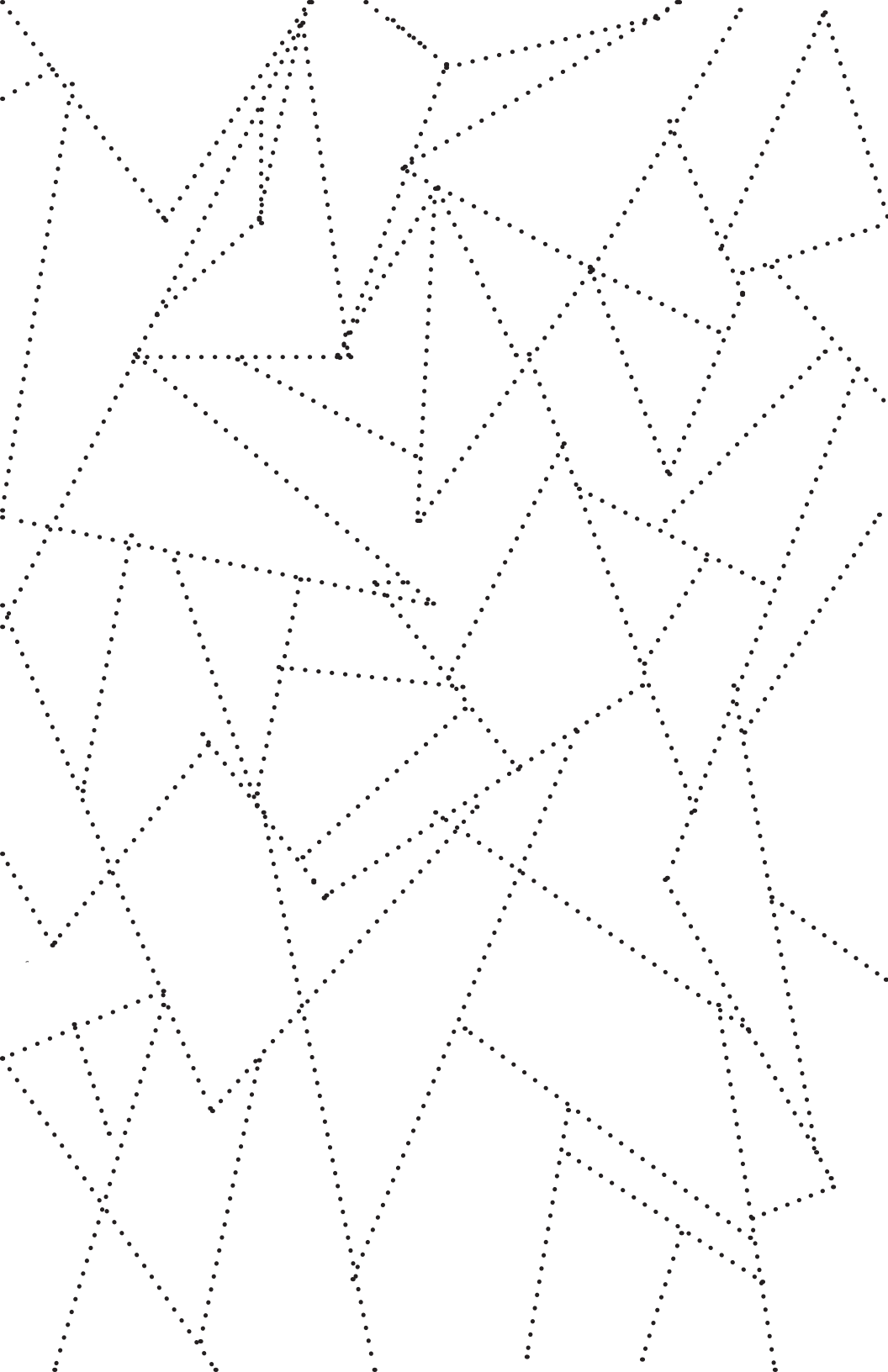




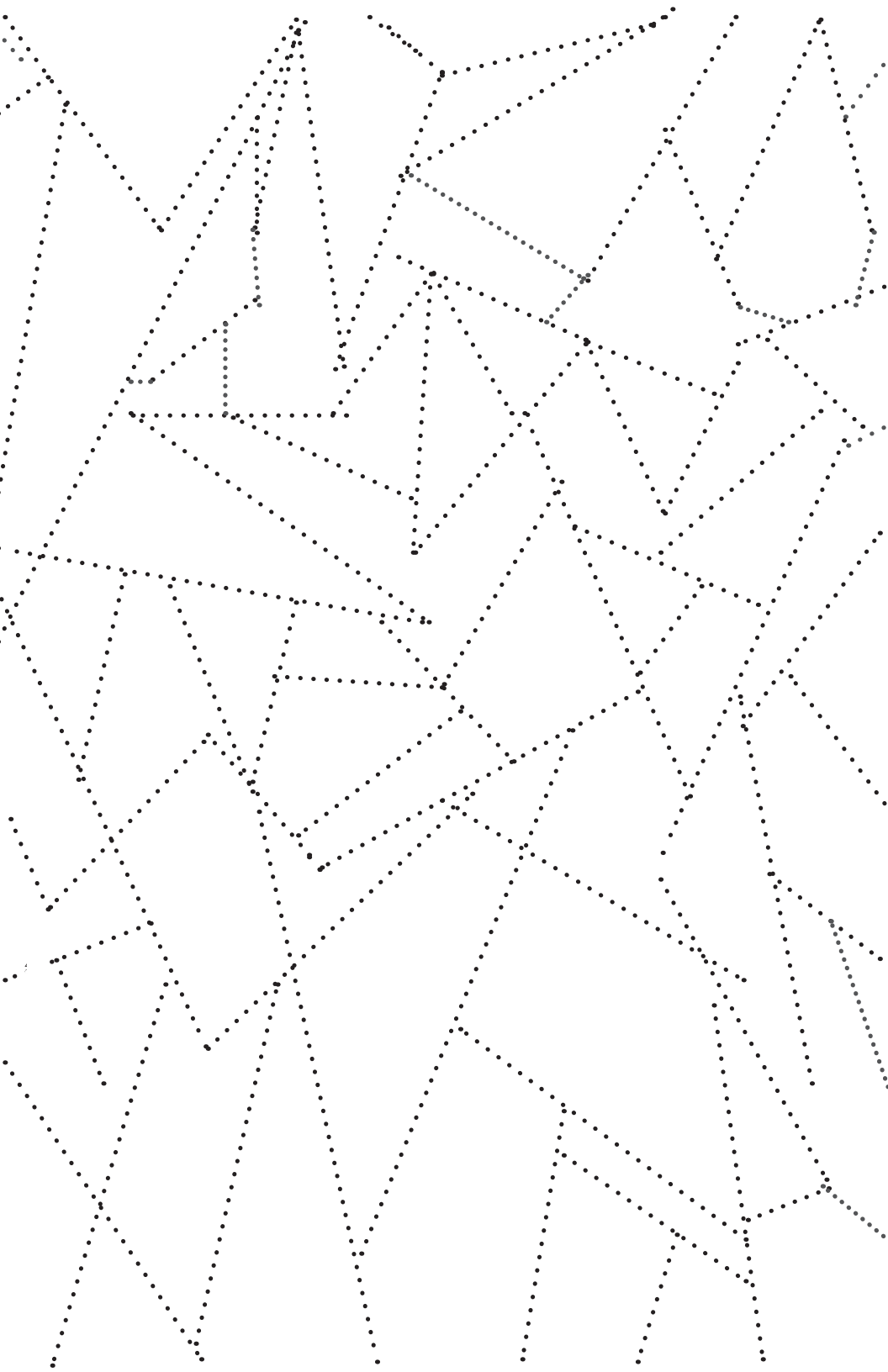
# **Stylus 2015**





# **Stylus 2015**

**A journal of literature  
and art**



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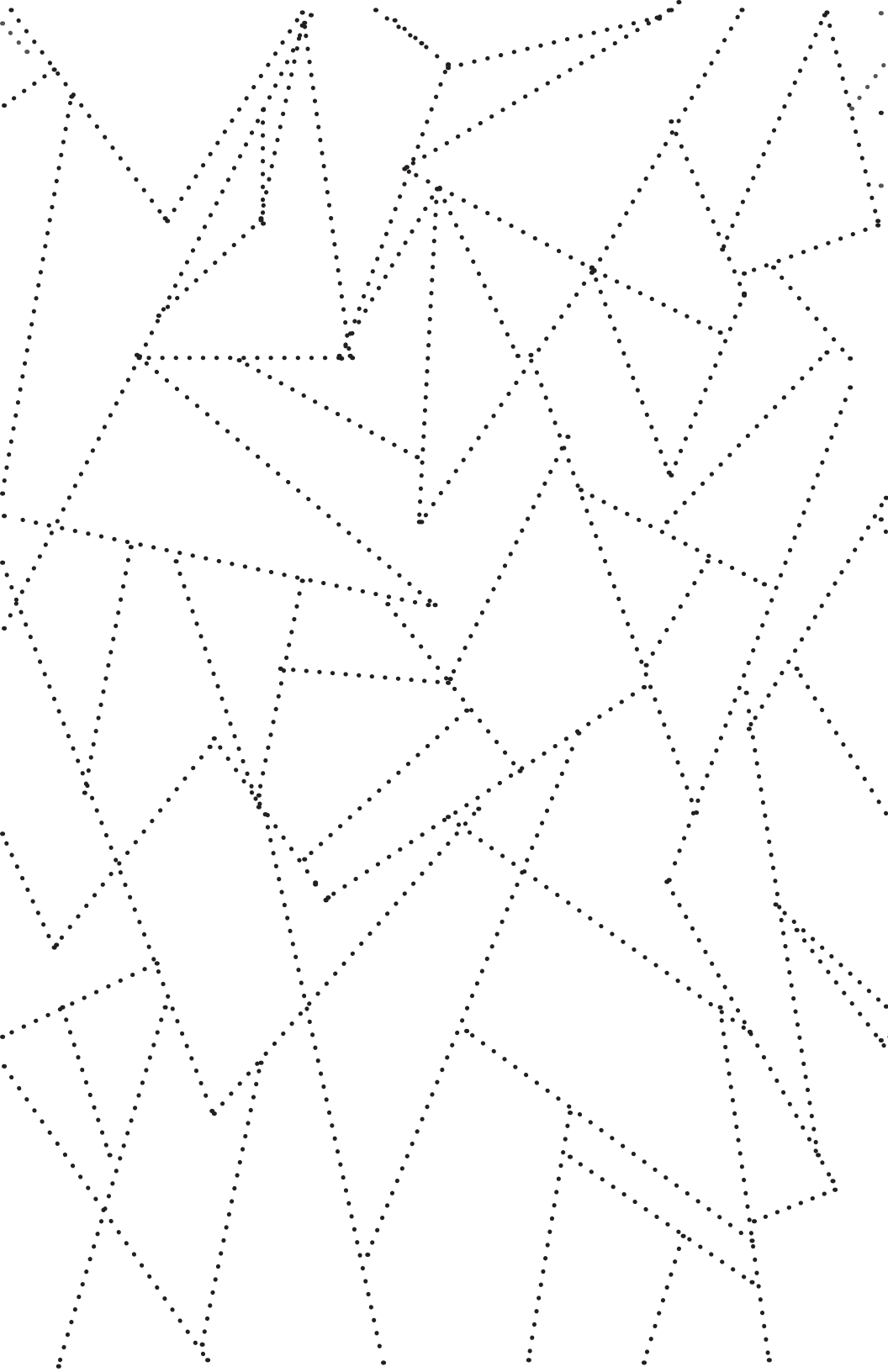
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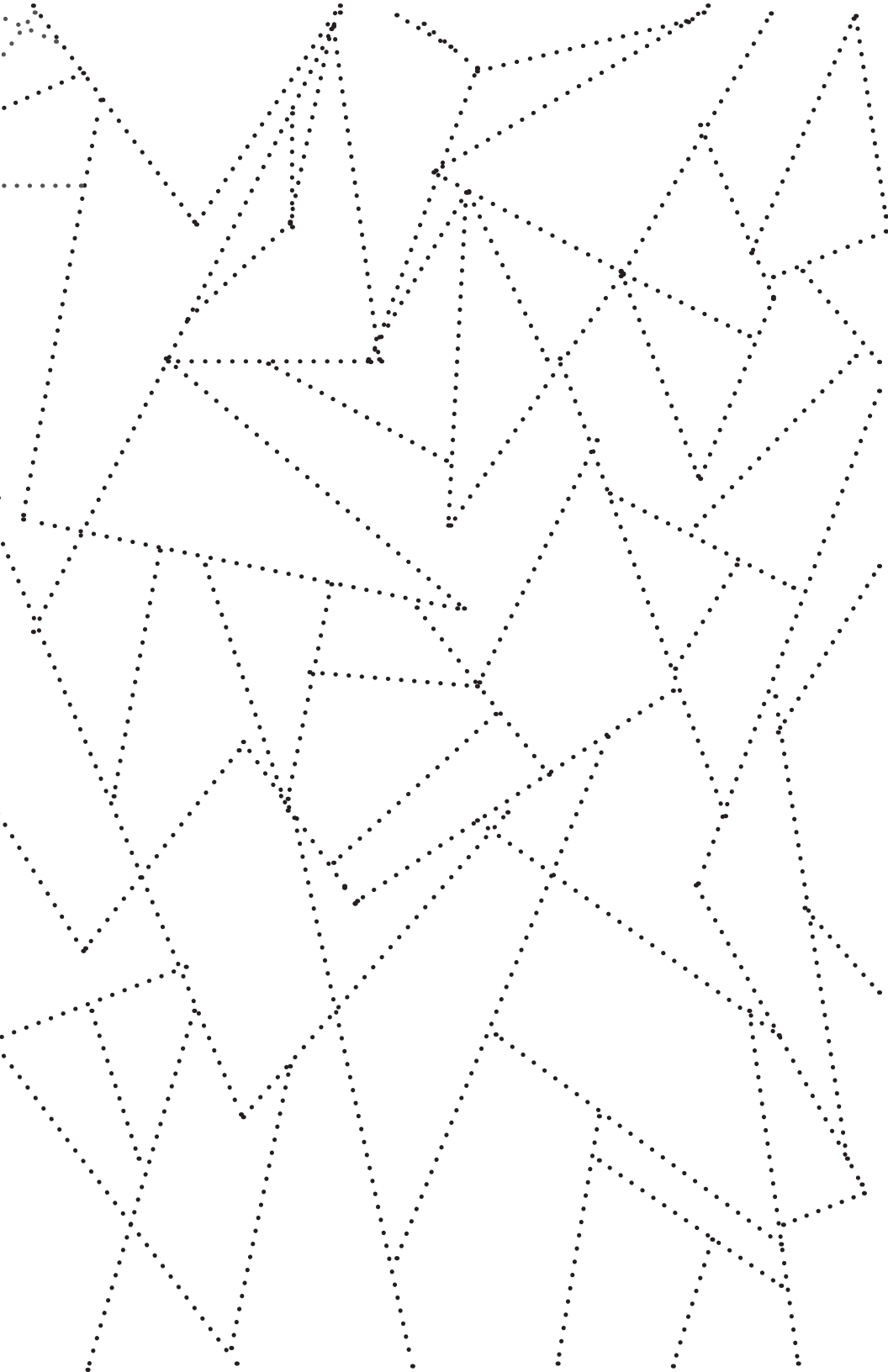
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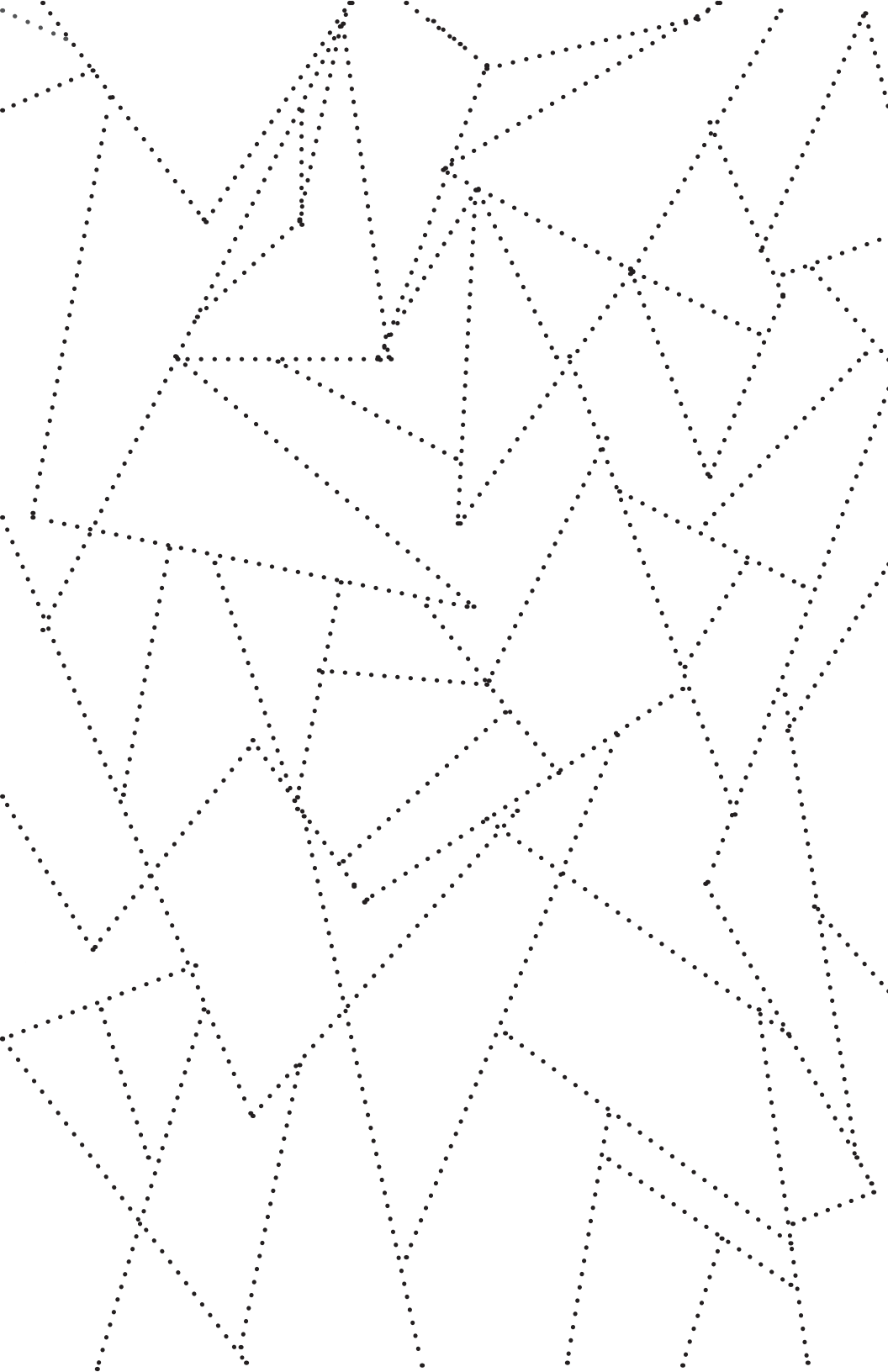
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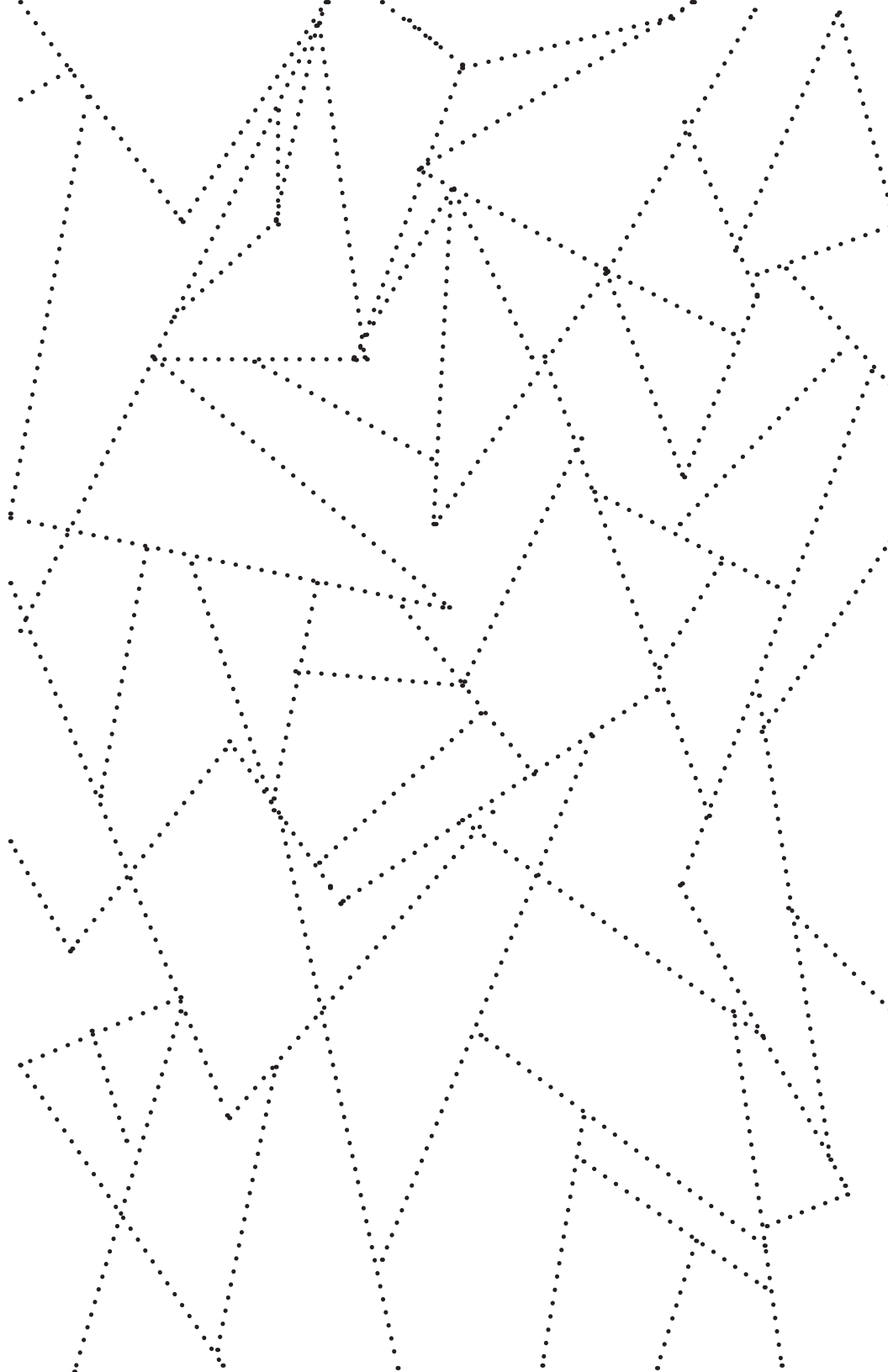


# Editor's Note

The sharing of creative writing, whether it is poetry or prose, is a strangely intimate experience. Whether the writer intends to or not, every keystroke, word choice, and oxford comma reveals a new side of the writer to the reader. This year's *Stylus* is a compilation of the stories and poems of many talented writers who have graciously chosen to share their creative work and, more importantly, themselves with you.

This journal represents a modicum of the submissions that we received and is the result of both brilliant writers and a tirelessly dedicated staff that pressed on through rigid deadlines, Friday night meetings, and stacks of submissions to deliver this journal to you. I hope you will enjoy the work found within these pages.

Sincerely,  
Maya Motayne  
**Editor-in-Chief**





# Prose

# On Fixing Anna Bella Sicilia

1st Place, Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize

1

The game was your invention—because we felt like destroying something, and the air was sweeter outside, and it was a summertime before we ever wanted to do anything apart from each other. You dragged the hose over to the sandbox and we let the water run, lapping at the sandcastles we'd formed with our hands until it leaked out of the sides. Plastic men with plastic muscles found high ground, climbing with limbs that rotated at right angles until islands of safety shrunk and they drowned in slow motion. The sand looked brown and polished when it was wet but dried itchy in between toes and fingers. Your sound effects were always better than mine: voice dipping low and swarthy for the protagonist, chirping high and girly for his love interest—that part always made me laugh. I tried my own story but mostly watched yours. The hose gurgled and spat. You were only about a year older but I was mostly in awe of you.

Mom was angry when she found the sandbox half-dried, sand still dark and silky, lying in bloated lumps with colorful figurine limbs extending in their final attempts at escape. She hated the waste of water, but always let it slide because we hadn't been fighting all afternoon and she didn't want to ruin how we were taking turns on the good swing to kick off our shoes and see how far they would fly.

Barefoot and muddy and pink-cheeked, waiting my turn for the swing, I don't think you knew how much I wanted to be like you—that summer, and probably the summers before (if I could remember), and for many summers after. The afternoon was sliding down a rosy sky and you'd filled it all, unannounced, with the games you secretly invented and saved for muted summer days. I watched you kicking a loose sandal across the yard—past where mine rested, a new record—and laughing privately. That's how I would remember that summer and the summers after: you laughing quietly with your mouth closed or building things with your hands or delicately handling the animals (frogs, stray cats, lightning bugs) that seemed comfortable with your touch.

2

The grass around our sandbox spread up the sides, encasing it in green fingers. Plants grew towards the sun and we, siblings, grew in new directions, too. Over the summers I went to camps and you had new friends, boys who wore baseball hats and were so tall that I felt like a little kid around them even though you were only about a year older.

You and your friends shot airsoft guns at soda cans in the backyard. Once, I was walking by and I felt the angry sting on my leg. Even though it was an accident, when all your friends howled like wolves with their mouths open you only hesitated for a second before you joined them, looking like not-you.

When they'd leave, you'd shrink back into yourself. You've always been quiet, but it became the kind of silence that is its own sound. You saw a tutor because you couldn't focus at school, being stuck inside all day like that, but Mom and Dad kept talking about getting some other kind of help. It was usually better if I stayed out of your way, because your door was usually closed and your eyes were usually hard, a plastic man trying to keep his head above the water.

3

After a while you weren't quiet anymore. I couldn't sit in front of you in the van because you'd pull my seatbelt tight against my neck until I whined like a little kid. When my door was open, little airsoft pellets would bounce, making sharp tapping noises and leaving apostrophe marks on the wall. You'd secretly invent those games and save them for the worst days, the ones where I'd scream and try to force open your door, kicking my bare feet hard against the wood even though I hated destroying things.

When you and your friends soaked me with water guns, Mom hated the waste of water, but always let it slide because she was learning about diseases without a sense of humor, about how you liked to burn instead of cut, leaving bloated lumps on your arms.

Is darkness the absence of light or is light the absence of darkness? Growing up next to you, I always had the sense I was the one missing something, some enlightened sense of realizing what's wrong and what hurts. Your door was always closed and your laugh was dry and humorless, but it never crossed my mind that you were weak. I guess it's because you were about a year older, but whenever I thought about the weight you carried, how your bones were filled with metal and you felt underwater lots of days, I still wanted to be like you in a lot of ways. I knew none of it was fair—the doctors and trying out new medication and wanting quiet more than anything—but you looked the same as ever when that stray tabby wandered into our yard. It nuzzled into your palm without hesitating and, even though I wasn't close enough to hear, I knew it was purring.

4

It is summer and the sandbox has been overtaken by beautiful weeds, leafy growths spread towards the sun and dandelions, fluffy and full of potential wishes. We eat out here on honey-sweet days when being inside is unbearable. The pills you have to take make you lose your appetite sometimes, small echoes of a larger kind of sickness, but you're not the type to complain about it because you've always been kind of quiet.

By now we've spent enough time outside that our skin is browned from the sun. The tan doesn't touch the white scars on your arms, arms that don't turn on themselves, that have lost their taste for destroying things. These days, you spend your time laughing quietly and building things with your hands. They're oily with a permanent layer of grease that collects in black outlines around your nails and in the swirls of your fingertips—lately it's been from the white 1992 Mitsubishi Eclipse that's resting, dismembered, in our garage. Every day the quiet clatter of metal-on-metal means more of the shiny silver objects—things that made no sense to me but are ordered and important in your mind—disappear under the car's hood. You will make a decent profit but more significant are the careful hours spent outside, absorbed by the ability of your own hands to create something that runs smoothly out of dented, repurposed parts.

I remember how it felt in the passenger seat of your first project car—that shitty yellow Jeep, I think—needing to brace against the bumpy jostling by holding onto the seat, and you sitting there, resting evenly, a monument. That car had been sitting in our driveway for months but there it was, alive and purring and carrying us forward.

# Squirrels and Flowers Reis Vance

2nd Place, Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize

The drive up to Tuckapaw State Park took Jay Henderson about ten minutes, longer if he knew he was on janitor duty for the day and pulled over on Lakeside Road to take a smoke in response. Leaving from his parents' house, it was a trip that moved him from the cracked pavements of the small farm town where he grew up through the dusty dirt roads that led into the park. The tree line had been pushed back for single houses to be built, none truly in a community, lone entities spaced out on the trail.

It was a Wednesday morning, and Jay pulled into the muddy parking lot by the information center. After letting his sight drift out the windshield for a few brief moments, he left his run-down Nissan and trudged forward towards the weathered building to check in for his daily responsibilities. This was his second summer working at the park, almost exclusively as a menial task worker, putting up flyers, picking up litter, cleaning kayaks, in general able to fade back. He enjoyed it for what it was worth, enjoyed being in the sun, on the grass. He especially liked it in comparison to how he spent the rest of his year: driving forty-five minutes one-way to go to community college with the rest of the underachievers and burnouts, staring at web assignments on his laptop screen until he finally gave in to sleep, telling himself he would finish the job in the morning. This, working at Tuckapaw, was quick, easy.

The woman behind the desk who normally checked to see if he was wearing his proper attire (a bright yellow t-shirt that read "Tuckapawer!") was absent and in her place was a note next to the bell. It read:

"Jay – You're helping out with kids today. About fifteen of them. Underprivileged, etc. Amanda's in charge of course but support her when she needs it. Be in Learning Center by 10."

Jay crumpled the note between his fingers and turned away. Kids. That was not what he signed up for. Not close. Jay had no interest in babysitting, no experience in it, had in fact taken this job in the first place due to its obvious promise of seclusion and de-emphasis on human contact. He was at peace picking up trash and resetting route markers and taking breaks whenever he deemed necessary – he had no intention to deal with anyone's children for a day, had no intentions at all.

He continued to mumble to himself as he trudged over to the learning center, letting his dark, unwashed bangs fall into his eyes, when he heard a voice call for him.

"Yo, Jay, want to come over here a sec?"

Jay turned to Eric Parkerson, standing tall and gaunt with smiling yellow teeth and black hair that fell over each shoulder. Eric had been in his grade in public school until he dropped out their senior year. At the time, Jay was quite sure that was a waste.

He walked over and Eric continued, "You want to smoke up a little, man?"

"Uh, I don't think it's a good idea today. Boss gave me some actual shit I need to do. Helping with a tour."

"Oh c'mon gimpy fuck. As if that matters. There's nothing that's gonna happen that you won't be able to handle."



Jay considered this. How hard would it be to watch some brats? Better yet: how hard would it be to watch some brats if he didn't have a little something extra to get him through it?

They went by the showers to disguise the smell and began to smoke the two blunts that Eric had brought pre-rolled. Every time he did this with Eric – a semi-weekly activity, as neither of them was especially vital to the park's operations – Jay would look out to the foliage, appreciate the way the sun lit up most of the green so that the leaves were translucent like water, like a great lime sea.

"God, I can't wait to be out of this place." Eric interrupted his self-conscious Zen.

"Why? What's so bad about it?"

"Man, there's nothing bad about it. I'm just bored. Aren't you bored?"

Jay paused to puff. "Uh. Yeah. I guess. But what are you gonna do?"

"Move into the city when I make enough money."

"And do what?"

"Code."

"Code?"

"Yeah man. HTML. Java. Ones and zeroes. Learned it while I wasn't doing calculus."

This upset Jay. It upset him that Eric had a plan.

"Who did you say you were working with?" Eric seemed determined to keep him from enjoying the silence.

"Amanda."

Eric choked on a smoky laugh. "Her? Aw man, you're in for it today."

"She's not that bad."

"Oh that's right! You have your little crush, I forgot!"

"Fuck off."

But he was right, Jay didn't mind working with Amanda – she had been a year behind him in school and was, he always thought, cute. This was her last full summer at home before she went off to a small private college in New York, a fact Jay pretended to be mostly unaware of so he could ask her vague questions about it. He always imagined hooking up with her, taking her out into the forest at dusk and getting her up against a tree or a boulder. That would be nice.

"You owe me \$35 now."

"Right, right man. I'll get it to you soon." Jay looked at his phone, unconcerned with his running tab. "But, shit, I gotta go. Need to meet up with everyone at ten."

"Sure, sure. Let me know how it goes with your lady friend."

"Fuck off."

Jay ran back to the building, a little dizzy but with a path forward. Eric was right; it will be easy to put up with these kids for half a day. And Amanda was smart, she wouldn't need that much, if any, of his help and he would make good marks just by showing up. As he entered the Learning Center, he twirled his shell necklace around his thumb and middle finger.

The gathering room was now filled with little humans at all the tables and Amanda – looking particularly fetching in her tan shorts and fitted Tuckapaw shirt, her light brown hair pulled back into a long ponytail – was entrenched in the front of the group at the white board. She spoke in slow, loud tones, fighting to keep the mob's attention.

"Okay everyone! Good morning!"

"Good morning!" the children responded in unison. Jay slid in the back, trying not to be noticed until he came down a bit.

"My name is Ms. Amanda, and I will be leading you guys on a tour through Tuckapaw today. We're gonna be walking for around an hour, so I hope everyone has brought comfy shoes. But first, let's learn about some of the wildlife native to the park!"

On the board, there were pictures of birds and small mammals. Jay remembered these lessons from his youth, how captivated he had been. He told teachers for years that he wanted to be a zoologist, wanted to work with animals and study them and discover new ones. Be like one of the explorers on TV who wore binoculars and khaki shorts, chasing rare animals so that they could learn about them; teach the rest of the world to appreciate the creatures that otherwise would like to be left alone.

"This is a beaver, has anyone seen one of these guys before?"

Jay went to the bathroom. He stared in the mirror, checking his eyes. They were worse than he thought they would be and so he decided he should go back to see if Eric had drops. But on his way out, Amanda noticed him and called him up to the front with her. She took him aside while the kids colored in squirrels.

"Where the fuck have you been."

"I was here! In the back, making sure everything was cool. You had it handled, so I didn't want to get in the way."

"OK listen. These kids are young and not very well behaved and neither of those things is their fault, but I need you to be on your game. We are responsible for these children." She was talking fast, and it seemed even faster to Jay.

"Yeah, I got it."

"Why are your eyes red? You're not fucking high are you?"

"No, no. No. My allergies are acting up."

She glared at him and he shrugged. They turned back to the kids who had started to grow bored of the activity and were beginning to roll up the papers to toss at each other. It looked like a lot more fun to Jay.

"Okay everybody, great. I have someone else for you to meet now: Mr. Jay! Everyone say hi."

"Hi!"

Jay started laughing and Amanda glowered.

"Mr. Jay is gonna come on our walk with us and make sure everybody is having fun. And, it's time to get moving! We have name tags up here, so everyone come and make one."

The children swarmed the table and Jay took a few steps back. They fought over marker colors and a place at the table. He watched as Amanda did her best to organize everything, make sure everyone had space at the table to write, help those who were not yet as comfortable with the alphabet. She really was great with all of them.

All except one. A tiny boy with short blond hair and a blue shirt had remained seated in his chair, still coloring in his squirrel. Jay figured that now was his turn to impress, and walked over to the child.

"Hey little dude. What's your name?"

The boy didn't look up from his art, continued to maniacally grind the crayons into the paper. After a few seconds, he answered, "Mason."

"Cool name. You know, you really should make a nametag with everyone else so ev-

erybody can know it. Right?"

"I'm not done with my squirrel."

"Yeah alright, I see that. You're really going to town on it. Why is it yellow?"

"I like yellow."

"Cool."

Jay watched Mason work, his little hand clenched around the nub of a Crayola, furiously shading in the bushy-tailed rodent.

"Jay, why doesn't this little guy have a nametag?" Amanda was finished orchestrating everything else, not bothering to hide the contempt in her interrogation.

"Uh, he wasn't done coloring. His name's Mason."

"Jay, that's not what I asked."

"Well what, was I supposed to force him to stop?"

"You could have made it for him, Jay. It's not exactly difficult. C'mon pal, let me help you out!"

Mason got up immediately at Amanda's beckoning. Jay stood still. It didn't seem fair for her to treat him like that, although he couldn't blame her. She was attending to all the other children like spinning plates and he was watching one color, not exactly pulling his weight, not exactly doing much of anything. He sighed, looked down at the yellow animal that had been left behind on the table, grabbed it and put it in his back pocket.

Amanda was now standing by the door. "Alright everyone, we're finally ready to go! Line up behind me please and follow out."

The children formed more of a clump, but it was good enough and they walked out the door to the clearing. Jay went up to the front with Amanda but she told him to take the rear and count how many kids there were. He did as he was told, and got to fourteen until he looked down at his side to see Mason walking at his hip.

"Fifteen."

"What?"

"Nothing. Hey, why aren't you up there with the rest of the kids? Don't you want to hear what Aman- I mean, Ms. Amanda has to say about the trees and, um, nature?"

"Not really. Why are your eyes red, Mr. Jay?"

Jay looked down at the blond boy. He definitely was the smallest of the group, Jay was sure now. His eyes were wide and green looking back up at him, and he was constantly rubbing his nose.

The group ahead of them had stopped at the entrance to the trail and Jay hurried Mason over so they could hear Amanda.

"Okay! This is the beginning of Tuckapaw trail! It's going to take us all the way up and around the lake. We'll get to see all sorts of cool plants, and hopefully some animals too if you guys stay quiet and we don't scare them! Stick together everybody, we don't want any stragglers."

Jay thought to himself that taking the full path wasn't the best idea. Tuckapaw Lake was fairly large – the kids didn't look prepared for a hike like that. But, he somewhat sagely decided that Amanda wouldn't exactly value his advice in that instant. He nudged Mason along on the path in front of him.

Amanda began her speech about the wondrous native blooming plants, the flora unique to the area. It was well-rehearsed. She told the kids that Tuckapaw Park was a con-

ervationist success story, that thanks to state funding and hard work we will always be able to appreciate this beautiful area, basically safe from intrusion by man. Jay said nothing and instead wondered how strong the weed had been as he was still pretty loaded.

After a few minutes, they made it to the first resting area and Amanda stopped the group. She reached into her backpack and pulled out a picture of a litling blue-violet flower, its petals facing downwards like tongues.

"Alright everyone! This is called a blue-flag iris. There's one of these blooming right now in this area, and so why don't we go on a short scavenger hunt. If you find it, don't pick it! Instead, we can gather around it and I'll tell you some cool facts about the flower. Ready? Go!"

The children scrambled wildly. Jay went to the bench in the center of the clearing and sat down, figuring he wouldn't be needed but still too high to be truly dejected. He watched the children move, scrounging on the ground, shoving their heads into bushes and flower patches. They were so motivated.

"Hey."

Jay looked up to see Amanda standing next to him, and moved over to give her some room.

"What's up?"

"Oh nothing," she sat down, much to Jay's surprise, "I just... how are you doing?"

"What do you mean?" Quietly shocked now.

"With the kids. I was thinking about it, and I really didn't give you any instructions." Amanda turned away from him out to the lake. "This big a group of kids just stresses me out, you know? Kind of made me a jerk."

Jay struggled both with containing his overwhelming astonishment and delight, and with shaking himself out of his current haze to construct some sort of meaningful response. He was sure this was his chance though and rallied, saying, "Oh, yeah, don't worry about it. I don't know how you do all that stuff. Hey, do you think later we –"

The sounds of a small fight interrupted his bid. Amanda rushed to where the noise came from, Jay lumbering in disappointment behind her. He saw her pull a larger, chubby kid in one hand and an enraged Mason in the other.

"Jay, take Mason from me, we need to separate them."

"Right. Come here, little dude."

He grabbed Mason's arm and the boy twisted and pulled away from him, tears welling up at the corners of his little eyes. Amanda managed the other children gracefully, and Jay was able to get Mason away from them, alone.

He bent down to one knee and asked, "Alright man, what happened? Why are you upset?"

"I found the flower but Jimmy laughed at me and said I didn't and I said he was wrong and fat and he pushed me."

"Aw dude. You can't call people names like that."

"Why not? It's true."

"It doesn't matter if it's true or not, little man. That's just not cool."

Jay was surprised by how easy it was to talk to Mason. The mantras and generalizations – how it seems most everyone talks to children – were flowing out of him without any thought or consideration to whether any of it was true. It was natural to be doing this, he

felt. He was connecting with this boy, he was sure.

"Mr. Jay, can I ask you something?"

"Yeah Mason, for sure, what is it?"

"Why does Ms. Amanda hate you?"

Jay got up and walked back to the group, Mason giggling behind him.

They were ready to continue on as Amanda had wisely decided to forgo the flower lesson. Jay, at once both annoyed with and impressed by Mason's intuitive candor, gave him a small shove out to the rest of the children.

"Okay everyone," Amanda started, "we're gonna keep going. We won't really have another place to stop for a break until we get near the end – I'll take things kind of slow so everyone can keep up."

Jay was glad for that. The next half hour or so of walking passed by in a bit of a blur for him; he could hear the occasional comments Amanda would make, but it was mostly white noise. Mason continued to try to talk to him, telling him about how his dad had gone away somewhere and that it was just him and his mom and sometimes another man named Frank. Jay nodded silently, no longer in any mood to humor the boy who kept getting in his way, who he shouldn't have to deal with anyway, who eventually gave up and moved back up towards the front. Jay spent most of the rest of the walk looking over his shoulder at the lake that was blocked intermittently by the translucent leaves, his green water joining the blue. The drugs helped with that.

He almost didn't notice when they arrived at the last clearing, nearly running into the crowd formed at Amanda's feet. She was giving them the talk about being good stewards of the Earth, about respecting the wilderness around you. The usual shit. Jay snapped a little bit back into focus, and realized he should probably do one more count, if only so he could tell Amanda that he did it in a last, half-hearted attempt.

He went through everybody and came up one short, figured he must have miscounted and tried again. Still only fourteen. Sweating now, he tried to go through everyone's faces, silently realizing that he had no idea what any of them looked like. Except for one.

"Hey, I think I, uh, dropped my water bottle back on the trail, I'll catch up," Jay lied.

He walked briskly back from where they came, not waiting for Amanda's response but vaguely aware that she gave one, sprinting as soon as he lost sight of the group and calling Mason's name. He couldn't let her know that he'd lost him. No, he had to find the boy himself, otherwise it would all be for shit. The park wasn't that big, he told himself, there's no way the kid could have gotten far. But it had to be him, of course, it just had to be. He must have fallen behind while Jay was fucking distracted, fucking high, fucking lost. He knew what he was supposed to be doing and he didn't. Again. God dammit, he thought, God dammit.

Jay made it back to the first rest area, wheezing and clueless. He caught his breath and shouted for Mason one more time, to no avail. This is too far, he thought, the kid must be somewhere back earlier on the trail.

"Shit."

He turned around, mustering up the energy for one more run, and placed his hands on his side. Feeling something foreign in his back pocket, he remembered the squirrel. The yellow squirrel.

Jay sprinted to where he hoped Mason would be. To where he needed Mason to be.

There was a section of the trail that briefly ran concurrent with a whole field of black eyed susans, a whole field of fantastically yellow petals, a whole field of the state flower Amanda certainly would have pointed out, a whole field that Jay certainly didn't even notice passing. By the time Jay arrived at the spot, he was no longer in any daze. He was fantastically present, bursting through the thin layer of brush into the field, determined and dedicated.

And he was rewarded: sure enough, Mason sat there, holding an individual flower up to the sun, smiling and blissful, unaware of any trouble. Jay charged towards him, scooping him up into his arms without a word, throwing him over his shoulder and moving as quickly as he could back to the trail and out, tears forming around his eyes in relief. He had done it, he had found the child, he had saved him. He was back.

Amanda was waiting at the exit. He put Mason down in front of her and took his hand.

"What the f-, what is going on?" She was trying not to yell in front of the boy.

"I found him."

"You found him? He was missing?"

"No. I mean, yeah. He was in the flower patch. The black eyed susans."

"The black eyed susans."

"Yeah."

"And you didn't tell me, Jay? You didn't think it would be a good idea to let me know that you lost one of the children? I was about to call the cops!"

Jay let go of Mason's hand. This wasn't fair. This time he was sure.

"Look, I realize I made a mistake but I fixed it myself and I didn't bother you with it because I could handle it." Jay searched Amanda for a reaction, which she did not give. Flustered, he continued, "And I mean this isn't all on me, you lost him also and I guess it was my job to watch the back of the line but, well, everyone is fine now so I don't understand why- "

"Jay, why don't you go home now." It wasn't a suggestion.

Amanda grabbed Mason's hand and turned. The child waved back to Jay, who stood motionless. He walked to the start of the trail and went through it one more time.

# Memory Plays Reis Vance

2nd Place, Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize

The dim lights are hurting my eyes, dull colors – muted yellows and burnt tans – swirl around me, muddy and unconvincing like a grainy television screen. I am here because I have to be, at least I think I do, I know she wants me to be, well I guess she does anyway. People file past me, thinking themselves patrons of the arts I suppose, satisfied that they're the kind of people who would come see *The Glass Menagerie* on a Friday, taking off hats and coats, laughing, swinging limbs around each other... I wonder what they're doing here, I mean what they're really doing, I mean why this and not something else, I mean what do they think they're getting out of it, yes, that's it, what benefit could this possibly be to them, entering this disquieting cavern that curves in around me, that just bothers me when I come in, that doesn't make me feel small so much as it makes everything else seem too big. I am alone here.

That's probably it. People come in groups to these things because there is some sort of communal knowledge, or whatever Jung went on about, that we (we!) would all feel this way coming in here by ourselves, that it's a fool's endeavor, and so of course I'm alone sitting here, as always. Ironic, considering.

My leg starts going. I mean fidgeting, tapping. It's a bad habit.

The crowd has filled most of the seats, but I see someone I recognize, I think, yes I'm sure of it, one of the mothers. I know her from when she introduced us at the last cast dinner before opening night, and so I have every intention to avoid her. She has flowers, very nice, and she's holding them high, almost above her shoulder, parading them, showing them off like, "look see whatever you will think of my son up there tonight remember that it is me me that can love him the most that will have the most to say see I brought him these yes they are very nice..."

I have flowers too, cheaper ones, but I realize now that I left them in the car, fuck, well yeah fuck what do I do about that. Could go out to get them? But that seems ridiculous, or not worth the effort anyway, and she will still get them. It will be a surprise this way, actually, which she might appreciate, I don't know. I never do.

Anyway the lights are coming down now, it doesn't matter. I lean back a little and lock in on what's in front of me. The curtains are still covering the stage so everything's as dark as it's ever going to be, my least favorite portion of this whole ritual, the vacuous moments before we're finally granted the absolute privilege of viewing their art. It feels like some perverse failure to withhold, an empty apprehension that makes me sweat.

The curtain finally raises and the stage is lit barely, blandly. There are a few chairs and a table and a large portrait hanging in space, and when I say large I mean it, the man's face devouring my vision. A shadow enters from my left and a bolt shoots down, tempering him so that we may see. He's my age. He stops walking and faces us, adjusts his hat, shifts his weight; it's supposed to look real.

He starts to talk. I give you truth in the pleasant disguise of illusion. OK. I know what he's saying, I mean I know what he's going to say, kind of – I remember parts. Because I've read it, she gave me a copy when she got the role, I was curious and wanted to understand why she was so excited, and she was too, so immediately serious about all this which I felt like I had to mime or else seem uncaring, like what she wanted didn't matter, and she al-

ready thought I acted that way so... I am the narrator of the play and also a character in it. Anyway I thought it was clever, occasionally.

I get bored by his speech, it goes on for so long. It's still so dark, but I pull out the program to try to distract myself anyway, as if it might contain some crucial knowledge and I will tilt my head back, "ahhh yes yes there's the essence of it all right there," but it does not, it has a cast list. It reads

Tom – Barry Temple  
Amanda – Julie Carter  
Laura – Helen Morris  
Jim – John Young

and I ponder the names, resting the longest on the third one obviously, but she's not on the stage yet. I think the rest of the play will explain itself and he exits, but the lights don't go down, the two women come on stage and sit on the table and of course yes she's one of them, the younger one, which makes sense she's always the younger one. She's in a big old dress and it looks fine but the neckline softens her chin, which I do not like, sort of silly I guess to think that but I do. They call him back to the table and pretend to eat and pretend to talk.

I recognize these lines; she had me read them with her around our table to practice. After we finished dinner every night for a week we did this scene. I didn't like doing it because I didn't like reading for both of the other parts, especially when she didn't have lines right after – I felt stupid, lost, fumbling over the words like a drunk dancer, trying to switch back and forth, and I think she thought it was funny that I was trying to understand these two characters at once and couldn't, she thought I was trying to prove something to her, like I could do this too if I wanted, I could be a character, but I wasn't trying to do that I was just reading. And we never moved on to a different section, I asked if we could, but she said that the opening scene was so important to establish character, that she had to get this right or else everything else is for shit. Well alright, I said, what is your character then maybe I can help. She stared at me and she didn't want my help with that, her brown hair parted in the middle, framing her aggravation.

"Frail."

She said Laura was supposed to be frail. And I said OK well hmmm then why are you talking so loud shouldn't you be quieter if she's timid and her expression didn't change and she said this was the theatre you have to project it isn't like a film c'mon you know that that's what makes this so hard I have to get to the core of this person on that stage and do it for everyone to be able to see and hear I have to become a larger version of her, a version of this shy person that is available to everyone in the room and it's not easy so that's why I'm practicing because I need to because everyone needs to.

"Oh sorry." She got up and went to bed and I read back through my lines, I know what's coming!

It wasn't always like that, at least I don't think it was. Maybe I just couldn't see it before, but no that seems arbitrary. When we met, in the bar I used to go to after work with



Henry, who I really should call actually because I need to know when those performance reviews are due and I know that he takes far more careful notes in those meetings than I do so I'm sure he'll have it... anyway, right, when we met, I could actually talk to her. Maybe it's because she was impressed with me, she was impressed that I was an editor and so young but it's the Internet we're all young. I didn't tell her that. She asked me about how we found our stories and I gave my practiced speech, I'm proud of it actually the new recruits really take to it and she asked me who decided which of those fun lists we would publish and I took a drink and asked her if she wanted to go back to my place.

We moved fast, faster than I ever have, I can't speak for her though and I mean anyway she moved in within two months wow was it really that quick. I wanted it to happen at the time, but now I'm not so sure. It all was easier when we had to meet up to talk, or laugh, or fuck, or whatever, and now that we can do it without planning, without at least a token acknowledgement of distance traveled or time set aside, all we're left with is each other. My foot starts going again.

The lights go down and people clap, fulfilling their role in this spectacle, and I wonder what would happen if we didn't, if we jeered, not because the show was an affront to us, to the original artist, to the grand tradition and integrity of the theatre, no not because of that, just because we felt like it. I look at the program again to find the act break but there isn't one. I roll my eyes for no one.

The lights go up. She has the first line and I think they changed her make-up a bit because she looks tired. I wonder if she can see me, if she's looking for me even and I realize how small my eyes feel. This happens when I watch things, sometimes I forget to remember to widen my eyes, and I sit there with them barely open, resting and uninterested, and it's ugly. And it feels odd that I still want my eyes to be big for her but I do, so I hope she hadn't seen now.

What frightens me is that I might look like that all the time. I can make my face look alright, I can squeeze it and twist and dress it up but then I don't know if it's my face. *Why? Why? How old are you Laura?*

*Mother, you know my age.*

It's going by swiftly now and I start to think about the actors. The girl playing the mother is very good, I think, good anyway for a semi-professional production in a rust belt city that will be reviewed by some hack in a bi-weekly as "a sturdy reminder of Williams' greatness with some promising performances to its name," or some such thing, as if he would say anything else, as if anyone here could – but I wouldn't really know. I hear someone behind me whisper similar praise for the mother's performance, and I feel stupid for building a consensus.

I hope she doesn't ask me what I thought of it, but of course she will. "I enjoyed it," I'll say. It was nice.

I'm not very good at this. This kind of stuff. I know I'm not because she told me. She told me that, when I found her laying on the sofa with the TV on and a blanket covering her entire body, I mean her head too so she couldn't see the screen, only hear the box talking, which I guess is what she wanted, so I sat down in the chair on the other end of the room and waited for her to come out, which she did eventually. I didn't say anything for a while but I stared at her, I don't think I realized that at the time, but I was, I was fixed on her puffy

face and slender frame obscured by the fabrics. I don't remember what I was thinking about but it must have been something, maybe it wasn't even about her, though that seems incredible, because what else could have motivated me, why else would I have done that why why why. All I can think about now is that my eyes had probably narrowed again by the time she looked back at me, which is surely some failure of character development.

*Look! – I've got no thing, no single thing –*  
"My uncle just died," she said.  
"Oh." I looked back to the screen. "Were you two close?"  
"Yes, of course, he was my uncle."  
"Right, right. That really sucks I'm sorry."  
*I'm all right. I slipped, but I'm all right.*

So she got up and told me that I wasn't good at this and left for the bedroom. I sat for a few more hours and watched the screen.

The show has zoomed by me, I don't know how it happened I thought I was watching but now none of it is making sense to me, the words spoken are vaulting past, oblique gymnasts racing forward to claim their medals. I can only look at them go now, appreciate the peculiar way they move, unable to do so myself but nevertheless entranced by the concept. Communication is a spectator sport.

I don't feel this way with our stories, I never do. It's easy to see it in print, whatever we're providing for our readers (our!) is clear and unambiguous. This happened, that happened. It means this, it doesn't mean that. Henry likes to inspire creativity, and he's trying to get a podcast with our best writers going, but I don't see the point. The news is the news, it doesn't need to pretend not to be, it shouldn't – we don't have the luxury of metaphor or speech. Why leave it up to interpretation? Why make things any more difficult?

The last character enters now so I know there are only a couple scenes left. He's supposed to seduce her, my her. People are not so dreadful when you know them. I think it's funny.

But actually now I decide I don't like that actor. He's big, up on the stage, he is centered. He talks slow, he smiles. It's all too cute, like he knows what he's doing, like his character does, a meta-textual murmur next to everyone trying to be so real, trying to breathe life into the characters, into the language, trying to avoid clichés like that one, and he's up there grinning and pissing and having a nice fucking time. I am disappointed but I am not discouraged. I'm twenty-three years old. How old are you?

My foot is tapping loudly now. I'm aware of it but I won't stop.

She gets up to dance with him. I can't believe it and I don't know why. I knew this happened, I saw it happen when I stopped by for a picture session the families were invited to so they could create their own memories, how sweet. I even joked with her after, playing the jealous goon I know I wasn't, trying to make her laugh again, and now here I am shaking. She puts her head on his shoulder and he cradles her waist and they swing around the stage together, her melting into him and me melting into my chair, mortified and helpless. Yes it's acting, I know that, moron, the play means one thing and the actors mean

another, of course. But what it's all confused, what if they blend together, where does it end and begin, who's to say who's to say?

But I'm not helpless, actually. This koan does not trap me, I have enough agency now, still, to vacate this lifeless ballet; I do not have to stay, I truly do not. I owe nothing.

I'm convincing. And so as the little glass piece breaks on the floor, and the tension of the moment is leaked out through cracks in the fourth wall, I get up and walk out from where I came in. I typed out a message on my phone to tell her that I was feeling sick all day but I managed to make it through the first few scenes before I really felt uncomfortable and had to leave but that you did such a good job and I'm sure that the rest of the show will go great. Or something. I change a few words and send it and drive away.

When she gets home she'll find me eating ice cream and watching a late night talk-show, some starlet giving us all a peek into her everyday life with a finely-crafted anecdote about going to the deli or the bank or the department store because you know she still does all those things herself. Maybe we could do a fun recap of it in the morning, I'll have to let the culture editor know. I'll ask her if she got my message and she'll say yes and I'll say sorry, the parts I saw were so good I really wish I could have stayed I'm sorry and she'll say no it's fine and then go to bed and I'll keep watching, imagining myself on the couch next to all those people with handlers and teams, and I wonder what I would say to the host, if I was deemed worthy to be beamed into strangers' households and could tell my quirky little tales to reassure everyone that the me they don't know is the me worth knowing, which of course is true of everyone of course of course of course.

"I'm not very good at this."

# Remission Lyla Lawless

3rd Place, Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize

The first time I went into remission, I shrieked and hugged my oncologist. I pushed my shaking hands against that crisp hospital paper while he showed me the spotless scans, then threw my thin arms around his neck, taking flight. He didn't know how to react to my fragile limbs, incarnated suddenly from months of PET scan images. But he patted my shoulder anyway, that darling little man, eyes crinkling behind his thick glasses. He was pleased, too. He just didn't know how to be filled up with happiness like I did then. The only language he spoke was probability, which must always consider the odds.

The first time I went into remission, I saw Dad bawl in front of me for the first time. I knew he'd cried a lot before that, because no one's eyes get that red from taking long showers or buying Cokes out of the hall vending machine. He didn't say a word during my appointment, but took my scans from Mom when we got in the car to drive home from the hospital, handling them like they were the original Dead Sea Scrolls. Before turning the key in the ignition, he laid them flat against the steering wheel and stared, drinking them in. Then he dropped his forehead against the papers and cried right there, for ten minutes, while Mom rubbed his shoulders and I held his hand, until the scans were so damp and creased that we had to order a new set for our records.

The first time I went into remission, I filled my stomach to bursting with eight different kinds of cookies baked by my Oma's Bible study, a little flock of woolly-haired saints. They took generations of love scripted on their dog-eared recipe cards and translated them to flour, eggs, and sugar. Pairs of them appeared on my doorstep with Saran-wrapped platters and Tupperware, hair full of sparkling raindrops from the summer storm clouds that rushed through the sky every afternoon the week my parents shared the good news. My Oma's Bible study friends, unruffled, shook their umbrellas out on our doormat and blessed the Lord. I was sure they were angels. They had tottered up to Heaven's front door and rattled its golden knocker, persuaded God on my behalf with china plates of their best offerings. God, like me, was a fan of white chocolate macadamia nut.

The first time I went into remission, I went back to school on a Thursday and got a standing ovation from Mr. Slokowski's earth science class. Every single person was smiling, even gloomy black-hoodie-and-eyeliner Jackie, who had dressed Goth before any of us were old enough to take interest in the fashion, let alone the word. She'd never spoken to me, busy as she always was inking dark, complicated patterns in the corners of her skull-and-crossbones notebooks. She had never even looked up when Mr. Slokowski canceled homework or swirls of February snow won us an early dismissal, but the day I came back to school in remission, my presence transformed people. I was the first spring crocus, or

a flock of new ducklings tumbling after their mother. I knew, at long, long last, the joy of being good news.

The first time I went into remission, I bought a 16-month calendar and wrote in all my friends' and relatives' birthdays so I would never forget another present. It was June,

and by the end of the calendar, my little sister Elodie would have just turned four. At that point she still wobbled when she walked, like I sometimes had during treatment. But when I bought that calendar, I pictured the day both of us would be in control of our limbs. I pictured us doing homework at the breakfast nook together, fists curled around crayons and pens. We would no longer hold someone's hand to move forward; we would sketch out our own dreams and possibilities.

# Bees Mary Nolet

Let me tell you, weird things start to happen around that time of year when the bees begin to go crazy. Their queens die and they lose their minds. Their worlds fall apart and they become suicidal; they'll fly right up to you and land on you if you're holding something sweet, they'll even sting you for no reason—then they die. Lots of things die—I mean I obviously know that everything dies—everything that has got a life to begin with, at least. There's just something about the bees though—the abrupt way their lives fall apart. That kinda something is extra sad about the bees, I think.

I keep my hands low, palms always facing down, and my toes pointed in so that the sky doesn't fall. No one really notices much and that's okay because I think it would only make people wonder, and I don't want everyone to worry about the sky falling and their worlds ending. Look at the bees; their queens die and everything goes to crap. You know why it goes to crap? Well I can't be one hundred percent sure, but I think it's because the bees notice when their queen dies. They lose their leader and forget how to just be. Maybe if none of them ever noticed they'd keep on pollinating the flowers—maybe even then the leaves wouldn't fall from the trees and the flowers would continue to look pretty all year. I mean probably not because I think that has something to do with the weather, and the temperature or something, but you can't take my word for much because I'm no scientist. I consider myself more of a quiet thinker, to be honest. When I talk I do it for the people around me, not because I really want to share what I'm thinking—I just want to keep everyone happy. It's important that everyone stays happy; that way they don't worry about the sky falling and their worlds ending.

My momma used to always tell me that everything would be fine. I would be okay, she would be okay, and Daddy and Lara would be too, of course. I wanted to believe her, but I just didn't think she could be fully aware of all the little things that could make the sky fall. Plus every now and then Momma would have one of her spells that made it hard for her to be our momma. Lara told me it wasn't our fault but that we still had to be extra good when she was sick. At eight years old I began wearing ski goggles. I wanted to wear a helmet because I thought that would offer me more protection in case the sky fell, but my teacher told me I couldn't wear a helmet in school. Apparently helmets fall under the "no hats allowed policy," and just because mine was for protection didn't make me exempt. Lara told me the ski goggles would be a good compromise because they were pretty sturdy and at least my eyes would be protected in case the sky began falling and I needed to find her, Momma, and Daddy.

That's the worst part of the world ending. If the world ends, who is going to be left? I for one cannot decide if it would be worse to be the last one standing or the first one gone. It's hard to decide because I think by being the first one gone you get to miss all the sadness of watching everyone else leave, but if you're the last one gone you get the joy of having spent the most time with everyone who matters most. I never want the sky to fall, so I keep my toes pointed inward and my hands low, palms always facing down.

Lara never worried about anything. She liked to tease me by grabbing my hand quick and turning it over, making my palm point to the sky. My face would turn red and I would shriek and cry and get so mad at her. I don't think she realized what she was doing. What

kind of danger she was putting us all in, making it so that the sky might fall. Lara never let anyone at school pick on me for my ski goggles. She told the whole school that I had to wear them every day because I was enrolled in a government training program and that one day I would be able to be a super spy for the government—all because my vision was going to be so enhanced from wearing the ski goggles all the time. That shut everyone in school up real quick, in part because it came from Lara, but also I think they were afraid that I would spy on them once I started working for the government.

Lara would talk a mile a minute. It was hard not to listen and be mesmerized by every word she said. She was also sort of a fibber sometimes, but most people let her get away with it because they either didn't realize it was a lie or else they wanted her to like them. I remember one time I was in third grade and Lara was in fifth, and she told Principal Montgomery that my momma and my daddy had taken us girls to Disneyland for the weekend. She told Ms. Montgomery all about meeting Cinderella and riding on the teacups. Later that day, when I was waiting at the water fountain during recess, Ms. Montgomery came up to me and my palms got real sweaty thinking maybe she had heard bad news about the sky or something. I turned my toes way in and lowered not only my hands but my head as well.

"Jenny," Ms. Montgomery said. "Why are you being so shy now? I just ran into your sister a little earlier and heard all about your trip to Disneyland. Was it your first time there? How did you like it?"

I could only stare at my toes. There was no trip to Disneyland and even at eight I knew there never would be. All I could do was look at Ms. Montgomery and shake my head before running off. At pick up time Ms. Montgomery asked Momma about it and Momma gave her that one-eyebrow-raised puzzled look before saying there was no trip to Disneyland. In the car she scolded Lara for lying and Lara didn't speak to me for a week.

"Why couldn't you have just said you had a great time?" Lara yelled at me. I could only tuck my toes in further and hold my hands down lower, I can't deal with Lara being angry with me—I never could.

It wasn't until Momma realized that when Daddy said he was going to work he never seemed to make it there that things began to get real bad. I swear it was just that time of year too—when the bees go insane. I got stung twice in one week, which was unheard of, Lara told me, but then she got stung too so I think she believed me a little after that.

When I first heard Momma yelling at Daddy, I rushed into Lara's room and climbed in her bed.

"Adults fight," she told me. "That's what they do. That's why you're supposed to do fun things when you're still small."

Lara held me all night that night, and even as I slept, I kept my hands down, toes in, and palms facing the ground. I could tell there was a rumble in the sky somewhere and that sometime soon it was maybe going to try and fall.

"Lara," I whispered in the dark. "I think it's gonna happen soon."

"What's gonna happen soon," she mumbled back.

"The sky falling, I know it."

Lara didn't respond. Instead she turned and wrapped her pale, thin arms around me and laced her fingers through mine. Each one of her fingernails was painted a different color because Lara didn't believe you should only have to choose one of anything.

That morning at breakfast Daddy wasn't home. Momma looked older than her 33 years, and her eyes seemed a bit puffy. Momma wasn't beautiful, and she couldn't afford to shop at the big stores with the marble floors like some of the other mothers I knew. Yet she always had a smile for anyone and everyone—you wanted to like her, though I knew plenty of folks who spent more of their time pitying her. She was a lot more like me than Lara. There were times when Daddy would come home and get real mad because there was no dinner. I always felt bad for Momma then because it wasn't her fault she sometimes got too tired to get out of bed. Sometimes Momma would have to stay in her nightgown for a couple days; her stomach probably hurt or something. At those times Lara would get real bossy with me, and even sometimes with Daddy. She would instruct us as to what to do and how loud we were allowed to be. She often wouldn't even let me into Momma's room to see her when she got like that. I never blamed Momma when she had one of her spells, but it woulda been nice if they didn't happen so often.

On the third day of Daddy being gone I begged Lara to tell me where he was but she shushed me instead. I knew Momma told Lara things that neither of them ever mentioned to me. When Nana died I started to tug at my hair and ever since then everyone started keeping secrets from me. I knew I must be missing something but Lara wasn't gonna tell me. My hands raked through my hair until I noticed that I was maybe lifting my palms too high, and you better bet I glued those things to my sides right then. We walked to school that day in silence until Lara turned to me sharply and said in a cool tone that was unlike her, "Maybe keeping your hands low and your toes turned in is actually what's hurting us. Today, maybe—just for today Jenny, try doing the opposite. Maybe if you do the opposite Daddy will come home." I knew she had noticed I was walking slower on account of my toes being so far turned in.

Lara's hazel eyes, which often reminded me of a kaleidoscope, pooled with water. Lara never cried. Lara could take down the biggest bully in school with just a few words, and now she was crying because maybe it was my fault that Daddy had gone. I felt a fear worse than ever before. My mouth went dry and my heart pulsed. How could I explain to Lara that if I didn't do these things, the sky would fall and then Daddy could never come home and Momma would be gone, and Ms. Montgomery, and everyone else too?

"Do it." Lara said, her usual commanding tone having returned to her voice. "Just this one day, just for me, Jenny."

Though I could feel my knees quiver, I nodded. Lara protected me more than anyone else I had ever met, even Momma.

"Good," Lara said. "Just this one day, Jenny, and everything will get better."

I sat in class that day and stared at my desk. Every pencil point seemed dangerously sharp. I asked the little brown girl next to me who never spoke if she would like to trade pencils. Hers seemed to be the only one duller than mine. Fighting every urge to flip my hands over and turn my toes in was nearly unbearable. At lunch time, the teacher called me to the front of the class and asked if I was feeling all right.

"Yes, ma'am," I replied while staring down at my toes to make sure I didn't point them



inward.

I made it through recess by sitting on a bench, watching my toes and making sure they didn't do anything that Lara had instructed them not to. I caught no sight of Lara, but that wasn't rare because she was always off leading a gaggle of girls, and sometimes even boys, on some adventure that left everyone talking even after lunch had ended. Sometimes Lara's adventures got her in trouble. She was always trying to sneak off to the ravine during recess because she said it was a magical place. One time a little girl following her couldn't make the leap across and broke her wrist.

The bell rang, ending my self-imposed timeout on the bench. I shuffled my feet back up to room 203, and sat at my desk with my palms facing up. I was doing it for Lara; I had to—she told me to.

Ms. Montgomery entered the classroom shortly following the end of recess. She stood in the doorway, her long, lean figure imposing a commanding presence. Her long pencil skirt and slightly too-sharp features gave the class a vibe that made us wonder who had done something wrong.

"Jenny," she said in a soothing voice that in no way matched her sharp features or the look of pain on her face. "I need you to come with me; your dad is waiting for you."

I rose from my chair, unsure of whether to be excited or nervous about the arrival of my father. Maybe Lara was right? Maybe it was my actions that caused Daddy to leave, and that by stopping them I was able to bring him back. My heart that had been fluttering all day sped up a beat. I looked down at my palms and wondered what power they held.

As we entered the office the part of me that was excited to see Daddy deflated like a week old balloon. Dad's eyes were red like they sometimes were when he came home from playing poker with his buddies; only he didn't smell like he normally did when he came from poker.

"Daddy?" I asked as I felt my panic begin to rise. He didn't say a word. He just took my hand and nodded to Ms. Montgomery. Daddy led me outside and opened the back door of our dented station wagon that may have once been green, but was now a murky grayish color. Lara and I often begged our parents to let us paint the car. They always refused.

In the car, Daddy didn't say a word to me, and the muscles in my jaw clearly had forgotten how to cooperate with one another so I couldn't ask any questions. I stared down at my hands and wondered whether it was time to disobey Lara and turn my palms back downwards. I caught one of my toes involuntarily facing inward and forced it back out. I had to listen to Lara; she would never steer me wrong. But where was Lara? And where was Momma? My tongue was failing me so I had no way to find out. Through the rearview mirror, I could see Daddy's eyes glistening, Lara's eyes, but neither of us spoke a word.

Out the window I watched the garden my second grade class planted last year turn gray as we passed. It was the season—the bees were too mad to do their jobs anymore. I tried to glance at Daddy in his rearview mirror without him noticing me. I was doing my best to melt into the tattered seat, silently begging the worn fabric to absorb me. Maybe compromising with Lara would fix things. Daddy came to me but something was not right. I let my mind go and my body take over, allowing one toe to turn inward, one palm to rest face down against the seat.

We pulled into our short, cracked driveway and Daddy turned off the car. He opened the car door for me and took my hand, slowly leading me out as if I didn't know where I was. He made eye contact with me for the first time and his hazel eyes looked tired and old. It seemed like he was trying to tell me something without allowing himself the use of any words. I wanted to tell him that it was okay, I was sure everything would be okay. He was home now; things could be normal again—Momma would forgive him. Out of our house came Mrs. Weber from across the street, the nice old woman who used to give us full size candy bars on Halloween. She had tears running down her cheeks. The panic that had built up inside me left. I couldn't be scared anymore; what had happened had happened. The urge to flip both palms over was almost unbearable, but I knew I had to at least stick to my compromise with Lara. In the distance I thought I heard the faint wailing of sirens—maybe an ambulance, I wasn't sure.

Mrs. Weber walked out to meet us and nodded at my father before pulling me into a smothering embrace. She wouldn't stop petting me and stroking my hair; I hated it. I pulled away from Mrs. Weber and rushed as quickly as my pigeon toes would allow to the front door, my palms facing down. I froze in the doorway and caught a glimpse of Lara not quite looking like herself. Her hazel eyes glistened. I looked up to make sure the sky was still where it should be; it was gray but seemed to still be in place. Next to me in the flowerpot by the door, a bee landed on a late-blooming flower. I wondered how it was surviving without its queen. Lara moved to block the doorway.

"Daddy's home," Lara whispered.

# Skin Genna Godley

"Why don't you go home?"

Eyes pried open like clamshells, excitement seeping through the cracks in her drying lips. Disbelief hangs heavy in the air. Thick, polluted air. A sick substitute for the oxygen I was born to breathe. I keep quiet.

"You can, whenever you want. You found it, just like the stories."

Iona devours our fairy tale, the seal girl who found her skin, who left her captor. She draws each word like krill through baleen, hoping tiny reminders of someone else's freedom will bring moisture to her paper skin. She sees herself in the wildness, too much of the sea still storming in her veins to understand that the stories are paper too.

I don't know how to tell her.

How do you tell someone that you've been drained? That you thought you were the ocean, fierce and wild, but it turned out all that blue was just the linoleum tiles lining the sides of your swimming pool heart? I taste of chlorine and chemical, the distilled daughter of a mineral once worth gold. I am salt, and salt can't ever go home.

We come here sometimes to talk. I sit on the shore and bury my feet in the sand, each toe a crustacean burrowing to escape an inevitable predator. I tell them not to worry; they are safe here. But they were never quite mine to begin with, so they seldom listen. She sits on a slick, barnacle-encrusted rock, legs tucked under her, hands in a tidal pool.

"Don't touch the urchins," I say. She ignored me, once, fascinated by her new perspective. Now she listens. Our bodies are battlefields, and our paper skin takes weeks to heal. She tries to love her jailer, but lately it's been harder to avoid the bruises.

Waves crash, frothy, filled with rage, and sweep the contents of the tidal pool back into the vast grey. They retreat when they notice Iona, chattering to themselves with the voices of a few hungry gulls.

"What do you think they're saying?" she asks me. We used to trade guesses, back when she was new to paper and stone. I had long since forgotten the language of low tide but every once in a while she could still catch a whisper.

*Come back, Iona.*

The waves jump forward and coat her limbs with liquid, a ghost of the sealskin that used to share the same space. Iona laughs at the unexpected contact, seaweed strands of black waging war in the wind. Someone probably thinks she is beautiful. She's not. She is salt.

I walk back barefoot, step by step, down the gravel road. The few cars that pass pay me no mind, but I like it that way. When people pay attention, they talk.

"The girl, the one living with Lachlan, have you seen her?"

"Poor thing. Someone should have warned her."

"Poor? Have you seen her hands? Webbed, like a frog, at least that's what I heard. It's her own fault, if you ask me."

Maybe they're right, I think, my feet crunching as tiny stones try to worm their way into my soft heels. The sky loses its color, threatening rain, but I refuse to put on the scratchy argyle sweater tied around my waist. It reeks of earth, of him, and I want to smell like my old ocean home for as long as I can. It wouldn't make much of a difference anyway; without my sealskin, I'll never really be warm. Maybe it is my fault. I loved him, once.

"You know the risks," my mother said, expressionless eyes betrayed by the pooling reflection of her anxiety clicking in my ears. "If you choose to go, even for minutes." We all knew. These were songs sung to us since birth, a rhythmic warning to quicksilver pups darting between rocks with reckless abandon. We spent afternoons staring at the sun through the rippling surface, wondering what it would feel like to let the shore inside ourselves. Few knew how to peel off their skins and even fewer dared to try, but as the white left our pelts, they grew heavy.

"I'll be home soon," I told her. The waves jolted, pushing me to the shore, quick movements concealing heartbreak.

*Don't go.*

I dragged myself across the sand, littered with shells and fragments of glass, until I was too far to hear them shouting, and peeled off my skin, stretching unused limbs for the first time. Taking a few shaky steps forward, I gathered the discarded bundle of fur in paper-white hands, tucked it into the cool shadow of a long, flat rock, and melted into the shore.

"What's your name?" he asked, waking me with an accent that I didn't hear, but felt rippling through me. I could trail my fingers down that voice, touch its mountains and valleys, build a shelter and call myself home.

"I'm..." I stopped, looking over to my concealed skin. With it lay my name, frothy growls entirely foreign to my new throat. "Gwen," I said, thinking it over. I liked the way my tongue curled back when I said it, my own personal wave. I was being careful, I thought.

"I'm Lachlan," he said, dark curls covering darker eyes. Caverns. He walked to the rock with legs steadier than mine would ever be. "I'd hate for you to forget your coat, Gwen." He stooped to pick up the black and grey pelt. I wondered if I had been fooled by his throat, which concealed bitter earth, and I moved to stop him, my heart no longer content allowing the moon to dictate its tides. No, don't, but he did, and I don't think I minded at all, because I was his.

I loved him, once.

He isn't there when I get back. I breathe a sigh of relief, exhaling the dread that had filled my lungs like slow, dripping syrup. I take two steps through the threshold, four over the wooden floor, fifteen creaking up the staircase. My sweaty palm suctioned to the rickety railing. Mind dragging someone else's legs, I look at the walls, each segmented stone fallen perfectly into place. There are days when the wind blows, fierce, and I wonder how

the structure doesn't crumble under the world's collective pressure. There are days when I wish it would.

He was so meticulous, keeping it hidden. I'm almost convinced I imagined finding my skin, but it's there, fur folded in the closet floor like a long forgotten carpet, something that was important, before. I take it in my rough paper hands, shake away the scent of mountain, and wonder if I could still be the ocean. It is thick, the grey and black of my family, but if I look closely, I can still see flecks of white. My skin stayed the same while I aged. I was so young, then.

Iona would tell me to run. She would scream and click with a throat that was never meant to speak my language because he isn't home, I have the skin, and I am free. This is my part in the stories Iona holds so closely, my turn to leave. I could do it, I think. I could walk back down the gravel to the shore, ignoring the whispers, dive into the froth and drown myself in home.

I could, almost, but my body betrays me. Though my veins ache for rehydration, this paper skin has been conditioned to stay where it is told. I can't tell if it hates the thought of being covered, secondary, or if it's afraid Lachlan will drag me back by the net I've been tangled in for so long. Salt burns when old wounds open.

"Not this again," he said, and his voice was a summit, hard, sharp. There wasn't enough air. "I have the skin. Without it, you aren't going anywhere."

"I'd come back; you know I would." Pleas that had never worked before. "I just miss them. I just want to see my family." Silence. "I love you."

"And I just want you to be a little less unstable, Gwen, but I don't see that happening either. You really think I'd let you leave?"

I fought back tears; I had cried too many already. I was drying up, and I couldn't afford to lose any more, but they came nonetheless. This skin hated me like that. He reached out, each finger a thorny vine slithering around my arm.

"Look, I don't want to argue, baby. Come upstairs."

"Please," I said, trying to stay calm, to ignore the dull roar I could taste growing sour in my mouth. "Can't we talk about this like I'm some sort of person to you, Lachlan?" Lips curled like a desert snake, a smirk I'd seen before. "But you're not a person, are you, Gwen?" He was right, I wasn't. He had won. "You're mine, and right now, I want you. Upstairs."

It took fifteen creaking steps, but only one blow. And while he cracked my brittle blue ceramic bones and I leaked out onto the hardwood floor, my paper skin loved him, because it knew he loved me too.

I sit in his favorite chair, the one that reminds him of me, waiting. My skin is folded in my lap and I feel it crying, but softer now that I have made up my mind. I try to think of a way to make Iona understand, but I know she won't. I wouldn't either. I shiver despite the crackling heat radiating from the fireplace.

One step over the threshold and two over the wooden floor. His legs are tree trunks. If I cut them open, I wonder if I could count the rings, one for each year. I wonder if they would tell me whether he was born empty, or if emptiness grew into him as the water spilled out of me. Now we are the same, after all.

"I found this earlier," I start. "While you were out, and I-"

"And you what, Gwen. You wanted to go home? You wanted to leave me?" His voice

is dry, distant, broken bottles with sharp edges and sharper words. There are no valleys to touch in a desert.

"No, I mean, that's not it, Lachlan, I just wanted to tell you—"

"Tell me what, selkie bitch?"

"That I would stay." Because I am not the ocean. I am not even a swimming pool. I am salt, and salt water can't save anyone.

"Yes, you will. You know how I know you will, Gwen?"

The skin in my lap, my only connection to who I had been, screams with my voice, the voice of Iona and my mother, my quicksilver brothers and sisters. His talons rip the fur from my hands and he isn't the desert, he is worse, stone buried deep, bitterness I'd hoped never to taste. He is small now, crushed by the pressure of the ground above him, but I cannot fight his density. Three steps and he is across the room; those perfectly placed bricks laugh at me, the fire jumps, and I am still screaming, though I hear no sound.

I cannot move.

"Don't," but it is just a whisper.

I watch, because there is nothing to do but watch. Eyes fixed on the inferno, ash and flames licking my sealskin, devouring it faster than a shark drawn to blood. Salt should extinguish fire, but my metaphor chooses now to fail me and I break, thick burnt hair acrid in my lungs. Armies of needles fight off my attempts to salvage the charred pelt. And as Lachlan laughs, confident he has captured rather than destroyed my soul, I watch myself burn.

Sand claims every inch of my unprotected flesh as I lie on the shore. I don't mind; anything to scrape off the fingerprint of ash and ember. The waves still fling each other forward, but they don't notice me anymore. I envy Iona, the way they flirt with her, lick her new skin and spit it back with distaste.

*You were better before.*

"I know," she answers, finding meaning in the foam. "I'll come home when I can."

She means it; newfound resolve burrows itself into the lines on her forehead as I tell her what happened. She leaks for me, plenty of tears left to shed, but I am done crying. She doesn't tell me that I shouldn't have stayed, but she wishes she could. Every inch of her seaweed hair begs me to show her how wrong I was, to convince her that she'd leave her captor, if given the chance. She is right, but she will be wrong in her own way.

"Of course I wish I hadn't stayed."

"No, Gwen, I wasn't going to—" Iona protests.

She wasn't, of course she wasn't, but I do regret staying. I regret a lot of things. My regrets linger like gnats in sweltering heat. I swat them away but they come buzzing back, tiny reminders of who I could have been. If.

"I just can't keep letting it drain me."

I am not a selkie anymore, but maybe I never was. Maybe selkie was a lie I told myself to help me sleep at night. I lost a battle in a war that I will not win until long after my wounds are scars and my bones have put themselves back together.

We both know this will be the last time we sit here, two pieces of sea glass washed up on the beach. My toes unearth themselves at my command. They feel like mine, now, and they will listen when I tell them to walk away.

# Love Language

Anna Dottle

There's something about being in love that requires us to believe no one else could possibly understand what it feels like to love the person we love in the particular way that we love them. And so there's something about being in love that is inevitably lonely. Because the person I love is doomed to love me in that particular way I can't understand and I am stuck trying to love them the same, and both of us try to communicate this by pressing our skin together in bed or paying for movie tickets so our knees can touch while we sit in the dark or one of us buys the milk this week and the other one the next. Sometimes I will take pictures of us kissing and look at them later, because they may tell me something important about what it feels like to love someone like that. They never tell me anything except that my photography skills are poor and our noses look strange when pushed together, but I keep taking them anyway. I keep one of them in my wallet, between a page of forever stamps and my driver's license, so I can take it out at a bar in DC and tell everyone, "this is us, and this is what love looks like," and then go outside to have a cigarette even though I don't smoke. Other times, I stand in the middle of the kitchen spilling drops of honey whiskey onto my socks and telling everyone at the party that I love no one, I love no one, I love no one, until someone takes the bottle from my hands and says "I think it's time you went to bed." We both lay down later that night and your fingers lightly travel up and down my back and I tell myself that's the closest we'll get to a love language, so I fall asleep understanding. Then I wake up cold and pull another blanket over my shoulders.



# Wanting and Not Wanting Him to Turn Around

Anna Bella Sicilia

He has decided (apparently) to get a haircut, and it shocks her more than it probably should when she finds him standing in front of the microwave with a bored expression that offers no indication that this is out of the ordinary. For him to think about getting it buzzed off like that, shorter than she ever remembers it being, he must have figured flipping bangs out of his face made him look younger, or that this military cut would highlight his strong jaw. Which it does, and as he's watching the timer count down from thirty she can also see the little acne bumps speckled across his forehead, revealing themselves. She hasn't noticed this before, hasn't noticed the squareness of his face or even the fact that of course that's something he probably wants girls at school to notice, too.

Even though he must have heard her come down the stairs he hasn't turned around yet. This pointed ignoring is something he's always done, and feels so comfortable that she is no longer sure if it is a gesture of rebellion or affection. The year he got a Gameboy for Christmas he would walk into her room, neck curving down towards the screen, nose close to the buttons, and install himself at her desk chair without looking up. She would say his name in hopes that he would glance up from the game, but couldn't yell or get up and demand his attention—that would mean he'd won. She wanted, more than she could let on, for him to turn his eyes up willingly—hazel, an ambiguous color, a more electric color than the rest of the family's uniform chocolate brown. It was sneaky in the way he could sometimes be, in the way many little brothers learn to be, because he knew she had realized too late in the Christmas-shopping game that she wanted a Gameboy, too. He was displaying it, a challenge to her; but his quiet presence was an offering. He did this every day for the rest of that winter break.

The colors blinking on the microwave have almost descended to zero and he has the same expression trained on them as if watching the Gameboy screen again—comically forced ambivalence. *Successfully* forced, because he could hold the expression steady and in general was much quicker to make others laugh than to break down and smile himself.

She wasn't the same way, she realized. She was too quick to please and was made of putty that could be squished into forced laughter when it might smooth over a situation. He had known this all along, and had awarded her little things that pleased her immensely and would garner support in later family decisions. There was this face he could make by raising one eyebrow and pouting his lips like a girl that was so precious. She laughed hard instead of putting her hands on his round cheeks, knowing that he would never make the face again if she did. But he only did it when acquiring a pompous British accent, and so she would sometimes try to steer the conversation towards England in hopes that he would, unaware of her subtle prompting, pout his lips out even just a little.

When he was *really* small it used to be his hands, which were so important to her that she felt she jointly owned them in some way, without his knowledge. Their appeal mostly came from their size, smaller surely than hers had ever been! Smaller than a slice of bread. Useless, really, for holding anything! But always working their way around furniture and folding around toy cars—dropping, picking up, dropping again—trying, bending at

the tiny joints with machine perfection. How well-formed they were in their silly proportions, with the palm bulging and sticky soft, tiny hard pellets of fingers that she could work around in different directions, like a toy, in the rare moments when she got to hold them. It was easy when he was small because she was charged with the excuse of leading him across the street. When he was old enough to do this himself, he would sometimes pretend not to wake up during long car rides and she would bend each finger gently, experimentally.

It still struck her, the size of his hands now, whenever she saw them. They were flat and dry, the fingers spreading out like tree branches, bulging at the joints. One of them could—and frequently did—wrap around a basketball and keep it steady in the air, drooping from his palm like a giant seed pod. They were the extension of a new, strong-jawed animal that made drastic haircut decisions nonchalantly and in secret.

He still has not acknowledged her by the time the microwave chirps and she is wondering whether he has noticed her presence at all, if this is part of their ignoring game or if he is maybe occupied with looking at his reflection on the microwave door. She is thinking about taking a careful step backwards, with no reason not to make any noise except that she feels suddenly that it would be an intrusion if she were to make him turn around.

# Infinite George

Joseph Zimmerman

"Listen, guys, I know you're scared to say it, but George has been a real goddamn stuck-up douchebag ever since he mastered all reality. Like, all right, so he googles his name, he sees his picture, and then he gets in touch with his cosmic side and finds his universal form or whatever, great for him. Really, I mean, that's totally cool that he's reached that state of existence and everything. Well, it would be totally cool, except that he's a total asshole about it and he's always goddamn everywhere. I mean, so he's beyond the limits of space and time and shit, but you'd think he'd give us a break sometimes, right?"

Earl and Steven looked at me like I'm the one with intermittently blue skin.

"Seriously, does he think we don't get it? Like, oh, look, there goes George playing every position at once on the Frisbee team. Oh, look, George is talking to everybody in the room at once with all of his heads, how fucking cool. Oh, wow, George is appearing as large as the infinite universe to get some girl to notice him. The guy is a goddamn infinite asshole, and it's time we tell him to get the hell out of our space."

They did not attempt to hide their surprise at what I said. If anything, they exaggerated their astonishment—Steven making a whole show out of almost spilling his soda and Earl expertly digging himself into a rut in the sofa.

"Holy shit," Steven said, ceremoniously rubbing his hand through his hair. "Let me just say for the record that me and Earl are in no way responsible for anything just said." "God, yeah, man, you know he can hear you right now," Earl said to me, looking around as though expecting George's head to pop up somewhere. It wouldn't be the first time. "You know he's especially alert to his name and everything."

"Yeah, dammit, man," Steven said, also looking around nervously, almost theatrically. "What are you pulling this shit for now?"

"Oh, he's coming over in a few minutes," I said. "Did I not mention that? I'm sitting in my room and I get a note from George. 10 minutes, he says."

As it happened, I was sitting in my room when a strange and impossible light flashed rather dramatically on my wall and what-do-you-know there was a wall-sized tapestry hanging there, displaying the intricately woven message: "Hey, Len I'm in the neighborhood. Cool if I drop by in ten?"

That meant I was guaranteed ten minutes, anyway. George loved his entrances.

"Shit," Steven said, ambiguously. "Tonight?"

"Yeah, he invited himself over again," I said, plopping down on the sofa next to Earl. "And you know what else, I wish he would just text sometimes."

"So much for plans," Earl mumbled before hurriedly acting like he was just having a coughing fit that merely resembled mumbled speech.

I looked straight ahead of me at the decaying drywall.

"We have to stop hanging out with him," I said.

This time Steven spit out his drink in shock. Earl coughed more loudly and pounded

his fist on the arm of the sofa.

"How much further are we going to let this go?" I asked my stupefied housemates. "I don't care—he can smite me if he wants to."

"Whoa there, whoa there, speak for yourself," Steven said, wiping soda spray from his face. "If you really feel that way, maybe you could address some of these concerns when me and Earl are outside of smiting range—am I right, Earl?"

Earl was busy intently studying the texture and build of our old secondhand sofa, looking into the quality of its numerous stains.

"Seriously," I went on, standing up and walking to the fridge, "this is our house. He chose to live in his little sky-bungalow. He can't keep coming here uninvited. We have to break it off before it's too late."

Steven beat me to the fridge and pulled out another soda.

"Okay," he said, opening his drink and rubbing his hand back and forth through his hair to show how thoughtful he was being. "Not that I'm acknowledging this blasphemous talk or anything, but you know what that would mean, right? Like, besides probably being cast off into oblivion and everything. No more George, no more George carrying us over traffic."

"No more getting movie theaters to ourselves," he said, elegantly swaying his can through the air now. "No more being guests of honor at his sky-parties. Nothing. If you got a problem, why don't you go google yourself, man?"

"Maybe when I'm done googling your mom," I said, cheaply, quite maturely. "Okay, so—pros: movies, traffic, parties. Cons: being called a mere mortal every time you go to the bathroom and dealing with a douchebag the size of the goddamn solar system."

Earl let out a weird laugh-cough, then went back to caressing the arm of the sofa.

"But I mean, he has mastered reality and everything," Steven said, as he attempted to master his third Dr Pepper of the evening. "Of course he's gotten a little cocky about it. Anyone would get a little overexcited about getting to that state of being."

"Steven, he brings it up in every conversation. He always finds a way."

"Lenny, Lenny, look," he said. "I know one can maybe consider George to possibly be something of a pain sometimes. Yeah maybe he's kind of a douchebag, and maybe he'll continue to be a douchebag for the remainder of his immortality or whatever. But he wasn't above douchiness before this whole universal form thing either. It's just George being George, man!"

"Well," Earl began, clearing his throat. "Lenny does sort of have a point. I think George..."

Earl had a thing for leaving thoughts unfinished sometimes, like everyone should know what was in his head. He would do this even before George was able to finish his sentences for us.

"Guys, it's okay," I said. "He may be an all-powerful dick, but he's never really threatened anyone."

"The IHOP waiter..."

Now it was Steven who wasn't finishing sentences. He gulped from his can and looked off into the middle distance.

"Poor bastard's gonna be scared of cats for the rest of his life," Earl reminisced, glancing up from the sofa and off into space.

"Okay, guys. I'm going to talk to him about it tonight. If you guys are with me, you—" From outside came the blaring of trumpets and the airy hiss of flames. George was right on time.

We wandered out in various states of disinterest to meet George as he parked his golden chariot, which was pulled by a pair of tortoises with wings.

George loved showing off those goddamn tortoises.

"Whoa, there! Whoa, there!" George beckoned needlessly to his complacent reptiles.

Apparently, George was manifesting his normal size today, and he seemed to have his normal number of limbs too. He was wearing jeans and a hoodie. He didn't look our way until he had made a whole show of locking up his chariot with this giant shiny chain that had lots of spikes on it.

"Oh," George said, turning his head all the way around to look at us. "Hey guys!"

"George," I said, nodding, trying to show how unimpressed I was.

"Nice flying turtles," Steven remarked.

"Oh, these?" George gestured towards the only winged creatures in the vicinity.

"Tortoises, actually. Yeah, they get me where I need to go."

Goddamn tortoises.

"Can't you just, like, materialize anywhere?" Earl asked.

George didn't seem to hear him—he was too busy patting his pockets.

"Wait. Wait. Dammit. I don't have my phone. One second, guys. I'm sorry."

Still standing on his chariot, George looked genuinely apologetic. A second later, another George came running across the scorched road behind the chariot, holding a cellphone out in front of him.

"Ah, thanks, dude," George said to the manifestation of himself. He grabbed the phone and the two Georges morphed into one George and stood on the sidewalk. "So, what's on the docket tonight, gentlemen?"

"Actually, George—" I began, but George looked distracted by something profound and far away.

"Wait—" George closed his eyes and put his hand to his head. I half-expected him to pull a bunny out of his ear. Either that or it was smiting time. "I think I know what it is that you seek, Lenny."

I tried to prepare myself for immediate smiting, but instead of unleashing a thunderbolt upon my poor mortal skull, George reached into his pocket, the same pocket that had felt phoneless a moment ago, and pulled out an impossibly large joint.

It was about the size of a trombone, to be precise.

"Gentlemen?" George asked as he passed this now-flaming immensity, this goddamn didgeridoo of dope over to Steven, who readily received it. "Also, I brought refreshments," George said, pointing vaguely at a few kegs that had materialized on my lawn.

"Well, well, well, well, well," Steven said, trying to reckon with the joint. I don't know how a thing of that size could possibly function in the way it was meant to, but Steven looked prepared to give it his best. He held it eagerly with two hands near the top like he was playing a particularly smoky alpine horn.

"Goddammit, man, I told you we can't have a party again here tonight. What's wrong

with your place?"

"What? Whatever do you mean a party? Do you think we alone cannot finish such a meager helping of drink and smoke?"

"Goddammit, man."

"Uh, you guys wanna take this inside?" Earl asked, presumably in reference to both our gathering and the gargantuan ganja. So George, Earl, Steven, the joint, and I headed inside while the kegs disappeared off the lawn.

"George we need to talk," I said quickly. "This isn't—"

But at that instant, the second after I had closed the door, the doorbell rang.

"Did you invite people?" I asked him. "Goddammit, George."

For all of his dickishness, at least George played it cool when we said stuff like that to him, not wanting to be treated differently except for the occasional whole-hearted veneration and mouth-gaping awe.

"Hey," he said, grinning. "I kept it to a minimum."

When I opened the door, five very tall women, most of them blonde and dressed in furs, were standing on the front porch.

"Lenny, Earl, Steven, this is Tatiana, Franziska, Anastasia, Svjetlana, and Brigitta," George said. "Tatiana, Franziska, Anastasia, Svjetlana, Brigitta, this is Earl, Steven, and Lenny."

"So nice to meet you," Tatiana said, smiling, looking my way for half a second.

Steven laughed loudly.

"Ah, ha, ha, George!"

"Would you ladies like to come in?" Earl ventured. Svjetlana, or possibly Anastasia, took his arm, and he looked pleasantly confused.

Well, George was in the house. He wasn't going to make this easy. I, however, was not so easily bought off as Steven and Earl. I was going to talk to him yet. I was going to tell him how we felt and at last I was going to be free, free of George and the colossal smugness and the tiresome tricks, free to live my mortal life away from his overbearing multi-armed reach.

"This is a nice place here," Tatiana said, I think to me, though I wasn't sure what she was referring to. Judging by her abundant jewelry and the mammal draped over her shoulders, I had a feeling that this rundown rental house probably wasn't what she would consider a nice place.

"Thanks, we try to keep it up," I managed to say. Brigitta giggled, and I led both of them into the other room.

"And this is the kitchen," Steven was saying, pointing to our fridge and sink with the joint that he still hadn't let go of.

"So," I asked the general crowd of women, "has George told you about how he can fold himself into really small spaces?"

"Enough talk! Let's have some music!" George demanded.

And then there was music. Loud dance music emanated from some uncertain place in our house, and George took Tatiana's hand and led her past the sofa. Svjetlana and Anastasia, both of them this time, crowded around Earl and seemed tremendously entertained by everything he said. Earl, moments ago a sofa surveyor and serial cougher, was now finishing sentences left and right.

I noticed the keg had made another appearance, now on our kitchen floor. With his foot propped up against one of them Captain Morgan-like, Steven appeared to be explaining something of massive importance to Franziska, with whom he now shared his behemoth joint. She looked like she was wrestling with a lighted anaconda.

Brigitta was left with me, I guess. She was pretty, with brown eyes and brown hair, the only non-blonde one of the bunch. She wasn't wearing any small animals or large minerals either. I talked to her for a little while, as George and Tatianna danced next to the sofa, soon joined by Earl, Svjetlana, and Anastasia.

I don't think she understood much of what I said, but I started talking to her about things that really got on me since George successfully googled himself into the next dimension. Like the way George would pretend he couldn't hear what everyone was saying to avoid being awkward about it, but really it was just condescending and patronizing, like, we all know, so what's the point?

And the way he said you could just say his name if you needed him and he'd show up, like he was our personal little genie, which, you know, would seem okay, except for how pompous he acted whenever one of us actually asked him for something. It wasn't always obvious, but you could tell he just loved it.

Brigitta smiled and nodded courteously.

I'm sure George would have swooned if I asked him to translate what I was saying to her. He looked pretty busy though, anyway. He was probably telling Tatiana about the party he planned to invite the whole world to. Steven and Franziska had gone over past the sofa too.

George's hands were moving fast. At one moment, he was playing with Tatiana's hair. At another, inexplicably holding a ping-pong paddle and bouncing a ball up and down on it.

Then, texting.

So apparently he can send texts to other people, but I still get the tapestry.

I did what I should have done much earlier. I walked over to him.

"Goddammit, George!" I yelled. "Why didn't—"

Suddenly I felt myself unable to move. The music started to speed up, and that was when George started to float in the air. He continued to dance, but his feet no longer touched the floor. He performed these slow, creepily deliberate movements with his arms and his whole body like he was doing an uneven, over-enthusiastic interpretive dance. Tatiana, who held the joint at this point, didn't seem to notice much, and if the rest of them did their reaction was slow and imperceptible.

The whole room began to blur. George moved faster, looking less and less like a normal human at all.

"Dammit! Shit! Are you seriously going to do this in our house?" I screamed, but I couldn't hear myself over the unnatural music. "Don't be a dick, man!"

There was George: skin blue, arms in the double digits, moving around like a spider doing the cha-cha on a dance floor of impossible geometry. The rest of the room seemed to dissolve in the strange twitchings of his cosmic dance. The women were silent, Earl and Steven frozen. If there was music still playing, I could no longer hear it. George and his whirling clothes and his weirdly pirouetting limbs may as well have been the only things in the room, maybe the only things anywhere.

"We can't be friends anymore George!" I tried to say, unsure if my mouth was even moving. Everything but George seemed abstract and uncertain.

George stared at me with eyes glowing like galaxies, with a stoic look not like hate but something like celestial indifference, like he was looking far beyond me into the depths of the cosmos. Supersymmetrical, smiling madly with a hideous duckface grin, snickering at the repetitions upon repetitions of himself, the massive George danced and danced.

In that moment I knew George had transcended mere douchebaggery.

Then, with a flourish, George's hoodie flew off his convulsing body and arced across the room. When it hit the sofa, the old piece-of-shit furniture collapsed in on itself, as though all its atoms suddenly converged into a single point in the space just beyond our kitchen.

The force of its collapsing sucked in a huge gulp of air, with the violence of vacuum cleaner against face. A brutal wind blew through the room and into the non-sofa. I fell off my feet when Brigitta tried to grab hold of me for support.

The rest of our meager furniture shook. Cups, cans, the giant joint, even a chunk of drywall all flew through the air and disappeared into the point of non-existence that was a moment ago our sofa, then everything was quiet.

When I looked at George he was in standard human form again. He didn't have his hoodie now, but otherwise he looked the same as he had when he had parked in chariot. He was standing on the ground now, looking intently at the space that the dirty old sofa had once occupied, which was now only an ugly stain on the ground.

Everyone else was on the floor. Svjetlana and Anastasia appeared to have collapsed on Earl, whose head was barely visible beneath the fallen women. Steven and Franziska, who had been closest to the sofa, were lying flat on the ground. Tatiana was up against the wall and looking confused. No one knew what to say. I tried to help Brigitta up, but I had some trouble getting my balance back.

"Shit," George said. He walked over to the spot where the sofa had been. "Sorry about that." He looked down, putting his hand to his head and snapping his fingers, and a new sofa materialized in the old spot.

Well, it wasn't a new sofa—it was still a shitty old sofa. Actually it looked very similar to our very own shitty old sofa, but not quite the same. I can say with absolute certainty it was a completely different shade of garbage brown. Also, the many stains were different—I too had long studied the stains of our sofa, and I knew it was all wrong.

Steven stared at the spot in disbelief, maybe even despair.

"I guess I should go," George said. "You ready, ladies?"

Once everybody was on their feet again, George left out the door, followed by Tatiana, Brigitta, Franziska, Anastasia, and Svjetlana. I thought it would be good to say something, but I couldn't think of what to say. Earl looked on sadly.

There was a Hummer limo waiting outside. They went in and it drove away kind of slowly, still leaving bursts of flames in its wake.

Earl mumbled something about going out and then left. Steven mentioned something about going out and then collapsed on top of the newly existing sofa and promptly fell asleep.

Alone in the house, I decided to go upstairs and think about the utter ruin of the



evening. This was our chance, but now it was gone. There would be no getting rid of George now. We talked about losing him and what? He showed up at our house with girls, destroyed our sofa, and then recreated another one. He acted like he was genuinely apologetic for that part, but I wouldn't be too sure about that.

I didn't want to keep thinking about how many more hoodies George had, how many more sofas he might destroy, how soon my day of smiting may be upon me, so I opened my laptop.

Abounding with infinite stupidity, I felt in that moment like I had to do it, but when I put in my name, most of the pictures just showed random middle-aged men or small-clothed women. One of them looked suspiciously like Tatiana.

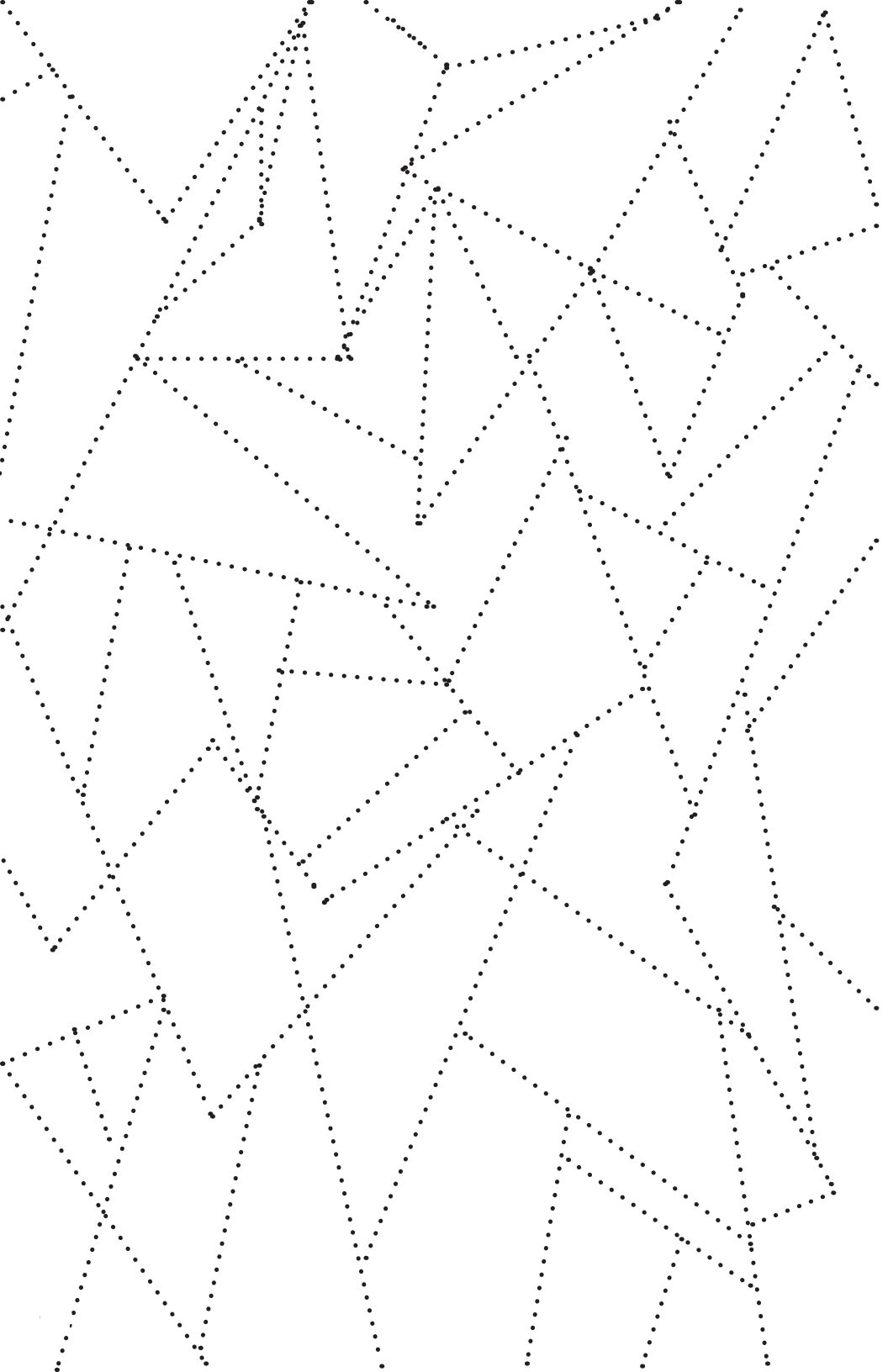
And there it was, at the top, that goddamn picture of George, looking heroic, leaping into the air to catch a Frisbee. The back of my head took up a small bottom corner of the photo, blocking out part of the tree George air-posed under, but I didn't feel any sudden cosmic consciousness coming on.

"Don't worry, Lenny. I know who you are."

I looked over and saw George, leaning nonchalantly into my second-story window. He hyperextended his arm and gave me a pat on the back.

"You're my good old pal," George said.

Then, sitting on the biggest goddamn tortoise I have ever seen, he pulled at the reins and rode off into the midnight sunset.





**Poetry**

# Nonskylesness Clayton Krollman

1st Place, Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize

You are going to come back from the sun all skystained the lucky one—  
latticework melts when you touch it now. Always wear gloves, but lose the lucky one.

Feel the sky press her body against yours like someone has built a house around you.  
You make the smell of linens together: breathing into mouths, guessing the lucky one.

The gunsmoke leaks out of her just to kaleidoscope light onto the walls,  
to bruise them bright as polished bone the house the body of the lucky one.

You tear off the parts of envelopes her tongue touches and save them for later—  
to keep her close you have pockets full of her scraps each one the lucky one.

You watch her sweat, watch her hammer the light into something worth holding  
until she finishes. She tears off a piece to share and calls it the lucky one.

The freckles appear where she builds the light; you need somebody else to count them.  
Make a mistake every day, Clay. Despite your best efforts, you are the lucky one.

# Love Song in Portland, Oregon

Rhea Ramakrishnan

2nd Place, Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize

The wedding was at a vineyard and I was drunk by 2 p.m.  
when the groom rode in on a horse. It took two men each  
to lift the bride and her wedded, four tries to lasso the  
garlands of jasmine (disjointed by beads of carnations  
colored like unripe tomatoes) around each other's necks.

Mom tells me when she was young, the ceremonies  
lasted three days and, for hours, the brides-to-be sat  
in their fathers' laps then crawled into their husbands'  
like overgrown orphans. It was all so grotesque,  
I'm telling you—After, they'd play games, smashing  
papadam on one another's heads, a kind of field day  
tug-of-war with a coconut instead of a rope....

The whole time the priest was singing, I imagined  
him turning over stones with his tongue and,  
at one point, everyone started whispering so I turned  
to the boy next to me, asked him What's happening  
and he said, I don't know I'm just in awe of it all ...

It was a bit like a cartoon I watched once  
late at night, every character a caricature of himself.  
It made me think of everyone I ever thought I loved.  
Then, it started to rain and I couldn't tell whether  
or not those were tears on everyone's cheeks  
whether I, too, should have been crying.

# Four Lenaya Stewart

3rd Place, Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize

I am four  
and have woken  
and decided to be a tree—  
a great oak tree.  
A thick one  
that never gets thirsty  
or tired.  
An old one  
that hears and knows everything.

They yell at me to  
hurry and make a wish.  
I see a trunk behind dark lids.

Yesterday, I wanted skin  
of an orange.  
Yesterday, I dreamed of citrus skin  
and its sour aftertaste—  
sweet enough  
to be bought and taken home  
sour enough  
to stop all the old woman's kisses.

In the photo on the wall  
I am four—  
just a reed of a girl  
bending over a cake.  
One hand  
reaches dangerously close  
to a candle's flame  
the other  
unravels a braid.

# time Colin Robinson

slow train arrival  
a platform filled with expectation

the first butterfly  
a blue holly  
crosses our path with silver

who are we  
and what are we eating  
clouds  
or the suggestion of clouds

ebbing day  
littered with clock-faces  
on the beach  
the world has already ended

there is no time after all  
and if there is  
who has it

# Shadows (On a Run) Jordan Kron

At the intersection of 1st and Main where two shadows meet against the blinds,  
The blinds of a bedroom window is where two shadows come together in the spring,  
Breathing, heavy sighs, and making three by fall.

Like ripples in an autumn pool— surround—  
My own shadow running, quickly running past another window  
(With a shriek) where two shadows stand . . . then one . . . and none,  
A murder-suicide with no witnesses, only shadows on the street,  
Nothing printed in the Times, no goodbyes,  
And no disguise of sleep or wake.

Yet if I dream might I pinch myself here,  
Before rounding this last corner window?



# Asphalt Fields

Caitlin Wilson

The sky is purple-dyed.  
My shadow is a newborn colt  
falling under strangers' boots,  
and all I see is pavement,  
chipped and weed-filled,  
as I count my footsteps.

My mother lent me her cowboy boots,  
a leather pair that is black-dyed  
and clicks on stone pavement  
and up the marble steps  
of my school. The soles are filled  
by her footprints; in them I wobble like a colt.

Pastures in the country are filled  
with shining horses and a colt,  
or two, that possess the surest steps,  
not ever touching pavement.  
Their every blanket is hand-dyed  
and not a spur on their riders' boots.

Construction men pour liquid pavement  
across a cityscape to be dyed  
by a march of soulless boots.  
An ambulance shrieks like a colt  
in a storm trying to match mother's steps  
but every lightning flash is filled

with rain, and mud swallows steps  
towards shelter. City pavement  
is hateful to thin boots,  
which split, soon dirt-filled,  
like the hooves of a neglected colt,  
needing to be re-dyed.

Mother owned a roan colt  
when she was young, not ache-filled.  
Named Hope, it took leaps, not steps.  
Mother's body always bruise-dyed,  
from her ribs to her boots,  
even without landing on pavement.

Every flower here is dyed  
dark from shadows in pavement  
cracks and careless steps.

# The Gardner's Arms

## Clayton Krollman

The way two elbows fit together like a car crash  
is enough to bring me to tears  
the way dad going out for a bad haircut  
on purpose when mom won't take off her hat  
so she'll feel less alone is enough to bring me to tears.  
When it's cold enough to make her stomach ache  
he's busy filling his pockets with dirt because come the warmth  
he'll reach down and coax spring from his hands to hers.

They don't smell rain, they smell trees rejoicing  
wrapping around each other until they can't breathe,  
the hypodermic scent of iron biting into iron, collarbones  
big as grabhandles tangling everything together.

# For Mark Strand

Rachel Edelstein

It's like what that one guy said about poetry.  
Because, you know,  
I do sometimes want to eat words.  
Crunch on them  
Like ice cubes.  
(sharp and cold and delicate)  
Even though I know  
My teeth will probably hurt afterward.

# Preamble to the Lincoln Tunnel

Lyla Lawless

We the surveyors of New York (and Jersey),  
in order to form a less perfect highway,  
establish exits, ensure confusing on-ramps and streets,  
provide for a heinous commute,  
promote high blood pressure problems and  
ensure extensive fossil fuel use by ourselves and our posterity,  
do ordain and establish the Lincoln Tunnel  
for the brave New Yorkers who still own a car.

# Expectation / Reality Alana Pedalino

Starving,  
But resisting  
The smell of melting mozzarella  
Wafting up the street –  
We gave in anyway.  
A week after he killed himself,  
We went to Michael's  
And the pizza was delicious.  
I ordered a thin pie with extra basil;  
Mom popped garlic knots into her mouth,  
Like the tapeworm that had knotted her stomach  
Since he first got sick  
Was taking a vacation.  
The owners gave us two glasses of wine –  
On the house –  
To celebrate our summer birthdays to come

Two weeks after he killed himself,  
The two of us sat  
At the table where three  
Once rang in the new year.  
There wasn't enough gravy on the pizza,  
He would've ordered extra.  
We asked the waiter for iced teas –  
Unsweetened, for familiarity's sake.  
Mom broke down taking a sip,  
Because she realized how limiting  
His diabetic lifestyle was,  
And how limited his life was, too.  
We left before the owners  
Could come over with two glasses of wine –  
On the house –  
To celebrate our summer birthdays to come.

# In an Ikea Display Kitchen

Paige Goodwin

You're standing in a larger version of  
the little Fisher Price toy kitchen I  
had when I was small - tiny rubber gloves  
and fake pots like the empty ones up high  
on these display shelves. I used to pretend  
with my friends, mimicking our moms with dolls  
in our arms, dinner waiting; fake food blend  
on a toy stove against a small fake wall.  
Imagine that we live here; that you've grown  
comfortable with the name baby,  
that we paid off our loans,  
that there's a slice of cake in this freezer.  
You smile and yank at a drawer that's stiff.

# Maintenance Clayton Krollman

Shyla calls every midnight—spits out ants  
made from whiskey or else love, just love,  
strong enough to carry me on shoulders  
(an inch between my body and the ground  
is all it takes to keep them dry). I am careful  
to let them stay warm this way,  
but there is only so much body. She calls  
to talk about rain somewhere, how to hide  
at bus stops, under strangers' umbrellas. I whisper back  
the opposite.

In California a rollercoaster stuck upside-down  
and no one looking up, no one ready underneath  
with baseball mitt or bug catching net  
to love them back to life. A boy kicks off his shoe  
and it hits him in the face on the way down.  
A man breathes to his mistress "if Cali could sell fire  
we'd be rich, baby" because the boy's foot is burning  
now, as every passenger watches the shoe's descent—  
half miracle by the end when it bullseyes their savior  
the size of an ant who looks up at them  
and they are as good as home where the newspapers will read:  
Man Demands Reparations from Rollercoaster Fire,  
and they are rich, baby, like someone is laying on top  
to keep them dry. Like someone can sell them fire.

If the earth was inside out, this is what it would look like,  
Shyla. Ants trying to scrub the ground clean each morning.  
Loving us all the same when we scatter their strength at night.



# Molecular Heritage

Emily Tuttle

*No matter can be created*

*Nor can it be destroyed.*

We are made of dented, rusted cells,  
run down like yellow wedding dresses,  
passed through like stained love letters in walls.

The eyelash of a bootlegger,  
the cobweb of a catacomb,  
a speck of Shakespeare's ink,  
are packed together and trapped  
in the craters on my palms;  
fingers small patchworks of particles,  
skin grafts of grainy time—

In eighth grade, there was a boy  
who, after writing poetry,  
could not recognize his own hand.  
It began to tremble and twitch  
like the spine of a fish on gravel,  
while he lied there hyperventilating  
frantic clipped breaths—  
Desperate to taste the specks of air  
that had once hit brilliant lungs.

# Till the Streetlights Came On

Lenaya Stewart

we liked to romp around  
play around  
run round in circles

legs scrambled  
knees buckled  
shins scraped on someone's  
brick path

we danced over  
row house rails  
side-skipped down steps  
leapt over cracks

ran inside for water  
ran outside for more play  
in shade cast from  
sides of the last home  
on the row

we yelled like sirens  
talked before listening  
sang duets  
demanded solos  
until the dusk.

# My Mother Says Some Things Grow Too Fast

Carmen Dodl

It is 1995.

I am three, and  
my mother is standing on the sidewalk  
next to our brick house on Forest Hill Avenue,  
hands gentle at her sides and speckled  
with garden soil,  
but what I remember most is the pink dress  
she was wearing that day and  
how she didn't care about  
getting it dirty because  
her lavender flowers (seven of them)  
had bloomed too soon before spring  
and she wanted to save them  
before the sun went down.

"We'll put them in a vase," she said.

"So they can live just a little longer."

I'd watch her clip the stems gently,  
but with each snap I'd wince, just a little.  
I am twenty now, but  
every few months, my mother  
tells me I look taller.

# Third Rail

David Jenkins

On Sunday nights we gather to forget  
we're going to die.  
(it's not like church at all so don't get any ideas)

Mr. Lonely wearing Seinfeld's shoes  
plays six string music on only five,  
tastefully out of tune.

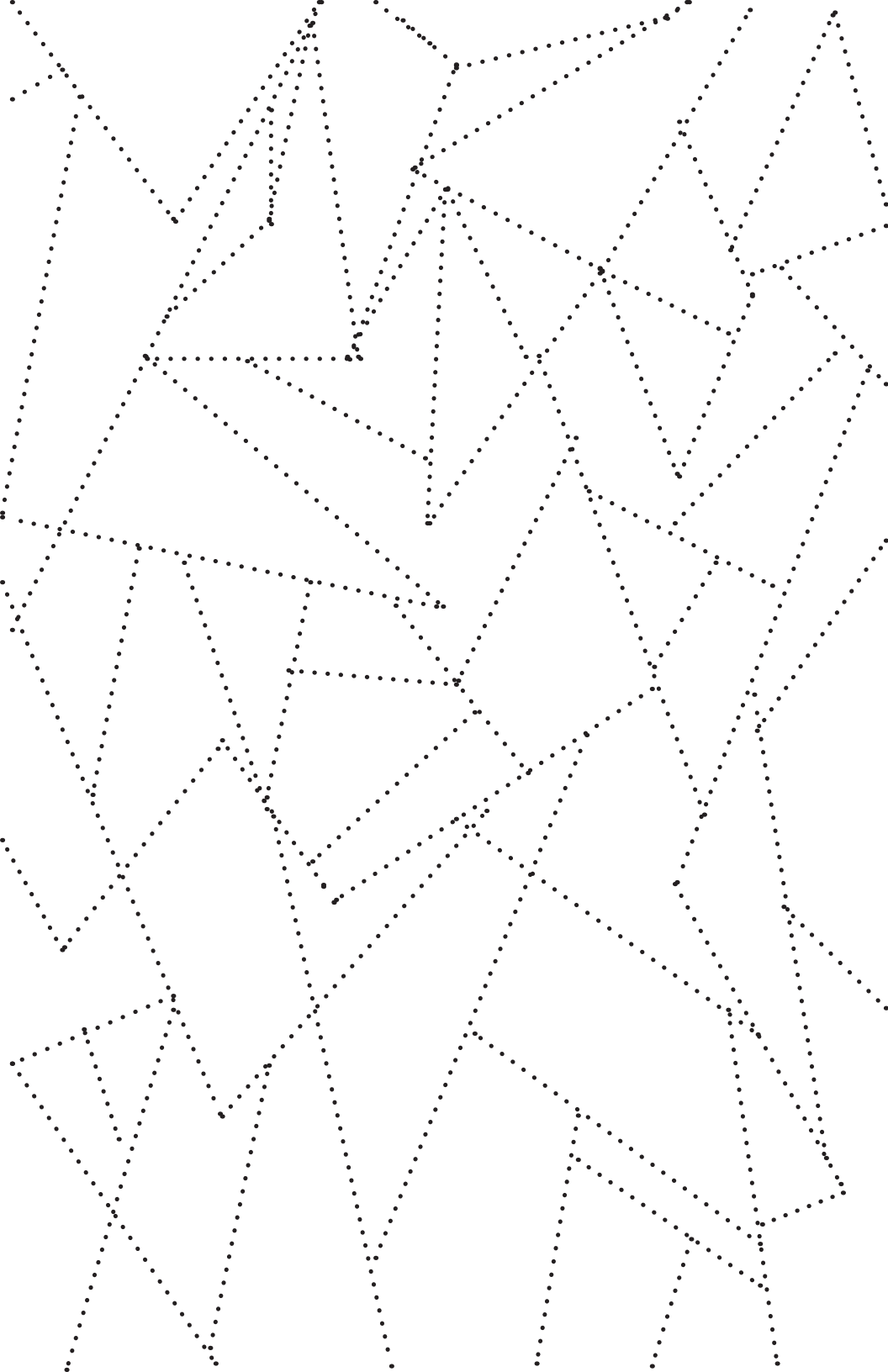
And Sunny, with his crooked teeth,  
won't take anyone seriously when they are making  
their hilarious noises,

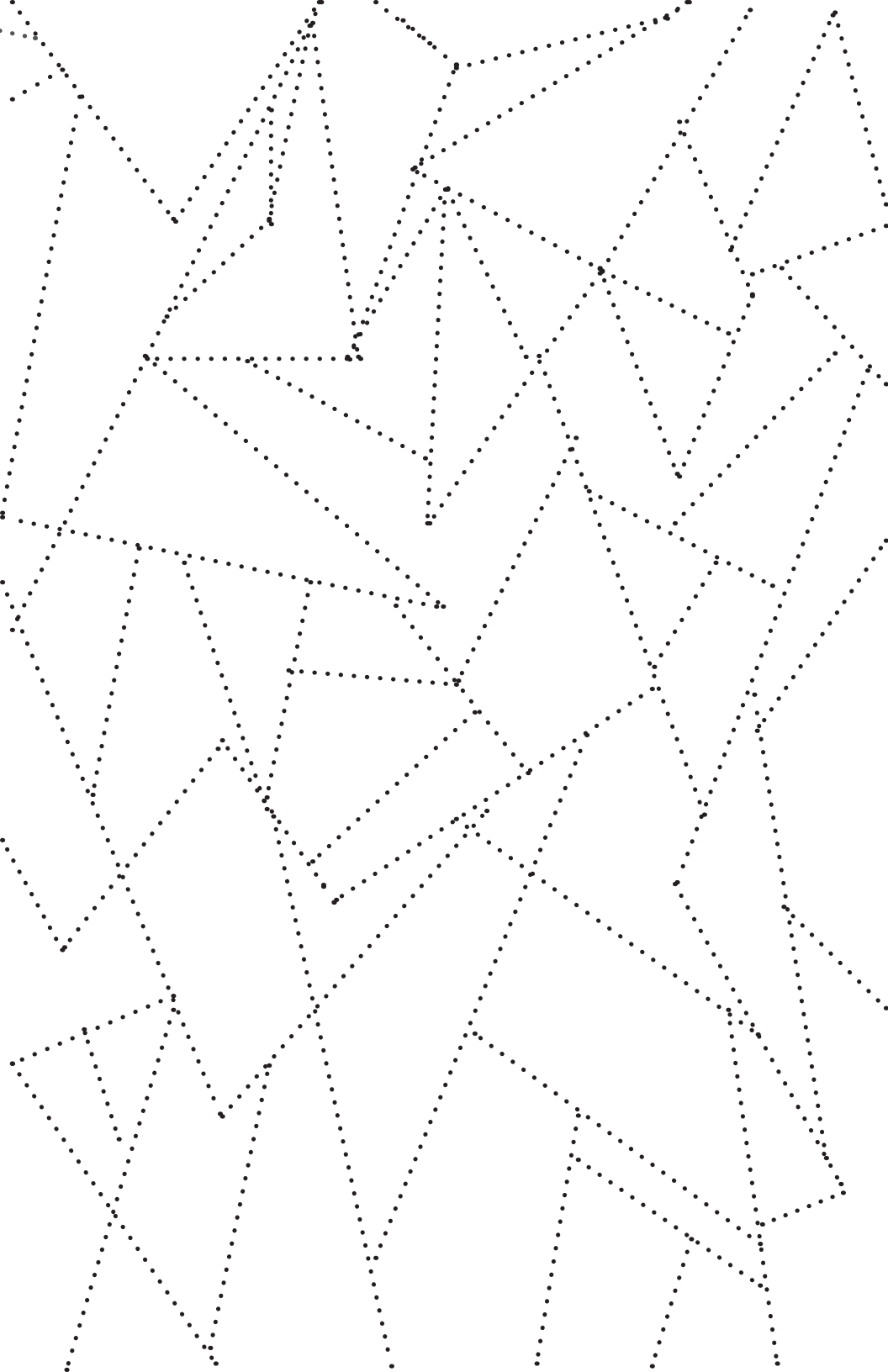
which of course upsets Dean's neurosis.  
And everyone is enjoying their knitwear  
because it hasn't been cold in a while.  
I wore my nice shoes.

John has a seizure and everyone claps.

To the kids who came for the show, it's precious,  
like a carbuncle;  
to the kids who just wanted some late night pizza, it's disturbing,  
like a carbuncle.

"Peanuts" is a stupid name for a song;  
thank God Maria laughed.





# Our Staff

## **Maya Motayne** *Editor-in-Chief*

Maya is a senior English major at the University of Maryland with minors in Chinese language and creative writing. She hopes to move to New York City and work as an editor for whatever publishing house will have her.

## **Lyla Lawless** *Prose Board Editor/Copy Editor*

Lyla is, officially, a senior communication and English major. Unofficially, she studies cooking without burning anything, making one-page resumes, using public transit, getting to class at precisely 11:59:59, and interrupting perfectly good conversations with awful puns.

## **Lenaya Stewart** *Poetry Board Editor*

Lenaya Stewart is an English major minoring in creative writing at the University of Maryland, College Park. She was a finalist in the Cargoes Undergraduate Poetry Competition and is the Poetry Editor for *Stylus*. She is currently working on "Another Black Experience" a collection of poetry for her Honors Thesis. Lenaya resides in Maryland and is an active member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House.

## **Genna Godley** *Assistant Prose Board Editor/Copy Editor*

Genna is a junior English major, creative writing minor, and member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. She spends most of her time in Tawes reading medieval literature, avoiding eye contact with people she knows, and trying really hard to like kale.

## **Chloe Isaac** *Layout Editor*

Chloe is a sophomore communication and studio art double major that loves the word "incandescent" and spends her free time eating cheese, staring at abstract expressionist art, and listening to Drake. She also reads.

## **Timothy Cheng** *Treasurer*

Tim Cheng is the Treasurer of *Stylus* and an undergraduate student seeking degrees in Math and Economics. He is definitely a serious individual.

# Our Contributors

**Carmen Dodl** is a junior geographical sciences major. She is a part of the Writers' House program and enjoys poetry and tea, preferably together.

**Anna Dottle** is a junior anthropology major at UMD. She was born in Annapolis, grew up in Italy, hates tomatoes, and is a cat person.

**Rachel Edelstein** is a senior English major, planning on becoming a middle school English teacher. Her aspirations even extend as far as becoming a middle school teaching librarian someday. Rachel primarily writes creatively in the form of short "children's book" style stories for her friends and family. Slack-lining, mobile-making, and, of course, reading, rank among her favorite hobbies, although she is also steadily working on developing a love for backpacking. This is her first (and last) submission to Stylus, and fortuitously serves as the fulfillment of one of her "bucket-list" items.

**Genna Godley** is an English Major at UMD and proud member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House. She can usually be found somewhere in Tawes reading medieval literature.

**Paige Goodwin** wants nothing more than to live her life like a character on *Mad Men*.

**David Jenkins** is a fourth year electrical engineering student.

**Clayton Krollman** writes and studies in Maryland, where he is trying to get it right.

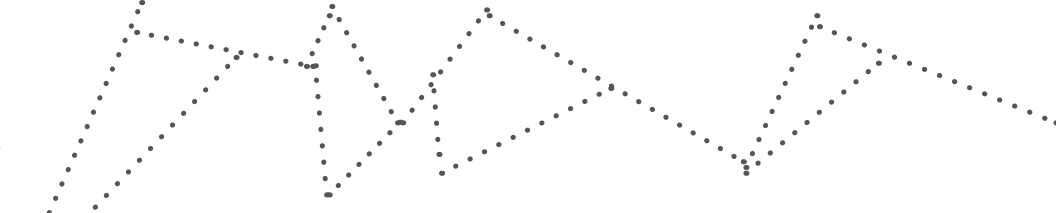
**Jordan Kron** is a senior studying English at the University of Maryland, College Park.

**Lyla Lawless** is, officially, a senior communication and English major. Unofficially, she studies cooking without burning anything, making one-page resumes, using public transit, getting to class at precisely 11:59:59, and interrupting perfectly good conversations with awful puns.

**Mary Nolet** is a junior communication major on the public relations track with a minor in creative writing. She loves reading short stories and eating pizza.

**Alana Pedalino** is a first-year Writers' House student and a sophomore journalism major. She enjoys writing free verse poetry. Her favorite poets are Thomas Lux and Ogden Nash. She is also a huge fan of F. Scott Fitzgerald's prose. In addition to her creative pursuits,





Alana is a DJ at WMUC-FM and a copy editor for The Diamondback. Outside of the university, she is a production intern for maDCap and a contributing writer for The Aquarian Weekly.

**Rhea Ramakrishnan** is a senior biology major and creative writing minor at the University of Maryland. She likes reading Jane Kenyon, Frank O' Hara, and the occasional YA novel.

**Colin Campbell Robinson** is an Australian artist currently living and playing the Celtic extremity of Kernow. He has had numerous pieces of writing published in both Australian and British journals.

**Anna Bella Sicilia** is a sophomore history and philosophy major with a law and society minor. She likes playing music, making art, and traveling new places.

**Lenaya Stewart** is an English major minoring in creative writing at the University of Maryland, College Park. She was a finalist in the Cargoes Undergraduate Poetry Competition and is the Poetry Editor for Stylus Literary Magazine. She is currently working on "Another Black Experience" a collection of poetry for her Honors Thesis. Lenaya resides in Maryland and is an active member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House.

**Emily Tuttle** is a junior English major, creative writing and neuroscience minor at the University of Maryland, College Park. She is the managing editor of the University's *Paper Shell Review*, member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House and an intern with *Poet Lore* magazine.

**(Reis) Ely Vance** is a Junior English and american studies major, with minors in philosophy and creative writing. Ely is also a member of the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House, and a DJ for WMUC Campus Radio. His fiction often concerns young men who feel sorry for themselves. He would like to apologize for that.

**Caitlin Wilson** is a freshman English major who predictably enjoys reading novels and writing poems.

**Joseph Zimmermann** is a junior majoring in English and journalism and a member of the Writers' House. He thinks animals are cool. You can find him in Queen Anne's or on Google.

# **Stylus and the Jiménez-Porter Writers' House**

Stylus is largely funded and supported 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 the program (though any University of Maryland student can be involved with Stylus). Located within Queen Anne's Hall, the Writers' House is a campus-wide literary hub 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 authors. The two-year program is open to students of all majors and 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).



[WWW.WRITERSHOUSE.UMD.EDU](http://WWW.WRITERSHOUSE.UMD.EDU)

# Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize

The Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize is an annual writing contest open to all University of Maryland undergraduates. The Prize 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.

## **Prose Awards**

Initial Reader: Shira Levenson

Final Judge: Pamela Painter

**Pamela Painter's** first collection of stories, *Getting to Know the Weather*, won the Great

Lakes Colleges Association New Writers Award, and was reissued as *A Carnegie Mellon Classic Contemporary* in 2008. Her second collection of stories, also from Carnegie Mellon, is titled *The Long and Short of It*. Painter is co-author, with Anne Bernays, of the widely-used textbook *What If? Fiction Exercises for Fiction Writers*. Painter's individual

stories have appeared in *The Atlantic Monthly*, *Harper's*, *Kenyon Review*, *North American Review*, and *Ploughshares*, and in numerous anthologies, including *Sudden Fiction*, *Flash Fiction*, *Flash Fiction Forward*, and *Microfiction*. She has work forthcoming in *Kenyon Review*, *Smokelong Quarterly*, and from *Word Theatre*.

## **Poetry Awards**

Initial Reader: Dylan Bargteil

Final Judge: April Naoko Heck

**April Naoko Heck** is an alumna of University of Maryland's MFA Program in Creative Writing. Her first collection of poems, *"A Nuclear Family,"* was published by UpSet Press in 2014. She lives in New York City, where she is a Fellow of the Asian American literary organization *Kundiman* and works for NYU.

# Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize Winners

## Prose Awards:

- • • • • 1st Place: **Anna Bella Sicilia** for "On Fixing"
- 2nd Place: **Reis Vance** for "Squirrels and Flowers" and "Memory Plays"
- 3rd Place: **Lyla Lawless** for "Remission"

## Finalists, in alphabetical order:

**Genna Godley** for "Skin," **Kathryn Mayer** for "Abandoned Houses," **Rhea Ramakrishnan** for "Home Depot," **Aiyah Sibay** for "Peacock," and **Ben Susman** for "Bad Feelings about Morning," and **Reis Vance** for "Missionary Positions."

## Poetry Awards:

- • • • • 1st Place: **Clayton Krollman** for "Nonskylessness"
- 2nd Place: **Rhea Ramakrishnan** for "Love Song in Portland, Oregon"
- 3rd Place: **Lenaya Stewart** for "Four"
- Honorable Mention: **Emily Tuttle** for "Virginia Woolf"

## Finalists in alphabetical order:

**Joe Antoshak** for "Because You Don't Like Reading About Things," **Elliot Frank** for "La Vita Intera," **Alexandra Kindahl** for "Paying for Breakfast," **Priya Krishnan** for "Return" and "The Japanese Ama Women Dive to Depths of 25m In A Single Breath," **Pegah Maleki** for "How to Woman," and **Lenaya Stewart** for "Floating After the Blessing of the Boats."

# Acknowledgements

We would like to thank the following organizations and people for their support. Their generosity has enabled us to publish a journal that fosters a literary community for passionate undergraduates, as well as a physical publication that celebrates talent and creativity. It is because of their kindness that this journal is able to continue each year.

## **Benefactors**

The Jiménez-Porter Writers' House  
The Student Government Association  
The Department of English  
The Center for Comparative and Literary Studies

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# Submission Guidelines

*Stylus* accepts high-quality submissions of poetry, prose, and art from all currently enrolled University of Maryland students. Our reading period is from September to February, and our final deadlines are January 31st for *Stylus* and February 15th for the Jiménez-Porter Literary Prize. We encourage students to submit early in the year in order to receive detailed feedback on their work.

We accept up to five pieces per submission season. The work is put through a rigorous, anonymous review process. A brief biography to accompany the work in event of publication must be submitted with the piece. We maintain flexibility in the layout process. No work is guaranteed acceptance until publication.

1. Do not include any identifying information in the document containing your work. Your name, UID, and biography should be listed in the "Cover Letter" field. Pieces submitted with names, UIDs, biographies, or other identifying information in the document will not be considered.
2. You may only submit 5 pieces to *Stylus*. You may independently submit 5 pieces to Litfest, but no more than 5 entries will be considered for any single submitter per category.
3. Submissions to *Stylus* and Litfest are in completely different categories. In order to submit to both *Stylus* and Litfest, you must manually submit a piece to both categories.
4. A valid UID is required to submit, and must be included in the "Cover Letter" field. Only University of Maryland undergraduate students may submit to *Stylus*.
5. A brief bio must be included in the "Cover Letter" field. The bio will accompany the work in event of publication.
6. Pieces should be submitted in a word processing document (.doc(x), .rtf, .txt. Please, no Pages documents).
7. Each piece should be submitted in separate files (no grouping of pieces). After submission of your first piece, you will have the opportunity to submit additional pieces.

## **Poetry**

No additional guidelines.

## **Prose**

*Stylus* has a 3,500 word limit on all prose pieces and reserves the right to edit pieces for length. If any edits or revisions are necessary, *Stylus* will contact you as soon as possible.

