

# *THE CATALYST*



*VOLUME 13*  
*FALL 2015*

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# “DO YOU HAVE AN ANSWER?”

A publication of *The Catalyst*  
Volume 13 – Fall 2015

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WHAT WE ARE:

*The Catalyst* is a student-run creative journal of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse English Club publishing prose, poetry, photography, art, music, and all other creative works by the students and faculty of UW-L. Each semester, the student editors pick a new theme and accept submissions about and outside the chosen theme.



## THIS SEMESTER'S THEME:

It has been 13 semesters since *The Catalyst* was taken up by the UW-L English Club. This semester's theme was brought about by the Editor-in-Chief. She was thinking about how little we as humans really know about the world and our futures. In essence, then, it's important to find out why we're here. But, do any of us really have the answer? We'll see!

- The Editors

## WORD OF THANKS TO:

William Stobb for being such a great advisor, supporting us and pushing us to grow into the publication we know we can be

The UW-L English Club for helping us obtain awesome submissions, and for spreading the word about our publication

Rob Wilkie for helping develop our new website and all the tech support he has provided through the years

Jake Speer for spending so much time helping archive all of our previous editions, and for IT information

Everyone who has submitted to *The Catalyst* in this publication as well as in the past

And, of course, all those who read this publication and support the amazing creativity we have here at UW-La Crosse!

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## Random Thoughts about a girl I know

*Rhiannon Fischer*

Life and the girl who made it tick irrelevant, backwards or blind.  
Uninvited stranger: the dust of her arrival I denied so diligently.  
Attempting a blue lull before blood spikes turbulent.  
The internal bind of fractured healing; bruised mobility.  
A forward thrust!  
Brushed her tangles from my hair and gave one last glance at the  
lust-rigged compilation fixed like honey beside my void.  
Every breath an irritable craving for distilled indifference.  
She was an epic diversion:  
a steep uprise then downslide before playground glimpse fixed  
opposite, pushed preposterous from balanced fire to smoke screen  
incline.  
I teeter, now, on the brink of depravity.  
Lavender miles afloat Juniper's breeze.  
I met her in a storybook I wrote for my own amazement.  
And when the clock halted and time became an uncertain melody  
physically embedded betwixt hollow heaven and gravitational  
meanderings  
My self diagnosis atrophied.....  
if only I could visualize myself using her perspective.  
But the laughter lines I wished to deepen, not destroy opened to  
morning's birth in iridescent reflection of an unstable sky.

Suppression's avid overtone  
Danced on in apprehension.



## Flowers of Despair

*Mikayla Peters*

He stood strong on the cold, dark day that he knew would eventually come. His eyes glanced around from person to person, peering through the pounding sheets of ice falling from the building tops. He clutched the daffodils in his hand, hiding them beneath the folds of his coat. If someone found out, he'd die for growing them.

She was worth the risk.

He stepped into the ice, letting his helmet do most of the work as he made his way down the streets. A bullet struck his shoulder, but his shield reacted just in time to block it. Cars whipped past him, blowing him into the gray buildings that lined the streets. He cursed under his breath as each staggering wind tossed him about. What if the flowers didn't survive?

He shook himself. They had to survive. They were his only chance at getting her back. Clutching the flowers tighter and looping one arm over them to create a bubble in his coat, he moved forward.

A young boy flew past him on a hoverboard, pausing to laugh at the man with his hands in his coat. "Hey, grandpa! Ever heard of flying?" he said, circling the man in the air.

The man didn't want any trouble. If he had to fight, he would have to drop the flowers, and the police would surely find him. "Young man, find the joy in walking. Joy that too many people have forgotten." People like her. She used to love walking with him, until the change. Now, she sat at home, watching the holograms argue around her in her television room.

He could barely remember the young girl with the autumn-leaf hair and the azure eyes who chased the water and leaves. Of course, all of that was gone. The daffodils would cure her, he knew. They had to! He had nothing else. The trees, the grass, and the other flowers had vanished long ago. Even the stream where they caught their first fish had to be plugged up and built over. Progress, they said. They needed room for the people to live, for the giant television rooms and the

multiplexes and the shopping malls. They needed room to poison her mind as she grew, to turn her away from the nature. They needed room to trap her.

A sigh of relief escaped him as the boy moved on. The man glanced down at his coat, then continued his steps towards her house. Curse these buildings for all looking the same! Had he taken a wrong turn in sector G? His eyes scanned the windows, hoping for a clue.

Room 103, Building II, Sector P. He could remember her address perfectly, he just didn't know where he stood now. With a reluctant move of his arm, he drew out his phone. Although he only had an older version for a phone (probably the oldest on the market), he still didn't enjoy using any technology, no matter how primitive. It would entrap him as it had the others, sucking up their souls into oblivion.

"Sector P," he said. The phone lit up, popping out a hologram map of the city. As it rotated, it pinpointed his location. The ice bounced off the screen of his phone, then slid off the protective shield.

"Five point three seconds away," it told him. The phone didn't have programming for walking distances, so he tried to do the math. Maybe another ten minutes of walking.

He memorized the map, checked the flowers, and shut the phone. With determined steps, he made his way through the streets, trying to avoid all the vehicles speeding around him. Avoiding a green bullet that spun around the corner and almost hit him, he could hear the jeers from the people inside. Idiot walking. He didn't care. He just had to get to her home with the flowers intact.

Finally, he reached Sector P. Building II sat at the gate to the sector, right across from Building I. Tensing as he drew closer, he went inside, looking for the stairs. Weaving down hallways and peeking through doors, he found little of interest. It took almost fifteen minutes for him to remember how recently they had built this building. It wouldn't have any stairs.

Slow and insecure steps led him onto the elevator. "Room 103," he muttered, tightening the coat around the daffodils. The elevator didn't

seem to even move, but the doors opened right outside her door. He stepped out, knocked, though he knew the system inside would have already alerted her of his presence, and waited.

Even though she knew he stood out there, she didn't come to the door. He knew that she probably didn't want to leave the show on the hologram. She had moved here so she didn't have to leave her programs ever. He showed his badge to the scanner outside the door, hearing a click from the mechanism. "Tracy?" he called as he opened the door.

"Tracy didn't have anything to do with it!" a woman said from within the television room.

"Tracy? Do you have company?" he asked, walking into the room, keeping the coat over the flowers just in case. He didn't need to worry, however. The woman talking, a hologram of the show, used the new technology to put Tracy literally in the middle of the show.

Without another word, he unplugged the television. The holograms and room faded, leaving just Tracy sitting on the only chair in the room. She turned to him, her beautiful eyes narrowed into a scowl.

"What the hell are you thinking?" she yelled.

He flinched a bit. "Tracy, I brought you a present."

Instantly, she softened, smiling to him. "A present? Why didn't you say so? What is it? No! Let me guess! Um... a new T.V.? This one is getting old." She had just moved in a few weeks ago. The projection box still had the price sticker on it. He shook his head. "A new game? I finished the last one!" Again, he shook his head.

"Tracy." Maybe if he kept saying her name, she would remember. Maybe him saying it was enough. "Tracy. It's these!" He pulled the flowers out from under his coat.

She gasped. "Liam! What are you doing? You can't bring those disgusting things in here! That's how people get sick! Idiot!" She pressed a button on her chair. "Housekeeping'll fix this."

He didn't even care that she turned him in. He knew that the housekeeping robots would take him into custody, where he would die. The flowers didn't work. Tracy, locked inside her own world of technology like the other thousands of people on the planet, had not remembered. The daffodils were his last chance to get his sister back. They were supposed to be the answer. The time he spent tending them, the bribes to get the seeds, the months spent making his own dirt...

It was all for nothing.

## HOLY UNTITLED

*Wes Isberner*

We didn't see each other for years, but the ringing ringing ringing always brought an image of you in blue blue blue to mind.

She couldn't come to the service with me because time turned over too quickly for her and she thought she had a prior engagement. You sat next to me and read fresh words out of my crinkled program because time turned over more slowly in your mind and you came in late.

We sat in the back of a closet-sized worship last week, communing more with the fly buzzing at our table than with the other prayer-whisperers. The candles brightened their skin but almost set our programs ablaze.

I repeated, word for word, what you told me moments before, and I was surprised when she cried; you didn't tell me she'd cry. I didn't know what to say, but her tears fell like sunflowers, which was far from poison ivy.

On the night we got together to scream our grievances at the sky, we both lost our voices, but you kept talking, trying to explain the world. I put my finger on your chapped lips because I couldn't hear a thing but ringing ringing ringing in my ears, and that noise made more sense to me than the water spilling from your mouth.



## Purple Shadow Boy

*Stella Nathan*

I see the whites of your eyes  
Like moon slivers  
Peeking out from behind  
The covers of night fall  
The stars are envious  
They've danced  
On a dark backdrop before  
But never so dark as  
Your melanin.  
Your purple shadow  
Moves slowly  
Over and under dull street lamps  
And twists around stop signs  
It ducks behind bushes  
And swings on swings with  
Metal chains that clang  
Laughing wildly because it cannot be seen  
No other complexion  
Has the luxury  
To blend in with the night  
You leave traces of your silhouette  
In black chalk dust and  
The stars sneak burning kisses  
On your back.

## **I Moved the Paper Clips**

*Holly Mueller*

a breath, to line up with my invisible  
line, only visible to  
me, in my torment  
of positioning the stapler forwards,  
not backwards, sequestering  
it to the right of  
the tape dispenser. Exactness. It  
is my reality to not alter my  
perception but to induce  
perfection in the mundane objects that merely  
sit lifeless, waiting to be  
put in their respective  
places, by me. Only me. My ideal  
world exists in my  
imagination.



**Ellie East**  
*Streetlamp*



THE ANTI-POETICS OF WHEN MY ANXIETY REMOVES ALL FORMS  
OF COMMUNICATION FROM MY LONG TERM MEMORY (*GUERNICA*  
ON HIGH)

Wesley Isberner

A map of a young adult's anxious brain which bears  
a striking resemblance to  
Picasso's *Guernica*.

Bright orange scrap paper filling with unintentional  
muscle fibers spilling from  
a generic therapist's pen.

Staff Training: a three hour slow-mo video of an introvert's  
social and emotional energy being drained  
by her extroverted coworkers.

My eyes have closely examined every pixel of this pin  
design twice, but asking for needed help  
and feedback is a work in progress.

An entirely good day in May was wasted because  
I couldn't figure out how to tell you  
I had better things to do.

Sometimes my vision blurs so much because of anxiety  
and nerves that I understand the slant of  
every line in Van Gogh's *Bedroom*  
but not the text from my girlfriend:  
"Hey, you want to get lunch?"

The professor is totally judging you for not writing right now,  
but the only thing coming to mind is  
quotes from other works, images  
from other minds; they bleed  
from your pen easier than –

Nervous doodles in your notebook page, on your arm, hand, edge of a library

book, desk, anything, anything. Nervous looking;  
don't look or they'll see your inability to.

Don't open your; nothing is going to.

Nothing. Nervous. It's nothing. Blank. No.

## Mind of the Student

*Dylan Elliot*

On the backs of  
lecture hall chairs,  
on the wooden sides of  
library study carrels,

that is where  
the mind of  
the student  
is scored.

Scored in pens and pencils  
bought to analyze  
Plato and Marx,  
to derive ancient formulas, to  
copy graphs and charts,

to write about the Mayans  
and the fall of Rome, to  
circle all remainders and  
create masterful poems.

But instead,

all that is written,  
all that is carved,  
reads:

“Where do I go from here?”  
“From here you go home.”

## **The Dime**

*Holly Mueller*

Find a penny  
pick it up...  
I found a dime, which  
means my brother keeps  
tabs on me, ever since I  
made the bet and  
never paid. It was only a  
dime. I don't even remember what  
the bet was over. I was four, he  
was eight. When we were  
growing up and my birthday came  
around, he always asked me for  
a dime if I received money. Each  
holiday we were together as  
adults, he'd ask about the  
dime. For thirty years, he  
never let me forget that I owed  
him a dime! One day he  
quit asking, when the love  
triangle dissolved, and the gun  
went off. It was then,  
as he lay in his casket, that I  
took a dime and  
placed it in his pocket.

## **Bottles**

*April Wildes*

He said he was  
never a drinker,  
after bottles with cigarette buds  
soak up left over beer and  
shot glasses with drops  
of brown liquor  
line the kitchen sink.

My dad went to Vegas and all I got was this crummy shot glass and an empty college fund.

Holes appeared  
in the wall,  
plaster pile on the ground, and  
my arm was bruised,  
a five-fingered print.

“Ya know, I had one good boy split into two half-assed girls.” Yes,  
Dad, and what great asses you did make.

My sister hid between  
the Lazy Boy and the wall.  
I was screaming for something,  
Anything.

In his stupor of  
whiskey breath,  
I left him in his ruins.



## **If I Wonder How...**

*Haolin Huang*

old fashioned flavor  
Comes packed in a pear.  
I have to plant a pear tree  
After I find a perfect spring

for the sprouts  
Being born before the spring  
I have to grow up as my mama wished  
Have every breakfast, lunch, and dinner.

I won't journey afar  
I won't trade or work  
I won't farm, I won't involve myself  
in politics,

for I shall never go to a big house  
I'll never feel randy, never behave dandy  
Never talk to a fruit seller  
Never talk to this coquettish world around.

I'll be useless, I'll bear hardship with equanimity,  
I'll bear the pear core in my arms  
I'll bear the pear core from my God.  
I'll sit. Sit in the spring,

sit into the spring,  
I'm the root swallowed by the spring  
The world was still barren  
The world was once ripened

I'll think only about the taste  
Of a pear.  
Maintain my chastened tongue  
Clench, my teeth.



## **Vanity**

*Stella Nathan*

She wants to be loved in a vain sort of way  
She has grown weary of being loved for her insides  
What is that? Guts and Intestines  
Wonderful  
Puke  
We all end up in the ground some day  
But while she's around  
She wants to be seen as  
More beautiful than the flowers  
You'll put at her grave  
Did you buy those flowers from  
Walgreens?  
Wonderful  
Even ugly people have sex  
So what's your excuse then?  
She's heard of a woman so ugly that  
One glance turned everyone to stone.  
Well at least they looked at her.

## The Ultimate Choice

*Mikayla Peters*

Finally, the day had arrived. With the car packed full of everything I would need, I set off for my new life in college. I would finally get to make my own decisions and create a life for myself. I felt sick. The car overflowed with boxes of books, video games, a stuffed lamb I couldn't leave behind, and pictures of my friends, significant other, parents, and siblings. My stomach turned, yet I digested the butterflies as best I could, sitting behind the wheel. In a month, I would no longer be just me, Alex. I would make all the decisions that would change me and define my future.

I glanced back at my home for a single moment, reflecting on the last eighteen years of my life. A life of ambiguity and obscurity had happened here, nothing more. Eighteen years of nothingness that hopefully left me ready for the decisions that lay ahead. I knew what my parents wanted for me, but I might not want the same things. Somewhere in my soul, the truth whispered, letting me know I would never hear from them or see them again. They wouldn't recognize me after a few weeks anyways, and I wouldn't remember them.

I left my room behind—a place I had tried to scrub clean of my existence, yet remained stained with the abortions of creative projects left half-done or torn to pieces, with the very fiber of my being, with the cells that grew within me, the memories I had gained and lost, the good times and bad. And I had little to show for it. Some medals from sports—cross country, soccer, basketball—still hung on the green-and-blue walls. A diploma sat on the otherwise bare desk, framed with the tassel from my cap. Stacks of rejection letters for my written works pierced with a thick, rusty, three-inch nail that I had found on the sidewalk hung from the door right at eye level.

Just like that, 18 years were gone.

Perhaps I should have brought more with me. My writings, my rejections, my achievements. Perhaps they would have struck something in my memory, brought back the ideas of the life I left behind and wouldn't remember in a month. Perhaps.

But too late.

Two weeks later, I walked into my advisor's office after my class with him, feeling the color drain from my face. A few weeks of studies were not enough! How could I make this decision? I had prepared my entire life for this, I knew, but to finally create an identity for myself meant committing for the rest of life.

Professor Baxter greeted me with a smile. "Are you ready for your exam, Alex?"

Shoving my trembling hands into my pockets, I nodded.

Professor Baxter put a hand on my shoulder, guiding me into the chair beside his desk. "Only a few questions for you. First, what major have you decided on?"

"Literature," I said, certain of that answer. I had discerned exactly what I wanted to do with my career, where I wanted to study, and where I would teach some time ago. The easy part had finished.

He made a mark on a clipboard. "What do you want to do?"

"Get my PhD and teach."

He nodded. My answer, swift and confident and sure, rang in the air, covering up the tiny scratching noise the pen made on the clipboard. The pen. Not pencil. No going back now. "Very good. And, finally, what gender do you choose for yourself?"

There it was. The question I had been dreading my entire life. Eighteen years without a gender made a person want to remain like that. I wanted to keep my memories, to keep everything I held dear to my heart. Drawing out of my pockets and running through my dark hair my hands still shook.

"I'm not sure, sir," I said. "Could you repeat the options?"

He gave me a look, as if asking me if I had paid attention in his class or not. "Male, female, bigender, or...well, I suppose agender, if you

can make a case for it. Remember, Alex, you cannot change your gender after this. Choose wisely.”

I searched for another question to stall him, but found nothing. Either I would look like an idiot, asking questions Professor Baxter had answered multiple times in his gender studies course, or I would have to choose this what would define me for the rest of my life. It would change the payment I received, the respect I got, my looks, my body, my license, everything! Of course, men generally had the better pay, I knew, but women who rose to the tops of their careers commanded respect and had more publicity than men. Women bled every month, but everyone could tell when a man got aroused in public. Bigender would be nice, but it was a difficult program to get into, as you had to defend yourself before a jury. Agender wouldn't change my body, but it would limit my abilities. I could neither have nor create children. Agenders also didn't reach the top of their careers. People had trouble acting around them because they had difficulty categorizing agenders into neat, comprehensible packages that matched all the others.

...There wasn't a single choice that seemed to fit me. I just wanted to be me with a PhD, Dr. Alex, who taught literature to the young, moldable minds of youth, respected by peers and students across the globe, with world-renowned books and research and—

“Alex, your decision now. Or do you want me to draw from the hat?”

I panicked. “I don't want a gender, Professor! I just want to be me!”

He frowned and shook his head. “I'm so disappointed in you. Agender is a long process that you should have started your defense of at the beginning of class. I suppose you could take it up with the board, but...I had thought you would be the star pupil. You are just another student who doesn't like change.”

I couldn't stand how let down he looked. Sighing, I said, “Male, I guess.” At least that wouldn't change me so much. I could keep my beautiful dark skin and my thick, dark locks of hair. Though... Sickness swept over me at realizing I'd have to use the restroom

standing up half the time. As I went to change my answer, Professor Baxter made the checkmark.

"And, which gender do you prefer to be attracted to?"

Another difficult question. With a female, I could procreate, but I had little desire for that now. That meant 18 years of loving my child, then losing them forever. I could choose male, but I hadn't done enough research. Every option, every gender had advantages and disadvantages I had not considered from the perspective of a male. I had to stop, to consider the options, the advantages and disadvantages of each—

"Alex, I need an answer."

"I...I don't know. I haven't thought of this from the male--"

"You were supposed to have all of this figured out after my class! What were you doing the past two weeks?"

Tears stung my eyes. "I...I was listening! I just...I forgot to consider it from all the perspectives! I wasn't—"

His hand reached into the jar on his desk, drew out a slip of paper, and made a mark on my chart. "Bigender."

My tears finally slipped down my cheek. "O...okay," I whispered, knowing I couldn't argue.

He nodded shortly, bid me a good day, and a pair of aids promptly escorted me out of his office to the room where I would get my memories erased and the injection.

The needle entered my arm, and my skin immediately began to bubble around the injection site as an aid in white strapped me to a chair. With my head tilted towards the bright light in the ceiling, I could see nothing of what happened to my body. Within seconds of the light turning on, I no longer heard anyone around me or felt anything.

“I am Alexander August, eighteen-year-old male college student. I love literature and reading. I want to teach. I like only bigenders. I am Alexander August, eighteen-year-old male college student. I love literature and reading. I want to teach. I like only bigenders. I am Alexander...” a mechanical voice whispered into my ear, filling my aching head as I sat up. It continued as I stood and stumbled toward the water beside my bed. My hand ran across my beard, and I smelled alcohol. I couldn’t remember anything from the night before. It must have been a wild party!

**Untitled**  
*Tori Larson*



## Time Spent

*James Groh*

Our quick getaway was stopped  
by my tire getting stuck on the curb.  
Before that I guessed the score of the football game  
was 36-16 and it was  
36-16 you didn't believe me  
when I told you  
I was gay but you believed me  
when I sent you a picture of a  
cross tattooed in permanent  
marker extending from my armpit  
to the top of my hip.  
Together our CD's eclipse the sun and  
*fuck you*  
is a sincerity,  
an afterthought  
with a cigarette on our lips  
once, twice,  
three times  
a summer  
with you.



## Garden Crust

*Samuel Petersen*

One summer I was "garden crust". Each day I collected more dirt and plant residue onto the creases and planes of my body until, by August, I was close to becoming the organisms I had been tending to in the garden. As I waded through the groves of tomato plants, the greenish-gold tar of their limbs accumulated on my hands and arms till they were black. As I dug potato plants out of the ground the dirt of their roots became lodged under my finger nails, caked the creases on the back of my neck and lined my nasal passages. The sun baked my skin until I was the hue of a morel. I became part of the garden and the garden became part of me until there was no differentiating between myself and the plants. I could stand in the corner of my little apartment in La Crosse and become as unassuming as a fern. "Where is Sam?", my roommate would wonder. After a pause, I'd respond, "right here in the corner absorbing this ambient afternoon light". My roommate would respond, "How can you just sit there like that? Don't you get bored?" To which I'd answer, "Not at all. As a plant I don't have to think. I've no need to ponder or watch. I've no desires and no anxieties. I just sit here with no mind at all. What a way to experience the world. The sun, the soil, the rain and the atmosphere; I experience them directly, with nothing between me and the environment, no thoughts to obscure the experience of my surroundings." Of course the summer eventually ended. The lush green curled up into brittle brown and the unpicked vegetables began to rot, breaking down into that from which they came. And I went back believing I was human and assuming the weight of consciousness. Still, I look forward to the day I become a birch, or the long, thin roots of the burdock.

## Catharsis

*Jennifer Glasgow*

Before the sun comes up,  
my alarm goes off,  
and my brain yells at me.

“Get up now or you won’t have time to do the one thing you want to  
do among the hundred things you have to do!”

As I step out of bed,  
pain shoots up my legs but I still

slip into skin  
tight leggings and a binding bra,  
wrap elastic around my hair  
and take Tylenol, then  
cover my wrist with an iPod

sleeve  
and leave.

Brisk cold hits my cheeks like  
the hard pavement strikes my feet.  
Even though my analgesics kick in  
I still feel my shins

splinting with every step,  
like shock waves rocketing up to my knees,  
but it’s okay,  
running’s good for me.

## Dreams

Danielle Watterson

I woke up in a nauseating wave of *déjà vu*. Chest heaving, palms sweating, I snuggled into the warm comfort of my dog, Maui, but I couldn't go back to sleep. I cried from the overwhelming confusion and anxiety; my unconscious mind's ghosts eluded a conscious grip like an electrified wind just passing through. The Sun continued to shove its citrine corona in my face; its eagerness to shine shadowing sympathies for another mundanely depressing Thursday.

On the drive to the family restaurant I smoked a bowl and took some Xanax; I needed to function despite the morning's mysterious madness. Once there, I immediately went in search of my mom. I needed to hug her. As I walked, I wondered again about my dream: *maybe she can help me feel better*. My gaze met my mom's, and I shared the pain concentrated in her eyes. The sorrow written on her face, now permanent as a tattoo, and the familiarity of her never-ending sadness ignited a resurgence through my being—I remembered.

I dreamt of you again last night. You were older, the lines of passing years wrinkled into your face and an auburn beard fully sprouted from your chin. You strolled in like you were simply away: exploring the world, making memories, living life—only stopping by to say 'hello'. I *hugged* you. I could smell you. I could feel your body envelope mine. But I didn't understand. In reality's perverse version of my life you're gone. Forever. And I'm left here.

After telling mom I assumed an acquainted stoic posture, pretending to be strong. "I know he misses you," I say through the fragile façade, "and he loves you so much." These words, now like a mantra, have lost their staying power. They're not coming from him anymore, at least, not in this reality.

## Depression

*Ellen Smith*

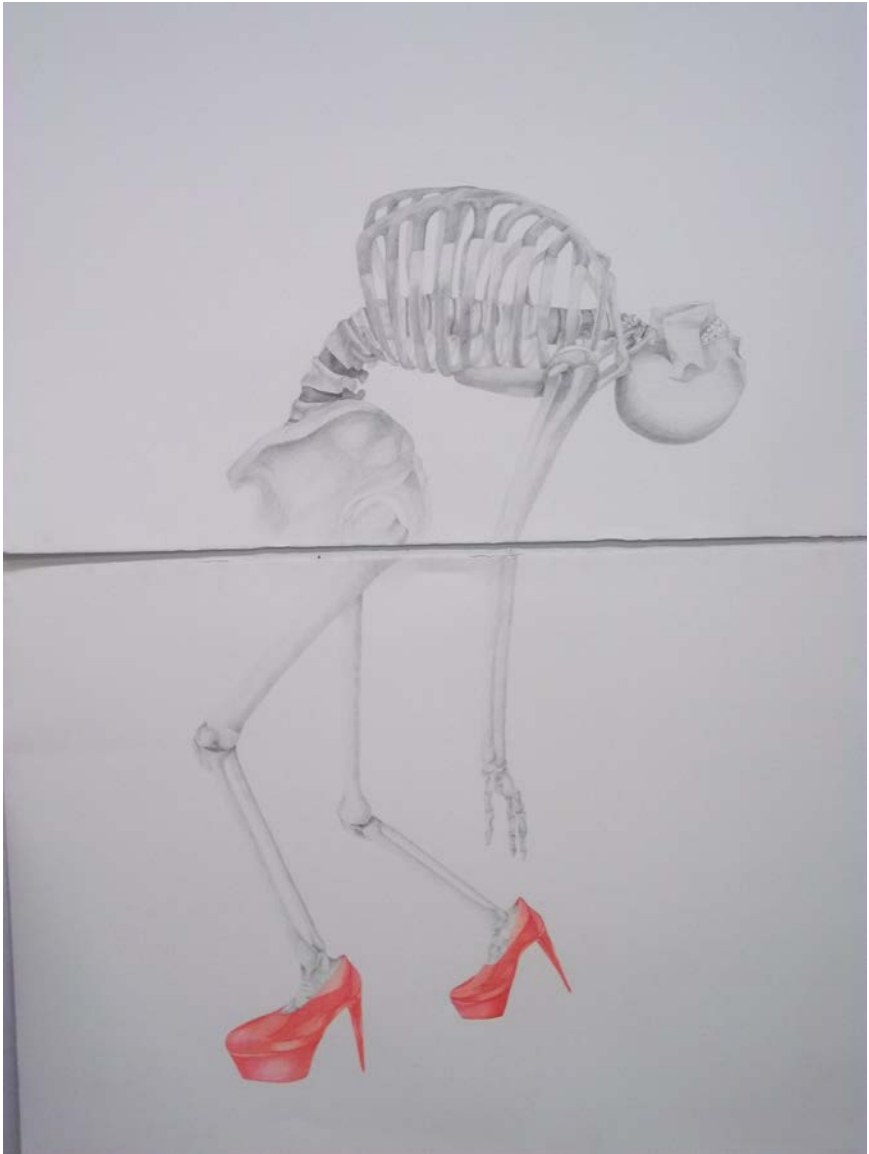
I saw running horses while driving a car with my friend  
and then I said hey those horses are running and she said cool  
which made me laugh because

what I meant to say was thank God for those horses  
they chose a good time to run and I want to say to them  
I know what you mean, I know exactly  
what you mean when you burst into wild sprints tossing  
your heads around in the wind and it reminds me of energy  
and I really thought for a while I wouldn't see something  
beautiful like that and

I was under the impression that maybe  
I'm a person who is one in a million  
who stops seeing great things after a certain age  
like the unlucky lottery  
but now, maybe I'm not since I got to see  
those running horses maybe  
I will see the pink magic light that makes my street glow  
soft and quiet and I'll see flocks of birds  
explode and I'll think this is how fireworks were inspired  
and the way the dogs sleep in fragments of light  
that shows the dust swirling in the air above them  
I can see these things now  
I think

I don't say this  
but I touch my neck with one finger  
and feel that I am alive

**Compensation**  
*Ellie East*



## Life

*Fue Yang*

It is 8:18AM, and I am currently sitting in my living room by the screen door.

I will make an Instagram sandwich. In a bowl of warm water will be a quarter ounce of yeast, three tablespoons of sugar, one tablespoon of salt, and three cups of flour with warm water. All flush of the measuring tools. Then I will beat and knead the ingredients until my dough is smooth. The dough will bake in my oven at 375 degrees in a greased loaf pan for forty-two minutes.

Two eggs, some iceberg lettuce, a big red tomato, the jar of mayo, four strips of thick juicy bacon, one slice of cheddar cheese, and an avocado. I love my eggs sunny side up to smother in my mouth. The slightly chilled lettuce balances the bacon. The tomato will be thin enough to not drown my bread. The avocado will be cut into fifths the long way.

Two slices of bread at exactly half an inch in width.

Mayo on both slices. The cheese slaps on first with the lettuce on top. Next is the tomato and the stretchy bacon. Finishing the sandwich with one slice of avocado and the eggs. The filter will enhance the colors brown, yellow, green, red, red, yellow, green, and brown. It will be the perfect sandwich.

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At my fingertips was the last bite.

I know I am going to have to just make another one again. I realized I spent all of this time thinking this sandwich was perfection.

I took my time creating something unique. But, if I end it thinking it was the best damn thing then that makes me a fool.

It is now 9:41AM which leaves me enough time to go make myself a PBJ sandwich before class.

## **Intertwine**

*Alex Johnson*

Coming home from his class for the day, he smiles at everyone in the hallway. Waving at friends and professors he knows, he takes the short walk home back to his dorm room. The sun shines brighter than any day before. Students on brand new bicycles ring their bells and ride through the summer breeze. The boy walks into his dorm hall, wrenches his smile one click tighter, he could almost burst. Finally, his room. The mask falls away, and all he thinks about is the thought of lying in bed, closing his eyes and shutting the world out. His phone lights up, his best friend pushing him to talk to that new girl he met during a hall event. But how could he? The darkness swallows up the sun beaming through the curtains. Gray clouds expand and engulf the light. He gives in, sending her a quick message before turning off his phone for a short while; his depression has sapped his motivation for the night.

Floors away, her phone lights up and her fingers hover over the keypad. Minutes tick by, but she cannot bring herself to respond, as she feels afraid of his reaction and is unable to put her thoughts into words. The words dance around her head like the Broadway play she saw in Middle School. How could she find the words for him when she has a hard enough time introducing herself to the people on her floor? He always seems so joyous and ready to take on the day. He is probably in his room, overjoyed, waiting for her response. The stress of her studies has brought her anxiety to new heights and she feels so laden down, social connections burden her. The light from her phone screen seems to close in on her, entangling her in a million worries and one. Then, she clicks "Send."



## 006.Georgia

*Melissa Drake*

*Georgia* is a friendship forged on the fourth floor of a hospital that's now like a second home. Corridor B is where my feelings live, suppressed by pills and supplements, but invited out to play in long beige hallways and little rooms with mirrors disguised as windows.

*Georgia* is the colorful capsules that paint the inside of my head; a few more and I'll have a serviceable rainbow to brighten my brain chemistry. Hang enough of these Christmas lights behind my eyes to cover up that big gray smudge, and maybe you can see my inner parts bathed in some fabricated, material cheer. Pull my ribs open like the old artificial spruce dredged up from the basement every year, and see my heart hung like an ornament upon drooping, bent branch.

*Georgia* is the sunshine I take from a bottle. Six pills a day, and she makes me forget I need them. She makes me laugh when nothing else will, And she can turn a rainy day into summer skies; the passing of storm clouds into better times. She is emotional Thursday mornings and a Thursday night's healing.

*Georgia* isn't just a name, and it's a state I've never been to, though maybe its a state of mind she grows in me. Session in progress-- do not disturb the quiet weekly meeting. Detangling the snarled knots in my head and helping lay a track for my overcrowded trains of thought-- often derailed, over-worked, running over cliffs instead of into open-mouthed stations like someday they will again.

*Georgia* is a place I call home, and I'm not ready to move out yet.

**Untitled**  
*Tori Larson*



## **Pigment**

*Molly Stapleton*

“The lipstick is wrong,” the little girl said as peered at her mother. The shade of pigment that colored her lips was pink. Pepto-Bismol pink. The old bubble gum that you accidentally brush with your hand that some careless person stuck on the underside of a desk for an unsuspecting person to find pink. Malibu Barbie’s dream house and convertible pink. The sort of pink lipstick that Aunt Tina wore, that left spots on her coffee-stained teeth when she smiled. The shade of pink that your eyes turn after you’ve been crying for a while. The color of the pink bows that you put in my hair, and the color of the county fair’s sickeningly sweet cotton candy. “The lipstick is wrong” she said as she peered at her mother in lying in a casket.

## New Rainbows

*Charleton Skinner*

after the rains  
came and went  
emptied weight—  
the equivalence of  
23,000 elephants—  
over a square mile

you said we'd  
never be the same  
or maybe I said  
I'll love you even  
when we're clouds  
and blown dust

I felt all your tears  
fall from 1000 miles away,  
the vegetation choking on  
salt, sputtering till leaves  
dried limp and died.  
You said Don't apologize.

on overcast days not an inch  
of blue bent through my eye,  
I'd stare down at puddles and  
remember spring, 1000 years  
gone, not praying for fair weather  
but feel pain welling in the sky

when in one breath, my feet rose,  
fingers and toes every fiber reaching,  
suspended in circulation, still one breath,  
swept flying over rivers, tears shrink microscopic,  
glazed in unfiltered light above the gray, storm clouds  
carry me, 100 billion droplets of water loosed over streets,

fields, sewers, gutters and streams, I fall over grass and  
sand and concrete, seep into dirt and drain down  
lower and lower to the sea. Storm cloud,

carry me 1000 times over and over,  
spread me out like a prism  
separating the light of  
new rainbows.

## **Feral**

*Ellen Smith*

Four storm cell-dodger whirlwinds of girls stick their heads out of car windows going 80 miles per hour somewhere in Nebraska drinking wild rushes of air and not fearing bugs or dirt or dust or birds for that matter and they've been caged for twelve hours and have five hours yet but it doesn't really matter since where they're going is better than where they're coming from and all that matters now is that they're running away from problems and grocery stores and cash for gold shops and car dealerships as fast as they can and soon, soon they'll mistake mountains for clouds and when they finally realize it's mountains that sit bathing in the hazy light of dusk, they'll press on further and chase the setting sun up and over the Front Range and will rise high, high up from the yellow plains that seem like a vast ocean and careen into the hills madly and they'll say the headlights that bounce off of canyon walls are like tornados and the wind will be so cold and it will swirl their hair into tumbleweeds but it will be so fresh and smell of sage and pine and the river all at once and when it's almost done, they'll know because there will be one final plunge towards a little town with orange lights like a congregation of candles and they won't see the mountains but will know they are there in black masses , and they'll slip away deep into their darkness.

## Love Letters

*Haolin Huang*

1

I took your shadow from you  
poured some salt into it,  
and added a dozen  
grapes. Now a fine bottle  
of wine, I'll drink it when I'm old.

2

Two things are left for  
you – time that we had carrot cakes together  
this summer, and a broken  
shot glass with my lip balm sticking on your brain

3

The sky was so blue that  
when I touched it  
I left a fingerprint

4

Your cat hates it  
when he has to walk through a room  
full of rocking chairs  
Even dappling your robe of dead lawn  
or tapping your heart of darkness  
over the edge  
won't make a difference

5

A visitor is too dear  
When it is raining gash forth  
I want to have my windows moved  
Closer to the stormy rivers  
With the faith that it rains everyday

Prevents you  
From a distance

6

Like running away from the moon  
When I was young  
I wished I could be so fast that I  
Outspeed the golden apple girl and I  
Get rid of your harsh brightness

Yet the most arcane corners where  
As deep as the pacific ocean or  
As high as the almighty heaven  
Still has you:  
an olive in a mysterious castle  
Through the long walk around Lake Louise  
Carrying a midnight summer dream  
Sometimes I look at the skies  
The sunlight says thanks to me

For once rammed down into this universe  
Reeled around to your favorite repertoire  
It still takes only a millisecond to find you in a crowd  
But hey, you see

The best time to plant a tree is  
Five years ago  
Or  
As soon as possible

7

An orifice of her opened  
said that Kyoto was like a tree  
that celebrated her  
at the moment in front of me

Hana wa saku, as I replied:  
“Ladies’ minds jump from affections to love  
From love to matrimony.”



Perhaps thinking about the things I regret  
wintersweets shed all over the ground  
For example  
looking at how she swam through the brook  
and made it to the top of a linden ladder  
or buoyed herself up in the pool  
but facing down so she could scare me

Being adventurous and  
sometimes taking risks are beautiful  
-- no better than  
a red her is back on a white horse

with a sunken trace of blushing  
she answers the bridesmaid's question  
there will ubiquitously be a mirror  
having her in the fixed place

... Once I think about the things I regret  
wintersweets shed all over the mound

## David

*Kate Habrel*

Your name was David, and I know this because when we met, my parents, friends of your parents, took me to a house I cannot recall save for a lack of light in the halls – and you met me in a darkened kitchen as our parents talked – the first thing you said was “David,” and I held to it, like I held your gift, a red tube of Chapstick, with a solemn vow to never lose it. Now, if I ask my parents, “Who was David?” they cannot remember – they do not recall

an unlit house and a black-haired boy who gave me his name so it wouldn't be lost.

Untitled  
*Tori Larson*



## THE CONTRIBUTORS

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**RHIANNON FISCHER**

**MEGAN BIERNE**

**JORDY SCHMIDT**

**MIKAYLA PETERS** is an English Literature major and German studies major. She is from Onalaska WI. Her interests include writing, reading, and working within the community. She's volunteered at Capable Canines of Wisconsin, Mission America, Feed My Starving Children, the Humane Society, YMCA, and more. Other interests include creating and playing video games, learning new languages and cultures, and studying psychology.

**WESLEY ISBERNER** is a sophomore English and Sociology major, who spends too much time listening to *Hamilton*. Their current phone background is a pig walking along a beach at sunset.

**ELINOR BROWN-LUCAS**

**STELLA NATHAN** was born a long time ago in the black dirt country of central Illinois. After wandering in the wilderness of the Upper Midwest he ended up near La Crosse where he has a family, a day job, and responsibilities. He also attends an occasional college class, writes, and publishes under a variety of aliases.

**HOLLY MUELLER**

**JAMES GROH** is a junior pursuing a major in biology with a biomedical concentration as well as minors in chemistry and creative writing. Although he is (and always will be) a science nerd, creative writing has been a hobby of his since high school. Inspiration for his writing comes from all aspects of life including the mundane and the magical. Everywhere you look there is a story to be written.

**DYLAN ELLIOT** is originally from Minocqua, Wisconsin, which is located just north of the top middle figure crease in the Wisconsin-hand map. In 2014, he transferred to UW-L from UW- Madison and is currently a senior majoring in English Literature. His favorite poets include Walt Whitman, Bobby Dylan, and Madonna. After graduation, Dylan plans on re-watching *LOST*.

**BRITTANY LOFGREN** is a Rhetoric and Writing major, with double minors in Professional Writing and Photography. Normally, her photography is of people- she does portraits, engagements, families. This submission, however, is one of the few landscapes she has taken. It is from her hometown. She can see it form the house she grew up in, and it has been standing there, alone, as long as she can remember. But it's beautiful.

**FUE YANG** is a junior standing student at UW- La Crosse. He is pursuing a Communication Studies major with an Advocacy and Communication criticism emphasis, and a minor in Professional and Rhetoric Writing. Aside from his academics on campus, his passions involve being an active member in Sigma Tau Gamma as President, an active member in Hmong Organization Promoting Education, and a peer Consultant at the Public Speaking Center. One of his hobbies is indoor climbing at the REC, and outdoor climbing up on Grandad's Bluff.

## **TORI LARSON**

**MELISSA DRAKE** is a newly-declared English Major at UW-L. She draws heavily on personal experience and feeling in her writing, and it has always been a great creative outlet for her, along with drawing. She has been writing creative pieces in some form or another since she was a kid, but in the last two years has written longer fiction pieces and poetry daily. She runs a small personal blog in her spare time. It is one of her proudest achievements, and writing on the blog has definitely kept her creative energy fresh and recharged each day.

**MOLLY STAPLETEON** is a senior at UW-L studying English Education and TESOL. Though she is new to the world of poetry she hopes she can continue writing and developing her poems. She is also looking forward to getting her future students involved in the craft.

## **CHARLETON SKINNER**

**DANIELLE WATTERSON** is currently a fifth year senior at UW-L who is double majoring in Philosophy and English while minoring in Psychology. When she's not in class, at the library, tutoring symbolic logic, or fulfilling her custodial duties at Cartwright, she bids her time with reading, writing creatively, and randomly philosophizing. She is rooted in her hometown of New Glarus, WI by the love and support of her mom and sister, her friends, and her dog Maui.

**ELLEN SMITH** is a former Chicagoland resident, a current UWL senior majoring in Rhetoric and Writing. She has aspired to be a hermit in the mountains from a young age, but for now is mostly a long distance runner for the school cross country and track teams. She tries to support local grocery stores by buying out entire sections of sweet potatoes.

## **HAOLIN HUANG**

## **KATE HABREL**

**JENNIFER GLASGOW** is a fifth year senior majoring in English-Rhetoric and Writing with a minor in Creative Writing. She plans to graduate this May. In her poetry, she draws inspiration from her real life experiences, but also enjoys writing fantasy stories. Aside from creative writing, she loves composing music for the piano, running, cooking, and working as a tutor in the UW-L Writing Center.

**SAMUEL PETERSEN** lives in La Crosse, but grew up on the other side of the river. It is there that Samuel continues to garden and ride his bike through the bluffs and valleys, the two activities that inspire him most as a writer.

**APRIL WILDES** is a junior at UW-L. She is a major in English literature with minors in anthropology and creative writing. She has a blog where she posts other writings of hers, [aprilwildes.wordpress.com](http://aprilwildes.wordpress.com), which only her parents end up reading. She has recently studied abroad in London and hopes to be back there in the near future, but will settle in Middle-Earth if all else fails. Happiness can be found in even the darkest of times, when one only remembers to turn on that light.

**ALEX JOHNSON**

