

IMPRESSIONS

Literary and Art Magazine

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ABOUT IMPRESSIONS

In print since 1974, *Impressions* is an annual publication created by and for the students of Maryville College and members of the surrounding eastern Tennessee community. *Impressions* aims to present the best of art, poetry, fiction, creative nonfiction, and other creative works submitted by the Maryville College community and the Appalachian region. Online editions of *Impressions* can be viewed at impressionsmc.org.

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EDITOR'S NOTE

Within this magazine you will find works of art, poetry, and prose created by the very talented students and faculty of Maryville College. Over the past two years as editor, I have seen many artists share their work in this publication. I have also heard more stories of people being afraid to submit their work to the magazine because they do not think what they create is good enough or they fear rejection.

I want to encourage anyone who creates art--written or otherwise--not to judge their own work too harshly and to know that the things they create are special and worthy of being shared with other people. During my time with Impressions, I have made it my personal goal to reach out to students, staff, and faculty across campus and let them know that their creativity is important.

So often, I fear that within the college setting students, staff, and faculty alike tend to forget about their creative needs. We focus so much on our work that we forget to express ourselves through some creative outlet--something we need to have balance.

This collection of works is a celebration of the fact that we, as humans, have the ability to create and appreciate art in its many forms and acknowledge the great role which art plays in our lives. I hope that you will take your time with this magazine and enjoy the exceptional work within.

Natasha Kollett, Editor-in-Chief

COVER ARTIST'S NOTE

Societal pressures often conflict with our wellbeing, causing an inner battle between societal expectations and one's true self. This distinction can leave one feeling dismembered and hopeless at times. To Exist in particular resembles my struggle of maintaining my own identity in this world filled with numerous distractions. For all those in the same battle, you do have purpose. Embrace your weirdness.

Taylor Williams, Cover Artist

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Part I

Prose

Myka Bland
His Eyes

I lie in bed next to him, wondering how I could be so lucky to be in the arms of a man that loves me and only me. As he holds me from behind and caresses my cheek, I think about all the riff-raff from that day: three tests, four papers, and two study groups for two more tests I have tomorrow. Doing college isn't easy, but the only thing that gets me by and keeps me sane is knowing that at 9:17 p.m. I will knock on the door that compares to Heaven and be amazed at who answers it.

As I turned around to look at him, I noticed that the eyes that I thought were going to be shut for what will seem like an eternity were looking at me with hurt, pain, sorrow, and regret. I looked into his eyes and saw no love of a father, very little understanding from a mother, and a little part of neglect from the world we were striving to fit into. I saw anger and grief within the eyes of the man I was falling in love with.

I wanted him to pour his heart out to me. I wanted him to breakdown and cry so, for once, I could be the one to comfort, care, and console him. I wanted him to put his guard down, even if it meant for a split second, so that I could be the sole provider of his soul and his heart. I wanted him to lay his head on my chest and explain why his bottled-up fear of the world got in the way of his love for me and how he planned to fix it. However, the only words that came out of his mouth were, "Are you okay?"

Chandler Chastain

You'll be Mine and I'll be Yours

After the darkness, there's a spark. It doesn't come in a midnight epiphany or an eye-opening moment of clarity. My spark, my beacon, my hope of new flame comes in the Craft Mart aisle as she is chasing a rolling pinecone to my feet. She bends, scoops her glittery pinecone, and looks to me with bright eyes that set my dusty heart to beating.

Julie. A singsong name that decorates her Christmas themed nametag. She says she's sorry, she laughs on about how her pinecone bag ripped open, and she bids me good day. I watch my spark tightly packaged in her red apron round the corner of the garland and snowflakes, and I am in the dark again.

She was what I've been waiting for.

This spark will become my flame. She'll be my wild-fire; she'll be what keeps me warm in the night.

Julie. She's real; she won't leave me like the others. They weren't strong enough to stay, they smothered away; they lied. She'll breathe for me, growing stronger with every gust of air I give her. She won't wither away to smoke and leave me cold; she'll consume and warm my heart. Julie.

I leave the store. I find my car. I sit. I wait.

Day gives to dusk; the streetlights bask the empty parking lot in their glow. I think of the others. Rachel, a waitress who laughed as she poured my coffee. She wasn't good enough to love me. She hit me when I tried to hug her in the diner. Hanna was a subtle brush of the shoulder as she walked past me in a bar. I tried to return the gesture in the back bathroom, she screamed when I touched her face. Lucy, a jogger who smiled as she ran past me. To show her I wanted to be with her, I followed her every morning, memorizing her running route.

She threatened to call the police.

I stare at Julie in the store. She's standing on a ladder, putting ornaments on the trees in the window display. She's different. She wants to be with me. I saw it in her eyes.

I won't let her be a liar like the others. She knows she needs to be with me.

Night falls; the store closes. Cars leave, but I stay. Employees leave, but I stay. I think of her chestnut hair cascading down her shoulders. I think of what her hair smells like. I want to touch her. I think of what her skin tastes like. I have to touch her.

The lights of the Craft Mart fall dark. My spark, my beacon, my hope steps outside, slipping her winter coat around her small body. She digs through her purse, finds her keys, and starts walking into the dimly lit parking lot. I slip out of my car.

Her head is up; she's looking around her shoulders. She is uncomfortable in the dark. She gets to her car, parked underneath a broken streetlamp. She fumbles with her keys, unaware of me. Unaware of how close I have moved to her. Unaware of how lucky she is that I am here for her.

She puts her keys to the door, and I put my hands around her neck. I feel her warm pulse as her muscles tense and she screams. She's so warm; she is my fire.

Sarah Hensley
Wilson's Dilemma

There was no question that Wilson was an asshole. The question was whether or not he would make assholes of the rest of us by association. That was the reason we joined his book club to begin with, to try not to look like assholes.

Wilson somehow sat at the head of our circle of chairs looking like his personality: starchy, haughty, and self-important. While the rest of us grudgingly poured ourselves a paper cup full of Goldfish, he unpacked his satchel.

"Man purse," Cassie mumbled from beside me, carefully selecting a Goldfish from our shared paper cup. I looked down, I had to pretend to take the book club seriously, we all did.

Wilson kept unpacking. He had several books. We were only reading one so the rest were for show. He always did that. He was always bringing books around that had nothing to do with the book club. Why couldn't he keep them in his man purse? Why did he have to drag them out to silently brag about how much smarter he was than us.

"I'll bring coffee next week. Someone can bring donuts. Maybe that'll make this livable," I suggested. Tara shook her head.

"I'll bring bleach instead of coffee," she said, smiling at her lap. Everyone but Wilson and Colton made fun of the book club. Colton was like Wilson's disciple. We all were in a forced kind of way. But Wilson wasn't Jesus, and everyone but Colton would have gladly volunteered to be Judas.

Wilson cleared his throat, and Cassie smashed a Goldfish between her fingers. He was trying to get the already quiet room to pay attention to him. I turned around and pulled my coffee stained copy of *Oliver Twist* out of my dirty

purse and thought about how I would have liked to have seen Charles Dickens be run over by a bus.

"So," Wilson began, looking over us with unmasked disappointment in his droopy eyes, "did anyone actually read the book this time?" We hadn't. We bragged about it every day before he walked in. That's what we lived for, the anti book club that we had each week before we settled into stale snacks and a forced discussion over a boring novel that we didn't get to pick.

Every year before the book club starts, Wilson picks our books and emails the lucky few of us the list. We've had heated discussions in the pre-Wilson moments of book club about how he does it. Everyone had their theories.

"He Googles 'list of painfully boring novels' and just copies and pastes sections of it into the email every time," Tara suggested once.

"No, they're always in chronological order. He must have Googled 'the history of unbearable books,'" James told us, jumping in.

"Maybe he does some crazy shit to figure it out. Maybe he lights a candle, pulls out his Ouija board, and asks the spirit of William Faulkner what to force on us," Cassie said. She was probably right.

"I wonder if he even likes these books or if it's all just a show," Kate said. I shook my head.

"You can't fake that kind of personality. That shit is hard wired," I replied. He walked in shortly after that, so we had to jump to attention. We never seemed to pick up the same threads that we had before, so the idea dropped. I personally liked the ouija idea.

Wilson blinked purposefully slowly, you could just tell. I don't know how, but I knew, and it made me so mad. Ruth decided to be the one to break the silence. She almost always did. I didn't like her when we first met, she talked too much, and that always freaks me out, but she turned out to be one of us, so it worked out. She was also the leader of the talkers as opposed to my half of the book club, the sitters.

“Well, time to fess up guys,” she said, smiling. This tomfoolery only stood with Wilson because it actually got people talking. If only to pause the silence and prolonged blinking.

“I really liked it, actually,” Colton said. His milky blue eyes got really wide, you know, like when you lie.

“Shut up, Colton,” Cassie mumbled quietly. I looked down at the book that I had open to a random page. I would have looked across the circle at my friend Kate, but we had an agreement. If we looked at each other, we would lose it and have to pretend to be either coughing or crying. Coughing only worked so often and crying was so difficult to explain. Once I laughed so hard I was tearing up so I had no choice but to pretend to be crying. When Wilson sighed and asked, “What could be the matter with you, Ruby?” in his toneless zombie voice, I told him that the book moved me to tears. We were reading *Moby Dick*. So my lie was as thinly veiled as the underlying themes.

Colton’s lie was much the same. He could give each of us as many shameful glances as he wanted, but he hadn’t read it either. I knew that because I watched him hide the CliffsNotes in his satchel when I busted into the room early. He looked like I’d just caught him with porn, so I decided to treat it with similar disgust. I shook my head and took my seat. His beige skin turned pink. I couldn’t wait to tell Tara.

“Thank you, Colton,” Wilson said, forcing his lips into a ghost of a smile. “Does anyone else have any opinions on the novel that are personal and not based in the text? What about you, Ruby?” he said, turning from Colton to me.

“Well, it keeps to Dickens’ general plot structure with pieces of the adventure plot, though that wasn’t quite perfected by this time anyway. Overall, I think it was a fun read,” I said. Bullshit, everything I said right then was pure bullshit, and everyone in the room knew it. All but Wilson. He made his mouth smile again and nodded his head. If you just rattle off some novel theory crap he takes it as honesty. We were lucky we were all English majors.

"I didn't really understand the role of the old guy who all the little thieves listen to," Jenny asked, she genuinely meant it, too. She was a sweet circle of a girl. She seemed to like the camaraderie of book club enough to be a talker. I appreciated everyone who spoke; they took pressure off of those of us that found it painful. It wasn't that I minded lying about reading the book; obviously, I didn't. I just didn't like when Wilson made me feel like a jackass.

That was his specialty. Making everyone who voiced their opinion or asked a question look like a jackass. It wasn't the boring novels or the showing off with all of his books or even the slow blinking. It was his uncanny ability to make even a sincere question sound stupid with his almost eye roll and sigh that he did every time. He always acted like he couldn't believe that you were dimwitted enough to ask that particular question. And if you were brave enough to have an opinion, you just better hope it was the same as his.

He was pulling the usual crap with poor Jenny. He sighed for just too long to be acceptable, just a split second too long. And then he looked at her with his eyebrows raised and his eyes droopy, and we knew he was going to lay into her, but none of us spoke to stop him. Loyalty only took you so far, and we were a room full of Judases.

"Obviously he is their father figure, as the boys are orphans, and that is the only figure that he can rightly play," he said. His voice sounded like he was reciting lines he was tired of practicing.

"I think that Fagin could have represented-" Colton was speaking, so I stopped listening. I checked my phone to look at the time. That was the seventeenth time that meeting that I had felt the urge to do so. It was crawling. Tara leaned over to me.

"Is it too much to ask to read Nineteen Eighty-Four?" she said, barely whispering.

“That kind of literature is witchcraft written for children; don’t blaspheme,” I mumbled back. Cassie was twitching beside me. She kept drumming her fingers on the table; she was counting. We were out of Goldfish. So she was probably counting the seconds until this would be over and we could all go and eat something shitty from the little cafe on campus and dread next week.

That was another problem with Wilson. He loved to hear himself talk. So, to try not to be assholes, we waited for him to finish, even if that did eat heavily into our lunch hour. He didn’t need lunch, we decided one day before Wilson showed up. He sustained himself on hot air. Which, coincidentally, he was just full of. We battled for the idea that what he was full of was shit, but we decided that was more us than him. At least we could be honest with ourselves.

“No really,” Tara whispered, “I’m going to say something. *Oliver Twist* is bad, but I can’t make it through *As I Lay Dying*.” That was our next book.

“God, I hate William Faulkner,” I replied.

“Fuck that guy,” Cassie said quietly. I have no idea how she heard us, or if she was even talking about the same thing as us, but I agreed. Faulkner was a blowhard who wrote paragraph length sentences about how hot it was in the South. Wilson cleared his throat again, and Cassie’s nostrils flared. I watched all the sitters drag themselves back from whatever happy place they managed to escape and give their attention grudgingly back to Wilson.

“Well,” he said, “I’d love to spend another day on Charles Dickens, but if we don’t move on to William Faulkner, we’ll never finish all the books before the end of the semester,” he said. “Plus, Faulkner is my favorite,” he said giving a short snort of a laugh that startled the piss out of every one of us. He really had our attention then.

“There’s a surprise,” Cassie said, a little too loud. He looked at her for a second, but then set to bookmarking his page.

“Hey, hang on. I was wondering if we could maybe fit something more modern in before the end of the semester?” Tara asked. Everyone got eerily silent, looking at her like she had just suggested we all jump out the windows in a mass suicide.

“You mean something like *The Catcher in the Rye*?” he said, looking surprised himself.

“No, like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or even something like *Harry Potter* or *The Hunger Games* or something like that?” she bravely suggested. Colton’s mouth actually hung open for a second. Wilson looked like he had just licked an electric socket.

“Absolutely not. What you’re calling ‘modern literature’ is pure media-fueled garbage that no self-respecting reader or writer for that matter should subscribe to. If you can’t find enjoyment in good literature, then I would suggest finding another book club to spend your Tuesdays with,” he spoke evenly, leaving us deadily quiet.

“Why,” I asked, breaking the silence, “do you have to be such an ass every time someone else has something to say? You’re not the only person that can form a coherent thought, but you act like it. Why? She just asked if we could swap out one of these dry, boring, books for something a little more fun to read. Why do you have to be so mean? What is wrong with you?” I said. I was calm, looking right into his shocked eyes. It was the first expression I had seen on his face that didn’t look like it was being forced against its will. He turned a little bit red. He picked up his books, putting them quickly but carefully back into his satchel, and he walked out of the room. His hand fumbling with the knob on his way out. Everyone looked at me, saying nothing, but they didn’t have to. They were judging me, and that was when it finally happened. Wilson had done it. He finally made an asshole of me.

Sarah Hensley
My Dilemma

Everyone is already in the room by the time I get there. I'm always late. I always keep them waiting on me. I watch them for a moment through the glass before I walk in. No one has seen me yet, so everyone is still going on about their business. Tara is passing out Goldfish from a huge boxy container. I won't be offered any Goldfish. Cassie is drinking out of a mug with a mermaid on it. She smiles like the girl on the mug. Her brown eyes brighten at something that Tara says, and she places the mug back on the table and pulls her curly brown hair up on top of her head and ties it up into a bun. Pieces of hair fall down and frame her bright smile. She doesn't smile when I'm in the room. Ruby laughs as Kate says something about the book, pointing to it. Her eyes crinkle behind her big glasses. Colton shoots Ruby a dirty look and Ruby narrows her eyes at him, daring him to say something to her. Cassie picks a Goldfish crumb out of Ruby's short hair. Ruby talked a lot during the moments that I saw them before the book club. She was always making the others laugh, but when I walked in, she and the others got quiet and sullen. I wanted to make them laugh like she did. I wanted to hear her jokes, and I wanted to know what Kate said about the books. I wanted Cassie to smile at me, just once and just a little bit. I knew that this wasn't going to happen. I took a shaky breath, and I opened the door.

The room went dead silent in the second that it took for them to see me. I ignored everyone's eyes as I made my way to my seat, wondering how on earth I always ended up at the focal point of the room. I used the rectangle table beside me to unpack my over-worn book

bag. I dug through my library haul to find the copy of *Oliver Twist* at the bottom of the bag where it had sat since the last meeting. I looked up over the mausoleum quiet group and cleared my throat. Cassie crushed a Goldfish.

“So,” I asked, looking at each person in turn, trying to look authoritative, “did anyone actually read the book this time?” I didn’t. I had read it in high school, and that was the last time I thought about it. I couldn’t let them know that though; I was the one that started the book club to begin with; I was the senior; I was the one that was going to be the teacher. I had to look like I had myself together. It was then that each of them decided to pull out their books. Ruth, the nontraditional student in our group, carefully pulled out a pristine copy of *Oliver Twist*. I noticed that the spine wasn’t broken. Ruby pulled her worn copy from her purse, unsticking a cough drop wrapper from the back cover and then flipping to a seemingly random page and looking at it hard. James ran his hand through his rough, shoulder length, red hair and sat back in his chair coolly. He had forgotten his book again.

“Well, time to fess up guys,” Ruth said, pulling my attention back to the matter at hand. No one had a chance to say anything before Colton spoke up.

“I really liked it actually,” Colton said, his pale cheeks flushing a little. He was lying. I knew he hadn’t read it. I wasn’t sure about anyone else, but I knew that Colton hadn’t read it. He was just sucking up to me. At least the others hated me honestly. I hated how he sucked up and pretended to like me. At least everyone else was honest. He treated me like the Messiah of the English department. But if I was the Messiah, he was definitely my Judas. I looked at the Q-tip of a man, trying not to scowl at him like Ruby had before I walked in.

“Thank you, Colton,” I said, forcing a ghost of a smile onto my lips. “Does anyone else have any opinions on the novel that are personal and not based in the text? What about you, Ruby?” I asked, half insulting Colton and putting the spotlight on Ruby. Her blue eyes widened and her cheeks turned the color synonymous with her name.

“Well, it keeps to Dickens’ general plot structure with pieces of the adventure plot, though that wasn’t quite perfected by this time anyway. Overall, I think it was a fun read,” she said after a moment, only meeting my eyes for half a second before they flickered back down to her used book. I nodded and forced another smile. I made her uncomfortable. I made all the girls uncomfortable and it killed me. I had to stop calling on Ruby; she couldn’t hide her disgust of me and my questions.

I used to think it was just the spotlight that made everyone nervous, but when the group discussion began to stir up everyone did fine and no one seemed uncomfortable. I couldn’t help but wonder what it was about me. I wondered if it was my prematurely graying hair that stuck out like steel wool from my head. It could have been my tired, droopy eyes. It could have been the way my hand-me-down sweaters clung to my also premature potbelly. I had tried to change these things, but I just ended up looking worse, and I would rather seem stuck up than deserving of pity.

“I didn’t really understand the role of the old guy who all the little thieves listen to,” Jenny asked. She brought my attention to her. She was bright and a genuinely nice girl, and she was new to the book club. I didn’t really expect anyone to ask me anything, but I wanted to answer her question, so I paused and tried to think of whom on Earth she was talking about in the book.

“Obviously he is their father figure, as the boys are orphans and that is the only figure that he can rightly

play,” I said, trying to sound bored and casual. I was a bad liar by nature, but usually my voice and expression were enough to cover myself.

“I think that Fagin could have represented-”

Colton began speaking, and I couldn’t help but not pay much attention. I was certain that he was saying something to impress me and to try and look smarter than everyone else. He didn’t look smarter. He looked like a kiss ass. I tried to make it as obvious as possible to the others that I found Colton irritating too, but sometimes my facial expressions didn’t exactly show what I wanted them to. I kind of had a stuck expression and voice. I thought I looked and sounded perpetually bored, though my general visage and speech had been mistaken for haughty before. I could handle that under certain circumstances, but I hoped it was different for the book club. I nodded at Colton when he finished speaking and luckily Ruth said something to Kate who said something to Tara and the conversation bloomed.

I was grateful for the break. I learned through the book club that I didn’t like teaching, nor was I good at it. Every single meeting, I had an inner mental breakdown because I had spent four and a half years on being a teacher who had stage fright and didn’t even particularly like children. Not only that, but it was clear that everyone over the age considered a “child” wouldn’t particularly like me either. I felt myself spiraling, so I decided to wrap it up.

“Well,” I said, “I’d love to spend another day on Charles Dickens, but if we don’t move on to William Faulkner, we’ll never finish all the books before the end of the semester,” I said. “Plus, Faulkner is my favorite.” I said giving a short snort of a laugh that clearly startled every one of them. I really had their attention then.

“There’s a surprise.” Cassie said, reminding me that she particularly hated me and my favorite author. I

looked at her for a split second before I went to bookmark my page, keeping my eyes on the book, trying not to let the heat in my face turn into a color. I was mid-internal breakdown when Tara spoke.

“Hey, hang on. I was wondering if we could maybe fit something more modern in before the end of the semester?” Tara asked. Everyone got eerily silent. It took me a moment to realize what she said and to respond intelligently.

“You mean something like *The Catcher In The Rye*?” I asked, feeling my breakdown edging outward.

“No, like *Nineteen Eighty-Four* or even something like *Harry Potter* or *The Hunger Games* or something like that?” she said. I looked around at the shocked faces around the room. Colton’s mouth was actually hanging open like a shocked cartoon character. It was then that my inner breakdown came out.

“Absolutely not. What you’re calling ‘modern literature’ is pure media-fueled garbage that no self-respecting reader or writer for that matter should subscribe to. If you can’t find enjoyment in good literature, then I would suggest finding another book club to spend your Tuesdays with.” I spoke evenly, leaving the room deadly quiet. I regretted it as soon as I said it. I was mad, and I was already freaking out about my future. I wasn’t good for anything and when she said she wanted to switch from my favorite book it just came out. Less than a breath later, everything got worse.

“Why,” Ruby asked, breaking the silence, “do you have to be such an ass every time someone else has something to say? You’re not the only person that can form a coherent thought, but you act like it. Why? She just asked if we could swap out one of these dry, boring books for something a little more fun to read. Why do you have to be so mean? What is wrong with you?” she asked. She

raised her blonde eyebrow at me, giving me a worse look than she gave Colton earlier. That was the first time that any of them had been truly honest with me. I sounded condescending, and they thought I was haughty. I had never been more embarrassed. I felt myself turning a little bit red. I picked up my books and put them quickly but carefully back into my bag. I hurried out of the room, my shaking hand fumbling with the knob on my way out. I stood out in the hall and breathed, making sure I was just out of sight of everyone in the room. I just stood there leaning against the slate gray walls and trying to get my heartbeat under control. I felt sick to my stomach, like I would never feel normal again. I was an ass and I knew that Ruby was right for what she said to me. I was a jerk. I didn't mean to be a jerk and I didn't think I was smarter than everyone else. I tried to act like I was, but I thought that everyone did a little bit. I overdid it and I should have known that. I was so bad at picking up on things like that. I peeked back into the room as soon as I gained the courage to do so.

Everyone was staring at Ruby. She turned red like I had, her face set and hard like she didn't notice. No one seemed to be speaking; they all just looked at her. They looked at her with something held back on their lips. They looked at her with contempt and thinly veiled dislike. They looked at her like they looked at me.

Sarah Hensley

The Gate

I was out of breath, so part of me was grateful when I tripped over the roots of the pine tree above me. I got my brief rest when I hit the ground, tiny pinecones burrowing into my knees and palms. I shook off the foliage and pushed myself to my feet and tried to run again. There was no guarantee that they would trip too. I had already lost my meager advantage and I couldn't afford to be caught. It was darker here. I had already escaped the safety of the streetlights in favor of the safety I thought the woods would bring.

I was only a few yards in when I realized that I was wrong. I couldn't run anymore. The mangled roots of the unnamable trees around me popped up beneath my feet with every step. I walked with my eyes straining to see my uneven path. A thorn bush grabbed my arm. The woods were trying to stop me, but I only let them slow me down. I still had a chance.

I could hear them coming behind me, but the woods wanted them too, so I kept going. I could hear the creek water running with me and the frogs and cicadas were cheering me forward. I was almost there. Just like me, the others had their boundaries. They were only allowed to chase me so far before I became someone else's, but I didn't have time to worry about what I was running into. I heard stories of people who made it past the rusted gate and made their own place for people like me to run to. But I also heard stories of more monsters.

The trees shook, applauding. Leaves fell and I heard their growls behind me. I moved faster. The stars and moon were no help to me. They were getting closer,

Impressions

their feet thudding on the muddy ground behind me,
snapping roots as they came. I was cold and I was caught.
Either by them or by the woods because I had nowhere left
to go. I saw nothing but thicket, but through the brush I
heard a faint squeak. Like the hinge of a gate.

Sarah Hensley
Booger's House

Booger's house was a wreck and I hated every time I had to go see him. I sat in my truck for a long time. It was cold and that was my excuse, but I knew everyone inside the house was still passed out or too hung over to be waiting for me, so I could take as much time as I liked. At least I could take my time until I felt like mom would get worried, so I had less than an hour.

I pulled the rusty handle on the door and pushed with my shoulder, popping the door open and cracking the ice on the window. There was no snow, so you could see the patches of dirt kicked up in the yard from where Booger tried to mow, but got stuck. My dad let him try because he thought it was funny and because he didn't mind picking up after his friend. I walked through the yard, crunching the ice as I made it up to the front door that I knew would be unlocked. I pulled it open and squeezed through the small crack in the door as fast as I could. Like lightening the dogs were upon me. Two well fed Dobermans that were always trying to get into the yard and always happy to see me. They were both gray, but probably actually black. They seemed dusty, and their fur was alive with fleas. But somehow they were happy dogs. I petted them until they walked away, jumping over the broken furniture and back onto Booger's huge bed that sat smack in the middle of the living room.

Booger's house looked like it had been abandoned many years ago after one hell of a party. Like it had been left to time and the dogs to destroy as they saw fit. That wasn't the case though. Booger had been living at the house with his grandmother who raised him until she died in his early 30's. My dad met him briefly after and

has been what could loosely be called “helping” him since then.

There was mud on my boots, but there was more mud on the floor, so I walked on. The large, unmade bed held Booger. He was cuddling his dogs in each arm, wrapped in what looked like nothing but a stained, brown fitted sheet. So I didn’t look at him any longer than I had to. He was a monster of a man. In fact, when I first met him, like most of my dad’s friends, I assumed he actually was a monster. He had grizzly brown hair all over his head and face and his skin was stained with dirt from only bathing once a month. It was an event, really; he sat totally naked in a washtub in his front yard while the dogs ran circles around the house. My dad would hose him down and let him sit in the dirty water until the neighbors began gathering and threatening to call the police.

Booger smelled like rot and he had a lot fewer teeth and toes than anyone else I’d ever met. But that was just what I expected out of a friend of dad’s. They were all the same in the sense that they were different. They all had odd names and distracting qualities. Like his friend Slick who only had a single, sparkling white tooth right in the front of his mouth. Or Roach who looked perpetually sweaty and was named so because he had survived four construction accidents that would have killed any regular man.

Booger was different, though, because he was my dad’s best friend. At least he was the one my dad spent the most time with. My dad began the friendship with Booger in order to have someone to drive him around while he was drunk. This was important because dad was drunk most of the time and needed a way to get around. And even though Booger not only couldn’t drive, but also didn’t have a car, my dad didn’t give up on him. He taught Booger to drive and even found him a falling-to-pieces tow truck to cart him around in. Booger drove like he

mowed, crooked and not very far distances. So whenever he and my dad went out, they only ever made it to dad's bar and back to Booger's house, so it was always pretty easy to find them.

I stepped through the crusted mud on the floor, over broken furniture and broken glass, until I came to the back room. The room had once belonged to Booger's grandmother but had since become my dad's honorary room in the house. I heard him before I saw him. He had the wheeze in his breath of someone who'd spent too much of their life on cigarettes. I turned the corner into the dim room and saw him sprawled out across the worn, quilt covered couch that was the only intact piece of furniture in the entire room. His shirt was bloody and ripped and his pants hung loosely off his tan, skeletal frame. His black hair was greased back on his head and his moustache was still perfect. His moustache was always perfect. He took impeccable care of it. He took better care of it than he did his liver, or mom, or me.

I stood there in front of him for a moment watching him take one haggard breath after another and thinking about how he was going to yell at me for waking him. How he would yell at mom when I got him back to the house. How he would hit her and scream at her to mind her own damn business and how he would stagger out the door to go drink some more. I thought about the last time he hit me so hard I had to get stitches and I listened to his wheeze and part of me wished that my dad would just stop breathing.

Albrianna Jenkins
The Greatest Sin

There is no greater sin than to capture the heart of a dreamer. In love, the freedom is stolen away, and the imagination is dimmed to set the mood of a romantic evening of arms intermingling and lips pressed together in a desperate attempt to breathe as much life out of them and into you as you possibly can. You realize in those moments of sweat and sighs, of gasps and cries, that this is an experience you do not deserve, because even their love is a masterpiece made of creation and chaos. You know it will end – it must. So, you cling on to them desperately trying to dissipate the doubt that you know will find you come morning. Weeks collide and maybe years subside and eventually you're holding their hand and looking at the one you've ensnared for almost five long years and you say, "I know this can't last forever and so I will end it now." And it ends. But not for them. Not for the dreamer. Not for the one who used to enjoy painting because it was liberating. Now, they paint only using the color of your eyes. Not for the one who used to find sanctuary in a world that they would create with each thoughtfully processed word. Now, all they write is you. All they remember is you. And years will go by and you'll casually remember that bursting bit of life that you held in your hands, and the tragic wonderland that it was, and you'll think, "it was a good few years we had together," but they'll still be finding you at the core of every broken masterpiece and every painful epiphany about life. You captured the heart of a dreamer and that is the greatest sin.

Rebecca Jones
Hit and Run

Reaching 40 miles an hour, a woman pressed the gas pedal down farther. The car lurched forward, gliding easily on the curvy road. It was getting close to being four in the morning, but being out late didn't really faze her. The trees sank inward over the road as the car sped past the forest that kept growing denser.

The speedometer showed the car hit 60 miles an hour and, by the time she saw it leap into the road, it was too late.

What she thought was an animal struck the windshield with such force that it caused her body to jerk forward. The car seemed to screech to a stop without her foot guiding the brake pedal to the floor. There was the sound of someone screaming and it took her a minute to realize it was coming from her. The cracks in the windshield had blood oozing down between them and the metallic smell made its way to her nostrils.

It took multiple attempts for her to unbuckle the seat belt. Her shaking hands fumbled for the door handle. It seemed to swing open on its own as she made her way to the body that rolled a few feet away from the stopped car. A terrible feeling in her stomach threatened to make an appearance through her mouth, but a hard swallow pushed it back down.

At the sight of her kill, the woman fell to her knees. The broken neck and legs in disarray was a sight no one should have the misfortune to see. A dark, red pool surrounded the body and grew bigger as she held her face in her hands.

An expression of clear disbelief and pain etched forever in the lifeless face of the man looked as though it was glaring at the thing that caused his demise.

Hot tears raced down her face, stinging her cheeks in the cold wind. Her thoughts of despair and guilt were replaced by images of sirens and prison in what felt like seconds. Her guilt was outweighed by the idea of never seeing the light of day again. The woman stood up and wiped her sleeve on both cheeks. "I'm not going to prison over this," she said.

It took a lot of muscle for her to pull the man's body off the road. She grabbed a foot and dragged the corpse towards the shelter of trees. The fallen leaves covered the ground completely, as if fate wanted her to get away with this. With the man's face in the dirt, she went to work piling leaves and picking up fallen branches that she could easily carry to cover up her mistake.

After taking one more look with dry eyes, she turned slowly and walked back to the open door. She took great care as she buckled the seat belt, making sure it was fastened correctly before putting the car in drive.

On the edge of the wood a lone stag raised his head showing off his dignity to a world that couldn't see him. As the car drove away, his eyes lit up for only a moment as light from headlights radiated through the trees.

Natasha Kollett

Paranoia

The Present:

On the American side of the border between Maine and Canada is a small house and a series of border patrol booths across the wide road. The house has been converted into an office building for the patrol guards and downstairs there is a small holding cell next to a rarely used interrogation room. The men working inside the office sit comfortably in the heated building and sip hot coffee from large steaming mugs, while those outside working in the booths are bundled with multiple layers of cotton and wool blends grasping disposable paper coffee cups, that let their contents go cold within the first few moments exposed to the frigid air, in a vain attempt to warm themselves. All the while they envy those inside enjoying central heating.

The men and women that work at the border patrol take their jobs very seriously. Cold or not, they have to be alert to the possibility of someone crossing without the proper papers or bringing something over that they shouldn't.

A booth worker stops a man with a suspicious looking passport and has him escorted into the building to be questioned about his papers.

The Slippery Slope:

Hi, I'm Ray. Nice to meet— Hello, my name is Ray. Hey I'm Ray... and I rhyme my words weirdly when I introduce myself mother fuck! Hello, I'm Ray. How's it going? No. I'm overthinking this... Okay, new job, sure, but it's just my old job in a new place. New place. Oh why did I decide to transfer here?

The Beginning:

Before Ray moved into his small apartment downtown, he searched the internet to find statistics. The schools seemed good—not that he had any need for schools. Crime rates were higher than he would have liked. He immediately assumed that the crime rate must be due to gang related activities. Overall it was rated as a good community, and this new job was a big promotion for him. If nothing else, it was better than the last place he lived—it was thirty minutes away from the nearest hospital! He might be dead before ever making it there if he needed it. Not acceptable. No, this place would be different for sure.

The Present:

A security guard leads the man into the warmth of the small house. He walks him past a small woman at the front desk, who looks at the small man with great curiosity—what must he have done to be pulled in here? They walk through a small hallway to a staircase and down into the interview room. The security guard leaves the man with two agents who started questioning him straight away.

“What’s your name?”

“My name? Well, as it says there on my passport, my name is Ray.”

“Ray. And where did you get this passport?”

Before Ray has a chance to answer, the second agent cuts in with his own line of more aggressive questioning.

“What were you doing trying to cross into Canada?”

Ray, trying to stay calm, starts to explain his situation, but the agent is impatient and won’t accept any answer that Ray tries to give him.

“Is your name even Ray?”

The first agent—the nicer one—gave up on trying to run the interrogation, and leaned against the wall to watch.

“Of course my name is Ray...that’s what it says on my passport, isn’t it?”

The agent grew angrier every time Ray opened his mouth. He thought he could trip the man up by asking the same questions over and over again, but it was getting him nowhere. Finally, the first agent moves away from the wall, cuts off his partner, and speaks to Ray plainly.

“Just tell us, why were you trying to cross the border with a fake passport?”

“What fake?”

He looks at the agents squarely and then points to his passport.

“That? No. That’s not fake. My name is Ray Bradley, just like it says. Look, I even have my license that will tell you the same thing. That’s me right there, now can I please go?”

Ray picks up the passport and holds it up to one side of his face and his license to the other then precedes to make the same awkward-faced smile he had in each one to show them the resemblance.

The Beginning:

The new town had a population of only about 30,000 people. The building he moved into only housed two other tenants and he hoped he would not have to make friends with either of them. He never had been good at meeting people, and the idea of trying to make small talk—or, lord forbid, maintain a friendship—with someone on a regular basis caused him a great deal of stress. At work, Ray spent his time in a small office doing data analysis. Occasionally he would interact with co-workers who inhabited nearby spaces, but he never went with them on excursions to bars after work and he rarely

went to office parties—even going to the annual company picnic felt like a chore to him. When he did participate in these events it was only to seem like a “normal”, less anti-social, person or to show his bosses that he was interested in the company. Outside of the rare social gatherings, Ray’s daily routine consisted of going to work and picking up takeout for dinner, which he would eat by himself in his apartment. That’s how Ray liked it. Those were the places where he felt safe.

The Slippery Slope:

I think someone is following me... A few days ago there was a man who sat in his car for almost an hour outside my window at work and today there was this girl taking pictures outside my building. She was so obvious about it, too! I walked up behind her while she took them—she fed me some lie about it being for a class, but I didn’t buy it. I need another drink. Maybe I’ll call out of work tomorrow and throw them off a bit. Unless that makes them suspicious. What if they come looking for me at my apartment? I know why they’re after me. They think I saw something that I didn’t. And now, they’re going to kill me for it! I’m going to have to leave town—maybe the state? I think I’ll go north. Maine? That’s how I’ll get away from them. I’ll go to Maine, or maybe Canada! How do I go to Canada? I’ll probably need one of those new identities so I can’t be followed. Where do I get one of those? Google: Where to get a new identity near me. 1.4 million results? Wow, the Internet is amazing!

The Present:

“Please, you have to let me go! There are people after me and if they catch up to me...if they find me, they’re going to kill me!”

The two agents step out of the room—clearly this man wasn't changing his story and all they could do was wait for the local police to come and cart him off. Ray sits alone in the interrogation room and begins speaking to himself aloud.

"Was that it? Are they done now? God, I really hope they are done. I have to get out of this place... have to keep moving! I showed them my license, it matches my passport. What more could they want? Why is it taking so long for them to let me go?"

The two agents stand outside the door and listen to the crazy man inside. They too wonder how long this will take—how long for the locals to come and take away this crazy man. Ray's rant continues and starts to spiral.

"Can they really tell that my papers are fake? I thought they were pretty good... Fuck! You don't think... no. There's no way the people after me are in on this... they couldn't be that good, could they? That would explain why they're stalling... Shit! I have to get out... I have to leave before they hand me over to those killers!"

The agents standing outside the door exchange looks. At first, they thought this man was just stupid, but now he seemed insane.

"This guy needs to be thrown into a psychiatric ward, not a prison."

"You think he's crazy? I think he's trying to play us."

"All I know is, if I were trying to cross the border with fake papers and I got caught, I wouldn't be trying to play the crazy-card to get out of it."

"And why not? If the people in charge think you're crazy they throw you in a hospital for a while and you're free to go. No jail time, no community service even!"

The Slippery Slope:

Alright Google, I know I asked for something close, but was that the best you could do? That place was disgusting! Not to mention the name they gave me is ridiculous... It's still my own first name! They're going to find me so easily with this...

According to that website, once I have a new name I have to be a new person. So, who is Ray Bradley? Whoever he is, he had better be okay with using public transit and staying in cheap hotels... Hey this Bradley guy is pretty cool! He's hardly afraid of anything. Okay Google, I need a bus ticket. Being on a bus is going to be disgusting.

Alright. I've got my—Ray Bradley's—ticket, my papers, and now I'll get on this.... bus... this is going to be awful. There are so many people, how am I going to be able to keep track of them all? How am I supposed to know if any of them are following me? I guess I can narrow it down to anybody who gets on now. Of course, that won't keep me safe from all the other crazy people with their random murderous bombing tendencies. You never can tell—any psycho could be right next to you and you might not even know it by looking.

Oh that bus was disgusting! Why did I ever think I could leave home? I'm not even sure that leaving helped any... Didn't stop this guy from following me on that bus, that's for sure. Maine wasn't far enough. I have to get out of the country. Canada it is then—I'm going to need a car to drive in. I think I saw a car for sale just a few roads back—.

This line to cross over sure is long. Who would've thought that so many people would want to go into Canada? My turn, finally. Papers, fee...what? No I

don't think I want to go with—. Why do I have to go inside? This can't be a good thing. Could they have caught up with me already?

The Present:

The border patrol agents are still waiting on local police to deal with their problem, but a supervising officer becomes impatient and decides that he wants answers for himself.

"We haven't been able to get anything out of him, sir."

"The man is crazy, sir. He just rambles on about being followed and something about a dead woman. Poor schmuck can't even string together a full sentence."

"And he keeps going back to saying that he didn't see anything. That's all we can get from him."

The supervising officer pushes past his subordinates and opens the door into the interrogation room. The man handcuffed to the table is still muttering about not having seen anything. The supervisor pulls back a chair and sits down across from the cuffed man.

"Do you know why you are here, son?"

"They found me. They followed me here! I tried to get away. Tried to escape, but they found me anyway! They knew about my name. They had to! That's how they found me... Please, I have to get out of here. You have to let me GO!"

"What did they know about your name?"

"Fake. They knew I got a new one... they were watching. They heard what it was. Bradley, such a dumb name. I should've gotten a better one..."

"Why did you need a new name? Who was watching you?"

"The men... the ones who think I saw what they did—I didn't see anything though!"

"What do they think you saw?"

“Them, killing that woman...”

“What woman?”

“I don’t know! I didn’t actually see her, I just heard her scream and then... and then she wasn’t screaming anymore. After that they started following me. I didn’t tell anybody what I heard; I thought they would leave me alone! But they didn’t. They followed me here and now they’re going to kill me if you don’t let me go!”

“Son, listen. I don’t know what you saw or didn’t see, but if someone was killed then you need to talk to the police where it happened. The problem for us right now is your papers. You can’t go around trying to use fake papers and crossing borders like this, you understand?”

The door opened and a man in a local PD uniform stopped the interrogation, escorted Ray out of the building, and threw him into the back of his patrol car.

Natasha Kollett
Flesh and Bones

People are buried here. Their bodies are, at least. What is it that makes people? Mom believed that people had souls, which inhabited our physical bodies, and that's what made our sacks of flesh and bones people. By her logic, then, there are no people buried here, only their bodies—which seems kind of gross and a massive waste of space. As if the human race hasn't done enough to harm this planet, we had to go and bury bodies all over it that may or may not be people. If we are just souls inhabiting flesh, then once we leave our flesh it should be cremated and disposed of, not buried and taking up space. Or the ashes should be used to plant a tree and make forests—that's what I want for my body once I'm out of it. But what if Mom was wrong? What if we don't have souls and the bodies buried in masses are still people? In that case, I'm not sure which would be worse: being trapped underground forever or being burned into nothingness.

Can you imagine being the buried dead? So many of them are placed together but each one of them is alone in their own six-feet-under cage. Sure, people may still come and visit their graves, but do you think the dead could tell from that far down? Could they even hear each other? Who knows, maybe they can tell. Good for them if they can, but I can't be sure. What if there was a third option? If we do have souls, but they are tied to our sacks of flesh and bones, what happens then? If the souls can't leave as long as their bodies are still around . . . why do we bury so many of them— isn't that cruel? So much for respecting the Dead.

I'd like to think that they know when the living come to visit their graves and I hope for Mom's sake that

she was right about souls inhabiting bodies, because that seems like the nicest scenario. Regardless, I try to come here and see her as often as I can—and while I'm not sure who it is for, I like to think that she knows that I am here.

I want to believe what my mother used to say about our souls. I have spent long enough on this earth for any person and I have no desire to spend any amount of eternity six feet underground. I would rather my body be gone and I disappear into nothingness than to spend any time like those who live in their boxes marked by stone. I want to be cremated and have a tree planted with my ashes. If someone I have left behind wants to feel like they are visiting me, they still can. I don't want them to have to go to a yard filled with stone tablets that have names and dates, or meaningless words that attempt to make families feel better, or express who a person was. No, trees are so much nicer and so much better for this planet.

I make it sound like I want this for the sake of the planet, or what's left of my family, but that's not it. I'm a bit more selfish than that. It's for me. I don't want any part of me left behind, just in case . . . Just in case Mom was wrong.

Liz Lane
So Long

“Where should I park?”

“Here’s fine.”

My brother, Justin, and I got out of his rinky-dink little Corsica and stepped out onto the familiar gravel driveway that, until sometime in the future, had been my Nana’s. My grandmother on my father’s side. We didn’t really connect with this side of the family much and I hardly knew my uncles apart from each other. I only have the vaguest sense of a memory about my Auntie Jeanne, the wife of my Uncle Kenny, who had ushered us into the driveway with a wave and a smile. I have a firm memory of her biting or scratching at my feet; whether she was trying to scare us or make us laugh, I honestly can’t remember.

We were here because my father had passed away the day before my mother’s graduation. My Nana had decided to sell the house and move down to Florida, where she already had a house and spent a good eight months of the year already. We found out my dad had passed when my oldest sister, Jessy, climbed into bed with me and Kate, my twin sister, and put an arm across us and said, “Dad died this morning. I didn’t know how else to tell you.” Forever in my memory those words will be burned, along with the holey pink sweater she was wearing that day. It took some time for the news to hit, as we were estranged. We had been for a long time until he discovered the internet. My mom had told us her truth of events that had happened and, as we had moved away from my father, I’d never gotten to hear his side. I don’t think I ever will, now. I was wary of my dad. I loved him, but I didn’t grow up with him as much as I should have. I wasn’t as responsive

as I could have been to his messages, but doesn't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've had until it's gone for good? We weren't close, but his passing hit me hard. I didn't have anything to hold onto besides Kate. Maybe, if I squeezed her hard enough, I could reunite the half of us that was my father and I could tell him I love him and that I really do miss him. But I can't; not now, I can only tell the living how I feel.

The drive down wasn't too bad, only an hour from Wells, Maine, the place that I was currently staying, and the last home of my also recently departed grandmother, but that is another story entirely and one that Joyce Driscoll deserves. But this is about Raymond Earnest Lane, my dad. Justin and I, we listened to music and argued about money, blasting bluegrass with the windows down. We made decent time and we got to Salem, New Hampshire, the place that I lived first, at around four. I recognized Canobe Lake and especially Canobe Lake Park, where my dad used to take us sometimes when we were younger.

My heart mended a little the day before. I was weeping my way through a stack of old photos my oldest sister had passed our way, when inside I found something I thought I'd lost to the wash years ago. He kept a picture of us on a log ride, the only other ride we could coax him on besides our favorite, the carousel. He sat in the back due to his portliness and I sat in front, terrified of roller coasters and the like. On his left wrist, if you were to look closely enough, was a little pink and white bracelet that I won for him, I think at skee ball. He kept it, after these years.

My heart broke a little as a few photos later was a selfie of me that he had printed out; one that I had lazily taken at college to show off my red hair. He loved us and he told us every time he contacted us. Other photos in the stack, amongst the Henry Paul Band and The Outlaws

merchandise, was the picture that my father and I took together, last time I hugged my old man. We were in a hospital and he had a trachea tube and he had issues with his legs, but he still smiled for the picture. I can't even look at it as now I can see how sick he was and how I should have tried harder, but that's to say after it's all said and done, when we're all sad, and everything's gone.

It's difficult for me to tell this story for a number of reasons as looking back makes things something else. A long time ago, I had fond memories of hanging out with horses at a racetrack. I thought it was because I loved horses at the time and we had umbrellas and pillows and dolls that were horses, but later I realized my dad might have had a gambling problem, but who knows? I didn't know until a year or two ago that he used to keep horses and one's name was Lizzie. I was probably named after a horse.

And that's pretty cool.

My brother and I were turned around all sorts of ways because of roadwork, and we ended up at a gas station that used to be a Hess and a US Gas before it, but now it was called something else. We were near "Rockingham Park," or so all the signs displayed. A "horse town," my brother called it. Like Scarborough, I imagine. I recognized the house of Jo and Sophie, my childhood friend's mom and friend, respectively. I remember the bus ride home from school each day, the excitement of spotting the boulder that sat at the end of the driveway, and I distinctly remember trying to make a Pink Lemonade Airhead last the entire ride home, becoming a liquid in my mouth before I was even halfway there.

We were met with my Aunt, Uncle, and Nana, sitting outside and enjoying the penultimate days of a New England summer. I didn't have many memories as a child of my Aunt Jeanne to compare her to besides the one where she spooked me as a kid on what I think was

Halloween looking back, so I was pleasantly surprised when she greeted us enthusiastically: “Hi! I don’t know if you remember me, but I’m your Auntie Jeanne!” Of course I knew who she was when she told me her name and all I could think about for a bit was how she looked so different from her profile picture, the sunset, absurdly enough. We’d friended each other on Facebook and she’d always cheered me on or sent her love whenever I posted something that wasn’t too weird or local. She had blond hair, like my older sister, Sarah, before she decided to consistently and constantly dye it black.

My Uncle Kenny, her husband, my Dad’s brother, was there beside her, looking for all the world like an out-of-season Santa or a cheery garden gnome. I mean that in the best possible way. He had his camera out, the one that filled his Facebook Page with hundreds of cool pictures of birds. He looked like my father a little bit, but I’d never been alive when my father was so skinny. Talking was a little difficult as I didn’t grow up with these folks and I had no clue what to say to them, much as I’m sure that they had no idea what to ask us about. I’d been a rug rat the last time they laid eyes on me. It didn’t help that I felt I was going to choke on everything I was feeling.

My Nana didn’t say much, but she’d earned that right. She sat there listening, occasionally chiming in about how Pokémon Go was a nuisance. She looked good for being in her eighties. I found out that she became a grandmother at thirty-eight, and that her son became a grandfather at that age as well. They were good people and I’ll get to know them better, hopefully. I asked about the history, if there really was a pool like I remembered, and if there were markings in a doorway of our heights when we were kids. Yes and no, there was a pool at one time, and no, that was my old house, just one or two houses down the lane, actually. She asked about Jessy, and told us that there were things for her in the house. I asked

if I could have one of my dad's hats. Jeanne asked if there was one in particular I was looking for, but there really wasn't. I had fond memories of my dad wearing hats and I wanted something to hold onto, something that I could remember him by.

Truth be told, I used to have an excellent memento, until my brother crashed it. For Kate and my graduation, my father gave us a 2000 Toyota Corolla, 'The Rolla'. According to my mom, it was a rusty death trap, but to me it'll always be My First Car and one of the only memorable, concrete things I ever got from my dad besides his name, my tablet, and the pretty blue laptop that I'm currently writing on. The car would have been perfect as a keepsake as how else to better remember a mechanic than by one of his cars? But unfortunately, my oldest brother, Ray, got rear ended in an accident outside my sister's college a few weeks before he passed and the car was totaled. I fought tooth and nail to keep what I could, the key that was given to me and the duplicate license plate, because I didn't know if there would be anything left for me to love whenever I saw my Nana again.

But there was plenty, actually. Old T-shirts from the bands he loved, The Outlaws and Charlie Daniels and Henry Paul and Little Feet, and even a "Ray Lane's Towing" shirt that would never fit me, but might fit a kid if I have one, some day. I got my hat, too. And other things that I didn't count on. Justin's tires were in terrible shape, and we'd bickered about the cost and whether we really needed to replace them for our 1000-mile journey home that we were taking the day after the visits.

My dad used to have an auto-body kind of shop, where they'd tow cars and do emissions inspections and what have you, and he had tires that were just a little bigger than the ones we had on, ones that would just fit when he turned the wheel. I took the opportunity to explore and photograph everything and I got the chance to see one of my childhood homes, the first one.

It was a good-sized yellow house with brown shutters that really needed a good, solid clean-up. There was trash in the yard, but the lawn looked mowed, so that spoiled my chances of looking around through the open window where I remember so strongly my dad living before he moved out. I walked around the front, getting in as many angles as I could, trying to remember the black walnut trees that had grown out in front, remembering the bee-infested Tuggy the Tugboat sandbox that had sat in the shade. I thought about the old wooden PlayScape that was there eleven years ago, and how the old shed was filled with wasps, and how my father used to draw balloons with faces and our phone number on them so we could let them loose and see how far they'd gone. We'd never gotten a call back and it was a questionable thing to do looking back now, but it was a hoot and a half then. I remember the screen porch, and my mom's old maps framed with bamboo, and sitting out and listening to records and the radio, and sneaking the frosting off of a KFC chocolate cake when no one was looking. I remember the billowing stream of black smoke rising into the sky when there was a fire at the shop, my sister Sarah shooing us inside. I remember not being able to climb on top of the roof with the rest of my siblings because I couldn't find my other shoe.

I kept walking, remembering the warehouse lot where Kate, Justin, and I used to play bikes, with me demanding to be in the back so nobody would hit my heels with their tires. As it turns out, that long, shady walk on the sidewalk that I remembered was at most twenty yards long, not even two houses down. It seemed so much bigger when I was a kid, but hey, didn't everything? I remember weekends with my dad, my sister and brothers and I out in the yard, raising hell, and coming back to our mother with grass-stained knees after making tunnels in the long summer grass.

By the time I'd gotten back, one tire was done, so I had more time to explore.

Kenny and Jeanne's house was literally across the lane from the garage where Justin's car was getting fixed, Ray Lane's, the sign and my uncle's cap proclaimed. As I found out, my uncle really loved to build bird feeders. I knew that he loved to photograph birds, his well-adorned Facebook wall being proof enough, and the fact that he greeted us with a camera in his hand said as much. His yard was filled with bird feeders and there wasn't a tree that was bare. They were diverse, more than a few of them being made from old license plates that he had pulled from totaled cars. There was one that I liked, CONLIN, it read, that was a cute little bird feeder. He said I could have it and I was grateful. Maybe I could do something like that with the plate I pulled from the Toyota. He gave Justin the last "Ray Lane's Towing" cap, so now we both had something to hang on the wall to hang on to.

We still had two more tires to go when Jeanne reappeared and we made small talk. As it turns out, she had a cat from a litter from the one time my dad and his girlfriend Erica had owned a cat. Erica ran the hotel he stayed in when he didn't have a house, one that I have most of my memories of him with. I wonder whatever happened to Erica and her daughter, Victoria. I hope they're doing well. I remember being around eight and fitting into her dresses when we played dress-up. Jeanne shared a memory with me, about how around the time my Mom and Nan got married I gave her a great big hug and told her I loved her. I wish I remembered doing that.

With the new tires on, we were on our way . . . but not quite. Uncle Kenny still had a few things for us. Three, actually. The first two being things Sarah made in art. One was a tea pot in the shape of a dinosaur and the other was a purposefully cracked cup. The third thing he gave us then was a guitar, "Jasmine," that his kids toyed with whenever they came up. It was my seventh, after that point, after Persephone, Diana, Loanership, The Spite Guitar, Amos, and The Mexican Smashing Guitar, which

all get their own stories, I'm sure. Even though it wasn't my dad's, I'll still cherish it. I'll probably end up scratching out everything but the J and add an R to it, for my dad. I got to see my dad's tow truck, #77, the one that I might get a tattoo of later. I remember riding in the cab when it was his only car for a while and him laughing when he rolled the window up on my hair on purpose, trying to make me laugh. I remember clutching onto my green lightsaber when he took me out on a call and Sarah giving us a white chocolate camel that she had hidden in the bed and all of us believing that it was actually soap. I remember so many things that I feel like I'm near to bursting, but I'll never have enough ink to tell it all, but that doesn't mean I won't do my best and try.

With our arms loaded up, we headed out, spending some time at the Rockingham mall, where I vividly recall being terrified of escalators and clutching at pant legs. The merry-go-round that we all rode on our birthdays was gone, replaced by more chairs and empty space. Maybe it's in another mall, maybe I'll find it again one day. I remember my father giving us a pass for it for our birthday that included a pass for a few friends, but we didn't have any friends, so all the kids behind us got to ride for free. Maybe that's where I get my love for carousels from. I wish that I could tell him all this, but I can't, so I'll tell the ones that are still here until I'm not anymore.

I found out that my mother got engaged to my dad at a Henry Paul concert after we came home and unloaded, my arms full of nostalgia and a history I don't get to hear from the primary source. My sister claimed a Henry Paul Band shirt, citing it as her first concert. My mom cooed and aaahed over them, which wasn't at all like I thought she would react. I expected anger instead. I was pleasantly surprised when I found out that some of the shirts that were in the bag were actually hers, some that he'd held onto, like the shirt from their engagement

concert. Justin tried one on, the one for the shop, with a hat and it made my breath catch in my throat how much he looked like my dad had when he was younger. Normally, he's the spitting image of my Uncle John when he was younger. How is it that one face can hold so many? I never thought I looked much like either of my parents, but I'd never known them as kids, now had I? I apparently look just like my Uncle Billy even though I don't remember him in the slightest and Jess looks just like my mom. Ray, on the other hand, could pass for my father when he was a teenager. It's nice to know that even with him gone, there's still enough pieces left behind for us to hang onto and enough for us to hang together.

Allison Luppe
The Boy on the Train

The train was half-full as it swayed and shifted with each of the stops. My hotel was at the end of the line, right next to the airport. I knew myself too well to try and haul my suitcases on the public transport in the early hours of the morning. I wanted to cling to the notion of staying here longer and not have to return to the monotonous life that I had lived before. I would need to raise money for another trip back here and that would put me in the factory on Suicide Highway as it was lovingly called. The back roads of my small hick town were dangerous to those who didn't know what they were doing, but I had been taught how to drive on those roads in a beat up truck so there was little doubt in my mind that I could be safe. I wondered if I would need lessons to jog my memory after almost five months of relying on other people and drivers to get from one location to the other.

Across the way, a stranger. Our eyes met a couple of times, but my mind was wandering to the things I had seen and experienced. I really wish I had brought an umbrella for the thunderstorm that blew through the city, if only so that I wouldn't have had to stand under an arch in an old church garden for almost an hour, watching raindrops make streaks in the old concrete and on the long hanging branches of the trees. I admit that I enjoyed the view of the city still rushing past even with that piece of the past planting itself firmly within a rapidly changing realm. I kept my eye on the stranger though, a kind of pull that I hadn't felt in a while. There are people that you meet in the world that you know will influence you and I could tell that this stranger would be one of them for me.

He began to talk to the man beside him and I began to make up a story as to why they were on this route, this line, going this way. I pictured them as business partners, going to a fancy restaurant for their clients, though he wasn't dressed the part yet. He could have a clip-on tie for his button-down and his jeans could be played off as not wanting to overshadow their guests. They would spend the evening with glasses of white wine and laughing at stories both of them had heard a million times before. He would be suave and kiss their benefactor's hand as though they were still in a time that she would appreciate that sort of thing. The benefactor, who I decided would look like Dame Maggie Smith, would laugh girlishly and bat at his shoulder with a blush tinting her slightly sagging cheeks. He didn't look like the business type, though, and I doubted that he would be able to get away with clipping on a tie for a business formal event, so I thought of another backstory.

Perhaps he was a writer, looking for the next story within the depths of the city. He might wander the streets, his eyes keen for the next narrator of a fast-paced murder mystery with his left hand clutching a notebook and his right perched and ready for the right phrase that would kick start it. He could sit on a park bench and watch the people go by, making up stories for them and deciding which of them he would feature. The child with their mother would make a great side character, a reminder to readers of the world that they lived in even if they were using his story as a means to escape. The jogger could be a zombie hunter preparing for his next kill on a high rooftop, watching as a lumbering beast made its way down the street. He seemed like the creative type and this notion of being a writer appealed to me, so I let my mind wander with that for a while until his gaze turned back to me. I could see the question in his eye as he leaned over the wide space between us to ask, "D'you have a pen?" His voice clung to the local dialect like a child needing comfort, making my heart thud slightly.

“Sorry, I don’t.” Even though I had spent so much of my time in a city not unlike this one, my paranoid nature made me reluctant to have anything on my person that I wasn’t prepared to lose, even a pen. “I usually do because then, if I see something cool I’ll remember it, but I’m a bit too forgetful for that. I swear I would lose my head if it wasn’t attached to me.” He gave a short laugh and rested his elbows against his knees, giving me a crooked smile that made my heart thud in time with the train’s movements through the city.

We continued talking of cool things that were and could be seen until the train approached my stop. I didn’t want to have our conversation end, but I also didn’t want to be lost in the city. Once the cool voice of the conductor finished with the name of the stop, I told him, “This is my stop coming up.” As the train started to slow, I stood as he did.

“Um . . .” He looked down at the metallic floor and gave a sheepish grin. “My stop was a couple of stops ago. I didn’t want to stop talking to you.” I blushed as I readjusted the bag on my shoulder, wondering what we needed to do. “I still don’t.” I nodded and tilted my chin up, putting on the airs of confidence that I wanted to pretend that I had.

“Okay. Do you want to go with me? I don’t really know what’s around my hotel.”

It turned out that the part of the city that I was staying in relied very heavily on the airport and not much else dwelled here but a few shops and a restaurant that had a distinct pub feeling. We walked and talked amicably as though we had known each other for days rather than mere hours, finally settling on the restaurant and sitting close together on a couch as we waited for our food to arrive. I believe he was part of the reason that my perception of time was skewed just slightly. I lived in a world that I never could have pictured, where hours skipped away

merrily while we talked and I told him what brought me to this place.

He was a musician. He brought up classic bands that I hadn't known still toured and still can't believe that he was a part of. It was surreal talking to him, especially since he seemed so interested. I ate slowly, not to look pretty and polite but rather to keep talking. I wanted to tell him everything, to catch him up to date on me. He did similarly, but there simply wasn't enough time in the night to hold all of the words that wanted to spill out. He found a pen in the restaurant and laughed as he remembered the reason that he needed it. "I . . . I wanted to give you my number," he told me, giving a boyish smile that sent my heart racing.

"I'm really glad that you didn't just do that. I would have been so disappointed," I admitted, giving him a soft look in exchange for one of mild confusion. "My phone wouldn't have worked in both countries." His light eyes widened with understanding and he gave me a disappointed look. "But we have Facebook . . . Skype . . ." My voice fell away as we saw the difficult road ahead. Time changes and long hours without contact would be torturous after a while.

"We can try," he said confidently, throwing a fry into his mouth and staring off into the middle distance with the determination of a man going into battle. I laughed at the contrast and he gave a grin back at me.

"We can try," I echoed, nodding my head as I settled back on the couch. He settled with me, though I kept some distance solely because he was still a stranger. As the streetlights began to turn on and twilight fell over that part of the world, the world sped back up and I realized that I had a flight that I would need to catch in the morning. I could feel my heart pound for a new reason and I explained to him, "I have to get up early tomorrow to go back."

"Well . . . We could always hang out in your room for a while. No need for sex," he said, a hopeful tone in his voice that told me that he was slightly hoping for that last sentence to be a non sequitur.

"I . . . I don't think I could do that." Even if he caused a worldwide shift, I couldn't see myself having sex with a man that I had only known for a few hours. I thought we had more time. He gave a slightly disappointed look, though I stood firm. Finally he nodded.

"Someday," he said, his voice soft with the upset.

"Someday," I agreed, taking his hand as we walked back down the road to my bus stop.

On our way back, our hands clutched together like a young high school couple who didn't know what they were doing. I don't know what his experience was, but I knew that mine hadn't been enough to be prepared for a night alone with a man I had just met only a few hours ago. After a stint of silence, he asked, "Can I kiss thou?" My heart thudded and I shook my head.

"I'm sorry . . . I don't think I can do that either." I wonder now if that caused some kind of doubt that I could be in an adult relationship with him. "But . . . you could kiss my cheek." He gave a satisfied grin and kissed my cheek with relish, making me giggle in a way that I had never thought I would do. Now neither of us was left with disappointment as we continued walking, him taking the opportunity at every chance to kiss my cheek and rub his thumb against the side of my hand. I wanted to believe that this would be the start of something beautiful, eventually with long days just like this one. I pictured romantic scenes of both of us running to the other at the airport, not daring to hope that the other being there was a reality. Spending long hours over Skype, catching the other up on the world and laughing at the cultural differences. Funny little messages popping up on the other's phone so that they didn't have to imagine that it was a dream.

“When can I see you?” he asked, watching as storm clouds rolled over the quickly darkening sky. As it always was in this part of the country, rain would come.

“Soon. We’ll . . . we’ll figure it out,” I said, nodding my head with my eyes focused on the clouds and my hand clutching his. We would find the hours, find each other through the wonders of the internet. We would make it work somehow, some way. The bus approached and I quickly kissed him on his cheek as a farewell, telling him to find me on Facebook. I leaned on the window as I watched him walk away.

It had been almost a month before I gave up seeing him again. I should have known better than to put all of my hope into one person, but that notion of people changing you clung to my mind like a parasite. I knew that I was being ridiculous, swooning and sighing over someone I had only known for a few hours, but I couldn’t bring myself to stop. I hated how much of a romantic I was sometimes.

Working for the summer at a factory gives you a lot of time to think and remember. Your body is doing all of the work while your mind is free to wander to different things. The people who work around me struggle with their dreams and wonder if they will ever be able to get out of this hellscape. I knew that I had a deadline as to when I would be able to get out since I was still in school, but since this factory was one of the few places within a twenty mile radius that paid this well for inexperienced labor, the people here probably would be here for a while. I clung to my memories of my time abroad, using them as a reminder of why I was doing this. I needed to save the money so that I could find a way to get back somehow. Not even for him, but for myself. During our ten-minute break, I glanced to my phone and saw that a notification for my Facebook had appeared.

After so many times of it not being him and my heart taking several free falls into my stomach, I'll admit it shocked me whenever I realized I recognized the request's face and my heart took a new route into my throat with amazement. It was him. I felt my hand go to my mouth in shock as my other pressed the Accept button and I saw that he was online. It was fairly early in his country, but maybe he was working another show. I checked my time and sighed when I realized I had to go back on the line. It wouldn't be too long now and I figured he deserved a little waiting too.

My shift flew by now that I had his message to look forward to. My coworkers looked at me in confusion, obviously wondering what had changed in the small window of time. I couldn't fully articulate what it was about the fact that he had shown interest in me and had taken the initiative to find me, even if it had been later than I would have liked, and I pondered the notion that this would be something that I could actually discuss with him. I figured I would find out the reason soon enough. Perhaps he had been offered some kind of tour job that took him all across Europe, the days long with prep and nights longer with shows and after-parties. I liked to think that I was always in the back of his mind, that silly pad of paper that he had that fateful day shoved into one bag or the other with no time to really look at it and do his investigating.

In the safety of my car with the late-night radio lulling me into a state of almost calm, I looked to my messenger and saw the little red one that told me I had a message waiting. I took a deep breath and opened the app.

His face smiled at me from a picture that looked a little old but not so much that I couldn't recognize him. His name sent a thrill through my chest and I tried to calm myself so I didn't seem desperate.

Hey.

I don't know why I felt slightly disappointed by the one word that I had been waiting for for these long weeks. Was there nothing else for him to say? I saw my coworkers staring at me as they walked by, confused as to why I hadn't joined the lineup of cars to leave. I gave a smile to a couple of them and decided that I needed to let him explain himself. My response was short if not a bit flirty.

Long time no talk ;)

The emoji gave a grin up at me as I put my phone into the cup holder, realizing I no longer had an excuse for sitting here since much of the initial lineup had left and someone from the next shift was waiting for my spot.

I heard my phone buzz but I didn't look at it until I reached a stop sign on the long winding highway that would lead me home. There were so many deer and other dumb animals on this road at night, even without the people, and I didn't feel like dying because of them.

Yeah, sorry bout that. Long couple of weeks. Looks like you made it home safe

I didn't know what to say to that, exactly, so I decided I could figure it out once I got home. I sat at the stop sign a little longer than necessary, relishing the fact that I had someone interested in me, and didn't really look to make completely sure I was clear to go. The SUV barreling down the opposite road didn't give me enough time to take a breath, let alone scream.

I guess it's his turn to wait a while.

Chandler Rhea
The Pursuit of Reason

Running. Running. I can't stop running.

If I falter now, it will be the last mistake I make. Run. Run.
Run. Run.

As I round the next corner, shimmers of blinding light try to slow me down, but I keep running. Arms reach out to me from the pitch-black walls on either side of the path. Nimble I evade their grasp and I keep on running.

Just as the next corner comes into view, an overwhelming smell permeates the air as if trying to suffocate me. It's strongly antiseptic and it introduces my already burning lungs to a new threshold of pain. But I keep on running.

The narrow labyrinth of halls and corridors seems to never end. Many times, I've encountered sets of stairs leading either up or down and I always choose down. Not only is the descending motion heaven for my legs and lungs, but I also know what lies in wait on the floors above. And so, I greet my Hellward plunge with smiling relief.

Suddenly, I realize an alarm is shrieking all throughout the building. Did it just start or has it been screaming at me this entire time? I'm not sure, but I can't stop running.

Authoritative voices greet me from below as I encounter the next stairwell, and my heart begins to beat out of my chest. Are they on the stairs? Are they searching the level

below? Hell, could their voices even be echoing down from above me?

It's at this point that I realize I've stopped running.

Without thinking, I pick up my habitual trek down the staircase. I do my best to quiet my steps, but I never stop to consider my hands. As I slide my right palm along the cold handrail, friction combines with nervous moisture to generate a sharp squeeeek! that echoes all throughout the now silent stairwell.

The alarms cease. The voices cease. Every joint in my body is now locked in fear.

Heavy footfalls sound on the stairs below. Their definitive rubber thuds beat each person's full weight into the concrete. It feels like an earthquake is working its way up the stairwell.

Right up to me.

I burst forth from my stupor, nearly tripping on the stairs as I woefully begin my ascent. My legs are completely numb, but I certainly cannot stop now.

Run. Run. Run. Run. Run.

My paced breathing quickly turns into panicked asphyxiation as I push myself to keep going. The steps seem to

grow closer and closer; the voices louder and more demanding. I dare not look back though. I have to keep running.

After mounting about seven flights of stairs, I came upon a door leading back out into a hallway.

However, upon opening this door, it was as if I were in a different place entirely.

Clean white walls greeted me. There were no brutish arms savagely tearing at my body as I jogged along the corridor. No unpleasant smells. In fact, my body felt better already—not strained as before. There were clear windows placed in variable sequence along these walls, though there appeared to be nothing on the other side of them—aside from more white walls.

As I turned the first corner, another strange sight greeted me—though perhaps the strangest sight of all.

This turn had led me to a dead end. Or well, a short hallway leading to another door. The entire area was apparently shaped like an L. It was nonsensical when compared to what I was used to.

I slowed to a walk when I realized I was no longer being chased. It was as if a sudden peace had overwhelmed me and I was no longer concerned about trying to run. I watched as my hand reached forward to grasp the handle of the door and gently turned it to release the latch.

The door didn't budge.

I pulled, I pushed, I punched, I nearly cried. Nothing worked to pry the door from its frame. In the final throes of despair, I sank to my knees. The cold tile floor was soothing and I welcomed it gratefully. When I finally sprawled out on my back, I noticed something above me that made my blood run cold.

Inscribed with deep gashes into the ceiling was a message, though at first it didn't make much sense to me. I've been staring at it now for what feels like hours, but if what the message says is true, there's really no telling how long I've been here. It reads:

"If you're reading this, you've been in a coma for almost 10 years.

We're trying a new technique.

We don't know where this message will end up in your dream, but we hope we're getting through.

Please wake up."

Haleigh Smith
The Single Room

The walls of the room are painted white, but they look more like a gray color from the dirt that has accumulated over the years. My twin-size bed is positioned on the left side of the room. On the bed is a flat pillow and a scratchy blanket that doesn't provide any heat. The floor of the room is always cold when my bare feet land on it and the windows have been painted shut to keep me in.

When I moved here, I was told I would have the room to myself, but I guess that was just a mistake, because I am now stuck in this room, for who knows how long, with her. I don't know if I can put up with being in this tiny room much longer. There is barely enough room for just me, but somehow they managed to squeeze another bed on the right side of the room.

I try to ignore her, but I can't, no matter how hard I try. Every morning she wakes up at four screaming that someone is coming to get her. Of course no one is actually coming to get her, but that doesn't keep her from screaming until I look up at her. Every single morning it is the same and I can't take her anymore.

After breakfast, she always comes to my side of the room and grabs the letters I have been writing out of my hands. She never gives them back when I tell her to, either. She will just hold them in front of my face and mock me for writing them. She reminds me daily that the people I am writing to don't care about me and I can't take her anymore.

In the afternoons, when I try to have some quiet time, she always stares at me and hums. I can never figure out what she is humming, but it is low, harsh and hard to

ignore. She'll do this until I pay attention, and I can't take her anymore.

The evenings never contained any solace either. She would make sure of that. She'd always use this time to make sure I knew every flaw I had, but I can't and won't take her anymore.

So, on this evening, I don't give her a chance to do what she always does, because I have finally found a way out and I am going to take it. I will be free and won't have to worry about her or anyone else anymore.

Later that night the nurse on call was going around giving each person their medicine. Her room was the fourth room the nurse would go to. When the nurse opened her door, he dropped the cup containing the pills she was supposed to take. He immediately ran out of the room in search of help.

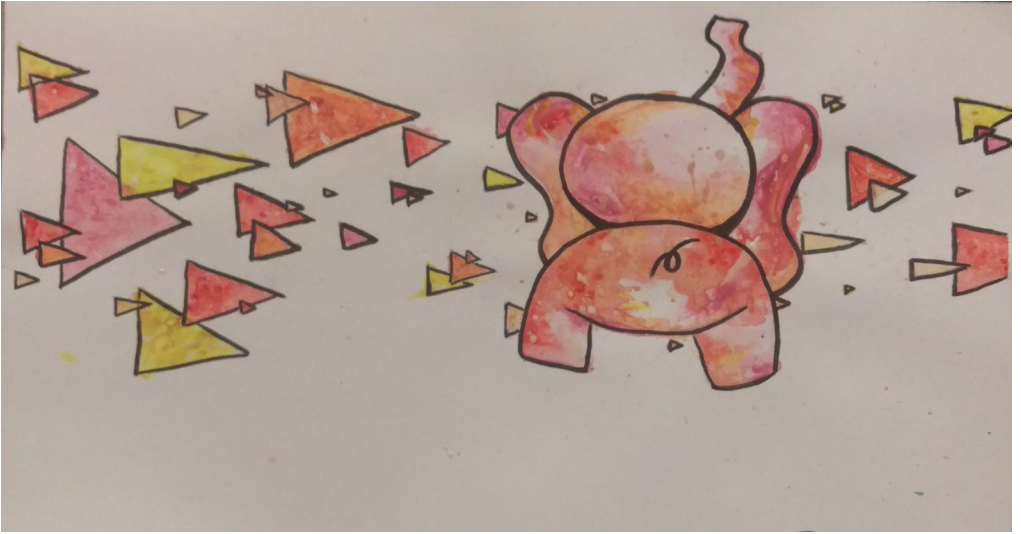
The only bed in the room had been flipped onto one of its ends. The scratchy blanket was tied to the metal bars of the bedframe and the other end of the blanket was tied around her neck.

Part II

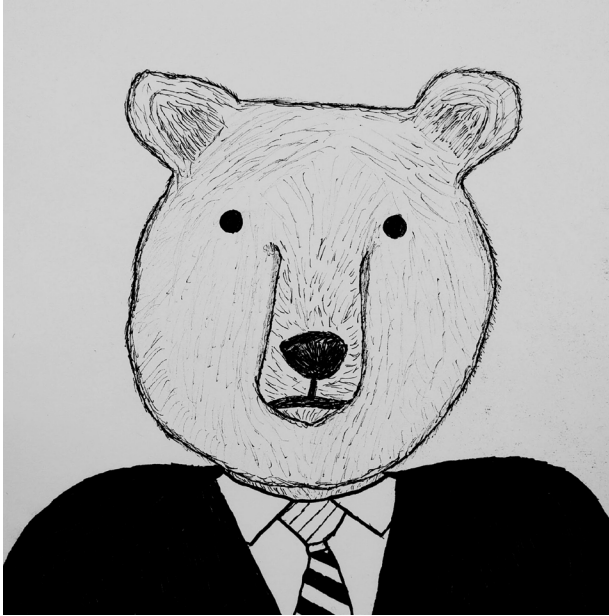
Art



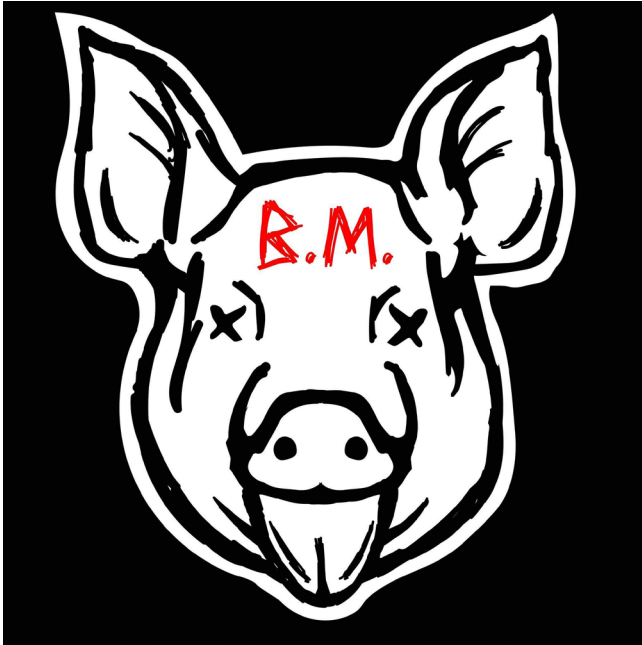
Unnamed by John Barnett



An Elephant in an Abstract World by Ana Luna-Gutierrez



Business Bear by Nate Kiernan



Of Good Taste by Nadia Marrero-Silva,
Xavier Sales, and Jack Townsend



Nonbinary by Jay Wilson



Spells, Studies, and Slumber Parties by Brandi Payne



Nature Reclaimed by Sarah Werkhoven



Untitled #1 by Saij Miller-Wildsmith



Untitled #2 by Saij Miller-Wildsmith



Untitled #3 by Saij Miller-Wildsmith



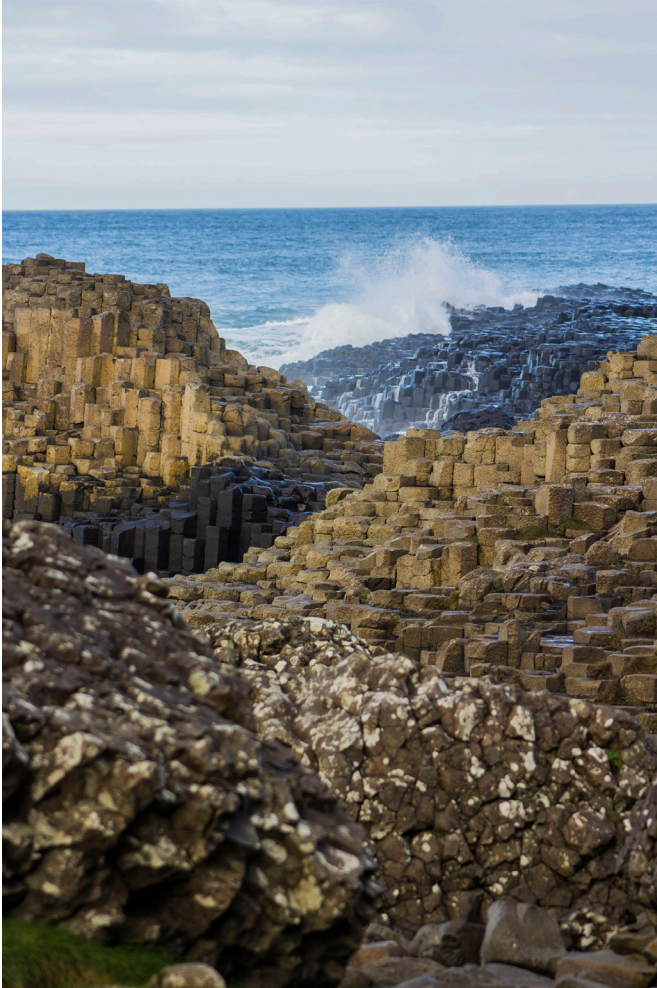
Keystones by Natasha Kollett



Pink in Fall by Nate Kiernan



Prejudice by Taylor Williams



Wave Through Keystone by Natasha Kollett



Personality Pic by Nate Kiernan

Impressions



Workshop Shenanigans by Ana Luna-Gutierrez



Lovestruck by Jay Wilson



Cliffside by Natasha Kollett



At the Bakery by Brandi Payne



Maryville Mural by Brian Reed

Part III

Poetry

Nabil Ahlhauser
I Didn't Believe in You

I didn't believe in you
I didn't believe in you, God
Abstractly, I always knew you existed
But I never notice grasshoppers
And I never noticed you
Blending into the background
My eyes failing to distinguish your camouflage
Among the other fairytales I read to kids
But despite it all God,
You still left caution signs by the road
Protecting me even though I wasn't some heroic figure
Even though I missed my shining armor payments
You still made sure that I was driving
Going in a uniform enough direction to be described as forward
And so even through my frailty, you cared enough to be there
In the glistening of the eyes of my friends as they talked about you
In all the prayers and songs we sang together
You were there, God
And, today, today I finally saw it
Realized the simple little fact
This simple little truth
That I believe in you
I believe in you, God

Nabil Ahlhauser
My Best Friend

I've started opening my notebook to a fresh sheet of paper
A blank canvas for the girl next to me to decorate
Front and back
We fill pages
Completely ignoring the teacher
With our anecdotes about how much she hates me
And how I take that as a sign of her affection for me
Thus, she has given me the nickname–
Scum
And I, I have countered it with the nickname–
Sunshine
Partially in hopes that it annoys her
But also because
See, there was this one time when I had, jokingly, asked her to
You know
Tell me her life story
And that's exactly what she did
We grabbed two mochas
Sat in high chairs
And let the hours roll by
When we had to leave
I asked for a hug
Not because I thought she needed one
But because
After hearing how her mother died when she was only eight years old
I had started crying
I was the one who needed a hug
And she was there to give one

Myka Bland
Life

Life – the period of existence of an individual. At least that's what dictionary.com says, but what do I say when life has not been so good and nice? What do you say when life gives you less ups than downs and all you can do is put on a brave smile? What happens behind closed doors when the lights go off and your bed is cold without a soul and all you know is what lies ahead can no longer be bread? You have to live in the moment, but you can't forget the past. You want to move on, but something's holding you back, so what is it? What makes you want to leave everything behind and quit? Is it life? Is that why you sigh and cry at night? Are you scared of what else life has to bring? Is that the reason you want to pack your things and just leave everything behind? I guess life has really brought you down, but not me; I don't believe. Life is hard, but praying to God will help you dodge all the mountains and walls that have blocked you from reaching your full potential. Hold your faith because it looks good on your face. Keep your strength because it's more than a gift. Believe in strife because it's all a part of life! Don't try to run and hide because your light shows a glare – life for any of us has NOT been a crystal stair.

Wesley Blevins
I am not of lines

I am not of lines
Or of punctuation
Or repentant from my wayward self
I am between
In a chasm
In a grave I have dug with my bare hands
I am the property
Of the soil
Of the song of my earthly existence
In the distance
I can see
My blind pursuit of immunity to reality
I must escape
I must climb out
And sink my teeth into the world above ground again
I must return
To the surface
To see the light of peace shine on my face again
To leave my shadows behind in a grave for my buried self
To inscribe an epithet on stone and mark the death of my insecurity
But I am not of lines
Or of punctuation
Or a realization of my circumstances
I am between
I am alone
Not wishing to leave the familiar darkness
I am content
With the soil
To lay within my lowly grave
And
Sleep

Wesley Blevins
Lyrical Vagabond

Rain dripping, slipping in between old
Cracks in the ceiling, flipping up my eyelids
Brain tripping on existential questions
I think I should mention that I'm in detention
Defensive prevention has never been my strong suit
When bad things happen, I just get up and follow suit
My heart is mute – its tongue got ripped out by a pretty girl
So now I'm left to speak for it, interpretation by a whirl-
Wind of insecurities, unfurling the white flag
Surrendering to nonsense, cat's out of the bag
Wandering the halls, rain falls, this isn't home at all
Evicted in the spring, broke by summer, homeless in the fall
Dreaming of the heavens under stars that don't know me
And now it's been so long that even I would disown me
Elucidated, barely made it, now I'm the dark again
Using lighters for lanterns and hoping I don't miss the mark again
I'll just jump a train and hope that my absence is not reported
In the afterbirth of all my dreams the real world aborted
I'm not ready for real life, but it's ready for me
It's plain to see my pageantry left me stranded, out at sea
Without the north star to take my hand and make me whole
Guess I'll work from nine to five and trade away my lost soul
There's no more space left in this old attic that I call a brain
And the ceiling's really cracked and letting in the rain
Illuminated, God, I hate it – my life plan's in pieces
Now excuse me while I go and try to finish senior thesis

Chandler Chastain

Rabbit Song

When Life stretched her arms out to Morning,
there was not enough to grab.
All at once you were right: beside me
and with knowledge of the gold tears.
Always there is a sparrow, art and a heart.
For me, I fill the air, follow the river of death
downstream and call to my family across states.
Until finally, finally, there is an embrace.

Chandler Chastain

Together We Will Clean

When we argue it's like drinking coffee
on an empty stomach and taping the windows before a
storm.
I get nervous and the eggshells I walk on are turned over
like
my eyes when you ask what's wrong.
I pretend to hide, like I don't know we're fighting,
but my attempts are as obvious as an ostrich's head
in the sand.

I know the questions will come in time.
They'll leak out and the quiet conflict
will be over.
Like debris from your storm littering
our driveway,
like old coffee from my cup staining
our countertops.
Together we will clean before company arrives, you with
your rake and I with my sponge.

Raven Daniels
Do you remember me?

Do you remember me? Bullies. The ones that called me stupid, ugly, repeatedly trying to instill in me that no one wants me.

But you come back to me and ask, "Can you help me with the homework?" Mmm... not stupid after all, huh?

Do you remember me? Teachers. The ones who recommended that I needed to be in special education classes and told my parents their child would not do well in college... Ha-ha, when you see me in the streets, your mouth drops when I say I'm in college.

Do you remember me? My so-called friends. You claimed that you will be my ride and die buddies, but instead you decided to betray me and spread rumors so no one would like me. You think you took my joy, but GOD fought my battle because you have to come back and cry on my shoulder because you got pregnant, your man left you, and I am the only person who respects and cares about you.

With GOD's guidance, I am able to get to the top in spite of negative comments, negative influence, and negative people.

As Beyoncé says, "Always stay gracious – best revenge is your paper."

Well, to all my haters, my revenge is my degree, which I am getting in May of this year.

Hollie Householder
Directions to Happiness

The lines on your face draw a map
Covering the expanse of your skin
Body wide and body long
My fingertips travel down highways
Of spine and back roads
Miles of mountains of bone
I get lost in the dips
Forests of body hair lined
Inner outer above below
No set destination but Here

Hollie Householder
The Beekeeper

My breasts belonging to the bees
Hives of love hiding
Buzzing in my belly
Veins becoming vacant
Spines spinning with wings
My groin a garden
Your hips, water
Make deep mud
Grow
Harvest me
Open my rib cage
Pull out my honey heart

Brian Gresham

To the Princess

Listen, my darling, and you shall hear
What I see in you when I've not had a beer.
When I said to you
How your eyes are imbued
With a scintillating shine
Surpassing all the stars combined,
Now I see that was a lie.
Daylight provides a better view.
When I saw that your lips were a richer red
Than I'd ever seen on a rose
I'd not a thought on my mind
But the warmth of your bed.
In my drunken prose,
I forgot to disclose
That I am colorblind.
Your steps are heavier than an angel's tread
When you glide, a swan has more grace.
There is nothing divine in the way you pace
The floor in my flannel threads.
Your face might launch one ship from its moors
But a thousand, I would doubt.
Perhaps a few more if you would wash out
The foundation that's clogging your pores.
Now, you blanch at this dose of reality
And have every reason for slapping me,
But show me the cost in what I say.
What beauty is lost or left unconveyed?
Breasts the peaks of mountains high
Would make poor rests for the head to lie.
And eyes as bright as the morning sun
Could not long be gazed upon.

A glass slipper,
Though it glittered,
Would have broken on the ballroom floor.
Cinderella
Should have met a fella'
Who saw the talent in her chores.
And one look at the annals of history
Should sway you from all royal fantasy.
Princes poisoned by arsenic, mercury, lead
Or debilitated slowly by generations inbred,
Are all you might find for your royal bed.
And if a courtly retinue attending to your toilet,
And beggars, thieves, and street latrines are not enough to
spoil it,
Just wait for a change of political scene
There's always the chance of the guillotine.
Yes, I know I'm an ass.
There's no need to pass
Such a judgement upon me.
Let's just raise a glass
And agree to bypass
This sad trap of hyperbole.

Ana Luna-Gutierrez
Jello

For the longest time I couldn't bear the thought of you,
Your reckless behavior really accentuated my anxiety
My repressive memory grew fond with the idea of you
But my age realized the anger than came within you
So I slowly remembered
I remembered the hate that fell upon your lips
I remember the coarseness that came out of your mouth
Your blistered hands felt the need to grab my skin and hold it until I
 turned a slight faint purple
That your fists felt accepted to hit again and again and again
Until I learned the errors of my ways
A very young impressionable child
Trying to figure out where I went wrong
Why I couldn't make you happy
Dad why was it so hard to make you happy?
And that question haunted me for years
And your abrupt dismissal left me
Unknowingly to where I'll end up

For the longest time I hated you
I woke up screaming from my memories of you
But . .
As I grew and as I matured
I've realized you were a victim as much as I
You knew the disposal of violence and dismay
The drinking gene crept up on you
Never revealing it runs your blood
As does it mine, revealing our connection

To an extent I pitied you
You grew weak in your shell as it decayed
But never once admitted its near death
You never called for help though you begged it with your eyes
I don't know where you are
I don't know how you are
I don't know if you're alive
But . . .
I do know I once thought of you
You are a gray matter, sir
You're more than what your layer is
You are complex
You're a continuous cycle of what your environment implemented
And although it's inexcusable, it's settling
My idea of you has shaped
You are neither solid nor liquid
No sir . . . you are a colloid
Suspended in your own repressed memories
And outburst emotions
And although you bathes in it
You bask in it
I refuse to be in it
I refuse to be jello-o.

Clark Jones
Doomed to this Course

Constant obstacles,
appealing to the eye
but terrifying to my soul.
Light merely glistens
on this cold, damned heart.
Every breath is a battle.
I fight these demons
only to remove myself
from the true evil inside.
At the lowest depths
of the ocean before me,
I have never sunk
into such a dark abyss.
That dancing beam I so long for
still seems miles away.
Where will I find dry land?
Will I find haven from the storm?
I see only one course
that will lead me to the destination,
if there is one...
Sunken and broken ships
lie before me on this path,
a vision of my fate.

Though I repeat the words
spoken from many tongues,
I'd rather drown in raging waves
than float adrift on an endless sea.

Clark Jones
Reckless Dreams of My Father

Reckless dreams of my father
left many all too alone.
Single mother set to be... alone.
My father never knew my name.
He never called to check.
He never saw me hit a homerun.
He was never there when needed the most.
Forced to become self-taught,
he never taught me sports or driving.
He never helped me get girls or go to college.
He never taught me how to do taxes.
My mother never spoke of him –
Too much pain would come of that.
All these things, so common for others,
I had never experienced in the presence of my father,
though his recklessness was defined by my selfishness.
My father's dreams were to leave me in a better world
to fight for freedom, though I did not ask.
Three months in my mother's womb
when he was called away.
Now his flag rests, gathering dust.
My father's dreams will live with me forever,
even though I never knew him at all.

Brinley Knowles
In Full Color

"I can just wait till high school."
"I can just wait till college."
"I can just wait till I can pay for school myself."
"I can just wait till college is over."
"I can just wait till I have a job."
"I can just wait till I can survive by myself."
The lies I tell to myself.
I try to convince myself all this hiding is worth it,
because in the long run someday you'll be here
and it will all be
okay.

Someday I'll meet you and I'll give up everything.
Nothing else will matter.
Right now, the world around me is
black and white,
but I dream in full color.
I dream about us in bright pastels.
I dream about telling my parents, unafraid of the consequences.
I dream about us in full color.
I dream about telling everyone.
I dream about us in full color.
I dream about us together in the North East
or in the West Coast.

They say never date a writer,
and I guess that's true.
Writers always write what we know, and what we know is
ourselves and those who surround us.
Most of my writing is about people from the past, but you are
my future.
But what will set you apart is that
hate and sadness will have no place in us.
Not then, not where we're living life in full color.
I dream about writing about happiness,
writing about life and love.
I dream about feeling like I can actually show you the words I
write about you.
I dream about us in full color.

Life and love,
two things I know you will teach me.
Making tea in the morning,
reading the Iliad in front of the fire,
sweaters on the beach,
warm Junes filled with happiness, and
three mini us.
I dream about seeing blue and green.
I dream about us unabashed and unafraid together burning:
red.
I dream about us in full color.

I dream about living a life full of color.
A life filled with bravery.
A life where I don't have to dream about what I want.
A life where I am with you.

Brinley Knowles
Ode to A Dark Achilles

I.
Maybe it's not you that I like,
maybe it's the idea of you I've created in my head clouded by
delusions.
It's just when I see you I reach for my pen,
longing to grasp the beauty in front of my eyes.
Write, write, write. I stare and wonder what it would be like to feel
you
or stare into the oceans in your eyes. I shut out the world and
imagine in my head how the constellations of my skin would look
flush
against the sky of yours.
What it would be like to have your hands roam,
to see the blemishes and what's left of
scars.
They lay under stars
four little streaks of white visible only when the light is right.
White.
My entire body is blank with only small traces of constellations and
stars.
I think of how my skin turns red in your presence or simply at the
thought of
you.
You're a dark and mysterious Achilles,
and yet
unknowable.
Am I your Briseis or your Patroclus? Or am I
nothing at all?
Nothing,
or at least that's how it seems to me.
You stole me in the way Achilles stole Briseis – unwanted, but not
refused.
I can see only you and the need to protect,
protect,
much like Patroclus' never ending love. But there I go again with
the delusions
as I attempt to capture what I feel:
write, write, write.
No words feel right, no matter how hard I try to
grasp you.

II.

When I first saw you my hands itched at my side.

Who are you? I asked the universe but got no response.

I was confused and angry at my lack of choice in our meeting. Time flew by

Monday

Tuesday

Wednesday

Thursday

Friday

Saturday

and I saw more of you.

The way your glasses stole attention from your cheekbones and jaw.

Write, write,

write.

I longed to paint you in words on a page as strong as the words you share with the world.

The words I want you to share with me.

And there it is:

the irony.

Do you see the loud but scared person covered in constellations, a permanent red tint, and

fire in her eyes?

We're so different and yet so

alike and that astounds me.

We share opinions

traits and a

star sign

yet the sense I look through is still smudged.

Words inside of me that I don't know surround you.

And I want to learn those words inside of you.

III.

You astound me, and yet I want to know your unknowable thoughts.

I want to tell you the stories behind my constellations and stars

but

I cannot find the words.

Am I yet to learn more of you

or will it stay like this?

Words flooding around me
as I try to
seal
what
I feel
about
you.
How can I speak when the only word left inside of me is
your name
Your name.
yyyour name?
Your name.

IV.
Names:
things people have questioned for centuries.
Do they really define us or are they just another thing our parents
decided at our birth?
Light.
That's what I think when I hear yours.
What do you see when you hear mine?
I am a burnt meadow waiting for the spring rain to cleanse me.
While you,
like Achilles,
are awaiting a crown appointed by a god. Beloved.
Write, write, write.
I never truly understood the words requited and unrequited until I
met you.
So where do I go from here? Do I
speak your name or do I
stay quiet
writing
afraid to tell you what I think I feel.
Or what I think I could feel:
more than fondness, but not quite love.
I think I could've married you,
but the week is long over and we are
far gone in more ways than
one.
Achilles you are.
At the same time everything I
want
and yet, dangerous.
I would die for you,
but we're both gone.
We're both gone.

The Liizard King
Box Plot I and II

I believe in nature and what I can touch
because I grew up thinking that I could find God in a box.
And golden Idols might still be something to avoid
If you don't want to end up as Satan's chew toy
And I was shown that saving my soul for all eternity
Required me not to fall asleep in the pews, and to get out of bed early.
Ringing bells and cardinals could lift you up,
But letting go is hard, even when you've had enough
And my mother had six kids who made it
But honestly I don't think she planned on it

And chances are, the church doesn't need my voice
And maybe not vouching for them will make this worse
But I don't remember drowning at my baptism
Or clawing my throat for air during that last hymn,
And maybe not remembering could have been worse,
But sometimes I wish I knew at least the last verse.

But I believe in nature and what I can torch
And suffering all my life isn't worth dying for
Gilded laurels and candles and yards of cloth are necessary, of course
if you want to find love, a new life or yourself or avoid war
There is a joy to be found that buildings cannot contain
Hidden like treasure in the woods and in others chests
And it's almost required that I thank them by name
And my fate has been spun by three women who know what's best
A hymn to a muse is what has taken shape,
And I will ask for forgiveness at no man's behest:

When I went to church, there was love, but also hate:
And I've chosen to embrace it instead of letting myself rot.
My gods walk among us, contained in flesh and softer places
Woods offers support, but it has the tendency to burn when things get
hot.

I didn't catch more than a rose
when they tossed the bouquet
And I left it in a safe place,
but my heart belongs in my own chest it seems,
deep in the woods and buried under lock and key
I carved many names into the gold laden lid,

but some were too deep and let in the rain
But the sunny times were nice too, but my heart sits guard,
deep in the woodlands, buried under what I need
We feel together as only fate can allow,
back and forth it passed like a tire swing,
when after we were too tired to swing
But my heart is kept in the oak keep, and it despise me
Maybe one day what I've planted will become a seed,
But as for these lonesome nights, it tortures me
And maybe someday, I'll let it out,
and it won't need to take root in every wayfaring stranger
and that empty chest will find a better use than to be empty,
sleeping beneath the trees, heavy under a borrowed lock and key

And this isn't the end, is it?
I'm carved from what I'm buried beneath
And maybe soon, the rains will come
and rot away what lays between
The part of me that beats and the part of me that needs to bleed
I'm hidden in the shadows, blessed by the rocks and weeds

The Liizard King
Hard to (b)reath(e)

I feel like if my heart weren't already broken
I could feel the fragments crumbling
But at this point, it's at a molecular level,
And I am turning to sand,
But I'm still around,
Clinging to the gaps
Like the soil in the path after a rain.

And I am sitting here in a seat I can't steer
After my brothers steering wheel
Collided with his chest
And I am waiting for my mom to notice
That I've lost weight
And that I can't seem to walk straight
And my sister herself hasn't had
A good night's sleep in days.

I am forcefully reminded of my loss
Because now my big brother walks
Like my Grandmother,
And I only have one of those anymore.

What I said was "Can you feel that?"
What I meant to say was "I'm so astounded that you're okay."
What I wanted to say was that I mean what I said.

The last time I saw my dad, he was in a hospital.
This is the first time I've seen my brother in a month,
My mother in two.

I've had four cars totaled by half as many brothers.
I'm listening to him walk closer now,
His wheels shrieking like a gurney.

I'm left here idling in a car,
Waiting for the next hammer to fall
Wondering which one will kill me next.

Lane Letner

Haikus

Squeaking and rattling,
Usual Volkswagen sounds,
Good roads and good vibes.

Warm air through my hair,
Drop-top Cadillac and the
Call of the desert.

Red eyes and big smiles,
Fleeting smoke rings and chip bags,
Wait. hold on, man. What?

Nostalgic music,
Rumbling of the road and tires,
Vibes of the road trip.

Amy Mann
Spaces

Closet.

We can close it, and close it, it close, it closes. Open but close. Open and close, open, and, close. It closes and opens. It's close to opening, and opening to close. When it is close to opening, you may be near. Our new maybe nearer. What hour is the nearest? Black most of time hidings the insides. Most of the hours hide the in sides. The sides, right, left, left, right, and up, down, down up. Write downtown; scattered thoughts hidden in the pile up. Does it hang up, is there a hang up, will you hang up? Clothes and calls and halls in the walls. Can we encounter?

Counter.

Hundreds of years ago, an appropriate title, the title? Does the title count? No more, but we're still counting. We count it all, count all, and count nothing. Mold is on my counter, but does that count for something? Speckles... a spectacle of inconvenience but beauty cover... cove holds mold, and organisms encased in the mantle. Mount? Creation.

Outer.

Is the outer out? Outer out. Outer not in insides. Outer in insides. Outer in, and outer insides. Still black? B lack and b lacking and blackening, still lacking b. Where is A? B is with A and A is with B. But where is space? Do we space it or s pace it? Can it be paced in s or only A or B, or B and A, or both or neither? Mar s and Venu s and S aturn and Uranu s. Spaces count or space s count?

My intestines contain dust from everything.

Amy Mann
you scare me brother

(you scare me brother)

Born two years after me,
I shared a house with you
my entire childhood.

As the older sibling,
it was me who brought the torture for years
as you then needed more attention than i
from our creators.
(jealousy, my part)

As we grew into the ages of adulthood,
new holes in the wall became old.
You held a vendetta against life the people of the home
couldn't understand.

in the distance, i shouted alone:

YOU SCARE ME BROTHER

Now, we rarely talk.

You hold up to the same standards as the creators of my
children.
No support, no effort to care for the lives you created with
these women.

(In retrospect, maybe that's a wise decision—
I don't know.)

(you scare me brother)

Jasmine Mans
Nicki Minaj

You are being traded paper in exchange for you to be plastic

All Dolls will evidentially malfunction

(I don't even know why you girls bother at this point like give it up, it's
me I win you lose)

Nicki Minaj

(It's me)

I must admit

(It's, it's me)

I have always been intrigued by your ass

I guess that's what the world looked like after falling from your
shoulders

(Like give it up)

You have the heartbeat of a suicide bomber

A baseline breathing out of your pulse

Your thighs play storage for the weight of the world

I dreamt that ou used to back packed, the lost raps, of Female MCs who
could not find their way out

the cipher

(It's just like I single handedly annihilated like every rape bitch in the
build)

Traded in your crown for unsharpened pencils and blank CDs

(Like give it up)

Do you ever feel a cord gripping on your neck, choke, spit?

Don't let this industry fuck the Assata out of you

(Harijuku-Barbie)

Can and will never be code for queen

You are a Queen no matter how many times they try to shuffle you back
in tape decks

Bi Sex, straight, you've earned my respect

(You da Bestest)

But I know your spine binds and crooke lines

And you can't seem to write a rhyme for your broken daughters

Slaughter, bent over back, ass cracked, bitch slapped, in videos

There is nothing pedal bike pretty about broken

Do you know what this media is trying to do to you?

They will porcelain
(Barbie)
Doll the shit out of you
Leave you noose necked hanging from Zion they will Lauryn Hill you
The mis-education of a Barbie doll coming soon
(I just had an epiphany)
 Barbie, I think NYC is making you forget you come from Queens
 It's scary when you have wack MCs trying to ghost write you obituary
 (You should buy a 16 cuz I write it good)
 Your existence is not recyclable to me
 (Barbie)
 Stop spitting me toy stories
 Of Woodys and Buzzlight Years who only come alive when no body is
 watching
Fake breast
 Once upon a time before puberty and tissue filled training bras all little
 girls wanted a toy chest
 What do you treasure? *
You have turned your G-spot into a land-mind
Dirty, disgusting
 We have been waiting centuries for a woman like you to carve your
 stiletto in history
This microphone is not a dildo so you are going to have to cum a little
harder than that
 (I, win, I win, you lose)
 Come a little harder for rap
 Too many women before you have laid down tracks - UNIT...Y?
So you wouldn't have to record your on your back
Spit some shit it for girls who kiss and got beat down to their backs
We will remember you for that
 Lips sync your screams and remember your inflections and copyright
 your raps
 MC
 (Barbie)
 For young money anyone can buy themselves their own (I'm Nicki
Minaj, Nicki Lewinski, Nicki Barbie, the boss)
 Crown, Vagina, Womanhood, and Talent
 All Sold separately
 (Barbie)
You are being stabbed in the back
Inserted with a wind up string and a tag?
(R, R, R, Roger that)

Beth Myers-Rees
Black & White: January 1961

Look at you holding me

Our silhouettes cast large and dark on the wall behind us
by the flash of Dad's Olympus
as he catches this Kodak moment

You are ahhing as I gibber

Oohing and cooing and gushing your new motherhood, while I,
too new to know, discover the brightness of your sweater . . .
the nubby wool of it under my fingers . . .
your sweet breath on my cheek

Dad's camera snaps another photograph

The stark brightness illuminating his makeshift bookcase;
tomes tightly packed on two board shelves under the sepia
sea painted on a canvas that hangs, in the same tan frame,
on my wall now

Look at you, twenty-two

Your gaze so soft, amazed at what you made. I, oblivious,
happily examine my surroundings. And Dad, the other half,
off-camera and in awe of we women; we mysterious, marvelous
women.

Beth Myers-Rees
Song

when songbirds migrate
it matters where you live
east or west of the route
 only locals sing
 quieting with the cold
northern places go silent
suddenly
the birds' destination gets a season of sound
every day
 every
 where
hard to separate
sound of the
 song of a thousand
 species
and en route
on winter days
it pays
to live near a stand of
 old growth
 on a ridgeline

when songbirds migrate
and a flock settles in the high tree tops
singing greetings after a long flight
 or getting their bearings
 mid-journey with a
clear view of the mountains from the
eastern edge of the route
some afternoons are
 made for porch-sitting
 just to listen

Rachael Scarbro

Alive

Gravity holds me
When I fly, I feel alive
Never touch the ground

Rachael Scarbro

Right in Front of Me

While I was looking
You were right there the whole time
Serendipity

Rachael Scarbro

Rushing Rain

Rushing rain drops skim my cheeks
Mother Nature's tears at full force
They blend into my own
Masking my anger and sadness
I find solace in the storm
Using cracks of thunder to hide my cries
But then the rain begins to slow
Beating with the sound of my own heart
Sun begins to dance like ballerinas through the clouds
Twisting and twirling
The warm rays brush my wet cheeks and they begin to dry
The warmth of light promises an end to this perfect storm

Hannah Sharp
Evening Primrose

I am
A soft green bud
Closed off to the world
Resilient and silent
Swaying in a light July breeze
'Til – the light of day
Is just a glimmer on
Outstretched hills –
Only then will I
Unravel, exposing
Vibrant yellow petals –
When there are no eyes to see –
And I will dance in
Moonlight before
Morning beams
Turn me inwards--
And I will cloak myself
Once again.

Hannah Sharp
Existential Crisis

what a troublesome
Paperclip – lying comatose
at the bottom
of my pencil case
holding Nothing together.

Hannah Sharp
Panic

No one was
watching me
in the dim and
foggy room where we were
all packed in together
like small and
smelly fish, sweat beading
on our faces.

I started drowning then--
in the middle of that
pop song. Standing between
two faces I had never seen.

There was an odd
light in my eyes
and my heart was
pumping-- too loud.

I staggered, my back finding
the uneven floor.

My insufficient lungs
begged for relief.

But oxygen
escaped them.

My head was filled
with water--
too
heavy
to lift.

Sharp

I think I can see death.

Then, nothing.

I wake up
like I do every
time-- not dead.

Not yet.

I hate my
own mind.

Tatyania Watts

Love

Love, a four letter word passed around like a flyer
Given the wrong person and it could be thrown in the
trash
Treasured by the right person & it could be passed around
like the title of times magazine
With you I felt that when you first gazed into my soul
The chills you sent ran right through my body, lighting
every dark part of me
This wasn't that ordinary word
Even though it had four letters it was filled with so much
meaning
It was patient
It was kind
It was slow to anger
It was warm
It protected me
It was understanding
And most importantly it was true

Matthew Whitehead

Insomnia

To dare to dream, perhaps, of sleep.
To one day find your eyelids heavy.
Your mind then quieted, still and weary.
But No! Not I.
I stare at the ceiling with eyes midnight bleary.
I hear the ticking watch and humming vent.
And ever more the snoring roommate taunts me,
Both with sleep an mumbled dreams.
These “quiet hours” both soothe and haunt me.
Oh sandman how have I slighted thee,
That laying here my thoughts yet vex me?

Matthew Whitehead
On Being Lost

The benefits of being lost.
They say:
“Not All Who Wander Are Lost”
But what about those who are?
What of those who wander to lose themselves
Or those seeking the lost spaces and forgotten places of
the world?
What of those who wander lost places,
Searching their souls with each meditative step?
Is there not value in being lost?
Not all who are lost yearn to be found.

Should you find me, join me.
Should you seek me, lose yourself.
Wander for awhile more.
Take some time from your search
In its stead, just explore.
Wander places old yet new,
Forgotten cities and abandoned shores.
Places mossed, and ruined structures claimed for dens.
Where saplings grow from rotted floors,
And life continues from collapse.
Open your soul, find the door.
You are lost now, and have found me.

Jay Wilson
Stop

You mustn't dwell.
Don't overthink.
It's over now.
You made mistakes.

She won't come back.
She's got a man.
And you know that;
You understand.

Still your heart aches.
You don't know why.
Thinking of her
Still makes you cry.

It will hurt less,
You're sure, with time.
But it's been long,
And you're not fine.

You leave her be.
You love her so.
Her happiness
Comes first, you know.

But if you could
Just hit rewind,
Fix your mistakes,
What would you find?

Jay Wilson
Thoughts

I had a thought the other day;
a Memory long past.
And though I know it's said and done,
it lingers and it lasts.

It started off as something Small
I thought I could ignore.
But one thing seemed like something else
and at once became More.

It's More than my mind wants to think,
so it starts Shutting Down.
It's more than my heart wants to take –
Blocks Out all things around.

Breathe in and out, push it back Down.
Now everything is Fine.
Tread cautiously, however, since
these Thoughts swell in my mind.

I know that I should deal with them,
but I'm just not sure how.
Maybe, some day, I'll let them go.
I will... just not right now.

Jay Wilson
Unexpected Love

I see you there, across the room,
And it seems like it's fate.
You're golden, glowing in my eyes,
And I can hardly wait.

You are the sweetest one I've seen.
Your warmth was a surprise.
I'm hardly complaining though;
You're perfect in my eyes.

Beautifully round and comforting,
Everything I adore.
You are delicious on my lips;
You have me craving more.

There have been others, yes it's true,
But none of them compare.
You're the best chocolate chip cookie
I've had anywhere.

The Students of English 349
I Admit I Was Wrong: Exquisite Corpse

I admit I was wrong
Towering trees peek in the windows on a Monday afternoon
Four drops of a two-liter Coke are usable for humanity
It all boils down – concentrating itself
Pale, peach lip gloss tulips, untouchable
A red beard laughs at a red dog
1899-1973
Chamomile and hilarity and some divine chemotherapy
And the sky fell heavily down
So much depends upon a good night's sleep
And I danced on a constellation, my tiptoes on the stars
Exploring the unspoken savagery of silently disowning one's satisfaction
Poisonous purple plants – where's the nearest liquor store?

Part IV

Community Spotlight

Community Spotlight *Maryville College Alma Mater Project*

The Alma Mater Project idea was created by Ben Wicker, an MC alumnus of the Class of 2003. The concept of a group tattoo project had been shared with Ben in 2004 while at the University of South Florida. At that time, he was made aware of a project called *Skin* by Shelley Jackson. He had been contemplating an MC tattoo for some time, but did not want an athletic tattoo necessarily and, upon remembering *Skin*, thought that applying the same concept to the College's Alma Mater would be great. The music and words were always very impactful to him as a student and still are as an alumnus and staff member.

The media coverage of the project started with a *Highland Echo* article by participant and writer, Evy Linkous. This article, because of a relationship the Echo had at the time with *USA Today College*, was picked up on their front page. With that, local media outlets WVLT-channel 8 and *The Knoxville News-Sentinel* covered the story of the project. I was also contacted for a story by a student reporter at *The Daily Orange* at Syracuse University. As the project was drawing to an end and the gallery was up in the Clayton Center's *La Dolce Vita* gallery, *The Daily Times* and *The Highland Echo* did additional stories.

The gallery, displaying 40 photographs of the tattoos, was up on display beginning at Maryville College's Homecoming events in 2016 until just after J-Term of 2017. The photos on these pages are the same that were displayed in the gallery, many just cropped to see the detail of the tattoos. A special thanks to MC student Rachel Britt for helping to edit and format the photos.

Maryville College Alma Mater Project
by the numbers...

39 – Total number of participants who got tattooed

22 – Number of interested participants who had to back out of the project

388 – Number of people in the project Facebook group

9 – Number of members of the Class of 2015 who participated, the most of any class

9 – Number of participants who chose this project as their first tattoo

15 – Number of participants who got their project tattoos at Studio 617 in Maryville, TN

14 – Number of current or former MC Athletes who participated in the project

3 – Number of each, Homecoming Queens and Kings, who participated in the project

13 – Number of MC Class years that participated, ranging from 2002 – 2019

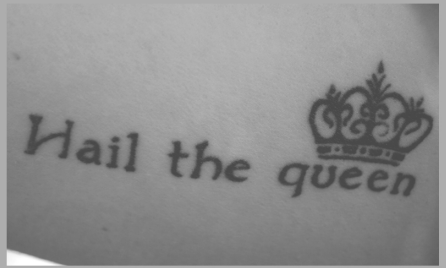
Athletic teams/groups represented: Soccer, Volleyball, Football, Tennis, Basketball, Softball, Cheerleading, and Dance Team

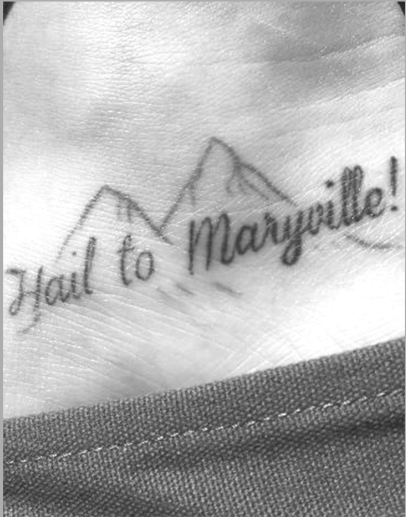
Campus organizations represented: SGA, SPB, APO, SLK, Highland Echo, Chilhowean, RAs, Up 'til Dawn, Bonner Scholars, Judicial Board, Peer Mentors, GSA, LSA, BSA, Ambassadors, Study Abroad, RHA, Bradford Scholars, Kappa Delta Pi, ODK, Sigma Delta Pi, Mountain Challenge, EAT, Alpha Gamma Sigma, Literacy Corps, ALANA Scholars, Sigma Tau Delta, FCA, Tri-Beta, Circle K

Impressions









Orange, Garnet,

float forever.

Ensign of our hill

Hail to thee,

our Alma Mater,

Hail to
Maryville



CONTRIBUTORS' NOTES

Contributors without notes

This issue of *Impressions* is overflowing with works of art created by an incredibly talented group of artists. In an effort to include as many quality works as possible in Volume 43, the editorial staff regrets not having the time and resources to gather and include notes from every contributor to this magazine.

Black Student Alliance

BSA is proud to be a part of Impressions 43rd Edition of the Magazine. Starting out as an African American support group to being the storefront of diversity on Maryville College's campus, the Black Student Alliance has branched out to become one of the most active organizations on this campus and this community. Amongst the other minority groups on campus, BSA has remained the longest-running organization on Maryville College's campus.

Our annual Black History Month Poetry Night has been around for the past 5 years; however, this is the first time we have collaborated with Impressions. Thank you to the staff of Impressions and to all who performed at the Black History Month Poetry Night!

Wesley Blevins

Wes is a senior with a major in English Literature. He enjoys jazz music, noodles of any sort, and creating an average of two new universes in his head every week. Wes is also a member of Sigma Tau Delta.

Chandler Chastain

Chandler Chastain is from Signal Mountain, TN. She is a runner and Writing Communication major. She loves books, long walks in the woods, and dogs.

Sarah Hensley

Sarah Hensley is a Writing Communications and English double major in her third year at Maryville College. She hopes one day to become a novelist.

Hollie Householder

Hollie Householder is a junior who is studying Writing and Communications with a minor in Sociology. She collects lost keys and buttons, and nothing makes sense.

Albrianna Jenkins

Writing Communications Major, Class of 2018. Words to live by:
"Either write something worth reading or do something worth writing."
-Ben Franklin

Clark Jones

I am in my third year at Maryville College. I major in marketing with a minor in writing communications. The poems I have submitted are all free verse works that I have written at different times in my life, explaining my views on various subjects.

The Liizard King

A sophomore Writing Communication major at Maryville College.

Brinley Knowles

Brinley Knowles is a double major in Writing and History from Media, PA. She loves reading and writing stories. She's also involved in the LGBTQ+ Alliance and some other clubs. When she's not studying or writing in her eno, you may find her knitting or watching Yuri!!! on Ice! Find her on twitter here: @brinlliance1

Natasha Kollett

Natasha is a senior majoring in Writing Communication with a minor in art-photography. Natasha enjoys hiking, rock climbing, and almost anything outdoors. When she's not outside, she's either writing creative fiction or watching Netflix.

Liz Lane

A sophomore at Maryville college studying writing communication and minoring in music, currently working on publishing two science fiction and fantasy books and one book of poetry.

Lane Letner

A Maryville College junior and English major.

Ana Luna-Gutierrez

Ana Luna-Gutierrez is a 19-year old Writing Communication major and Environmental Science minor who enjoys watercolor painting, poetry, and naps. She interns as the art editor for Impressions Magazine and a student in Publications. She has been painting and doing art in general since she could crawl, but has been focused on mentoring it within the past year. She hopes to be an editor for a creative arts publisher as well as a published author and mentor (with time to do research in the field!) in the near future! She believes that art is beauty and life should be entwined by it.

Amy Mann

Amy Mann is a junior at Maryville College, majoring in English literature. She graduated from Pellissippi State in Spring 2016 with an Associate of Arts degree; she also received the nomination for the English Outstanding Graduate Award and was a member of Phi Theta Kappa. She has two daughters and has resided in Lenoir City, TN since 2012.

Nadia Marrero-Silva

Nadia is a junior graphic design major at Maryville College.

Sajj Miller-Wildsmith

My name is Sajj Miller-Wildsmith. I am Executive Assistant of Admissions here at Maryville College. I am a proud mother of two wonderful boys and grammie to one!

Art has been a part of my journey since I was a little girl and is a huge part of my life. I have always been fascinated with abstract and the ways in which people interpret what they see. I am inspired by so many things, nature, other art, uniqueness. I especially love small details with ink. I have worked in many different media from painting with oils and acrylics (which are my favorite) to textile art. I have made handbags from old clothing which I have sold on the Art Walk here in Maryville at Razberries, and I love to paint on old doors that I repurpose. My latest adventure is an acrylic of the Green Tara Bodhisattva that I am putting on an old closet door.

I have also been commissioned over the years to do murals for local businesses such as SACC in Knoxville and Wah Lum Kung Fu in Knoxville as well. I have sold my art at craft fairs including the Maryville College Fall Craft Sale a couple years ago where I sold jewelry and head scarves that I made.

To me, art is an expression of self. When I am filled with ideas for something artistic, I let it flow however it needs to and in whatever form moves me at the time, and I believe that everyone has that within themselves.

Beth Myers-Rees

A senior, non-traditional transfer student majoring in Writing Communications, Beth recently became a grandmother and is sending her youngest child off to Tulane in the fall.

Brandi Payne

Brandi Payne is an 19-year old Design major who enjoys illustration and comics. She works as the Maryville College Design Lab intern, and she also draws the gag comic Raising Hell, which appears in the Highland Echo. Brandi's ultimate goal is to work in the animation or comics industry, but she supposes that, for now, graphic design is pretty cool, too.

Chandler Rhea

Chandler Rhea is a senior at Maryville College majoring in English Literature. She is a native of the Maryville area and enjoys reveling in local history and scenic beauty. Her works are contributed in memory of her loving parents, Douglas and Amanda Rhea.

Rachael Scarbro

My name is Rachael Scarbro. I am 22 years old and I am a junior here at Maryville College. I transferred in as an out of state student and began majoring in Writing Communication with a minor in Business. In my free time I love to hike and camp.

Hannah Sharp

Hannah is a senior majoring in Writing/Communications. She enjoys reading, writing, spending time with her family, and obsessing over

Game of Thrones. “When people call people nerds, mostly what they’re saying is ‘You like stuff,’ which is not a good insult at all. Like you are too enthusiastic about the miracle of human consciousness.” -John Green

Haleigh Smith

A junior studying Writing Communications.

Matthew Whitehead

Sometimes being lost isn’t a bad thing, and sometimes in finding someone you also find yourself. I am still lost and looking, hiding and yearning for discovery. There is more to it than this, but this is all I have expressed. Please continue searching, your author is wandering another labyrinth.

Ben Wicker

Ben Wicker is an MC alumnus of the Class of 2003 and current MC staff member. The *Alma Matter* project began with reaching out to MC-related folks via social media in the fall of 2015. The response was immediate and overwhelming. Once the method and division of the lyrics were decided upon, I began accepting participants for the 39 portions of the project. Everyone had to agree to have a tattoo that was legible and willing to be photographed. Aside from that, I did not want to be too restrictive as tattoos are such a personal idea to folks, and I wanted to see how folks’ creativity and personalities came out through the tattoos they chose to get.

Jay Wilson

My name is Jordan and I am a sophomore at Maryville College. I am currently majoring in Writing Communications. I’m not exactly the best poet in the world but it’s pretty fun and I enjoy it.

Taylor Williams

Hi! My name is Taylor Williams. I am a second year student at Maryville College. Although I’m majoring in biology, I am fascinated with all things art. Creating something out of nothing is what I live for.

And if you want any more information I have an art website: <http://taylorbwilliams.weebly.com/>.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

The editors and staff of *Impressions* wish to thank the following for their assistance and contributions to this issue, without whom it would have been impossible:

Christina Seymour, for her support and encouragement as our faculty advisor;

Carolyn Potter, for her assistance with anything the *Impressions* staff needed throughout the school year;

Ben Wicker and the participants of the Maryville College Alma Mater Project for contributing their vision and ink to the magazine;

BSA for including open mic contributions from *Impressions* and for submitting their prose and poetry for publication;

MC Security, for their help with the annual *Impressions* bonfire in October;

Vienna Coffee House in downtown Maryville for the use of their stage to present an *Impressions* spoken word open mic, hopefully the first of many to come;

the students of English 216, for their hard work in both semesters of the 2016-2017 school year;

and the contributors of the prose, art, and poetry published herein, without whom there would be no *Impressions*.