

ECHO

2016-2017



Since its birth in 1893, *The Echo* has developed a rich history, serving the Furman community not only as an esteemed publication of student literary and art works but also, and perhaps more importantly, as a location of conversation and communion among writers, artists, and readers. *The Echo* seeks to publish innovative work by promising writers and artists and to expose members of the editorial board to the process of editing and producing a literary magazine. In addition to the printed magazine, we are able to offer online versions of this and previous years' editions, thanks to Furman University's Scholar Exchange, at scholarexchange.furman.edu. I want to acknowledge and thank my advisors, who maintained me while I maintained the magazine; my assistant editors, who pushed with me through the grief and glories of process; the editorial board, who worked with diligence to bring this collection together; the writers and artists, who fill and color these pages; and you, O reader, for whom we continue to create.

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BIG BROTHER

MEG GILLOGLY

I thought that when I went to Cuba I would find Castro. Instead, I found someone reading *1984*. I found Winston Smith on the steps of the Bacardi museum in Santiago de Cuba. He was a middle-aged Cuban man. His tightly curled hair was sprinkled with streaks of grey, and his light brown skin looked leathery in the hot sun. He was sitting a few steps below me, resting in the glaring sunlight in a way that only the Cubans know how to do, and when he caught me staring at the book in his hands, I blushed.

I don't know what it was about that title, *1984*, that caught my full attention. Perhaps it was the surprise at seeing this particular book in socialist Cuba. When I wandered the streets of Santiago and came across vendors selling books, the titles reflected Cuba's complete devotion to Hemingway, Che, or Fidel Castro. Sometimes the titles were obviously anti-American, such as *Why Guantanamo Bay Belongs to Cuba*, and I snapped a picture for my friends back home. A novel by George Orwell seemed out of place.

Uncomfortable with being caught in my rude stare, I offered an explanation.

"I love that book," I stammered, struggling to meet his piercing gaze.

"I just started it," he replied in English. I immediately left my place in the shade and joined him on the step.

This particular Winston Smith told me that he had recently finished his education at the local university, and he was planning on becoming a professor. He had received Orwell's novel as a gift. I pondered this, comparing what I had learned about totalitarian states in my classrooms an ocean away to the information this teacher offered.

“Can I ask you a question?” I ventured, forgoing social niceties in lieu of quenching my Cuban curiosities. Still, I paused. I was often nervous that the real questions that I had about Cuba were not appropriate to ask, that they would be received as offensive rather than inquisitive. When he nodded his consent I closed my eyes for a brief moment, rolling words and phrases around in my mind until I found the right one.

“What is the most difficult part about living in Cuba?” I asked, expecting a response concerning the gripping chains of Communism.

“The economy.” Winston Smith answered without hesitation.

“Can you tell me why?”

“Life right now is difficult,” he stated. “The salary I currently have, it is not enough to feed my wife and kids. I don’t know what to do.” Sweat fell like tears around his tired eyes. His confession made me uncomfortable, and I looked away. I couldn’t help but think about the hundreds of Cuban dollars I had sitting in the bag that rested between us. A small fraction of what I carried would feed his family for a year.

“I am not looking for money,” he continued, as if he had read my mind. “I just want you to understand what life in Cuba is like.” I had heard this story of economic struggle before. The health care may be cheap, the schooling free, but the government-issued salaries are not enough to support a Cuban family. Many Cubans have two or three jobs—the one guaranteed to them by the government and the several other, illegal jobs that they have to pursue on their own. One man I talked to worked as an academic, a tour guide, and a street performer. My host father, when he wasn’t scheduling my meals and advising me through the streets of Cuba, worked in the foreign affairs department. Private businesses that competed with the government were illegal in Cuba, but the entrepreneurial spirit was vibrant. It made me wonder where Big Brother was.

When I first arrived on the island I thought I knew exactly where he was. Che Guevara screamed “Hasta la victoria siempre,” from sides of buildings, t-shirts, and cigar cases, and the revolution was praised on every billboard in the country. Newspapers were difficult to find, and the government controlled the only news station on

TV. Ciego Montero, a Cuban drink company, boasted to offer the best bottled water in Cuba. It also offered the only bottled water in Cuba. Still, Castro's presence felt oddly lacking. I continued to expect the dictator to lead our next tour through the revolution museum, or invite us to the capital building for a lecture on the perfect Cuban cigar. I felt his absence like a communist void in my chest, as if I wouldn't be able to say that I had truly gone to Cuba without having a mojito in Havana, riding in a classic 1950's car, or shaking Fidel's hand. José Martí had academic buildings, Che had peach pits carved into the likeness of his face, but Castro failed to make his grand entrance in the same demonstrative manner.

I asked many Cubans about what they wanted to change in Cuba, but I never got the answer I was looking for. No one told me that they wanted freedom, or more options, or even better Wi-Fi.

You may argue that they don't know what they're missing, that the Cuban people are stifled by Communism. But what if I told you that, while some Cubans do long for the freedoms of a Western world, others do not. Many Cuban people pitied us because we are too spread out, we move too fast, we don't sit on our front steps all evening calling to neighbors. The locals often bragged that Cuba was the third safest country in the world. My group of American students could not say the same about our native land.

"I just want you to understand what life in Cuba is like." Winston Smith's words rang in my ears long after I shook his hand goodbye and wandered off to the next museum. I never caught his real name, never asked him why his English was so perfect, never found out if he read and enjoyed *1984*. I never found out where Castro was either, why his presence was so subdued compared to his ruling counterparts in China or the former Soviet Union. Castro's name is one of the first associations that come to mind when the word *Cuba* is mentioned in America, but while I was visiting the island I never discovered where Big Brother was.

QUESTIONS I HAVE ABOUT BABY CORN (YES, THE PREMATURELY PLUCKED VEGETABLE)

ELEANOR HEWETT

I have so many questions for you, my tiny kernelled friends. Do you feel lonely in your narrow subcategory of existence, nonchalantly watching the events of the world through a haze of vinegar abyss? Is it difficult to follow Trump's latest tweet storm or the ever-abhorrent Food Network, who refuses to take your requests for more airtime seriously? I wish to understand these questions with you, dear Cornlettes. I also hope my use of Cornlettes does not offend. If so, what would you prefer? Baby corn has a condescending ring to it, and Cornlettes seems the equivalent of adult corn with lesser moral fiber. Am I wrong?

With whom can you commiserate about the oppression of miniature vegetables? After all, it has been revealed that baby carrots are merely whittled down imposters and cherry tomatoes are known for their poor company. They're too popular to ever understand the pain of having one's greatest aspirations limited to the realm of vegan, hipster cuisine.

Tiny dill pickles, too, are darlings of the food industry who will never understand. Miniature gherkins are essential for any successful cocktail soiree. They float around an elegant party atop the pedestal of the waiter's perfectly platformed hand, mingling with the elites of modern society. "That mink stole is simply marvelous, Kate!" Her Royal Highness Queen Elizabeth II beams to the Duchess of Cambridge as the wee cucumbers adorn their gloved hands. Their shriveled, toothpick-skewered bodies gleam like emeralds in the light from the seventeenth-century chandelier. Even Camilla, sulking in the corner, nibbles a sour green lump. It's unlikely you'll ever be circulated amongst the celebrated minds and leaders of our time. Perhaps Weird Putin has the habit of requesting your late night

company. Maybe he slinks through his palatial ice home to his giant jug of Baby Corn, and you are forced to bear his insufferable dribble. Mini Gherkins would never have to deal with that sort of nonsense despite their baby status. I suppose Cucumberlette lacks the same ring.

I believe the reason for your immortally pickled state is that you have been deemed a fragile vegetable. I previously mentioned your moral fiber, but, in seriousness, what's the deal with your inner core from a physical standpoint? Adult corn is blessed with strong stocks to support their rows of matured kernels, but when you're eaten you go right down the hatch, kernel, core, and all. Your inner support system has yet to fully form. Can you blame the world for commenting on your inner moral fragility?

Do you have a support group to discuss your exclusion from fun experiences like black bean and adult corn salsa? Although the thought is morbid in many ways, I can't help but wonder if you secretly wish to be slathered in butter, stabbed between two corncob skewers, and presented as a sacrifice to the vicious and snarling human mouth. I would assume that your kernels are too tiny to be caught adorning the canyons and crevices of teeth and gums. I've never heard someone utter the words, "You've got some baby corn kernels stuck in your teeth," after a traditional summer barbeque.

On an encouraging note, I wish to remind you of the great number of supporters who admire your miniature vegetable status. Take note of the baby corn costume sales figures. When doing so, you must realize the astounding number of mothers in the nation who consistently choose to dress their baby humans in corn costumes that seek to emulate your existence. Every year, millions of Americans open their doors on blustery Halloween nights to the pleasant sight of sweet human mothers holding human babies decorated in yellow kernelled costumes. What's more endearing than a small human wearing a small corn costume? Although babies in pea pod outfits are sweet, too.

Where do you fit into the realm of vegetable popular culture? Stephen King makes no mention of you in *Children of the Corn*, a story whose title describes your very existence, for heaven's sake! You don't see Vicky and Burt enjoying a lively conversation about the joys of prematurely plucked vegetables or an evil deity hiding amongst fields of baby corn.

You're even excluded from the world's fascination with tiny food videos. The camera zooms in on a hand lighting the flame beneath a miniature stove. Five grains of rice are added to a pot and brought to a boil in a thimble's worth of water. When softened, the rice is added to an elf's portion of tofu, which has been sliced by the world's smallest and most adorable knife that can only be held by one's pointer finger and thumb. But where is the baby corn? Where is your tiny food video debut? Alas, are you too small for the rest of the world but too large for a video in which robin's eggs are the largest form of protein?

How did you take your rejection from Oprah's Maui farm? At the very least, she should have included you in her recipe for Grandma Dorthea's corn salad. It's been a difficult year and, really, existence for you, dear Cornlettes, but maybe one day you'll be featured on the cover of *O Magazine's* gardening issue. Perhaps you'll be the avocado of 2018. We must hope for a brighter future.

With best wishes,

Eleanor Hewett

THIS ISN'T THE BALL CINDERELLA

BEN GAMBLE

mirror mirror on the wall
where's the slipper where's it all
i think drums blink and tremble
to the beat
why are they bare feet some sink
runs red
fingers nimble
like gold and
thimbles what have i said
to the stumbling dead it's too
late eyes dilate
by magnetic strips and money
clips there's no slumber something queerer
looking dancing in the mirror the birds
aren't singing the gold of the ring is
cold on the lips a slip of the king it brings
looking dancing in the mirror i kiss
the frogs half-asleep a leap
through the fog of red lights
forgotten sights blood-eyed knights
this couch a throne of gnawed
dog bones and golden rods
burn marks
of wizards pipes and insurance fraud
the sweat the skin it thins the blood the bass
listen listen it rattles the ribs against ink and skin
it says let me in let me in let me in and
give rhythm for your heart and fill your skull

it starts on barefoot broken glass there's
someone dancing white horse prancing and
no chance at all your highness it's blindness
i fall i lost
it all my veins
the dragon is coiled the glass it boils
a scream i dream the empty sound
snarling hounds and bloody gowns oh
someone someone someone stole my crown.

CLUTCH OF THE SEA

REILLY MAHAN

The evening sun
Golden, hazy, and sweet
Often, as a child, I would imagine travelling on my cardboard rocket ship
Right up to its rays,
Just to plunge in my favorite curly straw and suck out all of the molten
honey from its core.
So sweet.
I'd always remember to pack a peanut butter sandwich and a thermos of
cool milk.

For a moment, I fully submerge myself under the currents and remain suspended in my salty cobalt graveyard. This is no time to daydream of food and drink and innocence past. My lips sting, singed by the salt on each crack and blister. First degree became second degree a few hours hence; now second lingers about third.

The temptation to drink the water around me is no longer out of thirst, but rather to deliver me into the blissful arms of Hades sooner.

Night is coming quickly, my last champion leaving only faded magenta hues on the horizon. My choices are limited—yet even so, if I do not decide quickly, it will be decided for me. I must get out of the water, or else drink of the briny poison until the ocean consumes me from the inside. *Poetic, really. To take what traps me externally and consciously let it in, to be a part of my final essence.* I am losing my mind.

To my left, I hear a bird squawk, sitting on the edge of a small rowboat as they both drift slowly away from me. I want to shout, shoo the bird away. But my voice is as dust, and the mere effort sends me into a coughing fit. Luckily, that does the trick and I watch as the bird flies into the sun. “Good fucking riddance, you sick piece of shit,” I imagine saying.

Oh how I wish the boat were a mirage, a twisted, cruel trick of

the mind. For then, there would be no hope, no decision to make, and I could give myself the ending I deserve. But no—my selfish survival instinct lingers...and tries to convince me to continue on, get back in the boat, keep trying to live.

Instead, I think of my sister. I imagine her waking up from an afternoon nap about now, after hitting the snooze button repeatedly. She has a big event to go to tonight, and large crowds of extroverts wear her out more quickly than most. Fifty bucks says she'll wear her simple black dress, with tasteful yet eye-catching earrings. Fifty bucks also says she'll have a plaid shirt and jeans stored in her car that she changed out of at the last possible moment. "A modern wonder in the making," they all say. I've always known she was extraordinary. That glimmer of some "otherness," a slumbering ingenuity was ever-present in her gaze. As an adolescent, I would challenge her, my younger by seven years, to staring contests after reading her bedtime story. Initially, I thought maybe it would make her eyes so tired that she would fall asleep immediately. Instead, I became unnerved by how long she could hold my gaze, and that somehow, she seemed much older than I, more knowing of what the world was really like.

I find myself floating on top of the waves, snapped back into consciousness as one rises too high and rolls over my face, causing me to sputter and cough again. Each gasp feels like nails along the inner lining of my esophagus. As I begin to tread water again, my hand hits something hard and I jolt back, startled and fearful of the sea creatures in the looming night. My floating has taken me back to the boat.

Eventually, I muster the strength of both muscle and will to pull up on the edge of the boat. It rocks and, for a moment, I am afraid I'll flip it. Instead, the rowboat steadies itself and I am able to throw my left leg over the side and pull myself over. My whole body gives way, having used its very last stores of energy, and falls helplessly into the boat. Instead of the solid *thunk* onto the wooden planks as I expected, it is more of a *thud*, a cushioned *thud* provided by the sunburnt, bloated, lifeless body I find myself on top of. At first, I hold my breath, half from fear and half from the horrendous stench. Feeling guilty, I breathe out again and try to get used to the smell. Instead, I snuggle up against her and decide to rest my eyes. "I'm sorry sis, I know it's not your fault you smell so bad." We laugh together like it's the first joke we've ever heard...just like old times.

THE DAY I CHOSE BUDDHISM OVER BASEBALL

JARED BUCHHOLZ

1995

The Cleveland Indians make it to the World Series. They lose. But the “mistake on the lake” was about an hour and a half away from my boyhood yellow home. I chose them to be my team. Makes sense, I suppose.

My Uncle called me a fair weather fan. I asked him what that meant. *Means you're rooting for whichever team is winning. Means you're not loyal*, he said. And he practiced what he preached. You see he liked the Pirates. Pittsburgh was closer to us than Cleveland, but the Pirates were lousy, last place, cellar dwellers. I wanted to root for a winner.

1997

The Cleveland Indians make it to the World Series. They lose. Jose Mesa blew the save. I fell asleep watching it. But I read about it in the paper the next day and subsequently destroyed every baseball card with his face on it. Later that year I'll kill my first squirrel and see my first nude woman. I'll cry both times.

The Cleveland Indians make it to the World Series. I sat on a couch in the student common area. There were three others around me. No one watches baseball anymore. Fifty years ago, cities shut down because of game sevens. It felt odd. I felt odd. I didn't like the feeling. I was used to losing. Sure, there was the 2007 ALCS, but they lost four in row to the Red Sox. The Wild Card birth two years back didn't really count either.

During a commercial break, I suddenly wished that I could speak with my dead uncle, telling him I'd become a foul weather fan, and that I was sorry for how wasted I got at his funeral, and that I'd used his grave twice now as an altar, praying to God about things I don't understand, and that every time I think of his name, Gordon Payne, I think of snow, of pure white unadulterated snow.

After the seventh inning stretch, I left. I had a Buddhism exam at 9:00 am. And so I turned off my phone, went home, memorized terms like the *Lotus Sutra*, and marveled at things like the life of Shinran, knowing full well that I had forsaken the World Series willingly, that I had forsaken my team willingly.

In the morning, I read about what I missed: the historical extra inning finish, in the form of a loss for Cleveland. I ate breakfast. Eggs. I went to class. I took the test. I got an A.

FALLEN SPARROW

PAUL BRYANT

I miss that old Monte Carlo,
The engine raucous like a woodpecker.

I remember that sparrow I could never shoot.
It had yellow stripes.

My second son reminded me of the Monte Carlo.

Running across the lawn,
Legs pumping,
Sweat kindling.

His favorite color was green,
His body tan like leather
Scorched in the sun.

Shoes black like tires.
Treads strong and stable,
Fast like feathers.

But he isn't impressive anymore
And neither is the Monte Carlo.

If the sparrow fell,
What would fly?

Not the Monte Carlo. Not my son.

||| EMILY MATTHEWS

When my grandfather was a young boy,
his mother's dress caught fire while she,
bent over,
tied his shoes for church.

She,
afraid of catching the house on fire,
ran outside
and tried to roll the flames out.

She,
afraid of what her son might see,
begged,
stay inside.

My great-grandmother burned to death
on that Sunday morning,
her son still by the fireplace,
his eyes tightly shut.

When my grandfather was a young man,
he volunteered at the local fire station
and fought flames
for many years.

I wonder
if he ever closed his eyes
when smoke hit the back of his throat
just right.

THERE IS NO COOKIE BUTTER WHEN YOU DIE

MADDIE DEPREE

1 No cookie butter.

This is what they want to hear: reasons why you should not die. When they ask this, you may think about wet sand in your hands, or some nice chandelier that you haven't seen yet, or the face of God that you saw in a dog. Mostly, you may think about this: there is no cookie butter when you die. When you die, the amount of cookie butter that you eat is zero. If you want to eat cookie butter, that will be too bad. You will be dead, and there will be no cookie butter, and you will not be able to take your spoon out of the drawer in your dorm and dig into the jar until it is gone.

2 People will not know about the J.

You may also think about this: if you die with your mom's gold signet ring on your finger, nobody will know if the J is for Julia or John. Nobody will care that the J is for Julia. They wouldn't care if the J was for John, either. They wouldn't care if it was for Janet or James or Jupiter or Jam. The point is, you cannot explain it if you are dead, and you need to be around to explain the signet ring if anyone asks.

3 | Never have owned coolgirl sneakers.

You have also not owned a pair of coolgirl sneakers, and if you leave the earth now, you will never have owned any at all. Coolgirl sneakers are like regular high-top sneakers, only they are a thousand times cooler and probably some unusual color, like sea foam or silver or black. Only coolgirls wear coolgirl sneakers, and you cannot wear coolgirl sneakers if you are dead. Nobody would bury you in coolgirl sneakers either. You have to wear them while you are alive, while you can still walk around and get them wet and stomp hard enough to see your own footprints.

4 | More ink.

You may decide you haven't spilled enough ink yet, even though you got pen on your sweatshirt the day after you bought it, and you were mad at yourself until you called yourself sweetheart and decided maybe it was not so bad. You also still have the origami paper you bought yourself for Christmas, and the paper-bag-colored envelopes, and a wax-sealer shaped like a heart, and nobody will use those things to write letters to your sister except for you. If you are dead, you cannot use the paper or the envelopes or the wax. You won't be able to use any ink to write any words, and your sister will get no letters. You have to stick around longer to spill more ink.

5 | Oppressive heat.

You also still want to feel July, and you cannot feel July if you are dead. If you are dead, you cannot bend down to touch your palm to a hot sidewalk, or look at the way magnolias turn dark green in a certain heat. In July, the outside air will be thick and hot and the inside air will be cold. If you are not dead, you can carry around a sweater and pull it on just before you walk into the AC, just before you leave the heat behind.

|| GOLD STAR

LIZZY COYLE ||

I was just coloring in my math worksheet after a job well done when a gold star sticker was stuck to my desk.

“Mrs. Forrester,” I said “What did I..” I stopped my sentence as I looked up to find not Mrs. Forrester, my fifth grade teacher, but Julia Baker.

“Hey Julia B, why did you give me this?” I asked but she just smiled and walked away.

We really weren’t supposed to have anything stuck to our desks but our frog nametag, so I started to peel the gold star sticker off.

“Psst! Margo! No, what are you doing?” a voice loudly whispered behind me.

I turned in my chair, careful to not let my hair get caught in the metal dots on the back of my blue plastic chair.

Madison was glaring at me with her bulging eyes. I had heard a group of boys earlier in the year laughing and calling her Bug Eyes. It was a fitting nickname.

“What are you doing?” Madison repeated.

“I’m trying to get this gold star off my desk,” I said, wiggling my pointer finger under one of the points of the star. “Julia B stuck it on my desk, and that’s not allowed.”

Madison rolled her eyes and smacked a hand to her face. “Are you insane?” she asked. “Mrs. Forrester? Me and Margo have to go to the bathroom because she has a wiggly tooth,” Madison said as she hopped up from her desk. I began to open my mouth in protest but Madison bulged her eyes at me as she grabbed my hand and pulled me into the hallway.

“Madison, I do not have a wiggly tooth and I do not like to have lies told about me,” I said as calmly as I could, but I was really very angry.

Madison tugged me along as she walked. Her hands were sweaty

and she was holding my arm too tightly. I wriggled my arm free and said, “Madison, I refuse to take another step until you tell me what this is about.”

“Margo, that’s why I am taking you to the bathroom, silly. I can’t tell you out in the hallway because people are listening,” she said.

I looked around the hallway. The artwork of the first graders lined the walls, drawings of Santa Claus and what they wanted for Christmas. The linoleum floor was shiny from the sun that was coming in through the windows. It was quiet.

“There’s no one out here,” I said.

“Just come on,” Madison said as she grabbed my wrist again. I just let it happen this time.

Madison shoved the door open so hard that it slammed into the concrete block wall of the bathroom. “Is anyone in here” Madison asked. “Cause if so, you better leave ‘cause this girl’s about to puke!”

No one ran screaming from the bathroom, so Madison deemed it safe. “Madison, what on earth is wrong with you? You can’t just go around shouting things like that. I am not about to puke,” I said, crossing my arms.

“Okay, I brought you in here to tell you that Julia B is a crazy, psycho woman,” Madison said, her eyes bulging again.

“Why?” I asked. As far as I could see, Madison was the crazy one.

“It’s the thing with the gold star. See, she goes around and gives one of those gold stars out every week or so. Always on a Monday. She decides who she thinks would be good friend material and she gives it to that person.”

My ears perked up at that. I hadn’t made any friends yet. I’m glad someone thought I was good friend material.

“But, it’s like a test. She makes that person do things for her in order to win her friendship. You basically become her slave for a week, and at the end of the week, if you did a good job, she will let you be her friend. If not, she drops you. She makes everyone think you are lame and makes no one like you.”

“How do you know all this?” I asked. I immediately regretted it because I saw tears welling up in Madison’s eyes. I remembered the boys calling her Bug Eyes. She must have been one of Julia B’s rejected friends.

“I just wanted to let you know before you got your feelings hurt. You are still so new to school, I figured I would help,” she said.

“Well, what should I do? I don’t want to be her slave, but I don’t want her to make everyone dislike me,” I asked Madison.

“You have to be her slave,” Madison said. “It’s not so bad, really. I think she dropped me because I annoyed her about stuff. She just wants you to do tasks for her. I just kept asking why too much and she got annoyed.”

“If I become her slave and then her friend, will I still be able to be your friend?” I asked. I felt that I owed it to Madison to be her friend.

“Probably not. But we can go over to each other’s houses after school! We just can’t be friends at school. That’s better than having no friends ever, I guess,” Madison said as she looked down at her shoes.

“That’s not good enough for me,” I said. I turned and strode out of the bathroom. I heard Madison clamoring after me asking, “What are you going to do?”

My footsteps punctured the silence in the hallway. I was walking so hard and fast. I was mad, but I was also excited to have my first friend.

“Julia B,” I said when I got back into the classroom. Julia B turned in her chair and smiled at me.

“I guess you figured out what the gold star meant,” she said. “I have your first task for you.”

“Yeah, well I have your first task for you, too,” I said as I ripped the gold star from my desk. “Give this to someone who wants to play your stupid game with you. I don’t want to.”

I looked up and saw Madison looking at us from the doorway, mouth hanging open. I smiled at her.

“You have no idea what you just did,” Julia B said, eyes glaring and lips tight.

“I do. But I know who my friends are,” I said as I looked over to Madison again. She was still standing there, her eyes bulging and mouth open.

Walking into school the next day, I was excited. I hadn’t been able to sleep well because I was imagining all the fun things Madison and I would do as friends.

I walked into the classroom and hung my jacket up in my cubby,

and I saw Madison sitting at her desk.

“Hi Madison,” I said. “I couldn’t even sleep last night ‘cause I was so excited to be your friend.”

“Go away,” Madison said.

“What?” I asked. I was so surprised, I laughed.

“I said, go away,” she said again with anger in her voice.

“I don’t understand why you are being mean,” I said, my voice quivering.

Madison stood up from her desk and shoved me, hard. I fell and just sat on the ground in shock as she walked away.

After a minute, I recollected myself and stood up. I noticed a gold star stuck to Madison’s frog nametag on her desk.

|| ON OCTOBER 29TH

JARED BUCHHOLZ ||

They'll stand there together. Three's a crowd. Too much sun. Too much exposure. I'll kick at cement chunks. He'll walk between the piles of dirt and compost, camera in hand, knowing there's nothing he can do. She'll pick flowers. Orange and yellow ones that look like beautiful weeds. The sky will be cloudless. The air will smell like spoiling food. I'll watch interactions, little looks, eye movements, longings, subtleties. And I'll fall in love. And then I'll hear a combustion engine. My heart will beat louder. The NO TRESPASSING sign. The locked chain on the yellow gate. I'll yell out, "Someone's here!" They'll move fast, picking up equipment. I'll feel foolish. Just a dirt bike. Just someone else. Someone else in some place they shouldn't be.

SENIOR THESIS: THE MIGRATORY AND REPRODUCTIVE PATTERNS OF THE NORTH AMERICAN WATERFOWL AS SHAPED BY RISING GLOBAL TEMPERATURES

BEN GAMBLE

For years, the specifics of the migratory patterns of the North American waterfowl have perplexed ornithologists and casual bird-watchers alike. How the subtle variations in weather—more prominent with ever-intensifying global warming—affect these patterns is a mystery not yet fully solved. Traditional patterns of birds seeking warmer climates in the winter months may be altered permanently by these meteorological fluctuations. It is also fully possible that we may see—or have already seen—these patterns emerge in some humans, who are not immune to abrupt and truly disconcerting behavioral changes as a result of environmental factors. Really disconcerting.

To begin with, we'll look at the physiological adaptations of the waterfowl regarding mating, which often coincides with the migration patterns. By having the mating process occur during a time when millions of waterfowl from all over the North American continent are gathered, it allows for a significant variation of genetic material.¹ Consider the ability of many small pockets of sub-species to intermingle and cross previously insurmountable physical and genetic hurdles.² This variation can be catalyzed by inebriation in the female duck or apparently just boredom.³ Many ducks were previously thought to have mated for life, a statement that we all now know to be a sentimental lie believed by only the most foolish of ducks. These ducks, upon seeing

¹ But Jessica already knows all about that.

² Which is really alarming, because the female ducks may insist that the long-distance thing can totally work when they travel abroad.

³ I didn't know you could get bored with the person that loves you the most in the entire world

their mates leave them for others with more impressive plumage, more intricate mating rituals, or a more impressive nest, will often enter a worrying cycle of self-doubt and may present difficulties coping with their new realities.⁴

The genetic variation present in these migratory movements is unprecedented. There is literally no way of measuring how much genetic material is transferred between the multiplicities of sub-species in the North American continent.⁵ These exchanges could happen even when one duck tells her mate that she's at her grandmother's funeral,⁶ or that she's going home for the weekend, or the entire time she's flown abroad. That's how cruel some of these ducks are.⁷ In hindsight, ornithologists generally agree that female ducks will often employ an academically based excuse, such as a research trip, to justify their migration.⁸

The male ducks will then begin a prolonged odyssey to recover their mate. This takes many forms, as the duck has many acute senses and an ability to traverse long distances, hindered only by natural predators⁹ and legal constraints on the ducks ability to contact his former mate.¹⁰ Ducks, due to their excellent aerial vantage point, have great observational skills, which are further augmented by their keen eyesight. This is normally used to help them find sustenance on their long southward journey but can in some cases be better applied to looking at the females¹¹ Instagram page, cross-referencing it with her Twitter, and attempting to determine a rough chronology of betrayal.^{12,13}

Some ornethologists¹⁴ have attributed this behavior to

4 fly south straight to hell Jessica

5 at this point who even knows how many ducks got involved

6 I hope she outlives you Jessica.

7 Little does the female duck know that the bottle of Jack Daniels she left in the male's apartment is now his

8 we all know what you were studying on that semester abroad now Jessica

9 at times, the ducks father may be a member of the NRA, so the male duck must proceed with caution

10 go running straight to your uncle the judge real mature of you Jessica

11 wait should there be an apostrophe on this one? Theres an apostrophe on Jack Daniel's...

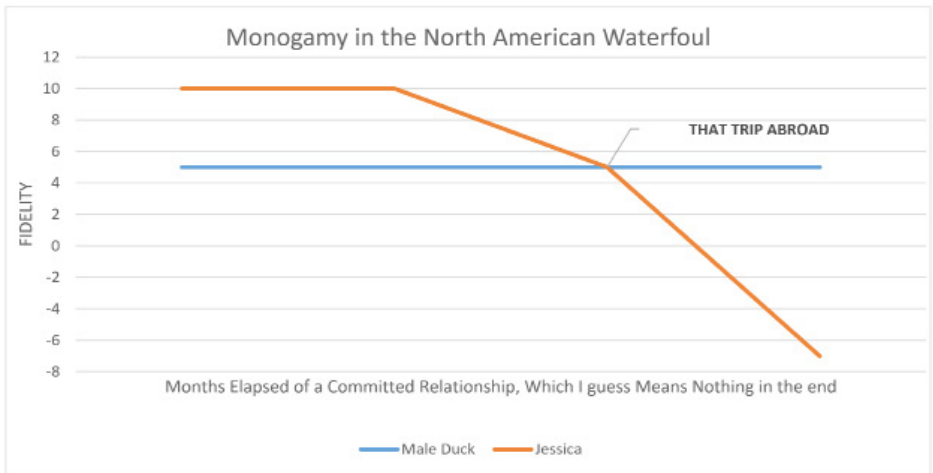
12 you friended him last May?

13 I had to make a twitter to do this you know

14 this is too many syllables for me right now

psychological issues stemming from the females lack of familiarity with the father duck growing up, but my far more likely assertion is that God is cruel. Which probably explains the global warming or whatever too.

These ideas are supported by empirical evidence, gathered from various sources close to the female duck who say she's doing really great, which cant be true, because a duck doesnt¹⁵ spend three years in a nest and then start doing really great as soon as she leaves¹⁶. Evidenced here is the irregular behavior of the waterfowl:



Clearly, the change in lifestyle for the female duck is totally jarring and reports that she has acclimated fine to her new climate and biome are completely and totally unfounded.¹⁷ Beyond that, the ducks older sister is, like, incomparably hotter anyways.^{18 19 20} If the female duck wants to run off to Oakland with the new male duck that's just whatever.²¹

¹⁵ dont use contractions in a formal essay whatever take off the points

¹⁶ Was this bottle full when you left it here

¹⁷ Jessica how come youre smiling so much in these pictures

¹⁸ she was totally hitting on me at Thanksgiving so I hope you like seeing me around Jessica

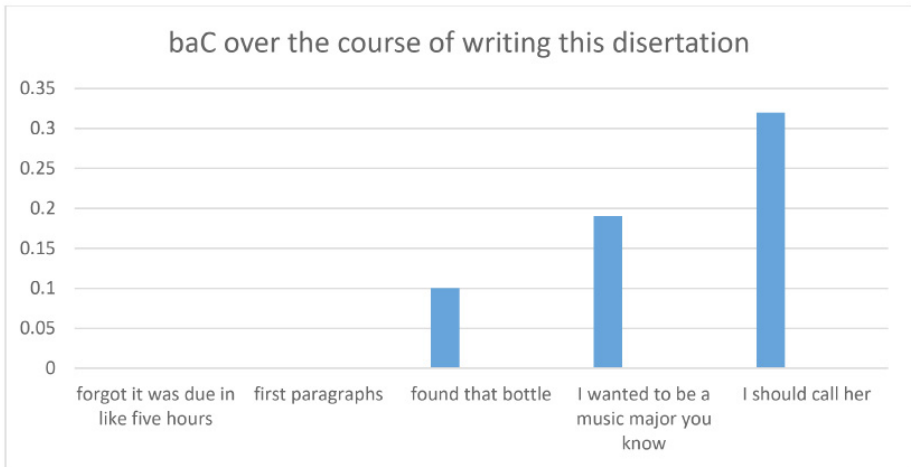
¹⁹ maybe this was incomparably? incomparably....incomparably...huh...

²⁰ and ill be at your grandma's actual funeral too.

²¹ hey im going to make a tinder all this duck stuff got me thinking

It doesnt even matter.²² The male ducks primary means of recourse are practically nonexistent. He is placed into an especially disadvantageous position when news of the female ducks ordeal does not reach him until the night before his dissertation is due²³.

Doomed by their own natures to return northwards with the flock that flew south, they will be forced to share an awkward and emotionally abrasive journey back over many thousands of miles once the winter months end.^{24 25 26} This brings back a diverse and more well-equipped population to deal with genetic bottlenecks or similar population crises that could cripple the ducks ability to maintain biodiversity, or even basic moral decency.²⁷ if one were to describe the behavioral archetype of this particular duck, it would be one that abandons her flock for the mallard who plays bass in his stupid band that she met last year on that trip abroad.²⁸



22 do you think he's hotter than me be honest

23 i dont even like ducks

24 im looking up your sister on facebook

25 wait tinder wants to connect to my facebook will Jessica see that i dont want her to think ive moved on

26 i mean like i totally have but she still shouldnt think that just in case she wants to come back itd be whatever

27 you couldnt have waited one more day, Jessica? this is like 40% of my grade

28 he has frosted tips

The mating behaviors of the North American waterfowl are further complicated by the presence of third parties that disrupt the reproductive cycle.²⁹ While some interruptions of this process are the to-be-expected obstacles of any species expansion and population maintenance, there have been irregular aberrances in recent years.^{30 31} Not that this really bothers the female ducks, who generally don't have to worry about hunters. Increasing samples of ducks captured by parks and wildlife services have reported that female ducks have totally changed, behaviorally speaking, making it difficult for the male to approach her.³² Like, really difficult³³. yeah its hard for ducks to get laid this is what four years of overloading courses at this school taught me. anyways these poachers will often swoop in and disrupt the mating ritual, resulting in the female duck being ensnared. Current Department of Natural Resources (DRN) regulations mean that this sort of thing is just totally accepted by the community, because thats just 'what happens' and "you need to move on" in an official press release by the secretary of agriculture or ducks or something.

in conclusion the behavior of female ducks now is totally not cool and if they go to warmer climates theres a pretty good chance theyll leave the flock and start getting tattoos. thats what ducks do. to reassert my central thesis³⁴, ducks are pretty lame, they start getting handsy with ducks from other flocks when it gets warm outside and monogamy is a lie ducks made up to sell diamonds³⁵. also second thesis BOOM³⁶ coming out of nowhere you can finish a dissertation two hours³⁷ before its due with a little hard work and a lot of alcohol. quack quack bitches watch out for global warming and watch out for jessica thats what all my field research says im out

²⁹ you know, I'm thinking about it, and im like ninety percent sure this was actually supposed to be about swans

³⁰ i could've sworn there was a button you could press to replace all the words with another word i could fix this duck/swan thing

³¹ @JustJessie19 subtweeting this entire paper at you

³² no way this bottle was full when you left it because its pretty empty rn

³³ really difficult

³⁴ kinda forgot my thesis had to scroll back up to find it, it was forty five minutes and a indeterminate amount of jack daniels ago

³⁵ you know how many ducks died mining those diamonds

³⁶ not gonna lie im super hungry for some duck right now. i bet i could eat like a whole duck

³⁷ like thirty minutes of that was making the graphs pretty too



Halo | Aaron Templeton | *photography*



Fall | Lauren Zimmerman | *charcoal*



Wasteland | Lauren Zimmerman | *marker*



One Thousand Samurai Procession
| Amy Poon | *photography*



“We’ll be Friends Forever, won’t we...?”
| Faith Kressner | *photography*



Sunday Afternoon | Bethany Knapp | *photography*



Tsujiki After Lunch | Amy Poon | *photography*



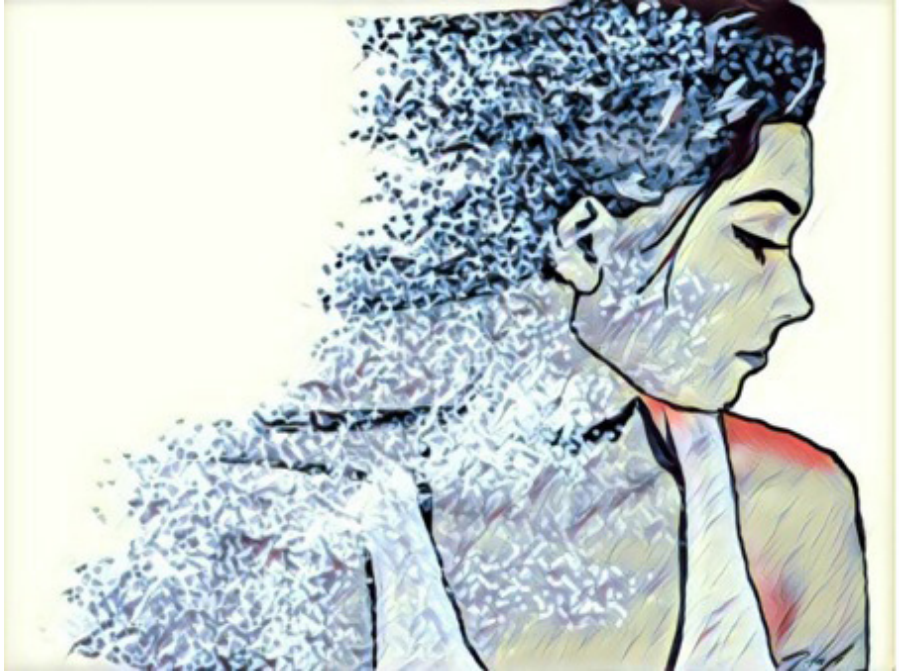
Rainy Zurich | Abby Cardwell | *photography*



Secrets | Bethany Knapp | *photography*



Grumpy Deacon | Olivia Kent | *photography*



Blue Dissolve | Hayden Arrington | *digital media*



Pause in Petra | Noah Zimmerman | *photography*



Via Dolorosa | Noah Zimmerman | *photography*



Cheese Omelette | Hayden Arrington | *digital media*



Peach Fuzz | Sarah Dusek | *colored pencil*



Sister Whiskers | Sarah Dusek | *colored pencil*

CHOCOLATE CHIPS

ZACHARY HUGHES

Limping just because I can,
Walking slow in thin soles
Cuz it seems to match the tone
Of a world-weary man.
Longing for a chance to see you,
Speak to you,
To close the distance put in place
To feel the closeness of your face
On my shoulder as we dance...

Boundaries between—concrete or more ethereal?
Feeling like a disciple abandoned,
Wondering if I should be preparin'
For a rebirth or just a burial.
If life weren't so material,
And time weren't so damn linear,
I could remember our future together or apart and stop
the wondering before it starts.
We could go back to our moments,
Not caring that the space-time continuum was broken,
Just caring that the storm that night was wild
And that we were falling in love quickly.

Worn boards beneath aching feet,
The glow of the horizon
In my eyes and
Thoughts of you in my mind replete.
You are the ache between each heartbeat.
Our lost love like chocolate chips—bittersweet.

ON THE POPULAR IDEA THAT EVOLUTION COULD HAVE FAVORED OTTERS

ELI SIMMONS

Find me another creature who
Sings and dances on the edge
Of the Abyss.

Find me another creature who
Puts word after word and
Transmutes Nature into color
On a canvas in the fading light
Of Dusk.

Find me another creature who
Laughs the dauntless, the deep,
The soul-shattering laughter of
Youth in the diffident face
Of Death.

And then I will concede that,
Yes, man is not so special
After all.

HANDS

SARAH LUKE

Winner of the Editor's Choice Award | Non-Fiction

When I am still young enough to be told when to go to bed, I sit on the green leather in the living room every night before my birthday and cry. My mother takes me in cold hands.

Someone has died. Someone who was nine has died and turned ten.

Into the bedroom she ushers me, under the covers with the stuffed rabbit whose fur is missing in quarter-sized patches across his belly, his foot, his face. My mother scratches my back and takes her voice down a rhythmic path: "*X marks the spot, with a dot, dot, dot.*"

Smooth fingernails etch patterns into my skin. The pillow swallows my face, and it smells like the lavender lotion on my mother's neck.

"Who loves you?" she says.

I know the answer; it's always the same: "You do."

I close my eyes and am in the front yard again, tapping the cicada shells on the Bradford Pear tree with the metal teeth of a rake. My sister, balancing on the tree's bent roots, looks up at me. She is a foot shorter and has the thin, breezy curls of children who have not yet turned five. I hand her a rake and she whacks at the flaking cicada carcasses.

In the fading light my mother drags her pointer finger across my back.

"With an exclamation point, and a big question mark."

Under the Bradford Pear my sister begins to scream. Stamps her feet on the ground. Tears fling from her face. "*Hannah, stop screaming,*" I say, and then I feel it too, little bullets the size of pine

needles shooting up my back, through my shirt, my pants. Hannah has already run inside and I follow her. "*Sarah didn't believe me,*" she's telling my mother. Our mother takes off our shirts and gets the baking soda out of the cabinet. These are yellow jacket stings.

I press my fingernails into the cushion of my palm. Slow fingers reach the tip of my neck and pirouette back down my spine.

"Cool breeze."

Our mother cakes wet baking soda onto our backs like beach sand, and we press our heads into her shoulders. Our grandmother comes over. There is one yellow jacket still hiding in the blinds, and she uses a broom to kill it.

A narrow sleeve of breath snakes through my hair.

"Tight squeeze."

Our mother and grandmother take us to our beds, rubbing our backs with their baking soda-chapped hands, saying, I love you, *I love you, big girl*, and electric fingers massage my neck, the muscles around my shoulder blades.

My mother's weight disappears from the bed. The eager springs of the mattress quickly replace the hole where she had been, filling it in like water. I wonder if Hannah ever thinks about the cicadas and yellow jackets, or if something like water has filled the memory.

"Do you want your door left open or closed?" my mother asks me.

I open my eyes to a crack of light from the hall flipping onto the carpet. Slipping farther under the covers, I listen to sock feet retreat down the hallway.

The hand has heavy fingers that crawl across piano keys. It plays "Jesu, Joy of Man's Desiring" on a baby grand. Deep chords.

"Your mother and father walked to that at their wedding," my grandmother says.

Speaking from the kitchen, head probably bent over a kitchen sink, she is a faceless woman making lemonade. *Two scoops of sugar? Or one?* When she stands over my plate, slicing oranges with juice-splattered hands, that is all I ever want to be, and when I face a

backyard audience from the cushioned springs of a trampoline, I can count the number of rings on her left hand. Now, though, if I had to draw a picture of her, I would probably forget the eyes. This is the difference between the concrete and the remembered, between the hopeful and the assured.

My grandmother taught me to play “Heart and Soul” in the second grade. I was the base, the left hand man, wrapping short fingers around carefully carved and painted slats of black and white. Her fingers fluttered across the melody, her lips forming the words *I fell in love with you, just like a fool*. The notes crossed each other in certain folds. With all its bouncing, overlapping pieces, it was a song that people played together and could sing in quiet houses without cringing from overuse. Hardly anyone played it anymore. When I sat on the piano bench with her side against me and our elbows knocking, I could tell that it was a song that really meant something.

Those were the days of backseat car rides and drawing finger art in the fog on the windows. In the afternoons I took piano lessons from a lady in a room filled with floral furniture and stale-smelling carpet. It smelled like it had been wedged between closet doors for days and she slapped it on the floor right before I got there. Against the wall that hid the kitchen was the upright piano with chipping wooden keys. I played the notes for “Merrily We Go Along” for the third week in a row, trying to make it faster and therefore more impressive. This was what I would play at my recital a few weeks later, and everyone sitting in those fold-up chairs in the recital hall would have to clap. I was the first to go onstage and the youngest beginner, playing a song that required only three of the fingers on my right hand.

After the recital I found myself in black tights buckled into the backseat of my mother’s car, clutching the program between short fingers. The words were etched in black ink into the space next to my name, the name of the song that people would remember when they thought of me, the name which meant to me that I was stuck. It was the first song in all the beginner books, and everyone knew that. I wedged the program between the seat cushions, hiding the names of all those who had done it better.

In my grandmother’s living room I pump out the chords on the

baby grand. This is the song of progression. This is the song that means I have moved from here to there. I imagine my mother walking down the aisle to meet my father: white veil, big puffy sleeves atop her shoulders. They would have kissed. How did one kiss in that day? In public. How did one kiss in public in that day?

The melody peaks and slows. A surge of passion. The corners of lips curving and parting, the tension in cheeks falling: the courtesy of restraint.

The quick and heavy wind from a metro whizzes by. All the people of the city my mother warned me not to face alone hurry past like they are counting footsteps, checking off faces with quick steps like they are boxes on a medical survey. I have brought one jacket and a pair of gloves. I pull everything tightly around me.

For the first time in my life I boarded a plane by myself, sat beside a man whose jacket smelled like a sweatshop. He had glanced at the book on the life of St. Francis that a friend had loaned to me that was sitting in my lap. I introduced myself as we snapped the seat buckles into place. "Tell me," he said, "do you think there's life outside of earth? I mean, do you think that we're the only ones that exist?"

"I really don't know," I said. "I guess I haven't given it much thought."

"There's no way," he said. "All those Christians out there, thinking we're so special that we're the only ones in the universe God would've made. Think about how big the universe is. That's impossible."

"It's a pretty big world out there."

"You believe in God?" he said.

"This book is about the life of St. Francis more than anything," I said. "He had a pretty interesting prayer life."

"That doesn't mean everyone has to think so," he said.

"I wasn't implying that it did."

All the trees of the Appalachian out the window rotated beneath us as we flew over North Carolina, all their canopies merging unobtrusively into cropland and then the crisscross of city streets as we approached DC. In an instant I was thrust back into my childhood,

dropping plastic cherries in a blue bucket for a board game called Hi Ho Cherry-O, slapping red tokens onto the black squares of a checkerboard. I opened my book and tried to forget myself there, aware the whole time of the scrutiny of the bearded man beside me and his questions: *Do you believe in God?*

In the underground tunnel of the metro I grip my bag around my shoulder, fold my ticket in one hand. Instead of feeling accomplished like I thought I would, I feel like my feet are sinking into the cement. This ticket is the only thing buying my way from this road to the next: a little stub with the time printed on it. The hand that holds it is so different from the way that it was, dry and knobby now with a thousand fine lines etched into the skin like transparent maps.

The hand rests its fingers across a black-panted knee. A cool draft whistles through the slats between big-blocked cement: *Do you know?* it asks. *Do you know who loves you?* Behind station windows trains glide past, dozens of metro cars with glazed-over doorframes and faces inside that never stop holding their breath. A quarter, a ticket. The train stops, slides the door open: Get in quick. It will not stop for you.

The summer before my third year in college I kissed a boy in the grass beside a muddy lake. Was scared I had strawberry between my teeth. I braided a Hispanic girl's hair in an old Lutheran church building and watched the boy play piano in the sanctuary. Light fading in through tinted glass. Dark shadows under the pews.

A week later I took the girl to the pool and bought her macaroni and cheese in a restaurant with covered booths and plastic menus. Then I dropped her off at the house with her mother and brother, a deep red curtain draped over the doorway between the kitchen and living room. The girl sat across from her mother on the sofa, propped an elbow on the armrest.

“How do I say, ‘I love your daughter?’” I asked. “How do I say, ‘I would love to take her out one more time before her birthday?’” They laughed against the cushions, their hands over their mouths. *Muchas gracias. Mucho gusto.*

Against the bushes in the Wal-Mart parking lot a man with a toothless grin played the guitar. His white beard was so long it tickled his

knuckles when he played. When I drove past him, he opened his mouth, flashing a wide, crooked grin.

“I’m going to stop and listen to him one day,” I said to the boy who sat in the car with me.

The summer days clicked by like camera shots, and those two promises I didn’t keep. The little girl and the bearded guitarist, I never saw either again. And they reminded me of the things that I’m missing, the things I’m forgetting, all those silent birthdays, shivering red curtains, a hopeful musician howling at a lot full of cars.

In the beginning I was a small body whose legs were tucked into pajamas with the feet in them and in the end that is now I am fully grown and walk in the side door at the retail store so I don’t have to look at the man who is ringing the Salvation Army bell. I can feel the money in the corners of my pockets, thrice folded bills and gas station quarters that I won’t give up. Like I don’t have loose change to spare. Like a five dollar bill hasn’t been sitting beside a grocery store receipt in the cup holder of my car for over a month now. I have resolved to buy a navy dress instead of giving to the Salvation Army pot and I must dispense this information to no one. I slip into the department store, unnoticed.

In a dream I find my cousin at her daughter’s sixth birthday party, the walls decorated in lights and her lips are lights. I walk to her and she cannot talk to me; she is cutting a white cake and holds her daughter’s hand so she doesn’t put a finger in the icing. A short-gaited man walks over to me, digging his hands out of his jean pockets, puts one of his arms around my waist and says so low he has to put his lips on my ear, “Can you go and get my wallet out of the car?” His breath is hot on my neck. This is my husband.

I toss the dress onto the counter for the woman behind it who scans the barcodes with a red laser gun. These are the people that have told me not to get my hopes up, tossing receipts into crinkly plastic bags, tucking the tags underneath shirt collars so that at least my things will be folded when I open them up at home. I watch their hands move across the keypads, skin stamped by unassuming scars in the narrow shapes of pine needles and caramel colored spots from the sun, and I can’t pretend that I don’t know what they are saying. The beginning is much like the

end, you know, and all the forgotten fallacies in between: a load of trash that grew heavy because nobody took it to the road for pickup, a stain on the carpeted stair someone never wiped away. But as I take my plastic bags and pull them a little higher to my chest so they won't whack my knees when I walk, I can't help but think that that may be wrong. What if this life will be so great we won't even know what to do with ourselves in five years? That we'll fall in love over and over and begin to caress the faces of walls we hadn't realized sheltered us?

In hushed memories on my way out the sliding doors and into the parking lot, I face the little girl and a ceramic bowl of macaroni and dig my fingernails into the cushions of my palms. I see the smoky jacket of an airplane passenger on a flight to DC, the chipping keys of an upright piano, and the marble-eyed rabbit I slept with until I was eighteen. I can hear my mother's hushed laughter now as she tosses her fingers through my hair: Who loves you? Blades of sunlight cut across all the edges of the asphalt, and part of me wonders if the things that haunt me are the very things that may one day forgive me and I should rather open my hand than cut it off. The bearded man has stopped playing his guitar, but I hear someone picking up where he left off. I think it's behind the radio static. I think it's inside my throat.

As I ride home from Charlotte with the one I had almost loved, I press my fingers to the window glass and sing somebody else's words: "We will overcome the apathy that has made us."

"Don't you love that?" I say. I'm looking at skyscrapers as I say it, all their lights shooting in a million different directions, piercing the sky, piercing people and all the lives that pass through the windows behind which I cannot see. People are stowing away information in there, stowing away their own lives, and I know it's their eyelids and not streetlamps that are blinking at me like lights.

When I get back I will have somebody's covered couch to sleep on, somebody's downstairs sink to use for brushing teeth and taking off this silver powder I have put on my eyes. Somebody will find me in the morning before she pours cinnamon-coated flakes into a bowl with milk; I will not even be the first to open my eyes. My "hello" will be a response to the offer of an extra blanket, another steady step in the rhythm

of being neither first nor last but always pushing each other into movement.

I look at the boy. He is chewing the end of a red gas station straw, letting the end hang across his bottom lip.

“Don’t let it bother you,” he says. “It’s just the way people are.”

He wraps thick fingers around the steering wheel. The window pulls my head away, back to the lights.

THE IMPORTANCE OF LIGHTNING BUGS

FAITH KRESSNER

I remember
Little glowing orbs
Floating through the purple July haze,
Blinking bulbs blooming in the indigo sky.

Little legs pumping, arms outstretched,
Summer dirt beneath our nails
And prickly grass between our toes.

And we cupped the little lights
Softly in the hollow of our hands,
Brushing the ticklish insects
Into the empty peanut butter jar
With holes drilled in the red lid.

And when these glowing drops of sun
Flicker against the night,
I hear whispers—
Friend, do you?
In secret blinking Morse:

Remember when? Remember when...?
Run faster, reach farther,
Quickly, quickly—

Before it fades into the indigo twilight,
Snatch the glowing memory,
Hallow it in the hollow of your hand

And brush the treasured gold
Into an empty peanut butter jar.

OBJECTS LEFT BEHIND

MADISON BROWNE

your granddaughter is 20 now
and she's at a new boy's house.
she sits on the toilet,
half-dressed,
and sighs.

she stands up and looks at herself
in the mirror.

her face shows no approval,
no disgust.

she reaches down to turn on the faucet,
and pauses, eyes fixed on the square of soap.
she picks up the green bar
as the water pours into the grimy porcelain sink.

some strange emotion passes over her face
creating lines contrary to her youth,
before softly returning to the closed lips, blank eyes.
she rubs her hands
against the scentless soap
—lathering—
washing her entire forearms.

she shakes off
her hands in the dirty,
towel-less bathroom.
she looks at the soap,
blinks once
then flicks off the light switch.

THE RUN
COLLECTION

HAYDEN COX

I. *Recovery*

busted toenails
water dripping
sweat

twinge of
pain, frustration, regret
muddled
ignored from the plantar fascia
on the white background of the bathtub

this IT band, screaming from knee to hip,
lectures again that actions have consequences
real
and imagined

soreness in the glutes and hips offers a feeble plea to the mind to get up
move on with life
but a deep exhale only roots the body in place

world, slipping
agony, fading
to nothingness

II: *Affliction*

suicide

Age 15

a neighbor

a friend

a brother

that's where the stopwatch began

on the run

away

from himself

somewhere between perpetually puking on the side of the road and racing a state championship on five broken bones, life started to make sense again

emotional pain replaced

by the physical

the stopwatch kept ticking

III: *Relapse*

January 3rd, 2017.

You'd think he'd have quit by now, but the same drudgery and pain again wraps him up.

It's nearly midnight. The world is home, at its resting place. Sit-coms dance as the world lays thee down to sleep. But his rest must wait for a forlorn track, whipping with a frigid wind that foreshadows the coming storm. Security asked him to "vacate the premises" two hours ago, but he has miles to run before he sleeps. Rest must wait until his Sisyphean task is complete. Now security has gone home, joining the

masses, leaving him alone with an empty water bottle, lying prone where his time begins and ends.

A deep breath coincides with the increasing rapidity of his footsteps, coming back for more. The meaninglessness was realized long ago, but he insists, like the widower who refuses to let go of his lover, as if just one more kiss could bring back life. He whips around the corners, body mechanic, snapping at the hips, trapped in lane 1 while his mind roams free. Almost.

Shared laughter with a teammate, a stolen kiss before the start, the feeling of invincibility when the world floats under his feet. All were once connected through the voluntary struggle, the same that he indulges in now. He suppresses the hope that he can bring them back. It's too late. He knows. All who once felt with him have gone, finding all this and more anywhere else.

He accelerates from the thought, focusing on his task, circling endlessly like a vulture, as if the laughter and kiss will grow again from the dead grass embraced by the borders of cold, broken rubber. The spikes in his shoes dig in again, pushing off to be yanked back a second later. Tease. He takes the first turn for the last time, hurling himself away from the emptiness of his bottle. 40 seconds later, he does it again.

After a while, the track begins to push him away, a heavy presence that has long overstayed its welcome. His lungs burn, stomach churns, legs begin to fail. Despite the consequences of his past, he ignores it, yearning blindly for what? He does not know, seeking in the next step, the next lap, the next mile a fulfillment that still outruns him. But the track—it has had enough. It rips at his insides until his footsteps cease. He collapses outside the walls, returning his borrowed calories to the earth. He didn't deserve them anyway.

Reaching for his water bottle, he recalls that it was never full in the first place. He returns to his exile as his lungs and stomach begin to heal, leaving the dull throbbing of his legs and the blood blister on his foot as a reminder never to return. He'll give it a week. Meanwhile the stench of his clothes offer advertisement of his misdeeds in case some other lost soul mistakes him for someone of worth.

There will be no mistake.

|| TAKING A BULLET FOR YOU

MADISON BROWNE ||

here's to loss.
he raised a shot glass,
and we each fell into our thoughts,
holding up our holy grails.
then liquor was burning down my throat,
but you hadn't left my mind.

A CASE STUDY ON THE THOUGHT SPACE OF COFFEE

ERIN MELLOR

AMERICANO

90mL Hot Water:

I have a query on theory. Why is it that theorists make the disenfranchised individual such a big deal? We all know you're just a cog in the machine. Albeit a shiny, crucial cog. Cogs fuel culture! If you were to grow rusty and incongruent with other cogs, all of society would hinge at a slightly different angle. Talk about the power of an individual!

60mL Espresso:

Is this the first drink ordered each day? I feel like it would be horribly unpatriotic not to make Americano first.

CAPPUCCINO

60mL Foamed Milk:

I hate book titles that begin with “The Secret Life of _____” or “The Double Life of _____.” Don't we all lead secret lives?

60mL Steamed Milk:

My journals may be remnants of my genius or madness; tomes paying tribute to a language that languishes under clichés. Remembered and misremembered ideas refusing to let go, rotting and rioting, finally accepting—as so many people fail to—that they will never be understood by anyone other than the girl who wields the pen.

60mL Espresso:

In the eviscerated light of dusk, when the sunset's glow puddles and brushes across fields and trees, I imagine the many abscesses of my restlessness melting into the sky.

LATTE

30mL Foamed Milk:

I foster a deep fondness for people I have yet to meet. Is it wrong to think that all of our lives stem from sweeping sagas?

120mL Steamed Milk:

I once saw an old man stop under a giant oak tree and look towards the light that hung like dust. He closed his eyes, let out a light hum, and said, "I feel you."

30mL Espresso:

Wasps drift through the frizzy wisps of my hair. Use caution when caressing.

DEAR MR. BUKOWSKI,

CLAUDIA CORNELISON

I read your poem in school today.
They told me to tell them what it meant.
I politely informed them that I don't read minds.
I told them they should ask you.
They said you were dead.

They said that it was my job to figure out
what you were thinking
and why.
They said to look at the rhyme,
the periods, the commas.
They made me count the syllables.
They said to circle words.

So I circled
Of
And
For

They said those were the wrong words.

Then the situation became violent.
They took out scissors and knives and shredded up your words,
pasting the bloody parts
all over walls.

My favorite wall, stained
with hot word blood,

the poor words
all mangled and ripped apart.
They couldn't even speak and God knows that words cannot
live long if they cannot speak.

I'm sorry Mr. Bukowski.
I'm sorry they did that to your words.
I thought they were nice.

THINGS YOU LEFT BEHIND

KELSEY FUSON

I.

You forgot your stuffed frog at a hotel in Chicago when you were six. Her name was Bitsy and she was missing her left eye (you tore it off, actually, because you wanted her to be a pirate frog. You thought that an eye patch would grow in its place, which supposed both that Bitsy was alive and that eye patches were some sort of organic bodily reaction to eye-loss. Your father sighed and rubbed at his forehead when you told him. “Jodie,” he said, “what am I going to do with you?”). You realized that she wasn’t with you an hour down the road and screamed and cried and begged to go back and get her, but your father refused, white-knuckled hands gripping the wheel and voice tight. It’s funny; Bitsy wasn’t even your favorite. That was always Bunny, the pink rabbit with the stuffing coming out of one arm that you threw up on once two years before. Years later, you think that Bitsy had very little to do with anything.

II.

When you were eight, one of your toenails came off during a failed attempt to climb higher in a tree. Your father climbed up after you and carried you down, mumbling meaningless comforts the whole way. Then he cleaned up your bleeding, dirty toe while your mother wiped away your tears. It was the last thing you saw them do together.

III.

You were nine when you left your father a note on the fridge that said you were running away. In reality, you were hiding in the corner of the linen closet downstairs with a Gameboy and Oreos. You wanted him to have to call your mom, for them to look for you together. It was, in retrospect, incredibly selfish of you. Your father searched the neighborhood for hours before he came back to the house, nearly hysterical. You watched through the crack of the door as he reached for the phone and started to dial, then hung up and held his face in his hands for a few minutes. When he found you another hour later, he grounded you for a month. You never told him why you did it.

IV.

Your mother and Josephine took you to an amusement park when you were eleven. You'd been feeling sick for the past few days but you'd been looking forward to this for weeks now so you ignored the ache in your gut and rode your first rollercoaster, your mom on one side and Josephine on the other. The queasiness you hadn't been able to shake hit its peak right as the coaster turned and your vomit was blown right onto Josephine's blouse. You tried to apologize to Josephine, but she laughed it off and went to go clean herself off while your mother bought her a new shirt from one of the vendors. The barf stain never came out.

V.

You left your book report on *Lord of the Flies* in the car when you were thirteen. You were especially pissed because you'd missed your best friend's birthday party to work on it and you were damn proud, so you called your father from the office (you didn't have a cellphone; you couldn't have one until high school so you had to go to the front office and ask the lady at the desk with this gross-looking brown stain on her shirt that you couldn't stop staring at if you could use the phone, please) and asked him to bring it on his lunch break. "You need to be more responsible," he said when he handed it to you an hour later. "I can't be bringing you your shit every other day."

VI.

You took off your favorite red hat to play laser tag and lost track of it when you were fourteen. Your mother and Josephine crawled around on the floor with you to see if it had fallen underneath a bench or something. You never did find it, but Josephine bought you a new one that you honestly liked better. It sits on your dresser to this day, unworn.

VII.

Your mother took you to get your hair cut when you were fifteen. After a disastrous attempt at shorter hair in fourth grade, you'd kept your hair as long as you could, but now you were ready for a change. By the end of it, there were over thirteen inches of hair left on the floor and what was left on your head barely brushed the back of your neck. Your mother clapped her hands together in excitement. "You look gorgeous, baby!" she said. Your father, when he saw it, shook his head and mumbled something under his breath.

VIII.

When you left your phone at the grocery store when you were sixteen, you said nothing and went back to get it later yourself. Your father yelled at you for ignoring his calls and you promised it wouldn't happen again.

IX.

You kissed your girlfriend goodnight in the car two weeks later and your father saw. You thought he would be angry, vicious with his words like he was when he found out your mother had married a woman. Instead he got so, so quiet. He wrung his hands and stammered something that you didn't quite catch (you imagine it was something like "et tu, Brute?" but that's probably just your dramatic side coming out). And things changed. Your father no longer seemed quite able to look you in the eye no matter how hard he tried. So you broke up with Shanice a month later (she didn't cry even a little, but you did. Not in front of your dad or your mother but Josephine, Josephine whose dark skin and darker eyes and soothing strokes of your hair reminded you so much of Shanice that you cried even harder). When you told your father this, he sighed and tried his damndest not to look relieved.

X.

At seventeen, you gave your father a movie that the two of you had gone to see together the year before for Father's Day (it's a sad film, one that had you sobbing in the theater by the end, clinging to your father's hand for comfort. Years later, you found out he'd hated it). But you also sent Josephine a flower arrangement (Anonymously. You weren't really sure why. You weren't really sure why you did any of it) which wound up costing you the money you'd planned to spend on a new skirt. By the time you'd saved up to buy it again, the store had shifted to the fall fashions and the skirt was no longer for sale.

XI.

You left your graduation cap on the floor when you were eighteen and running to hug your mother and Josephine (your father wasn't there; he refused to be in the same room with them and they refused not to come). You didn't really care, but Josephine picked it up for you even so. "I'll keep this for you," she said, "in case you want it in the future." You appreciated the thought, but you didn't care in the future either.

XII.

That night, your mother and Josephine took you out to dinner and your mother proposed a toast. "To Jodie," she said, "my brilliant baby girl who's going to college in the fall!" They both smiled and clapped a little too loudly, drawing attention to your table as you waved for them to quiet down. At some point, your class ring (which was too big anyway; you'd never really known your ring size) flew off your finger and across the restaurant without you noticing. Your mother was the one to point its absence out to you, and she was the one to search the most ardently. It was Josephine who found it, though, and your mother looked vaguely upset about that.

XIII.

At twenty, a kid who'd just gotten his learner's permit mixed up the brake with the gas and t-boned you in an intersection. Luckily for you, he wasn't going very fast, but you did break your arm and wound up having surgery to remove your spleen. You woke up hours later to your father and Josephine sitting by your bed. It was the first time you'd ever seen the two of them in the same room and it was almost surreal. "Your mother was out of the state when we heard," Josephine said when you asked about her, "but she'll be here soon." Upon hearing this news, your father kissed you on the forehead and told you he'd be back in the morning.

XIV.

Your father took you and your college boyfriend Dante to a bar on the night of your twenty-first birthday. He ordered you a Bud Lite and a steak. You never liked beer, though—you preferred screwdrivers, or a good mojito—and earlier that year you'd become a vegetarian. Still, you sipped at it awkwardly, ignoring the taste as best you could, and cut the steak into tiny pieces on your plate. Dante looked like he was about to say something to your father, but you shook your head at him. When you got back on campus, you threw your to-go box in the garbage and bought some Easy Mac from the convenience store.

XV.

Dante broke up with you three weeks later. He came by with a box of stuff you'd left in his room over the past eight months—some books, a teapot, twelve CDs (which he made fun of you for still listening to in this age of pirated music, but the CD versions just sounded better than the MP3 files), a stick of deodorant and a toothbrush, five hair clips of varying size, and your fuzziest pair of socks. He didn't give you back your red pen with a plastic heart at the top, though. You weren't sure if he did it on purpose or if he'd just forgotten until you saw him using it in the library the next day. You never mentioned it to him.

XVI.

You got blackout drunk one night when you were twenty-four and left Shanice a voicemail. You have no idea what you said, but when you tried to text her and apologize you found out your number had been blocked.

XVII.

You and your father went to your cousin's wedding when you were twenty-six. Your father brought a date, a beautiful Latina woman twice his size. Conversely, you've always thought your cousin was rather ugly (and felt horrible for thinking it, too, since she was never anything but nice to you). As she walked down the aisle, she wobbled in her heels and fell on top of you, dislodging the carefully placed bobby pins holding your hair up. As your cousin picked herself back up and the crowd tittered around you, you were desperately holding your hair with one hand and searching for your missing pins with the other. Your father's date leaned over and hissed, "Just let it fall. You're making a scene." You didn't let your hair go, but you didn't find the bobby pins either.

XVIII.

One week later, you were in New York trying to exit the subway when someone stepped on your shoe and it came off. When the crowd cleared, you saw a willowy brunette standing there, offering it up to you. "Sorry about that," she said. For a moment, you indulged yourself in a Cinderella-esque fantasy that this would lead to some grand love story. Then you took the shoe and you never saw her again.

XIX.

You left a white rose on your mother's coffin when you were twenty-eight. Josephine was supposed to give a eulogy but when the time came her legs wouldn't support her so you went and spoke in her place. As you turned to face the assembled crowd, you saw what you thought might be your father slipping out the back.

XX.

You were twenty-nine and cooking scrambled eggs for dinner when Josephine called. It was their anniversary, her and your mother, and she needed someone to talk to. You walked away from the stove as Josephine sobbed softly in your ear. “She loved you so much,” she said with a snuffle. “You know that, right?” You told her you did. The eggs were long since burnt once you got back to them.

XXI.

You were thirty before you first brought your girlfriend, Amara, to meet your father. You’d dated quite a few people of varying genders in the years since Shanice and Dante but they’d never lasted long enough for you to bother mentioning to anyone. Your father at dinner was polite, but tense; he asked all the right questions (How did you two meet? What’s your family like? What do you do for a living?), yet he sounded like someone was holding a gun to his head. He honestly tried, though, more than he ever had before, and the reality of it left you so bone-achingly sad. You pretended to get a text from your boss asking you to come in and left your father alone at the table.

XXII.

At thirty-two, you and Josephine were addressing invitations for your upcoming wedding to Amara. The invitation for your father sat apart from the rest, addressed and stamped. You were hesitant to send it—not because you didn’t want him there but because he might’ve refused to come. You told Josephine this and she did not assure you otherwise (you would never have believed her anyway). Instead, she opened her desk drawer and dropped his invitation in. “It’ll be here whenever you’re ready,” she said. Before it closed, you caught a glimpse of your high school graduation cap, still sitting in her desk fourteen years later.

SIMPLE SYRUP

MADDIE DEPREE

I

In Spanish,
we learn “estar enamorado”
instead of “ser enamorado”
because being in love is a condition that can change.
When you visit,
you bring me twelve roses and two pints of ice cream.
You’re more than sorry, you’re
SORRY SORRY SORRY
angry, because
It wasn’t my idea
insistent, and
I swear to God, I’ve told you everything
and I forgive you because
It was just one mistake.
Later, we learn “empearar” –
to get worse.

II

The temperature rises through October.
Finally,
the heat presses against your face
exposing
the humiliation of young adulthood,
the rawness of your fingertips,
your bare ego, scraping itself
against the moon
until it breaks its skin and bleeds.
Two years pass,
and you won’t meet my eyes,

Winner of the Editor’s Choice Award | Poetry

won't accept the small movement of my mouth
telling you
it's time to leave now,
there's nothing left to say.
You drive home alone.
Your mother holds you.

III

I unfollow you and your parents on Facebook
so I won't see your face unexpectedly.
I think about church camps,
Oreo milkshakes, Johnny B. Goode,
loveseats,
my head resting
against the cradle of your hip bones for the first time.
It was some night in June.
I think about you
lifting me onto my bed by my thighs,
the reflection of my warm legs in the mirror.
You, turning away afterward
Because
I don't want to talk about this.

IV

Three weeks go by
and my tests come up negative.
At his request,
you mail my dad two twenties
and a note that says, "I am truly sorry."
He calls it pathetic.
I tell him that you are not a bad person.
The next day I walk back to my dorm at 1:30 a.m.
to breathe, take a shower.
I wonder if you sleep before or after Pennsylvania.
My chest rattles

and my roommate says it sounds like bronchitis.
I don't cry. I wash my hands more.

V

One night I pray for you to die.
I fantasize about leaving you behind,
watching Atlanta become the size of a dime,
eating airline peanuts on my own
and thinking of you
not at all.
On the other side of the world,
I will hold my face in my hands,
watching
the enormity of everything, the people dressed in black,
my own feet moving
across the pavement,
and finally,
Thank God
I will embrace
the glorious absence of you.