

# The Catalyst



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Cover image: “Bookstore” (graphite drawing)

by Lyd Vos

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*The Catalyst* is a student-run creative journal of the University of Wisconsin-La Crosse,  
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## Sydney Kletecka / I Once Dated a Loser Who Played Bass

I once dated a loser who played bass. Albeit, I never actually heard him play the damn thing. I'd been regaled with tales of his band days ---as much as one can recall six months of playing with fellow losers two years prior-- with a smug smirk of mouth that tried to play up his skill set.

He did that a lot, revealed little so he could inflate his own ego and self importance without ever actually providing any substantial evidence of his so called "gifts."

For example, he claimed--again and again-- to have a photographic memory. But we often found ourselves in he said she said arguments. Arguments where I was always misremembering, mis recalling, mistaking because... well he had a photographic memory. Any accomplishments or testaments of my memorization skills (which is stupid to argue about in the first place) were dismissed. The notion that I too, had had a good memory all my life-- turned into a "good enough memory."

Funnily enough I seemed to remember a lot about that relationship only after it had ended. For one, that smirking mouth? Fucking huge. Like-- comically huge. Fishlike really. The mouth itself, lips and the imposing cavern-- were gargantuan in and of themselves. As if that wasn't enough, he also had these humungous teeth that seemed to bubble out of the space. How the endless amount of jaw space he already had wasn't enough for these teeth, I don't know. And for someone with such a gigantic mouth, he sure did say a whole lot of nothing.

The Mouth had been pointed out to me by friends consistently.

"It's just so big." They'd say.

"I like the mouth. He has a good smile."

An issue with the smile was that he never stopped smiling.

Imagine, someone has insulted you. Imagine, someone has made you feel lonely. Imagine, someone has made you feel unattractive with their inability to tell you that you hold value and significance in their life. Imagine-- you start to hate this person. Imagine, through all of that they're smiling like a cartoon hillbilly. Too big.

You may be starting to think I'm a little mean. So, let me get back to details I'd conveniently forgotten or ignored during my time with Nick Birch.

I'd met him in a nightclub. I was on the dance floor, and he was up on a platform dancing embarrassingly and publicly. Gag.

In our first texts exchanges he'd called me a "trophy deer." A gross, unsettling hunting reference. I had always found hunting for sport weird, and thought the allusion to being shot and mounted on a wall, logically, disturbing.

On our first date, he brought up his ex girlfriend, "jokingly" called me a slut, all while needing a lesson on "say it don't spray it."

At one point he informed me he had a condom in his back pocket. To which I said, honestly, "I'm allergic to latex."

On our second date, we got into it over his phone usage during said date. To which he agreed he'd stay off his phone for the rest of the night. And he did, I'll give him that.

However, in his attempt to make conversation The Ex makes a reappearance. He'd asked me what my favorite song was, after I'd answered he told me that wasn't a good song to have sex to-- and that the band that performed it was his ex's favorite.

To top off that second date, he made an accusation.

He said to me, "I don't think you're allergic to latex."

To which I replied, "I am allergic to latex, and we won't be testing the theory."

One evening we were laying in my bed and began playfighting, the room too warm and too dim. We'd come to a silent agreement, which ever one of us spoke first, lost. At one point, he had me hanging upside down from the edge of the bed, and I felt my chest heave a full inhale and exhale. I threw my leg around his neck in a head lock and flung myself upward, all the blood rushing from my head too fast. It felt like throwing your head all the way back on a swing set, so far your hair dragged across the ground each time you passed it.

I released my choke hold and climbed on top of him. Slowly, I crawled down the length of his laid out body and pulled up the edge of his shirt, revealing a stark white, long scar low on his right hip. He'd told me days before he'd gotten it in a car surfing accident. He'd said it had probably needed stitches, but he hadn't wanted to tell his parents.

I put my mouth to the scar and brushed my lips against it, so lightly. Barely a graze.

And then holding my breath, bit down on it. Hard.

"Did you just bite my fucking scar?" He asked jolting upright.

I looked up at him through, innocent, strategic, doe like eyes and said, "I won."

I spent a month total with him. A month more than I should've, given that I knew from the jump that any guy who dances on a platform at a night club is not someone I'd want to make a life with. When I broke up with him, he was smiling. Admittedly, I'd always known he was no good, just "good enough."

I think that's why when I ended it, he was more confused than anything else. He'd thought, quite obviously, that he'd been the one using me. In the end, after he'd made all his jokes and done all his

hypothesizing, he still had no substantial evidence for or against the contrary. Meanwhile the only thing I still wondered about him-- was how all those big teeth didn't fit all the way in his mouth. And I guess, whether or not he was actually any good at bass.

## Sydney Kletecka / Mama, I'll Buy You a Barbie

When I was eight, mama bought me a blue Cinderella dress.

“When you gonna take that dress off, babygirl?” She asked one night, her voice an easy drawl, pretending to be less interested in my answer than she was.

She kept her eyes on a thick textbook labeled *Anatomy and Physiology*-- the only word of it I understood at the time was “and”-- while I colored on lined notebook paper.

Mama was still in her scrubs and had just put a pot of water on the stove. Set the margarine real close to the flame so it’d be part melty when she mixed the store brand macaroni noodles and bright orange powder cheese together.

We sat at the kitchen table in our apartment’s dinky kitchen-- our the first apartment in Indiana. The yellow light over the stove mixed with the fluorescent overhead above the table, bathed the room in a hue somewhere between yellow and green.

“Can I wear it to school tomorrow?”

“No. Gotta wear your uniform.” She looked at me then and I stopped coloring to look back at her.

Eight whole weeks at my new school and I still didn’t understand why this school made me wear a uniform and my old one hadn’t. I started late in the year because we’d been moving, and tomorrow would be the first day back from spring vacation. My uniform was ugly and itchy around the collar, and I sulked in it every morning while mama drove us the twenty minutes across town it took to get there. But I’d already had this fit, knew it wouldn’t get me anywhere.

Mama raised an eyebrow.

“Can you paint my nails pink before bed?”

She smiled then, “Yes ma’am.”

The water began to boil.

On Friday that same week Annie Christie handed out pale pink envelopes to the whole class. Invitations to her birthday party. The school rule was she had to give one to everyone or else she couldn’t hand them out at all.

As she handed mine to me, eyeing the chipped pink of my nails-- the same shade as her pristine envelopes-- I knew that if there was no rule, I wouldn’t be getting one.

“Here, Elise.” She said with her upper lip curled-- like she was uncomfortable forming the words.

It reminded me of the first time I’d met her.

We were sitting in the reading corner on a carpet covered in brightly colored numbers, chapter books piled up on the floor and the squat wooden shelves. Ms. Coupely had told Annie to help me pick out a book to keep in my desk for silent reading time.

“Do you know this one?” She asked, pulling out a copy of *Matilda*.

She had her hair in a thick braid down her back, tied off with a big white bow. I thought about complimenting her on it, hoped she’d be my first friend here.

My hair-- just laid loose around my shoulders. Mama’d only had time to brush it so she’d make it to work on time after bringing me to school, and the wind had already reformed new tangles.

“My mama’s read it to me before.” Three times before actually, and our copy was a lot more torn up than the one Annie held in front of me.

She looked at me for a moment with her head tilted and that upper lip pulled as she said, “You talk funny.”

My face felt hot real fast, like summer heat hitting your face after you fling open the screen door.

“Everyone talks this way in Georgia.” I said.

“Well you’re in In-dee-ann-a,” she said each syllable slowly, “and no one talks like that here.”

When mama found the pink envelope in my backpack later that night, she started beamin’ and said, “Well ain’t that gonna be fun, sweetie!” She swept up real close to me at the table. “Mama can meet all your school friends and you can wear your princess dress.” It was princess themed.

“We’ll have to buy her a present,” I said quietly, “something nice.”

Mama’s smile drooped a little, then she quick looked down at the envelope, smoothed her fingers over it’s thick edges, and moved her gaze back up to me.

Mama had real dark eyes that always seemed to know more than she’d say out loud. Eyes that seeked soul and reflected it back at you.

“Well don’t you worry about that, baby.” She said, then kissed my cheek and moved from the table to grab the margarine out the fridge and the macaroni out the cupboard.

For the next two weekends mama worked Saturday *and* Sunday at the hospital, usually she only worked Saturday.

I spent the days with Ms. Mabel three flights up, whose apartment was always clean but still somehow felt dusty with old. Every flat surface was covered in white doilies and hanging from the windows were these awful yellow flower curtains. She had an orange tabby cat that always hissed upon

my arrival, then promptly went and hid in the bedroom for the rest of my visit. I'd spent all of spring vacation with Ms. Mabel since Mama still had to work even though I was off school.

The first Saturday, Ms. Mabel and I walked down to the corner store and I knew she'd gotten her social security check that week because she let me pick out my own candy bar, then grabbed one for herself and asked the cashier for three scratchers. The next Saturday, we split a Payday and she only bought one scratch off, while I longed for milk chocolate and peanut butter.

It had been Ms. Mabel's idea that Mama and I move to Indiana a little after she had.

*More help for single mamas up here. She'd said over the phone once. I'll watch her whenever. Can't be any more trouble than her daddy had been.*

Ms. Mabel had watched daddy when he was a kid. All I really knew about that was that she'd lost track of him now. Mama and I too.

Sunday Mama got off work and instead of just heading down the grey carpet stairs to our apartment like usual, she packed me into our Toyota and said we were going to buy Annie's birthday present.

From the front seat Mama started telling me a story from when she was a little girl. "About your age," she said, "maybe a little younger."

I listened real close, mama didn't ever tell me much about when she was a little girl.

"Your Grandaddy won a raffle at work and had a little extra money for the week. He bought me a brand new Barbie doll, with a frilly white dress and a pair of little high heels." I had lots of barbies, only a few were bought new. Most we found at garage sales or the toy bin at second hand stores.

Mama kept talking, "Couple days later Bethanne Mastin from up the road came hollering down the block bout her birthday party. Said her mama was making chocolate cake. But Daddy'd already spent the last of his raffle money so we couldn't buy her a present. Bad manners to go to a birthday party without bringing a present."

We stopped at a light then and Mama looked at me in the rearview. I stared back. The light changed and her eyes went back to the road.

"I wanted to go anyway, so I grabbed my new Barbie and dug the box out the trash can. Sealed it back up best I could. Bethanne liked it."

Mama's story made me confused, "Do I have to give Annie one of my Barbies?" I asked nervously from the back, picking at the fabric coming up from the seat.

"No." Mama said real quickly and met my gaze again in the rearview. "No, you're not giving her any of your Barbies."

In the store we'd found the toy aisle quickly, bright and pink full of stuff I know mama can't buy me. We pick out a doctor Barbie. Stethoscope and a clip board and a pristine white doctor coat.

"She's like you, Mama." I say while she grabs it off the shelf I'm too short to reach yet.

Mama laughs little and hands me the Barbie to carry in one hand while she grips the other tight.

"Well not exactly, baby. Maybe someday *you'll* be a doctor. And you can teach your old Mama all the things I don't know." She says.

But I know that can't be right, Mama reads those heavy books so much. Mama's *gotta* know everything by now.

The day of Annie's party I donned my blue Cinderella dress again and Mama carried the doctor Barbie, neatly concealed in plain pink wrapping paper. At the gate to a big back yard filled with my classmates and a bouncy castle, Annie's mom greeted us. She handed me a plastic tiara and took the box from Mama to set on a table overflowing with elaborate gifts in fancy paper topped with big gift bows. Our present, with no glitter or bows or shiny rainbow plastic, stuck out as much as I did.

The other girls, I quickly noticed, were in *real* princess dresses. Thick fabric of cotton or silk or chiffon, while mine was all gauzy polyester. And while I wore my one pair of beat up tennis shoes, they pranced around in little white two inch heels. They were all their own princess, while I played pretend.

Mama sent me off to play and I immediately kicked off the ratty shoes for the bounce house. No need to talk to other kids when you're too busy jumping around like a wild animal.

When I needed to catch my breath I watched Mama, noticed all the other kids's daddies watching Mama too. Then, all the other mamas, watching those daddies-- watching mama. She was younger, I realized. Prettier.

Mama made small talk-- only to other mamas. All respectful southern manners. And Mama watched me... watch them... watching her.

And when those dark eyes found mine through net castle walls, I knew they was wondering why I wasn't talking to the other kids.

When it was time to open presents, we all had to gather round Annie-- hair braided down her back, head topped with a real metal, jeweled tiara-- and go up to hand her the presents we brought. Stand there while she opened it and thanked us. When it was my turn I swallowed hard like molasse was stuck in my throat. I had no reason to be worried. Girlie little girls like me-- like Annie-- liked getting brand new Barbie dolls.

She tore through plain pink paper in a frenzy, having already gotten plenty of new, shiny, satisfactory gifts.

I looked at Mama, but Mama was looking at Annie. I thought of Mama's story. I thought of how she worked Saturday *and* Sunday last week.

Annie beheld the Barbie in her lap, finally having torn through all the pink. I held my breath, knowing mama was doing the same, the part of her that was still a little girl herself.

All at once Annie caved in on herself. Shoulders slumped, head hung low as she looked down at that doctor Barbie, with it's stethoscope and it's clipboard.

Thought of heavy textbooks.

There was a huff from Annie.

I watched that lip curl.

"I already have this one." She announced to the court, then tossed it towards the pile of discarded paper gathered around her.

I watched Mama's face sink. Wondered if my face did the same. Wondered if she could see her face in mine, twenty years back, at a different birthday party.

And in an instant I felt the Georgia sun rise and set a burn in my chest, felt the screen door slap in my face.

I knew Annie had something Mama and I didn't. Knew she didn't appreciate it.

Knew she never would.

That it wasn't fair.

I noticed mama was looking at her feet, and that I'd never seen Mama hang her head like that.

I knew that I was angry.

Knew that all the sudden, I had turned to Annie, grabbed that long thick braid, and started *yanking* and *yanking* on it like a rope in a game of tug- of- war.

I yanked that braid till she walloped and wailed and our mamas were on us, grabbing trying to pull us apart.

People were moving-- gasping. Jaws were dropping, but I could not hear, could not think, could not see anything but a blonde braid and a white bow and a little girl with *no manners*.

I pulled and pulled till the tiara fell off, dug my hands in between the strands and tangled my fingers into it, threw my elbows back and her with it.

Wrapped it around my fist-- planted my feet, and *heaved*.

Mama had grabbed me around the waist, by the arm, by the leg, by the shoulders-- anywhere.

Now Annie was crying... well so was I.

They had to pry each one of my fingers off.

"Elise! Elise Marie! What in God's name." Mama was holding my face in her hands now, eyes as big as mine while we gaped at each other.

Good southern woman she is, Mama still remembered her manners.

She turned to Annie's mama who held the birthday girl-- sobbing and shivering. Annie's mama said something mean I didn't hear and glared real hard at me while Mama used one hand to keep me behind her legs.

"I am so sorry. So, so, sorry. Forgive us, really. We'll be going now." Mama says while shuffling us out of there faster than a bat outta hell.

Mama dragged me to the car by my wrist, scolding me about manners and respectfulness and *young lady I raised you better than this!*

Spent most of the car ride lecturing me on how I outta know how to act right.

I stayed silent and glared out the window. Eventually, Mama went quiet too. Her facing turning over and over, brows pulled together, teeth worrying the skin inside her mouth.

"I just don't understand. What in God's name were you thinking, Elise?" I knew she wasn't expecting an answer.

When we pulled up to our street and parked, Mama started unbuckling her seatbelt. I held my breath for a moment, then finally I said, "She was ungrateful."

Mama's head shot up to look at me through the mirror and her posture loosened, dark eyes finding mine already looking.

Dark eyes searched my soul-- found the same shade as hers.

She let out a heavy sigh, blew the hair from her face.

Before she could say anything I bolted for the door.

It had no screen, and Indiana was cold.

I sealed myself in my room for the rest of the night. Didn't say a word while Mama tucked me in.

She'd offered to read something to me, her face still serious, but not so angry.

I just turned over.

For hours I laid in my bed in the dark, tossed and turned.

Thought about that Barbie's white doctor coat.

Remembered Mama wore scrubs.

*Uh-nat-o-me and fizz-e-all-o-gee.*

Later that night, when I crawled into Mama's bed and she pulled me close half asleep, I whispered, "Mama?"

"What, baby?" She murmured, eyes still closed

"When I'm big, I'm gonna buy you a Barbie."

Aidan Schmidt / Artist's Anxiety

graphite drawing



## Alexandra Staver / I'm Busy

They're bombing Gaza right now.  
The smallest of children running away,  
threats both above and around, some  
managing to escape the  
hardships, but most are  
not so lucky.  
Like the photo of a nine-year-old  
boy with neither arm still  
attached.  
He's learning to write with his feet.  
And I'm busy typing this essay with  
all ten fingers.

It's the first day of a new semester today. A fresh start. Something new. Not *new* new—we've seen this before, last year but one day later, in fact. But it's different this time. All of my classes are specific to my major.

Texas is flooding.  
Dozens swept away in the  
rush of water, separating  
loved ones from loved ones.  
Infrastructure destroyed, leaving  
nothing to shelter those who  
remain.  
Photos show only the roofs of  
what used to be houses poking up from the  
flooded expanse.  
And I'm busy complaining that the dorm shower  
water isn't pressurized enough.

I know more now. The dorm is the same—but different, again, just one floor higher and one room removed. I have a new roommate, but one that's familiar. I met her two semesters ago. She was nice then, and is even nicer now.

There's a drought in the Amazons.

What used to be lush, blooming  
waterways, teeming with  
life and greens and plants  
now as parched as a  
desert.

A photo of a man standing with a  
water jug, staring over the sand.

Long trek to what used to be  
next door.

And I'm busy filling my  
water bottle between classes.

I read a quick news email every morning. It's a ritual—of sorts—that I got into in the spring semester. At the time a sociology class had me wanting to become more aware of global events. Now it just weighs on my mind.

The president declares a new minority illegal.  
Executive orders that don't just  
bend the laws, they  
snap them into millions of  
suffering-shaped pieces.

He hides behind his mighty podium and  
declares his actions as good for the country,  
his infamous cadence calling those who  
say he's lying liars and traitors to  
His country.

And I'm busy feeling guilty for not getting enough  
sleep in my cushy dorm bed.

In my singular education class, we looked into prize-winning photos from around the world. They told all the stories—the good, the bad, and always the ugly. Trying to make people feel guilt or gratitude with moving images.

The world is falling apart through the seams.

Not enough water,  
too much water,  
fire storms, rain storms,  
flooding, draughts,  
wars, bombings, deaths.

Things no one in their lifetime hopes to  
see, or even hear about,  
yet made so plentiful and  
readily consumable.

And I'm busy worrying about the  
mundanities of college life.

## Alexandra Staver / Faith in Frisbee

“Get out there, Alex.”

Standing on the field’s sideline, my teammates’ words pulled my attention from the people already jogging onto the frisbee field. Many of them nodded towards the field in encouragement. My dad gave me a wink and a “Go get ‘em!,” while my sister in a matching folding chair gave a half-paying-attention clap.

I flashed them all a grin before I rushed to claim my spot for the point on the endzone’s front line. A solid lineup of six of my other teammates filtered onto the field.

The first pull of the game went off, landing close to the opposite team’s endzone. The rest of our teammates and spectators cheered from the sideline as we sprinted to the disc and completed several good, short passes. Three throws in and a new person had the disc: Jonas, one of our star players known for his beautiful deep throws.

The opportunity was as thick as the humidity in the air.

I locked eyes with Jonas. The muscles in his throwing arm tensed. His eyes widened just so. But he diverted his gaze. Faked a throw to another player. To anyone else, it would look like his glance at me was an accident.

But I knew better.

I cut under, a quick dash towards the disc as if I was trying to make a short pass. But I couldn’t do that. Wouldn’t.

*Don’t mess up, don’t mess up.*

My cleats dug into the soft grass. My muscles screamed as I sprinted the opposite direction. They pulled like elastic bands, pushing the limits of snapping. From the sidelines, I heard a chorus, the call I had been waiting for.

“Disc up!”

“Up, up!”

“Go, Alex!”

The sounds were a mallet to the gong in my mind. My pace, having faltered with the nearly fifty yards I had run so far, reignited. I glanced up. The disc was suspended like a halo in the air far above my head.

It’s trajectory: the end zone.

My feet pounded on the grass as I used the last of my energy to drive a burst of adrenaline into my shrieking muscles. My thoughts whirled around a single spot: the crinkled white line of paint against the green grass.

*Don’t mess up, don’t mess up.*

The disc was only a few feet above my head now. Five feet... four feet... I matched my stride with each descent, the timing like the perfect tick-tick of a metronome.

I jumped.

The disc, so far from me only moments before, settled artistically into my hands. I'd never gripped a frisbee harder in my life. I landed on my feet with a satisfying thud. Victory firmly in hand, I ground my strides to a halt. I whipped my head back to see where my footsteps had landed.

I was in the white lines.

Holding the frisbee like a beacon above my head, I whooped. My teammates flooded down the field, bringing with them smiles and congratulations.

I moved down our ranks, high-fiving everyone, making my way back to the sideline, where my dad was standing and clapping.

“Nice!” he enunciated, hand firmly held high for a slap.

I returned the high-five as my sister added, “I’m surprised you got that.”

“Yeah,” I agreed, panting. “Yeah, me, too.”

But maybe I shouldn’t have been surprised. Maybe it wasn’t a one-off thing. My team wanted me in for that point, and Jonas had trusted I could run for it. And I had done it. In front of so many people I cared about.

If I could do that, what couldn’t I do?

**Alexandra Staver / The Hammer and The Screwdriver**

It was a little thing.

“Here, just something  
small,” my dad had said.

It was wrapped  
all nice in a little gift bag—  
blue, if I’m remembering  
correctly—  
with plain or white or matching blue paper.

Inside:

A hammer.  
And a screwdriver.

With the knowledge of a  
contractor, my dad explained,  
“The mallet has sand in it,  
so when you swing it the  
inertia gives you extra power.

“And the screwdriver,  
the bottom screws off,  
to where the other screwheads  
sit. You can  
change them out.”

It was a practical gift—  
very like my dad—  
but there was something more there.

“It’s so you can fix things  
on your own.”

I figured it out then.

They were supposed to be  
independence

and sadness

and freedom

and longing

and strength

and pain

To give me what he of our house  
used the most, to delegate such tasks  
as casually as the passing of the Olympic torch,

it meant a lot.

It also meant that I was  
leaving.

To college,  
where the hammer might be used to  
loft or lower a bed. Where a  
screwdriver with many, many heads would be  
needed with the unpredictability of dorm furniture.

Would these simple tools—  
the hammer and shovel of the pyramids,  
the mallet and chisel of the artist,  
the two tools for the ages—  
help me through my own era?

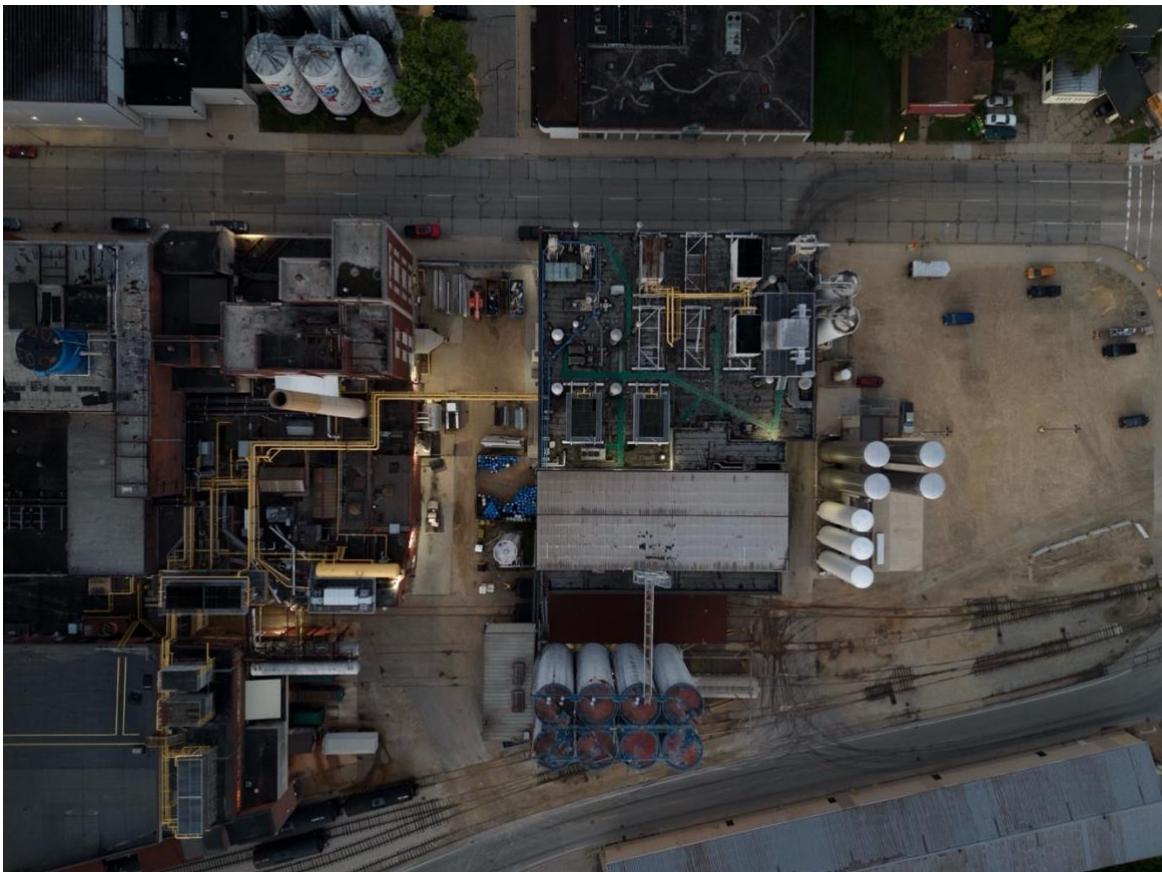
Allow me to build protective barriers?  
Help me righty-tighty any  
lefty-wrongs I came across?  
Break down any hurdles with the

ease of a hammer swung?

So many questions. But the one I  
knew I could answer:  
Would I be willing to rely on them for the  
strength of my father  
away from home?

William Clark / Above the Lines of Industry

photograph



## Chris Gough / This Farm is No Longer Mine

This farm is no longer mine.

Keys have been turned in

Your locks are bolted curtains drawn tight

But was it ever really mine?

This farm is no longer mine.

The ghost of owners past kept me

from entering the barn, walking the pastures, calling it home

it felt like an intrusion on someone else's property

This farm is no longer mine.

Your phantoms lurked in the corners of the house

Your haunts waited around corners, in the depths of the basement

Judging, your whispery eyes peeked through the lath

This farm is no longer mine.

The fields now belong to someone else

I was a farmer of soil but it was the stench of burnt cattle

with hints of rot which they sprayed over your fields; I wept with anger

This farm is no longer mine.

Barn kitties still needing to be fed daily

surviving on scavenged morsels

surrendered to rely on their feral skills

This farm is no longer mine.

No more staring out my bedroom

window late at night with the moon's

trickery shadows dancing around your pastures

This farm is no longer mine.

My son drew his first circle

jet black permanent marker, his inexperienced chubby hand  
wobbling on your wall; proud of his simple accomplishment

This farm is no longer mine.  
A dark night driving to the new home  
As if on auto-pilot, my car slowed down blinker flicked on  
no need to turn, you sit on your hill lonely and empty

This farm is no longer mine.  
Saying good-bye to an old friend with  
promises to meet again  
you never will; streets seem to go only one way

This farm is no longer mine.  
I can still drive the back roads  
whenever I want to find pieces  
of me left behind, perhaps my ghost resides

This farm is no longer mine.  
I can't drive by you; it is too soon  
When the ache becomes unbearable  
curiosity wins out, I'll drive by someone else's farm  
This farm is no longer mine.

**Jake Nielsen / Sanibel Smell**

I can't go there any  
more. A place succumbed to itself.

The ocean smell runs throughout  
the condo. Sand litters the floor.

The pastel bathroom art is the same of a red bike leaning  
against a light blue condo, with a white mailbox out front.

The cleaners have used the same scent every  
year we stayed. The sand, saltwater, trees perfume together.

You can hear the ocean break when each wave hits the  
beach. The palm trees dance to song. A thick humidity keeps your breath.

The Lazy Flamingo. A great restaurant with an old wheel from a wooden ship,  
crabs on the wall, and a Flamingo wearing shades.

They can rebuild all they want, but it won't be the same. The years have gone by  
without visiting and I have found new places to love, but this will always be my favorite.

I am here right now, but never again. Taken by its own attraction. Swallowed by  
the sea. Physically it is still there, I am not. Memories stay intact, attractions break down.

## **Jaiden Liu / It's All Or Nothing**

Our time is always  
 fleeting  
 One day, the gray hairs will not be  
 one-of-a-kind  
 Browns that have been kissed by too much sun  
 And we might say we “wasted” too much time  
 on games or movies  
 or doing nothing at all  
 And the money we spent  
 might have been better served elsewhere

But waste is a voided transaction  
 An exchange where we gained nothing and failed  
 to bargain for a fair deal with our finite currency: time

If I could reinvest  
 And fantasize about the big win like a desperate gambler  
 In this economy, perhaps the house doesn’t always win  
 I’d spend it all on the slot machine of hope and held breaths  
 The lottery ticket of daring to dream  
 of a life with you  
 The bet of all bets

So, every minute beholding you  
 Is worth every moment  
 that could have been robbed  
 to turn that cog of the capital machine  
 This silly, fruitless endeavor that they slander *love* with  
 How do I say that this all is the point?

## Alexandra Hill / I Miss My Ex

I miss my ex.

We were together for nearly five years.

Five.

Years.

I knew him as a friend for one year,

but dated him for four or five.

The day he ended the relationship,  
time stopped for what felt like an eternity.

I was so happy to see him,  
he came to help fix something at my place,  
and we spent time together while my mom had to work.  
We watched some shows on television and played Sequence.

At first, I thought it was a joke.

It had to be.

My voice cracked,  
tears falling seamlessly like a waterfall.

My chest hurt so bad, the only possible way to describe it  
was if you were to have a heart attack.

Everything felt like a blur,

What went wrong?

What could I have done to avoid this?

He also cried,  
his deep brown eyes swelling in tears.

He then began  
to tell me when it first started.  
Why not tell me then?  
Could we have worked things out?

I still talk to him,

seeing how we are doing from time to time.

But I miss him.

I miss spending our days together at his apartment,  
going outside to play Frisbee or to hike.

He was my first relationship,

My first love.

I miss my ex.

I know I shouldn't,

society says that it is impossible to be friends with an ex.

That being friends means you can't date anyone else because

"Why be friends with him? You're not dating him anymore so cut it out!"

But it is too hard for me,

as if telling me to remove a boulder from the earth.

I no longer have crying fits,  
wanting to get back together  
and begging to have another chance.

I have learned that we can still talk to each other,  
and that we could still be friends.

Even if he finds someone else,  
I will love him and be happy.

As long as he is happy,  
I am happy.

## Dawson VanHandel / **Degenerates**

I had originally planned on only having one or two, but the Bucks were playing and the familiar tree of discontent had planted itself in my sternum once again, so the bartender quickly became familiar with my face. Mike must have felt the same, as he swiftly produced a commendable collection of Coors Light bottles – Danny’s favorite beer.

Danny is Mike’s father, though he’s never really reflected that title. The type of guy who thinks he’s a bigger man than everyone else because he works with his hands, Danny pours concrete from the time the sun rises to the time it’s disappearing behind the horizon, a profession he passed down to Mike. Danny often worked with his hands in other ways too, which was evident from the countless times during our childhood where he would walk into Mike’s house late at night sporting a black eye or a bloody mouth.

Word around town was that he liked to get hit, picking fights with the wrong people at bars like it was his second job. During some of those nights, Danny would mix the booze with his bruised ego and impoverished status and set his sights on us, demanding that we wouldn’t be pussies and would act like “real men”, whatever that meant to a couple of kids who couldn’t even drive yet. He always addressed us both equally, as if I was Mike’s brother and not just his best friend, though sometimes I forget that myself. Every time he would go on one of his rants, Danny always maintained the same facial expression: a clenched, tight face and wide, lifeless eyes.

Tonight, about midway through the third quarter of the Bucks game, I recognized that same expression on Mike’s face, which sent a chill down my spine. He had fixated on a guy who had just walked in – tall, skinny, around our age, maybe twenty-two years old, and displaying some unfathomably high-end clothes and shoes; the antithesis of Mike. The real kicker was the sparkling earring he had on his left side, which was unapologetically staring at us as he made the mistake of sitting down in the seat to our right.

I should have known how it was gonna go.

After a small grace period, Mike started with his usual bullshit.

“Let me guess... a vodka cranberry, extra cranberry?” He slurred over to the unsuspecting customer, who either acted like he didn’t hear Mike or legitimately did not.

“Hey, buddy,” Mike started again after a couple seconds. “I’m talking to you.”

This time the guy acknowledged him, nodding at us with an expression that showed kindness at first but then slowly morphed into apprehension as Mike slurred out the same, god-awful joke.

“I’ll probably just go with a beer,” the guy replied warily, and sure enough, the bartender was bringing him his own Coors Light soon after. As we watched this spruced up, daddy’s money dweeb raise

Danny's beer to his lips, I could practically hear Mike's thoughts in my head, and soon those thoughts were spilling out of his mouth into the open:

“How does your first beer taste?”

“How much money did you waste on that stupid earring?”

“Does your daddy know you’re wasting his money on that stupid earring?”

“God that’s a stupid earring.”

“Do you get off from acting poor?”

“Fuck you.”

After about a minute of this, the guy finally cut in and told Mike to chill out, frantically drinking his beer and starting to put his coat back on. That would have been the end of it, a clear-cut victory for Mike, but then we heard the guy faintly mumble the word, “degenerate.”

The thing about Mike is that if you call him a degenerate, he will do everything he can to prove you right.

So Mike smacked the Coors Light bottle out of the guy’s hand, and he probably would have smacked something else too if there wasn’t instantly a group of guys telling us to get the hell out. Mike started to protest for a second before I grabbed his arm and dragged his belligerent ass out the door. Out on the sidewalk, Mike was a jubilant mess, giggling to himself like he had just told the funniest joke. I wasn’t laughing.

“Why tonight, Mike?”

He met my question with more giggles and turned his back to me, starting the trek back to our apartment. I followed loosely behind.

“Seriously, Mike,” I called up to him. “What the hell?”

In between chuckles, Mike scoffed and replied, “Chill out! Nothing bad even happened. You’ve never even been hit before anyway.”

“Why do you think I want to!?” I yelled, becoming increasingly agitated.

“Okay, okay, okay,” Mike said quickly, still letting out some chuckles and not even turning around to face me. “It’s all good now, let’s just go home.”

That should have been the end of it, a conclusive if not infuriating resolution to the night. But sometimes when I mix the booze with my complacency and pent-up frustration, I set my sights on things that shouldn’t be said.

“You know who you’re acting like, right?” I called up to him.

Mike’s giggles quickly dissipated, though he offered no response.

That should have been the end of it.

“Hey, Danny!” I yelled, picking up my pace and inching closer to Mike. He remained silent, focused on the sidewalk ahead of him.

“Hey, Danny!” I yelled louder, getting closer.

Nothing.

“Danny!” I was right behind him now. “Danny, I’m trying to talk to-”

This time Mike spun around in an instant, throwing his right fist and connecting with my jaw and cheekbone.

I stumbled back, barely remaining on my feet. In my hazy state, I didn’t even realize what had happened at first, but when the metallic taste of my blood flooded my mouth, I quickly realized that I had finally been hit, and it was my best friend who did it.

So now I’m staring at Mike, his fists still clenched, and I’m waiting for him to strike again. Waiting to defend myself. Waiting for us to finally be “real men”.

But as I’m looking in his eyes, the rage I was expecting on his face is absent. Instead, he wears a sullen expression, as if exhausted, and his half-closed eyes are glossy and hollow, looking at me but seemingly focused elsewhere. All at once, I feel both ashamed of what I’ve said and grateful that I am not actually his brother, because I don’t think I could bear to be his father’s son.

I give Mike a small nod, a telepathic message that if he wanted to go ahead and take out all his hereditary, undeserved hate on me, I wouldn’t stop him.

But instead, Mike unclenches his fists, turns around, and leads the way home.

Hailey Reseburg / Hidden Beauty  
photograph



## Cassidy Davis / Need

1. Once when I was about 10 or 11, I decided to take my bike out for a ride. My driveway is at an incline, and it took a few strong peddles to push myself up. It felt harder than it usually was and I took a minute to examine my bike, moving the front tire back and forth while looking down. The tires looked flat. I tried to inspect closer but lost my balance and went tumbling to the concrete below. My cries for help were immediate and incessant. 20 feet away were my older sister and mom tucked away in the house unaware of my accident. I screamed louder for help as the blood began trickling down my legs and arms. The physical wounds were minor, just a few scrapes that would scab over and heal in a few days, but my screaming was wild still. The tears had already made my face tight, and the blood was beginning to clot before I decided to go inside. My rage fueled me.

“You don’t care about me!” “You’ve never cared about me!”

Their concern was immediate and focused on my bloody knees. This only fed the needy flame of my anger. I couldn’t even get the story out in between accusations of neglect and my sobbing that had picked back up again. In my memory, the scene ends there, but because I know myself better than that it was likely that my mom called my dad to tell on me while my sister tried to mediate. I would have likely cried until I tired myself out and slept till dinner time. It is likely that at dinner I would have tried to win the affection of my family again, but my father would sit at the end of the table stone faced and cold, my mother would take a long drag off of her cigarette and talk about the regulars at work, and the children would stay silent, clean off the dinner table when the meal was done, and go to our rooms for the rest of the night.

2. At 20, I quit vaping. I put quit in loose terms because I quit but I also didn’t really quit. The day I decided I was going to do it was after a week of stress about a swollen lymph node in my neck. I tried every google search combination that a person could think of only to come to the conclusion that I most definitely had cancer. I looked forward to better breath, saving money, all the things they tell you, so you’ll stop giving big tabaco your money. I did all the right steps. I tossed anything that would tempt me, put any cash I had into the bank, and purchased nicotine replacement in the form of patches and gum. I anticipated the withdrawals, but I didn’t anticipate the raw neediness of a well groomed

addiction. The replacement helped soothe some of the more physical symptoms, but my anger flashed and gnarled in tandem with the waves of cravings.

At night, I couldn't sleep thinking about this need. It sounds childish and it is. The first time I smoked was in kindergarten. I snuck into my mom's purse and opened the silver foil of a Marlboro Red cigarette box. I slipped the lighter and cigarette into my pocket and headed to meet a friend at the park. We hid in the patch of pine trees that concealed us just enough, but the wind was too strong for our small hands to tend the flame and light the end. Nature could see into the future and was trying its best to stop the inevitable. We snuck away to my friend's house and went under the plastic cover of the boat in the backyard. The end lit nicely, and we took turns passing it back and forth in a smoky haze. I look back on that memory rather fondly, believe it or not. I think my mom knew I took one of her cigarettes. She said it was weird because she thought it was a new pack but one was missing.

The other day, on the way to class I smoked another cigarette. One I bought this time. The pack was over a year old and only got taken out on special occasions. I told myself I wouldn't ever get cancer. That my mom had been a smoker for over 35 years and she had at least 30 years on me in that regard. We share the same need. She pretty much gave it to me when I was young, and I took the time to nurture it into adulthood. This open wound of addiction.

3. At 19, I got my first real boyfriend. We spent a lot of time on facetime over the summer, when we both went back to our respective homes from the perils of college life. I was cleaning up my room wearing a shirt that showed the lower half of my stomach.

"I love to kiss your stomach, it's so soft."

I could only manage a thank you, but a PhD dissertation was required to satiate the level of care that comment radiated. The only part of my body that hadn't quite made it on the list of the things I like about myself after years of grappling with being alright with just existing was now something to be cherished. I kind of feel like I have this black hole of energy inside of me that calls people to be sucked in and spit out, that loving any part of me is because I manipulated it into being. I was born needy and every unmet yearning,

every look that says too much in too little time, it tells me to ask for more till I'm stuffed on it. There's this song by Mel Bryant and the Mercy Makers called, "I love you, I'm sorry".

I love you, I'm sorry.

## Cassidy Davis / Ode To The Girl Who Wrote Me A Love Poem

The summer when you stopped taking your meds  
I hoped you would find some relief in me.  
Spill your grief on the concrete and watch it dry in the sun,  
But you loved the stars and spent time conversing with God.  
Sputtered, splattering speech was all you could muster,  
My letters merely nostalgia to sweat out the drugs.  
You wrote,  
“Your voice has its own place in my head, and it silences  
Whatever tyrant has made their home there previously”  
But when I looked at you that night,  
Confused, restless, pupils the size of quarters,  
My voice was only molecules and atoms.  
The space between us infinity and zero.  
The summer had frozen a distant memory of winter,  
And we couldn’t understand why the frequencies pierced,  
Like turning a knob trying to find the right station.  
Why the rising bile of my anger stained my teeth yellow,  
Or how the people in front of us were somehow the same.  
Experience shaping us to dying gardens,  
And a loveless void to fall into.

**Liv Sinshack / We Who Get Red**

On Sunday night,  
my friends told me things,  
that they may not have otherwise told a soul.

But from one to another with the four of us there,  
not once did we think to care,  
with a window open or roommate down the hall.

They told me things I could not talk about before,  
but my head weighed dizzy with apprehension,  
as they told me things with crass abandon.

We warmed ourselves red,  
as our stomachs folded out from our belts,  
and spasmed there.

Then teared up my eyes,  
which stung with contacts in too long,  
and liner smudged for photographs.

Where I looked to them with drink in hand,  
and smiled wide despite my gum line,  
and lop-sided eye.

Where I failed to correct my laugh,  
and tone-deaf yell to the neighbors I had,  
in Evansville.

“God, I’m always so red. I feel hot,” one said.  
And me and another took our shirts off in her bedroom,  
for a womanhood I do not have.

“You don’t think they look weird?” she asked.

Of course not,

none of them look weird.

Of course not.

Don’t you know that?

I didn’t know that.

But we sat back down again and laughed

and laughed

and laughed.

“I’ve never had this before.”

“I’ve never gotten this red.

I’m sorry.”

And we laugh

and laugh

and laugh.

I have no womanhood.

But to me they are not women any more

than they are blonde or brown-eyed,

or freckled or pale.

I love that they are blonde or brown-eyed,

have freckles, and get pale in the winter,

when we stay in like tonight.

Where one cries on the floor,

while I use chopsticks

for the third time in my life.

And I think how great she looks in tears,  
how maybe,  
they did look weird.

But how great are we,  
to have this friendship on the floor?  
We four who get ugly and red and dear.

## Liv Sinshack / This New October/Canon Events

Each year, October comes like a calm fever,  
to my waking bones of breath and Autumn love.

It comes to bare a gift of orange and breeze,  
for sweater sheltering and midterm glee.

Where homecomings come, and I do not go.

Where the last time I was home-bound in the fall,  
I'd heard rumors of grim events that come to all.

One way or another your life would pivot in  
on your brightened blithe of being independent,  
and so my mother came to take me out of it.

But before we can depart for half a day or more,  
she tells me that there's a cancer in her chest,  
while mine's still reeling from the chance of divorce,  
sitting in the parking lot of my freshman dorm,  
crying on her birthday— on October fourth.

And yet, somehow I knew this was coming,  
all my wishing and wanting and compensations,  
via number twos and counting fours.  
Tapping and telling myself I'd reap some karma there,  
in CAC, before she came to bring me back to home.

When the woman to whom I've only ever taken advantage,  
tells me it's time for treatment, and could be over by June,  
I force myself to be kind for the weekend.  
I must be, before I leave, watching movies and snuggling.  
I must expand and compensate my love by noon.

Now Autumn comes again in gentle bliss,  
and I'm privileged well to hear her on the phone,

where she tells me that she's growing old,  
as I stir the recipe she'd up and sent for me,  
this being her fifty fourth— having survived fifty-three.

It's a sick and twisted number, I humor then,  
but I'm not thinking that it's great that she's alive.

For this aging brings her one year close to leaving me,  
an extension I'd taken advantage of in felicity,  
in the lucky absence of cancer's greed.

Where she may be given grace to grow to seventy-two,  
and pray to chance that the same extends to me.

I'll at last be old enough to fill her shoes,  
to have a child at thirty-four, over an ocean away,  
just as she did, only a few hours away.

I do not want my mom to have cancer.  
But I resent her growing old.

And now I skip those clubs in her name,  
and forget to call in lieu of a busy time;  
this new October, this quiet, orange exploit.

Where I stress that my canon event will be  
the messy love and like of a friend.

Where I have dreams of my father drowning,  
and hope the lump in her breast is not a precursor,  
to something worse for him.

Because it all could be so much worse,  
this October, when it comes and finally goes.

As I wait and hope it's not the breaking of a bond—  
this agony and long—  
instead of action and giving thanks for Mom.

Always procrastinating my relationships in the breeze,  
until they're well spent, misused, or gone.

So when November comes to claim my year in leaves,  
before I turn twenty-one, will I be grateful and call,  
because it did not succeed in its come for her, last fall?

**Aylin Hawkins / A Look Inside Lowe**  
graphite drawing



**Sabine Leichtman / Body Out of Order – Please Insert Breath**

A Pandemic Poem

My weary body lies here in repose,  
vacant eyes counting cracked ceiling tiles  
that expose rotting plumbing, mirroring my own.

Machines breathe louder than I do.  
My veins are an expressway for needles and plastic tubing.  
I count the seconds by the b e e p s,  
each one a reminder that something is broken,  
but not yet finished.

“You’ll learn to live with it,” my supervisor says.  
As though life is a lab coat  
I can simply shrug on, ignoring the gaping h  les.  
As though breath is *optional*.

Anger arrives first,  
curls inside me,  
a fist with nowhere to swing.  
Hot cayenne in the throat,  
a match struck against damp wood;  
it smokes but never burns.

Grief follows like a second skin —  
quiet, oily, unshakeable,  
pressing d

o

w

n when I close my eyes;

a

worried dog

pacing

the hall  
without  
rest  
when I open them again.

Fatigue folds me into the mattress,  
an anchor coiled around my limbs,  
Peter's Shadow stitched to my lungs  
whispering when I try to sleep.

I wonder how many versions of myself  
have already slipped away while I dream.

Death lingers here too —  
not a figure,  
more like the echo of shoes in an empty corridor.  
Elijah's empty chair pulled close,  
already warm, already taken.

I gasp into my navy-striped duvet,  
“I...am still...here; just brea—th—e.”  
The threadbare fabric swallows my words,  
yet in anguish, I lash myself to them anyway.

## **DEAR GOD JUST MAKE IT ALL STOP!**

*[But I don't wanna die...?]*

The room tilts,  
and inky, icy ocean waves gobble up my knees.  
My lungs protest and *burn*, but I'm standing.  
I breathe salt air, labored, yet real.

Someone calls my name from the shoreline.

The voice is mine

raw, but alive;  
stronger than I remember.  
And I answer back —  
not with words, but breath.  
I blink, and the sea recedes.

When I open my eyes again,  
fluorescent suns still flicker and warble,  
and the smell of antiseptic cleaves as sharp as despair,  
but something has shifted.

I am not cured.  
I am not free.  
But I am not *only* dying.

**Aylin Hawkins / Illuminating Objects**

graphite drawing



## Kylee Landvatter / The Fire of Desire

It begins as a flicker,  
singeing the deepest parts of me.  
A connection between us  
that grows in the hollow of my chest,  
Unspoken words,  
a language fluent  
through the rhythms  
of our breaths  
A slow fire.

I should put it out before it engulfs my entire body in flames.  
My father always used to say  
fire is dangerous  
and never to play with matches  
because they burn,  
and getting burnt hurts,  
so this definitely should be stopped...right?

But this flame is warm, not hot.  
It's not out of control  
A spark tended by silence and want.  
The brush of skin curing wounds I never named,  
and the ache of distance melts  
but it doesn't burn.  
I was told that fire would burn.

My father mentioned that sometimes the burn doesn't come until after.  
That one second you're fine and the next,  
Scorched, ruin, ash  
That's why you should always,  
stay far away from anything  
that could cause a fire.

But this doesn't feel like that.

This feels like light  
spilling into dark corners of the room,  
like warmth  
radiating from the fireplace  
after a long day in the cold.

This fire feels contained.

Safe

My father says that after a fire does its damage,

Everything is ruined.

The value of a home goes down,  
The foundation is no longer strong  
No one wants to buy a house with fire damage.

But I'm not a house  
and he is not a match  
and my father isn't a fire fighter  
and after all, if this is what fire feels like,

maybe

I want  
to get  
burned.

## Kylee Landvatter / Backrow Guilt

I can't work up the courage  
to move further towards the pulpit  
It's like chains hold me in the back pew  
Holding me exactly where I belong

I'm deserving of the backrow,  
If not the overflow seating  
That's probably more my pace  
Far away from the worthy people

I've done too much wrong  
To sit with the woman who knows every song  
or to worship with the pastor's son  
and praise a god that  
I don't know

I look upon the raised hands  
and wonder  
how they got to that point  
no chains, no sorrows, no trembling  
Freedom

*Have they ever been in the back row?*

Does Love notice me from back here  
half-hidden behind the bowed heads?  
Does Forgiveness reach the corner  
where I sit?  
Does Grace hear my out of tune song  
and harmonize with it?

Or do i need to move up a row  
Or two?

## Kylee Landvatter / Sunday's Best

Every Sunday morning my father buttoned his pressed shirt  
all the way up to his throat.

The fabric as crisp as his judgement.

He'd throw on a suit coat and fumble with his tie until it sat just right.

He'd stand before the mirror, combing his hair with a reverent hand  
each stroke a silent prayer of perfection.

One strand out of place and he would start over again.

Pressed, polished, perfect

“One day we’re going to present ourselves before God” he would say  
as he straightened his cuffs.

“Sundays are just our practice”  
and I— small and obedient,  
with my shoes biting at my heels  
and tights that itched like ivy--  
sat on the edge of his bed,  
marveling at the performance of it all.

I always wondered why we couldn’t wear Saturday clothes on Sundays.

Why my father turned into a completely different person

as he walked through the sanctuary doors

His voice smooth like honey,  
eyes brighter, shoulders higher.

His decorated hand resting on my mother's back  
one that lacked a ring the night before.

*I thought we weren't supposed to lie in church.*

My father told me that questions were sins of their own,  
that we must listen to the truth and obey it.

And I wanted to ask  
is that truth only dressed for Sunday?

When we are most presentable to God?  
Or does it live behind the closed doors  
where no one dares to look or listen?

Does the truth know about the empty bottles in the sink  
or the screaming in the living room at night?

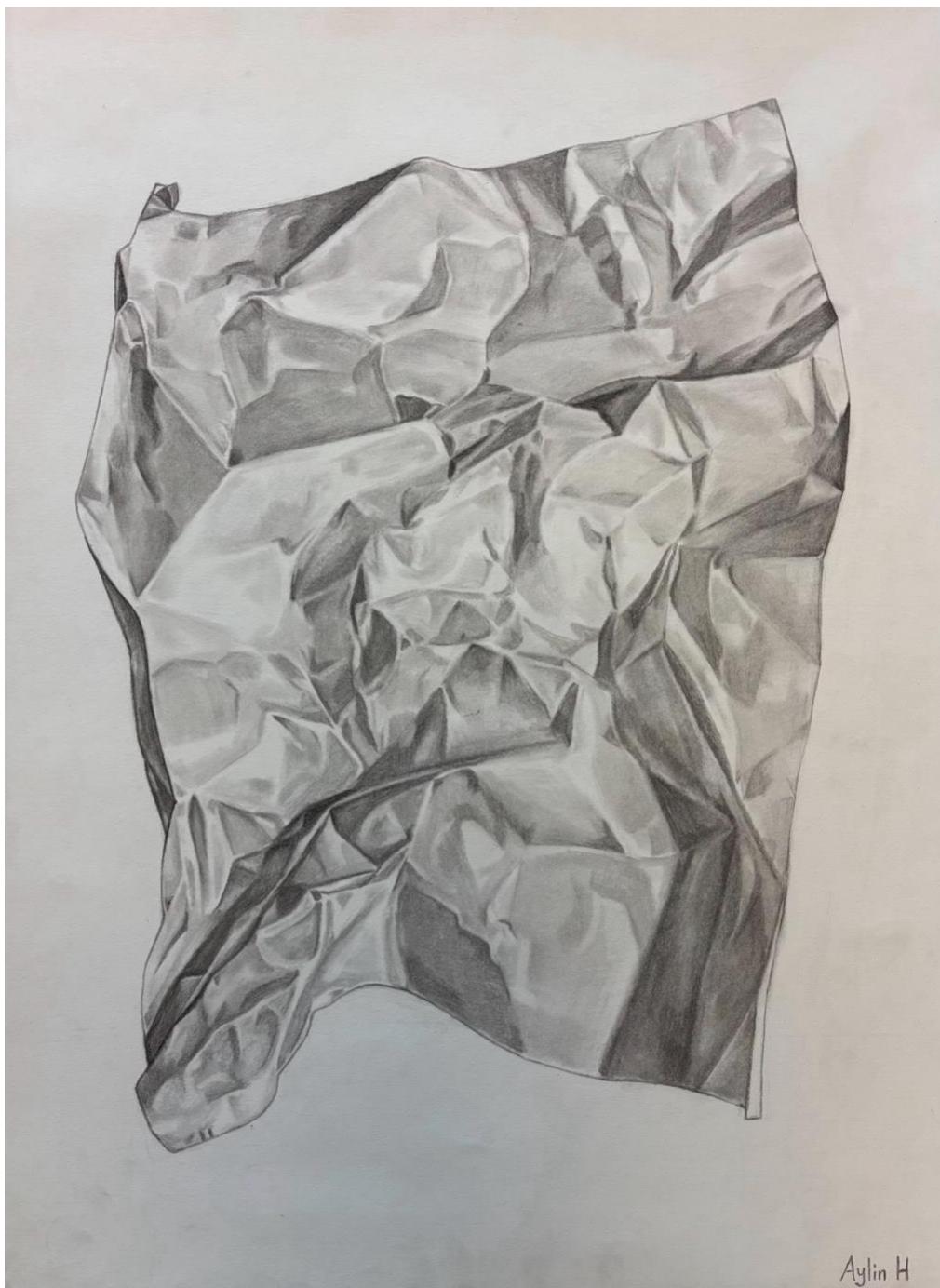
Does it hear the muffled cries, of a  
daughter, wishing for it to end?

Does it know about the pig-nosed woman  
who only comes by when Mom is gone  
or the other child that bears his face?

Does God see the difference?  
Does he know about Monday through Saturday  
or does He turn His face away,  
holy and silent,  
and judge us by our Sunday's best?

**Aylin Hawkins / Cautiously Crumpled**

graphite drawing



## Contributor Bios

William Clark is a creative artist with a passion for drone photography. His work captures unique perspectives and blends thoughtful detail with his own unique personal touch.

Cassidy Davis is an English major who dreams of becoming a writer. They spend their days wandering through life trying to find all the pockets of joy and grief. Their main goal is to tell stories of people (without all that AI garbage!) and shape their world through writing and reading.

Chris Gough is a full-time student, former organic farmer, trying to figure out how to replicate eighty-five acres into my urban lot.

Alexandra Hill has a passion for writing for fun, especially short stories and poems.

Aylin Hawkins is a freshman at UWL majoring in Art Education. She loves art of all mediums but especially painting, ceramics, and drawing with charcoal. She is excited to continue creating art and exploring new mediums.

Sydney Kletecka is a Junior at UWL majoring in Marketing and minoring in Creative Writing (and stresses at length on how to merge the two fields). She has a knack for the creative, spending her free time making things, or better yet—making things up. Better known as, well, writing.

Kylee Landvatter is an English Education major from Southern Wisconsin. She writes poems with themes of faith, womanhood, and childhood experience to create a vulnerable space that others can relate to.

Sabine Leichtman (pronouns: fae/faer) chronicles the absurd, messy, spectacular business of being human through creative nonfiction, poetry, and fantasy. When not chasing words and holding them hostage in the woods, fae can be found herding cats, searching for fairy rings, and testing new and bizarre Instagram recipes.

Jaiden Liu is a fourth-year student at UW-L studying biology with a Creative Writing minor while dabbling in all sorts of writing classes she doesn't need. She spends her time reminiscing about the food in Madison, playing video games, ice skating, and wishing there was a way to make her cat immortal.

Jake Nielsen is a junior from Hudson, WI. He hopes to be a sportswriter in the future. Writing prose and poems were never something he thought he would do, or share, but here his pieces are.

Hailey Reseberg was awarded the Undergraduate Research and Creativity Grant from UWL and this photo is featured in the series, which features Hailey's hometown of Appleton, and showcases Wisconsin beauty and culture of Wisconsin, one city at a time. Hailey is a junior at UWL studying art with a minor in photography. You can find her on instagram @hails.photography.5 and on Spotify with her podcast called Espresso shots.

Aidan Schmidt grew up in Spring Green, WI, where he enjoys time with his dog, Flint. Aiden is a sophomore at UWL, majoring in Plant Biology with an Art minor. He enjoys learning about wild plants in his free time.

Liv Sinshack is a second-year student studying Art and Creative Writing. They aspire to work on a creative team, illustrating graphic novels, children's books, or creating concept art, hopefully publishing their own writing and stories along the way. They have always adored writing, poetry especially, and are excited to share their work with others.

Alexandra Staver is a sophomore at UWL with a double major in English and TESOL education. When she's not writing papers for class, coordinating English Club meetings, or tutoring at the Writing Center, you can find her reading, crafting, and playing ultimate frisbee (not all at same time, of course).

Dawson VanHandel is a senior at UW-La Crosse and is majoring in English Education. He tries to prioritize writing as much as the world allows him to and enjoys watching the Seattle Seahawks play football.

Lyd Vos is a third-year Psychology major who loves to create art but hasn't had much time for that in the past 3 years... Outside of class, you can find Lyd spending too much money at coffee shops downtown or taking photos of cats.