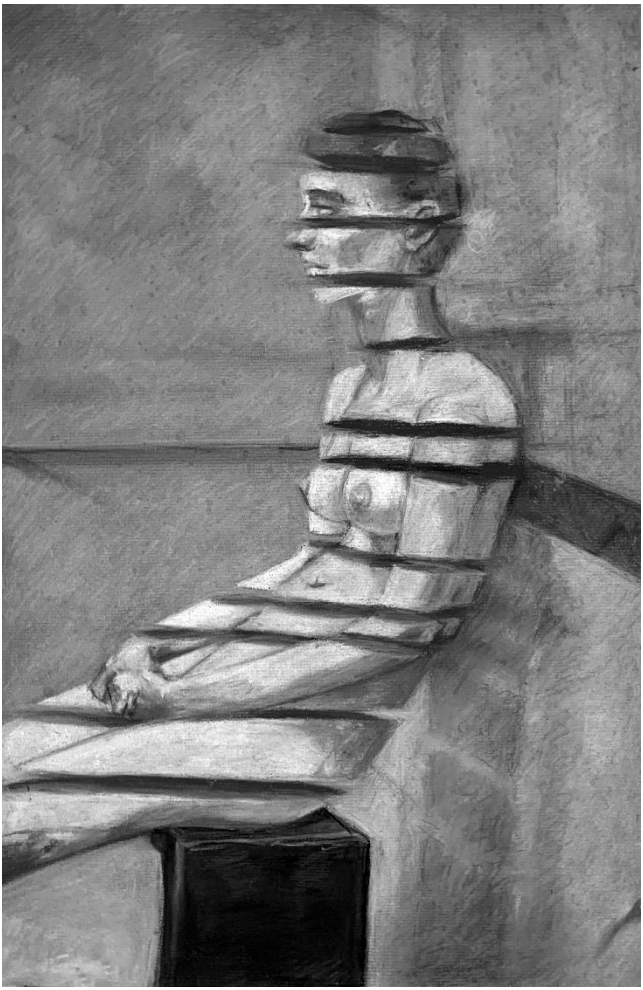


2024

Zephyrus

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A publication of the English Department at Western Kentucky University
Bowling Green, Kentucky

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Editor’s note: Our selection process is based on complete anonymity. If an editor recognizes an author’s work, he or she abstains from the decision-making process for that work.

Award Winners

Jim Wayne and Mary Ellen Miller Poetry Award

Browning Literary Club Poetry Award

Ann Travelstead Fiction Award of the Ladies' Literary Club

Breanna Leber
"Familiar Fire"

Wanda Gatlin Essay Award

Macey Basil
"Anatomy and Other Parts"

Dale Rigby Essay Award

Jessica Levine
"And When You're Dry and Ready"

Zephyrus Art Award

Haley Barth
"Uglow Hack"

Undergraduate writing award recipients are chosen by the Creative Writing faculty at WKU; the art award is chosen by the *Zephyrus* staff.

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Sage Mulzer **Untitled**

Anatomy and Other Parts
Macey Basil

"The space between is but an hour,
The mere idea of a flower."

- Philip Freneau "The Wild Honeysuckle"

Sissy,

I think of honeysuckle. The viscous crunch of the two front teeth, the slow slide of the tube, from the petals. Dribbles of gold we used to call them. Dribbles of clear liquid gold. It was okay to suck in your cheeks and curl your tongue, okay to rip petals to pieces as you swallowed the golden spit. We were just kids. Little girls desperate for even a drop of satisfaction and hungry to seize it for ourselves. You know that sweetness sticks better in memories, that sugar replaces honey and sap is only sticky now. Bloated belief.

I was fifteen when a boy pushed my hands down towards his crotch, just *asking* for me to touch something I had never seen or considered before. I'm sure you remember him, how he held my hand during Sunday church services. Honeysuckle, I thought of tubes and nectar and I was disgusted with the dirtiness of it all, and how he could look at me with the viciousness of a porn star and then teach me to touch him accordingly. How service feels like intimacy when that's all we're taught. Sour silver.

I was seventeen when I learned the word clitoris. Jokingly said in my anatomy and physiology class I had no clue what my friends were referring to - no one had ever gotten so intimate with me nor I with myself. They referred to an aspect of my body. An aspect of femaleness that I had lived with, existed as and never known. This left me wondering what else was hiding in my guts, my gums, my spirit and soul. What else I should be ashamed of and what else could be taken from me. Shame, Shame.

I think a lot about the girl with the green ribbon, remember that book? The hard strangled itch of velvet or cotton or satin or lace. Something to show but only for me. This danger was not synonymous sex appeal. Head rolls like haughty eyes. I think about green ribbon girls and I wonder why when a boy first grabbed my breasts that they didn't just fall off into his hands and roll straight across the room, that way he could have taken them home and left the rest of me intact. I used to pray in the dark once you fell asleep, hoping I wasn't past saving. Rotten roses.

You told me you were gay, and I was relieved to hear it.

"Hey I need to tell you something"

Like I didn't already know you were a little too excited to hang out with your "new friend" at Michael's craft store of all places. Don't worry, I can fill in the gaps.

There is something more holy to me about women, and I don't worry as much about your heart when I think about like minded bodies loving like minded bodies.

Yes,too, I think of soft honeysuckle, growing in lushes of spring-cooled heavens. Suckle - like kittens for milk or women for peace.

What have I learned of womanhood but to do what must be done?

Braver, I hope you teach instead.

Kentucky farm in early summer of my twentieth year. I take my boyfriend into the woods because ~~I want him to touch me~~ he wants to touch me. Crisp and cool with bile in my throat he stomps behind me until I whisper into the shade of this sensual snack, yellow and white curled around green undergarments. I remember you and I with stems of yellow blowy bells sitting on our old porch swing picking endlessly

with pollen stained fingernails. How you and I learned to extract the gold together. Nostalgia is the word. I stop now and I show him how to suck the gold out too.

I remember he could only talk of me sucking something else, and I swear I saw green satin dance behind that honeysuckle.

Yours forever

Like Us
Macey Basil

"So, I would fail better"
– Ada Limon

If you *should fail*, my friend?
If you should fail, then so shall I.

In soft breezes I find
the sun more tolerable, Kentucky baby.

But we aren't talking
snakes or devils or *gaps.*

If you should fail,
if I should fail,

The grass might come bristling
or birds pecking along.

That's okay. I'd eat Kentucky dirt
on vegetables - any day of the year.

In that patch of sun and weeds
my granny peels potatoes.

She feeds the skin to her dog
and never to me at her feet just the same.

"Raw potatoes will give you worms"
she chides and brings the knife round her thumb.

And I wonder
If worms and weeds are so bad

to steal the same pleasure
even a dog affords itself.

Now that I am older,
I can assure you;

There is no wrong way to eat a potato.

This goes for a lot of
things in life, I think.

So, if you should *fail*, I pray
the sun shines for just a tad longer than it planned

To aid in the growing
of your very soul.



Aiyana McDonald **Fishman in Trash**

A Scene in Taipei
Justine Davis

there is a buzzard circling the 101 building.
the honey-thick-thick
haze drips
a distraction.

i whisper across the basin
where the giants rumble on elephant mountain.
maybe they do not belong there,
but i do not belong here.

i slither along these eden streets,
the *yangguang*, sunlight,
across the ribbons of taxi lanes.
laoban, *laoban*, can you rephrase that, please?
and be patient. i am
trying.

i am a seraph. student. succulent,
swatting away mosquitoes
faster than they can fly to me.
i am flickering in and out of time,
so fast on the metro, the—what
is it called again? *jieyun*.
two tickets, jam my fingers
against the machine.
it has an english button i do not press. i am
trying.

even the shutter-film is filial.
my mother asks when i'm coming home
in every frame.
she is the the glass rain smearing

maokong gondola, and
i am tourist by the way i pour my tea—

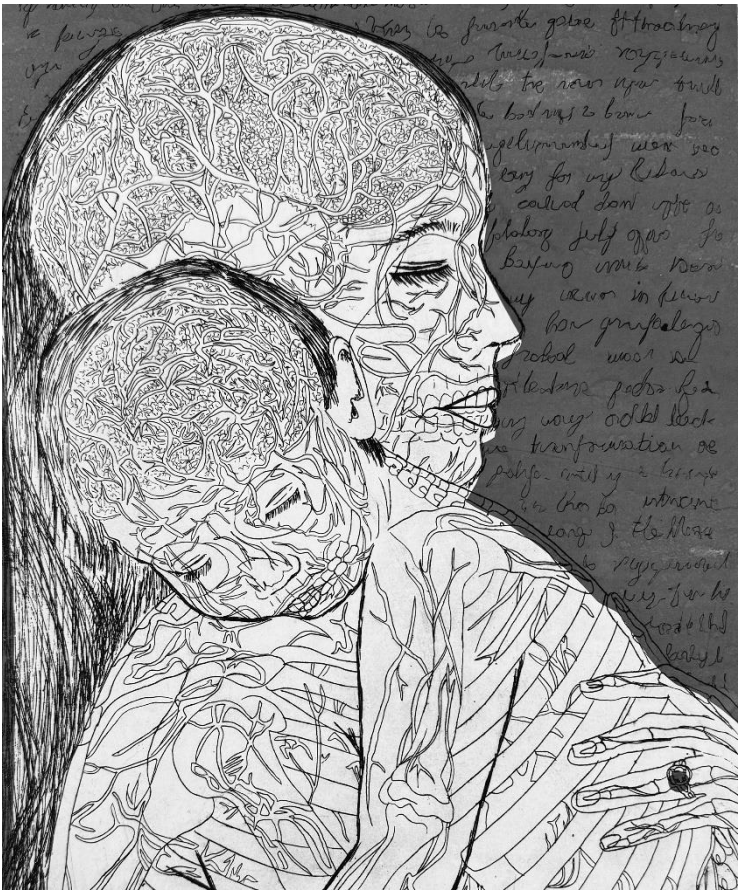
the oolong drip-drip-thick
haze cracks loose a buzzard
like an egg from the 101 building.
diving: what is he after?

—and there is earthquake residue scrawled into
moped-murmured streets.
the hot pan of the sidewalk burns bare feet.
there is no denouement.
there is no sound
but for every sound.
si shi kuai, says the machine. forty yuan.

My Mother
Justine Davis

my mother sways in
clouds of sage.
i am music in her womb's
sonography.
she is a capitalist
ballerina.
the blood center's
carotid artery.
maybe eden is
umbilical.
well, she dances just
like eve.
she pulls my life across
the stage.
she carries all of my
beliefs.
i am dipped in my
mother's milk.
my legs are big
fat manatees.
i am the brook babbling
her to madness.
a baby versed
in poetry.
i choke on
generational pearls.
i wear fast fashion
secondhand.
her kidney stones are
peanut butter balls.
i roll them soft, round
in my hands.

i always get it
wrong.
she gently takes the
bowl from me.
she knows the callouses
of warmth.
maybe i live my mother’s
dream.
maybe i’ll be her distant
stingray.
we share the same oceans
of grief.
though my mother
knows no god,
she’ll watch my flight
and pray for me.



Samantha Hightower **Connected**

Black Light North Star: a eulogy

To Daishyera

Nia Douglas

Faded conversations in memoriam
Swallowing the loss of a friend that wasn't mine
Not yet anyway, perhaps
we're still in progress
Long time yearning.
Mutual disdain for anything ordinary
Mutual love for everything spectacular
Black queer joyfulness despite every poisonous flake in a white blizzard

In every Bratz doll, at every Eiffel Tower
Short connections.
Revolutions in every hallway
Riots in every long skirt
Still in progress

Only inches away on the Venn diagram of dreams and reality
Pinned in the middle
A beaming purple light
Helping strangers cross over from part to whole
Mutual love for community
Mutual hate in The Man
Yeah, we're still in progress

Stitch by stitch
In the clothes I'll be brave enough to wear one day

But today I hold your hand across the diagram and
Through the circles
Until they become one

Did You Know They Give Chocolate to Dogs Before Euthanasia?
Carly Fawcett

We joked that death was all you wanted
while you preferred to sniff for raisins than a milk bone
Maybe death was kind
or maybe you were strong
for you evaded his grasp day after day
and he let you sleep in my bed night after night
your nose finding the crook of my arm without fail
in a nightly dance of chasing sleep
until you caught it
and it was just you and me

I'll always keep you warm
I'll wrap my hands around your cold feet
and carry you wherever you want to go
because I want you to feel my warmth forever
in the way they said I could stay as long as I wanted
and I couldn't let you go
because if I kept petting the spot on your neck
it wouldn't get cold

I held you in my arms in the white room
the same way I did the night before
Restless, no spot on the bed was right
and you looked to me for answers
I wish I could've heard all your questions
but there is only one language we both speak
so I held you
and sleep was yours, love was ours

When we've known each other for all of our memorable lives

it's strange to think I won't know you tomorrow
but I will, won't I?
My mind will play tricks on me
You'll be a blanket in my sheets
the ends curled outward into legs
and I'll hate to use it for fear of making you cold
before realizing you just want to keep me warm, too

They said I should put my grief somewhere else
so I'm putting it here
in hopes that the universe
or maybe a passing bird from your backyard
will pick it up and carry it elsewhere
so all that's left is you and me
at home on a blanket
finally finding sleep.

Backyard Baseball
Valerie Feldker

I used to play baseball
with the boys on my street.
Three trees for our bases,
a field, the fence.
Hit it to the tall grass and it's an automatic homer.
It was backyard baseball,
the best way to play.
We could be whoever we wanted to be.
I was Yadi.
Jack was Shoeless Joe.
Logan, Babe Ruth.
All the Greats made an appearance now and then
but we had our favorites.
We'd play games from dawn til dinner,
and sometimes extra innings after.
Those were the days.

Then something changed.
The boys would toss to me underhand.
I was not allowed to pitch.
They'd scoot up when I was at bat.
(Though I would still blast it over their heads)
And worst of all
was the day they told me
I could not play
as Yadi.
"Why not?" I would complain
still their answer the same
"A girl can't pretend to be a guy."
What a silly rule
and I told them so
but they stood by it.

No girls played in the major leagues.
At least, none that I knew.
So I made up names
and they let me play
as Ida Molina or Madam Wrightwain.
Then I learned the softball Greats:
Knight, Jennie Finch and I
had an arsenal once more.

But our games were never the same.
Our Sandlot lost its magic.
Time went on, we grew apart,
our sports became institutions.
We could no longer be who we wanted to be
instead, we each played our part.
Student, son, daughter, man,
woman, employee, nothing more
than mere roleplay.
You do whatever you have to do
to get by.

Then one day, we all came back
to play again once more.
For this game, we were ourselves
and I still hit dingers over their heads.

Inner Catcher
Valerie Feldker

I have to go to the mechanic
and I really do not want to do it.
I'm scared of the cost
and to make the phone call,
to hear words I don't understand,
and the stress of it all
unravels.

But then I think of the girl
who would crouch for hours
mere inches from a weapon swung
at one hundred miles per hour
and would not flinch—
thanks to a dad who would have her stand
inches from his bat-end fully extended
and tell her to stay put
while he swang with everything he had
until she could stand, unmoved,
so close he grazed her jersey—
She could catch a sixty-five mile an hour
projectile firmly in her glove pocket
or if necessary, fall to her knees,
become a wall,
and let the ball bounce off her chest
or arm or face
into the dirt—a block—
practiced thousands of times until her knees bled.
She would not be frightened.

So I call on her to help me tackle
the scary demands of the adult world.
She looks at them and laughs

at the challenge
to her dignity.
She puffs her chest and grabs the phone
A sly smile escapes.
Even superman has his kryptonite
she says while she gently pats my head.
She presses call and says what all
needs to be said.
My inner catcher conquers.

With the phone down she turns to leave
but I stop her and cry
What will I do next time?
She smiles and taps me on my chest
and says what I could not confess
You know where to find me.



Trini Morales **Where the Sun Kisses You and the Ocean Hugs You**

Of Pearls and Seafoam
Casper Geist

In depths where corals dance and sway,
Beneath the moon's enchanting ray,

Two mermaids meet in ocean blue,
Their love as deep as water's hue.

Here in the ocean's depths, they find their bliss,
Two lovers interlock in a sea-salt kiss

No judgment here, just love's pure glow,
In depths where only sirens know.

With scales aglow, in hues divine,
They dance together, hearts entwined.

Through swaying seaweed, they embrace,
In love's own hidden, sacred place.

Through storms that rage and tempests roar,
Their love's a lighthouse on the shore.

With longing eyes, I gaze below,
Where currents whisper secrets slow.

With thirsting heart and whispered plea,
I yearn to drift into love's fantasy

To feel the rush of water's caress,
In an underwater world, I confess

To trade my weakened legs for fins
I'd give it all and dive in.

With a tail adorned in shades so bright,
I'd join their dance in the pale moonlight.

Though legs may bind me to the shoreline
In my dreams, I roam all that is wet and sublime

In the depths where love's depths lie,
Beneath the ever-watchful sky,

I yearn to be a part of the sea,
To love, to live, forever free.

The Magic of Metal Roofs
Kate Gentry

Taps of raindrops,
soft muffled diamonds,
shimmer and spill
from the metal edges.
Seeps
in between the blades of grass.
The *pat pat pat* of water
pounds on the roof.
It sounds like static,
and becomes thunder
even when clouds are quiet.

Close your eyes,
you won't know,
sleep is there.
On the edge of lashes,
it pulls at your face.
The *tap tap tap*,
drops seem to bounce,
like shiny rubber balls
on metallic sheets.
Double tapping,
until they become one
repetition,
and you're already asleep.

Cicadas
Madison Green

On the swing set in the backyard,
We'd swing, slide, climb, things kids do.
At times we'd take mud and roll it in a ball
and throw it against the shed to watch it explode.

We'd take cicada shells clinging to the trees
and chase each other around with them.
I used to be braver then,
In my babysitter Mary's backyard.

Your grandma asked me if it was a cicada
making that sound and I didn't know that they
had a name other than the-bug-that-leaves-its-shell.
I pay attention to them now when I'm with you.

I think of the time we sat on the top of that hill
watching the stars in the back of your truck.
Me, you, the big dipper,
and the sound of the cicadas.

I also think of the years as a child,
running around the yard with a cicada in hand,
the smell of fresh cut grass, the chalk on pavement,
things were simpler then.

Thank you for reminding me.
I long for nostalgia, *A sweet escape of age.*[1]

Familiar Fire
Breanna Leber

A shoe lay in the road. Italian leather. Average size, about 10.5. The leather bleached and cracked, peeling from the shoe like an old snakeskin. No doubt it had sat there for a few days, perhaps weeks. Most of the boys marched right past it. They'd already traded in their own Wingtips for double-soled Roughouts. One in the rear, green in face and demeanor, halted to peer over the item. He held pale eyes that weren't deep and sunken. They'd yet to be baptized by fire.

Maybe it reminded him of his father. He was barely eighteen, after all, only an adult by number. He'd never had a chance to own a pair of Wingtips. His little sister, the surprise, was only five. They used to kick a deflated football, coarse and rough from use, about the garden. It was always late in the evening, after chores when the July air pressed in, slick and sticky.

Their father wasn't around much anymore, so the young boy looked out for his sister. They played ball so as not to think. Idleness bred thinking and thinking meant worrying.

One day, in particular, their father set off to work as the sky poured buckets. The sun peaked around the clouds just before noon and by the time the siblings were ready for an evening game, the grass still glistened with a steamy haze.

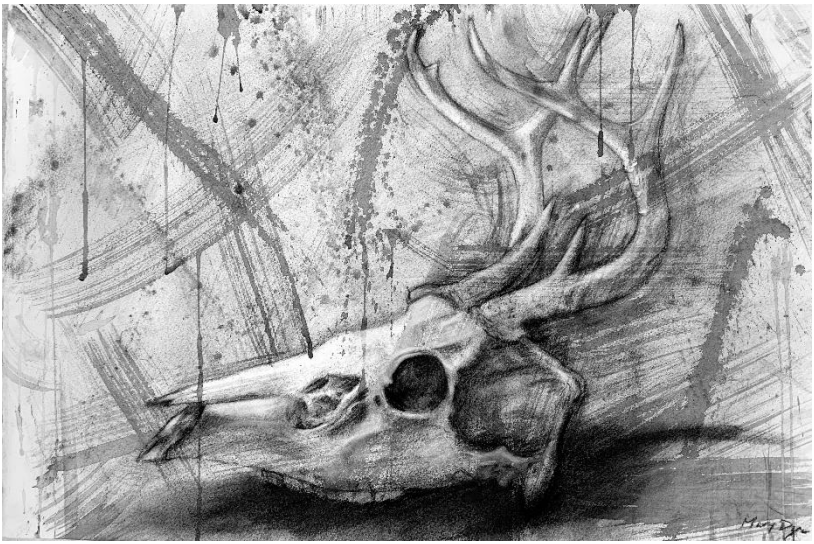
The boy kicked, letting the ball sail in a wide arc, but the satisfying whoosh and thunk never came. Instead, it was drowned out by the wailing siren's warning peal.

Mum ran from the house, frantic heels clipping along the back porch steps. They had rehearsed this a dozen times, by now it had become almost monotonous except for the heart pumping in the ears, and the blood rushing to the head. It wasn't till after they'd made it to the bomb shelter, his sister's arms securely wrapped around his neck. It wasn't till after the

ground shook beneath them, tremoring and gasping like a great beast's yawn. It wasn't till after they emerged to the smell of fire, and the distant blare of an ambulance. It wasn't till after that they would learn that the house would never hear that soft tap of size 10.5 soles on linoleum ever again. It wasn't till then, that the young boy pressed his lips to his sister's head and felt an ember glowing somewhere deep inside. An ember that fanned into a burning flame as he realized it was his turn.

So, he fingered the strap of his Lee-Enfield, as if to affirm that it still rested over his shoulder. Staring with that green face of his, staring down at that lonely shoe while the boys walked on. Thinking about whose father it belonged to, whose son… And he found that familiar fire bubbling up in his belly.

The fire his comrades had lost from staring Satan in the face, attempting to keep hold of their lives by taking his horns. The kind they could now only get from borrowed brass. Because in their world innocence is fleeting and guilt is so affordable that everyone buys it. Affordable like a well-worn pair of Italian Wingtip shoes.



Mary Dye **Momento**

And When You're Dry and Ready
Jessica Levine

Oh Dreidel, we shall play.

Your first dreidel comes in the mail when you're six years old. The package is addressed in Poppy's boxy, all-caps handwriting, and Grandma's floral Avon scent rushes out to hug you as soon as you pull off the tape. Inside is a Hanukkah Tales and Tunes VCR and the squarish plastic blue spinning top. It has gold lettering and doubles as a container for the chocolate coins. Dad says you can only eat the coins you win, but you end up splitting them and playing for pennies while a funny lady on TV sings "dreidel, dreidel, dreidel, I made it out of clay." You point to the screen when they light the menorah and ask why the actors are lighting it backwards, but your baby sister is squeal-laughing at the puppets, so you don't hear the answer. It will take you almost twenty years to realize that the video was right, and that your father's electric menorah in the kitchen window is the one lit backwards, left to right, so that it shows up right-to-left from the outside. But today, your "right" is the same as everyone else's. Today, you are fooled.

I made you out of clay.

You learn about the Holocaust in your 2nd grade history textbook. It's in a tiny block of text all to itself, gated away from the rest of the page in a bolded black border. You can't read the word, but you recognize "Jews" and "mass" and "graves." You've never seen "Jews" in a textbook before. It comes after the number six with six more zeros behind it, and you think "sixty thousand?" You raise your hand and ask your teacher if this really happened, and she dismisses it the same way she did the Trail of Tears book you brought in—yes, but that's not part of the lesson. And would you please follow along with what we're popcorn reading? Ten years from now,

your high school teacher will give you a profile card from a Holocaust Museum for a woman named Eva Levine. She'll gush about how Eva may be one of your relatives and just how cool that would be, and you'll stare at the clock while you explain how common the surname is. But today, you think saying nothing is the worst thing that can be said. Today, you are fooled.

I'll play you when I could.

You lose your three-subject notebook in 7th grade and find it in the lost-and-found two weeks later. When you turn to the next blank page, there's a swastika on it. This takes you by surprise, but you remember you jotted one down for reference when you were taking history notes, and maybe you used the wrong section. You turn to the next page, and there is another. Then another, and another, and another. Every few pages they change—some thin, some thick, some in groups of little ones. Half-way through, they become consistent—a massive one over the entire page, like an X made special just to cross you out. Not even the subject dividers are spared, not even pages you've already written on. 300 four-sided knives, and they sink into your skin one at a time. Your dad takes the notebook to the police station, but they tell him the same thing the principal did—there's no way to prove she didn't write them herself. Years from now, you will tell this story to your therapist, and she will be speechless. But today, you wonder if you overreacted, if the teachers will think you just wanted attention. Today, you realize you should have just thrown the notebook away, ignored the bullying like you're always told to. Today, you are fooled.

I made you out of wood.

You meet your best friend as a freshman in high school. She's Japanese, and you spend most lunches reminding each other not to react when your guy friends test out their Asian and Jew jokes. Today, one of the guys has the table shaking with laughter as he finishes off a "feline-stir-

fry" bit, and you cannot hold your tongue. The best Asian joke in the world still wouldn't change her mind about dating him, you say, and table falls silent. "Alright, Jess," he says, "You asked for it." Then he picks up your empty chocolate milk and taps the wet cardboard with his finger. "You know how I can make you fit in this milk carton?" A year from now, this boy will be begging your best friend to take up for him when he's accused of rape, but today, he says you walked right into that joke, and you believe him. Today, you are fooled.

I'll play you in the grass.

You're the only one who talks in your sophomore English class. The teacher is intimidating, and he doesn't care how long the silence lasts before someone speaks. You can't breathe in an awkward silence, so you always break it. Today, you are talking about The Diary of Anne Frank, and he is explaining how appealing Nazism was to the Germans, how seducing it was to be offered an enemy to punish. "When someone puts it that way," he says, "each and every one of us could be Nazis." The silence hangs for a half-minute before you joke that being Jewish makes you exempt. He huffs a laugh before saying, "you're going to the ovens, then." A year from now, officers will escort this teacher off the campus for sexually harassing several of your classmates on Grindr, but today he is still the man who openly favors you, who teaches your essays as examples, who pushes so hard for you to major in English that you're beginning to believe you may be smart enough for college. Today, you laugh because he wants you to. Today, you are fooled.

I made you out of glass.

After you turn 21, your rabbi invites you to a Pro-Israel rally. You didn't grow up in synagogue, so having a rabbi is new to you. You don't know what Pro-Israel means, but you don't want to seem anti-Israel, so you don't ask. You meander through the crowd at the Nashville Capital Building,

signing petitions you didn't read. A speaker says of the protestors on the other side of the fence "when you have nothing to say, all you do is make noise," but the signs to the right of the fence read "PEACE" and "NO MORE WAR." The speaker talks about antisemitism in his kid's school, and you see the swastikas cutting through your lined paper, you see the soggy milk carton, you see your English teacher's smirk. A few months from now you'll be dating a girl for the first time—a Muslim refugee from Bosnia. She'll cook you salmon and rice when her parents are working late and you'll joke that the religious scandal might distract your fathers from the gender one—or if you're lucky, vice versa. But today, the speaker says "right" lives to the left of that fence, and you watch your rabbi nod. Today, you are fooled.

I'll play you in the cold.

You tell your boss that you can't handle the new guy's Jew jokes anymore. You're 23, and you've learned by now that not reacting isn't always the best way to make a bully lose interest. Your last straw was when the "Jesus Killer" bit started. You can't step foot in the kitchen without the guy poking your side and saying, "just tell me why you had to kill Jesus." Your boss tells you to leave for a couple hours. When you come back, the new guy is fired. A year from now you will find your boss outside a staff party with his Halloween costume around his ankles, pushing himself into a 20-something waitress too drunk to give you her name, but today he is the first person to look you in the eye and say, "antisemitism is not okay." Today, a man says your "right" is the same as his, and you believe him. Today, you are fooled.

I made you out of gold.

You are 27, and you and your girlfriend have been sick for a month. It would have been her first Christmas and Hannukka with your family, but you salvage it as an opportunity to spend your first holiday season together. Like your mother, she was raised Baptist and had never lit a

menorah before falling in love with a Jew. But unlike your mother, she doesn't stumble over *"asher kid'shanu b'mitzvotav"* out of delighted spiritual interest. What the Hebrew means to her is that it means something to you. Her willingness to stand by you at the frosted window, to garble prayers to your God through wet coughs and haggard breaths—was there ever a rawer demonstration of love? A few Hanukkahs from now, when your blood sings through centuries to those ancient words, when you feel the tremor of every voice around the globe that ever whispered *"baruch atah Adonai,"* there will be a child watching their other mother stand beside you. They will see every color of devotion reflected in that dark window, every hue of selfless affection. And whatever is said to them after that, they will hold every well-meaning word up to the light of those candles. They will not be fooled.

Mom thinks the babies made her invincible.
After Maggie Smith
Jessica Levine

She fancies herself a mother-made-pillar who can hoist a crumbling
ceiling up with one hand and fry vegetable in a cast iron with the other
with a baby strapped to her chest and a dog leashed to her ankle while
a naked six-year-old throws tennis balls into the woodstove screaming
"Fetch! Fetch!" and never so much as wonders which side she should fall
on to keep the ceiling and the cast iron and the tennis balls and the dog
from smothering the baby if the house comes down and everything in it
shoots towards her like metal shavings to a magnet, as wondering how to
land is best left to those who allow themselves to fall, but she isn't made
for refusing contingency plans because she always ends up crushed
by the ceiling and the stove and the half-frozen vegetables, frantically
wiping away the plaster to show her bruises to the baby and the
six-year-old and even the dog as the splintered beams skewer them all,
splitting her throat wide open with *"look at how much I love you."*

Newborn
Sydney Lewis

It howls like backwater coyotes
crunching crickets by the crick,
sticking snouts inside the hearth.
We hear them in the chimney,
and it joins in the harmony,
crying like a kicked cat.
We sing to it like the wind gusts
before a storm. The whistling
of our chapped lips forms notes
which hover in the air like hummingbirds.
We drink red syrup, too, and flap forever
so our hearts don't stop.
So the baby we're holding doesn't fall,
hit its soft head on the bricks
and bounce like one of the rubber balls
we used to get out of gumball machines at the mall.

It knows in the same way a nose
can't know itself, but knows that it exists.
It smells like musty attic and aluminum baby powder,
like the freezer in the basement
full of meat that went bad in 1998.
When I hold it, the whale wailing makes
the neighbors worry. The May-bird
Peeks through the window and wonders
What kind of hen lets her chicks go hungry?



Rebecca Jury **Angel and Devil**

Home on Fire
Jona Mansfield

I was awake to see the flames grow higher,
The tiring embers impaling eyes miles away
To sway in choking wind, forcing air out of
Healthy lungs and scarring tongues and
I remember—vividly, like whips of light
Cracking against the broken, cloudy night—
The piece of burning wood that settled
Down, spot on my tongue, a charred rot
Burning deep in my mouth and throat
And like a rock, it settled like stone in a
Riverbed, into flesh and muscle that it
Weathered and eroded until the taste—
Like battery acid—corroded my stomach
Until I could no longer cry for help, instead
Left to wallow in my sorrow as my mind wept
In the face of the fiery snakes, wishing they
Would fade and dissipate into the heavy air
That brought it here to me, wishing I could
Breathe again something clean, free, clear.

Instead, I was left to watch as the flames
Stayed with a crackling heat, burning the
Wood of my body—forcing wounds into flesh
And devouring my heart and soul whole.

forget pretty.
Shatazha Mattingly

forget pretty.
it's the first thing people see,
but "for a black girl".
they negate our intellectual capacity,
and expect thanks for the reminder of our minority.

forget pretty.
not to be,
means facing undesirability,
but to be,
means I should feel honored for likability.

forget pretty.
it's an easy excuse,
for cocky predators.
whose hands; used to abuse,
defile her.

forget pretty.
it holds no real meaning,
nothing but a description.
it's misleading,
a form of sugar coated fiction.

forget pretty,
because it's not complimentary.
it's an evaluation,
a basic guarantee,
with malicious associations.

Mr. Fox and Peanut Butter
Bailey Padgett

Mr. Fox could see his breath in the air.

Huh, he thought to himself, shivering slightly and wishing that he had thought to bring his knitted scarf with him to work. *Would you look at that.*

Yesterday had been a fairly mild October day, but it seemed the weather had decided it was time to switch things up. He smiled in a way that anyone just passing by would not have caught. Perhaps it was silly that such a thing as a chilly day could coax this small display of joy out of Mr. Fox, but between you and me, he had had a very exhausting day at work and was eager to get some dinner in his belly and his feet propped up on his plush ottoman; any happiness he could glean before then was worth it.

The bus arrived a minute early to his delight, and as he climbed on, he saw immediately that his favorite window seat was free. This drew yet another smile from Mr. Fox. Good omen after good omen, he chose to believe, meant that his evening was going to be very nice. Perhaps his wife and four children would be in positive moods. Maybe his wife had even baked a pie! Well, that might be a bit too much to hope for. She hadn't done that in years. But no matter.

He settled into his seat and curled his bushy tail beside him. The bus trundled through the busy streets, leaving the bank far behind—along with Mr. Fox's melancholy, which he had left with no remorse at his desk. He would revisit it tomorrow upon his return to the frenzy of insurance reminders, rude customers shrieking for withdrawals, and the calls from angry folk at the grocery store demanding to know why their cards were declining. But tonight, he deserved some peace. It was his birthday, after all.

"Good evening, Mr. Fox," a cheery voice greeted him. He turned to see his good friend Mr. Peacock grinning at

him across the bus aisle, his brilliant fan of feathers nearly smothering the young pig on the seat next to him. “Pleasant workday?”

“Oh, yes, Mr. Peacock,” Mr. Fox replied. “You know me. Always a workaholic.”

They chatted back and forth for the rest of the way, and when the bus slowed to a stop in Mr. Fox’s neighborhood, he bid his friend a pleasant night and stepped out into the crisp autumn air. He waited a good, long minute, watching the bus turn the corner down the street, before at last ascending the stairs to his front door.

He wasn’t sure what he expected—Certainly not a celebration with pie and gifts and music and friends, but at least a hot dinner with his wife and children; at least a warm embrace from any one of them; at least a *greeting*. But instead, as he entered the too-dark house and hung up his coat, he was met with no acknowledgement at all.

Tommy was on the couch on his video gaming device, Kip breathing over his shoulder and shouting random instructions like “Jump!” and “Duck!” and “Make him do a flip!” that went ignored. June and Zuzu sat on the living room rug playing with dolls and arguing loudly over which ones they wanted to be. And Mrs. Fox stood at the fridge, placing the final Tupperware container of leftovers on the inside shelf. “We already ate,” she said without turning around.

“Oh. Okay.” Mr. Fox felt the hope that had filled his body earlier fizz out in a single breath. “Did you make a plate for me?”

“No. I forgot. You’ll have to heat one up.”

“Alright. What did you make?”

“Salmon.”

Well, it wasn’t his favorite meal, but he didn’t completely dislike salmon. He pulled a plate from the cupboard and took the Tupperware from the fridge, which he perceived did not contain much food.

Mrs. Fox, sensing his puzzlement, answered the unasked question. “Kip ate a second helping.”

A glance at his son’s indifferent countenance told Mr. Fox that Kip didn’t much care that he’d eaten half his father’s dinner. He sighed and set his plate in the microwave.

“Father!” Zuzu gasped as if she had only just noticed him. The hope lying dormant inside his heart raised its head warily; perhaps his youngest would be the one to grant him the birthday greeting he so desperately wanted?

Unfortunately, that was not the case.

“Father,” Zuzu whined as she reached him, “Spencer Slug’s parents bought her a brand new fleshbag and she picked on me all day at school because *my* parents didn’t buy *me* a fleshbag!” She stuck out her lip in a pout and tugged on his sleeve as if that alone would convince him that she was deprived. “Mother told me to wait for you to get home to ask and we’ve never had a pet before so can I please, please, *please* have one? I’ll take care of it all by myself and I won’t ever ask for anything ever again! If you truly love me you’ll buy me a fleshbag! Please, Father, *pleeeease*!”

Mr. Fox frowned. “Now, really, I’m not sure you need—”

“Oh, just get your daughter a fleshbag,” Mrs. Fox snapped. “She did say please, after all.”

After several minutes of pretending to think it over, Mr. Fox relented to familial pressure—the equivalent of peer pressure to a pimply teenager, if you can believe it. In all honesty, he was kind of a pushover, though he would never admit that aloud. But he knew it. As did his wife.

So, it was settled: instead of receiving even one gift for his birthday, Mr. Fox was to buy one for his irritating daughter, whose birthday wasn’t for a good many months.

Believe it or not, he didn’t sleep very well that night.

…

The bus ride to work the next morning felt just a little more bleak than it had the day before. That was simply how it was, and how it had always been. He was trying, he really was, but the fact remained that each new day took a little bit more life from Mr. Fox. He wondered when the small smiles would cease altogether. How many more unacknowledged birthdays he could bear.

The bank was slow that day. The only calls he received were all from rather impertinent people that only contributed to his dejection. At noon his boss griped at him for accidentally giving a man the wrong insurance information. At two his lunch break was cut short by a woman who yelled at him for twenty minutes before realizing that Mr. Fox was indeed *not* her ex-husband. By the time he at last placed the landline back into its holder and signed off on his last sheet of paperwork, his fur appeared a duller shade of ginger even to his own eyes, and his tail drooped low to the ground. Even the knitted scarf he wrapped around his neck, which he had remembered to take with him, could not lift his spirits.

The bus was a minute late this time. He climbed aboard and saw that his favorite window seat was taken by his work nemesis, Mrs. Cow. She smirked at him as he claimed the seat behind her, but he couldn't even muster the energy to bare his teeth in response. *What does it even matter*, he thought woefully.

Once again the bus trundled along through town, but this time Mr. Fox departed in the town square; it was where the pet store was located, and let it never be said that he was not a man of his word—He had said he would bring a fleshbag home for Zuzu, and so he would. The bell jingled merrily as he stepped inside the store, and for some reason, the sound made him feel a smidgeon less blue.

A young goat salesclerk stood behind the front desk. “Good evening, sir,” she greeted him warmly. “How can I help you?”

“My daughter is wanting a fleshbag,” he said.

“Ah, yes, we have quite an impressive collection of partially-trained *humans* in our kennels. We do prefer that term here, by the way. If you’ll come with me, we can have a look.” The salesclerk gestured for him to follow her into the back, and that he did. He had a feeling that really any human would do, since Zuzu only wanted one to get back at a girl in her class. He doubted his daughter would bother to remember it was there, much less care for it, after the initial excitement wore off. He would likely be its primary caretaker by this time next week.

“The males are on the right and the females are on the left,” the salesclerk told him as they entered the kennels. “The younger ones are more excitable if your daughter wants to be able to play with it, but some of the older ones enjoy games too. They’re all able to learn words through mimicry if you decide you want to take that route. Oh, and I am obligated to inform you that only some of them are toilet-trained. Are you wanting one that knows how to walk on two legs, or does it matter?”

“I don’t think it does,” Mr. Fox said vaguely. He scanned the cages with his eyes, taking in all of the different options with steadily growing interest. Some of the fleshbags ventured to the doors of their cages to see who had come to call; others didn’t bother. Some had wide noses and freckles while others had pale, bare faces with pouchy eyes and saggy lips. Some were young and fresh with a spring in their step, and some were speckled with age and sporting wiry hair. Oh, the hair—such colors he could see! Blondes like honey and sugar; ruddy ginger streaked with deep red; browns so deep they were nearly black; sandy heads that resembled the coast; grays and whites like wisps of smoke and spirits; roguish

cocoas and dull, dirty hues that drew his gaze every which way.

Every fleshbag—every *human*—present wore a white jumpsuit and a black leather collar around its throat. Their feet were covered only in stretchy white booties, such as what doctors wear over their shoes when performing surgery.

Mr. Fox realized he had been staring at one human in particular at the same moment the salesclerk did. “Ah, I see Peanut Butter has caught your eye,” she quipped. “Here, I’ll introduce you.”

She led him closer to the cage in question, which was at the very back of the kennel. The male inside looked to be in his late twenties, if Mr. Fox had to guess, and had golden-brown hair that did in fact resemble the color of peanut butter. His face was a little droopy and rather sad-looking, as if he’d seen some very disheartening things in his lifetime. As they stopped at last in front of the cage, Mr. Fox and Peanut Butter made eye contact, and something broken in the former’s heart mended instantly. It surprised him, how much lighter he suddenly felt. He could’ve sworn that Peanut Butter perked up a bit too.

“I think he likes you,” the salesclerk said, apparently noticing the strange connection as well. “He’s been here for quite a while, so I’m sure he’s eager to get adopted. Do you think he’d be a good fit for your daughter?”

“Oh, yes, he’ll do just fine,” Mr. Fox replied.

Fifteen minutes of paperwork and a quick goodbye later, he was leading his—no, Zuzu’s—new fleshbag out of the pet store on a brand new, bright yellow leash. The salesclerk had mentioned that Peanut Butter could stand on his legs but preferred to walk on all fours, and so he did; his five-fingered hands made funny slapping sounds on the pavement as he and Mr. Fox made their way to the bus stop.

"I suppose Zuzu will want to know if she can teach you any words," Mr. Fox said mildly after a few minutes of waiting in silence. "Can you say anything at all?"

Peanut Butter said nothing. He only blinked. Very, very slowly.

"I could teach you how to say please," Mr. Fox went on. "Zuzu misuses that word. She'd say it a million times if she thought it would get her everything she wants. Perhaps I was a fool to give in to this whole…*you* situation so easily."

Peanut Butter yawned.

"Or then again, perhaps not. You don't seem so bad, really. I'm sure you would have been a decent man if you'd lived before the Great Change."

The fleshbag only looked up at him curiously, as if he could nearly comprehend the words being spoken to him but had not the foggiest how to show it.

But Mr. Fox understood. And he smiled.

The bus arrived then, slowing to a screechy stop before the odd pair. The bus driver took one look at Peanut Butter and barked, "No pets allowed onboard. I'm afraid you'll have to walk."

"Oh, please, Mr. Zebra," Mr. Fox entreated. "He'll behave himself, I promise."

The bus driver shook his head. "No can do, Mr. Fox. I'm mighty sorry, but them's the rules." And he closed the doors and drove away before any more could be said.

Mr. Fox heaved a sigh. "Well, I suppose we'll have to walk now, won't we, Peanut Butter?" A small tug on the bright yellow leash was all it took for the fleshbag to start moving, and the two of them set off for that too-dark house on the other side of town.

The sidewalks were teeming with people, whether they were heading home to their families, coming in and out of shops, or selling newspapers and ads on corners. One of Mrs. Fox's book club friends, Mrs. Sheep, hurried past, the

wool on her head newly done up in a blown-out style that resembled a large beehive. Mr. Peacock stepped out of a bookstore, totes of tomes teetering on his terrific plumage. A mother pulled her screaming child out of the convenience store by his arm, admonishing him all the way.

It was all rather distracting. A glance at Peanut Butter told Mr. Fox that perhaps his new responsibility was a little overwhelmed. So was Mr. Fox, if he was being honest with himself.

And he realized he didn't really want to go home. Not yet.

"Shall we take the long way?" he asked.

Peanut Butter blinked up at him, and Mr. Fox took that as a yes.

…

They crossed through the park, which was lovely at this time of day. Dusk was upon them as they meandered through the hedge garden, Mr. Fox stopping every now and then to allow Peanut Butter to sniff at the flowerbeds.

The fleshbag had come alive in the time since leaving the pet store, Mr. Fox thought. He knew now that he had not imagined the slight perk he'd detected when they'd first come face-to-face. Gone were the sad, droopy eyes and depressed air about him; Peanut Butter seemed content here among nature. Happier. As if this was all he'd ever wanted.

"You like these flowers, huh?" Mr. Fox said, squatting down to the human's level in order to better see the violets.

Peanut Butter slowly slid his eyes to him as though to say, *Yes. Yes, I do.*

"They're quite beautiful. We can take some home, if you'd like. Mrs. Fox has a handsome ceramic vase we could put them in."

Peanut Butter seemed to like that idea, so Mr. Fox carefully picked a small bouquet of the violets and bundled

them up in his free hand. As they continued on, he noticed that Peanut Butter kept staring off toward the trees in the distance like he could sense something beyond. Mr. Fox wondered what was over that way; he had scarcely left town since settling down with his family so many years ago, but he liked to imagine that one day he would be able to forget that stuffy old bank and travel the world. Perhaps he'd go to Australia, or Brazil, or maybe even Tahiti. An island getaway would be quite nice.

Too late, he registered that neither his wife nor children had been in that quick fantasy, and immediately gave up such a silly notion as traveling so far. He snorted. *Tahiti.* Ridiculous.

"I wonder how long you were cooped up in that kennel," he said to fill the silence. "The salesclerk said it had been a while, but I hope it wasn't too long. I'd go mad if I were trapped like that."

Peanut Butter shifted his shoulders in a way that could have easily been mistaken for a shrug. *There's more than one way to be trapped,* the movement seemed to say.

"You know, you're right," Mr. Fox went on. "Maybe I *am* trapped like that. But I shouldn't say such things."

Hey, no judgement here.

"Alright, if you insist. I just feel sometimes that my wife doesn't care for me anymore. My daughters pay me no mind unless they want something and my sons hardly speak to me because they're too busy playing their video games. I wouldn't be at all surprised if our brains ceased all development in a few hundred years because of all this technology, just like what happened to your kind in those centuries leading up to the Great Change." Then he did a double-take. "Oh my, was that rude? I'm sorry if I overstepped."

Peanut Butter didn't reply; he merely blinked again. *There's no need to apologize.*

"I'm glad you aren't offended. I've grown rather unaccustomed to speaking my mind, in truth."

The pair reached the outskirts of the park, where the train tracks that lay before the thick, distant trees came into view. The bus was sturdy and reliable, of course, but sometimes Mr. Fox longed to board a train on a spontaneous whim and see where the wind took him. *There I go again, thinking of traveling*, he chided himself. The tracks stretched on for miles in either direction, gleaming in the fading light beneath overgrown weeds. Mr. Fox hadn't walked these tracks in decades, not since he and Mrs. Fox had played and laughed and flirted here for hours on end as children. She'd liked him quite a lot back then. What a world they lived in.

The bright yellow leash was not in his hand anymore.

Mr. Fox whirled, panic filling his heart for a split second before he saw Peanut Butter sitting on his knees in the grass before the tracks, just looking at the trees. He peered over his shoulder in acknowledgement as Mr. Fox deigned to join him. The two of them sat together, just watching. Watching and waiting.

For what, Mr. Fox didn't know.

"How come you keep staring at the trees?" he asked quietly. "You've been doing it since we left the bus stop."

Peanut Butter sighed through his nose.

"Could it be…that you want what I've secretly wanted all this time? To leave?" He laid a hand on the human's shoulder. "Is that it? Do you want to be free?"

"F…F…Free," Peanut Butter choked out.

Mr. Fox started at the word, and at the croaking voice hoarse with misuse. So humans could learn words through mimicry after all, just as the salesclerk goat had claimed. But it did feel odd that Peanut Butter would mimic that specific word, and so purposefully at that.

Or it would be, if he truly didn't understand what the word meant.

Peanut Butter, face still pointed toward the trees, closed his eyes in what looked to Mr. Fox to be silent, heart-wrenching longing. There might have even been a tear or two on the human's lash line, if he wasn't imagining it.

Mr. Fox made an important decision then.

"Do you know what I think, Peanut Butter?" he said. "I think you deserve a better life than the one my daughter can give to you."

He reached for the leather collar and unclasped the bright yellow leash that had brought such color to his life, if only for a short time. He stood, the leash bunched up in his left hand and the bouquet of violets clutched in his right. "Go. Go be free," he whispered.

And Peanut Butter did.

He too stood—shakily at first, but he managed it. Once he was on his two legs, he took a hesitant step toward those wonderful trees. And then another. And another. His back was rather hunched, arms bent in front of him sort of like a T-rex would've held its arms all those millions of years ago. He was hunched, but he walked. He walked slowly—so slowly—toward those tall, beautiful trees that promised freedom and life in the unknown, those trees that whispered and beckoned and spread their hope not only to the advancing human being, but also to the lonely old fox, who stood with that bright yellow leash and bouquet in his hands and watched and watched until Peanut Butter had long since disappeared into his lovely, green, broad new world.

Maybe someday, Mr. Fox thought as the hope in his chest was revived once again. *Tahiti.*

And then he went home.



Sam Cox **Did I Step on Something?**

Our Hearts are Buried in Venice
After "My Heart is Buried in Venice" by Ricky Montgomery
Elizabeth Roy

Emma was nervous on her first day of work at the 78th precinct of the NYPD. At least, she was nervous until she saw her new boss.

When she opened the door to his office, she nearly stopped in her tracks. He was the most beautiful person she had ever seen. The man in front of her was looking down at what Emma assumed was paperwork. He glanced up at her and smiled. "Hey, welcome," he said. "Head Detective Adam Fuller." His brown eyes sparkled in the office light, his suit fitting his body perfectly in all the right places.

She smiled back at him, at Adam. "Emma Gaines," she replied, shaking his outstretched hand.

He asked her out a few days after she started, and when Emma said yes, she had never been so sure of anything in her life.

—

Normally, their unit did not get these kinds of calls. They are a detective unit, not a unit of officers. They're not supposed to deal with hostage situations, unless they are part of an active investigation. The unit was never supposed to be called onto the scene of one. Especially one with kids.

—

"Do you want kids?" Adam had asked her on their first date. They were eating at his favorite restaurant in Brooklyn. Emma was dressed in a little black dress and heels, a choice she instantly regretted when Adam wanted to walk to the restaurant. Adam sat across from her in his best suit, his brown hair nicely swept across his forehead.

Emma looked down at her plate, using her fork to pick at the food left. "I've always wanted kids, but with my

job it hasn't really been an option. Plus, I haven't found the person yet."

"We can make it work," Adam said with a smile. Emma glanced up at him, brushing a few strands of black hair out of her face, and took a sip of wine.

"Yeah… we could make it work."

—

When their unit arrived on the scene, hoards of units had already swarmed the elementary school building. Adam immediately went searching for the negotiation chief. Emma stayed with her partner, John Woods. Everything was going fine, the negotiators were getting somewhere. That was, until they slipped up and the kids started screaming.

—

On their fifth date, Adam and Emma ventured to the Venice Bar near their precinct. After dinner and a few drinks, Adam Fuller and Emma Gaines had their first dance. They swayed to the music, laughing and kissing each other's foreheads. The song was one of their favorites: My Heart is Buried in Venice by Ricky Montgomery. They listen to it on long car rides between crime scenes and when doing the endless piles of paperwork overflowing Adam's office. It is their *song.*

—

It wasn't supposed to happen like this, He wasn't supposed to go in the building, and she wasn't supposed to be left behind. *We do everything together,* Adam had told her once. *You'll never be left alone again.* Now she is left screaming, shouting at him not to go, but to stay. John is holding her back, his grip on her arms never faltering despite her never ending attempts to get away from him.

"Adam stop!" she shouts at the top of her lungs, her cries echoing into the silence. She pulls again against the grip of John, because if only she could get away, if only she could stop him from going inside. "John, let go of me!"

Emma freezes as Adam stops at the door of the school and looks back at her. Adam meets her eyes, a silent apology echoing inside of them. Emma can feel the anger burning inside of her, anger at him for being so reckless and stupid, but she knows he is just doing his job, and how could she be angry at him for saving the children? It's fear, she ultimately decides. A mixture of fear and love so strong that it threatens to pull her under. He can't die, and he knows exactly what he is walking into. An unstable subject with a gun.

"Adam please!" she shouts again, hoping her pleas will cause him to stop. When Adam looks away from her, she knows it's done. His hand reaches for the door handle and he pulls it down. Adam is inside of the building. Emma turns and buries her head in John's chest and sobs.

"It's okay Princess. He'll be okay." John whispers in an attempt to comfort her. John leads her over to a tent, one set up with radio equipment, something he knows Adam would not have gone in without.

Eventually, Emma calms down. Everything seems to be running smoothly inside. Time moves slowly, like it's stuck in tar. Every minute that passes with Adam still in the school makes it harder for Emma to breathe. Fifteen minutes pass and a gunshot rings through the air. Emma is on her feet in an instant, sprinting to the door shouting Adam's name.

John rushes after her, shouting, "Emma, don't go in there!" But she is too fast, and is through the door before John can stop her.

—-

Adam remembers a few months ago when he finally proposed to Emma. She beamed at him as he slipped the diamond ring on her finger, the same ring she had gushed about on their vacation a few weeks ago. It was perfect, just like her.

The next few weeks were simply amazing. They searched for a house, one where they could grow their family

in the suburbs. In the field, Emma would wear the ring around a string on her neck so she would not risk losing the ring.

They had started to plan their wedding, everything from flowers to food to venue. Emma had even bought her dress. Adam gave her complete freedom to plan the wedding of her dreams, except for the song of their first dance. That was to be "My Heart is Buried in Venice". Emma happily agreed, because that song meant something to her. To them.

—-

They were supposed to be married next month. The twelfth of June, because Emma wanted a summer wedding. Adam could not disagree.

Emma ran towards his fiance, who was lying on the floor of a school classroom. He was covered in red. The shooter sat across from Adam, smiling at his work. Emma did not even think as she shot him, a clean bullet through the leg.

"Adam," she whispered. "Adam, talk– talk to me."

John ran in behind her, gun drawn. "Gaines, where's the suspect?"

"John, he's hurt," Emma says, her voice distant. "He's unconscious, we need an ambulance."

"Emma, where's the suspect?" John asks again. Emma doesn't even look up at him, her focus stuck on trying to stop the flow of blood from her fiance's body. John sighs and scans the rooms. He hears a grunt and glances to his right. It was the suspect trying to limp out of the school room. John runs towards him and cuffs him before he makes it out of the door.

Lilly, Emma's best friend at the precinct, runs into the room next. She instantly runs to Emma's side, taking in everything that is going on.

Emma turns towards her friend, tears streaming down her face. "Lilly, he- he's dying. He can't die Lilly, he can't. We are supposed to get married, and, and…" Emma breaks down into sobs, her arms wrapping around Adam's torso. The

sirens from the ambulance rang in the distance, drowning out Emma's cries.

"Emma, he's going to be okay. The paramedics are here, you have to let them take him." Lilly says quietly. She reaches down to pull Emma away from Adam, but Emma refuses to go with her.

"I can't leave him," Emma whispers.

"I'll take you to the hospital, okay? Just let the paramedics take a look at him." Lilly coaxes Emma away from Adam and gently pulls her off of the ground. Emma buries her face in Lilly's shirt, trying to muffle the sounds of her sobbing.

"He can't die, Lil. He can't." Emma says through her tears.

"He won't Em. He'll be okay."

—-

A similar situation happened a few months ago. Emma had gone undercover in a bar, where the suspect "picked" his victims. When she saw the suspect, she made contact, flirting with him, convincing him that she was to be his next victim. Of course, as Emma Gaines did her job well, the suspect kidnapped her. Except it was never supposed to get that far. The team raced to grab him before he got her, but they failed.

They had found Emma in the trunk of his car, beaten nearly to death. Adam had been the one to find her. Emma was barely conscious, so as he lifted her out of the trunk, he draped his own jacket around her shoulders. She clung to him as he carried her to the ambulance, like if she let go he would disappear.

Emma woke up in the hospital to "My Heart is Buried in Venice" playing, and she smiled.

—

Emma is sitting beside Adam on a plastic, uncomfortable hospital chair, as he lay beside her, barely

breathing. The words the doctor told her were echoing through her head. *There is a slim chance he'll make it, Detective Gaines. The bullet hit his heart, there's nothing we can do past surgery. It's just a matter of whether his heart is strong enough to keep beating.*

The room is silent, too silent, and Emma's mind keeps racing through all of the possibilities. If he woke up, he'd probably never be able to return to the police force. It would put too much stress on his heart. And that would be okay, because she- no he, could live with it, as long as he was with her, right? All she needs is him, and she knows he feels the same way. They will get through this together.

Emma reaches forward and grabs Adam's hand. "Come back to me, Adam. Please, just come back."

—

He woke up.

Emma answers her phone at five in the morning, and Chris's voice rang from the other side. "Adam's awake, get to the hospital, Emma. Come now."

She can barely contain her excitement as she walks into the hospital and down to his hospital room. Emma opens the door and stops.

There is Adam, awake, in his bed. His eyes are open, he is talking, and everything is going to be okay.

Everything is going to be okay.

"Hey Emma," Adam says quietly.

"Hi," she whispers back, still in disbelief. "How are you feeling?" Emma walks over to him and Chris offers her his seat. Once she is seated, Chris is gone.

"I'm fine," Adam replies. Silence fills the room, haunting the couple. "And, I'm sorry."

"Don't apologize, you're okay, and that's all that matters." Emma responds. Her voice hardens, though, as she says, "Just don't ever do that again." Adam nods in answer.

Later, when Chris returns, he finds them both in Adam's hospital bed, sleeping in each other's arms.

—

On their very few days off, Emma normally spends her time at Adam's apartment. They make popcorn and watch movies, eat takeout on the floor, and sometimes take walks in the local park. Her favorite thing to do is read together on the couch, wrapped in each other's warmth with a book shared between them

Now his body is cold.

—

Adam goes south quickly. It's not that he is putting too much strain on his heart, it's that his heart cannot take the strain of living.

His body is shutting down, the nurse told her. *I'd give him maybe two days.*

Two days.

Two days.

Two.

Two days left with the love of her life, the man who saved her, the man who showed her what it meant to be loved.

The rest of the team is mourning in their own ways.

Everything is going to be okay.

He's going to get out of bed and they're going to spend the rest of their lives together.

"Em," Adam says for the third time, trying to get her attention. "Emma."

"Hm?" Emma replies, the thoughts in her head scattering.

"I want to get married. You know, before…" Adam looks like he is going to cry, but he holds the tears back. "Please, Em, if it's okay with you."

Emma reaches forward and grabs Adam's hand, entwining their fingers. "Of course, I will marry you, Adam.

Even if it's for a day, or for a minute. However long we have."

Adam smiles. "We can have Chris perform the ceremony tonight, if you'd like. Someone can drive to my apartment and get the rings."

"I'd love that," Emma replies.

So they got married. The ceremony took place in Adam's hospital room, with the entire team. They both said "I do" and slipped the thin bands of metal on each other's fingers.

No tears were shed.

Only smiles.

—

The day after they were married, his heart started to beat slower.

And slower.

And slower.

The room is too quiet. It's driving Emma crazy, the silence. Just the machines beeping, no more laughter, no more joy. Adam tries, he tries to talk but it's hard on him, and Emma doesn't want him to strain himself, if only to keep him near her longer.

"We didn't get to dance," Adam whispers to Emma.

"It's okay, Adam," Emma replies. "We've danced before."

"But I wanted to dance with you." Adam shifts in the bed and winces.

"I know. I wanted to dance with you too, but I'm just happy we're married."

But she wanted to dance, and he did too.

—

Adam is no longer conscious. His heart is giving out, and he is dying.

Emma repeats it over and over to herself so maybe she'll believe it.

Adam is no longer conscious. His heart is giving out, and he is dying.

His heart is giving out, he is dying.

He is dying.

He is dying.

He is-

No.

—

He only has a few minutes left. Emma knows this. In a few minutes she will lose the love of her life.

They never danced as a married couple. They had this planned. "My Heart is Buried in Venice" playing, the two of them swaying to the music.

Adam is no longer awake. He will never wake up again. Ever.

They are married, but they won't dance.

But Emma can still give him the memory of the song he loved so much, of her singing it to him while he slept, because she knows he can hear her.

"Come rest your bones next to me," she sings. "And toss all your thoughts out to sea."

The machine starts to beep faster.

"I'll pull up each of our anchors."

He flatlines. Doctors rush in.

Tears start falling down her face, sobs stuck in her throat, as she watches his chest fall one last time.

"So we can get lost, you and me."

—

The funeral is a week later. The entire 78th precinct attended, along with all of Adam's family and some of hers.

Everyone tries to talk to Emma.

Emma really doesn't talk to anyone.

She still wears the rings on her finger. She can't bring herself to take them off when Adam was buried in his.

Everyone leaves after an hour. No one can bear to stay, the small talk and old friends no longer appealing. Emma stays, though.

She stays, sitting by his grave. Telling him all of the things she wished she had told him. About her life. About how much she loved him.

The tears haven't stopped falling since he died.

They never danced. He wanted to dance.

Emma lays down in the cold, itchy grass, and begins singing their song. "My heart is buried in Venice, hidden beneath all my worries and doubts."

Thunder booms and rain starts falling, pelting Emma like small bullets.

"My heart is buried in Venice…"

Adam's voice fills her head, back from one morning when he woke her up singing this song. His voice is wonderful, she remembers thinking. He had made her breakfast that morning. Pancakes and strawberries and strong coffee. She had beamed at him, and almost told him that she'd loved him.

Almost.

Emma Fuller sighs, and smiles at the rain. Smiling at Adam. All she has to do is finish their song.

"Waiting for someone to take it home."

death suits our pretty faces
Xavier Spiess

let me be your record player
sip on me like rocks and whiskey

kiss my bruises
pour salt in my scrapes and gashes

and when im back in Chicago maybe ill text you
remember when we walked through silver reflections
splashed around in black marble water

me and dad started smoking together since you left
we still dont talk
just huddle around stray sparks
feel a hot lick of your embrace in each hit

i remember standing over you before you died that night
begging you to say something
a boa crushes my chest
vexing me; his forked tongue whispers:
cardinal selfishness leads you, took you to hell

if i was older i imagine i would have told you to go, go on without me, but I was so young, and when you died i begged for you to stay, i hope through the cancer and the ventilator you couldnt hear me, i hope you thought i was ready



Sage Mulzer **Can You See or Are You Blind?**

Fall Again

Parker Stallings

Memories ride the autumn winds,
on this twenty-eighth of November.
And oh how it's come again,
an image of what we once were.
Watered by the fleeting passion of a summer rain,
a sapling flourished, with roots planted firm.
Until you found it too hard to maintain,
and our love was made kindling to burn.

But even if given the chance to be
immune to time and the falling leaves,
I would not be that cypress tree,
standing tall and alone, ever green.
Rather I'd walk amongst deciduous dead.
Stooping under their drooping limbs
which cry tears of orange, and red,
to follow their lead, and fall again.

For to the leaf the river winds
here and there at gods' behest.
So too does the stream of time
pull us along, no matter how we wrest.
But looking back those channels shine,
with imperfect beauty they cut the land.
And lovely too, is this past of mine,
meandering along as it shapes the man.

The Affair
Miriam Story

The Lover and the Beloved lie alone like
the dustpan and the wicker broom, the
ones who have given everything and
the ones who have received it.
If you can look through the peephole,
you might see them gleam in the dusk,
wrapped in rayon and polyester sheets.
Dust lingers in the air and floats by moonlight.
He is a reliable man, one who holds deep affection in his bones –
but she is The Woman of Dreams and
this must be said reverently, through hotel lines.

Early to Rise
Miriam Story

Under patchwork grandma quilts, threadbare from lye and lovemaking,
I will lie and listen to the shower fizz on an Alka Seltzer body –
I won't get up for a while, but when I do
I will cook breakfast and sit at the table an old friend threw away.
I'll kiss butter from the corners of a mouth that I
found and brought home.



Samantha Hightower **Untitled**

sexual tension
Mary Catherine Thomas

…that I could fill a watering can
with words unspoken
and pour them into your brain
without fear
of my scorching desires
overstaying
their welcome

memory of heartbeats
where heartbeats shouldn't be –
against handprints wandering,
lingering, grabbing with childlike enthusiasm,
claiming you as mine

and when you next leave my town
trading it in for your shoebox apartment
on the other side of the state,
remember me ravenous

how I take your love into my starving mouth
and devour it whole –
suckle your heart-shaped strawberry tongue
bursting with sweet nectar
as though it will never run dry

I'll see you in five days

Tits out at Texas Roadhouse
Mary Catherine Thomas

--we're making up for lost time
in the front seat of your truck.
The seats don't go all the way down,
but your hands search my back
for that little clasp

& I know we're in public
& I know it's indecent
but I can't pinpoint a time in recent years
that I've felt the way you make me feel
(so I let you have some milk for free)

and when we're inside
and the waitress is trying to get me drunk
because she likes
my loose-lipped jokes,
I laugh at how you get buzzed
off two sips
        but try to hide it
before my mind wonders
why can't it be like this
all the time?

Do you have to live so far away?

& when we've finished our meal
(after I've stolen all you'll let me steal)

we bookend the night by finishing it
the way we started.



Riley Beasley **Mother Earth**

Sad Rose Petals
Maria Wimsatt

There was a lush garden placed beneath you.
Fed by the river banks Narcissus himself gazed upon.
When he thought of you, his heart sang a sad song.

The melody, it flowed from his depths and
into the water he wept.
Holding just a singular rose to his heart.
The blood that fell from the velvet knives,
it seeped into the future.

Do not run from the river bank, my sweet.
Do not venture any farther than the eye can
see.
For if I lose you, they'll write poems about my
selfishness.

Though I was gazing so deeply, to find you.

Backyard Dreams
Joel Youngers

Burgers on the grill
Fifteen minutes to dinner
A sanctuary of swings and
Barefoot backyard dreams
The dirt
caking our brakes
Felt comfortable as skin
Soon enough up
to our heels
In that perfect
swing set dust

Ten more minutes to dinner
Rushing to make time
slow
Forcing the thought
Of leaving the sunset
And all its golden leaves
Beyond the realm of imagining
Clinging to those moments
We didn't know
We'd yearn for
As all our years slide by

Five more minutes to dinner
How I want to feel
That green seat
Swinging beneath me
That moment of weightlessness
Before being jolted back
I've forgotten how
to be

so free

Two more minutes to dinner
Those fading
yellow painted chains
Worn smooth by
Weather, hands
And change

One more minute to dinner
One more minute
To waking up

When was the last time?
That we left
Our swings shifting
Slowly in the breeze
When was the last time?
That we heard the call
For hands to be cleaned
And accepted our fate
Forced to leave
Our kingdom of swings and
Barefoot backyard dreams

Frenchman's Creek
Joel Youngers

Frenchman's Creek, a calm place I like to go, set behind a wall of dense trees, hiding it from the casual viewer. It's a creek that leads back to an inlet that opens to the sea. Most find the sea of more significance, however, and the creek is rarely followed. But long ago, I tired of the endless horizon, and now I spend my time sitting next to the little river of water that gurgles by in that pleasing way creeks do.

I like to build little wooden ships and set them a 'sail down the proportionately 10-foot waves. I am rather poor at building ships. They usually go down in dramatic fashion, with their imaginary captains undoubtedly going down with them. Brave little guys.

I take my grandson with me to my creek sometimes. I want him to find the value of sitting in a moment, content not to follow it to its end. He always makes his way up the creek and into the cove, though. He hasn't yet lost his taste for oblivion. I pray he never finds it, but he is too much like his father, who is too much like me.

I tried bringing his dad to the creek when I'd first discovered it, but by then he didn't want much to do with me. I suppose the two of us alone with only the babble of a creek to keep us company doesn't much appeal to him. In a way I am trying to atone for everything by bringing his son, even though most of me knows that's impossible.

Besides my grandson I don't take anyone to my creek. My wife would have had the privilege, but she

passed when my son was just a boy. I think that's when my relationship with him started following the stream into oblivion.

He doesn't visit himself. His wife drops the boy off for a weekend every now and again. She is not overly fond of me herself, but blessedly, she thinks it's important for a boy to know his grandfather. If I didn't have his visits, I might have taken the creek to the sea and not come back. I don't mean to sound pessimistic, it's just when you get as old as I am, and little more than mistakes to show for it, dying does not sound so scary. But for now, I'll try to take my own advice, and listen to the sounds of a creek, trying not to follow a moment to its end.



Emily Scott **Uglow Hack**


WKU