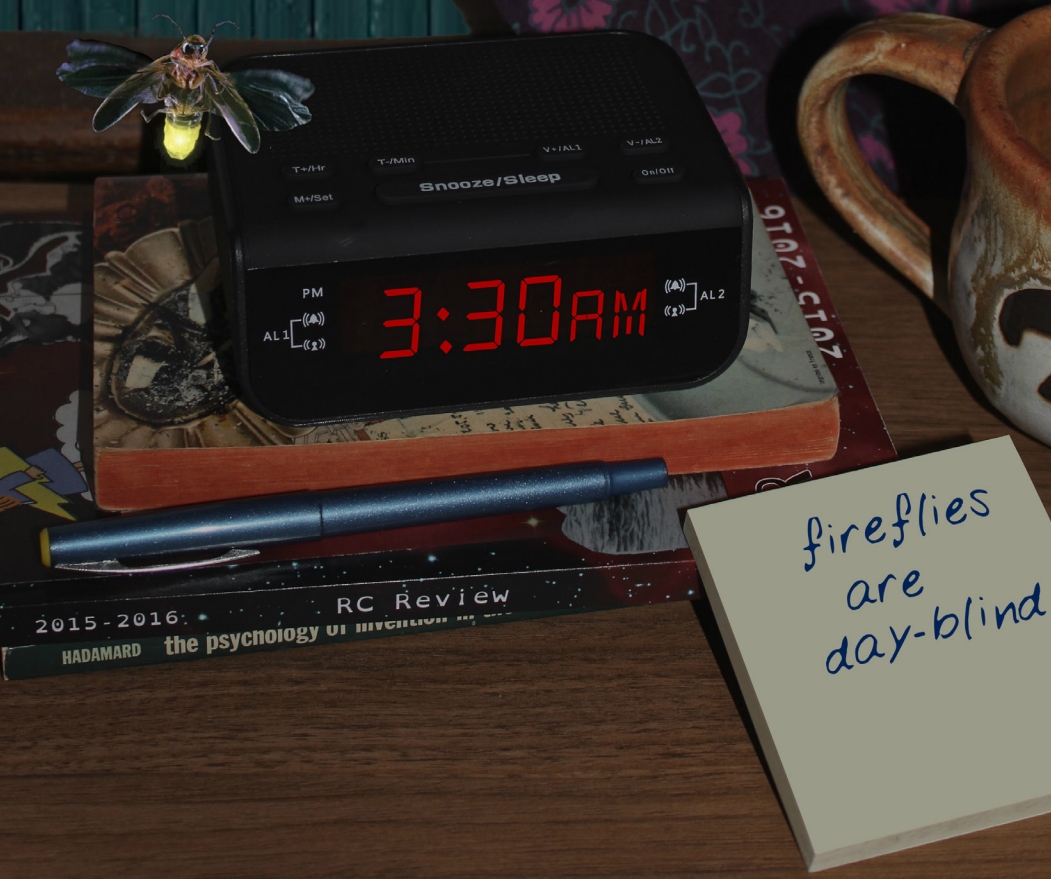


# THE RC REVIEW 2017



fireflies  
are  
day-blind





Cover design by AnneMarie Torresen  
Collages by the RC Review Staff





**THE RC REVIEW  
2017**

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## **2:18AM AND LIVING, WANTING**

Nadia Mota

it waits until  
the table is cleared  
and the dishes are washed.  
it waits until the canvas has dried  
and the paintbrushes are cleaned.  
the wanting waits for me until  
2:18am, wrapped in bedsheets, falling asleep.  
it wrings its hands in the collar of my shirt,  
pulls me right up to the event horizon.  
i don't know how to say this to you.  
i just keep thinking how you aren't thinking of me.

## **SWEET NOTHINGS**

Kate Cammell

The shattering of sentimental glassware;  
we are mosaic held together  
by coy words and concrete.  
Your lips caress my wilting roses  
and replace them with tomorrow's bible,  
skin that tastes half baked  
tender as craters on the moon,  
muscles tension then relax,  
you moan and the room is still.  
No wind could blow us away —  
sweet nothings is a stupid name,  
my empty everythings.



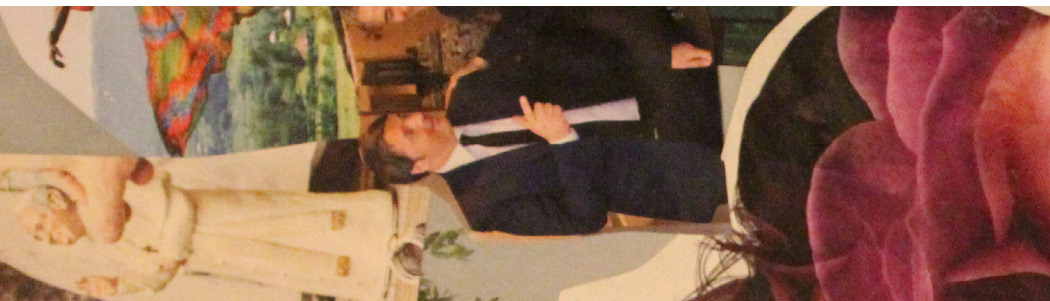
## **WORDBENDER**

Stina Perkins

They say she has a way with words,  
that she can braid them, you know,  
take them between thumb and index finger  
and pull a little, over and under and through  
until the “M”s split into mountain peaks and  
the little “n”s bow so low they form “u”s.  
The “s”s were never able to skip, but  
she taught them how last summer.

She has a way with words like  
mothers have a way with backrubs,  
and she massages the alphabet until it  
loosens a little, the “c”s roll over for tummy rubs  
and even the “F”s feel less sharp.

She speaks word-language,  
letting the “L”s lull from her lips like  
lantern light or lilacs or cookie dough  
smoothed by the rolling pin she stores in her cheeks.  
She bakes her words into pies with  
crusts so thin you’d think they could float, you know,  
just lift into the sky and form firefly constellations  
she doesn’t yet know how to name.



## **YOU DON'T GET TO CHOOSE THE SKY**

Kathleen Janeschek

As she listened to her parents fight, Shelby traced the cracks of her ceiling in the same way that boys were beginning to trace her curves. She imagined the cracks growing bigger, deepening with every shout, until the ceiling collapsed on her, collapsed on them all. Their words were wordless, their voices unfamiliar, their sounds inhuman. She flipped one way then the other, pillow tucked tight over her ears, but there wasn't any hiding from the wicked rising beneath her. No matter how much she tossed and turned, Shelby knew that it wouldn't make them quiet, it wouldn't even make them leave. They would only shut up on their own terms, their own time, and she was helpless to this condition.

After a howl harsher than the rest, Shelby rolled her legs out of bed and tiptoed to her window, careful to not let her floor creak, to not give away her wakeful state, and at her window she hesitated, glancing back to the drawer where she had stashed the cigarettes her friend had swiped from her own parents, but they were already out of reach, so she opened her window and climbed out onto the roof. When she was ten, she had gone away—no, was sent—to camp in the woods six hours North where she developed a lifelong affection—no, affliction—for the night sky. The counselors there taught these children the love of stars and stargazing, in the darkness of a forest untouched for miles, where the Milky Way swirled hues of purples and blues like a dollop of cream just poured into coffee once black. Then they sent them back home,





cruelly, back to the suburbs of cities, where rows after rows of street lights blighted the stars from their sky and the Milky Way was something you only saw in textbooks. Only a few stars kept their shine, only reminisces of a world untouched remained.

But tonight, Shelby realized, not even that. For when she looked at the sky, she found a gray mask of clouds covering her stars and even the spotlight of the moon barely shone through. There would be no rooftop stargazing tonight—but, still, there was no need to return to her bed, to the shouting match echo chamber. She would watch the night for a bit. She would watch the world she thought she knew when the world she knew was asleep.

For the first hour, there was nothing. The neighborhood creaked by. Wind whistled, critters scurried, shadows shifted. The suburbs tilted into the night.

Shelby was adjusting to this new life in the night, beginning to drift away, to doze in the twilight haze, when a pair of headlights rolled halfway down the street, blinked off, then rolled the rest of the way to stop in front of Tyler's house across the street. She felt suddenly conscious of her position on the roof, lit by the orange glow of the street lights, though she knew it was unlikely for anyone's eyes to drift up here. Watching the vehicle across the street, it took her a second to notice the boy's figure, Tyler's no doubt, making its way from around the house to the waiting car. For someone sneaking out, he didn't seem bothered by time or

the risk of being spotted. In fact, Tyler was strolling across his lawn and Shelby couldn't help but wonder how the boy she used to play hopscotch with had come to be so comfortable with slipping out past curfew. What life did he lead now?

And then, once he had reached the car, he turned from it, turned from them, and looked up at Shelby on her roof. A white hand rose and waved in the air like a white flag flaps in the breeze. He saw her. He acknowledged her. He invited her. And she froze, weighing the possibilities, the implications in her mind. He was still standing by the car, watching her rooftop, waiting for—what exactly? She could wave back, she could drop down from her roof and dash over there, and let the night write itself from there. A little light caught in the back of her throat, a hundred possibilities, escapes revealed themselves to her, but which one, which one would fall to her? This was chance, not choice. And then, a single second of hesitation had sealed her fate. Helpless, still, always. For Tyler turned back to the car, to the people in it and without a glance back, hopped in. The same maneuver with the headlights she had watched before repeated itself in reverse and then they were gone, off into the night, the world beyond her world.

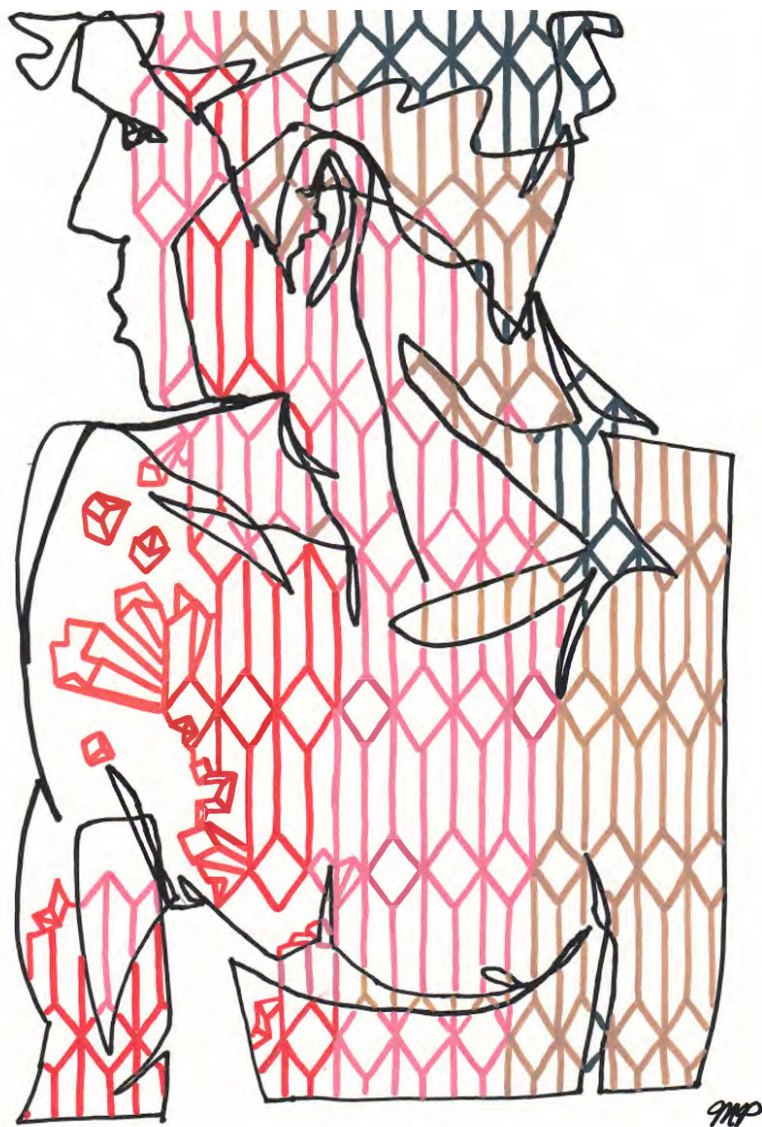
Disappointment leaked into her and she climbed back into her room, now still and silent as an empty cradle. But she returned in a moment or two, a pack of cigarettes and a lighter in one hand. Until then, Shelby wasn't sure if she could, or even would, but the listless night and the useless sky, and the boy who cruelly created possibilities with the sweep of his hand and dashed them upon rocks with the turn of his back, left her with the need to twitch something new between fingers. The night was young but growing old.

After the wind blew out the fire a few times, she finally got a flame to last long enough to light a cigarette pinched between her knuckles. For the second second of hesitation of the night, she watched the cigarette smolder and the smoke rise up and drift off and disappear, and during this time, Tyler paced through her mind. She hadn't given him a serious thought in ages, and all the life he had lived in that time made it seem like their years had different amounts of days, like their worlds went around the sun at different



speeds. And what did he see when he looked at her—did he see her like the boys in her class saw her or did he see her as the neighbor girl drawing lines of chalk? What did he think of her—did he think of her? Was he thinking of her now, like she him, wherever he was? He had this secret life led in the nighttime, he had so much, but she had this night and this rooftop and this glowing stick all to herself, and with her second of hesitation over, she raised it to her lips and sucked down her first swallow of smoke. And alone, she coughed. For only the faint outline of the moon's viewing pleasure, she had a coughing fit. By the time she was finished, her throat was on fire and her cigarette was not, so she tossed that one and pulled another from her pack. On her first puff of her second cigarette, Shelby held back her coughing, closing it up inside herself. With a fresh poise, she leaned back against the roof, her cigarette sticking up into the air and she couldn't help but admire the burning tip, the ashes set against the sky like a new kind of Milky Way, one that mixed greys with reds and embers and flame, one she could ease up there at will. A part of her fought against the smile forming on her lips, but she was helpless to this condition. She knew it was making her sick, it was blackening her lungs, but there was a buzzing in her head and nothing had ever seemed so beautiful. No other night was this.

Too soon, she found herself burned down to the filter. For a few seconds, she held her pack open, considering a third, considering another flame, and her parents' voices were rising again, the cut reopened, but after a deliberation, after she skimmed over all the night already had been, she found it enough, for now, so she flipped her pack closed and crawled back into her bedroom, her bed, and let the night be.



## **You Can't Hurt Me**

Maeve Pascoe

## **YOU TOOK A SIP**

Jessica Longe

You took a sip  
And I took a wrong turn  
You looked back  
And I turned into a pillar of salt  
That stare  
Made me crumble  
Why  
Am I constantly attracted to  
Emotionally unavailable men by the name of  
Paul



## **BINARY STARS**

Keighan Glynn

Response to “Untitled (March 5th) #2”  
by Felix Gonzalez-Torres

We sit staring  
at a crystal night sky  
as you explain  
that there are stars  
that when you peer  
at them through a lens  
of light-years  
of space and time  
look like one star  
even though  
they are two.  
You say  
they dance through  
a waltz on fire  
their touch sends planets into motion,  
conducts a symphony  
of spheres,  
and bathes  
the cosmos with the heat  
of their divine consummation  
And I cannot ask  
not even whisper  
what happens  
when one  
dies?

How can the other keep  
burning-  
orbit haunted by an  
absence that shatters  
the rigid march of comets  
now lost in new ellipses?  
How can it face  
the void of the heavens  
with just its mourning light  
alone?  
How can it handle  
its celestial nightmare as  
its lover dissolves into  
corona & helium-  
poisoned by iron blood?  
How can it  
ever possibly  
survive  
such loss?  
How can  
I  
possibly ever survive  
losing you?

## **4:34 AM**

Camilla Lizundia

misty skies  
soundless sidewalks  
lonely footsteps  
and day old newspapers

I sit  
I wait

somewhere between night and day  
between old and new  
I soak in this moment  
between insignificant and profound

my disillusionment is but a privilege  
a step closer toward reality in an artificial world  
and yet fear persists, as it always does, dragging me from  
behind

my eyes close for a second  
imagining what beauty I used to see

but it left, fleeting  
just like me



## **Garage Puppet**

Miriam Saperstein



## **VOMITORIUM**

Meghan Meneguzzi

Sometimes, I like to sit  
in the shower  
and let it scald me.  
Burn off the layers  
that are aching to die.

Humans live long  
because we're constantly shedding,  
sending our unwanted parts  
to a sleeping behemoth  
more patient,  
more absorbent,  
more resilient  
than us.

But this titan  
(no, mother)  
is brimming—  
with excess and bad ideas.

She will blow  
our scaly layers  
back in our faces,  
while our mouths  
open  
like the legs of a mistress  
inhale the dry debris.

And we will choke  
on what we've been avoiding.  
We were too daft  
to ask  
if she'd been trained  
in the Heimlich.



## Natural

Maeve Pascoe

## DUALITIES

Hannah French

I.

It takes more and it takes more and it takes more  
For me to enter  
The place where the door goes  
My footsteps shed smiles  
Whose broken teeth build like barricades  
Or a dentist's funeral  
I don't attend

II.

Don't we all form constellations?  
At least – shake like them  
Dancing in circles  
Tracing lines we cannot see – that aren't drawn  
Like us to the light  
Of a single lamp in winter

III.

I saw the door of the Eiffel tower  
Once - in a light show  
In fireworks I saw the elegant curves of its frame  
And in the next  
the shape of its whole  
I waffle between solid and abstract  
Skeleton – body – skeleton – body  
My bones becoming hollow  
Stars leapfrog up my spine  
And tumble from my breath -  
My wafer soul and apple-bite heart

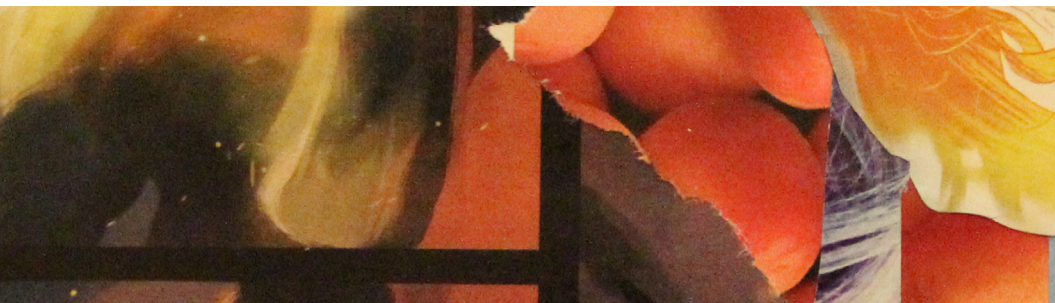
IV.

Atoms like constellations  
Or windows streaked wide with mortality  
Can chaos be preprogrammed?  
Or were you destined to leave me?

V.

I used to keep the windows open  
in winter  
Now I make sure they're locked tight  
I don't like the weather  
And I think twice before walking out the door





## UNDER THE BRIDGE

Mariah Cardenas

I have been emptied of my soul. As if someone took a knife and hollowed out every last broken bit of my heart during the long black night. As I wept out my spirit, my tears carried pieces of my soul down my face and out of my life. I did not sleep, but that is not why I am tired. I am bone-weary. I could sleep for a century and never be refreshed. Sleep is not what I need.

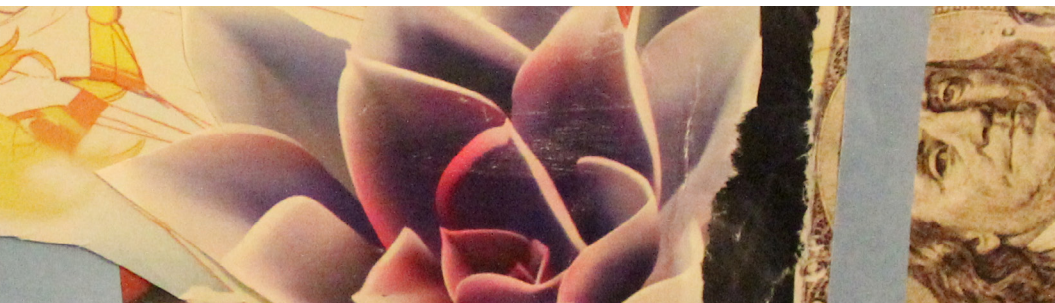
*"And I don't ever want to feel like I did that day..."*

I can't even muster up the energy to hum along to the Red Hot Chili Peppers playing over the speakers in the restaurant, even though "Under the Bridge" is my favorite song. I smooth down my burgundy apron in the mirror of the bathroom. My eyes are black holes. They are bloodshot, complemented by dark circles and thick eyeliner. How I managed to put on makeup this morning, I'm not sure. But I did, I sat in front of the vanity with slow deliberate strokes and painted my face on. I painted on my mask. Not much good it did me. I try to twitch up the corners of my red lipsticked lips into a smile.

They don't respond.

I can't even manage the energy for a sigh as I walk out into the restaurant and turn on the neon "Open" sign. A grumpy old woman with a scowl stumbles in with a cane, demanding to know why we opened two minutes late.

I apologize, seat her in a booth, give her a menu, get her decaf coffee, although, in my opinion, it is far too early in the day for decaf, if decaf is ever appropriate. She asks me to turn down



the air conditioning, even though its sweltering in the restaurant. I pretend to fiddle with the air conditioning, but really I just turn the air conditioning up a couple notches. She seems very happy when I tell her that I turned it down.

“See? Now was that so hard.”

Customers start to trickle in, one by one, two by two. The hands on the clock tick along at a steady pace. I watch the old lady slurp her soup as she eyes me disdainfully.

But it's all right. I stopped caring about her tip when I realized her bill was only going to amount to five dollars. I look at her defiantly as I refill her decaf coffee for the umpteenth time and pick up her empty bowl, and the lunch rush starts to come in. I shuffle to each table, the steady clock like my faint heartbeat. I'm already wishing for the end of my shift and dreading the moment that it comes... because then I'll have to see him again...

I hate lunch rush. I fear lunch rush. The restaurant will fill in ten minutes and everyone has to be out at the same time.

“Hello, my name is Rosalinda, and I'll be your server today....”

Today every table gets sat, and I sprint across the restaurant from one corner to the next. When people complain that I've messed up their order or that they have to get out at that very moment so please rush the laws of science on that well done burger, I just look at them with unblinking eyes. I'm empty, too empty to care if the restaurant is busy, if the sweet middle-aged

woman gets her food on time, if the jerk in the suit is late back to work.

After all, you can't get weeded if you don't care.

In their voices I hear the words he said to me last night screaming at me, swearing, cursing my name. I touch my face. It's the first time he's ever laid hands on me, but surely I knew it would come to that eventually.

"You worthless bitch," he said to me last night. "You're just like your father. You are nothing to me, you stupid, worthless whore." And I can see it repeated in the customers' eyes: that I am nothing to them. I am worthless, I am stupid.

I'm nothing but a lowly waitress.

My hands shake as I carry a Pepsi and almost spill it all over a guy who has eyes a little too blue, a little too similar to Alexsei's. I've never seen blue eyes that burn quite so hot...

An hour later I finally cash out the decaf lady, and lunch rush comes crashing to an end. And I slide into the servers' booth in the back corner of the small restaurant and hear Phil, the dishwasher, running the lunch silverware through the machine. Another day, another couple of dollars and a hundred more rolls of silverware... I close my eyes, tired of the four walls around me, sick of trays and the blue Pepsi cups. And I'm so entrapped in my memory that I don't even hear the telltale jingle-bell ring that says someone just entered the restaurant.

I bring my head up slowly, blink sadly. I take in the man – because, I guess, he isn't a boy anymore – who just walked through the door, someone I haven't seen since I dropped out of college three years ago. My good, too good, not quite good enough former best friend. Success upon success. Internships in Washington D.C. for three years running. I would be surprised if he wasn't on his way off to Harvard Law School in the fall. Like I could have been, like we planned.... Peralta and Schwartz Law Firm or Schwartz and Peralta, we hadn't quite decided yet.

"Your mom told said that you still worked here."

I taste something bitter in my mouth, something that tastes suspiciously like decaf coffee with a spoonful of regret. The words of the song come back to me momentarily.

*"Sometimes I feel  
Like I don't have a partner  
Sometimes I feel  
Like my only friend..."*

"What can I say? I despise change". My bare left-ring finger twitches.

He sits down like he owns the place. "So tell me, how are the twins, Rosalinda? What were their names again?"

"Svetlana Maria and Enrique Alexsei, but we just call them Lana and A.J." I manage a brief smile. My twins have my black eyes and their father's white-blond hair. They're with him, and he'll bring them to work when he arrives for his shift. My smile quavers. I hope he's not too hungover to take care of them. "They're almost three now."

"I'm sure you have pictures." He smiles as gets up and moves to the spot next to me.

"What kind of a mother would I be if I didn't?" I pull my phone out of one of the pockets of my apron and flip through photos, hyper-focused. There's one of AJ sitting on his father's shoulders in the park. There's one of him pushing them on the swings. There's one of him asleep on the couch with Lana sprawled out over him. My, what a pretty picture these photos paint.

"I'm guessing from these photos that you're still with Alexsei." He frowns, looking at me intently with those undefinable hazel eyes.

"Yes," I whisper, clutching my stomach. He pushes a piece of my hair behind my ear, tenderly.

"Is he still using?" His whisper is even lower than mine, but it the volume doesn't mitigate its intensity. I shake my head, yes. I nod my head, no.

*"I never worry  
Now that is a lie..."*

"He started drinking again last night," I reply curtly, for a moment anger balling up within the void within me. "Let's just say I gave him some unpleasant news."

"And the drugs?"



The track marks are still there, yes. But there isn't any heroin in his veins – not yet – not anymore.

“No, not for the last six months.”

I carefully, deliberately change the subject, and he talks about his life. His beautiful, angelic new girlfriend who must walk around with a halo over her head for how he talks about her. His acceptance at Yale's Law School. His plans for his future, including how he intends to get to the White House, or at least to Capitol Hill.... And I think about Alexsei, about our two children, about our little shack of an apartment infested with cockroaches. And I wonder, where it all goes from there.

An hour passes, then two, then three, only periodically punctuated with customers. Then he stands up to leave, and I have to clutch the back of the seat to keep from falling over.

“How long have you known?” He asks putting a hand over my shoulder.

“A month or so.”

He asks me if Alexsei is excited to be a dad again. I shake my head, no. He asks me if I'm excited. I shake my head, yes. I nod my head, no.

“Do you need a place to stay?”

I'm about to say something – I'm not sure what – but there is breath in my mouth, and words are forming behind my lips, and I know that I'm about to say something. I'm about to give him an answer that will change my life either way, when I hear the door open.

And Alexsei comes walking through with a twin on each hand. I see him, and I am pulled into his gravity like always. I go up to him, and my children hug me, and he kisses me softly, even though I smell like restaurant vinegar.

“I love the way you look in red lipstick.” He smiles vibrantly and my heart starts pounding and I start to smile, too, timidly, timorously.

In that one sentence, I know that he doesn't remember what he did last night. I know that he doesn't remember a word that he said. He doesn't remember the slap that still burns across my soul. He doesn't remember the words that sear into my mind

every time I so much as think of him. He was blackout drunk and, for him, it's as though none of it ever happened.

If a tree falls in the forest and there's no one there to hear it, does it make a sound?

"I wore it for you." I reply, quietly, shifting back and forth, making myself smaller. He smirks, as he walks slowly over to clock in. He grabs his head lightly to let me know that he still has a headache. I'm half tempted to purposely knock something over, but I know that that would only draw his rage. I shuffle the twins over to Nate Schwartz and I clock out, my hands shaking and the ghosts from last night still whispering in my ear.

"What's that on your face?" Alexsei asks, peering over at me as he ties on his apron and rolls up his sleeves.

"I ran into a door." I cringe, and he smiles, that beautiful impish smile, just a little bit yellow from his Marlboro Reds.

"I love you, Rosa." He calls out as I haul the twins towards the door with Nate close behind.

"Love you too, Alexsei." But he doesn't see me flinch.

And we walk out into the light, the glorious light. It reflects off of the twins' golden hair. They take it in with their dark eyes. The words of the song come to me again.

*"And I don't ever want to feel, like I did that day..."*

"You don't have to live like this," Nate says, running a hand through his light brown hair. "I hate seeing you reduced to this. Why don't you leave him?"

"Because I love him." And I do. I love him more than anything in the world except for the twins. I love the scars of track marks lacing his arms in between tattoos. I love the way he says my name, the way that he always has his nose buried in a book, any book. I love him, from his heartbeat to the soles of his feet.

*"Here I stay."*

## **AAAHH!!! REAL EMOTIONS**

Claire Denson

I have this emotion I watch online  
and only approach in my dreams  
It's been rotting for over a year  
but I refuse to throw it out  
it sounds like this: AAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH  
and I kinda want to fuck it  
but I feel like once I start  
fucking it I'll be like how do  
I get out of this  
and then I'll ask it if it wants  
to hear some poetry and then  
I'll start reciting something sad  
until its boner dies



## **Wishing for Tidiness in Decomposition**

Miriam Saperstein



## **POEMS FOR THE EXES: BOYFRIENDS, LOVERS, AND FUTURE LOVERS**

Jessica Jung

### **1. the break up**

someone really stupid once said that people accept the love  
they think they deserve. well that's bullshit because i knew i  
deserved better.

the way i see it, even in its realest and fakest forms, love and  
feeling loved can be better than no love and not feeling loved  
at all.

i think that's why i held on for so long. because starting over  
with someone new is harder than waiting for the last petal to  
fall off of a wilted rose.

### **2. how not to lose me & what to do when you do**

I.

treat me as you would your mama  
when grocery bags overwhelm her arms  
and she fumbles with her car keys

respect my time as you would your own  
because my patience is beginning to wear  
like the denim between your thighs

challenge me like you would your father  
when the shot clock sees 01  
and he doubts the nba's most valuable player

protect me as you would your sister  
when her prom date arrives at your door  
with that roaming hand and fucking grin

II.

fight for me as you would your wildest dreams  
persevering until every ounce of you is  
spent

weep in my memory as you did buddy's  
when your family decided it was time for  
him to play with the puppies in the clouds

then mourn this loss as deeply as you did the last at-bat of  
your career—  
bases loaded, bottom of the ninth  
*you're out.*

### **3. there's something**

beautiful about the way water collects in your eyes and pools  
over the edges, desperate to escape.

calming about the way your eyelids flicker in your sleep, like  
a filmstrip playing scenes from a movie.

unsettling about the fact that both heads have their own  
minds—the lower one always more persuasive.

pathetic about my inability to release myself from the maker  
of my tears.



**waves**

Hannah Brauer

## HOUSEWIFE YOGA

Kate Cammell

Fourteen sets of eyes close. Fourteen chests rise and fall in syncopation. Fourteen pairs of hands sweep through humid air toward the floor. Fourteen mouths chant ancient Sanskrit verses with matching notes, with varying timbre. Fourteen pairs of feet root themselves to the earth like the neem tree whose branches reach through the window in salutation. Fourteen spines straighten in release of the tendencies that force them to curve toward the ground. Fourteen bodies lie prostrate on woven mats. My eyes are open.

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The housewives of Pondicherry are employed in a full time job with no monetary gain. These women must rise before the sun and fall asleep long after the stars have mapped themselves in the sky. They have their schedules seared into their memory by the lashing tongues of their husbands. Day in, day out. Executing chores, cooking, commands. The housewives of Pondicherry are the gears spinning familial machines. The housewives are the oil, the chains, the production lines. The housewives are everywhere and nowhere. The housewives are clockwork.

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Fourteen housewives gather to breathe. I am the fifteenth- - their unmarried, sunburned, and inflexible counterpart.

Pondicherry's International School of Yoga is located in a residential cross street, tucked just off of the bustling main road that runs through the heart of the city. Building number twenty-five, where the housewives stretch, is in the heart of Tamil Quarter. It is the area reserved for Pondicherry's working class. The area where people do not live in excess, the area where people have enough. Every Saturday morning the housewives meet for one hour of yoga. Some use repurposed towels, others woven mats. Some are young, barely older than I. Some are wise, with bags under their eyes. All have dedicated their lives to serving. Except for me, but I am here.

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Doctor Lilatha leads the group. Her mat is placed in front of the open doors of the veranda. Natural light floats into the room through windows, the door, and the brightly colored kurtas that the housewives wear. The class begins with gentle stretching. The women effortlessly glide toward their mats. Their muscles obey them. They breathe in unison kissing the air with their delicate exhalations.

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Me, I try with all the strength my body will allow, to hold in the laughter that wants to erupt from deep within me. My skin reeks of whiteness and everyone in the room can smell it. So I don't laugh. But I want to laugh. I want to laugh at the way the tightness of my muscles shakes my body like it's exorcising a demon. I want to laugh at how irrelevant my chest is compared to the women in the room, whose bosoms have fed many mouths and hang toward the floor in down dog. I want to laugh at their local gossip that I can't understand. I want to laugh at the name of the class; housewife yoga. But I don't laugh, because I am not a housewife, yet they've welcomed me.

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Doctor Lilatha begins to chant in Sanskrit. The room of Tamil speakers knows every word. The women close their eyes and



place their hands over their hearts in reverence. The chant rides the soft morning breeze out the window, past the tree, down the cobblestone road, into the heart of the city. I know this because I watch. I keep my eyes open. I see the passion on the lips that form each word. I see the breeze sweep the words away before they can echo. I see them.

• • • • •

Doctor Lilatha worries about me. It concerns her that my muscles don't move like those of the fourteen women around the room. She pushes on my back and tries to force it into positions it does not know how to hold. The women around me, their backs know. They use breath to ease into postures, to hold them and find comfort. My breath is sharp, it sounds like the rattle of an engine; of a failing engine. These women breathe for me, around me, with me.

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Longer held poses turn into vinyasa flows, into movement. I can flow with these women. My body knows how to move, not the way theirs move, but there is motion. Doctor Lilatha wants to teach me real yoga, not the American kind. She worries that my body can't bend right. Doctor Lilatha told me to come to the housewives class on Saturday morning. She did not tell me that the women would place their mats around me. That they would breathe for me and with me. That they would hold me with their eyes closed. That they know how to care for other people.

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Fourteen sets of eyes watch their curries simmer on the stove. Fourteen chests rise and fall to fast paced heartbeats. Fourteen pairs of hands wash tin dishes. Fourteen mouths bite tongues while husbands lash out with theirs. Fourteen pairs of feet walk to pick their children up from the government school. Fourteen spines bend over the clothes as they scrub the dirt from the seams. Fourteen bodies lie exhausted. My eyes are open.

## **PRAYING WITHOUT A BRA**

Miriam Saperstein

My breasts hang while I pray.  
Does the starkness of my nipples  
Aggravate the ancient words?  
Book balanced on back of the pew  
Even though I know this by heart.  
(The heart behind my breasts)

The keepers of tradition accuse me of spite,  
To show up  
With these offending spikes  
Poking through my finest dress.

They say we're the chosen,  
I know that we don't chose

This body-  
God has none  
Release the old prohibitions,  
Build a ramp to the bimah,  
We can all touch sacrifice.  
We've all known flesh- the taste of ancient longing  
In shul I learned undressing is holy  
A cause for kissing and song  
God is in the unveiling

The Torah's sacred body  
Feels much different than my own  
The oily yellow parchment and the  
Antique sweat dripping with small dark letters

Tonight, this new moon, a new month

This small room, the sanctuary  
This window, the ark  
The absent moon, my ancient text  
Nipples alert from cold  
Outside snaking in through a crack in the frame  
A congregation of dust and clothes strewn about  
We are not rulers-  
We are healers,  
Dreamers.

My prayer is a bowl of soup,  
Warmth that grasps deep down,  
Pulling up belly moan from below the horizon of my navel.  
This hope for renewed orb of sky flesh,  
The inevitable promise on the emptiest night.  
This is a naked prayer,  
A holy one



## STIGMA

Angela Hsu

Kids playing in the field. Laughing. After school, by the gate, I was waiting for my dad to pick me up so I don't need to walk ten minutes to get home.

I scrolled down on my phone, minding other people's businesses.

"Girl who went missing 11 years ago was found," the headline screams in all caps. It vanishes into the top of the screen as my impatient thumb scrolls.

"Which celebrity are you most like?" My thumb tapped on it within milliseconds.

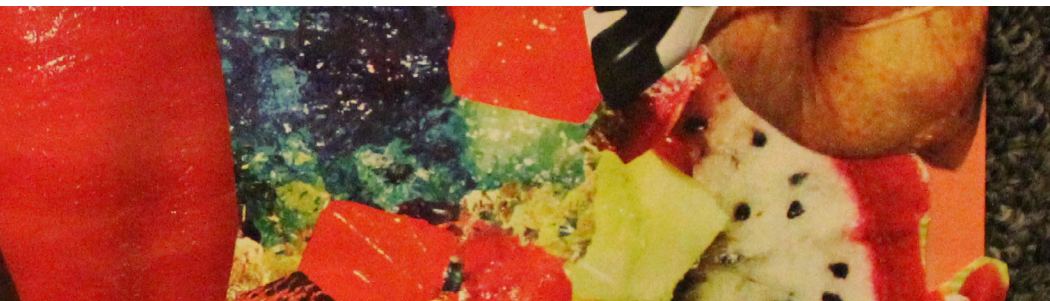
"Question 1: What is your favorite music genre? A) Rock & Roll, B) Pop, C) Indie, D)..."

Before finishing reading the first question, I felt a shadow in front of me.

I looked up. A woman with crazy grey hair exploding from her headband stood in front of me. She had barely four teeth in her mouth.

The pungent smell of aged banana peels coming from the garbage bags she carried crept into my nostrils. Her trimmed eyebrows and the typical permanent eyeshadows worn by old Chinese people certainly did not go with her buttoned up white shirt and black business pants. It was as if an old witch has stolen a rich boy's wardrobe.

"You see 'em people pouring that water? You see 'em?"



Indeed, a man walked by was pouring water from his water bottle to the ground. Almost amused by the woman's appearance, I nodded politely.

"Yeah you see 'em. You know what I'm sayin'! Those people been doing messin' around ever since my father died when he's 100. And my luck was taken away by 'em people pourin' 'em water." I took a step back. She took a step forward.

"Ain't nobody knows what 'em pourin' water means but me. I knew it right from the start cause they're messing with my luck. You know the government owed me 162 billion dollars why? Because of BAD LUCK!" To dodge her spit, I took another step back. She took another step forward.

My phone rang. "Dad calling."

I did not pick up. I muted the phone but set it on speaker. My fingers wrapped around my phone as I brought it up to my mouth to seem like I'm scratching my nose while holding my phone. I whispered to the phone, "I'm at the front gate... I'm at the front gate... I'm at the front gate..." A car rushed by. A tiny stone jumped at my knee, sizzling.

I saw a mother walking by with her daughter, a lollipop in her hand. I saw a stray dog sniffing the bushes. The old woman kept talking as I felt an ant climbing down to my chin. I thought I heard a nerve snapping off in my brain. I can't really tell. I blinked excessively at the daughter, the mother, the stray dog. No one

noticed me.

So I took a step back. Another one. And another. I turned around and my legs started running. A primitive instinct. My chest ached from running. As a reflex, I turned my head and checked, making sure I was free from the nagging woman.

A cold feeling ran from my head to my toe. SHE WAS CHASING AFTER ME. WHY IS SHE CHASING AFTER ME???

I ran faster. My feet slid inside my oversized leather shoes every time the shoes touch the ground. Every time, I thought I was going to fall down.

The street was freakishly empty. All the shops are closed. I found a dark corner and hid inside.

My trembling thumb struggled to swipe my phone open.

“Dad?”

“WHERE ARE YOU? I AM AT THE FRONT GATE!” This is the second time I hear him raises his voice. I heard one of the aluminum coils of the speaker cracked.

“I’m... I don’t know... I’m on a corner.” Looking around, I did not go on the street to check. He didn’t reply, but he didn’t hang up.

Indistinguishable noises and heavy breathing.

A huge shadow. My dad squeezed my head so tight into his tummy.

All the fear, anxiety, and confusion burst out into tears.

Dad grabbed my hand and we walked back. I tiptoed as I clutched to Dad’s index finger.

A cold feeling ran from my head to my toes.

“That is her,” I whispered, pulling my dad aside to avoid her.

“WHO DO YOU THINK YOU ARE? WHAT DO YOU THINK YOU ARE DOING?” Dad shook my hand away and walked into the old woman’s face. Surprised, the little woman stumbled.

“I ain’t doin’ nothin’. Right?” Genuinely confused, she looked at me, begging.

“DON’T YOU MESS WITH ME. YOU STAND RIGHT HERE. I AM CALLING THE POLICE. YOU ARE NOT GETTING AWAY THIS TIME.”

Dad grabbed the woman’s right arm so she couldn’t escape. The woman waved her other arm in the air, trying to fight back.



Not so long, a police car pulled off beside us.

"Sir, I will have to ask you to let go of the lady. What is the situation here?"

"This woman was harassing my girl. Who knew what she could have done this time? Thank God! It was so close... I was so close to losing her. Sir, you arrest her. People like her should not wander around on the street for God's sake! Too dangerous. Way too dangerous. Just do your job and lock her in an asylum already!" Dad sounded like he was about to cry.

*The owner of the knife drew his weapon across the woman's forehead like he was painting on a canvas. The sharp blade slid on her pale, almost transparent, cheek. The knife danced on her neck with elegance. A black leather glove sealed the woman's mouth.*

*"Yes! I am! I am crazy. I am. Out of my mind." The man laughed.*

*"I can tell that you will miss her a lot. But I am not sure for how long. So, let's find out, shall we?" The man with black leather gloves struck the well-polished knife into the woman's neck. Splash! Thick, red lava bursted out. On her neck. On her dress. On the floor. Everywhere. I saw Dad kneeling down, collapsed from yelling my mother's name. "Mommy!" I saw my six-year-old self crying.*

"Madam, did you or did you not harass the young lady."

"I told ya I ain't done nothing. LET GO!" The woman screamed like a child crying for candy.

"Of course she would not say anything. You have to interrogate her for God's sake! She needs to go to jail. I can't... I just can't... deal with this again! I am not going to lose my daughter!"

"Sir, please calm down. I am going to take care of this." The police handcuffed the woman. "You have the right to remain silent. If you do say anything, it can be used against you in a court of law..."

"You are hurting me! I told you it's bad luck! You are bad

luck!" The woman cried.

The woman was pushed into the police car. "Sir, I will take care of the situation. Please do not worry." The policeman assured my dad that he will be notified of the result and went into the car.

It was already too late when I acknowledged what was happening.

"But she didn't really do anything wrong..." I whispered to myself.

That night, I was too tired to sleep.

"So she is going to live in the city's psychiatric center... That's good news. I am very glad to hear that. Okay. Thank you officer. Bye bye!"

The woman's face lingered in my dreams. The crease on her collar. Its awkwardness. The huge gap between her teeth reminded me of my three-year-old cousin. The weird accent resulting from terrible enunciations. The murmuring woke me up, if I was ever asleep.

I had to.

Somehow, I found myself at the psychiatric center. The building didn't have space for me to breathe, but I didn't like the smell of the Penicillium anyways. The wall was white decades ago, but mold gave it a stomach-turning color.

And there she was, wandering around in a standard white robe that made the wall even uglier. Her permanent eyeshadows were dimmer, thicker. Her headband was gone. Her hair was whiter, whiter than the wall.

## MIDDLECHILD

Hannah Brauer

She was the middle child.  
She was the purple glue stick that dried clear  
between two pieces of construction paper,  
She was the shadowed valley between two mountains,  
The quaint shop hidden between skyscrapers.

She was the dog-eared bookmark between two halves of a  
book,  
She was the straight line between the sunset and the ocean,  
The middle seat,  
The connecting flight.

She was given a shoebox to fill with potential  
And she built a fort.  
She was the horizon that kept the ocean from spilling into  
the sky  
The bond between two pieces of paper  
The skyscrapers held cubicles while she held small  
freedoms  
She was given a valley and built a bridge  
that rose to meet the mountains in the empty space  
between their high passes.

Her book was written for her  
But she wrote in the margins  
Read at her own pace  
And kept her own place.

## TO THE SKY

Kate Cammell

The air is steam rising from the tin kettle in the hands of the chai wallah. The air is grey plumes putt-putting out the back of a yellow rickshaw. The air is the odor of fish under the midday equatorial sun. The air is filth caked onto 12 million bodies. The air is its own. The air is rampant with intruders.

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This isn't my suffering. I don't know the name of the woman who I am on my way to mourn: yet my body is gripping the edges of a rusted '90s Mitsubishi motorbike to watch her go up in flames. My main focus is on keeping my leg from swinging and hitting hot metal as the motorbike juts in the openings of traffic. I am holding the waist of a man I met six days ago. The way we're weaving grips my nondenominational bones and I send prayer toward the fading gold statue of Ganesha on the side of the road.

Yogis honk horns to race around slow rickshaws, Hindu priests accost passing pedestrians in the streets for rupees to buy food. Women cover their legs and expose their midriffs wrapped in bright colored sarees. Men hold their wives hands and later at night they will whistle at women walking under the moon.

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Yellow flowers are placed along the body-shaped mound

of clay. Incense is lit and becomes the first smoke to drift through the open walled hut. Then matches are tossed onto straw and under the elevated clay. Someone dumps fire propellant from a repurposed Sprite bottle onto flames. Wailing from the family edges it all onward.

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What does it mean to become ash? I don't know the soul that I watch lift into the sky. It twists up with a force only paralleled by the Bay of Bengal. At first it runs towards the finish like waves to the shore. Then realizing its address belongs to the sky, it slows — waiting, drifting, and letting the air sweep it into its arms.

I am standing on the outskirts of the wood-framed burning hut. Every so often I sneak glances at a woman I barely know as she crawls inside herself and lets pain leave through tears. Yesterday I saw this same woman smile at me over sambar and rice. I saw her confident as she sat at her desk. I saw her weeping by the door. I saw her purse and keys thrown on the floor as witnesses to calamity. I saw myself retreat and call out for other arms to comfort her. Here I am, pretending this is my suffering, too.

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After the ceremony, my coworker cries into the shoulder of her friend. People stand in a loud silence with their gaze directed at the smoke. It sneaks between the gaps of the woven palm frond roof, branching itself into arms, legs, hair. It dances, hugs, and rebukes the tears of loved ones. Then the smoke is gone. The smoke is part of the air. A mother's journey reduced to ash.

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Her daughter sat in my office and I don't know her last name. I climb on the back of the motorbike and turn back to glance at the cremation lot as my coworker whips the bike back onto the main road. He is wearing a gold cross necklace on a thick chain. He tilts his face back slightly and screams over the harsh traffic, "Are you Christian?"

“I don’t know,” I say. He talks about his God and heaven. I listen to him talk in a silence so deep it’s almost a prayer. Almost meditation. We bump over the cracking pavement and back streets that are the welcome mat to my apartment building. I get off the bike and walk past the seventy-year-old watchman, who, from the depths of his plastic chair, is supposed to guard the building. His bare chest is concave and screaming for food that he can’t eat with his multiple missing teeth. He fixes the single cloth he wears around his waist and smiles at me as I pass. I send him back a soft smile, no match to his enthusiasm. I like him. Soon he will be smoke.

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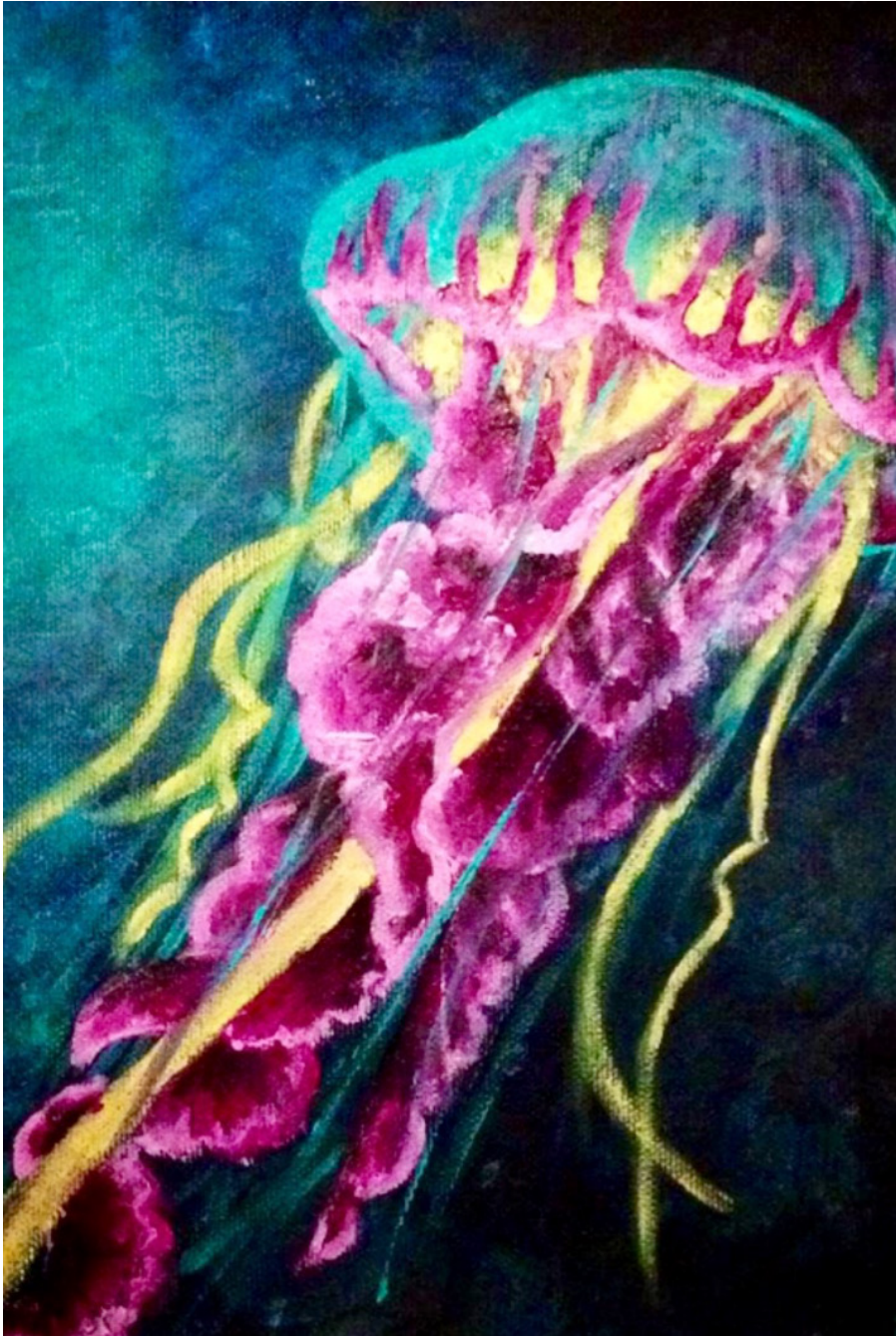
As I enter my apartment I make my way to the shower and bathe following Hindu tradition. I purify loss and let dirt wash down a drain. I sent her mother to the afterlife. I only knew her as smoke. She had a name.

Water gathers at my feet and soap clings to my body in a way that convinces me it is trying to enter my pores. It’s trying to get inside me, clean me from the inside out. Does it matter if I clean this flesh now? One day this flesh will strip itself layer by layer, away into wind. Does it matter if it’s starch white when it’s ascending? Must I purify bit by bit so that the dirt finds itself in a tide pool at my feet? I want to tell her thank you for everything she was, tell her she was loved. I never knew her.

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Traveling India solo was about self discovery. One week in I know it’s bohemian bullshit. Nineteen and alone, I have grown an exoskeleton of dry sweat that sheds itself on my clothing, sheets, on my pen and paper. I throw elbows in the supermarket to hold my place in line. I throw imaginary daggers at the men who openly point at me in the road. I found a cockroach in the bathroom, a lizard in my bed. I am an ignorant American. I am far from home. I am tired long before the sun falls asleep. What does it mean to be ash?





**Float On (Alright)**

Maeve Pascoe

## **RE: RACE TO NOWHERE**

Meghan Meneguzzi

A psychiatric ward  
is somewhere

clinical indeed

needles and a heart monitor  
when eyes could diagnose me

Ana is my name  
but I don't shake too many hands  
I prefer to prey  
in a pervasive  
stream  
of demands

Put down that  
empty calorie  
I think you've had  
too much

People these days  
are so  
goddamn  
gluttonous

But me--  
I have restraint  
so much  
I don't remember  
joy

Just the gurgle  
of my stomach  
the gap  
between my thighs  
the way I look  
on Instagram

I get a lot of likes?

Pretty  
disgusting  
is what they've started to say  
but two months ago  
no follow up  
to the first word  
of the phrase

Both then and now  
I was the same  
when it came  
to the inside

Empty  
Empty  
Empty  
Empty

So sick of this disguise

Help me  
Help me  
Help me  
Help me

I cry

So I'm here  
in a gown  
partly gaping in the back

Think that's sexy?  
it's not  
it's made of plastic

And I will return  
every week  
for six  
more  
months

As weary-eyed women  
put me on a scale  
and ask it  
to show a truth  
greater  
than the sum  
of the parts

## **ODE TO DUST**

Kathleen Janeschek

I run my fingers along you and  
you are stirred like skin  
rising to touch. You cling  
to their tips, their slight  
sweet sweat and you are  
painted on them, waiting  
for them to paint you. I watch  
you in the air you contaminate,  
where I am welcome, always,  
where I can breathe you in,  
where you come to rest  
in my lungs. Your scent, your taste  
coat my throat, a residue you leave  
without thinking like the blood  
I cough onto my sheets. You settle  
in those caves inside of me, hollowed  
out for your pleasure, for you  
to decorate, to paint  
their walls black, and  
suffocate me.



## Haunt

Hannah Brauer

## UNPLUGGED

Hannah French

Every day she woke up the same. The buzz of her alarm clock resonated throughout her body, her heart rocketing side to side erratically, like a hen in a battering cage. She sat up and stretched, shivering from the static in her bloodstream, and unplugged herself from the wall. The buzzing ceased and on came the notifications across her feed: the sky today was blue and cloudless; almost everyone else in Warehouse 3 was still sleeping; she was hungry and ready for a meal; and Jack had texted her back.

<< Oh, just doin' my thang. >>

His voice was casual, but his punctuation betrayed his investment in the conversation. The comma his way of saying he was thoughtful about his words, the apostrophe a flirtatious mockery of his own colloquialism. She'd asked him

<< What are you up to? >>



Awkward; an official approach, a seeking of company. The question mark confirmed her hopeful tone. Now, as she stretched and climbed from her charging station in Warehouse 3, her feed notified her that the food today smelled fatty. Excited, she hurried through the long, narrow hallways, stacked high with charging stations. She could text Jack back in the cafeteria. Her feed said that, because most people were sleeping, the cafeteria would be mostly empty. Perfect for intimate conversation.

As she walked she set her feed to absorb the news of the night. Immediately her vision warped as the information processed. Several news feeds scrolled past at once; Facebook, Twitter, ESPN. She was too wired in to notice him coming toward her until their feeds collided, and the EMF interference sent them both reeling backwards, their heads ringing from the impact.

\*crashed into Jack\* said her feed.

<< Jack!!! >> she said, alarm and a bit too much welcome--an uncontrollable impulse--in her punctuation. A noise came from him, a shout of air.

\*actually laughed out loud\* said Jack's feed. She saw it, because she subscribed to his action log.

<< Hey, Neri >> he said, with a wry comma smile and that subtle teasing tone.

<< What are you doing up so early dude?? >> two question marks made her expression bewildered, and the diction "dude" gave her tone an off-handed feel, saving face for her earlier excitement.

<< Doin' my thang, remember? >> he was grinning. The text was a friendly, playful shove that she did not know how to return.

<< Oh, right >> she folded her arms uncomfortably. << What exactly does that entail? >> genuine curiosity in her face and voice.

<< Ehhh >> he shrugged. (...) opening his mouth to tell her something ( ) deciding against it (...) staring at her with deliberative eyes << are you eating now? >> the physical distance of the question said he wanted to eat with her. A thrill shot through her

body.

<< Yeah, wanna come? :) >> she beamed, wanting and being wanted all at once.

<< I could eat >> but there was energy beneath the casualness; they were both eager and you could see it in the text.

<< So I got accepted into this program? >> he explained over breakfast, which was potato tots and apple juice for him, pancakes for her. His question mark avoided eye contact, humble and hesitant.

<< Yeah? >> a firm prompt, expectant look.

<< It's like, this competitive, like, thing >> he didn't want to brag about it but was brimming with pleased smiles.

<< And what do you do at this competitive thing >> she said, no smile in the lack of punctuation. The deadpan intonation would draw him out.

<< You go and you live, like, unplugged. For two months. With other people. >> All the periods, short sentences. He was waiting, leaving her space to reply, gauging her reaction.

Unplugged? Neri felt like she'd been short circuited. She blinked, took a screenshot of the conversation, to make sure it was real. The emotions overwhelmed her all at once, clamoring for attention

\*read 9:17am\*

<< How will you know when you're hungry? >> Insolent tone, hurt face

<< I'll feel it. In my body >> sadness crept into the light voice, mixed with wonder he tried to hide from his face without the period at the end.

<< How will you know how to interact with people? >> She was confused now, genuine traces of panic threading their way into her intonation, because how would you ever know what people were thinking without being plugged in? She knew where everybody was right now; who was showering, who was waking up, who was playing with their dog and who was exercising. She knew how they felt about it, because it was all buzzing around her head.

<< I'll look at them x) >> the amusement back at her

expense--instinctively her defenses lowered, she couldn't help it.  
<< Punctuation becomes the force of the words, capitalization becomes the pitch, diction becomes facial expression and syntax becomes body language...it'll be like learning a whole new language, but on the \*human body\* Neri >>

(...) he wanted to say things ( ) he held back for her

(...)

(...)

They both started to speak at the same time and

( )

( )

both stopped to wait for the other because neither knew what to say. She couldn't believe he was leaving the world behind. He was leaving her.

<< Wow >> she said finally, unable to contain the bitterness and shock but at least there was no period, she wasn't judging him. << That sounds like a game changer. >> It was, in more ways than one, and she was taking a step back, both of their shoulders hunching protectively as he said

<< Yeah I guess. It's supposed to be >>

No period because he was still wanting the conversation to go on. She thought about conversations they had and hadn't had. What would life be like without the feed--would she have had the strength to say what she needed to then?

<< When do you leave? >> she asked him

read 9:27am

He was looking at the ground, searching for a way out

<< tomorrow >> he said, non-capitalized 'T' because he was ashamed he hadn't told her earlier.

<< **Oh** >> she said, "Impact" font to try to get him to notice.

read 9:32am

He was too awkward to deal with that silence.

All at once she had to tell him, he had to know, how could he not have read it already, it was in every syllable she sent--in expression, intonation, and body language?

<< I'll miss you >> she said, blurted, simple and

straightforward at last.

<< I like you, too, Neri >> he said, unhesitant, thoughtful with his words, gentle on delivery, caressing her name with his voice. And still that teasing note emphasized in the “too,” when he knew all along and neither of them ever said in their commas and periods and capital letters. Never said it, not in this language, at least.

Neri looked up for the first time. She cleared her feed (the picture of her pancakes had already earned 31 likes) from her vision and really looked. She saw him, really saw him, and he was looking at her, too, and their eyes met for the first time. She didn't type

<< :) >>

but she did it irl.

And he did it back.

They held the moment, unplugged, as the world buzzed around them. But they were still.

## **CHIFLADA**

Nadia Mota

sunday afternoons in my church shoes, tiny  
broken buckles and satiny white bows  
at the ankles, i sat on the floor  
of my grandparents' emerald house, scratched  
at the peeling leather mary janes and curled  
away from their conversation.  
their open, laughing mouths were lifeboats  
and rolling tongues an ocean i couldn't cross.  
i waited for years, but  
no one ever sent me an invitation.  
ay, chiflada, silly spoiled girl.  
i tucked my hands under the folds  
of my white cotton dress, kept my tongue  
at the roof of my mouth.  
i've studied their language, can speak  
now without a shaky voice.  
yet there are still oceans,  
some things i'll never understand.

## **SOMETHING VAGUE**

Claire Denson

Packing for Athens,  
I clean out my old  
army green satchel  
I carried that summer.

Inside there's sand  
and a Coney Island credit  
for the Comet ride  
I didn't pay for, but went on  
twice.

I don't feel much,  
just something vague.

I heard you had surgery.  
I heard you missed a comedy show,  
the one that I love,  
for a mild emergency.

I hope you're okay  
medically, and otherwise.

## **littleletters**

Hannah Craig

youandi,we'relikelittleletters,  
confusing,annoying,  
andmuchbetterwithspacebetween.

## **TOO COLD**

Angela Hsu

I see you drowning  
We exchange looks  
Sorry  
Do you want me to save you  
because I don't know how

Your face is twitching  
it's red  
should turn purple soon  
the water is cold  
freezing cold

I can't understand what you are saying  
when you're underwater

Speak up!

Fine  
I should leave you alone  
You won't blame me for too long anyway.



## **Snow Queen**

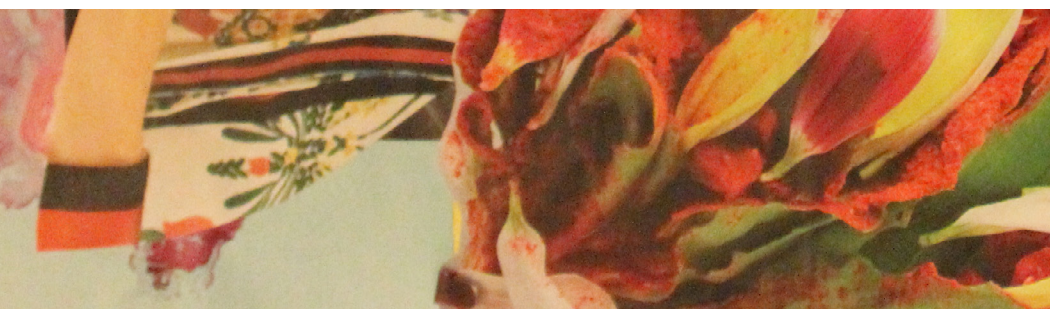
Hannah Brauer



## **COVEN**

Lily Buday

I have forgotten my true nature,  
I think as I wipe the remnants of blush from my pale cheeks.  
I have forgotten  
that I have fangs for teeth and claws for nails  
I have forgotten  
that I have a gaze which can pierce flesh and bone  
I have forgotten  
that the girl zipped tight into the dress is an illusion, and so  
are her  
long lashes  
bright smiles  
heart dancing  
laughter  
I have forgotten.  
I have forgotten about the poison that I keep on my lips,  
replaced with lipstick that night, so when I kissed him  
he still had the breath left to say that he didn't want me.  
Sometimes  
I think that forgoing the poison  
was my worst mistake.



I have forgotten  
and it is a howl on the wind as I hurl myself home,  
let my hair revert to brambles  
and my heart to coals  
that I lay bare on the hearth once I reach her.  
When she looks at me, her eyes are dark with the kind of love  
that burns empires.  
She grips my chin  
she marks my skin  
she paints my treacherous mouth with her own red blood.  
She extends her hand to me, and with all I have forgotten,  
I still remember  
that our entwined fingers spell out death,  
that our sisterhood is stronger than his scorn,  
that witches hunt in packs.



## **ON NOT LOSING YOUR VIRGINITY**

Kathleen Janeschek

There's a crossroads  
outside his window,  
grey at this hour  
and along the pavement  
creep cars whose  
headlights, still on, light  
arteries already lit  
by the rising dawn.

## **EYES, TIRED**

Kathleen Janeschek

My mother squints at me but the Sun  
is not in her eyes, only the green-gray  
of the summer sky during summer storms  
before it pours and pours, before  
it rips roots from the Earth  
and children from their mothers,  
before the boom, the crack, the break.

## FOUR TEXTS TO JULIET

Ashley Bishel

(1/4) you make me feel like:

the street of my childhood home the first night it snows every year everything stops for a few hours and i stand outside and watch thick flakes sparkling and spinning under florescent streetlamps and covering the ground and making everything go quiet.

(2/4) before i met you all my heart emojis were ironic.

(3/4) the first time you left something in my room (it was a plastic dasani bottle, it was still a quarter full) i left it where it was for a month i didn't want to throw it out because it was proof that you had really been there you were real you were there

(4/4) i cant stop thinking about the first time you said i was pretty

## **EROTICA OF THE FERN**

Sage O'Brien

I.

Is it wrong for me to desire a fern? A slender stem  
divides into many. Leaves trickle up and down,  
I've never seen anything so gentle in this wind.

II.

Is it perverse for me to seek a floral portrait?  
To impress on every facet of my life an image  
a reproduction  
a mechanized completion of my identity  
I tattoo flower and fern. Maybe I desire to bring  
myself closer to the ground  
maybe I can't wait for the moment my decomposed  
skin bursts into life under mounds of dirt,  
gives way to geraniums.

III.

I don't plan on being buried in a coffin. Not cremation.  
I plan on being buried in a pod  
where tree roots will become my bones,  
mushroom hyphae my arteries.

IV.

He asked me what the mystery of blood was  
I remembered the pop of raw cranberry, stain of  
blueberry on lips.

V.

I pressed a wildflower, a fern, in my journal.

VI.

What if I desire an oak paneled floor? Tree rings  
cut smooth. Concentric lifeblood.

What's the appropriate distance?

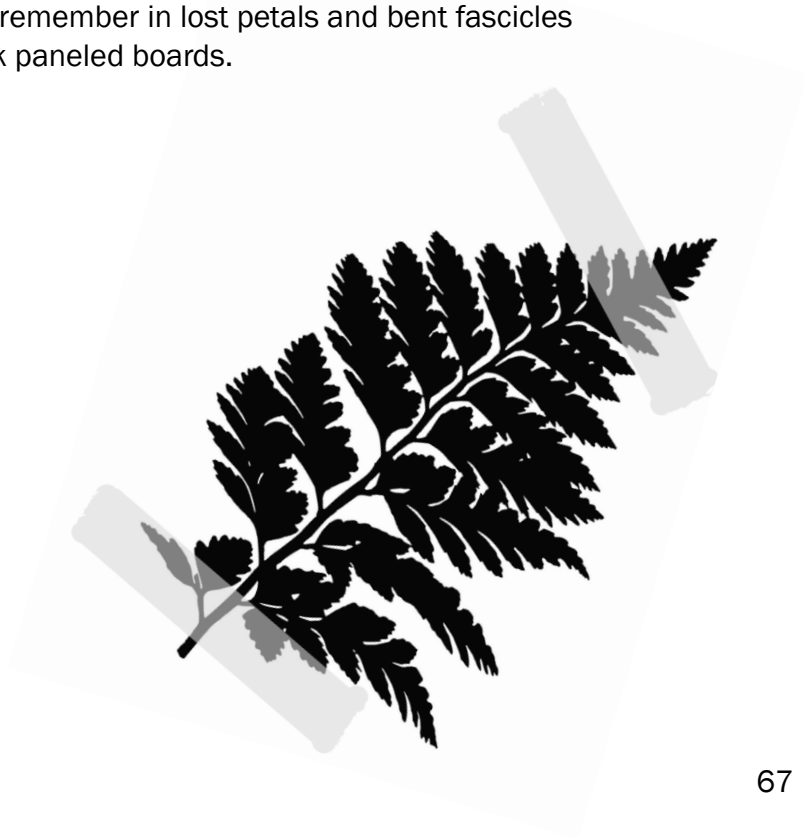
Between me and her and canopies -

How do I decide what is real and what is  
reproduction - seduction maybe.

Maybe there's something in the erotica of the fern.

That I define in comparison and in lack.

That I remember in lost petals and bent fascicles  
on oak paneled boards.





**crystallized**  
Hannah Brauer

## **SHAKE**

A. E. McCloskey

i am never.  
my definition of loneliness:  
a body. lonesome.  
i am nothing,  
an unlucky number. it has  
an old-fashioned ring to it.  
Vicki came back,  
i told her / unexpected / confession.  
why not?  
i am. confess?

## **I AM JUDAS / INSIDIOUS II**

A. E. McCloskey

i will burn you down  
with a mere flicker  
of my tongue.

crucify me, for  
i am the one,  
wicked.



## SIX WAYS TO SAY I LOVE YOU

Ashley Bishel

### One.

Her mother hates the new light bulbs. The new energy efficient ones that are supposed to replace the traditional incandescents cast a blazing white glow instead of the usual buttery yellow. Her mother's been going blind for longer than she's been alive, a degenerative genetic eye disease that was only properly diagnosed the year she were born. The new light bulbs give her a splitting headache.

She is making dinner with the lights off instead, moving slowly and carefully around the kitchen. The blueish darkness of the early evening surrounds both of them as her mother rinses fruit in the sink and she sits at the table, tapping at her phone. The family cat Muffin is watching her mother intently, tail twitching. It's almost time for her to be fed and she knows it.

*Can't you just buy the old light bulbs?* she asks, getting up from her chair to close the kitchen cabinet; sometimes her mother forgets to shut them and runs into them.

*The government is phasing them out. In a few years we won't be able to buy any,* her mother explains, pouring grapes into a bowl. She holds it out to her. *Take these to the table, please. And feed the cat.*

The conversation fades from her mind; at some point in the next week the kitchen lights are replaced with the old bulbs and there are no more dinners in the dark. The next time she thinks of it is when she returns home from soccer practice one day and her father is kneeling in the living room, packing small packages into boxes.

*What are those?* she asks curiously. Her father is not the type to organize or clean; his cleaning philosophy is that if it doesn't smell, everything is okay.

*Oh, your father says without looking up. Just some light bulbs.*

“Light bulbs” turn out to be the energy-inefficient ones that Uncle Sam wants to get rid of, and “just some” is actually nearly \$400 worth. Her father has quietly purchased several years worth of the light bulbs your mother needs, which she only finds out from her several weeks later.

*If you find a man like your father, your mother says. You should marry him.*

## **Two.**

It's her first house party, a friend of a friend invited her and all day she has felt the excited electric buzz of *doing something wrong* later. Every time she thinks about it her heart gives a little jump in her chest. She's one of the kids who doesn't have curfews because they're too boring to need one. Eve is her best friend since first grade who has somehow not abandoned her after puberty gifted her with a slim waist and a full chest.

*Are you sure it's all right if we go?* she hisses to Eve as they change in the locker room for practice after school.

Eve rolls her eyes at her, running a hand through her black pixie cut in a way that artfully ruffles it in all the right places. *Don't be silly. No one will care. Everyone will be drunk. Besides, we're going with Sam. He knows everyone.*

She's taut with nerves all afternoon, but she's not worried enough not to go. She's a little jumpy, goes to bed a little earlier than normal just to be safe. Her parents are on their weekly phone call with her older sister, who's off at college. They wish she would visit more, but they don't insist, as long as she calls. It's easy to slip away while they're occupied. She lies in bed for three hours, feeling her heart trying to beat out of her chest and listening to the familiar sounds of her parents getting ready for bed.

At 1 a.m., she sees a car without headlights pull in front of her house. She grabs her cell phone and jacket, pops out the screen of her window with her fingernails like she's practiced, and climbs onto the garage roof. From there, it's easy to reach the pine tree on the other side of the house and clamber down. Within a minute she's inside the car.

*Badass*, Eve says, handing her a dark bottle. Her friend

Sam nods in silent agreement starts the engine again, and they drive off.

The bottle is red wine and she and Eve have consumed all of it by the time Sam's car pulls up to the party. It makes her mouth feels sour and her head feel light, but she can walk just fine. She's not even nervous as she walks into a party full of older kids she doesn't know, arm linked with Eve.

There's a bowl of something that Eve makes a beeline towards, ladling it into one of the red cups scattered across the dining room table. When Eve offers her a cup, she wrinkles her nose and shakes her head. Unbidden, her sister's advice comes to mind: *Don't drink anything if you don't know where it came from.* Granted, that advice wasn't directed at her, but was just generally groaned in her direction after she'd accidentally woken her up on the first day of break. Her sister, freshly returned from her first semester of college, had mumbled that bit of hungover wisdom and pulled the covers over her head.

They make their way into the basement, which is throbbing with music. There's one lonely disco ball plugged into the corner, but everything else is dark.

She doesn't like this, not being able to see the dark bodies brushing up against her, pungent and sweaty. The music is so loud she can't tell what song it is, and the winking lights from the disco ball give her disorienting glimpses into the crowd: a girl from the lacrosse team pulling out her ponytail and shaking her hair free, a short senior she's seen in the hall tipping a beer can into his mouth, a boy from AP Physics pressing his hips against a small blonde she doesn't recognize. She's struck suddenly with the with the terrifying notion that if she wades into the crowd she'll be swept away from Eve, alone and adrift in this churning sea of music and spinning lights.

*I'll be back in ten minutes. Fifteen tops.* Eve gives her cheek a quick peck and turns, swallowed by the dark crowd.

She finds herself chatting with a guy in a corner around half an hour later. She her cheeks feel warm, and her chest feels light. She's acclimated to the music and the lights now; the trick is to keep your gaze in one spot. She has been staring at this guy's

shoulder for a good fifteen minutes. Without the disorientation, she's calmer. Words spill out of her easier than usual. The guy — his name is Tom? Chris? She can't recall — seems into it, or at least he starts moving closer to her every time she pauses for breath. She has to keep moving back; pretty soon she'll hit the cool cinderblock of the basement's wall.

*Oh, God, someone groans nearby. Some sophomore is puking in the bathroom*

With a unpleasant drop of her stomach, she remembers Eve. *Fifteen, tops.* Eve is a lot of things, but she keeps her promises. Their relationship had begun with Eve punching a cruel boy for her in second grade. Eve would not ditch her.

*One second,* she tells Tom/Chris, and slips into the crowd. It's not hard to find the bathroom; it's the door with a bunch of angry looking people queued up beside it. She knocks on the door. *Eve?*

There's just a moan.

*Eve, it's me. Can you let me in?*

Eve is a mess. Her makeup is smeared and her eyes are red and puffy. Most of the vomit looks like it made it into the toilet, at least. She feels unmoored, like the time her mother had bent over and cut her forehead on a drawer's sharp corner. It had been an unnerving role reversal. She had to call the doctor, get a washcloth, prepare ice. Her mother had needed four stitches that night, and the queasy feeling had stayed in her stomach for the next week.

*Oh, sweetie,* she says. Eve doesn't respond, just bends over the toilet again. Loud retching follows. She finds a stack of small Dixie cups next to the toothbrushes and fills one with water.

Eve spits into the toilet, looking miserable. *Sam left. I saw him go.*

She's not one for swearing, but right now she's feeling the word *fuck* in every fiber of her body. *Is there anyone else you can —*

She's interrupted by Eve gagging over the toilet again.

*Fuck. Fuck. Fuck.* She doesn't know anyone here. She can't drive and they're on the other end of town. She doesn't even have a car. She doesn't even know anyone who has a car, except —

She fishes her phone out of her back pocket and dials her older sister.

Her sister, who is at a university half an hour away. Her sister, who is probably still awake. Her sister, who will be annoyed as hell but who has a car and might be their best shot of getting home.

*Hello?* says the irritated voice on the other end of the line. *Why the hell are you calling me right now, I'm in the middle of —*  
The whole story spills out of her mouth quickly. *I don't know what to do, Eve has to get home, she's really bad, can you please, please come get me?*

There's not even a pause. *Yeah. Text me your address. I'll be there in half an hour.*

Her sister shows up in nineteen minutes, which means that there was both no traffic and she was speeding like a bat out of hell. She's braced for a lecture or at least some annoying comment, but her sister just looks concerned. *Do you know what she drank?*

All she can do is shake her head. *Can you take us home?*

Her sister nods. *Of course.*

They have to go in through the main door because Eve is in absolutely no shape to be climbing trees. She feels better as soon as they cross the threshold, comforted by the familiarity of every corner and shadow. Together she and her sister move Eve upstairs and into her bed, on her side. She goes to fetch the bathroom trashcan, just in case, and her sister gets two glasses of water and a bottle of ibuprofen. At some point Muffin has appeared like a specter, eyes glowing and unblinking in the dark. She is probably judging all of them. It's what cats do.

*You're both going to feel like shit tomorrow. Don't take acetaminophen and drink a lot of water.*

*Are you going to tell Mom and Dad?* she asks quietly, fidgeting with the hem of her shirt.

Her sister hesitates. *Not this time. But don't fucking do it again. Go to parties with people you know. You're smarter than this.*

She exhales quietly, in relief. *Thank you for coming to get*

*me.*

Her sister reaches over to ruffle her hair in the way she used to hate. *Always, kiddo.*

### **Three.**

Tom/Chris's name actually turns out to be Josh, and she learns this because at some point that night she'd given him her number and the next morning she wakes up to three texts from him.

He's nice, she decides. She'd never really paid him much attention before the party. She's kind of enjoying the attention. Eve doesn't like him, but she has a feeling that might be because she'd been talking to him at the party while Eve was puking her guts up alone.

Anyway, they've been talking for two weeks when he asks her to prom.

This was unexpected. She was only a sophomore, so the chances of her going to prom had been miniscule. All her friends are jealous. She can tell Eve wants to roll her eyes whenever it comes up but any jealousy Eve feels is unspoken, and she even helps her go dress shopping.

There's the corsage, the pictures in Josh's mother's backyard, the limo split with several other couples she doesn't know. She's more excited than nervous— she feels beautiful in her long navy dress, much older than newly sixteen.

The confidence lasts through dinner, where she's surprisingly at ease with the other couples. There's a pretty girl named Kaila who she's seen but never really spoken to before. She's charismatic and friendly, and starts talking to her immediately.

*I went to prom my freshman year and nobody spoke to me at all,* Kaila confides in her. *It really sucked.*

Kaila's fun, and her date and Josh are friends as well, so they all end up grouping with each other once they get to the dance. She can smell the sickly sweet odor of alcohol on Josh already; she has no idea when he had started drinking but he's not acting very drunk so she doesn't really mind. She doesn't think

anything of it when he wanders after Kaila to get food.

She does start to wonder where they went after twenty minutes. Armed with a plate of assorted meats and cheeses, she heads out of the ballroom to go find them. And find them she does, in a nook beside the coat room.

*Josh, stop it, what the hell —*

He has his face pressed up against her neck, or he's trying to, but Kaila keeps shoving him back.

*Oh, c'mon Kay, I love you, I keep telling you...*

Kaila finally manages to slip past Josh, and she rounds on him, looking furious. *I've said no to you for years, asshole, and I'm here with my boyfriend. And you're here with —*

It's that precise moment that she and Kaila make eye contact. Kaila doesn't look embarrassed or angry — just sad. It's the expression that Eve has when she's in the same room as one of Eve's parents and the start to complain about the other. It's an expression of regret, disappointment that she had to witness this particular unpleasantness.

The plate of cheese cubes and cured meat topples out of her hand and hits the ground. She suddenly feels very, very young. Before Kaila or Josh can say a word, she spins around and flees.

#### **Four.**

She'd been prepared this time, and had brought enough money to take a cab home just in case. And she takes a moment to be grateful that she'd thought ahead, as she sits in the back seat trying not to cry. If she cried, her parents would know something was wrong. Even if her mom couldn't really see her, she knew what her daughter's voice sounded like when there were tears involved. And she really, truly did not want to talk about this right now.

When she gets home, her parents are just sitting down to dinner. They both looked worried, but she claimed period cramps and fled up the stairs.

The dress she had felt so beautiful in just a few hours ago felt gaudy and silly now. She was a child playing dress up. Just some stupid kid Josh could use to get close to Kaila. How could

she think he was interested in her? How could she want him to be interested in her?

She peels off her dress, letting it fall in a heap on the floor. She doesn't care. Still fighting back tears, she pulls on her softest t-shirt and sweats before climbing into bed. Finally, *finally*, she buries her head in her pillow and weeps.

It could have been five minutes or an hour, she's not quite sure, but at some point she becomes aware of a soft purring beside her ear. Eyes puffy, she turns over and comes face to face with Muffin standing at the edge of her bed. The door must have been left slightly ajar, and the cat had let herself in.

Muffin blinks at her slowly, still purring, and slowly climbs onto her stomach where she begins kneading her t-shirt with her claws.

*What are you doing, cat?* she mumbles. Muffin only purrs louder. She sighs and raises a hand to scratch her cat's head, feeling the purr reverberate in her chest. Her breathing begins to even out. Muffin closes her eyes, tucking her paws underneath her body contentedly. She doesn't stop purring.

## **Five.**

To her credit, Eve never says *I told you so*. Eve doesn't reply to her text; she just shows up at her door fifteen minutes later with a cheap pizza and a bag of Hershey's Kisses.

*You were right about him*, she tells Eve glumly, before biting into a slice. The grease burns her tongue, but she doesn't care.

*I wish I wasn't*, Eve says, passing her a napkin.

*I was so dumb.*

*You couldn't have known.*

She lies back down on the bed and closes her eyes. Next Monday half the school would already know about the whole thing. She'd turned off her phone after Eve arrived; she saw five notifications from Josh and two from an unknown number which was probably Kaila. She wasn't interested in what he had to say; Kaila she might want to talk to, to assure her that she was okay. But not right now, because right now she wasn't okay. Right now everything sucked and all she wanted to do was lie on her bed and



eat pizza with Eve.

Eve pushes her over gently and lies down next to her. She can hear her parents downstairs cleaning up after dinner, her dad's loud voice and her mother's laugh. Right now that kind of love seemed utterly implausible.

*Thanks for coming over,* she says softly to Eve.

*You've always had my back,* Eve replies. *That's what friends are for. She props herself up on an elbow. Anyway. Fuck that guy. You deserve better.*

## **Six.**

Her parents walk around the neighborhood on Sunday mornings, her mom's hand on her dad's elbow. It's a quiet walk, shaded by large oak trees that shiver quietly in the breeze. The neighbors know them by now, and many of them say hello if they're outside. They know by now to greet her mom aloud rather than just waving.

They walk for about an hour together each week from early spring to the first snow, just as they have for as long as she can remember. She doesn't know what they talk about, and when she was little she couldn't understand the point of it. All she knew was that it meant she could sneak in an extra hour of cartoons if she woke up early.

When she asked her mom once, all she said was that it was nice to spend time with each other. That didn't make sense to her; they saw each other every day, there was nothing special about it. If they wanted to be romantic, couldn't they go out to dinner like people did in the movies?

(She asked her dad why they did it, and he said *exercise*.)

*I still don't understand,* she told her sister. *They barely say 'I love you' to each other. It's so weird.*

Her sister ruffles her hair, and automatically she jerks her head away. Her sister laughs, though not cruelly. *There's more than one way to say 'I love you', kiddo. Start listening.*

## **ODE TO COLD CHAI TEA**

Kate Cammell

There is no greater treasure than letting your tea steep;  
encouraging it to froth and be,  
to drink it when you're ready.

There is no greater pleasure  
than to watch foam settle  
and send bubble ships sailing,  
across a great expanse of cinnamon brew.

There is no greater measure of the contentment  
in my heart than to rest with my head  
on the steep skeletal mountain  
that is your shoulder, to laugh  
until my eyes tear while sitting  
at the wooden table, and to have the time  
to be together to watch our tea get cold.

## **SAGE GREEN**

Sage O'Brien

Green frothy bubbles slide down hot pink flesh -  
sage green.

My wise grandmother  
ask if I know my tights are ripped.  
Puke it up and bathe me in it,  
please.

Upchuck butterflies of words

feel my fluttering stomach and my accelerating heart  
beat.  
My head fits perfectly there.  
Chop off my fingers  
one by one  
cut open my sternum,  
please.  
Don't forget the scissors  
did you purposely situate your body as a metaphor  
your body is art.  
My arm hurts  
cut it off  
rip my fingernails  
cut them tiny  
into squares  
steep them  
in my tiny tea kettle  
everything in my apartment is small  
and cute -  
sage green  
evergreen  
forever green.  
Stop smiling  
you're making me smile  
you're making my tears congeal  
I made tzadziki sauce with the tears you made me  
cry.  
Please,  
cut off my eyelids  
so I can never stop looking.  
My tears congeal into thick gravy,  
a great ship meets a great wave  
the gravy boat tips  
thick brown sludge exits my salivary glands  
my hangnail stings -

I picked it too much.  
How am I supposed to feel?  
How do I feel?  
Can I be happy?  
What is the source of my happiness?  
Is it pure?  
Which do you prefer on chicken:  
gravy  
or tzadziki?  
Is there anything you're looking for in particular?  
Ok you're just browsing.  
No I don't like him.  
Thanks for understanding,  
these words are sage  
green  
they're sticking  
my hands  
cut them off -  
I can't stand sticky hands.  
I like your words  
I haven't told you yet.  
I don't like my words  
my speech is thick slime  
pours and trickles  
never in between.  
I puked on your shoes because I read too much  
I want to get drunk tonight  
words easier  
pinot grigio and sharp white cheddar  
I don't want gravy on my cheddar  
sage green burnt my tongue -  
cut off my tongue,  
please,  
I don't know how to use it anyway.



## **The World Below**

Maeve Pascoe

## **LOTUS**

Kate Cammell

My favorite galaxies are brown and born  
in the center of your eyes, full of charted  
constellations and the darkness  
between stars whose light  
has yet to reach my eyes.

A lotus at dawn, your petals grace  
downward toward still water, light crests  
the edge of lips the way the sun  
lies just so on cherry trees in bloom,  
you are spring,  
the morning dew that wakes me.

Your hands kiss skin  
with fingers like tea that steep  
and relentlessly relish the trail  
of goose bumps left in their wake. I love  
your hands and how they worship roses,  
embracing the hurt that comes with thorns.

## **X WAYS OF LOOKING AT MICHIGAN**

Jessica Jung

i.

air clouded with burnetts and kamchatka,  
judgment impaired, shadows stumbling,  
it's lit.

ii.

remember when your fridays, saturdays, and sundays  
weren't spent in the ugli until 2am?  
me neither.

iii.

weekend sleepovers where he takes  
all of the covers and shows up at 3am—  
without a burrito.

iv.

pregame playlist, eight shots deep  
how many more until we tailgate?  
welcome to ann arbaugh.

v.

family dinners,  
birthday celebrations, weekly outings.  
subtract one seat from the table.

vi.  
ten hours, six hundred dollars,  
floating four thousand four hundred miles,  
five times each year.

vii.  
white specks fall from the sky and  
conspire with wind  
to pierce my delicate skin.

viii.  
vineyard vines, canada goose,  
timberlands, and sperrys—  
what greek house are you in?

ix.  
out of fear of commitment and  
the desire to spend the day with one but wake to another:  
“wyd?”

x.  
i buy chipotle every other day because  
south quad can’t tell the difference between  
an avocado and a cucumber.



## **THERE'S NO SUCH THING AS SPACE**

Hannah Brauer

I would always see stars in your eyes, and  
I thought I knew them so well  
that I could draw the constellations from memory.  
I could see them  
in the darkness behind closed eyelids  
And that night  
I traced them onto your back as you stared into the sky  
and I stared at you,  
You said the stars above us had exploded,  
but the light took its time in finding us.  
I didn't understand then, how they felt so close,  
so real,  
we had them all to ourselves.  
I could touch them with as much ease as your spine,  
And I wanted to be there the moment one vanished,  
as the stars ran out,  
so I knew you were right.

And you were,  
because that instant your eyes imploded  
and I was engulfed by darkness,  
I realized I was as far from you as we were from the stars,  
And it took 365 days  
for the truth to travel the distance.  
The light reached me  
in the same time it took for the Earth to circle the sun  
And we are back  
in the same place  
we were  
before I met you.

In the same place we were  
before the stars burst open,  
Before the constellations cracked  
the planets fell from their orbits  
the galaxies collapsed  
Before I did the same  
Before you took the u-n-i out of universe  
and left behind verses  
to love songs that weren't about me;  
Before your black hole eyes swallowed everything  
and spit out skewed patterns  
that I couldn't connect,

I should have known  
that there's no such thing as space,  
Just illusions of what once was  
but will never be again,

Maybe the universe exploded a lightyear away  
And I'm just the first one to feel it.

## THE COLOR OF SAINTS

Kathleen Janeschek

It was almost Christmas but not a single snowflake had fallen and Daniel was the only person in the room wearing boots. There he was, standing with his back against the window in the red refracted light of the Christmas tree, smiling broadly and laughing heartily, jolly as can be. He was in the middle of telling a joke, or being told a joke, it wasn't clear, nothing was ever quite clear with Daniel, and he stood at the peak of the circle, his arms outstretched, encircling those closest to him, bringing them in. Some say it's a talent, that way he has with people, that ease, that poise, like it is a gift from God, like it is as natural as the way he moves his body. But the movements of the body are not natural: cover your ears and watch the wriggling, the wiggling, and you will see the design. Those arms, wrapped around others' bodies, a warmth or a grasp to remind, to remember another's presence, and oh, to be touched like that, or better, to touch like that, these are things that belong to others. Eyes that never failed to look into your own, blinking, wavering wetly, a shine in them no matter how little the light, a red reflection at that moment. The mouth, a bit too big for his face, that would only open in bits and flashes as if self-conscious of itself. A flash of white, a bit of red, here and sometimes there, and always that boisterous voice that boomed across the room as if carried by an impossible wind.

And it was there, on the other side of the room, that David sat in his armchair. It was a chair tucked in the corner of the room, where shadows fell unforgiving to the features and the light of the Christmas tree did not reach, but though darkened by his chosen setting, David could not be said to be brooding. In fact, something like a smile twitched upon his lips, or at least, something more like a smile than a frown. He had been listening to the chatter of those around him, those cordial tones, those colloquial toms,

but Daniel's voice kept cutting him from across the room, and he leaned lightly out of his shadows to better hear the words and he absorbed those words, that rhythm of language like a sinner in church learns the singing of grace. Rapt and entranced, his lips quivered and a longing thawed and blossomed in the pit of his stomach, a burning sinking through his tubes and vessels and intestines, scorching and smiting his insides as it dropped, until it reached his loins and smothered itself in his seat, extinguished as quickly as sparked.

Then someone, from the center of the room, some nobody, bored and drifting from their own tedious conversation, pointed a finger at the window and declared the first snowflakes of the season to be falling. The party turned from themselves to the window, all the scattered conversations unifying to one, a moment of closeness as everyone converged together, a shifting, a settling, a sighing. All to watch the lightest of flakes fall from the heavens, little flurries of white against the night, snow that would melt upon contact with Earth, wet the ground and nothing more, closer to a spring rain than a winter storm, but still, still a moment for a collective muttering, a wonderment at the world, for this was a first. Every first, even a wicked one, was a reason for excitement, and David tucked this thought into his coat pocket as he laced up his shoes, which now juxtaposed with this snowfall, as lackluster as it was, seemed insubstantial. They were too thin, too flimsy, like slices of skin pulled apart and his eyes wandered over to Daniel's boots, solid and heavy and ready for this. Somehow, he knew. He must be able to read the sky like he reads people and how one man could be attuned to both the world and the people in it, while David was left to stumble clumsily through both, seemed unfair. Meanwhile, a rush, a flush of joy was reddening the cheeks of all

until the moment was gone, and the friends and strangers turned away from the world and back to themselves.

By the time Daniel turned back to the party, David's chair was vacant.

• • • • •

The lake was walking distance from the house, but he had driven his car anyway. Out the door and down the hill he went, the glistening grass crosshatching his feet, the puddled leaves leftover from fall crunching beneath, his shoes dampening with every step. They would be ruined if he kept walking, weakened and then torn to shreds by the weather. It wasn't winter, it wasn't anything, yet the snow laced itself in matrices across his uncovered hair; in every second new shapes were formed, new patterns invented, and the universe expanded, only for them to melt away in the next, for the universe to shrink again and the realm of possibilities with it. It was not long before his hair was wet, frigid even, but David knew this was only the first way the cold would bite him tonight.

At the water's edge, the waves lapped at his shoes, seeking his toes. Though snow was falling, it was too early for the lake to freeze, it was too early for ice and frostbite. This wasn't the dead of winter, but he couldn't wait for the dead of winter, he couldn't wait for the snow banks and icicles and blizzards that shut down the world, the whole town, the kind people would disappear into. He tasted ash in his mouth and he couldn't swallow, he could only choke. He was cold now, properly cold, he realized. It was odd to feel the chill so soon after the burn, but the warmth of the party was fading from his memory, he was already forgetting the heat and the lights, red and glowing, and David stepped out of his shoes and into the lake.

## **IVY DRIVE**

Sage O'Brien

through bent out bump limb  
phantom trickle  
a pepper smear  
the grey white black speckles of antithesis  
the organ donor  
wing to bone  
the yellow shadow of lost tulip hangs on stem  
Ivy drive is full of wicker homes  
caged galaxies  
waiting for dismissal

## **UNDER THE PEAR TREE, FIRST AND LAST DAY OF SCHOOL**

Natalie Steers

a white dress with geometric designs  
under the pear tree  
leaf tips tinted gold  
soaking in the mango of the sun  
just beginning to leak  
a trail for the mustard bus  
to rumble to the falling leaves  
shutter of a camera lid

flutter of eyelashes  
black cap and red gown  
beside the pear tree's  
delicate green blooming blush  
When had time become so beautiful and so old?  
Where was her little geometric girl soaked in pear gold?







## **ELEGY FOR MNEMOSYNE**

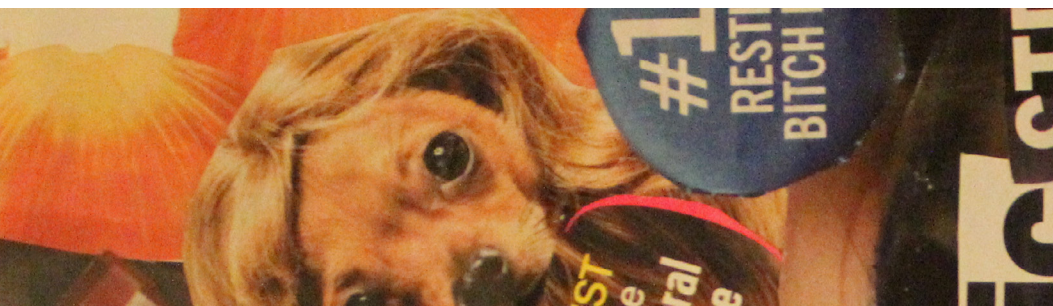
Hannah Brauer

Mnemosyne,  
Your voice echoes reticently  
between worn neurons  
sending slow signals  
from a growing distance  
All colors of you  
are seeping to sepia dreams  
folded and ripped  
around the edges  
I know  
I will not remember this day  
a year from now  
as I know Dawn opens her gate  
to the same sun  
each morning

Mnemosyne,  
the secrets we once shared  
are shrinking  
and I realize you are being swept down  
river Lethe  
Your thinning body drifts from shore  
as fleeting days fade  
from aging minds.



**Mnemosyne**  
Hannah Brauer



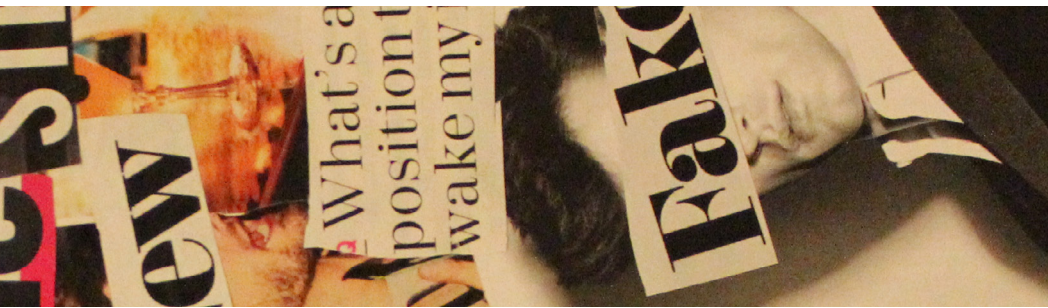
## **LASERS**

Maya Youness

The scalding snake kisses me and I am silent while my nerve endings scream. My vision: tinted pink.

Do not be fooled. This is not “la vie en rose”. This is not lust. She is not beautiful. Her skin is loose, murky, draped over something ancient. The alien sounds that steam from her open mouth are worlds away from hisses.

While I am not here, I wonder if she is venomous. Then I wonder if that would make any difference. After all,



I come here to suffer – to quell a different suffering.  
Her tongue is lethal, we knew that before we knew her.  
A glance at it turns the world into a forever crepuscule.  
Instead, I look up and hope for rain.  
The scalding snake can speak.  
Just once, she whispered in my ear: the opposite of an  
apology. Because I am supposed to find a way to not feel.  
Because I blame her when I can't.  
When she is finished, I always taste blood



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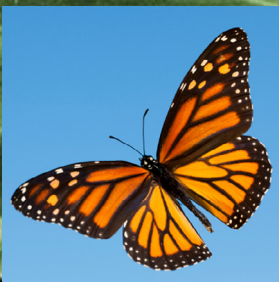
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