the echo
2021
Dearest Reader—

Thank you for picking up this year’s edition of The Echo! When I first learned I was to be chief editor during a pandemic, I knew that creating The Echo was going to be a challenge. The 2020-2021 school year will certainly live on in our minds long after we ditch the masks and the hand sanitizer, but hopefully The Echo will serve as a reminder that the creative spirit continues to endure, even in bleak times.

One of the most valuable lessons I learned while trying to put this thing together was that I would not have been able to do it alone. I owe a huge thank you to Ian McPherson, my valiant assistant editor-in-chief who fearlessly put up with my technological shortcomings—a flaw that I was unaware of until the pandemic. Ian is incredibly talented (and incredibly patient), and our meetings always brightened my day.

I also want to thank my editorial board for all their hard work. I wish that we’d been able to meet in person, and hopefully some of us will stick around to make that a reality next semester. Working in an entirely virtual setting is lonely, and I think I can speak for many of us when I say that the pandemic has given me a deeper appreciation for human interaction.

Lastly, I want to give a (literary) shout-out to everyone who submitted to The Echo. Even if we were unable to include your piece this year, I truly hope that you will continue to create and submit in the future. An artist is not necessarily defined by their success, but by how much effort they put into what they love.

So, without further ado, welcome to the 2021 edition of The Echo

Molly Cribb
Editor-in-Chief
Class of 2022
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Containment
Brandon Barney

1 The Echo - Studio Art
Every day I wake up and feed my body and dress up and clean my body and go outside and get in my car. It’s not a list, it’s one complex action, several efforts, like squeezing an empty tube of toothpaste onto a ruined brush. There are a thousand thoughts that roll through my head every second, half complete and broken like headless dolls and dull kitchen knives. The dull ones are the most dangerous, the dull ones don’t do what you want them to. I am a tenant in the prison my ancestors built. I’m made dull by thousands of passes at thousands of tough ligaments. I am dangerous because I don’t do what people want me to. These thoughts mean nothing, but they take up as much space as “YOU FORGOT YOUR KEYS YOU STUPID FUCKING-” and that gets exhausting through sheer volume. Spilling a glass of water is nothing compared to a leaky faucet. I am a leaky faucet: dangerous because I don’t do what people want me to. I am the exposed wire, the bare wire, the screaming and sparking wire that just won’t turn the light on for you, and if you come too close I might just bite. Today is the ten thousandth pass at broken bones and pulsing veins, though what I’m passing I don’t know. I start my car
and the air conditioner freezes my bare knuckles. I wish I had one of those heated steering wheels, then I’d be happy.

I get angry at a lot of things and some people don’t like that. I’m an even tempered person, maybe even nice, but when I see those insurance billboards I get so, so angry. They’re a dull knife that passes over my mind, taking up so much space. I’ve been told to ignore them, to not get mad. “It’s not rational.” Sage advice, though I wish I could follow it. That’s a lie, I do follow it. I follow it like my eyes follow the ball of a tennis match, like my eyes trace the path of the billboards as they pass in my windshield. I follow it until I’m dizzy and I’m angry again, so angry that it makes me want to cry. I know it’s irrational, I know, so don’t say it. You’d be angry too if it took up so much space and didn’t apologize, like someone forcing your elbow off of the armrest. I want to think of proactive solutions but the only one I can think of is living in the woods and killing animals with my bare hands. At least then I’d be fighting phantoms and demons. You can shoot those; you can’t shoot billboards. When I think about shooting something I shudder a little. I wish those little drifting thoughts weren’t so scary. Just don’t get mad, it’s not rational.

I’ve parked my car now, which is a process by itself. The person who parked in the place I normally go is trying to slow me down. They’re from Kentucky. They should go back to Kentucky. This next part is one motion too, so pay attention. Wait for the clock to turn five till and get out and walk in and clock in and walk out and get to my post. Every passing person is watching me, and I wish I could yell at all of them. There’s so much candy around my post. It’s there to trick people and I have to ignore it. It doesn’t speak to me (I’m not crazy) but it has little voices that almost whisper and taunt. It’s not rational to be angry at candy, but I am. The job is easy, but it twists the mind. The moment you get lost in thought another mouth breathing asshole comes around the corner with something they want to buy, waddling
like a child and looking at me like I’m a puddle of piss in the stairwell. I’m an associate, have a nice day, can I help you, did you find everything you need, asshole stupid asshole don’t-, you can remove your card, have a nice day. I wish I was crazy enough for disability, but no judge would dare. What am I talking about? I’m a rational person, not like in the movies. I feel strange but not especially profound, like a black rose in a spring bouquet or a painting about rape in a middle school showcase. Where do you even house such things? So few know the TV static that passes over my vision on days like this and so many see it as cause for resignation. “Hello, I am your trusted associate and I demand that you ask the candy bars to stop screaming at me. Anyway, see you tomorrow.”

I once watched a video of someone using a schizophrenia simulator. It was Anderson Cooper and he tried to buy a newspaper while voices in his ears told him he was worthless. He talked about how hard it was, and I told my friend I’d rather die than live like that. Boo-hoo. Now I know he was full of shit. Now I know how laughably inaccurate and meaningless it all was. Advocacy is a tricky thing to do when you have no idea what you’re talking about. Schizophrenia: a name on a dusty old book, though whether it was academic or gothic I can’t remember. It means “splitting of the mind” but I prefer the Japanese “integration disorder.” It’s a better description for the tole it takes on me. I just want to live in the woods and kill animals with my bare hands. Mental health, don’t make me laugh, I’m healthier than most. I’m not deep in my feelings, I’m just watching through the kaleidoscope. I’m not sick, sickness implies cure, or that I ought to be cured. Both are false and I’ll bite you until you bleed if you try to put me in one of those—

My break comes up and I buy a candy bar and I regret it and I eat it and I regret it. I shouldn’t try to make the world quieter by giving into its demands, it’s just not rational. I tried mindfulness once,
which is what secular society calls certain types of meditation – taken once daily or as needed. I hated the man’s voice. I tried to go without, but my mind was flooded with thoughtless visions, morphing little pictures, fluid forms that showed me things I’d never seen and what I could never understand. In a small scale society I’d be a shaman, carried through the village on a chair. Here, behind the register and after my break, I’m just twitchy. I’m forced to smile here. It’s no secret that big companies value money over honesty and I am to reflect that in my countenance. My teeth are displayed for the discerning customer, a knife that passes over my unwrinkled eyes, my eyes that follow every pass like a game of tennis. 10,001 10,002 10,003… I watch as the men and women walk the aisles. My body stays still, and my mind follows each and every detail until I’m out of breath and near tears.

I remember a girl I’ve only met through the stories of a friend. She didn’t know how to make movies, but my friend did. “She was over ambitious,” he said. She wrote a story about some person with schizophrenia, someone who kills the person they have a crush on. Fantasizing about killing someone you’re attracted to is only something a sane person could make up and call art. Some people think they know a lot. Some people don’t know what it’s like to watch through the kaleidoscope. She said I’m dangerous. I am dangerous, I don’t do what people want me to. I’m the tumbler girl’s raunchiest fantasy. I’m the bad boy who will cut your throat and make daddy disappointed. I’m a Halloween costume or a sexy girl with a baseball bat. I’m just plain dangerous, so topical, so subversive, so quirky and different. Nobody understands me [hand over forehead, look off into distance]. I’m usually pretty sex positive but your fantasies make me sick. There we go, I’m angry again, and here’s another mouth-breather who wants to buy a toilet seat.

I think of a scene over and over again, one in so many movies. It’s that scene where a character holding a cake trips and plants
their face into it. I saw it happen in real life. My mother was making soup, her enthusiasm dizzying and aggravating. A vase fell from up high and shattered on the counter below; glass got into the pot. That moment of disaster echoes for hours before a reaction follows. A person sits in that moment and sometimes it’s so devastating that tears cannot be produced, and speech is rendered useless. It happens when the ten thousandth pass bares down on something you’ve tried so hard to make happy. It happens when I pass that billboard, or when I smile, or when I’m told I’m sick, or when another talentless writer uses me as an excuse to fantasize about murder. I stand at my post with that pot of soup as I try to keep my face from showing anything, just watching through the kaleidoscope. I want to sob, like those people in the movies want to. The thing that stops them from letting it all out stops me now: It’s just not rational.
Interrupted
Caroline Bass
on again off again
Carly Marlys

Will you go downtown with me, 
a little drunk but not too much, 
dressed in jeans and shoulder-free 
running before me up sticky back stairs.

I could be your leprechaun in plaid. 
Listen to my friends. They know how long 
I’ve liked you. They say the words I can’t. 
Stop smiling so my heart can slow.

But be my cherry-wine sparkling sip of 
poor taste music and pitched sugar-sweet, 
my bible girl with the shining eyes, 
clasped hands on red-draped knees.

You’re the remnant of early-morning dark— 
refractive stripes and close-shaved heads, 
my stuffed-mouth secrets and later-tell mistakes. 
My glass-cased girl, my first and final year.
Along the Canal
Caroline Bass
Perito Moreno
Annie Schulz
MUNDANE LITURGY
Mary Shelley Reid

The sky above the horizon is yawning and drowning the kitchen in soft pink morning light as my mother washes the dishes. Steam rises up and curls the ends of her hair, soapy water loosens the skin on her fingertips, and I wonder how she manages to hold the world together with those hands. That evening she’s stringing white lights up on the tree slowly and gingerly, and I think about all thing things we do to keep out the dark.

Is not that the very essence of the human condition—crawling through tunnels, inching across dirt and mud, grasping for the light at the end?

My grandmother’s soft and honeyed drawl floats out to sit on top of the damp summer air while the porch swing sings and the street light on the corner flickers in rhythm with the crickets, and I marvel at how such tired eyes could inspire such wonder. After the children go to bed, she and I sit on the porch and our laughter rises up to the rafters and brings relief to my bones. Later, as I fall asleep, I notice that the heaviness is gone from my chest.
It has to come from somewhere, doesn’t it—
the light—even in minuscule
pinpricks, like stars poking through
the darkness of the night sky.

The trees are bare and wanting when we are walking
through the same woods in which I made my home as a child,
and a little hand is grasping your finger. I show
him how to call out to his echo, and as such a small voice
booms off the walls of this vast place, I remember
the crows-feet smile of my grandfather that taught me
to always bellow toward the light, and a grateful
laugh escapes from my lungs. On Sunday, the church’s
song is rising up to the heavens, and for a moment
I feel that the heavens are singing back.

It comes like that, sometimes—
not in flashes or sparks,
but like the rain
in glorious magnanimity.
Aunt Janet’s Wind Chimes
Brandon Barney

13 The Echo - Photography
Lost Memories
Alexis Burson

These rooms were once filled with people,
Dancing for hours
With no care about the morning,
Unbroken laughter,
Cheeks aching from smiling too much,
Voices cracking from overuse,
Knocking on the doors to tell us to quiet down.

But now,
Those are just memories
Sung in the corners of my tired mind,
Hidden with dread of tomorrow,
And muffled by a mask,
Hoping that one day,
The choir will sing again.
Creature of the Season
Lara Rudman

The beach air fills my lungs. Almost hyperventilating, I am desperate to take it all in, for it to inflate me. So I hold my breath as long as I can, twirling and dancing, a cloud of sand surrounding and enshrouding and the chill water straightens my spine and opens my eyes and I bathe in the light and the sounds of crashing waves block the cruel words swirling in my head and I feel myself filling up and up and up...

But the harbor never lasts, the tide always recedes, taking my sanctuary and sanity with it. The dreaded exhale comes suffocating and bringing an end to me.

As the color of my skin fades from my body, so do I. A creature of the season, slinking softly away as the leaves fall. I wait for my dawn again, never knowing if it will come then. I bide my time, pained and pale, hoping to feel the soothing sun set upon my face once again.
Morning Sunlight

Sophia Schaffer
Sunset
Carly Marlys

We’ve all seen blood-skies this week.
Rent open, heaven shattered blazes
of forest fire color, burning up
the clouds that sway like sheep
in a wolves-teeth winter wind.

Finally, the depths of air-bound
water reflect the madness that
has driven us all to stare at the sky,
with tears in our eyes and shaking fists.
At last, the sky bleeds back.

We all see it coming—
feel the hot-baked breath of ending;
even those who hide their souls
and let a rose bloom’s scent
distract them from the open sky.

Like me, the rose girl, the smile,
the one who tries to push a tilted world
in a perfect circle, until the sun dies
in a blaze of beauty and color
and I see a peaceful mirror of my own despair.
Riverside
Caroline Bass

Sprouts
Caroline Bass
Prose From a Farmhand on a Red Rose
Macy Petty

I have never seen a wild rose grow red. They always dot the grass or climb tree trunks in a self-important pink. Some are light and frail like little ballerina skirts dancing across the green, some are the same tasteful magenta as the winter coat and matching hat that the mayor’s wife wears to church every Sunday of Advent, but none are the color of blood, the color that mothers make daughters wipe off their lips before leaving the house. I have wandered every field on this side of the county, plowing or planting or sometimes just walking, and have never found a bold rose. At this time of spring, I was desperate, for with the passing of May and the arrival of summer amid the already unforgivable heat, all the wild roses and corn flowers would fade and give way to more practical abundances of squash and green beans.

I was looking very hard for my queen flower as I made my way to town that afternoon. I had itched for my break all morning; it was too nice a day to waste on hacking weeds from between rows of infant corn. The sky was mostly overcast by innocent looking clouds that were sure to darken into thunderheads later, but patches of
sunlight occasionally passed through oak branches and painted dull, uncentered mosaics on the dusty road. I was thankful for the slight breeze that rippled the grass in the cow fields to the side of the road. I had been able to work for the morning without sweating through my shirt and making mud of the dust on my face, so perhaps the lady I was going to pick up would not take me as a confirmation that she had come to live in a backwater town known only for bad news and even worse manners.

She had come to such a place of course. Such was the entire purpose of her departure from a bustling, jazz-playing city on the coast to live in the spare room of a farmer’s widow and her farmhand son, to teach a room packed with farmer’s children with her fine women’s college education. The rhetoric around the thing at church the previous Sunday was as desperate as my gazing through roadside lilies and dandelions for an exceptional bloom that morning. To hear the pastor’s wife tell it, she was our only hope to mold our children into scholars that might reach beyond the county line, seeking out a future devoid of a good piece of land to plow up or a good man to build them a house. The choir director seconded this assertion with the insistence that we all do our best to make her feel welcome, to make her want to stay. My mother resolved then and there that frying chicken and deviling eggs to perfection for the teacher’s first lunch would still any urge to depart, and had anxiously tasked me with personally greeting her and riding alongside her in the pastor’s car to deliver her to our home.

She had good reason to be nervous. I was sure the reverend had not deigned to come and pick me up this afternoon because I had questioned his theology far too often, and I was just as apt to meet this situation with skepticism. Those Sunday morning effusions about this woman had made me shift resentfully in the pew. As one of the poor youths who had been confined to this town, I wanted to
make clear that I was not hindered by lack of learning but by lack of means. Almost twenty years ago, the well trained lady who was my teacher had been brought in from out of town, and taught me to read everything I got my hands on, to follow every spring of curiosity that broke ground in my mind, but no amount of learning could produce a sum of money that could send me away for higher education. Rising to chorus “I’m a child of the King” along with the other congregants that morning, I didn’t resist too hard as cynicism sprouted like a weed.

This girl would leave as soon as she found there was no dance hall or theater to take off to in the evenings. All the young men would tell her she talked way over their heads and none would be able to take her anywhere besides the café on main street, maybe somewhere nicer the next town over if they had been paid that day. She wouldn’t be patient enough with the children, would get into fights with fathers about pulling them out of school to work. Yes, she’d pack her fine clothes and head back to paved roads and department stores before the leaves really began to fall.

I had expressed all this to my mother at Sunday dinner and she hissed in reply that I should be ashamed of myself. I did not think so. I meant no slight against the girl by it, I was sure she would be the very pride of the finishing school, mousy and polite, aware of her good fortune and never unkind about our lack thereof. Of course, she would be smart, but she would be that scared kind of smart that voraciously learned and repeated back everything that books and school mistresses told her. She would not rock the boat with talk of anything besides what the age-old lesson plans told her to teach about. I did not doubt her qualification or her good intentions.

Nor would I blame her for leaving. I just hoped she would be as dreadfully boring as I had imagined her, so I would not get used to quality conversation only to lose it all together. I didn’t worry much
over that, though. I had heard enough about her to discern she probably never sought out any knowledge that she wasn’t tasked with learning, and outside the schoolhouse she would probably embroider her way through idle gossip with the ladies who brought her here.

Worse yet would be if she stayed and did what she was meant to do. Inspire the children, she might. A few may even be able to go to college, but those who couldn’t would end up like me. I had a head full of daydreams, and eyes that saw to the very ends of the earth, but feet that would stay forever planted on these dusty roads. Because of it, I couldn’t even look forward to meeting a new face for knowing what she might bring about.

I came upon the church, marking halfway to town, just as the sun came out from behind the clouds. Ceremonially, I looked up at the cross that topped the steeple and gazed over the town. There was a lightness and clarity that came over me in the presence of this building for a reason that was fixed between fond memory and childlike faith, despite the dissembling and duplicity that existed within its walls at times. I had learned “love thy neighbor” from my Sunday school teachers as a child, and as an adult now saw that the thought didn’t quite reach its fruition when a scandal among the congregants was concerned. The duplicity continued in me though, I realized, as I had done nothing but discredit their young teacher since I first heard her name. Not very loving or very neighborly.

I was thinking of how to best push back my pessimism, how to shake her hand with the hope that she would be what we needed, when I saw it.

For rehearsing variations of, “hello there, welcome to town,” I almost missed a little flash of deep scarlet beneath an oak tree about ten yards away on the right side of the road. I paused and blinked, taking off my glasses and putting them back on again to be sure. In the patch of grass shaded by the tree and littered with old fall leaves
there was a single minuscule bloom. I dared not believe my eyes but still walked faster, wanting to see it quickly, but not too quickly as to spoil the anticipation.

Even from seven or eight yards away, I could tell it was a wild red rose, the finest, most regal shade of red I had ever seen, like blood and wine. The queen flower had bloomed across my vision at last, otherworldly in its beauty yet familiar, like a vision from my wanderings between pages of type. As I approached, still scarcely believing, I wrestled with whether or not I should pick it. Surely this find would be best preserved between the pages of my Bible, tucked between the verses of a joyful psalm. No, like the prize fish with a multitude of hooks already in its mouth, she deserved to live another day. More than bold and unseemly, this hue was defiantly intense. It was not just the rouging of cheeks or the spilling of blood, it was the very color of a beating heart deep down inside.

Except it was not red at all. As I arrived beneath the canopy of the tree, I saw that its thick leaves were merely shading another commonplace growth. This variety of rose was more winter coat than tulle skirt, and certainly not the singular specimen I had taken it for in the shadows. I could see now that many other buds were about to spring open around it, all the same. I released something like a sigh mixed with a bitter scoff and turned to walk away, only for a few of the thorns to grab at my pants leg. I shook them off a little more violently than I meant to. Perhaps they were trying to change my mind, to stop me from seeing only with my mind’s eye, but I would have none of it.

Main Street was in its typical afternoon stage of lifelessness when I reached its center. The barber hummed in his shop as he shaved a face I couldn’t quite see through an open window and a one-horse cart carrying a man and some pine boards made its way down the street. The courthouse stood stoic down the road, its big
grey stones boasting no authority these days, as not the first criminal case had been held there this year. Most of the shop windows were dark, most everyone having not returned from their homes or emerged from their back rooms for lunch, each taking their time in knowing that they would probably have only one more customer before closing at five. The silence became a bit off putting as I approached the train station and the barber’s humming faded away. I could not find it within myself to take up the tune, I was still disappointed by the dull flowers. Spring had offered its best already, I resigned. There would be no orchestral thunderstorms and the emerald fields of wheat grass would not shine like oceans in the sun. Perhaps these were all stories that I told myself, not lived experiences, never seen, never real, though they should be. Any whistling I might have done was cut off by that of the train.

I tried to feel real, to shake myself from this stupor of melancholy as I neared the platform. By the time I got there, the engine had ceased its puffing and the sparse passengers were beginning to disperse. There were only five left in a single car, a family of four who I did not recognize, probably coming to deliver their children to grandparents for the summer. Our girl had not yet stepped off. I recognized the reverend on the other end of the platform by his shock of white hair. He was fanning himself with his hat and looking for her with squinted eyes. I hung back as to leave all the first impression to him, as charm was his way of keeping congregants. His face shifted slightly to the left, and I followed his gaze to the door nearest to me.

What I saw first was red.

Red lips, red shoes, and a red string of beads around her neck. She looked right at me as she stepped carefully – not daintily – onto the metal steps. I couldn’t quite make out what color her eyes were – a mossy green or hazel – but deep like churning water nonetheless. She had on more cosmetics than I had seen a woman wear in these
streets. Her were cheeks roughed almost to the point of indecency, and the skin of her face looked like china, especially with dark ringlets of hair blowing across it.

Her lips shocked me the most – what a mockery! Why, they were the same color as that elusive flower, the same shade I had just imagined on the road.

There was divine laughter in this, I was being taught as lesson. I had taken her for a girl who floated on air, a girl of obeying and pleasing and giggling, a girl of pink. But this crimson woman smiled at me and strode over to the reverend with wide clomping steps and smirked at the little wrinkle forming on his forehead. He said something and she let out a loud, bellowing chuckle. Behind it I could hear years of saying “no” to being quiet, to wearing something a little less loud, to being a little more polite. Turning, she looked at me curiously with eyes full of knowing, and I would not have been surprised if she uttered my name then and there. I was frozen; she exacted a kind of magic that was as familiar, like staring wide eyed at wrapped Christmas presents in childhood, as it was entirely foreign.

There might be a chance after all. I decided this only because there was no way of knowing what this type of woman would do. I could predict the commonplace flower, but I had never seen anything like her before.

At least, that was what I imagined the farmhand was thinking about me. My mother had warned me that I might get such looks for wearing this deep shade of red.

I had stopped listening to the reverend’s description of the lunch being prepared for me an entire minute ago and had turned my attention to the man down the track who was staring at me behind his spectacles. Maybe it was those thick, round glasses that made him the most thoughtful looking man in a dusty shirt and suspenders that I had seen since leaving the city yesterday morning. There was no
animosity in his eyes; he didn’t think me indecent like the reverend, in fact he looked rather pleased. Maybe he was discontented with the monotony of this little town, his curiosity for the world encumbered by his life in the field, I thought. He looked a bit alarmed, so I decided that he had been looking for me all day.

I searched every field and gully along the track for a flower more passionate looking than those prim little pink roses, but they were all as disinteresting as the class of young women I had just left. All just about the same, none daring to be more. Maybe the lack of bold hues spoke for the women around here too. Not for long, I had vowed, freshening my lipstick as the train pulled into the station. I would teach these girls to be ambitious, to be “fonts of knowledge,” to never stifle their laughter. So too would the boys learn to admire them the way he was admiring me now. I smiled at him. I did not have much hope to find a man here who would not tell me I was talking over his head, but the astonishment in his eyes gave promise. I halfway heard the reverend say he was the son of the woman I would be living with, so I would find out soon enough.

Of course, it did not matter if he would grow fond of me or not. He could walk by and never speak to me, and that would be fine, so long as he thinks my lips are unlike any rose he has ever seen.
When I Called Him a Coward
Annie Reigel

White Rage
Annie Reigel
Let Us Be Glad!
Will Deng

Let us have no one’s tale fit fancy’s dread.
Murren ist vergebens. Laßt uns froh sein!
No faithful snares nor woe shall have us trapped.
But dine on Rhenish wine from nature’s vine.

Know you not vinter’s hands were stained to shrine
In curved glass ripened glee for someone’s bliss?
With nature’s gift do we learn the domed climb
And swelling dews on which the sun will rise.

How swiftly the mount crumbles and sense fades,
Blissful joy buried in its own fire!
Murren ist das wahre Kreuz des Lebens.
What dark passion should grumble a pyre?

Whoever dies will soon in morrow revive.
And those who rejoice shall forever thrive.
Laundry Room
Mary Shelley Reid

I saw you in a penny on the lint screen.
How odd it was to be so suddenly assaulted
by your presence when I hadn’t thought
of you in so long. Why I saw you
in a penny, or in a moment of such laughable
mundanity—upon the midnight realization
that I didn’t have enough clean underwear
for the next day—I couldn’t tell you.
But there you were, sitting snuggly
on the screen between two rather unremarkable
specks of lint. And to think,
if I’d said keep the change last week,
when I bought a latte for four ninety-nine
and spilled it on my jeans, you wouldn’t be
staring up at me in the face of Abe Lincoln.
The thought of it made me laugh,
which in and of itself was redemption.
Motherboard
Brandon Barney
Etruscan I
Jordan Winiski

Pondberry
Jordan Winiski
Run

Ariel Crank

Her shoes crunch against the ground, her heart racing and pounding, arms and chest burning. She’s not so sure about the ifs, buts, and whys, or how she got into this mess in the first place. All she remembers is her mom yelling *what about the children* and then the shattering sound of broken glass all over the kitchen floor. To the best of her knowledge the color of the glass was green. Then her father’s shouting, slurred cuss words transitioned to soft sobs that seemed so faint they were part of a dream, which she tried to convince herself she was having.

Her brother had a good head start, but it was okay. He knew that she was strong enough to catch up, that she knew these woods behind their house, that they played games such as hide and seek and tag all the time. They both knew, but not even a single word could escape their mouths in their unbroken run.
Home from the House of Death:
A Poem Found in Homer’s Odyssey
Elizabeth Mangone

*This poem is built using found words and phrases from Homer’s Odyssey*

The fire in all its fury burns the body down to ashes.
Rugged will and lion heart sifting away
like a shadow, dissolving
like a dream.
Two vultures hunched on either side of us,
bearing endless torture.
The water vanishing, swallowed down, laying bare the caked black earth.

In the swift ship at the water’s edge we went, sped by our rowing first, then by a fresh fair wind.

Earth be my witness now,
in the dark, cascading waters of the styx,
I cry out to the everlasting gods in hope,
as clear and sharp as a swallow’s cry,
holding them spellbound down shadowed halls.

In the swift ship at the water’s edge we went, sped by our rowing first, then by a fresh fair wind.
And in the cruel blue sea, I make my fury,
In the house of death with its all-embracing gates.
As only a priest, a prophet for this mob.

In the swift ship at the water’s edge we went, sped by our rowing
first, then by a fresh fair wind.

While the Beggar King of Ithaca,
delights in the grand feasts of the deathless gods on high:
cheese and luscious honey and heady wine,
the thousands raise unearthly cries,
wailing convulsively, streaming live warm tears.

In the swift ship at the water’s edge we went, sped by our rowing
first, then by a fresh fair wind.

Between the mixing bowl and the silver studded throne,
the rasping doors groan as loud as a bull can bellow,
bringing them all to a hushed,
stunned silence.
Did you think we would not make it home from the house of death?
Unpublishable
Carly Marlys

Scene on top of scene, a sharp-corner perfect book. The thrill of breath, of arrival, of being ready for a reader’s eyes.

An author friend of mine had brought a pantheon of crystal worlds to life. I loved his words, so let him glance at mine.

And then I learned that a single word, a pronouncement from just the right person will turn to dust what little life I make.

I am grateful, in a bitter way. He killed my creation, gently, before it could be jaded by the world—

before it could reach and strain and fall all the further for having caught a single glimpse of the open sky.

I would have fallen with it.

Handle
Jordan Winiski
Ars Poetica:  
For When the Smoke Clears  
Amanda Cordle

Poetry is a language  
I know best when I lose myself  
when I am nothing but a mirage  
of who I could have  
should have been  
before I choked on the ash of perfection and  
burnt myself to the ground

Some nights, the words flow easily across the page  
like stars against the ink-black sky  
reminding me that tragically beautiful  
is simply a poet’s term for desolation  
That the stars we wonder at  
are dying, burning to nothing. That  
poetry is both a solace and a cage
Despondency has a way of making itself a muse

For I have loved the words so much that they’ve absorbed me, made me a slave to the ebbs and flows of sadness for the sake of an art I will always run home to

I have forgotten to write of beauty, have forgotten to write of wild lilacs in the forest, and the orange streaked sky at sunset. I have forgotten the balance of nature--her seasons, her decay, her bloom
Final Destination
Anna Bowman

The sky falls in a sheet of gray, washing over the tallest mountains, flooding the monotonous stretch that spreads into interstate, taunting me at every turn.

The Tempest squalls as the tide pulls at my tires and the torrent coats my window, despite my need to see the Toyota that I tail too closely.

This deluge of heavy mist and sleet sustains as I continue to drive into the mammoth, slick puddle, so I collide—a tidal wave, devastation.
Frozen in Time
Elizabeth Mangone
The Guest Room

Jordan Stevens

The white paneled door stands entirely ajar, beyond which vaulted ceilings enclose a sheetrock cavern where old conversations echo past their expiration. Gift wrap is stacked neatly alongside glass cabinetry, well-loved cameras filled with undeveloped film tossed nonchalantly onto a muted damask pile. The couch remains unfolded into a thin bed, sheets unmade, as if waiting patiently for the return of their occupant.

In the corner of the unlit room, the star atop the tree has glowed for weeks now.

The white paneled door stands entirely ajar, though it might as well be closed.
The Overlapping Years
Lara Rudman

Birth often makes me think of death, but maybe that is just the morbid side of me. Since the birth of my niece, I have thought a lot about the death of my great-grandmother. Family is a gift, but the nature of death and family is a source of great suffering. You will probably only know four generations at a time. Even if you could trace your lineage back to before your ancestors came to America, those individuals would only be names on a sheet of paper. You have no connection to them other than a surname. The more removed the family member, the less you know them. However, as I have gotten older, I wish I had taken the time to get to know the ones whose lives overlapped with my own.

Grandma Winnie was my paternal great-grandmother, and the only living great-grandparent who was nearby. I was often uncomfortable around her, something that I feel terrible admitting. I rationalize that, as a child, I was often uncomfortable around many people. Maybe it was because I was so young and she was so old, but her fragility scared me. My dad used to drag me to the nursing home to see her, and I, never one to disappoint my dad, would begrudgingly go with him. He said she was lonely and wanted to see me, one of her two great-grandchildren, my older brother being the second. But I do
not remember him having to visit her as often as I did.

She lived at a nursing home called Cedar Lane, which was a rather generic nursing home name. It was the only place I ever remember her living, other than the hospice where she lived during the weeks leading up to her death. I cannot recall the name of the hospice, or what it looked like on the inside. All I remember is the dreary atmosphere, muted colors, and Grandma Winnie in a hospital bed, death not far off.

But the nursing home I remember well. Her room smelled like that of an old person: strongly perfumed, as if to mask the smell of age that grew on her with each passing year. I would hesitantly go to hug her, and she had so much lipstick on it would leave a mark on my face when she kissed my cheek. She would then rub the deep-red lipstick mark off my face with her wrinkled and papery fingers, stretching the skin of my cheek painfully. She had so many stuffed animals on the couch it was hard to find a place to sit. I guess she did not have guests often enough to have a permanent spot on the couch cleared off. I usually chose the spot next to Thumper, the bunny from Bambi. I would sink into the couch when I sat down, the stuffed animals surrounding me, as if they would engulf me if I sat back too far. Grandma Winnie would always sit in her recliner, which had a good view of the TV. The TV would always have Walker, Texas Ranger or Judge Judy on.

Funnily enough, the other day, I was scrolling through the TV channels and stumbled upon a rerun of Walker, Texas Ranger. I was shocked to find that I still remember the exact words and tune to the theme song.

Sometimes when we visited her, we ate lunch with her in the cafeteria decorated with yellows, blues, and pinks. Some residents were also eating with their visiting loved ones, while others ate alone, silently. I do not remember liking the food. I was not a fan of green
beans or Jell-O. Awkward silences would ensue, at least they felt that way to me, as everything seems more intense as a child.

If I did not see her at the nursing home, then I would see her for the occasional family dinner at my grandparents’ house. She slowly walked towards the door with her walker, as if each step caused her pain, my dad or grandfather lending her an arm. The air of the house changed when we all knew she was coming. A hushed whisper would travel through the rooms of my grandparents’ house. Grandma Winnie is here. I would watch her approach the house from a window in the dining room. When she finally got to “her spot” on my grandmother’s striped couch, she would sit there silently in the L-shaped corner with a red, knitted blanket across her lap and survey the room, waiting for someone to interact with her. Her eyes would lock on me, and I would walk over to say hello, as my father had instructed me to do in the past. I cannot remember what we would discuss. I was always itching to walk away, but I knew if I was rude, my dad would scold me.

After we all sat down at the dinner table, my grandmother would ask if anyone wanted to say Grace before eating. Without missing a beat, Grandma Winnie would quickly say, “Grace.” It was a joke that had probably gotten old for everyone else at the table, but that always got a chuckle out of me.

She died when I was in middle school; I did not cry. My dad picked me up from school to go to the funeral, and when it was over, I went back to school for the rest of the day. I did not have a strong enough connection with her to cry, and I think my dad knew that.

I think that if she were alive now, we would get along well. Grandma Winnie as I have come to remember her, and me as I am now. That’s what my grandmother tells me. Apparently, I am a lot like her. I am told that every time my grandmother watches me put a ridiculously unhealthy amount of butter on my bread at restaurants.
I find it strange that those little, inconsequential characteristics that I have are what reminds my grandmother of her mother-in-law, but maybe they are what really sticks out after all these years.

Grandma Winnie was a stubborn woman; she was opinionated and told everyone what she thought, even if they did not want to hear it. I cannot say I am the same in that regard, as I loathe confrontation; I do much better to stew and wallow passive-aggressively. I am of the mind that Grandma Winnie was never that way. My dad said that when he was a child, she would come out of nowhere and turn his computer games off if he was not listening to her. And when he got older, he would have to fight her for the check when they went out to eat. Despite all that, everyone who knew her thought she was wonderful. I just wish I had gotten to know her better, rather than hearing these stories in retrospect.

I was not allowed to see her during the open casket part of her funeral. My dad told me that was not how he wanted me to remember her. I thought that was an interesting sentiment because I do remember the last time I saw her; she was in hospice a couple of days before she passed away. Her nails were unpainted. She looked weak and frail, and her red hair, which was always perfectly done, was graying and not so perfect anymore.

I only went to the funeral after the casket was closed. It was a sullen and somber day, as it had been raining that morning. I do not remember any of the eulogies, or if my father cried. She was cremated, something that now makes the Catholic in me cringe. I was told that she had always wanted to be cremated and have her ashes spread at the top of a mountain. Then, when you would get a piece of dirt in your eye, and you would flick it out, you would say to yourself: “I had a piece of Grandma Winnie stuck in my eye.”

Years after she passed, my grandfather and his siblings scattered her ashes at the top of some mountain in Colorado. Now and
then, I get something stuck in my eye, and I think of her.

My niece will never know about Grandma Winnie, even less than I knew about her. I think about how she will probably never really know my grandparents, her great-grandparents. She will be relegated to remembering them the way I do my great-grandmother, a ghost that floated into my life just as quickly as she floated out. A distant person who shares my blood but who has no real connection to me. I am forced to remember her through the lens of others. Through their memories and stories, I craft my idea of Grandma Winnie. I do not put much stock in my memories; they are the scattered musings of a shy child who was too naïve to understand the opportunity she had. My great-grandmother deserves better than that. Grandma Winnie deserves to be remembered differently than I can manage on my own.

I think about what wonderful people my two pairs of grandparents are, and I think about all the happy memories I have shared with them. When I see the joy in my grandmother’s eyes when she holds my niece, the tears that I can see forming in her eyes, I wonder if this baby will ever know how quickly they fell in love with her. The scene reminds me of a photo in an album in my closet that shows Grandma Winnie holding me as a baby. I am struck by how the expressions of my grandmother and Grandma Winnie are the same; the look of unconditional love gracing their faces with a youth neither my niece nor I will ever remember. I hope I can do my grandparents justice with all the memories I have collected over the years. I think about how my dad talks about his grandparents, the smile that lights up his face as he thinks about the time he spent with them, the love they gave him that I will never feel. He tries his best to impart their memories to me, but it will never be enough. Although, it does not stop me from trying.
So, I ask my dad what he remembers and grill my grandparents about the times that I was not alive to witness. My grandfather begrudgingly gives me little details of what his childhood was like, growing up in Chicago under the iron fist that was his mother. I fill the gaps of Grandma Winnie with the memories and characterizations of others. And over the years, I have created a clearer picture, mixed with both my memories and theirs. I know she loved me, more than I will ever be able to love her in return. And maybe that is all that really matters.
Picnic Day
Caroline Bass
Furman Bell Tower
Nathan Norfleeet

Editor's Choice