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Alison J. Smith

*Dean, Kent State University Honors College*

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#### **Connect**


330.672.2312


[editor@brainchildmagazine.org](mailto:editor@brainchildmagazine.org)

[brainchildmagazine.org](http://brainchildmagazine.org)

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# BRAIN CHILD

a literary & arts magazine

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# foreword

THAT LIFE IMITATES ART IS SO PREDICTABLE A STATEMENT that it has now become fodder to be mocked and ridiculed. Within our pages, it is more accurate to say that life is art, and that the reverse is also true. Beneath this massive generalization, smaller truths exist about the process of living and getting by in a turbulent world.

This process is often messy, uncomfortable, and uncertain, whether despite or because of the swell of information that envelops our daily lives and the science that should make life less mystical with each passing day, instead of more so. The pieces that make up our collection show the uneasy interactions between what we think we know—what we think should be real—and what confronts us. As in life, even the most opposing sensations find places to coexist within this issue: the reverence for the natural expressed in Grace Beyer’s photographs “Honey Bee” and “Irish Hillside” is balanced against the sheer massiveness and destruction throughout Olivia Martin’s short fiction piece, “Eternity.” Works such as Frances Smith’s “Rapture” and Josh Myers’ “Slumpty” communicate the uncanny collision between art and science, between the eye seeing one thing and the mind perceiving another. Something about these images doesn’t seem to fit with what we expect from our world, and yet they are just as much a part of it as we are. These reactions are indications that the world is changing into something with the potential to be beautiful, but also the potential to be unrecognizable.

One of the realizations this collection encourages is that everything is real, both objects and feelings alike. Even pieces with surrealist themes, such as Nicholas Castle’s “Butterflies,” represent the truth of lives that people have lived, because everything that could possibly be written down or painted or photographed is based on feelings that people have felt. There would be no way to name or describe them otherwise, no matter how impossible the decorations of art and words that contain them may seem. Strip away the paint and the adjectives, and the truth will be there. It waits to be discovered, explored, described, and manipulated into art. Still, it remains.

Coming to terms with the truth of being and living can be painful. It can be painful in the way of damage—a shattering impact—or in the way of growth—a discomfort necessitated by the shedding of old boundaries in favor of new ones. Accepting change often requires difficult reflection and introspection, as in pieces such as Mara Cash’s poems, “A Small, Sprained Hand” and “To My Mother, Who Was Dying.” Works also such as Stamatina Tolias’ “Consumed by Passion” conjure feelings of unease within beauty, a sense of foreboding and loss seeping out from the lusciousness of the image. We all know that, simply by living, we guarantee encounters with hardship and loss. In “104 Words Aren’t Enough to Save the World,” Valerie Royzman writes about the kind of crushing tragedy that invades one’s life, that looms larger than the event itself. Even when we know these events will come, what do we do? How do we continue? What will we write? How?

Our modern age is full of both order, like that in science and formulas, as well as destruction, resulting in pain and anxiety—this much is true. Simultaneously, it is full of moments of hope and love and peace, like what Olivia Swasey so beautifully captures in “Rumpelstiltskin,” the Wick Honors Scholarship-winning poem that approaches the idea of getting to the truth of oneself and sharing it with others. While the collection we have assembled this year may not contain answers of the formulaic variety, we believe it does hold truths about what it means to be human, to cope with the experience of being human, and above all, to live. We hope the art that follows in these pages inspires you to think, feel, breathe, rest, and continue.



**Nina Palattella**  
EDITOR IN CHIEF



# Rumpelstiltskin

**Olivia Swasey**

Last night you said the name that no one calls me.  
Your mouth formed the letters like you were  
holding a robin's egg on your tongue, and  
you said it with such a quiet passion that  
it could have been mistaken for prayer.

I had never heard any voice sound so intimate  
as yours did in that moment as you called me that,  
the name engraved on my heart.

I felt at once vulnerable and unconquerable,  
as though your voice had made it safe for me  
to be anyone in the world, but with you  
I could only be myself. With my true name  
on your lips, you held my heart in your teeth.

That name fit so neatly into your mouth  
that I think you might be the only person  
ever meant to speak it out loud.

They say that to know the true name of the fey  
is to own their heart. One of these days,  
when I'm beat down by the world, I hope  
you'll press your lips against my neck  
and remind me in a whisper where my heart lives.

*Rumpelstiltskin is highlighted as the winner  
of the 2018 Wick Honors Poetry Scholarship.*

## A Small, Sprained Hand

Mara Cash

Drowned out in my early days  
by a cruelty I have felt  
six times so far.  
I called him "Sir,"  
praying a formality  
would save me.

The next day I died,  
and the day after that too.

I am the girl  
with a bow 'round her neck  
to keep her head  
from falling off.  
Tied it there  
the first day of first grade  
and spoke nothing of it  
for a decade.

Nothing of it for another lifetime.

Did I beg? With  
a small, sprained hand—  
Moses,  
do not leave me in Egypt.

I guess it's fair  
that I should be buried  
with my Daddy's black shoe.  
One day,  
I will crawl out of this hole  
and put my ribs back together.

## Étudier un petit rat de L'Opéra

Alice Roeding



**Medium:** pastel

*Étudier un petit rat de L'Opéra* confronts contemporary issues of objectification, the male gaze, and abuse by drawing on art history by exposing the abusive treatment and poverty of young dancers and women in 19th-century France.

## Gloom

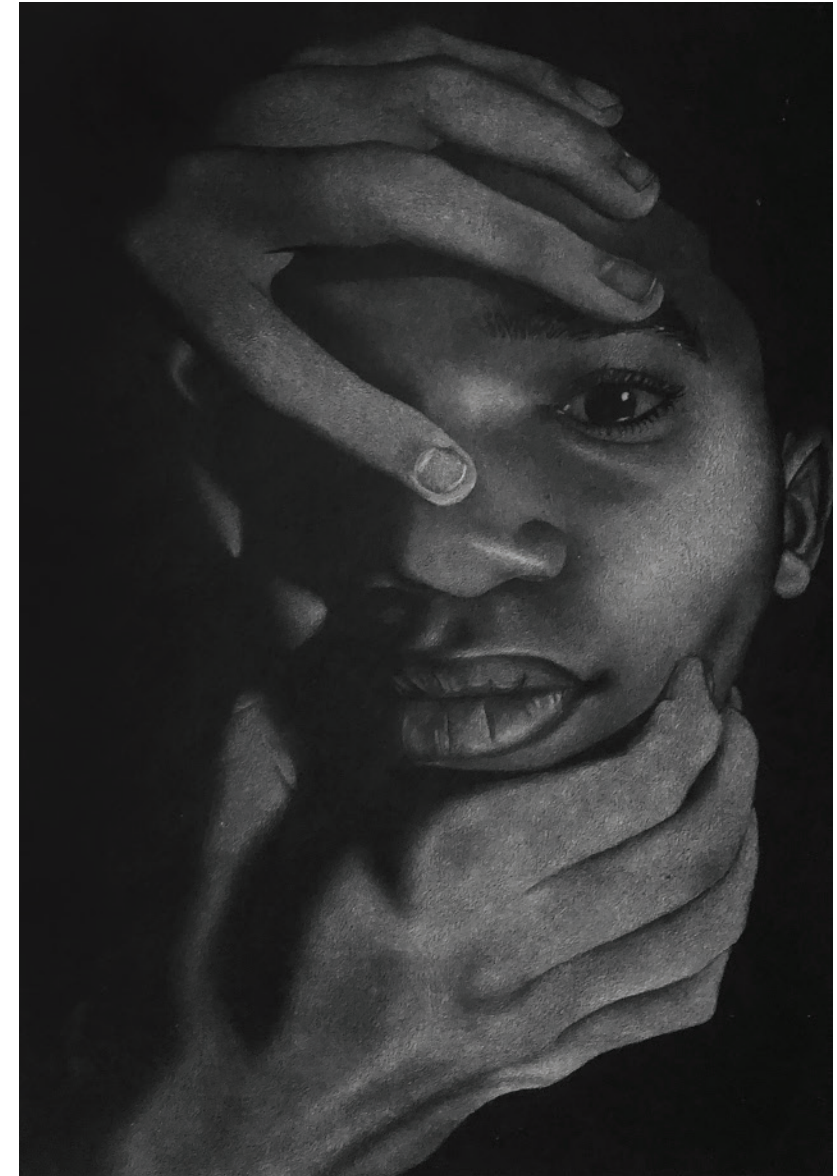
Jessica Miller

Darkened streets and forgotten houses  
 all lie back in deep shadows.  
 Who are we to judge their empty windows?  
 Are we ever sure we are enough to fill our own names?  
 To a viewer on the street, it can be easy to be lifted away  
 when looking into its empty eyes.  
 Once, in the long-ago past,  
 the walls of the house were covered and lavished and loved;  
 now they are forgotten and decrepit.  
 There is no light that shines out in the darkness,  
 no beckoning warmth.  
 As a viewer, you stand motionless.  
 You grew up next door to the street of gloom.  
 Childhood fantasies grew from a steady sense of curiosity,  
 but you'd never dare enter.  
 You pause and wonder—  
 will the house stand empty long after you?  
 Or will its bones shake loose its brick and mortar  
 and crumble in on itself,  
 as if it were never a tangible thing at all?

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## Oppression

Rees Jones



Medium: colored pencil

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## a balancing act

**Mackenzie Freese**

the edge of the line is sharp.  
it threatens to cut me as I walk across its narrow top.  
I am Bigfoot, and the line I walk along is ice—  
cold and fragile.

I fall a little to the left, and the blood  
leaks from the small cut;  
pain radiates up toward my heart.  
it threatens to worsen.

suddenly the blood is gushing,  
and I am emptying all that keeps me alive  
onto the ground left of  
the line.

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how empty I feel.  
I am the inside of a balloon—  
necessary but taken for granted.  
the balloon deflates, alone and forgotten behind the couch.

I regain my balance. the trickle lessens and leaves behind scar tissue.  
the line has become as slick as the ice that  
hides beneath a layer of fresh, white snow.  
I slip again, to the right this time.

the blood barely stains the ground.  
I am full, a novel filled with  
the words that paint a story's predictable ending.  
there is room for little else between the pages.

the fullness is addicting.  
I chase it, a child chasing a lost kite—  
with a reckless, wild abandon that threatens its very being.  
I am as free and alone as the kite that floats gently through the blue sky.

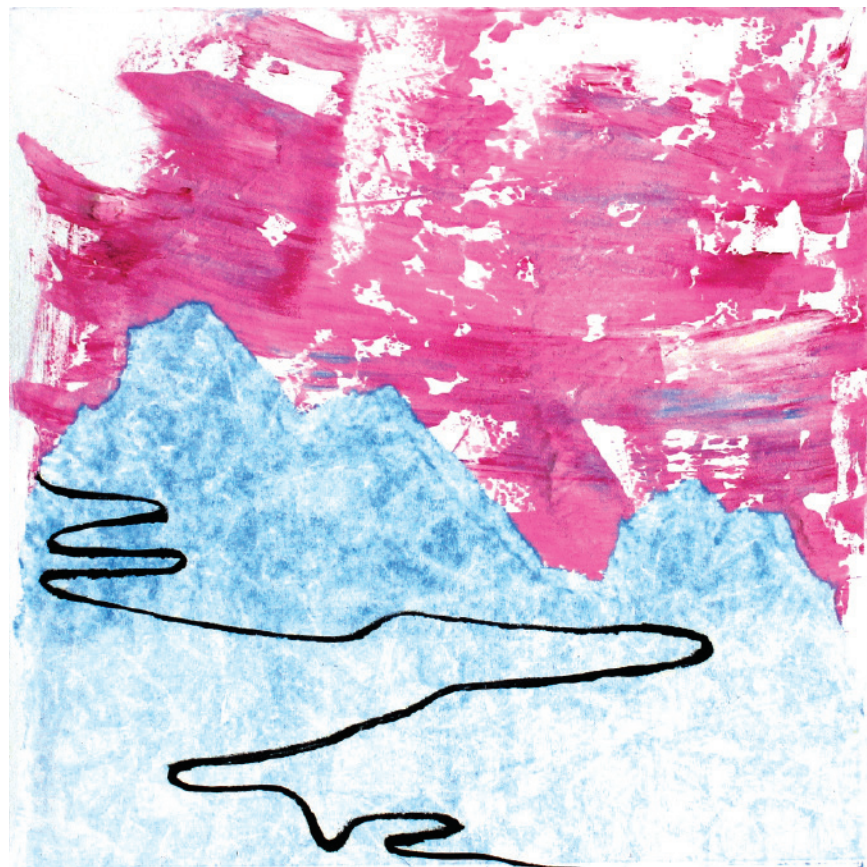
again, I stumble carefully along the line.  
I am so focused on this perpetual balancing act  
that the next time I look up,  
the line has ended.

a wonderful performance that leaves behind nothing  
but blood,  
a deflated balloon,  
and a lone kite drifting through the night.

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## Winding

Sarah Kronz



**Medium:** monotype

## summertime girl

Valerie Royzman

summertime girl's exhale swims its way into your smooth blue velvet dreams, wipes you off the buoy. you come up for air, momentarily forget how to use lungs. her sea-green gaze eclipses your need for air.

sometimes blessings come in waves like that.

her song tastes of the sweetest, juiciest cherry in the moody sun. you know, on the orthodox day, when it pours through your saffron bedroom curtains like lemonade glides down your glass throat and turns your ice-cube eyes alive. you both know, without calling for weeks, this is what she does to you.

her voice sounds like a washer humming your new york city name, as if she were placed here to call out to you. as if her ohio-girl declaration was meant to reach you so many oxygens away.

summertime girl parts her lips. she is grass fields and state lines away, still running fingernails painted nude along poolside thighs. she has the next two years to wish you were wringing the promise out of her pores.

as if you could discern her infatuation in the creamy july light. this is when her daydream floats between your cadenced breaths, caresses your skin as if it were a protective lover behind veiled windows, when your feet rendezvous with the asphalt and you believe yourself into the world.

# Honey Bee

Grace Beyer



# Math + Me + C = ∫ ove dl

Moriah Weese

MY MOTHER IS NOT A WOMAN TO BE TRIFLED WITH. Beneath her sweet face and winsome demeanor lurks a fierceness of spirit strong enough to strike fear into the heart of any eighth grader, particularly one she was willing and able to ground. Smushed dry erase marker clenched firmly, jabbing at imaginary equations floating in the ether between her face and mine, she monologues, occasionally gesticulating with her dried blue pen a tad too close to my face for comfort:

“Oh, you don’t *want* to take geometry? Shhh, what’s that? I think I hear something. Oh, *that’s right*, it’s a door slamming shut! Every time you don’t take a math class, a door of opportunity closes right in your face! Bam! Just like that! And if you think for *one second* that I—”

“Mom, I know, I know, I just loathe-despise-hate-abhor-detest *ALL THINGS MATH!*”

Melodramatic I may have been, but my mathematical emergency plan was solid: scream at it, and maybe it would go away. This worked until I was forced to stop screaming and start learning. In the space between the pencil and the tear-stained page, I discovered a new language—the language of the universe.

The idea of math has always existed hazy and undefined like a blue Pennsylvania mountain fog in my mind. This was not helped by the discovery that math is a social construct, and that numbers don’t exist.

You can’t point at an object and say that this, this thing right here, is one. It may be one table, or one tree, or one smushed blue dry erase marker, but it’s always one *something*. Words make sense. Numbers don’t. When you read, at least the word *apple* connects to the solid McIntosh that bobbed just out of reach as your four-year-old self strained fruitlessly from your father’s shoulders to grab as much as you could possibly hold in your short, chubby arms (FIG. 1). You can’t grab a number, hold it in your hand, bite into it, and let its tart juice dribble down your chin. It’s not *real*.

In the space between the pencil and the tear-stained page, I discovered a new language—the language of the universe.

It is, however, an idea that is forced upon us with dreary signs and well-worn, broken hopes that at least one student of the thirty-two (3.125%) might actually enjoy math

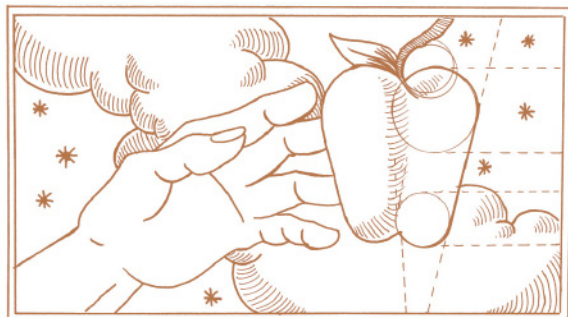


Fig. 1 REACHING FOR A SOLID MCINTOSH

and a handful more (perhaps 21.875%?) would care about it enough to chase a vaguely numerical profession—engineering, say, or finance. Not the girls, though. The boys bear all the pressure. Girls are bound to be good at reading, or even history,

but not at math. Never math. As author Sandra Cisneros explains, “Being only a daughter for my father meant my destiny would lead me to become someone’s wife.” Of course, it’s not just my father—it’s my mother and my brother and my church and my school and my and my and my. It’s not stated, of course, but there’s a reason the stats professor who sits in the ratty green pew by the sanctuary doors talks to my eighteen-year-old brother about theoretical mathematics and to me about my love life. Neither my brother nor I begin these conversations.

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The dreadfully wonderful thing about math is that you have to slog through so much before you can really sink your teeth into it and have a good time. That doesn’t hit until at *least* trig, and even then it’s like you’ve barely poked your toe into the bath to check the water before accidentally scalding your foot. It’s loads of fun when you finally get to manipulate the numbers and learn the language. That’s the whole point of math: you bend and shape and mold it to your will. You force it to obey. I didn’t like numbers until I was finally allowed to play with them, until I finally realized that once you start manipulating them, they start manipulating you. It’s intoxicating. You plop down in front of a jumbled string of letters and numbers and sift through them until they’re arranged sensibly.

My first experience with meaningful numbers grabbed me by the shoulders unexpectedly. Okay, that’s not quite true. My first experience with toothsome numbers that I enjoyed materialized in the autumn of my discontent, as all autumns are wont to be when you’re sixteen and have just secured your driver’s license. My mother, in her infinite wisdom and imperiousness, decreed that I must venture forth into an unknown land, one filled with dreadful beasts lurking, waiting to rip my

throat out. This land was the community college campus, and the most fearsome thing lurking there was the drab carpet that could scratch your feet through your shoes as you shuffled into the doublewide metal trailer that was, of course, only a temporary classroom (it wasn’t).

We would lounge outside the door before class, leaning on the once-polished metal handholds and avoiding each other’s gazes. No one talked. No one made eye contact. If I, as an awkward, ambitious adolescent, didn’t want to be there, then how much less did the engineering washouts and hopefuls want to retake precalc? Our mere existence was loathsome to everyone forced into that trailer, except possibly our professor, Dr. Collins. But he had to grade our exams, so I’m not sure about him either.

Assistant Professor of Mathematics Dr. Collins chose the wrong profession. Throughout millions of years of evolution, nature had molded the genes of his ancestors to create a man who, by all rights and facial features, should have been a stockbroker or *at least* a banker. Instead, he taught math, finding himself facing a class of would-be engineers, motivated thirty-somethings, and one ( $1.000 \times 10^0$ ) high school junior, a task that would have daunted even our lord and savior of mathematics, Leonhard Euler, who did more for mathematics than Picasso did for art. It would have daunted Dr. Collins too, had he not bucked millions of years of predestination in a tremendous act of temerity and possibly sheer stupidity. I’m grateful he did.

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Dr. Collins was the first to expose me to the beauty of math. Even in that dingy trailer, he radiated excitement and confident conviction. He loved math and wanted us to as well. With a class like the one he was cursed with, that was less than easy and slightly more than impossible. And still, he persisted. By all rights, he should’ve hated me. An arrogant, insecure sixteen-year-old girl in a class of forty arrogant, insecure (male) engineering wannabes somehow failed to encourage a calm working environment. The obvious conclusion was:  $41 \cdot \text{egos} + (\text{not} \cdot a \cdot \text{fun} \cdot \text{subject}) = A \cdot \text{Bad} \cdot \text{Time}$ . Dr. Collins, however, loved proofs, and he especially enjoyed disproving that particular equation.

The moment I stopped screaming and started learning took place on a sultry August afternoon. The air sweated. Beads of humidity pooled on the trailer walls and trickled down, absorbing into dark stains on the carpet. Class had been in session for a week, maybe two, and already empty desks dotted the room. Dr. Collins adored the flipped classroom model, and his vigorous problem work-throughs cowed the class into silent obedience and/or flight. As we trailed toward the heavy plastic door, dazed

from the stupefying quantity of numbers shoved down our gullets, I paused by his desk. I don't remember what I asked, perhaps some vague question about logarithms. When I stopped, though, his face lit up in a sparky, happy sort of way, making him look less old, less tired, more hopeful.

"I've been meaning to talk to you," he said. "You've really been exemplary thus far. You've got a mind made for numbers, young lady. I think—if you choose to—you could make a career out of it. I'd love to see you major in math—it's so encouraging to see bright young minds."

Dr. Collins always talked like that, in a jovial, absent-minded, vaguely paternal tone. It was downright annoying in class. He got so *happy* about the quadratic formula. This time, though, his words had an energy that was absent from his mathematical ramblings: his little speech didn't just make him happy—he actually believed it. Somewhere between my smiling daisies and fractal doodles framing the pages of my worksheets, between my sass and my snark and my standoffishness, between the bleak bare walls and bony grade-school desks, he saw potential. Up to that point in my mathematical career, loose vocabulary and grammar had been pummeled into my brain, but now, I had a reason to piece together sentences, and build sentences into paragraphs, because someone wanted me to speak the language fully.

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As a fellow creator of paragraphs, albeit in a different medium, Sherman Alexie remarks, "The words themselves were mostly foreign, but I still remember the exact moment when I first understood, with a sudden clarity, the purpose of a paragraph. I didn't have the vocabulary to say 'paragraph,' but I realized that a paragraph was a fence that held words." The laws of mathematics were my paragraphs, and they held equations and proofs and logic and beauty. I threw myself wholeheartedly, pigheadedly, into that class. I learned. I *learned*. And as I learned, I grew to love. The clunky sentences flowed more easily and lengthened. My syntax grew more complicated as I threw trig identities into equations instead of letters. The beauty of the abstract became the beauty of reality, and I stopped screaming.

Then I began again.

I started screaming again because, like any language, math must be spoken to have any meaning, and sometimes the hazy Pennsylvania mountain fog of math floats over people and all they want to do is bat it away, force it to clear up, because they can't see through it (FIG. 2). They don't understand that the fog is the part worth staring at. The fog, for them, is merely a means to an end—a manipulable means, not a goal worth pursuing for its own merits. The abstract and the reality stay separate—the only numbers that matter lie in the gradebook, not the workbook.

College meant freedom—luxurious, licentious freedom—from parental oversight, and therefore from parental protection. It was fall, we were freshmen, we were in love. Golden leaves clinging to sturdy boughs colored the September sky as we strolled, hand in hand, careless, happy, free.

*Bzzt. Bzzt bzzt.* Our phones, as united as we were, announced emails in our new, grown-up college inboxes. I grabbed my phone, and he grabbed his, hands dropping away from each other as one couple became two individuals. A bright aspen leaf



Fig. 2 NUMBERS IN THE FOG

fluttered into my face, so recently departed from its twin  $9.06 \pm 0.38$  feet above. The title across my screen read, "MATH 1061 003: EXAM 1 GRADES POSTED. Class, The grades from..." His screen differed from mine, similar but not the same. We chose different sections, after

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all. Ever eager, ever anxious, we turned away, thumbs flying to open Blackboard. I saw my score. 98! Mirth bubbling over, anxiety quelled by triumph, mind wrapped in that blue Pennsylvania mountain fog touched by sun, I spun toward him, mouth parting to partake in our good fortune. His good fortune too, right? He's so smart, so much better than I. If I've scored so well, he should be proud of me, right? Facing him, my grin shriveled and died, turned from golden to brown. My foot came down, and I stumbled. Crackle-crumble-crunch. The dead aspen leaf scattered to the wind. His face, oh his face—so far transformed from that bright September day he so well reflected—now he was November, so harsh, so cold, so dreary—his leaves all dead and gone, the light screened by shadows of forbidding clouds.

"Are you okay?" I whispered.

He didn't meet my eye. "No." His face crumpled in, turning dimples to sharper planes.

"Sweetheart, what's wrong? Can I help?"

He sighed. Not a weary, I'm-stressed-but-it-will-be-okay-just-hold-my-hand-for-now sigh, but a stronger, chilled exhalation: a sigh of frustration, of anger, of brewing

storm clouds. He finally looked my way, but his gaze swept over and dismissed me. The blue mountain fog in my brain was lifting, turning into a cloud to cover the sun.

“Stop smiling.”

The bare skeleton of the grin that once filled my face blew away.

“What did you get on your exam.” It wasn’t a question. It was a command.

“A ... a 98?” My voice squeaked slightly, just enough to betray my sudden unsettlement. My mind untangled itself fully from the mountain fog, hazy blue darkened to gray.

And the storm clouds burst.

“A 98!?!? How the f—ing hell did you manage that?! This stone-cold b— gave me a 54! The exam wasn’t that hard, how dare she! This is gonna ruin my chance at aerospace! Can’t f—ing believe—you’re—you’re just a stupid girl—”

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“I’m sorry—I’m sorry—”

He shouted. “It’s not my fault, you know—you know I’m good at calc, that f—ing professor just f—ed me over. That test wasn’t fair and you know it, babe. I took calc last year, everyone got f—ed over and you just lucked out. There’s no way you could’ve gotten a 98, I bet you just guessed—”

I panicked. “Sweetheart—sweetheart! Calm down—you know I studied. This was just stuff I practiced. I know your professor sucks but maybe you should’ve done the homework—”

“Don’t be a b—, babe, I was in Science Olympiad. I know what I’m doing! That f—ing c— just can’t teach to save her f—ing hide! I don’t deserve to—”

“Please. If you got a 54, I don’t thi—”

“Shut the f— up!”

The fog was gone. In its place was a wall, stark-cold-ugly, holding captive my beautiful numbers. My next exam, I scored a 66. Then an 84. Then a 92. And slowly, so slowly, the fog crept between the cracks in the wall and set the prisoner free.

How does one relearn how to learn? How do you start speaking a language that has rusted on your tongue and in your hand? How does a fog regather when blown apart? Drop by drop, word by phrase by sentence by paragraph. Number by number.  $x$  by  $(x+1)^2$  by  $x^2 \sin(x^2)$  by  $\int \tan^{-1} \frac{1}{x}$ . You start learning, knowing, living, because there is someone with whom to communicate. Perhaps it’s a stats professor, comfortable in his shabby, well-worn seat near the sanctuary doors, who shakes his head like he’s trying to get water out of his ears, squints at you, then slowly nods his head when you say that numbers aren’t real, but they’re the realest, most tangible thing in the universe. Or maybe it’s your tiny, flannel-wearing, sneaker-loving Chinese professor in MATH 1062 who grins as you pick up your exam all covered in scribbles and says, “Creative solution to #6 (FIG. 3).” And then again, maybe it’s your diminutive,

unassuming mother, still holding that smushed blue dry erase marker, muttering fiercely, “You’re going to take this class whether you like it or not.” Math, however unreal, however abstract, is the best descriptor you’ve got for the universe, so you cling to it. How can you ever tell



Fig. 3 A CREATIVE SOLUTION TO #6

anyone anything unless you speak the language of stars and projectiles and chemical reactions and climate change and cell behavior? You dipped your toe in earlier, and the bath was too hot, but now you’ve adjusted to the temperature and you can ease in all the way. The steam swirls up, forms a hazy, dreamy fog, and, as you submerge, the screaming stops and love begins.

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## Slumpty

Josh Myers

**Medium:** digital rendering,  
photo collage

Slumpty sits solemnly atop Simon Unger's Cube House in the cold, barren environment of upstate New York. Is he a mass or a volume? His voluptuous yet pinched exterior and withdrawn posture do not offer a clear answer.

## Butterflies

Nicholas Castle

IN A CRAMPED, DARK ROOM SAT DAMIEN SINCLAIR. His fingers tip-tapped on keys, rhythmic and regular, but he was careful not to press so hard that they made letters, nor produced words, nor formed sentences. His neck was craned and his eyes were fixed on the blank page in front of him. He was wearing his round reading glasses, which he used to see the print that he was not turning out. To anyone who might be peeking in his window, at least, he would appear to be busy, and that much was good enough for him.

Deciding that he had earned a break, Damien tilted back in his chair and lit a match. He stuck a cigarette between his lips, inhaled, exhaled, and watched the dry, dusty smoke paint fleeting forms above him from his awkward, nearly supine position. He basked in momentary peace, followed by a fit of coughing. As he reclined there, he listened to the floorboards creak under some invisible pressure, and he heard the tiny voices on the television floating in from the next room, but he could only make them out so much, as they were like sentences spoken in a half-understood language.

He could have gone on that way forever perhaps, but it wasn't long before the floorboards were creaking under an actual pressure and his wife was poking her head in. Damien could see the sleep in her eyes, which nonetheless maintained their unceasingly wry look. She called him to bed, telling him it was awfully late to still be pretending to work. She turned and left without waiting for a response. Damien wondered if he could see her half-skipping down the hall. He begrudgingly followed, then spent the night awake, bitter, repeating that another few hours of working wouldn't have very much hurt his sleep. The next afternoon, he found himself rising for coffee with her.

She was preparing a light meal in the kitchen when he walked in. "Well, do you think we'll need to buy some more paper soon? Aren't you running out?"

Damien snorted.

His wife's expression softened, and she said, "You know I'm only worried by how wound up you get by doing this. Don't kill yourself for the satisfaction of feeling busy."

Damien didn't know what to say, so he just snorted again. His wife told him he'd feel better once he woke up. He lit a match, stuck a cigarette between his lips, and walked outside.

On the noisy streets around his home, Damien only ever talked with two people. One was tall, fat, and spent a lot of time talking about nothing. The other was small and peculiar. Damien affectionately referred to them as his neighbors.

As he stood around, trying to look like nobody's business, the first neighbor approached him.

"Hello, Damien," said the first neighbor.

"Hello, neighbor," Damien said. Before he knew it, he was knee-deep in conversation.

"It's a good thing we're out of our place next week, you know?"

Damien nodded like he knew.

30 His neighbor explained, "I was talking to the guy next door who's been here since these houses were first built. He told me that before the wife and I moved in, the previous occupant died in there."

With one eyebrow raised, Damien probed, "Who killed him?"

Without any change in expression, Damien's neighbor kept going. "He was just found lying there in bed after a few days of nobody hearing from him. Apparently, he was sick and old but afraid of hospitals. I remember there was a weird smell in there after we first came in, and now I get goosebumps being in the bedroom. For all I know, the old man is watching over me while I sleep!" He gave a genuine belly laugh that faded out awkwardly.

With both eyebrows lowered, Damien took the opportunity to lecture that most ghosts don't really exist. His neighbor questioned what he meant by that, but Damien simply shrugged.

As the first neighbor walked away with a slight look of bemusement, Damien's neighbor—his other neighbor—came to replace him. He arrived trotting up on his short legs, and Damien flicked his cigarette away before steeling himself for a second engagement. His other neighbor had a fascinating method for spurring casual conversation.

"Hello, how are you? Do you think we're alone in the universe?"

Unsure of how to respond, Damien replied, "I'm all right, thank you." Although no stranger to his other neighbor's disarmingly bold questions, Damien did not have the charisma to reel them in.

Perhaps sensing the awkwardness in the air, the other neighbor made an attempt to change the subject. "Well, how did you sleep? Do you usually have strange dreams?"

This one was easy. "I don't have dreams," Damien said. He had been confident in his answer, but as the other neighbor looked at him with a distinct expression of pity, Damien suddenly became unsure and annoyed.

"You mean you can't remember them?" the other neighbor prodded.

"There are none to remember. I don't have dreams."

"Hmm," the other neighbor pondered. "Do you think it's because you go to bed too tired? Or not tired enough? Do you get too little sleep? Are you sleeping eight hours a night?" He paused. "Do you think it's more normal not to dream?"

Damien was somewhat taken aback by this stream-of-consciousness assault. However, he was unwilling to lose what little ground he had gained on the other neighbor. "Of course it's normal. Normal people are too preoccupied to chase butterflies in dreams. If I did that, I'm not sure I'd ever get any work done at all."

*"Do you think it's more normal not to dream?"*

"Oh, of course. I have dreams pretty often, but they don't make any sense, so I don't get much out of them."

Damien didn't understand the connection. "Is a dream supposed to make sense? Is there supposed to be something to get out of it?"

"Oh, I don't know. I usually dream about my real life, just mixed up." The other neighbor proceeded to give an exhaustive account of the dream he'd had last night. Most of it had actually happened in his life at some point, supposedly, but every scene had some misplaced character or a chronologically impossible outcome.

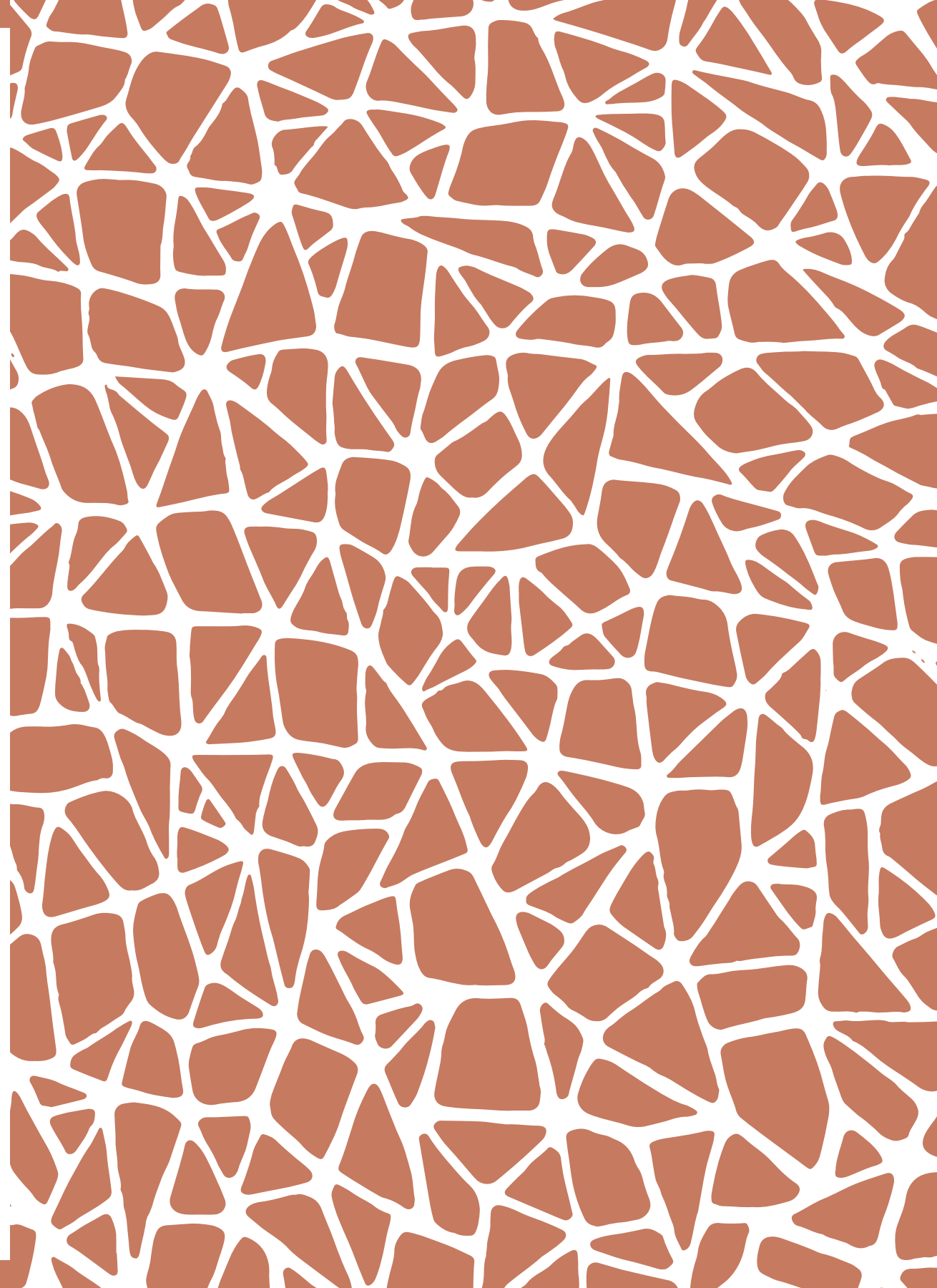


The other neighbor's history was splayed out before Damien like a naked contortionist: intimately revealed, yet twisted, unnatural, and uncalled for. Every detail was infused with a brain-scratching power that was at once irritatingly absurd and delightfully whimsical. It took a while for Damien to begin to care.

Every detail was infused with a brain-scratching power that was at once irritatingly absurd and delightfully whimsical.

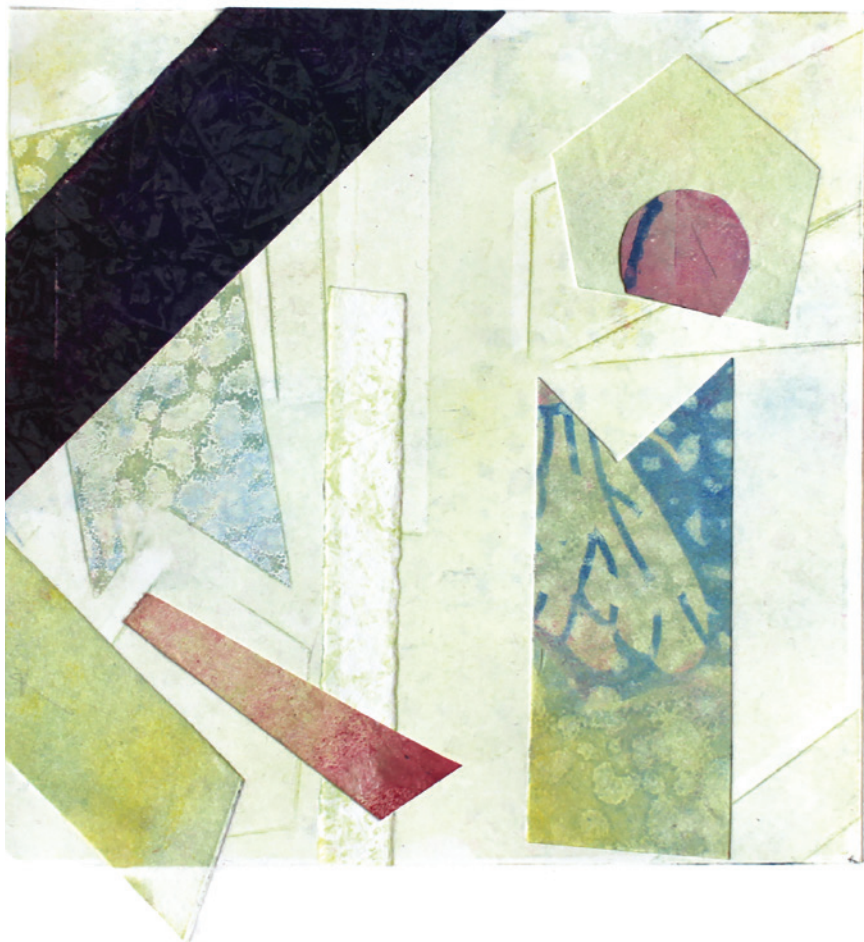
After sending the other neighbor on his way, Damien stepped inside, accidentally slamming the door behind him. He bypassed his wife and rounded the corner to his office. He sat down in his chair in the uncomfortable position that made him feel most comfortable, lit another match, and stuck another cigarette between his lips. His fingers

flew across the keys, and he made letters, and formed words, and produced sentences. He awoke the next afternoon and made sure to tell his wife all about it.



# Diffuse

Sarah Kronz



34

**Medium:** monotype collage  
An exploration of the relationship between real and illusionistic layering in collage.

# Refract

Sarah Kronz



35

**Medium:** monotype collage  
A mixture of intentional and accidental shifts in positioning.

## A Flower in the Window

Sarah Osvath

I am cared for by the ones  
who water me most.  
A plethora of marigold mysteries  
behind transparent glass  
begs to be revealed.

I am nothing but a dream to you,  
part of a partial reality.

*How we all wish to be flowers in the window,  
the excuse dripped from your lips.*

I hate to ruin your precious ideals,  
but time exists to leave us wanting more.

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I do not know that the little time we have left  
will choose to accommodate your pensive desires.

And for your sake  
and for my dignity,  
I hope you realize soon  
how many flowers grow in the valley.

With petals that fall and weeds that tangle,  
they follow the winds that whisper truths.

To make things clear,  
I am not sorry  
for not being sorry—

I do not think you deserve to be  
a flower in the window.

## Dentist's Office

Feyza Mutlu



**Medium:** charcoal

A child proud of her adult and  
soon-to-be lost baby teeth.

# To My Mother, Who Was Dying

Mara Cash

It took two whole days  
to fill her back up,  
but by then it swam alongside her,  
moved from her pockets  
into her stomach.  
Tried hard—  
very hard—  
to sneak back into her womb  
and consume her.

And all the needles  
and all the pins,  
and what did they give her?  
Giver of life turned  
rag doll, plushy with blood,  
dragged home with something inside her,  
and what did they give her?

What made a home in her body?  
Like me, like my sister after me,  
like me before my sister,  
like my father never could.  
What tried to take her away from me?  
A third, cursed sibling  
raging against its unbirth,  
squirming its way into her motherhood,  
reaching to grab from her  
what she had never wanted.

It dared—  
it dared to ask her to die  
for what she had never wanted.  
Asked her to get on her knees  
and expel it from within her,  
admonitions and  
three ancient curses and  
pain and  
one black demon and  
fear and  
thirty-six needles,  
all heaved into the toilet.

Maybe it went screaming,  
covered in five pints of blood  
and the weight of her mothers before her.  
Maybe it went softly, but  
either way—  
it went.

## Consumed by Passion

Stamatina Tolias



**Medium:** oil on canvas board

40

## Tainted Earth

Megan Hamilton

I have spent hours cutting my fingers  
on the tips of mountain peaks,  
letting the blood drip down the side  
like lava threatening the nearest city.

These scars run deep, dirt  
from the forests I destroyed mixing  
with the highest and lowest points  
to create mass chaos on the inside.

In trying to become everything,  
I become nothing—  
an empty void filled with fresh water  
that drains without permissions,  
tainted by fish hooks and rain.

I didn't ask to be this way,  
to blink and feel volcanos one second  
but encompass an ice age the next  
and then write it down, like that  
begins to tell the half of it.

Maybe one day I can skip over rocks  
without picking them up, but until then  
I will start avalanches.

Everything I feel burns holes into my skin.

I hope for regeneration,  
to let the plants grow out of my pores.

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## Where Did You Come From?

Meghan Williamson

“LADIES—WE WILL BE TRAVELING ON THE METRO AND YOU WILL GET GROPED!”

These were the first words that landed on my jet-lagged ears as I made my way through French customs. I perked up a bit to stare at the chaperone who had said it. I assumed she was one of the teachers from the other school going on this adventure over the Atlantic. She followed this brash statement by shouting, “Also, I would like to go on one trip without someone losing their passport or getting mugged!”

Funny—my teachers told me that the best way to get pickpocketed was to make it apparent that we were tourists, and I’m sure that shouting in English about being mugged in the middle of the Paris airport was not necessarily the best way for us to fit in. Still, her message made the uneasiness in my stomach grow.

The week leading up to this trip was not filled with excited butterflies, but with fear of the fact that I did not really know anyone. I was less than thrilled to be in a foreign country for the first time with so many strangers, and now I also needed to worry about being squashed like sardines into a metro car with a few kids from my high

school while someone to my right gropes me and someone to my left steals my purse. Great.

I tried to dismiss these thoughts as I grabbed my bright pink suitcase off the conveyor belt. I did not want to think negatively. I was in the City of Lights—

something I had dreamt about for years. I adored my French I class in eighth grade, mostly because I earned a One Direction sticker if I answered correctly. However, as I entered high school and started taking upper-level French courses, I genuinely fell in love with the language—honestly, I fell in love with language as a whole. We are all inherently the same at our core. We are made of the same DNA and created the same way, but we all speak differently. We take various symbols and put them in different orders to make different sounds so that we have different words for the same ideas and objects. I find it incredibly frustrating yet somehow the most beautiful thing in the world. French was special, though. It led me to teach an after-school

course, it led me to meeting my first boyfriend, it led me to a lifelong friendship from across the globe, and it somehow led me here, to France. I am a firm believer that everything happens for a reason, and I knew I was here to learn more than just the history of the Eiffel Tower. We were scheduled to be in Paris for three days, then journey to the Loire Valley area, the coast of Normandy, and then back to Paris for our final day. As my suitcase bounced over the tiles behind me, I threw some positive thoughts out into the universe:

*This trip will be fun.*

*This trip will be life-changing.*

*I will not be an anxious mess on this trip.*

◆ ◆ ◆

“No, you go talk to him!”

“I can’t; you do it!”

“Fine—let me just practice one more time. *Est-ce que je peux utiliser vos toilettes s’il vous plaît?*”

“Yes, that’s right—now go!”

I took a deep breath as I approached the waiter. We had been in Paris for a couple of days now, and I had made friends. However, although that crisis had been solved, a new problem had arisen. No matter how stupid it was, a certain stereotype kept swirling around in my brain:

French people are mean.

I am quite aware that this is a giant generalization, and I am sure there were perfectly amazing people living there. To be fair, Paris is just busy like any big city, and people have places to go and people to see, and a language barrier on top of that only adds

We are made of the same DNA and created the same way, but we all speak differently.

to the frustration of doing what needs to be done. That being said, my friends and I couldn't help but approach Parisians with caution and prepare to speak to them, even when asking a waiter a simple question such as "May I use your restroom?" Just because I loved and appreciated the language did not mean I was good at speaking it. After more than three years of taking French, the only thing I really remembered was a very basic conversation and how to spell "restaurant" in English.

I was not having the best morning, either. I had already thrown up in a men's restroom, been screamed at by a lady trying to get me to sign a petition in front of the Arc de Triomphe, and had my French pen-pal confess his undying love for me—I had had to politely explain to him, "Maxence, I just broke up with my boyfriend because he went to college an hour away; if I can't date out of the county, then I can't date out of the continent"—so I was not exactly sure why I was the one sent to scope out where the bathroom was. I could not take another embarrassing moment. Nevertheless, there I was, approaching the waiter in a little café, slowly repeating the line over and over again in my head. I weaved between the tables clustered together, filled with friends talking over an espresso and a cigarette.

*"Pardon moi, monsieur, est-ce que je—"*

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"Yes, the toilet is down the stairs and to your right," he cut me off, replying in perfect English.

Well, okay then.

I figured he spoke English, as the majority of people in Paris do, and I am sure he could tell I was American, but most of the people we had spoken to had let us at least finish our sentences before responding in English. I understood, though. To them, we were just tourists; the same as the ones before us, the same as any after us.

Despite the little blunders here and there, I thoroughly fell for the City of Love. From the architecture to the history, to the food, to the fashion—I loved it all. My friends and I had even managed to make it through the metros without being pickpocketed or groped. There was something missing, however, and I still felt as though I were just a passive tourist.

❖ ❖ ❖

"For the first time that night, my friends and I felt that we were the outsiders."



“Bye, Eiffel Tower, see you in a few days!”

My friend shouted a cheesy farewell out the window as our coach started to drive us out of Paris and over to the Loire Valley. We soon arrived at a small town near the valley called Tours. Quaint and beautiful, filled with small businesses, cobblestone streets, and with a Ferris wheel in the front of town, it had everything I liked about Paris, without the craziness that came with it. But once again, though I had solved one anxiety, another crept into my brain.

Barely anyone spoke English in Tours.

I had just adjusted to speaking in French to Parisians who were fluent in English, and now I had to speak French to people who barely knew English. I was conscious of how ignorant and hypocritical I was being. I was the one who preached about language being beautiful, and I knew that I could not possibly get mad at them, coming into their country and expecting them to speak my language, but I was still apprehensive about my ability to communicate. It was nerve-racking. Most of my conversations went as follows—the person would say something in French that I did not understand, and then:

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“*Pardon, je ne parle pas bien français.*” (Sorry, I do not speak French well.)

“*Quelles langue parlez-vous?*” (What language do you speak?)

“*Anglais.*” (English.)

“*Oh, je ne parle pas anglais.*” (Oh, I do not speak English.)

Despite this, we were making the best out of our time in the provincial town. After a day of exploring castles in the Loire Valley—you know, a normal Wednesday—we made it back to Tours just in time for Bastille Day celebrations. There would be dancing in a blocked-off square with a live band, followed by fireworks. Ten of us decided to go with some of the chaperones to see the live band, but there was not dancing as promised. There were at least eight hundred people present and a space for dancing, but no brave souls were willing to draw enough attention to themselves to start the festivities. So there I was, a girl standing in the middle of the square, surrounded by people she could not talk to, when a brilliant idea popped into my head:

*I would start the dancing.*

To this day, I do not know what possessed me to think this. I hated dancing, and more importantly I looked like an idiot when I danced, but I was contemplating making a fool of myself. Maybe it was the fact that if the residents made fun of me, I probably would not understand it, or maybe it was because I would never see these people again, or possibly it was just the magic of France, but something made me grab my friend, march to the dance floor, and start dancing to the band’s music. The band seemed to love it, and soon a couple of my classmates joined me, as did a couple of the French. More and more people joined our little dance party until there were ten high schoolers from Pittsburgh and about two hundred people from various places in France. We could not speak to each other very well, but we were communicating in an equally important way: through dance battles and limbo.

Everybody was just dancing to a band who seemed surprised that people were so excited to see them. It was so simple, yet so powerful.

The word must have gotten out that we were American and spoke English, because the band started playing some songs in English. I felt like I was in a perfect moment where time stood still. Nobody was rushing me to finish my terrible attempt to order a crêpe or pushing past me, the embodiment of a tourist staring up at Notre Dame. Nobody was gossiping or worrying about what they looked or sounded like. Everyone was just dancing to a band who seemed surprised that people were so excited to see them. It was so simple, yet somehow so powerful.

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After an hour or so of dancing, the band performed a French line dance. For the first time that night, my friends and I felt that we were the outsiders. We debated heading over to get a spot for the fireworks, but then I felt a tap on my shoulder. It was a woman, probably a few years older than I, with a look on her face that said she wanted to say something, but did not know how to. She gave herself some space and then began to slowly show me how to dance to the song. I smiled at her and followed her lead. Soon a couple other people went to my friends and one by one taught us the dance. It felt as though they cared about us being there—like we were more than some annoying tourists.

After the dance was finished, everyone clapped the loudest they had all night. Wanting to leave on a high note, we were about to leave when we heard the strum of a guitar and the lead singer begin to sing:

*If it hadn't been for Cotton Eye Joe*

*I'd been married a long time ago*

*Where did you come from, Where did you go?*

*Where did you come from, Cotton Eye Joe?*

The opening stanza of the beloved American line dance had just started, and, despite the fact that we had no idea how the band knew it, we knew we had to stay and dance. This time, there were only a few of us who knew the dance and hundreds of people who did not know it, but we knew we had to return the favor. Each of us showed groups how to kick their legs and when to spin, and soon all of the French were dancing to “Cotton Eye Joe” with us. When it was done, we performed a conga line out on the dance floor and the excitement died down as other people were beginning to call it a night.

Once we left, we watched the fireworks and returned to the world of clumsy conversations with people who did not communicate as we did. It was ironic how the place with the people who spoke the least amount of English ended up having the people who were kindest to us. This was the moment I had been waiting for the entire trip because, for one night, we were not the stupid Americans and the mean French—we were just some people enjoying good music.

50

## Irish Hillside

Grace Beyer



51

# How to Cross the Street in Rome

London Bishop

It's an act of trust on a hot, caustic river—  
your objective is to ford it.  
There's an Indiana boy waiting,  
wine on his dime and a promise just as sweet  
that you will not accept.

But you are not here for him  
or anyone else. You made a promise  
to yourself at thirteen,  
when you sat in a church pew with a graduation cap  
and said to the pastor, "I want to go."

You met Augustus and Antony and Caesar  
and Ovid and Aeneas and Virgil,  
you read their words and became their friends,  
and though their words were dead, the child in you  
was never killed off completely.  
You believed in them.

The train that brought you to the city was dirty.  
Dirt has faces. Dirt has eyes and souls;  
the train was filled with it.  
So was the city.  
A cat found you in the hostel while you were  
sending pictures home by the laundry.  
He had black fur and yellow teeth  
and a boil on his neck.  
He tried to catch you,  
but you were a mouse he wouldn't catch that day.

52

Is this what has become of that great nation  
whose pillars bloom in the squares,  
white and silent,  
with cats all around?  
What would they think, their monuments buried in faces and dust?  
*These children are a disgrace.*

They are waiting in the silence.  
All you have to do is take the step and trust.  
In the city there are no lights and signals  
to tell them to stop.  
As long as you show no fear,  
the carcinogen river flows.

The sun is setting.  
The boy from Indiana is forgotten.  
The sun burns, and the bells tell the homeless people  
the Basilica Iulia shall not be their bedroom tonight.  
The cats depart.  
The silence remains.

All that's left is sunset  
and the broken pillars burning into your eyes.  
For you cried, "Friends! Friends! I made it! I'm here!"  
But the silence will not be swayed by an answer,  
for you arrived two thousand years too late.

53

# Eternity

Olivia Martin

TIME MAKES YOU FEEL SAFE. It makes you look at the days and weeks and months spinning out in front of you, lets you believe that they are a promise instead of a phantom of what could be, tricks you into thinking that your time is something that you can bottle up and give, give, and give without ever wondering when it will start to take.

He knows better now.

*Do you remember*, he thinks, sitting beside her in this whitewashed hospital bed, wanting to say it even though this is neither the time nor the place, wanting to ask her even though this is the first night of easy rest she has gotten in weeks, *the things we used to promise each other? Back when we thought that forever was something we would be allowed to claim?*

He remembers. He remembers standing beside her the night that first bit of light ate up the darkness, the first time that someone had stumbled to their feet and turned spark into flame, how the Egyptians built their pyramids, humanity's seemingly infinite capacity to create. Then they watched as entire countries crippled each other

with the horrors of war, the two of them learning, with painful clarity, that finding new ways to hurt is the thing humans do best. *It's in the name of glory*, the people would say, like greed and good had become synonymous on their tongues, screaming it down from their podiums and pulpits: *for the crown, for the country, for your children*, like writing their history in red was better than being left with no history at all.

The two of them had done nothing, stood stagnant while the rest of the world spun on, promised each other that the

world would twist itself back on track. Now, looking back, he thinks that he, at least, deserves this; he deserves these nights slumped over in an uncomfortable chair with

a cup of lukewarm coffee clutched in his hands, the endless rounds of small talk with too-chatty nurses and the flickering lights, falling asleep to the countdown of her heartbeats coming through the monitors.

*When he stops to think about the worst part, it's the heart monitor he comes back to, a fierce contrast to the moments where he would catch her pulse underneath his fingertips just to remind himself that they really were alive, so unlike the heart that was settled in his own chest that had been counting away every minute of every hour of every day for each past millennium, a clockwork record of everything that was or will be sunk right into his chest.*

He thinks he probably deserves the look of blame in her eyes that he had seen the night that the doctor came in and told them that there was simply nothing more for him to do, that they had waited too long, that they should've come in sooner.

He had known then that whatever happened next was going to happen because of him, because he was the one who had told her to ignore it, who had told her she was fine. He had done nothing when she told him how weak she was feeling, when the oil in her veins and the minerals in her bones were dragged to the surface and used up. He had stood by when she confessed that it was getting hard to breathe, that smoke and ash and fumes had clogged up her lungs for so long that she couldn't remember what clean air felt like. He hadn't said a word when her green-tinged skin had turned gray, when the glaciers glittering in the corners of her eyes melted and ran down her cheeks like rivers. He hadn't done anything at all until the Second World War, when the first atomic bomb dropped and the pain had felled her to her knees—that had been their first night in the hospital. It had been the first time he remembered feeling useless, the first time he could do nothing to help. *We have forever*, he remembers thinking then. *Surely forever is long enough to fix this.*

There have been other bad days since then, days when she would reach over to grip at his arm with surprising strength and moan that her children were dying. (Not the humans—never the humans—but the whales and the tigers and the elephants and all the other species approaching extinction.) There were nights when she would wake up gasping for breath and clutching her side because yet another bomb had been released in the name of a god whom scripture had claimed was compassionate, nights full of fever dreams when her mutterings confirmed to him that, yes, the humans were just as good at hurting as they had always been, but they had never gotten around to figuring out how to heal.

Then they watched as entire countries crippled each other with the horrors of war, the two of them learning, with painful clarity, that finding new ways to hurt is the thing humans do best.

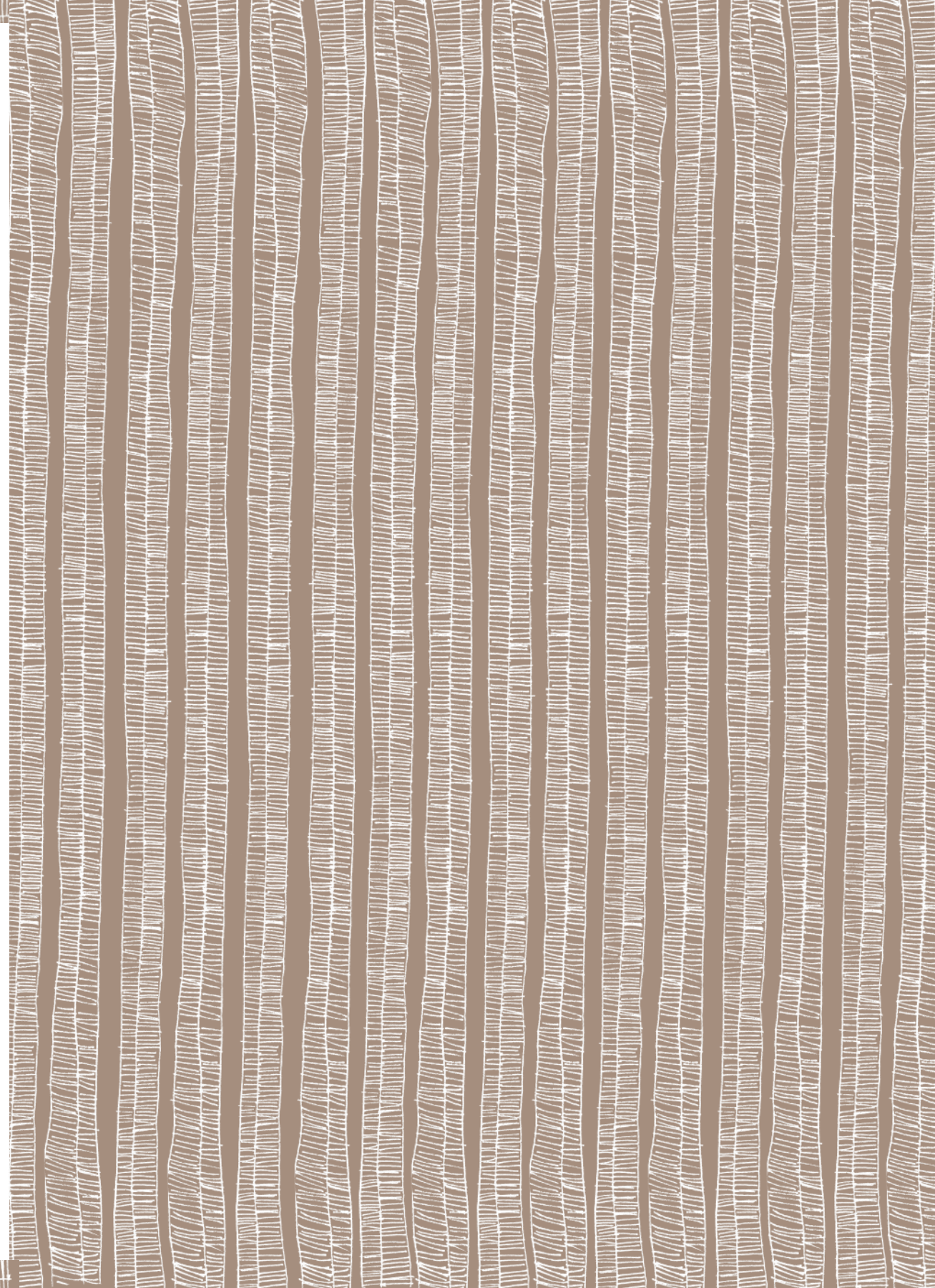
*Be okay*, he thinks. He tries for a prayer, unconvinced that there is anyone left for him to pray to. All that's left for him is this one plea, this one selfish thought. It reaffirms what he has always known: that she was always giving and he would always

be the one willing to take. Because even now, all he can think about is what this means for him, about how she will die and the earth will fade and the sun will burn right out of the sky, and even as everything else slips away—*ashes to ashes and dust to dust*—time will continue and he will remain to see it through: terribly, horribly, and entirely alone for the first time in his life.

time will continue and  
he will remain to see it  
through: terribly, horribly,  
and entirely alone for the  
first time in his life.

He had promised himself eternity, after all.

This is the first time that he has ever thought to be afraid of it.





# One Last Walk

Hailey Schlegel

EDITH SITS TENTATIVELY ON HER COUCH, with its old flowered upholstery, waiting for the familiar crunch of gravel. It doesn't come. No one's pulled into her driveway, not yet at least. Perhaps she should feel a sense of nervousness, but for now she's completely calm, pushing the inevitable to the back of her mind.

Her back is to the window, the plastic blinds closed shut. A layer of black dust has collected there over the years. When was the last time they were opened to let in the sunshine? She stares into the kitchen, watching the snow beat gently against the small window above the sink. A hummingbird feeder still sits there, frost sticking to its glass sides. She finds herself missing the hummingbirds and their sprightly wings. A shiver runs through her body and she pulls her light-blue cardigan tighter.

60 She's suddenly aware of the pain in her wrists and shoulders, and the movement reminds her that her skin isn't as thick as it once was, now more susceptible to bruising. She slides the sleeves of her cardigan up, revealing the purpling skin, nearly black in color. A frown forms on her wrinkled lips. She can barely look at the dark patches on her skin, their shape resembling the hold of his grip. "He didn't mean it," she whispers to herself. Her shoulder aches. She's been too afraid to look in the mirror to see the damage that he did when he pushed her against the wooden doorframe. *He didn't mean it.*

Gravel crunches outside. Edith sits up straighter at the sound of a car door slamming shut. She pulls her sleeve down to hide the discoloration. The screen door creaks. Edith relaxes her frown; she can't muster a smile, but anything is better than a frown.

"Mom, why is it so hot in here?" Debra greets her, then moves quickly to the thermostat. "It's snowing outside."

*Charlie loves snow*, Edith thinks. He used to take walks in the snow. She had always been too cold on those walks to enjoy them, but they had put a giant smile on his face. That smile always pleased her, even if she was shivering in her boots. He would hold her firmly as they would trod across the snow, her hand secure and trusting in the crook of his elbow. Always. Even into their old age, as her hair took on the color of the very snow he loved. She didn't share his enjoyment of the bitter weather, but she

stayed by his side. Charlie and Edith. Walks in the snow were something they could rely on. Could she rely on them now?

The younger woman finishes with the thermostat, turning back to her mother. "Are you doing okay, Mom?"

Edith gives a small nod, avoiding Debra's eyes. She feels the tears surfacing and can't bear to let them fall in front of her daughter. She knows Debra has been having a rough time with the situation, despite her tough exterior, and doesn't want to make it harder for her. Of her three children, she was the one taking on all the weight.

Debra gives her mother a small, gentle touch on the shoulder, her expression downcast. "Is Dad in the bedroom?"

"Yes," Edith says solemnly, watching her daughter's frame recede down the hall. Debra's voice is gentle as she talks to her father, a tone Edith finds both comforting and depressing. She didn't want to call Debra that night, knowing what the outcome would be, but she had been in such a panic. *He didn't mean to do it.* She has to remind herself that Charlie is not to blame. It was the dementia that saw her as an intruder and not his wife, that looked at her with blank eyes. It wasn't Charlie who grabbed her by the wrists and shoved her in an act of self-defense. That was not her husband.

Edith watches the dark hallway once again, waiting tentatively. Debra eventually exits the door at the far end, her hand intertwined with that of the old man. They walk slowly, their footsteps dampened by the worn carpet. They stop in front of the couch, Charlie's glance toward Edith absent of recognition. Debra's eyes don't quite hold the smile her lips would suggest. Her voice wavers when she says, "I'll go get the car started and put the address for the nursing home in the GPS. You two can come whenever you're ready."

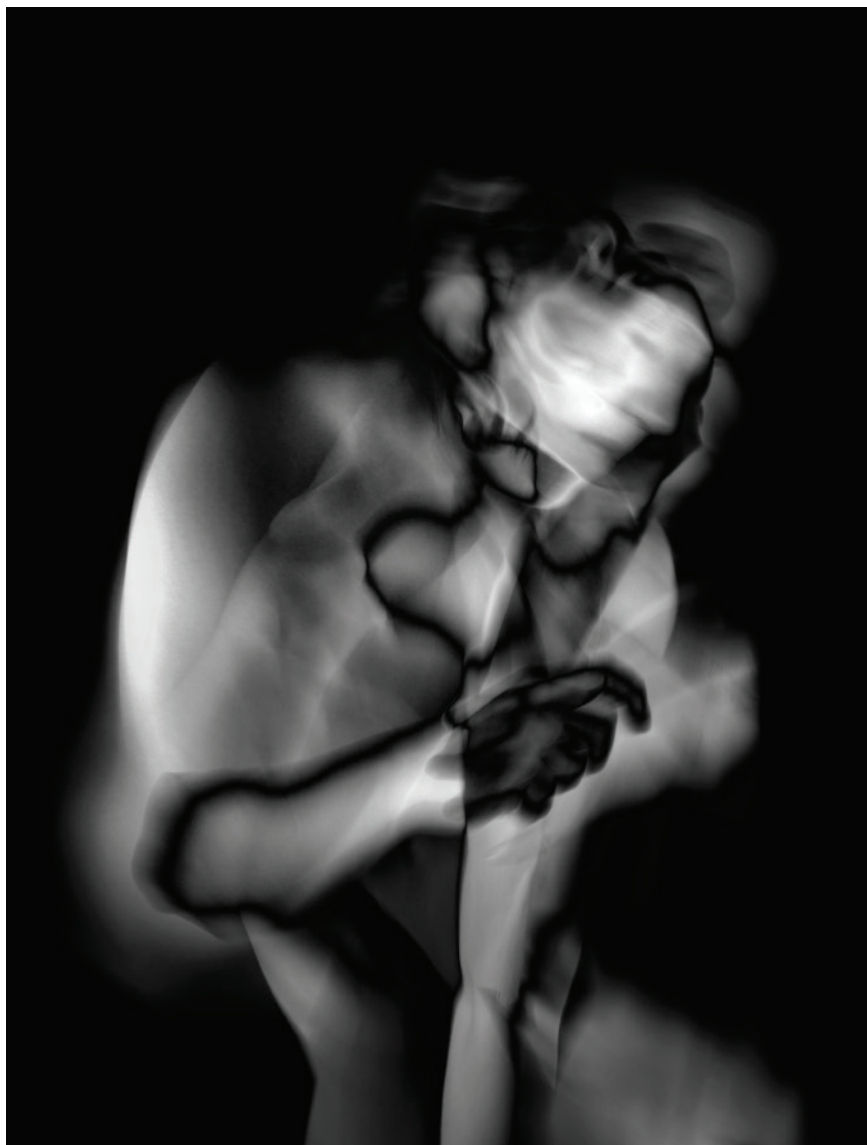
Edith's eyes brim with tears. She doesn't let them fall. She wants to say a million things to him, to the man she loves, but she can't find the words.

"Do you want to take a walk in the snow?"

She has to remind herself that Charlie is not to blame.

# Rapture

Frances Smith



**Medium:** digital image collage

# I don't know how to love

Hannah McFeeters

I don't know  
how to love  
a little bit.

Tell me one  
thing,  
not two.

Tell me red  
skies,  
not blue.

Show me your  
right,  
not your left.

Show me what  
you want,  
not what's left.

I can't keep my shoes  
half tied  
and expect to stay grounded.

I don't walk belly up  
to the ocean  
just to swim out.

I don't know  
how to love  
a little bit,

and I think that's  
a lot of a bit  
of good.



## Composed Of

**Korynne Kalen**

You are composed of a candle's flame,  
an innocently probing flicker,  
scarily illuminating.

You are composed of glass shards,  
a mirror I can see myself in,  
perched above to avoid its shatter.

You are composed of firecrackers,  
joyful pranks or necklace-tearing,  
gunpowder heart.

You are composed of loose beads,  
the makings of a mural in waiting,  
colors both hidden and displayed in full.

You are composed of paper,  
scrapped ideas and brilliant maps,  
work-focused mind papier-mâché'd.

You are composed of love,  
pure and to the core,  
not sure what to do with it all.

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## Entanglement

**Rees Jones**



**Medium:** colored pencil

Relaxation and normality in  
overcrowded environments.

65

## 104 Words Aren't Enough to Save the World

Valerie Royzman

For me—  
I read the soggy newspaper on the bus.  
I cling to every word, press down on it, tattoo it on my skin.  
“5 People Dead in Shooting at Maryland’s Capital Gazette Newsroom,”  
reads the front page of the New York Times.  
I count how long it takes for the letters to smudge.  
My hands rinse and repeat.  
They scamper across the keyboard, still hopeful somehow.  
I memorize the eyes, hear the stories, smile, weep after I leave the interview.  
I bleed rain, write wilted.  
For me—  
saving the world is insurmountable.  
I tread ink mountains anyway.  
I offer ears, intertwined fingers. Anyway

*After Nikki Giovanni*

# contributors

*All of our talented contributors are artists and authors who reside in the Mid-East Honors region. Thank you for shaping edition VI of Brainchild Magazine.*

## London Bishop

### MOUNT ST. JOSEPH UNIVERSITY

London Bishop is a senior at Mount St. Joseph University, double majoring in liberal arts and communications with a double minor in English and creative writing. Her passion is to create and protect beautiful things, whether in art, literature or the natural world. When not studying, she enjoys being seated at the piano or the drum set, or planning visits to new and exciting places around the world.

## Grace Beyer

### KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Grace Beyer is currently a junior with a major in applied communications and a minor in photo-illustration. She has been interested in photography for a long time; she took her first photo class in high school about five years ago. She is currently doing freelance photography and is always adding to her online portfolio. She mostly does portrait and landscape photography, but she is always trying to expand her horizons and learn new skills.

## Mara Cash

### KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Mara Cash is a senior psychology major with a double minor in Jewish studies and human sexuality at Kent State University. She has a passion for spoken word poetry and is excited to be published in Brainchild Magazine. She is grateful for the encouragement she has received to share her poetry with others and plans to continue doing so.

## Nicholas Castle

### COLUMBUS STATE COMMUNITY COLLEGE

Nick Castle is a twenty-two-year old student at Columbus State Community College. He is currently studying economics and foreign languages. He likes writing that says a lot by saying very little, and one day he hopes to be able to communicate with all kinds of people in all kinds of places by being a better writer and speaker.

## Mackenzie Freese

### KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Mackenzie Freese is a sophomore nursing student at Kent State University from Cincinnati, Ohio. She loves basketball, painting, discovering new books to read, and spending time with her family. After graduating from Kent State, she plans to specialize in neuroscience nursing and complete a graduate program to become a nurse practitioner.

## Megan Hamilton

### KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Megan Hamilton is a sophomore English major from Stow, Ohio. She enjoys writing poetry, finding new music, and capturing simple moments on her iPhone. After graduation in 2021, she hopes to continue on to graduate school where she will pursue her dream of becoming a professor and work on publishing her first book of poetry.

## Rees Jones

### KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Rees Jones is a freshman at Kent State University studying architecture. In his free time, he enjoys creating art pieces reflective of his current interests and inspirations.

## Korynne Kalen

### BALL STATE UNIVERSITY

Korynne Kalen is a sophomore at Ball State University majoring in Spanish with minors in travel and tourism and linguistics. Some of her hobbies include singing, being outdoors, and writing poetry. She has had her work published in her school's honors literary and arts magazine, The Odyssey, this year and last year. This is her first year being published in Brainchild Magazine, and she is very excited for the opportunity!

## Sarah Kronz

### KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Sarah Kronz is a senior fine arts major at Kent State University. For the past several years, she has been exhibiting her work at the local, state, and national levels, and some of her work has been published in previous editions of Brainchild Magazine. Apart from her artistic pursuits, she spends her free time outdoors, where she works as a summer camp counselor and high adventure programming facilitator.

## Olivia Martin

### KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Olivia Martin is a freshman at Kent State University. She is currently working towards a bachelor's degree in organizational communication studies. She enjoys reading and writing and hopes to one day be a librarian.

## Hannah McFeeters

### KENT STATE UNIVERSITY

Hannah McFeeters is eighteen years old and a freshman at Walsh University majoring in communications and psychology and minoring in writing. Hannah loves to think about love. It is both a subject and a motivator.

**Jessica Miller**

**KENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

Jessica Miller is a first-year Visual Communication Design major at Kent State University who is interested in using design to better people's lives through inclusion, sustainability, and accessibility. She enjoys expressing herself creatively through writing, drawing, singing, and photography and is often encapsulated by whatever her most recent project is. She is beyond grateful to the family, friends, and teachers who allow her to better herself and her craft.

**Feyza Mutlu**

**KENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

Feyza Mutlu is an architecture student at Kent State University. She enjoys learning about and is intrigued by everything and everyone in her surroundings. She likes to take elements of life which may seem mundane and add a little variation to them in her creative process in order to evoke unconventional emotions.

**Josh Myers**

**KENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

Josh Myers is a fourth-year architecture student at the Kent State University College of Architecture and Environmental Design. His interests lie in architectural theory's unique and often austere relationship with metaphysics and visual theory. His work looks to object-oriented ontology and means of fabrication to understand our reality in the post-digital age.

**Sarah Osvath**

**KENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

Sarah Osvath is a published author and painter and student at Kent State University. She enjoys anything creative, from painting to writing and even embroidery art. When she doesn't have her nose buried in a book, Sarah enjoys hiking, being out in nature, and traveling. She is currently studying to become an art therapist with the hope of spreading the therapeutic elements of creativity that have so touched her own life.

**Alice Roeding**

**XAVIER UNIVERSITY**

Alice Roeding is a junior undergraduate student at Xavier University in Cincinnati, Ohio pursuing a B.F.A. in printmaking and drawing and a minor in digital innovation, film, and television. She is inspired by social justice and its portrayal in various artistic mediums. She has a background in traditional figurative drawing, various printmaking and graphic design techniques, screenwriting, production, and post-production work. Alice is involved both in and out of the art department, showing work in juried shows at nationally known museums, including the Contemporary Arts Center in Cincinnati, Ohio, studying abroad in Italy, and competing and performing with the Xavier University Dance Team.

**Valerie Royzman**

**KENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

Valerie Royzman lives in Kent, Ohio, where she studies journalism at Kent State. Currently, she is the editor in chief of The Kent Stater. The newsroom is home to Valerie, and where most of her writing flourishes. She also interns for the Wick Poetry Center, where she previously worked as a teaching artist and adapted poetry as an English-learning tool for Akron immigrants and refugees. Valerie writes to feel, and to fulfill. She tweets @valerieroyzman.

**Hailey Schlegel**

**KENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

Hailey Schlegel is a second-year English major at Kent State University. Hailey has always enjoyed creative writing as well as drawing and painting. This is her first publication and she is excited to share her work.

**Frances Smith**

**KENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

Frances Smith was introduced to photography at Wright State in the fall of 2016 and has since fallen in love with this versatile art form. She is currently working on a capstone project that involves making abstract self-portraits to explore the impact of invented reality on her perception of her own identity. She will graduate from Wright State in the spring of 2019.

**Stamatina Tolia**

**WRIGHT STATE UNIVERSITY**

Stamatina Tolia is a junior Honors student at Wright State University where she is studying neuroscience with a minor in biochemistry. She intends to pursue an MD-PhD in neuroscience and integrate her creative abilities in mapping anatomical and molecular characteristics of spinal cord development. When she gets a chance to lift her head from the books, she enjoys painting, drawing, admiring nature, and watching art restoration. Through the use of light and contrast in her art, Stamatina hopes to evoke the pathos, mystery, and beauty of life instilled during her childhood in Greece. Ultimately, she can only aspire to capture life like Caravaggio and progress it like da Vinci.

**Moriah Weese**

**UNIVERSITY OF CINCINNATI**

Moriah Weese is a third-year biochemistry and biology student at the University of Cincinnati. Although she is a scientist, she has a passion for words, storytelling, and the communities they form. She enjoys reading, cats, playing Dungeons & Dragons, making chemistry puns, and medieval mystery shows with Sir Derek Jacobi.

**Meghan Williamson**

**KENT STATE UNIVERSITY**

Meghan Williamson is a first-year speech pathology student with a creative writing minor at Kent State University. On-campus Meghan participates in Her Campus, H2O church, the MAD1 lab, and Greek life as a Phi Mu. Meghan's dreams as a writer consist of either being a travel writer or writing for Disney!

