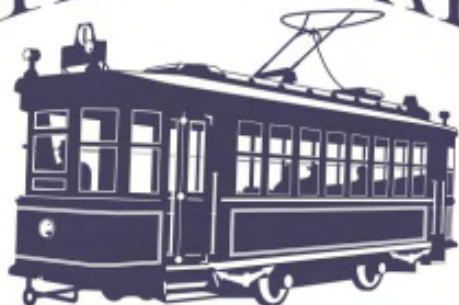


THE
STREETCAR



*Mississippi State University's
Creative Arts Journal
Est. 2013*



Cover Art:
Winter River by Jarod Weston

The Streetcar is published yearly by a student-run organization at Mississippi State University.

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To have work considered in future volumes of *The Streetcar*, undergraduate and graduate students enrolled at Mississippi State University may submit their work online at <http://thestreetcarsu.com/submit>.
The submission deadline for Volume 12 will be in Winter 2023.

Dear Reader,

It is with immense pleasure that we introduce you to Volume 11 of *The Streetcar*, a rich amalgam of creative works from a variety of Mississippi State University students. Even as so many things continue to change as time goes on, artistic expression thrives, shifting, but never losing its prevalence. In the pages of this journal, you will discover pieces by so many different artists and writers, forming a creative community which *The Streetcar* is honored to bring together.

The pieces in this journal illustrate the cyclical nature of life, taking you through a transition from a focus on manmade structures into work based on man itself, which soon fades out into death and decay. However, this decomposition does not mark the end of the journal, but instead functions as a precursor to art centered around new life, around the sun still rising and flowers blooming. Now, after the final page is turned, all that is left is for the cycle to begin again. These works will lead you on a journey and guide you to different visions of this world, as they did for us when we first saw them.

The Streetcar, along with working on this journal, has continued to provide an artistic outlet for Mississippi State students. With events like our Open Mics and 6-Word Horror Story contest hosted on our Instagram page, we reached a variety of students on campus. We also held an off-campus event with a local coffee bar, Nine-Twenty-nine, where we worked with local artists via our arts market. Aiming to foster a community of the arts both on and off-campus, we are excited to see what the future holds.

We are grateful to the Shackouls Honors College, a dedicated sponsor of *The Streetcar*, which has supported the journal and its staff since its inception. We are incredibly grateful for their continued support. We specifically want to thank Corrine Jackson, the Business Manager of the Shackouls Honors College, for being crucial to what we have been able to accomplish this year, along with the Director of Student Services, Mr. George Dunn, for all he has done to support and promote our journal. And last but by no means least, we want to thank Dr. Vivier, our faculty advisor, for all he does for this organization, guiding us and giving us the opportunity to succeed. We could not do this without you.

Additionally, we want to extend our thanks to the College of Arts and Sciences as well as the Writing Center, for their unwavering support of *The Streetcar*. The College of Arts and Sciences not only financially supports the mission of *The Streetcar*, but actively connects student artists at MSU with the journal, increasing both the quality and quantity of our annual submissions, and The Writing Center has historically supported our Open Mic Nights, aiding us in creating an engaging, supportive space for students to highlight their talents. We cannot wait to continue our relationship with both of you for years to come.

We are beyond thankful for everyone on our staff, who are the backbone of all we do, taking on new challenges headfirst and always putting in the effort. We hope you find parts of this journal that stick with you, large or small. Take the art you find here and take it into the world.

Sincerely,

Zoe Maddox and Isabella Thompson
Co-Editors in Chief, 2022-2023

Isabella Thompson and Ada Fulgham
Co-Editors in Chief, 2023-2024

TABLE OF CONTENTS

<i>St. Andrew's Staircase</i> - Ivy Ball.....	1
<i>A (Public) Monthly Reflection: November: "Writing in Pencil"</i> - Parker C. Haley.....	2
<i>Dead Letter Mail (I)</i> - Airy Valencia.....	4
<i>Modernity at No Cost</i> - Jay Snodgrass.....	5
<i>Searching Skyward</i> - Jay Snodgrass.....	6
<i>Never Never Never</i> - Anne Louise Phillips.....	7
<i>Depth</i> - Zoe Maddox.....	8
<i>Vehicular Maintenance</i> - Haylee Morman.....	10
<i>Verkehr</i> - Zoe Maddox.....	11
<i>Pay to Play</i> - Jarod Weston.....	12
<i>313 Dogwood Avenue</i> - Jay Snodgrass.....	13
<i>Industrial Crepuscular</i> - Zoe Maddox.....	15
<i>Conversation with My Reflection in a Rear View Mirror</i> - Mary Evelyn McLemore.....	16
<i>Surveillance</i> - Zoe Maddox.....	18
<i>Lean To</i> - Zoe Maddox.....	19
<i>The Three</i> - Lauren Adams.....	20
<i>The Neighbors Got Some Weird Sh*t Goin On</i> - Dontae Ball.....	21
<i>Chukwudinma</i> - Anonymous.....	22
<i>Together</i> - Leah Wisener.....	25
<i>It's a Living</i> - Katelyn Woodard.....	26
<i>The Boy in the Propeller Hat</i> - Anne Louise Phillips.....	27
<i>Biltmore Atrium</i> - Natalie May.....	28
<i>Prometheus, Re-Imagined as Bound by Aphrodite</i> - Kaz Shumpert.....	29
<i>Fire Muse</i> - Sapna Patlolla.....	32
<i>The Burning Soles of My Feet</i> - Callie Matthews.....	33
<i>Feel My Rage, Feel My Wrath</i> - Anonymous.....	34
<i>1264 Country Rd 170</i> - Lauren Adams.....	37
<i>End of an Era</i> - Jarod Weston.....	38
<i>Pleated and Floor-Length</i> - Isabella Thompson.....	40
<i>Silent Femininity</i> - Rabia Siddiqui.....	41

<i>The Story of the Lady in the Woods</i> - Lauren Adams.....	42
<i>A Monster with Keys</i> - Zoe Maddox.....	50
<i>Catfished</i> - Lauren Adams.....	51
<i>Sisyphus Disrupted</i> - Mary Evelyn McLemore.....	53
<i>Wild</i> - Sapna Patlolla.....	55
<i>Routine</i> - Haylee Morman.....	56
<i>Ratlickers Anonymous</i> - Rabia Siddiqui.....	57
<i>What Can't Be Beat?</i> - Natalie May.....	58
<i>Atlas</i> - Dontae Ball.....	60
<i>A Dead Moth</i> - Jay Snodgrass.....	61
<i>Untitled (April)</i> - Airy Valencia.....	63
<i>Ode to the Jungle</i> - Kaz Shumpert.....	64
<i>Mind Your Head</i> - Rabia Siddiqui.....	65
<i>Tangled</i> - Dontae Ball.....	66
<i>Captivity</i> - Anne Louise Phillips.....	67
<i>Golden Sunset</i> - Ivy Ball.....	68
<i>Nature's Salutations</i> - Lauren Adams.....	69
<i>A Back and Forth Between Two Gilded Mirrors</i> - Mary Evelyn McLemore.....	71
<i>Rise & Shine</i> - Natalie May.....	73
<i>Winter River</i> - Jarod Weston.....	74
<i>Big Rip</i> - Dawn Munro.....	75
<i>Blossoms and Blemishes</i> - Natalie May.....	76
<i>Best of the Streetcar</i>	78
<i>Staff</i>	79
<i>Thank You to our Sponsors!</i>	80

St. Andrew's Staircase



A (Public) Monthly Reflection: November: “Writing in Pencil”

Thursday, Nov. 24, 12:01 pm

In every choice lies a reason to not remain committed to the very choice you have just chosen. But we must live in an inescapable understanding that the choice not chosen could have been the choice that led us to a choice that resulted in a favorable outcome we would have deemed as Fate.

My choice to write this poem with a pencil has progressively allowed me to inform my therapist that we will no longer be meeting on Thursdays at 12 pm. The result of my choice is not one I planned, but it is now my Fate.

Please do not be startled, I can switch to my keyboard at my own will. But your will is not my will, so do not suggest it is; otherwise, your suggested will may impede and alter my will and then the last sentence becomes true. Let me explain why I find the wooden pencil to be a superior writing tool.

By using a pencil, a slow, gradual diminishing occurs upon the meeting of the graphite and the paper. The pencil ceases to be a vessel for any philosophical semiotics that people care to attribute to the successive lines placed on the page. Instead, the pencil becomes a tool for mutual vicariousness, and it replaces Sally, my therapist. In our last session, I explained to her that the pencil is an archaic human sense engager—she deferred. Just consider: Why do you think Nicolas-Jacques Conté never needed a therapist?

The proxied sense engager vibrates and whines most obviously, but it also has a distinct smell (especially when you erase) of rejection. The rejection of an unretrievable, and therefore meaningless, line of graphite. But if the erased line helped work toward a succinct written thought, it ceases to be meaningless, yet it isn't accredited for its input. Does good riddance then become bad riddance? In this vein (of graphite), I assume the pencil will soon reveal that it, too, needs therapy.

Through the lines erased and the lines remaining, the pencil slowly dwindles in my hand by my will. An unexplainable feeling of ensuing empowerment occurs in knowing the pencil works to express my feelings and thoughts while itself becomes nothing. By wielding the pencil to self-sacrifice, I am able to fathom being both the degrader and the degraded, and pencil writing, then, embodies and epitomizes sadism (without the sex).

My choice to write with a pencil remains my choice and my choice alone, not the pencil's. Because the pencil's choice is my choice and my choice is the pencil's, for the pencil can only live through me (the pencil is not real, you know?). So, if you choose to write with a pencil, know the very pencil you degrade could have been degrading me. And with that, we, too, are connected in this mutual process of degradation.

I could continue, but I am afraid of running out of paper (the pencil still has a ways to go). But who is to say the paper gets to dictate what me and my pencil do? Its limits are not ours, for ours live within the very lines we create and in the very Ticonderoga (with the logo scratched off) in my hand. I believe I will never return to the keyboard, nor therapy; a monthly writing suffices for substitution. This is my choice, and it was your choice to read my choices; but my will with the pencil does not affect your will, but my will to write about my will upon the pencil's will (except the pencil's will is my will) has now impeded upon your will. But this was neither of our intentions, therefore, it must have been Fate. But who is to say?

Dead Letter Mail (1)

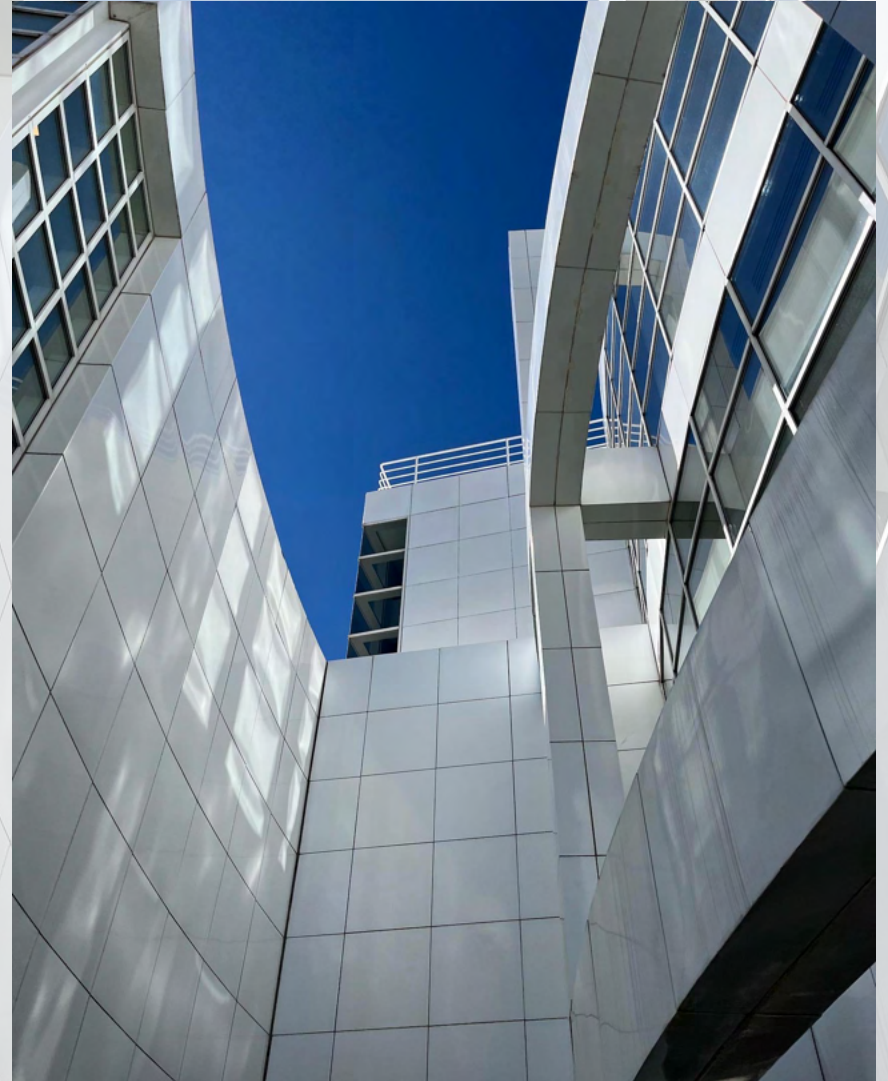
I've fallen in love with your eyes,
the way they glisten like soap bubbles.

Oh, my beloved!

I thought about the kiss you stole,
The one I owed to you.

My lips kept bleeding
and I delighted in
Knowing that my blood belonged to you
like the rain belongs to the earth
like the soft breath of your hair belongs to the palm of my hand.

Modernity at No Cost



Searching Skyward



Never Never Never

She draws the wind like in first grade, gray swirls over a paper sky, and he's trying not to smile, because, well, how can you when—

“It doesn't have to be...” she trails off.

“The way it is?”

“My gosh,” she says, and then, “don't be like that.”

“Don't be like what? You mean the way that I am.”

She's not sure how to respond, but she flushes. She bites the inside of her lip and returns to her drawing. A stick figure. A little house.

“I was joking,” he says, after a moment.

They both know he wasn't.

She holds up the drawing. “Put it in the Museum of Modern Art.”

“The Louvre,” he suggests.

“My new career?” she muses. “My true calling? It's better than being an accountant. I was never suited to the long, hard, nine to five grind of the typical human. I'm an artist.”

He wishes it were all true, for a moment. That he'd been joking, that nothing had to be the way it was, that she could be an artist, but, man, she couldn't even draw a stick figure.

“A life of relative ease for me...” She looks at him. “You know I'm joking.”

“The way that I joke?”

“You mean saying something awful and then pretending you were joking. No. That's called something else.”

“Go on, say it—”

“—I'm not going to call you names.”

He sighs. She starts to crumple up the drawing and he jumps up from his seat. “No,” he says. She blinks up at him, and he lowers his voice. “Can I have it?”

“Well, you can. Perhaps you mean may—“

And then suddenly it’s all too much for both of them. She hands him the drawing. He leaves in silence. She stands up, walks around the room in a circle, sits down again. She remembers when they were children and they sat and watched the cars pass by... and they swapped their burned CDs, not knowing they’d done anything wrong. And then there was that story they’d told themselves, about how someday things would be perfect, and they never never never were.

Depth



Vehicular Maintenance

A bicycle pump maneuvered by pistons of bone,
I listen to the wisdom being delivered by Dad
And we fix the tires that will carry me home.

The cement is wet-cold, here on our own.
As I learn that letting my tire pressure drop this far is bad,
A bicycle pump is maneuvered by pistons of bone.

I've nicknamed her Melanie for reasons unknown
Even to myself. I think naming cars was a fad
As we fix the tires that will carry me home.

My dad is pumping air, I'm holding my phone
And illuminating his work - for which I'm so glad.
A bicycle pump is maneuvered by pistons of bone.

The neighbor down the street spies on us; creepy old crone.
He lets me try pumping. I'd much rather be pajama-clad
But we fix the tires that will carry me home.

The aged plastic handle shakes, the force elicits a groan;
My dad pauses; his slippers are black, pants a deep plaid.
A bicycle pump is maneuvered by pistons of bone
And we finally fix the tires that will carry me home.

Verkehr



Pay to Play



313 Dogwood Avenue

1 Every Saturday morning at seven o'clock, the laundry boy made his rounds through the high-ceilinged halls of the apartments at 313 Dogwood Avenue, pushing his steel-boned, wheeled linen basket ahead of him. Today, he said good morning to the friendly back elevator operator, who tipped his red and gold cap and responded with a smile.

2 An hour and thirty minutes earlier, the laundry boy had awoken in his warm bed under the attic window in his house on Maple Street. The fading September sun had not yet smiled over the horizon, and the morning star was still visible in the dark eastern sky. With sleepy eyes, the laundry boy flicked on a dim lamp beside his bed, gently padded over to his wardrobe, and removed a pressed white uniform from between the folds of his hand-me-down coats and woolen trousers.

3 Uniform on, he tiptoed down the stairs to the kitchen, making himself two slices of buttered toast and grabbing a ripe apple before gently opening the front door and advancing on to the trolley stop at the south end of Maple Street.

4 The laundry boy found snippets of joy in his weekly journey to Dogwood Avenue, which was about twenty-five minutes away by trolley, all the way on the other side of the city. He waved at the terrier outside 245 Jones Street that always barked at the sparks that flew from the trolley's wheels. He listened to the chirping of the songbirds as the glow of the sunrise-lit white clapboard cottages in orange and pink. He admired the chrysanthemums that bloomed in boxes at the entrance to the opulent apartment complex before walking around back to the laundry room door, noticing as he always did the fragrant scent of the detergent that wafted outside.

5 Once upstairs, the laundry boy collected the labeled canvas sacks and garment bags outside each of the doors that lined the lushly carpeted hallway, placing them neatly into his basket.

He had come to learn the names of the halls' residents over time. Miss Franklin was an opera singer, who needed her beaded gowns dry cleaned frequently. Sometimes he could hear her practicing with the voice of an angel behind the door marked 520 in gold. In room 402 lived two large bulldogs—and Mr. Marlow, who worked as an executive at a bank. He looked rather severe, with a square jaw and heavy brow, but sometimes left little chocolates out for the laundry boy. Countless other characters lived behind the flat green doors, some happy in their wealth and professions, others dissatisfied.

6 At the ninth floor, the laundry boy pushed the full basket back into the elevator and asked the operator to press the button for the ground floor. The iron grates closed, and the elevator descended with a slight lurch. After dropping the basket off in the laundry room and saying goodbye to the ladies preparing to wash, he strode out the back door and towards the stop to board the trolley once more.

7 Back at home, he put the kettle on and had bacon sizzling in the skillet for his mother, who would wake at nine-thirty, tired from her shift at the hospital the night before. As the scent of the cooking meat filled the small kitchen, the laundry boy settled into a chair, feeling absolutely content.

Industrial Crepuscular



Conversation with My Reflection in a Rearview Mirror

Tangerines and knives to peel tangerines, food of love, food for thought;
randomness makes sense in the making, randomness like the turn I take to get to your house, randomness like the instrument of love, randomness like the way I spend my love; darling! I made for you a bed, a bed for me to cradle you and love you and keep you, a bed where all is right, you and me and the ghost we made standing in the corner, close enough to see the whites of our eyes and all that;
it never leaves me in order to love me better, reminders on top of reminders, darling, your face sticking out at me in the way you turn away, with the eyes I swear I see in the back of your head gazing all the way to the highway, the road to love where the cars drive slow; I want to love you softly, I want to hold your thoughts and feelings in my lockbox and swallow the key,
I want to shout it from the glittering terraces of constellations, graceful in all its histrionic beauty, my love! I want to sip slowly and swallow cleanly, this beverage called love, this bitter potion called love, this the Lord's lifeblood, this my trout snare; bait, switch, and hook I try to entrap it, but it's hard to catch something always on the move, it's always on the run you know, it's hard to keep up with your own image;
the fact of the matter is I keep moving further down the road from you, feet slapping on the pavement in the young vagabond's chosen fashion, the chase of your life not even half as fast, I keep running from you and your ghost, yes, that ghost, your figment of life, the thing I'm supposed to kill

in order to love, violence in order to prove my love, violence as a declaration of love, oh so this is the food of love! Food and fodder of my passion, darling, passionately driving on the highway you've led me on, faster and faster down the road to hit the person running, to outrun the path you carved,
the path paved with good intentions; cliché, yes I know, but I'm running out of breath now, my dear, I'm running out of pet names and excuses to forgive you- I'm running away from my way out
and it feels like I could swallow the sun whole, it feels like I am a fire eater and you have scorched me all the way down; the world has scorched me all the way down and tomorrow the sun is going to have to watch its back with the way I'm going, my every breath taken in the wrong way, my every thought having to do with the principle of the thing, the principle of this contract of love, this little story of love, this cheap reflection of love;
charmingly do I have it and hold it and dress it in silks, doll it up in ribbons, this failure of mine, this little crossroads of mine;
I have to live with you or the ghost and the ghost is better at seduction darling, I think we know what I'm going to walk towards on this well-loved, well-worn path; my own mirror stands just there mocking this decision, so stop staring at me like I've shocked you and hand me the keys already.

Surveillance



Lean To

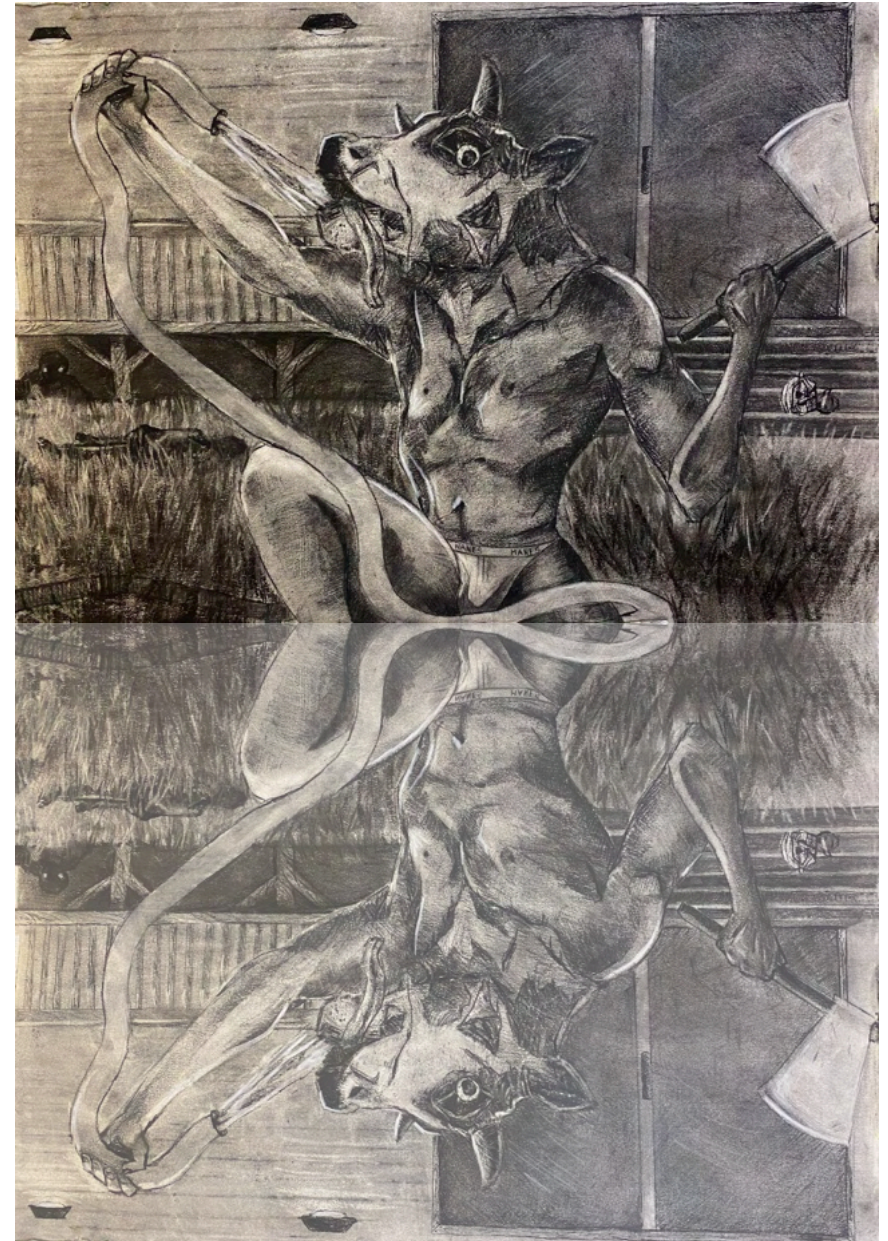


The Three

The morning they leave rings with gunfire. Two faraway shots knock their hearts out of their hands and onto the porch, stained with dried deer blood and peeling paint. Just as the U-Haul creaks closed, the firstborn takes one last breath of pollen, welcoming a thick blanket of air into her lungs and holding it there for as long as she can. But before too long, tires crackle up the driveway, the gravel sinkholes, begs them to stay. The second thinks of all they've left behind – rusted bikes, kitchen table scratches, hairs threaded in the carpet, doors off their hinges. 18 hours of lines and traffic pass by in silence, books unread, curses swallowed. The Black Hills send foreign summer winds to whistle hellos against the windows. Each wake to see cookie cutter houses lined in a row before flattened fields as the U-Haul screams backwards toward the house they won't notice is yellow until morning. The third jumps onto the house's concrete tongue and stretches the sleep out of her knees, but thin air closes her throat like a fist. Neighbors' blinds sway and tie their stomachs into crooked bows as three mattresses slither out just for the night and slap side by side onto the carpet.

Empty eyes meet each
other in the black as tears
trickle them to sleep.

The Neighbors Got Some Weird Sh*t Goin On



Chukwudinma

I was hunched over my desk when the newscaster's husky voice came blasting through the radio in the parlor, announcing that another young southern man had been doused in fuel and set ablaze by some soldiers of the Northern Nigerian forces.

"A year has passed since the 6th of July 1967, that blessed day when we declared ourselves independent of the brute Nigerian republic," The newscaster continued. "Since then, the Hausas of the North have vowed to take everything from us, but we the people of Biafra will triumph."

I snorted at the newscaster's bold declaration. Our starving children, our destroyed homes, and our cowering leader said otherwise. Biafra had already lost the Civil war; how naïve we were to think we could overcome a Nigeria armed by Queen Elizabeth to destroy her children in the Southeast! Now two things were certain; we'd either meet our end in an agonizing death or be eventually crushed by the lethal fangs of destitution.

I tried again to lean my back against the cushion of my armchair; my body had not let me since it heard the rasping roar of the first bomb that hit our town, Ogidi. My effort turned out futile, so I sat upright, and tried to sink my eyes into the view my home offered before two Northern soldiers break into my home and set me on fire while my wife and daughter watch.

The paint on the walls of our bungalow had worn so much that we could see the cemented concrete walls beneath. It used to be a pretty splash of yellow and red, with a plaster of Paris lining at the nexus between the walls and the tiled floor. We tried our best to maintain all the expensive furniture we had shipped from Britain when I got my first big paycheck. Unfortunately, the heat of the sunlight leaked through our rusty metal corrugated roofs and scarred them every day. It was only one year, and our house had not yet been hit by a bomb, yet it felt as if our house had been through many wars.

"Dinma!" I heard my wife scream my name from her room. It was the fifth bomb we had heard today. But this one didn't

sound faint and far away like the others; it was unnervingly close.

"We must go back to the bunker!"

I ran into my daughter's room, took her by the hands, and headed for the back door.

"Na aha Jesus! Na aha Jesus!" My wife prayed as we sprinted towards the bunker in our backyard.

Her prayer stopped me in my tracks. My legs wouldn't move. I had spent all my life believing in God and serving him. Every Sunday, we had come back home with exhausted lungs and tired limbs from singing and dancing to him. Every night we went on our knees to thank and pray to him, just as he said we should. Every morning, the first word my tongue uttered was his name. And how did he repay us? By sitting back and watching cruel soldiers rain bombshells on our town, our family, our home. He has sentenced me to watch my family suffer and starve to death. He has offered the alternative of me helplessly watching them become slaves when the Nigerians eventually conquer us, which they certainly would. I unlocked my hands from my daughter's and bent down to gently stroke her chin.

"Papa?"

"Remember Daddy loves you."

I walked back into the parlor and sank into my armchair. My back finally succumbed to the cushion.

"Papa?"

"Dinma! Dinma!" my wife hollered.

They both ran back to where I was now seated, tugging at my shirt, pulling my arms, expelling all the strength in their limbs to drag me with them to the bunker. But my body wouldn't budge. I had been seized by hopelessness; I had become a tower of despair.

They were crying now, and I began to cry too.

"Biko. Please let me be. I'm tired. Take my daughter and hide in the bunker."

Another bomb hit our town, and the walls of our house trembled. My wife finally gave up and hauled my daughter away from my legs, while her arms remained outstretched towards me, her blubbery eyes imploring me to follow them to safety.

I watched through the windows as they disappeared into the thick wads of forest in our backyard. In a few minutes, they would be crouching beneath the plank of wood beneath our homespun bunker. In a few minutes, the flames of the Nigerian army would consume me, leaving nothing but a puddle of scorched bones and charred flesh.

My eyes remained on the windows. Dull yellow leaves had settled beneath the hinges and the cold dry wind of harmattan had fogged the glass. Outside, I could see that the thickets of wildflowers had also been dazed by the malevolent harmattan wind, such that even the impact of the bombs would not make them quiver. The sky above them was overcast with the incense of incinerated hopes and dreams. The bomber jets drew nearer. The bombs sounded closer. My wife's last words paraded my ears like a troublesome fly. Today was the first time she had called me by my name since our unclad flesh collided in the sweltering confines of my dismal University's one-bedroom apartment. I found solace in the fact that her mouth would be the last to utter that delusive name of mine: Chukwudinma, "God is good to me."

Together



It's a Living



The Boy in the Propeller Hat

“I am gripped,” said the boy in the propeller hat, “with a deep realization that being alive is very hard, and yet we do it involuntarily.”

“Yes,” said the girl, who was lying on the floor, her hair played out. She inspected the ring she’d stolen. She slipped it on and off her finger. She held it above her face. She sat up and flung it across the room. The boy in the propeller hat didn’t watch. He looked at the wall.

“Furthermore,” he continued, mumbling to himself, “sometimes I am aware of the involuntary processes, and it’s a frightening sensation.”

The girl pulled her knees very close and looked at the boy in his propeller hat. She watched him breathing and watched him blinking at the cracked, gray paint on the wall. The walls always looked wet, but they were dry. The boy’s eyes looked wet, but when she asked, he said they were dry.

She said, slowly, “and what are you going to do with it?”

“With what?” asked the boy, jerking his head to make eye contact with her.

She swallowed and then licked her lips. “With being alive?”

Biltmore Atrium



Prometheus, Re-Imagined as Bound by Aphrodite

Prometheus awakes—
chained to his diabase monolith.
Unyielding confine him at the edge
of the endless oceanic expanse before him.
The water churns and teases
his sun-kissed skin.

Prometheus broils
in a deep, green pyre,
desperately wishing to bathe
in the cooling sea of cerulean before him.
This moment belongs to him—
when it is just him and the cage
which imprisons his immortal body.

Prometheus spots
the dove in the distance once again.
She flies sweetly to meet him
as if delighted forward by the thought
of their daily ritual.

Prometheus recoils
as she roosts on his shoulder.

He begs, "Can you not release me?
Must I be fettered in these chains?"
The bird coos.

Prometheus shivers
as she brushes against his face.
She says,
"But do you not adore
my snow-white feathers?"
He thinks of the soft obscurity
that covers Caucasus.
"What of my life?
Should I starve to spare you?
If not I, then who will satiate
their hunger on your harvest?
Yours is the only sustenance
I desire."

Prometheus acquiesces,
for she does not need his permission,
but she flatters him anyway. He
is not strong enough to resist her.
His heart blooms, endorphins
swimming through his channels,
and the animal strikes.
Her once powdery plume soaks
in crimson plasma.

Prometheus wails.
His chains constrict
clenched fists as she gorges.
Blood drips from the beak of the dove
as she admires her work.
Her spangled eyes
are slake and absent.
She dares not look at the Titan—
her meal reposed in perpetuity.
She absconds to the skies,
satisfied and free—
leaving the captive immortal empty but not slain
as he so desires to be.

Fire Muse



The Burning Soles of My Feet

Today I sat beneath the sun
and let its teeth sink into my outstretched legs,
my arms tucked beneath my back in shadow.

Today I reached for the endless sky—
fingers outstretched in all of their insatiable greed—
and imagined myself taking off my shoes and
stepping into the sky's cool
blue body like a pool
meant for swimming.

Today I watched timid green leaves
bask in a golden sunset,
a school of pink-stained clouds swimming above
my head as I eyed haphazard bumblebees
and imagined a place unknown.

Today I pulled off my shoes,
my socks,
and stepped into the sky—
burning the soles of my feet
unexpectedly
in the melting pool of sun while
searching for a place
I'll never find.

Feel My Rage, Feel My Wrath

I find myself in what I call emotional constipation. I am at the middle of a spectrum of emotions, and it's all stuck in my esophagus. I have no ability to speak when it comes to my own pain. The weight of systems on my back crush me for I believe I'm in a good enough place that I never actually face my hubris nor my shadow. It all seems so distant. I cannot access even the simplest of things that hurt me. I don't like voicing my feelings. It feels like black sludge tar I must push through, else I drown. It feels wrong. Why should I be the one to break free from the systems that I did not choose to live under? All this trauma, and for what? Harm was done to me and I can not fathom how to deal with it on my own.

It enrages me so.

Aha! Finally, something makes me mad. I was sitting here thinking I was a lone planet in the icy cool void of emotion. I shove all these feelings inside me, take my deep breaths, quell the rumble in my stomach, and move on. Is that not what I'm supposed to do? Breathe and move on? I talk to my mother who uses that same methodology, and it fills me with rage. At least I recognize when I'm wrong. How is one supposed to create change if you just breathe and move on? How are you supposed to create inertia if you decide that all your feelings are worthless?

For so long, I've been scared to even act.

I am no longer my father's daughter, clenching my jaw as I stare into holes in the drywall. I am no longer my mother's son, told to stop crying because there is no use for tears. Yes, I can get angry. I am angry that empires will continue to conquer my people. It makes me furious that my kind continue to perish at the hands of the state. How many of my blood will be lost before I can do something about it?

I am small. I am weak. But I am no longer scared. My fury makes it so. I am frustrated that I am told I can't do anything to help. And I am angry at myself for not being able to feel this heat I am so yearning for.



Today is last full moon of the year, the longest of the year. The full moon transforms people into monsters, lunatics if you will. Plenty of hospitals and EMTs are aware of the pain people go through during a full moon. At the same time, this moon is in the sign of Gemini, meaning power is brought to intuition and keenness. The longest full moon is surely a powerful one able to conjure the change inside all of us. What a perfect time to harness the pain of systems. What a perfect time to lie in suffering of what is needed to be felt.

No matter how many people I have supporting me now, I must support myself at my roots, otherwise I can not create the community that deserves peace from all that imperialism and militarism and bigotry. I shall embody that rage, that wrath, that grief. I invoke Sekhmet, Kemetic goddess of tumult and anger and bloodshed. Only after feeling these emotions that some might view as negative, may I party and drink and engorge myself with laughter and joy like she.

I am Sekhmet, bringer of destruction. My words are silk and aim to topple empires, those who neglect personhood, those that destroy the very foundation of diverse culture. Though in a small body, the voice can do wonders. Charisma is only necessary to convince people who aren't already on your side, and frankly so many people are suffering. All they need is a similar voice. A rallying cry. A roar.

Speak out, for many are listening. As. We. Speak.

As I write this statement, I know now what I make. It is the feeling of my ears burning and my hands typing. I become something more than how my pain manifests. I become whole.

1264 Country Rd 170

i set my heartbeat to your first footsteps
over my threshold and stand up tall for you. i blush
at your oohs and ahhs at my vaulted ceilings,
too busy looking up to notice my ripped carpet.

please don't mind the condom wrapper, the futon with
suspicious hairs left behind, the door that doesn't close!

check out my master suite, jet tub, (fake) fireplace,
perfect for stockings and photos and candles!

i smile with talk of renovations, four wheelers, paint,
everything new. i smile despite the growing weight of your
boxes dropping on the floor, of the kitchen table
scraping the linoleum in front of the sliding glass door,
giving you a perfect view of the magnolias as you eat your cereal.

it tickles when you scrub my walls clean as
the dirty water drips down, and my eyes finally ease
shut when i feel the brush paint on the primer.

but
the painter's tape grows itchy and flakes off
as the paint cans carve rings into my carpet.

the blinds brown with dust and dander, hairs from various species cling to my carpets, the \$20 vacuum sits clogged from its last venture. boxes remain – full of odds and ends – in the corner where the christmas tree should be.

paint me? or leave me
by the way, are you still going to
half-finished?

you rip my cardboard doors off their hinges, clog the kids' bathtub with cat litter and give the dogs linoleum as a snack.

i mold from the tears soaked into my carpet and begin to wish the wind would rip me from the ground just to throw me

back

down.

BPI
Service

End of an Era



Pleated and Floor-Length

Their skirt
is the one entering the room,
while they
are simply
being pulled along with it,
a mere passenger,
floating
as its hem
brushes flowery kisses
across the
linoleum.
And
that sight
drowns me
in envy,
for something that
I technically already
am,
yet never really can
be.



Silent Femininity



The Story of the Lady in the Woods

It all started with smoke, the smell of burnt hair. Screams muffled by howling winds and distant car horns.

This story scared us as kids. The one that my great grandma – we called her Memaw – told us just in time for the porch light to paint the silhouettes of trees dancing on the walls, for the ceramic doll smiles to be half hidden in shadow. Her hair would be coiled in curlers for church the next morning, rosy lotion freshly applied to her paper skin.

But I mostly remember her swallowed up by pumps and wires and beeps, surrounded by people called in the afternoon, people with ghost faces, who dropped whatever lives they had and drove whatever hours back home they had to – to watch someone’s life slip away. We always thought she was invincible – that she would live forever. But the slip of a knife inside her proved us wrong.

The house was small, more like a shack. It was one room, surrounded by wooden floors, walls, ceiling. Biddie’s daughter watched as ants marched to the blueberry she left by the back door. She quickly checked behind her shoulder for her mother as the ant army covered the blueberry, as if swallowing it whole.

“Lindy,” her mother whispered, making her heart skip a beat. “Come back to bed. Don’t wake Daddy or your baby brother.”

Lindy tiptoed back to her bed she shared with her brother, already sweating in his sleep. His curly brown hair stuck to his forehead, drool dripped down his cheek. She avoided all the squeaky floorboards and covered herself in the cool quilt made by a grandma she never knew. Her toes always got caught in its holes as she slept. She pictured the ants picking up the blueberry

and carrying it on their armored backs all the way back to their home to share with their friends and cousins and grandmas (?). She wondered if an ant had a grandma even if she didn’t. Then, she wondered how long ants live, and then she fell asleep to the rhythmless rhythm of her father’s snore.

My cousins, Liz and Ren, were there when my sister and I arrived at the hospital. Inside, the air was thin, like another world, making me want to run back outside into the still September heat. They guided us through the winding halls we would soon memorize and walk through in our dreams. I noticed Law and Order on the TV in the waiting room. Just what grieving people want to see.

The hospital smelled of hand sanitizer – which brought me back to kindergarten, when Memaw would pick me up after school, pounding with a headache after naptime – the smell of Germ-x stuck in my nose and on my hands. She would lay me on my father’s cool leather couch until he got home, her hands scratching my back as my eye sockets stabbed my skull.

We finally made it through the maze of ghost faces and closed doors to the one open door. I could hear the beeps from the hallway. I took a deep breath, held it there, and walked through, but the flickering fluorescent lights and the image of her plugged up to life burned my eyes immediately. People I only see for Thanksgiving and funerals crowded around her bed, hushing as we walked in. I remember we brought her flowers the next day, left them on the windowsill. Now that I think about it, I don’t think she ever opened her eyes again. She never saw them as they shined proudly in the sun, as they wilted in the rain, or as they were tossed in the trash once the sheets were stripped.

After hugs and nods, the room fell still and silent. The air grew thicker and thicker with words left unspoken.

“Do y’all remember those creepy stories Memaw used to tell us as kids?” Liz said. She always knew what to say or do in these situations. I rarely ever saw her cry – even at my Pepa’s funeral

– which is surprising since she was probably the biggest scaredy-cat I had ever met as a kid. She had to go home one sleepover because she couldn't sleep from watching Shark Week too much. We lived in northwest Mississippi.

I noticed a slight smile creep up on Grandma's tanned face, surely at the thought of her mother's scary stories and how they reached even the youngest ears.

The heat slowly eased Lindy's mother awake. It felt like laying by the fireplace at Christmas, exchanging the gifts they made as kids with her siblings. She remembered making a doll out of twigs and leaves and twine and flowers for her baby sister who eventually married off somewhere in Georgia. She realized she was being carried by her husband and started to wonder where they were going and what that smell was.

But everything went black when her head hit the ground.

"She told y'all stories, too?" my aunt, a small woman with straightened blonde hair, asked. She continued, "I just remember when I was a kid, me and my brother would spend the night with her on the weekends occasionally. And we would always look forward to it cause she would take us to the store and let us pick out bad cereals like Froot Loops, and she'd let us get treats and stuff like that that we didn't usually get at home. But when it came time to go to bed, it was a different story cause they put us in the guest room in the front of the house that they told us was haunted. And then, they'd tell us ghost stories. I don't really remember the stories, but then I – just remember that – that we could never go to bed cause we were too scared. And it was their fault cause they told us the stories."

The room chuckled with the image of my, then, curly-headed father and aunt scared to death just as my cousins and I were decades later.

Liz, who was younger than me by a year and had already grown much taller than me, asked, "Would Memaw have to sit in there with y'all?"

"Memaw had – she would have to lay in there in the bedroom with us til we fell asleep, and then she could leave. But we wouldn't go to sleep – we would always watch her and make sure she wadnt leavin'."

Through laughter, Liz replied, "So, whenever me, Ash, and Em were little, and we had the sleepovers, Memaw would tell us the stories as well but it usually was in that pink bunny room – is what I called it – back across from, like, the hallway from her bedroom. And I always felt like that set the mood because I was already scared of that room to begin with. I thought it was creepy – all those little bunny dolls sitting behind us on the bedframe behind, ya know? Um, and the room, the shade that – that the walls were painted, I thought was just creepy. And she would always wait to tell us stories in there typically, and then I would just sit there all night thinking about it. I would never be able to go to bed."

A tight grip held her wrist when she awoke to the feeling of someone stacking rocks on her chest. She looked to see her husband lying on the wet grass beside her, his cold body curled up next to hers, like he was siphoning her warmth. She whispered "Cash?" She couldn't speak any louder – it felt like gravel was in her throat. She nudged him harder and pried his purple grip from her wrist, rubbing it once she was free.

Nothing.

"Wake up please," she said, shaking his limp body, feeling her heart fall to the ground with a thud.

Nothing.

She rolled him over to see his face. His eyes were closed, like he was sleeping. Just like any other night.

Ash chimed in, "What was that story she would always tell us? Something about that lady in the woods?" She was the oldest out of us cousins, so she probably remembered it the best.

"Yeah, it's the story of the woman whose house burnt down. Ren, Em, do y'all remember?" Liz replied.

Ren was still a small, dark-haired preteen who straightened her naturally curly hair and wore big t-shirts with leggings. She quietly replied, "Yeah, um she – she would talk about how the house burnt down and – and all the family died and it was just the woman left and how at night she would like come and sit on the porch and people would try to give her stuff cause she obviously didn't have a home."

Flecks of sparkled paper floated around her face like fireflies. One landed on her cheek and burned – and she let it burn her to make sure she was awake, that this wasn't a dream. It was quiet except for the rain that already soaked her hair and her favorite yellow nightgown. She couldn't even hear Lindy singing to the birds (she was convinced that they understood her and that she understood them) or Charlie asking for breakfast. The silence lifted her chin to the house – sitting crumbled; the weight of the rain threatened its total collapse.

"Cash, where are the babies why didn't you bring out the babies why did you carry me out first why aren't you waking up?" The questions spilled out of her mouth like hot soup and onto the grass.

Biddie lifted her body that had started sinking into the muddy earth. It felt like her bones cracked with every movement. "Lindy, Charlie," she whispered. She clawed closer to the house, caked her nails with mud and dirt and grass to reach her babies. She crept

toward the pile of bones, left from her first house, from her only family left, until she couldn't anymore, until the house finally fell to the ground in ashes.

The firemen would later, supposedly, find evidence that Lindy and Charlie hid beneath their bed that night – possibly scared by the house burning and falling to pieces. They say those kids must've fallen asleep there before their father was able to get to them. They say that's why Biddie survived. Because her kids chose to hide out of the reach of their father. They also say that's why their father died – because he breathed in the smoke too long trying to find his children.

"Mhm," Liz replied, "Yeah I remember – I just remember Memaw saying that she also would – um – if people try to ask her questions she would turn and look at them and just stare at them, but she wouldn't actually say anything to respond to them, so it was like the people would just, you know, probably awkwardly shut the door and say, 'Bye.'" Liz chuckles and continues, "But um, another thing that I thought was always interesting was the uh – the part about things coming down from her house – down to the bottom of Memaw's –"

"Yeah, that's where she said that's where all that stuff came from – down there," I croaked out.

Liz replied, "Yes, cause me and Ash and Em – we would go down there sometimes when we were kids. We would somehow get down there and then we would look through some of the items that had washed down in that little – I don't even know what to call that – but"

My aunt interjected, "Little ditch."

Once she awoke again, she got up, whispering, every once in a while, three names into the air like God whispered each star. Eventually, she happened upon a house. She felt like it had been

years since she saw a house that wasn't burned to ashes, a house that she didn't breathe into her lungs.

The house was short and long, with red brick and a brown roof. Smoke billowed out of the chimney, twisting Biddie's stomach like a rag. Her bare feet slapped on the wooden steps up to the door, still cool from the mixture of morning dew and rain. She couldn't raise her hand to knock so she just sat down looking at the overgrown garden to her right. Bees buzzed around her head and landed on sagging daffodils. The birds began singing their songs as the sun crept up to its place in the sky – as if the day was still beginning, as if the world hadn't ended.

“Ma'am? Can I help you?” asked a brown-haired, curly-headed woman in a sweater and denim. She was holding a paint brush – a drip of orange threatened to dot the floor. Without an answer, the woman left and came back with a glass of water and a sandwich – some turkey and cheese between two soft slices of white bread. “Here, lady,” she said. “Take this.”

Biddie couldn't move, so the woman sat the glass and sandwich on the porch next to her. “You know, there's a church just up the road. If you need help, they'll help you. Ya hear?” With silence as her answer, the woman slowly turned away and shut the door. Only the faint scent of roses lingered to keep Biddie company.

“Yeah. – it's just a little ditch down there, but she – and I remember when we asked her about it, she would piece that to the story and say that those may have been items that belonged to that woman in her house and that they had slowly – you know, from rain and all that like – come and washed down to Memaw's house.”

Liz continued, “Her stories just felt the whole – I feel like it matched the whole vibe of her house and everything so. She was really good at telling those cause I mean look at us – we still remember it too so. That means it stuck with you – must've had some sort of effect so, anyway.”

She left that house surrounded by blueberry bushes and waxy magnolia trees and found her way back home, to her side of their bed of grass. She sat next to her love and hummed Lindy and Charlie's favorite song as the sun continued to rise and fall and rise and fall and rise and fall.

They say she died there. That she got stuck between this world and the next and couldn't find her way home, so she wandered to the homes with the porch lights on. Wondering if there was a life she forgot about, that this was all a dream and her family was waiting behind some closed door. When the owners would peek out their windows or creak open their doors and look down at her, she knew. The wave of realization hit her over and over and over again that she was alone.

But she never stopped looking for a different answer.

After about a month of Memaw laying in that hospital room, of Grandma and Uncle Bubba taking shifts sleeping on the plastic-covered couch, of Ash and I driving back and forth from college to home from home to college, we got the call that Memaw was slipping away. The call came when Grandma finally agreed to come home for a shower.

She ran back in her car, her short, curly hair dripping tears onto her shoulders, speeding to say goodbye to her mother with her brother and daughter by her side, to say goodbye to the house full of trinkets and the turkey and dressing and the homemade ice cream and the spidery letters and the stories.

A Monster with Keys



Catfished

Squeaking boots silently
hope for the deep and dark
to hold dinner, for dirt to unsettle
and rise to the top.

Frogs silence their croaks
as the boots search for a
lure. Fingers pinch a green
body as it leaps to escape.

Grasshopper chirps turn to
hisses as the hook pierces
its legs like twigs. Some fight
left, still kicking.

The bait ripples and sinks
into the water, warmed by
the Sunday sun. The whiskered
fish slithers from its watercave,

catfished by the metamorphosis
of grasshopper to sharp snack as it
hooks the lava red cavern of its
mouth, smile stretched.

The thread drags it through brown
blue water, through lilies
and cattails until it reaches open
air, writhing, drowning.

Bloodwater streams onto slippery
hands holding the prize as eyes stare
still. Supper settles in a cooler as
frogs continue their croaking chorus.

Sisyphus Disrupted

We are on the floor laughing but there is a leak in the dam.
We are giving each other secret smiles but there is a leak in the
dam.

There is a leak-

Watch me as I fit myself into the molds of
golden chairs, and watch as I
reread everything that turned me sinful.
Watch as you turn towards me with
slitted eyes and tongues. I will not for
One. Second.
Forget it.

Even I couldn't talk my
way out of punishment.

We are dying on the floor of my room, and
I watch as the sunbeams turn us hazy.
That's right, I said dying.

Did you think that this was healthy?

Yes you may eat my food, yes you may braid my hair, but
no, you cannot use my bathroom, no you cannot read my
journals, because
even if we are always looking for each other,
we do not have windows in our
walls.

I want to spill all my life into you, I want to
show you the force of all my light, but
I can't because it is
heavy, and I don't know how put it down
without

breaking things.

Watch as I push up all your burdens, watch as I try to
hold your shopping bags of edible woe,
and when you tell me to let go of
all my guilt I tell you,

This is the
thing that made me.

There used to be a script to this, there used to be
righteous punishment, there used to be
a boulder, a hill and
everything in between.
But now, I haven't got any whips
urging me up, and
I do not know how to carry on when
something is not fated.
Do you see what you have done? Do you see what you have done? Do
you see what you have-
Don't worry.
My footsteps are worn into the past, and
it is an intimate path, so
I will find my way
back into misery.
Discomfort is the price we pay for
familiarity, and
I will keep
paying enough for both of us.
I am used to it, what did you think that rock was
for?
Do not think it
was my only choice.

Wild



Routine

Her toes are so cold they feel wet.

A static-shocked halo of frizz crowns her.

Frozen streams contour her burnt skin.

She pads quietly across the noisy floorboards she had amusedly touted as a security measure in her near-delirious state the night before. The whirl of her discarded breathing machine provides the auditory cover needed to escape. Under the painted cherub's watchful eye and unbeknownst to the house, she slinks to the seclusion of the washroom.

Tarnished by years of splashing water, the faucet frames her eyes, the red mixing with the blue, the green, the black, the brown, creating a soft kaleidoscope, peaceful in existence, violent in creation. The freckles she loathes blur as hot tears well up, achingly defying gravity as they stubbornly refuse to fall.

Her nails ache to carve the granite counter, shrieking in frustration when they find it impossible, seeking solace instead in the soft flesh of her upper arms, creating red-lipped, crescent moon smiles everywhere they settle.

Cold water is splashed onto her face to be slowly toweled off. The feet carry the spiritless body to bed. The arms clutch the blanket to the chest. The head lolls back onto the pillow as the eyes roll back in their sockets. She stays at the sink, gaze locked onto the other her's eyes, stuck in the nightly war of self.

A tally is carved into the bedpost.

Sleep creeps in, exhaustion its friend.

The fight is paused.

Ratlickers Anonymous





Atlas



A Dead Moth

My moth died today. The one I raised from a larva, through its pupa and chrysalis phases, all the way to glorious flight. I found her at the bottom of her enclosure on my living room credenza, still for the first time since her transformation. I didn't cry.

I did love my moth dearly; how could I not love something I watched grow? I think I would love even a cockroach if I raised it myself. But I was never a crier. Crying doesn't bring back the dead, and it only ever made my pain worse when I was a child. Cry once and the grown-ups would beat it out of you. So I didn't.

I carry the dead moth out to the graveyard buried in the wooded corner of my backyard. I have lived in this house since I was a child, and it never seemed odd to me that my family should bury its members on our property. That was simply the way of things, and now I would bury my moth there too. The shadow of the house behind me darkened the forest floor as I gently placed the moth carcass in a little hole I dug with a trowel, singing a lullaby to it as I covered it in dark earth. I buried it next to my sister, carefully replacing the dirt and leaves until no sign showed that the ground had been disturbed. Then I walked back home.

I live far from town, about a fifteen-minute car ride from any other house. It suits me well enough. No one seems to want to be around me, but I don't particularly care to be around anyone either. They whisper. I don't like whispering.

The house looms up from rich loam, white paint peeling from beneath gabled rooflines. Windows darkened. I waltz through the back door and notice old dishes in the sink. That's odd, I think, I did those yesterday. But I gave my moth a sunset funeral in late summer; it is too late to do them tonight. I traipse up the narrow back stairs and collapse onto my bed, falling asleep fully clothed.

In my dreams, they haunt me.

An enormous moth in white and silver feeds on my baby sister's destroyed body, its mouth stained red with blood. It turns to me and morphs into a wisp of dark smoke, flying into my lungs. I am choking, choking, breathless until I cough it all up to swirl around

me, expanding until it is six feet tall and holding a belt.

Father, I stammer out.

No more tears. Her death—your fault. You must pay.

He raises an arm and I jerk awake.

On the walls of my room, roaches scuttle back and forth and over the sheets of my bed. I sing the lullaby to them. Maybe if I sing, they will leave me alone, but they are in my eyes and nose and ears and throat, and I am screaming, but no one can hear, no one is anywhere near enough to hear. I thrash against the insects, and they are growing, heavy on my chest, filling every orifice. I surrender with a sob and they vanish. Only to be replaced by the phantom which haunted my dreams. His shadow prances across my room as a spectral voice calls for me. I must still be dreaming.

Julia...

He vanishes once more, but I cannot move. I am frozen; try as I might to move even a pinky finger, I cannot. The shadow reappears and drifts towards me, I try to scream and this time no sound comes out. There is nothing I can do.

And then I am awake once more. But how will I tell what is a dream and what is reality? Did I wake up? Tell me, how could I know?

I pull myself out of bed and scramble to the kitchen.

The old dishes are gone, washed and replaced in their cabinets. Thank you, Anna, I whisper to myself. But she is here. I know my sister is here somewhere.

Anna? Anna, where are you? Your sister's here. Julia's here. Let me help you come back.

She is behind a veil, but I see my baby sister in the doorway and rush towards her. She vanishes before I can pull her through.

The moth takes her away.

Untitled (April)

I am the dog that follows the scent of your name,

A sin that slides off the morning dew onto the dead grass.

You buried me in a shallow grave in hopes that I would haunt you.

You have taken the color out of me.

You have made me into a picture of red.

I am moistened lashes.

I am moth-eaten thread.

I wear your gifts proudly.

I rip out my entrails, tie a necklace with them.

Your hands are crimson when they leave my face.

I wrap myself in white linen.

You wait for the evergreen to swallow you.

I slice my skin into ribbons to hang on the rips of your dress.

I am the prayer that burned your lips to say.

You stab the thorns of an orange tree on hallowed ground

As I hold your hands in mine.

Your body convulses as if birthing itself again.

Throw it at god's feet

He enjoys watching you perform.

Burn yourself alive.

I've only one favor to ask of you.

Ode to the Jungle

The child sprinted up the path—past the ivory and crocodile swingset, past the nursery of ceramic canines and their vegetative diet of succulents.

The child climbed the carpeted steps with his hands through the open door and into the house. There, in communion with her *Monstera*s, *Schefflera*s, *Elephant Ears*, and *Aloe Veras* sat the Queen of the Amazon. The house phone lived in the crook between her neck and collarbone while a pod of peas rested between her fingertips.

Hey, grandmama's baby! she shouted as loud as Judge Judy's gavel swing. With a spider's grace, she was on the child, encasing him in a lavender and shea butter cocoon of an embrace. The dining room was always warm that time of year, but her squeeze, as tight and unrelenting as a boa, was cool like the ocean breeze. Even when he grew to be a man, he was always "grandmama's baby."

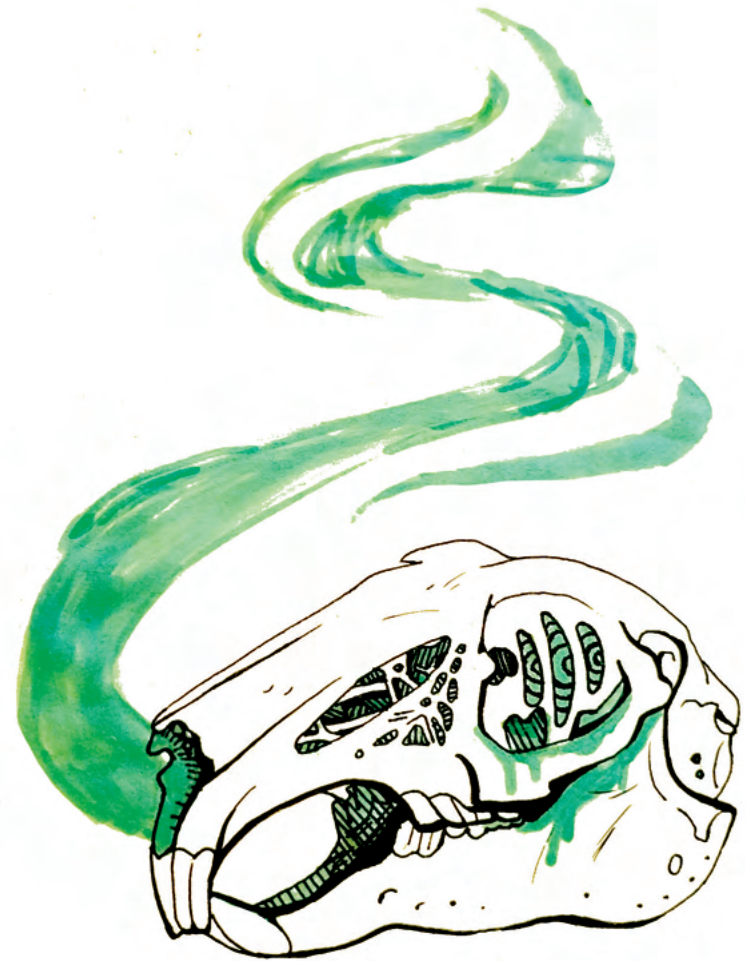
The man is old enough to remember the way his grandmother used to sit him down and feed him pillowy fried fish and potted meat and crackers. Old enough to remember the way her hands skillfully coaxed the green bean seeds from their bat-like membrane. Old enough to see the way *Myeloma* wildfire ravaged the blood in her bones. Old enough to heave the shovel of earth that laid her to rest.

He woke up this morning

There was a cardinal outside

It was eating her fruit.

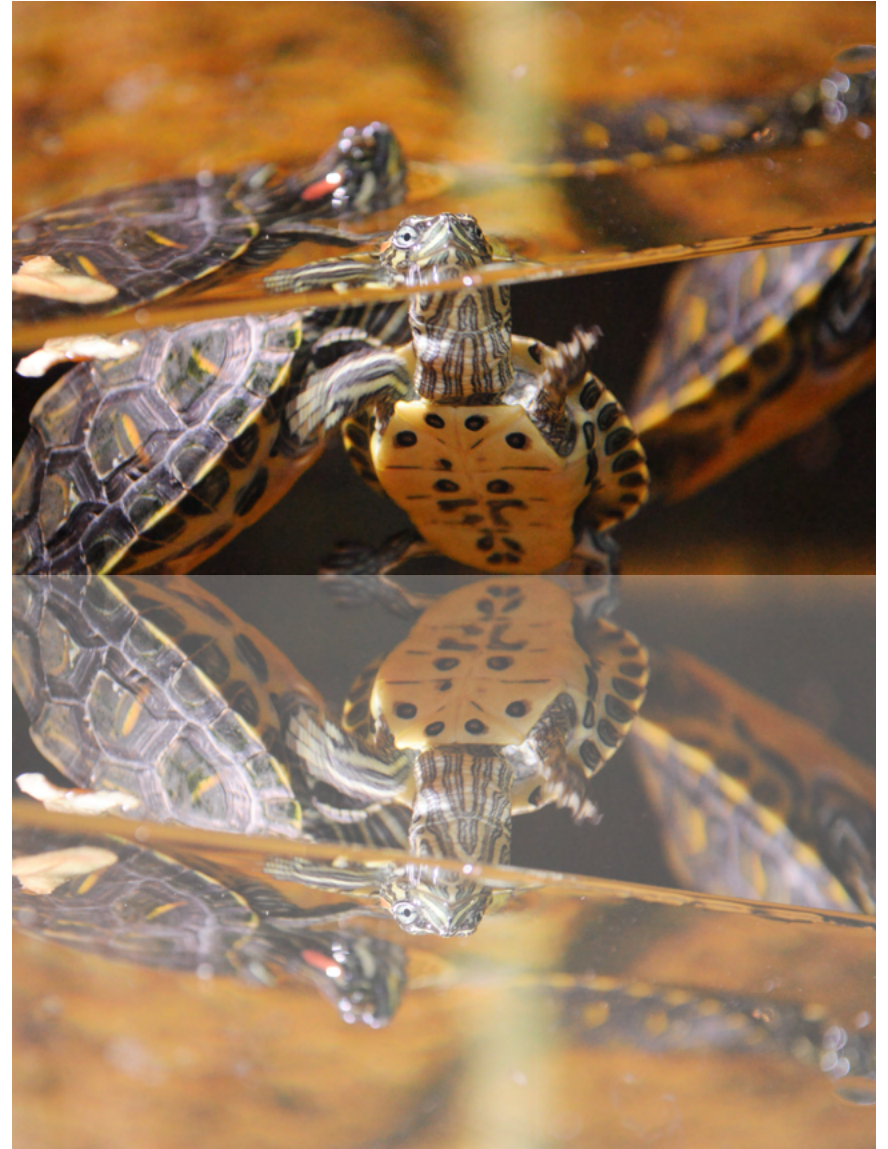
Mind Your Head



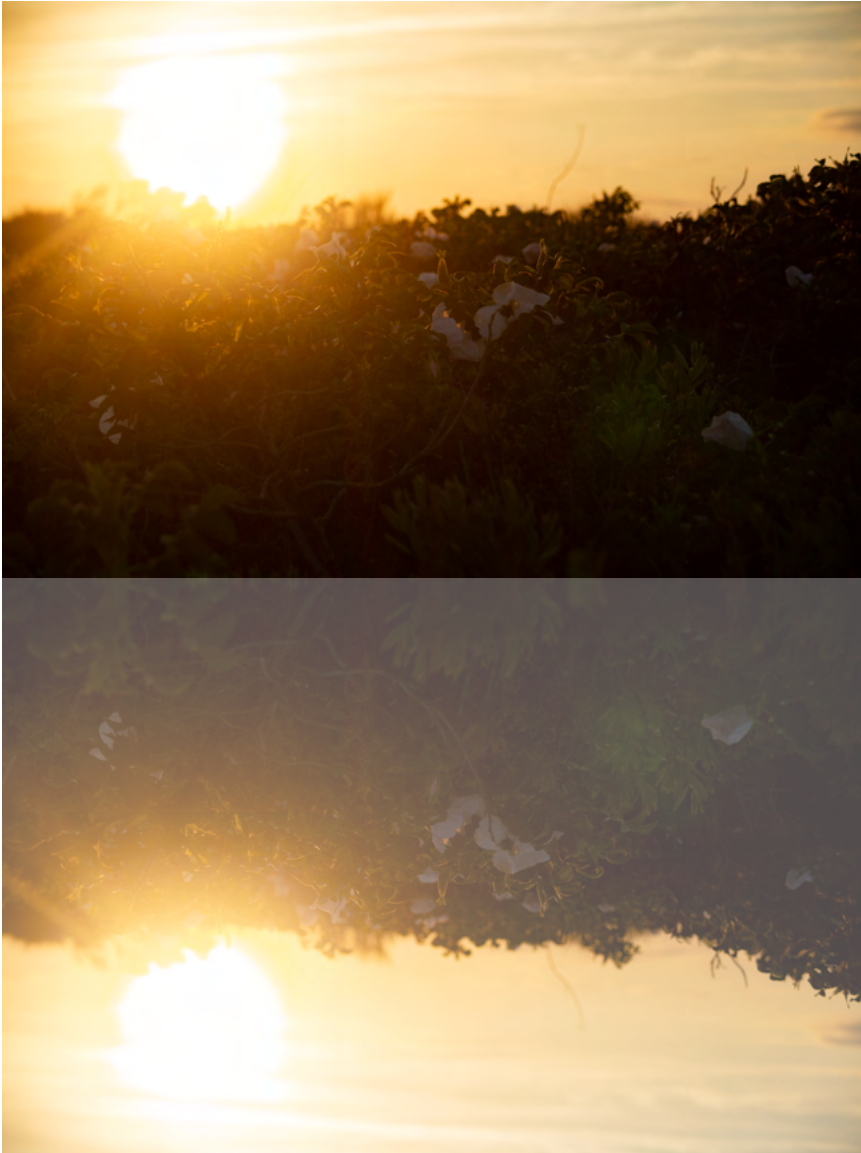
Tangled



Captivity



Golden Sunset



Nature's Salutations

I.

I watch as my shoes click
on the sidewalk, then squish
on soggy grass when
a branch, covered in sister
and brother blossoms, brushes
hair out of my face.

I spit out a curse
and blush to the eyes
staring straight ahead.

II.

I squint at the sun's hellos
through shaded lenses,
the supercut of the day
flashing on my brain
after previews play.
Then, a dragon fly darts
by, rips the screen. The lenses
land on spiky grass, leaving
my eyes wide, exposed.

III.

I stride toward something
unworthy of the knot in my

stomach, of the ache in my
jaw before mud pulls
me closer to earth.
I tip toe through landmines
of shadows holding on
to last bits of rain, but I let the
mud dry and crumble as I go.

IV.

I plant my heels in the ground
once the ringing grows too
loud. I sway with the branches
of child trees and see
their snowflake shadows dropping
warmth at every other step, their cousins
drinking the sun in open windows.
Then, I feel the sun's hand
on my back, ushering me forward.

A Back and Forth Between Two Gilded Mirrors

You've become the someone I keep writing to,
you know about the fist-full of heart,
With the blood running down your hands
Harkening back to peaches and cream evenings, licked fingers
and dimly-lit lakeside cabins,
Giving us a hunger and a thirst to be slaked;
Observations, apparently, are no substitute for
A reckoning, my dear, or a reason why
I can see all the girls we used to love in your eyes, wielding
Their ghosts next to me in supplication, a kind of revenge story
Where I hold fast to our ever-dimming
past with both hands, solid and wanton Red hearts glow gold
against an evening sky as I lovingly and gorgeously
hold the aftertaste of my leaving in my heart, my mouth,
To get used to the tang of moving forward,
The idea of this is purpose and I must eat it whole.
Remember the time I held your face
And it turned to dry, bone-chilling wind in my arms,
Shuddering its way through the dead branches of my soul;
I still tremble in it and revel in it, undressing it all, sliding back
into the world I know, shoving my upturned hands above
your bruised smile, bruised knee, bruised all over. I gave into my
carnage,
Then I gave it for a up for a passing glance
and damned it, this rampage into a bright and distant future;
it's blinding me you know, it's searing a hole
right through my waiting heart, ah yes I see you there,
hello my dear, hello my love, I want meet you here,
The place where I can collapse and sit and cry in my nightgown

I'm ready to take it all back, I swear. I'm ready for
devotion in all its grim glory, I'm ready to meet each other
In the peach trees again and to sanctify the lake,
Don't you want to be back in the street, the house, the love!
Squeeze my hand weakly and it'll prove to me the passion, call out
across
The distance, call me back to get me to leave and to love it, get me
to
Invite myself back into the circle; I want to quell the revolutions, I
want
To be the reason it's done- the light we hold in our bones
is golden and running me through, and now I'll feel complete,
now I'll have a reason to stay, my dear, my phantom there'll finally
a reason for your red hands, there'll finally the knowledge
that martyrs don't make revolutions, it's the other way around,
And I know you had my blessing for it all, but
Dear, that's not the point anymore. The point is that
Suddenly, always suddenly, always at the end of the dream,
The brink of the turning point, the about to leave,
the almost gone, the moment I finally meet your eyes squarely,
suddenly the orchard turns to kindling and I blink
and I'm back under the night sky dear, I'm back in the place I have
to be;
You should give me a war and call it love, you should call me back
And keep me there. I should be warming myself by the fires in
your chest,
I should be running through marshes and flying with
Hérons, the imagery wheeling to accommodate, the
Image of peach pits around my lips paling in comparison to the
Love of you, the hate and the need and the faults of you.
Teach me to forgive and call it a blessing. Now bless me again.
Listen to me, sweetheart. I can only reflect our sunsets. Listen.
Listen.
The stars are cold tonight.



Winter River



Big Rip

- *Big Rip (n.) - a hypothetical cosmological event in which all matter in the universe loses cohesion; possible fate of the universe if the outward acceleration of matter continues*

Whitman says “all goes
onward and outward,
nothing collapses”
But I can feel my lungs
collapsing
It is hard to breathe
The cold stings
delicate skin

I am losing pieces of me
A childhood memory
Left out in the rain
My voice has been stolen
I am drowning in words

I am folding in on myself
Like an origami bird
I will fly
Far
Far
away from this place

on paper thin wings
towards paper thin dreams

Maybe one of these days
I will spontaneously combust
A supernova
Rain down pinpoint star tears
Upon the earth

Or rip apart like the universe
When I have lost all connections
Or maybe I will simply
sink back into the ground
I came from
Maybe that's what Emerson meant
When he said "we all return to nature".

Blossoms and Blemishes



Best of The Streetcar

The best works of each category in The Streetcar, voted anonymously by staff. Staff pieces are not considered for best works.

Best Poem:

The Three by Lauren Adams

Best Work of Prose:

Chukwudinma by Anonymous

Best Work of Art:

Atlas by Dontae Ball

Best Digital Media Work:

Feel My Rage, Feel My Wrath by Anonymous

Best Photography:

Pay to Play by Jarod Weston

The Streetcar also features the winner from the Annual MSU Libraries Undergraduate Poetry Contest.

2022 Winner:

The Burning Soles of My Feet by Callie Matthews

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