

# *THE CATALYST*

Spring 2017: Volume 16

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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 UWL. 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 16 semesters since *The Catalyst* was taken up by the UWL English Club. This semester the new Editors-in-Chief decided to forego a theme, instead posting prompts on our new Facebook page to inspire creativity. Please check us out on Facebook! Hope you enjoy the latest volume of *The Catalyst*!

- 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

Various Professors from the Art Department for helping us obtain awesome submissions

Cullen Oldenburg for printing and distributing our posters to help spread the word about sending in submissions

Larry Ringgenberg for sending the campus wide email to stir up interest in the publication

Matt Cashion for helping us obtain amazing submissions and promoting our publication

Jake Speer for spending so much time creating our digital books for publication

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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Abigail Kolbe

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## Who Gives a Shit about Hypotheticals?

*Maggie Dahl*

If a tree falls in the forest but no one is around, does it make a sound?

Does it matter if it makes a sound? Who the fuck cares about a tree in the woods anyway? There are millions of trees in the forest and millions of birds and ducks and ants and bees that matter a hell of a lot more than a single fucking tree that falls in the forest.

So, who cares what makes the tree fall? Rotting inside from foreign invaders, chopped with an ax by a Man wearing flannel, or maybe just the wind that finally got too strong. No one will remember that tree. That replaceable tree with an unknown cause of death because she was too paralyzed to ask for help.

If a girl falls in the bathroom, but no one is around to hear, would anyone make a fuss about how she carved herself in front of a mirror? Who cares about what made the girl fall? Was she was attacked by a foreign invader, or by a Boy wearing flannel, or just couldn't withstand the wind any longer?

Like the tree, if a girl falls, she doesn't get back up.

But none of that shit matters because no one was around to hear her anyway.

**Beach**  
*Grant Horst*



## To Be Strong

*Quintin Howe*

Strong is to be happy,  
but more importantly  
strong is to be soft.

Soft because I care but soft means my edges are easily broken  
snapped off by well-intentions and glued hastily back on with rapid  
apologies.

I can see why people choose not to be soft,  
I don't blame them for this act of self-preservation.  
But I choose to be soft.

Soft is to be open and caring  
even when  
my anger pulls my attention.  
Yes, especially then.

And my anger should be felt.  
My anger could cause magnitudes of earthquakes  
that help to rebuild stronger than imagined.  
Just like those before me did  
and  
just like those after me will.

My anger demands attention,  
both mine and yours at times.  
There is power in being angry.

Never underestimate the power of being soft as well  
never confuse soft and calm for weak.

I am not weak.

And so I will wear down this world with calm slow movements  
and watch those unaware of my power  
marvel at my beauty.

## **Baphomet**

*Gregory Fletcher*

It's unfortunate that the name  
Baphomet  
is reserved for the occult worship,  
because I'd quite like to name a child  
Baphomet. I think it's cute.

"Baphomet! Come to dinner!"  
"But Moooooom, I'm performing  
a séance!"  
"The souls of the eternally  
damned aren't going anywhere,  
sweetheart, now come eat before  
your burger gets cold!"

I don't really want to damn  
a child to an eternity of suffering  
after they die because God  
filed his papers incorrectly.  
"It's time to torture Baphomet  
with the three thousand cold  
showers, followed by  
advanced studies of dirt particles  
in a classroom made up of barbie  
doll parts only! Oh, Me Dammit!  
That's the wrong Baphomet!  
Sorry, Baph, Me bless you."

**Koi**

*Sylvia Neumann*



## To the Sea

Dalton Gamroth

From the sea, a lot of curious things were born, and the Salish Sea of Puget Sound was one of the most curious.

Finn Hart's hands were still bloody from decorating the doorway. He didn't believe it made any difference, but it was one of his mother's many superstitions, passed down from her mother, who had it passed down from her mother. He *knew* the blood was useless. As were the bright red ribbons, and the tiny silver bells, and the salty bits of driftwood, strung together with twine, to create a curtain over the front door of their small home on the edge of the Sound, not far from the rocky beach. There was no such thing as good luck charms.

*One, two, three*, he thought as he rubbed his hands together in the soapy water. He knew the charms didn't work against the things he was taught to fear, the secrets of the sea that no one else knew of, but there was still a little part of him, gnawing restlessly at the back of his mind, that wondered –

*"I saw a monster in the water,"* his little sister, Genevieve, sang as he went to check the macaroni and cheese on the stove. *"I don't like monsters in my sea. I don't want it to drown me!"* He bit his tongue and rubbed his thumb and forefinger together in spurts of three.

"Gen," he said, his voice as soft as talc. "Go wash your hands, please." Maybe he should wash his hands again, just to make sure the blood was gone from under his fingernails. Just in case. "Dinner's almost ready." He looked down at the stove, but all he wanted to be looking down at was a sink full of clean water. He needed to wash his hands again. Right now.

So he did, relishing the water over his skin, and he stood by his little sprout of a sister to make sure she washed her hands as well.

He was startled when water splashed across his face, and the bathroom echoed with Genevieve's twinkling laughter. "Hey!" He exclaimed, but the water shook a smile out of him. "What was that for, huh?"

Genevieve buckled over the sink, laughing wildly, showing off her gap-toothed grin. "Got you!"

"No way," Finn laughed, too, and it felt like gold falling out of his mouth. He stepped up to the sink and spooned some water from the tap, tossing it over at Genevieve. "That's not fun, is it?"

“Stop it, Finny!” She whined, but still threw another handful of soapy water at him. “I’m gonna get you!”

“Not if I get you first, Bluebird!” He said, her eyes, the color of the bird, were bright with joy, and for the first time that day, his were as bright as hers, and her smile mirrored his own.

~

He sat at the table and stared down at the meal he’d made for them. Mom wouldn’t be home from work until later tonight, so he needed to make sure to leave some food for her as well. She’d certainly be hungry after such a long shift.

Gen had taken to pushing around the leftover noodles around on her plate. “Time for bed, Bluebird,” he said, trying to make his voice as tired as possible, though he was anything but.

“I am *not* tired,” Genevieve stated, standing up from the table and planting herself in front of him like a thorny bramble, unable to move easily without getting pricked. “I will *not* go to bed.” Her face was turned upwards, and Finn saw a younger version of his stone-willed mother.

His heart felt like a little hummingbird, beating against his ribs in the direction of the sea. “Don’t you want to watch the sunrise with me?” he asked, pathetically. Being only eight years older than her, Finn knew that sometimes the only way to win an argument with a six-year-old was to plead, and to offer up promises that were sure to be broken. “Tomorrow night you can stay up late. Mom doesn’t work the night shift.”

“I want to paint tomorrow,” she said.

“Then we’ll paint tomorrow,” Finn countered. “Please, let’s get to bed.”

The sun had set over Puget Sound.

Genevieve stared up at him stoically, and he watched her gears turning until she finally shrugged and nodded. Finn smiled and marched with her to her bedroom and watched as she tucked herself in, a tiny seed tucking itself into the earth. He turned off the light, whispered a goodnight, and shut the door, double checking to make sure it was all the way closed. His sister was as wild and bright as a blossom during the day, but on most nights, her petals closed and she fell into a dead sleep as soon as the moon rose.

He left the house with nothing but a small flashlight and a plastic shopping bag.

Standing on the wooden front steps, the full moon bathing his skin in silver, his mind raced, thoughts bouncing off of each other,

mixing together and forming new fears, new worries, like the darkest of paints mixing to create even more unpleasant shades.

The air was fresh, crisp, and Finn felt as if he could already taste the salt of the sea on his lips.

~

Their family had lived close to the sea for generations. That's how they knew of what lurked there, that's how they knew not to fall for their songs.

He was so excited, as he crossed the edge of the forest and onto the rocky shore that he could have screamed with joy; he could feel it building inside of him, right under his ribs, like a bright yellow balloon, a golden sunrise, and he broke into a run, the mix of pebbles and sand and broken shell and driftwood digging into his bare feet. He didn't stop at the water, mouth stretched wide into a rare smile. Instead, he stampeded into the ocean, the water alive and cold, and he stood there in the surf, up to his knees. The flashlight illuminated a small halo of dark water at his feet, and he clicked it off.

His thoughts, his worries, and his fears were all loud, but the sound of the waves and the wind was louder.

It stole each piercing shard of anxiety away, and he gave them up, throwing them into the water, one by one, and each cresting wave pulled them back out to the moon-stained swath of black velvet that was the sea at night. Seaweed wrapped around his legs with each surge of water, and his nose was filled with the fishy smell of the sea grass on the shore.

It was just him. Just Finn, with a whole world stretched before him, a world that took his problems one by one and turned them into foam.

~

A short ways down the beach was a small cave, just on the edge of the water, its entrance hidden by a collage of pine trees and boulders and large pieces of driftwood. Finn leisurely made his way towards it, the wet sand illuminated by the moon, and when he reached it, he pushed aside the spiny boughs of a pine and climbed, bare-footed up and over a large boulder.

The cave opening was but a jagged crack in the stone, and it was as dark and silent as a coffin. The air around him felt like glass; if he moved to quickly, or spoke to loudly, it would shatter into a thousand crystals. He couldn't even hear his own breathing, and the waves were but a murmur, a whispered lullaby.

“Jade?” He asked, and his voice almost hurt his ears. “I’m here.”

He heard a slight shuffling, and he backed out of the cave, longing to be standing in the sea again. The darkness frightened him, and, though he trusted Jade not to harm him, he still worried . . .

He backed out onto the shore.

Jade emerged; skin the color of a corpse left to rot under water, so thin that her bones looked sharp enough to draw blood. Her eyes, the color from which he named her, glowed hungrily. She wore nothing but a pair of athletic shorts and a baggy t-shirt that he had stolen from the laundry pile back home.

“Here,” he said, opening the bag and giving her the small baggy full of sardines, which he had opened and emptied earlier that day.

She limped towards him. When she was in the ocean, in her selkie skin, a boat propeller had caught her flipper, or so he thought; her leg was cut deeply, and he didn’t know what else could have caused a wound like that. She still wasn’t fully healed; washed ashore, the first time Finn had seen her, he’d left her to die, rushing back home and too scared to tell Mom. She hadn’t opened her mouth to sing, to lure him into the ocean to drown. He knew she had been a selkie; just like in his mother’s stories, her gray pelt was bunched up beside her, torn and damaged. Each night, he stood from afar and watched, angry that she had stolen the safety of the beach from him. She had withered until, finally, he had been brave enough to approach her. Though she never sang, she had ended up dragging him to the water’s edge, anyway.

And here they were now, a week later. He gave her food, she gave him time on the shore.

He watched her eat until her head perked up, gray hair flowing wildly in the wind, and before the first notes of her brother’s and sister’s songs hit him, Finn was sprinting back home.

~

Selkies, sea-maidens, sirens. In the stories, his mother called them by many names, but they were all the same: women – and very rarely, men – from the sea, hidden under heavy seal pelts that they shed on land, singing sailors and swimmers towards the ocean and their death, like a lamb to the slaughter. Their songs were deadly, yes, but that wasn’t the only thing to fear. It had been known, his mother had said, for selkies to creep ashore with their young, into quiet homes that smelled of sleep, and to replace the human children with their

pups. “To spare their pups from the predators of the ocean,” Mom had said spitefully. “That’s why we have the charms. It’s a warning for them not to enter. I won’t have them stealing my children and replacing them with a sea monster. I’d drain the oceans before I let them have you or Genevieve. Now, go tell your sister a story before bed, I have to get to work . . .”

He dreamt of them that night. Dreamt of their sweet songs that snuck into human ears like hooks in a fish, dreamt of wide-eyed, warm human children, whisked away to the sea while a pale, cold selkie child, pelt hidden away, took its place in the crib, and he woke to his alarm clock, moments before the sun was set to rise. Sleep had been restless. It always was.

He peeled himself out of bed.

“Gen,” he said, pushing open the door quietly. He hadn’t heard Mom come home last night, but she would still be asleep, certainly, after such a long night shift. The first brilliant rays of the sunrise were creeping through her windows, the lace curtains pulled back. His heart stopped. The curtains were open. She wasn’t supposed to have her curtains open, ever. He began to tremble.

“Gen, wake up,” he said, his voice high and ringing with tension, like the tiny silver bells in the wind. Forgetting to whisper, he flicked on the bedroom light. “Bluebird, get right up now!”

His sister had uprooted herself at some point in the night. She was gone.

~

If you were to cut open his chest, something rotten and soaked in seawater would fall out.

Genevieve’s body had washed up from the sea three days ago, and he had stopped speaking three days ago. He couldn’t think about what she had looked like, waterlogged, and he wouldn’t talk to the police when they came to investigate. He couldn’t have found words even if he tried. It was decided that she’d been caught in a tide and had been too weak to swim herself out.

It did something to Finn, to see his mother – a woman with a spine of sparkling, unblemished iron and a heart carved from the hardest of diamonds, beautiful but unyielding – so distraught. It was his fault, and the guilt he felt was what rotted him from the inside out. He knew exactly why Gen had decided to venture to the edge of the water.

He shouldn’t have made her go to bed that night, when she was so obviously not tired, so far from sleep and pleasant dreams. He

shouldn't have gone to the sea before checking to make sure that she was asleep, that her curtains were closed. After all, if her big brother could go to the shore, to the wild and forbidden sea, why couldn't she?

He couldn't breathe.

~

He couldn't run fast enough.

The air was as sharp as a blade, and it cut him to pieces, slicing him into little ribbons that floated away with each gust of wind as he ran, closer and closer, to Jade's cave. There would be no more Finn. He would find new things to build himself out of. Seashells, fish bones, water-smoothed stones. He wouldn't be a boy sewn from the threads of fear and worry.

The selkie was gone when he reached the cave, carrying nothing but a flashlight, the golden beam cutting across the jagged walls. He kept going, deeper into the cave, a sailboat moving through water.

When he had drifted far enough into the darkness, the flashlight caught a small nook in the wall. He reached his hand into it and found that his hand touched a pelt, ice cold and dry. It had been calling him for years now. He had felt it, like a needle embedded in his stomach, attached to a thread that kept pulling him back to the water. It was not the selkie's songs that he had feared for fourteen years. It was this.

It was too small for him. He hadn't worn it since he was a pup, but that didn't matter. The ocean would see that it molded its form to him the second he touched the water.

He left the flashlight in the cave. His eyes reflected the surging waves, his skin held the smell of seaweed. He placed the pelt over his shoulders, and a smile turned his lips upwards. His chest was as light as air.

He let his feet carry him.

Back to the sea.

**Mountains to Climb**  
*Laura Berry*



**Hat**  
*Grant Horst*



## Joy and Expense

*Gregory Fletcher*

I was a cashier at a grocery store over the summer. It was much better than being a sales associate in a department store, because then I was actually expected to know where every single item in the store was. I, in fact, did not know where anything was. Each shift was like a new adventure in a jungle of branded merchandise, ranging from sports equipment to make up supplies.

But as a cashier, all I had to know how to do was occupy my mind for four or more hours. Sometimes it's as easy as seeing how many items people buy. That got less entertaining once I found out the cash register kept track of that for me. Then it came to eavesdropping on customer's conversations with each other. That got a bit harder when I had to bite my tongue and resist telling them that, no, Captain America Civil War was not, in fact, Avengers 3, and no, it most certainly was not overrated, they just have very bad taste.

But the most fun I've ever had was when it came to scanning alcohol. Most cashiers were under 18, meaning that it was illegal for them to sell either tobacco or alcohol. That meant that the responsibility of impersonating a police officer fell to my shoulders. "Can I see your ID?"

Of course, people always got defensive when I asked. I could never figure out why. It was more of a compliment, to have to ask to make sure you're not a child trying to get drunk. I always thought it was implying someone was young.

People don't agree with me, apparently. Little do they know, I feed off their misery. Their aggravated sighs, their protests and whines, they give me joy. They give me the opportunity to go home, to talk to my fellow work friends, and then we all collectively laugh, a unified, "Look at this idiot" laugh.

My favorite idiot was someone who, thinking he was a real wise guy, scoffed at me. "Really?"

"Company policy, sir," I said politely.

He shook his head. Yes, feel that annoyance. Suffer at my expense. Your upset tastes delicious.

"Just out of curiosity, how old are you?" Wise guy asked.

The feast was just beginning! Tonight, I bathe in the glory of justified snarking!

I knew it didn't matter. I knew I didn't have to prove anything to him. I knew that I was not the person buying alcohol, so I wouldn't ever have to tell him how old I was. And even if I was buying alcohol, it wouldn't be that big of a deal. I'd be more afraid if I got away without showing my ID.

I smiled. It had been too long since I had that I'm right, you're wrong kind of feeling.

"I'm 21, thank you for asking."

Wise guy said nothing.

Score: Wise guy, zero, me, 1.

## Wordsmith

*Libbie-Sienna Miller*

in the heat of composition,

I remembered  
every word of mine is:

- a pinch of salt borrowed from a neighbor
- advice from a long-gone lover
- age old atoms newly latticed

each syllable is beautiful and used: care-worn,  
meticulously wrapped in  
crinkled newspaper,  
crisp as they fall from my lips,  
foreign, familiar, and loved.

handed down from  
comfort-food-and-stormy-afternoon authors,  
carrying on a single theme:

create. create. create.

**Repurpose**  
*Sarah Daentl*



**Two Koi Fish**  
*Sylvia Neumann*



## thoughts on God and a well-stocked fridge

*Connor Givens*

suppose the earth is a piece of fruit  
and all the plants and animals and things littering its surface  
are all the little things that grow upon the earth  
    because the fruit has gone bad  
imagine that life is the mold growing from this fruit we call the earth  
    slowly using up its resources  
    rotting it

picture it

and now also suppose that we and all the alien planets in the cosmos  
are all in God's refrigerator  
    that is why space is so cold  
and that all the stars are warm lights set inside the fridge  
that turn on  
    when God opens the door

God is irresponsible with His fridge and always leaves the door open

in the dawn of time  
God bought and stocked his fridge  
He read the instruction manual  
and screwed in all the lightbulbs  
and the universe was born

when God reached in to eat His food His hands appeared as black  
holes  
    and when a star explodes a black hole follows soon after  
    and a new star forms elsewhere  
        because God must change the lightbulbs that go out in His  
        refrigerator  
        and He does not leave food where He cannot see it  
so the star and the planets are removed and later  
replaced by the hands of God

and the universe will continue as such  
on and

on  
its contents shifting  
and new life forming  
as the cold starts to leave God's always-lit and ever-open  
fridge

and trillions of years from now  
all the food has gone bad  
the remaining planets are left empty, rotted husks of  
what once they were  
God runs out of lightbulbs  
and the fridge  
rapidly warming  
overworks itself  
leading to the heat-death of the universe

...and then God buys another fridge...

## The Fix

*Jacqueline Machamer*

“I don’t need it, I don’t need it,” she insisted. “I don’t need it, I don’t need it, I don’t need it,” the stern recitation continued.

Rocking back and forth, back and forth, hands wrapped around her head, eyes burning a hole through the crumpled picture of her sister placed on the floor before her.

“For Jenny,” Her voice trailing to faintness. Heavy breaths. “I don’t... need it.” A long, escaping breath. A whisper, “I don’t...”

She unclenched and opened limp against the wall behind her. Her body drained, her mind faded. Her arm trembled as it wiped away the droplets of sweat stippling her forehead, the skin paled nearly a shade of green. Another wave of weakness passed through her and again she contemplated a simple end. One quick fix. She glanced at the picture, squeezed her eyes shut and shook her head hard. The thought yielded to the thrashing and fell quiet.

She rolled back up tight and returned to her mantra, now a droning monotone. “I don’t need it, I don’t need it, I don’t need it.” There was no more life in the words.

She fell silent, her head sliding between her knees, her hands relaxed around the back of her neck. She remained without motion, a moment, maybe ten. She grabbed the picture and stood. She paced. She stopped and looked in the mirror at the empty staring eyes. She placed the picture on the desk and looked down. The crumpled bills spilled from her purse and littered the floor beneath the chair. She clenched her jaw until her temples ached. She studied the three letters at the bottom of the picture, R.I.P. She took a last glance into those dying eyes and said, “I fucking need it.” She scrambled her purse and left.

Pray  
*Grant Horst*



**A Writer is Born**  
*Laura Berry*



## Motorbikes and Dirty Dancing

*Gregory Fletcher*

Find yourself a girl, then ride with her on your motorbike. Take her far round the curves, cutting corners and hugging the turns, feel her breath against your neck as you force yourself into the next challenge, the one that could well break you, the one that could leave you in stitches, but you don't care about you. You're doing it for her, because no girl would date a coward. After you've damn near killed yourself, take your girl out to the loud clubs. Dance with her, get her real close to you. Hold her hips, kiss her neck, whisper her name. Do all that romantic shit that makes the girls go wild. Impress the girl with some fake "moves" you learned off the internet, tell her that her name sounds like a chorus of angels, whatever makes her blush. But don't go home with her. Take the night off for personal things. Date the girl, leave her alone. Not because she's ugly, not because you don't wanna sleep with her. Take the night off. Listen to Michael Jackson, David Bowie, The Beatles. Do your laundry, watch the college kids woo each other, watch them drink too much so they can't stand up. They fumble around, grabbing each other's genitals, shoving tongues down each other's throats. They're clumsy and dirty, they're broke and don't pay for their drinks. Leave without drinking anything harder than a Coke. Get on your motorcycle and go.

## Chains

*Katrina Anthony*

Max was no stranger to an early sunrise. The sparrows that lived in the eaves always woke before sunrise creating a racket he could never sleep through. A shiver traced down his back to the tip of his tail. The chill this morning was bad. Max considered getting up but he didn't want to leave his bed. It was hard, made of an old quilt and some planks, and not very clean. But it was warm since he had laid there all night. He looked lazily out over the field with the oak tree. Autumn was rolling slowly over the landscape, turning the grasses yellow. The nights were cool but the days were still hot. He couldn't lay for much longer. He had to pee. And get some water. He heard his hips pop as he rolled upright. The black on his muzzle was littered with white. More and more as each summer passed. Max yawned, his jaw snapping shut. His nose was the first thing out of his house.

He sniffed the air, hopefully. The bob-man in the house must be cooking bacon. Max was suddenly in a good mood. Sometimes the bob-man would rush outside and into the car, spraying bits of food in his rush. Looking forward to the possibility, Max stretched and quickly made his way to the corner of the yard. It wasn't much of a yard, he thought, looking around. The grass was sparse and dust covered everything. He grumbled low in his throat, trying to clear it. The dust got everywhere. Behind the bob-man's house was a pile of lumber that snakes moved around in, an old gasoline pump, a couple of dirty cars, and Max's house. One of the cars hadn't been moved in several years. Max could hear mice inside it, ripping out part of the engine. He wandered to the edge of his well-worn circle. Pulled at the damn chain. It was always ranking at his neck. Some days he noticed it more than others.

Max had been a little boy when the bob-man had first put it on him. Back then, they spent a lot of time together, the bob-man and him. Hunting, grumbling about the neighbors, eating Slim Jims and potato chips. Bob-man would lift Max up from his box and out they'd go. It was Max's job to jump around and scare up rabbits and birds. He did it well, or, at least he thought so. It seemed to please the bob-

man anyway. So he always did the same now when anything came close enough to scare. But the bob-man no longer seemed to be happy with him, no matter how hard he tried. Max had even taken to scaring up other bob-mans when they came by. Especially the sour scented one next door. Max eyed up the house next door as he walked over to his water dish. Nearly empty. Damn, he thought. The bob-man isn't going to like this. He hated getting more water for the dish. Max tried not to think about how thirsty he was and would be by the time night came again, if the bob-man forgot to fill it. He sat as close to the bob-man's door as he could get and waited.

The bob-man still limped. He had shot himself when Max was little while they were out hunting. The bob-man had tripped over Max and the gun went off. It had scared Max. He had crawled over to the wailing man only to wish he hadn't as a fist slammed into him. Max on wobbly legs had scooted away. He hid behind some thick grasses and watched as the bob-man pointed the gun at him. The bob-man had dropped the gun's nose to the ground when another bob-man had run over. A lady-collie came over, too. Her name was Jules. Max remembered that Jules had smelled of bread and clean laundry. Jules had seen what had happened. She tried to lick his face but Max had crawled under her belly to hide. He stayed there until her bob-man had taken her by the collar and dragged her away. Max tried to follow Jules, but he was grabbed from above and taken to the bob-man's home. He'd been on the chain ever since. The bob-man didn't hunt anymore. Max reckoned he had his chains, too.

Max heard it then. The sour-man from next door was going to walk past the yard. Max tensed, ready for the chase. The sour-man was stale like water that's gone murky and slick. He smelled sick. Max's muscles tensed. Almost there. Now! He burst from the inside of his house and ran full force, flying at the sour-man. Max was happy to see the sour-man jump. Both of them were shouting now. Max reached the end of his chain and grappled with the air, while the sour-man hurried away. Max continued shouting for a while until he got bored. The bob-man didn't seem to notice.

It was getting hot. Max tried to turn around in his shelter. It was stuffy. He was just about to push out the old quilt when he heard it. Those two-wheeled noise makers were three blocks over. Max

could hear them as if they stood over him. He knew they would come this way. They did every three days. Why didn't they get in trouble for being so loud? The tires squeaked as they turned onto his street. Any minute, they would loiter at his yard. He wasn't sure he was up to it today. It was hot. He sighed. Maybe this time, if he shouted at them loud enough, they wouldn't come back. Max shook himself and then shot from his bed. The chain rattled behind him. The two-wheeled men veered away. Then they made circles in front of him on the pavement, shouting at him. They teased him, coming close then turning away. Always just out of reach. Max was really hot now and tired. How much longer would they do this? Then the sour-man came out of his house. Max, with renewed ferocity, let them all have it. The sour-man laughed with the two-wheeled men. One of the two-wheelers was busy, barking nonsense at Max. Max decided they must be rabid. A car turned onto the street and the men quickly scattered. Max wandered slowly back to his shelter. That was a lot of work. There was a little water left so he drank it down. His throat hurt.

A few days later, Max thought it was one of the best days of his life. He had fresh water. The bob-man even rinsed the bowl out so it was clean. The sun was out but not so hot that he couldn't lay under it. His belly was up and the chain to the side. No bugs were biting. The bob-man had dropped bacon this morning. Hmmm. Max stretched and yawned. The wind was blowing his fur gently. It felt like a giant hand, stroking him. Like when he was little and the bob-man would hold him. Placing a hand at his head then firmly drawing it down to his tail. He sighed and a puff of dust rose into the air. Max sat up and watched the wind as it moved through the field beyond his yard. He wondered for how long the wind travelled. Did it ever stop? Did it sweep from field to field never stopping? He wanted to ask the birds that flew by. But they were arguing and he didn't think they would know what he was saying anyway. At least they never understood when he told them to leave his dish alone.

The sour-man was coming home. Max could hear it. The black truck was loud and smelled bad. It was easy to identify. Max sat still. Not sure if he wanted to move at all, but the moment was already ruined. The sour-man was annoying. Max waited for the truck to pull to a stop. He watched as the sour-man began walking up to his house. Max charged out from behind the old gas pump, shouting. The sour-man jumped. The groceries in his hands went scurrying like mice

all over the dusty grass. It made Max happy, so he shouted some more. The sour-man kicked his groceries into a pile. Then he hurried into his house. Max felt satisfied with his day. He laid down and waited for night. The stars were out and the birds asleep when he heard it. A low growl. Max lifted his ears. It was coming from next door. Max looked to the bob-man's house, a faint glow was leaking from behind the curtains. Maybe it was nothing. Max waited and sniffed the air. There! It happened again. Louder this time. He moved quickly over to the edge of his circle to listen more closely. The chain made a hollow rattle noise behind him. This time the growl was accompanied by a bark. Max narrowed his eyes. He knew what that was. It was the sour-man playing tricks. Max lunged to the line that separated his dusty yard and the sour-man's grass. I know who you are you mangy degenerate. Max shouted this over and over again. The sour-man went silent. So did Max, listening carefully. Nothing. Only the bob-man rapping on the window, shouting. The sour-man worried Max. He made his way back to his bed. Sniffing, as he settled in. His eyelids dropped closed and he wandered away to fields with wind that lifted him up by his belly. He floated above the grasses that waved and tickled him. Max loved this place. He was free.

He started awake. That sound came again louder than before. Max tried to ignore him but then the sour-man started barking nonsense. Max got up slowly and grumbled as he trotted to the edge of his area. The sour-man sounds stupid. Max was frustrated that his dream was interrupted. Max shouted for the sour-man to quit it. Max stopped and watched as the bob-man stormed out of his house yelling. The bob-man grabbed Max by the chain and yanked hard. Max felt his neck pop and tried to turn and go to his bed. His tail tucked tightly under him. The bob-man yelled and yanked again. Max yelped and fell to his belly. The bob-man came over to him yelling and pointing a finger in his face. The bob-man turned, causing a cloud of dust to choke the air. He bent to adjust Max's water dish. Max heard a raspy noise, then smelled the hot urine as it hit his cool water. The bob-man finished and stomped away. The door slammed and glass rattled. Max lay still. Not knowing what to do or how to fix it.

His neck and throat hurt. But he wasn't going to drink anything. If he was lucky, it would rain tomorrow. He didn't hold much hope for it. It didn't smell like rain. Confused, Max didn't move.

Instead he lay his head down between his dust-covered paws and wondered about the wind.

The sour-man was laughing and barking again. Like a maniac, again. Max's heart sank. He nosed the ground and ignored the sour sour-man next door. Then came the sound of yipping and whining. Max couldn't stop the sound. It rattled around in his head. It made him feel alone and small. It reminded him of the day the bob-man shot himself. It reminded him of Jules. Max started to whine softly. He was frustrated that the sour-man didn't get yanked by the neck. Max barked twice then whined. It hurt. He stood up. The chain pulled on the collar. It hurt and cut off the air. Max couldn't stand it anymore. He pulled and shouted and pulled and shouted. Twisting and leaping trying to get free.

The back door opened. The pale blue light flashed from inside the house. Max shouted wildly at the sour-man's house. Don't you understand? It's him next door the sour smelling sour-man. Get him, go after him! Listen! But the bob-man went for Max. The bob-man didn't yell or shout as he came across the yard, kicking up dust. Max barked once more and crouched down. He knew what was coming. He pulled back as the bob-man kicked the peed-in water at him. The bob-man reached down and took the chain in two red fists. Then he yanked it up and down. Max felt his head snap up high, then low. Up and back. The bob-man wouldn't stop. Max thought of his dream of riding the wind. His paws left the ground and he was lifted up by the neck, high into the air. Then he was falling down and hard onto his side. The air whooshed out from him. Before he could right his world, he was yanked in the air again. The stars twisted above him. Or was it below him? Maybe the bob-man got tired. Maybe Max's lack of noise at the end made him stop. Max was just relieved when he did. The bob-man kicked dust over him and turned to go back inside the glowing doorway. Max didn't see him go, but he heard it over the ringing in his ears.

Max lay on his side. He needed to move. If he didn't now, he never would again. He pulled himself up. His legs wobbled. His head was ringing. He didn't know which way was up. He retched up some saliva and dust. Max didn't want to sit in his hard bed tonight. He

crept behind his shelter and sat there hunched over. He watched as drips, like thick water, settled onto the dust not soaking in.

Something fell on his right paw and he jumped. Thinking the bob-man had come back out, he lay flat to the ground. But no one was there. Laying in the dirt was the collar. Its width was split open. The old leather had given away. It lay there like a dead snake. A lifeless rattle smothered in dust. Max looked to the sour-man's house. A light was spilling onto the grass. Max could see him through the window. He could hear him, laughing.

Max looked away and back to his own home. Should he stay? Wait for morning and for bob-man to come out? The wind blew the dust across his paws. He couldn't understand what had happened. He knew it wasn't supposed to be this way. Jules had looked happy that day, hunting. Worried for him, but happy. But this was his life. He nosed the ground. Maybe it would be safer to be alone. Max was thirsty. He sniffed the air, detected the scent of water. Max considered it for a moment then got up. He walked towards the bob-man's house and belly-crawled under the windows to the front yard. The road was empty and waiting.

## Denial

*Nathaniel Handahl*

When you think of a portly blue collar truck driver, you probably imagine Eugene.

5'10", salt and pepper hair, with a horn honkin' gut, but forearms that could lift the trucks he drives. Eugene also had a strict uniform policy of flannels, levis, and the Dallas Cowboys belt buckle he got for his athletic scholarship to UT Austin. Eugene's never been afraid of work, but had always been a dreamer. Eugene dreamed of the parties, what it could've been like to work anywhere in NASA, and what might've happened had he taken his coaches and dean's warnings with more merit about getting his grades up to play and stay enrolled.

Tonight however, Eugene's dreams awoke him in hot flashes, oddly leaving him burning and tingling cool, if only for a moment. He had dreamt a vivid quick scene of loud mental clutter and happenings. Smashing and engines banging, being ripped from seatbelts with questions of what was going on and where is Darcie? Darcie being Eugene's beloved wife of 22 years this June, whom was his only reason to attempt to turn college around as she was his tutor. He thought again, "Where the hell is she? Darcie!" he cried. But there was no response. Only muddled sirens and fire as the shock he endured began to vanish and the world came back in full motion. But it came back too quick for Eugene to comprehend and come to. He felt a foggy warmth on his temples and deep within his throat as his eyes closed again.

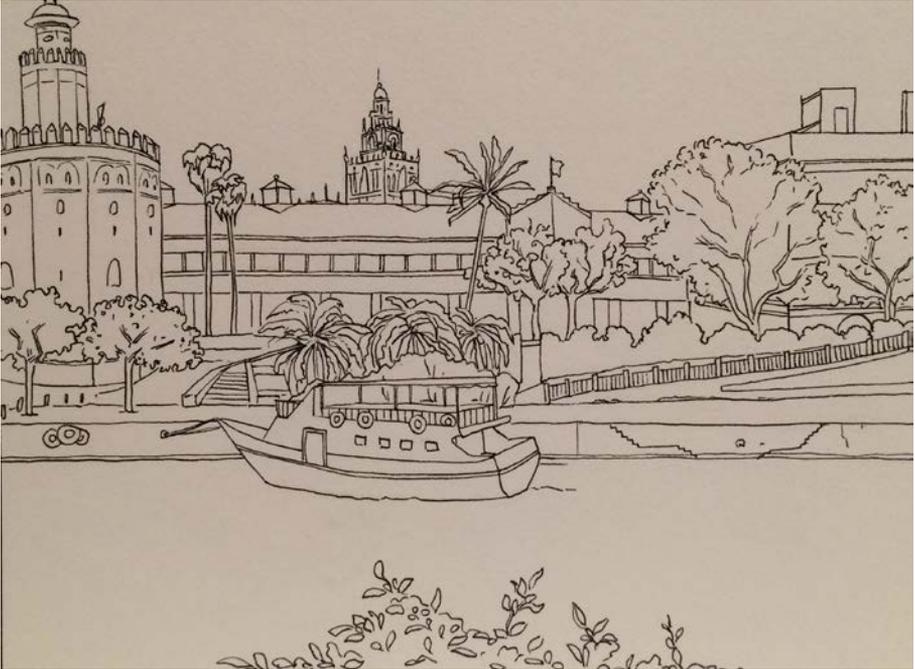
Now awakening again, Eugene hears the light beeping of an EKG machine, feeling wet. He looks to his side to see his wife Darcie, lying quiet, like she did when waiting patiently in hopes Eugene would get something right at his tutoring back at his college. But she began fading to embers as the EKG grew louder and violent...

Eugene awoke one last time on the cold damp marble that lay in the grass. "Surely, she forgave me. Just as she did before. Darcie..."

**Untitled**  
*Jacob Sandy*



**My Sevilla**  
*Bekah Kienzle*



**They Watch**  
*Laura Berry*



## Timestamp

*Gregory Fletcher*

I wonder if people can tell when I write my poems.  
Do they think it's some sort of special time of day?  
Do I get my pencil or pen out or open my laptop  
and say "I'm feeling pretty Hemingway today."  
I don't think Hemingway was a poet. I don't even think  
he was that good of an author. I read one of his stories once.  
Thought it sounded like a fifth grader's creative writing project.  
But somehow, Hemingway is important or whatever. So maybe  
this poem can be important or whatever. Maybe just because I sat  
down and was like "Well, time to write a fuckin' poem", in twelve  
hundred years some college kid will be like "Yes, I think this poem  
is about the human condition and the fleetingness of life." Well,  
allow me to tell you right now, Mister Future College Man:  
No.

Will this poem even be important? Will this poem have an impact?  
I always joked to myself that if I were to write a poetry book,  
I'd call it: "This Book of Poetry is Not a Sexual Innuendo."  
So maybe this poem will be important in that manner. Maybe it  
will be poem number 69 in that collection. So maybe the timing of  
the joke will be important.  
"Okay, this guy's done with the sex jokes. Wait, there's 69 poems?"

But on the real, I really do wonder about decisions and times.  
Had they been thought of a minute later or earlier, would they be  
different? Would Poltergeist be different if the proposal to use  
real corpses was thought about for more than five seconds? Would  
someone have sat down and been like "Guys, do you wanna get  
cursed?"  
This is how you get cursed. This is how your grandchildren get cursed.  
This is how you end up being the topic of the very horror movie we're  
filming." SOMEONE HAD TO FIND THE BODIES OF DEAD PEOPLE  
AND PUT THEM IN A MOVIE.  
I cannot be the only person who's thought about this.

So if this poem has a place in historical context,  
if it's read by college kids (like the kid who wrote it),

they're gonna be asked to write 1,500 words about "Fletcher."  
Here, let me get them started:

"Fletcher's poetry reflects a rather cynical view of modern times he was exposed to. Though cynical and possibly pessimistic, his serious content was often times seen as a mask; one that found a way to hide a child-like sense of humor and a love of sex jokes."

## Sunday Morning

*Christina Griffin*

In the moment I began to wake, before I even opened my eyes, I remembered it was Sunday morning. Sunday mornings were my personal bliss. I had time to make French toast and sit on the porch swing and watch the sunrise. Daisy, our black lab, would lie at my feet, staring at the bottom of my ceramic plate rapturously, unblinking. The aroma of honeysuckle and freshlymown grass would linger in the morning breeze. When I finished my breakfast, I would set the plate on the deck and allow Daisy to clean it off for me, and I would tuck my legs up under me and read; this week it was *The Portrait of a Lady*. Around eight o'clock, the neighbor kids would come outside and wave to me and play soccer, taking turns as the goalie, giggling and squealing all the while.

I opened my eyes. A thin-lipped woman leaned over me, upside down in my field of vision. Even though her hair and most of her face was covered, I recognized the femininity of her clear blue eyes. She said, "Can you hear me?" Her voice was higher-pitched than I would have guessed, and I squinted against the pang it sent through the center of my head. Thankfully the sound was muffled by the surgical mask she wore. I wanted to ask her what she was doing in my house, but my tongue felt heavy and loose, so it came out as a low moan instead: "Aighhh." Behind her head, the ceiling moved backward like a conveyor belt. The woman nodded her head.

"It's all right," she said. "You were in an accident. We're taking you up to surgery right now. I'm a doctor. You're going to be all right."

The ceiling stopped moving, and I realized the ceiling had not been moving at all. I was lying, not in my own warm bed, but on a padded metal gurney. I looked around; the place was familiar, but from my angle it was hard to recognize. My headache worsened as I tried to identify it: a hospital. I was in a hospital. The doctor had stopped to talk to a nurse, who was standing behind a low counter: the nurses' station. I couldn't hear their conversation over the ringing in my ears, so I stared blankly at the objects on the counter instead. A flowerpot containing a number of pens with fake yellow daisies taped to one end. A ceramic white cross with a single word – BLESSED – printed in blue letters. A calendar flipbook facing out announced the date: Friday, April 3. Only that couldn't be right, because I was so sure

it was Sunday: Sunday, March 29. I was going to make French toast and read *The Portrait of a Lady* and watch the neighbor kids play ball. I opened my mouth to point out their mistake.

The realization hit me like a gust of strong wind that steals your breath right from your lips, like the news that a family member who was fine yesterday has suddenly taken ill and passed away. I was in an accident. My head thudded as I strained to remember what had happened. I could clearly recall going to bed early, just after the Pope prayed for the victims of gun violence in Chicago on the evening news, on Saturday night; Frank teased me, “You’re becoming an old lady,” and unclasped my bra and gently cupped my breasts.

“If I’m becoming an old lady, then you’re already an old man,” I answered, slipping my nightgown on, and then we spooned beneath the sheets until I fell asleep to the sound of his gentle snoring.

I had no memory of waking up again, and I wondered if the accident had occurred while I was sleeping and if Frank was okay. I said, “Where’s my husband?” but it sounded like, “Err I uzzin?”

“It’s okay, Mr. Fletcher,” the doctor said, “we’re going now.”

I felt a surge of alarm as she wheeled me away from the nurses’ station to the elevators. I had seen enough medical drama reruns to know what was happening: she had her charts mixed GRIFFIN up. She thought I was Mr. Fletcher, who had been in an accident and needed surgery, and I wasn’t certain whether I had been in an accident or if I needed surgery, but I knew damn sure I wasn’t Mr. Fletcher. In fact, I was a little offended that she didn’t seem to recognize that I couldn’t possibly be Mr. Fletcher because I was, although admittedly losing some of my more attractive qualities in my old age, quite clearly a woman.

If the realization that I was in an accident was like a strong gust of wind, the sight of my reflection in the elevator doors was like the tornado that picked up Dorothy’s farmhouse and dropped it back down in Oz. At first I thought it was a trick of the light, or maybe that I was not seeing my own reflection but someone else’s, even though there didn’t seem to be any other gurneys nearby. I lifted my hand, noticing that it hurt like hell all up my arm to do so, and the reflection waved back. I wanted to scream, but this time I couldn’t even manage a grunt.

There was blood. Whatever accident this had been, it had done a number on me. They had covered me with a plain white sheet, which was blotchy with dark crimson spots. My right foot had come free, and I could see a white shard of what had to be bone jutting out

above my ankle. My skull looked to be bashed in a little, or at least was covered in gore, and there was a cut on my right cheek that was mostly dried over. I couldn't lift my head but a little, so I couldn't see my left side, although I could guess it looked as gruesome as the right.

The sight of the blood made me feel a little woozy, but it was my face that knocked the breath out of my chest. It wasn't my face. It wasn't my blue eyes, my high cheekbones, my blonde hair faded to gray. It wasn't even a woman's face.

The face in the elevator door was much younger than mine, maybe late twenties or early thirties, darker-skinned, and more rugged. It had black hair, cut short, and a thick black beard matted with blood. The eyes were brown, but in them I could still recognize my own, my fear.

As we got on the elevator, I began to kick and thrust my body upward, fighting to make myself heard. *This can't be right, it's Sunday morning! I am Rose-Marie Edwards, wife of Frank Edwards, daughter of Scott and Melissa Lowry! I went to Harford Community College, I met Frank there, we were married in the Bellevue Catholic Church the summer after I graduated. I got pregnant but had a miscarriage and could never conceive again. I was a vet tech for thirtyeight years before I retired. We got a black lab to celebrate and named her Daisy and I was going to share my breakfast with her while the neighbor kids played soccer. I am in the middle of The Portrait of a Lady for heavens' sake! Mr. Touchett has only just died and I was going to find out what happened next. I have lived most of a life, I know who I am, I am Rose-Marie Edwards...*

The doctor held me down and said soothing phrases, "It'll be all right," and "We're taking care of you." I heard deep shrieks and realized they were coming from me, only not me but Mr. Fletcher. The elevator dinged and the ceiling changed as they wheeled me out into the hallway and then into an operating room. I tried to shout, "I've lived most of a life!" but the anesthesiologist held a mask to my face. Against my will, my eyes closed again.

**Untitled**  
*Jacob Sandy*



**Untitled**  
*Austin VanBuren*



## **Megan Monroe**

*Christina Griffin*

Out of all the girls I ever had, Megan Monroe was the best. She had skills, man. I mean it. She always knew what you wanted, what you needed, even when you didn't. I would pick her up on Montgomery Street, and not once, not once, was she ever not there when I needed her. She never dirty-talked on the street either, maybe she did to other guys, I don't know, but not to me. I would pull over, and she would know I was comin' for her, and she would strut over with her hips swinging here to there, man, I swear, and she wouldn't even bother talking to me but she would just open the door and hop in the passenger seat. I never met another girl like her.

I always took her to a motel, I took them all to motels because when I pay for it I'm paying for a full experience, you know? Plus I couldn't take them home because someone was always there, if not my mother then my nosy rotten sister. So anyways, I'd take her up to the room and she would start stripping just about before the door was closed, and man, you shoulda seen her. She could strip, I mean it, and her tits would swing around like fucking watermelons in a backyard hammock. By the time her clothes were off I was rock-hard, I mean that's how hot her body was, it didn't take nothing. She always knew what you needed, man.

Shame she got killed last week.

## Death Sentence

*Mikayla Peters*

“How would you like to die?”

“How would you like to die, Ms. Levin?”

He saw the surprise around the corner of her eyes, the slight expansion of space beneath her eyelids. Brian smirked.

“I suppose something quick and painless,” she said after a pause. He saw her look him over, her gaze traveling his face to search for something she’d searched for a million times in the past year.

“What about you, Mr. Fisk? How would you like to die?”

“One of two ways,” he said, aptly prepared. He had thought this over a lot. “Either death by drinking, or poison in a small glass of plum wine.”

Sandy’s green eyes opened a fraction wider, and Brian noted each eyelash gently pulling upward or downward to reveal the emerald irises laced with gold.

Brian nodded, his lips curling from a smirk into a smile. “You know, the emperor Tiberius used to sew young men’s urethras shut before force-feeding them vast amounts of wine until they died.” Her mouth twitched back at the right corner. Disgust. “Without, of course, having my urethra sewn shut, I would enjoy succumbing to poisoning by alcohol. I wouldn’t even know what happens.”

“Mr. Fisk, I don’t believe—”

“Imagine it, Ms. Levin. What happens when you drink? When I drink, I begin to imagine life anew. I become the writer I was meant to be, with my novels in the hands of students all over the world. Millions of scholars spending decades writing papers about my pieces. Fame and awards come to me, falling into my lap. When I drink, I become

the most acclaimed author, the only one serious enough about the craft to actually experience what my characters do.”

“Mr. Fisk, I need—”

“Eventually, I’d forget why I drank. I’d forget the bad...and the good. I forget everything. Can you imagine dying in a state of bliss? One finally knows how dogs live—for the moment, for the feeling right then. They don’t dwell on the past or panic about the future. Neither do I, when I drink. That would most certainly be one of the best ways to die. With no recollection of anything.”

“Mr. Fisk, the state will not allow you to die by drinking.” Brian sighed. “Your choices are lethal injection, electrocution, or firing squad. This is Oklahoma, sir. Not some frat-school out east.”

Brian paused for a moment, leaning back in his chair. “It is my death. I’m quite certain the state should be very happy if I simply die. Why can I not die in a memorable way?”

“The state has specific laws in place for this. What if you didn’t actually die? What if you caused collateral damage? Hurt someone else? The state’s ways are tested. They are proven, time and time again, to be effective.”

“Why not try a new way?” Brian looked at her, his smile gone from his eyes, but still on his lips. “For the state’s convenience, I shall even provide the alcohol from my cellar. No cost to the state or taxpayers.”

At this, Sandy leaned forward, her arms on the desk. “No.” She looked over him again, eyes narrowed, trying once again to figure something out. Finally, she said, “Why’d you do it?”

“Do what?”

She frowned at him. “You know what.”

“Ah. Well, to feel.” Brian leaned back in his chair, closing his eyes. “You see, Ms. Levin, I am a writer.”

“I know all about your book.”

“Yes, the published ones.” He chuckled. “But my masterpiece! It’s to be published after my death. I have the instructions written out somewhere.”

“What is your masterpiece? Who has the instructions?”

He laughed and shook his head. “That would be telling. But, I will tell you this.” He leaned forward in his chair, arms on the table, eyes alight with passion. He gestured her forward, as if to share a secret, and, when he spoke, he kept his voice almost too low for the recorder to catch. “My masterpiece shall surpass even Shakespeare.”

“Mr. Fisk, I’m not sure what this has to do with—“

“With the murder. Right. Well, you see, one of my characters murders his brother.”

She watched him for a moment, eyes narrowed. “So, you murdered your own brother because of a make-believe character?”

He leaned back, no longer interested. She wasn’t worth his time. “Of course not. He’s not a make-believe character. He is my friend, my son, my creation. He talks to me, confides in me, and trusts no one but me. In order to do him justice—as I want to do by all my friends—I had to accurately display how it felt to kill a man. Not just a man, but a family member, a brother both adored and hated, a person old enough and strong enough to fight back, but with a problem.”

“What kind of problem?”

“A problem similar to what we are experiencing here. A problem with arguing, with understanding. A problem that goes back generations. How do you think he wanted to die?”

They had returned to the beginning of the conversation, and Sandy Levin crossed her arms, unamused. Her eyes narrowed as she

watched him. “Probably not drowning in his own bathtub while his brother held him under.”

Brian nodded, giving a short bow. “Of course not. But he did want to die.”

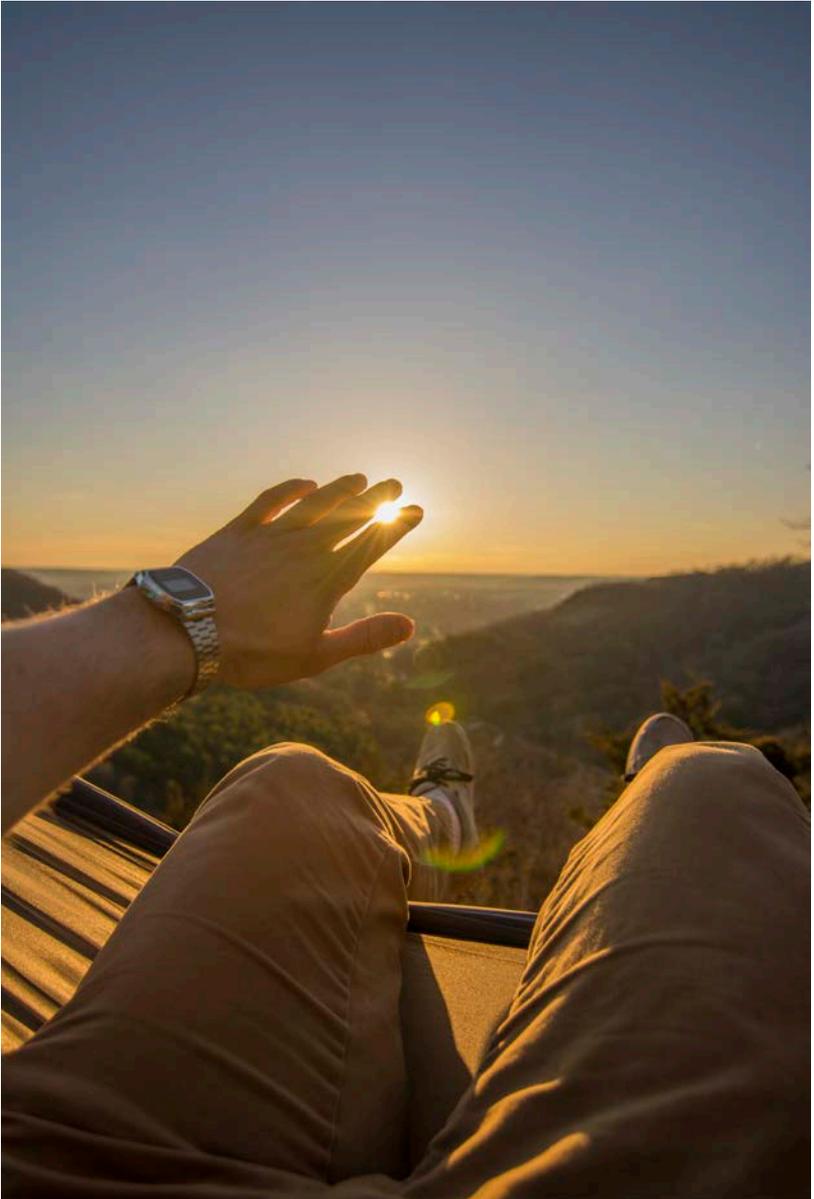
“Mr. Fisk, that does not give you the right—“

“The right! The right! We say this is a free country, and yet we limit rights! I can’t marry whomever or whatever I want, I can’t buy whatever or whomever I want, I can’t live wherever I want, I can’t have whatever job I want...In fact, I can’t even drive where I want. I have to stay on the government’s roads and paths, follow their rules, pay their taxes. I have a right to feel! I have a right to experiment! To explore! The government cannot stop that! Don’t you see?”

Sandy smiled. “It seems as though the government can stop you, though. You are here. You are going to die tomorrow.”

“Yes, yes. Death. Of course. But it didn’t stop me. It didn’t stop me. Killing me doesn’t bring Jerry back. It just causes another death. The law doesn’t stop me from doing what I want. It just adds extra consequences. The law can’t stop my book from being published just because I am dead. No. No. The law can just kill the body. It can’t kill the spirit, the soul, the accomplishments. I will be remembered for my work.” He smiled. “What will you be remembered for?”

**Untitled**  
*Jacob Sandy*



**Untitled**

*Christopher Hinytazke*



**Untitled**

*Christopher Hinytazke*



## **The Great Dump Monster**

*Christina Griffin*

I was too little to work the washer and dryer, and too uncoordinated to fold laundry to my parents' specifications, so I got the leftover chore: putting the towels away. I hated it. For a sixty-pound six-year-old, a stack of towels felt like a metal box of weight plates, so I had to make back-and-forth trips, carrying just two at a time, from the laundry room to the upstairs bathroom. But worse than those sweat-inducing treks up and down and up the stairs was my father's incredible stench.

Maybe it was coincidence, or maybe it was a well-intentioned but cruel joke, or maybe it was his spiteful revenge for my sex; he already had my sister, and when I came around, he'd wanted a boy. All I know is that it made laundry day my personal hell. Because every time my mom folded towels, Dad went upstairs and did what my family called Taking a Great Dump. So that when I brought the first pair of towels into the bathroom, I was knocked backward by an incredible odor, both sweet and sickening, which poured out the doorway like steam.

In that moment, I was not only disgusted but paralyzed with fear; from that mephitic, I was sure, would erupt a terrible monster, born not from the pipes or the sewers or the excrement but from the stench itself, and it would grab me with its claws and pull me into its thick torso as if in an embrace, and then drag me, fighting for breath, into the fumes themselves, where I would die, my lungs filled with the fetor of my father's Great Dump.

I had to mentally shove myself into the bathroom and, holding my breath and using one foot as a doorstop, cram the towels sloppily onto the closet shelf. Then I would run from the room, my heart pounding from terror and a lack of oxygen, and lean gasping against the wall until my mother called, wondering what was taking so long.

## How to Bake a Cake

*Mikayla Peters*

First, get yourself a box mix. Yellow and chocolate. White. Funfetti and German Chocolate. Mint. Anything on sale at Walmart or Target or Woodman's or Festival. Add eggs. Add water. Bake. Watch those you love try the cakes, tell you they are good. Ignore them. Determine that you need to figure out how to bake a cake from scratch. Ask your mom. She is a preschool teacher, one of ten children. She tells you she never had time to bake a cake. Your cakes were always from the bakery twenty minutes away. She tells you to call your grandmother.

Call your grandmother. Explain to her who you are. Explain how to use a telephone. No, you don't have to shout. No, you're not coming to see her. Yes, you're doing well. Ask how to make a cake. Listen to her complicated instructions that mingle with stories of children and grandchildren. "Take a cup of flour...Did I tell you how Jeanie thought any old cup would do?" Listen. Write down the important information. Tell her you love her. You'll see her for Christmas, even though you won't. Hang up the phone. Look at your chicken scratch on the piece of paper by the phone. Decide to use the internet.

Look up recipes and videos online. Learn about things such as "creaming," "sifting," "beating," and "blending." Make a cake, but forget the water. Watch nervously from outside the oven. Watch the cake rise and fall like the flutter of your hamster's chest before he died.

Scrape and dig the cake from the rusted pan. Put the remains into a yellow plastic grocery bag. Tie it up. Hide it at the bottom of the outside garbage with the pan. Open all the windows, turn on fans, light candles and incense to hide the scent. Tell your husband you're exorcising ghosts. Say you saw a spirit in the corner and burnt sage. Don't tell anyone about the cake.

Wait three years. Have two dogs. You are great with dogs. You love them. They love you. You take them on walks through the countryside by your house. You let them off the leash to chase the cows and the horses. And when they return to you with their tongues lolling out of their mouths and their tails wagging, when they are

content to be on the leash and stop pulling, you walk them home, thinking about the cake in the garbage years ago.

Tell your husband you're pregnant. Plan a party. Invite all your friends, even Mr. McCaffren, the teacher from high school you used to have a crush on. Order a cake and think about your failure years ago. Wonder if you've grown. Wonder if cake making just comes to women when they hit a certain age. Stare at the ceiling at night, wondering if your child will always have store-bought cakes. Get up. Make a cake mix. Follow the recipe exactly this time. Turn on the oven, mix the ingredients. Then remember you threw out your cake pan three years ago. When your husband comes down, he will tap you on the shoulder, look at the bowl in front of you, and grin. You will want to die. He will ask what you're doing. Explain, no, this is not what it looks like. It's a type of mud-mask for your face. He will ask why the oven's on. Try to smile and move away.

Determine you will make a cake for the baby shower. Ask your best friend for help. She's had two kids and is a wonderful cook. You met her in graduate school, where you were studying astrophysics and she was studying philosophy. She always cooked, even when you two dated for the best eight months of your life. She married her husband. You married his brother. A love square. A love rectangle. Maybe others were more distant.

She will bake the cake for you. She will decorate it with soft sugar lilies and buttercream lilacs—the two flowers you were debating naming your daughter after. Celebrate with your friends. Stuff cake into your mouth until you've eaten half of it. Break down and cry. Scream at your friends until they all leave, all except her. She will suggest you go out. Your husband will suggest you stay in. You are said to be hormonal. It's to be expected.

Scream at her that you can't bake a fucking cake. Your child has a useless mother who can't even bake one single fucking cake, and no one will tell you how and no one will show you and people either do it for you or ask why you didn't just buy the damn thing.

Calm down. Take a breath. Apologize.

Take her offer for lessons. Say you'll start tomorrow, when you are calmer and don't feel so sick. When your stomach doesn't ache. When your head doesn't pound.

Wake up at two am, screaming in pain, holding your stomach. Argue that you don't need to go to the hospital even though you know your husband won't let you suffer like this. He will pick you up gently,

kiss your forehead, and carry you to the car. He will drive to the hospital, windows open so your screams don't burst his ears.

Cry. Beg God to bring her back. Hold your empty stomach, now fat instead of pregnant. Promise that if God gives her back, you'll bake her a cake every day from scratch. Make promises. Your husband will hold you, apologize, tell you it wasn't your fault. He'll stroke your hair and suggest you go home. You will nod silently, say nothing, and let him carry you out and home.

Sit in bed for two months. Talk to no one. Eat the food they leave by you. Then, pick up the phone. Call your friend and beg her to come over, to teach you how to bake a cake just in case there is another child and a need for another cake.

**Untitled**

*Jacob Sandy*



Untitled  
*Austin VanBuren*



**Innocence**  
*Levi O'Brien*



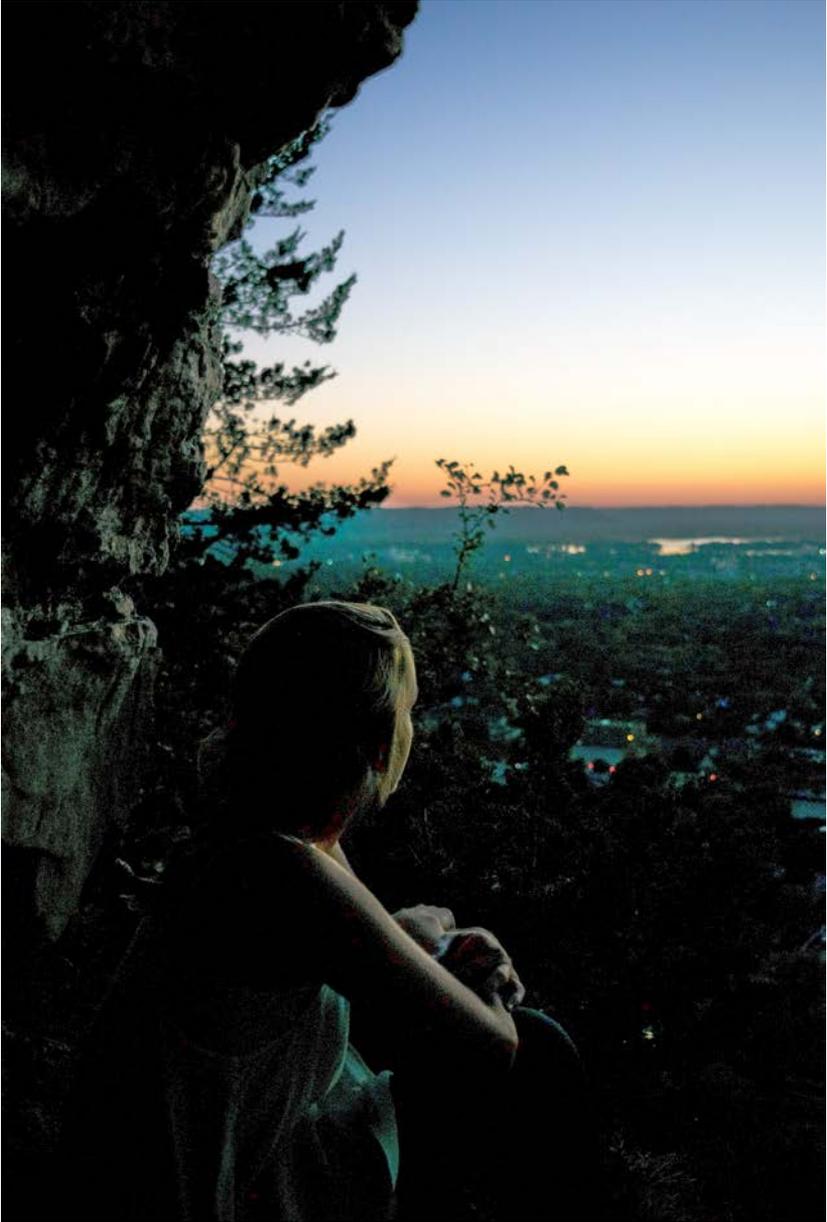
## Extra

*Hannah Murphy*

When I think of you  
I think of my dreams.  
You are an extra  
Visible in every scene  
Interacting with others,  
But always watching me  
From a distance.  
But you aren't only in my dreams.  
You stand in the corner of the  
Overcrowded apartment kitchen.  
You talk sweetly  
To a girl perched on the counter.  
Send me little smiles,  
Little stares  
From across the room  
In the midst of the party.  
You want me to notice  
The girl on the counter,  
You between her sprawled legs.  
I notice.  
I accept the little smiles,  
Little stares.  
I accept your decision to be between the girl  
On the counter.  
I accept that we aren't good for one another.  
But I know and you know  
That you'll be the last to leave the party  
Looking to end the night without the girl on the counter  
With little smiles,  
Little stares  
Up from under my covers  
And in my dreams.

**Soft Tone Girl**

*Levi O'Brien*



**Where I'll Stand**  
*Caitlin Krueger*



## **Black Roads**

*Hannah Murphy*

Mine swept with potholes,  
Dirt puddle filled unpaved roads  
Parallel the train tracks for more than a few city blocks  
As the passengers inside ride on.  
Residential neighborhood roads,  
Punched concave spots,  
A man's semi parked on forgotten city lawn  
Outside a pile of ranch style homes.  
A glass dusting left from unshattered ceilings  
Visible across dark pavement  
In direct sunlight,  
A beautiful hazard for bike tires  
Bare feet and thin sneakers  
That play on unpaved roads.  
A white woman stares out the commuter train window,  
But a white woman doesn't comment on black roads.

## Himalayan Bittersweet

*Hannah Geisen*

We were walking up the mountain on a narrow steep path. We had a wall of cold stone to our left, a rugged abyss concealed by green bushes on our right. Trees shadowed our way and the air got cooler with every step we took higher up the mountain. If one of us fell, she would end up in the roaring stream below between the white crests of the water. Dying was too easy out here, so we climbed in concentrated silence, focused on not losing balance.

As the trail leveled out, the forest opened up and gave way to an open field, grey with gravel. The path led over some hills alongside white stupas, the colorful prayer flags waved in the wind in front of a clear blue sky and the highest mountain range in the world. The mountains! Snow on the peaks was glistening in the sunlight, high above the few clouds we could make out. We were smiling, relieved we made it and exhausted from the days in the dark forest. The others were taking pictures and carefully putting more stones on the cairns that other trekkers had built before us.

I stopped right at the edge of the forest and looked back, appreciating the danger we had left behind. A bush with yellow fruit caught my eye and I scratched my thumb when I picked off one of them. I split it with my nail and velvety sweet smelling pits fell in my palm. I put some on my tongue and tasted, slowly chewed on them. First sweet, then bitter, not bad, I swallowed.

I am not allergic to anything, was the first thought that ran through my head when my throat closed, my tongue thickened and my eyes watered. Breathing got harder every second; I spit out what was left in my mouth of the sweet pits and coughed. The girls were up the first hill already, posing in front of Everest, next to a yak, a temple, squatting next to a toddler from a village, which had wrapped his arms around them. We were the last hikers from the group, had taken our time with lunch, no one would follow out of the forest. The sun was starting to set and bathed the white peaks in pink light, so beautiful, I thought.

**Film Fishing**  
*Levi O'Brien*



**What if there is no God**  
*Baley Murphy*



**Ghost Lift**  
*Grant Horst*

Take me for a ride

Somewhere far, where spirits reside  
Populated by death, yet lively at this time  
A forgotten land where your soul is the guide  
No more reason to hide, I see a ghastly fog in high tide  
Past lives occupy this land, physical bodies cast aside

I just wanted to be free, a victim less crime  
Escaped from reality, my ride booked ahead of time  
I drifted from my body, to which I'm no longer assigned  
No longer confined, a comfortable frame of mind.  
Yet my joy is overshadowed by a shroud of malign influence

I feel emptier than I ever have before,  
The spirits seem to implore for their previous rapports  
What have I done? What have I left behind?  
My entire world dissipated in the blink of an eye  
The vitality of my identity of which I said goodbye  
I now long for, death ensued my hue and cry

Had I known, I would have never set foot on that ride

## **Dream**

*Hannah Geisen*

Sometimes she imagines  
him standing  
on the bridge;  
Southbound highway  
Exit 21.

A last beer in  
the morning dawn;  
A new day almost  
for everyone  
except him.

His red truck blocks  
the street;  
Some honk in hurry and drive  
around the boy  
climbing the railing.

Sometimes she has a dream  
of floating  
down in the stream.  
Early morning sun  
dazzling on her cheek  
a shadow thrown  
by his dangling feet  
above to wake her  
up.

**Divine Winter**  
*Levi O'Brien*



**What if we take a closer look?**  
*Baley Murphy*



**We Were In Love So It's Not Murder**  
*Maggie Dahl*

She was propelled backward into the  
Moonless evening.

Forced by his hand but ripped back by her chest.

The endless, excruciating waltz between them had begun.

Twirling, the noose began construction

Weaving its way between them, drawing them closer, closer by the  
throat.

He dips her, the noose tightens.

Craveable affections are the poisons

She adores so.

As oxygen fades from her mind, she descends into ethereal madness.

The puppet master, once an adrenalin shot now has her up by strings.

Forever suspended.

## **Anniversary**

*Hannah Geisen*

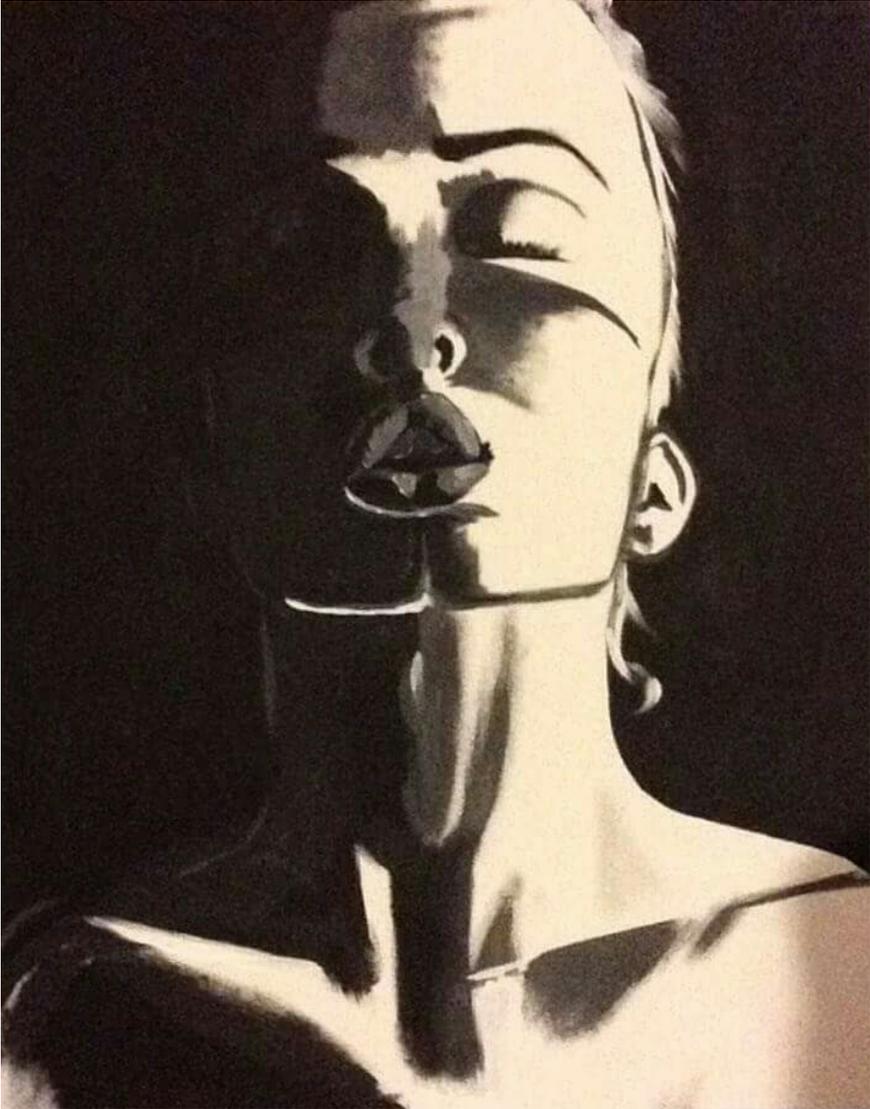
Tuesdays suck. I have four classes right after another. I blurt out prepared thoughts that make me sound smart and forget about my life overseas for an hour or two. The ten minutes in between I rush up and down the grey linoleum on second, then first, then third, then first floor, and text him back home, because I want to, and because he expects me to. The two-hour break before the last period, I eat, do homework, relax my mind for a bit rocking back and forth on the brown chair that came with the desk that came with the room that came with paying my student bill.

Today, I felt inspired. I gave myself an hour of my break to transform this inspiration into ink on paper, into letters that form words in Word. Images of snow on mountain peaks and salty waves on sandy beaches flooded my mind; I redeemed a waiting girl from her loneliness; I brought a friend back to life. I forgot about everything and got lost in the digital pages and created bits and pieces. I gave myself an hour.

When I rushed to my last class, his mood had shifted. He didn't appreciate me being absent for an hour, not texting or calling him when I would have had time. For him. He had been out with friends, drinking, celebrating. And I had given myself an hour. Doesn't matter, I'm okay, good night. I hate the Atlantic Ocean for not filtering, for not losing these messages that make me feel guilty for going away, somewhere in these massive dark waves of salty seawater. I mean, it's big enough.

Of today's twelve months, I had been gone one. Of today's twelve hours, I gave myself one. Selfish on our anniversary.

**Exposure**  
*Abigail Kolbe*



**Urban Conspiracy**  
*Abigail Kolbe*



## Poem

*Hannah Geisen*

Eight years ago a slim wooden cross  
stood where the blank grey stone  
stands now over  
him.

Raindrops sparkle in the silver moonlight  
the flickering candle sheds  
light on the fresh rose  
someone put on the damp earth.

A girl on the bench  
next to the grave  
is shivering in the cold night  
still waiting.

Any second now.  
Gravel crunching under heavy boots, no,  
just a cat.

She's wiggling her naked  
toes to keep them  
warm and make the grass come off.

The cigarette in her hand glowing  
up red  
with every drag and every gust.

Far away the church  
bells ring for midnight;  
she lights a fresh white candle  
for the ninth time in her life.

## On That Which is Most Excellent

*Kate Shepardson*

If I could take the best parts of the world  
and put them all together,  
It would look a lot like you.

Galaxies for eyes and  
the smell of Autumn leaves as your cologne,  
I would hear your approach,  
footsteps, like a creek in a quiet place.  
Your breath would always smell of honey and coffee,  
with your lips like the sweet release of sleep after a long day.  
Your ears would be the sound of children's laughter.  
Your skin would be made of the best paintings.  
Your bones of titanium would support  
the invincibility of your heart.  
The brilliance of your soul would warm cold fingers and toes.  
You would never know the permanence of disaster,  
Only the continual renewal of promises.

I promise dear.

We are made of gentle cells.  
We know of our decay.  
This, and all that sings in the universe  
Constantly  
reminds me how precious you are.  
Every breath you breathe is a confirmation of my existence.

Darling,  
The best of my world belongs to you.

# Utopia

Lauren Follansbee



In a world that prides itself on power, resulting in oppression and polarization, what if we took a step back and humbled ourselves? What if we instead focused on humanity, acknowledged the hurt in the world, the wound that we've created, and worked to restore our love for one another? This idea of a utopia may be a far-fetched hope, but it is a beautiful image to dream about.

## The Contributors

**Grant Horst-** I took these photos and wrote this poem while backpacking Southeast Asia by myself. I aim to get the most natural image possible in my photography and hope I get to see many more foreign countries in my lifetime

**Laura Berry-** I talk very little, but I like to write and snap a photo every now and then. Much of my material is born out of long runs through La Crosse and while in the shower. I enjoy clean, wool socks after a long hike and the calming smell of peppermint. When I grow up, I want to change the world, but for now, I'm happy just being a part of it.

**Quintin Howe-** I am a graduating senior this spring with a degree in women studies. I really enjoy being outside, writing poetry and the mere presence of cats.

**Sylvia Neumann-** I am a senior here at UWL. I grew up near La Crosse in the town of Holmen, WI. I plan to graduate with a major in Art Education next spring. My favorite art media are painting and ceramics. I've always loved recreating beautiful animals such as the koi fish, but my favorite part about art is the experimentation and process.

**Gregory Fletcher-** "Hi I'm Greg, I am getting published in my college's undergraduate journal."

**Dalton Gamroth-** "Dalton Gamroth is a junior at UWL with a major in English Rhetoric & Writing and a minor in Creative Writing. Some of his favorite things include books, indoor plants, and the ocean. Some of his *least* favorite things include people who block traffic by driving too slow in the fast lane, corn dogs, and required reading assignments. Don't get him started."

**Sarah Daentl-** My name is Sarah Daentl. I'm from Portage, WI and I'm a freshman art major, psych minor here at UWL. After college, I plan on becoming an Art therapist. I made this dress for my 3d foundations class last semester. It is made entirely out of card board and then spray painted it with a semi-glossy black color. It took me

about 15 or so hours to make. I really enjoyed this project and I think as an artist, it challenged me to think procedurally and constructively, two qualities that I tend not to emphasize in my work.

**Libbie-Sienna Miller-** “Libbie-Sienna Miller is a plant enthusiast who loves words, textile arts, and warm people. She's waiting for the perfect cat to walk into her life.”

**Connor Givens-** “Connor Givens is a junior this year and a Computer Science major / Graphic Design minor. He doesn't really know if his submission fits any sort of theme, but he thought of it one night during freshman year at two in the morning and wrote it all down and has kind of wanted to send it in ever since, just because he could. If it was not readily apparent, he hopes that you do not take it too seriously.”

**Bekah Kienzle-** sophomore at UWL. Psychology and Art double major. Studying abroad in Sevilla, Spain.

**Jacqueline Machamer-** My name is Jackie and I sleep with a stuffed penguin named Butta-Boota every night.

**Jacob Sandy-** My name is Jacob Sandy and I am freshman here at the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse majoring in economics. I have always had a passion for adventure and exploration and as of recently I've been documenting some of my favorite adventures through photography.

**Nathaniel Handahl-** Minnesota resident, seeker of any good story regardless of format (books, films, shows) and music addict.

**Austin VanBuren-** My name is Austin VanBuren. I am a student here at the University of La Crosse Wisconsin. Photography gets me out of the house. It truly pushes me to explore new places and meet new people.

**Christina Griffin-** Christina Griffin could be the president of a pepperoni pizza fan club, but she's not. She spends the majority of her time curled up on the couch snuggling with her spotted weiner dog and asking her fiancé if he wants to dance

**Christopher Hinytzke-** I am a senior at UWL majoring in finance

**Abigail Kolbe-** Abigail Kolbe is a sophomore at UW-La Crosse majoring in Nuclear Medicine Technology. A self-taught artist, she seeks guidance from small details of the world around her to aid her artistry.

**Mikalya Peters-** Mikalya Peters graduates May 14th, 2017 from the University of Wisconsin--La Crosse where she studies English Literature and German Studies. She will begin next fall at the University of Denver, getting her Master's in Literature.

**Levi O'Brien-** I am a sophomore here at LaCrosse. I got into photography a few years ago and have been experimenting ever since. Hope you like them!

**Hannah Murphy-** Hannah Murphy is a junior at the University of Wisconsin La Crosse studying Recreation Management and Creative Writing. Hannah plans to graduate in the Fall of 2018 with subsequent plans to move out west to pursue her interests in outdoor recreation, writing, and climbing. Within that plan, she hopes to secure a job to pay for visits back to the Midwest.

**Lauren Follansbee-** I am a psychology major with an art minor. I am going onto graduate school in the fall for occupational therapy at Rush University in Chicago. Up until this last semester of school at UWL and my fifth semester in the printmaking studio, I have explored a variety of beautiful, unexpected, and stressful situations. In the end, art, friends, and family have allowed me to cope with these transitions. Although I am not continuing a profession towards art, art has and always will keep a consistent priority in my life.

**Maggie Dahl**

**Caitlin Krueger**

**Baley Murphy**

**Katelyn Shepardson**

**Katrina Anthony**

Hannah Geisen

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