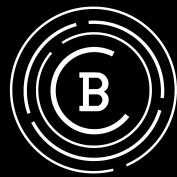


BRAINCHILD

VOLUME VII

Great art in any form is never stagnant: it impacts us and moves with us, serving as a guide to help interpret the past, endure the present, and prepare for the future.



KENT STATE UNIVERSITY HONORS COLLEGE

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a literary & arts magazine

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FOREWORD

The question of what art teaches us is understandably a difficult one. Art in any form is as variable as the people and circumstances that encourage it and spur its creation. One of the greatest benefits of art of any kind is that readers and viewers become a part of something outside of themselves: we are able to experience thoughts and feelings of others through words and art that we otherwise might not have access to.

However, just because we can see or read what the artist has made does not mean that it is always easy to understand. This is part of what makes art so enjoyable and continually new: very rarely can we be sure that we have the full story or that we are on the most favorable track of the many that may appear for us when we step into the world of the art. The world around us is like this, too. Our interpretations are colored by our own perceptions, and what we find may depend on what we are looking for and how we interpret what we are given.

This issue of *Brainchild* embraces both the concrete and abstract aspects of art and of life. In Sasha Feldmann's poem, "I Am

Ready for My Hair to Grow," the narrator's statements ring strong and true, aided by vivid imagery of snake charmers, spiderwebs, and vultures. Some declarations of truth are subtler but no less representative of life in all its complexity, such as T. Mesnick's expressions of emotion throughout the poem "Mama." Visual pieces such as Sarah Sparks' "Sweet Surrender" are impactful because of both their defined and undefined parts: there is room for interpretation, and space remains for the viewer to become a participant in the open-ended conversation prompted by the art.

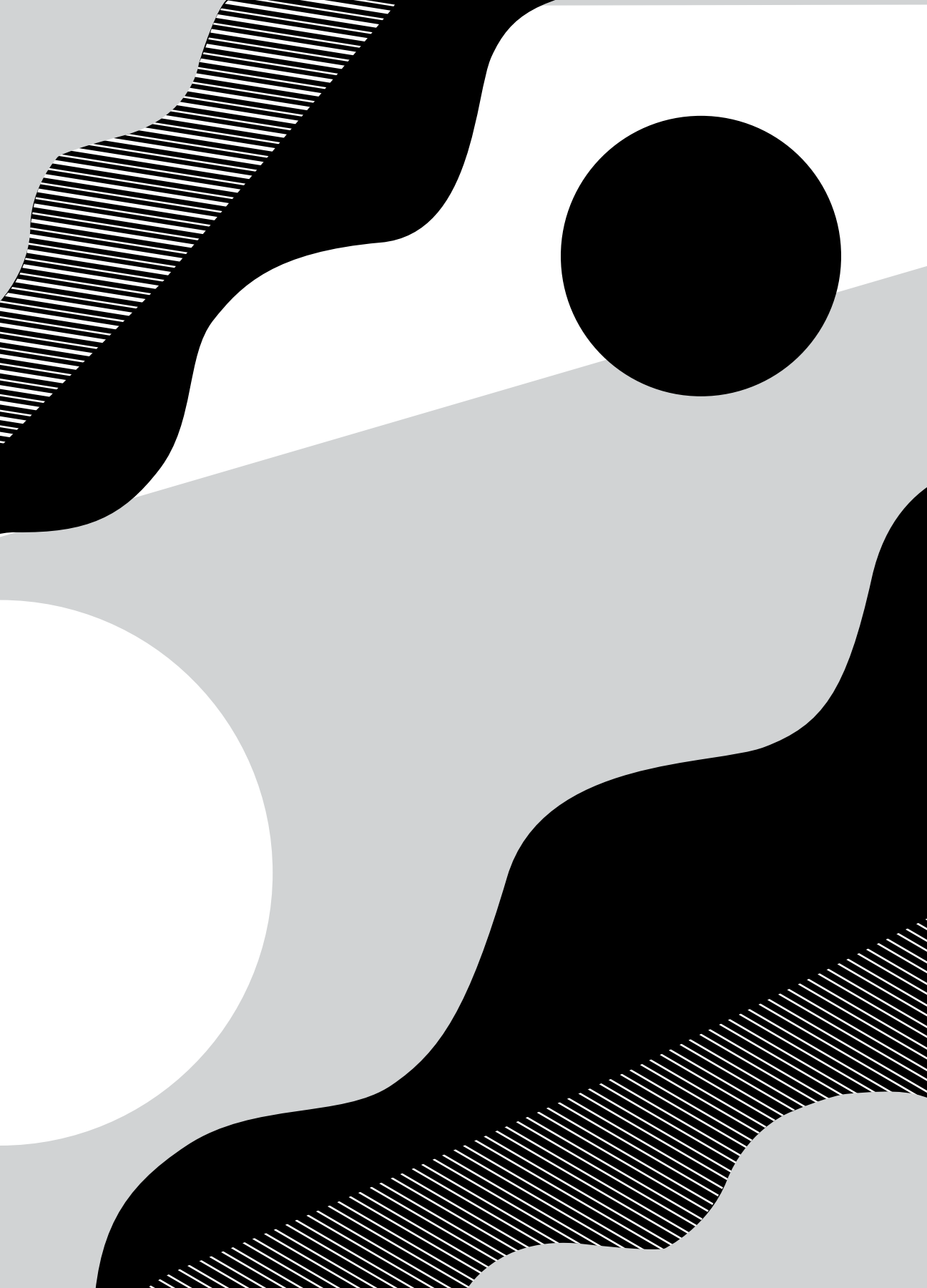
In our pages, even the ordinary finds a place to be elevated, such as in the earthy language of Eva Monhaut's poem "Hay Mowing." Daleen Cowgar's short fiction piece, "Ashes," also skillfully navigates ideas of remembrance, complicated by the melancholy of knowing that the person you once were may never exist again. On the opposite end of the spectrum, we are confronted with the fanciful and obscure, such as the relationship between the protagonist and Frankenstein's monster in Lindsay Watkins' "I Ought to Be Thy Adam." In art, something does not

necessarily need to be real to be true, or to allow access to the truth. The intricacies and surprises within art are what make it surprising, what make it fun. There is something new to be discovered in every nuance, and we hope you enjoy exploring these pieces as much as we have.

Throughout this collection, the past, present, and future coexist. We know that even in beautifully captured snapshots of life, there is always motion, such as in the color and warmth of Julia Tomlinson's portrait piece, "Binta." Great art in any form is never stagnant: it impacts us and moves with us, serving as a guide to help interpret the past, endure the present, and prepare for the future. We hope that the pieces we have selected for this issue will help enlighten you, expand your world, and be a source of enjoyment for you as you experience them. We thank you for sharing in this art with us.



Nina Palattella
EDITOR IN CHIEF



AND YET WE BURN

Olivia Martin

I think the angels are dying.

I think what we took for space
is a cemetery of supernovas
and all that light we see is just
the grief of distant divinity.

I think God has grown ancient
dying on the altar of our disbelief,
eternally weary, watching, how he
thinks sometimes of the covenant
that he must keep but wishes to
break with every lamb led to
slaughter, every time he catches
sight of his son's ever-weeping
wounds.

*We call him gentle, but this is
a mistake. We have laid our
innate urge to destroy at
humanity's feet with every
knocked-over sandcastle and
bomb-blasted country, and yet
we are mirrored in his image.*

I think God weeps.

I think that Judas sits at the
feet of the throne with silver
smudge bruises still ringing
round his neck, the taste of
metal sunk down into his
teeth, blood burning bitter
in the back of his throat.

I think Eve never stopped eating the apple, even when the juice runs rivers down her arms and it reminds her of the chill of phantom chains, think that Lucifer has lost any interest he ever had in saying sorry—

you speak of the lambs, but what of the lions? What did you make me for, if not to be something beautiful in its violence?

I think sometimes God takes me in his teeth, tells me to tear myself open at the belly and rip out all the raw, bloody parts of me and fill myself back up with something good, something holy, and I listen, let Hail Marys fall from the mouth like blood from a split lip, clutch at the rosary so tight that the beads score my palms, fall to my knees in time with all the other closet sinners and hope that it is enough.

They warn us of the flames, and yet we thrust our hands into the fire anyway—they teach us better, and yet we burn.



CRUMBLE, SIZZLE, SAVOR

Marissa Setele

ASHES

Daleen Cowgar

The locals laughed when I stepped into the small Wisconsin restaurant with its jukebox in the corner, old plows hanging on the walls, and asked where I could find the wolves. *Wolves can cover over 1,200 miles of territory per pack. Wolves can smell you two miles away. Wolves want nothing to do with you.*

I crossed my arms and waited. The couples wanting to cozy up to a song eventually got tired of me blocking the jukebox. *There's a wolf den with pups an hour north. Careful, city slicker. With pups, they won't hesitate to take a chunk out of you.* They handed me a map from one of the travel brochures and used the waitress' marker to scribble a star near the corner of the map, at least an hour away from the giddy "You are here" arrow.

Dad loved wolves, though we didn't have any in West Virginia. The last bounty was claimed in 1897 and they were never reintroduced. Dad would stand at the peak of our mountain, looking across our red-roofed barn, our house, our horses and cows grazing in the valley, the gravel driveway leading to the paved road which took you to civilization in a mere twenty minutes. *Wild, Wonderful West Virginia*, he'd

say, but it's not wild without wilderness and can it be wonderful if it's not wild? He wasn't supposed to like wolves, being a livestock man, but the power contained beneath their silver-grey fur and amber eyes enraptured him.

The travel brochure map had no scale on it for me to judge how close I was to the den—that is, if the star marking the den was even correct. When I thought I might be close, I parked my car on the side of the road. Bushes and grass tangled together as a border between the road and the oak and maple forest behind them. I grabbed my backpack and tightened my hiking boots.

Dad called me a few days before he died. *When are you gonna come home instead of running off to all these cities? The farm misses you.* I didn't know how to say that I wasn't. I couldn't remember which song belonged to which bird. I couldn't remember how to pull a breech calf. I couldn't remember the smell of hay. I wasn't like him. I didn't say it in words, but maybe he heard it through my hesitation or the fact that it had been ten years since I stayed longer than the holidays. The next call I got from

home was Mom. They found him on the mountain, hand clutching at a heart that no longer pumped.


A mouse-sized yip stopped me. Thirty feet in front of me, a wolf pup balanced on a log. Slightly behind the pup stood his mother, lips pulled back to display her teeth, the fur on her shoulders standing straight up like needles, a growl rumbling out of her chest and expanding in the space between us. I slowly backed away until her growl subsided. She thrust her nose deep into her pup's fur to verify he was unharmed.

Everything around us seemed to freeze, except for the breeze, which kept the leaves whispering together, the elevator music to this meeting. *You won't find the wolves*, Mom had said when I told her my plan. *Please, just scatter his ashes here. He loved this farm too, you know.* But I had found the wolves, or at least a wolf. He had spent hours of our family vacations alone in the woods looking for wolves and had never seen a wild one. But here I was, face-to-snout.

I slipped his urn out of my backpack. In my head, I had drafted a eulogy to give, but

words seemed inappropriate here. Instead, I silently opened the urn and held it up to the sun before letting his ashes slide out. They caught the breeze and twisted, floated, swirled towards the wolves. She raised her nose to the sky and howled. It was a song worthy of a funeral: beautiful, eerie. The woods around us reverberated with the sound of her unseen pack joining in her song.

Wolves' howls are songs of community, another thing Dad loved about them; they howl to each other for positioning and to share their affection with each other. Their song filled the space around his scattering ashes, called to them, laid them to rest, introduced them to the wild wonderful Dad had always dreamed about but could never find. I fit the empty urn back in my backpack and turned away. Had he still been alive, this might have convinced him I was still his daughter.



DAD LOVED WOLVES, THOUGH
WE DIDN'T HAVE ANY IN
WEST VIRGINIA. —

MAMA

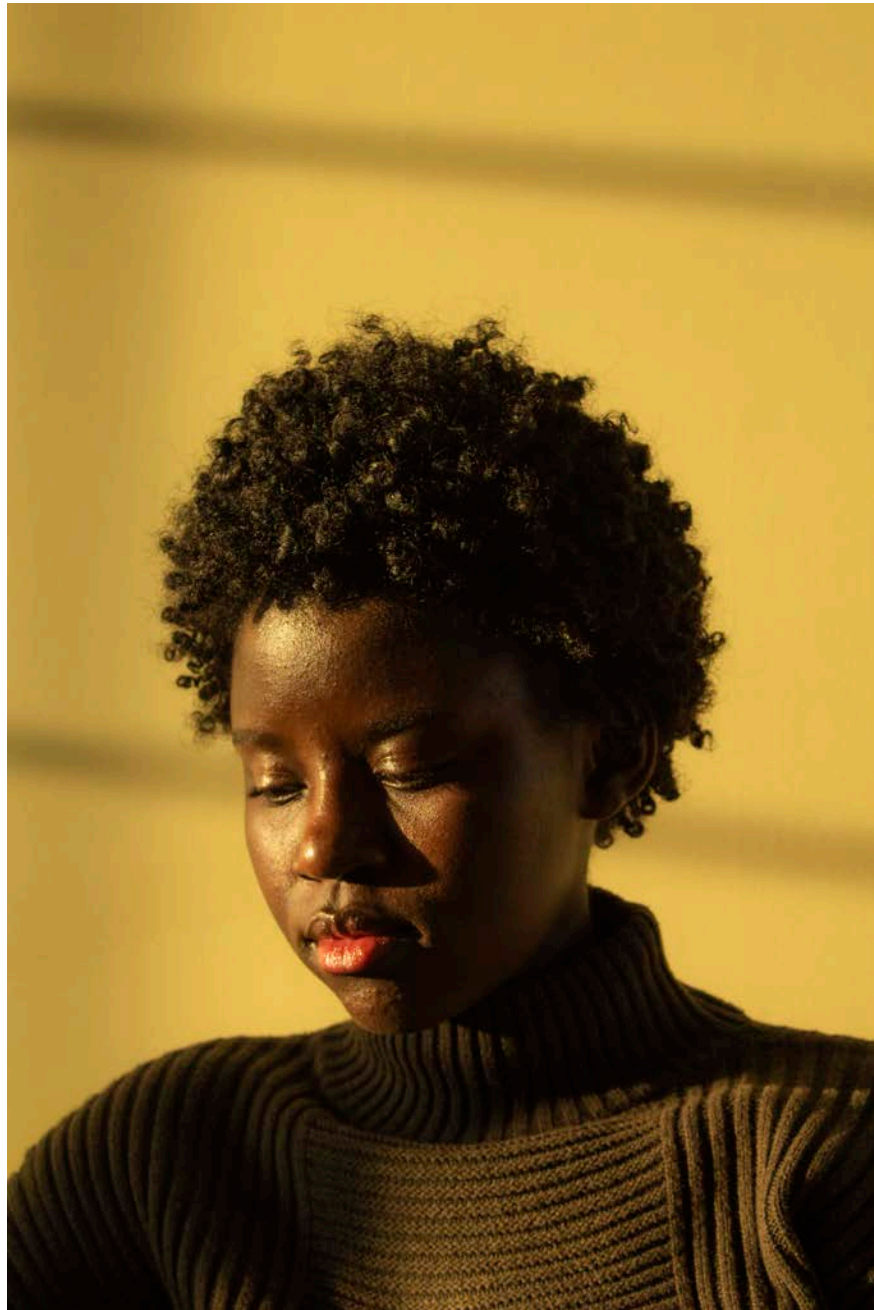
T. Mesnick

Mothers lord birth
over their children:
existence and vegetables become you

I watch ants crawl:
Large burdens and empty hills

I try to imagine weight under my eyes as I write this
But I feel only warmth:
I climb in my mother's branches
weave her leaves in my hair
her bark peels under my hands

I wish to God and gods
I were as small
as a spider



BINTA

Julia Tomlinson

I AM READY FOR MY HAIR TO GROW

Sasha Feldmann

I am ready
for my hair to grow

I am ready
for garden nymphs
to empty their watering cans
and dust their magic over my roots,
so that the budding wheat may explode into the sun

I am ready
for my hair to reach
horizontally like creeper vines,
writhing and twining around each other,
consuming every single living thing in their path

I am ready
for a snake charmer,
equipped and cocksure,
to perform his intoxicating song
and coax my tresses out from their sanctuary

I am ready
for strands to descend
like fibres of a spider's web,
trapping the defenceless creature,
leaving it to starve or to be eaten alive

I am ready
for curls to unfurl and emerge rejuvenated,
determinedly bursting out of the chrysalis,
until flight of freedom is the only option remaining

I am ready for the pieces
to be pulled away
from my scalp like vultures
plucking the eyes out of a corpse

Now.

BUTTERSCOTCH

Brooke Fugate

after Ellen Bass' "Indigo"

As I scroll through Instagram, I pause on a woman emerging from the ocean, her back arched, lips reaching up to kiss the sky, the ends of her blonde mane grazing the waves. She is my age, a jungle of glowing butterscotch skin and satisfied smiles. Naked, she's embraced by her own hands and the saltwater's sloppy kisses. The island is her home. She is intimate with her friends—they whisper, squeeze, hold hands and each other, roll around in the sand that glitters on their thighs and peppers their hair. *I'm so jealous.*

As often I am. It's kind of an obsession.

I don't want to move to Hawaii with two hundred in savings and hope for the best. I don't want to live in a van. I don't want to hike the Appalachian Trail and join the Peace Corps. I want to be a person who commits every day to living. Whose heart wakes up in the morning aching with emotion, treats her body like a work of art, cares enough to breathe deeply, drink celery juice, and stretch her limbs daily. I want to wear fishnets and kiss my friends. I imagine this tender woman cooking whole foods for her loved ones, who gather in a circle on the wooden floor, lit by candle as the sun sets, basking in the softness and warmth. I can't stop wishing I had dreams to chase. I'm on the wrong freeway, but I'm not sure where to exit. *Oh, I know it's a miracle to have a life. Any life at all.*

I miss when I was younger, when I'd see a balloon floating up toward the moon and thank god I was born human. *It took my parents eight years to conceive me. And here I am, alive.* I kiss and wear vibrant eyeshadow and write every day. Nobody close to me has died yet. I call my mom when I don't know how to mail a package and eat dinner on the balcony with my friends. I'm honest when I know what I want and I lay my head on my partner's bare belly. I observe my cousin's babies grow up and talk to my dad about classic rock. And when I hold my best friend in the field of the shared farm, watching the saturated sky perform its dance, we don't have to say a thing.



SWEET SURRENDER

Sarah Sparks

FELT

Ajdin Kulic

i'm gonna get clean. and then everyone will pull me apart in wispy pieces and there won't be anything to worry about. i'll be ready to get wet and stick to myself as i dry and turn into something else. and then you can step on me sleep on me wear me out and take me anywhere you want to go, functional and free.

in the mean time i'll survive and try to enjoy the winter. i'll wear red in the hopes of melting the snow. and in my red jacket a little rock to turn over and over again saying i love you i love you i love you in rhythm. i wish i had the time space and energy for more than one instrument.

i know i can go crazy, cause cold runs through everything, it will keep me a steady and silent thing until i meet you in spring.

when i get back home from the winter, i'll be ready, and i'll fold my jacket up into a red square, so you'll see exactly how to lay me out. wash me with your soap bar and your bathwater, like your underwear in the shower. let me dry in the clean bathroom. and carry me with you into a new season, functional and free.



IMMERSED

Katie Herring

GROWING PAINS

Natasha Gaj

So I speed a lot just as a principle but this time I had an appointment in five minutes and it takes ten to get there.

So I carefully but quickly careened into a parking spot. I get out and start jogging and stop and jog back to the car and fix my parking job and then get out and start jogging again.

I check in and give a polite smile. The secretary gives a polite smile back. She seems dead in the eyes so I get nervous and fumble with the clipboard and then I sit down and start looking through the forms. And I think to myself:

Oh my god, so many words.

I give the clipboard back and she politely smiles and it makes me feel crummy again and I sit back down. I'm running my thumb across my other thumb and then I'm grinding it and I imagine whittling a little stick into a little stake.

I sit in the same seat I've sat in every time. It's weird not having my mom and my brothers here. But I'm 18 now so I schedule my own appointments, goddammit. And my mom told me to,

If I stare at the clock, it takes twice as long to tick. Like I have a fucking superpower. I look out the window to my left and see my car. I click the lock button a few times and its lights blink in agreement. I look to my right and see the magazine stand. I thought I would finally understand the magazine stands when I was an adult, but I guess it's not time yet.

They don't have the Coffee News anymore. The stand where they used to put them is just sitting there. It was this one page, two-sided local coffee-colored newspaper. Me and my siblings would read the outdated horoscopes and find the mascot hidden in the ads on the sides. I always imagined a group of like five old guys sitting around a table writing it, so I think I was waiting for this to happen, subconsciously. Turning and seeing the empty stand feels like a familiar nightmare that has become inevitable. The kind that's tame but ominous.

I used to read Coffee News when I waited, so instead I look at the clock for a second. And then I look at my phone. *Fuck, there's a clock there too.*

I breathe. There used to be so much dread in this room. I would sit for two hours

waiting for my brothers to go first. Then they'd call my name. I remember a lot of scraping and crying and "I'm sorry sweetie" and "it's ok sweetie." The employees were all either nice or excessively nice. Asked a lot of questions and talked and talked.

My mom would always be with me the whole time. Then she would go up to the desk to schedule my next appointment and I got to pick a toy from a cardboard box. I collected bouncy balls then, so I scored big most of the time.

We would leave and she'd offer a treat for my troubles and we'd go to an ice cream place sometimes.

"Shannon?"

I politely smile and walk back.

"How are you?"

"I'm good, how are you?"

There was still scraping but no crying. No talking. The dentist comes in.

"How are you?"

"I'm good, how are you?"

She takes a mirror and swabs it across my gums. She says I'm good to go. I check out

and schedule with the secretary. The toy box still sits in the corner.

The secretary's smile doesn't reach her eyes again and I don't blame her for that but it's still a small slap in the face. She says, "have a good day." And I walk out the door.

Can I just say: there is nothing more jarring in this fucking world than moments like these.

I feel chewed up and spit out. In the span of 30 minutes.

I go back to my car, lock the doors and just cry. But I'm a crybaby so it's more like muscle memory than a whole dramatic thing. I hug myself and rock back and forth a little. I wish I was five.

I think about being five all the time. People looking down at me and smiling real smiles. Crying and being taken care of, being answered. Being carried everywhere all the time. Just a lot of warmth.

So I still hate the dentist but so does everyone else, I'm pretty sure. I've got shit to do, so I go home.

I'll get ice cream at McDonald's later.

HAY MOWING

Eva Monhaut

I grew up in the unsheltered heat of alfalfa fields sitting next to my father on the dirt-encrusted tractor seat, my hair in a grotesque ponytail—slanted, matted with summer sweat against my expanding skull.

I spent my days learning the art of introspection, watching the patient hands of my father guide the tractor back and forth, sweeping across the vast fields, downing the hay into neat rows. Sometimes, he would put the radio on low—listen to the news as we watched the day progress. Other times, he would stop mid-day at the sound of a car inching across the rows towards us; sometimes my mother,

later, my grandma, bringing lunch or coming to take me home.

I think it was there, in that necessary and organized death, in those fields, that I first understood who I was—and later, who I had become. Some nights, when I can't find the solace of sleep,

afraid

with only my bones to shield me from the violence of the world—nothing pulls me from that reverie save the memory

of my dull blue eyes searching the felled landscape of a freshly mown field and my father's weary voice fading into the evening sky:

It's time to go home now, sweetie—we are going home as he turned the tractor slowly towards the road.



UNTITLED 3

Reilly Schrock

CARRIE ON PLEASANT STREET

Cassandra Felten

Carrie lived alone on Pleasant Street in a house that was modestly sized but too big for her. At 24 years old, she was single—and somewhat of a loner. She did not leave her house often, only to go to the grocery store or the pet store (for her pet bird, a blue budgie named Rudolph). She worked from home as a support specialist for an online clothing company. Carrie wasn't a loner because she didn't like people. She was a loner because she didn't like leaving the familiarity and safety of her own home (and the bird).

The street on which Carrie lived was, indeed, pleasant. In the house directly across the street lived a widowed father. Carrie knew nothing about the circumstances of his wife's death. His name was Greg, and he took care of two daughters: Penelope, a quiet, polite fourteen-year-old; and Holly, who was eight and less quiet and less polite.

This story may or may not be about Carrie.

The first time that Carrie met Greg and his girls was about a month after she'd moved

in. He knocked on Carrie's wide, olive green front door at 5:30 pm on a Saturday. Carrie had just started brewing tea upon their arrival, and she was content to make more for them; she was even a bit excited to have a face-to-face conversation inside her home, though she couldn't help but wonder why these guests had come. She would never bother to ask.

Greg was a tall, stocky man. He wore a plain grey T-shirt and khaki jeans; even this simple outfit, though, made Carrie feel quite underdressed in her matching top and bottom cat pajamas. Greg seemed to force a slightly more jovial expression while at Carrie's that first time, but he usually looked intimidating after that, Carrie thought. Always so angry about something—or maybe just exhausted. His jaw was perpetually clenched, his eyelids droopy, his shoulders slightly slumped (how big would he look if he actually stood up straight?), his hands usually making fists at his side. His voice was low and gruff and often difficult to hear correctly. Carrie, during their conversation in her home, kept thinking she was hearing him say something

other than what he was probably saying (example: When Carrie heard, “Penelope is a motherfucker,” what he was probably saying was, “Penelope is a middle blocker,” since they were talking about Penelope’s volleyball team at the time).

Penelope, the older daughter, definitely looked athletic; she was quite tall for a girl of her age and slender but clearly strong. She had long dirty blonde hair that was pulled back into a tight ponytail, and she wore black volleyball shorts and an oversized red T-shirt that said “Go Nighthawks!” in bold black letters on the front. Penelope also sported large bruises on her knees, shins, and arms that were attributed to playing volleyball. Her resting face looked much like her father’s, only probably more tired than angry. She would always answer when spoken to, though, and had mastered the polite smile. She talked the least of the three.

The younger girl, Holly, was short for her age. She was also much more energetic than her companions. She bounced up and down on the couch when she talked, and her loose blonde hair bounced around with her. Carrie was slightly worried about Holly’s modesty when she bounced like that, since the girl was wearing a short pink dress. She had her own injuries on her legs—bruises and scratches—but everyone could see that Holly was an eight-year-old with a lot of energy and

(judging by the stains on the hem of her dress) she enjoyed getting messy and being reckless.

In the three hours that the three neighbors stayed over, here are some things that Carrie learned: Holly, when she was four, had become very jealous of her big sister for having a longer name than her, so Penelope had adopted the nickname Penny to make her feel better (which their father still refused to use). Penelope—well, Penny—didn’t know what she wanted to go to college for, but she knew that she wanted to be playing volleyball there. Greg was 38, had been single for four years, and was a manager at a factory nearby which apparently paid very well. And, overall, they seemed like a normal single-dad-two-daughters family that Carrie wouldn’t mind spending more time with if these random visits happened again.

Here’s what actually ended up happening: Carrie spent more time with Holly in the following year of her Pleasant Street residency. Her older sister came over with her every once in a while, but it seemed like it was more out of obligation to watch her little sister than any desire to spend time with Carrie. Their father only stopped by to pick up Holly if she stayed over too late. The man who had seemed friendly at their first meeting soon became the distant,

angry-looking man that Carrie would come to know. He would politely knock on her door a few times, Carrie would answer with Holly by her side, and Greg would say, “Hi. Evening. Thanks,” then leave with his daughter.

Holly was a confident, unapologetic kid who took what she wanted; she wanted to spend time with “Carrie Berry,” so she showed up at Carrie’s house whenever she felt like it. Carrie didn’t mind the company because it came with interesting conversations about what Holly was learning at school or who was bullying whom this week; she was so eager to talk about herself that Carrie never had to actually ask any questions. And because she never had to go to *Holly’s* house.

On a day that Carrie had received a particularly nasty call from a particularly unhappy customer, Holly showed up after school. She let herself in, something that Carrie had asked her not to do on many occasions but that the little girl would never stop doing.

Holly skipped toward the dining room table, where Carrie sat with her laptop, checking emails. On the way, the girl passed Rudolph’s expansive cage. “Hi, bird! Say, ‘Hello!’” Rudolph answered with a “Hello.” Then, “Hey, Carrie Berry!” Holly shouted to her, which was also repeated by the bird.

“Hi, Holly,” Carrie said, trying to sound as enthusiastic as possible despite the dreary day. As Holly came closer, Carrie noticed a new bruise over her left cheekbone. She gently touched it with the tips of her fingers. “Hey, what happened there?”

Holly did not flinch. She laughed. “Oh, I was running in the rain... My dad told me not to.” She paused. “Hey, what do you wanna do? I’m bored!”

Carrie stayed silent as she suddenly realized that she hadn’t seen Penny in a while. Usually, Carrie was awake and sitting in her living room by the time the school buses arrived. Penny had been absent for almost a week now. “Holly, where’s your sister?”

“She’s staying with Grammy and Grandpa. She’s really sick. Hey, can we listen to ‘Deck the Halls?’” It was April—hardly time for Christmas music, but Holly loved that song because of the line “deck the halls with boughs of holly.” She and Carrie sang along to the song all year.

Carrie opened up YouTube on her computer to play “Deck the Halls,” and she danced and swayed to it around the dining room table with Holly. By the end of it, Rudolph had begun to sing along with the chorus, like he always did. And, like she always did, when the song ended, Carrie lifted Holly up by her armpits and swung her around in

a tight circle, careful not to bump her into the table or chairs and give her even more bruises. Holly squealed with delight and wiggled herself around, making Carrie's task harder.

As Holly's feet touched the ground, Carrie thought she heard someone scream from close by. Holly swiveled around to rush to the door while saying quickly over her shoulder, "Sorry, Carrie Berry, I have to go home, I forgot my dad wants me, bye!" Rudolph answered with a "Bye! Bye!" Carrie did not answer her at all. Instead, she imagined Holly turning back to her and letting out that scream she'd just heard. Later that evening, Carrie would learn from Tom next door that the scream had been his wife when she accidentally cut her finger. She was fine now, by the way. Carrie hadn't asked.

Carrie woke up in the middle of the night a few nights later to more screaming. She couldn't move at first, paralyzed as the image of her dreams carried itself into her waking brain: Holly, standing in the darkness beside Carrie's bed and screeching at her, only now Penny joined her, too. Snot ran from one of Penny's nostrils.

Finally, she realized that the screams were real and coming from Rudolph. She threw off her covers and strode to Rudolph's

cage on the other side of her room, where she moved him at night so that neither of them would feel alone. She opened the cage door, and Rudolph stopped screeching and flew from his perch to Carrie's open palm. "What's wrong, buddy?"

Rudolph answered with a few quieter, contented chirps, then, "Deck the halls! Boughs of holly!"

Carrie sighed. "Yes, Rudy. Boughs of holly. Can we please go to sleep?" She set the bird back on a perch in his cage and shut the door.

Carrie woke up the next morning curled up on the floor in front of Rudolph's cage. The disorientation she felt when she opened her eyes startled her; the first thing she saw was a bunched-up grey blanket stuffed under her bed, and she thought the shape it made looked just like a human could be laying underneath it. This didn't startle her as much as the fact that she had passed out on the goddamn floor all night. Still, she reached to grab the blanket; there was nothing underneath it.

Carrie made herself a cup of black coffee and drank it while standing at her side living room window.

A week went by. Not only had Carrie still

not seen Penny around, but Holly had also not come by her house again. She would have just gone over to Greg's, but Carrie did not want to leave her house, so she told herself that the girls were both fine. Because why shouldn't they be? They had their own lives, anyway. Just like she did.

Carrie suddenly started coughing. She was reminded of Holly's comment about her sister being sick. Carrie went to her bathroom to find cough syrup, and she poured some into her coffee. Then, when she'd finished that cup, she made herself another cup of coffee and drowned that in more cough syrup. She repeated these steps until the whole bottle of cough syrup had disappeared.

Carrie was in her house, but she did not feel safe.

Rudolph was chasing her. He always seemed to be right over her shoulder, no matter how fast she ran away. Why was he chasing her? What had she done wrong?

The house was lit by the sun coming through the windows, but there were also huge shadows. Carrie was less afraid of these shadows than she was of Rudolph. She threw herself into the small space between the

couch and the end table. Rudolph screamed, even though Carrie thought that she should be the one screaming now. *Good call, though, Carrie. He isn't chasing you anymore.*

He was still staring at her from atop the coffee table. Carrie hugged her knees as close to her chest as she could. Penny opened her front door and walked in. She looked sickly—not a mere cold, but an on-death's-door kind of sick; she was pale and thin and tired-looking. Carrie felt sorry, though she didn't know why. Still, she apologized: *I'm sorry, I don't really believe in ghosts. Please believe me, I don't.* Carrie thought about telling Penny to go back to school. Also, to please close the door. Then, Rudolph's beak began to move. "Get out of your house, Carrie, you fuck-up."

Carrie wanted to scream at him, at both of them, but she was so tired. Despite her fatigue, she crawled out of her shadow and—*wait, why are you doing that?*

She stood up, slowly forcing her feet toward the front door; it was closed, and Penny was not there anymore. *Carrie, stop. It isn't time yet.*

She reached for the doorknob. The touch of her skin against the cold metal handle almost woke her up to reality, but not quite. It isn't enough; *Carrie, don't.*

She wasn't listening to anything but the screeches of her bird. And Greg. Why is *he* screaming? She imagined his dead wife must be screaming, too.

Carrie turned the knob, opened the door and took a step outside. *Carrie, come on, you aren't even wearing shoes.*

No one knew how much time had passed because Carrie was the only one in her house. It was dark outside when she woke up on the floor (again), only this time, she was in front of her front door. And, this time, she woke up not to Rudolph's screams but to a banging on the door.

Carrie jumped up and tried the doorknob; she had locked it at some point. She unlocked the door to a frightened Holly. It was raining out, so her yellow cat T-shirt, pink leggings, pink boots and her long, wild head of hair were all soaked.

Holly ran inside as soon as Carrie opened the door. Holly began to wipe at her face, and Carrie realized that she had been crying. It was hard to tell with the rain. "Holly? What are you doing here? What's wrong?" Her throat felt strange and hollow, like she wasn't really talking, but the words were floating up from her stomach through her esophagus and out of her mouth pre-formed.

Holly did not say anything, just sniffled. Carrie got down on her knees, and Holly threw her arms around her shoulders and sobbed some more. Carrie couldn't tell if she was hearing actual words from the girl, but it sounded sometimes like she was saying "Why?" or "Help" or something like that. Sometimes, it sounded more like "Penny."

Carrie moved Holly's hair to one side. She stared at a fresh, sizable bruise on the back of Holly's neck and felt like an idiot. *Hey, you should.* She debated whether she should call Child Protective Services. She didn't know the protocol for child abuse: do you have to have some sort of substantial proof before they could do anything? What could Carrie do besides hold the sobbing child and call herself an idiot? Rudolph was chattering in the background. She couldn't hear him clearly over Holly's cries, but she assumed he was calling her an idiot, too. "Carrie, you no-good, goddamn idiot! Go outside and do something!" Or something.

Carrie needed to just be there for Holly; it was the least she could do. But man, was she tired. She looked around her dark living room, and the places where there had been shadow earlier in the day now had light instead, but the rest of the room was shadow.

It was also strange that Rudolph was now flying around the room and singing the

whole "Deck the Halls" song. *I thought he was in his cage.* Well, he's not, is he? Also, the tears Holly was shedding now felt thicker and smelled of iron. *Wait, is she bleeding? Do not look. Also, am I dreaming?*

Carrie felt like her head was stuck in a vacuum until a loud banging on the door snapped her out of it. The bangs were followed by a voice: "Carrie! Open up! Holly! I know you're in there! You need to come home right now!" *Oh, it's Greg. Carrie, I hope you don't open that door for him. Remember that you've already done nothing for this girl.*

She did remember, and she did not open the door. This did not stop Greg from opening it himself. He burst inside, saw Holly on the floor with Carrie, and grabbed his daughter by her arm. His expression was just like it always was, but his voice sounded angrier. "Holly, you can't run away from home like that. It's dark and raining. Come on, girl." He did not look at Carrie. Carrie found it hard to look at him, too.

When Carrie came to (on the floor again; *what do you even have a bed for?*), it was the middle of the day. What day? Carrie checked her phone and saw 26 voicemails. She checked them all; some were from disgruntled clients of the clothing store,

and more recent ones were from her boss threatening to fire her if she did not pick up her damn calls. The last voicemail was from her dad.

Carrie didn't want to respond to anyone. She was tired of conversations. She could barely remember the events from the past day, but she couldn't stop thinking about Holly and Penny and how guilty she felt. Rudolph was quiet in his cage for the next few hours, but as Carrie sat hunched on her couch, every time she glanced at him, she could've sworn he was giving her a judging stare.

In the distance, she heard police sirens. They got louder, and Rudolph began to imitate them, so Carrie covered her ears with her hands.

The two police cars stopped in front of Greg's house. Carrie didn't remember calling CPS or anything.

She forced herself to get off of the couch and go to the front door. She took a deep breath and pushed the door open on the exhale. She wore nothing but an oversized black T-shirt and bags under her eyes and didn't care as she walked across Pleasant Street.

A police officer, who was young and seemed new, uncomfortably filled Carrie in on what had happened. The body of a young teenage girl was found stabbed to death in the chest


and stomach in the city's landfill. It or she (what do you call a corpse?) was a couple of weeks old. Her name was Penelope Price. Demanding as Carrie was, the officer would not let Carrie get closer to the house.

The other neighbors were out staring at the spectacle of the police lights. Outside of the comfort of their own homes, everyone watched together as Greg was taken from his house to one of the police cars in handcuffs by another officer. Greg met Carrie's eyes as he sauntered awkwardly toward the car, and he looked how Carrie imagined she would if she were to look in a mirror. He was bedraggled with bags under his eyes, and he was wearing the same grey T-shirt he'd worn when they first met. Carrie didn't know when Holly might come out of that house, too. She didn't want the poor girl to have to see Carrie Berry this way, so she thanked the officer and went back into her safe house.

What are you thinking now, Carrie?

That maybe there was nothing I could have done.

Maybe you're right, Carrie. Maybe you're right.



CARRIE DIDN'T WANT
TO RESPOND TO
ANYONE. SHE WAS
TIRED OF
CONVERSATIONS.



THE PLACES I HAVE BEEN

Marissa Setele



Paris, left, London, above

QUE PUDIERA OÍRLO

Korynne Kalen

I talk too much. Si debemos caminar preguntando,
¿por qué hablo tanto?
No sé escuchar, verdaderamente. Trabajo en caminar
a la vez que analizar.
Hay que ponerse a oír.
Put on your listening ears, your
inquiring eyes, Korynne.
El mundo quiere ser escuchado.
Te espera.
Si tan solo había alguien que pudiera oírlo.

who could hear it

*I talk too much. If we should walk asking questions,
why do I talk so much?
I don't know how to listen, really. I work on walking
at the same time that I analyze.
One must begin to hear.
Put on your listening ears, your
inquiring eyes, Korynne.
The world wants to be listened to.
It awaits you.
If only there were someone who could hear it.*



SOLACE

Abigail Mendoza

HOME GROWN

Ajdin Kulic

i had cravings for raw plants
in their full anatomy.

i see me
from behind
on all fours
my bodily autonomy
fully flowered

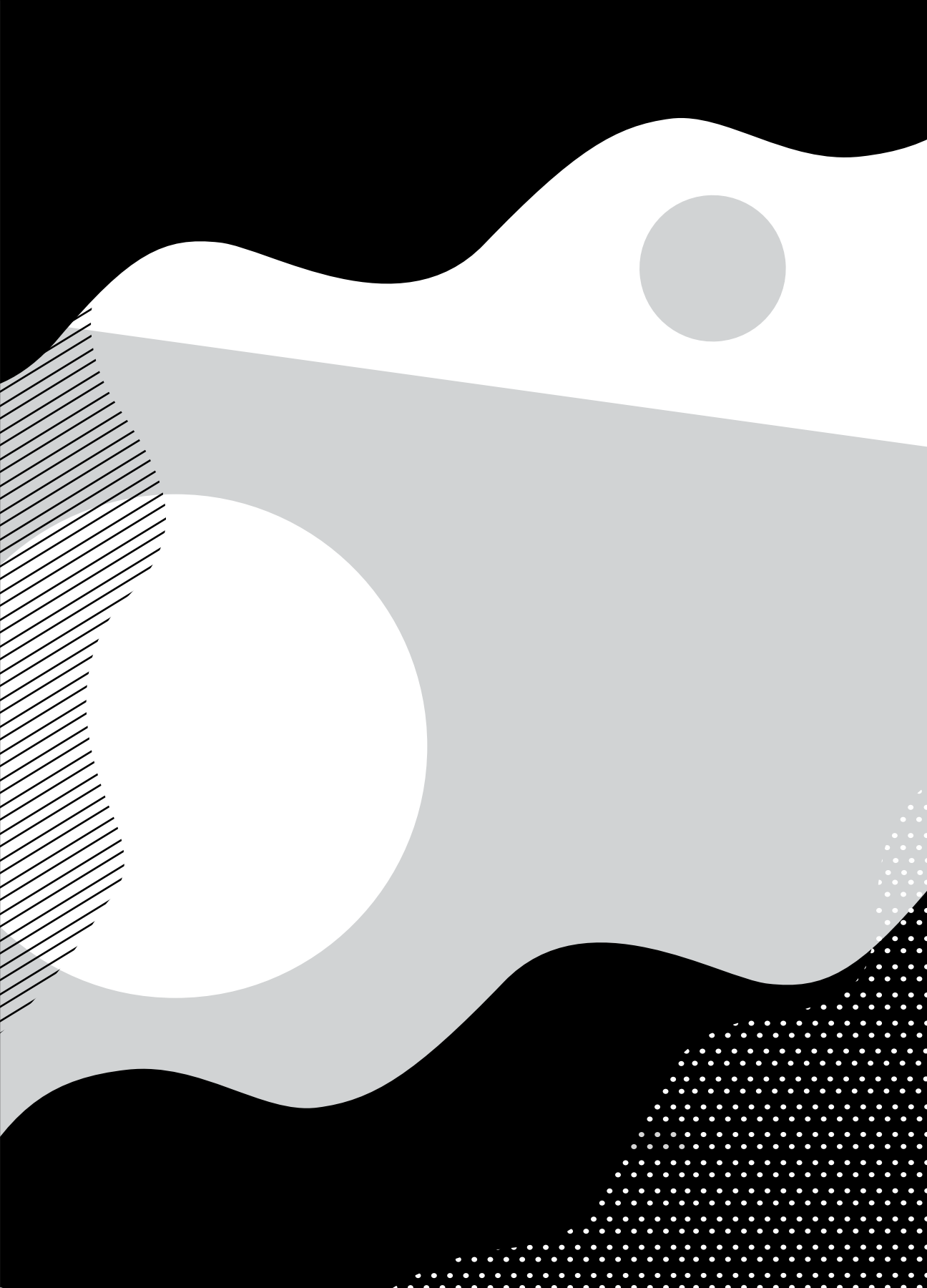
 i am a butterfly
 from below.

i see me
mirror
on my back.
in my fullness
my two spirits
balance.

i see me and me
walk in a circle
and eat myself
after i
eat the shaky ground
 under me.

to land on peace
nectar and
sugar water.
i tell me

if you was weak
i'd lick you up
groom you all better.
curled tongue
through the
strong hairs.
i tell me
it's time to be
a different bitch.
time to be
from somewhere else,
between something else,
in love
 with all my parts.
containing my history
my metamorphosis
first i hunger
 then i strength.



COCHLEAR IMPLANT

T. Mesnick

Masks peer into ear
canal; my grandma,
fearing proximity to the brain,
threatens to leave when
nurses with pursed lips
report that surgeons will be longer;
“they don’t know what they’re doing”

Cochlea sprouts a rootless plant
Mother defines *synechia*, *otosclerosis*,
strange words that blossom
on the living room couch;
mother grandma & papa
pore over the report; I think
my grandpa will be able to hear me
when I say stuff like:
hi papa
how are you
I love you, goodbye

& I wonder if I’ll sound
like a robot



STRIFE

Avery Latta

PREMONITION

Angelina DiFranco

Before her death, I dream of my grandmother in the desert.

Heather dust settles onto my eyelashes, sinks through my lids, and masks my vision with an arenaceous lens. A deep inhale, and my chest expands for the swirling sand to pour down my throat. It churns in my lungs, and my cramped frame collapses beneath the weight. I crumble onto the desert floor.

I no longer exist. I am sand, a witness within the flock. I am for the wind's manipulation. Strangled lament, raspy expiration, famished for solace is the broken figure.

She faces away. Pale wrinkles suffocate the bones that threaten to protrude from her hand. Red nails claw at the sand. *I can't breathe.* I swirl around her, desperate to fill her with sand, urge her to take flight. I beg her lungs to expand and welcome the dust.

Dust for life. Dust for heart. We are powerless against the storm. I am back with my flock. They lift me from the ground beside her. I don't want to leave. I scream. I scream until my voice croaks with exhaustion. She shrinks as I blow away.

SCHIZOPHRENIA

Mersadie Wilson

Squeezing my eyes shut to rid of the
serpents writhing on my skin—
my own screams replace the whispers,
reminding me of my sins.

smoke rises from my lungs,
filling my mouth like the cavity of dragons—
propelling fire to be set against my mothers'
silk curtains

my own tears
fail to extinguish the flames—
flames that grow in exponents, chasing
until I have been engulfed

a trek that pauses only for me to gaze,
my silk hands covered in crisped, black stains—
exposing a serpent's head
revealing his sharpened fangs.

tears of acid leave canyons in my cheeks,
blood retreating from a petrifying heart—
no matter how far I run, there will always be
a body paid to murder its own soul



SHATTER

JT Raber



FRAGILE ICE

Shannon Dalton

UNDERTOW

M.P. Armstrong

the sink has an extra spout.
 he is shorter and stouter
 than the elegant silver neck.
 he always simmers at a
 rolling boil, waiting to fall
 into a teacup or a bowl
 of instant ramen.
 he sometimes gurgles to life
 before i ask, spurts out
 blasts of hot water, a poltergeist
 tucked into the corner
 of the kitchen, and i am jealous
 of him; what a problem
 to have, jealous of the instaboil,
 less free than an appliance
 and less happy than an unbreathing
 slice of still life. i am my
 own kind of inanimate, a sheet of ice,
 frosted bubbles and a parade
 of feet and fissures. i would love to crack,
 want to stream out, but the final
 snap never comes. i am stuck in perpetual
 winter, sitting on the linoleum
 listening to the pipes murmur in the hopes
 that there might be a burst on
 some cold morning and all the answers
 might gush out and i can
 cannonball into them before it's fixed.



SPATIAL RELATIONS

Marissa Setele

I OUGHT TO BE THY ADAM

Lindsay Watkins

I woke up one morning to find Frankenstein in my room. Victor Frankenstein, the scientist—not the creature, who many people call Frankenstein, and who many other people correct the former about, telling them that it is actually “Frankenstein’s monster.” His *monster*. Victor was sitting in the chair at my desk, bored, glancing between each photo taped to the wall. He looked over to find me awake.

“You’re late for class,” he told me.

I looked at my clock. He was right.

“Fuck off,” I told him.

Here’s the thing: I am a fan of classic literature. I am a fan of Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein*. I am not a fan of the titular character of that work. I’ve always identified more with the creature that many call “monster.” I can’t help but feel empathy: a being whose parent rejected him, who people attacked on sight, who tried to rise above the situation of his birth and obtain a better life and wasn’t granted that. The root of his pain came from the man before me, who created a child and casted it out the instant it showed itself to be different than intended. The true monster of the story.

Here’s the other thing: if I was already late, then there was no point in getting up and going there now.

“You can still make it to the end of the lesson, if you leave now.”

“What’s the point in that?”

A pause.

“You know, when I was at university—”

“You were a dropout, Victor.”

Another pause, about eight months pregnant.

“I’m sensitive about that, Aubrey.”

I didn’t care much about that, so I rolled over and went back to bed. When you are in an immediate post-sleep haze, you do not pay much mind to the appearance of classical fictional characters appearing in your bedroom unannounced.

After I woke up again, about an hour and a half later, I did mind a little bit more. Sitting up in bed, I thought that the encounter was probably a dream—until I spotted Victor walking past the open doorway, moving from my bathroom into the main living space.

“Why is your dormitory so small?” he asked. He could sense, I suppose, that I had reawakened.

“Why are you here?”

He appeared again in my door. “I didn’t ask to be. You have a very active imagination.”

“I didn’t ask for you to be here either. I kind of hate you, actually.”

“Obviously.”

I glared for a moment before getting up, limping over, shooing him back a bit, and shutting the door.

“No goodbyes?”

“I need to get dressed.” My first class was in the wind, but I could at least attend my other two: History of the Civil Rights Movement and Elementary Statistics, my favorite and least favorite classes of this semester. One towards my history degree, the other a core class. I chose an outfit that approximated just about everything that I’ve been wearing for the past month: sweats baggy enough to fit over my casts and warm enough that the autumn winds wouldn’t freeze my ass off. I was not looking forward to winter.

I grabbed my crutch and went to brush my teeth.

“Took you long enough. I thought you fell back asleep.”

“Are you always this much of a bitch?”

“I do come from your mind, remember.”

“No one else can see you, then?”

“Obviously not.”

As I packed my bookbag and headed out the door, Victor followed.

“Coming with?” I asked.

“It would be insufferable to sit in there with nothing to do for any longer.”

“Well, don’t expect me to hold a conversation. I don’t want to look insane.”

“Might you be insane?”

“Maybe.”

“Stress does that. Drives you mad. The stress you’ve just undergone would—”

“You’re not a doctor, Victor. You don’t get to analyze me like that.”

“Ouch.”

Classes went by in a breeze. Victor was interested in the history class; he was learning with me, I suppose. In statistics, he just seemed frustrated—with me, though, not with the material.

“Do you only sleep?” he asked, irate, after I had nodded off for a third time.

I wrote, *She’s only covering stuff we read in the book for homework. I already know it in my notebook, and turned it his way to read.*

“It’s still disrespectful.”

I’m not doing it on purpose. And at least I’m in the back, not like the dude snoring up front.

“Still, though.”

Now you’re distracting me. And that shut him up.

“Why did you reject the creature?” I asked that evening. “He was basically your son.”

“He frightened me,” was his reply.

That first day was a Thursday. I have no Friday classes, so my weekend began. Which meant a physical therapy appointment, followed by a psychological therapy

appointment.

“That didn’t seem too bad,” was Victor’s response to physical therapy.

“You weren’t there for the beginning,” I replied.

During the other appointment, my therapist asked, “You know that what your mother did to you wasn’t your fault, right?”

“Yes,” I said. I had reached the point where this statement was honest, if painful.

Victor was silent after this appointment.

“Was I truly that bad,” Victor asked that night, “to deserve your constant contempt?”

I put down the plate I was currently scrubbing with one hand into the sink.

“Were you that bad?” I whispered, then crescendoed, “Were you that bad? You created a child, a being that was innocent, who saw you as a father, and abandoned him to fend for himself. You forced him to live a horrible, lonely life. And when he strived for second chances, and peace, and love... you denied him even that. Don’t you understand that? Don’t you know how much rejection stings?” I was yelling now. “You don’t! Because you lived in luxury, with a family! In narcissism! You saw only yourself and your ways as correct, and swept away anything that was different—even the child that came from you! You’re just like her!”

He was silent. Then, he said, “I understand why I’m here now.”

“Well, isn’t that swell?” I burst into tears and sat down hard on the floor. Victor sat by me.

“Tell me how.”

“What?”

“Tell me how I’m like her.”

“Why?” The shock and frustration briefly stopped my tears.


“Catharsis. Get the pus out of the emotional wound.”

“You rejected your child, she rejected me. You couldn’t stand that the creature wasn’t beautiful. She couldn’t stand that what she thought was a son was actually a daughter. She beat the shit out of me when she found out, and I’m sure you would have torn the creature apart if you thought you could win that fight. You would have destroyed him, like she tried to destroy me. We both thought we could trust our parents. We were both wrong.”

“And what will you do now? Now that it’s over?”

“Survive, I guess. The creature tried to survive, make a good life for himself. He got close to that. Maybe I’ll actually get there.”

Victor nodded, stood, and walked out the door. It was the last time I saw him, and for once, I was okay with the abandonment.



IT WAS THE LAST TIME I
SAW HIM, AND FOR ONCE,
I WAS OKAY WITH THE
ABANDONMENT. —

THE INFANT

Eva Monhaut

The infant crept forth from its mother
decay glistening from underneath its pearly fingernails,
its eyes waxing, bulging against the transparency of its purpled skin,
hands unfurling and recurving, tugging at the rope transfixed to its belly.

On the other side of the world
the father watched his best friend step on a landmine, blown to
pieces, bones dusting the desert sky, a soft haze of
white against the burnt orange of the sand.

While the infant crawled on all fours,
digging its way into being. Its mouth lined with a thin film of prehistoric matter—
it lurched—it cried—its lungs spurting, expanding and failing.

The father, cradling a picture to his chest,
looks out at the potholed landscape, reflecting:
Mastering the art of breathing
is such a delicate matter.



POLLUTED

Sarah Hagglund

THE SEASON OF GRATITUDE

Shaheeda Haque

There is an alternate reality
 in which my grandfather did not sip his tea
 out of fine china.
 In this dream, I am the same soul in the same South Asia,
 same sunny eyes, same chapped hands;
 Though now they are bound by a man
 three decades older than I.
 While my pillow is wet
 From missing my mother,
 my provider wields a scythe
 That dyes my thighs red
 another night, and somehow this
 familiar sight sends
 me to my knees still,
 it harvests my screams until
 the light from once bright
 eyes is finally smothered.

But in reality,
 in the same South Asia
 where the prophecy of poverty babbles on,
 bundled in black within
 my counterpart's ageless arms,
 my grandfather was born
 into fine slacks and wealthy words
 that helped him erect the respect of others,
 and his death sent my father
 biking across the sea at dusk,
 leagues away from mourning,
 faraway from a dying country,
 and my savior America
 raped the rest of the world
 so that I could wake up at noon
 and choose
 to skip class.

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MERSADIE WILSON

Indiana University Kokomo

Mersadie Wilson is a biology major at Indiana University Kokomo. She will be furthering her education in medical school in the hopes of pursuing a career as a neurologist. She spends her little spare time tutoring English, writing poetry, and camping.

REILLY SCHROCK

Kent State University

Reilly Schrock is a senior digital media production student at Kent State University. He has a minor in Italian Studies and has been an honors student since his enrollment. He has been working as a photographer and videographer for three years. He has also directed and worked in various roles in numerous short films here on Kent State's campus.

MARISSA SETELE

Kent State University

Marissa Setele is an honors student studying art education at Kent State University.

SARAH SPARKS

Kent State University

Growing up, art was always a major part of Sarah's life, and now as a sophomore interior design major at Kent State University, she loves being able to channel creativity into her schoolwork. Making art is a vigorous and rewarding process that allows her to express her ideas to others while showing her emotions in a physical form.

