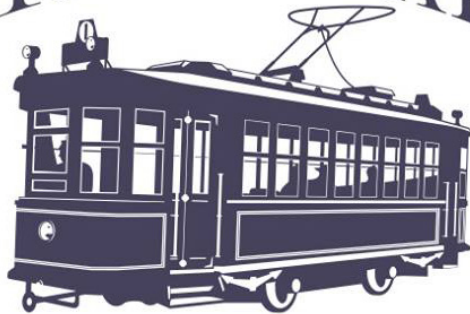


THE
STREETCAR



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



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Plitvicka Jezera by Meghan Brino

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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 10 will be in Winter 2021.

Dear Reader,

In the following pages, you will find Volume 9 of *The Streetcar*—a journal dedicated to showcasing the vibrant artistic student community at Mississippi State University.

In a year plagued by a pandemic and horrific incidents of racial injustice, art persevered. The following pieces represent the highest quality of artistic expression that the students of Mississippi State have to offer, meticulously reviewed and selected by our editorial staff.

Pieces like “Love Poem for Faggotry” and “One Night Stand With a Witch” courageously convey the trauma of prejudice and repression. Stunning snapshots of beauty are captured in pieces like “Where the Whales Sing” and “Colors of a Koi Pond.” Other pieces, like “Matches” and “Last Words to City Thrift in Jackson” explore the nature of an enduring past. As the journal progresses from one color to the next, we hope the reader is moved by the rich and diverse experiences of our artists and comes to see the world in a new, invigorated perspective.

The push for racial justice was a prominent part of 2020 through the Black Lives Matter movement, and our staff wishes to express the utmost support for further social progression. The *Streetcar* has been and will continue to be a safe space for people to share their unique experiences through art and writing.

This year, *The Streetcar* was determined to safely produce a journal despite the COVID-19 pandemic. We hosted socially distanced and virtual events, and, despite our fear of submission numbers being impacted, we received a record-shattering number of pieces. We thank our staff and the artistic community for their determination and flexibility.

Lastly, we owe enormous gratitude to the staff and faculty of the Shackouls Honors College and the College of Art & Sciences. We thank Ms. Kayleigh Few, Director of the Writing Center, for her support in funding various events and Mr. George Dunn, Director of Student Outreach for the SHC, for his assistance in outreach and community engagement. In addition, we thank our faculty advisor Dr. Eric Viver for his infectious love of the arts and occasionally stern advice.

Most of all, thank you to our staff for their faith in our leadership and their countless hours of work. We hope you are moved, in some form or another, by the passion in these pages.

Brady Kruse & Ruby Titus
Co-editors-in-chief, 2020-2021

Ruby Titus & Riley Cutler
Co-editors-in-chief, 2021-2022

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Love Poem For Faggotry

I remember when my blood
red shoes slapped gray pavement
as I bullhorned down neighborhood

streets, jogging, 13 years old,
when I contorted myself into ill

fitting boxes, shapes unnatural,
my tongue swollen in my tears.

I was polychromatic fire drowned
in red meat and anger, cargo shorts
sagging from your weightlessness.

You locked me out of suburban
homes, barred me from job offices,

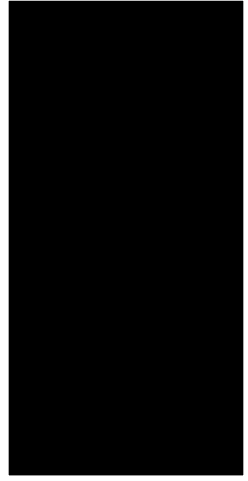
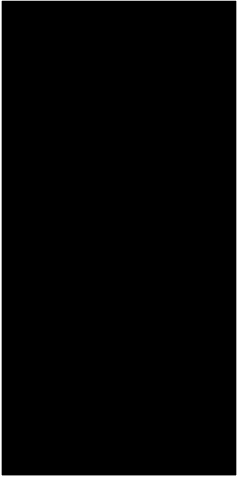
set fire to my family. The smoke
burns my lungs as their ashes
feather down to earth. I feel you

in the back of my throat,
the swing of my hips, the whistle
of my teeth, the flicks of my wrist.

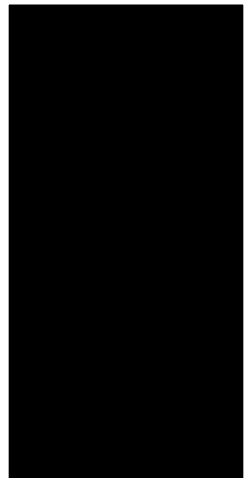
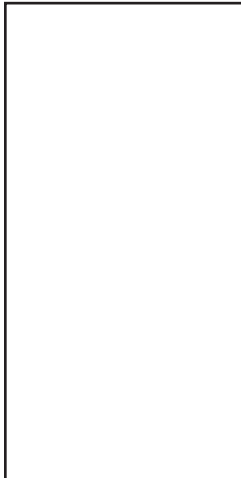
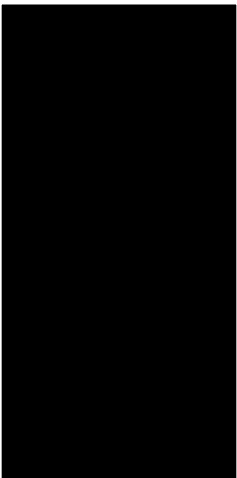
Tired from running, I embrace you;
we are eels in a mass of ecstasy.

You are my genital mutilation,
my damnation; you are the roses
in my veins. You give me fangs
and claws and scales and tentacles
like lassoes; my pores ooze —
the growth shows I have potential again.
No longer is my body bound to incite
screams, no longer is my voice
a grinding chair through my head.

I slither along the ground, flowers
blooming in my wake.



“I’ve Been 40 Years Discovering That
The Queen of All Colors Was Black.”
-Auguste Renoir, *Renoir: My Father*



Reticent



Meghan Brino / Photography

Through The Looking Glass



J.C. Watson / Photography



Microcosm

Bare feet permanently pressed
on stippled ceramic grass.
Her peony-petaled dress sewn
into the roots
that spread like spindly
fingers from the top of the hill.
Surveyor, poised for flight.
One pale hand clutching an amulet,
the other twisted as if
performing a spell.

Thatched roofs and white-washed cottages
pepper the ceramic countryside.
Plastic peasants caught in the middle
of their chores; winding gray water
from the well, driving a wagon-reined horse
over the emerald grass. Gardens teem
with tulips and marigolds,
seconds from browning
in the artificial sunlight.
Gold is piled in the gardens,
hoarded by the villagers.

Beneath a cumulus of fingerprinted dust
behind cold lead glass, glistening water
suffocates the scene. Gold mixes with
ceramic flower petals,
horse hair, thatches from roofs, and
chipped pieces of the well. They vortex
over the village for a millisecond before
settling around the ebony edges.
From a zigzag crack, gold glitter seeps
Silently.

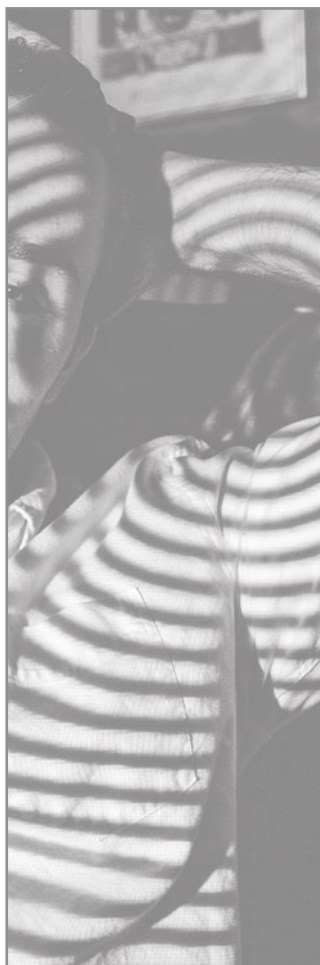
How Can I Say Goodnight To An Answering Machine?

Patiently. I saw roofs
removed in the hurricane
of your eye, and I,
sandstone, cowered
behind dust and cobwebs.
I prayed to raze myself,
afraid to let the water
fill my lungs.

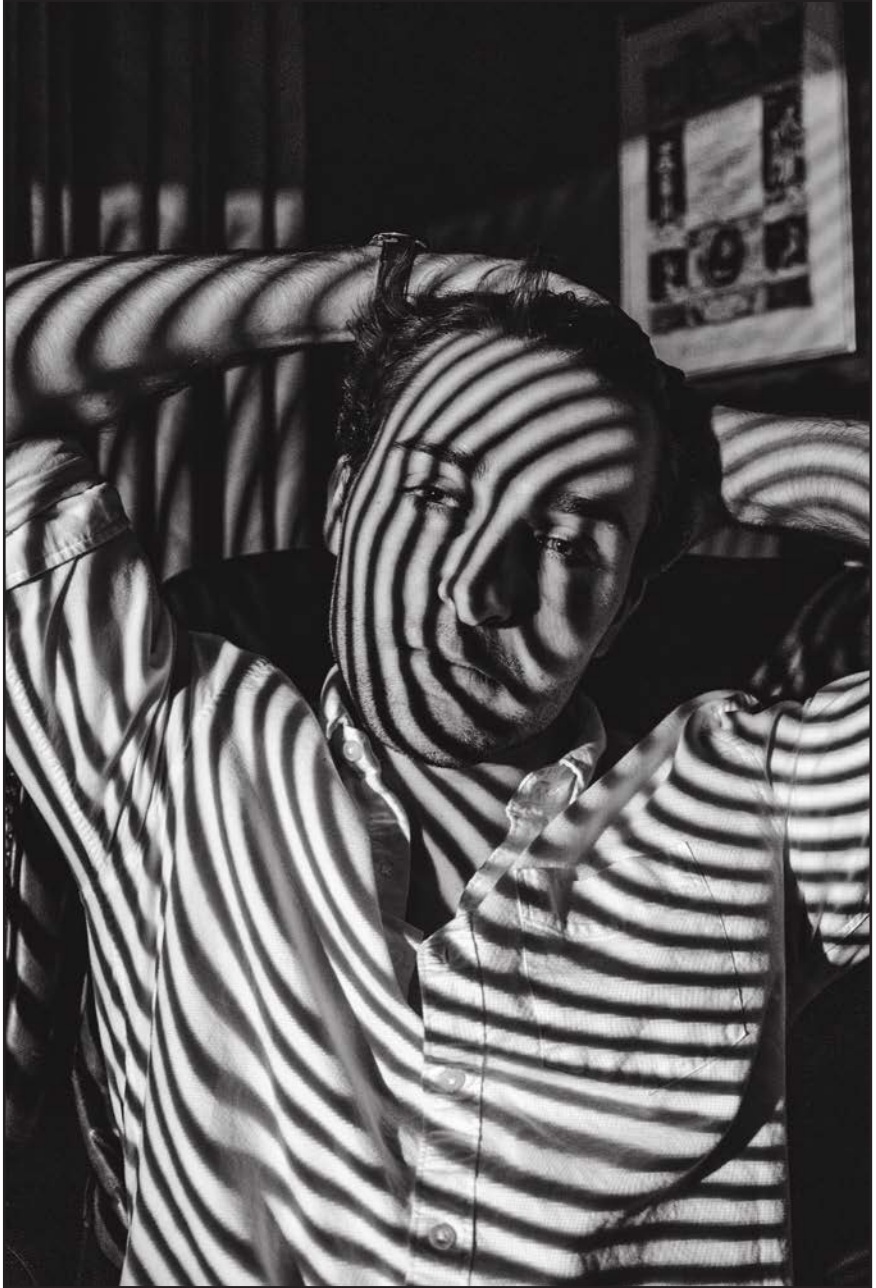
I want to be bloated
and rotten in your love —
will you let me drown?

My ribcage aches,
not feeling enough
of myself to be open
to tea in the evenings, arms
wrapped around me
in bed. I dream
of your mouth spewing
dial tones, lullabies
for my self-belief.

Hold me in the middle
of your bed, and I'll tell
you sorry with my teeth;
for now, I lob time bombs
from one hundred and thirty
miles away, my body
curled behind black
backlit blast screens.



Luz



Sophia Calderon / Photography

Little Jewels



Hanna Bewley / Art



Hanna Bewley / Art

To The Moon And Back

Melancholia

Bobby Jackson / Art



Baby Blues

He was born in blood
on a pewter afternoon in Seattle,
surrounded by a gleeful audience awaiting
his debut—screaming, scraping, searching.
His new blue eyes found yours and you screwed
your matching set shut.

He was scrubbed and swaddled, sparkling
like lost glitter caught in the grooves of a carpet.
The nurse gently handed him to you.
Slack-grip, you let him hover
eighteen inches from your breast.
Hold him closer
your mother said as if words could knit
together mother and son, an outside womb.

Evening came and his cries sliced the air
from the bassinet beside your bed, sparks
spitting at your numb body. You reached
for him, but the sparks burgeoned to flames
at your soft touch, like evergreens
in a forest fire.
You could feel his wailing webbing
in the fibers of your heavy body,
a chisel picking apart a mountain to make a mine.

It will get easier, they reassured,
as he tried to wriggle free from your grip.
Boys always love their mother most.
Simpering, your mother patted
your shoulder as your husband pried
the baby from your grasp.
He'll warm up to you.

Your husband could hold him,
and your father
and your mother,
even the woman in the next room.
She bragged that he smiled for her.
He is habitually handed to his father,
even though your hands ache to try.
Just once more.

You spent 48 hours in agony waiting for him,
wishing on the stars blurring your vision,
wanting to eat something other than ice chips.
An emptiness bloomed inside of you
as your body deflated
and something wriggling was held before you,
a prize.
Second-place burned your throat
as you observed him smiling
in the arms of others.

Your fingers twinge to touch the matchsticks of his left hand,
but they singe long streaks along your chest.
Blistering.



“All my life I’ve pursued
the perfect red. I can
never get painters to mix
it for me. It’s exactly as
if I’d said, ‘I want Rococo
with a spot of Gothic in
it and a bit of Buddhist
temple’—they have no idea
what I’m talking about.”
- Diana Vreeland, *D.V.*

A Table Of Drinks That I Wish Were For Us



Stone Vincent / Art

The Death Of The Soda Machine

“When there was nobody to care or to know, this gigantic effort on the part of an insignificant little moth, against a power of such magnitude, to retain what no one else valued or desired to keep, moved one strangely. Again, somehow, one saw life, a pure bead.” – Virginia Woolf, *The Death of the Moth*

I was rolling down the highway in a month I recall only in segments, blurred together against the backdrop of weeks and weeks and weeks of no times to wait and stress posing as success. It was one of many days that, although astir, was trapped in the stasis of existence, petrified in the amber of time—brimming, but never progressing, regardless of how much sweat was poured into the hours.

And at six that evening, I found myself on a street with no name, one that I had rolled through enough to make a rut, late to buy groceries though the store closed at nine. I stopped on an island of asphalt, in a sea of cement, distinguishable only by color and height and filth. The concrete jungle was both alive and dead, moving constantly yet dying, and I thought the same of myself.

I stepped outside of my car and the humidity and the emissions fogged my glasses. But at the moment before my eyesight stalled, I caught a glimpse of a relic—an omniscient monolith of the past, long forgotten but its veins pulsing with electricity. Glowing blue, an outdated logo proudly displayed on the plastic, rust creeping along the iron edges, and a barely discernible handwritten sign boldly claiming *Ice Cold Coke Fifty Cents*. I had haunted this market many, many times before, but this machine was strongly rooted, tied to the history of the ground, subsisting only by tapping into the soil and earth on which the city now leeches. When did I become so blind?

Wiping my glasses with my shirt, I stopped and stared and revived an extinct existence.

After school, my ritual involved sprinting into my father's office, swiping some candy from his secretary, and planting myself in the chairs across from his desk, sharpening my rudimentary rhetoric skills through my daily attempt to beg for a soda. The machine was just only thirty-three seconds away if I wore my fast shoes, sliding around corners in my pursuit. My father's laugh would echo against the cheap linoleum. He would shut off his monitor to ignore the mob of emails knocking his inbox, he would mute his phone despite the next call blinking red on the dial, he would halt the ticking of the clock through his own will: always another thing, always another person, but, inexplicably, abrupt peace while his son pleaded his case for fifty cents. Always my father obliged.

Dollars were never an option; the scanner was broken and the nearest gas station to make change was twenty minutes away by bike, but my father always had quarters for the scavenging. Searching through his white chipped mug of change that sat on the floorboard of his truck: nickels, dimes, pennies, *useless, useless, useless*. Only quarters will suffice. And then, two eagles extracted, and a sprint to the machine, and a celebratory parade back to the office, tapping the tops of the cans to push down the fizz. My father's office door was the breach of being, and as I passed through that barrier, stillness and solitude conquered time once again as life temporarily flooded the room. I presented the cans, and with a hiss, the nitrogen preserving the soda was freed. And Dad and I sat in that plain, white, monotonous room, surviving by sipping that sweet sticky succulence, stalling and forgetting, as time—as we—decomposed.

Soda was not allowed in high school, but the temptation proved too strong, and we devised a foolproof scheme to secure those exalted cans. Aaron was the only one old enough to drive. We would hoard our quarters in our duffel bags, packing them more diligently than our books, depositing them to Aaron's pockets in the secrecy of the locker room. PE was before lunch, and so long as you kept the cans underneath the tables, the teachers would never be wiser.

That soda machine on Fifth Street. The only place in town that still costs fifty cents. You know the one? Next to the church where Justin's family goes, but if you hit Nicki's house, you went too far. By the old Save-A-Lot. Drive fast, we'll say you're showering.

Aaron's virgin license and ancient car became our saviors, and every dull day was detailed with caffeine and sugar, the secrecy making it all the more refreshing.

Lunch came and went one afternoon, and Aaron was uncharacteristically tardy from the sacred soda run. Some factory worker from some town over, someone's cousin's cousin, still drunk from the night before, had, by chance or fate or whatever force, crossed paths with Aaron while driving down Highway Fifty-Four—a quarter mile from the safety of the school.

The police report noted that the inside of the car was sticky. Steel had ripped through the passenger dashboard, puncturing the dozens of cold sodas tucked away in Aaron's backpack. They had hissed and exploded, liquid shooting through the long-since-broken zippers of his bag, brown clashing against the red, caramel swirling into the blood, sugar dissolving in iron. The announcement came, lifeless and staticky, over the intercom during third period; administration decided we would be better served at home for the day.

With a bizarre, pitiful feeling of freedom, I biked home from school at eleven forty-eight in the morning—past Aaron's deceased parking spot, past the remnants of the wreck where sirens still hung in the air, to the soda machine. I fed two quarters to the beast and collapsed against the concrete wall, feeling the perspiration of the can wet my palm, breathing the strange, nervous stillness accompanying a sleepy fall day in a sleepy small town. And as I sipped my soda, and as I realized it did not taste like normal, all I could think was if Aaron had remembered to buy me two.



Jake was beautiful. Tall, handsome, smart, greedy: an idol for us to worship. And so, on the night of prom, the school collectively followed the animal magnetism radiating from him to a house that nobody had ever seen. As flocks of teenagers began to arrive, a contradiction became our reality: nineteen-year-old Jake, standing in his pristine white tux, his brand new car, his four hundred dollar shoes, his spotlight smile, and his dirty white home hidden behind it: pathetic, decaying, and home to trash.

I walked past the fountains of booze clutching my soda, holding my innocence to my chest. A drunk-enough Jake bet a thousand dollars on a pong game, slapping a stack of hundred-dollar bills on the scrubbed kitchen table, and the confused crowd partied on, accepting Jake as an impossibility of circumstance, attributing his clash of status to his bountiful charisma.

Jake trusted me, although I never quite understood why. He trusted me enough to ask if I wondered where he got his money, pride oozing from the question. He trusted me enough to invite me to the shed beside the house, but nobody else could follow. He trusted me enough to ask if I was done drinking the soda, if he could have the can.

Ozymandias pulled the curtain to his riches, pushing the creaky, chipped door forward and lighting the bare bulb hanging from a wire. Dusty yellow illuminated the room, rebounding, splitting, breaking against the glass containers, exposing plastic buckets with labels I could not pronounce, shining off the freshly polished shotgun leaned in the corner and the stainless steel snub thirty-eight on the table, spotlighting the bag full of crystals that he lifted to my eye. This, he claimed, was Jake.

My eye was drawn to a soda can, held with forceps over a gas stove. Burnt molecules reeked from the inside, the upper part showing the same brand as what Dad drinks, while a patina of black soot stained the lower, slowly creeping up as it was repeatedly exposed to the naked flame. I held mine tighter.

“The aluminum is perfect for cooking,” said Jake. “Thin enough to melt the tabs without bending up the metal. Do you want to see?” He took my can and smiled his beautiful smile. “It’s perfect.”

I jolted back to the city, adjusted the glasses on my face, and stared at the tired machine. This monolith of innocence beckoned me; something, something long forgotten, stirred back to life, and the world halted.

Dad always had quarters for the scavenging.

I sprinted to my car and tore open the door. Digging, digging, nickels, dimes, *useless*. Until, hidden beneath the seat, two glimmers of aluminum sparkled in the overhead light.

And then,

that same boy who would run through the office to the vending machine in the adjacent building, thirty-three seconds on the dot, sprinted through the parking lot;

that same teenager who would bike to the sacred machine and slump, shocked, against the wall of the Save-A-Lot, remembering a forgotten friend, was going on a secret soda run once again;


that same man who would watch Jake get high off of his soda can, who now wondered if they sold soda in prison, tried to undo the trials of age.

I slipped my quarters into the slot; they fell, *ping, ping*, echoing hollow, empty, pure in the rusted chute. I hesitated, savoring those few moments of anticipation, awaiting the release of reclamation, of ice-cold soda.

One Mississippi. Two Mississippi.

A faint smile brushed my lips. I slapped the button.

S-O-L-D-O-U-T



A specter of realization, of loss, chilled silently over me with the force of a hurricane.

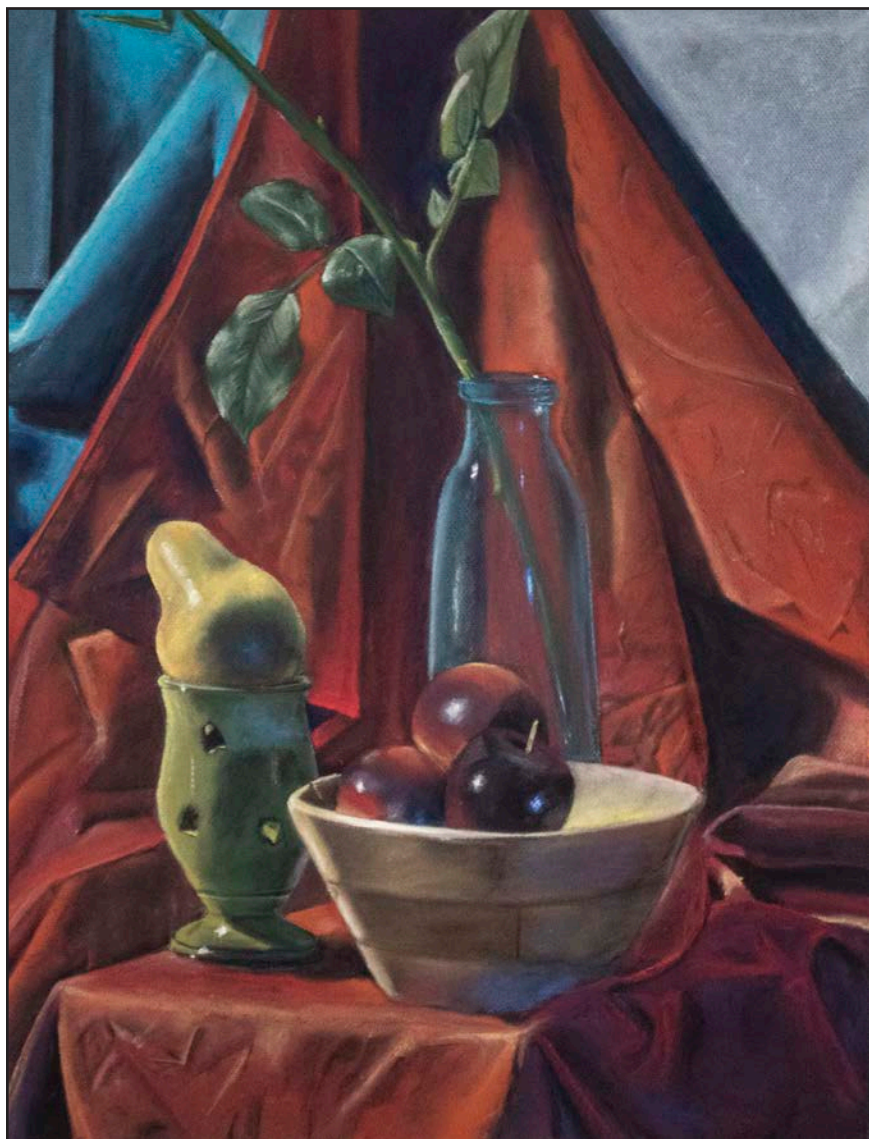
“It ain’t been stocked’n forever suhn.” A ghost startled me back into existence with a voice like chat crunching beneath a tire—an old, exhausted man slumped on a bench. A car had pulled into the parking lot.

The clock ticked once again. I turned to leave. The ghost protested, “You’nt want ‘em quarters?”

“No.” I ceded. “They’re not good for much anymore.”

And I drove away.

Blue Glass



Emily Harms / Art

Heat Rises

The screams in the kitchen
bounce off the blood orange walls
and echo downstairs
where I hide with my sister.
“Go to your room,” I say to her
as if she won’t soon be sweating
from an unavoidable flame.
I light a candle
to hear the strike of the match and
let the sulfur burn my nose
as the thick smell of cinnamon
slowly replaces the stench.

I feel the heat of the fight
grow warmer
as the flames reach the ceiling.
I sit prepared on the stairs silently
waiting, with my phone in
my shaking hands, ready
to summon the red and blue lights.
Through my burning eyes,
I watch the dancing flame
of my favorite candle
as it burns the smell of nostalgia
during a time I don’t want to remember.

Every time, we try
to put out the fire,
to pretend like nothing happened.
Smother it with a blanket!
Open the windows to let the smoke out!
But when I hear, “You pushed me”
from the quiet voice of my mother,
the first time the fire actually
scorches her soft skin.
I let it burn and
burn because they say,
heat rises.



Last Words To City Thrift In Jackson

You are the one place on earth where reincarnation is possible.
Your fluorescent lights go back further
than the eye can see;
liquid bars of artificial sun.

You have been called:
Museum of Broken Breadmakers,
Trashtacular Spectacular,
Temple of Discarded Dresses,
Shoulder Pad Central,
A Mercy Before the Dumpster


My friend and I did not call you any of these things.
We called you “that place that we always go.”
Sometimes we called you by throwing a knowing look over our
shoulder,
by wiggling our eyebrows,
without words.

Today, we stroll through your isles of chipped coffee mugs
advertising bygone corporations.
Your racks of taffeta two-piece suits and ruched gingham
look the same as always.

It is hard to tell that you are dying.

We talk together, remembering so much;
The light up Tempurpedic sign
that was probably stolen.
The crescent-moon purse
with emulsified pills in the lining.
The XXL leopard-print suit whose label says
it was made by The Women of God.

There are things that I want to tell you.
I want to tell you
that your gold-speckled peony tablecloth



is going to a prairie farm,
that it will rest beneath a vase of daisies.
I want to tell you that a family will cherish the bruised
cardboard
of your Monopoly game,
creating new rules to make up for all of the missing pieces.
I want to tell you that someone will wear your crocheted shawl
to a drag show,
that the musty bar lights will bounce off the woven yarn
and make it shine.
I want to tell you
that a little girl will wear your yellow overalls to her first day of
kindergarten,
that her mom will take a picture of her,
and cry unprompted while looking at it twenty years later.
“I can still remember her looking like that,” she would say,
as her husband clasps her shoulder.

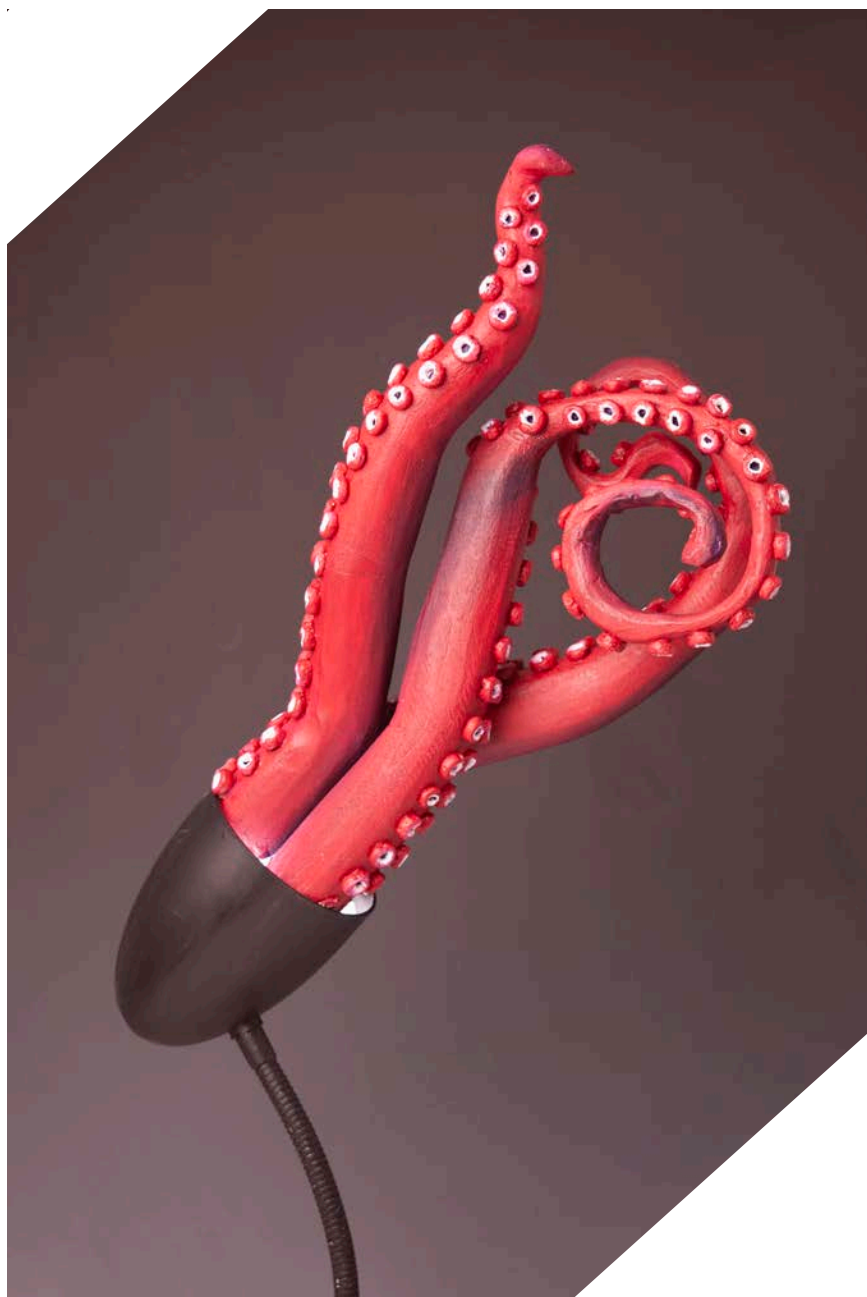
I want to tell you,
that your cycle of rebirth will continue
long after you die.
But you know I’d be lying.

You saw what happened to your dead friends,
all of the concrete skeletons in this city.
Their clothes put into a trash compactor,
so homeless people couldn’t pull them out of the dumpster,
then shipped away
to a colorful mountain of plastic and rotting food,
or a floating island in the ocean.

You know you will share this fate.
But let us not think about these things.

For now, let us tell you that we love you.
We love your polyester prom dresses
and your tuxedo t-shirts and
your plastic plants that smell like old cigarettes.
Like we’ve ever loved anyone we love you.
We love the feeling of our hands as they comb through your
racks,
like sifting our fingers through the ocean.
We love the Motown that drips through your broken speakers,
the way the voices soar
but always,
always come home.

Tentacles



Emily Harms / Art

Marie Antoinette

Cupcake dress of Champagne-pink atop the sickly sweet
wedding cake
spun sugar cane crawling up frosting, wisps of fingers begging
cake.

From behind a gold-trimmed vanity, an alabaster paste of lead-
tinged
baby's breath and vinegar smooths over her plump face, frosting
spreading cake.

Crushed cinnabar, mercury and vermilion drip from the
horsehair paintbrush
onto the milky canvas, a rosebud over naive lips. She offers
them a slice of forgetting cake.

Crumbs, the Raspberry glass sneers as he claws his way up the
tiers of spun sugar,
reclaiming the saccharine cloud. One shove and she's hanging
over the whetting cake.

Delphinium silk clutched between match-stick fingers, high-
heels dangling above spun sugar fingers as they engulf her. A
puff of powdered sugar, *Don't move. No more wrecking cake.*

Chalk-white slip, bent over the top tier of tilted cake, she croaks
Do not make me suffer long. Spun sugar fingers wait for steel-
bladed justice on the steps of the scaffolding cake.

Atop the frosted flower platform, from under liberty's sharp
sting, drops of ruby-red tighten
in the wound, cheers ring out below the beheading cake.

You Fought For Sam, I'll Fight For You



Listen, sir, as I nod to you in the grocery store,
and I speak out against your uncle,
I want you to understand.
I know you fought for me, deep down inside,
and I respect every bit of it.
And if you place my hand over my heart, I'll keep it there.

But even though you didn't join to die for some deep love,
you returned bearing its scars.
Back when you were reckless, young,
you'd let the fabric's ashes rise without a second thought.
But when you were young, you had a dollar to your name,
and your uncle bet two dollars on your life,
so you took the gamble and left.



I respect the hell out of you, sir.
You fought every moment with pride
and now the scars are red stripes
and the blue is the ice bath
your body reacts to when you shut down
over the fireworks you used to pop in July.
You joined because you were poor, sir,
and your uncle offered you nothing,
except a bleeding adoration for the trichromatic polyester.

I'm sorry. Blame my generation, we're disillusioned.
Stars in my eyes stolen and jammed into the fabric
that represents your courage and your uncle's exploitation,
both stemming from desperation.
I wish you'd had more dollars, so that
instead of bleeding red, weeping blue, shivering in white,
you'd be popping fireworks in July,
like you used to.



Things You Could Learn From A Buffalo



Stone Vincent / Art



“I wouldn’t mind turning into a
vermilion goldfish.”
-Henri Matisse, *Pierre Matisse,*
Passeur passionné: Un Marchand
D’art



Matisse At The Beach



Bobbye Jackson / Art

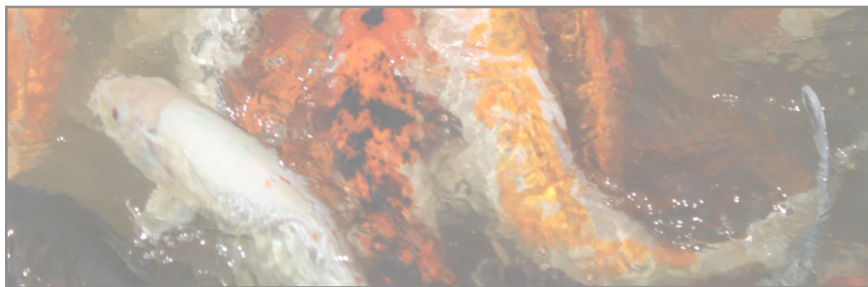
Lovesick

You make me sick —
close enough your eyes
meiosis, you resemble
a seraphim as we kiss.

When you choke me,
I almost vomit—a clumpy
churn—reaction of Yuengling,

fried dough, moss-fested lungs.
My head pounds, cheeks sore,
I feel reckless in your grasp,
your strap approaches,
reflex's gag closes and for you,

I slop my memories out.
I tell bismuth skies and I knew
dusk as powdered stars,
night as my jack'o'lantern
parked in grass—I paused
to look up. I now see how
hiddenite eyes revealed
you, a drunk and heavenly host.



Colors Of A Koi Pond



Madison Brode / Photography

Extreme Uncion

I sometimes found Father Augustine would stare through the small rectangular window of Father Thomas's room before entering. It was never something he intended to do, but he would still catch himself doing it. Rushing from his duties at the classroom after 3:00 pm, Gus would pass by many crucifixes and through many Dominican brothers, returning greetings to the litany of "Hello, Father," and upon reaching the end of his journey, he would hesitate to open the door. Thomas would always be playing his game of solitaire, sitting hunched over his small side table and framed by that small two-foot glass panel and afternoon light. Gus thought his pupil looked like some Baroque masterpiece, tucked away somewhere in a church storage room but miraculously found.

Thomas would always move and see Gus waiting outside the door, motioning him in and simultaneously ruining the composition of the frame.

"How are you doing, Father?" Thomas said as the door cracked open. "I'm sorry I didn't notice you there at first."

"You never do, so I would have stopped coming already if it bothered me."

"I'll have to find some other way to bother you then."

Gus saw Thomas flip the third card of the fifth row and sigh relief. He moved the Queen of Hearts to its rightful place above the same suit of Jack and motioned to the game with a broad gesture. "I've gotten through the thick of this game, so now, it's just fitting all the pieces together."

Gus entered and sat down in the chair across from Thomas and his bed, placing the oil and stole he had brought behind him. Gus noted that Thomas looked sleepless, yet he knew Thomas had slept for 12 hours the day prior. Sleep had become the thirst that could not be quenched.

"Have you honed your solitaire to a sufficient degree? Seems that's all I catch you doing."

"I think I've gotten a good grasp; I can win most games now. Did you know that, statistically speaking, you can only win eighty percent of all solitaire games?"

"Math is not my strong suit, but I would assume most randomized games have an upper bound of winning. Who knows? I went into theology for a reason."

"There's something poetic to it, don't you think? You can't hope to win unless you play the game, but you are never

guaranteed the victory either. The deck may be stacked before the first card hits the table.”

Gus appreciated the sentiment. He had always felt that to be a good priest you also had to be a good Romantic, to see God and glory in every detail. A priory should feel like Walden Pond, and the world should feel like a sonnet. In Gus’s view, priests explicating the nature of creation should sound more akin to literary critics than naturalists, and there was no doubt that Thomas was the Thoreau to Gus’s Emerson.

“Are you here to perform the rites, Father?” Thomas asked, noticing the oil glistening in its glass abode behind Gus.

“I am, but I wanted to talk a bit more before if that’s all right. How are you feeling today, Tom?”

“Drugs seem to be hurting more than helping, but I know that is just the child in me wanting sweets instead of solutions. Speaking of sweets, my food tastes like metal. Have I mentioned that?”

“Once or twice,” Gus said with a smile. “Your outlook is as inspiring as always. That sanguine temperament of yours has come in handy. Wouldn’t you rather be studying? An idle mind works little good.”

Thomas flipped the second card of the sixth row to find the *Rex* of Hearts and promptly placed it next to its *Regina*. “I am studying. I’m playing theological solitaire.”

“Care to explain?”

“Well, the ace is me. You’re the two. Three is Peter’s chair. Four is St. Joe. Five to Jack are the saints and the seven choirs. The Queen is Mary, of course, which leaves Christ as King. The goal of the game is to get everyone to be with the King.” Thomas placed the ace of spades on the last opening above his seven rows.

“Clever, but don’t you think a book would do you better?” Gus asked. Thomas gave a soft but resigned smile.

“I would, but it’s been hard to read recently. I can’t focus, and all the books I had planned to read are denser than I thought. Small bits of Scripture are all I can digest.”

Gus lowered his eyes and furrowed his brows. He was running out of time, but that’s why he was here. Did St. James not say to anoint the sick? Did he not promise healing, were it the will of God? The last thought gave Gus pause. God’s will is so inconstant a thing, it seemed, but a canvas must have seen the artist as inconstant, with so many colors on his palette. Still, he was painting too unsettling a picture for Gus to bear. But he was resolved. This canvas could plead with its painter. “‘This too shall pass,’ I’m sure. Are you ready to begin?”

“Of course, Father, whenever you’re ready.”

Father Gus had done the rite many times. He’d anointed wives next to their husbands, husbands next to wives, brothers next to brothers, children next to parents. *I confess to Almighty God.* He’d anointed members of his flock before, just not Father Thomas. He’d hoped it would be anyone but Father Thomas. *And to you my brothers and sisters.* It should be Father Thomas next to a Father Gus with a collapsed lung or a sudden stroke. *That I have greatly sinned.* It should be him on that bed: staring with pleading eyes and blurry thoughts, pleading forgiveness to God for sins he can’t remember, and hoping he’d pass without purgation. *Through my fault, through my fault, through my most grievous fault.*

He thanked God for the oil he was about to use, and with Thomas sitting before him, the words became colored in a deeper significance. He popped the top off the vessel, and the room was filled with the smell of olive oil. Its savory aroma spread into Gus’s nostrils and invaded his soul. Oil was reserved for special times in a Catholic’s life. It graced baptisms, with babies newborn. It found itself at confirmation, with Christians newly catechized. It marked times of sickness and death, with priests and their stage-four pancreases.

Gus took the oil on his fingers and marked the cross on Thomas’s forehead. *Per istam sanctam Unctionem...Amen.* He took more oil and accidentally drenched his fingers this time. When Gus reached for a towel to wipe some off, Thomas stopped his motion and broke Gus’s concentration.

“The more the merrier, right? Wouldn’t want it to go to waste on my account.”

“It’ll be your clothes smelling like a kitchen then. Don’t make the other brothers get the stain out.” Humor seemed out of place in such a rite, but Gus didn’t want to rob Thomas of small comforts. The person was already dead if he allowed the sickness to steal his old self.

Another cross, this time on the wrist. *Ut a peccatis liberatum...Amen. Pater noster. Adventiat regnum tuum. Ne nos inducas in tentacionem, sed libera nos a malo. Amen.*

“Feeling any different?” Gus asked. One never really noticed instant changes with the Sacraments, any more than a frog can know it is being boiled. The best things take considerable time, Gus thought.

“I’m feeling holier. I think it’s the oil.” Thomas yawned and moved one last card to his top deck, returning to his game. Gus could tell by Thomas’s sluggish motion that a nap was sounding his name from across the seas of consciousness.

“Devotion is a far greater holy oil, I assure. All right, my boy,” Gus choked and faltered, “I’ll let you get some rest. You’ve worn yourself out with card games and Sacraments.”

“Come back soon, Father. The brothers have been out on mission, so it’s been a bit boring recently.”

“Can’t have bored priests. What would the world do if it were to find bored priests?” Gus threw his arms up in mock lamentation. Thomas laughed and let his gaze linger on the floor.

“Yes, we certainly can’t.”

Gus returned to his quarters of the priory after finishing his work at the sanctuary and Mass. Along the way, he felt hopeful about Thomas’s recovery. The Sacraments were visible signs of invisible graces, and there was no one more worthy of graces in his mind than Thomas. He had seen Thomas from the seminary to ordination. He had seen Thomas teach little children and college lectures. He had seen Thomas piously perform Mass before hundreds of faithful. A good young man. A holy man. One God would save.

He was not wrong to think these things. Thomas was a good man.

As Gus went to sleep that night, he prayed for Thomas to be cured of a disease he no longer suffered from. Corpses do not have stage-four pancreatic cancer, at least not in any meaningful way. He prayed to me, Father Clement, to heal his young pupil, but I could not. It was one of those special tragedies of life when one’s expectations are so far removed from the sadness of reality.

I asked God to allow me to visit Gus, to grant him solace in the face of such suffering. He did so. I returned to the Earth I left 154 years prior, and I woke Father Gus from his slumber. Like a thief in the night, I came into Gus’s room and planted the seed of Thomas’s health in his mind, and when he groggily fell from his bed, he stumbled across the halls of the St. Pius V Priory like a soldier shellshocked. In his mind, he only knew he wanted to check on his favorite pupil, but in truth, it was by my gentle direction.

“Thomas, is everything alright?” Gus called into the night. The moonlight streamed in like a solid block from

stained glass windows, seemingly impassable, yet Gus turned into the room and saw Thomas's body lying still in his bed. He also saw me sitting next to Thomas's body, but he did not know who I was, not at first. "What are you doing here? The priory is not open to visitors at—" (the befuddled man checked his watch) "—three in the morning! Get away from him!" Gus said in a hushed scream. It was not only indicative of the time of night but most certainly Gus's state of mind.

"I am not a visitor. I lived here for quite some time."

"What are you...I have been prior of this place for twenty years, so you can't make such inane excuses. You are not welcome here in the middle of night, and you are certainly not welcome here in this room."

"Father Augustine, you need to control yourself. You will wake the brothers. Their university ministry has been stressful lately." "Brothers" seemed to snap Gus's eyes to my attire. He had so intently focused on the confusion my mere presence caused that he had yet to see me. My Dominican habit, worn by thousands of men for near a thousand years, was still clinging to my soul, an indelible mark. Its black cloak was gone, however, for there was no need to remind me, or anyone, of death in the Church Triumphant. *Memento mori* had become *memento mortuus eras*.

"Are you...from another province?" Gus asked. "Have we met?"

"One that does not fade and will not alter, known by many names but ruled by one with A Name Most Holy. And yes, we have spoken before but not in this manner."

Gus continued to stare dumbfounded, and in his unsurety, he edged himself around the wall of the room, sitting in the chair he resided in the previous day. His eyes never left contact with mine. Descending to his chair like I was a judge just waiting to condemn, Gus sat perfectly straight and stiff as starched vestments. "Blessed Clement Avery...no...Saint Clement Avery."

"It is good to see a prior such as you in my former home, Father. These walls tell stories of many saints, and I had the blessing to be one of such men."

Gus stared, eyes scanning my face like a cryptographer cracking a code. He heaved a great sigh and slouched in his chair. I wanted to take it as a sign of relief, but alas, it was merely despair.

"He's dead, isn't he?"

"No one is ever really dead, Father."

"Was that supposed to be infuriating or comforting?"

Gus squeezed his temple. "I'd think saints would do the latter."

I appeared to sit down at the end of Thomas's bed and leaned forward, hoping to match some posture of paternal support. "You would think knowing someone's thoughts would help to comfort, but I would know what you were thinking even if I was corporeal. I would say the same thing, too."

"I see. The answer is a 'both-and,' not an 'either-or.'" Gus got up and walked over to Thomas's body. His face contorted in that horrific way that men do when they try to avoid showing emotion, as if another person's visage was trying to burst out and had to be contained. "Have you come to bring him back?"

I had been told he would do this, and I knew what my response must be. Still, I gazed upon a man far more tired than Thomas ever was. A man wracked with fear and concern, loneliness and envy. He loved Thomas so dearly, but it was the wrong kind of love.

"I cannot do so. I have not been given the duty to resurrect him."

"Do you want to? If it wasn't your duty but you could, would you do it?" Gus stroked Thomas's hair and picked some lint from the black and white habit still showing Thomas's commitment to God.

I paused. Even with the knowledge of the question, I had not considered the answer. Dust particles floated through the illuminated beams of Thomas's windows. Angels on Jacob's ladder. "When I was here, I was obsessed with requiem Masses. I thought they were the most beautiful out of any Mass. I miss them, strangely enough."

Tears streamed down Augustine's face like wax on an altar candle, and he knelt on the bed with head resting on interlocked hands. He wanted to scream. He wanted to hit me. I might have let him if he tried. It wouldn't have hurt anything except himself, and Gus knew that. But the want remained.

"You're welcome to visit the one I have to do soon."

Augustine walked back to his room, leaving me with his tears. He rolled into bed, and there he would remain for the next three days. I would tell the others it was because he needed to finish Thomas's life in his absence. I, having finished my work that fateful night, remained a short while in Thomas's bedroom. He had a peaceful smile on his face. He certainly knew where he was going when he fell asleep. On top of his table, all four suits of cards showed kings.

Floreciente



Sophia Calderon / Photography

Life Of A Cookie

6:05pm

Sugar cookie crumbs
trail along pearly kitchen tile
like a crunchy grout line
leading to the creamy ceramic jar
resting on my countertop.

The crumbly morsels make guilty
the dough-crustled fingers
of my eight-year-old felons
sneaking back to their rooms.

6:03pm

With the oven door open
just a crack,
little noses twitch at the baked, buttery soft rounds,
gooey samples crisping at the edges
for drooling mouths to ball on their tongues.

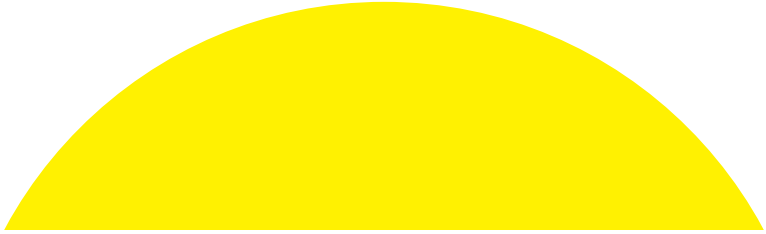
My children only behave
when the stove light is on.

5:48pm

Seasoned sheet pans and eager little bakers
crowd my island. Their hands, powdered with sifted flour,
roll, knead, and shape
spoonfuls of pudgy dough as they thud,
stick, and settle on waxy layers.
Dozens of sugary balls surrender
to iron red heat as I shove the trays
into the waiting oven.

I think the real question
is whether they can wait for their turn
at the cookie jar.

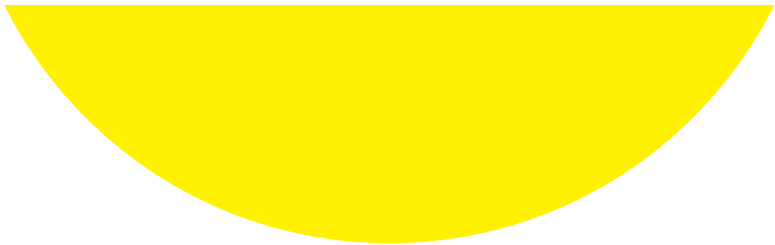




“Sunshine, a light which, for want of a better word I can only call yellow—pale sulphur yellow, pale lemon, gold.

How beautiful yellow is!”

-Vincent Van Gogh, *Vincent Van Gogh: the Letters: the Complete Illustrated and Annotated Edition.*



I'm Incredibly Lonely...

I'm Incredibly Lonely, But Don't Worry About it, Because I'm Too Terrified of Emotional Vulnerability to Tell You.

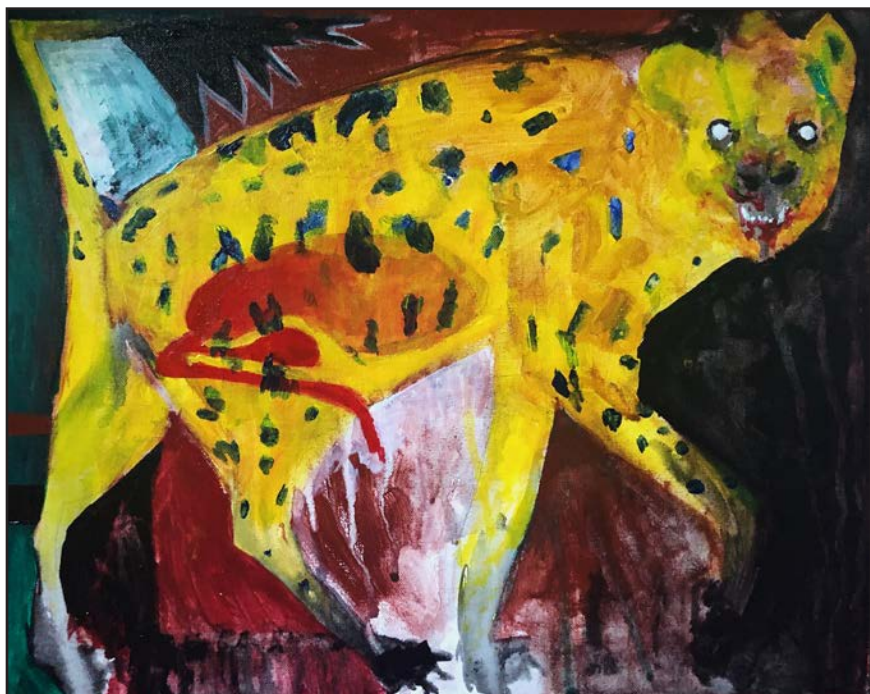
—After Terrance Hayes, after Lorca

I want to be a sailboat on a black ocean, surrounded
By nothing.
I want to feel salt wind push me away.
I want to lose sight of the floating city,
Watch its neon haze disappear behind the white caps.
I want to see a lighthouse loom in front of me,
Its red light sweeping over the ocean like a stop sign,
But abandoned, someone's left the lights on.

I want the stars.
I want to hold them in my sailboat hands and drop them in the
water,
Watch their white light sink.
I want to sail the gold-flecked cosmos.
My oars dipping into the ink,
The sky stream speckled with planets.
I want my sail to billow with star breath
That smells like cold honeysuckle.
Let it take me to Pluto,
Where I find harbor on the ice.
Pluto's lack of diamonds sparkles,
And begins to creep up my legs in icicles,
Quickfreezing me to the planet.
Immobile, encapsulated with empty and gusts.

I want to be on the moon.
No, I want to be a moon.
I want to be filled with craters.
I want people to believe my surface is fluffy so that they're
scared to land.
I don't want to be Moon the moon,
stuck orbiting a blue and brown planet alone.
I want to be one of eight moons
circling your planet. Your fern-covered
planet with gravity weaker than a black hole.
Your planet is trickling with liquid light.
You have a clean atmosphere
and eight moons, with one of them,
me, a sailboat dropping stars in the ocean.

Loving Mother



Stone Vincent / Art



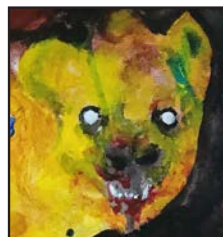
Cockroach

I once saw as a birch, my skin splinters
hedgehog pricks for public hands.
Gazing at grass and sky, I felt peace in porousness.
Termites in my ears tranquil, I slept.

Yesterday, I was a snake shedding
skin. I held onto old husks, afraid of
shaking as you shamed the scales beneath.
I remember you loving me cold-blooded
and spineless, the crunch of your boot
on shed skin. I hid heat lamps in dresser
drawers, prayed for fire. I became numb
to warmth, its absence frostburned my stomach.

Today, I am a dog who will not lay
down. I scream when kicked but do not heel.
As I bite a friendly hand, I know I would still
stay inside a burning building. To prove
I am strong, I would remain calm as my legs
brisket, my bones blacken, my eyes boil to tears.

Tomorrow, I will scuttle through your kitchen,
eight legs fleeing in fear of your questioning,
the harsh light it casts on the shadows inside
my body, the spark it gives to their eager fuse.
I dive into a new hole so I can cower in anticipation.



Literally



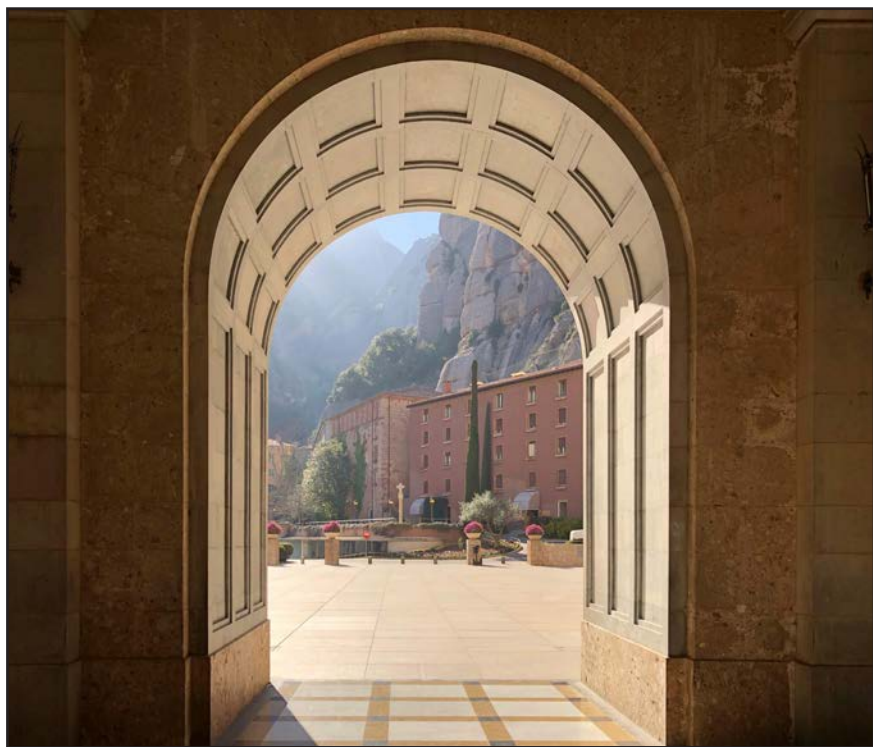
Alphabets are everywhere now,
But they are newer than Egyptian temples,
Crafted later than bronze,
Donated to us by Phoenicians.
Everyone takes them for granted,
For the letters come so naturally,
Greeting us at birth as our name.
However, many knew no such letters.
In fact, many names were pictures.
Just pictures that conveyed complex pictures,
Known in heads of special scribes.
Letters, however, carry the sound of the sign,
Making each syllable seep into your ear.
Never before has such an invention
Opened the mind of mankind,
Presented opportunities for prestigious beauty.
Quote me Shakespeare in pictograms,
Reader, if you dare such a task.
So thoroughly has this system altered us
That I sing you this alphabetic anthem
Using the very system worthy of praise.
Volumes of ink, splattered with words,
Wash over the sight of any scholar.
Xerophiles gave us this gift,
Yearning to track business exchanges,
Zealous in their quest for communication.

Post-It!



Sarah Steen / Art

La Porta



Madeline Bonds / Photography

Long-Lost, Long-Looking

I've looked for you.

I've watched for you through windowpanes,
surveying the tree line for a revelation.

I peered inside cardboard boxes and, selfishly, just in case, loved
the eyes that lived inside.

From underneath my yellow marching plume,

I scanned the rainbow mishmash of faces

for your fingers clutching a blue Pom-Pom.

I stood, waiting for your spindly? stout? swollen? skinny? legs
to jig and jive out from the disproportionately mile-long
Women's bathroom line.

Turning pages muffled third-grade laughter, distorting it to
white noise

as I pursued you through print and paper.

I read my way around the world, hunting for you on the
playground,

but black-and-white stories never told me your name.

I surfed the web, digging in for the 10 footers. Ready for the
really big ones:

the bone-crushing, the soul-crushing.

But you washed away with the tide.

I listened for your whisper in the conch shells the waters left
behind.

I wound through deteriorating grocery aisles

checking my ropes, ties, and knots,

wondering if your ship took port in the same Winn-Dixie as
mine.

A woman stocking shelves paused to study me.

My face cracked into a smile,

a yolk of hope dribbled down my chin and onto the laminate
floor.

I watched as she went without a word
to the back to fetch a mop.

Funneling

The stringy mess of batter
piles on itself into a fried,
bubbly mountain.
Popping oil bites my hand
but I rub away the prickly bursts
with my thumb.

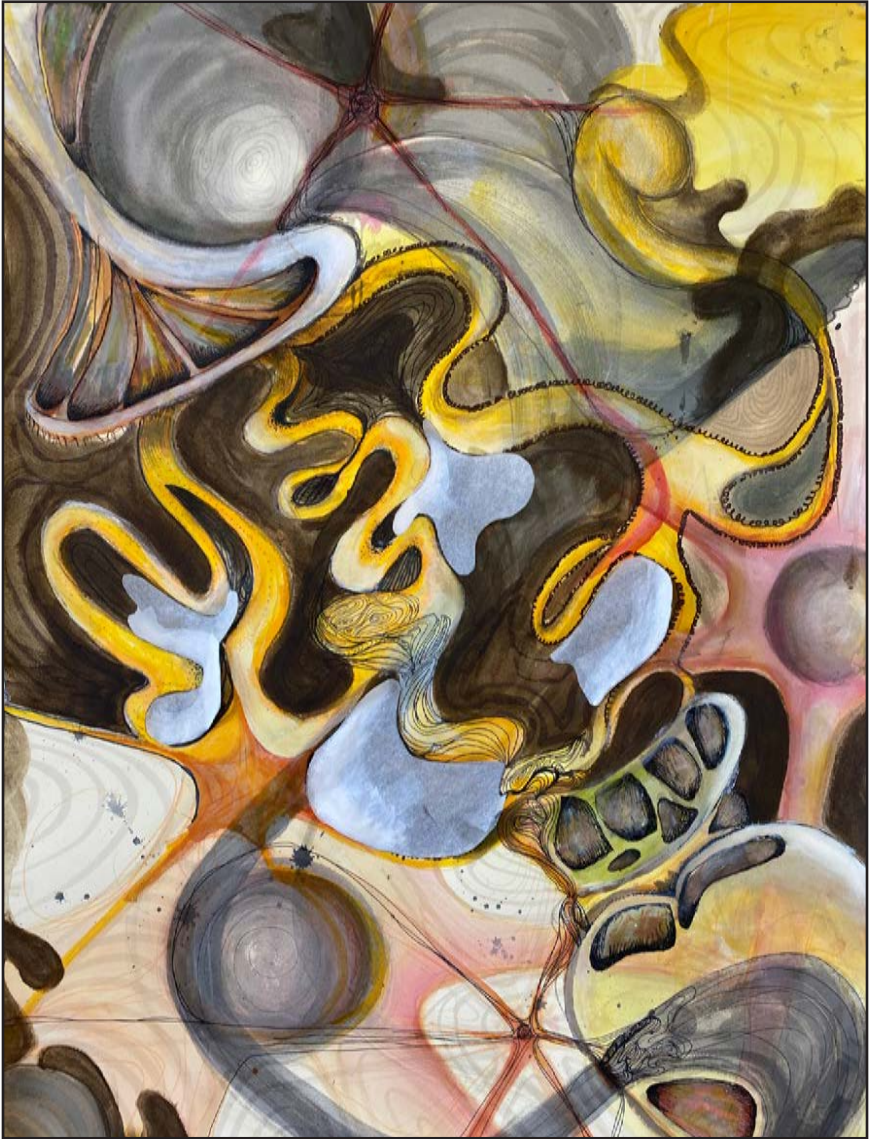
Some people, I decide,
are like funnel cake.
Spilling and spreading
greasy hate freely, filling
every given inch like a stream
of buttermilk batter,
funneling into a fatty vat to fry
oily judgement into every crispy bite.

They hiss, they sting.
They burn you.

I stand at the stove and pour,
flip, and plate.
Funnel another batch
into the pitcher.
Stand and pour.
Flip and plate.

The missing powdery sugar
is long forgotten
as we feed
on aspartame promises.
As long as they taste
like the real thing,
we scrape the lumps
from the bowl
to funnel the next batch
into our searing pan.

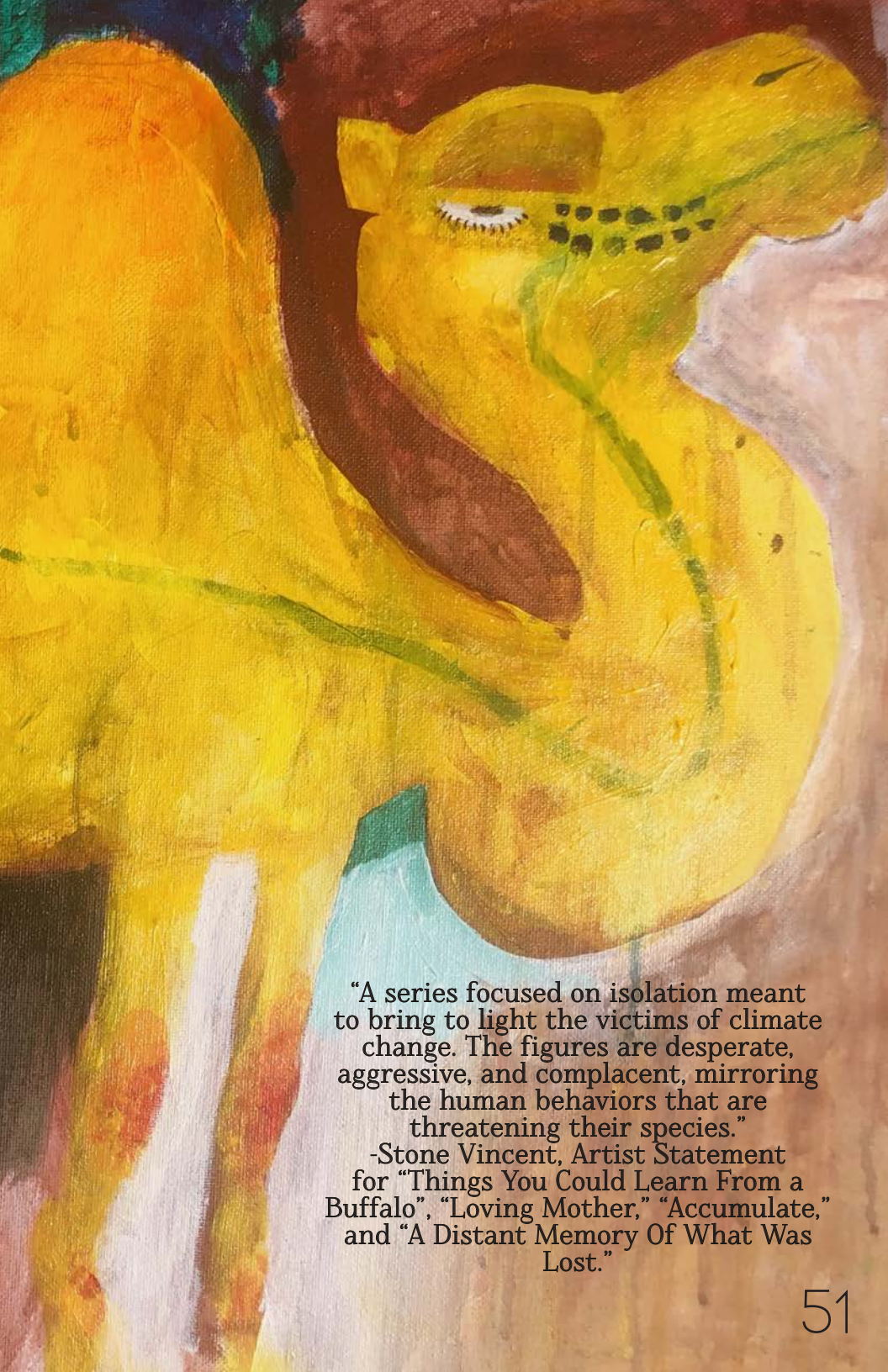
Nervous



Sarah Steen / Art



Accumulate



“A series focused on isolation meant to bring to light the victims of climate change. The figures are desperate, aggressive, and complacent, mirroring the human behaviors that are threatening their species.”

-Stone Vincent, Artist Statement for “Things You Could Learn From a Buffalo”, “Loving Mother,” “Accumulate,” and “A Distant Memory Of What Was Lost.”



“Gatsby believed in the green light, the orgastic future that year by year recedes before us. It eluded us then, but that’s no matter—tomorrow we will run faster, stretch out our arms farther. . . . And one fine morning—
So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past.”

-F. Scott Fitzgerald, *The Great Gatsby*

A Distant Memory Of What Was Lost



Stone Vincent / Art



Digital Decay



Alicia Vickers / Photography

Within my garden, quiet still,
I sought to work, my time to fill,
Yet flowers withered, died away
Because the body still decays.

He moves, I know, when I can't see
Because he yearns to be set free.
But here he'll stay, inside my fence
With my garden as recompense.

I tried burying him, long ago,
But in the soil, he'd only grow.
His veins infused into the ground
And killed the flowers that they found.

To save my garden from distress,
I built a throne for him to rest,
So he can watch me plant some more,
While he sits rotting to his core.

We sometimes talk, the corpse and I,
Though he has never told me why
He comes to sit outside my home
And refuses to let me alone.

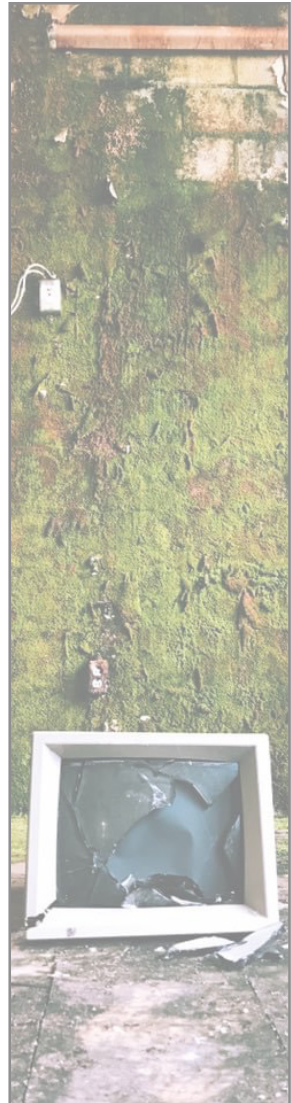
He whispers thoughts into my head,
How I should join him, being dead,
And paints me pictures, hellish art
Of a sword piercing through my heart.

I stay polite, I try at least,
In order to maintain our peace,
And he still sits, maggots galore,
Describing scenes of vivid gore.

Since in the garden he remains,
I plant flowers of many names,
Of golden, purple, red, and blue,
So he stays happy with his view.

And when the flowers start to fade
And petals to the ground cascade,
I come to start the plants anew,
Of golden, purple, red, and blue.

The Body In The Garden



The Undead Brunch Club

Why is my mother calling? Arlo thinks as his phone begins blaring “Monster Mash” in the middle of the supermarket. Violet, his fiancée, narrows her golden eyes at him as she picks up a bag of coconuts from the wooden produce box. He stumbles over an apology, the phone’s vibrations making his nonexistent heartbeat speed up. His mother’s snarled portrait taunts him from the lock screen, her ivory fang resting against crimson lipstick. Fifteen years he had been broiling—up to his neck in a grudge painted with blood—and avoiding his mother. A phone call couldn’t erase what Arlo would never speak of—not to Violet, not to his friends, not even to a therapist who tried to get him to explain the situation with dolls.

His mother had hosted a Renaissance Fair on the family estate. It combined her two favorite things: event planning and a captive audience. She made him dress up as a knight for the dinner theater entertainment that whole weekend. He weaved around guests and fought fellow knights on top of tables and even got to step in a prop bowl of pudding that his mother strategically placed during his final battle. After his final bows, he would steal away to the kitchen and try to ignore the hunger pangs that made his fangs appear involuntarily. He could hear their pulses, could see the blood pumping through their veins as he watched their Adam’s apples bob up and down. He had been clean for almost a year, subsisting on the blood of an invasive squirrel species in the woods near his house. His mother knew that and didn’t like it. What she didn’t know, though, was that he’d been seeing a human, Poppy, who regularly attended Renaissance fairs. Poppy hadn’t told him she was going to be at this particular one, though. She said it slipped her mind as he gave her a quick kiss behind his dressing tent. The next morning he found his mother with her fangs in Poppy’s neck as the other attendees were loading onto their bus. He hadn’t talked to her since.

His ringtone begins again, drawing the attention of the five other people with the misfortune of grocery shopping on a Saturday evening. Violet and Arlo did it because their work at Initiative for a More Sustainable Meal took up all their time during the week as they campaigned vampires all over town to join the ‘Coconut Over Blood’ movement. No one else in the store had any excuse. Arlo could smell their humanity before they even entered the store. With a sigh, Arlo slides his finger across the screen and greets his mother in a clipped tone.

“Mother, please make this quick.”

“Arnold, this is not how we start conversations.”

“Hello, mother, may I ask why you’re calling?” Arlo forces his face to remain stationary, to not let sarcasm and animosity drip into his voice.

“A brunch party. Your father and I would like to invite you to our annual Spring Brunch Party.”

“Are we having damsel as the main course?”

“How much longer are you going to hold that against me?”

“I’ve got nothing but time, mother.”

“Tomorrow at 11 A.M. Wear your best suit.”

“Are we dining with the Pope?”

“I will see you tomorrow, Arnold.”

Violet has already paid for three bags of coconuts by the time Arlo hangs up. She is waiting for him by the Valentine’s day section, her golden gaze glossing over the row of stuffed animals holding hearts that sport a range of cliché messages. She smiles and picks up Koala bear that says ‘I’m bear-y happy you’re mine.’ Five years ago, he and Violet had stopped at this supermarket on their way to a movie marathon at the Drive-In on the edge of town. It was their seventh date and Arlo had wanted everything to go perfectly, but he forgot the rose-scented coconut water Violet loved so much. She accompanied him inside and wandered off to the seasonal section unbeknownst to him. After a frantic search and lots of yelling her name, he found her holding a bee that said ‘Bee Mine.’ Arlo thought it was dumb but her eyes were sparkling and he had never seen her smile so wide. He’d buy her a million bees just to keep her looking at him like that. It was the night he knew he was going to marry her.

“Who were you on the phone with?” Violet asks as she slides the Koala back on the shelf.

“It was my mother, actually. She wants us to come to a brunch party tomorrow.”

“Are they finally back from their tour of Europe?”

Arlo bites his lip as they walk out into the nighttime breeze. Humidity clings to his skin, which is already slick with guilty sweat. That was the lie he told Violet when she asked about meeting his parents. She always talked about baking them muffins, and looking at his baby pictures, and calling them ‘mom and dad.’ Arlo didn’t have the heart to tell her that they didn’t keep any photo albums—they had spent the last 2500 years looking at him, they didn’t need pictures—and that the muffins they enjoyed came with a certain *je ne sais quoi* dripping in cold blood. Whenever she spoke of meeting them, a soft smile crossed her lips, like frosting on the tip of a finger, and Arlo knew when the chance came, she wouldn’t say no. He couldn’t blame her for wanting to meet her future in-laws, but his better instincts knew that that was a bell that one couldn’t unring. By his calculations, his parents had been in Europe for more than five years and part of him wished he could

just keep them there, keep them in their ignorance of Violet.

“Apparently, they got back last night.”

“And they want to meet me?” Violet turns to him, her bunny rabbit cheeks puffed with anticipation. He nods, his mouth unable to form the word yes. He knew it would be better for both parties if the meeting was unexpected. Forced hospitality was how he rationalized it. Everything was going to go wrong, but at least it would start out with his mother holding the door for Violet.

Violet stands in the curtain of ivy on the front porch of his childhood home, surrounded by the garden of hyacinths and daisies and peonies and hydrangeas strewn about the polished wood. The flowers appear to spring beneath her feet as she bounces from one leg to another, excitedly jamming her finger at the doorbell. The organ sound booms throughout the house and Arlo knows that his parents won't answer the door until the agreed upon start of the party. Despite the unusual October heat, Violet is wearing a pink corduroy skirt, a lilac sweater, and a pair of heavy black boots that clomp with each bounce of her leg. With one hand, she is holding a large black cat umbrella, which is protecting them both from the mid-morning rays, and with the other, she is holding a coconut cream pie decorated with edible pearls and raspberries. She had spent all night perfecting the diamond-pattern on top of the creme, using a pair of tweezers and a magnifying glass to make sure each pearl was in its proper place. Arlo knew his mother wouldn't show it nearly as much care and concern as Violet did.

When his mother, Emmeline, opens the door, Arlo holds his breath like a horse who can hear the sizzling of an iron a few feet away. Her gray hair is pulled severely against her head, tightening her chalky skin against her sharp cheekbones. She is dressed in black velvet, a lace collar bunched at her throat with a bat-shaped pin. Emmeline, hands on hips, stares down the bridge of her nose at Violet. She sizes her up, taking in the mismatched clothes and the boots that make her feet look three times bigger than they are.

“We don't need any Girl Scout cookies.” She sneers as his father, Alfred, comes to join her in the doorway. His eyes are narrowed behind his wire, half-moon glasses as his nose pricks.

He must smell the coconut. Arlo thinks as he looks down at Violet's pie, which still sits pristine in its pink cardboard box. He nudges her, gesturing for her to give them the pie before they start making any more comments. Her mouth forms an 'o,' which quickly transforms into a smile as she turns back to his parents. Emmeline accepts the pie between pinched fingers, as one would

take a used handkerchief or a piece of wet newspaper. She looks up from the pie with a pained smile and Arlo suddenly becomes aware of the sounds of other voices mingling in the house.

“Mother, this is my fiancée, Violet.” Arlo grabs the sleeve of her sweater and pulls her to his side.

“The Girl Scout?”

“She’s 2300 years old.”

His mother glares at them, her hands on her hips.

“And her clan?”

“Nightshade,” Violet pipes in before Arlo has a chance to tell his mother that nobody uses clans anymore.

His mother narrowed her eyes, her birdlike arms crossed tightly against her chest. “Edgar never mentioned turning someone so recently.”

Arlo rolled his eyes. *Of course, all the vampire hierarchy would be at her party.*

“Are you going to invite us in, mother? It would appear the party has already started without us.”

“I guess it would be rude not to.” She turns on her heel and begins to walk down the long 17th century rug decorating the hallway.

Violet steps over the threshold before his mother has the chance to rescind the invitation. Arlo follows her, his gaze trained on the floor instead of on the stolen art decorating the emerald walls. His parents’ only act of altruism in their eternity had been to salvage artwork stolen by the Nazis in World War II. However, they missed the memo that the artwork should have been returned to its country of origin after the defeat of the Nazis. Arlo tried to sneak Raphael’s *Portrait of a Young Man* back to the museum once, but his mom caught him before he could even get it off the wall.

Violet is a few paces ahead of him, walking on her tiptoes and talking to Emmeline in her bright, cheery voice. Flower petals fall from her hair as her head swivels, taking in every detail of the evergreen trees peeking out from behind the antique frames. She’s like a fairy just entering a new world, wings unclipped and a golden aura fighting to keep evil forces at bay. That was what first drew Arlo to her. She saw the world in shades of rose-colored glass. A beautiful pink tint that romanticized clouds of smog and made a can of coconut milk feel like dinner at a Michelin 5-Star.

At the end of the hallway, there is a crowd of well-dressed people picking up crystal goblets from catering trays and laughing at jokes told from across the room. For a second, it could almost be construed as normal. But Arlo knows how the party will end. The catering staff will be eaten, the leftovers will be wrapped up, and everyone will fly home engorged, compliments still hanging from their lips. That was how 2500 brunches had ended and there was no reason this one should end any different.

“Can I tempt you with some AB+? I know it has a tendency to be a little sour, but this is American, so it is nice and thick, really coats the throat.” His mother picks up a glass from a nearby tray as their group enters the living room, the beating heart of the party.

“I don’t drink human blood, actually.”

“Is that so? A Nightshade who doesn’t drink human blood.”

She takes a sip to compose herself and then feigns politeness. He recognizes the face—the flashing eyes, the wide smile. It’s the same face she had when he brought home his werewolf roommate from college. He tenses, remembering how well that meeting ended.

“They exist. Violet just watches at mealtime.” Arlo places his hand on the small of her waist.

She tenses under his touch; her eyes glued to the blood feast the runs along each wall of the spacious living room. Cupcakes frosted with blood, red clotted cream and scones, split veins and Bloody Mary sauce, artery soup, and his mother’s specialty: blood pudding. A gelatinous concoction of congealed blood decorated with red clotted cream and coarse sugar. It was Arlo’s favorite dish of hers. Deep down, it still is. He can feel his fangs poking into his tongue. If Violet wasn’t there, he probably wouldn’t be able to suppress his urge.

“If you’re a member of Nightshade, then you probably know,” his mother doesn’t finish her sentence as a sultry voice calls her name from the foyer. Arlo stares at a rain cloud hanging low just outside the bay window as the footsteps from the hallway grow closer to him. They are ticking off the beats of the funeral dirge that’s writing itself as he is caught between the web of his parents and Violet and the woman calling his mother’s name. He feels her soft breath on the back of his neck as she slides past him, handing his mother a lime-colored pie box.

“Blood Swirl tart with chocolate,” the woman says in her glimmering voice. Arlo feels hazy and ill as he tries to focus on the rain cloud. Ivy twists in the wind, long fingers curling around the trunks of the oaks that have been on the land longer than his parents.

“Arlo,” his name sounds like a spell coming from her mouth, the Ivory-gate dreams and false promises stitched into each syllable. A curtain of thick black hair falls over her shoulder as she turns to him, the silk of her emerald dress billowing. When he catches sight of her purple eyes, he freezes—flashbacks of France and guillotined heads and dusty libraries crossing his mind.

“Cosima, next in line for the throne of Nightshade.” His mother beams as she sets the pie on a display stand like it’s a piece of the Elgin Marbles.

“How could I forget?” Arlo tries out each word on his tongue like he’s not sure this is a conversation he wants to be involved in.

The smell of the lead-laced makeup and powdered wigs hangs around her like a halo. It still makes his mouth water occasionally. The last good meal he had was when he and Cosima ate the French nobility on the night he tried to propose to her. They were both still on the high of the blossoming French Revolution and he gave her a ring he stole from some Duke’s sister. The next day, she agreed for both of them that it would be best to go their separate ways. He used to get the occasional postcard from one of her cosmopolitan adventures, but that had stopped before the telephone was invented. He hadn’t seen her since her last letter, which contained a drawing of her in the alps. It was done by some guy named Jean and Arlo used it to roll his cigarette the night he got it. He imagined her face burning and turning to ash. His mother had watched him throw out the letters and portraits and leftover beauty products from his flat. Watched him swear at the moon that he’d never set eyes on Cosima again, and there she is, at his mother’s brunch party of all places.

“Arlo and Cosima go back centuries.” Emmeline smirks as she turns to Violet, a slyness settling in her dark eyes like Satan coiled around the shiny scarlet apple.

“More like Arlo and Cosima haven’t talked in centuries.” Arlo snorts and grabs Violet’s hand. “We’re going to go check out this feast.”

“Sure you are—smelling like a pair of tiki bars.” Cosima licks her bottom lip, her eyes on fire.

Arlo narrows his eyes at her and pulls Violet deeper into the party, hoping for the crowd to absorb them like a worm and mask the smell of coconut in the metallic scent of blood seconds from death. He spots three kings of clans, a couple of council members and a stray vampire prince before the pair of them reach the table. Violet leans against the wall and he hears some crinkling as she pulls a piece of her favorite coconut candy from her pocket. Her eyes are trained on Cosima, who is still standing with Arlo’s parents, laughing and basking in the glow of their compliments. Arlo touches Violet’s hand, his thumb rubbing against the palm in slow circles. It was how he comforted her when they watched the end of *The Fox and The Hound*, when she had a bad day at the initiative because someone slammed the door in her face, or, most recently, when she went to the doctor to find out about her goodwill heart transplant surgery. This doctor in the city would be implanting a donor heart in the cavity where the vampire’s heart would have been in a past life. It’s some initiative to reintegrate vampires into society and Violet is on the shortlist for the experiment. She is due for the operation next week and then, after

three months of blood transfusions and careful dieting, her heart will be able to support her on its own. She says the first thing she is going to do after is buy a stethoscope and hear her own heartbeat for the first time in 2300 years. Meanwhile, Arlo can't even bring himself to make a consultation.

"Why didn't you tell her about the veganism?" Violet asks as she pops another candy in her mouth.

"I didn't need my first conversation with her in fifteen years to start with 'hey, mom, I'm not eating blood at all.' She would've had an aneurysm." Arlo says as a waiter passes by with a tray of mini blood quiches. He can feel his fangs push painfully through his gums.

"Arlo, she doesn't even know who I am."

"There's never been a need." Arlo feels sweat bead on the back of his neck as he watches Edgar pull a piece of vein from his mouth. It's like pulling hair from a shower drain.

Violet glares at him, moving one of her boots so it is slowly crushing the toes of his left foot.

"I'm not some ugly plate you only pull out at Christmas. I'm your fiancée."

"Currently, you're the boulder crushing my foot." Arlo exhales sharply. *I didn't know vampires could feel so much pain.*

"I'm not even on full power, honey."

"I should've told them." Arlo says in a strained tone.

"Might've been a nice idea." Violet rolls her eyes and removes her boot, crossing her arms over her chest. "If I can put up with their old-world ways, they can put up with the fact that I don't drink blood."

"I don't think that's going to be their biggest problem, darling." Arlo bends down to massage his foot.

"What? They can't stand a little coconut pie next to the blood tart during the holidays?" Violet laughs and then draws out a sigh, her eyes glossing once again over the feast on the table next to them.

"I think you know it has nothing to do with the veganism." Arlo squeezes his eyes shut as a knife glides through the gelatinous body of his mother's blood pudding right next to him. His head begins to throb.

"You didn't tell them for a reason. Probably not for a good reason but I'm sure you rationalized it somehow." Violet purses her lips, her gaze trained on him. "What are you really scared of telling them about? About me? About the veganism?"

"Mortality. What will they do when you have a beating heart inside of you? When all that coconut water turns warm and red?"

"What does it matter? My mortality status is not their concern." Violet's eyes darken. "Anyway, why are *you* worried?"

You didn't even make your appointment. You're not the pariah here."

He can hear pulses from three miles away pounding like a million planes taking off in his ears. The blood pudding and the intestine stew and the taps streaming scarlet from secret hoses in the wall are painting the inside of his eyelids, constricting his dead organs like a python trying to win the last breath of life. He is fighting against the feeling in the pit of his stomach, against the fangs in his lips and the smell of lingering coconut on Violet's breath. She is breathing in his ear, holding his clenched fist, and whispering mantras she learned from when she first joined the initiative. They thought a few words could rid vampires of their sickness. He pushes away from her and parts the crowd as he storms past his parents and Cosima to the powder room next to the coat closet. He slams the door and sits down on the toilet, his head between his hands as he tries to force the coconut cupcake he had for breakfast back down his throat. He can still hear the pulses like whispers as he stares at the white tiles. Thoughts of blood spilling from white necks, of stains on freshly waxed floors, and of dark purple smudges that can never be removed from grout mix with the whispers in his head. And then Violet is in his mind with her coconut pie and her mantras and her heartbeat. The creaking of the door draws him from his reverie.

"Occupied?" Cosima asks as she slides in, pushing the lock on the door. Arlo watches as she stares at the empty spot in the mirror where her reflection should be. She is applying red lipstick which makes her fangs appear blinding in the soft hue of the bathroom light.

"What are you doing here?" Arlo asks, the cupcake still snaking its way back up his throat.

"In the powder room or at brunch?" She asks with a small laugh.

When he doesn't reply, she rolls her eyes and applies another swipe to her lips.

"Just because you stopped talking to your parents doesn't mean I had to." She smacks her lips and slips the lipstick case back into her pocket before turning to face him.

"What's the real reason? You don't do anything without an angle."

"No, you don't get a second question before I get my first." She chides, her eyes gleaming. "Why'd you bring coconut girl with you? You had to have known how she'd go over at this thing."

"She's my fiancée. I guess I assumed she'd be welcome."

"Because your family is so welcoming." Cosima crosses her arms over her chest as a small pause falls in their conversation.

"Being a vegan is not the worst thing you could be."

"Maybe not, but being a mortal is."

Arlo looks up at her, mouth opening and closing like a jammed elevator.

“People talk, Arlo, and people talk a lot about her.” Cosima tosses her hair over her shoulder. “That whole operation is so *unnatural*, and on top of being a vegan...”

She shudders as Arlo tries to find his voice in amongst the cupcakes and the persistent whispers and the smell of blood slipping under the crack between the door and the floor.

“She’s trying to make amends for what our kind has done for centuries. It’s not for fun. It’s not some experimental cosmetic procedure. She could die.”

“She’s not supposed to, and neither are you.”

Arlo stands up and tries to push past her to open the door, but his hands are shaking too much to turn the knob and undo the lock. Cosima sets her hand on top of his, her purple gaze holding him captive.

“You’re not mortal, Arlo.” Her voice is soft. “I saw the way you looked at that blood pudding. You’re hanging on by a thin thread and a beating heart isn’t going to change that.”

“It’s not as thin as it looks.” He exhales and turns the knob.

“My hearing picked up on your conversation earlier.”

Cosima says as he opens the door. “Are you more scared of what they’re going to do when they hear her heartbeat for the first time or of what you’ll do?”

He looks up and the glimmer in her eyes says she knows she hit a nerve.

“Maybe she’s not going to be doing it alone.”

“Yes she will.” Cosima replies without hesitation.

“So, they’re your angle.” Arlo pauses in the doorway and looks back at her. “Do they know? They send you to spy on me? Maybe get some dirt on the operation so I’ll be forced to come home?”

“They’re worried about you, about the rumors they’ve been hearing about her.” Cosima sighs and pulls a stray hair from the fabric of her black dress. “They knew I’d be the only one who could get through to you.”

“How well is that going for you?” Arlo walks out of the bathroom, his eyes zeroed in on his mother who is schmoozing some king of some clan who is eating a bowl of her pudding.

She catches his glare and tries to beckon him over but he rolls his eyes. He snakes around her and then feels a sharp pain in his forearm. Her nails are digging into his pale skin as she fights to keep her composure. Her talons draw out a wine-colored liquid, eyes narrowing as she looks up at him. She tastes some of the liquid and her face contorts like a victim of electro-shock therapy. He yanks his arm away and uses his silk tie to clean his wound.

“So it’s true.”

“All you had to do is ask. You didn’t have to send my ex-girlfriend to spy on me.”

“Why are you red? Not once in 2500 years have your injuries been red.”

“Guess that means I’m taking care of myself.” Arlo rolls his eyes. “Nothing wrong with that.”

“Everything is wrong with that.” Emmeline hisses. “You’re dead, have been since you were born. Why are you red all of the sudden?”

It was the coconut water. Arlo had noticed the changes a few months after he started the diet. Once he cut himself while he was cooking a coconut curry. He was mesmerized as this wine-colored liquid oozed from his finger. The coconut water was adding oxygen to the dead blood in his body. It no longer clogged his veins, but rushed through him like rain from a gutter. He could run faster, fly farther, and punch harder without the weight of another person congesting his circulatory system. Violet said, someday, he’d be entirely made of coconut water. He liked the thought of no longer being a thief.

He had spent the first 2500 years of his life weighed down by the thick, congealed blood of his meals, by their petrified faces and the piercing sounds of their screams as his hesitant fangs drained them. He used to tell himself it was okay because he fed in opium dens, bars, on battlefields and the coma wards in hospitals. During the particularly violent periods of execution in human history, he would feed on half-hanged witches and guillotined political heads. His feeding never turned anyone, never cursed them with his own sickness. He called it “humane” feeding, thinking that it somehow hurt them less if their fate was already sealed. But there was nothing humane about it and he hated himself. Then the coconut water, the crystal savior that made him feel alive for the first time in 2500 years. He embraced it, but there was always the gnawing in the back of his head, the little voice that told him he could turn back if he wanted to.

Arlo looks up and sees Violet standing in the corner, watching each passing vampire with apprehension as she sticks another candy in her mouth. For a second, the whispers cease, the smell of blood condensates on his cheeks and beads away. He can feel the hair of coconuts under his fingertips and hear the spike as it breaks the fruit open. He can taste the sweetness on his tongue, the saccharine snow of the flesh pushing the cupcake back down his throat. A deep breath escapes his lips as he walks to the kitchen where Violet’s pink pie has been discarded. He cuts two slices and walks back out to the heart of the party, handing one to her. The whole slice fits in his mouth at once and he swallows, his eyes trained on his mother. He relishes in the offense of her curled upper lip as he licks the frosting from his fingertips.

Daffodil

Peep-yellow April, I cower
at your squawks—the arrival
of spring. Your sugar bastes
my teeth, April, leaving
the bitter aftertaste of blue
Aspirin candy eggs.
You cover my upper

lip in twin dripping yolks,
your sunshine frying the whites
of my eyes. You let me loose
from your hotbox and I totter
home, pollen-flecked, baked
and ecstasy addled, my feeble
hands clenched jaundiced fists.

April, I hate how you show who
I am. I hate the holy shame
you slug through my veins,
and I hate how the holes
you place in my hands
frame what light enters in.

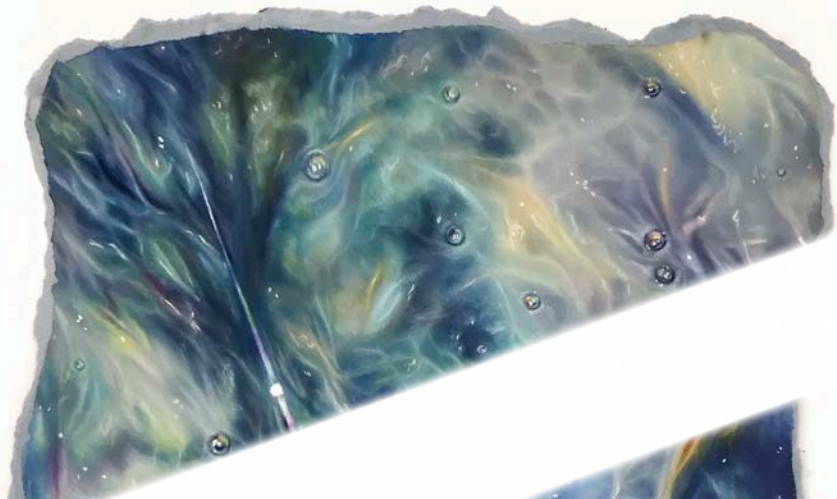
The lens whispers repression's
tender quell, my eyes whimper
mercy, yet you drag me to see—
the mirror shows me in her dress,
but my heart is a levee bursting,
the flood of fear is my relief.



Perspective Of A Plant

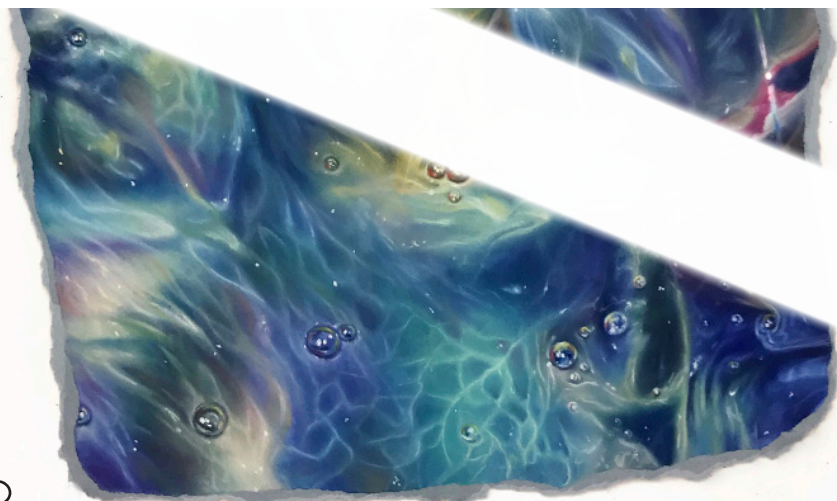


Madison Brode / Photography



“Sun-bleached bones were most wonderful against the blue—that blue that will always be there as it is now after all man’s destruction is finished.”

-Georgia O’Keefe, *Portrait of an Artist: a Biography of Georgia O’Keeffe*



Moments From Heaven



Hanna Bewley / Art

Elegy To My Schnauzer, Who Died Of Heatstroke After I Forgot Her Outside

Boop.
The butterweed's stamens
bounce under my finger
like the tips of paintbrushes,
like sphagnum-springy eyelashes
laced with perfume:
sour tulips,
battered pecans,
grandma's potpourri.
A nose would feel like this flower.

Boop.
I curl the tip of my finger around a single flower head,
bending the umbel to my brow.
A mosquito hawk dangles on the stock.
I release the eyelash-pistils, and
the Mardi Gras purple stem snaps back,
trebucheting the fly into the air.

It's staring at me, that flower, canine pupils
spread in terror. I extend
my hand to stroke between the eyes, but the flowers duck
away, bobbing and weaving like a marmot
racing to its hole.
There is no wind.

Renacimiento



Sophia Calderon / Photography

Plitvička Jezera



Meghan Brino / Photography

I know the sky
stretches
up, pushing
the edges of everything
until it sweats
and collapses
inward,
but sometimes the sky
acts like a dome
made of concrete
with chipping blue
plastered
on the ceiling.

It wears the mask
of a war banner
with cotton tears
reminding me
of a lost soldier.

But I think it's a bubble
dyed cerulean
and trembling,
waiting to be popped.

Regardless, I hate that it lies to me.

you act like I don't know.
I know
more than anyone.
I know,
even more than her.

I Fell In Love With The Sky, Once

You're lying through
your wind teeth,
telling me you're blue,
when we both know
the dome
only hides
the hollow vacuum
of your commitment.

You showed me at night.
Your stars caressed
my cheek,
as if you regretted
your empty space
and you thought
I didn't feel your pull.
Your lack of an atmosphere.
You thought I was asleep.

you act like I don't know.
I know
more than anyone.
I know,
even more than her.

The Story Folds



Hanna Bewley / Art



Bodies Of Water

I

Every other weekend
we went to the beach.
My little sister swung her flamingo-pink pail
while I gladly scooped sand for her
until the rim crusted over
with the brown sugar crumbs.
She toddled to the foamy sea edge
and imagined herself a baby turtle.
I wish I hadn't looked down
to scroll through Facebook,
letting the waves take her
as one of their own.

II

A rubber submarine
dives at the will
of my six-year-old,
whose sudsy mane refuses
to rinse clean. With spongy fingers,
he tugs on my arm,
begs me to blow raspberries on his cheek
to mimic the bubbles
floating through the top hatch.
I wasn't ready for him to grow up,
to join the military
and captain a ship,
much like our precious memories
of bath time.

III

I swim cheerfully along the ocean floor,
my speckled fins curving and flowing
with every undulation of the soothing water.

It's my first swim without another school.

The sea is my companion, a whirlpool
of bubbly adventures and sandy dreams.

But I can only practice along the reef today
as long as I stay away
from the spiny needlefish.

I remember this warning from my minnow friend
at the sight of prickly gardens
hidden in the sand ahead.

IV

Whether the sun was glaring
or the moon was glowing
you wanted to swim.

We nudged the sliding door open
at 11:55 p.m. and stepped quietly
from plush carpet to splintered deck,
dodging slivers of rotting wood and racing
to spoil the pool's cool, stagnant waters.

You beat me in your neon yellow trunks
as you broke the night sky's starry mirror.

If I had the nerve, if I had the voice,
I would have dared you
to leave your trunks
in the drawer.



V

All eight of my slimy arms curl, grasp, and writhe
in the pillowy sand.

A young girl smooshes her nose
into the glass across from me,
leaving a snotty green streak.

She backs away, unfazed, smearing
her finger through the slime.

I'm happy to know she wouldn't scream
in disgust at shaking hands
with the slippery likes of me.

I glide closer over the coarse rocks,
through the grainy cloud
stirred from my rigorous sifting,
and suction the glass with a single sucker,
making a faint ring beside her smudge.

I can see her blurry smile
through the algae-streaked glass.

If she was with me in my tank,
I'd like to think she would enjoy
making a mess of my
marine playground.

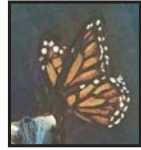
Where The Whales Sing

Riley Cutler / Art



The Elegy Of An Entomologist

I examine your freshly dried wings.
Terrycloth nebulae and chainmail lakes,
speckled with will-o-the-wisping stars and churning with navy
baitfish,
your eyespots pierce me.
They stand wide like
the eyes of every Hebrew mother who heard
the scimitar rap the door
for Pharaoh's task.
Why did you do it? you still ask.



Lifeless eyelashes
quantum entangle mine.
They should be winking through lupine.

Once,
my hand placed you into the freezer.
You heard the rasping suck,
you felt the clasping cold.
Up you stared
into the dying bulb.
The light around you fizzed
and collapsed
as your wingbeat's tempo
heaved,
and you relaxed.
Why did he do that? you must've asked.



Your proboscis unfurled
unveiling (*write it*) humanity
...if only I was there to see.

Now,
your desiccated wings examine me.
Scaled black holes
spotted with fuzzy mold,
those eyespots pierce me.
The wings I dreamed I lent eternity
by pinning for posterity
now hum
my elegy.



Outsider



Alicia Vickers / Art

Connecting Flights

It is nearly midnight and
the entire universe is sleeping beneath us,
all except for the celestial hum of the stars and you and I—
heavenly bodies surrounding our own—
and for a moment, we can taste infinity as
crisp as the air,
as abundant as the lights burning beneath us.

From above, the world is broken,
ceaselessly beaten by time,
glowing strands feathering cities through its cracks.
We are passengers praying for traveling mercies anew with
every connection,
and every feat of flight and fear of falling crescendo into the
space between you
and I.

Tell me I am like the lights on the horizon:
for the first time humanity is no longer bound by
untamable orbits
but illuminated by the brilliance of science not quite
explainable—
that the world held its breath when I took my first.
Tell me about the cities beneath us, tell me how much longer
until you leave, tell me
anything but goodbye.

It is nearly midnight and
I am surrounded by artificial wildfire skies
created by the burnt orange of streetlights splashed against
night haze.
Their umbrella-rays drip gilded showers onto the cars below
and dewdrops fall upwards upon the sky,
extinguishing each spark to create room for universes held
together by
fire and curiosity.
One flame dies for another—
an eye for an eye.

Half a million imagined words later, you are asleep on my shoulder,
lulled by the droning of engines,
haloed in moonlight and wrapped in warmth—
the world is sleeping beneath me,
sleeping next to me.
For this moment, we are together;
we are running thousands of miles towards home but have never felt so close to it.
We are inching closer to the inevitability of endings and the irreversibility of goodbye,
and if I'd have known this was the last time you'd touch me like that,
I would lose sleep just to feel your arms around me.

It is nearly midnight and
you help me with my luggage.
I am jet lagged, numb to the feeling of anything but your warmth.
The sky is freckled with stars,
dusted upon the cheekbones of clouds that once embraced us.
Maybe one of them is an airplane, its path set for home,
wherever that may be.

We make a wish, and I swear I see it blink.



“I think it pisses God off if you walk by the color purple in a field somewhere and don’t notice it.”

- Alice Walker,
The Color Purple

Expendable



Riley Cutler / Art

The Vine Stronger Than Concrete And The Sun

A scent like shade
pierces the noon haze
and the heat
that foams from concrete
underfoot.

Passiflora incarnata.

My pupils dilate against the light
to drink the nectar of your purple radial filaments.
No, not radial filaments.
Eyelashes.
My bare feet are scalded, blistering,
expendable.



Strands Of Antisense



Riley Cutler / Art



Amber

“[Amber is] sweet, resinous, cozy and warm, [an] often rather powdery note recreated from a mix of balsams...” -*Fragrantica*
“Fragrance Notes”

before there was language
there was you;
crystallizing billion-year-old mosquitos
in your silky browned glass.

you smell like honey-teeth,
or magma-lized caramel,
the yellow-tufted grass
at the base of a mountain.

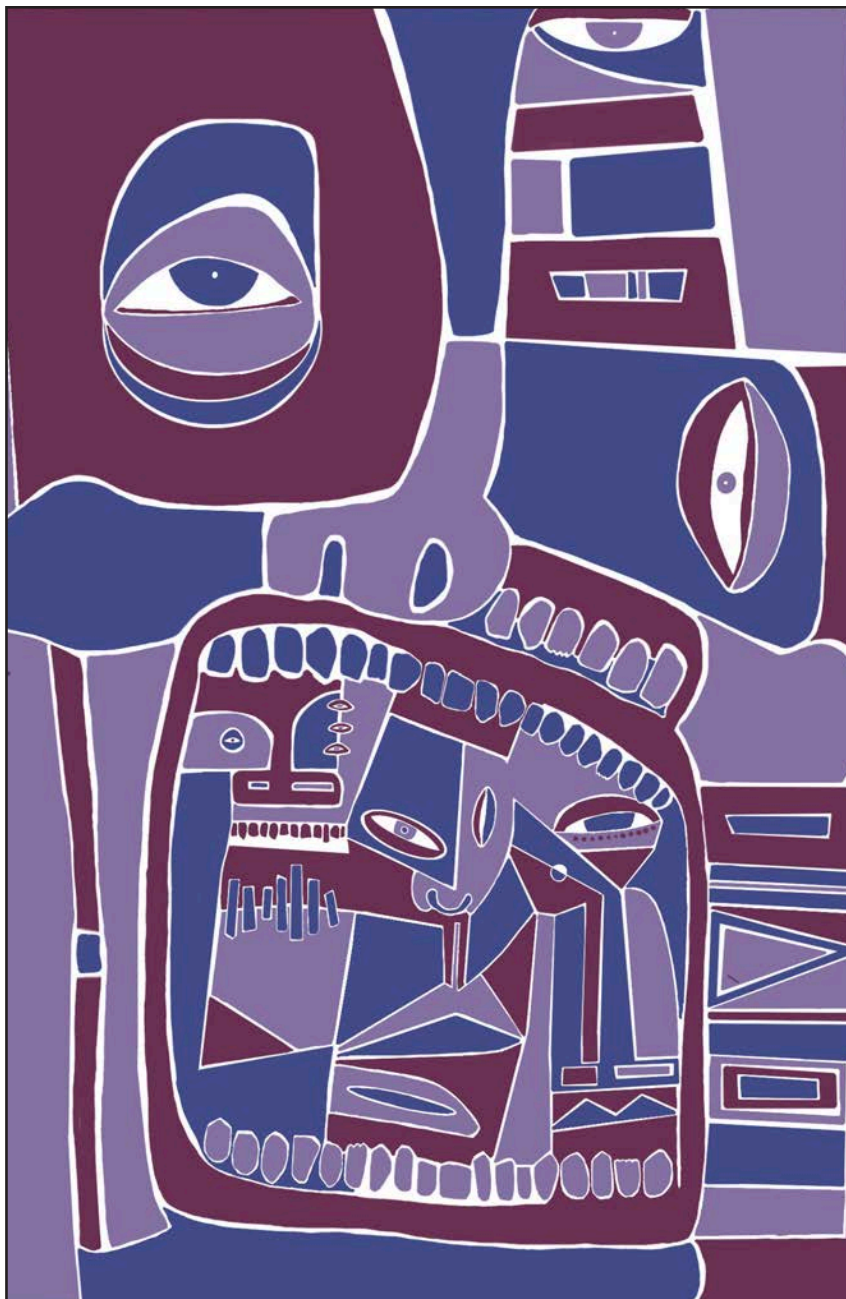
when my perfume wilts,
only you remain.
I hold my wrist to my nose,
And something golden and feathered
at the tip of my soul
wings out.
It, like you, is
something before language
and time,
predating the world.

Intergalactic Anemones



Sarah Steen / Art

Consumption



Stone Vincent / Art

My Mouth

If I could tell you where
This mouth has been,
You would hear stories of
Christmas candy canes in November.
Narratives of backyard anthills and
satin lies for all my lovers.

Fables of starlight kisses
Against my will.



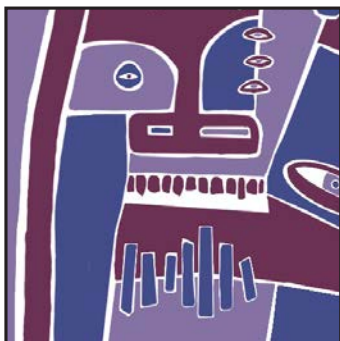
Cries in the back of my throat.

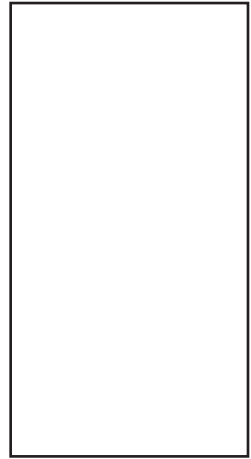
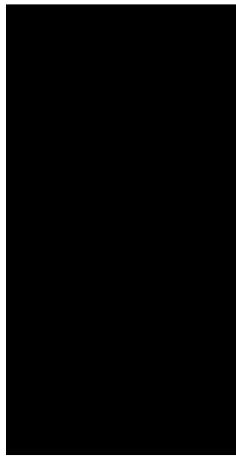
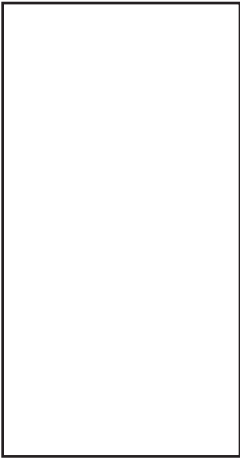
Clenched teeth
At the name of a father that I do not know;
Silent sobs begging a 200 thread-count void to hear them.
Fiery words fueled
By inflamed breath.



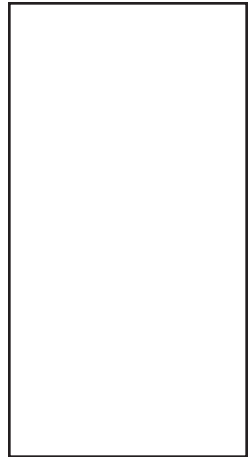
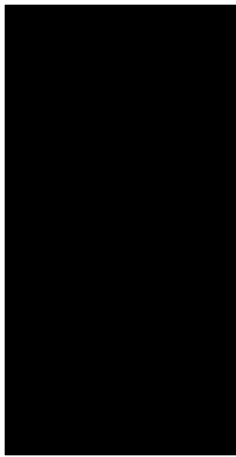
An inarticulate voice
Trying
So desperately trying
to find words in the English lexicon,
but never truly finding itself.

If I could tell you where
this mouth has been,
you wouldn't want to talk about it.





“...For the Whiteness of White
is Never Just White; It Is Always
Transformed By Light and That
Which Is Changing; The Sky, The
Clouds, The Sun and The Moon.”
-Richard Meier, *“Acceptance Speech.”*
Pritzker Architecture Prize



Coloring Book Page



Stone Vincent / Art

The Doll

The room is pierced
by a single lightbulb
hovering
above a mahogany table. A moth
buzzing, blinking; the toymaker's brows
furling
as he squints to see his work.

Three lenses on his wire-rimmed
glasses exaggerate a clouded eye
concentrating on her plastic limbs.
A fearsome dragon glaring
into the window of the princess's ivory tower,
threatening to spew
fire at the first sign of escape.

Dusted pink, her porcelain skin
of powderpuff softness,
her turquoise crystal
eyes lined with charcoal, stippled
lines; a doe gaze. Staring,
she doesn't say a word,
for he hasn't painted her mouth yet.

A paintbrush grazes
the canvas beneath her button nose,
crimson spilling over daisies.
A manufactured smile
shaped like a Silphium-fruit heart.

In a large matchbox,
with 'Nina' scrawled
on the strike surface,
is an azure brocade dress,
flowers of gold thread,
puffed sleeves, a useless corset
for her tiny waist.

Time to get dressed, Nina. He grins.
The fabric glides over her, billowing
around her dainty feet. She slips
from her metal stand, the clasp
for her waist now digging
into her armpits. It would be a deep
aching pain if she could feel it.

The toymaker rummages
through his toolbox for a hairbrush
to correct the copper curls
that took him five hours
to sew into her skull.
Thud.

Nina is upside-down
in the cup of paint.
Crimson dripping
onto the concrete
from her brocade
and her smeared smile.
You're ruined. He roars,
wrenching her head from her neck,
tossing it into the pile
of other disfigured
'Ninas.'

The Doll

Looking for some matches
Rifling through drawers
And cabinets. I don't know where I left them.
Turning the kitchen
Inside out.

I can't throw anything away.

I find 3 AAA batteries,

2 baseball cards,

A post-it note:

"3:15 lab meeting."

I haven't worked in that lab for a while.

In the drawer next to the stove I keep

All the things I don't need anymore.

A miscellany of memories

And loose office supplies.

I can't throw anything away.

I find a note from a girl,

With a movie quote and at least one promise.

Now I miss her again.

Who writes handwritten notes anyway?

A button from that campaign

I helped with, back when

We thought we could change the world

By sitting at booths and smiling. We were right.

I find the only

Hard copy photos I ever kept.

How I was ever that skinny?

That tux barely fit but that dance made me feel

Like I was floating

Six inches above the floor.

Maybe it was the Burnett's.

A thick little book

Full of knots, oaths, first aid,

Real life stuff.

My uncle it gave to me

And taught me everything about it.

I wish he was around to teach me

How to declutter my house.

I can't throw anything away.

Next time I open this drawer,

I'll find some tears.

And find more memories that'll come here to die

Over the next few months

Before I revive them again,

By rifling through them and my hippocampus.

Finding things to hurt me.

Finding things to make me smile.

But I won't find any matches.

I should quit smoking.

Matches

The Holy Slim



Bobbye Jackson / Art

Work Of Heart



Hanna Bewley / Art

When She's Standing There, Bare-Armed

She's going to Iceland. Her plane departs Tuesday, arrives Wednesday night. She should bring a book. Something to feel, to fill her hands. She won't read.

She'd showed him a photo last year. The landscape east of Reykjavik – lupine-laced rivers and crags dewed in moss, rusted lichens embracing black rock. Sparks on an ocean floor. One day, they'd said. He'd made it his desktop background.

She bought her ticket the day they found out. Her parents called her selfish; her friends asked if she was sure. He alone had no questions. He already understood what she does not. After all, he is the one leaving – the one dying. A lone voyager, just thirty-four, intrepid. She is the one breaking, being left behind.

She has a plan. At the airport, she will rent a car. Then she will drive and drive, east or north, as far as the Icelandic roads stretch, past the cities, she will not stop in the cities, and who knows if the roads will lead somewhere or maybe arc into a gorge or caldera, over a cliff in a burst of scree, or if they will take her straight up a peak, basalt crumbling, rising so high the car starts to slow, to whine, and she is reaching, boot firm on the gas please go *please* but instead tilting backward, suspended, waiting –

When she feels a rightness, she will stop the car. She will leave the door open and walk, stride out and into that desktop picture. She will not take her coat. She will pull off her shoes. And she will move until she no longer screams. Because she thinks that when she's standing there, bare-armed, inhaling tones of gray and ochre, the midnight sun bruising, lost in sharp lines and white sky, her chest splintering, the wind bitter but tasting of slate and not him, young and imploding amid something barren and shattered and weary but still beautiful, aching, she will understand.

One Night Stand With A Witch

her body, the shape of an eldritch flower,
bloomed and bloomed.
warmed matcha skin,
teeth the color of honeyed locusts,
eyes like a cauldron pot, boiling.

we cast spells, turning
the book of Leviticus
into crumbles of sugared lavender.
our chests rose and fell like the rain,
or the mist behind a waterfall.

alone, my shame sludges,
black murk oozing from ceiling tile.
so unnatural, the feeling.

even still, i hold her frilled black hat to my nose,
breathing in the smell of elk antlers and draconian violets
trying to conjure the image of that *her*
that was almost mine.

La Corriente



Sohpia Calderon / Photography

A Little More Woman Than The Other Boys

A peach-ringed t-shirt,
Buttercream as a '59 Fender Champ,
Pocketless jeans so baby blue,
You'd swear the sky rippled with denim,
A thin white belt -
An albino lizard tail writhing around my waist.

"You look like a little girl," My mom says.

I return to the changing room that I've imprinted on.
Two hanger hooks dominate the wall beside me —
One blue, sighing
"I'm not feeling it..."
The other pink, trumpeting
"I love this!"
I've been hanging my own clothes for a while.
I drill a hook into the middle, closer to the pink.

"You look like a little girl," My mom says.

Is that not what I was going for?
Why does her statement hurt so much?

I like to think that I'm a little more woman than the other boys.
My hair is a rainbow torch.
This week I sputter a Bulbasaur green,
Farm animals roam my fingernails,
A pasture blooming with self-expression.

I've always imagined a skirt
Pleated like a motel curtain,
I envision a me emblazoned with
A blouse flowing as free as I think I am.

“You look like a little girl,” My mom says.

But I’m not as free as I think I am.

I’m uncomfortable,

A stallion with broken shoes.

My body isn’t made for a blouse,

My hips can’t handle these jeans,

This pasture’s fence keeps me locked in my box of masculinity.

The enclosure gives me enough room to run —

Enough room to paint my nails or shave my legs.

But I’m scared to jump the fence into fully feminine fashion—

I am only a little more woman than the other boys.

I return to the changing room that I’ve imprinted on.

I drill another hook in the wall, closer towards the blue one.

“We live in a rainbow of chaos.”
- Paul Cezanne, *The Letters of Paul
Cezanne*

Best Of The Streetcar

The best works of each category in *The Streetcar*, voted anonymously by staff. No staff submissions were considered for best works.

Best Poem:

Love Poem For Faggoty - Susie Hunt, p. 1

Best Work of Prose:

Extreme Unction - Dylan Bufkin, p. 32

Best Work of Art:

Moments From Heaven - Hanna Bewley, p. 75

Best Photography:

Colors Of A Koi Pond - Madison Brode, p. 31

Six Word Short Story Contest

In December 2020 and January 2021, The Streetcar staff hosted a contest on Twitter and Instagram in which MSU students and faculty created stories with only six words and posted them with the hashtag #TSC6Words. The following tweets won based on anonymous staff voting:

First Place:

“You were wind—I, the dandelion”
- Kazarian Scott Shumpter @username_taken_3

Second Place:

“Wrong cat tongue your got, what’s?”
- Trevor Wycoff @trevy.rw

Third Place:

“The moon fell into my bedroom.”
- Maeve Rigney @maeve_rigney

Undergraduate Poetry Contest

The MSU Mitchell Memorial Library held its first Undergraduate Poetry Contest to celebrate poetry month in April 2020. Congratulations to the winners below! All winner's poems can be found at www.thestreetcarmsu.com/undergrad-poetry-contest-2020.

First Place:

“On Running into a Toad Outside My Back Porch at Eight in the Evening”

-Nate Venarske, Freshman, Biological Engineering

Second Place:

“Middle of the Road”

-Hunter DeJuanay, Jr., Junior, sociology

Third Place:

“Southern Blues”

-Keli Barrett, Junior, Pre-Interdisciplinary Studies

On Running Into A Toad Outside My Back Porch At Eight In The Evening

The toad won't move. He's begun to atrophy,
I believe. I blow gently on his back, warty as a rocky winter
knoll.
He stares unblinkingly. The audacity!
A few hours ago, my shadow would've instilled in him
vivacity—
I, his muse, inspiring him to clamber down his cavernous hole.
The toad won't move. He's begun to atrophy
With nightfall. He squats defiantly on bluestone as if enthroned
by lapis lazuli.
With pupils as dull as yellowed glass bowls,
He stares unblinkingly. The audacity:
As I stoop down he eyeballs me without concern, ballooning
his throat in tranquility,
As if his toadly majesty sat invisible!
The toad won't move. He's begun to atrophy—
His brain, at least. He possesses barely enough rationality to
pause his trill toad rhapsody
Till I continue on my nighttime stroll. Scowling, I seize a twig
and tap his skull.
He stares unblinkingly. Then, the audacity
Bubbles in his swirling eyes and morphs into a ferocity
That causes him to cock his hefty head and, losing all
semblance of self-control,
The toad that wouldn't move, that'd begun to atrophy,
He stares and blinks at me—the audacity!

Staff Biographies

Brady Kruse

Co-Editor In Chief

Brady is a senior computer science major and English minor from New Haven, Missouri.

He loves programming, reading Modernist authors, and losing money on the stock market. He is very passionate about the arts

and is in constant awe of the quality of work submitted by student authors. He believes

that creativity can be cathartic and has used prose to explore his own experiences with anxiety and loss. Serving as co-editor-in-chief of *The Streetcar* has been one of the highest honors of his college career, and as he goes forward into a career in technological policy, he intends to bring the lessons learned, social understanding, and love of arts with him.



Brady



Ruby Titus

Co-Editor In Chief

Ruby is a senior English and French double-major from Northern Virginia who is minoring in creative writing.

In her free time, she enjoys reading

Victor Hugo, watching period dramas and writing her own stories. In

Ruby

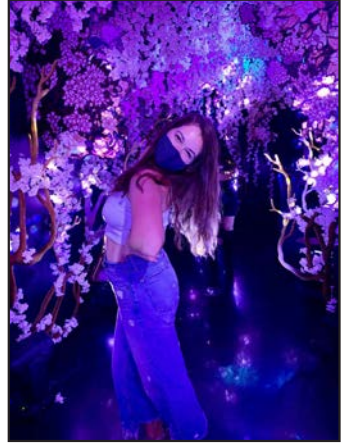
the future, she hopes to continue her passion for creative writing and French, and have a job that allows her to travel internationally. This is her first year as co-editor in-chief of *The Streetcar* and she is extremely honored to get to lead and foster the student arts community at MSU.

Riley Cutler

Art Editor, Editorial Staff

Riley is a senior Biological Sciences major who is also minoring in Art. She grew up in a motley of places but when asked, claims she's from Northern Virginia. Her passions range from, you guessed it, art (both spectating and creating) and human anatomy/physiology. When not frantically studying you may find her sketching random objects, trying to find cute animals to pet or making spontaneous trips to get her Target fix.

Riley



Maeve

Maeve Rigney

Poetry Editor, Editorial Staff

Maeve is a junior Political Science major who is minoring in English, Asian Studies, and Creative Writing. She loves to take care of her houseplants, read about new fragrances, and write poetry.

Maeve's ideal job would be writing ad copy for a perfumery, but she is also interested in practicing law. Her favorite poets are Mark Leidner and Mary Oliver, and her favorite poem is "Try to Praise the Mutilated World" by Adam Zagajewski.

Tarah Burrows

Copy Editor, Editorial Staff

Tarah is a 5th year English major who is also double minoring in Creative Writing and Spanish. She grew up living the #coasty life in Gulfport, MS and hopes to publish poetry, short stories, and science fiction novels. Some of her favorite authors are Aimee Nezhukumatathil, Paul Rudnick, Tahereh Mafi, and Tara Hudson. Some of her hobbies are painting, playing videogames, and attempting too many DIY baking recipes. You can find her at No Way José eating free tortilla chips with her friends.



Tarah

James



James Karlson
*Photography Editor,
Editorial Staff*

James is from the coastal city of Gulfport, Mississippi. It is his third year on staff, and he is a junior applying for the Graphic Design concentration under MSU's College of Art, Architecture, and Design. He is a comedy and science

enthusiast who loves to laugh and gaze at the stars. James also is a poet and water colorist with his head in many clouds. If he can land an occupation that allows him to learn, discuss, and create whether that be a comedian, artist, journalist, scientist or perhaps all four then he will be very happy!

Dustin Smith

Prose Editor, Editorial Staff

Dustin is a senior English and Philosophy double major from Columbus, Mississippi. His interests include gothic literature, political debates, music, bartending, and coffee.

Dustin is usually seen with earbuds in his ears and a pencil in his hand. He is passionate about equality for all, not editing great works of literature, and getting everyone interested in the humanities.



Dustin



Trevor

Trevor Wycoff

*Production Supervisor,
Graphics Designer, Outreach Team*

Trevor is a music major (concentration in guitar) from Dothan, Alabama. He loves all kinds of music, and loves to listen and play guitar, bass, piano, ukulele, etc. He's down for all sorts of self-expression and love, jewelry, nail polish, hair dye, and any other way to set himself apart from the crowd. You can find Trevor in the library making minute adjustments *The Streetcar* for hours on end. He wishes to be a music journalist or, if the stars align, a rockstar.

Zoë Maddox

Production Supervisor, Website Manager, Outreach Team

Zoë is an International Business major, pursuing a Finance degree with a concentration in Risk Management and

Insurance and a degree in German. She wants to become an international insurance investigator. Originally from Huntsville, Alabama, her family recently moved to Florence, Alabama. Her hobbies include reading, writing, long boarding and spending time with her friends, new and old. Her favorite place is Wilson Lake where she water skis and drives boats with her best friend. This is her second year on staff and she is excited to continue contributing to the journal.

Zoë





Brianna

Brianna Laverty
*Social Media Manager,
Outreach Team*

Brianna is a junior double major in Marketing and French and is one of those people who says she's from Atlanta when she really means Marietta. She's currently cultivating a bilingual library with dreams of a sliding ladder. Her passions include photography, rainstorms, and coffee mugs. Her life is inspired by Jay Gatsby, and when her time for a grand soirée comes some New Year's Eve in the future, you'll all be invited.

Bhakti Patel

*Event Coordinator,
Outreach Team*

Bhakti is a senior from Oxford, Mississippi. Her major is Psychology and plans on going to graduate school to become a counselor! She loves listening to different genres of music, traveling, and having art night with her friends. She loves photography and is grateful for the experience on *The Streetcar*. She will miss the fun conversations with other members of the staff and is so glad there is an organization to give students a community and creative outlet.





McKenna Alden

*Event Coordinator,
Outreach Team*

McKenna is a freshman Professional Meteorology major who hopes to double minor in GIS and some foreign language. Her home for the past two years has been Knoxville, Tennessee, but she grew up in Memphis. In her free

McKenna

time, you can catch her either listening to history and true crime podcasts, watching historical tv shows, or reading classic literature. She dreams of becoming an oceanographer and eventually, a marine archaeologist.

Brayden Stokes

Editorial Staff

Brayden is a senior from Vicksburg, Mississippi. He loves writing prose and poetry and listening to podcasts or watching documentaries about politics, true crime, and other real-life stories. He misses his cat Rocky and hopes to bring him along wherever he goes next. Being on The Streetcar staff for several years has been a purely positive experience that he will miss. Brayden plans to join AmeriCorps NCCC after graduating before going to law school.



Brayden



Caitlan

Caitlan Sutton
Editorial Staff

Caitlan is a Biological Sciences (pre-vet) MSU graduate from Clinton, Mississippi. Her goal is to go to veterinary medical school to become a large animal veterinarian with a specialty in either equine surgery or equine sports medicine. Her biggest dreams are to provide veterinary services for top national racehorses one day and to own her very own prestigious equine hospital. Though Caitlan has lived in Mississippi her entire life, she wants to move to a

different state or out of the country once she graduates from veterinary school. She owns an eight-year-old, five-pound Shih-Tzu named Sparkle, who she loves with all her heart, and in her free time, she likes to write poetry, hang with friends, watch comedic YouTube videos, and chill in her hammock.

Allyson

Allyson Espy
Editorial Staff

Allyson is a junior Foreign Language Asian Studies major with a minor in Computer Science. She is enthusiastic about boosting participation in the arts no matter what the field or major. Allyson is from Clarksdale, Mississippi, Home of the Blues. She enjoys baking, writing, and programming.





Toria **Toria Folsom** *Editorial Staff*

Toria is a senior English major from Holly Spring, Mississippi. In her spare time (if she has any), she loves to read or watch anything centered around science fiction and afro-magical realism, and her favorite authors are Toni Morrison, Gwendolyn Brooks, and

Shakespeare. She is VERY enthusiastic about literature, writing, and storytelling in general, so if you ever want to strike up a conversation, hit her up, and she will probably talk with you for hours (be careful). Ever since she was fifteen years old and she read a novel with a lot of potential but inconsistent plot lines and terrible grammar, Toria has wanted to go into publishing.

Her ultimate goal is to become an editor at an independent publisher in order to help future authors write out their stories to their fullest potential.

Sarah Grace Dulaney *Editorial Staff*

Sarah Grace is a junior microbiology pre-med major with a potential sociology minor from Vicksburg, Mississippi. She tends to view science and the arts as two sides of the same coin and adores discovering earth's beauty through the lens of both biology and art. Most of the time you can find Sarah Grace in what she and her roommate have fondly titled their study dungeon (their room, but with empty ice cream cartons and lots and lots of chemistry notes). If she's not studying organic chemistry, she spends her time writing plays and stories, directing children's plays, watching Hulu (Netflix is overrated), ranting about Marvel films, reading depressing 1920s classics, telling gross medical stories, and looking at pictures of her cat.



Sarah Grace



Meghan **Meghan Brino** *Editorial Staff*

Meghan is a second-year veterinary student from Memphis, Tennessee. She loves being outdoors, traveling abroad, and driving friends on cross-country road trips. She's always in search of good conversation—on who we are, how we live, and all things in between. Meghan writes a little, hikes a lot, and eats whenever possible, so if you want in, hit her up.

Ada Fulgham *Editorial Staff*

Ada

Ada is a first-year Architecture student from Starkville, Mississippi. She enjoys cooking and baking, experimenting making music and art in all mediums, and playing with her chickens and cats (who surprisingly get along really well). This year is her first time on the staff of *The Streetcar*.



Isabella Thompson *Editorial Staff*

Isabella is a first-year horticulture major from Madison, Mississippi. She has an intense love for nature, as well as a lifelong adoration of the arts. On a typical day, you could find Isabella drawing, attempting to tidy her living space, talking to trees, and/or listening to ridiculous podcasts. This is her first year as a member of *The Streetcar* staff, and she is beyond thrilled to be able to be a part of an organization that encourages creativity and elevates student voices.



Isabella