

Diamond Line Undergraduate Literary Magazine

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Diamond Line - Spring 2020

Diamond Line Editors

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the **DIAMOND LINE**
undergraduate literary magazine



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LETTER from the EDITORS

It took a while to figure out exactly what this magazine was meant to be. Emerging from its roots as a smaller project, then an extracurricular, The Diamond Line has adapted with the ambitions of its members and found its place as a class. We hope this form will allow for a broader reach and leave a lasting impression. Though the trials of this year have strained our production, we are proud to publish our debut edition.

Our featured writers and artists have produced outstanding work, and we hope it will provide some comfort during these difficult times. It is reassuring to see that people are still creating during this pandemic. Hardship can often be a driving force behind the creation of art and literature. The ability to create allows artists to process the world around them. We aim for The Diamond Line to continue on as an outlet to reflect students' passion.

The first issue of the magazine is credited to the diligence of our staff and the support of all our contributors. Thank you to those who submitted, and to those who will in the future. We hope our readers will be able to see the potential and talent that we see in the featured contributors and showcased works. We aspire for the first issue of The Diamond Line to be something readers can come back to again and again.

We are struck by work that cuts us deep. The Diamond Line was originally named such in homage to our state gem, but a name carries the narrative weight of its symbols. Someone could cut into their very soul with a diamond, and that's how poems and stories and paintings are created; by being carved out with something so sharp it leaves us raw. As such, we are dedicated to showcasing emotional truths and authenticity. We have committed ourselves and our magazine to allowing people to dig as deep as they can until they find their own rare and beautiful gem.

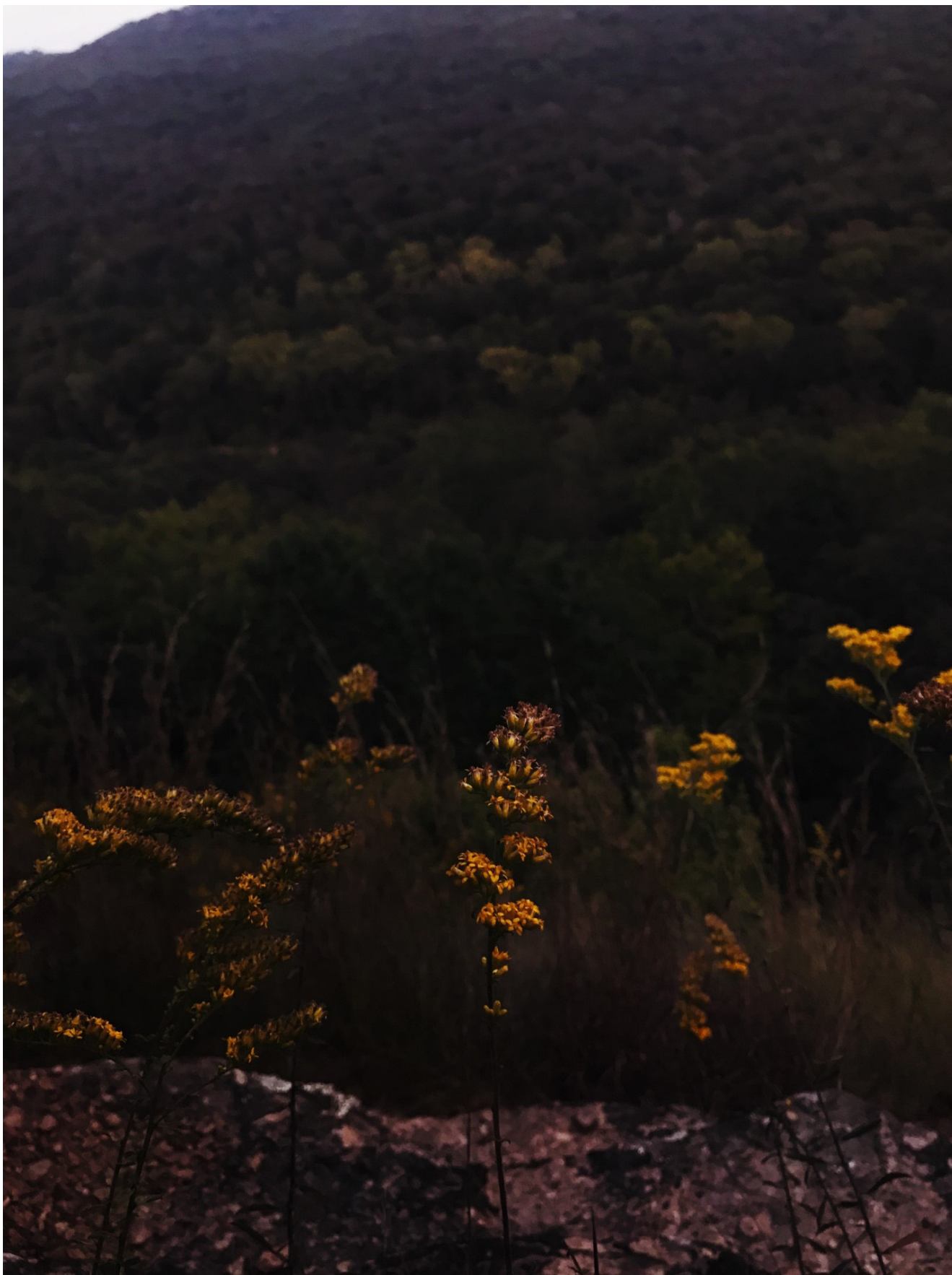
-Your Editors in Chief

February 3rd

Anna Beth Lane

The sort of innocence of an early spring day at 59 degrees with no tele-phones—no idea of anything else. The fluctuation of senses, the cough, the yell, the gust of too cold air blowing hair in your lips, the possibility of smells, of pine tree smells, the hobble of an old man with a telescope on an iron bridge, the peeling white skin of a sycamore, the yellowing of white pages in the afternoon. The idea of endings, the spider leg hairs on your knuckles, the voices around, the cloudlessness or blueness or orangeness of the sky, the stump-your-toe frustration, your toes on dewy grass or folding into cool sand or thick moist mud, the struggle to fit your second arm into a coat, the feeling of looking silly in public alone. The idea of dying, the possibility you could get wet and feel your clothes and skin differently and see the street lights differently because they shine on the wetness in a way you'd never see if it were dry, the green stink bug working its way up your sweater sleeve

the light space hanging
between a thumb and insect—
just before the crunch.



To Be Still
Sophia Crozier

you say you love the streets of copenhagen

Kate Duby

flirty and asymmetrical

the houses that cling to each other
like a blue and yellow chain

the grand sails atop young, shaky ships
weathered by the teasing of the tide

the eavesdropping accordion players huddled
in their corners
converting gossip to song

and giving you to the city

maybe someday when I visit

I'll sit where you sat on the dock,
have my picture taken

and learn what love means to you

Saigon Syndrome

Gabrielle Vatthanatham

Seemanyeet was a dangerous woman born betwixt and between the fine line of a land neither here nor there: and anywhere she might run to would always be fought over.

She let three of her daughters be Vietnamese. The last one she smothered in her sleep because Seemanyeet was afraid of being called a whore.

It was so hard back then; I wouldn't understand the conditions that kept a Hakka woman tied to children because she was afraid of dying alone.

She let my grandmother be raped by the father of her dead child.
She let her daughters grow up scared.

When they were old enough to feed themselves, they ran from home like an IV drip of Mekong water threading black hair.

My grandmother sold opium to survive; ran the dens like an Oriental bazaar; handed samples of her crystalpoppygoo to old men who only moved against their cots to make another pipe.

Life was hard.

And my mother had only asked once where her mother had gone—had only felt want once—

When the time had come to grow up and no one had taught her how to be a Hakka woman.
How to move and breathe carrying an ancestral legacy of grief in flesh-pink bundles on her back.

My mother says her mother was only a smell that she remembered from time to time.
When she took me to get my driver's license at the DMV,

A woman sitting beside me held a coffee to her lips after rubbing floral scented lotion on her hands.
My mother closed her eyes a bit and said, *there is no smell like opium—*

Art by Lauren Dial

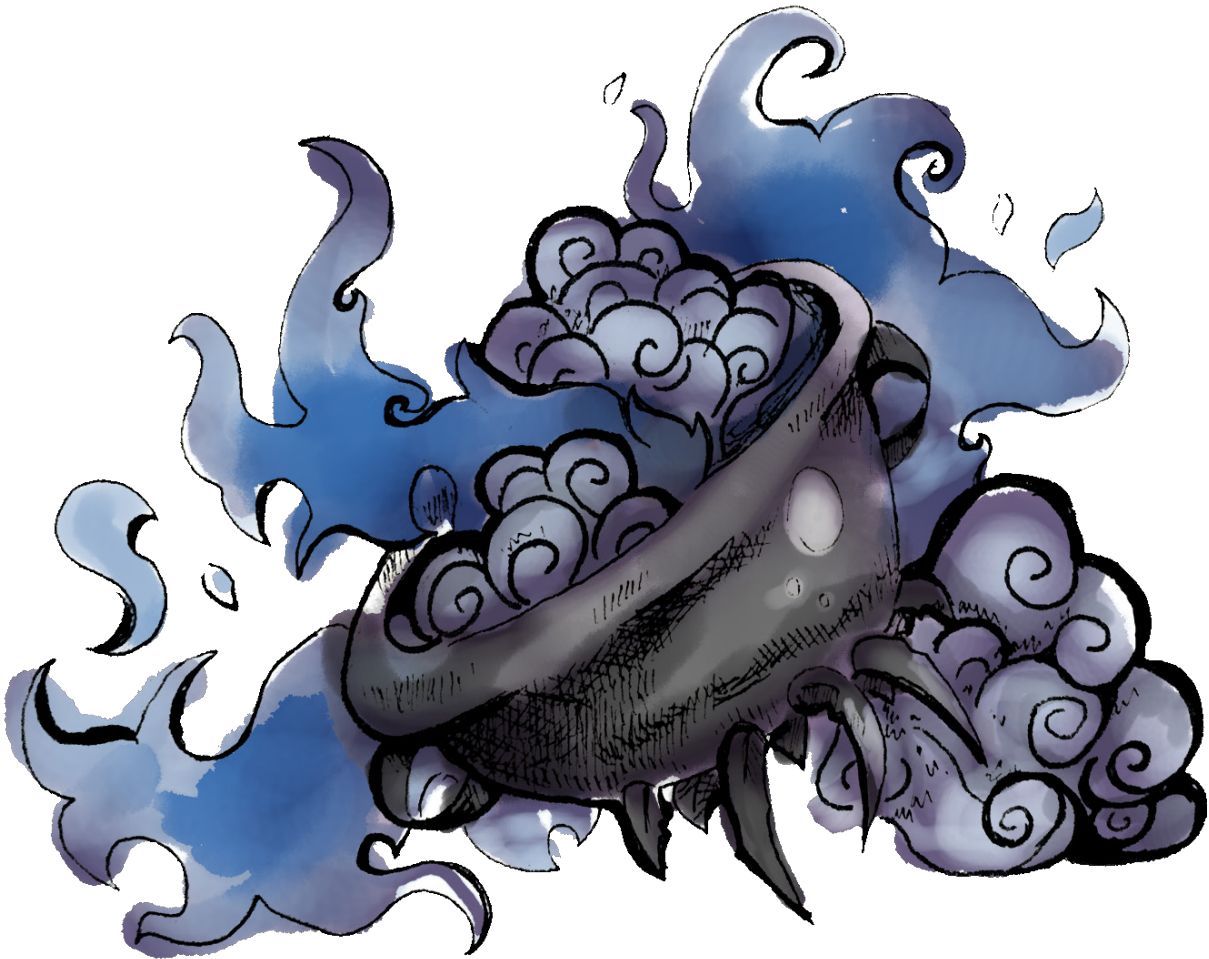
Nothing like it.
Sugar in an iron pot. Robusta coffee. And chicory root. And

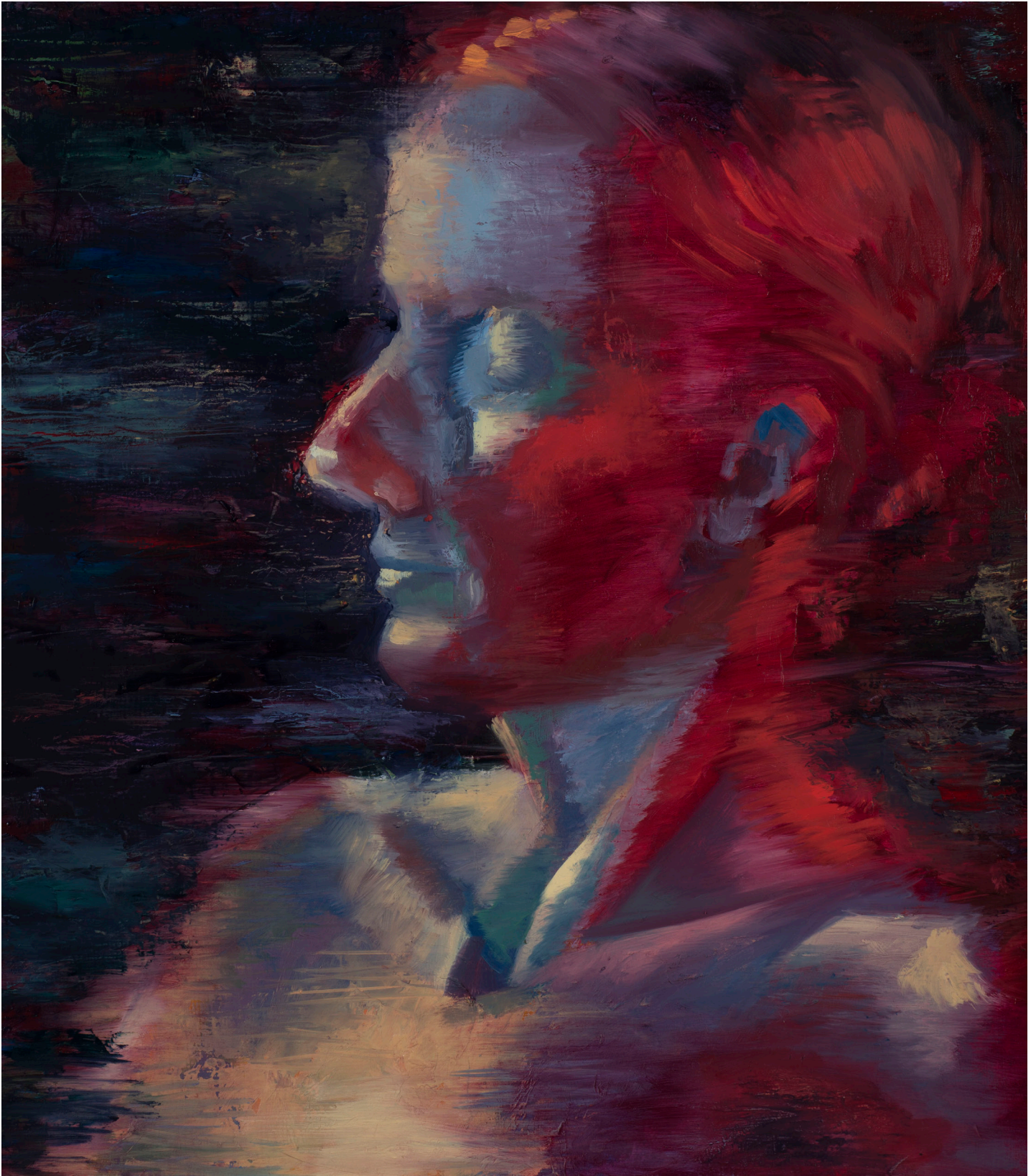
flowers too—
Except the flowers were burning.

They made her eyes sting.
And she remembered that not even the napalm burned as bad as the blue-black smoke that
curled underneath
her eyelids—

Gouged into the scleras—pulling out a memory from its dusty roots in the brain—beating it across the
frame of a folding mahjong table with tiles

spelling out the name:
Saigon.





Permeable Figure

Justice Henderson

The Wife of Sisyphus

Chance O'Neal

The Dinner Bucket was Scranton's biggest eyesore. Linard Cooper first founded the original diner by selling his wife's car, a 1984 Toyota Pickup, and renovating the old dollar store next to the Valero Station on 5th Street. It did well enough during its grand opening, but a kitchen fire burned it to the ground only four months after Linard cut the ribbon. With no insurance and almost all of the Cooper's financial assets burnt to nothing, many thought that that would be the end of the Dinner Bucket.

But Linard begged and pleaded with his wife until she finally agreed to sign the papers for another mortgage on their small one-story house and set up shop on the other side of town half a year later. This diner lasted almost two full years before Mark Laurence suffered a heart attack driving towards the diner's parking lot and crashed hood first into the front window, killing himself and three other people.

Scranton wasn't very sympathetic to Linard after that. People suspected that the Dinner Bucket was a bad omen of sorts. Soon superstition had such a hold over the town that Linard couldn't find an investor or landowner for miles who was willing to give him a chance.

Linard's next opportunity wouldn't come until four years later when Mrs. Cooper's mother passed away in the night, leaving quite a large settlement behind for her daughter for what, in her will, she called escape money. With more than enough funds to rekindle his dream, Linard's biggest dilemma was that he couldn't find anyone willing to sell him property.

So how did it happen?

It is the general consensus of the people of Scranton that the mayor finally caved in and sold him the property right outside of town to keep the impending collateral damage as isolated as possible. That, or just to stop Linard from coming by his office every Tuesday and Thursday at noon sharp to bother him with coffee and a story about his grandkids before finally getting around to asking if any new prospects had opened up around town. Either way, it didn't matter. Linard had his diner, and either from curiosity or just the noise of their own stomachs, he knew people would come eventually. As much as the town denied it, Scranton was just too small to ignore a story as big as the Dinner Bucket.

Nowadays it's not too surprising to see old Chevy trucks with faded paint and specks of dried earth still clutching to the sides from midding the night before starting to turn into the wet graveled parking lot, waiting, ready to dash out at the turn of a lock and fill the old wooden restaurant with a combination of button down-shirts and polished dress shoes and camo jackets and waterproof boots.

But not before Mrs. Cooper finished making the teas, stocking the salad bar, and counting the register from the night before. She would smile, listening to her husband whistle contently as he breaded the fish and started the fryer, and collect herself for a moment before flipping the diner's sign from Closed to Open and greeting customers with a timeworn smile that had made a man's wildest dream come true.

The Gamble

Halie Brown

And on the 8th day,
God said:
 “Let everything be lost,”
And with a shake of a hand
And the crackle of die
It was

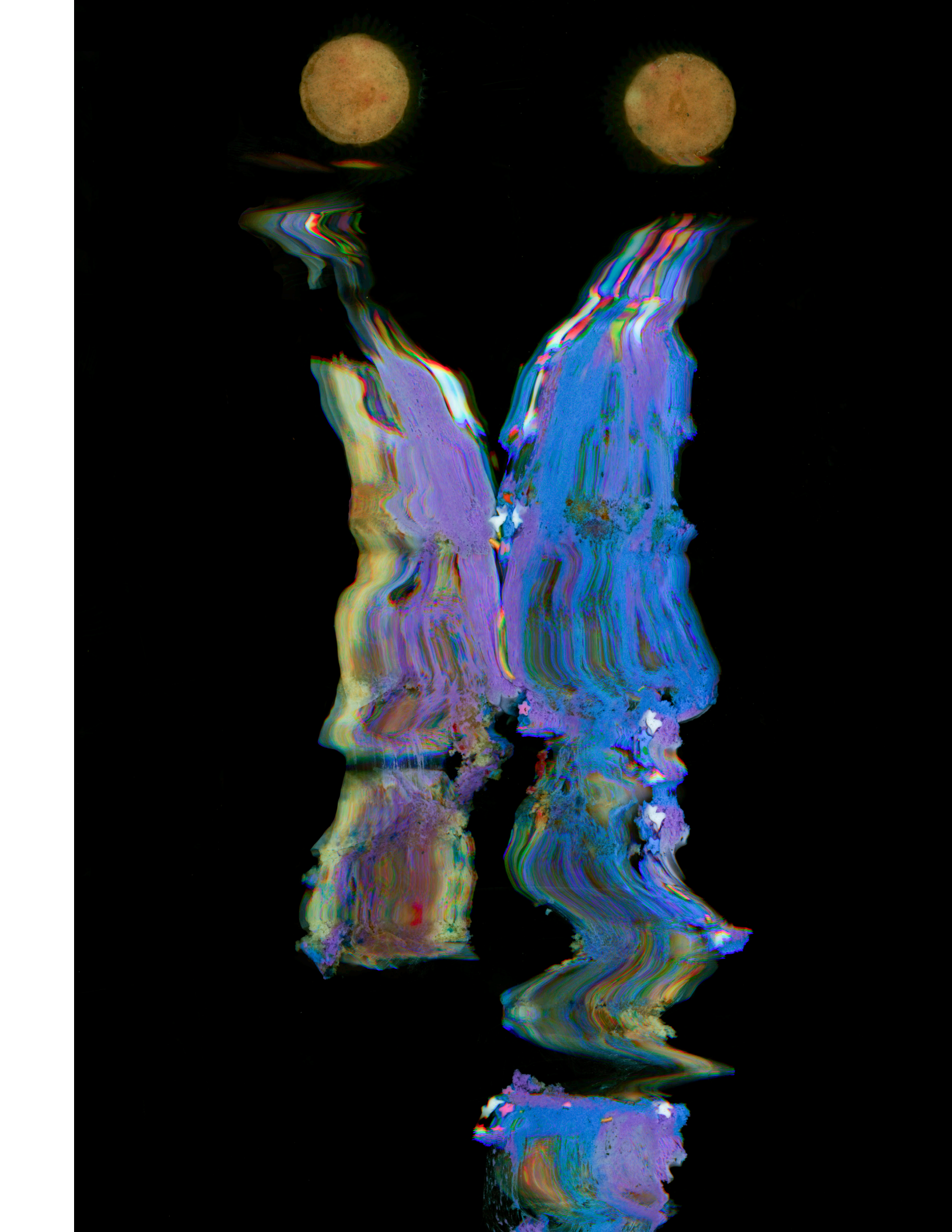
Jump Rope

Halie Brown

A mouth full of cotton.
Venom-soaked fiber.
 He slipped through the grass, the rocks and plastic.
 Curling and winding over the wheels of a turned-over trike,
 Into honey-glazed hands. Sugar broke off across his scales,
 As he stared into a starburst of a smile.
The cry of a siren.

Cupcake Smash

Katy Wright



Allon-Bacuth

Michayla Ashley

Three scoops of mint chocolate chip ice cream melted in a bowl on the closed toilet seat. A spoonful melted in my mouth, the chunks of chocolate filling the dips of my molars. I let it rest there until I could no longer taste the mint. Dolly sniffed at the bathroom floor, her torso moving past the threshold as she shuffled to where I sat naked on the tile with my back against the tub and a pile of discarded clothes tossed inside. She gave the first puddle one good sniff before her tongue lolled out of her mouth to clean up the blood.

Her bony elbows dug into the tiles before the door, but the rest of her white-and-black-body remained on the carpet. I sighed but made no motion to stop her as she crawled to the next puddle. After all, she was cleaning up my mess. Another pain in my lower abdomen forced my fingers to burrow their sharp nails into the soft skin of my palms. They stretched once more to grasp at the air, then closed again. When the pain ceased, I had already gulped down the lagoon in my mouth.

Far above my head was a faded green towel with spots of discoloration from an accidental cycle with bleach. It had been drying on the shower rod since yesterday morning, placed there long before my hospital visit. I reached for the towel, pulling a loose thread between my fingers, hoping it would meet me on the floor. Yet the stiff towel was stubborn, and I had to stretch further and pull until it collapsed beside me. I bundled it underneath my head and laid down on my side, my ankles digging into the unforgiving floor. Tears fell sideways to hit my nose and run along my other cheek. They fell prettily enough, so I decided to sleep without wiping them away.

...

I knew he was home even before I could open my eyes. Midnight Train to Georgia played from the speakers in the kitchen and he sang along. His voice wasn't anything special, but Dante could always capture the emotion of Gladys Knight.

I wanted to call out, to make it known to him that I was now awake and wanting to be a part of the moment. However, my tongue seemed to have grown to fill my mouth and stuck to the inside of my cheeks. She knew, though. Dolly, my own seven-month-old mutt with her tail becoming a blur behind her and her muzzle and chest a bright, matted red. She knew and that was enough for me to stand on weak legs. Taking my steps mindfully, I grabbed the bathrobe hanging off the door. Tightly wrapping myself in the fabric, I picked up the empty ice cream bowl and braced myself on the granite sink. I need to remember to clean the mirror. My fingers poked at the patches of red on my cheeks. My hazel eyes only becoming greener the more I stared at them, thankfully

without revealing any of my guilt, which I hoped for. They merely looked distracted, but maybe that's something else I hoped for.

"Nina, you finally up?" Dante called, turning the volume of the speakers down until it was a soft hum. "I started dinner, but I wasn't sure if you were feeling it. It's your favorite soup, though; if that changes anything."

I moved towards the yellow light where his voice came from. The kitchen lights stung my eyes, having been sitting in the dark since the sun sunk below the horizon.

"It changes everything," I said with a grimace, entering the room. I meant to smile, but my tone must have been convincing enough by itself because he laughed under his breath.

The kitchen was outdated and full of my own sentimental knick-knacks that I refused to rid myself of, despite Dante's best efforts to convince me to. My kitchen is, single-handedly, the

most charming place in this ugly apartment, I would claim. He would disagree and complain about a headache due to the clashing colors. Then, we wouldn't talk for the hour before dinner. This became a routine in our relationship and felt domestic in every sense.

I dragged a wooden barstool out from underneath the counter and Dolly laid between my legs, my bare feet traced the knots of her spine. The L-shaped counter space allowed me the perfect view of his profile: thin frame, straight nose, an indentation from his glasses that now rested on his head, combed, and gelled hair. His posture was relaxed, shoulders slightly hunched, but his eyebrows were furrowed. Seeing this expression often when it came to Grandma Vines' handwritten recipes, I knew that he was trying to decipher her cursive. Usually, he would ask for my help. This time he decided not to.

Dante and I met in the fall. After riding the same bus on the same route for who knows how long, our paths had officially crossed on October 23rd. Ever since then, he had become a constant in my life. I had forgotten what that felt like to have someone in my corner, but it was a welcomed change and not one I felt the need to defend myself against. It was now March and we had been together for five months. Since then, we created a comfortable space for each other in our own lives. I cut him a key and cleared out a dresser drawer for him, which only contained a pair of dress shoes, running shoes, three pairs of boxer briefs, a pair of basketball shorts, three white t-shirts, his second favorite pair of slacks and a button-up shirt. Dante even brought his own ironing board and a bottle of mouthwash, but still no toothbrush. We were working on that, but he wasn't here as often as I would have liked him to be. He seemed to come

and go too easily, but he cooked me dinner when he could get away from work and took Dolly for jogs around the complex.

He turned his face in my direction, now looking at me from behind his glasses. His expression was one of suspicion and I met his gaze, unwaveringly, but I had been silent for too

long. “Are you going to tell me why Dolly has dried blood all over her?” he asked, stirring the soup. I wanted to laugh at the casual tone of his voice, despite what he was asking.

I stared at the shadow boxes to the left of his head, searching for the perfect answer. Five shadow boxes filled with my collection of thumb-tacked four-leaf clovers, marked with the dates that I had found them. I had three more of the same in a shoebox on top of the fridge, but I ran out of nails to hang them up. That had been two months ago, and I never bothered to buy any more. When did nearly everything I own become a shade of green? I thought to myself. Aloud, “Dante, I think I lost him.” I tried to put meaning into my words without speaking them into existence.

“Him?” Dante questioned.

“‘Him’ sounds better than ‘it,’ wouldn’t you agree?” I said.

“Were you pregnant?” he asked. His voice sounded peculiar—detached—and his words sounded premeditated, despite me having only confirmed our fears moments before.

I nodded. Dante placed the ladle on the counter, even though we had a perfectly centered ceramic spoon rest that sat between burners. He turned his body until he was completely facing me. I stared at the ladle as the puddle formed beneath it.

“You sound unsure of yourself.”

“I’m not unsure.” I began to cross my arms, but I knew how much he hated that. So, I straightened my back and sat on my hands until they went numb under my thighs. My fingers then moved to tie strands of my copper hair in knots. When the knots fell away, they tied them up again. “The doctor said I was five weeks along, but I had no idea what was happening, Dante. It’s my own body and I had no idea.” The sight of him standing in front of me, thin and once singing with

Gladys Knight, was becoming unrecognizable as tears gathered near my waterline. Instead, all I could see were speckles of sage and the ladle still on the counter.

I could hear the clinking of him putting the lid on the pot, the sound of the soup boiling mollified to a simmer as he moved to my side. “You had no idea, Nina. So, you couldn’t have done anything to stop it from happening.”

I shook my head. “But I should have known, that’s the point. I should have known.”

“You didn’t even know for sure if you were—”

“But there was a ‘maybe.’ And that still didn’t stop me from going out for drinks with Jaime and Katrina three days ago. Or when we celebrated your birthday two weeks ago.”

Dante rubbed at his nose. “Yeah, not the best decision,” he muttered.

I wanted to break that nose. I wanted him to be angry and sad for me. For him to throw the fits and scream until his screams became gulps. Taking on all the blame, instead of making vegetable soup in my kitchen and questioning me as if I were another one of his patients and him my therapist. I wanted him to talk to God behind my back and tell Him that I didn’t deserve this. Rather, I wanted him to make it all okay. Or, at least, lie to me.

Instead, I sat there. Stamping out bouts of rage that threatened to spread. I cautiously admitted to myself that between waking up on the bathroom floor and this conversation, the columns holding my chest up pushed inward. Between it all, my stomach somehow crawled its way up and latched itself to the walls of my throat. Yet, it had no problem growling at me when it could smell the hearty aroma of the vegetable beef soup when Dante turned away from me to lift the lid off the pot.

“Go sit down at the table; I’ll bring you a bowl.” He said. I follow directions well, choosing the seat that was closest to me and facing the wall in case I would need to excuse myself. Shortly after, he joined me.

We sat in silence, eating our soup at the small table shoved in the corner of the room. Our plates nearly touched, and our knees would brush ever so often, but nothing was said. Midnight Train to Georgia was playing on a loop, neither of us standing to play the next song. Dolly would come and go, begging for scraps by pushing her head into our thighs and huffing. Occasionally her matted chest would stick to the skin of my leg and I would squirm in my seat. Dante would then catch my eye and I would stop. And when the weight from my thigh had gone, I knew she was begging on his thigh. Somehow, I missed her when she would leave, but that feeling would be replaced by annoyance as soon as she came back.

“You know I love you, right?” He sighed, reaching for me across the table. I pulled my hand away, grabbing my glass of water and taking a long sip. This was the first time he

had ever said those words to me, and I didn't realize that it was the last thing I would want to hear, until now. He blew hot air out of his nose. I turned my head to the side to catch the heat on my cheek.

"Isn't that what you wanted to hear? That I love you and I would have stayed, even if you were able to keep the baby?" He asked, his collected demeanor beginning to crack. I shook my head. Again, again, and again.

He sniffed and rubbed at his nose. The skin around his nose was pink. Perhaps he was coming down with something. He was already halfway through his second bowl of soup and I had barely touched mine. "I think I'm going to stay the night on Colin and Amy's couch, instead. That might be what's best for both of us right now." Somehow the spiderwebbed cracks in his façade had been melded together, his voice sounding calculative once again.

I continued to sit with Dolly's head in my lap. The spoon cradled in my hand targeted a shorter green bean and guided it between chunks of beef and carrots as I listened to him throwing open his one dresser drawer to shove his stuff in a trash bag. It didn't take long before he came out of my room, trash bag in hand, to stand behind me. He placed a brief kiss on my hair before grabbing his keys and leaving through the front door. He locked the door behind him. I waited, guiding the green bean around a golden potato, as his footsteps left the metal staircase to stomp on the sidewalk to his car.

I finally stood up, Dolly's head falling away from my thigh. After leaving the bowls to soak in the sink, I changed the song before it could play again. I searched for a bottle of red in the fridge and a glass from the cabinet. A warm tongue licked the exposed skin of my calf, as I pulled out the cork and poured a half-glass of wine. Realizing which song had begun playing, I gave a short laugh. I've Got to Use My Imagination, how fitting. Leaving the wine opened, I turned up the volume. I danced into the living room and around the couches, picking up the discarded pillows from the floor and organizing the magazines on the coffee table. I spun in a circle, breaking into a sloppy glissade, and twirled once again. Dolly barked at my side as I danced around her, ignoring the doctors' order of no strenuous activities as I wait for the placenta to pass naturally.



It could've been me

Claire Riddell

My skin is an experience
my mom has never had to have.
Despite adopting two brown kids,
she'll never fully understand.
How do I tell her that blue uniforms
are a source for nervous hands?
That passing those in MAGA hats
are cause for nervous glance?
The times we watch the nightly news
and she hears the words: "I can't breathe",
she only hears Eric Garner's voice.
My mom does not hear me.
How can I explain the pain that I feel
from the anthem, "Build The Wall"?
That even though I'm a citizen,
I still suffer the hate of it all?
And when we watch the nightly news,
and El Paso clips fill our screen,
she quickly changes the channel so that
my mom does not see me.
She doesn't feel uncomfortable
walking past police.
She doesn't feel eyes bore into her
when discussing diversity.
She doesn't wince at confederate flags
or anti-immigrant speech.
She doesn't ever watch the news
and think, that could've been me.

Trees and Moon

Jonelle Lipscomb

A Song for My Brother

Morgan Walker

We love each other in the 30 minute drive to our parents' house in the country. Driving on the dark and angular road, headlights wash over us, and I am reminded of the shadow he casts over me.

“Did you listen to that song I sent you?”
I want to connect with him in communal playlists and

shared screenshots and he humors me by saying he listened. We are almost home and he tells me he's been listening to heavy metal. He knows I mute scary movies, so he's quick to speak when I look at the album cover. “It's actually been helping me lately... with her diagnosis and everything.” My mouth is dry and

I wish I could say something, to prove that I am with him in more than what the music cries.



Edited: A Poem About ~~Love~~ Changing Seasons

Zach Turner

When the last forecast of snow turns to a chance
of rain and the ice on the pond breaks into ripples
and the winter bedding finally feels too heavy on ~~our~~ *my*
~~shared~~ bed,

When the Fish begin to dive into starry depths
and your Ram reaches the peak of its yearly climb
and you step out into the day with a cardigan instead
of a coat,

When the bear in the hills behind ~~our~~ *my* house
wakes and startles the north-minded birds and ruins
the fresh honey hives of the too few bees, this year even
fewer,

When the grass pulls a phoenix and you hear
the first mower of the year droning, droning and your
allergies return and you call your mother to talk about your
[new] man,

When the air begins to smell less like salt
and more like perfume and the puddles in the potholes
splash instead of crack as you pass over them on your way
to work,

When you lie down in the home ~~we~~ *he* built
and I stand in our *my* garden waiting for the year's first
butterfly to find the ~~daffodil~~ *narcissus* I planted for you,
for us,

I will still [redacted],

[add] or I won't.

From the Mist

Rashi Ghosh





Window Drawing I

Justice Henderson

Chantix

Sara Schellenberg

I am stomping sparks
on the driveway for the last time
so maybe I'll outlive my brother,
and be there to not smoke at his grave
while he is turning to maggots
and I am waiting to be ashed.
Doctor says I should quit smoking.
I know, I know, don't you see
I am embarrassed
Ashtray strangers asking my age like
they got license to smoke, they
down-low enough, French or hip
or gay enough, blue-collar or butch,
black-and-white, white-trash,
Dada or Ab-Ex enough.
stand sour in the rain.
try to keep it tender.
Forgive the early memory of black foil,
dad sitting cross-legged in the fireplace, the first sight
and smell I can remember as loving him.
Chimney-father tells me my lungs ring hollow
and deep like a drum. Now
under fluorescent lights
I am my brother, shooting cans
and scurrying away white camels, bald head
thrown down against the cruiser,
reeking like bad Nino
who threw wheelies on the dry grass,
like the tan jacket dad wore in the driveway--
quit smoking years before the dark
pansies
bloomed like a puddle
and made him into stick-man.
Doctor says his lungs are still pink and fresh
No more lung-drum beating now, sick man
still misses the cigs
I'm stepping back inside soon
wearing dad's tan jacket. Don't worry--

THE FELIX CHRISTOPHER MCKEAN MEMORIAL AWARD (UNDERGRADUATE) WINNER

Poem For Ann

Elizabeth Muscari

Tonight the cotton moon has sucked the light
into its stomach, the excess seeps through
its pores like a holy aura. You float
on your back wherever it is my body
keeps you. I only find you when it's necessary.
You must be somewhere convenient because
you come through my throat suddenly.
You appear in the shadows of my
forgetfulness and in either howls or hushes
we inherited each other. But I've never
been one to look for the lost.
The night you smoked as children slept,
the starved afternoon of *Am I dead yet?*
I only heard about these things.
We collect death in our back pocket
like coins until we pay our debts. Besides—
what I do remember about you happened
also to me in a yard which is now
paved over. The violation of skin still
simulates with cement. But I'm not
one to look for the lost. For now, the dark
arrives in murmured speech where it eats
the flame from my hands and I find comfort
in the fact I might lose you come morning.



The Disco Garden

Katy Wright

Elizabeth Muscari is a senior English (Creative Writing) major from Dallas, TX. Beginning Fall 2020, she will attend the University of Arkansas's Master of Fine Arts Program in Creative Writing and Translation.

primordial goop

Gabrielle Vatthanatham

In the beginning, there were three or so little fat green things contorted on the small branch of dill my mother brought in from the garden. I only saw because she motioned me fervently with her free hand like she was afraid noise might cause the grubs to fright, stir and fall. I didn't know they were worms until I managed my way over to her.

I wonder if it's some offense to be made to touch one of them without my consent. Without theirs too. Regardless, the little worms were placed into my hand by my mother who thought it a very sensible thing to do. The things paid no mind to my indifference. They only bent themselves back—moving dill from branch to mouth—not eating—this was conveyor belt style sustenance. If they stopped, they'd die:

Survival of the fittest.

“Go and find a place for them.” My mother didn't stay long enough for me to ask what she meant. But there was a speck of light caught on the edge of some sentiment in her eye that let me know that it had been joy that moved her back into the vines and burrs she called garden and I called jungle.

In it some patterned chaos of summer weeds called basil, blackberry and Jerusalem artichoke amongst the bramble and wires called dill where the eggs were made and left to grow old.

It's a jungle out there.

I paid enough heed to her though. There was a laundry net we used for washing bras and other delicate things that I put them in. I set the base with a sturdy piece of cardboard and laced a string of twine on the construction so that it might hang on the kitchen chandelier like a plank swing on an old oak tree or a tot's hands around a mother's neck.

I thought everyone should want to see them, especially at dinner time.

My mother returned bearing gifts. “Siblings” she called them. They probably weren't, but I didn't have the heart to tell her otherwise. She trusted that I would reunite the bugs in the net whilst she went out to salvage any more caterpillars. When she was satisfied that her hunting had produced all of the siblings she let herself take a stay from her gardening to play with the little worms.

Holding one in her hand she touched it gingerly, tenderly poking at it until it poked its

little yellow antenna at her in aggravation. No one will talk about it, but it leaves a stink like acrid venom and stains the skin like curried eggs. She seemed to smile more at the response though, and I was reminded of a little Chinese proverb my mother taught me when I was small.

You're poking a worm in your hand. And you keep poking at it until it bites you. When it does, you let it fly away. I never poked on worms growing up.

"Such a bad mom," my mother stated matter of factly.

"I'm sorry?" I turned to look on her.

"The butterfly mom had all of her babies on a dead dill plant." she stroked the caterpillar in her hand as if her touch could nurture it: could make up for the time it had spent without care and without home.

"All of the babies were eating dry dill before I brought them in."

I nodded a while before she asked me to hold one of the worms. I didn't feel like arguing when she said

"Look, it's chubby like you."

She brought herself from idleness some twenty minutes after to buy dill for the little worms. I stayed to watch them through the net. I don't know how my mother had the will to carry them in. Spring green skin stretched tight around their bodies, black bands striated their entirety and though they had

only food for kindling, all of them were too fat for their own good. They looked carcinogenic. Like holding one could tempt any good cell in the body to become bad.

The first one hatched en route to Galveston Island. Day twenty-three hour: high noon. Hanging from the rear-view mirror of our Nissan Murano this worm had the audacity to emerge and drip bug juice on the console. I don't remember ever seeing my mother so excited. She relished in the good luck she had in bringing them along for family vacation as if she had paid mind to see a tot's bare feet touch ground for the first time.

"Look!" she said taking the bug out. It crawled on her hand as if it remembered her warmth or benevolence or taste—I heard caterpillars taste through their feet, or butterflies maybe. It's so hard to tell the difference sometimes.

"It likes to hang because it has to dry!" she laughed unreservedly turning the bug to face us.

“Look! It’s your big sister!”

It was hard to imagine that four weeks had moved hand enough to trade green bug for blue and black one. I still remembered them as they were during the first two weeks when my mother diligently cleaned and fed them every morning and night. It was ritualistic the way she cared for them. The way she would take them out in turns saying “hello, hello”. Exponentially. They grew exponentially, and there was nothing we could do about it but say “hello, hello”. She was so proud of them. She had to have been. Every time I had chance to look on them, I saw them crawl around, under, over, beside and through one another. Children chasing each other around a prickly pear.

There was only this black thing now. Not really a worm, but not really a butterfly either.

She watched it walk a bit, traverse the length of her hand before she allowed herself to grow concerned. She frowned a bit, but then decided that it was too early for the little thing to encounter fear.

“What if it’s hungry. If we raised it inside will it know how to find food?”

“We can open up the window and find out.”

My mother frowned at me hard. The skin of her small lips pursed up as she did it too.

I was sorry for it.

My mother was not. She turned to my father and in twenty some years of marriage and family, he had recognized that face four distinct times.

“We need to stop at the next gas station”

There was no argument to be made.

At our stop, my father was sent to retrieve a bag hard candies which we all assumed my mother would enjoy at her leisure. When he returned, my mother immediately tore through cellophane to soak one in her mouth. But there was no leisure in it. She pushed the candy around with her tongue as if testing it to dissolve—needing it to. Even if she risked splitting lip or teeth in her fervor she continued at it until, I suppose, it gave way to her. No one knew what she was doing when she took a finger to her lip and collected a string of saliva and suspended jolly rancher, red and viscous. She held it out to the little bug, still wet with amniotic juice. Oh no, my bugs aren’t fed formula. Just pure, unadulterated candy goop from momma.

I was really sorry for it.

“Look!” She said laughing again—small lips spread wide around her mouth. “It eats.”

Her firsthatched was released, without delay, near a tuft a vegetation courtesy of the condo’s landscaper. Weighing a hearty three paper clips, our very proud mother could not be happier to find that it was indeed a healthy flyer.

If we had not been reminded by the periodical absence of my mother from the unit we all filed into after the changeling’s release, we would’ve all forgotten about her other little worms. As soon as baggage was carried from car to condo my mother rushed in her madness up to the terrace and fastened the net against the iron railing of the balcony. “There you go.”

There was a couple smoking cigarettes on the terrace of the adjacent unit and I wondered if they wondered what my mother was up to. She only thought that the little worms might like the warm salinity of the air and the sound of the ocean like we do. She’s a beautiful woman.

Between days twenty-four and twenty-eight two more hatched amidst the heat and humidity they spent under seven Texan suns before we were due at home. But in that time when we had danced, trampled, and burned on the sand, those two little worms were coming back to something they had known once whilst the others had no care to born again. And though we had no care for an explanation, my mother assured me that it was normal for malnourished caterpillars to emerge late. They were homesick. They just needed another week to actualize all that was meant for them. To trace the thread from egg to caterpillar from caterpillar into—

Days twenty-eight to forty saw them on the chandelier now two weeks overdue. My mother who had played role of harvester, and nurse, and demi-mom to those worms now played the role of false hope. Imagine two weeks of five-pound bundles of grocery dill, two weeks of bulking for hibernation, two weeks of hello, hellos, three weeks of gestation to be made null by—

“They just ooze! They just ooze! It was supposed to come out, but it just oozed!”

Imagine if all women were forced to perform their own caesareans. I remember not wanting to move close to her. I could not be bothered to see the cause of her distress, nor to look upon the fate of those little worms.

Such a bad daughter.

When she held her hands out to me she offered broken shell and dark green goop:

pestilent spit on a concrete floor.

I was reminded of a principle I learned in a progressive biological science class once.

In the beginning there was the world. And all the world was watered muck, dust, particle, matter until some unmoved mover decided one day: “wouldn’t it be cool to have life?” and ZAP the first worm was formed.

They call it the theory of primordial soup.

Primordial soup?

*Primordial goop

And on the seventh day, God rested the entire world on the black wing of a little worm known sometime as: caterpillar.

I think I was born to be sorry.

“They just ooze! I didn’t know!” I watched my mother lay eyebrow scissors on the granite counter.

“I know”

“I didn’t mean to”

“I know that too” I took the goop from her hands. Is it disrespectful to throw something like that in the trash when we allow so much ceremony for human corpses? What is in a worm corpse that is worth any less? Empty shells collected as pastime for fate to look on and say, “I remember what lived in here.”

“Do you think they feel pain? Do you think I hurt it?” my mother wouldn’t look at the thing in my hands. She looked at me.

I just wanted to play with the goop. That sort of cosmic limbo where all karmic debts might be taken and paid in full. That liminality. Not of this world but the next. Betwixt and between. So close yet

so far. Close but no cig—

“I don’t think there’s anything to feel.”

I think my mother felt satisfied with that response. So we let twelve more days fall be-

tween the weave of the laundry net. My mother would not allow herself to touch the worms. I had taken to reading about them though. Of learning of ways to expedite metamorphosis.

If I played Bach or Handel, wouldn't they come out to be perfect little prodigious things? Or if I oriented them to the East, some vibrational energy could be conferred to the worms that might still save them: make them comfortable enough to gain consciousness, realize all that my mother had done for them, understand that it was time to move on to something new, and emerge out of pure respect.

I also read that if you pinch the tail of a chrysalis and the worm does not move it means it won't ever move again.

I told my mother this in week eight when all the worms had calcified like small shards of stony gravel.

From egg to caterpillar from caterpillar into—

gravel. How proud that gravelmom might be to know that some couldn't-be-helped biological process in her produced seven little low-grade metamorphic rocks fixed to the sides of a white laundry net hanging from the chandelier of a Chinese woman's home.

"I don't like looking at them anymore" my mother told me at breakfast week eight, day two, hour: too early. "I don't want to keep them in the house anymore" she furthered. I thought I saw her top lip tremor when she finished with:

"It makes me sad."

"It makes me laugh. We have petrified caterpillars hanging on our chandelier!" I said. But I was sorry for it, and I apologized.

"No, it doesn't make me laugh." I admitted. "What should we do with them?"

What should we do with them? Because we were the living. Because we got to decide things for the dead. Those worms no longer belonged to themselves. Did they ever belong to themselves.

I watched my mother's eyes move. Whether she contemplated cereal or death, milk or suffering, mother or child, those eyes ran over net, then closer to broken shells, then floor, then coffee, then to me, then shells, then back to me: her daughter. She looked at her daughter when she said

"Burn them."

“Why?” It would’ve been so much easier to leave them out on some branch or wood. To let whatever become of it happen. Never again left to neglect, or dry dill, or hurt. One day I should like to be a shell on the beach.

“Do you think they still feel?”

I sat there over the warm mist of my food. Thinking of it.

“Maybe somewhere else. But not here.”

“Then burn them.” She reasserted. “I don’t want the birds to come for them. Just in case the butterfly mom comes back.”

“Would it make her sad?”

My mother nodded “maybe next time they’ll do better” she suggested. “Next time.”

Her look was far away and I knew she was recalling happier days when those caterpillars still belonged to her like they could be called Gabrielle, Isabelle, Ivan or Estelle.

Those calcified worms made food for flame on the fourth day of the eighth week over an overambitious grill. My mother did the whole of it, but I stood close to watch her. I imagined as she let each one give way to flame that she said a prayer for it: hello, hello. Goodbye, goodbye.

It came so naturally to her, to love and to nurture something that was not made of her flesh, was not crafted in her womb. Did not speak or move around the world like she would. Would not prefer pumpkin over squash in the lazy turn of fall. Would not grow into her shirts or perfume. Would not live, or laugh, or love like we do. She loved because in her own quickening, fate knew to make her a beautiful woman.

When all the sometime caterpillars were burned and my mother had turned down the propane. We sat a while on the veranda facing the jungle where those worms were born and buried live. I saw the turn and bend of every wire and weed. Heard the droning cries of gnats and other winged things. And in the midst of that space I thought there was something in the humidity that was heavy, and smoky and raw like the temporal half of the universe decided to sit right next to us and linger on the breath of the still air.

“Why do they do it?” I asked my mother. I don’t know if I really expected an answer, or if I just wanted her to say something to me.

She turned her large, square face towards mine and I thought: one day I'll look exactly like her: small pout and crinkly smile: black brows and all.

“What do you mean?” I clarified.

“If they know there's a chance they won't come out of it alive. Why do they do it?”

My mother let us be silent for a moment. For more time than would make me comfortable, but with all the sensibilities of a mother; she waited a minute in her response—Just a minute—If she had it then she let it oxidize—take on some quality of the air and mist—let it hang on her tongue just a second longer so that in my discomfort or boredom I could be made to steal a glimpse at the fruits of her garden, hidden beyond the thorny underbrush of her weeds.

“They do it, so they can be like you,” she said.

“Oh.”

I remember now that the Chinese proverb I thought I had remembered was wrong.

You're poking at a worm in your hand. Because it doesn't bite you, you let it go.



Fatal Floral

Bia Edwards

Crack my skull and from my brain sprouts lilies
white ones, like those at my mother's wedding, pristine but stained with bits of myself,
they like it here and grow like fungus in over saturated soil
their judgement is clouded, but that's okay
at least they're nice to look at.

The societal lobotomies started it.
Roses shot through my eyes hitting the right part of my prefrontal cortex
to sever the connection to reality
and cause me years later to give birth to a garden,
but in winter

when the world is cold and cruel to new things.
This industry loves to paint flowers new colors
until their petals wilt and a new seed sprouts.

They wipe the dirt from the shining new face
perhaps a chrysanthemum, golden and frilled .

While my veins clog with poppies, red ones, an ode to death
since it'll likely one day cause my own.

But at least it will be pretty





**“If You Can’t Join
‘Em, Beat ‘Em!”**

**“My Eyes Are Up
Here!”**

Emily Shaddox

girls

Heather Drouse

you were twenty-two when
you had your first kiss,
your thin lips pressing sheepishly
against that lovely girl's smile.
she wore strawberry chapstick,
which was funny,
because you had on cherry.
the first kiss was quick,
almost a blur; the two of you
laughed and laughed over how
flustered you were, and then
she dove for you from
across your bed,
and again you drowned in
her soft lips, her gentle embrace.
how confident she was;
it was her first time, too,
and yet she led you by the tongue
as if she had been waiting
for you all her life.
you never want to forget how
mesmerizing and how freeing it was
to be intimate with that lovely
girl, how relieved you were
when the fires of hell didn't
come for your sinful body like
your mother said they would.
instead, in your first kiss, you
finally found peace,
and a sense of warm love in your
heart that could rival even the
hottest of hellfire.

you were twenty-two when
you began to love yourself.



The Dogwood

Alyssa Tidwell

It is a slow disrobement at first
casual, then passionate at the rousing of the wind
and stranger I stand – warmly welcomed – beneath her arms
 stepping on the hem of her clean white cloak
She sheds each piece
She paves the ground for me
Me, the young morning admirer.

But my boots, mud caked by belied kindness
My jacket, thorn torn and faded denim
Am I not just a girl the world has touched?
 So I will wash

My hands venture toward her waist
and I see now that blushed blame transfer
lively white hot in my cheeks soaked
 from that crimson-pierced petal
She drapes over me
and I have a new name, and it is
Humble.

The Lump in Her Breast

Michayla Ashley

Prologue

The pads of her fingers
dot the surface
of this ocean
caressing
roundness
her own
naked breast
her hand
veers to the twin
I mimic
colors seaweed
and grow
and assemble my
brothers for this
noble
cause
At once her hand
becomes mine
once again
this caress
different
these fingers
sink into flesh
forcefully
un
inviting

Epilogue

When fate has been
acknowledged
they become
one and then
grow wizened
and with death
comes a joyous celebration
their return
to the earth
no longer will
the poets speak of
famous star-crossed
lovers
they will speak only of a faithful
knight's sword buried within
the chest of a radiant
queen



Art by Lauren Dial

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**Additional pieces not in print can be found on The Diamond Line's website
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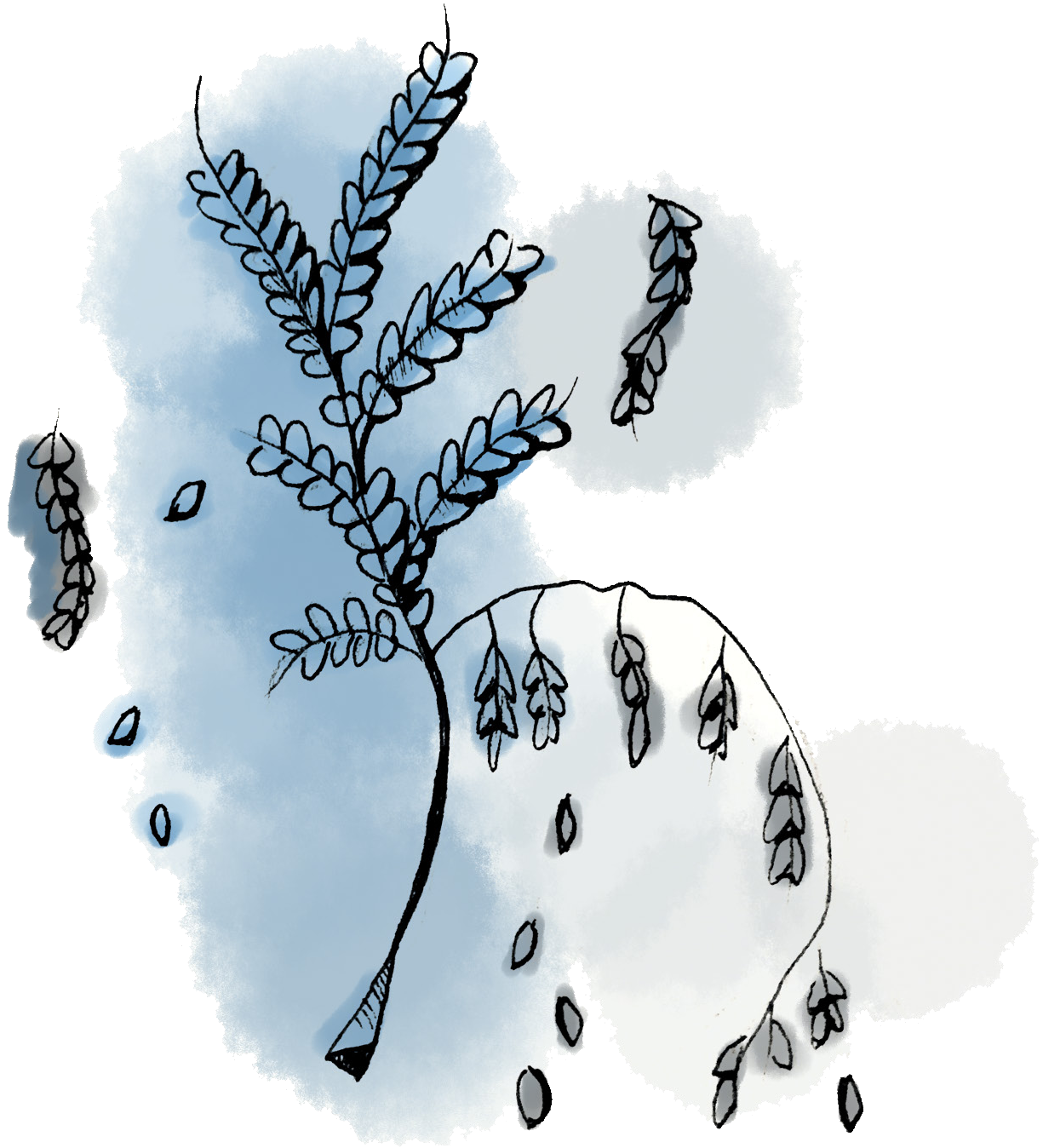
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Colophon

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Hangzhou

Sophia Crozier

