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Exile Vol. LXV

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Exile Vol. LXV

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EXILLE

2019



EXILE

Spring 2019

Denison University's Literary and Art Magazine

Since 1955

Cover Art
Femme Fingers
by Priscilla Sullivan

“My digital painting was inspired by a piece of imagery expressed in the music video for Janelle Monae's song 'Pynk.' In the wake of the #MeToo movement, creating this was a way for me to deal with the outrage and pain, the urge to speak out, and feelings of togetherness and camaraderie all at once.”

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You of the finer sense,
Broken against false knowledge,
You who can know at first hand,
Hated, shut in, mistrusted:

Take thought.
I have weathered the storm,
I have beaten out my exile.

E z r a Pound

MASTHEAD

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Charm for Walking Alone at Night

Jaley Bruursema

In the eddy of my flash-lit breath
I see I've spun an incantation,
magic thicker than smoke and steam,

magic so thick I split
into four slivers of moon
at certain intersections of lamplight.

In sections my extra selves surround me,
slipping over ground as I march
beside the school's lot of empty buses,

spooling back inside me, dissipating
as I thumb the sky's scaly back,
count the Seven Sisters,

sisters sharpening seven knives
polishing them with opened darkness,
pressing blades to milk-white throat of night.

A Snapshot of Spades: December '95

Lexi Noga

In her new apartment my mother wears lipstick
the color of raspberries.
The record player gently siphons 60's blues,
she is unapologetic when she sings off-key,
or smokes inside to ease the tension of new sheets.
She's smiling, and its clumsy,
conscious of the gap between her front teeth,
but still, it's honest.
She bridges a blue deck of cards forming,
a kaleidoscope of numbers and patterns.
Her beauty distracts, though she doesn't know.
In my mind, she shuffles again,
each number counting the times she wished she were fearless.

Familial Fruit

Emily Ables

My glasses smudge when I smile. Upturned lips in turn push up my cheeks to sloppily kiss my lenses. A permanent oil stain is smudged along the bottom on a good day. My cheeks, my Geary cheeks imported from Ireland, squish my eyes together when I laugh. Tight, red skin pulled over extra-large marshmallows, small golf balls, intrusive protrusions that pull my face even wider. I lift up my lips, feel my cheek in my fingertips, squeeze to feel its shape and wish I could tug it out, as if it were a golf ball that was placed in my face by accident. They are a gift from my mother, and I rarely appreciate gifts from my mother.

My mother's glasses don't smudge as much as mine, but where I am tight, she is soft. Soft like wet bread, her cheeks squish to the touch. They have loosened through the years, sinking further as I grew older, almost as if the stress of motherhood insists on being seen. She stands in the mirror and pulls her fleshy neck back. She holds it tight, like mine. She looks at me in the mirror and says that she was never as cute as me. I look at her and think that maybe I do like this gift she gave me. She looks back at herself and thinks about her own mother.

My grandma uses her cheeks to pray and to swear. Her cheekbones rest lower on her face, closer to the ground. They are always dusted a faint, artificial pink, a color that I think she created herself. Her laugh is in her cheeks, a sharp, taunting guffaw that does not invite you to join but demands it. Her cheeks extend past her jaw that is

always moving, always swinging her pale skin back and forth until she falls asleep.

When I help put in her earrings from her husband, I brush against her skin and don't think I've ever felt anything so thin.

My grandpa's cheeks looked just like his belly: round and bouncy and always growing. His cheeks told the truth, even if they didn't say it. I could see his meaning in the quirk of his lip, the curve of his cheek, the quake of his jowl. He would sit at the head of the table, telling us stories from the day, snickering at his own slick quips. His stress was etched in his cheeks, too. His lenses were smudged by his cheeks, too. My mother can see her dad in her own blunt bones. I hope they can see grandpa's honesty in me.

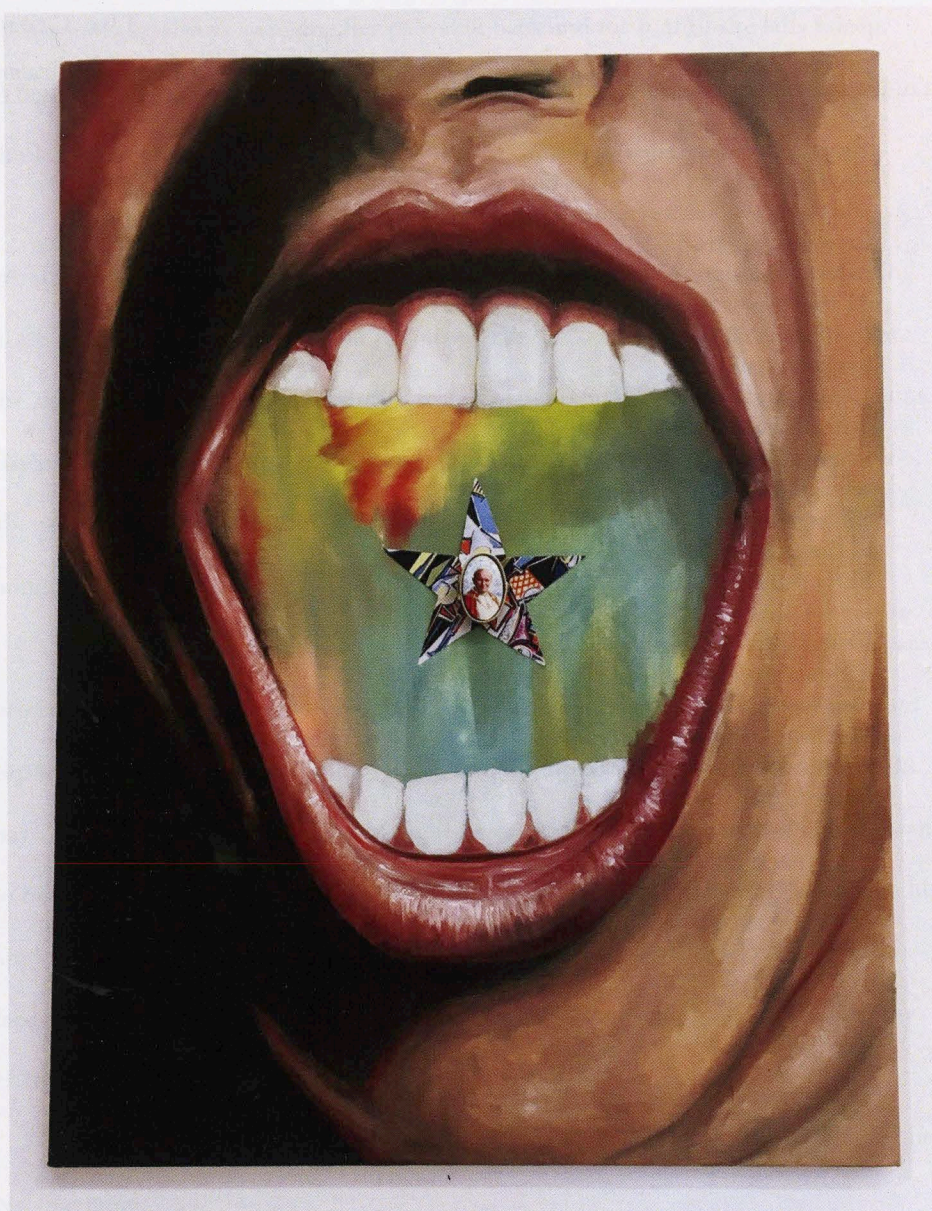
My dad's cheeks are spotted red and stretched over kind words. His cheeks are bright and lined with laughter, laughter that travels as far as Paris. They are oval and can hold secrets, turn them around in his mouth until he swallows them. His cheeks have lines, but they are also defined, tight when they must be and soft when they want to be. As a little girl, when he wouldn't shave on the weekends, I pet his face, from his apple to his jaw, whispering "good kitty" and he let me. Sometimes I would hit his face and yell "bad kitty!", a joke from my fingers, and he would grab me and kiss my cheeks until I screamed.

I can't quite recall what my brother's cheeks look like, but I think they must be red like mine.

Grandma handed me the serum
she bought to fix her crow's feet,
which she saw as a sign of age
lines guiding traffic
to her freckled green eyes.
As the crow's feet curled
deeper into her skin,
Grandma told me

how the crow avoided
all criminal charges, it cawed,
releasing the knife from its beak,
wings beating against gravity
as the weapon twisted in the air
like a vengeful baton.

This morning, Grandma didn't walk
with me to school, instead she fussed
with her nest of hair in the bathroom.
The last drops of serum soaked
into her skin as she turned
towards the window where
now, the crow's feet clutch
at a branch in her backyard,
missing the weight of the knife.



Vaticano Olivia Durham

Schizophrenic Hallucinations

Liz Anastasiadis

Each time she woke, my mother dressed to laugh
at the woodpeckers. They scurried behind her
in the house, buzzed past her knees like
an ever-sounding heartbeat, their rhythm forcing
hands closed over eardrums. She stepped over
the threshold, their hum-chatters woven into
her blood. She stumbled in-between the carved-out
trees, the woodpeckers, waterfalls, and wit.

Now she slams the alarm shrilling, shreds off
her covers, sloshes mouth with mint; swallows
water with two, three, four capsules shoved down
esophagus. Elbows on shins, she taps her bare foot
on kitchen tile until her head knocks relentlessly back.

Midnight

Temitope Sholola

My mother
like her mother
and all the women
before her
birthed midnight.

1.
I was born on the hottest day of August.
Temitope; Mine is worthy of praise.
My skin was so dark, ash and soot mistook it
for ruin.

Oyinkansola; Wealth and honey
The day that bore witness to my birth, scoffed at the certificate.
Couldn't find anything to praise among the blood and
generational pain.

Saw the bitterness that coursed through my veins and said
This must be Yetunde's child,
she is already screaming

2.
"Tell your mother to stop crying"
I saw her break down.
Her body a twisted serpent, skin scaled like anguish shanked her open,
loss be a poised poison, a tight smile tucking the sob underneath the tongue.

My mother could make misery
look like
a light rouge shade of lipstick

Could never cry on the Sabbath.
Could never let her foundation streak.

The day that bore witness to my grandmother's death
recited scripture at dinner.
Rubbed my mother's shoulders and wrapped my father's silence in aluminum.

My mother flooded her bedroom in tears
And yelled at me for getting salt water on the carpet
Didn't I tell you to hold your lips?

My belly button burned that night,
The umbilical cord that linked us broke.

Grandma died before I met her
Before she could trace stories of survival into my fists.

I wanted to ask her if I
too will birth midnight.

Midnight pt.2

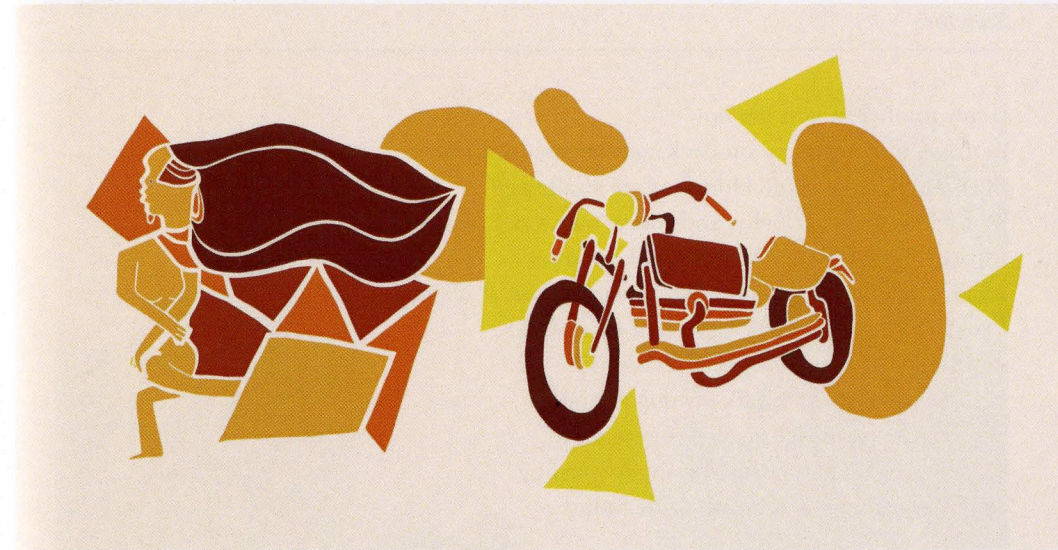
I saw my mother
cry in a bathroom.
Sorrow sunk its teeth into her skin,
and harvested a pound of flesh.
She sobbed like someone set her afire,
body: a boundless vessel of ash and mass.
The girl in me didn't know how to hold a home
never saw decimation on a Saturday
afternoon.

All the women who have raised me
can lull a man into a death bed.
Have always sharpened knives
to the sound of their husband's heart beats
Pray that their enemies face God's wrath
And slip open clothing pins into their lover's aso ebi

I heard when Eve ate from the tree of knowledge,
she spat up seeds of sin.
Told Adam that she stained her palms
with the universe,
and he laughed when she offered him the world.

Her mouth, cherry red,
with blood and wisdom.
Now, every time a woman cries,
she chokes on the apple core lodged in her throat.
Pain must be the ache of sacrifice
the insanity of giving until you runneth over with

thirst.
Pain must be a worn out jigeda
glass beads stretched and scratched with time.
I know that we must wear our pain with pride,
arise, a penny brown phoenix,
We must love in the same way brown,
sweet and spread in silence.



Aams for A Shanti Basu

In College I Wanted to Visit You

Sam Rice

so my mother taught me how
to drive long distances on back country roads. I take
my time. Gardens and churches are swallowed
by I-670 into wheat fields and rotten barns as I twist
through little towns with names like Margot
and Homer, as if they might know each other. If it's night
I am to keep my brights on so that every yield
and stop sign lights up like televisions
behind windows as I walk my dog at night.
This way I spot any stray deer or barn cat
that crosses the road; this way every warning
or pothole glows as if meant to be found.

But I knew you might grow tired
of waiting—what my mother did not warn me of
were the hills that stretch along the outskirts of towns,
the ones that settlers and Natives camped
on when they didn't want to drown in the open rain.
She did not tell me how quickly there could be nothing
and then a harsh flash of white light climbing
the hillcrest as cars drive past. She did not tell
me that in a space of road as bright as noon
I might swear it was you in the driver's seat,
the weight of a decision on your pale brow.



Untitled Rosa Canales

MotHeRhood

Alexandra Terlesky

L O, how our sun lives:
alone it silently spins,
o turning aBout its axis and
n burning without complaint.
e around it, the eArth does race
l in its elliptical orbit tightly encased
y because if it were not For the light and
gravity the sun pours, the earth would
a into the endless void and be Gone. but the sun,
r its death eminent but far, refuses to abandon our
e world; itself it continues to slowly Kill, waiting for
something quite as simple as a halt in our fighting and arguing
throughout titan's cold blue rain that tumbles froM clouds of methane.

Those without help.

After My Mother Told Me

Sam Rice

what I wanted to know first
was which hand did he use?

The right, or the left? The same hand
that reached into the cold air

of the fridge at 2 A.M. for a gallon
of milk as I watched

with my neck craned and my eyes
fixed on his dark stubble

until he slurped from the plastic jug
and passed it off to me?

Was it the same hand he clasped
with another as he held me from behind,

striking my stomach until a wet jawbreaker
fell loose and rolled across the floor?

But after a few moments, I found
something I wanted to know more—

what kind of love did it take her
to set me on his sun-bleached porch,

kiss me on the cheek and turn around,
knowing everything would be more than fine?

The Floor is Lava

Liz Anastasiadis

The rain drops incessantly as my feet splash through the puddles, step after step. I squint up at the sky, where the white fog mists into a thick layer. My hands are clutching my lunch box where Hannah Montana's smiling face stares at the ground. My backpack is heavy on my shoulders, and I run into a boy, his shoulder smacking mine, and I almost fall over. People snicker as I walk by, their acne-ridden faces scrunched up, red and furious. I grab the handle of my mother's green Jeep Liberty, the handle nearly rusted off. The door creaks open, and I jump in, shaking the water off my rain jacket.

I smile at my brother Michael in the back seat, eyes closed, bottle dripping on his shirt. I reach back and pick up the nearly empty bottle, putting it in the cup holder. I study his face, which looks soft and innocent in the car that suddenly feels dark. I play with the cuff of my jacket and wait for my younger brother Chris to get in the car.

Through the crusted window, I see Chris approaching. He's holding his ninja turtle lunchbox, Donatello glowing through the fog, purple bandana and all. He waves at us furiously, wind blowing back his hood as he runs to the car. He tries to open the back door several times before shuttering it open. Hair dripping wet, he shakes off like a dog, and starts laughing.

I look back at him and put one finger on my mouth, and he giggled more quietly. I smile and mess up his blonde-brown streaks of hair, turning back around to face mom.

My mom's eyes lock with my own as she softly nods and puts the car in drive. Her nail-bitten fingers turn the wheel as we drive out of the lot, moving through to some backroads.

Tires scraping over the gravel, we pull into the parking lot of Midview Middle School. My brother doesn't have a coat, an umbrella, or a poncho. There is a bang of thunder. He walks up, his brown hair plastered over his eyes. He opens the door with one fluid motion and jumps in the car. I nod in the direction of my brother, and he doesn't respond.

She pulls out of the lot, and we get on the highway. I take a book out of my bag—a beat-up copy of *the Magic Treehouse*. In the static of radio silence, I flip through the same chapter three times. The rain drops run down my windows.

“So, have you guys talked to your father lately?” my mom says, eyes looking blank and cold at the ongoing road.

“Not since we saw the man in the suit,” says Chris, fidgeting around in the back seat.

William sighs heavily and says, “Well, I talked to him on the phone yesterday. He's really upset that he hasn't seen us for two weeks.”

Mom sits there, and her eye twitches. “Was that before or after you told the lawyers that I'm a horrible mother?” I blink and realize that I've read the same line six times.

Electricity fills the air, the small space of the Jeep pushing in on us. Our car starts to slow down, 65, 45, 35, 25 miles on the freeway. I look up from the pages, my eyes darting back and forth between the road and my mother. Although we are miles from our

destination, the car is now completely stopped, and she unlocks the doors. I set the book down, putting my hand on my mom's shoulder. She pushes my hand off her and stares at me—eyes glossing over.

She quietly observes outside the window and starts to relentlessly whisper “Following me.... They're following me...”

“Mom,” I say, gathering my backpack in my chest, “Why did you call the police that day dad was taken away?”

The fog wraps around the long, empty stretch of road. She turns to me with her eyes glossier than ever before.

“I called because you will always choose dad, not me,” she whispers. “Hey guys! Raise your hands if you don't want to live with me!” We all remain silent. She screams and starts honking the horn, and passersby on the highway honk back.

“Give me my phone back,” she barks while turning, open palm snapping towards me.

I move my fingers into the soft fabric of my pocket, unsteadily take it out, and hand her the phone she bought for me a month ago for my tenth birthday.

“Get out of my car!” She says and reaches across my torso to open my door violently, shoving me out of the car and locking the door. I tumble over the asphalt, knees scraping, hair soaking. Her eyes glare out the window, and I look up at the still parked car, sitting in a puddle, knees bleeding. I am still holding my copy of *Treehouse*, the pages stained with rain water and my blood, my blood, my blood. My mom sits completely still,

continuing to stare out her window, as if she is waiting for an animal to jump out of the shadows.

I can hear the echo of Michael crying, Chris and William bang on the glass and throw open the door. William pulls Chris out with him, turns to my mother and screams, “This is why we hate you!” and turns away, face scrunched up. He slams the door and runs to enclose me in his arms.

“Wh-where's Michael?” Chris says, shaking and holding his purple Donatello backpack.

William sighs, and says, “We can't carry him in the rain, buddy. He'll be okay.”

Her Jeep is still loitering, the engine vibrating it, dusted orange falling off. Mom sits there in silence, holding her head in her hands. Her blonde hair glows through the misted window, and she starts to shake. I enclose Chris' small hand within my own and turn to the blacktop, rain-flooded road and start walking. I rub my knees, wincing, and one warm tear trails down my face. You wouldn't be able to tell with the rain.

The car zooms in front of us, old engine ruffing, and her tires lift water from a nearby puddle to enclose us. I remember the last moment where I stood with Chris this way, in our old house, 221 Finch Drive.

The walls of our house were painted beige, a crowning of fruit bowls filled with green grapes, apples, and faded pears etched close to the ceiling. Photos of me on the jungle gym with my dog going down our scratched yellow slide hung on the wall. Photos of me and Will in our red mini-jeep with hot rod flames aligned next to those, my smiling face holding a fairy wand with a fuzzy pink and sparkly tiara lacing my head.

I fell off my couch, and Chris rang with laughter saying, "The floor is lava. You just died!"

My cat Muffin walked by my face, tail smacking me as I got up from the floor and made my way to the couch again. "I've got another life!" I said.

My pink small-footed socks were stark against the couch, that not-quite-black-but-green color. I was wearing a shiny white feather boa and my old tiara, pink fuzz getting in my eyes. Chris was wearing a cowboy hat and clutching his new Indiana Jones whip he got for Christmas in his small hands.

Mid jump, Chris screamed, "WAIT! TIME OUT! I want to tie this to both couches so I can balance on it. PLeasseeeee?????" he whined. I nodded, laughing, and he jumped from the couch to the floor. He put the rope on the arm, looped around, and tried to do it on the other couch arm. He lifted it, and it fell. He tried again, but to no avail. His lip started to wobble, eyes welling up with tears, and I silently got up and picked up the rope. I held his hand over my own and looped the end under the circle twice.

"See? We can do it together. Now, pull both ends really realllyyyy tight," I said.

He pulled them as hard as he could, his face turning red. When both sides were tied, I tested the new tightrope by putting one foot on it.

"Seems pretty sturdy to me," I said, flipping fuzz from my eyes.

He got back on the couch.

He put one foot in front of him, shaking for balance. Arms held out, his blue Pacman t-shirt riding up, he took another step. Shook a little, and almost fell. I jumped up and down in anticipation—I wished I could take him off his tightrope, cover the whip

with duct tape so we could balance and stick forever in place, so he won every time. He put one foot, then another foot, and finally, his sockless toes hit the sofa edge.

I jumped on the rope and began my balancing act. Facing him, socks off, I made my way backwards, sliding my foot to locate the small rope. Focusing on my feet, I made it close to the edge. A loud crrrrch sound erupted through the room. I looked up and found there was a shiny and steel end protruding from the cushion, right in-between Chris' feet.

Screaming, he scrambled from the couch rubbing his toes, his body frozen on the floor, curled up with his hands covering his knees. I yelled and fell off our makeshift tightrope, face first into the brown carpet full of cat hair.

"What is going on?!" yelled dad as he ran into the living room, holding a wooden spoon with its end covered in pasta sauce, glasses half off his nose.

He ran a hand through his black hair and stood frozen for a second.

Then he looked behind him and screamed, "Becky!"

Sirens blared outside.

"Becky!"

Jazz music flew in from the kitchen, the saxophone solo proceeding.

Dad unfroze and ran to Chris, picking him up off the floor and hugging him, and moved forward to examine the couch.

He picked up the cushion and gasped. I ran over to get a closer look, knees picking me from the floor. I stood next to dad and saw that in the couch were enough knives for

an artillery set—hunting knives that were carved from makeshift wood, steak knives from the knife block.

Mom walked in and gasped, saying “What are you doing Steve? We need those in case a burglar comes in the house!” She rushed forward and snatched the cushion from his hand, placing it gently back on the couch.

“Liz, Chris, go to your rooms so I can talk to your mother,” said Dad. “It’s bed time.”

He put Chris back down, and I walked over to him. We went to our rooms, and when my head hit the pillow, my head danced with silver knives.

The next afternoon, my hands held open the cover of my *Magic Treehouse* book. The waft of mac and cheese lifted through the air, the kitchen sink ran with water, and all I wanted to do was jump in the pages. I looked up and exchanged a funny look with Will and Chris, who tapped on my book, gesturing to my bookmark on the table. I put it in my book and looked up at Mikey in his seat, clapping his hands while holding a pastel green spoon. Light shined through the tall, sliding glass door-windows looking over our back porch and illuminated the room, and my dad who was mixing the mac and cheese spoon in the pot, eyes fixed out the window.

My mom silently walked in from under the arch of the living room and messed around with stuff on the counter. Her blonde hair was clipped up, red painted lips pursed, her hands in coat pockets. She walked out and sat on the couch near the mahogany and glass front door. She crossed her hands with a phone in her lap and stared at our grandfather clock. It was half past one.

“Kids, food’s ready,” said Dad. “Come and serve yourselves while I talk to your mother.”

The boys raced to the stove, but I remained and stared at the white ceiling. A hint of gray still stained it from the time Will got his *Spider-Man* web shooter on his tenth birthday two years ago. The lines and tracing of the web were as familiar as my palm. I watched the running faucet at the sink under the window overlooking the backyard. Dad caught a garden spider once and put it in a jar sitting at the windowsill. The spider stayed in the jar until it suffocated. For a second, I was the spider in the jar. I shrunk down, lid closed over me, and I could no longer look at the ceiling. No longer play on the monkey bars or jump rope. No longer read and sing to *High School Musical*. A heavy knock at the door made me grow larger again.

Will and Chris, who were digging into their mac and cheese, froze mid bite.

My dad got up from the living room couch and made his way to the door. It creaked open for him to find a tall and hefty police officer. My mother cheered, hands held in the air, and said “This is him!” pointing to my dad.

I was frozen in my seat, feet not responding to my internal plea: *get up get up get up*.

Mom picked up and examined my dad’s favorite *the Smiths* record. You could see her face off it, but warped and slightly unrecognizable. “Take this piece of shit and get out!” she screamed, handing it to my dad. “Officer,” she gestured to the man, “Officer, this is the knife he threatened me with,” she spat, holding up the carved hunting knife dad found in the couch.

“Ma’am, you will have to calm down, everything’s going to be fine.” The officer sighed, turned to my father, and said “Sir, I’m going to have to ask you to leave the premises.”

Am I in a body? “Your stuff is on the porch, so you can leave right now. You’re welcome,” she spat to dad. My fingers curled around the bottom of my chair, nails digging into the carved wood. Mikey started to cry and banged his spoon off the table.

My dad was silent. He didn’t move, but whispered, “Why Becky?” His face was scrunched up more than I’ve ever seen. Mikey continued to cry.

The officer repeated his mantra, and my ears started to ring. My vision started to become spotted. Dad walked over to us at the table, holding a backpack and his guitar case. He examined us for a moment and started to shake. He put down the guitar and engulfed us all in a hug. Dad held on, squeezing so hard I could barely take in air. When he pulled back, my shirt was wet from where his face was buried on my shoulder.

“I’m coming for you guys, don’t worry,” he said, “dad will get you back.”

Will nodded to dad, and he clasped his shoulder and bent down to pick up his guitar case. Mom watched the clock with her hands wrapped around herself. It gonged twice, and with each gong, dad took another step near the door. The officer tapped his foot. The Police must believe that they are the good guys in every story, ah, a lucky savior! I never liked the police. I could still hear the faucet running. I was still clutching the bottom of my seat.

I unfroze and clasped on tightly to Chris’ small hand. We ran to the window overlooking the driveway and stand there. Dad got into the car, waved to us, and drove

away with the officer following him. Mom remained in front of the grandfather clock, whispering to herself. My face was hot, my vision blurry. We stood there until mom fell asleep, long after the mac and cheese was cold.

My feet hit the driveway of my grandparents’ house, with the crunch of gravel under my pink sketchers. My body feels like it has gone through a hurricane. My glasses are spotted with rainwater, and I can barely see my brothers as they walk beside me. They are in a similar state, water dripping from their hair, soaked into their shirts, making them look like different colors than they really are.

We reach the front door and William uses his key to unlock it. We walk in and stand in the foyer for a second. It looks the same as I was here before. I look to my right to find Grandpa on the couch, reading *the New York Times*. I slowly walk over there, finding my feet again.

I sit down on the beige sofa. The room has old printed wallpaper, with gold framed versions of the DuBois motto *Don’t Give Up the Ship!* plastered around. The grandfather clock gongs five times. I knit my fingers together on my lap.

Grandpa snaps his head up and says “Ah! I didn’t know it was five. You guys are home rather late.” The newspaper crumples, and I hear steps from behind in the foyer walk upstairs.

I nod, and he cranes his neck back to the paper. “Where’s mom?” I say.

“I thought she was with you,” he says while thumbing the newspaper.

I shake my head. I continue to shake my head. He doesn’t look up. “No,” I say.

“She wasn’t with us. We walked home.”

He looks up then, glasses hanging on his hooked nose. He sets the newspaper down on the coffee table. "Well, why didn't she drive you guys home?" he says.

"She was upset about the lawyers," I say. "And dad." My hands tighten, my nails biting my palms, and I wince.

He sits there holding his chin in his hand. "Steve needs to be out of the picture. It's causing Becky too much stress," he says. He reaches to pick up the newspaper again, opening it.

"Dad is already gone. He left when we left the house," I say. I unknit my fingers and feel the cold wetness of the couch.

He looks up again, kind eyes shining. "Yeah. Grandma and I were happy about calling the police that afternoon," he says, turning the page of the newspaper. "We were scared for you kids when Becky found knives in the couch."

Thetis at the River

Sophia Menconi

A child begotten of war, golden apple
already sliced and falling to bits at his mother's feet.
And so mother takes her son to the river. She holds him underwater
and she tries to keep him under
water. She wants to save him,
but no one can remember the danger. She tries to sear
immunity into his skin, but she cannot
save all of him, so she raises him

out of the water, clutching his ankle
between her thumb and finger; she lifts him out of the water, and he is not
drowned. She holds him against the harsh light
and says *I have done my best.* Thinking *I should have done more.*

She sends him out in to the daylight, in to the sea-salt air, in to the battle.
And then he dies.

There are parts in between, but they don't matter.
Mother takes her child to the river and she doesn't
drown him. She doesn't save him, either.

Rocamadour

Cassandra Fleming

We stand on cliffs that kiss the sky
and peer over the edge to a village
in miniature, lilted streets
of cobblestone, blueberry
bushes, a family of
stray cats curled
on a dark roof.

A little boy, cheeks painted with
play, tilts precariously towards
the edge beside me until
his mother stills his
laughter with her
two hands.

In a breath, she swings him over the edge,
holding him only by the collar of
his raincoat. His spine curls
against the cold. His feet
kick, swimming
in the air.

My mother's hand finds my shoulder
before I can scream, her fingers
caught in the hollow of
my collarbone as we
watch her pull
the boy back.

Our shock fades into the mountain air.
He promises to behave. Below us:
lilted streets, blueberry bushes
a family of stray cats,
and a single yellow
rain boot.



Snowmass Sunrise Josi Miller

Fire, Milk, and the Ocean

Ben Bowers

The man who saw Nepal spoke
of the thunderous booms of the avalanches,
how the snow and rock consumed
entire villages and of the guide who kept
them safe. His guide had witnessed
a great many things, and he recounted
just a few for the man on their journey –
like the story about the young, grey goat,
who free to roam the farm, welcomed
himself into the kitchen, allured by the sickly
sweet scent of the milk boiling on the stove.

The goat began to drink, taking in the hot,
steaming liquid, before crying out so loud
you would swear it was another avalanche.
And then the goat resumed, taking pauses
only long enough to cry out to the heavens,
before lapping up the milk from the pot
once more. A few days later, the grey
goat lay dead outside the house. The doctors
say the cause of death was internal burns.

The woman told us of her tales at sea,
navigating the sapphire blue waters
with just the guidance of a sextant
and the stars. She spoke of the fish
that could leap from the water and fly
forever, and of the ship she longed
to run to and stow aboard, to be reunited
with the sea once more. She saw many islands
in her time adrift, many were barren, no more
than a place for coconuts to wash up and rot.
But on one forgotten speck of the map,

there were children playing soccer,
who swarmed the woman and asked her
to join, in a language she had never heard
before. She played with them and learned

to speak their tongue, only to learn on the night
she left that they could all speak fluent English.
The children told her goodbye after they
danced at the feast, just as generations
of their ancestors had, to wish good luck
and fair winds to wayward travelers,
in a way that transcended words.

Tired of playing cards in the cabin,
the rest of the group soon returned
to gather in the warmth of the campfire.
I took the opportunity to slip away –
One day I hope I will feel as though I can
return to that campfire, listen to their stories,
wait for the conversation to lull,
and then bowl over the group with
some spectacle I had experienced.
But for now, I just go to sleep,
hoping to dream that I am a sailor.
Instead, waking up in a cold sweat,
with a goat's cry ringing in my ears.

Disposables from Senegal Grace Rooney



clay

Shanti Basu

the ceramics professor said,
clay has a memory.
(it doesn't make sense to call her that,
as if she'd run her hands through soft matter in spectacles and a suit)
clay has a memory.
it will forgive you:
slamming boulders into valleys
sneaking corners into curves
smoothing creases with the heel of a fist
it will forgive you, but commit to memory
how your hands made pieces whole
how material became embedded with soul
clay has a memory,
do humans?

Cherry Pit-Spitting

Imani Congdon

the whistle of under-trees in the golden bath of early eve,
when the clouds are chewy marigold and cavity sweet
and I swirl a thumb atop
to reach the crystalline amalgamation of sugar beneath

to feel the drip beneath my lower lip,
the cold syrup that escorts the wind and briny fruit,
to bite towards my chin and, unseen and brash, sip

to stick myself together with Allura Red AC,
and relish in my unearthly redness,
my new glazy sheen

I am candy-apple Lazarus,
sprung from dirt-dull earth
to taste the open-mouthed,
artificial kiss
of God.

A Barbie World

Diana Muha

Band-Aids wrap around all ten of Barbie's toes during her first few weeks of work. Callouses cover her feet, numbing the pain of having to constantly wear pleaser heels, a brand of plastic high heels Barbie had to blow a hairdryer on to stretch out. After dancing at the strip club for about twelve hours every week since August, Barbie has built up a tolerance. Heels are on the long list of things that no longer bother her.

A first-year, full-time materials science engineering student at Ohio State University, 18-year-old Barbie (who preferred the use of her stage name to remain anonymous) started working at the club in early August, after her Parent PLUS Loan failed to get approval under her mother's name. Knowing that her family was cutting it close by putting her father's name on the loan, Barbie began stripping as soon as she was of legal age.

For Barbie, who has a scholarship as well as some grant money, in-state tuition at OSU comes down to about \$5,000 a semester. After working as a dancer for nearly three months, she has already saved enough money to pay for an entire year's worth of tuition, roughly \$10,000, since, as a sophomore, she will live in off-campus housing, which is cheaper. She is also paying off the interest on the loan.

Between the years of 2001 and 2016, the amount of student debt owed by American households tripled from \$340 billion to more than \$1.3 trillion (The Federal Reserve 2018). 68% of college students in the year 2011-12 took out federal student loans, and each year that percentage has steadily increased (Velez 2017). Despite the

negative stigma of sex work in this country, many students find sex work a viable opportunity to meet the crippling prices of higher education and a way to make a living wage.

"The people who think sex work is something to be ashamed of have never been to a strip club," says Barbie.

In the United States, there is an absence of recognition that sex work is a legitimate occupation and opportunity for social mobility (Powell-Sears 2018). Unsurprisingly, "exotic dancers report that the doubt cast on a female exotic dancer by the media, the legal system, and the general public is much greater than that of a woman with a 'non-deviant' profession" (Kuntze 2009).

Liza, an exotic dancer from Lancaster, Pennsylvania, explains common stereotypes about strippers. She says, "There are so many stereotypes about exotic dancers: They are drug addicts, or uneducated, or come from a poor background, or have daddy issues... as a result I don't think the profession is on the same caliber as an accountant or any other 'respectable' job" (Green 2016). Barbie is not embarrassed by her job, nor does she feed into these stereotypes. While she admits that it was difficult to sit her mother down and tell her she was stripping, in the end she decided it was better to be honest. She's open about being a dancer with her family and her roommates at school and says that usually, "people are more understanding when I'm able to explain it."

Another stigma around stripping is that it is dangerous. The specific club that Barbie works for requires dancers to sign in at the beginning of their shift, which for Barbie is around 6:30pm, and sign out at 2:30am when the club closes. For safety purposes, the cars in which dancers arrive and leave are kept track of, as stalkers pose a real threat for many sex workers. There are cameras positioned throughout the club as well as security guards who make sure there is no loitering in the parking lot. Barbie makes it clear she has never felt unsafe while working, despite being in situations where customers act inappropriately. She has never been afraid to remove herself from uncomfortable situations, and when they occur, she gets on with her job. At the end of the day, she says, "I'm there to work."

Many sex workers do not have the same experience as Barbie and have been harassed, abused, and put into life threatening situations because of their occupation. As a result, sex work is often seen as degrading and disempowering, and, "reinforces the idea that women are only valuable based on their sexuality: a sexuality that someone else has made... for them to sell" (Hannon 2013). But many sex workers, including Barbie, also believe the contrary—that stripping is empowering.

"I walk in the club like I own the place," Barbie says as she curls her eyelashes, her blue eyes bright.

She explains that having confidence intimidates male customers, making them more easily manipulated. The power structure Barbie participates in works to dismantle preconceived notions of strip clubs. Though a "stripper" is a male-centered

concept, Barbie doesn't think about her jobs in terms of objectification. When she is dancing, she is in control.

She recounts a night when two men got into an argument over buying a VIP room with her, "I told them, 'Whoever has the most money for me can go first.' They started bidding at \$400, which rose to \$900, on top of the \$300 VIP flat-rate charge." Barbie made \$1,200 in just *one* hour.

Her first stage sweep stays fresh in her memory. After dancing on the main stage, which sits in the middle of the club and doubles as a bar with nearly 24 chairs around it and a pole in the center, it was as if it had rained dollar bills. Cash covered nearly the entire stage and had to be swept off into a trash bag. Since then, the stage has been swept many times for Barbie. "A lot of people come in and say I'm the most good-looking girl here," she says, shrugging.

Based on a study from research done in 2002, strippers earned on average "\$26,000 annually, with a range of over \$60,000 to under \$10,000, for an average of three working days a week" (Hannon 2013). For Barbie, and many other young females, dancing offers a more flexible, economically beneficial occupation than typical service jobs. She pockets \$20 per dance and \$300 every time she books a VIP room, not including tips. Despite being a fairly new dancer at the club, she already has six to seven "regulars," men who visit her weekly by making appointments with her in advance. The men typically spend time with her in the VIP room, an intimate

setting where Barbie performs a few dances and talks to her customers like they're friends.

"Write this down," she says, pointing. "It's so hard to stay motivated to get this degree because coming out of school my starting salary will probably be less than what I'm making right now."

This honesty is not uncommon among other young dancers. Many have voiced the desire to make as much money as they can before they graduate, knowing they will take pay cuts working as lawyers, engineers and psychologists (Chang et al. 2014). The Student Sex Work Project, conducted in the UK, found that 5% of students in higher education have taken on some form of sex work at some point in their education (Staga et al. 2015).

Barbie manages her time as a full-time student and dancer the same way any other student worker would. She continues fixing her makeup as she gets ready for her Wednesday night shift, which she works because her first class on Thursday starts at 9:00am, giving her a little more time to sleep. One reason she loves dancing is because she can make her own hours. Barbie completes as much homework as she can during the day in between classes, so nights are free to work if she wants. She can dance as little or as much as she wants to in a week.

In terms of her social life, Barbie claims that for her, and many of the other girls she works with, going to parties, bars, etc. "feels like work." Even though it's fun,

she finds it pointless to pay a cover charge, buy drinks, and dance "for free," when she could be at the club.

"If I could strip forever, I would! It's so god damn easy. I love finessing these mother fuckers," Barbie says, laughing.

She recently purchased a new pair of \$200 black leather heels that hurt less than the clear plastic ones she wore when she first started dancing. The rhinestones on the new heels sparkle in the purple and pink technicolor club lighting. Barbie expertly spins around and around a pole, center stage. She is captivating in her matching black and white lingerie set, her long, crimped platinum hair swinging.

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The President Cannot Define Me Out of Existence

Cody Tieman

First, I told my toothpaste-glazed mirror.
I'm gay, I'm gay, I'm gay,
each tear catching on my eyelashes' feather boa edges,

Then, I scraped slurry from my eyes
with a nail file, each swipe of the tool
sculpting a hardness, until I shaved

so deep I nicked my skull,
found the bone was cracking under pressure,

though the x-rays were inconclusive,
my bones rang clear. I'm trans,
made of terracotta but still of the earth.

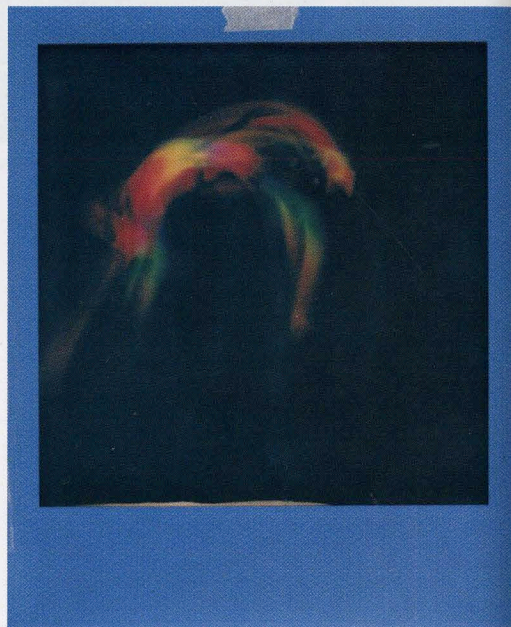
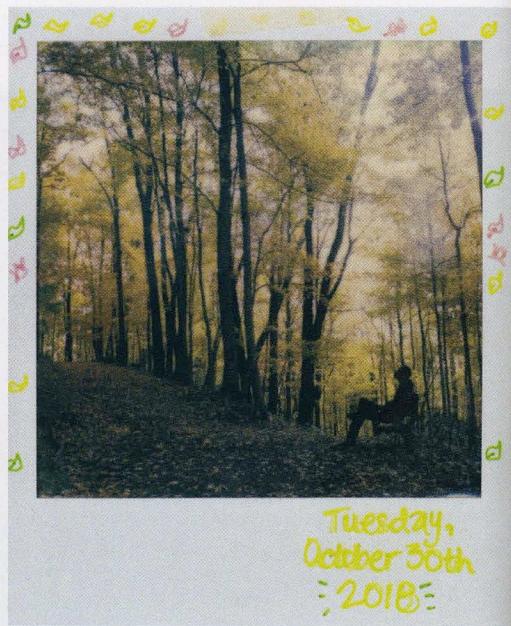
Yesterday, the president tweeted
"the United States Government
will not accept or allow
Transgender individuals to serve."

His spit fire attacks target
bodies that already burn.
I swallow the flames.

Embers glow in my belly
but I am not his broken pottery,
no ash will gather beneath me.



Six Minutes and 20 Seconds Emily Ables



I am nine years old, and I have a crush on Brendan. I don't know where he is right now, but I wish I did—it's hot underneath the jungle gym. The plastic bench kneads into my legs; I try leaning my arms on the table between us all, but the sandy texture digs into my skin. The new sun burns through the holes in the black, rubbery floor of the structure above us. Soles stomp and scream, making it harder to hear what my friends are saying. Something about American Idol. Something about who is the best singer and which boy is the cutest contestant. From my seat, I try to look around the playground for Brendan again, but the primary-colored poles and slides and climbing walls block my view.

I readjust myself on the bench and feel the imprints of the bumpy pattern on my leg. I move my foot and get stabbed by a piece of mulch stuck in my sock. I flinch and reach down, take off my sneaker to pull it out.

I am sitting next to Brendan's sister, Shelby. She is a year older but in the fifth grade because she skipped a year. I don't know anyone else at school who has skipped a grade. She is the same age as my brother and Emma's brother and Elizabeth's brother. She is the same age as Amber who sits across from me. Amber has bright eyes and a sheepish smile; her voice is so soft that sometimes I can't hear what she says, but I'm always eager for her to repeat it so that I can laugh.

I like to hang out with Brendan and Logan, too. They make me laugh, and they treat me the same as their other guy friends. We talk about video games and Harry Potter, and I feel very cool when I am around them. I like to be liked by them.

I sit with them a lot at lunch time. We have a lot of time to talk about whatever we want to when we're not in the classroom.

Being gay is just wrong, Brendan told me.

What's that? I'd never heard that word before.

It's when a guy loves another guy and they do...*things* together.

Oh, yeah, that's not right, I shook my head.

That's not true, it doesn't matter if you're gay, Logan sat across from us.

Yes it is—

It's not supposed to be that way, I said, so quickly on Brendan's side.

My mom's best friend is gay and he's really nice, Logan stopped eating.

Brendan and I stopped eating, too. Brendan took a deep breath.

The Bible says—

I'm gay! Logan turned red.

Brendan and I looked at each other with wide eyes and empty lungs. My chest had gone so cold, it burned. For the first time, I couldn't read Brendan's expression.

Guys, I'm kidding.

We each picked up our sandwiches, needing something to fill our mouths with.

I can hear Brendan and Logan in the distance, probably yelling on the blacktop, probably Logan has a football and Brendan is pulling on his golden bowl-cut. I should get up and join them. I like playing football, too. I like being rough and pushing them and them pushing me, the pride that comes with a trip to the nurse's office where I am a regular.

Sweat drips down the middle of my chest, down my belly and into the waistband of my shorts.

I look down at the mulch, just one color for some reason, the dulllest light brown that has ever been invented.

I take a deep breath and inhale the exhaust fumes from Cleveland Avenue behind me.

I look at Amber and the quiet chaos in her eyes.

I look at the underbelly of the red triple-slide where I usually sit with Emma. I hear the painful, dry sound of child skin sliding down sticky, hot plastic.

The playground is loud and messy and wild, bright and crunchy and hot, thick and rich and smells like dirt, but I cannot think of another single thing to look at besides —

I look at Shelby's boobs.

Her shirt, probably one from before her growth spurt, shows the edge of her cleavage, the soft line of separation in the middle of her chest. She laughs at something one of the girls said and her boobs ripple, hesitantly, as if they don't yet know how to move properly. They're big and they shine in the sunlight filtered through our holey floor-ceiling.

But I'm not staring. I'm not really looking, anyway. My face is pointed towards Amber like I'm listening to her favorite performance of last night, but my head is slightly tilted to my right. Just enough to see Shelby out of the corner of my eye. I'm not really looking. Not really.

"Emily, stop staring at Shelby's boobs!"

"No, I'm not!" My defense is out of my mouth before I can process what has happened and who has said that. I turn my head back towards Amber (I *was* looking at Shelby's boobs) and she had an embarrassed grin on her face and a laugh in her eyes. The other girls are looking down towards us. Shelby expresses her confusion with a smile but doesn't seem bothered. I think my stomach flipped six times over and exchanged places with my heart during the shock of being outed. Someone brings up Ms. Kathy and why she's being annoying again. Attention has already shifted; there's only space for one drama at a time in third grade. I don't hear what Ms. Kathy did. I don't know who told the story this time.

I should go find Brendan, since he's my friend, and I have a crush on him.



What's Your Poison? Olivia Durham

I was sitting at the top of the white staircase attempting to hide behind the railing bars. My mom told me she would be back in twenty minutes and that I should get more pillows from the hall closet while I waited in my room, but my young curiosity overcame me. My grey, hand-me-down, pajama pants tucked under my heels as I crouched on the top step. The large, red door opened into the front hall as the three familiar silhouettes emerged from the front porch. My mom closed her soaking umbrella and turned on the small chandelier that hung in the middle of the entrance illuminating the two familiar faces. It was hard to get a good view without revealing myself from behind the bars. The two girls sat down on the antique rug, that used to belong to our great grandmother, and clumsily pulled off their rain boots and coats as my mom's sharp glance met mine through the cracks. I stood up quickly, trying not to trip on my loose pant legs and ran back to my room down the hall.

I slid under the flowered covers, pretending to be asleep when my bedroom door opened. The light from the hallway contrasted with the darkness from my room and illuminated the three silhouettes crowded in the door way.

"Stella," my mom whispered as I looked up from under the covers, "Lane and Janie are going to sleep over at our house tonight." She turned on the overhead light revealing the two young girls in their matching, damp pajamas. My mom closed the door to the hallway as we all squeezed into the double bed. My Aunt Sally only let us have sleepovers on special occasions. But never on school nights.

We could hear my mom arguing on the phone in the hallway. Her tone changed from stern to soft, "Yes, the girls are okay... alright... okay... call me tomorrow... I love you" she hung up the phone. Lane and Janie told me that their dad peed in his work pants in the hallway again. They joked about how he needed diapers more than their younger brother Fletcher who was already asleep in his crib. We laughed for a while before my mom shut off the hallway lights, leaving us snuggled in complete darkness. Janie started to panic and climbed out of the bed onto the cream-colored carpet. She slid across the carpet and searched through her small, red sleepover bag for her nightlight.

"Janie doesn't like the dark because she's scared. You're a bigger baby than dad is, and he pees his pants" Lane teased her like the older sister she was.

"Shut up! I am not!" Janie whined back as she pulled out her transparent blue, butterfly nightlight. It was outlined with silver and white gems that reflected the light in every angle. She plugged it into the outlet near the bed and the mechanical wings started to whirl as they flapped slowly. The light moved with every pulse from the wings, causing the blue light to move around the walls. The dreamy shadows on the faded, pink walls were entrancing and comforting. The hypnotizing shades of clouded blue distracted any thoughts that raced through our young minds.

The sharp ring of the doorbell woke us up the next morning followed by the slamming front door, "Girls!" my Uncle Chris' deep voice bellowed from the foyer as my mom made her way up the staircase. "Hey girls, your dad's here to pick you up. Grab your stuff and head downstairs." Lane and Janie jumped out of bed and ran down the winding, white staircase. He squatted at the base of the stairs with his long arms wide open. They

launched themselves into his arms. I stood at the top of the staircase as he held them each in one arm. His brown curls were freshly showered. His black, back-up work pants were perfectly pressed. His white button-down newly steamed and cuffed just below the elbow.

He squatted as he lowered the girls back down onto the ground, kissing the tops of their matted, curly brown hair. "I'm sorry about last night," he whispered into their ears, "but how about we go get some pancakes before I drop you guys off at school, huh?" he swung their bags over his broad shoulders and held the girls' hands as he turned towards the door. "Can you guys say, 'thank you' to Aunt Ruth?" they thanked my mom as they walked through the door. He turned over his shoulder, "Thanks Ruth. I promise it won't happen again." She nodded as they started down the front walk. My mom closed the front door behind them. She turned around, her bright blue eyes meeting mine as I squatted behind the bars on the top of the white staircase.

*

A few months later we drove up the winding, gravel driveway to our grandparents' house for Christmas. My parents in the front seat. Felix, Lily, and I in the back. The two corgis in the middle row. The large, grey farm house rested on the top of a hill surrounded by a small forest near the back of the house and giant open cow fields in the front. It had a white wrap-around porch with wooden rocking chairs and metal porch swings resting on the wood boards.

My grandma always loved Christmas. She set up the bargain Christmas tree that my grandpa always waited to buy two days before Christmas Eve in their living room that smelled of soot and nutmeg. The bottom of the tree was decorated with a porcelain nativity scene. All of the painted details on the small figures were slowly fading away after years of young hands smudging and jostling them.

We ran around playing with miscellaneous blocks and wooden cars as the parents sat around the fireplace. Uncle Chris sat with the rest of the adults around the fireplace. He slowly raised the small metal flask to the rim of his eggnog-filled mug. "Are you sure you want that?" my Aunt Sally said as she grabbed his hand. He looked her sternly in the eyes and jerked his hand away, "I'm fucking fine" he whispered, "It's the holiday spirit!" he shouted as he filled his mug to the brim. She moved her hands back around the chipped handle of her green ceramic mug.

The kids' room was on the third-floor of the house. The grey walls were lined with five twin beds and the old wooden crib. Everyone knew which bed ours was based on the different colored blankets folded at the base of the dark wooden frames. Blue, green, purple, orange, pink, and yellow. The six of us filled the beds in the large room, as our parents were scattered throughout the three levels in the house. The slight whirring from the blue light in the corner of the room drowned out the crashing bottles and muted yelling coming from the room across the hall. The blue light reflected across the angled, grey ceilings, encapsulating the room in the familiar, faded blue haze.

He slammed the door behind him as his heavy footsteps stumbled across the hallway. The yelling turned into soft mumbling as he opened our bedroom door. His limp

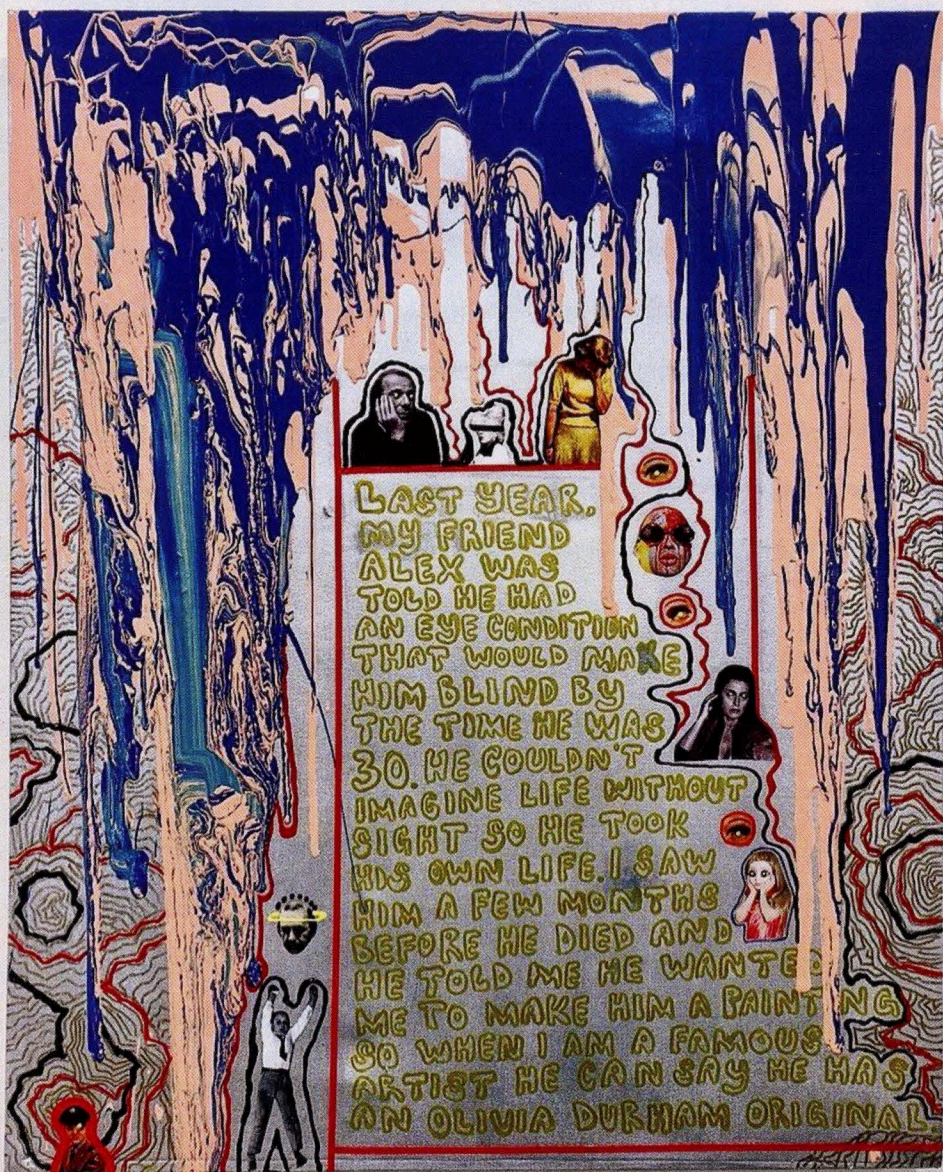
silhouette stood in the door way as the blue light flashed gently over his body, striking the half-full, transparent brown bottle that rested in his loose hand on his right side. The inseam of his khaki pants was getting darker with every sip from the near empty bottle. His babbling made him sound like a child.

I looked up from the covers and gazed across the room to meet Janie's large hazel eyes. The blue light drifted over her face as her eyes shifted to the corner of the room and stared at the mechanical wings. She slowly pulled back her purple covers and lowered her right foot to the ground. He raised the tip of the bottle to his pursed lips and took a swig as his eyelids drooped over his dark brown eyes. She slid under the bed frame and laid on her stomach. Her red, reindeer nightgown collected dust from floor boards as she started to slide towards the corner of the room. He saw her pulling herself across the floor towards the blue light. His grip tightened around the neck of the bottle as he pulled it over his shoulder. I muffled my screaming as the bottle hurled across the room and shattered the nightlight next to her hand. His silhouette, now pitch black, stood firmly in the doorway,

"Turn that damn light off and go to bed" he muttered as he turned and marched across the hallway. Janie didn't move until the sound of his footsteps was only an echo. Her chest moved up and down slowly as she slid back to her bed. She crawled back under the covers, holding the shattered blue wings and loose gems in her cut hand close to her chest.

We always knew when the train was coming. Even before we heard the low rumble and the screeching signal, we could feel the tremors in the ground, rising up through our bare feet and legs, goosebumps standing on edge. Usually, we'd be outside, soaking up the last few hours of the torrid summer sunshine. Sometimes, though, we'd be on Grandma's screened-in porch, sitting tightly in the stiff white wicker furniture, sipping iced tea or lemonade or Diet Coke for Bridget, because once she was diagnosed with diabetes she had to limit her sugar intake. We would sit with our restless limbs and our sun-kissed skin, waiting for the first one of us to sense it to jump up with a start and scream, "It's coming!" We'd be out of our seats in an instant and out the cracked screen door, always letting it bang shut even though we were told not to every time. We'd race across the lawn, bare feet slamming parched grass until we reached the edge of the cliff at the end of the yard, where the dense overgrown shrubbery threatened to trespass on my grandma's meticulous lawn. There, we would wait for the steel beast, staring at the tracks below, watching the boats float serenely across the Connecticut river that seemed just out of reach.

When the train passed by, I always imagined I could see people looking out the window, even though the train was often a freight train that held no passengers. I'd focus my eyes as hard as I could on each car, trying to soak in as many details as I could take in. I wanted to know where the trains were going and for how long, and I'd



For Alex Olivia Durham

imagine myself running down the bank and jumping on the back of one, letting it take me out of the small town I'd lived in my entire life. I'd never been on a train before, and I was itching to sit by the window and let the world pass by, surrounded by mysterious strangers who I imagined would give wise advice and share stories about their travels. I'd then let my eyes unfocus, a blur of black and green and red and brown and graffiti of every color. We'd count the number of cars; once, we counted 120, our record. It was our evening ritual at Grandma's house, a constant in the summers of our uncertain lives.

When we were young, the grown-ups would call me and my cousin Philip "two peas in a pod." We were both shy around the adults, sneaking sly smiles from behind our mothers' legs, but when it was just us, we became wizards and fairies and monster-fighters. As a child, his hair was as fair and fine as the corn silk we'd throw at each other as we husked corn on the porch, a chore that became a game. Mine was the burnt orange of a forest fire, untamed and unruly. Our eyes were identical shades of blue, the color of the ocean at dawn, wide with curiosity. We were the pickiest eaters of the group, vegetarians who preferred plain pasta to vegetables. We made various pacts: to "save" the neighbor's black cat and keep it for our ourselves, to persuade the grown-ups to serve spaghetti for Thanksgiving dinner, to never grow up. One time I kissed his cheek without warning, the boldness making us both giggle and blush and retreat back to the porch, where we kept our secret safe.

There were four of us: Bridget, my sister, was the eldest, our cousin Nellie was two years older than me, and her brother Philip, a year younger. They lived up north, in Middlebury, but would make the two-hour drive a few times a season. There were four of us until I turned seven and our cousin Ella was born. Bridget got older and stopped being interested in the trains. She started talking to the grown-ups, actually conversing instead of just nodding her head shyly like I did. She talked about her dreams of being a doctor and whatever book she was currently reading and her ski-racing success. It was me and Nellie and Philip until Nellie got bored of chasing trains, preferring to stay inside and write poetry and listen to women wailing about love on her purple portable radio. Once, she told me that she needed to focus on the "real world," not games or magic, and the next time I watched the train roll by it seemed duller, like I was watching from behind a thick glass screen. Then Philip started hanging out by himself upstairs on the computer, playing games that involved guns and war and gold, and I was left with either the grown-ups or baby Ella, who couldn't talk yet but loved to pull on my twin braids so hard my scalp would throb for days.

Then, later, Bridget left for college and started working more during the summer and Nellie and Philip visited less often, their parents' divorce complicating matters, as divorce always does. We were all older, and I started to participate in grown-up conversations about race and politics and my future as a writer or a photographer for National Geographic, and Nellie went to college, and Philip still barely came downstairs when they visited, a drifting apart that seemed inevitable at

the time. It felt strange when I saw him, like the things we had in common had dissipated, leaving us with strained, awkward smiles. "He's always had trouble making friends," the adults would whisper, louder than they thought they were being. Then my own parents got divorced when I was eighteen, and family events at Grandma's grew smaller and smaller, and then I went to college, far away in Ohio, and Philip went to college close to home for a few days before dropping out, and the air became thick with tension at holidays. Then we found out Philip was ordering prescription pills online. When my mother told me, I laughed out of shock. "Pills?" I remember saying, "You can buy pills online?" I guess I knew then that you could buy drugs online; what I couldn't fathom was that Philip, who was always so quiet and kept to himself, who I had never seen even drink a beer, was doing drugs.

After that, we didn't see Philip much at all, though he was staying at the rehab center in my town. My grandma would mention seeing him, how his face seemed thinner and how he seemed more tired, but she didn't know how bad it had gotten. My mom would tell me that every time she drove by the Brattleboro Retreat Center, she expected to see him, smoking on the lawn outside with the others. He was in and out so often that I lost track of where he was. While I was having roommate trouble about a boy we both liked, his roommate got kicked out for being aggressive. While I was attending classes like Issues in Feminism and Creative Writing, Philip was attending group therapy, learning how to cope with withdrawal. While I was partying until 2:00am, Philip had a curfew, with nowhere really to go, anyway. It's funny how

easy it is to lose track of someone, how details and memories blur together, how you start taking "everything is fine" as the truth because sometimes it's easier that way. Somewhere along the line, pills turned into heroin, a darker turn I couldn't fathom. It suddenly seemed like the entire country was having this problem, an issue that always seemed so distant from my life. The news in both Ohio and Vermont broadcasted images of people passed out, overdosed in a parking lot or a park. Overdoses and deaths from heroin, a drug that I had barely heard of before, seemed to skyrocket. The worst was the judgement I'd hear from almost everyone. "Druggies," they'd say. "Good-for-nothing, undeserving, pathetic druggies."

During my sophomore fall, I wrote a poem about Philip for my Creative Writing class. I hadn't seen him in a while, and I'm not exactly sure what inspired me to write it. Nostalgia, maybe, and the uneasiness that comes with turning twenty. I wrote about my grandma's porch and the sprint to the train and the orange glow we'd see on the river after dark that we were convinced were will-o'-the-wisps. I never meant to show him the poem; we weren't close anymore, and I was shy about my writing. I titled the piece "Train Race."

I remember the last time I saw Philip, around Thanksgiving, how after in the car my mother remarked that she thought he looked better, that she thought he seemed fine. He did look healthier, like he had gained weight, and he seemed more energetic. I didn't think about him too much, though. I was preoccupied with finals and winter break plans and Christmas shopping. I remember thinking that everything

would be fine, that there was no other comprehensible option, that getting help always helped.

I was in the car with my mother and her boyfriend at the time when I found out, during winter break of my sophomore year of college. We were driving back from New York City, a trip where I was cranky most of the time due to the boyfriend's apprehension of subways, forcing us to walk what seemed like hundreds of blocks in the biting cold. I was going back to school in less than a week, nervous and angsty about a room change and a falling-out with a friend. I had my headphones in, blocking out the sound of the jazz music my mother's boyfriend always played that I found pretentious. My mother answered her phone, sounding confused, and in a split second the world as I knew it was turned on its head. It was my father, who never called with good news, who rarely called at all anymore, now that he was newly married. When she turned around to face me, I could tell something was wrong. I quickly removed my headphones as she told me that Philip was dead.

A heroin overdose, alone in a hotel room in Boston. He had been returning from Colorado, a trip to see a close friend. He had called my aunt to tell her he was staying over in Boston for a night before returning to Vermont. He told her he was going to visit the aquarium. I didn't cry until I got home and saw the framed picture in my childhood bedroom of us together in a leaf pile in my grandma's yard, all carefree smiles and pudgy toddler fingers, waiting for the train race.

*

Philip stood on the marshy shoreline of the pond while I splashed him, wearing his green swim trunks with the turtle pattern. "Come on!" I said, throwing my body into the water to create crystal gems of water that shot up and out like a rocket before sinking back into the now turbulent water. "I can't swim," he said, looking away over at his mother, as if asking for an explanation. "Really?" I said. "I learned how to swim when I was six!" Though that was a lie, and I had only learned to swim just last year, my eight-year-old self still had bragging rights. "What do you do when you go to the ocean?" My family's summer vacation at the Outer Banks was always the most exciting part of my year, and though I was scared of sharks and fish and large waves, I loved to wade in the shallow tide pools. "I've never been to the ocean" he said softly. "Well, maybe next time you can come!" I spun my hands out in a circle, creating a wall of diamond droplets between us.

Two years after it happened, on a black sand beach in Raglan, New Zealand, the farthest I had ever been from home, I thought about him. Something about the black rocky expanse of the beach and the emerald water gave me the feeling that I was on another planet entirely. It was early, sunrise, and I was alone, relishing the time apart from the group of twelve others I spent every waking moment with. Standing knee-deep in the lukewarm salt water, I felt my chest cave in. The thought came to me like a breeze, soft at first, then picking up into a pounding wind: Philip had never seen

the ocean, and he never would. I longed to transport to two years ago, to take him here, as if the water could heal him, could save him. I should have tried harder, been better at noticing what was happening before it was too late. I think about the red flags: the hiding upstairs, his time on the internet, his difficulty connecting with others his age. What if I had gone upstairs, asked him how to play his games, asked him how he was doing more often? I wanted to shake him and scream, to show him that we did care, we did notice. We should have all tried harder, been better. We should have taken him to the ocean.

It took a long time for my anger to dissipate. Sometimes it still rises up when I think about whoever sold a naive nineteen-year-old heroin. I knew it was someone he met in rehab, and I think that's what made me so angry. I wonder if they knew they were handing my cousin a death sentence. It's not that simple though, nothing ever is. Addiction runs through my family like a curse; the cigarettes that killed my grandpa, the empty bottles in my father's office that felt like a dirty secret even at eleven. My anger hasn't left, it's shifted, but it's difficult to find answers when there's nobody to blame.

There are only four of us now, and none of us chase the trains anymore. When I visit my grandma's house, I sit tightly in the white wicker furniture, limbs longer but just as restless. I drink lemonade or iced tea or wine, sometimes, and converse with the grown-ups, who count me as one of them even though I don't feel like it yet. Each

time the train comes, I am filled with the urge to fly to the edge of the yard and count the cars as they speed by, but I never do.

Mostly, I long to board the train, to let it take me somewhere where the memories don't sting, somewhere where Philip didn't use heroin that night, or at all, somewhere where we never stopped playing with magic, where a train passing through could still be entralling.

In some ways, I know I've started to let go, as my visits become short and sparser, my future in a far-off city becoming increasingly tangible. Sometimes when I hear the low rumble of a train, I picture Philip sitting by the window, watching the world go by in a blur of green and blue and brown, heading toward the ocean.

beignets

Elizabeth Arterberry

the soft sweet scent of powdered sugar
and the habitual hiss of hot frying oil
are all i am aware of as, almost sleep-walking,
i descend the stairs into the kitchen
to greet my enthusiastic father
stationed at the stove, shadowed by
a fluffy, four-footed phantom
lingering at his heels, longing for a taste

i stand beside him and fidget
with typical twelve-year-old impatience
watching the bubbles pop and sizzle
dough swelling like deformed balloons
he shoos me away when i get too close
to the flame for his liking, and i retreat reluctantly,
gaze lingering on those golden globs slowly rising.



Restaurant Roses Ginsy Barnes



Untitled Rosa Canales

Standstill

Dylan Walczak

Time stood still one night. Only he knew it.

He awoke to find everything in its place, everyone in their position, every sound dissolved into white, every sight withheld in color.

His wife could've just been asleep, and the looming darkness covered the mystery of her body as convincingly as her bedsheets. Yet when he hoisted his body from the bed, he found a peacefulness only matched with death.

After reality gripped his insides, he frantically paced to the vast window of the high-rise apartment, discovering a silence to the city that hadn't visited since old times. The familiar neon landscape arranged a spectacle as to evoke an invitation, an understanding. As its spectrum remained enclosed within structural confinement, he found himself in monotonous continuity, stark shadows and gray areas. The street below was desolate, no essence of life to be found in anything but the colors. The stoplights and crosswalks set forth a constellation of earthly proportions for no one in particular.

He looked back to align with the beady, fiery numbers of the alarm clock on his nightstand. It had been 5:39 for quite some time.

Perhaps he did deserve this. Perhaps this was an invitation. He had been living in darkness for a while, he lost track. The glistening architecture of the metal jungle

hadn't reflected brightly in his eyes like it did now, and until now, it never seemed so alive at night.

And his wife was asleep. And it was still 5:30.

He cleared his closet to prepare for the indecisiveness mid-February offers. Charcoal jeans, foggy sweatshirt, stone jean jacket, whatever boots, smoky parka.

Stumbling through the apartment with a sleepy physicality, he found the remnants of the living room as artifacts of a long-lost exhibit.

How long had it been like this?

The elevators didn't work, so he took the stairs. It was here the darkness retained most of its strength. The nodes between publicity and privacy, reality and fantasy, life and death. It forced him to keep his hand on the railing for guidance. Thus, he was guided to where he wanted to be.

As he stepped into the limelight, he found his clothes mismatched in color and texture, a comfort he fell deep in for the moment. The air was stuffy where he stood, and as he stepped aside, he found the wind itself to be frozen in time. He started down the street as the instilled current halted and boosted his pace. Even the snowflakes embodied a crystalline essence as if they split from the buildings themselves, and they stood their ground in space until he stood through them.

He was part of the city at last. What a joy it was for him with every step to be more fully submerged in a place he long lingered for. A place that finally understood him once again.

Something illuminated red in the northeast corner of the four-way street he was approaching.

Why had he been here before?

The door was open. Everything was red when he sat. Red booths, red stools, red brick, red limelight, red pictures, red drinks, his drink, he was red.

He knew the Bianchi family hanging along the aging brick. He knew the signed photographs from Sinatra and Martin and Armstrong and Pavarotti. He knew how Petie always placed his drinks in alphabetical order and he knew Bacardi was next to Cuervo and Jim was next to Johnnie. He knew the cushion of his stool always forced him to slump more than he wanted. He looked around in search for a closeness he knew. This was a moment he knew.

Why was she here?

The door swayed and stopped. She stood in front of that Sophia Loren *Marriage Italian Style* poster between the restrooms. She stood further off than he had thought, but there she stood. She stood with that vibrant red V-neck dress whose short sleeves he thought too long but whose length he thought just right because he loved her. The red reflected from her skin, glowed in her bones. Hell was unleashing.

She made no noise as she walked toward him, but her actions rang loud. Her hair bounced, her hips swayed, her eyes fluttered, her legs floated. As she sat beside him, he found that Sophia was missing from the poster. He always thought his love looked like her. Her body was no mystery of that.

His eyes were wet as he looked at her, as she looked at him. His wife had created a safe haven free from death the best she could, and here was his love, mid-February in motion. The woman that moved with him, stayed with him, revived him, haunted him.

Here was Hell. Here was Reality. Here was Redemption. Here was Forgiveness.

She moved her fingers to the aglets of his sweatshirt and twirled them as she did his emotions. She stirred his emotions, prolonged them. She looked up from the aglets, and at that moment, he was in love with her and the red and the poster and—

Wake up.

Matthew, you okay honey? It's 5:40, you should probably start moving.

His eyes were wet. He looked at his broken alarm clock. It was 5:4.

Staring at The Sun

Sophia Menconi

1.

I dream, and we are two bodies somewhere, not hunted.
I love you and when the sun rises golden at dawn,
I open my mouth to swallow it whole.
See the city smothered in light. You are kissing me,
and existing is no longer the glare
of light reflected in eyes. I
am holding you close to me and hear
in you the shifting of feathers, ready to break
through soft skin. God feeds the Ravens
as he has promised, and the stones
in the field
turn over.

2.

I found a dead bird on my walk home last night, I wrapped it in my soft red scarf
and placed it in the river. I think of you often, your fingertips as they traced my name
through the window fog in dawnlight. I lived inside the morning bright white, the
sunrise bleaching bones. I do not live there anymore. You asked for your things back,
so I wrapped them in red tissue and placed them in a box. I'm not sure when they will
reach you.



Birth of Entrepreneurship Kevin Gomes



Tell Your Stories Here Emily Ables

A Night-In with Mr. Congeniality

Micah Frenkiel

He doesn't like citrus, I remembered.
Or really anything that isn't
buttermilk pancakes
from the box in the freezer,
defrosted, then set in the fridge by his mother
the night prior.
He also doesn't like word games,
the city,
unfiltered water,
boat shoes,
his own dog,
holding hands when his friends are around,
holding hands when my friends are around,
the following flavors: cherry, green apple, lemon,
eye contact,
water sports,
Europe,
being seen together anywhere by anyone at any time,
the moon landing,
foreign languages,
porn that isn't high definition,
honey,
his mother, Denise, who makes for him said pancakes,
non-contact sports,
sex in places
other than the right half of the couch
in the basement under the blue seizure of broken television,
there in case we need it,
to distract ourselves from how embarrassing we become
during the shared pursuit of pleasure.

Blackjack and the Buffalo Bills

Gabe Kaminsky

I was 13. The Buffalo gusts wrapped around my ears, and my brothers and I were shivering cold. We saw a faint light in the midst of a noon snowstorm—a restaurant illuminated in a hollow and monotonous town. We wandered in. It was even frigid inside, and the woman working the register wore a bulky, violet jacket: she seemed cold too. There were around four people in the place, but it felt empty. Had it been in another city, on another deserted street corner, or even another time, it may have felt like a commonplace restaurant. But we were in upstate New York during a brutal snowstorm. We hurriedly scanned the menu and ordered eight soft-shell tacos to share. Eating was the only way of distracting us from the inevitable: we were about to walk to the cemetery to bury our grandfather.

I looked over my left shoulder and observed my cousin in tears. He was 25 at the time, and, in many ways, his grief was contagious. Before I drove to Buffalo for my grandfather's funeral, it did not genuinely hit me that he was gone. Every other time I had been to the city, I spent time with my grandmother *and* grandfather, but once I stood cautiously next to his plot in an immobilizing snowstorm, reciting psalms, I became cognizant of the fact that I would never communicate with him again. The cold was all-pervading, and I began crying a bit more as my father commenced in his eulogy. He was quoting Bruce Springsteen.

Well they built the Titanic to be one of a kind, but many ships have ruled the seas.

They built the Eiffel Tower to stand alone, but they could build another if they please. But when they built you, brother, they broke the mold.

My brother Dan and I got into his car to go back to our grandmother's house after we took turns shoveling dirt atop his casket. The trees shook vehemently all around the car, and I felt like we were moving at an improbable velocity. Things needed to slow down. As we drove, I could not help but have my eyes sharply glued to the window like I was some vexatious tourist ebullient by sightseeing. Buffalo was tired, and every aspect of it seemed worn down. I caught a momentary glimpse of *Ted's Hot Dogs*, an old-fashioned fast food diner that my grandfather and I had been to a couple of times.

The place seemed non-existent to me now, like a once captivating venue that had lost its allure and wrinkled up under the sky of a lifeless city. We parked on the street, walked up the cracked and powdery brick stairs and entered the house. We were greeted by relatives that I perhaps met once or twice but did not remember. "I remember you when you were this big," they maybe said, though I did not care to hear them annoyingly chatter. They seemed like strangers to me, and that is all they had ever been. It smelled sweet in the kitchen, which was expected since my grandmother had an affinity for cooking desserts. I sat down on a creaky wooden stool, and my grandmother brought me some pie. I could have sworn that the milk

chocolate she used in the pie tasted almost identical to the type that she formerly employed within her company, *Deluxe Sweets*, but then again, I had not tasted any of her products since she took away the family discount code. As I ate, I glanced at some of the old pictures along the bookshelf. They were gray. The television was audible, so I scooped up my plate and retreated to the living room where my dad lay on the same couch my grandfather would scream and yell on as the Buffalo Bills blew game after game. Old-fashioned mints were encased atop a brittle glass table in front of the television, and a wave of nostalgia seeped into my conscious mind as I remembered my grandfather giving me a handful of those same mints years ago. The Bills were losing 20-0.

At the end of the day, my siblings and I shuffled around with my grandmother in her room to take some of my grandfather's former belongings. My brother tried on beige leather loafers and took them blithely. My sister was given a vintage watch and my eldest brother took a pair of Black Nikes that had presumably not been worn since the early 2000s. I did not end up picking anything.

The following day, my family would drive home. It was a long and exhausting weekend, and we had all experienced a whirlwind of emotions. In the car, I thought about my time spent with my Aunt Beth in the living room. She explained to me the time she was on a cruise ship and dominated poker in the basement one night. She

was hungover, she said, and the next day when she walked down the stairs to the tables, everyone was chanting her name loudly:

“Beth, Beth, Beth!”

With my eyes glued to the window again on the way back, I pulled out the 2 of Hearts card my Aunt placed in my hand before I left. It was crinkled now. In the front seat, a cigarette dangled between my sister’s fingers letting in the cold air. Seeing me looking her way, she grabbed the carton in the cup holder, pulled it open, and passed one back with a red Buffalo Bills lighter she had apparently taken from the living room. I rolled down the window and inhaled.

The ‘Master Model’

Mara Kilgore

On Saturday nights at six o’clock, my father and I sit in cool, leather chairs around an antique side table whose chestnut top wears round and ringed stains from years of hot mugs and dark pints upon it. Chris Thile’s voice spills from hung speakers and sweetens the room as he narrates this week’s sponsors: “This portion of our show is brought to you, as always, by Fast AF. Fiddle tunes are safe, therapeutic, and *fun*.”

Thile is the host of American Public Radio’s *Live From Here*, a show where musicians from all different backgrounds rendezvous to explore the depths of Folk and Bluegrass. Now 37, Thile made his first appearance on the show, then titled *A Prairie Home Companion*, when he was only 15 and already well on his way to becoming a mandolin virtuoso (Streep). He, like I, was inspired at a young age by Saturday nights with Garrison Keillor.

Growing up in a musical family, Chris Thile picked up his first mandolin at age four. By 13, he was touring in his band Nickel Creek and had already released his first solo album (Stone). In recent years, when not hosting *Live From Here*, Thile plays with his band, Punch Brothers, an incredibly talented Bluegrass, and yet not Bluegrass, quintet. His tunes are plucked on the stretched strings of his Gibson Loar F5 Mandolin, which Thile refers to as “The Bank of Thile,” for it cost him his entire savings (Stone). This mandolin is one of only 330 identified and documented Gibson

Loar F5 Mandolins (Wolfe). Designed by acoustical engineer Lloyd Loar, in the world of mandolins, Thile's is one of the very best.

If not in our music room on Saturday nights at six o'clock, Dad and I are in a theater to see Chris Thile in person. Near the end of a Punch Brothers show, Thile will unplug, step forward, and play Bach's Sonata No.1 in G minor on his Loar F5. He cradles the small and sunburst body of his Loar as the crisp and spiraled edges brush against his arms. Eight thin strings stretch across a peculiarly long neck, where they meet at the instrument's head on either side of a pearly torch inlay. The Loar F5 features two thin and curved f-holes, designed to create resonance within the body. A peek inside one of these holes reveals the instrument's serial number, date of creation, and the signature of Lloyd Loar himself. These are the marks of the "Master Model" mandolin, and anyone with the good fortune of owning one has their instrument's number and data memorized. The 'Bank of Thile' is number 75316, signed Feb. 18, 1924.

Known for its particularly long neck, widespread f-holes, and raised fingerboard, the Loar F5 transformed the creation of mandolins. Lloyd Loar designed this instrument when he worked for Gibson as an acoustical engineer, a job which perfectly combined his childhood passions of physics and music (Siminoff). From a young age, Loar was curious about the construction of mandolins (Siminoff). When he began at Gibson, without much experience, he was quick to test new ideas for mandolin design. To create this revolutionary instrument, Loar began with the

existing Gibson F4 and then incorporated structures found in Stradivari violin principal. The blending of guitar and violin through the f-holes, long neck, and raised fingerboard created a distinguished look and tone in Loar's instrument, which became known as the 'Master Model' mandolin (Siminoff).

As the popularity and prestige of Loar's instruments grew in the 1950s, mostly due to "The Father of Bluegrass" Bill Monroe, mandolinists began to track and document the hands which held these 'Master Models.' One such musician was Darryl Wolfe, mandolinist of The Knoxville Grass. In an interview with Wolfe, he confessed that his interest in Lloyd Loar began when he was only 15 years old, and in the years following, Wolfe began to search for Loar creations. Out of curiosity, he would write down the serial numbers and descriptions of the mandolins he found. Over time, his hobby turned into the *F5 Journal*, the most robust and accurate archive of all located Loar instruments.

Following the *F5 Journal*, Darryl Wolfe planned Loarfests, where musicians who owned Gibson Loar F5 mandolins could come together and share in their appreciation for Lloyd Loar's designs. Wolfe remembers fondly these gatherings of 15-20 mandolinists, all sitting around a stage and playing each other's instruments.

"It's been a great journey," he recalls as he lists off name after name of famous mandolinists he has befriended through these festivals.

Wolfe purchased his first Loar mandolin back in 1976. Then only 23, Wolfe drove from North Carolina to New Hampshire with his father and wife. Wolfe noted

that, back then, there was no internet nor immediate way to communicate, so he had planned in advance, over the phone and through letters, the exact details of this mandolin exchange. Wolfe was adamant to pick up the Loar in person for he wanted to ensure it was the right instrument for him. If the neck of a mandolin does not fit the shape of your hand or the tone does not match the sound you desire, there is very little that can be done to change it. However, for Darryl, it was a match, and he purchased the mandolin and drove right back to North Carolina. He arrived home just in time to walk on stage and play a show with The Knoxville Grass. Later on, Wolfe discovered that the man who sold him that Loar was a con man and, had Wolfe not insisted upon buying it in person rather than having it shipped, the instrument very well could have never been sent to him.

Beyond the stories and tunes which often bring these music makers together, they are connected by the numbers recorded inside each of their Loars. When speaking with Darryl Wolfe and listening to interviews with famous mandolinists, I noticed that many are quick to recite their mandolin's serial number. It seems to be a point of pride which exact Loar they own and who their neighboring owners are. In an interview with Fretboard Journal, as John Reischman shares about his Loar, he recites the serial number, 75327, without a second thought (Verlinde). He recalls that his mandolin is only one number away from David Grisman's, who once lost his Loar but stumbled upon the exact same one many years later (Verlinde). Similarly, Darryl Wolfe made certain that I understood his Loar is only five numbers away from Bill

Monroe's "Million Dollar Mandolin," which is arguably the most famous Gibson Loar F5 mandolin and now sits in the Country Music Hall of Fame (Rudder).

Perhaps most impressive of all is the mandolin held on stage before Dad and me. Thile, a world-renowned mandolinist, Grammy winner, MacArthur Genius, and my first crush, plays the mandolin which is only one digit away from Lloyd Loar's personal Gibson Loar F5. Thile plucks a melody which dances about the room with sharp, woody steps. As the final notes of Bach's Sonata fade into the farthest corners of the silent theater, the Punch Brothers step forward and join Thile at the edge of a dark stage. With all instruments unplugged, Thile begins one final song with a slow and scraping strum on his mandolin strings. One by one, the others join in, not fighting to be heard but to tune into the present dance which carries on the legendary work of Lloyd Loar and his 'Master Model' mandolin.

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Grandpa was an oracle,
must have foreseen my mother
somewhere, screwing someone,
my dad home, restless in his hospital bed.
That's why grandpa painted our front door
red in the sweaty neck of summer
for the daughter-in-law he never loved.
It was sliced skin before we felt it,
still too early to see punishment
in the scarlet paint

my mother loves anyway.
She denies her hair is auburn,
thinks it's still the deep stain of blood
she charms from sick people at work,
the tint of the minivan she drives home
on the phone with her boyfriend.
When she walks through our front door,
though the paint sizzles like a neon sign,
though it tries to stitch itself to her breast,
somehow it doesn't stick to her,
but slips right off her chest.

Notes on Snow Cones

Taylor Shook

Tiny hands slam basketballs into tile floor. *Whump-whump-whump-whump*. It's a sound I hear in my sleep. The metallic beat reverberates against hallway walls, mingling with spectator voices and the *pop-pop-pop* of a popcorn machine. February snow falls outside — I know that, despite the windowless hallway. Sweat gathers in the armpits of my t-shirt and the knees of my jeans. Clusters of ponytails, flushed faces and ruby red uniforms rally around coaches with khakis and clipboards. It's 10 in the morning, the games will start soon.

This schoolgirls' basketball tournament is all players and coaches and referees and parents and grandparents and siblings. But I am none of these things.

"Medium." A round grandpa interrupts my people-watching.

"You would like a medium snow cone?" I correct him. He nods.

He gives me four dollars; I notice the \$50 bills in the folds of his wallet.

He ignores my tip jar, which reads "COLLEGE FUND!! THANK YOU!" in black sharpie.

The ice shaver's collar stings the tiny scratches on my fingers as I fill a blue paper cup with shaved ice. I skip my usual "here ya go, darlin'" when I pass it to him.

I pray to God for patience. The man floods the snow cone with strawberry syrup, making white ice turn blood red.

My dad's words roll around in my head. "Don't let customers get the best of you. Show them how to treat people."

He was fired from his last job, working in a car dealership's customer service, because he was "too snippy" with customers. Dad serves snow cones, too. It's not his day job; he does it for grocery money, or to get away from my mom. Maybe both.

A boy in Nike slides shuffles by. He sizes up my blue cart of ice, my six-flavor syrup dispenser, and me, my face caked with makeup (prettier people make more tips). He buys a medium snow cone for four dollars.

I check my watch; it's 10:03. That's eight dollars in revenue, in three minutes. In 57 more minutes, I'll earn the same.

My first day on the job, my boss showed me the ropes in his dingy warehouse, which is only 10 blocks from my house. I asked him how much each snow cone costs him.

"Oh, about 15 cents," he grinned in his manic way. "This here is a real cash cow."

Customers rotate through, a chorus of *gimmealarge* and *lemmegetasmall* and *doyouhavenapkins?*

I collect cash into a red zipper bag and scoop cubed ice into the machine, filling paper cups with crushed ice. I wipe down syrupy surfaces, mop up spills. It's mechanical, mindless.

There are irritated foot taps and icy stares while customers wait two minutes for me to use the toilet, maybe five minutes to gulp down a packed lunch.

At the end of the day, I count profits, making neat stacks of \$1s, \$5s \$10s and \$20s. \$1,024 in revenue. About \$938.50 in profits, taking into account my \$48 pay. It's a cash business, and I work alone. It would be easy to steal, but I don't.

I am freshly annoyed that I will take home \$48 and my boss will earn \$938.50. He did not smile at rude parents, appease sticky-handed children, drip with sweat in a too-hot hallway. His ears do not ring; his fingers do not bleed.

My dad would argue that my boss earned his profit fair and square, because he bought the cart and the cups and the ice and the syrup and the spoons and the napkins.

"But without me, the server, there are no snow cones!" I would fire back. "Why is simply owning stuff considered a productive enterprise?" I would try to confuse him with my college words.

Waiting for Mom to pick me up, I plop down on a concrete bench and pull my hood up around my face. I run my hands through my hair in an attempt to silence my ringing ears.

My Dad

Micah Frenkiel

My dad
takes his morning with juice
and long, translucent sheets
of Atlantic smoked salmon
laid to rest like apricot stained glass
flat against the sourdough
and the radio too loud
so that a monologue by Garrison Keillor
takes up the room like
hot syrup in a jewelry box
drowning my mother in her sleep and
staining the walls burgundy
a shade she calls scab
and hated anyways

Before *The Bachelor* Brainwashes You...

Savannah Delgross & Molly Keisman

This semester, we started the Monday-night tradition of having people over to watch *The Bachelor* in our apartment. We'd change into our pajamas, drink wine, laugh at the ridiculousness, and comment on the show's gender politics.

This season of *The Bachelor* made waves by featuring its first virgin bachelor -- former football player Colton Underwood who is saving himself for love -- an ambitious move on a 12-week reality television show where women compete for a marriage proposal. Contestants made constant jokes about Colton's virginity, and countless petty fights broke out among the women -- Courtney did *not* like being called "the cancer of the house."

We loved and pitied the women who tried so hard to make themselves memorable. One contestant showed up in a sloth costume and was sent home. Another woman tried to spice up her personality with a fake Australian accent -- she also didn't last long.

To be clear, our weekly *Bachelor* viewing parties were a guilty pleasure, and we spent much of the season criticizing the show and relentlessly mocking its participants. And then, something shocking happened in the last few episodes of the season: it got serious.

Picture this: it's week nine, and Colton has three women left. There's Cassie, a charming speech pathologist; Hannah, wide-eyed and sweet, who received Colton's

first impression rose; and Tayshia, a bubbly personality, whose smile Colton frequently comments on.

In a surprise twist, Cassie, a fan favorite who has made it to the end of the show and shares seemingly powerful chemistry with Colton, breaks things off. On their overnight date, she explains to Colton that she isn't in love with him like she'd thought. A conversation with her father (who is dubious that his daughter could be in love after mere weeks) clarified many things for her, and she realizes that she isn't ready for marriage. She tells Colton that she is leaving the show. He begs her to stay, claiming he can be patient, take things slow. "I don't know that I'm ever gonna get there," she responds.

Then, Colton quickly transforms into the obsessive, mad-for-love male protagonist that we know all too well. Embracing the tropey "grand gesture," a frustrated and lovelorn Colton hops the gate of the hotel and runs away, sending the whole *Bachelor* crew out looking for him. The following episode sees him break things off with Hannah and Tayshia by saying he is in love with Cassie and is "going to fight for her."

While begging Cassie to be with him, Colton says, "I gave everything up ... I'm not telling you that I love you. I want to show you. I want you to see exactly why and how much I'm willing to give up and give to us." Cassie responds, "I just don't understand what's happening." Colton says, "I hopped an eight-foot fence and walked away. I grabbed my wallet, and I ran away!" Like so many depictions of men trying to

win over women, his efforts to show his love do not involve him acknowledging her own emotions and feelings.

Cassie is stuck, succumbing to her partner's desires when she's unsure about her own — a visceral, relatable entrapment. When Colton tells her that he has broken up with the other women, the pressure seems real, even on camera. Cassie bursts into tears, clearly shocked and confused. She says she doesn't know if she'll be able to give him what he wants — a sentiment glazed with the special sort of selflessness that many women are socialized to carry. It's tempting to dismiss it all as trashy reality television, but occasionally we're reminded that these are real people grappling with real emotions. When Colton breaks up with Tayshia, she whispers that she doesn't want to do this on camera and invites Colton into the apartment, away from the crew. The camera stutters and shakes, giving us a view of the camera person's shoes and the tropical ground. The microphone picks up on hushed sobs as Tayshia tries to comfort the man who has just dumped her.

The sad part is that after all his begging and promising to take things slow, Cassie gives in and agrees to be with him.

It's easy to analyze the way *The Bachelor* embodies problematic gender dynamics — in this case, the pressure exerted on women to satisfy male desire. We can also look at it as an example of how not to show love. Toxic relationships surround us in real life, but when viewers see TV and movies as idealized versions of our world, we absorb all the wrong ways to show love. The public's reactions to this season of the

Bachelor serve as evidence. One article, published in *Cosmopolitan*, is titled: "‘Bachelor' Season 23 Finale Recap: Colton and Cassie's Love Is Real. Trust Me, I'd Know." In *Kroger*, we thumb through an issue of *People* with Cassie and Colton on the cover. A whole spread is dedicated to the couple. They sit together, Cassie draped over Colton's lap, all smiles. Above them, in large letters, is a quote from Colton. "I Couldn't Let Her Go!" it says. The start of the article reads, "He professed his love, she left him broken-hearted. But the star of *The Bachelor* refused to give up and won his dream girl back. Now the couple is happier than ever and starting a life together." It's a simplistic, soft way of reframing what happened between the two. It places responsibility on Cassie for breaking Colton's heart, but reassures the audience that Colton's persistence saved the day, ensuring happiness for both of them.

The toxic narrative is not foreign to us; romantic comedies, arguably America's favorite genre, often celebrate the "romantic" grand gesture — the last-ditch effort, what's supposed to be the "purest" expression of a person's love. We see it in *Love Actually* when Mark professes his love to his best friend's wife on her doorstep with her husband in the other room. We see it in *Say Anything* when, after their breakup, Lloyd stands outside of Diane's bedroom window, his boom box blasting the song they listened to while having sex for the first time. We see it in the more contemporary example *Sierra Burgess is a Loser* when Sierra catfishes Jamey the entire movie, even kissing him without his consent but wins him back in the end with an

emotional song. We see it in *The Bachelor* when Colton is so overcome with his love for Cassie that he jumps a fence and dumps the other two prospects.

That romantic comedies encourage unhealthy behavior isn't a hot take: people are increasingly critical of romantic comedies, cognizant of the ways in which harmful behavior is framed as romantic. Beyond the screen, film and television shape our realities—they have a direct impact on what we deem “normal,” what we are willing to settle for, how we perceive ourselves and our relationships. It's important to dissect our world views and separate them from the warped movie logic we have internalized. In *The Bachelor's* case, we have to stop congratulating Colton and instead acknowledge his extreme lack of respect for Cassie's clearly-communicated desire to disengage. It is never a good idea to relentlessly pursue a person against their wishes—let alone on national television. Of course, we don't want to presume that *The Bachelor* is “real,” but even so, the show sends a harmful message. Colton's actions are emotionally manipulative and shouldn't be regarded as anything else. Mainstream media behave irresponsibly when they endorse Cassie and Colton's relationship as something to aspire to. “I couldn't let her go!” is hardly a healthy sentiment.

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