

eleven40seven
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“I THINK WORKS OF
ART- ANY FORM OF
CULTURE- HAVE THE
CAPABILITY TO GIVE
PEOPLE A CERTAIN
HOPE AND PASSION
AND BELIEF AND
CONVICTION THAT
NOTHING ELSE CAN.”

- Shirin Neshat

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Most quotes I have read about finishing a project go something like, "Beginning is easy; finishing is hard," or, "Starting something doesn't mean anything unless you finish."

I could not disagree more. Beginning is hard. Continuing is hard. Finishing is hard.

The truly brilliant team of students making up this semester's staff, often fueled only by coffee and candy, embraced the hard to create this complex edition of eleven40seven. Many factors tried to impede this journal's completion including a few counts of COVID, concussions, ER trips, surgeries, migraines, and exhaustion; yet, we did it anyway. To begin, to continue, to finish, in spite of—that's hard. That's worth celebrating. This journal is a celebration of our hard work and perseverance, unique opinions, developing minds, and the creativity of TCU's students.

We received 118 submissions this semester and every single one invoked thoughtful, sometimes difficult discussions, forcing us to look at things outside ourselves. There were many times when most of us had a set opinion on a piece, ready to make a final decision when someone would say a few words that completely toppled our view. We were blessed to have a diverse staff who had a sense of responsibility to represent all voices, a readiness to navigate tough topics, and a willingness to have our minds changed.

I want to thank each staff member for their time, dedication, attention, patience, kindness, and empathy. Being the Editor-in-Chief of this team has been an incredibly rewarding experience. It allowed me to watch us grow alongside this journal, and thus I am proud and honored to present the Fall 2022 edition of eleven40seven. I hope you will celebrate with us.

Sincerely,

Brianna Harkins

Editor-in-Chief, Fall 2022

Grown Up

Hannah Johnson

Peter is old now, very old—
Twenty-six at least.
He's got a job in Charing Cross, he takes
the bus, and pays the fees and
even when he speaks to me
he never speaks of Neverland.

One day he woke and felt a beard
Sprouting like jungle moss on earth.
And oh—his heart—poor Peter Pan
his heart, it gulped and welled
with tears that broke the spell.
He fell that day, second star to the right
still alight with sprightly laughter,
tumbling down to Battersea.

Peter is wise now, very wise—
His cockiness all gone.
He's done with bedtime story things, he eats
his greens, and feeds the dog and
when we walk in Kensington
he never talks of Neverland.

But there is hope for Peter Pan
Acting so grown-up and absurd.
I know there's hope because I saw
A little scene on Bowling Green—

Peter Pan, alive, alight, jeans pressed in
to the tender earth.
On his lap, a child, a smile
in his eyes a sparkle, spark
of mermaid laughter, breaking through
fairy dust riddles and pirate tunes
And one above all—I lean in to hear—
It's slipped from the lips all covered in beard
It is Pan—Peter Pan, with youth in his hand
Singing a song of Neverland.

What We Know After Eventide

Leah Marut

Walk with me another midnight;

I know this promised garden is nothing

more than my color-coded shortcomings,

but I still ask that you take my hand

and peruse these moonlight regrets. Golden

pollen dusts your hair, close enough

to your smile to be a fate sweeter

than being forgotten by the bees—

we take up their dance in our clumsy human

way and your skin brushes against unfurling petals

like a kiss of melted honey. Somehow

things seem so soft

so forgiving

in these hours. Even wayward thorns

refuse to draw blood for tonight. I cannot say

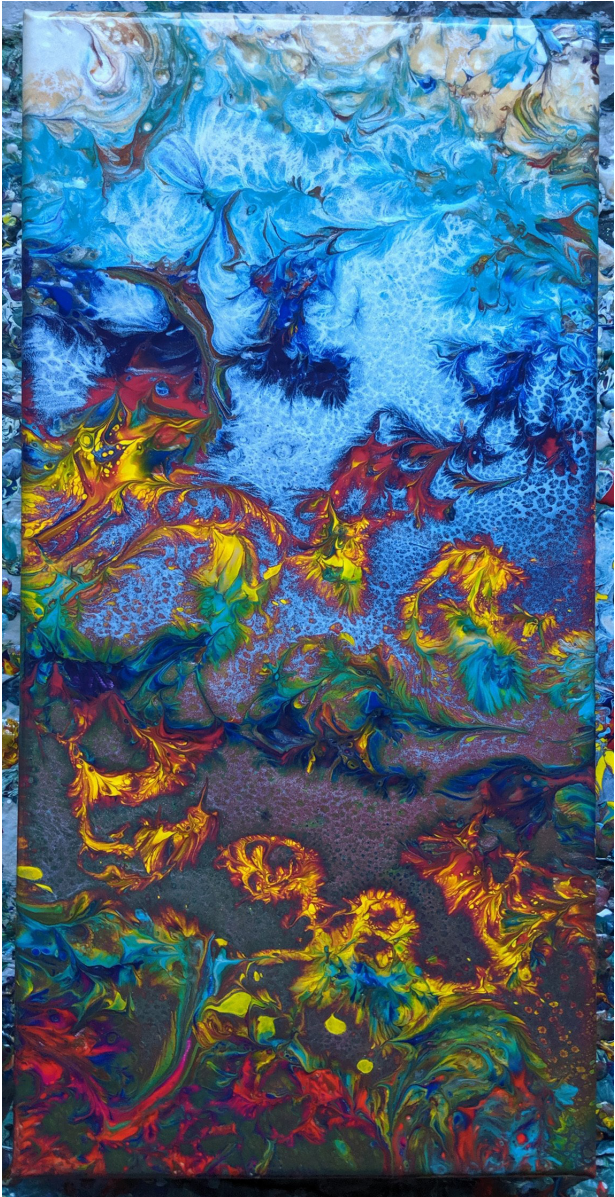
what the sunrise will bring, but stay with me

for the evening and maybe that will be enough

to stop these blossoms from fading.

Figures

Kelly Winegar



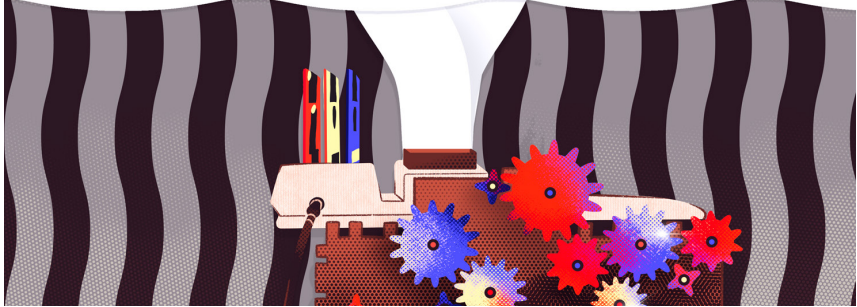
Mac the Oracle Poster

Isabella Perez



CHARISE
PISANI JOE
RHODES
ANDRÉS
CORTÉZ
MADDIE
LAY

MAC
THE ORACLE



Self Portrait as the Moon

Sam Serrano

I couldn't help

but long to be in the light,
yet for so long,

I lingered in the dark.

I felt safe here,

in a space where

it was only me

surrounded by

the little lights

that longed to illuminate

and highlight me

with a gleaming shine.

I didn't know how to begin

a rotation that was not

fit for me, but I

wondered what it

would look like

from the other side.

The side of me that

is almost always

hidden. The side of me that most

do not see, with the craters,

unexplored and untouched.

Vulnerable, and unharmed.

I feared the movement

that was to come,

because I did not know

how they'd love who I have become.

I wanted to let go. I could feel myself

drifting into the atmosphere,

among the stars. I felt myself

beginning to *spin*.

A Story Night in Domestic Bliss

Mark Rose

“Can you get our little angel to lie down, please?”

I look up from the book I’m reading and see her standing in the hallway wearing my old college sweatshirt and some shorts I vaguely remember buying her. Her brown hair is in a messy bun, and she looks at me wearily through the “ugly” tortoise shell glasses she refuses to wear in public. She stopped trying to look chic when going to bed years ago, but I don’t care. She looks just as beautiful to me now in her mismatched sleepwear as she did in those fancy silk pajama sets she used to wear back in college. I’ll have to remember to buy her some more of those. She used to croon about how soft and comfortable they were.

“Hello?” She brought my train of thought back on track.

“Of course, baby.”

She hesitates, unsure if she should accept my answer. She’s exhausted, though. The long hours at the office drain her natural youthful energy over the day. She gives in, and I can see her switch her “mother mode” off as she sighs in relief, “Thank you, darling.” She shuffles over in her fluffy slippers, and I get up from the couch to save her the strenuous act of bending over to kiss me. I wrap my arms around her waist, just like I’ve done countless times over the years. It still feels the same as the first time, she’s stayed about the same size. She put in countless hours at the gym to shed the baby weight. I told her back when our little angel was born that I still thought she looked heavenly. She replied with a curt scoff of disbelief, paired with a venomous eye roll, and headed out to the gym as soon as we were discharged from the hospital.

I stare in her hazel eyes and tell her, “I love you.”

She replies with, “I love you more,” and gives me a quick kiss before unwrapping her arms from my neck and trudging to our bedroom. She stops in the doorway and turns to me, seemingly one last effort from her “mother” side to make sure I’ll get our little angel to bed. I don’t know why she doesn’t trust me to not put her to sleep. She’s only caught us staying up late watching cartoons once or twice.

“Trust me, baby. I’ll put her to bed. Scout’s Honor.”

“You were never a Scout, darling.”

I give her a mischievous smile, and she replies with her own smile. Its radiance briefly erases all the tiredness from her face, then she turns to go into our room. “Don’t take too long! You know I can’t fall asleep without you next to me.”

I chuckle to myself, knowing she'll be drooling on our pillows by the time I join her. We should really wash our sheets soon.

I turn to our angel's room and begin walking down the hallway. My brown Oxfords clack on our hardwood floors as I loosen my tie and undo the top button of my white shirt. I hear rustling in her room as I get close, and as I open the door I see quick little last-minute movements to pull her legs under the pink blanket. Her eyes dart around under her closed eyelids, trying to appear asleep.

"Pssst," I quietly whispered.

Her head tilts slightly. "Who is it?" Perfect opening.

"Joe."

She seems confused. "Joe who?" Hook, line, and sinker.

"Joe Daddy."

She opens her eyes and sits up in her little bed. She giggles then says, "I don't get it." Her dark hair is nicely combed, but after seeing it was Daddy, she sets to messing it up again, twirling it in her fingers mindlessly.

"Mommy said you'd tell me a story." I move across the room, careful to avoid princess dolls and stuffed animals scattered about the floor.

I sit next to her and ask, "I guess Mommy didn't tell you to clean your room tonight?"

She giggles again before replying no. Thinking of a solution, I say, "Hmmm. How about this? IF you help me clean up your room, I'll tell you a story. How does that sound?"

She ponders my offer, and I see the gears turning in her six-year-old mind. Then, she hits me with a counterproposal—"IF I help you clean my room, you'll tell me a story AFTER watching a cartoon with me."

I'm surprised she didn't understand my "Joe" joke yet has the critical thinking ability to negotiate. She may get her looks from her Mommy (thank the lord), but her craftiness she gets from me. I wonder if she'll go into law like her Daddy. Oh, that'll mean so much debt! This must be how my parents felt when I decided to get my JD.

"Counter-counter offer. No cartoon, but I'll tell you a story AND get you some strawberry donuts for breakfast before school tomorrow.

How about that?" She acts like she's considering my proposal; we both know she has already made up her mind on it.

"Deal!"

We get up and begin picking up her toys and placing them in the storage bins, with her occasionally correcting where I put her dolls. How could I forget that Princess Victoria must be with her Prince Xavier? I'm not sure where she got those European names from. I must have left BBC America on the TV one day.

After tidying up her room I tuck her back into her bed, grabbing her favorite toy, a weathered purple squid named JJ, and hand it to her. "What would you like to hear?"

She immediately replies, "How about when you and Mommy met?" I think she's had that prepared for a while.

"Okay so, me and Mommy met about 12 years ago in our first year of college. *College is school for grownups, right Daddy?* That's right, angel. We had a class together and sh—*What class?*—biology. And she—*What's biology?*—biology is the study of living things, like people and fishies and butterflies and roses and much more. Anyways, Mommy and I were assigned by our teacher to be partners on a homework assignment. Well, I thought Mommy was very pretty and—*Mommy is very pretty*—yes, she is, angel. *Am I gonna be pretty like her when I grow up?* You already are. Anyway, we worked on our assignment for a few weeks together in class but after we finished we still kept talking to each other. *Why?* Well, she became my friend. She was smart, nice, and very funny. When she would tell a joke, she couldn't help but start laughing, and by the time she finished it you could barely understand what she was saying because she was laughing so hard. I thought her laugh was beautiful. *How can a laugh be beautiful?* The way it sounds, angel. The way it makes you feel when you hear it."

"So, after a few more weeks I asked her out. *Did you love her?* What do you mean? *Did you love Mommy then like you do now?* Not yet, angel, I just had a crush on her. It takes time to fall in love with someone. *Did it take you a long time to love me?* No angel, I loved you the second I saw you, when you were still in Mommy's tummy. Anyway, I picked her up in my car and—*Our blue one?*—no, I had a different car in college. A gray one. She was a great car, but when we had you, we wanted a newer, safer car, so we got the blue one. *Your car was a girl?*

How did you know it was a girl? To boys, cars are always girls, and I took care of mine. Always kept her clean.”

I think of my old car. Lara was still new at the time, a gift from my parents senior year of high school. I flashback and think of all the adventures I had with my “boys” in there—the impromptu concerts, the quick meals before classes started again. I should really call the “boys” and see how they’re doing. I miss them a lot.

“Daddy?”

“Sorry, Daddy got distracted. I picked Mommy up in my old car and we went to the State Fair of Texas in Dallas. *What’s a fair?* That’s the kind of place we went to a few weeks ago, remember? The place with all the games and candy and clowns? *I don’t like clowns.* Me neither, angel. So we went to the fair, and she mentioned that she loved stuffed animals. *Like me!* Yes, just like you. I wanted to impress her, so we went to one of the games to win her a stuffed animal. *Which game?* It was a game where you have to throw bean bags to knock down some milk bottles. *Did you win?* I did, just only after spending \$20 worth of tickets. After I finally knocked over all the bottles the man running the booth let me pick out a prize, so I let Mommy pick out the stuffed animal she wanted. After that it became her favorite stuffed animal. *Why?* Because it showed her how much I tried to impress her, and how much I cared to win it for her. *I don’t get it.* One day you will.”

“Well, after playing some more games and riding more rides, the weather started to turn bad. The sky became dark and gray, the wind started howling, and—*How can wind howl?*—when wind blows fast, it can sound like a doggie’s howl. *I want a doggie.* When you grow up more and can take care of one, maybe we’ll get you a doggie, okay? *Okay Daddy!* Anyway, we didn’t think anything of it until Dallas’s tornado sirens began blaring, warning that a tornado was about to touch down. *What’s a tornado?* A tornado is like a very big tube of wind that blows super fast. *Are they scary?* Yes, they can be sometimes.”

“We were on the Ferris Wheel—you know the huge wheel with the seats on it that goes very high? We were on that when the sirens turned on, and that’s when people started to run for the safe room at the fairgrounds. The person running it was a teenager who was very scared, and he ran away without letting us off. *What a meanie.* Well he was scared, angel. We all were. Mommy was very worried and was clutching her stuffed animal very tight.

What about you? Were you scared? Yes, I was. But I wanted to keep Mommy safe and calm, so I tried not to freak out. *What did you do then Daddy?* Thankfully, the attendant forgot to turn off the ride, and so we were still turning. We didn't have a way to slow it down, so me and Mommy took off our safety latch, waited for our seat to reach the bottom of the circle, and we jumped off. *Were y'all okay?* Yes angel, we were. We landed on the ground and as soon as Mommy picked up the stuffed animal she had dropped when falling, we ran into the safe area too."

"After that we waited for a while with everyone else there until the sirens blasted the okay signal, and we left the fairgrounds. We were very blessed that the tornado did not come our way and that it was a small one. Me and Mommy were still a little freaked out, so we just decided to head back to the dorms and call it a night. *What are dorms?* That's where you live in college your first year. *You didn't live with Grandma and Grandpa?* No angel. *Why not?* Well when you grow up, you leave home to live on your own, so you can make your own home." *I don't want to live by myself without you and Mommy.*

She began to tear up a bit, her little lip starting to quiver, and I stroke her hair to comfort her. "Don't worry, angel. You won't have to for a long time, and by then you'll probably be itching to move out."

"No, I won't, Daddy!" I chuckle wryly, trying to savor and burn this moment into my memory. I know someday in several years I'll be reminiscing about this moment, wishing I could relive it.

"Do you want me to finish the story?" She gives me a meek little nod and stops clutching her blanket.

"After we got back to the dorms, I walked her to her building."

Her demeanor immediately changes. "Did you kiss her?" I give her a bashful chuckle then say I did. "Ewwwww gross."

"You won't be thinking that whenever you grow up and want to start kissing boys."

"I'll NEVER want to kiss boys, they're gross." She stuck her tongue out and made a disgusted face. If only she would think that forever. That would save me a lot of heartache when the time comes for me to be replaced as her #1 man. I begin to wrap up the story.

"After that, we went on more dates, eventually fell in love, both graduated, and after Daddy got his JD, we got married, and a year later we had you. *What's a JD?* It just means I went to college for law.

And that's about it. *Can you tell me about the other dates, or when you got married?* Not tonight, angel. Those are stories for another day. Right now you need to get to bed, okay?"

She looks disappointed that storytime is over and that she cannot push bedtime away any longer. She lets a defeated sigh out but gives me an okay. I bow my head and say our nightly prayer, then get up from the bed and tuck her in again. I stroke her hair and marvel at this little girl and wonder how something so pure and innocent came from someone so imperfect and undeserving. I send a brief "thank you" to above in my head, then tell her I love her. She repeats it back, but as I get up to leave, she asks me to wait. "What happened to Mommy's favorite stuffed animal? The one you won for her?"

I smile, then say, "You're holding her." She looks down at the purple squid in her arms, still stained with the dirt from the fairgrounds, then smiles as she realizes what I meant. Her beaming smile echoes her mother's. I turn on her nightlight by the door, turn off the light, tell her goodnight, then close the door.

I grab myself a glass of water in the kitchen and look at the many pictures on the fridge without actually seeing them. I see through them and instead see that night from so many years before. I briefly remember the carnival food smell mixed with the dew on the wind, the dazzling lights flashing all around, the sound of her laughing blending with the cacophony of the rest of the fair, the butterflies in my chest every time she wrapped her arm with mine. I still feel them to this day. I snap out of my little detour through memory lane then walk to our room. I change out of my clothes, shower, brush my teeth, then lay in bed in my own mismatched sleepwear. She is already asleep but flips over to me when she feels the bed move. "I thought you couldn't fall asleep without me?" She gives me a half-asleep little smile, then drapes her arm over me. I lay there, staring at the ceiling, trying to save this moment again. Trying to capture the entirety of my life at this moment.

Because one day, her hair will have streaks of gray, then the rest will follow. One day, I will be laying here reflecting on a fight I just had with our angel, and one day it'll just be me and my wife in the house alone, as our angel has grown up and is in college making her own memories now. One day we will be on opposite sides of the bed due to an argument we had. One day I won't be taking off those fancy clothes for work anymore, or maybe one day they won't fit me at all.

One day we will hear the little footsteps of children running again—only this time it'll be our angel's own family.

One day those all may come to pass, but those days are not today. Right now, I have a beautiful brunette wife draped over me and a gorgeous little girl sleeping in her room who still thinks boys are gross and never wants to leave us. Right now there are still the three of us, and tomorrow I will wear my fancy clothes and go to work. Tomorrow I will hear little footsteps, but it'll be our angel making them still. One day in the future, I will be reminiscing about this moment, and thinking to myself how good I had it. Today, though, as I drift off to sleep, I think about how blessed I am to have it all right now—and how I have to swing by the bakery to get some strawberry donuts in the morning.

Still Life

Isabella Baker



Growth

Michaela Harris



Just Breathe

Amari Harris

*Breathe in. Breathe out. One. Two. Three. Breathe in.
Breathe out.*

I try to soothe myself as my peer finishes up his speech in front of our class. His topic is on the detriments of globalization or something like that, but I am not sure because the entire time he is speaking, my world seems dead silent. As his pale pink lips move to formulate what I believe are the words “in conclusion”, I feel my heart begin to sink lower and lower into my body.

You are next.

I was next. I am next. I feel my hands grow increasingly warm and moist as I reach under my desk to wipe them off on my slightly wrinkled black Ponte pants that I spent 15 minutes trying to iron that morning. I reach up to pull at the collar of my coral blouse that, along with my black blazer, seems to be trapping all of my body heat in. I start to feel like a human oven, and I sense the panic begin to set in.

You are a fraud.

What do you actually know about the IMF?

Nothing.

You have always been horrible at anything involving economics.

You have always been horrible at everything.

I can feel the tears pooling in the corners of my wide, brown eyes when I am suddenly startled by a sharp clapping noise coming from behind me. It is not until the rest of the class also begins to clap that I realize the presenter at the front of the hall is packing up his belongings and making his way back to his seat.

This is it.

It is time for your classmates to find out their assumptions about you are right.

You don't know anything.

Her words make me wish that I could sink into the tan, speckled floor whose resemblance already mirrored that of quicksand, but I soon realize that everyone has turned their eyes to look at me.

Don't cry.

They will see how weak you really are.

Suck it up.

Suck it up. I push back my flimsy metal chair and stand while avoiding eye contact with everyone around me. I pick up my laptop and my index cards covered with scribbles of ink instructing me when to change slides, pause, ask questions, breathe.

Breathe.

I can feel the hand of my anxiety wrap her fingers *one, two, three, four* around my already sweating throat as I make my way down the steps of my lecture hall and towards the podium that my smug professor stands at. Professor Reynolds, or Professor Misogyny as I like to call him, stands at the front of the sea of XY chromosome individuals that I have the “pleasure” to call my peers and stares at me with cold, piercing eyes filled with amusement and mocking. Although it is certainly a change from the apathetic attitude he has addressed me with for most of the semester, I am not sure that I like this energy any better. I would rather my existence go unacknowledged than judged at this point. God. All I have ever wanted is to be acknowledged. But not this way.

Breathe.

“Interesting choice of hairstyle for a professional presentation,” Professor Misogyny remarks as he reaches a liver-spotted, pale hand towards my still damp, dark brown curls that sit as neatly as I could make them in a high-puff on top of my head, “but I guess it looks okay”.

Move your hand.

Do not touch me.

I am not a petting zoo.

“Thank you professor,” I respond in a meek voice as his rough finger pokes into my forest of coils. I hear some snickering from a few boys sitting on the first row who, despite our shared pigmentation, seem to find this rather dehumanizing scene comedic. The others also smirk as their eyes dart between my distressed countenance and our haughty teacher; though, their darting eye movements could also be the result of their shameless abuse of Adderall and alcohol at any and every hour of the day. And they think I am unprofessional.

I am able to side step Misogyny before he has the chance to inappropriately invade my personal space again, and set my humming laptop on the tall, dark podium intricately engraved with a growling leopard; its teeth bared and seemingly ready to tear into my flesh at any moment. So aggressive.

Aggressive.

Be aggressive.

Breathe.

I look out at my fellow political science majors and instantly feel my stomach smash through the floor. I try to keep it together, but I feel my grip on my emotions slipping. My heart is hammering against my rib cage so hard that I am certain it will tear through my chest and onto the cold floor any second. I feel like I am about to lose control. I can't breathe.

I can't breathe.

I can't fucking breathe.

All my life I have tried to prove my worth to my teachers, my peers, my family, to everyone. How long can one exist under the weight of being seen as lesser than until you finally break. Until I finally break.

You don't belong here.

You are not good enough.

Not smart enough.

I look out at my male-dominated class and feel my skin crawl as their eyes survey me up and down as if I am a piece of meat and not one of the top students in our class. They don't even see me as a person at this point. *You don't belong here.* It does not matter if I stand here and give the best presentation of my life, in their eyes I will never be as good as them. *Not good enough.* From my lack of a Y chromosome to the melanin in my skin, they will never see me as enough. Maybe no one ever will. *Not smart enough.* But I am. I am. Fuck them. Fuck you. Fuck it all.

*Breathe in. Breathe out. One. Two. Three. Breathe in.
Breathe out.*

Begin.

Beauty is Pain

Isabella Pasino



Pain

Hannah Johnson

He came unbidden to the world,
A stranger at our feast
He hoped he would destroy us all—
This unrelenting beast.

We didn't know his appetite—
The blade, the blood, the rope
He didn't know our mettle—
Didn't factor in our hope.

Unaware, he sparked a magic
Worked by Deity on high
With every stroke he grew our faith—
Deep longing tinged our cry.

Sweet blessing sipped from poisoned glass—
He schemed, we triumphed still—
His voice grew hoarse with raging on—
Ours held a quiet will.

How strange a fiend to share our bread
To calculate our ruin
A beast, he tried to crush our clay
And left us madly human.

When You Lose Someone

Julie Papaj

it's like you're standing at the edge of the world.
a place where the moon's lost control of the sea
the tides, a mercurial darkness beneath your feet
a place where the sun grows cold
and the stars refuse to glow,
where the lilacs have lost their sweetness
and the wild roses never bloom
your heart buzzes with a numbness
just like a frantic bee
as you endlessly search for a light
too far gone to be seen
just
out of reach.

when I lost you
it was like I was standing at the edge of the world.
the waves, ripping apart at the earth below
there I stood
a husk of a human, a hollow tree
struck by the force of a tormented scream
I fell to my knees
praying, that the water would swallow me whole.
wrap me in a bitter cocoon
so that I too could be lost
too early
too soon.

but I couldn't.
I didn't.

when I lost you
it was like I was standing at the edge of the world.
and yet
there, as I leaned into the abyss
and tasted its sweet darkness
somehow
I felt you.
just a drop of that sunshine
stolen once in a storm

When You Lose Someone

not in the way it was but new, reborn.
and like a trickle of fireflies painting the sky
beat by beat
I felt the warmth of your light.

when you lose someone
it's like you're standing at the edge of the world.
and yet
the stars still glow, the sun does not grow cold
lilacs stay sweet and the wild roses still bloom –
the world is not lost, just new.
and that candle
once lost at sea
still burns
wild and free
just a flicker,
a flame
that will breathe fire into your veins
drown out the chaos
so that all that remains
is a promise.
that just because something is lost
does not mean it can never be found.

Nobody Knows Death

Adrienne Stallings

For Lauren Bajuk

When I am done
And all that's left
Are memories
And stunted dreams,

Perfumed

By the roses drooping
In a curve
Akin to a plague doctor's nose,

I hope no one will mourn.

I want to be
Someone's redemption story.

Give me a Viking's funeral—
Let me spur others to fight
As I change from "is"
To "was."

The brightest stars
Burn
Fast, so bury me
With a bang.

(Though
if you put me in
Those godforsaken
Shoes—I will
Haunt you.

And please,
Don't let my obituary read
"Who was he?")

Nobody Knows Death

My death shall be
No act of god, but rather
An acknowledgement
That I've finally done enough.

If legacy
Is a thing that grows,

May loved ones picnic
In our gardens

And toast to life.

I Talked to You Today

Adrienne Stallings

For Londyn Tippet

Now that I think about it...

I wasn't talking to you
In that dream.
It was just you
Talking to me.

Your mouth moved,
Though no words came out.

We sat together,
Flanked by two other
Faceless friends.

You smiled
In the way that you do—

A grin so wide
It creased a crinkle
Around your eyes
(So green and warm
And alive).

I could almost feel you

Leaning in, telling me
Your hopes and dreams—

Fiery hair spilling
Over your shoulders,
Fingers drumming
To an inaudible beat.

I moved closer,
Hanging
Onto your every non-word.

And the last thing I remember
Before I woke up,

A single,
Clear thought:

God,

*I wish this were real.
Stay for just another minute,
Please.*

Benny

Michaela Harris



Split

Kien Nguyen Nho



The Swimming Hole

Corinne Green

Sometimes, when Jane was alone in the house, she wandered down the sunlit hall into her mother's wide, empty bedroom. Running a hand across the cream walls, she crept into the bathroom with cold feet on the marble tiles and quietly opened the drawer she knew was full of makeup. The chocolate brown liquid made her unrecognizable; she rubbed it down her neck until the line between the makeup and her white skin was hidden by the collar of her shirt. Jane stood close to the glass of the mirror, observing her eyes and the spots of green that brightened them, wishing they would dissipate the way the color does from a baby's eyes in the months after it's born. Even when her skin was covered in the mask of Mama's warm brown, her eyes sorely reminded her of what was beneath.

"Hai!" One afternoon, her mother's voice interrupted Jane's fantasy, and she froze standing before the mirror. She had just left for the market, and Jane had snuck to her room once again, conceding to her guilty pleasure. But this time Mama had forgotten her bag and had gone back upstairs to grab it. "Jane! *Mennene wannan*, What is this?" she cried.

"Mama, I—" Jane stuttered.

"No," she bustled over, snatching the tubes of makeup from Jane's hands and throwing them back into the drawers. "One day you will understand," she said, turning to face her daughter, "that your lightness is a privilege."

A privilege? Jane bowed her head and thought about the way that kids in school would pinch her skin and the little ones would run behind her bicycle chanting "*na-sa-ra, na-sa-ra, na-sa-ra!*" Ngambay for "foreigner", "White person".

When Jane walked the trail past the wrought iron gate of the yard and followed it deep into the foliage, she forgot about the reflection she despised. Jane knew the surrounding forest by heart. She could describe just where the dirt path veered into a barely blazed trail and widened into a shimmering pool of waterfall runoff. It was safe to swim there, but she knew from experience falling and skinning her legs to avoid climbing on the black rocks slick with algae. In her mind, she could instantly conjure the smell of the forest floor after it rained, earthy and fresh, humid and inviting.

But today, it was sunny. Spots of light shot through the canopy of trees overhead, bouncing across the verdant forest floor.

"I found it!" a voice called from up the hill, and Hassan came into view, jogging toward her with a wild grin stretched across his dark face. Hassan was one year older than her, and to Jane it seemed that he had grown into a young man in just a summer's time, his face longer, leaner, with scruff growing down his jawline. It was also Hassan that made her forget. In a place where she only half belonged, he made her feel whole.

When Hassan reached Jane, she saw he had unearthed the old box he had buried last year. It was full of paper money that he had earned in his summers at the stables and any loose change he could gather. Hassan dreamed of leaving and attending school in the United States. His fantasies were filled with some life other than this— one full of discomfort and city streets and the American dream. Not a life like the one he and Jane shared here— the one she loved dearly.

Several years ago, Mama had forced her to attend a tutoring session where volunteer students worked for extra income. *Education is power*, she told her. Jane heard the reminder daily as she walked out their ornate front door. Her mother would wave her off in a brisk and purposeful motion as if she was anxious to be rid of her. Jane disliked school, especially math, which she struggled to understand most. Words always flowed in her mind with ease, but numbers did not. On her first day, she sat begrudgingly at the table across from a boy with tousled dark hair and brown skin, flinging her bag down and sighing in exasperation. “Let’s get this over with,” she had said. The boy smiled, his black eyes shining with amusement.

“I’m Hassan.” He stuck out a hand and she shook it reluctantly. “And we don’t have to do math if you don’t want to.” Jane had smiled at this.

“I’m Jane.”

“Jane?” He asked, “Are you American?” She shook her head.

“My father,” she replied, studying the table. “He was a missionary here.”

“Ah, well it’s a nice name,” Hassan had said with sincerity. As they delved into solving functions and graphing them, Jane soon realized that he was incredibly gifted. Hassan spoke about math as if it were a great, mysterious puzzle, exciting and larger than life. As if he were a knight, and each problem was a quest obtained from a king. Jane could never muster the same energy, but she worked with focus because she noticed Hassan’s glow when she understood what he had taught her.

Now, she watched him gleam with that familiar vitality.

“It’s all here,” he panted wildly, clearing the soil from the wooden lid and opening it to reveal the stacks of paper money rubber-banded together. Hassan did not trust anywhere but the deep forest to keep his money safe. Home was especially perilous. For Hassan, it was a place to tiptoe, to exist only in shadows. Somewhere he passed through but could never stay. His mother died before his memory began, and his father was a broad man with a face that was incapable of showing any emotion other than rage and disgust.

Since the day Hassan met Jane, he stayed with her most of the time. He refused their extra bed no matter how many times her mother offered and slept in the old treehouse Jane's father built for her before he left. It was in the corner of the yard, supported by the trunk of the banana tree and rotting wooden beams that stuck out wildly and threatened to give at any moment. Hassan never once complained about the flattened excuse for a mattress or the bugs that found shelter with him when it rained.

"Oh good," Jane smiled with just her lips, trying to hide the selfish disappointment bubbling in her chest.

"I'll have just enough for a plane ticket," he said, "and then who knows what I'll do from there!" He laughed, and Jane frowned.

"Hassan, it's not that easy." His face fell.

"Neither is living here," he said, turning away with his box and starting the walk back to their spot by the swimming hole.

Jane walked silently behind him. He was shirtless, his budding muscles moving like small animals under his skin. She noticed the sunlight shift across his body, smooth and warm like cacao mixed with milk before bed. Sometimes, it stirred an unfamiliar yet pleasant feeling deep in her gut, and she shook her head to drive it away each time it arrived. As he turned along the path, her eyes landed on a patch of purple skin, blooming outward from beneath his arm.

"Oh no," she breathed. These bruises were appearing almost weekly, and anytime she asked him what happened, he attributed them to a horse accident with one of the new untamed stallions.

Hassan walked briskly, and for each one of her steps, he took two, leaving her perpetually behind. She knew where the bruises were coming from, but she couldn't bear to imagine her life if he left. *Please, change his mind*, she prayed silently. She prayed to a distant God that Hassan would forget about his box of money, that he wouldn't leave her. That he would stay with her for good. It was quiet except for the rhythmic cadence of the wild, the shrill call of a lonely falcon occasionally piercing the silence between them.

As Hassan pushed aside an overgrowth of bromeliads spilling across the path, the swimming hole finally came into view. It was a small pond with emerald water, and tiny minnows darted across the surface, electric with daylight. Two deer with rust-colored coats stood in the moss at the opposite edge, tall ears perked at Hassan and Jane's arrival; one continued to drink while the other turned and slipped gracefully into the brush. Jane watched the first deer, its head bowed and vulnerable, eyes wide and innocent. After a moment, it too leaped away into the wilderness.

Setting his box aside, Hassan stretched out on the rocks with his legs partially submerged in the water, his figure long and lean. His wide eyelids were closed and his dark lashes rested lightly on his cheeks. For a moment, Jane stood above him and youth flooded his face, pure and peaceful.

“What are you looking at?” Hassan opened his eyes, laughing, and Jane turned away. She unbuttoned her old striped shirt and dove into the water, spraying him with a cold mist.

“Hey!” he sprung up, launching himself into the pond with a clumsy flop. When he resurfaced, he let out a gurgling mixture of laughter and howling at the sting across his abdomen. Jane grinned devilishly, enjoying the simplicity of his presence.

“What do you think it’s like?” Hassan asked, floating on his back. “To swim in the Pacific ocean.”

“Salty?” Jane rolled in the water to face him.

“I had a dream last night. That I was there, in California, and I was floating like this. And all I could see was ocean. In all directions.” He stretched his arms and legs out to demonstrate. “And you were there, too, Jane.”

He liked to do this. To pretend like she would come with him like she wanted to. They were just old enough to make it on their own—eighteen and nineteen. But Jane was comfortable here, knowing exactly what her life would consist of. She was sure that she would be an obedient and faithful wife. And then, she would be a mother—quieter than her own, dutiful and doting. She did not need anything else to make her happy. The forest breathed into her and the water sustained her as it did for all of the animals. Maybe she hated the idea of leaving this place because it was all that she had to define who she was. Anything else had been lost the day her father left, waving from the truck, the promise that he’d be back in a couple of months ringing in her ears along with the roar of the engine.

Hassan must have noticed the immediate fall in her expression, and he waded over to her with a sad look in his eyes. He took her hands with his own, and Jane’s stomach flipped. This time she did not try to expel the warm feeling.

“Jane,” he said slowly, “there is so much more than this. I want to learn. I want opportunities because I don’t have those here. When I go, you know I will write to you. Every day. I promise I will.”

When he goes. She nodded, and her heart sank to the bottom of the pond.

The Swimming Hole

At dusk, the sun's orange light played over their faces as they trudged back through the forest. Pausing to catch her breath, Jane looked up at Hassan.

"Hassan, hold on. Turn around," she said gently.

"Why?"

"Just turn." He slowly rotated to face the tree behind him and she studied the blood pooled so precariously under his skin. It made her nauseous, the way he looked so fragile, so weak. Jane's brow creased with worry and she lightly laid a hand on his back. "Tell me what happened," she whispered. She felt his body go limp in surrender, and he leaned against the tree with his head in his hands.

"It's nothing," he faced Jane, eyes squeezed shut. As he opened them, she saw they were filled with tears. Hassan never cried.

The next day was a Sunday, and the village felt like a greenhouse, the sky full of cumulus clouds that raced away with the churning hot air. As Jane rode her bicycle to meet Hassan at the stables, she passed the white stone chapel down the road from her home. The bells were sounding, and her eyes narrowed with each chime. Jane resented the church and the hands that built it. But mostly, she resented how it reminded her of herself, reflecting the sun with its white paint and protruding awkwardly from the surrounding brown mud brick huts.

By the smell alone, Jane knew she had reached the stables before she saw the decomposing wood stalls. "Who are you looking for *budurwa*?" asked a thin older man with dark, leathery skin, hopping down from his perch on the fence.

"Hassan," Jane replied. "He's been working with the stallions."

"Hassan..." the man crinkled his face. "Haven't seen him today. Did not show up."

That's strange, Jane thought. *He would never miss a day of work.* Fear rose in her chest; she needed to find him. He hadn't slept the night in the treehouse last night—he'd gone home to gather the few things he had in preparation to leave. Jane ran to her bicycle on its side and quickly mounted it, pedaling hard and fast in a frenzy of kicked-up dust.

Jane discarded her bike when she reached Hassan's house and ran toward the rotten fence that marked their property.

His father was there, slumped against the outside wall, his hands cupping his face. Why were his hands red?

"Where is he?" her voice shattered and fell as it escaped her throat. He shook his head slowly, emptiness pouring from his eyes just as Jane saw the river of blood trickling down the hallway past the open front door.

Hassan. She ran to him, his body on its side in the hallway. She felt his wrists and his soft neck, warm and moist from sweat. The pulse was faint, but it was there. Jane was breathless, eyes darting from the gash in his head to the shovel on the floor caked with a mixture of red dirt and blood. Jane tore her shirt, pressing it to his head, and wrapping it tightly in an attempt to contain his last bits of life.

"You," she stormed through the doorway, angry tears rolling down her cheeks. "What did you *do* to him?" she cried. Hassan's father just shook his head once more, and Jane noticed the empty bottle of cheap liquor in his limp hand, the broken glass that littered the dirt yard.

"You will give me the keys to that truck," she yelled, gesturing to the ancient, rusted truck sitting in the yard. "I'm taking him." She snatched the keys from his father's hand and sprinted to the truck, pulling it in front of the house.

Jane sobbed, reaching under Hassan's arms to hoist him upward. Her arms were not nearly strong enough to carry him, and she felt him groan as the weight of his body dragged through the dirt.

The hospital was dark except for the light streaming through a single window in the waiting room. Jane picked at the dried blood beneath her fingernails, tapping her feet and cursing herself for her selfishness. For wanting him to stay. For knowing the truth, but holding him back from escaping it.

"Who is here for Hassan?" a sweaty nurse rounded the corner and shouted. Jane sprung from her chair, following her back into a large room filled with thin beds and rolling IVs.

Jane sat in the plastic chair beside Hassan for hours. He slept as if he were napping on the rocks, his expression soft and unaware. Suddenly, Jane understood. She thought about the home that she came back to every night. The front door her father had imported, the clean walls and windows, the swirling marble tiles, and the front gate that was a fresh white. Jane thought about Mama and her constant badgering, the pressure for her to go to school, to work hard, to "become something." Jane had resented her for her constant criticism. How she complained about Jane taking it all for granted. But how could Jane appreciate the things her father left behind?

The Swimming Hole

Slowly, she began to understand the way Mama scolded and shushed her whenever she spoke poorly of him. Whether she had seen it or not, he had provided for her. He had paved a road out of this dirt village, a way out of the life she should have lived—a life like Hassan’s.

“Jane?” Hassan’s voice was raspy and barely audible, but Jane leaped from her seat, standing beside him and reaching for his hand.

“Hey,” she whispered, her eyes once again clouding with tears. He smiled, and Jane leaned forward, pressing her lips to his cold cheek.

“Hassan,” she knelt beside him and took both of his hands in hers, interlacing their fingers so they alternated and formed a pattern of brown and white. She thought about her skin. *It’s beautiful when it’s next to his.* His eyes were still closed, so she looked down at the small table beside him where the contents of his pockets were resting. Jane picked up a piece of paper and turned it over in her hand. It was a postcard, a sandy beach stretching across the front.

“We’ll go, Hassan,” she whispered.

Ode to Natural Hair

Amari Harris

Long, layered curls frame a melanin complexion
With strands of coiled gold in an array of fashions;
A wash-and-go, a puff, a bun, braids, twists, plats
And any other style one's delicate brown fingers can conjure.

A mass of hair that is often called "nappy" or "unkept,"
If only they truly understood
The complex curated care that is put into you;
Two hours to prep, *one* hour to wash, *three* hours to style.

So much work, sweat, patience, and, at times, tears
Just for people to glance at you and judge
The poor, proud girl whose forehead you drape upon
To be unprofessional, unsuitable, unworthy.

All because of you, radiance like the summer sun;
A warm and joyful mass that, to those who love her,
See you as a reflection of her, as an image of her beauty,
As an illustration of her rich and delicate history.

You seem to have a story of your own,
One as troublesome and complicated as hers; one of sorrow.
You were burned, processed, and hidden from the world;
For so many years she hated you, how the world perceived you.

Now, you are celebrated, appreciated, loved; just like her.
Two complex peas in a simple pod, you complete each other.
Without you, that little sun-loved girl would never understand
The grace and elegance she holds within when you two are
together at last.

One of the Good Ones

Amari Harris

How
Well
Spoken!
I
Didn't
Expect
For
You
To
Sound
So
Educated.

*Stop;
Please stop.*

Stop being so surprised when a person of the
"Melanated persuasion"
is able to express themselves;
Stop telling little black children
That they speak "white" when they know how to speak
well;
Stop pushing the narrative that
only our white counterparts are expected to be
Literate.

Stop thinking that only those with a "proper" education
are bright;
You kept us out of your schools for so long
That so many of us cannot have this privilege.
Just because someone can not express their thoughts in a more
Scholarly manner does not mean they are not
Intelligent.

Stop putting our intelligence in a box;
Stop assuming that the four-digit test score with our name below
it
Is indicative of our worth.
We are so much more than the two-dimensional measure of
intelligence
That is applied to children from grades K-15;

One of the Good Ones

*Stop;
Please stop.*

What

An

Educated

Young

Woman!

You

Must

Be

One

Of

The

Good

Ones.

Restrained

Kien Nguyen Nho



Going Under

Natalie Neale



*Honorable Mention for the
Helen Hamilton Award for
Excellence in Creative Expression*

Culinary Hearts

Christina Phillips

People bake emotions in kitchens. Love simmers on low in a speckled red saucepan, stirred now and then by a wooden spoon and a steady hand. We scoop it out of our mixing bowls and into the pretty pink cupcake liners we picked out at the dollar store. It comes piping hot from the oven, and we drizzle it with sweet glaze and serve it hot. Fear, though, fear is no such delicacy. Fear is dragged out of the freezer, fear is eaten raw from the can, fear is slammed behind the microwave door. It is a dish choked down standing at the kitchen counter, alone in sweats and shame, hands dripping with grease and guilt and guilt and guilt. It pools on the floor and it pools in the gut and it burns away love's saccharine sanctity and the innocence of buttercream frosting. And we swear we'll avoid the kitchen like plague, that the binge can never be worth the purge, but we are liars. We're bad liars and excellent chefs.

Vitreous Vicousness

Mary Bowling

I bought a mirror from
an antique shop. It was
beautiful, sparkling and
silver — my second
favorite winning piece,
the rewards of my good
efforts, my saving. I
cherished this mirror
for many days. She
showed me handsome
women, golden with
youth, innocent eyes
matching innocent hands.
In exchange for friendly
displays, I was her
devoted maid. She
remained clean as a
whistle; squeaky. And
yet, the
bewitched
glass began
to shift
such as day
shifts to
night. My
prized antique,
now dark with
wickedness.
The beauty
ripples away
as if I threw
a silver stone
in the pond.
She shows me
my nemesis in
a cruel joke,
and I am
trapped
underneath

the harsh
canary light
in my
bathroom.
Like sworn
enemies, we
leer defiantly
at one another,
animosity
swirling in
the air above.
Violent stares
within the
reflective
squares,
sharp snarls
accompanied
by the burning
ocean that
made a
permanent
home in her
eyes. Why
must she
advocate
against me
now? I am
returning my
black mirror
today, for she
has burdened
me with evil
mind games
and trickery.

Arsonist

Emily DuBose

She walks with fire burning in her brain.
The blaze eats thoughts almost faster than she can think.
She must smoke them out before they're gone,
write them down before they are incinerated.
Her flames are self-contained; no one knows the heat
that lights her up inside. Her cheeks are the only sign;
they burn red when she speaks, betray her mind.
The fire warms her palms, the back of her neck,
they're coated in sweat, ideas dripping out of her
mouth and out of her pores. She can't control the flames,
only tend to their light, shifting through half-baked,
half-cooked ideas to find the one burning brighter
and let it spread out of her cranium to burn down
and light up the people who dare to test her heat.

“No Sabo Kid”

Dezirae Rodriguez

I lost myself
and it's impossible to think
I would find joy
it isn't the end of the journey
and all I can think about is:
I keep trying to be accepted
a barrier between me and my family
because how could there ever be
a chance to redeem myself
Give up
because I'm never gonna
learn the language of my ancestors.
People questioning my identity
how can I even tolerate
my own imperfections.
I let other people make me feel insecure
and to think,
I'm the granddaughter of immigrants
I'm an outcast.
and all I've ever felt:
I'm a no sabo kid.
a disgrace.
because I'm not
Enough.

Now read it from bottom to top

*Helen Hamilton Award for
Excellence in Creative Expression*

Bring Forth Man

Madelaine Seyer

The art teacher has dragged us all up on the roof, trying to teach us something about finding beauty in the open whiteness of winter in Vermont. She's young, green enough to expect us to remember what the summer hills look like past the highway when the sun touches their tops. We're too focused on keeping our ears from going black with frostbite. I don't mind- the roof provides me with enough space to sit and observe everyone in peace. Or at least one specific person. Andrew Leonard.

He sits near the roof's edge, closer than the others dare, his frail legs dangling just above the concrete. There are days that I wish I wasn't so obvious, the way Andrew was. I'd pray for it on the bad days- the days my father came home drunk and angrier than usual, the days he hit first and asked questions never. The days I just wanted to look in the mirror and like the person reflected back at me. But I took up space, more than most, and all I could do was be silent and stay out of the way.

He's doing the assignment or at least pretending to. He thinks of himself as belonging with the other people on this roof. That couldn't be farther from the truth. Andrew's nothing like the people who reek of chlorine from morning swim practice or lie to the teacher about feeling sick just so they can go light up in the bathroom. He isn't one of them in the same way that I'm not one of them. I knew that his big personality hid his father's hatred the way my hoodie's sleeves hid my father's disappointment in his only son.

Every few minutes, he nudges his girlfriend, Jade- a pretentious name fit for the person that bears it. She always laughs, high-pitched and somewhat grating, but genuine. Andrew wears a hat over his dark hair, the same hat he has worn practically every day, as long as I've known him. It's a true red that glares at you the way lights from the back of a car stay stained on your eyelids moments after they stop blinking. The Chicago Bulls logo is on it. Andrew never gives in when people try to talk to him about the Bulls. This doesn't keep them from trying, desperate for their one minute of attention. Hoping that they can receive one ounce of the personality Andrew is adored for. I'd be disgusted if I didn't want the same thing.

The class drags by, most of it spent looking out at the bristling of the school's white pine, firm in its resolve to not move in the brisk breeze. It crackles with the strain of the pressure. An obnoxious ringing signals our exit for the day and there's a mass exodus out of the stairwell and into the halls. Among the crowd, a flash of red has me looking to the left where Andrew and his girlfriend have reunited by her locker after a tortuous minute of separation.

She's pretty, in the way one might think their sister's childhood friend is pretty, acknowledging it with no real emotion attached.

I'm drawn closer to them and stop just within earshot of their conversation, pretending to open a locker that isn't mine.

"I can't come over tonight. My parents need me to watch Scotty." She's pouting just slightly and this appears to have the desired effect on Andrew.

"You're such a good sister, JJ. You know, I can come help if you want."

"No, it's fine. Go out with your friends. But I'll miss you tonight." They're walking away from me and out of hearing range. Against my better judgment, I follow.

Andrew drops Jade at her car and I think he'll go with her. Instead, he gestures and says something indecipherable, waves goodbye, and heads back toward the school. He's unaware of me trailing behind him like his shadow. We go in the door to the stairwell, up the sixty-two steps, and back out on the roof again. Back into the cold air, four stories above the parking lot. Andrew looks around for something in silence until he turns around and jumps at the sight of me.

"Oh Jesus, Corey!" His breath rushes out of him and he runs a hand through his hair.

"Why are you up here?"

"I wanted to... finish the art assignment." The lie slips out without hesitation. "Why are you here?"

"Looking for my gloves. Think I might have dropped them." Silence lingers between us. When he realizes I don't have a response for him, he continues his search. "Can you help me look or something? Last time I lost them, my dad nearly—" He stops himself, his right hand moving to his side, seemingly subconsciously. I instantly prickle. I knew he was like me. Some kind of morbid kinship made me know it. Andrew shifts in discomfort at his almost slip-up.

"Hey, how come you never talk?" His words are blunt but not cruel.

"How come you never stop talking?" His surprised laugh lasts only a second but rumbles through me, bringing satisfaction with it. Like a confirmation that I was the kind of person who made Andrew Leonard laugh. That our humor matched.

"I guess that's fair."

"You make it look easy. Talking to people. I can't do that." It's shameful to admit but Andrew's face remains passive.

"Have you tried?"

"It's not easy." He knows me, I can tell. I must have tried to make friends at some point. I just couldn't remember the last time.

"No, no, I get it. You know, sometimes I wish I could do what you do. Sit in the back, not talk to anyone. Let myself be invisible. I'm not sure I ever could."

"Have you tried?" Andrew considers this, considers me. He's looking at me with understanding. He nods seriously and that tells me everything I need to know. "You're right. It's not that easy." A forced smile breaks across his face before I can respond. "You seem cool enough. If you made an effort, I'm sure someone would be your friend." *Someone*. But not him.

"Right." I shut down at the implication. Whatever had just passed between us was superficial, here and gone as quickly as the sprouts that try to start their life in this brutal season.

Andrew reads the change on my face. "Corey, I didn't mean it like that."

"You know, not everyone is you. I'm not going to pretend my life is perfect when everything is so clearly wrong. I'm not so desperate for attention." My voice is louder than I intended.

"Hey, man, trust me I know my life isn't perfect. I'm sorry, I just meant that—"

"You meant that eventually, someone equally as pitiful might just have mercy and be my friend. Did you ever think that I don't want one? Not if it would make me anything like you." He's moving away from me. With every step back he takes, I match it, the two of us moving in a dance along the roof. "I don't need someone to worship me. If I could fade into the wall, I would. I thought you would understand that but I guess I was wrong."

He starts to say something but I know whatever he says will only confirm the truth. My patience for him has disappeared. The impulse is sudden. My actions are out of my control and I'm moving without meaning to. I am out of my body, looking down on the scene from overhead, out of my mind for a split second. But a split second is all it takes.

I watch from beyond myself as I reach my arms out, almost too fast to tell it had happened. My hands are strong and sure as they slam into Andrew's body. He may have caught himself if he hadn't been so taken off guard. Fear and surprise are stark across his face as he tips, unable to react before I've uprooted his body from where he stands near the roof's edge. He slips over the roof's edge, a grating sound resonating as the metal tabs of his jeans scrape on the concrete. He twists just in time to grasp the ledge, his lower body slamming audibly against the side of the building. His panicked voice is the only one in the growing nighttime; everyone else escaped from the bitter air for the manufactured warmth. No one is here to hear him.

“Corey!” An entirely foreign sensation of control shadows over me and I lean over to look into his eyes. My body blocks out the color of his irises, my shadow taking up every millimeter. My blank face is reflected in his fearful gaze. He needs my help. I consider giving it to him. A smile creeps onto my face.

“COREY!” Andrew’s words are strained, the exertion tightening his body to an extreme. His arms are shaking, hands pale. The grip he has on the ledge isn’t strong and he is too unstable to adjust it. He can’t hold himself there for long.

Andrew needs me. *He needs me.* I take a step forward but hesitate. I know I’m too slow but my arm extends anyway of its own volition. Another cry from Andrew shocks me back into my body. I lurch forward to grab him. Much too late.

His fingers lose traction and the grip is gone. His hands are no longer there. I was going to help him. I *was*. I was just about to. I don’t watch his body fall the four stories. I only listen, frozen in my place. I hear his short scream, quickly losing the air in his lungs as he plunges to the ground. I hear my breathing in my ears, quick and erratic. I hear the smacking sound on the pavement. I hear these sounds hours after I run back down the sixty-two steps and out to my car, never daring to look anywhere but right ahead of me.

I move in a daze. I attempt to clean myself up when I finally trudge home but when I look in my bathroom mirror, my face has changed. Subtle, but sure. A new freckle on my cheek, a more rounded jaw. It’s frightening and ultimately too much to look at for more than a second. I throw myself into bed and cover my face with the sheets. I don’t sleep that night and rush out of the house as soon as the sun comes up, careful to avoid any other mirrors.

Pulling into the school parking lot is a nightmare. Police cars block three of the aisles. An officer directs students out of the lot and away from the school. Another has a megaphone and is trying to communicate something to the mess of people. I roll my window down to hear him.

“All students are to return home immediately. There will be no school today. Go home to your families and wait for further communication.” My vision goes blurry and can’t refocus. All I see are Andrew’s fingers, white as bone before losing all traction and disappearing.

“Kid, come on. Move out of the parking lot.” The first officer’s voice strikes me and my vision returns with the breaking of the trance.

“What happened?”

“A student has died.” When my foot doesn’t come off the brake, the officer lets out a sigh, deep and weighted. “He fell from the roof. Or jumped. We’re not sure yet.”

I leave the parking lot only to park on the curb of the main street. I’m not the only one. Students have lined their cars up, climbing out in trepidation. Students’ curiosity wins out over their fear of the situation. I follow the flow toward the red and blue flashes, feeling the same as the night before that my feet are not my own and something’s moving me like a chess piece.

The ambulance is stationed directly under the place I last looked into Andrew’s eyes. Its lights are not on. There are groups of students leaving- no, fleeing- the area. Sobs echo over the hush of those near the front. Someone is trying to tell them not to go home. I think I hear the sound of someone dry-heaving but when I try to locate the sound, heads block my view.

I spot Jade being comforted by another girl. Tears run silently down her cheeks, their shine visible from where I am standing twenty feet away. Without my permission, my mouth opens and shouts her name. Her eyes squeeze shut, forcing more tears down her cheeks and she looks up. Our eyes meet and I wonder what she sees.

A camera crew forces their way through the crowd of students. Shouts can be heard from somewhere in the throng and I spot the principal trying her best to usher students away from the cameras. My feet lead me towards the crew of their own volition.

A man in a gray suit with a microphone looks around the scene. His tie is the brown color of days-old snow on the street, trampled under a hundred different shoes. He sees my quick approach and directs the crew my way, finally having a willing participant out of the chaos. I stop abruptly in front of them. The man pauses, maybe waiting for me to introduce myself, maybe trying to form a question. I don’t have time to process my thoughts before words are coming out of my mouth.

“My name is Corey Baird. I am- or was- Andrew’s best friend.” The words sound foreign to my own ears, as though someone else spoke them. “I was the last person he talked to when he jumped.” Something about saying it out loud wakes me up. “He was my best friend. He understood me better than anyone ever has. I saw him go up to the roof. I should have followed-” My voice catches in my throat. I’m caught off guard by the rush of grief that covers me. It’s instantly debilitating and tears prick at my eyes. I see myself again reflected in his wide eyes. I wanted to help him, I know I did. But in the end, he had let go. If he had wanted to live, why did he let go? “Why did he do that?”

The words come out as a whisper. Before I can form more words, emotion crushes down on me and I'm overwhelmed. I need to leave.

Jade has moved closer to the cameras. Her look is one of confusion, her eyes narrow and mouth pinched. This time, I'm in control when my feet move away from everything, speeding up as I run back to my car.

The day is a blur of driving and nothingness, my head empty of direction and purpose. I don't know where to go, I just know I can't go home. My car starts to feel like a tomb and my breath comes quicker. I park my car and leap out of it, scrambling to my feet. I walk nowhere, everywhere, letting my feet carry me. Walking, drudging, dragging myself through the frigid air.

A house is before me. I know I've never been here but it's somehow more familiar than my own. My body has positioned itself by the trees circling the property. This is Andrew's home. His parents are inside, the lighting in the family room casting their image out into the dark. A police officer is with them as well as a woman dressed in a suit. Their faces aren't visible from here but their bodies are slumped around each other like matching C's. I tilt my head and wonder if my dad would mourn me if I was the one that jumped. A laugh wants to bubble out of me at the thought. I walk around to the side of the house and look up to see a window cracked open, waiting for me to go in. A trellis goes up the side of the house that may have once supported ivy but now lies empty and brittle. It will support me, though.

The wood is familiar under my calloused hands. I've climbed it never and hundreds of times. The window pane is cold on my fingertips as I push it open. My torso goes up and over the ledge until I'm sprawled on my back inside the room, looking at a ceiling with posters tacked to it. It makes the room feel smaller and my breath wants to quicken. I get up and go to lock the door but the lock has been roughly removed.

My ears are sharp for a few beats, ensuring no one heard my less than graceful entrance. Voices from below, muffled and grieving, resonate through the floor. I roll over and push myself up off the carpeted floor to fully view the room I'm in. Andrew's room. There's a neon 'OPEN' sign unplugged from its outlet. A Willie Nelson poster is coming unstuck from its place by the door. Andrew hadn't made his bed before leaving for school that morning. He hadn't needed to, considering he wouldn't be coming back.

The closet is open, light on, beckoning me to look. Nothing surprises me there: sweatshirts, sneakers, some jeans and t-shirts. Shades of gray and blue and green. One of the shirts is falling off its hanger, urging me- *forcing* me- to take it. I oblige. The cotton is wrinkled, the Nirvana album print facing me as I shove it into my backpack. *Smells Like Teen Spirit*.

Objects jump out at me, begging for a new home. A book on sports legends of the 90s leans away from its neighbors and I know it needs to be read at least one more time. A pair of shoes poke out from under the bed with orange toes, my favorite color. It all goes in my backpack until it's almost too full to zip.

As I'm about to leave the way I came, movement catches the side of my eye. I whip my head, brief adrenaline rushing through me before recognizing the mirror hanging on the wall. There's a photo next to the mirror, Andrew and Jade together at some formal event. His arm is around her shoulder and she's leaning into his chest fully. Both are laughing at some private joke I yearn to be in on. I take the photo off the mirror and hold it by the lamp for a better view. Andrew seems happy. My reflection is even worse than before.

My hair seems darker than normal. A product of the dim lighting, I'm sure. I bring myself closer to the reflection. No. No, my hair is definitely darker than normal. I also seem to have developed another new freckle under my left eye. It may be winter but sun damage could still happen, right? I shake my head and move toward the window, wanting to escape the image of my distorted face. I put the photo in my backpack too, more gingerly than the rest.

When I finally go home, I try to keep the door quiet but my luck has run out this time. My arrival is quickly announced with a slam as the door slips from my hands. Instinctually, I whirl around to face the kitchen, expecting my dad to be waiting for me there.

"Where were you, Corey?" I'm startled by his voice behind me. My dad is sitting in the den's reclining chair but it's all the way upright. Who knows how long he's been sitting there.

"I was just... out. With a friend."

"What friend?" His tone is all accusation and disbelief. "A student died at your school. But I'm sure you knew that." He stands from the recliner. With the step he takes towards me, I reverse. "I'll ask again. Where were you?"

"I told you, I was out."

“WHY ARE YOU LYING TO ME?!” He slams his hand against the door by my head. I feel its vibration in my teeth. The outburst is brief but effective, my fight-or-flight keeps me glancing at his hand on the door. He sees this and sighs. “I was just worried about you, son.”

He takes another step toward me. I try to keep myself from stepping away but know all too well how it would only make things worse.

“Give your dad a hug.” I don’t move. “I said,” his voice is steady and threatening, “give me a hug.”

Despite every brain cell telling me to stay exactly where I am, my father will stand there forever if he has to, waiting for me to obey him. I resign myself to the command. Even though I tower over him, I feel as small as when I was eight, looking to my mother for help I would never receive. He embraces me and it feels genuine but I know better. My arms hang limply at my sides. He slaps me once hard on the back. “Was that so bad, son?” His smile doesn’t reach his eyes. When I make it to my bedroom, I bury myself in Andrew’s clothes.

Jade isn’t at school the next day. Or the day after that. Rumors circulate that she is moving away but I know she wouldn’t leave her boyfriend like that. She makes her reentrance the third day after the tragedy was announced. I had spent those days returning to the familiar house and had almost been caught by Andrew’s father once but narrowly avoided it with a sturdy jump out the second-story window.

I was now fully avoiding mirrors after noticing a slight change in my eye shape. I kept my head down at school or covered, not wanting anyone to witness what was happening to me before I could even understand it. The hallways felt more crowded than normal. I try to hustle my way out, wanting to get back to the familiar house. Before I could burst through the main doors, my arm is caught by someone. I’m whipped around and brought to face Jade.

“Oh, hi. How have you been? I mean, obviously not well but.... If you ever want to talk, maybe swap stories.”

Her face is incredulous. Anger is written in her body, tensed for an argument. “Are you trying to make a joke? Because it isn’t funny.”

“No, I want to know if you’re okay.”

“Of course, I’m not okay. And you pretending to be Andrew’s friend isn’t making it any easier.” Her voice is sharp. Pretending to be his friend?

“What are you talking about, JJ?” She won’t release my arm and is glaring into my eyes.

She’s wanting me to back down first but from what, I don’t know.

"No. You don't call me that. Only Andrew called me that."

"I've always called you that. You're freaking me out."

"I'm freaking *you* out? Why are you doing this? You think no one notices you but I do. Andrew wasn't your friend. I asked his parents and they told me they'd never seen you." The words are like a slap. I'd been to their house! She doesn't let me speak before continuing. "I know Andrew didn't jump. And I won't hesitate if anyone asks me questions." She stops there, her meaning clear.

JJ's threat stirs my head into confusion. Had I not been a loyal friend to Andrew, to her? The idea that she would make such horrible assumptions about what happened hurts like a physical wound. The feeling keeps me from going home. I don't want to see my father or myself. I go where my feet take me, trusting their judgment so far. They take me outside the school and around, my eyes squinting into the relentlessly bright winter sunset. A memorial has been thrown together there. Letters and photo collages litter the wall and the ground surrounding it. Some people brought flowers or stuffed bears. Andrew would have hated that.

My eye is caught by a glare of red. The Chicago Bulls hat sits apart from the rest as if whoever put it there knew I would be back for it. The red color was made even stronger by the flaring of candles some sympathetic soul had lit. He would have wanted me to have it. I know he would. I'm drawn to pick it up, something in me knowing that if I put it on, I would understand Andrew, completely and unendingly. When I put the hat on my head, it fits perfectly.

The clarity is instantaneous. I have been in a trance for days, not knowing what was wrong with me. It all makes sense: the flowers laid out for me, the photos of me taped up to the wall. Me and JJ, me with my parents, me in my soccer uniform. It doesn't make sense and yet it's the clearest my head has been in days. I pick up one of the letters.

Andrew,

I'm sorry if I ever made you feel like you couldn't talk to me about whatever you were going through. Rest easy, friend.

They thought I was dead. Someone had to have made a mistake, I'd been in classes today. I'd been home. Maybe my parents hadn't heard me. I take my phone out and search for my name. "Andrew Leonard death."

The funeral is freezing. I'm late but I had a hard time getting into my house, my keys must have gotten lost at some point. I ended up having to climb up the trellis into my window, just like my freshman year days.

I couldn't find a suit in the mess- someone, my mom probably being nosey, had come through it like a tornado- so I had to grab whatever I could find. In this case, a t-shirt and some khakis. I put my Bulls hat on, feeling not myself without it.

I had sprinted to the funeral, not able to find my car and missing my keys anyway. I'm sweating by the time I get there despite the almost freezing temperature. Rows and rows of people had come to see me into the afterlife. I wasn't exactly sure how to go about making my return but knew this was the place, all my loved ones in one spot to receive the good news.

"Thank you all for coming to say goodbye to this lovely soul, Andrew Leonard. He was greatly admired in his community, loved by all he met, and talented beyond measure. His family is grateful to you all for coming." JJ cries silently next to my parents, looking just as beautiful as she always does. It pains me to see her mourning. My parents aren't much better off. My mother is shaking softly, a tissue crumpled in her hand. She stares blankly at the casket. It's my father's face that spurs me forward. A man I have never seen cry, known only as a stoic and aggressive, has a tear running down his cheek.

The sight is so shocking, my reverie is broken and I make my way toward the crowd. People see my approach but no one takes a second glance. 'It's me!' I want to yell at them. I look around, trying to make eye contact with my parents. People look at me, look through me, seeing nothing. What's wrong with them? Why aren't they happy to see me? The lack of reaction stirs confusion so deep in me, that I start to become fearful. I stalk toward the podium and all but push the minister out of the way.

"Guys, I'm back! It's fine!"

I'm met with stares. But not stares of people shocked and overjoyed at the return of a loved one they thought had died. Stares of judgment, of disgust. My parents are looking at me with shock, hurt, and confusion.

"Mom, dad, it's me. Andrew!" No one is moving, all looking as though the winter chill has frozen them to the spot. "Someone say something."

JJ is the only one who does anything. She comes up from her place to embrace me, surely, tell me she missed me and knew all along I wasn't dead. Instead, she slaps me hard across the face.

"What is wrong with you, Corey? Do you not think we're hurting enough?"

I reel back at the name. Corey... The last thing I remember is being on the roof with Corey. We were getting along, he was actually talking. Then I fell. Or he pushed me. I pushed him? Corey pushed Andrew.

I was Andrew. But I see myself falling from Corey's eyes. I glance at the casket.

I feel my body here, cold in the air in a t-shirt and khakis. Andrew's supposed to be in the casket. I am supposed to be in there, buried in a box wearing the suit that was missing from the closet. The tomb for the dead person everyone is here to mourn. In a panic, I pull my phone out of my pocket. I don't recognize the screensaver. I open the camera and see my face. Corey's face. I'm seeing myself falling over and over again but when I try, I can remember watching Andrew- myself- fall. I pushed him, no, he pushed me. I can't remember. It's all confused in my head. The casket seems to be getting bigger, the wood moving slightly with each of my breaths. Everyone is staring at me like a stranger.

"Corey, leave! Just go." JJ, Jade- no she's JJ!- is trying to yank me away but my legs won't support themselves. They threaten to drop me to the cold earth. "Go! Leave!"

I'm limp, unable to understand. The sensation of falling over and over, of pushing, looking up, refusing to look down, fear, power. It's all warring inside my head. I think I hear sirens somewhere not too far but then again, it could just be the residual ringing in my ears, my bones cracking on impact, my heart shocked from its rhythm, my eyes closing forever, for now, as I hit the ground.

Mt Fuji

Kelly Winegar



Wine Light

Rachel Stegall



Display Case

Emily Masters

The next trophy, the extra mile
All for the award
Represent. She hears it often
Practice makes permanent
If you don't work harder, someone else will

She knows it.
She lives it.
She loves it.
And she does it, better than anyone.
Laces up her shoes, starts at the block.
Runs.
Feels the wind in her hair, the crowd at her back, the finish line
ahead.

She crosses the line, breaks the ribbon
Sees the glint of gold
Before the trophy is sealed in the display case with all the others
Won by her and those who came before.

She lives this life.
She loves this life.
So why
When she can't attend her best friend's birthday because she has
practice,
Why is she disappointed?
She hears the party was fun.
She wonders if they missed her.

She lives this life.
She loves this life.
So why is the extra mile so much farther,
And the extra pound so much heavier?

It's all in her head, or so the coach tells her
And of course she believes
So she declines more invitations
Practices even harder

Display Case

Until the extra mile is routine for her
And the invitations stop coming.
It's all in her head, the coach tells her.
College scouts are watching.
So she squeezes lunch between practices.
She doesn't ask her friends to wait.
It shouldn't hurt when they go.

Eat, sleep, run, repeat.
Those are the words she lives by.
A promising talent, she hears on repeat
A blur of weights and miles and timers.
Take a rest, her coach suggests
Take a walk and get some water.

But on her way to the fountain, she stops
When gold catches her eye
The dusty, glittering display case
Trophies, plaques, and medals arrayed behind thick glass.
They're polished in front, shining proudly.
Hiding the old trophies of days long past.
Tarnished and pushed aside, cast off like old shoes.

And in that case, she sees herself.
Five years down the road, ten.
Where will she be?
Rotting in the back of an old display case
Like the trophy she lived to be.

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C E N T E R F O R
— D I G I T A L —
E X P R E S S I O N

“THE CREATIVE
ADULT IS THE CHILD
WHO SURVIVED.”

- Ursula Le Guin