldn't see me talking to Molly, but Rose always knows when I "betray her". I don't mean to, but sometimes I just forget to think of Rose before I do things. She hates that about me.

"I need you to cook breakfast, I'm about to head to the office," Mother says.

I walk to the fridge and gather the ingredients I need for a spread of scrambled eggs, french toast, fresh fruit, and bacon. I'm almost done cooking when mom storms into the kitchen.

"Seriously Bee? What possessed you to waste everything in our fridge?"

Mother does this all the time. She asks me to do something. I do it. She doesn't like how i do it. She yells at me. I don't know why I ever do what she tells me. I'd get in less trouble if I simply ignored her.

Instead, I try to be a good daughter even though it never works. She always thinks I screw up on purpose. Maybe I should.

"I thought if I made all of Grandma's favorite breakfast foods, she wouldn't be mad about yesterday."

"I'm sure. Everything you don't eat needs to go in the fridge. Deal?"

The bacon starts to sizzle. It's almost done cooking. I turn up the heat.

"Deal."

I'm sitting on the couch flipping through channels when the smoke from the kitchen wafts into the room. I smirk. Nothing like a smoke alarm to start Grandma's day. Rose says this will make up for my talking to Molly. Things have been too quiet around here; she was so bored. I will do anything to stay on her good side. If people knew better, they would too.

The alarm sounds. I hear rustling upstairs and suddenly Grandma's hobbling into the kitchen.

"BEE? BEE! Come help me turn this off NOW."

I bite my tongue to keep from laughing.

"What? Grandma? What's happening? I must've fallen back asleep. I was trying to make you bre..."

"NOW BEE. GET IN HERE NOW," she shouts between coughs.

I hold my breath and run into the kitchen. Grandma's struggling to open the window. I push her out of the way and do it myself. She already turned off the stove. I grab her arm and drag her out the front door.

We sit in silence for a few minutes, both of us trying to catch our breath. I wonder about the rest of the food. Will it taste too smoky to eat? She rears her hand back and slaps me.

"You bitch. You evil bitch. My child, the devil sent you. You're as despicable as your father."

I wipe the tears away as I run down the street. I hate her. I hate my Mother. I hate my Dad. They hate me too. Mom brought Grandma here to make me miserable. I just know Grandma was the person Dad texted. She must've convinced him to leave me. She ruins everything.

I want to be alone but Rose beats me to the apple tree. She shouldn't be here. She hates it here, but she would do anything for me. Why do I ever betray her?

She hugs me. She tells me it will all be okay. She tells me I'm not my father, not at all. She tells me she loves me, that's all that matters. She tells me she can fix everything if I just let her. She tells me to trust her. I do.

When I get home, I put on the same mask I wore to bury the shoebox to clean the kitchen. The inside of the pan looks like tar in the summer. I throw it out. Mother will be mad about that, but she would also be mad if I saved it.

I haven't spoken to Grandma since she slapped me. I'm sure she's upstairs napping again. I'll wake her in a few minutes to eat the leftovers. I save her the worst pieces and throw the rest out. I'm not hungry.

I head to her bedroom, but when I get there, the bed is empty, so I check the bathrooms, Mother's room, my room, the attic, the basement, and all the closets. She's obviously pouting somewhere secret. She should be apologizing to me. She's a monster. I never would've done it if she didn't make my life hell. I don't want to waste the rest of the day on her. I gather the gardening supplies so I can finish what we started yesterday.

Grandma's lying in the same spot she was when she found the holy shit, her head hidden behind the True Value sack. I make my way over to her.

"Can you move? I'm going to finish pulling the weeds."  
No response. She might be the only 80-year-old woman in the world who still believes in the silent treatment.

"If you don't I swear to god I will..."  
Grandma's chest isn't moving. Her lips look purple

against the baby powder white of her skin.

The shoebox lies at the edge of her feet. A small piece of paper towel, grey from the smoke, lies on top. "She's dead. You're welcome." I hug the note to my chest and fall to my knees.

"Thank you," I sob. "Thank you."

I light candles in the kitchen to mask the remaining smell and gather the shoe box and note and re-bury them under the apple tree. Molly waves from her window as I walk past.

Mother arrives home at 3:00 P.M. and screams when she sees Grandma's body lying in the flower bed. I pretend to have just woken from a nap. She calls 911. The paramedic tells us the cause of death is most likely a heart attack "induced from stress."

"Did anything out of the ordinary happen today? Anything that might have caused your Grandma immense stress?"

"I burned the bacon," I say.

The next day Mother makes me go with her to pick out an urn for Grandma's ashes. We choose a white one with golden trim in the shape of a shoe box. When we get home, I remember to change the linens. Rose will be mad if I don't. She hates dirty sheets.

*"Did anything out of the ordinary happen today? Anything that might've caused your Grandmother immense stress?"  
"I burned the bacon," I say.*



**Narcissus** *by Claire Hutchinson*

Yolk-yellow flowers with trumpet mouths proclaim their self-importance to the clouds in a field of cracked-egg daffodils, unable to see their uniform reflections in the wide blue sky stretching over their petals, voices lost in the symphony of cicadas and fireflies and echos.

I do not know, I cannot say  
Why whispering willows swing and sway  
And though the slow and solemn stream  
Sings truths within its soft requiem  
It is a music few can play.

I mourn the moon with every gaze  
For if the beauty of its rays  
Will e're be captured but in dreams  
I do not know.

My dearest dictions can't display  
The fragrant blooms of life's bouquet  
But if I caught that obtuse theme  
And held it fast, with eyes agleam  
Would then the magic still remain?  
I cannot say.

*I do not know, I can not say*

*by Toby Haymore*



**Forget the World With Me**  
*by Tabitha Novotny*

## how beautiful, the sight of her

*by Heather Drouse*

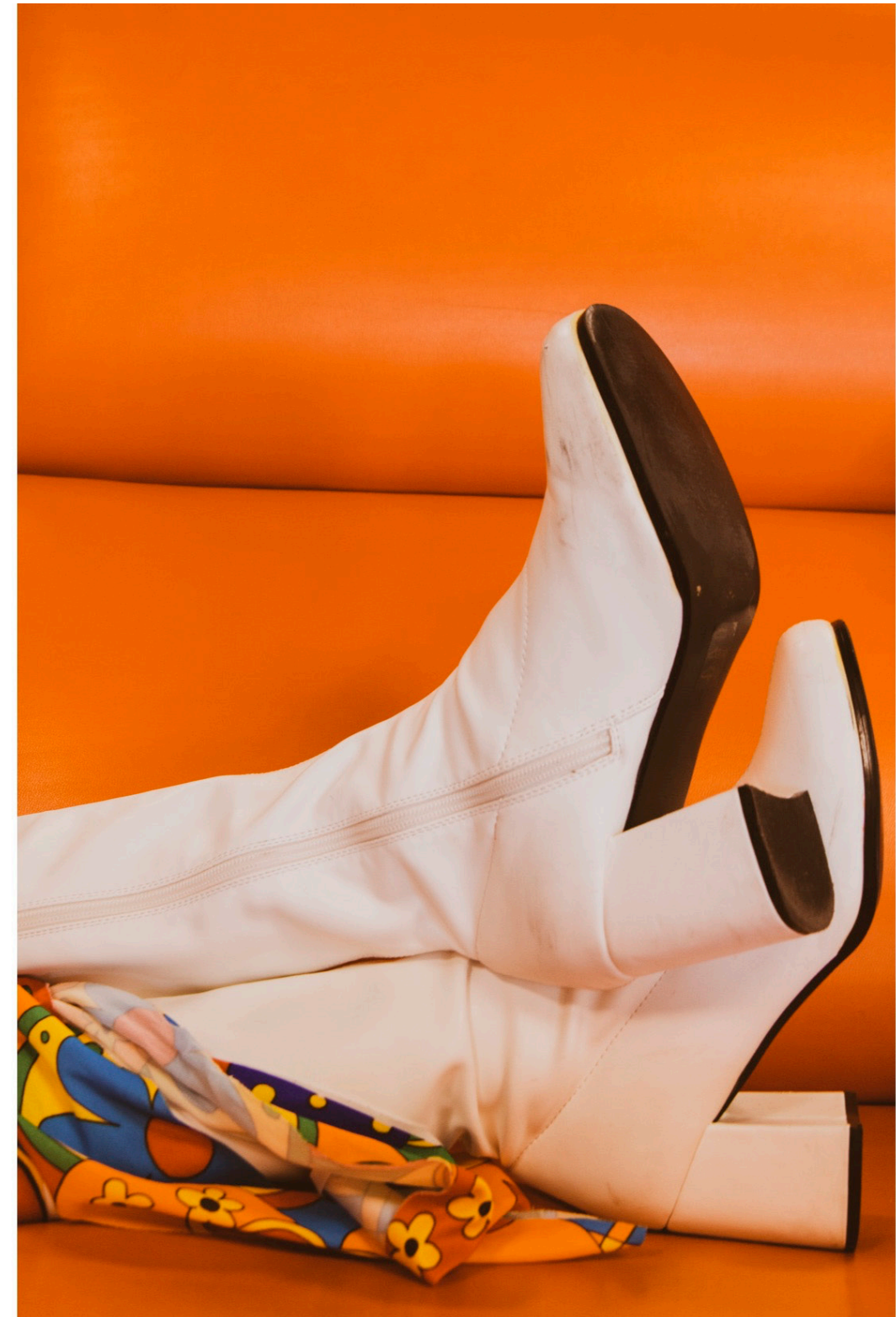
i want to escape to the far reaches of the forest  
and lie down in the space where the foliage opens up  
just enough for the moon to slip lovingly through.

i miss her long, pale arms and her comforting embrace,  
when she'd hold me in the night and sway so lightly  
that i thought i could die in her arms and be satisfied.

i trust her with my secrets and sorrows unlike any other  
for her soft streams of light cleanse my worries  
just as they leave my lips; stolen away like her sweet kiss.

soon, i will have my time to dance with her again,  
but i know i will leave wanting more, as i always do  
and she will reassure me, swaying, whispering

that the water will always need the moon.



**Orange Series, Groovy Shoes** *by Emly Corn*

# Contributors

## Autumn Blaylock

Autumn Blaylock is a freshman at the University of Arkansas majoring in Studio Art with a planned concentration in drawing. Blaylock signs her work under her childhood nickname, "Mussey" as her work often deals with the themes of childhood and nostalgia; her work also concentrates on the presence of femininity while growing up in the Ozarks.

## Emly Corn

Emly Corn is an undergrad student in the UARK BFA Studio Art program, with a concentration in Photography. Her work explores various themes through retro styles, fashion, and extreme pops of colors. She is also drawn to the aesthetics of nature, shadows and lighting, and people she is surrounded by. Corn aims to leverage a proven knowledge of visual design and personal connections throughout her photography, so those who discover her work can take something new and incorporate it into their lives.

## Heather Drouse

Heather Drouse is a sophomore studying Creative Writing with the hope that she will be able to find work in editing fiction in the future. Most of her work consists of free form poetry based on urban legends she heard growing up in farm town Michigan, as well as her personal experience with exploring the natural world.

## Claire Hutchinson

Claire is a senior majoring in both creative writing and classical studies. Currently, she is working on her honors thesis project manuscript and is also interning with Open Mouth Poetry. In 2019, she published a monthly series of zines under the Instagram hashtag, #2019zineproject and has had zines published in Hill Magazine and the Honors College's A+ Magazine. In her free time, she enjoys weaving macrame friendship bracelets, hanging out with her roommate's cat, and eating sour gummy worms.

## Elise Lusk

Elise Lusk is a senior English Creative Writing major. In her free time she enjoys frequenting the farmer's market, coordinating her masks with her outfits, and toting around her tiny dog, Cowboy, in his puppy backpack.

## Alexis Jamilee Carter

Alexis Carter is a twenty-year old undergraduate at the University of Arkansas. She is a junior Computer Science major this year. While her major is not literary in nature, she still writes frequently and has taken part in several creative writing workshops. It's something that she's done since she was twelve, and it is something that she will always do even if her future career doesn't have anything to do with writing.

## Lauren Dial

Lauren Dial is a Junior attending the University of Arkansas studying Creative Writing and Italian. She was the Fiction Editor for the first edition of The Diamond Line. Her work generally revolves experimenting with new perspectives. She believes stepping into the unknown lives of people, or creatures, entirely unlike yourself is a leap into a greater understanding of the larger consciousness.

## Toby James Haymore

Toby Haymore is a sophomore and English major, who is currently seventeen years old. He's been told he likes rhyme and meter too much.

## Caroline Jennings

Caroline Jennings is a junior University of Arkansas Honors College student majoring in Applied Math and Creative Writing with a minor in Spanish. She writes both poetry and fiction in an effort to make more sense of the complicated world we live in. One day, she hopes to publish a collection of poetry or a young adult novel.

## Heidi Kirk

Heidi Kirk is a senior earning a degree in broadcast journalism from the University of Arkansas School of Journalism and Strategic Media. Heidi currently holds the position of Volunteer and Recruitment Coordinator at UATV and serves as Lead Producer of Razorback Reels Entertainment show. Heidi also fulfills a position for student media as a whole as Director of Strategic Media in which she works to emphasize collaboration between all six student media outlets. Heidi is a Staff Photographer and Contributing Reporter for The Arkansas Traveler and volunteers weekly as a Student Ambassador for the University. Heidi plans to graduate in May of 2021 and pursue a career in journalism starting out as a multimedia journalist/reporter.

## Brittaney Mann

Brittaney Mann is a freshman English/Journalism major. She has loved writing for as long as she can remember. She writes poetry, reads, and does other creative hobbies in her free time.

## Anna Karen Olivo

Anna Karen Olivo is a Senior from Fort Worth, TX. she will be graduating this December with a Bachelor of Fine Arts in Art Education with an emphasis in Painting. Karen creates artwork that speaks to her experience as a Mexican American woman in the United States. After graduation Karen aims to obtain a teaching position in a public-school setting; as a teacher she will aim to include and celebrate diversity in her classroom and curriculum. A long-term goal for Karen is to create a non-profit organization based in the arts for under privileged students in her community.

## Hadley West

Hadley West is a senior English major from Bentonville, Arkansas and she hopes to someday publish a novel as well as a compilation of her poetry. She currently works as a freelance content writer and loves to spend her spare time reading, writing, and cuddling her Siamese cat, Roux.

## Tabitha Novotny

Tabitha Novotny adores the raw expression of emotion that art can provide. She herself is a visual artist specializing in photography, film, and painting. Her photographs aim to bring out the inner spark within her subjects, and conceptualize social commentary with her fine art photographs. She is a visual editor for Inklette magazine, her work has shown on the cover of Flora Fiction online journal, and works within Flora Fiction and Beyond Words magazines. She as a founding art director for her college's literary journal and has had numerous expeditions at her college, at her university, and as part of community events. She is a horror film fanatic, a lover of old books (and their smell), who would drop anything to walk the streets of Paris in the rain.

## Lexie Price

Lexie Price is a poet based in Fayetteville, Arkansas, studying English with a concentration in Creative Writing. This is their junior year. In their work, they strive to traverse their own emotional landscape and explore how it interacts with the realities of the world. In addition, they enjoy striking a balance between coherent expression and neurotic impulse and like to think of their work as a demonstration of reverence for the act of writing itself.



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*Cover Art: "Pandemic Prom" by Autumn Blaylock*

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