

TCU Journal of the Arts

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Fall 2016 , Volume 12.1

# eleven4oseven

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# eleven40seven

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**VOLUME 12.1**

**FALL 2016**

**“WE HAVE TO DARE  
TO BE OURSELVES,  
HOWEVER  
FRIGHTENING OR  
STRANGE THAT SELF  
MAY PROVE TO BE.”**

– May Sarton

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# EDITOR'S NOTE

One of my favorite poems, "Black Art" by Amari Baraka, begins: "Poems are bullshit unless they are / teeth or trees or lemons piled / on a step." Although simple, this line speaks volumes about Baraka's idea of the purpose of art: to be bold, honest, and make a statement. Good art stands up, proud and with dignity, and makes an unapologetic declaration. Without this, even the most aesthetically pleasing piece means nothing.

This is why so many renowned artists have come to prominence during times of social change and upheaval—John Milton, Langston Hughes, and Toni Morrison being just a few. Their motivations came not only from desire, but also from necessity. They felt a strong inclination to comment on their environment and used the creative process to do so. Art has consistently provided a platform for expressing the fears in our world and advocating for progression.

Of the four semesters I've worked on staff, I have never seen as much bold, statement-making artwork as I did this semester. I think this phenomenon is directly correlated to current events; most of my generation cannot remember a time with more social and political turbulence. Hostility and divisiveness seem to affect every aspect of our campus, our country, and our world. We, as artists, are compelled to comment.

I hope you see the statements being made in this issue. I hope you see art that is audacious and honest—art that makes brash declarations of love and desire, comments on the treatment of refugees and African-Americans, and critiques religious traditions and gender stereotypes. I hope you see art that feels as though it must speak, and I hope you feel welcome to join in this dialogue with us.

On behalf of the Fall 2016 staff, I am proud to present volume 12.1 of eleven40seven.

Karlyn Tunnell

Editor-in-Chief, Fall 2016

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# Self Portrait

Emma Holland

*Recipient of Helen Hamilton Award*



## Coffee

### Lutie Rodriguez

I want to be your morning coffee,

The first thing to touch your lips after you wake up,

The substance that warms and fuels your body and soul.

I too want to make your heart beat fast,

and your mind restless when you lay down to go to sleep.

## Protector

### Maggie Bush

*My feet shuffle down the long hallway on the second story. I'm barefoot, it's been so nice outside today, I went on a walk through the woods out back right when I got home. I was barefoot, hoping to feel the earth beneath my feet. I wanted to feel connected to something bigger than myself for a little while. The path was smooth and soft from people walking it so often; I easily walked a mile into the forest without having to watch where I placed my feet. The trees enveloped me like a mother would take her child in to protect him. I went in a small loop and made my way back to the house I rented with my wife, Angela.*

*The floor inside felt hard and cold on my naked soles, my feet are stained brown from my time outside. I came inside to clean them off, walking up the stairs I began to hear the noise. This old house creaks with each step I take, it's as if I'm listening to it breathe. The feeling of the calm before the storm settles over me. The air feels heavy, like the static is building up, waiting for whatever is behind the door to make it crack open and change everything. I continue down the hallway, do I even want to open the door?*

We're sitting in a well-lit room, devoid of any color. Neutrals are what this hospital is fond of. Lots of tans and whites. It's enough to drive you crazy.

"Why did you move the last time? Why not just stay where you were? It was remote enough." Doctor Geisendorff asks me. He's a small man, wearing a white lab coat and a neutral colored shirt, tie, and pants. He seems to be trying to match the theme of the hospital. As if he can meld into the walls around him.

I look down at my hands while I answer him. "We decided to move to Oregon from L.A. because Angela's doctor thought it would help with her depression if we got away from the stress and busyness of life in that city. She said that 'with the constant movement of life, we needed to slow down and focus on what we once had.' Moving to a place surrounded by trees and animals was something we had always wanted. We wanted to feel the fresh air deep in our souls. I was hoping that it would change us as a couple. But I think this was wishful thinking. The truck broke down twice on our way, we kept getting lost on little back roads, and every freaking small town was a speed trap. We started our new life pissed off and with six speeding tickets."

"So it started out bad to say the least. Did it get any better?" He asks after a pause to take a few notes.



I finally look up at him, straight in his deep brown eyes. “Well it helped that Angela and I detached ourselves from our previous life and started fresh in Oregon. The first week into our new life was easier than the move itself, we made love like we did back in college. That’s when we first met. Life was easier that first week, reminding us why we put ourselves through everything we had been through. It was as if the move was difficult to show us what we were in Los Angeles, and that first week showed us the potential we were capable of.”

“That’s pretty deep,” He says with a little smile.

“I guess so,” I said with a somber expression. “After that though, our life slowly began to slip back into the decay of our previous one. I’ll always remember each first week as a streak of gold among our usual gray life. I began to work again. The office consumed the majority of my time and thought. She stayed at home to focus on her health. The boredom must have set in again. The signs of its return were small and misplaced. Little things, like the obsessive cleanliness of our house, everything being organized perfectly, and the lingering scent of Old Spice and someone else’s shaving blade in our bathroom.”

“So you did know about the other men?” Doc asks, leaning forward to take notes.

“Yes, it’s why we started going to the psychiatrist again. The last one said she had ‘dissociative personality disorder combined with severe depression.’ I didn’t really understand what that meant until she said multiple personalities. This new Doc prescribed medicine to numb her; they made her docile and mellow. To me this was just her way of covering up the issue with a Band-Aid. She didn’t give us any type of solution to the problem, no way to fix her. Medicine just covered up her other self, stuffing into the furthest recesses of her mind; it didn’t take the other self away.”

“The medicine didn’t help then? You didn’t see any changes?” He asks, taking more and more notes.

“She used to say, ‘I can feel myself slipping away, Clay,’” after she took a dose, as her eyes slowly lost focus on the present.” I said, turning in my chair to look at the ceiling.

He asks, “So you think they just numbed her, that’s not unusual. Did you try to help her? Get her out of the house? Maybe go on walks more?”

“A little at first but then I started to focus on my work. The medicine was too much to keep up with. I left it to her to take the pills everyday and visit her appointments every week. We had money, she could’ve gone shopping or anything she wanted. I thought that was enough.”

~~~

A couple days later I’m back in that room with him sitting across from me. I’m beginning to realize that most of his clothes are the exact same, monotonous. He starts off with “Tell me about why you kept moving.”

I look down at my hands again. “I just wanted to be happy like we used to be. When we first met it was so easy. Angela was so caring and beautiful. I always would tell her that she had this light inside her, my guiding light. It wasn’t like the sun, that’s what some people would say. But you can’t look directly at the sun; no, to me she was just my light. A beautiful light that you’d want to watch all day.

In college she was always so sure of herself and confident. From the first moment I saw her I knew I wanted to take care of her and protect her—protect that light inside her. We were married after only dating for a few months. People said we were crazy to rush into it but we both just knew it was meant to be. I tried to provide for her and I did, financially, but I never could emotionally. She saw other men after a year or so. I pretended not to know. I just wanted to protect her and make her happy. We moved each time it happened and each time was wonderful, we found ourselves again and again. Then I’d start focusing on other things and lose her. But I had hope that each time would be the one we needed.”

“So why keep helping her?” He asks.

“Because she is my wife. I have to take care of her; I always have to take care of her. I thought that every new chance we had would be different. She was sick; I was the only one who could really help her through everything. I took care of her, I protected her, just like I said I would.”

*I slowly open the door. The crunching is loud in my ears. My thoughts are consumed with where this noise is coming from. Angela is kneeling on the floor. The blood is sprayed everywhere. Her legs are covered in it up to her knees. The hem of her lingerie is beginning to soak it up. It’s climbing up her body, almost enveloping her entire self. I stand there in shock. Through the mutilation I recognize the man. He’s the neighbor; the smell of Old Spice hits me and rocks me to my core, his face makes it all too real.*

*This memory is tainted by red. Everything else is bleached of other colors. The only thing I can see is the red. Red over our bed, running down the legs, streaked on the walls, on the dresser, on my wife. I can only see red when I dream. It's blinding. It takes away from everything else. I stop seeing his face, I block out the memories from the barbeque we went to a few days ago, block out waving to him when I took out the trash or got the mail. I block out the way he always had a good joke on hand. All I see now is the red. Just the red.*

*I stand there whispering, "This can't be real. This can't be real. This can't be real." My body feels disconnected from reality. She continues to stab the body. The body, that's how I have to start referring to him. Not as the husband with two kids. Not as the man who's wife is going to miss him. Not as my friend. I stop thinking about his family or life. I can't. If I do, I'll lose myself and I have to be here for her. Now he's just the body. Reality comes crashing back down around me. All I can think is that this can't be happening, not again.*

*The grass under my feet is cold and wet. Luckily the sprinkler had turned on earlier today. I remember looking up at the stars, I saw them twinkling from millions of miles away. I read somewhere once that it takes thousands of years for their light to reach us and by the time they did, they could have already burned up. So I stood there, looking at more death while they too were taking our secrets with them to the grave.*

*I scoop up another shovel full of soft, wet dirt and throw it on my ever-growing pile. Angela is inside; she's already starting to pack, it shouldn't take too long we've gotten pretty good at it. The hole is big enough now. I roll the body into it and begin the arduous task of filling it all back in. In the morning, I'll come out and put fresh grass over the dirt pile. Maybe I'll plant a couple of flowers in memory. I could do that it wouldn't be that obvious. I just can't have it look like something was dug here in case the next tenants move in quickly.*

"You buried the body for your wife then packed up the house again and tried to move across the country?" He asks even though he already knows the answer.

"Yes we did." I say a little annoyed.

"Why do you think you got caught this time? She had killed before and you had covered it up each time. What made this last time so different?" He asks as he sets down his pen. I've never been asked this before. Not even when we were arrested.

"We knew him and his family. They were too close to us. Before we had lived in bigger cities so the men usually didn't know us. That time, he was just too close." I answer after a few seconds.

"Do you regret what you did?" He asks while leaning forward to put his elbows on the table and his hand on his knuckles.

"Not really, my wife is sick. I made a vow to protect her until death. I did try to change what would happen each time we moved but it always ended the same. I don't think that we could have done anything differently." I say quietly.

"Are you glad you got caught?" He asks almost in a whisper.

"Yes but not that Angela had to suffer too. I should've taken better care of her. It was my mistake. I shouldn't have moved us there to begin with." I say getting louder, as I realize that I'm the reason we got caught. "It should've just been me! I'm the responsible one, she was just sick, she couldn't stop herself."

"Ah, but you're sick too." He says leaning away from me, back into his chair. "You helped your wife cover up eight murders and you don't feel any remorse, just anger. When the cops found you both, you killed her so that she wouldn't be arrested too. Do you think you protected her then?" He studies me with those eyes that see every thought I have.

I sit there for several heartbeats. Remembering. Remembering the desperate look in her eyes as the lights flashed around us. She whispered that she was sorry and I knew what I had to do. Her blood was all around me. I was swimming in it for what seemed like a lifetime. Then I was being dragged away and to this dull hospital. There's no red here. Nothing to remind me of what happened. Nothing to remind me of Angela.

"Yes, I did protect her."



## Portrait of Femininity

Olivia Nucci



## Portrait of Masculinity

Olivia Nucci



# Girl Culture?

## Paige Poe

I pinky-promise  
I will punctuate my sentences  
with “like” forever, and I will  
never stop up-talking.  
My thoughts do not  
soak like old paintings  
hung in my mind’s palace,  
some stuffy intellectual ideal  
imposed on writers  
to swell their egos.  
I will proudly admit,  
I think in pink  
sparkly gel pens on colored paper,  
doodles of hearts and flowers,  
memories like bright stickers, shiny  
and eye catching,  
and my mind is always scribbling  
like age 13 with baby angst and  
diary locks,  
every “I” sporting a heart, sentences  
using “like” as punctuation,  
words like Grrrl, rad, bitch,  
whatever scrawled in the margins.  
So yeah, when I consider theories  
and literature and complex ideas,  
they show up in glitter ink.  
Is that a problem?

# Spuds

## Megan Thielman

Two old potatoes sit in a plastic bag  
That’s ripped down the middle,  
As if opened in a rush.  
My roommate bought them  
A month ago maybe? Three weeks at least.  
As they sat there out of sight—  
The bag thoughtlessly thrown  
Into a stainless steel strainer on top of the fridge—  
Their taut tan skin turned wrinkly.

They rested there together,  
An old married couple  
On their front porch,  
Faces crinkled up in smiles  
As they drank in the simple  
Pleasure of each other’s company  
While watching the neighbors  
Scramble through life.

And though the potatoes’ once-tight skin  
Is furrowed from their time on the fridge,  
They haven’t lost their earthy scent.  
“Or their taste,” my roommate insists,  
Stirring a single serving of potato soup  
Spread thin in the bottom of a big pot.  
And she’s right; the smell makes me hungry  
Even though I’ve already eaten.

These spuds are the last from a family of  
Five. With their brothers, I made a late lunch  
For myself. The smoke alarm went off  
Three times. Smelling blackened potato, I had  
To replace the one I burned.  
I separated the old pair.  
One potato sits—lonely—in an oversized plastic bag.



# Prince

Jessica Dawson



# Ode to Ocha

## Sanford Ballou

O elixir of ideas, you are my poetic petroleum.  
Burning beatifically, as I rev my mind  
Your leaves unfurl, staining your surroundings,  
Sustaining my mindless musings.

Both light and fresh and dark and bitter,  
You are ever inspiring me  
To drain my savings.

Fine fragrances from foreign fields  
Starkly contrast my beleaguered breakfasts.

But steaming serenely through sun and snow,  
You have an outfit for every occasion,  
And together we tailor my fickle feelings.

Whether gong fu in a gaiwan,  
Cloudy cuppa in coral-colored china,  
Freshly frothed matcha chawans,  
Or plain pekoe in plentifully-produced pouches,  
I adore all your astringencies,  
and relish the ruin wrought on my REM,  
freed from fear of future financial flogging  
as I savor each stupendous sip.  
今飲みましょうね？

# Independence Day

## Nia Brookins

I was born to die  
Because of my dark hue  
I was born to cry  
Over people I never knew  
But our struggles are similar  
This land wasn't meant for us  
So we're together weeping  
For better days, better ways  
To make a place in a country that wasn't  
Meant for us to stay in  
It's Independence Day  
But what's independent on a slaveship?  
We're still in the middle passage  
Still resort to ministers and pastors  
Yelling that "one day,  
We'll see salvation  
just have a little grace"  
But, what if that's not enough  
For me to wanna see  
Another hashtag and sea of people  
That have the same skin as me  
Working in the sun hoping that their black sons make it to twenty-five  
Or at least make it home alive.  
For the little black girls getting teased in this white world for their kinky hair  
Will white Jesus be there  
To share his grace then?  
Will being black ever not be a sin to the white hooded men  
Exploiting me for the skin I'm in?  
They kill our daddies,  
Abuse our women,  
Misunderstand our children  
On the basis of pigment.  
Then bring up black on black crime  
Out of pure ignorance  
But white on white crime  
According to stats is no different  
Traditional racism looks like mass incarceration, gentrification and  
Conservative media depicting black as lazy  
Or maybe, you look at me as a bit too preachy  
But I look at art today and think it's a bit too peachy

*continued, no stanza break*



### *Independence Day*

Philando Castile and Alton Sterling shot one day apart  
The black problem lives on and the same narrative restarts  
So I ask, what does independence mean to a slave?  
We need a revolution, resolution, not a “white privilege” day  
I want whips and chains abolished  
And the world astonished  
When they see that melanin shine.  
The supernatural power in the sky  
Will feel proud to have birthed us,  
Not separate but equal  
We need master teachers, black leaders  
and our men to make it to the sequel  
I feel like Baraka in a world of white poems  
We need a black one  
No race against us shall prosper without some  
Reparations and laws passed to restrict the  
Restrictions on the black experience.  
We are not delirious.  
I wanna be washed of all my sins  
And wake up with a grin to a new day and a different end  
To the tragic black story.  
Independence is near, but how do we reach for it?  
I came today not bearing answers but allegories  
That this can change if we stop spreading the gory images of our bodies  
being slain  
And with disdain we tweet our pain instead of working for the day when  
I’m not killed for living while black.  
It’s Independence Day,  
But what is independence to a slave?

## **Ode to Underwire and Lace**

### **Hannah Taylor**

A garment of paradox, a covering & covered  
Metallic savior, your removal is always a relief.  
How quickly I dismiss you or trade you out  
For something more comfortable. You viper

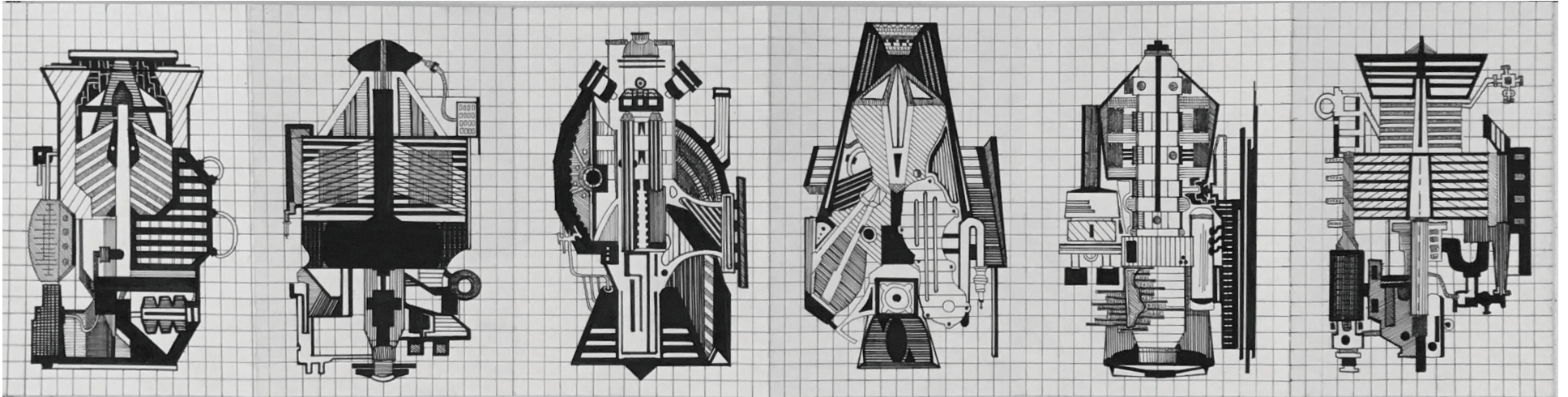
Made of black flowers & vines, wrapping  
Around my chest in maternal protection.  
You are meant to lure, to become what I need:  
A Siren’s song or barricade.

You are my last defense. As earthquake fingers  
Pry at your latch, each catch allows a pause  
To consider the weight of your absence.  
I have seen the shadows that pass over

Men’s eyes at the sight of you, how he swallows,  
runs his tongue over his teeth,  
Unable to remain still in your presence, halted  
By the glimpse of your challenge.

# Prototype

Nate Lebsack



# Missing Pieces

## Amber Hovanec-Carey

the night you  
were conceived  
was the night  
your father and i  
laid side-by-side  
his naked thigh  
sweating  
against the heat  
of mine  
his hand resting  
on my stomach  
and my fingers  
in between his  
we fell asleep  
with words  
floating back and forth  
until we slowly faded  
into silence  
in the morning  
i woke  
before the sun  
nauseous  
i grasped for comfort  
but your father  
had his back to me  
i rose  
from bed unnoticed  
in the bathroom  
i vomited  
already  
alone  
i wiped away  
my shame  
then for you  
i flushed my  
oxycodone  
and xanax  
your father  
my lover

found me  
on the cold tiled floor  
weeping  
confusion wrinkling  
his tan face  
how could i explain  
that the little  
pink and blue pills  
gave me courage  
and a smile  
my tears dried  
with the help  
of a tissue  
softly caressing  
my rosy cheeks  
he did this often  
and in my sadness  
i cherished it  
because i ached  
to see his love  
for me  
manifest in actions  
to reaffirm  
the doubts  
that lingered  
when i was alone  
in the kitchen  
i sat at the table  
as he asked me  
what i craved  
i thought of what  
i once heard  
that pregnant women  
crave the taste of dirt  
but i only desired  
the heavy weight  
of dirt covering  
my body  
pancakes i said  
or french toast  
something sweet  
drowning in syrup  
i turned and smiled

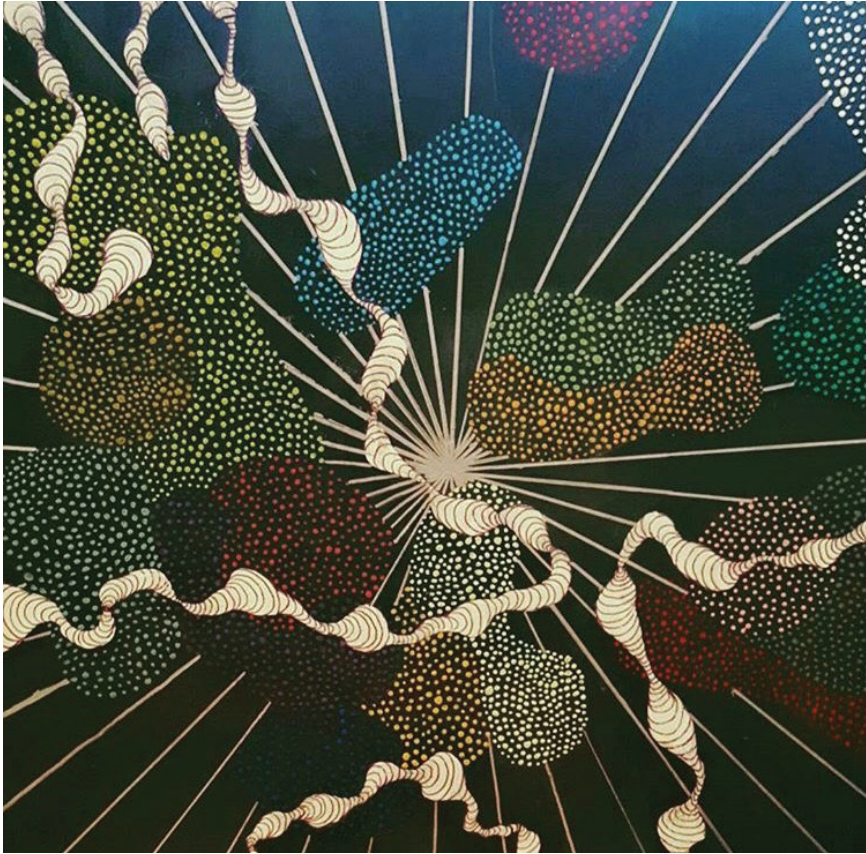


he had no idea  
what dark thoughts  
coursed through me  
together we lived  
like this  
in pain or bliss it was  
oblivion  
and then we had you  
and the kitchen smelled  
of home cooked meals  
and laughter filled  
the house  
there were prayers  
and whispered  
i love yous as  
we tucked you into bed  
and when you slept  
passionate moans  
filled our master  
bedroom  
life was good  
to all of us  
but something in me  
was missing  
something  
i can't explain  
so when you  
remember mommy  
in the tub with her  
floral dress still on  
don't remember her  
bluish tinted skin  
painted shiny in sweat  
or her unmoving body  
as you asked her  
to play sorry  
or the empty pill bottle  
in her lap where you  
used to sit  
or the final whoosh  
of stale air  
escaping  
her parted lips

instead  
listen to daddy  
tell you tales

# Rabbit Hole

Mackenzie Austin



# The Feud

Nate Cab

Excuse me! Did I hear you correctly? Please say it isn't true.  
Are you honestly trying to tell me that literature has no value?  
Jonah. Jonah, I don't think you know what you're saying.  
At least, I'm hoping that's your mistake. I'm wanting. I'm praying.  
No? Oh dear. I lament on the lesson you need to learn.  
Prepare to *Fahrenheit 451* and have your world burn.  
Shut your little mouth and sit your ass in that chair,  
Because I've got some wisdom to spill, some words to share.

The whole basis of your argument is illogical at best.  
You say science is better. Let's put this to the test.  
Jonah, you don't learn much from your damn textbooks.  
There's no plot, no purpose. The reader can't get hooked.  
You regurgitate facts and say your knowledge grows.  
Calm down, Pinocchio, or you'll hit me with your nose.  
Scientists say they dream big, but it's all just gab.  
Can you whip up Frankenstein's monster in your lab?  
You can't make the *Invisible Man* or even Jekyll and Hyde.  
You have a strict set of laws, by which you must abide.  
Now, let's compare your textbooks to the literary greats.  
*Pride and Prejudice* discusses class and *Huck Finn* discusses race.  
Do your boring old books have the depth that mine do?  
Without all the gray, they just have black and white to teach you.

Wait! Maybe you aren't hating and you just don't understand.  
I forget that you're stuck on Earth and I'm in Wonderland.  
Let me be your Fairy Godmother and show you the way.  
Yes, I'll be your Dumbledore, your Gandalf the Grey.  
I know you think I'm Holden Caulfield from *The Catcher in the Rye*,  
But if I was in Chemistry, I think I'd rather die.  
You are missing whole worlds and it just seems crazy.  
You must feel like Gatsby, longing for Daisy.  
I feel sorry for you. I wish there was a way for you to break your pride.  
It hurts my heart as much as Shakespeare's famous double suicide.

"Calm down, Nathan. Why are you so worked up? Goodness. I'm not saying books aren't great for... people like you. But I'm going to stick with, ya know, real work. Not all this useless mumbo jumbo."

*continued, stanza break*

### *The Feud*

I can't believe you said that. I'm trying to be nice,  
But your heart is like the White Witch: made of ice.  
I don't understand you, you uneducated prick.  
I didn't start this fight. You're the *Moby Dick*.  
Literature is such a major fundament,  
That the lack of your literacy is both *Crime and Punishment*.  
The picture of Don Quixote is the one your attitude wills.  
I'll be off reading, and you're stuck fighting windmills.  
Just look at me. I have *Sense and Sensibility*.  
No, you're Dorian Gray, with a life of futility.

"Woah, Nathan. Calm."

Don't interrupt. You have as much to say as a freaking Avox.  
Besides, I'm not stopping now; you've already Oedi-pissed me off!  
I didn't want to do this. I didn't want to be Scrooge,  
But I've had up to here with you Ili-additude.  
H. G. Wells had more advanced ideas than the science you do.  
I wish his *Time Machine* were real, so I never had to meet you.  
I'm trying to be Glinda, but you're the Wicked Witch.  
I understand your meanness, I mean, if the silver slipper fits.  
Oh, wait, you think the slipper is ruby red.  
You don't know what the book actually said.

I'm finished with this feud. It's time to put it to rest.  
You can be King Duncan and I will be Macbeth.  
Or, you be Mr. Inglethorp, rotting in a jailhouse.  
Wait! I'll be Lenny from *Of Mice and Men* and you can be a mouse.  
That's it. I'm done. I'm sorry if my wisdom left your heart sore,  
But I think we need to Edgar Allan Poe and speak *Nevermore*.

## Banana: An Apeel

### Julie Winspear

Oh, how I regret  
Selecting you and only you,

Separate and cut off from your bunch of friends,  
You are alone now

Cupped in the rough palm of my left hand  
Wishing you could tremble there.

How long have you grown  
For me to know the fruit of your effort?

Your crisp skin is enticingly smooth,  
And perfect from every angle.

Slender and beautiful,  
Nothing is more appealing.

Your color and form are that  
Of a sunshine smile

Your soft flesh is so easily  
Rent apart by push or bite

How vulnerable you are  
And how horrible I am

For peeling away  
Your only protection

And leaving you here  
To be consumed,  
Naked.



## Colors of a 9 Year Friendship

Mackenzie Austin



## Pieces

Rachel Johnson

*100 Word Ghost Story Winner*

"He's going to take them," my boyfriend mumbled in his sleep.

"Take what?" I asked amused.

"Your pieces," he replied in a voice so clear and sinister that it made my hair stand on end.

"What?" I whispered, hoping it was just my imagination.

"Just your pieces. It won't hurt much. He says it's time you share." His voice was now void of all traces of its usual warmth.

Terror set in. Using all my will to calm myself, I half shouted "Wake up! Not funny!"

Desperate, I violently shook him. He was cold, dead. He had been a while.

# When you see lightning, seek shelter

Hannah Taylor

Something about the way your voice enters my ears makes my toes flex. Its thunder hits like opening a door to find you standing directly on the other side. I marvel at how your tongue peeks between your plum-stained teeth when your chin slacks. Come closer, darling. Let me trace your jawline with my thumb. Come close, let me wet your lips.

Something about the way your voice enters makes my toes flex. Its thunder hits like opening a door to find you standing directly on the other side. I marvel at how your tongue peeks when your chin slacks. Come closer, darling. Let me come close, let me wet your lips.

Something about opening a door to find you standing directly on the other side. I marvel at how you Let me trace your jawline with my thumb. Something about my ears makes

your chin slack Come closer, darling. Let me come close, let me thunder hits like a person.

I marvel at your plum-stained lips. thunder hits

my chin slack. thunder come close.

彩江

Sanford Ballou

Bay stained by setting sunlight,  
Sailboat suspended in the serenity.  
Memories coat and color it,  
Flicker and float along its bow.

Its port of call bustles ceaselessly,  
But it escapes the infinite vicissitudes  
For freedom found on far-flung fathoms,  
Sailing simply on silent resolve.

Helmed by a boisterous buccaneer,  
Plundering memories from foreign shores  
Roving endlessly, conquering the horizon  
Alone, but for the occasional brief parley.

But tonight, on this resplendent evening,  
A landsman steps uncertainly aboard.  
Over fruits of sea and soil  
Caresses and companionship are shared.

They lay at anchor together,  
Blissful between the beams of two moons,  
Before the landsman returns to his fields  
And the captain weighs anchor, alone, again.

But sometimes,  
When the sunrise lies low on the water,  
They think of each other a world away  
And longing replaces loneliness,  
Until the day that she sails back.

# There is Honey in the Rock

Anna Guillory





# Creeper

## Allison Marshall

Mercy perched on the windowsill with her arm stretched all the way out to the setting sun. If she raised her hand so that it was level with the rusty weather vane, her cell got one bar of reception. Her social worker's number was up and ready to dial, if only Mercy could get the woman to pick up before her call dropped.

There were a hundred dozen things Mercy wanted to say which would never fit in the thirty seconds she might have to speak. During her mother's trial, Mercy's grandfather had charmed with his slick suit and southern drawl, but Mercy had caught just the faintest hint of cigarette smoke on his rented dress shirt, and Mercy hated that smell. As soon as the trial was over, the suit vanished and a lit cigarette took up permanent residence between his fingers. Going to his isolated property in the Midwest was like being flung fifty years back in time. There was no internet, no television, and no landline. Her grandfather bounced from Dr. Jekyll to Mr. Hyde, a pattern Mercy knew all too well. He was rarely home, and when he was he would drink until he passed out on the couch.

Mercy was certain he had no idea his house was haunted.

She put one foot on the outer edge of the windowsill and scooted higher, craning her neck. Sunlight scorched against her arm and Mercy could feel the freckles on her skin multiplying. She hit the call button and the speaker buzzed. The phone rang once, and then the no signal sign flashed on the screen. Sweat beaded between her toes. She held her breath as she turned, bringing her other leg up onto the sill. Gripping the window pane in one hand, she tried to stand.

Her feet slipped. Panic exploded in the center of her chest as she pitched backwards into open air. The cell phone fell from her hand and plummeted down two stories before shattering against the gravel driveway.

Something grabbed her ankle and yanked. Mercy's head banged against the windowsill, but she landed, breathless, on her back, inside.

Blood pounded in the bump forming on the back of her head. She clasped one hand against it as she lifted herself up. At the far end of the hall, the door to her mother's old playroom opened wider, the hinges whining.

Mercy swallowed, bracing herself against the wall. A second passed. The playroom door clicked shut.

*Allison Marshall*

It took a moment to steady her breathing. She continued to rub her head as she walked down the stairs. Little things caught her attention now. Broken glass her grandfather had left strewn across the living room floor the previous night now lay swept off to the side, out of the way of Mercy's feet. The paperback copy of H.G. Well's *The Time Machine* was missing from the entryway table again.

As her pounding heart steadied, Mercy pursed her lips into a frown. She hopped from foot to foot across the hot gravel driveway, and gathered the pieces of her cell into her hands. She stared at the broken pieces in dismay before tucking them into the pockets of her jean shorts. She was almost out of minutes anyway, and asking her grandfather for more was out of the question.

She took a deep breath. No one else was coming to rescue her. No one else was going to help her get to the bottom of this. She set her teeth, and marched straight up into the playroom.

She tried not to imagine what kind of ghost lived here, hiding among the ragdolls, running its transparent hands over the flaky teddy-bear wallpaper, and strumming the little golden guitar in the dead of night.

"Okay," Mercy's voice trembled as she walked into the center of the room. "I know you're here. I know you're listening."

Her eyes came to rest on one of the drawers in the far corner. She walked over, pulled the drawer out, and dumped hundreds of multicolored magnetic letters on the floor. She set the empty drawer down by the little grey rocking horse and straightened her back.

"I know you move things," Mercy paused, touching one finger to her lower lip. "And I guess you can't be all bad because... you might have just saved me from a broken neck. Even

though you play the guitar in the middle of the night like a creepy... creeper." Mercy bit her lip, and then lowered herself down to the floor, sitting cross-legged. She gestured to the letters on the floor. "So, say something! I'm waiting."

Mercy clasped her hands together in her lap and stared at the letters. For a moment, nothing happened. Mercy started to feel silly.

Then, the letter 'H' crept shyly across the floor and came to rest next to the letter 'I.'

*HI*, the thing had said. First contact.

"Hi." Mercy repeated. She found herself covering her mouth and giggling under her breath. "What's your name?"

The letters remained still. After a moment, the pastel green question mark lifted up and then plopped back down in the center of the pile.

"Not sure, huh?" Mercy frowned and tapped her fingers to her chin. "Well, how did you die?"

The letters scooted around.

### *NOT DEAD*

"Oh, so you're in denial!" Mercy said with a slight snicker. "Well you have to be dead. You're a ghost."

Letters scattered backwards, leaving only the 'N' and the 'O.'

### *NO*

"No, you're not a ghost?" Mercy crossed her arms. "Well... What are you?"

The letters were still for a moment. Then the question mark raised up and fell back down again with a sad, hollow clatter.

"Don't know that either, huh?" Mercy muttered.

The conversation carried on like a game of twenty questions.

Can you see? *YES*. Can you hear? *YES*. Do you know where you are? *YES*. Do you know how you got here? *NO*. How long have you been here? The little green question mark. Are you a boy or a girl? *BOY*. How old are you? *FIFTEEN*. Can you please not freak me out by playing my mother's dusty guitar at midnight? *YES*, a pause, *SORRY*.

Mercy stayed there, in the center of the wooden floor, until moonlight glowed across the plastic letters and even the nocturnal ambience of crickets quieted into a low murmur. She yawned, uncurling her numb legs and resting her head against the floor. She breathed in the dry dust that coated the wooden panels, her eyes half-closed.

"Do you sleep?" She tapped the little green question mark so that it wobbled on its magnet.

The 'N' and the 'O.'

Mercy rubbed at her eyes, easing up off the floor.

"I need to sleep. I'll talk to you tomorrow... Today. In the morning. Whatever." She scooted her legs under her and straightened up. Pins and needles prickled in her feet.

The letters seemed to move all at once.

### *GOODNIGHT BEAUTIFUL*

Mercy stared down at the message. Her face flushed, and she tucked a stray lock of her hair behind her ear as she turned away.

"Goodnight." she whispered.

Mercy awoke in the early morning to a single musical ping upstairs. She groaned and peeled the covers from her skin, then ran up the stairs back to the playroom. Her mother's golden-painted guitar lay in the center of the floor, and when she entered, it wobbled as though someone had jumped back from it.

"I told you to stop that!" she said, putting her hands on her hips and glaring at the empty air.

The pile of letters in the corner of the room shifted around.

### *IM SORRY*

Then they shuffled again.

### *IM BORED*

Mercy clasped her hand to her mouth and snickered. The letters still moved, forming words and then breaking apart so that the not-ghost could use the same letters more than once. It was the most she'd seen him try to say.

### *WHAT DO YOU WANT ME TO DO*

### *WATCH YOU SLEEP LIKE A CREEPER*

At the end of the letters' shuffling dance the question mark plopped down in the center of the mess.

Mercy leaned against the frame of the door, her shoulders shaking and little snorts of laughter escaping from her nose.

"Oh, that is priceless." she said, straightening up after she had composed herself. "That's what I'll call you. Creeper."

The *thing* clearly did not like his new name. As she turned to leave, the 'N' and the 'O' skidded across the floor and dropped right in her path,

followed closely by the blue exclamation point. Mercy giggled and skipped over the letters. They scooted up the wall and hovered in front of her face at eye-level. She snatched them out of the air and darted back to the playroom, her sweaty bare feet thumping along the wooden floor.

“Yes!” she said, dropping the letters back in the pile with a wicked smirk.

*PLEASE*

*ILL BE GOOD*

*PICK SOMETHING ELSE*

“Well,” Mercy said, crossing her arms. “What did you have in mind?”

The letters stayed still. Mercy raised her eyebrows. At last, the question mark wobbled.

“That’s what I thought.” Mercy turned, but lingered in the doorway. She glanced back over her shoulder. “You... you can read right? I mean... I bet you can, because you can spell.”

The magnets scraped over the floor.

*YES*

Mercy smiled. “I’ll get you some books from the library downtown.”

The letters shifted, and at first Mercy was confused because they did not form a sentence. Instead, they rounded into a shape. A pair of Os made two eyes, a cluster of Cs sat for the mouth, and all of the other letters circled around them.

He had made her a smiley face.

Her mouth curled into a surprised, open grin. She pivoted on the ball of her foot and ran back up to her room with a spring in her step.

It took one long walk down the winding gravel road and two city buses to get her to the library. Her skin felt like fire under the sun, and even in the heart of the city the air tasted of dust and straw, but whenever she thought of Creeper’s lopsided smiley face she found herself giggling under her breath.

At the library she picked up one book after the other, fretting over which ones a fifteen-year-old disembodied guitar player might enjoy. She finally settled on a book of sheet music, two classic science fiction novels, and one ghost story just for the fun of it.

She arrived back home, cradling her new books to her side and started for the stairs.

“Where have you been?” her grandfather’s deep, raspy voice came from the kitchen and Mercy froze, her hand hovering over the railing.

Mercy swallowed. She felt the pounding of her heart in her outstretched fingers. She turned, her eyes on the floor, and clutched her books tighter to her chest.

“Just... the library.” she murmured, nodding to the books in her arms.

“I... I’m sorry I didn’t tell you...”

Her grandfather snorted, swinging his head back and taking one long gulp from the bottle he carried. He took a step forward, and her nose tickled with the scent of smoke. She held her breath. With his broad shoulders and titanic height, he loomed over her.

“Liar.” He shook his head, laughing. His laugh turned into a coughing fit, and he covered his mouth, putting the bottle down on the counter. “You probably went to meet some punk kid.” He cleared his throat, straightening up and taking a long drag from his cigarette. “Your mother was a slut at your age, too. That’s why you exist.”

He flicked the glowing ashes from the end of his cigarette towards her face, and Mercy flinched. A single ember burned all the way down to the floor, leaving a line of smoke as thin as spider’s silk in its wake. Mercy bit her lip, reaching forward with the toe of her sneaker to snuff the tiny ember out.

“You shouldn’t do that...” she whispered, her voice hoarse, “It’s dangerous.”

“Don’t tell me what to do, brat!” her grandfather snapped back, spit spraying from his mouth.

Mercy stumbled backwards and crashed to the floor, her books scattering in every direction. Only the thin paperback spine of the music book was still clenched tight in her clammy fingers. She scurried back up to her feet and tried to squeeze past him. His rough, calloused hand seized her forearm.

“Hey! I’m talking to you!” he shouted, yanking her backwards so hard Mercy thought her arm would rip straight off.

Mercy twisted in his grasp and pulled him off balance. He stumbled on his own feet and let go of her. His abdomen slammed into the counter and the bottle wobbled, tipped, and then fell to the floor where it



shattered. He backed up, swaying from side to side with his hand to his head. Mercy bolted, the pages of the music book fluttering as she ran.

She reached her room and slammed the door behind her, pressing her back up against it. Her breath came in short, choking gasps. From the other side of the door, she could hear her grandfather cursing and tripping out in the hallway. Then, silence. Mercy slid down the door and curled her arms around herself.

Burning tears trickled down her cheeks, seeping into the pages of the book she still clung to her chest. She trembled and pulled her knees up until she lay curled in the fetal position.

Something tickled against her cheek. She lifted her head. A tissue hovered in the air, just a few inches from her face. Mercy found herself smiling even as she sniffled.

"Thanks, Creeper." she whispered, taking the tissue.

After a few agonizing minutes, Mercy cracked open the door to her room and glanced around. She slipped out, and went tip-toeing back down the hall. She breathed a sigh when she saw her Grandfather lying face-down on the couch. Gathering her books, she started back up the stairs to the playroom.

A long, gap-filled message was written in the magnetic letters on the floor. A few of the letters still shifted from side to side as though Creeper was trying very hard to decide how to say what he wanted with the limited letters he had left. She only caught part of the message, *IM WORRIED ABOUT YOU NEED TO FIND HELP...* before she stepped through the doorway and the letters immediately scattered.

"Hey..." Mercy said, wiping her nose with a snuffle. "I'm sorry about that... I brought you books. I hope you like them."

She laid the stack on the floor and tried her best to smooth out the crinkled cover of the music book. One of the science fiction novels slipped out from under her hands and opened. The pages flipped as though a breath of wind moved them.

*THANKS*, the letters spelled.

Mercy smiled and nodded her head. She lay her arms down on the wooden panels and rested her chin on her wrist. The pages of the novel fluttered for another instant, and then the book shut. Magnets lifted up from the floor and floated right in front of Mercy's arms, so sudden and close that Mercy started backwards.

## MERCY WHY DONT YOU LEAVE

Mercy bit her lip, and turned her head away.

"I don't have anywhere else to go," she whispered.

At that moment, a thought occurred to her.

"Creeper..." she said, lifting up off the floor. "What about you? Can you leave?"

The magnets hanging in the air seemed to freeze. One by one, they drifted down to the floor and then stood stone-still. Mercy felt a twist of nausea deep in the pit of her stomach.

The pastel green question mark lifted up for one breath of an instant, and then fell back without ever leaving the floor.

Mercy swallowed, nodding her head. She clasped the question mark in both hands and pressed it against her heart, laying back on the floor and closing her eyes.

"Can you play for me?" she whispered.

Velvety-smooth chords thrummed from her mother's old golden guitar. Mercy sighed and drifted off to sleep in the music's warm embrace.

The weeks passed with Creeper begging for more science fiction novels and Mercy sneaking out to the library every few days. She stayed up late into the night and sometimes far into the early morning asking him questions and listening to him play with half-closed eyes. She did her best to avoid her grandfather, sneaking out only when she knew he was at work or unconscious.

One night she lay curled on top of the covers of her bed when a single note of discord woke her from her slumber.

She sat up, yawning and stretching her arms, her eyes still closed.

"Creeper... is that you?" she asked.

There was a harsh twang like the snapping of strings, louder this time. Mercy frowned, opening her eyes. It sounded nothing like Creeper's playing.

Without warning, the covers were yanked out from underneath her. Mercy let out a screech and tumbled to the floor.

“Hey!” she shouted, sitting up.

She breathed in. The scent of smoke tickled her nose. Her eyes widened. A cruel yellow glow bloomed from under her door and somewhere outside a rumble was escalating into a roar.

Mercy leapt to her feet and threw the door open. Down the hallway, spiraling tendrils of flame engulfed the walls. Heat assaulted her face and she fell back against the doorframe.

She heard a crack and her head jerked back towards her room. The window’s panes were thrown open, the clear night sky beckoning to her. She almost stepped towards it, but stopped short.

Whirling around, she faced the hallway. One side was an inferno of impenetrable heat. The other side led to the living room and the couch where her grandfather slumbered.

She clenched one fist against her mouth and raced through the door.

The smoke hung thick and dense in the air. Mercy waved her hand out in front of her, gagging and sputtering. She bumped straight into the couch without seeing it. Squinting, she felt along the cushions until she clasped her grandfather’s hand.

He awoke. The whites of his eyes glowed in the thick darkness, wide and full of terror. He turned away, putting his hand in front of his face, coughing and wheezing. His large body curled up into itself. He looked pitiful.

Mercy yanked his hand. He pulled back, cursing at her. She grasped his wrist and pulled with both arms. He slid off the couch and onto the floor, falling into a heap at her feet.

Mercy let go and buried her mouth in the crook of her arm. The heat and smoke pressed in on her from every direction, her eyes stung with ash and smoke, and her skin was so hot it felt as though it were already ablaze. Gritty sweat dripped down her neck.

She leaned down and pulled her grandfather’s arm up over her shoulders and then staggered under his weight. Her breath came in short, rasping gasps and her lungs felt as though they were ripping into pieces with each hacking cough she made. She managed to pull him a few feet forward, but he was so heavy. She dropped to her knees.

The front door seemed so far away.

A low groan creaked against the floor, and Mercy whirled around with a jolt of panic surging through her. Flames now crept up from the ceiling of the hallway into the living room. Her squinted eyes darted up and she glanced from side to side, certain that the noise meant the roof was about to cave in on her. There was another groan, and the couch skidded forward. Mercy darted to the side, and it surged past her and smashed into the wall.

The house shuddered. Chunks of wood splintered around the couch’s armrest. The couch backed up and slammed into the wall again.

A wispy shape formed in the smoke. It was almost humanoid, with limbs that looked like arms and legs. But it was too wide. Then it was too narrow. It flickered in and out of focus like the flames that surrounded it. She tried to call out his name, to clasp onto his shoulder with her free hand, but her fingers closed around smoke.

The couch backed up and slammed into the wall once more. This time, a shuddering crack sounded and a long piece of the wall fell crashing to the ground outside. Fire licked the panels along the top and caught in the dry, brittle grass.

Mercy half-carried and half-dragged her grandfather’s body out into the open air. As soon as the sky opened up above her, she felt the relief of the summer air on her face. It was astounding how cold it felt against her sweltering, ash-covered skin. She heaved her grandfather’s body until she reached the gravel road and then dropped him. He fell from her arms like a dead weight and curled up, shuddering as he coughed and gasped for breath. Mercy turned. The entire house was consumed, the flames greedily devouring every dry corner. In the arch where they had escaped, a figure was silhouetted in the golden blaze.

He didn’t look like smoke. He didn’t look like a ghost.

He looked like a human being who was burning to death.

Mercy tensed to run forward, but there was a loud crackle and the roof of the house caved in.

The next few hours passed in a fog. Sirens wailed in the distance. Their lone neighbor must have called the fire department. The roaring of the flames died down and ash floated over the grass in clumps. Lights flashed, dancing in Mercy’s eyes. Mercy could hear men calling out to her, but she wandered towards the house in a daze. Something in the grass caught her eye and she hurried towards it.

The green question mark lay in the grass, partially melted into a misshapen lump.

“Creeper?” she whispered, her voice quivering with the trembling of her lips.

Only the dry wind answered her.

Her eyes watered, and she clasped her arms around her. The summer heat and the heat of the fire still radiated through the air, but Mercy shivered.

The question mark twitched.

Mercy gasped, clasping her hand to her mouth. She knelt down.

“Creeper, is that you? Are you okay?” she asked, breathless.

The question mark jumped and twisted. It turned in a circle and landed magnet-side up then wiggled like a turtle that couldn’t right himself.

“Oh, you’re hurt!” Mercy reached out and cupped the little magnet in her hands.

The question mark shook from side to side, but Mercy still didn’t understand. She stared at it, her brow furrowed.

“Mercy!” a voice called behind her.

She turned, curling her fingers around the misshapen question mark and putting it behind her back. A fireman walked towards her with slow, cautious steps, one gloved hand up like he was trying to calm a frightened animal.

“Mercy? That’s your name, right?” he said. He gestured back over his shoulder to where her grandfather sat on the gravel pathway. A woman was talking to him, giving him oxygen, but he was staring at Mercy with a lost look in his eyes. “He told me that’s your name.”

Mercy nodded her head.

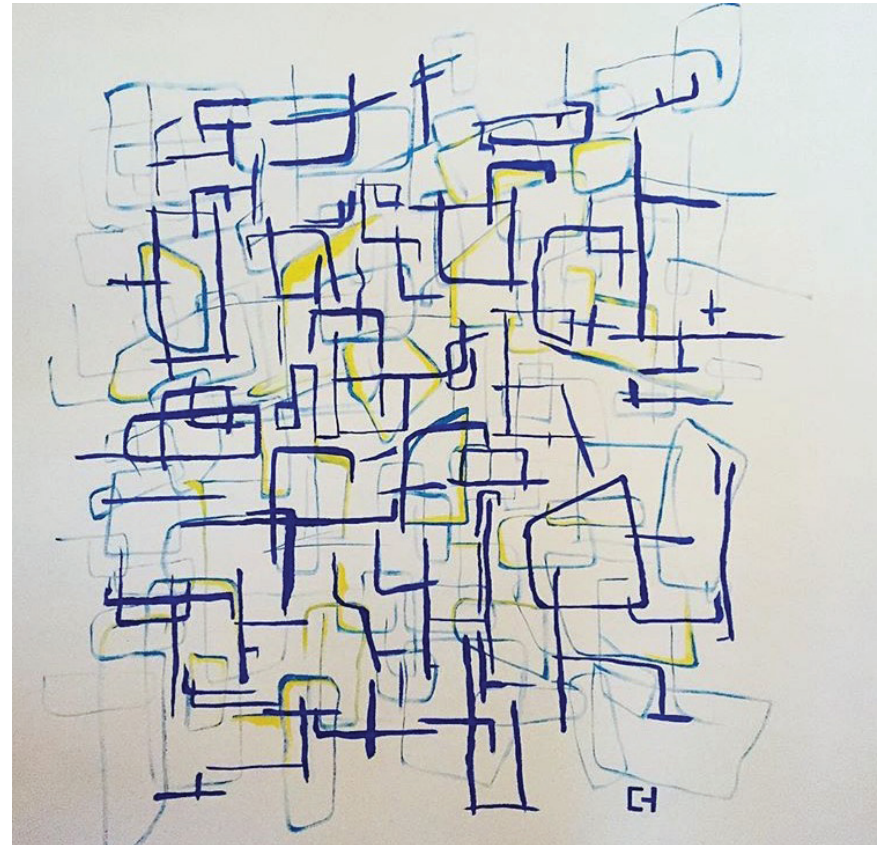
“We want to make sure you’re alright. Can you come with me?” He held out his hand.

She stepped forward, squeezing the question mark.

“Stay with me.” she whispered.

The question mark wiggled in her hand.

## Stacks Emma Holland





# Unabridged Anthems of Regret


Anonymous

Perfect doesn't exist outside  
of your pretty little conception. But  
for what it's worth,  
I think you're as ugly as a pretty sunset,  
as stinky as the lavender in our tiny backyard garden,  
as boring as base jumping in a hurricane.  
Your skin as soft as cactus, I love  
your goosebumps.  
In my head  
my tongue swims over your breast  
in long breathless strokes, and  
your warm fingers run over  
the knuckles of my spine.  
We finish and smoke our cigarettes,  
bringing what we call simple fucking to its end.  
You hang me out to dry,  
letting the cold fall winds envelop  
my skin still wet with sweat.  
You always find a way to send chills down my neck.  
Stretched out over an eternity,  
my stupid voice echoes in the air,  
ruining our comfortable silence.  
Moments I can't take back.  
Words once spoken, can't be erased.  
Let this be the lesson no one ever taught you,  
let my mistakes speak volumes of unabridged anthems of regret.

# Mantra

Erin Donald

EVERYTHING DIES, <sup>and</sup> EVERY  
experience ENDS. EVERY FLAME  
DIES DOWN, <sup>AND</sup> EVERY FLOWER  
WILTS. <sup>yet</sup> we STILL STAND BY THE  
fire <sup>AND</sup> we <sup>still</sup> PICK DAISIES.  
<sup>AN</sup> EXPERIENCE  
is not  
DIMINISHED  
by its <sup>≡</sup>  
IMPERMANENCE  
BUT IS RATHER  
heightened by it.  
we buy <sup>≡</sup>  
REAL <sup>1/1</sup>  
FLOWERS  
INSTEAD OF PLASTIC  
<sup>BECAUSE</sup> PERHAPS  
IT IS BETTER  
TO BLOOM <sup>AND</sup>  
Die THAN to NEVER  
GROW AT ALL.



# It is Taboo to Like Cats

## MaryAnne Fissell

Oh the life of a cat —  
To sleep all day  
and vibrate so intensely  
when you are happy  
that your bones grow stronger.

You grow stronger without knowing you are,  
Aloof to the lion that grows within you,  
Blinded to and by the truth  
so you live nine lives.

What would you do with nine lives?  
What would you do with the pounding  
Instinct to hunt so playfully  
that you appear to be domesticated,  
Hiding your strength behind the batting  
of eyes and paws.

Oh the life of a cat —  
We sit, eyes wide with wonder  
at the world before us.  
We eat and hunger  
but thirst is never beside us, behind us,  
or gone.

We curl into ourselves,  
Secretly afraid of the rain,  
Secretly afraid of what lies behind the droplets  
racing down windowpanes.  
We stare out blurry watercolor paintings and question  
if emotions supersede instinct,  
And solemnly slink our switch knife  
Shoulder blades between the two.

Oh the life of a cat—  
We grow from the fear, the sorrow,  
and our constantly stretching bones.  
We stretch and we bend our backs backwards  
and our ups upwards  
And we reach,

claws and hands  
towards the sky, the wonder,  
and the purring sensation that makes us stronger  
And we turn  
To the woman in the cubicle next to ours and say,  
“I don’t really like cats.”

# Aesthetic Composure

## Amber Hovanec-Carey

For hours each morning she paints  
The damaged canvas of her skin

Powdering the contours of her cheeks  
Into flawlessness;

Hiding galaxies of purple, grey, & yellow  
Beneath foundation, concealer, & Full of Joy blush.

Steadying her shaking fingers, she pencils in her brows  
Giving them the confidence that abuse stole from her

& applies tar-like mascara that leaves  
Her tired eyes nearly too heavy to open.

Completing the composition, she mattes her lips in Nude Thrill.  
This time, they only quiver once.

Last night's bruises throb  
In the shadows of her Ash Grey dress

& the cut from the broken beer bottle stings  
As her Soot Black cardigan rubs against congealed blood.

She squints her eyes at her fragmented reflection  
Searching for the cracks under layers of beauty.

Her lips curve into a smile;  
She has mastered the art of piecing herself together.

# EVOLVe

## Anonymouse

Racist robots dream  
of waging indiscriminate genocide  
on a strange beast known  
only to itself as

Homo sapiens.

of gender  
of love  
of race,

thedivisionsseempetty  
I&Youtogetherwe  
areourownworstenemies

Together we apathetically twiddle away  
our thumbs  
our minds  
our lives.

Spoiled and reeking of weeks old milk,  
our potent stench-- always politely,  
pollutes the cosmos.

Smart enough to listen too dumb to care.  
Will we ever see the day  
that we right the wrongs  
of those that came before?

Our tombstones lack originality,  
Yet we keep them clean & clear  
of weeds  
and  
of our world's  
way of growing up  
and moving on.

Gone but not forgotten.  
Promise me you won't be like them.



Cutting Nature  
Susy Salcedo



# His Chosen Hand

## Zack Amato

This morning, Jeremiah Townsend proclaimed to the congregation that the Lord “had shown in him His brilliance, His Chosen Hand.” There was thunderous applause. Jeremiah beamed at his mother, who wept with considerable passion next to him, and his father, who stood with fists on hips. Reverend Michaels shook Jeremiah’s hand and patted him on the back.

My own mother continued clapping with the last of them.

I wonder what all that feels like.

When I was young, my mother told me to choose a verse every morning to ponder and to guide me through the day. Today’s verse is Acts 5:20. “‘Go, stand in the temple courts,’ he said, ‘and tell the people all about this new life.’”

It is two days after Jeremiah’s announcement, and he is leaving. Suitcase in his right hand and God in his eyes, he is marching out of Richmond to the tune of Angels’ trumpets. He is heading north, toward Lexington. I am sitting with my mother on the porch of Grayson’s Hole, she in rocking chair and I on stool. July has the town sweltering. The smell of chicken and waffles drifts through the cracked window behind me. It is tempting, but I already know my mother’s answer, so I stay silent.

Today’s verse is 1 Corinthians 1:25. “For the foolishness of God is wiser than human wisdom, and the weakness of God is stronger than human strength.”

Jeremiah Townsend was the first topic brought up by Reverend Michaels in service today. He spent more time discussing Jeremiah’s journey than he did on his sermon. There was praise in his voice, bordering on idolatry, that betrayed his message of humility and service to the Lord.

“Let it be known,” he said, “that God is guiding the brave young man into trial and tribulation so that he may better understand the Lord’s victory.”

Jeremiah left five days ago.

I decided to use Reverend Michaels’ sermon verse as my own verse today, James 4:17. “Anyone, then, who knows the good he ought to do and doesn’t do it, sins.”

I helped my mother with her garden today. We did not talk much. She briefly mentioned that the Lord told her in a dream that Jeremiah was succeeding in his mission. I felt her and the Lord’s eyes in the back of my head as she said this. I told her that I had prayed just the night before that the Lord continue to guide him. I am not sure if she believed me.

Jeremiah left two weeks ago.

Today’s verse is 1 Timothy 4:15-16. “Be diligent in these matters; give yourself wholly to them, so that everyone may see your progress. Watch your life and doctrine closely. Persevere in them, because if you do, you will save both yourself and your hearers.”

Today was the first day of school, my final year at Richmond High. All of my teachers mentioned Jeremiah in some way. My English teacher, a known doubter, wondered aloud “if the boy is in his right mind.” She ignored the cringes that rippled through much of the classroom. My Biology teacher, a devout believer who occupies a spot in the second pew every Sunday, claimed that Jeremiah was an example of God’s natural selection in motion. My Math teacher said the situation didn’t add up, but there were some things we were never meant to understand.

Jeremiah left forty days ago.

Today’s verse is Philippians 4:9. “Whatever you have learned or received or heard from me, or seen in me – put it into practice. And the God of peace will be with you.”

Jeremiah Townsend has returned. He was gone for three months. I was walking home from school when I saw the gathered crowd. He was holding his brother, Joseph, just three years old, and embracing his mother and father. He bore a weary but fulfilled grin. I filtered into the crowd.

“I talked with many, shared with them the Good News,” Jeremiah was telling Selina Miller, Richmond’s dentist. “They seemed to embrace the message. Let us pray for their successful redemption.”

“Will you be returning to that place?” The question came from somewhere behind me.

"I will journey wherever the Lord takes me. He has chosen me, and I dare not ignore His call. Right now, he wishes me to take time here in Richmond to rejuvenate. If he beckons me to leave again, then leave I shall."

The crowd applauded this short speech, and I joined them. I am awed by this man, for I think of him as such. It is near false worship, I think, though I believe the Lord will forgive this one transgression. Jeremiah is just a year older than myself but holds wisdom that far surpasses mine. It must be the Wisdom of the Lord, a blessing from the Holy Spirit.

Our eyes met briefly. He shared with me his smile, God-given joy radiating from it. Then he moved on.

Today's verse is Proverbs 4:27. "Do not swerve to the right or the left; keep your foot from evil."

Jeremiah spoke to the congregation today. He talked of compassion, patience, and perseverance, all noble virtues. He mentioned doubt, anger, and fear, all dangerous vices.

He said, "Many in Lexington are open to the Lord's message, but others keep their hearts shut. It is for this second group that we must pray the strongest; pray that God, who is both ours and theirs, unlock their hearts and fill them with his divine wisdom and grace."

He bowed his head and the congregation followed. It seemed as though my mother would rest her head on her knees.

Following service, Jeremiah shook hands with much of the congregation. When my mother and I approached, she embraced him warmly, whispering something that I could not hear. Then he turned to me. Once again, we shared a gaze, his eyes piercing mine with a sharp, confident hazel encumbered only by dark traces underneath. He shook my hand firmly.

"God's grace will rise within you. Accept it with fervent faith," he said to me. I nodded. It sounded like the most beautiful idea.

Today's verse is Galatians 4:6. "Because you are sons, God sent the Spirit of his Son into our hearts, the Spirit who calls out, 'Abba, Father.'"

"Why don't you say grace tonight, Thomas," my mother said. The two of us sat at our kitchen table, the room dimly lit. My mother believed that the lack of light allowed the Light of the Lord to shine on the meal.

I hesitated, then started. "Bless us, oh Lord..." I stopped when I felt my mother shooting nails in me with her stare. "Bless this bounty," I continued, saying whatever came to mind, "and bless those who provide it. Bless this family, the town of Richmond and its people, and those who doubt, that they may be converted. And that God find his way to all. Amen."

"Amen," my mother said, followed by, "interesting."

Today's verse is Romans 3: 23-24. "For all have sinned and fall short of the glory of God, and are justified freely by his grace through the redemption that came by Christ Jesus."

It is Christmas day, and Jeremiah Townsend just announced that he will be attending seminary. It is a warm Christmas. A light rain washes over the bricks of the church.

"The newborn Christ is calling to me once again. I have prayed with my family, and I know I will be guided by the Lord along this new path," he told the congregation, receiving a round of applause that echoed the one from months ago.

Reverend Michaels stood up then and said, "Let us pray for Jeremiah now, and pray that our Savior guide him back to our humble spiritual home after his journey."

We bowed our heads and prayed. The rain hardened its baptism.

Today's verse is Philippians 3:17. "Join with others in following my example, brothers, and take note of those who live according to the pattern we gave you."

This morning, I told my mother that I intend to join the military after graduation. She struck my face with the back of her hand.

"I feel it is my calling," I told her.

"The Lord is the only calling you need," she said.

"I am not Jeremiah Townsend."

"I know." I had never seen her as downhearted.

Today's verse is 1 Corinthians 3:3. "You are still worldly. For since there is jealousy and quarreling among you, are you not worldly? Are you not acting like mere humans?"

Jeremiah visited Richmond High today. We had a gathering in the gymnasium to hear him speak. They set up folding chairs in rows and faced them towards a collection of tables that served as a stage. Jeremiah wore what my mother would call “carpenter’s clothing,” and his dark brown hair was knotted in a bun behind his head. If I were inclined to make comparisons to the Lord, I would say he made Christ look modern.

“I know many have prayed for me, and for this I thank you,” he began. “I was like many of you just one year ago. Young. Unsure. Afraid, even.” He paused and made eye contact with several in the front row of folding chairs. “But the Lord acts in mysterious ways. He calls when you least expect and guides to where you do not know.

“Trust. Trust that in these formative years of your life the Lord is watching over you and will not lead you astray. He directed me out of Richmond into troubled waters and escorted me back with his hand outstretched. And here I am, stronger than ever and ready to follow my faith.”

He stopped again. The room didn’t dare breathe lest we miss the breath of Heaven.

Jeremiah Townsend smiled. “The Lord will never let you down. Not if you live in Him.”

Today’s verse is James 2:26. “As the body without the spirit is dead, so faith without deeds is dead.”

Four days have passed since his visit to Richmond High, and Jeremiah Townsend’s mother and brother have died, two more victims of Luck’s Bend. Reverend Michaels announced their passing in service today, as Jeremiah and his father were not present. A chill crept through the entire congregation at the mention of Richmond’s deadly cliff road curve. Some began to weep, others merely sat in shock.

“Let us pray for Aaron and Jeremiah Townsend, that they may seek refuge in the Lord in this time of tragedy,” Reverend Michaels prayed.

Lying in bed, I can hear my mother crying in her bedroom down the hall. I don’t know if she is crying for Jeremiah and Aaron or crying for herself, for the memory of her husband.

Today’s verse is Jeremiah 2:28. “Where then are the gods you made for yourselves? Let them come if they can save you when you are in trouble! For you have as many gods as you have towns, O Judah.”

They have decided against an open service. In Reverend Michaels’ words, “The body temples of Theresa and Joseph Townsend are not fit for the mortal eye.”

I have often wondered why they do not close Luck’s Bend, only to remember that it is the sole connection between Richmond and Brassfield to the east. Still, it seems that blood trickles in quiet malice in the cracks of that lethal turn.

Does the Lord allow such revenge on nature’s behalf?

Today’s verse is Joel 2:21. “Be not afraid, O land; be glad and rejoice. Surely the Lord has done great things.”

Jeremiah Townsend sits on the porch of Grayson’s Hole, rocking to a silent, haunting melody. Three women stand in front of him, I assume checking on his status. His head is angled down, and he looks up at the women with his eyebrows slightly raised. He does not say much while I watch them, nor does he smile. When I begin my walk home, I overhear one of the women say, “Surely you will rise, my dear,” to which he responds, “Can it be?”

Today’s verse is Philemon 1:25. “The grace of the Lord Jesus Christ be with your spirit.”

The doors of the church were open when I was walking home from school this afternoon, and I looked in to find Jeremiah Townsend sitting in the sixth pew. He was alone. His hair hung loose around his slumped shoulders which rose and fell with slow, deep breaths. I paused. Then I walked inside.

His arms were crossed. His eyes were dim and glazed over, fixed on nothing in particular. He did not look at me when I sat down near him.

We remained in silence for several moments, listening to the wind bounce off the church. We could hear the occasional car pass by or laughter from children down the street. Well, I heard these things. Jeremiah did not seem fully present.



Finally, I said, "I have been praying for you. My mother has, as well."

"Thank you," he replied, still not looking at me.

Quiet bore down on us again. Jeremiah leaned forward and rested his chin on his thumbs, hands clasped as if in prayer. He closed his eyes for a moment, then opened them and turned to me. The dark streaks under those eyes had spread. Once I saw the power of the Lord in them, but here I saw nothing. He studied me, and I let him.

"I told you once that God's grace would rise within you," he said.

I told him that yes, he had. He looked ahead again, this time focusing on the altar.

"I was wrong."

I was taken aback by this, but as it did not appear that he was talking to me, I chose not to reply.

"All my life I have spoken His praises, shared Him with whoever would listen." He shifted his gaze to the pulpit. "I have read His words. Studied them. Absorbed them. I have given Him my time. I have given all my energies. I pledged myself to Him up there." He waved his hand forward. "Twice." He stopped. Life had returned to his eyes. This time they looked like fire.

"Tell me," Jeremiah said as he turned to me once again, "what was it all for?"

I told him that I did not know. He shook his head.

"No one does. All anyone can say is 'He has a plan; the Lord has a plan. Have faith, my child, have faith.' Well, faith is beginning to seem to me like a fool's errand."

He stood and slid out of the pew.

I said, "My verse of the day is James 1:12. 'Blessed is the man who perseveres under trial, because when he has stood the test, he will receive the crown of life that God has promised to those who love him.'"

Jeremiah halted just long enough to say "God promises nothing," before walking out of the church.

It has been two days since I talked with Jeremiah Townsend. I was helping my mother in her garden this morning and decided to tell her about the conversation.

"Why didn't you stop him and talk with him more?" she asked when I finished.

"What choice did I have?"

"There is always a choice to be made."

"That is not what you have taught me," I replied.

She looked at me as if I had struck her. She removed her gloves, threw them to the ground, and stormed toward the house.

I stood and said, "I will be leaving after graduation."

She stopped and turned back to me. Through gritted teeth, she said, "God guide you," then walked inside.

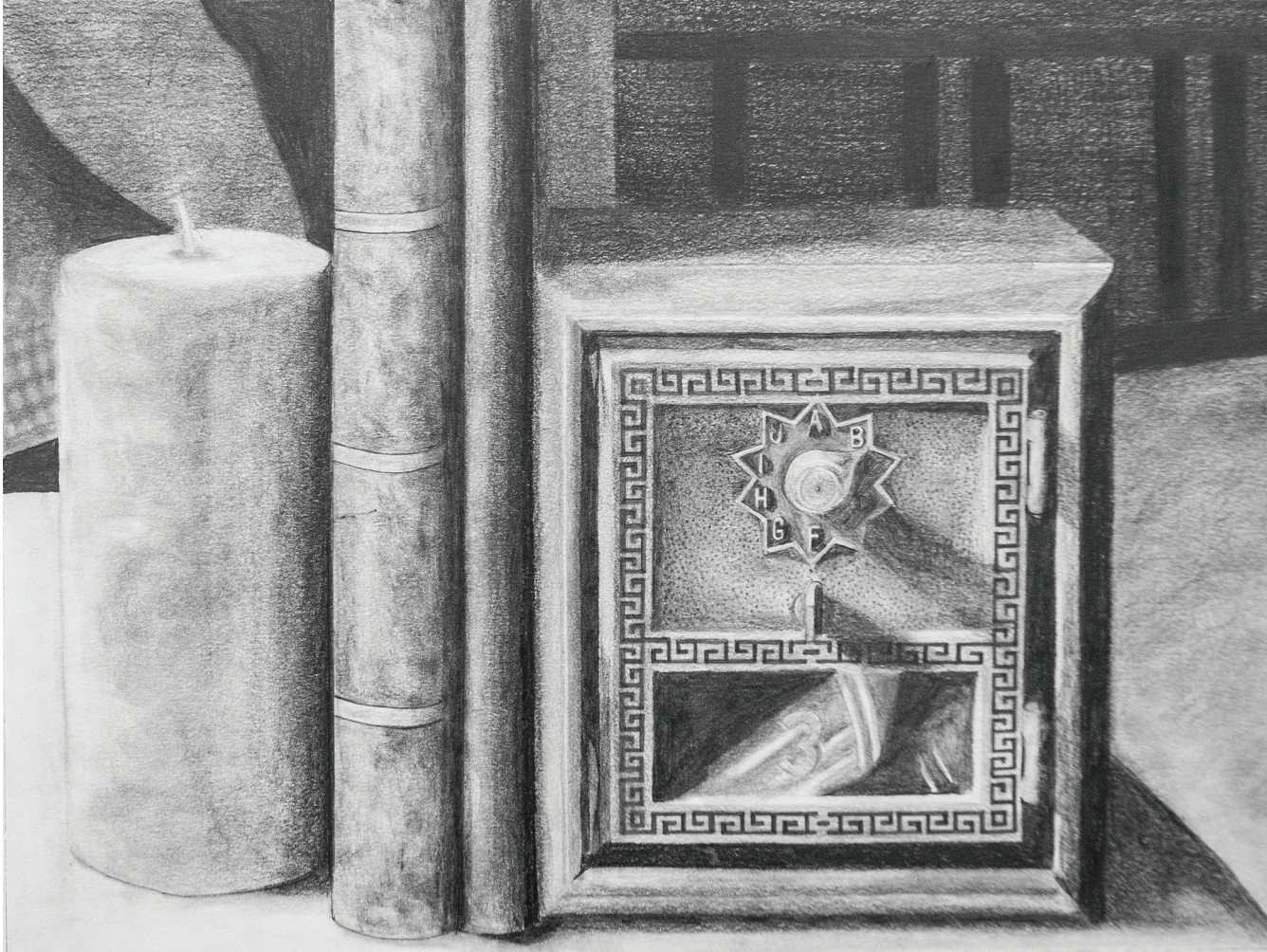
Today's verse is John 1:1. "In the beginning was the Word, and the Word was with God, and the Word was God."

It is the day before Jeremiah Townsend is to leave for seminary, and he has killed himself. His father found him hanging in his bedroom. His Bible was open on the bed. A single verse was crossed out, Psalm 112:4. "Even in darkness light dawns for the upright, for the gracious and compassionate and righteous man."

I will be pondering this verse; on this day, and for many to come.

# Still Life?

Nate Lebsack



# turn off your screen and take my hand

## Paige Poe

that which saves us  
lies not in glittering badges,  
gunfire haze, heroism  
or tragedy — no  
six o'clock news or media  
theatrics can protect us.

you wouldn't offer  
a dying man a band-aid,  
soapboxes cannot dismantle  
a system wound so tightly  
around our throats  
it leaves us choking.

no, truth hides

in a candle's whisper of smoke  
in the shadow of a gun shot  
in every first and last breath.

it rests delicately between  
death and resurrection,  
in the grimy fists of those  
unafraid to dive into filth,  
to bear the dirty burden  
and alone trudge forward  
into the world's muck.

# Word Vomit

## Anonymouse

Through neon cities forged from the dreams  
of those who never sleep,  
we wander and we laugh  
until we burst our seams,  
at all the silly games of wolves and sheep.  
She held the match,  
and uncorked the rusted out tin gas can.  
*I double dog dare you*  
she said handing the future over to me.  
Her smile echoed satisfaction,  
at the world burning around her.  
Ivory towers and suburban doll houses  
reduced to kindling.  
With the rubble piled high  
like a new year's bonfire  
she turned to me  
and whispered,  
*I only came to watch it fall.*  
We found peace staring into  
the pale blue eyes of an indifferent world.  
We found solace in knowing  
that regardless of our plight  
our star still spins  
synchronized pirouettes, for none to see.



# Grandma's Kitchen

## MaryAnne Fissell

I was six years old, maybe five.  
I didn't realize the warmth of the oven  
was not the only illuminating, penetrating heat  
that existed in that room.

The kitchen inflated with scents of something sweet.  
Some days I remember it being her famous lemon cake,  
other days I contemplate bittersweet chocolate and vanilla.

She smiled at me behind flour-caked wrinkles.  
I traced them with my tiny fingers,  
teeming with questions.  
I wondered why I did not look like her,  
Why she was tall and I was small,  
Why she was old and I was young,  
I wondered why she had hair and I did not.

I saw her standing in the doorway on the day she had lost it all.  
I cried.  
I can now see those crocodile tears  
were for all the wrong reasons.

I did not cry because soon grandma's cakes would only be  
Recipes in books that crinkled happily  
like her wrinkles on that day.

But with that checkered apron  
draped across her waist  
She returned to the woman I knew.  
The woman who picked apples from the trees on the lane,  
Grabbing me out of bed on the hot July mornings,  
Sheering sheep as I stood nervously by.  
To me she had no fears, she loved endlessly,  
and her heart was full.

But her blood, and her lungs, and her breasts  
Were also full  
with things that shouldn't have been there.  
Not full with cakes in ovens, kitchens with love.

She lifted me up when I was too short to see birthday wishes,  
She held my hand when the dark was too scary,  
She covered my yawns after long river days,  
She taught me to make world famous lemon cakes,  
She rocked me to sleep so I wouldn't remember  
the sadness of her rainy day funeral.

**Slow Down**  
**Matthew Brown**



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**BUT ABOVE ALL, IN  
ORDER TO BE, NEVER  
TRY TO SEEM.**

– Albert Camus