

**STYLUS**



**STYLUS**  
**A JOURNAL OF**  
**LITERATURE**  
**AND ART**



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# EDITOR'S NOTE

It is true that one experiences 68% of hearing loss while naked. Honesty can have an impact on the senses. It is our hope that the themes of vulnerability in this journal resonate with you as they have with us. As you read this journal, read it as a transcript of a conversation. Each piece speaks to the next. You will hear things meant to be kept in the strictest confidence. You will hear the lull between a lie and a belief. You will hear the kind of quiet your epidermis induces. Resist urges to cover up.

All character names and references are fictionalized and any resemblance to actual events or living beings may or may not be a coincidence. There would be no way of knowing.

Despite the copious use of ink, no squid, squidgirls, octopi, or other cephalopods were harmed during the production of *Stylus* 2011.

Be, then write back,



Gabrielle A. Dunkley



**PROSE**



## Squidgirl | Stella Donovan

He stammered something about coming, and Grace shut her eyes. The tiny glass animals on her dresser rattled against one another. She didn't look at him until the room quieted again. She didn't want to see the face his orgasm made.

They severed and sat in a silence that shouldn't fall between two coworkers. He made an apology for the headboard, and she excused herself to the bathroom. There was too much dark between her and the toilet, and then too much light in the bathroom. She reached for the black washcloth on the sink and began to scrub her thighs vigorously. Clean yourself first. That was her rule. There was so much this time, and even with soap and water her legs didn't look quite flesh-tone. She flushed the toilet. She kept her eyes on the faucet as she washed her hands.

Outside, Mark fumbled for his boxers. He didn't want to be utterly naked when she came out of the bathroom, but didn't want to look too dressed either. She'd insisted on the darkness, and now he kept grabbing at fistfuls of sheets, mistaking them for his underwear. He needed a towel. He could feel himself staining her sheets like some sloppy adolescent. He heard the toilet flush and quickly yanked the chain of the small lamp on the end table. He looked down.

Grace froze in the bathroom when she heard the chain drag. The lamp was a silly, decorative thing, something she'd only bought because her mother told her the black sheets made her room look gothic and dreary. She knew it wouldn't give him much light, but it would be enough to see his lap. She slowly removed her black silk robe from the hook behind the bathroom door.

The first thing she saw was the condom, pinched between his fingers like a caught scorpion, drenched with a black substance that would have dripped had it not been so thick. It stained his thighs and fingers, and left a distracting smear across his forehead. Grace wondered if he'd wiped sweat away at some point.

"What the fuck do you have?" he asked her, staring at the condom. She tightened her robe and sat down next to him on the mattress.

The first boy that fingered Grace left her parents' basement pale and

stricken. He joined the seminary after high school and avoided her at the reunion. She lost her virginity in a dorm room two years later. She slipped an envelope of quarters under his door later, the day after it happened, the words “For Your Laundry” neatly written on the front. He didn’t ask to see her at night again. Then came the one who couldn’t make her come, and things worked pleasantly enough for a few months. Doctors were the only men she saw the next year, followed by college graduation, depression, expensive therapy, spurts of self-acceptance, and a string of one-night-stands. And then, inexplicably, came Mark.

“When I orgasm, I release ink.”

The mattress caved under them as she sat down, drawing their hips together. She leaned her torso away from him as she talked, aiming for a sense of normalcy rather than intimacy.

“Not the writing kind,” she told his blank stare, “but more like how squids or octopi release ink. To confuse predators.”

She tried not to look at his forehead. There had been other nights like this, other sloppy errors, but never on anyone she knew.

“Is it some sort of condition?” Mark asked her, still staring at the condom.

“I don’t know. I’ve talked to gynecologists, doctors, specialists. No one can tell me anything about it.”

She took the condom, flicking it into the trash can under the nightstand.

“It isn’t contagious, if that’s what you’re concerned about,” she said, wiping her fingers on the robe.

“Oh, I wasn’t worried about that.”

Not until she mentioned it.

“I’d appreciate it if you didn’t say anything to anyone at work,” she continued.

“Of course not,” he replied too quickly, her composure making him nervous.

“Also, this was fun, but I think it would be best to keep it a one-time thing. It’s never good to get involved with your coworker. Things can get messy.”

He couldn’t tell if she meant the last part as a joke. He didn’t laugh, just in case.

“Sure. Yeah.”

Things seemed to be happening quickly.

“Would you like some tea before you go?”

Very quickly.

“Sure. Ok.”

“I’ll put the water on.”

Grace withdrew from the room, pleased with the conversation. Mark continued to fumble for his boxers, left alone among her things.

She only wore black. That was her rule. There was no other way around the paranoia, the fear that the ink would seep from her other orifices. From her pores. The restriction made shopping easy and depressing. She owned every variety of black cocktail dress, button-up, pencil skirt, and t-shirt. Her underwear drawer looked like a deep, cavernous hole, accented by some lacy things for the weekends. His mouth tasted horrible, a combination of the liquor and cookies he'd consumed at the office Christmas party. The alcohol had left his system by now, but the sugar still coated his teeth. It wasn't Mark's habit to get drunk. It wasn't Mark's habit to do a lot of things he had done that night.

When he came out into the kitchen, Grace was pouring hot water from an electric kettle into two matching mugs.

"What would you like? I have Lipton, English Breakfast, Chai, Chamomile..."

Mark looked down the long row of tea boxes, overwhelmed by choices.

"I'll just have whatever you're having."

She kept a conversation going as she rummaged for two small spoons and packets of sweetener. They were talking about nothing, and doing it unskillfully. She placed the tea down in front of him. Mark stirred it too vigorously, causing a stream of brown liquid to spill over the rim of the mug and trail down the side of the white porcelain, pooling in the saucer.

Grace often recoiled from men after she'd slept with them, and this time, this man, was no exception. She always found reasons to dislike them, things she couldn't see in the dark, flaws in their appearance, irritating gestures. Mark had missed a button, naturally. His mouth twitched unattractively before he spoke. He looked a bit soft in the belly, and his face—

The smear of ink was still there, rubbed across his forehead like shading on a charcoal painting. She tried to continue nodding and participating in the conversation as she looked at it, but it was there, as conspicuous as if he had an entire salad lodged between his teeth. She removed a napkin from the holder on the table and leaned over him.

"I'm sorry, you have some—"

Mark flinched.

"Oh. How'd it get all the way up there?"

The question stuck in the air and instantly stagnated.

Grace stood up from the table and made her way to the trash can near the refrigerator. She fussed with the ties on her robe again, though they hadn't loosened.

Mark looked up from his tea, still mostly full, when he realized she wasn't moving.

“Grace?”

Grace found a different man each weekend, cycling through the downtown bars, participating in the same abbreviated courtship ritual: the introduction, the recitation of the four essential facts (name, choice of drink, occupation, hobbies), the touchy walk or cab ride back to the man’s apartment, the sex in the dark, and then the exit. She carried a change of underwear and a thick, black handkerchief in her handbag, to tidy herself up in the bathroom after the man fell asleep. When she’d first begun to sleep around, she’d tried to clean the men off, too. But after discovering that they usually woke up at the feel of a soft towel rubbing against their groin, she’d been forced to leave them in the mess of the aftermath. She bought a small pack of pens each Friday, cracking one on her way out the door and throwing it on whatever bed she’d briefly occupied.

Without fail, she noted the way out of the building or house as she entered it. That was how she could do it so messily and often. There was always an exit.

“I’m sorry. I don’t know why I’m reacting this way. I think I’m still a little drunk.”

“What’s wrong?”

She looked at the napkin crumpled in her hand, streaks of black visible on the dainty rosettes bordering the napkin.

“You should have seen your face. You were completely disgusted.”

“I was surprised, not disgusted. You could have told me beforehand.”

“How? At what point—”

Grace stopped speaking abruptly and wiped her eyes. The twin black trails of mascara staining her face looked similar to the ink, causing Mark to feel uncomfortable against his will.

“I mean, I would have found out by the end, right?”

“They don’t always find out,” she mumbled, grabbing a new napkin to wipe her eyes with.

Not caring to deconstruct the various layers of this statement, Mark continued to reassure her.

“It’s nothing to be ashamed of.”

She laughed bitterly and buried the napkin in the trash can.

“No one that you’ve been with has ever been okay with it?”

“At best, I’m a novelty. Weird fetish guys. A tattoo artist. But no, no one that mattered. No one lasting.”

“I find that hard to believe.”

“There was one guy, but it didn’t end well.”

“What happened?”

Grace looked at his teacup. It was more than half full. They had time.

“My junior year of college I saw a lot of doctors. I used to think I

was normal. We learned all this stuff in high school health about women releasing natural lubrication, and I thought that was all the ink was. But then I got to college. After two years of humiliation, I decided to do something about it.”

She took a sip of tea.

“You told your parents?”

“I told my mother that I had some sort of infection. She thought it was an STD. I could never convince her otherwise. I told my dad I was having digestive issues.”

Mark laughed.

“Go on.”

“So my case is so baffling that I got passed up to this really high group of doctors, some of the best in the country at this kind of stuff. They all seemed very ambitious, told me again and again how fascinated they were by my condition. They had this whole speech about teamwork, talking about how together we could figure out what was going on with my body. They put me through these horrible tests, horrible, for like six months.”

“What sort of tests?”

Grace shook her head. He nodded and took another sip of tea. He could still smell the ink on his fingers each time he raised the mug to his lips, giving the tea a strange, musky taste.

“There was this guy there who worked behind the desk, an intern with the hospital who wanted to be a doctor there one day. He’d sign me in, we’d joke around, and it made all the waiting easier. Eventually I told him why I was there, and he didn’t seem disgusted by it. It actually intrigued him. I guess it’s the whole doctor mentality. Long story short, we started dating.”

“And the inking thing?”

“He enjoyed it. He wanted to have sex all the time. I felt so desired by him. I practically moved into his apartment. He seemed so interested in me, in every aspect of my life, my family history, my diet. Everything.”

“So what happened?”

“One day he left some files by the door. I recognized them, because he was always working on them in the apartment. I knew they were important, but he couldn’t tell me anything about them because of the doctor-patient confidentiality thing. So I decided to drive them over to the hospital in case he needed them. I dropped them on the way out the door, and all the papers fell out.”

Grace paused. Mark took the cue.

“What were they?”

“He was keeping files on me, for the doctors, to try to impress them. He was conducting our sex life as an experiment, writing down how the discharge was affected by various positions, the average amounts of ink

expelled during each act. There were Polariods, samples, and I swear I saw a reference to a video. He even identified himself as a control. Though he greatly exaggerated the size of his dick. Greatly.”

“Holy shit. What did you do?”

“I cried. I got angry. I called a lawyer. He told me I could press charges, something like malpractice. They settled quietly, out of court, to avoid publicity. They paid a pretty generous sum to keep me quiet. I bought myself new sheets and a kitchen.”

“What a dick.”

She paused.

“Squidgirl. That’s what he called me in his reports, because he couldn’t officially name me.”

There was a pause before Mark started talking again, saying the nice things that nice boys say. Grace wasn’t listening, not anymore. He’d finished his tea, and it was time for him to go. She’d told him too much too quickly, and his quick reassurances were making her feel claustrophobic in her own kitchen.

A few minutes later the cab arrived, and Mark put on his coat.

“Merry Christmas, Mark.”

She felt inexpressibly lonely as he turned to go. It was better to be the leaver than the left.

She shut the door behind him and returned to her bedroom as the sun was coming up. She stripped the bed of its dirty sheets and looked for new ones in the closet. All she could find were pale yellow castoffs from her old bedspread. She floated them down over the mattress and got under them carefully, as if she were lying on a bed of glass. These would be ruined, surely.

Celibacy, she thought. Maybe she’d try celibacy.

She felt the ink all the time, collecting in her toes, congealing in her joints, hardening around her heart. It needed to be released. It would dye her pupils otherwise, she suspected, or come out of her nose when she sneezed.

The five company interns had piled into one cab after the Christmas party, splitting the fare and giving Grace’s address because it was the closest. The group tapered off and left one by one. Mark offered to stay and help her clean. Together they walked through the apartment, clearing up plates, picking up trash, righting overturned bottles. There was a puddle of wine on the carpet near the counter, though neither of them could recall who’d spilt it. Together they knelt and pressed paper towels onto the stain, their fingers getting sticky as the rivets on the towels absorbed the crimson liquid. Something about their proximity brought a new awareness to the room, one that Grace would have ignored if Mark hadn’t seized it.

Two months before, Mark had been left by his girlfriend of four years. He was determined to become a new man, to do all the things that he’d never

done before, such as have sex with women that weren't her. So when Grace's shoulder brushed against his lip as they were cleaning up the spilt wine, he felt brave and drunk enough to kiss it.

And from there the ink warmed and began to course through her body. Things got foggy once the current began to move. She didn't remember how they made it to the bedroom, or how they undressed each other. She just heard the tiny glass animals rattling on her dresser and knew that they'd arrived there somehow. Not Mark, she thought.

And then he stammered something about coming, and Grace shut her eyes.

## Smoke | Johnnie Simpson, Jr.

When she woke and turned her head on the pillow, she saw the bull rider on the edge of the bed in nothing but blue jeans, the corded muscles of his back facing her, not in defiance but ambivalence. The light broke through the blinds and fell in strips on her face. He got up and walked to the bathroom. Percolating coffee gurgled on the table across from the bed. The TV silently cycled through a vacuum cleaner infomercial. He came back in the room, took up the coffee pot and filled a dirty mug. Last night it had held whiskey. He crossed the bedroom and grabbed a pack of Marlboros off the nightstand. Her hand grazed his arm as he bent, and she said, “Mm—,” wordless and tired, though he understood her. She turned her head as he pointed to a fold of bills on the table and she mumbled, “Thanks.” He took a sip of coffee, set the mug on the nightstand and stepped outside.

The morning air outside the motel room was cool and thin. He lit a cigarette and leaned against the railing that stretched across the second-floor walk. The sky glowed orange and red, framed by gray clouds above, and the Tennessee fog below rested on the trees beyond the road. It was still dark enough to see the red tip of the cigarette flare up when he took a drag. He blew out a long stream of smoke as the neighboring door opened and a thin but short Brazilian came out on the walk.

“Morning, Sam,” he said.

“Morning.” Sam passed the cigarette to the Brazilian and said, “Think I need a splint for this finger. It’s been acting up.”

“I have some bandages in my room.”

“Thanks.” The door opened behind them, and the woman came out in Daisy Dukes and a tank top draped by a blue button-up shirt that was three sizes too big for her. She wasn’t wearing any makeup, and she’d hastily pulled her hair back into a ponytail.

“I’m taking this,” she said, tugging on the collar of the shirt. Her face was close enough to Sam’s that he could smell his leftover coffee on her breath.

Sam turned to stare her down. “The hell you are.”

“You shorted me twenty dollars, Sam. I’m taking this.”

“Jesus Christ, woman.”

“You know my damn name,” Ellen said.

Sam rolled his eyes as he reached into his pocket and said, “Yeah, I’d almost forgot it, too.” He held out a twenty poised between two fingers. “Quit reminding me.”

She put the bill in the pocket of her shorts, then unbuttoned the shirt and tossed it at his chest. “Who the fuck even asked you to come back around here? Go back to LA or wherever the fuck you said you ran off to.”

Sam said nothing and bent his attention back to the sunrise. Ellen walked away, muttering  *fucking bastard*  and stomping her pumps on the walk.

“Did you really live in Los Angeles?” Diego asked.

“Baltimore.” He tossed the cigarette butt off the walk. The burning stump twirled in the air and sparks flew when it hit the pavement. “C’mon,” Sam said. “Let’s get out of here. I don’t wanna be late.”

They pulled onto the dirt road that lead to the farmhouse. The earthy stink of manure wafting from the pasture seeped in through the air conditioning vents of Sam’s ‘98 Chevy Silverado. Sam and Diego were not the first to show up; a cavalcade of trucks were parked in a neat row on both sides of the dirt road and around the edge of the farmhouse on one side. Sam parked the car, and the two men walked up the path and could see Tammy Carney standing in the doorway, five-eleven with long white hair streaked with faded red.

Her land was a hundred-acre ranch that raised beeves primarily, and pigs. The farmhouse was two stories and white, and the missing roof shingles and chipped paint made it look sickly and desiccated. Tammy had inherited the land from her father, his father inherited it from his, and so on. She was the first woman to own the land. The first brother died in infancy and the second moved to Knoxville to be a lawyer, wanting nothing to do with waking up at five in the morning to slaughter pigs and shovel shit. But Tammy’s thick arms and straight back relished the work. “How you doing, Sam?” she said as they walked up the front porch steps. “Haven’t seen you around here in a while.”

“I’m doing fine, ma’am. Thank you.”

“What about you, friend?”

“Little tired, miss. But okay,” Diego said.

“Is this that Mexican you were calling me bout last week, Sam? Fella you met at the ride in Kentucky?”

“Brazilian, ma’am,” Sam said. “But yeah, this’s the guy.”

“Well, any friend of Sam’s is a friend of ours,” Tammy said. “You boys ready to go? You’re running a little late.” They were late. The ride started at seven sharp, and they could hear long cheers and groans coming up from the

pasture.

“I’m ready. Let’s do it,” Sam said. They walked down to the pasture where the men had gathered around a large fenced-off portion connected to a chute. A rider was losing his grip on a yellow bull called Wild Child. The bull rope went loose when he fell, and the bull stopped bucking and trotted to the penned lane that led back to the pasture where cowboys were waiting to lead him away. Sam leaned against the fence with the other men waiting to ride. He lit a cigarette and puffed a few times before Tammy coughed and snapped the cigarette out of his mouth and tossed it away. Sam put his hands out in protest. “Aint you learned nothing from your pa?” she said. “Now get on that bull.”

Buck You was 1500 pounds, brown like mud, with tough muscles that rippled when he threw his legs up to kick off anyone who dared sit on his back. He was often described as a mean son of a bitch, the kind of bastard bull who would lunge forward in the chute, a move trainers had worked for years to get him to stop doing, because if the rider was too busy adjusting the bull rope and not paying attention, Buck You would lunge, and the rider’s upper body would be thrown forward and he’d smack his face on the wood beam of the chute. Buck You had knocked out riders without even one second on the board. “Watch him,” Tammy said. “He won’t let you put that rope on without a fight.” Sam nodded as he climbed down from the beam and sat on Buck You. The bull grunted and shifted his hooves in the dirt. Sam looked at the men exchanging money with Tammy, who tallied up the bets and divvied out the winnings when a rider went eight seconds. Sam grabbed hold of the bull rope that looped underneath the bull and came back around the other side. He pulled up the loose end, jerked it some to get the rope as tight as possible, then pressed the excess rope down on his gloved right hand. He could hear the air blowing out of the bull’s wet nostrils. The bull’s black eyes were empty and contemplative, quietly furious. Sam was set. He put his hand up, and the cowboy in the arena swung the gate open.

The bull burst out of the chute and went to spinning, and Sam worked into a rhythm with the spin and the buck, sitting up and moving forward when the bull’s front end came up, leaning back when the bull threw its hind legs up from the dirt. Then the animal switched direction, throwing his legs right, and Sam leaned against the transition, his hand tightening on the rope. There was no way to know how many seconds he’d been on until the horn went off, but he couldn’t think about the time, only the ride, only the movement of the bull, anticipating the switches, pressing his legs against the bull’s growling sides, waiting for the muscles to tell him when to adjust his position, when to adjust the angle of his body and the rhythm of his leans.

The horn rippled through the small dirt arena and Sam let his hand off the rope. The rope went loose and Sam threw himself off the bull. The men

leaning on the fence whooped and hollered and clapped as Sam wiped his sweaty hair off his forehead. He spat in the dirt and left the pen. Diego came up to him and said, "*Parabéns, amigo.*" Sam shook his hand and smiled. A crowd had formed around Tammy, who was busy handing out winnings and calming down a few angry spitting boys who lost more than they were willing. Sam went to Tammy and received his winnings. He counted the bills slowly and looked up toward the pasture. He watched the cows and the bulls meandering in the field, bending their heads down and slowly chewing the cud. Tammy said, "Nice going there, cowboy."

"Yeah, thanks."

"I guess you got some shitty motel somewhere?"

"Something like that."

"You can take the guest room."

"Thank you. But I don't wanna be beholden."

"You aint nothing, boy. You're staying here the night. Okay?"

Sam nodded.

The guest room was spare, but the sheets were clean and supper was free. Sam laid back on the bed. Someone knocked at the door. "Come in," he said. Tammy entered the room and leaned against the wall.

"You got everything you need?" she asked. Sam nodded. She said, "Your win enough for the bills this month?"

He rubbed his tired eyes and said, "I can get by."

Tammy sighed and said, "How much more do you need?"

"I don't wanna be beholden," he said. Tammy was tired of hearing it.

"You can't get by on your own and neither can your pa. Now stop your posturing. I could give a damn about your pride. How much?"

Sam sat up and leaned against the headboard. He scratched his head and said, "I'm short seven."

Tammy sat down in the chair by the desk and pulled out the checkbook she'd had all along. She wrote out a check, stood up and handed it to him. He looked at it and said, "This is too much."

"Don't give me that. You know what it's for."

He took the check. "Thank you," he said, his voice cracking, his eyes heavy.

"Sam," Tammy said. She sat on the end of the bed. "How you doing?" Sam didn't say anything. "I know it's hard out there. And I know you wanna make your pa happy. Especially now. But I think you oughta tell him—"

"No," he said. He was clenching the sheets. "I won't do it." He laid back on the bed and rolled on his side. "I thank you for your generosity, Mrs. Carney. Truly." Tammy nodded and left at once, gently closing the door despite her frustration.

Sam turned on his side and watched the clock on the night stand. He thought about his seventeenth birthday, when his father drove him to Memphis, to the Mississippi River, and in the bed of the pickup his father surprised him with a brand new Zebco rod and reel, and a fully-stocked tackle box. Later that day he watched his father fight with a five-pound largemouth bass from the muddy river, a smirk on his face, a short thin cigar clenched between his lips, his dark forehead furrowed and patient. He fell asleep thinking about his father's smoke twirling in the wind, and the sound of the river splashing as the bass struggled on the line.

The receptionist at the Pleasant Point Hospice Care processed Tammy's check and Sam's winnings and asked him if he'd like a receipt.

"Yes," he said. When she handed the receipt to him, he said, "I think I'll go on and see him for a bit."

She looked at her watch. "Visiting hours end at eight thirty, so you have about fifteen minutes."

Sam wanted to protest for more time, but didn't see it as an immediate issue. He said that's fine and went down the forest green hallway to his father's room. He was always surprised at the calming citrus smell, like scented hand sanitizer, not the urine stink he expected when he first visited his father at the hospice. He reached room 18 and tapped on the door. His father's throaty voice invited him inside. Sam opened the door and shut it behind him. His father was sitting back in a wheelchair next to the open window that looked out across the parking lot, blowing the smoke from his cigarette out the window so as not to alert the nurses. "Hi, son," his father said, the stoma in his neck distorting his voice like a kazoo. Sam thought after five years he would have gotten used to his father's new voice, but he was still unnerved by it.

"Pa." He took a seat on the edge of the bed near his father. His father had deteriorated; his skin was washed out, his hair thinned to a few white unruly strands, his eyes sagging, vacant and milky. This was the same father who taught the boy to be a man; who yanked out five-pound largemouth and knelt down in the dewy grass at dawn and slit the fish open on the shore and cooked it over the campfire while the boy's stomach growled impatiently; who, on the boy's twenty-first birthday, drove them down to the smoky womblike bar at the edge of the county and bought Sam a beer; who bowled every Sunday afternoon, flicked the ash off his short cigar, taught the boy how to work the clutch and cast a line, broke a man's teeth when a stranger didn't speak to Sam's mother like a lady, and buried her when she transferred her life to the boy, and never took anything he didn't earn by his own grit. Sam looked at his father, could remember the man, could remember the photograph of his mother and father, the two laying back in a boat, the father

craning the camera over them, his mother's smooth hair framed by the dark wood, and his father smiling, nuzzling her neck, his hand enveloped in hers, her eyes closed and her cheek grazing his brown hair.

"You learning a lot at school? Studying hard?" he asked through the hole in his neck.

"Yeah, pa. I'm studying."

"What you study?"

Sam rubbed his hands together and stared at the floor. "Shakespeare."

The man leaned back in his wheelchair and scratched his chin. "That's good. I never got to study no Shakespeare. You're real lucky. I hope you know that."

"I know, pa."

"You meet any girls?" he said, his voice queer and full of gravel.

Sam rubbed the arm of his blue button-up shirt. "Not really. I keep to myself. Working hard and all."

"Well, there aint no rush. I'm gonna give you the same advice your granddaddy gave me. Don't marry the first woman willing to jump into bed with you."

Sam nodded and kept rubbing his hands. "They treating you all right, pa? You have everything you need?"

"Oh yes, I'm fine. Fine."

"Okay," Sam said. He stood up and his father put out his hand. Sam shook it and the father held on.

"You keep on going to them classes, y'hear? I don't wanna hear nothing about you skipping out before your time's up. Got me?"

"Yeah, I got you, pa. I got you." Sam's hand dropped to his side, and he turned and left his father by the window. Before he closed the door, he looked once more at him, at the quivering hand on the armrest of the wheelchair, the lines of the cigarette box in his breast pocket, and the fleshy, wrinkled remains of his neck, the vacant spot like a bullet wound. Sam could smell smoke on his clothes as he walked down the hallway.

When he reached the lobby he saw Ellen standing by the reception desk, now with thick red lipstick and blue eye shadow. "What do you want?" Sam said.

She ran her hand through her hair and said, "I seen you."

"What?"

She enunciated, "I said I seen you."

"Look, I got shit to do. We can do this go-round later. Okay?"

"No. We're doing this now. I seen you, Sam. I seen you in Memphis. I seen you in Chattanooga. Smyrna. Gatlinburg. Even way the hell up in Louisville when the money ran out."

"What the fuck are you saying to me? You been following me?"

"I go where the money goes. That's the rides. But we aint talking about me, we're talking about you. You aint never gone to no school, Sam."

Sam relaxed his hand out of a tight fist. His chest became tight, his muscles tense but tired, like an anemic. A flop sweat formed on his forehead and his breath became heavy and rapid. "You don't know what you're talking about." He stormed off, but she caught his arm, whirled him around and slapped him.

"You son of a bitch," she said. "You go back in there and tell your pa the truth. I been coming here for two years and every time I go in there I got to listen to him repeat all the bullshit you been feeding him. And I keep my mouth shut. Not anymore."

"Get your damn hands off me," he said.

"No, Sam. You go in there and tell him the truth. You tell him where you been sending those checks he's writing for schoolbooks. You tell him what you been doing with them, Sam. Tell him it's for him. You're keeping him here suffering and you know damn well he aint got no chance. He's here 'cause you won't let go. Now tell him!"

Sam turned red and went blind, shoving Ellen against the wall, grabbing her throat and squeezing, his face up close to her angry furrowed brow. "God damn you. God damn you, whore."

They stayed suspended in that animal moment, united by flesh, by upbringing, by the memory of her running down the dirt road in her little yellow summer dress, away from her father and into the arms of Sam's pa, who would point a sawed-off shotgun at Ellen's father and say, "Go on home and get yourself sober, you damn fool." Then swirling incomprehensible adolescence, a momentary whiff of her shampoo as she passed by his locker. And later, the paralyzed halt on 16th Avenue when he saw her standing on the corner in Daisy Dukes.

He came to his senses. He dropped his hand and Ellen coughed and recovered, rubbing her neck. Then she looked up at him, her eyes wild and wet and furious. She pulled back and smacked him across the face, her fingernails cutting deep in the skin. Sam clenched his hair and stared at the floor, saying, "I'm sorry...I'm sorry...I'm sorry." He shook his head and wanted to hold her, to brush the hair out of her eyes, to touch her hand. He tried to put his hand on hers, but she shoved him and left.

Sam went to the lobby and sat in the corner and watched two emaciated geriatrics play cards. He left when a nurse came by and told him there was no smoking.

He got out of his truck and walked to the pen and joined the others. Someone offered him a cigarette and he pulled out his own pack; said he wouldn't be beholden. He watched the boys spin in circles on the bucking

bulls, get thrown off and land in the mud. He looked out across the pasture and watched a steer, its eyes serene and peaceful. The steer bent its head and pulled up some grass, chewing circular and methodical. Diego came up and leaned against the fence with him.

Diego said, "You still smoking those, amigo? Aint your pa in the hospital or something?"

"You know, Diego," Sam said, "I suppose once a man gets it in his head to destroy himself, aint nothing you can say to stop him. Just gotta live with them vices. Know what I mean?"

Diego shrugged and said, "I dunno, brother. Worse things out there, I guess."

"Yeah," Sam said.

Tammy walked up to the two boys and said, "You ready?" Sam nodded and went to the chute.

Sam didn't know the name of the bull, its characteristics, its habits, its attitude. He threw his leg around its back and sat down. Methodically, thoughtlessly, he grabbed the bull rope and pulled it up tight, stretched it across the bull's back and into his palm. Moving without thinking, reactionary and instinctive, the way a snake fresh from its mother's egg knows to wait in silence in the brittle auburn leaves. He put his hand up, and the cowboy below swung the gate open, and the bull threw its hind legs out and spun around in continued motion, in the smallest circle, and Sam could only feel the spin, as if no other motion than the bull's twisting and bucking were possible. He felt thrown to one side, sliding off but keeping his right leg tight against the bull's ribs. Then the bull bucked forward, changed rhythm, bucked forward again, and Sam, not paying attention, listening to the rhythm of some unknown, unreal beat, a beat that had died out long ago, fell forward, his face smacking against the bull's skull. Darkness—then bright again, a holy sensation like laying back in water, the sky whirling past in a great wide arc, and the collapse into the soft wet mud. He could feel it on his face, a mixture almost biblical, of blood and dirt and sweat. Crouched on his hands and knees, he let the blood pour out of his broken, mangled gums, four front teeth gone, replaced by exposed soft flesh. His arms quivered under his own weight, his knees sinking into the mud, his fingers clenched around the sopping earth. Out of his darker heart, he rose to his feet, and through the blood saw the bull. Without knowledge, without predetermined thought, his right arm was suddenly wrapped around the bull's horn, his left hand gripping the horn in crazed obscene rage. He lifted up his body and went limp, letting his full weight down. The bull's neck dragged into the mud, its snout sticking in the ground, but quickly thrust up again, throwing Sam away from his mad struggle. In rebut, the bull rushed the collapsed bleeding heap, its head pointed down to the motionless body. And then

the cracks, the hooves crushing, the head beating down on his ribcage, and his arms grabbing the horns, grabbing the snout and the face, pushing and gouging. And then darkness, but the shouting high, closer—

Tammy knelt down beside Sam and took up his head in her arms, wiping the blood out of his face. She lightly smacked his face, saying, “You hear me? You hear me? Wake up. Wake up, Sam.” And Sam could see; blood smeared away from his eyes and down his cheeks. He sensed the gray-haired woman cradling his broken body in the mud, and he lifted his filthy hand and grabbed her shirt, pulling on her like a toddler. Sam pressed his face against her soft blouse, and he sobbed, wept, loud and careless and childlike. And Tammy could only rock slowly, and gently guide her fingers across his dirty forehead and move the hair from his eyes. Sam felt the warm body, and the light press of fingers on his arm. He thought he smelled smoke.

“It’s nothing,” he said. “It’s nothing.”

## Pygmalion | Kat Small

Pygmalion stares at the statue for many hours, tracing the white lips with his fingers, until the mouth is slick with his oils. Although he fears to look into the sightless eyes, he eventually shifts his gaze to the smooth, almond-shaped indentations. How hateful, he thinks, to see her and know she sees nothing. How cruel for him to know that his love is not returned. He jerks away from the statue and retreats to his bedroom, but the solitude is devastating there. He returns to his workroom. Now he comes from behind, mumbling apologies for his abrupt departure. His rough hands convulse around the smooth, ivory hips and shudder over hard abdomen and ribs, fingers splayed. He moans as his hands reach the undersides of the cold breasts. Nervously, his hands cup them, and he presses the length of his body against the statue. He kisses the point where shoulder and neck meet and praises his creation for her beauty. Breathing hard, he looks to the sky. He has never called on one of the gods before, and he works up his courage. Lips pressed against the shoulder of his statue, he whispers, "Venus, I beg that I may have a woman like this ivory."

Even as he speaks these words, he feels the shoulder warm, then tense under his lips. The breasts in his hands soften and have weight. She dips her shoulder and turns her head to see what holds her. Her first inhalation is a gasp. She begins to pull away with new muscles, but he drags her back against him. "The goddess gave you to me," he tells her and turns her around to face him. He presses his lips against hers and frowns when she turns her head away. He fears that she will flee, and so, gripping her arms, he pushes her back onto a table amid the stone dust and chisels, which prick and irritate her soft, bare skin. Her mouth is still too dry to scream, but she struggles. Heart pounding, he pins her down and bends over her. In her ear, he says, "The goddess made you and means for me to have you." She stills, and he begins to move his hands from her shoulders to her hips. She only cries out once.

Later, the girl wipes her eyes with the backs of her hands. The wetness surprises her.

## The Stars | Rebecca Ogle

When you left your childhood bedroom, you brought your ceiling with you. You gaze up at it: cascading whorls of plaster, flattened putty where plastic stars used to be. When you turn off your lights, you feel the silver-blue glow on your face from the window that would be south, to your left. You feel the black gaping mouth of the closet on your right, breathing cold air, and whimper in your sleep. So your roommate tells you.

She knows that you don't sleep beneath the same ceiling, even though you're in the same bunk bed. She knows because you saw that she's kind, and you wanted her to know why you cry in your sleep. It was important to you then.

You write poems about the ceiling. Most of them begin with the image of plastic stars. When you placed the firmament, you did not have a plan. You were just happy for the excuse to jump on your bed, even though you were old enough to know better – around 10. You thought you would place the stars randomly, then lay in bed and see if you could make shapes of them. Shapes, and also stories, like the book on the ancient Greeks that inspired you.

When you lay in bed, you stretched out, smiling, letting your eyes discover lines between points. What you saw were faces; always faces! You picked out like forty different expressions of a smile. You sort of laughed at yourself, thinking it silly that your eye couldn't imagine so much as a dragon in the random arrangement of stars. Not so much as a snake. Just eye, eye, curve. Shy smiles, wide smiles, zany grins, sly smirks.

You made do with this. When you were too restless to sleep or read, you saw how many smiling faces you could make, and described their expressions. Who was this character, and why would he smile like that? Some of them became familiar. You never named them—it was a completely visual exercise. You were always pleased to see a new one, when your eye found a new arrangement.

The poems about the ceiling climax around the eclipse of those glowing stars; their fixed position and your rhythmic sliding back and forth beneath the shadow. There is usually something about bursting out of your

body and into a world of lights like comets that spiral around you, white-hot heads, tails aglow in soothing tones. Their movement is music and wind that picks up the sort of white gossamer nightgown you've always wanted. There is a full moon above you; you are on a high, black cliff that shines like glass. Below is unfathomable distance.

Other poems departing from these glowing stars move down instead of up. Down involves a crest of pain that explains why tattoos on the bone are like nothing, followed by oblivion.

This is not fiction. This is what you know.

You know a story like this has no meat. The meat of it is what gets a man a life sentence, what sparks the family dramas, what happens on *CSI* to the delight of viewers who don't know any goddamn better. Meat involves details of how he removed what, on which side of the bed he stood when you woke and discovered him there, where he touched, what he said. Meat is what police are looking for when they ask you to describe what he did and they use words like intercourse, vagina, and penis. Meat is silly, and meat makes you sick. You don't really remember so much, just the bones.

The ceiling is great because it was there with you. You saw beyond him to another side. The smiles were from a world that was, in that moment, alien, but otherwise completely familiar. So you and the ceiling stuck together. Glowing five-pointed eyes were your witnesses.

You get so tired of telling the story. You like to begin with the ceiling, because it already knows. With the ceiling there smiling as if to nod, nothing is omitted, only left unsaid.

One morning you'll wake up and figure out the difference between sleeping under a ceiling, and sleeping beneath the stars. Hear me out: I don't mean sleeping outdoors. I mean that wherever you are, no matter how many layers of plaster come between you and the sky, you're always sleeping beneath the stars. Also, you're sleeping above them and beside them. They go out in all directions. In space, there's no up and down, back or forth.

Look. Draw a zero around yourself in that bed, like placing yourself in an egg. Then push it out and out, through wall and ceiling and floor, through ground and sky. Break the atmosphere and break through the planet's core to the surface on the other side. Push it through space and planets and stars. Push it through spiral arms and nebulas, push it past infinite pinpricks seen through the planet's most powerful telescope. Further.

When you run out of ways to imagine expanding your zero, let it explode. Return to where you are now. Notice your body, how it feels. Notice the room, the air. It's different. Blow out through your nose, and breathe in. Then draw a one through yourself. Go about your day.

Or, how about this: put on your sneakers and shorts and go for a run. By now you'll know how. You'll have learned how to breathe and cycle the

air through your body slowly, so that you won't panic. You'll have practiced. Today, warm up, stretch, and start running. Inhale deeply into your belly through your nose, and blow out twice through your mouth with every breath. Find your rhythm. Pound another rhythm with your feet. Listen to it. Become absorbed.

Now you're gonna picture yourself flying in the clouds, and also picture yourself buried in the ground. These are ghostly images; meanwhile, see yourself in full color huffing, puffing, and pounding along on the pavement on this sunny autumn day. You're gonna draw two lines starting at your chest. One goes up, the other goes down. One reaches the flying girl's chest, the other reaches the buried girl. Then you draw lines from their chests back to yours. You've made a figure eight. Good! Now slowly, slowly, without breaking the lines, pull them in towards yourself. Let the eight collapse. The line will thicken. As the loops of the eight tighten, the ghosts of you will turn upright, grow into your adult size. As they merge with your body, they'll begin to move in sync with you. When they align perfectly, the little eight will have collapsed into a point in your chest. Good. Focus on this point. Let it draw in the ghostly light of your overlaid selves until their outlines disappear. Then let it flare out. Let it expand and blaze, wheeling along with your breath and your feet. Don't let it stop or shrink. Let the light fill you, surround you, burst out with its source in your chest. And when you feel full, just run and enjoy the day. Congratulations! You are whole. You have run six miles today.

When he pops into your head, tell him off. Sooner or later he'll stop showing up, 'cause he's you now. There's no more him to speak of in your life. So when he bothers you, kill yourself. You can commit selective suicide. Your blood cells do it all the time, eating up diseased carriers of your very own DNA in order to protect the whole. Do it carefully, relentlessly. When you masturbate without a single thought of the way he sneered at the stains on your pillow when you were 13-years-old; when you make love without recalling the title of the file "Spycam in Sister's Closet"; when you buy the black lace panties with total confidence because you know, without even reminding yourself, that he won't take them from your dirty laundry basket, you're living beneath the stars. Do you feel it? Good, because you never wanted the ceiling to stay with you. Of course, you didn't want the meat. That goes without saying, and that's what everybody says. What you talk about is the ceiling and this wacky out-of-body stuff that's easier for you to believe than a word like rape. You talk about your experience, not a consensual interpretation of the very same event. Still, yours or theirs, you didn't want it.

Who is this about? I write in second person because this didn't happen to me. Under the ceiling, we would call this *denial*. Under the stars, it's a choice. I was bewildered and scared, then unconscious. That's all. I choose

to move beyond anchoring myself in that little girl. Divide all the time in your life into infinitely small moments, including the traumas, scraped knees, birthday parties, peek-a-boo and laughing as a baby. That's how many reference points you have, and infinitely more beyond childhood. Infinite points from which to begin, every second. Grab on to one of them, whichever you'd like. Choose a different one every day.

The truth about those nights remains right where I left it. It's not going anywhere. But I can go anywhere. Someday you'll wake up and the ceiling will be gone, because you won't be afraid anymore. You'll have trained your mind and body so you don't return to that room so often. When you must return, you will get back out, but leave the ceiling where it is. You won't need the reassurance of those plastic stars, of that flattened putty where the stars used to be, saying *yes, we know, we saw it all happen. We are so sorry there was nothing we could do.*

Go ahead and accept their apology.



**POETRY**



## 1981 | Naod Yimam

It's been raining ever since the day  
we came home from our family vacation in  
Atlanta where we saw our cousins and aunts who  
aren't really our cousins and aunts, but  
close family friends that never get tired of us, even though  
I get tired of them and their country Ethiopian accents  
that bring to mind my mom and dad in '81,  
when they stepped off the plane at Hartsfield,  
the busiest airport in the world, looking like  
Al Green and his emotionally unstable girlfriend, only,  
their threads were a bit outdated, which is  
expected when you spend a few years in  
a refugee camp in Sudan, trying your best to get on  
the plane to America, competing for seats with  
people who fought on your side and  
people who captured and tortured  
you and your friends, most of whom are dead,  
leaving you to wonder who's left to fight, and why  
men should be saved from the Horn of Africa  
if they have destroyed their own homes, and why you  
also should receive salvation  
when you used to chant *Yankee, Go Home*  
because you knew socialism was the next big thing and  
you felt obligated to leave your family and fight, failing  
to think about having the blood of men from your hands  
drip down to the dry ground  
and cry out to the God of Solomon and the Queen of Sheba  
who let some sinners get away with killing  
though the innocent were dying, and then you remember  
all have sinned and fallen short, and death is the reward  
unless you can get to Hartsfield.

# Lauren and the R-word ;

Brendan Edward Kennedy

She may be as tall as one-fourth of Shaq,  
but damn can my sister shoot a three-pointer.  
Every Wednesday night at the Y,  
she plays like a 24-year-old kid—  
she smiles, panting with rosy baby-cheeks,  
dodges unseen opponents, fakes left, dribbles right  
until at the last second she lines up the shot, hops a little hop  
and gives the ball up to heaven.

When Lauren was born, God loved her so much  
that he gave her the gift of one more chromosome  
so she could have more of herself to share.  
So great was this gift that Mom wept,  
holding her baby in her hospital blankets,  
white with wondering  
How can we make room, she is so much,  
how can we make room?

So, quietly, Dad kissed both their brows,  
prayed, put on his penny loafers  
and built a house to house her gift—  
soon it ballooned from a junkpile sanctuary  
to a three-bed two-bath cathedral  
in the Bel Air suburbs.

Her gift transcended those hallowed walls,  
poured out the windows into the school bus  
(the long one)  
where those other kids learned  
to love her the way God did.

We loved her, too, Me and Megan,  
when we came along in three and four years.  
Soon we bore witness to her gift,  
that somewhere in her sunny almond eyes  
and her wild brook laugh there was something,  
some word that some kids said.

Mom and Dad told us never to name it.  
It was a swear so sacred to know, so profane to utter  
that we crammed it in a cardboard box,  
tied it in sellotape and scrambled to find  
a place to hide it.

But the thing is Lauren knows it, too.  
She just doesn't let it bother her.

She shoots baskets every Wednesday night.  
A damn fine player, that girl.  
You can almost hear God saying  
You are perfect  
in the whispering swish of the hoop.

## Bottom Rd. | Brendan Edward Kennedy

When the trees are sloshed  
in August's cider light,  
you can find the thousand florists buried  
under Bottom Rd.,  
their lavender fingers poking out  
of the roadside sod.

They'll wag them at you  
if you drive too fast  
from your house  
like I did.

Through the driver's seat window,  
a ghost of your perfume.

## the silk flower | Meg Eden

there! father pointed to the scrawny bud,  
like a fern, beginning its infestation.  
pull it by the roots. do not let it spread its spores.  
I point out their pink feather duster flowers,  
the beauty they are capable of producing,  
but he is not won over. these things, once they grow  
old enough, their trunks get thick,  
their cambium cumbersome, get them  
while they're young. I think of young

girls and mothers armed with kitchen knives  
and scissors. take the legs and peel the pleasure  
like sap from bark. grow into a woman-  
shape. we will take your feet and prune them  
into little dolls. set root into the floor boards.

little mimosas shrink in the cover  
of the woods.

# Hipbones Point to Heaven | Grace Toulotte

Our bodies are covered with gems,  
green and red and blue.  
We write our names on the wall,  
leaving our mark.

We speak in tongues,  
a godly language.  
Our world is neon lights, electricity, and seeing the unseen.  
We reflect and refract in the glass windows.

He looks through my eyes and reads my mind.  
Yellow light greets my palm and he glides his finger across it,  
reading life lines and nine lives.

We lay in bed,  
hipbones point to heaven,  
covered in colored ash, only eyes exposed.

I look at myself,  
I see myself dripping with the jewels of my grandmother.  
I trace my freckles with coal,  
outline the lines on my face with India ink.

I am a sepia-toned portrait.  
I am a contained woman,  
censored in corsets and ringlets,  
fighting to break out of the frame.

The hard kiss of air conditioning wakes us.  
And we are in our world again,  
average looking,  
average feeling.

My body is like a block of ice,  
he melts it with his forefinger.

“I never used to believe in this stuff,” I say.

# Adultery | Dylan Bargteil

I imagine the sinking

feeling, like an “Oh.”



## ! Dylan Bargteil

It is simple to palm a coin if your hands are large.  
I could pull a coin from behind  
your ear, and you would smile,  
and I would hold your face in my palms,  
and you would kiss me,

but my hands are not large. I imagine  
your face slipping through my hands,  
a small stone in my stomach, as your lips  
don't touch mine. And even  
as your hand engulfs mine  
I dream of having hands bigger than yours.

## While Dreaming of the Ocean | Ned Prutzer

She wonders if she is nothing more  
than a caesura, a whole rest,

or if she is swooning  
through the crests and troughs  
of the waves, rather than drowning.

The smile on her face  
resonates like a plucked string,  
its pulse growing staccato  
with her hurried eyes.

Her enamel catching the coral of her lips,  
she feels, somehow, heavier now:  
dense, like a dirge, rather than a melody.

## Stockholm Syndrome | Casey Whieldon

With everyone this far gone, there are no elephants in the room.  
Our minds work in unison, so I ask on behalf of the group:  
*Have you ever killed anybody?*  
Chris is silent for a minute, flicking the blade open and shut.  
The air so thick with smoke that light hangs in yellow beams from the ceiling.  
*Honestly, when people ask, I tell them I don't know.*  
And the friend I've known since preschool is melting into a recliner.  
Lazy red eyes moving between the TV and the storyteller.  
*I mean, I never really stuck around to find out. Why would I?*  
Remember when money represented open possibilities?  
Nowadays, a dollar is a fraction. Part of a whole. Nothing more.  
*I don't really plan on finding out, either.*  
And if you have enough dollars, you buy dope.  
And if you have too many, you buy smokes.  
*Cause if I didn't stab them, they would have stabbed me.*  
And if you don't have enough, you beg or you steal.  
Open, shut, open, shut. I can't afford to take my eyes off the blade.

## Bruises | Karen Turner

the first appeared on the left breast  
a pallid green circle the size of your thumb  
framed by a halo of purple  
the next, a tooth-mark crescent on the shoulder  
a tiny galaxy above the collarbone  
a dark stain on the upper lip

these were the reminders  
of private healing  
secret victories  
study each while alone with a mirror.  
take a picture.

cradle them  
then turn inward for the glow  
of peace restored to flesh:  
it won't be long—  
I've already sketched out  
the color and shape of the next one.

## The Living Dead | Sohayl Vafai

*What becomes  
of the dead  
buried in colorless  
prisons?  
Should we not  
set them  
under the gaze  
of the sun  
to burn slowly—  
every day  
another organ  
emptied onto the  
hot grass? Or  
should we consume  
the flesh of the past,  
bathe in the blood  
of our ancestors,  
the iron smell  
of red death?*

“I know  
how to tip  
the moon,  
how to push  
her off the sky’s  
ledge. Behind  
the clouds,  
my hands bring  
winter,” says  
the spider of time  
as she devours  
our living bodies.

Tonight, worms  
will curl  
around my ankles,  
push through  
my body's  
lonely crevices.  
I will remember  
how much  
emptiness the sky  
holds.

I sit with gaping mouth  
hoping to drink the  
past—to come across  
floating bits of flesh  
our mother let slip  
from her knifelike  
fingers.

When I die,  
let my blood  
run,  
inch  
in thick streams  
down the wayside  
of your mind.

“Behind  
the clouds,  
my hands bring  
winter,” she says.

There, in the web  
of your mind, I sit  
tongue ready.

## Pickles | Robyne McCullough

We ate in a diner with  
grease stains on the walls.  
My pancakes and eggs  
to your Rueben  
and onion rings.  
You watched me  
lift the dill spear from your plate,  
smiled at the crunch and said,  
“You can have them  
for the rest of our lives.”

## distant lights | Eric Sim

in october, beneath the stars  
i set the stable on fire.  
the horses ran out  
broke the fence  
ran off.

in a different land, an observatory.  
inside, a girl who only knows to be unafraid  
dwindles when she tries to smile.  
she listens to crickets for two hours.  
her eyes are dry. her fingers are  
restless.

after revolution, there is  
repose. after incandescence, there is  
a smoky sigh. the earth, damp. the sky,  
cancerous. i drifted off, my eyes were  
telescopes, my shoulders ran out  
broke the fence  
ran off.

she refracts, too. steps into the air.  
spreads herself with a knife between constellations.  
loses her vision, thinks of biking home.  
here, and there. "i orbit the earth," she thinks.  
"that's why i can't see myself right now.  
i'm on the other side."  
she shivers, it's cold, the violet sky is  
restless.

## decretum gratiani† | Alexa Grey

but you would never miss a thing, would you, mother?  
a rip in my pantyhose, an old pair of tennis shoes—  
beaten up, written on. if only i would dress like a lady,  
and isn't that what all good men want anyway, a lady?

a trap-door, rag doll mute, a high heeled boot to plug  
the hole of the sinking ship when the life boats run out?  
a letter sent back, the licked stamp—yes, this must be  
the road best taken: trampled on, but not a tramp.

you see—i remember the day i ran to you in tears,  
my heart bloody in pieces in my fragile, shaking fingers,  
and you looked into my bones and said, *all men are the same*,  
handing me back the same jagged edges,  
like it wasn't polite to bleed, like you don't get on your  
hands and knees to clean his fucking toilet seat, hunching  
your body over, like a kneeling altar boy receiving god.





**ART**





"Cleansed"  
Becca Goodman  
*Oil/Acrylic*



"Lady Macbeth"  
Becca Goodman  
*Oil/Acrylic*



"Ziegfeld Girl"  
Alondra Hernandez  
*Marker*



"Passport to Infinity and Beyond"  
Alondra Hernandez  
Paper and fabric



"Map Series: Part 3"  
Kate Kauffman  
*Mixed media and India ink on plywood*



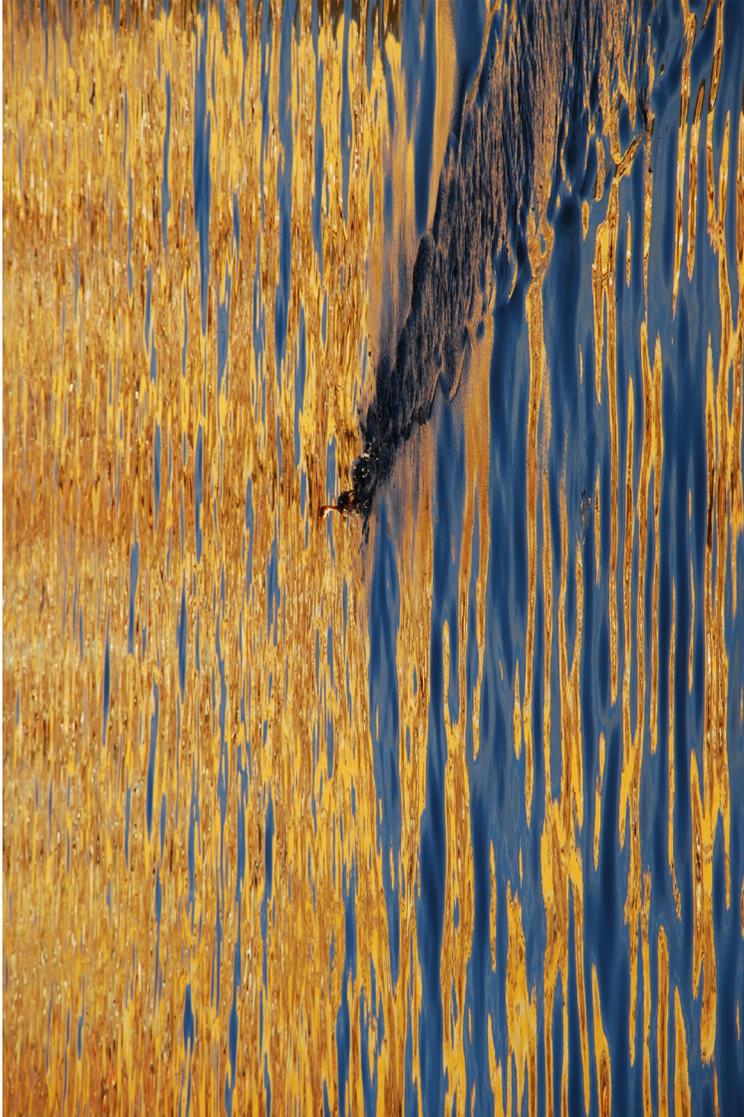
"Eruption"  
Fawna Xiao  
*Screenprint on Stonehenge paper*



“St. Peter Trumeau Statue”  
Connie Shih  
*Pencil and white conte*



“Roadside Distractions”  
Ana Maria Nicolich  
*Photograph*



"Golden Pond"  
Ana Maria Nicolich  
*Photograph*



"Inner Space"  
Adrian Galvin  
*Acrylic paint on canvas*



"The Descent"

Rachel Pafe

*Thread, pastels, acrylic paint, oil paint, ink,  
tracing paper, and brown paper*



(Untitled)  
Mara Duvra  
*Screen print on paper*

# CABRINI ART AWARD

The Cabrini Art Award is the first art contest presented by *Stylus* and judged by our talented art editor, Annie Pi. The Cabrini Art Award winners were selected from a pool of submissions that the editors collectively voted on as finalists for the award. Annie Pi then determined the three winners based on a point system meant to objectively score each piece on artistic merit.

The Stylus Cover Art Award is a separate contest judged by the art editor, editor-in-chief, managing editor, and layout editor. The cover contest gives an artist the opportunity to have their artwork featured as the cover design for the journal. The specifications for the cover contest were tailored to represent this issue's theme, tone, and mood. The art submission that best represented these aspects of this year's artwork and writing was awarded the honor of cover design.

All art submitted to *Stylus* for publication was considered for both the Cabrini Art Award and Stylus Cover Art Award.

# 1st Place



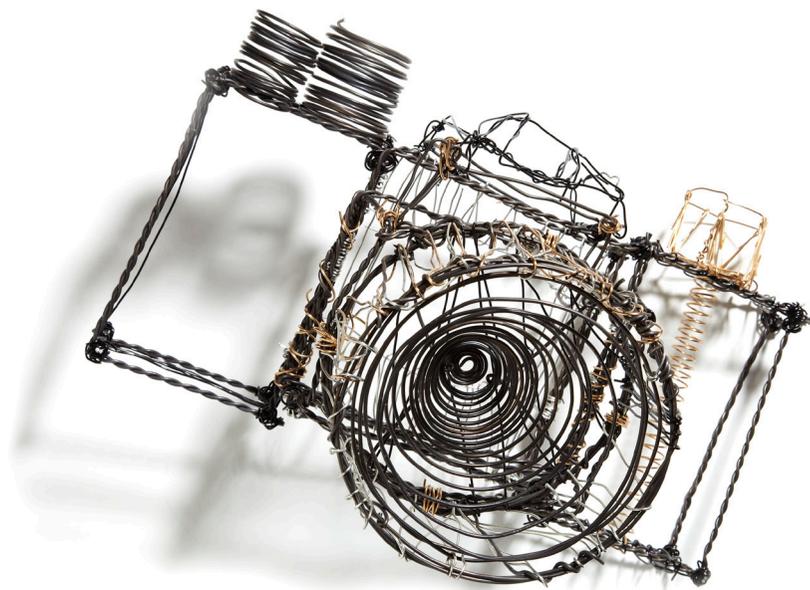
"Lucidity"  
Jane Joo  
*Pen and ink*

# 2nd Place



"Sweet Disposition"  
Mara Duvra  
Screen print on paper

# 3rd Place



"Camera"  
Eve Kenney  
*Wire Sculpture*



# THE JIMÉNEZ-PORTER LITERARY PRIZE

The Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize is an annual writing contest open to all University of Maryland undergraduates. The prize is in its ninth year and is administered by staff at the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. To preserve anonymity, outside judges read the manuscripts after names of authors have been removed. This year Shevaun Brannigan and Anastasia Salter were the initial readers.

## POETRY JUDGE

JOHN MURILLO is the author of the poetry collection *Up Jump the Boogie*. A graduate of New York University's MFA program in creative writing, he has received fellowships from Cave Canem, the *New York Times*, the Wisconsin Institute for Creative Writing, and the Fine Arts Work Center in Provincetown, Massachusetts. His work has appeared in such publications as *Callaloo*, *Court Green*, *Ninth Letter*, and *Ploughshares*, and is forthcoming in *Angles of Ascent: a Norton Anthology of African-American Poetry*. Currently, he is visiting associate professor of creative writing at Cornell University.

## PROSE JUDGES

MATTHEW SWANSON was born at the base of a dormant volcano in Pasto, Nariño, Columbia, an unwitting child of the Peace Corps. For years he lived in Kansas, subsisting entirely on corn products and writing horrible rhyming poetry. Now he makes books with Robbi, works as a writer and consultant for a very fine strategic communications firm, does a bit of freelance writing, and plays his harmonica as much as possible.

ROBBI BEHR was born and raised on the Alaskan tundra (summers) and in a small town on the Eastern Shore of Maryland (the rest of the year.) She has held all manner of art-related jobs, including museum docent, gallery assistant, door-to-door children's photographer, t-shirt designer, graduate student, production designer, and freelance illustrator before settling into a life of making books with Matthew.

# THE JIMÉNEZ-PORTER LITERARY PRIZE

## PROSE AWARDS

1st Place: "Ellipsis" by Laura Pavlo

2nd Place: "The Diner" by Shira Levenson

3rd Place: "Jumping Man" by Emily Zido

### Finalists:

"Four-Color Pen" and "Alabama" by Meg Eden

"How to Pretend" by Shira Levenson

"Spaghetti Fight" by Julia McLaughlin

"First Wife" by Samuel Pelczar

"Goodnight Maria" by Casey Whieldon

"The Bath Towel" and "The Novelist" by Emily Zido

## POETRY AWARDS

1st Place: "I Thought of Your Body" by Lyons George

2nd Place: "I am carved there" by Brendan Edward Kennedy

3rd Place: "Listening to *In Through the Out Door*" by Ned Prutzer

### Finalists:

"Virginitophobia" and "life lessons from my father" by Meg Eden

"The Goose" and "Ghazal" by Lyons George

"Remembering my right hand at the Kotel" by Joel Sephy Gleiser

"O. The Fool" by Rebecca Ogle

"Turbulence in the Skies" by Misted Sai

"In October, beneath the stars" by Eric Sim

"Ideas of Home" by Grace Toulotte

# 1st Place | PROSE

## Ellipsis | Laura Pavlo

I like writing in tight spaces because if I give myself too much room, I might say too much.

Right around the fifth grade is when the people who make maps for textbooks stop printing tiny teal sea dragons and monsters of pirate tales in the vast spaces of blue between the continents. I used to draw them in anyway, because I liked thinking about the adventure a sailor would have trying to fight off the eight-legged one with one eye, or the three-football-field-long one with a hollow mountain peak spine that rose above the invisible meniscus in the salty, frothy sea. I was never very good at geography, but if I had brought my textbook to my art teacher, she would have stuck a sticker to the page.

I forgot to tie up my hair this morning. As I walked to work, it stuck to the back of my neck because it was so hot out and I wanted to take a blade and cut it off. To ignore how uncomfortable I felt, I counted the people I walked by who were

wearing the same color shirt as me. Twenty-one. It made me feel unoriginal.

I broke two fingers on my right hand twice, two different times during the sixth grade. When I told my friend, she feigned devastation, offering to write all my notes in class. I was annoyed with her because first, I hated her handwriting, always in purple or red ink which the teacher never liked, and entirely too swirly for my all-capitals print, and second, how could she not have known that I was a lefty? If it weren't for the fact that I loved being a lefty because apparently only fifteen percent or so of the population is left-handed and it made me feel unique even though most of the time I tried to look and act and be just like everyone else, I would probably have given her up as a friend because I just couldn't understand how a friend could not know which hand their friend wrote with.

Last night, the man I currently love pushed me against the wall in the hallway of our apartment that leads to our bedroom and kissed my neck, up and down. He said he couldn't wait for the bedroom, that he had to do it here, right out in the open of our apartment, so that the books could judge us from their spot on the bookshelf, so that the plant beside the coffee table could quiver at the sight of our bodies meshing together, so that the clock could tick and tock and tick, laughing at the very idea that we were so hasty to make love when we had the rest of time to do so. He slid his warm, creased hands up my shirt and ran them down my sides to rest on my hips because I think he liked being able to team up with gravity and hold me down. His lips were kissing butterflies on my neck and I wanted so badly for him to kiss my lips because that's why we have lips, so that they can be kissed, so instead I pressed my nose into his scruffy brown hair and

I could smell my apricot shampoo because he ran out that morning and he had asked me to buy him a new bottle at the grocery store that afternoon, and I squeezed his upper arm and he looked me in the eyes for a split of a split second and I could feel his pulse beneath my fingertips running through his veins as fast as insatiable jaguars and then his fingers were brushing against my breasts and I felt as though I should trigger something inside of him too so I brushed mine against the zipper of his dark denim jeans, and we continued like this for quite some time, my back against the exposed brick wall of our boxy little apartment, his hands hungry, his lips greedy, his mind running off someplace too far to see. But when he kissed me on the lips for the first time after making them jealous of my neck, I realized that the clock was only laughing because maybe we had no time at all.

If I put my thumb in the upper  
corner of my right eye, half  
against the bridge of my nose, I  
can feel my heartbeat.

A few nights ago I ate out with a friend who happens to be a man (but I swear there is nothing of romance between us), and every once in a while (after I finished my roll with butter, my glass of ice water with lemon, and my entrée of grilled chicken and lemon-spiced vegetables) I would look into the curve of my spoon. He didn't say anything, because he's a polite kind of guy, but he noticed. When I did it the first time, he stopped saying whatever he was saying, and looked at me, and when I stopped looking at myself to see that he was looking at me and I looked at him, he continued saying whatever he was saying. I've never done it before, this looking-in-the-curve-of-a-spoon-to-see-yourself-upside-down, because, to be honest, it is an odd thing to do. But going on a date with him was an odd thing for me to do too, and admittedly, I was nervous, but not because I was on a date with a friend who, throughout dinner thought he was going to get a little something later that night (I didn't give him a little of anything), but because I'm a visceral kind of person and I had known

myself well enough to recognize that going on a date with a man like him (a good man, just not a man for me) was the same as flipping myself upside down, shaking around all my insides, and trying to smile truthfully at myself in a mirror, right-side-up.

I took the subway home today. The cars bent like an arm with six elbows, the front end twisting away from the back. Where's the end of the tunnel, a child asked, and the mother focused on the song playing on the radio above us that was singing a song she did not know the words to but she caught them when she opened her mouth to answer her child and I think she felt as though she was trying to push blood out of a wound so she said that there isn't an end to any to any to any tunnel and his face fell and his lips went a little bit to the left so she put an arm around him and I think she assumed he forgot the original question and the three of us continued through the tunnel and when we got to the end he said, This is the end of the tunnel, and she did not say anything.

What are you going to do with words, what will you make with words and what about money and what are you going to do with words, why are words so important, you need to make money for family and kids and family and what are you going to do with words? And I looked at her and I said, that's ironic, and she said, what is, and I turned my back to her as if she was the wind.

You know that high-pitched sound that comes from when you fill up a glass of water? It starts at a perfectly fine, tolerable volume and creeps up and up and it sounds as though the sound is going to explode and I feel like I'm going to overflow before the water even gets the chance to but then the water reaches the brim of the glass and the shrill sound plateaus and I manage to turn off the faucet and I drink the water and everything is okay. It happened to me in the break room at lunch today but no one was there for me to ask if the same thing happens to them, too. The answer would probably be "no," because I feel as though most of these things I go through are simply that: things *I* go through.

I worry about the going-away  
part of life more often than not.  
Where do we go, and when?  
That's what I'd like to know. But  
who wouldn't?

People change, I told my mother when I moved from under their wings for the first time. You changed too much, she said, brushing a piece of my hair off of my eyebrows, just as she had done since the day my chestnut hair was long enough to do so. Maybe, I said, turning to face my ten-year-old white beetle, wanting to leave, leave, leave. Or maybe I didn't change enough, I said. That was the first time I left my mother, and it was for college, where I spent most of my time alone in my dorm room while people listened to music that was too loud and drank liquors that were too much on fire for their young livers to hold (because I had heard that human bodies do not finish developing until into the early twenties – my roommate was a biology major, and she told me this; I later wondered if she just didn't want me at her parties.) The second time I left was because a man who loved me (quotation marks should be inserted around that lethal little phrase) left me after three weeks of living together. I have too much to offer this world, he said without tears as I suddenly noticed how cold our warm cherry wood floors felt on the soles of my feet, and I can't be giving all of that to you. When my mother asked why I had come home, I said it was because I gave the man too much love and he just didn't know where to store it all, when I think my mother knew me well enough to know that it was the other way around.

You ask if you satisfy me. I ask you to repeat the question. You ask it again. I wish I could fall to my knees with words in my fists and throw them in the air up at you because words are only enough when you are.

Sometimes, the man I currently love hunches his shoulders and they look like

icy mountain peaks, frozen by time, his palms pressed flat on the cool granite countertop we picked out together. His neck is loose with the too many words he said, thrown at me like heavy water balloons and thin with the pressure of what he is and what he isn't. I told him it's okay for him to say what he wants, it's okay to be honest. He said, Honesty is good only sometimes, which made me wonder if I was being honest with myself and if I was, was it good for me? Maybe sometimes honesty leaves me, but it always seems to find me again. He made it seem as though honesty had been tucked in his back pocket like a white flag since the day he was born. Instead of saying what I was thinking, which was what he was doing, I said, You've got to find someone to fill the pieces of yourself that you give away in your work. I run my fingers down his chest, over his heart, not really thinking that what he interpreted was, we shouldn't be together anymore because I'm not big enough to fill the holes in your heart. I made it worse by saying, You've got to find someone to fill up those big, big holes. Saying this was justified in my mind, because in my mind I wanted it to come across more as, You should find a friend who does the same work as you so that they can understand what you're going through, because I can only understand so much. He is a computer technician at a small recording studio that he doesn't allow me to visit because one of the company's contracts is with one of my favorite musicians and I probably would maul her if I showed up at his work and she was there, singing her new song, which I would probably find anyway, leaked onto an illegal site that would give my email away to a few hundred spam sites. My lover, he gave his all to that business. He was a guitarist in his younger years; he had this really delicate voice and he sometimes threatens me with all the girls that used to swoon over his smooth lines and croons, After my shows, there were *lines* of girls, waiting just for *me*. Waiting. For. Me. I don't let this bother me because why should I, they probably don't even remember his name and were too drunk during his shows to even remember what they were thinking about him because he only played at small pubs and taverns. Besides, his name never grew out of the little posters it was printed onto, and it never reached billboards or was pixelated across dot-coms. It sits next to mine, and I think the sight of it scares him more than stage fright could.

When my mother calls me once a week to check in on me because she thinks it's her duty to do so, she always asks about my lover. She asks how he is doing, how work is going for him and if we did anything fun together over the week. All of these questions amount to one; are you happy with him? She never asks that question, but when she called me today, I had an answer prepared:

Yes, and I'm happy because I love  
him. I really do. I do, I do, I do,  
and I'll continue to say it until I'm  
standing with him at the altar.

A change of scenery is what my seventh grade guidance counselor told me I needed in order to do better in school. I did most of my studying in my bedroom, leaning against the bottom-right bedpost of my purple sheet sanctuary, the convex bulge in the cherry wood swooping perfectly into the nape of my neck. My mind must have adjusted itself too well to my bedroom environment because I lost focus very easily. I started studying in parks, but the way leaves fell stole away my attention from the way numbers fell when I long-divided them. Then I studied in a red cushioned chair in my town's library, until I started wandering down the aisles of books, my mind writing my name on the spines of books instead of on the tops of my half-written papers. I studied on my front lawn but eventually wandered back inside because the smell of my father's cooking seeping through the front window sat on my mind much better than the date of every war this country has ever had. The best place to study, I found, was sitting on top of a laundry machine at the laundromat in my town. The gentle hum of the machine, the sloshing of frothy clothing and the smell of sunflower yellow detergents wiped my mind clear of whatever it was trying to focus on that wasn't assigned for me to focus on. Math problems were completed to the cycle of the water cycling around and around in the washer, definitions of science terms became as clear as the circular window I looked through to see if my clothes were done, and the difference between transitive and copular verbs was as warm in my heart as my dryer-heated tees. I used to purposely dirty my shirts just so I had an excuse to clean them; sometimes they weren't dirty at all. I think the owner of the laundromat started to wonder why I was there three-sometimes four-times a week, but my teacher never asked why my grades had suddenly improved. Maybe the problem all along was not the environment I was in, but the people around me.

I take my dog for a walk each  
night before bed. I used to be  
able to go outside barefoot. Now  
I'm afraid of what I might step  
on.

I met a divorced woman this past week. She seemed  
happy, or as happy as she could be if the person who loved  
her left her one Thursday night while she was making

dinner for her kids, ears of corn slippery between her fingers as she told the younger one, put the crayons down, do not even *think* about touching them against the new beige walls. She was nice, very friendly, and offered me a coupon to her store. But the thing with divorced people, I've noticed, is that they act happier than they really are, as if they are trying to hide the void in their once regular, classic-American-style life. In most cases (I say "most" because that is what I'd like to believe), the people who get divorced *should* be happier because they are no longer with the person who didn't make them happy, or forgot to make them breakfast on Sunday mornings or tell them how much they love the way they do this or that, that they love you before bed especially, glasses low on your nose and a magazine in your lap because novels are too heavy for a soul that weighs as much as yours. Most of the time, divorce is for the better, especially when the relationship becomes abusive (all senses of the word included.) Divorce becomes a safe place, a safe, safe place. And yet at the time of the divorce, everything around you is quite the opposite of safe, the world hungry and gnawing away at what you put together since the day you said the two hallow and hollow words to a group of witnesses wearing light springy colors to match the façade of the occasion. But this woman, this clerk at the coffeehouse who made me one delicious caramel cream coffee, it was apparent that she wasn't one of the "happy" ones; she was one of the small percent (as small as I'd like to believe it is) who was not happy with the situation, and I wanted to ask her why. I wanted to ask her why she was divorced from the man who proposed to her in Paris, in Rome, in New York, or in the fanciest restaurant their hometown could offer. I wanted to ask her why they weren't together anymore, why they had to do that to their kids because I always feel bad for the kids more than either of the two who signed on the dotted line. But I felt it would be wrong to ask because I didn't know who she was or what she was about and maybe she wouldn't have known what the answers were anyway. I doubted myself for a minute, wondering if she was in fact divorced, because one cannot simply go on their gut instinct *all* the time. However, I noticed her fingers were naked and the "Mrs." on her name tag was crossed out with a black Sharpie and above it, "Ms." Regret was all over her face, like badly applied blush, too much

rouge for a pale woman like herself. In my experience, I've observed that those who are divorced carry regret with them, like rocks stuffed inside a heavy backpack, instead of allowing it to schlep away with the other shreds of self-respect that one loses when separating himself or herself from the person who fooled them into thinking that they had found their other half.

The man I currently love, he held me in his arms one time when we were sitting together on our sofa after the do-you-know-where-your-children-are-news went off the air; he had just turned the television off and that pitchy tone as shrill as life filled the room around us, and he pressed his lips into my hair and I could hear him breathe me in, and half of me wanted to crawl away and hide under the couch because I could not comprehend how much I loved him at that very moment, and the other half of me wanted to crawl out the door and sleep on the street outside of our apartment and never come back in, never come alive again, because I felt as though I didn't deserve any of it. But I pressed my lips into his and the moment changed and I think I deserved it that time.

If there is anything more than what I'm doing here, right at this moment as I press whatever it is I am into whatever these shapes are that I've adored since my age was a single digit and my fingers were stained with the sixty-four hues of childhood, then I'm sure it has yet to find me. I'm always going to pick apart the little pieces of myself and I'm always going to question what I did or didn't do and I'm always going to look for things to attach myself to, things to pull me together because sometimes I allow myself to go too far when I should be containing everything in columns as straight as the path I want so badly to walk along. After years of this, of unraveling myself and rolling myself back up, of changing my ways only to change them back, of pushing myself into the mold

of another so I could see what it is like to be different, I have yet to find the path that will take me from my whatever job and my whatever boyfriend and my whatever sleep patterns and my whatever phone calls home and my whatever ways of living and bring me to a place defined by everything that I haven't already tried to rearrange.

Listen to me, you have to listen to me, his voice was tugged by long, begging fingers, I can't be with you. I pictured myself driving a car. The car smashed into a wall. For a second, it almost seemed as though he wanted to kiss me, the way his hands tightened against my cheekbones. I said something about him not going, that he couldn't leave me, he just couldn't. But he could, and we both knew it.

The man my mother used to love, he was a man of transition. She told me his story several times as I learned how to grow up and into the shoes my father left outside my bedroom door to fill. Instead of pink princess books printed in big, swirly font that should optimally be read outside under a tree with light from the flickering lightning bugs, my mother told me stories of another man... not the one who taught me how to ride a bike or drove me to soccer practice (but did not tuck me into bed—that was my mother's chore.) While her smooth, longing words filled the quiet room around us, she stroked a tuft of golden fuzz on top of my teddy bear's head, looking beyond my purple walls, her hay-colored hair in a bun resting on the nape of her neck as the moon crept from behind my closed shutters. He was so handsome, she told me, gently stroking my teddy bear's fur as I sat wide-eyed, my tired little body confused by stories that weren't mine, he showed me what life was, that boy, he showed me *life*. So many stories were told to my eager ears, so many words jumbled beneath my layer of faded coffee bean hair, so many

things to understand and sort out. We went to Paris one summer, just the two of us, she whispered, her smile the only thing I could see in the soft darkness of my bedroom. We climbed to the top of the Eiffel Tower and I swore I could see the world. After she tucked my sheets beneath my lanky, weed-like legs, she went downstairs to make a pot of coffee and stayed up to watch the sunrise paint magenta streaks in her eyes, her mind running over what she did and didn't tell me, imagining that the arm around her shoulder was the arm of the man who gave her the world she gave up when she married the man who made mine.

Sometimes, I imagine myself breaking into a thousand tiny pieces wherever I'm standing, just falling apart into pieces on the floor so that whoever is around me has to bend down on their knees to pick up the little balls of yellow that are my hair and off-turquoise that are my eyes and brown with little lines of stitching that are my sweater and a tiny black one for my eyelashes and pupils, and gather me up in their hands and hold me because I've never really been held, no one has, not like that. And then I wish the person holding all the little spheres of my simplified little being slips and their hands open or realizes that the little marbles they are holding are really a human being that has broken and has always been broken and they are scared of that, of knowing that a person can *actually* be broken, and they throw me to the ground, and then I would break again all over the floor, the beads of whoever I've been this whole time rolling around in all the directions that the protractor I carried around in my yellow pencil case in the fourth grade for all that angle stuff could possibly have a tick-mark for, and then the person would feel sorry for me but would walk away because their knees hurt.

But you know, my knees hurt  
too, and maybe they always have.

When I moved away from home for the last time, I pretended as though I wouldn't miss my parents, especially since I had lived away from home before. I knew that I would, but I did not want to believe it. But when I hugged my parents "so long," as my father insisted on saying (because you only say "goodbye" to people you won't ever see again), the back of my throat got all warm and I felt sick all of a sudden and the inner corners of my eyes started stinging and I couldn't even return the "so long" because I thought I would burst. And I drove away without saying anything at all, white-knuckled on the steering

wheel, and I pulled over four miles down the road and cried until I couldn't see the yellow lines, so I kept crying until I couldn't and promised myself I would never cry like that again. When I drove away, gray smudges under my eyes and my cheeks painted with fire, I wished I had held my father with tears running down my face and into his shirt so that it would be damp with everything I'd promised him I'd become.

This is what I have decided. I will reach an apex at a certain point in time, when everything I threw at myself and everything that was thrown at me by the hollow men and women who make up this hollow world will be shaken and swirled within me and I will begin to confuse the who and the what and the where and the how and the why and the why and the why of what I have been doing this whole time to figure out who I am in a mess of people who already seem to know, even though most of them are just as confused as I am, just as willing to place an ellipsis at the end of their thoughts because they thought they knew where they were going but they want to think about it first, they want to digest more of what is around them, like the way people carry themselves or what the news that rushes along the bottom of the screen at eleven in the evening says or what authors wrote about in books or musicians sang about in songs, or maybe they will begin thinking that this isn't worth it, maybe adding that ellipsis only expands the hole in your sense of identity and maybe the stream of whatever is within you, even though it is as long as this sentence, is only a reminder to you and the world that this feeling keeps going and going and going and there isn't anything beneath the ripples of your mind, nor is there anything else.

Or maybe that is where  
everything is.

# 2nd Place: PROSE

## The Diner | Shira Levenson

I made it to the diner and saw your sweetheart in the sandwich line. An orange was hanging loose from his too wide pocket. He palmed it with his whole hand and tucked it in deeper like it was the kind of secret he hid well from the world but whispered to you later with a certain reverence. Did that orange find its way into the folds of his clothing because he'd meant to steal it? I have my presumptions but thieves and honest men have the same kinds of fingertips. He got two sandwiches and I thought perhaps one was for you, maybe you were waiting somewhere for him on the other side of the cafeteria. He walked by me quickly and I willed the orange to fall out of his pocket so he would have to bend down to pick it up and I could look at him, figure him out by the movements of his eyes if he had meant to steal it or not. The orange didn't fall. It stayed steady in its place.

## Jumping Man | Emily Zido

Peter doesn't know when he sleeps. Some nights he wonders: it occurs to him that without sleep he'd be dead, a ruminating figment. He imagines what it would be like to dream once more about the alicanto bird, the mythical dream of his childhood. His father would put him to sleep with stories of the bird circling for a year, abandoning his golden cave to spy endlessly on the desert.

In the dream, Peter is persecuted by the bird. Spotted, he is finally pecked to death by the covetous creature. Ablutions spout from his metallic eyes. The Atacama fills with his internal silver.

In the day, the person strapped to his skydiving suit shudders, doubting for a moment their decision to jump with Peter. This person, who could at any given moment be a businessman from Munich, a Tokyo sous-chef on a food tour of the Americas, a Californian tourist looking to get high on shaman tea, etc., is also someone who sleeps. This man tells Peter before takeoff that he's visiting Chile from Uruguay.

"My son is in university," the Uruguayan says while fumbling with the task of zipping his large, comically blond self into the jumpsuit. "My wife and I wanted to visit before the winter break. He's graduating soon, meaning he doesn't want to come home for vacation—wants to travel with his friends instead, to Argentina, Bolivia."

Through the jumpsuit Peter notices the Uruguayan's heart pulsing irritably, harder than a few moments ago when the rhythm was a dull tremor. There is an added frustration to the sound, reminding Peter of the horribly infected eardrum he had as a child. His mother poured warm cooking oil into the ear canal to ease his suffering, shaking his head out vigorously, causing the oil to fly around the bathroom like the droppings of a mad condor over the Valle Central.

"Last night," the Uruguayan continues, "my son told us he's volunteering this summer at some charity hospital in Peru. I don't know what they're teaching him in school but he's been talking like little Che for over a year

now. Ungrateful prick. I pay for him to study economy, and now he wants to go abroad and become a slum doctor. At least, if you're going to go through the trouble, try to become a brain surgeon or a cardiologist. Ungrateful prick. I've raised an ungrateful socialist prick."

Having finished with the straps, Peter signals to the pilot. He is tired of listening to the Uruguayan, who thinks they've established some kind of primal bond giving him permission to gripe. Peter waits impatiently for the hour when there are no more jumps scheduled, when he is free of clients. Then he will be free to drink at La Placita with his good friend Alonso, *el dueño*.

With an industrial roar the plane's hatch opens, revealing a deep expanse of lagoons and pasture. The Uruguayan looks down to the field where his wife and son are waiting. He tells Peter that his son has brought a camera along to document the event. Peter's dog Milo, a large mutt, is also waiting in the wheat field, playing ground-control until his master returns.

"Of course," the Uruguayan shouts over the roar, "my wife tells me I should be proud he wants to be a doctor! After all, we've raised him to be ambitious! But how can I be happy when I'm afraid he'll throw it all away, turn on me and move to some commune in the Andes? For all I know he could end up a goat herder, shitting his life away on a volcano!"

The plane, a small yellow model nicknamed Piolín, loops around for a second time. On days when Peter is not working, Piolín docks beside his house in Pucón, resting among a garden of bellflowers. Peter thinks of the bloom just as he thrusts both men from the hatch.

The Uruguayan smiles and coo-shouts, watching his event with the fascinated eyes of a toddler falling into a swimming pool. It's a jump that bores Peter, an expert who knows how to strap himself to the air like a cowboy, a Newtonian *huaso*. He can roll like an endangered species of chinchilla if he wants to, tucked away in the deepest mountain, bathing his fur in fresh volcanic ash.

In forty-three years there have only been three accidents on the job, none fatal. The worst was when an Argentine nearly split his femoral artery when the emergency chute grazed it. There was also the teenager from an American university who broke some ribs on the return ride when Peter's truck hit a pothole—the boy's parents, a couple from Rochester, New York, threatened to sue Peter on the grounds that his truck had no seatbelts. Unfortunately, Peter found it difficult in this situation to explain that hardly anyone in Pucón wore seatbelts.

Peter had been to the United States before. In fact, he'd been going there every August since he turned fifty, renting a leaky attic in Wisconsin and taking clients up in his plane. He had a booth at the state fair—people came to him high on cheese and cream puffs looking to jump. He was, there-

fore, rather accommodated with the Wisconsin use of seatbelts. Almost every summer he came to the US the police ticketed him for not wearing one.

The process of being pulled over by an American police officer amazed Peter, who'd been middle-aged when the coup happened. To Peter, the officer always seemed so bored. He would only grumble for his license, returning with his fine in a haze of bumbling monotony. It was all procedure to the officer: there was no guesswork involved, no de facto rule-twisting. He didn't hold a gun to your head; he didn't beat you for papers, affiliations (unless you looked Mexican, which Peter didn't, being German-descended). He didn't threaten to deport you, either, not even when you unashamedly broke his seatbelt laws (which amazed Peter, the sheer democracy of it!) Unlike the Chile he grew up in, the US seemed so democratically modern: checks and balances; voter referendums; a system of appeals. Hell, it had even managed to outsource its torture practice to Cuba, of all places, a land of backwards communists. The technocrats bent on modernizing Chile admired the American system: how in line the act of outsourcing was with capitalist values.

While living in Valparaíso Peter knew about the converted discotheques near the harbor used for holding political prisoners. The torturers would mask the victims' screams with loud pop music. Peter distinctly remembers the refracted image of a disco ball coming from the high window of La Carbonería on his walk to work one morning. He had had a song by the Bee Gees stuck in his head for weeks afterwards.

In January, Peter is scheduled for his 7,765th-7,768th jumps. That is, the jumps he remembers. He only started keeping track in the seventies, when his first daughter was born and he became the kind of person who keeps track of things. After the third daughter he only kept track of some things. Then the divorce, and the lost sleep.

At three o'clock he meets his clients at their hotel in Pucón. They are three American women, a lesbian couple plus one of their mothers, all over forty. The eldest one, Minnie, speaks with a Texan accent. She is the only one jumping today, in celebration of her sixtieth birthday. She seems nervous, the anxiety of which Peter hopes will turn into a special kind of lavishing over him when the trip is done with and Minnie invites him to dinner. At sixty-three, Peter is the kind of *chileno* who knows how to charm any woman, even a lesbian, he thinks. His huge graying mustache gives him a kind of Hollywood appeal to the older women. To the younger women he is a kind of throwback to explore. They enjoy his wide hands and occasional use of the word 'fuck' at tables, something they find sweetly barbaric, especially while on vacation.

"Don't you dare drop me!" Minnie shouts. He can feel her heart beating harshly, making him wonder what his own sixty-three-year-old heart must

sound like.

The two stand before Piolín's abruptly windy hatch, skin shaking with velocity, ditched and smoothed. Minnie peers down at the far-off maze of blue and yellow. She begins to shake in the jumpsuit, causing Peter to feel a certain tenderness towards her. For a moment, Peter breathes in her hair as he breathes the lush mountains, the white of Villarrica's volcanic summit. He keeps breathing until the floor dissolves, leaving no trace of its existence. The air gathers him in pieces through the hinterland of Piolín's roar, a simpering time-break, liquid sifting of elements. He is nothing but a fluid transition, grinning, looking for clouds he has seen before. Even after all these years the atmosphere pulls at him like a *muñeca*, a child braiding doll hair, pulsating through his curls like a dandelion weed floating in its own dry ripeness. At twenty-two seconds he pulls the chute, yanking the two bodies like tandem suicides. He smiles, wondering why no one ever looks up.

"That was absolutely thrillin'!" Minnie declares after landing in the wheat field. She shakes her hair aside, a streak of white showing. Peter can still feel her heart bounded in the jumpsuit. Milo runs up to meet them, jumping wildly, amazed at the landing scene.

"You did great," he tells her. "The weather is perfect today. You could see the volcano for the entire jump."

Minnie turns to smile at him. He thinks that her way of speaking is different from most Americans, she seems more involved. But maybe he hasn't been to the US enough to know the difference.

"How was it, mom?" the younger woman with the short hair asks. Peter has since forgotten her name.

"It was incredible!" Minnie says, the tone of her voice falling. Peter takes it for a sign of how overwhelmed she is. It's a beautiful thing when a person genuinely appreciates what he does for a living.

"Oh Peter, I feel totally renewed! It's like I'm starting over at sixty!"

"It's nothing, darling. Nothing, *gracias a tí*."

Later, when he is packing away the parachute, Minnie approaches him.

Peter looks at the two women standing by the pickup. The dark-haired woman, rather good-looking, moves to put her arm around the daughter's hips. Both appear to be less-than-thrilled.

"Mom, I'm sure Peter is busy tonight," the short-haired daughter says. "He has to take the plane back, for one."

"Oh, hush! Since when am I so old I can't stay out after dark?" Minnie winks at Peter. "It's our last night in Chile," she says, pronouncing it chilly. "And besides, it's my birthday. I get to call the shots on my birthday, don't I?"

"Ok Minnie, we hear you," says the dark-haired woman. She smiles to break the tension, looking directly at Peter, who is still involved with the parachute. "It's your birthday, so we'll all go out."

“Well, I’m glad I have your approval. Not that I need it anyway.” Minnie turns to go to the pickup. “I’m old enough to be your mother too, you know. Now, did I leave my water bottle over here? I could’ve sworn I brought my water with me.”

The dark-haired woman watches Peter for a moment longer, eyeing him peculiarly. Peter remembers that this woman is called Natalia, and that she grew up a few hours north in Santiago. She is nearly six feet tall—tall for a *chilena*. And she is indeed very beautiful. As Peter finishes with the parachute, however, it occurs to him that he was being eyed by Natalia with suspicion. How strange this *chilena* lesbian seemed to Peter, eyeing him warily over a dinner invitation when it should have been the other way around. After all, this was Latin America. Had she forgotten what the people here were like? Had she forgotten that they understood what nature intended, unlike in some places where the people fucked like confused dogs? It was ludicrous that she would even think to eye him so. He figured her for one of those lesbians who looked down on men, the angry type he read about in the papers that rallied over things like abortion rights and refusing to shave their pubic hair. He felt revulsion creeping up inside of him, nausea over an attractive woman. He had to force himself not to show such disgust.

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Outside of the hotel, Minnie is wearing a short-sleeve black dress and the turquoise jewelry that her daughter gave her for her birthday. She looks good for a woman of sixty, Peter thinks, knowing that his own ex-wife has aged less gracefully. Now an instructor at the Sorbonne, Marie spent too many hours in tanning beds trying to revive the looks she had at twenty-five. He originally met Marie in France, where he had traveled decades ago to lead a jump seminar. She was a young literature student at the time, attracted to Peter and his risky profession. She spoke Spanish like a *Madrileña*, using formal verbs she must have learned in school. It sounded old timey to Peter, whose French was equally outlandish. They decided therefore to speak to each other in English, preserving their native tongues for the bedroom. Marie made the decision to come with him to Chile, liking the climate, his house at the time in Valparaíso. They vacationed in Pucón, marrying before the coup, a revolutionary time for people in their twenties. They might have even guessed themselves happy on that fateful day in September, when the General bombed the house of government and the President’s body came out in a blanket; the original 9/11, extremism before the word even existed.

“*Que linda*,” Peter says to Minnie, who doesn’t speak a lick of Spanish. “Where are the girls?”

“Oh, they wanted to stay in tonight, rest before the flight,” Minnie says,

her cheeks turning color. “Both of them are being such party-poopers. I don’t know what’s come over them.”

“Well,” Peter says, kissing both her cheeks, “at least the grown-ups won’t be bothered.”

He touches her elbow, leading them to where Milo is waiting for them in the back of his pickup. The three drive to La Placita, where Alonso is waiting for Peter with two pisco sours. Peter called his friend ahead of time to let him know he was coming with a woman. Milo is made to wait in the truck, looking depressed as the couple leaves.

“Peter, how are you my friend?” Alonso walks up to hug him. The two men are old skydiving friends—he wraps his arms around Peter the way they used to embrace falling out of the plane.

Alonso chauffeurs them to an outdoor table, one next to a wall steeped in bellflowers. Minnie removes the shawl she bought earlier in the week.

“This is lovely, Peter,” she says, feeling glad tonight: glad to be out-of-country on her birthday; glad to be with a man for once who isn’t her ex-husband.

“Of course, darling. I’m going to order a bottle of wine. What would you prefer, red or white?”

Minnie flushes. “Peter,” she laughs, “we have drinks right here.”

“I can see that, but what will you have? Red or white?”

“Oh, I’m fine with this pisco! Thank you, though.”

Peter is confused by her answer. “It’s your birthday. You should always drink wine on your birthday. What will you have then, red or white?”

“No, no, I’m fine with this pisco,” she laughs. “It’s too much for me as it is.”

Peter is feeling pushy. He doesn’t intend on being the only one drinking tonight.

“What I’m saying is, you have to drink wine on your birthday. Otherwise you’re not really celebrating.”

“Oh, well, maybe later then. Later I might have just a drop.”

Peter orders red wine, figuring maybe she’ll be apt to drink it when the food comes. From the menu Peter orders an assortment of things. Soon after Alonso produces *humitas*, corn cooked in husk. Minnie has never heard of this dish before.

“You mean you’ve been in Chile for two weeks and haven’t tried *humitas*?” Peter asks in disbelief, wondering what tourists eat all day in their nice hotel rooms.

“Oh, but I have tried this before! I just forget what it’s called.” Minnie points to the steak.

“*A la pobre*. Very popular in Chile. The poor man’s meal—delicious of course, and bad for cholesterol.”

Peter pours more wine. He drinks precipitously, the way his father

taught him to when he was a teenager. They lived in Valparaíso at the time, their house a purple cliff-hanger, his mother serving them Sunday barbecue on the rose terrace. He'd been drinking since he was thirteen and considered himself skilled at it, wishing at this time that some Americans weren't so puritanical about their drink—it would've made for better company this evening, for one.

"You don't seem like the kind of person who worries about cholesterol too much," Minnie says, doubling-back over her phrasing. "I mean, you just look so healthy. Like it comes naturally. Unlike us boring old people who don't skydive for a living. We have to eat our granola, take our multivitamins. Otherwise we'll break in half."

"Darling, don't sell yourself short. You're not one of those people. Besides, you look tremendous tonight. Not a day over forty."

Minnie lowers her chin, smiling. She takes a sip of wine despite her pleading.

"Peter, where is your family from? I'm just curious about your name."

He grins, liking this question. "My parents were German. They immigrated here during the war, along with many others trying to escape the violence. That's where this curly hair comes from. My father was from Hamburg, big port city. He got to know all the dock workers here—they told him stories from the north, miners' stories. Both my parents are buried in a German mausoleum. I've visited my parents many times there. Last time, a stray followed me to their plot. He tried making love to me, crazy mutt. So I kicked him, but then he started humping himself. None of the strays here are neutered, you know. It gives them a terrible sex drive. Your animal rights people would be appalled."

Peter drinks, feeling more optimistic about the night. He's not ready to tell Minnie that her birthday coincides with a very important anniversary for him, something he's been dying to talk about with someone other than his restaurant-owning friend. He feels familiar with her, like he occasionally feels with strangers. In his line of business he has the opportunity to experience this more often than most people, though he's never felt this particular way with an American.

"That dog, I'll never forget him. He found a dog's jawbone right by my father's grave—started mauling it, yelping, ants crawling on his nose. It was very entertaining, except for the smell, of course. What is it you gringos say? 'It's a dog-eat-dog-world?'"

Minnie tries to grin, the joke falling short. She wants to change the subject but draws a blank on conversation starters. After a few moments Peter does the job for her.

"You know, darling, I'm not as healthy as you think. What you said about cholesterol, it's not true. I worry about it all the time, ever since I had

my heart surgery.”

“Heart surgery? When did that happen?”

Peter downs his third glass, feeling very warm. “You see, darling, two years ago I was terribly unhealthy. It was right before my wife and I divorced. I fell over on my way to the bakery. I’d had a massive heart attack and needed a triple bypass. They slapped me to the operating table for six hours. My ribs were split open, right down the middle. All my organs were in ice. You should see the scar, it’s amazing.”

Peter reaches to lift his shirt, not noticing the look on Minnie’s face. He draws the fabric out of his waistline, unfastening the buckle, scrolling it up to his neck. The act reveals his thoroughly hairy stomach, two pudgy breasts, twin nipples looking crumpled. His whole midsection is separated by an ugly pink scar. It runs the length of his torso, starting below his belly button, ending at the convergence of wrinkles at his neck.

“It was ironic, too,” Peter continues, examining the scar with a finger. “Three days earlier a woman doctor from Australia jumped with me. At the bottom she told me that she could feel my heart, that it felt to her like I was going to have a heart attack. Three days pass and I’m practically a dead man. I should have written to her, told her she was right.”

Peter rolls his shirt down, tucking it back in his pants. Soon after, Alonso brings the table another bottle of wine. He noticed the American woman from across the floor looking uneasy. Another bottle would help to loosen her up.

“Thank you, friend,” Peter says.

“Another pisco for you, Señora?”

“No, I’m fine thank you.”

“Amigo, amigo, did you know that today is this woman’s birthday? She is sixty today. Sixty! Older than you *chiquitito*.”

Minnie turns red, her face matching the flowers. Peter is turning out to be unexpectedly crude, announcing her age so casually.

“Happy birthday, Señora,” Alonso says, uncorking the bottle.

“Thank you.”

“You want to know something about that guy?” Peter asks after Alonso disappears. He is feeling drunker than expected, a nice surprise.

Minnie sits coolly, not answering. Peter senses the wine in his body, warming him, accessing his thoughts. He knows that he is making this person with him unhappy. He doesn’t know why it is giving him pleasure. He is unhappy about his actions towards this perfect stranger. He is ashamed to feel such pleasure.

“Minnie, you must excuse me,” he says, not quite sure why. “Today is a terrible anniversary for me.”

The woman momentarily softens. She is not so unforgiving, remember-

ing for herself what it is like to be divorced, alone. She figures that perhaps this will serve as her act of birthday charity, listening to this lonely man before the long flight home. Her lone act of birthday charitableness.

“That man and I, we’ve been friends for many years. We jumped for decades. He was with me when I met my wife. He’s godfather to my first child.”

Minnie can feel the wine in her body, too. It makes it easier to tolerate the pitiful nostalgia in his voice.

“We were both in Valparaíso at the time. The government had started a new program and needed pilots. Of course, when the government came to you in those years, you said yes. So we told them yes.”

Minnie is holding the wine stem, examining the knuckle she used to slip her wedding ring over. It came across her mind before the trip that she should pawn the ring, spend the money on a spa treatment or a divan or perhaps a new ring. In the end, she couldn’t bring herself to go through with it. The ring sat locked in the home safe along with the rest of her jewelry.

Peter sighs, watching the bellflowers. “They needed regular pilots to fly the missions. They wanted it to look like it was people taking joyrides, you see, so there would be no suspicion. My friend was copilot. We flew to the coast like we were told, to a small airfield I never heard of. When we landed they gave us a body. She was in a bag, of course. You could smell she had not been dead long.”

Peter stops to drink more wine. It tastes metallic; the alicanto coming for him.

“We were given a knife, some gravel. A week before one of the bodies had washed ashore. People were suspicious. We were to cut her open before the drop, fill the stomach with stones so she would sink. Then there would be no more suspicion.”

Minnie is still examining her finger. Peter looks to the spot she is staring at. He sighs, realizing that it reminds him a little of his wife.

“One of the soldiers tossed a coin. I was to fly the plane, Alonso to cut. When we flew over the point I signaled to him. He was looking at her curiously. It was sad to see him so. I’ve never forgotten the look on his face, the sadness.”

Peter thumbs his scar through his shirt. He knows the doctor told him his heart would be good for another ten years, so long as he keeps his cholesterol down, but some days he wonders.

“Alonso is a good man,” he explains. “His father owned a restaurant. Alonso used to help him in the kitchen—he always had cuts on his hands from chopping onions, red marks from the burner. So you would think a man who cooked and chopped and diced for so many years could handle cutting one more thing. You would think a man could do such a thing for himself, for his friend. A forgetful thing, something you did once and shut

up about for a lifetime. But you'd be surprised what a man can't do. You'd be surprised, when it comes down to it, what makes him want to die pitifully."

Peter goes on not quite hearing himself. "Do you know what went on here? Do you have any idea what they would have done to me, to my family? I would have been the next body. Alonso would not be here. My wife, my daughters. My plane confiscated, burned. My life over, not remembered. What they did was unforgivable. But you can't understand what it felt like. You can't understand what it was like to butcher that woman."

Peter puts his head down. It feels too heavy for him. He feels pathetic, wondering how he ever thought he'd manage to sleep with Minnie that evening.

"Today" he continues, "is the anniversary of our flight from hell. But Alonso, he doesn't even want to talk about it, that Catholic prick. He never lets me say anything. Just sits here all day, that penitent fucker, chopping and dicing and burying his head in onions or piss, pretending to be a saint. Acting like nothing is wrong, like we never...like we never, ah...like the world isn't..."

"Peter," Minnie says, feeling tired. She takes the glass from him, rubbing it against her naked finger. She reaches past his elbow, touching the point of the scar that is visible at his neck. She feels momentarily tender towards him. She remembers that today is her birthday, smiling because she is not obligated to feel a thing.

Peter sighs. He thinks that his heart may last ten years after all. "My wife left me. She wanted to leave me years ago, but divorce laws were such. So she went back to France. She told me I was an alcoholic; she told my daughters I was an alcoholic. I don't know how to forgive her. She turned my children against me."

A different waiter arrives with the check. Minnie drinks the last of her wine, feeling unfulfilled.

"No one in my family knows what I did for them. No one. But not one of my daughters visits me in Pucón. That's what I don't understand. That is the one thing more unbearable than memory."

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Later, Minnie decides to walk herself home. Peter doesn't push things, unlocking the car door, feeling a foolish mess as Milo jumps to the front seat. He licks the man vigorously, covering his neck and ears with harsh slurps, thick gobs of delight. Peter calls to Minnie, laughing, the joke fresh in his mind: "You see? Didn't I tell you, it's a dog-eat-dog world."

Minnie turns to leave, the joke falling short again. She walks briskly, feeling fine for a woman of sixty. In fact, she thinks to herself, she doesn't

feel a day over forty. She is intent on smiling at Natalia and her daughter, on meeting their eyes and smiling about how wonderful the evening was, on how wrong they were about Peter, on telling them just how much excitement they missed. She is already practicing the smile and the story she will tell when Peter starts the car, feeling more sober than he has felt on former evenings leaving La Placita.

In bed that evening, Peter lays face-up on the mattress. He thinks that he can feel the initial whims of decent sleep coming onto him for the first time in months. The alicanto bird is there, of course, its metal wings shining over the desert. Peter sleeps, putting his lips to the pillow, closing his mouth over the cloth.

In the middle of the night, Milo climbs up from the floor. He lies down next to Peter, licking him anxiously. Peter turns over as Milo yawns, revealing a line of white, potent teeth. As the dog sleepily paws an itchy ear, he manages to kick the jumping man in his sleep, breathing on him, exuding a powerful stench. Peter stirs abruptly. Annoyed, he sits up in bed, cursing the giant mutt. With a great shove he sends it crashing to the floor, unaware of how dreadful he looks in the dark.

## I Thought of Your Body | Lyons George

### I. *What I Meant to Say*

is that I was mistaken in not taking the time  
to forget you completely or fuck you to sleep;

I've been meaning to kill your father  
but I lost my gun and money is tight;

the blood in my vomit is black—black blood  
comes from the stomach— it's the color of love;

I thought of your body the other day.  
I was lying in a field. I was shooting at doves.

### II. *"Just Fuck Me, It's Fine"* *(Before the Funeral)*

she told me her  
father was dying  
and her mother  
had found a new  
boyfriend in town.  
she said my  
lovers were just  
like her lovers  
strength always  
in numbers—she  
finds me in bed.  
she said: shut up  
and I'll cry til  
you're hard yes  
the body is dirt

but our fingers  
are spades.

### III. *Touching Myself*

this clock ticks an alien time  
my hands dance in sweat;  
its been days since I smoked

friend said *shit man just think about  
porn, all that flesh rubbing flesh*  
and then your flesh on yours

saw a man today covered in blood—  
a street-corner god  
(one bored cop keeping vigil)

so I drank til my name went away  
*no sense to excess*  
said one dumbstruck survivor

### IV. *The Bed We Shared*

is still  
wet  
with bouts of palms

and bloody compassion;  
it's ok,  
Jane used to say.

I don't mind the snoring.  
I don't mind the sweat.

*Shhh,*  
she told my closed eyes.  
And blew them open.

Said: *taste me  
and be proud.*

# 2nd Place : POETRY

## I am carved there | Brendan Edward Kennedy

I think of three years ago.  
Before my legs shrank tight as ropes.  
Before I sold my clothes.  
Before my gut pulled into me.  
Before my eyes dried shut.

I think of three years ago:  
I stood with feet  
unsocked and pale  
under a Junebug bough.  
Its shagbark thick with shade,  
I picked some bits apart  
until a heartsized circle of smooth  
found itself under my palm.  
The quiet gravel of Long Green Road:  
It was safe to do this.  
I picked up a sharp rock  
and tattooed my name  
on that heartspace.  
Seven letters carved.  
I am carved there.

I think of three years ago  
when I stumble back over the roots.  
Falling, feeling around  
with callous hands,  
eyes dried shut.  
Winter whipping through my frame,  
I find the trunk,  
grate my ribs on the shagbark for warm,  
chip off bits of scab.

I feel for the heartspace,  
for the letters.  
There is only the blow of December  
as my hand falls down on  
a stump.

## Listening to *In Through the Out Door* ; Ned Prutzer

*In The Evening*—then,  
bourbon-scented nights,  
crimson highs lit up

in the back of a Volkswagen,  
nasty shag carpet, and just like that,  
you're sixteen again—it's 1979,

the world weightless,  
careless, despite the turbulence  
of the driver switching gears.

Your eyes are as golden  
as the center of a Cherokee  
rose, your hair stitching

through the wind like a needle.  
Your friends in the back  
laugh at your ambition

as they replicate the melody,  
their vibrancy gilding the starkness  
of the unattainable midnight horizon,

filled with lust and dreams  
pressed like posters  
to moldy walls.

But six songs in, your voice  
gets amber in tone,

smoky, as if it had scruff,

the way bark gives texture  
to a tree. Every sense  
is lessened, and you feel

the shiver of the radio static,  
the potholes of the road  
now weathered with memory,

the petals of that rose  
scattering back to the ground,  
sighing—*I'm Gonna Crawl*.

# Selected PROSE Finalist

## First Wife | Samuel Pelczar

There is a house across the river. An estate. The owner hasn't been there in years. It is old and brick. Outside there are gardens without vegetables, with stone paths led by a procession of Forget-me-nots on either side. Wooden benches slick with moss rot in the shade by the low brick walls separating the Hyacinths from the river. Within these walls somewhere there is the rain-eaten stone bust of a goddess under the smothering petals of the dogwood. A caretaker lives there now. Dad sat on the dock and looked at the house. Dad was a caretaker once.

Dad was a doctor. He liked to help people. He liked to help people when it was reasonable that they should be helped. He liked to feed ducks. Canvasbacks and two Hooded Mergansers. They were bottom feeders, but he didn't seem to mind.

Mom peeled carrots in her kitchen. Rinsed potatoes. The water sang. A door snapped shut, and she knew that Ray was home, and she noticed how nicely the baked potatoes looked wrapped up in their aluminum blankets, steaming, almost rolling, like children in bed.

On the table in the kitchen three places were set. Mom carried over a platter of fried rockfish and a bowl of steamed carrots and potatoes. Her face hung over the steaming plates of food like a fragile chandelier. She divided up the single fried soft crab, and put a third on each plate, the biggest on Dad's. Dad yelled for Ray. "Din-ner!" Ray is coming. She thought he didn't need to yell. Ray always comes. Ray knows. He didn't need to yell.

Leaning over the stair railing, Dad yells again for Ray. His big Polish pumpkin-head gets red. He yells and his face turns to wrinkles like an old jack-o'-lantern at the end of November, skin loose and over-ripening, mouth drooping, everything drawing downward. He yells and his eyes, red from drinking, bulge a little and have the glazy mucus-yellow and bloodshot gaze of a dead catfish, bloated and floating downriver. The food is getting cold. He stirred his cocktail with stiff fingers and followed the warm river smelling of fried fish into the kitchen.

Dad sat where he always sat for dinner. He looked out the window in front of him, a black square of night. He tossed whole pieces of fish into his mouth, glancing at Mom by the stove, while one of his fingers drowned in his cocktail. The news was on. Somebody said something about health care. Something had exploded somewhere where people wear things on their heads. The mysteries of sex have been debunked. He gobbled another piece of fish and chased it with his drink. His numb finger lay in rigor mortis on the tablecloth. As he filled up, there was no more room inside of him for the somebody's voice. He became impermeable for the moment and receded inside of his thick sweater.

Mom and Ray sat down. Dad clasped his hands and said grace. They ate in a loose silence. Dad moaned and closed his eyes.

Good dinner, Mom, he said. Potato fell from his mouth. Have you tasted the fish?

I don't like fish.

Mmm. Good fish.

I don't eat fish.

And you wonder why you have health problems.

He closed his eyes and chewed a mouth-load of potatoes. He moaned and set both of his hands on the table and inside, fell slowly into opalescent darkness, a snowflake's fall onto a warm oil spill. The image of the estate flickering on the back of his eyelids like a corroded silent film. It said nothing. But, the garden... The dogwood petals had fallen, hadn't they? He breathed in slower and heavier now, continuing to fill himself in his sleep. Yes, the petals have fallen. They cover the ground with a milky shroud. Below his wrinkled eyelids leaked a few tears that were forced out, as room had to be made for the potato he was consuming.

Ray raised his eyebrows to Mom, and grabbed a marker. He stood next to Dad and carefully wrote on top of his bald head. THE DAD, he wrote. Mom smiled, then covered her smile, so as not to give way to laughter, which would awaken her husband. Ray began to clear the plates.

You think that it'll stay on tomorrow, when he goes to work I mean.

I better not let it.

Was it always like this? Him falling asleep at the table?

Since I married him.

And before?

Not when we were dating.

No. I mean before, with his first wife.

No. I mean I don't know. How would I know?

I just wonder what he was like.

Yeah, me too.

# Selected PROSE Finalist

## Spaghetti Fight | Julia McLaughlin

When I woke up I smelled toast. I shook Noah awake, asked him if he smelled it too.

“Noah, did you make toast?”

“No.”

“Who’s in our house?”

“No one’s in our house, stop worrying.”

“There’s probably a ghost in our house.”

“Why are you always so crazy? Go back to sleep.”

Always? I got up and made myself some toast too, spread hate across the bread like butter. I wanted to offer some to the ghost but he was probably trying to make peace. I thought maybe I should try too. I should try and make peace with the man upstairs.

Then I went to sleep on the big armchair next to the fireplace we never use and I forgot about making peace. Months passed.

One night I made too much pasta and it started out as a short word fight. Noah came home and I showed him all the spaghetti but he was already in a bad mood so he made some cheeky comment about what a bad cook I am. I got tired of him calling me a bad cook the second month of our marriage and sometimes when you try to ignore a problem for so long it just becomes bigger and angrier like a spreading bruise. That’s when I scooped up a handful of spaghetti and lobbed it straight at the back of his head. It stuck there for a few seconds, the ends dangling from his hair, and then one by one they peeled off and fell to the linoleum.

He turned around and stared at me in a blend of anger and amusement.

“What was that for?”

“That was for calling me a bad cook!” My words shook.

“Don’t get mad at me for something that’s not my fault.” He turned away.

I pitched another spaghetti handful his direction. It landed in front of him on the coffee table. I threw more. Victory! It caught his shoulder.

He plucked it off his suit jacket, slowly turned and hurled it back.  
“Will you stop it?” he yelled, pasta airborne.

Dirty jacket spaghetti hit me right in the face. Then it became an all-out war. Long, thin noodles danced across the space between us, covered our bodies, fueled our anger, fueled our amusement. Ten minutes in, it wasn't about me cooking badly anymore. It was only about spaghetti and how it felt to get slapped by a glob of it on your bare skin. We threw spaghetti out of anger until the anger raised its little white flag. Then, we threw spaghetti only for amusement.

I remember thinking that it was the best idea ever, why hadn't I done this as a kid?

Noah said he remembers thinking it was ridiculous, but he never gave up because he thinks it's important to win so he kept the fight going with me. I guess that's why he stayed with me anyway; he didn't want to 'lose.'

It was spaghetti, spaghetti, spaghetti for half an hour and then we both looked at it all and saw how disgusting the pasta had gotten. I wanted to take a shower. Noah wanted me to sit next to him on the couch. I did because suddenly I remembered the toast.

We sat silent for a few moments, looking down into our laps, children waiting to be scolded by their mother for making a mess in the kitchen. Then we looked at each other, smiled and laughed one of those laughs that feels like a first breath and relaxes your shoulder muscles.

“Hey,” he said.

“Hey.”

“I'm sorry.”

“Me too.”

“What was that?”

I laughed, “I don't know, I really don't.”

“Do you want to order in?”

“You don't want the spaghetti?”

He laughed and said, “We should clean up.”

And that was it. We cleaned up the spaghetti, ordered a pizza and watched stand-up comedy for the rest of the night and I felt the stitches in our marriage become tighter.

But something that's been loosened once normally has a pretty good chance of becoming loose again. We needed much, much more than a spaghetti fight but I didn't know that then and I didn't know it for a while or at least I chose not to acknowledge it. We went around pretending like we were okay and we didn't need to have a serious talk and we definitely didn't need to talk about how I left bed every night to go sit downstairs and have toast so I would remember when I realized I hated him and that I should try and fix things. I was trying to remind myself of how I wanted to make peace

with Noah and feel that connection again but it just wasn't there anymore. Maybe all it was now was obligation and vows and because my father wasn't around to give me away at a second wedding.

When my father first met Noah he liked him, probably because my brand new fiancé didn't talk much for a while. It takes him a while to get comfortable with people. It took him months to even get comfortable with me. After those months he told me that at first he had thought I was too weird. It's interesting how his first impression had managed to hide itself for so long only to come rushing back years into our marriage.

The day before our anniversary I made too much pasta and waited for him to come home from work. I showed him all the spaghetti and he looked at me like I had said there was a ghost in our house again.

"That's not happening again."

"What's not?"

I had to pretend I forgot about our first spaghetti fight and that we were good and we didn't need to have a serious talk but I had hoped, hoped, hoped so hard that pasta would come through for us at least one more time.

"You know what I'm talking about. Do we have any meatballs?"

# Selected POETRY Finalist

## life lessons from my father | Meg Eden

you do not begin a *fianchetto* then leave it as an empty nest. you do not put your knights to the side ranks where they have no mobility, or isolate your pawns as islands in the center of the board. a bishop pair is to your advantage; a rook with an open file will be your blessing. do not leave your pieces blocked behind pawns as useless vestigial appendages. when you release your queen too early, you endanger her and make her an easy target. once you have moved your king, he can never be made pure again. read over the informants in the office. memorize the opening sequences; the masters have seen what you have, and more. pin his pieces as an obligation. do not give him room to maneuver. play him into your hand when you can; gain tempo, *schweissen sug*, forks—do not make life easy for him, nor count on his mistakes. he will not try to make life easy for you. always shake hands at the beginning and end of each game; take both victory and loss with grace. before sitting down, do not ask his rating: you will either get cocky and careless or fearful and anxious. one careless move can lose even a won game. always demand a reason for his actions. material advantage is not everything. do not be afraid to take risks, but first, plan and imagine always, the best moves. sit on your hands. do not move until you are certain it is the absolute best move on the board. do not settle for a mediocre easy solution, or isolate your focus to only the cluster of action. make a move for the center. claim your territory before it is gone. do not give away your plans too early. always develop. against all people, you have the potential to win, so never lose hope; people blunder. these motions should become natural reflexes for when you are running out of time. bring an extra pencil with you, sharpened, ready to notate. do not let him intimidate you with his quick movements, the slamming of the clock, but please do not move too slow. there is only so much time.

# Selected POETRY Finalist

## Remembering my right hand at the Kotel

‡ Joel Sephy Gleiser

A race for the wall.

Curls chase hats. Strings chase pants—chase for the wall.

There, the man stares at the mammoth bricks.

His eyes pierce like the eyes of an ibex. He is a face for the wall.

He weeps grenades, and bread, and safety, and another son, and the wall.

He prays for the wall.

Circles form around him. Circles of brothers, fathers, and sons.

Some are from Holland. Some from Peru. We embrace for the wall.

But the ibex eyes pushes us. He just cries.

He gives all his days for the wall.

For the wall, from his father, from numbers, from forearms, from bellies' voids,  
from knowing what it is to have no place for the wall.

And me? I've only watched, danced, and laughed.

The curls and hats asked me to say grace for the wall,

But I couldn't. I touched it instead. I fed it papers like nickels into a slot machine.

The other nickels mocked me. There was no space for the wall.

I felt the wall suffocate between curls, hats, strings, pants, grenades, bread, safety,  
another son, and itself.

And between rocks, and mosques, and a start of the world, and a race for the wall.

And between the not race, and the not space, and the not grace, and Yosef Shimon,  
and all the names before that one, there still stood a case for the wall.

# Selected POETRY Finalist

## Ghazal | Lyons George

What about dawn—what about the cold water?  
*He wakes up submerged and steps out from cold water.*

My father shoots birds, and so do I by extension—  
a flotsam revision he touts through cold water.

It ended when Jane wouldn't fuck anymore.  
Our bodies in bed: oil pouts to cold water.

Mother says sex doesn't make a man happy,  
but she made six children devout by cold water.

In bed with the river my body is mud.  
My eyes are fish eggs, my mouth is cold water.

Something shot from the sky will die and then fall.  
“Please stop me from falling,” it shouts to cold water.

I am only as lonely as the rivers  
at dawn, when maniac suns rout the cold water

and guns are held high and fathers held quiet  
*his tongue cannot move on account of cold water.*

My father says sleep is a man's proof of work.  
His snores swim upstream just like trout in cold water.

And this is how Lyons stays alive: he floats.  
He swaps out his blood, in times of drought, for cold water.

# Selected POETRY Finalist

## The Goose | Lyons George

Still warm, maybe warmer  
for having been brought in

from the sky  
to a bombed-out barn

and the cat's consideration.  
Not to mention, it takes forever

for blood to cool—you remember  
that much from your very first dove,

shaking hot in your hands, melting  
ice from your hands.

It is your job to clean the goose;  
how could it possibly cool any quicker?

After all, your hands,  
plucking, covered in down,

are even now  
returning life

into the belly, recalling  
flight as they crack the wings

backwards, teasing  
the limp neck

into a familiar stretch  
across the cutting board.

Listen:  
you can hear yourself

talking to it,  
apologizing to the body

for your hands  
even as they grope and

wrestle with its dumbness.  
And yes,

what the old hunters say is true:  
one in the hand

is worth two in the bush, and don't  
worry about the body, the body

was dumbness  
to begin with.



**ET CETERA**



# STAFF BIOGRAPHIES

GABRIELLE A. DUNKLEY is in a twelve-step program with Johnnie Simpson for recovering workaholics. She is a Write Bloody Publishing editor and media consultant. Her editing work has led to the Pushcart Prize nominations of Write Bloody authors. She is an Individual Studies Program student, majoring in publishing and literary media studies. She is the executive producer of the Intern Edition at NPR. She is also the founder and director of Regarding The Elephant, an online writing workshop that has been featured at the University of Maryland's Jiménez-Porter Writers' House as a pilot program. She is a former teaching assistant for Writing For Publication and first-year colloquium workshops and the former president of TerPoets. Gabrielle would like to thank her manfriend Jared Law and her friends and family for their love and support, especially her incredible mother, Jacqueline, and sister, Jules. She would also like to thank her incredible staff for their remarkable dedication this year and the immense support from the JPWH directors, Johnna Schmidt, Zein El-Amine, and Vivianne Salgado.

NICK STRUMPF is in his third year with *Stylus*: previously he was layout director. He is not a member of Writers' House, and as an outsider, he greatly appreciates and encourages staff diversity. He is graduating this spring with degrees in marketing and supply chain management.

ZACH LYON is a senior English major. He has the best dance moves. He loves Ke\$ha, somewhat inexplicably. He writes pretty cool reviews for the Singles Jukebox. I love his face, and I would like to be kissing him right now. ALSO, he is considerably more talented than Rob Hayunga.

NICK LYLE is a senior English major at the University of Maryland and is a member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. As assistant prose director, his tasks mainly consisted of proving the superiority of prose to both poetry and art. A master of wit and repartee, Nick also serves as president of the *Maryland Cow Nipple*, the University's premier-by-default humor magazine. He is a regular participant at TerPoets events, where he enjoys reading comedic monologues and flash fiction. His favorite authors include

Raymond Carver, Katherine Anne Porter, and George R. R. Martin, among many others.

**MARK STUBENBERG** is a junior English major. Discovering his interest for poetry at Robert Frost Middle School, Mark continues to be actively involved in the poetry scene today. His interests include bungee jumping, rock climbing, paragliding, snowboarding, piloting helicopters, cliff diving and extreme mountain biking, and he has dedicated himself to finding the time to give each of these activities a try.

**ALLISON GIBEILY** is a sophomore English major in her first year as Stylus' assistant director of poetry board. She enjoys reading, writing, photography, thrift stores, hair accessories, cynicism, and all of the stereotypes that go along with these things.

**ANNIE PI** is a sophomore English and marketing major. Last year, she served as a member of the *Stylus* art board.

**JOHNNIE SIMPSON, Jr.** is a graduate of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House and a recovering workaholic. He would like to thank God, his friends, and his family for all their love and support. He lives in Nashville, Tennessee, where he divides his time between fishing and writing about the people and culture of the South. He quit smoking.

**CARLA LAKE** is a junior English major, Writers' House student, writing tutor, and assistant copy editor who is doing all this because she loves the feeling of holding a book she worked on in her hands for the first time. She aspires to a career in publishing.

**ROBERT HAYUNGA** is mad about good books and can't get his fill. He is a senior at the University of Maryland and a graduate of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. Also, he is a proud copy editor, he thinks that if you find anything wrung with his manuskript; you should tell some1.

**KAT SMALL** is a junior English and Latin double major. She is a graduate of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. She is currently beating Johnnie Simpson at that fantasy racing game. She also defeats Rob Hayunga at everything. As Layout Editor, she basically had the power to do whatever she wanted. And she did.

**RYAN CLARKE** is a twenty-year-old sophomore at the University of Maryland, studying English with an emphasis in creative writing. He is a member of the Honors Humanities Program on campus, and is at the present date completing a new book of poetry through the program. He currently lives in the Jiménez-Porter Writer's House, and will be studying throughout the 2011-2012 school year at the Université de Nice through the Maryland-in-Nice program. Ryan will also be adding a French major during his time abroad, and hopes to use this experience to broaden the base of his writing through new languages and cultures.

**ROBYNE McCULLOUGH** is a senior broadcast journalism major at the University of Maryland. Two of the best years of her life were spent in the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. She's a poet who loves springtime and a journalist who loves telling stories with pictures. She can be reached at [Robyne.McCullough@gmail.com](mailto:Robyne.McCullough@gmail.com).

**THACH HOANG** is a computer science major, doodler, Web designer and browser game connoisseur.

**JACK SLATTERY** is a junior English and history major, and has been participating in *Stylus* since his freshman year. His passionate love for *Stylus* has both tender nuance and provocative intensity.

**SHIRA LEVENSON** is graduating this year. She loves kettle corn, hippy medicine, and the colors green and purple. She hopes to someday publish a novel or at least find a serious pen pal.

# CONTRIBUTOR BIOGRAPHIES

DYLAN BARGTEIL is a junior physics and math major, a member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House, and a musician. You may find his music available for free at [foxtailband.tumblr.com](http://foxtailband.tumblr.com) and a book of his poetry for free by being in the right place at the right time. Or you could try asking.

STELLA DONOVAN is a sophomore English major and first-year student in the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. She would like to thank her parents for their uneasy support of her literary aspirations, and her fellow JPWH students for being brilliant writers and generally excellent people. She would also very much like to mention that her story is in no way physically autobiographical.

MARA DUVRA is a senior art and psychology double major from Mount Rainier, MD. Her artwork investigates the nuances of identity through a progressive use of the figure. Finding ways to reveal and obscure identity; the silhouette has served as a point of entry in a continuing body of work. Her most recent work employs photography as a means to convey a more visceral form of investigating the ephemeral relationship between identity and anonymity. After graduation Mara plans to pursue a Master of Fine Arts in printmaking.

MEG EDEN has been published in various magazines and anthologies, including the *Claremont Review*, the *Science Creative Quarterly*, *anderbo*, *Gloom Cupboard*, and *Crucible*. She has won various writing awards, including the Columbia Scholastic Press Association's Gold Circle Award CM, Scholastic Writing and Art's Gold Key Award, and Blue Mountain Arts' Poetry Contest. She is currently working with a literary agent with hopes of publishing novel works.

ADRIAN GALVIN is double major in dance and visual arts at the University of Maryland. He uses the creative process as a path to self-discovery and enlightenment.

LYONS GEORGE is a senior at the University of Maryland, where he

studies English language and literature. He would like to thank Johnna Schmidt, Vivianne Salgado, Michael Collier, Lindsay Bernal, Suzanne Matson, and Shara Lessley.

**JOEL SEPHY GLEISER:** who cares? His parents are Colombian Jews. It's like if a Woody Allen movie could dance. Poetry is a thing. Piano is a bigger thing probably. Piano has been a thing since Joel was 4. He has a degree in jazz studies and one in English. (That's right! TWO!) Joel is in a band you should google called Bad.Loud.Trio. Whatever poem is in this literary journal probably has to do with some recent adventures in Israel.

**BECCA GOODMAN** was born in Baltimore, Maryland, in 1991. She attended magnet schools for the arts throughout secondary school and is currently in her second year studying studio art and art history at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is actively pursuing a career in art conservation and restoration, but she never intends to stop making her own art. Her work is directly rooted in her Obsessive Compulsive Disorder and stands to advocate awareness about mental illness.

**ALEXA GREY** is a poet and spoken-word artist from Baltimore City. Fascinated by domesticity and the idiosyncrasies of human interaction, her work explores growing up in the forgotten, unforgiving corners of 21st-century America.

**ALONDRA HERNANDEZ** is a senior mechanical engineering major with a passion for art that she's had since she was little. Her artistic interests include painting, paper art, photography, crocheting, and crafts.

**JANE JOO** is a junior cell biology and genetics major at the University of Maryland. She still devotes a generous amount of time to art, something she can't seem to give up. She hopes to continue working in parasitology research in the future.

**KATE KAUFFMAN** is a senior studio art major and French minor. She transferred to the University of Maryland in 2009 as a junior. Her focus is sculpture, but through the art department she has started to love painting and drawing as well. Graduating in December, Kate plans to hike the Appalachian Trail before pursuing her career as an artist.

You are **BRENDAN EDWARD KENNEDY**. You may have a beard at any given second. You couldn't live without peanut butter, blackberry jam, whole

wheat bread, mechanical pencils, paper, or love. You fervently promote the wearing of jean shorts (jorts for short.) You are not “The Fresh Prince” of Bel Air, Maryland, nor was your great-uncle a United States President. You are fluent in Gibberish and its variants, including Swiss Gibberish and also Mandarin Gibberish. You insist that the ghost of Walt Whitman lives in your hat. You are probably right about that. You are a senior, Round One. You would like to read me everything.

**JULIA McLAUGHLIN** is a sophomore at the University of Maryland and is currently an English major. She’s in the process of creating her own major involving photography, creative writing, and American studies. Sadly, this is her last year in the Writers' House.

**ANA MARIA NICOLICH** is a freshman double majoring in architecture and romance languages. For as long as she can remember, she has been interested in the arts, with photography as her main passion. Photography is to her, as described by one of her inspirations, “that feeling of happiness that surrounds you when you know that you can capture feelings, dreams and memories in a timeless capsule, you can keep that which is important to you and show it to other people exactly how you want them to appreciate it.” She is happy to have found herself in this art because it makes her feel capable of expressing herself in such a beautiful universal language. Her photography can be viewed on her blog at <http://anasphotographs.blogspot.com>.

**REBECCA OGLE** still insists on believing that writing is a real job. She takes her vitamins, practices yoga, and sprints across campus pursued by zombies. Her biggest financial concern is when she will be able to afford a dog. Having a dog, she believes, will help her resist the temptation to marry unwisely. Rebecca and her Amazing Traveling Dog plan to go out west, spend time on Indian reservations, and enjoy breathtaking vistas together.

**RACHEL PAFE** is an undergraduate junior art history and art studio double major. Her artwork discusses the idea of duality. It deals with cognitive dissonance and the sense of unease and discomfort that results from harboring conflicting ideas/senses of self. In modern society this is present in every facet of life, from religion and politics down to the very basic everyday human interaction.

**LAURA PAVLO** writes best once the sun has gone down. She believes in the ellipsis because there is always something more to say. She is an English and studio art double major because art is everything she can’t say and

English is everything she can. One day she will publish at least one full-length novel, although she plans on publishing more than that, depending on how well the publishing economy is doing when she does so. Wish her luck, because who doesn't need it?

**SAMUEL PELCZAR** (1991-2032) was an American author whose works include the short story collection *Ephemeral Splendor* and the collection of poetry *Mirrors in the Motorcycle Grass*. He died in a motorcycle accident.

**NED PRUTZER** is a senior English and American studies major (with a minor in creative writing!) He works on campus with the Academic Achievement Program (AAP) and the Writing Center. In what has been at times a frustrating yet very exciting and enjoyable senior year, he would again like to thank his family, friends, teachers, and, most importantly, Maja Vljajnic, for their support and kind words. Additionally, he would like to thank the Writers' House for being one of the many reasons why his time as an undergraduate has been so fulfilling.

**CONNIE SHIH** is a sophomore art studio major at Maryland. Her artistic style is expressive and messy. She is kind of a perfectionist when it comes to her drawings, and is rarely satisfied with her work. She redid the drawing "Trumeau Statue" many many times, and is honestly still not satisfied with the final result. She is most interested in expressing human emotion in her art because she thinks that topic is the most tangible, real, and difficult artistic problem.

**ERIC SIM** is a senior English major. He enjoys dance, video games, and pitying himself.

**GRACE TOULOTTE** is a senior studio art major, creative writing minor and a member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers House. She is the graphic designer for TerPoets. Her portfolio can be found at [weareunitedbylove.com](http://weareunitedbylove.com). She would like to thank those who helped guide her to writing, and consequently, who changed her life. She would also like to thank the Writers' House staff and students for providing her a wonderful extended family. Special thanks to Jihan Asher, Jackie Orlando, Maud Casey, Johnna Schmidt, Silvana Straw, and to her parents and her sister Arielle whose unbridled love and enthusiasm always prevail.

**KAREN TURNER** is a junior English major with a Chinese language minor at the University of Maryland.

SOHAYL VAFAI is a junior English language and literature major at the University of Maryland, College Park. He has performed poetry at the Kennedy Center and the Atlas Performing Arts Center, among other venues. He also performed in the Brave New Voices 11th Annual International Youth Poetry Slam Festival, which HBO produced and aired. He lives in the Writers' House on the University of Maryland, College Park campus.

CASEY WHIELDON is a college dropout who currently resides at boot camp in Great Lakes. He has yet to get laid for writing poetry. Someday, though. Someday.

FAWNA XIAO grew up determined not to be an artist. She took minimal art classes in high school, and started at the University of Maryland as an architecture student. She spent her fourth to last semester as an undecided major, and after contemplating leaving school altogether, picked art as a major in order to finish her degree (and pacify her parents.) She has won the Sadat Art for Peace Award, and has been recognized with an honorable mention at the Excellence in Printmaking Exhibition at the Washington Printmakers Gallery, and shown at several other galleries in the area. Fawna is also a dedicated traveler, a very very minor ex-PBS star, and a formidable N64 Super Smash Bros opponent.

NAOD YIMAM is new to this poetry thing, so he has a lot to learn. He hopes to graduate from the University of Maryland with some sort of degree in the near future. This is his first contribution to *Stylus*, and his first poem that has been published.

EMILY ZIDO is a senior English and history major at Maryland. She'd like to thank Vivianne Salgado and Kerry Gantt, who led the study abroad trip to Chile. She'd also like to thank Judy and Wes for their love and support, Adam for his thoughtfulness and patience, and Mom and Dad.

# STYLUS AND THE JIMÉNEZ-PORTER WRITERS' HOUSE

*Stylus* is funded and supported in large part by the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House, a Living and Learning Program at the University of Maryland, College Park. Many of the journal's staff members belong to our program (though any UMD student can be involved with *Stylus*). Located within Dorchester Hall, the Writers' House is a campus-wide literary center for the study of creative writing across cultures and languages. Students hone their skills through workshops, colloquia, and lectures led by Writers' House faculty and visiting writers. The two-year program is open to all majors and all years. For more information about joining the Writers' House, visit our website at [writershouse.umd.edu](http://writershouse.umd.edu) or e-mail the director, Johnna Schmidt, at [jmschmid@umd.edu](mailto:jmschmid@umd.edu).

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## BENEFACTORS

The Jiménez-Porter Writers' House  
The Student Government Association  
The Department of English  
TerPoets

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| Maud Casey | Michael Collier | Zein El-Amine | Merrill Feitell | Eva Freeman  
| Jesse Freeman | Margo Humphrey | Rod Jellema | Laura Lauth | Elizabeth  
Loizeaux | Charley McCullough | John Murillo | Howard Norman | Stanley  
Plumly | Kevin Remmell | Vivianne Salgado | Anastasia Salter | Johnna  
Schmidt | Jason Schneiderman | Anne Turkos | Joshua Weiner | David Wyatt

# SUBMISSION GUIDELINES

Submit all work at [www.styluslit.org/submissions](http://www.styluslit.org/submissions).

*Stylus* accepts high-quality submissions of prose, poetry, and art from all students currently enrolled at the University of Maryland, College Park. Our reading period is from September to March, and our final deadline is February 15th. Submitters will be notified of their status by April 1st. We accept up to five pieces per genre, though some students may be invited to submit more. The work is put through a rigorous, anonymous review process. A brief biography of the author or artist must accompany each submission. Please also include your UID with each submission. We maintain flexibility in the layout process. No work is guaranteed acceptance until publication. If interested in serving on our staff, please email [styluslit@gmail.com](mailto:styluslit@gmail.com), or visit our website for more information at [www.styluslit.org](http://www.styluslit.org).

Prose and poetry should be uploaded through our website as a Word document, in .doc or .rtf format. Our prose limit is 5,000 words. Students interested in submitting longer pieces of exceptional quality are invited to email an excerpt of their piece, along with an abstract.

Multilingual work should be accompanied by an English translation when possible, or with expressed permission to be translated by our staff.

Art submissions may be emailed in TIFF or JPEG format at greater than 600 dpi. Submitters should also include information about the medium and dimensions of each piece. Students unable to send their pieces electronically should email [styluslit@gmail.com](mailto:styluslit@gmail.com) to contact our art director.

*Stylus* is a project undertaken solely by students of the University of Maryland, College Park; the University of Maryland is not responsible for any of the statements, opinions, or printing errors contained herein. Furthermore, while the *Stylus* staff has done its utmost to prevent any printing errors. If an error should occur, the journal will print a correction on the website.

