

# eleven40seven

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“  
**THE OBJECT OF ART IS NOT  
TO REPRODUCE REALITY,**

**BUT TO CREATE A REALITY  
OF THE SAME INTENSITY.**”

—Alberto Giacometti

# CONTENTS

A Haunting	9	Olivia Nucci
Crumbling	10	Tanner Libby
Anxiety	12	Mackenzie Heard
3/11/11	13	Krystin Pickering
Carnival	16	Reagan Sheffield
Cling	18	Hayley Zablotsky
Flower Skull	27	Gabby Zeagler
Hushed Heat	28	Amber Hovanec-Carey
Divided	29	Mackenzie Heard
Trees	30	William McDonald
The Eclectephant Scholar	32	Emma Heinz
When I was Lucy	33	Polley Poer
You are a Gem	42	Sydney Peel
The Human Heart	43	The Human Heart
Go Through It	44	Zachary Gutierrez
Back to the beginning.	46	Kelsey Emery
December	47	Lauren Conte
Blue Skies	48	Meg Gleason
Time	50	Morgan Killian
magnolia mother	51	Paige Poe
Hummingbirds	52	Sanford Ballou
Sand Castle Kings	53	Tanner Libby
Sunny State of Mind	54	Emma Heinz
Sunset Observations	55	MaryAnne Fissell
Reason to Be	56	Zack Amato
Pennsylvania Moments	62	Eve Matten
Unwanted Wanting	64	William McDonald
In The Living/Listening Room with The Wizard of Oz	65	Nathan Ching
to see is to believe	66	Paige Poe
Spritual Beings	67	Michelle Bonilla
Brain Dead	68	Eliza Calvo
Metatenas Especial	69	Maria Barrientos
I Hate You, Writing	70	MaryAnne Fissell
The Distractions We Invent	71	Rachel Brooks
Bouganvilla	74	MaryAnne Fissell
Worm	75	Eliza Calvo
I am not a shell	76	Sydney Peel
Veiled	77	Olivia Nucci
A Portrait of the Pick-up Artist as a Young Man	78	Joshua Borders
Bugs	80	Sydney Peel
Fish Out of Water	82	Nathan Ching
Micro	84	Mackenzie Heard
ocean song	86	Paige Poe



# CONTENTS

Waves of Solidarity	87	Michelle Bonilla
burnout	88	Haley Decker
A Prayer for Modern America	89	Sanford Ballou
Listen	90	Polley Poer
Untitled	92	Collin Pratt
God’s Greatest Gift	93	Nicholas Ferrandino
Curiosity		Mackenzie Heard



# EDITOR'S NOTE

A life without art would not be a fun life at all. This sentiment I am trying to express has been much more eloquently put by my favorite author, Kurt Vonnegut. His words, I think, explain why this journal, working on this staff and art in general are so important to me. He tells us, "The arts are a very human way of making life more bearable. Practicing an art, no matter how well or badly, is a way to make your soul grow, for heaven's sake." Art is good for you, and everyone should create something whether they think they're talented or not.

One thing that has become so apparent to me in the three semesters I have worked on the staff of the journal is how talented our student body really is. I am continually amazed by the beautiful and thoughtful work that is submitted to us every semester.

All of the submissions we received are important and personal to the artist. I am honored and humbled to be able to take that art and those artists and give them a platform to become important and personal to every person who sees, hears or reads them.

I have loved every minute of being on staff for eleven40seven. During my first semester working on the journal it quickly became apparent that this would be one of my favorite parts of my college career. People always tell you that you have to find your place or your thing in college and I truly believe that eleven40seven has been that thing for me. I could not be more grateful that I'm closing this chapter of my life as a TCU student as the Editor in Chief of our journal.

To the staff and Dr. Rode, thank you. You guys have all been so amazing. I can't tell you how much I appreciate your hard work and dedication this semester.

Lauren Langston



# A Haunting

Olivia Nucci



# Crumbling

## Tanner Libby

Hand in hand, you lay out the future  
Together. Step by step, brick by brick.  
It's easy at first, forming the path  
By which you will walk side by side into  
Unknown lands. The conversations flow  
Just as each brick slides into place in front of  
You. The sun rises and sets on your journey  
Smoothly and the days pass faster and faster.  
Falling harder, you begin building a foundation;  
Laying out the schematics, and painting the perfect  
Palace for the end of this chapter, moving to the next.

Your hands part. Careless. You each place the  
Stones you discussed, communicating the  
Rooms, stairs, elaborate designs and dates.  
So wrapped up and enamored by the immaculate  
Castle, coming to life around you at last. You  
Fail to notice the ground shifting beneath your  
Feet; microscopic imperfections in the corners of the  
Life you built together. Selfishness causes thick  
Walls to come up in untranslatable spaces.  
Finding the one you love trapped behind hard stone;  
Realizing the construction went wrong along the way.

The finished kingdom, beautiful as a whole but  
Tragically divided. Seeing the walls you built,  
The bricks you set, the dreams you breathed into  
Existence. Discovering impurities in the half  
You built; knowing you must seal them to protect  
The integrity of your work. The mortar you need  
Left stranded with the one slowly slipping from your  
Grasp. Walls thrown up as barriers from pain; bricks  
Become weapons, cracked by lack of trust and chipped  
By many sleepless and tear soaked nights apart.

*continued, stanza break*

The split from the corner grows deeper and wider  
Spreading across the length of the floor. You  
Charge from the room in search of your love, aware  
That it is the only thing that can prevent the impending  
Downfall of the work of art you have created. Frantically,  
You chase the past through dark empty hallways in an  
Attempt to retrace the steps taken to reach the present.  
You find yourself lost in a labyrinth of chaotic memory.  
The voice of your future calling to you from every  
Direction. The fights painted on the cold, gray walls,  
Forced to recall those dark marks on bright times.

The tick-tock of the clock mocks your hunt for  
Reconciliation. You race time itself in hope of  
Reaching your love before the blunder permanently  
Stains your masterpiece. The foundation continues to  
Crumble interminably causing load-bearing walls to  
Collapse under the immense weight of entanglement.  
Imploding on itself, the fortress deteriorates; bits of  
Memories crash to the floor and light breaks through  
Holes left in the ceiling by words spoken, now seemingly  
Unobtainable. You reach the one you love just in time  
Only to realize it's too late, you stare together at ruins.

Not even one rampart left standing around the now  
Unrecognizable pile of debris. Finding one small  
Dandelion, you pluck it from the wreckage and  
Hand it off to the one who matters most in exchange for  
Half of a smile; the laborious decision still to be made.  
Torn between returning down the uneven brick path  
Until you part ways or taking one another by the hand and  
Starting again. The verdict, reached mutually when reflecting  
On the time. The energy exerted to assemble the first castle  
Still kinetic enough inside, fusing hearts; bodies. The same first  
Slab placed once more. Vigilantly. Hands never again parting.

**Anxiety**  
**Mackenzie Heard**





# 3/11/11

## Krystin Pickering

*The Great East Japan Earthquake hit Japan at 2:46pm local time on March 11, 2011, causing structural damage up and down Japan's coastal Prefectures. The 9.0 earthquake's off-shore thrusts created tsunami waves that hit up and down the Eastern Coast of Japan, the largest hitting a height of 140ft in Iwate prefecture. 15, 894 people died as a result of these events, and the areas affected were almost completely destroyed. Many communities are still recovering, and the topography of some areas of land have been permanently altered.*

She waits for her mother to hand her her shoes, feet hanging down into the entry-way from where she sits on the step. She waits for her mother to finish straightening her school uniform and smoothing down that last strand of black hair, insisting that she must look her best despite the fact that the school year is ending at the end of the week. She waits for her mother to gather the bags and her wallet so that she can go shopping after walking her to school. She waits for her mother, and while it's rare that her mother walks with her to school, she wishes she could have picked a different day. She waits for her mother as they walk down the stairs of their complex into the streets, greeting the elderly woman that tends the flowers with their routine bow and a polite greeting. She waits for her mother to speak as they walk, going over the points for her presentation on the Genroku period and running down the list of Kanji she had to memorize for her exam. She waits for her mother to finish lecturing her on her slacking off of her duties around the house as they walk down closer to the sea wall, and instead of protesting, she is distracted by the gentle moving and flowing of the waves. She waits for her mother to stop teasing her when they walk by the older student she has a crush on, wondering if she'll ever let her live that down. She waits for her mother to hand her her lunch when they arrive at her school and tells her she'll see her this afternoon.

She waits for her mother to text her when the earthquake is felt and they file down the stairs in an orderly fashion, standing on the ground once they reach it to ride it out. She waits for her mother to come and take shelter with them when the tsunami warnings come over the intercom, and they run to the roof of their building with others from their city. She waits for her mother to come walking up the stairs any moment and stand next to her on the railing, watching the taller buildings bend and sway with the earth that moves beneath them and seeing the wave monster grow. She waits for her mother as the ground liquefies and buckles, and it looks like the streets have turned into an ocean before any water even hits them.

She waits for her mother to come as the wave comes, crashing over the sea wall and rushing into the buildings below, throwing cars and buildings around the way children kick around a can in kankeri. She waits for her mother to answer her calls and tell her that she's all right, that she reached higher ground, but she can't even hear the dial tone over the sound of rushing waves. She waits for her mother's voice to join with the others around her asking "Nande?" (Why?). She waits for her mother to appear on one of the few other rooftops left standing across the city, hoping she'll be looking down at the debris and destruction in the streets with as much disbelief as she is, but her hopes fade as she watches buildings crumble against the weight of the waves, becoming nothing more than floating piles of wood and insulation and pieces of concrete. She waits for her mother to appear thrashing in the water beneath her, but she fears that she is among those drowning under the black water surrounding her school.

She waits for her mother as the waters recede and rescue and clean-up operations begin, waiting anxiously for news—a text, a call, something. She waits for her mother as her relatives call her, checking in, wondering if they're safe, and offering them places to stay; she tells them they couldn't get out of Kamaishi if they wanted to and that they are needed here more. She waits for her mother to push her way out from underneath the rubble that used to be their house, maybe out from under the door resting on what used to be their bathroom, coming up with nothing but a few scratches and a bruise or two. She waits for her mother as the aftershocks begin—not knowing that these would continue for years to come—the first few almost as strong as the initial quake, shaking rubble and knocking down tsunami-weakened structures. She waits for her mother as footage rolls in from neighboring communities: Ishinomaki, Kesennuma, Sendai, and Otsuchi, showing them wiped off the map, showing families weeping over the loss of their homes, showing parents kneeling in front of small figures covered in blankets. She waits for her mother—her heart aches watching her people suffer this tragedy—and she prays that when her mother turns up, they'll be involved in whatever capacity they can to help with relief. She waits for her mother for what feels like days, watching as doctors, workers, and supplies from dozens of countries land on their shores, and as time passes she'd be happy just to see her, even if she had been terribly injured or maimed by this disaster. She waits for her mother as names on the list of missing shortens and list of dead lengthens. She waits for her mother as the strangers leave and the news stops flowing and she gets the feeling that the world has moved on and left them behind. She waits for her mother as she walks down rubble

covered sidewalks and over places where buildings used to stand, seeing landmarks in her life reduced to nothing but memories. She waits for her mother as she walks by what used to be her elementary school, wondering if the next body she sees will be hers.

She stops waiting.

# Carnival

## Reagan Sheffield







# Cling

## Hayley Zablotsky

*Recipient of Helen Hamilton Award*

Do you know what I like about fish?

Nothing, actually.

They awaken in me such a profound and disturbing pity that I can barely stand to look at them. Eyes glassy like marbles, bodies greasy and textured like the underside of a non slip shower mat. Spines like delicate combs. They are grotesque creatures, really.

Yet my family has a perverse obsession with them. We must, or we wouldn't do what we do.

The day after Thanksgiving, while the rest of America goes shopping, my family visits the fish hatchery. Every single year. We do realize that fish and the holiday season are unrelated. But we did it once -- visited the fish hatchery on Black Friday -- and now we must do it a thousand times.

It is tradition and is therefore something we must cling to.

Traditions, by definition, encompass the act of clinging. But my family takes it a step further -- we *cling* to traditions, which means that we *cling* to the act of *clinging*.

I've never been certain if going to the fish hatchery is a Thanksgiving or Christmas tradition. I'm not sure that it matters to my mom, who is insisting that we go even this year. Now that my older sister Kaitlin and I are both in college, we feel the need to assert that it would *really be okay* if we didn't go to the fish hatchery this year.

"But just think of the *experience*, girls," mom says as we reluctantly pile into the SUV. Kaitlin and I sit together in the backseat in a sort of solidarity with each other, leaving the front passenger seat to mom's tan leather purse. "You can't have this kind of experience in every city," mom says.

That's right. Only here in Sacramento, California.<sup>1</sup>

The hatchery is located on the American River, smashed between the freeway and a dizzying number of bike trails. Northern Californians *love* to bike and love even *more* to not stay in the bike lane. There are lots of bikers out today like always, and I watch their stringy taught calves pedal by after we exit the freeway.

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<sup>1</sup> I would never recommend that you visit Sacramento. There is nothing to do here. Wait -- that's not true. We have a mediocre zoo that used to have an HIV-positive chimpanzee right near the front. That's sort of notable.

"Have you ever noticed," I say at a red light, "how the men bikers have no hair on their legs?" Stringy taught calves from Northern California never have hair. They are tanner and smoother and lovelier than mine.

"Air resistance," Kaitlin informs us. "You know, like swimmers and water resistance? The tiny leg hairs slow the pedaling down."

"Really?" mom asks from the front seat.

"Really?" I ask from my seat next to Kaitlin.

"Actually I'm not sure," she says. "But probably." There is no apology in her voice. She enjoys speaking with authority. We let her.

I look out the window again and watch a biker in a tight red biker suit pedal next to our car. His stringy taught calves from Northern California, of course, are remarkable. It makes me proud to be a Northern Californian.<sup>2</sup>

A lot of things about California are a freaking mess right now but at least we have our calves.<sup>3</sup> You can't take that from us.

The fish hatchery parking lot is crowded like always. There are strollers and short-legged toddlers everywhere, and Kaitlin and I give each other a look. But we know not to say anything more in complaint. We've been coming here since we were in strollers, and we don't want to ruin the nostalgia for mom. We are going to be good sports. We have silently, mutually decided this.

The stench, the wire fences to keep the birds out, and the potholes in the concrete are so familiar as we walk up the steps of the hatchery. These things reach out invisible hands to me and smear patches of nostalgia all over my coat.

We fight our way through a pack of children as we approach the main gate. "Look at them all," Kaitlin says, discreetly pointing out a staggering toddler with ruddy cheeks. "They still *believe*, you know?"

"In what?" I ask.

"Oh, *everything*. Unicorns and Santa and all of it."

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<sup>2</sup> Note that I don't feel this feeling often.

<sup>3</sup> And when I say "our" I do mean *all of us Northern Californians* -- even those of us who can only ride a bike until it's time to steer.

"When *did* you figure out that there isn't a Santa?" I ask Kaitlin, suddenly wondering why I've never asked her that before. We never talked about it. We just both figured it out and silently agreed not to discuss it.

"*Shh*," she chides me. "Don't ruin it for mom."

Mom still maintains that Santa is real, of course. She has always gone full-out at Christmas. She's the type of parent who disguises her handwriting on the to-and-from tags on gifts. She uses special gift wrap for the presents from Santa. She tactfully arranges the cookie crumbs speckling the WELCOME SANTA plate.

To this day, she does these things. It is tradition. And we must cling.

"Look how ugly they are!" mom is gushing. Kaitlin and I catch up to mom. "So ugly they're kind of cute," she says, lifting her sunglasses up onto her head to take a better look.

The first attraction is a long series of cement troughs -- home to the baby salmon. The fish are actually not that small at this point -- about the size of an ear of corn -- but we all pretend they are darling anyway.

"Oh, aren't you just little gems," I say to the fish. I don't like nature very much.

"Remember when you guys used to feed them?" mom says with a laugh.

"You're even uglier than I remember," I muse softly to them.

"It was so fun when you tossed the food in and they all jumped for it," mom remembers.

"It all goes down from here, kids," I tell them.

"Should we feed them today?" mom asks.

"No," Kaitlin and I say together. "Not today."

There are dispensers at the end of each row of troughs that look like candy or bubblegum machines. You jam in five or six nickels and then about two or three pellets of fish food roll out into your eager, clammy little hand. Throwing food to the baby fish is very exciting because the fish jump and thrash to gobble up the pellets. In feeding these fish, children learn at a very young age that we live in a cutthroat world.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> When we were children, Kaitlin and I learned that we live in a cutthroat world.



Sometimes I wonder how ethical the fish hatchery is in placing these food machines. Most of the time they don't work. I've seen frustrated fathers pounding on them and screaming as their disappointed children await inevitable failure.

"I brought them to feed the fish, damn it," a father berates the food dispenser, which squeaks and trembles from the blows but never yields. "I want my money back! I invested seven nickels -- seven nickels, you jackass!"

"Tony, lower your voice," the mother soothes, glancing around to see if we are watching her husband's temper tantrum -- which, of course, we are. "We'll feed the fish next year."

"We'll feed the fish *this* year!" The children are mostly calm and bewildered, wandering around and bouncing off of each other in puffy winter jackets,<sup>5</sup> not nearly as distraught as their fathers.

When we were little, my sister and I used to hoard nickels for the very special outing to the fish hatchery. We also came to the hatchery equipped with plastic baggies, knowing that fish food gripped too long in a sweaty hand might erode our skin with its foul odor. In the end, it's all about being prepared.

"Look at this one, look at this one!" mom says.

I edge closer. What one? Aren't they all the same?

"Look at his little eyes -- they're looking right at you!"

No, they're not. They have no other direction to point.

After cooing to the baby fish, we fast-forward to the end of a fish's life by heading to the fish ladder.

The ladder is a series of wide steps with a rushing current flowing down the stairs. The salmon have to jump from step to step to reach safety at the top.

To this day, I don't understand why we make the salmon work so hard to reach safety. It's like a game with a set of dusty and stained instructions that we must follow *exactly* even though nobody really knows why.

But the really sadistic part of all this is that we go gawk at the salmon as they struggle and fight the current. There is even a group of professional

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<sup>5</sup> Which are entirely overkill in the mild November sunny chill.

photographers today, who probably see the spectacle as the crux of life at large.

And families -- young families with *children* -- walk down the hill to watch the salmon jump. I didn't used to think anything of this practice -- after all, my family used to be one of those young families. But now I see the ladder as a horrible invention, something not at all family-friendly. The fish are blind and determined, so instinctual that they can't even see the brutality and abuse they are sustaining. They question nothing, just clinging to their instincts. Enduring the same struggle over and over and over.

"Don't lean over the edge," Kaitlin says in her big sister voice.

Oh, for God's sake. I'm almost twenty years old. "I'm not going to fall in," I tell her. I stare down at the white noise of the water roaring over the edge of each wide step. I smell the musk of the murky dark blue-green water gathering at the bottom of the ladder.

"Do you see any fish?" mom asks, leaning over the edge with me. You have to stare along time without blinking to see a hiccupping fish wiggle its way up a step or maybe only *try* to wiggle its way up a step and then slide back down the waterfall. I usually end up blinking.

We always take a picture in front of the fish ladder and since it's always late morning when we visit the hatchery, the sun is always directly in our eyes. I'm not sure that we have any good photos at the fish hatchery -- ever -- since our eyes are always squinting and watering. These photos serve no purpose, never go in Christmas cards, but still we take them because tradition tells us we must.

At the top of the fish ladder is a "holding pond." The waiting isn't very exciting, and the fish just swim in listless circles, dazed and battered from the ladder, awaiting the doom they may or may not know is before them.

I know what is going to happen. To me it feels like a doctor's office waiting room. Capped tension hums through the holding room. No one wants to look nervous, but everyone is *really freaking out* because that is the thing to do in a waiting room. Magazine pages crack as patients flick them sharply, and feet bob and twitch.

They say that no news is good news, but the salmon hear news. Eventually the waiting is over and the massacre begins. You see, it is easier to get the eggs out of the female fish by cutting her open and scooping all 5,000 eggs out rather than letting her naturally reproduce.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>6</sup> Of course, killing the salmon to get the eggs out is not inhumane or unreasonable because salmon die after spawning *anyway*.

If you go to the hatchery on the right days, you can actually watch this miraculous killing and “egg-taking” process through large dirty glass windows. Or, if you’d rather, you can watch a short movie explaining the process. We never did these things when we were little because mom always says you can never un-see something.

“Once it’s in, you can never get it out,” she says ominously.<sup>7</sup> I guess mom wants to expose Kaitlin and me to the horrors of the world *gradually*. Fish fighting over food and fighting to climb the ladder are of a different magnitude than slaughter.

So we’ve never watched the egg-taking. And since watching the event has never occurred to me as something I’d *like* to do, I probably never *will* watch the egg-taking. The fish handlers (or whatever they call themselves), however, say it’s really something to see.

Once we’ve had enough fun on death row, we head toward the tiny “museum” attached to the hatchery. As I wander around the museum, eyes glazed and disinterested after years and years of reading the same plaques and listening to the same giant plaster salmon head stalk -- in both English and Spanish -- when you press the red button, I wonder about things. Things about salmon. Things like: do they care if they’re served with brown butter and couscous versus mandarin orange arugula salad?

And then I wonder things about me. Things like: why don’t I eat salmon? I’ve been a vegetarian for almost five years. Why do I do it? People always ask that. Especially the ones who like bacon.

Sometimes I really wish I had a good reason.

*“You see, the newest philosophical thought proposes the supposition that the animal soul transcends flesh and integrates with the human soul, thus creating an unknown and perhaps dangerous hybrid anima.”*

Wouldn’t that be a cool reason? That would be a cool reason.

But I don’t have any such reason. I am not morally against eating meat. I do not have a health condition or dietary restriction. I tried being vegetarian just to try it. And I liked it. Suddenly, it’s been five years. I still like it. So why not?

Not everyone understands. Most notably my dog and the type of guys I

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<sup>7</sup> You can only imagine my delight when I finally convinced mom to let me watch my first PG-13 movie.

seem to date. Who knew that vegetarianism could be a factor in dating? For most people who are dating, The Talk is about labeling the relationship. *Where are we? Where is this going?* But for me, The Talk is a bit different. “So... I have *this*... thing. I’m kind of... vegetarian.” If you don’t believe me that this *does* play a role in the dating scene, try explaining the concept of *salads*<sup>8</sup> to a well-mannered redneck with a barb-wire encircled Texas tattoo, a lifted truck, and the beloved tradition to shoot the Thanksgiving turkey in the backyard.

“Hayley, Hayley, come spin the wheel,” Kaitlin says. We are still in the museum. There’s a Salmon Survival Wheel you can spin in this museum if, for some reason, you want to pretend you’re a salmon. Spin the wheel and see what your fate is.

The wheel is wooden and sticky, with plastic wedges. The wedges are different colors, and each one details your possible destiny as a fish. I spin the wheel and wait for my fate. The best outcome is the red wedge that reads, “Return to reproduce. Cycle starts again. Then die.” That’s the big winner.

“Statistically you don’t have a very good chance of survival,” Kaitlin points out to me. “You’re probably going to die.”

“Thanks,” I say while we wait for the wheel to slow down. “Thanks very much for that.”

I am eaten by a diving duck. That is my fate. I don’t even reach adulthood. I am a smolt. I reach smolt-hood. What is a smolt. It’s not an adult. I know that. So that means my death is young and beautiful and tragic. And that’s really all a salmon can ask for, right?

I imagine, as far as salmons go, a diving duck is a pretty dignified way to go. First of all, it wouldn’t be my fault -- because there’s no way the side-positioned eyes would have seen the duck coming. Second of all, I wouldn’t have had to fight my way up the ladder. And most important, I wouldn’t be sliced open for an egg donation.

Now it’s Kaitlin’s turn to spin the wheel. I can’t pay attention to the colors spinning by. I can’t stop thinking about egg donations.

I’m not totally opposed to the idea of organ donation. In fact, I rather like the idea because what am I going to do with a stinking kidney once I’m dead? I’ll be on to bigger and better things like halos and eternal life of the soul. Probably.

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<sup>8</sup> Don’t even try kale or quinoa.

But eggs are different. Donating eggs is like saying, “Here, sure, you can take little Madison, our first-born daughter.” I *feel* there is a difference between kidneys and potential children in terms of emotional connection.

My family doesn’t like it when I talk about organ donation. At all. I usually bring it up after the fish hatchery just for fun. Just to make them itchy about it. Just to cause a little bit of trouble.

My family doesn’t like to talk about death in general. But I feel that discussions need to be had just in case. As we finish up with the museum, I decide it’s time to rock the boat.

“I might like to be buried at sea,” I say suddenly as we head toward the exit. “*After* my kidneys are donated.”

“You’d be eaten by a shark,” mom protests.

No, actually a trusted source has predicted that it will be a diving duck.

“A shark! How could you live knowing that?” mom asks.

“That’s kind of the thing, mom,” I remind her. “I wouldn’t exactly be living anymore.”

Kaitlin catches up with us from where she was staring in disappointment at the survival wheel.<sup>9</sup>

“You want to be *fish food*?” she demands, no doubt thinking of the smelly stuff by the baby salmon troughs.

Oh, great. Let’s take everything out of context.

“No, I never said that,” I protest. “All I said was that I might like to be buried at sea. And if a shark ate me, well, that’s the circle of life, right?”

“Hayley!” A gasp from mom.

“*Why* would you want to do that,” Kaitlin says flatly.

“I don’t know,” I say because I don’t really. “I guess... I think it’s kind of romantic. It would be a peaceful way to float... into... eternity.”<sup>10</sup>

“*Gawd*,” Kaitlin says. “There’s nothing romantic about it. Your body would bloat, your organs would implode after 72 hours, and then a shark would eat your drifting morsels.”

“Really, 72 hour implosion?” mom asks.

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<sup>9</sup> She didn’t even hatch. Her egg was flushed away and destroyed.

<sup>10</sup> I do realize that this meditative and dramatic answer is utter bullshit.

"Really?" I ask.

"Well, I'm not *sure*," Kaitlin says. "But probably."

"Also," I say somewhat indignantly, "I won't *have* organs to implode because they will all be donated to needy souls across the nation."

Mom cringes. I know we need to stop. My organ donation beliefs are a bit liberal for her, and the topic of death in general really should be put on the off-limits list with the questionable existence of Santa Claus. But I need to finish this with Kaitlin.

"Okay, fine," I say. "I'll be cremated. Then you can dump my ashes into the ocean and *nobody* will be able to eat me," I say. "If you want me to be selfish about it, that's *fine*," I say.

When we get in the car, mom turns on the radio. Her favorite Christmas song is playing, and she takes it upon herself to drown out the radio.

"It's the *most* wonDERful timmmmmme of the yearrrrrr."

I decide to stop thinking and just sing along. Thinking about fish and death and the *why* and *why* of the world is draining. Some things just are. There isn't a *why*.

"And HEARTS will be *g*lowing when loved ones are NEARRRRRR!"

Or maybe there is a why and we are just too lazy or too stupid -- or maybe too smart -- to even try to figure it out, let go, move forward.

"It's the *most* wonDERful timmmmmme... IT'S THE MOST WONDERFUL TIME... of the yearrrrrrrrrrrrr!"

And so we just cling.

# Flower Skull

Gabby Zeagler



# Hushed Heat

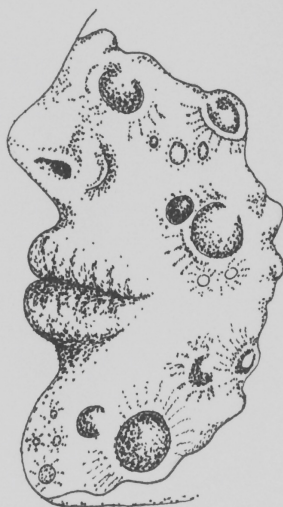
## Amber Hovanec-Carey

You weave through halls, eager to get to class before the bell rings. A smack burns your butt and an eruption of laughter follows; your eyes burn behind suppressed tears and you walk faster, escaping into a classroom, a textbook, a test. You're just a little girl. To them, your body is a land to be explored. Their eyes travel the curves of your body, mapping out their own excursion; you will them to look into your eyes, but their tour is a round trip past the 5 Wonders of a Woman: Legs, Hips, Butt, Waist, and Breasts. Everyday you think this body is for me to live, breathe, and make a difference. One day, you escape into your 8th grade math classroom. Here you are partnered with the "popular" guy. You are focused on an assignment when you hear your partner say that if he likes a girl, he asks her to be his girlfriend. He uses you as an example. He says, if I want to date you because I think you are pretty, I will. You would never date him but you press your lips shut and work through each equation. Your partner turns to you; he notices your long, slender hands. He forms a circle with his thumb and fingers then smirks. He comments on how nice that would feel. Your cheeks burn; you write in the margin of the page: Live, breathe, make a difference. Inside your head, you yell for him to stop but the only noise that echoes in the room is the bell, signaling the end of another day.



# Divided

Mackenzie Heard



# Trees

## William McDonald

are like me—especially the magnolia  
in the park where I am wheeled almost  
every Thursday evening at 5:00pm  
ever since November of 1987.

Every Thursday, I'll hand my  
caregiver five dollars for coffee  
to buy me time to watch the trees  
especially the magnolia across the  
sidewalk next to the rusting lamppost.  
I've watched it for years.

I grew out of my mother's uterus  
unable to move—only grow up and out  
like a tree.

Trees run from the womb,  
realizing the deception much  
quicker than we. It must be dark in there.  
Over the years, I've watched it  
thicken its cage, sinking its roots down  
deeper in vain.

Trees don't reach for the sun. They  
evolve arms and branch fingers to  
find the collar, find the cutis  
to pry away the inspissation,  
to be free.

I find comfort in its shared misery.  
I want to whisper in its trunk.  
*It will be over soon.*

At least I can see the hand that  
holds the cup to my mouth and that the  
wind is not as scary as it may seem. Imagine  
their fear in a drought—just waiting  
and straining in the parched black.

*continued, stanza break*

I also find comfort in knowing that all is also contained. I am contained, and so is this world, and our world in the solar system and the solar system in our galaxy which is contained as a dust mite in the beam of the universe. I'm sure it, too, is contained. It, too, grows out as things spiral within.

I am content nearing the last days of my groaning. The trees never realize this rest. The taller they grow, the louder they ache into the wind break me in two.

Soon I will be uncontained, unearthed from this wheelchair and silly-string my dna across all that has yet to be unlatched on my way out of containment to god-knows where.

# The Eclectephant Scholar

Emma Heinz



# When I was Lucy

## Polley Poer

### SWEATSHIRT

My tiny kid brain was a mirror that only reflected myself. It didn't matter who was knocking on the door, asking for entry, hoping to take a stroll along my frontal cortex. No, you poor souls, you're not allowed in. This is a one-woman show.

I was four years old when I screamed at my mother for the first time.

*I told you not to buy me clothes!* I roared my tiny little aggravated voice inside my head, wiped my nose, and ran off to my room. I'd told her, if she were going to the store, to buy me a toy. That was all I wanted. Was that so hard? Everybody bought me clothes. I had *plenty* of clothes.

But still, she had walked into the living room with an excited smile and held out a red sweatshirt. "Lucy, I found something you're going to like!" she'd said.

Later that evening, after my insolent tears had dried like paste on my face, I snuck into the living room and brought back the sweatshirt. She'd known me well. On the front, it had a collage of my favorite Disney character. Somewhere in an attic, in a box with all my keepsakes, I still have that tiny red sweatshirt.

### POER HOUSE

Our house was always quiet enough that you could hear the wind blow through it. Saturday would come, and Mom would be in her room, Dad outside in the yard. He would always leave the backdoor open. As I heard it periodically slam against the doorframe, clunking the shabby blinds along behind it, I would lie in my bed and contemplate my options for the day.

*I could play school in the front room.*

*I could watch movies until my head hurts.*

*I could go outside with Dad.*

*I could try to convince Mom to take me to Target.*

After choosing to go with option four, I would stroll into Mom's room and find myself hanging my head as I stalked back out. The time was 1:34 pm. Mom was asleep.

## DUMB LITTLE SENTENCE

I was 6 years old when I wrote a fake, cheesy haiku at the elementary school Mother's Day brunch. We were required, much to my dismay, to recite a sentence about our moms in a microphone as they all sat and watched. I fought hard to turn my mirror-brain around, to let it show someone else. But everyone in the audience was a blubbering mess. I looked around at all of those women and felt my skin crawl as they sat there, glistening eyes and all, holding their hands to their mouths. Mom cried, I was embarrassed. I hated when she cried. Can't we just move on and pretend like that touching moment didn't just happen? Such a dumb little sentence. I was sure she'd tell all my family about it. She stuffed tissues into her purse.

## COLD EGGS

Sometimes, if I were lucky, I'd wake up on Sundays to find my dad making pancakes. I thought he made the best pancakes. He'd whistle to himself as he stood alone in the kitchen, hovering around the space like it was built for him. Everyone was in bed, the house just as still and quiet as it ever was. I'd perch myself up at the bar to watch the bubbles grow on top of the rounds. We'd make a full batch. Mix more batter, pour more blobs, flip, flip, flip.

Then, he'd decide to make eggs.

Then he'd throw in a little bacon, too.

"Hey, we've got 'em," he'd say. "Might as well cook it all!"

I'd think about how happy Mom and Sam would be when they woke up to a huge breakfast ready to devour. Dad would tell me "you flip pancakes like a pro" and I'd wonder if Mom flipped pancakes any differently. I'd never know.

Dad liked to cook like he was cooking for a party; as if there would soon be a constant knocking at the door while people strolled in ready to eat. We'd have to keep cooking, keep slapping pancakes and stirring eggs. We'd hear their laughter over the loud sizzling of a new slab of bacon on the pan. They wouldn't be able to get enough. Someone would have to *run-to-the-store* in their pajamas, pick up more stuff. The coffee pot would never cease its gurgles and hisses.

We never quite grasped, however, that the extra eggs would get cold, extra pancakes thrown in the freezer for rushed mornings out the door, bacon given to the dog, and the only meals made out of the Sunday morning feast would be by him and me.

A little person inside my head wanted to confront them. *Dad and me made breakfast, get up!* But I didn't, I just let it slide, like the leftover eggs into the trash.

## THE SILENCE OF LORETTA LYNN

I was 12 years old when Mom insisted I watch "Coal Miner's Daughter". I don't think I really even knew what a coal miner was, but I obliged. Somewhere in the story of the country singer, I was appalled. The husband was a creep, a pig, *did they have to have sex like that back then?*

It was always matters of harsh sexism that sent me into a fit of uncontrollable crying. I'd barely made it 20 minutes into the movie.

*What just happened?* I thought, horrified. *Why did he do that?*

Mom said nothing. She gave me Advil and told me to try to sleep. This happened a lot.

## SING SWEET, SING SOFT

I was 13 years old when Mom bought me a guitar. In the privacy of my room, door shut, I might've tried writing songs. No one ever heard them. Some nights I sat with it in her room and strummed the only six chords I knew.

She always videoed me playing as she lay in her bed under the covers. I didn't know many country songs, but she knew all of them. I'd get out my phone, look up how to play *Me and Bobby McGee*, and end up skipping a few chords here and there because I couldn't quite shape my hand like a pretzel along the frets. I hummed along with the tune, far too embarrassed to sing.

"Ooh, lemme see it," Dad would say as he walked in after a day of work. Sometimes he looked like a little kid when presented with a new toy. "I used to be able to play this song."

Somehow, though with much difficulty, in the pings and groans from the guitar, I could hear something by Aerosmith coming from the strings. My dad sung, pitifully, but I just giggled and watched him fumble.

Mom didn't try to decipher the song. She had taken off her glasses and closed her eyes to sleep.

## SNOWMAN MELTDOWN

I was 14 years old when we decorated her hospital room with Christmas decorations. We bought lights, a little tinsel, even a tiny little green tree that we perched up by the window so she could see it from her bed. We hung her favorite ornaments on it – the crappy ones my brother and I made as kids. Christmas and Mom were like hot chocolate and marshmallows, and if she had to spend the holiday in a tiny hospital room that smelled and looked like the stale remnant of the maternity ward she might have birthed me in back in 1997, peeling blush wallpaper and all, we were going to make it sparkle. By the time we finished, it was still small, but warm and cozy.

I spent fifteen minutes gluing fake eyeballs to the foam cutout of a snowman. Mom loved snowmen. We made one for every person in the family. As Dr. Mini-Giant entered, he grinned and nodded at the pitiful display of ten snowmen taped along the window. I grimaced. It wasn't my best craftwork, but there was only so much to work with in a hospital.

"Good news!" Dr. Mini-Giant clapped a massive hand on my brother's back, nearly punching him out of his chair. His voice boomed like he was announcing a football game. "The numbers aren't high enough for the transplant. You're all spending Christmas at home. Be happy!"

Mom told me months later, after all the times she went back to see that doctor, he never forgot the December night he made her daughter cry. *Hope he's thrilled*, I thought. *It was a rarity.*

I think we ended up hanging the snowmen above our piano. Probably threw the tiny Christmas tree away.

## LIFE LESSONS OF ATTICUS FINCH

I was 15 when I read Mom's favorite book of all time: *To Kill a Mockingbird*. It's a wonder my brother wasn't named "Jem".



Scout reminded me of her. She was inquisitive, smart, but never much like the rest of the family. Not as outgoing as her sister, not as outspoken as her other sister, and not a young athlete like her brother.

She wanted to make the cheerleading team. I once found out she was devastated when she didn't. I felt a twinge of that pain. I wanted nothing more in the seventh grade to make the volleyball team. She bought me a present when I didn't.

Mom was different, maybe an outcast.

The smart one.

The first one to go to college.

The quiet one.

The extra body in the room.

I tell myself she was always thinking as she sat silently in the corner at family gatherings. Sometimes I looked at old picture albums. Mom wasn't really in that many pictures. She was probably the one taking them.

I think Mr. Atticus Finch made her feel better. The wise, intelligent, noble lawyer from Maycomb meant something to her that we never quite understood.

The first time I watched the movie, a floating voice was engrained in my head.

*"Maycomb was a tired old town."* But the voice wasn't the narrator's, it was Mom's, sitting in the kitchen like she'd lived the story herself.

#### WORDS FROM ABOVE

One night, in my 16th year, she pulled a hat over her ears. She hated wearing hats – even more than she hated wearing her wig – but it was cold. I think she was always cold.

That night, she sat upright in her bed, signaling that she was in a good mood. The brown comforter was matted underneath her.

When I slowly walked into the room, hesitantly, I wondered if I should release the question I had tucked into my throat.

*It would be stupid.*

*Don't bring it up.*

*She'll probably just nod.*

*What on Earth would she have to say to that?*

"Mom," I start, trying to sound casual. Her eyes perk up and see me, acknowledging my call. "I was thinking about entering this writing contest. But I don't know, I think it might be dumb. I just thought maybe I could earn some extra money."

Maybe the transplant changed her – she says the German woman's bone marrow she got turned her into a 'foul-mouth'. But I noticed something rise in her as the corners of her mouth turned up. Her eyes peaked upward, and she spoke.

"I love that idea. Write, just write all the time." She told me.

Later, when I stalked back to my room, I wondered if I'd just seen the light I thought she'd lost years ago. I thought I met a new person, or at least one that had been hiding for 16 years.

## CABBIE

I'm almost 17 years old when we're back in the hospital. The third time is the most tense for everyone. My head is pounding, my nose stopped, my eyes so swollen I can barely see the empty waiting room around me. It's late, probably eleven. The other hospital goers are gone, but it isn't important for me to worry about school the next day.

I'm standing there, shaking violently as my tear-ducts have dried like deserts, when I notice a woman on a hospital bed being wheeled around the corner. She seems to be happy, but dazed, like she's "goin' for a ride". I hide my tissues, wipe my face quickly, and walk to her as she waves at her cabbie to halt.

"Hey Lucy," my mother says to me. Her eyes are swollen like mine, but hers are from the medicine. Her left arm – the one she earlier named "Stan" - lays lifelessly by her side, the cancer having cut off her ability to use it, but she grins without a clue. Her spacey smile frowns almost immediately when she notices my puffy red eyes. "What's wrong?"

*What's wrong?* I could've screamed. Mother, 'What's *WRONG?*'

*We've been in a hospital for almost two weeks. You're sick, and we've been doing this off-and-on for six years. Nothing has worked.*

But this, she doesn't know. She has no idea. All she knows is that this nice lady in scrubs has taken her for a stroll around the hospital, and her daughter has been crying.

"Nothing," I say simply. I try to smile, but it's weak. Why would I choose *now* to tell my mother how I feel?

Her eyes question me for a moment, but her airy smile relapses like the sense had just blown out of her.

"Okay, well call me if you need me." She says, and the nurse pushes her away down the hall again.

## APARTMENTS AND COOKIES

I'm sitting in a pew, the front row, the VIP, hand-in-hand with my first boyfriend. He's a sweet guy, tall and gentle. Little do I know he'll break up with me in a year and it'll kill me almost as much as the casket I'm staring at.

Mom's funeral was good. There's no other word for it. I didn't cry, so it was great. Everyone else cried, so it sucked. The flowers and her casket were beautiful, so it was great. She was dead, so it sucked.

In the lobby of the church, a couple of women in their mid thirties approach me. They smile sympathetically, give the old "I'm so sorry for your loss, she was a great lady," spiel, and begin to tell me their peace.

"We were her students in her first year teaching English," the Carroll High class of nineteen-eighty-something tell me. "She used to invite us to her apartment and bake cookies."

My mom? The woman who just spent the last two years of her post-bone marrow transplant life convincing everyone she started cussing because of her German transplant donor?

"One time she bought us journals," one of them continues. "She told us to 'write, write all the time.'"

## STICKY NOTES

Mom wrote everything down. Of course, I never knew this, but as I'm looking through her old jewelry box that afternoon, I find trinkets.

Student council pin from the 70's. *She was in student council?*

Topaz and gold ring. *I never saw her wear that...*

A note from my aunt Lyn on her 22nd birthday. *What was she like at 22?*

Further and further I go, opening random notes, all folded at the corners into neat little pockets that someone told me people my age never make anymore. She wrote down song lyrics, poems, lines about love. They're all words of wisdom scribbled onto little pieces of fading paper.

But all of these things are old, tokens, memories, flashes of the past. A past I never knew, one that I wasn't a part of. I had opened a treasure chest, a time capsule my mother had once lived in, a sacred space of the person she used to be. And I wasn't a part of it.

I throw the wooden box to my side and think of all the things I'll never know.

Then, I notice a yellow sticky note sticking out from between two scraps of paper.

I pick it up, smile, and begin to cry for the first time in a long time. In her handwriting -perfect cursive lettering that failed her after she got cancer- the note read:

*"Nothing dies that is remembered."*

## SCOUT FINCH AND JESSICA SIMPSON

The burial was long. My heels – my new Jessica Simpson pumps that she'd have never bought me because "her money would never go to something with 'Jessica Simpson' on it – dug into the grass. *Poor Jessica*, I thought. *She met the wrath of one ferocious woman.*

We got a dog that night. I named her Jean Louise. Scout, for short.

## LIST OF 'NEVERS'

I'm 18 years old when I'm sitting in class; it's my second semester of college. My fellow students and I sit in a circle. There's no professor in the room.

*Why am I in here?*

*I don't belong here, look at all of these people!*

*That girl over there, you know she knows what she's doing.*

But I stop myself.

I never entered the writing contest because I thought they'd laugh at my entry. I never told my ex-boyfriend how much he hurt me because I thought he'd think I was crazy. I never applied for scholarships because I thought I wouldn't get them. I never told my mother I loved the red sweatshirt.

A woman enters the classroom, clearly the professor.

"Hi everyone," she smiles as she stands at the front of the room.

"Welcome to Intro to Creative Writing."

SPLASH

I'm splashing across the street in electrifying rain, my Jessica Simpson shoes dangling in my hand, laughing at myself for having this terrible idea. I've given up on trying to fit my body under my college roommate's umbrella – I didn't need it - and begin sprinting. My foot doesn't hurt. The rain splatters like my screaming laughter.

*We're idiots*, I think.

Even though my toes feel like I could break them off one by one, I've never felt more powerful running in the street. I'm sure, somewhere, there are people staring and watching. But I don't see them.

A car comes to a casual halt as we frolic across the painted intersection. It's only when we're mere feet in front of it's bumper that it jolts forward.

We scream, sprint, our lungs choking for air between a mixture of panic and laughter.

I promise myself that I'll make up for all the things I should've said and should've done.

In the morning, I'll make someone go eat eggs with me. I'll sing to someone - as pitifully as my parents - to my friends. I'll write as much as I can, and tell people what's wrong. Maybe someday, I might even write dumb little sentences and shout them out to the people I love, especially when they buy me sweatshirts.

**You are a Gem**  
**Sydney Peel**



# The Human Heart

## William McDonald

```
// Method getJoy() is given an object to process for joy.
private void getJoy(Object x ) {
// Use boolean method gratifies() to gauge satisfaction
// Call getJoy() for Object x if it gratifies.
// WARNING: Infinite loop will cause a system crash.
    if (x.gratifies()==true) {
        satisfaction = true;
        getJoy(Object x);
    }
    else{
        satisfaction = false;
    }
// While satisfaction is not met by Object x, call getJoy() for
// a new object.
    while(satisfaction==false){
        discard(Object x);
// Use a recursive call of getJoy() to restart the method.
// Maybe she will be better.
// WARNING: Infinite loop will cause a system crash.
        getJoy(Object y);
    }
}
```



# Go Through It

Zachary Gutierrez







# Back to the beginning.

**Kelsey Emery**

*1st place Contemplative Poetry Contest Winner*

*Eyes closed, ears open  
Heart beating slowly  
I begin to see with my ears  
The painting of life  
Birds speaking to one another  
Singing in glorious harmony  
Leaves kissed  
By the breath of the earth  
The wind moves my hair to one shoulder  
Pushing me to expose myself  
Become raw  
Like the earth which I sit upon  
I hear whispers saying  
You were created by this dirt  
And will be buried here again one day  
Take peace dear friend  
In knowing that you  
Are a part of something much greater  
That your being was created  
By mother earth herself  
And that you are innately  
A part of nature's community  
So breathe in the air  
Feel the moisture in the soil  
For this, is where you belong.*

# December

## Lauren Conte

As you enter the car  
icy air slices my skin  
I feel your presence and  
rather than meet your eyes  
I watch the stoplights

Green to yellow  
Yellow to red

I slow down but you command me  
to push on ignore the change  
We can make the light  
We can make it through  
I listen to you  
rather than my fears

Onward we drive  
My hands grip the wheel you direct

You steer me off main roads  
dark tunnels  
Under thundering railways  
we slow to a stop  
Drifts of snow conceal cracked pavement  
We exist alone together

Hands on the wheel  
I am unable to relinquish my grip

In the dim lot  
steam fogs the windows  
Hot, angry words trapped  
inside with us

Outside snow falls  
illuminated by the few lights

The heat of your words exhausts me  
Expose to the blue flame of your eyes  
I give in to the warm honey  
of your lips  
But when our mouths are ensnared  
my stomach recoils

Onward we drive  
My hands grip the wheel you direct

Snow underneath the tires  
Causes us to lose control  
Trapped below  
the weight of the car  
I am unable to relinquish  
my grip on the wheel

Green to yellow  
Yellow to red

I slow down but you command me  
to push on ignore the change  
We can make the light  
We can make it through  
I listen to you  
Rather than my fears

The light flicks red  
before I can stop.

# Blue Skies

Meg Gleason





# Time

## Morgan Killian

*3rd place Contemplative Poetry Contest Winner*

Tick Tock. Tick Tock. Tick Tock. Tick Tock. Tick Tock. Tick Tock. Tick Tock. Tick Tock.  
Wake up! Get up! Frown. Need more sleep. Another hour. Please, let me be.  
Can't believe I did that. I must do this and this. Where is my list?  
Places to go. People to see. Hurry up, get on your feet!  
Devoir this. Chug that. Fast food. To-go.  
Chomp. Slurp. Clang. Clash.  
Beep. Zoom. Honk.  
Bang. Bash.  
**Time.**  
Quiet. Still.  
Listen. Observe.  
Be peaceful. Sense. Smell.  
Savor this. Relish that. Simple. Smooth.  
Step by step. Experience your body, your breath. Focus.  
Be present. Calm. Clear. In the here. In the now. Tune in. Enjoy.  
Slowly, gently open your eyes. Sit up tall. Feel the morning air. Stretch. Smile.  
Breath in, out, in. Breathe in, out, in, out. Breath in, out, in, out. Breathe in, out, in, out.

# magnolia mother

**Paige Poe**

she stands, rooted in private  
history, and she  
embraces the sky,  
blooming cavernous white blossoms  
and swaying to our delight. she hosts  
brightly winged insects, quarrelsome  
squirrels, adventurers,  
protecting all who ask, and  
her branches hold me too

but I cannot speak to her:  
her language is of air and light,  
incompatible with my clumsy speech.  
all I can do is stay, swinging  
my pale legs above the ground,  
ear pressed to her branches,  
listening for something I understand.



# Hummingbirds

## Sanford Ballou

Once,  
You put hummingbirds  
Under my skin.

It scared me because  
They were so fragile  
And I so coarse.  
I felt their heartbeat,  
And I wondered:  
Aren't they exhausted?

I wouldn't move  
For fear of hurting them  
And my thoughts were consumed  
By the mere sensation  
Of fluttering feathers  
Felt in my fingertips.

It didn't last long.  
And when they had left,  
I couldn't decide  
Whether I missed them  
Or if I only loved them  
Because I knew it was

Fleeting.



# Sand Castle Kings

## Tanner Libby

Blue waves roll and crash on the beach,  
Then retreat quickly to the ocean.  
The wind carries the smell of coconut  
Through the rustling palms.

Cotton ball clouds glide across the sky;  
The sun shining bright through.  
Shade cast from umbrellas scattered  
Keep dark tan bodies covered.

Crumbling castles line the sandy shore;  
Their Kings splashing one another  
In an epic battle to conquer the vast sea.  
The battle rages, full of laughter.

Their small red bodies clothed in swim trunks;  
Wrapped in invisible capes and crowns.

# Sunny State of Mind

Emma Heinz



# Sunset Observations

## MaryAnne Fissell

And I walked, a slapping soul that penetrated  
The skin on bones and pavement we had laid  
Where little foot prints used to be stamped, and mailed  
And imprinted into a thick mud which we have never seen again.

And beside me there was the sun, and before me there was a set  
And below me there was an earth that cried for its inability  
To see that glowing globe, only left to smell the rain, listen to the thunder  
And to feel the little footprints, which it waits patiently for, swallowed into  
eternity.

I walked into that enviable shining red, which beckoned to me  
Like the hell which I swore I belonged, beckoning behind confessionals  
Where my red rape was painted black and pink and whatever color  
They thought would look beautiful in mosaic glass.

That mural, the one that marked my virginity, my saint ship  
My cracking, shattering, glistening life, whose sharp corners pricked at  
pinky toes,  
Stood before me, on the other side of a busy street where the cars slowed  
To watch the miracle, the accident, the tragedy they couldn't help but cry  
over.

But as those tears were mine, so was that blood and  
So were the colors that streaked, Vincent's clumsy ghost fingers, across  
the sky  
Which no longer cried for the absence of birds or the existence of clouds  
But only bowed to my toes, which had now scabbed over.

And I turned the corner to blue, a red revolution spiraling  
Out of my golden wheat roots, blowing its bustling grains behind me  
Creating a shadow of the wind and a lullaby of leaves flowing into impure  
pools  
Where eventually I no longer saw red-ish hues, only tattoo dotted moons.

# Reason to Be

## Zack Amato

I had been an avid fan of the Sunny Mountain Boys for two years, attending every show I could around my assignments from the *Times*. They had a sound that reminded me of my teenage mornings by Niagara Falls: drums like the cascading water, harmonicas like wind through the trees, banjos and guitars mimicking the movement of deer, foxes, and bears. They played their music indoors but pulled from nature, guided by some sense of what bluegrass *should* mean.

But when word spread among the fans of Jimmy Martin's group that someone had denied the anointment of Sunny Mountain Boy, I had to know who would be crazy enough to do so. So I flagged a cab the night of October 26th, 1956, to Café Wha? for my first experience with a Mr. Brian Richards.

It was crowded, even for a Friday. There was a certain electricity in the bits and pieces of conversation I could gather. These people weren't just here for a drink and background sound; they were here for Brian Richards.

I sat at a two-person table near the door, ready to make an exit should my ears be disappointed. For close to an hour I fended off advances from several men, all of whom seemed to be wearing gray suits and subtle cowboy hats. *Exactly like Jimmy Martin. Of course.*

I heard one proud "Woohoo" from the opposite corner, followed by a growing congregation of such cheers. I looked to the stage to see one man strolling toward its center. He was built like he'd done physical work for quite a few years and had hair the color of an autumn leaf down to his shoulders. He wore a simple, faded red t-shirt and gray trousers that had two rips at the left ankle. I could see the outline of a harmonica in the right pocket.

The man checked the kick drum to his right. Satisfied, he picked up the banjo that lay in the case to his left. He picked it twice, then leaned into the microphone.

"Hello there. My name is Brian Richards, and I'm from Nashville, Tennessee." *Typical Tennessee twang.*

He leaned back, cleared his throat, and began to play.

HOW ONE MAN CAN BE A GENRE: IS BRIAN RICHARDS THE NEW BLUEGRASS?

by Blair Tolliver

My piece was to headline the Culture section of the *Times* on Sunday, February 10th, 1957. But the longer I considered it, the less of it I could think to write. After going to see Brian Richards play consistently for nearly three and a half months, I had plenty of experience to work with. Yet, I could not sum up what his music was; the sound, the message, the feel.

I wanted to write: "He plays the banjo with an almost offhand attitude, as if he knows what sounds it's going to make long before his brain tells his fingers how to make them." Instead I wrote: "Richards's banjo simultaneously reverberates caution and carelessness, as if the notes find themselves on his fingers, not the opposite." I wanted to write: "When he sings, he sounds like he has been hurt but doesn't care, like he knows everything is going to be okay for him." Instead I wrote: "His voice echoes pain but proclaims hope; his words are keys to a brighter tomorrow."

I then tore that page in half. I knew nothing about Brian Richards other than his kick drum, his banjo, his harmonica, and his hair.

I realized then that I had to meet him.

I found out there were three things that Brian Richards believed in: Music, People, and Jack Daniel's.

"Don't forget about Miss Blair Tolliver," he would tell me with a wink and a kiss. After two years, it still made me smile.

By 1959, Brian was playing Café Wha? five nights a week. The only other place he would play was in Central Park, for passersby and his ever-growing following. These were Brian's favorite shows; they allowed him to play out in the air, free and loose. He would only take his banjo, leaving the drum and harmonica at home. He would lean back against a tree, breathe and play and sing. Children would run up to him and he would shrink to their size. He would hold his banjo out to them and let them strum, humming along to whatever disjointed tune their tiny fingers created. He would laugh with the crowd, talk and make jokes, smile and nod at those he recognized, but he would never let the banjo be quiet. When he was done, usually after about two hours under the tree, he would simply say, "Thank y'all quite much" and walk away, grasping his banjo with one hand and me with the other. He was simple that way, gracious that way.

Things changed in 1961, though I wouldn't realize it right away.

It was another crowded Friday night, March 3rd, at Café Wha?, a typical crowd for Brian those days. There were a few girls standing on tables in the back, screaming for Brian to come talk to them after the show. He would just smile at them then find me at our table and we'd lock eyes in reassurance.

He opened with his typical introduction, having not changed it in four years.

## *Reason to Be*

"Hello there. My name is Brian Richards, and I'm from Nashville, Tennessee." *Still has the same ring to it.* He then played a ten-minute banjo solo and followed with covers of *Blue Suede Shoes* and *I Walk the Line*. A Jack break and a quick talk with the crowd led into three of his own, *House of Cards*, *Until I Lay Low*, and *Reason to Be*. *Reason to Be* had become a crowd favorite; it had Brian's foot working on the kick drum like the rapid tap of a pencil on a desk, his harmonica whistling like a train, and his fingers attacking the banjo like mine attacked the typewriter.

*Take a walk on the street  
See a hand in need  
Reach out for a moment  
Give them something to believe  
Take a glance at the sun  
Be thankful for each day you get  
Be thankful for each blink  
Each breath, each drop of sweat*

*No matter what you're looking for  
Whether it's inside or outside your door*

*We've all got some reason to be  
We've all got some reason to be  
We've all got our seasons,  
Our rhymes and our reasons,  
Yea we've all got some reason to be*

I loved this one because it was the essence of Brian. Caring for people, believing we all have our purpose. "The world is a big place, miss," he would tell me. "Everyone's gotta be able to touch it somehow, someplace."

Brian's show ended and the crowd lingered, eager to discuss whatever they could with him. He would smile and nod along with them, laugh, contribute when necessary, make sure everyone knew he wanted them there. I sat at our table to the side of the stage, watching. *The reporter in me, always wanting to observe.* It was then that I noticed the boy, no older than seventeen, in the back corner, standing alone, quietly, fiddle and bow in hand. He wore a forest green jacket that had seen several winters with a button up shirt of the same green underneath. His pants and shoes were a faded black. His complexion was that of coal.

Café Wha? gradually emptied, and Brian was able to remove himself from the crowd. As he turned my direction I gestured with my head to the figure in the corner. Brian glanced that way and back at me, then smiled before strolling to approach the boy.

"That's a pretty instrument you got there, son," Brian said. The boy stood at attention with a start.

"Thank you, Mr. Richards, sir," he replied.

Brian chuckled. "Call me Brian, friend. What may I call you?"

"Ollie, sir."

"Well, Ollie, how are you with that there fiddle?"

"I... I just got it a few months ago, but I've been practicing, sir," said Ollie, timidly. When Brian didn't immediately respond, the boy continued: "I was walking home from practice just now when I heard you playing and stopped in."

"How 'bout you show me what you've been learnin' then."

A shocked Ollie stared as Brian motioned for the boy to follow him to the stage. Brian retrieved his banjo from its case. He plucked a couple strings before asking Ollie, "You know *John Henry*?" The boy nodded, and Brian began to pluck the tune. It was a full two minutes before Ollie raised the fiddle and tucked it between his shoulder and chin. Cautiously, he pulled the bow across the strings. Brian grinned widely at the boy, still playing. Ollie smiled back and, as if suddenly free, began to move the bow with purpose.

An hour passed before the café was quiet again.

"Hello there. My name is Brian Richards, and I'm from Nashville, Tennessee. And this here is Ollie Vernon from right here in New York City."

The crowds had shrunk since Brian and Ollie started playing together after that early March night two years before. Since then, Ollie had become something like Brian's younger brother. They evolved together, Ollie mastering the fiddle and Brian refining his music to fit with another artist. The two were electric on stage, the strings of their instruments uniting to make tunes sound like hymns. If anything, the shows were even better now than they were when it was just Brian, his banjo, kick drum, and harmonica.

But people aren't as colorblind as music. Even some that had been around since the first night I saw Brian play in '56 had gone missing at his shows. Brian refused to notice it, but I could feel it: tension in the rooms, cautious glances to the stage. As if people were afraid to like what they heard. Fewer people stayed after to chat, and more lingered from a distance until Ollie made his way to the restroom or home to Harlem.

It was July 18th, 1963. The show was over, Café Wha? mostly empty. Brian, Ollie, and I were sitting at our table next to the stage, Brian and I with Jack, Ollie with water, laughing and enjoying the night. Ollie excused himself and went to the restroom. As soon as the door had shut behind him, Brian and I heard from across the room:

“Hey Brian, I gotta know, what you keeping that boy around for, eh?”

Brian stared at the man for a while, just long enough to feel the silence, before answering, “He’s got a good fiddle. He ain’t too bad, neither, friend.”

“You no pal of mine if ya got a darky for a friend.”

I winced at the sting of his words. Brian let the man leave without retort, and I thought he was just avoiding conflict. But after we got home, he didn’t come to bed. I woke up twice in the night and peered out the door to find Brian at the table, right hand over his mouth the way he would when he was thinking, middle finger of his left hand tapping out a beat on the wood. There was a paper with words and angry scratch-outs in front of him. I left him to the music.

When I woke up for work, Brian was gone, *probably on a walk in Central Park*, and I didn’t see him until the show that night. He was much quieter than normal, somber, almost tense, like he was braced for some invisible enemy. Over the next hour, a larger crowd than the previous night filled in Café Wha?, probably drawn in by the “Discount Beer Weekend” sign situated on the sidewalk. There were some phantom faces to be found in the crowd. We nearly reached the Friday night atmosphere we used to feel. Nearly.

As he stood to make his way to the stage and Ollie followed suit, Brian pointed him back into his chair. “You stay right here on this one” is all he said before striding to the stage, cheers shadowing him like theme music. Ollie and I exchanged curious glances before focusing on Brian. He didn’t check the kick drum, just reached for the banjo. He leaned into the microphone and said:

“That’s the loudest cheer I’ve heard in two years.”

The room fell quiet. I leaned back in my chair, surprised that for the first time in seven years I did not hear “Hello there” out of the microphone.

“This is a new one, it uh, it came to me last night.”

A soft “Woohoo.” He put his fingers to the strings of his banjo but stopped before the first pluck. He paused and surveyed the room. No one said a word, no one moved. Again, he leaned to the microphone.

“The world is changing, folks. Ain’t it ‘bout time we changed with it?”



This time he plucked the strings of his banjo and began to sing.

*It was dark when I woke up  
In the middle of the night  
It seemed the world had stopped turnin'  
So I figured that I should fight  
My way out of my fears  
The fears that once consumed me  
Oh oh  
Then a hand reached down to guide me  
Whoa oh oh oh*

*When I left my room that day  
It seemed like nothing changed  
Even though the world had stopped turnin'  
Everyone was still filled with rage  
Whoa oh oh oh whoa oh  
And then a hand reached down to guide me  
Whoa oh oh oh*

*The hand said hate had filled this world  
It was such a crying shame  
If we wanted the world to keep turnin'  
We must love every man the same  
Whoa oh oh oh whoa oh  
Said the hand that reached down to guide me  
Whoa oh whoa oh*

His fingers tore at the strings with vigor until I thought they would bleed. His face was red; his jaw was clenched. It was the most passionate I had ever seen him play or sing. He was angry. He was sad.

When he finished, the world inside Café Wha? had stopped turning. Out of the corner of my eye I could see Ollie hang his head and close his eyes. A curl appeared at the edge of his mouth. He inhaled softly.

Brian did not pick up his banjo case. He did not move his drum. He simply carried his banjo out the door of Café Wha?, down the street, and into the dark night.

# Pennsylvania Moments

Eve Matten





# Unwanted Wanting

William McDonald

Growing up, my pants never fit well.  
Even today, I fidget in my Wrangler jeans  
belted tight at the waste with my panicked underwear  
climbing up the hairy wall of my abdomen.

An uncomfortable feeling would always come.  
Though it was not the billowing boxer briefs  
spilling from my church clothes that released the unrest.  
I could never trace it to a beginning.

When my mom made me kill my imaginary friend,  
I thought it came from that.  
When I learned about cancer in elementary school,  
I thought I had that.

It's the feeling that led me into my sister's closet as a boy,  
and the feeling I had when I'd buckle on my catcher's gear—  
searching for the reason my father loved  
my sisters and my teammates so much more than me.

Mom said bad habits could be broken,  
so I tested her words on one as old as this feeling.  
Fourteen years later I stopped biting my nails,  
but I still unwantedly want to be a girl.

# In The Living / Listening Room with The Wizard of Oz with lyrics from “In My Life” by the Beatles

## Nathan Ching

We sit in the living room in my parent’s house  
and listen to memories on vinyl,  
my grandpa and I.

*There are places I’ll remember*

He wears a muted green hoodie  
like a badge of honor,  
And I wear my crisp red and gold  
letterman jacket,  
one size too big,  
like a disguise.

*Though I know I’ll never lose affection*

He drinks booze in green, glass bottles  
to soften the world,  
and lets himself remember  
his longtime lover,  
his dog of a brother,  
his favorite child,  
and his neglected wife,

*For people and things that went before*

as I sip Coca Cola in a red solo cup,  
my mind chasing California girls  
in shimmering gold dresses,  
and my parents’ god.

*I know I’ll often stop and think about them*

Brian Wilson said  
that music is the voice of God;  
and if he’s right,  
God has been telling me  
that I could use

*In my life, I love you more*

a little less Eleanor Rigby,  
a little more Claire de lune;  
a little less Father McKenzie,  
a little more In A Sentimental Mood.

*In my life, I love you more*

# to see is to believe

## Paige Poe

I have known the magicians,  
the gurus of transformation,  
those guardians of the curtain;

I have known those who  
pull back the velvet veil  
to reveal the worlds we've built

I have known the butcher, the baker,  
candlestick maker, looked into  
the hot lights and seen the future  
seen the past  
seen the in-between

I have known the tinkerers,  
architects of language,  
witnessed swans turn into humans  
and back, seen fairies,  
wizards and ghouls, lived  
whole lives in the dark  
sanctuary, holy church  
where humanity and magic mix

I have known her stories,  
the immortal theatre: my muse,  
and my knowledge grows everyday  
like the thin line of perspiration  
on an actor's dazzled brow.

# Spiritual Beings

Michelle Bonilla





# Brain Dead (Imitation of Gerald Stern)

Eliza Calvo

The hands of a 1620's slave are scarred and covered by the mixture of blood, rust, and agony, and the worse of it is that he has no control of his fate yet similarly the mind of my own is caged and the purpose of the tight and infectious straitjacket death placed upon me is not to restrain the weak but to dangle me in front of this demon who I fear most for he forces me to walk among others on a leash like a black puppy with big eyes, too innocent to understand his purpose in life and the amount of worry that fills this temple is enough to reject Him and my rationality plus this embodiment of Death has made insomnia a part of my daily routine and even Mr. Daniels approves for he replenishes this empty hole and feeds my ulcers and though I am breaking steadily like an antique porcelain doll who wears that faded smile, I still have a heart that pulses at irregular beats because I now carry something that no one understands so avoiding people is essential because I have grown to accept that it is society that terminates what is left of my motivation and sometimes the release is sweeter than the grasp and I pray that one day an angel will open my head like a coconut and carry this tired soul to the golden gates so that I myself can shake the corrosive hands of the free and depart together as equals.



# Metatenas Espacial

Maria Barrientos



# I Hate You, Writing

## MaryAnne Fissell

I need to learn to not write  
About the alcoholism I endured since twenty years old  
Where I drained the blood from knuckles, wrapping around curved necks  
Begging to be broken, covered in dents and hickeys  
In the pursuit of draining the thoughts  
From my ever racing, always pacing mind  
Or about the rape I encountered since I was eighteen years old  
Where I lost myself beneath the oleander bushes  
That flanked my childhood room, where I had wished for Prince Charming  
Or about the universe that I have questioned since I was sixteen years old  
Where I spiraled out of control, conveniently on cliff edges  
Which I dreamed were beckoning to me beneath cicada cries

Maybe I simply need to not write at all  
I need to not bleed black ink from my cuticles  
And sob out high vocabulary, never rhyming words  
Through red rose blossoming bloodshot eyes  
To the ignorant moon which I love too much to ever visit.  
And maybe I need to go back in time and become someone  
Who I never gave myself the opportunity to be  
Who cannot and will not strip from herself  
Everything that I ever did love, torture, or bless  
Through the altering tips, both finger and ballpoint  
That I used to fill perpetually void spaces.

Maybe if I could go back I would not pick up a pen  
I would not read Sylvia Plath and Robert Frost,  
I would not see the world through forever flipping, crunching pages  
Racing pens, and terrible penmanship that my parents couldn't pay to fix.  
And I would forget that instead of a heartbeat, I have heard a heart murmur  
Which whispers cringing creativity and ionizing inspiration  
Into my spinal fluid leaking ears  
As I rip out from myself everything and all things that trouble me,  
Ungluing the self inflicted purple splotches of skin from my bones,  
Dissecting my amygdala  
All in the name of making unpredictable, unappreciated art  
Which lifts scabs from barely healing wounds and aborts growing feelings  
From my forever barren womb.

# The Distractions We Invent

Rachel Brooks

She heaved a deep sigh, delicately touching the tip of her pen to the page. She watched as the ink leaked out, pouring into the micro crevasses and spreading out in a thousand lightning bolt tributaries, each vein smaller than its father.

As the blot grew, her brow furrowed. She lifted the pen from the page, snatching the page in her other hand and closing it in a fist. She growled from deep in her throat as she chucked the page over her shoulder. It fell to the floor two feet from the trashcan, but it was only two inches from the nearest crumpled piece of paper.

She held her pen up to the light, glaring at it as if to accuse it. She turned it this way and that, rotating it in her fingers and shaking it up and down. It seemed like a perfectly fine pen. She shook her head and pulled another sheet off the stack at the back of the desk, laying it carefully in front of her. She held the pen just above it, not letting the tip touch even the highest of the tiny mountains that the fibers presented. She narrowed her eyes and glared at the tip of the pen, as if issuing a dare.

A single drop of ink began to bubble at the tip. She held her breath as the ball of black liquid grew fat. She shook her head, as if her willpower could stop it. The drop, now engorged, fell. It splashed onto the page like a water balloon, spraying ink outward in every direction. The ink rolled down the mountains and into the valleys, creating rivers at the bases of the canyons.

She screamed, whirling in her chair, and hurtled her pen across the room.

She sat panting, her arm still outstretched from the action. Her wide eyes fell suddenly on the mess of papers surrounding and pouring out of the trashcan. She had been so careful with the first couple, calmly getting up and walking over there to dispose of them. The next few she had delivered more angrily, stomping to the wastebasket. As the problem persisted, she began throwing the papers she discarded. Eventually, she stopped looking when she did. Thus, there were wads everywhere.

Her breathing grew heavy at the horror of it. She leapt from her chair and dashed across the room, falling to her knees in front of the basket. She began grabbing up handfuls of pages and cramming them in. She pushed with one hand and reached with another, trying to hold the potential explosion that overstuffing would cause within the bucket. She looked around quickly to be sure she had gotten all the trash, whimpering slightly when she saw she had missed one. She looked from the page, crumpled

and waiting just out of her arm's reach, to the trash can, barely contained beneath the pressure of both of her palms firmly applied there.

She turned to the page and back to the basket and back to the page and back to the basket. She made a groan of frustration, glaring at the page that was just out of her reach as if she could threaten it into coming closer. She scooted on her knees toward the page, pulling the bin with her. Her wrists burned as they pressed the inside lip of the metal ring that crowned the can, and the thin plastic of the bag did little to protect her skin from the sting.

When at last she knelt beside the wad, she smiled triumphantly. She looked to the basket with a satisfied hum, letting her arms relax so her wrists could rest. Then she seized as if struck by a bolt of electricity. She looked to the wad with fearful eyes and back to the basket she was trying desperately to keep pressed down. Closing her eyes, she took a deep breath. She bent toward the wad of paper and opened her mouth.

Delicately, ever so delicately, she gripped the edge of a fold on the wad with her teeth. She brought herself up and dropped the wad from her mouth to the basket, wiggling her hands so she maneuvered them on top of the final piece. She smiled widely at the accomplishment, looking around for some sign that the world was right again.

What she saw proved the opposite.

On her desk, where she had left it, was the last piece of paper she used. Even from her crouching position on the floor she could see the blot upon it as though it were a bloodstain on her white carpets.

She screamed, leaping from the floor and dashing across to the desk, snatching the offensive thing and tearing it to shreds where she stood. Only when the page was reduced to a pile of furry strips on the desk did she stop screaming. She stiffly lay her palms on the desk on either side of the pile she had created, breathing in deeply. She turned her head ever so slightly, only using her peripheral vision to look behind her.

The papers she had been pressing down into the bin, without her pressure to keep them down, had leapt from their confines.

She closed her eyes and turned her head to face forward again. She dug her nails into the edge of her desk and inhaled so deep she felt as though her lungs would burst.

She let the breath out slowly, releasing her hold on her desk and gathering the shreds in her hands. She walked slowly to the trashcan, delicately laying the pieces of paper on top of what was already in the basket. She then turned on her heel, returned to her desk, and sat down.

She took the next piece of paper from the pile on the desk and set it carefully before her. She rolled her shoulders as she admired the beautiful, pristine white surface. With her eyes still moving over each of the delicate and perfect imperfections of the parchment's skin, she reached for a new pen.

She took a deep sigh and delicately, ever so delicately, she touched the pen to the page.

# Bouganvilla

## MaryAnne Fissell

And as we sat, speaking of never forgotten grandfathers who passed away and sentimental sweethearts who promised they would stay forever, we reflected how both slipped out the front door in the middle of the midnight hour. We looked out the silver paned window, which framed my childhood and where we wished frost would rest. November had arrived and was now halfway out that same front door, taking everything I loved with it.

The Bouganvilla swayed in the sky, ripping and writhing and shifting in a nervous and unsettling way, reaching desperately for words that the two of us would never again be able to say to ex lovers and fathers who kissed us in the morning and taught us how to put fitted sheets on beds and to cry without anyone noticing.

It's pink flowers blossomed brightly and delightfully, framed by envious green that constantly fell to the background, woefully going unappreciated and unseen. But, ignored the most was the blue behind it, dotted with cotton balls that spotted my bathroom counter, mascara and red lipstick stained. The scar like shadow veins sat beneath the flower's fuchsia organza, imperfecting such a beautiful creature, that longed to be loved and seen. Not unlike me, the way my mother taught me to be.

Her eyes, the exact same as mine, glazed over with tears which begged to be caught in her sixty-something year old wrinkles, which always made her look happy. The wind that ruffled that bush reminded her of the home which she could no longer claim to be solely hers. We continued to reflect on love, life, death and the tragedies and triumphs that came in between. My grandfather was well-respected in his lifetime. My lover was overly appreciated in his. These are the things that came to mind as we looked out that frostless window before she said briskly between pursing, cracking lips, "It's very pretty," pausing for a few years or two, "It will all freeze soon."

I'm still not sure to which she was referring.

# Worm (Imitation of Gerald Stern)

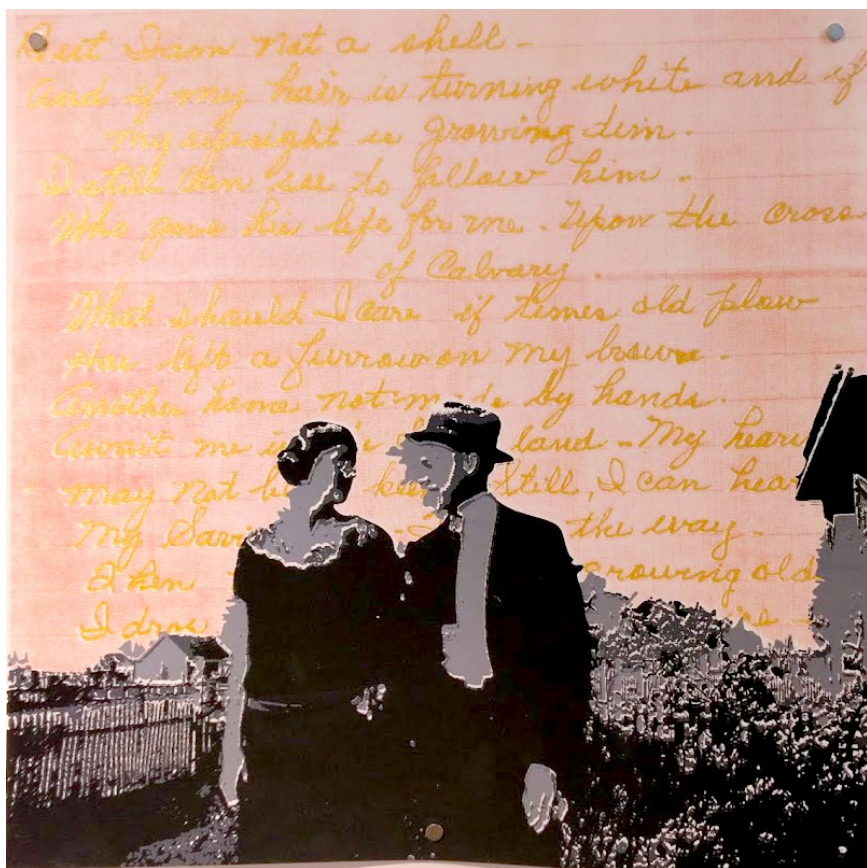
Eliza Calvo

I was sitting by a small garden in February  
where the weather was mild and the smell of fresh  
mulch hugged my nose but the elegantly  
painted tulips overshadowed it to even notice and they  
were all dancing with the Earth as a community and though  
it was entertaining a pair of yellow tulips blossomed  
and it envied me and the cruel shitty joke of two turtle doves  
left a gift next to me, but at least they had  
something to offer and I undeniably regret  
looking at you just a little while; so to me  
Mother Earth is punishing the weak like  
how small crystals over time pollute the soul only  
to find out I am a 20 pound sack of obsidian rocks  
squeezing in a 10 pound one and though  
Aphrodite would be proud of such an elegant garden  
the tears of the Earth drown the inhabitants with  
her friends Grief and Obsession and even the  
withered peonies sticking out of the fresh mulch  
can not heal these invisible wounds.



# I am not a shell

Sydney Peel





# Veiled

Olivia Nucci



# A Portrait of the Pick-up Artist as a Young Man

## Joshua Borders

Drama, schmama, say *lil' momma*

The sequester depleted my rhyme reservoir

But I can do my best, dull the pastels and make it feel right.

Stop painting! The water

Is polluted with wormwood, the last relic

Of that great Evil stalking you.

I think the NEA is a slush fund for the derelict, but you

Hold the same view. I asked your momma

If her new wedding ring had a story, but she called it a relic

Of a day when boats sailed the rotting flesh reservoir.

*Man overboard!* She drank too much fluoride water.

But who's to say what is healthy and right?

I know that was postmodern, but the Right

Also underwent its post-truth puberty. You

Are just a late-bloomer. Drink some water

And eat your greens so you'll be big and strong, just like momma

Said. Lying is like a reservoir

Where every fib is piped through a smidgeon, a relic

Of truth mixed with two parts charisma, filtered through a machine,  
a relic

From the Nixon era. Bat your black eyelashes, plead ignorance, then  
you're all right.

Do people actually have a reservoir

Of innate goodness? John Calvin dissents, and you

Are exhibit A. Say *lil' momma*

Our love was like water-

Falls; you enter the babbling brook of water,

Take some pictures, relish the future relics

Of film to show your momma.

Paddle your canoe a tad to the left, then correct and go right

Headlong towards the stream where you

Discovered the bottom held a reservoir,

*continued, stanza break*

A gold rush of emotion, the forty-niners mining your own reservoir  
Where you've almost drowned in your own water  
The Loch Ness monster coiling, compressing you.  
The souvenir shops only sell whitewashed relics  
That grandparents can purchase for the right  
Amount, and show off at bridge games hosted by widowed mommas.

My own momma drained her reservoir  
Of love right before I came along. Now we sip sparkling water  
And pretend our apathetic relics of affection were just a prelude,  
building anticipation for you.

# Bugs

## Sydney Peel







# Fish Out of Water

## Nathan Ching

Curled up in a conch shell,  
I fantasize about  
sea horses and teasing jellyfish  
who reach for my  
windward heart and leeward mind,  
as I wait for  
inspiration's little death.

Before the daylight dies,  
an angel paints over drabby blue skies  
with generous strokes of popsicle orange that drip  
off the clouds like bombshells,  
liquid sunshine reaching for door handles  
inside of me that I cannot see.

I once was blind, but now I see,  
octopi blotting out the dying light with ink expulsions,  
reaching for scars on their arms.  
Oh, how they used to bleed blue!  
These creatures lack spine or shell,  
creatures for whom truth lies in wait.

While waiting for war,  
cantankerous sea dogs sing vespers  
to shell-shocked comrades  
about mermaids they dyed fifty shades of blue;  
out of sight, out of reach.

Their hands reach for starfish but caress  
Sea urchins. They sing touch tank blues  
to ease the mind's weight,  
and I eat peaches and pomegranates  
so I don't die of scurvy,  
and I realize that we are one in the same;  
we are oysters with sand in our shells.

*continued, stanza break*

And now the angel tells me  
to shelter my pearling majesty from Ursula's reach,  
to die the good death  
and carry truth's noble weight.  
So I place my pearl in her diadem,  
and my peaches in her pocket,  
and cast my pomegranates upon the waters.

# Micro

Mackenzie Heard







# ocean song

Paige Poe

an ocean lives  
behind my eyes, a sea  
of strange thoughts and uncommon  
sentiments, fears that bite  
and the water

oh the water, how it aches  
to break the dam.  
sometimes I am afraid  
it will pour out my mouth  
and drown me.  
sometimes I hope it will.

I can hear it, whispering  
sea songs between my ears,  
like a seductive siren,  
directing me towards  
certain death like so many  
sailors before me,

sylvia, anne— poets  
Who bore this burden  
and fell victim to the sea,  
drowned like Ophelia.

I can't stop the unshakable tide,  
can't drain it or dry it. instead  
I will sacrifice all my strength  
To hold it back  
until my body gives way  
and I let the water take me.

# Waves of Solidarity

Michelle Bonilla



# burnout

Haley Decker

i remember the day you  
described your favorite color as the baby blue  
that tickles the sky when night succumbs  
to morning; i couldn't resist succumbing to you

and i grew terrified when you illuminated  
my darkness with the stars in your eyes  
i couldn't allow myself to taste sunshine  
only to have my constellations one day crumble

but i lost my footing on the sweet, silky, slippery words  
that spilled from your whispering lips onto my skin  
and surrendered to naivety  
and plummeted far, farther, farther

i fell for your thoughts, your ambitions -- the way  
you said my name like it was your favorite sound  
sometimes i feel the echo of  
your fingertips tracing the curve of my back

your lips stole the endings of my sentences and your  
arms became my asylum; i caught you in  
the little corners of my mind as i sank into sleep each night  
until your baby blue painted the new day

they say it takes time for the light to go out  
after a star dies. i guess  
that's all i'm waiting for. i guess  
i'm still trying to forget the blaze

# **A Prayer for Modern America**

## **Sanford Ballou**

Help me mother, to conform,  
Fear the other, serve the norm.  
Endless choices, finite truth:  
Feel their voices turn you mute.  
Pointless squabbles, all the same,  
Worship baubles, savor names.  
Drink your sorrows, smoke your shame,  
Fill your hollows, glad you came.  
Fuck the future, fear the past,  
Waste the present, shake your ass.  
Creation's scary, work is hard,  
Do what's easy: charge that card.

Listen  
Polley Poer







# Untitled

## Collin Pratt

*2nd place Contemplative Poetry Contest Winner*

Recognize desire  
Now I understand the source  
Of my deep sorrow



# God's Greatest Gift

## Nicholas Ferrandino

*"Science Meets Fiction" Contest Winner*

### Century 1

At last, after a lifetime of dedication, I have achieved immortality.

During what we once considered the average human lifespan, the cells of an organic body die and regenerate, reconstructing an entirely new figure in a constant cycle of death and revival. The neurons in the brain, however, do not. It is such a fatal flaw, as the brain controls the body's regenerative processes. So then the key to immortality is not in finding a way to keep the body alive, but instead in discovering how to replace the cells of the brain, for as long as the brain is kept alive, the body will continue to function. Most attention was directed toward stem cell research as a means to unlocking the powers of the Holy Grail. Poor fools, they might as well have been hunting for the shrines dedicated to Lovecraft's outer gods. I knew of the faulty foundation of stem cell research, and I would not be blinded by the same fantastical promises.

During my research, I theorized a method of extracting the nervous material of one brain and incorporating it into another. The first and easiest step is removing a brain's 'unique' genetic material, achieved through extreme electroshock treatment, frying away the brain cell's ribosomal templates while keeping the organisms in tact. Once sterilized, the matter can be applied to a specialized anticoagulant, breaking apart the binds between the cells and liquefying the brain to a viscous paste. Afterwards, the material is inserted into the brain stem with the aid of an external prosthetic. There it will remain inert, until the moment a brain cell dies, at which point the dormant cells will activate and replace the spent organism.

## *God's Greatest Gift*

Several decades back, when I first revealed my findings, the entire world labeled me a madman, claiming my method would never work in practice. Desperate to prove my theories true, I elected myself as the first human test subject. With my contacts at a local morgue, I harvested the necessary organs for my very first field experiment. Enlisting the help of an old friend, I underwent the necessary procedure to graft the metal apparatus containing the neurological cocktail directly to the brainstem.

Three decades later, after displaying no signs of physical deterioration, those who once called me a fool hailed me as the mind of their generation. On my hundredth birthday, I still possess the same figure I had when I first showed the world what I was capable of.

\*

### Century 2

Once my invention became public knowledge, a slew of corporate representatives came to my home, each hoping to acquire marketing rights for my machine. I told each of them I would think it over, and shut myself off from the public once the lackeys tapered off. After two weeks of silence, they all came back, promising to pay well and above the original offer. For another half year, I toyed with the corporate world, not for money, but because I found it so amusing. Never before had I possessed such influence, and I didn't intend to waste it on some meager fiscal payoff. So I bided my time, reveling in the attention, waiting for the perfect deal to arise.

Then one fateful day, a disgruntled representative handed me an agreement allowing full control over my patent in a well-to-do medical goods company with full control over the production, marketing, and distribution of my product, along with any sum of money I found necessary to fund my endeavor. It was the perfect deal. I signed on immediately and set out to spread the gift of life.

First, however, I needed to secure a steady influx of natural resources. I might have invented the chemicals and the augmentation, but I never discovered a synthetic or natural substitute for the human brain. With the backing of my political ties, we passed a new law declaring the human corpse government property (as well as a clause allowing the government to sell these cadavers at their leisure). Of course the bill encountered minor resistance when it became public knowledge, as the traditionalists and those with a nose for subtlety cried foul. The dissentient politicians fought against the bill with ardent fervor, listing their own moral standards in the hopes of debasing their opponent's. Their outrage, however, was drowned out by the public's greater desire. In consideration of what they had to gain, the right of the dead was but a pittance. The bill was passed with near unanimous consent.

With a reliable supply of gray matter at our disposal, production began immediately. Against the bemoaning advice of my business associates, I sold my invention at the most affordable price possible, making it available for rich and poor alike. In just two decades, over half the world held eternity in the palm of their hands.

Our species is beyond death.

\*

### Century 3

An ironic complication arose halfway through the twenty-second century; with more than three quarters of the country now in possession of my invention, the influx of bodies tapered considerably. We no longer had enough supply to support the ever-growing demand. My employers advised me to inflate prices, but I refused to act so materialistic.

In an attempt to gather more material, I outsourced my company. Collection facilities appeared over every part of the world, offering a tidy sum for

## *God's Greatest Gift*

any fresh bodies brought in for processing. In less than five years, the company accumulated enough brain tissue to last another half century.

The offspring of those who cried foul when I first advertised my product complained to the media again. They argued such programs would somehow increase death and murder rates in lesser-developed countries. They conducted weekly protests in front of every collection and distribution center they laid eyes on, chanting day and night in their quest to dismantle my life work. But no matter how long they marched or how loud they yelled, the Generational's outrageous claims were insubstantial in turning the public against me.

I don't concern myself over such naysayers. Nobody who owns my product pays them much heed anyway. After all, how convincing can one be when they are ignorant enough to refuse the gift of eternity? As time continues forward, the opposition will be replaced by another generation who will be less willing to shoulder the weight of a backwards ideology. I might find luck in convincing these later generations to rectify the mistake their ancestors had so foolishly made.

One of my colleagues suggested we attempt to broaden our profit spectrum by repurposing my device for domesticated house pets. It will take some time to create, as we will have to redesign the augmentations to fit the anatomy of each individual species along with discovering the proper compounds to safely liquefy their brains, but I am confident we will have the new products ready for public consumption by the next century.

Children are now a rarity. As the chief reason for reproduction has been rendered moot, only a select handful of wealthy families choose to take on the financial hardship of parenthood. The young are now as much a symbol of one's wealth as they are an article of personal affection.

Century 4

Society as a whole has changed. Mortality's ultimate demise has consequentially brought about the end of religion. No longer plagued by the inevitability of death, we have no reason to delude ourselves with the notion of an afterlife; with the power of the Holy Grail in the palm of our hands, god can no longer repress us with his trivial limitations. Most religious institutions, sensing their eventual dissolution, have either dissolved or joined the secular wave sweeping across the world.

Our lives, once a thin veil separating the border between existence and emptiness, are now a fortress whose buttresses are fortified by the strength of human ingenuity. Inside this newfound stronghold, our species stares out into the void, free of her cold empty caress, unperturbed by the daunting landscape surrounding us. It will soon be ours, as we continue to expand and innovate and overcome. Inspired by our recent achievements, we now turn our eyes toward the stars.

With our advancements in space travel, we have already managed to establish small mining colonies on the moon and our neighboring planet. As we make the most of this new opportunity, brave pioneers flying under the banner of human progress venture further into the great unknown. We scour the earth for every available resource in our race to settle across the universe. Soon we shall be free of this planet's stubborn grip.

In spite of this progress, the Generationals still insist on adhering to their regressive ideals. From one discovery to the next, the fools remain stringently opposed to these advancements. Now, with the possibility of space travel within reach, the Generationals claim we choose to leave, not of our own volition, but because we refuse to remedy the many problems that plague the planet. This notion, I believe, has not formed so much from the

## *God's Greatest Gift*

Generationals' inherent dislike for progress, but of their misconception of this world. They see the planet as a caring guardian, a mother tending to all her children. But she does not care for us, she despises us; she violently debases us, hurting us with storms and tectonic upheavals, she holds back her wealth in fear of us demanding more from her, and when we pry what is rightfully ours from her fingers, she wilts, crying in proclamation of her infinitesimal greed. It is our duty to be rid of her and claim what is ours by right. If the Generationals continue in their refusal to see this truth, we shall have no other choice than to leave them to their fate.

The quest to give immortality to household pets has proven unsuccessful. After nine decades of experimentation, we could not find a way to tailor the chemical formulae to match the respective species. Our failure is most likely due to the absence of some vital compound in the other creature's anatomical composition. Regardless, the experiment's fruitlessness is a trivial loss.

\*

### Century 5

I suspected ignorance would prove an impediment to progress, but never did I imagine it posing a legitimate threat. The Generationals have organized themselves, and they are no longer content to stay out of our way. Adopting the basest criminal tactics, they infiltrate our infrastructure and corrupt it from within, doing everything in their power to destroy everything we have worked so hard on. Several life banks have been sabotaged, diminishing our lifespan and spreading panic throughout the public. And while we console the troubled populace, the rebels spread their propaganda through every imaginable avenue. Hacking billboards and hijacking cellular implant channels, they display their slanderous filth with startling efficiency, spreading rumors that our immortality is sustained through war and murder, with the

government sending contracts to independent security firms for fresh corpses. They say that our body banks have revitalized the human trafficking market, providing funds to a mass underground criminal network.

Once I might have seen the Geneationals as poor misguided souls in need of proper instruction. But now I see them for what they truly are; genetic trash, unfortunate rejects resulting from our inevitable progression through the Darwinian timeline. It is in their nature to perish, and in their demise they wish to bring us down with them.

I will not abide this, and neither will any other sound individual. We have come too far to stop now, and we'll be damned if we permit a crowd of depraved miscreants to stand in our way.

On the day marking my 500th year on this planet, a journalist visited me at my home; he was the same interviewer who greeted me after my discovery went public. It was a queer experience. The first time he interviewed me, he typed away on a small typewriter, hanging onto my every word, intent on milking the entire scene for every possible detail. He asked me to slow down and repeat myself several times throughout the interview, expressing his desire to write down everything he could.

Now all he brought was a holo-recorder connected to a small anchor. At the interview's start, he excused himself from the room as the miniscule device asked me a list of prerecorded questions, analyzing my blood pressure and heartbeat all the while, determining whether what I said was of any validity through a simple cross-reference with my vitals. When the device signaled the end of the interview, the journalist slipped the device into his pocket and left without another word.

I try not to take offense. After all, half a millennium can turn anything into old news. Now everyone directs their attention to the great space

## *God's Greatest Gift*

race. Once we have perfected space travel, it will also turn mundane after a handful of centuries, and we will set our eyes on an even more illustrious goal. Such is the way of human ingenuity.

\*

### Century 6

The old human form no longer satisfies us. Since we have already gone so far with the recalibration of our natural lifespan, do we not deserve to fly of our own volition? Should we not explore the vast seas immune to its many hazards? In our abolition of the gods, should we not take their place? We find ourselves in a metamorphosis; our old shell is cast off, the weakness of our flesh no longer impedes us. The vulnerability of the oafish larvae is superimposed by the grace of the butterfly. Our true forms, at long last, may be fully realized.

Personal augmentations have taken the world by storm, fueled by the boundless passion of imagination. Our Bipedal forms now take on shapes of increasing complexity. Anatomical specialists from around the globe collaborate to invent newer and better modifications every year.

For some time I had watched the progress of these so-called "body splicers", ever since the middle of the twenty-first century, wondering what they might accomplish with their combination of anatomy and technology, metal and flesh. My patience has at last paid off, as the work of these ingenious minds is now available to everyone.

I elected to remain true to my old form, feeble as it is. It remains locked away, for safety, as a reminder of what we once were. A foolish sentiment, but one I will remain persistent by. If I ever desire to remind myself of the limitations we were once subject to, I will awake myself from preservation and walk once again in that insubstantial skin.



My mind now resides on a personal network, exploring the world at my leisure with my many puppets of flesh and wire. And if the urge ever arises for me to return home, I need only think of it.

Of course, the Generationals do not appreciate these new inventions. I care not recite their grievances, as they are surely just as trivial as their previous arguments. It matters not; they are so far disconnected from society for their opinions to be of any consequence. Even their menial acts of arson pose little trouble.

At least we have put the Generationals to some use, their carcasses acting as the main source of cranial matter. However, since they refuse to connect with the public mainframe, it poses some difficulty to locate them. But one only need see a Generational to know what they are.

#### Century 7

This world is too small. I have scoured every corner of this derelict mass, discovered and catalogued every part of the world, conquered every obstacle there is to be conquered, experienced everything worth experiencing. There is little more this land can offer.

When will the space expeditions return? I yearn for stories of worlds beyond ours; I long to know what wonders await us out on the astral plain. I am anxious to discover what worlds we will conquer next. There has been little contact since the pioneers' departure, and I calculate their supply of neurological tissue will soon be insufficient for a return expedition. Until they return, the mega corporations refuse to invest further in space travel.

Personalized augmentations remain the corporations' chief interest. New possibilities are unlocked every year, as different firms compete to invent the newest cybernetic installations. The old

## *God's Greatest Gift*

bipedal form has almost entirely been abandoned. In its place, a conglomerate of distinctive forms has taken to every visage imaginable: beings of piscine and avian nature populate the skies, tendrilous bodies traverse the tightly packed urban environment with their multitude of appendages, individuals of every size and stature roam the earth in an infinite combination of legs, wheels, pads, gears, and every other conceivable method of transportation. Those few who retain the old human physique tend to the cattle, as the livestock's familiarity with the traditional body mitigates the threat of rebellion.

The trafficking of Generationals is now a new economic venture, as the demand for neurological tissue increases. Reproductive materials from the livestock are sent to the life banks and undergo germination. When the fermented eggs reach three years of age, in which the brain experiences the most radical growth, they are set in cryogenic stasis and sent to the storage facilities to await consumption. It is necessary to enlist the help of these primitive creatures, for our increased lifespan and wealth of augmentations has rendered our species sterile.

We must not allow the Generationals to discover their new purpose. If they did, they would no doubt act selfishly.

### Century 8

Our extraterrestrial pathfinders have yet to return. The mega corporations are reluctant to fund further explorations, awaiting the guarantee of financial benefit before pouring any more resources into the project. At this point, I have abandoned all hopes of a return. I must take matters in my own hands if I desire to witness the colonization of other solar systems within the next eon.

To aid me in my endeavors, I have enlisted the help of the research crew who built the ships for the

first expedition. They are eager to craft another vessel to pierce the cosmos, working tirelessly to surpass the previous models in every way.

My foundry, which aided in our triumph over death, comes to life once again in our quest to conquer the stars. It warms me to see the factory rekindled in the flames of a shared passion. Soon, it shall hammer out the forms we will inhabit in our universal conquest.

Other external circumstances spur my enthusiasm as well. The Generationals grow suspicious of our interest in them, and the anti-technological radicals return once more in anticipation of rebellion. Silencing them again will be a detestable waste of resources, but a necessary sacrifice if a conflict were to arise. And considering the roach-like insistence of those unsavory creatures, a violent confrontation is near inevitable.

I do not wish to be present for that affair, for in the aftermath the life banks will be in search of genetic donors to repopulate the herd. In its stasis, my preserved body still retains its genetic potency, a viable candidate for their breeding program. If the life banks were to discover it, they would not hesitate to confiscate it in preparation of the oncoming conflict.

Although I harbor no great sentiment toward the tired carcass, the idea of fathering the next generation of cattle is a disturbing thought I would much rather not come to fruition.

To avoid inquiry, I cannot make a substantial withdrawal from the life banks. The administrators would become curious and investigate the anomaly. During their inquiry, it is certain they will discover my body and demand its forfeiture. We must keep this expedition a secret, for my sake. The colonies founded on our neighbor planet have been abandoned. No valuable resources remain worth

the fuel and transportation costs to bring back to our world. Preparations for excavating the asteroid belt and further gas planets are under way, but initial scans do not promise much.

Century 9

The purge has begun. With systematic precision, chemical squadrons sweep through the mortal colonies, scanning the vitals of the Generationals below. If a body's amygdala is not properly stimulated, its owner is dissolved under a concentrated spray of carborane-accelerated acid. Those with properly stimulated pituitary glands are gathered up by the tetra-pods and carried off to the life banks for processing.

Of course, the Generationals are never satisfied with keeping things simple. Spurred to action by our mass-rehabilitation efforts, the extremists resort to the most violent countermeasures, targeting the life banks once more in one final act of defiance. Even at the rebellion's apex, only a handful of squadrons and two minor life bank branches suffered irreparable damage.

Another terrorist cell is located and expunged almost every other month now. The Tetra-pods discontinued extraction efforts after the first year of the Human/Generational war after gathering the requisite number of bodies, and the chemical squadrons now cleanse the remaining mortal colonies indiscriminately.

I have taken advantage of the administration's relentless campaign against the remaining rebels. Enlisting my own squadron of tetra-pods, I search for the remaining independent cells myself. Upon locating one, I collect a few choice specimens before retreating from their stronghold and contacting the proper authorities. At this point I have collected more than enough life to last several millennia.

Observing one generational with the utmost scrutiny, I was appalled by their morbid familiarity. Save for the device grafted into the upper spine, my body was near identical to that of the traditionalist ape. The comparison, however queer, only goes skin deep. Beneath that familiar visage resides an inferior intellect, a mind incapable of retaining the vast knowledge our species has to offer.

Soon I will be absolved of this world, as the ships near completion with every passing day. By the end of this century, we will depart to claim rightful ownership over the galaxy. I have contemplated releasing a few specimens from cryogenic stasis on the expedition. Doing so would require the construction of a new section of the ship capable of supporting a biome to suit their basic needs. I have expressed to the manufacturers my desired upgrades to the vessel and am preserving a range of edible flora and fauna to populate the mock ecosystem. The male and female I have chosen for this project will have their memories wiped before entering the biome to avoid the possibility of retaliation. If I were to encourage a pair to copulate, I would possess a regenerative supply of cranial matter for the voyage.

Rumors have arisen of a select group of generational rebels accepting augmentations to better combat the cleaning parties. None of these stories have been substantiated, though, and I doubt such stubborn creatures would willingly go against their own ideals, no matter the benefit.

#### Last day

For the past thousand years, I believed I could encompass the past millennium of our history in a few brief paragraphs. Now, as the last surviving document of the human race, I find this brief chronology grossly insubstantial. There is no mention of a majority of humanity's greatest scientific achievements. No reference is made to the resource wars waged on the interplanetary supply

route. Indeed, I have even failed to detail the development of a steadily growing hive mind amongst our species. No time remains to record in greater detail the events of the past few centuries. Even if there was, I do not believe I could bring myself to recount them.

Upon leaving the planet ninety-one years ago to this day, Extermination of the mortals was no longer the Administration's chief priority. Believing the remaining forces would perish with time, the world turned its attention to other endeavors. Aided by their enemy's negligence, the remaining Generational forces banded together and hatched a plan to strike at the heart of the Administration.

Reports arose over the next decade of solitary mortals hiding in small niches of every major city throughout the world. The life banks, eager to increase their supply, added these strays to the storage facilities without a second thought. Soon after, several incidences of cryogenic failure affected a great many life banks, forcing administration to relocate the awakened specimens while they searched for the cause of the malfunction. In every case, the most recent tenant was absent, their hibernation pod shattered and infested with a bluish-white mold.

The insurgents had bioengineered a highly carnivorous fungus. Once inside the human body, the organism stays dormant, clinging to the inner chambers of the heart. There it remains, until the circulatory process slows and allows the fungal colonies to spread. The heart and veins clot and burst from the mold's cancerous growth. From there, the organism breaks down and consumes the rest of the body using a highly corrosive digestive enzyme. When the mold comes in contact with the air, the compound emits a significant amount of thermal energy and releases a cloud of microscopic eggs small enough to bypass the ventilation filters and infect the other inhabitants.

Of course, when it was first discovered, the administration did not know how the fungus operated and therefore saw no reason to issue quarantine. By the time administration understood how the fungus worked, nearly every major distribution center and storage facility was contaminated beyond use.

The hunt for all remaining insurgents renewed with ardent vigor, in hopes of capturing another group of mortals before they infected themselves. When the chemican squadrons were sent to the final insurgent cell located at the bed of the Pacific Ocean, the Generationals detonated the subterranean base, erasing all hope of salvation.

The world devolved into turmoil soon after, as dwindling supplies sparked large-scale power-struggles across the globe. With every year that I drifted further away, and with the ever-deteriorating connection of the broadcasts back on my home world, I listened as the world fell into chaos. The world fractured into dozens of dying factions, all fighting for the last scraps of life. The last faded transmission I received thirty-seven years ago relayed the launch of the first nuclear warhead.

If I was not so selfish, I would have returned with my uncontaminated supply and brought order back to the world. Sitting here now, however, writing this final log with my own two hands, I think it was for the best.

Walking around the ship on my own two feet, I am disturbed by the sterile atmosphere. The steel and wire floor slips under me with great discomfort. Every step I take is another reminder of the empty carapace I inhabited for so long. The only comfort I have on this prison is the arboretum's inhabitants. Watching them from this perch fills me with emotions too long forgotten for me to describe.



## *God's Greatest Gift*

It still disgusts me, thinking about everything that had happened when I surrendered my mind to the cold calculations of that infernal machine. After living in an artificial body for so long, this skin feels too real; my mind is too clear, emotions wash over me in sickening waves. My senses are sharpened by their unfamiliarity, all to the point of agony.

Despite the pain, I do not wish to give my body up again. The thought of returning my conscious to the cold colorless clutches of this metal prison only causes further discomfort. After running away for so long, I am too tired to avoid the responsibility any longer. Let death take me from this existence, only then will I be absolved of my sins. I must do my best to save the few untainted souls on this ship. I might have forsaken my home, but I will not be responsible for our species' extinction. I will send my two subjects away in the only escape pod on this forsaken vessel, and hope against hope they might find another home. My inconsistent almanac will go along with them. With luck, they might someday advance far enough to decipher the manuscript and reclaim the history of our species. I will remain in this empty prison, and await the void's embrace.

I do not wish to write any longer. The emotions become ever stronger, and I am beginning to hallucinate.

What will they call me, if ever they are given the chance to discover my story?

----

Everything prior is written in an unfamiliar language.

----

(January 2, 1924, at an excavation near the intersection of the Tigris and Euphrates River.)

Dear Gerald

Our archeological endeavors have taken a turn for the surreal. The Arabs unearthed a large metal carriage of the strangest geometry. Upon cursory inspection, we found the vessel to contain a hollowed cavity. Directing my crew to remove the odd mechanism's discus-shaped door, we managed to pry the lid open on a strange invisible hinge that neither my associates nor I have been capable of locating.

The vessel's interior is just as astounding as its exterior. Two padded chairs furbish the cramped space with a variety of storage compartments populating every wall. Further examination leads me to believe the storage units kept agricultural implements as well as a wide array of seeds and preserved foods. Several spots in the sparse cabin contain writing in symbols wholly unfamiliar to my linguist and the natives.

Only one loose artifact was discovered inside the pod; a small black rectangular box the size of a snuffbox made of a smooth plastic-based substance with two oddly shaped sockets at one end and a strange metal protrusion extending out of the other. On the top is a glass insignia in the shape of an old geometrical compass.

Upon returning to my tent with the artifact, I distinguished that the outlet of the box was reminiscent to that of the power inlet of my portable radio. Tampering with the wires and plugs on my old speaker, I managed to reroute the power to feed into either side of the mysterious device. When I switched on the dissected radio, a faint light issued from the strange symbol on the box and coalesced several inches above its surface. The miniature display was akin to a flattened typewriter. An indecipherable murmur echoed from within, issuing from what I could only imagine was some interior stereo. When I moved my hand over the anomalous

## *God's Greatest Gift*

light, the colors of the display changed and the murmur became a labored clicking. I dare not tamper with the device any further until I am certain of its function.

If I had not eliminated such fanciful notions during my term in Oxford, I would have concluded this artifact is altogether extraterrestrial. However, I am experiencing great difficulty in finding a more rational explanation for the origin of this queer anomaly.

Please, if you can, come to my expedition in Turkey and help me uncover the mystery surrounding this phenomenon. Your technological expertise will be most beneficial in shedding light on this situation. I suggest you bring a large battery or some other substantial store of electricity, for I believe the strange rectangular artifact demands more energy to function properly.

Please respond with the utmost urgency.

-Your friend, M. J. Hensen



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**ARRANGE WHATEVER  
PIECES COME YOUR WAY.**  
”

— Virginia Woolf



# Curiosity

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