



# SEQUOYA REVIEW

UTC's Annual Literary & Arts Magazine 2020

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Thanks to Sarah Einstein, this year's advisor

## **A Statement from the Cover Artist: Kat Friedmann**

“Cessation” is a study exploring the heightened value of an object through the lens of obsession. Created through the process of documentation and extensive handling, the object began to crumble, thereby shedding both its character and initial beauty. The object, now disfigured, is left devoid of its previous value, the value now lying in the documentation itself.

## **A Statement from the Design Editor: Taylor A. Johnson**

Spring of 2020 is not ending how we expected, and unlike before, the Sequoia Review is presented to you in a digital format.

In this time of uncertainty, I believe that the best we can do is to lend our hearts to others and help each other out the best we can. Reach out virtually to one another, spend time doing things that make you happy and may bring joy to others. If you are struggling, there are many out there available to listen and to help.

Here we present this year's selection of writing and art to hopefully inspire during this time. Please enjoy & thank you.

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**WRITING**

# ¿Qué Eres Tú?

Samantha Thompson

Evie was only seven when it first happened, which is too young — though some would argue that one is never old enough to experience it. She could still remember now, as a grown woman of development and progress., How she felt back then hearing her beautiful ethnicity isolated into a single vulgarism. She could hear the word like a chant, echo in her mind. Her curled hair, tan skin and dark eyes made her beautiful — or so she'd thought — but they couldn't see beauty or humanity or poetry... they only saw that word. Somehow even this was better than the other responses she received. The lightness of her skin in contrast to her dark hair and eyes was disconcerting to those whom she could call hermano y hermana by blood, but not by acceptance. They cared not that she partly belonged to them, only that she partly belonged to something else. And even worse still was the question too often and so blatantly asked: "what even are you?" Evie wanted to scream at them she was human, she was a woman, she was a successful, professional member of society...

Alguien que está cansada de sus preguntas...

Going back in time, she could almost hear her mother's sweet voice singing her to sleep, could almost feel the back and forth rocking, — the comfort of mamá — could almost see the dark face bending forward to kiss her nose. She closed her eyes to feel the memory, when she didn't know what it meant to the rest of the world that she was part Puerto Rican. That was when she didn't realize that being white meant that you were an oppressor of people. That was when she didn't know that being latin made people question your belonging.; Before she realized being mixed was a contradiction of some kind that confused and overwhelmed people. That was before... Before that word and the others that came after it.

The memory resurfaced as she heard the question again, "so what are you..?"

\*\*\*\*\*

"I'm mixed," she heard herself say in a tone that lingered on the boundary between boredom and exasperation. "I'm half Puerto Rican, half Irish."

Some "ooh"s and "oh"s and "hmm"s came forth from her audience of two as they took a moment to process her heritage.

¿Cuándo conoceré a alguien que no le importa?

"Well that's cool..." Amie trailed off. "What is Puerto Rican..?"

Jaqueline chuckled and smacked her shoulder, "Amie that's so offensive! You can't ask that!" She covered her mouth and giggled more.

"Sorry Evie" her apology smiled. "I didn't mean to offend, I'm just trying not to be ignorant." Has fallado.

"That's okay."

Evie briefly explained what Puerto Rican is, where the island is and the language.

"Oh! So you're just Spanish!" Amie laughed in consolation to herself that the world once more made sense — the feeling was short lived.

"No..." Evie saw Amie's eyebrows furrow. "In order to be Spanish you have to be from Spain. I speak Spanish, but I speak Puerto Rican Spanish, which is different... I'm American."

"Girl!" Jaqueline laughed. "Make up your mind: be Puerto Rican or American!"

Evie watched them walk away in annoyance. "Soy ambos."

\*\*\*\*\*

Bedecked in basketball jersey she skipped towards the door, but it slammed in her face.

"Little girl!" Mamá called after the door-slammer. "Why did you slam the door in our faces?"

"I don't open the door for no white chick."

Evie didn't realize what "black" was until years later. As time when by she realized that not many people in "this here South" knew anything, but "white" and "black." My mother stood in shock with her very confused 8-year-old as the little African-American girl sauntered off. Shaking herself off she turned to Evie.

"Estas bien, mí cariña?" She smoothed Evie's hair and held her daughter's face in both hands as Evie nodded.

Evie took her hands out of her pockets and examined them. "¿Mamá? ¿Soy blanca? Holding her face firmly in her strong latin hands Mamá whispered fiercely, "tú eres bonita. No importa más." "El mundo intentará hacerte algo que entiendan, pero eres un ser. Eres mí bonita."

That fierce moment washed away like snow in the spring, but the memory never faded from Evie's mind. That understanding of herself was what kept her dry in the storms that followed. During the beatings down, the wearings out, the torturous pressures of the world trying to fold her like a piece of origami paper into an image they could understand, but she was not lotus, crane or frog. Once she rejected their definitions they rejected her. They forced their views on her: "spic" "white-privileged" "Pitbull-Rican"... Fluent Spanish only offered her more privilege according to other Puerto Ricans and it only intimidated uni-lingual Americanos. It was just another reminder that she didn't belong to anyone — or simply they didn't want her to belong.

## Dirty Talk

Kayla Delk

I ain't ever been good at dirty talk, but  
baby, hit me just right, and I'll fix ya up real nice  
choke me 'til I see spots and don't stop  
there are no bridges to jump off here in the country  
no rollercoasters  
only you and me,  
and I get off to the sound of my own screams

## On the Killing of a House Spider

Tyler Lockwood

I killed the spider living in my bathroom this morning. I'd left it alone in the corner for days while it ate stinkbugs caught in its web—it's October, 90 degrees, and my home has become refuge for anything hiding from the heat.

I was in the shower when I saw it out of the corner of my eye, sleeping I think, in a fresh web stretching from beneath the shower head to the opposite corner. I was going to leave it there, squishing myself against the far side of the shower, the tile wall freezing against my back. It was just a spider.

But then it was an awake spider stretching its tapered, spindly legs. The spider looked at me and I looked at it. It must have interpreted this as an invitation and not a warning because it moved towards me across the invisible bridge it has spent all night building.

I cupped water in my hands and threw it, drenching the web while the spider fell further and further down the yellow tile with each handful of hot water until it reached the tub floor and circled the drain like a cyclone before it disappeared. It was just a spider.

A new one moved in this afternoon, bigger than the previous tenant. It's fixed itself back in the corner near the door and I think I'll let it stay there until autumn when the stinkbugs leave.

# An Epitaph for a Cat

Luke Wiley

I got a call today.  
It was from my sister, in tears.  
Apparently, my cat is in the midst of dying.  
He can't stand, or eat,  
And his breath reeks of death.  
He was throwing up,  
More than usual, that is.  
It's not the death of a grandparent or an aunt or uncle,  
But it feels kind of like it.  
I knew it would come eventually,  
But eventually kept spreading out,  
Longer and longer.  
I took his everyday presence on my lap for granted.  
And here I am 118 miles from home.  
I already feel powerless to the thralls of death,  
But now I can't even be there for him in his last moments.  
I'll miss the impromptu funeral in the woods out back.  
I'll miss the eulogy my little sister will give in his honor.  
I wonder what quote or verse he would like spoken?  
I wonder what his choice of epitaph would be?  
Maybe it would be:  
"Mickey. Beloved tuxedo cat, but more dog than cat. 2006-2019."

# Personal Essay

Samantha Thompson

Mamá,

¿Cómo está? ¿Está bien? Estoy bien; extraño estar en casa.

University is easier now. Yo se...I know you were sad when I changed my major from music. But I never felt your disappointment through the whole ordeal, even though you'd put so much into my violin playing. From the time I was eight. Do you remember the Vivaldi tape? I think about it from time to time, and how at eight I desperately wanted to be one of his orphan girls and learn from the master himself. ¿Recuerda nuestras lecciones? 16 years. I realized only the other day that it's been that long. 16 years of callouses (that bled from overuse in college); 16 years of breaking strings, tears of frustration and exhaustion, small victories, constant revisions, retraining muscles; 16 years of orchestra rehearsals, never being good enough, and my ever increasing repertoire. 16 years of gentle insistence that I do well from my coach, mi mamá. Sometimes when I play, I hear your voice in the background: "Do it again." "That's not the way Mrs. Blommers said you're supposed to hold the bow." "Straighten your wrist chiquita." 3 years into high school and it'd been a while since you'd sat in on my practice, but I could still hear your voice. 16 years of protestations and you knowing me so well it scared me. You knew me like every line of your favorite book; it always startled me porque ni me ha entendido mi misma. For those 16 years siempre estoy agradecido.

I don't think I even thought about college until Mrs. Hayes (perra malvada). Every time she told me I'd never be anything worthwhile, that I'd never achieve anything I laughed at her in my heart. She expected my existence would be static—in her eyes I was worthless. If I'd told you, you would have pulled me out of lessons...I know, pero...lo vi como un desafio a superar. You would have chuckled if you would have seen her face when I told her I was going to apply to Lee University's music program. She was even more shocked when I told her that I'd been accepted. I thought she might faint when I told her I won a concerto competition. Maybe if she hadn't discredited that particular competition, she might have fainted in reality. If she'd known about all the scholarships I was awarded while at Lee she might have had a stroke.

For the first time since I was thirteen a teacher told me that I was talented, that I had a future, that I was exceptional. Mrs. Yu invited me to teach at her conservatory of music in Shanghai. I think about it all the time and how I turned her down. It's a small regret of mine even though I'm happy where I am. She praised and criticized me in equal measure—to be a better performer. Preparing for my UDAE was brutally difficult, but even before the preparations started, I realized that mi corazón estaba enfermo. I hated everything about that place. I hated most of the relationships I had (mi novio mono), my major, never being good enough, myself, and who I was becoming. I began to think about the change I needed to make.



My UDAE consisted of 4 memorized pieces, 3 scales of my judges choosing, and sight-reading. Mrs. Yu and I prepared all three movements of the Vivaldi's concerto in a-minor, the second movement of a Bruch concerto, Paganini's Cantabile in D Major and Bach's Sonata in g-minor. All of this would be performed before the Performance Board of the School of Music. I never told you or dad anything. I never told you how terrified I was, how I cried when I walked into my practice room, how my fingers bled due to over practice. I never told you how much I hated stepping into the music building and knowing I would leave discouraged by my own inner critic. Mrs. Yu and Maestro Bernhardt were my only lights in that place.

Mrs. Yu told me that I was fine, she said "you worry too much" with a wave of her hand. But her mind was always changing, so I would be fine one moment and the next a dismal failure. I never faulted her changing mind; I found her funny because I knew she loved me. Six weeks into preparations and I broke down crying in my practice room. I'd been there for 3 hours. I couldn't manage a sixteenth note run in part B of the Bach. For the first time ever, I decided something on my own about the direction of my life: I was going to leave the music department. I didn't ask you or dad or Shannon or Austin or anyone, I just decided. If I could pass my UDAE then I could leave. It wasn't quitting. It wasn't because I couldn't. It wasn't because Mrs. Hayes was right and I sucked, it was just that I could do other things. I could find myself somewhere else.

Mamá...you might think that I simply decided in a moment of overwhelming emotion, but that moment was simply the culmination of a decision my heart had made long before—that moment was just a notification from my heart to my brain. I had you in my mind every step of the way, every time I practiced I thought of how many years we practiced together, and I rebuked myself for throwing it all away. I felt like I was breaking promises and being irresponsible; following a spoiled idea that you can follow your passion rather than your responsibilities. When I told Qingye, she yelled at me for not following through and then hugged me while I cried. I called Ash and told her. She encouraged me and said I was doing what was best for myself and that I shouldn't be ashamed. Thinking back on it, I can't help but smile slightly at the clashing of cultures in their separate reactions, yet I'm sobered by the privilege of being able to make the decision I did when others like Qingye and Yiran could not.

You were hundreds of miles away at the time, but I wish you could have been with me that day. From January to April I had practice 5-7 hours a day (todavía no lo suficientemente bueno), 6 songs played 'til I couldn't feel my fingertips anymore; the smell of sweat lingered in the room (proof of hard work), my butt was numb from sitting

in that plastic chair, and I couldn't feel my legs or feet; but I was so determined. I would do so well no matter how bad it hurt. I would prove that I could leave, not because I couldn't make it, but because I wanted to. On that day I dressed in my best concert outfit, which my sister and friends approved, then I gathered my things and walked in tall heels to the concert hall.

Mi corazón latía; my hands were shaking. When I walked on the stage my heart fell into my stomach even though the judges greeted me kindly and familiarly. They told me they'd cut me off in the middle of each piece to save time, but they let me play too long. I made it through each piece very well until I reached Bach and they let me play too long. I played through the first half and it was fine, but then they didn't cut me off and I kept playing... that sixteenth note run, that had never resolved itself to my fingers, dominated me. Even though the rest was fine, I left the hall discouraged. I felt like Anne. I was in the depths of despair. I got to my dorm and I cried pointless, tired tears. I could have kicked myself for that reaction a week later when I received my scores: I passed with flying colors. Todavía no puedo creerlo.

Mamá I worked so hard to play the violin from eight years old to twenty-two. You worked so hard to keep me from quitting. But when I got my scores back, I realized that I hadn't failed you or daddy or gran or anyone. I wasn't what Mrs. Hayes thought and I wasn't even what I'd thought. In the music program I was a girl full of fear. I feared the uncertainty of who I would be if I failed and I feared who I would be if I succeeded. I hated myself there. That's why I will never say that I quit, but that I moved on.

I moved on through the acceptance and respect of you and dad; and the love and admiration of my teachers. All my friends called me crazy for changing my major 2.5 years into college, but I didn't care. In the semester that followed I discovered many things about myself. I discovered that I loved to sing more than anything, that I could create art (outside of music), and that I loved poetry and writing. When I was young, I couldn't understand you. I was mad at you for making me practice and play such a hard instrument. I find it amazing and never thought it would have happened, pero terminé siendo como tú: una escritora.

Gracias mamá, con toda de mi corazón.

Su hija,  
Samantha.

# To My Classmates

Sarah Elise

I am sorry  
for many years, I found my safety in a building -  
a building thriving with a purpose, a reason, a message  
a sermon title with that extra dazzle,  
a song with just the right chorus,  
a momentous display of choreography synced with delicate expertise in order that it  
might bring about  
salvation  
or maybe at least,  
a better attitude  
or a smile  
or even a willingness to get past the first five minutes -  
whatever the reason, my safety was found, it was good, and it was home  
but  
it was home in the way that a child trembles in it  
home in the way that ignorance is truth more than it can be called a lie  
home in the way that it wasn't quite a home at all,  
and for those of you who read this, perhaps recognize a line or two, please know that it is  
not an angry letter,  
or a rant  
but rather, simply, an apology for those who deserve it

I am sorry, my friends, my classmates, my neighbors -  
I am sorry to those on the street I once looked at or those who flinched at my social  
media shares  
for the church, while safe in places, is a work in progress  
a work in progress to the savior we love, but can't seem to act like  
a work in progress that oppresses those scripture convicts but fails to see their own  
conviction in the light of their lies,  
mistakes,  
and shortcomings  
we are not perfect  
and I am sorry for those who pretend that we are  
but I can only speak for myself  
and in the hopes I can be heard above the smoldering pulpits,  
Facebook pages,  
bumper stickers,  
and death threats  
you are loved  
oh, so loved  
and I am sorry  
in more words than I can say  
that I ever implied otherwise.

# A Political Climate

Ellie Bixler

There's apparently a point in walking—  
somewhere halfway between that left and right,  
left and right step—  
when we're in freefall,

burning through the atmosphere  
at a million miles per hour;  
colliding with the pavement,  
leaving craters, big as swimming pools

for our kids to splash and play  
and drown in, when we aren't looking.

# Duality

Susanna Skelton

The sun touches its' peak.  
The mountain awakes to day.  
Flowers billow with rising rays.  
Each petal screams life.  
Songbirds sing and fowl prowls.  
People begin their ascent.  
Honeysuckle fills their noses  
and grazes memories.  
Clouds like feathers hold them still.  
The man reaches his arms for sky.  
Still, he is crushed under foot.  
Adversary prevails  
in trekking to the peak.  
With his white flag,  
he waves surrender.  
Moon rises,  
a sparkling pebble.

**The sun touches its' peak.**  
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he waves surrender.  
Moon rises,  
a **sparkling** pebble.

# Strings Attached

Kayla Delk

Moments of magic spark on my fingertips.  
I am pulled into a night of couch cushions and waterfalls;  
they leave wake to the entanglement of a messy life.  
I wonder if it's worth it.

While movies don't bleed into reality,  
some scenes have been written to the background music that is the radio.  
We kiss slow and off key; timing is everything but us.  
The façade of no strings attached paints us as puppets,  
conjoined at the heart.

I push forward.  
You are left behind.  
The thread has not broken.

A caffeinated heartbeat pushes me into you,  
or maybe it's the fact that I'm an addict.  
Either way, we are sewn together.

# Death Row

Sarah Elise

I'm tired of kissing my best friend  
While others kiss a needle  
in their arm  
unsure if they will drift off,  
quiet, serene, hands out to meet the dance with the Death  
they quite expected  
or petrified  
that their slipping into the unknown, the known, and the dark  
with a wild and violent rattle throughout their entirety  
that manages to be silent and unassuming at the same time  
and we walk the streets  
of our pride, ignorance, indifferent sleight of mind,  
placing our need to keep our bloodied hands clean  
under the guise of consequence  
when really, it's just playing God,  
our tired game that we often claim a "victory" in -  
even though the killers of the boys and girls we send to war  
call the death of our own their victory just the same  
I'm tired of having dinner with my family  
While others beg for a seat to their own funeral  
beg for a shocking revelation  
rather than risk what they know we don't understand,  
but still dress up and paint it grace  
they'd rather feel the end ride their spine like a tidal turn, shock wave,  
back bone blown to ashen dust  
rather feel their tears pop the pupils as we meet their gaze  
hoping, wishing, wanting  
us to wonder in some sort of empathy  
some sort of sympathy  
what either of us did for superior, inferior  
humanity  
I'm tired of making tired excuses in a tired system  
That will still kill the lost  
and call it mercy

# The Allnut Problem

Thomas Matherly

Once upon a time there lived a youth who eschewed the fellowship of his own kind and went to live in the woods, among the beasts that feast upon one another. One morning he ventured forth from his village with naught but the clothes on his back and set off upon the road to the woods.

Presently he came across a cat washing itself by the road. 'Hello, little cat!' he called out.

'Hello,' the cat replied. 'Whither are you going at such an early hour?'

'To the woods,' answered the youth. 'I despise the life of man and wish to live among the beasts.'

'Very well,' said the cat. 'But beware, for I have heard tales from the birds who live in the woods of a vicious wolf whose thirst for blood cannot be quenched, and who devours every creature with whom he comes into contact.'

'I fear no such animal,' said the youth, 'for I shall become one with nature.'

The youth arrived at the edge of the woods, where he encountered a robin's nest with a lone fledgling resting in it. 'Hello, little robin!' said the youth to the robin.

'Mother says not to talk to men,' the robin replied curtly.

'I am not like other men,' said the youth. 'I have to come to live in the woods, among the birds and the beasts, where I shall become like them.'

'Very well,' said the robin. 'But beware, for in these woods lives a vicious wolf whose thirst for blood cannot be quenched, and who devours any creature with whom he comes into contact.'

'I fear no such animal,' said the youth, 'for I shall become one with nature.'

The youth continued into the woods, collecting berries along his way, until he found a clearing, where he settled and built a fire for the night, and there he fell asleep.

Some hours later the youth awoke to find a wolf staring at him from across the fire, the very same wolf that the cat and the robin had warned him about. 'I caught the stench of manblood as soon as you stepped foot in these woods,' he said. 'You are foolish, boy. Man should have more sense than to enter my domain. It is well known around here that my thirst for blood cannot be quenched, and that I devour any creature with whom I come into contact. What is your business here?'

'I have come to escape the hypocrisy of man. I shall live in these woods and become one with nature,' said the youth.

'You shall become one with nature,' replied the wolf, 'when you become one with my stomach!'

'You need not kill me,' said the youth. 'I have plenty of berries; you may have some if you like.'

'Foolish boy,' said the wolf. 'Berries cannot satisfy my bloodlust. Only the blood of life is sufficient to sustain a creature like me.'

'But berries are just as good, and you need not kill them before you eat them,' said the youth.

'You are so very naive, boy,' said the wolf. 'It is necessary to kill in order to survive; that is the way of nature. If you wish to become one with nature you must first learn this simple rule.'

'The birds and the rabbits do not kill, and yet they live,' said the youth.

'Yes, but you and I are neither birds nor rabbits,' said the wolf. 'I am wolf and you are man, and we must both kill or be killed.'

'Perhaps you must kill because you know no better,' said the youth, 'but I am a higher being, blessed by God with the knowledge of good and evil, and I refuse to kill any living thing.'

'So naive, so foolish,' said the wolf. 'Your kind and mine were created to engage in mortal combat; thus, we must fight until one of us lies dead at the other's feet.'

'Do what you must,' said the youth, 'but I will not kill you.'

'Then you will die,' said the wolf, and he pounced.

The boy is ready for him and dives out of the way. The wolf lands on the spot where the boy stood a moment before; its jaws snap shut, biting nothing but air. The boy scrambles to his feet and spots a large stone a few yards away. He starts to run for it but the wolf dashes in front of him. It lunges for the boy's groin but he kicks it in the snout, jumps over it, and grabs the stone.

The wolf turns around and snarls and the boy clubs it in the head with the stone and places his foot firmly on its throat. "I told you I wouldn't kill you, but I won't let you kill me either," and with those words he smashes the wolf's hind leg with the stone. The wolf screams but the boy doesn't stop until all the bones in the leg are nothing more than powder.

the wolf limps to the fire and flops to the ground, lying on its right flank, its mangled leg stretched out behind it, all the while fixing its frigid glare on charlie youll have to do more than break my leg to stop me from killing you in your sleep 'i could,' the boy says. 'i could but i wont and i already told you why. there are a lot more ways to stop you from killing me than to just kill you. and you wont kill me in my sleep because im going to stay awake as long as i need to to make a civilized creature out of you.'

we both know im no civilized creature  
'not yet. but you will be.'

never  
'well see.'

two days the boy stays awake and watches the wolf. he goes out occasionally to gather food and firewood and when he returns to his camp the wolf is still there waiting for him. every time he returns the boy offers the wolf some morels but the wolf does not accept them and growls at him. the time in between these vignettes is spent by the boy and the wolf staring at each other youll fall asleep soon and that night the boy does. the wolf limps to where the boy sleeps and snaps at his jugular but the boy is ready for him and rolls to the side and grabs the stone and destroys the wolfs other hind leg. and while the wolf lies whimpering the boy whispers to it 'eat,' but it refuses.

the next two days pass in the same manner as the previous two days. brief sojourns for food and firewood and the rest of the time staring at the wolf, which now had half of its legs but twice as much spite and hatred toward charlie you will sleep eventually and the longer you stay awake the deeper that sleep will be charlie knows this but he will not kill the wolf and so he feigns sleep again that night.

the wolf, having lost the ability to walk or even limp, drags itself with its forepaws to charlie and sees that he is awake but it does not retreat. charlie breaks one of its forelegs but it lies still and makes no sound and looks at charlie while he brings the stone down again and again.

charlie throws the stone away and stands above the wolf as they both breathe laboriously. 'just eat something,' charlie says. 'i dont want to keep hurting you.'

the wolf looks at charlie and looks down and sighs. it uses its last remaining leg to drag itself to the store of morels and tentatively takes one in its mouth and chews and swallows. charlie smiles and says 'thank you.' he finally sleeps that night.

The boy will awake to find the wolf staring at him from across the fire, on all fours, as if nothing had happened. Both of his legs will be broken; though baffled, all questions will dissipate from the boy's head. 'Very well,' he will say. 'If it is my fate to die between your jaws, so be it. But God will know that I never stooped low enough to take your life.'  
'you talk about god and believe hes on your side,' the wolf will say, 'yet im standing here miraculously with all my legs intact, and youre lying there with both of yours decimated.

that should be proof enough for you that youre no divine creature. youre going to die just like i am, regardless of whether or not you kill an animal, and no amount of affected moral superiority can save you. to kill is the law of this earth. so ill give you one last chance to kill me. one last chance for you to become a killer so you can go to see god as one who obeyed the laws of his world.'

'I am a man,' the boy will say. 'My purpose in life is to rise above the laws of this world – this is God's will; if it were not so, how could my species have evolved from base creatures such as yourself, into beings who are on the verge of becoming gods themselves?'

'youve deluded yourself into believing that youre special: that is the explanation,' the wolf will say.

...

...

... 'perhaps,' the boy will break the silence.

and the wolf: 'then i take it youre not going to kill me?' and the boy:

...

...

... 'No.'

'good,' will say the wolf. 'im hungry.' and he will pounce.

# Evergreen

Susanna Skelton

Consuming blooms  
that have broken season's rules.  
Rebelling against their mother  
while sons and daughters laugh  
in harmony.  
They smile  
at the star in the sky  
that shines down on peers and kin  
likewise. Never giving  
second, third thought  
to the day to come. Dawn  
shakes the abodes  
of sisters while caressing  
the jawline of streams.  
Flowing without ceasing second,  
droplets ban together locking  
card-house arms together  
praying  
for a windless day.

# The Thornbird's Nest

Lysa Scealf

There were many things floating on the wind that day. The scent of dandelions pollinating, their seedlings like parasols invading the air; the melody of birdsong carrying them for miles; the warm sun leaving a hint of rain on the tongue as the last days of summer began to wane into fall. I stood in the sun and breathed in deeply, taking it all inside myself, the particulates entering my senses, unaware of their ability to affect me. They were filling my heart with something other than heartbreak, loss, unwanted change—if only in that moment. It was a good day to celebrate life. To remember life as it was.

In hindsight, this is the moment I was coming undone. I was beginning to unravel, though I was not aware of it. Nor could I have imagined how bad things were going to get for me. I had never thought I was capable of losing myself. Despite any hardships, I was always in control, always taking care of everyone, always calm and kind, ever present. Until this day.

It was cleaning day. My mother was dead, and I had come to clean her apartment. Though I knew this apartment as hers, I had never lived there. It was alien except for the familiar belongings, which had accompanied me throughout my life. The antique bedroom set with the nail in the back of the headboard where her pistol used to hang, the rails set up on concrete blocks, the aging mirrors on the vanity and highboy cracking with extreme age. I recognized these as her possessions, now they were mine. I couldn't move. I wasn't ready to walk inside and claim them. The swelling of my heart with every beat, the physical response to a feeling, a sense memory, an unrequited need for a mother's love, began to blur out the essences that surrounded me as I stood paralyzed, my feet heavy against the sidewalk, life going on all around me. I stood there regretting, hurting, thinking, barely breathing, hesitating. I just stood there, catatonic in the experience, trying to find a coping mechanism that would help me process things I could never prepare for as the only child of an indifferent parent. I stood frozen and reflected on the last ten days that led me here.

Jacqui's death was a mystery, as was most of her life before that. I got the call late, my cousin Carrie on the other end of the line, "Lysa, it's your mom..." I knew without her elaborating; I had always known how she would go. It was too soon.

"Overdose? Unusual circumstances? In that lonely apartment?"

My cousin confirmed I was right, "How did you know?" That's when the numbness seized me. Now I had to sift through the questions and the artifacts she left behind. There were some concrete details, although the staged events, the clues of her last moments, were a puzzle I would have to solve. I was hopeful I would find some truths during the excavation process. Something to explain why.

Her paintings, from which she had made a name for herself —The Thornbird, her self-appointed moniker —applied to each in the usual spot, would need to be carefully curated and preserved. I would have to explain why she left them, why she left me, behind. Explanations were always necessary for Jacqui's behavior, even when it was subtle. Her life was a bread crumb trail of enigmas due to her mental illness and her conspiratorial nature. The paintings, like me, were both a part of her and both abandoned. And for some reason, in that moment, I was worried about them.

I thought the worst was over after receiving the call, the weight of the stress the woman constantly oppressed me with was over, until arriving at the funeral home a couple of days later where I was informed that I would have to identify her body. My poor Aunt Betsy, my mother's only sister, tried in vain to spare me, to amend with the funeral director in his duty to administrative policies and pleaded with him to allow her to go in my stead.

"No, I'm sorry." the man with Dippity-Doo in his grey hair and wearing a swamp green knit suit said with feigned concern, "It must be the sole heir. If there is no spouse, the responsibility lies on the eldest surviving child. It's Tennessee law."

I, Jacqui's only child, would do whatever it took to end this meeting and remove myself from this situation. To return to life and all its hardships and joys, to anything but the choking smell of furniture polish and formaldehyde laced with Lysol in this theatre of macabre circumstances.

"It's fine, it's okay. I can do this." I reassured my aunt, myself feigning a smile.

And as we waited for the hospital to courier over my mother's body like a take-out order, the details of the cremation process were described in brutal detail against our desire to hear it. A grim dialog which was, thankfully, interrupted as soon as the ambulance arrived with its corporeal passenger. The memory will never leave me, though at the time, I pushed it back just to muscle through the shock. It was a vivid image, a monochrome guise of finality, that would resurface in my mind while standing in front of my mother's apartment door seven days later.

I was ushered into one of the over-upholstered parlors, the farthest parlor from the front door, the pocket doors shut behind me. It was a morose setting, cold and thick with noxious odors, reminiscent of an X-Files or Twilight Zone episode; an illusion. The typical funeral decor, a showroom for the dead —and then, a metal gurney, chaperoned by two EMTs doing their mirthless duty of pulling back the sheet, exposing my mother's sleeping face. The sheet was for my sake. Jacqui had been in cold storage at the local hospital morgue for a couple of days. I could clearly see the body bag she arrived in rolled up and temporarily tucked away above the wheels of the gurney, crudely shrouded by the sheet that covered her. I nodded, confirming —accepting it was her, and then the tears came. Tears I did not expect, not like this. Gushing, uncontrollable tears. My eyes stung; my throat tightened. My heart swelled with pity, for my mother and for myself. I stopped the men from covering her and asked for a moment alone. They kindly obliged. And for the next ten minutes I apologized for being angry, for not visiting, for not calling, for not trying anymore. I told her goodbye. Kissed her forehead. Walking out I turned, pulling

the pocket doors to, my gaze on her lifeless face the entire time. It was the first time I had laid eyes on her in months, and it was the last time I would ever see this form of her again. That's when I understood too late, my choice to avoid her had been wrong. I should have —could have — found another way to deal with her like my grandmother had asked.

Facing that apartment door burdened my mind. There was, of course, a memorial service first. Friends long lost, some un-liked, hugging me, touching me, indulging me with their condolences, gathered around Jacqui's remains telling me what a wonderful person she was. Family, intuiting my lack of presence, though wholly unaware of just how numb I had become, tried to run interference. Before it was over, my mother's ashes were handed to me in a black, plastic, rectangular box. Somehow thanking the funeral director seemed inappropriate. While all of this was happening, my mind could only focus on the next errand: opening the front door.

Walking in, I was immediately confronted by relics of my past. To the left, a gallery wall, a floor to ceiling display of artwork — some old, some new, water colors, pen and ink, pencil sketches, oils — mostly of people: some I knew, some I didn't, angels, musicians, a self-portrait of Jacqui as a lost child, a shrine to St. Valentine patron saint of lovers, epilepsy, beekeeping, and the plague. To the right, kitchen counters smothered with prescription bottles, a pin board on the wall with photos of people; again, some I knew, some I didn't. Her keys, full of extra rings, a pewter angel, and an antique bobby whistle from London on a hook next to a row of coffee mugs, one also from London. Her kitchen was full of normal mortal things, human things, fridge magnets holding photos of my daughters, the card we sent for her last Mother's Day. Almost nothing inside the fridge.

I move on to the living room. The apartment is small, four rooms, basic, generic, government issue, except for the pieces of her collections scattered throughout —things that were Jacqui —and angels, angels are everywhere. On blankets and pillows, painted on canvas, ceramic figures, in feathered plastic and crystal hanging by fishing wire from the ceiling. These were new to me. It suddenly occurred to me they have been surrounding me since I entered the dwelling. It was chilling to see her madness made manifest like this. But more chilling still, was the instrument of her death still clinging, powdered and pulverized, to the inside of a marble pestle on the sofa table next to the antique fainting couch that held her body as she died; angels hovering overhead like some inanimate, glimmering, ethereal jury.

Jacqui was diagnosed with schizophrenia at age fourteen. Born in 1943, one of six children, she was always vying for attention, but her unbalanced and often tempestuous behavior drove my grandparents to seek help for her at an early age. The professional understanding of this disorder in the mid-fifties was very limited, and the primary treatment was shock therapy, an ineffective and inhumane solution by today's standards, and cruel by my grandmother's. The shock treatments were not pursued, but Jacqui did spend much time in and out of treatment facilities and psychiatric wards her entire life. In perpetual denial about her real problems, her psychosis worsened over



the years, mounting into severe delusional paranoia. She preferred to draw attention to imagined maladies, claimed wild and unrealistic fantasies as truths, effectively duped the medical community—in other words, she “worked the system.” Drug problems inevitably followed.

There was a yard sale soon after cleaning day. All my mother’s things, in boxes and piles, strewn about my cousin’s lawn. Fodder to pay the toll on my Grandfather’s wallet for the cremation there was no insurance to cover. I sorted through every last thing. Her books, of which I rescued many, furniture—minus the deathbed, this I kept, as well as the antique bedroom set, which I had no room for and later had to donate. A gift to my parents the day they wed; it made my heart sick to see it go. Her clothes; coats, pants, shirts—part of her psychosis, an eating disorder tied to her self-worth, meant that they were all tiny enough to fit a ten-year-old. She had long ago tied up her feet in ballet shoes, bound them in oriental fashion to make them smaller, meaning I couldn’t salvage any of her shoes either. Hats, purses, jewelry, dishes, bed linens, household items. Her Maloney Dilators I sent directly to the dumpster. I never wanted to look at them again—long rubber tubes in various diameters routinely swallowed to stretch her weakened, Bulimia-torn esophagus. Her art, her journals, her address book, letters, medical documents, and prescriptions; all these I kept in a vain attempt to sleuth through them for answers. A way to ignore the pain I had resolved did not exist.

Nothing, however, would ever untie the knot in my throat over selling her belongings.

Taking on my mother’s modest estate had overwhelmed me from the moment I got the call. I just didn’t realize standing on the sidewalk that day, that I was already broken. It snuck up on me, and I lost hold of myself in the course of things that followed. The dreadful task of emptying Jacqui’s nest was akin to looking at my life through a View Master. I could change the images by pushing down on the lever, but eventually they would come full circle and start all over again unless I changed the disc. My emotions, like my memories, were reeling, looping over and over, beyond my own control.

The life I had known up to this point was erasing itself from me; aching, slowly fading away. Yet still, all I could focus on is that the weather seemed perpetually sunny and warm. I remember blue skies, birds filling the trees everywhere, warm wind washing over me, immortalizing the moment. I also remember I would not listen to any music during this time. I wanted no soundtrack for this horror, nothing to set this tragedy irrevocably in my mind like some dark redundant opera. I wanted no playlist that would allude to my mother’s death every time I heard it despite the sunny weather.

I had never before experienced the absurd lack of control that would come over me; cause me to snap, stop eating, give things away, neglect my children, betray my family’s trust, pour my mother’s ashes into a hole I dug on her parent’s grave—but I did all of these things. This malady of the spirit entered me like a possession, dark and subtle; an entity I was ill-equipped to fight in my vulnerable state. It was scary, like an out-of-body experience. Trying to pull myself back in, I couldn’t. A sensation similar to swinging an ineffective punch in a dream. I was helpless and at the mercy of my subconscious. Stuck inside myself, I waited to be rescued but nobody came.

It has taken me years to come to terms with the damage I left in my wake. Always a nurturer, always a doting mother, I had left my post. I was so unaware of my own instability I could not properly articulate the scope of my need. Out of the happenstance of temporary madness, I simply lost myself. Suddenly, I had no identity. Who was I? Jacqui’s daughter? Mother, wife, homemaker, woman? What happened to me? All at once I was nothing; disconnected, lost, forgotten. A part of myself was just gone forever, taken away, and I had no choice in the matter. This was a hard lesson—one which I am still learning from.

I wake up every day hoping to outlive my mistakes. To take back those things, that in the wake of my self-destruction, took on collateral damage. The dissolution of my character under duress caused me to do things that frightened my children, that hurt and disappointed them, left them feeling unsafe, insecure, unprotected, things that ruined my image, damaged our bond, traumatized them as I was once traumatized by Jacqui. I couldn’t explain to them that I was broken and lost, that I had fallen down, that I needed desperately to reconcile who I was. For a long time, I could not accept that I had ever been that person. I still find myself mitigating misunderstandings from these regretful mistakes and it sometimes feels like I will never outlive them. Maybe, in some terrible way, I finally understand how my mother’s lack of control was not always her fault. I have since forgiven Jacqui. Forgiving myself is much harder.

It took some time, but I can once again enjoy the magic of a summer day, listen to the euphony of bird song, feel the warm breeze against my face, inhale the pollen aspirating the air as bees carry it on the wind, without thinking about cleaning day. The day I was bespelled with some inherent madness that, for a time, turned me feral, then suddenly released its grip and left me shell-shocked and naked in the aftermath. I wonder sometimes if Jacqui ever new this kind of shame.

My daughters and I were once very close. One day, I hope we can find our way back to each other. I want them both to know how repentant I am for it all. One day, maybe, I can explain what I found in the Thornbird’s nest and what it did to me.

Stubborn, head-strong, willful; forgiveness is something else I have learned the hard way. I hope it’s reflective.

# What Does it Mean to Dream About Drowning?

Nora Cooper

The sky was fading into the sea and she stared at it, hypnotized. She ran toward the ocean, pulling her younger brother along with her, their footprints dotted and cracked the dark sand as they took their first steps into the icy waves. Bobby sat down as the water receded and waited for it to splash down again, waited for the sea to engulf him and pull him in.

She was not so patient. She ran to the wave as it sprouted and dove into it, her arms and legs scraping against the sandy floor. And as the wave failed to pull her brother into the sea with her, Bobby managed to stand and follow his sister deeper as they both splashed into the waves. She laughed as he paddled around in the choppy water, and watched as the sunset beamed on their foreheads trying to warm them.

It would be time to leave soon. The sun was finally falling over the horizon. She started to head back to shore. The water barely lapped at her ankles when she turned to call that it was time to leave and almost saw nothing. Her heart made a deep bang as she tried to focus around the mirror of the waves. There it was. A face, her brother's face, sticking out of the water much too far out and bobbing as he tried to keep afloat. Be it cramp or current, she ran out quickly as she took a deep breath. "Bobby!" she yelled.

She cried out for help and the lifeguards panicked when they noticed the drowning boy. The girl knew it would be too late before they reached him, so she plunged toward him. She swam as fast as she could, using all the efforts her little hands and feet could extinguish. At last she reached him. She struggled to lift him out of the water, while managing to still keep both of their heads above the water. He coughed and sputtered, while holding tightly onto his sister's shoulders. She was breathing hard and he was shaking. She felt like she was going to fall apart. She looked back to the lifeguards quickly swimming toward them, but they were not moving fast enough. Her legs were giving out from trying to tread the water, and she could not push from the current with her brother weighing down on her chest. With all her last strength, to keep her and her brother from going down, she hurled him forward, toward the lifeguards and out of the current, leaving herself to fall deeper into the trench, the muscles in her legs finally reaching their limit. Her feet touched the bottom of the sea, and her right ankle swerved on the slippery wet sand, bending the wrong way and scraping on something hard. She tried to push herself out of the water, but as she did pain pierced up her leg. She grabbed around the water, trying to pull herself up, but her muscles already felt like they were on fire. Her lungs began to burn for lack of oxygen. With a final rush of adrenaline, she pushed off with her left foot.

When she reached the surface, gasping for what little air she could before a wave forced her under again. The ocean yanked her around like a deflated beach ball. It seemed that every time she came back up, she tried to find the direction of the beach, but was always pushed back under and pushed further and further from shore.

She was happy at first. She could not remember how long she had been tumbling through the sea, but she felt like an astronaut drifting through space. She had had a dream once where she was a woman who had fallen into the sea during the sinking of the Titanic. She would never forget the feeling of how she drifted slowly into the depths while watching the moon above her, a lopsided pearl shining on the surface of the water. And as she woke from the dream she could feel the adrenaline pushing against her chest, telling that she was either dead or dying, although she wasn't. It is this way that the mind often tricks the body. She liked the feeling that she felt then, like the water was eating her up and pushing her back into reality. And that is how she was now, only stuck somewhere in the middle of the physical and the holy. She had fallen into a black hole that was taking her to heaven. And she was waiting for the angels to come and tape wings to her back and welcome her to the live in the clouds.

The angels did come, she thought. Three, four, five pairs of white eyes appeared inside the hole, and she laughed. The eyes floating in the middle of the darkness looked like a book she had read when she was younger. The princess runs into the forest and is scared when she sees the eyes through the darkness of the forest. The picture book had drawn the eyes big and bulging like the pupils had been ripped off the bodies and placed there carefully.

The lights that sparkled off of the eyes seemed to expand, and she noticed now that the eyes were stuck inside heads, which were connected to necks, which broke into arms. Arms that were long and boney and shimmering in the darkness. She was frightened as two pairs of hands reached out for her, and was repulsed to find that they felt cold and slimy. She shut her eyes to try and wish them away, but she could not move. She was a fly caught in a spider's web, with five spiders all fighting over her. She felt a hand go over her mouth and shut her eyes tighter. She could feel the angels holding her close as the hand pushed on her jaw, trying to pry her mouth open. Eventually, the pressure got to the girl, and she decided to let the angel win. She tasted a slick substance against her lips, and she felt her mouth go numb as she swallowed. It went down like cough medicine. She shuddered and tried to yell. She opened her eyes to find only the empty black hole to comfort her.

She didn't know what day it was, but if she had to guess, she'd say it was probably Sunday. Only a few days after falling into the sea. She had been sitting for so long her legs were starting to fall asleep. She needed to stand and walk, but she couldn't, everything was too scary. She pushed her legs out and let her body lean on her arms. She stretched out until the muscles were tightening to the point where they felt as though they were about to fall off. Letting go and settling back down, she made a deep and desperate sigh.

Closing her eyes, she could feel the vibrations in her arm muscles as they finally tried to grasp some blood and warmth. It felt especially nice because of the how chilled the floor was, and she pleasantly shivered to the sudden heat. There was so much dark surrounding her; at night, she couldn't see anything but the outline of the door, where the light seeped in. Occasionally, she could see shadows of people that walked passed, and she hoped that someone would remember that she was in there. It was impossible for her to keep track of how long she had been there, but it seemed like at least a few days. She began to feel as though she would never escape from the dungeon. Of course, though, it was not really a dungeon. It was a brig. A brig was kind of like a piratey, underwater dungeon.

The men with the orange pants found her lying on a wooden boat in the water. She was lying on something cold and hard when she woke up. She had noticed how clear the moon was before she realized that she was cold. She tried to push down on it and it moved under her weight. She made herself flat, realizing that she was floating on the sea. The far memories at the beach felt like a dream. She wondered if she might have still been dreaming, but the breeze biting at her nose made her head feel clearer than it had in a while.

They had asked where she came from, and she said the beach.

"Which beach?"

"The one with the stripey blue umbrellas."

"How did you get all the way out here?"

"The water was too strong. It pulled me away."

"Wasn't anyone else on the boat with you?"

She shook her head. "No. This isn't my boat. I just woke up here." She looked at her toes, thought about how cold it was. The ocean was trying to take my brother, but I saved him, so it took me instead. She remembered her dreams about the angels, and wondered if she should tell the men about them. But it didn't matter, they were already done talking. One of them gave her a big, plastic shirt to wear over her wet clothes and took her through one of the doors that went deeper into the ship.

The man who had given her ham sandwiches and cups of water came into the room to tell her that they had reached land. That it was time to leave. She nodded and held his hand on the way to the dock.

More questions from more old adults, and series of long car rides filled the next couple of days. She spent her time braiding her hair into different shapes. A nurse who had checked her heartbeat and asked how she was feeling gave her some hair ties so that she didn't have to keep letting the braids fall and unravel.

Her face hurt from smiling on the day she saw her family car pull up to the white building.

"It was so dark in there," She would say to her parents, later, as they drove away.

Mom turned to her like she wanted to say something, but she turned away quickly when tears started to roll down her face again.

"So, the nurses told us that you've been having dreams?" asked Dad.

She was confused. "No, I haven't had any dreams since that night." She remembered telling the nurse who gave her the hair ties about it. How her face had warped into something not quite sad, but not quite happy either.

"What night, sweetie?"

"That night the ocean took me. I can't remember what happened because I had a weird dream." She remembered the faces of the angels—round, glowing, orbs with black holes for eyes. Like the ghosts in her Halloween picture book. And how their hands came after her. They were slimy and long like worms. She shivered.

"Do you want to tell us about it?"

"No." She had almost forgotten everything sitting in the car and watching the trees on the roadside go by, waving.

## To the Bee I Woke too Early

Tyler Lockwood

Sorry to the bee I poked with a flower stem this morning. It's just that your small hairy body was resting on a lavender blossom for seven minutes without moving—I counted—and I thought that maybe if you were dead, poking you would somehow resurrect you. Stupid. But it's not that stupid because you weren't in fact dead you were just sleeping. Was it the lavender that did it? My mom used to put it underneath my pillow before I went to bed. Brings good dreams, she told me. But I don't think that's true.

## Smaller

Courtney Wells

Light bulbs flash like stars between my eyelashes  
the blue one is pluto  
because the blue one is always pluto  
My hands feel like they could just be a little bit smaller  
I want the salt water to stain my skin and seep down into my neck  
sweet release  
my shoulders long to crumble into themselves, concave my chest into my sweater  
I wish that boy had never given me his book  
looked at me and knew it would never work  
but good men can't be honest because it hurts too much  
I tug at my shirt more than I tug at my heart  
mostly, I can't even remember how lonely I am  
If i close my eyes just enough,  
I believe that the stars between my eyelashes are light bulbs

# The Five Percent

Courtney Wells

Of all the marriages in the world, half end.  
some are so broken, that not even endings mend.

how can I expect to compete?  
when I am predestined to be incomplete?

what I really fear is being too much  
overwhelming, intimidating, and such

he wants to fix my mind with flattery,  
but his words can't fix twenty years of insecurity.

I disassociate and it's easy to doom myself  
only the worst are good enough for the shelf.

I reside in a hypocritical orbit of the opinions of the next man.  
I didn't know what I could do with myself, so I ran.

Fulfill my desire for affirmation  
with commotion and loosely held fascination.

comfort my fears, and satisfy my lust  
only commit to me if you must.

because even if i could handle it  
there's no way I could believe enough to submit.

# To Chris

Jude Keef

I wish you had a hard drive for a brain  
so that when you lay sad and drunk on the couch,  
I could sneak up with a Philips double-o screwdriver  
and remove the hidden plate behind your ear

I'd take this device to my room and study it for a few hours  
looking at all the busted and damaged edges,  
and when I finally got stumped from the physical aspects  
I'd plug it into my desktop and check the files it contained

I could spend eternity searching the thing for answers,  
signs or a clue or one tiny fragment of information  
Surely, most of the files would be corrupted,  
but the ones that remained wouldn't be more helpful

I'd have to call for outside resources, a friend or a technician  
to figure out the mess that is your parenting style  
and when I got all the extra help from the therapists  
and mechanics, it wouldn't make a bit of a difference

Maybe it wouldn't be so bad if you had a hard drive  
for a brain, in fact your selfish actions would be understood,  
and when you were still there three days later  
you wouldn't reek of alcohol and filth but of clean titanium

# Dashes to Ashes

Keily Arnold

She dashed into my aunt's dining room sometime in the December of 2006. It was long before I had even completed a sentence. She cleared the baby gate set in place for her, as though stubby corgi legs and a recent spay couldn't hinder her from reaching me. My own wounds had only recently healed, shallow knife wounds that would fade in years but back then had meant a nice week-long stay at the Parkridge Valley behavioral health facility. I think my grin nearly split my face when I reached down to meet her.

It was the August of 2019 when her mind finally left. Two years prior, I'd been shocked by the idea of "dog dementia." I'd seen Alzheimer's in humans. It ate away at my great-grandmother till she could no longer eat on her own. My family had collapsed in their grief, and I'd been unable to comfort them. Grief eluded me through the deaths of several relatives, classmates, and friends. It was a language I couldn't comprehend.

It found me with her. It sparked as fear and smoldered over the years as she lost more and more of herself. Some days she'd wander the house, scratching at empty bedroom doors for my mom to let her out. There'd be a faraway look in her eyes. Her breaths would come in frightened pants like they always did during thunderstorms and fireworks displays. She'd forget the commands we carefully went over in her puppy years, the ones that I'd boasted she had learned faster than any dog I'd seen.

When a person has Alzheimer's, people feel sympathy for their loved ones. It scares people so much that they consume whatever the media and doctors say is best to stop it, though nothing has been proven. There's a bunch of movies and TV shows about it that leave people in tears as fictional characters fade away. I recall another of my great-grandmothers began to think her own daughter was her sister, and it broke her and everyone around her.

People wanted to know what was wrong with her. "Why is she acting like that?" or, "does she need to go outside?" Explaining became exhausting, especially when the usual response was more like sound than empathy or sympathy, "Aww, poor thing!" Some people just laughed like her confused, panicked actions were the quirky antics of a senior dog.

How could they have known she was my best friend? That one day, she'd stop recognizing everyone besides me? That the entire world would terrify her? That I'd have to make the choice to end my best friend's life?

I walked into a classroom the Tuesday after, having survived two classes knowing she wasn't waiting at home to jump on me and whine like I'd been gone months, not hours. I hadn't broken till then, not really, but something about the quiet of the classroom brought back the sound of her yelp when the sedative entered her. It conjured an image of her on the floor, tongue lolling about as the sedative worked its way through her. The guilt of leaving her in such a state finally filled me, and I finally knew what grief was. I told my professor, "I can't do this."

My professor excused my behavior to my group. "She had a bad day yesterday."

Her body was still lying in wait to be cremated when my parents and the rest of the family dried their eyes and forgot her the way she forgot them. Except there wasn't anything eating away at their cognitive function, nothing to slow down their memories. They talked about the simple things in their lives, the worries that I didn't have enough room for. I'd choke out my words on her, and they'd patiently wait for my sentence to end before asking their questions.

"How's school going?"

"How have you been?"

Of course they didn't hold her every time the kids in high school picked on them. They never had a point where the only truly good thing in life was coming home to a stubby, playful black corgi mix whimpering and wiggling, tail wagging in an erratic blur. They didn't break down into tears, only for her to trot over and nudge and lick their faces till they stopped.

They never had a moment where their only friend in the entire world was her.

So they didn't spend all their time wondering if her life had been "good enough." They didn't think about the white that suddenly peppered her black fur. They didn't think about whether or not her cheap, six-ingredient diet caused her brain to expire before her body, or if she had enough exercise and play time to ward off the disease. They didn't wonder if the Neutricks or Senilife the vet sold them would've helped her hold on a little longer.

They didn't think about how much money the last two years had cost them, the frantic efforts to keep her alive. They didn't throw out nearly four hundred dollars to surgery, hundreds more to monthly allergy shots and skin condition treatments. Hundreds desperately bled away into anxiety treatments, anything the vet said "might help."

So while they asked what color the urn was, excited over the box that would hold her remains, I was wondering how much it would weigh when I finally had her in my hands again. She was heavy, but not like I remembered. I placed the urn in the living room, only to avert my gaze and hurry past it like she was still watching me with those frantic eyes. Still, I talked about the pretty, cherry wood box with its empty picture frame for days with anyone who would listen.

I recited the items that came with her cremation package, dutifully relaying every piece to anyone who cared about such things: a lock of fur, a clay paw print, an ink paw print, a sympathy card, and literature on pet loss.

## What did you sound like?

Aaron Lively

I left out how I opened the pouch with her fur and curled in on myself in the office, moments after laughing at some forgotten joke my fiancé and I shared. My sobs were so loud, so sudden, they immediately pulled him back to me. His eyes had been dry for days, but he held me as I spoke of her.

Later I arranged her worn, red collar around the urn. The frame was still empty, though my fiancé had reminded me to order a photo every day since we picked her up. There was an ink paw print her vet sent me, along with a sympathy card. There was a generic message and a list of names reminiscent of my high school yearbook. Among the scrawled names likely scribbled in passing, there was a short message one of the receptionists inscribed.

The “sorry for your loss” was noise to me. I had heard it countless times, with the same fleeting sympathy. It was the “of little Odie” that made me pause in my desire to toss the card. Instead, I placed it next to her urn.

I told myself I’d spread her ashes when she was gone, but I haven’t found a place worthy of her.

What did you sound like?

I don’t think I remember—which is funny  
since, for so long, you were all

I could hear.

Did you sound like stirring fingers into buckets full of seashells, that summer on the gulf?

Like

the hot ocean sand slurring around my thighs, the churning clouds, the roar  
of a jet, like thunder, looking into the conch colored sky, wondering

if it was you

in that dot

a thousand miles up, there,

right there

for once, in front of my

naked

eyes?

Like the beehive in my speakers

that buzzed every time

you laughed? Or the moon

brushing my shoulders, your lips pressed

to your phone, a thousand miles away, showering

me with cherry chap-stick butterflies—

“What were those?”

“Presents.”

“Oh.”

“Yeah, for you.”

When

you thought I was sleeping, and you whispered—

speaker buzzing, breath fluttering, shivering, like hot salt waves

slushing over seashells—

“Sweet dreams. I love you

so

much.”

And

there were the cracks in your voice

that slipped out your smile, out

the crooked white gaps

of your toothy grin. I know somewhere,  
somewhere  
I have your breath,  
your laugh,  
your pause,  
your words  
oh, those words that I'd strained—heartstrings tight—for so long  
just to hear, from before  
we found facetime, from when it'd been years  
of only letters, texts, from when we only wrote, those days of  
waking up every day earlier, going to bed evermore late, listening to the  
sun  
sigh as it rose, gold, every morning, waiting just to hear  
that note from my phone that meant  
you were awake, too,  
in your far away home, hours before  
your own dawn  
just to hear me.  
I have you, your faceless voice, your voiceless face,  
caught  
like a butterfly in a net, fluttering  
with your every word, safe inside, but  
I never open, too afraid  
to let you out,  
afraid to look and  
to hear, afraid  
that you'll be too loud, you'll flutter away, and I'll run after  
you again and stumble and scrape, too heavy, bones like lead like they were  
the last time I heard you  
when  
your voice wasn't  
in my ears  
when only  
the aching  
sinking into my sheets, phone falling from my limp,  
moon cratered hands  
your voice crack  
the silence my  
gasp  
the  
burning hot  
lava lamp threatening to

burst from my eyes your  
fist plunged  
into my  
throat like  
that bucket  
full of seashells,  
unable to speak, only choke and  
listen to my bones  
cr  
ack,  
your breath,  
your hand  
in my neck the  
waver the  
pause  
the beehive  
buzzing in my speakers full  
of your breath,  
your  
fucking  
hot  
breath.  
So,  
I pretend that you ask,  
“What did I sound like?”  
‘cause I want you to know  
that all I let myself hear  
are your shivering breaths when I hung up,  
and all of you  
gone  
in my ear.



# Faith

Austin Gwinn

Sweat falls from the brim  
washing the shavings  
from the cedar hull.  
Sanguine  
caresses from one  
body to another.  
Calloused  
palms rugged and integral  
shaping land to  
escape  
diligence for  
a canvas carved without  
crevice;  
without Perfection.  
It will bear the burden  
wherever the current may flow.  
Calm in the meander of  
past, future, and present.  
Faithful,  
but at the mercy of  
the rapids.

# The Theory of Relativity

Kayla Delk

People change in time.  
Water smooths over a stone;  
even the stars cannot remain the same.

Everything heals with time.  
Scars fade; a tree grows after  
it's been cut down, and you will too.

Time flies. Moments pass by  
in the same way they came—  
quickly.

You're just killing time.

Time is relative.  
Mine is no longer something  
I'm open to give. How long  
is long enough to wait,  
and if I loved you once,  
shall I for an eternity? I am finding  
strength in a mourning heart.

Time is relative.  
How many nights will it take to heal?  
This is not a head cold trauma;  
It did not come overnight. No,  
time is a thief who started stealing  
my memories long ago—  
which weren't even all that good—  
but they were mine nonetheless.

Time is relative.  
Yesterday was yesterday, and today  
is today, and September  
was the longest fucking month  
of my life, and I have only begun  
to pick up the pieces of my broken parts,  
but every time I reach down, they shatter.

Time is killing me.

# When I Broke my Arm

Aaron Lively

A small boy dances in the living room  
With no burden of worry or fear.  
He plays with his stuffed animals,  
Bears, dogs, frogs, everything except a horse.  
He hollers like a lion and whoops,  
Waving around an invisible lasso.

He wants to show his act to Dad  
Who plays with his older, smarter siblings.  
He runs to him and tries to talk,  
But Dad takes one kid to the restroom  
Who needed to go really bad.  
He bends his head and walks away.

He thinks of what he could do  
To get his dad to see him play.  
Then, he sees the family's biggest toy:  
A large, rickety rocking horse  
That could have come from the carousel.  
He smiles and runs toward the beast.

He climbs up the horse carefully  
So that his feet slip through the buckle.  
Feeling a sense of joy and purpose,  
He rocks the rocking horse.  
Back and forth, back and forth he goes,  
Trying to earn the attention of an empty audience.

Then, he tries something exciting;  
He stands up on the saddle and stands,  
An outlaw staring down his foe.  
He tries to see if Dad came back to see.  
But the horse is still rocking  
Back and forth, back and forth, back and –

He loses balance.  
Wham! He falls onto the ground  
But not on his feet.

He cries out in pain,  
Tears fill up his fearful eyes.  
He can't see a thing.

Someone picks him up  
And carries him to some seat.  
He feels himself move.

He sees images  
Flashing before him: grey lines  
Moving very fast.

A tall, white building  
With people standing in front  
And a rolling bed.

They quickly take him  
To the bed, despite his pain  
And roll him away.

He yells and hollers.  
Someone gives him a fast shot.  
He then falls asleep.

He wakes up, still with a tinge of fear.  
He sees his father sitting on a chair.  
Tears in his face, Dad walks up and hugs him.  
He tries to hug back, but his left arm doesn't budge  
Shocked, he stares at the cast on his arm,  
A scar on the boy, a reminder of his "fun".

# BasketBall to BabyDoll

Reed Carol

Ten-year-old Daisy Burg woke up on Christmas Eve and wrapped herself in her blue bedsheet. She tucked a basketball under her makeshift robes, looking at herself in the bedroom mirror. She compared her reflection to the picture of the Virgin Mary taped in the bottom right corner of the glass frame. Daisy had gone full method in preparation for her role as Mary in the church Christmas pageant. The church made it clear that all customs were Do-It-Yourself.

She waddled down the hallway to towards her parents' bedroom. She arched her back like she had seen pregnant women do and held the ball in place. Daisy stopped outside the closed door and waited for a pause in the conversation.

"I don't get why they have it so early," Zack complained.

"They've always done the Christmas Eve services early," Elena said, "Father Cole has Nyctalopia."

"What?"

"Night blindness," Elena said, "I've mentioned that before."

Daisy asked as she knocked on their door, "Do you have anywhere that I could stay?"

"Try your bedroom," Zack said.

"Please let me in," Daisy begged, "I am going to have my baby any minute."

"Try your bedroom," Zack repeated.

Daisy rapped her knuckles on the door until Elena opened it. She laughed at daughter's homemade costume. Daisy furrowed her brow and stuck out her bottom lip, "This is an emergency!" Daisy claimed.

Zack joined his wife in the door way, "Wait here, Daisy," and he went to get his phone from on his bedside stand.

He took the pictures while his daughter frowned. Frustration boiled up in her gut. Her head hurt from holding back angry tears. Daisy retreated back to her bedroom, where her teddy bear, who she had appointed as her stand-in Joseph, comforted her as she fumed from her parents' peanut gallery behavior. For the past three weeks, Daisy had refused to go by her name, she faked labor pains, and tried to use the neighbor's Great Dane as her donkey more than twice.

The church the family went to was nondenominational and attended by people who were there for the social circle rather than spiritual obligation. A month ago, roles for the Christmas pageant were assigned via a lottery system. Kids interested put their names in a fishbowl and the Father Cole would draw the slips of paper and announce them to the congregation.

The couple got dressed and Zack made his famous French toast. The three sat around the breakfast table when the doorbell rang. Daisy rushed to the door with her arm supporting the basketball baby bump.

"Susan's here," Elena said.

She had invited her best friend to the pageant after telling her all about Daisy's behavior. While Father Cole grew weary of Daisy's intensity during rehearsal, congregation intrigue grew.

"She asked for a ride, I told you yesterday."

Daisy opened the door, "Have you brought gifts for my son, the son of God?"

Elena pushed her daughter aside, more roughly than she intended, but was relieved of her brief shame by the sight of her best friend, Susan Miller.

"Please, come in," Elena said.

Daisy remained at her mom's side while the two women hugged. Elena turned to her daughter, "That wasn't very welcoming of you, Daisy."

"My name is Mary," Daisy said.

"Will you say a polite hello to Susan?" Elena asked.

"My name is Mary," Daisy raised her voice.

"It's good to see you, Mary," Susan coaxed.

"Why don't you say hello politely to Susan?" Zack asked from the breakfast table.

"My name is Mary!"

Daisy removed the basketball from her robe and threw it to the ground. Her face flushed red as the ball bounced once and rolled. She went back to her room again. She shut the door and looked to the picture of Mary, "What was it like for you?"

"It was very hard, but I was my own angel," Daisy made her voice high-pitched in self-response.

"Aren't you worried?" Susan whispered.

"Yes, I would have taken her out of the pageant," Elena said, "if this wasn't the only social activity she was willing to participate in."

"Yeah, but this seems pretty intense," Susan said.

"She's just very devout," Zack explained, "everyone needs their evangelist phase."

Daisy stayed in her room with Mary's advice until it was time to drive to church. Susan sat in the back with her while the radio played Christmas carols. Zack attempted to parallel park three times on the road before pulling into the paid lot.

They entered the church, a bustling rented venue with individual seats rather than pews. Daisy found her Father Cole and her cast mates.

"How about you get rid of that basketball now?" Zack asked.

"That's a mean thing to say to a pregnant lady," Elena laughed.

Daisy turned away from them and headed to her cast. She had grown weary of the arrogant laughter of adults. Her dad knew what the basketball was supposed to be. Mary without her pregnancy ball was Eve without her apple.

"Alright, is everyone ready?" Father Cole asked.

The kids nodded. The Wise Men straightened out one another's fake beards just so, while the girl who played the donkey adjusted her papier-mache mask. The congregation found their seats. Daisy relished the nervous rush of pre-show tension. She was Mary, mother of a demigod, star of the nativity.

"Places everyone," Father Cole said, "remember, just follow my narration."

He went to the pulpit and began reading from his script. Father Cole punctuated each word with eye contact with the audience. A group of kids dressed as livestock gathered at the front of the congregation and put the manger in place. Daisy walked with Joseph and the donkey down the aisle. The girl who played the donkey mimicked a bray and the congregation laughed. Daisy fumed. She tripped over her bedsheets and fell to the hardwood. The basketball rolled out in front of her—a bitter betrayal. Joseph and the donkey looked back but proceed ahead.

"Does anyone have somewhere for me to have my baby?" Daisy improvised as she stuffed the ball back into the sheet.

"Those aren't your lines!" Joseph said and he and donkey both quickened their pace.

She met her apathetic husband and beast of burden-avoidance at the manger. The children in livestock costumes shuffled around to make room for the couple. Daisy went to the pulpit, where she had stowed the baby doll Jesus last Sunday. Father Cole moved aside, unsure of the eccentric actress. She replaced the ball with the doll and turned her back to the audience. She drowned out Father Cole's reading with her impromptu false labor pains. Her screams shook the audience. She turned around with the baby in her arms. The church went quiet for a few moments after she placed it in the manger. Father Cole cleared his throat and introduced the Wise Men as the three strutted down the aisle with their gifts. Mary and Joseph accepted each prop as the Wise Men bowed and stepped aside.

That can't be it, she thought. The shock of all that work for such a short thrill felt like a mockery to her. There were no Thank-You's to Mary, no How-Are-You-Feeling-Mary's, and no Thanks-For-Giving-Birth-To-The-Messiah's. She caught sight of her parents and Susan. They smiled at her. I am to be taken seriously, Daisy concluded.

"But little did Mary know that her son would die!" Daisy yelled.

"Just grab the doll," Joseph whispered through his gritted teeth.

"Mary was only thirteen when she gave birth" she yelled, "why aren't we talking about that?"

She punted the doll out to the congregation and watched as the baby doll's head popped off on impact with the ground.

"I just think she deserved more credit!" Daisy yelled.

The rest of the nativity hovered around Mary.

"You ruined it!" Joseph cried.

"You're lucky you even got a role," Daisy said.

He pushed Daisy, who fell into the Wise Men. Daisy rose again and pushed her spouse back. The pair wrestled as the Wise Men cheered. The children dressed as animals herded together. Daisy got Joseph into a headlock.

Zack started to get up, "No, let her beat him," Elena said.

"Did you know your child is a religious feminist?" Susan said to Zack.

Father Cole came from behind the pulpit and pulled Joseph from Daisy's arms. Joseph ran from the cast to the arms of his mother, who sat in the fourth row. She rubbed his back while he sobbed.

"How about you lead everyone back down the aisle without adding any more lines," Father Cole said.

A few people in the congregation chuckled, which grew into laughter, which then crescendoed into applause. The congregation stood as Daisy walked by. She stopped to pick up the dismembered baby doll, and threw both pieces back to her cheering audience.

## For Dorothy

Kaitlyn Sommerfeld

You are a monument to pain and perseverance. Your body creaks with a vintage flair and your feet still carry your burdened soul. Through each step, you move the Earth. Your back bends like mountain roads. Your fingers curve in the wrong direction like a plant that's grown to reach for the sun. It's those fingers that still find the sun, even after all these years of being forgotten and untended, prying through the cracks of the cell you were born in.

## Inspired By Betsy Sholl "Genealogy"

Allan Ruggeri-Ray

One of my parents was a map, the other a hammer.  
One was a nail, the other a magnifying glass.  
In the night I'd wake to pounding and the faint  
Smell of steam.

The image tattooed on my lower back  
Is one for freedom everlasting.  
One of my parents was a flying bird.

The other a spark, I carried into the night,

Convinced it was explosive.  
One of my parents I drank, the other I dreamed.  
In the revolving door of my becoming.  
One spoke to me and one commanded me.

Thus, my troubled birth, my endless struggle.  
One was an ocean current, the other a whale.

How they amused each other.  
One was a traveler, the other an educator. I was ashamed

of not knowing, embarrassed I couldn't explore.  
I was a boy calling across the land to a freedom

He didn't have.

# Adipocere

Shannon Sweeney

The first time I went to the Confederate cemetery, I found a sorority girl's wedge sandal. Twenty feet away, a white marble headstone was splashed with merlot. There were cigarette butts blooming from the mud like pale mushrooms, and there still are — ever since the campus smoking ban, people cross the street to sit on the stones and fill their lungs. I walk past them in the afternoon, when the shadows start to stretch, and feel the heat coming off the slab walls. The walls all lead to the white castle arch, a fortress of limestone and iron studded with stars and bars. The gates are always sutured shut with a sturdy chain. The cemetery doesn't like to let go of things.

But I can still step through if I squeeze past the gates, or take the little stairs cut into the rock, and wander at will. My sneakers stick in the wet earth, made up of leaf litter damp and dark, of mud rich with the scent of wood rot. At night the sodium lights cast strange shadows between the foliage, lights shifting as though they were submerged: the trees pull in light like the limestone pulls in heat. Sometimes I can hear the rushing water. It's a loud waterfall roar coming from behind the parking garage, where the filtration center squats just a bridge away from the river. The machinery keeps its water in a state of perpetual limbo, inexhaustibly rising and falling. A parody of rain, trying to cycle itself clean.

And yet, the mud besides the center still smells like the riverbed. It's not the soil that makes its smell, but what's inside of it. Minuscule bacteria, endlessly consuming themselves, spitting out geosmin. The cemetery actually used to lay on the riverbanks in 1860, back when the dead were still fresh, but the graves kept flooding. Water lapping up over the tombstones, floating the old wooden markers off, rushing into silt and loam. A hundred and forty-one names lost to the water. No one knows how many bodies rest in the riverbed.

And so the dead were moved once more, retreating upstream to find the greenery. When stranded soldiers are unearthed during city construction they're moved too, escaping the threat of being forgotten. Most of the upright headstones are newly erected, smooth white marble paid for by grandchildren and great-grandchildren and so on. But the original headstones are laid flat in the earth. It's easy to walk over them without noticing. When the light is overhead their inscriptions are nothing but a glare, black rock bouncing back white beams, the names disappearing in daylight. They're impossible to read until the sun slants sideways. Until dusk comes creeping across the trees, and the light comes in at an angle. Some things refuse to be seen head-on.

Wet ground can hold a body for decades, centuries even. If there's enough water in the casket, enough alkaline in the soil, and not enough oxygen in the air, corpses become waxy-grey adipocere. It's called saponification, soap making. I look at the impervious white castle, the endless rows of pristine headstones, the filtration center trying to cleanse itself of what the water is, and I wonder how badly they wish to sanitize the dead.

The filtration center cannot contain its tides forever. The water must condense, rise, fall back into the river once more. Go roaming across the valley, spilling back down where the dead were laid to a restless rest. Here's what I know: That the limestone gate was erected in 1901. That the city stopped paying for maintenance in 2017. And that, over time, rain becomes acidic. It will wear on limestone until it erodes back into gravel, back into mud, and it will never be clean.

# Just a World

Michael Kaylor

We live in this world  
Full of great evil  
We know not the solution  
Nor could we hope to reveal  
That we know less than we do  
It would hurt how we feel  
We want to run from life  
But this struggle is real  
It is time to let go  
Procrastination to kill  
Let's fix all these problems  
Through strength they will squeal  
All the children will smile  
That's the good that can heal

# Money

Julius Rehmatt

Everything you do, everything you want  
Each decision, each life choice requires money.

Staying at home all day doing nothing  
Watching TV, eating food requires money.

Stepping out, going places  
Buying stuff, wanting stuff requires money.

People struggle, die everyday  
Kill each other, chasing after money.

Going to school, working hard  
From morning till night, for what? Money.

People living and dying, making and breaking relationships  
One thing in the center of it all, money.

People who don't have it, want it  
People who have it, searching for more money.

From birth to death, working for one thing  
One thing on mind, money.

# Nothing Like You

Angela Hunt

F is for Father. A father is a man in relation to his child or children.

Remember when you took all of us girls, your girls to the park? The one down the street from Gram's house at the bottom of the hill. It was the one that burnt down when I was ten or eleven. I stole your pack of cigarettes and soaked them under the fountain. Maybe I did it because I thought it was a fun game, or I didn't like when you smelled like smoke. All I remember knowing was that cigarettes could make you sick. Your face turned bright red, your eyebrows furrowed, and your eyes narrowed. I knew what was coming next, but I was more afraid of you not being around in the future.

A is for Alcoholism. Alcoholism is when one can no longer control their use of alcohol.

Remember when we lived on Catlin Street in Auburn? The one that had a tiered backyard with your vegetable garden. The house that Francesca, the middle one, and I shared a room with bunk beds. The one where we huddled under the bed, under the blanket crying because we could hear you yelling. And we heard your wife scream because you were beating the shit out of her. It was the house where Mom picked us up in the middle of the night and the cops took you away in the back seat, blood on your hands because you broke your wife's nose. I was petrified of what you were truly capable of.

T is for Tantrum. Tantrum is an uncontrolled outburst of anger and frustration.

Remember when Mom moved to Maryland when I was sixteen, and I moved in with Gram and lived in the same town as you? I only saw you after I turned seventeen and bought my first car. You would call me up when you needed a ride since you lost your license because of another DUI. I wanted to have a relationship with you, but you'd always remind me of how I looked just like Mom, and then you'd shut down. When I graduated high school, a class of only seventy, I looked for you in the crowd because you promised to show up. I really thought you'd show up. After all you made it to both of my older sisters' high school graduations. Later that day, you dared to show up to my graduation party. I saw you and my blood ran hot, I began to sweat, and I shook with anger. I couldn't even think straight. My veil lifted, the truth finally said, "You are a liar." My heart sank as my love for you faded and my distrust in you grew. I felt abandoned, again.

H is for Haggard. Haggard is looking exhausted and unwell.

Remember when I let you see your first grandchild when she was two, and how excited you were to finally meet her? She had soft brown curls, big brown eyes, and smooth olive skin. You even shaved your beard for her, because she was scared of the way you looked. Fully greyed mop on your head, an unkempt stringy beard, a battered broken nose, smoke-stained teeth, some missing because of a fight with the police. She did not like you. And I can't even blame that little girl, I wasn't your biggest fan either.

E is for Estranged. Estranged is no longer close or affectionate to someone; alienated.

I ran out of remembers. You are a stranger to me, and me a stranger to you. I only know the person of some good memories: you helped me out of the tree because I climbed too high, you showed me how to plant flowers, and to mend a garden. And even more terrible memories: you got angry because my half-sister fell down the stairs, you threw me across the room, you got angry at Mom and smashed your wedding rings. You are a person I only share a bloodline with; not even a last name anymore.

R is for Regret. Regret is to feel sad, repentant, or disappointed over something that has happened or been done, especially a loss or missed opportunity.

Over this past summer, I was visiting Gina, the oldest one. She lost her best friend when she was only four, she protected us from most of your destruction, and now she has a family of her own: a husband, a three-year-old daughter and new son. You asked Francesca, the only one you call, to give us a message for you. For us to call you. I'd like to think in your 'old' age, you realized what you've missed and continue to miss.



## Reflections

Elise Steele

The robin hits my window with a dull thud,  
trapped outside my world, with no entrance.  
It flutters in confusion for a moment,  
and I step toward the living room window,  
my palm open, as if I could offer consolation.  
But the bird disappears in a rapid streak,  
similar to its arrival. I pity the robin,  
hurting itself to try and see past  
the betrayal of the illusive pane.

That night I sleep with my bedroom window open.  
I wake up with the robin perched on my wooden sill,  
carrying the morning light, heavy on its wings.  
In a quick flash of chaos  
the bird takes flight into my room,  
—jolting from wall to wall—  
trapped inside my world by a sense of panic,  
the window seemingly unreachable.  
I shield my face with the covers,  
as the robin screams and circles,  
until I hear the familiar strike of pain.  
I uncover my eyes to see the robin,  
still and lifeless on the surface of my vanity,  
a remorseful streak of blood on my mirror.

## Perspective

Mark Deitz

One day, millennia ago,  
A cyclops started sensuously saying  
To his cyclops lover  
Whilst lounging on the beach  
Of some Mediterranean cay –  
Besides them, populated by olives and mountain goats –

“How grand life is when there is no speck  
Inside or behind one’s eye.”

“Yes,” his cyclops lover said  
As she swallowed a hero’s head,  
Blood-stained mouth belching a bilious cloud  
And blinking rather ravenously.

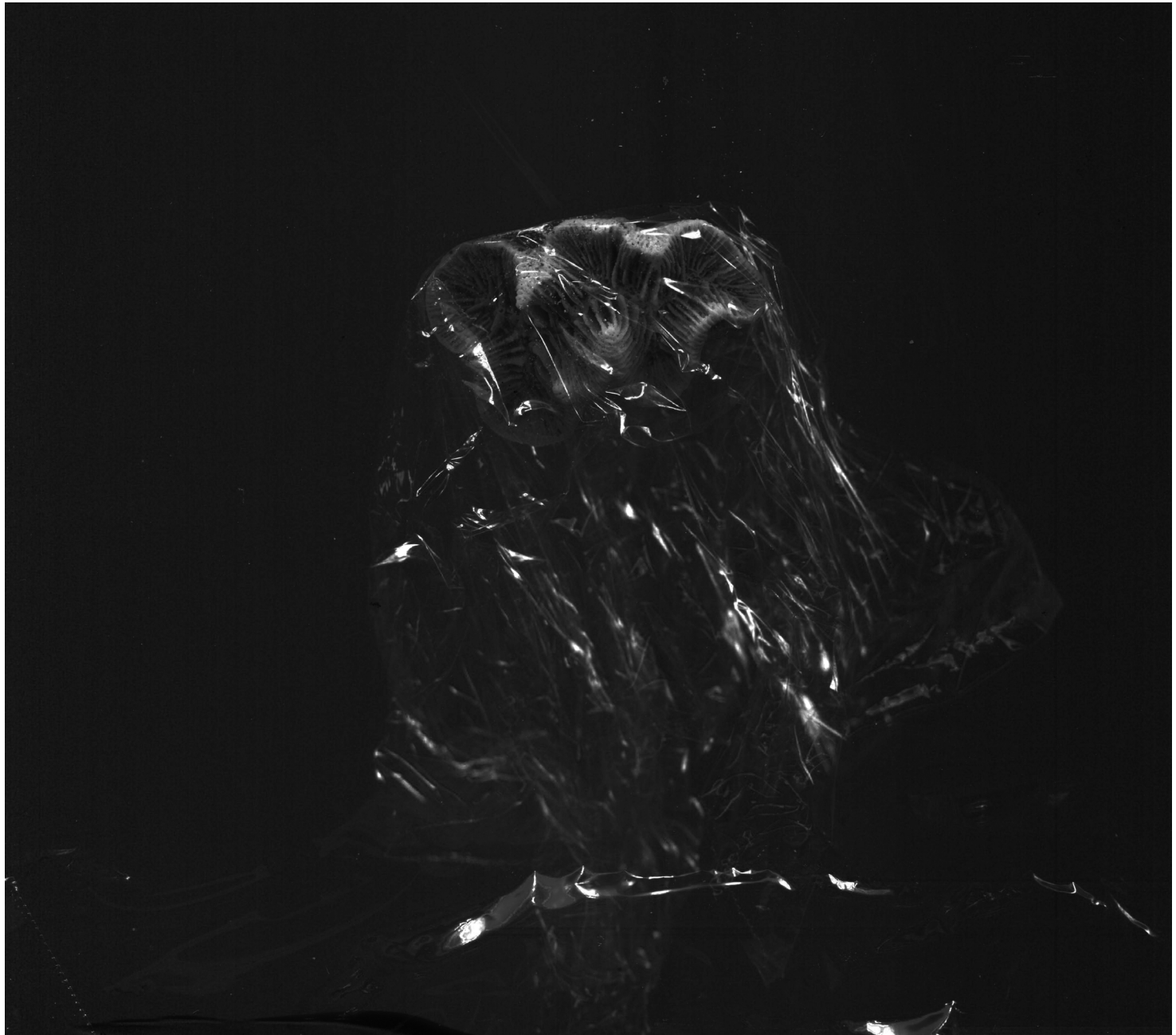
“But imagine the kind of life where  
Our kind had twice the sight.”



**VISUAL ART**

# Cessation

**Kat Friedmann**  
Mixed Media  
2019

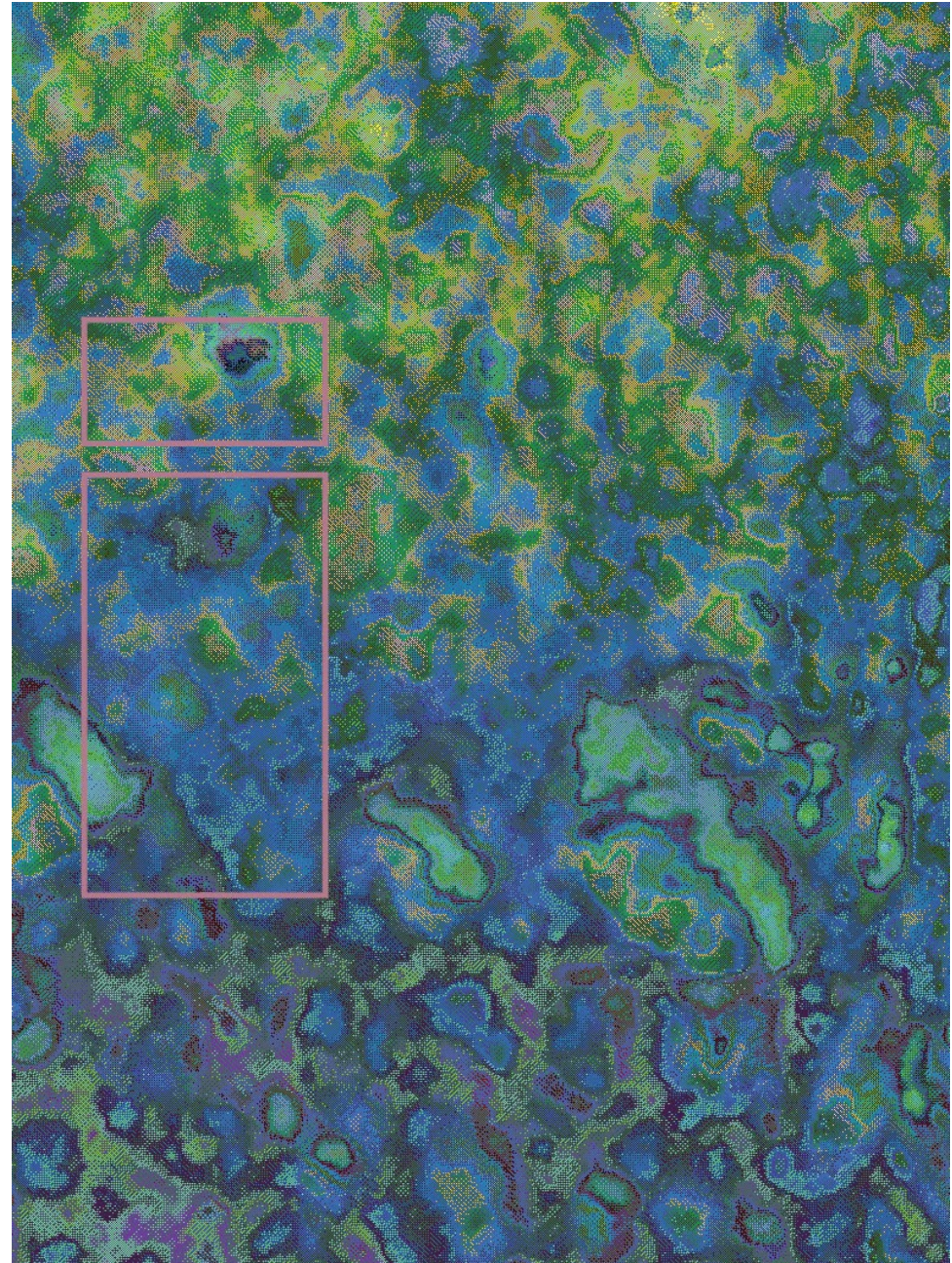


# Soft.

Alex Patel

Selection from publication

2019



# Goodbye Long Island, New York

Liz Pase  
Self-Portrait (1 of 2)  
2018



# RED

**Brianna Litchfield**

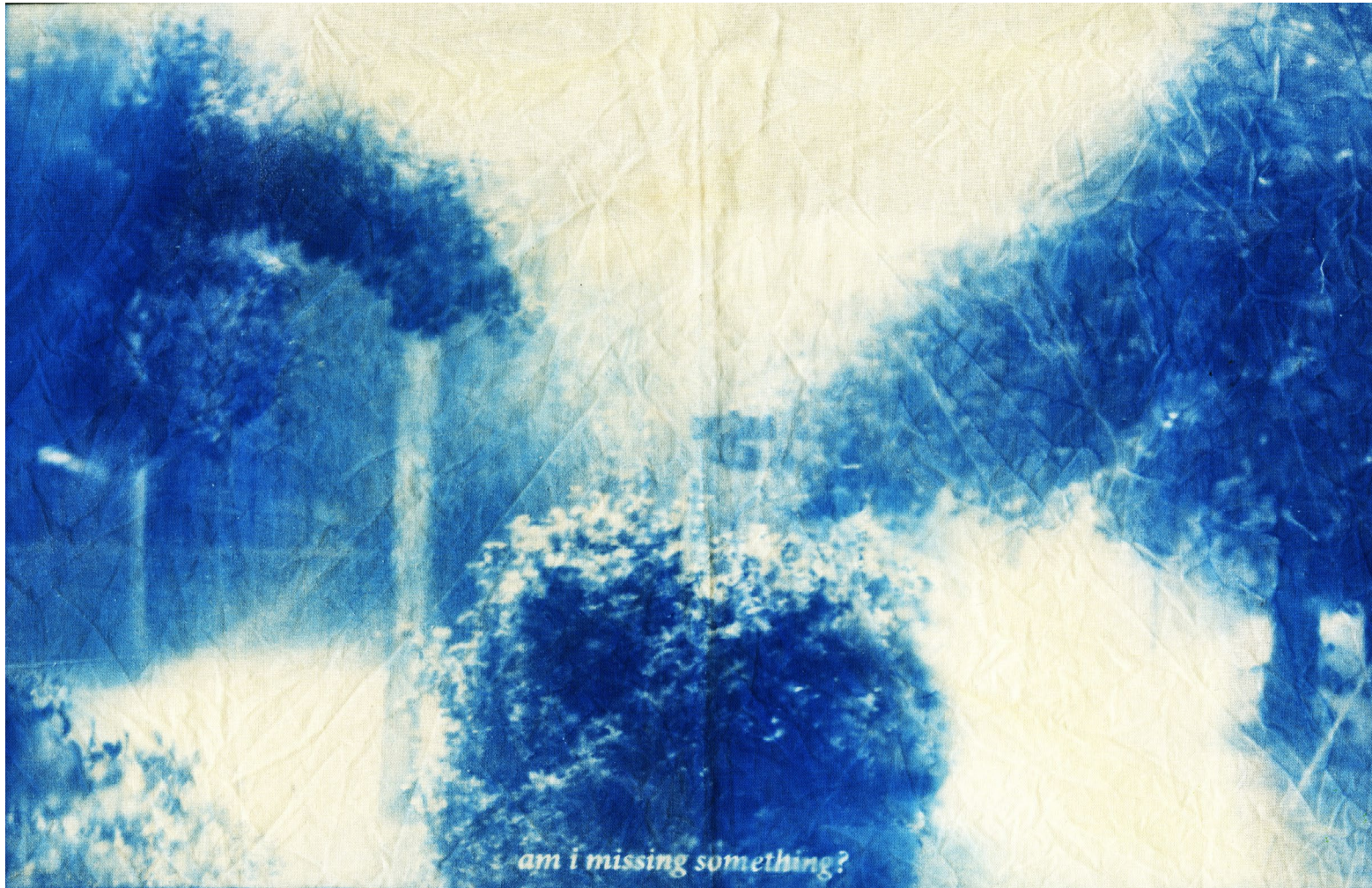
Poster board, laser cutter, thread

2019



# Growing Pains

Elisabeth Sterchi  
Cyanotype on cotton  
2019



# Reconstruction of the Female Nude

Victoria Sauer  
Oil on canvas  
2019





# Half Cab brought me here

Will Sutton

Ink on paper, spread from sketchbook

2020



# They poisoned the Luddite

**Kyle Cumberton**  
Steel and aluminum  
2019



# A Painting About Words I Did For My Thesis

Arden Craft  
Acrylic on paper  
2020



## Coils, Curls, and Kinks

Mya Hollingsworth

Photograph (1 of 2)

2020



# In the Thick of It

Olivia Tawzer  
Acrylic on Paper  
2020



# Untitled

Rainn Jackson

Digitally manipulated photograph

2020



## Felt Baby #4

Summer Tones  
Needle-felted wool  
2019



# disposable body

Jonathan Howe

Scanned xerox print & latex glove

2020





# Private Show in the Green Room

Larkin Cook  
Oil on panel  
2019



# PACHAMAMA

Emma Hoffman  
Photograph series  
2019



# A Bible for Robots

Johnathan Waters

Video still (15:01)

2019



# Picking Up the Pieces

Julia Fennell

Oil on canvas

2017



# Comfort

Baylee Green  
Fiber fill and fabric  
2020



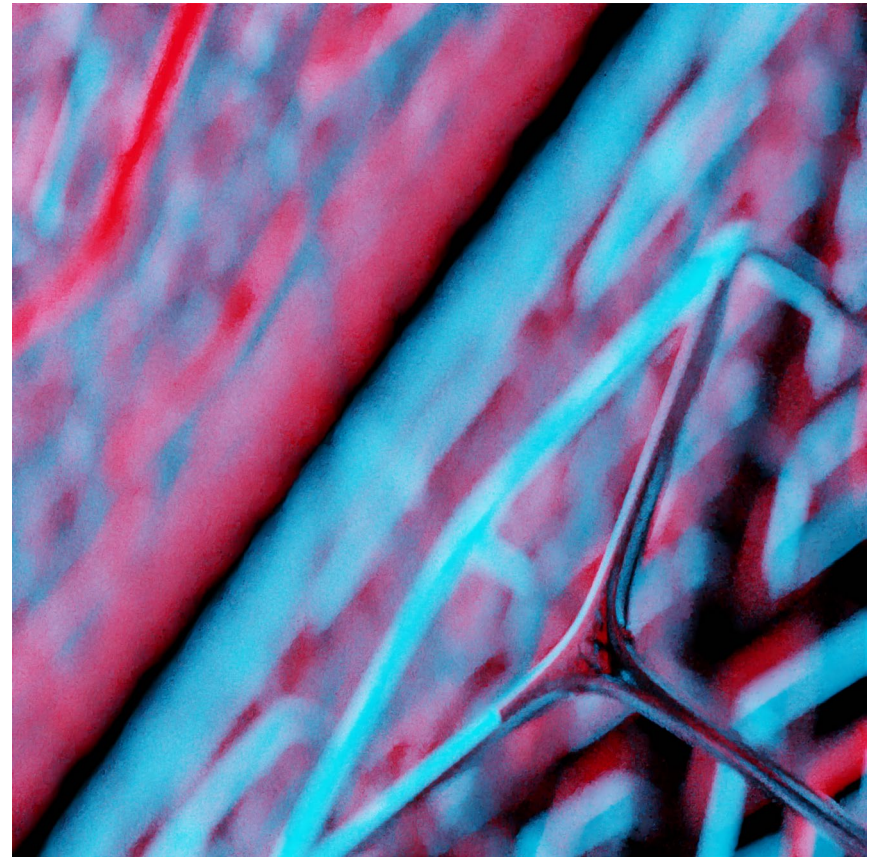
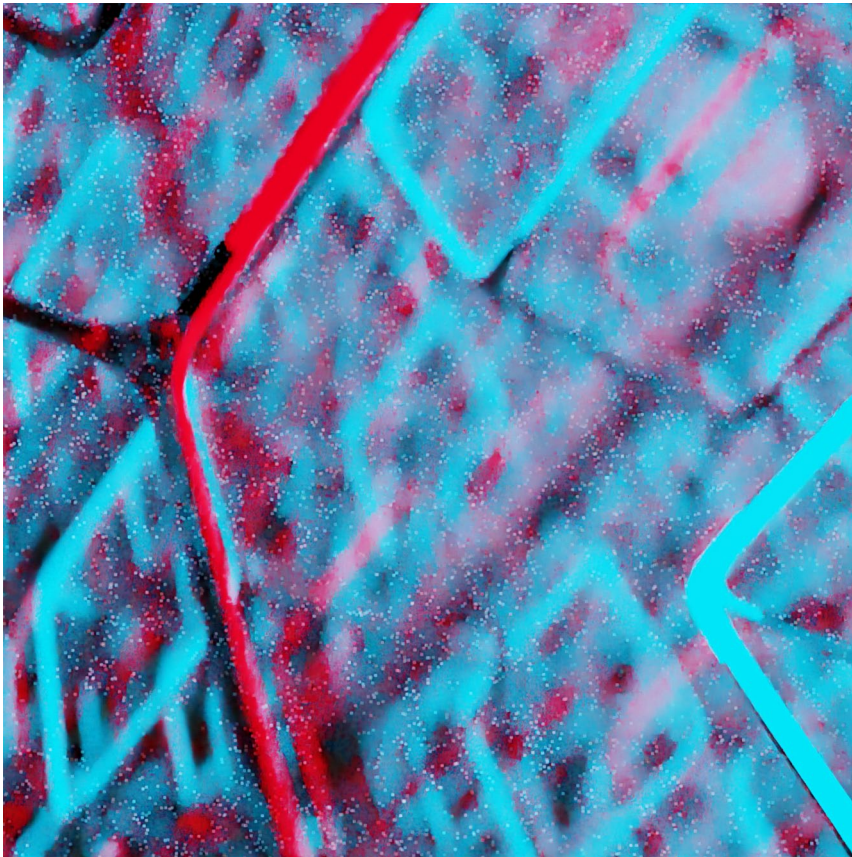
# Field Trip

Molly Bowman  
Photograph  
2020



# AI Denoise Painting

Michael Mohr  
3D Rendering  
2019



# Untitled

Cameron Williams

Photograph

2020



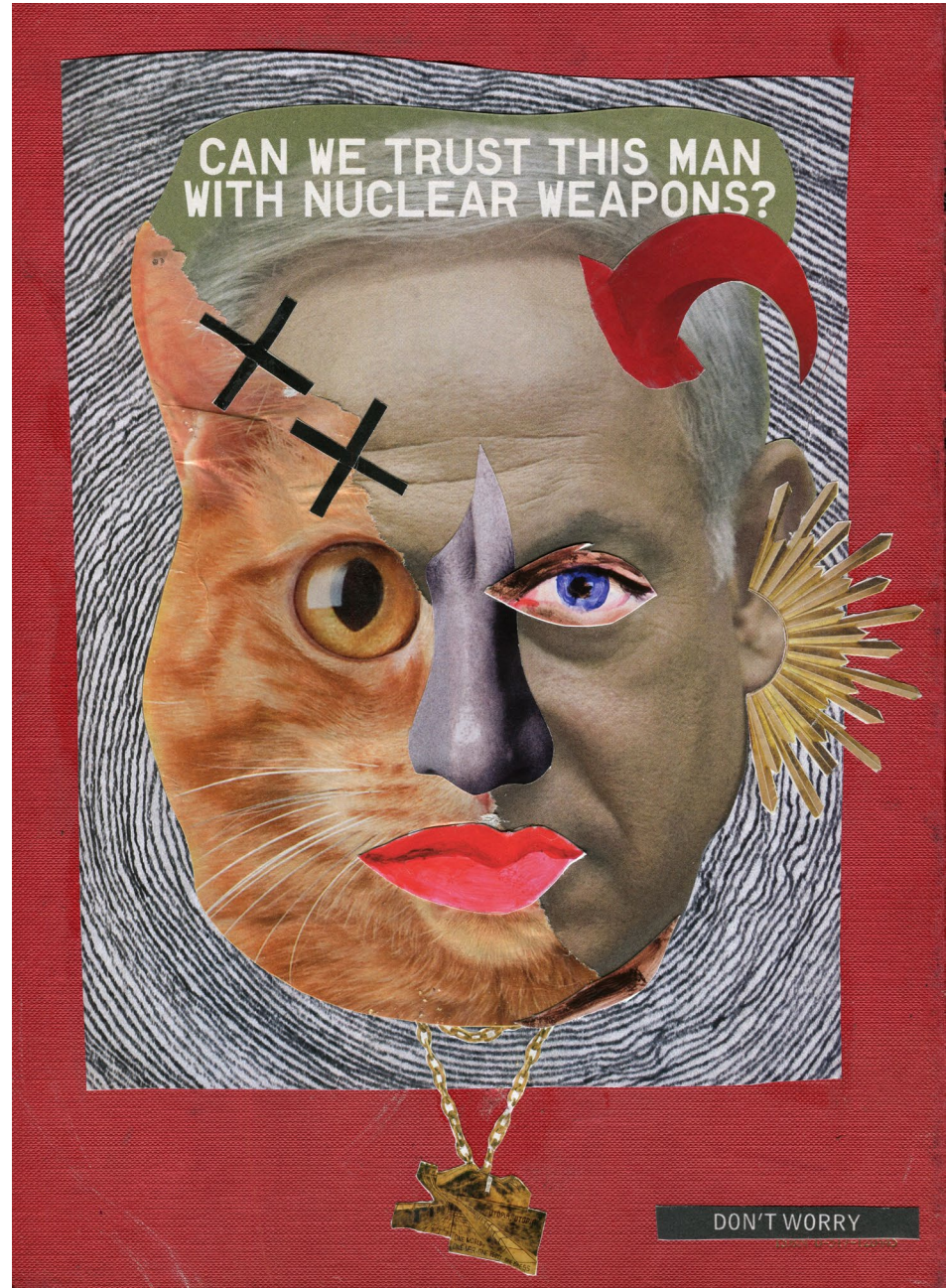


# Don't Worry

Noah Marlowe

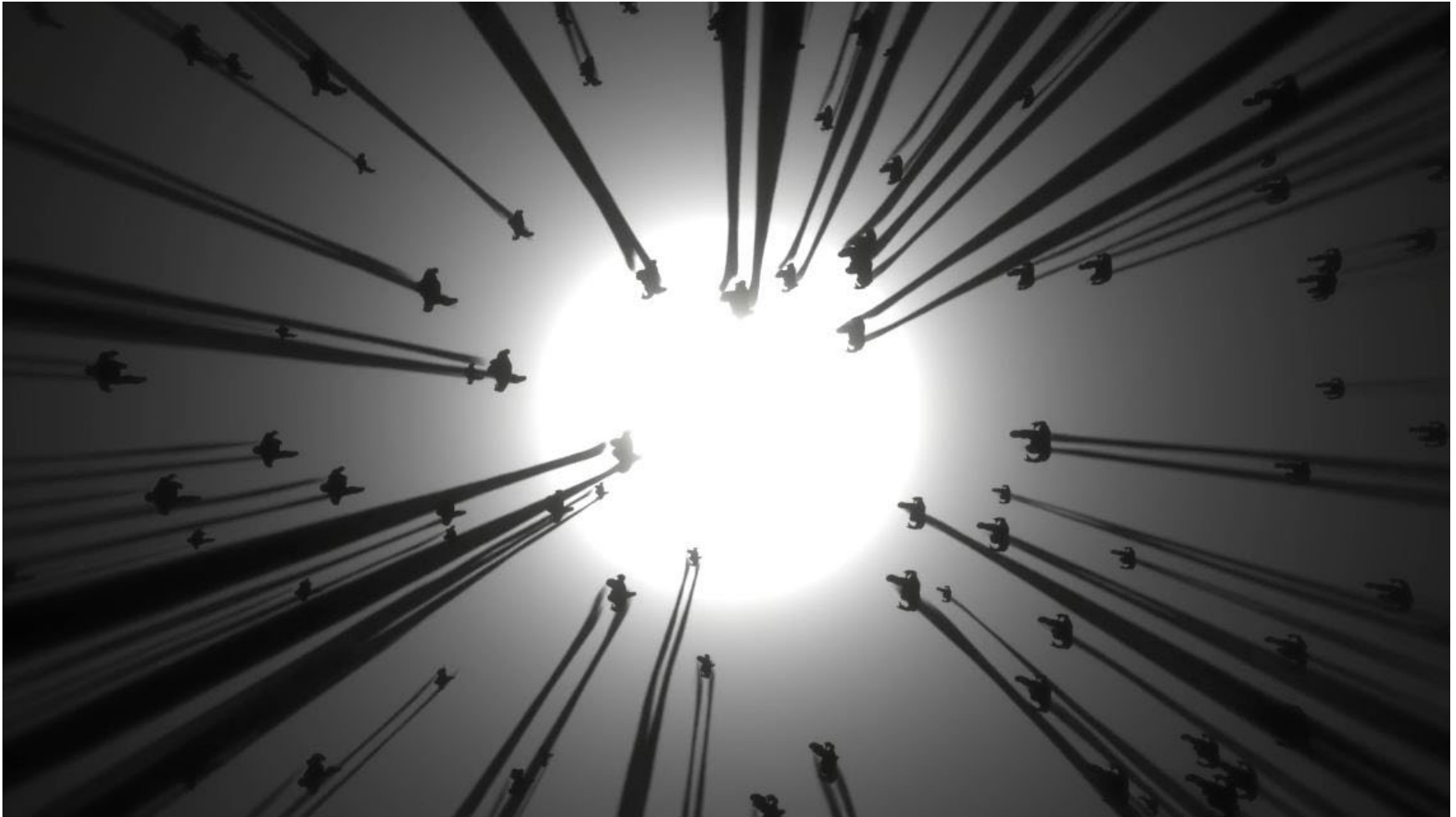
Collage

2020



# DDOS||SODD

Libby Michael  
Digital video still  
2019



## Restless Residences #056

O'Len Davis  
Photograph  
2020





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