

Volume 22 (2019)



Vol. 22  
Spring 2019

**Featured Selections:**

- 'Senescence' – Kylie Mullen
- 'The Last Christmas on Breconshire Drive' – B.J. Hollars
- 'Crow on a Fence' – David Blackey
- 'On The Jetty' – Valerie Griggs

**Fiction**

The Call of the Loon – Paul Wicinski  
Gone Fishin' – Orit Yeret  
Persistence of Memory – D. A. Hosek  
Senescence – Kylie Mullen  
Clawless – James P. Hanley  
A Bike of My Own – Charles Grosel

**Nonfiction**

Screen Kiss – John Michael Flynn  
The Last Christmas on Breconshire Drive – B.J. Hollars  
How to Make Sure He Really Loves You – Ariella Neulander

**Poetry**

Autism's ABC'S – Shawna Ervin  
Patience – Dana Robbins  
Etoposide – Cameron Morse  
I'm burning my daughter's dollhouse – Joe Cottonwood  
Smolder – Charlotte Covey  
They Put Up A Fence In Cass St Park – Jordan Makant  
Dead Fish – Laura Bonazzoli  
Heeding A Warning – William Rudolph  
Last Project – Julia Hatch  
Crow on a Fence – David Blackey  
The State of the Union – Laurinda Lind  
Mucophagy – Timothy Dodd  
Hurricane Katrina – Susan Tollefson  
Herds – Susana H. Case  
Ants in the Pantry – Irena Praitis  
4th of July – Paul Bluestein  
Soothing – Shawna Ervin  
"I Feel Like I Sprained My Damn Heart" – Diane DeCillis  
Fallen Angel – Krikor N. Der Hohannesian  
That Night, W – Luther Jett  
Ranger Cookies, aka Making Friends for Introverts – Beth Bayley  
Affright – Scott T. Hutchison

Unobjectified at 38,000 Ft. – Sarah Morgan  
Still Not Quite There – David Hart  
On The Jetty – Valerie Griggs  
Once More – Claire Scott  
Tete de Femme – Karen Depew  
Checkout Line – Shawna Ervin  
Rehab – Brian Daldorph  
Tara – Liza Wolff-Francis  
Aged Hippie in Suspension – Bob Schildgen  
Better Than Sex – Gaylord Brewer  
How to Tell a Crow It's Not a Raven – Deborah H. Doolittle  
Self-Portrait as a Young Jewish Girl – Nancy Smiler Levinson  
The archaeologist. – DS Maolalai  
Witness – Yvette A. Schnoeker-Shorb  
Isadora – Terry J. Allen  
love song – John Sweet  
The Brown Tree Snake – Helen Tzagoloff  
Behold – Rochelle Jewel Shapiro  
This Tiny Group of Humans – Katherine Davis  
Herd – Lucas Shepherd  
Careening Towards Parkinson's Disease – Barbara Tramonte  
The Dunes at Pamet Beach – Krikor N. Der Hohannesian  
Little Toad – Gaylord Brewer  
Regurgitated Lies – Shawna Ervin

**Art**

Tubbs Fire – Tali Aiona  
Eagle Statue at Riverside Park, La Crosse, WI – David Schmitt  
Calla – Carolyn Adams  
sale – Eoin Vincent  
Sky Lace – Carolyn Adams  
atmospheric river – Tali Aiona  
traffic – Eoin Vincent  
paperhouses – Eoin Vincent  
Hand, Cemetery, Sopron, Hungary, 2017 – Harry Wilson  
Shadow 2 – Ann Hubard

## Staff

### **Editor-in-Chief**

Kayleigh Marshall

### **Fiction Editor**

Luis Acosta

### **Poetry Editor**

Abigail Duncan

### **Fiction Readers**

Jahni Brandt

Bethany Dempze

Haley Gagliano

Nicole Nettell

William Stolski

Melissa Vander Sluis

Ashly Weis

### **Poetry Readers**

Maggie Dahl

Tess Douty

Olivia Hackbarth

Nick Janke

Dylan Klein

Sarah Schimpf

Chen Yang

### **Art Editor**

Rachel Bernard

### **Submissions Manager**

Mclaine Isabella Schwertfeger

### **Public Relations Specialist**

Maddie Makinster

### **Faculty Advisor**

Matt Cashion

Before you die, offering half the sandwich you made yourself that morning to the younger, quiet girl at the edge of your table, you catch the eye of a boy entering the cafeteria.

Without a thought, you smile.

A minute after you die, your brain continues to hum, aimless and gray and not-yet aware that the body it directs and inhabits has ceased breathing, that the heart has stopped beating, and that you have stopped being.

The doctor, soaked calf to sternum with blood that has grown tacky and stiff in her scrubs, leaves the table long enough to change before finding your mother and sister in the waiting room. She tells them that, despite the stents and transfusions and stitches, you couldn't be saved. Your family crumples into the chairs they had refused upon arrival. Neither screams or wails, but they press their faces into their palms, their knees, and each other, and the stains will eventually wash out of your mother's blouse, but she never wears it again anyways.

An hour after you die, the tension in your muscles that have bound them since they formed in the womb fades. Your pupils dilate, a mockery of what you had only just learned was a sign of attraction. Your veins begin to collapse as the blood splits and settles and drains away. In the metal drawer where they store your cooling body, you grow as frigid and white as porcelain.

In that hour, your sister and mother move for the first time in years. Their joints are stiff from the blue plastic seats and ache as one rises to get a drink from the metallic-tasting water fountain. The other's hand hovers over the call button on her phone. The background hasn't been your picture in some time.

Some part of them knows he is there, at the hospital with you.

A day after you die, the stiffness in your body has come and gone. Your back is mottled with dark, pooling blood, the only lightness remaining on your shoulder blades and hips and heels, points of bright white against the bruised purple and maroon, dead stars in a dead sky.

That day, your sister rises early, and your mother hasn't slept at all. One makes breakfast for both with shaking hands, calling out when it's finished. Your mother doesn't respond, and your sister seeks her out through the winding, nonsensical halls of the duplex-turned-ranch house. She finds your mother in your room. The bed is unmade, the light off, and the mint green accent wall is sickly yellow in the early morning light. Your mother lays at the foot of the bed, staring up at the little plastic stars you glued to the ceiling when you were eight, and the tears leaking from the corners of her eyes slip into the graying hair at her temples.

A week after you die, you're embalmed. The soft, warm parts within you are scooped and scraped and sucked out through a stainless-steel trocar stabbed into your abdomen and pushed sluggishly from your veins down a drain. You are painted and sewn shut and slid with care into nylon stockings and the mauve lace dress you were going to wear to high school graduation.

At your funeral, your sister steps up to the podium, only to find her throat and lips and eyes dry. She has cried herself out, in the quiet corners of the house, in her car, in the hallway behind the chapel. She reads a passage from the last book you called your favorite, one in a long, long line. She looks out over the room when she's finished. Family and friends only take up the first few rows of seats, heads slung low and eyes downcast and stitches holding. This isn't the first funeral some of them are attending this week.

A month after you die, the chemicals that had been pumped through your veins had slowed the natural process but hadn't stopped it. The little things in your gut that had helped you eat now eat you, carving out what was left of the soft muscles beneath your skin and filling the cavity with gas. The wood cracks and caves and lets in the dirt, and from the long, y-shaped cut in your chest and the puckered wounds that litter your arms and legs sprout wriggling, pearly maggots that gnaw away the meat. The worms crawl in, the worms crawl out. The dirt around you is dead and still, yet bursts with life – bugs and beetles and roots and blooms.

The suitcase your sister has been living out of disappears under the bed, the clothes tucked neatly back into the dresser she never thought she'd need again. Your mother cooks constantly, egg bakes and cookie-topped brownies to share with the neighbors. Your friends and family come over on the holidays – the doctors say loneliness kills.

He's on the news that morning. Fresh out of the hospital and ushered to a squad car. The next time he's on the screen he's wearing a suit.

They're holding a trial for the boy who killed you.

A year after, what skin you have left is as dry as paper and tough as leather. The cartilage in your knees and your twice-broken nose harbors knots of eggs where the larvae will spring forth and feast upon what little remains. There are tattered bits of lace around you, blending in with the dirt.

That year, the first memorial vigil is held in the cafeteria. Your mother and sister attend and cradle your youngest friend as her wails bounce off the empty rafters and bricks and drywall-patches, begging for a trade.

That year, he's on the news just twice: once to announce the sentence, once to see him disappear behind dead, gray cinderblock walls.

Ten years later, you are bones, white and clean in the dirt. The bugs and beetles have eaten their fill, carved out the secret pockets of marrow within and left nothing but calcium to the earth, and the indigestible nylon stockings, full of holes.

Your mother still lives in the house, not the nursing home she will eventually relent to, and your sister comes and goes with the seasons. Moving on has been a contentious topic, one that will eventually chase your sister from beneath the weather-worn eaves. Nothing is more contentious than your closed door, the dresser and books and knick-knacks gathering dust. Your sister thinks they should donate them, start a fund. Your mother will never let them go.

He's on the news again. He died in jail.

Your sister closes the article and sets her phone down on the counter like that one motion can put him out of her life once and for all. It can't. Your mother passes in the night. The corners of her mouth are curled, tight, into her cheeks. Her hair has gone full gray and spreads against the pillow like a dull, dead halo.

In the dirt, you're little more than dust.

As a strong believer in giving credit (and blame) where credit (and blame) are due: allow me to say simply, that it was my mother's idea.

One last night in our family home before leaving it forever. That the night happened also to be Christmas Eve made it all the sweeter. There would be magic in the air. We would make sure of it.

In those days, we were a family of five: my six-year-old brother, 39-year-old dad, 40-year-old mom, the dog whose age we never quite knew, and me: a boy who, even at 10, knew a bad idea when he saw one.

Because this had to be a bad idea, didn't it? After all, who in their right minds sells their home, boxes up their belongings, moves them to the new house across town, and then returns to the old house, now empty of everything but a Christmas tree, in order to say goodbye?

This was in 1994: "Hakuna Matata" was on every tongue, *Forest Gump* on every screen, and the Buffalo Bills on every bookee's "Do Not Bet On" list. As for me, I was a scholarship kid fifth grader at a brand-new private school. Had I known anything about tax brackets back then, I'd have known that my family was a couple brackets beneath my fancy new friends. They celebrated Christmas, too, only they celebrated in the Bahamas.

Our last Christmas on Breconshire Drive was a spartan affair by comparison: our purse strings a little closer to Bob Cratchit's than Ebenezer Scrooge's. It was the year we had the least but felt the most. The year we kissed goodbye to the gluttonous revelry we'd grown accustomed to.

Where was the figgy pudding? The cup of good cheer? And the presents! How would Santa know to which house to deliver the loot?

That year, there was no glow from the television set, because there was no television set. My brother and I were forced to stare into the flames in the fireplace, instead. And then, the Christmas miracle occurred: we started...talking to each other. A family, on its own volition, talking to each! Our laughs echoed through the cavernous house as my brother and I chased our dog in all the spots where the furniture used to be.

As bedtime approached, my mom, dad, brother and I unfurled our sleeping bags alongside that hearth—our dog serving admirably as a space heater. Within minutes, my entire family was dreaming of sugar plum fairies, while I spent that night staring at the ceiling.

Our house was full of memories. The height markers on the door frame, sure, but also, the fruit punch stain on the carpet. And the holes in the walls where, once, our family pictures had hung. We would leave it to the future owners to do the dirty work of erasing us. Let them steam clean and spackle us away. We would take no part in it.

As for us, by morning we'd have a new home to christen, a new doorframe to mark, a new carpet to stain, and a fresh wall to hang our family pictures.

Staring at that ceiling, it occurred to me that in a few hours' time, even our memories would become memories. But not before I made one more.

Sometime after midnight, I slipped from my sleeping bag and peered out into the dark. Santa was nowhere. What I saw, instead, were the pair of pine trees I once leapt over with ease; suddenly, they were taller than my head. Just a couple of pine trees, nothing more, and yet I was despondent by the realization that they would continue to grow without us.

In the coming years, our family would grow, too. We'd grow together, we'd grow apart, we'd grow beyond our shared roof. It is the nature of families as it is the nature of trees: in both instances, you hope the roots can hold you.

A quarter century later, my brother and I returned to our roots on Breconshire Drive. Standing across the street from our childhood home, we conjured what we could of that last

Christmas. Within minutes, we were approached by a pair of men who accused us of...casing the joint.

There'd been a few robberies, they explained, and what business did we have there?

We tried to explain that this had been our home once many years ago. That I'd dedicated a decade to scraping my knees on that sidewalk. That my brother and I had built fort after fort in that forest. I knew every cattail in the ditch, every acorn in the tree, the best spots on the block to catch fireflies.

The men didn't buy it. It was easier to believe that we were burglars than sentimental.

There was nothing we could do to persuade them. Every memory of us was now gone. If the pine trees remained in the backyard, I didn't see them. But I like to think they were there.

As my brother and I removed ourselves from the premises, it was clear that our home was no longer our home.

But, of course, home is never a place, it's always the people. It's a lesson better learned late than never.

Like I said, it was my mother's idea. And my mother's lesson.

Every Christmas, I thank her.

## **Crow on a Fence**

*David Blackey*

It's as if all the ice  
from Time's beginning  
swept through the valley overnight,  
clenching bare trees  
with crystalline fists.

The furnace moans  
to keep my cabin above zero.  
The fireplace struggles to yield  
a six foot penumbra  
of one-sided warmth.  
Six layers of wool  
don't help a damn.  
I reach for a bottle of Solace.

Scratching frost from a pane,  
I spy a crow frozen on the rail fence,  
its face a startled rictus.  
The woodpile shivers.  
The winds yowl.  
I retreat toward the flame.

Soon I give up  
to cold power  
stepping outside  
to embrace icefog,  
thankful for my sable hat  
and ZZ Top beard.



## On the Jetty

*Valerie Griggs*

I want to be out there  
on the jetty  
far enough out  
to feel I'm in the middle of the ocean.  
Caressed by sun  
surprised by intermittent sea spray  
with arms around me  
that sing and hold me steady.  
Hands ready to touch  
a mouth ready  
to read my body  
listening for my desire  
under the sun now setting  
on the jetty.  
Gulls soar over  
the rainbow around your heart  
and around my waiting  
to catch your breath in mine.  
Tracing with fingertips  
an invisible configuration  
of pleasure swirling  
with the surf, in and out.  
How the moon rises  
and rides the waves  
over you, over me,  
a silky weight sliding  
sweeping away the broken places  
on the jetty.