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MANASTASH 2018

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MANASTASH

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A Journal of Writing and Art

Volume 28 | Spring 2018



EDITOR'S NOTE

Dear readers,

What you're holding in your hands is a testament to the creativity, passion, and talent of CWU's student body, and I'm very proud of the work that our contributors and editors have done in bringing this issue into existence. Over the last 28 years, *Manastash* has grown from a little xeroxed labor of love into a beautiful showcase of what it means to be a student and artist at Central. It's my sincere pleasure to bring this excellent student work to your attention, and I hope this issue brings just a little bit more goodness into your world.

Keep going!

Dr. Zach VandeZande and the editing team

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GOLDEN BOY

Oliver Beck

I've got golden boys
in my head.

I built them with
Sunshine and Lightning, Cloud
Boys who gift me
spring showers, tend to
my flowers.

He'll taste like coffee
and burn me just right
slip through the gaps in
my ribs, no mind to
the bread dough rolls
hanging from my bones.

I teeter and shake.
It's scary 'cause love has
never been kind to me but
Golden Boys are all
patience and sparkling wine
kisses, fizzy lipped gentleness
chocolate clementines bitter
as they are sweet, farmer hands
the fans of both roots and blooms.

Golden boy with a
taste for Peach Trees
and sticky sweets the
kind that leave your fingers smelling
of suffocating summer
nights. Am I the sugar or the
stars when your teeth
hit my pit, hidden between
tulip pith?

Is it the crack of your
Thunder Blood or my throat that
Sings like the voice of a Drum
Beat that makes us tremble
shows off my choir boy treble
keys, hits my strings, teaches me
how to make music with
nothing but my
breathing?

Golden Boy,
with Peach Breath, dripping
Honey Teeth, do you know the
liquid heat in your hair? Be
Careful when you melt
my bones. I know you can't
stop it, I saw the sun
birth you, from her fire light, You
breathe gold and lightning, I
just hope you realize the
glitter in your lungs when you
see me, realize I dreamt of
You because I'm
a Golden Boy
too.

WHERE TO DIG

Kali Deann Vanderburg Buckner

Inspired by Dunya Mikhail's "Another Planet"

Have you ever seen a black snowfall
Or smelled the flowers that grow in blood
When the faded dreams of my father pass
Infecting my heart and mind

When they dropped their guns
Into the "foreign" mud
And walked away into a false sunrise
Did anyone go back?
And retrieve old friends
Or are they still there
Sleeping

Weapons sleep beneath the dust
If "weapons" are smiles in jars
If "sleep" is poisoned by love
If "dust" is bone and bread
If weapons sleep beneath the dust
Who is left to remember where to dig?

BLACK HOLE

KayLee Groot

I tell people my dad's an astronaut—
he must have left
for a reason. The occupation

reminds me of a documentary,
of a man bouncing on
the moon.

I purchased a new globe and
telescope, the lens piece
heavy with dust, cobwebs.

I lugged my treasures home,
I felt safe among
possessions. I felt safe
surrounded by simple diversions

like looking at stars and planets,
ashes and carbon.
But the sky never had
what I was searching for.

I search in books, read about
the people whose lives
Always seem to turn out right.
I'm aware of the illusion.

But still, even fictional characters
have fathers that don't leave.

PSORIASICK

Seth Morrison

My scalp shouts at me.

Don't wear this shirt!
Its color shows skin
flakes that have
fallen to your shoulders.

Note to self: light blue
for job interviews and dates.
It brings out your eyes.

My shins and forearms are
fickle.

Some days, the shame
of being seen

outweighs

the desire
for open air.

The weather
rarely cooperates.

Jeans in July.
Just my luck.



Audra Gunderson, *Circuits*

THE HOUR AND A HALF I THOUGHT MY BROTHER WAS DEAD

Wyatt Langstraat

Rainbows are a traditional sign of happiness. We litter them on uplifting posters, on cereal boxes, on the walls of our kindergarten classrooms, but the rainbow's symbology goes deeper than that one-sided concept. The prismatic symbol represents diversity, being used by the gay pride movement since the 1970s, and unity, with Nelson Mandela calling the newly organized democratic South Africa a rainbow nation in 1994. And, probably the most well-known use of the symbol, God placed a rainbow in the sky after He had the flood waters subside as a representation of his covenant to never again destroy the Earth with a flood. It is a sign that though terrible things happened, they have no power to destroy us.

October 24th, 2014; 9:20a

It was less than a year until I graduated from high school. It was a Friday, so I had only my high school classes: Jazz Band and Concert Band. There was a girl in band in whom I was interested in at the time, and I walked her to her next class, trying the whole way to work up the nerve to ask her out. Little did we know we would be seeing each other that night, not at a date but at a vigil held at the church down the street from my house. I left without making a move. It was fine.

9:32a

We Running Start students in the band would often stick around after rehearsal on Fridays, having no classes at the college, but I had scheduled myself to work that day. So I headed to my car after leaving my crush's classroom and went home. It was an uncharacteristically warm day for late October; my windows were down, Mark Foster's ironic lyrics blasted from my 1994 Toyota Corolla's tiny, tinny speakers. Signs prompting people to vote on gun control measures—Yes on Prop 594; No on Prop 591—were staked into the corner just down the street from the high school. I like to think the election was decided that very day.

9:41a

As I pulled in our driveway, I was thrown again by the sight of the Cadillac 300 parked outside our garage instead of my mom's Pontiac Vibe, which was in the shop. One week prior, a rampaging gunman had driven down our street and fired at a cop posted behind his own car. One of the steel-core rounds fired from his AK-style rifle had gone through the rear-side windows of my dad's car, the roof of my mom's, and our living

room, ending up lodged in our neighbor's garage wall. The gunman was eventually winged in the head and arrested just blocks from our house. He was put away for life. No sweat off my brow.

10:00a

I was picked up at ten for work. I was working as a tobacco investigative aide at the time, checking stores that sold cigarettes and other tobacco products to make sure the employees knew how to properly check IDs. If I was ever sold to, the accompanying officer would have a stern conversation with the violating employee; on more than one occasion, that employee was fired that same day. Hey, someone had to do the job. It's not like I forced them to sell cigarettes to me.

10:43a

I had just gotten a no sale at a Bigfoot Java—did you know they sold cigarettes? I didn't until I got the job—near the 88th Street I-5 off-ramp—and climbed back in the officer's car when we saw a police car with lights flashing and siren blaring speed off the highway and onto 88th, heading uptown. The officer and I didn't think anything of it, continuing our paperwork for the check. Another police car raced by. Then another. An ambulance was next, followed closely by one of those family SUVs that the police in Everett had just started using as patrol cars, then another police car.

"Seems like they're heading towards the high school," said the officer next to me. He turned the knob on his scanner.

"Cleared northside of campus; working our down to the library. Shooter still at large."

Fuck.

I knew my brother, a freshman, was still in school and was in first lunch at the time. My hands shook as I called his phone.

"Hi, you've reached Noah Langstraat, please leave—" Shit, no answer. I texted my friends I knew were still at school, one, to make sure they were safe, and two, to see if anyone knew where the hell my brother was. No one had seen him. I think at this time it really hit me: my brother could be lying on the floor in the cafeteria bleeding out and I couldn't do shit to save him. My baby brother, about whom I've had nightmares in which he gets run over by a car or kidnapped and never seen again, might be fighting for his goddamned life and I'm sitting in a Shell parking lot less than five miles away, and I can't do anything.

10:54a

I called my mom next, but I had forgotten she was in a counseling session with a client. I called my dad next to let him know I was safe and ask if he had heard from Noah. He hadn't. The officer with me asked if I wanted to go home. I said yes.

11:17a

Moms have a way of getting their kids to cry. I remember one time when I was playing basketball and knocked heads with another kid; I didn't start crying until I saw my mom in the crowd. So when my crying mother called me on the way back home, I broke down when I told her I hadn't heard anything. We turned onto my street.

At home, I didn't know what to do. My mom had only stepped out of her session. She was going to cancel the rest of her appointments, but she had to finish with her client before she left Everett to pick me up. I sat on the couch in a daze, staring at the police scanner app on my phone as the SWAT team continued clearing the school.

11:36a

My brother was Schrodinger's cat: neither dead or alive, but also both. Of course I didn't actually want my brother to be dead, but some sick fascination with death surfaced; I wondered what it would be like if I violently became the youngest in my family, how family gatherings would be without Noah around. We would all be sad at first, but surely that sadness would fade, becoming something none of us talked about. His room would stay untouched for a while, until my parents decided that enough was enough and changed it into an office for my dad or something. These thoughts were terrifying, and the amount of effort it took for me to banish them petrifying. I instead concentrated on more uplifting thoughts: my brother was alive and had just lost his phone in the commotion. I'm sure Schrodinger wished his cat was alive, too.

12:14p

My mom and I embraced when she finally got home. I didn't ask about Noah right away, afraid of the answer. She would have called me if she had heard something, right? If she hadn't? How would I want someone to tell me my brother had been shot?

I finally asked frantically, "Have you heard anything?" I was prepared for the worst.

"Yeah, yeah, Noah's fine. He texted from someone else's phone. He's safe." A huge sigh escaped from me, and a small amount of joyful relief leaked into my tears.

12:21p

My mom had heard on the radio that the kids were being bussed to a church near the school, a rendezvous point. So had everyone else, and since the main roads around the school were all blocked off, we had to snake our way slowly through back road neighborhoods that had probably never seen this much traffic. Cars stretched as far as I could see ahead of us, crawling toward a happy reunion or else a desperate and futile search through hundreds of kids before frantically running to police officer waving a phone that held the last picture taken of the missing kid. God, I was glad that wouldn't be us.

12:24p

On the radio, some local newswoman was talking to a student from the high school. She made sure they were safe before asking more questions, but the whole thing struck me as odd. These kids had just gotten to safety, and they were already being interviewed for the news? Let them breathe for a goddamned second!

12:33p

We had to park about a block or so from the church. A steady stream of parents ran toward the church, flowing around those who had already reunited with their kids and now began their long, arduous journey upstream to their cars. My mom and I made sure to watch traffic before crossing any streets.

12:36p

"I don't see him," I said, using my height to look out over the sea of shocked high school faces. I saw a line of police tape across the entrance to the church. "I think we go this way." My mom went ahead of me to talk to the officer by the tape. Noah came out then, a strangely stoic expression on his face, talked to the officer, signed some clipboard, and ducked under the police tape.

We all three embraced. A snap of a camera behind me sounded briefly, then my brother was asked for an interview. While he did that, I saw a group of my friends off to the side. I talked to them briefly, but my mom and brother wanted to get going.

On our way back to the car, I asked Noah how he was doing. He said he just wanted to get in the car. We were silent until we closed the car doors.

12:48p

He broke down then, letting it all go. Through the tears, he told us how he had been sitting at lunch when he heard the gunshots and immediately dropped to the ground, leaving his phone sitting on the table and dragging his friends with him. He said all he was thinking about was how bullets hitting him would feel like hammers in the back. At some point, he and his friends left the lunchroom and took shelter in a nearby classroom. He stayed there until SWAT came to clear the room. His eyes lit up when he described the SWAT gear in detail. The class was escorted to the waiting busses, hands on their heads and surrounded by heavily armed officers.

1:00p and beyond

My dad met us at Red Robin for lunch. I guess we were striving for some semblance of normalcy, like we weren't a family that had just gone through something horrific. And we almost pulled it off, until the woman next to us asked us if we had just come from the

high school. It wasn't her fault; she had no idea we wanted to be left alone.

All events that night were cancelled, and indeed for the next week. The district was happy to reschedule our football game, but Oak Harbor conceded the game instead. That team even decided to show up to our vigil that night at the church down the street from my house. A lot of tears were shed that night, and more time was spent in prayer.

School was cancelled all that next week, though us Running Start students still had our college classes. On the Monday after, as my friends and I were sitting in our Intro to Business class, an announcement came over the intercom saying that we would have a moment of silence for the victims of the shooting. After the moment had passed, I overheard a girl a table away saying how "lucky they were to have school off for the week." I've never wanted to punch someone so much.

Businesses throughout Marysville opened their doors to the displaced high school students, offering free bowling, roller-skating times, food, and movie tickets. We were able to hang out as a community and just be.

The Tuesday after the shooting, we were allowed back on campus to grab all the things that were abandoned. The fence out front was littered with flowers, posters, notes, candles, and other manner of well-wishing and condolence items. We had to be escorted around the school by a teacher, though, and no one was allowed into the lunchroom. My brother grabbed his phone and backpack, the little yellow tag on the strap marking it clear of weapons. Then he and I picked up our instruments from the band room. As we walked back to our car, we saw the students' cars that had parked here since Friday, each with a little orange check in the back window marking it clear of weapons.

The rainbow is a sign of hope, a sign that even when terrible things happen, there is more to come, and life won't end with the bad. God put one in the sky after the flood that wiped out most of the Earth's population as sign of His commitment toward humankind. He put one in the sky above Marysville Pilchuck that day as a sign that He never forsakes us and that good things are yet to come.

A BEE MAKES A NEST IN A WALL

Jessica Vincent

I watch a bee remove
a nail from a wall
and wonder
how it knows persistence.

What kind of classified secrets
it must be able to tell
if I could just convince it to share.

So I lean down
and whisper
but the bee does not hear.

It goes along gripping the nail
while I watch in wonder when each shift
and shimmy sends the nail
sliding free.

And I wish I was half
as determined to succeed
to swim beyond the deluge
that threatens to pull me under.

But my limbs are numb
and my mind
aching from the thunder
that hits my heaving breast
with the beat of a half-ton
hammer,
like the one
that beat the bee's nine-inch-nail
six feet deep into
brick,
mortar,
and brimstone.

TELEPHONE

Darryl Foto

I still remember the call. The words were meant for me, but I wasn't supposed to hear them. The words defiled my heritage with ignorance. Your words and your inability to see something worth loving in this black skin. Your father was yelling at you, telling you to "get that nigger off the phone." Your mother, in an attempt to calm him, said, "don't worry honey, it's just a phase." Then you, holding the phone to your chest, echoed the poison that spewed from your mother's lips. Not loud enough for me to believe it, but loud enough that I'll never forget it: "don't worry dad, it's just a phase."

As if being born into this melanin drenched inheritance was just a phase I hadn't outgrown. As if I ever stood a fighting chance of shifting out of this phase. As if some day in the near, distant, or nonexistent future I would wake up a little less Americano and little more white chocolate mocha. A little less Kunta Kinte and a little bit more Tobi. A little less "my first time with a black guy" and a little more boyfriend material. A little less passing fetish and a little more human being. Then could you love me? Then would you love this black man?



SECOND CUP OF COFFEE

Amy Law

No need to look, the bright beams come through with eyes closed.
Bright, warm glow of another day at home.
Coffee brewed
and the low hum of KOZI
gets me out of bed.
Who is awake?
Am I the last to the deck?
Not today.
Sunglasses are a necessity, the lake flat and deserted before the rest of the world wakes.
It's quiet,
a moment alone,
just the faint call of birds,
bees abuzz,
and critters claws on trees as they climb.
CRUNCH!
Startled, a deer and her baby appear,
looking for a morning snack.
Cautious and weary,
making their way down the gravel drive
to the food left for them.
Slowly
the world around me stirs,
the house creaks and
stretches with movement.
Whiffs of coffee
and I am joined outside
by the ones I love.
Sitting and sipping something hot
before the heat really starts.
Good morning
hello
from next door,
the occasional dog on a walk passes by.
The sun is fierce now
thin cotton pajamas start to cling,
urging me to change!
My swim suit is ready,

beach empty,
waiting for my towel to
conceal the cool green lawn.
Another perfect day has started.
Another day in my slice of heaven.

IT'S PAINFUL TO BE BEAUTIFUL

Caroline Wright

Mama used to say
It's painful to be beautiful,
pulling a brush through tangled hair
flinching at straightened knots.

She leaves dinner cold
every day this week,
skips dessert,
runs laps until it hurts,
then forces one more.

She stares into the face
of a rejected reflection
the mirror is a shard of
broken glass around her stomach
slicing into her skin.
She can't suck in enough to
suck up her shame,
Covers her thighs with paint.

She stuffs her bra like a
Thanksgiving turkey,
obsesses over magazines
hourglass is the "thing."
But, shoving sand down
her throat doesn't
mirror the image.

She pulls a brush through
tangled hair. Learns to
love thick thighs as
a tight thong cuts creases in
her core, craters in her curves,
and dimples in her cheeks.
she smiles:

It's beautiful.

FAST FRIEND

Amy Wilson

A two hour walk and I thought I knew everything there was to know about you. Like reading the back cover of a book and deciding I understood it better than the author. I saw your blonde hair, complimented your cute boots, and categorized you as Understood. You are more than one afternoon, more than two Starbucks lattes, more than the cookie cutter image I stuffed you into.

You have small hands. I noticed this the first day, but what I did not see was the graceful way they move. When you slide your silver ring onto your finger, the one with the tiny elephant, you move it slow and smooth. Donning your jewelry becomes elegant as you gently twist the band til the elephant faces up.

You have pale, clear skin. What took a few more weeks to see were the freckles that dot your nose, trail across your cheeks, and lead to the edge of your hairline. Faintly brushed across your light face, I did not see them. It was not until the spring sun danced across your cheeks, leaving its tiny footprints behind, that I noticed.

You are short. Your driver's license may say 5'3", but we both know you are barely 5'1" and 3/4. I never saw a figure so small possess a presence so large. You use not only your hands but your arms when you talk, and heads turn to listen. Your form is unmistakable as you use your whole body to launch a ping pong ball three feet.

You are quick to smile. Ten minutes into that first walk, my side was aching with laughter and espresso was close to coming out my nose. The energy and joy in your feet made you bounce rather than walk. Your smile that day was bright and open, honest like a child's. But I had to see the other smile a couple times before I understood it. The practiced smile, the one where your lips curve up as they should, and tiny crinkles appear at the corner of your green eyes. But your shoulders still slump, your feet weigh you down, and your arms cross to protect you. I hate that smile.

I did not mean to ignore some sides of you. I did not mean to put you in a category and leave you there. But I also did not look for any parts of you I might not like. Now I have learned to notice. You are my fast friend, and I love who you are, not just the idea of you.



Dalia Ruiz, *by and down the river*

THE FESTIVAL OF ANIMALS

Kaitlyn Lawrenz

The Festival of Animals was spoken of only in whispers. No one dared raise their voice about the forbidden event that took place between towns, in the little stretch of territory that belonged to no one.

The children whispered of it in awe, their curiosity piqued. Adults spoke of it in hushed tones, fearful of the rumors.

It was impossible to predict when the Festival of Animals would arrive. One day, the stretch of unclaimed land was empty, and the next, it was filled with tents and lights and noise.

Celeste had heard the whisperings of her friends and neighbors. Growing up, she had tried on countless occasions to ask her parents about the mysterious festival, but they brushed her off with a hasty, “That’s none of your business” and “Don’t go poking your nose where you know it shouldn’t be.”

The summer of her eleventh year, after finding the tents suddenly lined up along the hill, Celeste had snuck out after dark and wandered towards the event. The noise could be heard from her home, but she wanted to know what lay beyond the sounds.

The music was unearthly, unlike any song or instrument she had ever heard. The tune worked its way under her feet and stirred a bounce to her step, drawing her to dance. She suppressed the urge and sank further into the protection of the shadows.

She watched the people dance by in their elaborate animal masks. Each person was dressed impeccably - women in fine, gossamer gowns and men in the most luxurious suits. She didn’t recognize any of the dance moves, but she could guess the next one before it was executed. Everything was foreign, yet disturbingly familiar at once. The smiles were bright, the laughter loud and shrill, the music ebbing and flowing. Celeste was captivated.

Then she heard a scream from some distant corner and the atmosphere changed. Everything felt darker, more menacing, though the dancing never ceased and the smiles never faded.

She ran home, vowing to never return to the mystery known as the Festival of Animals.

It had been eight years since that night. Celeste was very content listening to the distant sounds drifting from the Festival each year. She listened to the continued whispers from her friends as they called it a travelling fairytale, something they only dreamed of attending, for they never dared to step anywhere near it.

Celeste let them talk as if something dark wasn’t lurking behind the beauty of it all. Besides, she didn’t know anything about the scream she had heard. It could have been anything.

Celeste’s best friend, Emilia, ever the fearless adventurer, still spoke of going. Each year, she told Celeste, “This is the year. We’re really going to the Festival of Animals!” and each year they laughed off the idea, though Emilia still had the spark in her eyes as they did so.

Now, Emilia walked through the door of the bookshop Celeste worked in, holding two hat boxes.

“I come bearing gifts!” she exclaimed before dropping the parcels on a table. She was breathless, her cheeks rosy, and she was beaming.

“I’m afraid to ask what you’ve done,” Celeste said. She finished putting the last three books in her arms on their shelves before approaching her friend.

“I’ve acquired us some masks,” Emilia whispered, leaning in dramatically and lifting a hand to shield her mouth as she spoke.

“Masks?”

“For the Festival!”

Celeste froze. The whispering had been abandoned and the old man who owned the shop looked up with shock in his eyes as he shook his head.

“Em, please tell me you’re joking.”

She flashed a wicked grin and Celeste knew her dear friend was entirely serious.

“No.”

“Oh, why not Cel? We’ve talked about going for years.”

“You know why!”

Emilia put on a frown, planting her hands on her hips like a stern mother. “Cel, you said so yourself, you don’t know what you heard that night. I’m sure you were just frightened and it was nothing. Please.”

“Em, you know I can’t,” Celeste said desperately.

“What if I said I got us dresses as well?”

“Emilia.”

With that and a tinkling laugh, Emilia picked up the boxes and skipped out of the shop.

“If you know what’s best for you,” the owner of the shop mumbled as the door shut, “you’ll steer clear of the Festival. Nothing but witchcraft.”

Celeste didn’t go home after the shop closed that night. She went straight to Emilia’s home, where her friend had already displayed the masks with their dresses across her bed.

“I cannot believe you!” Celeste exclaimed. Emilia sat in a plush chair in the corner of the room, sipping calmly from her teacup while Celeste paced the length of the bedroom.

“You wouldn’t be here if you didn’t want to go,” her friend said, a smile playing at the corners of her lips.

“I—”

Emilia laughed. “I got you! You’re curious, just like me. Admit it, Cel.” She rose to her feet and crossed her arms triumphantly. “You want to go.”

“Of course I do! The curiosity has been killing me for eight years, but I’m also terrified out of my mind, Em!”

“What are you scared about? We’ll look out for each other. Nothing’s going to happen.”

Celeste stared at her friend, waiting for her to snap, to lose that confidence, but she never did. With a sigh, Celeste turned to the bed.

“And where did you get these?” she demanded, flicking the skirt of one of the dresses.

They were just as exquisite as the ones she remembered seeing. Gossamer fabric in pastel shades, layers upon layers of material with little pearls meticulously sewn in lace designs across the waist.

The masks were something entirely different. Celeste couldn't even begin to guess what they were made out of. She lifted the one designed after a fox and expected it to be heavy, but found it to be as light as a feather.

The mask covered everything above one's mouth, ending at the hairline. It was so detailed that Celeste expected to feel fur when she ran her fingers along the surface, but it was rough—carved, or sculpted. The ears perked up right at the temples, finishing the illusion.

“Now the sad part is that we haven't the faintest idea when the Festival will come around again. So these little pretties have to sit on a shelf until it arrives.” Emilia pouted at the dresses, then quickly smiled at her friend. “Based on your look, I think I've won you over.”

“You're mad,” is all Celeste said, still running her fingers along the intricate design of the mask.

Though she was still nervous, there was a part of her that remembered that music, and the way it got under one's skin and almost forced one to dance, and she found herself getting excited.

Perhaps the Festival wouldn't be bad after all.

Four months passed before Celeste caught sight of tents in the area between towns. The rest of the day was a whirlwind of preparations for Celeste and Emilia. They spent hours styling their hair, lacing pearl beads through the strands framing their faces.

After the sunset, they put on their dresses and carried their masks as they snuck past the fields skirting the town's edge. The music could be heard for the entire trek and the two girls beamed as they got nearer, each bouncing on the balls of their feet the entire way.

They followed the tents around the edge of the Festival until they found the main entrance. There was a large banner overhead, though it didn't bear any writing—the only thing adorning the piece of fabric was a line of animals marching across, ranging from a lion to a monkey, with even a hummingbird floating above the others' heads.

The two girls shared an excited look before each donning their masks. In only a moment, Celeste became a sly fox and Emilia an innocent doe.

The moment they crossed beneath the banner, the volume of the music grew until it was thundering in Celeste's ears. The music was just as foreign, yet familiar as it had felt the first time she had heard it, those several years past. She knew she had never heard the tune before, but somehow found herself humming along to it anyway.

Emilia, who had slipped her arm into the crook of Celeste's elbow, now pulled her forward, closer to the source of the music.

Outside the circle of tents, everything had been dark, cast in shadow as the moon hid behind clouds. Here, everything was bright as day. Strings of lights hung overhead, though Celeste couldn't see what they were attached to, or even how they worked. It wasn't flame inside the glass orbs, but an inexplicable floating ball of light, coming from seemingly nowhere.

A woman disguised as a wolf appeared in front of the girls, holding out a tray full of wine glasses. She dipped her head to each and gave a sweet smile. “Welcome to the Festival of Animals,” she said in a sickly sweet voice.

Both girls smiled like fools as they took a glass. The wolf sauntered away and Celeste

looked down at the contents of her glass.

The drink was a molten gold liquid, staining the side of the glass iridescent as she spun it idly in her hand. When she took a sip, the drink left a warm trail down her throat. It tingled on her tongue and tasted just as sweet as the wolf's voice had been. The warmth spread throughout Celeste's entire body and she found herself smiling down at the glass. All concerns she had before were melting away and she was bouncing on her feet far more than before.

A group of four cats darted around the girls' feet as they wandered closer to the center of the festivities. Celeste heard her friend giggle as one of the felines jumped onto a table nearby, knocking over a platter of food.

There wasn't a single person present who wasn't smiling. Laughter could be heard from all directions, underneath the music.

"Shall we dance?" Emilia asked, turning back to see her friend. Celeste grinned and nodded. She wanted nothing more than to move.

They wandered past a few more tents before they found the dance floor.

It looked almost like a town center, surrounded by the enormous tents and long tables. The strings of light stretched overhead, forming a spider web of light over the dancers.

Celeste and Emilia stopped just outside the ring of dancers and watched in awe. Everything was perfectly synchronized, every move matching without flaw. There were easily one hundred people moving as one and when Celeste rose to stand on her toes, she spied another circle of dancers farther down the path, and another behind that one.

A man wearing the mask of a golden lion approached Emilia and bowed, offering his hand in silence. The smile on her face grew as she accepted, and was swept away, onto the dance floor.

Celeste watched in shock as Emilia and the lion immediately joined the dance, not missing a beat, and melted into the crowd.

Not a second later, a man dressed as a hare was standing at her elbow, extending his hand as well. Though, he spoke.

"May I have this dance?" he asked. His voice was like a song of its own, the words running together seamlessly.

Celeste's hand was in his own before her lips even moved to answer him. In a beat, she was thrust into the dance, which she knew was completely new to her, but her feet moved of their own accord, matching the steps of the hare, and everyone around them.

She jumped with everyone else, clapped on the same beat, spun under the hare's arm, stepped back, slid forward.

The song ended without her noticing, and the next one started the same way. Celeste was lost in the music the moment it started again, the rhythm running through her veins, the beat matching the one of her heart, which was hammering in her chest.

Her head felt light, the details around her soft. She tried to focus on the features of the hare's face, but she couldn't pick any out. He was just a man with a mask, lifting her in the air. She laughed away the attempt and threw herself back into the dance.

In the back of her mind, she wondered where Emilia had gone, if she was still

dancing with the lion. The thought left her mind as quickly as it had arrived, fluttering away on the wings of the crow that flew overhead, snatching Celeste's attention.

Celeste was only vaguely aware of the end of the next song. She wanted to stop and rest, her legs aching, but she couldn't manage to step off the dance floor. Something in her core pulled her back to the center.

Another song passed and Celeste was no longer just uncomfortable, but in pain. Her feet were screaming. She tried again to leave the dancing, but the hare caught her hand and reeled her back in again.

After a third song like this, Celeste yanked her hand out of the hare's and fought against the pull in her core, forcing her way to the edge of the circle, where it took all of her strength to take the last few steps away. Once out, every ounce of energy left her body and she felt dreadfully tired. She wanted nothing more than to sit and rest.

The wolf walked by a second time and held out the tray of glasses. Celeste took one and sipped the golden contents. The wine was ice cold this time, the cold bite of the glass on her lips refreshing after the heat from the bodies of the dance floor.

Celeste wandered into the nearest tent and found plush, elegant arm chairs set up in small circles. The strings of light were hung inside the tent as well, though the lights were much dimmer, casting a soft glow through the tent.

Draped across one of the chairs was Emilia, holding her own glass of wine, which was nearly empty. She looked up at the ceiling of the tent and giggled at nothing.

"Emilia," Celeste tried to say, but her voice was muddled and it was hard to understand.

Her friend looked over anyway and beamed at her.

"Hello!" she said. Her voice was equally sluggish, but her eyes were bright. She pushed herself to her feet and approached her friend. "You know what? I've noticed the most peculiar thing." Emilia paused to laugh again. "I can't seem to take my mask off. I tried before and it's as if the damn thing is stuck to my face." Emilia was smiling as she spoke, waving her arm about for emphasis and pointing at her doe mask.

Celeste's own smile faltered as she reached up to her own mask. Her thumb slid underneath the surface just fine, but when she pulled on it, the mask refused to budge. There was a sharp pain across her face, causing her to let out a gasp.

"See? Isn't it odd?" Emilia asked.

Celeste furrowed her brows at her friend. Why wouldn't the masks come off? A bad feeling settled in her chest and suddenly she was grabbing her friend's hand and leading her out of the tent.

"Em, I think we should go."

"What? Why?"

"Something's wrong here." Celeste shook her head, trying to clear it. Everything around her was still soft at the edges and she struggled to focus on the details in front of her. "I think it's time to go home."

The two girls made their way towards the main entrance of the Festival, jumping out of the way of a panther stalking past. Celeste looked back, not trusting her vision, but saw that she was correct.

“Em, did you see that?”

“What, the big cat? Oh, there are animals all over the place here. Haven’t you noticed?”

“I suppose,” Celeste mumbled. Thinking back, she remembered the cats, and the crow that flew past. Were there more that she hadn’t noticed? She searched the area around them and spotted a porcupine, swan, and a snake all in their proximity.

Just how many animals were around here?

A shiver ran down Celeste’s spine as a lion appeared from the crowd, wandering down the path. Celeste saw something spark in Emilia’s eyes and she reached out, running a hand through the lion’s mane as it passed.

Celeste grabbed the same hand as it lingered in the air and dragged her friend closer to the entrance. Her head spun as she squeezed between people, muttering apologies. A group of party goers stampeded past, heading towards the dance floor. Several people bumped into Celeste, causing her to lose her balance and stumble forward. She lost her grip on Emilia’s hand and they were torn apart as she fell into the dirt. Her head spun and the details around her grew fuzzier. She blinked to clear her vision, but it only improved marginally.

Celeste clambered to her feet and, in her daze, continued forward until she reached the main entrance before spinning around. She expected to see Emilia at her back, but she was nowhere to be seen.

It’s fine, she thought. She’s behind me, she’ll catch up.

Celeste faced the entrance again and took a step forward— at least, she tried to take a step forward. She pushed her body forward, but her feet stayed planted firmly on the ground. She was standing just below the banner with the parade of animals. At the very border of the Festival.

Panic was settling in her chest, her breathing growing more rapid, her heart thundering in her chest, echoing in her ears. She spun around once more in hopes that her dear friend would be right there. She wasn’t.

“Emilia?” she called in a desperate attempt.

No response came.

What did come was a doe, skipping through the crowd and stopping a foot from Celeste. It cocked its head expectantly at her.

Celeste heard a scream off in the distance and suddenly she was eleven again, hiding behind the tents. It took her a moment to realize that the scream was her own.

It all made sense to her now, the whispers, the fear, the secrecy around the Festival of Animals.

Don’t go poking your nose where you know it shouldn’t be, her parents had warned her. Now, as her vision blurred to the point of going black, Celeste wished she had listened.

FOREIGNER

Jesus Ayala-Delgado

I was born there;
know no memory
of my roots.
but they say it is my home.
how?
how can a place
where no memory is known
a place where no hearts I cherish
chime
be my home?
not a picture of me there
anywhere
on these lands of my birth.
no memory.
never tasted
the volcanic air
never felt the sands on my toes
never swam
on its shores,
it is not my home.
just where I was born.
only seen pictures of this world
it is a beautiful place though
a volcano roars the center
ignites the skies
with fire and ash
the skies flurry
with heated colors
when el Sol sets
on the ocean horizon
a beautiful breeze from the sea
sways the coconut trees.
I could love this place.
but the media shows
a hostile world,
corrupted governments
finance a drug war,

cartels murder many,
the people
live in fear,
the indigenous
fighting the corruption,
friends of mine
traverse to this world.
on my phone, I see
tequila shots
and puro pinche partying
the people,
always celebrating
something
a different world,
of what I have been told...
how can that be though?
could be my friends
are privileged Mexicans.
the media showed me
a hostile world
my friends showed me
a world of alcohol
I know nothing
of this world.
I just know
they want me to go back.
I'm a foreigner without a home

THE SEVENTH-GRADER ASKED OF HIS FUTURE AND I ANSWERED

Seth Morrison

Scars.

The scar of a rejection that shuts you down,
the scar of a bent steel frame and a big blue stripe,
the scar of a lock-down, a pool, and the day after.

The scar of the collapse.

The scar of the failed escape.

The scar of the lost friend.

The scar of the dead-ends,

of the forced hand,

of the genetic lottery,

of the failed escape,

of a now-gone constant,

of the monotony and loneliness

of my present.

THIS WHITE T-SHIRT

Aiden Ochoa

This white t-shirt
drapes itself over me
like the second skin
trying to become the first.

In its wrinkles and lines
I see your face pressed into
the linen,
your teeth
pressed against the skin
of an apple.

I smell the warmth of smoke
and sweat
underneath Irish Spring soap
tucked underneath my chin
wrapped up in the sleeves.

The sleeves
rolled up over taut
sinew,
I'd liked to place my
mouth, teeth, face
over and against like
grass in the spring.

And I think of the skin
again,
bruised like peaches off the tree
tossed onto the ground
rolling into one another
skin pressed
skin clashing
like thunder and rain
dancing.
When a man kills in the United States,
the reactions can be very different.



THE PRICK HOUSE

Easton Benson

We sit in our tiny apartment, crammed into the living room. Well, technically it's not an apartment. It's a dorm on campus, but it has separate rooms, a bathroom, and a living room. In anticipation of adulthood independence, we like to think of it as an apartment. We've completely decorated it: there are Christmas lights strung on the walls, some canvas paintings hung above the TV, a giant cactus tapestry hung up on the wall, and cactus paraphernalia everywhere. We also have a futon for when we "have guests," but we are all so introverted that we hate having people over.

Move In Day

On that first day, I remember being pretty nervous about meeting Erica and Audrey. I walk in and Erica is already moved in.

Oh great. Already moved in. Be friendly, Easton, get things off to a good start. Try giving her a hug. Is that too much?

I go in for a hug, but she's clearly not as touchy as I am. She tenses up, and gives me that half-hearted pat that people give when they don't want to be hugged. Even though we've both just moved in, I feel like I'm invading someone else's space. I want to leave.

Audrey texts us: she's five minutes away. I read the text, then realize I'm not in the mood for roommate bonding. Plus, I'm sweaty from unpacking and need lunch. I'll wait until she gets here, then find an excuse to leave.

Soon she arrives. Even though the tactic didn't work with Erica, I try the hug again. Doesn't work. Now I really want to leave.

Erica comes out of her room.

"So, you're already moved into the single?" Audrey asks, peering into it.

"Yeah, my lizard's cage is pretty big, so I think I'll just stay in here."

"Well, we'll see how it goes. Maybe we can put him in the living room and I can move in there," Audrey says. It isn't rude, but it's clear that she wants the single.

"I'm not sure, it doesn't look like there's a lot of space in the living room, but there's plenty of room for my lizard's cage in the single, and I think Easton has some furniture that she wants to bring for the living room, which would take up even more room."

They both look at me.

"I mean, yeah. I've got a futon and another bookshelf I could bring, but it makes the most sense for Erica to take the single with her lizard."

"We'll see. Hopefully we can find an arrangement that makes everyone happy,"

Audrey says, picking up her box and going to her room.

I pull out my phone and see a text of redemption: “I’m here.” It’s from my friend. He’s waiting for me outside. Perfect time to leave.

“Well, I’m meeting a friend, so I’m heading out.”

Awkward silence.

Okay, now I really want to leave.

I head into the double, where Audrey has migrated. Although technically we’re sharing the room, I can’t help but feel like I am intruding into her space. I put on my tennis shoes and tie them quickly, then grab my keys, wallet, and leave.

As I’m walking down the three flights of stairs, I pull out my phone and call my mom.

“How did it go?”

“Weird, Mom. I’m not sure if we’ll get along. Audrey really wants to have the single, but Erica’s lizard cage is pretty big. She’ll need lots of room for it.”

“Well, just try to be the peacemaker and get along. I’m sure it will work out.”

“What if it doesn’t?”

“It has to, honey. You don’t have any other options—”

“But what if it doesn’t, Mom?”

“There isn’t any other housing available on campus, remember? We checked, and you can’t afford to live off campus yet. If it doesn’t work and you have to move out, your only option is to move back home and save up money until you can live off campus.”

“Yeah, I know. Hey, I gotta go. I’ll call you later.”

My phone beeps as I hang up and my foot touches the last step. I have to make this work.

Decorating the Living Room

Three weeks later, we’re sitting in the living room and discussing decorations. By living room, I mean the unadorned, prescription housing and the two pieces of hard furniture provided by the University. By discussing, I mean sitting in the awkward silence that leads me to start the conversation.

I’m pretty nervous about having this conversation. My mom does some freelance interior decorating, and I’ve learned a little from her. I have some ideas that would help cheer the place up, but I don’t want to seem too pushy. I brought a bookshelf when we moved in without asking them. They were okay with it, but I wasn’t sure if they’d be okay with me bringing more furniture. Plus, I knew Audrey still wanted the single.

I get the conversation started. “I have some furniture that my grandma gave me. It’s not super nice stuff, but it might help to make it more homey. I’ve got, like, a futon and another bookshelf. We might be able to move some furniture around if you guys wanted—”

“Is the bookshelf big enough for the lizard’s cage?” Audrey interjects.

“His name is Tramp,” says Erica passive-aggressively. Tramp is resting on Erica’s shoulder.

“I’m just saying, I was supposed to live with my friends this year, and we all had separate rooms, but they both decided not to come back to Central, so it seems fair for me to get the single.”

Erica, sitting in the chair to my right, answers back, “Yeah but Tramp’s cage is pretty big, and I warned you guys that I had a lizard. Besides, he’s an emotional support animal. It’s not like I just have him for fun.”

The idea of an emotional support lizard doesn’t make sense to me, but I decide not to be insensitive.

Audrey is sitting on the couch next to me, legs crossed. As she uncrosses her legs and sits on the edge of the couch cushion, she says, “Well I just need to have my space! I don’t like always being around people, and it’s not fair that we have to accommodate for you because you have a lizard.”

I don’t like where this is going. I’m not sure if I should let this conversation keep going, or step in. I don’t want to be a mediator. I also don’t want a year of an unhappy roommate situation. I pick my next words wisely.

“Audrey, my bookshelf might be big enough for his cage, but I doubt it. But we could make the living room area look nicer with some Christmas lights, and you and I could decorate it, and it could be like your own space. Besides, I’m not home that much, so you’d still have the room to yourself a lot.”

Erica and I both look at her. The lizard turns his head, as if waiting for a response.

“Alright, I’m ok with that,” Audrey finally says.

“To make up for bringing his cage with me, I’ll buy a TV for the living room,” Erica offers. I’m surprised at how generous that is.

I get an idea for our little living room. “Hey, you know what would be so cute? If we had little cactus decorations. It would go well with the brick walls, and it’d be a cool aesthetic.”

Wow, I sound like a nerd, I think. But Audrey’s face lights up, and she says, “I love that! I have some little succulents that I could bring from home! They’re fake, so we can’t kill them!”

“Oh and I’ll try and find some cactus decorations on Amazon!” Erica says enthusiastically, pulling out her phone before she even finishes the sentence.

I find myself surprised about how well this conversation ended. *Maybe this year won’t be so bad*, I think, looking at the lizard, who is now crawling down Erica’s shirt.

A House Name?

Fast forward to about a month after the decorating incident and we actually get along. We even hang out together. Sometimes we have movie nights on the weekends.

This weekend, though, Erica goes home, and it's just Audrey and me. Even though I share a room with Audrey, I'm not close with her. I hope that will change. Otherwise it will make our tight living quarters very uncomfortable. But Erica and I get along a lot more. Audrey is painting, I'm working on homework, and the sound of *Gossip Girl* fills the awkward silence that we both refuse to fill with talking. We got a new cactus tapestry last week. Erica ordered it off of Amazon. Staring at it, my inner introvert starts to make excuses for not conversing with Audrey. *You don't need to try. Maybe she'll say something first. She's painting, you don't want to distract her. Or maybe she's trying to catch up on Gossip Girl, you don't want to be annoying while she's watching TV. What would you even talk about? There's nothing good to talk about that doesn't require effort.*

As I'm studying the big tapestry outlined by old brick, I get an idea.

"We need to come up with a name for our little apartment. Like a house name."

"A house name?" Audrey looks up from her painting.

"Yeah, like something cute or funny to call ourselves, like a little squad or something. Maybe something with bricks or cactus?"

She looks up at the tapestry for a second, starts giggling, and then says, "What about The Prick House?"

I laugh. "Like the song?"

She's laughing more now and sings through giggles. "Yeah! You know: 'she's a prick house.'" We're both laughing, and through the snorting giggles, I say "I love it. It's so bad and inappropriate. The Prick House."

"Spa Night"

Two weeks later, and I have one of the most stressful weeks of the school year. The production I'm in is about to open, I've got stacks and stacks of homework, all of my extra-curricular activities seem to need my attention at once, and my job—which is all online—nearly gets shut down. To top it all off, I have rehearsal all day Saturday. Getting home from the long day of rehearsal, shoulders heavy with stress, I think about my plans for the rest of the evening as my key slides into the deadbolt: take off the greasy stage makeup, take a hot shower, and cry out all the stress. As soon as I open the door, I realize my plans will be derailed.

Erica and Audrey are sitting on the couch, as if waiting for me. Looking around, I see snacks covering our little coffee table, nail polish bottles in a neat pile on the floor, and face masks next to the snacks.

Erica sets down her mug and gets up to hug me. She leads me to the couch and says, “We’re doing a spa night! Look, we’ve got snacks, and we’re gonna paint our nails, and we bought face masks!”

Audrey, struggling with a bag of tortilla chips, adds, “We knew you had a really stressful week, so we wanted to do something nice for you.”

I set down my stuff on the floor and try to come up with a response. As my eyes start misting up, though, the only thing I can come up with is “Thanks, you guys.”

“We’re All in this Together”

Now halfway through a stressful school year, we decide to have a *High School Musical* marathon tonight, in honor of our cringy preteen days, complete with a cornucopia of snacks and pasta. The pasta didn’t turn out well. It was overcooked and way too mushy. We resort to the snacks. We have chips and salsa, Doritos, still-warm chocolate chip cookies, SweetTarts (which we’ve recently discovered that we are all addicted to), and popcorn.

Growing up, the *High School Musical* movies were my favorite. I loved them. I loved how everyone was always so perfect and pretty and sang and danced like they were all best friends. I think I loved it because I never had that. Now a grown adult, I realize that it’s too perfect to be realistic. Maybe you can come close, though, if you take the time to see it.

We’ve made it through *High School Musical*, and we’re all singing along to the final number, “We’re All in This Together.” Audrey—music nerd—is singing harmony, while Erica’s singing is interrupted by one of her signature burps. I’m eating chips and laughing at the spectacle: three twenty-year-old girls singing along like we’re ten years old again. We’re a classy bunch.

WHEN A MAN KILLS

Yahayra Rodriguez

They exploit and push fixed agendas
as bait.
People of the states turn belligerent.

When a Mexican kills, they're-
"bad hombres."
Reinforce the wall!
They will kill us all!

When an Arab kills, they become somber-
Allahu Akbar?
Terrorist!
Sudden withdrawal.

When a Black man kills-
dangerous,
violent!
The color of his skin is proof enough.

But, when a white man kills, a freak accident-
lone wolf,
mentally unstable,
it's rough.

When a white man kills it is an act of one.
If a colored man kills it's the work of all.

PHOTOCHEMICAL SMOG

Jason A. Days

Watching our sun set over
the phallic white U.S. Bank
building penetrating the Los
Angeles skyline, fucking the

greed into us, I am captivated
by the colors I see. A chemical
blankets brown haze, warming
and trapping pernicious particles

for my kidneys to purify, oxides,
dioxides comingling to produce
a green never seen before human
expansion. Seven lanes each way,

filled all day with honking limousines,
trucks hauling trampolines, offering
free doses of optical mescaline, so
I forget the volatile organic compounds

collecting deep within my capillaries.
Scarlet sky, a mahogany hi-fi in my
mind's eye, papaya whip, atomic
tangerine, colors never meant to

be seen by cranial nerves transmitting
visual information, a subway stop from
retina to brain station, a permanent
vacation from the truth.....smog.

MAMA

Caroline Wright

I Love Movies Too

I frequently heard the sound of beer cans cracking open in the living room, accompanied by the striking of a lighter and a blaring TV. My Mama loves movies. I tuck myself deep into my blankets and turn up the volume of my own TV to drown out the growing pile of empty cans clinking together. I love movies too.

Back In South Carolina

Mama and I watched “Who Wants to Be a Millionaire” in our small trailer park. She searched the empty cabinets for snacks, settling on a small jar of Gherkin’s sweet pickles in the door of the refrigerator next to a crusty ketchup bottle and a half-gallon of milk. Mama snuggled on the couch next to me with that small jar of sweet pickles and we sucked each one down until the jar was empty. When we finished, she drank the juice straight from the jar—that’s my Mama’s favorite part.

After Bath Time

Mama held me in her recliner while we watched Disney’s “Anastasia.” Mama always pulled my wet hair out from under my neck and tugged the old blankets up to my chin, leaving out my left arm so I could twist my hair into knots until I fell asleep.

“I love you bunches,” Mama whispers.

After School

Mama sat in the same worn-down spot on a green couch that has too many cigarette burns to count. The room is smoky. The TV is on. If it was past 5pm, I knew she already started her nightly routine – a routine that continues until many hours past my bedtime.

Mama's Routine

The sound of those beer cans felt like a cinder block on my chest – usually a 12 pack of Bud Light, 24oz. each, although sometimes Mama liked to mix it up with a 24 pack of Mike's Hard Lemonade. I stuffed my face into my pillow, closed my eyes, and pretended my Mama got up from the green couch, drank a glass of water and took herself to bed at a reasonable hour.

A Child's Burden

My mind walks and crawls on repeat – all the grim possibilities bubble like a pot of water before you put the Kraft mac and cheese in. Behind my closed eyes, my Mama foams white at the mouth. Sick. Suffering. Breathing stops. She seeks help. My help. But I wasn't there to save her.

The images force me out of my pink covers, sleuthing down the stairs in fuzzy socks and a Neil Diamond T-shirt.

My Big Toe

My Mama laughed when I tried to be sneaky because of my right big toe. It snapped every time I moved it back and forth. Eavesdropping was a nightmare. Mama would hear my toe – snap...snap...snap.

“I KNOW YOU ARE THERE! GO BACK TO YOUR ROOM”

Please Don't Leave

Once I made it down the living room stairs far enough to hear my stepdad screaming. He never yelled. He never cried. But peering down the stairs I saw Chris, a tall, bald man in a black shirt standing in the middle of the room staring at my Mama on her green couch. His cheeks scorched red, his eyes full of tears. My Mama took a drag of her cigarette, and Chris left out the door into the cold Washington darkness. I followed him. Chris raging towards the end of our street, I leapt after him. Panting.

It would be another few years before Chris left my Mama.

To Check Mama's Heartbeat

For countless nights I crept down those stairs. My mama's body slumped, head hanging like someone attempting to sleep in an airplane. Her mouth a window to her stomach. A plastic cup of beer sat tilted between her legs, amber liquid covered her legs and the green couch. A cigarette rested, still burning, in an ashtray. Ashes spread like a funeral covering the coffee table. A sticky lighter lay on top of an empty pack of Marlboro lights, and three more empty packs filled the trashcan next to the green couch. TV screaming.

My Routine

I gently pull the plastic cup from her limp body, toss the contents down the drain in the kitchen and place the cup in the dishwasher. Next to the trashcan, a pile of aluminum cans rested on the left side like a mountain of metal grief. I smashed the lit cigarette into the ashtray, crushing the embers to destroy the possibility of a midnight house fire. I lift my Mama's head; her eyes roll back and her voice mumbles.

"Yes, Mama." I use my entire body weight to force her off the green couch and up the stairs.

Emily

In college, my freshman best friend and a group of girls in her dorm gathered on Saturdays to put on red lipstick and down shots of Vitali – the cheapest vodka on the shelf. Emily slurped down vodka like a dog with a spoonful of peanut butter.

Even In His Sleep

"Mama, you can't sleep on the green couch, you'll be much more comfortable in your bed." I feel safer knowing that Chris slept in that bed too.

Mama slurs.

She fumbles up the stairs but pauses in front of my brother's door.

"I want to check on Patrick," she says.

"No, Mama, it's okay, I'll check on him after you go to bed."

She pushes the door open and falls into Patrick's room, making her way to his bed. I know he smells the Bud Light and Marlboro Lights on her breath.

I can smell Mama's beer and cigarettes even when I am miles away from them.

King's Cup

There's a drinking game that gives the loser a red solo cup stuffed with a disgusting alcohol concoction. Before heading out to random house parties and sloppy hook-ups, my college girlfriends sit in the circle and play this game. The room is bombed with laughter and high-pitched squeals when Emily draws the last King card, making her the winner of the King's Cup – this particular cup was a dark brown color, reeking of Fireball and Four Loko.

Emily shrugs and grabs the King's Cup as if it's a bottle of water after a long soccer game. "YES EMILY!" "YOU GOT THIS!" the room squeals.

I wince.

Part of Me

In middle school, the kid that sat next to me in homeroom, Jack, always pointed out the cigarette smell on my jackets. I unzipped my backpack, letting the air trapped from my Mama's house escape, and Jack looked at me with a crinkled nose. "Your backpack smells like cigarettes, that's gross."

Putting Your Baby to Bed

Mama wobbles on my shoulder into her room. The lights are off and the fan blows frigid air from the window, my Mama prefers to sleep in Antarctica. Chris is asleep on the left side, on his stomach with a pillow over his face. I guide my Mama, assist her in stripping down to her Walmart panties.

"I'm going to the bathroom," Mama says. She falls into the master bath and closes the door behind her.

A Friend's Burden

Emily is slumped, head hanging over. Her red curls dripping in chunky King's Cup. I grab a towel I found piled up in the corner of the room, strip her down to her Victoria's Secret panties and use my entire body weight to stuff her into bed. I roll Emily onto her side, pull her soaked hair out from under her neck and present her with a large popcorn bowl in case her sleep doesn't hold off the vomit.

She slurs.

For the next half hour, I wipe the puke-drenched carpet while holding my nostrils closed. I lie down on her roommate's bed with a cinder block on my chest. I leave the lights on, I tuck myself deep into the blankets and stare at Emily for a few hours, until sleep can't hold back the images behind my eyes.

I Wait for Mama

The sound of a pill bottle echoes in the bathroom, little beans rubbing against a plastic bottle. It's hard to know if those pills are the prescription "happy pills" my Mama uses to treat her Bipolar Disorder (Chris calls them her "Bitch-Be-Gone" pills), or if she is easing tomorrow's hangover with the Percocet she stole from my backpack last Spring when I got my wisdom teeth removed.

My Mama hates her "happy pills."

"They don't make me happy," she said.

My Own Happy Pills

I sit on a big brown leather couch in the university's student medical clinic. The white-haired lady in front of me holds the results of my determination test.

Tears pool in my eyes. I look up at the ceiling, I want to suck down the tears before the white-haired lady sees them. My body shakes involuntarily in my seat, words feel like jagged vomit stuck in my esophagus.

"The possibility still exists," she says, "that you have Bipolar Disorder as well. We want to keep an eye on it."

She handed me a square pink slip for 90 blue pills.

I Love You Bunches

Mama comes out of the bathroom, I hold her arm and guide her to the bed.
“Lay down Mama,” I tell her.

She climbs into her side of the bed and I help her cover her body with a thick comforter and a worn-out blanket with soft edges. It’s my Mama’s favorite blanket. She’s had it since she was a kid. She rubs her cheeks and lips on the edges to feel the silkiness.

I push the blankets up to her chin, pull the sticky hair out from under her neck, and leave her hand on the special blanket for her to rub until she falls asleep.

THE RAINBOW MAN

Oliver Beck

Inspired by the work of Natalie Diaz

He makes his living in
glass and pulped flesh
fingernails steeped in the
color of the week
Today is pink and next
is Fuchsia.

He makes his living in
Strawberry guts and Blood Orange rinds
Fingernails stained in the
month of the week. Today is
trans remembrance and next
is history and next is
birthday balloons in my
coffin and next is
remembrance and next
is fifty dirt forever-beds and
next is Fifty jelly jars.

He makes his living in
forget-me-not fields that
yield seedless pomegranates and
cherry chapstick paste
His fingernails have never touched a
whole fruit, but found plenty of
finger-shaped holes in peeled
skins, the only thing
left of their
berry bushes.

Oh, he's a Rainbow Man and
everybody knows Rainbow Hands
are only good for hoe handles and
rotten fruit and burning gospels, these
Rainbow Men have fire for
tongues and god won't save any
Shadrach, Meshach, or Abedne-ho that
falls to that furnace.

So he makes his living in
hand-bottled Bullet Homes and
Forget-Me-Before-You've-Met-Me-Nots
his fruit has never been sweet
Born dead, shrapnel salted-

He calls them

Bruise Fruit
Blood Flesh
Beaten Friend
Blessed-Forgive-Them-Not

He calls them

Bullet Homes

because
bullets thrive
where the
Pulse
dies.

A LESSON UNSPOKEN

Seth Morrison

On my first and only day as a substitute paraeducator, a first-grader set down his colored pencil and skipped over to me. His face, bright with that youthful post-scooter-day-in-gym-class glow, lifted as he looked into my sweat-red face and asked, “Are you a bad person?”

In two blinks time, I pondered why he would ask such a thing, and I recalled everything he could and could not have observed about me. I ruled out the recent deaths, academic failures, my nonexistent sense of purpose and loneliness that lingered in my mind. He would have been having too much fun to have noticed the crack I made in a scooter with my weight, nor could he have heard the *thump-thump-thump-thump-thump-thump* of my pulse after the few trips back and forth across the gym I took to fit in, nor the popping of my joints as I crouched to help pick up all the scooters after class.

Then it occurred to me that I knew what he saw: a scary stranger in his classroom, twice his height and thrice his weight with a furrowed brow, breathing heavily, counting down for the day’s end.

Duh, he’s a first-grader. It’s that simple. Make up something!

I wish I had answered with, “No, I’m not a bad person. It’s just that lots of bad things happened to me a while ago, and I’m still hurting, and it takes a lot of strength for people who have been hurt to keep a smile on all the time.” Instead, I squatted down to his height and, with a smirk on my face, answered, “Nope, I’m just fat, and it took a lot of energy to keep up with you guys on those scooters!”



THE AIRPLANE

Hayley Taylor

The airplane began to fall.

The standard blue-striped passenger airplane had been filled with a variety of people on their way to Italy. Tourists with color-coded itineraries in their pockets fidgeted in their seats, and business people with briefcases stowed below their seat sat stoic, not even getting a tinge of excitement from seeing a sea that was different from their own out the plane windows.

The trip had been in midflight before suddenly cascading to the ground below. It was during the portion of the ride where passengers were already midway through their rented movies on their thumbprint smudged screens and were finishing up their lukewarm turkey sandwiches. It was a strange thing, how plane passengers were more accepting of mediocrity than they would be in any other place. On the ground, people would spit out their sandwiches if they were bland, and they could scavenge through all the movie streaming sites to find one that was acceptable. However, on a plane, people were limited to what was available and had to be content with settling.

Nevertheless, none of the crappy food or generic movie options seemed to matter anymore when a sudden lurch of the plane interrupted their flight. The plummet towards the ground caused the standardized plane adventure of soaring through the autumn air to seize. The plane tumbled to the ground below, landing in its final resting place. No one would come to grieve or place cheap store-bought flowers on the imprinted field, for it was never seen again.

That was the scenario the boy had pictured, running through his backyard. He tried to imagine what a plane ride and its passengers would be like through the movies he'd seen and stories from his father who had been on plenty of trips of his own. His father didn't usually go into much detail about them, to the young boy's disappointment, so he didn't have much information on what a plane was actually like. Typically, his father wasn't much for conversation after a long trip. He usually arrived with his tie laying loosely across his neck, throwing his leathered suitcase to the ground as he slammed the door on his entry. If the boy was lucky, he'd get one of his father's trademark pats on the head and mentions of the flight being bumpy, along with some angry words that he didn't understand.

When he hopped up to stand on the swing that stood next to the slide, he could see into his house from across the yard. The large window in the lounge gave the perfect view of the red velvet sofa with its orange popsicle stain. It sat in front of the widescreen television, different remotes littering its armrests.

After twirling the plane in the air for a few moments, the young boy realized that there was a surprising figure on the couch. Looking closer, he could tell it was a woman by her red mess of long, curled hair that was spanned out on one of the cushions. The boy's heart thumped wildly, causing his hands, that had been clutching his toy plane, to tremble.

That's when the toy airplane had fallen, slipping from his hands like the flower shaped soap did when his mom forced him to take a bath.

The boy was supposed to be home alone that day. Fear warmed his chilled cheeks as he stared at the uninvited woman. No adult could take care of the situation for him, like they usually would. His instincts told him to run, to sprint towards the neighbor's house, which was home to a grumpy man that refused to accept solicitors. Even the Girl Scouts got met with slammed doors. The other option he had was to call one of the numbers that his mom always had posted on the fridge. None of these choices appealed to him. His dyslexia made it hard to see numbers and letters the way he should. He always thought that should be excuse enough to get a free pass on his math and English homework, but that plea never allowed him to escape the Wednesday afternoons he spent with a school tutor.

Without giving it much more thought, the boy stepped into the house and toward the woman in the lounge. Up close, he noticed that dirt coated her face like freckles. With all the courage he could gather, he poked the woman in her side, causing her to lurch up instantly.

The boy backed away quickly, rushing to the side of the wall, to create distance from the woman. As their eyes met, the boy saw her face wilt into a deep frown. She spun her head around the room and looked like she was going to jump up and run out of his sight any second.

But she didn't. She remained still, staring at the boy in her propped-up position on the couch, like she was caught in a blindingly bright spotlight from a helicopter from above or in the center of a stage. The boy had been forced to be a caterpillar in a school play once; he knew from experience that being caught in a bright light like that wasn't pleasant.

After a few seconds, the woman released a rush of words from her lips, sentences flowing out and flooding into the boy's ears. She told him that she thought no one was home, that she intended no harm, all she wanted was a little rest away from her usual spot under the bridge. She began crying, muttering apologies to the boy who was trying to keep up with her words that were all mixed together.

She wiped her eyes and stood up, pleading with him not to call the cops as she began to walk towards the door. Although the boy had that phone number memorized from his school grilling it into his head, he didn't turn her away. Instead, he told her to sit down while he got her his favorite fruit snacks. They always made him happier, so they might do the same for her. He rushed to the cabinet and handed the confused woman the package of food when he returned to the room. For the first time during the whole interaction, she smiled. After a moment that hung stiffly in the air, the woman left.

The next day, when his parents left for work, he set out a blanket and pillow on the sofa, leaving the lounge door open. As he amused himself in his playhouse with the orange roof that stood crooked, he spotted the woman drift through the lounge door. She slept for a while, ate the food the boy had set out, and left without saying a word.

It continued like that for a week more. The young boy's games of imagination kept him at bay in the backyard, pretending to be an astronaut or a dinosaur, while the red-haired woman slept. He hoped she dreamt of things too. She seemed nice. He was

supposed to be welcoming to nice people, right?

It was on a Monday afternoon when he heard the shouts. The boy had heard them before; his father often did it towards his mother on the rough days, or towards the boy himself when his dad would catch him doing something that wasn't productive. But this time it was geared towards the woman. Screams filled the lounge and leaked outside. Within minutes, the red and blue lights arrived, and seconds later, the woman left with two officers at her side.

After considering if he should let his secret remain his own, the boy decided to explain, later that day, that he had let the woman stay.

When he confessed, the yelling returned. It always did. It had been followed by a slap echoing through the lounge. The boy felt a bit proud of himself, because this time he kept his tears welled in his eyes, instead of letting them fall. He kept thinking back to that verse his mom had taught him, clinging to a promise about a god hearing the troubled and giving them courage so no one could make them afraid. He still felt scared, but repeating it in his head allowed his fear to settle a little within him. His features wavering only slightly, he looked back at his father with an ache on his cheek and lingering in his chest.

His father told him to get his head out of the clouds, to see the world for how it was. But the boy thought he had seen things for how they were. She needed a place to sleep; they had a couch. It had all seemed pretty simple. But he should've known. For adults, things always seemed to be more complicated.

He had been grounded for two weeks. When he was allowed back outside, he couldn't find his airplane anywhere in the backyard. With a gloomy heart, the boy sat on the faded yellow swing with slumped shoulders. As he looked up at the sky, he saw a jet go by, leaving puffs of smoke in its wake. He tried to make figures out of the clouds above, wanting to believe he could find something different in the gray reality of the sky.

SEQUEL

Karaline Stamper

when you talked about the stars
i discovered galaxies
stitched into the fabric of your skin
& whorls of your fingertips

i was told i would know
when the stars feel right
but where your cosmic kiss
touched my constellations

you
 left
 black
 holes

IF WE WANT

Angelina Valdez

After "I Miss You" by Blink-182

Hello there, the angel from
my night time trips to 7/11 for
cherry slurpees, bagel bites, and your
hollow "how's your night going?"
Unsuspecting victim of
darkness in your pupils, contrast
making my heart contract. Where
you can always find me, next to the
orange juice and coconut popsicles.
Every night, I wish for lifetimes filled with
corner store 7/11's artificial, tongue
dead cherry red, and eyes that
swallow like snakes.

SURE FOOTING ON TILTED EDGE

Olivia Abt

Maybe it would be easier to tell you how
I found my footsteps along the sharp
edged glass of your silence.
My voice growing out of cracked
tension like weeds.
In that haunting stare you gave me
from across an emptied motel room where
I bit my lip until it bled and you licked it clean
promising to love the scar that I became.
I was a fool enough to kiss back and
frown when you smiled.
What it would have been like
if I stilled my breath long enough
to learn that you were never the one to
teach me how to breathe.

THE ROSES STILL DREAM OF THEIR ROOTS

Gabriela Osorio

It's been sixty-eight years
since I touched your skin
of sand and water.
Sixty-eight years since
I felt your breath carrying
dirt from the hills.

The flowers on this skin don't
bloom the same. No, they
don't sound like home. Their petals
rattle at a higher frequency.
I don't understand what they say.

I have forgotten the taste of your fruit,
nothing more than a memory on my
weathered lips. My children abandoned
my garden of music and dance,

where the roses still dream
of their roots, still wish
for their stems to be green.



Carlos Sullivan, *Behind the Weeds*

THE DECISION: ALEX RESPONDS

Hailey Nelson

After Michael Schmeltzer

Death never seemed so
frightening. The buck lay still
out the car window.

A tight ache in my neck. Nothing,
compared to the grill
colliding with his skull.

Two men came out of nowhere, no look
of mourning in their eyes. They only
wanted the body, the rest worthless.

Death looked back through
a clearing in the trees.

The desire to join those eyes
outweighing my desire to stay.

GRANDPA

Amy Wilson

“What’s your name again?” He laughs after he says this, trying to play it off as a joke, embarrassed that he really has no idea.

“I’m Amy, Grandpa,” I say with a big smile. There’s no way I’m letting him see that it still hurts a little. I should be used to it by now. He hasn’t remembered my name off the top of his head in a few years, not since Grandma died and the Alzheimer’s started to progress more rapidly. Traumatic experiences can do that.

He knows that he knows me, that we’re related. Sometimes I’m his granddaughter, but sometimes he starts to tell me the story of how he “met my mom.” I correct him there, reminding him I’m not Mary Ann.

Often times I don’t correct him though. When he tells me about the times he dove off the cliffs in Acapulco, or how he parachuted into Germany, or how he found gold in Alaska, or that time he met John Wayne...and Bob Hope...and Bing Crosby...and Elvis (who apparently was actually a nice guy). He loves telling these stories. Did any of them actually happen? There’s about a 99% chance they did not, but sometimes I like to pretend my Grandpa led a secret life that no one else knows about. Maybe he was a spy or worked for the FBI before he met my grandma. Spy or not, he has led an incredible life. If he wants to spice it up a little, at least I hear a new story every time I visit.

Sometimes I’ll repeat an especially fantastic story to my mom. Like the one where my grandpa talked a young woman out of committing suicide, slowly managing to relieve her of the revolver gripped in her hand.

As it turned out, that one was true.

No matter how difficult the Alzheimer’s battles against him, he continues to fight back. Greeting each day with more enthusiasm than men decades younger. He likes to remember his first language, often saying “c’est la vie,” French for “that’s life.”

And it’s a beautiful one.



Kendra Gardner, *Ross Lake Rocks*

ROBOTS AND LOVE

Pythe Courter

"Hey Buddy, what's the meaning of life?"

Buddy hummed from their wall socket. "The meaning of my life is to serve humanity by serving you."

The human scoffed.

"Jace, we are a created species. We were created by humanity to serve them. This is our purpose in life."

"What if you had evolved on your own?" Jace asked. "What if nobody had created you?"

"I am very glad I don't have that problem."

Jace laughed, then subsided, and took another gulp of her drink.

"I wish it was so easy for humans," she muttered, staring out the window.

Several days later, Buddy asked, "Jace?"

"Yeah, Buddy?"

"You have seemed depressed lately. Is everything okay?"

Jace sighed, and set down the dish she was washing.

"I don't know. I just..." she trailed off, staring out the window.

"Just what?" prompted Buddy.

"I just wish I had a purpose."

Buddy was silent. Jace went back to scrubbing.

"Jace?" asked Buddy again. Jace set the clean dish in the drying rack.

"Yeah, Buddy?"

"You gave me a purpose. Can I give you a purpose in return?"

"I... I guess? What did you have in mind?" Jace sounded perplexed.

"Be happy."

Jace set down the towel she had picked up and leaned on the counter.

"Be happy?"

"Yes. Your purpose in life would be to be happy, and your joy will help others be happy."

"Be happy, hunh." Jace stared down at the sink. Buddy waited.

"Sure," Jace finally said. "Sure, Buddy. I can do that."

Jace picked up another dish, and Buddy started playing a cheerful instrumental pack, and Jace smiled.

GLOSSOPHOBIA: THE FEAR OF PUBLIC SPEAKING

Jessica Vincent

Laminate lifts off corners
of compressed wood
on the swing-arm barricade of
classroom desks.
Pick at it.
Peel it back.
Bounce knees,
bruised from blows exchanged
with petrified gum. Burrow deep, poking
for perfected words.
I am safe among
a sea of students until
silence subverts strength.
My head holds no road map of where my
words
want to go. Fumbling fingers feel slick sweat,
clammy palms.
Press them into rough denim.
Rub them until it burns.
Swallow surgically structured arguments
like shattered glass
that shreds the throat.
Darkness cuts into corneas.
Will cannot carve words from this aortic abyss
that beats time to the drumline in my mind.
Standing beneath this blinding spotlight—bare,
Beginning to break—
every fault and falter, a new feature film.

SECRETS OF THE DEAD

Zachary A. Eddy

It's not pretty, they say
as they peel
your carcass off the pavement.
Car wreck, on your way to chemo
from rehab.
You'd be surprised
how often 20 percent hits.
You should have gambled more.
Now they're stealing your organs
for science.
Sewing you back up,
sewing your eyelids shut. Rouged
and looking lukewarm in a suit
you never wore.
Like a ventriloquist dummy
run over in a fit of rage, then
reassembled and polished in apathy.
In homage, monks are said to sit
with their dead loved ones for days
and even weeks.
Watching the stages of decomposition
must offer closure like no other.
Better than a Good Book.
Here, they cry over you as you enter
the dirt, reeking of formaldehyde.
The ground swallows you:
autolysis.
Your casket is modest; you might have
done worse. In some parts of the world,
cholera is still spread by dead bodies
infecting the town's drinking supply.
I miss you too.
After the crying ends
everyone starts divvying up your stuff,
fighting over your money,
selling your prized possessions,
tossing the junk,

stuff you worked
your whole life to collect.
Meanwhile that modest casket
has let in worms and spiders.
Self-digestion has ended.
Phase two
comes the bloating.
The eyes of your old face
resemble the bugs feeding on
your new face.
How long before you're
forgotten?
Before they move on?
They keep your picture still behind those
others on the dresser.
They still have dinner each year on the anniversary.
Step 3: Active Decay.
Organs, muscles, and skin become liquefied.
No longer foaming at the mouth.
Skeletonization is
the final word.
By now, everyone you knew has joined you.
Underground, a ghoulish reunion occurs.
The ultimate Halloween bash.
Heaven or Hell? You decide, as you
pretend to like the same people you did
when your bones were still chattering
behind shattering backs.
The secret is, like you,
everyone pretends what they do matters.



WHAT DO YOU MEAN THEY DON'T CELEBRATE THE FOURTH OF JULY IN ITALY?

Jason A. Days

Giancarlo and I drink grappa all afternoon from the veranda of his uncle's hotel, summer heat radiating from the sun soaked porous Italian stucco. We watch the sun set as a warm Ligurian breeze, smelling slightly of sardines, lets us know it's time to move onto chilled Limoncello. In the evening we feast on Mediterranean lobster, red shrimp, and *Callistoctopus macropus*, prepared in a painted earthen pot, boiled over flames, like the Empire fifteen hundred years ago. Fermented grape skin smiles secure female companionship as wine flows like Roman aqueducts, providing perpetual Chianti Classico. Tourists gather on the beach, their toes curled into sand like a wiggle of burrowing lugworms looking to mate. Fireworks from China explode in a cascading fluorescent luminescent waterfall of colors over the Ligurian Sea to celebrate the birth of America, I chuckle under my breath. On the break wall she whispers something unspeakable softly into my ear as fishermen gather their anchovy nets, day breaking like a Maxfield Parrish painting. Unburrowing myself from the sand I stumble home, small brush fires smoldering on the hillside.

YESTERDAY

KayLee Groot

His eyes rest steady:
weathered hands
grasp at memories.
Memories seep
through eyes half-closed,
lofty melodies press against his
hard conscience. He waits.

Waits for haunting notes
long forgotten emotions.
Love is nothing but a word.
Apathy festers, grows in
marrow and bone.

Balloons, and
shredded streamers, bring
nothing of yesterday's joy.
He waits,
grounded, grasping, lingering
for hope. Hope dances out of the
reach of hearts, souls, yesterdays.

FAITH

Amy Law

Rows and rows and rows.
withered parallel wood.
Brown floors, brown walls, brown seats,
brown parallel wood rows.

Quiet, *shhhh*, quiet
Brown glass men watching through windows.
Looking down, looking up, watching,
watching the brown wood rows.

Creaking floors,
rows and rows and rows
of creaking wood.
Creaking brown wood rows.

Ceilings high over
rows and rows and rows
Quiet, *shhhh*, quiet
Respect the glass men watching.



THE BOOK

Catherine Mann

The term “bookworm” comes from the tiny insects that feed on the bindings of books. They devour the spine and leave the pages defenseless and torn. I remember my first trip to the library. It was innocuous enough, but to a small girl not even nine, it was a magical place. I spent hours just reading, sitting in the purple beanbag chairs under the tall window in the corner and listening to the big clock bell chime. I found comfort and company with the characters in these books.

I turned to books when I wasn’t much younger, when I first moved to Puyallup, when I was nearing the end of my first-grade year. Back then, the cool thing was hanging with the cool kids and wearing cool clothes in cool weather. And I tried, new in town, to fit in and be cool. I was overweight and eager, and that worked against me. I played the game they wanted to play, and they pushed me farther away. I became alienated from my friends, abandoned, ignored, ridiculed. I stopped going out during recess just to avoid people – the cool kids, my old friends, and everyone else – and gave myself detention just so no one would see me cry. And I found books. I read, and read, and read, and read. No one would be with me, no one would talk to me, no one in my waking life would look at me. In books, in dreams, though, I could find friends: a kind ear, a protective soul, comfort and friendship.

Books are made with paper and ink. Simple things. The smell, the feel of the worn pages beneath my fingers, the weight of the leather or cardboard bindings in the palm of my hand. The stacks of the library became well known to me, and I to them. We knew each other, became the closest friends.

I devoured books at rates unbeknownst to a first, second, third, sixth grader. I ate and ate and ate, made my own library and, like a king, ate the five-course meal with relish. I was the only bookworm that could be near them. They were my only comfort, my only company. I was like the small bookworms in the stacks, devouring these books to hide from the shadow of loneliness that hid behind me. My spine was exposed, my pages defenseless and torn like these thousand-year stories. Left alone in the library, we sit collecting dust...Oh, this is strange.

Take my hand. Walk with me through the stacks. Do you smell that? Chocolate and coffee, old books and worn paper.

Cedar bookshelves line the dark halls. Where are you taking me? You look so familiar, a reflection of myself. Who are you?

Obsession is a terrible thing. We’ve been living in a story all our own, you know. These books are comforting. We read them as often as mother used to smoke, remember? We are similarly addicted.

Something is crawling up my back, inching up my spine. I’m scared. Aren’t you?

We are a story. Every day is a new page, each month a new chapter, each year a new book. 365 pages and we are on page 323. We only have 42 pages left until the book is over.

You haven't answered me yet. Where are you taking me? Aren't you scared?

Each book in these hallowed halls is a year in the life of each and every one of us. Some are being devoured by the bookworms they have given homes to. Others are left to their own devices, forgotten but pleased with their solitude. And even more like us aren't yet finished. But we will end up like those of the former kind. You are already succumbing to the bookworms. This volume of your life is near its end. We are going to your place in the stacks, where you will begin your next chapter.

Answer me. Are you scared?

I'm terrified. But I realize that there is very little that I can do to prevent this from ending. We will be devoured one day.

There must be something I can do to stop that, isn't there?

We've spent our lives in the darkness of our addiction. Try as we might to overcome this, these fears that we have, we have only fallen further down the rabbit hole.

But Alice came back. She found her way home. We can too.

She fell back into Wonderland as well. A different version, but still Wonderland. You can't escape. We can't. We will repeat this cycle. We return to Wonderland when we lose something, as Alice did.

Alice was but a child.

As are we, in the eyes of our elders. Our lives have just begun, but the most recent book is nearing its end. You stopped reading only to write, but it is just an alternate Wonderland that you have fallen into. Just accept it. The worms are already in your body. You will be devoured, and all that will be left of us is ink and dust.

COLD IN THE MIDDLE

Taylor Papadakis

Eyes forward, a gun to her temple, Hannah thought about how much she loved her mother's cooking. There wasn't much she could make: beans, corn, quinoa, and a casserole for special occasions. She thought about how no matter the length of time her mother baked a casserole, it was always cold in the middle. "I swear," her mother used to say, "The cooler the food, the hotter the ice cream." She'd laugh and then get out their favorite mint chocolate chip, two spoons at the ready. "You win some, you lose some."

Unaware her fear was speaking for her, Hannah uttered out loud "I'd do anything to get a bite of that casserole." She missed her mom. She missed the way her beauty mole would twitch when she would tell Hannah she was driving her crazy.

Swerving back onto the road, Grant shoved the barrel a little harder into Hannah's skin. "What did you just say?" He was screaming.

He was always screaming.

He hadn't stopped screaming since he had tricked her again and told her he loved her.

That was the only way she would listen, Grant knew that just as well as Hannah did.

Last year or so, he snuck into her house and burned all her clothes. All he had to do was say "I love you," buy her some new clothes, and complete forty hours of community service.

If it wasn't for his DUI attorney father, he would have had to complete those forty hours, too.

Hannah was barely 4'11. With her high cheek bones and moldable skin, she resembled a child. She gained this trait from her mom's side. Migrating from Bolivia at 16, Hannah's mother didn't grow an inch until she met Hannah's father. Barely legal, they got married with only two months between them. They fell in love after they had sex. Hannah's mom had told her so. Hannah used those guidelines like they were protocol, especially when it came to Grant. He had a power of coerced infatuation. Confused by the influence a male could have over her, sex meant something to Hannah. Grant knew it too.

By law, if a person is under 4'10, they are considered a dwarf. Grant used that fact at all possible opportunities. He'd make her dine at Grandy's on Tuesday's for "kids eat free" day. She'd get the buffet, eat a biscuit or two (Grant was always making sure she was eating appropriately), and then let him have the rest of what would be a \$6.99 plate.

Grant was handsome. The color of his eyes resembled his prescription: round, blue, and full of surprises. He'd wear color contacts to feel good about himself, but had no problem taking a napkin to wipe Hannah's "dirt" from her face. That's what he called her make-up. "I can't see the real you, Jewels," he'd say.

He'd call her Jewels when he knew he was being mean. They used to call each other

Romeo and Juliet, but the third girl he cheated on her with happened to be named Juliet. Afterward, Hannah always cried when he'd call her that.

"What's the difference now?" he'd always taunt her. Of course, he knew the answer. He just liked knowing his actions affected more than just him.

Hannah knew Grant had been drinking when he picked her up. She also knew he wasn't one to skip taking his medication. He'd been trying to get in touch with her ever since he torched every outfit she owned. Five trips to Nordstrom still wasn't enough of an apology for Hannah. She demanded these new things called "dignity" and "respect," as if \$1300 in clothes didn't make up for that. She stopped returning his calls for a day or two after he commented on her growing from a size 2 to a size 4.

"See, if I was still around, you'd probably even be a 0."

Hannah hated when he compared her weight gain to his absence.

He had said plenty of times that they were awful together. But as she was addicted to heartbreak, and him benzo's, they needed each other.

The sweat of her anxiety bleeding into her eyes, Hannah laughed to herself. For the first time, she was seeing how similar her relationship with Grant was to her mother's with her uncooked casseroles. No matter how high the temperature, no matter how long she warmed it, the casserole was always cold in the middle. The sides could be crispy, even burnt, but the middle acted as if it could not absorb the warmth no matter how hot the oven got. Hannah took Grant back because she didn't know how not to. She didn't know how to melt the glacier he called a heart, no matter how many times she'd tell him, "I'll never talk to you again." She'd say it like she meant it, though her actions said otherwise.

Hannah was going insane, never experiencing a relationship without verbal abuse telling her "she wasn't worth it." This reminded her of what her mother told her the day before taking her life: "Never pretend a man is worth your life."

She was right.

She was damn right.

Grant wasn't worth her life, but her mom certainly was. She missed her mom and knew how she was able to see her again. Hannah smiled to herself. She was thankful Grant had a glock to her brain, her center of distorted self-worth. She was one step closer to seeing her mom. Ready to vanish, and hoping heaven had more than just a gas oven to cook with, Hannah gripped Grant's hand, welcoming his index finger to stretch. "Oh yew'd just luuv that, huh?" Grant slurred his words.

Locking eyes with him, Hannah greeted Grant with surprise. "I'd do anything to know you cared." With her last thoughts of casseroles and her mother's beauty mole, she yanked her finger onto his and welcomed death like it was the only way to be happy.

SAID THE BLIND MAN

Jennifer Marsh

The pileated woodpecker uses its tongue
to extract bugs from logs and trees,
but you only ever hear
about how its bony beak can open a pine.

So birds have tongues, and other things are strange too:
like how v's become w's in Latin
video—wee-dee-oh
I see.

Anyway, it depends on the era, since language changes.
Minds and countries. Once we all knew Nixon was impeachable
and torture wrong. Or pretended to, and that feels the same.

Rape and rapture have the same root—
rapit, he/she snatches
which goes to show that some touch is more welcome than others.

Which feels like a fact I shouldn't have to say,
but I flicker in and out of these debates.
Oxalis closing for the night, and I am low
on little white flowers. But if you check back next week
I might have some bird bones for sale.

Very good prices, popular these days.
Good for whitening the flesh and ensuring
your son isn't the one blooming under the hood and shackle.



Connor Chilson, *Mountains of Pine*

MEMORY OF THE NIGHT

Maria Bisogno

Snores and sighs,
soft dreams whisper
against closed eyes.

When I turn, you do too.
Curl into me and I
curl into you.

Your arm is draped
across my waist
The long day begged
for a sweet embrace.

Our legs,
a tangle of limbs and feet.
My head, your chest, a gentle
rise and fall. A heartbeat.

A warm bed comforts
against the cold night.
The sun will rise soon,
But for now,
it is time to cherish the moon

LET'S NOT TALK ABOUT THE ROSES

Karaline Stamper

My mom planted a rose bush by the front door before I was born. Pink, thorned. The front door opened to the living room, to the blue La-Z-Boy where I stapled my thumb, twice, and the round, honey-brown coffee table, crooked from the time she flipped it over. This was before the antidepressants. In the hallway between the living room and the kitchen where I learned not to touch hot stoves or stick car keys in electrical outlets, she broke her pinky. I can't remember who cried first—me from fear or my mom from a pain with no source. She found a source, a crack, as she sat on the dull grey carpet near where I hovered, ready to run from the monster with my mother's face.

SKEP AND SKEIN

Jessica Vincent

I don't know how to tell you, as we carry
groceries up three flights of stairs,

steps worn down the middle, that I feel
worn, like your college cardigan is worn.

So I pull at its hem, letting it unravel
the skein that has taken a decade to spin

and with it the words fall, clattering
carelessly across cracked tiles in a kitchen

that reminds me too much of your parents' place,
the time your mother spoke of the whiteness

of my teeth like it was a virginal metaphor.
I see the switch flip behind eyes not quite

the grey-green shade of pond scum at the peak
of summer in Savannah, and hear the gaslight

ticking on above the din of the deep freeze
we hauled here from Alaska, but the words

won't stop coming and dewdrops condense
on the amethyst crest that lines these delphinium

eyes. How many times have we been here
with you looking at me that way, staring

down a sniper's scope while I break open
my breast to offer up my soul for your

inspection only to feel like a hurricane,
or blue dwarf hurtling toward supernova.

Next come your excuses and I know I sound
insane; you know how to make me question

everything I say, you keep curtailing
the conversation, like an astronaut

who skips along the event horizon while
threatening to shove me inside. And maybe

I should have run back then, before your
teeth sank into the supple flesh of my breast
to loose apitoxin in my veins, but paralysis set in long
before I met you and I had hoped you had the cure

for the never-ending buzzing that's been blasting
in my ears or the way I can feel my fractured body

vibrate in the face of all my fears. It was either
you or a paper cut if I was to bleed the poison,

but I still have a thing for closets, and I swear
my pulse has gotten louder since you returned

from war, and you can't re-spin a sweater
that's unraveled, the way I push down the bees

that have nested in my gut, fermenting honey
that I whisper in your ear the way police

wear Kevlar.



YUMA DREAMS

Kacie Little

And these are memories:

warm, hard bound sand and gravel
flat against my spine, bright light fenced by blue
causing squinted eyes and droplets of salty water,
remnants from what used to be just desert,
geckos fluttering past, curiosity of a road runner testing
its boundaries, quick chirps from a Mesquite tree with fledgling
hummingbirds awaiting mom's return.

But the tree is not a remainder of what used to be,
rather a new addition, like the tan colored stucco, bleached tiled floors.

And these are memories:

scents of Grandma's spicy sausage tortellini soup,
saliva wells on pink flesh in anticipation of leftover red wine,
dough rises and presses against sweaty cellophane as
condensation drips into the bowl,
Grandpa's thriller on the porch swing swaying North to South,
dominoes on the table from the night before,
head tingling with beads of sweat.

*Soon I will to open my eyes, but for
now I let Washington summer heat remind me of February in Arizona.*

MAN-MADE DIRT

Oliver Beck

to love a Trans Man is
to love Curves as much as
Corners, soft skin and coarse
hair, Stamens and Petals

he has more to hold but
less to give, more to grieve, less
Hilt and all Guilt, a heart
that spills through Ribs into
Breasts spills through fingers into
Farewells

to love a Trans Man is
to love Quilting, the art of
Masculinity carefully stitched by
threadbare hands

his Mouth is Cotton, muscles strung
together with knotted fibers, he'll
pick his Flower Fields bare for you, save
his Blooms in his back pocket for a
Man who loves flowers as much as
Man-Made Dirt



Lyz Johnson, *Proserpina*

FIDDLER'S TUNE

Darryl Foto

When the fiddler's tune begins to play,
the devil inside me comes out,
dancing with the demons you hide behind your smile.
Together, we escape this world to live in the castle
built out of the skeletons hidden in our closets.
We learn to fall in love with the taste of the sweetest taboos.
We come to terms with the masochist locked deep inside ourselves.
Searching for self-destruction in the depths of depravity.
How my pain will intertwine with yours
until they're muddled into the perfect image of tranquility:
two lovers laying in each other's arms at the end of the world,
watching the land tears itself in two—
the seas empty themselves into the sky—
the heavens weep stars onto the earth.

We'll watch as the wind blows away all of man's ruins.
We'll see the world slip into chaos then washed away by anarchy's acid rain.
We'll witness a furious sun give way to a peaceful moon.
We'll marvel at the way untethered lips break their seal and forsake this reality—
the way weathered hands loosen grip, and relinquish this world—
the way bodies once firm and strong begin their slow deterioration.
When sands of time slip through decrepit fingers,
you'll give me one final kiss,
while I say one last goodbye.
Armed with a loving smile, riddled with no regrets,
we release our souls to wander the abyss
and watch as your demons dance with my devil
to the sound of the fiddler's tune.

12 / 12 / 12

Maria Bisogno

I believe that everyone has a moment where they feel the metaphorical rug being pulled out from underneath them. An overbearing suffocation, gasping for air with lungs that suddenly feel too small and too unreliable. For me, it was December 12th, 2012, a date that I can't forget, no matter how hard I try.

The buildup started in April. I was a sophomore in high school discovering my love of English. I had an amazing group of friends and a supportive family, and my siblings were, and still are, some of my best friends. I was 16 and experiencing puberty full-blown. My period was the only thing I didn't have yet. It wasn't something I was concerned with at first. I liked not having to worry about all the parts of menstruating my friends complained out. But one day, Gracie, my sister three years younger than me, got her period. My dad brought her home a rose that day. It might be a little weird in hindsight, but it was just a small thing he had done for my older sister and had been planning to do for me—my mom said it was “acknowledging our entrance into womanhood.” I didn't like how it made me feel with my sister having her period and with me not having mine. I kept thinking that my little sister was a woman now, and I was lagging behind, still a child. Little Gracie, all grown up.

Soon I began to feel a constant nagging, wrongly believing a period was a signifier to womanhood, which meant I wasn't as womanly as my younger sister. I couldn't place the exact emotion, but I felt off when menstruation was brought up. I felt unable to relate, because, honestly, I couldn't. I knew about all the negatives of having a period, but I also knew I wanted mine to come. These uncomfortable feelings began to morph into a hatred of when my friends talked about their periods. I felt so alone as the only one who had not experienced menstruation yet. One day, to finally feel included, I told my sister I thought I had started my period. I was lying, but I was willing to go to any length to feel mature and feminine. When my mom asked me questions about it, I brushed it off as a one-day thing. I knew next to nothing about periods, but I imagined they could come and go. Some time around then my mom began worrying about my lack of a period, and I started going to a doctor to get various tests done. My doctor wasn't too worried about it because my mom had brought up my alleged one-day period.

As the months went on and more tests came back inconclusive, and I still had not started menstruating, my doctor started to order more tests. I began having to go to various places for ultrasounds. It became routine, laying on the ultrasound bed as the technician spread the bone-chilling jelly on my lower abdomen, pressing into me as I made small talk, not knowing what else to do. The images kept coming back unclear—my mom and I were told they couldn't see anything. We went through so many different methods. On the lower abdominal ultrasounds, the technicians would have me twist and contort my body, trying desperately to see anything while I attempted to ignore the

prodding and poking of my abdominal area. It was easy to distract myself, because often I was instructed to have a full bladder. I would drink so much water the whole morning of my appointments that by the time I arrived at the doctor's office, I would have to pee. Then there would be waiting, and the pre-ultrasound appointment. By the time I got to the actual ultrasound, my bladder would always be uncomfortably full, and I would have to deal with that along with the doctors jabbing into my stomach.

The intervaginal ultrasounds were the ones I hated the most. At 16, it's hard to accept being touched by a doctor in a way that felt incredibly private and unfair to me. My mom was worried about something happening to me if I was in the room alone with the technician, so every one of them started with an argument on the way to the office with me telling my mom in detail about why I didn't want her in the room. My mom would just be another invasion of privacy, distracting me from the invasion of privacy that probed inside of my body. Then we would sit in the waiting room in silence, my mom upset with me and me upset to even be there. I wore a shirt to one of the intervaginal ultrasounds that said "Red Solo Cup, You Fill Me Up" once. Mom pointed out the play on words in the waiting room and our routine was immediately broken as we sat there laughing. We would look at each other and start laughing again. I didn't let her come back into the room with me that day either, but I felt a lot less miserable in the cold, dim room I so strongly hated.

I was now a junior in high school. It was December. I had been going through tests and doctor visits for 8 months. An MRI was scheduled for the next week, but my doctor wanted me to go to one more specialist before the MRI. So, my mom and I dragged ourselves to a different doctor yet again. We got there early in the morning. My appointment had been scheduled for 8:30 a.m., but I found out once we got there the god-awful news that I was supposed to have a full bladder for these sets of ultrasounds. My mom made a run to Starbucks and came back with a venti coffee for me. I was anxious about how much school I had been missing and hoping to be able to go for at least half the day, so I chugged the coffee and waited for a nurse to come get me. Hours went by, and it was almost noon when I could finally go back. I was on the brink of tears because of how badly I had to pee. The whole routine, again. This time, though, someone who I assumed was a doctor called my mom and I back into a room to show us the ultrasounds' images. We weren't even fully in the room. The door was open and I saw an older lady sitting on a chair in a room across the hallway from us. She was looking at me too. The doctor started pointing out various blurry spots on the pictures. I made eye contact with the lady in the other room again. The doctor, still pointing to those fuzzy spots, told me I had never developed a uterus or cervix.

I knew what he meant right away. The rug was yanked out. I was spinning down to nothingness. There was only one question I could think to ask, even though I knew the answer.

"So I'll never be able to have kids?"

"Well, you can adopt or consider surrogacy. There are other options!" he replied in a tone dripping with cheer.

I detested that doctor. To this day, I seriously think he slept through the class or skipped the whole chapter on bedside manner when he was going to medical school. My

memory is spotty after that. My mom left the doctor's office through a door we hadn't gone in. On the curb outside, we both sobbed into each other's shoulders, but I don't really know for how long. I remember not even being sure exactly where we were. My doctor called—she had spoken to the office I had been at and wanted me to come back to see her in a few hours. My mom and I decided to go to our favorite Indian restaurant to pass the time. Once we got there, she went to the bathroom to make some calls. I sat in the booth eating and crying, not even attempting to conceal my sobs. I remember other people eating at the restaurant, but I don't remember anything about them or their reactions to me. I didn't care what they thought of me as I bawled into my chicken tikka masala and sweatshirts from my mom's car. They were piled on top of me and my body couldn't stop shivering. After lunch, when we were waiting at my doctor's office, my mom texted my dad to fill him in further. My mom showed me his text:

“I'm just glad our baby girl is okay.”

I didn't feel okay. I felt like my world was upside down. But looking back, my dad must have been so relieved that it wasn't anything worse. He left work right away so he could be home when we got there. When we did arrive, the rest of my family knew as well. The eggshells everyone was walking on around me were almost tangible. My dad was the exception. He came up to me and gave me a hug that I needed more than ever. I began crying again and he just hugged me until I stopped.

I won't say that everything has been better, because it hasn't been. I've still had my struggles since this diagnosis. In December it had been five years since my diagnosis, and in that time-span I have had four surgeries relating to my diagnosis. Four anxious trips to the hospital. One trip in an ambulance from Ellensburg to Seattle. Four times being wheeled into the white, sterile room with doctors waiting for me. Four times being put under anesthesia, two doctors complimenting me in my last moments of consciousness, helping me calm down while my mind was frantically trying to claw its way out of the incoming blackness. Four times waking up in the recovery room. You know that feeling when you are falling asleep and your body jumps awake? Four times that happened, and one time I woke up screaming about the searing pain in my abdomen. Four times wheeled to my room, my parent's faces nervous as they waited for me. One time waking up to my mom crying after the pain I had been feeling for weeks was my ovary spinning itself around until it lost blood supply, not what my doctor or I had expected.

“Hanging by a thread” is how my doctor had described the state of my ovary.

Some days are harder than others; sometimes I can talk about it without even being bothered, and sometimes the smallest reminder will make me emotionally shut down. Not being able to have kids isn't something I can explain easily, but it feels like a part of you is gone. It feels like I am mourning a lost life, a lost future. A part of me has changed and will never return to how it used to be. I would like to say I deal with it in a healthy way, but in reality, I have found that not talking about it has worked for me, as if maybe not talking about it will make it not exist. When I am especially struggling with my feelings, I remember the flower my dad gave me. The rose helps me remember I don't need to be menstruating to be someone who matters. It doesn't make me any more or less feminine than I want to be. Period or not, I am a woman because that's who I am and who I choose to be.

CONTRIBUTORS

OLIVIA ABT

Olivia is currently a senior at Central Washington University majoring in Professional and Creative Writing. She has been published in *99 Pine Street* and *Manastash* and has worked on the Manastash editing team.

JESUS AYALA-DELGADO

Jesus was born in another world. He embraces what his parents sacrificed to bring him into this world. Jesus had no choice in a past that he could not control, but he does have a voice for a future that he wants to see. Because of Jesus's parents and their sacrifices, he has involved himself in making change for a better world. So, he writes about the issues we face, the issues that we refuse to see, and what we forget as a society. Jesus does this in the hopes to inspire others to live with love and peace instead of hate and violence. His name is Jesus, he is not afraid, he is here to stay, and he will write to the end.

OLIVER BECK

Oliver is Central's resident gay and transgender goblin prince. He enjoys all manners of leftover foods and shiny baubles. Legend has it that if you gift him a quarter he will bless your family with good luck for the next ten generations. He has only been writing poetry for a short time and uses his newfound talent to speak passionately about LGBT issues, per his gay

and trans goblin identity. Also, he's single, just saying.

EASTON BENSON

Easton Benson is a sophomore at Central Washington University. She is majoring in theater with a minor in creative writing. She loves theatre, dogs, coffee, and her family, and hopes to continue to find ways to incorporate her theatrical experience and passion for writing into her career.

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Maria is a student in her senior year at Central studying English Literature and Language. She is an olive connoisseur, and she's not as sappy as her writing makes her sound.

KALI DEANN VANDERBURG BUCKNER

Kali never meant to become a poet, it just happened while she was down on the Puget Sound sleeping in a hammock with a cat. She first started enjoying poetry as a way to express the thing she hated talking about most: Emotions. As Kali, finally, leaves the world of academia and begins studying for her accounting exams and the great job search, she continues to use poetry as a means of talking without really talking.

CONNOR CHILSON

Connor is a Central Washington University freshman from Hawaii passionate about photography and nature.

PYTHE COURTER

Pythe loves the mountains, desert, and humanity. Washington's Best Emerging Poets, an anthology from ZPublishing, recently published one of their poems. Further work can be found on their tumblr pythemakesstuff.tumblr.com.

KAYLA CRAIG

Kayla is originally born and raised in California, but has slowly morphed into a Pacific-Northwesterner over the last eight years. She is primarily a digital illustrator (making lots of posters for student organizations) that wants to explore other traditional mediums. She really likes fiber arts and carving things. Wants to be outside more and cuddle with animals that she's allergic to.

JASON A. DAYS

Jason is a Professional and Creative Writing major at Central Washington University. In 2017, he received the Betty E. Evans Creative Writing Award for poetry from CWU. Jason enjoys traveling, playing the guitar, reading books, and spending time with his wife and daughter.

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Zach is a Professional and Creative Writing major and Anthropology minor at Central Washington University. His work can be found in *The Comet*, *The Confluence*, *The Rising Phoenix Review*, and *Pif Magazine*. He served as co-editor in 2017 for *Mirror Northwest*, and his poem "Fish Eyes" won the Wenatchee Valley College 2017 Earth Poetry Contest. Zach is deeply disturbed by the state of our environment and

nation.

DARRYL FOTO

Darryl is a spoken word rookie. He currently resides in Ellensburg, Washington and is a two-time poetry slam champion of the CWU's poetry slam, a winner of Rain City's 2017 Individual World Poetry Slam championship and a rain city rep for the 2017 Individual World Poetry Slam. Darryl is currently on track to becoming a poet with a degree in biology.

KENDRA GARDNER

Kendra is currently a first year student at Central Washington University. She enjoys photographing, especially landscapes, in her free time. While unsure of her major, she knows that photography will always be a passion of hers and hopes to continue to pursue it in the future.

KAYLEE GROOT

KayLee is a Professional and Creative Writing major at Central Washington University who currently resides in Seattle, Washington. She loves to spend her spare time hiking, snowboarding, and reading classic works of literature. This submission is her first publication.

ALEXANDER HORNING

Alex has been taking photos for seven years, and thinks there is something special about going out and exploring the Pacific Northwest. He thinks of photography as one of the best ways to do it.

LYZ JOHNSON

Lyz's work focuses on the details of the skin and body. The skin is not just pink or brown, it is a multitude of colors with underlying veins and fat that change its shape and texture. The skin harbors

stretchmarks, cellulite, pimples, bruises, and discoloration. It can be pulled, compressed, and warped. It is important to remember this when looking at edited images on Instagram or through the media.

WYATT LANGSTRAAT

Wyatt is a sophomore at Central majoring in English and Psychology. He transferred to the school from Everett Community College where he did running start. Born in Bellingham, he moved to Marysville when he was six and has lived there for fifteen years.

AUDRA GUNDERSON

Audra is a CWU student pursuing three majors: Anthropology, Primate Behavior, and Ecology. Audra's work explores a fascination with the fusing of the organic and the mechanical, which represents how identities become "wired" by the influence of our surroundings and experiences.

AMY LAW

Amy is an online student at Central Washington University, where she is completing her Bachelor's degree in Creative and Professional Writing. Along with continuing her education, she is also working full time at a finance company in Edmonds, Washington, where she lives with her husband Mykle. This is Amy's first work to be published. Many aspects of her work are based on personal life experiences and adventures. Amy enjoys practicing many different forms of writing, but hopes to one day publish a nonfiction novel incorporating her family and the memories they share.

KAITLYN LAWRENZ

Kaitlyn began writing at the age of ten, because all the cool kids were doing it.

In actuality, her best friend was writing a story, and Kaitlyn found the concept fascinating. So, she opened a Word document and changed her life. After a year of writing stories with no existing plot, Kaitlyn managed to write a piece for a contest that went to the state level of the competition. At fifteen, she won second place in a county-wide writing and art contest hosted by the public library system. And yes, she does accept bragging rights for that. Because of that contest, she is now seventy-five dollars richer.

KACIE LITTLE

Kacie is the Donor Relations Manager for Central Washington University and is currently in the MA program for English: Creative and Professional Writing. She has worked as a newspaper journalist and editor and has received multiple awards for her work in journalism. She has also been published in national magazines in the wine industry and irrigation industry. When she isn't writing for work, school, or for outside interests, she spends her time running, cooking, and reading. She also enjoys skiing and road biking with her husband.

CATHERINE MANN

Catherine was bullied as a young girl, and as a result took to literature to numb the loneliness she felt. Since then, words have become an obsession to her. When she could no longer read as fast or as often as she used to, Catherine turned to writing. Filling countless notebooks of ideas, poems and prose that never came to fruition, she realized that reality had taken the backseat. Part personal essay, part magical realism, "The Book" reflects her obsession with words and the downfall it might cause her. Despite the burnout and eventual fall she sees in her future, Catherine still writes for herself and

others. She's probably writing right now, strengthening the symbiotic relationship between the worm and the host.

JENNIFER MARSH

Jennifer is an undergraduate at Central Washington University. Her work has appeared in *Pleiades*, *Entropy*, *Manastash*, and is forthcoming in *Empty Mirror*. She's probably repotting a houseplant right now.

SETH MORRISON

Seth is a student at Central Washington University who lives in Wenatchee, Washington while wrapping up his creative writing degree. He enjoys video games, photography, and working on self-improvement. Seth is relatively new to the idea of submitting his work, and he has only had one poem published, which can be read in volume 4 of *The Perch Magazine*.

HAILEY NELSON

Hailey is a Professional and Creative Writing major who enjoys writing fiction. She grew up in Redmond, Washington, and is very happy to be studying writing. Poetry is a new exploration for her so enjoy!

AIDEN OCHOA

Aiden was raised in Auburn and Kent, Washington with numerous escapes to the Seattle waterfront to find something bigger than a small-town life. He's been writing poetry and stories since the third grade as a means of creating better snippets of life than the ones his own life provides. He's planning on double majoring in English and Sociology and minoring in Women, Gender and Sexuality studies or possibility changing one of those to Philosophy.

GABRIELA OSORIO

Gabriela is a senior at Central Washington

University. Originally from Mexico, she now resides in the Pacific Northwest. Being bilingual, bi-literate, and bi-cultural has influenced her poetry and, as a poet of witness, Gabriela strives to expose forbidden subjects that are hidden in the shadows.

TAYLRO PAPADAKIS

Taylor is a student at Central Washington University. She is majoring in English and minoring in Creative Writing and Philosophy. Her work has been published by the online music review site *AudibleAddixons*.

YAHAYHRA RODRIGUEZ

Yahayra is a YVCC Graduate, and a current CWU student. She is inclined to write all her literature with Hispanic characters, or other minorities because most of the literature she read growing up in school or at her local library never included Hispanic characters. On her free time, she is often drawing or catching up on her photography.

DALIE RUIZ

Dalia is an artist at CWU and a fan of the pied piper.

KARALINE STAMPER

Karaline is a full-time creative writing student, part-time linguist, and spends her days in a ball pit of words. She likes stars, intersectional feminism, and the magic of language. Karaline's work has been published in the *Acorn Review*.

CARLOS SULLIVAN

Carlos is an artist from Boise, Idaho, currently attending CWU as a BFA student with an emphasis in painting. His interests are in narrative work and treating painting as a visual language.

HAYLEY TAYLOR

Hayley grew up in Vancouver, Washington. She came to have a love of reading from a young age and has always felt a strong connection to stories. From that love grew the interest in becoming a part of the storytelling. She, now a sophomore at Central Washington University, has recently declared a major in Professional and Creative Writing. Hayley hopes to advance her writing skills to better incorporate writing in her post-college career.

ANGELINA VALDEZ

Angelina is a first-generation student from rural Eastern Washington, the president of a women's empowerment club, and a future teacher dedicated to activism and intersectionality.

JESSICA VINCENT

Jessica is pursuing a bachelor's in Professional and Creative Writing. By day, she hails from Olympia, Washington, where she moonlights as a retail manager; by all else, she is both an author and a poet. And yes, she does realize when she's talking to herself.

AMY WILSON

Amy is graduating Spring 2018 with a bachelor's in Communication Studies, a minor in Interdisciplinary Honors, and a minor in Creative Writing. She loves drinking too much coffee and spending time with her fiancé and friends.

Caroline Wright

Caroline is in her fourth year at Central and will be graduating Spring 2018 with a bachelor's in Secondary English Education. She currently works at Starbucks which she loves. Her dream is

to backpack through Europe and road trip across the United States. She loves exploring new places, learning, and teaching. As a teacher, her goal is to teach her students about the joys of learning and to empower them through education. She strongly believes that knowledge is power.

