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SAGA Art & Literary Magazine

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Spring 2017

## SAGA Vol. 80 / 2016-2017

Alyssa Froehling

*Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois*

Elena Leith

*Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois*

Emma Smith

*Augustana College, Rock Island Illinois*

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SAGA ART & LITERARY MAGAZINE

VOLUME 80 / 2016-2017

# SAGA

2016-2017

Vol. 80

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# SAGA

Art & Literary Magazine

Volume 80

2016-2017

# ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors-in-chief would like to thank the Augustana English department and Admissions Office for their contributions to SAGA Art & 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 Linda Anderson, former English, classics, and religion office secretary, as well as Christina Sanders-Ring, the current secretary of these 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, Joseph Lappie, John Holman, Dora Malech, and Nancy Huse, 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 Jack Harris, who designed the serene, idyllic 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 student's 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 200 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

Professor Rebecca Wee told me that choosing to be a writer would always be an entanglement of personal life and professional life. I can't help but wince sometimes I as submit my work to journals, knowing now it is free of me, free of my context, any explanation. I think part of the reason I harbor this fear is because of the way art and writing has been taught to me and others years before college—we are taught art and writing, especially poetry, is sneaky. It always has some hidden moral meaning or depth that any reader has to work to uncover, or can't uncover.

I'm not trying to tell you what to do, but I will tell you this: poems often aren't meant to be emotional labyrinths. Art, no matter how abstract, often isn't asking you to do mental acrobatics.

What I'm getting at is that if you picked up this copy of SAGA, I ask that you just read. Take the time to sit with something that makes you feel something and let it be just that. No projection, no grandiose moral epiphany.

I know from personal experience that it's difficult to put yourself out there, in the gaze of those who may not "get" what a piece is trying to say—but that being said, it's okay if not everything is understood. For this show of bravery, I'd like to thank and congratulate not only those published in this year's magazine, but also everyone who submitted, as well as everyone who has made art on this campus this year and shared it in some way.

I'd also like to thank Professor Rebecca Wee and Dr. Daniel Morris, two faculty members at Augustana who served not just as mentors, but people who frequently checked in to make sure I was okay, who worked with me to help me end up as who I am now, never perfect, always a little hopeful. I also want to thank my co-editors Emma Smith and Elena Leith. No matter what we're doing, even if we're not saying anything: just having them around is a comfort. Thank you two for teaching me how to be a good friend and how to take care of myself.

Thank you will never be enough to say to any of you: Again Emma and Elena, and also Sara Baugh, Lauren Wilkerson, Luther Grulke, Charlie Bentley, Padraic Price, Vernon Meidlinger-Chin, Alli Petrassi, Jaime Schultz, Claire Cordoba, Rachel Mackinnon, Cam Best, Keila Saucedo, Audrey Johnsen, Melissa Conway, Rachael Meadors, Brian Lovejoy, and Diana Cleveland. You all have had an impact on my life I can't quite write into a neat little letter, but know I am changed because of you, I owe many pieces of myself to you, but most importantly I love you not for anything you have done for me, but because you exist in this world.

I'm excited and scared for what the rest of this world will hand me once I leave Augustana, but I know I have to keep mourning losses while continuing forward. SAGA has always been a labor of love, a gathering of love, and a show of the strength in vulnerability. I'm proud to have been a part of this outlet for grief, joy, justice, and healing.

Alyssa Froehling  
Editor-in-Chief

Working on SAGA as a chief-editor this year has been, from start to finish, a challenge and a privilege. It was clear to me several years ago, thumbing through the older editions, that there exists a profound personality to this magazine and an elusive trait that connects each volume with its predecessors. Only now, sitting down to write this, have I realized what that trait, or quality, is: an intimate manifestation of "we".

No, not *Wee*. I am not referring to our ever-guiding light and queen, Rebecca Wee. Although I must take a moment to convey my heartfelt gratitude for the unconditional love and sage advice she so frequently took the time to give me—for the hugs and commiseration she provided during tearful office visits—and for the emails and poetry she wrote and shared with me that I will very literally keep forever. She is my poetry mother, my teacher, my friend, and a vital ally and mentor to this magazine. I, like so many, am forever changed having met and worked with her. The writer I have become is the result of her guidance and support.

The "we" to which I was referring is the collective "we". The one which unites us as individuals into a singular entity: *us*—here—living and breathing the good and the bad. *We*—who persist in this place during the most volatile years of our lives—striving to capture the uniquely universal experiences of us all. We are young, searching people. Bridging the gaps between us by exposing ourselves and our vulnerability. Creating a newly intimate and diverse collage of a collective we may not have even realized we were a part of. We have done it again this year. I am honored to have assisted in accumulating and exposing the work of such truly remarkable artists.

I want to thank my co-editors, Alyssa Froehling and Elena Leith, for showing me the ropes as the newest addition to their team and for their unwavering and true friendship. Their endless compassion and unreserved love gave me hope through every chapter of trial and transformation in my personal and professional life. Thank you to my best friends, Diana Cleveland and Jenna Bronson, for believing in me, holding me, and taking such good care of my heart—to Uxmar Torres, for touching my soul and bringing so much inspiration, love, and confidence to me and my life. Lastly, I want to thank my parents who've supported me and my aspirations every step of the way. I am infinitely grateful to the art, prose, and poetry editors with their boards for their service to SAGA, as well as our technical team, graphic designers, faculty advisors, and all those who helped make this publication possible. We have left our mark, added our souls to a legacy, and will not be forgotten. We mattered. All of it mattered.

Emma Smith  
Editor-in-Chief

# LETTERS FROM THE EDITORS

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The final weeks of production are not fun. I don't mean I don't enjoy them, because I'm the type of nerd who likes to mess with leading and kerning into the decimals. I like letting my perfectionist gain control, squinting at the screen until textboxes line up exactly where I want them to. What I mean is that spending 7+ hours in front of the computer while completely ignoring my (minimum) 25 page senior inquiry project and my raging insomnia is not fun. Still, when the hours are done and I'm staring at an almost complete magazine, I am very proud of us all. We all have had a wonderful time putting this magazine together. We started the year as friends, but we're ending it as family. Not to sound cliché, but that's what we do here.

SAGA is more than a college magazine. We're a community, albeit a small one. I pray that Augustana College will always have SAGA and its artists and aficionados to breathe passion into college life. And although little, we be fierce. SAGA's art is a testament to the vision and creative talents of the students of Augustana.

This year has been hard. Senior year aside, the world has had plenty of obstacles to overcome. Despite our struggles, our community banded together for an outpour of creativity. I am more than grateful to have been a part of this for three years. This is my final year and I will greatly miss SAGA and all our affiliates. I'm grateful to everyone in this magazine who took the time to contribute to our final product and proud of everyone who was a part of SAGA in some way. Thank you all for sharing your work and your time with us.

I'd also like to thank my family. They were my first creative community and have fostered my artistic endeavours and aspirations. I'd also like to thank my Augie family: Cam Best, Alina Lundholm, Claire Kepner, Rachael Meadors, and McKee Jackson. You are my friends and my foundation. You have guided, inspired me, and helped me grow. I cannot thank you enough. I wish I could do more than write these few words, but we're all lucky I got this stuff down before my senioritis really kicked in.

I'd also like to give a brief thanks to my mentors and advisors: Dr. Rebecca Wee, Dr. Jane Simonsen, and Anne Earel. You lovely ladies have been true friends to me during my time at Augustana. I can't possibly express my gratitude enough to satisfy, but know that your guidance, encouragement, and comfort gave me the strength to forge ahead. Thank you so much for all the time and consideration, late-night emails, and mid-day office visits.

Last, but not least, I'd like to thank Emma, Alyssa, and Diana. My senior friends who have done more for me than I could ever say. You three gave me strength to forgive and heal. I cannot wait for our futures. I will treasure SAGA memories. I am proud to have been a part of these past three years, proud to have my name stamped on these pages. May art always have a voice on Augustana's campus.

Elena Leith  
Editor-in-Chief

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## Inner Workings

*photography*



## A Word on Words

Violet expression and soft accusations,  
 a halo of raw thoughts and sudden epiphany,  
 writing tells you more about yourself  
 than anyone else could  
 you just need to listen to its soft patter,  
 a toddler's tug on your sleeve to  
 "look, hey look!"  
 because something glorious came from you  
 and you'll really want to see this.

Revel in the comforting mask of self-expression  
 and parade around the pieces of your heart you can stand to expose,  
 sun-washed bare-skin morning screaming "I love you too, here's how much"  
 because a poem knows how to say these things better than a tongue ever could,  
 an alphabetic miracle  
 that knows how to carry you better than any man could  
 whispering through gritted teeth,  
 the first morning you wake up alone again "I will get better, here's how I'll try"  
 because you know something glorious can come from you  
 and you'll really want to see that.



## fever wrists

does it matter if the singing  
moves in the same circles

as his mouth when he says  
*migraine?*

and what if i told you when i was born  
i was a tadpole and i swam

in similar movements  
on your ceiling:

screaming like styrofoam  
cut with a wire?

i fell onto you like snow swinging:  
fists melting into your sheets.

someday you'd hold me, like  
a needle in the bathtub.

someday you'd hear me,  
a bell passed between

concrete. it is  
the same echo rotation

crunching your jaw down  
into headaches.

mortar and pestle woman  
grinding against you:

those reoccurring fever dreams where  
you lose your teeth?

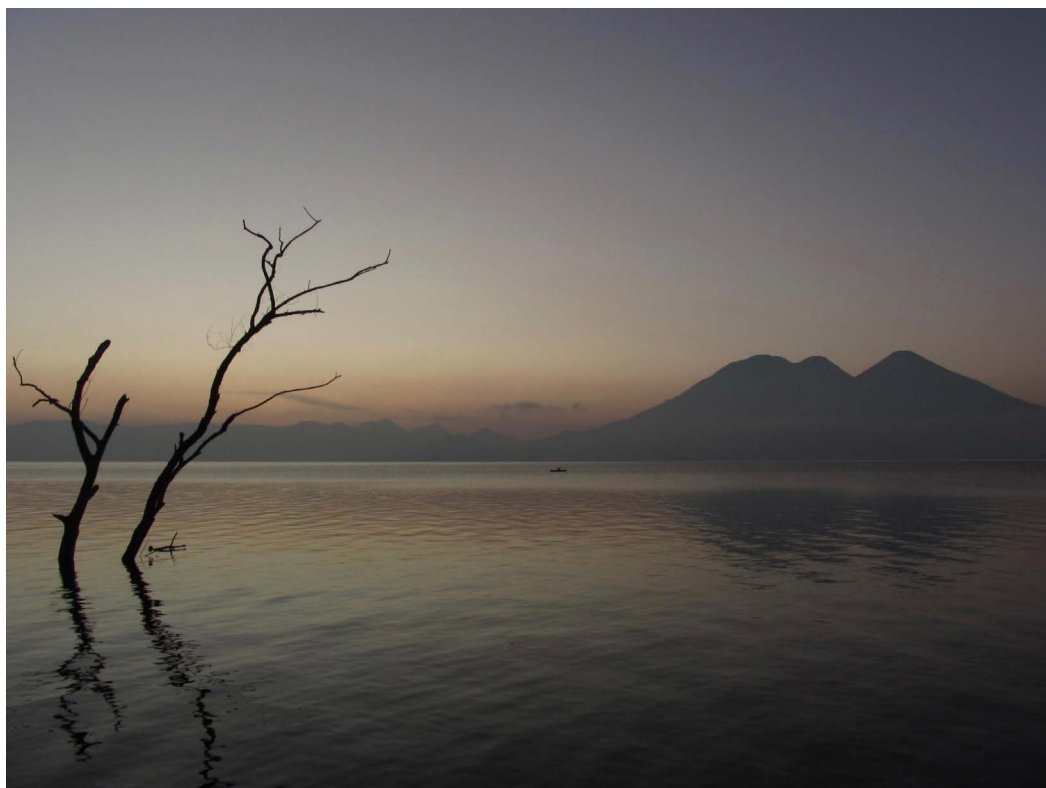
i've hidden them in my shirt cuffs  
and sold them for a penny each.

## Echoes

Sweet vermouth  
sticky like overripe peaches bruised and pulpy  
with soft broken flesh  
your thumb digging into my neck mottled pink echoes  
of things that are  
gone.

## Balance

*photography*



## sonata for a fish with lungs

when i think of blue, i think of groceries  
rolling onto asphalt, eggshells and florets and my fists  
clenched tight around plastic bag handles.  
somehow my knees asphyxiating

it's uncomfortable to associate  
the same color as the sky with  
the lake full of leeches i stand in,  
waist deep, begging to be drawn out by

my six-year-old self standing  
on the shore, reading aloud  
her own butchered definition  
of marriage. how bloody it is,

this union of the real and surreal.  
they plant feathers like crops in  
fields that die rather than take  
flight. this disappointment.

what you knew would not  
be possible turning into blue,  
always baby faced, always more  
suffocated than you remember

## How I Heard Harm and Its Separation

*For Tom and his ex-partner Liam*

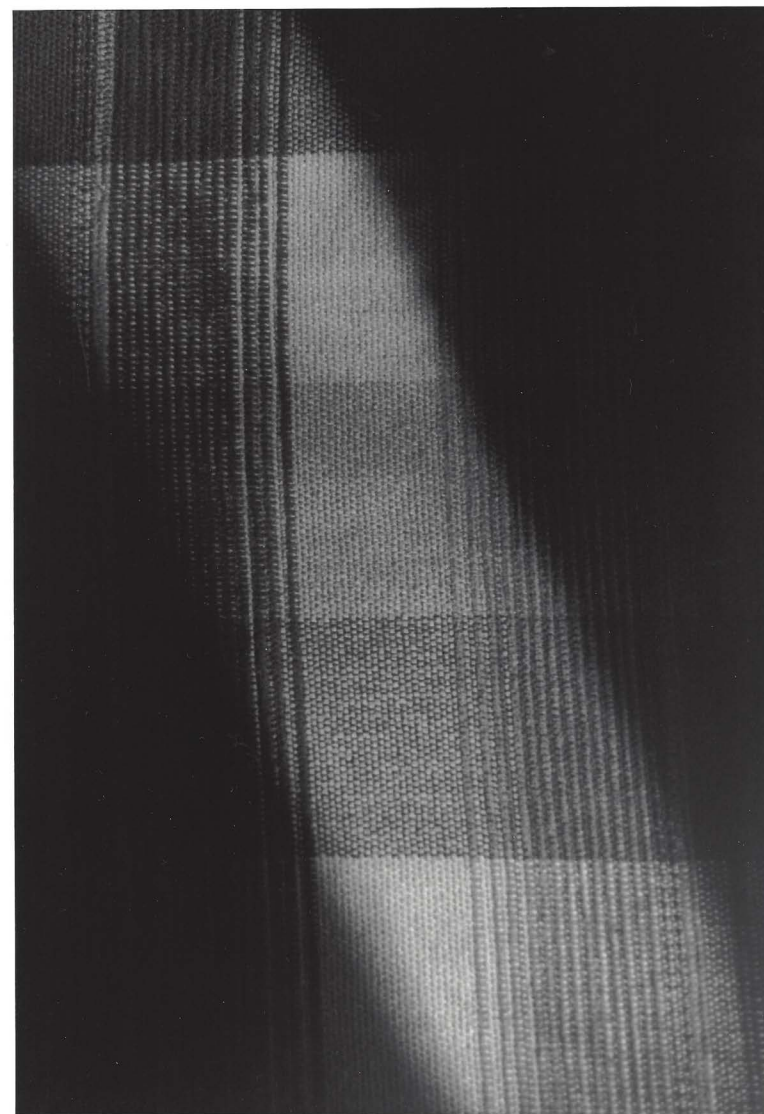
"I could be the blind  
chair that becomes  
muted and flaccid  
when sat on. Tearing  
the breath and  
becoming the slouched  
shape of a raindrop.

When the thousandth  
crush isn't noticed  
upon me, I'll crumble,  
sending both him and  
I stuck to the floor.

He being the only  
one that can rise"

## Lazy Sundays

*photography*



## Water

a  
little  
piece of  
heaven kissed  
my temple to wake me.  
blue is the color we  
die for.

## Working in the Peripheries *photography*



## It Was a “Fuck You” Kind of Rainstorm

It was a “fuck you” kind of rainstorm, the kind that crack- shock-snapped me awake from the last peaceful sleep I’d have for a very long time. I’d been dreaming about something white like snow, but a lot warmer. I wanted to dive back into it, then thunder jolted through me, eyes to ears to a thousand voltages squeezing my heart. I never liked loud noises. I never liked much of anything. I grew up a child afraid of the world, I wasn’t much of the sports-star my dad wanted from his only son. Instead I studied computer science at the local community college. My pale freckled hand reached out from the sanctity of the warm covers to grab the black plastic alarm clock and slide the blaring bright blue face of it toward me. A light scar pink against my fingertips. A stagnant loop, a reminder of the impulsive kid I forgot to be. I touched the pink hardened skin to my thumbs.

When I was 9, I asked for Bionicles for Christmas. I loved putting the pieces together to build this powerful warrior, as if I had some control over an element of strength. I liked popping the plastic pieces into their sockets. I found a child’s fascination in structure and creation, like these broken protectors of Mata-Nui wouldn’t exist without my clumsy hands. My parents got me a remote control helicopter instead. So I put it together, fending off little sister Sabby’s toddler curiosity. She didn’t want to focus on any of her own presents which only seemed to piss me off. I crashed the helicopter into our smoldering fireplace on purpose, as if destroying this gift would create the one I’d wanted. The helicopter’s blades hit brick first and a sudden sense of urgency ran through me. The slick black controller fell from my hands. The helicopter smack- bang- popped into pieces that hit the floor in a whirring clatter. Guilt and remorse snatched my stomach between their teeth, gnawing. I rushed to it. Sabby started crying. I tried to put the propellers back onto the chipped plastic neon green nub. Melting plastic bits popped within the fire. It smelled wrong. I tried to pull the pieces out. The gray plastic stuck to my fingertips, burning. I knew better.

“What the Hell are you doing?” Dad’s eyes were wide running into the once cozy living room. I’d never seen my dad afraid before. He picked up his bird-boned son and rushed to the kitchen. “Katherine! Come take a look at this, Ian burned his hand.”

Childhood accidents in this house were marked by a worried father and calm mother. She worked at the hospital downtown, there’s no doubt she’d seen worse.

“I just wanted to fix it.” I choked out. I hadn’t realized I was crying until I tried talking “I wanted to put it back together.” I consider that the first day of my adolescence I began to understand loss.

Sleepy eyes took a second to focus on the bold blue numbers screaming from the digital clock. It was four-something-in-the-morning. I got up anyway, throwing back the covers and wondering if it’s worth it to shower now or if the rain will do enough on the walk to class.

It was a “fuck you” kind of rainstorm that dragged the morning into a perceived eternity before my little sister woke up and ate the french toast I made for her. We said bye to our parents, on their way out to work together, umbrellas in hand. My sister finished eating. Her dark brown hair trapped in braids behind her ears, there was syrup stuck to her chin.

“Backpack, Sabby.” I handed her the crisp new red backpack she got for her 11th birthday last week. I helped mom pick it out.

“Kids at school call me Sabrina now.” She held her head high, trying to look older maybe. She was eight years younger than me and almost up to my shoulder.

“You’re gonna miss your bus, Sabby.” I cleared plates from the food-stained off-white table cloth.

Sabby was born with only one functional ear. She had both ears cosmetically, but only the left could actually hear. Her doctors weren’t too worried about her development, but our parents were. They were conscious to never leave her without some kind of auditory stimulation, mom spent a fortune on jingling learn-the-alphabet baby toys, Dad constantly scheduled meetings with her teachers to make sure she seemed to be on par with the other kids. She liked to play with my etch-a-sketch when she was little. Sabby always tells them they worry too much.

The yellow hunk of metal was rolling down the street through the thick rain. Sabby wiped the syrup off her chin and ran, grabbing an umbrella from the coat rack next to the hefty oak door. A quick breeze lifted the hair from my forehead for one brief second then a bang shook the house as thunder coincided with the slamming of the door behind her. It was suddenly quiet. The house seemed to absorb the sound of the rain, only leaving a soft patter. I showered.

It was a “fuck you” kind of wind that swept and snapped my umbrella into ting-tang-tingling pieces on the concrete as I walked to class a couple hours after Sabby left. The precipitation slung against me in ice-shard buckets over my jean-soaked body. I wished I wore something warmer than this denim jacket riddled with holes.

It was a “fuck you, yes! Distinctly you!” kind of visibility that kept me from seeing the car, headlights first, coming directly toward me as I crossed the street. I froze in the middle of the lane, a pang freezing me in place, thoughts of a paper I wrote on Medusa in middle school, the way stone froze until an eventual decay. It was a blur of metal that I was sure would kill me until it swerved to avoid me. Until it swerved from the road into the body of a kid splashing in sidewalk puddles. I hadn’t seen him either.

It was a “fuck the world” kind of rainstorm as my jacket caught this kid’s blood. I saw my arms reach out to save him, maybe snatch his breath and shove it back inside of him. It was a “fuck humanity” kind of subtle movement. I’m talking about the ragged rise and fall of his chest underneath a soaking wet dinosaur t-shirt under an un-zipped raincoat or maybe I meant the flicking of his wide brown eyes, wild, like they didn’t know what was happening, maybe I meant the movement of the woman gripping the steering wheel, my eyes met her’s as she drove away, screeching tires then a sharp ringing in my ears. She was a blur of dark hair and white car. I tried to call 911 but my phone wasn’t working in the rain so I held it inside my jacket until it rang.

He tried to pick his arms up, I tried not to look at the mess of his legs. They weren’t all there. I thought of the toys I played with when I was his size, the plastic limbs so easily taken apart and popped back together. I wondered if anyone knew how to put this kid’s legs back together. Bone shards breaking free of the skin, passed torn jeans and shredded meat like someone shoved raw burgers inside of a scarecrow, so bloody I wanted to vomit. His mother ran out the front door, throwing herself on top of his body. Her purple t-shirt and jeans already darkening with rain. “Danny!” She sounded like she was gagging while she wailed his name. I recognized his mom, and then it hit me that this is little Danny Carter. I used to drop Sabby at their house in the mornings before she was old enough for Kindergarten. The oldest daughter Clarissa would walk Sabby back in the afternoons.

I was seven the first and only time I broke a bone. Running

through the woods behind our grandma’s house. I was going so fast I felt like I was flying, I was flying. My mind free from my body free from the Earth. Laughing and running and the world was deep and green and I was invincible. I was invincible. Until I fell and landed hard, my body betrayed my body and the world was deep and bloody, left arm snapping beneath me. The pain was the most intense I’d ever felt, I was terrified of unraveling. I screamed until Sabby came back with our dad.

“Don’t touch him, wait for the ambulance to get here” I don’t try to fly anymore. I grasped Ms. Carter’s forearms in my hands, reciting what I learned about accidents from the time we learned first aid in health class. Mrs. Hawk told us to check for breathing, to tie something like a belt or a shirt around a limb if it was bleeding- to apply pressure- but Danny’s legs were smashed to shit, she never said what to do if a little kid’s legs were smashed to shit. I couldn’t tell what was tears or blood or rain, it all looked the same especially as the flashing lights of the ambulance arrived.

It was a “fuck your happiness, fuck your ideals of childhood, fuck what you wanted for your son” kind of rainstorm as a single drop of blood splashed into a puddle underneath the grey-green gurney holding Danny as they carried him away. Danny started screaming like the world was ending as soon as they lifted him. Maybe to him the world really was ending. He had a “fuck no, I’m not done here” kind of scream that shook me to the core. I still hear it most nights when it rains. They took him away with his mother and suddenly I was left alone on the street with the downpour and a multitude of strange neighbors crowding the sidewalks. They were watching the spectacle, but suddenly didn’t know what to do with themselves. I was covered in the blood of a kid I barely knew. A kid who I was positive would be dead by tonight. His blood was on my hands, I wiped and wiped and wiped it into the grass, knees burning against the sidewalk. We all remained glued to the pavement. Me kneeling, them standing underneath the sky as it rained for what seemed like eons, like the birth of the Earth and the death of us all.

I came home to an empty house. The door shut behind me. I threw up on the carpet between the fireplace and glass-top coffee table. My jeans and jacket were glued on like a second skin. The denim was stained. Not really red, but it was his blood so I tore off my clothes. Tears dripping in my mouth, I inhaled them as I struggled to find my breath. My lungs felt like perpetually deflated balloons.

My foot slammed hard on the trash can lever, the metallic lid popped up and I threw my clothes into it. I covered them up with popsicle wrappers, empty boxes of mac n cheese, an orange juice cartoon. I laid on the kitchen floor, pushing my damp skin to the tile, staring straight up at the ceiling. I concentrated on the smooth white surface of it until my body remembered how to inhale. Exhale. Inhale. "Please." Exhale. "Stop." Inhale. "Calm." Exhale. "Calm down." Inhale. "You're okay." Exhale. "You're okay. You're okay. I'm okay."

A police officer arrived at my house the morning after an ambulance sped Danny away. A soft knock on my blue-painted door. The walls were painted white and dappled with light blue sponge shapes. The perfect nursery for the perfect baby boy. Only I'm 19 now and the paint is chipping off around the door frame.

"They have a couple questions about the driver, hun." My mom tried to make her voice soft but she always sounded like a doctor. There was something distant and clinical within her. "You feeling alright enough to come into the living room?"

"Yeah," Walking down the steps, I swallowed hard and fought back tears. A peculiar kind of salt water searing. It was guilt eating away at the lining of my stomach. A volatile bile dissolving my very being from the inside out. All I knew is that her eyes were lighter than Danny's and how scared he looked. He was a burning pain lost in the wilderness, like a forest fire burning inside of him and he didn't know how to put it out. Didn't know why the rain seemed to only fuel it. "Her eyes were light and her hair was dark and her car was white. No, I don't think I can ID her."

Since the police never arrested the driver, I was the only face anyone could put the blame on, even if they didn't mean to. I'm the person who walked into the road, I'm the guy who couldn't ID the young woman who hit Danny, I'm the person who didn't even think to look at her license plate, I'm the guy who remained intact.

The newspaper article about the accident said Danny was out of school for the morning for a dentist appointment. He was supposed to be in class, learning about math and books but he had a cavity. They said it's a miracle he didn't bleed to death. Sabby cried on the couch in my bedroom one night after she got home from school and found the article on my nightstand. She told me that seeing Danny without any legs doesn't look like a miracle. She said the way kids talk about him like he's not a person doesn't feel like a miracle.

It was that Wednesday, two days after the accident when the

kitchen phone rang. I hadn't been going to class. A woman's voice rang through.

"Danny's alive." It was Clarissa although I didn't realize that at first. Danny's alive but "He lost his legs, mom said he'll be able to go to school still. Once he gets used to the chair. Said you were there, thought you might like to know" and she hung up.

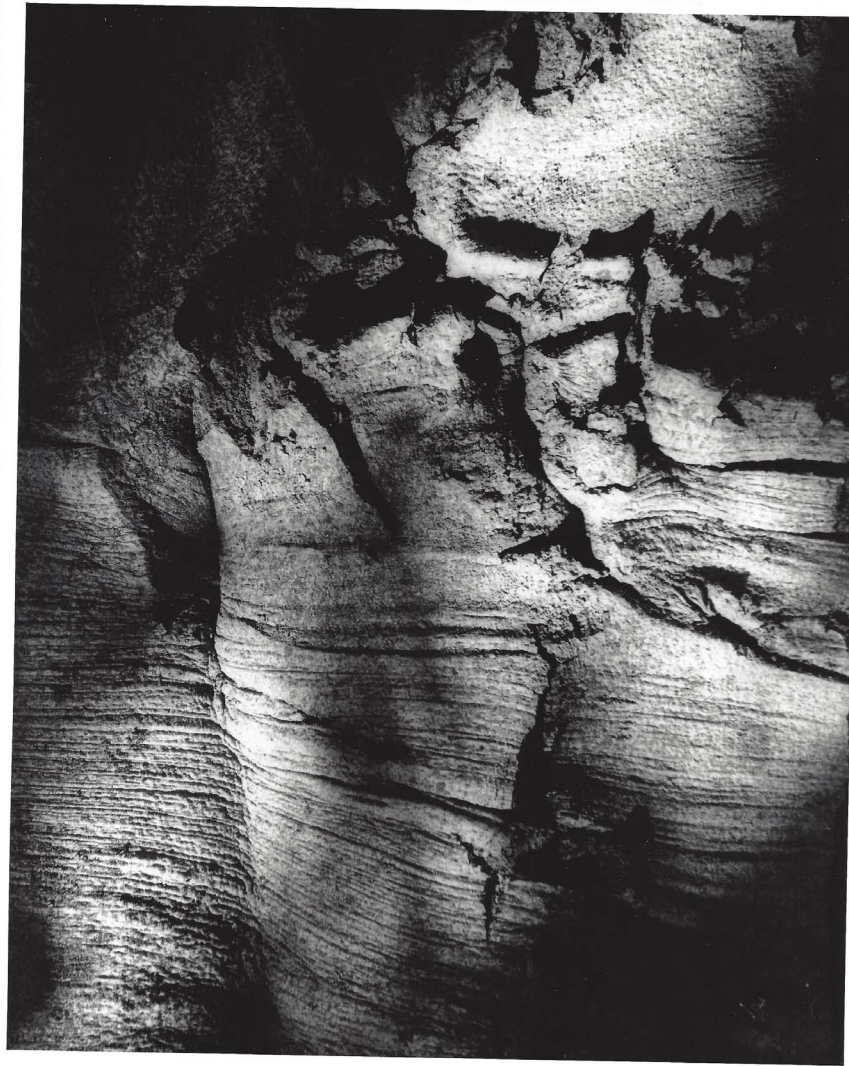
It must be a powerful fucking storm that raged inside of that kid. I saw him sometimes when I walked by their house after Danny came home. I always waved, but I don't know if he remembers me. I hoped he didn't remember too much about that day. That kid is a warrior. A year or so later there was a "For Sale by Owner" sign out front and I didn't see the family after that. Danny's alive. No one really knew where they went.

I think about Danny even now, especially now, as I'm driving to Sabby's graduation and it starts to drizzle. The sky opened up and lightning flickered in the distance. Danny's alive and I think about him every time it rains, like his veins are pouring again but this time it's cleansing. Like this time he's growing. Today he is growing. I wonder if Danny is wheeling across his own stage right now, reveling in the glory of his own graduation.



## Bark Texture

*photography*



## Sunshine Coast Companions

*photography*

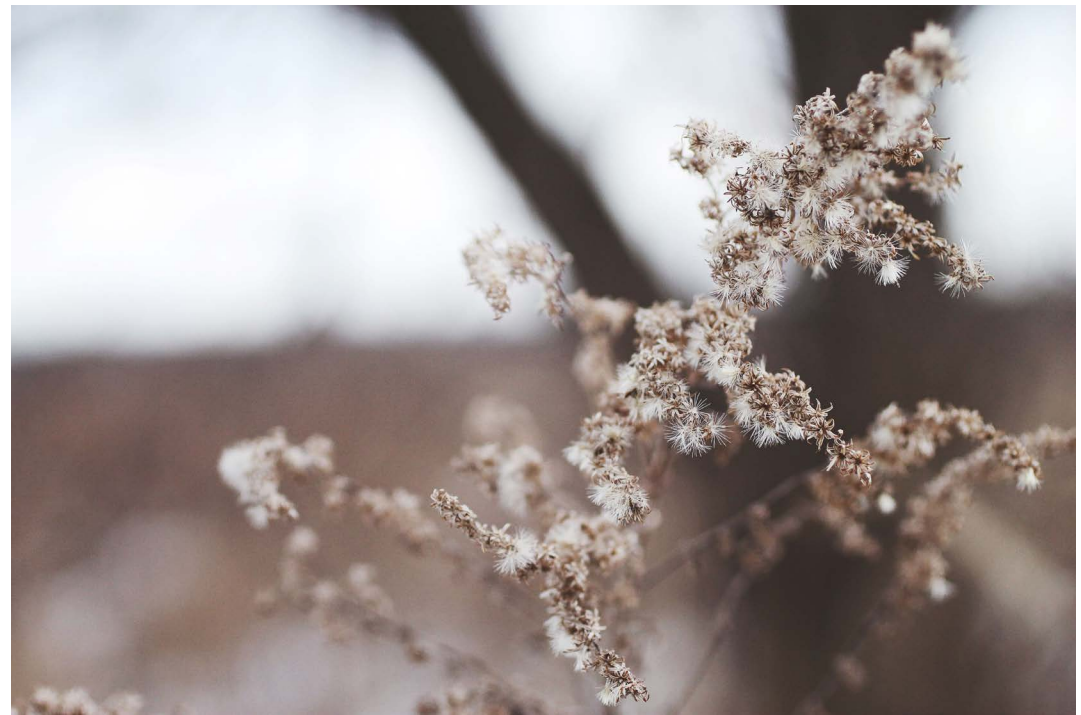


because you called me brave

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

## Dead Prairie

*photography*



# Promise

*For Rachel and Hannah, who love against all odds*

Give her a ring to turn her finger green  
 Let forests grow from your hands  
 Watch wildflowers grow in the creases of her eyelids  
 When she cries, catch oceans in your hand  
 And say “baby, flow.”  
 Because you’ve watched her grow  
 Through nightmares and dreams and in-between when neither of you could sleep  
 There have been bad days  
 Days that go down like whiskey  
 And good days  
 Days that go down like whiskey  
 And if your love is hard for some people to swallow, let them choke

There have been days when you’re both half out the door  
 But never need more than the freckle on her shoulder to guide you back home  
 Let her be your favorite poem  
 You won’t understand every word  
 But her lines are the closest to holy you’ve ever heard  
 Ever since you met in youth group  
 You’ve got a bible verse tattooed on your shoulder  
 Promise to speak her name like a goddamn hymn  
 Read her like a braille diary  
 Ice skate on the ponds between her collarbones  
 Kiss her neck and watch the ice thaw  
 Melt together like nostalgia  
 This kind of love has to be a verb

Even in towns that frown on your hand-holding and want you to fold  
 Like crumpled up letters in the pocket of your jacket pull them out and use them to wipe your nose  
 You proposed  
 Your bent-knee promise not to be her other half  
 Because she is whole  
 And not to keep her happy  
 Because she will feel dull

So love her,  
 love her, full  
 She is a light  
 And you will burn  
 Say “baby, burn”  
 Love the way she cooks pancakes late at night,  
 with extra chocolate chips  
 Love the way she lives in second-hand,  
 sweaters hang from her shoulders perfectly  
 Learn to love her silence  
 She will not insist on helping you  
 But she will always be there  
 Learn to hear “I love you” when she says “I will take you home”  
 And as you look out on the highway,  
 count the streetlights like sheep  
 Fall asleep in her arms  
 Dream girl  
 She will listen to your heart and rewrite it’s rhythm  
 She has piano key fingertips to slide your spine  
 Beats in time on your vertebrae  
 When you are with her do not fear heights  
 Her hands are firm  
 Her hands are good for climbing  
 They were given to her by her pilot father and music lessons  
 When you are at the top and you don’t know how to climb back,  
 she will take your hand  
 Let her, not because you need to be rescued  
 But because a ship never refuses a lighthouse

## Persephone and Her New Skin

*photography and photoshop*



## a vow cracked open lengthwise on a mattress

i put a string in your mouth  
and you spat it back out—

drawn from one eye to another  
i traced you with chalk and wrapped

you in sheets green with detergent.  
we slept curled in the washing machine

and called it camping. you weren't dead  
yet but you sung like a bird married

to a windowsill forever. death did us  
part and the parts continue:

a part of your body traded for mine,  
an ear for an ear, the curve of your

hair, a tangled mess of streets  
uncombed by our tandem.

stranded by the bus stop,  
i let my knees bleed and think

about groceries: a head of lettuce  
to replace you in conversation,

cranberries to crack like knuckles  
left out long in the cold. high on

klonopin i look through an opaque  
glass of sparkling water,

i miss you deep, like a wish  
to be buried

into the core of the earth and  
then the rewind climb

like hell to get out.  
you are a conch

i cannot escape. you swirl in me  
marbled cake—

the aches and pains of the stomach  
cured with a little pink powder.

the string once glowed red  
before fury cut it, and the rage

chopped me down to the size  
of down feathers, my moment

of melting, of falling. i'm a witch  
for your wandering. forever

reeling out on a spool.

## Dorian

Two 7/11 cups between us in the front seat of your truck,  
driving through a long stretch of cornfields,  
your neighbor's farm,  
then nothing,  
a gas station leaking harsh florescent lights in  
the middle of that nothing.

I want to get out when you park.  
But I don't.

I watch you pump gas into your maroon pick-up truck  
standing bright against the shadows. I always hated  
pick-up trucks, but I liked you.

I liked the way you smelled like cigarettes and lavender,  
and whispered my name,  
and wore your t-shirts  
with enough holes to see your tattoos through.

I packed an extra flannel, the red one, that night in case you got cold.  
But you didn't.

I wanted to reach over and touch  
the inked out eyes on your shoulder, peering through the torn white t-shirt, bite  
your lip ring to make sure you're solid, kiss you between deaf breaths,  
and find something in all of that nothing-  
but I don't.

I waited in your car,  
wishing you'd quit smoking,  
playing with the grey powder of your ash trash  
underneath the radio  
watching it collect in the indents of my fingertips  
like a road map marking interstates  
connecting where I am  
to where I should be.



## Yellow Summer

\*\*\*

*After*

Peter and Jacob stood silent in the kitchen. The clock above the microwave ticked incessantly. Rain splattered the windows, racing down the pane. It had been raining since early morning. Jacob took the silence as an opportunity to observe that the plants in the corner near the kitchen table had wilted pathetically. He thought about watering them.

Elsie wasn't home yet. She was off to the grocer's in town, getting food for the weekend of guests. She'd tasked Peter and Jacob to clean the kitchen, and they'd finished quickly, not talking much. The lake house was in surprisingly good condition, given that it was only inhabited a few months out of the year.

"I just don't get it," Peter said, suddenly. "Why she thinks it's such a great idea, I mean. To invite them all up here."

Jacob didn't particularly like Peter. He wasn't an easy man to get along with. He was selfish, and unnoticing of the trials of others. But he was Elsie's brother, and Jacob tried – as best he could – to tolerate him.

"I don't really know what to tell you, man," Jacob responded, shifting his weight uncomfortably. "Is it really the end of the world, to have them here? Might be fun, right? The old gang, back together again."

Peter looked over at Jacob as if he had recently escaped from a mental institution. "The end of the–? The old gang? Christ," he laughed sharply, diving a hand through unruly copper hair. "That's *hilarious*."

Jacob wasn't sure how to respond to that, and wished that Elsie would hurry up and get back. Elsie was the glue that held it all together.

She'd heard his plea telepathically, somehow. He heard the back door bang open, then trudging footsteps. Elsie reached the kitchen, brown hair frothy and frizzed beneath the hood of her raincoat, arms full of grocery bags.

"A little help?"

Jacob rushed forward to grab bags from her, setting them onto the counters near the fridge. Elsie shook herself of rain, removing her coat, the water dripping onto the kitchen floor.

"What's up in here, guys?" Elsie was tugging her hair up into a ponytail, a hair tie stuck between her teeth as she kicked off her rubber boots. "Weird vibe."

Peter didn't help with groceries. He leaned against a counter on the opposite side of the kitchen, regarding his sister with crossed arms, ignoring her question completely. "I don't want them to come, Elsie."

Jacob couldn't see it, but he figured an eye roll from Elsie. "Oh, come on. We're not having this conversation again, Pete."

Jacob felt like he didn't need to be in the room. Peter and Elsie had argued about the visit the night before in the living room, loudly. Elsie had insisted on it, and Peter had been fighting the decision ever since.

"We're just going end up talking about things that I don't want to talk about," Peter whined. "There's reasons we haven't seen them all these years. It was for the best."

Elsie sighed. Jacob handed her a box of crackers to put into the cupboard next to the fridge. "Look. Can't stop it now, okay? I sent the email ages ago. Gwen's flight's in tomorrow morning, and Theo and Owen are in sometime tonight. Angie's been at her Aunt's since last week. You're going to have to suck it up, Pete. Be an adult."

The rain intensified against the kitchen windows. Jacob bunched the empty plastic bags up and shoved them into the cabinet beneath the sink. "When's Gwen's flight due?"

"9, I think."

"And I'm still picking her up?"

"Yeah." Elsie looked over at her brother, who was glaring out the rainy windows.

Peter looked between the both of them. "This is a fucking *horrible* idea. You'll see."

Elsie's eyes dropped to the floor, and she leaned back onto the counter. "Peter, I honestly don't care whether or not you want to see them, alright? I think it's time we all sat down and talked about it. They're all coming, and you can't change that."

Peter's jaw locked and un-locked. "Don't come crying to me when it all goes to hell, okay?"

The room went silent again. Jacob thought about the wilting plants, and went to get the watering can from the hall closet. When he came back to the kitchen, Elsie and Peter were still caught in a bitter silence, both pairs of eyes locked on pieces of distance he couldn't see.

Jacob knew they were thinking about it. That summer.

\*\*\*

*Before*

Owen surveyed the cabin. There were a lot of kids in it that he didn't know. A lot of them were girls, beautiful creatures, with hair reaching halfway down their backs, skin sunkissed from hours of laying out. Cans of cheap beer rattled against silver bracelets, silver rings. They were clustered together on leather couches, laughing too loudly, trying to impress the older boys that were passing joints in the corner near the windows. The boys didn't look, but knew they were being watched. They would all probably get laid, later. There were four bedrooms upstairs.

Owen tugged at his baseball cap, flipping it backwards. Some shitty pop music pounded in the background, Britney or Christina – one of the girls had hijacked the stereo with her own CD mix. He chugged the last of his beer and tossed the can into a garbage bag lying on the floor. He felt a hand on his shoulder.

"Look who's here." A rough, cigarette voice. Theo.

Owen looked to where Theo's finger was pointing. Two girls had just entered the cabin, a redhead and a brunette. They looked younger than the rest of the girls. The redhead wore a short sundress, the brunette jeans and a skimpy tank. A bottle of wine passed between them.

"Shit." Owen turned to Theo. "Is P here?"

"Nah, haven't seen him yet." Theo shook his head, a smirk on his lips, dark curls dancing.

Owen watched as the brunette found a group of girls she knew on the couch and rushed excitedly to greet them, shoving the wine into her friend's hand.

"Who's that?" Owen asked, tilting his head at the redhead.

"Shit if I know, man." Theo pulled the hood of his sweatshirt up over his head. His breath smelled like smoke.

"She can't be more than sixteen, T, look at her."

The girl had awkwardly sat down at the end of the couch, watching her brunette friend laugh and talk with the group of older girls. Her hair was wild, crimped, or something. Her eyes were rimmed in black. She looked supremely uncomfortable.

Theo raised his eyebrows. "Yeah, dude, I'm *looking*."

Owen had an uneasy feeling in his stomach. Too much beer, maybe. The brunette had hopped up from her position on the couch. She was skittering towards Owen and Theo.

"Jumping party, O," she slurred, nearly falling into Theo as she tripped on a floorboard.

"Hell, Elsie, too much wine?" Theo grabbed her arm. Her eyes were dark and red, her shirt slipping off her shoulder.

Elsie leaned hard against Theo's side, wrapping her arm around his waist. "And how are *you*, T?"

Owen felt the back of his neck flutter with goosebumps. "Where's your brother?"

"Dunno, thought he was here?" Elsie reached a hand out towards Owen and brushed her fingers across his jaw before playfully slapping his cheek. He grabbed her wrist, confused by her behavior. She laughed, then leaned forward. "Hey," she whispered, conspiratorially. "You guys got any *weed*?"

Owen shook his head. "I don't think you need to smoke right now, El. Your brother would kill you. Would kill us."

Elsie rolled her eyes and teetered on her feet.

Theo steadied her with a hand to the waist. "Who's your friend, El?"

"Who? Oh!" Elsie brushed her hair over her shoulder, and then turned her head, yelling, "Hey! Ang!"

The redhead stood up and made her way towards them, uneasily. She clutched the bottle of wine tightly. Up close, Owen noticed her eyes were a startling blue. "Boys, Angelina. Angelina, Owen, Theo. Friends with Pete."

Theo stuck out his hand, his eyes wide, and Angelina shook it, tentatively. "Call me Angie."

She looked over at Owen. He tried and failed to recall another time he'd seen a redhead with blue eyes. "You here for the summer, Angie?"

She nodded, rubbing her lips together. She wasn't wearing silver bangles or rings, like the other girls. "My grandparents have a lake house on the east end."

"Turmend?"

"Yeah, you know it?"

Owen shrugged. "I run over there, sometimes. Nice, quiet area."

Elsie was grappling for the bottle of wine in Angie's hands. Theo pulled her away, saying, "Probably don't need more, Els, let's get some water, how about?" He led her away from the wine and towards the kitchen, leaving Owen and Angie.

"How do you, um, know all these people?" Angie turned slightly, observing the crowd.

"I don't actually know a whole lot of them," Owen confessed.



"Most are just summer kids, visiting family or friends. There's a few year-rounders."

Angie was worrying her bottom lip with her teeth. "You live here?"

"It's my stepmom's cabin, she comes in the winter. She lets me use it when she's gone for parties and stuff."

"Cool stepmom, then." Angie smiled half-heartedly.

"Yeah, I guess," Owen responded. "I'm gonna get another beer. You want one?"

Angie held up the wine bottle. "I'm good."

Theo returned right then from the kitchen, a fresh beer in his hand, his eyes focusing on the new girl. "Be right back," Owen told him.

In the kitchen, he found Elsie sitting on a counter, a glass of water in her hand. Her head lolled against the cabinet behind her. She offered Owen a wide grin. "Can I tell you a secret, O?"

He sighed, stuffing his hands in his pockets. "What's up?"

She took a huge sip of water, then smacked her lips in contentment. "I've always found you the cutest. Even cuter than *Theo*."

"Elsie?"

Owen whipped around to find Peter entering the kitchen. There was a girl trailing behind him. Owen recognized her but couldn't remember her name.

"Pete!" Elsie squealed, leaping from the counter to engulf her brother in a hug. Peter staggered backwards. The girl behind him, a small thing with short blonde hair, looked up at Owen, who didn't say anything but sidestepped her to exit the kitchen.

When he found his way back to Angie and Theo, he found the pair locking lips against a wall. He ignored the tug of jealousy in his chest, and instead went to join the guys in the corner. He needed a smoke.

\*\*\*

### *After*

Theo and Owen flew in together from Tulsa, arriving late Monday night. The hotel they'd booked was fifteen minutes from the lake. They weren't set to meet the group at the Jackson's family lake house until the next day. Both of the Jackson parents had since passed, but Elsie and Peter still kept up the lake house and stayed

there sometimes in the summers.

"Are you nervous?"

Owen was sprawled on the bed, flipping through cable channels. Theo was brushing his teeth on the edge of the bed, watching as the channel landed on TLC.

"Of course I'm nervous. Fuck."

Theo took the toothbrush out of his mouth and turned around to look at Owen. Age hadn't dimmed Owen's brightness – his eyes still sparkled with a glitter of youth. "Are we sure this is a good idea, this reunion?"

Owen sat up. "Probably not."

Theo stood up to finish brushing his teeth in the bathroom. When he came back, Owen had slid beneath the covers and turned off the light. Theo discarded his shirt, pants, and socks before joining him.

On the TV, a fifty-two year old woman was confessing her strange addiction of being stung by bees. "*It started out innocently*," the narrator said.

Owen barked an unfeeling laugh. "It always starts innocently, but shit, bee stings?"

Theo turned on his side. The TV light played out strange shadows on Owen's face. "Do you think we're idiots to have come up here?"

"Well, yeah," Owen answered. "But that's not going to stop us, is it?" He turned his head to find Theo's eyes, reaching out to trace his fingers up his neck, his jaw. "We'll be fine. It'll be fine." He leaned forward to kiss him, soundly.

On screen the woman held a bee with a pair of tweezers. It struggled helplessly against the metal grasp. She was saying, "*the first time I stung myself, it didn't hurt as bad as I thought it would. It just got easier every time.*"

\*\*\*

### *Before*

"It's freezing, Peter!"

"We're almost there."

The night raced and reeled. It was the kind of summer midnight that washed away the heat with a stiff chill, a cold that bit at the legs of teenage girls that had stupidly worn jean shorts. Peter's hand was sweating, but Gwen had never held a boy's hand before and she'd

been wanting to hold Peter's hand for an awfully long time, so she didn't say anything. There were lights retreating behind them, the string lights that hung from the front porch of the lake house that her family rented every summer. Her heart pounded. She wondered if she would lose her virginity to Peter.

The woods were familiar to both of them, but the trees were scary at night, angular shadows thrust against a sky that was one shade away from completely black. Gwen kept her eyes on the back of Peter's head, watching his long brown-blond hair brush his shirt collar with every step he took. She smiled widely. She couldn't believe they were actually holding hands.

"Okay, here we are," Peter announced, the woods falling away in front of them to reveal a clearing. Within the clearing, a hundred feet or so from them, was a log cabin, its windows glowing against the black of night. Gwen paused, forcing Peter to stop, too. He looked back at her. "What, are you scared?"

Gwen looked at him, nothing but a silhouette in the darkness. She imagined his eyes, steely grey, and his smile, the way his cheeks reddened every time he laughed. She wished she'd had the forethought to change into jeans. The cold bit at her ankles.

Peter sighed, letting go of her hand and moving so he was directly in front of her, their faces inches away. Gwen nearly swallowed her tongue. She could feel his breath on her chin. "You don't have to be scared, okay? I'm here."

There wasn't any time for Gwen to panic. Peter lowered his lips onto hers and held them there, unmoving. Gwen wasn't entirely sure if this is what kissing was supposed to be like. She felt like she'd fallen off a cliff. She wasn't sure if that was a good thing or a bad thing.

When Peter drew his lips away, she was dizzy. "Okay, just be cool now, okay?"

Gwen nodded. It was probably imperceptible to Peter in the darkness. He took her hand again, leading her towards the cabin.

\*\*\*

### *During*

The third summer everything settled. The six of them established a rhythm.

Theo was the oldest, and was quite a catch for Angie. During the year after they met, they'd written constantly. The second summer, they'd sealed the deal, going from summer exclusive to year-long exclusive. Elsie tagged along wherever Peter and Angie did, and

Owen was an inevitable addition. There was only a two year age gap between the genders, and it had worked itself out. Owen's stepmom's cabin became the axis from which they all orbited.

Those summers shimmered. They drank, smoked, laughed – lived recklessly. They drove around in Theo's door-less jeep, screaming, blasting music. The lake was theirs in the summer. They lounged on the dock of Angie's grandparent's house, swimming until they'd swallowed too much lakewater. By the third summer, they were in sync.

By the third summer, they thought nothing could touch them.

\*\*\*

### *After*

The dinner had settled into an uncomfortable quiet. The only sounds were the clinking of silverware against plates, the lifting of a wine glass to lips. The lake house dining room was large and poorly lit. The bulbs likely hadn't been replaced for years. Elsie mentally put in on her to-do list. Peter was glaring at her from across the table.

"So what do you do, Jacob?"

Elsie looked up in relief. It was Gwen, smiling widely, that had addressed Jacob. She was wearing bright red lipstick, perhaps in an effort to distract from the paleness of her skin. Motherhood had left her body significantly less fit than her teenage figure. The weight had settled awkwardly on her hips and thighs, leaving her upper torso skinnier than the rest of her body. The gaudy blue blouse she wore accented her proportions disadvantageously.

"Oh, um, I'm an engineer, actually," Jacob responded, surprised that he was being addressed and not ignored. "An industrial engineer, for a company near Chicago. It's a good gig, and close enough to the city that Elsie can run the gallery just fine, for shows and whatnot."

"And you two live in the suburbs, right?" Angie was asking this time. Next to Gwen, she looked like a breath of fresh air. She wore a white shirt and jeans, small gold hoops in her ears.

"Yeah, Evanston?" Elsie said.

"Oh, right." Angie was nodding, bringing her wine glass to her lips. "Nice area."

"Yeah," Jacob confirmed.

The conversation died away. Elsie snuck a glance at Peter. He was staring at Owen, eyes ablaze.

She remembered the money that had disappeared from the study whenever Owen visited, a connection no one had made until it was

too late – how that petty cash fueled a steady, downhill addiction to painkillers. “*But he’s five years clean, Pete, you can’t blame him for stupid things he did when he was a kid!*” she’d said to her brother weeks ago, in an attempt to justify the email invitation she’d sent without consulting him. “*Doesn’t fucking matter how long he’s been clean, Els. He was taking our money. We trusted him. The fucker.*”

Elsie was broken from her thoughts by the sound of a ringing phone. Gwen reached into her pocket and apologized. “I have to take this, it’s Adam.”

Peter raised his eyebrows at her, but she was already gone.

\*\*\*

*During*

“You can’t shotgun a beer to save your life, Gwen, okay? C’mon.”

Angie, Gwen, and Elsie were driving back to the lake, returning from a long day of shopping in town. It was the end of summer, and the sun was hot. Their windows were rolled down, the drive taking them through the dense forests surrounding the lake. All three girls felt the end, but they didn’t want to talk about it. It was this way at every summer’s end. Denial that autumn would arrive, that they would have to leave the lake and resume their secondary lives.

“I’m talented at a lot of things, so I’m sorry that shotgunning beers isn’t one of them.” Gwen rolled her eyes and laughed, adjusting her cat-eye sunglasses. She was recently nineteen and thought herself queen of the world.

“Do you guys mind if we stop at the cabin before home?” Angie asked from behind the wheel. Her red hair had been chopped off to chin length after the second summer, and the look suited her thin, long face. During the third summer, she’d really come into her own. She was studying environmental science at Duke. She and Theo had been dating for two years. “I left my contact solution in Theo’s.”

“Sure, I think Pete’s hanging with them, I gotta ask him when dinner is anyways,” Elsie nodded. She was the youngest among them, still eighteen, and holding out desperately for Owen, like a child. She was extremely thin, thinner than the second summer. Gwen and Angie hadn’t said a word. And Elsie hadn’t said a word about Owen’s biting comments.

Angie parked the car on the side of the road in front of a sign that declared *Lake County, 10,866*. The girls hopped out and hiked down into the woods, following the well-known path to the cabin. Gwen snapped her gum. Elsie fiddled with her shirt. Angie adjusted

her hair.

The cabin looked different in the daylight, more inviting. Owen’s stepmom still lived there in the winters. They’d never met the stepmom, but Owen said that she was deeply troubled.

The front door was open, but no one was on the first floor. Gwen went off to use the bathroom next to the kitchen and Angie started upstairs to retrieve her contact solution. “Theo?” She called as she climbed the stairs. There was no answer.

She checked in the bathroom and found it empty. All the bedroom doors were open except Theo’s, which was closed. As she approached it, Angie heard a strange noise coming from behind it, something almost like the wheezing of an engine that refused to start. Perplexed, she paused near the closed door to listen.

Then – her eyes widened. Her heart stopped. Then – her nose flared, and her blood boiled.

*Don’t open it, Ang, don’t*, is what a rational part of her said. But the less rational part of her just went ahead and barged in.

Theo and Owen looked up at her at the same time.

“Fuck.”

\*\*\*

*During*

Angie banged on the locked bathroom door. “Gwen, c’mon, will you please let me in? Open the door, will you? C’mon, you’re scaring me.”

Gwen sat on the floor of the bathroom. She leaned her head against the wall, her eyes falling shut. She chuckled the test away from her. Her eyelashes curled with moisture. Her chest felt heavy.

“Angie? What’s going on?” her mom.

*Shit*, Gwen thought, scrambling to her feet. She looked around frantically for the test, finding it and shoving it in her back pocket. She leaned towards the mirror to wipe away tears and fix her smeared mascara. She unlocked the door.

Her mother and Angie were standing outside on the landing, staring at her in disbelief. “Sweetheart, what’s wrong?” Her mom asked, a basket of laundry limp in her arms.

“Nothing!” Gwen forced a smile. “Just an upset stomach. I’m better now. Angie?”

She didn’t wait for a response before flying down the stairs and speeding out the back door. She heard Angie hot on her heels as she headed towards the lake.

“Gwen, slow down, will you? Jesus.”

Gwen did slow, when she reached the dock. She sat down on an edge, and Angie joined her.

"For God's sake, Gwen, you maniac."

There weren't too many people on the lake besides a yellow boat, far away, cruising the horizon. It was still early, nine or ten. The lake wouldn't fill until afternoon, with boaters and swimmers. Gwen pulled her knees up against her chin. "I'm fucked, Ang."

Angie took off her sandals so she could dip her toes in the water. "In what way?"

Gwen pulled out the test from her back pocket and handed it to her friend. Eyebrows wrinkling in confusion, Angie stared at it, then up at Gwen. "But-Gwen, how-"

"I've been sleeping with Peter."

Angie opened her mouth to respond, then closed it. She set the tiny stick down on the dock between them. She looked out across the lake, not saying anything for a long time.

"What are you going to do?"

Gwen shrugged. She felt a little delirious, the reality of her situation hadn't really sunk in yet. It shimmered in the air before her, as if it were the circumstance of someone else, something she could watch from afar.

"Will you tell him?"

Gwen thought about the three years of school she had ahead of her. It would be hard. She might have to postpone her education. She touched her stomach, unconsciously. She couldn't imagine how Peter would react. He'd be angry, probably. Unhelpful. Trusting him had likely been her first mistake.

"Yeah," she responded. The yellow boat had floated out of her vision, behind a patch of forest on the inland shore. "But maybe not till summer's over."

\*\*\*

*After*

Dinner had been unbearably uncomfortable.

Afterwards, Elsie had gone down into the wine cellar to get four more bottles of their father's coveted merlot.

Intoxication led to:

Angie, arm gripping Theo – "I only wish you'd *told* me sooner, if you'd told me it would have been *fine*, I was sixteen, shit, Theo, what'd I care if you were *boning* a guy, too?"

Owen, shaking his head at Peter – "Fuck, fuck, fuck. That's all I thought, for ten years. Couldn't tell you where it started, then I ran

into Theo in Canada, of all the god-forsaken places, I'd been living in the same tshirt of ten years, and then I thought fuck, fuck, fuck – what've I done? What happened to me? Fuck."

Peter, laying on the ground next to Gwen's feet – "I haven't called since March. Does he remember me?"

Gwen, rolling her eyes at Peter, on the ground near her feet – "He remembers you, alright. He keeps every birthday card you've ever sent. He wears the San Francisco sweatshirt to bed every night. I try to wipe you out, and I can't. You're the best bad father I've ever seen."

Theo, yelling at Owen, inches from his face – "it could have been *meth*? You're right, it could have been meth, you idiot, but it also could have been could have been something healthy, like brussel sprouts– what? No, I'm *not* an asshole for saying that. You could have been addicted to *fucking brussel sprouts*, you hear me?"

Elsie, to Angie and Gwen, all three crying, three bottles in – "why did we think tube tops were the end-all, be-all? Why did we think that way?"

Jacob had no choice but to sit and observe the past fifteen years unravel in front of him. It was a colorful – and disturbing – scene. He drank and drank and wondered what kind of people ignored each other for fifteen years over a little closeted homosexuality, drug addiction, and an unplanned child?

But he hadn't been there. He got another bottle from the basement.

\*\*\*

*After*

The half-light of early morning bathed the lake in gold. Gwen traced the shoreline with drowsy eyes, the tops of her sneakers dirtying in the wet sand. She found Peter greeting the yellow dawn on the same shore, hands shoved in his pockets. She pulled her sweatshirt tighter around her torso.

If he noticed her approach, he didn't let on. She traced her gaze to where his eyes were locked in the distance, out across the lake. On a bank opposite them, there was a scattering of white herons, four in total, speckling the rock-strewn edge of the inland forest. They were elegant, lanky creatures, dipping their long yellow beaks in and out of the water, as if to test its temperature. Or perhaps to see if the mist billowing over the surface of the lake colored its taste.

"My grandfather was a birdwatcher, you know," Peter said.

Gwen nodded. "I remember."

One of the herons, the largest of the group, ruffled its wings,

snapping its curved neck quickly to the side. Perhaps it had heard something a great distance away. Gwen didn't know much about how good the hearing of herons was.

"Do you miss him?"

Peter kicked at the sand with his shoe. Gwen noticed he was wearing the sweater she'd given him for his birthday one year, a muted blue. It looked nice against his dark complexion, the rough skin of his neck. There were little tick marks of red dotting his jaw where he'd shaved and miscalculated.

Gwen afforded herself a quiet smile. He rarely shaved slowly, like she used to tell him too. He was needed instant gratification.

He'd stayed with her for a while, when she'd been expecting. They'd moved into the town where Gwen went to school, a little apartment. And it had been fine, temporarily. But things didn't work out between them.

Peter noticed her gaze. She blushed and looked away.

"Not really." He turned his head once again to the herons. "He wasn't a very nice guy, you know. Well," he laughed. "You *do* know. You met him more times than you probably would have liked."

The yellow morning was arriving lethargically. The herons preened their feathers and shuffled along the shore on long, stilt-like legs. There was a beauty in the awkward, gangly nature of the creatures, in their blue-grey wings, whitish chests and bellies, in their stooped, curving statures.

"He wasn't always the most sensitive...to our situation," Gwen confessed. "But he was always kind to Adam."

She was remembering the first time she'd come to the lake, the summer after she'd turned sixteen, and how magical Minnesota had seemed, at least compared to Arizona. The forest-patched wildernesses, the open air, the possibility that stretched her lungs each time she looked out her bedroom window. She was used to desert, all her life, and so the lushness was invigorating. She'd had no idea what awaited her in the forest, how her life would change.

Peter was smiling, a sad smile. "Are you glad we came back?"

"Truthfully?"

"Yes."

It took her a moment to consider the question. She thought about Adam back at home. It was a Saturday morning and he'd be up already, getting ready for basketball. It was his team's year, he was sure of it. He was only in middle school, but she thought he was showing surprising talent. She'd invited Peter to several games. He'd declined every invitation.

"I am glad," she answered. "I'm glad...it's all out in the open."

"I don't regret him, you know."

Peter's eyes turned to hers and she regarded the calm grey, the same grey that had captivated her teenage heart so long ago. She almost laughed at how much she had changed since.

"Neither do I."

"I wish I could do be better. For you." He looked down at his feet. "For Adam."

Gwen knew that he might try, for a while, but would never be the dad that Adam needed. She wanted to think that he could be that dad, if he really tried. But she was older, and she wasn't keen on lying to herself.

"It's okay," was all she could say.

The pair fell silent, watching the herons. There was suddenly a choreographed shiver among the birds, a wind ruffling their feathers, their yellow eyes transfixed on some invisible danger lurking in the mist. They took flight at precisely the same moment, wings extending magnificently, necks folding over their streamlining bodies in S-curves. The four of them dipped low to the water, gliding in adept synchronization off into the golden morning.

Gwen followed them with her eyes, wondering where their families were, if there were all connected somehow. Or maybe they were just individuals, thrust together by the circumstance of their speciation. A troupe of rogues. She wondered where they all would go when the yellow summer mornings turned grey and frozen.

"Where will they go?" she asked aloud. "In the winter?"

Peter shrugged noncommittally, kicking a stone with his shoe. He knew nothing about birds, or their migration patterns.

"I don't know."

## What is Left Behind

*photography*



## Degausser

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*



## I will never need balloon weights because my thoughts are heavy enough

when happiness takes  
long naps loneliness  
tries on my latex skin  
I want to boldly  
display tattooed  
words so that I  
will never have  
to release the hot  
breath inside me  
again because you ask  
me questions and  
never listen to hear  
the answer my nails  
are never painted  
since crawling out from  
underneath thoughts  
chips the color  
I wonder why no one  
ever told me  
“you will not mend  
gracefully”

## Natural Self-Remedies

pop shock and lock jaw  
slap hands to hands  
lips to lips, smack and suck-  
wet hope for the future

of tonight.

stare into the blurred fractal remains  
of the girl you met-  
try to find her in  
the bottom of a bottle  
you'll shatter by morning.  
you screamed in the grocery store until i gave in to you,  
shaking knees quaking  
give i n t o m e  
light headed helium delirium  
on a  
tiled floor tilt-a-whirl-  
insisting on the sterile surface of the bathroom floor-  
the fluorescent fauna native to the drug-  
burning itch within your skin-  
L I Q U I F Y I N G  
injected maggots, wet hope in shining bloodied needles-  
golden prick of a cure-  
your natural self-remedies-  
a torrid hay-ride, dried  
out veins, dropped  
cigarette butt or something hotter  
candle-light blazing night fight-to-forget-  
to love the ones who set you on fire  
you're on fire?  
stop drop n rock n roll  
it's an acidic incineration,  
disco-floored discourse  
an incarceration of what we've built  
my continuation is a threat to yours

tiles crack beneath dirty palms-  
wet hope in smeared bloodied imprints-  
joint memories are scalding  
i still see that first morning together  
we went fishing-  
waiting for the sun to thaw us out  
an earth worm crawl through blackened veins  
bait the hook,  
we witnessed someone's  
lake-side funeral  
across the pond  
cast your line,  
violins played loudly at first,  
until they didn't.  
so they don't.  
and we won't  
ever end.

depression  
*acrylic paint on masonite board*

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

# The Vampire and the Hunter

June 15, 2019

I realized too late that I was going to die.

Patrol missions were simple: just walk around the forest and make sure no one's dying. Yes, I had seven-odd weapons on my person, not including the night vision goggles strapped to my head, but it was *totally* normal. Two years of college – Associates in Forestry – with rigorous training day and night, I was finally in the field. Day Three was starting out just as boring as training had said.

How did I fuck up this bad?

I'd just checked my watch, the blinking face reading 3:57am. My patrol had begun only fifty-seven dragging minutes before, and I had at least three hours until dawn, aka the end of my shift. I had already circled my sector twice. Six more rotations to go.

That's when I heard it:

The swishing of feet through fallen leaves.

No one on my team would A) be in this area, or B) purposefully be that loud, so my next option was campers. But then I remembered the lack of campers in this area because of the recent murders.

That left only on option, and I was about five minutes late on my reaction.

My reality tilted so quickly my bearings went out the window. What window, I'm still not sure. I must've black out because the next thing I knew I was dangling upside down from a tree branch, two feet off the ground, with all my blood rushing to my head.

I blinked, the next realization being that my goggles, and – ultimately – my sight, were gone. The knot holding my feet together cut off the circulation to my feet, so this was a professional job. I was still in the forest, trees and bushes filling my vision, so I couldn't be far from where I was taken.

I laughed abruptly. Of course. My teammates were messing with me. *Tie him up, give him a good scare.*

"Ooh, a hunter who laughs," a feminine voice said, bristling every nerve in my body. "What a rarity you are."

The girl appeared from behind a tree. She was in high school, the typical "dark princess" outcast girl. Dark jeans, dark t-shirt, and combat boots to prove her bad-assery. In reality, her cheeks were puffy and she hadn't filled out into her "adult" body yet. Her brown hair was done up in a high ponytail, bangs hanging across her forehead. Not like chocolate brown or mud, but just kind of...*brown*.

As she cocked her head, the fading moonlight reflected a twinge of red in her locks.

Her smile, however, made me seize up like a shot in the arm. A pleasing feature on any other person, but hers was different. Her lips were curved, and her eyes were laughing, but she was watching me squirm. She was *enjoying* my struggle. "And here I thought you were all stuck up pricks," she was saying.

"What do you want?" I asked, my voice tight in my throat.

"He speaks," she said in awe. She crossed her arms, her bundle of rubber bracelets sliding to her hands. She meandered towards me. "I was wondering when you were gonna wake up. I didn't even knock you out. Though newbies take it the hardest the first time around."

I bent my head to check my watch. 5:29am. "What do you want?" I asked again, returning my gaze to her.

Her smile broadened, slightly agape. "You don't know. Wow, you newbies...dumber and dumber."

I gazed into her brown eyes – same plain color – hoping something would slip up. Windows to the soul and all. Maybe a pinch of fear. Some hunger, perhaps. Even a bit of doubt would've been nice.

Nothing.

She snorted. "Do I have to spell it out for you?" She paused, allowing time for the response that didn't come before flashing a smile with teeth.

Vampire teeth.

I flinched backwards, only to swing back towards her. Damn you, physics.

"Ah," she laughed, "there it is."

"But-But how?" I stuttered out. I paid attention in training.

Vampires smelled *strongly* like death, a combination of eternal morning breath and rotting meat. They lived for blood, and would spare no one.

So why did she tie me up instead?

"An excellent question." When my nostrils flared with alarm, she continued, "It's all on your face. You're an open book. To answer your question, I tied you up because...I thought it'd be fun."

"Way to be a sadistic psycho," I muttered.

She cocked her head to the side and raised her eyebrows.

Vampire hearing.

Shit.

But she just laughed. "Wow, a sense of humor. That's refreshing."

What's your name?"

I was all too aware of vampire compulsion, so I was able to avoid her glance, but her story alone was compelling. Why let good food rot?

"Fitz," I felt my lips say.

She smirked. "Pretty. Underused, too. This generation is whack with their names."

"And yours?"

"Alyx," she answered without hesitation. "Unoriginal, I know. I didn't choose the name, obviously."

"Since I doubt your parents are alive, why not change it?"

I regretted the words the moment her eyes hardened. The question was innocent, but inherently insensitive. "I don't know about you, *Fitz*, but when I lose the people I love, I don't go around and erase every piece of them." Alyx paused, her anger simmering down. "Besides, that's just the English translation of my name."

"What's your native language, then?" My feet were completely numb now as they lost their last drop of blood. I *needed* to get out of this. The lesson my instructor, Kurt, drilled into us ran through my head: *Keep 'em talking. They're suckers for conversation. Then go in for the kill.*

But I didn't have a kill plan. I didn't even have an attack plan. I just wanted to survive.

Her facial expression remained guarded, however, my last question poking her in tender areas and bringing out her defense mode. Guess Kurt's lesson only applied to non-psychos. If she wouldn't talk, I would never get out. "I haven't even told my *friends* my native language, let alone some dumbass hunter."

I knew she wasn't saying it to hurt me – name-calling wasn't torture. Specifically names you get from pissing off vampires. I'd just made her mad, and she needed to express that. "Try harder," I mumbled, the pressure in my skull making my words slur.

Alyx's face twinged with one clear emotion – alarm. Without warning a shiny object flew from her hand, slicing through the ropes above me. Thankfully my reaction time was pretty good, so I managed to swivel to my back, not my head. The ground was covered in a spot of thick grass and fallen leaves. I thanked nature for cushioning my fall. I sat up quickly, reaching to untie my feet. That was a mistake. Black spots blotted my vision. Alyx appeared through blinks, the shiny object – a dagger – twiddling through her fingers. She reached down and my legs flinched away. A glare set across her face as her teeth ground together. She grabbed my legs

despite my protest before slicing through the ropes. Instant relief filled my toes, followed by the prickles setting in. A rustling in the foliage nearby shook me from my thoughts and confirmed my fears. Alyx was nowhere to be seen as a squadron of hunters swarmed me. The morning light drifted through the canopy of leaves, and I could make them out clearly. Victor, Mario, Ted, Aaron, and even Kurt. The group surveyed the area quickly before rushing to me.

The other men kept watch as my friends dragged me up and checked me over. "Fitz, what happened?" Victor asked, his eyes wide and his mouth agape.

"Fitz," Kurt's rough voice knocked away my response, "what did you think you were doing, abandoning your post like that?"

The answer died in my throat. It was easier to process now that my blood wasn't pounding in my ears and my fear wasn't pounding in my chest, but my brain wasn't able to process what'd happened. I'd been knocked out for nearly an hour and a half with no recollection. And *Alyx* – I couldn't even put her into words.

"Kurt," another hunter called from the side. He was holding the rope, the one I'd been freed from. I didn't understand the dilemma until the rope disappeared into nothingness.

"What the hell?" Mario cursed.

Kurt shook his head, jaw crooked. "We need to get this back to Joe."

The newer recruits stiffened. Joe was the head of our section. According to the others, he went crazy about ten years back after his son was killed by a vampire. I didn't blame him, but after his own squadron went down about ten years back by some wolves, he'd tightened up training regimens and required only the best on hunts. It was a little ridiculous for a small, university town in Ohio, but we'd all seen the murder reports. At least three kids, besides his son, had died since he and his team raided the vampire nest before his son's demise. We were all *certain* something was missing. A fact, a location, an event that we had no knowledge of. And judging Alyx's reaction, we were far from the truth.

"Fitz," a voice rushed into my ears. Kurt stared at me expectantly. "We're moving." Every step was pinpricks in my feet, but it was getting better. We made it back to base as the morning light spread across camp. They led me to the main building, which housed Joe's office and our main conference room. My initial tour had outlined the conference room, but Joe's office was a mystery to this day.

Until now.

He was at his desk, his head bent as he read. A picture frame was

placed towards the edge of his desk, but its back faced me. Kurt and another man, Randy, stood and waited for Joe to notice. Finally, he pushed his papers away.

"Yes?" he asked. His face showed the wear of the hunting lifestyle. It wrinkled at the eyes, strands of gray bloomed in his hair and beard, and his eyes were glossy brown. Not like Alyx's brown, but a dark wood. A door, slammed in your face.

Kurt and Randy focused on me. I blanched, my tongue drying instantly.

"Someone please say something," Joe said.

"Night patrol was compromised," Kurt finally answered. "Fitz was unresponsive for nearly two hours. We found him sitting in the middle of the forest with a cut rope at his feet. He appears unscathed."

"And the rope wasn't actual rope," Randy added, "it was magic."

The three men seethed simultaneously, as if the word itself would poison them. "Are there any leads?" Joe asked.

The two men shook their heads. "Not as of yet, but Fitz hasn't said what happened," Kurt said, each word amplified with a nudge of his shoulder against mine.

I stepped forward, forcing my tongue to cooperate. "I was patrolling in my area at nearly four. I was suddenly overtaken by a nauseous spell, and I awoke nearly two hours later, hanging from the tree I was found beneath."

Joe watched me intently. "Was there anyone there? Were you bitten, or did you find any magic particles on you?"

I wanted to tell Joe he was crazy, to tell him how arrogant hunters were to assume *we* were the superior species. It had not only been easy for Alyx to get the jump on me, but also more than effortless to escape without being discovered. Instead I replied, "There was a vampire there. We exchanged words, most not so kind, and then I was cut down when the blade missed my heart, as Kurt and his men tromping through the undergrowth startled the creature." I wasn't sure how, but I had managed to evade both Alyx's name and any pronouns.

Joe rubbed his face, sadness crossing it. His eyes were on the picture frame. He nodded, but his next words were more than an accusation. "So, you're saying you were *unconscious* for nearly two hours and you're absolutely *sure* this vampire did not bite you?" I nodded, swallowing. "Because that's not like vampires at all. They like blood, why not drink yours? Do you have—" He waved his hand. "—any explanations, Fitz?"

I shook my head, glad I didn't have to lie. "If I knew, sir, I'd tell you."

Joe shrugged. "I guess we'll have to add this to the drawing board. There's a softy in the bunch. Easy target." He leaned back in his chair. "You are dismissed, Fitz."

I turned on my heel and exited, trying not to run. He didn't believe me. Not for a second. What I said was true, though, if absent of details. But I couldn't ponder on that. I *needed* to figure out was Alyx. She was angry, madder than mad, smoke coming out of her ears and everything, and yet she'd just...let me go without another word.

Victor would've knocked me over if he hadn't been paying attention. "Hey!" he said, helping me regain my balance. "I was looking for you. Did you talk to Joe? Is he as scary alone as he is during briefings? The boys are wondering." He guided me towards our cabin, one arm around my shoulder.

I shrugged as we walked up the stairs. "He wasn't as angry, I guess. Just a little uptight."

Victor pushed the door open, leading me into a bombardment of questions from Mario, Ted, and Aaron.

"What happened, bro?"

"Is it true you killed a witch with your bare hands?"

"I heard a werewolf stole from a witch, caught you while you patrolling, and the witch killed him for revenge *and* your blood, but *we* scared her off."

"Did you really destroy a vampire with your bare hands?"

Victor held up his hands. "Seriously, Ted, what's up with you and killing things with your bare hands?" Ted flushed, sitting down on his bed. "Fitz will tell us what happened, so just sit down and relax, you two." Mario and Aaron did as they were told, and Victor reclined on his own bed. "Fitz, the floor is yours."

I shrugged, the silence pressing on my eardrums. *Why couldn't this have happened to anyone else?* "Well," I started slowly, "there's not much to tell. I got kidnapped by a vampire and was set free when you guys showed up."

"Was that what happened with the rope? Was it calibrated to disappear?" Mario asked. Every team had five positions: captain, lookouts, weapons expert, and tech expert. Mario, our tech expert, was obsessed with all things magic, though we all knew better than to allude as such to the older men.

I shook my head. "No, I don't know why it disappeared. I know that the vampire threw a blade and cut me free. That's it."

Aaron frowned. "Why? That doesn't seem very effective with

magic rope.” This, coming from our weapons expert, made me even less comfortable with the situation.

Victor shook his head. “Something doesn’t add up, Fitzy. Why would this vampire let you go? They kill people. That’s what they do. Blood in your veins means—” He drew a finger across his throat. Leave it to the captain to ask the same question the lowly lookout had been running through his head at every angle since he woke up.

“I don’t know, maybe the vamp wanted information,” I suggested, even though I could hear myself being lame. Alyx’s mood had swung from amused to angry to alarmed within ten minutes. Who knows what made her kidnap me.

“I still can’t believe you escaped a vampire,” Ted muttered. He was probably jealous. As the other lookout, it could’ve easily been him.

Victor shook his head. “It doesn’t add up, Fitzy. Are you sure there isn’t anything else?”

My throat tightened. “Sorry, guys,” I said after a long pause, “it doesn’t make sense to me either. When I figure it out, I’ll let you know.”

The boys shrugged and muttered, “Okay.” I knew they were disappointed, but there were no words I could use to encapsulate Alyx, and I was positive I didn’t want to tell them I got kidnapped by a girl.

“I’m gonna grab some shuteye,” I added, walking over to my bunk.

Victor smiled weakly as I passed. “It’s been a long night, Fitzy. You deserve it.”

#### June 24, 2019

It was nine days later that I found out what Alyx wanted.

Mostly because I found her standing above my bunk in the middle of the night.

If I hadn’t been awoken with my oh-so human need to use the restroom, I would’ve never noticed her. She was slowly shifting through my trunk of stuff, as well the small desk we each possessed. This time she was dressed in plain skinny jeans, a black band shirt, and a white sweatshirt, a pair of Converse on her feet.

I sat up quickly, reaching for the silver stake I had strapped to the side of my bed. “Hey!” I whispered feverishly.

She glanced at me out of her periphery, neither startled nor scared. “Sup.”

I threw off my covers and walked towards her. She didn’t seem

mildly threatened by the sharp object in my hand, nor my easy reach of her heart. “What are you doing here?”

Alyx smiled, her eyes scanning a letter from my parents the month before. “Just wondering how you were doing.”

“You know where the compound is?”

She rolled her eyes, picking up a more recent letter. “Puh-lease. I lived here fifteen years ago, stopped living here ten years ago, and started living here again five years ago. I know when and where you move your operations.”

“That doesn’t make any sense!”

She shrugged, reading. “I’ve been told I make as much sense as the American education system.”

“Like you would know anything about that, Miss Not Natively English.”

“English wasn’t always the only language in America.”

I huffed. This wasn’t going to end well. “Why are you here? Be honest.”

She put down the letter and picked up one of my poorly carved stakes. “Honestly, I wanted to bother you. Hunters are always miffed by me, but you – you were interesting.” She started aiming the stake at me, but she used it as a pointer rather than a weapon. “You weren’t as scared as the rest of them.”

“Are you kidding me?” I said, my voice rising. I swallowed hard as Mario shifted, snoring louder.

She rolled her eyes, placing the stake in its spot. Actually, nothing was out of place. “You weren’t,” she answered. “I had you tied up and you were making idle conversation. Most of the *experienced* ones can’t handle that without pissing their pants.”

“So, the only *logical* course of action was to walk straight into the center of our camp, where you’ll most likely be tortured and die?”

She pouted. “Why do you doubt me? I kidnapped you and none of you could do anything about it. And then I let you go, simply because I wanted. I could – and still can – kill everyone if I wanted, you included.”

“I doubt that. Once you’re seen they’ll kill you.”

“Seriously, you’ve seen what I can do and you think I’m *that* incapable?”

I rolled my eyes. “First you claim you lived here when you should’ve been one, and then decided to come back for God knows what reason, so I’m gonna have to go with yes.”

“Why don’t you let girls into your league of stupid?” She put her hands on her hips. “Is it because they’re not as dumb as you?”

I grabbed her arm and dragged her out of the cabin before she woke someone up, something I should've done the moment I saw her. Despite her size, she was *not* as light as she looked. "Shut up before they hear you. Or worse, see you."

She planted her feet, and I couldn't move her at all. "Why is it that before you said *we* and now you say *they*?"

This caught me off guard. "What?"

"You said *they'll kill you* not *we'll kill you*. Does that mean you care?"

My teeth ground together in frustration. "Are you always a sarcastic little shit?"

Alyx smiled, her fangs protruding slightly. "Yes."

"Can you just go already? I'm doing fine, no need to check up or bother me anymore."

"Don't you want me to answer your question?"

I sighed. "*What* question?"

"Why I didn't kill you."

I paused, just as she knew it would. I was starting to believe she knew literally everything. Nothing I did got past her. "Fine," I responded, staring off into the distance and waiting for her answer.

She rolled her eyes, crossing her arms and putting her right leg out. "Oh sure, play it cool. I know you're *dying* to know."

Even though she knew everything, I didn't want to fall to her game. But she stared at me, unblinking, until I gave up. "Fine," I muttered. "I'd like to know."

Her fangs peeked from under her lips, but they didn't seem threatening. "I don't enjoy torturing innocent people. I saw you walking a little close for comfort so I figured I'd rough you up a bit. Scare you off. But then you made me laugh, which is a rare occasion anymore. Nice, though. Unexpected and pure." A dark cloud passed over her face. "Not many things are pure anymore."

"Well, thank you," I answered, not wanting to start poking into whatever that look was for.

She perked up. "You're absolutely welcome. I try not to brutally murder the ones who have brains. You could be useful one day."

"What makes you say that?" I asked, a laugh in my tone.

Since I'm the reason the hunters try to kill vampires and other supernaturals, I guess I could find a hunter to fix it, to bridge the peace between us. The last hunter didn't work out." Her face was dark again.

"What happened?"

She blinked, her eyes glistening. "He died. By his own hand."

I recognized the look on her face now. It was the same one Joe had when he'd looked at the picture frame. "You loved him?"

Alyx became entranced with her hands. Her fingers were long, slender, elegant. "He was family."

Instead of pushing the *how was he your family you're like super old* question, I just offered, "Sorry for your loss."

She shrugged. "You win some you lose some." Her eyes trailed up and down on my body.

"What? What are you—" I gaped at her. "Are you checking me out? Because that's sick. You were just talking about your dead friend."

Again, she laughed. "Hell no. I'm off the market, besides. I was just wondering if you were gonna actually go the bathroom, or if I'd scared you shitless."

The corner of my lips turned up, even as hard as I fought to keep them down. "So, sarcastic *and* punny?"

"There's no other way to live, Fitz." Her head snapped towards town. "Well, that's my cue."

Around me dawn began to filter through the trees. That meant night watch would be back soon, but I hadn't heard them yet. *She's a vampire*, I reminded myself. Her hearing is better than yours.

"Oh, yeah," she said, reaching into her pocket and pulling something out. She tossed it to me, and I caught it without thinking. The object was made of lightweight metal, electric cables running through the sides and attaching to the two connecting screens. My night-vision goggles.

"You might need those, if you're ever gonna catch up." She walked off towards the forest, the morning light bouncing off her white sweatshirt and ivory skin. It was then that I was even more afraid of her.

Because there was no smoke.



# Memory

*photography*



# I love skeletons but hate the idea of becoming one

death tucks hair  
 behind my ear and  
 all I can do is smile  
 the freight train  
 headache in  
 my skull pulsing  
 sometimes  
 I sit in dark rooms  
 knowing this is  
 how typewriter  
 heartbeats begin  
 when anxiety flares  
 I feel words  
 storing themselves  
 in the small journals  
 of my vertebrae  
 my veins are licorice  
 but not the sweet kind

I am a proponent for  
 romanticizing  
 used car lots  
 and I cry when  
 thinking  
 no one takes the time  
 to admire plants  
 on highway medians  
 let alone ones in  
 cemeteries

## Neighborhood

An empty schoolyard at dusk,  
the brick building dull in the languid summer heat,  
It looks small against the hazel sky,  
like a single blue outlined box on a great expanse of graph paper,  
the world smelled like cut grass and charcoal,  
the slide is yellow and crooked,  
a jank display of childhood excitement,  
or maybe a metaphor for the kids who don't brush their teeth.

A water fountain hooked to the side of the school  
hangs on with desperation,  
it's rusted and smells like copper,  
It hangs on,  
the silver is chipped off,  
it hangs on  
like the basketball hoops whose nets dangle from a few gray loops,  
a deck of cards is spewed across the black dried tar  
spanning from the playground  
to the gas station next door,  
a card stuck against the white metal gas pumps flits in the breeze.

That world smells like gas and mud, a dark greed pick-up  
the only car in front of the station,  
is being fueled by a young blond girl in a black baseball-t  
while she's wondering if anyone else can spell the peroxide still on her hair

## Annabel Lee

*photography*



## Falsities

I've been thinking a lot lately  
About God and pornos  
That ah, ah, ah fake moan fake prayer kind of love

Idolizing false deities  
I think God would be into that 70s bush  
God in a gold chain, showing off his chest hair  
God delivering pizza to the busty babysitter and hiding his boner in his cargo shorts

Sex is easy  
Clothes peel away like onion skins  
He slides in like, like, some poetic bullshit  
Legs spread open like pages in a bible  
Prayers slip from her lips  
Moans like hymns  
Orgasms like "hallelujah!"  
More of that poetic bullshit

I went to church and kneeled  
But I couldn't help but feel a little horny  
Thinking about fucking like fast food  
That drive-thru kind of church  
That artificial sacrifice  
Plastic dildos and dark meat  
Psalms your Sunday School teacher made you memorize  
Palms hairy  
Playboys worshipped like a bible, hidden under your mattress

Mutter a couple close-eyed words under your breathe and clasp your hands tight  
They say faith and masturbation will make you blind  
Blame the consequences on a higher being and click play  
Mutter "fuck" under your breathe  
Clasp yourself tight  
You're almost there  
Seeing is believing and you can see at least two people fuck whenever you go online  
God doesn't work in mysterious ways  
He works in sexy nurse costumes and breast enlargements

God is your fluffer  
That cum stain on your sheets looks just like the Virgin Mary

Jesus is the popular cheerleader you never got to grind on in high school  
And now you can walk into her home and cum in her eye

## Penis Envy

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

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*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

# Sacrifice

*photography*

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*



## Stranded

Zoe came-to with a start. Her body shook as she started to spit up the salty sea water that had nearly choked her to death. Her mouth and nostrils were burning with the saltiness that left her desperate for fresh water. The muscles in her arms screamed as she tried to pull herself ashore, but the sand and the tide only made things more difficult. She was weak already, but thought that if she was meant to die, she would have happened by now. She finally dragged her soggy body past the reach of the water. Resting on the sand, she tried not to pay attention to how it caked itself to her skin and hair. Her hands were swollen, and she knew that it must have been from all the salt water she ingested. She realized she was still shaking, but she wasn't cold. It was the adrenaline that still surged through her wasted body with no way of escaping. The hot sun was beating down on her and she realized that her need for fresh water was more important than trying to remember all the details of the plane crash. She got up into a sitting position and looked around. There was a black suitcase not too far away from her. She crawled the fifteen or so feet to the suitcase and opened it. There was a water bottle inside, but it was empty except for a few drops. She opened it anyway and tried to drink it, but it was barely anything. She searched harder through the suitcase, but found nothing else helpful. Feeling more awake knowing that there could be more suitcases by the shore, she got into a standing position and started walking along it until she found another one. This one was bigger and didn't look like a carry-on. She opened it and found a bottle full of water. She greedily drank from it until all the water was gone. The thirst was still there, but she knew that it was enough to reach the next suitcase which was another ten feet away. She got up, but her head swam from drinking too fast, and she threw up all the water she had just drank. After taking a few calming breaths, she started toward the blue suitcase. There was a half-filled water bottle on top, which she drank slowly. It made her feel better, and as she looked at the other contents of the suitcase, she found a small box of cookies nestled among t-shirts. It wasn't the first thing she wanted to eat, but it was food none-the-less. She ate those slowly, too, not wanting to regurgitate water again.

She walked around the shoreline looking for more water, but only found one more bottle, that had a case on it with a strap. She

took sips sparingly, letting it hang from her neck when she wasn't drinking, and headed inland. The island had a small forest of trees, and the rest was rocky hills. She figured she would have more luck finding a water source in the forest than among the rocks. As she passed the tree line, the whole island seemed to change. The tan-blue of the sand-sea combination outside the forest was changed to a green-pink of leaves and flowers. The sand had turned to dirt, and there was a strong smell of fruit in the air. She turned around to look back at the shore, but all she found was more trees and flowers.

Her heart began to race and she could feel herself breathing faster—indications for an oncoming panic attack. She looked in all directions, but found only the forest surrounding her. The water bottle was still around her neck, so she knew that her experiences on the shore were real. Her mind started racing, but she couldn't remember details of the plane crash. All she remembered was the fear, panic, and the sense that her stomach was dropping as the plane descended toward the water. Not being able to remember what happened before, or even who she was sitting next to, she sat down to try and clear her head and calm her breathing.

*Survival. Water.* She needed to stay focused on staying alive. This strange island—forest—whatever it was, could be figured out later. She got up and started walking. She didn't have a clue in which direction she was going, but knew she was bound to come upon water eventually.

She walked for what seemed to be hours, but was just minutes and she found a small pond. The water was dark blue and there were grey pebbles scattered around the border. She knelt down next to the edge and cupped her hands for some water. She licked the water first to see if it was fresh. It was. Drinking through cupped hands again and again, she felt the thirst ebb away. She dunked her water bottle in to fill it up, too.

Now she needed food. The cookies had not been enough. The air smelled so strongly of fruit that there was bound to be some somewhere. She kept walking and started to inspect the trees more. They bore no fruit, and the flowers were not giving off the fruity smell. She continued on, but stopped abruptly after a few minutes. There was one flower that was *blue* not far from her. She ran towards



it and smelled it. This one gave off such a strong, fruity smell, that she felt queasy. She decided to pick one of the petals off and see if she could eat it. When she plucked one off, another grew back in its place instantly. She sniffed the petal, and the smell had become fainter. Licking it, she realized it tasted like strawberries. She took a small nibble, and waited to see if anything happened. When nothing did, she ate the petal and felt instantly better. She plucked another and ate that too. With her hunger and thirst virtually gone, she evaluated her situation. The trees seemed to go on forever, but she couldn't spot anymore blue flowers. She started walking in the same direction as before hoping to come across some clue as to where she was and how to escape. She had completely forgotten the crash and was curious as to why she had sand in her hair. She felt as if the forest had always been her home, and she didn't remember ever coming across sand. Just as this thought entered her head, she saw an opening in the trees. Without caution, she approached it and noticed a yellow glow coming from the opening. As she stepped through it, she saw a landscape of yellow sand with a tall temple in the middle of it. She walked towards it, and did not notice the forest disappear behind her.

The temple was much taller than anything she could remember. The front doors themselves must have been ten stories tall. She smiled at the beauty of the tall ornate doors before her. There were pictures of the flowers she had seemed to know her whole life. Zoe pushed gently on one door and it swung open with ease. She stepped inside and fell down a trap. She hit the ground hard after falling what seemed twenty feet. The impact woke her up from whatever trance that she had been in. *The petals must have been some kind of memory wipe or hallucinogen*, she thought. She got up and looked at her surroundings. She was in a long, stone hallway lit by torches. Her mind was going crazy. *What's happening? Where am I? Am I actually alive?*

"Hello? Is anyone here?" Her voice echoed off the walls, then died away. The panic started to build up again. She wanted to run, to cry, to scream. She was shaking from—what?—fear or anger, she didn't know. Going forward seemed to be her best option. This world seemed to keep changing, but only if she went forward.

The hallway was straight and unadorned as she kept going. Everything was evenly spaced; the torches showed up every ten steps she took, one on either side. She walked on and on, and had

no concept of how long she was walking. She started to go stir crazy with the endless hallway before her. Her walk turned into a jog, then a run, then a sprint. She stopped, out of breath with a sharp pain in her side, and leaned against the wall to drink from her water bottle. When she was finished, she grabbed the torch that was next to her for stability. At her touch, it went out. A dark doorway appeared in the space in the wall that the light once occupied. She touched the torch again, and the light came back, making the doorway disappear. She felt the wall where it had shown itself, but it was solid. She took the torch from the wall and it went out. She touched the darkness where the wall had been, but she felt nothing. She walked through the opening.

She was surrounded by darkness. She turned around, and saw no light from the hallway she had just exited. She put the torch in her other hand and it came to life. The light illuminated the room she was in. It was small and circular with no doors or windows, just glossy stones. There was a pedestal in the middle of the room. She inspected it and found that there was a hole in the middle. She put the torch there, and the room sparkled. It looked like the walls were moving. Suddenly, a voice called out, "Lights out" and the torch went out.

The room was now glowing with the ghost of the flame, and Zoe saw a small figure where the torch had been. It was probably two feet tall, cloaked in black, and hooded, with its back towards her. It seemed to be giving off an ominous yellow-orange glow.

"Who are you?" she asked, scared for a reply.

It turned around and she saw its face. It was animal-like. No nose; two large, round, milky eyes; gray-brown hair; and wrinkles that sagged beneath the eyes and at the edge of the small line that was its mouth.

"Congratulations," it said, its mouth moving slightly, "you've reached the end of the test. Welcome to the Island of Insanity." At that, it disappeared, along with the light. There was a moment of darkness and Zoe came-to with a start, back at the edge of the sea, with no recollection of anything that happened after the plane crash.

Persephone, Looking at Cerberus  
*photography*



Persephone, Daughter of Demeter  
*photography*



## Shark Syndrome

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## Paint Me a Smile

*watercolor*



## Face Her

The blackness of her skin  
blends into the night:

onyx hiding in plain sight of  
a luminous, white moon.

Camouflage does not spare her  
from predators' eyes.

They point and cut through  
long black nights with flashlights

until they find her fleshed out  
body, awaiting the image

of God at dawn. Rising  
she trusts, crying she falls.

There is no fight. She is key  
to another man's survival.

Threshold of sacrifice, Christ  
for her neighbor. Raped

to death for entrance not  
into eternal life, but a gang.

Acceptance. No one asks  
her name.

The world does not need names  
for black brothers and sisters.

Death does not discriminate, but  
it is still racism when a body

split open, legs bloody and spread,  
requires no name. When relief

is a swollen, mutilated face too  
brutal to broadcast nationwide.

She is not nameless because  
she is faceless. She is nameless

because she is black.

Black like the silent night that took her  
and was her and forgot her.

## Armadillo Heart

Blossoming in hesitation, you've  
wakened an armadillo heart from  
what it long thought as safety.  
My body can't provide me the  
security it was meant for, but you,  
in your ice-axe ways, pushed  
down love as a lever, breaking  
me away from myself long enough  
to look down at my slumping corpse,  
and tell me what it needs in order  
to bleed back into humanity.

## Night and Day

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*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

Charon

*photography*

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

## tacky summer romance montage

i heard rabbits on the train platform  
frantic with all the dances we never did

their lucky feet to the beat of an engine  
pulsing further into this city:

the traffic below a sculpture  
of the tangles in your hair.

we named an otter “pickles”  
at the zoo, drank tiny six dollar

margaritas. you remember those high  
altitude tacos. the uninvited arctic monkeys

karaoke against the velvet paneled wall. i kissed  
ice cubes into your mouth to watch you stumble

back into the parade. we raced turtles in a bar,  
rolled in the tall grass in-between cop cars.

your second story evanston apartment made  
dizzy fools of us, eating corn chips over your

laptop keyboard. the billboard you stole  
from a music festival. the wide array of hats,

theatre props. butterfly wings made of wire  
and stockings. this doesn't have to be good,

this doesn't have to mean anything. mid-august,  
i stand on my porch and listen to you lie about

visiting me once i move away. it isn't malicious.  
i'll come back to the bench where we ate korean

takeout out of styrofoam, alone someday.  
i'll read the same graffiti unless it's been

painted over. i'll listen to the hum, the agitation  
of taxis, the people with boots sizes too big or too small,

it doesn't matter. i can hear the cars pass,  
i can feel me passing, fading in and out of the quick rabbit heart of you

where once, i leapt inside

## The Days

I remember the days  
sitting on the floor  
in the passenger seat.

I was always the passenger.

With the heat on my back  
and oldies blaring on the old radio  
we drove through black streets.

“My Brown-Eyed Girl.”

I remember the day  
playing lava in the backyard  
while you placed new green in the earth.

I was always green.

With my feet covered in earth  
and useless screams as you pushed the needle  
into my blister.

popped it.

It was nothing to worry about.  
Just a bubble of skin  
that you assured me wouldn't hurt.

I was always wrong.

These days, your legs don't work so good  
your heart is less than it was  
your insides corrode while you sink inwards.

You are the passenger.

I blare the radio with Katy Perry and Taylor Swift  
and we sing along, the wind in our hair  
I take you home.

“Mama”

I watched you watch  
the kids play lava in the yard  
and the gardeners take care of the new foliage.

You miss the green.

You mutter and hum  
useless words that mean nothing to your audience,  
The personal bubble of thought spreading.

I popped it.

I gathered you in my arms  
and held you close to my lungs  
so you could know what breath felt like.

I always knew.

## Natural Diversity

*photography*





## Me, Ophelia, and Annabel Lee

I've gone wild and floating. Like Ophelia. Fresh out of an toxic relationship, I'm standing under an everlasting stretch of tin-foil sky, crackling with clouds. The lack of heat in the air combined with the expanse of dead field makes for a paradox of breath. Respiratory system turned metallic with every inhale and faint wind chime from every release. I wheeze. I feel like a smoker's lung rinsed clean. Full of water, free of charcoal, dying in a different way. The wet edged kiss of a back float finally sustaining, my legs have stopped flailing. According to this open space, I can stop fighting.

The Deer Grove Forest Preserve in Palatine, Illinois, is just barely large enough to make you believe you're out of suburbia...at certain angles. I'm with my father. We're walking, and I have my camera in hand, my new macro lens I received for Christmas fastened on the front. January 30th, 2016. Everything is new and dead at the same time. My assignment for photography class is natural landscapes, but I can't stop being a sucker for the details. I spend most of our hours long journey getting as close as I can to dead plants, adjusting the manual focus, and getting the most crisp image of what was once alive in its crustiest, most lifeless and fragile form. A shriveled flower reminds me of a sea sponge and I think of Edgar Allan Poe's Annabel Lee. The poor girl reduced to a poem after death, her coffin floating for a while before crusting over with barnacles, types of molds that only grow in the sea. I think again of Ophelia when I see the remainder of dainty white flowers on a brown stem. That famous painting where she looks shocked, flowers in her hair, veil floating. I get angry. Not at these two women, but the men who wrote their fate, their weaknesses wrapped up in their love. I won't die because of my own love. I'm going to take it all back and bloat myself with it, a body sustained by drowning.

Macro lenses are named as such because of their ability to focus on the details instead of the whole. In this way, bringing my macro lens out on an assignment based on sweeping landscapes is going against instruction. There was no material to turn in from the snapshot after snapshot of dead plant, each in all of their grotesque decay.

My fingers are cold and my socks are growing damp. It's been cloudy all day. A clean slate sort of sky. My dad is mostly silent,

except for a few jokes here and there. I'm surprised how well the snow reflects enough light to make the mud-brown tinged foliage turn golden behind the lens. Perhaps I'm spinning into gold.

My dad and I, we argue a lot. Mostly about religion. He believes in heaven and hell, and I can't understand why heaven and hell aren't here, right here, in the right now. But we don't talk about that now. I just think of dead fictional women, and hibernating real life plants, and how my life is made up of these snapshots.

One. We walk through mostly dying plants. We slip on mostly dying leaves.

Two. We sneak into the football stadium at night and you tell me what we can see in the atmosphere is already mostly dead.

Three. The side of your face, the curve of your ear, the color of your hair the same as the dead grass.

Why are we so afraid of death if we already live it? Every season, we watch it happen and no one is screaming. No one is running through the woods, shaking the trees awake again. We let them sleep. I let you go. Who's to say where you are breathing now? I am breathing right here, under a sky too large for the suburbs, too heavy to hold up with my two hands, too everlasting for me to ever believe I'm going somewhere else. I am concerned with the dead grass, my dad's dumb jokes, and I burn and rewind the images in my memory. When you don't stay, you incinerate. I go to water, and you to fire. It's like the classic tale of oil and water except more violent, more sudden, and more sad.

I'm not sad here. I'm not wondering what you are doing. I am walking on ice and prairie, face burning with the cool of the woods. No detail overlooked.

## The Art of Poetry

Taunting tongues and  
black berets.  
Tasting toffee in  
charming cafes.  
Poetry is positivity  
wrapped in pessimism and purple.

el guitarrista  
*digital photography*

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

## Purple Sheets

“I think you should take those.” My friend, Clarissa, slurped up the last of her slushie, the staccato sound echoing in the large Gulp plastic cup. I glanced at her, watching as she waved absently at one of the two packages in my hand before her gaze moved on to something else. I couldn’t blame her for her inattention. She’d been through this trip with me before way too many times.

Every time I ended a relationship, I somehow ended up moving back in with her. I never even signed her lease these days. Maybe that was a sign.

The story stayed the same every time. I’d move out, stay with ‘the one’ for a few months, usually less than two years, and then everything would crumble and before I knew it, I was back at the store looking at sheets.

See, that was the thing. I could never take the sheets with me.

It had something to do with the way he and I had shared the bed. I could never explain it fully enough to satisfy anyone, my explanations paling in comparison to my hang-ups. But I could never take the sheets. After sleeping with him for however many consecutive nights, I couldn’t imagine sleeping in those sheets by myself. I would smell him, dream of him, wake expecting to find him despite remembering our—usually ugly—break up. I’d tried washing, up to 10 times in a row, but it never seemed to rid the cloth of him. It was just another odd thing I did, another little quirk that made my friends roll their eyes and sigh dramatically. I was the weird one. Every break up meant new sheets.

I looked back at the sheets again, glancing at the others that lined the shelves in perfectly square packages. They were all Purple. I’d had Purple bed sheets ever since I was a little girl. My hippie mother had been very into energy and auras and had done her fair share of research on the topic of color. After going to a few fortune tellers and self-proclaimed psychics, my aura had been determined Purple. Hence, the Purple sheets. It didn’t help that I was a naturally somber person and Purple was supposed to ‘lift my spirits’. It was supposed to make me happy and calm, make sure I could sleep through the night.

I was still debating whether it worked or not.

After having severe night terrors as a child, ones that had woken

the whole neighborhood and caused a few Child Protective Services visits, my mother had taken matters into her own hands, deeming any doctor’s advice null. Gypsies, fortune tellers, séances, and psychics had been the answer.

Even as an adult I’d been unable to get away from Purple. I’d tried all the colors under the rainbow, and yet I always came back. Blue was too placid, red was too much to handle, yellow hurt my eyes, even white had its drawbacks. So I’d given up on ever having my own personality, and caved. I’d bought, and continued to buy, Purple sheets.

The ones I was currently holding were bright and happy, small blue and pink flowers exploding like stars on the plain royal Purple background. It made me think of drawing pictures on the walls with sharpie, days of scribbling in a notebook and waiting to get home to eat cookies or macaroni ‘n’ cheese. But, they didn’t feel right. Not the right Purple.

I sighed, setting it back on the shelf and stepping back.

“I can come back later, if you want to leave.” I said, feeling guilty for pulling my best friend-turned-roommate into yet another shopping trip. We’d already been shopping for sheets twice before and I’d had yet to make a decision. Every time I picked something out, it just didn’t feel right by the time we’d reach the cashier. For the moment, I was sleeping on her futon. The ratty old thing that had lasted through college with us, traveled from dorm room to apartment to apartment. She had a spare room for me, a mattress all ready, but no sheets.

I know I frustrated her, but I really wasn’t trying to. I don’t think she believed me though.

“If you don’t choose one now, you’re going without sheets for another week.” She muttered, chewing on her straw as she turned, eye catching one of the miscellaneous, completely useless items that were displayed like candy on the shelves. A quick glance made it out to be some sort of window liner, to keep the heat in I supposed. It was so weird how they had things displayed like this. It was as if, while looking at sheets, you were suddenly going to remember that you needed an avocado slicer, or a banana peeler, or a vegetable brush shaped like a potato. I loved how none of them actually had anything

to do with sleeping, or bedrooms, or sheets, for that matter. It was some marketing plan...

I left her to her own devices, wandering off down the aisle, knowing the coffee would kick in soon and we'd be running around this place like children. Or rather, she'd be the child. I'd be the overworked mother trying to rein her in. Sometimes I wished they made those child-leashes for adults.

If they'd hung that on the shelves, I'd buy it. But I'd look pretty weird holding back my coffee maddened friend.

My eye caught a new pair of sheets and I stopped, picking up the glossy package and held it against my stomach, as if the stress and weight of the sheets against my abdomen would help me decide. The florescent lights above reflected my face back at me on the shiny plastic, the dark circles under my eyes and sunken cheeks only exaggerated in the crinkled plastic Purple. It gave a stain to my cheeks and neck, like a deep bruise stretched across my skin.

Purple. But a Royal Purple. Never lilac or violet. Dark Purple. Royal Purple. Queen sized, 100 percent cotton, 75 thread count. The plastic covering crinkled in my hands, blemishing the otherwise happy color with sickening shadows. It reminded me of the last pair of sheets I'd left behind. The way the shadows had seemed to extend between our bodies, blemishing the otherwise perfect, post-coital moment.

My stomach twisted as I put the latest package back, shoving it onto the shelf so hard I saw the way the other sheets bulged outside their perfect lines. I immediately felt apologetic to the shelf-stocker, but I couldn't make myself touch the package again. Rubbing the goosebumps on my arms away, I shuffled around the corner, glancing over the array of colors, patterns, and shapes available to customers.

That's when I saw it. The little green flowers practically popped off the khaki background. Both colors were something my mother had strictly banned. Colors of camouflage and the army, colors of conforming. To me, it looked like spring earth, just when green was popping through hardened winter soil, filling the earth with color and life again. It made me think of my mother's incense; spring breeze, and that feeling of when I found the new "one" and we rode off into the sunset. It was fresh and new and a change I wanted more than anything. Anything other than Purple...

I stared at them for a moment longer, lifting a finger as if to touch the fresh petals...

\*\*\*

Two minutes later Clarissa waited in the car while I checked out. A woman in front of me gathered her crying child and bulging bags and briskly walked out, looking relieved to finally be leaving. I knew I probably looked the same way. I was happy to be done. I would be happy to sleep.

I set my package of sheets on the counter and watched as the band rolled them towards the scanner. The bar code scanned and the cash register beeped in response. \$29.95. The cashier stopped just before she put the sheets in the bag, smiling at the sheets before turning that blinding smile to me. My expression didn't change.

"Purple." She said. "Such a lovely color." I blinked at her, not knowing what to say.

Of course.

It was always Purple.

## Last Words

*I love you*  
mom whispered as her grip  
slipped further away  
her tears like drip drops  
on my concrete flesh  
I embraced  
the light

*I love you*  
Too

## New Orleans

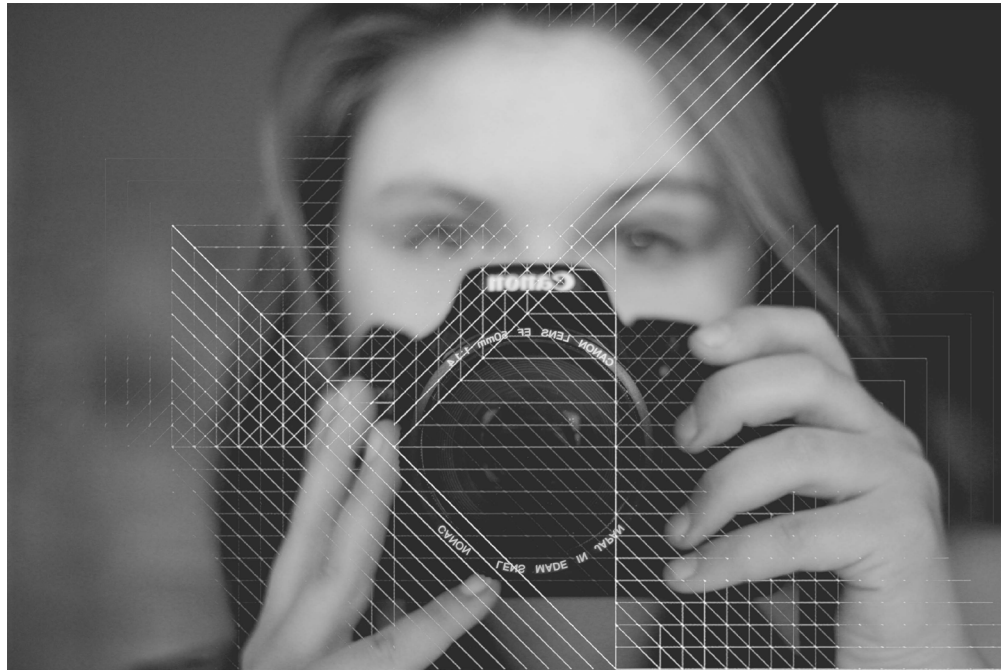
Crows perch on porches  
Trees warp the boulevard  
City in a swamp

~

Small ferns grow from bark  
Of towering live oak limbs  
Stillness, harmony.

# SelfGraph

*photography*



# Quantitative

*Artist Prefers Content Not Shown*

a pleasure to burn

*book pages, wax, glue, acrylic, paper on stretched  
canvas*

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## Lemon-Drop Fist Fights

sucker punch bruising, candy corn smiles  
 you're lying- to me-  
 on the ground- to yourself-  
 on a powdered cloud of confectioner's sugar  
 you said we can coexist-  
 caramel apple camaraderie,  
 we both want to be devoured.

loving you was loving a popsicle ferris wheel,  
 our ups and downs were cyclical,  
 every acidic orange crush scream was  
 a projection of your strawberry shortcomings  
 I held your hand but your nails dug deep,  
 iron scented cherry ooze dripped from my palm,  
 puckered lips dissolved in lemon-drop fist fights-  
 you were never a very sweet girl.

Melt down your cotton-candied mind-  
 a sweet cloud that can't do much thinking,  
 only rot holes in my teeth,  
 watch it form a fairy-blue puddle on the concrete,  
 I wanted to kiss you in a fondue fountain,  
 as a chocolate river pours through your veins,  
 you gave me a taste,  
 and I gagged on the rancid decay of it,  
 you were meant to water the garden,  
 so you drown it in lemonade  
 you're afraid to let anything healthy grow.

## ED Doesn't Holiday

The man in my stomach slams  
 on his door trying to gain my  
 attention, trying to have me  
 feed myself with glass fingers.

He doesn't realize my mind  
 holds the shadows of every  
 bite I've ever tasted, stamped

with a buckling grin on why I've  
 never asked you for seconds.

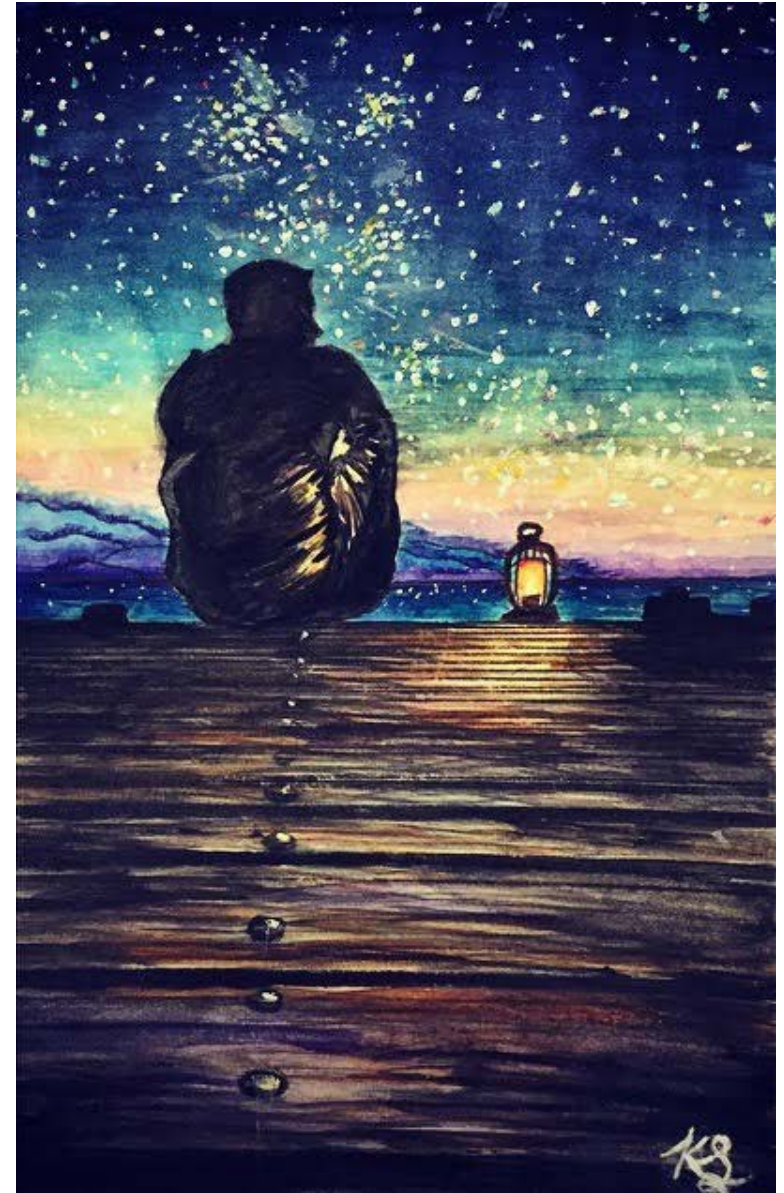
## The Wasteland

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Stargazer  
*watercolor*



## Girl Queen

*photography*



## Hollow Moon Hope

l'eclissi arose from solitary  
confinement, hollow from organs they had  
carved from her belly, trapped in the masses  
beneath a skyline filtered like pulp. the  
world had changed, strawberries were as vibrant  
as golden, deep-fried eggs and bold as rats  
disappearing below. she cupped the air  
sparkling within her hands, tangled it  
within her fingers and said:  
  
we were weak,  
and now must embrace the infinite!

# AWARDS

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## ART AWARDS

**Judged by:** Joseph Lappie

**Bio:** Joseph Lappie is an Associate Professor of Art at St. Ambrose University focusing in Book Arts and Printmaking. He exhibits nationally and internationally, with three solo shows in 2017, and has artist's books in permanent collections in 40+ institutions including: Yale University, Ringling College of Art & Design, Wesleyan University, and the School of the Art Institute of Chicago. He balances work between art, design, education, and family.

**First Place:** Persephone, looking at Cerberus by Alyssa Froehling  
An ephemeral piece. The muted tones, culminating in the darkness of hair, with a tinge of white at the weighted center gives "cerberus" a meaning beyond myth. We often think of dualities, but we are made up of multiples and this seems to suggest that further. The confrontational stare of the model also requires the viewer to be culpable to what they are witnessing which is a good thing for any piece of art.

**Second Place:** Balance by Mikaylo Kelly  
This is serene and though it is nearly a curse word, it is also pretty (I promise I mean that in a good way!) The tiny boat in the near center creates a solid balance to the beautifully dark tree limbs popping sadly out of the water. The reflection of the mountain and the colors bouncing back and forth makes for something both comforting and disheartening - a tough feat to accomplish.

**Third Place:** a pleasure to burn by Cam Best  
You can't reference Ray Bradbury (who I was lucky enough to meet twice) without my ears and eyes perking up. This sculptural book gives strong directional movement, texture, and color that helps epitomize the phoenix mythos. The stylized bird is appropriately presented. I can't tell from a digital photograph, but am interested to know if it is copies of Fahrenheit 451 or banned books, or books that the artist feels something for. Whatever the intentionality, because the text is present it will add impact.

**Honorable Mention:** SelfGraph by Emma Stough  
I love the directional lines and their variant widths overtop the photo. It's what makes the piece. It lets us see the importance of placement and marries linear with photographic nicely. The murkiness of the face and focus on the fingers is a nice change to a more traditional selfie.

## POETRY AWARDS

**Judged by:** Dora Malech

**Bio:** Dora Malech is the author of Shore Ordered Ocean (Waywiser Press, 2009), Say So (Cleveland State University Poetry Center, 2011), and Flourish (forthcoming from Carnegie Mellon University Press). Her poems have appeared in publications that include The New Yorker, Poetry, and Best American Poetry. She co-founded and formerly directed the Iowa Youth Writing Project. A recipient of Ruth Lilly, Civitella Ranieri, and Amy Clampitt Fellowships, she is an assistant professor of poetry in The Writing Seminars at Johns Hopkins University, where she was the recipient of the Crenson-Hertz Award for Community-Based Learning and Participatory Research. She was a Teaching Fellow in the English Department at Augustana College from 2008 to 2010.

**First Place:** Promise: by Sage Shemroske

**Second Place:** a vow cracked open lengthwise on a mattress by Alyssa Froehling

**Third Place:** fever wrists by Alyssa Froehling

**Honorable Mention:** Penis Envy by Cam Best

## PROSE AWARDS

**Judged by:** John Holman

**Bio:** John Holman teaches writing at Georgia State University. He is the author of Triangle Ray, Luminous Mysteries, and Squabble and Other Stories. His work has appeared in numerous journals and anthologies.

**First Place:** Yellow Summer by Emma Stough  
This story succeeds at orchestrating multiple characters and points of view over time, utilizing an effective non-chronological structure. It renders setting vividly and uses it as the literal and metaphorical means of revealing the rather complex relationships among the characters.

**Second Place:** Shark Syndrome by Cam Best

With lively language, and convincing social relationships, this story deftly conveys the plight of a character who overcomes a seemingly debilitating and isolating problem to enjoy a vision of hope for his future.

## AWARDS

**Third Place:** Night and Day by Cam Best

This story manages in a compact space to show the past and present conflict, and suggest the hopeful future, of a displaced character who changes from having a negative disposition to experiencing positive expectation, and it accomplishes that with purposeful use of setting and cross-cultural relationships.

**Honorable Mention:** It Was a “Fuck You” Kind of Rainstorm by Melissa Conway  
This story uses fresh language to convey the family and troubled interior life of its character.

### THE BARBARA ANDERSON MILLER AWARD

**Judged by:** Nancy Huse

**Bio:** Nancy Huse received her PhD from the University of Chicago in 1975. She was an Augustana faculty member from 1972 until she retired in 2006. Her favorite courses to teach were American Literature, Life Writing, and a seminar on Emily Dickinson. For several years she helped to prepare English teaching majors. She was a “founding mother” of the program in Women’s Studies and was its first director. She loved her job, but concedes that being retired is a wonderful time in life. Her desk continues to be very messy, which she considers a good sign.

**About the award:** 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.

**Winner:** Yellow Summer by Emma Stough

### ANN SHERRICK AWARD

**Judged by:** Nancy Huse

**About the award:** 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.

**Winner:** The Days by Elena Leith

## CONTRIBUTOR’S NOTES

### CAM BEST

Cam Best is a senior English Education major, and yes, she is currently experiencing an identity crisis, thanks for asking. Fortunately, her art has helped a bit with that -- she’s been painting with oil and acrylic since high school, writing stories since middle school, and drawing inspiration from the poetic genius Thomas Stearns Eliot since the day she dared to disturb the universe. She’d like to thank the academy, her parents, and T. S. Eliot. She takes solace in imaginary worlds to hide from adulthood.

### MELISSA CONWAY

Melissa Conway was born at a very young age to her mother. She spent many years as a child, growing up to become a teen then an adult. Her childhood was “nice, lots of time for reading and climbing trees”. She has always enjoyed reading books and began writing through the encouragement of her 8th grade teacher Mrs. Lindig. She graduated high-school and is currently attending Augustana College, majoring in Creative Writing. She thinks Saga is “pretty neat” and when asked about her experience on the poetry board she’d say “I liked it. Creative people, talented artists, hard working staff. Overall positive experience.”

### ALYSSA FROEHLING

I was trying to be less of a manic pixie dream girl but then I went and dyed my hair pink.

### MONICA GIL

I am an amateur photographer and photo editor. More of my art can be found at <http://monicagilart.tumblr.com>.

### MICHELE HILL

I am an aspiring author in fiction, writing both short stories and novels. I mostly free write when story ideas pop into my head.

### TREVOR JABLONSKI

Like a monstrous snail, a toilet slides into a living room on a track of wet, demanding to be loved  
-Russell Edson

### ALLYSON JESSE

Self-proclaimed master crafter. I love to live a creative life full of poetry, photography, and sewing.

### MIKAYLO KELLY

Mikaylo Kelly took 3 gap years and is a first year student at Augie. These pieces reflect his solo travels by canoe from Chicago to the Gulf of Mexico, and his subsequent time spent living in Guatemala, Mexico, and now Rock Island. He hopes they will inspire introspection on the nature of nature, the concept of perception, and the reality of relationships.

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**ELENA LEITH**

Elena Leith is a coffee saturated soul with some writing aspirations. Hopefully, she'll find her place in this world eventually.

**ALIA McMURRAY**

My name is Alia, I like poetry, photography, crystals, and bananas.

**BRENNA PARSON**

I have always known I was meant to be a writer. After finishing my first book my sophomore year of high school, I knew that I could do this. From there, I have taken my inspiration from my extensive reading list, various genres of music, and movies I have seen. Sometimes the best ideas can be found in your junior English class; you just have to be willing to look.

**SAGE SHEMROSKE**

Sage Shemroske is a student who spent exactly four terms at Augustana before their financial aid was taken away. During their time at Augustana they focused on writing mediocre poetry instead of preparing for the real world. Now they sell nudes on the internet.

**EMMA SMITH**

She's an emotional force of nature. Aspiring beam of light. Can be soothed with cute, small things.

**EMMA STOUGH**

Emma feels like the real beginning of her (potentially) illustrious writing career was in 8th grade when someone taught her about fanfiction - the rest, as they say, is history. Emma's interests include photography, graphic design, playing the flute, Jane Austen, and losing chapstick constantly. She hopes one day to give the world the type of story that made her want to be a writer in the first place. At this very moment, she is no doubt admiring the inexplicable draw of Michael Cera.

**KELSEY SYKORA**

Kelsey Sykora is a biology major studying pre-optometry. Her favorite media is acrylic and says that music has a big influence on her pieces. She has been making artwork since the age of five and is thrilled to be included in this year's SAGA magazine.

**UXMAR TORRES**

He just wants to perform and speak words that'll make you feel warm and weak. He's both a poet and an artist, neither most loving nor the smartest. But hey, who is?

**NATE WENDT**

I'm not a morning person, but I am a mourning person. I see a lot of the strife in the worlds past, present and future. I try to capture these moments and show that while there are moments show destruction, there is also a lot of beauty in them.