Spring 2016

SAGA Vol. 79 / 2015-2016

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors-in-chief would like to thank the Augustana English department and Admissions Office for their contributions to SAGA Art and Literary Magazine. Without their generosity and commitment to their students, SAGA’s publication would not be possible.

We would also like to thank our faculty advisors, Rebecca Wee, Kelly Daniels, and Kelvin Mason, who have consistently offered their support and advice.

Additionally, we would like to thank Mary Jane Letendre, former English office secretary, as well as Linda Anderson, the current secretary of the English, religion, and classics departments. Both of these women were of great help when it came to any of SAGA’s administrative needs, whether it be sending out campus emails, passing along student questions, or supporting us in our creative process. This magazine would not exist were it not for their hard work and kindness.

Also, we would like to thank our award judges, Carolyn Krueger, Heather A. Slomski, Melissa Barrett, and Ann Boaden, who kindly took the time and effort to thoroughly review the art, poetry, and prose selected for this magazine.

We also extend our thanks to Emma Stough, who designed the bold and eye-catching cover of this year’s magazine.

Lastly, we are grateful to Jack Ottinger and the other staff of Allegra Elgin in Elgin, Illinois, for printing this year’s issue of SAGA magazine.

ABOUT SAGA

SAGA is Augustana College’s art and literary magazine, which has been published by students since 1937. While SAGA traditionally published two magazines per academic school year, one in winter and one in spring, it has been published as a single, larger issue since 2014.

The goal of SAGA Magazine and its staff members is to spread and showcase student art and writing around Augustana’s campus, and to increase the prevalence of creative spaces and outlets around the place students call home. Those of any major, interest, or background are encouraged to submit, uninhibited and uncensored.

Submissions are open exclusively to currently enrolled Augustana students. All submissions are sent anonymously to student boards who have selected the pieces published in this issue. This year, we received over 150 total submissions of poetry, art, and prose. We are proud to present this year’s selected pieces.

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LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

Last spring, I got an email with the application for this position. Being unobservant me, I immediately opened the application and started filling it out rather than reading the entire job description first. A few weeks later when I got the email saying I’d been selected, I realized something crucial that I hadn’t noticed before. I’d applied for Editor-in-Chief, not the regular Editor position I’d thought. It was also not a position that I believed I was qualified for or prepared for. Needless to say, my anxiety threw a party.

Now, almost a whole year later, after working with Alyssa (who is amazing, if you haven’t met her) the faculty advisors, and the other SAGA staff, I can’t be more grateful for my unobservant qualities. This year has been testing and there were definitely hoops to jump through (or burn if you listen to my radical side) and I faced some major learning curves. But I can’t say I regret any of it. I’m more excited for this magazine than for the next Jim Butcher book to come out and I can’t believe that I was here to play such a huge part in making this year’s magazine a success (and it will be a success).

Alyssa and I did struggle, but with the help of our Editors (thank you all for your help and superior technology skills) and the amazing English department who came to our aid when we needed them, we have pushed past all the difficulties and built this beautiful thing. I’ve made some great friends and I have seen and worked with some incredible art and artists. SAGA is a world of opportunities and I was lucky enough to be chosen to participate. It makes me happy that I didn’t read the whole email, just in case I’d chickened out.

So, to finish up, thank you SAGA peeps, thank you faculty advisors for choosing me, thank you for all of you who said “Keep going” or “You can do it,” you’ve helped me more than you can know. Ruth Jessee, you’re an fabulous friend for dealing with me and my publisher-speak this year, you’re awesome. This year has been trying but invigorating. I can’t wait to share the masterpiece that Alyssa and I have created with you all. I hope you enjoy it and try to get some SAGA in your life!

Elena Leith
Editor-in-Chief

This was the year I caught the hiccups. I’d like to thank my co-editor Elena for helping me find new routes to accomplish the huge task of constructing this magazine, also for keeping me grounded when I made mental to-do lists that sounded more like a beehive than a plan. Elena and I, we really pulled a Robert Frost here (this particular phrasing goes out to my brother, who likes to tease me for being an English major by reciting “The Road Not Taken” at me whenever I come home on breaks) but like any unknown, it was as much fun as it was frightening. I’d also like to thank Emma Smith and Cam Best for not only being my staff members, but friends I can rely upon, shoulders I can catch in the dark when I feel I am stumbling around. Sara Baugh, you’re the Jayjay Falcon to my Sparrowson. Thanks to Padriac Price for driving up to see me so we could have seven hour long conversations in Cool Beans. Thank you to Rebecca Wee for guiding me as an editor-in-chief as well as reminding me to stop and notice everything breathing, including myself, every now and again.

The group I worked with to create this issue of SAGA is a good place to look if you’re looking for passionate individuals who make the deliberate choice to be authentic and hard working human beings. I could state the obvious and say that SAGA aims to spread art and writing around our campus, which it does, but it also does the unexpected in an inexplicable way that I’ll try and explain anyway. SAGA and the SAGA staff also spread hope and comfort, good conversation, break-and-bake cookies. Poetry isn’t dead, art isn’t dead, and there’s a reason. All of the work you will find in this magazine is embedded in experience, created as a result of radical acts of vulnerability. Art and writing and creative expression is too human to ever be gone for good. As long as there are people willing to be their authentic selves, there will be art and writing. Which is why I’m so excited to share the work of my peers with you. If any one of these pieces speaks to you, comforts you, disturbs you, angers you, makes you grimace or laugh or experience a flash of thought or emotion you haven’t had before—then know this magazine is doing its job.

Congratulations and my utmost thanks to all of our hardworking SAGA staff, contributors, faculty advisors, ancestors, and readers. I’m honored to have bumped into all of you in someway, somehow on this earth. I may have caught the hiccups this year, but that’s an excuse to eat peanut butter (peanut butter cures hiccups, try it). And as anyone who knows me knows, I go through the same amount of peanut butter jars per year as the average four-person family. However, I was never alone, or without family to share it with, thanks to SAGA and thanks to those who continue to create art that comforts and inspires me. May this magazine do the same for you.

Alyssa Froehling
Editor-in-Chief

Alyssa and I did struggle, but with the help of our Editors (thank you all for your help and superior technology skills) and the amazing English department who came to our aid when we needed them, we have pushed past all the difficulties and built this beautiful thing. I’ve made some great friends and I have seen and worked with some incredible art and artists. SAGA is a world of opportunities and I was lucky enough to be chosen to participate. It makes me happy that I didn’t read the whole email, just in case I’d chickened out.

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Elena Leith
Editor-in-Chief
TABLE OF CONTENTS

POETRY
“Sex Drive”/Emma Smith 9
honeybee (b.a.c.)/Alyssa Froehling 19
slow dance on the hot coals/Anna Serafini 20
Have Our Tears Haul Our Coffins/Trevor Jablonski 28
gravel kingdom cul-de-sac/Jackson Phillips 29
A New Kind of Fairytale/Sage Shemroske 31
“Toasted Prawny Healing Complex”/Emma Smith 32
a murder of crows/Alyssa Froehling 40
Desperate Housewife/Katie McClellan 41
Mirror Thoughts/Melissa Conway 43
mathematical proof refuting the existence of change/
Anna Serafini 49
“Silence is a violent song on loop.”/Emma Smith 50
Hemlock/Alyssa Dutil 51
Heading East/Emma Brutman 53
Late Warnings of the Wildwood/Trevor Jablonski 56
Sestina: For Daniel/Anna Serafini 57
Purple/Evan Henkel 60
tornado/Anna Serafini 61
Maps/Melissa Conway 64
this morning/Alyssa Froehling 66
Mona Lisa/Alyssa Dutil 73
“Warning: Blurs Ease Blindness”/Emma Smith 74
bloody mary doesn’t show up when he calls her name
three times/Alyssa Froehling 75
t all of the sundays/Alyssa Froehling 77
Rachel/Sage Shemroske 79

PROSE
Running Through Life/Jamie Hochmuth 11
A Case of Mistimed Expiration/Emma Stough 22
It Came from the Sewers!/Elena Leith 34
Sleeping Pills/Jamie Hochmuth 44
What Jackson Would Have Wanted/Anonymous Prime 69

VISUAL ART
Solstice in Elysium Fields/Cam Best 8
Highway/Emma Stough 10
Self-Portrait #2/Jacob Soukup 18
Guilty Pleasures/Migdalia Perez 21
Pink Laughs/Alyssa Froehling 30
The Blood I Lost with You, It Drowns the Love I
Thought I Knew/Kelsey Sykora 33
The Pillowman/Cam Best 39
Observation/Trang “Tracy” Ngo 42
Pipeline to Atlantis/Cam Best 48
Dome Framed by Flowers and Leaves/Leah Shelton 52
The Sky’s the Limit/Jacob Soukup 54
Surfer/Jacob Soukup 55
Galaxy/Alyssa Froehling 59
Gambler’s Heart/Monica Gil 63
The Other Woman/Migdalia Perez 67
Crying Comic Book Woman #2/Renee Millette 68
Model #2/Jacob Soukup 72
Fall Leaves Around Dome/Leah Shelton 78
Save the Sparkle/Emma Stough 80
A full tail glowing
popsicle boy stretched out
and wrote me an arbitrary melody
called Handbells Forever.
I guess I never really took him seriously
until it made no. 7 track on “lifeline records”.
Impressive.
That vaginal pulse rendered my engine useless.
Like cattle wax or some other stoic concoction.
But I guess the crow broke my shadow box
and took the fur with it…
But that’s aftermath for you:
more numbers to crunch.
It’s not simple.
Red candles with a twist.
George, 16, was strolling down the main street of Hays, Kansas – the little town where he had lived all his life – on the way to the store. The area had survived the first World War, the Depression, and now, having been announced in the newspapers this morning, September 2nd, 1945, it had survived the second World War, nearly unchanged besides the colorful posters hanging in the windows promoting joining the Army, or rationing what you eat to help the troops. He was daydreaming about what meal his mother would make now that the restrictions were lifted: pies, meat and potatoes, butter, cheese, chocolate. The bell above the door to the local grocers chimed as Ruth, 15, ran out of the store in front of him. He jumped back to avoid a collision and turned to watch the girl jog down the street, her cotton dress flowing around her knees and her long blonde braid hitting her in the back. He couldn't keep his eyes off of her and had to wait for her to turn the corner before he could enter the store.

He knew they went to school together, but though the school was rather small, they had never talked. She was elusive and always on the run, never stopping longer than necessary. Maybe that's what attracted him to her, the fact that she seemed to understand the movement of the world better than he did, but whatever it was, he couldn't get her out of his head. His older brothers often teased him about it, saying that she would never take a second look at him because he wasn't interesting enough to glance at twice, especially when she was moving at her speed. After grabbing the items he needed, George exited the store and it was on his way home that Ruth suddenly turned the corner in front of him. He watched as the toe of her shoe caught on a loose flagstone and she fell forward, arms outstretched.

He instinctively dropped the bag he was carrying and reached out toward her, somehow grabbing her before she could hit the pavement. Helping her to her feet, their eyes met and they truly saw each other for the first time, and George didn't care that his mother was going to be upset about the now broken eggs, because Ruth was looking right at him and not looking away.

Ruth, 18, cringed as she heard crashing down the hall. Her father had had a hard day at work again, trying to keep his business afloat as times changed. She was sure the breaking glass had been another bottle, most likely empty, the contents already in his stomach. She turned back to the bowl of green beans on the table and continued snapping, trying to ignore the shouting that leaked into the kitchen. Eventually, her mother walked in and went directly to the stove to stir the boiling potatoes, her back stiff. When Ruth cleared her throat slightly, trying to dissipate the tension in the room, her mother turned around.
“Ruthie, dear,” she said. “Why don’t you run down the street and pick up a little more bread. We’re almost out.”

Ruth nodded, trying to ignore both the redness of her mother’s eyes and the full loaf of bread she could see on the counter. But she was happy for the excuse to get up and walk out of the house where heavy snoring had begun in the back room.

As she stepped outside, Ruth took a deep breath of clean air and set herself to begin jogging down the street, as far away from the house as she possibly could as fast as she possibly could. Turning to look the other way, something moving caught her eye – George, 19, walking in her direction, whistling. She stopped suddenly. She hadn’t remembered that he said he wanted to meet her family today, to ask to begin formally courting her. He smiled at her from down the street and picked up his pace to meet her on her front stoop. His gaze turned from one of happiness to one of concern when he saw her face but as he opened his mouth to speak she shook her head. Instead, she grabbed his hand and began to lead him jogging down the street, taking the two of them away from her problems.

Ruth, 20, stood in front of the mirror, not sure whether or not the reflection was actually her. It was too pretty, too perfect, a china doll in white lace with a sheer veil over her face to distance her even further. She could hear the bustle of people down the hall as they made their way into the chapel. The smell of fragrant flowers was overwhelming and Ruth suddenly needed to be outside, breathe fresh air. She turned and rushed out of the little room she had used to dress and ducked out the back door of the church onto the lawn, picking up her dress to allow her to run to the edge of the woods behind the church and to a tree that she crumpled underneath, resting her hands on the ground to help her catch her breath. She knew George loved her, desperately wanted to care for her, but she wasn’t sure whether or not she was ready to be tied down to him. He had already been accepted to a steady business job, his family was nice and got along with her parents, they had similar religious and political beliefs, but she couldn’t help herself to begin jogging down the street, as far away from the house as she could possibly.

Eventually, soft footsteps came up behind her and George knelt down in front of her, lifting her veil from in front of her face. The reflection was actually her. It was too pretty, too perfect, a china doll in white gown dragging just slightly on the floor, Ruth’s eyes began to well up a tear. He could tell that she had been crying and when he softly placed a hand on her shoulder he softly lifted her chin to allow him to wipe away the tears from her cheeks. Behind her eyes he could see frustration and sadness.

George chuckled softly lifting her chin to allow him to wipe away the tears from her cheeks. Behind her eyes he could see frustration and sadness and anger at herself. He kissed her forehead before pressing it to his own.

“We… we don’t have to do this if you don’t want to,” he said softly. “I understand you’re scared, and that this all seems to be a lot, but I love you and I want to be with you and I want to explore the world and the rest of our lives with you.”

She turned her head up to look at him, and his eye contact sent a shock wave through her, they were so filled with love and concern. She took a deep breath and grabbed his hand.


George, 39, walked in the front door of his home after being dropped off by a colleague. The business he worked for was trying to keep up with the rate Hays was growing and it had been a long day with endless piles of paper, more meetings than he could keep track of, and a few missed phone calls his secretary decided to inform him of at the very last minute. He was exhausted, but the mess inside brought him back to the present moment. Toys were strewn everywhere. His youngest, little Michael, was sitting on the floor, eyes glued to the little TV in the corner with the volume up too loud, hands covered in what George could only imagine was chocolate though where he had gotten it George didn’t know. He found out in the kitchen where his middle child, rambunctious Tommy, was elbows deep in some sort of mixture, probably for chocolate cake though it seemed none had been made with all of the mess on the counter and the floor. The boy looked up from the bowl guiltily before starting to lick the brown goo off his hands as he walked out of the room. George’s oldest and only female child, beautiful Linda, was leaning against a wall at the back of the kitchen talking on the phone loudly with the curly cord wrapped around her fingers and a large smile on her face, oblivious to what was happening around her.

George realized that his wife was nowhere in the house and began to search for her, finally finding her in the garage, sitting in the driver’s seat of the car, her head leaning on the steering wheel. He walked over to the passenger side and knocked on the window to get her attention. When she didn’t even lift her head to acknowledge his presence, he simply climbed in. He could tell that she had been crying and when he softly placed a hand on her back she turned her face into his shoulder and continued sobbing.

“I just couldn’t take it anymore,” she choked. “They just wouldn’t listen to me, and I couldn’t get the house clean, and I couldn’t make dinner because they were causing such a racket. I had to get out of there. I wanted to leave, to drive away, but I couldn’t do that either because I couldn’t find the keys.”

George chuckled softly lifting her chin to allow him to wipe away the tears from her cheeks. Behind her eyes he could see frustration and sadness and anger at herself. He kissed her forehead before pressing it to his own.

“We are going to make it, alright?” he asked. “We can do this together.”

She nodded slowly before leaning away from him and getting out of the car. He picked up a few rags from a box as he followed her back into the house and the chocolate chaos of their lives.

Ruth, 46, stood with the rest of the congregation to turn and look down the back aisle of the church where George, 47, was linked arm in arm with their daughter. As the two began their slow walk forward, Linda’s slim, long, white gown dragging just slightly on the floor, Ruth’s eyes began to well up a little. She would never understand how quickly her little girl had grown up, or how quickly she herself had grown up from a young woman in the same position, her father on her arm. As George passed their daughter on to the man that would love her forever, he slipped into the pew next to Ruth and...
laced his fingers through hers.

The reception was beautiful with all the people piled into the wood paneled ballroom. As the bride and groom cut the cake and everyone cheered, Ruth stood in the back, unsure whether or not she could stay. It was all becoming too much for her, the happiness and sadness with the fact that her daughter was now married, and the firm realization that she was no longer a child, that time was passing too quickly. She wanted to duck out of the back door and get away, maybe home, maybe somewhere else, but away so she could deal with it better. She didn't notice George walk up behind her until his arms were wrapped around her waist, pulling her into him, and though she should have felt trapped, she just felt warm. His presence calmed her and reminded her that Linda wanted her here, and that George wanted her here, so she sat in his arms and let the night run away without her.

Ruth, 57, rushed into the hospital and up to the receptionist's desk. “I got a call that my husband was here,” she said, gasping for breath. “George Bundle?”

The nurse looked at her clipboard. “Yes, he’s here,” she said finally. “I’ll let the doctor know you’ve arrived. Just take a seat over there.” She pointed at a line of chairs against a wall.

Ruth walked over, but couldn’t sit so she paced. She wanted to run, but whether in or out of the hospital she didn’t know. She just had to move, to get away, so she paced.

After what seemed like a lifetime, and Ruth was sure she had worn a trench into the floor, a nurse came and called her name. She forced herself to walk to the nurse in a semi-normal fashion, as she was sure running would be considered a safety hazard.

The nurse led her down stretches of hallways until she pulled back the curtain in one room. There was George, 58, sitting up in a hospital bed eating a cup of Jell-O. Ruth could have turned around and left then and there he looked so content.

“What are you doing?” she asked incredulously.

“Eating Jell-O,” he replied, pointing at it with his spoon, his mouth still full.

“You’ve had a heart attack!” she shouted at him.

“A minor one,” he said calmly. “And that doesn’t inhibit my ability to eat Jell-O. I’m fine, I promise.”

Ruth began to pace in front of the bed. “What happened?” she asked when she had enough breath to make words.

“The doctors said that this can happen sometimes with men at my age who have wives that cook as well as you,” George chuckled. “I’m here. It’s all going to be fine.”

Ruth finally sat down at the edge of the bed. “Well that means that you get no more chocolate cake and you get to start taking walks with me,” she said, not looking at him.

“I’ll go wherever you lead me,” he said, and he meant it.

George, 67, sat on the couch watching Ruth, 66, pace back and forth in front of him. She had been doing this for almost a half hour, rambling on about wanting to leave, to travel, to go somewhere new. He had learned over time to allow her to work out her energy in these moments, and he knew she had no idea what was hiding in his pocket.

“You’re retired now!” she said for the fifteenth time. “We have the funds to travel, so why don’t we? We could just get away for a little while. I just can’t be here anymore.”

“I don’t know,” he said. “The kids want us around more now that we’re free, and with another grandbaby on the way, maybe it isn’t the best time.”

He knew it was mean but he smiled a little as her pacing quickened and she refused to look at his face, concentrating more firmly on the floor in front of her.

She suddenly stopped. “You’re right,” she said, still not looking up. She began to walk out of the room and he wasn’t sure if she knew where she was actually headed.

He stood up. “Ruth?” he asked, making her stand still. “Could you take a look at these please? I could use your opinion.”

She turned around to find him standing there with two plane tickets in his hand. The look of pure joy and delight she gave him filled him completely, and reminded him just how much he loved her adventuresome spirit.

George, 70, and Ruth, 69, sat in their family room at 11:58pm, watching the scene of New Year's Eve in New York City on their television, champagne glasses in hand. They watched the large glowing ball slowly fall closer and closer to the base of the tower, the people on the street getting louder and louder in the speakers. They had both taken naps earlier that day in order to stay up for this very important event, the beginning of a new millennium.

They both thought back on the past few years. As often as possible, the two had picked up and gone on adventures, often of Ruth’s choosing. She would decide on a beautiful foreign location – Paris, Rome, Greece, or a destination for a road trip – Florida, Colorado, Montana, or simply a weekend visit to one of their children and their families. George always followed, absolutely content to allow Ruth to make the decisions. She still had more spirit than him when it came to existing in the world, and that still attracted him to her is ways he almost didn’t understand. Her energy, her drive, the way that her eyes told him everything, were all incredibly amazing traits about the woman he was still desperately in love with.

As the clock hit midnight, and the ball finished its course, the crowd on the television erupted into cheers. Ruth turned toward George, tipped her glass to his and lightly kissed him, before shifting herself closer to him, allowing his arm to stretch around behind her as she leaned against his chest, turning forward to watch the mass of people and sip her champagne.

He smiled, knowing the new millennium would be one full of joy.
Ruth, 84, and George, 85 had found their usual rhythm. The kitchen was full of steam and smells, pots clattered, food sizzled, and there was the occasional hum of contentment when something was tasted and found satisfactory. The two of them spun around the room together, never touching, never even rubbing elbows, but perfectly in sync. As she slowly moved to the stove, he found his way to the dishwasher. As he reached into a cupboard, she was examining the refrigerator. They did not need to talk as they moved – they had done this frequently enough. Eventually, by the slightest of head nods, they agreed the meal was prepared, and they moved to the little set table in the nook nearby.

He pulled the chair out for her, giving her his arm to assist her in sitting before moving to his own chair. She served. They sat in quiet eating for a small while, and he jumped a little every time she coughed. His attention was not on his food as he studied her. Her hands were softer now than they had been all those years before, she was slightly shorter, but then again so was he, she was more reserved, more wise, more beautiful, and her eyes told the entirety of her soul when she glanced up at him. He was not ready to lose her.

The doctors, reading off of their shiny iPads that seemed to hold the answers to everything, had recently told him that her body was beginning to deteriorate. Old age, they said, though he believed they could not decide what "old" was until they had experienced it for themselves. But he knew they were right. Her soft hands shook almost constantly, her short back was hunched and it caused her pain, some of her reservation came from the fact that she had difficulty forming words, but her soul remained unchanged, and that was all that mattered.

He remembered the first day that he saw her, so many years ago, when they had almost run into each other on the sidewalk of the main street of the town. She had been running, he did not remember where to, but she streaked by him suddenly, distracting him from whatever thoughts had taken him into the clouds, and making him turn to watch her continue down the street, her long braid whipping across her back. From then on, he kept looking out for the mystery girl that always had a place to go it seemed, whether she was late for church, or needed at home, or out for the occasional errand. He smiled to himself when he recalled the day that she tripped on an uneven flagstone in front of him and he caught her, making sure she did not land face-first on the pavement. She had stared at him with those beautiful eyes then and he knew he never wanted to let her go. Now it seemed as though he would have to, and he jumped slightly as her soup went splashing back into her bowl from her spoon.

She sat frustrated with her hands that would not allow her food to remain on a utensil all the way to her mouth. It was as if her body would no longer listen to her, perform the actions she required of it, or even acknowledge her presence as the controlling force of her limbs. She knew he was staring at her, evaluating her, making sure she was all right, but she also knew that he was aware of the fact that she wanted as little help as possible. So, in order to not make him worry, she took her time with each spoonful and each swallow, making it seem as though she was simply savoring the soup they had made.

She wanted to tell him, to let him know that she cared for him deeply, that she never regretted the decision she had made under that tree in the back lot of the church. She wanted to make sure that he knew how much he had done for her, to help her, to make her feel loved, but she knew words could not express it. She frowned slightly thinking of the numerous times in their relationship that she had wanted to give up and run away because some aspect of it was too hard for her to deal with, but he had kept her rooted every time while still making sure she was independent and free. She knew that he never would have truly begrudged her if she had left though it would have pained him greatly, and in a way, now she was leaving him at the exact time she didn't want to, and while she did not have the ability to form this all into words, she reached across the table to cover his wrinkled hand with hers as a way of saying, "I'm here. I love you. It's all going to be fine."
one morning you wake up and tell me you want to live on the carousel. you leave our bed for the beer soaked carnival ground and i watch you revolve around impaled horses until you fade into the sound of slurled laughter, into the smell of sugar so refined it makes my skin feel grated, my blood anchored body unwelcome in your new sweet frenzy. i realize i am alone. pair after pair of glassy eyes meet mine, shuddering dropped opals disappearing into deep water. the horses cannot speak but their mouths are wide, screaming lines of ivy over the strangled hiss of the fairy lights going out one by one. i wait for you but you never get off the ride. you never stop laughing and drinking and circling and eyeing fried cakes and frantic bulbs of red and yellow light even when the organ grows old and dips into minor key. rum and molasses build amber confines. the sun melts sticky into the evening, simple as salt and caramel on your tongue. there seems nothing left to do but cry and wait to crystallize. i do not call for you. i shut my eyes. i open them and then i spread out like an eternity. i wipe the carnival away with chalky hands, until it is only boiled alcohol ascending to scar the sky with a dawn blister. hard neon gives way to young tulips. i wear honeybees around my head. i wear honeybees around my waist. they hum so i can fall asleep without you. they hum softly so i know you cannot hurt me here.
slow dance on the hot coals

we are a pyre in the places where
the sound hums in the veins
of mortar between the bricks,
the quake making our bodies
into swollen prayers.

another one of my nails fractures
against your back, firm
and unyielding, arced forward
like a tree sagging
under the weight of snow on its branches.

do you know the feeling
of building a church
in every concrete cave,
of pressing against the low ceilings
like a drowning woman grasping
for the air, forcing
the threshold upwards
with her desperate lips?

you hold
the neck of your guitar
like a lover’s.

this sermon
is salty on my tongue,
blooming in the room
like an explosion of knives.

we hoist grace
by her armpits from the floor,
dust off the beer
and rubble from her dress,
hold breath ragged
in our throats as we wait
for her blessed howl.
A Case of Mistimed Expiration

The birth was very normal. Anyone would have said so if asked. The baby’s cries were ear-splitting and pure, very healthy, very alive. The husband was quiet when he first held the baby in his arms. “Lovely,” was his final reaction, as he grasped his wife’s hand. She was exhausted and barely heard him. Round the baby’s ankle was the tag, tied loosely as not to cut off circulation. April 18th, 2026.

People seeing the woman running by suspected that they knew why she was running. Even knowing this, they were puzzled by her. It was normal for the very young, those with unlucky dates, to run. But an adult woman? While it was difficult to determine her exact age as she passed by in a blur, many suspected she couldn’t have been younger than 30. A grown woman, running? It was unspeakable. “I hope she knows,” observed an elderly man with a frosty white beard, “that she can’t escape it.”

It wasn’t anywhere near her date, so Rebecca’s illness made people very focused on things other than her. Her mother suddenly had taken up yoga, her father a obsession with model trains. Even her husband and child panicked, flying across the country to find a more pleasant climate. Rebecca lay sick in her bed. She felt like her esophagus would implode any moment. January 2nd, 2038. It was only December.

The weight of the war was felt on everyone’s shoulders, and it was considered a mutual burden. The cost of being on the losing side was extremely – even oddly – accepted by all, justified completely. Atrocity Reaps Atrocity, that was pinned to a lot of bulletin boards and kiosks throughout the bigger cities. A phrase the people took to heart. They sang it sometimes during services.

Felix grew up in a normal kind of way. His parents weren’t necessarily proud, but they always wished him well. His room had a favorable view onto the gardens below, and he liked to view it with a cup of tea and a mind fixed upon things he didn’t have and never would get. The unfortunate circumstance of his parent’s identical dates left him to often wonder what he would do afterwards. He often thought of it until his tea went cold.

It was said in the East that many people liked to be alone on their dates. This practice shocked many Northerners, since many Northern provinces had laws requiring a person to spend their date in Homes. Easterners displaced into the North were likewise appalled by the idea of being surrounded by other people on the date. Westerners were completely unconcerned with either method.

One leaves pieces of oneself behind wherever one goes. There was a story often told of Sam, a boy whose date was right before his mother’s. He spent his days laying in bed beside her, staring out the floor-length window in his parent’s room. There was a sparrow nesting in a tree just outside the window, and Sam felt like he knew the bird. His mother’s breathing was shallow, as if her lungs couldn’t contain the air much longer. One day Sam shattered the window and the sparrow flew inside. His mother didn’t notice until the bird had perched itself atop her chest. “Hello there,” she cooed. Sam expired that same day, but the bird stayed. “I miss him,” the mother whispered softly to the sparrow. The sparrow cooed in response, as if to say, “I miss him, too”.

The woman was still running. She didn’t get tired; she’d trained for the journey. There were twenty-seven miles between her and her destination. The world passed by in lively color, but she didn’t take the time to look. There was a silvery sheen coating her eyes, as if her awakened senses cast an ethereal glow upon all that lay before her. A little girl on the side of the road watched the woman run by with glittering curiosity. She hoped someday she could run just as fast.

At the main Home in town, the woman in charge of getting rid of bodies had fragile wrists. Her doctor had recommended her against that particular line of work for that precise reason. “Your wrists,” he had told her, sternly, matter-of-factly, “are much too fragile for such work. You’d do well as
a seamstress, I think. Perhaps you'd consider that career instead.”

The woman didn't seem to care much about what her doctor thought. She didn't enjoy the job, necessarily, but it distracted her from her date. Any distraction was welcome. Most people would have understood that. Distraction was always welcome.

Atrocity Reaps Atrocity, but Atrocity Also Reaps Anger. With anger comes resistance. Naturally, along with those who cooperated fully with the new laws, there were also those who believed themselves above it. Only the very rich could afford to think this way, as might be suspected. There were certain underground networks in place, very secret, extremely well-monitored by those who ran them. Beneath the new laws, time was currency. The purchase of more time cost unimaginable things: death, disease, sorrow.

For others.

It was a nasty business, this expensive resistance. The richest family in town, the Caldwell family, was single-handedly responsible for a mysterious massacre that had occurred at the local supermarket on a Sunday morning. All four Caldwell children inexplicably acquired more reasonable dates following the incident. For some reason, this rose no suspicion.

City Hall was always flooded with Inquiries About Dates, and the pamphlet titled “I'm Expiring. So What?” was already in its 21st publication cycle. Questions mostly came from those who had been cryogenically frozen before the war. In an effort to sustain a sizable population, cryopreservation had become a common practice during wartime. Of course, when such citizens were awoken post-war, they were not only confused about the new laws, but were often left without families. At the communal fault of the government – local and national alike – the people, and the new laws, the thawed citizens never seemed to acclimate very well to the new atmosphere of mutual responsibility and consequence. The walls of City Hall reverberated daily with declarations of anger and confusion. “THIS WASN'T MY CHOICE,” a woman screamed as she was dragged from the premises. “I DIDN'T ASK FOR THIS.” Inside, more calmly frustrated citizens browsed all 92 pages of “I'm Expiring. So What?”.

Three miles left. The woman's breathing was steady, as if she weren't in motion at all. Her mind felt like a balloon, expanding and depressing methodically with every footfall, a big red balloon, she imagined, like the kind she'd had at her tenth birthday party. She was in a forest now, surrounded by big sturdy trees that had been there for longer than any human, she was sure of it. Three miles from her was a cave, a dank, dark cave, and inside was what she'd been avoiding all her life. What everyone around her had been avoiding, desperately, despite the knowing that their efforts to avoid would be wasted. From birth, their fates were sealed. The woman knew, everyone knew. The sky was darkening; there were flickers of nighttime atop the clouds. She hoped the evening would be starry.

Rebecca's death was widely speculated. A death before a date? Unheard of. The town shuffled around nervously, unsure of what this meant. The town didn't know that the same thing had begun to happen in other towns. Rebecca's husband and child returned from vacation, confused and devastated. Her mother threw away her yoga mat and her father gave up model trains. Their hearts became heavy. The inevitability of a date rarely made anyone sad, but this unexpected mistake came as quite a shock.

After his parent's date, Felix moved out of the house and into a smaller apartment. There were no garden views in the new apartment, but Felix found that as an orphan, he didn't like gardens quite as much anyways. Or tea for that matter.

The cave seemed much smaller than she'd remembered when the woman finally found it. It couldn't have been more than six feet wide, or eight feet tall. Stepping into it, she did feel it was both dark and dank, as it had been before. Groping blindly against a wall, she found what she'd left there many years ago: a flashlight. She switched it on, and the wide beam of light lead her further into the cave. The air was cold, but the woman's purpose warmed her as if she was enveloped in a cloud of heat. It was many minutes before she reached her destination. The flashlight landed on a solid lump in the ground, rectangular and massive. Her breath caught in her throat, but the woman moved slowly towards the structure, her pulse suddenly electrified. It had been so many years.

The narrow light of the flashlight swept the lump, landing finally on a plaque of bronze, engraved meticulously. HERE LIES HENRY, A SOLDIER. HAVING DIED FOR A CAUSE DEAR TO HIS HEART, MAY HE REST IN PEACE FOREVER MORE. “Henry,” passed through the woman's lips, a low and despaired sound. “I've come to end this all.”
There was a fluttering in the air, a tremor of something amiss. Everyone felt it: Felix in his apartment, Rebecca in her grave, the worker with the fragile wrists in the Home, and the old man with the frothy white beard on the side of the road. Many checked their dates, just to make sure they’d had it correct all along. “Yes, September 4th, 2042, that’s what I thought,” one woman said to herself. “What’s the meaning of this buzzing in my chest? Have I caught the flu?”

Far away from the town, far away from the cave and far away from anywhere remotely civilized, there was a tiny house atop a hill. The house appeared quite normal from the outside, with a pleasant enough paint job and a chimney that coughed out smoke. But inside, the house was quite unusual. It seemed that every inch of the interior was positively plastered from floor to ceiling with...stuff. Impossibly extensive records, mile-long receipts, file-folders stuffed beyond capacity, pens both full and empty of ink, oceans of papers and record-books, mountains of thickly-bound books – there wasn’t a square-inch of emptiness in the place. Where one might suspect to find armchairs and couches one only saw a singular mahogany desk, and a singularly uncomfortable looking desk chair.

Upon this chair sat the stodgiest man one might ever imagine to see, with wrinkles so frequently appearing upon his chubby pink face that he appeared no less than 200 years of age. Atop his head was a pitiful nest of scratchy white hairs, and upon his nose perched horn-rimmed glasses that could have possibly been purchased in the early 19th century. This great old lump of a man, stuffed like a sausage into an incredibly outdated three-piece suit, was furiously scribbling away upon a thick stack of paper, stopping only to occasionally check a gold-plated pocket watch.

The scene was an odd one, a very odd one, until one noticed the sign outside the home that was very easy to miss if not carefully sought out. “HAMILTON DOONE, CLERK OF EXPIRATION” was spelled out in thick black letters, and below that, in smaller and less noisy script, was written: “As Determined By the Council of Post-War Consequence, Sir Doone is Hereby Exempted from Expiration, Until Further Action is Required”. The date read August 29th, 1812.

The truth of the matter was that Hamilton Doone was, indeed, two-hundred and fourteen years old. And for that long he had lived in the house atop the hill, monitoring expiration with not so much as a flaw in the system.

The woman knew nothing of Hamilton Doone, but she knew that the new laws forbade only two things: the changing of a date, and the termination of a life before its randomly predetermined expiration.

The woman sought to defy this second rule. She sat herself down next to her husband’s grave with nothing but a flashlight and a will to die. Her date wasn’t for three more years. She was thirty-four. She’d never had children. She turned the flashlight off and took out a knife.

Hamilton Doone answered the door quite agitatedly. “What is it you want, McDougal? I’m quite busy at the moment, there’s been an absolute outpouring of children in the Western sector. It’s madness, just madness, does anyone really expect there to be−”

“Sir, I’m very sorry to interrupt you, Sir,” the mousy boy interrupted his boss rather timidly. “It’s just that I’ve received some news, and it’s very grave, Sir, I’m afraid, very grave,” the boy gripped nervously at his woolen hat. “It’s just that, well, I’m afraid there’s been a suicide, Sir.”

Hamilton Doone’s face drained of color. He reached out and violently seized the boy by his shoulders. “Are you, sure, boy? Are you telling me the truth?”

“Quite sure, I’m afraid, Sir,” the boy choked out.

Hamilton released the boy. His ancient face resembled the white of an eggshell. “Good God,” he spluttered, suddenly gripping one flabby hand to his chest and staggering unevenly against the door frame.

“Sir!” cried the boy, reaching desperately to help the old man.

“Good God,” Hamilton repeated, his breaths dragged exasperatedly from his chest. “It’s over.”

The boy was left to watch helplessly as Hamilton Doone expired before his very eyes.

A baby born that very moment, miles away, had very healthy and vivid cries. His mother and father gazed at him adoringly, marveling at his tiny face. “Just beautiful,” the father confirmed, and the mother nodded in agreement. The nurse attending to the birth tilted her head in confusion.

“How very odd,” she murmured. “What’s the matter?” the mother asked, concerned at the nurse’s blank look. The nurse gently grasped the baby’s foot.

“Why, there’s no tag!”

The mother looked down at her baby’s tag-less ankles. “How very odd, indeed.”
Have Our Tears Haul Our Coffins

Tucking moments bite into morsels
and the loud lip-smacks echo in the
Planet’s room. We plunge our digits
deep to our eardrums,
the beat is our wound. We hear
the children marching to death but
we don’t pause to take action on the
crime. We can feed them but do nothing
to keep their final tears from
running down their mouths.
Some of us still wait
for our tender skin to crack into
leather. Trying to stitch themselves
back together with love’s whispers,
never looking the other way to decide
these were wastes of breath.

gravel kingdom cul-de-sac

Children ruling the neighborhood--
No, the world.
Alone in a sea of adults.
(Lost memories doused in shades of blue.)

Enemies defeated
With sheer imagination.
Viking hats like trophies
Perched on little heads.

Fight back the bad guys,
Triumph over all.
Imagination leads the way,
Stumbling over tiny feet.

Pause for nothing.
(Except food.
And family.
And bedtime.)

The deck is home.
The deck is comfort.
The deck is free.
The deck is infinite.

Enjoy the rain,
Adore the snow.
Lose the baseball,
Then find a sword.

Ignore the bugs,
The dog leash lying about,
The wet grass,
The broken fence.

Protected from evil
In the safety of the yard.
(Because grown-ups have
Nothing to do with it.)

Gravel-kingdom-cul-de-sac,
Top of the world.
Immovable.
(Car coming, run, run, run!)
A New Kind of Fairytale

We stumble through the gingerbread forest holding hands and leaving behind bloody footprints so we can find our way back.

We offer ourselves up to the big bad wolf.

But wolves don’t eat kids with porcelain ribs and paper faces and lamplight eyes, so we sacrifice ourselves.

We kiss monsters and dance with witches over boiling cauldrons, waiting for the steam to burn our feet like a volcano waiting to explode,

and turn the page of our story.

We slit our feet on broken glass slippers and cut off our hair.

Yet we still believe in princesses,

and far away kingdoms,

and happy ever after,

and you.

The hidden creatures with talons and buzzing wings live inside us and scratch at our skin.

The monsters are real.

We trade buried treasure for potions that burn our throats and fill our lungs with smoke and send us stumbling into a forest full of vines.

And when our skin begins to bubble and peel, we wish for fairies to dress us in ball gowns woven from barbed wire and broken glass.

And we lure other kids off the path, away from their soggy bread crumbs.

And we show them the cottage made from candy and invite them in, to warm their bleeding hands.
The potent pestilence of silly putty carousels--
that's what you feel like.

_The mockery_,
stretched thin with imprints
of a casing you spent years trying to construct.

I only wanted to grow up a little,
but now it's a race backwards and we
_rage on_...
crawling back to our eggshells
and hiding within their dark insides.

But we're all each of us a
_blue print of fear._
So scan me in, Orsen.
We're all a little alien in this
make-believe, nothing world.

“The Toasted Prawny Healing Complex”
It Came from the Sewers!

Bleak darkness swallowed the meager glare of the flashlight as Winston trudged through the slime. Layers of mire and dirt coated everything in a thick shell, from the curved walls around them to the stagnant water at their feet. The old sewer manager was sure that there was little if anything remaining of the original stone walls that had been constructed down here.

“There could at least be some damn lights.” Peter grumbled behind him. Winston sighed, but otherwise ignored his grumpy companion. Peter was only two years old to this job and most of their coworkers found the bear of a man annoying as hell. No one said so, of course. Peter’s temper was as fiery as the burnt orange hair on his head and he wasn’t called a bear just for being big; he had the attitude to match. He continued to grumble as Winston led them deeper into the dank tunnels; his house and home these last twenty years.

Sometimes he didn’t believe how long he’d traversed the sludge covered walkways, memorizing them top to bottom. He didn’t even notice the smell anymore, although many of the other men whined about it after weekends away. Winston didn’t take weekends. Not anymore.

“What are we looking for anyways?” Peter sloshed through the muck to catch up with Winston.

Bristling gray hair formed a bridge over his nose as the aging man turned to his companion. “They said there’s a problem. That’s what we’re leading them deeper into the dank tunnels; his house and home these last twenty years.

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“Tunnel B12. Just down around the bend with the notch in the top corner. See the marker there?” He shone his light down the tunnel, a reflection briefly flashing back in acknowledgment.

“It’s blue. Blue is for B tunnels, right?” He swore it was like teaching a monkey. Winston moved on, tutoring Peter as they waded through the oppressive dark and silent burrow. His free hand waved occasionally as he talked, pointing out this or that that could eventually lead to an issue, but that they didn’t have the money to fix. The fifty-seven year old didn’t push to get things done anymore. That was for the younger generations in his opinion. He was working to scrape out the last few pennies from the bank for food and lodging. He’d given up hopes of union wages, winning lottery tickets, or six digit checks years ago. It didn’t matter if anything happened now anyway. He’d be gone, dead and buried, by the time anything was carried out.

“Did you hear that?” The light ahead of them dimmed as Peter stopped a few paces behind and turned towards one of the mini tunnels that ran rampant through these walls. Winston didn’t know what they were there for, he figured in case of flooding, but they were too small for any human. Maybe a small child, but even then they’d have to be scrawny to fit through the space.

Sighing again with fatigue, Winston pushed his way through the sludge to look at where Peter was pointing. He frowned at the hole in the wall, eyes squinting to see into the deep blackness.

“I didn’t hear nothing…and no one’s there.” He glanced at Peter, trying to keep the condescending out of his eyes. Peter was such a boy, still. Seeing things in the dark, hearing things that weren’t there. Winston wondered how long it’d take before he became hardened to the smell and the mysterious sounds.

“Sound travels on water. It was probably some rat that got scared and ran off...’Cmon. I want to get back before Barry gets in.” He didn’t wait for Peter to follow him, picking up his water-logged boots to begin their trek again through the sewers.

It was a while before Peter followed him, but the old man didn’t wait. He knew that eventually the thought of standing alone where he’d heard a mysterious sound would gear the hot head into action. Sure enough, a few minutes later Peter came huffing up next to him, matching his stride and adding his light to Winston’s.

Winston could still see the way his dark eyes darted around, though, searching for the source of his fear. It almost made Winston smile. Almost.

Finally, it seemed they’d reached their destination. Winston sighed, veering off into sublet twelve, waving a hand for Peter to follow him.

“One of the guys left a note. Said something about the emergency ladders being all jammed up.” Winston moved with ease even as the tunnel became narrower, snorting slightly in contempt at his coworker’s fears.

“No like we need ‘em anyways.” The mutter was mostly to himself, but Peter nodded in agreement as if it’d been phrased to gather support.

As they neared the end of the tunnel, natural light weakened their flashlights, but added strength to their eyes. In a few more feet, Winston could see almost everything within their small space, snapping off his flashlight and stuffing it in the drooping loop on his worn leather belt. Peter had more trouble. His belt was newer and he had to hold the loop open before he could shove the heavy thing in. Winston had his gear use down and the hot head into action. Sure enough, a few minutes later Peter came huffing up next to him, matching his stride and adding his light to Winston’s.

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His eyes followed the familiar path of processed steel, twisted into shape around the curves of the wall and covered with the orange rust after years of running water dripping from above. It’d been dry for a few weeks, hence the low water level, but Winston thought a storm was brewing. Soon, this place would be more treacherous and dangerous than now. Even covered in the gooey filth, the tunnels were considered dry at the moment. Slowly, his thin lips turned down into a puzzled frown and his bushy eyebrows formed that gray bridge across his face.

“This is wrong.” His eyes followed along the outside length of steel that led up to the sewer cover, the brief indent from past years where it’d been tugged up and down from inspectors and construction workers, and over the rungs that held dripping flags of fungus and rot.

“What’s wrong?” Peter asked, coming up next to him, peering at the same ladder as if it was speaking. Winston didn’t answer him, although not out of frustration, but a growing sense of urgency. He pushed Peter back, moving to the ladder and swinging himself up onto the lowest rung, his gloved hands reaching up to pull at the lever that loosened the brake and let the rest fall down.

His fingers merely ghosted across the metal before his balance was lost, the ladder grinding with a scream of long-awaited agony and breaking off to the right. Winston jumped, stumbling backwards as the rusted metal swayed to a stop, the three remaining rungs breaking off from the cemented foundation, revealing a jagged-toothed smile. Peter blinked, stunned at the movement and opened his mouth to say something stupid but a growing sense of urgency. He pushed Peter back, moving to the ladder and swinging himself up onto the lowest rung, his gloved hands reaching up to pull at the lever that loosened the brake and let the rest fall down.

His fingers merely ghosted across the metal before his balance was lost, the ladder grinding with a scream of long-awaited agony and breaking off to the right. Winston jumped, stumbling backwards as the rusted metal swayed to a stop, the three remaining rungs breaking off from the cemented foundation, revealing a jagged-toothed smile. Peter blinked, stunned at the movement and opened his mouth to say something stupid and inconsequential. Winston cut him off with a sharp gesture and quickly pushed him out of the way, crouching down to look at the base of the side bars.

“Look here.” His finger lifted up the hanging side, tilting it slightly towards them so Peter could see the sharp fragmented edge.

“It’s broken.” Peter sounded shocked, as if it was an amazing thing to see broken metal. Winston regained some of his calm, his eyes rolling and knees grinding as he stood straight again.

“Yes, but by what.”

“You mean who.” Peter hadn’t looked away from the broken ladder, his eyes wide and body frozen.

“What?” Winston was slowly regaining.


“No one can break a ladder, Peter. Even one as old as this. It’s still strong. Look at the inside.” He waved a hand, turning back to the conundrum and frowning cautiously at it again. “No...something broke this.” He said, emphasizing his previous statement. “Probably some sort of rot or somethin’...but whatever it is we better find out fast ‘cause if this gets into the rest of them we’re—” He cut off, turning as one with Peter as splashes echoed off the walls around them. Something had moved in the tunnels behind them.

Peter looked worried again, tugging at his belt to pull out his flashlight and then aiming the wavering beam down the way they’d come.

“Barry, that you?” No one answered and, for a brief second, Winston felt fear tug at him. He quickly dismissed it. There were no alligators in the sewers, so to speak. He’d found that out as a young man and he wasn’t about to change his mind now.

“I tell you Winston, somethin’s down here.”

“Yeah, and aliens created the planet.” The old man muttered, stepping forward. His own flashlight glided into his hand, illuminating the tunnel somewhat better as he peered forward. It didn’t help much. His eyesight hadn’t gotten any better since his younger years.

“Barry, you better come on out. I think we got trouble here...”

Nothing moved.

Winston huffed in anger, stalking off down the tunnel and turning at the intersection, flashlight beam snapping both ways in rapid succession, trying to figure out where the sound had come from. That had been no rat. It’d been steps. But who the hell would be down here?

“Hello? Who’s there? I know you’re down here.” Winston waited for a reply, his anger growing by the moment. Even the construction guys knew better than to mess with them. If Winston’s guys knew there was trouble, all it took was one phone call to shut down sewage treatment for weeks.

Winston heard something brush against the stone to his left and swung around, his light reflecting off of something before it disappeared around a bend.

“Hey!” Without thinking, he ran after it. Seconds later he realized his mistake, his arthritis bursting into action in his knees and hips, lungs aching and sweat pressing the wispy remains of his hair to his scalp beneath his helmet. He followed the splashes that echoed back to him, hearing Peter behind. Combined, the chase had sounds ricocheting off the water and walls, a strange cacophony in this uninhabitable place. He heard Peter call for them to stop, that they wouldn’t hurt them, that they were professionals. Winston was thankful, he couldn’t have talked if he’d wanted to, his breath wheezed in and out like an old saw.

They turned a corner and stopped, fabricated light flashing in dizzying waves over the dead end they’d run to.

“What the hell...?” Winston slowed to a walk, peering around the barren walls, looking for an escape route. There was nothing. Each wall had its own flood tunnel, but all were sealed up as well. There was nowhere to go.

“They didn’t need a light.” The statement surprised the manager, Peter coming up beside him to stare wide-eyed around them.

“What?” Winston asked after he realized Peter wasn’t going to elaborate.

Perhaps he had.

“They didn’t need a light.” He repeated. “They didn’t have anything
ahead of them to see with.” Winston looked around their small area with a surprising amount of calm.

Despite Winston's urge to turn around and go back, call in the broken ladder and go home for the night, something nagged at him. He stepped forward, looking around, gazing at the sharp-edged corners from where the tunnel had been bricked over a decade or so past. Then, Peter yelled.

Winston spun, water splashing high and soaking his clothes, to stare at the scene behind him.

The thing was between him and Peter. They blocked it in. Its gray-skinned body was covered in something that he supposed was clothing, hanging in dragging, dripping tatters. It crouched in the water, one hand raised and what Winston realized were talons extended in an effort to ward them off. Its legs were shaped like a dog, the joint reaching out behind, farther than a human's in an obtuse angle. Its body was pushed forward, head thrust out and teeth bared at Peter, a faint hiss coming from behind its sharpened teeth that locked together like a shark's mouth, no gaps. That wasn't the most unusual anatomy though.

Winston took in the large ears that extended a hand's width across the side of its head and almost a foot from bottom to tip. They tapered at the point, reaching well past the smooth curve of the thing's bald head and into the air. Peter shrieked again as it jerked as if to lunge and his flashlight came down, directed at the creature.

Immediately it hissed, scrambling back and shoving itself into the lip of the flood tunnel behind. Winston rushed forward, mimicking his companion and angling his beam to show the shape cowering from them. It flinched with the light, a soft whine coming from its throat, hands pawing at its dull colorless eyes as if in pain.

“It looks like a bat.” Peter said, voice soft and throaty as if he was out of air to talk with. Winston couldn't say he blamed the man for being scared. He stared at the creature in absolute shock, expecting with each blink to wake up in a mad house. This must have been what had broken the ladder. This is what Peter had heard splashing behind them.

But what the hell was it? A bat boy? He snorted, shakily smiling at the thought. He wasn't going to be a nobody after all.

“Well...you don't see that every day.”
a murder of crows

the gravedigger’s son is a six
foot tall orphan who never learned
to bury the dead deep enough.
they all rise inside of him:
a faceless congregation
in a silent church.
wiped clean every antiseptic winter,
embalmed in wrought iron gates.

the ivy crawls in frozen whispers
through the grounds he keeps.

he cries over dead gardens
he refuses to water,

he tells me he prays for
everyone i have left behind,
plucks out the feathers of my circling
sparrows, turns them into the plumes of crows
my own grave germless, bodiless
sanitized of me

with every turn of his head
and every turn of the stone.

Desperate Housewife

I turn the water
on and off
I scrub at the plate, the pesky stain mocks me.
If I get it out,
Will he love me again?
Birds pass by the window and I scowl.
I take out my gun and shoot them down,
watching them smack against the pavement.
They can’t leave if I can’t.
I need to keep my hands busy,
they’re dangerous.
Sometimes when they’re idle,
I want to shoot more than birds
but I’m scared to ruin my lipstick.

There was lipstick on his collar last night,
he said that it was mine but we both
know we haven’t touched in years.

I pick the kids up in an hour,
maybe if I’m lucky the brakes will stick
before I get them
and they’ll say to themselves,
“If Daddy was driving, he would’ve survived”
because everyone knows that
men are born superior.
The oven drones, beeping,
reminding me of my duties.
to make the house ready for my husband
and kids
and to watch life pass me by,
a smile on my face
and not a hair out of place.
Mirror Thoughts

A ceiling fan swings in a colorful blur
Blades helping out the woozy feeling creeping in
Scabs pull my skin as I stretch
Hands to the sky
Unhealed wounds inside and out

It's another day of desperation
Another week of starvation
One more year of deprivation
Searching for a way to feel human, healthy, happy

Taking in two bottles of water
washed down by heart medication and diet pills
called breakfast.

Living alone is bliss when I want to hurt
but I am so sick of pain
So sick of seeing nothing in the mirror worth trying for
Wishing I could be some sort of prettier than the body I've been encased in.

Running water
Scalding
Immersed in a light pink pool I try to find renewal
The bathroom ceiling blurs from the bottom of a tub
Bubble bath stings deep into my eyes but they remain open

I will bear witness to myself
Feeling the weight called choice squeezing my lungs
a burning desire to let the water in
to be filled with something stronger than the nothing I feel

I know it gets better. I've felt it before.
An easy smile
Hope for tomorrow
Midnight walks through moon-lit parks
A cup of coffee and a well-worn book.
A future worth lifting my head up for.

I see myself and wish for something new
Some kind of creation that isn't afraid of the inevitable end
But the world around us is dying
And no one seems to care about the pain it feels.

We are all self consumed and I am no longer ashamed.
Sleeping Pills

The floor vibrated underneath her in time to the music that came drifting up the staircase. It seemed to pulsate through the fog of cigarettes that had also risen, drifting over everything – giving the whole hallway a misty look, like she hadn’t cleaned her contacts in a while. The sound and the fog and the room itself spun together in front of her as she stumbled down the hallway to the small door that led to the bathroom. Knocking hard to make sure no one was occupying it, she pushed open the door that had a tendency to stick, nearly fell inside, and shut the door again. The music and noises of people became a dull roar though the ground still shook.

The light in the bathroom was too bright, nearly blinding her as it reflected off the large mirror and into her eyes. The white counter was filled with clutter – soaps, hair products, perfumes, bobby pins. Her feet sunk into the bright pink rug in front of the sink. Someone hadn’t flushed the toilet. She reached into a drawer and pulled out a box. Fumbling, like her hands were too heavy for the rest of her and her fingers no longer had feeling, she ripped open the cardboard and removed the sealed plastic inside. She clumsily popped two small pills out of the packaging, grabbing at them to make sure they didn’t roll down the drain. She found a cup in amongst the clutter and filled it with water from the tap, swallowing a sip once before popping the pills in her mouth to swallow with another gulp of water. Most of her third sip of water went down her shirt. The rest she poured down the drain, slamming the plastic cup back on the counter.

She had begun to take the pills when she was a senior in high school. She had told her mother that the school nurse recommended them. Her mother didn’t bother to check. Now they were what she looked forward to – an escape from pain and inadequacy; a way to be swallowed by darkness and carried to dreams where her life could be better. That was if the nightmares didn’t come again, as they often did. But sometimes nightmares were easier to deal with than life.

Her reflection caught her attention. She leaned forward, placing both hands on the white ceramic, nearly touching her nose to the mirror as she lost her balance for a second. Her mouth widened into a smile that in her state looked more like a lunatic grin. Her eye makeup, that had been overdone to begin with, had begun to run making her eyes look like they were stuck in black holes. Her lipstick had smeared in places, her hair hung overdone to begin with, had begun to run making her eyes look like they were stuck in black holes. Her lipstick had smeared in places, her hair hung over her shoulders in little strands, and her whole body seemed to shine with sweat. She was missing an earring. She laughed hard as she swiped a hand across the mirror to distance herself from the face staring back at her with sweat.

Passing by a number of closed doors with moaning going on behind them – some followed by the sound of retching – she finally found hers. She didn’t bother turning on the light but it was difficult to even make it to the bed, though she desperately wanted to. Her legs felt like someone was tugging on her ankles, dragging her down and holding her to the floor. Eventually, she was able to collapse on top of the quilt, turn over on her side, and finally close her eyes, feeling darkness washing over all her senses. The music downstairs stopped.

The bell rang and all the students got up from their seats. They had already packed their bags ten minutes earlier, less stealthily than they thought. Loud chatter and laughter filled the hallways and began to spill out into the parking lot as they all climbed into each other’s cars to head to shopping malls, movie theatres, large homes. She plodded along behind them slowly, knowing that no car was waiting for her – no friendly voices to teasingly invite her along. The parking lot quickly cleared and quiet enveloped her. She began to walk.

She sat cross-legged on the couch in the middle of the room. The only light came from her glowing computer screen and the world was dead beyond her breathing and the whir of the laptop’s fan. A half-empty microwave meal container was on the floor at her feet, where it had been for the past two hours. She heard the door open behind her and light feet tramp across the room and up the stairs – her mother, home from work at the hospital. She knew her mother would be in bed almost immediately and wouldn’t be up until she had to leave the next morning. She pulled the blanket up over her arms and curled into the back of the couch, wishing it was her mother’s arms.

The door banged open, flooding light and sound into the room. The couple quickly stopped giggling and began to step back out into the hallway, whispering to each other. One of them slowly began to creep forward, and eventually tugged the blankets up and over her body. She thought she was moving limbs to help, but based on the grunts of exertion she heard, she wasn’t. A pillow was gently placed under her head. They shut off the light and closed the door. She smiled, but wasn’t sure whether or not it actually made it to her face. Darkness washed again.

High pitched laughter surrounded her on all sides. She had failed, again, at the young art of traversing the monkey bars. Only two swings in, she had fallen flat on her backside, kicking the wind out of her. As she rose to her feet, a foam ball hit her square across her head, nearly knocking her over. When she turned to look for the culprit, all she saw was a mass of her second-grade classmates, all pointing and laughing. Calling her names. Pounding into her heart that she was not good enough for them. Her hands curled into fists and she rushed at them swinging, trying to get the noises to stop. A large hand grabbed hers hard, stopping her in her tracks – the playground supervisor. The children scattered. Suddenly a large, mean looking face was too close to her, yelling. The grip around her wrist got tighter and tighter. She began to cry, but this did nothing to stop the punishment.

Someone was crawling into bed with her. They pulled the covers open...
Jamie Hochmuth

and slid in next to her, cuddling up behind her. She tried to see who it was, to get them away, to fight back, but her body refused to respond. Her mental struggle seemed meaningless to whoever it was, when it only came out in moans. There were hands on her side, her stomach, her breasts. There was nothing she could do she realized, and she began to give in. Then yelling started, and the hands were gone. The body was gone. She relaxed. Darkness washed again.

Large, warm hands ghosted over her body. The roses he had given her that night were lying on the desk across the room. She pressed her lips harder to his, wrapping her arms tighter around his neck to draw him closer. She couldn’t believe that this was happening – that someone cared for her in this way. His hands reached under her shirt, pushing it up and over her head, and throwing it across the room. The rest of their clothes quickly followed. He grabbed her hand and pulled her onto the bed. She never opened her eyes, but she smiled the whole time. Passion. Power. Ecstasy. Warmth.

Emptiness. When she woke up the next morning, he was gone. Her sheets stuck to her naked body as she checked her phone for any message. None. She wiped her messy hair out of her eyes, pulled herself from the bed, and took a long shower. She wouldn’t allow herself to doubt him, not yet. But, as time passed, her meager hope disappeared into the well of self-doubt at her core. The next time she saw him, his arm was around another girl and the roses on her desk had begun to die.

The light flashed on, brightening her eyelids, though she could not open them. Someone was talking words she couldn’t process. They yanked the covers off of her. She was cold but she didn’t react. She felt whoever it was tug on her foot, move her arm, press their fingers to her neck. Then she heard sobs, and beeping, and frantic talking to someone who wasn’t in the room. At least, she didn’t hear another voice. She was forced on to her side. Someone was stroking her hair. Darkness.

Twisted metal, smoky smell, iron taste. Dripping down the side of her head, stabbing pain in her right ankle. Crying. Her seatbelt was cutting into her neck and she was trapped behind the back of the driver’s seat. The door wouldn’t open. She heard cars stopping behind them and people yelling into cell phones. Her mother, who had been in the front passenger seat, was able to pull herself out of the car and move over to her side. She stuck her hand through the broken window to grab onto a wrist. Her mother, now knowing she was alive, moved to the driver window. She watched as her mother stopped care? Do you think I would be sitting in the hospital right now if I didn’t care? Get your head 

Anne sat in a nearby chair. “Clearly not. Like you ever think of anyone thinking about you?”

Sam bolted up in bed. “Anne! Would you shut up? Did you think I was talking thinking about you?”

Anne sank her head into her hands. “I’m going to go home and make silence.

Silence.

Anne sunk her head into her hands. “I’m going to go home and make sure everything is ok there. People were going nuts when the ambulance showed up. I… I’ll come back later.”

Sam didn’t turn over but, when she heard the door close, she pulled her knees into her chest, tears developing in the corners of her eyes. No one had ever fought her before – no one had tried. But eventually, after more time than she wanted, the darkness fell over her again, allowing her to abandon the feelings she did not have the energy to feel.
mathematical proof refuting the existence of change

you are the dead leaves that cover the cracks in the sidewalk
and i am the places where the sky opens up
and you feel the presence of the river without having to see it.

they built bridges
across its twisting girth,
like the water was a wound
that needed to be stitched together,
and the cities became hands
reaching across an ever-changing distance
to entwine somewhere between a hum and a sigh.

when i bike to the coffeeshop
where we first met, my shoelace wraps around
the gear, and time becomes cyclical
as i pull up to a barren sidewalk
haunted by the ghosts of bodies
like a misty evening.

this structure has always been parallel.

in the bathroom, i carve an epithet
on the wall with the pen i will later use
to write this poem.
i imagine that the splinters that flaked off
the wooden stall under the pressure
of my need to be remembered
cling to the tip of the pen and rub off
into the first lines of verse.

the waves smooth all the scars
away eventually; you’ d say
it’s just the fall, but i’d say
that the trees still bloom
in the spring, that the sky
will still look the same where it plummets
to sink its arms into the swaying river,
even after the bridges we once drove across
have all caved in.
Mine is a blind man staring, pressing his weight against our closing door.

He is stripping himself in ordered to rust... vicious notes turned to shame.

Subtle resin base with a match in hand. His wallet creased... the pick's gone.

The price of imminence was wrongly spent... with cheap rape in strange tones.

His cuts are invisible. They close the door to our once infinity.

“Silence is a violent song on loop.”

Hemlock

We stand a fox leap from the edge, staring down into a lake at night now a place with no stars reflected. Our eyeshine the only light reflected over icicle stalagmites. Draped in sweet-briars and dog rose with sheathed claws. Rivers flow from the bells of cape mushrooms over birch trees and gem formations hide limestone geodes. I hum a whale song over the church hymn while Eden locks us inside, blackbird feathers weaved into the gate, us crowned with upside down dogbane, thornapple, and begonia. Ivy leaves dapple my hair while laurel grows from your mouth, stained with blood of spectral hearts, given to the westward wind. Wind gallops over us carrying a fawn's heartbeat. Feasting on spider legs and mole whiskers before bark grows in our pelvic bones. You are full of rhododendron and Fuller's thistle, smelling of oleander and monk's-hood. Summer sun comes late this year, frost storms the groundwater below. Rabbit eyes strain for kestrel shadows. I eat the holly and nightshade at dawn. I am covered in sorrel squirrel-red cat fur and you baptized in ash from a long dead fire. Burning your garden of foxglove, daffodils, and columbine.
I have been dust but I ain't never been a bone.
Wrought in flesh I am no man.
No one ever pulled a rib from Adam
on the eve of my creation.
Dust and ribs cannot define me
nor confine me to the
gated prison of the garden
of my reckoning.
Lilith headed East and she ain't never turned around.
Lilith was no rib and she did not obey.
She was dust and dust breeds dust
and that was all the kingdom
she inherited: the East was dust
and Lilith headed East.
If I am ribs then I am ribs and rancor.
Dust is more than some man's bone
for it is every man that ever was;
we all are dust but Eve -
Eve, she was a rib.
She was a rib without the rancor.
She was splintered bone without a
splint to hold her,
she was sharpened shards
with marrow leaking through the slits,
she was a broken bone and Eve -
Eve healed crooked.
When Lilith headed East she sucked the marrow
from the bone that would be Eve.
She took the rancor that had started leaking
and she let it trail behind her
through the dust.
Lilith was the rancor and the dust
to which each broken rib returns
and when she headed East she left
a man behind her in the dust;
for he was dust and
dust to dust returns
but Lilith -
Lilith headed East and
she ain't never turned around.
The Sky’s the Limit
Oil Painting

Surfer
Oil Painting
Late Warnings of the Wildwood

The Earth flew me notes of leaves.
Nature’s language was held in my hands
promising I could burrow my feet

in the ground and She would take care
of me. She told me I could harvest myself
near the tender plants and only worry about

the Sun’s smile. Hurt by black top floors
to being attended by Mother’s womb,
I eagerly soothe myself in,

desiring to know how the flowers met and
were merry. I found out that each tree had a
letter, the knots of their trunk spelling out secrets.

Breath, open and proper, filled my new kingdom
as I sprouted my first buds. Never knowing why
the trees were so excited in rainless weeks.

Murmuring branches crackled, but I was too
much of a sprout to understand. My footy stump
anchored me into comprehension.

Stories they wore around them were scars.
They grew honesty and carried blemishes
changeless. Ever since they could speak to their

elders they desired fire to their timber; ashing
them into grey secrets on the ground. I could not
be let go, but could only wait to burn in regret.

Every winter the river guides men around,
digging their hands in tracks. I knew they
were safe, for the cold left nothing to say.

But each year at the time after blossom,
Mother talks with our leaves to innocent men
that yearn for sincerity

Sestina: For Daniel

Angel, I watched the crosses dance in your eyes
as I held the flame up to your face, carved
from the trees that grow tall beside the river.
Jerusalem could not have looked as holy
as you did when you drew long
from the pipe, smoke slowly wreathing your face as you breathed.

Next to you, I could barely breathe.
I took the pipe with shaking hands and closed my eyes.
The fire burst in the dark but I couldn’t see the long
shadows it threw across the room. In your house, the carved
furniture looked so holy
and it had always intimidated me. As I breathed out, the smoke swirled above our
heads like a river.

Your proud skull lolled back as you spoke in languid river-

tongue. In sharp relief, your chest rose and fell as you breathed.
In the haze, the low warm light, each and every one of our sins was holy.
I reached for your hand, and our eyes
locked. With the smoke in us, even carved
stone would feel alive. The minutes went by, longer and longer.

In the old stories, the sons of God walked long
in the desert. When they reached the river
they understood. God shaped it, laid it down to carve
through the surface of the earth, being its breath,
its life. In the old stories, the sons of God saw all this, and their eyes
were opened, and all they perceived became holy.

Blessed by God, the holiness
of your ancestors lives long
in you. The lights in your eyes
glitter like the life-giving river.
We are feeling like the air we breathe
is shaped by ethereal hands, carved

into the ancient caves of our bodies, carved
in the lines on your young face. Those lifelines, holy.
We are feeling like there is something around us that breathes
as we do. The moment stretches on, longer and longer.
The wavering light swirls rivers
through the lingering smoke. Still, our eyes

and hands held. We stayed suspended in the moment as if carved from stone, a
moment that felt longer
than days. In the holy silence, you were dreaming of the rivers
of your homeland. We breathed in unison. In the dark, you closed your eyes.

Galaxy
Photography and Photoshop
Purple

I struck you and your face turned purple,  
allied with the violets in your cool white room.  
Their insides fade to grey with your eyes,  
only alive to show the truth to any who look.  
That image cools the heat of my hand.

I left you and went to the hospital,  
where I saw old men with discolored skin -  
their faces drained, their wrists bruised  
the same color as my eyeshadow  
worn especially for you.  
I close these eyelids like the man before me  
and so suddenly, he is you.

It makes it much more horrifying:  
the blackened edges of his bones  
and your blank silver eyes beside a smudge  
of the dark dust caked on my fingertips.  
I touch my thumb to my lips  
to find them warm with undue love for you;  
dry, aching to kiss your face and take away the dirt  
marring your forgettable, pallid cheek  
and place in its stead a wet, pink circle.  
But your inexpressive eyes are strong enough  
to keep the apologies from spilling from my mouth to yours.

I’ll be back tomorrow, maybe; whenever I have the time.

tornado

she uses the word ‘frock’  
often. it rolls around her mouth  
like a dead thing, red  
but no longer alive. she likes  
the way it sticks in her throat.  
hers letters are sepia-toned,  
residual memories; whole  
tapestries woven into a language spoken  
but not seen, the song some  
forgotten pioneer hummed  
to himself as he sunk his pickaxe  
into a mountain that did not  
belong to him. men, she whispers,  
will always take what does not  
belong to them. her berry mouth  
twitches coyly in the candlelight.  
it’s easy not to doubt the gore  
beneath the soft snowfall of  
her skin. during the dust bowl,  
destitute farmers heard her name  
on the wind as it danced past  
their windows, making everything  
barren and washing the  
wood walls with ash. the  
weather prophesized her  
like a murderer, the girl  
born with a bird skeleton,  
the girl with  
the jeweler’s eyes and  
a thief’s fingertips. there’s  
a place for girls like her,  
in the desert veins of flowers  
pressed between spidersilk pages  
and forgotten about; her  
eyes stare out of the faces in  
thrift store photographs, the ones  
that seem to know their descendants  
didn’t care enough to keep them.  
her body is turning to grains  
of sand squeezing through the
hourglass; her name used to echo in the caverns of the wolves’ mouths but the wolves are dead now and she is fading, traces of her used to linger like a cloud of cigarette smoke on a cold night but now she only appears in shards: a bit of her hair wrapped around a gnarled tree branch; the nest the cardinals suddenly abandoned after returning every spring for 5 years.
Maps

Running under a broken street light
at 4 am, not able to breathe.
Pleading with myself to get out of bed,
or at least reach for something to eat.
Lying underneath my desk when my bed's too far away.
These are pastimes I don't miss too much.

Illuminated accusations—she won't hear my “sorry.”
Her hand seems so vulnerable hanging off the bed.
I want to be her protection.

I remember a blazing night
A little tipsy on the lawn
Sleeping on my friend's back porch when I couldn't find the key to my house.
Work to get a sentence out
Watch it clatter to the floor—falling—breaking—wooden scrabble tiles that
were not there before.

I picture you in my thoughts
Lemon-drop fist fights
You were never a very sweet girl
You say you feel the world is spinning beneath your feet
while the sky stays in one place and you wish that you didn't have to too.

A big part of my life has been trying way too hard, thinking it over and over
and over.
Like chewing food into a paste that you don't want to eat anymore—but how do you spit it back out?
Nothing seems to be consistent here and my opinions run around
scratching at the surface—digging through the ground.

You want to take a moment that you can't stop playing over in your head and
solidify it,
but a place in time is too hard to print out on a sheet of paper to carry with
you in your back pocket.
You have a map on the wall of your bedroom stuck full of pins where you
want to be.
I'll be your point of reference—
A pinhole in your path
Lacking substance

But it's where you want to go.
That much is undeniable.

Hypocrisy is in the air—
I can smell it slipping down the drain.
Something small like paper cuts
dripping on my notes.

I'll make you lose more than blood.
Hate is a stoplight I meant to run.
Fear is wanting to drive 70 miles an hour down the highway but one lane is
going 60 and the other is going 80 and you have to make the choice to limit
yourself or endanger yourself.
I am a danger to myself.

A God of hopelessness and despair feels too 8th grade,
but who's to say we didn't get it right when we were 13?
And everything since then—
your lifetime of disillusion—
has been the false vision you can't seem to shake.

I'll put a pin on the map in your bedroom to show you where I'll be when
you give up on your dreams and realize you're not worth as much as we both
thought you were.
The waters are high, but you know how to swim.
That doesn't make it easier.

Melissa Conway
this morning

a whole bar of soap melted in warm water,
rasping shower whispered over the rust.

i imagined your eyes clicked while you blinked,
our bareness a double exposure.

lost sleep blurred and approached,
taking you with the steam, leaving me.

(above my bones:
sticky with salt, the sting of mint.)

lemons sweated near the sink,
flesh cut into new routes with lines of sugar.

lavender unwound, and calm
neglected me touch by touch.

like most vulnerable things
morning brittles and breaks

(unfounded on linoleum floors,
on closet doors in crooked frames)

and then exists in shapes
that are not whole
Crying Comic Book Woman #2
Fiber Cross-Stitch

What Jackson Would Have Wanted

Artist Prefers content not shown
Mona Lisa

Lines around the masses taking us into the vastness.
Moving in the forever wade as we move further away from each other.
No stars or light alone with me, nothing here with me tonight.
I catch the tail end of a comet in my hands and follow under the glittering neon water.
Cosmos swirl and vortex spawn, gliding by in silence. Lines in flight and light forms feathers.
Spectrums of rose colors bloom across my eyes and a garden grows in my palm.
Bismuth roads take me further from home while lightning guides me.
I dance on the thunder and wing beats of a horse's heart.
I breathe in the ice while exhaling an ocean.
Laburnum hangs upside down dripping the suicide drug into my open mouth.
I paint with fallen leaves behind closed eyes and mock the tiger's stripes.
I dig into the neck of a rabbit, pull out a spine of opals.
Ash trees dance in their kingdom of flame-licked wood.
Leopard spots and zebra stripes flash by in a kaleidoscope of shapes imperfect in perfection.
A parliament of owls discusses my fate as I stand in painted crow feathers.
Burnt bones and obsidian skulls stare out with pyrite eyes.
Thistle, marigold, and nettles hang limp under the stars, a crown for the saddest soul.
Singing with the whales and wolves worshiping the sun until the moon comes out.
The aurora borealis swims into the clouds by the early dawn over the ice.
Ancient waters drown the world following the lunar prophet.

Model #2
Oil Painting
You’re a serial decadence
and I know now to forget you.

To cut off the oxygen and starve
myself of its leftovers.

I’ll spin for a while,
a colloquial phrase,

and leave the lights dim while
ghosts parade their lanterns.

They say there’s freedom on the
other side of torn off reins, and

I am a stallion heart; but that
whip of yours means to take

skin off, and me with it.
You’ll bandage memory with

a shiny new host. She’s called Lobotomy:
sin branding age, breathing so close

she can’t see behind you
to the war paid for in

blown-apart limbs—hearts screaming
on the floor, the sounds of the score

gone minor—one symbol of gore.
This musical took a turn.

You killed the leading lady
and clatter chose foggy tower stains

and washed out shallow paints:
a bursting carousel girl

with all those lights to
make the world forget.

I bet you like the blindness of
ultraviolent spinning. But I’m riding

wine into slumber. Perhaps it sounds
like chaos to you. It sounds like home to me.

“Warning: Blurs Ease Blindness”

bloody mary doesn’t show up when he
calls her name three times

while you sleep i am the
death of red. i am the cartographer
of the punch you still haven’t thrown:
all of the venom, the sour berries, and the
powdered lemonade
you bought to make it all go down easier,
but it didn’t get any easier

november brings me a fist
full of dried nightshade
and nightmares, the kind where
each cherry pit becomes a blood
clot i spit back out onto
the kitchen counter

when this was a dream, i hung mirrors
underneath each of my eyes to keep
insomnia away, and all its terror born visions
of storm-blown cement from kansas to missouri

i saw you and you saw me
and in blooming pools together
we sprinted along the curb
as soon as i looked down to see our reflections touch,
my mirrors fell to the ground and shattered

now i can only watch you from the other side
but i won’t do that because
i loved you so i’ll let your blank
morning stare belong only to you, be returned
only by you
be something only you have to live with

Alyssa Froehling

Emma Smith
what i gave to you, i now give to sunday
but no bended knees for prayer
or sex or oh god:

it's just all slow. and sunday
shouldn't flatter itself
because i can be sad about you
on any day of the week.
i heard your new
best friend is nice. at least
his friends tell me so
unsolicited. on sundays
i take myself to football
games at midnight. i don't know
the rules, i've only heard
of them. same with you: i don't
know you, i've only heard of
you, and how you run like blood
that never clots, out
of my nose whenever someone
asks me how you're doing.
i stay in bed most sundays
i play phone tag with you in my
head. don't worry about me,
i'll rise on the third day when the
third day finally shows up. it's just
taking a little longer than three days.
it'll be a sunday, i'm guessing.
right now i am a blurry gray
photograph on a missing person
flyer. i don't feel like telling you i've
been missing because i don't want to tell
you anything anymore.
when enough time goes by
you can assume i'm gone for good,
face down in some body of water
singing love songs to the dirt and
whiskered fish on the bottom,
bubbles rising in slow tandem around my body
like a church arranges hymns around the sermon
on sundays
Rachel

I think I’d like to find home in myself
decorate the interior of my head like a bedroom in a catalogue
fold up my thoughts and store them neatly in a varnished dresser
but my mind is a hurricane
and I get swept up in the wreckage
I am a walking disaster
I am damaged goods
I am a used car
but this car has seen a lot of road trips
and you are a rest stop
a motel
hotel
guest room
offering me four walls
that I can feel at peace in when I do not feel at home in my own skin
you offer me a map and steer my car straight
when I feel like I’m crashing
and after a long trip
I find solace in you
Save the Sparkle
Photography
AWARDS

Art Awards

Judged by: Carolyn Krueger

Bio: Carolyn Krueger, a Rock Island native, is a graduate of Augustana College. She is the proud owner of The ARTery gallery in The District of Rock Island. Carolyn has been teaching pottery at The Family Museum in Bettendorf, Iowa, since 2004. Carolyn works mostly in clay but dabbles in painting and collage. You can find her work for sale in The ARTery, Artworks in Le Claire, Crafted QC, Bucktown Center for the Arts, DeBrock Galleria and many other fine establishments with good taste. Visit her gallery's website at www.QCARTery.com.

First place: Save the Sparkle by Emma Stough
Second place: Crying Comic Book Girl #2 by Renee Millette
Third place: Self Portrait #2 by Jacob Soukup
Honorable mention: Pink Laughs by Alyssa Froehling

Prose Awards

Judged by: Heather A. Slomski

Bio: Heather A. Slomski is the author of The Lovers Set Down Their Spoons (University of Iowa Press), winner of the Iowa Short Fiction Award and a Finalist for the Minnesota Book Award in Novel & Short Story. She received her MFA from Western Michigan University and held the Axton Fellowship in Fiction at the University of Louisville. Her stories have appeared in TriQuarterly, American Letters & Commentary, Columbia: A Journal of Literature and Art, The Normal School, Storyville, and elsewhere. A recipient of a Minnesota State Artist Initiative Grant and a Minnesota Emerging Writers’ Grant, she currently lives in Minnesota with her husband and son and teaches writing at Concordia College.

First place: What Jackson Would Have Wanted by Anonymous Prime
Second place: Running Through Life by Jamie Hochmuth
Third place: Sleeping Pills by Jamie Hochmuth
Honorable mention: A Case of Mistimed Expiration by Emma Stough

Poetry Awards

Judged by: Melissa Barrett

Bio: Melissa Barrett's poems have recently appeared in BOMB, Gulf Coast, Crazyhorse, Best New Poets, and Best American Poetry. She lives and writes in Columbus, Ohio.

First place: “Sex Drive” by Emma Smith
Second place: Heading East by Emma Brutman
Third place: a murder of crows by Alyssa Froehling
Honorable mentions: this morning by Alyssa Froehling and tornado by Anna Serafini

Barbara Anderson Miller Award

Award bio: In 1982, Dr. James E. Miller endowed SAGA in memory of his wife, Barbara Anderson Miller, who graduated from Augustana in 1943. While attending Augustana, she edited and wrote for SAGA. The award is given to the submission that is most competently crafted and most promising in imaginative power. This is SAGA's most prestigious award.

Judged by: Ann Boaden

Bio: Ann Boaden is professor emerita of English and creative writing at Augustana College, where she received her undergraduate degree (and served as SAGA editor). She earned her master's and doctoral degrees in English from the University of Chicago. Her fiction, creative nonfiction, and poetry has appeared in a variety of literary journals and anthologies, including South Dakota Review, Penwood Review, Big Muddy, Pietisten, SIMUL, Buffalo Carp, Time of Singing, Knight Literary Journal, The Heartlands Today, The Hyde Parker, Wascana Review, Northwoods Journal, Christmas on the Great Plains, and others. With Karin Youngberg of Augustana's English department she has co-authored two YA novels. Her book Light and Leaven: Women Who Shaped Augustana's First Century appeared in May 2011. She has written three one-act plays produced by New Ground professional regional theatre company, as well as libretti for four musicals performed locally.

Winner: Sestina: For Daniel by Anna Serafini

Judge's comment: This poem shows an impressive command of form; a complex experience created through narrative movement; imagery that coheres and gathers power throughout the piece; lyrical control, and, of course, precise word choice.
In so restrictive and demanding a form as the sestina it's hard not to make lines sound forced. This poem largely—remarkably, I think—avoids that problem. Its lines move easily and lyrically from image to image, perception to perception. Read aloud, it speaks with the authentic music of poetry.

That music is universal. But the narrative voice, the persona, is personal and distinct. The combination of these two ways we hear the poem makes for a rich experience, like harmonics in music. It's also consistent with our/narrator's seeing the Daniel character (I assume that's the smoker) as both individual and archetype.

I read the narrative as a movement toward vision and relationship, as the narrator comes to understand the Daniel character as part of a larger pattern. And in that understanding, sees the narrator's own self as part of the pattern as well.

The imagery is both complex and accessible. It arises naturally from the concrete experiences being detailed, and, as I've said, builds layers of interest and complication as the poem proceeds. The controlling imagery gives us a nice tactile paradox: hard carved surfaces and the fluidity of shadow and smoke. And these merge into the movement and voice of the river—which in turn is the image for holiness. This confluence (sorry—couldn't resist the pun!) of images happens naturally and inevitably. Coleridge would say it creates an organic poem, one consistent within itself. In today's terminology, not artificially altered. I like that holiness here is seen as linking the natural world with humanity. The images of breathing and looking (eyes), darkness and light, support this definition. (In the Judeo-Christian myth the Creator breathes life into the darkness of chaos.)

**Ann Sherrick Award**

**Award Bio:** In 1984, faculty in English Department established a prize in memory of Ann Sherrick, who graduated from Augustana in 1979 and had a passion for children’s literature. The Ann Sherrick Award is given to the best work suitable for young readers.

**Judged by:** Ann Boaden

**Winner:** gravel kingdom cul-de-sac by Jackson Phillips

**Judge's comment:** This poem obviously isn’t necessarily for children, though the childlike simplicity of image and diction could appeal to young readers. What’s impressive about it is the double-voicing: it’s the child’s words and perceptions filtered through adult understanding, as indicated by the parenthetical “lost memories doused in shades of blue.” What the adult discerns is presented through the children's voices with an irony that escapes them: the power of the imagination is continually undercut by the fragility of the children's lives and selves. Paradoxically, imagination is powerful for them (“ruling the neighborhood—/No, the world,” “Enemies defeated/With sheer imagination”), but the adult recognizes sadly (in shades of blue) that it’s limited, that it can easily be lost or broken. It “stumble[s] over tiny feet.” And even that perfect world is precarious, inhabited by bugs, a discarded dog leash and a broken fence, reminders that freedom is always limited, always under attack, though the children choose to “ignore” these signals.

And so just at the moment when the children are totally in charge of their kingdom, “top of the world./Immovable,” the collapse occurs, as in the best drama from Sophocles on. I find that last line “Car coming, run, run, run!” really chilling (I’ve got goose bumps now, rereading it for the umpteenth time), because it’s so final a destruction of all that has seemed at once exciting and safe. The perils of that car can be variously interpreted: obviously the physical danger of accident, but, even more sinister, a driver who/d threat/en the children in other ways.

So while children could appreciate the poem because it evokes their experience in vivid details, adults can respond to the darker significance of these details, and, with the narrator, see the whole in “shades of blue.”
CONTRIBUTOR’S NOTES

Cam Best
I have worked with oil and acrylic paint for four years, with a painterly style that ranges from realism to “aww, sweetie, how... expressive” (to falsely quote what I imagine my mother would say if she understood art). My senior year of high school, the magical Nikon stork brought me a baby D3100. It was a boy. His name is Daryl. I primarily photograph Augustana Theatre, though when I finally escape from the pit that is Potter Hall, I like photographing scenic landscapes and holes in the wall (maybe it’s an idiom, maybe it’s literal. maybe you’ll never know...)

Emma Brutman
I’ve been writing poetry recreationally for years and my creative process usually starts with a poignant line or a concept I want to explore. I tend to write in circles until I realize where I’m going, and then I hone my writing until it gets there. “Heading East” started with the phrase “ribs and rancor” and the concept of Lilith being expelled from the Garden of Eden and eventually became what it is.

Melissa Conway
I am a first year student at Augustana. I have been interested in writing and poetry from a young age and am excited to begin sharing my pieces with others.

Alyssa Dutil
My process when I start to write is to first find something that interests me, usually about the natural world, and then find a way to deeper explore it. One of my favorite parts about writing is being able to create images from a simple word until everything comes together and we are left with a poem. I am greatly inspired by the natural world and find it to be a place where I can find plenty of images that I would love to expand on and share with the world.

Alyssa Froehling
life is strange

Monica Gil
I am an amateur photographer, but I love what I do! If you are interested in seeing more of my work or purchasing prints, feel free to visit my art page at monicagilart.tumblr.com.

Evan Henkel
is a junior computer science major and the president of the Muslim Student Association. Besides writing and making pixel art, Evan enjoys playing video games and snuggling fluffy cats.

Jamie Hochmuth
is a senior double major in Creative Writing and Business, exploring careers in Public Relations and Publishing. She tends to focus on Fiction, but also enjoys dabbling in Creative Nonfiction and Poetry. She is currently working on a fantasy novel. She wants to thank all of the creative writing professors at Augustana for helping her grow during her time here, and transforming her work from a hobby into a passion. She hopes you enjoy her two stories!

Trevor Jablonski
The first note that may be read: bring me priests when I die. My poems are hurting the invisible.

Elena Leith
Just a storyteller.

Katie McClellan
I like to write (poetry and short stories, mostly), go vintage shopping, drink coffee, and am a total horror movie nerd.

Renée Millette
If you watch a lot of TV, get a hobby so that you can make cool art while also still watching a lot of TV.

“Tracy” Trang Ngo
I’m just a humble Vietnamese girl with burning desire to learn about the world. The artwork is inspired by my journey to the United States.

Migdalia Perez
I am a senior, who transferred from Elgin Community College as a junior last year, majoring in Psychology and minoring in Sociology.

Jackson Phillips
Jackson, known on campus as Jake, is an autistic, genderfluid, 19 year old with ADHD who doesn’t know when not to talk about their mental health issues. They’re also really active in Augustana’s LGBTQIA+ community and likes to talk about gender and sexuality, specifically their own gender and their asexuality. As a result, most of their writing is just super gay and kinda confused, much like Jake themselves. Ah well, c’est la vie.

Anonymous Prime
The bastard son of Optimus Prime. Based on a true story.

Anna Serafini
has been writing poetry since 8th grade. they used to write mostly about boys but now they write about their daily crippling existential fear. and boys.
Leah Shelton
Photography has become a version of relaxation for me. Once or twice a term, I give myself a free hour to walk around campus with the intention of observing the beauty I see. It serves as a break from my typical scattered thought process and helps me focus on a few scenes that I want to capture. The two photos of the Old Main dome represent moments when I let myself take ten minutes to frame a perspective that I didn't want to forget: looking up at the dome through what at first seem like obstacles blocking the dome, but when standing in a precise spot, the obstacles become part of the beauty.

Sage Shemroske
Although I've never taken a writing class, I frequently write poetry and enjoy exploring subjects that most people aren't willing to open up about.

Emma Smith
I never saw myself writing poetry, but I'm glad the universe led me to its madness. It's been key in expanding my numerous writing endeavors as well as surviving the ever-volatile transitions and deeply emotional struggles presented to me in my life. I'm grateful to all those who've helped me come so far. "Conta le notti con le stelle non con le ombre; conta i giorni con i sorrisi non con le lacrime." - Italian Proverb

Jacob Soukup
I am a Business (Marketing/Finance) and Art double major. As senior year is coming to a close I am getting increasingly more excited for my senior exhibition show. After I graduate I plan to do something with my life that combines both my love for art and my drive for success.

Emma Stough
For me, photography is more than just taking pictures. It's about looking at life through a lens and capturing things that the naked eye can't. I think photographs that make people feel something are the best kind, and so that is what I seek to do through my own work. I've loved to read since I first picked up a book, and so it seemed only natural to me as I grew up that I too should write stories. The stories I like the best take me somewhere I never expected to be, and I seek to do the same with my own work.