



eleven4oseven

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VOLUME 13.1

FALL 2017

“**YOU’RE ONLY GIVEN
A LITTLE SPARK OF
MADNESS. YOU
MUSTN’T LOSE IT.**”

— Robin Williams

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EDITOR'S NOTE

When people ask us, “What is *eleven40seven*?” I pause to find the words to represent the intangible, inarticulate answer I’m looking for. Our journal is a compilation of hundreds of tongues dripping poetic words, fingers guiding paint across a canvas, and cameras clicking shut to grab a moment in time. Our journal is a representation of the TCU student body that we, the staff, only help to uncover. I thoroughly believe that *eleven40seven* is something deeper than student artwork; it is student identity.

My past three semesters on the staff of *eleven40seven*, and my most recent as Editor in Chief, have been my most humbling. I am impressed every semester with the artwork we receive and the enthusiasm with which student artists and staff members connect for the sake of art. Art is the glue that binds humans together—we crave edginess, emotion, and life represented on a page, a photograph, an instrument, or a sculpture. I am so happy to have gotten to experience that kind of friendship.

I am thoroughly thankful for the experience *eleven40seven* has given me to learn from others, to respect one another, and to work collaboratively with those of whom you share a common goal. Thank you to my beloved staff members who encouraged one another and strove for truth. Thank you to Dr. Rode who helped guide us along the way. I find comfort in the idea that there will always be a need for art and human expression, and there is always another story to tell. As my favorite author, Virginia Woolf, once put it, “What matters is precisely this; the unspoken at the edge of the spoken.”

Amanda Smiley

Editor-in-Chief, Fall 2017

With Wandering Eyes

Liam Evans

Standing on the pavement I felt the warmth
emanate from the small bulbs that draped the street.
The stoplights blinked in their usual fashion—
downtown moved, I did not.

With wandering eyes I searched for another to latch on to
but found none, for it was only me, a single soul, unattached,
its presence in the light—fully exposed.
The Orange Hand disappeared; I held my breath.

My shoeprints pressing into the ground felt heavy and
cumbersome.
The Light Man took his place; my fingers curled in my pockets,
unclenched, yet not relaxed, not certain.
And onto the white stripes I strode.

As I walked gazes seemed to follow my articulate strides
lying behind glass where the street lights could not see.
I found my spotlight beneath the neon sign of the diner,
inside the building a clump of lamps glanced in my direction.

I took a beat—a pause succeeding his question—,
then responded, “Just one.”

Mountain

Kyler Waldron



Black with White

Erin Hill



Brother

Polley Poer

Brother:

You were a silly, cheesy, smiley little boy with glossy blonde hair and a love to laugh. You laughed at singing songs, at taking baths, at Dad kicking a soccer ball with you in the living room. When I was a baby, you'd pat me on the head when I cried and tell me everything was okay even though your tiny two-year-old arms holding my chubby body was probably the reason I cried in the first place.

You've always had back problems because you hurt it in high school doing dead lifts. The school didn't seem to care—they kept telling you that if you didn't participate in their performance programs you couldn't play baseball—even though *who the hell knows* if those coaches knew what they were doing. You got an MRI and everything.

You weren't really the aggressive type. Dad used to point to the catchers on TV and tell you that you needed to hurl the ball to second base like *those* guys—the ones with some kind of burning fire in them to get that ball where it needed to be. You needed the flame that he always had when he was your age, but you were a gentle bull. There was no fire; you just enjoyed the game—grazing through the innings like I moved through my music. Playing catcher killed your back even more, but it didn't stop you.

You were quiet, just like always, when they sat us down at the dining table we never used and told us she was sick. You wore your middle school ID on a lanyard with little pink ribbons all over it until it was so dirty that it broke off your neck. You ate the chocolate cakes and the mashed potatoes that people sent home to us and groaned when people brought healthy foods like salad and snap peas because us Poer kids were raised on 99 cent mac-n-cheese from the box and pasta from a can.

You watched baseball on TV every second of every day. Old games, new games, little league, MLB, your team, the other guys, it didn't matter. You'd lay in the floor and eat your chocolate cake and listen to every word the ESPN guys said. You went on living your eighth grade life like nothing was different. But it was different—you could see it in the house. You started sleeping on the floor in Mom and Dad's room and you never told anyone why, though no

Polley Poer

one asked you. I followed you with itchy couch cushions and the four of us bundled into that room like it was the only one in the house.

You once hit a grand slam. It was one of the best days of your life—I know it was Mom's. She was pissed because it was the only "at-bat" you'd ever had in your life that she hadn't caught on tape. "SAMMY's GRAND SLAM" is what I think your teammates called it. Two of them crawled down into a gutter to get the ball for you, and you grinned a cheesy corner smile and laughed through your teeth. You were like me—"hooting and hollering" wasn't your style. But you loved moments of success just like anybody else.

Dad used to say he thought he "took your smile away." When the games got serious, you laughed a little less. Your friends were competitive, and the gentle bull fights no man. Those screaming middle school parents pushed their agitation at you. Suddenly, the game and everything else was no longer just a game.

You had a girlfriend who broke a piece of you. With her, you dabbled in the rebellious world. You wore a different shade of yourself, the one you never wore before because no one had ever pulled you to the dark side. But it didn't look good on you, and you knew that. You were never irrational—you were the good guy, the one people want but never sit still long enough to have. You used to keep a picture of her in your truck and tell me how pretty she was. I don't think I ever heard you cry until she dumped you.

You moved home after your first semester of college for good. The distance was too far, and Mom wanted her son close. You were her boy and six hours of road between you and her was six hours too many.

I don't remember what you looked like the night Dad told us Mom was dying. I remember I cried a lot, but you were silent—like always. You said you wished she would've been there to see the Rangers through one more baseball season.

You were late getting to the hospital that day in January, but she held on for you. I didn't go with you because I couldn't make myself be there, so you had to drive alone. She was breathing rough, like through a pencil-shaped hole and you walked in the room and grabbed her hand. She took two more breaths, and she

was gone. You were holding her hand when she died. You moved home from college to get dumped by your pretty girlfriend, and to watch your mom take her last breath.

You walked into Dad's room one night and saw me flustered with anger. Something snapped in you and you screamed at me because I "wasn't the only one who lost a mom." You changed me and my selfish heart that night.

You still can't listen to the Alabama Christmas album because it's one of those rare things that makes you cry. You used to try to sing the bass voice during Jingle Bells and Mom thought it was hilarious--she recorded it and put it on Facebook for all her friends to see. Nobody laughed like you and her because you were her *Sammy*.

You walked across the stage years later in a green, shiny robe as they called your name at your college graduation. Your fiancé was there and she called you by your full name, but I'm not used to people calling you "Samuel" because I've never thought of you as anything but Sam. Dad brought his new girlfriend, and Mom's family sat on the other side of the coliseum.

You don't eat chocolate cake anymore because you know it'll make you sick. You haven't played baseball in a long time. I don't know if you still have the grand slam ball, or the book she made you about how much she loved to watch you play. But you still love the game. You still go to the ballpark in a perfectly neat and clean cap and t-shirt and buy a hot dog. You still eat the drippy nachos and hand me the rest without a word when you can't finish them. You still stand during the entire 9th inning whether we're winning or losing, and you don't hear anyone else. I don't remember what it was like to hear you and her talk about the game, the players, the stats, or how the new jerseys compared to the old ones. But I know you do.

Your little sister

Nothing About Us Without Us

Sydney Peel



Carrie Fisher Reo Nathan



Drowning Sarah Calvo

I'm chained somewhere in the bottom of the ocean and
I'm scared of the sharks and octopus that
pass by and I'm screaming but
I think no one can hear me and
I'm crying but
no one is noticing so
I'm trying to
swim away but
the pressure is
keeping
me
down
because
my heart is

heavy

and
I can't swallow the pain
down so
I'm breathing in water

now,
letting myself
d
r

o
w
n

and
no
one
is
coming.

- help

Combustion

Ethan Mito



Hoi An Vietnam

Hau Ha



Intensity

Stephen Flores



A Very Brief Discussion on Empathy

Joshua Borders

"The people I meet as I walk down the street, they say 'Hello!' I say 'Hello!' They say, 'What's your name?' I say, 'My name is Yon Yonson...'"

-Excerpt from Kurt Vonnegut's Slaughterhouse-Five

Two people – friends, colleagues, whatever – are about to walk past one another. They both were previously looking down, their respective construction crews inside their respective brains clanging and bashing, thoughts accelerating like sloths on amphetamines. Each glances up at separate times and sees the other approaching, but the other keeps their head down when their counterpart looks up. This affords both of them an option.

"Maybe my friend or colleague didn't see me," one thinks.

"It's entirely possible I can brush by without comment," the other thinks.

Now they are only a few yards apart; the time for action or inaction is now. They both look up.

"Hi, how are you?" one asks, continuing to walk.

"Hey there, how's it goin'?" the other spits out, not breaking stride.

Each of them smiled when they greeted the other, lest they appear to be unfriendly or reclusive. When they were past one another, however, their smiles twisted into the same, pained grimace.

"At least I don't seem self-absorbed," they both thought, but you can never really know what someone else thinks now can you.

Little Cactus

Madison Hart

Sun beating down on the small
prickly pear.
Strong spiky extensions around
the dark green silhouette.
Little water, little care, little plant
that bears not so little:
Dry, hot, humid, horrible—
cotton mouth, tired, sickly
In the harsh elements that
cause one to sweat and dehydrate.
This little cactus stands tall and
proud, independently loud,
Screaming at the top of its lungs
'Is that all you've got?'

Post POP

Angela Zuniga



Agate
Sydney Peel



The Book

Annie Brenkus

If you were a book
I would read and
reread you until my
fingers left you stained and worn. I
would hold your
pages, not all of
them, between two
fingers and make you
sing. I would use my nose to
tickle your spine, I would touch you
everywhere, I
would memorize every word
of you. I would fall
asleep holding you and
wake up to
find my place.

Like the moon

Annie Brenkus

I need painkillers
and I need
release.
I need you.
you're like
ice, biting,
temporary.
hot, but
not like the
sun. I need you like
the moon;
I'm tied to and
enamored with
you. the moon is
clairvoyant and
so am I
when you
talk to me without
words, with
forest eyes.
When you breathe
I can feel your vastness.
I dive into your
waves of hair
and folds
of your skin. I
sink, I drown,
I die in you, I
hurt for you.
I'm aching. I need
painkillers, I need
you.

Landon Nate Lebsack



The Endosymbiotic Theory Winona Gbedey

Finnegan, you've finally woken up! Welcome to the beautiful Ozark Mountains. Take a deep breath, soak it all in. Refreshing, isn't it? This is where I *saw* you for the first time, on our field trip for Ecological Conservation Biology. Do you remember that trip? It was the fall semester of our junior year, when the trees were finally beginning to change color. You were by that stream over there, bundled up in a sweater and a bright red scarf, watching the minnows swim by, and you had this huge, mega-watt smile on your face. Absolutely breathtaking. One look, and I knew I was a goner. You had already ensnared me in your clutches and you didn't even know I existed yet.

That's why I brought you back to this place, the place that started it all. The Ozarks will be our Alpha and Omega. It'll be our beginning and our end.

You must be wondering what we're doing here, right? I mean, we haven't talked to each other face-to-face in more than a year. Well, we're here because I've made a discovery, an amazing discovery that I've been sitting on for a while now. I wasn't sure how I wanted to bring it up, even if I *should* bring it up considering how the night is going to end, but I think I've settled on something that we'll both enjoy.

I'm going to tell you a story! Don't look so scared, it'll be fun, like we're in class or something. Just make sure you pay attention, okay?

Picture this. Billions of years ago, when the Earth was fresh and new, the first endosymbiotic event occurred. Do you remember what the endosymbiotic theory is, from your Introductory Biology class? No? That's alright, I'll explain it to you.

This theory helps explain how eukaryotes—cells with membrane-bound nuclei and organelles, yada yada yada—came to be. Those beginning days, they were scary. Real dog-eat-dog stuff. Well, one day, a bigger bacterium engulfed a smaller one, most likely with the intent of consuming it for energy—but the smaller microorganism *escaped* destruction and set up shop inside its new host. This wasn't an issue, though, because the smaller bacterium provided additional energy for its host, and the host provided protection and transportation for the smaller bacterium. Thus, symbiosis!

Over time, the two organisms became so dependent on each other, that now, one cannot survive without the other. That smaller microorganism became the mitochondria—you know, the “powerhouse of the cell”—which eventually allowed for the evolution of the modern-day eukaryote. You and me, Fin, we’re made up of those eukaryotic cells—oxygen dependent ones to be exact. But enough with the lecture, I think I’ve illustrated my point.

Why am I telling you this? Come on, Fin, you must have figured it out by now, you’re smart. Here, I’ll help you put it together. The mitochondrion was the first endosymbiotic event. The chloroplast was the second. And we—we’re the third. *This* is my discovery! *Us*. You and I are like those early microorganisms, Fin. We evolved together, intertwining our lives in such a way that our individual survival is now dependent upon one another. You brought me into your life, and now we are eternally entwined. Isn’t that beautiful? I think it is.

You still look confused, so I’m going to put it more simply: we *cannot* live without one another.

We were *good* together, Fin. *Great*. That’s why, when you decided to cut me out of your life, I floundered, like a child swept out to sea. You almost ruined me. I thought I wouldn’t survive it. I-I thought I was going to die. But then I saw you at the coffee shop. This was, what, like five weeks later, after I had finally dragged myself out of the black hole you had dropped me in. I saw you in the coffee shop, your hair an absolute mess, skin as pale as a ghost, with these really ugly oversized clothes on, and I knew that *you* were drowning too. Seeing you like that made me realize that we needed each other, just as much, maybe even more than we need the oxygen in the air or food in our bellies. We were meant to be together.

Finnegan, I’ve thought and I’ve thought and I’ve thought about this, and I’ve decided that this, right here, is the only way we can overcome the endless turmoil we’ve *both* experienced. I’ve tried reuniting our severed bond, God knows I’ve tried. I gave you everything I had to give: gifts, flowers, love letters—the whole shebang! But there’s only so much one man can do.

I think my favorite gift that I got you was the one I sent you for Valentine’s Day. I asked my friend to get it for me. Dawn—you remember her, right? The little blonde girl? You met her at the New

Year’s party last year. You don’t remember? You thought she had a crush on me . . . oh, *now* you remember.

Well, her crush sure came in handy. She works with cow hearts in one of her professor’s research labs, and I convinced her to steal one for me. I stuck an arrow through it and wrote a cute little note. You remember the note? It said, “You have my heart, forever and always.” I thought it was cute, at least. You know, because of the actual real live heart in the box? No? Never mind. I only bring it up because I thought it would have gotten a response out of you. It was so cool, but you hardly seemed to care.

And, actually, I wrote you a lot of notes . . . which you never replied to. I left them on your bed, on your pillow, where you would see them. I thought that something had happened to them, you know, since I never got anything back from you. But then I found them crumbled up in your trash. You’d thrown them out.

Did you even read them, Fin, before you threw them away? Actually, no, don’t answer that. I don’t want to know.

But what about the pictures? Do you remember those? I’d pinned up a bunch of pictures I had taken of you in your office, so that you—and everyone you worked with—could see how much you were loved and admired.

Stop looking at me like that, Fin, like I’m fucking psychotic. That shit took a lot of time, a lot of work, and I just—look, I just wish you had taken the time to appreciate it a little more, you know? I spent all night with those stupid little thumb tacks, pinning your beautiful face up on the walls. And the tape—God, don’t get me started on the tape. My fingers ached by the end of it. They ached so much, I thought they would bleed. That would have been real bad if they had started bleeding, though, because then I would have had to explain to the police what my blood was doing at a potential crime scene.

You didn’t need to call the police, Fin, you know that, right? I mean, I know I escalated things a little quickly but that’s only because you weren’t responding to me. I understand, your stupid coworkers make you call them, but it sure made things a heck of a lot harder on me. I had to figure out ways to circumvent them while they were investigating. And let me tell you, they didn’t make that easy. They were like an impenetrable fortress around you. I almost thought . . .

you didn't want my presents. My friends were convinced of it. They thought I needed help. Dawn thought I was becoming obsessed with you. Can you believe that? She thought I was turning into some kind of crazed stalker. But I wasn't. I'm not. They just . . . didn't understand.

After the whole picture fiasco, it just kept getting harder, being away from you. It was like someone had their hands double fisted around my heart, and they were squeezing with all their might. That's how I knew that I was right, that we were meant to be together. Nothing hurt worse than being away from you, Fin, *nothing*. I just wish you had realized it too. You know, before we had gotten to this point. But the past is the past, I guess. Right, Fin? That's why you locked me out and threw away the key?

Honestly, I'm surprised you even lasted this long without me. You broke up with me, let's see, one year, four months, and seven days ago—I could do hours and minutes too, but that would be a little excessive. But a year? That's a long time! Especially when you're away from the person you love, from the person you *need*. It's like a slow burn: it gets worse with each passing minute. I felt like I was going insane watching you pretend to live your life as if we had never existed.

You were pretending, weren't you, Fin? Actually, don't answer that either.

Whatever you were doing, you had everyone convinced. I don't know *who* told you to get a restraining order against me, but it was totally uncalled for. And it did a number to me social game, let me tell you. I've never heard my name in so many people's mouths before, people I didn't even know. It's amazing how one insignificant little paper can get the rumor mill chug, chug, chugging away.

I remember when I heard them for the first time, the rumors that was I stalking you. Apparently, my friends weren't the only ones who thought I was a little too in over my head. Apparently, *your* friends had the idea first, and they had told *everyone* in the school—every *fucking* person. The rumors started in the education school, because that's where you all are. Then they spread to the math majors, because your emphasis is in math. Then it spread to the physics majors, then the chemistry majors, then the biology majors, until it finally reached me. Shortly after that, they infiltrated the entire

school, like an infection. You see, I traced it out when I found out, because I wanted to know. . . I *needed* to know if you had started the rumors. I needed to know if I could still trust you, Fin.

Thankfully, it wasn't you, it was just one of your stupid friends. I don't know if I would have been able to handle it if it had been you.

And just to set the record straight, I only started following you when you started dating that freak with Justin Bieber hair. You don't believe me, right? You thought I was always right there, watching in the bushes. I wasn't. I was trying to pretend too. I was trying to create some semblance of a life. But that didn't work out. Obviously.

I failed out last semester. Did you know that? Of course you did, everyone knows. I think *that* is an excellent example of how much I sucked at pretending. School was my *shit* growing up. I was *good* at school. And then, suddenly, I wasn't anymore. I just, I couldn't think, knowing you were with him—knowing you weren't with *me*. I'd look at an assignment or a test, and the words would just swim together. All I could think was, "WhatisFinnegandoing, whatisFinnegandoing, whatisFinnegandoing?" Over and over again, on an endless loop. That's when I realized that getting you back had to be my number one priority. I was falling apart without you. You were in my brain, Fin. I could hear your voice, I could see your face, I could touch you and taste you, and you weren't even there. Somehow, I was back in that black hole. And it was a scary place, Fin, fucking terrifying.

You must have felt it, how wrong it was, when you started dating him. He didn't fit with you like I did. He hadn't forged an *evolutionary* relationship like I had. *He* was the parasite, not me.

What was his name again? Come on, baby, stop crying. Tell me his name. Huh? Speak up. There you go. His name was Tony? Yeah, he seemed like a Tony. Horny little guy, wasn't he? Like, I know animals are programmed to survive long enough to reproduce, to maximize offspring output and all that, but *he* was ridiculous. *Our* relationship had more substance than *that*. You should be thankful that I got rid of him for you.

But how do you repay me, for everything I've done for you, for everything I've done for *us*? You called the cops—*again*!

I couldn't believe it. Killing Tony was the ultimate demonstration

of my love and dedication to you, and you turn it into a homicide investigation. You should have been *thankful*.

When that happened, I knew you were too far gone. You decided that you could live without me, but you decided wrong. What is a eukaryote without its mitochondria? Dead. That's right—without the very thing it tried to consume and discard in the first place, the same cell that eventually evolved into me, and you, and your beloved Tony cannot survive. Its life grinds to a screeching halt. It ceases to exist. I think it's kind of poetic, really. The thing it tried to kill ends up taking it down with it. Ha! Of course, that means I'm screwed too—because just like how the host cannot live without its mitochondria, the mitochondria can't live without its host.

What I've been describing is not a parasitic relationship, Fin. *I* am not a parasite. *Giardia* is a parasite. Malaria—*that* is caused by a parasite. Parasites leach off their hosts; they kill them slowly, from the inside out. I-I'm the mitochondria to your eukaryote. I'm the unexpected little thing that made your life infinitely better. I'm like the glasses to your bleary eyes, the toaster to your untoasted bread. You didn't realize you needed me until I was there, just like I didn't realize I needed you until you were gone. I am *not* a parasite. You and me, Fin, we were *meant* to be together.

You're everything to me. My life ended the day you told me to leave. *You* ended my life that day. You've killed me a little more every day since.

You haven't experienced the same pain that I have, and that's okay. It doesn't mean I'm wrong. The cells that make up you and me, they have mechanisms to generate energy when they are in emergency situations. Their death isn't as rapid and all-consuming as the mitochondria's death. But the energy they can make on their own, it isn't enough to sustain them forever. Eventually, they, too, succumb. That's why we're here, Fin. I don't want you to suffer like I did, so I'm giving you one last kindness before I go. This life isn't worth living. If I had the option to end my life before this year began, I would have taken it, gladly. I'm giving you what *I* would have wanted.

When you die, your spirit will transcend the planes of this reality. Your blood will water the forest floor. The insects will feast on your body. You will become one with the planet that helped spawn you, and I will follow close behind. Even though we couldn't be together

in life, we'll be reunited in death. This is our fate.

Oh, don't look so scared, baby. See this? This, right here, is what I'll be using to do the deed. I made sure to sharpen it before I brought you up here. I mean, imagine trying to stab something with a dull knife. That's absolutely grotesque. Now, before you start crying again, I want you to picture something, something that will hopefully make you feel a little bit better. Imagine being stabbed through the heart: for one moment, maybe two, it'll be one of the most excruciating things you'll ever experience—and then, that pain you feel, it'll be gone. You see, I've seen people die—Tony, for example—and they look so peaceful in those last few seconds. Our bodies don't *want* us to suffer, not if they can help it. So yeah, it'll hurt—it'll hurt a lot—but then that pain will be over. In the end, you'll feel nothing but calm and peace. I think that's kind of beautiful too.

Alright, I've talked long enough. I think it's time we bring this little tragedy to a close, don't you think? I can hear the police sirens in the distance, which means we have at least a good thirty minutes before they find us.

Please excuse me if I don't execute this with the most finesse. I wanted this to be special, you know, but you've gone and screwed it up with your stupid homicide investigation. So I guess you're just going to have to settle for this: I love you, Finnegan, more than I've loved anything in my entire life. You've been awful to me, but, you know what, I forgive you. What matters is that we're here together now. People always say that they would die for the person they love, kill for them. Well, I've *already* killed for you, and I'm about to die for you too. I'm *that* dedicated. I've loved you to the point of insanity. And even though we won't go down in evolutionary history like the mitochondria or the chloroplast did, I'll be damned if they say we were anything less than extraordinary.

So buck up. Smile. Relax. I'll see you on the other side.

Masquerade

Jessica Tran



Jellys

Nicole Bosley



Medicate

Eliza Calvo

Inject passion into your delicate vein.
Swallow a pill of liberation.
Drink a vial of traditional notations.
Once you feel it come up,
let the music spill all over the soil
and feed your demons.

Juturna

Mackenzie Austin



Wonderland

Madison Hart

She just, sort of, ended up here--it was not her intention
In a place she had only ever heard them mention, yet

Not blind was she to the tumbling pink haze which stunk of lovers'
rose
Dimples in the curve of the fishing bank you could have taken me
Soft patch of bushy grass targeting the bed where you had.

Inhale the pink fog it makes you feel better
Makes it feel like it isn't that bad for you, she knew

That if you linger too long, the air acts like poison—how long,
though, none know
That milky smog billows toward her face— feel the hand across
your chin
She does not run to leave, even when she starts to feel it within.

Weak in the knees and all confused breath begins to falter
But euphoria then engulfs the body causing

Her fingers to tingle as she follows the haze and trees of dense oak
forest
Hands go numb, touching the bark as she follows the shadow of
tall familiar figure
Seeing the exit melt away behind her, she wants out.

But the part of her that keeps her here—my aching heart be still
Tunnel vision as she backs away maybe wondering if she will.

Barbie's Indulgence

Merissa De Falcis

Recipient of the Helen Hamilton Award



venom and vanilla

Haley Decker

early morning sunlight pours
through my window, interrupted
by slats of shutters,
shadows scattered across my
bare body

more parts thunderstorm
than organs
I am powerful and beautiful
and wild.
this skin contains a lifetime
with scars to show for childhood adventures
and clumsiness I never outgrew

this proud collection of calluses
from years of dancing
on wooden floors,
the splinter in my foot
that I never could get out;
ankles that lifted me to the
lips of past lovers

elbows spent propped on mattresses
fingers familiar with turning pages
wrists practiced in filling notebooks
with messy handwriting
and messy thoughts

dark pupils thirsty
for new words, countries, people
to drink in; surrounded by
pale gold flecks peeking out from
ice chip eyes

hurricane hair kissed by summer
draped over shoulder blades
tousled by nervous habit
tucked behind ears
pulled between bed sheets

Haley Decker

I am equally soft and steely
my veins run venom and vanilla
steadfast ribs and rosebud nipples
petal lips and a mouthful of matchsticks
itching to spark a wildfire

velvet neck atop shoulders
that can carry any burden
a throat full of
laughter and songs
and “fuck you’s” and “watch me’s”

erupt in goosebumps at the lightest touch,
in rage at unwanted ones; I am to be given,
not taken—this black lace is not for you
I am utterly complete
yet with so much room for another

I tap a finger—nail
bitten short—to the center of my lips,
tracing the valley between my breasts
mapping each breath
unzipping my ribcage

my heart beats there,
powerful and beautiful
and wild.

continued, stanza break

Modern American

Kyler Waldron



Urban Cowboy

Nate Lebsack



Tainted Seeds

Darlene Ninziza

My sapped mother aches,
her chest emptied and heavy,
but she has given her fifth husband
a tenth, a new born baby. Lying
cheek to cheek with the twins and
Ngenzi, my one-month old baby.

My mother sweats her tears and fears,
traded her tender heart for me.
The fifth intoxicates the room
at his clumsy return,
A daily grumbling sunrise. I'm chocked
by my awakened nightmare.

He strikes my mother and
falls into the wall, exploding
in a laughter filled groan.
The alcohol mocks him like a victor
in a rivalry and my son begins to moan.
A familiar demanding request.

Assuming it is his father,
Only this month his father's mischief awoke.
I was to love a man like my father.
A rainbow to omit our storms,
But he is not like my father. My mother's first.

Father, as I remember,
Was like grandfather.
My grandmother's first.
But where will I end up?
If this is my beginning.

License and Registration

Lillian Young



Star Spangled in Times Square

Piper Gourley



The Pebble Feeling

Katrina Marler

I stood frozen in the middle of probably the smallest mall in America in Logan, Utah, looking like an idiot, clutching a plastic bag with a lumpy sweater inside. People whizzed past me close enough to hit my purse and make it bounce back off my thigh repeatedly. I stood facing the people-traffic, with everyone having to part to go around me—couples letting go of each other's hands, strollers veered around me like a pebble in a stream. All of this made me feel, at once, insignificant and like a giant nuisance. I call this the pebble feeling: feeling large enough to be an annoyance but small enough to flick away. Whenever I panicked, I felt the pebble feeling and let everything slip by me in a current I didn't feel a part of.

I stood on endless white tiles, disrupting shopper's paths for going on 7 minutes, which feels much, much longer than it sounds. They all gave an accusatory "Excuse me!" that sounded eerily similar to when someone prompts a kid to say thank you by saying it themselves and giving you a *now it's your turn* look. "It's...I'm sorry, I'm thinking." I mumbled at two tweens, a couple of Eminem clones who looked like skateboarders that never learned how to ride. They were out of earshot, couldn't hear my mumbles; but I was fixated on their presence, and oddly aware of mine. I was suddenly seized by the idea that my frozen body freaked them out, that I was standing in the middle of a crowded mall, holding onto my bag like I had a secret. Like I had a purse full of drugs or gold, or I don't know. I panicked and yelled their way, "I don't do drugs! I'm trying to buy a sweater!" The two black hoodies and low-rise jeans turned around at my absurd comment.

"Psycho." One of them told the other.

"Shit." I said to myself. I needed to get it together and get out of everyone's way—I was annoying everybody. Were they looking at me? Maybe no one was paying attention. Or probably everyone was paying attention.

This is what anxiety does.

I turned around quickly and took three steps forward, then stopped again. Someone ran into the back of me with an *oof*, and I

Katrina Marler

waved at them to go around me like I was stopped at a green light with smoke coming out of my engine. I was trying to decide if I should return the lumpy sweater back to the store *again*. Within an hour I had gone inside a little boutique in this tiny mall and impulse-bought a sweater. I had broken up with my first boyfriend, Jordan, the day before and a spontaneous purchase of the \$37 black and white sweater was the sad and weird aftermath. I immediately returned it.

"Was it worn or damaged?" The clerk smacked her gum and smirked. Her hair was severely bleached, and her peachy-pink acrylic nails looked sharp and pointy at the ends. I gave her a look that said *real fucking funny, lady*. "Sorry, we're required to say that," she said, squinting her eyes and smacking her gum. She hadn't even given me back my credit card yet before I asked for a refund. I placed the card back in my wallet and sulked out of the store, embarrassed and a little depressed. Did I want the sweater or not? When it came time to make insignificant decisions, you can count on me to be paralyzed with fear over it. More than once have the absence of fluorescent lights in the grocery stores reminded me I've overstayed my welcome deciding between two boxes of cereal or brands of frozen vegetables. I've been caught sitting on the floor in Target holding up two eerily similar shirts comparatively, my eyes bouncing back and forth from one to the other until my arms were numb and bloodless.

Having just turned 19 and beginning to grasp onto something kind of resembling adulthood—my second year into college, an apartment, a job, a boyfriend—I had begun to realize my anxiety was beginning to trickle into more spaces in my life besides the gut-clenching decision that comes with consumerism. When Jordan and I first got together we sat on his dingy, cream-colored couch in his apartment that was up the hill and to the left of mine. Jordan was wrong for me in so many ways, he was too loud, too assertive. I was too young for him and too sensitive. He wore pants too tight for my liking and it creeped me out that he *literally* slept with one eye open due to an accident when he was younger involving something sharp and his left eyelid. I would often stay awake long after him and watch his snores that made his eyelid twitch, and I didn't find it cute or funny or endearing. I knew I didn't love him. He wasn't scared of my father and I thought he should be, and I didn't like to hold his hand in public. There was a lot working against us.

Credits were rolling on his ancient T.V. after one of our first nights “in” together and I was wringing my hands together in a fret. “Jordan.” I began without looking at him. “I have something to tell you.” He slid his arm out from behind my back and turned a little my way—a signal that he was ready to listen. “I have anxiety.” I confessed to him. He started laughing. I was confused. He called me cute. Then he said, “That is very sweet for you to tell me, but I’ve already gathered that.” It felt like a verbal pat on the head. So, I wasn’t hiding it as well as I’d thought. Still, I felt I needed to let him know these things if we were starting a relationship together. I didn’t want him to be blindsided by anything, and, most of all, I felt this constant need to be completely honest with everyone around me. That’s part of the anxiety, though: a painstakingly, ultra-revealing, honesty I *needed* to unleash on people. I often felt this was the best way to diffuse or prevent any conflict that may or may not occur at any time between any person I may or may not know. It’s too bad I wasn’t Catholic because I’d occupy those confession booths for hours—a poster child for sharing my thoughts and feelings. I’ve been this way since I was young—obsessively confessing or apologizing for silly, unimportant things to adults and teachers, like throwing away food I didn’t eat all the way at lunch or forgetting my student ID number in elementary school (35610). The adult in question would always look at me in a similar curious and bewildered way, giving me that same pebble feeling I knew so well, peering down at the little girl pulling their sleeve apologizing for throwing away the crust on her sandwich, looking at me as if to say: *I do not actually give a shit, little child*. And they would laugh, too.

On top of my constant fear of disruption and conflict, decision making and needing to be good, it was in those moments that I learned I feared I annoyed everyone with my fears.

Maybe that’s why it worked so well when I found Michael a year and a half later. It felt instant with him; it clicked like Lego pieces. My mom loved that way he would put his hand on my thigh and smile at me when I got especially tense. Michael didn’t mind me taking my time in stores and he was nervous to meet my dad. He had kind eyes that closed all the way, and he was just so damn patient. Relentlessly patient. He was as patient as I was anxious. At our wedding, the only thing I was nervous about was if my brothers were going to fight at my reception, or if I was going

to say something weird during the ring exchange; I was never nervous about us, about choosing him. It was the biggest and easiest decision I’ve ever made.

At the mall, I gave myself a little time-out to think. I sat on a bench across from the little boutique after returning the sweater, the *first time*, and I felt indignant. I felt like saying to myself what my mom used to say when she was on the phone with a credit card company, “I’ve had it up to here!” and “cut the bullshit!” (A phrase that makes so much more sense as an adult—as a child my imagination ran with an idea that ended in a very weird activity and a dirty pair of scissors.)

I sprang from the bench. I was angry at myself for putting too much thought into my one and only impulse-buying experience, and I marched myself into the store again with the same forced fervor and confidence of a Monday morning. With the mantra of *cut the bullshit!* running through my head, I placed my credit card on the acrylic counter.

“I’m gonna do it.” I said to the clerk. “I’m gonna buy the sweater.”

“Are you sure? Because we close in like, half an hour.” I nodded but she gave me an expressive look with her fake eyelashes that said she wasn’t convinced. I sensed her wariness. The dead could sense her wariness. She swiped my card for the third time that day.

“I’m not great with decisions. I get nervous.” I told her wryly—an effort to combat the suspicion in her voice. She handed me my lumpy sweater and told me she’d see me around. I grimaced and rolled the comment over in my head as I walked out and took three steps into the people-traffic and stopped like the insignificant, giant nuisance of a pebble I was.

Which brought me here: an afternoon of self-flogging in front of JC Penny with everyone running into me, frozen in place, clutching my twice-bought sweater and incoherently yelling at 12-year-old 8 Mile wannabe thugs about drugs. (A waste of time, really; they probably knew more about them than I did.)

The Pebble Feeling

With each bounce of my purse, I thought about the line of indecisive women in my family and wondered if it was nature or nurture that made us this way. Am I biologically inclined to ricochet between knowing and wondering? Was I born with the fear or regret that nearly murders my ability to make decisions, or did I learn this? And who the hell from?

I thought about the medications we all took at different times in our lives to change our brain chemistry; I thought about the breathing exercises taught by well-meaning but patronizing therapists to try and make our sweater-buying experiences a little smoother, restaurant menus a little less daunting. I thought of myself tugging hundreds of adults' sleeves only to receive a laugh I didn't understand; and I thought of the pebble feeling. Anxiety, whether it was inherited or learned, was something I, as well as modern medicine, would come to understand very well, and somehow not at all.

~

I cleaned out my closet the other day and pulled out that lumpy sweater. It's been over two years since I've worn it, and two more since I bought it (and returned it and bought it again). I still don't make quick decisions. My cursor still hovers over submission buttons and I still blurt out thoughts and confessions that confuse people. I ask Michael if he's upset with me even at the most pleasant of times, and he puts a hand on my knee and smiles. I shut down grocery stores, clothing stores, and picking my current apartment was a month-long affair. (Third floor or first? THIRD FLOOR OR FIRST?) But, as I sat with my sister-in-law, who confessed to me that she was worried about her 6-year-old daughter's anxiety, I told her, "She will be okay." She contested and spoke about the difficulty of the "bad days" they had. I didn't have a solution for those. "There are positives, you know. She will be caring and compassionate. She'll care about doing something right, and being honest, and she'll care if other people think she's good. There are worse things to be."

Sunset at TCU

Hau Ha



Looking Up

Merissa Merrill



Loss

Michael Lostritto

The restaurant bustled around us at the height of its dinner rush. Chatter filled the air, punctuated with the clatter of forks and spoons against plates. The occasional grating screech of a knife cutting through to the plate broke above the ocean of sounds. The air was filled with the delicious flavors floating from the kitchen. Waiters and waitresses darted here and there between tables, carrying their trays full of food and drink with a balance Thaddeus knew he would never be able to maintain.

He sat in a pocket of silence amongst the bustle. In his hand, a breadstick. He felt he should eat it, but didn't feel as though he could bring it to his mouth. Across from him, Naomi stared down at her empty hands that sat on the table top, motionless. They were very pretty hands. Dainty, but strong. Thaddeus wasn't sure how the two existed together, but somehow that's what her hands conveyed.

His eyes traveled up from her hands to her face. It was blank. That was concerning to him. The one thing he had always been able to count on was her emotions showing. Now they were gone, frozen inside of her. And he had been the one to freeze them. He hadn't done it on purpose. The call had come in last night. He still didn't know what to do.

"Are you going to accept it?"

The sound of her voice startled him. Low and barely perceptible over the sound of the laughing family one table over, she sounded distant. Like she was speaking from across an expanse of water. Shouting out to him over the table, in a whisper.

He shrugged, not sure what to say but needing to say something. "I wanted to talk to you first." She glanced up at him, their eyes met. He smiled at the contact, hoping for something in return, but her face remained empty. For one of the most emotionally available people he knew, she still had the ability to shut herself off completely. It worried him.

"What is there to talk about?" Her words came out short and sharp, as if she was biting her sentence off as soon as it left her mouth.

Michael Lostritto

Thaddeus gestured vaguely, almost a shrug but he didn't want to keep shrugging. He didn't know what to say. He wasn't supposed to be leading this. She knew how people worked, how words worked. She was supposed to be helping him, not shutting him down.

"I-I want to..." He stopped, not wanting to say the wrong thing. "I want to know what you think."

Naomi smiled, and for a second he was hopeful, but it wasn't a happy smile.

"You already know what I think," she said, her voice still low, but softer now. "And I know what you think."

He could feel them. The tears were beginning to well behind his eyes. Not now, not in the middle of the restaurant. He sucked in a deep breath and blinked a few times. It worked. How long would it last though?

"Okay, sure," He said, trying to force a joyful smile and failing. "But can't you just say it? So I know for sure that I know."

One of the waiters stopped beside their table. He set his large tray down on one of those stools and began to slide plates onto the table. The pasta sent up warm, wonderful scents, and Naomi began to fuss with her napkin and utensils. Thaddeus couldn't take his eyes from her. The waiter asked if they needed anything else. Thaddeus barely heard him. She flashed a quick smile and shook her head no. The man left. Her eyes flashed between his face and the food. She didn't want this conversation. Thaddeus knew that. But they needed it. He needed it. It had been three years now. Didn't that at least deserve something?

She decided and took a bite, her eyes staying focused on her plate. He sighed and picked up his fork, pushing it into the angel hair pasta and slowly spinning it. The fork was full and he kept spinning. Now it was too full, so he pulled it out and began again. This time he stopped at a manageable bite and brought it to his mouth. The flavors filled his nose, and then his mouth, just as he knew they would. And just as he had thought, it did not bring the joy he had hoped for.

"I think you should take it."

Again, her words were unexpected. Thaddeus leaned forward an inch. "What was that?"

Naomi rolled her eyes at him, as if he should always hear what she said no matter how she said it. "You heard me. I think you should take it."

"But the distance. And you said you'd never do..."

His words trailed away as she raised an eyebrow at him. The gesture was filled with a loving mockery that only made him ache more.

She leaned forward, reaching across the table to put her hand on his. "That's why I said there wasn't anything to talk about."

Thaddeus held her hand as though it were his only chance of survival. The warmth of her skin against his brought back the feeling of closeness that he didn't want to survive without.

She pulled his hand up to her lips and kissed it softly. There was a smile there, a happy smile that did not reflect the pain in her eyes.

"You could never say goodbye, Thaddeus," she said, looking through his eyes to his soul. "Now you don't have to."

His hand remained in hers for a moment far too brief. Then she laid it down gently and picked her fork back up.

"Now," she said, and he thought he heard a slight catch in her throat. "Let's have a nice dinner. Okay?"

The false smile was still painted on as she began to eat. That smile burned through him as the pocket around him began to cave inward. The restaurant crashed around him and the noise filled his head. Trying to drown out the feeling of relief that was overwhelming him. She knew him so well. She knew exactly what he needed. And now, because of that, he lost her.

Thaddeus picked up his fork as a single tear slipped out and slid down his cheek. He took a bite, brushing the tear away as he did so, and smiled.

You're not weird, your brain just works differently than everyone else.

Madison Palica



Commonly Uncommon

Angela Zuniga



Surface Level

Nicole McGregor



Market Day

Erin Ratigan

Flavia's small son was walking beside her, his small, soft fingers intertwined in hers as he attempted to steady himself. Walking was new to him and his tread was light, like that of a fawn – shaky and not without caution. Today, however, his trepidation was her comfort, for the market was crowded with men, women, and children, all of whom appeared struck with a sense of urgency. They walked swiftly and carelessly. Flavia feared for her son's safety should he stray from her side.

The sudden smog that settled over the city added to her anxiety. The main square, along with its surrounding huts, was usually a sunny oasis at the center of the city. Today, it was shrouded in darkness – as though night had come early.

The crowd was filled with discussion, the subjects of whom she could not decipher. Every year, the harvest brought merchants to town, and the city was rife with excitement, the locals taking the day to walk about the square at their leisure. In that sense, today was very similar, despite the unseasonable heat.

As Flavia led her son toward a nearby crockery stall, a conversation two stalls down was becoming heated. The merchant farmer was refusing to sell to a gypsy, and was throwing olives and shouting. Flavia did not intervene, and watched as the gypsy returned the merchant's screams, his face turning slowly red – a near shade to that of the merchant's radishes.

Elsewhere in the square, a cart hauling lumber had overturned, the driver catching his wheel in an unsightly crack in the pavement. The lumber tumbled to the ground with a loud bang. Flavia jumped at the sound, but paid it no heed as she reached into her drawstring bag to retrieve a coin. She hoped she had enough for a full sack of grain – perhaps she could haggle?

Suddenly, the ground lurched beneath her, knocking baskets of figs and pomegranates from the neighboring stalls. The tremor flung her boy to the ground, leaving a long gash below his knee as he hit the pavement. All around them the crowd responded with cries of surprise, clustering in groups as they attempted to find their partners. Flavia heard nothing other than the cry of her son, whose focus was centered on his injury.

Erin Ratigan

Flavia knelt beside him and tended his wounds while her fellow villagers began running and screaming about her. Someone ran into her suddenly, tossing the bag from her hand and leaving its contents strewn across the cobblestones.

It was then she saw it: a ball of fire, churning from the top of a not-so-distant mountain – the one which, before now, had seemed so distant and peaceful. She picked up her son and joined the fray, running, clawing, fighting her way out of the town square. A scent of molten, burning mortality swiftly approaching.

Her satchel remained lying on the ashy cobblestone street behind her. Flavia did not notice.

Figuier, Haiti
Lexie Bryant



Hurricane

Angela Zuniga



Let Freedom Ring

Jessica Dawson



Afraid of the Dark

Taylor Kerr

I'm afraid of the dark so I put stars on my ceiling,
And I watch their stillness above my bed
And every other's corner is slightly peeling,
And the backdrop of black void forces feelings
Of unknown emptiness about what lies ahead,

I've always preferred nighttime outside,
There is serenity in the open, contrasting sky
And the shine of the stars above is purified,
But with only plastic stars to illuminate inside
The hollow shadows of a dark room terrify,

There is no twinkle, no sparkle, no shine;
But the stars of the universe seem to repel
The dangers of thought with their beautiful design.
As I lay in bed, the plastic stars send shivers up my spine
Darkness consumes a human mind so well.

**You're not weird, your brain just
works differently than everyone else.**

Madison Palica



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– Arthur Rimbaud