the echo.

2023
the echo.

Furman University’s Literary and Visual Arts Magazine
editor’s note.

Dear Reader—

Welcome to the 2023 edition of The Echo. This year’s Echo is filled with art, photography, and writing that exemplifies the brilliance of the Furman student body. The editorial board selected the works in this issue based on their artful handling of style, composition, and invention.

I want to note that this is the 130th issue of The Echo. Since its first release in 1893, The Echo has created a long tradition of sharing student writing and art with the community. I’m honored to present to you, once again, this celebration of Furman students’ excellence.

Thank you to the whole editorial board for their decisive and thoughtful decision-making throughout the editing process, and for being good sports when the Big Editing Party’s pizza plans fell through. Special thanks to my three Assistant Editors, Gabriella Williams, Zoee Lawrence, and Alissa Xiao for their design expertise and quick thinking. Each board member has been a delight and a credit to The Echo this year. Additional thanks to Dr. Joni Tevis and Dr. Laura Morris, our advisors, for helping The Echo run smoothly behind the scenes.

And, thank you to all the students who submitted work to The Echo this spring. I am grateful that you boldly offered your creative endeavors to us, and I encourage you to continue sharing your works with the Furman community. Creation and sharing what we have accomplished with one another brings Furman closer together.

My involvement with The Echo is coming to a close after three years, and I am sad to go. But, that sadness is overcome by my excitement to see what the 2023-2024 editorial board will share with us.

While we wait to see what next year brings, please enjoy the 2023 edition of The Echo. Happy reading, and open yourself to be surprised, delighted, and touched by what is inside.

Anna Blackman
Editor in Chief
Class of 2023
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Intrusive Thoughts in Academic Settings

Studio Art — Grayson Jarrell
Food
Poetry — Liron Golan

Food is—
sound distorted underwater,
a taste I recognize, but twisted.
Dissonance. Disconnection. Sweet taste—rot
in my mouth. Pinch myself so I don’t
gag. Force it down.

Dread is—
walking into the dining hall so hungry but
I can’t eat because the thought of taste is
sickening.

My body
caves in and thins out,
walking through the halls feeling
less. Lying on the floor, my wrists held up
to the ceiling light, wondering if they were always so
thin.

Some days
I am so hungry but become full so fast.
My body adjusts to less, and it’s easier to let it.
Another skipped meal, another lost pound, and
how much of me is
left?
Under dozens of hanging red and green lights,
I hear my seven-year-old self speak.
She is finally found once again
and ready for play.

I missed this, she says. I missed you.

I try to sit still on a cream-colored bench
as we both wait for the ride to start.
*It’s been a while since we’ve felt this
wild and free,* she tells me. I agree.
I ask her if she’s always been here,
just waiting for me to stop worrying.

Life is just as we remember it.
*Everything is brighter,* she tells me,
*and some things never change.*

Together, we prepare to grab the golden wheel
that will soon let us move,
and I clap and cheer.
We could never keep all this joy locked
in our heart. I know much of that joy is her.

She tells my body to loosen up,
and I feel at ease in perfect chaos.
I know my laughter lines are showing
as my eyes squint and my face
takes the time to smile.

Children are still running, ready to find their seats.
They disappear behind massive teacups for a moment,
and I can recall when that was us.
We were that small too once, and everything was so big.
I couldn’t help but wonder if the largeness of the world scared us back then?

My eyes continue to race around the room, drawn to magnificent patterns that look just like artwork from my youth. Designs that look like nonsense in hues of pink and blue decorate the teacups’ once plain powder bases.

And color makes everything better, my younger self would say with a fist full of crayons.
Remember when we drew on the white walls of our home? We never fear a blank canvas.

The wooden floor that carries our elaborate vessel shines, and I let myself see through younger eyes. The floor becomes the table, and on it lay our circular bowl with stripes. We are the drink tonight!

Trying to let all the laughter escape my lungs, I feel I can barely catch my breath. As we scream and spin together, I am fully present, then forget where I am.

I close my eyes and continue to let myself twirl around and around. In the darkness of my eyelids, I can still see green and red move as one.

The wooden walls that matched the clean floor disappear. My vision is blurred now, and I cannot tell what I’m near. I hear children shouting and, above all, there is noise. I am part of the sounds around me, a kind of inexplicable joy.
We both know this joy
is from spinning together.
We can make anything fun.
I hear her again, speaking our truth.

I holler as my shorts slide on the smooth bench
that seems to sway beneath me, left and right.
It catches all my dizziness while I barely keep
my feet on the floor of the giant cup.

I grab the wheel again and give it a hard twist,
realizing that I have to keep spinning.
That’s it! We must choose to spin
and let the joy in.

It really is a choice we make
when we make everything fun, I reply.
We both have to be willing to take control
of what’s in front of us and what we have been given.

Child and adult in the same mind,
in the same space, we see each other.
We need each other to enjoy and live
purposefully in this love and light.

Younger and older Alice in their happiness.
I see each moment is what we’ve both made it.
Endlessly embracing harmony and spinning,
moving with twists and turns
in our own way, at our own pace.

Can we spin forever?
They tell us artists are like moonflowers, only able to bloom in the dark  
Society admires their suffering  
Because their pain serves a purpose  
Because we only want the flowers when they are wilting,  
the ocean when it is drowning you,  
the love when it is star-crossed.

I used to feel inadequate when I was not miserable  
Because it made my poetry boring  
My only muse was the blues  
Without that I was useless, an abandoned shell  
Searching for a new inhabitant

But today I had a picnic with my friends  
And the sun was shining down on me  
With the warmth of all the people I love  
And maybe that is not profound enough for some but for me  
It was a revelation.
Melted Sugar
Poetry — Emily Clancey

You
Liquid and sweet,
Paint the walls pink,
Melt in my mouth,
Decadent,

You
Take to my flesh,
Sticking to stay,
Candy that’s fresh from the Microwave,

You
Seal my lips,
Burning,
Scarring
Places unseen,

You
Melting my Mouth, until
Liquid and
Sweet.
December 2022, 22 Years Old

Snowfall turns me so small, always has.
I am miniaturized by its heavenly self.
Convinced that swirling flakes are all that’s good.
These angels floating, like kisses dancing, are little mercies just for me. I hesitate to impose myself upon this sacred new land, but relish the cold rubbing against my cheeks like a sweet trauma.
I stand by the door for hours aching at the beauty

Inside, the pansy coffee pot presides,
mountainous and matronly
on the black-coil stove.
My heart sighs under thick quilts.
The kitty cat sits in the windowsill to catch the winter sun like a prism. She’s swishing her tail back and forth—a slow clock.
Time doesn’t attack so fiercely in the snow
Vase in Chun Blue

Studio Art — Cecilia McGinnis
On Monday morning, the saltines stand guard on the coffee table like sponges for grief. A small battalion keeping company with the honey bear who reaches out periodically—a humble tissue in his sticky hand.

Thursday afternoon: the brown sugar candle putters its soft-shoe dance, singeing the ache out of the room with its tongue. The spoon, a good friend, cradles curly ramen noodles to dry, papery lips. A few specks splash like holy water onto the wadded-up snot boulders of Kleenex.

Now Saturday but too late it’s Sunday. The sailboats on the wall melody by in their pastel dreams, collecting emptying tissue boxes, depositing new ones. Mercy, mercy: chamomile tea is true to its word and novels pat an arm with motherly love

The sunrise calls out, blowing kisses between the scraggily fibers of crochet blankets. Mourning doves rest like a choir on the cold rooftop and the mums are opening their warm eyes to the gilded ache of the day. Isn’t it about time we do the same?
I saved a spider in the bathroom this morning
Slid this piece of paper underneath a cup
And watched as he sprang back to life
From a little black tangle
Into eight perfectly arched legs
That tapped lightly against the plastic
I could almost hear the sound
Gentle and insistent
Soft like those first saltshaker raindrops in a nighttime storm
Like your voice
Sometimes when you talk it is so low that I can barely hear you
I try not to talk over you, to be a good listener
I am a singer and my voice projects
The wind from my belly blows careless notes up to my lips
That jump onto everyone in my path
Sometimes the sound can be so loud and harsh that I fear for the children
Who might one day suffer my lullabies
But your sentences are something like blown dandelion seeds
Floating to the ground, landing in just the right place
Just where I need them
Saving this ugly little knot is something you would do
I prefer an ambush with hairspray
I hold the glass up to my face
And observe his sizable fangs
I am not sure why I give him mercy
I wonder what I would do if it were a big wolf spider with eyes I could see
Babies on her back
I am scared at this precedent for kindness
It is rich for me to consider the worthiness of big things to live
I have always been a big girl
Who likes skinny boys
And as I tiptoe to the door
I am considering my worthiness to love
To love you
But not for that reason
I would not normally go out on the porch in my gown
And take care lifting the cup, jumping back before he moves
I play at this kind of sweetness
Because you could always find a prettier girl
But you pretend nothing
You are as real as the sun warming the cold morning
The wind playing sighs on the empty tree branches
Thinking of you makes me want to build a home in the gentleness
Of those tapping legs
And I laugh at my morning visitor scurrying away across the lines of this paper
Where I will write silk words
And try to sound just like you
Reflection
Photography — Ella Chesney
Didn’t See You There
Poetry — Kayla Burrell

I’m sorry I didn’t see you there
you and your one teardrop
drifting down the hallway

I didn’t believe in ghosts (still don’t
really) & you were just so
still yet always shifting like wind
I figured you were a draft
I could walk through
knife through butter

didn’t realize you were more like glass
than air so easy
to break & I made you drop
your tear & it
shattered too.
Swan Lake Sky
Photography — Hanna King
Weeping Willow
Poetry — Lucy Gamblin

There is a place I go to grieve
The person I used to be
When in shoulds I did not believe
And I lived only for me

It is a willow growing
Deep in the back of my mind
The moonlight there always glowing
Wide tear rivers run behind

A young girl sways beneath the boughs
Her face and dress translucent
But her chapped lips, a smile allows
Unkempt hair, a soul unbent

She runs and plays and jumps around
When I make my sad return
How do I tell her she is bound,
She is dead, already turned

That she’s the one the trees for
Living six feet underneath
Time’s worms chewing at her before
I save memories from teeth

That she fell to the world’s schemes
She stepped their scaffolding
Traded skyscrapers for leaves
Became a tall, lonesome thing
And how do I tell her she lives?
That some days she still stands tall
Though her face worn, lines like knives
Drawn across, betray all

That she would not recognize
The woman she’s become
And that I don’t either. Her eyes
The only piece left, a crumb

And when will I be left here too?
While she moves far beyond me
And I start weeping, willow through
All ghost and worms and free

And a woman I don’t know grieves
When You’re Old Enough to Drive
Poetry — Alice Tyszka

Metal, ice cold on my skin, feels like freedom
My hand and heart sense a new energy – an escape
And with open palms
They scream
*let it in*

The head echoes warnings
though they all sound faint at first

The mind brings the stern voice of my father
And words repeated so many times
they were a most played song
On a broken record

You can go out when you’re old enough to drive

My mother’s voice was next on shuffle

When you’re old enough to drive,
you’ll be old enough for a later curfew

Play the next song

When you’re old enough to drive,
You’ll get more responsibility

Holding the jagged silver just a little bit tighter,
My feet move across the hot pavement of my driveway
and feel the strong summer sun
My lebaron was waiting for me,
Its red paint glistening and sweating
In the warmth of June

When the door handle found its way into my hand,
I felt freedom return like a fire once again
Burning inside just as the handle seemed
like it would sear my flesh

My mother and father used their camera and took
What felt like a million photos
of the lebaron and I
And the flash they couldn’t turn off
was useless like headlights under daylight

My eyes caught a glimpse of my uncle on the front porch
Standing with his arms crossed, he watched from a distance
For a while until my parents finally went inside
with their smiles and their camera

I got in the lebaron trying to escape
*Why couldn’t he smile for me?*

Our eyes never met as his figure slowly
Moved toward the car
Nothing but a shadow from the light above

Reluctantly, though, the window rolled down
and my ears listened to words that would forever
haunt

*When you get behind the wheel, always remember
You have power, you have freedom*
There are truly tragic things that come with age

Every time you get behind the wheel,
You have a responsibility to stay safe

If you aren’t, you can kill someone
You can be killed

A memory, a story on the news
Something people take too long to drive by, curious
As they see uniforms holding brooms

And they can imagine the sigh of bristles sweeping glass
And tire rubber against a dark road

These are the things you have to think about now
When you’re old enough to drive

My mind thought of everything and nothing as I
Worked to steady my small shaking hands
Against the red leather wheel

The body does silly things when it suddenly gets hit
By the weight of the world

I was young enough
But old enough to die
Making a Picture
Prose — Ciarán Francis

Photography was a gift given to me through the dust covered antiques and dead hobbies of those before me. My father and my mentors, as generous as they have always been, gave me machines sometimes double my age. Every camera I’ve ever used has been someone else’s. How ironic is it that these tools are my eyes, my excuses. These were the promises still being fulfilled: this moment could last forever. They are heavy swords made of glass; They are hammers driving delicate nails. I use an old Cannon that threads the tongue of fresh film by itself with a wirrrrr, like a toy car. It is a heavy lance with a long lens. Old cameras are tools of legend, like Gae Bolga, the spear that never misses.

There’s a kind of assumption we’ve built around photography. From its infancy it was questioned as an artform; it was seen as a mere presentation of what was. It is an objective thing. We all see the colorful pictures of birds and exotic landscapes that pass as backdrops to our electronics. It’s easy to assume that the image presented exists as though a square was cut in the fabric of our vision. It isn’t true, though.

The way I see the world changes when I hold a camera. I collect little pieces, taking chunks out of my life like marble. A collection of these is called a roll of film. The branches of a tree are texture and all the colors of the world exist on a continuum: light to dark. These are stills, like stories suspended in plastic. They are invisible until made ready by development. I am a different person when I hold my camera. I could walk anywhere, talk to anyone, move through walls and transcend all sociological boundaries. I have a camera, that’s why. This is silver pulled in strings to make faces through chemistry. This is strings of faces wet with soap. A line of film hangs in the cabinet, delicate as caribou velvet ready to peel. This is easy.
The hard part is everything else. Walking home one night I hap-
pended upon a woman in her car, lining her lips and eyes as the engine purred. Her windshield was like a TV screen projecting the orange over-
head light. It was as though nothing else existed but her little world. I
stopped, stared, but I had to move on. I had nothing to capture it with.
These are the most preventable failures. Want is fruitless with such a
fickle master. How many times have I sent the shutter in motion, smiling
at my own brilliance, only to find a blank square? How many times have
I beamed with joy only to find a dim and blank figure at my hand. This is
the violence of failure, the erasure of memory.

Deciding is hard. My sister always thought I was indecisive. I
walk in a coffee shop I’ve been to a hundred times and ponder for five
minutes what I should eat. I get the same thing I always do. It’s not
because I’m unsure. It is reckoning of, for a moment, all that is possible.
 Legendary photographer Bernice Abbott said, “A photograph is or should be a significant document, a penetrating statement, which can be de-
scribed in a very simple term… selectivity.” It is written on the very walls of the building I learned to control a camera in. Decision is everything there is. There is a whole planet to photograph; there is only so much film.

The enlarger awaits. His eye hangs suspended from a rack or floating on tracks; he finds his face in the film threaded through his cor-
nea, a tiny light bulb and a lens. His deadly gaze brings magic paper to life like a movie screen, a projection of stillness. Light trickles down and touches the delicate skin of the enamel on paper. An impression is made, invisible for now, the mark left by an X-Ray. This, despite what you’ve been told, is photography. There is taking a picture, and there is making a picture. You have only ever seen the product of the latter. Photography is not so much cutting from the world, but assembling what it should look like.
The paper is bathed and, like waking up, a road appears and bodies and a soft light. The sun in threads of cotton, spooled through the branches. The moments I catch most photos are insignificant. I have, in fact, dedicated whole rolls to good, boring shots. These are nothing out of my wheelhouse, nothing I will regret losing if experimentation fails. I’m sometimes walking to get dinner, or going downtown, or losing myself in a lonely cabin. The moment from me deciding to shoot, to pressing the button is barely longer than the time it took to expose the film. In that time mechanical malfunctions occur, hair rises and falls, and half a breath is taken. Silver grains explore every inch.

It’s not always easy. I throw myself at failure’s foot. Each passing sheet of paper is another go at what should be. The highlights are too muddy, the shadows too gray, the development too strong. The difference between good and bad is the same as deciding a new outfit for an important date. I dash myself again and again at those jagged rocks until finally, like sunlight passing into a clearing, something beautiful shows itself in that wicked pool. Making a single print takes a lot of failure, and if you do alternative process (you like it dirty), then it also takes a lot of experimentation. I call all of these little experiments, these little shots in the dark, interpretations.

Like interpreting the Bible, the original text doesn’t exist. People carried those stories first by mouth, then by scroll, then by press and pocket and pillow. The moment is gone, and the negative is extremely difficult to read. The only way I can experience what I’ve made is by making decisions: more contrast, sharper highlights, brush direction, time developing, clutter clutter clutter. It is the decision that makes the whole thing exist. There is no truth in any of it. Don’t let anyone tell you a camera doesn’t lie; a camera cannot speak but for what I tell it to say. It is only what I think. It is only what has survived until the end. It is my eye, my excuse.
Trees that burn at night
Poetry — Kayla Burrell

A fire-dried tree lies sideways in a field
brittle ash propped on crumbled twigs

Before, it stood alone
branches stretched in welcome

Newborn lightning
heard its call
Flames blazed like autumn leaves

My new friend is made of light like me

the young bolt said
before it disappeared
into the night sky.
Linear Reflections
Photography — Anna Timbes
The baby is crying before I even try to sleep. A severe case of colic—we’ve been at it for months. My arms and hands are in the shape of her, contortions and contusions of her weepy fists and knees. She smells soft and milky and oblivious. Everything else reeks of staleness and all the air in the house enters my lungs like pulp.

I pace the rooms with her. Streetlights shining in the windows guide my repetitions, slipping across her pinched up face over and over. My mouth tastes of damp trash, teeth gritty when I run my sludgy tongue across them. The house creaks like an old woman who wants to die.

The baby cries harder. 2:28 a.m. I sing little Jesus songs to her. I am wearing one sock. The floor is cold. Count the 63 wooden boards in the hallway 20 or 30 times. My nightgown slips past my breast every few rotations. I fix it half as many times as I ought.

She wails and wails and I change her and she wails. Try to nurse her. My left nipple bleeds. Graham cracker crumbs collect in her fairy floss hair as I munch on them. A dry honey-cinnamon mush in my mouth. She hungers, but my body is failing us both. We sway in the rocking chair for an hour.

4 a.m. and I cry too for a while. I tire of the tears, she doesn’t. Our slate-colored couch slouches likes it’s melting away. I wish it would take me with it. The ice machine dumps another noisy load and punctuates the hollow that is this place. The dim light shows off the dirty windows, smudgy and smeared and so sad-looking they seem to sag.
Underneath a medley of rough, fuzzy blankets, we sleep: a whole 45 minutes. She cries. Pterodactyl. The clock acts as a metronome for the baby’s fuss. I let her scream her lungs away. Turn the subtitles on for the news. Clouds moving in today.

We step outside. The sunrise might be more brilliant from within the shadows. It’s cool and damp on the porch. I glance down at her precious little body and it looks just like closed doors and dusty furniture. I understand—she cries—the abandonment. When it breaches the treetops, I look the sun in the eye.
For the girl who had a snake in her apartment last night

Poetry — Alice Tyszka

Were your hands shaking as you held
the wood of an old brown broom and heard
the sound of bristles against
your apartment’s worn-down tile?

When you saw that movement in the corner of
your eye, was your first guess a
snake?

I’d imagine you turned to a friend and asked
what was that? as the unsuspecting visitor
wearing a faint orange coat appeared
and left you out of your damn mind.

Still startled this morning, and without your coffee
you are stuck with left-over shock to swallow
Over something that made
your silent heart race loudly
so loudly you could hear it
in your ears
and your head
felt the vibrations

When your friend opened the door
and you shooed the long squiggling line away,
how grateful were you?

Did you simply sigh and thank God?
Or were you trying to quiet your mind,
which hissed with like the slithering reptile? (Maybe change “with” to “like”)

Could you hide the fear from your eyes when you saw his,
and that tongue forked in two?
You smiled with the crowd as you all held carrot-colored coffee cups. Warm, unlike the blood of last night’s companion guest (Maybe guest/visitor instead of companion) and such a similar shade of orange to the “beast” that was let in.

You and your table all take sips, and they ask if you’ll ever recover. I nearly spit out my tea, knowing I had been considering the same thing.

Except – I wondered if the light orange guest who greeted you all (I would delete all and just have “you”, makes sense as a plural) Just wanted to join in on the fun. Had he liked the movie that was playing? The soft maroon couches or the popcorn?

Or had he just taken A wrong turn on his way home

Only to have his face hit With a broom Over and over and over again.

Until he departed. And you, nearly unable to stand, sent him to different land.

How will you recover?

How will he recover? For this was his home, and we’ve all built right over it.
Setae
Photography — Gabriella Williams
Cries From the Tall Grass
Photography — Gabriella Williams
Cloudfall
Photography — Gabriella Williams
Catch
Photography — Gabriella Williams
I am obsessed by the dichotomy of good girls and bad girls, as a writer, as a reader, and as a girl myself. What I mean is, I like writing cat fights – an attention-seeking, pretty girl and demure, sweet girl loving the same guy. The bad girl is demanding and wears him out. The good girl asks for nothing, and he finally comes to his senses. I watched a dozen movies like this on Disney channel as a child. My favorite was Another Cinderella Story; Selena Gomez - down to earth, unloved by her adoptive family - falls for a pop star who happens to be her vindictive sister’s ex-boyfriend. The worst were the Barbie movies – pastel, blonde princesses who went up against gothic witches. Odile in Barbie of Swan Lake was the most memorable, played by Maggie Wheeler, who lent the grating voice of Janice from Friends to the black swan. This came full circle for me the other day when I read a Pinterest post that went something like “Don’t worry ladies, you’ll find your Chandler. He’s just busy with Janice right now.”

These stories persisted for me when I really began to pay attention – the virginial Christine Daaé murdered by Meg the ballerina turned prostitute in Phantom of the Opera sequel Love Never Dies, cunning Morgana targeting kind Guinevere in BBC’s Merlin. While other fans studied the femme fatale, I was always more interested in the boring, one-dimensional love interest. Only opera gave me some food for thought with morally shady but ultimately good characters like Violetta, the martyred courtesan from La Traviata.

I did not fully recognize the problem with these narratives until I tried to write one of my own. It went something like this – plump country girl Grace moves from Georgia to Baltimore to attend law school and takes a room in a boarding house with Jenny, frigid and alluring. Jenny looks down on Grace as undesirable and awkward, so she is surprised to one day find Grace in bed with Dr. Abernathy, an older man who Jenny had been pursuing herself. Jenny goes off the rails, dressing like Grace, bleaching her hair the same blonde, trying to discover what Abernathy sees in the other girl. By the end of the story, Jenny is fantasizing about killing Grace.

I tried to make the story sound less like a high school drama to a friend who was workshopping it for our writing class. I said that being with Abernathy was Grace’s reward for being a good girl,
after years of feeling like no one wanted her. She told me that was messed up. “It makes it sound like she’s getting all her validation from a guy,” she said.

Since that conversation, that abrupt reframing of the narrative, I have been constantly asking “why?” when it comes to the stories that I tell myself. Why do I always write blameless heroines who have to be rescued from mean girls? There’s a very important rule somewhere about not pitting women against women, especially over a man. Worse yet, I do it in my own life. I compare myself to others, and always manage to make myself the sensitive one, the blameless one, bargaining for what she has and what I have: “She is a better singer, but I am nicer, I don’t demand attention, I don’t need to be seen.” The whole point of Jenny was that she was jealous and I relished her envy – someone finally wanted something from a girl like me, a fat girl, a girl who does not know how to talk to men, a girl who belly laughs and dresses like a grandma sometimes.

I suppose I am really the jealous one. And in my quest to be a precious, blonde protagonist, I might be tempted to let my favorite trope make me feel like a horrible person. But then I remember myself as a little girl, hair bobbed off because it was easier for my mom to fix, already growing chubby, wandering around the playground wanting to play with the girls I had deemed “pretty” and “cool”, girls who were tall and skinny with long hair and could do bridges and cut cartwheels. They looked like princesses and I felt like a troll, never being admitted into their circle that huddled on the asphalt and told scary stories. I even asked my teacher to make them play with me once, and she told me if they did not want me around, I should just find someone else to play with. They are pretty but I’m smart, I would say. I liked reading and history class and singing hymns in the choir. I was already falling in love with my title of “old soul” and my mind was always filled with the chorus of I am, I am, I am.

For a long time, I thought you could only be pretty or smart, never both. Maybe I still do. But who first told me I was not pretty? Or that I had to fill in the space with something else – smart, good, kind?

Who told me I had to be anything at all?

“The world is made up of two types of girls,” says Carrie Bradshaw says to her girlfriend over a cosmopolitan, while her ex, Mr. Big, celebrates his engagement to another woman across town, “the simple girls and the Katie girls.” She is talking about a movie I love to watch with my mother, The Way We Were, and is doing nothing to help my condition.
Pocket Change
Poetry — Emily Clancey

My old jacket has another loose thread.
If I pull, it will unwind, with more loose threads to follow.
Fabric stretches.
Color fades.
Zipper breaks.
It still fits.
My Sister
Poetry — Caroline Prewitt

During the brief two years we went to elementary school together, my older sister would meet me in the green tube connecting two platforms on the playground, a sprawling microcosm of rungs and platforms.

There, in the convection oven of spit and dirt and spring pollen, slumped against the curve of the tube, our tennis shoes resting above our knees, she would lean over to whisper about her day, or ask me to point out my first grade boyfriend, one of the kids roaming outside the small square of thick glass, all blurry and shaded green.

Once, as she was crawling out of the tube, her shoe slipped on the smooth paint of the ladder, and she fell back-first into the mulch.

I tried to get help, to yell for the teachers because she’s crying, but the words couldn’t make their way to my mouth and all I could say was

my sister, my sister, my sister.

I can still picture her lying there, hair gathered around her head like a halo, wind knocked out of her body, gasping in the dirt.

I remember, even then, hoping I looked just like her when I grew up.
Winter Begin-ter
Poetry — Kayla Burrell

Every winter’s start I go to the garden and watch the flowers get clipped clean till each beheaded rosebush barely breaks the hardening soil. It is so they don’t die in the freeze. It feels unfair. For months, these plants have painted and perfumed their petals, arranged them perfectly atop their thorn-adorned stems. But gardening calls for merciful shears. And so the roses fall. And the stumps sit alone in the cold surviving. The chill in the air turns to snow turns to thaw and slowly, green tendrils snake up and rosebuds open like the mouths of baby birds tasting spring for the first time.
Something Beautiful is Going to Happen
Poetry — Eric Neumann

Fallen leaves brush up
Against the aging wood
—notice the crack at the end
And the harsh split in the grain

Rain beats against
The dusty window
Stained with mildew
And ringed by spiders

Furniture, battered and
Decaying is revealed by
The flashes of light
Striking the ground miles away

Yet there has never been more
Life in this old place

Hear how the mice
Move underneath the creaky
And warped boards
—hear how they cling to breath

See how the grass
Grows up the remaining
Few white wooden steps
—see its transcendent green hue

As the last wooden plank
Has rotted away and
Returned to earth
Appreciate the forest that had grown beneath
i start my mornings by popping k-cups and listening to the coffee pot brew. somehow i feel like the youngest and oldest child, wandering through empty classrooms filled with children’s scissors and struggling to read analog clocks.

i am learning slowly that love can be cruel. i am slithering out of this skin and leaving it behind while the letters burn. feathers branch from my spine. i am growing into this new life and learning to fly on my own.

like you amy i was born to create art. born to be great. born to survive by what flows from my fingertips. these words are dangerous but lovely. the trash is filled with tissues and there is a whisper of a knock on my door.

sometimes i feel so small amy. like my limbs are being stretched like elastic and starting to wear down. little by little. the body inside me is seeking safety in excellence. breaking down in hopes that my accomplishments will outlive me.

i am hoping that someday soon things will change and my spine will stand straighter. this room is dark and needs more light, but the sun is not my friend. how does one fight feeling disposable when it is something you have become?
Each Other’s Nerves/Pile of Flesh/Fuse

Poetry — Emily Clancey

Each Other’s Nerves
If we both turned our skin inside out.
If we were curious and damp and gentle.
If we drew close.
Then, if we pressed our flesh together, I don’t think it would hurt.

The cutting would hurt.
The peeling would hurt.
The harsh under-breaths in separate rooms would hurt.
And the touching of the red flesh as the blood mixed and dripped would not hurt.

Pile of Flesh
If you could bite me and swallow.
If I could give what’s deep.
Would you?

Pile of flesh, we’d be a sloshing shattered pile of flesh.
Would you hold what’s left of me?

Fuse
If we press our flesh together, would it, could it fuse?
Cut and peel and draft like fruit and trees.
Stay still for a long time.
Would our bodies reject it?

You swear one day I’ll bear your fruit.
I hope you’re right.
I’m afraid of stretching, screaming, unseaming.
But for you I’d burn my fuse.
the echo.

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