

2022

# the echo





the  
echo.

Furman University's Literary and Visual Arts Magazine

# editor's note

Dear Reader—

I am proud to present to you the 2022 of *The Echo*, a celebration of Furman students' excellence and boundless creativity. Each year that I've participated on the editorial board, I'm struck by the beauty and innovation of the writings and art contained within. As the pandemic both continues and dwindles, sharing art of all kinds has become a vital vehicle for communication and human connection. The volume in your hands is the culmination of the efforts of an entire team of brilliant Furman students.

Thank you to the editorial board for not only their flexibility and diligence, but also for lending their honesty and own creativity throughout the editing process. I couldn't have asked for a better group of individuals to collaborate with this year. Special thanks to my Assistant Editor, Caroline Bass, for sticking with me and for lending her design skills. Additionally, much gratitude to our advisors Dr. Laura Morris and Dr. Joni Tevis, who generously supported *The Echo* with their time and expertise even when they were busy with their own projects.

Lastly, thank you to all who submitted to *The Echo* this year. I sincerely hope that you continue to create and share your work with others—creativity takes courage, and I'm grateful for the courage and passion each applicant displayed by submitting to us.

Please enjoy the 2022 edition of *The Echo*. I hope that you find something within these pages that inspires and delights you!

Anna Blackman  
Editor-in-Chief  
Class of 2023

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# Ode to Yellow - after Olivia Gatwood

Poetry — Caroline Prewitt

My favorite color is a sunny day  
And a sunny day is honey on a spoon,  
the daffodils blooming fresh and bright  
like a promise, like a celebration.  
the corn colored threads running  
down her shoulders, meeting her elbows  
pineapple juice in the morning

I want you to coat my insides like pure joy,  
like heaven's ecstasy  
want you to fill me up  
yellow paint like Vincent Van Gogh  
I'm not too found of his irises,  
but I liked the sunflowers

And I like the way the world tries to underestimate you  
because your soft, right, optimistic  
something precious adolescent girls can't let go of  
and that makes them naive, right?  
Someone to be adored, protected,  
laughed at?  
But you have them right where you want them

The sun can warm and burn,  
the bee can bumble and sting  
bite,  
make you hurt,  
leave a mark on your wrist  
The lighter that flickers when the house is asleep  
the flames on top,  
moving and shaking  
ready to catch something  
hungry to zap,  
eager to burn  
lions and tigers and the flesh of her sick skin

A concept I learned in Kindergarten,  
when I grabbed a lizard by its tail  
That love is exuberant and indelicate

and when Claire screamed  
and everyone turned their back on my assailant ways  
I learned that the world might love you more  
if you were a shade or two lighter  
a cream, a butter  
something you can bake in a cake,  
because lemons need sweetener  
but the parameters on your happiness taste too much like insecurity  
and how else can you get what you want other than to grab it?

You have no insecurity  
you are shining and brilliant and bright  
even when the world around you is a brewing blue,  
a serious cobalt  
a thundercloud raining on your parade  
because they forgot you were lightning

Spring is my favorite season  
because it is the season of you,  
the giggle of pine trees  
pollen coating every surface  
My seventh grade converse,  
monarch butterflies,  
pina colada popsicles,  
the lightning bugs that blink and fly away

Yellow,  
When the world tells you  
that you are too much  
too uncontained  
too uninhibited  
when they complain that you are some sort of lightweight

Yellow,  
Remind them about the bees  
Tell them about the goldfinches  
and the bitter love of a sunset  
on everything you wished to be

explain the multitudes you are and everything you love,  
and show me how to love it too

Because I've been burned by a spark before,  
and I've never felt more acutely alive.



# Kudzu Monsters — SDG Life on Land

Studio Art — Anne Heaton Sanders



# Vinegar Girls

Poetry — Macy Petty

“Sweet girl” is what boys call me  
Because I don’t know  
How to play games  
I can’t measure up to the subtle bite  
Of wormwood  
The raised brow  
The cold rolling of an eye  
I took sweetness and stillness  
Dew on the grass on a cool Sunday morning  
And distilled them into a perfume  
That I could wear  
But Granny was wrong  
About flies and  
Honey, thick like tears  
And new pressed powder  
And “too hefty” laughter  
Vinegar girls do so much better

# The Fishbowl

Prose — Ciaran Francis

The Fountain of Youths flows from a speed pourer, smooth as glass. Three shot glasses are filled, and the patrons drink to their limitless health and are satisfied with a grimace. This is O'Neal's: an Irish bar only in name and in reckoning. It lies in a college town and so on the weekends it belongs to the undying horde. On the weekdays it goes to the vultures, townies, and whatever other creatures take pleasure in picking at dry bones. Those days are quiet. This is Friday. This is Bloody Sunday. Here, suffering and joy are divine.

But so many inescapable questions were lost in this moment of trespassing, late in the night. Two girls huddled in a closed stall in the men's restroom. Jean jacket was retching over the bowl and the curly haired one held up the other's ponytail from a standing position with the other hand holding a cup. The pose lended itself more to a garbage bag than a lock of hair. Jean's stomach threatened to come up next, and Curly thought of many things in those long moments in and around heaves. None of these were on the absurdity of the situation. Long gone were her obsessions with "the other" and the facilities they require. She didn't so much as glance at the urinal, nor at the piss-soaked floor below. She stared at the mortar between cinder blocks and at the shape that made an "I", much like she did in detention all those years ago. Her eye got caught up at the bottom portion of the shape and she traced it over and over again with great care.

Only moments before, the two had barged into the restroom. Jean clung to Curly's arm as she pushed the swinging door. The wrong turn was not a blunder, but a calculated decision. The men's was always near empty, but the women's had a line five deep out the door. Had there been a moment to lose, the pair would've gained the ire of everyone who made their way over to the restroom. There was no time for negotiations or gender performance when her friend was so close to disaster. This calculation, however, failed to take into consideration the sheer volume of contents that needed to be disposed of. Jean had her whole stomach to give, and her generosity was not nearly through. The men's was usually nearly empty, true, but that didn't mean there wasn't a constant flow in and out. Rude steps entered the small room, and most immediately recognized what was going on. Curly rolled her eyes as one made a joke, and the other laughed. Her arm was getting sore and if they thought it was so funny, they could take the reins.

Meanwhile, Jean kept up her usual pace, spitting and cursing as the bowl reflected every gasp for air. She had no concept of what was outside this little fishbowl, other than the allpowerful spinning and the evil in her stomach. A person promises funny things when they're in a situation like that. She was totally absorbed in this little, porcelain world, the cold liquid touching her knee, the strange stain that wouldn't go away no matter how much she flushed. She forgot about rage and fear and what she wanted for her upcoming birthday. In these few moments she knelt there, she was closer to God than she had been in almost ten years.

The two men from the bathroom had other business to attend to. The conversation white shirt and combat boots had left carried on without them and welcomed the pair back with bitter unrecognition. Red shirt and trucker hat were still talking, Red going off on another tangent and Trucker listening well enough for someone so far into a tab. They stood close, side by side; for people more reasonably distanced it was almost impossible to hear what they were talking about over the music. The two knew each other from a class they had a while ago. Red had spotted Trucker while trucker was making his way around the bar with White and Boots in tow.

Boots kept getting lost in his own thoughts as he stood there. White was listening closely but the liquor from last night was still disagreeing with his sensitive stomach and disagreeing with each new drop. Red was talking about his brother now, or at least his brother was mentioned and that he was going to some other university north of here. It's a nice town, apparently, with enough restaurants for the pair to go down a list of. Boots had pre-gamed too hard, and with too much variety, and he had just remembered this. Every detail he was able to pick up on, his mind just ran with until another was heard. He was feeling stuffy, like he should say something or pace around for a bit. The conversation was boring, apathetic, he was going to say something. Current affairs were making him sad, and he couldn't intellectualize why.

The conversation shifted to Trucker's dog, who was going blind. That poor creature can't do anything by herself anymore. That's sad. But then there was a lull in the conversation, a perfect opportunity to get himself included.

"The other day," he began, looking for whether the others would listen. Nobody looked at him, but nobody kept talking, "I was walking down to the library. There was a guy in front of me walking too, and he had one of those canes blind people use. Well, I started following him. Full national geographic style, ya know? I was fascinated. Until this point, I hadn't ever seen a blind person in real life. I kinda assumed they were pretty helpless. I was thinking, *ell maybe he'll need some help getting to*

where he needs to go, but nope. That cane of his found every bump in the sidewalk. I asked myself, *how does he know when there's a crossing*, but his cane found the little bumps. You know the little bumpy plates at crossings? I asked myself, *how does he know where he is on the sidewalk*, but if he ever got off to the side his cane found the grass first. He even held his cane different depending on where he was and what he was doing.

"I got so excited to see how he would tackle the next thing, ya know? But I also got kinda ashamed. This guy was unstoppable, a real machine, ya know? Like he ever needed my help. People really do find a way in the face of adversity. I was seeing the world in a whole 'other way. Like, what am I experiencing right now? If he's doing pretty good, can I start doing pretty good? Well, I'm way past the library at this point, I'm way past. There were more questions like, *wonder how he's going to find that street sign*. Well, he found that one with his face. He really slammed into it, like you could hear it ring a little bit. It was disappointing. He might've been independent and capable, but he was still blind as shit I guess. Or human at the very least. I was pretty embarrassed myself. I had just been watching this guy the whole time like an idiot, so I just decided to leave him alone and hope he didn't notice me. I don't know what I thought of that... It was pretty funny I guess."

Red pursed his lips a little and nodded solemnly. Trucker took a sip of what must've been his fifth beer or tenth drink. White laughed a little, he seemed to really picture the story but didn't say anything. Boots reckoned with what he was doing there, both at the bar and with this group of people. There really wasn't much else he could do. There slight sting of embarrassment to go with it all. He let go of his obligation to listen or to contribute, so too did he let go of the small island his friends inhabited within this turbulent sea of people. Soon the world around him grew larger, so large that he lost where exactly his tiny body had gone. The song changed, and with it Boots began to fade. He became translucent. Through osmosis he left the group, carried away by some current or another. He became like a petal on the wind. Through embarrassment or some more bitter resentment, earned or unearned, he ascended into something just short of annihilation.

Late in the night, a vending machine gazed out into the crowd with immaculate, unblinking hatred. It occupied a dark corner of the bar. All light seemed to be sapped there. At the top of its window was a light, hich illuminated all that was inside. Off all of its rows, only half a dozen or so were occupied with cigarette cartons. Red and green boxes dotted the black mechanical background. These, as the machine understood, were colors closely associated with a celebration of gift giving and generosity. These cigarettes where different from food or drink in some

ay, but this difference didn't matter to the machine. The chemical processes made possible by the cigarette would never be relevant to the machine, except that people wanted it. It loved to watch the faces, those twisted masks, and it loved to see them change when it ate the paper bills and gave nothing back. It watched this particularly interesting night from behind the glass. He watched the animal dance.

Witnessing the ascension of Boots was Curly, who coolly sipped at her cup as her blonde, battered friend lost five dollars to the vending machine. That was one of the boys she had been talking to in the line.

Trucker had ascended the que inexplicably. In the freezing cold he had talked his way from group to group, climbing with skillful abandon along the side of the bar. As soon as he became acquainted with one person, he had gained the interest of another, leaving Boots and White well behind. Boots watched in awe as Trucker ascended and wondered how another person could move with so little regard for anything, how someone could learn to fly as he did. Boots wondered if this feat of social genius was just the virtue of a dog wagging its tail, guided only by the scent of piss and over eager hands. Trucker left nothing behind but a general stirring, but in his wake there was at least a shred of opportunity.

Behind Boots and White, there was a group of girls who had been so stirred and had not forgotten the conversation that had just left them. Most of them talked amongst themselves, not so interested, for one reason or another, in mingling outside the group. The exception was a curly haired girl and her jean jacketed friend. Boots had made an offhanded comment about how quickly Trucker had made it up the line, and that he'd be inside in no time at all.

"It's kind of impressive," Curly said, "but it makes you wonder if, ya know, there's anything wrong with the guy."

"What do you mean?" Boots asked.

"Well, sometimes people like that have something wrong with them. They're so good at putting on a friendly face because they've practiced it. Maybe he's just trying to cut in line..."

"No," White said, keeping the conversational tone, "I've been roommates with him for two years now. He's one of my closest friends. He really is just that nice."

They all looked up the line at Trucker, who was a full six groups ahead of them. Boots said, "he really is like a golden retriever with his tail wagging." Neither of the other two seemed to agree with what he said.

"I could be wrong. I'm a neuroscience major, so I think about these kinds of things. It's sort of common among people like that to be so outgoing. Take John Wayne Gacy for example. He was a popular, local politician up north. He also had like thirty boys buried in his crawlspace."

"You don't think someone like our friend could be well intentioned?" asked Boots.

"I'm not saying that he isn't, I'm just saying that it's a thing."

"Nah," said White, "nah, he really is just that nice. He's always like this. That's how we met. He just came right up to me, and we became friends. He really is just that nice."

Curly gazed at Trucker the exact same way that Boots had. She dropped her assertion, but she too tried to pin the climb. It wasn't between dog and its opposite for her, though. What Trucker wore was a twisted mask, and she wanted to know what was beneath it all. She wanted to open up the back of his head like a present and see what all that clicking was about. There was no plan to put him back together, either. Such violence was justified when someone like that was walking around, someone so much... She didn't even want to finish the thought. Trucker had made it in, despite the speculation of everyone he left behind. For all their faults, the others remained in the cold for just a little longer. They were able to go their own sperate ways and to enjoy the fountain of youths.



## **Conversation pt. 4**

Photography — Anne Heaton Sanders



# Looking Glass

Photography — Catherine Sigman



# The Dining Room

Poetry — Alysha Matthews

shuffle into the kitchen  
And lay the food on the table.  
He sits by the window  
The TV is on, but it's too early for wrestling  
Oh  
He's watching that church in Texas.  
Or maybe he's looking out the window at his garden.  
The garden has not been the same  
It's been hard  
since he got sick  
"Thanks Doll"  
I don't need to fuss at him about his sugar  
or his medication  
or the oxygen pumping in through a tube from the other room.  
e's already pricking his finger  
lancing at the medicine chart Shirnett made him  
And the oxygen tube is draped over his head and plugged into his nose.  
So I sit  
I look at him  
I tell him about covid  
about old friends and coworkers  
about our grandkids  
and how the basement flooded and  
so many of his things  
are gone.  
He nods along while he chews his yam and chouchou  
He smiles  
it trembles as if he's holding in a laugh  
But the chair is empty now.  
The Tv is off and  
I sit alone.  
It's been a long time.

# Blurred Past

Poetry — Alexis Burson

It's been so long  
The ballroom empty  
Lost footsteps  
Echoing in the silence  
Every cough or clearing throat  
A grave danger  
A step back

But the melody is in the distance  
The chair  
Orchestration indoors  
Audiences present  
Unmuffled laughter  
Visible smiles  
Crowded stadiums

Is that what life used to be like?  
It's been so long  
But the melody is engraved in my veins  
The old notes coming up my throat  
It's been so long  
But it's so close  
If we could keep going a little longer

# Popular Emptiness

(an erasure poem made from 21 different Yik Yak posts)

Poetry — Cassis Auctoritatis

All this talk about [redacted] the algorithm of life [redacted]  
[redacted] but [redacted] some of the questions [redacted] are almost  
impossible to answer [redacted] How do I determine whether I've cross the line [redacted]  
[redacted]!

The messed up memories we made together are being destroyed to make space for [redacted]  
[redacted] the universe [redacted] sending [redacted] a sign [redacted] that [redacted]  
[redacted] the world in not gonna end

[redacted] the world is not gonna end

Why [redacted] does anyone [redacted] fear [redacted]  
[redacted] ? Your city is insane [redacted] and [redacted] You [redacted]  
[redacted] are [redacted] fighting for your life [redacted]

You [redacted] are [redacted] universally [redacted]  
and [redacted] violently alone [redacted] with [redacted]  
an abomination [redacted] barreling towards you. You don't feel anything

[redacted] not even [redacted] fear [redacted] only [redacted] a [redacted]  
feel [redacted] ing [redacted] like [redacted] drowning [redacted] in the lake.

Go to sleep it will Be there in the morning

# Let Go

editor's choice

Prose — Lara Rudman

She got another cat for her birthday. After she had lost the last one. The girl had taken it outside for some fresh air, as her father had often instructed her to do for herself. The cat and the girl sat in the yard lounging in the sun until the sound of the garbage truck coming to pick up their trash had scared the cat away. Into the brush it went, and it was gone. The girl had run inside crying, a blubbering mess. The mother had looked for the cat for a couple of hours but eventually gave up. She was sad that her daughter was sad, but it didn't really bug her that much that the cat was gone. It often fell to her to take care of it, including scooping the litter box. She very well couldn't trust her daughter to do it, or even her husband for that matter.

Her daughter had seemed to take on the qualities of her cat, slinking around the house, careful to stay out of sight. Sometimes, the mother would turn the corner and find the girl and her cat crouched just around that corner. One time they scared her so bad she dropped a basket of laundry, socks and T-shirts scattered about. The cat had pounced on the socks, falling over with a little blue sock caught between her little paws stretched up to the air. The girl had giggled endlessly.

Her husband was much more upset than she was about the lost cat. He wouldn't touch his wife, but he liked that cat. It would cuddle up on his lap as he sat down to watch TV at night. Or when he would sleep on the couch. The lost cat was a new thing to fight about. That—as before he told her he was leaving. Now that he was, they fought a lot less. The uncertainty had become certain, and that was it. They didn't know when to tell their daughter about it. So they got her another cat, hoping to soften the blow. No dad... new cat. Almost even in the eyes of a four year-old.

One night her husband insisted that he was leaving the next morning. And it suddenly became too real for the mother to handle.

"Please don't leave," she sobbed, clutching at his shirt. She wrapped her arms around his torso, his whole body stiff. "If you love me even a little bit, you would stay... for just a little bit longer. Please stay." She squeezed him harder and harder. Her arms dug into his side.

"Ow," he said. Unconvincingly at first, but his voice became more insistent. "That hurts. Let go." She continued to squeeze. Tighter and tighter. "That's enough," he barked. "Now let go."

And he wrenched her arms off of him, holding her wrists up in

the air by her head. "This won't make me stay. We can't do this anymore."

She stared him down, the tears drying on her cheeks. "And if I told you I was pregnant?"

The man dropped his wife's hands and backed away from her. "That's not --"

"It is," the woman interrupted. "When you 'slipped up' a few months ago."

He didn't say anything for what felt like an eternity. She knew that face he wore though. He was thinking. Calculating. But she had played her hand. The final decision was his.

The man took a short step forward and placed a hand on her belly. His eyes met hers. "Our children deserve better," he whispered, with a sincerity that was uncharacteristic of her husband.

She thought about that for a moment before she answered. "We are all they will ever have. That counts for something. We count for something, more than you and I could ever be separately." The woman brushed her hand against his, pressing his hand flatter against her stomach. "I can't do this alone. I'm not enough." She left him with that thought and turned towards the door.

She walked out of the room to find the girl and her new cat sitting outside the room. Playing aimlessly together. The girl lay on the floor, her hair splayed out around her. The smokey-grey cat pounced on her tendrils of auburn hair, catching strands in her little claws.

Surely, she was too distracted to hear their conversation, the mother thought. Surely.

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The girl quickly grabbed the sock from her kitten and ran into the bedroom, the cat following after her. She waved the sock in the air, keeping it just high enough out of the cat's reach. The girl laughed as she watched it contort and throw its body in the direction of the sock. Eventually, the cat got bored and just stared at the girl as she waved the sock in its face. Quicker than the girl could react, the cat's paw lashed out, claws scraping against the back of the girl's hand. She dropped the sock, surprised. "Ow," the girl said, clutching her hand to her chest and eyeing the cat strangely. It lunged for the sock and went underneath the girl's bed with it. The girl laid her face on the floor, trying to see underneath. All she saw were slits of green, blinking at her. The girl reached toward those eyes, and the cat hissed. The girl sat up quickly and began to cry.

She closed the door of her bedroom and sat leaning against it. She would wait. Eventually, the cat came up to the girl, gingerly, and rubbed up against her knee. The girl took this as an apology. She picked up the

kitten, and the animal clipped out a quick meow before beginning to purr in the girl's arms.

She hugged her cat to her body. Swaying back and forth. The cat tolerated it for a moment until it started to squirm. On instinct, the girl hugged harder. Her cat was not going to leave her. She rocked back and forth. The cat exhaled a ragged cry. I love it, the girl thought. I love it I love it I love it. The cat's back paws broke the skin on the girl's chest as it struggled to break free from the girl's death grip. She grimaced through the pain. Finally, the cat stopped struggling, accepting of its fate. She held the cat like a baby, rocking it back and forth.

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The mother popped open a can of cat food, the distinctive shrill of the metal opening up. Usually, the cat came running towards the kitchen at the sound, but no one came. Confused, the mother went looking for it. She called the cat and made clicking noises. "Baby, have you seen the cat?" she called.

"It's sleeping," the girl answered. Her voice sounded dulled coming from her bedroom.

The mother opened the door and stopped when she saw the girl cradling the cat. The woman crossed her arms and braced herself against the doorframe. "That's nice," the mother said. "But it's time for dinner."

"Okay," the girl said. The girl took the cat, extending it out to her mother on open palms. An offering. The mother gasped at the sight. When the girl moved her arms the mother saw the streaks of blood on the white, cotton shirt she wore. She fell to her knees next to the girl and swatted the limp body from her hands. The ashen cat landed with a soft thud next to the girl. The mother frantically pulled up the girl's shirt. Angry, red cuts stretched across her chest, reaching as far down as her stomach.

"What did you do?"

"I just wanted it to stay," the girl said.

"Where did you think it was gonna go?" The mother asked, desperate to understand.

The girl looked at her, confused. "I'm not sure."

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The woman couldn't tell her husband what had happened. Not when she wasn't even sure herself. So, she quietly took her daughter by the hand, leading her out of her bedroom. The mother checked the hallway to see if her husband was around. He wasn't. The two slinked down the hallway, as quiet as church mice, to the little girl's bathroom. There, the mother wet a towel and wiped away the blood. Tears streaked down the girl's cheeks, but she was quiet. The mother was not sure if she

was crying from the pain or because of what she had done, if she even knew what that was. The mother bandaged her chest and stomach as best she could and put fresh pajamas on her. The mother left the blood-stained pajamas in the bathroom sink to soak, but she knew she was never going to get the blood out. She might as well have thrown them in the trash, but she couldn't bring herself to.

Leaving her daughter in the bathroom, she went back into her daughter's room, gripping the bloody towel tightly in her hands. She picked the dead cat up with it, she carried it carefully out the back door of the house.

Sometime later, the woman walked back into the house, silently, and washed her hands in the kitchen sink, scraping furiously to get the dirt and blood off her hands. Even over the sound of running water, she heard the sound of footsteps coming towards her.

"I'm sorry, Momma," a soft voice said. The woman ignored her and continued to scrub away. She put another dollop of soap in her hands. The footsteps got closer, and the woman felt little arms wrap around her leg. The woman refused to look down. She refused. So she scrubbed furiously, the scalding water almost burning the skin off of her hands. "Momma," the girl repeated. The woman slammed her hand down on the faucet. She paused for a moment and then twisted the faucet to cold. She placed her hands back into the freezing water, cupping them and collecting some water in her hands. The girl's arms seemed to burn around her leg. She let the water run through her hands, let it collect, and then run through again. She did this over and over, until she heard her daughter draw a breath, as if to speak again. The woman's hands were cupped, full of water, and she moved them away from the sink and overtop her daughter's head, where she quickly drew her hands apart. Water splattered atop the girl's head, some of it getting on the woman's dirt-stained jeans. The girl let go of her mother's leg with a gasp. She looked at her daughter, wet hair stuck to her forehead and little drops of water dribbling down her face, so much like the blood that had been on her chest.

"Now, you're clean," the mother said.

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She stared out the window above their kitchen sink. Past the backyard with the swingset. Past the trees standing at the entrance of the woods. She looked deep into the woods and saw only a little mound of dirt over top of a dead kitten.

The woman was still standing at the kitchen sink when she heard her husband call her daughter's name. And then he called her name. She turned around to find him standing in the hallway, holding dripping wet

pajamas stained pink with blood.

Part of her had hoped that if she had left the bloodied clothes in the sink, her husband would find them and she would be able to tell him what happened, explain to him the kind of person their daughter might be. Now that she was faced with the situation, she wasn't sure what to say. How could she tell the father of her child what his little girl had done? But he needed to know.

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"It was an accident," the woman said, trying to convince herself, too. "She didn't know what she was doing."

"How could she not know?" the man demanded. "It was hurting her. It was raking its claws down her chest. Why wouldn't she just let go?"

The woman could only shake her head. She didn't have the words to explain it other than to say, "I think she heard us."

Her husband dropped the soaked clothes on the floor, which made a sickening slap upon impact. With an unreadable expression on his face, he abruptly turned around and walked towards his daughter's room. He opened her bedroom door slowly, the light from the hallway trickling in to reveal his daughter laying down in her bed, turned to face the door. The slightest reflection from the light revealed that her eyes were open.

The woman watched her husband walk into the room. She called after him, "Please, leave her alone. She knows what she did. She's sorry." The woman braced herself in the doorframe, preparing for one of her husband's tirades. Instead, she watched her husband climb into bed behind his daughter. He wrapped his arms around her, as the girl now stared at her mother intently. Like a cat would.

They stayed like that for a moment. The father, with his head buried into his daughter's hair, whispering words that his wife could not hear, words that she was not meant to hear. And the mother and her daughter meeting each other's gaze, neither one knowing what to make of the other.

Finally, the girl turned her back to her mother and scooted herself closer into her father's chest. He tightened his embrace until they were one sleeping organism breathing in unison.

The woman backed out of the room and closed the door behind her, letting the darkness take them both.

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Her husband had stayed. And they had, for all intents and purposes, worked out whatever it is they had been going through. No cat and a new son provided an interesting perspective for both of them.



Her husband had taken to spending time with his son, something that he had been reluctant to do with their first child. It had taken him time to warm up to his daughter. But with this one, he held him all the time and the baby never slept as well as he did when he was laying on his father's chest, rising and falling with each breath.

The girl was fascinated by the baby, and she asked to hold him often. The mother relented, but would never leave the two of them alone. She would always be there, watching as she folded laundry, or did the dishes, or made dinner. The mother assumed the girl had noticed this, her hesitancy. Her lack of trust. But if it bothered her daughter, she didn't show it. Over the years though, the woman became more relaxed with the supervision. The girl had earned her trust back, she would tell herself.

One day, the mother walked in on the girl hugging her son tightly. She froze in the doorway at the sight. "Ouch," he said. The daughter continued to hug him, almost tighter after he said something. He struggled some more and desperation entered his voice as he asked his sister to let go. His tiny frame was enveloped in hers.

From her position in the doorway, the mother took a step forward, about to walk toward them and pull them apart. As soon as the mother's foot touched the ground, she let go. The daughter grinned widely at her brother, who reciprocated in kind. She gave him a kiss on his forehead and the boy laughed. The girl turned to look at her mother, her arms going back to brace herself in her seated position, and met her mother's gaze. Whatever the girl found there made her frown.



# Swarm

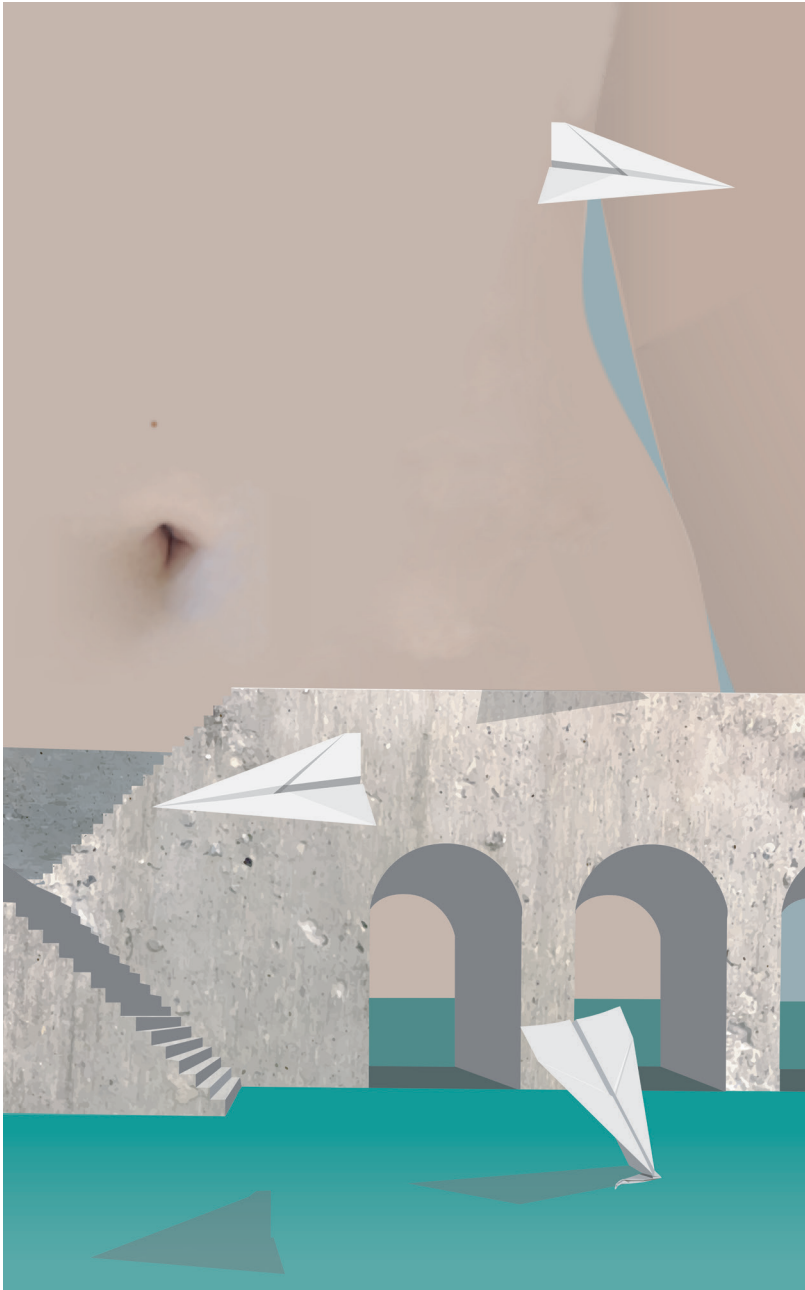
Photography — Catherine Sigman

editor's choice



## **At Work**

Photography — Caroline Bass



## **Attention pt. 3**

Studio Art — Anne Heaton Sanders

•

## Poetry — Laura Dame

the female obscenity  
captures, climbs,  
creeps my body like a thousand  
toy soldiers come to life with knives  
punching and pinching and prying  
me open—a flimsy can kind of day  
where half my body seems  
to leech away like crimson  
acid from a crumpled old battery

i'm down to 2-D: merely  
a sticker with the image of a stranger  
flat and floppy my muscles  
no longer my own to move  
is to scrape myself off in a process  
of agonized peeling always  
pretending I am not shriveling  
a nursery out from inside of me

my emotions a hijacked flight  
and me trapped on board  
don't fault the passengers  
blame the self-appointed crew  
you wouldn't be laughing if  
your hands were tied too

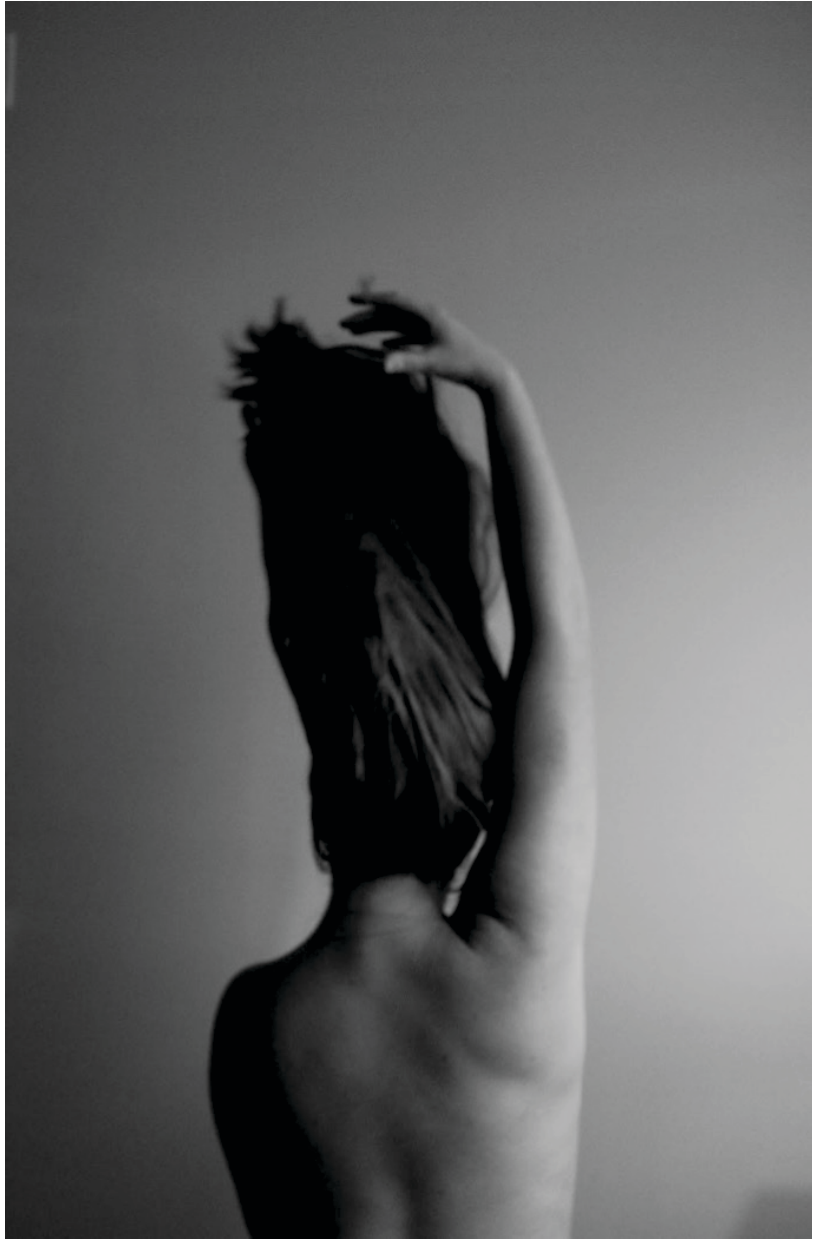
fancy wrappings  
soft and fuzzy things  
heat, gratitude, sweets  
all placations perpetually lacking—  
pitiful attempts to paint  
the pain into a pretty one I just  
can't see the rose  
for all the thorns

9 years  
of rousing speeches have  
yet to do the trick  
in making this predestined  
companion seem cool or even hip  
every month the same conclusion:  
turns out she's just a bitch

# The Flowers are Beautiful

Poetry — Alysha Matthews

The flowers are beautiful.  
They match the colorful tomatoes and red peppers.  
The peppers are picked, washed, and then simmered.  
Olive oil and thyme dances around them  
My grandmother adds the ackee and saltfish  
dumplings fry nearby  
She cuts an onion in her hands  
the pieces join the beloved pot  
She glances out the window at the garden.  
The grass is tall and a plush green,  
too green to be real.  
The gardener's tools are in the basement nearby,  
they've been dormant for a while now.  
The fence meant nothing to the squirrels and snakes,  
They didn't bother the gardener,  
and they didn't dare bother us as we played  
and laughed  
and danced  
at our backyard parties.  
There's a beloved white rabbit buried here somewhere  
in the little wooden coffin  
that the gardener made for him so  
lay the flowers at the rabbit's grave,  
And the gardener's also.



## **Body and Soul**

Photography — Emma Carruth



# Changing of the Guard

Studio Art — Adare Taylor

editor's choice



# Red & Rust

Prose — Alexander Rainier

He was late to his daughter's volleyball game. He knew this. There was no need to check his watch or phone for the time. Somehow he knew this meeting went on much longer than planned. They never went long in the first place. His boss always liked a brief meeting. He needed to leave now, he knew how upset his daughter would be if he missed it. His boss was preoccupied anyways. But he lingered there for some time before finally leaving.

He slipped into the elevator, staring at the point where the doors met the floor. It had been a long day for Joe. Stressful beyond belief. Had to come in on a Saturday of all days. Him and his team to work on God knows what. He was not even sure what his job was anymore. Day in and day out. Coffee and a dry ass bagel before crawling to his car. Sitting in that car for years before finally getting to the building. Sliding through the front doors like slime before he took the elevator up, up, up. A general disgust as more and more people filed into the elevator as he went. More and more miserable faces taking up his space when all he wants is one trip up or down alone to breath.

The elevator doors open and Joe heard a gasp. Joe spotted the man's wrinkled and year-torn shoes before he looked up. David Bauer. Ex-drinking buddy, easily startled, and one of MaryJane's favorites. Used to be, however.

"Off to the game," Joe said with a cracked smile. He was feeling light-headed.

Their daughters go to school together. His never made the volleyball team. The doors closed without Bauer moving an inch. He dropped, falling to his knees and grasping at the elevator door. He rested his head there for a moment. It had been a long day for Joe.

It was close to six. He needed to be there twenty minutes ago, but his boss kept talking. Joe was suppose to stay until much later in the day. Eight o'clock if he was lucky. Nine if she was in a good mood. But, Mary-Jane was surprisingly open. Her red lipstick, the same shade Joe's wife loved to wear on dinner nights with the neighbors. Rosewood, maybe. Or was it rosy? That deep red smiled as Joe walked in, the way it always smiled when disruptions come knocking. She was in the middle of filing. Mary-Jane was organized like that. Kept the place running smoothly thanks to it. Or, so she claimed.

Joe could not remember if she offered a seat. She never did so

outright. She wanted to make sure the conversation was a long one before she offered anything. It was a long conversation, so he had to have sat down. Right? But it has been a stressful day for Joe. Five days of work only for a sixth to be tacked on right before he hit the button for the elevator. Those red lips loved to tack sixth days onto the weeks right before you call the elevator.

Joe's heels echoed through the lobby with a sort of emptiness to them. It feels like one can always tell if a building is empty just from the lobby. Not closed, but *empty*. Devoid of life. A hollow echo. Joe pushed the glass doors open, hand pressed up against the glass and leaving a distinguishable mark. Someone, Joe did not know who, would have to clean that up later. He did not really feel sorry for them. They needed to wash the doors anyways. What was a little slip up every now and again? Besides, window cleaning must be an easy job compared to the hell he has to go through every weekday.

He slipped into his car and tossed what he had in his hand to the passenger side. The inside was roasting and so was he. It was that time again; cold as hell when you get to work, hot as hell when you leave. And it was always cold in the building as if the owners could barely spare a few extra dollars to keep the place at a decent temperature thought the day. Normally he would throw the coat on and off throughout the day because no one seemed to care about a constant and comfortable temperature. Today, however, he suffered through. He folded up his jacket and tucked it away at his cubicle, putting it on again when he wanted to talk to Mary-Jane. He knew it would send the right message. Joe was boiling in his skin. Granted, it was much better than when he first stepped in, but he was still sweating. The car began to stink as well, but he refused to crack open a window. He suffered through it.

It was a twenty minute drive and he had been driving for about five of them before he reached some traffic. The music on the radio cut out in favor of an announcer's voice depicting grave news. Joe got into the left turn lane and managed to slip to the very front before needing to stop. He was lucky enough to need to take a left. The lanes in front and behind were clogged with angry and depressed drivers trying to get home for a beer. Maybe a car crash ahead.

"... If you are on the roads, keep a look out for a silver Toyota Camry and a man inside with..."

The light turned green and he crept into the intersection, waiting for an opening. The truck in the opposite turn lane did the same and the two drivers made eye contact for a moment. At first the opposing driver looked away, before his eyes shot back, and then to the radio. As soon as the light turned red Joe sped out of the intersection where

the road was much more open and Joe began to speed. He wished his manager had not talked for so long. Those fucking, red lips going on and on about his conduct and attitude. The ignoring whenever anyone said good morning. The upturned nose at bad (and sometimes good) comments during meetings.

Joe's hands continued to ice the whole conversation as he stood there like a brick. She never offered for him to sit down. Now he remembered that. She was too busy talking about him. His work ethic. That was why she called him in today. He had apparently been falling behind because he was "far too overqualified for this shit". She just kept talking and talking. Those red, fucking lips kept moving and moving, never stopping or turning around just enough.

Until they did. Until they turned so their back was to Joe. Joe revealed the rusty and weather-worn ax from his jacket and swung it in a single movement over the low backed chair. And then he did it again. And again. Those red lips did not scream, although Joe wished they did. Blood splattered his face and his coat. The walls and desk and filing cabinets dripped with that sanguine fluid.

Joe finally reached the gym that seemed to be in the middle of nowhere. He grabbed the ax from the passenger's seat and stumbled in. As he stepped in he could hear gasps around him and sirens behind him. He hurried a little, finally gaining the urgency he needed all along to burst through the gymnasium doors to a delayed but expressive bout of gasps and screams. The volley ball slapped the hardwood flooring as Joe stared straight ahead at his wife at the top of the bleachers. She was horrified. His daughter sat on the sidelines in front of him and screamed when she saw him. She was crying as the police burst through the doors and lifted their guns yelling what they always do. Joe lifted his hands above his head, the bloody ax dropping to the floor beside him. Joe's knees hit the floor about the same time the ax did and the police apprehended him, shaking him and dragging him out of the place in handcuffs.



# **Cygnet Creek Bridge** **(Spanning Furman University Place of Peace Stream)**

Studio Art — Isaiah Ives



# Halcyon Years

Poetry — Laura Dame

The ants like it there, appearing  
every summer as a seasonal curse.

Little borrowers—

different from Mary Norton's.

They listen to the pleas for  
one more popsicle, one more game,  
one less storm.

They stampede in small fluxes  
from the cracks in the walls,  
a quiet bug

in a world of whirring cicadas.

They are not scared  
of thunder and lightning.

They are not singing and swinging or  
peaking, never falling.

purple patchwork dress;  
cool grass under small tip-toes;  
wet laundry, hot breeze.

Moody clouds fill in the gaps  
of all the newly bare trees.

Clouds who look like maybe  
they might hold snow and  
that's good enough, hopeful enough,  
close enough to a promise.

They are the formal invitation to  
make dust of the dry, brown sculptures  
that form a leaf museum  
on the cool stiff ground.

They do not smell the bare air  
so comfy to breath.

They do not cry  
over math at a dining room  
table that squeaks.

They are not trying  
(so hard) and wondering  
who to be.

crisp brand-new blue jeans;  
arm pumpkin muffins to eat;  
flannel sheets on beds.

The frost clings  
to the warped window panes like  
sea creatures from a frozen world,  
peering in at strands of colored lights  
and ornaments that dance  
on a towering, 6-foot plastic tree.  
Little window friends  
who tell sugary stories  
about forthcoming snow.  
They watch the twirls  
in a golden crown;  
they hear the giggles, the racing heart,  
the grinning cheeks.  
They are not enchanted  
by Rosemary Clooney singing so husky.  
They are not hoping  
to get snowed in.  
They are not the most joyously happy  
just because it is freezing.

furred velvet dresses;  
cold air smacking barn red walls;  
car rides, heat cranked up.

Violets  
turn fields into a Monet painting:  
blurs of white, purple, blue.  
Wildflowers for picking  
on new spring days,  
offerings of love  
from one so small.  
They are warm under  
the soft yellow sun,  
begging to be plucked, caressed,  
savored.  
They are the harmony to  
the buzzing of carpenter bees.  
They do not chase  
rainbow bubbles through the yard.  
They are not squealing  
in delight at the feel  
of bright warmth on skin.

lime green tee, bare arms;  
hot rolls for the Easter feast;  
windows open wide.



# **Fabric Memories**

Photography — Emma Carruth



# Satellite Watchdog

Poetry — Alissa Xiao

abandoned dog  
culled from the cold of мамочка's stomach  
in Moscow streets,  
with vodka-muddy paws and a  
rum-stained tongue rough from asphalt  
easy to find and unlikely to be missed  
unnamed dog,  
hunter of flesh and bone  
    (a desperate form of violence)  
you bear the sins of all street dogs  
of dreaming for more.

in the cloying winters  
your neck cranes to the sky in a howl  
to a moon who has never listened  
you prowl like the silver lining of a knife  
    *Soviet scientists chose to use Moscow strays  
    since they assumed that such animals  
    (beasts hunters violators beggars)  
    had already learned to endure conditions of extreme  
    cold and hunger.*

they gave you a name in exchange for the stars.

# Up in Smoke

Prose — Shi Pope

The rough smell of smoke woke Cade up from his sleep. Sniffing the air, he could smell burning wood. He sat up quickly, seeming to trigger the fire alarm as he did. The siren began blaring through the house causing him to cover his ears and cringe. Before leaving his room, he bolts back to the bed and grabs his beloved stuffed teddy bear. Cade holds the bear up to his face allowing the softness of the fur to calm his nerves.

Before exiting the room, he remembers what his grandfather—a retired fire marshal—taught him. Cade uses the back of his hand to feel how warm the door is. The wood of the door was hot, but there was no burning sensation. He opens his door slowly and looks around. Black smoke is filling the house, seeping into his lungs so much he can taste the fire on his tongue.

The little boy crawls on the carpet, his elbows and knees burning from the friction of the rough shag material. As he's making his way down the hall, he passes the kitchen. Smoke is billowing out from the oven into the air. He squints through the smoke and sees the clock on the microwave flashing 4:47 am.

"Cade! Cade, where are you?" His mom's voice is frantic as it carries through the small house.

"I'm in the hall Mommy, beside the kitchen." Cade is quick to reply, already feeling safer knowing his mom is awake and alert. He stays low and put, knowing better than to move locations. It is only a few seconds before the face of Cade's father appears on the ground in front of him.

"Cade! Good job son. Okay, we're going to crawl to the front door and stay as low as possible."

"Where's Mommy? She yelled for me, but I don't see her." Cade chokes up from crying and the smoke affecting his lungs.

"She's already safe outside. I sent her out to go to the neighbors to call the fire department. They should be here any minute. Let's go honey."

Cade began crawling behind his father staying low to avoid the smoke and gripping his bear tightly. The smoke was becoming thicker and darker, making it harder to see his dad in front of him. The fire was roaring louder as they got closer to the front door. Glass on the photo frames hanging on the wall beside the stairs shattered and clanged on the hardwood as they tumbled down the steps. Cade's tears picked up speed

as they fell from his face. The tears made his vision go blurry and he stops crawling to rub his eyes. He is able to slow down the tears and begin crawling again. As he looks up, he realizes he can no longer see his dad.

“Daddy! Daddy, I had to stop because I couldn’t see, and I can’t find you. Wait for me Daddy, I’m scared.”

“What?” His father’s voice is frantic as he calls out to him, “I’m going to stop. I’m right by the steps, son. Please move as fast as you can, okay?” His father knows the fire is devouring their house quicker every second. The smell of the wood and carpet burning is making him feel sick to his stomach. If they don’t get out of here soon, they could both pass out from the smoke.

The crackle of the wood is growing louder and louder and his father stays put waiting to see Cade’s face before he begins moving again. He has turned himself around so that his feet are facing the front door. Smoke has clouded the entire house and Cade is pulling himself across the carpet as quickly as possible. His father’s face comes into view covered by a thick haze of smoke.

“Dad!” Cade rejoices and waves.

“Good job, son! Okay, I’m going to turn around and we’ll start moving back to the door. While I’m turning come up here and get beside me, so I don’t lose you again.” His father—though remaining cool and collected—is growing weary knowing that the delay to wait for Cade has potentially hindered their ability to make it out of the house. He begins turning himself around with his elbows and knees, feeling the burn of the carpet tearing off layers of skin. Cade has become exhausted from crawling and is moving slowly on the ground. The creaking of the wood is escalating until there is one final deafening crack.

Cade jolted upright in his bed as sweat rolled down his back. He sighed deeply while reaching to grab the inhaler off his nightstand. The wood headboard is cold against his back working to cool down his smoldering skin. His inhaler only has 15 remaining clicks before he will need to get a new one. The oxygen is relieving as it courses through his lungs to soothe his erratic breathing. This is the third time this week he has woken up like this. Always the same crack and feeling of heat against his skin. It’s coming up on the 13th anniversary of his father’s death and his mother’s disappearance. The events of the fire all those years ago keep him up at night and the pharmacy bill through the roof. After the stairwell crashed down on his dad, Cade’s memory blanks.

A knock on his bedroom door pulls him out of those dark memories. The door slowly creaks open and a plate with a muffin topped with a candle makes its way across the threshold. Miss Mamie, the sweet old lady who has taken him in for the last 10 years of his life, smiles so

wide her eyes almost crinkle shut. Cade blushes deeply.

"Miss Mamie, I told you we didn't need to do anything for my-," She shushes him and plops herself onto the end of his bed. The plate is thrust in his face as she winks at him.

"Oh honey, did you really think I was going to let today be a 'normal' day? It's your eighteenth birthday darlin', this is the very least I could do for you."

Mamie took Cade in three years after the events of the fire. Her son died in a car accident just before his eighth birthday and she has poured all her love for him into Cade. She first noticed him on her way to visit her son's grave. Cade was sitting outside the orphanage drawing on the sidewalk with chalk. A butterfly landed on his chalk flower and he began cackling. Mamie felt her soul light up with the sound her house had been deprived of for the last nineteen years. She spent her visit with Cash telling him all about the little blonde boy and his infectious smile as she placed flowers on his grave. Deep within her heart, she knew Cash wouldn't mind her bringing in another little boy. After a few long months and mounds of paperwork, she finally welcomed Cade into her home.

Cade laughs gently and peels the wrapper off the muffin as she begins singing the Birthday Song. Her voice is quiet and soothing as it echoes throughout the small room. She finishes with her signature jazz hands and he blows out the candle. He breaks off a piece of the muffin and places it in his mouth before passing the plate to Miss Mamie.

"So, when are you going to work today?" Pieces of blueberry muffin hang off the edge of his lips as he breaks Miss Mamie's number one rule.

"You're lucky it's your birthday, boy," she swats at his leg playfully and dabs her mouth with a napkin. "I'm actually not going in today. We have something we're going to do today for your big day." Mamie grows nervous as she reminds herself of the "gift" she has for Cade. The emotional turmoil she went through after being given the box all those years ago has snuck its way back as she pulled it out of her closet last night. She has kept it away from him, waiting until the right time but also fearing how it will affect him.

"Finish your muffin and get changed and meet me in the kitchen." Miss Mamie slowly stands up and pats Cade's head as she heads towards the door slowly pulling it shut. She makes her way slowly across the hall into the kitchen and pours herself a cup of coffee before sitting down at the old table. The wood is cold on her arms as she places them on the table before peeking into the box filled with so many nightmares. She shakes her head and pushes the box towards the other end of the table and rubs her wrinkled forehead. The coffee is bitter and cold on her

tongue and she scrunches her face up in response.

"I've never seen you shove aside a cup of coffee Miss Mamie; you must have really messed that pot up." Cade chuckles and grabs a banana off the table and sits down across from her, "What's in the box?" He begins opening the lid and is met with a slap to his hand. He quickly withdraws it and rubs over the crevices and scars across the top of his hand.

"Shoot, I'm sorry. Boy, you are just about as impatient as any man I've ever met. I've got to tell you a few things before you open it." Miss Mamie gathers herself, slightly stunned by the feeling of his burn scars against her palm. She's held that hand more times than she can count but the shock never goes away.

"Cade, this gift isn't particularly something you're going to be happy with. I'm sorry about that, but I've waited too long to let you see. It's not going to be easy for you to accept—and I'm not telling you that you have to—but you need to know. All those years ago when I first brought your sweet face home, the orphanage gave me this box. They told me to look through it and then make my decision. I knew long before I walked in there that day that I was gonna take you home, nothing they could tell or show me was going to change that. With that being said, honey, this shook me to my core. You are a strong boy and I know you are ready for this. I'm going to leave you alone to look through everything, but if you need me just yell, I'll be in my bedroom. I love you, sweet boy."

Mamie finishes up the speech that she lost sleep over trying to perfect. She stands up and kisses him on the head before grabbing her coffee cup and leaving the kitchen. Cade has started breathing heavily as he stares at the box. He racks his head for thoughts of what could be inside, but nothing stands out to him. He closes his eyes and breathes deeply before sliding the box closer to him. His hands are shaky as they work to remove the lid off the old shoebox.

He drops the lid immediately back onto the box after spotting the first item in the box. A polaroid image of him and his family from his first day of Kindergarten burns into his brain. His eyes sting as tears pool into them.

"Mamie! Mamie, what is this?"

Miss Mamie emerges from behind the wall and sees the box still shut, "Honey, I told you this wasn't going to be easy. I know it hurts, but I think it will be worth it. I'm going back to the room. This is something you should do alone."

She quickly moves into the room and shuts the door. Cade's confusion and pain only grow as he continues to stare at the box. He sits

with his head in his hand and works to control his breathing. Hot tears roll down his cheeks and drop onto the wood beneath him. He rubs his eyes harshly and lets out one huff of breath before snatching the lid off the box once again. The picture still lies on top of a folded-up piece of paper and a ring.

Cade grabs the photo and studies the image carefully. His floppy hair is covering his eyes and his mom and dad are standing proudly behind him. As he lets the image soak in, he notes all the ways he resembles his parents. The crinkles in the corner of his father's eyes matching his own and the red color of his hair and brown eyes put off the same glow as his mother's. He sits the polaroid down on the table and slides it away. Seeing his parents brings back feelings of comfort but also horror as the image of his father's body being crushed forces its way out.

He shakes his head and pulls out the silver ring lying at the bottom of the box. The ring is cold in his hand as he turns it over on its side. The inside of the ring has a small inscription, and he squints to read the words, "Forever and always," Cade whispers. He feels the groove of each letter before sliding it on his ring finger. The small size of his hands pales in comparison to his father's, evident by the space between his arm skin and the cold metal. He pulls it off and squeezes it tightly in his hand before setting it down on the picture.

The folded-up letter lays in the bottom of the box itching to be picked up. Cade peers over the box before grabbing the letter and sitting it in front of him. It is folded in threes and the edge of the paper is fraying on the side from where it was torn out of a notebook. The paper is rough against his hands as he unfolds the edges. He breathes deeply one final time before he begins reading the letter to himself.

Darling,

This world is cold and cruel. It promises things to the weak to give them hope and once the hope is burning brightly like a flame, they extinguish it. These things are hard to understand, but one day you will see what I mean, and maybe then you won't believe me to be a monster. What I am going to do is wrong and I know that. Everything I do though, I do for you. Your father and I have been struggling for quite some time. Anything I do is never good enough for him. Our life is not what you see. We spend more time fighting or giving the silent treatment than we do just having a civil conversation. It's not entirely his fault, his father was the same way.

He is going to leave me soon. I can feel it coming. Last week he hit me for the first time, and it won't be the last. The alcohol has become the only thing that can keep him happy, besides the mix of prostitutes he brings into our home while I'm gone. I have nothing outside of him.

No family, no friends, just you, my darling baby boy. But I won't take you with me. I can't. I am not that selfish. You deserve so much more than me and what I can give you. I know you don't understand, I don't expect you to until you are much older and have a family of your own. I promise you this is what's best.

Tonight, I am going to set our house on fire. Your father is going to take you to the neighbor's house for a sleepover while I run to the store. When I get back, and you are safe away from the house, I'm going to slip your father some sleeping medication so that the fire does not wake him. When everything is said and done, you will be the sole inheritor of everything your father and I have. It isn't much, but because of the tragedy, the state will take care of you. Everything for you will go so smoothly because of this.

I know it's hard to hear, and I'm sure you're feeling a storm of emotions, but I am not the bad guy here. I am doing you a favor. One day you will understand and even if you don't, I hope you can forgive me.

I love you forever and a day darling,  
Mom

"Miss Mamie!" Cade yells urgently for her as he stands up from the table. Mamie enters the kitchen just in time to witness Cade falling quickly to the tile floor and landing with a thud.

# Snow

Poetry — Kayla Burrell

I whisper your name like a prayer into the winter night.  
The cold wind carries it away,  
A wish that seems far off  
But that I hope for still.  
The still snow reflects the starlight,  
Sparkling and bright, full of life,  
Like your eyes, your smile, your soul.  
I wish when I say your name that I might  
Warm your hand with mine one day  
As you carry me with you through the frosty air  
Amid the flakes of falling snow;  
That I might look beside me  
And see your eyes reflect the stars like diamonds,  
See your smile approach mine until our lips meet,  
Minds numb, a wave of warmth engulfing us  
As we forget the frozen night.





# Fuego

Photography — Annie Schulz



# The Woodpile

Studio Art — Caroline Bass



# Fireplace

Studio Art — Caroline Bass

# Sickly Sweet

Prose — Lara Rudman

She had left in a hurry, barely taking the time to grab the car keys before fleeing out of the door, her husband's yells still audible from the outside. Yelling at her, even after she had left the house, for only her children to have to endure. She hated leaving her children in that house, but she knew they would be fine. With her no longer in the house, his anger would dissipate quickly, and silence would envelop the house once again. She definitely had not thought to grab her coat, so even within the interiority of her car, she shivered with the late fall chill that seeped into the car on that dark night.

She gripped the steering wheel and thought about the scene she had just left. The four of them sitting at the dinner table, including her baby boy in his highchair with his bowl of mashed green beans in front of him.

Her daughter sat at the table, absolutely still, as if a slight movement would remind her father and her mother that this argument was about her. It was often about her.

The argument escalated quickly between the two, eventually becoming about something greater than what it was initially about. So, the woman had fled. Sometimes he left, but this time it was her. Her children were the only ones still seated at the dinner table.

Her baby. He was still in his highchair. Her husband had stormed out of the dining room and into his office, shutting the door behind him. Her daughter would not have known to take him out of the highchair. He was so wiggly now, trying to stand on things he shouldn't. What if he fell out of the highchair? Onto that hardwood floor. Had she remembered to buckle him in? She was starting to panic. Should she turn around? Walk back into that house where her husband was waiting for her return to start berating her some more? No. She couldn't. But her baby. The woman was beginning to think that she hadn't buckled him in the high chair.

She reached blindly into the passenger seat, trying to find her cell phone. She flipped it open and hit #1 on her speed-dial.

Please, pick up the phone, the woman thought. It went to voicemail. In her daughter's sickly sweet voice, she heard the voicemail message. "You have reached--" The woman quickly ended the call. She called again. No response. She called again. The phone audibly clicked, someone had picked up. That sickly sweet voice spoke.

"Mommy?"

"Sweetie, where is the baby?"

"He's in his highchair in the dining room." The woman thought she heard something in the background.

"Is he crying?" she said.

"Yeah. He wants out of his seat." The woman gripped the phone tighter in her hand.

"Go tell Daddy that he needs to take the baby out of the highchair. It's not safe to leave him in there alone." The woman did not get a response. "Sweetie? You still there?"

"Yes."

"Can you go tell Daddy?"

"He's gonna yell at me."

"Well, someone needs to get the baby out, and he's too heavy for you." She was trying to keep the concern out of her voice. She knew the girl would shut down if she pushed her too hard. "Sweetie. Go say something to your father now."

The girl did not say anything but she thought she heard the tell-tale sounds of little bare feet on the hardwood floor. She knew she heard the sound of her husband's office door opening, that distinctive creak. She heard a mumbled voice that belonged to her daughter, but couldn't quite make out what she was saying.

Her husband's response she heard well though. "If she was so concerned, she wouldn't have left. She can come get him herself," he barked.

"Sweetie. Tell him again." The panicked had edged into her voice as her options slipped out from under her. She was going to have to go back to that house. "Please."

The girl must have picked up on her mother's desperation and said to her father, "Mom says--"

"Hang up that damn phone." She heard the sound of his office chair rolling back. She could picture him coming towards his daughter, his tall frame bearing over hers, yanking the phone from her hand. The line clicked. He had hung up.

She called again. No response, just the voicemail. She called again and again.

She could imagine the landline phone ringing, carrying its shrill tone throughout the house. She could imagine her daughter staring at the phone, worried, and contemplating whether to pick up. To pick up would surely incite the rage of her father, an act of open defiance, and her daughter was never one to do that. The girl knew when it was better to play it safe.

She was calling so many times, looking at the cellphone in her

hand, that she had stopped looking at the road. All she could think about was the image of her baby boy standing up in his high chair on unsteady legs, losing his balance, and his head hitting the hardwood floor with a sickening crunch.

The woman called again, waiting for the call to inevitably go to voicemail. Again, her daughter's voice came through the phone to deliver the message. When they moved into the new house a year ago, her husband had suggested that their daughter record the voicemail greeting, and at the time the woman had thought it a wonderful idea, but now the sound of her daughter's voice made her want to vomit.

She just wanted to know that her baby was okay. She took a deep breath and began to leave her message that she knew would be projected from the base of the landline. The woman could imagine the sound of her distressed voice floating through the house. To her husband's office, where it fell on uncaring ears. To her daughter, biding her time silently in some forgotten corner of the house. To her son, struggling in his highchair.

"Please, just take him out of his highchair." Tears were streaming down her face as she drove down the dark street. "Just tell me he's okay." She paused, still waiting for someone to pick up. Anger seeped into her body and her foot pressed harder on the gas pedal, and the car lurched forward. "If something happens to him, I swear to God I will--" She didn't know what she'd do, but by God, she was going to do something. Maybe she would leave, for good. She opened her mouth to continue her tirade with her new threat on her lips but was cut off by the sound of her car making an impact with something else. A dull thump from the passenger side of the car.

The woman slammed on the brakes, her car skidding to a halt and her head pitching forward. She pulled the car to the side of the barren road, swiftly put the car in park, and turned on her hazards. She reached into her center console and pulled out a flashlight. She opened her car door and swung her legs around to step out onto the road. She paused when she noticed her bare feet. She had forgotten to grab shoes. Nevertheless, the woman pressed her bare feet to the chill asphalt and walked around her car with her flashlight. There was a medium-sized dent in her front bumper. The woman looked around for whatever she had hit. The light of her flashlight traveled along the perimeter of the trees that lined the road. On the ditch on the side of the road was a form that distorted the beam of light.

The woman walked forward to see a fawn, its leg bent in an unnatural direction. She drew a long breath and continued her approach slowly. She knelt in the grass next to its body, which heaved with each

labored breath. The deer eyed her with pure terror. She placed a hand on its tan pelt, and the fawn began to kick its feet erratically, trying to stand. She quickly took her hand off, and the animal stilled. She looked around. No one was on the road, and she didn't know what to do. She couldn't just let it die. The guilt washed over her. She stood up and backed away from the fawn, as that seemed to make it more comfortable. She walked back to the car and grabbed her phone, which was sitting in the cupholder in her center console. She flipped open the phone and the screen lit up in her face. She had two missed calls.

Before she could see more, she heard a shrill sound. The woman whipped around to find the fawn in the jaws of a mountain lion. "No," the woman gasped. The fawn's legs twitched, even the broken one. The mountain lion seemed to stare her down, as if daring her to come forward.

The woman took a step forward towards the two animals that in the dark seemed to form one monstrous organism. She directed her flashlight at them and the mountain lion began to pull the deer into the safety of the shadows of the forest.

The woman could do nothing but sob as the big cat tugged the baby deer into the abyss.

The woman grabbed her phone again and made a call, not expecting an answer in the slightest. The ringing comforted her, in a way. It had become familiar.

The cellphone rang a couple times, and the woman was shocked to hear a whisper come over the line. The woman pressed the phone closer to her ear. "Hello?"

"Hi Mommy," the little girl whispered. "I sneaked upstairs, and I called you on the phone by your bed. Daddy doesn't know I'm talking to you." The girl said something else, but her mother wasn't paying attention. The woman had taken to staring into the exact sliver of shadow that the two animals had disappeared through. The woman heard more chatter from the phone.

"What did you say?" the woman asked.

"Daddy pulled the baby out the highchair soon after you called." The woman couldn't quite comprehend what her daughter was saying to her. "He's okay, Mommy. Don't cry. He's okay."

She hadn't even realized she was crying until her daughter had said something, and now the tears came quicker and hotter, splattering on her cheeks.

"It's okay. It's okay. It's okay," the daughter repeated until her mother's tears subsided.

The woman gasped, drawing breath to speak. "Can you ask

Daddy to come pick me up?"

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She sat on the cold asphalt, her bare toes were numb. The headlights cast shadows past her seated form. The door of the car swung open, illuminating the inside of the car, which held her two children in the backseat. Her husband stalked towards her. When he reached the woman, she looked up at him as he stood overtop her. She had no more tears to cry, but she knew he could see it on her face. She was sorry. And she thought that he might be, too.

He wordlessly pulled her up from the ground, pulling her close to his chest. After a moment, they separated and the man took the woman's hand. The husband led his wife back to the car, that held the girl and the baby boy.

He helped her into the passenger seat and then walked back to her car to survey the damage. The woman blindly reached into the backseat to touch her baby boy. She felt his little foot in her hand and gently squeezed. The boy giggled, and she wondered if that was the most magnificent sound a mother could hear. She wanted his laughter to block out that ringing in her ears.

The girl unbuckled her seatbelt so that she could get close enough to her mother to put her hand on her mother's shoulder. "Are you okay?" the girl said, sweetly. The woman reached up to pat the girl's hand, even as the sound of her daughter's voice grated on her ears. She didn't know what bothered her more, the ringing of an unanswered call or the voice that had taunted her with each call that went to voicemail.





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