

2017

PRISM



2017 PRISM

The background of the cover is an abstract composition of overlapping, semi-transparent geometric planes in various shades of gray and white. These planes create a sense of depth and perspective, resembling a stylized architectural structure or a series of stacked, tilted layers. The overall effect is clean, modern, and minimalist.

PRISM 2017

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Founded in 1978 by professor Paula Stofer, PRISM is a journal of art and literature featuring work by students, staff, and alumni of Lawrence Technological University.

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A Note from the Editor

Explore the lives and musings of the students, staff, and alumni of Lawrence Technological University through the works published in PRISM 2017. The artists and authors of PRISM created works ranging from the triumphs to the sorrows, the raw and the playful, the introspective and the observational. PRISM is a collection of visual and written works designed to take the reader through a journey of discovery and emotion as each page is turned. A prism separates white light into a full spectrum of color, just as the talented artists PRISM have separated their life experiences and shared them through illustrations, photography, poems, and short stories.

We would like to give our sincere thanks to the College of Arts and Sciences and the Department of Humanities, Social Science, and Communication for their continued support. Special thanks is also given to Sara Lamers, the editorial board, and all of the artists that poured their hearts and souls into their works to share through PRISM. Such a powerful publication could not be possible without the efforts of everyone involved.

Enjoy PRISM 2017.

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Rachel Seeger, Illustration

Infallible

A stroke of black on her eyes and red on her lips; the armor she wears to keep herself held high. Her gaze is strong, because she has no other option. A moment of weakness is unforgivable. The armor she wears to keep herself held high may be inconspicuous to others outside herself. A moment of weakness is unforgivable she is a diamond; strong, but brittle. She may be inconspicuous to others outside herself but she knows her own worth. No one can take it away. She is a diamond; brittle, but strong. She arms herself with black on her eyes and red on her lips.

Brown Sugar

Gritty sand on my tongue,
dissolving into Sunday afternoons
with a whisk and a bottle
of delightful vanilla.
Molasses roots
tease sensations, and
the Rolling Stones
reverberate breathy sighs.
'How come you taste so good?'
they marvel.
I sway my hips
to a saxophone
bellowing its love
as my tapping feet
reveal mine.
A giggle bubbles up and
escapes my lips
as sandpaper hands
close around my fingers,
drawing me to our
kitchen's sunny center.
Carelessly we swing,
and he tastes
of warm brown sugar,
drawing my lips
to his honey scented throat.
'How come you taste so good?'

Tyler Adams

It's a Michigan Thing

Bare arms in the winter,
wading through seas of snow,
you'll freeze to death!

Driving through blizzards,
nothing out of the ordinary,
an inch of snow should close schools!

Foreign currency
accepted in stores,
well, you are basically Canada.

Trolls under bridges,
as if hiding from the cold,
what does that even mean?

Hands for maps,
left is upper, right is lower,
no wonder you can't find anything.

How can you do it?
Smiling, I always turn to them,
you wouldn't understand,

it's a Michigan thing.

Jacob Radatz

Swirl

When the great swirl played out in the arena
I was in the stands
and did not envy the victor
and did not envy the injured.

When the crowd rose to its feet as one
I stayed in my seat
and observed the action
and did not enter their excitement
and did not enter their despair

And when the shout goes up like thunder
at the very final gun
I will be still
watching.

Louis Finkleman

Hiding

I drank too much last night trying to blur thoughts
turn them into an impressionist watercolor
running together and soft around the edges

My head feels full
stuffed with the lint of an itchy wool blanket
eyes hot marbles staring up from a summer playground

If I could sleep all day
or a hundred years
I would wake in a world that never knew you

Take a pill
Swallow down some pain
bury the longing like memories stuffed in an old box

But the pain is rotting garbage
overwhelming me with its stench
and the memories refuse to be hidden.

Sarah Roberts

Lemon Pledge

As a child brought up on sugary cereals,
one of the best was Froot Loops.
Their strange, unnatural colors
were straight out of a Dr. Seuss book.
The fluorescent green of a glow stick,
blue of Superman ice cream,
yellow of a plastic slide,
orange of a Sharpie,
red of a Coke can,
and purple of Barney were
always enticing.
The rigid imperfect donut shape
with a rough surface
would always excite.
My sister and I would always come running
when we heard the crinkling
of the plastic bag opening.

One thing
at the age of twenty-two
that still confuses me:
Why do Froot Loops smell
like Lemon Pledge?

Tyler Wiersing

Shattered Glass

Be careful when reaching
for the broken pieces.
Notorious they are for leaving
scars on the innocent.
Streams of tears fleetly
flow down dreary eyes.
Wounds are bandaged by I love you's
and it won't happen again,
soothing your soul's sadness
until the broken pieces penetrate deeper,
piercing once more, through the core, of
your heavenly heart's harmonic hymn.

Shattered slivers slice so senselessly.
Being broken has built barricades
around the edges of my heart, yet you still
reach for its scattered pieces shattered
like fragments of a cracked diamond.
You place pieces pointlessly in place,
patiently waiting for your kind words,
listening ear, and sacrificial support,
to latch the pieces back together,
but my heart still is missing peace.

What image do you see
from my heart's ragged reflection?
You are either foolishly blind
or see something sensational
beyond my howling,
venomous words that
incinerate your innocence,
outbursts of rage that trample
the tender shell of your kindred
soul, and broken promises that
leak loosely from lying lips,
leaving you gasping for air,
slowly drowning in tears of sorrow.

The damage from the pain I inflicted
is not grasped until my eyes visualize
the image of something oddly recognizable,
a mirroring picture of harsh words exploding
from your lips and outbursts of rage that
resemble the appearance of myself, reflecting
from the shattered glass of your broken heart.

Ivorie Morrell

Choices

I recently chose to live
because you can't just have a life
you cannot just float down the river on your inner tube
like everyone else who
watches the canoes and the kayaks pass swiftly by.
You Must Choose To Paddle.
And that choice is difficult
because your inner tube is safe
and predictable
and there are so many other people just like you.
But, if you choose to paddle
you choose to live your life.
To live, you have to do hard things,
make difficult decisions.
You have to get out of your inner tube
and paddle.

Kai Schmidt

The Final Frontier

Oh, but how to describe
a starry sky?
Galaxies and planets
so pleasing to my eye.

How then, to express
my eternal love?
Heart fluttering in my chest
like the wings of a dove.

Their colors an oil painting
through my telescope.
Greeted by the man in the moon,
with his smile full of hope.

The color of love is red,
filling my heart and my face.
Out of all on Earth and beyond,
one person I wish to face.

All avenues on Earth explored,
and all the maps so clear.
The astronaut, brave and bold,
explores this final frontier.

Of love, no maps exist,
and pathways fork and twist,
Yet lovers push through all the while,
No idea what's in their midst

The vast expanse
boggling the mind.
Forever a mystery,
to all of humankind.

Space and Love.
Love and Space.
Quite different, yet the same.
Their qualities fascinate, tantalize, hypnotize
and drive humankind insane.

Cody Chumbler

Tick Tock

Tick Tock.
Into bed I'll
crawl, hoping that I won't
keep myself awake.

Tick Tock.
Odd thoughts and a
ceiling fan circus show
keep me entertained.

Tick Tock.
Is that a spider?
Could it be a ghost or a
Komodo dragon?

Tick Tock.
Over time, I'll
consider watching TV. I'll
keep trying to sleep though.

Tick Tock.
Instead of sleeping, I
crawl out of bed; a
knot in my stomach.

Tick Tock.
Our bed was never
comfortable. I squirm and
kick off the sheets.

Tick Tock.
In my hand, I
cradle a photo of us
kissing on that special date.

Tick Tock.
Over the horizon, the sun
creeps in through the
kitchen window.

Thomas Roggenbuck

Brother

Our mother let us cross the street
of the high rises along the beach
to a motel with a marsh behind it
to feed ducks the color of butter.

Daily, the street sizzling with heat
stung our bare feet like needles,
and the smell of sunscreen
permeated our singing skin.

I remember the sea less
than the ducks waddling noisily
toward us, our wet bathing suits
pasted to our butts, a bag

of bread dangling from my free hand,
the other secure in yours,
suspended between permission
and restraint as the cars whizzed past.

The ducks, the hotels, the beach
have long since been swallowed
by the sea that sand dunes
and weeds could not hold back.

Long swaths of coast eroded now;
it is no more.
It will not come again.
I still long to bolt, brother.

Melinda Weinstein

Before We Gave Up

Who did we think we were
before acrimony made us bitter,
an aftertaste in our mouths
we were young and starry-eyed,
bellies filled with white desire.

Who did we think we were
before blame spewed from us,
infection from a wound
we were blindly hopeful,
minds filled with longing dreams.

Who did we think we were
before lies tore apart our trance,
vicious wild dogs at carrion
we were kindly thoughtful,
formed our words with care.

Who did we think we were
before years distorted us,
reflecting circus images
we were two-way glass,
our images combined.

Who did we think we were?

Before we gave up?

Sarah Roberts

A perfume boutique framed in frosted glass and burnished marble. I dragged my feet and endlessly asked are we done yet? like any five-year old. The invasive smells of sharp lemon and the thick blasts of musky roots that penetrated my nose; breathing there was a dangerous endeavor. They were labeled with flowery depictions like Daring Daffodil and Romantic Rosemary, Vivid Vanilla and Captivating Chamomile, but what reached my nose was the dirt, the muck, the churned earth where they grew. I was encircled, by the shelves, the bottles, the soaps, the nature in the air. One wrong whiff and it was over.

The popcorn shop was my reward at the end of a long and boring outlet mall. I threw open the door to walls of rainbow confetti surrounding me. Sight and smell guided my search into boxes and tins where some bright color and distinctive aroma assaulted my senses. A stolen taste of Tangerine Tart would refresh me after Pineapple Punch knocked me out. The overwhelming number of choices often brought me to Blueberry Blues. I would continue and find this drawer was filled with sweet Candied Apples and, another- warm Caramel Crackle, or Milky White Chocolate. The tastes were unmistakable, the room felt syrupy, not to mention the mingling of flavors in the drawer labeled Rainbow-Flavored popcorn.

My mother created pies every year, first allowing me a single fruit sliced in a bowl, the flesh dripping from its blushing fringes, the almost too-sweet taste tingling in my cheeks, teasing a smile out of me. When I finished licking every fragrant drop of juice from my fingertips, she took the bowl and shooed me from her stage, ushering in an art which I could never hope to recreate.

The music oozed out of the kitchen. Bob Segar and Cat Stevens twisting down the halls, my mother began her performance. Methodical, her own metronome, she danced across linoleum floors, paring, carving, pouring, mixing - writing the arithmetic of the sublime: Adding dashes of zesty magic, subtracting cuts of crumbling skins, she derived into being something beyond interpretation, the intoxicating perfume of sweet peaches exuding from her well-seasoned scene.

Rubbing my small fingers on velvet rind, turning it over in my palms to see its crimson and golden ripples, I felt the tender flesh beneath. I touched my nose to each succulent fruit, breathing deeply, allowing the sweet scent to fill my lungs. The earth was decaying, decomposing into auburns and apricots, bare saplings and beige lawns, but seemingly in its foliage-ash rebirthed the peach.

The Black Boy

I was 13 years old the day the black boy whispered in my ear. I was standing in the back of the narrow bookstore in the mall, perusing the paperbacks on the carousel. At first, the whisper was so light, I didn't realize someone was speaking, it felt like a gentle brush of air against my neck, but then I heard the words.

"Hey, pretty, little white girl." Softer than a whisper, the flutter of butterfly wings, but the words felt ugly.

I dropped the book I was holding, turned, and pushed past the boy. I fled the narrow confines of the store, the safety and comfort of my favorite place instantly destroyed. Turning right I ran down the wide main concourse of the mall, colors, people, thought, nothing but a blur as I sought to put distance between the pursuer and myself. Fight or flight, the age-old question and I emphatically chose flight. Safely past the entrance to Montgomery-Wards, the anchor for the north end of the mall, I slowed down, carefully navigating the stereo system displays with their white noise and high-pitched frequency that always gave me a dull headache and set my teeth on edge. The popcorn-scented air settled around me as I made my way past the candy counter where I had pestered my mom for treats on not so distant trips to the store to buy back to school clothes, snow boots, or help my mom choose new curtains for the family room. Just past the men's department, I turned left and made my way down the hallway to the catalog pick up area staffed with reliable middle-aged clerks and the safety of the ladies' room.

Pushing through the swinging door into the puke-green tiled sanctuary, I selected a stall, stepped inside and quickly shut the door, sliding the shiny silver bar into the latch. Safety. Turning, I leaned against the door, shut my eyes tight, tried to take a deep breath as the tears squeezed between my long black lashes, and began to course down my cheeks. I released a shuddering sob and doubled over, folding my arms across my middle to hug myself.

By the time my mom picked me up from the mall on Saturday, I had decided two things. The first was that I was lucky to be alive; so much had the danger of the situation grown in my mind. The second was that I was never going to tell my mom about it. This might make no sense, but the truth was I didn't want to lose my hard-won independence. I was the youngest child of an overprotective, stay home mother. My Dad ran his own residential plumbing business that kept

him busy, so he always deferred to my mother's wishes when it came to rearing kids. It had taken me months of begging, bargaining, and promises before my Mom would agree to let me go to the mall, or anywhere, unchaperoned. I was terrified at the thought of going back to the mall on my own but, the very real possibility of being doomed as the only girl in my class who couldn't go anywhere without an adult was even worse.

When I got to school on Monday morning, I made a beeline for the playground, in search of my best friend Nancy. I was desperate to tell her about the black boy, what had happened inside the bookstore. I found her just where I expected, holding court at the tetherball pole. A bunch of the 7th and even a few of the 8th grade boys were hanging around, trading insults with each other, trying to impress her. Nancy was really small, but she had an impressive vertical jump and a volleyball serve that converts nicely to tetherball, making her all but unbeatable. When the guys realized they couldn't beat her at the game, they decided to fall in love with her. It was weird how that worked - I couldn't figure it out. My 17-year-old brother Frank, who had plenty of girls chasing him, told me after the first time Nancy came to our house that she was one of the most homely girls he had ever seen. That may sound mean, but Frank wasn't, so I guess I believed him.

I started waving, trying to get Nancy's attention; I wanted a few minutes to talk before the bell rang for first hour. The last two days had been torture; I hadn't been able to call her all weekend since she had spent the whole time at her cousin's house. I knew she saw me, but she was flipping her long hair and grinning at Mike, a cute 8th grade basketball player with blonde hair, parted in the middle.

"Nancy!" I hissed, and again a little louder, "Nancy!" She said something to Mike that I couldn't hear, but he and the others burst out laughing. Nancy looked over her shoulder towards me, her hooked nose almost touching her lips as she pulled a smirk and shook her head, rolling her eyes. It felt like a punch in the stomach. Numb with embarrassment and shock, I bent down; my long curly brown hair fell over my pale face, and grabbed my khaki canvas book bag with the iron-on appliqued hearts, where I had dropped it on the asphalt. I turned and walked quickly toward the building as jeers and laughter followed me. What in the world had just happened? Suddenly the black boy at the mall seemed to shrink in my mind and in his place was a hot jumble of humiliation and hurt.

Things had become so confusing lately. I wasn't the most

decent grades, I had decent clothes, I could play most sports without totally embarrassing myself. I had always been social; in fact, that was how Nancy and I had become friends. She had come to St. Paul's at the beginning of 5th grade from public school in Detroit, where it was no longer safe for the white kids, that's what my Mom said anyway. It is nearly impossible for an outsider like her to gain acceptance with the "in crowd" this late in the game. Most of us had started kindergarten together. I had watched her that first day, standing next to her desk, her knobby knees practically knocking together as she waited to be introduced by our teacher. I felt so sorry for her that I shot her a smile and she returned it with a relieved one of her own. From that day on, we were inseparable.

Now if I was honest with myself, I had to admit I was jealous of Nancy. I was jealous of her perfectly straight hair that feathered, unlike my curly mess that would never cooperate. I envied the way she was able to talk and joke with guys, without being shy and awkward. I hated how she always seemed to be at the center of everything. It all made me feel left behind and I didn't like it. I was resentful and disliked feeling that way.

By lunchtime, I had sunk so low in a pit of self-pity and anxiety that I chose a seat at a table all the way across the cafeteria from our usual spot. Sitting with my back to the room I hunched over my brown bag, pulling the contents out one by one as the other kids at the table looked at me as if I had grown two heads.

"Why are you sitting here?" a shrill voice broke into my misery. I looked up as I set a bag with carrot sticks on the nicked blue Formica of the table.

"Why shouldn't I sit here?"

Anita Ryan narrowed her dark eyes at me and tilted her head. "Because you ALWAYS sit over there!" she pointed a chubby finger across the room to where I knew, without turning, that Nancy and our usual crew were busy gossiping and trading snacks from their own lunches. Shrugging I looked down at my bologna and mustard sandwich, my absolute favorite, wondering how I was going to choke it down. "Well?" Anita was not going to let me off the hook.

Taking a deep breath, I raised my eyes and scanned the group around the table, who did Anita think she was, questioning me? "I just don't feel like it, okay?"

"No, not okay."

"What?" I was shocked out of my wretchedness by this. Was Anita Ryan was telling me that I could not sit where I liked to eat lunch? She was smirking and her chubby cheeks

"Listen Diana, we sit here every day, we never try to sit at YOUR table. If we did, I bet no one would even ask why, probably just shove our lunch tray on the floor. You can't just sit wherever you want." she folded her arms defiantly across her chest, "This is our table, go back to your own and leave us alone." I was speechless, looking around the table I saw her cronies nodding their heads in agreement. I quickly shoved my unwanted lunch back into the brown bag, pushed back the chair with the force of standing and walked to the cafeteria exit; I dropped the bag in the trash as I headed out the door.

As 5th hour approached by dread increased, Nancy sat next to me in that class. We usually had a blast, passing notes back and forth and generally making life difficult for Miss Strunk, our Careers teacher, but today I was afraid. Right at the bell Nancy sauntered into the room, dropped her book on her desk and turned toward me. "What's up, D?" the way she looked at me made me feel guilty as if I was the one that had hurt her feelings.

I could not even look at her, "Why did you ignore me this morning? Why did you laugh at me with the guys?" I felt like I was choking, my breath was catching in my throat and tears threatened.

"God, D! You are such a baby!" rolling her eyes she flipped her hair over her shoulder and turned toward the front of the room, slouching low in her chair.

"You know what Nance? If I'm such a baby, why did a black boy at the mall want to do it with me?" I had blurted it out before I knew where it came from and I felt sick and ashamed of what I was suggesting. I made something totally gross sound romantic. Nancy whipped her head back around, her eyes wide.

"What are you talking about? When did this happen?" Relief flooded me as the old Nancy burst through her veneer of nonchalance at the prospect of some juicy news.

"I almost got raped on Saturday at the mall, by a black boy! Nancy I was dying to tell you all weekend! It was so scary!" I was clutching her hand and she was squeezing back.

"D! What did your parents say?"

"I couldn't tell them! You know I can't tell them! They will never let me go anywhere alone until I am 30!" Nancy quickly raised her hand and Miss Strunk nodded to her to speak.

"Miss Strunk, can I please escort Diana to the nurse, she isn't feeling well." That was Nancy, always thinking on her feet! She squeezed my hand twice, this was our secret signal for the other one to be quiet and go along with the plan.

be rid of us for a while, she really was a nice lady, "but please come right back."

Nance pulled me up and I attempted to look sick, which was not too difficult after the day I was having. Smiling weakly at Miss Strunk, who nodded sympathetically, I let Nancy guide me into the hallway. Glancing left and right, Nancy quickly pulled me down the long blue and white tiled hallway to the girl's bathroom. Safe inside, we checked all of the stalls to be sure we were alone. This ritual complete, she turned to me and said, "Spill."

Later that evening, after dinner and homework, I was allowed a half-hour of phone time. This schedule was necessary for several reasons in a house with five kids who all wanted to use the phone. Being the youngest, I was thankful that I got any time at all, to tell you the truth. I lay on the tan and brown shag carpet of the upstairs hallway and dialed Nancy's number; she answered after the first ring. "D! How did you know he was black?"

"What?" I asked incredulously. "I told you, he was black."

"Yeah, but how did you know? You said you felt his breath on your neck and heard his whisper... and then you bolted." Nancy paused and I stopped twirling the white phone cord around my finger.

"I know he was"

"But how did you know?" She sounded impatient, but I was silent for a few seconds thinking. How did I know? I had bolted. It was the words, 'little white girl' - white girl - that was what he said that made the whisper sound ugly to me. Then I remembered something that I did not even realize I knew. In the split second after I understood that the butterfly wing was really a whisper and dashed from the store, I had actually turned and faced the speaker. In that split second, I had seen him. He was just a little taller than I was and stood so close I could see the darker specks in his deep brown eyes. He had smooth cocoa colored skin and his hair looked like it had been processed, standing out from his head in clumpy spikes. He was skinny and wore a plain white tee shirt covering his narrow chest. Yes, I had seen him and he was a black boy. Just a black boy.

I cut my conversation with Nancy short, I was in no mood to listen to her wise cracks about our teachers or her parents, or rehash the last episode of Mork and Mindy; I had a lot of thinking to do. Grabbing a notebook and pen, I made a list of what I remembered about the black boy: about my age, a little taller than I, skinny, light brown skin, brown eyes with dark flecks, messy hair. When he walked, it was in a black and

white, I felt silly. I mean I know I was startled to have someone whisper in my ear, but he called me pretty, didn't he? He had not threatened me! If I had seen a blonde, blue-eyed boy when I turned around, I know I would not have run.

I had very little experience with black people or coloreds as my Grandpa called them. I don't think any lived in my neighborhood and there certainly weren't any in my school. As I was thinking about this, my sister Janine walked into our pink and white striped room. "Jan, are there any black kids in your school?" Janine is fifteen and goes to the Lutheran High School that I would attend in a few years' time. Janine and I look a lot alike. We have the same long, dark brown, curly hair, except she gets up at 5:30 every morning before to school to straighten hers with a special blow dryer with a comb attachment she got for Christmas. We both have the fair skin we inherited from our father's Scots background, but she has his blue eyes, while I got my mom's hazel ones. She also has a great body and gets to wear make-up ever since she started high school. Sometimes, when she isn't home, I sneak into her drawer and try out the eye shadow. She would kill me if she knew, so I am always super careful to put everything back just like I found it.

"Yes, two." She grabbed a book off her nightstand and flopped down on her bed.

"Have you ever talked to them?" She looked over, rolling her eyes, annoyed at me, as usual.

"Yes." This was like pulling teeth.

"What are they like?" I stopped, considered a second, "I mean, are they really different from us?" My entire perspective of black people formed by television sitcoms like *The Jeffersons* or *Good Times* or things I heard from my parents.

Janine pushed herself to a sitting position on her rainbow bedspread and set her book in her lap. "Yes, they are different because they have brown skin."

"Duh!" Man she was annoying! I guess she saw that I was serious though and thought for a second.

"Their dad owns the McDonald's at Northland. They have tons of money. Other than that, they don't seem that different."

"Oh" I was hoping for information about black people in general, not about two spoiled rich kids. "Thanks."

"Why are you asking?"

"No reason." I closed my notebook and shoved it in my book bag then headed to the bathroom to brush my teeth before bed.

The next few days I spent a lot of time thinking about how worked up I got when Nancy snubbed me at the tetherball

pole on Monday. I thought about Anita Ryan and the other kids at the lunch table in the cafeteria who resented me for sitting with them, just because I had no one better to sit with at the time. Mostly I thought about the black boy. I thought about his plain white tee shirt. I thought about his sad, processed hair. I thought about the dark flecks in his brown eyes, and why I thought what he had said to me was ugly, just because he was a black boy. I was beginning to realize what all of those things said about me. Nancy and school had returned to normal, at least as normal as they had been lately, but I felt different about many things.

The spring weather had turned chilly again and I was shivering as I hung out at the tetherball pole on Thursday morning, watching Nancy with her fan club, trying not to be jealous. Anita Ryan walked past with a few of the girls who had been at the lunch table on Monday. "Hi Anita." I smiled and waved. Anita looked confused and scurried away, whispering to her friends; I do not really blame her. I was just going to have to keep trying.

I had returned to my regular spot in the cafeteria on Tuesday, but with each passing day, I became more aware of the different groups that occupied each table. Each clique really seemed to be having fun or just plain comfortable with each other. I had never really given them a lot of thought, other than to imagine them wishing they could sit at our table. I rolled my eyes and shook my head, Wow, I am such a stuck up jerk! I thought.

Finally, Friday came, I sat across from Nancy at lunch as she sipped her Welch's Grape Soda and munched Fritos one by one - she ate the same thing every day in the same way - one chip, one sip. "Hey D, do you want to go to the Mall tomorrow? We can have lunch at Kresge and hang out at the arcade." She popped another chip, "I want to beat my score at Space Invaders."

"I can't, I have to go to my Grandparents house with my family, they just got back from vacation and want to see us." I quickly looked down at my bologna and mustard sandwich to hide the flush on my cheeks. I have always been a crappy liar; blushing is the least of it. I didn't like to lie to Nancy now, but I have to go to the mall alone. I just know if I don't go tomorrow I might lose my nerve and never find out what I need to know.

"Okay, next weekend for sure, you can't hide from the black boy forever!" Nancy gave me one of her goofy looks and stuck out her tongue. Laughing I crossed one of my eyes, a trick Nancy has not mastered and it always cracks her up, this time was no exception. My Mom almost wrecked my plans

when she picked me up from school that afternoon.

"Hi Honey, how was your day?"

"Fine." I slammed the door on the brown Buick and snapped my seatbelt on. "Hey Mom, can you drive me to the mall tomorrow?"

"Sorry, not tomorrow", she replied as she maneuvered out of the parking lot and into the line of cars waiting to exit onto Middlebelt Road.

"Why not?"

"I have alter guild tomorrow, and afterward I have to run home, pick up Janine and get her to driver's training."

"But Mom! I have to go to the mall!" a whiney note was creeping into my voice.

We turned onto 8 Mile Road, but Mom just shook her head, "Sorry Sister, I took you to the mall last week. Don't pester." I began to think furiously.

"What time do you have to be at church for alter guild?"

A warning note crept into my Mom's voice, "Diana, enough."

"No, I was just asking. I mean if it's after the mall opens, maybe you can drop me off on the way?" Leaning toward her, I clasped my hands, prayer-like in front of me.

We stopped at a light; she turned to look at me. "Diana, that solves nothing, I won't be free to pick you up" she glanced at the light, then back to me, "discussion over."

I sat in sulky silence for a few minutes.

"What if I get Frank to promise to pick me up? If he says yes, will you please drop me off?"

"Why is this so important all of the sudden?" she sounded a bit suspicious. I guess having five kids had taught her a few things - my luck I came last.

Oh no! No, no, no! Lying to Nancy was one thing... I blew out a breath in a huff and sat for a few seconds trying to come up with something.

"It's not so important" I flopped back against the seat, "I just want to get the new Sweet Valley High book before next weekend, if I don't everyone will have read it and spoil it for me!" This was true, not my main reason for wanting to go to the mall, but not a lie either. It was a good choice. My mom loves to read as much as I do, and knows I hate when someone ruins a book for me by blabbing about it before I can read it.

Defeated, she patted me on the knee, "Ok, but only if you can get your brother to promise to pick you up, I can drop you on my way to church..."

"Thank you, thank you, thank you!" I squealed.

"What? Anything! What?"

"Homework done tonight, once you get your nose in a book I've lost you!" she chuckled.

"Deal" I smiled happily, as we pulled into our driveway.

When my mom dropped me off at the mall the next morning, she reminded me to be careful, and meet Frank at the main exit at 1:00 as arranged. This feat had taken some real negotiation because Frank and Jack, my oldest brother, played on a softball league and had practice on Saturday afternoon. I promised to unload the dishwasher for him for a week if he could pick me up before practice. Leaning over, my mom gave me a peck on the cheek, and handed me a dime to put in my pocket in case I needed to call home from the payphone.

"I'll be fine." I smiled at her and jumped out of the Buick.

Heading into the mall I scanned the faces all around me, not afraid anymore. I was nervous though, nervous that I would not see the black boy. I wanted to walk right up to him and ask him his name, tell him mine and ask where he lived. I wanted to know what he liked to do; had he been in the bookstore that day because he loved to read, just like me.

I was getting frustrated, I had looked in the bookstore first, but no one was there except an old lady at the cashier stand asking for help. I made up my mind, if I didn't find the boy in the next hour, I would just call home early and ask if Frank could pick me up. I was losing my nerve. Just about to give up and head to the bank of pay phones, I spotted him. He was sitting on the edge of the fountain; today he was wearing a grey hooded sweatshirt. As I approached, he didn't notice me in the crowd, at least not right away. I could already feel the mist from the fountain on my face when he did spot me; he looked scared. I walked right toward him, and smiled.

I sat down on the edge of the fountain, about two feet of pebbly tile between us. "Hi, I'm Diana" my voice was shaking, "what's your name?" The boy turned his head towards me; his hands braced against the tile edge, arms rigid, like he was ready to launch. His expression was hard to explain, surprise, anxiety with a little bit of curiosity mixed in. Several beats, nothing happened - it felt like hours.

"James"

"Hi James." one corner of his full lips turned up.

"Hi Diana." We sat in awkward silence for several minutes, looking everywhere, but at each other, I nervously started snapping and unsnapping the flap on my purse.

"So, do you live around here?"

up and rubbed a spot over his left eyebrow, "Um, listen, I'm real sorry I scared you the other day" his voice trailed off as he looked at his sneakers.

"It's okay" He turned to face me, "but I don't think you should try that particular stunt again". For a second he just looked at me, and then started laughing. It was nervous laughter, but it had broken the tension and I started giggling too.

When we finally stopped laughing, I realized my back was beginning to feel damp from the mist, so I said, "Do you want to walk down to Kresge with me to get a coke?"

"Yeah, sure!" I didn't look right at him, but I could hear the smile in his voice. It was a little awkward walking toward Kresge, as if neither of us knew how fast to walk or if we should lead or follow. When we entered the cafeteria, James looked around, like he wasn't sure what to do. I figured out then that he had never been in here before. I walked up to the counter, pulled an amber plastic cup from the rack and filled it with crushed ice and coke from the dispenser. After a beat he did the same, I noticed him eyeing the cellophane wrapped sandwiches and desserts packed in beds of ice along the counter, "Do you want to get something to eat too?"

"Naw, I'm not hungry." That I did not believe; he looked like he could eat for a week and not gain an ounce, just like my brothers. When we reached the skinny girl in the ugly Kresge smock operating the register I opened my purse, but he reached in front of me and handed the girl a dollar.

"That's okay, I can get my own."

"Naw, not today."

"Thanks" I said, shyly as the girl handed him some coins. I took my cup and walked to a table at the edge of the room. There are big openings along two sides of the cafeteria to look into the store and the front is glassed in so you can look out on to the main concourse of the mall - the same one I had made my mad dash down the previous week. James slid into the booth across from me and set his cup on the green tabletop. Suddenly I was unsure what to do or say, so I took a sip of my coke, looking sideways at the concourse. James picked up his cup and took a sip too. Okay, this was getting stupid.

"Um, so, if you don't live near here, why are you here so much?" I traced the damp ring of moisture left by my cup on the table with my finger.

"My Mama works here." His 'Mama', that is exactly what he said. I used to call my mom, Muma when I was a lot younger and sometimes still slipped and said Daddy, but he didn't seem to think that it sounded babyish calling his mother 'Mama'

"Oh, which store?" James looked uncomfortable, maybe he thought I was going to go tell on him, so I hastily added, "You don't have to say."

"Naw, it's ok, she's a janitor. She has another job" he sat up straighter, "during the week. She just works here on the weekends, for extra."

For a second I was not sure what to say. My mom didn't even have to work one job and here was this lady, working two and cleaning up after people she didn't know on top of it. "Well, that must be good, to have extra money." I trailed off lamely.

James gave a little laugh; it sounded more like a snort, "Not extra money, just extra work. She is saving up because she wants me to go to college."

"Wow that is great!" I really meant it, I plan to go to college too, but I just took for granted that when that day came, I would pick a school and go, like my sister Beth had. I didn't think about where the money would come from or even if it cost anything. "What do you want to study?"

James seemed grateful for my response and smiled, "I'm not sure yet, but I really like math." I must have made a face because he laughed and continued, "No, really, it's fun."

"Okay, now I know you are pulling my leg! Math! Fun?"

"Yeah, it is, it's like a puzzle. I like science too."

"Now I know we can't be friends." I shook my head. James just stared at me for a minute.

"You want to be friends?"

I looked at him silently and nodded. "Yeah, I do."

James and I sat at the table in Kresge talking for a long time. He told me that he had been in the bookstore last week because just like me he loves to read. He cannot afford to buy the books, so he hides in the back hoping the clerks don't catch him. I learned that he takes a bus from where he lives in Detroit every Saturday morning with his mom; she refuses to leave him home because she says there is too much mischief a boy of James age can get into. He said she told him she isn't working two jobs saving for him to go to college, just for him to up and join a gang.

I was waiting at the mall exit as promised when Frank pulled up in the ugly, two-toned green, used Chevy pick-up truck he got for his seventeenth birthday present. I could see his curly blonde head through the windshield. I hopped in and slammed the door hard - you had to or it flew open when you went around corners.

"Hi Twern" Frank smiled over at me as he threw the truck

into gear.

"Hi. Thanks for picking me up."

"Did you get what you needed?"

I looked down at the bookstore bag I had set in my lap and nodded, "Yep."

James and I have remained close throughout the years we even tried dating for a while when we were both in college, but we made better friends than lovers. He is a chemical engineer with a beautiful wife, daughter and home in a Chicago suburb. His Mama resides in comfort with them after all the years of saving for the day her son would go to college. I have two sons of my own and a career I love, but when I look back, I know that the day the black boy whispered in my ear was one of the most important of my life.



Walking Life

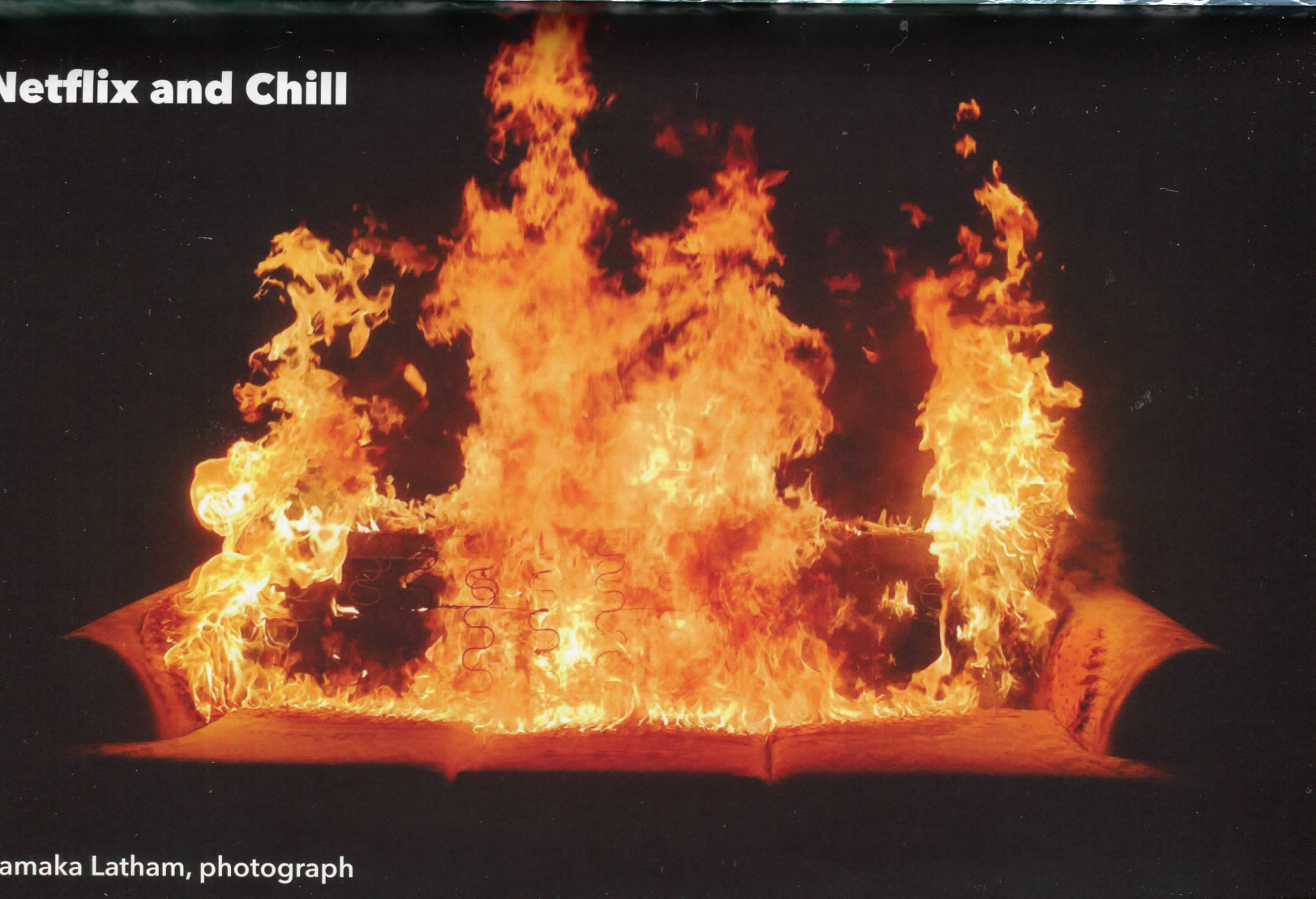
amaka Latham, Digital Art

Abyss



Andreea Vasile, photograph

Netflix and Chill



Amaka Latham, photograph

Touching the Heavens

Nicolas Paul, photograph

The Path

Andrew Keiltyka, photograph

Aviator



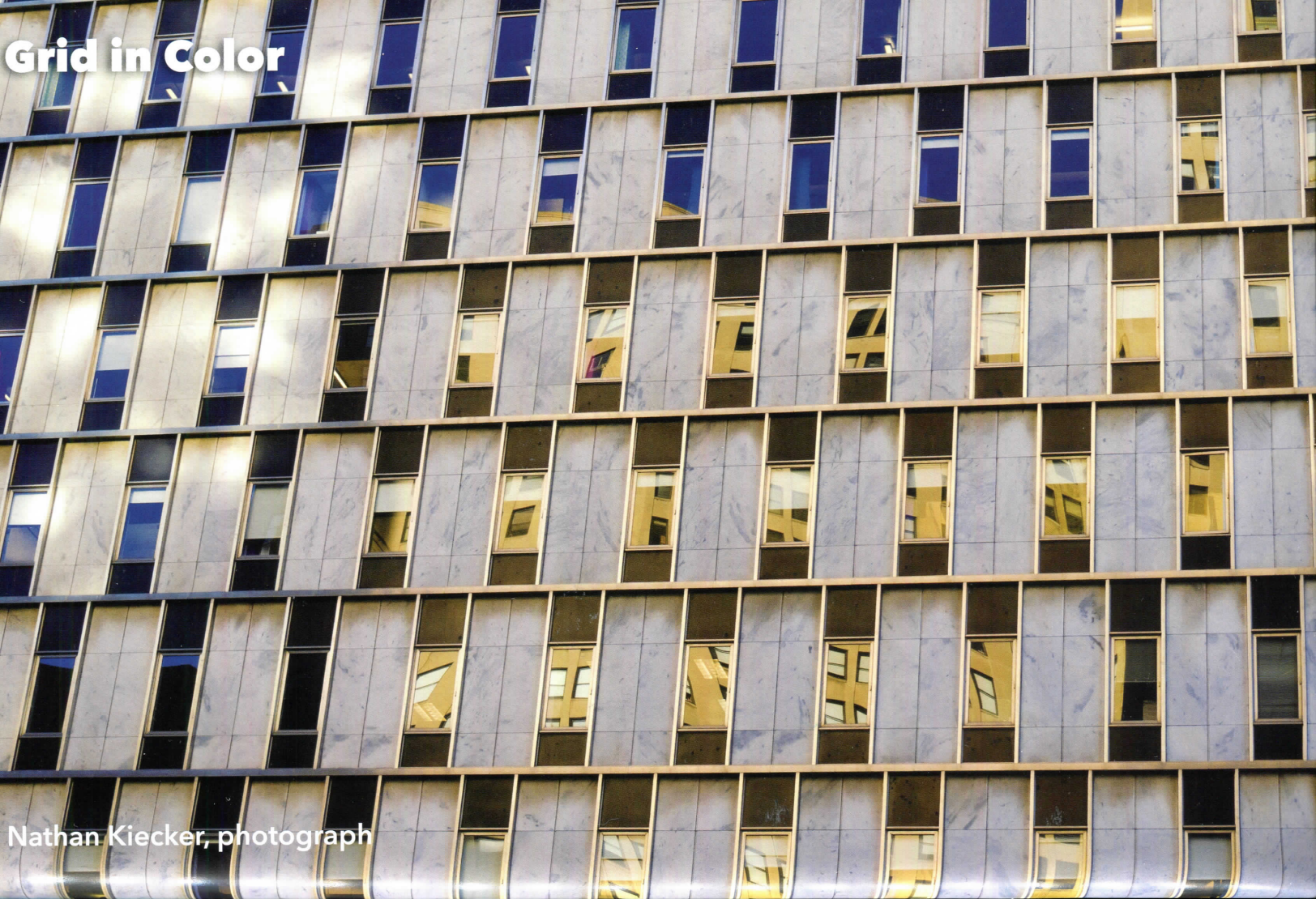
Rachel Seeger, Illustration

Shifted Perspective



Andrea Vasile, photograph

Grid in Color



Nathan Kiecker, photograph

A Sandy Toad



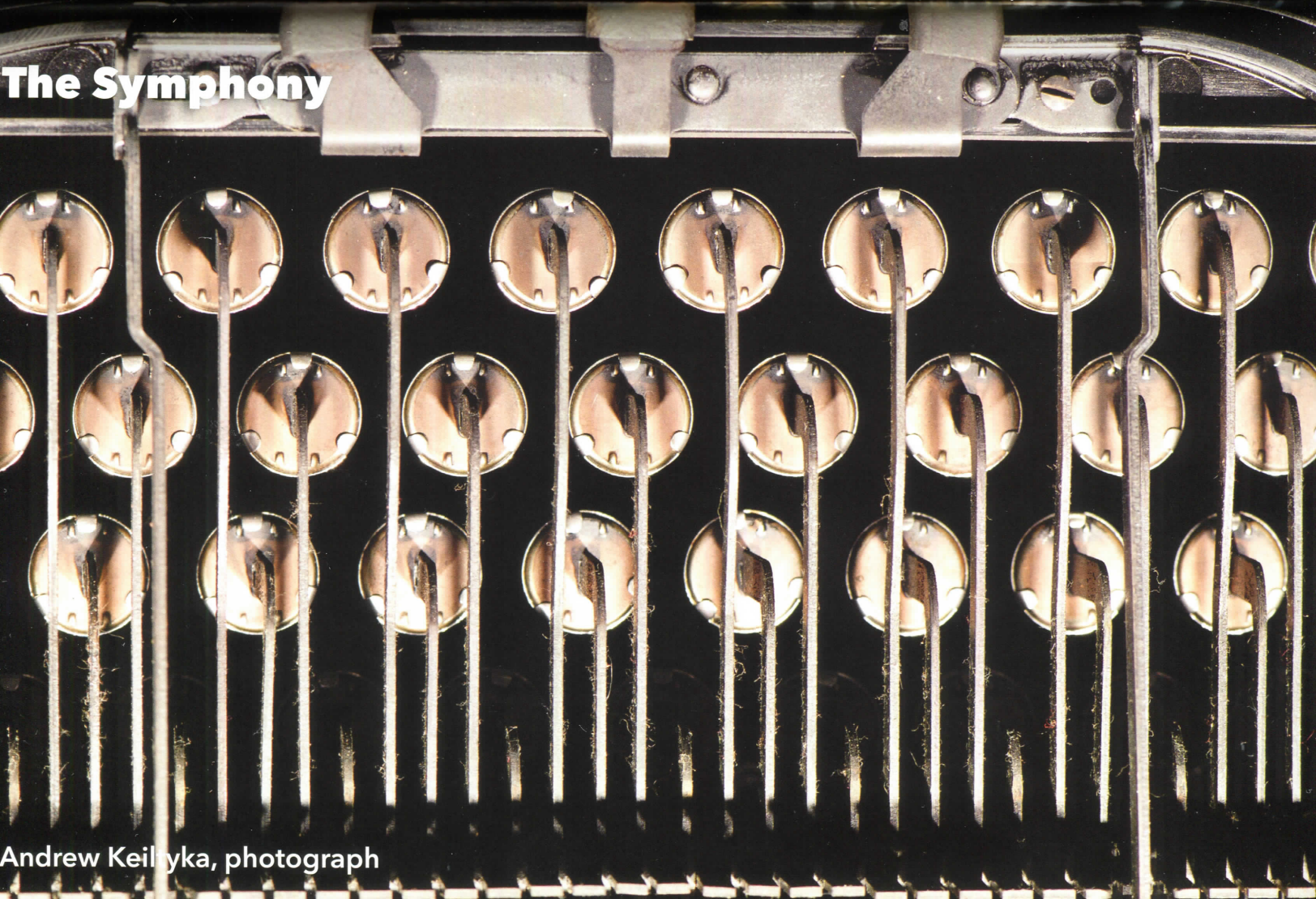
Nicolas Paul, photograph

Up



Andrea Vasile, photograph

The Symphony



Andrew Keilyka, photograph

Illuminate



Amanda Sweet, photograph

Not the Colosseum



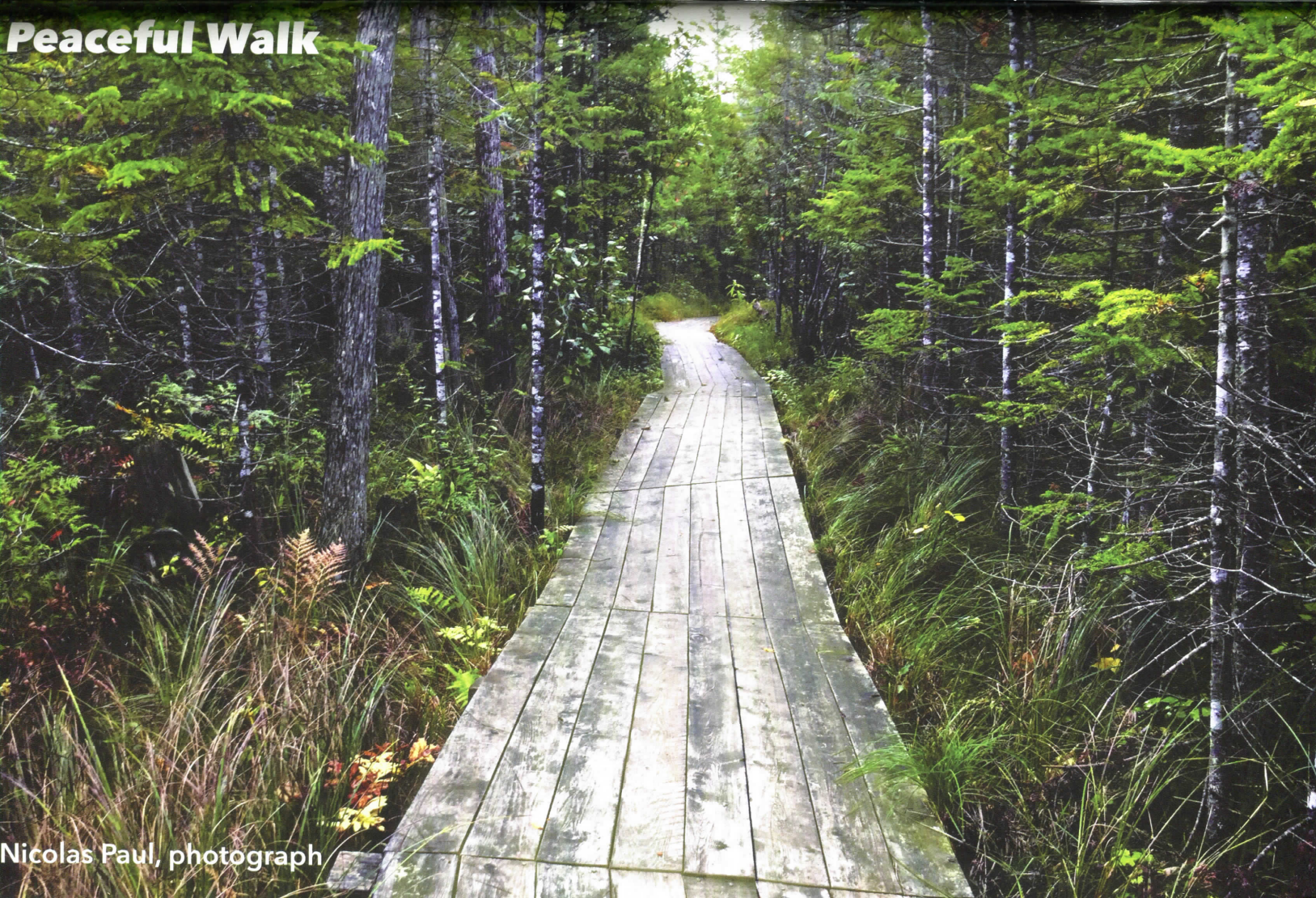
Andreea Vasile, photograph

Centaur Samurai

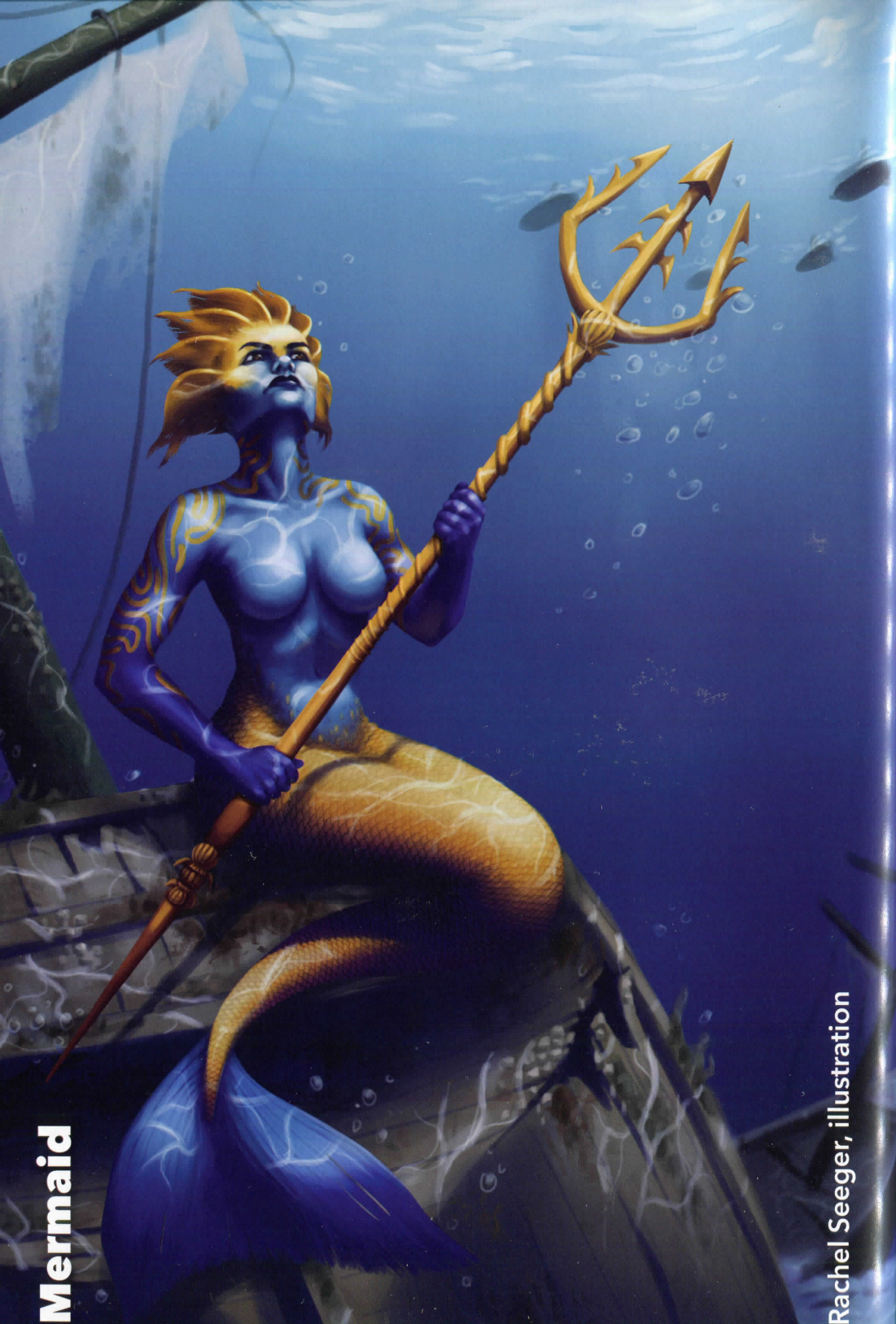


Rachel Seeger, illustration

Peaceful Walk



Nicolas Paul, photograph



Rachel Seeger, illustration

Time

Silent tears streamed down my face, escaping from my tear ducts one by one as if playing follow the leader. My eyes wouldn't seem to focus on anything, so I just stared at my watch until I could read what the hands said, 2:22 AM. I tried to wipe the tears away, furiously trying to regain composure, and regained my focus back on Pa.

"I'm sorry, what?" I asked.

"She's gone," he repeated, raking a shaking hand through his long grey hair, "Just now."

A keening scream filled the narrow corridor as a small figure dropped to the ground next to me, and I lunged to grab the falling form before she met the floor.

"Jo, I got you," I said grimacing as I enveloped my younger sister into my arms, my knees thudding into the cold tile as they made impact.

I welcomed the coldness, it mirrored the emptiness that I felt welling inside my body.

My mother was dead.

It seemed forever ago that we got the news, and it was. Two years almost the day, I had finished a day's work out on the farm around 7:30, and was retreating back into our white plantation home, breathing in the crisp North Carolina air.

I dropped my boots on the bottom step of our wrap around porch, they thudded loudly against the step and an array of manure and hay that had been matted into the treads of my boots flew out, dirtying the white wood. I padded up the steps in my wool socks, rigorously wiping my dirty hands onto the legs of my overalls.

"Great," I murmured, as blood started to intermingle into the mud on the jean. My blisters had opened. Carefully grasping the doorknob, I pulled the screen door open with a screech and bellowed, "Home!"

"Asher, that you?" a deep tenured voice responded from the living room to my left.

I walked through the foyer towards the voice, rounding the corner to see which one of my siblings was perched in there today. The sight of my eldest brother greeted me as I fully entered the room.

"Hey bro," said Aidan, a smile enveloping his deeply tanned face. The crinkles in his eyes framed his wolf-like silver eyes, ones that we both shared.

He was perched on our worn moss green couch, a notepad in hand. He had a prosthetic leg, and it was propped up on a pillow out in front of him. I nodded in response to

his acknowledgment with an exhausted smile, and leaned up against the warm wooden frame of the door. I was careful that my pants were not making contact with any portion of the wood, Ma would kill me if I got mud and dirt stains in here.

"Long day out there huh?" He asked.

"Are they ever short?"

"For me, always. For you, no."

"Well then there's your answer," I laughed.

"You barely work Ash. Once a month is hardly much. Especially when you are trying to outwork a cripple." He chuckled as he tucked the pad under his arm, gestured to his bum leg and hoisted himself out of the chair as he continued, "Don't worry Maggie Valley's good ol' Ghost Town will reopen soon, and you'll have your amusement ride attendant job back. Then in the Fall you'll be off to Duke. After which you'll turn into one of those hipster city-kids who doesn't come home very often and always has a book up his ass."

"Hey now, Aid." I said laughing, "Play nice. You know very well that's my dream, don't make fun of it. I don't make fun of yours... to stay here and die a farmer."

"Ohhh okay now, that's how it is going to be." Aid scoffed, in mock offense.

"But seriously Aid, how can you just resign yourself to a life in Maggie Valley forever?"

"I'm happy here Ash. I have Isabelle, I have the responsibility to our family, and I have a particular affiniton for farming. It just all works out."

"Well it's suffocating to me," I replied, resting my head against the wood. "Besides I wouldn't want to get in an accident like you and lose my leg eh?"

"Woah attacking my life a lot tonight aren't cha?" Aid laughed heartily, but drew his eyebrows close together in a frown. Then with a roll of his eyes, clearly deciding to let it go for now. "You're lucky I have a good sense of humor."

I flashed him a wry smile, and ran my hand through my short black hair, head still against the door frame. My eyes were threatening to close on me. I had to get to bed soon or get some coffee. Either one. I shook myself out of the encroaching haze, and turned on my heel back towards the front of the house.

"I'll grab a bite after I clean up," I said over my shoulder as I started my trek up the stairs to my room.

"Whatever," Aid replied distantly as I bounded up the steps, trying to avoid the books that silently were encroaching their way across the tread stack by stack. I smiled at the sight

bookcases for all of my books and was constantly getting more, so my Grandpop gave me the brilliant idea to just start stacking them on the stairs. He claimed, "The stairs had nothing else better to do." So I did, and they have been there ever since amassing more and more every year. It drove Ma mad.

I rounded the top of the staircase, turning left and left again. The familiar shape of the large bookcase silhouetted in the moonlight greeted me. I ran my fingers absentmindedly down the row of books as I crossed the room to my small drawers, my favorites Moby Dick, Heart of Darkness, and Les Miserables all greeted my fingertips with a loving sense of familiarity. I grabbed my usual grey sweater, jeans and wool socks from the depths of the chest, then leaned over to grab my Grandpop's silver watch off the nightstand, and hurried over to my adjoining bathroom. I showered quickly, and found myself bounding back down the stairs. My small leather journal in hand.

The silence of the kitchen hit me twenty steps into my small trek across the living room. I stopped in my tracks. I sniffed the air, welcoming the musky antique smell that most of our home consisted of, into my nostrils. It was completely void of the typical aromas of baking bread, or freshly chopped vegetables. Concern slightly raised the small hairs on the nape of my neck, and I resumed my walk into the kitchen with more haste. Rounding the corner, I saw Aiden now sitting at the worn oak table scribbling into his pad still.

"Where is everyone, and what are you doing?" I asked, Aiden rarely wrote anything down and it was extra weird to see him still scribbling away.

"Jo's in the barn, she said something about a new baby chick. So saving the world per usual. Elliott is home catching up on TV, William is God knows where," he glanced up at Ash to roll his eyes as he used his fingers to count off the rest of the Burroughs family, "Tom is at the bar... And I'm just writing out the guest list for Isabelle and my wedding," Aiden briefly paused with a smile, then continued, "Oh and Pa took Ma to the emergency room, she had a bad headache today."

"A headache again?"

"Yup." He shrugged, his eyes went back to staring at whosever name he had just scratched off the guest list.

Ash's brows furrowed. Ma had been having them a lot lately, "Maggie Valley's clinic or Mercy West?" I asked.

"Maggie Valley. Didn't want to leave town."

"Oh." I said, trailing off as I grabbed an apple off of the

The sweetness filled my mouth, but soured quickly as my stomach started churning. It was the same guttural reaction I had when Grandpop started to get sick. This realization made me even sicker. I didn't want to go through another sickness like that again. Well I couldn't really. Nothing I could ever encounter for the rest of my life would even get close to that pain. That loss. Even Ma, especially involving Ma, I knew it definitely wouldn't be that bad.

Just then, we heard the back door into the kitchen opened and in walked Pa. I instinctively glanced down at my watch, 10:32 PM, I wondered how long they had been at the hospital. When I looked back up at him, I noticed how far away his eyes seemed to be. They were looking directly in Aidan's direction, but were so unfocused they seemed to shift everywhere and nowhere at the same time.

"Pa, what is it?" Aidan ventured.

"They aren't positive." Pa responded, taking another step into the kitchen. The back door, slamming harshly shut, making me flinch.

"Positive about what?" I asked.

"Positive. Positive about it being a tumor..." Pa trailed off, reaching out a hand to steady himself against the wall for a long moment and then continued, "But they think it is. Brain cancer. Your Ma has brain cancer."

Now, the beginning of her two-year fight against cancer seemed like a dream away. I glanced down at my watch, 2:25 AM, as an Earth shattering relief coursed through my veins. I must be some kind of monster for feeling this way.

I was supposed to be genuinely sobbing like Jo was. I was supposed to feel like my world had just dropped out from beneath my feet. But I didn't feel or do any of those things. I was simply overcome with a pure, sweet waves of liberation.

Don't get me wrong, I loved my Ma. But we had both resented each other for so long, I could finally let it go. To be honest, I was actually shocked that tears were even still steadily running slowly down my cheeks, I didn't even think I had tear ducts left to emit anything after the copious amounts I had cried when Grandpop died. But yet, here they were.

Jo pulling out of my arms brought me out of my reverie and I wiped my face vigorously trying to eradicate the salt lined streaks.

"It's going to be okay," I told her, my voice gravely with sadness that I knew I wasn't actually feeling.

I surveyed the scene around Jo. Aidan was standing off to one side of Pa, holding my youngest brother William to his

chest. His fiancé, looking downcast standing next to him with a supportive hand on his back. Aid wasn't crying as far as I could tell, but was staring at the ground rather intently. Elliott was standing in the corner of the door frame, staring into the hospital room. I couldn't see his face, but his lean shoulders shook with silent sobs. Tom was nowhere to be found.

"Pa, ca-can we go see her?" Jo asked, wiping her tears on the sleeves of her shirt trying to compose herself.

Her broken voice brought Pa out of whatever place he had withdrawn into, and he nodded. We all followed him into Ma's room. A nurse and doctor greeted us at the door, ushering us in with solemn faces and whispered words of sympathy.

I walked into the patient room, and instantly all I could see was Ma's red hair, painfully contrasting the sterile white surroundings of where she lay. Jo let out another whimper, this one resembling the defeated tone of an animal just before it dies. It was the soundtrack to my tunnel vision accompanying the sight of my mom's red hair. All I could see was the red.

She had such beautiful vixen red hair, and the memory of when it started to dull blasted into my mind. I could remember it vividly. It was also the day I started driving her to the hospital. I had been lying on my bed, staring up in the ceiling, trying to memorize all of the character's names from Tolstoy's War and Peace for my community college's Russian Literature final exam, when my Ma peaked her head into the room.

Her eyes had been red and puffy, her hair matted down on one side as if she had just arose from a nap. I glanced at my watch, 1:11 PM, early afternoon. She looked so much thinner than she did last week, the cancer was starting to get to her. Her red hair was once so vibrant it rivaled a sunset, now I realized with a jolt that it was starting to resemble the dull color of a brick. Her pale skin practically glowed in the sunlight, revealing her protruding bones and shallow face. I couldn't even imagine what this chemo was about to do to her if she was already this gaunt. Her voice had a quiver to it when she said, "Ash, could you drive me to Mercy West?"

My eyes narrowed slightly, giving only the slightest sign of irritation and I relented. She disappeared with the ghost of a smile etched on her face. I grabbed my keys from atop of my wooden dresser, and my small notebook. If I was going to sit in the hospital for a while, I at least needed something to do. I slowly traversed the perilous bookshelf staircase and saw my mother leaning up against the front door waiting for me. I passed in front of her, flinging open the door and we both crossed the mossy green yard over to my black Wrangler.

The first ten or fifteen minutes of the drive were dead silent until Ma burst out, "How has class been?"

Clearly she too was uncomfortable with the silence. My eyebrows rose high on my face in response, she never showed interest in my school, and I replied, "Pretty good." It was great actually. She didn't need to know that.

"That's good Ash. I'm glad ya are finding something ya actually enjoy."

"Umm yeah I guess so."

"Grandpop would be very proud of you."

To this I whipped my head sideways to stare at her, my mouth agape. "Grandpop? Seriously?" You're bringing him up now?"

She looked aghast at my outburst, "He was my father, I have the right to say he would have been proud."

"You hated him," I retorted.

"I did not. We just didn't have the best relationship."

"Well no need to resent me for that. You let him down all on your own." I muttered.

I glanced over to see her face, wondering if she had actually heard my comment. Her grey eyes were wide, panged with guilt.

"That's something that I have to work on. I realize that. I made mistakes," Her tone hardened as she continued, "But you don't have to resent me from keeping you away from Duke. From following in your Grandfather's footsteps of being a Lit professor. No one demanded that you stay home. No one made you decline Duke's offer. That was entirely on you."

"You don't get it then do you," I said as I scrunched my face together with anger, the sharpness and intensity of my tone came crashing out full force. "I had to give those things up. I had to sacrifice for you. How were we supposed to pay for all of this without my help?"

"We could have managed."

"Really you could have? With Tom drinking and gambling away our life savings every weekend? With Jo wanting to go get her Veterinarian Degree? With Elliott literally doing nothing to contribute besides giving you his petty Post wages? Or with Aiden's bum leg? How exactly would you plan on supporting all of that? Huh? Pa would have to work even more hours than he already does, which is probably starting to kill him too at his age." I retorted with great anguish, "But oh no, wait till now to tell me that you had this all figured out. You could have done that ages ago. I could have been miles away from here, and not sitting in this car with you wasting my time. Believe it or not, I don't thoroughly enjoy watching you wither away and die!"

Ma's entire face dropped into shock, and I stared back at her also in shock with what I had just told her. I never used to be like this: angry, out bursting, and mean. This isn't who I am. That me left when I gave up everything important to me, and she truly had no idea. Her expression then transitioned into one of sadness and fear. I realized she was trying to make amends, trying to understand me and deeply saddened that this was how I was going to react. I basically just confirmed that she was going to die, she was just buying time. The resigned look on her face confirmed that she already knew that she was. I didn't know what to say, so I didn't respond.

The rest of the forty-minute drive dragged on, and I was gasping for a sense of comfort once we got to the hospital. We continued like this for the past 2 years. Her guiltily staring at me, pretending to care about my passions, and me being at a loss for words.

It was now 2:30 AM and my Ma had been dead for eight minutes, five of which have consisted of me staring at her prone body lying in the hospital bed. Five of which also consisted of my sister's wailing form over her mother's body. I hadn't moved an inch. Hadn't cried one more tear. Just stood there at the end of her bed watching.

"When are we going to have the funeral?" Aiden whispered to my Pa, drawing me out of my reverie.

Pa, sitting at the end of the hospital bed, holding onto Will, looked up at Aiden, "In a few days or so." His eyes trailed back downward towards Ma, his grip visibly tightening on Williams shoulders.

"We need to contact the rest of the family," Aiden replied, already digging out his phone as if he was going to call all of them at this very moment.

I placed my hand on his arm, dragging the phone away.

"We can do that later, there are too many people to contact anyway."

"But shouldn't her siblings know?"

"She hasn't talked to em in years," I replied with a slight hint of bitterness to my voice.

"Ash, let's not do this now. Of all times," Aiden scolded me, giving me a severe look.

I sighed, knowing he was right. My Ma hadn't spoken to any of them since the night Grandpop died. She never fully revealed why she didn't get along with him, nor did he. But somehow it affected the rest of the siblings too. I never wanted to know really, all that mattered now was that most of her family don't know she is dead. I doubt they ever even knew she was even sick.

"It's late," Pa said casting a look between Aid and I that told us that conversation was definitely over, "We need to say our goodbyes. Much to do tomorrow, and we will need our strength."

We all nodded solemnly in response. Jo was the first to go, her small frame nearly enveloped the entire upper half of Ma as she leaned over her to give her forehead a gentle kiss.

"Night Mama," she said. "I love you." Straightening herself up, she slid off of the hospital bed, took Isabelle's hand and proceeded out of the room.

Not wanting to be in that room any longer, I walked over to her body. I touched her hand gently, said a silent prayer to God for her safe passage, murmured "I love you." Then walked out of the room. I was still feeling a profound sense of liberation, but I knew I had to at least tell her that I loved her. She was still my Ma. No matter our history.

I rounded the last bend of our long driveway, finally home from the hospital, and parked my car in the usual spot over by my namesake ash tree grove. All of the lights were on in my house, even though I was pretty positive that I was the very first one to make it back. We must have forgotten to turn them off in our haste to get to the hospital earlier. We had practiced for weeks' drills of getting to the hospital if anything were to happen, like expectant mothers do before they go into labor, apparently we forgot to assign someone to turn off the lights. I laughed to myself, what a funny thing to do when in the end it didn't even make a difference.

I made my way up the porch steps, glancing down at my watch, 3:15. Though I knew I was going to be so tired in the morning, right now I felt wide awake. Trudging through the front door, I made my way up the steps to my bedroom. Once there, I grabbed my notebook off of my nightstand and plopped myself down on my bed. I felt the insatiable need to write. So I did for a little while. I wrote about the utter sense of release I felt, I wrote about how much of a monster that must make me, I wrote about the alienation I felt. I had to get it all out.

A half an hour later or so, I heard the sound of multiple car doors slamming shut. I closed my notebook gently, and placed it in my back pocket of my jeans. I then slid off the bed, I deciding to go check in on the family. Descending the steps, I almost run straight into Jo's form as she barreled up them, tears permanently staining her cheeks as she sent books flying everywhere until she summited the stairs, and whipped into her room.

"Alrighty then," I said, leaning down to push my novels

back into their "neat" stacks on both ends of the stair.

"Give her a break Ash," Elliott said from the bottom of the staircase. I looked up in astonishment. Elliott rarely came home. But there he was, standing there with a look of slight amusement. Red hair blending in with his red blotchy face, probably from crying. He was a spitting image of Ma and it was really hard to look at him given current events. Especially when he was trying to reprimand me.

"Nice of you to come home for once," I retorted.

Elliott sent a forced smile at me, then turned on his heel and walked towards the kitchen. I begrudgingly followed, knowing that was where the rest of my family probably were residing.

Walking into the kitchen, I was greeted to the sight of my Pa, Aidan, and Elliott. Isabelle must have gone home, William to bed, and Tom infuriatingly was still nowhere to be found.

Aiden, standing by the sink looked up first to see me walk in. "Hey how'd you get home so fast?"

I shrugged, "Sped I guess. Either that or yall are just really slow."

"Hmm," Aiden said, eyeing me warily with his steely eyes.

"Did you get everything taken care of Pa?" I asked, changing the subject.

Pa's head snapped up to look at me when he realized I was addressing him. "Yeah. Yeah we did. Aiden helped. Embalming her body now. Funeral two days." He then put his hands up to his face, and rested his head back on them. He looked exhausted.

"Good. Good," I mumbled. Honestly I didn't care too much about everything getting taken care of, I just wanted Pa to feel like he had things to do to keep busy. Aiden pulled away from the sink, and gestured towards Elliott and I to move over to him.

"You know what this means Ash, don't you?" Aidan whispered.

"What?" I said, my eyebrows creasing together.

"We'll need to work even harder on the farm. Elliott you too. Pa is in no state to work."

Elliott nodded, "I can get work off from the Post. I barely do anything over there anyway."

I must have made a pretty disgusted face, because Aid flinched when he looked over to look at me.

"Ash," he said raising his hands slightly, "It's not going to be that much more. And probably just for another few months or year or so."

"Another year of never leaving this place?" I sputtered out. I knew I had resounded myself to sticking around while Ma

was still really sick. But now? Now I had basically no reason to.

"Just till Pa gets back on his feet." Aid said, taken a back. He kept glancing across the room to make sure Pa wasn't listening.

"No, no I don't think so." I said, my voice starting to rise. "Now is the time I can finally leave. I can start school in the Fall. I can finally leave."

"Ash, you clearly aren't thinking straight," Elliott cut in.

"I'm thinking perfectly straight," I yelled back.

Pa was now staring at us, confusion clouding his face.

"You're tired. It's late. You're emotional. Just calm down."

Aiden said, he took a step forward and tried to place his arms on my shoulders."

I snapped.

"I am tired of you guys not listening to me! I am thinking straight. Crystal clear actually. And I know for a fact that I am not spending one more wretched day out in those fields, and for the record I am doing fine. Just fine. Don't I look fine?"

They all looked at me with a shock dancing upon their faces, shock and in Pa's case a mixture paired with hurt. I didn't want to hurt him, but I was so sick of lying. Of succumbing to everyone's expectations of me. I know it's selfish, but I finally felt like I deserved to think that way.

"How can you be fine Ash? Ma just died. You can't just accept that in a drop of a hat. By claiming you are fine, it tells me exactly that you aren't," Aid said incredulously.

I was genuinely taken aback, why couldn't he believe that I was alright? He knew my history with Ma, saw it firsthand. He knew what I had I had given up, "What do you want me to tell you Aid? That I'm going to sob myself to sleep tonight? That I'm going to wake up later today and not feel that much unburdened by this? Because I am! I am going to wake up and feel way better tomorrow morning. Does that make me a monster? It might. But I don't care. I have to move on from this. I have to. And you know what? Everything is going to be alright. Everything. I'm going to get out of this freaking town and finally go to Duke and never ever come back! So yes, everything is just peachy keen." I finished my monologue gasping for air as I felt something begin to crack inside of me. Comprehension hitting me like a ton of bricks.

Ma was really gone.

I staggered a step back, nearly collapsing into one of our china cabinets. I reached a hand to steady myself against one of the wooden chairs in a moment of desperation before I felt my legs completely give way underneath me. Pa, Aid, and Elliott all lurched forward to try to catch me before I collided

with the wooden floor. Elliott was closest to me, and was still too slow in his fumbling form to grab me before I slammed violently into the ground.

I didn't feel the pain. It was like one of those out-of-body experiences where you are feeling so many emotions that they just explode out of you like a volcano, rendering you only able to process one thing at a time. For me that was confusion.

Aid's face was a blur in front of me, trying to pull me up and find out I was okay, but all I could focus on was my train of thoughts that were derailing before my very eyes. I had felt such an overwhelming relief before, why was this happening now? In front of everyone. Ma and I weren't close; I could count on my fingers how many good childhood memories we had together. She had been my captor, barring me from everything. She kept me prisoner in this town, and now she was gone. I could get out. Realization dawned on my face, she had given me my freedom.

Somehow, I got to my feet, avoiding my family's desperate efforts to grab me and I flung myself into the living room.

"Don't follow me," I yelled as I whipped myself around to confront Aid and Pa as they tried to see where I was going. "Just leave me alone."

They abruptly stopped in their tracks in response to my outburst, and continued to stare at me with utter disbelief. Turning away from them, I raced upstairs to my room. The "flight" feeling was all encompassing. I needed to get out of there, I didn't even need to know where. I just needed to go.

As I turned into my room, I was greeted by Jo sitting on my bed. She gasped, her eyes instantly wetting with tears and shock, as she took in my crazed face. My hair was ruffled everywhere, my face blotchy red, and eyes erratic.

"Ash! What happened? Are you okay?" She barraged me with questions, barely pausing between them.

I ignored her as I grasped under my bed for my trunk, opened it, and ripped all of the vinyl albums out of it. Martin, Armstrong, Elvis and Sinatra littered the floor, cluttering up my once pristine room. Jo's voice was still ringing in the air as she still attacked me with questions. But they abruptly stopped as soon as I violently pulled out my drawers and dumped out the few clothes that I had into the trunk. Then went in the books. Herman Melville, Thomas Hardy, Victor Hugo, and Joseph Conrad thudded harshly against the bottom of the trunk as I threw my favorites inside. Once content with the capsule's contents, I slammed it shut and locked it.

My aggressive nature must have really been terrifying. I

used to really never be like this, because when I looked up looked up at Jo she had more tears rushing down her face, and over her hands as they clamped over her mouth. I crouched down in front of her and gathered her hands into mine. Finally, a moment of clarity descended upon the scene like divine intervention.

"Jo, I need to go."

Confusion wracked her face, her eyes growing even wider and her grip on my hands ten folded.

"How can you go? Ma just died," she stammered out. "Where are you going?"

"Away. I don't know. Somewhere. I can't stay here anymore. It's time to go."

"It's because of Ma's death isn't it?" she asked, touching my face.

"Somewhat," I responded, cringing at her worried touch, "It has to do with a lot of things, but I just can't handle being here anymore. I finally need to just go. It's time."

She looked up at me and nodded solemnly, as if she understood. Against all odds. She understood. Overwhelmed by the sense of acceptance, I pulled her to me and leaned my forehead against hers. Relief once again flowing through me.

"Grab your things," I finally said, "We leave in two minutes."

Jo only had a brief look of confusion, before she tore out of my arms and ran into her room adjacent to mine. I grabbed a piece of paper off of my desk. I had to formally explain to my Pa what I was about to do, he didn't deserve to be left with the scene from the kitchen. Especially since I was taking Jo with me.

I couldn't leave her behind when she was all I really had left. Sure Aid and I were usually on decent terms, but she truly was the only one who ever really understood. Plus, I couldn't leave her somewhere where I knew she would never be able to actually become a Vet. I knew Maggie Valley would suffocate her just as much as it did me. I wanted to give her the world. The pen scraped against the paper as I explained as much, signed it and I dropped it on my pillow.

Jo greeted me in the hallway, carrying a small suitcase, and had a look of blazing determination on her face. Taking her hand, we descended the stairs. The luggage banged against the walls and into the stacks of books, some of them fell down the staircase with loud bangs. I quickened my pace at the thought of being caught and strode towards my Rambler. I have expected to see Pa or Aid standing outside, anticipating my next move, but they were nowhere to be found. I promised myself that I would reach out to them once I had settled

down, let them know I was okay. Throwing down the trunk and suitcase into the back, I gestured for Jo to get in. She had her back to me, and I could tell she was slowly surveying her childhood home. A pang of regret and guilt ran through me, but I knew this was the right decision for her too. Selfish or not.

"Jo, we really need to go now. We don't have time for this. Let's go."

She turned towards me and nodded solemnly, then climbed into the passenger seat. I slide in after I heard her door safely click shut and I turned the engine on. The car came to life with a small roar, and I desperately hoped everyone in my family were too exhausted to wake to the sound of the roar. But as the car got halfway down the winding drive, I saw a flash of white light. I slammed on my brakes, my head slamming into the head rest behind me and I made eye-contact with... nothing. And everything. I had finally breached that seemingly impenetrable force that had been blocking me for so long. I sat there, staring out into the dark night frozen in place and knew I was finally free.

"Ash?" Jo prodded, "Why'd ya stop? There's nothing there."

"I know I know," I said, shaking myself out of it as my eyes focused on the silver watch still embellishing my wrist, the time read 4:25, "Sorry." And I propelled the car down the road.

The Big (Black) Apple

Samaka Latham, photograph

Earthenware

sweet thing of fire
breathe,
you are a barn burned, the
smell of hay in the summer,
you, lion, uncaged and golden in the sun-
set on the hill, you are grass sway amongst
young lovers, with fingers entwined and
the soft sound of their breath is
red wine, fresh picked you
are festivals gone and
past
you / of hard eyes
and soft heart
your hands pull the strings
out of silent violins

Carissa Vadella

The Game Studio

Artists hunch over pages of designs,
minds focused on correcting harsh critiques of their work.
Programmers scattered around the room,
typing at a rhythm, creating complex code with their
keyboards,
thoughts adrift in logic, sailors at the helm.

We respect one another as equals, in sync,
each with different talents, but with the same goal,
searching for perfect creations,
lost in our work, anticipating the results
through the haze of what we dream to become,
and the sleep we need fades away to nights
of tight unexpected deadlines, the unfair, hated curse.

Strangers' faces peak through the window as they walk past,
wondering what new games are being made,
without realizing the hectic paradise that lives within.
Oblivious to the effort and care that is being poured
into their entertainment, they walk on.

Arcana

I am not a fool
believing in magic
and sacred maidens.

The great queen guides me
to emperors' land,
where the popes take rest.

My love for all things
carries me through them,
justifies my life.

A hermit of faith
moved by fortune and pain,
strengthened by solace.

Other men lay hanged,
brought death on themselves,
lacking temperance.

The devil tricked them:
Towers of ego
to worship the stars.

Who placed the moon on the sky?
Who placed the sun for us all?
And bring judgement to our land?

A godless world of wealth,
is where the real fools dwell.

José Gonzalez

E.D.

Everyone suffers from E.D.
Every holiday, celebration, birthdays, all sorts of Days
Erectile Dysfunction, Epidemic Diseases, Election Day,
Existential Dread.
Every Day a new day in Eternal Damnation.
Every Day a new Experience of Dread.
Each Day someone Dies.
Everyone has someone they Damn.

Existential Dread was a disease I had
Entering my mind when I was eight years old.
Earthly desires and dreams Dissolve.
Every happy moment turned Dull.
Emotions tumble out in the face of Death.
Experiment input hypothesis, conclusion output Dread.
Each time the thought came up I become Depressed.
Extrapolating the thought of no memory nor reincarnation
after Death.

Enjoy the last moment of innocence before it Dies
Even now the thought has already entered your mind
Escape? There is none, only Death.
Existential Dread
Eternal Damnation
Every Day
E.D.

Jeffrey Cheng

She Could Do It All

Once there was a girl who hid her face in her dad's chest when strangers asked her name, and he laughed and told them

she was just shy,
and they told him she was so sweet
and he was so lucky. A girl who danced
around her plastic kitchen and pretended
she was making food for a zoo of stuffed animals,
saying she wanted to be an artist when she grew up,
painting the tigers.

A girl who wailed,
fat tears rolling down her cheeks,
when her mother took her to school, but
she told her it would always be okay.

Once there was a girl whose dad
came to parent-teacher conferences late,
apologies dripping from his tongue
like a leaky faucet. A girl who read
at a sixth grade level while
she was still being taught to add
two digit numbers,
and said that she wanted to be a writer
and a painter when she grew up,
because she could do it all
while still running the zoo.

A girl who clung
to her mother's fingers,
and threw up when she got nervous,
and her mother would rub her back
and tell her it would always be okay.

Once there was a girl whose dad
didn't know how to talk to her
once she started forming opinions
from all the books she read,
though he wasn't there to try. A girl whose
unquiet mind couldn't find the right words, so
she buried herself in textbooks,
but still painted for fun if she had time
after AP classes.

Tyler Adams

A girl whose mother
told her daughter she needed to stop
being so anxious, it was even
stressing her out, and
her mother asked her
'What do you want me to say?'

Once there was a girl who stopped
answering her phone when her dad called
because she just didn't know what to say
after the divorce. A girl who
didn't see the point in writing
her unremarkable stories
but still regretted
her choice to study sciences
when it made her bones tired,
and she didn't paint anymore
because the anxiety made her hands
too heavy to pick up a brush.
A girl who tried to visit mother
when she found the strength
and a moment to breathe,
so she could rub her mother's back
and tell her it would always be okay.

Dust Bowl

Rain brings life to soil
Fosters growth and abundance
The axle upon which all farmers drive their lives

Virgin soil
Unmarked by spade or plough
Slashed open
Skin of the earth torn
A bed for new life

Food for millions
Unfettered by infertility
Taken greedily from the earth

Open scars
Cracks for water's path
Wind blows dry ground
Skin of the earth pulled thin
Bones poke through

A season shifts
Rains return
But fragile plants lose their hold
bones hold no life

I stare out over fields gone barren
Deep furrows mar the hills, murky rivulets dredging their
bottoms
Too much water drowned the seeds
No harvest will come this fall, nor the following spring
How can I stop the rain
stealing the earth from under my feet?

Slash the skin one last time
Scrape carry sculpt
Force smooth hill into folds
Wrinkled skin of old men

Now the water cannot run
Walking, it cannot hold the earth
Keep stone bones
Far beneath

Donald Sampson

College (noun, f)

Surrounded by ancient mythology
trying to forge a new path
forcing your way through the rafters
only to find
the glass sky is but a reflection
of the sea.

Branches and Burrows

A branch breaks and falls from its lofty brethren.
Stealthily it rises from the forest floor,
shaded by the family's arachnid umbrella,
a new root sheathed among the grass and leaves.

Drawn by virgin territory, tiny travelers
crawl and creep among its hills and valleys,
spinning notches into its sandpaper skin,
their own little nests in the craggy terrain.

They reproduce, their numbers grow.
Living their lives upon the lifeless length.
Their tunnels spread like veins,
weaving among the bony fibers.

Their burrows a living web,
sprawling and subdividing,
like branches on the family it came from,
and now emulates in its dank depths.

Kai Schmidt

Josh Briell

A Veteran's Day Barbeque, Post-Election

Drinks in hand, men and women sit a round, shooting the wind. Dogs bow in quiet prayer to the table, licking heavy jowls and crossing their paws like beggars on a street corner.

A blue bird incites a bark and show of fangs in a hustle for one scrap to bring home. We greet arriving neighbors as friends with that familiar tone, shifting ourselves

right or left, accommodating the new arrivals and as though with much needed company we talk to draw away from the conflict of those grumpy old men, and bitter rivals.

Scott Ohlrich

Rules for Interaction

Walking down a crowded hallway can be claustrophobic. People like me, with their own baggage and problems. Strolling past and around me, pushing or gently brushing against my shoulders. I wonder if they even think about what's on my mind like I do theirs. Maybe I care too much. Maybe I don't care enough. Who cares? They don't. Probably. Although a crowded hallway is bad, two people in an empty hallway is worse. Walking towards each other, fully aware of the other's presence. Do I say hello? Do I even look at them? I hope I don't know them. Are they a friend or an acquaintance? I hope they don't hate me for ignoring them. That awkward dance when we don't know which direction to pass. It should be simple. Like merging into traffic or arriving second at a four way stop. There are rules for these interactions. Unspoken common law that goes unnoticed until broken. The consequences of which are subtle. You feel it in the back of your mind like when you think you've forgotten something. Having these rules keep order to an otherwise chaotic world. Rules for interaction are similar to rules of engagement. Setting a standard for warfare. Killing one another mustn't be too complicated. We took the time to sit and decide bullet from bomb. What we should and shouldn't use. Who we should and shouldn't kill. As if we understand our barbarous nature. Putting a limit to our evil. Guidelines for how to destroy your enemy and remain humane. Guidelines for how to seem human.

Noah Balanda

Smart Phone

How many hours have I spent trapped in my handheld
prison?
Staring at moving images of steampunk, political memes,
cute kittens, braggadocios posts, pictures of adorable kids,
awesome vacations, delicious meals, adorable kids
on vacation, eating delicious meals.
Promising myself, only 5 minutes;
I might miss something important, something good.
Only to find an hour gone,
maybe two and nothing to show for it.

Scrolling

Scrolling

Scrolling

Endlessly

All the while, all around,
I am missing something important.
Something good.

Ridicule

Nothing mocks an artist like a blank paper
waiting
taunting
jeering
daring

The pressure to create
and to create well
is a mounting stress
like a swelling balloon
ready to burst.

"Do your worst."

"Do your worst."

Sarah Roberts

Michaela Quigley

Addiction

A quiet nagging.
In the back of my mind.
An itchy tag on the collar of my shirt.

No matter how hard I try
I just can't ignore it.
Always there, wanting me to scratch it.

They will tell me to change my shirt
And I know I wish I could.
Why take it off?

It looks so good on me anyways.
Why should I change?
It's my life.

If only it was a shirt.
Some clever analogy.
Not this pain weighing over me.

The truth is hard
I'm hurting myself.
I know it.

My family knows it.
They wish I could see it.
I can.

If I could change I would.
But I won't.
I like this addiction.

It gives me a burden.
A struggle I've never had.
A little more depth.

Give me a better reason.
I might change.
Besides it's only a shirt.

Noah Balanda

Imprints

It's been two years,
and every time I come
home I still call her name.
I have to stop
myself short. I know
she's not there.

It's been two years,
and every time my house creaks,
I think it's her
wandering around. I know
it's not her. I know
she's not there.

It's been two years,
and every time I walk around at night,
I think to be careful, she may be
sleeping somewhere. I know
she is not. I know
she's not there.

I know.
I know.
I know she's not there.
But she is.

I see her in imprints
of paw prints still left on
the stove top, I see her in the scars
still etched on my hands, I see
her toys sitting on the floor,
waiting for her return.

I know all of these things
are her.
I know she is still
here.

Alexandria Steinke



Hell Boy

Seeger 10/10

Rachel Seeger, illustration

Artist Bios

Tyler Adams is a senior, pursuing a degree in Mechanical Engineering. She enjoys music and writing in her free time.

Noah Balanda is a Media Communication major who loves everything related to video and every aspect of its production.

Josh Briell is a senior in the Game Art program. He enjoys various forms of art including drawing, drumming, writing, and theater. In the future he wants to draw comics.

Jeffrey Cheng is an odd student to say the least. He is very creative with words and insightful with his critiques, but you'll have to get used to his "autistic" tendencies.

Cody Chumbler is a senior in the Audio Engineering Technology program whose passions include entrepreneurship, technology, writing, stand-up comedy, and self-reflection. He has been involved in various organizations such as the LTU Music Society and the Sigma Phi Epsilon fraternity.

Louis Finkelman enjoys teaching literature, reading, vegetable gardening, and brewing wine.

José Gonzalez is an international student from Venezuela. He is currently a junior pursuing a degree in Computer Science and Game Development.

Andrew Kieltyka is an LTU alumnus who has a strong passion for photography. He found this passion for photography in high school when he had an opportunity to shoot a sporting event and has explored multiple styles ever since.

Nathan Kiecker is a junior in the Architecture and Design program. He is extremely passionate about his work and has a variety of interests in many different fields of study, not just Architecture. A few examples include the phenomena of the physical world collectively, including plants, animals, the landscape, the art of photography, and problem solving techniques studied in Psychology. He maintains his focus on academic work but is able to break away from that to immerse himself in nature, play golf, hike, and critique films in his free time.

Xamaka Latham's approach, no matter the medium, is to be meticulously observant of himself and his surroundings. Persistently developing his understandings of cognition, the only constant in his process is change.

Ivoire Morrell is a senior Computer Science major, with a focus in Business Applications. Writing, basketball, music, and community outreach are a few of Ivoire's many passions.

Scott Ohlrich is a graduating senior who put off Creative Writing until the last semester. The creative shift from game development to written word was a welcome digression.

Nicholas Paul is a passionate Mathematics and Computer Science student. Much of his time is devoted to programming, spending time with friends and family, and his education. He also enjoys research, data science, northern Michigan, and photography.

Michaela Quigley is a third-year Game Art student who's had equal love for both writing and drawing. She does as much of both as possible.

Jacob Radatz is a junior studying Computer Science. His concentration is in Game Software Development.

Sarah Roberts is a non-traditional student who hopes to complete her Bachelor's degree in English and Communication Arts before she retires, when she will fulfill her dream of becoming a travel blogger.

Thomas Rogenbuck recently rediscovered an old passion for writing. He draws inspiration from his childhood adventures on his family's dairy farm. He placed third in Writer's Digest's Annual Writing Competition in the Genre/Short Story category and writes rock music as well.

Donald Sampson is a senior Electrical Engineering major. He comes from an agricultural background in Ohio where he developed his love for detail in nature.

Kai Schmidt is a graduating senior majoring in Audio Engineering Technology and minoring in Computer Science. She enjoys writing small, poems in small notebooks and anything theatre related.

Rachel Seeger is a senior in the Game Art program. She has previously worked on PRISM twice, including one year as Editor-in-Chief. She is also a freelance artist, and runs an art-themed Youtube channel called Color and Scribbles.

Alexandra Steinke is in her fifth and final year studying Architecture. She is an avid reader, mostly fantasy, and loves to write stories while cuddled with her cats.

Amanda Sweet is a senior in the Media Communications program.

Carissa Vadella is a sophomore in Game Software Development. She has some weird cats.

Andreea Vasile, a senior in Architecture, is extremely passionate about art and prefers working with a variety of media. Photography is by far her favorite because she believes in each individual having a unique way of perceiving and capturing moments and places.

Melinda Weinstein has been an Associate Professor of English at LTU since 2000. She teaches World Mythology, Shakespeare, and Creative Writing.

Tyler Wiersing is a Computer Science student in his senior year. His hobbies include video games and traveling and he is currently working as a Web Developer for Sagebrew.com.

