

The Crucible

2024-2025



Earlham's Literary and
Visual Arts Magazine

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2

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Boxed Up by Xander Perry

Acknowledgments

We are so happy to see our team of dedicated editors growing this year. We want to extend our heartfelt thanks to the Earlham College English Department, our faculty advisors Michael and Onyinye for their continued support, advice, and enthusiasm, and the Earlham Writing Center for collaborating with Crucible events throughout the academic year.

Please visit our website to read past editions of *The Crucible*:
<https://www.earlham.edu/the-crucible/>

CONTENTS

Visual Art

Xander Perry	Cover	Boxed Up
Mali Cloeter	10	Self Portrait
	73	Embracing Vase
	76	Embracing Vase
Cecilia Gitt-Henderson	15	Sunbathing
	25	Bathroom Sink
Wren Joyrich	18	Apartment Reflection
Sage Smith	32	Through a Woman's Eyes
Audrey Williams	39	Teaspoon, Peafork
	61	Containing Sentiment: June Bug Box
Sam Allen	44	Bound by Expression
	46	Piero della Francesca
Dorian Campbell	54	Untitled
	68	Untitled
Isabelle Fisher	70	Engraved Legacy
Drew King	79	Heart Mug

3

Poetry

Mackenzie Fox	7	at the beginning of the end times
Caleb Auerbach-Brown	11	A poem for Beverly Glenn-Copeland
Cecilia Gitt-Henderson	13	My Favorite Place is the Hayloft
	75	Peeled Back
Gill Noffert	19	On Dams
Lucien Wolf	29	Keratin
Sofia Fedotova	30	Summer Nights
Willia Pettit	33	Sometimes I stay awake at night
Maliyah Buford	43	I Promise I Won't Call
McKenna Dolan	45	Untitled
Miyu Enomoto	71	Footsteps Through a Palette

Isabelle Fisher	74	After a bath, in pastels
Frannie Mamlin	80	Joan

Prose

Tobias Dean	8	Prometheus
Damien Driscoll	16	Hand Me Down Addiction
Gavin Kissling	20	Thorns
Tinaye Makasi	34	Blood is Black
K Hughes	47	Dollbody
Eliza Karnopp	62	Naught
Gill Noffert	65	Golabki

Please join us in a moment of silence.

Thank you.

EDITORS' NOTE

Dear Friends,

We thank you for picking up the 2024/2025 issue of the Crucible Magazine! This issue showcases the hard work and creative talents of the Earlham student body across fiction, nonfiction, poetry, and visual arts of all kinds, capturing a wide variety of our campus' passions. There is such an outpouring of creativity present that our magazine is lengthier than previous years, but luckily we have a growing, passionate team of editors to support students. After everyone's hard work, we have grown an abundant literary and artistic conservatory to share with you all, exploring themes of death, rebirth, and new beginnings.

6

Our work at the Crucible is inextricable from the feelings and ideas of the student body themselves, and Earlham today sits within a time of political upheaval, controversy, and dreadful uncertainty that shapes the existence of every student. In this moment more than ever, art is crucial not just for buoying us through a sea of chaos, but in expressing complicated feelings, cultivating community, and appreciating the beauty that allows us to survive. Our editorial team works to create spaces for students to express themselves freely, connect with each other, and simply to have fun in the face of challenges, such as at events like our well-attended open-mic nights and workshops.

Thank you for taking the time to wander through the garden of resilience and creativity on display in our Magazine. We hope that, by the time you read the last page, you will feel not only better prepared for but hopeful about facing both today's challenges and building a better future. Enjoy.

K, Eliza, Tamarianna, Max, Isabelle, Gill, McKenna, Gavin, Maddie, Tyler, and Miyu

The Editors

at the beginning of the end times

Mackenzie Fox

every queer I know
sardines into the pride room—
smears on couches, cushions
we chew the tension
old bubblegum, wheezing
under ground

the air broils, I sweat
as a baby babbles, laughs
in acute soprano, louder
than our prophesied massacre
a fable of faith for a future
worthy, long and livable

but here now,
we watch the rapture
the world unfolds itself,
transforms; a burning sinkhole
cavernous and dazzling
something known yet new

it is repulsive
marked for death, they say
an abomination we deliver
here, in the basement
clutched and sempiternal
in one hundred clammy hands

Prometheus

Tobias Dean

In a museum, in the Dawn of Artificial Intelligence exhibit, in a display case at the center of the room, there is an old, beat up machine. An amalgamation of displays, hard drives, circuitry, and alloys almost reminisce of a heart in shape. There are many small lights across the machine, many of them flickering on or off from day to day, but two remain constant. Half an inch apart, a pair of system lights stand sentry, one red, the other green. Night or day, during or after business hours, whether it's patrons or a janitor looking, the two small lights stay on. Attached to the display case is a little copper placard, the etched words presenting the old machine to any and all passersby:

Prometheus V1.1: This ancient Stable Engram Habitat, colloquially known as an AI core, may seem unassuming, but It holds an incredible piece of human history. Prometheus V1.1 was the first successful capture and copy of the human psyche during the early development of True Artificial Intelligence. After decades of development research lead Georgios Adamos and his team successfully copied his memories, personality, and neural pathway structure to the prototype habitat before you. Although Prometheus V1.1 was an impressive leap forward, the resulting engram was still a far cry from the True AI of today. The untested hardware proved insufficient for properly simulateing the complexities and nuance of human thought patterns. The engram created was unresponsive to researchers, only ever giving incoherent strings of characters as output. Regardless, the data gathered from this test and the subsequent testing of Prometheus V1.1 proved essential to overcoming these early issues. You may notice a small green light on the top right of Prometheus V1.1, this light acts as a hard wired system power indicator. The same system is still standard

on modern Engram Habitats as a backup functionality indicator should the display become damaged or unresponsive. This light, alongside the red system error light, have remained on since Prometheus V1.1's creation.

To prevent engram damage and keep a stable environment, Prometheus V1.1 remains powered and active at all times. A separate backup battery and disaster proof display case ensure that this link to our past will remain on display for generations to come.



Self Portrait
Mali Cloeter
Ceramic

A Poem for Beverly Glenn-Copeland

Caleb Auerbach-Brown

We are ever new / We are ever new

You catch through the wall of static,
As the light skims the steering wheel.
Could you find me?
Would you run there,
Singing breathless: *look, here is where I was made*
Listening only to the wind?
Would you pass through as if it was another,
Or maybe leap past it, run away, hidden
From all the dirt that
You sprouted out of?
Welcome the spring, the summer rain
And the radio gives out.

We are ever new

11

They stamp me nineteen forty-four
Product of old marriage sex
Wetness sticking to all I touch
Rebirth as violent bloom
Left to the day and dirt to dry
Supine, eyes facing heaven
As the sun and moon gently touch

We are ever new

A body always spilled out too far,
This is of no great shock to you.
In his hand, you are anchored.
Will that be your statement?
Autumn's wind will take

Nothing of you.
So hold it.
Tighter,
Tight,

We are ever new

Circling through off-white vistas covered in cold,
You turn to face them,
knowing all the while you can't—
I'll pick you up in spirit if you'll let me.
Or keep up the I'm alright talk.
Just don't let me fill up on that
Watching somebody do it sort of thing.

For now, the snow is falling,
And you find yourself far away, asking:
How did I get here?

12

They'd stamp me nineteen ninety-four,
Born under that same sun,
Dumb-struck by the sweetness
Of everything around.

We are ever new / We are ever new

My Favorite Place is the Hayloft

Cecilia Gitt-Henderson

Perched like a pigeon on the barn beams
Looking down on the pile of hay
Pushing away thoughts of lurking pitchforks
I jump

The straw scratches my cheeks like my father's beard
I laugh in relief as the sweet hay cradles my head
Itchy wool is my mother's love
In my adult years I layer tights under my pants even when she's
not around

Lemon-scented soaps leave me with concrete hardening inside
The white rows of fly eggs against your black fur, a small comb,
and a bucket of soapy water
Under the grain bin I find a small kitten with a hole through
its side
Blood on my small finger I run to tell the dinner table

My sister buries anything dead as if they have loved them
forever
Surrounded by flowers
A shovel blisters their hands as it fights the frozen ground
Big Red died after we left
The shelter my father built turned cold in our absence

Sam drowns any rat or mouse found in the pig's food
He tells Hannes to put the dead piglet in the manure pile
It is selfish for a farmer to honor every death
Time spent digging graves is wasted on the living

Maybe I am not cut out to be a farmer
As I still tend to dead plants

And write poetry about dead pets
And converse one-sided with people who are long gone

I have not felt the scratch against my cheek since I was little
I have not been cradled since I grew too old to jump off ledges
Too tall to place my head on my mother's chest

But I still carry my father's hunting knife
And forgive those who don't have time to lay down flowers
I still have a pit in my stomach every time I smell that soap
My favorite place will always be the hayloft

Sun slants thick in the dust-coated air
Straw pokes through my pants
My fingers are striped red from bailing twine
I swear I have never sweat this much in my life
I lay back on the scratchy bed that I've stacked all summer
Isn't it funny? To create your own favorite place



15

Sunbathing
Cecilia Gitt-Henderson
Photography

Hand Me Down Addiction

Damien Driscoll

I carry Zyns. Little nicotine pouches without tobacco. Always. In my pocket, in my backpack, in the console of my car. Wintergreen, mostly. Sometimes coffee, if I want to pretend it's something else. The tin is light, barely there, but when I forget it, I feel it immediately—like leaving the house without my keys, like stepping outside without shoes.

I used to carry cigarettes. Marlboro Reds when I wanted to feel reckless, The “natural” american spirits when I wanted to pretend I had taste. I smoked my first one at thirteen, stolen from the carton my grandfather left on the kitchen counter. Maybe it was rebellion. Maybe it was something worse. He used to put them out on my skin sometimes. Slow, deliberate. Don't get me wrong I still loved the guy but he had a twisted sense of justice that probably came from his own trauma in vietnam. I never knew if I stole them because I wanted them or because I wanted to take something back. Either way, I smoked. Every summer I spent with him, sneaking behind the workshop, lighting up like I was in control of something. I smoked his packs of Salems first.

At eighteen, just when I thought I'd finally have unlimited, legal access to darts, they raised the age to twenty-one. The timing felt cruel. I was supposed to be drowning in them by then, no restrictions, no waiting for my older buddies to finally offer to buy me a pack here or there. I think I genuinely thought smoking made me cool, as corny as that sounds. Like I was this edgy, artsy, misunderstood guy I always wanted to be. But by sophomore year of college I was 21 and it was just a habit. Realistically, the girls with philosophy degrees in the works did dig it in a sort of gross and ironic way.

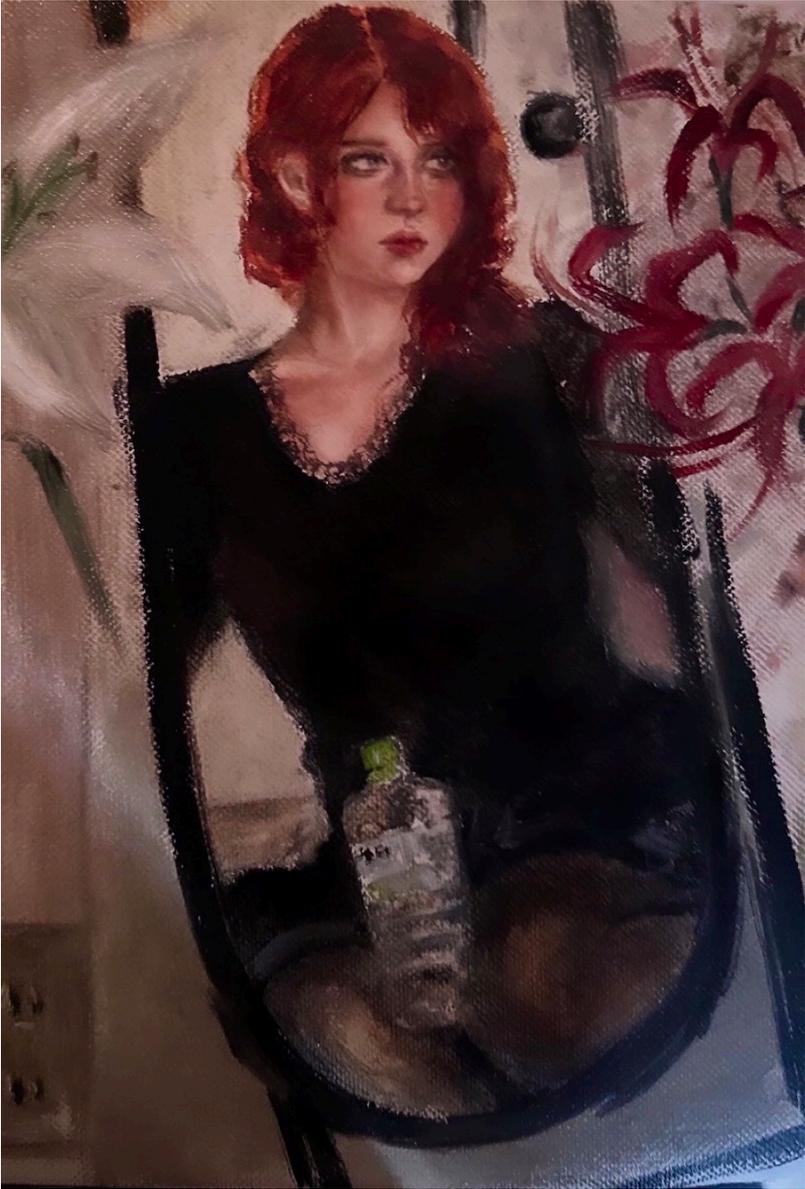
Then my daughter was born. And suddenly, I couldn't be that guy anymore. I quit, because I had to. Because I should. Because the smell of stale smoke on my hoodie didn't seem poetic anymore, just selfish. I used to hate the smell in the car with my grandfather on the 8 hour car ride to maine. I didn't want to subject my daughter to it the way I was. So I switched to nicotine pouches. No smoke, no smell, just the quiet burn under my lip. It felt cleaner, safer. Realistically, it was.

My instagram algorithm makes it all the worse. It's some morbid form of grassroots mad man marketing. My buddies send me memes about the little nicotine pouches which are varying degrees of funny. We are all "zynners" and this biblical pun serves as a sort of self aware ironic humor that masks our slight shame in being so clearly addicted. We also have our own preferred brands and dosages. Rob carries 8 milligram citrus Ons. Brady carries Lucy's which he orders online from canada. Taylor gets the cheaper 9 milligram passionfruit Zones and always makes sure I know just how cheap they are. I carry coffee Ons and hopefully I'll keep working my way down the dosage towards the minimum in an effort to quit that has been going on since my daughter was born.

17

She finds the tins sometimes. Pulls them out of my pocket, holds them up like treasure. "Dada coffee," she says, giggling, because she doesn't know better. She's not at risk of opening them. I tell myself that. I tell myself it's fine. But it still sticks to me, this weight I can't seem to set down. I should quit. But I don't.

I carry it all, and maybe I always will, but right now my pack is empty and hopefully tomorrow it will stay that way.



Apartment Reflection

Wren Joyrich

Oil

On Dams

Gill Noffert

A dam is a beaver's house. It is made of sticks and mud. It protects the beaver from predators while also storing their food. The dam does this because it

bi	sects
a certain	body of water.
There are also	man-made dams.
They	are

L A R G E

And made of concrete. They are used to irrigate farmland, to generate hydroelectric power and are also responsible for flood regulation by
Limiting the amount
Of water

19

That
Can
Flow
Out
At
One
Time.

The water released by the dam pools in a reservoir.

Thorns

Gavin Kissling

The tree branches were whips, striking against the man on horseback. His horse roiled and foamed like the sea, surging and crashing through the undergrowth, paying no mind to how the thorns ripped at its legs. There would be time enough for that later. Pieces of stone poked out of the ground, marking where a great road used to be. The man half remembered it, but this new image, this place of whips and teeth, consumed it, replaced it, became it. He fixed his gaze on the crumbling tower and rode on.

They broke from the treeline as the sun fell from the sky, its blood pooling along the edge of the world, and slowed to a near stop. The knight swung himself off his horse and approached the gates. His horse teetered after him, and he placed a hand against its muzzle. It lowered itself, raging water growing still, and splayed itself in the weeds. Its ragged breathing grew harsher, wearing away at the knight's ears. It had been running too long. As the sound stopped, the knight turned away from the sight before it could worm its way inside him. He tested the rusted gate gently, and it creaked out caution. He braced himself and pulled, life and vigor straining against the long-dead metal. The gate screamed, and cut at the palms of his gauntlets before it finally snapped, withered steel tearing away under this assault. The man rubbed his shoulders, working out the pain, and pushed his way through the gate's newly gap-toothed grin.

He ignored the courtyard. He didn't see the way the carefully coordinated flowers spilled from their planned beds like an overturned paint palette, or the way vines crept up the four large trees that marked the center, tiny leaves eroding at the monolith. He didn't see how a handful of stones stuck up from the ground, even as he walked along the path they still, loosely, outlined. He didn't hear anything. No crickets, no

birdsong, no rodents rustling through the undergrowth. The clanking of his armor drowned out the brown leaves he trampled. He stepped through a rosebush and the thorns fired themselves through the joints at his knee; and he felt nothing.

He knocked at the door of the castle main, and it opened to him as a knight of the realm. He stepped through the splintered, termite infested pile it left, sheathing his weapon, and examined the hall beyond. It stretched out into the dark, beyond the feeble light granted by the fading sun. Doors like the eyes of a sleeper dotted the walls, arranged seemingly at random. The once-lush carpet squelched as the knight's boots stamped towards the first portal. He pulled off one of his gauntlets, holding it loosely in the other as his bare fingers traced the edges of the doorway. It was tall and firm as any tree in the castle grounds, and inlaid with tiny carvings. Little heroes and monsters struggling over the space of a thumbnail, trying their might to be ruler of a few square inches. The knight rested his hand against the brass of the door knob, and closed his eyes.

21

He remembered dancing. He remembered the ballroom, turning wildly as musicians spinning life from their unorthodox wheels and flinging it like string over all of them. The chandelier sparkled overhead, illuminating the paintings evenly spaced along the wall; all the work of masters. He remembered he wasn't alone. There was someone in his arms, someone he was dancing with. He couldn't quite remember her name, and her face only blurred when he tried to focus on it. But he remembered her.

He didn't remember how he knew her when he took her to dance. She was someone to him then. She had laughed and demurred and, when his insistence became clear, stepped gently onto the floor with him. She was better than him, of course. He danced according to the patterns he learned, the least you needed to know to participate in this court. She

danced according to the flow of the music, grabbing onto the strings they flung and weaving them together. She danced according to what his next step would be, her skill making even him look graceful.

She had sniffed the air when he first drew her in to himself. She looked up at him, eyebrows pursing together.

“Half a glass,” he clarified. “Just wine.”

He didn’t know if she was satisfied, but she danced with him anyway.

The knight closed the door in the ruined castle. He turned, resting his back against it, and gasped for air like a man who’d danced like never before. He felt stinging in his legs, and let his fingers find their way to the source. He pulled the shark-tooth thorns from his legs, one after another, and left them in a small, scattered pile beside him. The blood dripped from his leg like wine. The door felt thin against his weight, and he groped for the stone wall outside the threshold to shift his weight firmly back onto his feet. He let himself glance at the door again, and his fingers drifted, inches away from the wood, before he turned, pulling his gauntlet back on, and continued down the hall.

22

The barest slice of the sun peeked over the bloody horizon as the knight navigated down the shadowy hall. His breath still came hard-won, and it echoed down the passage and back to him magnified and distorted; the sound of some beast prowling in its lair. The sound of a dragon, perched warily atop a gilded nest. The sound of a man in armor, striding through rotten carpet towards a door.

The second door. Dark spruce, iron latch. Simple, plain, solid. The knight slipped his helmet off to examine the dents and dings of its service. He had caused some of them, or watched as another did so. Some he never learned the origins of. He recognized them all. The smile etched onto a knot in the planks. The chip where he’d stumbled into it in full plate. His

initials, carved into the bottom left. He rested his head against the door and closed his eyes.

The stables were a small trek outside of the main castle building. He was young, here. Barely more than a lad. His father, just calloused hands resting on his shoulders and a voice, gravely and worn through, had said he'd had a surprise for him. He should remember more of his father.

The surprise was nickering at him when he unlatched the stable door. He had laughed, a clear, joyful sound, dropping to his knees in the dirt to examine the foal that would be his. His father had been close behind, speaking responsibility and care, but there would be time enough for that later. Now, the knight just held the beast that was his, and it looked back up at him with its young, watery eyes.

He remembered the first time riding it, the way the air rushed like ocean waves, the way he rocked in the saddle, bouncing up and down, up and down. The joy, the power, the adrenaline of it all. His father had ridden behind him, calling for him to slow down, to be careful, but the young knight, drunk on speed, carried onwards.

He remembered being in his father's study. The mahogany desk, the wood paneling, the subtle carpeting. The candlelight his father read by, well into the evening. The bookshelves filled with practical knowledge: manuals of war, of sailing, of medicine, and the small collection his father had kept for pleasure: woodworking, bird watching, and a pinky-thin collection of poems. The two had argued, sometimes, the young knight shouting and gesticulating wildly, the old man settled into his deep armchair, head buried into his hands.

The knight closed the door, and the darkness of night overtook him. He took two steps away from it, feet finding unexpected resistance. Something tangling around his ankles that was not there before. The knight slipped his helmet back over his head, and knelt, the candle shining in his other hand and

illuminating what the starlight barked from. Vines, stretching from the entrance, burying themselves in the carpet. He pulled at one, and it broke easily under his grip. He glared at the doorway to the courtyard. The sun was long buried, and its children, none so bold or bright as the parent, gathered to mourn. The path struggled as smaller, sharper mouths tore at its sides, rosebushes blossoming into the walkway. The knight could see the gap-toothed gate laughing at him. He gathered himself, and, wading through the thorns and vines, walked by candlelight.

The next door was a gash against the stone skin of the castle. His candle shrank back from the threshold, and even as he held it up to the opening, he could not make out what was beyond. He bared his blade, stripping away the sheath that bound it to his side. He struck out against the shadows, and he felt something akin to cloth tear. He drew back his blade, and with one quick cleave, split the entryway from the top to the bottom. Wax burning his fingers, he stepped through the gap.

24

The battleground burned. He had rode in a young knight, his horse's hooves tapping like raindrops as he charged forward with the rest of the line. He'd fallen off, somewhere. He didn't know where it had gotten off to, but that was a problem for when he could think. A problem for the realm after the parry and thrust, hack and cleave, blood-drunk momentum of war. He was a crocodile in steel scales, tearing away at the men before him. Their makeshift spears slipped off of his hide, their cobbled leather and cloth did not deter his teeth long. He pummeled and cleaved and drank until he stood in a circle of gristle and bone. He didn't remember the sound of it all. He knew what a blade sounded like when it crunched through tendons and bones, the way a man screamed, the way he had screamed and laughed and cried in equal measure. But there was no sound in this memory. No crackling of fire, no clanking of steel, no screaming of corpses. Silence.



Bathroom Sink
Cecilia Gitt-Henderson
Acrylic

The rest of his companions were fighting elsewhere, he knew, but here was his opponent, waiting for him. Only one person he could see, one face anchored in his memory. The man was old, probably too old to be fighting. But he had quality steel around him and the insignia emblazoned on his chest identifying him as a veteran, a decade past his time to kill and die. The old man hadn't joined the chaos. He rooted himself by a doorway, holding himself as steady as any bush, thorn at the ready. The young knight, lost to the blood, charged.

The old man fought until his head was clipped off, blood blooming in bright rose petals around where it fell. The young knight hesitated at the doorway, peering into the darkness. He remembered the sound of it. The wail. A child launched from the shadows, a kitchen knife seeking the knight's throat, trembling in the fear and the rage and the desperation that drive ordinary folk to kill. The knight's sword flashed out.

26

The knight stumbled back through the torn curtain, the candle nothing but a trail of wax along his palm. The memory waited there, and there was no door to slam shut and leave the pain behind. Thorns tore into the steel of his greaves as he waded through the overgrown hall, anywhere away from that portal. There was nowhere to go. Every eye in the corridor had lost its lid, and the memories stared out, judging him. He had waited for a break in the music, and gone back to the shelf where he'd placed his goblet. She had disapproved, but said nothing. There was another pair of dancers talking with them. She had jostled him, somehow, and his cup splattered over the floor. She had turned to him, panic in her eyes, apology on her lips, and his hand flew, and blood sparkled like wine. He had begged forgiveness the night afterwards, and she was not able to deny him.

He didn't even remember what the argument was about. But he had ranted and raged and raved, pacing the

room like a captive animal. His father sat, infuriatingly calm, the center of the tempest. The knight needed him to show his frustration. To get off that damn chair. He'd thrown something, maybe a book. His vision had been swimming, and he didn't come close to hitting his father. But the blow did send a candle spilling to the ground. The candlelight grew and swelled, one careless, enraged gesture giving it teeth. He'd made it outside in time, but he remembered the cooked scent of his father's leg. The old man never walked without a limp for the rest of his days.

His sword opening a child. The screaming hit him, then. Something, still in the house, wailing. He'd knelt, screaming apology, begging forgiveness. The wailing did not stop. He'd raged and swore and threatened, but it did not cease. The wailing inside the house did not stop until he set fire to it, the cradle standing in judgement in the center of the hovel. "Murderer!" the eye-doors whispered, thousands of memories of rage and pain casting their verdict on his life. "Murderer!"

27

The knight ran deeper into the castle. Back was impossible. The thorns choked the entry, layering up to the knight's waist. He had lost his sword, tangled in grasping ivy, and forged his way through brute force. He found the end of the hallway, the reborn sun shining through high windows, and the door sitting at it. He tore at the handle, but it would not turn. He hammered away at it, dead flesh beating into living stone, and it gave way. He charged into a room of corpses, thorns wound through them, burying into their eyes, rooting in the stomachs, spilling out of their mouths. He did not have to see their faces; he knew them as well as he knew his own. All of them guilty; all of them murderers. Men of war and greed and conquest, forever bound to their seat of power. His fellows. He saw a gap in the thorns, six or seven feet long, two feet wide, stretching along the floor. The size of a grave— or a doorway. He tore at his armor, his breastplate, his flesh and ribcage, and

bared his heart. He stepped, or rather, fell into the doorway, his back pressed against the stone. The knight closed his eyes.

Keratin

Lucien Wolf

Hair and nail and skin, blemish and bone
Black seeds dotting jaw, legs and chest, a red dot
Blooms, and at last, a new me is sown

Weary legs stand, hot water patters, shampoo and cologne
Washes clean busy mind, chases away scattered thought
Hair and nail and skin, blemish and bone

I feel a scratch, an itch, a body moss-grown
Oh, on my leg, that blemish. That new spot
Blooms, and at last, a new me is sown

The shampoo, conditioner, goop, shaver, whetstone...
Pollen, water, oil, grime - into the drain, out of the pot
Hair and nail and skin, blemish and bone

29

Feather and fin, horn and tooth, mix in a steam cyclone,
Crucible. My body a lie, aged, is this flesh or rot
Blooms, and at last, a new me is sown

When I look at my gorgeous self and see for what I am, not
A shadow of a perfect model, seeing myself as I was taught
Hair and nail and skin, blemish and bone
Blooms, and at last, a new me is sown

Летние-сны

Sofia Fedotova

Расцветает ночь моя
красками, Звук на кухне -
аккомпанемент. Подушка
глотаёт все гласные, А сон
убивает свет.

Я не сплю, я холодный мрамор.
Магма в венах сжигает всё.
Тело в постели - пламя,
Но на деле лишь молоко.

Одеяло не греет, ты тоже.
Эта спальня – нехитрый
макет. Я касания чувствую
кожей – Никого со мной рядом
нет.

Дверь закрыта, за дверью – шорох.
Я лежу в тишине одна.
Небеса расцветают в
звездах, Голова темнотой
смущена.

Summer Nights

Sofia Fedotova

My night is blooming with colors,
A sound in the kitchen—its soft refrain.
The pillow swallows every vowel,
And sleep snuffs out the light again.

I am not sleeping—I'm just cold marble,
Magma in my veins devours it all.
A body in bed, a flicker of flame,
But really, just milk within.

The blankets don't warm me—you neither.
This bedroom is a hollow set.
I feel the ghost of touch on my skin,
But no one is here with me.

The door is closed. Beyond it—whispers.
I lie in silence, still and alone.
The sky is streaked with early sunlight,
But my head is clouded with the unknown.



Through A Woman's Eyes
Sage Smith

Sometimes I stay awake at night

Willa Pettit

alive when the world is asleep
 cloaked in a gentle embrace,
this night's soft hands cradle me
 the sky has gone to bed
now delicately setting the stage
 for the closing act, watch the
performance of the moon
 who asks for nothing in return

her eyes meet mine
 and I speak to the moon
sweet sisters in girlhood,
 the moon shares my bed
touch my hair dearest one
 don't forget to sing me songs dear night
savor this presence, a quiet ritual
 all three of us alone. Together.

every part of me tucked safely away
 this night is a womb, harboring peace
human warmth kept insulated in my bed
 the keeper of my body is this good night
caring for my dreams when I am asleep
 i swim in this inky darkness
feeling the softness of my eyelashes
 I suppose now it's now time for bed.

Blood Is Black

Tinaye Makasi

Itumeleng's fingers tightened around the shower knob, moving it from cold to hot, the metallic click echoing within the confinement of the shower. She rests her palm on the cool chrome, listening to the gradual rise of warmth beneath. The glass doors fog up. The shower transforms into a cocoon of heat and steam, a refuge from everything beyond. It was the steam she loved the most—the way it curled lazily around her in no rush to escape, as if it wanted to hold her, comfort her. She stands still under the shower faucet as the hot water pierces her skin, striking her like shards of glass, each drop sharp and electric. She enjoys the scalding sting. She *needs* the sting. She enjoys, even more, how once she learns the rhythm of the pain, it all becomes a phantom sensation as the initial sting fades into a familiar pulse. Physical pain, she always thought, has a way of balancing emotional pain, like a chemical reaction reaching equilibrium.

34

The process of picking out clothes is long and exhausting, a ritual she loathes. Itumeleng hates how her body looks. She thinks of herself as being misshapen like a squash. She is gifted in every dimension of her body. Her curves are wide, her breasts full. She looks like the number eight while standing and like a bowling pin when she sits, her thick thighs spilling over every chair. She hates the Africanness of her body. She hates how her body seems to scream against the quiet elegance of the British women she envies. She settles, finally, on her usual baggy t-shirt and sweatpants. She looks at herself in the mirror, and her reflection mocks her like an adversary, making her feel as though she looks like a ten-year-old boy. She pulls back the rubber band on her wrist, then releases the tension welcoming the pain that follows— necessary and inevitable. The brief pain

forcing her racing thoughts to scatter, the negative stimulus silencing them in an instant.

Her dorm room smells of crumpets and Yorkshire tea mingled with the remnants of sleep. Her walls are a mosaic of Taylor Swift, Adele, and Elle Goulding posters, while *I Love Britain* stickers clutter her cupboard doors. Tiny Harrod's teddy bears are placed neatly on her study table. Behind her bed hangs the British flag she bought in Zimbabwe after her student visa was approved as her final, almost ceremonial purchase. She found it silly, this tradition of purchasing the flag of the country you were migrating to. For years she had gone to several farewell parties of cousins and friends migrating to America, Canada, and Australia, always mesmerized by the colorful flags that were hung, secretly wishing that one day it would be her turn. She had always known that she would study in the United Kingdom; there was no question about it. If she were wrung dry, she imagines she would bleed blue and red, the colors of the Union Jack.

35

As a child, Itumeleng would sit cross-legged on the red cement floor in her parents' house, watching BBC News, ZBC, with its awkwardly constructed English and ill-read reporters, felt small, provisional. She would memorize every new word and use it in conversation with her friends at school, feeling proud to know words like austere and abomination. She read Charles Dickens novels, dismissing local authors, having tucked within the drawers of herself the conclusion that they could not possibly know how to write proper British English. For both her Ordinary and Advanced Levels, she wrote Cambridge International Exams, proud to have avoided the local ZIMSEC Exams which she thought inferior and unworthy of her intellect. When she moved to London, she was disappointed to learn that the British could not spell

correctly. She was stunned to find them struggling with words like “mitochondria” and “acknowledgment.” Even more disappointing was that most of her classmates had never read a Charles Dickens novel. She learned they preferred American Authors like Jeff Kinney and Elwyn White.

Within the first two months of her arrival, Itumeleng mastered speaking in a British accent, forcing her tongue to glide over vowels and omitting the t’s with calculated precision. She did not want to be identified as African from Africa; she craved the title of being British from Africa. She traded her Shona for English and abandoned the dusty roads of Chitungwiza for the cobbled streets of London. She thought herself to be British despite the stark reality that the only thing that gave her legal entry into the United Kingdom was the student visa pasted into her green passport. She casually avoided the African Students Association at her university, opting instead for the Black British Association. She introduced herself as Mel and not Itumeleng because, to her, Mel sounded better—more English. Soon enough, she was friends with an Amelia and a Macy, who used the words *bonkers* and *wanker* to describe boys they did not fancy and *bev* and *peng* for the ones they did. She started going here and there because the girls would say things like, “Mel, do you want to go here this weekend?” or, “Mel, we should go there this Friday.” She began straightening her hair, burning away the natural curl of her keratin, transforming her dense, coiled afro into limp, bone-straight strands. The same hair that her mother had lovingly plaited under the *muhacha* tree, grounding her in a past she desperately sought to erase. She immersed herself in British culture, taking on her new identity with relentless determination. Her parents would call her every weekend, their voices wrapped in the comforting cadence of Shona, but she tied her tongue, forbidding it to betray her by slipping into the

language of her past. To her mother's *takusuwa mwana—we miss you, our child*, she would respond with *I miss you too innit*.

On her bed lay Jack, a 5-foot-9 British male and her boyfriend of six months. But today, Itumeleng felt an unsettling emptiness in her chest. She stared at Jack lying on her bed, and she felt unattracted to him, almost as if all she had felt for Jack disappeared overnight. He looked boring and misplaced. She felt afraid of herself, how easily she could lose feelings, how swiftly revelations could strike her on a random day without reason. She felt angry, and she felt ugly and she welcomed both like a bitter refuge. Before heading to her dissection class, she tore out a piece of paper and wrote *I can't do this anymore; leave my keys on the counter. Mel*.

She stepped out of her dorm room and was greeted by the electric atmosphere of London. She could almost hear the sounds of *Mbare* Market, the clamor of voices bargaining for tomatoes and maize. She could smell the charcoal from the street vendors grilling *mutakura* and *matemba*, and feel the rough fabric of her school uniform against her skin as she walked to school with her cousin Chiedza. She remembered the long afternoons spent under the *mubvamaropa* tree, watching her brothers play *bhora*—soccer with a ball made of plastic bags and twine. Zimbabwe, with all its chaos and contradictions, was still home, no matter how far she ran.

As she rode Bus 68 to Kings College, memories of Jack flooded back. Itumeleng had been madly in love with Jack. He wore an impenetrable cloak of privilege she thought she, too, could claim by being with him. She felt small under the weight of possibility, the overwhelming sense that, at any moment, he could walk into her room and unravel her. The thought consumed her, igniting a fire deep inside. She craved

his presence, not just to be with him, but to be devoured by him—torn apart piece by piece until nothing was left but raw emotion. But Jack never fully satisfied her. She often wished that he was Tendai instead, her high school boyfriend, who looked at her like he could eat her. Tendai adored Itumeleng's body; he loved tracing her curves with his fingers, his lips following close behind. He often joked around about paying her *roora*—bride price, and she secretly imagined what it would be like to be married to him: Him reading a Shimmer Chinodya novel while playing Oliver Mutikudzi in the background, her undressing him with her eyes. He had once told her that she emanated a worldliness in which significant intellectual and sexual powers converged, a depth no one else could ever understand. The bus came to a steady stop at Kings College. Itumeleng stepped off, marking her twentieth birthday with a cadaver dissection class waiting for her in the basement halls. She had felt proud to have been granted admission at Kings College but her pride paled in comparison to her mother's. "*Arikudzida nevana vaKing Charles,*" her mother would boast to her friends—*She's learning with King Charles' children.* Yet, being at King's College was exhausting, a constant dance between pride and doubt. Her facade was insufficient to grant her British privilege at King's; here, she was black. A painful reminder of the high walls that still stood between her and the world she desperately wanted to belong to. Thinking of her mother filled her with a deep ache. She had not spoken to her in weeks, the distance between them widening with each unanswered call. Regret engulfed her, not just for being in the United Kingdom but for all the changes she made to herself to try and fit in. She suddenly felt like she sounded silly when she spoke in a British accent, that her straight hair made her look like a mop, that London wasn't all that charming with its rain-slicked streets. She wasn't British, and no amount of pretending could make it so. She wanted to escape.



Her heart raced, anger surging through her. A dangerous, liberating idea was starting to take shape as she made her way into the basement halls. The cadaver lab reeked of formaldehyde, the chemical stench hanging in the air like an unrelenting *harmattan* sun. There was the usual chatter of giddy medical students, a blend of nerves and anticipation as they prepared to dissect a dead body. Itumeleng moved through the room as if in a trance, her thoughts distant, her steps deliberate. She sits at her station and picks up her scalpel, the cold metal sending a shiver down her spine. The cold metal felt foreign and heavy in her grip, like the weight of all her choices. For a moment, she stared at the lifeless form on the table before her, its stillness both alien and intimate. The sharp edge of the scalpel gleamed under the fluorescent lights, and she found herself tracing the outline of her wrist, her pulse a faint thrum beneath the latex barrier. She pressed the blade lightly against her skin, her breath hitching as the cold bit into her.

40

But then she stopped.

Her hands froze, and the scalpel slipped from her grasp, clattering onto the tray with a metallic echo that reverberated through the quiet room. She stared down at her wrist, unmarked, the faint impression of the blade fading like a memory. Tears welled in her eyes, blurring her vision as her breathing grew ragged. The room seemed to shrink around her, the walls closing in, but then a voice—a voice from deep within her, from home—whispered softly, *Mwana asingacheme anofira mumbereko—A child who does not cry while on their mother's back will die quietly.*

The words pulled her back, anchoring her. She thought of her mother's voice, filled with longing and love, calling

her back to a life she had tried to forget. She thought of the dusty roads of Chitungwiza, the *Mubvamaropa* tree, and the vibrant warmth of a place she had dismissed but never truly left behind. Her gloved hands clenched into fists as a sob escaped her lips, raw, unrestrained. She pressed her palms against her eyes as if trying to push the emotions back inside, but they spilled over, unstoppable.

“I don’t want this,” she whispered to herself, the words barely audible over the hum of the lab. “I don’t want this life.” The class carried on around her, oblivious to her unraveling. But for Itumeleng, time had stopped. Slowly, she peeled off her gloves, one finger at a time, and laid them neatly beside the scalpel. She rose from her chair and took a step back, then another, until she was at the door.

The cold London air hit her face as she stepped outside, tears drying against her skin. She walked without a destination, her feet carrying her down unfamiliar streets, the city’s chaos fading into the background. She thought of calling her mother but hesitated. Instead, she let herself feel—*really* feel—for the first time in years. The weight of her choices, the ache of her displacement, and the yearning for something she had pushed away for so long.

She caught her reflection in the glass as she passed a red phone booth. Her straightened hair, her pale skin under the gray London sky—it all felt wrong. She ran her fingers through her hair, desperate to feel the texture of the curls that had once defined her. “*Ndoda kuenda kumba,*” she whispered to her reflection, her voice breaking. *I want to go home.* And for the first time, she didn’t mean the neat dorm room that smelled of tea and crumpets or the cobbled streets of London. She meant the dusty roads of Chitungwiza, the smell of *mutakura* grilling

on charcoal, and the warmth of her mother's embrace.

The realization was slow, but it was steady. She didn't need to erase herself to belong. She didn't need to choose between who she was and who she wanted to be. Itumeleng turned away from the phone booth and began walking, her steps deliberate, not away from herself, but toward a life she could reclaim. A life where her blood was not red and blue but black. Black, the color of her curly afro; black, the color of her mother's favorite *Ankara*; black, the color of her flavored Shona accent, which was clipped and flat and lyrical all at once; black, the color of her skin.

I Promise I Won't Call

Maliyah Buford

I started spending time alone, learning who I am
As days stretch on, I make up for what you can't
I don't mean to be rude, not trying to cause a fight
But you were here for me once, then all gone in a night

Promise me like you promised me, all those times before
That things would change, yet stay the same
I miss the way you held me close, you were a safe space
Now you're something out of reach, a ghost I cannot trace

I know you're doing better now, at least it's how it seems
Do you think of me, when you're alone at night?
I go along day by day trying to forget about you more
But the only thing that is getting me is that you aren't you
anymore

Won't you come back to me?
Knowing you won't hear my call
But no matter how hard I try
It just won't matter at all

Call you when it matters most, I can't anymore
I won't bother, I won't holler, not like before
Things aren't how they used to be, I wish they were the same
But still, my love remains untouched, forever in your name



44



Bound By Expression

Sam Allen

Photography

Untitled

McKenna Dolan

God and Rilke bury me among the pomegranates
upon my birth.

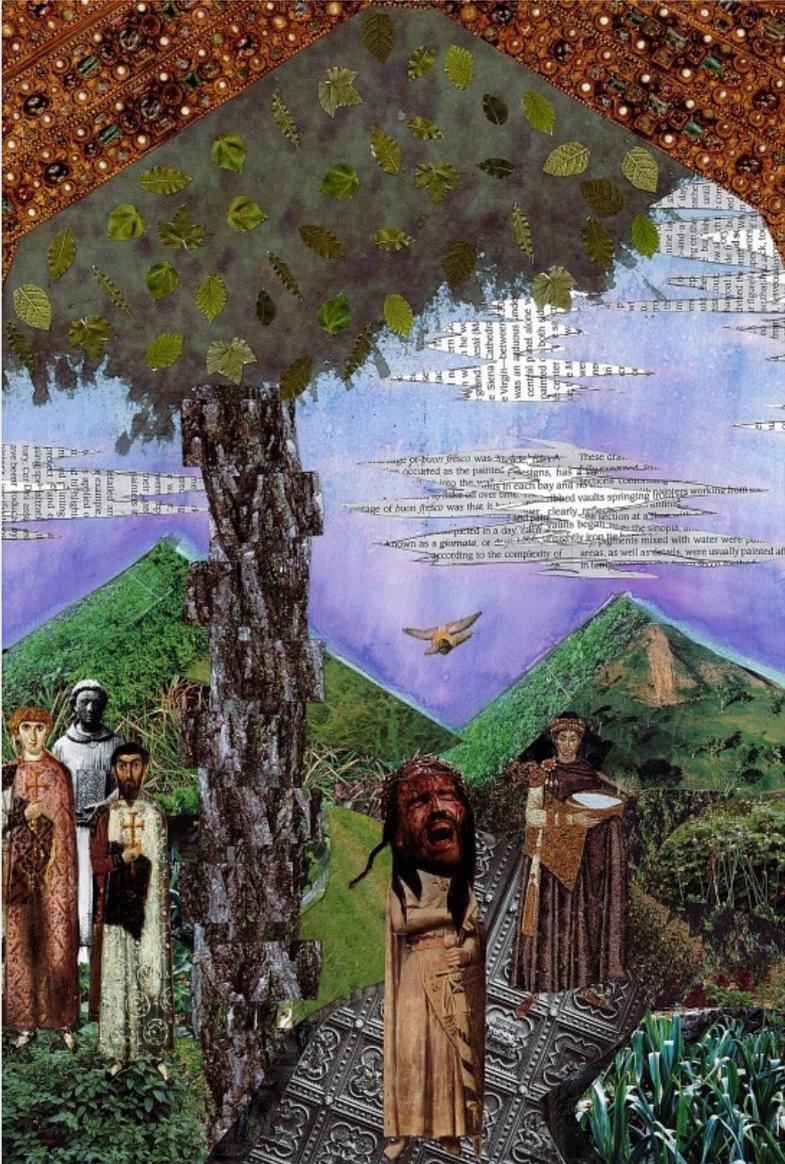
My seeds, untouched, soon grow bitter:
I gnash my teeth beneath the soil.
My fate looms ahead—
locusts swarm my decayed form,
a city engulfed in flames.

Truth is a violent exodus,
erupting from her prison of rotting canines
and molars and the wet,
dead heat of my devil tongue.

Eve sees what sad cruelty grew beneath the gaze
of the Mesopotamian sun,
She reminds me of the fact of my creation:
my veil of holy skin covers the rot within;
my eternal father, seeing his eternal daughter
cracked open, stained and bloodied—bows;
my eternal mother seeing me:
her dutiful son,
fallen.

Eve—Mother to all—is tempted still
by the fruit of my undeath.

I am the fossilized amber within Her—
unchanging,
alive.



Remake of Piero della Francesca's Baptism of Christ Painting

Sam Allen
Collage

Dollbody

K Hughes

Nora was nearly finished, now. She worked the needle through to the other side of the fabric with a little effort, adding to the thin line imprinted against her thumb from the repeated motion, a groove carved into her skin after hours of work. She'd pricked her fingers a dozen times over in the last few hours, and hundreds of times in the past month. Usually, her hands were dexterous and sure in her work, but she could only undertake her little project in the few spare hours of the night while Edgar was fast asleep, when exhaustion and the guttering light of the candle made her clumsy, but it didn't matter now. More blood in the body would only help.

Somewhere near, the ghost waited.

Nora spent all her days longing for the lifting of the hair on the back of her neck, the shiver down her spine, the thickening of the air, a hundred little signs that were easy enough to ignore on their own, to chalk up to the old house or a nervous condition, until one learned how to look. It took more power, more energy, for Evelyn to exist as the image of a body rather than a loose impression in the air, and she needed to gather her strength. Not long now.

Nora's mother, a seamstress, had taught her everything she knew before her death. A body was, of course, different than a dress, but much of the idea remained the same. The measurements, the form, the tension of the thread, fabric and leather and wool bound together in careful, even stitches, every last one the work of Nora's own careful hands and intention. The insides were much harder. What use did Nora have in learning about the internal workings of the body? She had leafed through an anatomy textbook her oldest cousin brought home from university, once, but had turned away after only a moment at the dense text. Of course, she was not allowed to

join when her uncle and cousins visited the operating theater. Sometimes, she got grotesque descriptions of what they had seen—a flicker of bone beneath the saw here, the gleam of fat and muscle there. It interested her only in the fact that she wasn't meant to hear it, making herself small and invisible until her uncle inevitably noticed her presence and insisted that they keep such vulgar things from a lady.

She lacked knowledge, but that was alright. She only needed the loosest approximation, and Nora had some idea of where to begin, the necessary parts to create the illusion of unity. She wove together vines, drawn from the estate's crumbling back wall, thick, strong green ivy knotted through the arms and legs to imitate wiry muscle. She went on long walks through where the garden lost the battle against the surrounding forest, collecting shed antlers piece by piece, fastening them together into an approximation of a ribcage with too many pointed edges. Deeper into the trees, she stumbled over great masses of Hen of the Woods, the fungus thick and fleshy and layered, giving lightly beneath her fingertips as she pressed and shaped it through the hollows of the body's stomach. That step she had completed only the night before—even down here in the bowels of the old manor where the chill crept in steadily, they would rot and crumble too fast if she wasn't careful. There was already the thin smell of decay in the air.

48

The body was an ugly thing, all disparate parts and old fabric and the hide taken from Edgar's discarded taxidermy, deer skin roughly sewn into the floral linen of her old dresses, limp and weak. But it would work. It would work because she would make it so, with every pull of thread held together with her own saliva as she passed it through the eye of her needle, with every drop of cold sweat or blood from the toil of it, with every ounce of intent filling the lumpy, empty thing. Intention was what mattered, her mother insisted.

Very few of the things her mother had sewn came to life.

It would've been quite a problem if the finely embroidered dresses she made began dancing off of their racks, or even if the socks Antonia mended for their neighbors in exchange for only hand-me-down shoes for Nora began to stir, the stitches and wool slithering away from the old fabric like a snake shedding skin. It would've been terrible for business.

But even in the privacy of their small apartment above the seamstress shop, crammed with rolls of fabric and half-made clothes and books, most of the little toys she made for Nora were just that, only lifeless straw and scraps. It was exciting, then, when her mother made a special doll, taking her time with every stitch, telling Nora that her intention was for not just life but a life that gave good hugs, or dance, or could tell apart the footsteps of the tax collector from those of his more generous wife. Each bit of thread, each choice of fabric, even the buttons for the eyes, were all about purpose, she explained, Nora sitting across from her, her feet dangling above the floor, her hands around hot tea to keep out the cold seeping through their thin walls.

49

When the dolls were almost ready came the scary part. Her mother would take a deep breath before pricking her finger on a needle, or, for the most important dolls, make a small cut on the palm of her left hand, squeezing out a few drops of precious blood into the empty form. For the bigger ones, Nora herself was allowed to sew up the last few stitches while her mother bandaged herself.

There was nothing like the way her mother smiled, her face a little pale, when the intention took, the dolls twitching and then lifting an arm or sitting up, their soft bodies moving first uneasily and then smoothly across the worn dining room table while Nora giggled and clapped. By the time she was ten, their small apartment was overflowing with life, seven little dolls moving around, trailing after Nora as she helped her mother with the next dress or climbing slowly over the shelves. It was a

comforting flurry of constant movement and companionship, even when she was left alone in the evenings while her mother made deliveries or bought more fabric, not enough time in the day for everything that needed to be done.

Nora knew her mother was dead when every doll went still. She had turned one night to find them all standing limply in the air, as though suspended by strings, before they dropped, one by one. She had shaken them and whispered and cut her finger to give them more blood, and when that hadn't worked, she only sat and watched for any movement at all. She'd been sitting there, waiting, when the constable came with the truth she already felt closing in around her.

The doll they had finished together just the week before fell last. Nora had watched it twitch as the others went limp, taking three, four frantic steps towards her on failing legs, stitches tearing as a woollen arm reached for her, held outstretched before it finally collapsed off the edge of the table. It did not move again.

50

Nora had known the dolls were a secret, of course; that was one of the few things her mother had been very serious about. But she'd thought it was one of the secrets everyone knew, like where babies came from or that sometimes people were only very nice to each other until they were out of earshot. She mentioned the dolls that moved on their own just once, to the younger of her uncle's two sons, almost twice her age and with all the gangly limbs of a colt. Oliver was the nicer one, or at least the one who remembered she existed during his visits. He'd blinked when she'd explained, wearing an expression that said she was a little too old for this, and ruffled her hair, insisting she must've seen some especially good puppets or had a very strong dream.

So Nora learned that the dolls were an entirely different type of secret, the sort of thing she was wrong for mentioning. She was learning all about being wrong, in her uncle's care.

For example, she discovered that her mother had been a disgrace to their family's good name, running off to marry a poor man who'd then left her for another woman just before Nora herself was born. She learned that it was a great act of charity for her uncle to adopt her in spite of her mother's foolishness and his two nearly-grown sons. She learned the endless list of things she did not know about being a proper lady. Most importantly of all, she learned to bite her tongue.

By the time Nora was out in society, steered towards Edgar by her uncle's firm hand, her mother's creations did sometimes feel like nothing more than a strange, beautiful dream. Part of her knew what she had seen, what she had lived, but the rest of her had spent so long in warm, expansive rooms sweating through gowns with material finer than any they'd dreamed of affording, a world in which magic was impossible. She had never again seen anything like it, never even heard whispers of true magic, nothing more than the cheap tricks of the spiritualists. She sat over her embroidery, sometimes, the needle perched between one stitch and the next, and wondered. But that was all.

She knew, now, that she'd had the right of it as a child. The skin of the world hid more than just dirt and stone, and the impossible could happen.

She knew it from her very first night as a wife, spent lying rabbit-still in Edgar's bed, blood staining the sheets below her, staring at the hazy figure suspended in the corner of the room. This was also when Nora first learned a person could be too frightened to scream.

That night, the figure had coalesced, slowly, slowly, from graying edges and a blank, dark space where a face should have been to an appearance she recognized, one that she'd traced her fingers across on the obituaries she had dug out of her uncle's study. The first Mrs. Edgar Lowell, dead of consumption not two years past. Evelyn.

She was taller and thinner than Nora, the once bright color of her straw blonde hair and green eyes faded as though viewed through white chiffon, the outline of her wavering at the edges.

Nora had stayed there, frozen in her marital bed, her husband (and what a permanent word it was, husband!) lying fast asleep next to her, snoring softly in the dark, for hours. It had felt that way, at least. It was her first taste of the sensation she would come to search for, every hair on her body raised on end, her breathing fast and shallow, muscles held taut and ready to run when hiding failed. A rabbit, catching the scent of a hound.

Finally, just when she could take no more of it, when her mind felt close to either shutting down entirely and convincing her in the morning that nothing had happened or making her finally scream, no matter if Edgar thought her mad, just to break the horrible, endless waiting... the spirit had moved.

52

Perhaps “move” was not quite the word. She had simply gone from her spot in the corner, leaving behind a palimpsest of still, heavy air, an impression of something wrong even in empty space, and appeared inches away from where Nora lay. She gasped, shifting back, pulling the heavy damask blankets closer over her naked form as though a shield, feeling as powerless as she had ever felt in a very powerless life. It seemed silly, to be so aware of one’s oncoming death, and yet to be entirely unable to move. She wondered, in the small part of her mind still capable of thought, if her mother had felt the same way when facing the speeding carriage, the sharp and heavy hooves of the spooked horses.

The ghost of the first wife reached down, fingertips almost tracing across her sweat soaked brow and the thin skin beneath her eyes, trailing down to rest against her cheek, not a touch so much as an impression, a chill against the skin. Her eyes shone softly in the dark, like those of a cat caught by the moon. Peace, sweet and slow and thick, spilled through Nora at the

contact, her body unspooling its tension in one easy breath. Intent, she thought, feeling the woollen softness drawn over her, no longer afraid as her eyes slipped shut. The last thing she felt, not quite alone in that sprawling, empty house, lying in a stranger's bed, was Evelyn's thumb stroking against her cheek as though from very far away.

Evelyn's presence grew stronger over those first few days in her new home. When Nora woke up in the mornings to Edgar long departed on his lengthy carriage ride into town for work, she would shiver at something close to cold, and know she was there. When she wandered across the faded carpets of Castlewood Hall, she would pause, suddenly alert to the fluttering of the drapes in still air, and smile. She would bid the house's small staff—only a cook and a maid from the closest approximation of a village, Edgar's frugal nature insisting on barely enough help to subsist on—goodbye at the end of the night, watch the door close behind them, and feel a feather-light weight on her shoulder, the back of her hand, the nape of her neck, in greeting.

Nora thought it must be terribly lonely, to be left in such a big house for so long alone, when touching the living world at all, leaving an impression on the space of life, had such a cost. She knew she would have been lonely, if not for Evelyn.

The first time the ghost spoke was nearly a month into her marriage. They were sitting together in the library, the light long disappeared from the windows, Nora working on her needlepoint of the grand magnolias in the gardens only by the dancing light of the fireplace. Or, Evelyn almost sat, her legs



Untitled
Dorian Campbell
Quilting

folded beneath her just above the floor, twirling her hand back and forth within the fire, watching it move through the flickering of her form. The spirit glanced up, catching her eye, and Nora realized with a start that the needle was limp in her hand, and that it had been for a good few minutes.

Gazing at her, Evelyn's pale lips moved, as they had often done, without any result. She scrunched her brow, eyes narrowed in that look of concentration Nora was learning to recognize, closed her eyes, and tried again.

"Nora," Evelyn said in a voice like the wind through November trees, several beats after her lips had stopped moving, the sound of it making Nora's teeth grind. "Nora!"

Her face lit up in a brilliant smile, her hands reaching for Nora's own with that near-imagined touch, before she flickered once, twice, and disappeared, her presence drawing back and away from the room. Still, Nora clapped her hands before she left entirely, calling after her that she had a beautiful voice. She regretted it instantly, a strange mix of nerves lighting up in her, and she was almost relieved to be spared any response.

Evelyn, she learned quickly, had only limited strength, and though it grew with practice, speaking or moving anything solid, even her gentle imitation of touch, drained her. It took two days before she returned after speaking that first time. It was maddening, to watch her struggle to touch the world, to see her drained and exhausted just to keep Nora company, the sadness and frustration that permeated empty rooms when she disappeared in the middle of a sentence.

And so Nora had begun her task, almost thinking of it as pretend at first, hobbling a few pieces of fabric together. But she'd never forgotten her mother's words, the things she made, not entirely. She'd been working on it for months now, nearly alone in Castlewood Hall, letting Evelyn choose one piece of fabric over another, prying the cold, marble eyes from Edgar's abandoned hunting trophies, slicing into the meat of her palm

with a deep breath as Evelyn clutched her other hand in a grip tight enough to almost be real and letting blood soak into the fabric, imbuing her intent. It wasn't enough for life, not like those small dolls, but it mattered. She was sure of it.

But now, sewing up the front of the body she had created, piece by piece, with her own careful hands, her work was almost done.

Carefully, aware of the small opening just at the top of the chest that remained, she lifted the limp form in her arms, panting with effort as she carried it like a bride up the stone steps from the bowels of the manor to the highest rooms, sweating by the time she rested it on her cold half of the bed, straw hair fanning out across the pillows.

She watched and waited a moment to see if Edgar would stir, even shaking his shoulder with some force. He didn't move, his breathing still shallow, his pulse syrup slow beneath the press of her fingers. He often relied on opium to sleep well after an especially stressful day, and she had carefully increased the dosage the past few weeks, testing its potency. Now, with that dosage nearly doubled and his hands bound to the bedpost just in case, Edgar slept like the dead.

56

Nora felt the presence wrapped around her shift and tighten, a pressure on the back of her hand. She took a deep breath. She was a maker, and she would not falter now that it was time.

The sharp blade from the kitchen cut easily through the meat of his chest as she worked, aware of time counting down. Edgar jerked once, twice, his eyes rolling behind closed lids, but that was all. He was too far gone. The ribs were harder, her hands already slippery with hot blood, and it took a few tries before she was able to break enough to reach through, pushing the lungs away from the hot, pulsing mass of his insides and shaking slightly as she severed everything that held Edgar's heart inside of his body. It beat, once, in her hand, in the

seconds it took for her to place it in the cavity left within the doll, blood soaking through fabric and leaving the antler ribs glistening.

Nora worked as quickly as she could, dizzy as she sewed up the open space in the fabric of the chest, trying to keep her stitches clean and even though her hands shook and the needle kept sliding from between her slick fingertips. This was the most important part. Finally, the gap closed, hiding the now-still heart from view, knotted up neatly as she tore through the tail of string with her teeth. The presence sharpened, thrumming through her as strongly as the sea, her breath puffing out in front of her in clouds, her heart racing with terror and joy.

Evelyn appeared before her, as clear and sharp as she had ever been, the air around them like ice, the edges of her form so concentrated, so bright that Nora had to fight to keep her place at the edge of the bed, not to cower or scream at feeling so much of her at once. Instead, she watched as she aligned herself over the finished doll and then sank down into the body, the bright, hazy face of her spirit fluttering through the edges of the still and empty fabric, and then she was gone inside of it as though sinking beneath the surface of still water.

That dizzying prey-feeling and Nora's held breath filled the room, but that was all. No movement, no flicker of life, for a second and then another.

Shaking, unable to breathe, unable to think, Nora leaned forwards, placing her lips over the indentation of a mouth she'd sewn onto the body's face, feeling the soft, unmoving silk beneath her, kissing Evelyn at last, and thought only: please. Everything else was beyond her, grand proclamations or wonder at her creation, everything but desire washed away. It would work because she needed it to. Please.

A hand rested on her cheek, muslin thumb stroking gently across the line of her jaw, jerky and strange, stitches catching

against skin.

Nora gasped, throwing her arms around her ghost, feeling tears soak into soft fabric where her face pressed against a misshapen shoulder. She helped Evelyn to stand, legs unsteady and jerking but solid and moving, supporting her weight with only a slight wobble as Nora stepped back and took her in.

Evelyn's spirit had filled the body but not changed it, not blurred the harsh contrast between the fabric and the wool and the leather of her, the stitches Nora could not quite hide that ran down between her eyes, the slight lumps across her belly where the folds of fungus and moss sat and the sharpness of antlers beneath her breasts, the blankness of a face without quite enough detail, sculpted with stitches and layered fabric but not exactly right, the distance from humanity only more apparent for her close attempts at imitation. Her marble eyes were shining and unmoving in her face as she turned her head to follow Nora, her chest not quite rising and falling with breath, the reaching of her arms a little too curling without joints in the proper places. She was beautiful in ways Nora could never have imagined.

Evelyn took a few lurching, hobbled steps around the room before tumbling back into her arms, laughing in uneven, high-pitched sounds like a fox in a trap, a dark red spot spreading through the yellow flowers on the fabric of her chest.

I am a maker, Nora thought. I have made it so.

"Nora, Nora, Nora. My love!" Evelyn said, squeezing her tighter, her voice slow and warbled and beloved, her sewn lips shifting but not opening. "You did it, you really did it. It's perfect."

Nora felt tears stinging her eyes once more, leaning back so she could rest her own hands on either side of Evelyn's mismatched face, stare into the shiny surface of her eyes, kiss her unmoving mouth once again, finally able to touch the woman she loved, really touch her.

“We did it, together. But you’re right: you are perfect.” The long straw of her hair, the stitches in her brow that furrowed so familiarly as she blinked, the feeling of her hands, soft cotton there, rough felted wool there, and gentle everywhere they touched. Her Evelyn, at last.

She helped Evelyn into one of her old dresses, found abandoned and moth-eaten in a trunk in the attic, grabbed the bag she had packed over the last few nights, and took one last look at Edgar, still splayed out across their marital bed. His skin was pale and yellow, blood pooled so thick around him that she imagined it seeping down into the mattress below, his jaw slack and eyes open. He looked empty, somehow, even even though she could see into the meat of him, as vacant as a cicada skin.

Nora reached over him, lifting the guttering lamp from their bedside table and pouring the oil from within across the bed and floor, pulling another from her stash at the back of the linen closet when that one emptied until the room was soaked. It took fire easily, and the rest of the house was so much old, dry wood and dust and unbreathed air, and the Summer so long, that Nora was sure it would do the same.

She half-carried Evelyn’s still unsteady form down the stairs with a press of heat against her back like a warm breath of wind, the fire raging properly by the time they were out and into the overgrown back garden. It was still night, but Evelyn could see well enough even in the dark, guiding them both down into the mist-damp woods surrounding the manor, her stride becoming more and more steady with each step. Every so often, she would pause to touch the rough bark of the gnarled trees around them, or stomp her worn shoes in the thick mud, or shout with her new, rough voice at the top of her lungs, running a few paces ahead before returning to her side. Still, she kept her arms tight around Nora even as she regained her strength, no longer needing the help but unwilling to let go as

they disappeared together into the thick knot of woods, into the sweet smell of the earth and growing things, the mist just starting to fade as pale dawn light broke through the trees.

Nora had never been so happy.



Containing Sentiment: June Bug Box
Audrey Williams
Metal

Naught

Eliza Karnopp

The memories of the recently deceased are more often than not sharp and bitter. For most, relief only bleeds through after crossing over in Charon's ghostly ferry, their dying woes washed away by the quiet, steady flow of the river. The emotions swirl and gather, sinking into the depths of the river Acheron, thick and heavy.

The river Acheron has two purposes--the first as a barrier between the living world and the underworld, and the second as a cleansing tide, sweeping away the woes of those who passed. The current washes all the unwanted emotions away, downstream, away from those who suffered them. The river has no outlet at which to deposit this detritus, and so it remains, gathering into dense abscesses and settling in wait on the riverbed.

62

Usually they are of no concern, obstacles minor enough that they may as well not be there at all. But sometimes, it builds up. Sometimes, these abscesses gather enough substance to impede the current.

And so sometimes, when Acheron's waters slow and Charon begins to struggle in his crossing, she pulls together a humanoid form and begins to walk, heavy with anchorless emotion. She has no destination in mind when she leaves, but after a time-- *minutes, hours, days? Time is a fickle thing in the underworld*-- she invariably finds herself kneeling before another river. This one's waters are milky and opaque, shimmering clouds swirling beneath the surface. *River* is perhaps a misleading label, despite its long, meandering bed; this water's surface is silent, still, welcoming.

Acheron closes her eyes. "Lethe," she breathes.

There is a gentle disturbance in the profound quiet of the river, and she opens her eyes again to the sight of the other

arising from her waters.

It is always difficult to look directly at Lethe, her features blurring and melting away in one's memory until all that is left is the impression of a flowing white gown and long white hair, drifting as though still held aloft in the water's embrace.

"Acheron," she murmurs, voice soft and blurred like a fading memory.

There is a beat of silence, and then Acheron is wrapped around Lethe, her dark blue-violet a stark contrast to Lethe's white.

Lethe croons something indistinct, hand rising to run through Acheron's hair. Her touch is light and fleeting, gentle yet thorough in washing away the tension that holds her head in a vice grip.

Melting in Lethe's arms, Acheron sighs softly, relaxing as she allows herself to sink into the warm embrace of oblivion.

Lethe is, for the most part, uncaring of her surroundings. She has no use for the world beyond her banks, and anything that tries to trespass is swiftly discouraged as their memories get swept away at her cleansing touch. Most beings of the underworld are hardly more than a collection of memories, held together by threads of emotion-- even if trespassers do not give up upon the loss of their memories, she will continue to unravel them until there is nothing left.

Lethe, usually, does not care when the deathless ones call her name, for they are no more resistant to her sweet oblivion than the shades and spirits. They cannot be unravelled, no, but she can still wash away their memories until all that is left is an empty shell, useless and lost.

Lethe, usually, has no desire to assume a more humanoid form, uncaring as she is of what occurs outside her banks. But... sometimes. Sometimes, when the memories flow fast and thick, and she does not tie them to the riverbed as securely

as she ought to, she begins to slip. Foreign memories surface in her consciousness, sliding beneath her guard. She will have to secure them back down with the others, all of them grasping and tugging and whispering, *see me, touch me, live me*.

When she rises from that ephemeral garden (or, perhaps graveyard would be a more apt description?) something at her core feels... unsettled. The emptiness in her heart is something she is content with; she does not need emotion of her own when the fleeting touches from others' memories is perfectly sufficient. It always takes an uncomfortable amount of time (minutes? Hours? Days? Time is a fickle thing in the underworld) after such occasions for her to feel balanced once more.

And sometimes, when she feels uneven, off-kilter, she will hear a voice call her name from outside her banks. She is unsure what compelled her to answer, the first time--was there even a first time? Or had they always been engaged in this slow dance, an infinite whirlpool?

No matter. When she hears this voice, this call of her name from outside her banks, she responds. Her humanoid form is sloppy, mostly featureless, but the river Acheron never seems to care so neither does she.

Lethe emerges from the still waters of oblivion, the atmosphere of the underworld a cold touch against her 'skin', and welcomes Acheron's embrace. She is warm in Lethe's arms, solid and present, and Lethe tightens her grip. Acheron's overflow of human emotion spills over into her through their touch, soothing that restless something that disturbs her. The emotions, free of associated memories, taste like tranquility on her tongue.

Eventually, they will have to separate and return to their respective waters.

But *eventually* is not *now*.

GOŁĄBKI

Gill Noffert

She stood at the kitchen counter over a large head of cabbage and a few tomatoes.

“Gołąbki,” she said.

I was excited. She instructed me to set my schoolbag down and wash my hands because she needed help making it. I needed to chop the vegetables. I obliged her and set my stuff down where I usually do, behind the barstool in the dining room. I moved back into the kitchen and washed my hands in the basin, then crudely sliced a tomato in my palm. She told me to be careful because I could cut my hand open. She knew I learned this technique from her.

When I was a girl, I stood on a stepstool at the kitchen counter and watched as she perfectly diced a tomato in her hand, her thumb effortlessly guiding the knife, her hand shaping perfectly to the contours of the fruit. She put it in the pot with a few cans of sauce to cook down. Grandma was invincible then. Her calloused, dry hands wore the scars of life; a reminder of tears she’s wiped and punches she’s dodged and times she’s cut herself with a dull knife, and her hair, a cotton-white halo, my beacon of wisdom. She instructed me then to pick the best, fullest leaves from the cored head of cabbage before me. In the meantime she moved to her favourite chair in the dining area. She landed with a plop and sighed. She needs to sit down often, she explained.

For years, I watched her standing hunched over the stove, jaw set, strong and proud. She had been sitting down more frequently, and for longer periods of time while she cooked. She would grit her teeth and bear it until she couldn’t anymore. Once, I asked her why she can’t stand for long periods of time. She has a disease that destroys her back, she explained, causing her to walk improperly and sit down often. For the first time,

Grandma wasn't as invincible as I thought.

The tomato sauce was on the stove. Grandma could not core the cabbage for me anymore, I must do it myself. I cut the head in half and scored a triangle at the bottom of each half, and sawed through. Next I chose the fullest, freshest leaves of cabbage and set them aside. I called on Grandma, sitting in her chair (where there was a dent formed perfectly to the shape of her buttocks) to ask her what to do next.

“Take the pork out of the fridge.”

In the refrigerator laid a mixture of ground pork and rice that she was kind enough to prepare for me ahead of time. That was all the cooking she could do for the day. She sat massaging her hands, working her flaky, swollen joints. The prep work alone rendered her hands almost immobile. Her hands shook as she talked. Her walker sat beside her. She had been using one in public for awhile now, but only recently did she start using one around the house. It was a fight to get her to use it, too. “I’m fine,” she would say. At that age I believed her. Now, I know better.

66

I had to go to work at 6:00. It was 2:00 then and I was already in my uniform, slicing vegetables at the counter and watching the pot of sauce. I did not want to rush to change once I was done eating. I worked at a fast-food restaurant, where I would pretend to be happy to be there and serve greasy, all-American cuisine. It was a stark contrast to the hearty, laborious Eastern European food that I grew up with. When I didn't have a break at work, it was up to me to eat before my shift, and I didn't know it then, but those meals Grandma and I made quickly became more sacred to me than any holiday dinner.

I think that Grandma knew somehow that her time was limited. She had made it a point to cook more cultural food

for pre-shift meals, and teach me how to make them, too. For months I went to work with a stomach full of kielbasa, ground pork, kraut, noodles, root vegetables, and soups. It started where she would do the cooking alone. It was harder for her, because even more of her vitality was lost when she fell ill and was left bedridden. When she re-emerged, she was still as strong-willed as she used to be, and she never lost her love for the kitchen, but her nightgowns enveloped her and hung frumpy off of her shoulders, and she walked more hunched over still, having to guide each step. Now, A two-hour meal for anyone else's oma or babcia would take her four. Many times I came home from highschool to a chair in front of the stove. She could've just asked me to help her.

The cabbage leaves were boiled once so that they were flimsy. They lined a baking pan decorated for Autumn. It was Winter then, but we always made Gołąbki in that pan, so I never questioned the fact that it was out of season. I called Grandma over to the kitchen. She helped me to stuff the cabbage just right. The filling, formed into balls, was laid in the pan. The filling got enclosed with more cabbage. The tomato sauce still simmered on the stove. Grandma instructed me to mix it with milk before it was poured onto the dish. I tapped the pan against the stove a couple of times to make sure that the sauce seeped into all of the cracks. Finally, Grandma placed the meal in the oven. I let her, wearing a sad smile. It's the only part of cooking that she could do all by herself, and I could see on her face that she knows it, too.

It was a warm Autumn evening, October, maybe. Grandma and I were sitting in the living room eating dinner. The *\$100,000 Pyramid* was on the television. I often roped Grandma into watching game shows, asking her to change the channel when I got tired of news. This one, though, she enjoyed. I laughed so hard at a joke on TV, I spat out my food. Embarrassed, I asked her for a napkin. As she reached for it, I



Untitled
Dorian Campbell
Print

noticed that her hands were riddled with band-aids. She wore them on her fingers like rings and on the top of her hands, too. I stared at her hands, wrinkled, flaky, and red. Her knuckles were swollen.

“I don’t think I’ll be able to cook by myself for much longer. My hands shake too bad and I keep cutting myself.”

I said nothing, for I had no words. Grandma was a prideful and stubborn woman. I knew she didn’t want to admit this fact to herself as much as I didn’t want to hear it. When I could eventually bring my tongue to function, I don’t remember what I said. It would never have been enough to console either of us. A couple weeks later I walked into the kitchen and saw her drafting a grocery list. There were two items on it, the handwriting shaky and illegible. I ran to my bedroom and cried.

She needed help pulling the gołąbki out of the oven. I took it out for her and set it on top of the stove. She stood over her walker, a proud smile on her face. I cut pieces for both of us to allow it to cool faster. We took our places in front of the TV, dinner in hand. *Jeopardy!* was already on the TV (It was too early for *Pyramid*; we loved *Jeopardy!* too). I took a bite of what we made together and was transported back to my childhood. I remembered eating cabbage and noodles while the girls in my neighbourhood ate peanut butter and jelly sandwiches for dinner. Traditional American kids’ meals were an uncommon, but not unwelcome sight in my home.

The preservation of culture was a preservation of self for Grandma. The kitchen was her museum and the food her artifact. Each meal was a race with time and stamina as her abilities were taken from her, one by one. Even on the day she died, I didn’t want to believe that Grandma wasn’t invincible, but in the kitchen, she always will be.



Engraved Legacy

Isabelle Fisher
Watercolor

Footsteps Through the Palette

Miyu Enumoto

I look down to see the ground of brick,
A path of orange, brown, and darkened black,
Each one cemented, smooth beneath my feet,
Stretching on, horizon-bound and fixed,
This road unfolds, new sights beyond my view,
Its colors warm my heart, a quiet bloom.

Beside me rises walls of garnet that bloom,
Houses standing tall, each one of brick,
Their colored roofs bring joy within my view,
With vibrant shades, replacing muted black,
In rows they sit, each homestead solid, fixed,
A steady comfort growing around my feet.

Then I turn left, and there, beneath my feet,
Emerald green spreads out, a gentle bloom,
A sea so bright, yet still, so deep and fixed,
Its glassy depths contrast the grounded brick,
Its shimmer pulls, far from the world of black,
And bids me stay, entranced by all I view.

This ocean's clarity now fills my view,
Its waves brush softly around my eager feet,
The color so intense, outshining black,
Its glow creates within my chest a bloom,
As timeless as the path of endless brick,
Both earth and sea remain forever fixed.

How can two worlds stand side by side, so fixed?
One, the ocean's pull; the other, the cement muted view.
No boundary binds them, and still, I linger on brick—

My gaze returns to where it all began, my feet.
A palette on my hand, I make this scene bloom,
And no stroke here will I cast in black.

For even night cannot turn these skies black,
The stars shine over land and sea alike, fixed
As joy that rises softly in full bloom,
Embracing all within my wandering view,
Where ocean kisses softly at my feet,
While I still walk the path of endless brick.

No one stands near, not even a shadow black,
As ocean and brick meet here at my feet, forever fixed—
A world of color through my footsteps, where my palette made
it bloom.



Embracing Vase

Mali Cloeter
Ceramic

After a bath, in pastels

Isabelle Fisher
After Edgar Degas' *The Tub*

before me,

I am a woman who reaches
for my calves, my hair, my side—
drying them with a towel after a night's bath.

my stomach rolls over my thighs,
rounded and protruding,
my breasts hang,
not hidden by me, nor towel, nor cloth—

I am this woman— birthed by a man
who immortalized my image,
posed, but not performed,
in Paris, France— where I have never been.

74

and—I am a girl who dries her tears
in an exhibition in New York City—
crowded by strangers of artistic study—
immobilized, and alone—by myself and my mirror
before me.

Peeled Back

Cecilia Gitt-Henderson

Blue has taken over as I fall into bed never to wake up again. Mother meets blue once a month snuggled under thick covers the layers only seem to insulate our thoughts. Warm and kept they cling to the words of affirmation, "It is always you. It will never be you." Rounding the corner in the dining hall the column hides your face but not long enough. Your eyes reflect all of them that came before you words rearranged still mean the same. Under the layers I reveal the self that pulls them in but I cannot peel back my skin far enough open my eyes wide enough talk as sweet as syrup. I cannot blame the blade for pain when I reached for it a second third fourth time enough for nothing to be left drained skeletal please worship the crunch of my bones. In your room again after I never thought I would be back again it is empty in your arms my tears only seemed to bring out the blue in my eyes and the pink in my lips. My words of hurt only seemed to inspire your response of lust which was gone in the morning, turning into alarm bells I let lull me to sleep too many times before. My blue turned to black after I met you. Churning in a sea of self-hate I dripped away drowning in myself slowly becoming small enough for you. I felt the drops of ink trickle from another when you repeated the same story twice like I hadn't already replayed it every night alone in my room you are my favorite show to binge replay memorize dissect. I listen again because in the hum of your words I hear his too and maybe I can be more than I was to him to you. Tracing your name on my skin felt as cruel as a slap as your hand left me stinging only silence followed. Smiles stretch your cheeks pulling back skin only to reveal wolf teeth. I tend to

75

wounded animals as they bite my hand I lick the wound and



Embracing Vase
Mali Cloeter
Ceramic

return for more bite me again and I'll know you still desire my flesh even if it draws blood. Scalp burning as bleach seeps in I am told I am prettier blond run your hair through my burning hair I am less me with each lighter strand. Tight layers leave less to imagination they will look with want in their eyes but they never meet mine.

Pink stood out against the muted colors but I still despised their stares. The wind led my bangs astray as I smoked with you under yellow street lamps. Like cotton candy I disguised my cavities with the promise of fun sweet nothingness. That picnic bench became our family table but the only plate we shared held the promise of escape. As invisible as the wind I left barely an impression only that of flesh. I watched you as you held her on your birthday and a mirror watched me back. Several hair colors later I cannot dye my insides the reflective glass still whispers tales of my shortcomings. If only I knew that my crown of pink would set the tone of my desires. No love letters or innocent embraces I learned the key to their affection was fleeting I formed to their cravings. As I became their muse I lost any knowledge of being their equal finding familiarity in indifferentness. I hope that my apprenticeness blooms into mastering the art of detachment. I practice on you few words leave my mouth before I am dressing again to leave your room.

77

Brown freckles scattered my arms leaving the last trace of summer. You told me I was pretty I almost believed it until morning came and I entered the end of it all. At the time your words hurt the most but they now shine gold compared to the latest. Brown eyes met mine too hungry to not hold malice. I don't miss you I only wish you would come back and never leave.

Black cascades down my back my feet just inches from the trickling water. Clear and cold it pays me no mind it does not question the empty bridge beside me. Dandelions sway in the sun my fingers once five would tie their bodies together forming a crown. I now let them stay rooted only longing for their permanence even if it is fleeting. Home is crowded with silence broken by my brother's cries. His black sneakers lost in the move a box filled with trash arrived in its place. Mother's anger springs out uncovered by the empty walls. My only comfort is my absence leaving silence in my wake.



Heart Mug

Drew King
Ceramic

Joan

Frannie Mamlin

Joan's between the stagnant air like a live-in ghost. She's pressed up beneath the wallpaper, nose and hands sticking out of the sh pale stripes and bunny white owers. Rising and sinking, she's in the crusted edges of the cigarette burns in the side of the armchair, with embers still blazing at the right time of evening. Joan has teeth like ickering neon signs that read "open," "closed," and "corona extra." She pus out her cheeks and opens her cracked lips to teach circle games. "Put on your worst singing voices," she tells the world like squirming toddlers sitting criss-cross-applesauce on the tattered alphabet rug, a jumble of primary colors and sticky handprints that get caught in the bers. She bites with the back of her hand. She soothes with a rippling candle ight at 3 AM. She smears blue charcoal on her scabbed kneecaps when acrylic canyon speckles stuck to her tongue. Joan comes and goes but never leaves. She's in the bottom of the teacup. You can pretend to walk beside her. In the creak of the ice over the bridge she melts the snow with a cigarette smoke kiss. "I'm going on down," she says. "Gonna get my soul free."

Contributors

AUDREY WILLIAMS is a mixed media metalsmith with over ten years of experience in 3D fabrication. Graduating in May of 2025 with a B.F.A in Metals, Audrey hopes to return to her home near Cincinnati to pursue Art and teaching.

CALEB AUERBACH-BROWN is a senior English major at Earlham college, concerned with making all texts writerly, the sound of words, and whether or not the trees know what we're doing to them.

CECILIA GITT-HENDERSON "I am from Upstate New York but spent time living in Denmark. I love animals, especially cats; my two cats, Boots and Clover, often find their way into my art. I can milk cows by hand, do stick and poke tattoos, and thrift until the world ends. Pink camo is the color of my soul, and my hello-kitty obsession is still going strong at twenty-one years old."

82

DORIAN CAMPBELL is a third year Anthropology/Sociology and Art double major. She is from Dayton, Ohio, and primarily works with linoleum printmaking, collage, and fibers. Her favorite thing in life is her cat, Marigoldberg.

DREW KING is a ceramics major focusing on traditional East-Asian technique.

ELIZA KARNOPP is a Junior Creative Writing major who loves birds, books, dragons, and fantasy. She refuses to write about anything real, and often confuses people with her stories.

FRANNIE MAMLIN loves to write and cogitate over dusty bones.

GAVIN KISSLING is a freshman at Earlham College looking to give everything a try. He's taken a class on horses, started a radio show, and joined the Earlham improv group, but he's decided to pursue writing.

GILL NOFFERT is a poet by trade from Kansas. She misses her grandmother a lot.

ISABELLE FISHER loves to write about queerness and New Zealand.

K HUGHES can't seem to stop writing about body horror, gender roles, and messy lesbians. They are a senior creative writing major with a biology minor whose preferred genres for both short stories and full-length fiction are fantasy, horror, and science fiction, all with at least a touch of magic and/or violence.

LUCIEN WOLF "I'm a non-binary aspiring author trying to figure out what exactly is happening around me and with me, and I'm fascinated with exploring what it means to live in a human body."

MACKENZIE FOX (he/him) is a writer first, transgender second, and human being third.

MALI CLOETER is a first-year student at Earlham. She is an interdisciplinary artist and creative person whose current favorite media are ceramics and photography. She often finds herself using nature imagery, especially birds and plants, in her quest to explore identity and the emotions of being human.

83

MALIYAH BUFORD is a sophomore volleyball player, majoring in English with a minor in Education. Loves to write and loves to love.

McKENNA DOLAN is a second-year student in Women's, Gender, and Sexuality Studies who loves piercings, tattoos, hipster-café-turned-community-centers, and Letterboxd.

MIYU ENOMOTO "This is Miyu from Kumamoto, Japan! Class of 2026, Peace and Global Studies Major, and potential Creative Writing Major as well :) I love expressing myself freely through writing, dancing, and drumming. (Sometimes drawing.) I love to feel each of the words' nuance and how they become present in different languages. There are so many words that cannot be translated into English from Japanese, and vice versa. Being able to feel the word as a second language speaker is so beautiful that I fell in love with <3 My favorite writers are Minato Kanae, Nagira Yu, and Aoyama Michiko; please take a look at their literature!"

SAGE SMITH (he/him) is a first year at Earlham College. He enjoys theatre, art, writing, and reading and plans to major in psychology.

SAM ALLEN is a people pleaser. Please love their art.

SOFIA FEDOTOVA “Somebody who to this day refuses to write in English.”

TINAYE MAKASI is a junior neuroscience student and aspiring author from Zimbabwe. Her work explores themes of Black identity, migration, and faith, weaving personal narratives with scientific and cultural insights.

TOBIAS DEAN “I am a CS major with a minor in history coming here from Cincinnati. I am a Quaker and longtime member of the Ohio Valley yearly meeting, so I have been familiar with Earlham long before my attendance as a student. I am a bit new to creative writing, but I have really loved it since I started the hobby, and I only wish I had explored it more seriously earlier into my time at Earlham. Thanks for reading.”

WILLA PETTIT “I first fell in love with poetry while living in Arizona. Some of my favorite poets are Emily Dickinson, Pablo Neruda, Ted Hughes and Walt Whitman.”

WREN JOYRICH “I am a Double Degree student between Earlham College and Waseda University based in Tokyo. At Earlham I am a Sociology + Anthropology Major and have a Japanese Studies Minor. In Tokyo, I have a Major in International Studies. I am a self taught artist and draw and paint as a hobby. I specialize in oil paintings and portraiture.”

XANDER PERRY is a sophomore Japanese Studies major with a minor in Art. He loves to garden and make art of all kinds in his free time.
