



**WINDHOVER**

**VOLUME 60**

# WINDHOVER

Cover artwork by Julia Smith

*I caught this morning morning's minion, king-  
dom of daylight's dauphin, dapple-dawn-drawn Falcon, in his riding  
Of the rolling level underneath him steady air, and striding  
High there, how he rung upon the rein of a wimpling wing  
In his ecstasy! then off, off forth on swing,  
As a skate's heel sweeps smooth on a bow-bend: the hurl and gliding  
Rebuffed the big wind. My heart in hiding  
Stirred for a bird, – the achieve of, the mastery of the thing!*

*Brute beauty and valour and act, oh, air, pride, plume, here  
Buckle! AND the fire that breaks from thee then, a billion  
Times told lovelier, more dangerous, O my chevalier!*

*No wonder of it: shéer plód makes plough down sillion  
Shine, and blue-bleak embers, ah my dear,  
Fall, gall themselves, and gash gold-  
vermilion.*

## **THE WINDHOVER**

Gerard Manley Hopkins



**WE ARE NC STATE'S  
LITERARY AND ARTS  
MAGAZINE  
STRIVING TO SERVE  
THE CREATIVE**

# **MIS**

# **SI**

# **DO**

**COMMUNITY OF NC STATE BY  
ANNUALLY PUBLISHING STUDENT  
ART, FILM, MUSIC, POETRY, AND  
PROSE. OUR GOALS ARE TO  
PROVIDE A WELCOMING**

**ENVIRONMENT FOR  
OUT-OF-THE-BOX THOUGHT  
AND A PLATFORM FOR  
NCSU ARTISTS TO DISPLAY  
THEIR WORK.**

# **N**

I wrote last year that Windhover is a mirror I hope everyone can see themselves in. In selecting pieces and compiling our book this year, I've come to realize that it's a series of windows as well.

Art separates the artist from the rest, but I believe that art is not, and should not, be a separative or isolating force. Art and literature, to the creative artist and the witness alike, are our connective tissue. They are two of the few things that so transparently allow us to see our identities reflected in raw, real, and relatable ways. By consuming someone else's work, empathy is stirred in us— only if we open up to it. We are able to step outside ourselves and gain perspective on the experiences of others, and that perspective is fundamental. We must remember that we can't exist without others. In a time when we find ourselves itching to be alone just to prove we can be, art continues to show us that we are not wholly unique or independent from the world and shouldn't strive so hard to be.

One of the best parts of Windhover, to me, is its accessibility. It's a place where editors, designers, and those who are passionate about art don't face a barrier to entry when joining and creating with us. Thank you to everyone who has joined our team and believed in our mission even when the plans weren't fully fleshed out or the brainstorming sessions were long and unorganized. I came into Windhover knowing nothing about editing or leading, and

learning it all alongside such a fun group of people has been the highlight of my past four years. Thank you, again, to every member of our staff and our volunteers who have dedicated time and passion to making this book happen. Thank you also to our NC State Student Media advising staff, and especially to our adviser, Ray Black. Above all else, thank you for believing in Student Media and every person who finds their way into our offices, no matter how they walk through the doors.

With this year's Windhover, we wanted to prioritize bold, diverse work that gives a loud voice to the messages of NC State's students and alumni. Most importantly, though, we wanted to have fun and create something playful as a team that has grown so much together. What you see in this book is the result of hard work and long days and nights, but it's also the product of having fun creating something in collaboration with one another and every artist featured here. Art lets us continue to believe in ourselves as people who can create something from absolutely nothing; it reminds us that we have the capacity to be creative without an assignment or a rubric.

The works in this book, and art everywhere, are reaching out to draw you into someone else's experience; to push you, to move you toward action for justice and deeper understanding. Let them, and see what might come of it!



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**MOTH**  
ELIZABETH WHETZEL



They say the moon turns pink  
for strawberry season,  
rosy-cheeked, sweet and full-

but on the edge of the world  
in the Carolina bog, she burns  
a fierce red like the hungry  
maw of opening flytraps,

fighting the cold silt and sludge  
of messy marshland night, her  
ruddy face howling, gaudy in its anger  
as it slides inevitably away  
into squalid oblivion.

Somewhere, something is decaying  
and something is being born.  
The creatures of the bog sing anyway,  
sharp reedy pipes from bug-eyed frogs  
coupling with the flat drone of swarming  
bloodlust  
into a vulgar chorus. I take a peek  
in the opening venus mouths  
lining the acid peat-floor and see  
the exoskeleton of a fly sucked dry,  
the vibrant green of a tiny carnivore  
straining to be crushed beneath my feet.

Up where the sounds of the bog  
do not reach, that sweet red eye stares  
down at us all, no more alive  
than the stone I stand on, but  
just as hungry, and for once  
I think, I understand-

It is all life, somewhere.  
I belong here the same way  
my blood belongs in my flesh  
and my flesh belongs in the earth, and I  
could sing with the frogs or lie  
empty among the worms, and  
it would be no different.

**KAIRAVI GARDÉ**

# FLYTRAP MOON

# CAPTIVE BOLT

JACKSON CONNOR

**W**hen Chris first got this job, his mama had made a face and asked him if he hated pigs, as if hatred of some animal based on nothing more than some abstract human concept of what made a pig a pig could drive someone far enough that they would make their whole life about killing them.

"I don't hate pigs, mama," Chris said, loosening the collar of his button down shirt, the smell of floral perfumes and strawberry hard candies stuck to the collar. He leaned forward and snatched a piece of bacon from the griddle. The meat was still soft, a tad rubbery, on the side of just barely safe to eat. "But I do like bacon, and someone's gotta kill the pigs to make this happen." His mama reached out to smack his hand, then sighed and turned her attention back to the griddle. She pushed the remaining bacon closer together, unflinching as the grease popped and sizzled with the movement.

"I guess. But isn't it sad, taking care of them just to kill them? They don't even know, Chrissy, they don't even know." She shook her head, mumbling to herself as she turned over the bacon on the griddle. "Poor babies, they don't even know."

"You'll get used to the smell."

That's what Daniel, the barn manager, told Chris with a slap on the back when the young man stepped into the barn for the first time. The smell, somewhere between vomit and bacon, citrus and sulfur, invaded his entire being. Even after leaving and two long, consecutive showers, Chris still smelled. Day after day, week after week, month after month, Chris could never get rid of the pig smell. It was constantly there, hiding in the back of his sinuses, the forever after-scent of everything he smelled. He had taken to sitting in the very back of the chapel on Sundays, head hung low, embarrassed that even after getting up at four just to shower, he still couldn't get rid of that stubborn scent of fermented shit.

Chris started working on the pig farm two years ago, and still, every morning at six, when he walked into the barn, his nose curled and he shook his head as if that would be able to clear the air of the stink marinating on the concrete floor for over forty years. Maybe, in another two years, he would be "used to it".

Part of Chris' job was to walk up and down the aisles every morning, checking the pens for dead pigs and low feed. The grunts and barks of future hams and pork chops and sausages and bacon greeted him, raising their heads from where they were all huddled together, laying one on top of the other, shuffling their feet as Chris got closer to peer inside of the feeders.

When this batch of pigs first arrived,

barely two months old and just over fifty pounds, they all scurried away from Chris whenever he so much as looked at them too long. The bravest of their hoard would sometimes inch forward when it thought Chris wasn't looking, get close enough that it could just about stretch its head and move its wet nose against the leg of his coveralls. As soon as Chris turned, or knelt down to scratch its head as if it were just some curious mutt coming to say hello, the thing would squeal, offended at being perceived, and bound quickly away to the safety of the group. Once they got older, filled out the pen more and started to challenge Chris in weight, more of them would start to crowd around him, rooting at his pockets, biting at his boots, moving in between his legs and allowing him to pet them—sometimes. They were funny like that, and at times, Chris found it hard not to get attached to the particularly funny ones.

During his first year, he grew close to a Hampshire cross, a red one that bordered on orange, a single band of white across its belly, as if it were wearing clothes. Whenever it saw Chris, the thing would snort then jump around its pen like a fawn bounding through the fields, ending at the gate, where it would push its snout between the bars. Chris had taken to feeding it, first feed from the floor, then oranges from his lunch, and then some chocolate from his pocket, melted and hardened several times over, resulting in a weird shape difficult to open.

He liked the innocence of the pig; it wasn't like a cat or a dog, who would look at you first, judging your intentions, before hesitantly approaching, sniffing the food, questioning it, then finally deciding to take it. The Hampshire would lean forward, open its long mouth, and use its nose to move the food toward it, chewing happily on whatever he had to offer. Pigs didn't question things like a cat or a dog; they didn't even have to particularly trust you to accept what you offered—it just had to be something.

When the Hampshire reached six months, Chris was handed a bolt gun. "Make an X from the base of the ears to the eyes and right there—" Daniel pressed a finger against the forehead of the Hampshire, right on a curl of wiry red hair. "That's where you'll place the bolt gun and pull the trigger." The Hampshire didn't squeal as its snout was restrained; the thing only grunted, sniffing forward, looking towards Chris expectantly to see what he had to offer.

He pressed the muzzle of the bolt gun against the Hampshire's head and looked it in the eyes. It was the least he could do.

Chris got home in the evenings. His current pigs were nearing the end of the finishing

stage and would soon be slaughtered, their carcasses sent to a plant to be processed. There wasn't much more work to be done with them aside from making sure they were healthy. The brunt of his work came from helping out with the other farm chores: cleaning the aisles, incinerating the dead, hauling feed from the storage barn to the silo. By the time the day was done, Chris used his last bit of energy to shower. All he could manage after was to settle on the couch with a room temperature beer and half of a reheated pizza.

Turning on the TV, Chris had a strange sense of déjà vu. His feet kicked up on one of his mismatch furniture, a beer in hand, and dressed in nothing more than flannel underwear, he was transported back nearly twenty years ago, when his daddy occupied the same position.

His daddy worked a similar job to the one Chris had now, the kind of unskilled labor that parents used to scare their kids into doing well in school, the people you would see on the side of the road, digging up old tarmac concrete, driving heavy machinery up and down up and down up and down long stretches of highway, forever working on one endless project. By the time he came home from work, all he wanted to do was eat and watch TV; it was how he kept up with everything, his daddy said, since he couldn't keep up with it at work. The only time his mama would let Chris watch TV with his dinner was when his daddy was watching the news, the only thing besides sports that the man used the TV for.

His mother didn't like the news; she said it was too sad, that it only ever talked about the bad in the world. She was the type of woman who stood outside Planned Parenthoods and cried, holding her "Protect Life" sign high and proud as women passed her, heads down, eyes averted. "I'll pray for you," she would shout as they scurried inside, and "Your baby could have done great things!" as they left the clinic. That, she told Chris once, was her full time job. After standing outside all day, she didn't want to have to listen to any more sad news. The information on the screen now was much the same as it had been all those years ago, when Chris got to join his father in the living room, TV tray sat across his crisscrossed legs, cradling the couple ounces of beer his father poured for him when his mother wasn't looking, a finger against his grinning lips. This was how he bonded with his father; the weekends were too precious to spend at Saturday morning baseball or Sunday evening flag football so the news was all they had.

Every night at eight, the Patrick and Sarah hour would start. Over the years, Patrick

and Sarah changed, completely replaced with a new man and woman every decade or so, but the name stayed the same and every night they would begin their job of updating the public of what happened in government that day.

Chris' generation's Sarah was a blond woman in a smart red suit and perhaps a touch too much filler. It wasn't enough to be distracting, but it was enough to be noticeable; her face full while the rest of her body was as slim as it could get. Her co-host wasn't much better, with grey hairs disappearing and reappearing each and every time he appeared on camera. Chris figured they were both pushing their limit of being commercially; him at almost seventy and her just over twenty-five.

"You know what I've realized, Patrick?" said the Sarah. "The democrats aren't trying to compromise for the betterment of the American people, and they never have. The President and his cabinet proposed a policy that would not only decrease the federal debt but decrease the taxes owed by everyday citizens, and what was the response of the democrats? Outrage." The Sarah glanced at the camera

attention back to the news and he would watch, shaking his head, muttering about what this world was coming to before the topic would change to something he was less interested in, and he would relax back into the couch, scrolling on his phone again until his eyelids grew heavy.

"We are closing operations as soon as we finish with our current pigs; whatever your assignments are right now those will be your last." The conference table barely fit in the small office that served as both meeting and lunch room; the sixteen men around it sat elbow to elbow. The table that had rattled with the shake of anxious knees at the beginning of the meeting was still. They sat in unanimous silence as they took in Daniel's words. The swine farm, an offshoot of a much bigger operation that dealt primarily in cash crops, lost its contract with the government to supply the nearby military base with pork in return for financial assistance

Someone's alarm went off, and the dam of silence broke, the anxious voices of bread winners, the hard-to-employ, the newly emancipated pushing at the walls, flooding the room that already struggled to contain a plain table.

## "WHERE ARE WE SUPPOSED TO WORK?"

with a self-aggrandizing smirk on her face, tapping the edges of her papers on the desk.

Patrick wagged his finger in agreement. "And that's why there is so much divide in this country. I mean, there are some things we're bound to disagree on, right? But getting rid of debt and lower taxes? I mean, I'm not mad, are you?" He asked the question to the camera, pausing, waiting for the call-and-response bit to be completed by the viewers at home.

Chris pulled out his phone, opening whichever social media app was most recent in his tabs, and started to scroll. Patrick and Sarah became background noise. He turned the TV on out of habit, but he hardly tuned into what they were actually saying. Every now and then something particularly outrageous—the government lying, illegals killing citizens, men in women's sports—would bring Chris'

Chris stared straight ahead at Daniel, forcing him to make eye contact with his decision. "My pigs are done in a week. Where do I go? What do I do?"

More voices joined in, lamenting their concerns: I make all the money in the house, my wife's on disability, my kid needs new clothes, school supplies, food, hungry hungry mouths to feed. Daniel shrugged. "What are any of us going to do?"

Before the farm, Chris worked construction with his father. His mama had pushed for him to go to college, but Chris stubbornly refused; he didn't like school, school didn't like him, and if a fancy degree didn't mean shit to his father, then it didn't mean shit to him.

Chris had hardly worked there six months before he was fired in an effort to down-size the company. Seven years later of

working odd-jobs car-wash wai-ter fry-cook and Chris finally had something steady—steady enough that he could move out of his childhood bedroom, the twin size comforter on a full mattress older than him, the walls a patch-work of hormone spikes from his teens and embarrassingly recent, the carpet turned to rice-paper hardwood. His new place wasn't much better than the place he grew up in; in many respects, it was worse, but it was his. His shithole apartment, located squarely on the side of town that decent folk avoided even during the daylight hours, with its one bedroom and small kitchenette, a fancy word for one slab of wood next to an easy-bake oven that only sometimes worked, its yellow walls and ceiling and floor, stained the mystery stains on the carpet that seemed to move in the dark; this was all something Chris could barely afford.

The pigs barked and grunted as Chris made his way through the aisles, unable to control his hands. They clenched and unclenched, he contorted his fingers into the worst positions he could manage, heard the pops of his joints and tried to push further. Weeks: that was how much time he had until he would be unemployed again. How much longer until he was homeless, and back at home?

Mama would be happy, at least, to have Chris living back at home. His daddy would grumble about it for a few days, weeks, months maybe, but then they would just settle back into their routine of Chris doing whatever employment his mama suggested, his daddy's jabs about how when he was his age, he was married and working and about to buy a house, and their nightly routine of watching Patrick and Sarah, his daddy's commentary punctuating the important points, making sure Chris was soaking it all in.

The sound of Chris kicking a metal gate reverberated throughout the barn, starting up a cacophony of barks and grunts and squeals as the pigs moved around, crawling over one another, hitting against the feeders, climbing on the fencing. Not all of them moved. "Shit."

As herd manager Chris had one job above all else: keep as many pigs alive and healthy until shipping day. A pig could die for any number of reasons: They were squished by a pen mate, they were too cold, too hot, something spooked them so bad they had a heart attack. Each dead pig meant a dock in the farm's expected pay out, calculated by the number of pigs each herd started with. This one marked the second pig Chris had lost, and the icing on his wonderful cake of a day.

The wheels of the carcass cart squeaked behind him as Chris dragged it from

the corner and into the pen. The pigs clamored around him, those in the adjacent pens sticking their noses through the bars to get a better look at who was lucky enough to have such a fun novel object enter their space. He swatted at those that chewed at his coveralls, his boots, the cart—until he found his hand had no effect, and let them be with the occasional empty kick when their bites grew too adventurous.

Pink skin turned muddy green, the dead pig lay at the end of the pen, stretched out in the corner. Chris knelt by the body, ignoring the nips and nudges and bites from the living pigs around him.

He pressed a hand against the flank

## —COLD, ELASTIC;

it had probably died last night. It was a wonder to Chris that its pen mates hadn't already taken the liberty of sampling the corpse, muse over the flavors of fermented grain and ammonia, then go in for another taste; they bit at him enough that Chris expected one of their own wouldn't fare any better, especially when it lacked the function to defend itself.

The dead pig's eyes stared up at him, blue, glassy, gazing through him, and Chris stared back at himself, watching his reflection work to move the 300 pound corpse onto the cart. In church they talked about how all life was precious, but Chris had always gotten a sense that some life was more precious than others. A baby over a mother, a citizen over an alien, a human over an animal. Maybe to pigs as well, the life of a pen mate meant enough to them that they did not disturb its final rest with their curiosity—or maybe they had their fun during the night, when its life first left its body, and what Chris was witnessing now was not a strange sort of reverence, but disinterest, the left overs of fun already had.

From Chris' point of view, the pigs had very little camaraderie amongst them. They lived together, ate together, died together, but they didn't act together: they acted in accordance with their own wills. A pig would chow down happily while in the next pen over, barely hidden from sight, one of its own was being hammered through the skull, spasming as its body lost control—and the other pig would just eat, eat, eat, ignoring the violence directly next to it. To the pig that had the food, the thought that crossed its mind: surely, that would never happen to me.

The body had to be incinerated; a pig that died before the gun only ever met the fate of the flames. For the next few hours, the whole barn would have the scent of burning pork



## FORGOTTEN HOME MILO CICCONE

added to the persistent fragrance of ammonia and fermented corn and oats, creating a weird collage of aromas that confused the nose on whether to find the scent manageable or stomach churning. Chris pressed the button on the incinerator and watched as the flames started up, bright orange before blue and white, grabbing the body with its tendrils, stripping away the mud, the hair, the skin, the flesh. The smell was more sour than last time, like spoiled cheese and cat piss mixed together with rotten eggs, scrambled and served with a side of ketchup.

That's how his mom made eggs, with milk and cheese and a squirt of lemon juice, a squiggly line of ketchup over top. It was his favorite part of Sunday mornings, when she would make a big brunch for the three of them, sometimes enough to bring left overs to the older ladies of her church. They loved it when Chris would come with her, handing out the pre-made plates as they

fawned over him, telling him all about what he could be when he grew up: an actor, a model, a firefighter, a police officer, a good strong boy that would make his mama proud.

The grunts and barks of the pigs called Chris back to the present, aware now of the intense heat on his face. He turned away from the machine and made his way back into the room to check the feeders.

"The American unemployment rate is the lowest in years, thanks to efforts by the current administration," Sarah began as the title card swept across the screen, just under where Patrick and herself were sitting at a white, circular table, a stack of paper in each of their hands.

"This is good news for all Americans, even those who repeatedly bash the president for doing his job efficiently. If you hate him so much, then stop reaping the benefits of his administration! Poverty rates are set to be slashed in half due to measures he introduced,

yet the democrats would rather whine and complain about not getting their way than see what good the president is actually doing for this country." Patrick shook his head in disbelief, pausing a moment for a breath, and then continuing on with his tirade about how those unsupportive of the country should leave, and allow the president to do his job without dissent.

The TV continued on in the background. Chris turned the volume down a few clicks so he could hear his daddy better. "I lost my job today, daddy." "What? How'd you manage that? Unemployment's going down, not up son! You'd have to be an idiot to get fired now." "I don't know, dad."

In the back of the call, Chris barely made out the sound of his mama's voice. "Argh, hold on, your mother wants to talk to you, too," his dad grumbled as he fumbled with the phone, the two voices of his parents soft and far away as they struggled to figure out speakerphone.

"Hello? Chrissy, can you hear me?" "Yeah, mama, I can hear you." "How'd you lose your job?" His mama asked, her voice wet and heavy with concern, dripping out of the phone and into Chris' ear. He felt a tightness in his stomach, a heat in his throat, and a simultaneous numbing cold on the back of his neck.

"I already asked him that, Susan, he said he didn't know!" His dad barked. "They fired everyone, dad, they're shutting down the swine farm, or something. My last day's at the end of this week." "Why're they doing that?"

Chris sat quietly on his end of the line, listening to the labored breathing of his dad. He was in his sixties, had a bad back and bad knees and bad hips and never any medical intervention to help except a few Advils to get through the day every day. He still worked at the same construction company as when Chris had been a boy, the same one Chris got fired from when the company downsized.





# FLASHBACK

*LE LOTUS*

*Le Lotus is a Raleigh native band that plays dreamy alternative rock. "Flashback" is centered around the life of Midori Naka, a stage actress living in Hiroshima when the U.S. dropped the atomic bomb that destroyed her city.*

Light then dark, Monday is in parts  
Oh flashback  
Hear the ring, feel my bones sting  
Oh flashback, oh flashback

Beautiful, like a saint  
Everyone knows her name  
Once graceful, now remains  
White and gray, inhale and taste



# I CAN'T



## NAHOME

I don't know where we'll go  
This love ain't the picture  
As long as I live for

There will be another life  
Where maybe we're gonna fight  
To keep this burn alive

# RALEIGH

## AMELIA LEONARD

The following three tracks are from Amelia's album "raleigh," the entirety of which she wrote and recorded in her apartment at NC State over the 2024-25 school year.

## WHITE KNUCKLE GRIP



Give me the white knuckle grip  
That you give the bottle on your lip  
And hold me together

Sip me like a liquid  
The one that makes you livid  
Until I'm gone  
Gone

## ARMS LENGTH



I want to be more than this  
Shrapnel, this granite behind my teeth

But really, I'm  
Losin' every war I pick with my  
Body, and soul, and I can't help it I think that  
Some of us are just meant to lose  
We are just meant to lose

# TRUTH BE TOLD

## JAYDA MURRAY



In the truth of the moment I fibbed just a little bit.  
Under my breath I said "aw, man."  
When your feet started (towards the door).  
You inquired about what I had meant.

My response was "I said 'oh,' but 'aw' works too I guess"

You see that I lied.  
But I wanna try again,  
and say the truth,  
and nothing, nothing, nothing, nothing,  
but the truth.  
I don't want you to leave,  
for a while longer.

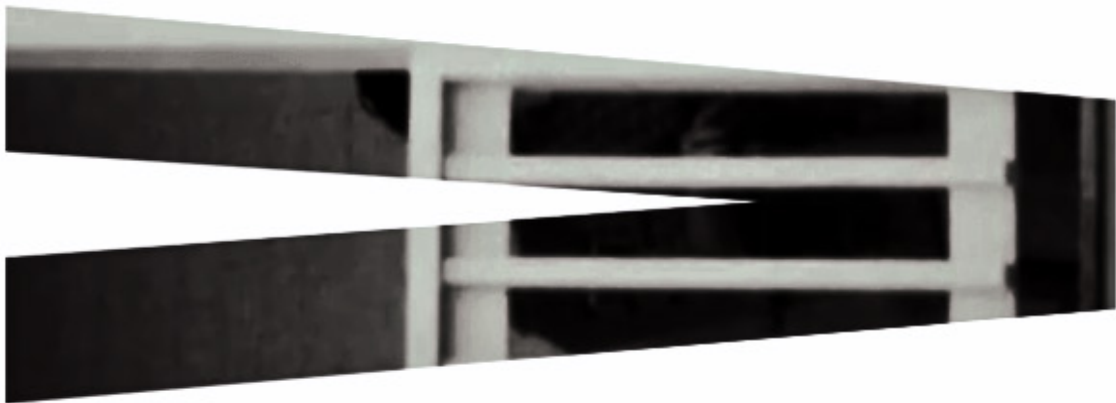
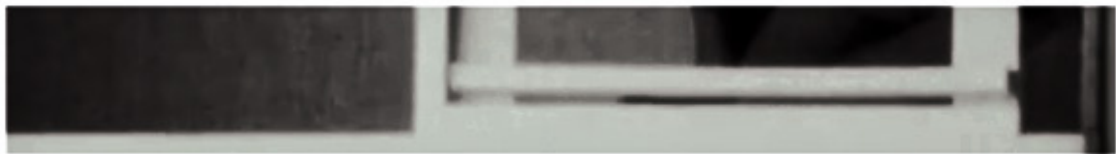
## JOLENE



## FEATURING AURA GRAY

Jolene you caught me at a weird time  
I wasn't right  
I don't speak about you, don't utter a line  
But you live in my mind

Don't get it wrong, Jolene  
I'm not in love you see  
I've had enough of that stuff



**CLIFF AND EVANGELINE**  
*MATTHEW BASTIAN*

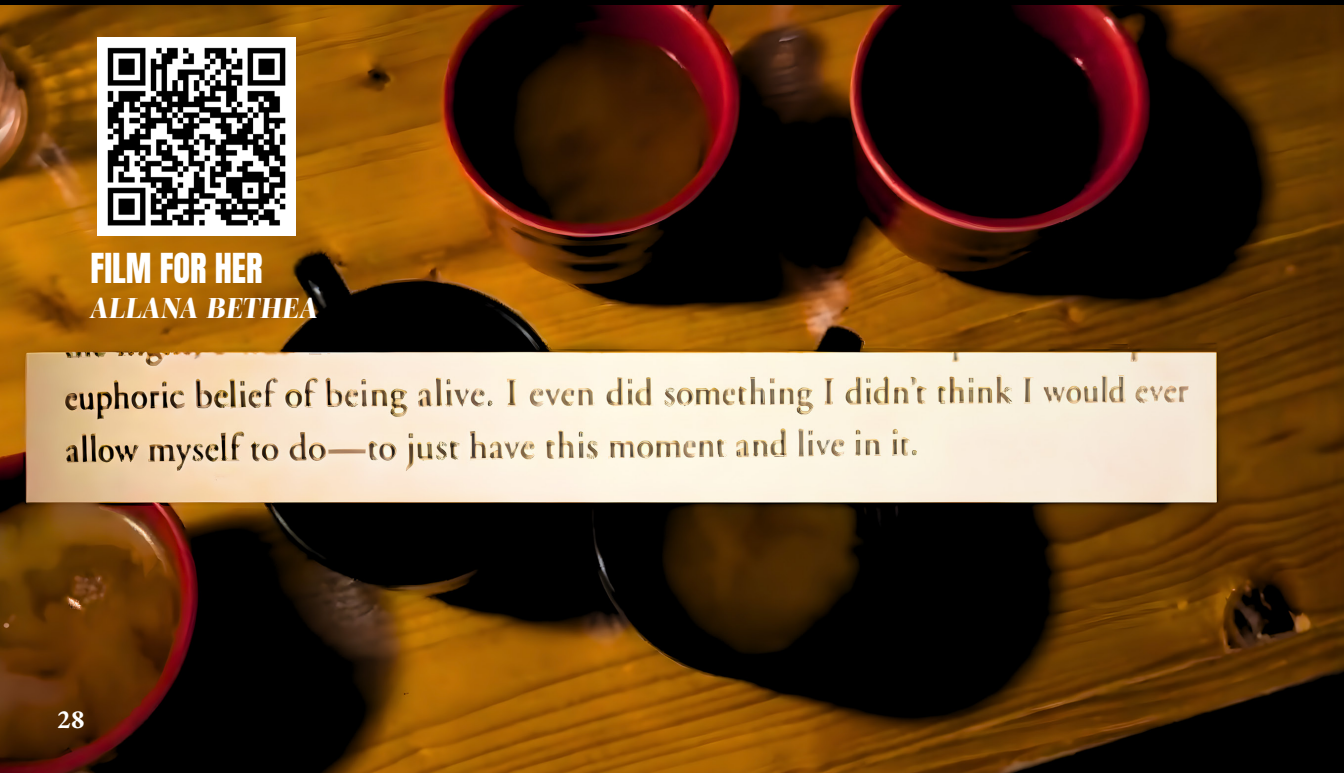
# VENGEANCE



*JORDAN ZAMOJCIN*



**SILICONE PUPPET**  
*AURORA HENDERSON*



**FILM FOR HER**  
*ALLANA BETHEA*

euphoric belief of being alive. I even did something I didn't think I would ever allow myself to do—to just have this moment and live in it.

# A DARK ZONE



*GREYSON SPELLS*

# BROTHERHOOD

JILL TANNER

I left her at 3:00 on a Sunday. The lawn needed to be fertilized. The wind blew up a green sequin from her prom dress months prior. It landed on the driveway. My truck was packed with useless things: a blanket she made me, and a black cowboy hat. My despair and worries. Mama said it would be good for me to leave my town goodbye. Finding solace in a horn angle, smearing black and red makeup on my eyelids, Legs crossed, a crowd roars, the rearview mirror on my truck. Mama said it would be good for me, as she handed me a check for my tuition— what a stupid fool. Sitting on a patterned couch, hair washed, and legs crossed. My truck has low tire pressure, my hair is clean and short. A cracked center console, a crack in her heart. Collared shirts, straight white teeth, Southern old money. Months later I pledge, in a tight suit and socks that don't match. My colleagues whistle and holler, handshakes, nods. Brothers. Mama said It would be good for me to leave her behind. Months later, my eyes roll back, I'm smacked across the face with 10-20 boys crowded in my dorm room. My roommate looks up at me. A look I've seen before. I'm drunk every night of the week, with suits and ties. They said they are my brothers; I just wanted solace. Months later, I am asleep in a pavilion. My tuition was due the day before. Deny, lie, lie, lie, lie, and lie as my roommate moves closer. Later, I receive a 5-page letter in the mail of remorse, anger, and confusion. The truth will never escape my lips. I reach for the keys of my old truck, the center console still cracked.



JULIA SMITH

# BLINK.

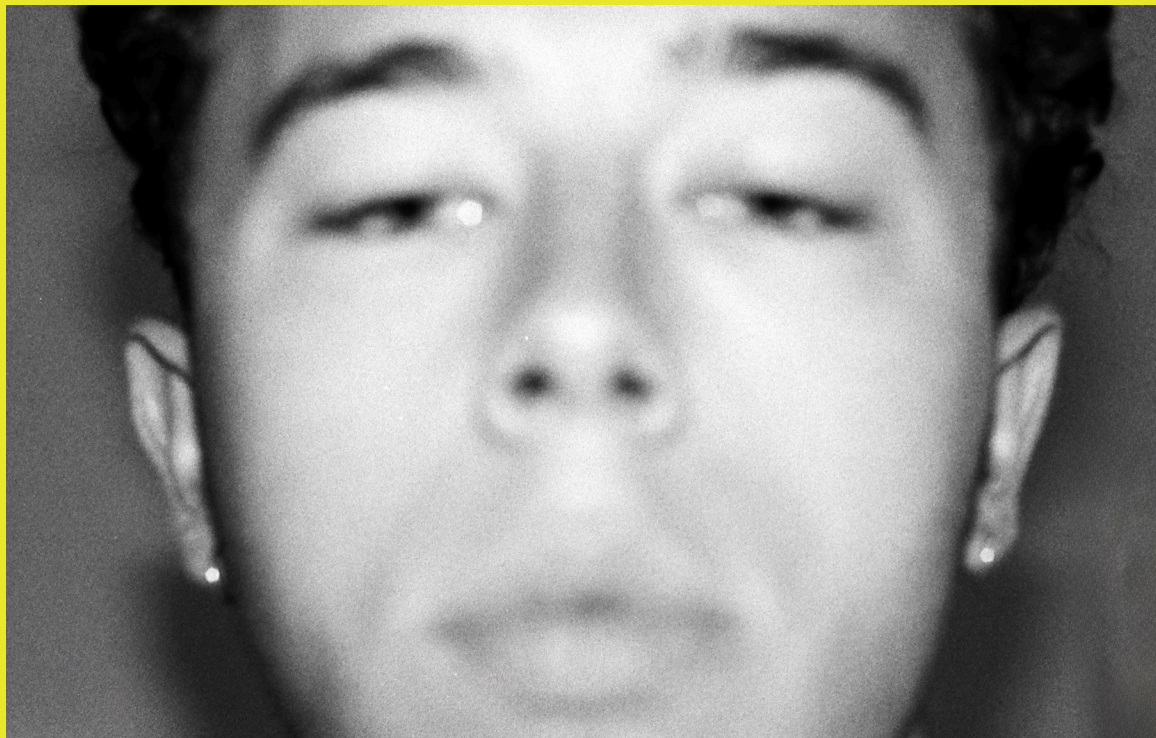
# I AM (NO CERTAINTY)

*GRAYSON KIRBY*

a god does not reject worship  
and a saint does not fear death  
but I found both in you.  
I wanted neither of these finalities  
when I handed you that chunk of ice  
from my chest, told you to breathe, and count to  
seven, then eight, then seven again,  
watching your chest rise and the drops fall like  
heaven weeping in your clenched fist  
and oh  
oh, how I forgot to cry with you.  
the altar is desecrated, the seas adjoined,  
the lights are low enough to swing from,  
and you ask me to meet you eye-to-eye.  
you sought for yourself a god  
in a man and not the man in a god.  
for that you have yourself to blame  
but I will never forgive myself for when you,  
vertebrae peeking through your skin,  
fell just to hold me  
like I was a bead at your knuckle,  
like I was something holy,  
like I was deserving,  
and I let you believe that I was.



**CUPID AND PSYCHE**  
*HANNAH KOMULAINEN*



# STEMS AND PITS

*SAMMY LA ROCCA*

Cherries color my fingertips,  
stain my nail beds,  
and the crevice between my gums and teeth.

They're vulgar, they're indecent.  
Find some decorum.  
Cherries are expensive, no matter the season. Exponentially costly.  
\$5.99, \$6.99, or \$7.99,  
and always by the pound.

**LOOK AT ME!**  
*KEVIN FOSTER*

While I hate to spit, I refuse to buy the unpitted. So I'll gnaw  
and scrape  
and pluck  
until there's nothing left but a green string and a brown nut.  
I rarely feel so closely related to an animal,  
the epitome of a homo sapien-biological.

But cherries drag it out of you.  
They're vicious in this way,  
but addicting, all the same.

# SHACKLED FLESH

KAYLA LARE

It was sometime after dinner when I stumbled across my mom laying flat on her back, hidden in the tiny alcove by the stairs.

Her eyes were wide open, staring at a fixed point on the ceiling. She didn't see me see her flinch when she heard my soft bare feet pad up the wooden stairs. It was my seventh Thanksgiving, and I could hear my family chattering below, hearts and stomachs satisfied. I was the sort of sleepy that made everything around me move slower, as if my house had been submerged underwater.

"It's because of the tryptophan." My brother had informed me, inserting a disc into our Wii console. His voice went goey, like the apple slices in the pie we just devoured. "Or maybe it's past the wittle baby's bedtime."

I disappeared after that. Went upstairs to sulk, or maybe tattle—I couldn't quite figure out which would make me feel better. When I reached the landing, my mom's gaze slid toward me, bringing me to an abrupt standstill.

There was a heaviness in her movements as she held her index finger to her lips. I obediently held back my laugh, unsure why I felt the urge to laugh in the first place. It was a bit absurd, seeing my collected and composed mother collapsed onto the floor. But it wasn't funny.

No, I knew that for certain as I looked into her eyes, the ones she had given to my brother. It was unnerving, in a way that frightened me, as if she were trying to convey an emotion that I had not yet learned to identify. Not knowing what else to do, I curled up next to her and wrapped my arms around her body.

"Don't tell them I'm up here."

My mom whispered these words in my ear as she scratched her manicured nails against my scalp.

"I just need a couple minutes," she said. "Just a little time for myself and then I'll come back down."

I nodded. Then I stood up slowly, padding away

with a distinct sense of guilt that I had disturbed something sacred.

The first time I looked at my body was when I was twelve. I had seen it before, in the mirror as my mom fought a brush through my hair, in family photos hung in pretty frames around the house, even sometimes in the nearby pond where my dad and I would feed the ducks. I had never looked at it though. Not for more than a couple seconds; not in a way that led to squinting, squeezing—scrutinizing.

I was twelve when I realized that bodies can be right and wrong.

My eyebrows were right. They were perfectly angled, not too bushy, but not too thin either. My hair was also right. Long and dark and thick, the kind that friends liked to braid and braids that boys liked to tug. My fingers were wrong. They were short and stubby and decorated with nails that got bitten until they bled. My hips were also wrong, jutting out at awkward angles and taking up more space than I preferred.

The good thing about having a body that's wrong is that it gave me more time with my dad. Every night we'd make the drive over to Planet Fitness; he'd teach me how to lift weights while I taught him who was allowed to sit with who at lunch. I remember there was one exercise I really liked. It was a back exercise, the one where you sit on a bench and yank a cord toward your chest. I liked that I could feel the muscles in my back moving. I hated my back.

One day, I voiced this aloud to my dad. I had whispered it in the crowded gym, like it was a shameful secret. My dad had laughed.

"Why?" His voice was full of kindness.

"God designed your body for having babies in the future. You'll appreciate it one day, trust me."

For a reason I couldn't quite figure out, his response made me nauseous. With tears brimming my eyes, I yanked on the cord until I was certain I'd wake up sore.

My roommate Ella has a fat ass. She tells me that it's helpful in a nightclub, something for her to shake and something for men to grab. She tells me that it's inconvenient when you're fifteen and your dad's friends try to hit on you, or when you're twenty-one and looking to borrow jeans from your college roommate.

Ella and I met our freshman year in an empty biology lecture hall. The first thing I noticed about Ella was not her fat ass, but rather her neat penmanship and the fact that she wasn't studying biology. She told me she was a linguistic major, and when I didn't ask her what she was going to do with that, she decided we were soulmates.

One night, Ella came home late with a man she had met at the gym. I knew what this meant, but my headphones had died just hours before. I analyzed myself in the mirror above my desk as I waited for them to charge, trying not to listen to the chorus of bedsprings screeching through the thin walls. I turned sideways in the mirror. I—decidedly—did not have a fat ass.

The next morning, the man was gone. I climbed onto the corner of Ella's bed and asked her if she liked him. She told me she didn't remember.

"What's the point of sleeping with someone if you don't remember them?" The question came out as judgmental, but I didn't mean it to. At least, I don't think I meant it to. It was too early for Ella to be anything but honest.

"It always hurts a bit when I'm not drunk."

"Then why do it at all?" I asked. This time the question was unmistakably curious.

She shrugged. There were dark bruises on her collarbone.

I cried the first time I put a tampon in and how a baby is much bigger than a tampon. Instead, I try to think about introducing someone to my favorite books, of having someone that I could teach to ride a bike, or tie their shoes, or say a prayer. I try to imagine having someone teach me what it's like to want to take care of someone. I try not to think about the dirty laundry sitting on my closet floor for the last six weeks. I try not to think about how I brought a banana and a small pack of Skittles for lunch. I try not to think about how I'm already so tired and there's no baby or husband or \$5,000 white picket fence that needs repainting every spring.

But I do think about it. I think about it and I get queasy. Queasy, like I have morning sickness. Like I can feel my body mutating. The queasiness turns to fear and it's stupid because my body's always mutating. I'm always growing and shrinking and growing and shrinking and I don't know why I care except that I've been told I should. All of a sudden I'm not terrified but angry, and I hate sex and I hate men and I hate my body and I hate my mind for watching me cry in the mirror and thinking: the way your lips puff up when you cry makes you look sexy. If only someone could see you like this.

The morning after my seventh Thanksgiving, my mom made me breakfast. She heated up leftovers for lunch and dinner. She did the dishes and cleaned the house. She cut up a mango and salted it for me before I went upstairs to bed. We never talked about me finding her collapsed on the floor, but I did catch her massaging her feet as we sat on the couch and listened to my dad and brother cheer on the

## "IT FEELS WORSE TO NOT BE WANTED"

I'm petrified of getting pregnant. I've been assured many times that it's my age making me feel like this, that once the biological clock starts ticking, I'll be begging for a baby with my eyes and my husband's smile. The husband thing? Yeah, I've been assured about that too. No one has bothered assuring me about the housing market, but what's a husband and a baby if you can't afford a white picket fence?

I've been thinking a lot about motherhood recently. Less in a biological clock way and more in a I've-been-told-I-should-want-that-and-I'm-sorry-but-I'm-not-very-sure-I-do way. I try to avoid thinking about how my body would tear apart, try to avoid thinking about how

New York Giants. Now when I come home from college she makes me dinner and scratches my scalp and I wonder how much my "thank yous" can possibly mean to a woman who has given me every part of herself for free.

I've been thinking a lot about motherhood recently. I've been wondering if I'm selfish, for wishing my body could be mine.

I've been wondering if I'm stupid, for believing that it was ever supposed to be.

W.

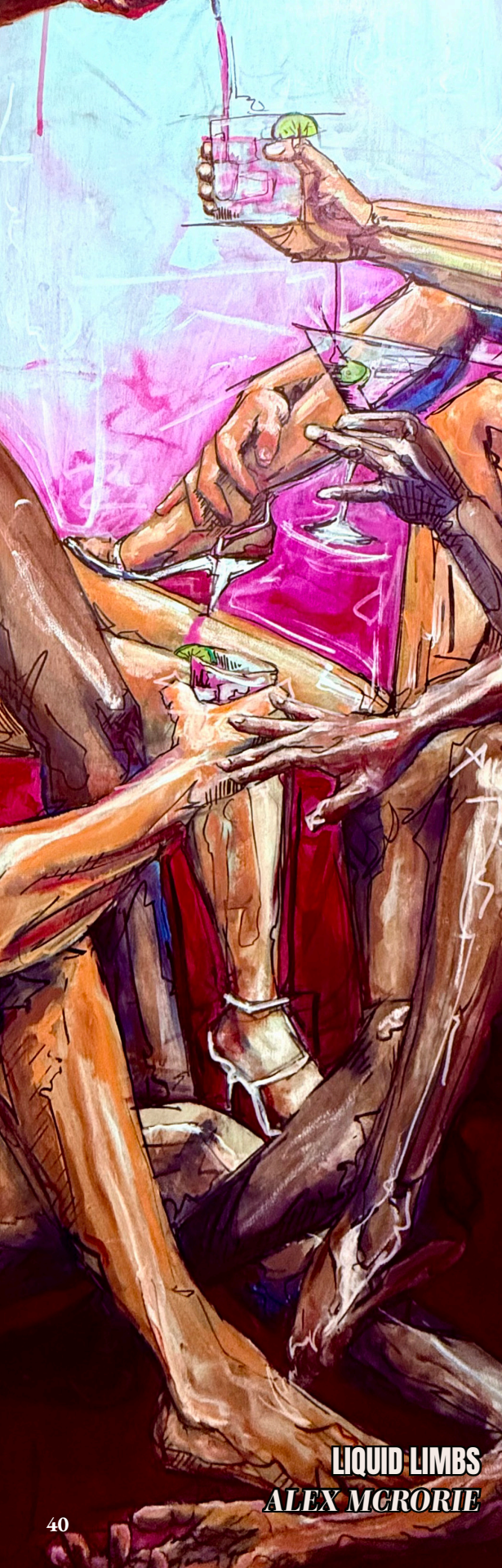


**STRAPPED**  
*AURORA HENDERSON*



# HARRPIES

*LILY MCCABE*



LIQUID LIMBS  
ALEX MCRORIE

# LADY LUCK

KRUSHI BANDAM

lady luck sat me down at a green table, victorious,  
the horizon among mountains of poker chips  
and laundered green bills, her cards face up

she had a smile to rival a cat's,  
pupils frayed like the blunt edge of a cut thread,  
watching me with an even sharper gaze

lady luck is patient, and she waits for me  
to take a seat, smoke rippling from her lips,  
laughing soft amber.  
her finger rests on the roulette wheel,  
itching to pull the trigger.

lady luck has many faces, but i can't recognize the  
one in front of me.  
her lips dip into pockmarked valleys, the three  
threaded braid strung taut in her throat, her nine  
ringed neck, speaking with words no human  
mouth could shape.

lady luck says to me:  
'choose your cards wisely'

i hear the squalling screams of a baby and a  
newfound mother,  
swaddled in a blanket from cloths herself,  
the snap of the umbilical cord,  
the snapping of the rope,  
and air beneath my feet,  
a comet burned into my sole.

i feel another's skin on mine, grappling hands,  
i feel another's lips on mine, breathing their  
lifeblood into my lungs, filling me up like a balloon,  
my skin stretching tight over my skull, the sky a  
little too vast- i burn as i fall

i feel metal to my neck, a bludgeon to the back of  
my head, and the breath leaving my lips once again  
as i meet my maker,  
i walk down a tunnel, accompanied by the roars of  
metal beasts,  
the earthly world spread behind me in a bad hand,  
seven, two, an offsuit, paper stuck between my teeth  
lady luck's dice thrown once again- two, three

over and over again, i am thrown into the same  
chair, new marks and worn arms,  
picking at stray hairs that don't belong to me,

over and over again, my soul accumulates,  
my past stacking itself  
on the lush velvet of the table,  
a crown of decades past,  
the sweat of my labor watering the green.

lady luck accepts my offerings, recording it on  
bronze skin. her body a paper scroll, curling at the  
edges, her elbow resting on the dark wood. she  
deals me a new deck with a new smile, blinking  
slowly, knowingly,  
listening to the whispers of the cards,  
and the keen of the silence  
as i make my first move

lady luck, have you realized?

man plays best with the cards they've been dealt.



**COWBOY TEARS**  
**TRINITY NGUYEN**

# WHAT ISN'T AN APOLOGY

**JAM CROSSETT**

In the fraction of a life I have lived, I have, on occasion, prided myself on an ability to write letters to the people I care about. A skill which felt sharp at 12, chipped at 16, and rather dull at 21. Perhaps it was my wording and phrasing becoming less precise—more reliant on convention. Perhaps it was a growing appreciation for the word platitude and its implications on the value of my assertions. Perhaps it was a measure of resignation, a realization that as time passes me by, the fractional words I wrote would only serve as pointless reminiscence on a time and a place and a person who is dead. Who will always be dead. A tombstone of parchment engraved with platitudes for a future unobserved.

In the fraction of a life I have lived, I have, on occasion, deluded myself into believing I am alive. I tend to her grave, you know? The version of myself who thought that. She was kind, I think, quite like you. Perhaps it unsettles you to see me wear her face, rotted, distorted from what she thought was life. My fault, really; I just like being her. I apologize for that, the deception. I realize you would not have come out to my graveyard if you knew I would poison your memory of her. It is the only apology you will receive tonight. It is the only part of myself I will ask forgiveness for,

the deception. For I am a corpse, and you are standing over my grave.

left one of my best ones out, a journal waterlogged and dried into an inky brick, tough enough to break the soil and hold

# WHAT WOULD I BE IF I SAID YOU COULD NOT SPIT ON MY BONES?

*Dear visitor, I think it wise to agree with you here. That undoubtedly as I write this, and presumably as you read this, I am not above life. Not above noticing the brightly colored caterpillars crawling amongst the trees here. Not above crying over the one you crushed as you walked in. Not above loving how cruelly human, alive, it is that you simply had to move on. Your name on my breath tasted like being alive, and I didn't hate it. Yet I lie amongst these graves as a means to an end and to be alive to you would simply be to wear a newer skin over the same clammy meat. And besides, you didn't know the me that skin belonged to anyhow. Enjoy your stay and maybe by the end of this tour you can tell me again why I am any less dead than the smudge on your sole.*

*Sincerely,  
The Corpse I Was Yesterday*

As we trudge through the weeds here, I always find myself wondering whether all of these graves are mine. Far out from the bulk of my dead, lie a great many smaller graves I don't remember digging. Most don't have any, but take the marker here, a dusty mason jar filled with chipped marbles, haphazardly preserved from someone else's collection. The ground is level beneath it, as if long settled, and the plants growing from the rot beneath are a kind of kudzu, resilient to a fault. As if whoever is buried here, I cannot forget. You know what, why don't you grab one of my shovels? I

ing questions the dead would claw their way out to answer. Not great leverage though. It's just over by the little wooden greenhouse at the edge of the grounds.

**Only a few moments pass and you find yourself once again weaving between the many crumbling one-white stones which mark each of me. Do you take the time to notice the bells hung next to each one? Had you asked I would have told you they're fashioned after a fad of the 19th century, tied at their canons to a thread wound down below the earth with a knot placed in the hand of the deceased. The poor medical knowledge of the time led to substantial fears of being buried alive, and the thought was that as you hear right now, if the dead were not truly gone they could tug the thread and ring the bell for someone to Oh? You tripped on a root, it happens I assure you, especially when running from something clawing their way out. I know my nails aren't so pretty when they're filled with dirt, but I assure you that she's only a middle schooler, only a kid desperate for a kind person like you. So move forward if you like, around the open graves for tomorrow and tomorrow, through the willows stained with a shallow white paint, away from versions of me I would rather you didn't address. You arrive to an old arched wooden structure, its peeling white paint giving an impression of splintered bone where the wooden joints have collapsed in. I'd love**

**to tell you it were glass in the gaps, an idyllic home of life, but you saw it was just a clear plastic tarp hung over the form, collecting dirt in its wind-worn grooves. It's where I keep the plants I like, the ones I find growing from strange versions of me, nestled in a skull or breaking from packed grey dirt 6 feet above.**

for it too lost its only and closest rememberer. Nobody will tend to their final grave except you. I did not know how to take care of hers, but in knowing I could not cry for her, I at least, at last, planted something which would not need them.

Truthfully there was likely something she wanted you to

# BUT I DIDN'T TELL YOU THAT.

So you rummage through them, tipping under each pot, looking for the weapon I sent you for, unsettling dust around my prettiest thoughts until a sharp crack from overhead scares you out of the crumbling structure and backs you into a bookshelf next to the door. Good luck too cause it meant you found your tool, stained green from dusty mold and a friend of the pests in the cracked wood, pesky little doubts eating away at me!

Soon you return. Soon a piece, a parcel of life breaches our newly dredged dust. Wiry and creased, the arm belongs to a mother, a grandmother, hands smoothed by years of work done for people who would outlive her. There are deep grooves worn in the pads of her fingers from crochetwork she shared with her community every year to their delight. There are unreadable patterns of wear from hours and days and years of time spent alone. But none of those experiences belong to the corpse in my graveyard. The corpse is a reminder, one that does not wish to be forgotten, of someone who did not ask for me to remember them. It was the people at the funeral, who saw this wrong facsimile of who she was, who impressed upon me that even this imperfect resemblance of her was worth seeing, even once. It is hard to grieve without empathy.

see, even if it hurt you, even if the image consumed you as it had consumed her, so she might not be alone in the end. Yet worn paths and stories saved her none. Your silenced tour guide makes only the sound of dead weight dragged against leaves and the shiver of bones over the occasional root until you arrive back at the entrance. Alone with the bells. I could tell you she might've wanted you to take her with you, to be buried in someone else's garden too, but that it's up to you to decide if you have room for a fool when you leave, have words for another eulogy. For you will always leave, unless of course, you are dead.

*Dearest visitor,  
I know you thought me limited, and I cannot disagree. My final corpse is waiting for me. It always waits, filling this garden with beautiful, temporary things which feed and feed on my mind. Yet those things are not of my mind, as my last corpse is not me. It categorically is not. What a dangerous fantasy to see myself as that corpse! To see myself as fixed! That corpse will be what I make it; they will say it has done many things I have not yet, they will say something nice about a person it and me are not, they will say it felt some kind of way before it became what it is, though all*

# COULD YOU IMAGINE WHAT IT IS LIKE TO NOT EXIST?

I think it is much easier then to empathize with the corpse, long after I am no longer me. And even when I dance with it for

*the last time, we will not be the same. I will be alive and it will be dead and I will be afraid and it will not. I will have cared. I will have cared for every grave in this garden. I will have grown grand gardens in the graveyards of others. The many dead which lie in my graves will ring their bells because they were not dead when they went in, as dead as they felt in every moment before their last. Do not mourn my final corpse. Mourn only the silence in my garden, and the graves we once left to each other. It will not care, but once I did.*

*Kindly,  
The Corpse I Was Today*

**W.**

# **ENOUGH**

**MOE GAMEZ**



# I HEARD THEY SHOT YOU

ROBERT CARL SWANN



## UNDERDRESSED

SAM WILLIAMS

My socks have holes in them—  
I can feel the shoe pulling tight  
on my foot's calloused corners  
and the rag dredging  
dirt on my rocky heel.  
I pull my sores upwards,  
leaping over rotted branches,  
psocoptera and mud-pools,  
seeing small lamps in the sky  
poking holes in frigid air.

Fabric moans as it stretches.

I look down to  
glistening leaves,  
dew on piney veins—  
naked foot, stung by icy dirt  
slipping on roots  
passed by ascending climbers.

# TO WRESTLE THROUGH WORDS

K.B. CHAYYA

I knew him before he knew me, if we even knew each other. We don't know each other, and with the way I'm demanding him to let himself know me, I think my piercing stare drowns out his words, as if they could ever stand a chance at cresting my mounting heartbeat.

It's the first time we're talking face-to-face, but it isn't our first conversation. We aren't supposed to be talking, so throughout last season we shared sneaky split-second glances—a stare I let linger, an eyebrow he raised, eyes filling in for words unspoken and crossing the distance between us faster than my camera can shoot. Sight doesn't need consent to dissect, messages are received in a blink. He expects that I'd always be looking, at least, that's what he should expect. I search for stories underneath a scene's surface and string together sentences from stills. I knew him before he knew me. It's my job to do so, and he knows he's my subject.

But I pretend I know nothing, blending in with

weight, each flame-blasted entrance scorching my irises into orange embers.

They posture, shifting weight from one foot to the other while staring down their opponents on the other side. The only time they break their visual assessments is to accept high-fives from their brothers.

I aim my lens' great, unblinking eye at my two warring subjects when their battles unfold. My arms ache from holding up my gear, shoulders tight from my uncomfortable position on the floor. Their brutal trial pushes them to their physical limits, sometimes beyond. I only look up with my two real eyes when they break out of bounds, scanning the arena for a coach's instruction, a teammate's reaction, or a fan's jeer—any ephemeral moment to be stolen for the story set before me.

My prying eyes don't see everything but they try to, just as this boy's running mouth doesn't know all its words

chose the language of our unspoken words, our messages were lost in translation. What looks he gave me were just looks, nothing underneath to uncover, no hints to be hung in my mind and wished upon like stars. I thought—when our eyes met on the mat, between the podium, behind backstage—I'd seen a story behind his dark, deep-set gaze, and I couldn't have been more mistaken. I'd made a fool of myself for coming here, as if I wasn't already one, and he probably judged that of me months ago.

Knowing so much about someone without them knowing anything about you in return was more than unfair. It was violating, intruding. That's why people don't like journalists, and that's why journalists detach from themselves. They're objective witnesses, sharing what they see without opinion and judgement so that their subjects can feel at least somewhat safe sharing their life stories. I justified my pursuit by saying I wouldn't be a good journalist if I didn't try to read every word of every sentence of every act of the play that existed between me and him.

I knew how he started far behind in the rankings, lingering caution over once-broken wrists. I watched him claw up the ladder, watched when he fell, when he recovered, when he clutched a conference championship. I witnessed him cutting his predicted championship placement in half and photographed him standing on that podium, holding a trophy above his head. I knew all this because I saw it, but so did everyone else.

But did everyone else know the way he gestures with semi-splayed fingers to ask for water? How he wears his tops indiscriminately tucked underneath the waistband of his pants? How he tilts his wrist up when he's frustrated with a referee's call? Did everyone else know of the double-take and the raised eyebrows in the arena, the smile and nod backstage? I was the lone witness.

Never mind that "witness" was a part to be cast in the grand performance of this play. Never mind that heart was what made the difference between a good actor and a great one. Never mind that an objective witness with a heart made a perfect actor for the role of a "great fool."

It was heart that led me to contact him through Instagram, the only acceptable channel of communication I had that could teeter between professional and casual

interaction. I asked if he'd like to grab a coffee and look at the photos I so carefully captured and compiled. He said he wasn't a coffee fan but then added that "we should sometime." It was a non-answer for the chance to get to know me, so I shot him a clarifying question, to which he gave me no response.

I'd made a complete fool of myself for coming here. I'm supposed to be an objective witness, withdrawn from bias and emotion, and he knows this.

But it's too late to walk away now. We're in the final act of the play and I'm making him write the ending of the story that I started and he left unfinished.

I slid my media credential across the flimsy plastic cover of the table. Despite my flameless entrance, I was burning alive and couldn't show it. A whistle blew in the back of my mind when his eyes widened.

"Oh hi, uh... K- Ch—"

"Hi," I interrupted before he was able to recall which name of mine to use, if he was even able to remember my name.

"You want me to sign this?"

“MHM.”

I flashed a smile and worked through the period, gauging my opponent and gathering important information. His wrists and hands were left unwrapped, no black hand tape. The two new teammates sitting on either side of him peered over, interested in my media pass from last season's national championship tournament, the one that made him an All-American. His marker hovered over the credential, unsure of where to sign. When ink hit the card, he scribbled his name dead center.

... BUT IT TRIES TO.

the thousands packing the street for the festival. I'm trying to hide behind eagle eyes—no bulky black box to shield my face—while his own, brown like mine, dart around for an escape, muscles tense and ready to flee. He's a cornered cat, unlike the wrestling wolf I'm used to watching, his outer struggle mirroring my inner turmoil. A look I thought he was incapable of wearing rears itself on his face: anxiety.

It's unlike how we carry ourselves in the arena, catching breaths between buzzers and blown whistles while being pummeled by lights as bright as the cheers are boisterous. We pretend pressure doesn't get to us. If it does, we can't show it, or else we disallow ourselves an opportunity to score a point or snap a photo.

We've read every word of the script, memorized every line of the play, recalling the familiar performance each time we stepped onto the floor. I'm sitting beside a thick foam mat, looking up at the boys as they line up by

This white plastic tent is like an oven trying to bake us like bread, though the sweltering southeastern heat isn't what's making us sweat. It's the test of finding ourselves in reversed roles, playing parts in an unfamiliar script, stuck in our uncharacteristic performance.

The boys are fidgeting with permanent markers and sitting in rigid plastic chairs. No passerby cares about the battle-hardened warriors lined along the long row of tables, no one gives them a glance except me, the sole visitor. My biases towards these boys are fact-checked by the reality that wrestling is niche. Still, everyone remains unaware of our duel, we're almost crumbling in the confrontation. He trips over words I can't hear over my thundering heart. The more he talks, the more his philosophy seeps into my skin, focused on one thing and one thing alone: walking away the winner of the bout.

Only, if eyes were the windows to our souls that

Handing it back to me, the pass now printed with both our names, I didn't look at his signature and I didn't even catch my breath. I leaned forward, finding a thrill in the way I towered over him. For the first time, he was the one looking up at me. I cut to the chase at the next period.

"Did you forget to reply to my message?"

"Uh, well kinda... you know—"

His words reached my ears and filtered through my mind, but unlike a photo, I couldn't store them as .jpgs or .NEFs. I didn't have enough memory to process his words, faced with a scene as unfamiliar as it was fascinating. Did everyone else know how his brown eyes hinted with amber in sunlight? And then his gaze faltered when my single-minded intention to test him became clear. Regardless of whether or not his answer aligned with the stars I let lead my heart, I would walk away with his statement. He might have rambled a bit, but I was focused on unraveling his answer, which was leaving me with more confusion than satisfaction. He seemed to rely on an arbitrary rule concerning the appropriate time frame to respond, saying that when he saw my message, it was too late to send a reply.

"—I'm... sorry."

Anxiety hid behind me, the situation too humiliating for even it to come forth, but I knew I caught him. He was speechless. Either of his answers would recontextualize everything. He could have said yes and I would've walked away. He could have said no and I would've walked away—with his number, of course.

Instead, he chose to do what he knew best:

Wrestle.

"Uh— yeah, I mean... like, I'm not really lookin' for people like that— I don't really, like, talk to— I mean I do... but it's just, you know, I'm not ready for it, or like looking for—"

And here I am now. Staring, smiling, listening to his struggle to speak. He keeps on going. And going. I don't know what his goal is. I don't even know my goal anymore. We're two fools who didn't have the guts to say what we really meant, wishing that we hadn't indulged in the language of looking. We can't even think about whether our torturous conversation is on the record. My heart's being flipped over and thrown to the mat, crushed under the weight of his words, while my mind's trying to piece together sentences that never seem to stop, just start again and again.

I don't blame him for his attempt to write the

## A SHUTTER CLICK.

I blinked, engraving his tense smile, ashamed cheeks, skittish eyes, into my mind. His apology pulled my heart not forward, not backward, not up into my throat where it liked to hide, but back into place. It settled down—for all but a moment.

A blaring buzzer.

Genuine apology or not, there was no time. I had one last question.

A whining whistle.

Good journalists choose careful, objective questions. Foolish journalists choose leading ones to get the answers they want.

The top of the third.

And great journalists? They lay questions like traps, catching their subjects and forcing them to speak the truth in exchange for their freedom.

"Are you going to disallow yourself the opportunity?"

"Sorry, what was that?"

I maintained my smile.

"Are you going to disallow yourself the opportunity?"

ending to this play. Maybe my line of questioning was unnecessary, unbearable, and unnatural—but it was far from unexpected. If he knew one thing about me and one thing alone, it was that I was as much a great journalist as I was a fool.

But, I don't know. I don't know him, he doesn't know me. We don't know each other.

We never will.

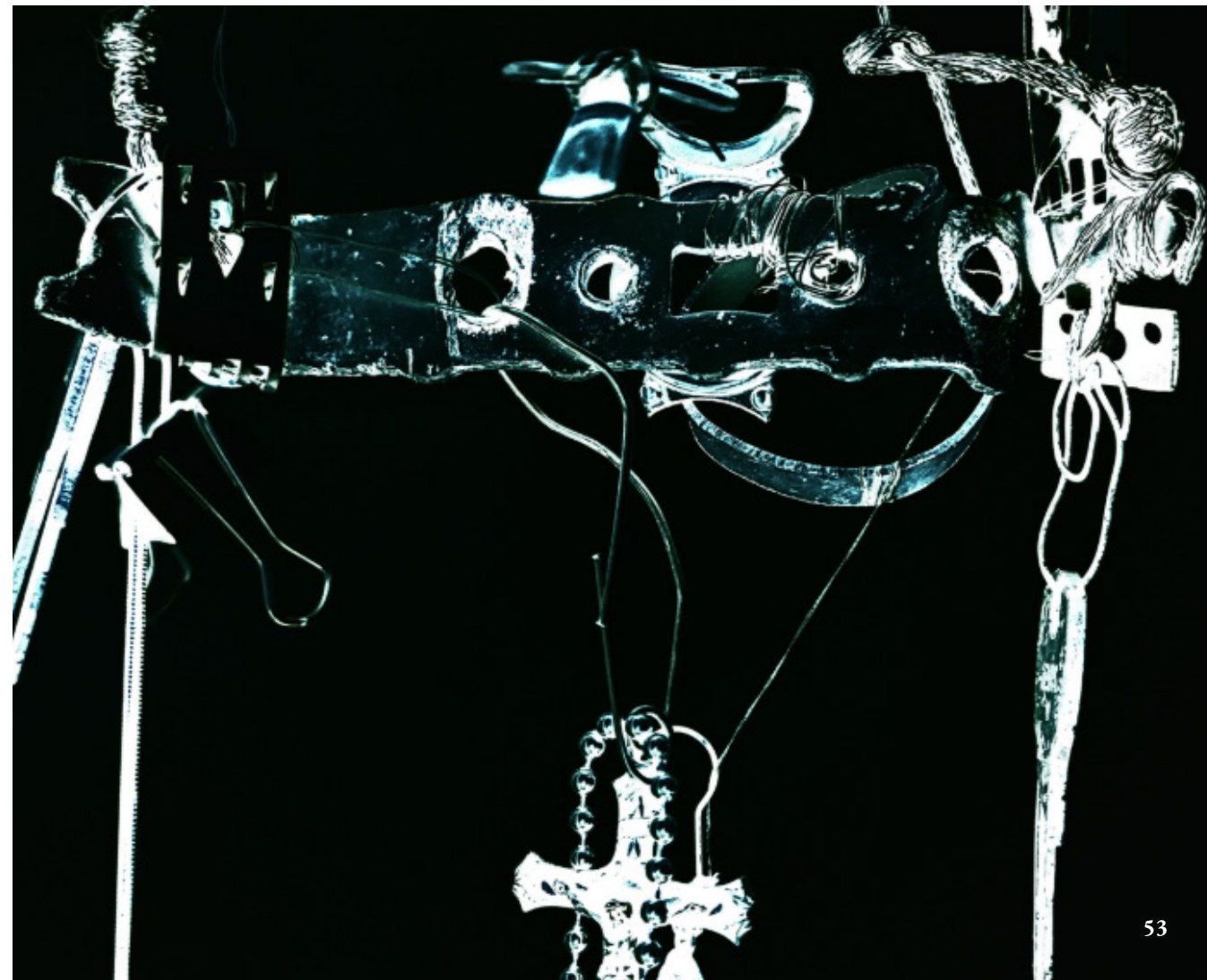
He's taking up an English minor to extend his eligibility. I hope that fiction writing class he enrolled in teaches him how to wrestle through his words—

—and win.

W.

# METAL MOBILE

EVIE DALLMANN



# TIGHTLIPPED

**SAM WILLIAMS**

My jaw clenches when I'm anxious,  
so she gives me gum on the way out.

Leaving once she had enough,  
I only realized after  
that she must have been listening  
for concealed pops and squeaks.

My jaw clenches when I'm anxious,  
but it's hard to tell when lips are like  
curtains. Sugar is pinched and pulled to  
fill gaps, but I'm only aware of people's  
teeth before feeding or fornication.

My jaw clenches when I'm anxious,  
the pearly pulverizer  
dragging molars left and right  
with the chalky aftermath  
pooling deep into my throat.

My jaw clenches when I'm anxious,  
but only the closest ones know that.  
Those unfamiliar see a curled  
thumb on my cheek  
and fingernail over the lips.

My jaw clenches when I'm anxious,  
just ask the guy who's  
tongue I nearly ripped out  
because he let it slide  
a little too deep.

My jaw clenches when I'm anxious,  
so I chew her gum on the bus.  
I keep my lips tight.

No one needs to smell  
my pineapple breath.

# CASTING

**ANISHA UPCHURCH**

We talked about Heaven last night.  
The parts of the Bible that don't feel real.  
Admitting to the dark  
the things we don't believe in.

"I wouldn't want to worship for eternity."  
"Me neither—"

Sleeping has never felt natural, but  
we share a blanket.  
The fan is on, but I know you  
get cold so I cover you  
with another.  
It's warm here in your arms;  
our heat, a breathing  
furnace. I curve  
into the bend of your right  
shoulder. I melt myself into your  
cast; pouring my limbs  
over the mold of you.

Half asleep now,

"—I wouldn't want  
to be in Heaven  
without you.  
If I didn't know you,  
there would be no point."

So, let me sleep, annealed  
in our eternity.  
This feels natural, like Heaven,  
in the end.

that night when you  
(the bludgeoning realization  
that you are) had struck,  
the sun was freshly set, so ripely deep,  
enough to bite into the sky's skin and leave with  
a mouthful of shining star-shaped seeds;  
and my roommate had packed his suitcase for the weekend again,  
and the elevator's creaking laugh followed me into the ground again,  
a reminder, caroming after me  
as the late spring dawn chased you away,  
because no matter how many fragments  
of myself I throw away  
(no matter how many times I pray for them  
to end up in the wrong hands)  
I will be the same heap of  
unspoken words, now only that much lonelier  
and that much farther from you.  
I will live in the creases of my boots  
like a grain of sand  
where I know I will be loved even when I'm  
ragged and ruined  
let them carry me far and away from how soft and shaken  
my hands become when your shadow  
of unworn softness nears that staircase  
let them carry me  
to a shoreline where I cannot irritate your sweet skin,  
because the antediluvians would call it the root  
of your fingers, and the anatomists would call it  
your metacarpophalangeal joint but  
I would call it the place where my hand  
entwines with yours in my dreams  
that night that I bit into you.  
I am back in that chair  
(the one so terribly within reach of you)  
then two people snicker behind me about  
some new ironies and falsehoods,  
the professor stutters  
over the word *disjunction*,  
and I know now that my end began with your smile,  
your smile shining with star-shaped seeds,  
since you never once thought of me.

**GRAYSON KIRBY**

**IN THE MIDST**  
**GRACE CHEN**





**JACKSON REED AT LINCOLN THEATRE**  
*SOPHIE BURGESS*



**PHOTOGRAPHY TYPOGRAPHY**  
*HENRY O'BRYAN*

# MOCHA MADNESS

*SARINA LABADIE*

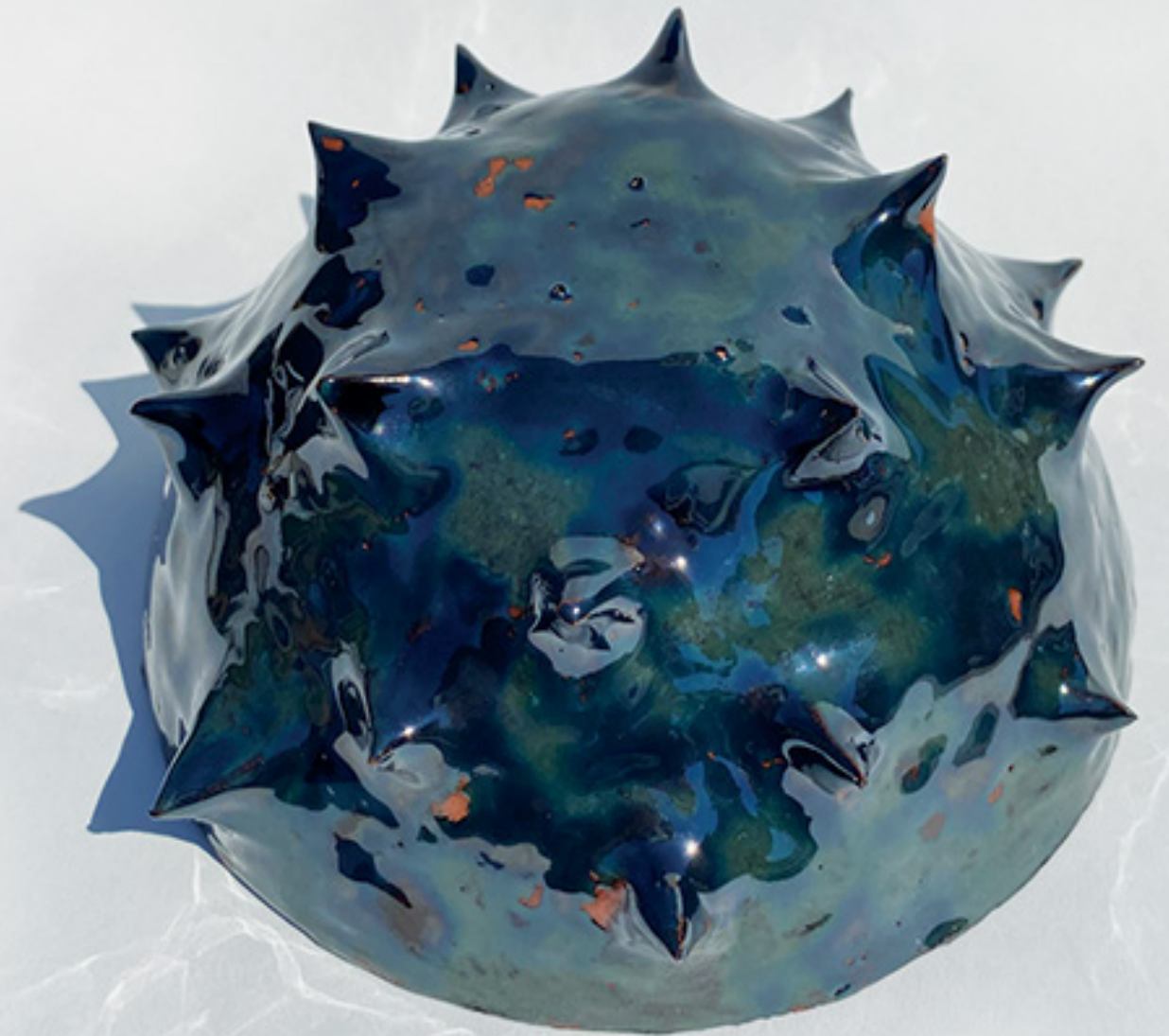
I read *A Room of One's Own* in the coffee shop I thought I wanted to belong in, but don't.

The man next to me refuses to budge as I encroach on the space that is his to defend unwaveringly (although he leaves before I do).

He takes up as much room as his feeble legs allow, while I cross mine out of politeness. He's reading a book on finance and masculinity and violence, highlighted in bold red lettering He's predictable, but maybe I am too.

We are both reading in the same coffee shop at the same time, drinking the same drink of the same size, and maybe that is all we have in common.

This stranger of a man is another example further proving my point, and to him, I am merely a body taking up space in his vicinity, while he does not have any point to prove.



# SEA URCHIN

*JULIA GRACE HARDY*

## HAYDEN DRIVER

Passing the home I inherit,  
I can see your footprints,  
hidden by decades of dust.  
Black, permed hair,  
teeth crooked- bared and determined;  
aged textbooks and cold sweat perfume you.

Years before, you walked the street  
with tired eyes and rugged ambition,  
head high, bobbing up and down.  
Staring ahead, furrowed brow,  
with the same crease I attempt to relax,  
the young woman I can never meet.

Our thoughts follow the same trail,  
running in circles without conclusion.  
I don't see her often,  
only when I spot my reflection.

Today, I can only imagine  
her hope for the future,  
her fears of the day,  
her youth wasted on the girl  
when it belonged to the woman.

My hand fumbles for memories in the dark.  
Nostalgic for a life I never lived.

I hum an old hymn to signal my arrival, born of  
your spirit, a gift of your love.

Did she sing the same song,  
conjuring the woman  
she never thought was once a girl?

When my footprints are dusted,  
when the present shrivels like an autumn tree,  
when today is a whisper of a memory, Will  
someone think of me?



SAORI WEAVE  
AMELIA BOYS



# KARA AND STELLA

*ROBERT CARL SWANN*

# FUTURE

*LOGAN LOWERY*



# FOR THOSE WORRIED ABOUT THE FUTURE, A NATURE WALK HELPS

DUKE DIX

As I sit beneath drapes  
of autumn's shade  
While birds chirp from  
high above the glade  
My foot on a stone and  
wind at my neck  
The low, rusted, half-rotted  
chair far sturdier than  
I'd expect  
At another time  
That goes to show the  
sublime  
Is never less than  
enchanting  
Even on days when you're panting  
From dread and regret  
And the weight of all things  
crushing down your shoulders  
Into a grave, rotting and wet

But even rotting things must  
retain the semblance  
of life  
A heady smell of things at  
peace  
Fading, slipping from from  
all strife  
For what's that said of a  
sweet release?  
The leaves beneath my feet  
give no dispute  
Only that humid aroma,  
fresh again with each  
breeze  
To reassure that life  
will not dilute  
But merely change with  
the seasons, unable to  
freeze  
In spite of all winter's gloom  
can do  
For I am as the leaves,  
part of the cycle  
Persistent until spring  
buds anew

The splintering tightness,  
the apocryphal blight  
Which casts my mind into  
eternal night  
Then cannot hold me  
captive wholesale  
For though my future may  
hold firm to its veil  
Somewhere stands a tower  
of oak, and iron, and  
words  
Mine alone to climb,  
and join with the birds  
In their song sublime,  
rejoicing all nature sent  
And I will, some day, find it,  
and there be content

# CHAMELEON

AURORA HENDERSON





*JULIA SMITH*

# ST. GEORGE



# CINNAMON

*ABBY SCHWEBKE*

# ALL MORNING

*BEN COLLINS*

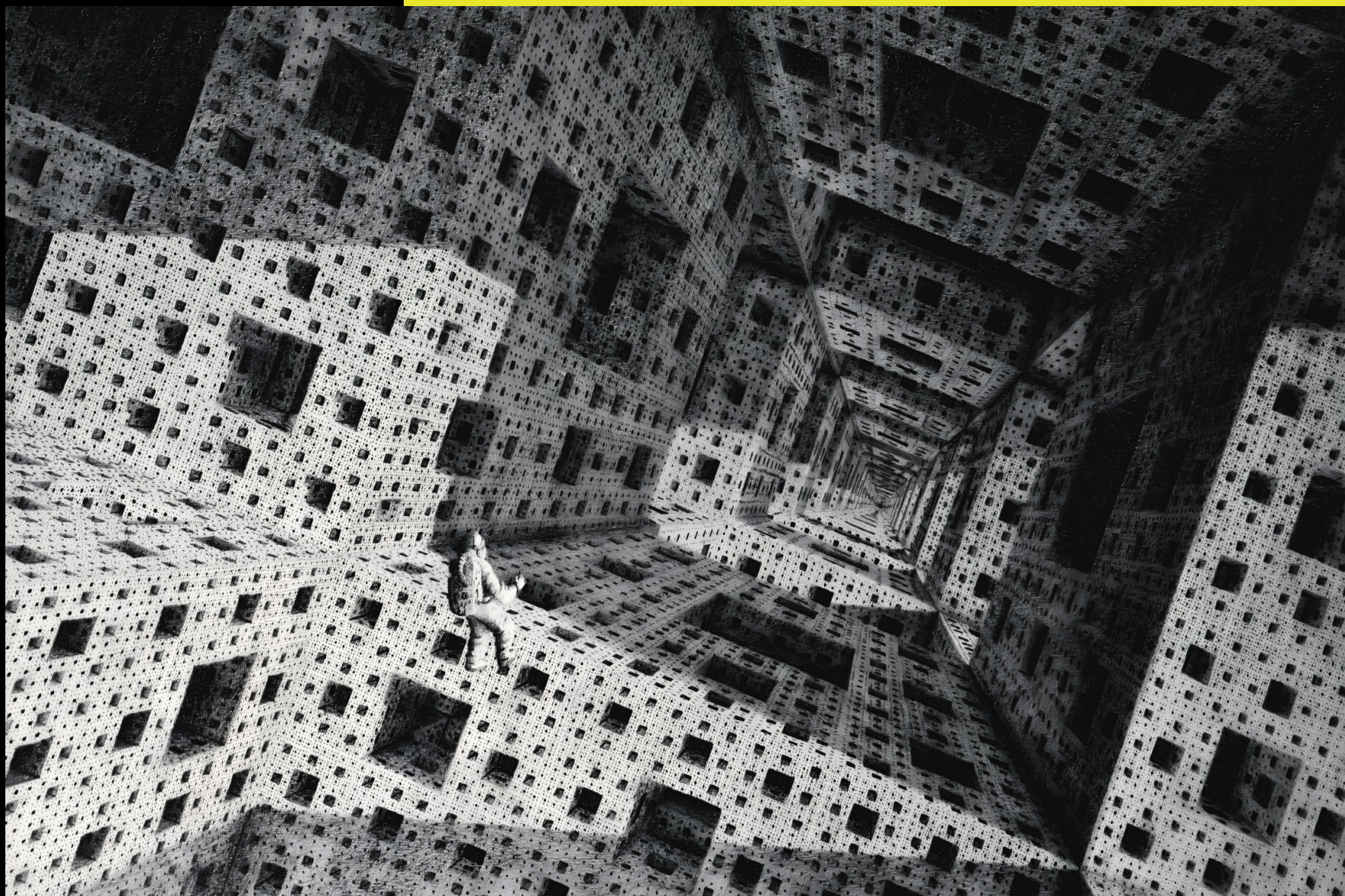
and all afternoon  
since I dragged myself outside to watch  
the New Year rise  
I have been trying to catch up on sleep.

on this nineteenth January 1st  
I have been awake for six hours.  
I have played "The New Year" four times on my earbuds,  
had two cups of coffee,  
and I am still awaiting one response to another  
"happy new year" text.  
And it is okay that I have no idea  
what will happen this year, or even this evening.

Because last night  
the room was filled to absolute capacity  
with thoughts of 365 days and beyond.  
We time-traveled,  
said "I love you" to our friends,  
and meant it. We made plans  
that might happen but might not,  
and the chorus just hit  
on number five.  
so I am making believe  
that I am wealthy,  
for just this once,  
or maybe the whole year,  
if I can manage that.

# FRRACTAL 2

*HENRY O'BRYAN*



# VEINS OF EARTH

OMAR ANSARI



# LIL' TOOT

VICTORIA SAFFELL



Now I am grown so much,  
red and blue sorrows I do not touch.  
Not crumbling in sickness,  
shedding tears in my mother's embrace.

Now I am grown so much,  
not bound by emotion's chains.  
Not seeking playmates,  
as lost in nature's games.

Now I am grown so much,  
father's rules no longer wake me.  
No more pleading to my brother,  
for books, pens, or pencils, carefree.

Now I am grown so much,  
no more idling, counting stars, or such.  
Not entrance,  
nor chasing any lover's embrace.

Now I am grown so much,  
not screaming from hunger's ache.  
Not breaking down  
over pride and ego's sake.

Now I am grown so much,  
as to not stress my brain,  
Heart and mind, in their own lane.

Now I am grown so much,  
love's simple release,  
from heart's desires to mind's peace.

Now I am grown so much,  
not stirred by raven's claw,  
in the heart's machine, only logic's draw....

Now,  
I am grown so much.

**MD ABUL SHAHID**



**MIRRORLESS**  
**MILO CICCONE**

# FROM THE DESK OF RUBENS



NATHANAEL LECLERCQ

COLIN TRAN



COLIN TRAN

# IN THE WAKE OF US

# HOW DO YOU LIKE YOUR EGGS

?

BEN COLLINS

Not everything needs a touch-screen.  
the stove is perfect just the way it is,  
heating dish after dish  
love letter after love letter,  
the best form of a hug.

And one of the best ways I know to tell  
someone I care about them  
doesn't need a touch-screen, or LEDs,  
or any other bells and whistles.

I would rather my eggs  
have slightly burned edges,  
little scorches that say:  
I'm not perfect. But it'd be really cool  
if you had breakfast here again,  
and again,  
and again.



## **POLICY**

Windhover considers artistic work for publication across many mediums created by NC State University students, staff, and alumni. Editorial staff, alongside their committees, review submissions with particular criteria in mind and then choose their submissions for the annual magazine. Submissions do not reflect the opinions of Windhover, Student Media, or NC State University.

These individuals were volunteers for this volume. As per our Submission policy, volunteers are not permitted to take part in the review of their own submission(s) to prevent subjectivity and bias. The acceptance and consideration of their piece(s) is decided by the editor-in-chief based on a pre-existing critique process.

Trinity Nguyen, Amelia Boys, Greyson Spells, Duke Dix, Kayla Lare, Krushi Bandam, Sarina Labadie, Jill Tanner

*For submission guidelines, please visit [windhover.ncsu.edu](http://windhover.ncsu.edu)*

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