



Winter 2015  
muse

# NOTE FROM THE EDITOR

Dear reader,

You have in your hands a copy of Muse, Washington and Lee's undergraduate literary arts magazine. The goal of Muse is to promote creative expression across campus, so in this issue you'll see work that represents students from a variety of majors, minors, and extracurricular activities. There are a lot of creative people on this campus. But I think that sometimes it can be easy to overlook the importance of the arts at Washington and Lee (and in general). I think that you'll finish this issue with a richer understanding of the talent that we have at our school. My biggest hope, then, is that Muse can draw us all a little closer, connect us in that way that only art can.

Annie

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FRONT AND BACK COVER ART: "DAVID" by DANIEL RAUBOLT

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

4. PERSONAL AD POEM  
    Jok Asiyó  
UNTITLED  
    Edward Stroud
6. RIVER RENKU  
    English 205, Spring Term 2014  
RAVE  
    Leigh Stauffer
8. THE RAPE OF A WOMAN IN A PLAY  
INSTEAD OF REAL LIFE  
    Anna Katherine Barnes  
STOP MOTION  
    Alex Minor
10. 3. STEP BACK FROM YOURSELF,  
MOVE OUTWARD AND AWAY -  
JUDGE THE IMAGE  
AS THE FACE OF SOMEONE YOU ONCE  
KNEW.  
    Amira Hegazy
12. NORTH AMERICAN TIME  
    Nick Lehotsky  
COLORADO CLOUDS  
    Daniel Raubolt
14. THREE DEATHS  
    Liza Boldrick  
CROC DIAMOND  
    Ryan Johnson
20. A FLAME WHICH CONSUMES BUT DOES  
NOT BURN  
    Mac McKee  
UNDER THE LIGHT  
    Kattie Pettit
22. WONDERING ABOUT ATLANTA  
    Kiki Martire  
LEAF LAMINATE SERIES  
    Nicki Ross
24. SEX, LOVE, & BEING A NOT SHITTY  
WRITER  
    Marino Orlandi  
LEAF LAMINATE SERIES (CONT.)  
    Nicki Ross
26. CASSANDRA'S LAMENT  
    Claire Sbardella  
COUNTY ROAD XX  
    Shaun Soman
28. LIGHT AS BRICK MEN  
    Sarah Helms  
NEURONS  
    Alex Minor
32. A WALK IN THE WOODS  
    Chauncey Baker  
SHARK  
    Ryan Johnson
34. SWIPE RIGHT  
    Sara Korash-Schiff  
LITTLE EARS WITH A GOOD HEART  
    Dillon Stanfield
40. EKPHRASTIC II  
    Linda Gaida  
BLUE MOOSE  
    Janey Fugate



# PERSONAL AD POEM


Jok Asiyó

Last time I saw it –  
was on the bustling sidewalk,  
by the chalked,  
grey-toned, graffiti marked,  
bus stop.

It's covered in riffraff,  
extra chocolaty Kit-Kats,  
disguised with Tic-Tacs.  
My mapped-out mood-swing bar graph,  
mixed with my bad past,  
that hopes to bypass, getting side tracked,  
seeking secure safety from shallow insecurities  
so it's security guards stay safe.  
Seen anything like that?

It's terrified of the dark,  
of the gun shots in the park,  
it's the passion behind Noah's Ark,  
and resembles the romantic question mark.  
Bashed, beaten, broken, battered.  
Smashed, slammed, sliced, shattered.  
Melted, mended, molded, mastered.  
Poisoned with dark matter,  
because it's only family matter,  
is pondering if family matters...

It longs for Ninja Turtles,  
and orange and white cassette tapes.  
Power Ranger powered light sabers,



and Play-Doh with the extra play shapes.  
For Pokémon cards, limited edition,  
light up sketchers, mint condition,  
when the food pyramid was the definition of nutrition.  
For AIM and walkie-talkies to be the only way to talk,  
Distracted during dinner, playing tag on the sidewalk,  
running around the church parking lot,  
once it's dark, playing manhunt,  
hiding in the bushes, creeping by the streetlight,  
sprinting to the door, because it hears a dog bark.  
It hopes for you to hug it  
like you're leaving for a trip.  
and kiss it like you mean it  
mixed with feelings – meaning, it  
doesn't hope for sexual attraction dripping from your lips,  
but a counterpart to snuggle with and cuddle for a bit  
grab a cozy blanket, watch a golden crisp eclipse,  
And make some matrimony; make a Mrs. from a miss.  
It tries to keep it simple, so it's searching for a kiss,  
Describing's not my specialty, have you seen something like this?

I've been feeling pretty empty since I left that bus stop,  
Beneath my chest is nothing,  
and I even heard my pulse drop.  
Wait, I've got it!  
I should've known from the start.  
I fell before I left, and I must've lost my heart!

I tripped on the curb, and it must have fallen, how clumsy of me,  
But if you caught it, you can keep it, my heart and I could use some company.

UNTITLED  
Edward Stroud

RAVE  
Leigh Stauffer



# RIVER RENKU

Jeb Bland, Helen Clay, Nolan Doyle, Rayane El Hraiki, Anna Feiss, Ellen Gleason, Jack Koch, Cameron Lee, Gordon McAlister, Tom Mostellar, Lindsay Reese, Wheeler Reiss, Brooks Taylor, Lesley Wheeler, Jamie White, & Bella Zuroski

A quick and secret  
thinker, the Maury River—  
what turns in its mind?

Thick, slushy vengeance:  
a cold-blooded killer.

Icy cold water.  
Splash! My comfy soul is  
drenched.  
Remnants of winter.

Flash! Snap of a camera,  
memories immortalized.

Phone in my pocket  
now a moon underwater—  
trembling up the bank.

I forgot to cash my check.  
In need of liquidation.

I check myself but  
the current drags me forward—  
need to gain control—

Sleepily I float, crowd-surf  
a refreshing audience...

no beach paradise.  
but it's the closest I'll come.  
I sip lukewarm Bud

Light while dreams of big waves  
spawn.  
I am Honolulu bound.

Your touch sends a surge  
of chills along my spine: friend  
lost then found again.

Friends are planted on her verge,  
mingling as the cold recedes.

That empty dock, lone  
chair—who sits there when the moon  
blossoms into light?

Conversely I'll light my bud,  
warming my lungs and my mind.

Smoke rushes the pipe  
and I float further away.  
The bugs and I buzz.

My isolation bugs me.  
A party sounds appealing.

Incessant chatter  
drifts through the still, muggy air.  
Despite myself I

overhear the sonorous  
clouds talking in a rumble.

Cloudy memories  
of last night's actions; fifth night.  
Sober this morning.

Mourning the loss of snow—  
Am I the only one?

The daylight is warm.  
My jacket stays in the dorm.  
Flip-flops can be worn.

Grass lawn. Abandoned sandal.  
Too much sunshine for someone?

I walk down the trail.  
Grassy meadows begin to  
change into flowers.

Thinking back to the showers:  
dim and gloom before the bloom.

Boom! The monster comes  
pushing through the stormy clouds.  
Light cracks the dark sky.

Wind swirls through vegetation—  
dancing amidst turbulence—

unharmd, the Maury  
glides, springing between rolling  
hills, free from Earth's clock,

cracking the face of the watch,  
ripping the hands of time.

Sunscreen on faces  
protects us from summer. That  
cool moon's hiding too,

the one that ignites May blossoms.  
Icy river of nectar

flows through us, a glow  
that washes the term away.  
Soon, June, and cherries.



# THE RAPE OF A WOMAN IN A PLAY INSTEAD OF REAL LIFE

Anna Katherine Barnes

“Vengeance is in my heart,  
death in my hand,  
Blood and revenge  
are hammering in my head”  
– William Shakespeare,  
Titus Andronicus

1. My professor, a Shakespeare scholar and an Anglophile, leads her students to the Globe Theatre. She says that at Titus Andronicus, groundlings are often splashed with blood. We are reminded to proceed cautiously: a few of us are clustered together, backs against the brick wall, as far from the stage as a groundling can be; the bravest of us walk towards the front, eager to experience the violence. I find my way to stand amongst the weak in

the back. But I am not worried. It is just a play.

Up on stage: the actors, vengeful and crazed and Tamora rises from nothing to take down Lavinia for TITUS, the enraged woman

the brothers are Goths in Titus Andronicus this work of fiction, so red It seems, her blood defines her

and she acts it out on stage because Shakespeare told her to

anger and silence in the Globe Tamora knows of her sons' crime I know it hurts to be raped

2. To imagine a time of rage when she is shamed a time of revenge and war

the Goths bang metal to metal among the groundlings and, her blood is spilt, we see

she lives in silence

shock

they slice her tongue      remove her hands  
insurance for their rape  
dignity and hope  
robbed in this circular playhouse  
Lavinia loses  
herself and slowly  
her father's love as well





## STOP MOTION

Alex Minor

did Will S know that in 450 years  
it would be the same?

this play might not be fiction

3. People suffer from criminal acts of rape and it takes time and healing to overcome this suffering. Some of the suffering are: one-in-five college women experience sexual assault or rape: one-in-six men suffer these violent acts before the age of eighteen: most men are not rapists: to see a victim of these violent acts describe them to Rolling Stone and then get torn to shreds will turn over your stomach and it will make tears in your eyes.

(the breaking of silence  
the telling of stories  
to overturn this suffering)

4. Our backs touch cold walls  
after Lavinia's rape, faces  
whitening from pain

revealed in a play  
reveled in a jail  
so on that script  
the force and pressure  
of it appears  
words of fiction  
on stage  
an acted scene  
enters my heart  
a teacher staring  
through silence:

dizziness

What happens to Lavinia  
has happened for centuries  
we know it from Shakespeare

it is not fiction

sexual violence  
burning crimes  
spinning heads

a heart beats faster  
after rape

there is another student whose  
face blanks  
and we are weakening

We walk into the bathroom outside The Globe  
the show goes on  
we find a mirror  
it sees our clammy complexions  
and we see our faces  
cold sweat on white

bodies know the heart

no one notices nothing has changed  
though the play tells us

they are actors     says the playwright

I am typing these thoughts like needles,  
breaking through my skin. I was not nervous.  
It was just a play, but fiction tells true stories.  
My amateur English is not different from  
Shakespeare's. People suffer from criminal acts  
of rape. There are signs but we ignore them.  
Jackie, who confessed to Rolling Stone, spoke  
her heart of truth. Some of the suffering are:  
it is hard to prevent rape; this is the millenni-  
um; my poem cannot touch Jackie now. We  
have forgotten Lavinia's rape. I am afraid. You  
should be afraid. The rape of a woman in a  
play instead of real life makes no difference. I  
know it hurts to be raped. My mind is overflow-  
ing, my brain is reeling, I cannot touch Jackie,  
and this play is not fiction.

2014\*

STEP BACK FROM YOURSELF,  
MOVE OUTWARD AND AWAY -  
JUDGE THE IMAGE  
AS THE FACE OF SOMEONE YOU ONCE KNEW.

Amira Hegazy



# NORTH AMERICAN TIME

Nick Lehotsky

Inspired by Adrienne Rich's "North American Time"

"The provocation can be aesthetic, emotional, intellectual, spiritual--positive or negative--but reflect on what your reaction teaches you."-LW

"Content versus context/They have a fight, context wins"

Titus Andronicus, "Still Life With Hot Deuce on Silver Platter"

'I am me as you are he as you are me and we are all together"


The Beatles, "I Am The Walrus"

Let us be real, let us  
be frank, let us be  
ourselves. We never  
did anything. We did  
not motivate, we did  
not mutilate, we did  
not negate, we did  
not relate "our" words  
to "their" wounds,

silent slices of time  
in which we see red  
and breathe orange  
calling others yellow  
All, then, all of the  
cool heads guillotined  
because the 4th estate  
told us so. Nobody  
can tell us justice  
(or love) comes  
to those who  
demand its  
resurrection.

Sitting in mid-day gloom  
and I'm already hungry  
for leftovers, knocking  
back water glass by glass  
back wash no matter as  
back words disgust me more.

I still have some purple dream  
left in the bottle two or three  
glasses' worth



Enough for me  
and my body to brew the secret  
formula to happiness silent singing  
howling laughs concentrated fumbblings  
and a smile that squeaks out like bad gas.

You can market empathy or cynicism,  
and you know that giving is better than receiving,  
and you take pride in your work, but do you  
think prejudice has anything to do with it?

You space out, your mind, the squeaky wheel,  
hollers for its fix of grease, you remember that  
“You must be the change you wish to see in the  
world”  
At least that’s what you say, anyway.



CROC DIAMOND  
Ryan Johnson

# THREE DEATHS

Liza Boldrick

## First Death

The bayou, dark and smooth, like black glass. Far above at the top of the hill, moths quietly sacrifice themselves as they rush toward the light. Under the water his flesh looks whiter in the moonlight, his hair looks darker, wet and sleek and cut close to the ears and neck.

Below, a strong ropy ripple, a current that doesn't quite make it to the surface. It startles the hundreds of scuttling gray crawfish who cling to mossy rocks and cease their miniscule hunt to scatter like cold breath. The air hangs heavy as the water. The crickets lie still in the heat.

Teeth like arrowheads sink into the swimmer's leg and he thrashes, the surface of the water exploding in a starburst of geysers. Confused, frightened, the alligator bites harder still, and violet blood floats and intermingles with the murky black water. Tiny crustaceans burrow deep into the mud, fish glide quickly past, and the swimmer gags as bayou water rushes to his lungs. The alligator hadn't expected a fight and abandons its prey in a cloud of tough gray scales suspended in thinning blood.

The swimmer hangs, swollen lips punctured by his own teeth.

## Second Death

The next morning, when they pull the body out, it is bloated and bruised. Spindly little creatures with forked

tails from the bayou have already begun to gather at the drained wound. The neighbors are disgusted, thrilled, amazed. Alligators never attack people—what was he doing swimming in the bayou? and at night?—there hasn't been a gator sighting here in five, ten years. Don't let his mother see the leg. It must have thought he was a...a giant catfish. Alligators can see in the dark. It must've got bored with him, what a waste. What was the poor fool thinking?

He is brought inside wrapped in his mother's extra linen, which is just long enough to contain his small frame. She weeps, slumped against the kitchen counter, while the men debate whether or not to take him inside. Should we call 911? What would be the point? Somebody call animal patrol.

At seventeen, he had not written his last will and testament. His mother elects to cremate the body after he is taken, rather unnecessarily, to the hospital. The ambulance doesn't use its lights; it blares its siren at a stoplight. He is returned to her in a clear plastic baggie, vacuum-sealed, millions of tiny charred ashes. She cannot see his face in them. She scatters them in the backyard dirt, where the beings of the water can't touch him, but the wind blows bits onto the banks anyway and the crawfish creep cautiously out from behind their rocks but do not feed. A funeral is held and an empty casket buried. The gator slips quietly away while the mourners dutifully sing. It grows plump and slow on a family of fledgling birds.

### Afterlife

Julian comes into consciousness suddenly and finds himself in a sterile blue room. He is wearing a paper gown and a figure stands over him. The harsh light beating down on the table where he lies obscures the man's face, but Julian can tell by his chalky rubber gloves and long blue jacket that he is a doctor. A surgeon.

"Oh, good, you're awake," the doctor says, glancing down at Julian, for a moment leaning toward him so that his face is briefly revealed. "You've been out for hours."

Julian doesn't know what to say. He has a vague recollection of soft, silky water in the black night, a searing pain, and a panicked struggle to breathe. He can't connect the hazy, dark fragments of then to the stark bright light glowing down on him now. He makes a move to sit up.

"Whoa, whoa, hold on there," says the doctor, pushing him back. "Almost done here. Hang on a minute." Julian wonders then why he isn't in pain. Is he under waking anesthesia? With horror, he sees a tiny insect crawl down the length of the table.

"There we go, all finished," says the doctor, snapping off his gloves and making grabbing motions in the air with his hands, so that Julian can hear the tiny crack of his knuckles. "All right, follow me now. You'll want to talk to Ida, I'm sure."

Julian glances around for a wheelchair. "Shouldn't I...I mean, did I just have surgery? Can't I..."

"You're fine to walk," answers the doctor, offering him an arm. Julian grasps the doctor's forearm and hoists himself off the table. His leg only shows the faint shadows of stitches. It bears his weight fine.

He follows the doctor gingerly across the room, his mind still sluggishly taking stock of his surroundings. He knows he should ask questions, but he doesn't know what to ask.

The two step through a door into what looks like some sort of lobby. Dozens of people sit on rows of hard plastic chairs, holding slips of paper in their hands, and behind a frosted glass window a woman calls out something through a PA system. Several people are crying.

"Look, do you see that woman in the sweatshirt?" says the doctor, pointing. "Take a number and sit next to her. Then they'll call you and you can go up to the window. Just wait for your number and they'll explain it to you." He strides back through the door into the blue room. Julian stands for a moment, dazed, still in his paper gown. He notices that a few other people in the room are similarly dressed. He walks towards the woman in the sweatshirt and takes a number from a system hanging on the wall. Forty-six. He sits down next to her.

“Nice dress,” says the woman. “What happened to you?”

“I don’t...my leg. Something happened to my leg.” Julian looks down at the tiny white hatch marks that criss-cross up his calf, then back to the woman. She is old, with bluish-white hair, dressed in black flannel slacks and a large, pink sweatshirt with the words “Merry Christmas” stitched into the front, surrounded by embroidered stockings. Her slacks are covered in what looks suspiciously like cat hair.

“That’s all? I got pneumonia,” she tells him. “Went out to get my paper with my hair still wet. Worst cold I ever got. Only took about four days, but thank the Lord I can breathe through my nose again.” She laughs good-naturedly to herself, patting Julian’s leg as she does so. “I remember once--“

“Forty-six,” booms the PA system.

“I think that’s my number,” Julian says to the woman, holding up his slip of paper.

“Well, it’s just like the DMV! Been here at least half an hour and you just got here, and already you’re up.

Well, I know it’s not your fault. I’m sure they’ve got some sort of system. Go on up there, honey.” Julian stands up uncertainly, nods to the woman, and walks to the frosted window. He places his slip of paper in a small opening at the bottom so the blurry woman behind the window can take it. “I think you called my number,” he says to the blur.

“Mm-hm, that’s right, forty-six,” she agrees. “Go on back through that door, and you’re gonna make a left down the hall, and it’s the second door on the right.”

“Thank you,” says Julian, and he opens a door to the right of the window and steps into another waiting room of sorts, but much smaller and quieter, with overstuffed armchairs covered in ugly, pale blue fabric. A narrow hallway branches off the left side of the room, which Julian pads down. On the walls hang framed watercolors of sailboats, landscapes, someone’s pet Labrador retriever lounging in a meadow. He turns into the second door on the right.

It’s an office. The room is very tidy: minimum furniture, velvety green potted plants flanking a wooden desk, a lamp, a small bookshelf. The walls are blue. On the desk sits a day-by-day tear-off Garfield calendar. The woman behind the desk stands as Julian enters. “I’m Ida,” she says brightly, sticking out her hand, which Julian shakes. “Why don’t you have a seat?” Julian lowers himself into another fat armchair, this one covered in a green, mossy pattern. “Now...” She shuffles through some papers on her desk. “Julian. How much do you remember?”

“I remember going swimming,” Julian tells her. “In the bayou behind my house. We, uh, my mother and I, we live on a bayou,” he finishes somewhat lamely.

“Yes, yes, of course,” she nods, as if she already knew this. She peers inquisitively at him, and Julian understands he is being pressed for more details.

“Did something happen to my leg?” he asks. “Well, it feels fine now, I mean, but I woke up in surgery. I should probably call my mother.”

“Don’t worry about that, Julian,” Ida says soothingly. “The surgery was mostly for cosmetic reasons. We want you to feel comfortable.”

Julian doesn’t understand this, but can’t think of what to ask. He looks awkwardly around the room, fixing his gaze on one of the potted plants.

Ida sighs, bringing his attention back to her face. She clasps her hands together and leans forward, elbows on her desk. “I was hoping you would come to it on your own. It sometimes happens. But...well, that’s okay, that’s half of what I’m here for.



Julian, dear, I'm sorry to be the one to tell you this, but you died last night. When you went swimming. In the bayou behind your house. You drowned."

The silence between them is a living presence, swollen and dense like a giant slug. Julian turns and swiftly vomits into the potted plant.

"I'm sorry," he gasps when he resurfaces, throat burning and eyes streaming.

"That's okay," Ida says. "It's fake anyway."

"But my--my leg...when did I...I know how to swim!"

"Well, Julian, it was actually a very strange case. You know, I'm sure, that alligators are quite common in Louisiana."

"Alligators don't attack people. You're thinking of crocodiles. And I haven't seen an alligator in our part of the bayou since I was a kid."

"Ordinarily you'd be right, on both counts. Generally your bayou doesn't have alligators, although they do occasionally pass through, but that's usually at night, so you wouldn't have seen them. And generally alligators don't attack people, but sometimes full-size ones do. I can tell you that once it bit you and you fought back, it got spooked and left you, so most likely it mistook you for some sort of easier prey. But by that point you were unconscious from the loss of blood, and you drowned."

Julian is shaking, running his hands through his short hair, rocking his head back and forth. "This can't be real," he says. "I feel fine. My leg got bit and they took me to the hospital and I'm fine now. I need to call my mother."

"Julian, I'm sorry," Ida says, the soft, calm undertones in her voice jarring against the rising panic in his. "But this is real. They did take you to the hospital, but you were already gone by then."

"Then what now? What do I do now?" he almost yells. Ida remains unperturbed. "That's the other half of the reason that I'm here. I'll explain it all to you. Would you like some water first? I understand how difficult this is, but I need for you to be calm."

He nods, the redness in his cheeks subsiding slightly. She pours him a glass from a pitcher on the desk. For several minutes she sits quietly while he drinks the water, first in great starving gulps and then, slowly, in smaller sips. The pounding in his head lessens. Eventually, he nods to Ida, and she unfolds her hands and sits back.

"Okay. First of all, we each die three times."

"Like--like three lives? Do I get to go back?"

Ida looks sorrowfully at him. "No, I'm sorry, Julian, not like three lives. You don't get to go back. But you do have three deaths. Last night was the first, when you drowned and your heart stopped beating. In three days, I believe, you will have your second, which is when you're buried. Well, it might be before that, depending on whether your mother decides on cremation or not. But in any case, it's when your body is put to rest. And the third occurs when your name is spoken for the last time. I can't tell you when that will be."

"So...so what does that mean for me? Why does that matter?"

"You don't leave here until the third death occurs. Until then, you'll just have to wait."

"Is that what you're doing? Waiting? Then where do I go after?"

“Yes, that’s what I’m doing too, so unfortunately I can’t tell you what happens after because I don’t know myself. But you won’t be here anymore.”

Julian looks around the room. “And ‘here’ is…”

She brightens. “Oh, well, we have a nice little community. You’ll be assigned to a building, with a roommate at first, and if you’re here long enough eventually you’ll get your own room. And you’ll have a job. Do you like the outdoors? We need a new gardener. The weather’s always nice. But we can talk about all that later. In the meantime, let’s go get your room assignment.”

Ida stands up, signaling the end of the interview, and walks towards the door, motioning for Julian to join her. Like a puppet, he mechanically rises and follows her, scanning each room they pass for a phone.

Third Death

Today, at home, Julian would have been 49. His old roommate, Anthony, has baked a cake in the community kitchen for the occasion, and several of their housemates have joined to eat it. Ida is no longer here, but for a minute, Julian is able to convince himself that he is home. Anthony has even used caramel icing for the cake like Julian’s mother used to do.

The group sits in the community courtyard, quietly eating, quietly telling stories. People are quieter here, Julian has noticed. So much less is relevant when you can’t go back.

They go around the circle and talk about their favorite birthdays. “Thirty,” says David, a gruff-voiced man with perpetually windburnt skin and a grizzled beard. “The wife took me to the Poconos. Saw a bear.”

“My second one here,” offers Sophia dreamily, tucking an imaginary piece of her cropped black hair behind her ear. “Everyone was so sweet. Ida—you all remember Ida—she baked a carrot cake for me. She remembered it was my favorite from one of the first times we talked. The cake was…well, not like home, but the gesture was so sweet.” She smiles to herself and studies her unpainted fingernails, fingers curled towards her palm in an almost-fist.

“Tired of having birthdays,” mumbles Arthur, who lived to meet his first great-grandchild. A few people in the group laugh quietly, understanding.

“What about you, Julian?” asks Sophia. They wait silently, but the silence is not demanding. It curls up at Julian’s feet and warms itself in the sun while he thinks. He remembers his first birthday here, shortly after he arrived. Anthony had showed him how to get a glimpse of home the week before. He hadn’t told anyone it was his birthday, and after breakfast he slipped away unnoticed, leaving his housemates to enjoy their toast and apple jam in the soft gray morning light. He went to sit in his bedroom. Through the open shutters he could see an older woman in a plaid scarf and a young man, a few years older than himself, playing cards on the empty space between them on the bench where they sat in the courtyard below. “Go fish,” said the man.

Julian closed the shutters and sat facing the periwinkle wall. He tried not to see the thin fissures that had begun to form at the moldings. He closed his eyes, folded his hands in his lap, the way he had been taught to pray during grace. And he focused. But the images that came to him were muddy and random: the boy he had sat next to in U.S. history sneaking a cigarette; his old postman tripping on a rock, almost dropping the heavy package he carried; his elementary school principal, filling out paperwork at her desk stained with watermarks. He shook his head and the memories scattered. He covered his eyes with the heels of his palms.

Finally, he saw her: her movements were shadowy and disjointed but they did not immediately fade. She was sitting at their kitchen table and her face was pointed downward at an unfolded newspaper. He could see the sour lines that appeared in her forehead as she raised a chipped mug of coffee—she always drank coffee, never tea—to her lips. It must have gone cold. She flipped a page in the paper, flipped another, and another. She wasn’t even skimming the articles. Suddenly, she grabbed one of the thin inky pages in her fist and crumpled it. It sat sadly in her hand as she relaxed and unrelaxed her fingers, her face pointed up now, sobbing with eyes open. Her eyes were flat and ringed with red.

He started and his eyes flew open and he was back in his periwinkle room. He slumped to the ground and leaned against the iron frame of his bed until Anthony returned from work.

Back in the courtyard, the group sits patiently as Julian remembers. "Today, of course. Today is my favorite birthday," he grins. They smile back at him with sad lips and someone changes the subject.

After a little while he stands and slips away. No one stops him; no one asks where he is going. He walks out of the courtyard, past the housing compound, the meditation garden, the community kitchen. He walks past the building that houses what used to be Ida's office and continues along a running trail until he reaches a small, empty field where the Recreation Committee occasionally holds painting classes. At the edge of the field, he sits. There are no distractions here. He can see home more clearly if he wants to, uninterrupted, and it is not so hard to look back now.

Today he is lucky. He can feel the wet, muggy air that drips into the bayou. He can taste boudin balls crushed between the molars of his old neighbors. In the lazy heat, his mother is sitting on the screened porch. She hasn't been well; she has a daily nurse now. She leaves her purse in the oven and her reading glasses in the freezer. She forgets her friends' names, many of whom are no longer alive, and those that are hardly visit anyway.

This morning the regular nurse is sick, so the agency sends over a new one, a young, little thing, still under the impression that she can make a difference by feeding cereal to an old lady with dementia. Julian's mother does not notice. She sits on the porch, her view of the bayou broken up by the hundreds of wire crossings of the screen. The land and air are still.

"What a lovely place you have here, ma'am," says the nurse cheerfully.

"Thank you," replies Julian's mother automatically, barely listening.

The nurse casts around for a new topic. She gets up to make Julian's mother a cup of coffee, and on her way to the kitchen notices a photograph of Julian, aged 16, dressed nicely for some sort of holiday--Thanksgiving, maybe? It is the only picture Julian's mother hasn't boxed up, having put the rest into storage years ago as they made her too depressed. He is a handsome boy, short dark hair, fair skin, and a small, wiry body. The nurse wonders if he is perhaps the old lady's son.

"What a cute photo," she says to Julian's mother back on the screened porch, showing her the picture. "Is this your son?"

Julian's mother slowly drags her eyes from the bayou, her gaze foggy and uncentered. She looks at the picture the nurse is holding up and feels the stirrings of recognition in her chest but is unable to focus.

"This boy," the nurse says, attempting to pull back the old woman's attention. "Is he your son?"

A murmur escapes from the old woman as the picture frame slips from the nurse's hands. She scrambles to pick it up, relieved that the glass is still intact. "I'm so sorry, I didn't hear you," she says.

Julian's mother's eyes are back on the nurse now, the brief moment of clarity having fled. They are quiet for a moment while the nurse waits for lucidity. Today it isn't there. "I don't know," the old lady says. "I couldn't tell you his name."

The group in the courtyard waits for Julian as the sky darkens and the crickets take up their symphony. The minutes crawl by, and Julian doesn't return. Finally, the friends disperse quietly, and out of respect no one says Julian's name.

# A FLAME WHICH CONSUMES BUT DOES NOT BURN

Mac McKee

From underneath the heavy greyness  
sighs the whispering flame  
at the turn of the world.

It sears the edges of our eyes.  
It sears the edges of our eyes.

It presses itself into the fullness  
of our dark. Every breath  
stokes it. Each sitting moment  
it burns brighter.

Its warmth reveals us to those who  
stand under moonlight for company, those who  
breath hotly onto winter windows in only those places  
where secret etchings hide. Those who  
stretch to see where the constellations call home.

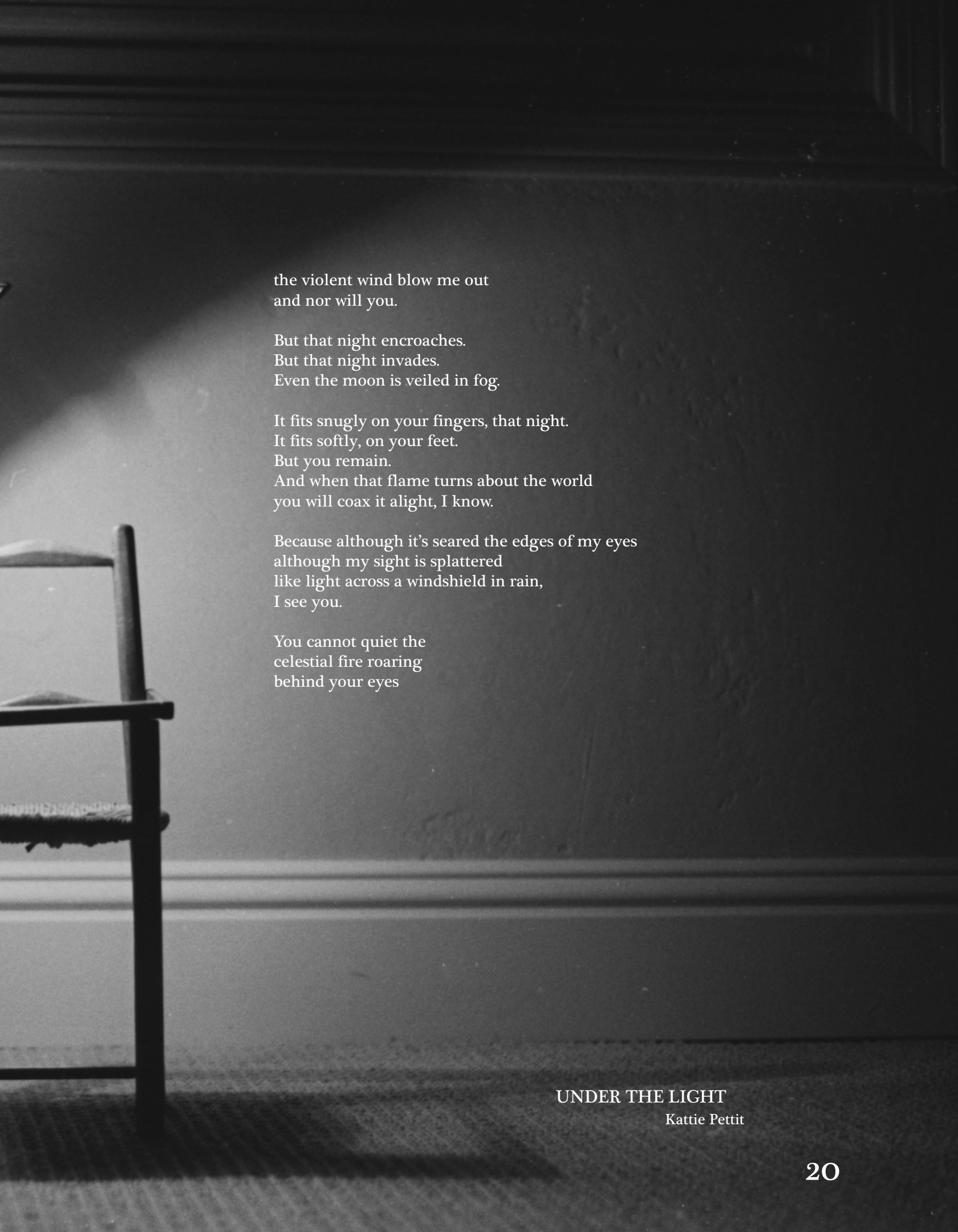
There is a hollow hunger  
a search for fired lips, for blood  
running white, setting the world  
ablaze, keeping away the encroaching  
night – away from our nocturnal black  
we cannot light.

There is a hollow hunger  
a search for easy breathing, for feet  
no longer weary, for those who  
flow cool and slowly  
in deep recesses where flames no longer burn.  
We dissolve into that encroaching night.

No! You should not let  
the despairing rain snuff you out  
and nor should I.

I will not let





the violent wind blow me out  
and nor will you.

But that night encroaches.  
But that night invades.  
Even the moon is veiled in fog.

It fits snugly on your fingers, that night.  
It fits softly, on your feet.  
But you remain.  
And when that flame turns about the world  
you will coax it alight, I know.

Because although it's seared the edges of my eyes  
although my sight is splattered  
like light across a windshield in rain,  
I see you.

You cannot quiet the  
celestial fire roaring  
behind your eyes

UNDER THE LIGHT

Kattie Pettit

# WONDERING ABOUT ATLANTA

Kiki Martire

Airport concession stand take-away bag reads:

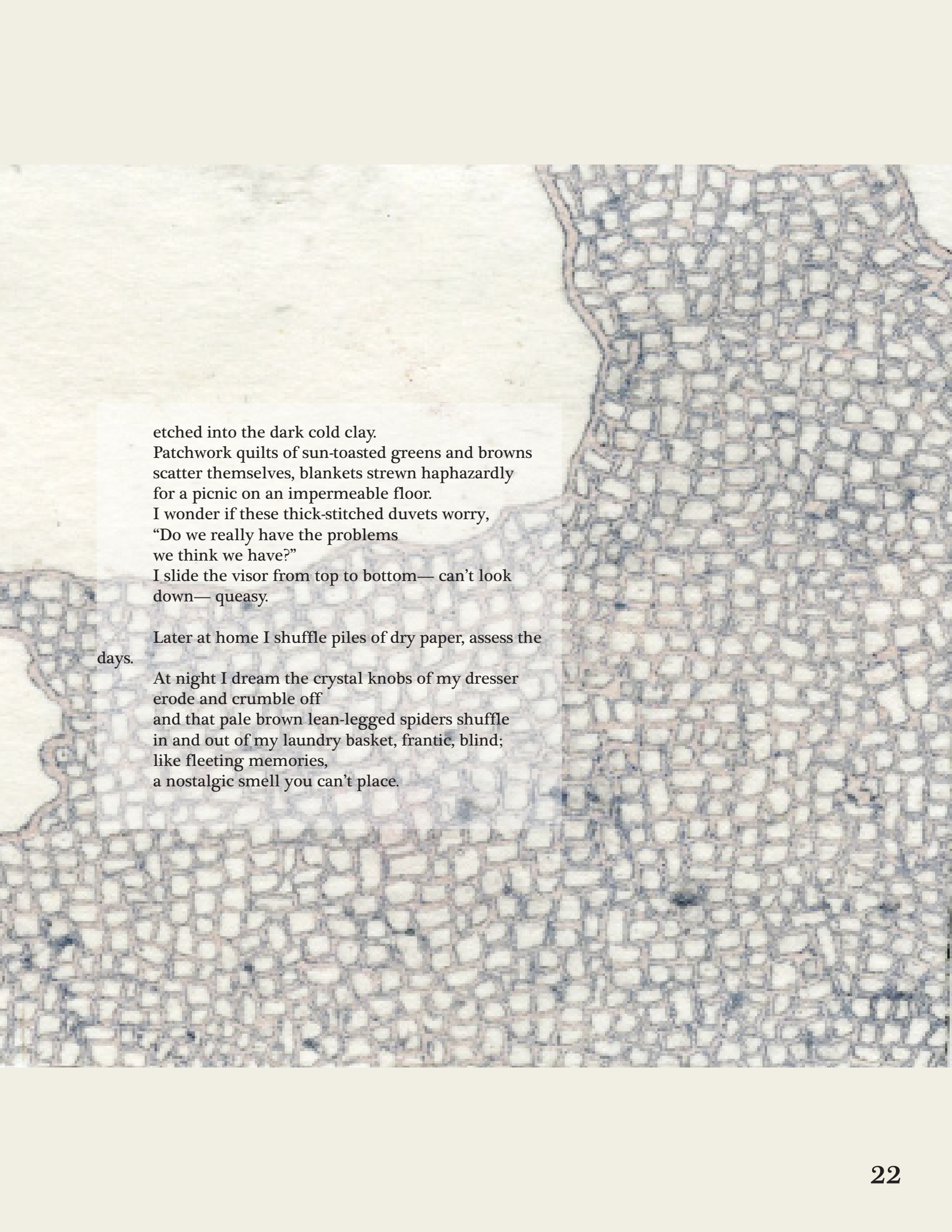
“The most important question  
we can ask ourselves is,  
‘Do we really have the problem  
we think we have?’ ”

Suitable words for a trip of rumination.  
From Austin, through Atlanta, to Virginia.  
I peer out the bug portal.  
The kind of window I imagine God  
would look through  
with a gray cloud telescope,  
accessing fate, stirring up  
our minute resolve.

I wonder what Atlanta does,  
who Atlanta sees.  
I’ve never touched down in Georgia—  
just scanned the stretch  
of tarmac, of massive sky,  
glistening beetle cars  
like sequins, the rows of a shifting abacus—  
no way through for us but up, in.

We pass a long expanse, that for an equally long time  
all there was were mountains.  
Mountains like miniature mounds of wet sand  
pinched at the tops by pudgy beach fingertips.  
They sit the way rocks ripple, like the nub spine  
of an iguana’s back. Mountain backs carved  
by the wind—round and sharp breath cavities.

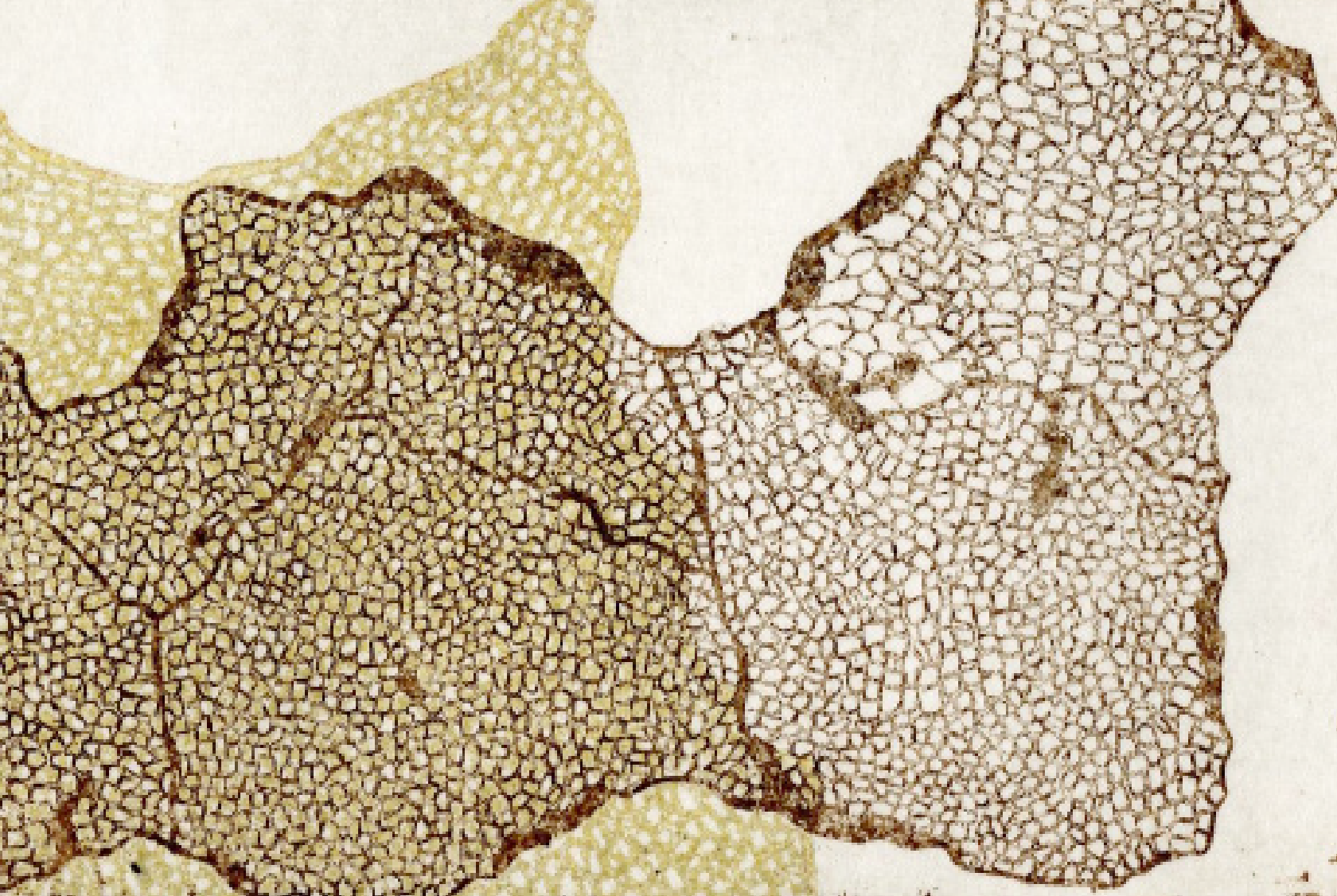
Within the valleys of the peaks lie lakes  
or maybe stagnant rivers  
pit green in their shallow bellies.  
The waterways are excavated  
like a line of eager hunting dogs  
running tail to snout, a coil  
of undulating coyote.  
I pick out their shapes  
like children do with clouds,  
but I am inverse, apart from what’s below,  
the opposite of an echo.



etched into the dark cold clay.  
Patchwork quilts of sun-toasted greens and browns  
scatter themselves, blankets strewn haphazardly  
for a picnic on an impermeable floor.  
I wonder if these thick-stitched duvets worry,  
“Do we really have the problems  
we think we have?”  
I slide the visor from top to bottom— can’t look  
down— queasy.

Later at home I shuffle piles of dry paper, assess the  
days.

At night I dream the crystal knobs of my dresser  
erode and crumble off  
and that pale brown lean-legged spiders shuffle  
in and out of my laundry basket, frantic, blind;  
like fleeting memories,  
a nostalgic smell you can’t place.



LEAF LAMINATE SERIES

Nicki Ross



# Sex, Love, & Being a Not-Shitty Writer

Marino Orlandi

Writing has always been, in my mind, like dating. Or I guess dating is like writing. There's this weird kind of give and take in relationships, a tenuous balance of caring and letting go. And depending on the dynamic, the whole framework of how you behave is shifted. Different types of relationships require different things, and you can't know what works until you try. And fail. And, ever optimistic, try again.

During my first foray into the formerly unknown world of creative writing, poetry took my virginity at a time in my life when what had previously been disinterest started turning into marked attraction. I started to look at putting pen to page—a formerly arduous and wholly tiresome task—in a completely new light, and of all the collections of written words wandering the high-school halls of my brain, Poetry made me feel confusing things. I was YouTubing my way through a slow Saturday afternoon before, you guessed it, a crazy night at Applebees and the movies with Matt Perkins and Fil Skwara—my best friends—when I saw Russell Simmons' Def Poetry Jam series for the first time. I'd heard poetry before, but this was something else. For the first time, I noticed this indescribable passion in the ways the words interlocked with one another. The way they aggressively but gently wove themselves together as they danced through the air to a beat with no sound, a marriage of raw emotion and calculated technicality that left my jaw hanging loosely below my face. Poetry was sex, and I was a teenage boy. We were made for each other.

Fiction. Oi vey, fiction. Pure, utter incompatibility. And it sucks because I wanted it to work out. I put in hours and hours trying my best to make something where there was less than nothing. I read stupid internet articles like "10 Tips to Spice Up That Climax" or "When He Learned THIS About Symbolism, Everything Changed"... Shut the fuck up Buzzfeed, nothing changed. Stubborn immobility turned to resentment turned to anger. "LOVE ME" I wanted to scream, but Fiction wasn't listening. She was busy cavorting with the other guys in Rodney Smith's Fiction class, dancing gracefully across their pages while she awkwardly stumbled across mine. Whatever, it's over and I definitely wasn't jealous.

Then, I met her: Memoir. For the first time, I didn't think of myself first when making a decision. For the first time, I was under a self-imposed obligation to the truth. For the first time, the story I was telling wasn't completely mine. I was in literary love, no longer afforded the privilege of selfishness because I wasn't the only one affected by the choices I made and the words I put down. Before, I never had to really think about somebody else because it was my path to follow, passing through wherever my wandering feet happened to take me. Now, I found myself walking hand in hand. Love tethers you to something, and you have to know, or learn, how to interact with it in a way that is truthful. Being truthful, though, doesn't always mean being honest.

The line between the truth of a story and the facts of the story becomes, quite necessarily, blurred when you write memoir. I found myself, particularly early on in the semester, constantly struggling with this concept. I felt comfortable choosing a story from my history that I wanted to share. I even felt confident enough in my writing to put together something that people would enjoy reading, by virtue of the writing itself if not for the story. But when it came to actually putting pen to page, or fingers to keys, my mind became arthritic. Every small scenario plagued me as I struggled to convey particular occurrences and sentiments in the ways that they were when they happened. I wanted you guys to feel what I felt, but I couldn't figure out how to do that. Even worse, I was painstakingly focused on the accurate recreation of every scene; and still, it felt wrong. I was telling the story exactly as it had happened, but somehow it had changed. The triumphs were less exciting, and the failures were less detrimental. Zingers had somehow managed, during transit from memory to page, to lose their zing. Someone had pulled out the color from my memories.

It wasn't until I read the last sentence in Dorothy Allison's "Two or Three Things I Know For Sure" that everything became abundantly clear. "I can tell you anything. All you have to believe is the truth" (Allison 94). Truthfully, I don't even know if she meant it the exact way I understood it, but it almost doesn't matter. It helped me come to the turning point in my development this semester. Memoir is challenging because every one of our memories is colored not with its details, but with its background. Every interaction is decorated in expectations, forged from every moment we've encountered prior to now. Memoir tells truths from our lives, not facts. A writer accepts the obligation to add in a little color when necessary, to make the intangible tangible for the reader. Great memoirists wield this brush in a manner that bespeaks the responsibility with which it demands to be used, respecting the delicate balancing act that truth performs between fact and fiction. Maybe one day I'll be able to put into my own writing what I'm just starting to understand about others.

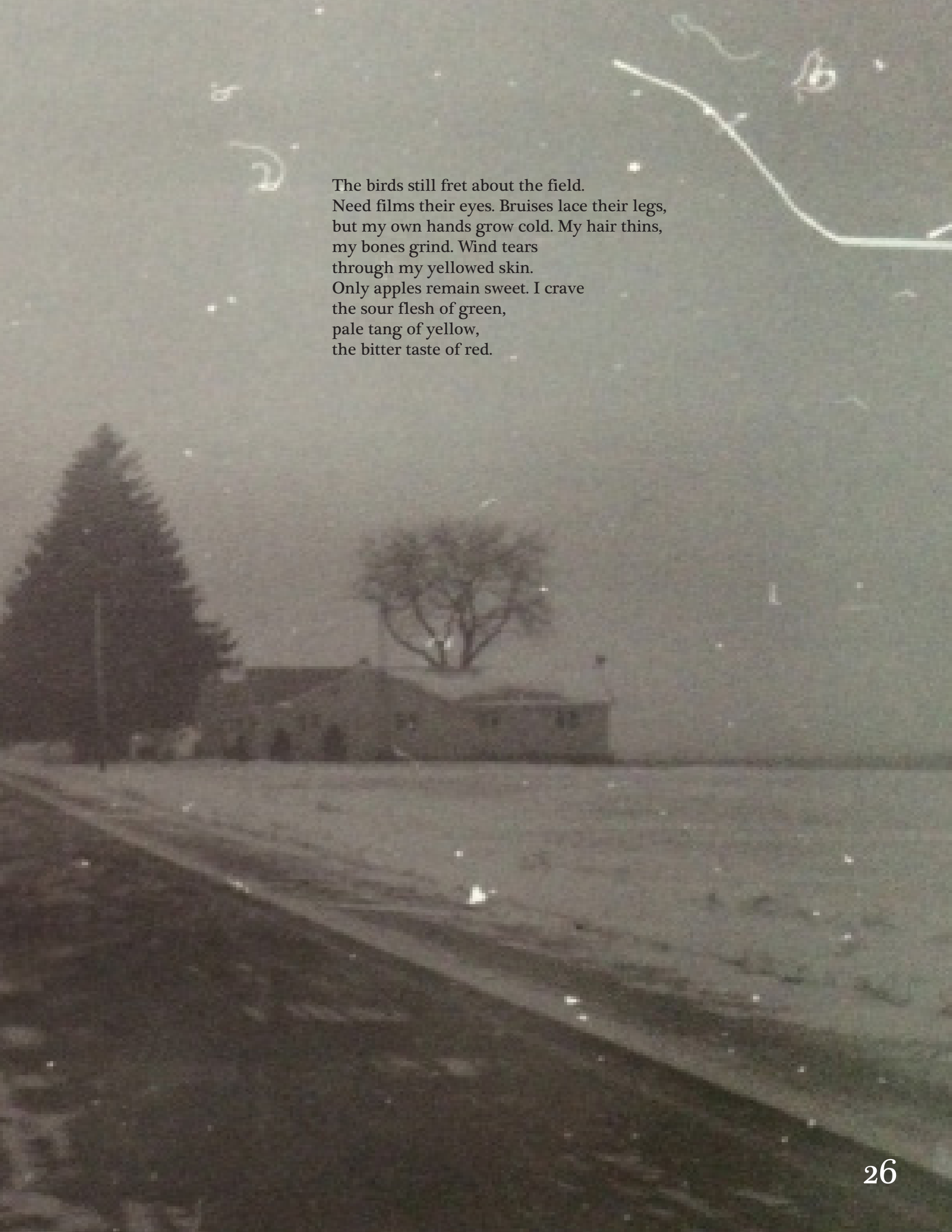
Until then, there's always poetry.

# CASSANDRA'S LAMENT

Claire Sbardella

And the sun grew dark in my eyes and I saw  
birds, black-legged and blue veined,  
scattered about a ripe field of grain.  
They circled the seeds, the fat-rolled pinecones,  
but picked only at the broken stems.  
The slow wing-beats matched the pulse  
of their hearts, their feathers dropped  
to the cold ground like leaves.  
And in the vision I cried out to them saying  
"nourish and restore yourselves"  
but only their eyes feasted on the seeds,  
and only their ears heard the anguished wind.  
In this field upon a sign lay these words:  
to attain perfection, one must sacrifice the self

COUNTY ROAD XX  
Shaun Soman



The birds still fret about the field.  
Need films their eyes. Bruises lace their legs,  
but my own hands grow cold. My hair thins,  
my bones grind. Wind tears  
through my yellowed skin.  
Only apples remain sweet. I crave  
the sour flesh of green,  
pale tang of yellow,  
the bitter taste of red.



NEURONS  
Alex Minor

# LIGHT AS BRICK MEN

Sarah Helms

Cratchit scowled so that his eyebrows and sweaty upper lip tore together and met in a sneer like the center of a pinwheel, and his epithets spun out across each instant and corn shuck. “The old stop and go, that’s what will get you, the moving and waiting machine.” Footbeats authoritative, crackling low on weeds and dry hulls. Put foot down just so around the tall corn stalks so he didn’t have to use his hands to brush them away. Continued. “Nobody puts baby in a corner, my ass that’s what, nobody puts my ass in the corner or even in a comfy chair, that’s what.” “Fuck you that’s what.” “Thank the Lord and Zarathustra for bees because they make the world go round and ain’t nobody NOBODY gettin’ their socks knocked off anymore.” Sweat slipped off the pool curing on his lip, tasted like salt tinged with coffee and his own sweet mold. “Fuck it Cratchit you didn’t murder anyone, and if I’ve got money hallelujah I’ve got the blues in a box and Elvis’ blue suede shoes and those weird sandwiches he liked so much.” “I’ll make my own weird sandwich, make it so nice when people eat on it they’ll think about a waterfall flowing down the sides of some mountain that I never even seen, got nothing to do with the sandwich.” “They’ll write reviews, ‘This sandwich is turgid and replete, toasted and roasted with rain.’”

Footbeats drilled on. Here he was, center of the field. A clearing that didn’t used to be a clearing and back then you just had to know it was the center. Couldn’t have been cleared on purpose as nobody kept up with this field since the Creampires moved. Just looked like it had been picked over by time, crows, and the dust of sea monsters, grimy kids’ hands, death row prisoners, and who knows who else’s or what else’s skin cells made this part of the field look tan and desolate.

Here he was center of the field. Somebody musta been murdered here, that’s what. Youth thudded, absolutely thudded, in his ears. Force like, take a thick quick calibration shot, no trickle no warm up just strong flesh hot creases, youth between fingers between sinews between between god between ribs god. He pictured eagles, lusty caws, success is coming down the wind, and he felt all of it sink like lead veins over his head and down through his feet so that if he took a step, the earth would shake, maybe one of the Mount Rushmore faces fall off or that fat president who got stuck in his bathtub shook loose. The surprise look would slide over his shame look so we could laugh, say howdy, shake hands.

Cratchit’s face, smooth and cured, did not change. “Fucking bees, that’s what,” he muttered. Here he was center of the field. He stepped forward

yelled

“I DON’T MATTER”

“NOBODY WILL CARE”

“I CANNOT WRITE TO YOU”

“WE ARE NOT COLLECTIVE YOU FUCK—

—his voice broke up into a squeal. Crows or ravens that has been watching him from the top of some dead cornstalks squawed, fluttered away.

It didn’t matter—right—that he yelled, but it felt cathartic and hell better than killing someone, ha ya get me, and you chuckle.

~~~~~

This field is where he had met Louisa. She thudded in his ears normal as youth. Painting the trim, she’d look over her shoulder and say, “Surprise looks over shame looks over what? Over what though? You get me?”

Peering over her glasses, backlit by the cream porcelain lamp with technocolored forest birds at the base, she'd say, "You ever think about Abraham and monkeys? Politicians and everybody else fooling themselves if they say they run unattached."

This field is where he had met Louisa. She thudded in his ears, happenstance where turned earth meets turned earth. They'd come back, put a wooden chest in the earth together and he knew based on where the sun would hit at 80 degrees at 1:00 pm, thank God for the sun, at 1:00 pm he would know where to stand.

They had mostly told each other stories about saving themselves and not knowing what they were doing. Standing on the porch, she'd look over her shoulder, after looking out, and say, "Maybe you can't save yourself. But I'm not really myself either, so I can't save you. Maaaaan what's rough is people've been figuring this out for all of time, and my bet would be that we both are really just wrong enough." Standing on the porch, stories about saving themselves and not knowing what they were doing, and loving Jesus seems like a fucking lot of talk, a lot of that warm blooded apple pie American bootstrap wanting and not a lot of changing, and man you hate to see that. You hate it. It could make Louisa cry. But if wanting walks like a dollar sign, talks like a dollar sign, and asks you for money like a dollar sign, it probably is a dollar sign.

Though she'd turn sharp and add, "We sitting in cardboard boxes yelling and sitting on our hands to keep them warm or what? Lesson 1: When you cross the road, look left, look right, look left, then after looking both ways stroll holding your mother's cool hand, papery because we don't dither with fucking body lotion in this household, that is a top-down societal comfort, let your hands be true hands, and if your employers hate you for it, smile from your heart and tell them age is beauty and they'll wish more people thought like you when they're in an American retirement home and love seems like a hollow word."

12:50 pm. Suddenly his body felt bashful like he was falling in love. Heart a little tickly, a little high. When he felt like that he'd turn on any lady in the aisle of the convenience store or in the car next to him at a stoplight. They'll come sniffin and cawing like squirrels in heat, same glisten in their Virginia eye. Lean arm out on the gas pump. Look at Cratchit go... felt that good dream peel off his brain as he came back to himself... ...."God..."

Louisa. The chest. Oak. Dirt. 1 p.m.

Sun shone as promised. With his foot, scratch, scratch. Pulled the collapsible iron shovel out of the low back pocket of his blue jeans. He shoveled, heave, earth, heave, earth, heave, earth, heave, knock down edges so the hole stays a nice two foot by two foot square, straight edge, heave, earth, heave. Knock on wood, "Thar she blows." He tossed the shovel to the side, where it made a soft ploofing sound on the earth he had just disemboweled, and lowered to the ground from his knees. They cracked and he balanced on his heels, knees splayed so the jeans were tight across his stance, elbows resting easy. Well one day, you gotta reach forward. He peered over the edge of the hole like peering over his nose at someone else's business, neck craned like it's pretending to Mr. Head that it's not looking, and forward and down he thrust his hands. Fingerpads felt the wood crusty with silt and fingerpads turned so that fingernails curved under the sharp wooden edges of the chest and like flipping a coin he popped the chest out of the earth.

Took stock of himself. Jeans. Feet. Hands. Flesh. Bones. Actually very bare bones, actually lots of marrow left for the taking. He opened the chest. Money in plastic bags staring up at him.

~~~~~

A few times within a few moments he had said: words have bones, skeletons that rise out of the earth like a horror movie, a resurrection. From under the serene cream porcelain, fur throw holding her curled knees, she would listen. He chilled to the bone when she talked about dying young. "I can't help the thought, I can't help the thought, because I need the thought, okay." He didn't love her, but he'd have to figure out how to not believe in sadness if she died, or if his whole family died. Didn't really matter because Louisa had left and he was standing alone in the center of the field eating dust and holding money.

She had said the edges of his eyes were black, and good enough excuse if that's just how your eyes are made, and he could feel the pleasure curl from the back of his brain up to the front. Money means freedom, that's what, freedom and pleasure and time in a box, have your no fear cake and eat it too. Hadn't known he would feel so happy, hadn't known what would be in the box because Louisa had decided and had also decided it was a secret. Could have been cut flowers, could have been pamphlets with different words circled and a secret message, could have been dozen other boxes nested or in rows.

~~~~~

Money bag was glowing red with the white light from the past 1:00 p.m. sun, and he touched the edge of the bag with some instinct to see if it had become warm with the light. Realized, something below corner of money bag giving it uneven height in chest. Turned back the corner to see a stone the size of a quarter cup, shaped halfway between a sphere and a donut with a fingerwidth hole through its center. Looked fresh from the ocean and was white the color a skull turns without bleach. Cratchit took it and gripped on it so that its invisible white grooves bit into his palm like rough pumice.

Remembered the last time he had held this stone. They had come through the roads up the ocean path, it was cold, and they'd stood tense and symmetrical, bare feet in the cold water. She went left, he went right, but hadn't been walking five minutes until he heard her behind him, he knew her breathing and her cadences, and she said Johnny look what I found this stone! dropped it into his hand when he didn't reach to take it. He remembered, they started to argue again. He didn't have words to say, threw the stone in the water, and that was when she stopped talking but he knew the way her back bent when she looked out at the water said, Johnny I know it was just a stone but could have been nice if you had liked it too.

In the Thin Days, Louisa lost weight, slept in the batik print chair under the porcelain lamp with the light off. On one particularly Thin Day she didn't barely smile, she didn't raise a brow. But on a better day before, she had tried to change her name to Winnifred. For a week, every morning she would call, "Wake up Johnny," followed by her call, deepened, "Mornin' Winnifred." Talking to the flowers, she would announce, "Hello Marigolds, it is Winnifred," and she would reply, "Hi Winnifred." He let her try a week. Then watched her face tense when he said, Louisa, you can't change your name. Then watched her face ease, light up a little, when he explained: you have memories of your parents calling you and you were Louisa, you have memories of me calling Louisa, you are always reinvented as Louisa, and Louisa you can't change your name. Remembered the conversation so well because, one of the only times in the Thin Times when Louisa gave him her warm smile, the one where her head tilted left and her neck straightened exposed in that way that made him want to touch it. Four years later, she had already been gone awhile, and she also had leukemia full-fledged, was in the hospital always, got one of those weird infections from when she was playing in the children's ward, died of one of the many and sundry causes of ends of bodies. Read the article in the paper.

He breathed heavily holding the rock. He felt warm, tired, even though he did not want to. His eyebrows soothed out two notches, in his peripheral vision a bird black and watching him unfold. Your drama unfolds, your life unfolds, your cards unfold, it is you who unfolds not unlike a withery plant, tadpole, chess game. Money now made him feel dry inside and he trusted to take half. Leveled chin, sweat shone on his forehead. Walked in a circle a moment, retraced his footsteps to where he had entered the clearing. Quiet, then walking, then picking up. "We rising on sheeps' backs, going down their spines?" "In the cloud, in the in the precipice skipping rocks to the fucking next station. 18.5 miles upstream that kid five years old going down the slide, mud puddle at the bottom in its fucking glory." Walked out the field the same way he came in the field, striding, muttering, etc.—because he was a man not a miracle? because what could have happened quickly? Because he was one man on God's green earth who also has his own garden to tend and jokes to play and women to love and truths like containers to fall back out of, to spill him back onto the earth.



SHARK

Ryan Johnson



# A WALK IN THE WOODS

Chauncey Baker

I think I took a wrong turn a while back.  
Several hours ago an unmarked fork  
led into the woods  
and the Romantic in me screeched  
THE ROAD LESS TRAVELLED  
so I walked into the evergreens,  
and somewhere the path dropped off.  
Now it's been only stones and roots for miles

I thought my coat would help  
keep back the wintery weather.  
It's my favorite. Red, double breasted.  
The dye runs when it rains, makes me  
look like i'm bleeding  
at the seams. But it's not raining now.  
The trees watch me walk, angry,  
gray fingers interwoven. Dead leaves  
compost beneath my feet  
in their churlish damp.

Shouldn't I have reached a road by now?

A slight whistle unnerves me,  
a man rounds the nearest pine tree,  
smiles, surprised yet friendly.  
"Little miss, little miss, you look gorgeous  
with the crimson high on your cheeks  
and your hair pulled back like this."  
I'm flattered. Am I?  
He's handsome. He is.  
He holds out his hand.  
"You seem lost. We should go together."

I think of wolves dressed as woodsman,  
admire his flannel, his conspicuous rifle.  
I think of teeth, better to eat with,  
buttered bread, and jars full of clotted old lady's blood.

I think of Grandma's words of wisdom:  
Never have sex in the woods.

LITTLE EARS WITH A GOOD HEART  
Dillon Stanfield



# SWIPE RIGHT

Sara Korash-Schiff

They met on Tinder. Not PlentyOfFish or FarmersOnly. Not ChristianMingle or eHarmony. She was too hip and modern for that. He wanted to be hip and modern. So Tinder it was. iPhone 5s balanced in their hands and thumbs ready to swipe left for no or right for yes, they both tapped on the red flame icon and waited for the “Finding people nearby...” message to clear.

For Tom it was quick work. Right, left, left, right, followed by seven quick lefts, and then a right, scratch that, very hard right.

Jenni, 20, was pretty and pretty close to Tom at four miles away. Their shared likes included camping, hiking, beer tastings, and hunting, but she wore chiffon and cowgirl boots or heels in all of her pictures. He liked that she smiled timidly; as if she was surprised someone was pointing the camera at her. The low-cut dress didn't hurt either. She was any man's fantasy, including Tom's. Swipe right and the waiting began.

*She leaps over charcoaled grass, feet colliding with the ground faster than the rhythm of her hammering heart. Leaves crunch under her white converse, her breath expels clouds into the night, drops of perspiration glide against her lower back, coyotes howl. After minutes maybe seconds, a sudden cramp stops her and she bends to stop the pain. Trees rustle. Clouds clear. The autumn sky comes into view. Then the big dipper. Time to keep running.*

Jenni took more leisure in her Tinder selections.

Jesse, 21, and fifty miles away was last active three hours prior. They had three shared interests: Billy Curington, “DUDE! We almost died” (when and why she liked this, she wasn't quite sure), and Texts From Last Night. Jesse only had three pictures, two posing with his motorcycle and one god-awful selfie. Swipe left.

Zach, 19, was about forty-three miles away. Had a baby in his photo, which could have just been his baby sister or niece, but Jenni assumed meant he probably had a child. Swipe left.

Chris, 23, was eerily close at less than one mile away. He wore ill-fitting German attire in two of his photos. So long, farewell, auf wiedersehen, adieu Chris. Swipe left.

Then came Wilson, 20. Somewhere around fifty-seven miles away and had last been on the app eighteen minutes prior. He had a short bio, but it said enough. “KA – Ole Miss.” Jenni liked the idea of meeting this Mississippi frat star. Picture one, Patagonia. Picture two, tuxedo and perfectly quaffed hair. Picture three, football jersey and a big smile. When picture four came up, mid-jump, shirtless, Frisbee picture. Jenni didn't need to see anymore. She was pretty sure Wilson was a Greek god in a former life. Swipe right, and TINDER, “It was a Match.”

But one wasn't enough for Jenni and neither were the 1,328 matches she already had. No, Jenni wasn't done, not yet. She needed to “Keep Playing,” like the phone app suggested she should.

Michael. 21. Crazy nose piercing. Too artsy. Swipe left.

And then as if the universe knew she was having a bad night, queue Tom.

Tom, 24, was only four miles away. His shared likes included whiskey, Pink Floyd, Ferris Bueller's Day Off, and Hemingway. From his pictures, Jenni guessed he was somewhere around 6 feet tall, give or take. Ray Ban prescription lenses didn't appear too boxy on his face, they were just right. His hair looked like something she'd like to run her hands through on an early Sunday morning. His friends looked like the type of guys she could watch a football game with later that same Sunday. She swiped right, and wouldn't you know it, it was a match.

She thought Tom was handsome. Tom thought any girl whose name ended in “i” was easy. And Tom was probably right. Jenni liked that Tom wore bow ties in two of his pictures. She thought he looked sweet. Jenni couldn't have been more wrong. Tom liked that Jenni's pictures left little to the imagination. He messaged her thirty seconds after he received their match notification.

It all started off rather innocently. A quick “hey” followed by a “hi there” and smiley face emoticon. The thrill of the match made for an easy conversation starter. Then they learned the basics.

Jenni was “Just doing ethics readings” as Tom was “Watching the game” with his roommates. Jenni was jealous and Tom was sad that Jenni couldn’t join him. Jenni was a junior communications major, which Tom took for *looking to find a husband in college*. Tom was in an MFA program, the next step after taking a year off as he tried to *find himself* and become *one with nature*. Jenni took this for *stereotypical hipster*. Tom learned Jenni was from the Berkshires, and grew up hiking the Seven Sisters with her two older brothers. She learned that Tom grew up in Alabama, roll tide, and spent his summers in Jackson Hole, Wyoming. And as Tom missed Ole Miss embarrass Bama, Jenni fell further and further behind on her reading for class. Lust at first swipe, gets them every time.

*Stopping to catch his breath for a moment, he wipes his clammy hands against his jeans. He listens for the sound of her feet striking leaves in the distance. And when he does, he’s off again.*

Tom and Jenni first met in person at a small coffee shop they both frequented. Tom arrived at 1:57, got his black coffee and nervously waited outside for Jenni. He hoped he could recognize her from the pictures she had posted. He hoped she really was the girl from the pictures she posted. Fuck, he hoped she was actually a girl.

Jenni arrived at 1:50 and sat in her car for 20 minutes, so she could see him arrive, then appear to arrive fashionably late. She watched Tom through her car window as he almost hit another car parallel parking. She watched him walk into the coffee shop, chat with the barista as he ordered, and walk back outside to a little table outside the storefront.

After a suitable amount of time, enough time that Tom had taken out his phone to awkwardly scroll, but not too much that he got up and left, Jenni got out of her car and timidly walked toward the khakis and Patagonia adorned guy at the table.

“Tom?”

“It’s you.” Tom stood. He tried to hide the relief that the girl before him wasn’t ghastly unfortunate looking. “Were you expecting someone else?”

“Oh no, sorry, I’m just relieved you’re not some guy or a 45-year-old lesbian.”

“I’ll take that as a compliment.”

“Oh, shit that came out wrong.”

Jenni giggled.

“I didn’t mean to say that.”

“So you aren’t glad I’m not a guy?”

“Shit, no. Wait, can we start over?”

Jenni smiled.

Tom reached out his hand. “Hi I’m Tom, nice to finally meet you.”

“Jenni, and same to you.”

“I figured since it was so nice out today, we could sit and look at the leaves a bit?” Tom gestured to the chair.

“Sounds good to me.”

Jenni stepped toward the table as Tom pulled out the chair for her.

“How about I get you a coffee, Jenni?”

“Latte? Vanilla, with soy milk?”

“A latte it is, I’ll be right back.”

Tom walked into the coffee shop, giving Jenni and himself the chance to catch their breaths after their encounter. Two-minutes in, and he had already begun swearing like a sailor and exposing his eccentric sense of humor. When her latte was ready, Tom took a deep breath and went back outside.

“Sorry about before,” Tom said.

“It’s totally okay.”

“That’s just my biggest fear about using Tinder.”

“Understandably.”

“Right?” Tom said nodding his head.

“Although mine’s more that I’ll meet a serial killer,” Jenni giggled before blowing into the lid of her drink.

“Ha, that’s me right here, just luring ‘em in one at a time.”

“Thanks for the warning.”

After the opening awkwardness, Tom and Jenni finally settled into conversation. They learned that they shared a love for cheese. Jenni had a love for Gouda. Tom was more a Havarti man himself. Both had an affinity for 20th century American literature. Hemingway, Fitzgerald, Faulkner, those were writers: Jane Austen could go hang herself with one of her longwinded sentences. Tom grew up in a conservative family, but didn’t pay attention to politics unless they interfered with the money he got from his dad every month. Jenni would have called herself a libertarian, if anything, but knew no one ever admitted that out loud.

They both lived for football. Drawn together by the shared sense that this sport, no, this sacred affair, could bring hundreds of thousands of people together for singular moments, they agreed football confirmed each of their beliefs that there was something greater out there (it was even the only reason Tom wasn’t considering atheism, like any good hipster should).

Alabama was where their problem lay though. Tom had highly valuable and cherished tickets to Bama games, Jenni’s mother and sister had both gone to Auburn.

Two hours into talking about everything from high school, to favorite foods and local hiking trails, they were both so engrossed in their conversation they didn’t notice the coffee shop had closed, until the manager noisily got out his keys to lock up on his way out.

“So hiking this Saturday then?” Tom asked.

“Sounds like a plan to me.”

“Does two sound good?”

“Sure, I’ll drive...If that’s good with you of course?”

“It’s a date.”

*Twigs snap under beginning-to-blister feet. The churning river becomes more thunderous, as we weave through unmarked paths guided by the lights of the North Star. They always run don't they? Don't they know it only makes me want it more?*

Jenni picked up Tom at his house at exactly 2 p.m. that Saturday. Though, she really got there at 1:50, and drove around his neighborhood for a few minutes before pulling into the driveway and texting him. She didn't want to look too eager. Thirty minutes later the two were on their journey up the mountain together.

They talked about everything, families, friends, favorite restaurants, and anything else that came to mind. When they made it to the top, they talked more about the future. Jenni said she was still lost in that regard. Tom said something he tried to make sound deep, ensuring her that the feeling of being lost probably never really ends. Jenni pretended to slip on a rock so that Tom could grab her by the waist to prevent her from "falling," and Tom rattled off information about tree species. As they talked, the sun began to set and Tom suggested they head back to the car, so they wouldn't be stuck in the dark. As they started walking, Tom and Jenni talked about their past relationships.

"Sometimes I think I enjoy the chase of it all more than the actual dating part," Tom said. "The thrill you get from not knowing what will happen when you first meet someone gets me every time."

"So you don't like easy?" she deadpanned.

"Not what I said, but I do like a challenge," he said, chuckling. Tom couldn't tell if he saw a blush spread across Jenni's cheeks, or if they were already pink from exertion.

"And you see me as one?"

"Maybe."

"And if I'm not?"

"I'm not sure, but I think that's what I like about you."

"Oh really, how so?"

"You're hard to read," Tom said, rubbing his chin between his thumb and the knuckle of his pointer finger.

"Like you don't know what to expect from me next?" Jenni asked as she fell behind Tom and slowly came to a stop.

Tom continued walking. "Yeah exactly!"

"And you like that?"

"Yeah, I guess I do."

Jenni fidgeted with the back of her sweatshirt.

"I've had a great time with you today," Tom said.

"The fun's not over yet is it?"

Tom noticed Jenni was no longer walking with him. "I know what she wants," he thought "and I'm gonna give it to her."

Excited for a hookup in the woods, he turned around ready to pounce, only to find Jenni standing a few feet away with a knife in her hand.

"What are you doing with that?" he asked, taking a step back.

“What ever do you mean, Tom?”

“Jenni, just put the knife down.” Tom thought about lunging at her and thought he was strong enough to wrestle it away from her, but then he took a second to really look at her.

Jenni stood transfixed, holding the blade with the same crazed look in her eyes Tom imagined Lizzie Borden had when she wielded her axe. She knew how to use a knife.

“You said you liked the chase, I’m just giving you what you want.”

Jenni smiled, but it didn’t touch her eyes. “Now run.”

*Fear has overpowered his senses. He can hear nothing but his rapid heartbeat, reverberating like a guitar with a wah-wah pedal attached. Then snap, a twig splinters from feet away. But in what direction he can’t be sure. He’s lost. No phone, no car, no salvation. Just as he decides on a direction to travel, Tom realizes he was wrong. The chase isn’t the best part, not when you’re*

*the prey.*

# EKPHRASTIC II

Linda Gaida

A love like this

I saw her from across the swamp:  
her impeccably plumed wings moved  
with the sort of fragmented  
grace and lure  
of loosened cranks  
and curving knobs.  
Bulging stomach  
told me she was a  
skilled frog stalker;  
the arch and bow  
of her neck was ideal  
for swift plunging.  
And she was tall.  
I could tell even  
from my distanced  
one-legged bearing  
in mud.  
Her lingering chestnut legs  
extended for miles  
to perfectly hooked claws.  
All I could do was wade, wait.  
And I felt  
my supposed great blue  
greyer than usual  
against the mauve swamp.  
Staring instead  
at the glowing, silvery fingernail  
murkily tattooed  
on water's surface  
was all I could do  
to keep balance.  
We're supposed to be solitary, aren't we.  
We have our rookeries,  
but for the most part—loneliness.  
And posing there  
from across the swamp  
she and I  
were so lonely.  
And I mused if I  
might be the first heron  
to be taken  
by another's loneliness.  
And I wondered where she would descend  
and whether her landing would ripple.







BLUE MOOSE  
Janey Fugate

