

An aerial photograph of a vast, snow-covered mountain range. The terrain is rugged, with deep shadows and bright highlights on the snow. A single, small figure of a person stands on a prominent ridge in the upper right quadrant, providing a sense of scale to the immense landscape. The overall tone is serene and majestic.

Apogee

Vol. 53

2015

CAYLIE GUINN

CHBYENNE MCINTOSH

BROOKE DAVIS

AMANDA CREECH

JOCELYN KRULL

KRISTIN STEPHENS

HALIE SOLEA

SUZIE NAGY

CASSANDRA SCHMITZ

SARAH LAWSON

ANNA MEER

RACHEL BERTRAM

MACEY DICKERSON

TAYLOR CARLTON

RYANNE WISE

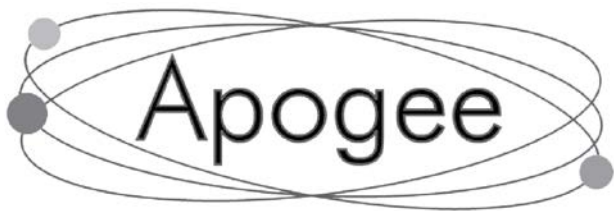
AIMEE NABHOLZ

EMMA PEAVEY

EMILY MEESE







Volume 53  
2014-15



A publication of the Department of English  
Franklin, Indiana

EDITORS

Amanda Creech  
Brooke Davis  
Caylie Guinn  
Jocelyn Krull  
Sarah Lawson  
William Maze  
Cheyenne McIntosh  
Anna Meer  
Victoria Mullis  
Cassandra Schmitz  
Kristin Stephens

Evan Vernon  
Ryanne Wise

LAYOUT DESIGN  
Ryanne Wise

COVER  
Rebecca Bridges

FACULTY ADVISORS  
Dr. Carl Jenkinson  
Dr. Susan Crisafulli  
Dr. Will Kanyusik

The staff would like to thank Christine Hendershot and Wendy Shapiro.

The *Apogee* is an annual publication of the Department of English at Franklin College. The faculty advisor posts submissions anonymously to the magazine's web page; the staff selects the work for publication without knowing the identity of the author or the artist.

“This year’s *Apogee* cover is the product of a brainstorming session directed by Franklin College professor Wendy Shapiro at the request of the Apogee staff. Professor Shapiro prompted the Apogee staff and many FC art and design students to create images defining the words “apogee,” “universe,” and “highest point.” Afterwards, Apogee staff reviewed all of the images produced and finally selected the piece designed by FC freshman Rebecca Bridges. Her design incorporates white clay on black paper. Apogee staff selected the piece because they believe it captures the meaning of behind the journal’s name and is a visually pleasing design.

Rebecca will be awarded her prize for the cover art at the annual Apogee+ reading.“

- Apogee Staff

# CONTENTS

---

## Featured Writer: Katie Burpo

Interview .....	8
Craft Night .....	12
<b>National Competitions</b> .....	21
<i>Emily Stauffer Poetry Prize Winner:</i>	
Dancing With Neruda's Bones by Andrena Zawinski .....	22
<i>Kathy Carlson Flash Fiction Prize Winner:</i>	
Everyday Weather by Annika Browne .....	24
Black and White Barn by Rachel Bertram .....	26
Vestige by Sarah Lawson .....	27
Prologue by Suzie Nagy .....	30
High Point by Caylie Guinn .....	32
Punch Bowl Plaything by Meg West .....	34
Mein Leibster Führer by Aimee Nabholz .....	35
Fragments by Anna Meer .....	37
Journalism by Amanda Creech .....	38
ee eye ee eye oh by Cheyenne McIntosh .....	40
Still Laugh by Emily Meese .....	42
Jesus Barn by Rachel Bertram .....	43
The First Stage of Grief by Brooke Davis .....	44
The Search for Self by Macey Dickerson .....	48
What God Has Given Us: by Cheyenne McIntosh .....	49
Tilt-a-Whirl by Anna Meer .....	51

Out of Place by Kristin Stephens .....	52
Station Benches by Halie Solea .....	54
Italian Sunset by Ryanne Wise.....	57
Something Broke by Jocelyn Krull.....	58
A Private Room by Brooke Davis.....	60
Sorceress by Macey Dickerson.....	62
Tremendous by Brooke Davis.....	63
Stairs by Emma Peavey .....	66
The Genome Project by Cheyenne McIntosh .....	67
Gondola by Ryanne Wise.....	69
Dirt by Rachel Bertram.....	70
The Calm Before The Storm by Anna Meer .....	71
The Examination by Anna Meer .....	72
Stopping at Seventeen by Jocelyn Krull .....	73
Portrait of an Ethiopian Woman by Macey Dickerson .....	75
Swarm by Brooke Davis .....	76
The Courtroom by Anna Meer .....	77
Her House by Cassandra Schmitz.....	78
Churning by Taylor Carlton .....	79
La Nuit by Caylie Guinn.....	83
Two Gatherings by Sarah Lawson .....	84
The Eye by Jocelyn Krull .....	87
Contributors .....	88



# FEATURED WRITER

## KATIE BURPO

---

Katie Burpo is a native Hoosier and graduate of DePauw University. She holds an MFA from Western Michigan University, and her memoir and fiction have appeared in *Chautauqua*, *Barely South*, *Specs*, and *The Southampton Review*.

### **Apogee: Why did you start writing?**

B: I never wanted to be a writer until I went to college. I thought maybe I would do journalism but then I accidentally took a class in creative non-fiction, which I thought was a fancy way of saying “How to write essays in a way that’s interesting.” It ended up being a memoir class. I was terrified the first week, thinking that I’d never be able to write anything creatively. Thankfully, I ended up liking it so much that it became my major. I didn’t write my first creative piece until I was eighteen.

### **Apogee: What do you like about memoir?**

B: Memoir is where I got started. It’s so easy to start out by writing what you know, which is what memoir is all about, so it came really naturally. I’ve always liked to tell stories.

My dad was always the life of the party everywhere we went because he told these great stories with so much detail and humor and so I think I was always a storyteller. I just never considered myself a writer until I took the class.

**Apogee: You were recently in France. Have your travels affected your writing?**

B: Yes. I write about it quite a bit. I have one story from the time I went to Russia. It was such a deeply affecting experience that I had to write about it. And that's one of my favorite pieces of fiction that I've ever done—it's about the Museum of Sex in Saint Petersburg. You can actually go visit Rasputin's penis. It's in a jar. That was a pilgrimage that I took which later became a short story. So yes, I do like to write about my travels because those moments that really stick with you often happen when you're forced to be outside of yourself and your comfort zone.

**Apogee: What is your goal when you sit down to write a piece of fiction?**

B: I try to strike a balance between something literary and something for the masses. I like works that can be enjoyed by broad audiences. I like works that speak to universal truths of everyday life and I think humor is almost always essential in conveying those truths. So I really like work that's funny and I attempt to be funny in my own work. My favorite writer is probably Vonnegut, and what I admire about his work is that it's so devastating, but it's also hilarious. So I think good

fiction does that—it makes you feel good reading it, but it’s devastating at the same time.

**Apogee: You grew up in Martinsville, Indiana. How has that affected your writing?**

B: All of my short fiction that’s not travel-based is set in a fake Martinsville, Indiana. I think it’s a unique space to write about. There’s a lot of beauty in Southern Indiana that’s overlooked because Indiana gets such a bad rap, so I feel like it’s sort of my angle as a fiction writer—that I write from the specific perspective. There’s also a very particular dialect in Southern Indiana, so I get a lot of comments on my work for the dialogue and how it’s kind of strange, but if you’ve ever been in Southern Indiana it’s completely accurate to the way people talk. So I think there’s a lot of flavor to South-Central Indiana, and I just love all that. I love writing about the weird foods, like pork tenderloin and chicken and noodles with mashed potatoes. You can mine this [area] to all these different extents.

**Apogee: What would you say the hardest thing about writing is?**

B: [Laughs] Just sitting down and doing it. I just have to be in such a particular headspace to make progress on anything I’m writing. It has to be my main order of business for the day because I find it so exhausting. I also struggle with revision. Sometimes I have this perfect vision of what I want my work to be and it comes out on the first try, and I have to have a lot of distance from the piece before I can come back and pick

it apart, which is a terrible thing for me to say as a teacher of writing. [Laughs] But I've always struggled with deep revisions of my work.

**Apogee: Do you have any advice for people who want to be writers?**

B: You set yourself up for a tough life. It's not an easy road to travel. I would say for new writers, just try to keep it in perspective. If you become a Writer with a capital W, you do and if you don't, you don't. And it doesn't always have to do with how much talent you have. It has a lot to do with luck, and it all depends on how you measure success. I get a lot of satisfaction from writing something that I know will never be published.

# CRAFT NIGHT

---

Angela sat on the toilet, legs spread, looking between them at the mostly clear water in the bowl. She should have started her period hours ago. Her husband appeared in the doorway holding a cheap beer. Beads of white foam clung to his scraggly moustache. His attempt at facial hair only made him look younger, not more free-spirited or distinguished.

“I hope you’re ready for the first abortion of your married life,” he said, shrugging. It was supposed to be a joke. He believed in the power of contraception and trusted what he’d read about marijuana lowering his sperm count. His eyes were watery, the thin red veins prominent.

“I’m scared,” Angela said. “We’d have to keep this one. We’re married. We’re twenty-five. It wouldn’t look good.”

“Don’t kid yourself, babe,” he said. “Just wait a few more hours. I’m sure you’re not pregnant.”

She looked down, hoping just a single drop of blood would collide with the surface of the water and explode out in red wisps like a science experiment. She thought, this is not a crisis, and put in a tampon anyway before leaving the apartment. On the way to Pam’s house her lower belly began to tighten and burn. The sensation was familiar and

indicative. She reached down and palmed the flatness of her stomach, feeling sad and wishful. This was not the time. She made a quick left turn across the busy street into the lull of a residential area. It was dusk, the cool air imbued with the scent of Midwestern autumn. The crisp, fallen leaves littering the streets and pumpkins on porches, carved and uncarved, reminded Angela of children.

She could barely recall the excitement that the changing of the seasons brought her when she was a little girl. She wondered if she would remember how to properly observe events like the first snow, thunderstorms, and Easter egg hunts when the time came. She and Adam had talked it over, and decided never to trick their own children into believing nonsense like Santa Claus and the Tooth Fairy. Their kids wouldn't grow into a sense of entitlement; there would be no gifts or dollar bills materializing from nowhere. Adam called holidays the opiate of the masses and rolled his eyes in Wal-Mart every time they walked past the seasonal aisle exuding festive colors and the smell of plastic. Sometimes, Angela tried to imagine her own childhood as politically correct and sanitary, and she wondered what could replace the delight of gifts left by a magical creature. Her children would probably tell the other kids at school. She would get phone calls from angry mothers about their loud mouth, know-it-all brats. She would want to tell these mothers about hypocrisy in religion, about the ways in which capitalism had bastardized every holiday. She imagined, though, that she would be too tired and would apologize instead. Adam didn't like confrontation. Angela loved the feel of the guts inside a pumpkin. Halloween could stay.

Angela took her purse and a six-pack of Hefeweizen from her backseat and proceeded to Pam's front door. Pam opened the door before Angela could knock.

"Oh, for Christ's sake!" Pam said, kissing Angela, wetly, on both cheeks. "It's you!"

"Thanks for having me," Angela said. She walked in through a slim hallway and into the kitchen. The air was heavy with the smells of cumin and chocolate. She stashed her beer in the fridge, opening one for herself immediately. This was only the second time she had come to Craft Night, and she felt nervous as she looked into the sun porch, realizing that only a couple of the faces were familiar.

"Sit down, Angela," Pam said, toasting the room with a bottle of Corona Light. "Let me introduce everyone."

Angela was one of those women who always said she got along better with men. She didn't particularly care for the company of other writers, either. Her best friends were her two sisters and her mother. She had little patience for women, for girls—the cattiness, the insecurities, the constant maintenance. These other females could only pale in comparison to the closeness and comfort of her own blood. It was hard being away at grad school, and she missed her family, terribly sometimes. Adam was almost perfect, but he had no endurance for certain parts of her—shoe shopping, cooking shows, long, obsessive talks that escalated into tears and frenzy. Angela hoped to find girls at school whom she could love. She thought she was ready, but when she had received the invitation for Craft Night in her mailbox at the university English office, she felt ill.

Angela sat down at a folding table littered with translucent boxes filled with beads. They looked edible—shiny

and iridescent, in every color. Angela picked through them absently. They felt cool and smooth. She hadn't the slightest clue how to arrange these objects into a "craft," and resigned herself to peeling the label from her bottle of beer until Pam brought her a steaming bowl of vegan chili.

"Here," she said. "And feel free to use any of the supplies you want. I have a shit load."

Pam was small and had very straight, grayish brown bangs. She wore a white turtleneck under an appliquéd sweatshirt that read "Key West," the script taking on the vague shape of a dolphin. "You gotta see this necklace Cynthia made. It's fucking beautiful."

A woman at the end of the table held up a strand of amber beads, the centerpiece a tribal looking wooden pendant. It was nice, but not fucking beautiful. When she met Pam for the first time, Angela had noticed that she couldn't manage a sentence without profanity. Angela liked women who cursed more than she did. It made her feel lady-like by comparison, demure. Pam's dirty mouth was a possible product of her childless existence. People with no kids can drop f-bombs at any moment in their own homes. They can put as many jalapeños as they want in their vegan chili, leave glue guns and mini-soldering irons lying around, and collect boxes of gewgaws sized perfectly to block a toddler's trachea.

"Wow," Angela said, nodding at the necklace, dangling and swinging at the end of the table like a timepiece. "Very nice." She sucked a large gulp from her beer. The necklace-maker smiled, then returned to her work.

"I'm not really much of a crafter," Angela said. "I'll just watch."

"Oh come on," Pam said. "We all have extra beads



and stuff. Don't be a stick in the poop.”

“Really,” Angela said. “It's fine.”

“Just let her drink if she wants, Pam,” Cynthia, the star necklace-maker said. “I don't see you making much progress on that cross-stitch over there.”

“You bitch,” Pam said. She winked and guzzled from her clear, slender-necked bottle. “You're right. Do whatever you want, Angela.”

Two playwrights had brought a bottle of Jameson and began pouring shots. Angela obliged, but Cynthia waved away the bottle. When it reached Angela for the second time, she took a swig directly from it.

“But, Cynthia, it's your favorite,” Pam said.

“I'm not drinking,” Cynthia said. She had switched to knitting—wide shiny needles and yarn the color of lima beans. “My doctor says no.”

“Are you?” one playwright asked.

“Not yet,” Cynthia said. “It helps your chances if you stay off the sauce.”

Angela, like anyone else, could describe herself based on her unfulfilled desires. She wanted a baby, and had wanted one since she could remember. She wanted to please people by doing everything—making money, being thin, reproducing. She asked Pam for directions to the bathroom and left the craft table. The cramping in her abdomen had intensified, and, she had, sure enough, begun to bleed. She flushed the toilet and panicked for a moment when she noticed how weak Pam's water pressure was. She imagined the toilet overflowing into the hallway, bright blood gushing against the door jambs like a bad horror movie. The bathroom looked like

it could have used a good scrubbing. The city water was full of minerals and all the fixtures and surfaces looked dingy. here was a stack of old New Yorkers on the back of the toilet and a small, frayed brassiere draped over the shower rod. There were nine or ten different hand soaps and lotions to choose from – expensive ones named for fruits and flowers. Angela opened the medicine cabinet. She found contact solution, Ben-Gay, half a dozen tubes of anti-wrinkle cream. There were pill bottles – old antibiotics, allergy prescriptions, expired Vicodin. Angela’s cramps were getting worse and worse as she got older; her mother used to take Darvocets for hers. She popped one of the Vicodins, grinding it up between her back teeth so it would kick in faster. Her mouth filled with dry bitterness and she drank sink water from her cupped hands. The pain radiating in her insides seemed like a sign from her body – pay attention to this part. It was a signal, a stop, like punctuation. The term “period” made her imagine a baby made of commas and parentheses, feet like ellipses, eyes and mouth like tittles and dashes.

Back at the craft table, Cynthia had begun to weep, almost unnoticeably, over her knitting. Pam came in from the kitchen, carrying a cup and saucer. She palmed circles on Cynthia’s back, whispering, “That fucking doctor doesn’t know shit. Everything will be fine.” The other playwright told Cynthia that doctors had told her mother she’d never have children, but she had three. A crocheting poet said she saw in a trash magazine at the grocery store that Celine Dion was pregnant again. “Isn’t she, like, fifty years old or something?” Here were all of these women, knitting and talking at one table, except for Angela, who had been in the bathroom when

all was revealed. She thought she should say something about her own fears, something to ingratiate her world, her womanhood to the space of Craft Night. Instead she was quiet, realizing that Cynthia had waited until Angela left the room to start crying.

The women returned to their macramé, their strings of slick beads, their slow-moving needles. Cynthia maneuvered green yarn as if nothing had happened, and the blood in Angela's brain began to pulsate. It was the Vicodin. It was the Hefeweizen and the way her husband had said "abortion" to her hours before. She began to cry into empty hands. The room was quiet. She drank more Jameson and looked from one woman to the next. The playwrights worked on a quilt together. The conjoined patches of fabric draped over their legs seemed to hide something. Cynthia's yarn and needles moved nonsensically. Pam cross-stitched and hummed nonchalantly as if people's biological clocks weren't slowing and sputtering out in this very room. Angela thought she could hear the skeletal crunch of dried up organs, crinkling and disintegrating inside of all these women like the dry fallen leaves outside.

"I'm so sorry, Cynthia," she blurted out.

Cynthia looked up. Her eyes were wide and wet, prismatic like beads.

"You got fucked over," Angela said, now gasping to hold back sobs. "We're all getting fucked over."

Cynthia might have said, "No, fuck you," but Angela was wailing too convulsively to hear her. She might have said, "It's okay. Thank you."

In the meantime, Pam dug a cell phone out of

Angela's purse and called Adam. He was annoyed, but not surprised when he picked up. This was Angela's trademark – drinking too much in front of people she knew little too well. When she got in the car, the dome light glimmered against rivulets of mascara dripping down her splotchy neck.

“You hate crafts,” he said, reaching over the console to massage her thigh. “Why did you even go?”

“I thought I could make friends,” she said. Her voice was soft and nasal. She wiped her nose on the shoulder of her blouse and hiccupped.

“What happened?” Adam said. “What's got you so worked up?” He pulled a freshly rolled joint from the front pocket of his shirt and used the car lighter to spark it.

“It's nothing,” Angela said. “You would think it's stupid.”

“All right, babe,” he said. “I'm sorry you're upset.”

He offered her the joint, and she shook her head.

“You'll be happy to know I started my period,”

Angela said. She could hear the sound of her own breathing as if she were listening to her chest through headphones. Things began to spin.

“I knew you would,” Adam said. He cracked the windows and exhaled a wavering plume of smoke.

“It would be okay, you know,” she said. “If I hadn't.”

“Yeah, right,” he said. “Maybe.”

Angela rolled down her window the rest of the way and hung her head out, unbuckling her seatbelt so she could breathe in the full force of the wind. She closed her eyes and opened her mouth, the ghosts of streetlights and bright billboards projected against her eyelids—moving spheres and

bars of color. She did not see the police lights, but heard the siren. Adam yanked her back into the car, reached across her, flinging the joint out the passenger window and refastening her seatbelt in a single, deft motion. When the officer reached the driver's side, he made eye contact with Angela first.

“You all right there, ma'am?” he asked.

Between them, Angela and Adam had gone to school for so much longer than this smirking, fresh-faced police officer. They had nothing to show for it, really. Adam pulled espresso for a living and played video games. She had saved words and phrases on a hard drive, indulgent sentiments and confessions of little use to normal people. This cop had a uniform, pieces of paper – summons, citations, arrest records. His work was tangible and productive. He took Adam's license and registration back to his cruiser and turned off the flashing lights.

“It's your fault,” Adam said. “Hanging your damn head out the window like an insane person.”

Angela closed her eyes and imagined babies built of punctuation. Their little asterisk mouths making sounds like sirens. She wanted to hear the siren again. She wanted to hear something, anything louder and longer than the words seeping uselessly from her muddled brain.

# APOGEE

## NATIONAL COMPETITIONS

---

### EMILY STAUFFER POETRY PRIZE

Having grown up in Pennsylvania, New York, and New Jersey, Emily Stauffer earned her B.A. in English from Gettysburg College, her M.A. from the Pennsylvania State University, and her Ph.D. from the University of Connecticut. In addition to liberal arts courses in writing and literature, she regularly taught Romantic, Victorian, Modern British, Canadian, and world literature classes. After 31 years at Franklin College, Dr. Stauffer retired after the 2014-2015 school year.

### KATHY CARLSON FLASH FICTION PRIZE

Kathy Carlson taught English at Franklin College for thirty-five years. Carlson grew up in Rockford, Illinois and attended Wheaton College. Her teaching areas included composition, writing about literature, literary studies, American literature from colonial times until the 20th century, and watercolor painting. Carlson retired after the 2014-2015 school year.

## POETRY WINNER

# DANCING WITH NERUDA'S BONES

ANDRENA ZAWINSKI

---

Neruda, only known to me in the poet's words -  
*I love you as certain dark things are to be loved,*  
*in secret, between the shadow and the soul* - Neruda  
has had his bones exhumed for examination.  
I did not want his decomposed body uprooted  
from its plot, transmogrified into murder mystery.

Poet of eternal present, I cradle his imagined bones  
and pull them to me, his tango body's phalanges  
jangling as I cross and giro their tibia and fibula  
*pinned by the sun between solstice*  
*and equinox, drowsy and tangled together*  
clanking across tiles of a kitchen floor.

Let Neruda be, I plea, still dancing, his bones tethered  
to my body tripping and swaying in tango rhythm,  
talking head on the radio droning on  
in conspiracy theories of the Pinochet regime  
poisoning Neruda, life split in poetry and politics  
*as the night wind whirls in the sky and sings.*

Forecast of ill fortune - to lift bones from the grave -  
much like this wave of melancholia. In inevitable  
surrender, I concede: what does it matter  
to have dug them up as his love lyrics resonate  
in his monotoned moan, Gardel crooning  
behind our bumpy boleto: *el día que me quieras*.

Neruda's unearthed skeleton clings to my arms,  
scent of honeysuckle climbing limbs like vines,  
as I sweep and dip inside his metaphoric sigh of sea  
and our final *soltada*, *voice of the rain crying*:  
*no carnations or barcaroles for me,*  
*only a wound that love had opened.*

Neruda, now so mystical and magical,  
cloaks his bones in flesh and play, conjures  
a dusty fiddle, leaps and lands on the walkway below,  
*the violin with its ragged companion...*  
*learning how to befriend lost souls*  
*and sing songs to wandering strangers.*

---

NOTES: Neruda's lines are cited from these poems in this order:  
Love Sonnet XVII, Drunk as Drunk, Poem Twenty,  
Lost in the Forest, Come With Me I Said And No One Knew VII,  
Ode to a Violin in California



# FLASH FICTION WINNER

## EVERYDAY WEATHER

ANNIKA BROWNE

---

When spring came, the snow kept falling on Alder Street. It fell on the second house on the left, specifically, but in the warm, wet March winds it sometimes blew through the picket fence to melt in the neighbors' leafy gutters. Alder Street was a normal street, in a normal suburb of a normal city, so the neighbors didn't worry about the snow. As their lawns turned green and leapt upward, snow lay in great drifts on the second house to the left. The neighbors mowed their lawns back into golf-course perfection and ignored it. It was only snow, after all.

The people who lived in the second house on the left had a teenaged son, who could often be seen leaving for school in the morning bundled in a great black coat with over-long sleeves. Sometimes, as the weeks drifted on and April became May, the neighbors' children would tug on their parents' pant legs and ask why the snow fell only on one house.

"It doesn't concern us," their mothers said.

"That's their business," their fathers said.

"Shush," their mothers and fathers said.

When June turned to July, the neighbors put sprinklers on their lawns and watched carefully as their children sold lemonade and cans of Dr. Pepper to the other

neighbors and the other neighbors' children. They didn't watch the boy in the black coat, who shoveled the driveway of the second house on the left with the slowly growing weariness of a man running up a long flight of stairs. The water from the neighbors' sprinklers dried in the yellow sunlight or flowed down the street to the second house on the left, where it froze in thick smooth sheets across the driveway and in front of the garage.

In August the families had picnics in the park, their children playing tag on the smooth, clover-spangled grass. The boy in the black coat slipped on the ice once, then twice. The neighbors were careful not to stare.

He fell for the third time in early September. This time his head cracked against the ground with a sharp noise like a gunshot and even the paramedics, tucking him into the soft stomach of their van, could not keep him. The neighbors watched over their fences and, when they came inside from the darkening street, hugged their children tightly.

"What a terrible accident," they comforted each other when they met at the hardware store or the tennis club.

When October slipped into November the snow fell again on Alder Street, frosting each house equally. By spring a new family had moved into the second house on the left, where the grass was green and perfect again. The neighbors might have wondered about this, but their lawns needed mowing and the gutters had to be cleaned. The first house on the right had a small tornado in the chimney, which had been blowing leaves into their gutters for more years than they could recall.



*Black and White Barn* by Rachel Bertram

# VESTIGE

SARAH LAWSON

---

“Do you believe in God?” the missionary asks me, his scripture balanced in his lap.

“I want to,” I tell him. “I want to.”

\*\*\*

“You have to move,” you say, voice heavy with breath.

“No, I have to stay.” I’m pressed against the door, and we both know that all you have to do is push me away if you really wish to leave.

You’re watching me with dark eyes, alertly posed like a meerkat, looking out not only for me, but for anyone to just see you—to see us—here by the front door.

“I don’t want to hurt you.”

I feel the scalpel in the pocket of my jeans, which I had taken from you moments before. I imagine the cut that it would make in your skin; the cut that it would have made.

“You won’t,” I reply.

\*\*\*

“I’m here,” you tell me.

I’m on my knees, feeling the fabric of well-tailored clothes, wondering if I am dreaming or awake. You lay your hands on me, but they’re cold. I don’t remember falling, but

I know you catch me. I know you're beside me holding me, that your shoes are still on, and that you're going to run away again.

"People don't put a suit on at three a.m.," I mutter. I sound raspy, like I'm old, like I've been yelling all day.

"Just sleep," you whisper.

\*\*\*

"How do we get closer to God?" one of the missionaries asks in my next lesson.

"We repent." My eyes are looking at the shadows we cast on the wall in the dim light. They tower over huddled figures in a little room.

"Repent is an action verb. It requires acknowledgement, then acting. If you don't reflect upon what you have done, how are you to be wiped clean of your sin? You have to want to change," the missionary continues.

So I acknowledge what some call sin, but what others call self-preservation. I remember how many times I've greeted you at the door, but have left you in the middle of the conversation. I recall when you surprise me with gifts or call me the most beautiful girl in the world, but how you'll keep me up all night over a shaky phone line immersed in uncertain silence, with no answers, and no respite. I think of how many times you say it's going to get better.

Doctors claim that medication can fix even the things that we cannot see. I cannot see God, but I can see you afflicted in those days when you are better than others, and in those times I cannot get you to eat because you'll vomit all over yourself. Repentance be damned; you are no Lazarus. Misery shows itself in stained sheets, snot, and chipped nails.

“When do you know that you’ve ‘repented?’” I ask suddenly.

The missionary pauses, knows that I’m not looking at him. “You feel free.”

# PROLOGUE

## SUZIE NAGY

---

He is fair skin  
on the cusp of adulthood.  
I ask what's going on in  
his head and  
he swears  
the sun set  
last night.

His hands are  
brittle,  
foreign to both of us.  
I swear I've been here  
before. That  
moment when a  
room stops spinning  
and all the people,  
the colors,  
the sounds,  
are there.

“You’ll come  
back to me.”

He knows.  
I am fool’s gold.



# HIGH POINT

## CAYLIE GUINN

---

There's that smell, that acrid, busted-pen smell. I can't get enough of it. The buzz of the gun is hypnotic. I sink into a stupor at the sound. He brings the needle down to my arm. I salivate at the pinch. It digs into my skin, again and again. Feeling that pressure, I know what it's like to get fucked. In and out, in and out, a thousand hits a second.

His skin aches for penetration. He watches intently as the artist fits the needle to the gun. The clamp tightens, plumping the tip. He stares at the silver point and can't suppress a rise. He is that needle. Sharp and hollow, they are one. His skin pulses with anticipation.

I pull the rubber tighter on my arm. The needle flashes against the dim light. I squint and slap. Search frantically. Racing heart. Freaking out because shit, oh, shit, I can't find it. Where the fuck is it? Slap again. Pull tighter. I swear, I pull so hard one day this fucker will fall off. Finally, that lucky blue line surfaces. It throbs. It begs. Greedy little bitch. I ease the needle in deep.

Time melts. He slumps against the wall. The world is a top on the verge of collapse. He clings to his knees, pulling them in close as his eyes glaze over. His skin is damp with perspiration. He feels nothing and everything all at once.

The air caresses him. Boils his skin. Whispers seduction. Screams in his ears. Specks of light firecracker through the darkness.

I chase the hell out of that dragon. But right as I catch the fucker, it runs off and leaves me starving. There's never enough juice. So I hit the empty needle again and pretend to feel strong.

The hollow point slides into his skin. Seamless. Seductive.

Like a shiny new whore, I knew this needle was squeaky clean. No crash, no regret, just aching. Hunger. Lust. That delicious ink swims in the bottle, glistens on the tip. My skin is raw. When the needle pulls away, ink and blood swirl together.

There's not much blood. The needle missed the vein.



*Punch Bowl Plaything* by Meg West

# MEIN LIEBSTER FÜHRER

## AIMEE NABHOLZ

---

Lights flicker in the silence  
As we sit side by side on the  
Sofa, its warm leather cradling  
The silver gun, his gun.  
The low ceiling suppresses  
Soldiers, Berlin, the bunker.  
The army is falling  
We are falling.

A dozen white, oval pills  
Casting shadows on my hand.

Next to each other  
In the hockey stadium, metal  
Visible between each other's legs.

We pluck pills from the table,  
"Ich liebe dich."  
Neatly-trimmed moustache  
Perfectly outlined in the dim light,  
You blur as my mouth burns.

Memories, all nothing.  
And the army is falling,  
They're here for you.  
They're here for us.

My vision flickers—is it a light?  
My eyelids fall, I hear a  
Gunshot, the proximity blasting  
My eardrums apart.  
If I had the energy to scream  
I would scream so loud  
That the army would rise.



*Fragments* by Anna Meer

# JOURNALISM

## AMANDA CREECH

---

My grandmother is in the business of the press. She isn't a reporter. She isn't a photographer. She delivers papers for *The Tribune*. She was delivering newspapers long before those careless heathen teenagers took over and forgot about the quality of good delivery.

Before being forced into school, I spend every day helping Miss Imogene.

Roll the newspapers. Rubber band them.  
Deliver them.

She takes me along her route in her 1988 Ford Tempo with automatic seat belts. *You cover one side, I'll cover the other*. She never takes a sick day. She refuses to quit and won't until they force her to retire, when they gift her a plaque and a party. Until then, though, Cory and I are her little helpers so long as we are on our best behavior.

The first time she brings me to The Tribune to pick up her papers, I step into the news business with awe. I can hear the whirring press, see the day's paper flying out of the large and awkward machines: this miraculous explosion of words, photos, things the town is eager to read and digest at their breakfast tables while the hot ink is still drying on the page.

Beyond the printing presses, there is a room full

of another type of whirring: fingers furiously punching out emails, voices rising and falling, a cascade of ringing phones. Organized chaos. It is beautiful. My grandmother smiles when she talks to the editor in chief. There is a twinkle in her eye, a glimmer of pride when she speaks to him and I realize something then.

She's an ant. Delivering a message by another's hand. She is no Joseph Pulitzer, no Cronkite—hell, she didn't even finish grade school.

I decide in that moment what I want to do. I will be the writer. I'll write the paper and grandma will deliver it to the town. I will do this just for her. Because she can't. "Grandma," I tell her, "I'm going to write so you can deliver my stories."

She keeps her hands on the steering wheel. She says to me, "You do that, honey."

And I keep telling her, even if she cannot hear me. Her mind is long gone, her sight too. All of those happy memories of her kids, husband, grandchildren: a coin washed away in the sea. Whisked away by a god who believes a devout Christian woman, a grandmother, and a mother deserves such a mind-eating disease.

But I still tell her anyway. I tell her in her tiny room when the nurse leaves for the night and the smell of weed still lingers from my aunt's bedroom, "I'm doing it grandma, I'm going to be in the paper." I know she's still there somewhere. The shell of her body is all that's here with us. But whether she is with God or stuck here longer than she would prefer, I still tell her.



# EE EYE EE EYE OH

## CHEYENNE MCINTOSH

---

that time when  
I was crazy  
I walked into a  
home improvement store  
and screamed  
about murdering  
all the people  
in all the houses  
and my screams were muffled  
into an embroidered couch cushion.

and on the cushion  
the stitches formed a  
red rooster  
and *how that rooster crows.*

there was a 16  
year old boy there,  
working part time,  
and I said  
*the south shall rise*

so that he would  
tell all of his friends.

all he said was:  
*cash check or credit*  
and I was ashamed  
so I went home --  
to queen and country,  
to mother and state.

# STILL LAUGH

## EMILY MEESE

---

You're so pretty, as you plea,  
Even as the red dyes your bulging eyes  
And your lips turn blue.  
Bruises blossom where I have  
Mapped the contours of your body  
So soft, even the stretch marks.  
The smell of lilies mingles with blood  
And migrates from your still body.  
A quick brush of lips  
To your clammy temple.  
I wonder if your laugh was warm.



*Jesus Barn* by Rachel Bertram

# THE FIRST STAGE OF GRIEF

BROOKE DAVIS

---

There's something wrong with my cousin, Gia, but nobody wants to say what. She locks herself in her room to play *Resident Evil* all night and sleeps all day. She remembers the name of every pro-wrestler and what color spandex he wore when he won the title belt, but ask her to solve a math problem and she'll put her head down on her desk and grunt until you go away. She's even thrown some legendary, red-faced screaming fits when anyone tried to push it. And she won't quit eating all those goddamn hotdogs even though she's allergic and they make her face swell up like she's got golf balls stuffed in her cheeks.

I tell Mom, "There's something wrong with Gia."

"Of course there is," Mom says.

"You should tell Aunt June."

But Mom already did, years ago. And Aunt June told her to shove it up her ass.

Mom and I are driving to Aunt June's so we can help with dinner. We have family coming from Kentucky. The parents will sit in lawn chairs around the fire, the younger kids will play corn hole, and the older kids will drink in the garage. But I'll get stuck with Gia, like always. We're both seventeen and go to the same high school. Or we did, until she

got kicked out for biting a teacher's arm so hard that when she finally let go, there was blood dripping down her chin.

I follow Mom to the kitchen, but Aunt June tells me, "Matt, Gia's been waiting for you. You should go say hi."

She's reading and sipping lemonade out by the in-ground pool. Her legs dangle over the ledge and soak in the cold water. I take off my shoes, roll up my jeans, and stick my feet in next to hers. She holds out her book to me—a manga where all the girls have cat ears and tails and live in an igloo.

"Yuki is going to kill the Moon Trolls," Gia says.

I push it away. "I don't read that stuff."

"Since when?"

"I don't know. Like, middle school."

My phone rings and the caller ID flashes *Dad*. I shove it in my pocket without answering and ignore the vibrations against my thigh while I watch the leaves twirling on the water. The pool takes up most of the yard, spreading out towards the limits of the ten-foot privacy fence. The branches from the neighbors' trees spill over the top and the leaves break off every time the wind blows, drifting down into the water. I think about grabbing the net and fishing them out, but I can't remember the last time anyone actually swam in this thing anyway.

Gia stares hard at my pocket. "Answer it," she says.

"There's something wrong with you, Gia."

"Answer it."

"Are you listening to me?"

"There's something wrong with me," she repeats.

"Right." I rub the back of my neck. It's too hot outside to be talking about this or anything else. But if no

one is going to tell her, I should. I'd want someone to tell me. It's better to know. "I'm not a doctor or anything, but yeah, there's definitely something wrong with you. I'm sorry."

Gia turns a page in her book. She has a hard time pretending to give a shit about things she doesn't give a shit about. I elbow her. "Did you hear me, G?"

"There's something wrong with me," she says again, turning a page in her book. "Yeah, I know. But you're the one who pees blood."

"What the *hell*, Gia," I hiss, craning my neck back towards the house to make sure no one heard her.

"Well, peeing blood seems like something wrong."

"I don't—I told you, that only happened once, and—"

"You seemed pretty worried when you called me. You should see a doctor," she adds offhandedly, eyes still trained on her book.

"No. That's not what we're talking about. You're the one who needs a doctor."

"I'm not peeing blood."

"There's something wrong with you."

"I know that."

"Well don't you want to know *what*?"

My phone rings again. Gia's eyes latch onto the lump in my pocket.

"Is it your dad again?"

I shrug. "Listen, if we figure out what's wrong with you, maybe you can learn how to be normal. You can get better."

Gia grabs my wrist suddenly and turns the palm upwards, leaning her nose in close. “How long have you had this rash?” she asks.

I snatch my hand away and cradle it against my chest. “*Goddammit*, Gia, we’re talking about you. Not me.” The sun is too hot on my back. My phone rings again.

“Answer it, Matt. He’s worried.”

I start coughing. Gia tilts her head at me like she’s proven something and I want to say, *Fuck you. I’ve had a cold lately. What do you know about anything, anyway?* I would say that, but I can’t breathe.

I cover my face with both hands, catching sticky phlegm in my palms and dripping snot into my open mouth. Gia’s slams her fist into my back. Once. Twice.

When it’s over, my head is in Gia’s lap, but I don’t remember lying down. Her head blocks the sun. I hear her stick her fingers into her glass of lemonade, and then she’s holding an ice cube against my forehead in her cupped palm. Sugary water leaks into my hair and eyes and runs over my temples.

“Yuki is about the fight the Moon Trolls,” Gia says, rewinding the conversation, going back to where she wanted it in the first place.

“Read it aloud.”

She shakes her head. “You need to look at the pictures or it won’t make sense.”

“Just help me out, okay, Gia? God, there is something seriously wrong with you.”





*The Search for Self* by Macey Dickerson

# WHAT GOD HAS GIVEN US:

CHEYENNE MCINTOSH

---

I read about God in the poetry  
of old men who have no country,  
of old women with all dead children,  
and I try to know Him.

I hear about the God who stoops  
over the pulpit, His left hand heavy  
on the book, sweating from hell-fire  
and I try to know Him.

In stained glass and rap songs, God is  
the image of man, standing with His posse  
of saints around Him, the glint  
of gold shining from His cup, overfloweth.

On the streets and in the shelters, God is  
the father who ditched once, but now stays,  
hanging around until the next paycheck  
from the state, whispering about hope and trust.

In black and white TV shows, God is  
the bartender who, with His white rag,

perpetually wipes the same spot on the counter  
where everyone knows your name.

But when I go for a drink,  
the whiskey is sour,  
and the man behind the counter  
says, “the lady’s had enough.”



*Tilt-a-Whirl* by Anna Meer

# OUT OF PLACE

## KRISTIN STEPHENS

---

Cunt shouldn't have been a word yelled drunkenly at a funeral. But it was. Polite awkward conversation should have been what was happening. But there that word was. Out of my drunk uncle's mouth. My mother heard it at the same time I did. It didn't take much to realize it was directed at her. Another thing for her to be the bigger person about.

My grandmother laying in the casket. She should be there. She's been dying for as long as I've known her. But the rest of us, we needed replaced.

The man at the pulpit, speaking of stories he's only recently heard. He doesn't know the storm that's been brewing. He shouldn't have offered an open mic. The Lord's Prayer should have been said and flowers divided. Not a flask of whiskey being passed around.

My uncle raises his hand when the words "would anyone like to speak" is said. He jumps up like it's *The Price is Right*. There's the awkward shifting of bodies while everyone braces for impact. Everyone knows what's likely to come out. More bullets for the disowned daughter: my mother. I watch Bethany and the rest of my cousins make eye contact. I'm called on by Dustin. We should have stayed sitting in the

hard plastic chairs. We shouldn't have gotten up. We shouldn't have left our grandmother's funeral in shame.

Out in the cold isn't where we belonged. But that's where we found ourselves. Them sharing a cigarette and me trying not to shiver. We didn't talk about grandma like we should have. We talked about the feud and how drunk uncle Allen is on whiskey. After a few minutes pass we decide it's either devolved into a fight or it's over. As we enter back in we notice neither of them are true. Everyone's reciting the Lord's Prayer as we stand in the back ready to run. The words foreign in our mouths, all of them stumbling out.

As the service ends we stand there still. All of us seeming to form a reverent line. A sigh of relief escapes my chest. Instead of mourning my grandma I'm excited. I don't have to pretend to like most of these people anymore. I will never have to see them at Christmas or Thanksgiving unless I want to. No more imminent death hanging over my head. I am free.

# STATION BENCHES

## HALIE SOLEA

---

I've never been over the county line.

Mama always said we were better off here; that we girls need to stick together because there was nothing out there but drug dealers and goddamned liberal democrats. I bet Mama'd never leave our trailer if she didn't have to sort fruit every day at the Publix down the street. She said that's where my dad went was I was born. Once he'd crossed that black dotted line on the state map hanging in the library, he was smoke.

I walk to the town library every afternoon, dragging the laces of my red high tops in the dust. When I get to town I count cracks in the sidewalk.

I don't think anyone notices that sometimes I go to the library instead of school. I usually only do it on the mornings when Mama forgets to bring back breakfast after a long work night. Ms. Gray, the librarian, always offers me a carton of juice and a Chewy granola bar when she makes her morning tea at the desk.

This morning, my stomach is rumbling because she fell asleep in a rocking chair. *Gone with the Wind* is still in her lap, glasses slipping down her nose. Her powdery wig is crooked. I didn't want to wake her up so I picked out a few of

the outdated National Geographic magazines and flopped onto the big round rug in the middle of the room. I'd rather be the person that took those pictures.

Last week Ms. Gray gave me a poster of the old-world map that hangs over the fairy tale section. It was ripping so the town was paying for a new one to replace it. I taped up the slash right there at her desk and took it home to put up on the wall above my bed. I don't even know how much time I've spent lying on my back staring up at it, my feet propped up and leaving footprints on the wall.

*Here there be dragons.*

Did they really think there were monsters lurking in the places they hadn't yet explored?

At exactly 4 o'clock in the afternoon, I go to the train station with a geography book. I watch the people, sweating as they carry suitcases and hurry around my bench. Picking one out, I open the book to a random page. That's where they're going. I fill in their story as they wait for the train. There are a surprising number of Russian spies in this town.

I try to blow my bangs out of my eyes but they stick to my damp forehead. I use the edge of my shoe to transfer some chewed gum off of my bench and wipe it onto one of the crumpled newspapers on the ground.

The paper shifts to reveal a ticket, used and ripped in half as usual. I've never held a whole one. I pick it up and shove it in my pocket to put with the others. Right now they're all in a drawer at home; Ms. Gray said I should make a scrapbook and start writing down the stories of the people I see.



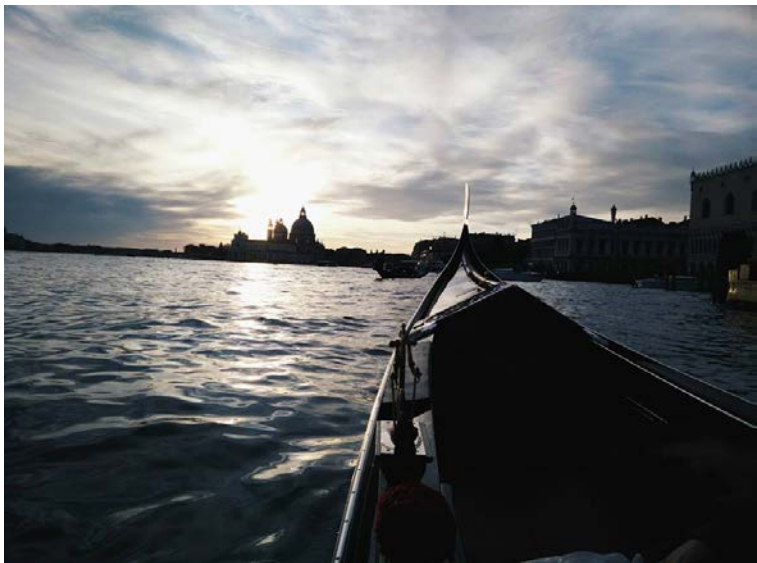
At 5 o'clock, I start looking up for the train.

It's just a sound at first, a low rumble that starts to shake the wooden platform of the station. The rumble is drowned out as passengers stand up, putting on their hats. A mother ushers her boys to pick up their suitcases. The train's whistle cuts off her shouts. This is my favorite part. The shrill gives me goose bumps.

I watch the mother, her boys, and the Russian spies all board the train to somewhere else.

The conductor's running late today. They're already preparing to move again.

From my bench, I watch the train leave. It lets out a big cloud of black smoke as the iron arms heave to turn the wheels. The gears protest and scream but it picks up speed anyway, charging toward the dotted line.



*Italian Sunset* by Ryanne Wise

# SOMETHING BROKE

JOCELYN KRULL

---

I was dancing.  
My feet flew  
And then crashed,  
Burned into the carpet  
As a voice caught me mid-air.

Mom.

I climbed stair  
After stair  
After stair  
Until I reached her.

She sat on the four-post.  
Anchors dragged her eyes  
Into her salted palms.  
The roses in her cheeks  
Withered as she told me  
Something broke.

Dad's lifeless eyes  
Bore into the wall.

Dead,  
Yet the blood  
Still rushed to his face.

The ceiling,  
The sky,  
The December moon,  
Everything came tumbling down.

My family  
Now a dust ring  
Where a vase once sat.

# A PRIVATE ROOM

BROOKE DAVIS

---

Her mother used to call to remind her  
she needed to get a new  
mattress—the old one being heavy  
with dead skin cells  
that flaked off while she turned.

Skin cells  
regenerate twice as fast  
on the hands and feet.  
That's what  
the tattoo artist told her—the one  
with the glasses, the universal  
symbol for someone who  
knows their shit,  
even though Daddy told her

people with tattoos are  
stupid. But that's  
what she wanted anyway—  
to be stupid.

She spent her nights tapping  
her head against the wall  
until it turned to liquid,  
soft as the mashed nutrition a nurse  
feeds her through  
a straw because she doesn't  
understand knives or  
forks or fingers  
anymore,

or doors pushed  
open or doors pushed  
shut or the rhythm  
of footsteps or the absence  
of footsteps,

or skin cells  
packed away for safe-keeping.

She can't read the clock on the  
wall, rounded like a  
steering wheel, like a  
dinner plate for 4<sup>th</sup> of July  
burgers. Can't  
know the difference between  
the nurse's nightly rounds and visiting  
hours—the difference between who is  
there and who is not.



*Sorceress* by Macey Dickerson

# TREMENDOUS

## BROOKE DAVIS

---

I saw Will Tomlin get run over by a train. I haven't fallen apart yet, which concerns some people. My emotional stability could be a harbinger for a psychotic break.

The high school guidance counselor, Ms. Congrove, says I'm just not done processing it, and that this is a normal way of dealing with things that are too much to think about all at once. But Mom says I'm as heartless as a block of ice and I should be ashamed of myself. I'm supposed to be blubbering in bathroom stalls and hugging strangers. I'm a girl, aren't I?

Ms. Congrove tells me I just need time. It'll hit me soon enough.

She asks me if Will was suicidal. I tell her I don't know—I never talked to him before the day he died, even though he was in my art class. He was a shitty painter. Everybody in that class was a shitty painter, and we tried to laugh about it. We made lazy circles and squares all over our papers and said that we were just misunderstood and someone was going to buy our stuff for a million dollars one day, after we were dead.

But Will didn't get it. He demanded to work with the largest canvas the teacher could find and prop it up on an easel like a real artist. Then he got a big, thick brush and covered



it in too much paint, rolling the bristles across the canvas to make a dark red line that dripped like he had sliced open an artery. He kept painting and we watched because he seemed to know what he was doing, but when he finished, it didn't look like anything. All the lines were shooting off of the canvas, like he had more to show us but he didn't have enough room. Like this was just the bottom-left corner of the next *Starry Night* or *Birth of Venus*. Will was sweating, his chest rising and falling.

I followed him home because I wanted to ask him what the painting was. He walked on the train tracks, jumping from one side of the rails to the other, like a game. "Don't you get tired, doing that?" I asked.

He was breathing hard again and his cheeks were flushed, but he grinned at me and said in his voice that was always just below a shout, "What are you saving all that energy for?"

Then I heard the train coming. I didn't think much of it. Kids walk on the tracks all the time and don't get hurt, as long as they don't let the vibrations under their feet scare them into freezing up. They just move out of the way.

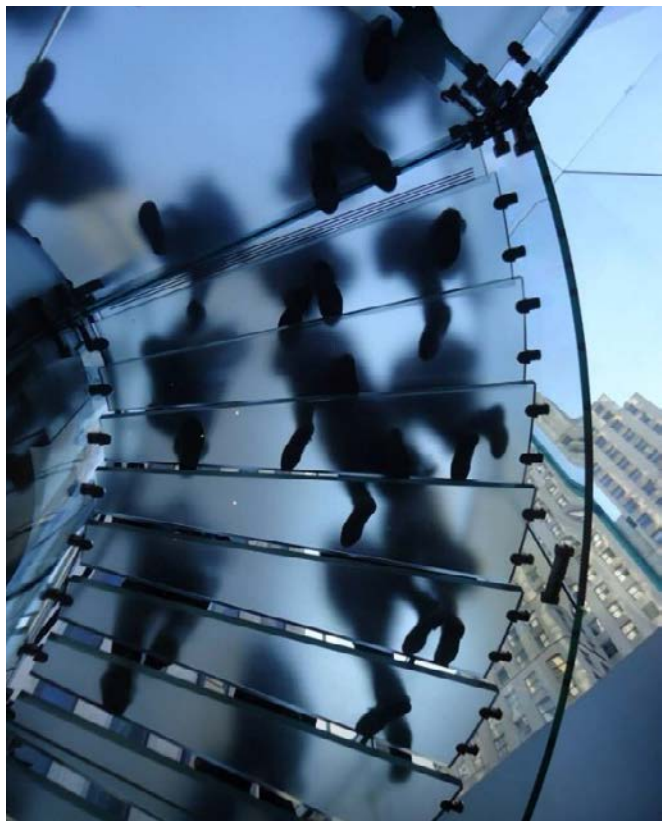
I ran for the trees. I thought Will was following behind me, but when I turned back to ask him why he tried so hard at being such a shitty painter, he wasn't there. He wasn't where we'd been standing on the tracks either. He was fifty yards further down. Sprinting.

I never realized how big trains are until I was right up next to one. I've heard that a single loaded freight car can weigh up to two hundred tons, and I felt every one of them shaking the ground beneath me, clattering my bones out of joint. The bay of the whistle was in my chest, pushing under

my ribs like a balloon blowing bigger and bigger, trying to crack me open.

And there was Will—a black speck running from a beast of biblical proportions.

Maybe he was too scared to think straight or maybe he really was trying to kill himself. “Or maybe he was just stupid,” I tell Ms. Congrove. Even though I know that can’t be it either. Nobody’s dumb enough to think they can outrun a train. But that’s how it looked—like if he traded in all his coins, he could make something happen that had never happened before.



*Stairs* by Emma Peavey

# THE GENOME PROJECT

## CHEYENNE MCINTOSH

---

when I count,  
I have seven mothers  
but only two fathers,  
and not all of them  
remember my name.

a monk turned all of his  
yellow peas green  
and I wonder  
how much time,  
how much insecticide,  
it took to breed out  
the bad seeds.

*out with the old*

from our first breath,  
we are closer to our last  
but what about that time  
when we are still in the womb

does the clock to death  
start to tick faster than  
your heartbeats, only seconds  
from matching hers,

or does death allow us  
peace within those walls  
a grace period, where we may  
inherit without fault  
all the life she passes through us:

can we ever know our mothers  
the same way, ever again?

I wonder if that monk  
ripped the roots from the ground,  
if he cut apart only the weak,  
or if he set the garden on fire  
and watched all his work  
wither and burn.

when my brothers are young men,  
they will know.



*Gondola by Ryanne Wise*

# DIRT

RACHEL BERTRAM

---

I hold Drew in the rusty swing-

He gums matted fur on  
Spike, who is missing the eye  
I swallowed when I was two.  
Stuffing inches toward  
Our toes, painted with dirt.

Momma rolls tobacco on the stoop,  
Scraps of brown tissue whirling  
On her scarred thighs.

My lap feels damp;  
A pungent smell tints the air.  
Drew cries while daddy gathers  
Scrap for diapers money.  
My sleeve across Drew's lip  
Collects moisture that the  
River will steal on washday.



*The Calm Before The Storm* by Anna Meer



# THE EXAMINATION

ANNA MEER

---

Ankles swimming  
in the puddle of  
her dress, she's a curl of  
buckling ribbon.  
Soap clean skin,  
already purpled stains  
flowering her thighs.  
Latex fingers rewrapping  
the handprint blackening  
against her throat.  
Tweezers, swabs —  
A flash, a photograph.  
Scouring her skin — bloody —  
mute lips still closed,  
a habit.

# STOPPING AT SEVENTEEN

## JOCELYN KRULL

---

The IV drips with the seconds on the clock. The glow of the nurse call button leaves the darkened room blushed an eerie shade of crimson. My entire lower half becomes a needlepoint project as the prickling sensation starts in my toes and cross-stitches up to my knees. At least my legs are getting some sleep.

I've been in and out of this hospital for a long time now, but nowadays, it's been becoming more like home. I have a bed to sleep in, three squares a day, a couple of nudies in the drawer. Hell, my mom practically lives here, too. She sits here with me every day, holds my hand, and repeats the same mantra:

“I'm here. Everything is going to be okay.”

I hate it. It's like telling somebody to go ahead and die because you'll be there to make sure there are lilies instead of daffodils at your funeral.

She's asleep right now, breathing like a puppy. Rapid, anxious. She's suffocating here; I can tell by how tightly screwed her smile is beneath her surgical mask. She could be out enjoying her life, shooting the breeze, and eating the worm. But no. Instead, she bites the curb with me here as the walls start closing in around us.

A shadow passes beneath the lit crack of the door and a wedding ring clinks against the metal handle. I put on my best fake sleeping face as the door opens and a head peeks in. Thankfully, he only spends a few moments checking on me before withdrawing.

He's never done that before. Normally, he just comes in twice a day, reading off of the daily blood charts in his monotonous, radio static voice, always having to adjust his glasses when he throws out terms like "lymphocytes" and "interleukin-21." For the past few days, though, he's been coming in more often and asking how I'm feeling and if there's anything he can do for me, practically salivating at the chance to show some mechanized compassion. Earlier today, he pulled my mother out into the hallway and I overheard words like "hospice" and "palliative" in their conversation. Son of a bitch already has the band playing a dirge. Newsflash, Doc: the body's still warm.

Kind of.

I don't sleep much these days. Tonight alone, I've counted all thirty-four ceiling tiles sixteen and a half times. Stopping at seventeen isn't on my list of to-do things right now. However, on the nights I do sleep, I always see the same thing in the morphine haze. Two horses. A white one and a black one. Lately, I've been seeing them even when I'm awake, and they never leave.



*Portrait of an Ethiopian Woman* by Macey Dickerson

# SWARM

BROOKE DAVIS

---

He didn't know the names of the pale brown  
flecks that hovered outside his window,  
volleying in a reckless cloud made out of themselves;  
he liked the way they weaved in and out of each other,  
but never seemed to touch.

He put his head out to hear the static hiss of wings,

but inside the cloud, he clapped them  
dead between his palms. He shook them from his hair,  
pounded them from his ears, knocked them from  
his eyes. He spat the bugs clear of his mouth and watched  
them drop, empty peanut casings, together,  
on the ground.

# THE COURTROOM

ANNA MEER

---

She wrings her hands like  
A washcloth. Her words  
Miss the microphone,  
Fall to the hardwood—  
Behind me,  
On top of me...  
Inside of me—

Her hair  
Drops from its clip in  
Excruciating seconds,  
Curtaining a handprint stain.  
Behind her eyelids,  
He crouches—tie loosened.  
He licks his lips  
And tastes her every word.

# HER HOUSE

CASSANDRA SCHMITZ

---

Sirens assault my ears while the stars drown in flashes of red. In front of me, a house crumbles from the inside out, riddled with flame. I know the couch we sat on to watch *Oklahoma* together will be gone soon. God, I hate that movie. The poster of Hugh Jackman hanging over her bed is surely ash by now. He'll never watch her undress again.

Soon, the front hall where my friend introduced me to Brian will be gone. His Chuck Taylors that are sitting by the door will disintegrate. A breeze shifts the smoke my way and I breathe it in. If I concentrate hard enough, maybe I'll smell the roses in the kitchen. I saw them sitting on the counter, wrapped in paper towels, while Brian shook my hand.

Smoke crowds the windows, and the nails driven into the window and door frames assure that there is no escape. Breathable air will soon run out while the pressure builds. The window panes are too small for breaking the glass to matter. Even now, Brian emerges through the smoke in her bedroom and slams his hand against the barrier. I don't know if he sees me, but I raise my hand anyway to be polite.

# CHURNING

## TAYLOR CARLTON

---

My doctor works from a small office in a strip mall, between a Curves fitness and a sandwich shop. I sit on-top of the examination table, staring at the four frames that are tacked into the plaster. They're diplomas—a list of state schools that mean that he's certified to diagnose me. To tell me what's wrong.

He says that I have extreme anemia deficiency.

I just stare at his achievements.

The appointment ends with a list of vitamins and prescriptions. I tell him I'm travelling to France next month. He looks up, squinting under his glasses.

“That shouldn't be a problem,” he says.

\*\*\*

It starts like this: I am five. It's the afternoon, right after the evening news. In a corner, with a coloring book in my lap, I connect the dots of a cartoon elephant with a thick crayon. The doorbell rings.

“Dinner's here.”

My dad goes to pay the delivery boy, handing the teen a wad of crumbled bills—he tells him to keep the change. It's a weekly ritual: the pizza night. They always order the same thing—pepperoni and sausage. It's been this way for months.



The moment the smell touches my nose, I know it's about to begin.

"Smells gross," I say, examining the cardboard box on the counter. I said the same thing last week.

My mother sighs, opening up the cabinets to find the box of Coco Pebbles that she had hidden on the top shelf.

"We can't let her eat that shit," my father says. "Why would we let her eat that when we have perfectly good pizza?"

But they can only take so much of my moping. When the cereal is poured, I insist on shoveling down by spoonfuls. Deep inside, I know that my resistance to the pizza on the counter goes beyond the initial desire to be a picky eater and to make my parents' lives more difficult. But, there was something so appalling, so disgusting about meat, smelling like itself, bleeding with grease.

Listening to the churning of my stomach, I imagine the acids sloshing around the pizza, breaking down the food into indistinguishable mush.

\*\*\*

Every Thanksgiving at school, the the cafeteria provides the students with a traditional holiday meal. While all the children carry their trays of turkey, ham, and stuffing, my own tray holds only a thin slice of cranberry jelly and four measly green beans. My teachers begin getting concerned, sending home behavior slips with red stickers.

I'm called into the counselor's office. It's after lunch, and her office reeks of salami and lettuce. I want to run, but I'm confined to my seat.

She asks me what my favorite thing to eat is.

"Cereal" I respond.

The next week, she hands them information pamphlets and food pyramid charts. On a small card, she lists numerous recipe and counseling books.

“A lot of children her age have problems or anxieties regarding food. It’s completely normal. She’ll grow out of it.” I wonder if this is what she tells all the parents with children like me. That’s it’s just a phase, to give it time. It’s the easiest answer, the one that doesn’t require any knowledge, or research, or background information. The counselor recommends sneaking meat into my diet, blending and reducing until it is not even food—just nutrients. She uses testimonials from other parents in the school: how little Danny is now one of the most attentive kindergarteners since his parents began balancing his diet and cutting out sugars and fats.

My parents buy into it.

My mother devotes her time to the kitchen, pureeing chicken and simmering beef broth. She makes me test new things, but the meat is always too prevalent and too real. Each meal turns into an experiment. When I throw up bits of meat in my mouth, I feel like I have failed my body. So I swallow it back down, and turn my head up to face my mother.

“I like it.”

I lie.

\*\*\*

Near the newly developed area of town, where we’re lucky enough to stay during our study course in France, most of my food needs are met within a short walk. There’s a bakery around the corner, and two blocks across the bridge is a small grocery store. Cafés are scattered throughout, tables

with stiff umbrellas and fine china. People carry their groceries in a number of ways: re-useable bags, stuffing their food into backpacks, wheeled carts. After the first day of shopping, I awkwardly carry my full bags back to the hotel room, hoping that the straps don't break and spill my food onto the street.

I look into my sack: it's full of packaged croissants and Nutella. It's what I've had as my dinner the past two nights, along with a glass of cheap wine.

*It's safe*, I decide.

I avoid restaurants, fearing I'm going to order the wrong thing and get a plate that I don't know what's in it. I miss America. I miss the ability to know everything that is in a dish and exactly what I'm ordering.

That night, I get a call from my mother. I picture her leaning against the kitchen counter, watching the coffee drip into the mug below.

"Can we trust you to take care of yourself?"

"Yes, Mom," I tell her. "I can take care of myself. I eat fine at school."

She and I both know that this is a lie. I'm twenty, and I eat food the way all college students do: late at night, an odd mixture of fast food and microwavable-boxed delicacies that cost little to nothing.

"Are you eating well?" My mother asks two days into my time in Paris. I look at my hotel room. The containers of Nutella and packaged croissants are spread out across the floor.

"I'm doing fine."

I'm not lying.

# LA NUIT

CAYLIE GUINN

---

He snores like a horse, sounds too strong for a man this weak. Her back to his, she cringes. His skin is mud through her bones. The moss walls rot, darkness devouring the color. On the street, motorbikes buzz like mosquitoes, lights swarm the inky sky. She sighs, her mind swimming in an ocean of Scotch. No stars tonight.

# TWO GATHERINGS

## SARAH LAWSON

---

Hazy smoke in the rain  
One in a drab wool sweater, young, and unshaven with curling  
dark hair  
jeans tight against muscular thighs.  
His mate, in a pea coat with slicked-back hair, shoes shined;  
not sneakers.  
A female in the center just off lunch break, but still  
there talking,  
bitching about foreigners, about leaving tips and  
wasting money.  
All three are clotted together outside the café  
crushing cigarette butts and murmuring in rapid French  
in an alleyway near St. Denis.

Hair unmoving in the wind, like mannequins on display  
their voices are barely whispers, with the occasional shrug of  
the shoulder  
or a *Mon Dieu* or *Mais non!*  
They're here though on a Tuesday, muttering phrases like  
*fous le camp*, *merde* and *putain* in broad daylight, as if they're  
saying "Hello" and "How are you?"  
Pigeons poke at the cigarette butts beside their feet.

The unshaven man must reek of smoke, clinging to his unkempt hair,  
yet he gives the woman the *faire la bise* with ash-stained lips.  
Lover I think—until he gives it to his other friend;  
long coat, with big hands, who doesn't seem to care.  
The trio parts and breaks away.

She walks downhill, to a bakery athwart the café.  
The girl's lips are framed with dark pink liner—  
full, pronounced.  
Her skirt's above her knees, yet no one catcalls to her, or calls  
her a whore.  
I wonder how she walks in heels in a storm, unnoticed.

I remember on the street side in Indy, men with pants  
hung low  
wide ball caps to their brows, loose shirts--loose everything  
high with cravings, with battered lungs and battered brains.  
Sleeves rolled down to hide the purple splotches tattooing  
their skin,  
bloodshot eyes, scratching at their arms, and cupping  
their balls.

Walking down the street, in sneakers and sweatpants--  
not heels  
in a city I was born in, passing corners

where I learned to ride my bike and scraped my knees  
they notice me, but there is no conversation.  
Just catcalls, no “Hi how are you?”  
or “Goodbye.”

Their voices dart towards me from across the street  
loud, cracking, like split pavement in audio-resound sound.  
“Fuck you bitch, come over here,” they say.  
“Do you have a boyfriend?”



*The Eye* by Jocelyn Krull



# CONTRIBUTORS

---

**CAYLIE GUINN** is an English, Creative Writing, and French major at Franklin College. Caylie recently discovered a passion for writing short stories and poetry. Eventually, she hopes to publish a collection of her short works. She has a severe case of wanderlust and plans to join the Peace Corps after college. Later, she plans to attend graduate school for English, then pursue a professorial or editorial career.

**CHEYENNE MCINTOSH** is a senior English major, originally hailing from southern Indiana. Her memoir and poetry can both be seen in previous editions of the *Apogee*. Her poem “3 a.m.” was recently published in *Atticus Review*. To keep up with her creative writing and future publications, follow @crm\_writes on Twitter.

**BROOKE DAVIS** is a senior majoring in English and Creative Writing. She loves to read, write, and travel. Her favorite place to visit is Montpellier, France. After graduation she plans to work in publishing.

**AMANDA CREECH** is a junior with a major in Journalism. She started writing in high school and has continued writing

through college. After a creative writing class, she became interested in writing memoir. She keeps a journal with creative writing ideas and memoir pieces. Writing about real life experiences has helped her get a better grasp on her writing style.

**JOCELYN KRULL** is a freshman majoring in Creative Writing and minoring in English. She enjoys poetry, specifically Romantic, and can recite *O Captain! My Captain!* by memory. She also spent nine months in Taiwan teaching conversational English. Whenever time is not of the essence, she likes to read, write, and indulge in conversation.

**KRISTIN STEPHENS** is a sophomore at Franklin College. She plans on majoring in English and Creative Writing in order to become an Acquisitions Editor at a publishing house. Her hobbies are writing, reading, and racing motorcycles. She's lived in Franklin for her entire life and aspires to live in Canada in her future.

**HALIE SOLEA** is a Journalism, English, and French major at Franklin College. She is also minoring in Public Relations and Creative Writing, and hopes to use all of the above to write editorial magazine pieces. She wouldn't mind writing a Pulitzer prize-winning article about small, artsy businesses or writing an Oprah's Book Club-worthy novel. She recently finished a creative writing course in France, and hopes to participate in a graphic design internship abroad next summer.

**SUZIE NAGY** is a freshman at Franklin College.

**CASSANDRA SCHMITZ** is a freshman at Franklin College majoring in English and Creative Writing. She wants to use her writing to inform people of problems in society. After school, she plans to become a fiction editor while working on her own pieces.

**SARAH LAWSON** is a senior at Franklin College studying English, French, and creative writing. Being a pianist, she enjoys playing with rhythm and the concept of time in her writing. After graduation, she plans to teach English abroad.

**ANNA MEER** is a Franklin College sophomore majoring in English and minoring in Biology, while also taking as many painting and writing classes as her schedule allows. She enjoys reading, photography, and watching good movies. Upon graduation, she hopes to attend graduate school, spend some time traveling, and then pursue a career in editing and publishing.

**RACHEL BERTRAM** is a freshman Psychology and Sociology double major with a minor in Creative Writing. As a child, she developed a passion for writing and wanted to be the next Stephen King. Then she was introduced to the wonderful world of Freud, Milgram, and Adler. Her biggest dream is to become a Clinical Psychologist who can also produce suspense novels and photography in some form.

**MACEY DICKERSON** is a senior majoring in Studio Art Painting. Since she was a little girl growing up in Indianapolis, she has had an innate desire to express herself through

art. Through her classes at Franklin, she discovered new awareness that became a catalyst to her exploration of self and search for understanding. This spiritual and psychological journey is an underlying theme in all of her work. Through her art, Macey aims to inspire contemplation in the viewer so that they may gain awareness of the internal and external world.

**TAYLOR CARLTON** is a junior History major with minors in English, Creative Writing, and American Studies. She is a member of Panhellenic council, college mentors for kids, and Zeta Tau Alpha. In her spare time, she likes reading fantasy books with strong female characters and eating cheap Mexican food.

**RYANNE WISE** is a sophomore at Franklin College majoring in English and French and minoring in Nonprofit Leadership. She is a member and officer of Delta Delta Delta. She enjoys painting, reading, photography and indie music. She is passionate about nonprofit work and hopes to serve others for a future career.

**AIMEE NABHOLZ** is a freshman who spent her first semester at Franklin College and is still undecided on a major. She spends her free time playing video games, drawing, and most importantly, writing. She's working on a few fantasy fiction novels and hopes to have them published someday.

**EMMA PEAVEY** is a senior at Franklin College.

**EMILY MEESE** is a junior at Franklin College.

